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the pioneer

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SARA SHARES HER STAGES OF POSING
12 VIVACITY

Farmers to step up protest today

To block Delhi-Jaipur NH, union leaders to hold hunger strike at Singhu Border today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the standoff between the farmers and Centre continues over agriculture laws, farmers are going to block the Jaipur National Highway-8, which passes through Gurugram, on Monday. Following which the Delhi Police has upped security on the national Capital's border with Haryana.

On Sunday heads of all farmer unions declared that now they will observe a one-day hunger strike on Monday, farmer leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni said here on Sunday. Farmers said the hunger strike between 8 am and 5 pm on Monday is part of the farmers' plan to intensify their agitation from December 14.

The announcement by farmers' unions to block the Jaipur-Delhi highway comes amid protests by thousands for the last 17 days at the various other border points of the national Capital, including Singhu and Tikri, against the laws. Farmers are demanding that the Centre withdraws the legislations.

Addressing a Press conference at Singhu border, where the farmers have been camping in agitation for over two weeks, Chaduni said the leaders will observe the hunger strike at their respective places.

"Also dharnas will be staged at all district headquarters across the country. The protest will go on as usual," he told reporters. "There are groups that are ending protest and saying they are in favour of laws passed by the Government. We want to clarify that they are not associated with us.

Continued on Page 4

Ministers into huddle to end stalemate, next talks soon

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to end farmers' protest, the next round of talk between the Government and the agitating farmer unions is likely to be held soon.

Union Minister Som Prakash, who is among the Government representatives negotiating with farmers protesting against the three new farm laws, indicated that efforts are on to call next round of meeting with leaders of the agitation to end the stalemate.

Sources said the Government and representatives of farmer unions are in touch to hold the next round of talks after the nationwide protest on December 14.

According to sources, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said if the Government gives another proposal for talks, our committee will decide on it.

Sources said the Government is in touch with Sanyukt Kisan Morcha's leaders and other moderate farmers leaders to chalk out a strategy to end the stalemate.

Earlier, Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala, who met Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and Food, Railways and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday to discuss the farmers' protest, has stated that he was hopeful that the logjam would end in the next 24 to 48 hours.

Chautala's Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) counts farmers as an important constituency and has faced prickly questions about his alliance with the BJP amid the mounting protests.

Earlier, a delegation of 29 farmers led by BKU (Mann) leader Guni Prakash from Haryana and a delegation of 90 farmers' leaders from Uttarakhand meeting with Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar was also the part of the back door channel diplomacy.

According to farmers' leaders, differences erupted among the farmer unions.

Continued on Page 4

Farmers during their sit-in protest against the Centre's farm reform laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to the martyrs of 2001 Parliament attack on its 19th anniversary at Parliament House in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

Book chronicling valour of CRPF bravehearts released

On 2001 Parliament attack anniversary, Speaker releases English-Hindi versions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The story of valour, grit and commitment of the CRPF jawans has been compiled in a rare collection, which was released by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday coinciding with the anniversary of the Parliament attack.

The glorious history of the Central Reserve Police Force has been scripted by its bravehearts who served the nation with sheer grit, indomitable courage, and unflinching commitment to duty, the CRPF said in a statement. "The acts of valour of these fearless men and women have been recognised with more than 2,000 gallantry medals — the highest among any Central Armed Police Force," it said.

With the belief that every citizen deserves to know and take pride in the stories of these acts which serve as true example of courage, patriotism, integrity, discipline, and selfless devotion to duty, the CRPF has penned 'The Shaurya Unbound-Tales of Valour of the Central Reserve Police Force'.

The book is a collection of 13 most exemplary acts of valour of CRPF bravehearts who were awarded with Chakras.

On the anniversary of the attack on the Indian Parliament, Birla released the English and Hindi version of the book which includes tales of insurmountable gallantry, of Constable Kamlesh Kumari Ashok Chakra (posthumously) and four Shaurya Chakra recipients while retaliating the attack on Parliament in 2001.

Continued on Page 4

Wheat cultivation takes a hit in farmers' protesting States

Farmers from MP, Maha who are not protesting have sown more crops

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With the farmers protesting at the Delhi/NCR borders against the three new farm laws, wheat cultivation back home in their States of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan has taken a hit in the current rabi season.

States like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, from where not many farmers have participated in the protests, have sown more wheat or rabi crops this year. As per Agriculture Ministry data, the area under wheat cultivation is down by 60,000 hectare in Punjab, 1.2 lakh hectare in Haryana and 2.25 lakh hectare in Rajasthan so far.

Data showed that total wheat cultivation in Punjab was at only 33.3 lakh hectare so far in the current rabi season as against 33.9 lakh hectare last year. Similarly, Haryana has reported wheat cultivation in only 22.04 lakh hectare against the 23.06 lakh hectare last year. Rajasthan has reported 25.05 lakh hectare under wheat cultivation as compared to the 27.29 lakh hectare last year, a reduction of 2.25 lakh hectare.

Wheat is the biggest rabi (winter sown) crop of Punjab and is the biggest contributor of the food grain to the national buffer stock. Wheat is expected to be sown over nearly 35 lakh hectares in Punjab with an output target of nearly 170 lakh tonnes. Normally, wheat sowing starts in the last week of October in the State.

Interestingly, in absence of adult males, women have taken the charge of irrigating fields, sprinkling fertilisers in them, tending cattle, milking cows and chopping fodder for them with their children's help, while keeping their spouses and adult sons assured all the while not to worry about the chores back home and focus on their protests.

Continued on Page 4

Punjab DIG resigns in support of kisan

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Lakhminder Singh Jakhar on Sunday said he has resigned from the service in support of farmers who are protesting against the Centre's three new farm laws.

Jakhar said he tendered his resignation to the State Government on Saturday.

In his resignation letter to Principal Secretary (Home), "I would like to inform you of my considered and introspective decision to stand with my farmer brothers who are peacefully protesting against the Farm Ordinances, 2020 which are detrimental to interest of farmers and their future generations." He wrote that he was himself a farmer.

Continued on Page 4

Vested interests compromising unity, security of country, says CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Speaking tough against the vested interests who are compromising unity, security and the integrity of the country by using innocent farmers, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that such elements would be dealt with a heavy hand.

Addressing a rally at the Agriculture University in Meerut on Sunday, the chief minister said that those behind this conspiracy did not want to see the farmers prosper.

"It is for everyone to see that some elements are advocating an anti-India voice in the name of the farmers' movement," he said and called upon the farmers to stand with the integrity of the country because solution of a problem lay in dialogue and not in struggle.

Details on Page 2

BJP president Nadda tests Covid +, in home isolation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda who has just returned from West Bengal tested positive on Sunday for the Covid-19. Nadda said he has been following all the guidelines for home isolation.

"I got the test done after experiencing the initial symptoms of corona and the report came back positive. My health is fine and I have been following all the guidelines for home isolation on the advice of doctors.

"I request everyone who has come in contact with me in the last few days to please isolate yourself and get yourself checked," Nadda tweeted in Hindi.

Prior to this, Nadda was on a two -day tour (December 9 & 10) of the West Bengal for the party poll campaign.

Continued on Page 4

CAPSULE

2 TERRORISTS KILLED, 1 HELD IN POONCH

Jammu: Two terrorists were killed and another was captured on Sunday in a gunfight with security forces in J&K's Poonch district, officials said.The terrorists were believed to have infiltrated about three days back and were heading for Shopian when they were intercepted.

INDIA'S SOLAR STRIDE 'INCREDIBLE': UK PM

London: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has hailed the "incredible things" being done by India in the solar energy sector as he warned that the emergency facing the world from climate change was far more destructive than even the coronavirus.

Drastic rise in obesity among kids under 5 years in 20 States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There has been a drastic rise in obesity among children under five years in 20 out of the 22 States where a study was conducted, according to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) with experts attributing it to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits.

According to the NHFS-5, several States and Union Territories, including Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep and Ladakh have registered many fold increase in cases of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4 conducted between 2015 and 2016.

The data reveals that only Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu registered a drop in the number of overweight children under five years of age.

"About 13.4 per cent children under the age of five were found to be obese in Ladakh which was highest among the 22 States and Union Territories surveyed, followed by Lakshadweep at 10.5 per cent, Mizoram 10 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sikkim 9.6 per cent each," as per the data.

Not just children, rise in obesity has even been recorded in adults in the latest survey in comparison to NFHS-4.

Continued on Page 4

CM: Vested interests compromising unity, security & integrity of country

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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Addressing a rally at the Agriculture University in Meerut on Sunday, the chief minister said that those behind this conspiracy did not want to see the farmers prosper.

"It is for everyone to see that some elements are advocating an anti-India voice in the name of the farmers' movement," he said and called upon the farmers to stand with the integrity of the country because solution of a problem lay in dialogue and not in struggle.

Yogi Adityanath was all praise for the diligence of the farmers, especially those from western Uttar Pradesh, saying the land of Meerut belongs to the revolutionaries and has contributed a lot to the country since Independence.

"We are committed to the development of this region. We have already initiated the process for building a Rs 32,000-crore rapid rail project from Delhi to Meerut and have sent a proposal for another rapid rail project from Meerut to Muzaffarnagar," he said, adding that the government was working on a proposal to construct Kanwad road till Haridwar to reduce the distance to the Uttarakhand town.

The chief minister said that the UP government had made payments to the tune of more than Rs 1.12 lakh crore to cane farmers during the last three years besides expanding the Ramal Sugar Mill and giving licence to 300 khandsari units in the state.

He pledged to clear all cane dues.

"Sugarcane will also be used to produce ethanol and for this, ethanol plants will be set up," he said.

Hitting out at Congress for its stand on the farmers' issue, the chief minister said the grand old party could not comprehend that the vexed problems of Ayodhya and Kashmir could be solved.

"Instead of being thankful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his pro-farmers policies, they are instigating the farmers unnecessarily," he said.

Yogi Adityanath said the three farm laws were aimed at doubling the income of farmers, giving them freedom to sell their produce anywhere they want and keeping intact their ownership of land and crop.

"In fact, the opposition, which is being funded by foreign agencies, is conspiring against the farmers and adding fire to the fuel to serve their ulterior motives," he said.

The chief minister spelled out the priority of his government for the safety and security of women and girls and said crime against them would not be tolerated.

He said that "Behan, betiyon ki suraksha mein sendh lagane waalon ka hoga Ramnam satya, suraksha mein sendh lagane waalon ka hoga Ramnam satya" (Those who breach the security of the country, women and girls will not survive).

On this occasion, the chief minister laid the foundation stones of 88 projects worth Rs 325 crore in Meerut. He lauded the achievements of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Agriculture University and said it was realising the dream of Sardar Patel in a true sense.

He also inaugurated an agriculture exhibition and hi-tech central library.

SAG has benefited 3.50L girls in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Within months of its launch, Uttar Pradesh's Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) has reached out to about 3.50 lakh girls aged between 11 and 14 years against a target of five lakh.

The scheme is primarily providing them with a supplementary diet.

The broad objectives of the SAG scheme in UP is to improve the nutritional, health and development status of girls and promote awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition and family care.

The scheme also provides them opportunities for learning life skills, going back to schools, helps them in gaining a better understanding of the social environment and take initiatives to become productive members of society.

Under the SAG, currently covering 53 districts, food containing grains like millet, wheat, corn, black gram and desi ghee is being provided to the girls as supplementary diets. Besides, girls in 22 districts are being provided with daliya and laddoo premix every month. In addition, the girls are also being given pills of iron, calcium, folic acid and vitamin C.

During the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the scheme is being carried out with the help of self-help groups (SHGs) which are facilitating door-to-door services with the help of Anganwadi workers. They have been distributing dry ration like rice, pulses, lentils, skimmed milk powder, desi ghee to the girls.

Besides this, over 1.67 lakh Anganwadi centres and over 22,000 mini Anganwadi centres of 987 schemes under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) are being successfully operating in the state, focusing on the all-round development of kids aged between six months and six years, pregnant women and midwives through various programmes.

SCHOOLSCAN

THE SAM-2020 INAUGURATED

The 4-day international sports, arts and music competition (The SAM-2020), organised by City Montessori School, Jopling Road, was inaugurated online on Sunday.

The chief guest on the occasion was divisional manager, Indian Railway, Monika Agnihotri, who virtually inaugurated the event amidst scintillating educational-cultural presentations. CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi wished the participants good luck. Student teams from Iran, Russia, Greece, Nepal and various states of India are participating in this competition which aims to encourage collaboration and unity amongst youths, students and public at large.

Speaking on the occasion, Monika Agnihotri said the coronavirus pandemic has left a negative impact on the minds of people all over the world affecting education too, but there has been a lot of creativity and positive thinking as well, which clearly points towards India's culture seeking unity in diversity.

Ram temple construction may start in Jan 2021

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An expert committee formed by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust for the construction of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya will submit its report on December 15 and the construction can start by mid-January next year.

The 8-member team will suggest ways and means for construction of a strong and long-life temple which will be constructed at the Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya.

According to sources, Prof VS Raju, former director IIT-Delhi is heading the experts committee while Prof N Gopalakrishnan, Director, CBRI, Roorkee is the convenor. The other members of the committee are Prof. SR Gandhi, Director NIT, Surat, Prof TG Sitamram, Director, IIT Guwahati, Prof B Bhattarcharya, IIT-Delhi, AP Mal, advisor to TCI, Prof Manu Santhanam, IIT-Madras and Prof Pradipta Banerjee from IIT-Mumbai.

The expert team will suggest details of construction and design of the temple on five acres of land and the remaining area of the total 70 acres area would be developed as a Vedic city.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust member said that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath wanted the parisar (campus) to be developed as a Vedic city.

While attending the recently-held Deepotsav festival in Ayodhya, Yogi Adityanath said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi"s dream to develop Ayodhya as a Vedic Ramayana City.

As per a government spokesperson, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister has said a 'Navya Ayodhya' will be developed and the grandest and divine temple of Lord Ram will be the world's tallest.

The UP government plans to develop Ayodhya as a global city for tourism and will set up a modern sewage treatment plant there to maintain the flow and cleanliness of the Saryu river.

Accept applications of entrepreneurs online: Chief Secy

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary RK Tiwari has issued directions to all additional chief secretaries and principal to ensure that applications of entrepreneurs for obtaining various clearances for establishing or running their business or industrial units are accepted online without exception.

Warning officials of stringent departmental and disciplinary action, the chief secretary directed various departments to issue government orders prohibiting offline acceptance of entrepreneurs' applications for the services available online on the single window portal Nivesh Mitra, officials said here in a statement on Sunday.

He further stated that despite clear orders issued earlier, it had been noticed that a few departments were either accepting offline applications or doing offline processing of applications received online through Nivesh Mitra and entrepreneurs wer e being compelled to personally visit offices of departments to submit hard copies of required documents. Tiwari said that this practice was unacceptable and contrary to the state government's commitment to improving ease of doing business in the state.

The additional chief secretaries and principal secretaries of the departments concerned have been directed to issue government orders without delay to forbid offline acceptance of entrepreneurs' applications for the services available online on the single window portal.

He also asked the additional chief secretaries and principal secretaries to review the compliance of these directions on a monthly basis and penalise any officer found to be violating the orders.

These directions have been issued to Agriculture, Revenue, Commercial Tax, Excise, Labour, Stamp & Registration, Legal Meteorology, Energy, Food Safety & Drug Administration, Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Housing and Urban Planning, Public Works, Medical and Health, Urban Development, Home, Mining, IT and Electronics, Information and Public Relations, Namami Gange and Finance departments.

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Expert docs to supervise containment activities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Health department is posting social and preventive medicine experts in areas having maximum coronavirus cases. According to a senior health official, it is a new idea for effective containment of the virus. These areas include Gomtinagar, Indiranagar, Sarojininagar, Chinhat and Aliganj. "These doctors will supervise all the activities going on in these areas for effective containment," the official said. He added that the cases are continuously seeing a dip in the district.

The official said preparations are underway for Covid-19 immunisation and a hall is being set up at the District Immunisation Centre as a night shelter by HAL and it will also be completed by the end of this year. Two residential flats will also be used as the storage area for the Covid-19 vaccine. "We could not construct a new building, hence we are using these flats. They were in a dilapidated condition but we have renovated them so that they could be used for vaccine storage," he said.

He pointed out that they still do not know what type of vaccine will come, what will be the storage and what will be the dosage. The official said training of the vaccinators in the district will begin once these things are known.

On Sunday, 209 persons tested positive for coronavirus in Lucknow while 249 patients recovered. With six more deaths, Lucknow's toll climbed to 1,056 while there are 3,043 active cases. The fresh cases included 22 from Gomtinagar, 27 from Indiranagar, 14 from Talkatora, 12 each from Rae Bareli road & Jankipuram, 11 from Mahanagar and 10 from Chowk. Across the state, 1,441 persons tested positive, including 43 in Kanpur, 152 in Ghaziabad, 49 in Gautam Buddhnagar, 123 in Varanasi & 95 in Meerut, taking the UP tally to 5,65,556.

Meanwhile, tributes were paid to 12 doctors from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who had sacrificed their lives during Covid care, at a programme held online on Sunday.

Dr Surya Kant from KGMU was the chief guest while former national president of IMA Dr KK Agarwal the moderator. An article on these doctors was published in the journal of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) by Dr Surya Kant, head of the department of Respiratory Medicine, KGMU. His initiative paid off and various institutions came forward to help the families of these doctors.

A pharma company proposed to provide financial assistance to the families of 300 out of 800 doctors of the country who lost their lives while fighting against the coronavirus, which the IMA accepted and appreciated the initiative. A campaign was started by paying tribute to the 12 doctors who lost their lives in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar on Sunday.

Dr Surya Kant said similar programmes would be organised for the martyred doctors of other zones.

Meanwhile, spokesperson Forest department Mukesh Kumar said that over 10 forest officials and staffers have lost their lives to coronavirus, including those at the directorate and in the field. Among the first ones to lose the battle was senior official Prabhakar Dubey and his steno. On Sunday, the Shalom Methodist Church in the city felicitated over 40 Covid warriors, including police staff and other employees from the state capital. Father Morris said that the warriors were felicitated for their support in Covid-19 times.

Man shoots at son during verbal spat

Lucknow (PNS): A man shot at his son during a verbal spat at their house in Gudamba on Sunday night. The victim was identified as Zohaib Khan of Kalyanpur locality in the area while his father as Naeem Khan. Zohaib was admitted to KGMU Trauma Centre while Naeem Khan was said to be absconding. Reports said both Naeem and Zohaib picked up a fight over some issue. In a fit of rage, Naeem whipped out a pistol and opened fire at Zohaib, leaving him injured. Police said Naeem is a retired police officer while Zohaib is jobless.

Meanwhile, a youth, identified as Amit Kumar (25) of Ranjeet Kheda, was killed in a road mishap while two of his friends suffered grievous, in Mohanlalganj on Sunday afternoon. The injured were identified as Nagesh and Diwakar, also of Ranjeet Kheda. They were going to the town area in Mohanlalganj for some work. Around 1 pm, a speeding truck knocked the bike when they reached the highway.

Two persons found murdered

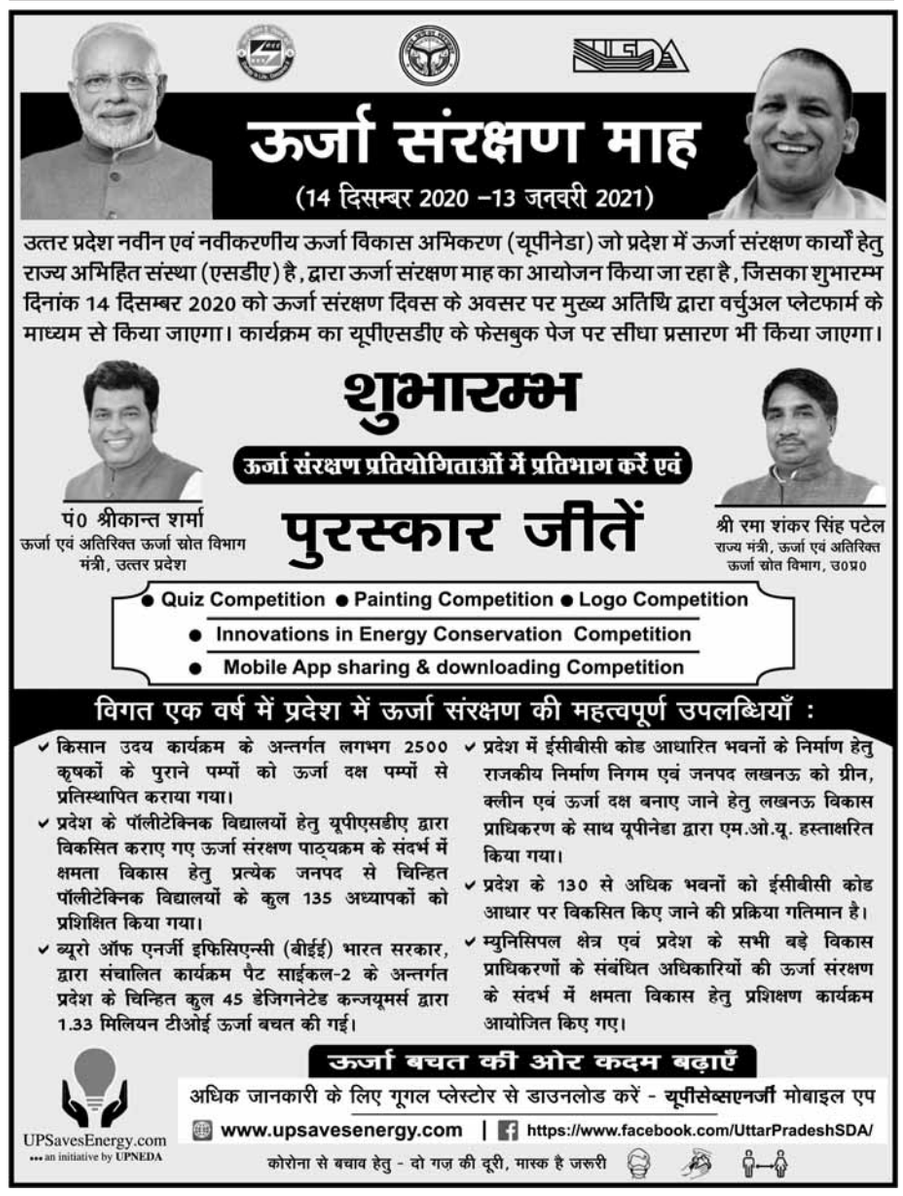
PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two persons were found murdered in separate incidents in Mohanlalganj and Nigoha on Sunday.

In Mohanlalganj, the victim was identified as Jeevan Prakash of Adauli village in the area. As per reports, Jeevan Prakash, along with an elderly man Ramakant, had gone to attend a marriage function. Both got drunk at the function and while returning, they again had a drinking session near a dhaba. A little later, Jeevan Prakash left for some place while Ramakant stayed back. Ramakant told police that he went to search for Jeevan Prakash but could not find him and later returned home.

On Sunday, the body of Jeevan Prakash was recovered from a place close to the road. The police said the body bore no injuries. In another incident, body of an unidentified man was recovered near the toll plaza in Nigoha. The police said the identity of the deceased could not be ascertained despite strenuous efforts.

Meanwhile, a 50-year-old man welder was found hanging at his house in Maal police station area on Sunday. The deceased was identified as Mahadev Pasi of Gahdo village in the area. Reports said Mahadev had returned home on Saturday night after purchasing vegetables. On Saturday night, his son found him hanging from the ceiling with a rope tied around his neck.



The nine-day art exhibition titled 'The Beginning', held at Hussainganj metro station concluded on Sunday — Pioneer

Theft suspect attacks son of UPAVM president

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A theft suspect, allegedly caught red-handed, was accused of attacking the son of president of UP Adarsh Vyapar Mandal (UPAVM) on being challenged and warned of police action, in Hussainganj on Saturday night. He was overpowered and later handed over to police. As per reports, Sanjay Gupta of Diamond Apartment, along with his family, had gone to a wedding in Krishnanagar and his son Shreyas Gupta was all alone in the house.

"Shreyas left the flat for some work for around 10 minutes after we left the house. When Shreyas returned, he found the door bolted from inside and he sought help from neighbours, who broke open the door and found a man inside carrying a knife. The articles were lying scattered. The man attacked my son and tried to flee but was overpowered," Sanjay stated in the FIR.

He said neighbours called the police and a team of cops reached there and took the accused in custody. "The accused was identified as Vikesh Maurya aka Brijesh of Gudamba," the police said. A case of attempt to murder was registered against the accused.

BJP to hold state-wide kisan sammelans

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh unit of Bharatiya Janata Party will organise state-wide kisan sammelans for five days from Monday to educate farmers about the farm laws recently enacted by the Narendra Modi government at the Centre.

BJP national vice-president and in-charge of UP Radha Mohan Singh, party's state president Swatantra Dev Singh, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and other ministers and senior party leaders would address these kisan sammelans, which would continue till December 18. Swatantra Dev Singh said that the opposition was spreading lies in the name of farm bills.

"The political parties which misled farmers when they were in power are now shedding crocodile tears on the name of farmers," he said.

The BJP state president said that the new farm bill gave more options to the farmers to sell their produce wherever they want to sell.

"This will help in breaking the monopoly of middlemen and in turn help the farmers earn more," he said.

BJP state general secretary Govind Narain Shukla said that party's vice-president Radha Mohan Singh would address kisan sammelans in Basti and Ayodhya on Monday, while the next day BJP state president Swatantra Dev Singh would address a kisan sammelan in Gonda.

H said Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya would address the kisan sammelan in Varanasi, Jal Shakti Mantri Mahendra Singh in Moradabad, Co-operative Minister Mukut Bihari Verma in Amethi and Information and Culture Minister Neelkanth Tiwari in Pratapgarh.

SP's protest in support of farmers' agitation today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party has announced to stage a protest in support of the ongoing farmers' agitation on Monday. The SP also attacked the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Central government for linking the farmers' protest to "Naxalite and anti-national elements".

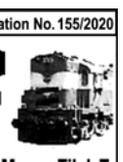
SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary in a statement here on Sunday said, "The farmers of the country are on a continuous strike for their legitimate demands from the government in the chilly winter, but the government wants to suppress the farmers' movement. We are aware that the DNA of Savarkar and Godse is in the DNA of the so-called nationalist government which is seeing Naxalites and Anti-Nationals among the farmers."

He said that Samajwadi Party president and former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav had instructed party leaders and workers to stage protests at the district headquarters in a non-violent manner on Monday in support of the agitating farmers.

"Akhilesh Yadav has decided that our protest, in support of the farmers, will continue from village to village, no matter how much the government wants us to frame in cases, send us to jail or beat us to suppress the movement. But we are not going to back off even one step. Until then, the Samajwadi Party will continue to oppose all three black laws," Chaudhary said. Earlier, Akhilesh Yadav asked the BJP government to stop "atrocities" against farmers and withdraw the three agriculture laws brought in for "looting farmers". In a press release issued by the party headquarters here, Yadav said the farmers of the country had understood that the BJP government was adopting different tactics "to snatch their land and harvest".

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY Notification No. 155/2020

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR RAIL PASSENGERS



It is notified for information of general public that following Festival Special train will run as under:-

02107/02108 Lok Manya Tilak T.-Lucknow Jn.-Lok Manya Tilak T.
Tri-weekly Superfast Festival Special Train

Train No. 02107 - Ex. Lok Manya Tilak Terminus from 16.12.2020 to 30.01.2021- Tri-weekly on every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday (20 Trips).
Train No. 02108 - Ex. Lucknow Jn. from 17.12.2020 to 31.01.2021 - Tri-weekly on every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday (20 Trips).

02107 Ex. Lok Manyna Tilak T.		↓ Station ↑	02108 Ex. Lucknow Jn.	
Arr.	Dep.		Arr.	Dep.
—	16:25	Lokmanya Tilak T.	21:50	—
16:43	16:45	Thane	21:07	21:10
17:07	17:10	Kalyan	20:47	20:50
19:30	19:35	Nasik Road	17:57	18:00
23:20	23:25	Bhusawal Jn.	14:25	14:30
05:30	05:40	Bhopal	08:15	08:25
08:17	08:19	Lalitpur	05:05	05:07
09:35	09:45	Jhansi	03:35	03:45
11:33	11:35	Orai	01:38	01:40
13:55	14:00	Kanpur Central	00:10	00:15
15:30	—	Lucknow Jn.	—	22:45

Rake Composition: Generator-cum-laguage Van-2, General 2nd Class-03, Sleeper-12, AC 3rd-04, AC 2nd-01, = 22 Coaches.

Please Note:- • This trains will run with full reserved accommodation • It is mandatory for the passengers to follow the guidelines issued for prevention and safety from COVID-19.

CPRO/T-76 Chief Passenger Traffic Manager/Gorakhpur

About any passenger amenity complaint SMS on Mob. No. 09794845955

Do Not smoke Bidi/Cigarette in train

School principal duped of ₹5 lakh by project director of real estate co

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Principal of a private school and her sister were duped of Rs 5 lakh during their bid to purchase a land under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in Gudamba. As per reports, Laxmi Singh of Gomtinagar and her sister Sudha Singh gave the money to Zaid Ubai, who is the project director of a real estate company, eight months back. Singh met Zaid through a friend and was shown a piece of land near Sports College in the area. Later, Zaid and his friend Ashfaq told her that she would get a rebate of 50 percent under the scheme if she paid the total amount. "We trusted them and paid the money. However, time passed by but they did nothing. They even threatened us when we demanded the money back," she alleged.

In another case in Gudamba, a woman was duped of Rs 30 lakh during her bid to purchase a house in the locality. As per reports, Chandraprabha Saurabh of Indiranagar sought to purchase the house of Sangeeta (of Kalyanpur in Gudamba) some time back. In her complaint, Chandraprabha said Sangeeta, her husband Ramesh Gupta and her brother-in-law Ravindra agreed to sell their house to her. As per deal, she gave Rs 20 lakh as the advance sum to Sangeeta and later paid Rs 10 lakh. However, in due course of time, Sangeeta and others refused to register the house in Chandraprabha's name. When she demanded her money back, Ramesh boasted of his links with the police brass and allegedly threatened to kill. "After much efforts, they gave us a cheque which was dishonoured by the bank. I went to their house but Ramesh and his family members lost their cool. They hurled abuses at us and also issued threats," Chandraprabha alleged.

Research is religion, age no bar: Dr Sarin

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Stressing that research is religion and age no bar, director of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Science Dr SK Sarin urged the faculty members of SGPGI to take up research work. The eminent hepatologist was speaking at the first Research Day celebrations of the institute on Sunday.

Dr Sarin said one must have the grit and vision to carry out research. Projecting the picture of a man sailing through rough waters of the sea in his presentation, he said this is what he believes is the true projection of a person going for research.

"You must know what to do, where to go and have the confidence to sail through the choppy waters of the sea," he said. He added that every student is an academic head of an institute and every day is the potential day to start research.

"Every faculty should go for research, and not just once. You should always ponder on what you are leaving behind – a loan, a car or your ability that you can carry out research. Be a role model for your students with your research and start a trend," he said. Dr Sarin said that the administrations should help doctors taking up research. Dr Aruna Loke from PGI (Chandigarh) shared the ground reality of doctors not taking up research. "There is a general feeling among doctors that when the career is assured without research, they do not get extra money for the research which they do and if it does not guarantee them promotion, why should they carry out research. However, there are 30 percent of doctors still carrying out research. Every time a clinician is trying to manage a disease, he or she is always caught in the throws of what, when and how, which is equivalent to research. Whenever you are faced with unforeseen circumstances, you always start thinking and your mind begins questioning," he said. He added that a good researcher must keep asking questions.

"The hospital administration should also take initiative to ensure that faculty members are encouraged to take up research because it is the research work which gives a better ranking to any institute," he said.

Yogi to be chief guest at SGPGI Foundation Day

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be the chief guest at the Foundation Day of SGPGI on Monday. He will also address the gathering on the occasion. SGPGI celebrates its Foundation Day on December 14 every year. "On this day in 1980, the then President of India, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy laid down the foundation stone of this institute. Over the years, SGPGI has constantly endeavoured to provide state-of-the-art medical care to patients and quality medical education and training to students. It has also contributed to research activities towards amelioration of diseases," the spokesperson said. The Foundation Day oration will be delivered by director-general of ICMR Prof Balram Bhargava. In view of the ongoing pandemic, the programme will be observed with social distancing and the number of guests will be limited while others will take part in the celebrations via video-conferencing.

Vintage car rally in Mall Avenue on Sunday Pioneer

PCCM inspects work for amenities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Principal chief commercial manager (PCCM), North Eastern Railways (NER), SC Prasad inspected the ongoing work for civic amenities and development at Lucknow Junction and Badshahnagar railway station on Sunday. He was accompanied by divisional commercial manager Anuj Singh and Lucknow Junction station director Girish Kumar Singh. Prasad inspected the circulating area, platforms, inquiry counters, display boards, TT running room, cabway, lift and foot overbridge. He also inspected cleanliness of railway station, drinking water facility, lighting and security arrangements. He asked the officials to ensure better facilities.

Prasad asked the officials to improve the quality of civic amenities, increase revenue and ensure strict implementation of Covid-19 protocols.

Early flowering a cause of concern for mango farmers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Early flowering in mango trees in the month of December is becoming a cause of concern for the farmers. Director of Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture (CISH) Shailendra Rajan said unusual flowering has been noticed in the mango orchards of Malihabad.

"In several orchards, the initiation of the panicles has been reported by farmers. Some farmers were happy thinking that this year flowering will be early and profuse. But when they interacted with the scientist, they came to know that the flowering during this time of winters is of no use. The panicles which have emerged will not transform into fruits," he said. He pointed out that in the last mango season, farmers suffered losses at many places due to very poor crop.

"Late harvesting usually delays the flowering time of the next crop. This is one of the reasons why mango flowering has started early due to poor crops earlier this year. Another important reason for early flowering is early use of chemicals. For getting regular flowering and fruiting, farmers of Malihabad and nearby areas have started application of a chemical which is being marketed by many names in the mango-growing areas of the state and readily available in the market. The most significant problem is the excessive use of chemicals by contractors who want to get the crops. Contractors don't bother for the health of the trees, but they are interested only in getting heavy crops. This is more problematic in the orchards where the contract is for multiple years, as the owners hand over the orchards to contractors for crops and maintenance for several years," Rajan pointed out. He said CISH is getting such complaints by farmers from different parts of the state.

"Many contractors do not reveal to the orchard owners that they used chemicals. Many farmers requested the institute for the analysis of the chemical content in soil for legal action against contractors," he said.

He added that in general, panicles emerging during February are the most productive, but December flowering is advanced for over 50 days in few orchards. "These panicles will be damaged by low temperature and frost. CISH is working on the residue of the chemical in soil and plant systems so that recommendations for balanced chemical application to plants are made. Judicious use will ensure a balance between shoot growth and flowering required for sustainable mango production," he added.

Virtual conference on importance of skill mapping

Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh Chapter of PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) organised a virtual conference on 'Importance of skill mapping and creating skilled workforce bank for MSMEs' on Sunday. The webinar was supported Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission. The objective was to deliberate the ways to promote skilling and self-employment amongst the youth. The virtual conference was also aimed at enhancing the employability of migrant labourers in the state.

Joint director, UPSDM, Rohit Gupta laid emphasis on the significant role played by MSMEs in contributing towards the economy of the state and also said that with such technological advances and effective steps in ease of doing business, UP is soon going to be the hub of MSMEs.

He also shed light on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programmes by UPSDM in every district of the state and said that RPL aims to align the competencies of the unregulated workforce of the state to National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF).

Kingpin of gang which hacked tatkal ticket system arrested

Lucknow (PNS): The Special Task Force (STF), on Sunday, nabbed the kingpin of a gang which hacked the tatkal ticket system of the Indian Railways and sold tickets illegally. He was identified as Saddam Hussain Ansari of Basti.

The STF team recovered 243 used tatkal tickets, two tatkal tickets for a journey in the days to come, a mobile phone, two laptops and other articles from him. He was arrested from Chhawani police station area of Basti.

The police were tipped-off that a gang was hacking the tatkal ticket system by using various softwares to get illegal access to it.

The police were also tipped-off that the gang sold these tickets to different agents who sold them to those travelling in urgency. An STF team worked on the case and traced the location of the accused. He was later arrested. The accused owned up his crime and disclosed that his gang was active in UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Haryana, Delhi and Punjab. He also disclosed the modus operandi of the gang. As per his confession, the gang used to install different extensions in the laptop and then bypass the Captcha and used autoread the OTP needed at the time of online booking of a ticket within 60 seconds.

The police said booking of a tatkal ticket at the booking counter consumed 1:30 to 2:30 minutes. "By using the software, the gang members used to do the work in comparatively very small time and this way they hacked the system," the police explained.

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग, प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी

निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना

पत्रांक :– 673 /ग्रा0अ0वि0/निविदा आम/2020–21 दिनांक– 07.12.2020

1– महामहिम राज्यपाल उत्तर प्रदेश की ओर से अधिशासी अभियन्ता, ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी द्वारा ऑफलाइन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। प्रतिशत दर पर विभागीय अधिकृत पंजीकृत ठकेदार/फर्म श्रेणी ए0बी0सी0 एवं डी0 श्रेणी के पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों के द्वारा एक अथवा अधिक कार्यों की निविदा डाली जा सकती है।

क्र0 सं0	कार्य का नाम	निविदा की अनुमानित लागत टी0एस0टी0 छोड़कर बिला ऑफ क्वाटिटी के अनुसार (लाख में)	धरोहर धनराशि (लाख में)	निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य स्टेशनरी चार्ज एवं (समस्त करों सहित)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि	अधिशासी अभियन्ता कार्यालय का पता	अधीक्षण अभियन्ता कार्यालय का पता	जिला–धिकारी कार्यालय का पता
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	पूर्वांचल विकास निधि							
1	विकास खण्ड मसौली के अन्तर्गत ग्राम खैरातीपुर में नीरज रावत के घर से अमित के घर तक तथा रामगोपाल के घर से दिलीप के घर तक इण्टरलॉकिंग कार्य।	9.070	0.181	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी
2	विकास खण्ड मसौली के अन्तर्गत ग्राम अमदहा में ललिता यादव के घर से अवधराम के घर तक इण्टरलॉकिंग कार्य।	9.680	0.194	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी
3	विकास खण्ड मसौली के अन्तर्गत ग्राम जकरिया में अलीम चौधरी के घर से गोपी गुप्ता के घर तक इण्टरलॉकिंग कार्य।	4.470	0.089	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी
4	विकास खण्ड मसौली के अन्तर्गत ग्राम सद्दीपुर में मुन्ना के घर से रमाकान्त के घर तक इण्टरलॉकिंग कार्य।	6.290	0.126	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी
5	विकास खण्ड हरख के अन्तर्गत ग्राम टिकरा मुर्तजा में बरौली रोड़ से यू0पी0एस0 टिकरा मुर्तजा तक इण्टरलॉकिंग कार्य।	7.650	0.153	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी
6	ग्राम पंचायत निन्दूरा मजरे निगोहा में आर0सी0 सी0 रोड से रामनाथ की बाग तक इण्टरलॉकिंग निर्माण कार्य ।	2.080	0.042	856.00	03 माह	ग्रा0अ0वि0, निकट विकास भवन बाराबंकी	ग्रा0अ0वि0, बड़ा रमना परि0 फैजाबाद	कलेक्ट्रेट बाराबंकी

1. सम्बन्धित कार्यों की बिक्री बिड डाक्यूमेंट सहित दिनांक 30.12.2020 से 04.01.2021 तक समय 11:00 बजे से 04:00 बजे तक कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग प्रखण्ड बाराबंकी/अधीक्षण धीक्षण अभियन्ता ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग परिमण्डल अयोध्या/जिलाधिकारी, बाराबंकी कार्यालय से प्राप्त की जा सकती है।
2. सम्बन्धित कार्यों की निविदा प्राप्ति की अन्तिम तिथि व समय स्थान 05.01.2021 को दोपहर 12:00 तक कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग, प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी, अधीक्षण अभियन्ता ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग परिमण्डल अयोध्या एवं जिलाधिकारी बाराबंकी कार्यालय में प्राप्त की जायेगी।
3. निविदा खोलने की अन्तिम तिथि 06.01.2021 को समय 12:00 बजे कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग, प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी में गठित समिति के सदस्यों/उपस्थित ठेकेदारो के समक्ष खोली जायेगी।
4. निविदाओं से सम्बन्धित जानकारी कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग, प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी से की जा सकती है।

अधिशासी अभियन्ता
ग्रामीण अभियन्त्रण विभाग
प्रखण्ड–बाराबंकी।

उ0प्र0 157744 दिनांक 10.12.2020 विज्ञापन वेबसाइट www.upgov.nic.in पर उपलब्ध है।

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

MINISTERS INTO...

After Haryana, a delegation of 90 farmers from Uttarakhand met Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar at his residence and extending their support to new farm laws enacted by Parliament. The agitating farmers have claimed members of these delegations are not genuine farmers and the Government has propped them up to create confusions. In another development National Working Group of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee disassociates itself from a statement made to media by VM Singh. The statement was neither authorised by AIKSCC nor did it follow protocols of decision making by working group. The working group of AIKSCC reiterated that it firmly stands with the demands of the farmer organisations agitating in unison for the repeal of 3 anti-farmer acts and legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price. Sardar VM Singh has stated that AIKSCC was ready to talk to the Government on the issue of legal guarantee of MSP. The last six rounds of talks between the Centre and 40 farmers' union leaders have remained inconclusive. The Government has sent a draft proposal to the farmer leaders for consideration. But the farmer leaders have rejected the Government's proposal and intensified their protest.

WHEAT CULTIVATION...

According to the Agriculture Ministry, area sown to wheat, the main rabi crop, has increased marginally by 2.53 per cent to 254.73 lakh hectares so far in the ongoing 2020-21 rabi season from 248.44 lakh hectares in the year-ago period. Total area under all rabi crops remained higher by 3.87 per cent at 507 lakh hectares so far this rabi season as against 488 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

Madhya Pradesh reported higher areas (4.55 lakh hectare), followed by Gujarat (2.34 lakh hectare) and Maharashtra (2.12 lakh hectare)", the data showed. The data showed farmers from those States who have not participated in the ongoing protests have planted more in the rabi season. Rabi sowing begins from October while harvesting from March onwards. Besides wheat, gram and mustard are other main rabi crops. "Overall trend of rabi sowing progress is very good. Increased area coverage has been recorded under wheat, pulses and oilseeds including rapeseed and mustard," officials of the Ministry said. As per the Ministry's latest data, area sown to pulses rose 9.10 per cent to 130.59 lakh hectares as on December 11 of this rabi season from 119.70 lakh hectares in the same period last year. Area sown to oilseeds also increased by 7 per cent to 73.79 lakh hectares from 68.93 lakh hectares in the said period. However, area sown to rice was lower by 6 per cent to 10.47 lakh hectares so far this rabi season as against 11.13 lakh hectares a year ago.

Similarly, area sown to coarse cereals remained lower by 6.20 per cent to 37.43 lakh hectares as against 39.90 lakh hectares in the said period.

FARMERS TO STEP...

"They have been hand-in-gloves with the Government, they conspired to sabotage our protest. The Government is hatching a conspiracy to derail the ongoing farmers' protest," added Chaduni. Farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakka said, "Government agencies have been stopping farmers from reaching Delhi, but the protest will continue till their demands are met."

"Our stand is clear, we want the three farm laws repealed. All farmer unions participating in this movement are together," he said. Another farmer leader, Rakesh Tikait, said, "if the Government gives another proposal for talks, our committee will decide on it. We appeal to all to maintain peace during protest".

Sandeep Gidde, another farmer leader, announced at the Press conference that the proposed indefinite hunger strike by farmers from December 19 has been cancelled and it will be a day-long strike on Monday instead.

Farmer leaders on Saturday had said they are ready to hold talks with the Government, but will first discuss repealing of the three new farm laws, and announced that representatives of their unions would sit on a hunger strike during a nationwide protest on Monday.

They had also said thousands of farmers will start their ''Delhi Chalo" march with their tractors from Rajasthan's Shahjahanpur through the Jaipur highway at 11 am on Sunday.

The Delhi Traffic Police has deployed its personnel across important border points to ensure commuters do not face difficulties and is constantly updating people about open and closed routes on its Twitter handle. On Sunday, the traffic police tweeted the Tikri and the Dhansa borders are closed for traffic movement but the Jhatikara border is open only for two wheelers and pedestrian movement. Those going towards Haryana, can take Jharoda (only single carriageway), Daurala, Kapashera, Badusarai, Rajokri NH-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundahera borders as they are open, the traffic police said.

"The Gazipur border is closed for traffic from Noida & Gaziabad to Delhi due to farmers' protests. People are advised to take alternate route for coming to Delhi via Chilla, Anand Vihar, DND, Apsara & Bhopra borders," it tweeted.

The traffic police also informed commuters about the closure of the Singhu, Auchandi, Piau, Maniyari and Mangesh borders. Since these borders are closed, it suggested that motorists take alternative routes via Lampur, Safiabad,Saboli and Singhu School toll tax borders, it said.

Traffic was diverted from Mukarba and GTK Road. So, commuters have been advised to avoid Outer Ring Road, GTK Road and National Highway-44, the traffic police said. Farmers have been protesting against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020.

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

Farmers from Rajasthan and some other places gathered in large numbers on the Haryana-Rajasthan border near Rewari for their march towards Delhi and sat in protest on side of the Delhi-Jaipur national highway as the Haryana police put up barricades to stop their onward march.

Rewari's Superintendent of Police Abhishek Jorwal told reporters at the site that district authorities had imposed Section 144 of the CrPC banning assembly of five or more people.

"We have set up barricades and we will try to stop them here," he said, adding, besides adequate force of the Haryana police, three companies of paramilitary personnel have been deployed to ensure law and order.

The farmers were sitting in protest at Jaisinghpur Kheda area in Rewari along Rajasthan-Haryana border (NH-48). Gurgaon is over 70 km from the site while Delhi is nearly 80 km away.

Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav, who was at the site, said since the barricades have been put, the farmers had no option but to stage a sit-in. A farmer from Rajasthan who was among those who wanted to march to Delhi against the Centre's new farm laws said they will "force the government to rollback the anti-peasant legislations." Earlier, the farmers had threatened to block the Jaipur-Delhi highway. Thousands of farmers have been protesting at various border points of Delhi for over a fortnight demanding repeal of the new farm laws. Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the 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, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

BOOK CHRONICLING...

Also, the book contains tales of Head Constable Yam Bahadur Thapa, Constable D Santosh Kumar, Constable Sukhwinder Singh and Constable Shyambir Singh. Co-authored by DIGs of CRPF Nitu and M Dhinakaran along with their team comprising Amit, Assistant Commandant CRPF and Inspector Deepak Saxena, the book has stories of the recipients of Ashok Chakra -- the highest peacetime gallantry award, Vir Chakra, and Shaurya Chakras.

As CRPF has been going on peacekeeping missions to different countries, it is no surprise that the tale of valour scripted by its brave-heart in foreign land has also found a place in the book.

The Speaker congratulated the Force for bringing such a detailed book and said that he is sure that this book will fill hearts of everyone with pride and inspire the generations to come.

Lauding the release of the book, Dr AP Maheshwari DG CRPF said that these true stories are our heritage and every citizen has the right to know about these stories and take pride in them.

The authors have sought to bring out the intricate details of the operations with valuable insights.

The book often comes up with interesting anecdotes from the lives of these intrepid warriors.

Dedicated to the citizens of the country and a homage to those who made supreme sacrifice at the altar of duty, the book is written with reverence to bravery, adherence for accuracy, and most importantly a passion that simmers in the heart of a patriot.

BJP PRESIDENT...

Former BJP President Amit Shah had also earlier tested Coronavirus positive. Incidentally, Shah too intends to visit the West Bengal later this month to monitor law and order in the State. During Bihar poll around two dozen BJP leaders, including former union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy, were infected by the Coronavirus.

DRASTIC RISE...

According to the survey data, 16 States and Union Territories registered a rise in obesity among women while 19 states and UTs recorded an increase in obesity among men. Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at 38 per cent. Also, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at over 40 per cent. Men and women were counted as obese whose body mass index was found to be over or equal to 25.0 kg/m2 while children's obesity was counted in terms of weight-for-height. The present NFHS was conducted on 6.1 lakh sample households, involving household-level interviews to collect information on population, health, family planning and nutrition related indicators. Doctors have blamed rising obesity on unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activities among children and even adults. Dr RK Dhamija, Professor from Delhi-based Lady Hardinge Medical College said that children are "not eating healthy" and "not getting enough exercise," leaving them obese.

He warns that obesity is likely to get worse during the Covid-19 pandemic which has restricted kids and elders inside the homes. "Many children are moving less and eating more and that too junk food," he said adding that this may result into various ailments like diabetes and breathing problems. He suggested adopting health lifestyle including eating health foods and physical activities.

Dr Arun Gupta from Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) underlined importance of breastfeeding in this regard, pointing out that it prevents babies from getting obese and undernourished. "It is well known babies in India are either undernourished or getting obese in some sections of the population. Breastfeeding provides a double duty action to prevent both these problems," he said. He cited a WHO study involving 16 countries that says breastfeeding reduces child obesity risk by up to 25 percent. The NFHS results of 17 States and five Union Territories have been released now as phase-one. The phase-two results covering other States will be released next year, the Union Health Ministry had said.

PUNJAB DIG...

"I have always listened to my conscience and now I earnestly feel that I should stand by my brotherhood," he wrote in his resignation letter. He further wrote that he may be treated as prematurely retired from the service with effect from December 12. Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and other areas have stayed put at various Delhi border points, protesting against the new farm laws, which they fear will dismantle the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporate firms.

Earlier, Akali Dal stalwart and former Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal had said that he had returned his Padma Vibhushan award in protest against the farm laws. SAD (Democratic) leader Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa had also announced he would return his Padma Bhushan award in solidarity with the farmers.

Several international sportspersons from Punjab had also extended their support to the farmers' agitation. Noted Punjabi poet Surjit Patar had also stated he would return his Padma Shri award. *PTI*

Absconding AMU student leader in release list of farmers

Aligarh: Farmers have included in their demand letter the release of intellectuals and student leaders of the country, including the student leader of AMU, who was under the scanner of the Civil Lines Police till a week ago. Photographs of these people have also been placed at the farmer's picket, including the photo and name of Farhan Zubairi.

At AMU, students protested against an incident in France last month. The next day, a video went viral, in which AMU student leader Farhan Zubairi, the western UP in-charge of the MIM youth organization, gave a controversial statement that if anyone insults us, we will behead him. If someone raises a finger towards the Prophet, he will break his finger.

The civil lines police filed a case against Farhan when the video went viral and has been continuously searching for him since then. Police teams went to Bihar, Bulandshahr and Delhi in search of Farhan. Now the agitating farmers in Delhi have included him in their list in which they are demanding the release of some intellectuals and student leaders of the country. Ravindra Dubey Inspector Civil Lines said that last week in the High Court, Farhan had filed a petition in which the court has ordered in his favor to appear in the court in 45 days and present his bail application.

China & Pak are enemies of humanity and peace: Indresh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Asserting that China and Pakistan are enemies of humanity and peace as the former is behind to spread out the global pandemic COVID-19 while the latter is responsible for the menace of terrorism in the world, the Member of National Executive, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) Indresh Kumar has on Sunday said, there should be boycott not only of both these nations but also of their supporters at each level.

Indian Muslims should be aware of Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti as both favour the anti-India act of China and indulge in defaming Muslims. These both ex-CMs of J&K are free to take shelter anywhere in China or Pakistan if they dislike India as Indian Muslims have become aware of their reality and they will not stand by the leaders who are working against the country, the RSS leader said while speaking as chief guest in the convention of Muslim Rashtriya Manch. The representatives of districts of this eastern belt of UP associated with the Manch participated in the convention convened at Lamahi, here.

Senior RSS leader Indresh Kumar addressing a seminar in Varanasi on Sunday

All the countries of the world should unite against China and Pakistan if they want to protect humanity as both countries have posed a serious threat to humanity because of their policy of imperialism, he said adding, Indian Muslims will expose those who stand by both nations and also boycott them. The Manch will not only boycott the supporters of these two nations but also write letters to the UNO against them, he said further.

India shows an example of human sensitivity before the world by extending its help to other countries during the COVID-19 pandemic and India is ahead to become the World Power under the leadership of Narendra Modi, he said adding, this is why the entire world is looking towards India for global peace.

The convention chalked out a strategy at block level to boycott those who stand by China and Pakistan and in this order the organisation has already launched an awareness drive which will last till January 10. The convention also gave a slogan to evict Gilgit Balochistan from Pakistan and Aksai Chin from China. Mo Azaharuddin conducted the convention and Tusharakant offered a formal vote of thanks at last. Among those attended it included Maulana Shafiq Mujddidi, Haji Mobin, Afsar Baba, Sabana Khan and Ayaz Khan.

Woman, son murdered in village

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

In a shocking incident, a 52-year-old woman and her 26-year-old son were brutally murdered with sharp edged weapon by some unidentified goons late on Saturday night in Saraidina village, under the Soraon police station. This has caused sensation in the village. The police reached the spot as soon as the information was received and started investigating. Some people have been picked up for questioning.

Dharmo Devi and her son Surendra Pasi were asleep in the verandah outside the house in Saraidina village. Panic gripped the area in the morning when villagers spotted the bodies of mother and son in a pool of blood lying outside their house. They were brutally killed with a sharp edged weapon. This caused a stir in the family. Initial investigations have revealed land disputes with some people living in the neighbourhood. Police have started an investigation.

Mother and son were brutally murdered in Prayagraj district. The incident took place on Saturday night. The incident came to light when a girl from the village came to fetch milk on Sunday morning. Police officers and the forensic team reached the spot after getting the information. Dog squad was also called. Land dispute is said to be behind this brutal murder. Two people are being interrogated in the case.

Dharma Devi, a resident of Saraidin village, has three sons. The eldest son Jagjivan lives with his family in another village Sikanderpur. At the same time, his two sons Surendra Pasi alias Tidoo (22) and youngest Mahendra lived with her. On Saturday night Mahendra had gone to attend a marriage procession. Dharma and Surendra were in the house. After having dinner, both were sleeping in the verandah. Late in the night, the miscreants killed both by hitting them with brick-stone and sharp edged weapons.

On Sunday morning, a girl from the village arrived at Dharma Devi's place to get cow's milk, after seeing the body of both of them in a pool of blood, she raised an alarm and immediately informed a young man from the neighbourhood. Following which, the young man reached the spot and seeing the corpse of the two, called Mahendra and informed him. Mahendra reached home after receiving the news.

By then the crowd of villagers had gathered there. Police reached the spot after getting information. Mahendra said that there was a dispute over the land from the neighbour. It is suspected that they had committed this murder, Mahendra alleged.. The police took the neighbour and his son into custody. Police said that the case is being investigated. Those who have been suspected, are being questioned in custody. Apart from this, other points are also being investigated, police added.

Dharma Devi wife of late Ram Sajeevan in Sarai Dina village under the Soraon police station and her son Surendra were murdered on Saturday late night.

People were shocked when the incident was detected in the morning. Police arrived on information suspected that the murder took place over a land dispute. Police have received information about a dispute with the neighbour over land. Police have detained two youths in this connection and are being grilled, police added.

66 new Covid cases in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 66 more new patients have been detected in the district on Sunday, increasing the total number to 20,255. The day also saw two more deaths, increasing the toll to 335. During the day, the follow-up negative reports included 117 and all of them have been recovered from home isolation, increasing the number to 16,327. As no patient has been discharged from any of the hospitals, the number remained at 2,886. The total number of patients who have been recovered so far is 19,213, leaving 707 active cases. The recovery rate is 94.85 per cent, while the mortality rate is 1.65 per cent.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh has informed that in the first report of the day, 42 positive patients were found out of 2,520 reports received. Till then, the total test reports received were 4,66,533 and the results of 3,489 are awaited. Out of them, 4,46,302 were negative, while 20,231 positive. The total number of samples collected was 4,88,114. Earlier, a female aged 40 from Bharati Nagar (Garhwaghat) succumbed to COVID-19 at Sir Sundarlal Hospital, Banaras Hindu University (SSH BHU) while a male aged 71 from Phulwaria died at Medwin Hospital. With the addition of seven new red zones, the total number of hotspots has increased to 2,565 including 218 red zones. There are 2,347 green zones with 15 new ones.

Meanwhile, on the instructions of the District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma, mass/ group antigen tests continued to be conducted at Varanasi Junction (Cantt.) and Manduadih railway. At Cantt, three out of 38 tests have been detected positive but all the 26 tests at Manduadih have been found negative. Besides, all the 210 tests have been found negative at Shree Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Hospital, Kabirchaura, 167 at LBS Hospital Ramnagar, 115 at Government Women's Hospital, 31 at CHC Shivpur, 22 at Swami Vivekanand Hospital, Bhelupur and 55 at SSH BHU.

'₹1 cr counter transactions under POSB took place in UP circle'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Minister of State for Education, Communications and Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India Sanjay Dhotre, who visited Prayagraj on Saturday told mediapersons that approximately ₹ 1 crore counter transactions under Post Office Saving Bank (POSB) took place in UP circle and a total of ₹ 22,000 crore have been deposited or withdrawn during March 25 and June 14, 2020.

More than ₹1467.56 crore cash has been disbursed, and ₹ 73.43 lakh transactions have been done while 24.06 lakh account have been opened in this financial year up to December 6, 2020 through APS.

The minister stated that UP Postal Circle has collaborated with different drug agencies/e-Commerce companies for delivering the medicines, COVID-19 testing kit, PPE kit.

During first phase of lockdown (upto July) UP Circle delivered 0.47 crore article, booked 1.06 crore articles and earned revenue of ₹41.15 crore. One hundred tonnes essential items booked and delivered. In this financial year up to November-2020 more than 3.13 crore items have been booked, 1.99 crore items have been delivered and a revenue of ₹136.44 crore has been earned

The Minister stated that Department of Posts, U.P. Circle has tie-up with Health Department, UP Government which would help in the vision of CM of UP to make first TB-free state in India. UP Postal Circle is collecting TB Sputum samples from laboratories of Health department and the same is being delivered to testing labs within 24 hours in some district and 48 hours in another district. He informed the media that MoUs have been signed with Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust, Varanasi and Hanumaan Garhi Nyas, Ayodhya for distribution of Prasad through Postal Channel across the country. To prevent the spread of worldwide pandemic COVID-19 and to promote MSME sector, UP Postal Circle has signed an agreement with Meghdoot Gramodyog Sewa Sansthan (MGSS) to sell hand sanitiser and other Ayurvedic products at reasonable prices in post offices.

As many as 1,21,425 Aadhar Registration and Updation Centres are functional across the state. Already about 16,55,391 Aadhar transactions have been done in 2020 (up October 2020).

Passport Sewa Kendras (PSK) have been set up in 48 post offices. This facility has eased the process of applying passports. Now the citizens can approach the nearest Post Office-Passport Sewa Kendra for availing the service.

16 including four doctors found absent

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh made a surprise inspection at different health centres to see their conditions and available services here on Friday. As many as 14 teams have been constituted at CMO office level and almost all medical teams made such surprise inspections at different places. During the inspection, 16 persons including four doctors and 12 other health workers were found absent without any prior notices. They all were warned and their one day salary was withheld.

These teams visited 44 health units in the urban and rural areas in the district including CHC Arajline, PHCs Mahgaon, Payagpur, Jagardevpur, Cholapur, Chiraigaon, Badagaon, Shivpur, Sadar Bazar, Pandeypur, Chowkaghat, Sikraul, Orderly Bazar, Badi Bazar, Adampur, Konia, Rajghat, Sewa Sadan, Madhopur, Manduadih, Anandmai, Madanpura, Ashfaqnagar, Durgakund, Bajardiha, Sewapuri and Gangapur.

CMO Dr VB Singh inspecting a health centre in Varanasi on Saturday Pioneer

During the inspection, the progress of all the national health and family welfare programmes were also reviewed apart from seeing the cleanliness condition and availability of medicines, bed-sheets and other facilities.

Meanwhile, presiding over a meeting of the Task Force Committee, District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma has instructed the concerned department to complete the wellness centres and hand over the same to the Health department soon.

He also directed the Health and ICDS departments to conduct a special campaign from Monday to Friday to ensure providing 100 per cent benefits of various schemes to the beneficiaries.

He also directed them to complete all the pre-assigned work within the next 5–6 days. He said that on-site review and evaluation of the works would be made by the senior officers during their visits there. The meeting was also attended by Chief Development Officer (CDO) Madhusudan Hulgi, CMO and officers of other departments.

49 more test positive in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

A total of 49 cases of coronavirus were reported in Prayagraj district within the last 24 hours on Saturday. At the same time, 51 patients also became infection-free on the same day. About 45 persons also completed their home isolation while 6 patients also discharged from different Covid hospitals. With this number of people completing their home isolation, a total of 19,740 persons have completed their home isolation.

One patient also succumbed to the deadly virus on the same day. On Saturday evening, a total of 5,517 persons got their corona test conducted. Of them, as many as 49 persons were tested positive for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, scientists in the Department of Mechanical Engineering of Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology (MNNIT) have claimed to detect corona infection in just 30 seconds through x-rays. Also, it has sought financial support from Department of Science and Technology (DST). So that machines can be prepared for testing.

MNNIT Director Prof Rajiv Tripathi informed that our scientists have achieved this important milestone under the leadership of Prof Mukul Shukla of Mechanical Engineering Department. Digital x-ray and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can detect in just 30 seconds whether a person is infected with COVID-19 or not. Financial assistance has been sought from the Department of Science and Technology on behalf of the institute to further this project. With the help of DST, a machine will be made for testing, which will be taken to rural areas and it will be easier to check for COVID-19 infection.

MNNIT Director Prof Rajiv Tripathi said that the Allenger Company has also recognised the work of our scientists. Soon, on the advice of the scientists of the institute, the testing work can be started afresh by making necessary changes in the normal x-ray machine. Project Head Mechanical Engineering Department Prof Mukul Shukla said that x-ray examination of corona infection would be done through Artificial Intelligence. For this, x-ray screening of corona infectives in China, Italy and India has been seen on scanners with the help of Artificial Intelligence.

It has been closely studied what kinds of spots have been found on the x-ray film of the infected person.

Prof Mukul Shukla said that the help of Dr Deepak Gupta, a well-known radiologist of the city, has been taken in this project. Dr Gupta has described this entire testing process as scientific. He informed that testing has started in Indore on the basis of this technique.

Prof Mukul informed that Mayank Mayukh of MNNIT, Dr Sameer Saraswati and Dr Pradeep Agarwal are also associated with the project. It was also informed that earlier the scientists of the institute have prepared many instruments including Woralizer 1.0, Viroshield, Sterilizing Box, Power Base Hand Free Wash Basin, Paper Sanitisation Scanner, turning disaster into opportunity in Covid period. Seeing these achievements of the institute, Union Minister of State for Education, Communication and Technology Sanjay Dhotre, who visited MNNIT on December 11, has also appreciated these achievements.

Senior citizens felicitated at Lal Girjaghar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Several senior citizens were honoured at Lal Girjaghar here on Sunday when at this church like all the other churches of the city, third Sunday of the Advent prior to the forthcoming festival of Christmas was celebrated with traditional gaiety. Advent is the period of four Sundays before Christmas, being celebrated as coming of Jesus into the world. On the occasion, carol songs were sung at the churches.

At Lal Girjaghar, felicitation function was organised in which the outstanding contributions of some old persons were highlighted. Besides, a special prayer was held and Rev Sanjay delivered discourses on Bible.

The function was conducted by Vijay Dayal. Among those who were honoured on the occasion were BS Lal, Orleen Dayal, Roseleen Das, Hemant Das, John Dayal, Rakesh Hamla, Pushpa Sidney, Asha Tagore, Eva Prakash, Sheela Andrews, Morin Phillips, SV Das and Ashok Das.

IG gives cheque to deceased cop's family

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Inspector General (Range) Vijay Singh Meena handed over a cheque of ₹30 lakh to the family of deceased police constable Rahul Kumar who died in a tragic road accident recently. As the cop was an account holder of the HDFC Bank, so the bank paid the same to his bereaved family being the bank's salary account holder. The cheque was received by the deceased cop's brother Santosh Kumar.

Speaking on the occasion, Meena said that the bank provides this special facility to the salary account holders of the police employees, which shows the bank's respect towards the warriors of our society. He praised the bank for its commitment to the special section of the society, which is continuously committed for 24 hours service to the society and in any case of tragic mishaps, such contribution gives an economic support to the dependents. On the occasion, the bank's regional head Manish Tandon, zonal manager Deepak Jha and branch manager Varun Bansal were also present. On behalf of the bank, Manish Tandon said that the bank has always stood by and will continue to work for these guards of the society and make efforts to further benefit the people through its world-class banking and financial services. Expressing his thanks, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said that a society is prosperous and empowered when all the institutions work together for the benefits of the individual, group and society.

Many sell masks to earn livelihood

ALLAHABAD (PNS): Mask is a powerful weapon to break the chain of coronavirus infection. In the coronavirus period, it is also giving shade of self-reliance to the people. Many people are making masks and selling them by setting up shops along the road. This source of income helping them earning their livelihood for their family. Among them are many people who once worked in metros like Delhi and Mumbai. Now they are making and selling masks locally in their own family. There are also some people, who are selling masks by getting them from outside in the district. Naseer Ahmed of Sikandra said that he used to work in a textile sewing factory in Mumbai. His job stalled when there was a lockdown due to a corona infection. He was unable to get any means to return home but arrived at home somehow. But he kept sitting unemployed for seven months and wandered in search of employment in the district. Last month, work started by placing a sewing machine on the footpath near Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital in Shantipuram. They make masks themselves and are also bringing designer and fancy masks from the market and selling them at their shop. He said that the economic situation was not good. Somehow he arranged for money and bought an old sewing machine. He has no ability to pay rent for the shop. So, he opened the shop on the sidewalk. Masks from ₹ 5 to ₹ 25 are available in their shop. He told that 300 masks are sold daily. Ghulam Mohammed of Nai Basti, Phaphamau, said that he used to work as a vendor in the train. The coronavirus knock had put a break on life. Due to the stalled operation of the trains, no work was going on. Eight months later, about 15 days ago, he decorated the shop on the footpath on Lucknow road near his house. He gets the goods from the Chowk market sells designer and fancy masks for ₹10 to ₹ 30. He said that about 250 masks are sold daily. On the strength of this work, his family came back on track.

Joint Opposition Front members hand over memorandum to DM on Sunday expressing solidarity with the ongoing farmers agitation at Delhi and demonstration on Monday. Pioneer

DC orders fresh probe into Coolie Bazar house collapse

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar has ordered a fresh inquiry into the house collapse in Coolie Bazar on December 3 and directed the Kanpur Development Authority vice chairman to probe the incident as per the new guidelines and submit the report by December 15.

He has also asked the district magistrate and the DIG to find out if the builders were working as per the sanctioned building plan and take stern action against the guilty.

The divisional commissioner said on account of digging for construction of a basement, the building had collapsed and one person had died and 22 family were left shelterless and this could not be taken lightly.

Shekhar returned the reports which had been put up and sought further investigation on certain points. He said the report did not mention if the work was being done as per the sanctioned building plan or not.

He said it was a grave issue and a thorough inquiry had to be carried out to find the root-cause of the accident.

It may be mentioned here that the aggrieved parties had approached Member of Parliament Satya Dev Pachauri and requested that an inquiry be ordered again as the report did not mention of the role of builders who were digging the ground for construction of a basement.

The report termed the building collapse as an accident.

132 candidates selected in JKC placement drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The JK Centre for Technician Training and JBM Group joined hands and signed a memorandum of understanding for skill promotion.

A campus placement drive was also held in which 132 candidates were selected.

JKC for Technician Training Chief LK Khanna said the objective of this centre was to extend opportunities to the youth of UP and surrounding areas by imparting skill development training to them.

He said this was strictly in continuation with the Skill India programme proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said today skill development was the focused area and the objective was to develop skill

and also identify the skills needed and the gap present, and then with the right skill development training, bridging this gap for the best results and high productivity.

He aid with the ever evolving corporate culture, the need of the hour was to have talented employees and leaders who could master any skill and become an asset for the organisation and work towards nation uplift.

JK Centre for Technician Training and JBM Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Pioneer

Khanna said this training helped in increasing employee engagement so that employees could work towards their goals and accomplish them. He said it created a culture that was backed by accountability and ownership. He said it also increased employee motivation by helping them be updated with latest trends in the industry and reduced employee turnover and increased the adaptability towards accepting new technologies and policies.

He added that it also enabled leaders to shape up their experiences and beliefs of the people they are leading to help them achieve their goals. It helps in persistent and long-term change-related problems as well.

The JBM CGM (Skill Development) said professionals these days were always on the lookout for methodologies that could help them recede the gap between their skills and on-job requirement.

He said there was so much that one could learn on-job that was never taught in B-schools or in textbooks. He added that when an organisation encouraged the culture of skill development and invested in skill development training programmes for employees, it automatically helped them become more engaged towards their job.

He said the company was a 2.2-billion-dollar professional group and its mission was to provide newer services and solutions through its products like motor vehicle, engineering designs and services, renewable energy, railways, electrical and CNG buses, lithium batteries and e-charging. He said it had 60 centres in 60 countries.

The vote of thanks was proposed by M Omar.

A total of 52 recognised fitters and fabricators and 80 ITI fitters were selected in the placement drive. Later they were given certificates .

Prominent among those present in the drive were Ashutosh Tiwari, AK Pandey, M Omar, RK Agarwal.

133 registries executed in KDA camp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

After a long gap, 133 registries were executed in one day in a special registry camp organised at Kanpur Development Authority office on Saturday.

The camp was organised at the KDA office on the demand of the clerical staff who had struck work due to alleged misbehaviour by a lawyer in the registry office in the recent past.

Keeping in view their demand, KDA Vice Chairman Rakesh Kumar Singh had allowed the registry camp at the development authority's office.

A large number of allottees arrived on Saturday to get their properties registered.

Keeping in view the winter season, the KDA had made arrangements to serve tea to all the visitors.

As many as 45 registries were executed in Zone 2 followed by 18 in Zone 3 and 70 in Zone 4.

KDA organised special registry camp on Saturday. Pioneer

51 more test positive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar reported 51 more coronavirus positive cases on Sunday evening. Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil K Mishra said that 51 more people had tested positive for coronavirus infection between Saturday evening and Sunday evening taking the tally of confirmed cases to 31,468 cases. He said that 5 patients were discharged from hospital. He said one COVID-19 deaths in the city was reported till Sunday evening keeping the death toll to 801. The CMO said at present 706 active cases were undergoing treatment. Dr Mishra said 3096 samples were sent for testing in the city.

4-year-old killed in road acident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A four-year-old boy was killed when a speeding truck knocked down a scooty in Chakeri police station area on Saturday night.

The local residents caught hold of the truck driver and brutally beat up him. He was later handed over to the police.

According to reports, Adnan, son of Enalhuda of Sujatganj, was going to Chishti Nagar on scooty with his younger brother Arham (4) when a loaded truck coming from FCI godown hit their two-wheeler near Shyam Nagar outpost. Both brothers fell on the ground and before they could be removed, in a bid to escape, the truck driver mowed down Arham, killing him on the spot.

On hearing about the incident, the kin of the deceased reached the spot and staged a demonstration with the body and blocked the road.

ASP Cantonment Nikhil Pathak assured the kin of the deceased of stern penal action against the guilty truck driver.

Enalhuda is employed in Saudi Arab. He is presently in Kanpur for the construction of a house in Chishti Nagar.

KNN to free parks from encroachments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Mayor Pramila Pandey on Sunday said that from January 2021, the Kanpur Nagar Nigam would launch a drive to remove encroachments from parks.

She said the KNN owned valuable lands measuring 100 acres in the city that was encroached by vested interest and thus it had been decided to free the entire land.

She said these encroached lands were worth crores f rupees and located near COD drain, Swarup Nagar, Ghantaghar, besides several parks encroached upon by land sharks.

She said the KNN had also decided to launch a drive to create awareness among people about the need to curb polythene littering.

She said in the new year, a special drive would be launched against milk dairies in the city and they would be shifted to the outskirts of the city.

She also warned against garbage burning and said if any person was found to be indulging in it he/she would be fined and punished.

SMCS TO HONOUR ASHOK SINGHAL POSTHUMOUSLY

The Sanatan Mandir Chetna Society (SMCS) will present the Sanatan Dharma Ratna award posthumously to Vishwa Hindu Parishad international president Ashok Singhal.

The award would be given to the kin of Ashok Singhal by the society's patron Padma Vibhushan Jagatguru Swami Rambhadracharyaji in a function to be organised on January 14, 2021. SMCS secretary Ajay Kumar Mishra said the award, carrying cheque of Rs 1 lakh, a silver medal and a certificate, would be given to the nearest kin of Ashok Singhal. In 2019, this award was given to Swami Rambhadrachryaji. The SMCS felicitate one person every year for his/her contribution for the uplift and protection of sanatan dharma.

NCL sets a new record

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

The Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL), the Singrauli- based subsidiary of Coal India Limited (CIL), has set a new record by despatching maximum coal in a day on Friday. NCL despatched about 3.76 lakh tonnes on Friday which is the highest in a day since the inception of this miniratna company. The NCL also did 4.02 lakh tonnes of record coal production on Friday which is more than any single day production of this financial year. On this spectacular achievement, the CMD and functional directors of the company have congratulated the team NCL. With the relentless efforts of NCL employees even in the tough time of the Covid-19 pandemic, the company has produced about 77.4 million tonnes of coal in FY 20-21 with a growth of 5.4 per cent. NCL has also recorded a phenomenal growth of about 20 per cebt y-o-y in OverBurden Removal, the material above coal layers which is to be removed for coal exposure. Overburden removal is an important factor to judge the performance of opencast mining companies. NCL has despatched about 73.16 million tonnes of coal out of an annual coal despatch target of 113.25 million tonnes. Going by the figures it is expected that the NCL will once again cross its assigned targets and will set new records. In the last FY 2019-20 also NCL had produced and despatched more coal than its set targets.

5,206 cases settled

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

As many as 5,206 cases were settled at the National Lok Adalat held on Saturday. Under the aegis of District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) the litigated matters were settled. The achievement of the programme was that pre-litigation matters too were settled and through the family courts 13 couples agreed to live together. The Lok Adalat was jointly inaugurated by DJ Lal Chand Gupta, principal judge Diwakar Prasad Chaturvedi and presiding officer MACT Veer Nayak. Through 54 courts cases of revenue, land, bank loans, motor accident claims, telephone bills etc were settled.

MASS MARRIAGE: As many as 40 couples tied the nuptial knot during a mass marriage held at block headquarters of Narainpur on Saturday. Under the scheme run by the state government 40 couples were eligible. The rituals of 37 Hindu couples were performed by the team of Kewla Shankar and Maulvi Faiyaj performed the rituals of three Muslim couples. Under the scheme the couples were presented traditional jewellry and utensils and was sent to ₹35,000 to the bride's account. Among those who blessed the couples were UP Minister of State for Energy, Rama Shankar Singh Patel, MLA Shuchismita Maurya and CDO Avinash Singh.

Theft case

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

A gang of thieves sneaked into a house in Chakia village under the Pipraich police station and decamped with booty. They entered the room and took away ornaments and cash along with a sewing machine. The theft came to light when the landlady who had gone to her relative's place returned home on Saturday. According to information, Sundravati Gupta, wife of Sudeep, a resident of Chakia village, lives in a house along with her children on Bhathat Bailon Marg. She runs a grocery store in the house itself. She had gone to Ramkola along with children to attend a marriage. The thieves entered the room, broke open the locks of cupboards and boxes and fled with ornaments, including two pairs of anklets, utensils etc from there. SHO Pipraich Dinesh Mishra said that the case was being investigated and the thieves would be arrested soon.

LTT-Lko Jn puja spl to run from Dec 16

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration for the convenience of the passengers will run the following triweekly superfast puja special train in 20 trips from December 16 to January 31. All coaches in these trains will be of reserved category and passengers travelling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines, Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Pankaj Kumar Singh said. The 02107 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus (LTT)-Lucknow Junction triweekly superfast puja special train from December 16 to January 30, 2021, will every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday depart from Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 16.25 hrs, from Thane at 16.45 hrs, from Kalyan at 17.10 hrs, from Nashik Road at 19.35 hrs, from Bhusaval at 23.25 hrs, from Bhopal the next day at 05.40 hrs, from Lalitpur at 08.19 hrs, from Jhansi at 09.45 hrs, from Orai at 11.35 hrs, Kanpur Central at 14:00 hrs and leaving Lucknow at 15.30 hrs. During the return journey, the 02108 Lucknow Jn-Lokmanya Tilak Terminus tri-weekly superfast puja special train will from December 17 to January 31, 2021, every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday depart from Lucknow Jn at 22.45 hrs, the second day from Kanpur Central at 00.15 hrs, from Orai at 01.40 hrs, from Jhansi at 03.45 hrs, from Lalitpur at 05.07 hrs, from Bhopal at 08.25 hrs, from Bhusaval at 14.30 hrs, from Nashik Road at 18.00 hrs, from Kalyan at 20.50 hrs, from Thane at 21.10 hrs and reach Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 21.50 hrs. A total of 22 coaches, including two of generator-cum-luggage van, 12 of sleeper class, four of AC third class, one AC second class and three general second class coaches will be attached in this train.

CANCELLATION/REDUCTION IN FREQUENCY: The cancellation and reduction in frequency of the following trains will be done by the railway administration from December 16 to January 31 due to operational difficulties caused by dense fog and bad weather, CPRO said. The 02179 Lucknow-Agra Fort daily special train will remain cancelled from December 16 to January 31, 2021. Likewise the 02180 Agra Fort-Lucknow daily special train will remain cancelled from December 16 to January 31, 2021. The 02561 Jaynagar-New Delhi special train will be cancelled on December 17, 24, 31 and January 7, 14, 21 and 28, 2021 (every Thursday). The 02562 New Delhi-Jaynagar special train will be cancelled on December 18 and 25 and January 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 days (every Friday). The 05273 Raxaul-Anand Vihar Terminus special train will be cancelled on December 17, 24, 31 and January 7, 14, 21 and 28 (every Thursday). The 05274 Anand Vihar Terminus-Raxaul special train will on December 18, and25 and on January 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, 2021, be cancelled (every Friday). The 02553 Saharsa-New Delhi Special train will be canceled on 22, 29 December 2020, 05, 12, 19, 26 January, 2021 days every Tuesday. The 02554 New Delhi-Saharsa special train will be cancelled on December 23 and 30, and January 6, 13, 20 and 27 (every Wednesday). The 02557 Muzaffarpur-Anand Vihar Terminus special train will be cancelled on December 16, 23 and 30 and on January 6, 13, 20 and 27, 2021, (every Wednesday). The 02558 Anand Vihar Terminus-Muzaffarpur special train will be canceled on December 17, 24, 31 and on January 7, 14, 21 and 28 (every Thursday).

Three special trains to be run

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration for the convenience of passengers has decided to run the following three pairs of special trains between Anand Vihar Terminus-Raxaul-Anand Vihar Terminus. All coaches in them will be of reserved category, CPRO PK Singh said.

04008 ANVT-RAXAUL SPL: The 04008 Anand Vihar Terminus-Raxaul biweekly special will from December 15 till the next order every Tuesday and Thursday will leave Anand Vihar Terminus (ANVT) at 17.06 hrs, Ghaziabad at 16.30 hrs, Pilkhua at 17.34 hrs, Hapur at 17.50 hrs, Amroha at 18.53 hrs, Moradabad at 19.40 hrs, Raja Ka Sahaspur at 20.07 hrs, Chandausi at 20.35 hrs, Amla at 21.30 hrs, Shahjahanpur at 23.28 hrs, on the second day Hardoi at 00.26 hrs, Alamnagar at 01.51 hrs, Lucknow at 02.25 hrs, Nihalgarh at 04.23 hrs, Musafir Khana at 05.02 hrs, Sultanpur at 05.38 hrs, Lambhua at 06.04 hrs, Sri Krishna Nagar at 06.30 hrs, Jaunpur City at 06.58 hrs, Varanasi at 09.10 hrs, Varanasi City at 09.28 hrs, Aunrihar, at 10.00 hrs, Nandganj at 10.22 hrs, Ghazipur City at 10.54 hrs, Yusufpur at 11.15 hrs, Ballia at 12.22 hrs, Suraimanpur at 12.59 hrs, Chhapra at 14.08 hrs, Dighwara at 15.05 hrs, Hajipur at 16.23 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 18.15 hrs, Sitamarhi at 19.25 hrs, Bargania at 20.01 hrs, and reach Raxaul at 21.50 hrs During the return journey, 04007 Raxaul-ANVT biweekly special will leave Raxaul from December 16 till the next order at 23.45 hrs every Wednesday and Friday, the second day Bargania at 00.48 hrs,Sitamarhi at 01.30 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 04.00 hrs, Hajipur at 04.55 hrs, Dighwara at 05.28 hrs, Chhapra at 06.40 hrs, Suraimanpur at 07.05 hrs, Ballia at 07.41 hrs, Yusufpur at 08.23 hrs, Ghazipur City at 08.49 hrs, Aundihar Jn at 10.02 hrs, Varanasi City at 11.04 hrs, Varanasi at 11.45 hrs, Jaunpur City at 12.42 hrs, Sri Krishna Nagar at 13.14 hrs, Lambhua at 13.49 hrs, Sultanpur at 15.30 hrs, Musafirkhana 15.56 hrs, Nihalgarh at 16.14 hrs, Lucknow at 18.27 hrs, Alamnagar at 18.46 hrs, Hardoi at 20.07 hrs, Shahjahanpur at 21.16 hrs, Amla at 23.00 hrs, Chandausi Jn at 23.55 hrs, Raja Ka Sahaspur at 00.23 hrs, Moradabad at 01.13 hrs, Amroha at 01.43 hrs, Hapur at 03.12 hrs, Pilkhua at 03.28 hrs, Ghaziabad at 04.12 hrs and reach, ANVT at 04.45 hrs. In this special train A total of 23 coaches, will be attached.

04016 ANVT-RAXAUL SPL: The 04016 ANVT-Raxaul biweekly special will from December 18 till the next order every Friday and Sunday leave Anand Vihar Terminus at 16.30 hrs, Ghaziabad at 17.06 hrs, Pilkhuah at 17.34 hrs, Hapur at 17.50 hrs, Amroha at 18.53 hrs, Moradabad at 19.40 hrs, Chandausi at 20.35 hrs, Aonla at 21.30 hrs, Shahjahanpur at 23.28 hrs, the second day Hardoi at 00.26 hrs, Alamnagar at 01.51 hrs, Lucknow at 02.25 hrs, Nihalgarh at 04.21 hrs, Musafir Khana at 05.00 hrs, Sultanpur 05.38 hrs, Lambhua at 06.04 hrs, Sri Krishna Nagar at 06.31 hrs, Jaunpur City at 06.58 hrs, Varanasi at 09.10 hrs, Varanasi City at 09.26 hrs, Aunrihar at 09.55 hrs, Nandganj at 10.17 hrs, Ghazipur City at 10.55 hrs, Yusufpur at 11.15 hrs, Ballia at 12.25 hrs, Suraimanpur at 13.00 hrs, Chhapra at 14.25 hrs, Dighwara at 15.05 hrs, Sonpur at 16.08 hrs, Hajipur at 16.23 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 18.15 hrs, Motipur from 17.44 hrs, Chakia at 19.03 hrs, Bapudham Motihari at 19.29 hrs, Sugauli at 20.05 hrs and will reach Raxaul at 21.10 hrs. During the return journey 04015 Raxaul-Anand Vihar Terminus biweekly special will from December 20 leave Raxaul every Tuesday and Sunday at 22.55 hrs, Sugauli at 23.47 hrs, Bapudham Motihari on the second day at 00.04 hrs, Chakia at 00.33 hrs, Motipur at 00.54 hrs, Muzaffarpur at 04.00 hrs, Hajipur at 04.55 hrs, Sonpur at 05.07 hrs, Dighwara at 05.28 hrs, Chhapra at 06.40 hrs, Suraimanpur at 07.07 hrs and after stopping at Ballia, Yusufpur, Ghazipur City, Aunrihar Jn, Varanasi City, Varanasi, Jaunpur City, Sri Krishna Nagar, Lambhua, Sultanpur, Musafirkhana, Nihalgarh, Lucknow, Alamnagar, Hardoi, Shahjahanpur, Aonla, Chandausi Jn, Moradabad, Amroha, Hapur Pilkhua and Ghaziabad reach ANVT at 04.45 hrs. A total of 23 coaches will be attached in this special train.

04018 ANVT-RAXAUL SPL: The 04018 ANVT-Raxaul weekly special will from December 16 till next order leave ANVT at 16.30 hrs every Wednesday and reach Raxaul at 21.50 hrs. During the return journey the 04017 Raxaul-ANVT weekly special will from December 17 till the next order leave Raxaul every Thursday at 23.45 hrs, the second day Sitamarhi at 01.30 hrs and reach ANVT at 04.45 hrs. A total of 23 coaches will be attached in this train.

BJP joins hands with UPPL, GSP to form BTC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As its impressive run in poll after poll continues – this time in Assam — the BJP on Sunday decided to join hands with the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) to jointly form the next Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) after the results threw up a hung House. And in the process, the BJP junked the offer of its NDA ally Bodoland People's Front's (BPF), which has three Ministers in the Sarbanand Sonowal Government, to join hands with it to form the BTC. The BJP and BPF had contested separately.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah promptly congratulated the BJP's Assam unit along with ally UPPL for the win.

"NDA is committed to serving the people of the Northeast. I congratulate our ally UPPL and BJP Assam for securing a majority in the Assam Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) election," Modi tweeted.

The 40-member new Council will be headed by UPPL Chief Pramod Boro, Sonowal told reporters after a meeting with the representatives of all the three parties. Boro is the former president of All Bodo Students' Union and was a signatory of the peace accord earlier this year.

The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has won 12 seats, the BJP nine, while the Congress and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP), headed by Lok Sabha MP Naba Sarania, got one each. The BPF emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats.

Shah said the BTC win is vindication of his party's commitment to the development of the North-East. "NDA secured a comfortable majority in Assam Bodoland Territorial Council polls. Congratulations to our ally UPPL, Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, State Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and party's Assam unit. I thank people of Assam for their continued faith in Prime Minister's resolve towards developed North East," tweeted Shah.

"We're going to stake claim to form the next BTC. Pramod Boro, UPPL will be the next BTC chief. UPPL urged JP Nadda (BJP president) to include them in NDA," Sarma, Assam's Minister and NEDA convenor, said.

The BTC is an autonomous district council covering the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri, which fall under the Bodoland Territorial Region.

Addressing a press conference here, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said the BJP which had one seat in the outgoing council has now won nine seats this time round.

"We are winning, be it in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan or Telangana.. BJP is winning and Congress is losing," said Javadekar.

The elections in 40 constituencies in the region were held in two phases on December 7 and December 10 while the results were declared on December 12.

Pyramid Borough

BPF chief Hagrama Mohilary appealed to BJP to extend its support in forming the BTC, but the latter chose to ally with the UPPL and GSP.

2001 PARLIAMENT TERROR ATTACK

Prez, V-P, PM pay homage to martyred jawans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday led the nation in paying homage to the security personnel who lost their lives in the 2001 Parliament terror attack.

"The nation gratefully remembers the brave martyrs who laid down their lives defending the Parliament on this day in 2001. While commemorating the great sacrifice of those defenders of the temple of our democracy, we strengthen our resolve to defeat the forces of terror," the President tweeted.

"We will never forget the cowardly attack on our Parliament on this day in 2001. We recall the valour and sacrifice of those who lost their lives protecting our Parliament. India will always be thankful to them," the Prime Minister said in his tweet.

The Vice President said terrorism is a serious threat to democracy, individual freedoms and global economic advancement which are the core values of present day civilisation.

In a Facebook post, Naidu said December 13 is a stark reminder of the menace of terrorism and its professed antagonism to democratic values and economic aspirations.

Earlier, he along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Harivansh and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid tributes to the martyrs who laid down their lives while defending Parliament from the terrorist attack.

Homer Minister Amit Shah, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment and Leader of the House Thaawarchand Gehlot and Leader of the Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad also paid floral tributes.

It was on this day in the year 2001, that nine persons namely Jagdish Prasad Yadav and Matbar Singh Negi, both Security Assistants of Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Kamlesh Kumari, Constable, CRPF, Nanak Chand and Rampal, Assistant Sub-Inspectors, Delhi Police, Om Prakash, Bijender Singh and Ghanshyam, Head Constables, Delhi Police and Deshraj, Gardener, CPWD, had sacrificed their lives while defending Parliament against the terrorist attack.

Naidu said their acts of sacrifice will forever be etched in the minds of our countrymen. Praising the courage of the CRPF Constable Kamlesh Kumari, who first spotted the terrorists and kept tracking and informing about their movements in the Parliament House complex, the Vice President said that her bravery was instrumental in quickly putting down the terrorists' game plan.

"She fell to the barrage of the bullets pumped into her and became a martyr, leaving a saga of inspiration and commitment to fight for the country," he said.

Referring to the attack on the World Trade Center the same year, the Vice President said in the first year of this millennium, the most populous democracies of the world, India and the USA, were at the receiving end.

Observing that in the last two decades several such attacks of different degrees were witnessed by humanity, Naidu cautioned that the only agenda of terror outfits is to disrupt the democratic and economic fabric of the world and force humanity into a dark era.

Researchers develop online 'Covid-19 mortality risk' calculator

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As countries across the globe shift focus on Covid-19 vaccination exercise, researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health have developed a new online "Covid-19 mortality risk" calculator to help health authorities prioritise certain groups for vaccination.

"Our calculator represents a more quantitative approach and should complement other proposed qualitative guidelines, such as those by the National Academy of Sciences and Medicine, for determining individual and community risks and allocating vaccines," said study lead author Nilanjan Chatterjee, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor in the departments of Biostatistics and Epidemiology at the Bloomberg School.

The new risk calculator is presented in a paper published in the journal Nature Medicine.

The researchers also collaborated with PolicyMap, Inc. to develop interactive maps for viewing numbers and the proportion of individuals at various levels of risks across U.S. cities, counties and states. These maps will allow local policymakers to plan for vaccination, shielding high-risk individuals, and other targeted intervention efforts.

"Although we have long known about factors associated with greater mortality, there has been limited effort to incorporate these factors into prevention strategies and forecasting models," Chatterjee said.

He and his team developed their risk model using several Covid-19-related datasets, including from a large U.K.-based study and state-level death rates published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and then validated the model for predicting community-level mortality rates using recent deaths across U.S. cities and counties.

The calculator based on the model is available online for public health officials and interested individuals alike. It enables a user to determine individual risk based on factors such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, and medical history and can be used to define risk for a group, such as for a particular community, corporation, or university, based on the mix of relevant factors that define the group.

The calculator allows users to calculate mortality risk of individuals by combining information on individual-level factors with community-level pandemic dynamics, as available from a large variety of forecasting models. Thus, when a big wave of infections hits a population, the risk estimates for individuals will rise in that community. Currently, the tool is updated on a weekly basis to incorporate information on state-level pandemic dynamics.

"People may understand broadly that with a preexisting condition such as obesity or diabetes, for example, they are at higher risk, but with our calculator they should be able to understand their risk in a way that takes multiple factors into account," Chatterjee said.

Monitoring of community wastewater early, cost-effective indicator of Covid-19 presence: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An Indo-Swiss study titled 'Monitoring of community wastewater for early signalling the spread of COVID-19' has found that monitoring of community wastewater is an early, cost-effective, unbiased community-level indicator of the presence of COVID-19 and also of 'hotspots' within a community.

It can alert asymptomatic infections in the community through real-time community sewage detection and guide decisions about where and when to impose or relax more targeted restrictions on movement and activity. It can potentially also alert a second and subsequent wave of the pandemic .

The study was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and conducted by a consortium of scientists, academicians and policy scientists from The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), Mu Gamma Consultants Pvt Ltd (MGC), SRM Institute of Science & Technology (SRMIST).

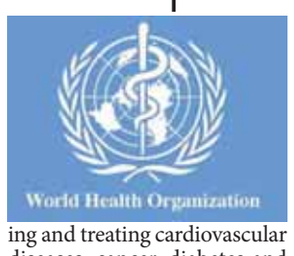
The study analysed the presence of SARS-CoV-2 in the community wastewater of different catchments in Chennai, the first-of-its-kind in the region. A total of 156 samples were analysed in the STPs of Chennai City, SRM campus and Chennai Metro Area during partial and post lockdown period, out of which 48% (75 nos.) was found to be positive.

Dr. Girija Bharat of Mu Gamma Consultants said that wastewater has emerged as a good indicator for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 as confirmed by several research studies across the globe. "With that background, we set out to conduct this study in Chennai which confirmed that the level of presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus in community wastewater is directly correlated to the spread of COVID-19 in the community," said Dr Girija said.

Jonathan Demenge, Head of International Cooperation, SADC, India, was also part of the webinar on Friday where the study report was unveiled.

NCDs accounted for 7 of top 10 causes of death before Covid-19 pandemic: WHO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) accounted for seven of the top 10 causes of death before the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said recently with heart disease topping the list, killing more people than ever before. Strokes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lower respiratory infections, and neonatal conditions were among top four conditions.

Just a decade ago, the WHO's new Global Health Estimates show, that NCDs made up just four of the top 10 causes of death. It also pointed out that people were living longer lives — but those extra years were not necessarily lived in good health. Good news is that HIV/AIDS dropped from the eighth leading cause of death in 2000 to the 19th in 2019.

Covid-19 is likely to figure in the 2020 top 10, WHO officials said, with the death toll having passed the 1.5 million mark on December 3.

The top 10 causes of death accounted for 55 per cent of those fatalities. They fall into three broad categories: cardiovascular, respiratory and neonatal. The figures "clearly highlight the need for an intensified global focus on preventing and treating cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, as well as tackling injuries," the WHO said in a statement.

Heart disease has been the world's leading cause of death for the last 20 years. "However, it is now killing more people than ever before," the WHO said, with nine million fatalities in 2019 — up by two million since 2000.

Heart disease represents 16 per cent of total deaths from all causes, with strokes claiming 11 per cent and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease six per cent.

Diabetes has entered the top 10 causes of death following a 70 per cent increase in the number of deaths since 2000. Bente Mikkelsen, the WHO's NCDs chief, said that although insulin was discovered nearly 100 years ago, fewer than half of the people who need it have access to it.

Mikkelsen said the most efficient way to protect people against NCD risk factors was "to increase the tax on tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages" and other unhealthy products.

"It's also a very important way to increase the health budgets." NCDs together accounted for 74 per cent of deaths globally in 2019.

"We need to rapidly step up prevention, diagnosis and treatment of NCDs," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

It however remains in fourth place in Africa, despite the number of deaths on the continent dropping from more than one million to 435,000 over the 20-year span.

The new estimates found that in low-income countries, communicable diseases took a heavier toll, accounting for six of the top 10 causes of death, including malaria (sixth), tuberculosis (eighth) and HIV/AIDS (ninth).

Global average life expectancy was more than 73 years in 2019, compared with nearly 67 in 2000, with the biggest gains in the least-developed regions. However Bochen Cao, from the WHO's data and analytics department, warned that healthy life expectancy was not increasing at the same rate.

The NCD Alliance global partnership said the report depicted a "devastating toll" on human life that could have been prevented.

Senior EC official to visit West Bengal before Assembly poll

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Assembly polls due in April-May next year, Deputy Election Commissioner In-charge of West Bengal Sudeep Jain will be visiting the State on December 17 to review preparedness for the Assembly elections.

Sources said that Jain is scheduled for a two-day tour during which he might also visit North Bengal. He will be reviewing the preparedness for the ensuing polls amid the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Jain will also look into complaints of opposition parties, the sources added. On December 14, West Bengal State Election Commission will have an internal meeting with district magistrates.

With the introduction of new election procedures in Bihar Assembly elections amid the pandemic, it may be presumed that West Bengal election too will have a change in rules if the pandemic persists. Election to the 294-member state assembly is due in April-May next year.

PFI student wing member arrested in Kerala

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested a member of the PFI's student wing, Rauf Sharif, after he was apprehended by authorities at the Thiruvananthapuram airport in Kerala, official sources said on Sunday.

They said Sharif has been placed under arrest under sections of the Prevention of the Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on Saturday and a Kerala court has sent him to judicial custody. The ED is expected to move for his custodial remand on Monday.

Sources said Sharif, reported to be the general secretary of the PFI's student wing-- campus front of India—was "evading" ED summons in connection with a criminal money laundering probe being conducted against the Kerala-based Islamic organisation Popular Front of India (PFI).

The ED, sources said, had got notified a look out circular against Sharif after he allegedly skipped multiple summons issued by the ED under the PMLA.

Following this circular, they said, he was intercepted by authorities at the Thiruvananthapuram airport on Saturday following which the ED was alerted and the central probe agency picked him up.

Sharif, they said, was planning to take a flight to a foreign destination from the airport.

The ED is probing Sharif's role with regard to some suspect monetary remittances received by him in the past and it had recovered "incriminating" documents linked to him during the recent country-wide raids it conducted against the PFI, its chairman O M Abdul Salam, Kerala state chief Nasarudheen Elamarom and others.

The PFI, formed in 2006 in Kerala and headquartered in Delhi, had called the raids a gimmick and an attempt to divert attention from the farmers' issue. Sharif's role in connection with movement of funds in the aftermath of an alleged gangrape and death of a Dalit woman in Uttar Pradeshs' Hathras district is also under the scanner of the ED, sources said.

Replanting Banj oak trees may lessen humans-primates conflict

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Replanting Banj oak trees and conservation of existing patches of the species which are sleeping and feeding sites of local langurs in the fragile high-altitude Garhwal Himalayas can help mitigate conflict between humans and the primates in the region, researchers have said.

In a first-of-its kind study, published in Global Ecology and Conservation journal, the researchers tried to investigate the reasons responsible for crop-foraging by any high-altitude langur species and suggest important steps for the mitigation of conflict over resources between the non-human primates and humans.

Oak is the dominant tree species found in the Himalayan zone and dependency of local communities on oak forests for livelihood is quite high and as these dense forests are in wane, Himalayan langur (HL) are being forced to raid the agricultural crops.

Langurs are leaf-eating primates, found along the Himalayas, ranging from north-western Pakistan, through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in the western Himalayas in India, to Nepal in the East.

The study noted that main food source of the langurs was oak during the fruiting season, but also that 22 per cent of their feeding time was spent on cultivated crops around harvest time.

To better frame a human-langur conflict-mitigation strategy for this particular landscape, lead author Himani Nautiyal from Kyoto University, Primate Research Institute, Inuyama, Japan said it was important to understand the peoples' perception of langur crop-foraging and obtain a more detailed picture of langur habitat resource use by monitoring their feeding and sleeping site activity.

The study was conducted in the five villages of the Mandal valley, Chamoli district, Uttarakhand frequented by the langur troops.

The researchers found that villagers, who owned relatively more agricultural land and had good production throughout the whole year, had low interactions with langurs due to their low dependency on natural resources for their livestock.

However, farmers with relatively less agricultural land and low productivity depended significantly on livestock for extra income and thus relied more on the neighboring forest for grazing their cattle and collecting fodder for them.

"This high pressure on the surrounding forests is likely to have been a driver for langurs to forage more on agricultural crops in these areas at times of the year when natural food availability in the forest was low," said the study.

Moreover, respondents who owned a relatively greater number of livestock, as compared to other households, perceived a reduction in the available resources in the nearby forests due to their intensified use of the nearby forest areas for livestock fodder.

Hence, the researchers suggested that this increased livestock-driven pressure on the forest compels wild herbivores to compete with livestock for food.

"This may also help explain the reportedly higher crop damage to households that had more cattle and had their perceptions of significant loss of resources in the village managed forests. "Agricultural land, annual crop production and livestock populations thus emerged to be the strongest predictors of crop damage by langurs in the Mandal valley," they said.

The other researchers were VirendraMathur from Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali, Anindya Sinha from National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, Indiaand Michael A.Huffman, also from Kyoto University.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Chinks in Cong armour

The late Pranab Mukherjee's book, saying the leadership lost 'political focus' in 2014, exposes a gestational freeze in the party

In his lifetime, Pranab Mukherjee was a measured man, always walking the middle ground, rarely vocalising his innermost thoughts and particularly careful about representing the party he lived and rose by — the Congress. He may have had a complicated relationship with the party leadership but always had workarounds to get things going and never made it public. If Ahmed Patel virtually ran the party, Pranab babu ran the Government and both built their relevance and indispensability across three generations of the Gandhis. There was one key difference though; Patel was never keen on the limelight but Mukherjee harboured prime ministerial ambitions. And though everybody knew about it, the latter never articulated that wish and even in his memoirs, he skirted such controversial issues that would have made for best-selling fodder. But looks like he had dropped guard in the last of the series of his autobiography, *The Presidential Years*, and did some plainspeak and revealed some home truths. This is the most overt of Mukherjee's analysis of the drift in the Congress, ironically coming at a time when party veterans are increasingly clamouring for inner-party democracy and an elected rather than an entitled leadership. For Mukherjee's account seems to only confirm that the party's top leadership had not been addressing the stasis in the party since 2014. The late President seems to have attributed the Congress' defeat in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 to the lack of connect party chief Sonia Gandhi had with cadres and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's absence from the House and little to no interaction with MPs. And giving credence to the dissenting "letter writers" of today, he has said that "some members of the Congress" believed that had he been Prime Minister, the party would not have lost power. And in possibly his strongest words yet establishing his weightage as a stabiliser, he says the Congress leadership "lost political focus" after his elevation as President. And that this cost governance that Narendra Modi took advantage of with his autocratic boldness. The revelations couldn't have come at a worse time for the Congress, which seems frozen in a mess of its own making. And considering the way 23 of the party's senior loyalists were sidelined in August for writing a "dissent letter" and pleading for inner-party democracy, the party's first family, the Gandhis, have decided that their writ, that is no longer earned but rests solely on history, will not be challenged even if the party hurtles down the road to perdition. Still, some letter writers like Kapil Sibal and Ghulam Nabi Azad renewed calls to rescue the moribund party after its dismal performance in the Bihar Assembly elections. But like every other time, they have been called out for making intra-party matters public and subdued all over again. Through their letter, the leaders had only suggested ways and means of reviving the Congress, that too by staying within the provisions and democratic processes already laid down in the party's constitution. The Congress last held CWC elections in 1998 and understandably this is the reason for the turmoil and impatience in the party where worthy leaders, who have worked their way up from the ground, have no say whatsoever.

The point is will the Congress ever give up its dynastic stubbornness and risk the anointment of Rahul Gandhi as Congress chief again on nomination or an election? Perhaps to neutralise the noise over the party's future strategies and reel in allies to prop it up once more, Sonia has herself indicated her desire to step down as chairperson of the Congress-led Opposition bloc, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). And there is talk of former Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar assuming that role, though he has denied it. Pawar could be the counterweight to the criticism of Gandhi dominance in matters political. Besides, the Maratha strongman is well-versed in managing coalition politics as he has largely managed to keep the ideologically divergent Congress-NCP-Shiv Sena frictionless. This in the face of rabid attacks by the BJP, still smarting at having lost out to the Sena. In fact, Pawar could very well be the adhesive that the Congress and its allies need. For though the Opposition *mahagathbandhan* was swept away by the Modi wave in 2019 because of its less-than-spirited unity, some images remain significant. Like that of NCP chief Sharad Pawar as sheet anchor, with chief organiser and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee constantly relying on his good advice and all regional leaders paying him obeisance. Surely the Maratha strongman and quintessential politician of the old guard would command respect and deference. Given his pan-India acceptability and recognition and the fact that there are suspicions and anxieties about the national leadership abilities of regional satraps, he could well emerge as the leader of a combined federal front, one who could be listened to. This is significant considering that many federal leaders are not comfortable negotiating with the younger Gandhi scions. And after the NCP's consensus with the Congress in Maharashtra, the former Congressman is not being seen as a one-time rebel but as a newly-returned ally for the grand old party. Besides, he has held important Central ministries all along. Pawar likes to be a grandmaster and the Congress could do with his skills to bounce back with federal allies. Already, given that it dragged down the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, its prospective partners in the Bengal and Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, the Left and the DMK, are worried about its vote-cutting rather than vote-harvesting capacity. Particularly in Bengal, it would only end up being a spoiler, assuming it does perform, or boost the BJP's polarisation agenda. Yet Pawar can paper over rifts and misunderstandings. The Congress leadership has to respect the stakeholdership of its cadres first.

A jab of a challenge

The Health Ministry plans only 100 shots at each session

There's no doubt that the administration of the Coronavirus vaccine, which is expected to roll out early next year, will require a general election-like preparedness, booth management and cataloguing, considering that we haven't had any template of a mass immunisation drive. And considering India's population density, any margin of error would translate into a health hazard. So the regulators are rightly being doubly cautious. With the Health Ministry planning to vaccinate 20-30 per cent of India's population to reach a critical mass for herd immunity, and the Serum Insititute CEO Adar Poonawalla claiming that there would be enough vaccines by September-October next year, everybody is getting drill ready. The latest is that each site will administer 100 shots a session, taking precautionary and hygiene measures as well as following COVID-appropriate behaviour. Now with the early rounds of shots in the UK triggering allergic reactions among recipients, the Government is factoring in recovery booths where they will be watched for half an hour and rushed to facilities should anyone fall sick. Poonawalla said the company is preparing to manufacture enough vaccines for the Government and private markets but the challenges are many.

The toughest would be the logistics of the supply chain, the safety of the vials and ensuring enough trained workers to administer and monitor its effects. But we have to reckon with some cold facts. Currently, our immunisation shield means that around 390 million doses of vaccines are administered every year. Assuming we can tap into this network immediately, we will still need to supplement its strength to administer 400-500 million doses of a COVID-19 vaccine by the first two quarters of 2021. Also, a two-shot vaccination drive would mean double the effort. Much has already been said about the challenges of a contiguous cold chain infrastructure. The first vaccines announced by Pfizer and Moderna require sub-zero conditions; they must be thawed from -70^{0}C and injected within five days. Else, the whole consignment could go bad. We would have to rely on a vaccine that can be stored and transported in liquid form (anything between 2^{0}C and 8^{0}C) instead of the frozen kind.

We are the Misled

A completely new social and political standard has gained currency in India in the past few years, thanks to the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government

AJOY **KUMAR**

By virtue of being a father to two lawyers, I have the opportunity to come across certain legal parlance from time to time. One such legal construct is that of a "reasonable man". This standard can be found in quite a few laws as well as judgments passed by judicial authorities in most jurisdictions. The reasonable man or woman standard is typically employed to examine the conduct of a particular person against what may be considered as "reasonable" according to most people. Cases that fall outside of this wide berth of reasonableness are ones that usually attract judicial or legal scrutiny.

In India, we have now been introduced to a completely new social or political standard, all thanks to the Bharatiya Janata Party and our Honourable Prime Minister. This new standard is that of the 'Misled Man'. The concept is fairly easy to understand and apparently refers to all Indians who are being "misled" by either foreign powers or the Opposition or by experts when it comes to matters of opposing this Government's poorly thought through policies.

One of the earliest applications of the Misled Man standard was during the Prime Minister's now-infamous decision around demonetisation. We were told that demonetisation was a "surgical strike" on black money and targets only those people who have something to hide. Therefore, when renowned economists, public policy experts and members of the Opposition raised questions about the manner in which the policy was implemented without prior consultation and without expertise, we were told by the Prime Minister that the public was being misled. Similarly, when people brought forward evidence of how during demonetisation the only people who benefitted were corrupt bank officials or how there is just as much — if not more — counterfeiting with the new currency as with the old, the Prime Minister once again said that we were being misled. At no point, however, has the Prime Minister taken any questions from the Press or from the public or taken the opportunity to rescue our misled public. Instead all we got was an introduction to what future years proved was the BJP's go-to explanation behind a protest or any sort of push back from the general public — that in reality there are no problems at all and that any sort of protest was a result of the lamb-like public being misled by people with vested interests.

Demonetisation was just the beginning; we also saw the BJP and the Prime Minister rely on the same excuse when it came to the issue of One Rank One Pension or OROP, an issue that our servicemen have been fighting for. The BJP Government has come out and claimed that they have, in fact, implemented OROP. However, the former service men and soldiers who, one can safely assume, know enough about the issue, are staunchly of the view that OROP in fact has not been implemented at all by the BJP Government. Here too, we saw the Prime Minister say that the public is being misled on OROP.

The most recent application of this excuse has been the explanation for the huge protests by farmers that we have seen taking place in and around New Delhi. Since the introduction of the three Central Government farm laws that were passed in a controversial and frankly undemocratic fashion in the Rajya Sabha on September 20, the protesting farmers have consistently maintained their protest and have marched in large numbers demanding that the Central Government roll back the controversial farm laws. The Congress has highlighted and consistently support the fight of the farmers by arguing that the controversial farm laws take away any real support for the average farmer and give an open road for powerful industrialists and businesses to control the entire farming system and thereby expose farmers to great risk and barely any negotiating power. What the Congress has most significantly argued against is the manner in which these farm laws were passed without talking to the stakeholders who will actually be directly affected by the laws — the farmers.

> DEMONETISATION WAS JUST THE BEGINNING; WE ALSO SAW THE BJP AND THE PRIME MINISTER RELY ON THE SAME EXCUSE WHEN IT CAME TO ONE RANK ONE PENSION, AN ISSUE THAT OUR SERVICEMEN HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR. IN THE MOST RECENT APPLICATION OF THIS EXCUSE, THE BJP AND THE PRIME MINISTER COULD NOT RESIST RELYING ON THE OLD THEORY THAT THE FARMERS ARE BEING 'MISLED'

There is widespread anger among farmer unions about the high-handed and arrogant manner in which the Central Government has conducted itself during this entire process. It should be obvious to the BJP and the Prime Minister that these concerns are genuine and which is why we see tens of thousands of farmers on the road demanding that the Government listen to their demands. However, here too the BJP and the Prime Minister could not resist relying on the old faithful theory that the farmers are being "misled".

This pathetic explanation is forwarded by many in the present administration and not just by the Prime Minister. For example, a BJP Union Minister said that the farmer protests are essentially being motivated and sponsored by Pakistan and China. One cannot blame the Union Minister who merely decided to take a leaf out of the Prime Minister's handbook. Such a response is unbecoming of a Government of a major democracy. It assumes that India is meant to be led by a 'messiah' who knows the one true path and that all of us are merely sheep who should have no say in the matter. It is antithetical to the basic tenets of a functional democracy which relies on peaceful protest and public participation while making laws. Perhaps, this is why Niti Aayog chief Amitabh Kant said that "too much democracy" makes law-making hard in India. The Government should realise that law-making is meant to be hard because it requires public participation of which peaceful protest is the last recourse. The first option for most people, if the Government had paid attention, is to be involved as stakeholders in the decision-making process. Instead by labelling the public, representatives of the public, our soldiers and now our farmers as "misled", the BJP is insulting the intelligence of all Indians.

The Prime Minister is right about a few things though. We are currently not only misled but also misgoverned and misunderstood. If the Prime Minister wants to attribute blame on who is responsible for our pitiful state, his Government would be a good place to start.

(The author is former IPS and member of the Congress Party)

SOUNDBITE

CM Pinarayi Vijayan's hometown in Kannur goes to polls on Monday. He should be at the front of the election battle but appears to be in hiding.

Kerala Congress leader
—Ramesh Chennithala

The Opposition thinks it can put pressure on me by holding rallies against my Government. That is not the case; but the rallies will endanger people's lives.

Pakistan PM
—Imran Khan

Theatres bring people together. Isn't that public service? It is hard to decipher why we have Entertainment Tax in India. Why tax people for being happy, moved, elevated?

Filmmaker
—Sudhir Mishra

Virat Kohli is a proponent of all-out aggression. He does not believe in passive resistance. Kohli is the most 'Australian non-Australian cricketer' of all time.

Former Australia skipper
—Greg Chappell

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Polity with dignity

Sir — The Centre is playing with fire by indulging in dirty politics with Mamata Banerjee's Bengal Government to create an air of hatred. The BJP-led Government has ignored the State with regard to Central funds which has resulted in bitterness and a no-holds-barred fight between the parties.

The recent attack on BJP chief JP Nadda during his Bengal visit again underlines that all is not well with the Centre's relations with the State. The BJP is trying hard to wrest power in the 2021 Assembly elections by hook or by crook.

I strongly feel that the BJP is playing dirty games by trying to unseat a democratically-elected Government which is nothing but the murder of democracy. The need of the hour is for the BJP-led Government to stop this vendetta politics as the day is not far when it may backfire on them. It is correctly said that nothing or nobody is permanent in power. If the Centre doesn't immediately stop such brand of politics with the non-BJP ruled States, the arising situation for the country could turn out to be disastrous.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Protect the farmers' right to freedom

The Government's constant efforts had been to empower farmers and to make agriculture and villages *aatmanirbhar* or self-reliant. But there should be no pressure or coercion over a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their produce. The new farm laws are meant to help corporates get such monopoly. Nobody had demanded such reforms!

MSP with C2 formula, the comprehensive cost, includes imputed costs of family labour, imputed rent of land owned and imputed interest on capital owned. A2 plus FL includes costs a farmer pays for various inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, machinery and family labour.

Had the Government started payments using the C2 formula, farmers would have got ₹2,800-3,000 per quintal for their wheat crop but, with the A2 plus FL formula, they are getting ₹1,975.

It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that farmers get the right price for their produce. Farmers across the nation are against these laws but the Government is adamant on their implementation, only to please some capitalists.

Even over a fortnight of their continuing protest at the Singhu border, the farmers are full of enthusiasm and prepared for the long haul until a law is enacted to safeguard

their interests. They came to launch the protest after cultivating the wheat crop and have left the responsibility of irrigating their fields to family and friends.

The Government's divide-and-rule policy will not lead the nation anywhere. Until villages and agriculture are self-reliant, the country cannot become self-reliant. Weakening the *mandi* system and the MSP regime for procurement are seemingly aimed at benefiting corporates.

TV Jayaprakash
Pallakad

Pandemic lessons

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Year of the pandemic'. Indeed most of us were not used to words like the pandemic, social distancing or even lockdown. So many firsts have occurred during 2020.

But the biggest lessons for all of us should be to become more sensitive towards nature, compassionate towards society and have an attitude of gratitude as we have seen the plight of migrant workers and how frontline Corona warriors have gone out of their way to help millions of fellow countrymen.

We can never know about the future but we should be hopeful that the worst is behind us and that we don't get to witness a year like this again and remain content with our existing vocabulary.

Bal Govind
Noida

Govt should plan, then act

Sir — It appears that the Central Government would have to completely step back from its stated stand on the agriculture laws, thanks to the determination and willpower of the farmers, especially those from Punjab and Haryana.

Employees and depositors of the public sector banks (PSBs) earmarked for distress sale also need to register a similar resistance to defeat the Centre's plan to expose lakhs of crores of deposits these banks built up painstakingly over the years to private, mostly unscrupulous, corporates.

Lakshmi Vilas Bank was a hoary institution. Where was the need to merge it with a foreign bank when it could have been taken over by one of the big five? Today the Government of India is selling its banks. Tomorrow it may even resort to selling one of its States.

It is just like parents selling their children to overcome the family's financial problems. The right and honourable course of action with regard to the remaining six Government-owned banks is to go for another merger exercise. Our PSBs are peace-loving pigeons but it seems that the Central Government is trying to set a cat among them.

MR Anand
Chennai

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

The Central Vista is a costly affair

This project spells disaster for the environment and indigenous bird and plant species that stand to be dislocated and destroyed

KOTA **SRIRAJ**

The Supreme Court recently rebuked the Centre over its "aggressive actions" regarding the Central Vista Redevelopment Project. It ordered the Government to halt all construction activities until it decides on a bunch of petitions challenging the mega redevelopment plan. The project which envisions a new 64,500 metre Parliament building that will be able to house 1,244 MPs, also includes a secretariat and a totally revamped three km-stretch of Rajpath, among other things. It is expected to be ready by 2022 to coincide with the 75th year of India's Independence. However, the project that is being pursued in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic is stirring environmental concerns and eyebrows are also being raised on the massive budget allocated to it at a time when the economy is in shambles and there are other pressing areas in need of funds.

The sharp rebuke earned by the Central Government was on account of the hasty removal of structures and uprooting and translocation of old trees, despite the court having reserved its order on the matter on November 5. There are major concerns being raised as to how the decades-old trees will fare once they are translocated. This is because soil quality and the groundwater table are not the same in every place. Apart from the obvious environmental impact their removal will have on the area and given the fact that the trees have historically been an integral part of Central Delhi, people and environmentalists alike are wondering who will shoulder the responsibility if majority of these trees die after being moved?

Plus Delhi is already turning into a concrete jungle and given the fact that it is one of the most polluted capital cities of the world, there is a dire need to preserve the green cover. With the national Capital already reeling under the effects of air pollution and facing endless traffic congestions on a daily basis, the focus should be on decongesting the city and adding to the green cover, not diminishing it further. Environmental activists are worried about the fact that the construction work would create huge amounts of demolition waste and transporting this waste and construction material for the new structures would require thousands of trucks to pass through Delhi, adding to the pollution woes of the city.

Also, Delhi is a water-stressed city. According to a survey conducted by the World Wide Fund for Nature, Delhi is among the 30 cities in India susceptible to acute water risks. The ecology of the area is such that there is a watershed from the Ridge to the Yamuna and water flows, both overground and underground. The Central Vista Redevelopment Project will create a barrier at both levels because it will be fully concretised. The green area that currently absorbs rainwater and recharges the water table in the area will be gone, too.

The haste to implement the project is baffling Delhiites considering the fact that the Central Vista is a heritage precinct as per the 1962 Master Plan of the city and therefore, an important site whose alteration would need multidisciplinary studies including a full Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA). But surprisingly, the Environment Ministry was one of the first to give a clean chit to the project by granting the "green clearance" as early as May. Some environmental experts are terming these clearances as "greenwashing" wherein approvals are hastily provided to facilitate the rapid execution of a project.

Such major projects elsewhere in the world are done in a democratic manner with due importance give to established procedures. The UK's Parliament expansion work took 10 years, as all proper studies that assured the viability and impact of the project were completed and meticulously presented to the public before starting construction. This project spells disaster for the native environment and indigenous bird and plant species that stand to be dislocated and destroyed thanks to the mega construction activity. At the end of the day, urban and environmental planning should go hand in hand and not one at the cost of other.

Apart from the adverse impact on the flora and fauna, a project of this scale has a bearing on the infrastructure too, as it increases the requirement for power, water and stresses the waste and sewage disposal system. These aspects need careful assessment before embarking on the implementation of projects; otherwise we may end up with an ill-conceived development that proves costly for the exchequer, the people and the environment. The authorities must respect public opinion and as a first step, the Government must have inclusivity in its project planning and implementation. As a part of this, any meetings involving the project should have public representatives and respected environmental experts on board. The Central Vista project must earn the tag of being a "people's project." The citizens must have unrestricted access to various aspects of project design and implementation.

Better still, given these apocalyptic times, the Government will do well to practice austerity and put the astounding amount of ₹20,000 crore to better use. It could be utilised for the rehabilitation of the COVID-hit population or infused into the ailing economy.

(*The writer is an environmental journalist*)

POINT**COUNTER**POINT

HOW MANY MORE SACRIFICES WILL THE FARMERS OF THE COUNTRY HAVE TO MAKE TO GET THE FARM LAWS REPEALED?
—CONGRESS LEADER
RAHUL GANDHI

THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO PROTECTING THE INTEREST OF FARMERS THROUGH ITS POLICIES AND INTENTIONS AT ANY COST.
—PRIME MINISTER
NARENDRA MODI

Root for savings, not credit

A safe and smart savings account can transform the lives of people. Accumulation of money also serves as a form of self-insurance and enhances the sense of well-being

MOIN **QAZI**

There's an old saying about poverty: Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to catch fish, and you feed him for a lifetime. However, in today's context, one of the most effective tools to fight poverty is not a fishing rod, but a savings account. Over four decades ago the most popular retail banking product was the Pigmy Deposit or the Daily Deposit Scheme. Housewives would scrape together a few rupees daily to give to a savings collector who would visit their homes. The money was deposited in a bank account that paid interest and was insulated from the daily demands of life. The depositors squirrelled away a decent sum by the end of a year. Most of the time it was enough to buy a much-desired home appliance. The simple message was, saving money, even if it was only a few rupees at a time, was a sure way to build wealth.

Later, a very innovative idea — microcredit — was born out of a radical concept: Poor people, when lent small amounts of cash, pay it back in a timely manner. In the meantime, that money could be put to use in ways that would help boost income and ostensibly, raise a family's standard of living. The world soon witnessed a great global rush, with banks pouring billions into microcredit to help the poor. It was a powerful revolution, but it bypassed the centuries-old idea of wealth creation: Savings, the most trusted and the oldest building block of financial management for all societies. As impoverished borrowers defaulted on debts at alarming rates and often with fatal consequences, many organisations questioned the power of credit. This led to soul-searching by the industry and the rediscovery of a new radical idea, specifically the realisation that what the people really need — more urgently than business loans —was a safe place to save their money. This is what development expert, Robert Vogel, once famously called the "forgotten half of rural finance." It is now universally acknowledged that the most fundamental instrument of personal finance is the piggy bank.

The tide is now turning, sparked in part by microcredit's discredit. We all now know that there may be families who have the intelligence to benefit from loans, but there may be many who can be ruined. When they miss loan payments because a lingering illness keeps them away from their business, they get into a regular default cycle.This soon leads to acute indebtedness and makes life stressful for the entire family.

On the contrary, every family in the world can benefit from the habit of stashing small amounts of cash away. Given the variability of their income, the poor are vulnerable to sickness, death and natural calamities, which can be a drain on finances and may even prevent families from hanging on to accumulated assets, including productive ones.

These shocks can quickly sink families into a financial mire. As a result, the poor lead precarious, anxiety-ridden lives with the risks looming much larger than opportunities. The benefits of microcredit are often extolled, but debt remains debt; it always increases the risk and borrowers are sometimes overstretched. Savings can help people manage such risks conveniently, with a smaller monetary burden. And savings do matter, especially to women.

Credit can be both, an opportunity and a risk for low-income families. Though it is necessary to open the doors of self-reliance, but this can also be a barrier. You can dig yourself into a fair amount of debt, and that prevents you from moving up financially. It may become a deepening hole. Loans can be malignant. Some people just cannot handle debts. Certain business enterprises are too risky. And there is always the temptation to take these costly loans and scrimp on the necessities of life. However, in contrast, savings are a vital way for the poor to weather financial shocks and capture income-generating opportunities. Nest eggs increase the capability of the poor to manage cash flow, address the problems of uneven income, reduce the impact of the lean season, become more resilient in the face of shocks, build assets or invest in a family business and, most importantly, become empowered to improve one's status within the households and communities.

> ONE OF THE LESSONS IMBIBED DURING THE CURRENT PANDEMIC IS THAT THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR SAVINGS, GIVEN THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE, IN RURAL AND URBAN INDIA, TOO ARE SURVIVING ON SAVINGS DURING THIS CRISIS. THANKFULLY, THIS WISDOM IS NOW PARTICULARLY INFLUENCING YOUNG PEOPLE IN INDIA

Savings involve little risks and not much expertise in financial management. Even in traditional societies, no matter how oppressed women are or the level of their literacy, they are often stewards of the family's savings. Sadly, most people do not put aside enough money. That is because humans suffer from economic myopia: The failure to give adequate weight to future benefits over immediate pleasures.

This is because, the self-discipline required to save is greater and the consequences of failure are worse. The instinct for gratification of immediate pleasures overrides the urge to put money away in a savings account for a rainy day. This is particularly true of men. The key to effective financial inclusion is a safe and confidential savings account for every woman. The older ones always advise the younger women to keep a store of value that other family members do not know about. When there is an emergency, they will understand your wisdom and appreciate you. The poor require little compulsion to save. They simply want a reasonable mechanism to do so and the assurance that they will be able to access the nest egg as per their needs. Households normally put away money in order to have an insurance against emergencies, for religious and social obligations, for investment, for the higher education of their children and for future consumption. Savings have been the mainstay of the impoverished across the country. In particular villagers, who cope with a veritably Biblical range of hazards. Nature delivers snakes, scorpions, malaria, dengue, drought, floods, hurricanes, tuberculosis and pests that ravage crops and animals. Then there are the environmental and vocational risks arising out of changes in market climates. Families are normally financially prepared for education and marriages, but health emergencies are usually a nasty surprise.

A safe and smart savings account can transform the lives of people. Accumulation of money also serves as a form of self-insurance and enhances the sense of well-being. They are a gateway to self-employment and job creation. Lower-income families can convert savings into home purchases, education and microenterprise. Despite conventional wisdom, the underprivileged actually do save, even if it is just a few rupees each day.

The importance of savings for the poor is also demonstrated by the many ingenious (but often costly) ways they find to put money aside. They use a variety of informal mechanisms like hiding cash at home, loaning funds to relatives, participating in rotating savings groups with their neighbours, engaging deposit collectors and so on. However, for a variety of reasons, most such mechanisms fail to meet the needs of the poor in a convenient, cost-effective and secure manner.

As a consequence, when poor households are provided a safe, easily accessible opportunity to save, their commitment to saving, and the amounts they manage to put aside, are remarkable. In fact, Indian households contribute to about 60 per cent of the country's savings. However, like everything this year, the Coronavirus pandemic that crippled the economy took a toll on much-needed savings, too. The country's savings rate touching a 15-year low, with household savings also falling. However, once the economy starts booming again, the rate of savings is expected to go up.

The fact remains that institutions that promote credit, to the exclusion of savings, place poor clients in bondage. To finance a child's primary school education, clients must take on debt because they are not in a position to save. To deal with a health emergency or family food shortage, to finance weddings, funerals or social ceremonies, they must keep borrowing, again and again. To acquire essential gadgets, they will need to borrow at prohibitive rates of interest that keep them on the debt treadmill since there is no other option. Financial institutions ought to realise that they owe poor people a safe, flexible entity to save. With credit alone, they cannot free them from the tangled web of poverty. Putting money away is a vital prerequisite for the emancipation from poverty. We must think beyond the standard microcredit model.

One of the lessons imbibed during the current pandemic is that there is no substitute for savings, given the fact that most of the people, in rural and urban India, too are surviving on savings during this crisis. Thankfully, this wisdom is now particularly influencing young people. Earlier the usual refrain was "young people don't save enough." It represented the conventional wisdom about our millennials. This is now changing. This cohort of young people is putting away more funds, though for short-term goals. Millennials now have a savings discipline that the preceding generations lacked. It is heartening to see people realising the wisdom of putting some cash aside. Stuart Rutherford put it pithily long ago: "The choice to save rather than to consume is the foundation of money management."

(*The writer is a well-known development professional*)

Media needs to take its blinkers off

There should be a holistic approach in the mainstream media towards coverage which can contribute to ensuring the rights of the PwDs

SANTOSH **BISWAL** UTTAM **CHAKRABORTY**

The insensitivity of the people of the country towards the differently abled is nothing new. In 2014, Satendra Singh, a person with disabilities (PwD) faced humiliation at the Hyderabad Airport while undergoing a security check under the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) guidelines. The disability rights activist, who was on his way to speak at the International Conference on Evidence in Global Disability and Health, in Hyderabad was asked to remove the callipers he uses for walking, resulting in humiliation and harassment. This was in direct violation of his fundamental rights under Articles 15 and 21 of the Constitution. And this is not an isolated incident. Scores of PwDs face humiliation at the hands of their fellow citizens in the country on a daily basis. Hence, it is not surprising that the media, too, ignores the plight and daily struggles of *divyangs* in India. It was only because Satendra Singh was a high-profile person that his nightmarish experience was reported extensively across the country.

Even today, the situation has not changed much in India. While scores of differently abled people are struggling for survival during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, the news media is chasing celebrities like Kangana Ranaut and her ongoing spats with actors and politicians of all hues.

Even though the PwDs were in penury, their tales of woe went unheard and unheeded. The addressable mechanism for the differently abled from governmental apparatus is potentially developing an urban-rural dichotomy. Diversity, equity and inclusion remain a distant dream for the PwDs who represent 2.21 per cent of India's total population.

The media, being the fourth pillar of democracy, has the responsibility to highlight the issues that the marginalised sections of society, including the PwDs, face in the country. Particularly during such uncertain times that leave them more vulnerable than before.

However, the lack of objective reporting, a plethora of paid news, unethical engagement with the public and advertising agencies, high-decibel and manufactured television debates leave little space for genuine problems of the common man, leave alone the highly-marginalised PwDs. Instead, Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), Television Rating Points (TRPs) and pay-per-click (PPC) are the decisive factors, determining news value and coverage these days. Suffice to say, the ethical compass of the news media, especially that of television channels, has gone completely awry.

Despite the Accessible India Campaign, accessibility to public institutions remains well-nigh impossible. Several Government establishments are not PwD-friendly. Women with disabilities are doubly marginalised and the gender inequality dimensions have come to the fore like never before.

While the PwDs in urban areas have a voice at least, unfortunately, the differently abled residing in rural pockets are facing double discrimination. The inclusive approach to address their issues has been diluted. This has further posed a threat to achieve the United Nation's sustainable development goals.

Suffice to say, the media's job is to highlight the issues pertaining to the PwDs. However, disability rights are being violated time and again and the media remains a mute spectator. The media's disconnect with disability throws up numerous questions.

It is only around December and January, when the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the World Braille Day are observed on December 3 and January 4, respectively, that some token coverage is given to the woes of the differently abled. Despite the growing level of activism on rights of the PwDs, the coverage largely remains sporadic and the emphasis is on the rehabilitative model of disability.

Newsrooms and reporters pan-India are facing flak for their mannerism and lack of sensitivity and awareness on disability issues. The language used is yet to be socially and politically inclusive. The narrative on the gender and rural-urban dichotomy is missing which has invited discontent among the rights activists. Moreover, even though India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the Indian media does not heed the guidelines on reporting on disability that have been brought out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

News value and media ethics should not be swayed by ABC, TRP and PPC, which are market driven. There should be a holistic approach in the mainstream media towards coverage which can contribute to ensuring the rights of the PwDs in one of the largest democratic countries of the world. Media literacy is the pressing need of the hour and we cannot ignore it for too long.

(*Biswal and Chakraborty are Assistant Professors at SIMC and SIBM respectively and are working at Symbiosis International, Pune*)

FOREIGN EYE

IT IS ALL ABOUT PARTY POLITICS

Telling lies about Europe is one of the consistent themes in Boris Johnson's life and politics. It would be a foolish leap of faith to suppose he is going to change now. Politics and economics pull him in opposite directions on Europe. But in the end the British Prime Minister mostly puts party politics ahead of national interest.

(*The Guardian* editorial)

FM reviews progress of various schemes

Banks sanction ₹ 2.05 lakh crore to MSMEs

NewDelhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman took stock of progress made under various schemes under the three Aatmanirbhar Bharat Packages (ANBP) to help revive economy hit hard by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

Following announcement by the Prime Minister, Sitharaman presented the details of the Rs 20.97 lakh crore ANBP 1.0 in a series of press conferences from May 13-17. It was followed by AatmaNirbhar Bharat Package 2.0 on October 12 and the third tranche on November 12.

Sitharaman on Friday concluded a comprehensive review of ANBP with the Secretaries of various Ministries and Departments concerned over three days, the Finance Ministry statement said on Sunday.

Sharing details of the progress made by various schemes under the ANBP, the statement said, banks have sanctioned loans worth Rs 2,05,563 crore to about 81 lakh accounts under the Rs 3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector that was impacted by disruptions caused due to the coronavirus pandemic.

While 40 lakh MSME accounts have received Rs 1,58,626 crore till December 4, Rs 3 lakh crore collateral-free guaranteed loans - budgetary provision of Rs 4,000 crore made for the Scheme in First Supplementary Demand for Grants for FY 2020-21.

Announcing Aatmanirbhar Bharat Package 3.0 last month, the Finance Minister had said that Rs 2.05 lakh crore sanctioned and Rs 1.52 lakh crore disbursed under ECLGS 1.0.

As part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan 3.0 (announced on November 12), ECLGS Scheme has been extended through ECLGS 2.0 for the 26 stress sectors and health care sector with credit outstanding of above Rs 50 crore and up to Rs 500 crore as on February 29, 2020.

Under ECLGS 2.0, entities with outstanding credit above Rs 50 crore and not exceeding

₹2.05 LAKH CRORE SANCTIONED AND ₹ 1.52 LAKH CRORE DISBURSED UNDER ECLGS 1.0

Rs 500 crore as on February 29, 2020, which were less than or equal to 30 days past due as on February 29, 2020 are eligible, the ministry said.

The loans provided under ECLGS 2.0 will have a five-year tenor, with a 12-month moratorium on repayment of principal.

The entire scheme (ECLGS 1.0 and ECLGS 2.0) valid till March 31, 2021, it said.

Some of the sectors identified by the Kamath Committee for one-time debt restructuring included power, construction, real estate, textiles, pharmaceuticals, logistics, cement, auto components and hotel, restaurants and tourism.

The RBI had in August set up the committee headed by former ICICI Bank chairman K V Kamath for suggesting financial parameters to be factored in the resolution plans under the "Resolution Framework for COVID-19 related Stress" along with sector specific benchmark ranges for such parameters.

Talking about progress of other schemes, the finance ministry said Rs 775 crore have been released to Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) under the Rs 1,500 crore 'Interest Subvention for MUDRA-Shishu Loan'.

Of this, Rs 206.73 crore already disbursed to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) as part of the first tranche for immediate release of interest subvention benefit.

With regard to the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme, another tweet said, it has covered 1.69 crore farmers with sanctioned credit limit of Rs 1.54 lakh crore as on December 4, 2020.

As part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Package, the government has announced to cover 2.5 crore farmers under the KCC scheme with a credit boost of Rs 2 lakh crore through a special saturation drive.

It further said that public sector banks (PSBs) have purchased bonds and commercial papers worth Rs 27,794 crore issued by 67 NBFCs under the revamped Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme (PCGS).

"PCGS 2.0-Purchase of portfolio of Rs 27,794 cr already approved by banks...Rs 25,000 cr. Disbursed from Additional Emergency Working Capital Funding for farmers through NABARD (as on December 4)," it said.

New front loaded refinance facility of Rs 30,000 crore sanctioned by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) during COVID-19 to Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Banks. This is over and above Rs 90,000 crore to be provided by NABARD through the normal refinance route during this year.

"Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued refunds of over Rs 1,45,619 crore to more than 89.29 lakh taxpayers between 1st April 2020 and 8th December 2020. Income Tax refunds of Rs. 43,274 crore have been issued in 87,29,626 cases & corporate tax refunds of Rs. 1,02,345 crore have been issued in 1,99,554 cases," it said. ***PTI***

Finmin to take call on ₹14,500 cr capital infusion into banks in Q4

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry will take a call on residual Rs 14,500 crore capital infusion in the public sector banks (PSBs) in the fourth quarter of this fiscal, sources said.

Following the financial performance review after the first half, sources said, it was found that Punjab & Sind Bank, out of the 12 PSBs, was in need of Rs 5,500 crore to meet the regulatory requirement.

So, the government approved capital infusion through preferential allotment of equity shares in Punjab & Sind Bank last month.

The fund was approved from Rs 20,000 crore cleared by Parliament in September for capital infusion of PSBs as part of the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for 2020-21. With Rs 5,500 crore going to Punjab & Sind Bank, the government is left with Rs 14,500 crore.

When the performance review post third quarter numbers takes place, sources said, by that time banks would have clear idea about additional

Fund was approved from ₹20,000 crore cleared by Parliament in September for capital infusion of PSBs as part of the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for 2020-21. With ₹5,500 crore going to Punjab & Sind Bank, the Government is left with ₹14,500 crore

burden on them due to one-time restructuring being undertaken as per the RBI guidelines to help the industry tide over the risk of default due to subdued business environment in the COVID-19 crisis.

Besides, sources said there would be a clarity on NPA recognition as the Supreme Court may decide on interest on interest case by then. NPA recognition process has been halted by the apex court till further order.

During 2019-20, the government proposed to make Rs 70,000 crore capital infusion into the PSBs to boost credit for a strong impetus to the economy.

However, the government refrained from committing any capital in the Budget 2020-21 for the PSBs, hoping that the lenders will raise funds from the market depending on the requirements

In the last financial year, Punjab National Bank got Rs 16,091 crore, Union Bank of India received Rs 11,768 crore while Canara Bank and Indian Bank got Rs 6,571 crore and Rs 2,534 crore, respectively.

Allahabad Bank received Rs 2,153 crore, United Bank of India got 1,666 crore and Andhra Bank received Rs 200 crore. These three lenders have been merged with various PSBs.

, Bank of Baroda got a capital infusion of Rs 7,000 crore, Indian Overseas Bank received Rs 4,360 crore and UCO Bank got Rs 2,142 crore. Punjab & Sind Bank received Rs 787 crore and Central Bank of India got Rs 3,353 crore. ***PTI***

Oil companies halt auto fuel price rise as crude firm but static

New Delhi: Petrol prices march towards all time high levels has been temporarily halted by the oil marketing companies (OMCs) as they chose to keep the retail rates of petrol and diesel static for sixth consecutive day even though global oil prices remained firm with crude close to $50 a barrel.

Accordingly, there was no change in retail price of auto fuels on Sunday with price of petrol remaining at Rs 83.71 a litre and diesel Rs 73.87 a litre in Delhi. Across the country as well the price of the two petroleum products remained unchanged.

OMCs have gone on a pause mode at a time when news of successful coronavirus and expectations of big pick up in demand had kept crude on the boil with prices breaching $50 a barrel mark. Crude, however, has remained static for late few days reducing any pressure on upward revision in fuel prices.

Petrol prices was very close to breaching the all time high level of Rs 84 a litre (reached on October 4, 2018) when it touched Rs 83.71 a litre on Monday. But the March has been halted ever since then with no price revision by the OMCs.

Global crude prices have risen almost $10 a barrel in last one month to reaching over $50 a barrel now. But even at this level, it is far less than than average crude price of $80.08 a barrel in October 2018 when petrol prices reached highs of Rs 84 a litre in the Capital.

With Sunday's pause, fuel prices have now increased on 15 of the past 24 days with petrol prices rising by Rs 2.65 per litre and diesel by 3.41 a litre.

Petrol prices had been static since September 22, and diesel rates hadn't changed since October 2. Though retail pricing of petrol and diesel has been deregulated and oil marketing companies were following a daily price revision formula, the same was suspend ended for almost two months to prevent volatility in international oil markets from impacting fuel prices regularly during the pandemic. ***IANS***

'PLI scheme to provide major impetus to manufacturing sector'

Says NITI Aayog CEOAmitabh Kant in a virtual session

New Delhi: The Centre's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for key sectors has the potential to add $520 billion worth of manufacturing in the next five years, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said on Saturday. Recently, the Centre had announced the PLI scheme with a budgetary support of $26 billion.

Addressing the virtual session, 'PLI for Exponential Growth of Manufacturing', organised during Ficci's 93rd annual convention, Kant said that the PLI scheme in the 10 champion sectors will support Indian manufacturers.

He emphasised that this is the time for supply chains across the world to get relocated and India must leverage the opportunity to become the most preferred destination for manufacturing.

According to Kant, the PLI scheme is a game-changer for the manufacturing sector and the 10 sectors will attract investment in large scale, boost export potential and give rise to economic space which will ensure India's integration in the global value chain.

"If we want size and scale of manufacturing, we should support manufacturing for the next five years so that companies become an integral part of the global value chains," Kant said. He further mentioned that the government has supported both labour intensive and cutting-edge technology areas with PLI that will help MSMEs in the value chain.

"We want India to become global champion in manufacturing in areas where we have announced PLI," Kant said.

"Our 73-74 per cent exports were concentrated in items where global trade is only 30 per cent and with the PLI scheme, we are supporting areas where we can take lead in major globally traded items," he added. ***IANS***

RBI to set up automated banknote processing centre in Jaipur

Mumbai: With a view to effectively deal with increasing circulation of banknotes, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to set up an Automated Banknote Processing Centre (ABPC) in Jaipur for receipt, storage and dispatch of currency notes.

The functions of the ABPC will also include processing of banknotes received from currency chests (CCs) and bank branches, and destruction of soiled banknotes in an automated manner, said the RBI's Request for Proposal (RFP) for engagement of consultant for comprehensive consultancy services for establishment of ABPC at Jaipur."Cash remains an important mode of payment for most Indian citizens, notwithstanding the growth in digital payments. In fact, the banknotes in circulation have been concurrently growing with the rise in digital payments. The global trend of increasing volume of banknotes in circulation has been witnessed in India as well," the document said.

The volume of banknotes in circulation has increased threefold from March 2001 to March 2019, and is expected to rise further in the years to come.

Besides, supply of banknotes by the presses has increased about four times from March 2001 to March 2019 and is expected to increase manifolds.

"This has necessitated a relook at the present system of cash management and a need is felt to automate the handling of banknotes for receipt, storage, retrieval, processing and destruction, in line with the global changes, adopting modern technology," the document said.

One of the desired activities at the proposed ABPC would be automated receipt and storage of fresh banknotes received from the printing presses, automated retrieval and dispatch of fresh banknotes to the identified issue offices (IOs)/CCs.

"The proposed ABPC is expected to provide for storage and dispatch of fresh banknotes and storage and processing of soiled banknotes to/from the identified CCs/bank branches covering the jurisdiction of the states being catered," the document said. It has also projected storage capacity requirements for the ABPC in Jaipur -- fresh note stock (daily average) at 1,883 million pieces during 2024-25, 2,950 million pieces during 2029-30 and 6,853 million pieces during 2039-40, and soiled notes at 7,718 million pieces during 2024-25, 11,568 million pieces during 2029-30 and 27,757 million pieces during 2039-40.

"The facility may be designed to store the daily average fresh note stock requirement and hold a stock of about 15 days of soiled banknotes and provide commensurate processing and destruction capacities," it said. ***PTI***

GSTN enables auto-populated GSTR-3B return form beginning Nov

New Delhi: Businesses will now get complete auto-populated monthly sales return form GSTR-3B, GST Network said on Sunday.

"For ease of taxpayers, now the system will auto populate GSTR-3B (monthly) on the basis of details filed in GSTR-1 and auto-drafted ITC statement GSTR-2B from November 2020 tax period onwards," Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) said.

Based on the supplies return GSTR-1 filed by businesses, GSTN will auto-populate the liabilities, while input tax credit (ITC) would be populated from system-drafted statement GSTR-2B.

"If the total liability of a particular period is negative on account of debit/credit notes, the same will be auto-populated as zero liability," GSTN said. While businesses file GSTR-1 of a particular month by the 11th day of the subsequent month, GSTR-3B is filed in a staggered manner between 20th-24th day of the succeeding month.

Also, the facility of communication between taxpayers has been enabled on the GST portal. EY Tax Partner Abhishek Jain said GSTN has enabled the facility for suppliers and recipients to communicate with one another over the online portal itself.

"This shall enable the businesses to raise a red flag to their suppliers/ recipients in relation to various discrepancies at their end, as well as receive their comments. This development by the GSTN should facilitate better reconciliation of GST credits between suppliers and recipients," Jain added. ***PTI***

Round-the-clock RTGS facility from mid-night tonight

Mumbai: The Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS) for high-value transactions will become available round-the-clock from 00:30 hours Monday onwards, making India one of the few countries in the world to operate the system 24X7.

In October, the RBI had announced that RTGS will be available round-the-clock on all days of the year.

"RTGS facility becomes operational 24X7 from 12.30 am tonight. Congratulations to the teams from RBI, IFTAS and the service partners who made this possible," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said in a tweet.

India will become one of the few countries in the world to operate its RTGS system round-the-clock throughout the year.

RTGS on 24X7X365 facility comes within a year of RBI operationalising NEFT 24x7. NEFT is a popular mode for small-value transactions.

RTGS, which began its operations on March 26, 2004 with a soft launch involving four banks, presently handles 6.35 lakh transactions daily for a value of Rs 4.17 lakh crore across 237 participant banks.

The average ticket size for RTGS in November 2020 was Rs 57.96 lakh, making it a truly large value payment system.

RTGS uses ISO 20022 format which is the best-in-class messaging standard for financial transactions. The feature of positive confirmation for credit to beneficiary accounts is also available in RTGS. "Round the clock availability of RTGS will provide extended flexibility to businesses for effecting payments and will enable introduction of additional settlement cycles in ancillary payment systems. ***PTI***

GST officers arrest 140 persons on charge of fake invoicing

New Delhi: GST authorities have arrested as many as 140 persons, including five chartered accountants, in about a month's time on charges of issuing fake invoices, and have now trained their guns on entities transporting under-valued goods.

In its nationwide drive against fake invoice frauds since the second week of November, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) have also unearthed cases of GST evasion by way of transporting under-valued and unaccounted goods, they added.

Revenue Department sources said some companies of Delhi and Himachal are under investigation for under-valuation of goods and its transportation through transporters of Ludhiana and Jalandhar.

During searches and surveys, the field formations have seized unaccounted goods as well. ***PTI***

Former Guj milk marketing fed chief arrested in embezzlement case

Ahmedabad: Vipul Chaudhary, former Chairman of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) has been arrested for his alleged role in a Rs 14.8 crore embezzlement case involving bonus of employees of a Mehsana-based dairy entity to which he was connected, police said on Sunday.

Chaudhary was arrested on Saturday from Gandhinagar for allegedly embezzling Rs 14.8 crore that was meant to give bonus to employees of Dudhasagar Dairy cooperative in Mehsana, of which he was a former chairman, a state CID (Criminal Investigation Department) official said.

An FIR was lodged against Chaudhary and others, including Dudhsagar chairperson Ashaben Thakor, vice chairman Modhjibhai Patel and managing director NJ Bakshi, in CID Crime police station in Gandhinagar, the CID said in a release.

They were booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Prevention of Corruption Act for breach of trust and criminal conspiracy among other offences, it added. ***PTI***

Policy of reserved tickets on express trains to stay for now: Railways

New Delhi: The Indian Railways on Sunday refuted claims about issuance of unreserved tickets, saying that there has been no change in policy to run all Express trains, including festival specials and clone specials, as fully reserved trains only, by issuing reserved tickets for second class coaches coaches and passenger portion of SLRs coach.It clarified that "permission" given to zonal railways to issue unreserved tickets is meant for suburban and limited number of trains.

In a statement, the Railway Ministry said: "There has been no change in policy to run all express trains including festival specials and clone specials as fully reserved train only as yet.

Accordingly till further advice, the existing mail express special trains including festival or holiday specials, clone specials which are running on fully reserved basis (as on date) shall be continued as fully reserved only, by issuing reserved tickets for second class coaches and passenger portion of SLRs also.

"Permission has been given to zonal railways to issue unreserved tickets is meant only for suburban and limited number of local passenger trains operating on few zones.

"It said that running of trains, norms of travel and reservations are constantly evolving under Covid times. Further changes, as and when they happen, would be informed to all concerned accordingly. ***IANS***

Macroeconomic data, US Fed interest rate decision to drive markets this week: Analysts

New Delhi: Domestic indices will track macroeconomic data announcement and global events like the US Fed interest rate decision for its movement this week, analysts said."This week, domestic markets will be waiting for major data points like inflation and import-export updates.

"The trend in global markets will be guided by developments in Brexit deal talks and updates on the expected US stimulus package," said Vinod Nair, head (research) at Geojit Financial Services.

Siddhartha Khemka, head (retail research) at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "The overall trend of the market remains positive as it is showing resilience on the back of abundant liquidity, positive developments on the vaccine front and signs of economic recovery."

He, however, added that the market may consolidate at these levels for some time given stalemate in US stimulus and concerns over probable no-deal Brexit talk.During the last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark index jumped 1,019.46 points or 2.26 per cent."Indications are in favour of some consolidation in the index and it would be healthy for the markets," Ajit Mishra, vice-president (research) of Religare Broking Ltd, said. ***PTI***

Airstrike: Airlines gear up to deliver Covid vaccine blow

New Delhi: India's airline industry which was heavily battered by the pandemic's onslaught is now gearing up to take the fight back to the virus via lending the key logistical support for anti-Covid-19 vaccine deployment.

The industry is expected to play a vital role in the country's impending anti-Covid offensive via vaccines.Already at an advance stage of planning, the industry and especially its leading players have formed dedicated teams, new specialised logistical arms to safely and efficiently transport veils across India and potentially around the world.

Notably, the airline industry has the capability to quickly transport the temperature sensitive vaccines across the country from the pharma hubs of Hyderabad and Pune.From a pure business standpoint, the integration of cold-chains, logistics and the last-mile delivery will boost the revenue stream of the sector.

Lately, the segment has become a lifesaver for the industry."Cargo operations have already gained pace for the airlines in the absence of adequate passenger traffic. And depending on the economics for the vaccine, air transportation is a probable option," said Kinjal Shah, Vice President, ICRA."This can definitely be an additional revenue stream for the airlines.

"According to Vasudevan S. , Partner, Aviation, KPMG in India: "It is a huge business and revenue generation opportunity for India and can create new jobs as well, but the larger focus should be on nation building and stamping our reputation globally as a reliable ally and business partner.

"Besides, Suman Chowdhury, Chief Analytical Officer, Acuite Ratings & Research contended that: "It is unlikely that such an activity will have strong profit margins at least in the initial stage since it is expected to be viewed more as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) particularly by the government.

"On their part, some airlines plan to deploy a dedicated number of freighters, while others have formed a new logistics' arm.

A case-in-point is airline major SpiceJet, which has tied-up with logistics' firms to provide seamless end-to-end cold chain solutions for Covid-19 vaccine delivery.

Furthermore, SpiceJet's cargo arm, SpiceXpress launched a new specialised service, Spice Pharma Pro, dedicated to transporting Covid vaccines, medicines, blood samples and temperature-sensitive cargo.With Spice Pharma Pro, SpiceXpress has said that it has the capability to transport extremely sensitive drugs, vaccines, blood samples and medicines in controlled temperatures ranging from minus 40 degrees Celsius to (plus) 25 degrees Celsius.

On its part, AirAsia India has marshalled a dedicated cargo services team for evaluating the special logistics requirement, such as temperature controlled containers, that may be needed for transportation of vaccine and are evaluating various measures to support the same. ***IANS***

Gems, jewellery exports can now be couriered globally

New Delhi: Gems and jewellery exporters have been permitted to send their goods across the globe to their buyers using the convenience of cost effective and reliable courier services.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has issued a circular clarifying that extant regulations do not restrict exports of gems and jewellery through the courier mode and such restrictions only apply to imports.

This would mean that gems and jewellery exports could be done through courier services following all other regulations in place for such exports.

Doubts had arisen over use of courier services for exports as Regulation 2(2)(a)(iv) of the Courier Imports and Exports (Electronic Declaration and Processing) Regulations, 2010 places a restriction on imports of precious and semi-precious stones, gold or silver in any form, through courier.

The Regulation 2(2) (a) (iv) reads as "These regulations shall not apply to the following imported goods requiring testing of samples thereof or reference to the relevant statutory authorities or to experts before their clearance, namely precious and semi-precious stones, gold or silver in any form".

Thus, the restriction imposed by Regulation 2(2)(a)(iv) on gems and jewellery is applicable only on their imports, CBIC has clarified.

Earlier, the Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council represented before CBIC seeking clarification on whether gems and jewellery is allowed to be exported through courier under the Courier Imports and Exports (Electronic Declaration and Processing) Regulations, 2010 as also the Courier Imports and Exports (Clearance) Regulations, 1998. ***IANS***

Biden's challenge: Building Cabinet that meets all his goals

Washington: Shortly after President-elect Joe Biden's victory last month, Cabinet hopeful Marcia Fudge pointedly noted that Black people are often typecast into positions such as housing secretary.

On Friday, Biden announced Fudge, a prominent Black congresswoman from Ohio, was his nominee for that very role. She was introduced alongside Biden's pick for the job she initially sought, head of the Agriculture Department. That went instead to Tom Vilsack, a 70-year-old white man who already spent eight years in the position during the Obama administration.

Those nominations highlight the competing priorities Biden is facing as he fills out the top ranks of his administration. He's pledged to nominate the most diverse Cabinet in history and restore experience at beleaguered federal agencies. He's seeking to reward loyalists who have stood with him throughout his lengthy career and give opportunities to new voices in the Democratic Party.

Each of his nominees has to win confirmation in a narrowly divided Senate that could be controlled by Republicans, depending on who wins two runoff races in Georgia next month. The GOP has barely acknowledged Biden's victory so the cooperation of its senators in the confirmation

process is far from certain.

"There's a lot of pressure, and part of the reason you saw such big turnout is that people are eager for change from the Trump years," said Democratic strategist Karen Finney. "That creates a lot of high expectations."

The challenge won't get easier. Biden is facing a decision on attorney general that will come under intense scrutiny from Black leaders, who want someone with a background in civil rights advocacy, and Republicans who are demanding political independence as Biden's son, Hunter, faces a federal investigation into his finances.

Some of those tensions emerged last week during a meeting between Biden and civil rights leaders who pressed the incoming president to diversify his Cabinet and warned about the Vilsack pick in particular.

Vilsack has been criticised for the firing of department official Shirley Sherrod, who is Black, during his last stint at the USDA, a move he later apologised for. NAACP President Derrick Johnson warned Biden that the Vilsack selection could hurt Black turnout in the critical Georgia contests.

"Vilsack could have a disastrous effect on voters in the state of Georgia," NAACP President Derrick Johnson told Biden during the meeting, which was private. Audio was leaked to The Intercept, which released excerpts.

Biden bristled at such concern, saying, "Let's get something straight, you shouldn't be upset." "What I've done so far is more than what anyone else has done this far," he added. "I mean what I say." The president-elect has several more Cabinet posts to fill, and has made history with some of his early selections.

He nominated retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin to be the first Black person to lead the Pentagon, while picking California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to be the first Latino to lead the Health and Human Services Department. His nominee for U.S. Trade envoy, Katherine Tai, was born in Connecticut to Taiwanese parents.

But those choices were announced after African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans in Congress voiced concerns that their perspectives may not be fully represented in the new administration. Some nominees will face other hurdles, most notably Austin who needs a waiver to fill the civilian role leading the Pentagon. That's a step some Democrats have historically opposed. ***AP***

Trump appoints flurry of allies as presidency winds down

Washington: His time in the White House rapidly ending, President Donald Trump is rewarding some supporters and like-minded allies with the perks and prestige that come with serving on federal advisory boards and commissions.

On Thursday, Trump announced his intention to nominate two authors who wrote books that flattered him to a board that makes recommendations on education research. Another author who helped write a favourable book about the president was chosen for the same board a few days earlier.

On Wednesday, the Department of Defense announced that China hawk Michael Pillsbury would become the chair of a board that gives Pentagon leadership advice on how to enhance national security. Pillsbury has served as an outside adviser to the president on China.

And on Tuesday, Trump said he would appoint his former counselor and 2016 campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, to serve on the board of visitors to the U.S. Air Force Academy. Going to the same board will be Heidi Stirrup, an ally of top Trump adviser Stephen Miller. ***AP***

Supporters of President Donald Trump attend a rally at Freedom Plaza in Washington AP

4 stabbed in clashes as Trump supporters protest to back election fraud claim

AFP ■ WASHINGTON

Four people were stabbed and one shot as rallies backing President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud led to clashes in major US cities on Saturday.

Scuffles broke out in many places between rally-goers and counter-protesters who turned up to criticise the president, who lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden but is yet to concede.

Washington State Police said in a tweet late Saturday that a shooting had taken place after clashes near the capitol building in Olympia, and that a suspect had been detained.

In the US capital, DC Fire and EMS Department communications chief Doug Buchanan told AFP that four people had been stabbed and were now hospitalized "with serious injuries." The New York Times reported that 23 had been arrested throughout the day.

There was no indication of whether any of the victims had been involved in the protests, on either side of the divide.

Officials: Bomb and gun attacks in Kabul kill 3

Kabul: Separate bomb and gun attacks on Sunday left at least three dead in Afghanistan's capital, local police said, a day after a barrage of mortar shells shook the city.

A sticky bomb attached to an armored vehicle in northern Kabul killed two, and wounded at least two others, according to Ferdaws Faramarz, a spokesman for the Kabul police chief. No further details were immediately available.

Faramarz also said that an Afghan Government prosecutor was shot dead in eastern Kabul. The prosecutor was on his way to his office when he was attacked in Kart-e Now neighborhood, the police spokesman said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks in Kabul. The Islamic Sate group has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks on the capital in recent months, including horrific attacks on

Afghan security personnel inspect a damaged vehicle after a bomb blast in Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday AP

educational institutions that killed as many as 50 people, most of them students.

The Sunday attacks happened as a day earlier the IS militants hit the capital with a barrage of mortar shells, killing at least one civilian and wounding a second, amid a countrywide spike in violence. The extremist group claimed responsibility on its affiliated Amaq News site, saying it fired 10 Katyusha rockets toward the capital's Hamid Karzai International Airport. ***AP***

Iran summons EU envoys for protesting reporter's hanging

Tehran: Iran on Sunday summoned the German envoy to Tehran after the European Union condemned the execution of an Iranian journalist whose work helped inspire nationwide economic protests in 2017, Iranian state media has reported.

IRNA said that an Iranian foreign ministry official summoned the German ambassador because of EU statements on the exiled reporter Ruhollah Zam, 47, who was hanged on Saturday.

Zam was being held in jail in Iran after Iranian authorities seized him while he was traveling in neighbouring Iraq last year. The German Foreign Ministry on Saturday expressed its shock about the circumstances of Zam's sentencing and what it described as his "abduction from abroad" and forced return to Iran.

Iran will also summon today the French ambassador to Tehran over European reactions to the journalist's execution, IRNA added.

"This is a barbarous and unacceptable act," the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement, which also condemned the hanging as a "grave blow" to freedom of speech in Iran.

Zam had been living in exile in France, before his kidnapping and conviction in Iran.

Iranian state television referred to Zam as "the leader of the riots" in announcing his execution by hanging early Saturday. In June, a court sentenced Zam to death, saying he had been convicted of "corruption on Earth," a charge often used in cases involving espionage or attempts to overthrow Iran's government.

Zam's website AmadNews and a channel he created on the popular messaging app Telegram had spread the timings of the 2017 protests and embarrassing information about officials that directly challenged Iran's Shiite theocracy.

Those demonstrations, which began at the end of December 2017 and continued into 2018, represented the biggest challenge to Iran's rulers since the 2009 Green Movement protests and set the stage for similar mass unrest in November of last year.

The initial spark for the 2017 protests was a sudden jump in food prices. Many believe that hard-line opponents of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani instigated the first demonstrations in the conservative city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran, trying to direct public anger at the president. But as protests spread from town to town, the backlash turned against the entire ruling class. ***AP***

Analysis: The election is over, Trump's attacks will linger

Washington: The 2020 presidential election is over. But President Donald Trump's baseless efforts to undermine it, and the consequences of those undemocratic actions, will linger in America for far longer.

It is increasingly clear that there is no fact, no piece of evidence and no court ruling that will dissuade Trump from trying to mislead Americans about President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

And Trump has hardly been alone in that effort; numerous Republicans have stood with him or stood by silently, including 126 GOP members of the House who backed a bid to get the Supreme Court to invalidate Biden's victory in four key states. The court emphatically rejected the case Friday night.

Trump responded on Twitter late Friday, "The Supreme Court really let us down," but he vowed to "fight on!" The actions of Trump and his allies have exposed a striking reality about America: Many lawmakers in one of the nation's two major political parties are either willing to back efforts to overturn a free and fair election or unwilling to speak out against such a campaign.

That lays the predicate for politicians to question the integrity of any election if the results don't go a party or a candidate's way, a dangerous notion that is likely to further erode Americans' trust in government and test the durability of the nation's democratic institutions.

With the sitting president leading the way and friendly media outlets standing by to amplify his claims, the result is that millions of Americans will likely remain convinced Biden's victory was illegitimate and the election was fraudulent. ***AP***

Hundreds of Nigerian students missing after attack on school

Lagos (Nigeria): Hundreds of Nigerian students are missing after gunmen attacked a secondary school in the country's northwestern Katsina state, police have confirmed.

The Government Science Secondary School in Kankara was attacked Friday night by a large group of bandits who shot "with AK 47 rifles," Katsina State police spokesman Gambo Isah said in a statement.

Police engaged the attackers "in a gun duel which gave (some of) the students the opportunity to scale the fence of the school and run for safety," Isah said.

About 400 students are missing, while 200 are accounted for, Isah said. The school is

believed to have more than 600 students.

"The police, Nigerian Army, and Nigerian Air Force are working closely with the school authorities to ascertain the actual number of the missing and/or kidnapped students," said Isah. "Search parties are working with a view to find or rescue the missing students," he said. ***AP***

Pak Opposition alliance PDM to stage its final rally in Lahore

Lahore: The Pakistan Democratic Movement, an 11-party Opposition alliance seeking the ouster of "puppet" Prime Minister Imran Khan, is set to hold its final rally here on Sunday, despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in COVID-19 cases across the country.

A number of workers of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have reached Minar-i-Pakistan. They broke the locks of its main gate, placed chairs and have installed lights for Sunday's much-hyped power show of the Opposition.

The rally will be addressed

Supporters of the Pakistan Democratic Movement, an alliance of opposition parties, attend an anti-government rally in Lahore, Pakistan on Sunday AP

by former prime minister and PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif from London, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, Jamiat Ulema Islam chief and PDM head Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. ***PTI***

Bahrain approves Chinese Covid-19 vaccine for use

Dubai: Bahrain said Sunday it approved the use of a Chinese coronavirus vaccine, following its earlier approval of a vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech.

Bahrain's state-run news agency said the Sinopharm vaccine would be available in the island kingdom off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf.

It offered few details though on study results of the vaccine, in line with the United Arab Emirates, which last week announced the vaccine was 86 per cent effective. The Emirati statement provided few details but marked the first public release of information on the efficacy of the shot.

Bahrain said over 7,700 signed up to take part in a trial of the Sinopharm vaccine in the kingdom. The kingdom earlier said it plans to give the public free coronavirus vaccines, but has yet to answer any questions about its programme.

The Sinopharm vaccine has been approved for emergency use in a few countries and the company is still conducting late-stage clinical trials in 10 countries. Morocco is gearing up for an ambitious COVID-19 vaccination programme, aiming to vaccinate 80 per cent of its adults in an operation starting this month that's relying initially on the Sinopharm vaccine. ***AP***

Country music legend Charley Pride dies at 86

Dallas: Charley Pride, country music's first Black superstar, has died of complications from coronavirus at age 86.

Pride, known for hits like "Kiss an Angel Good Mornin'" and "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antone", died Saturday in Dallas, Texas, according to a statement shared on the singer's official website.

Born a sharecropper's son in Sledge, Mississippi, on March 18, 1934, Pride emerged from Southern cotton fields to also become the first Black member of the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Veteran country singer and Pride's friend, Dolly Parton was among the first to pay tributes on social media. ***PTI***

Lanka records highest elephant deaths in world

Colombo: Sri Lanka has recorded the highest number of elephant deaths in the world due to the human-elephant conflict, according to a media report.

The island-nation's Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) had ordered a special audit into the human-elephant conflict by renowned elephant expert Dr Prithviraj Fernando, the head of the Centre for Conservation and Research.

In a meeting of the COPA held recently, it was also disclosed that Sri Lanka ranked number two globally after India where highest number of human deaths were reported due to the human-elephant conflict, according to Daily News.

COPE Committee Chairman Tissa Vitarana said that in the past 12 months, the

number of elephants killed in conflict with humans in Sri Lanka was 407 as against the previous annual average of 272. The number of people killed also increased from an average of 85 humans to 122 per year in the country.

COPE Committee Chairman Vitarana and other members emphasised the need for the Wildlife Department and other relevant agencies to work together on a more efficient programme to resolve the human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka, which has become a serious problem.

He also said that despite 60 years of efforts to resolve the human-elephant conflict, no significant progress had been made and that a new approach was needed to find a solution.

The COPA directed the Department of Wildlife Conservation to set up a National Coordinating Committee with all relevant institutions as soon as possible to reduce the human-elephant conflict.

The Committee pointed out that although 4,211 km of elephant fences had been constructed by 2016 to control the human-elephant conflict, they had become inactive in a short period of time due to improper maintenance.

Although ₹86 million rupees is spent annually for the maintenance of the electric fences, the committee pointed out the need for the Wildlife Conservation Department to monitor whether this maintenance is being carried out on a daily basis, the daily said. ***PTI***

Sudan's PM visits Ethiopia as Tigray refugees top 50K

Khartoum: Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on Sunday arrived in Ethiopia, his office said, amid a growing refugee crisis that has seen more than 50,000 Ethiopians flee conflict in the Tigray region into neighbouring Sudan.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed greeted his Sudanese counterpart at Addis Ababa's airport, where Hamdok arrived with the acting Sudanese Foreign Minister Omar Qamar al-Din and top intelligence and military officials.

"I look forward to having productive discussions on political, humanitarian and security matters of common concern," Hamdok tweeted.

The visit came two weeks after the Ethiopian leader declared victory in the fight

against the regional government in Tigray. However, clashes between Ethiopian federal and regional forces have continued.

The fighting, which started early in November, has threatened to destabilise Ethiopia, which is the linchpin of the strategic Horn of Africa, and its neighbours.

The conflict has alarmed the international humanitarian community since the eruption in violence has largely cut off from the world the Tigray region of 6 million people.

The UN refugee agency said more than 50,000 Ethiopians have fled into remote areas of Sudan, first straining the generosity of local communities and then challenging the capacity of humanitarian groups that have hurried to set up a system to feed, shelter and care for the refugees.

The influx of refugees adds to Sudan's economic and security burdens. The transitional government has already been struggling under the weight of decades of US sanctions and mismanagement under former ruler Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted from power last year.

Eastern Sudan, which borders Ethiopia's Tigray region, was the scene of bouts of tribal violence in recent months that claimed dozens of lives. ***AP***

Trend Blazer

Sara shares her stages of posing

Actor **SARA ALI KHAN** has shared with fans the secret to her stages of posing for the camera, with some random rhyming.

In a string of pictures that Sara posted on Instagram with her *Coolie No.1* co-actor Varun, she breaks down the art of posing for the camera — with trademark relish in rhyming that she is known to render to her social media captions.

She wrote, "Stages of posing. First, hold your pose and strike a smile, then break into laughter since it's been a while, hug and thank god that we are the opposite of hostile and then post about it, and make sure your caption rhymes since that's your style..."

It's very important for me to render the character I'm essaying with sincerity. I have no fear of facing the camera without make-up; to be honest it's quite a relief and it saves time. I'm playing the role of a murder suspect who is vulnerable and frightened. Embodying her was a challenge and the zero make-up did its job.'
—Kirti Kulhari

Actor **JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ** has multiple projects in hand, and finds this busy period exciting.

Even as she juggles her projects, she was recently cast in Sajid Nadiadwala's *Bachchan Pandey* starring Akshay Kumar and Kriti Sanon.

"This period has been so exciting. Ever since lockdown eased up, I have been shooting nonstop. The festive months couldn't get any better — I have been celebrating all special occasions on the sets and I am definitely not complaining," said she who had celebrated Diwali with her *Bhoot Police* co-stars Yami Gautam, Saif Ali Khan and Arjun Kapoor.

'Social media is spreading hate'

Hollywood star **ISLA FISHER** feels social media is being used to spread conspiracy and hate, saying it needs a bit of re-thought.

"I think social media just as a platform has to just be re-thought in a major way. It's spreading conspiracy and hate and lies and it's threatening our planet and democracy. So, I'm a big believer now that we're on a precipice. We need to get involved and stop. We also need to stop these big corporations from changing the way we think and not being able to tell what to believe or what not to believe," she said.

LESSONS FOR A LIFETIME

As the world grapples with unprecedented chaos, acknowledging the importance of mental health and how it benefits us has become a key learning this year

What we achieve inwardly, will change outer reality. Plutarch, Greek historian and philosopher once said.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 coincided with the arrival of the new year and even before the world entered February, there were already a lot of changes and travel restrictions in place. However, the most remarkable aspect of humanity is its resilience and the ability to bounce back from such events. The virus is still raging out there in many parts of the world, but it is no longer novel. Even a potent vaccine might just be available before long.

The one major change this year made to our lives was the focus on physical wellness and keeping ourselves safe from the virus. Lockdowns, isolations, social distancing, face masks and work from home have become the new norm. However, this has also lead to a lot of stress, anxiety, fears and paranoia among the people. Mental health has traditionally failed to gain as much attention as physical health and not much has changed. People have become increasingly conscious of their physical health in the wake of the pandemic, but mental health and its impact on various aspects of living is still not adequately understood.

It is only a healthy mind which can ensure continuation of our emotional wellness, social behaviour and intellectual prowess. A sound mind is more efficient at analysing situations and enhances the quality of decision making. As the world grapples with the unprecedented chaos, acknowledging the importance of mental health and how it benefits us has become a key learning in 2020.

There is ample incentive for people to focus on their emotional and mental health. After all, it impacts the way they think, react and conduct themselves. In the prevailing turmoil, it is easy to start feeling low, exhausted. We might even find ourselves preoccupied with negative thoughts, inaction and feel like withdrawing from social interactions even when there is a lot we want to talk about. This is where stress can lead to depression and anxiety over time.

By being emotionally healthy and resilient, we can improve our social and professional standing. According to the World Health Organisation, millions of work days annually are affected by depression and mental health issues. The unfortunate part of the phenomenon is that this illness is considered a disability. In the wake of a global pandemic, such risks become more pronounced. Hence, it is really important to keep ourselves mentally fit and alert. This can help in improving productivity, performance, and the ability to work enthusiastically.

Another key aspect of our lives is the relationships we have with self, friends and family. The outcome and quality of these relationships is completely governed by our emotional health. A person's thoughts reflect his behaviour and the kind of people they will attract. By instilling discipline in our mental space, we can reap similar benefits that one gets for the body after regularly working out at gym. Avoid negativity, over analysing situations and the tendency to undervalue own performance. Give yourself a pat on the back and know that you deserve happiness as much as anyone ever did.

Nobody can completely escape stress. In fact, many psychologists believe that stress in moderation is essential to drive us towards our goals. If one were to be completely care-free then there might be no motivation to work towards the goals. This is exemplified by the 'hare and the tortoise' story that has been repeatedly narrated from playschools to corporate boardrooms.

However, extreme stress can lead to various ailments such as weak immunity, diabetes, heart diseases and migraines and even chronic fatigue. By managing stress and remaining mentally healthy, we can dynamically manage life's challenges, relish moments and progress towards our goals.

The global health scare that we are currently dealing with this year has made it clear that ignoring mental health will sooner or later cause problems for overall well-being. The good thing is that these issues are as curable as any physical ailments. There are plenty of mental health experts, psychologists, and counselors available even on digital platforms. They will listen to you, effectively understand your mental struggles and help you cope with them. If you feel that you don't need professional help, but just need someone to talk with, then you can open up to a trusted friend or family member.

Live a mentally healthy life to enjoy all the boons that future has in store for you. This is what 2020 has taught us and it is a lesson for lifetime.

(The writer is Shumita Kakkar, Founder, United We Care.)

Tales of courage

On the first anniversary of *Mardaani 2,* actor RANI MUKERJI talks about how the film acts as a mirror to society

Actor Rani Mukerji's superhit *Mardaani 2* became a must-watch film last year as it shocked and gripped the nation with its storyline. Inspired by shocking true crimes against women by juveniles, the edge-of-the-seat thriller saw Rani in a race against time to capture a brutal serial rapist who systematically targets women. The film received incredible appreciation from media and critics and took the gritty female-cop franchise forward in leaps and bounds. On the first anniversary of the thriller, Rani opened up about why the Mardaani franchise is close to her heart.

"The franchise of *Mardaani* is very important to me, not only because it's talking about women empowerment and certain brutalities that take place on women, and there is a woman, who is the main protagonist, who is standing up against all of this, but because it is also an informative film as it projects a lot of things women need to be aware of. It speaks about all that because in a society we tend to always see the positive things. It is good to be positive and but in reality, certain people have bad intentions and on a bad day we can encounter them," said she.

Rani added, "So, I think this film empowers women to think that they are strong. It gives a lot of hope and courage to women. When they are watching it, they feel that they are getting introduced to their inner strength, so I think the entire franchise being what it was made for and the fact that it was received the way we wanted it to be received, makes it truly special. When we set out to make a film as filmmakers and as people who are a part of a project, we had certain aspirations for the film but to see those aspirations getting fulfilled and resonate with the women is so heartening."

Rani revealed that the reaction she got from female-cops across India has been very overwhelming. She said, "Whenever I have met lady cops, they have not reacted to just the film. They have also reacted to the portrayal of Shivani Shivaji Roy, which they feel is very positive and it showcases the entire gamut of things that they have to deal with during the course of their lives and career. The credit for that should actually go to the writer and those who have envisaged *Mardaani* as a franchise which is Adi, Gopi (Puthran – director and writer), Pradeep da (Sarkar) put together because I think the fact is that the actors get to portray a character only when it's written and fleshed out well."

She added, "The fact that they took time and energy to build Shivani's character around real-life woman cops also adds to the persona of the film. So it makes everything look real and you could encounter somebody like that in your lifetime. She is relatable and larger than life in her actions, in terms of the courage. The character is true to every person who is on the battlefield and for cops. Also, it's not a superhuman portrayal where the person can fight goons all by herself. So, as a cop, I think it's a combination of using brains and brawn."

The film enables Rani to bring startling realities of society out in the open. She said, "It gives me an opportunity to actually bring out these topics, which are slightly difficult to digest and talk about, but unfortunately that's the reality, that's what we read and see in the newspaper and news channels day in and day out. And what is the most disturbing part in all this is that it's not ending. These incidents are not getting over and done with. No matter how much we do, we still have to do much more. The film is just a small drop in the ocean of things that need to be done for this cause."

Rani added, "It generates conversation and there is awareness when women watch these kind of films. They understand that we live in a world where things are guarded but you never know which person, in which corner of the street, is lurking with a bad intention. You never know whom you will encounter. So, one has to be always ready and prepared and that is the truth of life. The film seeks to find some answers."

WEBBED

SONG EXPLODER (VOLUME 2)

Get inspired as musicians dig deep into the creative process of songwriting and reveal their intimate thoughts in a series based on the hit podcast. Starring Hrishikesh Hirway, the series releases on December 15 on Netflix.

HOW TO RUIN CHRISTMAS (SEASON 1)

Prodigal daughter Tumi tries to make things right after completely ruining what should have been her sister's picture-perfect Christmas wedding. The first season of the comedy-drama releases on December 16 on Netflix.

SWEET HOME (SEASON 1)

As humans turn into savage monsters and wreak terror, one troubled teen and his apartment neighbours fight to survive — and to hold on to their humanity. Starring Song Kang, Lee Jin-uk and Lee Si-young the series releases on December 18 on Netflix.

MARKET TO THE RESCUE

The Haat Bazaar clinics in Chhattisgarh are making healthcare accessible to the rural and tribal population, who would reach out to the local quacks otherwise. By SARITA BRARA

Kohiti Bai, a resident of Dhaneli village in the Naxal-affected Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, was at the mercy of quacks for her treatment of an unknown ailment. It was during a random health check-up at the *haat bazar* (local market) Clinic at Tarandul, where she was diagnosed with high sugar levels. Hailing from a *pahunch vaheen* (inaccessible due to Naxal activism) village, the former sarpanch Kohiti was initially reluctant and insisted on continuing her treatment with a local quack.

"After a lot of persuasion and motivation by the haat bazar Clinic staff, she agreed for the treatment," said Navin Pandey, Rural Medical Assistant, who is also in charge of the Hatkarra sector in Bhanupratappur area of the district. Kohiti's diabetes is now under control. Seeing a vast improvement in her sugar levels, Kohiti has now started visiting the check-up centre regularly to get medicines for her treatment or sometimes, she also pays a visit at the bazar Clinic, as per her convenience and medical requirements. More importantly, using her influence as ex-sarpanch, she has been able to motivate others to come to the Primary Health Centre (PHC) and the bazar Clinic.

Following that, a fall in the villagers' dependency on the quacks has been observed. "Seeing the improvement in my health, villagers were curious to know about the treatment I had been taking. I told them about the clinic and the convenience it offers. Having been a sarpanch earlier, I was able to convince them to consult the doctors at the PHC for check-ups and treatment for unknown ailments," said Kohiti.

Not just quacks, owing to unawareness and high rate of illiteracy, many people depend on the so-called mendicants or faqirs, who claim to treat people with occultism or other powers they claim to possess. Being dominated by tribal population, these remote areas with difficult topography lack presence of health facilities. Hopeless, they turn to such quacks for treatment. It is mainly to cater to the health issues of people residing in nondescript villages that the Mukhyamantri Haat Bazar Clinic Yojana was launched in October 2019.

As part of the scheme, mobile healthcare vans have been deputed at weekly Haat bazars. Medical teams and medicines to these weekly markets are provided. These clinics also facilitate OPD consultations. From blood test for several ailments like diabetes, malaria, anaemia, these clinics also help monitor blood pressure, conduct eye check-up, pregnancy tests and other health-related tests. Immunisation facilities are also provided free of cost.

One of the major benefits of these market clinics is that many a times, ailments and diseases can be detected at the initial stages, which allows for timely treatment avoiding alarming or severe situations.

It was during a random health check-up at the clinic at Koda village in Khadganva block of Koriya district, when Dr Tejkant Sonkar, sector in-charge, PHC, Salka, suspected a man of having leprosy. He was asked to get his test done at the PHC which confirmed the doctor's fears. The man is now availing treatment at the PHC. The early detection of the disease and the start of the treatment means that the man will be cured of this disease that is tagged with social stigma.

Dr Sonkar shared that among the many challenges they face, convincing the tribal villagers to take treatment is the most difficult task. The unawareness deeply rooted in their belief system has created a gap between them and the government trying to tackle the misconception. People in several villages still prefer to consult quacks.

"One has to adopt different ways of persuasion, coaxing and sometimes warning of the dire consequences of not taking the right treatment. This helps pushing the villagers to go for further health check-ups at the PHCs and continue with the prescribed treatment," explained Dr Sonkar.

It is easier to do the tests at the clinic, where villagers come to buy or sell their goods. The issue of accessibility and availability is addressed through these haatsas they form an important part of rural life. Here, many villagers agree for random check-ups. As per Dr Tejkant, many of the villagers suffer from high blood pressure. While some agree for treatment at the PHCs, many of them just don't bother. It is only when the situation grows serious and the quacks are unable to handle that they come to the PHCs.

Dr Gyanendra Kushawaha, Ayurveda Chikitsa Adhikari, Khadgawan sector, Majhhauli Haat Bazaar agrees with Dr Tejkant. "Due to availability of Mahua - a prominent forest tree in tribal areas, the villagers drink the local beer made from its flowers and believe that this is the cure of all diseases," explained Dr Kushawaha pointing towards the level of misconceptions these villagers have.

Many deaths have been reported in the past due to snake bites as even in such serious scenario, tribal villagers prefer going to the quacks than visiting a doctor. The field workers face a difficult time trying to spread awareness among the people.

"The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a further deterrent as the number of the people in these villages coming to the PHCs has reduced further because of misconceptions and doubts about the pandemic despite the spread of awareness," said Dr Kushawaha.

When the Haat Bazaar Clinics were re-organized after the nationwide lockdown due to the pandemic, they were used as a platform to create awareness among villagers. Rapid antigen test for Covid-19 was also done on 12 people and all of them were found to be negative.

Over 1200 Haat Bazaar Clinics were organized across all the districts of the state and nearly one lakh ten thousand peoplebenefitted from these health clinics from July till Novemberduring the current financial year. Nearly 97000 patients were given medicines for various ailments as per the details provided by Dr Kamlesh Jain, state nodal officer of the HaatBazar Clinic scheme.

As per Dr Jain, rural and tribal area mobile clinics should be merged with the Haat Bazaar scheme for synergic impact. "Besides continued monitoring of the implementation of the scheme, adequate and dedicated human resources and improved mobility will enhance the quality and assurance of this scheme," advised Dr Jain. He also feels that the scheme will win the trust of the people if referrals from Haat BazarClinics get priority at the higher health facility centres.

The concept of Haat Bazar Clinic is ideal for villagers as most rural people flock together for treatment at these clinics where healthcare workers, besides treatment, provide consultation, medicines, follow-up course and pathological facilities. The only thing required at the moment is to make this scheme more effective by listening to the voices of the experts working with the villagers.

This will address the urgent need of improving the health care services accessible and available for the remote, rural population of the country.

—Charkha Features

Take the holistic route

A lack of moral and spiritual values leads to a complete breakdown of the social system, thus giving birth to broken and unstable relationships, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

The world is surrounded by many problems, but we all do not have a common understanding of why it is so. Why is the world full of problems? Unless we know the underlying causes, we cannot have the right solutions and for that we need to study and observe individuals as well as institutions and their aims and methods of achieving those aims and then find out what is the basic flaw in them that ultimately takes the world to a situation where it finds itself struggling for human rights, rule of law, peace and happines. We all know that the first fundamental truth about all living beings is that they have the natural will and the aspiration to live a peaceful and happy life unless and until life becomes an unbearable burden. Similary,all institutions are also formed to work for certain laudable, useful, meaningful or necessary aims and goals. And for that they organise and administer themselves for achieving those aims which form the basis for like-minded people to form an association or institution. An objective study of this situation would lead us to the conclusion that the aims and objects of an institution or the goal and desires of an individual generally gives it a vested interest and makes it slightly or greatly selfish. Not only do these aims and objects give the individuals and institutions the necessary focus and the emotive force but these also, by their very nature, give them a narrow or sectional outlook. Hence, their first and foremost object and effort always is to achieve their goals, for which each one, manipulates human and material resources first to its own advantage whatever be the effects of these on others. Now this interest or self-interest or institutional interest is, by its very nature narrow as it does not encompass the whole globe. This, therefore, segregates the individual or the institution from others to the extent it is narrow. However noble and laudable be it's aims, these relate to particular class, group, country, community,etc and hence these cannot be considered as holistic (wholistic) in their nature, for these have their own confines or boundaries. So, when each one tries to exert itself to realise its own aims or ambitions which are only sectional or which relate to a segment only, there arises the possibility of struggle among themselves, for each one tries to have human resources, funds, facilities, etc., for fulfillment of its own goals first. It is this struggle that causes pressures and problems and leads to predicament to which it has led. Thus, self-interest, narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness, monopolistic tendencies, expansionist attitude and, in the process, marginalisation of others, etc., have been manifestly the main causes of pressures, problems and the present predicament that the world faces today.

So, considering the very nature of the things as they are, only such an institution or individuals can bring about harmony, unity, wellbeing of all and universal goodness that is an instrument of Supreme,because only HE alone is the one who is absolutely above narrow or group interests, who acts only on merits and not on any other considerations, who is impartial and who loves all as HIS beloved children. We must realize that human beings, by nature, have social, cultural, political and other limitations and cannot rise above all these. Only by being associated with Supreme Almighty, they can imbibe his qualities and work for the welfare of all.

If we go deeper within, our analysis would reveal that the root cause of all these sufferings is identity crisis. YES! it's a truth that man does not know himself, nor does he correctly know his place in the cosmic scheme. As a result of this, he does not know his correct relationship with Almighty and other human beings. This, in turn, leads to lack of moral or spiritual values and it is that which has ultimately led to the break-down of all the systems. We should understand that nothing can work unless man has cordial relationship with his fellow beings based on some values which determine his rights and duties.

Towards a greener future

A survey reveals that power demand can be enhanced with energy-efficient appliances

Power demand can be enhanced through energy efficient appliances, according to a report by Smart Power India (SPI), a subsidiary of The Rockefeller Foundation.

The survey titled *Demand Generation Manual for Solar Mini-grid* noted that meeting the needs of energy-efficient appliances contributes up to 40 to 45 per cent of the total demand for electricity of the mini-grid. The introduction of energy-efficient appliances (EEAs) creates numerous additional benefits for both the consumers as well the ESCOs.

The mini-grid sector has played a critical role in providing access to reliable electricity in rural India. Reliability of electricity not only enhances the lighting and productive uses but only spurs micro-enterprise activities in the villages, said the report.

The energy service companies (ESCOs) running mini-grids need to focus on meeting rural India's existing power demand along with building additional demand for power by supporting the development of local micro-enterprises to ensure financial viability and economic growth, it added.

Jaideep Mukherji, CEO, Smart Power India said, "India has made phenomenal strides in achieving universal electrification. It is indeed a welcome development that due to the government's persistent efforts, all villages in India have been electrified and today, almost 100 per cent households have received electricity connections."

He noted as the government has achieved this feat, it is time to shift attention to the next electrification challenge of providing reliable electricity supply not just for lighting purposes but also for productive use.

As per the report, targeting a high demand area is critical for generating adequate demand. A robust site selection framework should be able to estimate the potential demand of the village as well as provide inputs to the demand generation strategy.

"The critical factor for the success of any solar mini-grid is its reliability in meeting consumer demand cost-effectively. At the core of the framework is the generation of electricity demand to ensure that the mini-grid is sustainable, scalable, and attractive for an ESCO," it said.

—IANS

"Whoever is happy will make others happy too."
—Anne Frank

CARROTS ARE HEALTHY FOR HEART

Carrots are a good source of beta-carotene, which is a precursor of vitamin A and to get the full health benefits of this superfood, we need an active enzyme to produce this vitamin, say researchers.

Beta-carotene is the bioactive compound that gives carrots their orange colour. Studies with humans and mice show the conversion of beta-carotene to vitamin A reduces 'bad' cholesterol in the blood.

"Thus, beta-carotene can help protect against atherosclerosis development, which leads to the accumulation of fats and cholesterol in our arteries. Atherosclerosis cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of death worldwide," said study author Jaume Amengual from the University of Illinois in the US.

The research team conducted two studies to further understand the effects of beta-carotene on cardiovascular health. They confirmed its importance but identified a critical step in the process.

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE LINKED TO DEPRESSION

Young adults who increased their social media usage are significantly more likely to develop depression within six months, say researchers.

Compared to the participants of the study who used social media for less than 120 minutes per day, young adults who used more than 300 minutes per day are 2.8 times as likely to become depressed within six months.

The study, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, shows a link between social media usage and depression over time.

"We know from other large studies that depression and social media usage tend to go together, but it's been hard to figure out which came first," said study author Brian Primack from the University of Arkansas in the US.

"This new study sheds light on these questions because high initial social media use led to increased rates of depression. However, initial depression did not lead to any change in social media use," Primack added.

LOCKDOWN CAUSES DROP IN CO2 EMISSION

The global Covid-19 lockdowns caused fossil carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions to decline by an estimated 2.4 billion tonne in 2020 — a record drop, say researchers.

The fall is considerably larger than previous significant decreases - 0.5 (in 1981 and 2009), 0.7 (1992), and 0.9 (1945) billion tonne of CO2 (GtCO2).

"It means that in 2020 fossil CO2 emissions are predicted to be approximately 34 GtCO2, seven per cent lower than in 2019," said study author from University of East Anglia (UEA), University of Exeter and the Global Carbon Project.

In India, where fossil CO2 emissions are projected to decrease about nine per cent, emissions were already lower than normal in late 2019 because of economic turmoil and strong hydropower generation, and the Covid-19 effect is potentially superimposed on this changing trend.

EXERCISE MAY PROTECT BONE HEALTH

Although weight loss surgery is a highly effective treatment for obesity, it can be detrimental to bone health, say researchers, adding that exercise may help address this shortcoming.

Exercise has been suggested as a therapeutic approach to attenuate bone loss induced by bariatric surgery (BS), but its effectiveness remains unclear.

The study, published in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research, aimed to determine if an exercise-training programme could induce benefits on bone mass after bariatric surgery.

"These findings showed that a structured exercise programme may be a valid treatment option to minimize weight loss surgery-induced bone loss, which may be particularly important since many patients undergo surgery in early adulthood or even at pediatric ages," said lead author Florêncio Diniz-Sousa from the University of Porto in Portugal.

COVID-19 ANTIBODIES MAY FADE VERY QUICKLY

While some reports have come out saying antibodies to Coronavirus may last longer, a new study has revealed that the antibodies fade rapidly post contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the virus that causes Covid-19.

A new five-month longitudinal analysis of Covid-19 patients who displayed a wide range of disease severity — from asymptomatic to deadly illness — suggests that IgA and IgM antibodies to the SARS-CoV-2 virus disappear quickly during convalescence.

IgG antibodies likely persist for longer, but the research team from the Stanford University in the US, documented a slow, inexorable decline in this antibody class as well, even in severely ill patients who mounted very strong initial antibody responses.

India end with lot of positives

Gill, Vihari, Pant and pacers impress in three-day pink-ball dress rehearsal

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The Indian cricket team will head into the first day-night Test against Australia with a lot of optimism and happy selection dilemmas, having managed to tick most of the boxes before drawing the three-day pink-ball dress rehearsal against Australia A here at Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Australia A gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track, despite being reduced to 25 for 3, ending on 305 for 4 riding on Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's centuries. Both the batsmen survived a barrage of bouncers under lights from Indian pacers.

The talented McDermott (107 off 167 balls), younger son of Craig McDermott who was India's tormentor during the forgettable 91-92 series, along with his skipper Alex Carey (58, 111 balls) added 117 runs in a counter-attacking fourth wicket partnership to partially save the game.

Rookie Wildermuth (111 off 119 balls) also got his ton and added 165 runs with McDermott but Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri, watching the proceedings from the dug-out, will be happy with multiple options that emerged from the game.

In the first hour itself, the probable first Test opening pair of Joe Burns (1) and Marcus Harris (5) was sent back by Mohammed Shami (2/58 in 13 overs).

While out-of-form Burns shuffled across to a straight delivery and was caught plumb in front, Harris was set up nicely with a leg-slip and his flick landed into Prithvi Shaw's hands stationed for that particular shot.

The lack of runs from the two openers will certainly increase the Australian team's worries.

Shubman Gill's composure and technique opening the innings wouldn't have gone unnoticed compared to Shaw's loose batting during his two knocks in the game.

There is a lot of time at Gill's disposal and the upright stance with an ability to get his body behind the line of the ball like any top international batsman does, gives his team a lot of hope going into the series.

Similarly, Hanuma Vihari strongly kept himself in the hunt with a hundred that again reflected his patient approach. With his handy off-breaks, one such delivery got rid of Carey, he can be a good option for the sixth specialist batsman's spot in the side.

But then there is an extremely stylish KL Rahul, who has been sweating it out at the nets under the watchful eyes of his skipper.

Rahul gives multiple options both as an opener and a middle-order batsman.

The fact that he has experience of 36 Test matches won't be lost on the decision-makers when they sit back and pick the playing XI for the Adelaide opener.

If the day/night warm-up game is any indicator, then Rishabh Pant, after his 73-ball hundred, is the primary contender for donning the big gloves.

The selection will be purely on Pant's ability to turn the game around in a session with his batting, which unfortunately his senior and more accomplished keeper Wriddhiman Saha is not really capable of.

As far as bowling is concerned, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav and Ravichandran Ashwin look all set to start the Test match.

While Umesh and Ashwin were not played in the second warm-up game. It was more about checking the other pacers and letting Bumrah and Shami add miles to their legs.

On the third day, both bowled 13 overs each respectively and rightly conserved their energies for the big battle allowing back-up pacers Navdeep Saini (0/87 in 16 overs) and Mohammed Siraj (1/54 in 17 overs) bowl longer spells without much success.

McDermott looked a stylish player with some attractive drives on the off-side and Wildermuth under lights negotiated the short ball well enough, picking up a few runs in the process.

Spinners 'difficult to read' under lights: Kuldeep

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Backing his case, Kuldeep Yadav reckons it may not be a bad idea to play him in the series-opening day-night Test against Australia, as batsmen often find spinners "difficult to read" under lights.

Kuldeep, who represents Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL, will be in reckoning for the day-night match starting December 17 at the Adelaide Oval.

"I feel it's difficult to read spinners at night, because if a spinner uses variations it's not always easy to spot the seam position of the ball. That can be an advantage for us," he told *KKR.in*.

It will be India's first day-night Test overseas, having played their maiden one in Kolkata in 2019.

"I have never experienced a pink ball match outside India. So, it will be exciting to see how it goes."

He added, "It'll be unfair to say spinners haven't dominated in Australian conditions, there have been many instances when spinners have done well Down Under. It completely depends on how quickly you adapt to, and read the conditions.

"A lot of us, having played so much T20 cricket of late, will have to be patient when playing Test cricket. Mental toughness is very important.

"When switching to the longer format, you sometimes tend to try too many things too quickly. Wickets don't come easy in Test cricket, so patience is the key."

Kuldeep also slammed suggestions that India's first-ever Test series win in Australia during their last tour was made easy by the absence of Steve Smith and David Warner.

"You need to win Test matches to win a series. We won two of them, and could have won the fourth one too had there been no rain. The criticism holds no merit. Whenever you are playing against a team, your own team's performance matters the most.

"So instead of looking at the other team — who they have in their squad, and who they don't — it makes more sense to talk about your own team."

Kuldeep has so far played six Test matches, including two against Australia. Provided the fast bowlers strike form, India can win again, he said.

"We did well, and hence we won the Test series. If our fast bowling works well and we perform as prolifically with the bat as we did the last time, we will win this time too.

"Yes, their team has now improved with the return of the experienced David Warner, Steve Smith and the likes of Marnus (Labuschagne), who has really done well for them in recent times.

"But last time too, their team was good but we played some really, really good cricket to win. Looking forward to the challenge once again, it's going to be a great contest."

Vihari feels more sure about his game

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The reticent Hanuma Vihari has slowly but surely cemented his place in the Indian Test team and is confident of contributing to the team's cause, saying he is well-equipped to execute plans in the traditional format.

Vihari scored a hundred and also got a wicket with his part-time off-breaks against Australia A in the pink ball warm-up game. He looks set to bat at number six in the first Day/Night Test at Adelaide.

"In 2018, it was my second overseas tour (after England) and it was a good challenge for me back then. Although I contributed a little (back then), I feel I am more well equipped with my game and pretty sure with my gameplan as well and looking forward to the Test series," Vihari said after the end of the warm-up tie.

While he will be batting at number six in the Test match, during the warm-up game, he did get a chance to bat at number 4 and 5 along with seasoned pros like Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane

"At number four, I always feel you have more time than you think. In domestic cricket, I have always batted number three, so I am a bit familiar batting up the order," he said.

"Obviously, batting with *Pooji* (Pujara's nickname) is completely different. We always have a good communication and he tells me what the bowler is trying to do," he observed.

His assessment of Rahane is that the *Mumbaikar* is more flamboyant and has a good grip on game situations. "Batting with Ajinkya, he is more flamboyant and he has also got a good sense of game situation "....But coming to bat at number six is a total different game situation. You have to bat with the keeper or an all-rounder or the bowlers. I enjoy batting at both position and it's about what the team needs," he said.

Having been in Australia for a month along with two first-class matches under their belt, Vihari said the players are now well-prepared to tackle the pace and bounce of Australian tracks. "First two games, if you see we are leaving the ball very well and trying to acclimatise to conditions here. Going into the first Test, we are very well equipped with pace and bounce of the wicket," Vihari said.

Asked about skipper Virat Kohli, Pujara and Ravichandran Ashwin, Vihari said the veterans are sweating it out in the nets and are ready to come out all guns blazing on Thursday.

"They have been practising everyday in the nets and have been putting in the hardwork. We have played a Pink Test before this as well so they are used it and are practising every day. Being professionals they are the will be very well-equipped."

Starc's return huge boost for D/N Test: Hazlewood

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Australian team will be bolstered by the return of Mitchell Starc for the first Test against India as the senior speedster has been phenomenal in pink ball games, said his pace bowling partner Josh Hazlewood.

The left-arm pacer, who has the top bowling figures in the pink ball with 42 wickets at an average of 19.23 in from seven D/N Tests, will rejoin the squad here on Monday after his 'compassionate leave' due to family illness.

"He's obviously a huge part of our team and attack. Everyone knows his numbers with the pink ball. We welcome him with open arms," Hazlewood said during a virtual news conference on Sunday.

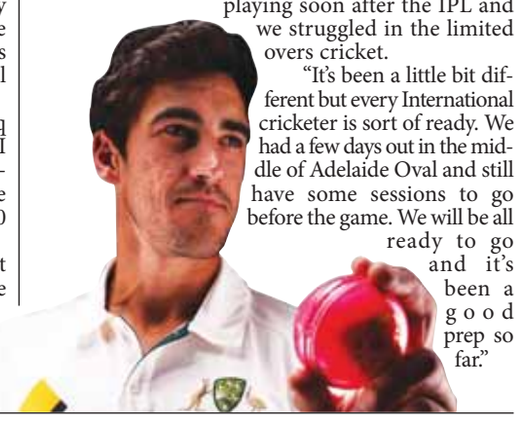
Starc was withdrawn after the first T20I last week after learning of a family illness, but Cricket Australia on Sunday has announced that the Aussie pacer was ready to return.

"I think he would be fine. Nothing goes to plan. He is a professional player and would have been doing everything he could have over the last week. He will be ready to go and jump straight in," Hazloood said when asked if a two-day preparation is enough.

With vice-captain Pat Cummins, Hazlewood, Starc and spinner Nathan Lyon, the Aussies would have full strength, even as their batting faces some question marks with injury woes to opening duo of David Warner (groin) and young gun Will Pucovksi (concussion).

All-rounder Cameron Green, who bats in the middle-order, too faces injury concerns after suffering concussion from a Jasprit Bumrah hit during Australia A's tour match in Sydney last week.

Asked about the disruptive preparation, he said: "It's been an unusual one. Pretty much every guy was playing soon after the IPL and we struggled in the limited overs cricket.



"It's been a little bit different but every International cricketer is sort of ready. We had a few days out in the middle of Adelaide Oval and still have some sessions to go before the game. We will be all ready to go and it's been a good prep so far."

WI stare at another innings defeat

AFP ■ WELLINGTON

West Indies captain Jason Holder held off a venomous New Zealand attack as the tourists survived to be 244/6 at stumps on Sunday on day three of the second Test in Wellington. They require a further 85 runs with four wickets remaining to make New Zealand bat again and avoid a second innings defeat.

Against a four-pronged pace attack, rated by the West Indies as "one of the best" in the world and who continued to get bounce and movement off the pitch, the tourists lost seven wickets in the first two sessions but only one after tea as Holder launched into the bowling. He was not out 60, with eight fours and two sixes, when bad light ended play an hour early.

Joshua da Silva, in his debut Test, was not out 25 with the pair adding an unbeaten 74 for the seventh wicket.

West Indies opener John Campbell eked out 68 runs in the second innings but said it was hard going in New Zealand conditions where the ball does a lot.

"It's difficult. It's one of the best bowling attacks in the world right now in Test cricket and in their own conditions," he said. "When they bowl they put us under tremendous pressure."

New Zealand needed less than five overs at the start of the day to take the remaining two wickets and end the West Indies first innings at 131.

Tim Southee mopped up the tail to finish with 5/32 to go with the 5/34 by Kyle Jamieson, who was not required to bowl on the third morning.

Faced with a 329-run deficit, the West Indies second innings was already wavering at 73/2 by lunch with Trent Boult accounting for Kraigg Brathwaite (24) and Darren Bravo (4).

Campbell and Shamarh Brooks put on 89 for the third wicket but just as they looked comfortable the West Indies lost their way losing three wickets for three runs.

Neil Wagner accounted for Brooks (36) and Kyle Jamieson removed Roston Chase for this second duck of the match and bowled Campbell for 68 and the West Indies went to tea at 158/5.

But the only wicket to fall in the final session was that of Jermaine Blackwood, bowled by Boult for 20 before the stubborn resistance of Holder and da Silva ensured the Test went into a fourth day.

Mushtaq Ali T20 from Jan 10-31

Decision on other events after group stage: BCCI to states

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI will start its much-delayed domestic season with the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy from January 10 to 31 in six different states where bio-secure hubs will be created.

The participating teams will be expected to report to their respective hubs on January 2.

It is learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has e-mailed all the state units that Mushtaq Ali will kick-start the domestic itinerary although there is no clarity as to when the Ranji Trophy will start.

"After having gone through your responses and in accordance with the feedback received, I am pleased to inform you that BCCI is planning to start the domestic season 2020-21 with the scheduling of the T20 tournament for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy," Shah wrote to state units.

"By Saturday, January 2, 2021, teams will have to assemble in their respective hub. From Sunday, January 10, 2021, tournament will start and the final will be played on January 31, 2021."

Shah, however, said that a decision on Ranji Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be taken once the group stage of the Mushtaq Ali gets over. Feedback from members will be factored in.

It is understood that Mushtaq Ali is being held because the BCCI wants to have a mega players' auction in early February ahead of the next IPL which may have nine or 10 teams.

As far as one more tournament is concerned, it could well be the Vijay Hazare Trophy instead of the Ranji Trophy as it can be organised in a shorter span of time like Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Fractured thumb rules Babar out of NZ T20s

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan sustained a major injury blow ahead of next week's three-match T20 series against New Zealand when its captain Babar Azam was ruled out because of a fractured thumb.

Azam sustained the injury on his right thumb at Queenstown on Sunday during team's practice session.

The Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement that Azam will not be able to attend net sessions for at least 12 days after scans confirmed the fracture.

"During this period, the doctors will continue to monitor Babar's injury before confirming his participation in the first Test," the PCB said.

The T20 series begins at Auckland on Dec 18, followed by matches at Hamilton (Dec 20) and Napier (Dec 22). The first Test begins on December 26.

"I have spoken with Babar and he is sad to miss the T20 series," Pakistan head coach Misbah-ul-Haq said. "We have a long season of cricket ahead and we now hope that he regains complete fitness as early as possible so that he can return to competitive cricket."

It's a second injury blow to the Pakistan team after opening batsman Imam-ul-Haq fractured his left thumb, also in a practice session, on Thursday.

All-rounder Shadab Khan will lead Pakistan in the T20 series in the absence of Azam, provided he recovers from groin injury sustained on Sunday.

Manchester battle ends in stalemate

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United and Manchester City did their Premier League title ambitions little favours in a drab 0-0 draw at Old Trafford as Chelsea's challenge also suffered a setback in a 1-0 defeat at Everton on Saturday.

The pressure on United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was ramped up after his side crashed out of the Champions League with a midweek defeat at RB Leipzig.

The beleaguered boss desperately needed an uplifting result in the derby to win back some support, but there was little for either side of the Manchester divide to get excited about as both teams failed to fire.

United have won just one of their last four games in all competitions and have only one win at Old Trafford in six Premier League games this term.

However, Solskjaer defended his side's performance as they restricted City to just one big chance when David de Gea saved from Riyad Mahrez midway through the first-half.

"In my time against Manchester City that's the best performance we have had. Not the best result but the best performance," Solskjaer said.

A draw leaves United still one point above City but the Red Devils are now eighth with Pep Guardiola's men ninth.

"The important thing is we didn't concede," said Guardiola after his side kept a club record sixth consecutive clean sheet.

United were awarded a penalty two minutes into the second half when Kyle Walker kicked Marcus Rashford, only for the decision to be overruled by VAR as the forward had strayed offside in the build-up.

'NOT GOOD ENOUGH'

A penalty was the difference between the sides at Goodison Park as Everton fed off the atmosphere created by 2,000 fans for the first time since March to arrest their slide.

Ancelotti's men had won just once in their previous seven games after a flying start to the campaign had taken them top of the table in early October.

The only goal came on 22 minutes when Dominic Calvert-Lewin was wiped out by a rash challenge from Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Gylfi Sigurdsson coolly slotted away the spot-kick.

Chelsea hit the post twice through Reece James and Mason Mount from shots outside the box, but were limited without the creative spark of the injured Hakim Ziyech and Christian Pulisic.

A first defeat in 18 games, excluding penalty shootouts, leaves Frank Lampard's men still two points adrift of Tottenham and Liverpool who can extend that advantage to five points with win on Sunday.

Victory lifts Everton up to seventh and back to within one point of the top four.

Real win Madrid derby

AFP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid reignited their La Liga title push on Saturday beating leaders Atletico 2-0 as their city rivals suffered a first league defeat of the season.

Real, who salvaged their Champions League campaign in midweek by making the last 16, moved to third in the table, three points behind Atletico.

It was a disappointing night for Diego Simeone's side who had boasted a 26-match unbeaten run in the league, stretching back to February.

That was a run which consisted of 17 wins and nine draws. Real had been the last team to beat Atletico in the league.

"We confirmed the improvement we showed in many areas against Sevilla and Borussia, and gave another good display," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane, reflecting on his side's wins in the past week which have helped turn around the season.

His team were in front after 15 minutes when Casemiro headed home a corner from Toni Kroos. That was reward for Real's early pressure which had seen Karim Benzema denied by a fine save from Jan Oblak moments earlier.

Atletico, who also made the Champions League knockout round in midweek, struggled to make any impression and star striker Luis Suarez was an anonymous figure up front.

Real went 2-0 up after 63 minutes with Kroos again the provider. His pass eventually fell for Dani Carvajal who unleashed a 30-metre drive which hit the post but was diverted into the net by the helpless Oblak.

The 'keeper was credited with an own-goal for his troubles. It was only the fourth goal conceded by the usually water-tight Atletico defence in 11 league games this season.