

**OPINION 8**
BUDGET FOR
COMPASSION**WORLD 11**
IRAN PRESIDENT SAYS ISRAEL WAS
BEHIND KILLING OF SCIENTIST**SPORT 14**
NEW ZEALAND BEAT
WINDIES IN 2ND TEST

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URVASHI'S
2021 GOAL
IS SELF-LOVE
13 VIVACITY

Vaccination protocol out

Centre draws immunisation plan, max 200 people to get Covid-19 shots per 'session'; it will be similar to election process; 30 crore people to be immunised in 1st phase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As India gears up for Covid-19 vaccination drive, the Government has prepared an extensive immunisation plan according to which only 100 people per "session" are likely to be vaccinated against the virus and the process will be similar to the election process.

The number of people per session may go up as high as 200 people if logistics allow on the days as fixed by the States and Union Territories, as per the 'Covid-19 Vaccines Operational Guidelines' which was released by the Union Health Ministry recently.

In the phase one of the vaccination drive, the Government plans to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people, including healthcare & frontline workers, people above 50 years of age and those under 50 with comorbidities.

"Anticipating that Covid-19 vaccine may soon be available, the Government is preparing for its introduction in the country so that it can be expeditiously rolled out when available. One of the milestones in this direction has been the constitution of a National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC). The NEGVAC guides on all aspects of Covid-19 vaccine introduction in India," the Ministry wrote in the 112 pages document, calling the conduct of the vaccination process (will be) similar to the election process.

Union Minister Prakash Javadekar while speaking at International Coronavirus Short Film Festival on Monday indicated that vaccine for the novel coronavirus will be soon available in India.

"Coronavirus vaccines would be available in India soon. I urge everyone to not let their guard down before antibodies are created and second dose of the vaccine administered: Union Minister @Prakash Javadekar while speaking at International Coronavirus Short Film Festival," PIB tweeted.

Presently, popular vaccine candidates in line for Emergency Use Authorisation include Pfizer-BioNTech's vac-

cine, Astrazeneca and Oxford university developed and Serum Institute of India manufactured 'Covishield' and 'Covaxin' by Bharat Biotech Limited, raising hopes of vaccination at the earliest.

The document containing vaccination guidelines talks about aspects such as training vaccine workers and keeping logistics in place. The vaccines need cold storage units to keep them in usable condition.

"One session for 100 beneficiaries. While most of the healthcare and frontline workers would be vaccinated at fixed session sites, vaccination of other high-risk population may require outreach session sites, and mobile sites and teams," the document states.

A vaccination team will comprise of five members — the main officer with four aides. The officer can be a doctor, nurse, pharmacist or anyone legally qualified to give the injection. The second will security personnel to check user registration and guard the entry point at the vaccination session. The third officer will verify documents, while the fourth and fifth officers will be responsible for managing crowd and communication as directed by the Home Ministry.

The Government is also gearing up with 28,947 cold chain points with 85,643 pieces of equipment across the country to store the vaccines.

Continued on Page 4

A framed notice is put in front of a shop selling confectionary and designer accessories in Dharmasala on Monday

AP

104 test Covid-19 positive in IIT-Madras, institute closed

Chennai: The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras has been hit by Covid-19 with 104 people, a majority of them students, testing positive, Tamil Nadu Health Secretary said.

Radhakrishnan said though the results showed a 20

per cent positivity rate, there was no need for concern.

A spokesperson for the institute said all departments and labs have been shut and only about 700 students, mostly research scholars were accommodated in nine hostels.

Covid-19 IN INDIA

TOTAL

CASES: 99,04,096

DEATHS: 1,43,710

RECOVERED:
94,18,066

ACTIVE: 3,39,754



STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	18,83,365	48,269	17,61,615
Karnataka	9,02,240	11,954	8,74,202
Andhra Pradesh	8,75,836	7,059	8,64,049
Tamil Nadu	8,00,029	11,909	7,78,081
Kerala	6,72,038	2,648	6,11,600
Delhi	6,08,830	10,074	5,83,509
Uttar Pradesh	5,66,728	8,083	5,39,727
West Bengal	5,23,629	9,100	4,93,145
Odisha	3,24,089	1,864	3,19,458
Rajasthan	2,92,539	2,555	2,73,784
Telangana	2,78,108	1,496	2,69,232
Chhattisgarh	2,57,020	3,097	2,34,853
Haryana	2,53,385	2,733	2,41,544
Bihar	2,43,673	1,325	2,37,372
Gujarat	2,28,803	4,182	2,11,703
Madhya Pradesh	2,24,636	3,412	2,08,421

CAPSULE

KOLKATA-DELHI DAILY FLIGHTS RESUME

Kolkata: The Bengal Government on Monday Gave its nod for resumption of daily direct flight services between Kolkata and Delhi, an official statement said. Currently, Kolkata-New Delhi flights are available thrice a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, airport officials said.

VIJAYVARGIYA'S SECURITY UPGRADED AFTER ATTACK

New Delhi/Kolkata: BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya's VIP security has been upgraded with the addition of a "bullet resistant" car in his convoy during his West Bengal tour, official sources said on Monday.

NORTH INDIA: NIGHT TEMPS TO DROP BY 3-5°C

New Delhi: Night temperatures are expected to drop by 3-5 degrees Celsius in the next 2-3 days over north India, the IMD department said on Monday.

SUICIDE PACT: FIVE OF FAMILY IN TN FOUND DEAD

Villupuram (TN): A couple in their thirties and their three children were found dead in their house at a village near here on Monday, police said. Preliminary probe hint at a 'suicide pact' and the man and woman could have ended their lives after killing their two daughters aged seven and eight and five-year-old son, they said.

Unprovoked aggression at LAC a wanton disregard for rules: Rajnath

Defence Min makes remarks at ASEAN meet in presence of Chinese counterpart

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With no let-up in tension on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said "unprovoked aggression" on the Himalayan frontiers is a reminder of the changing world and China not abiding with existing agreements. Without naming the eastern neighbour, he also said it was asserting its power in the Indo-Pacific region, too.

Making this point here, Rajnath praised the armed forces and said they have shown exemplary courage and remarkable fortitude and "fought the PLA with utmost bravery and forced them to go back."

This was in reference to the bloody brawl between the Indian and Chinese troops on June 15 in the Galwan valley in eastern Ladakh. Twenty Indian Army personnel, including the commanding officer were killed in the fracas. China, however, has not disclosed the number of its personnel killed in the clash.

This blunt observation came days after Rajnath last



week called for exercising self-restraint and avoid actions that may worsen the situation. The Minister made these remarks virtually at a conclave of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) where his Chinese counterpart Weng Fei was also present.

The two leaders had held marathon face to face talks two months ago on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Moscow. The two Ministers had then discussed ways to defuse tension at the LAC.

On Monday while addressing a seminar organised by the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Rajnath said the "unprovoked aggression" on the Himalayan frontiers is a reminder of how the world is changing, how existing agreements are being challenged, how power is being asserted

not just in the Himalayas but across the Indo-Pacific.

"Whenever there is a situation at the LAC, the most obvious outcome is a comparison between India and China's military strength. There can be a serious debate on who owns more military might but when it comes to soft power there is no scope of ambiguity. India is far ahead of China when it comes to leading the world with ideas, he said. Due to its location, size, population and economy, India has always been at the strategic forefront of global security, he added.

Stating that India has been a victim of cross-border terrorism, Rajnath said India fought the scourge alone even when there was no one to support but later, the world understood that India was right about "Pakistan being the fountainhead of terrorism."

Continued on Page 4

No retrograde steps against agri sector will be taken ever, asserts Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Making it clear that the recent farm laws — which the farmers want to be scrapped — were undertaken keeping the best interests of farmers in mind, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said there is no question of taking any 'retrograde' steps against the farm sector. However, he said the Centre is open for discussion on the farm laws.

Addressing the annual convention of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) against the backdrop of farmers' protest, Singh said the Government is "always willing to listen to our farmer brothers."

Continued on Page 4

Centre asks Hry, Punjab for toll plaza security as kisan pickets cause ₹200 cr loss

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has written to Punjab and Haryana Governments to facilitate security at toll plazas following the heavy revenue losses in toll collection due to the ongoing farmers protest that has blocked the plazas leading to losses of about ₹200 crore in last two months.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) had to pitch in to incur the losses to tune of ₹1,900 crore to the concessionaries of NHAI due to the Covid pandemic related lockdown across the country.

A senior MoRTH official said the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has

suffered a revenue loss of about ₹200 crore so far on account of farmers' protest at toll plazas in Punjab and Haryana since October 1. The protesting farmers are not allowing toll collection.

The Central road-making agency has written twice to the Punjab Government over the blockages at toll plazas.

Continued on Page 4

Ex-diplomats slam Canada, say encouraged by its 'support', protesting farmers hardened stance

New Delhi: Slamming Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement on the ongoing farmers' protest in India as "uncalled for, disconnected with ground realities and served merely to fan the

AIKCC becomes 4th farmers' union to back farm laws

New Delhi: As farmers' protest against the three new agri laws continues, yet another delegation of farmers, led by All India Kisan Coordination Committee (AIKCC), met agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Monday to extend their support to the contentious legislations.

This is a fourth group of farmers to have extended their support to the agriculture reform laws in the past two weeks.

flames", a group of former Indian diplomats claimed on Monday that Canada's support has led to the protesters hardening their stand and adopting an "all or nothing" approach.

Students should visit tech marvel Atal Tunnel: UGC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Perhaps in a first of its kind, the Union Education Ministry has asked the University Grants Commission (UGC) to urge the universities and engineering colleges to share details of the Atal Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh with students and encourage them to visit the "technological marvel".

The university regulator has directed that students must follow Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Centre as well as the State Governments during their visit to the tunnel. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Atal Tunnel, the



world's longest motorable tunnel in Rohtang, in October. Educational-cum-recreational tours are part of the course curriculum in the higher and technical education. But a

senior Education Ministry official said that this could be a first where UGC has asked the universities and colleges to take a keen interest in a particular project of national importance.

"Situated at an altitude above 10,000 ft, this 9.02-km tunnel has been constructed in an extremely difficult and hostile climate, deploying the latest and best practices in tunnel technology with state-of-the-art features, including semi-transverse ventilation, SCADA controlled fire-fighting, illumination and monitoring system," UGC Secretary Rajnish Jain said in a letter to VCs.

The all-weather Atal tunnel will reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 km and the travel time by four to five hours. It is the longest highway tunnel in the world.

Continued on Page 4

Youtube, Gmail restored after 1-hr global outage

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Youtube, Gmail, Google Docs and other Google services were restored on Monday after over an hour-long outage that hit users in several parts of the world, including India.

"We're back up and running! You should be able to access YouTube again and enjoy videos as normal," YouTube said in a tweet, updating the status of the service.

Google said that the services like Gmail, Google Docs, Google Classroom and all other affected services should now be working for the vast majority of affected users. "The problem with Gmail should be resolved for the vast majority of affected users. We will continue to work towards restoring service for the remaining affected users, but no further updates will be provided on the Google Workspace Status Dashboard," Google said.

'Emergency should not have happened', says SC, agrees to examine proclamation of 1975

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Emergency is something which should not have happened," the Supreme Court on Monday said as it agreed to hear a plea of a 94-year-old woman seeking to declare as "wholly unconstitutional" the proclamation made in 1975 during the tenure of the then Indira Gandhi-led Congress Government.

The SC, which issued notice to the Centre, said it would also examine whether it is "feasible or desirable" to make a simpler declaration of the proclamation after a lapse of 45 years. "We are having difficulty. Emergency is something which should not have happened," said a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul.

Continued on Page 4

Tatas, Interups, Al staff group among bidders for Air India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group, US-based fund Interups Inc, and a group of 219 Air India employees are among "multiple" entities that on Monday put in preliminary bids for buying loss-making national carrier Air India.

"Multiple expressions of interest have been received for strategic disinvestment of Air India. The transaction will now move to the second stage," Department of Investment and Public Asset Management Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey tweeted. He, however, did not reveal either the identity of the bidders or the number of bids.

Sources said Tata Sons has put in an EoI and so did Interups, whose chairman Laxmi Prasad had in the run-up to the disinvestment made his intentions clear to bid for Air India. **Detailed report on P10**

Yogi invites NRIs to invest in UP

CM directs review of all development authorities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has urged the Indians settled in the USA to invest in Uttar Pradesh and contribute to the state's target of becoming a 1-trillion dollar economy and India becoming a 5-trillion dollar economy.

The chief minister was addressing a 'UP Investment and Tourism' event organised by UP Association of North America through video-conferencing late Sunday night.

Yogi Adityanath said with the cooperation of the entrepreneurs and investors, UP and India had achieved new heights in social, cultural and economic spheres.

He said the NRIs, through their grit and hard work, had earned a new identity for themselves in the global arena and applauded their love and devotion for the motherland.

The NRIs evinced interest in the pharmacy sector, entrepreneur development, software park, solar park, energy, education, entertainment, health and medical facilities.

The chief minister pointed out that Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 24 crore, was a huge market endowed with rich natural resources and the state government was working with sincere commitment for the development of the infrastructure in the state.

Yogi Adityanath said tourism too had a huge potential. He said besides tourism, there was huge potential in developing eco and heritage tourism.

The chief minister said the temple city of Ayodhya would be developed as one of the most developed cities of the world. He recalled the successful

CM's road trip for first hand stock of ground realities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

His impromptu road journey from Moradabad to Ghaziabad enlightened Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath about the ground realities and he ordered officers to travel by road to get first hand information about the state of ongoing development projects.

"It was a spontaneous decision of the chief minister to travel by road to Ghaziabad from Moradabad that left his security personnel a worried lot. Ignoring security threat, the undeterred chief minister embarked on a road trip of about 150 kms during which he was well received by the people along the route," a senior official said.

The chief minister had gone to Moradabad on Saturday and from there he was to go to Ghaziabad where he was supposed to dedicate the Kailash Mansarovar building to the public. But because of inclement weather the chopper could not fly and the officials suggested that he should postpone his visit to Ghaziabad.

"He firmly told the staff to go ahead with the event and said he would travel by car instead," the official said and added: "This, in fact, was deliberate on his part as he wanted to take first hand stock of the ground realities in terms of condition of roads, arrangements of cleanliness and general amenities for the people of the state."

On the route, he asked many questions about roads, hospitals, cleanliness and schools and interacted with a few to have hands-on



information.

He took notes, some on I-pad and some mental, of his road travel and asked questions about some shortcomings he found in terms of cleanliness and other civic amenities.

"As it was not enough, on returning to the state capital, he immediately asked the officials about what he noticed during the visits," the official said.

"He also indicated that he would take such impromptu trips in future or even planned ones to make on-the-spot inspection of the public amenities and facilities," the official said.

Later, the chief minister asked officials to take road trips to different parts of the state to see the status of ongoing development schemes.

was underway for the construction of a 600-km-long expressway for linking Meerut with Prayagraj.

Yogi Adityanath said industrial clusters were being developed in each of the 75 districts of the state while work on construction of three airports — at Ayodhya, Jewar and Kushinagar — was underway and metro rail service was in operation in four big cities — Lucknow, Ghaziabad, Noida and Greater Noida.

Besides, he said, the Delhi-Meerut rapid rail and 12-lane Delhi-Meerut expressway were under construction.

The chief minister said the government had also ensured round-the-clock power supply in rural and urban areas of the state.

On the health facilities, he said the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Gorakhpur would commence operation in March next year while work was on for the construction of a sports university in Meerut and a law university in Prayagraj district.

Yogi Adityanath also informed the NRIs that work for setting up a film city and defence industrial corridor was also in progress.

US-based investors Rakesh Agarwal, Akash Agarwal, Rajesh Kshetria, Dr Devendra Shukl, Dr Anil Chopra and Rajiv Agarwal participated in the video conference.

The NRIs appreciated the robust law and order in the state. They said during the last three years a congenial atmosphere for investment had been created in the state and the NRIs were keen to make investment in UP and were keen to cooperate with the UP government in social activities in the state.

CM directs review of all development authorities

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed officials to review the works of all development authorities, saying that the schemes should be time bound and should ensure that citizens are not disturbed or harassed.

The chief minister was reviewing the works of various departments at a high-level meeting convened at his official residence here on Monday. Expressing commitment to the interests of farmers, the chief minister said that an effective and hassle-free paddy purchasing system should be ensured at all procurement centres.

"Effective procurement should be ensured so that farmers get the benefit of MSP on time," he said.

He also directed officials that all paddy purchasing centres of the state should be reviewed and cautioned them that some disruptive and anti-development elements were trying to disturb the smooth operation of the procurement process.

While instructing officials to simplify ease of doing business for industrial investment, the chief minister said that there was need to deploy hard working officers in Invest UP and development authorities.

The chief minister also gave instructions to complete the process of inter-district transfer of teachers in the Basic Education department at the earliest. He said that all road-blocks in this regard had been sorted.

"Smart City and Amrut Yojana of the state will be reviewed soon along with the Union urban development minister. These tasks are related to public interest. These should be monitored continuously. Officers should prioritise these projects and schemes," Yogi said.

The chief minister called the newly-created Kailash Mansarovar Bhawan an excellent gift for the people of the state. He said that this building was dedicated to the devotees of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, Sindhu Darshan Yatra, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

The chief minister gave instructions to improve the system in all government medical institutions. He said that now the state was entering a new phase of Covid unlock and the process of COVID-19 vaccination was expected to start

soon, but in the meantime there should be no negligence in treatment of the patients suffering from other diseases.

"The operation of OPDs should be made smooth in all the medical institutions of the

state as it will help the general public a lot," he said and added that during Covid unlock, life was becoming normal but care should be taken and people should not lower their guards.



RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

DEPARTMENT OF SUPERVISION

8-9, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010

U.P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Press Release

U.P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)- Withdrawal of Directions issued by the Reserve Bank of India


The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had issued directions under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (As Applicable to Co-operative Societies) to U.P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh vide directive dated September 19, 2018. Directions imposed were extended and modified from time to time, last such extension being up to December 25, 2020 vide Directive DOR.CO.AID.No. D-22/12.28.029/2020-21 dated September 18, 2020.

Reserve Bank, on being satisfied that in the public interest it is necessary to do so, in exercise of the powers vested in it under sub-section (2) of section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (As Applicable to Co-operative Societies), hereby withdraws the said Directions so issued (and modified from time to time) to U.P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

A copy of the directive is displayed in the bank's premises for perusal by interested members of public. The bank will continue to undertake regular banking business hereafter.

Lucknow
December 15, 2020

Regional Director



GUJARAT WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD

Executive Engineer, Unit No-2 (Sujlam Suflam), Gandhinagar.

State Water Data centre building, Sector-8, Gandhinagar

Ph No. 079-23236711/23236712

Tender Notice No. 02-2020-21

The Executive Engineer, Unit No-2 (Sujalam Suflam) 2nd floor State Water data centre building Sector-8 Gandhinagar PIN-380008, Gujarat State invites on line tender (E-Tendering) for following works (EPC works) in three bids system from experienced and resourceful agencies as under:

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost (Rs in crore)	Qualification of bidder (1) Class (2) EMD. (3) Tender fee (4) Time limit (5) Solvency
1.	Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contract for Construction of Pumping Station-2 Nos at various locations and supplying and laying M.S. pipeline (ID) of various dia such as 1500 mm dia, 950 mm dia & 800 mm dia of various thickness such as 11 mm, 10.5 mm, 7 mm & 6.5 mm including designing providing lowering & laying underground pipeline with allied works etc with operation and maintenance of commissioned project for 10 years including 3 years. Defect liability period for Madhavghad Taluka Talod to Raygadhi Taluka Himmatnagar Dist Sabarkantha Pipeline Project.	Rs. 170.53 crore	(1) AA class (2) Rs. 170.53 lacs (3) Rs. 21240/- (Rs. 18000+3240 GST) (4) 24 month (excluding 10 year O & M period) (5) 34.11 Crores

- Date of uploading - 15/12/2020
- Pre-Bid Meeting - Dt-02/01/2021 at 12.00 hrs
- Last date for downloading tender document and On line submission of tender date 19/01/2021 upto 18.00 hrs.
- Physical submission of tender of Tender fees. EMD & Other document Only by speed post /R.P.A. D/couter-from Dt. 20/01/2021 to 28/01/2021 upto 18.00 Hrs.
- The EMD exemption certificate will not be accepted.
- The EMD less than 180 days validity will not be accepted and offer will not be considered
- Online verification of Tender fee, EMD and other document and Pre-qualification bid Date 29/01/2021 12 Hrs.
- The details of above tender will be available on www.statetender.com, www.gwrdc.gujarat.gov.in and www.gwrdc.nprocure.com. The tender will be accepted only on line.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Unit No-2 (Sujalam Suflam)
Gandhinagar

No/INF/VPN/2020/G/1480

Lko-Knp expressway to be declared as national highway

Lucknow (PNS): The proposed greenfield Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway will be soon accorded the status of National Highway (NH).

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had sought approval from the Uttar Pradesh government for the same. The proposal has been accepted by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Soon a no-objection certificate will be sent by the state government to the Government of India in this

regard, an official communiqué confirmed here on Monday. It may be mentioned here that M/s Aegis (India) Consulting Engineers Pvt. Ltd. was assigned the task of preparing the detailed project report (DPR) of the 63-kilometre-long Kanpur-Lucknow Expressway. The alignment of the project has also been finalised.

After the construction of this expressway, the travel time between Lucknow and Kanpur Nagar will be reduced to 45 minutes, officials claimed.

CITYBRIEFS

TWO MOUS SIGNED

Two MoUs were signed on Monday between State Bank of India and NABARD for collaboration towards providing banking support to 10,000 joint liability groups (JLGs) in three years and financing SHGs under Project e- Shakti, and to jointly support financing of economic activities in Watershed Development Project & Tribal Development Project areas in the state. NABARD will be providing training and handholding support to SBI officials. Chief general manager of NABARD (UP) Shankar A Pande and chief general manager of SBI Ajay Kumar Khanna signed the MoUs. GM (FMM) Network Alok Kumar Sinha was also present on the occasion.



SP state-wide protests in support of farmers, several leaders held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party, tending support to the one-day fast called by farmers protesting against new farm laws, staged protests in the districts of Uttar Pradesh.

The SP leaders were placed under house arrest in several districts and were also taken into custody by the police.

In Lucknow, Samajwadi Party workers clashed with police in Kaiserbagh. The SP workers were stopped from going towards the district collectorate. A number of SP workers, including women party workers, were also taken into custody by the police.

"Samajwadi Party supports the demands of farmers and its sympathy is with the farmers. The Kisan Yatra was started by the SP on December 7. On December 14, the party workers staged a dharna at all the district headquarters in the state. I have been arrested in Sandila (in Hardoi district), and many party leaders are under house arrest," said SP MLC Rajpal Kashyap. In Agra, police used mild force to disperse the protesting SP workers. The police detained a huge number of SP leaders and workers, including district president, in Gorakhpur when they were going to participate in a sit-in demonstration at Nagar Nigam campus on Monday.

Police started detaining SP workers in the morning and arrested party district president Ram Nagina Sahni.

The police also detained Samajwadi Party workers during the protest in Prayagraj. District president Ziaul Islam said they were prevented from exercising their democratic rights.

SP to form govt on its own: AKY

Lucknow (PNS): Samajwadi Party president and local MP Akhilesh Yadav on Monday claimed in Azamgarh that his party would form the next government in Uttar Pradesh on its own strength after the 2022 UP assembly elections.

Yadav visited Azamgarh, his Lok Sabha constituency, for the first time after getting elected in May 2019.

Yadav said that the Bharatiya Janata Party governments at the Centre and in the state had failed on all fronts and the Samajwadi Party was standing with the farmers' agitation with sincerity and honesty.

He alleged that the Centre and the state governments were anti-farmers. "Today, the

farmers have launched a movement to demand their rights but the government is not willing to concede them. The inflation is galloping and the prices of essential commodities are rising continuously. Black-marketing is at its peak, the electricity tariff is also increasing," he said.

The SP chief said the government was talking about doubling the income of farmers but now it was retracting from its promise. The SP workers, who were very keen on meeting the party president, broke the door of the Circuit House as they lost patience. The SP workers also had an altercation with the policemen over the same matter. In view of the situation, Yadav went to an SP

leader's house without meeting the party workers.

Raising a question on the modus operandi of the Centre over the management of the coronavirus pandemic, Yadav said that other countries had made full preparations for vaccination but so far, there was no preparation in the country.

"Things are being said in the air. There is confusion about the vaccine today," he said.

Responding to a question about alliance, the SP chief said that this time alliance would be with small parties.

Reacting to a question about Shiv Sena, he said that it was a personal matter and would be solved after sitting together.

against the farm laws," he said.

However claiming that the situation was normal so far in the state, Kumar said that strict action would be taken against the offenders breaking the law. He said to maintain law and order magistrates had been positioned at the police station level while 140 companies of PAC had been deployed to control any untoward situation. Besides nine range IGs have been rushed to the sensitive districts to supervise the law and order.

CM ADOPTING DOUBLE STANDARDS: CONG

Congress accused Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of adopting double standards over taking action against those alleged to have indulged in violence.

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CM asks SGPGI to start general OPD, transplant

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed Sanjay Gandhi Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) to begin the general OPD and transplant programmes at the earliest because being a premier institute, it cannot afford to lag behind.

Commending the institute for its performance in Covid-19 times, the CM said it should brace for the challenges ahead with institutes like AIIMS opening in the state and posing immense competition.

Yogi was speaking at the 37th Foundation Day of SGPGIMS on Monday. “The medical infrastructure of the state is improving and there are new hospitals opening across the state bringing competition, and every patient should leave the hospital satisfied with the services,” he said.

Acknowledging the superior work done by SGPGI in virtual ICU monitoring during the pandemic, he said the institute has to change the mindset of following AIIMS. The CM said that although the SGPGI has had 37 glorious years ahead, it has a long way to go and work as per requirements of the time. “The institute should connect itself more with government schemes such as Ayushman Yojana, which is a facility for poor patients. Using technology as a tool, the institute needs to keep moving forward because people have a lot of expectations from this hospital,” the CM said.

Referring to the exchange of memorandum of understanding with UPPCL for creating virtual ICUs in six medical colleges of the state, he said



that the telemedicine facility is the need of the hour to combat this kind of pandemic.

Yogi said that at the start of the pandemic, he had received calls from the Central government which expressed concern because of the threat of large-scale spread due to huge population in UP. “We created a system for containment of the virus and treatment and I held meetings everyday. Even WHO has also acknowledged the health infrastructure of UP which helped in fighting the pandemic,” he added.

SGPGIMS director Prof RK Dhiman welcomed the guests and presented a progress report of the institute. He said that within a month of his joining, Covid-19 was declared as global pandemic by WHO.

“SGPGIMS was given the responsibility of creating an apex Covid care facility in the shortest possible time, which was a huge challenge. Under the guidance of the CM and unconditional support from the government, Rajdhani Covid Hospital was set up. We created a full-fledged state-of-the-art hospital and deputed a commit-

ted expert team of doctors and other healthcare workers to plan, manage and run it,” he pointed out. “I take this opportunity to thank them all for their enormous efforts. The department of Microbiology can boast of doing one of the highest numbers of diagnostic tests per day — up to 7,748 RT-PCR tests. The department has processed over six lakh samples till date,” he added.

Director-general of ICMR (New Delhi) delivered the Foundation Day oration and talked about how India rose to the Covid challenge in a scientific manner since February.

Awards were also given away to the best residents and paramedical staff to acknowledge their contribution to the institute’s progress.

The CM presented the awards to Dr Akash Mathur (DM, Gastroenterology), Dr Vikram (MCH, Endocrine Surgery) and Dr Shruti Pandey (MD, Pathology). Research day awards were presented to Dr Anshu Srivastava, Dr Kirti Naranje, Dr Shagun Mishra and Dr Moinak Sen Sarma.

Implement NEP and take start-up culture to great heights: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Stressing that the state universities are faced with the challenge of implementing the New Education Policy (NEP) in the post-Covid times, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked Dr Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University should take the new culture of traditional knowledge, innovation and start-ups to great heights and reap the benefits of the policy.

The chief minister was speaking at the seventh convocation of the rehabilitation university on Monday. He unveiled the statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the occasion and launched several development projects of the institution. Over 122 students were awarded medals and degrees at the convocation.

Referring to the NEP, he said it would help in making India self-reliant. “There are three things of great importance in this new era and based on knowledge and economy — traditional knowledge, innovation in the area of traditional knowledge and start-up culture in the country. The policy will help in creating a good coordination between all these three areas and provide the path to progress and self-reliance,” Yogi said.

“In the post-Covid times, universities have to form committees for successfully implementation of the NEP. If the universities make efforts in this direction, we will be able to see behavioural aspect of the aim behind knowledge,” the CM said.

He pointed out that the convocation is special for several reasons. “At a time when

SMNRU CONVOCATION



Governor Anandiben Patel doing the honours as Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath looks on, at SMNRU convocation

Pioneer

the entire world is battling the pandemic, the university is celebrating its convocation and this effort needs to be appreciated. It also shows that if you want to progress, no challenge can stop you. Besides, the statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has also been unveiled on the occasion and university, as per its anthem of moving ahead, has launched a number of infrastructural projects,” he said.

“We should be grateful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who coined the term ‘divyang’ for the handicapped, thus inspiring the differently-abled to move ahead,” he added.

The CM said that in the Covid-19 times when welfare schemes are being announced

for all sections of the society, questions are raised regarding what is being done for the differently-abled. “More than 10 lakh differently-abled were given pensions and a sum of Rs 1,000 each was also deposited in their accounts. Efforts are also being made to increase their strength in various services by the PM,” he said.

He added that it is a proud moment that the granddaughter of Dr Shakuntala Misra, founder of the university, secured the first PhD degree on this momentous occasion.

Meanwhile, putting forth her suggestions regarding NEP, Governor Anandiben Patel said: “The policy has talked about skill orientation and the skills of the differently-abled

should be estimated. There have been several suggestions given in the NEP but what is important is how it will be implemented. More focus needs to be put on training of teachers. There is also a need for a change in the mindset of people and learning material for training needs to be prepared.”

She said the universities have to work extensively to make changes in the courses because 60 percent of the teaching under the new policy will be carried out online.

“We have to make extensive changes in the existing courses,” she added. The governor urged the students to think in terms of what the country wants in the next 25 years.

‘Studying with differently-abled an amazing experience’

Lucknow (PNS): The toppers of Dr Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University appeared determined to contribute to the country. They also said they had an amazing experience of studying at a university which brought the differently-abled students and others on the same platform.

Rohit Srivastava won the Chancellor’s gold medal, CM’s gold medal and Vice-Chancellor’s gold medal for getting the maximum marks in B’Tech. Rohit has specialised in civil engineering. He also happens to be a student of the first batch of the university’s engineering course. Son of a railway employee, he said that studying with the differently-abled was a great experience. “They are more able than most of the people. In fact, I was trying to learn from them. Interacting with them was challenging as well as interesting,” he said.

Aditya Rawat, who completed B’Tech in electrical engineering grabbed the Chancellors silver medal, CM’s silver medal and Vice-Chancellor’s gold medal. He said he is preparing for Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE). “My long-term goal is to have my own start-up,” he said.

Rawat, who is the son of a farmer, said his success mantra was patience, hard work, dedication and accurate time management. About the experience of studying with the differently-abled, he said it was great as he learnt they they have a strong sense of perception.

Akanksha Singh, who won the gold medal for the highest marks in B’Tech (computer science), two bronze medals, said he is working as a software developer.

Covid positivity rate hovers around 3%

184 test +ve, 260 recover

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Covid positivity rate in Lucknow is hovering around three percent and the current rate is 2.9 percent. A senior health official said that in the areas with maximum coronavirus cases, the RTPCR positivity is five percent, which is higher than the district average. He pointed out that the RT-PCR and Antigen ratio in the district is 50:50.

The official said that the total number of tests conducted in the district has been 12,57,566. Public health experts will soon be sent to areas having maximum coronavirus cases to look into various aspects. Certain pockets in Gomtinagar, Indiranagar, Chinhat, Aliganj and

Alambagh currently have the maximum cases. He said five public experts have been identified for the same.

On Monday, 184 persons tested positive for coronavirus in Lucknow, taking the tally to 75,210. Besides, 260 patients recovered and the number of recoveries reached 71,186. The death toll stands at 1,056 while there are 2,968 active cases in the district. The fresh cases included 16 from Gomtinagar, 14 from Chowk, 13 from Alambagh, 12 each from Aliganj & Thakurganj, 11 from Talkatora, and 10 each from Indiranagar and Rae Bareilly road. Across the state, 1,229 persons tested positive, including 54 in Kanpur, 69 in Ghaziabad, 89 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, 56 in Varanasi and 67 in Meerut, taking the UP tally to 5,66,728. There were 14 deaths in the state, including two each in Prayagraj & Varanasi and one each in



Lucknow, Kanpur, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Meerut, Lakhimpur Kheri, Pratapgarh, Rae Bareilly, Sultanpur, Auraiyya & Baghpat taking the toll to 8,083. As many as 1,972 patients recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 5,66,728 while there are 18,918 active cases.

Meanwhile, Dr Sunil G Babu from BBAU’s department of Biotechnology, has published a review article on production strategies used for

Covid-19 vaccine worldwide. The article entitled ‘Prospects of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines and their landscape’ was a review on the different vaccines and their production platforms under clinical trials.

Spokesperson Dr Rachna Gangwar said that in this article, Dr Sunil G Babu has described the different vaccine production strategies, including the new and cutting-edge platforms such as DNA, RNA and codon optimisation,

which were used for the first time in Covid-19 vaccine production and how they significantly cut down the time of vaccine availability to any pandemic. “By using these strategies, vaccine candidates were available within a record time of 4-5 months and were ready for the phase-I of clinical trials. He has also given a brief account on the Covid-19 vaccines which have entered the phase-III clinical trials. This article also provides information on how RNA, DNA vaccines and codon optimisation technology reduced the time taken to produce vaccines,” she said.

She added that Dr Sunil G Babu emphasised on how the knowledge obtained from early coronavirus outbreaks, that is SARS CoV and MERS CoV, was helpful in making the vaccine leads for SARS CoV2 and readiness of safe, effective adenoviral vectors.

Metro makes fastest recovery in ridership



Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow metro claims to have made the fastest ridership recovery in the country. UPMRC officials said the daily ridership of Lucknow metro has crossed the 31,000-mark after lockdown.

“Lucknow metro continues to be the safest mode of transportation. It is evident as the daily ridership has crossed the 31,000-mark. This figure is about 50 percent of the earlier ridership,” a senior official said.

He said since the resumption of service in Lucknow after lockdown on September 7, the figure of 31,000 is the highest as well as the fastest as compared to metro services in other cities.

“The ridership in other cities, especially Delhi, has been the highest in the country, but their current ridership is around 16 lakh and they have been able to achieve only 30-35% of the previous ridership. Similarly, almost all other metros have been able to achieve only 20-30 per cent of their earlier maximum ridership,” he pointed out.

Police yet to get a clue a day after liquor shop-owner shot at, looted

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow police failed to get a clue about the miscreants who had shot at a desi liquor shop-owner and looted Rs 45,000 from him in Kakori on Sunday night. After the incident, some of the senior officials reached the scene to oversee the investigation and later teams were formed to nab the attackers. In the attack, the victim, identified as Jitendra Kumar Jaiswal of Sitapur, suffered firearm injuries in his stomach and was admitted to KGMU

Trauma Centre. He was attacked around 10 pm near his shop in Dashari village.

Jitendra, who was on a bike, was waylaid by three motorcycle-borne miscreants. The miscreants first attacked Jitendra with a stick and attempted to snatch his bag. As Jitendra offered resistance, one of them opened fire on him. Jitendra fell down and the miscreants looted his bag before fleeing the scene.

A spokesman said he was yet to get details from the police teams working in the case.

Sources said the police had initially tried to dispute the victim’s claim and said he was trying to misguiding the cops. “However, the police teams have not found anything fishy during investigation into the case so far,” they said.

Meanwhile, in the Gudamba incident in which son of a retired police officer had suffered firearm injuries during a verbal spat between him and his father, the police are waiting for the family to lodge a formal complaint to initiate legal action.

The spokesman said that

the police are yet to register a case in this connection. It has surfaced during probe that the victim, Zohaib of Kalyanpur in Gudamba, had pointed a knife at his mother on being denied money. His father Naem had snatched the knife from him later. Zohaib later went inside the room and returned with his father’s pistol. Seeing a pistol in his hand, Naem tried to overpower him and the gun went off. Zohaib suffered injuries in his stomach. His condition was said to be improving at the hospital.

PCS allied services selectee held for sexual exploitation just after marriage

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

PCS allied services selectee was arrested by Ashiyana police on the charges of sexual exploiting a woman, who was once his classmate in a city coaching. As per reports, the accused identified as Anurag Ranjan of Ruchi Khand in Ashiyana, got married to a woman on December 12.

After the function concluded, another woman reached his house and creat-

ed a scene, claiming that the accused had sexually assaulted her and promised to marry her later. She alleged that the accused had cheated on her and married another woman.

ADCP (East) Qasim Abdi said the youth was selected in PCS allied services in 2018 but was yet to join the service. “As the woman accused him of sexual exploitation, a case was registered and the accused was arrested,” he said. As per the victim’s claim, she studied

with the accused at a coaching in Lucknow in 2017 and they came close in due course of time. The accused promised to marry her and sexually exploited her. He later distanced himself from her and married another woman.

The victim, who was keeping a tab on the accused since their separation, got to know of his marriage and reached his house. A team of police later arrested the accused and started further investigation.

Unaided private schools to hold exams offline

Lucknow (PNS): Unaided Private Schools’ Association decided that examinations for students of classes 9 to 12 would be conducted offline. President of the association Anil Agarwal said the decision was taken as board examinations would also be held offline. “More than 40 members of the association took part in a meeting held today. It has been observed that students undertaking online exams score considerably more than they do offline, because of lack of invigilation,” he said.

BOMBAY MERCANTILE CO-OPERATIVE BANK LIMITED
(Estd:-1939)
Regd Head Office : Zain G. Rangoonwala Building, 78, Mohammed Ali Road, Mumbai - 400 003.
Tel : 022-23425961/62/63/64, 23449586,62552800 For Account Balance Enquiry Missed Call : 9512004406
Toll Free No : 1800 220 854 / VR No : 9512004407 / IFSC CODE : UTIB0SMBG1

(Multi State Scheduled Bank)

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Members [Shareholders] of BOMBAY MERCANTILE CO-OPERATIVE BANK LIMITED will be held on Wednesday, 30th December, 2020 at 10.30 a.m. at HAJ COMMITTEE OF INDIA, Baitul Hujaj Haj House], 2nd Floor, 7-A, M.R.A. Marg (Palton Road), Mumbai - 400 001 to transact the following business;

- To confirm the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 30th September, 2019.
- To consider and adopt the Report of the Board of Directors and the Audited Balance Sheet, Profit & Loss Account and Statutory Auditor's Report for the year ended as on 31st March, 2020.
- To appropriate Net Profit as recommended by the Board of Directors for the year ended 31st March, 2020.
- To appoint Auditors for the Bank for the year 2020-2021 and fix their remuneration.
- To consider the Annual Budget of the Bank for the year 2020- 2021.
- To approve the amendments in Bye-Law Nos. 3(5), 44(3), 57(10), 77(A)(7) and to approve Bye Law No. 77(A)(9) as per the Annexure attached.
- To grant Leave of Absence to the Members of the Bank who have not attended this 83rd Annual General Meeting.

By Order of the Board of Directors
Sd/-
DR. M. SHAH ALAM KHAN
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Date : 09 December, 2020.
Place: Mumbai.

Note:

- If there is no quorum within half an hour after the appointed time, the Meeting shall stand adjourned to 11.00 a.m. on the same day and the Agenda of the Original Meeting shall be transacted at the said venue, irrespective of the rule of quorum, in terms of Bye-Law No.39.
- Any Member desiring information pertaining to Accounts, is requested to write to the Bank, at-least six days in advance of the date of the Annual General Meeting.

Copies of the Annual Report are available at the Head Office and the Branches of the Bank.

Notice for Request for Proposal

No: RMSA/Robotics lab-20-21/1315/2020/19 Dated: 14/12/2020

This is an invitation of proposal from the reputed registered organization affixing court fee stamp of minimum value Rs 8.25/- for the implementation 50 (fifty) Robotics Lab in Govt/Prov. Secondary and Hr. Secondary Schools through e-procurement system of Govt. of Assam i.e. <https://assamtenders.gov.in> . Bidder should have valid Digital Signature Certificate and have to register in the portal <https://assamtenders.gov.in>. Detailed RFP document may be seen at <https://assamtenders.gov.in> *for eligibility, scope of work, RFP terms and conditions etc. The RFP is to be submitted online through the e-procurement portal of Govt. of Assam i.e. <https://assamtenders.gov.in> only on or before 5/1/2021 at 2.00 p.m.

Important Dates and Milestone of the RFP:

SI	Particulars	Date & Time	Particulars	Date & Time
1.	Publishing Date & Time	14/12/2020,2.00 PM	-	-
2.	Document Download Start	14/12/2020,2.00 PM	Document Download End	5/1/2021 1.00 PM
3.	Pre-Bid Meeting	22/12/2020 2.00 PM	-	-
4.	Bid Submission Start	14/12/2020,3.10 PM	Bid submission end	5/1/2021 2.00 PM
5.	Technical Bid Opening	5/1/2021 3.00 PM	-	-
6.	Financial Bid Opening	To be intimated to the technically qualified entity at a later date.		
7.	Earnest Money Deposit(EMD):	INR 3,20,000/-		
8.	RFP FEE :	INR 5000/-		

- The RFP document can be downloaded from the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in>
- The details of the scope of work and requirement areas provided in the bid document. The Proposal has to be submitted as described in the bid i.e. in <https://assamtenders.gov.in> .
- The RFP document shall have two covers: (i) Technical Bid & Commercial terms (ii) Financial Bid.
- Online mode of submission of Technical and Financial Bids are mandatory. Manual submission of Financial Bids will not be accepted
- However original copy of the Tender Fee / EMD and Technical Bid along with Rs. 8.25 court fee stamp to be submitted at State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha, Assam (RMSA, Assam) , Kahilipara,Guwahati-19 before the last date and time of bid submission.
- Samagra Shiksha, Assam (RMSA, Assam) reserves the right to amend or cancel the bid document without assigning any notice or reason thereof at any stage of the bid. Moreover, in case of non-availability of sufficient bidder (or less than three bidder), authority has the right to take decision without prior notice.

Sd/- Executive Director,

Janasanyog No. CF/3229/20

Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

CM condoles deaths in Pratapgarh road mishap

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic mishap, five persons, including a police constable, were killed on the spot when the vehicle in which they were travelling crashed against a tree. The accident took place late Sunday night on Pratapgarh-Patti road in Kandhari police circle. Additional Superintendent of Police (East) Surendra Dwivedi said on Monday that the driver lost control over the vehicle leading to the accident.

Condoling the deaths of the victims, chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday asked the local officials to ensure proper care of all those who were injured in the mishap.

The victims were identified as constable Sandeep Kumar Yadav, 29, Sandip Yadav, 26, Akhilesh Yadav, 35, Rahul Yadav, 28, and the driver of the ill-fated vehicle, Pappu Yadav.

The accident happened when they were returning from

a wedding ceremony near the Dewan Mau village. Superintendent of Police Surendra P Dwivedi, said, “The family had gone to a wedding ceremony in a nearby village. They were on the way when the mishap took place. The cause of the accident is yet unknown. Further investigations are underway.” Speaking to the media, a family member said, “My family was going to attend the wedding ceremony of my cousin. A total of seven people were in the vehicle. My mother and I got out of the car to board another vehicle. Later we got to know that four of my family members had been killed in the mishap.”

Meanwhile, in another mishap, a 50-year-old man riding a bicycle died after being hit by a motorcycle in Amethi district, police said on Monday.

The accident took place in Warisganj in the Jagdishpur police station area. Jagdishpur police station SHO Rajesh

Singh said that Shyam Lal (50), a resident of Shukul Bazar of Amethi, was returning home on Sunday evening when he was hit by a motorcycle. Lal was seriously injured and was rushed to the community health centre, where doctors pronounced him dead.

In another mishap reported from Fatehpur, a dozen passengers of an Uttar Pradesh Roadways bus were injured when it was hit by a truck on Sunday, police said on Monday.

The accident occurred around 4:30 am at Pilkhani Morh and both the vehicles fell on the roadside, SHO of Kalyanpur police station Anoop Singh said.

“In this accident, 12 passengers of the bus were injured. All of them were admitted to a government hospital,” the police officer said, adding that the truck driver and his assistant escaped after the accident. The bus and the truck have been impounded.

Covid vaccinators’ training begins

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Declaring that training for the Covid vaccinators had started from Monday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that in order to provide best possible facilities to COVID-19 patients, it was necessary to continue with the existing effective system of treatment and protection. The chief minister said that the training of the vaccinators should be in easy language so that they understood the nuances easily. He also reminded the officials about maintenance of cold chain for efficient storage of Covid vaccines as per the instructions already issued. Yogi directed all medical institutions to further improve the arrangements as quality health services to the people was always the top priority of the government.

Presiding over the unlock review meeting at his official residence here on Monday, the chief minister said that doctors should take regular rounds and hospitals should remain

The CM said that the training of the vaccinators should be in easy language so that they understood the nuances easily

equipped with adequate medicines, medical equipment and oxygen. The chief minister said that people should be made aware of the Covid protection protocol and it should be properly publicised through various modes of communication, including public address systems. He said the Covid tests should be continued in the same effective manner and adequate number of RT-PCR and rapid antigen tests should be done every day. He also asked officials to run Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs) actively.

Minor held for kidnapping, killing a 6-year-old boy

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Maharajganj police claimed to have solved the kidnapping of a 6-year-old boy when they arrested a 14-year-old boy, a Class IX student, for the crime.

The police said the accused killed the boy soon after kidnapping him and later buried the body in a field nearby.

The police have exhumed a body and sent it for autopsy.

According to the police, the victim and the alleged killer are related and their houses are located in the same neighbourhood.

“The accused revealed that he was unhappy with the victim’s family as they used to make remarks on him and even called him a thief. To teach them a lesson, he killed the six-year-old and buried the body,” the local SHO said.

The accused also confessed of writing a letter for ransom in his handwriting and later throwing it in the victim’s house.

However, residents of the area protested against the detention of the Class IX student, accusing police of framing him.

The SHO said that the accused had confessed to the crime and based on his inputs, they had located the body of the six-year-old.

The locals withdrew their protest only after the police

showed them evidence against the boy, the SHO said, adding that the situation was now under control.

“During our probe, it came to light that the 6-year-old was last spotted with the accused so we brought him to the police station for interrogation. During questioning, he confessed to the crime and gave us the location of the body. Based on his information, we dug a field, which is around 100 metres from the victim’s house, and recovered a body... The Class IX student had killed the six-year-old just 20 minutes after kidnapping him,” the SHO said. “He will be produced before a Juvenile Justice Board, the SHO added.

On Wednesday, the mother of the six-year-old had filed a complaint with the police, stating that her son had gone missing while playing outside the house. Later that night, a stone wrapped in a letter was thrown in the victim’s house. In the letter, a demand of Rs 50 lakh was made for the safe release of the boy.

Meanwhile, in a separate incident, at least six people were injured in stone pelting between two groups over sexual harassment of an 18-year-old girl in a village in Muzaffarnagar district, police said on Monday.

The clash took place on Sunday when a man entered the girl’s house. The girl was

sleeping at that time. The man allegedly sexually harassed the girl. Her parents were in another room at the time of the incident.

Police said the victim’s family opposed the man but violent clashes started as more people gathered there.

The two groups pelted stones at each other, injuring at least six people. The police reached the spot and controlled the situation.

According to the local SHO, V Shankar Tripathi, the police have registered a case against 30 people and named 14 others. Apart from this, some people have also been detained.

He said that security has been tightened in the village.

In Hamirpur, a youth was crushed to death by a tractor in Chikasi area over some dispute. Inspector (SHO) of Chikasi police station, Vinod Kumar, said on Monday, “Motorcycle rider Amit (21) was returning from Biligand village to Bilgaon Danda village after his cousin’s wedding on Sunday. He was crushed and killed on the spot. One more person on the pillion was also injured.

“Investigation found that there was a fight between Amit and Dhir Singh over something a few days ago,” Kumar said, adding that a case had been registered against Dhir Singh in this regard and efforts were being made to nab him.



MOU SIGNED

Power GRID Corporation of India Limited signed an MoU with Sanjay Gandhi Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for establishing POWERGRID-SGPGIMS tele-ICU in UP. As per the MoU, a command centre will be established at SGPGIMS and spoke centres at Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Prayagraj, Agra, Meerut and

Jhansi. The MoU was signed by director (personnel) VK Singh on behalf of POWERGRID and Prof RK Dhiman on behalf of SGPGIMS. Tele-ICU is technology-enabled care delivered from off-site locations developed to address the increasing complexity of ICU patients and shortage of intensivists. Tele-ICU, as a means to negate the shortcomings in current ICU care, is being actively sought after.

Sena MLA files breach of privilege notice against media houses for stories based on Kangana’s tweet

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In fresh trouble for controversial Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, senior Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik on Monday filed a breach of privilege notice against some media outlets for running stories allegedly based on a tweet put out by the actress that a Pakistani credit card was found during the recent raids conducted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on his houses.

Sarnaik, a three-time MLA and close aide of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, in his breach of privilege notice filed against Kangana before the

Principal Secretary of the Maharashtra Legislature said: “On November 24, the ED raided my houses in Mumbai and Thane and seized several documents. The ED called me and my son for inquiry and we are cooperating with the ED.”

“On December 12 and 13, some selected news papers, electronic media and web portals -- based on a tweet by Kangana -- reported that a Pakistani credit card was found in my house during the raids. They published without any proof. The only basis they had was a false tweet put out by the actress. The news reports have defamed me and projected me in a poor light,” Sarnaik stated

in his notice. He has urged the Principal Secretary concerned to forward his notice/complaint to the Privilege Committee of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly so that an inquiry into the matter of breach of privilege and necessary action can be taken against Kangana. If the breach of privilege notice against the media outlets admitted by the State Legislature, Kangana -- apart from the media houses -- may also asked to appear before the Privileges Committee to know on what basis she put out the “false” tweet which, Sarnaik has alleged, has maligned his image as an elected representative.

Katheria: No farmer associated with SP

Lucknow (PNS): Taking a jibe at Samajwadi Party which is supporting the farmers protesting against the agricultural laws, BJP MP Prof Ram Shankar Katheria said that Mulayam Singh Yadav was indeed the “son of the land (dharti putra)” but today there was no farmer left in his party.

Prof Katheria on Monday told journalists in Etawah that

no farmer was associated with the Samajwadi Party, which was agitating against the agricultural bills.

“New agriculture laws are a boon for the farmers but the opposition are creating an atmosphere of confusion among the farmers about the bill,” he said.

The former Union minister said that the Narendra

Modi government was introducing many schemes for increasing the income of the farmers through which the economic condition of the peasants could improve.

“In view of these efforts, the government has brought the new agricultural laws which are related to the farmers’ crops, opening up of markets etc.,” he added.

NUMBERS SURGE...

Then crossing through the toll plaza, as one reaches the main barricades, heavy police presence is witnessed.

Several borders of the national capital remained closed on Monday due to the ongoing protest. The Delhi Traffic Police took to Twitter to inform people about road closures and advised them to take alternative routes to avoid inconvenience.

Farmers from different States have been camping at Delhi’s Singhu, Tikri, Ghazipur and

Chilla (Delhi-Noida) border points for over two weeks to demand a repeal of the farm laws enacted in September.

In a series of tweets, the Delhi Traffic Police said, “Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, Sabholi & Mangesh borders are closed. Please take alternate routes via Lampur, Safiabad & Singhu school toll tax borders. Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba & GTK road. Pl avoid Outer Ring Rd ,GTK road, NH-44.”

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

In Punjab and Haryana, farmers raised slogans outside the offices of district commissioners and took out protest marches on Monday. The Haryana Police closed the Ambala-Patiala highway after protesters gathered at the Shambhu border point with adjoining Punjab. Hundreds of farmers have stayed put at the Haryana-Rajasthan border as they were stopped from moving towards the national Capital.

“Tens of thousands of farmers are moving towards Delhi from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and other States and the numbers of protesting farmers at Delhi borders are swelling,” a farmer leader claimed. Multi-layered cemented barriers, additional police force and barbed wires formed the first layer of security at the protest site at Singhu border. The second layer of barricades deployed by the Delhi Police is being guarded by a team of Rapid Action Force along with personnel from the paramilitary forces.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Tractor2twitr -- has garnered 2.5 million impressions from across the globe since November 28. “I had come to India in October-end to attend to some personal work, but then this (farmers’ protest) happened and I stayed on,” Bhavjit Singh says. He said his idea was to disseminate authentic information about the protest as a “lot of people have been tweeting, running a vilification campaign against the movement.”

His friend and a volunteer, Jaspreet Singh, says, “Paid and motivated users dominate and encroach up on the Twitter space. Our campaign is an effort to counter them.”

Protesting farmers at Delhi border points have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the “mercy” of big corporations. The Government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture. In Rajasthan, farmers blocked the Delhi-Jaipur highway in Alwar.

With the police stopping their march along the State’s border with Haryana, the farmers camping at Jaisinghpur-Khera border in Shahjahanpur under the leadership of Swaraj Abhiyan chief Yogendra Yadav and others went on a day-long hunger strike, seeking the repeal of farm laws.

toilets are being arranged. The aim is to give them a safe and comfortable environment to stay at the protest site, they said.

CENTRE ASKS...

Several groups of farmers’ have been protesting against the new Central laws on farm sectors and have been demanding these legislations be repealed. Farmers had also resorted to “rail roko” agitation earlier. The losses due to this protest have ranged to the tune of ₹30,000 crore on various stakeholders including industries.

Earlier the NHAi reportedly suffered revenue losses of Rs 1,822 crore due to suspension of toll collection on national highways during the 40-day lockdown, as per ICRA rating agency. While revenue loss for the NHAi operated toll plazas is estimated at Rs 821 crore, while the compensation to BOT Concessionaires under force majeure (political) event has been estimated at Rs 1,001 crore, as per ICRA. Centre had suspended tolling at NHs following the pandemic.

“The total estimated loss to NHAi due to lockdown is likely to be Rs 1,822 crore. With goods traffic (both inter and intrastate) allowed to ply from April 20, 2020, onwards, in case if the toll suspension is revoked with effect from April 20, the loss could reduce to Rs 1,181 crore,” the statement said.

There are around 570 operational toll plazas on the NHs across the country which includes both public-funded (under NHAi) and projects under build-operate-transfer (BOT) (Toll) and toll-operate-transfer (TOT) mode. For the BOT Toll and TOT projects, under force majeure (political) event, the revenue loss is compensated in the form of extension in concession period.

In addition, 100 per cent of operations and maintenance (O&M) and interest costs are reimbursed for the BOT Toll projects for the affected period and this amounted to 50-55 per cent of loss of revenue incurred by these projects.

Whereas for projects which are public-funded (currently being tolled by the NHAi through toll contractors), the suspension would result in a direct revenue loss for the NHAi. The ICRA also recalled that during de-monetisation in November 2016, the 24-day period toll suspension NHAi offered compensation to the toll

road SPVs under force majeure political clauses and incurred loss in the range of Rs 650-700 crore.

The NHAi has now made mandatory electronic toll collection across India on its over 500 toll plazas while doubling toll charges from the vehicles entering FASTag lanes without the tag. In order to give prime importance to existing FASTag users, dissuade defaulters and further encourage adoption of FASTags by national highway commuters, vehicles without FASTags entering the FASTag lane are being charged double the toll fee, and last month over Rs 20 crore were collected from 20 lakh vehicles encroaching FASTag lanes across India.

“At the vaccination site, only pre-registered beneficiaries will be vaccinated in accordance with the prioritisation, and there will be no provision for on the spot registrations. The States have been asked to allocate the vaccine from one manufacturer to a district to avoid mixing of different vaccines in the field while all measures will be taken to avoid exposing the vaccine carrier, vaccine vials or ice packs to direct sunlight,” as per the document.

‘EMERGENCY SHOULD...

The bench also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Hrishikesh Roy said that the court would be disinclined to open all such aspects as there may be some wrongs done to persons, but with the passage of almost 45 years, it would not be appropriate to reopen all such issues. It asked the petitioner to amend her petition by December 18 with respect to the prayer of declaration of emergency as unconstitutional.

STUDENTS SHOULD...

“It is desired that the knowledge of this technological marvel of the country, encompassing the best practices in engineering, design, planning, construction and project management be disseminated to students of engineering colleges who should be encouraged to visit this tunnel to see, appreciate and assimilate the capabilities in tunnelling efforts which now exist within the country,” he added.

The tunnel is built with ultra-modern specifications in the Pir Panjal range of the Himalayas at an altitude of 3,000 metres. The south portal of Atal Tunnel is located at a distance of 25 km from Manali at an altitude of 3,060 metres, while its north portal is located near village Teling, Sissu, in Lahaul Valley at an altitude of 3,071 metres.

NO RETROGRADE...

“We are, however, always willing to listen to our farmer brothers, allay their misgivings and provide them with assurances we can provide. Our Government is always open to discussion and dialogue,” Singh said. The Minister said agriculture is one of the sectors that is able to the cope with the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and “come out the best”. He said, “Our produce and procurement have been plentiful and our warehouses are full.”

VACCINATION PROTOCOL...

Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network (Co-WIN) system — a digitalised platform — will be used to track enlisted beneficiaries for the vaccination and anti-coronavirus vaccines on a real-time basis while twelve photo-identity documents, including Voter ID, Aadhaar card, driving license, passport and pension document will be required for self-registration on the Co-WIN website.

**कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, विद्युत पारेक्षण मण्डल-द्वितीय, उपग्राम पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड, पारेक्षण भवन, विमुक्ति खण्ड, निकट मंत्री आवास, गोमती नगर, लखनऊ ई-निविदा सूचना**

अनुमोदीत फर्मों/ ठेकेदारों से निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु निम्नलिखित निविदाये दो भागों में आमंत्रित की जाती है। ई-निविदा का द्वितीय भाग में मूल्य/ दरें वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in पर ई-निविदा का प्रथम भाग के खुलने की तिथि से एक दिन पूर्व 17.00 बजे तक अपलोड की जाती है। निविदा सम्बन्धी समस्त जानकारी, प्रिन्ट व अंककारी शर्तें, निविदा प्रश्न में अंकित है, जो वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in से डाउनलोड कर अनिवारित/अपलोड की जा सकती है, निविदा का प्रथम व द्वितीय भाग वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in पर ही अपलोड किया जा सकेगा। निविदा से सम्बन्धित कोई भी प्रश्न, मौखिक रूप से कार्यालय में स्वीकार नहीं किया जायेगा। अग्रोहस्तारकर्ता को बिना कोई कारण बताये किसी अध्यायी निविदाओं का अस्वीकार/ विमाजित/ निरस्त करने का अधिकार सुरक्षित है। विस्तृत उपकरणों, अन्य किसी प्रकार के संशोधन एवं तिथि विस्तार आदि के सम्बन्ध में निविदा अपलोड करने के दिनांक/ समय तक कृपया वेबसाइट www.etender.up.nic.in पर सही ओन करें।

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(1) ई-निविदा संख्या-विनयारोमं-दि/रं/२०/६२/२०२०-२१ (निविदा खुलने की तिथि २०-०१-२०२१) : विद्युत पारेक्षण खण्ड, उन्नाव के अनर्गत विभिन्न 132 केवी0 उपकरणों पर कोमिकल स्के, घास एवं जंगली पेड़ पौधों की कटाई एवं साफ-सफाई एवं केबिल ट्रेनसेस की सफाई का कार्य निविदा प्रश्न अनुसार : बरहोहर घनराशि रु० 7500/-, निविदा प्रश्न मूल्य रु० 1180/- (18 प्रतिशत जी०एस०टी० सहित)।

(3) ई-निविदा संख्या-विनयारोमं-दि/रं/२०/६३/२०२०-२१ (निविदा खुलने की तिथि २०-०१-२०२१) : विद्युत पारेक्षण खण्ड, उन्नाव के अनर्गत 132 केवी0 उपकरण मोरारों, उन्नाव पर स्थापित मार्गसिंह बाक्स की रिपेयर/ओवरहालिंग का कार्य निविदा प्रश्न अनुसार : बरहोहर घनराशि रु० 2000/-, निविदा प्रश्न मूल्य रु० 590/- (18 प्रतिशत जी०एस०टी० सहित)

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SP workers staging a protest in support of farmers' stir in Varanasi on Monday

Pioneer

SP workers stage protest in support of farmers' stir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In response to the call given by agitating farmers, workers of Samajwadi Party (SP) and many other organisations staged protests at different parts of the city here on Monday, expressing their solidarity to the ongoing agitation near the borders of the national capital. A group of SP workers led by its district president Sujit Yadav, the party workers staged a demonstration at Shastri Ghat and they handed over their seven-point charter of demands to the district administration for forwarding the same to the governor. In view of the call given by the agitating farmers, elaborate security arrangements have been made at the district headquarters. In the meantime, the police also did not allow some senior SP leaders to come out from their houses as a precautionary measure.

In their memorandum, SP

raised several issues of the farmers including non-payment of ₹180 crore of sugarcane farmers of Moradabad, taking no steps to check the damages of crops by stray cattle and failure of the state government to check prevailing corruption. They also expressed their concern over high rates of wheat seeds, irregularities in paddy purchasing centers and others. Meanwhile, the police did not allow some senior SP leaders to come out from their houses when they tried to join the protest at various places as a precautionary step.

Among those who joined the protest were Pradeep Jaiswal, Raju Yadav, Umesh Pradhan, Anand Maurya, Satish Sood and Rishi Narayan Yadav.

The activists of Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sabha under the banner of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) staged a protest at Shastri Ghat and submitted

a memorandum in favour of their demands to be forwarded to the President of India. They termed the new farm bills as a conspiracy by the government to benefit a few capitalists as the bills have a provision regarding the guarantee of the foodgrain to be purchased by private companies on MSP. They demanded the repeal of new laws and said, the government should stop the privatisation of public institutions.

The activists of Kisan Nyay Morcha, UP also staged a protest at the same venue and blamed the government for holding talks with agitating farmers for nothing just to misguide them. The nation will progress only after the farmers prosper, they said and demanded, the government should give an ex-gratia of ₹ 50 lakh each to the farmers who passed away during agitation. Mahendra Prasad, Suresh Pal, Dr Ramsagar Patel, Ashok Prajapati and others joined the

protest.

The workers of Loktantrik Kisan Union also staged a protest to show their solidarity with the agitating farmers and demanded the repeal of farm bills in the larger interest of the farmers of the country.

Indrajit Singh Patel, Yogi Raj Patel, Vinod Patel, Vinod Agrahari and Bhagvati Raghuvanshi mainly joined the protest. The activists of Joint Action Committee also staged a protest at BHU main entrance gate to show their solidarity to agitating farmers.

The police took a youth Praveen in their custody as he was protesting the bills observing silence in the water of river Ganga at Assi Ghat. He adopted this way to extend his support to farmers' leaders who observed fast near the border of the national capital in order to mount pressure on the government to repeal the bills.

SP workers taken into custody while going to stage dharna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

On Monday, the activists of the Samajwadi Party took to the road in support of agitated farmers over the new agricultural laws. The police have taken into custody all the party workers going to stage dharna in the district court's premises at Prayagraj and Pratapgarh as well as Kaushambi district headquarters.

At Jhalwa, farmers union workers also demonstrated. So far, about 100 have been detained in Prayagraj and have been sent to Police Lines. At the same time, the officials and workers of the Aam Aadmi Party who were protesting were also detained.

The workers of the Samajwadi Party was detained during a demonstration outside the Collectorate office in Prayagraj. Barricades to Collectorate have been barred to stop protesters. At Pratapgarh, the SP workers took out a procession from the old Malgodam Road in the city. One-and-a-half dozen SP activists, including SPs District Vice-President Irshad Siddiqui, Wasik Khan, Shanti Singh, Sushma Pal, were detained by the police in front of MDPG College towards Bhangwa Chungi. They have been kept in Tilak College. Heavy force of police have been deployed in the whole city.

The police force also have been deputed at Kaushambi district headquarters. The SP workers, who were going to give the memorandum to the District Magistrate, stopped them on the way. They were then taken into custody. The SP workers have been taken to Pipri police station.

Among those who were taken into police custody included Shimla Shri Tripathi, state secretary, Anjani Kumar Mishra (state secretary), Sarvesh Yadav (district general secretary), Jyoti Prakash Chaubey (city unit president), Ramendra Pandey (district vice-president), Poonam Singh



(women district president), Sanjeev Mishra (district youth president), Virendra Kushwaha (District Farmer's Cell president), Sunaina (district women vice-president), Sanjay Pandey Prachanda, RR Mishra (City Northern Assembly Speaker), Ram Lakhna Chaurasia (Western Speaker of the Assembly), 13- Harendra Pratap Singh (media incharge city unit president), Shubham Kesarwani (Southern Legislative Assembly treasurer), Mukesh Jaiswal, Mohammad Akbar (general secretary Western Legislative Assembly).

Meanwhile, Cabinet minister Siddharth Nath Singh strongly attacked the SP's activism in the farmers' movement. He said that these days Samajwadi Party is trying to cultivate vote bank on the land of the farmers' movement. During his stay in Prayagraj, he urged everyone to give correct information to farmers. Efforts should also be made to avoid

confusion of opposition.

He said that after the failure of the bandh organised by the opposition, satisfaction was expressed that farmers also understand politics. They do not need to understand their own good and bad by others. He is a provider, feeding everyone. In such a situation, where are the farmers themselves and how are they, all the farmers are also understanding this.

SP President Akhilesh Yadav, who announced to make a yatra in support of the peasant movement, continued to enjoy the dance of hero and heroine of Bollywood until he was in power. The farmers have never been his priority. Today, they are trying to become advocates. The Narendra Modi Government at the Centre and the Yogi Government of the state are constantly working to get the efforts of the farmers, and the oppositions are engaged in politics.

The Cabinet Minister said that Akhilesh, who is pretending to be the ultimate benefactor of farmers, should be asked about the reason why maize was not procured in the state in 2016-17. With the arrival of Yogi Government, the first focus was on payment of dues. During the three years, the Yogi Government has paid sugarcane farmers of more than ₹1.12 crore so far.

He said that it is a result of the Yogi Government's commitment to farmer interests that till now 277.29 lakh quintals of paddy have been procured from farmers.

This purchase is more than one and a half times from last year, Yogi Government has ensured the purchase of paddy six times more than the previous government. Not only this, so far 3.52 thousand quintal maize has been purchased from farmers from 102 maize purchasing centers in the state, he added.

One dies, 3 others injured in mishap

ALLAHABAD (PNS): In a road accident one person died and three others sustained injuries when a Tavera coming from Lucknow side with newspapers, collided head on with a speeding truck on Mansoorabad by-pass under the Nawabganj police station on Monday at 4 am. The body was later identified as of Man Bahadur, 43. The injured were rushed to hospital for immediate treatment.

The Tavera loaded some newspapers from Lucknow and accommodated some passengers to come to Prayagraj. In the foggy morning the driver could not see a speeding truck coming from the opposite direction, and collided head on with it on Mansoorabad bypass at 4 am. This accident claimed the life of Man Bahadur.

The police later removed the vehicle somehow from the road to normalise traffic on that road which had witnessed a jam after the accident.

LOOTED: A group of three unidentified men barged into an elderly couple's home and made off with cash and jewellery worth lakhs of rupees in Mumfordganj area on Sunday evening. Police have detained the couple's domestic help among others for interrogation. SP (city) Dinesh Singh said that an FIR against unidentified persons has been registered. Police said that Krishna Chandra Srivastava (80) and his wife Jyoti lived at their home alone.



Three different maids used to work for the couple. The couple told the police that around 6.30am, Jyoti heard a knock on the main door. 'When she opened the door, three men in the verandah surrounded her and dragged her inside. They then assaulted the couple and robbed them at gun-

point,' police said. The accused stole gold chains, rings, earrings, two bangles, a silver glass, three debit cards, Rs 31,000 and two mobile phones among other items before fleeing.

GANGA PARIKRAMA YATRA TO BEGIN TOMORROW: 'Atulya Ganga' is a veterans' initiative to synergise all efforts of the government, non-government, volunteers and common public for rejuvenating Ganga to its pristine glory.

India's longest and inaccessible Parikrama Yatra from Kumbhanagri Prayagraj will begin on December 16. This Ganga Parikrama is a unique initiative of 'Incredible Ganga', an organisation formed by former officers of the Indian Armed Forces. This organisation formed by former military officers Colonel Manoj Keshwar, Lt Col. Hem Lohmi, Colonel Gopal Sharma etc, reflects the strong and service spirit of the Indian Army.

Inauguration of Ganga Parikrama Yatra will be done by the Governor (UP), Union Minister of Water & Power Gajendra Singh Shekawat and Union Minister for Cultural and Tourism P Patel via video conference information about the main purpose of this journey will be given by the team of 'Atulya Ganga' at the press conference to be held at 1 pm on December 14 at Press Club of Prayagraj.

Jaiswal for completing projects in time

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Stamp and Court Registration Fee (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal has instructed the officers to launch a drive on a war footing to complete the ongoing projects in time maintaining their quality of work. He was holding a meeting with the Divisional Commissioner (DC) Deepak Agarwal, District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma and Municipal Commissioner (MC) Gaurang Rathi and others at the Circuit House on Sunday. MLA Saurabh Srivastava and MLC Ashok Dhawan were also present in the meeting.

The Minister also directed the officers to ensure the presence of departmental JEs, AEs and other concerned officers at the work places. He said that the progress of construction works should not be left completely on the mercy of the contractors. According to him, in Varanasi district, huge projects worth thousands of crores are underway and the timely completion of these projects would give a lot of benefits to the people. He has directed the departmental officers and engineers to supervise their respective projects regularly.

According to him, he would review the progress of all such projects by holding a meeting with concerned executive, assistant and junior engineers soon.

DC INAUGURATES CULTURAL EVENING: A cultural evening was organised under the auspices of Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Union Ministry of Textiles and Subeh-e-Banaras in Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Hastkala Sankul, popularly known as Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC), at Bada Lalpur here on Sunday. Orchestral and group Kathak dances were performed in the programme.

The programme was inaugurated by the Divisional Commissioner (DC) Deepak Agrawal by lighting the lamp and the function was also attended by eminent social worker Padmashree Rajinikant, Joint Commissioner (Industries) Umesh Singh, Assistant Director (Handicrafts) Gopesh Maurya, Secretary of Subeh-e-Banaras Dr Ratnesh Verma and Museum Incharge Ajay Srivastava. The programme was conducted by Ankita Khatri.

The instrument programme started with Alap, fol-

lowed by a presentation of Kalavati. Finally, a presentation of 'Lagi Lagan...', based on Hans Dhvani, enthralled the audience. In the programme presentation, Kumar Sarang Chaudhary was on santoor, while Shanish Gyawali on flute, Anand Kumar on sitar and Lalit Kumar on tabla. In this sequence, the group Kathak dance was performed by Sunidhi Pathak and her group. The Kathak dance started with Ganesh Vandana followed by traditional Kathak and finally. It mesmerised the audience by presenting dance on 'Chaap Tilak Sab Chhini...'

COVID-19: TRIBUTES PAID TO DOCTORS: Rich tributes were paid to all the doctors who lost their lives in their fight against global coronavirus pandemic at an online programme held on Sunday. The chief guest of the programme was the head of the Department of Respiratory Medicine, King George's Medical University (KGMU), Lucknow and a member of the Corona Task Force, while it was conducted by former National President of Indian Medical Association (IMA) Dr KK Agrawal. Around 800 doctors of the country have sacrificed their lives during their fight against COVID-19 pandemic

and recently, Dr Suryakant, published an article on these 'martyred' physicians in the IMA Journal. His initiative paid off as various institutions have come forward to help the family of the doctors who sacrificed their lives during the pandemic. At the online programme, tributes were paid to 12 doctors of UP and Bihar.

These doctors included ACOMO of Varanasi Dr Jung Bahadur, Dr M Vakil Khan of Prayagraj, Dr Mohammad Asad of Azamgarh, Dr Mohibbul Haq of Mau, Dr Rajinikant Srivastava of Gorakhpur, Dr Rashim Dureja, Dr Suresh Sondhi, both of Bareilly, Dr Kavaljeet Saluja, Dr Gyan Prabhakar, both of Kanpur, Dr Raghunath Prasad Mishra of Gonda, Dr Sunil Agarwal of Orai Jalaun (all of UP) and Dr Deepak Kumar of Patna (Bihar). Rich tributes were paid to all the doctors.

Addressing the function, Dr Suryakant demanded that martyr status should be given to those doctors who had sacrificed their lives while fighting against pandemic in the same manner as the military personnel who sacrificed their lives while protecting the borders of the country are given the status of martyrs.

Covid vaccination: Master trainers being trained

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Chief Medical Officer Dr AK Mishra said a two-day special training for COVID-19 vaccination began on Monday in which all chief medical officers, deputy chief medical officers, additional chief medical officers and other district level officials took part in a big way. The training is being imparted to these master trainers on how to vaccinate a person and store the vaccine in such a way that it remains effective even during transit.

The CMO said special containers would be prepared to carry the vaccine from one

51 new Covid cases in city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar reported 51 new coronavirus positive cases during the past 24 hours, taking the tally of confirmed cases to 31,519 on Monday evening.

Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil K Mishra said 11 COVID-19 patients were discharged during the past 24 hours. He said no COVID-19 death was reported on Monday and the death-toll stood at 801. The CMO said there were 710 active cases in the district. He said 4,178 samples were sent for testing on Sunday.

place to another without disturbing the cold chain.

He said the master trainers, after being trained, would visit blocks, CHCs and PHCs and

organise training camps for the staff and paramedical staff to impart training on how to vaccinate and maintain the cold chain. He said special care was

to be taken of the vaccine in transit and at the villages where electricity was a major problem.

He said the WHO officials along with UPSEF and UNDP officials would be giving online training to the officials.

He said vaccination was to be carried out with full care and said they had to ensure that the person who was vaccinated waited at least 30 minutes to one hour at the place to monitor any reaction. He said special arrangements had already been made to ensure that the vaccine cold chain was strictly maintained. He said the training would be conducted on Tuesday as well.

Rich tributes paid to Sanjay Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Rich tributes were paid to Sanjay Gandhi on his 74th birth anniversary by Congressmen at Tilak Hall on Monday.

The partymen first garlanded Sanjay Gandhi's portrait and appealed to the youth to emulate the great leader who had given a vision to the youth at his time.

The party leaders later spoke on Sanjay Gandhi's political contributions to the country.

Addressing the gathering, veteran Congressman, SD Mishra said Sanjay Gandhi although did not hold any political designation yet he made major contributions and tried to uplift the nation.

He said Sanjay Gandhi was a visionary and wanted to place India with the developed countries of the world and had introduced a five-point charter during his time which was meant to uproot social evil and factors which retarded the pace of the country's progress.



Congressmen paying rich tributes to Sanjay Gandhi on his birth anniversary on Monday

Pioneer

He said it was Sanjay Gandhi who had introduced a massive tree plantation drive all over the country which had improved the green areas of the country. He said Sanjay Gandhi

had implemented family planning with an iron hand and was of the opinion that India's population had to be controlled if the nation had to progress.

Besides, Sanjay Gandhi

was the person who introduced adult education and was strongly against dowry and caste system and had made every effort to eliminate these two evils from society.

Behmai case plaintiff dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

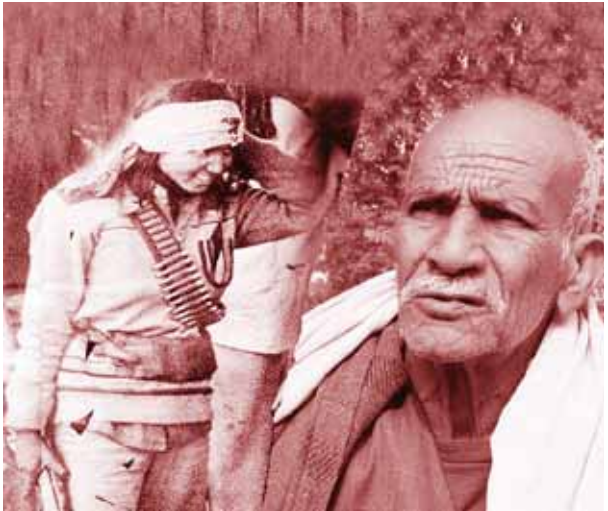
The plaintiff of the famous Behmai case of Kanpur Dehat, Rajaram (85), breathed his last on Sunday after a prolonged illness without hearing the verdict of the case.

The trial of the case has been pending in the court for the past 39 years and the decision was deferred at the last minutes in January.

Since then, the ailing Rajaram was awaiting the verdict.

His son Ramkesh Singh said that Rajaram was suffering from liver disease and died at home on Sunday.

It may be recalled that on February 14, 1981, bandit queen Phoolan Devi and her gang had shot 20 persons in Behmai village of Kanpur Dehat. Rajaram of the village had lodged a report against 36



Plaintiff of famous Behmai massacre Rajaram (85) (right) died after prolonged illness. Bandit Queen Phoolan Devi (left).

Pioneer.

dacoits, including Phoolan Devi.

For the past 39 years, he

was appearing for the case in the court. On January 6, the decision of the court was

deferred due to non-availability of original case diary.

After his death, the case would be contested by the state government without affecting the trial hearings.

DGC Raju Porwal said "the case will not be affected by the death of the plaintiff as the testimony has already been completed". Initially, there were 43 witnesses in the trial, of which 28 have died so far.

Out of the 36 dacoits, including Phoolan Devi, against whom the case was registered, only four are alive. Posa (75) of Pata, Churkhi, District. Jalaun is in jail since 1981 while Bhikha (65) of the same village, Vishwanath (54) of Maheshpur, Sikandra (Kanpur Dehat), who was 15-year-old at the time of the incident, and Shyambabu (70) of Sada Panna village, Auraiya, are out on bail.

'Condition of women's human rights not satisfactory in India'

KANPUR (PNS): Mahila Mahavidyalaya Principal Dr BR Agarwal while addressing the Human Rights Day at the college said this year's Human Rights Day focused on the devastating fallout of COVID-19 pandemic on the under-privileged people, particularly children, especially women.

She said this engendered the need to build back better by ensuring human rights which were central to recovery efforts.

She said this year the theme was 'Recover Better — Stand Up For Human Rights'. She said every year Human Rights Day was observed on December 10 with an objective to create equal opportunities for all and to address the issues of inequality, exclusion and discrimination.

She said the Indian culture hinged on the promotion of the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is a family) and added that HR could be defined as the minimum equal and inalienable

rights compulsory obtainable by every human for being a member of global human community regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, race, religion, nationality or any other ground.

She added that the Constitution of India also recognised these rights in form of various fundamental rights and guaranteed equal rights to both men and women without any discrimination, yet the actual condition of the women's human rights in India could not be said satisfactory.

She added that there existed a huge gap between de facto and de jure condition due to the present structure of Indian society and practices prevalent in it.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Saba Yunus said India had a patriarchal society where male dominated and were always treated as superior in comparison to their female counterparts, and that was why the condition of Indian women

was not as good as that of men. She said women had to face discrimination, injustice and dishonour based on gender in every walk of life.

She said however, the Indian Constitution provided some special provisions to women only for their empowerment and overall development. She said the legislature and policy framers of India had made multiple laws, rules and regulations ensuring rights of women but they were proving ineffective because all were limited in form of 'Act' instead of 'action' and that was the reason why Indian women were mistreated, harassed physically and mentally.

Others present on the occasion were Dr Mamta Dixit and several others. The girls presented a short skit on HR.

The first prize in painting contest was bagged by Anjali Shukla. In a similar function organised by the Sakhi Kendra, Shyamnagar, its general secretary Neelam Chaturvedi said

crimes against women in India were increasing day by day and as per the data of the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), there was a sharp increase in rape, cruelty by husband and relatives, kidnapping, modesty outrage, cyber crime related to women and POCOS. She said the pertinent question that arose was as to how this human rights shield provided to women under constitutional provisions and various legislation could be made beneficial to them.

She said there were various legislation in India which recognised women's human rights in form of their legal rights and provided protection to them. She said these laws were important for the overall empowerment of women. She said the right to live with dignity given under article 51 (A) (e) and it was a fundamental duty of every citizen of India to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

KNN to produce diesel from polythene waste

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar Nigam Executive Engineer RK Singh said the municipal corporation would produce diesel from garbage and the initial production would take off soon.

He said each day the KNN would produce 2,000 litres of diesel from polythene waste out of which it would consume 700 litres per day for its vehicles and sell the remaining diesel at 5 per cent reduced rate.

He said the KNN would set up its fuel station which would sell the excess diesel.

He said this project was on PPP model and the KNN had signed a MoU with Bhopal-based firm Pavitra India Waste Management Pvt Ltd.

He said the company would be provided land at Bhaupur and also polythene waste.

He said every day 200 tonnes of plastic waste was generated in the city and currently the KNN was preparing Refuse Derived Fuel RDF and selling to cement companies.

He said the diesel plant would become operative by February 2021.

He said the KNN would launch a drive to collect polythene waste from the city and carry it to the Bhaupur plant.

Cash and jewellery stolen from house of shopkeeper

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Cash and jewellery worth around Rs 2.50 lakh were stolen from the locked house of a cosmetic shop owner in Jarauli Phase-I in Barra police station area on Sunday night.

Ram Kumar Gupta runs a cosmetic shop in Barra-8 and lives with wife Sunita and son Sumit (10).

The marriage of Gupta's niece Gujaini was fixed for December 15 and to attend pre-marriage rituals, he had gone there with family members on Sunday and stayed there overnight.

On returning home on Monday, he found the locks of the main gate broken and the centre lock intact. After opening the centre lock and entering the house, he found the almirah open and household goods ransacked.

He said when the robbers failed to open the centre lock, they broke into the house through the balcony and escaped with cash amounting to Rs 40,000, jewellery worth Rs.2 lakh and other valuables.

UP Board students' database leaked

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Senior IPS officer Amitabh Thakur has sought immediate registration of an FIR and strong legal action in the alleged leakage of database of Class 10 and 12 students of the UP Board of Secondary Education to a private company. In his complaint sent to the Kanpur Nagar district police chief and others, Amitabh Thakur said that as per his information, a private company, Indees, situated in Raipurwa area, was selling database of Class 10 and 12 students of the UP Board at Rs 1,000 for one PIN code, Rs 3,500 for one city and Rs 6,500 for the state.

As per the company, it has database of 3,46,505 Class 10 students and 2,27,984 of Class 12 students of Uttar Pradesh.

This database includes name of the students, their fathers' name, email addresses and mobile phone numbers.

Amitabh Thakur said that procuring this database prima facie seems to be a serious criminal act. He said this database was the sole property of the UP Board of Secondary Education which had the responsibility of keeping the database safe. "Hence leak of this database to a private company is a serious matter. It is also serious violation of privacy of these students," he said, adding that an FIR should be immediately registered and strongest legal action should be taken against the persons concerned.

Gkp-Secunderabad special to run as per revised timetable

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration for the convenience of the passengers is making changes in the timings and days of run of the following special trains. Therefore, the passengers are requested that at the time of making reservation or before travelling, they should get information about the revised timetable of the trains. All coaches in these trains will be of reserved category and passengers traveling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines. Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Pankaj Kumar Singh said.

GKP-SECUNDERABAD

SPECIAL: The 02589 Gorakhpur-Secunderabad superfast weekly special train according to the revised timetable will from April 14, 2021, every Wednesday depart from Gorakhpur at 06.35 hrs, from Khalilabad at 07.15 hrs, from Basti at 07.44 hrs, from Mankapur at 08.28 hrs, from Gonda at 09.05 hrs, from Barabanki at 10.27 hrs, Badshahnagar at 11.04 hrs, Aishbagh at 11.50 hrs, Unnao at 12.42 hrs, Kanpur Central at 13.22 hrs, Pokhrayan at 14.15 hrs, Orai at 14.52 hrs, Jhansi at 16.45 hrs, Lalitpur at 17.50 hrs, Bhopal at 21.00 hrs, Itarsi at 22.50 hrs, Ghora Dongri at 23.50 hrs, from Betul on second day at 00.32 hrs, from Amla at 00.54 hrs, from Nagpur at 04.00 hrs, from Sevagram at 05.00 hrs, from Chandrapur at 06.35 hrs, from Balharshah at 07.45 hrs, from Sirpur Kagaznagar at 08.30 hrs, from Bellampalli at 09.00 hrs, from Manchiryal at 09.25 hrs, from Ramagundam

at 09.25 hrs, from Kazipet at 11.10 hrs and reach Secunderabad at 13.40 hrs. On the other hand, the 02590 Secunderabad-Gorakhpur superfast weekly special train will depart from Secunderabad at 21.35 hrs, from Kazipet at 22.23 hrs, from Ramagundam on second day at 00.35 hrs, from Manchiryal at 00.50 hrs, from Sirpur Kagajinagar at 01.42 hrs, from Balharshah at 03.20 hrs, from Chandrapur at 03.40 hrs, from Sevagram at 05.20 hrs, from Nagpur at 06.30 hrs, from Amla at 08.50 hrs, from Betul at 09.10 hrs, from Ghor Dongri at 09.48 hrs, from Itarsi at 11.55 hrs, from Bhopal at 13.50 hrs, from Lalitpur at 17.09 hrs, from Jhansi at 18.35 hrs, from Orai at 20.12 hrs, from Pokhrayan at 21.00 hrs., from Kanpur Central at 23.10 hrs., from Unnao at 23.44 hrs, the third day from Aishbagh at 00.58 hrs, from Badshahnagar at 01.20 hrs, from Barabanki at 02.05 hrs, from Gonda at 03.30 hrs, from Mankapur at 03.54 hrs, from Basti at 04.43 hrs, from Khalilabad at 05.12 hrs and will reach Gorakhpur at 06.25 hrs. In the special train a total of 22 coaches, including two of SLR/D, four of general second class, 11 of sleeper class, one of AC second class and four of AC third class.

GKP-PANVEL SPECIAL:

The 05065 Gorakhpur-Panvel special train, according to the revised timetable, will from April 10, 2021, depart from Gorakhpur at 05.30 hrs, every Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (five days a week), from Anandnagar at 06.20 hrs, from Shohratgarh at 06.47 hrs, from Shohratgarh at 07.08 hrs, from Barhani at

07.55 hrs, from Tulsipur at 08.35 hrs, from Jharkhandi at 08.59 hrs, from Balrampur at 09.20 hrs, from Gonda at 10.35 hrs, from Barabanki at 12.50 hrs, from Lucknow at 14.05 hrs, from Kanpur at 16.05 hrs, from Orai at 16.32 hrs, from Jhansi at 20.00 hrs, from Bina at 22.55 hrs, from Vidisha at 23.50 hrs, from Habibganj on second day at 00.50 hrs, from Itarsi at 02.40 hrs, from Harda at 03.34 hrs, from Khandwa at 05.40 hrs, from Bhusaval at 07.30 hrs, from Nashik Road at 10.55 hrs, from Kalyan at 13.45 hrs and reach Panvel at 14.50 hrs. During the return journey the 05066 Panvel-Gorakhpur special train will from April 10, 2021, depart from Panvel at 15.50 hrs every Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (five days a week), from Kalyan at 16.20 hrs, from Nasik Road at 19.25 hrs, from Bhusaval at 22.55 hrs, from Khandwa on second day at 01.10 hrs, from Harda at 02.26 hrs, from Itarsi at 03.40 hrs, from Habibganj at 05.05 hrs, from Vidisha at 06.00 hrs, from Jhansi at 09.25 hrs, from Orai at 11.05 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 13.50 hrs, from Lucknow at 15.45 hrs, from Barabanki at 16.55 hrs, from Gonda at 19.05 hrs, from Balrampur at 19.46 hrs, from Jharkhandi at 19.54 hrs, from Tulsipur at 20.18 hrs, from Barhani at 21.05 hrs, from Shohratgarh at 21.29 hrs, from Siddharthnagar at 21.51 hrs, from Anandnagar at 22.17 hrs and reach Gorakhpur at 00.20 hrs. A total of 23 coaches, including two of SLR/D, eight of general second class, nine of sleeper class, three of AC third class and one of AC second class will be attached in the train.

One arrested with intoxicating powder

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

The City Kotwali police arrested an accused along with 120 gms of intoxicating powder on Sunday. As per the reports, Ravikant Mishra, incharge Vasliganj police outpost, was on routine patrolling when he intercepted a suspect at GIC ground. On frisking him the police recovered 120 gms bn of the intoxicating powder. After recovering the powder the police registered a case under relevant sections of NDPS Act and sent the accused Amrit Lal, a resident of Mahuaria under City Kotwali police station to jail.

NABBED: The City Kotwali police on Sunday arrested one person who was accused of raping a woman. As per the reports, a 44-year-old woman had lodged an FIR through the court that Arvind Gupta, a resident of Civil Lines, had raped her at knife point. After registering the case the police arrested him from Bisundarpur. After completing the legal formalities the accused was sent to jail. Meanwhile the Chunar police have arrested one person who was accused of physically exploiting a girl. As per the police, the accused, Umashankar Sahni, a resident of Raipuria village, had developed a physical relationship with a girl and promised to marry her. When she became pregnant she exerted pressure on him to marry her he not only refused to do so but manhandled her too. Her father lodged an FIR against the accused alleged-

ing that he along with his friend had enticed his 18-year-old daughter. The accused then developed physical relationship with her as a result of she became pregnant, he stated further. After registering a case the police arrested the main accused and launched a search for his accomplice, last reports received here said.

On the other hand, following a complaint a case of molestation and under SC/ST Act was registered against Pushparaj at Halia police station on Sunday. The victim had submitted an application to CO Lalganj Bhanu Prakash. On his intervention the case was registered at the Halia police station.

PROJECT MILAN: Under Project Milan 15 couples got reunited through the meeting of Parivar Paramarsh Kendra held at Police Lines



on Sunday. Through the counselling by the members of the centre the married couples agreed to live together. They were residing separately due to some misunderstanding. In a amicable atmosphere the 15 couples reunited and set out for their residences thanking the members.

One killed, three hurt in mishaps

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

One person was killed and three others were injured in separate road accidents under Campierganj police station on Sunday. The condition of the injured was critical, last reports received here said. It is learnt that two persons were injured in an accident near Mahavankhor intersection at 10 am on Sunday. Besides Amit Kumar (24), son of Ramvilas, a resident of Madha under the Peepeeaganj police station, was injured when he

was hit by a car while he was going to Campierganj on a motorcycle in connection with some work. In another incident a cyclist was seriously injured when he was hit by an unknown vehicle on Sonauli highway near the Campierganj petrol pump. On getting information the police took the injured to the CHC in unconscious state where the doctors on duty declared him dead. The deceased was identified as Chedi Beldar, a resident of Bajaha village under Campierganj. The police sent

his body for the post-mortem examination. Meanwhile some car-borne miscreants kidnapped an elderly man, Ramdhari, a resident of Amwa village under the Chiluaat police station, and looted ₹50,000. After the loot they escaped leaving him in the Bhatat area and threatened to kill him if he reported the matter to the police. The victim later reported the incident to the police and the outpost incharge also inspected the spot. According to police, the incident is being investigated.

Special dialogue on safety organised

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

A special dialogue on safety was organised at NTPC Rihand station. Executive Director (Rihand) Balaji Iyengar who was the chief guest at the event said safety is our top priority. He said it is our collective responsibility to ensure that every worker working who entered the premises returned safely. While stating that regular pep talk and tool box talk were important he laid emphasis on organising them regularly. Apart from them every personnel should be given training and work guidelines in easy language from time to time. Earlier the ED while speaking in detail about the new safety app 2.0 launched by Chairman and Managing Director NTPC Limited, urged everyone to load it in their



Executive Director (Rihand) Balaji Iyengar addressing the special dialogue on safety

mobile phones at the earliest and use it. Talking about the subject, he said the more we register unsafe activities and conditions and take action on them on time the faster we will move towards a better and safer work culture. Manager (Safety) Mukesh Kumar conducted the programme on the occasion. The

programme was attended by General Manager (Maintenance) S Sri Krishna, GM (Operations) A Kumar Chattopadhyay, GM (Maintenance Plan) Kailash Chandra Tripathi, the heads of departments and NTPC personnel. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks being proposed by Kumar.

Farmer groups meet Tomar, support farm laws



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At least 10 organisations representing farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Bihar and Haryana and associated with the All India Kisan Coordination Committee (AIKCC) on Monday met Union agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar to lend their support to the three farm laws and advised to allow the existing mandi system under the control of State Government in Punjab and other States which were opposing it. This is the fifth group of farmers who have extended support to the laws in the last one week.

After the meeting, the agriculture Minister said that the Government is engaging with farmers' leaders to decide on the next date of talks. "The Government is ready for discussion anytime. The farmer leaders have to 'decide and convey' when they are ready for the next meeting," Tomar added.

"We tried to convince farm-

ers and farmer unions' leaders. Our wish is that they come for clause-by-clause discussion. If they are ready to express their views clause by clause, we are ready for discussion," he said. Tomar also met Home Minister Amit Shah and discussed the way forward to end the deadlock.

Led by its General Secretary Gunavath Patil Hangergekar, the AIKCC, which has presence in 28 States, submitted a representation to the Agriculture Minister seeking continuation of the three farm laws, though with some amendments.

The farmers unions have urged the Government to encourage those States who are ready to implement the agri reforms. They also demanded to abolish the essential commodities Act.

On Sunday, a delegation of more than 100 farmers from Uttarakhand had extended their support to the laws. Before that, a delegation of 29 farmers from Haryana met Tomar on Saturday to extend their support to the new

BJP raps Cong, AAP for misleading farmers just for sake of political gains

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Citing its serial win in the State and local bodies elections across the country, the BJP on Monday claimed that farmers and the "poor" are standing with the party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the new farm laws and hit-out at the Congress and AAP for allegedly "misleading" farmers for "achieving" their "own political ends".

As the stand-off with the Central government and agitating farmers calling for the roll-back of three new farm laws is nearing three weeks, the BJP has stepped up its efforts to collect support for the Government even as it also attacks the opposition for its alleged attempts to exploit farmers' protest on the outskirts of Delhi.

"Since the notification of new farm laws, BJP has won all elections be it Bihar Assembly polls or local bodies elections in Hyderabad (Telangana), Rajasthan, Assam, Arunachal

Pradesh and latest in Goa 'Zila Panchayat' polls...it says loud that 'gaon, garib aur kisan' BJP aur Modiji ke Saath hain", announced BJP's national spokesperson Sambit Patra here at a press conference.

Counting the results of Goa 'Zila Panchayat' results where he said BJP was inching towards majority mark (already winning 27 out of 48 seats vis-a-vis three of the Congress). Patra said without the support of "gaon, garib aur kisan", who form the spine of this country, the BJP would not have won all these elections. Lashing out at Congress and AAP leader and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal for "creating confusion among farmers" and "misleading" them,

BJP spokesperson said both the opposition parties tried to "lay siege to Prime Minister Modi on four issues of Coronavirus, economic crisis, migrant labourers and new farm laws but badly lost

the farm laws passed by Parliament in September and demanded the Government to continue with these legislations.

Last week, farmers, representing Har Kisan, an organi-

out..."

Claiming that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who "knows little about agriculture" and may "confuse Rabi and Kharif crops with the names of BJP workers", he said, "Rahul is spreading confusion among farmers".

"Farm agitation has turned into a fight of political parties..Punjab CM Attacking Delhi CM...they have forgotten farmers", said BJP leader.

Pointing out that AAP, which also contested in Goa local body polls and scored a duck, Patra quipped "Kejriwal Goa main Zero hain, yahan hero hain..".

He said it was Kejriwal who had said that if his party were to be in power in Punjab, "he would remove middle-men and reform APMC. "You notified farm bill in Delhi and are now sitting on hunger strike,," the BJP leader said condemning the "double-faced stand" of AAP.

sation of 116 farmer-owned agricultural enterprises known as farmer producer organisations, met the agriculture minister and asked for a separate meeting with him with more members.

India plans to establish regional climate centre for Himalayan mountain region

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After China, India is also planning to establish a regional climate centre (RCC) for the Himalayan mountain region which will not only provide weather-related advice within the country but also to its neighbours. The RCC is likely to come up in Delhi. The centre will provide weather-related services specially for the farmers and tribes residing there.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutunjay Mohapatra the work for establishing such a centre has already begun and talks are also on with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). China is also building a similar regional climate centre on its side of the Himalayas.

Addressing a webinar on 'Weather and Climate Services over Mountains Region', Mohapatra said India has the eastern ghats, western ghats along the east and the west coast and the Myanmar hills in the northeast. Considering the size of Himalayas and its role in India's hydrology, meteorology, disaster management, ecosystem and many other activities, the world has correctly recognised it as the 'third pole of the world', he noted.

As a part of the ecosystem, as a part of the land, ocean, atmosphere system, the moun-



tains, including the Himalayas and all other hill ranges play a significant role, Mohapatra stressed. Being a data sparse region, the relative observational network is limited as compared to the plain ranges of the country, Mohapatra observed. He said there is a scope to improve further the physical understanding of various processes occurring in these mountains regions, their modelling and hence the forecasting and warning services.

"At the same time, we have to develop the climate applications scenarios, especially with respect to water sector, industries, tourism, agriculture, specifically in these mountains regions."We are planning to establish a regional climate centre for the mountains region and it will be providing advices not only to India but also to the entire region in the Himalayas," he

said.

Himansh, the country's remote and high altitude research centre, established in 2016, will also undertake weather research activities in the Himalayas. Mohapatra said natural calamities in Himalayas like the earthquakes are well-recognised — the heavy rainfall leading to cloud bursts and also many other phenomena that affect the local agriculture, local industry, local bio-system, local lives. Mohapatra said a lot of initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Earth Sciences and IMD for augmentation of observational network with deployment of doppler radars and automated weather stations and with the development of region specific numerical models and application activities with improvement in forecast activities and warning services.

Temp may fall by three lto five degrees Celsius during next 4 days: IMD



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday predicted a fall in temperature by three to five degree Celsius over most parts of northwest India during the next four days after snow falls in Jammu and Kashmir and Himalayan region. Parts of northern India experienced snowfall on Sunday, leading to temperatures below 'zero' degrees Celsius in Jammu and Kashmir. Cold weather conditions prevailed in many parts North West India.

"There will be no significant change in minimum temperatures over most parts of Central and East India during the next two-three days and then fall by two-four degrees Celsius thereafter", the IMD said.

According to IMD, during the next 24 hours, "cold day to severe cold day conditions"

are very likely at a few places over Punjab, and "cold day conditions" are very likely at isolated places over Haryana, Chandigarh, and northwest Rajasthan.

The IMD said the ski-resort of Gulmarg registered minus 7.6 degrees Celsius and was the coldest place in Jammu and Kashmir. Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 3.2 degrees Celsius, while the night temperature in Kokernag settled at minus 2.3 degrees Celsius. Mercury dipped below freezing point in Mount Abu, the sole hill station of Rajasthan, where the night temperature was 0.4 degrees Celsius. In the plains, Sikar was the coldest place with a minimum of 4.5 degrees Celsius. Hisar in Haryana recorded a low of 6.2 degrees Celsius. In Punjab, Amritsar experienced a cold night at 5.6 degrees Celsius.

"Dense fog very likely in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, northwest Rajasthan, northwest Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Sub Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura on December 14," the IMD said.

Connect, concentration and counseling necessary for children's well-being during Covid: Vardhan



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With about one in 10 children and young people suffering from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and conduct disorder across the world, Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Monday outlined 3Cs—connect, concentration and counseling — as the three mantras for the well being of the impressionable minds, particularly during the Corona pandemic.

"We should understand that children go through critical stages of mental health during their childhood and adolescent times. Also due to the pressure of studies, competition and a new change of living style due to the involvement of technology in our lives it becomes necessary to talk about mental health issues of our children," said Dr. Harsh Vardhan after inaugurating a e-conclave on mental health for



children organised by Affordable Private School s' Association and The Life is Beautiful Foundation.

The tendency of stress, anxiety, anger and depression have increased within our children nowadays, he said adding that connection with family, friends and society is one important aspect which gives a sense of security and platform to discuss personal problems.

The concentration attained through Yoga is another very important tool for building a calm and stress-free mind while counselling of children in case of any issue like stress, anxiety and fear is another important area which must be available for our children, the Minister added.

Lakshya Chhabaria, President of Affordable Private schools' Association, said that the aim to hold such an e-conclave is to understand kids

related issues like emotions, behaviour and perceptions and solutions.

Jyoti Arora, Principal Mount Abu Public School, Rohini cautioned against over-exposure of digital technologies, while Dr. Rajesh Sagar, Professor, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, pointed out that there's a myth that children do not have mental health problems. "If a child is sad for more than 2 weeks then he has depression issues which must be taken care of," he pointed out and called for integration of mental health services with mainstream health services.

In fact, Saad Omer, Director of the Yale Institute of Global Health, in another event recently organized by his institute had cautioned that the Covid pandemic's silent killer is having its impact on people's mental health, particularly children.

Maha Govt happy to cooperate in restoring INS Viraat: Chaturvedi's letter to Def Ministry



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi has written to the Defence Ministry saying the Maharashtra Government is "happy to cooperate in restoring and preserving the historical ship" INS Viraat, which served as India's aircraft carrier. "It was with great sadness and concern [that] I read that the scrapping of the historic INS Viraat has been initiated at Alang in Gujarat," Chaturvedi, the Shiv Sena MP wrote in her letter to Defence Minister Rajtanth Singh.

The letter, which asks the Defence Ministry for a no-objection certificate to preserve Viraat, comes at a time when the decommissioned warship is being pulled ashore by a ship-breaker in Alang before it is destroyed for scrap.

"We as a nation must use our decommissioned naval ships to help citizens to better understand the significance



The letter, which asks the Defence Ministry for a no-objection certificate to preserve Viraat, comes at a time when the decommissioned warship is being pulled ashore by a ship-breaker in Alang before it is destroyed for scrap

of India's maritime history. It saddens me further to note that

though there is an offer to convert the warship into a maritime museum, it awaits a no-objection certificate from the Ministry of Defence for transfer of the warship," Chauturvedi said.

The letter comes following series of media reports which highlighted the plight of Viraat, the decommissioned Indian Navy warship which was India's flagship for several decades and came to define India's maritime power. Before being commissioned into the Indian Navy in 1986, Viraat served as HMS Hermes in the Royal Navy where she fought with distinction in the Falkland Islands war in 1982 in the south Atlantic.

SC asks Centre to apprise it of steps taken so far by CAQM to tackle air pollution



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to apprise it about the steps taken so far by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas to tackle air pollution.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde was told by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, that the gov-

ernment is readying a comprehensive affidavit to be filed in the apex court in the matter.

"You file your affidavit," said the bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian.

The top court said the affidavit should have details of what steps have been taken till now by the Commission.

During the proceedings conducted through video-conferencing, the apex court, which was hearing the matters

relating to air pollution in Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), was told that the Commission has not done anything.

"The committee has 14 members but they have not done anything. They should file some affidavit," senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for petitioner Aditya Dubey who has raised the issue of pollution caused due to stubble burning in neighbouring states of Delhi, said

CBI books Mumbai-based Soni Ispat Limited for fraud in credit facilities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked Mumbai-based Soni Ispat Ltd for alleged fraud in connection with credit facilities availed by it from Bank of India.

The case under Indian Penal Code Sections relating to criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust by public servant and cheating under Indian Penal Code and criminal misconduct under Prevention of Corruption Act was registered on a complaint from Bank of India.

Besides the firm, five individuals including promoter/directors have been named as accused in the case.

The fraud, according to the FIR, was allegedly committed by siphoning and diversion of funds, causing loss of public money to the tune of Rs 12.12 crore and uncharged interest of Rs 16.83 crore by the accused firm.

"Soni Ispat Ltd during the year 2008-11 entered into criminal conspiracy with unknown public servants to commit fraud upon the Bank



The fraud, according to the FIR, was allegedly committed by siphoning and diversion of funds, causing loss of public money to the tune of ₹12.12 crore and uncharged interest of ₹16.83 crore by the accused firm

and in pursuance thereof have fraudulently obtained credit facilities from Bank of India, and siphoned off/diverted the loan amount and thereby caused wrongful gain to themselves and wrongful loss

High blood pressure accelerates decline in memory, verbal fluency: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

High blood pressure appears to accelerate a decline in cognitive performance which includes memory, verbal fluency, attention and concentration in middle-aged and older adults, according to a study published in Hypertension, an American Heart Association journal.

Although the participants of the study were adults from Brazil, the findings are applicable to India too where hypertension is the most important risk factor for chronic disease burden. Studies from various parts of India have reported high prevalence of hypertension. To make the matter worse, hypertension is increasing and there is low awareness and control in India.

Blood pressure of 120 mmHg - 129 mmHg systolic (the top number in a reading) or higher is considered elevated. Systolic pressure above 130 mmHg, or diastolic pressure (the bottom number) of 80 mmHg or higher is considered hypertension.

"We initially anticipated that the negative effects of hypertension on cognitive function would be more crit-

ical when hypertension started at a younger age, however, our results show similar accelerated cognitive performance decline whether hypertension started in middle age or at older ages," said study author Sandhi M Barreto, Professor of medicine at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

"We also found that effectively treating high blood pressure at any age in adulthood could reduce or prevent this acceleration. Collectively, the findings suggest hypertension needs to be prevented, diagnosed and effectively treated in adults of any age to preserve cognitive function."

Barreto and colleagues analyzed findings from an existing study that included blood pressure and cognitive health information for more than 7,000 adults in Brazil, whose average age was about 59 years old at the study's start. The study participants were followed for an average of nearly 4 years; testing included analysis of memory, verbal fluency and executive function, which includes attention, concentration and other factors associated with thinking and reasoning.

Now, hunger strike

As the farmers mount pressure and remain intransigent, the Govt seeks more discussion. Will price guarantee work for it?



This is unlike any other civil protest in recent times and has outlasted them in terms of commitment to a cause, unity despite provocation or temptation and a determination to be heard. The farmers' intransigence would seem egoistic in the face of liberalisation of the agricultural sector and reforms which are intended to set up an enabling architecture for increasing its GDP percentage. But the farmers fear that the gains of the new farm laws would not percolate down to them and have rightly expressed fears of their negotiating power losing out to the largescale corporatisation it involves. And the Government, by pushing the laws in

haste, has lost out on the virtues of consensus that could have ensured acceptance of its policies and addressed the angst of farmers. And though it is considering a clause-by-clause discussion on the Acts now, the fact is the farmers' protests have now escalated across the country: From demonstrations, sit-ins and road blockades to hunger strikes now. For its part, the Government is no longer relying only on Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar but, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah stepping in, even high-profile Ministers with heartland appeal like Rajnath Singh are playing the negotiator. Singh said the recent reforms had been undertaken with the best interests of "farmer brothers" in mind and that agriculture was one sector that had managed to avoid the lows of a pandemic-hit economy and had ensured the nation's food security. But the reconciliatory moves so far have not yielded any results, with the farmers still firm on the repeal of the farm laws. They simply want a level playing field. Experts may argue that the protest is largely being spearheaded by agitationists from Punjab and Haryana, who have benefitted since the Green Revolution because of the Government's guaranteed pickup of volumes and fixed rates, namely the Minimum Support Price (MSP), and are stuck on cash-rich prospects of wheat and rice. Of course, this assurance has meant an over-dependence on water-intensive crops like paddy and wheat, which is depleting aquifers and crop diversity. However, farmers argue that they would be incentivised to grow other crops provided the MSP was guaranteed for all and not selectively and new laws alone would not even out the imbalance. In the end, the Government has to give a price guarantee of sorts as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) has itself become unremunerative given rising input costs. Farmers are naturally wary of competitive prices in the open market that would lower their earnings. In such a scenario, the Government has to probably do some direct cash transfers to them, grading their capacities, as a transitional measure to a new system. The reason why farmers are not buying into its claim that MSP and Government *mandis* will co-exist is because price equalisation in an open market would mean that the parallel market would be weakened over time.

Of course, the small and marginal farmers, the lot of whom the Acts intend to improve, would still be dependent on some sort of mediatory intervention to deal with food majors. With most of them not literate enough about exercising their rights, dispute resolution could also end up being loaded against them. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, seeks to bring uniformity in contractual farming rules and State APMC Acts. So the farmer can now enter into a contract with a corporate entity at a mutually agreed price. The problem here is that the mechanism for price fixation is not codified and farmers fear that corporations could use their might to manipulate or browbeat them into accepting their terms. Finally, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, aims to remove cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from a regulated list, which is being seen as a major threat to the food security of the poor. Besides, most farmers do not have or cannot afford the post-harvest warehousing and processing storage this involves. They would willy nilly have to depend on food corporations. A licence won't be required to trade in farm produce and anyone with a PAN card can now buy directly from the farmers. Growers want they be registered too, considering they have a trusted bond with their existing commission agents, as their licence is proof enough of their credibility and delivery abilities. Governments like Punjab are obviously upset that access to another market would dry up their own revenue from their APMC *mandis* and are seeing this as an affront to federal controls. Farmers are not entirely without reason, battling as they are bad loans and non-payment of sugarcane dues in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. They do not want to be swamped. And while the Opposition is hoping to make good on a political capital that farmers are, the fact is they themselves are not throwing up any pragmatic alternatives. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which had initially stayed away from the farmers' stir, is now deciding to fast with them. Yet the Opposition disunity is the reason that it failed to block the Ordinance on farm reforms or muster enough numerical strength to shout out the ruling party in the Rajya Sabha, force a debate and discussion in the House or at least make sure that the legislation was scrutinised by parliamentary committees. Of course, farmers have not let parties take the upper hand and are in it for the long haul. For the Government, it's impossible to go back unless it brings in another supportive law to convince farmers that they won't be cheated in the end.

It's Pink!

India will play Adelaide day-night Test with Kookaburra



This isn't India's first dance with a day-night Test but the first such match in strange away conditions. India has a lot of selection dilemmas ahead of the first Test in Australia that is being played at the Adelaide Oval. Ordinarily, this would have been written about in passing, just another Test series between India and Australia, the two pre-eminent cricket powers in the world, no matter what the English think. Yet, as we all know, this has been no ordinary year and the very fact that India is ending 2020 playing a Test match might have seemed improbable back in July or August. But the Indian Premier League and the first half of the Indian tour of Australia have passed without much of a Coronavirus scare and India surprised punters by even being competitive in the white-ball matches. But the Test in Adelaide is a first for India as it is our first away day-night match and even though India played a day-night match against Bangladesh at Eden Gardens, this one is being played with the strange (to Indian players) Kookaburra pink ball and will be a unique test of skill.

It could also be a preview of future India-Australia series, with the day-night fixtures being far more attractive to Indian television audiences who will be spared a five o'clock alarm, given that the first session starts at a surprisingly attractive 2.30 PM India time. The fact is that more day-night Tests in Australia will allow for more viewers in India, thanks to the vagaries of time zones and ergo, more television (and online) advertising revenue for the rights holders. This could work well with day-night Tests in India with England as well. Few other global sports have innovated as much as cricket with three recognised and popular formats, and even changes to those formats. Purists might argue that the constant tinkering devalues the sport, but it also brings in a whole new fan base not just in established markets but across the world. *The Financial Times* recently reported that a new IPL-style franchise cricket league is being created in the United States and, with the significant diaspora population in the US, not just Indians but also those from the Caribbean and England, cricket is possibly the most innovative of all major global sports. If this day-night Test fixture between the top two cricketing nations works, the sky might be the limit.

Budget for compassion

The Government's Budget-making exercise in COVID times must handhold the domestic industry as well as look for resource mobilisation avenues



BINDU DALMIA ATUL JOSHI

Closer to the Union Budget-making exercise, Finance Ministers are compelled to recall Kautilya's "capacity to pay" principle from the *Arthashastra* that a tax collector should collect taxes "just as a bee collects honey from a flower, without disturbing its petals". For fiscal 2021/22, this will be a daunting task as any FM would rather sting like the bee from any source that yielded supernatural gains while remaining benign towards the most afflicted sectors. The focus of this article is to put oneself into the Government's shoes and suggest possible avenues for raising revenues while also offering relief, where necessary.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that for each month of containment, there is a need to factor in two per cent loss of annual GDP. The IMF advises that during periods of hardship, Governments must go slow in restoring public finances as raising taxes must be commensurate with resumption of economic activity.

As India entered the crisis with weak balance sheets in banks, shadow banks and corporates, their current state of recovery or indebtedness cannot be determined till the next fiscal year due to moratoriums and the 'standstill clause' in operation to avoid the NPA tag on COVID-hit companies that have gone in for restructuring loans. Should some sectors have gotten further singled in the last nine months, two risks get compounded: The systemic risks of increased NPAs; and the increased number of retail loans coming under pressure due to debt servicing limitations of borrowers whose income growth is uncertain.

Central avenues for taxation: Ideally, how should countries tax after the pandemic?

As nations compete for investment and jobs, taxation is one of the competitive levers to attract FDI as well as to encourage domestic consumption and Capex expansion.

But most likely, new taxes on the "super profits" of digital internet companies will be the key avenue for raising revenue. We, therefore, must think of applying a higher corporate tax rate on large corporations in 'oligopolised' sectors with excess rates of return, just for a limited one-year period.

Second, though wealth tax was abolished in 2015-16, the



scope for raising just one-time revenues through this avenue cannot be underestimated in the post-COVID times. However, this does not call for reverting permanently to the days of wealth tax and estate duty as that would amount to unfair and double taxation.

Indians who have made it to the world's richest lists must be taxed progressively higher than a normal HNI. Super-HNIs, according to the *IIFL Wealth Hurun India Rich List 2019*, have an average net worth of ₹5,000 crore among the 953 richest Indians. Their combined net worth is a quarter of India's GDP. Levying even a one-time, say a four per cent, WT on them can yield much-needed additional resources. Such provisions should be one-off in nature, applicable for just one fiscal year.

Other prospective avenues for raising revenue are: **Introduce Leave Travel & Stay Allowance (LTSA):**

While high-frequency data points to a firm recovery in consumption, manufacturing, retail, housing and consumer durables, the losses in the contact-intensive services sectors of aviation, tourism and hospitality have suffered irrecoverable losses.

Every rupee spent on tourism has a threefold impact on the economy. Tourism creates maximum employment across the economic classes of labour. One way to boost tourism is to announce a relief package directly impacting the expenditure budget of the Government. The other is to announce benefits to the masses. The existing Leave Travel Allowance scheme is riddled with several strictures.

The Government may introduce LTSA as deductible income for FY22 and FY23 provided it is spent only in India, allow hotel and stay expenses and multiple vacations be allowed. The Government may recover the

tax foregone through increased spending and GST recovery. **Education Fee Deduction:**

The education fee deduction was set up many decades ago at ₹200 per child. Today it will not cover the cost of even a textbook. This needs reinstatement to realistic levels. A deduction of ₹25,000 for formal education from pre-primary to graduation level or its equivalent and ₹50,000 for Post-Graduation/professional courses per child annually for a maximum of two children should be allowed. This will help achieve Sustainable Development Goals as set by the UN and adopted by India.

Special WFH Allowance:

People have had to redesign their homes for creating work space and have incurred expenses to that effect. A special allowance of ₹1,00,000 must be allowed for FY 2020-21 and FY 2021-22. The actual expense incurred to redesign, repair, purchase PCs, laptops, internet devices and so on should be allowed.

Special levy on fliers:

The Government may impose a special COVID levy of ₹500 on the economy class and ₹1,000 on business class on international travel. A special levy of ₹100 may be imposed on domestic air travellers. By imposing a small amount, the travel is not rendered uneconomical. The Government may make a revenue of ₹3,500 crore from seven crore international travellers and ₹3,000 crore from 30 crore domestic travellers.

Creation of strategic holding companies for banks, PSUs and infrastructure: The Government should transfer its holdings in all banks, PSUs and special institutions such as NABARD, NHAI, PFC and REC to a sector-specific holdco. This holdco should receive funding from the Government which can be lever-

aged and then given to operating companies as debt or equity. This will ease the Government's burden of supporting companies through fiscal allocation.

The Government may contribute Viability Gap Funding (VGF) as equity in holdcos which, in turn, invests the same as equity in infrastructure projects. The repayment of debt of holdcos could be from dividend income and/or sale of investment. Holdco structure would allow timing of disinvestment instead of fire-sale. Besides, consolidation of land holdings of subsidiaries could help achieve affordable housing targets as well.

Also, nations will be in a wait-and-watch mode before recalibrating their domestic policies depending on whether the Joe Biden administration retains status quo on Donald Trump era's taxation which lowered corporate rates to 25 per cent.

Future avenues for State taxation:

The ratio of States' debt to GDP is poised to rise to a decadal high of 36 per cent this fiscal, according to a CRISIL report. Given the massive tax shortfall due to higher spending on health and relief measures, States must look to enhance their own tax base through the avenues still within their purview, like agriculture and land by:

Affluent farmers' net income above ₹1 crore must come under the tax net by taking a three-year average of earnings (permitting them this benefit due to climate variations). In 1969, the KN Raj Committee had first initiated the suggestion to tax farm income. But it has never been acted upon as political considerations have outweighed economic considerations. There is no economic rationale for excluding such large earners

out of the tax base. Since this will require a constitutional amendment with the support of States, let the entire proceeds of such collections devolve upon States as *quid pro quo*. This will also reduce the devolution commitment of the Union. The sense of inequitable treatment will be addressed that emanates from this sector getting the largesse of farm loan incentives without tax obligations. Taxing income of *arhatiyas* needs to be introduced given high income levels. As per the Panjab University, Patiala, report of 2016, in Punjab alone around ₹1,400 crore was outstanding as loan from *arhatiyas* at 12 per cent to 18 per cent interest.

Lowering of stamp duty, as Maharashtra and Gujarat have done, will increase construction activity and bring in more revenue through economic activity. Lowering stamp duty in conjunction with low interest rates is a big incentive for home buyers. The case for lowering stamp duty varies between 2 per cent to 7 per cent. This reduction will boost real estate transactions, encourage price transparency and encourage fuller declaration of capital gains.

Lastly, it is time to dispense with an aggressive, adversarial and target-oriented tax department for encouraging compliance and reducing litigation. The taxpayer must be treated as partner in nation building. For building a stronger India, it is imperative for the policy-makers to balance welfare with growth; laying out a red carpet that facilitates FDI but also handholds all sections of the domestic industry.

(Dalmia is a columnist and Chairperson NCFIL at Niti Aayog and Joshi is Founder & CEO Oyster Capital and ex-CEO India Ratings)

SOUNDBITE

The Government is ready to renegotiate with farmer leaders and when the real leaders come forward, they will find avenues for solutions.



Agriculture Minister
—Narendra Singh Tomar

We must acknowledge the then governments of India and the UK for bringing Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman back home alive in 1972.



B'desh Foreign Minister
—AK Abdul Momen

Asians are at the top of most companies in this country. We are killing it in America. We are gaining both visibility and power. The recent election was our coming out party.



US actor of Indian origin
—Ravi Patel

Our fitness tests in the strength, weight, speed and muscle components show we are on target. We are close to the level we showcase in international matches.



Indian hockey head coach
—Graham Reid

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Be cautious on farm laws

Sir — The Opposition and many trade bodies are opportunistically supporting the farmer agitation, reminiscent of when a moribund BJP revived itself by jumping onto the Anna Hazare-led India Against Corruption bandwagon.

Now the boot is on the other foot. The ruling party is trying to discredit farmer leaders and attempting to drive a wedge among their groupings. There is genuine fear that APMCs may collapse as a result of these laws and farmers will then be at the mercy of corporates. When procurement through MSP is delayed or denied, farmers under duress will fall into the clutches of corporations run by oligarchs.

The unsolved question, therefore, is how to ensure that the reforms do not lead to monopoly or cartelisation? Equally important is the issue of federalism, as agriculture is a State subject. The States play a critical role in the sector but they have scarcely been involved in the passing of farm laws. If the Government admits that no one has a magic formula for societal and economic problems, it will open up avenues for dialogue and lead to faster and amicable solutions.

Shovanlal Chakraborty
Kolkata

New Parliament building has little value

The NDA Government's "new Parliament" is all set for take-off. The Central Vista project's launch has attracted both bouquets and brickbats. PM Narendra Modi's ambition is to ensure that the upscale building is ready for India's 75th Independence Day celebration in 2020. The Centre has said it wants to free up the Lutyens space and bring more Government ministries under a common roof, apart from housing the Vice-President and the Prime Minister.

Also, since the freeze on the number of Parliament seats is going to end in 2026 and it would pave the way for delimitation, States are likely to send more representation to the Lower House, and consequently to the Upper House, through possible amendments. It will necessitate more space.

But what about the mammoth cost to be incurred? ₹20,000 crore is no small change.

What's wrong with the existing building? It is a 93-year-old imposing structure which is not just a building. It symbolises the spirit of Indian democracy that has stood the test of time. Yes, the structure looks old, but it looks grand. The massive colonial product has been made their own by Indian leaders over the years. The very fact that the Government plans to convert the old Parliament into a muse-



um has pained observers.

Felling of innumerable trees to make way for the sprawling 64,500 sq m building is another hotly disputed issue that has threatened to go out of hand. It is clear that laws and guidelines pertaining to land clearance and environment were bypassed while visualising and executing the 'new Parliament' plan. The Opposition parties have cried foul; of course they were not consulted because the Centre would rather rush ahead with a grand project which would have anyway met with their disapproval.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Farmers beat COVID?

Sir — Lakhs of farmers are protesting against the three farm laws for the past 20 days but not a single Coronavirus case has been reported from the huge gatherings. It leads one to wonder whether the figures and data released by the Government are bogus and aimed only at creating

fear to extract money from the people in the form of treatment and facilities by doctors, hospitals, testing laboratories and chemists.

This has resulted in some people not reporting COVID symptoms and taking home treatment to avoid being cheated by health professionals who are looting patients. However, the farmers are well organised in the

aspect of healthcare and have a medical team with them.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Cheetah times return

Sir — After 70 long years, cheetah is going to be reintroduced on Indian soil. The apex wildlife body of India has started evaluating sites for the big cat's reintroduction.

The site evaluators must think hard about the required prey base, water availability, climate and topography before shortlisting/ finalising the sites. Also, for the longevity of this project, a suitable budget must be allocated for anti-poaching squads, CCTVs, drones and other paraphernalia. From environmental bio-diversity to sustainable tourism, all points of view seem to merge into what looks like a win-win situation.

Sunil Chilwal
Haldwani

Cattle insurance scheme

Sir — The Madhya Pradesh Government has launched 'Pashu Dhan Bima Yojana' under which an insurance cover would be offered to indigenous cattle owned by farmers. This will help them mitigate the losses they suffer due to the death of their cattle.

The scheme has been implemented across the State. It is a welcome step and one hopes that the scheme will benefit the maximum number of farmers and encourage them to adopt animal husbandry as a livelihood option.

Amit Singh Kushwaha
Satna

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Reimagine healthcare

In the future, telehealth benefits for employees will be an integral component of a firm's plans for the well-being of its staff



VIKRAM THAPLOO

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed healthcare to the forefront of every organisation's agenda. Businesses across the world have adapted to telecommuting, reconfigured work environments and logistics and updated operating protocols to cope with the effects of the global health emergency. While there has always been a correlation between the health of the population and the economy, never has it been more apparent than in the COVID era. Governments across the globe have realised that investing in the health of the population can not only improve the quality of life of citizens and mitigate the risk of a public health crisis, it can lead to greater economic returns and productivity, too.

The pandemic is set to cause a 4.5 per cent permanent loss to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), say experts. Poor health and loss of productive potential among the working population will only make things more difficult. If we want to achieve a healthier nation and minimise economic losses, we need to shift the focus to preventive care. A large percentage of economic benefits can be achieved with safer work environments, increasing access to medicines, preventive care and by encouraging workers to adopt healthier lifestyles. The rest will come from timely treatment of diseases with proven medical interventions.

Change is imperative: The switch to prevention is easier said than done. Not only does it necessitate the need to shift incentives in the existing healthcare systems to health promotion, but it foregrounds the need to make better health a policy prerogative, too. The contagion has also highlighted the importance of tackling non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which have been one of the leading causes of India's disease burden. NCDs are responsible for 61 per cent of the deaths in the country, and we need to focus on scaling up screening programmes and awareness drives to address chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, heart and lung diseases, stroke and cancer. A paradigm shift to focus on preventive care can be realised at a low cost and the implementation costs will be more than offset by the gains to productivity in healthcare delivery.

Time to rethink the healthcare architecture: The outbreak has demonstrated that it is possible to reevaluate healthcare service delivery. Reimagining workforce and patient flow in COVID-19 wards and a move to teleconsultations are just two notable transitions. People are already demonstrating that it is not that difficult to induce a behavioural shift by showing their readiness to wear masks, prioritise hand hygiene and reduce person-to-person interactions in order to help curtail the spread of the virus.

The contagion has also fast-tracked innovation and collaboration by scientists across the globe. If this is sustained, it can help us address major health conditions like cardiovascular diseases, cancers and mental health disorders. As of September this year, scientists have shared more than 50,000 genome sequences and close to 200 vaccines are in different stages of development. Many of these are the result of multi-sectoral, transnational collusions. Companies are playing a key role in the ongoing transformation and pharmaceutical giants, healthcare providers and the medical technology industry are an integral part of the pandemic response. They should further come up with ways to build on innovations and help do their part in the ongoing remodeling of healthcare systems. They must ensure the alignment of incentives and efficient collaboration to improve the overall health and prosperity of the population.

The corporate world needs to adapt: Companies outside the healthcare domain are also adapting to the crisis by revamping their organisational workflow and operation models. There is a strong economic case to be made for the need to invest in the health of their employees. In today's fast-paced and hectic corporate world, occupational risks are increasingly linked to mental health triggers, sleep hygiene and the level of physical activity. Mental health, too, is fast becoming a concern as the economic uncertainty associated with the pandemic is beginning to take its toll. Chronic conditions like migraines, back pain and mental health problems like anxiety and depression can reduce the productivity of workers and have a negative effect on the quality of life. Companies should seriously consider providing greater access to mental health services and more flexible working hours.

Encouraging workers to take advantage of telehealth and virtual programmes is the first step. Times like these bring a lot of uncertainty and anxiety, and people feel the need to talk to a counsellor. Mobility restrictions not only make that more difficult but also end up exacerbating symptoms of anxiety. That is precisely where telehealth comes into play. It will help people cope better in times of crises and induce a behavioural change in their attitudes towards seeking remote help, which is necessary as we increasingly adapt to a digitally-mediated life. By offering telehealth benefits, organisations will have an engaged and productive workforce while employees benefit from a convenient and readily accessible form of healthcare. In the future, telehealth benefits for employees will be an integral component of a firm's plans for the well-being of its staff.

(The writer is CEO Apollo TeleHealth)

WHILE THE AVAILABILITY OF THE SHOTS FOR KERALA IS AN ISSUE THAT WE WILL LOOK INTO, THE COVID VACCINES WILL BE GIVEN FOR FREE.

—KERALA CHIEF MINISTER

PINARAYI VIJAYAN

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



HE THINKS THE VACCINE WILL SAVE HIM FROM IMPENDING HUMILIATION AND IGNOMINY (AT THE HUSTINGS). BUT HE'S MISTAKEN.

—BJP STATE PRESIDENT

K SURENDRAN

Don't squeeze PSUs

The Govt should collect money from all those who owe it instead of squeezing CPSEs for bridging fiscal gaps. This is neither healthy for the economy nor good for the enterprises



UTTAM GUPTA

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam) has come out with a circular requiring Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to pay interim dividend every quarter or half-yearly, depending on whether it is a relatively higher dividend (100 per cent or ₹10 on a share of ₹10) or less. Even those which can't pay the prescribed "minimum" must give an interim dividend. Further, at least 90 per cent of the projected annual dividend should be paid as interim. Even as the bureaucrats justify this in terms of easing cash flow and improving the investment sentiment, the reality is that the Government is squeezing CPSEs to lessen its fiscal woes. However, there are better and potent ways to do this; for instance, by plugging leakages in direct and indirect tax collections. The Centre should collect money from where it is due, instead of squeezing CPSEs for bridging its fiscal gaps.

The CPSEs have also been asked to pay the final dividend of the last financial year (FY) (April-March) soon after the Annual General Meeting (AGM) is over (normally, it is held in September of the FY) in cases where the interim dividend has not been paid out fully during the last FY and there is a balance to be paid out as final dividend.

A shareholder is eligible to receive dividend on the share capital held by him/her in a company if it makes profit in a year. The profit made is the revenue generated from its operations (sale of products or services or any other income source) minus expenses (on raw materials/other inputs, wages and salaries, interest payments and so on). While this is pre-tax profit, the surplus left after payment of tax or Profit After-Tax (PAT) is normally used for building resources such as capital reserves (to offset capital losses), securities premium reserve (used for buyback of shares), general reserves (used for working capital) and so on.

After appropriation to the reserves, the left-over amount is surplus cash, which can be used for paying the dividend. Therefore, the amount available for distributing the dividend is a derived figure through a complex process that has to keep in mind the overarching interest of running the enterprise in a robust and sustainable manner. This has to come from the company management. Unfortunately, in the case of CPSEs, leveraging its majority ownership and control, the Government follows a top down approach, issuing directions from time to time.

As a general principle, the guidelines issued by the Dipam require the CPSEs to pay a minimum annual dividend of 30 per cent of PAT or five per cent of the net worth, whichever is higher. This is seriously flawed. Given its financial position, the enterprise may not be able to afford the dividend as per this diktat of the Government. Yet, being forced to give can result in derailment of its business plans and impact its viability.

This was bad enough. Now, the Dipam has come out with excruciating directions on the "interim dividend." This is a dividend payment made before a company's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the release of final financial statements (audited accounts and the balance sheet). Its declaration is normally accompanied by release of the company's interim financial statements. What is the need for interim dividend?

For any given FY (say, 2019-20 ending March 31), it takes time to prepare, process and finalise the financial statements, get these audited and approved in the AGM, which normally happens

“TO WRIGGLE OUT OF A TIGHT FISCAL SITUATION, THE GOVERNMENT IS GOADING THESE PUBLIC ENTERPRISES TO DIP INTO THEIR ACCUMULATED RESERVES ON THE ONE HAND AND TAKE RECOURSE TO BORROWINGS ON THE OTHER. TRUE, THIS WAY, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO FUND CAPITAL SPENDING. BUT THIS WILL MAKE THE ENTERPRISES OVER-LEVERAGED. SURELY, THIS IS NOT A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF FINANCING INVESTMENT”

six months after the end of the FY. This means that the regular dividend can't be declared till that time (or September). Having to wait that long can make the shareholders jittery. The idea of declaring interim dividend — normally done towards the end of February/March of the concerned FY — is to put some cash in their hands. This practice is fairly logical as at the time of declaring the interim dividend, the FY is almost over and the management has got a broad idea of the profit/loss the company is expected to make. But to stretch it to a point where the CPSE is asked to give "interim dividend" at the end of each of the four quarters or half-yearly (as contemplated in the Dipam circular) during the FY, is appalling.

The performance of a company can never be consistent throughout the year. If it has made "X" amount of profit during the first quarter (April-June) of the FY, it does not necessarily follow that in the remaining quarters, it will sustain this trend. The profit could be less or there could even be loss during subsequent quarters. In such a scenario, if interim dividend is paid in the first quarter, it will spell financial trouble for the enterprise even as payment once made can't be reversed after financials are finalised for the whole year.

Furthermore, directions such as forcing companies which can't pay dividend as per the prescribed "minimum," to pay interim dividend and that too at the end of the first half of the FY (during October/November) or payment of at least 90 per cent of the projected annual dividend, in one or more installments as interim dividend, are completely devoid of any logic.

By nature, an interim dividend can only be a small portion of the regular dividend. Yet, if 90 per cent is given as interim, it tantamounts to demeaning the very concept itself.

Bureaucrats have sought to justify quarterly/half-yearly payments citing that bunching of interim dividend

payouts in February-March may compete with their cash availability for year-end payments to suppliers, as well as towards advance tax. They also aver that this will improve investment sentiment by assuring investors of regular and certain dividend receipt during the year. The argument is untenable.

When to make payments to the suppliers and discharge other liabilities is purely a commercial matter and the company management is best equipped to ensure that these are met satisfactorily, without causing any cash flow problem. As regards investment sentiment, the investor sees the fundamentals of an enterprise and its ability to ensure a reasonable return on investment on a sustained basis — not by how frequently the dividend payment is made. The real reason behind issuing the obnoxious guidelines lies elsewhere.

The Union Government gets a good portion of its non-tax revenue as dividend receipts from CPSEs — surplus transfer from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and telecom spectrum receipts being the other major components. In recent years, these receipts have declined (courtesy, reduction in its shareholding in many profitable enterprises via disinvestment). For the current year, the situation has worsened. Against the Budget estimate of close to ₹66,000 crore, it has so far received only ₹10,000 crore.

This, together with a substantial decline in tax revenue (during April-September, this was only ₹4,60,000 crore. This is a reduction of about 33 per cent over the corresponding period last year) and the surge in expenditure due to COVID-19 has made the Government desperate. No wonder, it is making highly unrealistic demands.

Shockingly, the directive has come at a time when the profits of CPSEs have plunged due to the pandemic. If their financials don't justify payment of dividend (at the rate desired by the Centre), how does one expect them to

pay? This looks even more anomalous when seen in juxtaposition with the Government goading these very CPSEs to undertake spending on a massive scale (to make up for the substantial decline in investment by the private sector and, during the current year, by the Government too). How can the latter spend on projects and, at the same time, fill the coffers of the Centre?

To wriggle out of a tight fiscal situation, the Government is goading these public enterprises to dip into their accumulated reserves on the one hand and take recourse to borrowings on the other. True, this way they will be able to fund capital spending. But this will make the enterprises over-leveraged. Surely, this is not a sustainable way of financing investment.

The Government can't have the cake and eat it too. It can't keep on denuding the CPSEs and yet expect them to remain healthy and contribute to capital formation. To meet the rising expenditure and keep fiscal deficit within the prescribed ceiling, no doubt it needs to raise resources. But there are better ways. For instance, during 2019-20 (then the impact of the Coronavirus was not there), there was a shortfall of about ₹2,00,000 crore in tax collections *vis-à-vis* even revised estimates. Under the Goods and Services Tax, there are fraudulent claims of input tax credit of close to ₹1,00,000 crore since its launch from July 1, 2017. From the 'Vivad se Vishwas' initiative launched in the Budget for 2020-21 on direct tax demand of about ₹10,00,000 crore under dispute, the expected recovery is about ₹70,000 crore — a meagre seven per cent. The list is unending.

The message is loud and clear. The Government should collect money from all those who owe it instead of squeezing CPSEs for bridging its fiscal gaps. This is in no way healthy for the economy in the long run, nor is it sustainable for the CPSEs.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

A swift end to farmers' stir desirable

The Centre as well as farmers should resolve the issue rather than prolonging it. This would be beneficial for the entire country



KALYANI SHANKAR

The continuing protests by the farming community for the last 20 days might be one of the biggest challenges of the Narendra Modi-led Government. Though the Centre is seized of the issue, the confrontation still continues. Perhaps it is time to look back and see how India went from being one of the largest food grain importers after Independence, to achieving self-sufficiency.

Former Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri and his successor Indira Gandhi were responsible for the Green Revolution in India. The food crisis began in the last year

of the Jawaharlal Nehru era, as the first two Five-Year Plans did not pay adequate attention to agriculture. In 1949 the Indian food situation was difficult and the foreign exchange position was worse. In November 1949 Nehru made his first visit to the US and during his talks with US President Harry Truman he mentioned the scarcity of food in India. Truman's response was positive, but bureaucratic hurdles, resistance in the US Congress, red-tapism and other difficulties, including the US' bid to barter wheat for strategic materials, ensured that there was no pact in the end.

As a result of the continued food shortages in some of the States, India witnessed riots. It was then that the country resorted to PL480 food grains as part of the US' policy of 'Food for Peace'. However, soon, India faced a crisis in the supply of food grains from the US, as President Lyndon Johnson's food politics was a puzzle even to his administration. However, it had a happy ending because, by the time Johnson left office, India experienced a Green Revolution.

Prime Minister Shastri had in his very

first month in office in June 1964 indicated a policy shift from heavy to light industry and towards consumer goods and agriculture. Shastri asked his Agriculture Minister Chidambaram Subramaniam to chalk out a new strategy to increase production. By giving the slogan "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" Shastri inspired both, farmers as well as farm scientists, to sow the seeds of the Green Revolution.

Meanwhile, within a few months of his second term in office, Lyndon Johnson decided to take a tougher approach to food grain supply to India and Pakistan. Johnson told his puzzled officials, "I will take care of the problem." He always waited till the last minute before personally authorising the shipments. Then American Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, called the supply the "ship to mouth" programme as it never went through the warehouses.

After Indira Gandhi took over as the Prime Minister in January 1966 she continued the focus on agriculture. One of the first things Indira Gandhi sought from Johnson during her first visit to Washington as Prime

Minister in March 1966 was food aid. Though Johnson was bowled over by her charm he made it clear that the two primary conditions for the US' aid — self-help and more focus on agriculture — were necessary.

Things began to change for the better as India ushered in an era of expansion in the farm sector, which started with the introduction of high-yielding varieties of wheat in the late 1960s. With all the push for agriculture, coupled with the efforts of leading scientists like Dr MS Swaminathan, slowly India began to see improved yields and got closer to solving the chronic food shortages in the country.

Indira Gandhi made the Green Revolution a priority of her Government and along with new hybrid seeds, initiated State subsidies and ensured the provision of electricity, water, fertilisers and credit to farmers. Agricultural income was not taxable.

The result was that India became self-sufficient in food. This was something that Indira Gandhi wanted to achieve with all her heart, particularly given her frustration with Johnson's erratic and conditional food

aid. Once, as soon as she hung up after talking to Johnson, Indira Gandhi is reported to have said angrily, "I don't ever want us to have to beg for food again."

She hit back at Johnson and signed a declaration calling for an end to "imperialist aggression" against the Vietnamese people. Lyndon Johnson's response was swift and food grain shipments to India slowed down. But later, once Johnson was satisfied that the Green Revolution in India was on track, he became liberal and tried to get the support of other countries to share the burden with the US.

The World Bank, too, started a consortium for food supply. Today, India has achieved self-sufficiency as food production has gone up from less than 50 million tonnes (MT) in 1947 to 292 MT in 2019-20.

Meanwhile, Government investment in agriculture rose sharply, too. Apart from that, institutional credit, remunerative prices and the availability of new technology at low prices were facilitated. By the 1980s not only had India become self-sufficient in food grain production, it was exporting farm produce

to pay off its debts and loaning it to food-deficit countries, too.

Over the decades, successive governments have thrown sops at farmers, including large subsidies on power and fuel, but there has been little sustained or strategic effort to modernise the sector. The Modi Government, too, came up with several schemes for growers and is now talking of an 'Evergreen Revolution' in the farming sector.

However, the new farm laws seem to have created apprehensions among the farmers, who have been protesting on Delhi's borders since November 26. Though the Government has held six rounds of talks with farmers' organisations, there seems to be a trust deficit and the Opposition parties, too, have joined hands with the growers to attack the Government. The Centre as well as farmers should resolve the issue rather than prolonging it. This would be beneficial for the entire country. No one wants to see the nation's "annadata" suffering in the fields and on the streets, too.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

Tatas, Interups among ‘multiple’ bidders for AI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Group and US-based fund Interups Inc were among “multiple” entities that on Monday put in preliminary bids for buying loss-making carrier Air India.

A group of 219 Air India employees submitted an expression of interest (EoI) for the carrier in partnership with Interups at the close of the deadline on Monday.

“Multiple expressions of interest have been received for strategic disinvestment of Air India. The Transaction will now move to the second stage,” Department of Investment and

Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey tweeted.

He, however, did not reveal either the identity of the bidders or the number of bids received for buying the national carrier.

Sources said Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group, has put in an EoI and so did Interups, whose chairman Laxmi Prasad had in the run-up to the disinvestment made his intentions clear to bid for Air India.

It was not, however, immediately clear if Tatas have bid alone or through its budget airline AirAsia India.

A group of 219 Air India Ltd employees, each one con-

tributing at least Rs 1 lakh, hold 51 per cent in the bidding consortium. The remaining 49 per cent is with Interups.

An official said the transaction advisor will inform bidders before January 6, if their bids have been qualified.

Qualified bidders will then be asked to submit financial bids.

The government is selling its entire 100 per cent stake in Air India that has been in losses ever since its 2007 merger with domestic operator Indian Airlines. The airline, which started as a mail carrier in 1932, will give a successful bidder control of 4,400 domestic and 1,800 international landing and parking slots at domestic



airports, as well as 900 slots at airports overseas.

Besides, the bidder would also get 100 per cent of the low-cost arm Air India Express and 50 per cent of AISATS, which provides cargo and ground handling services at major Indian airports.

With previous attempts since 2017 failing to get any significant interest, the government had this time sweetened the deal by giving freedom to

potential suitors to decide how much of the airline's debt they want to take on as part of the transaction. Previously, the bidders were required to take over the entire Rs 60,074 crore debt.

Tatas operate two airlines - full-service carrier Vistara in partnership with Singapore Airlines, and budget airline AirAsia India in alliance with Malaysia's AirAsia Group.

The DIPAM secretary had earlier said that potential investors in Air India have given feedback that due to the uncertainty created by COVID in the aviation sector the debt should not be fixed at the EoI stage.

Hence, the government late in October decided to do bid-

ding for Air India based on enterprise value, which includes market capitalisation of a company, short-term and long-term debt as well as any cash on the company's balance sheet.

Sale of stake in Air India is part of the government's target to raise a record Rs 2.10 lakh crore from disinvestment proceeds. The target includes Rs 1.20 lakh crore from the sale of shares of central public sector enterprises and Rs 90,000 crore from a share sale in public sector banks and financial institutions, including the listing of insurance behemoth LIC.

So far this fiscal, Rs 6,138 crore has been mopped up through CPSE stake sale.

Sensex, Nifty scale new peaks; auto stocks skid

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks darted up to fresh all-time highs on Monday as investors accumulated energy, infra and banking stocks amid supportive macroeconomic cues. A strengthening rupee and robust foreign fund inflows further buoyed sentiment, traders said.

After touching its record intra-day peak of 46,373.34, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 154.45 points or 0.34% higher at 46,253.46, its new closing record. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty rose 44.30 points or 0.33% to finish at a record 13,558.15. It hit a lifetime high of 13,597.50 during the session.

ONGC was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying 4.91%, followed by I&T, NTPC, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, HCL Tech, Titan and Asian Paints. On the other hand, M&M, Bajaj Auto, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries were among the main laggards, dropping up to 1.98%.

Global markets were on a firm footing as a last-minute extension to Britain-EU talks calmed fears over a no-deal Brexit.

“Domestic equities remained firm and witnessed fresh record highs mainly supported by continued rebound in PSU banks. Barring auto, most

of sectoral indices traded in positive range. Notably, volatility index shot up sharply today indicating unease about current valuations of the market.

“Positive data flows along with persistent FPI flows have been quite supportive for the markets. Further, better than expected IIP data for Oct '20 along with sharp jump in electricity suggests that industrial activities are back on growth track, which bodes well for equities. However, rich valuations of market do not offer much comfort and any threat to earnings recovery may lead to a reversal and broad-based rally will be difficult to sustain,” said Binod Modi, Head-Strategy at Reliance Securities.

India's industrial production rose to an eight-month high of 3.6 per cent in October on the back of recovery in manufacturing, consumer goods and power sectors, official data released after market hours on Friday showed. The wholesale price-based inflation rose to a nine-month high of 1.55 per cent in November as manufactured products turned costlier, while food prices eased, as per data released on Monday.

Sector-wise, BSE capital goods, oil and gas, industrials, utilities, metal, basic materials and bankex rose up to 2.10%, while auto, realty and telecom indices closed with losses.

Retail inflation eases to 6.93% in Nov on softening food prices

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Softening prices of food items like cereals, fruits and milk pulled down retail inflation to 6.93 per cent in November, though it remained above the comfort level of the Reserve Bank of India.

Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 7.61 per cent in October and 7.27 per cent in September.

According to data released by the National Statistical Office on Monday, inflation in the food basket was 9.43 per cent in November, down from 11 per cent in the previous month.

Inflation in the 'cereals and products' category reduced to 2.32 per cent from 3.39 per cent in October.

The rate of price rise in 'meat and fish' segment was 16.67 per cent in November, as compared to 18.7 per cent in the previous month. Similarly, inflation in vegetables was lower at 15.63 per cent from 22.51 per cent.

Inflation in fruits and 'milk and products' was also lower over October. The rate of price rise in the 'fuel and light' segment too moderated to 1.9 per cent as against 2.28 per cent in October.

The RBI, which mainly factors in retail inflation while arriving at key

policy rates, has been mandated by the government to keep inflation at 4 per cent (+, - 2 per cent).

The central bank had maintained status quo in the policy rate earlier this month due to high inflation.

Commenting on the data, Sachin Chhabra, Founder of B2B grocery business Peel-Works, said it was heartening to note that the inflation subsidised in November, riding primarily on softer food prices.

“We expect inflationary pressure to subside even further in Q4 of the current fiscal. This will provide elbow room to RBI to continue its accommodative stance, which is crit-

ical for sustained revival of demand,” he added.

Sunil Kumar Sinha, principal economist, India Ratings and Research, said retail inflation at is still outside the comfort zone of the RBI.

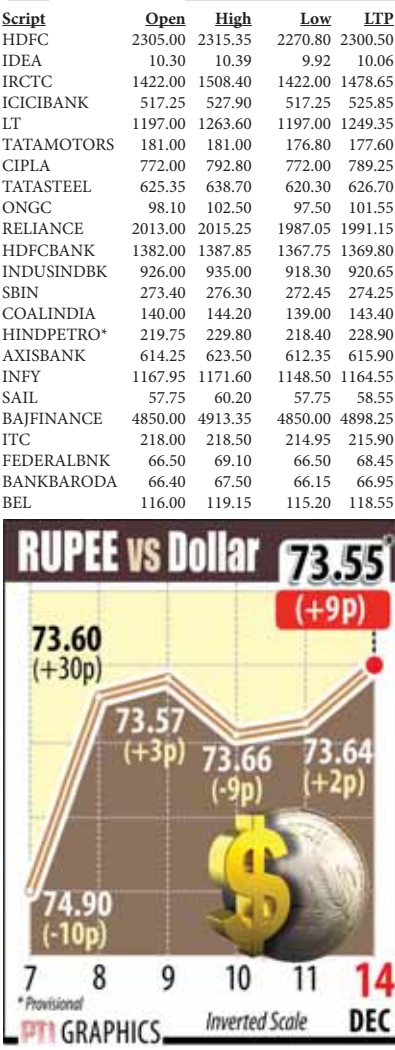
However, core inflation (non-food and non-energy) and core-core inflation (non-food, non-energy and transport and communication) are broadly stable in the range of 5 per cent to 5.79 per cent and 4.72 per cent to 4.95 per cent, respectively, since May 2020, he said.

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) expects the retail inflation to decline to 5.5 per cent to 6 per cent

range in the fourth quarter of the fiscal due to the cooling-off of food prices.

The NSO data further revealed that retail inflation was 7.2 per cent in rural India and 6.73 per cent in urban areas, taking the combined CPI-based inflation to 6.93 per cent. Aditi Nayar, principal economist, ICRA said, “The headline CPI inflation for November 2020 printed appreciably lower than our expectations, benefiting from stable vegetable prices at the retail level. While this provides welcome relief, it is unlikely to prove adequate for any imminent rate easing.”

BSE 500



Script	Open	High	Low	LTP
HDPC	2305.00	2315.35	2270.80	2300.50
IDEA	10.30	10.39	9.92	10.06
IRCTC	1422.00	1508.40	1422.00	1478.65
ICICIBANK	517.25	527.90	517.25	529.85
IT	1197.00	1263.60	1197.00	1249.35
TATAMOTORS	181.00	181.00	176.80	177.60
CIPLA	772.00	792.80	772.00	789.25
TATASTEEL	625.35	638.70	620.30	626.70
ONGC	98.10	102.50	97.50	101.55
RELIANCE	2013.00	2015.25	1987.05	1991.15
HDFCBANK	1382.00	1387.85	1367.75	1368.80
INDUSINDBK	926.00	935.00	918.30	920.65
SBIN	273.40	276.30	272.45	274.25
COALINDIA	140.00	144.20	139.00	143.40
HINDPETRO*	219.75	229.80	218.40	228.90
AXISBANK	614.25	623.50	612.35	615.90
INFEY	1167.95	1171.60	1148.50	1164.55
SAIL	57.75	60.20	57.75	58.55
BAJFINANCE	4850.00	4913.35	4850.00	4898.25
ITC	218.00	218.00	214.95	215.90
FEDERALBNK	66.50	69.10	66.50	68.45
BANKBARODA	66.40	67.50	66.15	66.95
BEL	116.00	119.15	115.20	118.55

PVR	1480.00	1481.00	1447.45	1473.30
ULTRACEMCO	5030.00	5080.00	4994.95	5073.35
ADANIPORTS	478.00	478.00	463.30	467.00
L&TFH	90.55	91.75	90.35	90.55
WIPRO	353.00	354.55	347.10	349.30
PETRONET	263.10	267.95	261.90	266.80
M&MFIN	174.00	174.90	165.00	172.30
LUPIN	94.25	94.90	93.75	94.25
JSWSTEEL	364.80	364.80	356.45	357.35
CUMMINSIND	580.00	601.95	580.00	607.95
ULTRAFOOD	2678.00	2678.00	2592.40	2632.70
DLF	218.15	218.75	212.40	213.50
ADANIENIT	451.90	461.95	447.25	455.15
NCC	57.15	58.55	56.95	57.65
APOLLOTYRE	193.75	194.45	187.70	188.40
ZEELE	213.15	217.70	213.15	215.45
TATACHEM	510.00	513.05	506.20	509.50
NAUKRI	4530.00	4693.00	4481.35	4676.00
POWERGRID	195.65	196.85	192.90	194.40
JSWENERGY	68.10	68.60	66.90	67.90
STAR	794.00	811.00	790.00	794.80
INDIGO	1717.05	1729.50	1698.00	1714.45
IDFCFIRSTB	37.65	38.00	37.50	37.75
ICICIGI	1465.50	1493.70	1461.10	1489.85
HDFCAML	2842.00	2850.00	2802.10	2841.50
AVANTI	546.25	564.00	544.95	547.70
GRAPHITE	280.00	297.55	279.90	288.30
AUROPHARMA	899.95	905.65	888.00	889.05
CADILAHC	468.50	473.20	466.70	469.85
DIIVSLAB	3641.50	3669.45	3587.10	3599.95
RECLTD	133.35	140.60	133.35	139.60
DISHTV	14.00	15.24	13.80	14.72
BIOCON	459.90	460.65	450.75	453.70
GEPIL	299.00	306.35	294.20	306.35
SIEMENS	1536.00	1554.00	1525.95	1544.30
DIXON	12689.20	13400.00	12689.20	12907.55
ALOKTEXT	24.35	24.35	22.75	23.60
TECHM	924.00	924.00	905.95	908.55
WABAG	199.45	217.90	199.45	214.85
PFIZER	5388.00	5539.00	5250.00	5299.60
MARICO	417.00	420.50	412.35	414.20
CUB	176.90	186.80	172.55	185.00
VAKRANGEE	49.00	52.20	49.00	50.55
INDIANB	87.70	97.75	85.15	95.90
NATIONALUM	43.00	43.45	42.40	43.05
AMBUJACEM	247.00	248.85	245.00	246.30
CHOLLA	161.00	162.60	160.94	161.51
ACC	371.00	374.45	366.75	371.65
GRANULES	118.00	122.55	117.90	121.35
GRASIM	90.45	92.38	90.45	91.10
MMTC	22.40	26.20	21.55	25.95
SBICARD	825.00	834.90	812.45	814.75
ENGINEERSIN	76.40	79.90	76.40	78.90
DBL	392.00	397.20	384.80	387.50
CYIENT	499.90	551.00	499.90	539.55
BAJAJ-AUTO	3340.00	3340.00	3266.00	3289.15
SCAI	83.95	87.80	81.10	84.20
BIRLACORPN	747.45	751.50	735.65	740.75
IFBIND	1061.05	1217.15	1061.05	1163.35
BDEL	349.90	349.90	335.45	338.65
DEEPAKNI	861.40	890.00	845.00	880.00
HFLCL	23.70	23.70	21.75	22.60
ASHOKA	97.20	98.40	94.40	94.90
TATAELXSI	1639.00	1639.90	1589.00	1599.35
LIHGSPIN	862.65	932.00	862.65	929.65
UNIONBANK	33.55	34.35	33.55	33.85
CHAMBLFERT	243.00	243.00	225.65	229.75
PCJEWELLER	25.15	25.75	23.10	23.20
HDFCLIFE	666.00	665.65	653.30	655.65
TVS MOTOR	484.00	489.25	477.20	487.55
SBILIFE	852.00	857.90	848.80	849.85
FSL	73.00	79.50	75.00	78.70
TORNTPOWER	323.60	336.70	323.60	335.55
BLISSGVS	175.75	179.50	173.20	176.20
IFCI	10.90	10.90	9.89	10.27
AFPLE	3700.00	3712.45	3542.55	3690.25
SUZLON	4.13	4.13	4.13	4.13
MCX	1690.00	1709.40	1662.30	1700.85
WOCKPHARMA	515.25	522.95	503.00	507.25
CONCOR	401.00	408.00	401.00	403.85
FRETAIL	81.55	81.55	79.50	80.85
MGCLDCLTD	51.05	57.70	51.05	55.35
HAL	856.50	877.00	856.50	872.85
ADANI GREEN	1034.90	1034.90	996.10	1012.00
BOSCHLTD	13299.90	13299.90	13053.05	13182.35
LTI	3290.00	3319.95	3215.50	3234.35
GUJGAS	350.00	360.60	348.85	359.35
BANKINDIA	52.00	53.30	51.00	52.85
MRPL	35.40	37.20	35.10	36.90
GLENMARK	524.95	534.50	524.95	526.20
IDFC	39.05	41.20	39.05	40.65
CHALET	192.70	208.60	192.70	204.45
SRF	5272.60	5346.45	5240.00	5307.00
ABBOTINDIA	16239.95	16669.80	16211.00	16495.30
SYNGENE	608.70	617.25	599.00	611.75
ABCAPITAL	93.00	94.40	91.35	91.70
PEL	1433.65	1438.20	1415.55	1421.75
CGCL	296.00	297.00	287.50	294.20
CENTURYTEX	375.05	381.35	373.30	376.00
MRF	77866.60	78494.55	77363.40	77534.65
CENTRALBK	15.15	15.47	14.85	14.98
BALKRISIND	1670.30	1670.30	1636.85	1653.55
RVNL	23.70	23.80	23.05	23.25
UBL	1156.00	1171.35	1148.00	1157.80
GMRIINFRA	26.60	27.30	26.35	27.15
KEC	383.00	383.50	357.95	367.00
INOXLEISUR	292.50	293.50	287.50	289.35

RCF	117.90	124.55	117.25	123.30
DCBBANK	9.95	9.95	9.51	9.59
SOUTHBANK	91.10	96.40	90.910	94.60
LINDEINDIA	128.00	135.00	127.35	132.90
ITI	1430.00	1444.25	1429.00	1437.55
MINDTREE	607.60	632.00	607.60	617.50
JUSTDIAL	55.80	59.55	55.70	58.20
NBVENTURES	110.85	118.55	110.65	116.70
OIL	931.00	938.95	925.25	936.45
ATAMARAJABAT	171.60	172.80	169.50	172.55
MANAPPURAM	10.13	10.18	9.90	9.95
TREND	136.45	137.85	131.40	135.00
RAIN	152.00	154.90	149.15	152.15
INDIACEM	23660.00	24120.00	23620.00	24001.95
PAGEIND	74.70	76.65	74.70	75.75
TATAMTRDVR	790.00	800.00	776.10	

Electors meeting to formally choose Biden as next Prez

Washington: Presidential electors are meeting across the United States on Monday to formally choose Joe Biden as the nation's next president.

Monday is the day set by law for the meeting of the Electoral College. In reality, electors meet in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to cast their ballots.

The results will be sent to Washington and tallied in a January 6 joint session of Congress over which Vice President Mike Pence will preside.

The electors' votes have drawn more attention than usual this year because President Donald Trump has refused to concede the election and continued to make baseless allegations of fraud.

Biden is planning to address the nation Monday night, after the electors have voted. Trump, meanwhile, is clinging to his false claims that he won the election, but also undermining Biden's presidency even before it begins.

"No, I worry about the country having an illegitimate president, that's what I worry about. A president that lost and lost badly," Trump said in a Fox News interview that was taped Saturday.

Following weeks of Republican legal challenges that were easily dismissed by judges, Trump and Republican allies tried to persuade the



Supreme Court last week to set aside 62 electoral votes for Biden in four states, which might have thrown the outcome into doubt.

The justices rejected the effort on Friday.

Biden won 306 electoral votes to 232 votes for Trump. It takes 270 votes to be elected.

In 32 states and the District of Columbia, laws require electors to vote for the popular-vote winner. The Supreme Court unanimously upheld this arrangement in July.

Electors almost always vote for the state winner anyway because they generally are devoted to their political party. There's no reason to expect any defections this year. Among prominent electors are Democrat Stacey Abrams of Georgia and Republican Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota.

The voting is decidedly low tech, by paper ballot. Electors cast one vote each for president and vice president.

The Electoral College was the product of compromise during the drafting of the Constitution between those who favored electing the president by popular vote and those who opposed giving the people the power to choose their leader.

Each state gets a number of electors equal to their total number of seats in Congress: two senators plus however many members the state has in the House of Representatives.

Washington, D.C., has three votes, under a constitutional amendment that was ratified in 1961. With the exception of Maine and Nebraska, states award all their Electoral College votes to the winner of the popular vote in their state.

The bargain struck by the nation's founders has produced five elections in which the president did not win the popular vote. Trump was the most recent example in 2016. **AP**



People wait in line on the first day of advance voting for Georgia's Senate runoff election at the Bell Auditorium in Augusta, Georgia on Monday

Biden's likely AG pick accused of sexual harassment by ex-aide

New York: A former aide to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo who is now running for Manhattan borough president accused him of sexual harassment in a series of tweets on Sunday, saying he made inappropriate comments about her appearance.

Lindsey Boylan tweeted that the Democratic governor "sexually harassed me for years. Many saw it, and watched." "I could never anticipate what to expect: would I be grilled on my work (which was very good) or harassed about my looks. Or would it be both in the same conversation? This was the way for years," she

continued. Boylan, 36, worked for the Cuomo administration from March 2015 to October 2018, serving first as executive vice president of Empire State Development, and then as a special adviser to Cuomo for economic development.

She did not provide details of the alleged harassment and didn't immediately respond to messages from The Associated Press. Boylan later tweeted, "To be clear: I have no interest in talking to journalists."

The Associated Press earlier reported that Joe Biden might consider Cuomo for the job of Attorney General. **AP**

Early in-person voting begins in Georgia Senate runoffs

Atlanta: What could be the main event in Georgia's twin US Senate runoffs — early in-person voting — begins on Monday.

More than half of the record 5 million votes in the November 3 general election were cast during the two-week early voting period. Early in-person voting could be even more important in the January 5 runoffs because of the short time frame

for voters to request and send back ballots by mail, as the two races decide which party will control the US Senate.

"It's very important," Democrat Raphael Warnock, who is challenging Republican US Senator Kelly Loeffler in one of the races, said Friday after a speech to labor union canvassers.

"It's how we won in the general and it's how we're going to

win in the runoff?" No one expects turnout to be as high in the Warnock-Loeffler contest or the race between US Senator David Perdue and Democrat Jon Ossoff. But Bernard Fraga, an Emory University professor who studies voting, said overall turnout could rise as high as four million.

More than 125,000 people cast ballots in October on the first day of early in-person vot-

ing before the general election. Gabriel Sterling, election system implementation manager for the Georgia Secretary of State, said he expects a surge of people on Monday. Some Atlanta-area early voting sites in October and November saw people frequently lined up for hours.

"As always, on the first day of early voting, it's kind of like when the iPhone comes out," Sterling said last week. "People

want to go get the new iPhone at the Apple store. They're going to stand in line for a while."

One question is how many mail-in ballots will be cast in the election. By Friday, 1.2 million mail-in ballots had been requested and 200,000 returned. In the general election, Democrat Joe Biden won 65 per cent of the 1.3 million absentee ballots that were returned, a record fueled by the coronavirus pandemic. **AP**

Iran President says Israel was behind killing of scientist

Tehran: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Monday claimed that Israel was behind the killing of a scientist who founded the Islamic Republic's military nuclear program in the 2000s in an effort to start a war in the last days of President Trump's administration.

Rouhani's comments in a news conference marked the first time he has directly accused the Jewish state of carrying out the killing of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh late last month.

Israel, long suspected of killing Iranian nuclear scientists over the last decade, has repeatedly declined to comment on the attack. "Waging instability and war in the final days of the Trump administration was the main aim of the Zionist regime in the assassination," Rouhani said.

Rouhani vowed to avenge the killing but said his country will not allow Israel to decide the "time or venue" of any retaliatory action. He said Iran will not allow instability in the region. Fakhri-zadeh headed Iran's so-called AMAD pro-



gramme, which Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility of building a nuclear weapon.

The International Atomic Energy Agency says that "structured program" ended in 2003. US intelligence agencies concurred with that assessment in a 2007 report.

After the killing of Fakhri-zadeh, a top Iranian security official, Ali Shamkhani, accused Israel of using "electronic devices" to remotely kill the scientist.

Israel insists Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran's ballistic missile program and research into other technologies. Iran long has maintained that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes. **AP**

US court rejects bail plea of 26/11 accused Tahawwur Rana

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A US court has denied the bail plea of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, a key accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack and declared a fugitive by India, asserting that he has not negated the "risk of flight".

Rana, 59, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was rearrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the Mumbai terror attack in which 166 people, including six Americans,

were killed.

Pakistani-American LeT terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case, and is currently serving a 35-year prison term in the US for his role in the attack.

Magistrate Judge Jacqueline Chooljian, the US District Court of Los Angeles, in his order on December 10 said that Rana "presented a robust bail package" and offered conditions that significantly mitigate the risk of flight.

But the "Court cannot find that he has negated the risk of flight" and as such granted the request of the US government to the continued detention of Rana.

Meanwhile, the US government in the court has supported India's request that the documents submitted by it in support of extradition of Rana be not made public.

The extradition documents presented by India apparently include information about Rana's involvement in the Mumbai terrorist attack that would be shared with him.

Oli Govt tacitly supporting pro-monarchists: Nepal Opp

Kathmandu: Nepal's main Opposition party Nepali Congress on Monday accused the KP Sharma Oli Government of tacitly supporting pro-monarchy rallies that have recently surfaced in different parts of the country, demanding reinstatement of constitutional monarchy and re-establishing the country as a Hindu state.

Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, addressing a massive anti-government demonstration in Hetauda in central Nepal, alleged that "Prime Minister Oli seems to have been standing behind those who are staging demonstrations."

"Otherwise, how come they are taking to the streets freely at the moment?" Deuba questioned.

Former prime minister Deuba, however, ruled out the possibility of revival of monarchy at present.

"There should not be any illusion at all about reinstatement of monarchy in the country," he said.

Deuba was pointing to the recently held demonstrations by loyalists of ex-King Gyanendra in different parts of the country, including capital city Kathmandu that demanded the government to declare Nepal a Hindu state and restoration of monarchy. **PTI**

Study: Bacteria can travel from one continent to another in atmospheric dust

London: Some bacteria can travel from one continent to another 'hidden' in atmospheric dust, according to a new study which says these microbes may not only affect human and animal health, but also impact climate and ecosystems.

The research, published in the journal Atmospheric Research, deciphered the mystery of the transport of microorganisms across continents via 'giant' atmospheric particles called iberulites that could be inhaled by humans.

According to scientists, including those from the University of Granada (UGR) in Spain, these aerosols act like a "launch vehicle" for bacteria, and may pose risk of disease transmission across continents.

They explained that iberulites are giant atmospheric bioaerosols made of multiple minerals, measuring on average one hundred microns approximately.

While these bioaerosols were discovered in 2008, the scientists said the mechanism by which bacteria are involved in the formation of atmospheric iberulites remained unknown.

In the current study, the researchers analysed atmospheric dust deposits in the city of Granada in Spain. **PTI**



Officials show seized crystal methamphetamine during a press conference in Penang on Malaysia

AP

MALAYSIA MAKES ITS LARGEST-EVER CRYSTAL METH SEIZURE

Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia): Malaysian authorities have seized more than two tons of crystal methamphetamine worth more than \$26 million aboard a small boat off the coast of Penang.

The agency said in a statement that a maritime patrol

country's history.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said over the weekend that it made the seizure on December 9 off the coast of Penang.

The agency said in a statement that a maritime patrol

found the drugs on a recreational boat that was behaving strangely. Methamphetamine is illicitly smuggled across much of Southeast Asia, China and Australia, part of a multi-billion dollar illegal trade in the drug. **AP**

London to move to highest alert as new coronavirus variant identified in UK

London: Britain's capital will be placed under the highest level of coronavirus restrictions from Wednesday amid a "very sharp" spike in COVID-19 cases in London and its surrounding areas and a new variant of coronavirus being identified as responsible for the "faster spread", the UK government announced in Parliament on Monday.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told MPs in the House of Commons that "swift and decisive action" was needed as the doubling rate of the deadly virus has hit just seven days in many of these areas.

Tier-3 restrictions, the highest level in England's three-tier system, mean a near-complete lockdown, with people allowed to meet those they do not live with only in outdoor settings

and hospitality venues directed to shut except for takeaways and deliveries.

"A new variant of coronavirus has been identified in the UK, which may be associated with the fastest spread in the southeast of England," said Hancock.

"We do not know the extent to which this is because of the new variant but no matter its cause, we have to take swift and decisive action which unfortunately is absolutely essential to control this deadly disease while the vaccine is rolled out... We must act now to shift the curve... because when the virus moves quickly, we must move quickly too," he said.

The minister said that experts had identified over 1,000 cases with the variant, predominantly in the south of England.

"Cases have been identified in nearly 60 different local authority areas and numbers are increasing rapidly. Similar variants have been identified in other countries over the last few months," he said, adding that the World Health Organisation has been notified about the variant and that it is unlikely to cause more serious disease than other variants of the coronavirus. He stressed that mobile testing and community testing are also being expanded, with another 67 local authorities getting community testing this week to help areas "move down tiers" and return closer to normal life.

In reference to the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine rollout currently underway, Hancock said that thanks to science "help is on its way", but "this isn't over yet". **PTI**

Master of espionage John le Carre dies at 89

London: John le Carre, the spy-turned-novelist whose elegant and intricate narratives defined the Cold War espionage thriller and brought acclaim to a genre critics had once ignored, has died. He was 89.

Le Carre's literary agency, Curtis Brown, said on Sunday he died in Cornwall, southwest England on Saturday after a short illness. The agency said his death was not related to COVID-19. His family said he died of pneumonia.

In classics such as *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *The Honourable Schoolboy*, Le Carre combined terse but lyrical prose with the kind of complexity expected in literary fiction.

His books grappled with betrayal, moral compromise and the psychological toll of a secret life. In the quiet, watchful spymaster George Smiley, he created one of 20th-century fiction's iconic characters — a decent man at the heart of a web of deceit.

"John le Carre has passed at the age of 89. This terrible year has claimed a literary giant and a humanitarian spirit," tweeted novelist Stephen King. Margaret Atwood said: "Very sorry to hear this. His Smiley novels are key to understanding the mid-20th century."

For le Carre, the world of espionage was a "metaphor for the human condition." "I'm not part of the literary bureaucracy if you like that categorizes everybody: Romantic, Thriller, Serious," le Carre told The Associated Press in 2008. "I just go with what I want to write about and the characters. I don't announce this to myself as a thriller or an entertainment. **AP**

DOCYARD


DR. ROHINI PATIL

MBBS, specialises in Diet & Nutrition, Founder-CEO

NUTRACY LIFESTYLE



Vital to be with Vitamins



India is considered to be the fifth most polluted country in the world. We can witness the thick layer of hazy air which causes difficulties in breathing for not only the working people but also for the children and aged people. With the increasing instances of global warming, the situation is getting worse. This is the time for us to take initiative for our health by having healthy food and take precautions. Here are some vitamins which help to fight the effects of air pollution.

Vitamin A: Vitamin A enriched food items especially leafy green vegetables like spinach, lettuce, radish leaves and root vegetables like beetroot, carrot etc help to fight the inflammation caused by air pollution. The beta carotene in these food items help to boost the overall immune system. Vitamin A also protects eyes and skin from the harmful particles in the air.

Vitamin B: Regular consumption of vitamin B helps to protect the respiratory system. There are various tiny particles in the outside air. Vitamin B prevents them from entering into the body. Even if they enter, it reduces their negative impact on body. Vitamin B is called the diverse vitamin as it is divided into six forms such as B1, B2, B3, B5, B6 and B12. It has a wide range of functions from producing different hormones, healthy cholesterol, helping in the replication of DNA to the maintenance

Vitamin A enriched food items especially leafy green vegetables like spinach, lettuce, radish leaves and root vegetables like beetroot and carrot help to fight the inflammation caused by air pollution

of the nerve cell, synthesizing carbohydrates and fats in order to produce energy and producing RBCs. Vitamin B deficiency can cause severe diseases like megaloblastic anemia, dementia, paranoia, fatigue, nausea, depression, dermatitis etc. There are various vitamin B supplements available in market. Vitamin B is present in a wide range of food products like whole grains, lentils, beans, different kinds of seeds and nuts, dark leafy vegetables, avocados, bananas etc. along with animal products like eggs, red meat, poultry, oily fishes, milk, cheese etc.

Vitamin C: This is a miraculous anti-oxidant vitamin which is capable to slow down the aging process. It eradicates the free radicals from the body. Vitamin C helps to heal injuries and produces collagen that plays a major role in boosting the immunity. It prepares the body to fight the harmful gases outside. It forms iron in the body, an important component to distribute the oxygen to different body parts. It helps to maintain healthy lungs. Vitamin C deficiency causes diseases like fatigue, scurvy, depression, internal bleeding, delayed wound healing, gingivitis, internal bleeding so on and so forth. We can get vitamin C from citrus fruits like orange, kiwi, strawberries, sweet potatoes, Brussels, red and green peppers, spinach, tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, sprouts, leafy vegetables, squash etc.


Vitamin E: This anti-oxidant enriched vitamin is responsible for a better defense and prevents the skin damage caused by air pollution. It also helps in repairing muscle cells and boosting the effectiveness of vitamin K. The deficiency of vitamin E causes Crohn's disease, poor skin, cuticles, cystic fibrosis along with some generic diseases like ataxia etc. Vitamin E is present in food items like asparagus, spinach, nuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, corn, turnip greens, soybeans, bell peppers, breakfast cereals, margarine, spreads, juices etc. There are also spices which you must keep in your diet to strengthen your immunity such as cloves, chili powder, oregano, paprika, parsley etc. Replace your normal cooking oil with plant based oils like peanut and olive orcanola.

WARMFOODS

NUTMEG: This spice is believed to be the warmest of all. Nutmeg is considered to be high in potassium, calcium, iron and manganese, and Vitamin C and B. Consuming a pinch of it daily can not only stimulate digestion but can treat intestinal problems as well.

Nutmeg can contribute to treating various oral problems such as cavities, bleeding gums and toothache. It can prevent your liver from the adverse effects of environmental pollution, stress and unbalanced diet.

Copper is an important nutrient in nutmeg which helps to balance the blood pressure and consequently helps in the maintenance of heart rate. It



Experts say that your immunity is related to how healthy your gut is. Hence, it is important to identify all the gut-friendly foods and include them in your diet to keep several diseases, including COVID-19 infection, at bay. MUSBA HASHMI brings you a report

It's a no-brainer that the root cause of all our problems is in our gut. A happy gut means a happy and healthy body. In a time when immunity has taken the driver's seat and anything and everything that claims to be immunity booster is running out of the shelves at lightning speed.

But what if we tell you for a stronger immune system, all you need is to take good care of your gut. Would you mind believing it? If one has to go by the experts' words COVID-19 is definitely related to our gut and several studies have proven it.

"Gut releases more antibodies. Hence, strengthening the gut means strengthening immunity," Ishi Khosla, a practicing clinical nutritionist, columnist, author, an entrepreneur, researcher and welfare worker, said addressing a webinar COVID & Gut, organised by the Celiac Society of India.

Dr Neerja Hajela, Head, Science, Yakult Danone India Private Ltd, explained that there is a connection between the gut and the lungs. "Before one is tested positive for COVID, there are always some GI symptoms," Hajela said.

Dr Pankaj Verma, Consultant Physician & Head of Department, Integrative Medicine, Mahavir Jaipuria Rajasthan Hospital, agreed with Hajela and added that almost 30 to 50 per cent COVID patients experience some kind of GI symptoms,

including abdominal pain, diarrhoea and vomiting.

"Also, the most common symptom is anorexia. Almost 80 per cent of patients are complaining of this symptom. It has also been observed that people with GI symptoms present with more severe form of COVID and of course a prolonged course of illness. Moreover, the susceptible group, including the elderly, Diabetics and patients with heart diseases, have some problem of the gut. So, definitely it has to be linked with COVID," Verma explained.

In such a case, it is advisable for patients to eat light food like dalia, replenish water intake and avoid having a lot of high protein diet. "If we combine diet modification with COVID treatment, symptoms decrease and the course of the illness also shortens," Verma said.

When one talks about gut health, it is impossible to miss the use of pre and probiotics. "The balance of good and bad bacteria is important in the gut. Probiotics mean for life. They go into the gut alive unlike other gut friendly supplements and balance the bacterial growth. They improve gut health and build gut flora and thereby helps in building immunity," Hajela said.

Dr Tom O'Bryan, a world-renowned expert in the field of gluten-related disorders, Non-

FOLLOW THE HALF PLATE RULE, FILL UP HALF OF YOUR PLATE WITH VEGETABLES OF DIFFERENT COLOURS AND THEN EVERYTHING ELSE, INCLUDING RICE AND CHAPATIS, ON THE OTHER SIDE. MAKE SURE YOU ARE HAVING ALL THE COLOURS IN A DAY — ISHI KHOSLA, NUTRITIONIST, AUTHOR & ENTREPRENEUR

Celiac Gluten Sensitivity, Celiac Disease and their link to other chronic conditions, including autoimmune disorders and diseases, explained that the reason behind having more bad bacteria in the gut is because of eating wrong and unhealthy food.

"All we tell people is to aim for a healthy gut. If you have arthritis or weak immune system, just build a healthy gut. It is the ultimate solution. For this, we recommend a rainbow diet, which comprise of different types of fruits and vegetables," he said.

More often than not, we focus on adding all the greens in our diet. But Celebrity Chef Sanjeev Kapoor tells you that it is probably a Western concept and that not only the greens, but all the different colours of course make for a rainbow diet. "Onion, garlic, tomatoes, coconut, unripe bananas, unripe mangoes and apples all work wonders. These are probiotic rich and are extremely good for the gut," Kapoor said.

For those who wonder, what is the right amount of fruits and vegetables that one has to have daily, Khosla had a piece of advice for them. "Follow the half plate rule, fill up half of your plate with vegetables of different colours and then everything else, including rice and chapatis, on the other side. Make sure you are having all the colours in a day," she advised.

YOUR SPECIAL ONES NEED CARE

The pandemic has led to further deteriorating the condition of special needs children. DR ANIL SHARMA shares tips that can help not only the children but their parents too

India has the most number of children with developmental disabilities (about 1.15 crore) out of 195 countries surveyed according to a 2018 study by the medical journal *The Lancet*. These are children with physical, mental, or emotional difficulties who require constant care and check on their progress in order to get better. Fast forward to 2020, the pandemic has taken a hit on the lives of everyone in the world and has resulted in these children losing out on education and regular skill development therapy sessions.

The COVID-19 has confined people to their homes. Work-from-home and social distancing have become the new normal. While people, in general, are feeling mentally exhausted, the pandemic has led to further deteriorating the condition of special needs children.

Social skills and interaction are one of the hardest for these children and no outdoor exposure has added to the struggle. Professional in-person therapy has seen a drastic decline as therapy centres have remained closed for months and even now as they are gradually reopening, parents are choosing to continue with virtual therapy sessions in fear of contracting the virus.

However, the world has adapted to the new norms and soon will the children, with their parent's support and active involvement in helping them adjust to the current circumstances. The best pedagogy in such difficult times is to adapt and implement a model where the parent become the child's co-therapist and keep them engaged as much as possible to encourage skill development.

It's time we go digital: Digital has become the reality of the world during the pandemic. Enabling the child with digital practices and actively getting involved with them can improve their condition immensely. These online therapy sessions not only help children but also help parents to learn and work with the children themselves.

Focusing on mildly challenging activities: These times have already put a lot of burden on children. Losing on social engagement, outdoor games and proper training has led to a lot of children experiencing angry outbursts, disruption in the routine, and negative impact on their health. To ensure that the child is coping the right way, focusing on mildly challenging activities that are not too demanding can be of great help.

It's important to stimulate the child cognitively at all times. From activities as simple as sorting, matching, pattern building to complex cognitive tasks, depending on the potential of the child, something should definitely be included in the child's daily intervention plan in some way or the other.

Build on already developed strengths: A parent should also focus on coping better with their own stress and continuing to build the strengths of their child. This will not only help them get better while staying at home but will also make sure there is not too much pressure on the child when they get back to regular therapy.

The writer is Clinical Director at Mom's Belief

DadiKaKehna

Many people suffer from dry cough at night. The most common reason for this is GERD. ROSHANI DEVI shares easy home remedies that can help relieve it



While catching a cough and cold is the worst thing to have during this pandemic, it is not always because of the COVID-19 infection. If you face the problem of dry cough and night and don't what the reason is, it might be because of Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). However, it is always advisable to consult your doctor because there can be many underlying reasons for it.

Having said that, there are several home remedies that can help prevent and cure it.

Tackle your GERD. Avoid eating spicy or oily foods. Antacids as per your

doctor's prescription can help.

Drink plenty of water. Water has a solution to many problems. Keep yourself hydrated throughout the day and increase the intake during the periods of cough. Water will help to neutralise the acid reflux.

Try honey. You can try taking honey by the teaspoon several times daily, or add it to tea or warm water to drink.

Turmeric can help. It contains curcumin, a compound which may have anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and antibacterial properties. It may also be beneficial for dry cough.



Dig out the truth

Nothing can be as bad as falling for a myth. DR PRADEEP SETHI busts a few and helps you bring out the truth

Getting a hair transplant comes with a lot of angst and confusion. Here are a few myths and facts about the procedure.

Myth: The process is very painful.

Fact: Like every other surgical process, there is an underlying conception for hair transplant to be painful which is not true. The procedure begins with inducing local anesthesia which is a pinprick with a very fine needle following which the procedure of transplant is rather comfortable and painless.

Myth: Causes headaches and migraine.

Fact: People anticipate that the procedure might cause headache or migraines which is not true. There have never been a case as such where people who have had hair transplant complain about conditions as such.

Myth: Hair don't grow long

Fact: Post transplant you can grow your hair as long as you want without any further

treatment or procedures. Once grafted they become as natural as your existing hair.

Myth: One can make out they are not naturally grown hair.

Fact: This entirely depends on the person who performs the procedure. If done by a well experienced professional, an onlooker cannot make out if the hair has been transplanted. It is highly recommended to do a proper research before opting in for the procedure.

Myth: Related to cancer.

Fact: There is no relation to cancer at all. The transplant doesn't cause any health conditions.

Myth: The transplant is temporary.

Fact: The hair is taken from the safe zone and will remain life long without any losses. Whereas, there is nothing temporary about transplanted hair, the characteristics might change with age like whitening of hair.

Myth: Old people cannot have a hair transplant.

Fact: As long as you are not

suffering from any uncontrolled pre-existing health conditions, advancing age is not bar

Myth: Donor can be anyone.

Fact: Only your own hair can be transplanted on you.

Myth: The procedure leaves scars.

Fact: Scars are generally not seen on the scalp if extracted in a proper manner. There are seldom a few chest extractions cases that leave scars on patients with a tendency for keloids. Whereas any break in skin leaves a scar which are generally lifelong, with a professionally done hair transplant, there will hardly be any visible scarring.

Myth: Cut and stitch.

Fact: The cut and stitch technique has now been replaced and individual grafts are extracted by aided equipment, an entirely modernised procedure with absolute precision.

The writer is Professor Hair Transplantation/Dermatology, Co-Founder, Eugenix Hair Sciences

INBRIEF

The UK's leading sports and nutrition brand has now made its entry to India and has launched few unique products with interesting flavours to treat the taste buds of all the fitness enthusiasts.

Impact Whey Protein — Masala Chai Flavour: It is a tribute to the country's love for a cuppa. Every serving features 21g of protein, with less than 1g of carbs and 1.9g of fats, and only 103 calories. Perfect for lovers of tea who are looking to build muscle and supplement their protein.

Six layered protein bar: Another recent release in India is Myprotein's Layered Protein Bar. Each bar features six layers of taste and texture to provide a hit of protein, carbohydrates, and fibre. Packed with over 20g protein, essential minerals calcium and copper, these mouth-watering treats are the ideal way to upgrade your healthy snacking.

Clear Whey Isolate — Lychee Flavour: Hugely popular Clear Whey will now be available in Lychee flavour, also an Indian favourite. This light and refreshing health drink has absolutely no milky taste or texture and is very low in sugar.

There is more to the list — IWP Rocky Road. All these products are available at www.myprotein.in.

Trend Slazer

Urvashi's 2021 goal is self-love

Actor **URVASHI RAUTELA** has announced her goals for the forthcoming year on social media, and it is all about self-love.

Urvashi posted a portrait picture on Instagram, where she is seen smiling at the camera dressed in a saree.

"Setting unconditional self-love as one of my 2021 goals," she wrote alongside the image.

She shared another picture in the same outfit and wrote:

"Current status: Fearlessly unbothered by the opinion of others. How much of your personality are you hiding because of a fear of other people's judgement?"



'I am playing a clean and flamboyantly dressed superstar named Saleem, who

has the superstardom of a hero in my next film. He is either unpredictable or tries to do a performance of unpredictability. He is a superstar who acts on screen and off screen. I had a lot of fun.'

—Pankaj Tripathi

Actor **NEENA GUPTA** says her version of a perfect date is one where she can eat and drink anything she likes.

"(My idea of a perfect date is) That someone will take me to a beautiful place for a candle light dinner and we could talk about many things. I should be able to order what I want to eat or drink," Neena said.

She will be seen having a conversation about dating in Bumble's web show *Dating These Days*. The show will also see stars such as Sanya Malhotra, Kirti Kulhari, Sushant Divgikar and Maanvi Gargroo opening up about various challenges around dating.



Priyanka Chopra is 'blue jean baby'

Actor **PRITYANKA CHOPRA JONAS** is in the mood for casual chic in her new post on social media. She wittily calls herself a blue jean baby describing the style.

Priyanka posted a picture on Instagram, where she is seen dressed in a white T-shirt paired with blue jeans. She completed her look with powder grey boots and basic make-up.

Alongside the image, she wrote: "Blue jean baby."

On the work front, Priyanka has started shooting for the forthcoming Hollywood romantic drama, tentatively titled *Text For You*.

Written and directed by Jim Strouse, the film is an English remake of the German-language film *SMS Fur Dich*, based on Sofie Cramer's novel.



Rejoice but safely

Singer **LUCKY ALI**'s impromptu gig in Goa makes netizens raise questions about his fans, who were seen sitting close to each other without any social distancing

A video of Indipop singer Lucky Ali recently went viral, in which he can be seen performing his hit number, *O Sanam*, in front of a small crowd in Arambol, Goa. Shared by Twitter user and actor Nafisa Ali Sodhi, the video features a group of people sitting close to each other. While netizens seemed to be in awe of the singer giving an impromptu performance, soon, comments questioning the social distancing norms started to pour in. During his performance, which seems like a very intimate affair in the video, nobody in the

crowd is seen wearing masks or following the distancing protocol, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nafisa, who is currently residing in Goa, shared the video in which the singer is seen treating his fans with another soulful rendition of the song. She wrote, "Lucky Ali's live and impromptu performance at Arambol. At the Garden of Dreams @official-luckyali #goa." The 62-year-old singer is dressed in casuals as he plays the tunes on his guitar. When he pauses after singing, "nazron se ab na humko giraana",



the crowd completes by singing "toh bhool na jaana" in unison. "Love... Please tell him I'm his biggest fan," wrote a user, while another user shared, "O Lucky, how wonderfully you sang! Straight from the heart!" "So good to see him. I am a die-hard fan of Lucky sir. My child-

hood memories are filled with each and every song of his," shared another user. One user wrote, "The crowd must have gone crazy and one is in awe of Lucky's magical voice."

One user commented, "Lucky Ali always such a delight to hear. But that latest video is

scaring me. Not one person is wearing a mask, no social distancing. Is COVID over in Goa?" Another wrote, "So many people are retweeting the Lucky Ali video, no one is asking questions about not one person is wearing a mask. Is this from 2020 or an old video? Or did everyone in Goa already got the vaccine?"

Taking a dig at scene, a Twitter user retweeted with comment, "Goa is now post-COVID, it seems!"

"Lovely song, lovely setting and all, yes, but why no masks on anyone? This video is really pissing me off. Some of us haven't met loved ones in months because there's a pandemic on and we are too scared of what might happen if we are even the tiniest bit careless," commented another user on Twitter.

The cases are still rising but

the people in the video are too engrossed to care about the pandemic. "Lovely! But why none of the people in the audience are wearing masks and what about social distancing? Why are they sitting so close? Am I the only one left with this consciousness now?" another user questioned.

Last month, a video of the singer crooning this hit and playing it on the guitar had gone viral. In the video, the singer stops at a line where there is a mention of the word 'death', drawing widespread emotional response from fans.

Well, this makes it evident how precautionary measures keeping in mind the COVID situation have taken to our consciousness and are being prioritised over a social gathering that looks less preferable now.

—With inputs from agencies

No more home-bound

A travel trend report reveals that one in every third Indian is planning to go on a vacation in the year's last holiday season



Limited, goibibo shared, "Pent-up wanderlust is real and these survey findings reflect that Indians are finding new ways to fulfill their travel aspirations and are confidently stepping forward when assured of safe travel choices. Over the past few months, we have worked closely and creatively with the

entire travel and hospitality value chain to raise safety standards and help customers make the journey from being homebound to being travellers again. Bookings for the winter festive holiday season on our site indicate an increase in travel to domestic leisure destinations including Goa, Lonavala, Mahabaleshwar, Pondicherry, Coorg, Shimla, Manali and Darjeeling. As we step into 2021, we are confident of a continued upward travel trend that will find more force as mass vaccine roll-out plan materialises."

The survey conducted among 2000+ respondents between November 15 to December 5 further indicates some trends:

Long distance leisure travel makes a comeback

The trends indicate that the season will witness leisure travellers booking a trip for two or more days. Among them, 50 per cent are willing to opt for air travel signaling a boost in passenger confidence and trust in hopping on to a flight post-pandemic. With flight holidays in equal consideration as drive-through holidays, the preference to air travel can also be attributed to the mini-road trips undertaken by people since unlock was announced in July.

Relax and unwind

More than 80 per cent respondents are looking for on-premise engagement activities. Findings reveal that almost 50 per cent of the surveyed are keen on opting for properties that offer bonfire, barbeque options and a private party place options on Christmas and New Year's Eve; and 37 per cent are looking for in-house dining options that serve

a variety of local delicacies allowing travellers to indulge in local delicacies of the destination.

Prioritise safety

As safety remains paramount, survey responders gave highest preference to sanitisation, hygiene and safety certification in their order of priority while choosing their stay option. 90 per cent respondents are willing to spend more on safety, hygiene and sanitisation facilities during their stay. Some of the parameters that travellers are actively considering while booking a hotel include availability of sanitised and trained staff with protective gears (46 per cent), regular deep cleaning and sanitisation of rooms (46 per cent) and COVID free certified hotels (41 per cent) among others. Additionally, as people now spend more time weighing various travel parameters before firming up their travel plans they are looking for easy and flexible booking options with 86 per cent opting for fully refundable air tickets and hotel vouchers for their next travel booking.

It is the perfect time to get ready for the post-pandemic blow. Beach bars, cocktails, adventure and new experiences will certainly make you feel that the lockdown days and isolation is far away.

More than what meets the eye

The online auction of AstaGuru features rare masterpieces of modern Indian art

AstaGuru will showcase a comprehensive collection of masterpieces and rare works in its forthcoming *Modern Indian Art Auction*. The auction catalogue has been carefully curated and includes iconic artworks of historical importance and those that shine a spotlight on the pioneers of Indian modernism. It further presents an extraordinary opportunity to acquire several remarkable works from National Treasure artworks to Indian Masters.

Tushar Sethi, CEO, AstaGuru said, "Our primary objective while compiling the Modern Indian Art catalogue was to showcase the versatility that Indian modernism has to offer. Presenting a comprehensive catalogue is always a challenge given the scarcity of important works by modern masters. However, our dedicated research team makes it possible to procure these rare works. Our forthcoming sale offers several works of historical importance of which many will be making their auction debut. I am confident that the selected works will intrigue the imagination of art aficionados. We eagerly look forward to the auction."

The online auction is led by Lot 28, a portrait of Victor Egan by Amrita Sher-Gil, *Circa 1939*. This rare Amrita Sher-Gil, oil on canvas will be making its first ever auction appearance. The presented lot (Lot 28) is intertwined with the artist's personal life and has emotional sentiments attached to it since it's a portrait of her husband painted by her. Amrita Sher-Gil created the work as a parting gift to her husband, Victor Egan's family. After they got married, Victor and Amrita lived in Hungary. However, due to the looming war situation, they decided to shift to India in the year 1939 to Amrita Sher-Gil's parental home in Uttar Pradesh, thereafter moving to Lahore in 1941. Victor Egan was a Hungarian Army doctor and therefore, while executing this work, she captured her husband, clad in his Army uniform. They shared a spiritual bond, which inspired her to capture his presence in glory. Estimated at ₹10-15 crores. Born in 1913 in Budapest, she was the first significant woman artist from India to attain fame internationally in the 1930s.

Appearing in the auction is *Himalayas* by Nicholas Roerich



(Lot 20), a great artist, scholar, writer and humanitarian. His legacy of works and inimitable ideology till date awaits a predecessor of stature. He was pre-eminently a symbolic painter, one whose hues of sapphire and claret clouds of white will forever be etched as magnificent representations of the Himalayan range. Nicholas Roerich's association with India began during his childhood, when he came across a portrait of a majestic mountain range that enthralled him. He eventually found out that it was a painting of Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas, and knew then it

was where he had to be. His colour compositions and vivid imagery were all derivatives of a mind that perceived much more than what meets the eye. It is estimated between ₹5-7 crores.

One of the key Lots debuting in this auction is SH Raza's *Sanshari* (Lot 27) (150 x 150 cm), created in 1994. Raza experimented with a number of modernist styles, however, he is best known for his *Bindu* series. It is estimated at ₹3-4 crores.

Also making its debut will be Jehangir Sabavala's *Under the Shadow Of... II*, (Lot 13). His art is defined by its attributes of soli-



tude in the midst of elegance. The subdued colour composition establishes his inclination towards the triggers of light and shadow. The presented landscape (Lot 13), composed with the aid of fragmented geometry, has a multi-facet imagery of continuity. Jehangir Sabavala puts together the elements of despaired land surface only to redeem them with uninhibited beauty and thus, proves his mastery in terms of colouring, texture and lighting.

Next in the presented lot is Prabhakar Barwe's *The Landscape* (Lot 8). He was an abstraction-

ist who was influenced by *Tantric* symbolism and played with space and form like free verse. Also making its auction debut is MF Husain's *Untitled Ganesha* (Lot 7), from 1979, an acrylic on canvas, estimated at ₹30-40 lakh. Husain's repertoire is rich in its depiction of Hindu deities. Of these, the artist gives the elephant-headed god Ganesha a special and prominent place. In particular, Ganesha works are very popular among collectors and highly sought after.

(The auction will take place online on www.astaguru.com on December 19 and 20.)

Aus better place than 2018 side: Lyon Wriddhiman may get nod over Pant in D/N Test



PTI ■ SYDNEY

Injury-ravaged it might be but senior off-spinner Nathan Lyon feels that the current Australian team is the “tightest group” that he has been a part of and is certainly in a much better space than what it was two years back, when India triumphed 1-2 in Tests.

The veteran of 96 Test matches is expected to play a key role for Australia in the upcoming four Tests against India, starting with the Day-Night game in Adelaide from December 17.

“We obviously know what happened in the last series against India and how well they played. We have spoken about that and come up with few different plans,” Lyon said during a virtual media conference.

While Lyon didn’t reveal his gamelan but did mention that the whole team is in a better head space even though it will be missing key players like David Warner due to injury.

“I can’t reveal my plans for

Henriques in, Abbott out of Oz squad

PTI ■ SYDNEY

All-rounder Moises Henriques was on Monday added to Australia’s injury-hit squad for the opening Test against India while pacer Sean Abbott was ruled out of the match due to a calf strain.

Henriques, who had missed the three-day second practice game due to a low-grade hamstring strain, cleared the fitness Test on Monday to return to the Test squad after a gap of four years.

“All-rounder Moises Henriques has been added to Australia’s squad for the first Vodafone Test against India after the hosts’ camp continues



to be hit with injury,” a report in *cricket.com.au*. Said.

Abbott became the latest Australian player to join the injury list after being picking up the strain during the second warm-up game in Sydney which ended in a draw. He is, however, expected to be available for the second Test in Melbourne, which begins on December 26.

Indians to read about but there is a great vibe in this Australian team and we are in far better place than we were two years

ago. It’s exciting and the tightest Aussie team that I have been a part of,” Lyon said.

“We have done a bit of

homework and ready to go. It’s disappointing when you lose guys to injuries and we all know what quality of player Warner is,” he added.

He is happy that one of his close friends, Mitchell Starc, is back in the mix for the first Test and revealed how he intends to trouble the Indian right-handers. “Obviously, I will try to get edges on both sides, catches around the bat. I love footmarks created by Starc. He (Starc) is pretty pumped up and not only a quality player but also a quality bloke,” said Lyon.

He is also not unduly worried about Starc not having a lot of preparation due to the break he got on compassionate ground due to an illness in the family.

“Mitch has played a lot of cricket. He played three Shield games. I am not worried about lack of preparation and in fact he bowled with the pink ball at the Sydney nets. We all know how good he is with the pink ball,” he said.

For someone with seven

This summer is chance to rectify our mistakes: Starc

ADELAIDE: Smarting from the series defeat to India at home two summers ago, Australian speed merchant Mitchell Starc is ready to make amends in the upcoming four-match rubber against one of their biggest rivals, terming it a chance to “rectify” that.

Under Virat Kohli’s captaincy, India humbled hosts Australia 2-1 in 2018-19 for their first series win Down Under after seventy years of trying.

“You never want to lose a series and you certainly never want to lose one in Australia,” Starc told *ESPN’s The Cricket Monthly*.

“India were just better than us throughout the (2018-19) series with bat and ball.

“Sure, we haven’t hidden away from that. We needed to be better in all facets of the game and this summer’s certainly a chance to rectify that,” the pace ace added.

PTI

five-wicket hauls against India, Lyon loves the challenge of attacking the defence of Indian batsmen for long periods of time.

“We have best bowling attack in the world, so we should make sure that we do our stuff, challenging the Indian (batters’) defence for long periods of time,” he said.

“For me, it’s not about my success but about playing my role and helping in picking 20 wickets.”

Lyon is only 10 wickets short of 400 Test scalps. He said he is quite chuffed about being just the second Australian spinner after Shane Warne to get there.

“From where I had started to where I am at present, it is pretty exciting. Hopefully, I can create chances and get close to 400 wicket mark,” he said.

“In the last five years, my bowling has gone to an altogether new level. I love the challenge of playing an attacking side like India.”

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wriddhiman Saha’s far superior glove-work may be given preference over Rishabh Pant’s blazing blade in India’s opening day/night Test against Australia, starting at the Adelaide Oval from Thursday.

One of the most hotly debated topics going into the first Test has been the Indian team’s probable playing XI, with the jury still out on whether the better keeper in 36-year-old Saha pips the better batsman that the 23-year-old Pant is.

There is a school of thought in the team that Saha’s superior glove-work and also safe batting should be valued more at this point of time.

Coach Ravi Shastri, captain Virat Kohli, assistant coaches Vikram Rathour, Bharat Arun and travelling selector Harvinder Singh will be assessing both Pant and Saha’s performance based on their individual contributions in match situations.

Saha’s 54 came when India could have lost the game and he bailed the team out while facing a top-quality attack. The score read 143 for nine and the team could have lost to Australia A, but he guided a young Kartik Tyagi, scored his runs and saved the game.

The attack that Saha faced had James Pattinson, Michael Neser and Cameron Green, which was international standard.

Compared to that, Pant came after India had already taken control of the pink ball dress rehearsal with leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson and part-timer Nick Maddinson in operation.

All the hard work was done by Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal and Hanuma Vihari before Pant joined the proceedings.

Saha averages 30 plus in 37 Tests with 1238 runs and three hundreds in his kitty. Besides, he has 103 dismissals behind the stumps, including



Wriddhiman Saha plays shot during his innings against Australia A in the first warm-up game in Sydney

BCCI/Twitter

92 catches and 11 stumpings. Still, even if Saha goes on to play the first Test, it wouldn’t mean that Pant would be out of equation as the Bengal

stumper would need to perform decently with the bat to keep his younger competitor out of reckoning for a place in the first XI.

Quick century in warm-up game was big confidence-booster: Rishabh

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Indian wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant says the hundred that he struck in the recently-concluded pink-ball warm-up game was just the confidence-booster he needed ahead of the Test series against Australia starting December 17.

Pant, who struggled with fitness and form in this year’s IPL in the UAE, created a happy selection dilemma for the Indian team management by smashing a 73-ball 103 in the visitors’ second innings against Australia A in the second practice game.

“When I went out to bat a lot of overs were left, so (Hanuma) Vihari and I wanted to build a good partnership. We wanted to bat as much as possible. I was just trying to

give myself as much time as possible and slowly I started to develop confidence,” Pant told the BCCI’s official website.

“This hundred has been a big confidence-booster for me. It’s been a month, I am in Australia but I didn’t get the chance to play in the first practice match because of a stiff neck.

“In the first innings here I was unlucky as I felt the LBW decision was wrong from the umpire. In the second innings, my focus was to spend as much time as possible and the result is I got a good innings under my belt,” he said.

The 23-year-old left-hander said the team’s main focus in the second practice game, as a batting unit, was to spend time in the middle against the pink ball.



Neymar stretchered off in PSG defeat

PARIS (AP): Paris Saint-Germain surrendered top spot in Ligue 1 after losing 1-0 at home to Lyon on Sunday but potentially suffered a more devastating blow as an anguished Neymar was stretchered off with an ankle injury.

Tino Kadewere’s first-half goal secured Lyon a seventh win in eight matches as they moved level with Lille, who took over first place earlier in the day following a 2-1 home victory over Bordeaux.

PSG dropped to third after losing for the fourth time in 14 games this season, but the far greater concern will be the health of Neymar after his ankle appeared to twist awkwardly under a challenge from Thiago Mendes in stoppage time.

The Lyon midfielder was sent off for the tackle following a VAR review while a distraught Neymar, in considerable pain, was taken off on a stretcher having immediately signalled for medical assistance.

Lyon’s first win away to PSG since October 2007, provided fresh hope of a genuine title race this term with the top five teams separated by just three points.

STILL UNBEATEN

Hernandez’s late brace rescues Rossoneri

AFP ■ TURIN

Cristiano Ronaldo marked his 100th game for Juventus with a pair of penalties in a 3-1 success over Genoa on Sunday, as the champions closed the gap on Serie A leaders AC Milan who were held at home against Parma.

French defender Theo Hernandez’s brace rescued a point at the death for AC Milan who came from two goals down to draw 2-2 in the San Siro.

Milan’s lead on second-placed Inter was cut to three points after Antonio Conte’s side staged a 3-1 comeback win at Cagliari.

Playing without injured top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Milan had looked set for their first league defeat this season.

Hakan Calhanoglu rattled the woodwork three times with Ibrahim Diaz also hitting the post for the hosts before Hernani put Parma ahead after quarter of an hour.

The Brazilian midfielder then set up Jasmin Kurtic for the second after 56 minutes.

But two minutes later Hernandez headed in off a Calhanoglu corner with the French defender adding a second in injury time off a rebound.



Chasing a first league title since 2011, Milan are unbeaten in the first 11 matches of a Serie A season since the 2003/2004, when they also won the *Scudetto*.

In Genoa, Juventus were boosted after their 3-0 Champions League win in Barcelona, with Paulo Dybala getting his first goal this season.

Stefano Sturaro levelled for the hosts after an hour.

But Nicolo Rovella’s foul on Juan Cuadrado allowed Ronaldo to slot in his first penalty after 78 minutes with the second coming a minute from time after goalkeeper Mattia Perin brought down Alvaro Morata.

Kiwis complete another whitewash

AFP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand shot to the top of the world Test rankings on Monday when they thrashed the West Indies by an innings and 12 runs to wrap up an emphatic series win.

It lifted the Black Caps to 116 points, equal with Australia at the head of the rankings table, and also extended their unbeaten home run to 15 Tests.

New Zealand also stayed in the hunt for the inaugural World Test Championship final as they overtook England to move into third in the standings behind Australia and India, who start a four-Test series this week.

“It does sound pretty cool,” said Tom Latham, New Zealand’s stand-in captain while Kane Williamson is on paternity leave.

“I didn’t realise that until this morning,” he said of the rankings boost. “We have been playing some good cricket as of late in our conditions, and away for that matter, and it’s a pretty cool thing.”

After Williamson pulled



out on the eve of the second Test, Latham said the team stepped up with Henry Nicholls overcoming a form slump to score 174 and lay the foundations of the victory.

Kyle Jamieson, in only his fourth Test, took five wickets in the first innings and two in the second to be man of the series.

Tim Southee took seven in the Test. New Zealand also won the first Test in Hamilton by an innings.

“It was great for our squad that we do have depth where guys can come in and perform straight away,” Latham said.

But it was a disappointing tour for the West Indies, with both Tests ending on the fourth morning. They have now lost four in a row since beating England in Southampton in July.

Captain Jason Holder said they only had themselves to blame.

“It’s just tough when we

didn’t take our opportunities when they came. We were good in patches but still not good enough,” he said.

After losing the first Test in New Zealand by an innings and 134 runs, and being rolled for 131 in the first innings of the second Test, they saved their best for their final bat on tour, scoring 317 all out in their second innings.

The tourists resumed the day at 244/6, needing a further 85 runs to make New Zealand bat again and with Jason Holder on 60 and Joshua da Silva on 25.

Holder added one to his overnight 60 before he was bowled by Tim Southee, who also had Alzarri Joseph caught behind after an entertaining 24 — all from boundaries.

Da Silva marked his maiden Test with a half-century but on 57 he fell lbw to Neil Wagner, who also bowled Shannon Gabriel without scoring to leave Chemar Holder not out 13.

For New Zealand, Wagner took three for 54 and Trent Boult finished with three for 96.

Barca-PSG clash headlines CL draw

AFP ■ NYON

Barcelona’s clash against last season’s runner-up Paris Saint-Germain headlines the Uefa Champions League round of 16 fixtures as the draw for the first knockout round was completed on Monday.

Defending champions Bayern Munich, who are yet to lose a match since the beginning of the last season in the Champions League and beat PSG in the 2020 final, face Italy’s Lazio in what will be the first meeting between the two sides in this event.

Frank Lampard’s Chelsea were handed a tough draw, facing Atletico Madrid in the first knockout round of Europe’s most coveted club competition.

English giants Manchester City and Liverpool will both be facing Bundesliga clubs, taking on Borussia Monchengladbach and RB Leipzig respectively.

Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus will play Portuguese



side Porto, winners in 2004, while the competition’s most successful side Madrid take on last season’s surprise quarter-finalists Atalanta.

The round of 16 first legs are scheduled for 16/17/23/24 February, with the second legs on 9/10/16/17 March. The teams

that finished first in their groups will play the second leg at home.

TOUGH FOR UNITED, ARSENAL

In Europa League, struggling in the domestic league, Manchester United and Arsenal have been handed tough match-

es in the round of 32.

United, having slipped into Europa League after crashing out of their group in the Champions League, face high-flying La Liga side Real Sociedad.

Meanwhile Arsenal, who are in crisis in the Premier League but had a perfect record in Europe, take on Portuguese giants Benfica. The latter are placed second in Portugal’s top flight while Arsenal are starting at a relegation battle in the Premier League.

Tottenham face Austrian side Wolfsberger and Leicester City will take on Slavia Prague, while Scottish Premiership leaders Rangers play Belgian side Royal Antwerp.

Winners of Europa League get direct entry into next season’s Champions League.

The first legs of the knockout fixtures are scheduled for Thursday 18 February, with the second legs on 25 February. Seeded teams are at home in the

Same old story

Messi steps up to end Barca’s losing skid

AFP ■ BARCELONA

Lionel Messi saved Barcelona from another embarrassing result by scoring the decisive goal in a 1-0 win over lowly Levante on Sunday.

Messi struck with 14 minutes remaining of a lacklustre display from Barca at the Camp Nou which will do little to ease fan fears following their 3-0 hammering at the hands of Juventus.

Ronald Koeman’s side are still way off the pace in the title race, nine points behind Sociedad who reclaimed first place despite only drawing 1-1 with Eibar.

Barcelona do however have two games in hand on the Basque outfit.

Atletico are level on 26 points with Sociedad and also have two games in hand while Real Madrid are now just three points behind the leaders having played one less after beating their local rivals 2-0 on Saturday.

Villarreal are four points off the lead in fourth after drawing 1-1 at Real Betis, who are one point behind Barca in ninth.



10-man Arsenal lose again

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal’s season went from poor to dreadful as captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored an own-goal and the Gunners were reduced to 10 men in a 1-0 loss to Burnley in the Premier League.

Aubameyang had been looking to end his goal drought, but at the other end of the field at Emirates Stadium on Sunday. But the striker headed the ball into his own net while defending a Burnley corner in the 73rd minute.

Boos rang out from the home crowd with 2,000 fans allowed under coronavirus restrictions.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta is under increasing pressure with his team 15th in the 20-team division with 13 points from 12 games — four points more than Burnley which climbed out of the relegation zone.

Arsenal was already down a man after Granit Xhaka was sent off for violent conduct in the 58th after a VAR check and a review by the referee on the sidelines.

Xhaka had grabbed Ashley Westwood by the throat and pushed



him to the ground after a challenge on another player.

The Gunners were lucky not to be down to nine men after VAR deemed that Mohamed Elneny wasn’t guilty of violent conduct just before the corner was taken that led to the goal. Replays showed Elneny appearing to push defender James Tarkowski in the face. He ended up with a yellow card instead.

The Gunners have now lost four consecutive home league games.