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REFORMS AIN'T
MAGIC TRICKS**WORLD 11**
RICKSHAW BOMB KILLS 15
KIDS IN EASTERN AFGHAN**SPORT 14**
LEWANDOWSKI WINS FIFA'S
BEST PLAYER AWARD

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY DECEMBER 19, 2020; PAGES 14 ₹3



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SHAKEELA IS A
COMPELLING
STORY: PANKAJ
12 VIVACITY

MSP, APMC intact: Modi to farmers

Opp misusing farmers as Govt wants to help kisan grow more earn more, says PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court suggested that the Centre should put on hold the three contentious farm laws and open talks with the agitating farmers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday made another outreach to the farmers and said he is ready with folded hands to discuss their concerns.

The PM emphasised that the system of Minimum Support Price (MSP) will stay and "talk about MSP ending after the new laws is the biggest lie ever".

"If anyone has any concerns, then with our heads bowed and our hands folded, with humility, we are willing to discuss with them and assuage their fears," Modi said, addressing farmers in Madhya Pradesh via video as part of the Government's redoubled efforts to reach out to farmers.

Modi said the Government is ready to ally farmers' fears and maintained that "they are being misled by Opposition parties" who are supporting the protests to promote their own agenda.

"Agar hamain MSP samapt Karin hoti to hum Swaminathan Committee report kyon lagu kartain", he said.

Seeking to dispel farmers apprehensions, Modi said, "It is six-month since the new farm laws have come into effect but not a single mandi has been shut down."

"Phir ye jhoot kyon failaya ja raha hain?" asked the Prime Minister as he defended three farm reform laws.

Farmers have been asking the Modi Government to provide a written guarantee on the continuation of the MSP, apprehending that farm reforms which now allow trading, would gradually end the MSP and the mandi system.

Opposition is feeling slighted as "we have delivered on farm reforms", said the Prime Minister.

Modi said Opposition parties are using you (farmers) to do politics to find relevance today, since they have lost their political ground. "They fear that Modi will get the credit for reforms. Please take the credit, for me, the only thing that

matter is growth and progress for farmers," he said.

Modi said all old manifestos of other parties said the same thing "what his Government has dared to implement".

Without taking any name, the Prime Minister said Opposition parties are trying to take mileage from farmers' protests.

He said farm reforms did not happen overnight, years of discussion and consultations have gone into it.

"In the new farm laws, the centre has only stated that whether the farmer sells his produce in the market or outside, it will be his will," Modi said, adding that not a single market has been closed after the new laws were enacted.

"Today I want to expose those who have absolutely no care or genuine concern for you — our anna-daata (farmers). I want to caution all those who are being misled and instigated in the name of these farm laws," the Prime Minister said.

It is the 20th day of protest by farmers on the outskirts of Delhi and agitators hope that the Government would take concrete steps to resolve the stand-off by walking the talk as the Government seeks farmers to not to press for scrapping the new laws.

Opp misleading farmers just for political gains, alleges Tomar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar — who is leading the negotiation with about 40 farmer unions along with Food Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Commerce Som Parkash — asserted the three new farm laws are beneficial for farmers and the Government is ready to give a written assurance that the MSP and mandi system will continue.

He put the blame on Opposition parties for misleading the farmers and accused them of changing their stance on the reform process.



Farmers watch live telecast of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on a screen during Kisan Mahasammelan in Raisin on Friday

PTI

All HC issues notice to 10 newly-elected RS members from UP

Lucknow (PTI): The Allahabad High Court on Friday issued notice to all ten newly elected Rajya Sabha MPs on a petition moved by businessman Prakash Bajaj claiming that the returning officer had wrongly rejected his nomination. The Lucknow bench of the high court fixed January 27 as the next date of hearing in the matter.

A bench of Justice Jaspreet Singh passed the order on the election petition moved by Bajaj who contended that the returning officer had wrongly rejected his nomination citing fault in the affidavit and form and all ten candidates were declared elected unopposed on November 2. "Since the nomination was arbitrarily rejected, the elections should be conducted afresh," the peti-

"Since the nomination was arbitrarily rejected, the elections should be conducted afresh," petitioner Prakash Bajaj demanded

tioner demanded.

The plea also said that same mistakes were there in the affidavits and forms of the others but by "applying double standards", the returning officer allegedly illegally and arbitrarily rejected only his papers.

After hearing the plea, the court issued notices to all the ten newly elected MPs seeking their response.

Another jolt to TMC, one more MLA resigns for BJP

CPM MLA too quits for 'right' movement; Suvendu's resignation from House not OK'd

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after senior Trinamool Congress leaders Suvendu Adhikari and Jitendra Tiwari left the Bengal ruling outfit, two more legislators, one from TMC and the other from the CPI(M), quit their respective parties dropping hints of their rightward movement.

Sources close to Adhikari whose resignation from the Bengal Assembly was not immediately accepted by Speaker Biman Banerjee on "technical grounds" said he would join the BJP in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah during his Saturday rally



at Midnapore.

Adhikari has been summoned by Mamata to explain his position personally to him before considering his resignation. Shah is coming to Bengal on a two-day organisational trip.

"The letter he submitted personally to the Assembly secretariat has no date while the e-mailed letter to me contains a date... this discrepancy has to be clarified by him for which I have asked him to meet me on

December 21. Then only I will be able to accept his resignation. Till then he continues to be a TMC member of the House," Mamata said.

Adhikari a former MP and Bengal Transport Minister later said he would meet the Speaker at the Assembly on the designated date.

The leader who had expressed concern about his personal safety and that of his followers was being provided with Z-category security by the Union Government sources said without providing further clarifications.

The other two leaders who on Friday left their respective parties are TMC legislator and Mukul Roy confidant Sil Bhadra Dutta and Tapasi Mandal a CPI(M) MLA from Haldia whose husband left the Marxist outfit on November 21.

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Mercury drops below 3° C in Delhi, more in store for 2 days

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi is likely to witness "severe" cold on Saturday and Sunday. "Cold wave" conditions are predicted in Delhi on Saturday and the cold spell is likely to continue till Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The minimum temperature dropped below the three degrees Celsius-mark in parts of Delhi on Friday as frosty winds from snow-covered Western Himalayas continue to sweep the national Capital.

The mercury plunged to 2.7 degrees Celsius at Jafarpur. It settled at 3.5 degrees Celsius and 3.8 degrees Celsius at Ayanagar and Lodhi Road weather stations, the IMD said.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 4.4 degrees Celsius. The maximum, however, rose to 19.8 degrees Celsius.

Covid-19 cases cross 1-cr mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's coronavirus tally crossed one crore mark on Saturday. The country added over 25,661 cases and with 308 new fatalities, its Covid-19 death toll reached 1,45,137.

With a continuous trend of daily reductions, India's share of global active coronavirus cases is down at 1.51 per cent (one in 66). The last one million cases for India have come in 29 days.

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Covid-19 IN INDIA TOTAL

CASES: 1,00,03,495

DEATHS: 1,45,137

RECOVERED:

95,48,434

ACTIVE: 3,07,295



Conmen put Modi's Varanasi office on block

4 held for listing PM office for sale on OLX

PTI ■ VARANASI

Four people have been arrested for allegedly posting an online advertisement listing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi office for "sale", police said on Friday.

The accused had taken a picture of the "Jansampark Kaaryalay (public relations

office)" of Modi, who represents Varanasi in the Lok Sabha, and put it "up for sale" on OLX website, they said.

The office is located in the Jawahar Nagar locality of the city, and it falls under the Bhelupur police station limits, Varanasi Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said.

"Yesterday, it came to our notice that the Prime Minister's office here has been put up on sale on OLX website. An FIR was immediately lodged at the

Bhelupur police station, and the matter is being probed," he said.

"Four people involved in the case have been taken in custody," the SSP said, adding that the person who took the picture and put it on the website is among them.

The accused are being questioned, and further legal proceedings are being carried out, he said. Modi was first elected to the Lok Sabha from Varanasi in 2014 and then re-elected in 2019.



LAC parleys inconclusive but both agree on disengagement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the stand-offs continuing for the ninth month at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), India and China held yet another round of diplomatic-level parleys on Friday to break the logjam. There was no breakthrough, but both the sides agreed to sustain the process of dialogue and ensure speedy disengagement at the border.

The latest round of diplomatic level talks under the aegis of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was

held nearly 11 weeks after the last round on September 30.

These talks, though inconclusive, could pave the way for the ninth round of Corps Commander-level talks between the armies of the two countries. The two commanders had met last on November 6 but of now no avail.

Given the apparent mistrust at present, India has ramped up its military preparedness and has deployed additional mountain warfare trained troops for the winter months all along the 1,700 km long LAC in Ladakh. More than one lakh troops from both the sides are facing each

other in the Ladakh sector.

In the virtual WMCC talks, the sixth since the face-offs began in early May, the Indian delegation was led by Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the Ministry of External Affairs Naveen Srivastava. The Director General of the Department of Boundary & Oceanic Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hong Liang led the Chinese delegation.

The two sides reviewed the developments along the LAC since the last round of the WMCC, the External Affairs Ministry said here.

Continued on Page 11

Covid curbs must be announced in advance: SC

Violators of Covid guidelines, SOPs must be punished

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said that any decision to impose curfew or lockdown must be announced in advance so that people may make provisions for their livelihood.

The court said this while observing that Covid-19 pandemic has spread like wildfire owing to the lack of implementation of guidelines and SOPs.

"Curfew on weekends/night may be considered by States where it is not in place. However, any decision to impose curfew or lockdown must be announced long in advance so that the people may know and make provisions for the livelihood, like ration," a Supreme Court bench comprising Justice Ashoke Bhushan, R Subhash Reddy and MR Shah said.

The apex court said strict and stern action should be

taken against those who are violating Covid-19 guidelines and SOPs, irrespective of their position.

The bench said there should be more police personnel at food courts, eateries, vegetable markets, sabzi mandis, bus stations, railway stations, etc, as these are the places which are seeing gathering of people.

No permission shall be granted for any celebration as far as possible, the SC noted adding that there should be mechanism in place to check the number of people attending such gathering. The bench also observed that there shall be more and more testing and the focus should be to declare correct facts and figures.

Continued on Page 11

Uttarakhand CM tests Covid positive

Dehradun: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said he tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday. "I had undergone a coronavirus test today and my report has come out positive. I am well and have no symp-

toms. So on the advice of doctors, I will remain in home isolation," tweeted Rawat.

The CM also requested the people who had come into his contact over the last few days to get themselves tested for the infection.

UN VEHICLE HIT: INDIA REJECTS CLAIM BY PAK

Islamabad: The Pakistan Army on Friday accused the Indian Army of "deliberately" targeting a United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) vehicle in the Chirkot Sector along the Line of Control, an allegation dismissed by India as untrue.

₹7,926-CR BANK FRAUD: HYDERABAD FIRM BOOKED

New Delhi: The CBI has booked Hyderabad-based Transstroy (India) Ltd and its directors for alleged bank fraud of over ₹7,926 crore in a consortium led by Canara Bank, in one of the biggest banking scams in the country, officials said on Friday.

More FIRs against Azam Khan



Lucknow (PNS): Trouble continued to mount for jailed Samajwadi Party Member of Parliament Mohammad Azam Khan as the Rampur police lodged 11 more FIRs against him, taking the total cases against him to 100.

Azam Khan has been lodged in Sitapur jail for the last ten months along with his MLA wife Tazeen Fatma and disqualified MLA son Abdullah Azam in connection with a fake birth certificate case. Besides, they have also been named in cases of encroachment, land-grabbing, power theft, book theft, idol theft, goat theft, buffalo theft and bullying.

During the hearing through video conferencing on Thursday, the Rampur police told the Special MP/MLA Court that Azam Khan's name was added to 11 more FIRs. Earlier these cases were registered against his close aides for illegal demolition of houses in Rampur.

Additional district government counsel in the MP/MLA Court, Ramavatar Saini, said that Azam Khan was not named in the FIR lodged by the complainants but during investigation and on the statements of the accused, his name was added.



NOTICE

I have changed my name from Isha Gulati to Isha Kakkar in future I should be recognised by this name. Isha Kakkar W/o Varun Kakkar, R/o Block No. 13 Govind Nagar, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have ended my relations with my son Jitendra Kumar Sonkar and his wife Jyoti alias Preeti and disinherited them from my moveable and immovable properties due to their bad character. I have no connection with the acts done by them for which they would themselves be responsible. Sushil Kumar Sonkar S/o Late Babu Lal, R/o 1/58-A, Nawabganj, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I Army no. 14535467H, Ex HONY NB SUB Radhe Shyam Tiwari S/o Late Chandrabhushan Tiwari was serving in Indian Army's corps of EME. I here by declare that date of birth of my son Raj Gopalan Tiwari in my army record is 15.09.1999 which is wrong. His right date of birth is 15.09.2002 which is registered in his school record, aadhar card, and family register.

सूचना

मेरी पत्नी का नाम मेरे पीपीओओ में गलती से REKHA R CHERUBIM और जन्म तिथि 31-12-1971 दर्ज हो गई है। जबकि मेरी खाता अभिलेखों में उनका नाम REKHA RAKCHHA CHERUBIM है, जो सही है। मेरी पत्नी की सही जन्मतिथि 03-11-1970 है। साथ ही मेरी दोनों बेटियों का नाम और उनकी जन्मतिथि इसी प्रकार है। (1) RACHAEL CHERUBIM D.O.B.- 30-09-1995 (2) ROSELINE CHERUBIM D.O.B.- 27-06-1998. RAKCHHA CHAND CHERUBIM (Retd. NAVY) 568 KHA/379, Krishna Palli Alambagh, Lucknow-5

आवश्यकता

किन्नाल सिंह महाविद्यालय कैंडर, असेक्टर फोर्टपुर (कोलैज कोड 02044) सम्बन्ध-श्री राजेश सिंह (रज्जु बन्धू) विश्वविद्यालय प्रयागराज (आरओ) में प्रार्थना-योग्यता-55%, पीएचडी/डीफिल अनुभव-महाविद्यालय में 15 वर्ष का शिक्षण अनुभव सहयोग आचार्य - शिक्षा-विश्वी सहयोग, अर्द्धक शिक्षा, अकादमिक शिक्षा, शाला, गृह विज्ञान, समाज शास्त्र, इतिहास, भूगोल, संस्कृत व इंग्लिश एंड फीटिंग, योग्यता समीक्षा विश्व में परास्नातक 55% व Net / SLET / P.H.D. दस्तावेज - यूजीसीसी के मानकानुसार, नोट-इन्फॉर्म अगली अगली 04 फोटो, समस्त सैबिक प्रमाणपत्र सहित 15 दिनों के अन्दर महाविद्यालय के डेड लाइन 371 हरिद्वार फोर्टपुर (आरओ) में सीधे जमा करे या पंजीकृत डाक से भेजें। प्रत्यक्ष-सर्वीस कुमार सिंह, मो-9515032705, 9838327225

Govt facilitates inter-state marketing of farm produce

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Even as protests raged seeking the repeal of three agricultural laws, the UP Agriculture department facilitated cultivators and farmers producer organisations (FPOs) to set up direct links with aggregators and food processing firms and form unique convergences to market their produce.

In two recent examples, the Maharajganj Vegetable Producer Company Limited (MVPCL) in eastern UP signed an agreement with Tuber Foods Private for the supply of sweet potato, while Mahalaxmi Producer Company Limited (MPCL) in Deoria established a convergence between three government departments - Agriculture, Education and Rural Livelihood Mission - for the sup-

ply of oyster mushrooms by women cultivators for mid-day meal scheme.

The MVPCL has signed an agreement with Tuber Foods, a processor from Gujarat dealing in food processing and export to West Asia, for supplying 210 tonnes of sweet potato for two cropping seasons (January and June 2021). While sweet potato fetches Rs 20 per kg in the local market, Tuber Foods would pay the farmers Rs 25 per kg and lift the produce directly from their farms. The produce would be used by Tuber Foods for preparing healthier burger-patties and chips than those prepared from white potato.

The Union government had recently advised the Uttar Pradesh government to include mushroom as well as honey in Integrated Child

Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal Scheme for their immunity-boosting and anti-viral properties.

An Agriculture department official said that for the first time farm produce from UP had found its way to a market in Gujarat without going through the hassles of APMC route.

"Earlier inter-state trade was hampered due to restrictions imposed by the APMC system, which have now been removed. It is going to help both the farmers and consumers. In the coming days, several farm products would be traded directly to better markets - inter-state as well as intrastate. The department will continue to facilitate many such tie-ups through different channels," the official added.

Rajbhar backs Kejriwal on farm laws

Lucknow (PNS): Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party president Om Prakash Rajbhar on Friday said that his party supported Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who tore down the copies of the three agricultural laws in the Delhi Assembly as these laws were against the interest of the farmers and were for serving the corporate. Attacking the agricultural laws brought by the Union government, Rajbhar said his party would support the initiative by the Aam Aadmi Party against the agriculture laws. Rajbhar was in Hardoi district on Friday to take part in a meeting of people from the Arkavanshi community in Sandila town.

The SBSP chief said that those who talked about doubling the income of farmers were in reality benefiting the industrialists through the farm bills.

"They have nothing to do with the interests of the farmers. What Arvind Kejriwal did was right. He wants that the lands of the farmers are not usurped by the corporate houses," Rajbhar said.

SP TO CELEBRATE CHARAN SINGH'S BIRTH ANNIV

Buoyed by its success in mobilising the cadre to protest against the three agriculture laws, the Samajwadi Party will celebrate the 118th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh on December 23 in a grand manner.

SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said here on Friday that a grand programme to celebrate the birth anniversary of Chaudhary Charan Singh would be organised at each district headquarters.

Mass drug administration to eradicate filariasis soon

Lucknow (PNS): Highlighting the importance of mass movement Director, Vector-borne Diseases, Dr Ashok Paliwal, said that participation of masses was crucial in making any public health programme a success and therefore it was important to break the cycle of transmission of filariasis.

Dr Paliwal was speaking during a virtual media sensitisation workshop to spotlight the upcoming Mass Drug

Administration (MDA) rounds for elimination of lymphatic filariasis (LF) in the state.

"Elimination of polio was possible as it was converted into a mass movement with active support from communities. If the media also disseminates the right message, our fight against transmitted diseases will become stronger. Campaign to have medicine once a year, for three consecutive years, can eliminate filar-

iasis from the state and the country," he said.

Filariasis is a disabling disease that is transmitted by mosquitoes. Usually acquired in childhood, the infection damages the lymphatic system and if left untreated, causes abnormal enlargement of body parts such as hydrocele (abnormal swelling of scrotum) and lymphedema (swelling in the limbs). A few patients also develop chronic cough called tropical pul-

monary eosinophilia and could have symptoms like passing of milky white urine (Chyluria).

Joint Director, Medical and Health (Filaria) Dr VP Singh said that to start with, eight districts in UP would be undertaking the MDA from December 21.

"Everyone except children below two years of age, pregnant women and seriously ill people, must consume the prescribed anti-filarial drug during

the rounds in the presence of trained health workers," he said.

Districts where the campaign will be carried out are: Auraiya, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Ghazipur, Kannauj, Kanunabti, Rae Bareilly and Sultanpur.

"Those suffering from medical conditions like hypertension, diabetes and arthritis must consume anti-filarial drugs, as they will not have any adverse reactions," he said.

CNG boats to cruise in Varanasi soon

Lucknow (PNS): In an attempt to make the Ganga river pollution-free in Varanasi, the Uttar Pradesh government will replace the existing diesel engine boats with CNG-run boats soon. The upgrade will be made at an estimated cost of Rs 34 crore and will be the first in the world on such a large scale.

Varanasi Divisional Commissioner Deepak Agarwal told news persons in Lucknow on Friday that GAIL

(India) Limited had taken up the responsibility of making the Ganga river free of pollution under Corporate Social Responsibility project.

Pegged at Rs 34 crore, as many as 1,700 small and big boats with CNG engines will be made operational. While a small CNG engine-fitted boat will cost around Rs 60,000 to Rs 70,000, a big boat will come at a cost of Rs 2 lakh. The boat-

men will have to shell out a small amount for the changeover. Deputy General Manager of GAIL (India) Limited, Gauri Shankar Mishra, said that 51 boats would be fitted with CNG engines at a cost of about Rs 1 crore in the first phase for which Datar stations were being built on the river ghats. He said fuel dispensers had also been set up on the jetty and would become operational in a fortnight. Former Director of

Kashi Hindu University, Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development and Coordinator of Mahamana Malviya Ganga Research Centre, Kavita Shah, said that poisonous carbon monoxide, sulphur, particulate matter and heavy metal were released when a diesel-engine boat cruised but in case of low-density CNG engines, the environment was hardly affected as the compressed natural gas was less toxic.

VHP workers to collect donations for Ram temple construction

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Wishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) workers will go from door to door from January 15 to collect donations for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

This was stated by VHP vice-president and secretary general of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, Champat Rai, in Lucknow on Friday.

Announcing the launch of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Nidhi Samarpan Abhiyan, Rai said the campaign would start from Makar Sankranti (January 15, 2021) and continue up to Magh-Purnima (February 27) when VHP workers would reach out to 110 million families of 4,00,000 villages of the country to seek donation for the Ram temple, linking the common man with Shri Ram Janmabhoomi. "The VHP workers would issue coupons or receipts with the picture of Lord Ram's temple," he said.

"With public support from every caste, creed, sect, region and language of the country, the Ram temple would actually take the form of a Rashtira Mandir (Temple of the Nation)," he said.

Addressing press persons, Rai said that the Hindu society struggled for five centuries to protect the country's honour by reclaiming the birthplace of Lord Ram.

"Finally, the Supreme Court accepted the sentiments of the society and directed the government to form a trust," he said.

On undergoing preparations for the temple, Rai said that engineers from IIT-Mumbai, IIT-Delhi, IIT-Chennai, IIT-Guwahati, CBRi Roorkee, Larsen & Toubro and Tatas were working on the foundation drawing which would soon come out.

The three-storeyed temple will be made of stone blocks and each floor will be 20 feet high while the length and breadth of the temple will be 360 feet and 235 feet, respectively.

CBI chargesheet indicts 4 Hathras rape accused

Lucknow (PNS): The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a chargesheet against four jailed accused in the gangrape and death of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in Hathras district at a Special SC/ST Court in Lucknow on Friday.

The chargesheet was filed for murder, assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty, rape and relevant sections of the Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

On December 16, the probing CBI team had submitted before the Allahabad High Court that it would be filing a

chargesheet by December 18. The CBI team, through the document, confirmed that the victim was gang-raped and injured leading to her death, by accused Sandeep, Luvkush, Ravi and Ramu.

The accused and their kin had earlier claimed innocence. Meanwhile, the CBI also submitted that it would take the Hathras victim's brother, who had lodged the FIR, to Gujarat for a psychological assessment.

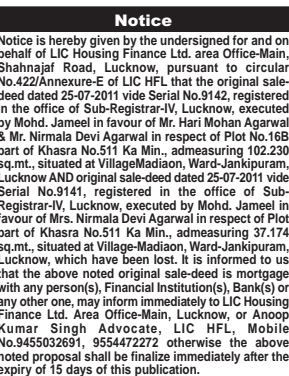
The CBI had taken up the probe on October 11 and quizzed over 50 people, including the family members of the victim. Besides, the CBI sleuths also carried out brain

mapping of all accused.

On September 14, the 19-year-old victim was allegedly assaulted and gang-raped in Hathras and she later succumbed to her injuries at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital on September 29.

Her body was cremated by Hathras district administration and police without the consent of the victim's family, triggering an outcry.

The Supreme Court had earlier directed the Allahabad High Court to monitor the CBI probe into the Hathras incident. On a request from the UP government, the CBI registered a case on October 11.



NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, PRAYAGRAJ

Tender Notice No. 5920202021 E-TENDERING TENDER NOTICE
Date 14 .12.2020
Divisional Railway Manager (Engineering)/North Central Railway/Prayagraj, for and on behalf of the President of India, Invites E-Tenders by Two Packet System on prescribed form for the following work up to 13:30 hrs. on the tender opening date. The details of the Tender are as under:-

SN	Tender No.	Name of work	Approx Cost	Earnest Money
1	164	Supply, Stacking and Loading into Railway Wagons / Hoppers/KC Wagons etc of 200000 cum Machine Crushed Hard Stone Ballast of 65mm Gauge at BARUA SAGAR DEPOT in Jhansi division for (use in Prayagraj division) under Divl. Engineer/Track/N. C. Rly., Prayagraj.	₹ 14,32,32,000/-	₹ 8,66,200/-

Completion Period : 30 Months. **Date of Opening of tender :** 13.01.2021. **Eligibility Criteria for similar work :** Supply of machine crushed stone ballast / stone aggregates.

Note:- 1. Tenderers have to submit following test report along with their tender document from any reputed Govt. organization / Institutions as per list given in the tender document (Para 3.1 of Specification of Track Ballast on Page 48 & 49 of Tender Document) otherwise their tender will not be considered and summarily rejected: (i) Size Gradation Test (ii) Abrasion Value Test (iii) Impact Value Test (iv) Water Absorption Test. 2. E-Tender forms shall be issued free of cost to all tenderers. 3. The complete information along with tender document of above E-tenders are available on Website www.ireps.gov.in up to 13.30 hrs. on the due date of tender opening. 4. Bids other than in the form of E-Bids shall not be accepted against above tenders. For this purpose, vendors are required to get themselves registered with IREPS website along with Digital Signature Certificate issued by CCA under IT Act-2000. 5. Rates entered into financial rate page and duly signed digitally shall be considered. Rates and any other financial entry in any other form/letter head if attached by vendors shall be straightway ignored and shall not be considered. 6. The tenderers shall submit a certificate as given in tender document as "Annexure" in standard format without which their tender may not be considered and shall be summarily rejected. 7. The supplier/contractor of goods and/or services would be subject to GST Act and Rules as applicable from time to time. 8. Document being attached should be signed by the tenderer on its body. 9. This tender notice has also been uploaded on www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in 10. Payment of earnest money deposit (EMD) in respect of e-tendering shall be accepted through net banking or payment gateway only. 11. In case of any difficulty helpdesk available on the website of IREPS may be approached. 12. Tender on line can be submitted up to 13.30 hrs. of tender opening date. 13. The tender offer shall be made online through two packet system i.e., (i) Technical Bid & (ii) Financial Bid. 14. The Tenderer has to submit necessary documents in compliance of clause 10 to 18 (Part-I) of GCC July, 2020 mandatorily, otherwise offer will be considered as incomplete offer and accordingly shall not be considered.

138720 (SP)
North central railways www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in

‘Second wave unlikely’

258 more test Covid positive, 221 recover

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Looking into the current trend of cases across the state, particularly in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh is unlikely to witness a second Covid wave, a senior health official said on Friday.

“The number of cases has been continuously going down and now that the vaccination drive is expected next year, there will be further dip in cases and the second wave under these circumstances is very unlikely,” he said.

The officials said that targeted sampling gave brought good results and now they are carrying out focused sampling in areas with maximum cases for effective containment. He said the entire focus at the moment is on vaccination but the surveillance and containment activities will be continued as usual.

“This strategy has worked for us. The targeting sampling which we carried out was for the isolation of patients

who were potential super-spreaders. We did it just before the festive season and just before the wedding season,” he added. Regarding the preparations for Covid immunisation, he said the points where the vaccination will be carried out have been identified and the list of beneficiaries has been prepared while trainings have already been completed.

“The district-level training will also be completed within a week,” he said.

Additional CMO and district immunisation officer MK Singh said the vaccination will be carried out at 50 government hospitals in Lucknow. Under the district-level training which is underway, the district hospital training will take place next week.

Secretary, People’s Health Organisation, Dr Ishwara Gilada also said that the second Covid wave is unlikely. “As a clinician and a practicing doctor, what I have noticed in the last three months is that

the virulence and infectivity of the coronavirus has come down steadily. Another thing is that if a patient was infecting a lot many people earlier, this rate has also come down in the last couple of months,” he pointed out.

He said though there is not much change in the behaviour of people, the number of infections is stagnant in some places or going down in most of the places. “After recording 98,000 cases on September 16, the day India achieved its peak, the cases have come down has come down to less than 30,000 per day even though the number of tests has been unchanged. People are also developing immunity against the virus which is mutating to become weaker. In some places, particularly in the areas where there were large number of cases, people are developing herd immunity,” he added.

On Friday, 258 persons tested positive for coronavirus in Lucknow while 221 patients

recovered. One more death took Lucknow’s toll to 1,073 while there are 2,901 active cases in the district. The fresh cases included 18 from Gomtinagar, 19 from Indiranagar, 14 from Vikasnagar, 13 from Rae Bareilly road, 12 from Hasanganj, 11 from Jankipuram, and 10 each from Ashiyana, Cantt, Chowk and Alambagh.

Across the state, 1,440 persons tested positive, including 41 in Kanpur, 95 in Ghaziabad, 42 in Gautam Buddh Nagar, 66 in Varanasi and 69 in Meerut, taking the UP tally to 5,72,196. There were 18 deaths in the state, including three in Ayodhya, two each in Mathura & Varanasi, and one each in Kanpur, Prayagraj, Meerut, Gorakhpur, Muzaffarnagar, Sultanpur, Chandauli, Amethi & Mahoba taking the toll to 8,154. Besides, 1,584 patients recovered, taking the recovery figures to 5,46,087. There are still 17,955 active cases in the state.

CM stresses on vaccine cold chain mgmt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that Caction was being taken at the district level for the COVID-19 vaccination and all district officials had been instructed to arrange an effective cold chain and transportation for the vaccines.

Chairing an unlock review meeting at Lok Bhawan in Lucknow on Friday, the chief minister also said that it was necessary to maintain vigilance against COVID-19 as little carelessness could be harmful.

“People should be constantly made aware about prevention of the infection



and be motivated and encouraged to maintain social distancing and compulsorily use masks,” he said.

Yogi also said that effective arrangements of COVID-19 treatment should be maintained and testing should be conducted with full capacity.

“Focus should also be on contact tracing and surveillance. It should also be ensured that the Integrated Command and Control Centres work with full capacity. District magistrates and chief medical officers should regularly hold meetings at COVID-19 hospitals and the Integrated Command and Control Centres,” he said.

Nitin Bharti to receive Hewett gold medal at KGMU convocation

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Nitin Bharti will receive the Hewett gold medal for securing the highest marks in the final professional MBBS examination at the KGMU convocation which will be held on December 21. A total of 46 students will be awarded medals on the occasion. Nitin will receive 10 other gold medals, including the Chancellor’s Medal for highest aggregate marks in MBBS, University Honours Medal for maximum number of Honours and Certificates in all MBBS professional examinations in the batch. He will also receive a silver medal and certificate of honour with distinction in Pediatrics and certificate of honour in Surgery and a number of book prizes.

Nitin said it was his dream to get the Hewett gold medal. Born and brought up in Lucknow, he is the son of a retired IISR employee. “Being in Lucknow, I had been reading about the Hewett gold medal year after year and was keen on securing it for myself. I am also aware of the fact that the Hewett gold will be given away to a male student after three years,” he said.

Nitin said he is not a bookworm but actively takes part in skits and nukkad natak and is also a painter. “There is no success mantra and there were no specific hours for me to study. I have always believed that duration of studies notwith-



Nitin Bharti

standing, you must put your soul into it and try to correlate it with the clinical cases that you see. The studies have to be done in a consistent manner which I did,” he said.

He said he was not sure which branch he would take up after MBBS. “I have kept 2-3 options such as Radiology, Dermatology or MD Medicine, and I also want to go for higher studies in Oncology,” Nitin said. He added that he wanted to join KGMU as a faculty member as it would help him train young minds.

Besides, Akanksha will receive seven gold medals, including Prof UC Chaturvedi gold medal for second highest aggregate marks in the final examinations, Sri Gaya Prasad Tandon memorial gold medal for the highest percentage among girl students in the final professional MBBS examination held in January earlier this year.

Anjali Singhal will receive three gold medals, including Prof Devendra Gupta gold medal, Prof Dinker Chand gold medal and gold medal with distinction in

Pharmacology. Harsh Shanishwara will receive Dr BR Agarwal Memorial gold medal for MCh in Plastic Surgery. Adesh Hanumany Palyekar will receive Prof NC Mishra memorial gold medal while Khandare Shubhada Om Prakash Dr AM Kar centenary gold medal for the best performance in DM (Neurology) examination for this year.

Haramohan Sahoo will receive the Late Smt Sutee Nag gold medal for the best DM (Neurology) PG of DM (Neurology) examination. Kaushal Kumar Gupta will receive the Prof TC Goel gold medal for the best MCh (Urology) PG student passing MCh (Urology) examination in the first attempt for the year 2020. Prashant Bafna will receive the Dr Siddharth Kumar Das gold medal for obtaining the highest marks in DM (Rheumatology) examination for the year 2020.

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36-year-old property dealer shot at

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 36-year-old property dealer, identified as Tauqir Khan, was shot at by two unidentified miscreants around 9 pm on Friday. Khan was attacked on Deva Road when he, along with two others and driver, was returning home at Kamta in Chinhat in his SUV. Police said the bike-borne miscreants were waiting for him to pass via the road.

Khan was rushed to Chandan Hospital where his condition was said to be stable. A native of Jaunpur district, Khan is said to have been into the real estate business for the past 15 years.

Meanwhile, a trickster disguised as sub-inspector duped a woman of her ornaments on Friday afternoon. The victim was identified as Manju Singh (24), who is the wife of Ram Kamal Singh, a resident of Nayak Nagar under Madaon police station. The police said she was going to her house around 2:30 pm on Friday. The police said the incident took place near Awadh Lawns in Keshav Nagar. A youth approached her and introduced himself as a sub-inspector of the local intelligence unit.

“He asked me not to

move around wearing ornaments as miscreants are on the prowl in the area. He then asked me to take off the ornaments which I was wearing. I took out three gold rings, earrings, nose pin and gold chain and he kept the jewellery in a sachet and handed it to me. When I reached home, I was surprised to find stones and pebbles in the packet,” she said. Her husband lodged a complaint in the evening.

Meanwhile, an 18-year-old girl, who had gone missing from Central Hotel crossing in Aminabad on November 30 evening, was recovered from Lakhimpur Kheri in the wee hours of Friday. The police said the girl left the house with her mother to a function hosted by her friend, who is a resident of Aminabad. The woman dropped her daughter at the crossing as she had to go elsewhere. She told her daughter to return home at the earliest. When she did not come back, her parents and other family members started searching for her. A missing complaint was lodged at Wazirganj police station on December 2. The girl was recovered from Lakhimpur Kheri following a tip-off on Thursday evening and was brought to the state capital.

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PRINCIPAL

Farm laws beneficial for farmers: FAARD chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Praising the government for its commitment to provide maximum employment to farmers through agriculture, President of Foundation for Advancement of Agriculture and Rural Development (FAARD) Prof Panjab Singh said that three new farm laws are beneficial for the farmers because the government through these laws has made its efforts to provide good benefits to the farmers and help the latter get good income of their produce. He was addressing the farmers through virtual platform while FAARD team, along with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR) representatives under ongoing Biotech-Farmer Project being run in four districts of the region which is sponsored by the Department of Bio-technology, Government of India, reached Bhikharipur and Bengalipur villages on Friday.

Prof Panjab Singh further said that the main objective of



FAARD team visiting a village in Varanasi on Friday

Pioneer

the project is to provide maximum benefit to the farmers by distributing new technology and seeds to farmers. He stressed the need for covering more and more farmers under the project. The team members visited four villages of Varanasi district during the days to study the progress made under the projects at ground level. Apart from Bhikharipur and Bengalipur, they also inspected Jayapur and Jogapur under the leadership of former Director of Institute of

Agricultural Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IAS-BHU) Prof Shivraj Singh. He was also accompanied by Dr Neeraj Singh of IIVR, Project Co-Investigator of BHU Dr Santosh Kumar Singh, FAARD Trustee Dr Umesh Singh, Public Relations Officer (PRO) of BHU Dr Rajesh Singh, Secretary of Rajeshwari Research Foundation Dr Vinod Kumar Singh and many others.

During the inspection when a woman raised the issue

of crop damages by the animals, Prof Shivraj Singh said that today it is a very big problem and the government would take some steps in this direction soon.

He said that for good farm production, under the project we are making the farmers aware towards new techniques of farming and ongoing government schemes. Former Dean of Faculty of Agriculture, IAS-BHU Prof RM Singh and many other senior agricultural scientists also apprised the farmers of the main objectives of the project.

Dr Umesh Singh said that under the Biotech Farmer Project, there is a provision of fellowship to the farmers in the selected four districts.

In this, fellowship will be provided to progressive farmers especially women farmers in each district under which they will be given an award of ₹ 10,000.

On this occasion, Surendra Singh of FPO Jaya Seeds Producer Company, Madhukar Patel, Adarsh Kumar, Tushar Kant, Amit Biswas and others were also present.

82 new Covid cases in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 82 new patients have been detected in the district on Friday, increasing the total number to 20,556. The day also saw two more deaths, increasing the toll to 341. During the day, the follow-up negative reports included 116 and all of them have been recovered from home isolation, increasing the number to 16,816. As no patient has been discharged from any hospital, the number of patients remained at 2,890. The total

number of patients who have been recovered so far is 19,706, leaving 509 active cases. The recovery rate is 95.86 per cent while the mortality rate is 1.65 per cent.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh has informed that in the first report of the day, 43 positive patients were found out of 2,627 reports received. Till then, the total test reports received were 4,81,208 and the results of 3,065 are awaited. Out of them, 4,60,691 were negative, while 20,517 positive. The total number of

samples collected was 5,02,381. Earlier, a female aged 72 from Cantt succumbed to COVID-19 at Medwin Hospital. With the addition of three new red zones, the total number of hotspots has increased to 2,591 including 207 red zones. One green zone has been converted into a red zone again. There are 2,384 green zones with 13 new ones. On the instructions of the District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma, mass/group antigen tests continued to be conducted at Varanasi Junction (Cantt.) and

Manduadih railway but all 55 and 41 tests conducted there respectively have been found negative. Besides, one out of 212 tests has been detected positive at Shree Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Hospital, Kabirchaura while one out of 28 at CHC Shivpur. However, all the 112 tests at LBS Hospital Ramnagar, 125 at Government Women's Hospital, 42 at Swami Vivekanand Hospital, Belhupur and 105 at Sir Sundarlal Hospital, Banaras Hindu University (SSH BHU) have been found negative.

APEDA office inaugurated in city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Seeing the potential to increase the farm exports from the Varanasi region, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is making efforts to set up an Agro Export Hub as it has succeeded in exporting fruits, vegetables and rice to the global markets recently. To accelerate its activities further, APEDA has opened its project office in the Horticulture Complex premises in front of Circuit

House which was inaugurated on Thursday by APEDA Chairman Dr M Angamuthu.

The function was also attended by Divisional Commissioner (DC) Deepak Agrawal, District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma, Secretary APEDA Dr Sudhanshu, AGM Dr CB Singh and other senior officers of Horticulture and Agriculture departments were present on the occasion.

As APEDA did not have an office in North India, the exporters of UP were doing their exports with APEDA head-office and other region-

al offices.

The DC personally took special interest in opening of this APEDA office in the city. The opening of APEDA office in Varanasi is an opportunity for farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs to send their produce to the global markets. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with the efforts of APEDA and local administration, local farmers had managed to send various consignments to different parts of the world. A couple of days ago, APEDA stored 532 metric tons of rice from the Varanasi region which was sent to Qatar.

APEDA's persistent efforts will move towards fulfilling the mission of the Prime Minister to double the farmer's income and increase exports.

Meanwhile, APEDA Chairman visited Ramnagar to see the farming of brinjal and rice in trans-Ganga Ramnagar area. He also talked to Geographical Identification (GI) expert Padmashree Dr Rajnikant, who told the former that the process for getting GI registration to Ramnagar brinjal, Adamchini rice and Paan leaves from this region of Purvanchal (eastern UP) has already started.

Many injured in road mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Panic took place at Cantt railway station in the morning on Friday when a car ran over about half-a-dozen persons who were standing in the Sun in the circulating area of the station. The injured were admitted to the divisional government hospital where the condition of two was stated to be critical. The police took the driver into their custody.

According to the information, the driver Rajesh Yadav was trying to start the car at a pre-paid taxi stand in the circulating area of the station on Friday morning around 10.30 am but failed in the same. He took the help of some to push the vehicle to start it. And when some persons were pushing the vehicle, the car suddenly started but Rajesh, who held the steering, lost his control over it and hit a biker Vikash Nand Mandey (35) of Lohta.

Thereafter, the four-wheeler broke the rallying of main building of the station and dashed against the main building after running over a rickshaw-puller Mangru (50) and four of same family Meera (40), Asha (40), Divya (21), Lucky (10) who were standing in the Sun. It led to panic there and other passengers rushed to the spot. The RPF and GRP personnel also reached the spot and rushed the injured to the divisional government hospital in Kabirchaura.

The GRP personnel took

the driver Rajesh into their custody. The driver claimed that he failed in controlling the steering of the vehicle because its brake had failed. The condition of two injured Divya and rickshaw puller Mangru was stated to be critical. Jamuna Prasad of Kotwa in Chirgaon, whose family members received injuries, informed that he had come to his native village in Kotwan to attend a marriage party and he along with family members was to go to Mumbai by Pawan Covid Special Train but missed because of the change in its time table.

The police lodged a complaint against the driver and started the investigation into the matter.

BODY OF YOUTH FOUND: Sensation prevailed at the wholesale vegetable market in Lamahi, under the Lalpur-Pandeypur police station when the body of a youth was found behind it on Friday morning. The family members blocked the road keeping the body on the road. They blamed the youth was lynched to death and demanded the arrest of killers. After the assurance by the police, they ended the road blockade and thereafter, the police sent the body for autopsy.

According to the information, the passersby saw the body of a youth behind the wholesale vegetable market in Lamahi on Friday morning and it led to a sensation there.

On being informed, the local police reached the site and the body was identified as of Rajkumar Rajbhar of Goithahan village. The body was half-naked and his head was badly damaged with some heavy object and there were severe wound marks around the neck.

It was said that the deceased was a labourer at a shop of building materials. After completing his work he left the shop late evening on Thursday last and was seen at a liquor shop late night last time. On Friday morning, the family members received information about his body behind the above mentioned vegetable market. They along with the villagers blocked the road keeping the body on the road. They were demanding the arrest of killers. The police succeeded in pacifying them and sent the body for the postmortem examination.

Land dispute was said to be cause behind the murder.

KILLED: A middleman was killed in a road accident that occurred at Khardahan village, under the Cholaapur police station on Friday morning. The police sent the body for the postmortem examination. The deceased identified as Ramesh Yadav (48), resident of Singhpur village was engaged in the work of supplying material to the bakery. It was said that he was going to purchase some goods by his two-wheeler on Friday morning and

when he was on way in Khardahan village, a tractor trolley hit the two-wheeler and he came under its wheels. He died on the spot. Seeing this, the villagers rushed to the spot and blocked the road demanding the arrest of the tractor driver who managed to escape from the scene with the vehicle after the accident. On getting information, the police reached the site and sent the body for the postmortem examination by pacifying the agitated villagers and family members of the deceased.

MUSIC ALBUM LAUNCHED: Holy ghats of Ganga attract the Bollywood musicians to shoot their music and in this order, the songs of music album "Faqr Hui" was on Friday shot at Chet Singh Fort and Guleria Kothi, situated on the bank of the river. The album was also launched after the shooting. The music lovers will have full entertainment with the beautiful scenes the holy ghats in the song of this music album, the musician of the album Ajay Jaiswal said informing, the music album has been launched on the YouTube channel of Zee Music.

Ms India -2018 Stefi Patel, Yukti Kapoor and Krishabh Jaiswal will be seen performing acting in the music album, he informed adding, the title song has been sung by singer Jyotika Tangri. Rashi Maheshwari is it's lyrist and Uday Rao is executive producer, while Swapnil Jaiswal directed it.

98 more test positive in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The increasing number of corona infections has raised the Health department's concern. On Thursday, 98 new cases of corona infection were reported late in the night. About 29 people defeated the infection. One infected died during treatment. According to CMO Dr. Prabhakar Rai with 98 new Covid positives in the district the figure of the infected has reached 27,657. A total of 29 people died of infection. Of these, 12 patients were discharged from Covid hospitals. Home isolation of 17 people completed. So far the number of those who beat Corona has increased to 26,529.

The CMO said that the number of deaths due to Covid infection on Thursday during treatment of an infected has

increased to 365. He said that Covid testing of 6,558 people was conducted in the district. A special testing operation was conducted at the ECC and CRPF camps.

After confirmation of Covid infection in people with no symptoms at the ECC and CRPF camps, the Health department decided to conduct random checks at public and crowded places. Samples will be sent for the Covid testing by sending teams to offices with more than a hundred employees. On Saturday and Sunday, the CMO has decided to get Covid Protocol compliance checked in private hospitals.

CHALLAN FOR NOT WEARING MASKS: With the Coronavirus infection is being lesser people started being careless. Every public

place in the city is crowded but most people avoid wearing masks on their faces. In this case, the coronavirus infection can again take a dangerous form. The court has already ordered the police to take action in this matter by adopting a strict attitude on not applying the masks by the people. In view of this negligence of the people, on Friday, on the orders of the officers, the police cut off the challan at several places in the city for not wearing masks.

Police have been continuously checking and fined since the coronavirus began to wreak havoc. People showed understanding by following the physical distance and guidelines of applying the mask, which resulted in corona infection being reduced to a great extent. Four hundred

cases started coming up in Prayagraj, which has stayed on less than hundred cases every day since last month. But here people have started being careless again. Market, shop, park or model shop for drinking, many people are reaching everywhere without wearing masks. For this reason, the police had to start checking in the city on Friday.

Khuladabad police checked near the Karbala booth and at the railway station intersection and instructed the people to put on masks or else they would infect their families after being hit by Corona. The police also collected a hundred rupees during the city-wide checkup so that people could come out of the house only after applying the masks and ending the coronavirus infection.

NCR's Prayagraj div making efforts to improve goods loading

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prayagraj division of North Central Railway (NCR) is making continuous efforts in the field of improving goods loading. As a result of the efforts being made in the field of increasing the goods loading, Prayagraj division has made 4,47,816 tonnes of goods in September 2020 and has earned income of ₹ 41.99 crore, which is 21.93% and 5.92% respectively as compared to the same period of September 2019, in October 2020, 4,55,793 tonnes of goods loading has an income of ₹ 46.91 crore which is 24.73%

and 28.98% respectively as compared to the same period of October 2019.

About 4,29,564 tonnes of goods loaded in November 2020 with an income of ₹ 45.82 crore, which is 8.11% and 12.57% respectively as compared to the same period of November 2019. In the same sequence, the revenue from goods loading has been ₹23.8 crore as on December 17, 2020, which is 13.5% higher than the same period of the previous financial year.

Transportation of goods through railways is safer, faster, environmentally friendly and more cost effective than other modes of transport

and increased transportation of foodgrains and other agricultural goods through railways, an important development in agriculture and allied sectors.

Prayagraj division has taken several steps to improve the loading of foodgrains and other items including finalisation of Station to Station (STS) proposals for improvement in Goods Shed, provision of additional foodgrains and up to 30% exemption for new traffic streams. New tractor loading traffic at ICD Dadri; Obtaining new traffic through loading of foodgrains etc.

Some achievements of loading of foodgrains and

other agricultural related goods at Prayagraj division, after a gap of about 6 years, 2 rakes of foodgrains were loaded from Iradatganj to the tune of ₹73 lakh, about 522 from Naini in the last 2 months. Income of ₹ 5.78 crore by loading of wagon of foodgrains, loading of foodgrains under new traffic from Sonbadra to 336 wagons, loading of 400 tractors in 4 NMG rakes from ICD Dadri to Bangladesh and loading of 150 tractors in 1 NMG rake for Tiruchirappalli, 2 mini rakes from Fatehpur and 194 wagons from Pankidham include loading of foodgrains etc. under new traffic.

House of Farhan Ahmad demolished

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Friday came as a black Jumma for Farhan Ahmad, sharp shooter of mafia don Atique Ahmed when three bulldozers roared at his Bamrauli residence under the Dhoomanganj police station, and his palatial building was razed to earth within a couple of hours. The Prayagraj Development Authority initiated action against this unauthorised construction under 'Operation Mafia' launched

by the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

A close associate of Atique Ahmed and brother of Abid Pradhan, Farhan is a sharp shooter and he himself involved in over a dozen murders, including that of BSP MLA Raju Pal, besides scores of other crimes.

This hardcore criminal has his history sheet in a number of police stations of Prayagraj and Kaushambi. The property which has been pulled down by the Prayagraj

Development Authority, supported by heavy police force deployment, had been raised on a huge plot grabbed illegally by Farhan When the police force and the officials of the PDA reached Dhoomanganj police station on Friday morning, people started enquiring as to who will be the target. The officials kept mum and proceeded towards the palatial house of Farhan with three bulldozers, and finished their assigned work within hours.

Farhan is at present in jail. He had made an escape when was being taken from Kaushambi to Prayagraj court, but realising that he may be eliminated in an encounter, he surrendered before the court to be safe within the boundaries of a jail.

He is under top-10 criminals of Dhoomanganj. Over two dozen cases are pending against him related to serious nature of crime including murder of the BSP MLA Raju Pal.

Devotees to be told about importance of Sangam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

During the month long Annual Magh Mela, devotees will also be made aware of the world heritage along with bathing and worshiping at the Sangam. Special preparations are going on for devotees to learn discipline and rituals in Prayagraj. Along with this, the importance of Sangam will also be told to them. The Sangam is not only water for bathing, but is a global heritage, this information will also be given to the devotees who come here from across the globe during the month long Magh mela, an awareness campaign will be organised for it. Prayagraj Seva Samiti will play the leading role in this regard.

Prayagraj Seva Samiti will also campaign against the Corona pandemic with Sangam World Heritage Maha Abhiyan at the upcoming Magh Mela. A meeting of Prayagraj Seva Samiti was held under the chairmanship of the president of the organisation, Pandit Dharmaraj Pandey, in the context of the upcoming Magh Mela. In which the members gave suggestions and ideas, District Convenor of Sangam World Heritage Maha Abhiyan and BJP's Cultural Cell and Secretary of Prayagraj Seva Samiti, Tirtharaj Pandey 'Bacha Bhaiya' said that like last 14 years, this year also the Jan Jagran Magh Mela of Sangam World Heritage Maha

Abhiyan will run in Magh Mela.

Tirtharaj Pandey said that according to the guidelines of Corona pandemic, detailed information has not been made available by the administration.

Therefore, the decision of cultural programme 'Ek Sham Prayagraj Ke Naam' and honour ceremony held in Tirtharaj Prayag is yet to be decided, but a campaign of propagating the need of wear mask with slogan 'Do gaj ki duri mask hai jaruri' between the kalpavis and pilgrims coming from out of station.

Mahila Morcha president Anupama Pandey said that elderly women in the camp of Kalpas will be informed about

the prevention of corona infection. Cultural Minister Vishnu Dayal Srivastava said that every time many cultural events were organised by the institution in which Shankh Samrat and Choti Samrat and street plays etc used to be done but this year, all these types of play will not happen due to Corona infection.

Senior members KC Pandey, Bhakta Raj Pandey, Surendra Srivastava, Shakti Raj Pandey, Pushparaj Pandey, Yograj Shastri, Raviraj, Prabhuraj, Katyayani Pandey, Durgesh Nandini Pandey, Akash Nishad, Annu Gupta, Hariom Chaurasia, Ashok etc were present on the occasion.

IOC launches Bharo Tel Jeeto Car Yojana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The country has become economically weak during the Corona pandemic. In order to overcome the economic crisis, the Indian Oil Corporation Limited has launched the Bharo Tel Jeeto Car Yojana throughout the year at Kapil Dev Vyas Filing centre at Thornhill Road in Prayagraj.

On this occasion, Dr Utti Bhattacharya, Executive Director and Head of State, Uttar Pradesh State Office, told reporters that a customer can win an SUV car and bike by getting oil worth ₹ 400 or more. For this, they have to send the code bill number of that dealer and an SMS of the amount of oil to be sent to the



said mobile number 9052155555. Starting from

December 4, the scheme will remain in effect till December

31.

In addition, 100 daily winners will get ₹ 100 each as extra reward points. While 25 weekly winners will get ₹ 5,000. Also, there will be 16 bikes and four lucky winners if selected at the end of the final draw.

On this occasion, Chief General Manager Subrata Kar Nagendra Singh, Deputy General Manager Tanay Kumar Atul Kumar Neeraj Tripathi etc among others were present.

In order to fulfill its objective, two-wheelers will now be able to convert oil or mobil through modern technology, quick lube oil change. On this occasion, he also inaugurated the Servo Shop and Petrol Bhi Health Bhi Yojana.



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Raj Shekhar chairs the meeting to streamline city traffic on Friday.

Pioneer

Kanpur's traffic problem to be solved soon: Shekhar

Plan to shift bus stations to city outskirts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar said in Friday the local administration had worked out special plans to resolve the traffic snarls problem of the city on priority in the coming times.

He admitted that Kanpur Nagar was currently facing a major problem of regular traffic snarls which had become a bane for the citizens.

The divisional commissioner said it had been mooted that the bus stations should be shifted to the outskirts of the city along the ring road near the national highways entering the city.

He said it had been decid-

ed in principle to set up one bus stand at every national highway entry point to decongest the city.

Shekhar pointed out that at present around 1,200 buses entered the city on daily basis at various bus stations situated inside the city area.

He said if these buses were run from the bus stations outside the city limits, there would be a large relief and smooth traffic movement within the city.

He said for this the administration was identifying suitable places for new bus stations (with depots) near every entry point of the various national highways along the outer ring road alignment.

Addressing a meeting at his camp office here on Friday,

Shekhar directed District Magistrate Alok Tiwari and the ADM (FR) to identify suitable land measuring between three to five acre in the next 30 days juxtaposed to other national highways in proximity with the proposed outer ring road for bus stations, especially for buses plying on that particular route.

He also directed the Kanpur Development Authority vice chairman to complete pending works of the new bus station at Signature City in the next 20 days so that it could start functioning in the next two months to cater to the needs of passengers for buses moving towards Lucknow.

He said this bus station could handle 200-250 buses every day.

The divisional commissioner said the district administration had identified around five acre land of gram sabha for a bus station on the Prayagraj highway in village Sarsaul near Tiwaripur.

He said this land was on the national highway and was suitable to ply 400-500 buses on a daily basis towards Prayagraj.

Shekhar said the upcoming Metro, SMART traffic solutions by Smart City Corporation, proposed new flyovers and new parking areas in the city and it would help to a large extent to ease the traffic congestion in the city in the coming days. He said such future planing and advanced preparation would help in easing out the biggest problem of Kanpur Nagar.

33 more test positive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar reported 33 more coronavirus positive cases on Friday evening. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anil K. Mishra said that 33 more people had tested positive for coronavirus infection between Thursday evening and Friday evening taking the tally of confirmed cases to 31,705 cases. He said that 15 patients were discharged from hospital. He said three COVID-19 deaths in the city were reported till Friday evening keeping the death toll to 807. The CMO said at present 671 active cases were undergoing treatment. Dr. Mishra said 4029 samples were sent for testing in the city.

Woman alleges sexual harassment by pvt hospital director, lab incharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A woman employee of a nursing home in Kidwai Nagar has accused its doctors of dragging her with malintention.

The victim has lodged a complaint with the police.

A woman of Juhi Bara Devi is employed in the pathology of a nursing home in H Block of Kidwai Nagar. She is engaged in sample collection job.

She alleged that during the initial few months of her job, everything was right but thereafter the hospital director and lab incharge started eyeing her with malintention.

She alleged that they would often call her in their cabins and indulge in obscene acts and on protest, they would mentally torture her.

She alleged that in December 12, the lab incharge called her in his cabin and attempted to molest her and when she protested, he accused her of misappropriating Rs.2.50 lakh. She said the lab incharge held her hostage in the cabin and snatched her mobile phone.

She alleged that the director and lab incharge pressed her to indulge in obscene acts and when she refused, they used her mobile phone to tell her family members about the misappropriation of Rs.2.50 lakh and collected a cheque of Rs 58,000 from her mother. She alleged that after getting the signature of her brother on a plain paper, an agreement showing her confession for the theft was prepared and thereafter she was freed from the hospital around 11:30 pm.

The woman alleged a police outpost incharge and a constable mounted pressure on her on behalf of the hospital director and lab incharge. Station House Officer Dhanesh Prasad said the inquiry report was sent to the SSP office.

SUCCUMBED: A labourer, who was knocked down by a speeding truck on Wednesday, succumbed to his injuries during treatment on Friday morning. Sughar Singh (48) of Dheepur, Vidhnu, a daily wager, was going to buy vegetables when a speeding truck hit him near Harha village. He was admitted to LLR Hospital from where he was taken to a private hospital in Raipurwa. During treatment, he succumbed to his injuries on Friday morning.

'Plastic Park' to be developed

KANPUR (PNS): Additional Chief Secretary (Infrastructure and Industrial Development) Alok Kumar said discussions were on for the setting up a 'Plastic Park' in Kanpur Nagar through Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority.

He said a proposal in this regard was to be forwarded to the Central government and the 'Plastic Park' could be set up in Dibiyapur (Auraiya).

The additional chief secretary said a police outpost had been sanctioned for the 'Plastic Park' which would be developed on 360 acre land out of which 275 acre would be used for industries while on 85 acre an residential complex would be developed. He said till date sanctions had been given to 77 industrial and 109 residential and one two more areas.

'Achieve paddy purchase target'

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Vindhyachal Divisional Commissioner Preeti Shukla directed the officials concerned to achieve the target of paddy purchase and pay the price to farmers without inordinate delay. Such direction was given by the her at a divisional meeting held on Thursday to review the progress in the purchase of paddy and in the work under AMRUT scheme.

The DC expressed her discontent over the purchase when she was apprised by the RMO that it was only 25 per cent against the target. She directed Mirzapur District Magistrate to expedite the purchase work when she was apprised that the progress was only 16.28 per cent in the district. The DM informed the DC that the area lekhpals had been involved in motivating small farmers to bring their paddy to the procurement centres and get the payments without delay.

During the meeting the DC directed all the officials concerned with procurement that they get the fund from their headquarters in advance and ensure payment of the farmers within the stipulated timeframe. Moreover the SE, Jal Nigam, was taken to task by the DC for not providing the information related to the AMRUT scheme. The DC directed the officials concerned with the ambitious scheme, including the working agency, to ensure the speedy progress on each



Divisional Commissioner Preeti Shukla holding a meeting at her office on Thursday

Pioneer

points, including the construction of parks, pipeline work, overhead tanks, treatment plant etc. On the occasion the DC made it clear that the work should be completed within the allocated fund and stipulated timeframe. Besides, no revised estimate would be allowed at all to increase the expenditure, she added.

SUICIDE: A 19-year-old girl committed suicide in Mujehra Kala village under Chilh police station on Thursday. As per the reports received here, Rani, daughter of Premchand, had gone to sleep on Wednesday night with her family members. During the wee hours her brother was taken aback on seeing his sister hanging from the ceiling. On hearing his cries the entire family got up and brought her down. On getting information about the matter, the police reached the spot and took the

body into custody for the post-mortem examination.

CASE REGISTERED: Madihan police have registered a case of rape on Thursday. As per the reports, a 16-year-old girl of a village under the Madihan police station had gone to a shop in evening on Wednesday. When she was returning home, she was stopped by someone at his house who then raped her. When the girl did not reach at her house at night, her family members became anxious and then launched a search for but all their attempts ended in vain. They came to about it when she reached home weeping on Thursday. Following an application given by the father of the victim a case has been registered against the 20-year-old accused and the matter was being investigated. No arrest had been made yet, last reports received here said.

DM honours pensioners

CORRESPONDENT ■ JALAIN

District Magistrate Mannan Akhtar honoured few aged pensioners on Pensioners' Day at the district treasury office in Collectorate premises on Thursday. Senior treasury officer Ashutosh Chaturvedi welcomed the guests and said that they were providing pension to 13,766 pensioners who include those who had are settled in different states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Haryana and



Uttarakhand. He said they had received 6,300 complaints

regarding pension out of which 6,200 had been resolved and the rest of them will be done so by the end of this month. He said the pensioners could submit their life certificate online at jeewanpramaan.gov.in. Meanwhile District Magistrate Mannan Akhtar honoured Bharat Sharan Dwivedi, Krishna Chand Dwivedi (84) and Phool Kunwar (80) by presenting shawls and bouquets to them. Assistant Treasury Officer Ram Manohar Pal and Assistant Treasury Officer Rajvir Singh were also present on the occasion.

DGMH allays apprehensions about COVID-19 vaccine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Director General Medical Health Dr DS Negi has allayed all apprehensions regarding the COVID-19 vaccines.

Addressing a virtual meeting, he said the government had taken all possible precautions and proper care for the vaccination drive that would be launched in a big way.

Dr Negi said there was no doubt that the new vaccine could raise some issues of drug reaction but the government was well prepared for handling such a situation. He said all the

vaccination centres would liberally be provided with anaphylaxis kit.

The DGMH said in the first phase there would be 1,500 vaccination centres and their number would be raised to 2,000 in the second phase and finally to 3,000 in the third phase across the state.

Dr Negi said anaphylaxis was a severe allergic reaction to venom, food or medication and in most cases it was caused by a bee sting or eating foods known to cause allergies, such as peanuts or tree nuts.

He said anaphylaxis caused a series of symptoms, including

a rash, low pulse and shock, which was known as anaphylactic shock, but with the kit available at the centres it would be administered to the patient if the need arose.

MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW BOARD SET UP: CMO

Meanwhile, Chief Medical Officer Dr AK Mishra said that the Mental Health Review Board had been set up and issues related to mental health would be successfully dealt by it.

He said the MHRB would take care of the family and social problems of the mentally ill patients and also the

problems that cropped up while undergoing treatment under a psychiatrist.

The MHRB was set up under that Mental Health Care Act, 2017.

Dr Mishra said District and Sessions Judge Rampal Singh was the chairman of the MHRB, the CMO its convener-member and SDM, HoD Psychiatry Dr Vipul Singh, Dr Manish Kumar of Medicine department, Ursula Hospital its members. He said the MHRB has two members from non-governmental organisations — one from Swaraj Vriddha Ashram and other from Shifa Eye Care Centre.

UPMRC erects I-girder near IIT-K station

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation (UPMRC) erected the first I-girder near IIT-Kanpur Metro station.

The erection of four I-girders has been accomplished between pillars nine and 10 near IIT-K Metro station.

Basically, I-girder is an arrangement that is adopted in place of U-girder on elevated corridor for creating scope for track crossing or platform switching for metro trains.

According to UPMRC public relations officer, 178 I-girders will be placed on the 9-kilometre-long elevated primary section of Kanpur Metro. The terminal metro stations art IIT-K and Motijheel, and the depot line or Polytechnic metro depot are the three designated spots where the I-girders are to be placed in the primary section of the project.

Approximately 27-metre-long I-girders will be placed at the three designated spots and the width of one I-girder is about one metre and its weight around 58 ton.

For the arrangement of cross-over or track change on the elevated corridor, the I-girder is used instead of U-girder and two U-girders can be placed above the pier cap between two piers or pillars while in the same space, there is an arrangement for the place-



Kanpur Metro places the first "I" Girder at IIT-K metro station.

Pioneer

ment of four I-girders.

The I-girder is shaped like the English alphabet 'I' and these are pre-cast in the casting yard.

With the help of cranes, they are placed at the fixed spot on the corridor, and after that the slabs are prepared on them while the U-girders are the complete structures along with the base and side walls.

As there is no wall or boundary between I-girders, the train can easily move from one track to another.

KPSA MEET TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS OF PVT SCHOOLS TODAY

General secretary of Kanpur Private Schools Association and coordinator of CBSE, Balwinder Singh, said that in the current times of COVID-19, schools were in a

dire strait and thus the annual convention of the association had been summoned on Saturday at KDMA School and it would be attended by 200 members.

He said the convention would be graced by National Independent School Alliance president Kulbhushan Sharma, Confederation of Independent Schools, Meerut, chief Rahul Kesarwani and Global Education Training School founder Sunita Gandhi.

Singh said the COVID-19 pandemic had dangerously jeopardised education, especially the primary and secondary, and it was reflecting dangerously on the schools and the teachers and this was a major cause of concern.

He said there were several major issues which were being ignored by the government

and they engender the need for drawing attention.

He said the convention would be a platform to send across a clear message that "Unity is Strength" and it was the last resort.

He said during this period, the schools had maintained a link between the studies and normal conduct of schools and worked very hard for a better education.

Singh said that many challenges were faced by the private schools and the problems which had plagued in successfully running schools would be taken up in the convention to work out a concrete solution to this vexed problem. He said, "The school runs smoothly by the holy trioka — management, teachers and students — but in view of the pandemic this has been hit adversely."

Efforts on to make Vns div scrap free

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As a result of effective leadership and compliance of directives of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Varanasi, Vijay Kumar Panjiar, on the Indian Railways e-procurement system portal through e-auction the Stores department of Varanasi division in the financial year 2020-21 after sale of scrap received railway revenue of ₹13.97 crore which is notable in



various divisions of Indian Railways. In Varanasi division till now the deliveries of 11 lots out of 21 have been disposed of and further work is being done at a rapid pace to make Varanasi division a zero scrap one, Public Relations Officer (PRO) Ashok Kumar said. It may be pointed out here that in the financial year so far the revenue of Railways increased significantly due to the sale of scrap.

Covid-19 testing camp organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Rail Locomotive Works (BLW) administration is striving for the best care of the health of its employees, officers and their families. In order to check the spread of the Covid-19 infection a camp was set up in the premises of the BLW administrative building on Thursday. At the camp testing of as many as 96 BLW personnel was done and all of them were found negative. It may be pointed out here that the BLW administration for protection from Covid-19 was fully following the instructions issued by the

Ministries of Health and Railways. Along with it awareness campaigns are also being organised in the BLW from time to time. Posters and banners have also been put in the entire premises, including office and workshop, for protection against Covid-19. Besides all personnel are being motivated to ensure proper use of face masks, washing of their hands frequently and to maintain physical distancing.

QUIZ COMPETITION HELD

A written quiz competition for officers and employees was organised under the Energy

Conservation Week-2020 at the Technical Training Centre of BLW on Thursdat. In the written quiz competition questions related to energy conservation and its importance were asked. Its purpose was to make people aware about maximum energy conservation and motivate them for it.

The BLW officials and employees participated enthusiastically in the competition. It may be pointed out here that the Energy Conservation Week was inaugurated by General Manager Anjali Goyal on December 14 through a video demonstration to save domestic and industrial energy.

Will ensure resources for nation’s safety: Rajnath



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India facing hostile situation on the Line of Actual Control(LAC)facing China and the Line of Control (LOC) with Pakistan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday these posed challenges to resources.

He expressed confidence that to meet the twin challenges, the Government will ensure there is no shortage of resources, he said.

Meanwhile, apparently referring to the impact of social media in conflicts between nations, Rajnath said the reach of the mobile phone now was bigger than that of a missile. “Covid-19 has adversely impacted our economy and we need to pay special attention for efficient utilisation of our budget,” the Minister said addressing scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at the annual awards ceremony.

Stating that the armed forces will be facing many new challenges and security threats in the days to come and technology can be used positively, Rajnath said in such a situation while carrying out a realistic assessment, there is need to develop our capabilities quickly, according to our needs.

At the ceremony, he handed over the DRDO made Indian Maritime Situational Awareness System (IMSAS) to Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh and the Border Surveillance System (BOSS) to Army Chief General M M Naravane.

“The system (BOSS) has been deployed at Ladakh border area for day and night surveillance. The system facilitates



monitoring and surveillance by automatically detecting the intrusions in harsh high-altitude sub-zero temperature areas with remote operation capability,” the Defence Ministry said in a statement. The system is being produced by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Machlipatnam.

The IMSAS is state-of-the-art, fully indigenous, high performance intelligent software system that provides global maritime situational picture, marine planning tools and analytical capabilities to Indian Navy. The system provides masritime operational picture from Naval headquarters to each individual ship in sea to enable naval command and control, it added.

Addressing the scientists, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat said the private industry is also motivated and need the scientists support. “I feel that in case of war in future, we will win it through indigenous weapons,” he said.

Addressing the annual Military Literature Festival in Chandigarh, Rajnath warned that different kinds of security threats may emerge in the future. “This event is important from another point of view,” he said through video

conference. “As times change, the nature of threats and wars is also changing. In the future, other security-related issues may come before us.” He added that conflicts are gradually becoming “comprehensive” in the manner never imagined earlier.

Possibly alluding to the power of social media and mobile apps, he said, “Today the range (marak Kshamta) of a mobile has crossed even the reach of a missile,” he said.

He added that the enemy can now reach people even without crossing any borders, and urged everyone to play the role of a soldier.

“We should remain alive to these dangers and save ourselves from wrong and misleading information and save others too, and festivals like this can play a key role in this,” he said, urging literary figures to make use of their talent to the full for this.

The defence Minister did not specifically refer to China. But in recent months, since the standoff between the two sides began at the LAC , India has banned several Chinese mobile apps, citing concerns related to national security and privacy. These included the popular TikTok and WeChat

CBI files two separate cases in bank fraud case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered two separate cases related to bank fraud to the tune of about ₹7,926.01 and ₹313.79 crore. The agency also conducted searches at several locations at the premises of the accused in Hyderabad, Guntur and Chennai.

The first case has been registered against Hyderabad-based private company Transstroy (India) Ltd. and others including its CMD Cherukuri Sridhar, Additional Directors Rayapati Sambasiva Rao and Akkineni Satish, unknown public servants besides unknown others on a complaint from Canara Bank.

“It was alleged that the private firm based at Hyderabad and its directors had availed credit facilities on multiple banking arrangements. The consortium was formed with other banks, led by Canara Bank. It was further alleged that the accused had involved in falsification / fabrication of books of accounts, fudging of stock statements, tampering of balance sheets, round tripping of funds etc,” the CBI said in a statement.

It was also alleged that the accused misappropriated bank’s funds and diverted the loan amount sanctioned by the banks and caused loss of ₹7,926.01 crore to Canara Bank and other member banks. The account had become NPA and the fraud was reported.

Searches were conducted at the premises of private company/other accused at Hyderabad and Guntur, which led to recovery of incriminating documents, it said.

The Second case was registered against a private company based at Chennai Agnite Education Ltd. and others including its Chairman K Balasubramaniam, Director K Padmanabhan, unknown public servants and private persons on a complaint from State Bank of India.

Domestic air passenger traffic in Nov down 51% from 2019 level: DGCA



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 63.54 (6.35 million) lakh domestic passengers travelled by air in November as compared to 52.71 lakh in October and 39.43 lakh in September. According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the number of passengers travelled in November is less than 51 per cent as compared to the corresponding period last year.

The DGCA data showed that IndiGo carried 34.23 lakh passengers in November, a 53.9 per cent share of the total domestic market, SpiceJet flew 8.4 lakh passengers, which is 13.2 per cent share of the market. Air India, GoAir, AirAsia

India and Vistara carried 6.56 lakh, 5.77 lakh, 4.21 lakh and 3.97 lakh passengers respectively in November, the data showed. The occupancy rate or load factor of six major Indian airlines was between 66.3 and 77.7 per cent in November, it stated.

“The passenger load factor in the month of Nov 2020 has shown some recovery due to increased demand after the opening of Lockdown and onset of festive season” it said. The occupancy rate at SpiceJet was 77.7 per cent in November.

Meanwhile, the occupancy rate for other major airlines IndiGo, Vistara, GoAir, Air India and AirAsia India was 74 per cent, 70.8 per cent, 70.8 per cent, 69.6 per cent and 66.3 per

cent respectively, according to the DGCA. India resumed domestic passenger flights on May 25 after a gap of two months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Indian airlines are allowed to operate a maximum of 80 per cent of their pre-COVID-19 domestic flights.

The DGCA data showed that in November, IndiGo had the best on-time performance of 97.5 per cent at four metro airports—Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai. AirAsia India and Vistara were at number two and three at these four airports in November with 95.6 per cent and 94.8 per cent on-time performance, respectively, the DGCA said.

Slight relief from winter chill only a week later in north India, says IMD



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As winter chill grips the plains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday said night temperatures would continue to be below normal in north India over the next week and a slight relief can be expected only a week later.

In its forecast from December 17-24 and from December 24-30, the IMD said the minimum temperatures would be below normal by 2-6 degrees Celsius over most parts of northwest, central and east India. Near normal or slightly above normal temperatures are likely over remaining parts of the country during the first week.

“Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions would occur in some pockets over Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan during the first half of the first week and decrease thereafter,” the IMD said.

Cold day to severe cold day conditions would occur in some to many pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, north Rajasthan and northwest Uttar Pradesh during next two days

Cold day to severe cold day conditions would occur in some to many pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, north Rajasthan and northwest Uttar Pradesh during next two days and abate thereafter, it said. A cold wave has swept the north Indian plains since last week with day and night temperatures dipping below normal.

During the second week, there would be slight rise in minimum temperatures as compared to the first week. However, the minimum temperatures would be below normal by 2-4 degrees Celsius over most parts of northwest, central and east India, and near normal or slightly above normal over remaining parts of the country, the IMD added.

Rahul may be back in the saddles again: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday said the party will soon start the procedure to elect a new president and indicated that Rahul Gandhi may be back in the saddles again, saying that majority of Congressmen want that he be again chosen as full-time party chief.

The grand old party is likely to hold the AICC session in January to elect the new president, for which the party leadership will discuss and chalk out the plans.

AICC chief spokesman and party General Secretary Randeep Surjewala said that Congress will soon start the procedure to elect a new party president, adding that 99.9 per cent of people, including himself, want Rahul Gandhi to take

charge as the next president of the Congress.

Electoral College of Congress, AICC members, Congress workers & members will choose who’s best suited, Surjewala said at AICC Press conference.

While Rahul Gandhi early this week during a meeting with few senior leaders reiterated his stand that he will not wear the chief’s mantle again which he relinquished last year after the dismal performance of the party in Lok Sabha elections.

Incidentally, AICC sources said incumbent chief Sonia Gandhi is scheduled to meet party dissenters and other top leaders soon to discuss “key” issues concerning the grand old party.

Sonia has expressed her

desire not to continue as interim Congress chief and asked the party to start the process to elect a new party chief.

The party’s recent poor performances in the state assembly elections of Bihar and Maharashtra have turned several of its eminent leaders into dissenters.

Sonia is expected to hold talks with her confidants about the new Congress chief and revive the party in states going to poll in 2021.

AICC sources said Sonia will also meet some of the prominent members of the “letter-writers group”, who had been demanding an overhaul of the party. Among them are the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and the deputy leader of the party in the Upper House,

Anand Sharma.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath, who lost power in the state, after his bete noire Jyotiraditya Scindia quit the party and joined the BJP along with several MLAs, is also slated to meet Sonia and discuss the fall-out of the recently-concluded bypolls in the state, in which the Congress failed to make a mark.

This is the first time that Sonia Gandhi will be meeting her party leaders in person after the pandemic. So far she has been holding virtual meetings including the crucial CWC meet in which party leaders discussed the “letter” by the group of 23 leaders demanding a change in the leadership and an overhaul of the party organizational structure.

Be a responsible social media user: Naidu

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Friday said there was need to ensure “sanity” in the use of the rapidly expanding social media platforms, given the implications for social harmony, common good, peace and national security.

He said the freedom of expression does not mean unfettered outburst of anger and hate against each other that may lead to chaos in society.

Journalism by nature, the Vice President said, is supposed to be critical of the order of the times based on facts and supported by evidence. But he emphasised that this should not slip into “complete negativity”.

Media should use a standard set of reporting and analytical tools that captures the changing narrative without imposing respective positions, and should not be seen by the public as discrediting the changes taking place, the vice president said.

Pointing out that advertisement revenue is key to the viability of any media organisation, Naidu said with the mushrooming of media outlets and the shrinking revenue pie, the traditional norms and principles of journalism are being forced to be compromised with

serious consequences.

Speaking at the 6th M V Kamat Memorial Endowment Lecture on ‘Journalism:

Past, Present and Future,’ he said the disruption caused by technology has resulted in a serious crisis for the media and appropriate revenue sharing models need to be evolved for the survival of traditional media.

“Technology giants have emerged as the algorithmic gate keepers of information and the web has emerged as the main vehicle of distribution of information and news. We are witnessing the consequences,” the vice president said. According to the text of his speech made available by his office, Naidu said while the democratisation and decentralisation that followed the rapid expansion of social media enabling freedom of expression is welcome, the world is witnessing the downside of it in the absence of self-regulation and protocols.

In this era of saturated information and over abundance of news, the very news is getting devalued, he felt.

While the traditional print media is “sincerely endeavouring” to adapt to the technological disruption by going online, it is struggling to come out with viable revenue models, he pointed out.

“The information and reports generated by the print media at substantial cost is being hijacked by the social media giants. This is unfair. Some countries are taking measures to ensure revenue sharing by the social media giants with the print media. We too need to take a serious look at this problem and come out with effective guidelines or laws to enable print media get their share from the huge revenues of the technology giants,” Naidu said.

Over a period of time, media in our country has acquired a certain orientation which is broadly termed by the commentators as “left leaning and liberal”, Naidu said. “Nobody can make an issue out of this. But the problem arises if the media is keen to stick to the perspectives acquired earlier and stayed with them for long and refuses to acknowledge the changing narrative,” he said.

“I am not suggesting media to be like a chameleon. Media should use a standard set of reporting and analytical tools that captures the change without imposing respective positions. Media should not be seen by the public as discrediting the change that is happening since such a change is contrary to their long held positions,” he noted.

The vice-president said while journalism by nature is supposed to be critical of the order of the times based on facts and supported by evidence, “this should not slip into complete negativity”.

“I am not suggesting that media is completely cynical. We have opted for parliamentary democracy for negotiated socio-economic transformation and nation building.

As a bridge between the people and the Governments, media need to focus on the development taking place on various fronts.

“Governments are the principal catalysts of this change for the better. Development journalism does not mean beating the trumpet of the Governments. It is about examining and reporting on the triggers of change, partnerships built and participation of people and other stakeholders, challenges faces and the way they were overcome this kind of positivity reinforces the trust of the people in the institutions of our body polity,” he said.

Till the advent of modern media, print media played an important role in furthering the cause of independence by promoting the spirit of nationalism and nation building through socio-economic transformation subsequently, he said.

PM’s new residence will be built on a 15-acre plot ESTIMATED COST ₹13,450 CRORE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Prime Minister’s new residential complex will have 10 four-storey buildings with a maximum height of 12 metres.

Official sources said that there is “no question of dropping” the proposed new Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) from the Central Vista Redevelopment project, after the CPWD did not mention the same in its new proposal before an expert panel of the Ministry of Environment and Forest. The Central Public Works Department (CPWD), which is executing the project, has revised the estimated cost from ₹11,794 crore to ₹13,450 crore.

The Prime Minister’s new residence will be built on a 15-acre plot and it will have 10 buildings and they will have ground plus three floors, the CPWD said in its proposal.

Permissible ground coverage at the prime minister’s new residence would be 30,351 square metre, it stated, adding that a building for the Special Protection Group will come up on a 2.50-acre plot.

The Central Vista Redevelopment project also includes the new Vice President’s Enclave which will be built on 15-acre land and will have five-storey buildings with a maximum height of 15 metres, the CPWD said in its proposal. The VP Enclave will have 32 buildings.

Reacting to the CPWD’s move to drop the proposed new Prime Minister’s Office in its latest proposal, Kanchi Kohli, legal researcher, Centre for Policy Research, said that the documents submitted to the Environment Ministry do not give any justification on why some plots or offices have been excluded or why the costs have increased despite such exclusions.

“But equally important is the CPWD’s answer to whether any alternatives to the present proposal were considered is a No.

The study of such alternatives is required to be done before seeking environment clearance,” Kohli said.

The CPWD’s proposal for terms of reference, which is a step before the environment clearance, was discussed by the Environment Ministry expert appraisal committee (EAC) on Thursday.

The EAC had approved the CPWD’s proposal to construct a new Parliament Building earlier this year.

The redevelopment project of Central Vista — the nation’s power corridor — also envisages a new triangular Parliament building, a common central secretariat and revamping of the three-km-long Rajpath, from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.

NGT asks MoEF for report on whether clearance needed for inland Ganga waterway projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to submit a report on the issue whether Environment Impact Assessment is necessary for inland waterway projects in Ganga river in the stretch from Varanasi to Haldia also known as the National Waterway 1.

The Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) is being implemented on the Varanasi-Haldia stretch of National Waterway-1 (NW-1) with the technical assistance and investment support of the World Bank, at an estimated cost of Rs 5,369.18 crores (USD 800 million) on a 50:50 sharing basis between Government of India and the World Bank, according to the Ministry of Shipping.

Out of the USD 800 million, USD 375 is IBRD (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) loan. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson justice A K Goel

noted that the report of the expert committee constituted by the MoEF has not been filed even though almost one year has lapsed.

The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by Bharat Jhunjhunwala and others on whether EIA is necessary for navigation infrastructure in the River Ganga in the stretch from Varanasi to Haldia also known as the National Waterway 1 (NW1) undertaken by Inland Waterways Authority of India.

The project envisages developmental activities such as river terminal, jetties and locks and barrages and multimodal river water terminals along with necessary dredging. The applicant referred to Entry 7(e) of Schedule to the EIA Notification to state that “ports, harbours, back waters and dredging” require clearance.

However, the entry further mentions that maintenance dredging is exempted, in the manner mentioned therein.

SC directs States to form panel in each district for fire audit of Covid hospitals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Friday directed all the States to constitute a committee in each district to conduct fire audit of Covid-19 hospitals at least once a month, inform the management of medical establishment about any deficiency and report to the Government for taking follow up action.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that COVID-19 hospitals, which have not obtained no objection certificate from the concerned fire department, should be asked to immediately apply for NOC and after carrying necessary inspection, decision shall be taken in this regard.

“Those COVID hospitals who have not renewed their NOC should immediately take steps for renewal on which appropriate inspection be taken and decision be taken. In event, COVID hospital is found not having NOC or not having obtained renewal, appropriate

action be taken by the State,” said the bench, also comprising Justices R S Reddy and M R Shah.

The top court directed that all states and Union Territories should appoint one nodal officer for each COVID hospital, if not already appointed, who shall be made responsible for ensuring compliance of all fire safety measures.

“In each district, state government should constitute a committee to carry fire audit of each COVID hospital at least once in a month and inform the deficiency to the management of the hospital and report to the government for taking follow up action,” the bench said in its order.

The apex court had last month taken cognisance of the fire incident at a COVID hospital in Gujarat’s Rajkot in which five patients had died. It had also taken note of similar incidents which had happened earlier in other COVID hospitals.

Blow to Mamata

BJP is doing an Operation Lotus in advance by weaning away top TMC leaders and re-directing trend winds



Following its more than surprising surge of 18 seats in the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP not only became ambitious about taking Bengal from its archrival and Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief Mamata Banerjee, it proudly said that it would draw more than half of her MLAs to its fold and that the desertions would be voluntary. Now with the BJP's strategist-in-chief Amit Shah determined to seize the psychological edge over the emotional hold Mamata has on Bengal's voters, he is crafting his game of optics. Claiming that the BJP would win 200 of the 294 Assembly seats, Shah has modified the template

of Operation Lotus, finding the weaknesses of the TMC and breaking that party from within even before elections. His biggest gain happened over the last 24 hours when Didi lost four senior leaders, prize picks all, and he will probably parade them in front of the media to prove his point. There is no doubt that her cadres are none too happy with her protectionism of nephew Abhishek, whom she is grooming to be her successor and for whom, despite claiming that people are her heart, she has the familiar dynastic dream of passing on her legacy to. And because Abhishek Banerjee got in election strategist Prashant Kishor to help the TMC battle the BJP's organisational might, the latter, too, is being distrusted by the grassroots workers. Of course, none of the defecting Trinamool leaders are clean but they each have a committed constituency and can swing the BJP's fate, with the latter promising them immunity from probes by investigating agencies. After Suwendu Adhikari, who was the key architect of Mamata's crusade at Nandigram, and Jitendra Tiwari, TMC MLA Shilbhadra Dutta and minority cell leader Kabirul Islam quit in rapid succession. Of course, the BJP purred over the *ghar waapsi* of its one-time Asansol observer, Col Diptanshu Chowdhury, who resigned from the post of South Bengal State Transport Corporation and as head of the State's grievance monitoring cell. Of these, Adhikari, who has a hold in the Haldia port area, can swing results in about 50-odd seats.

Mamata understandably has deeply furrowed brows. Any exit hurts her larger-than-life image and makes the BJP look like a solid challenger. It started with Mukul Roy, whom she sidelined after he was found to be involved in the Narada sting operation case and the Sharada ponzi scam. For all practical purposes Mamata's eyes and ears, Roy felt slighted for being selectively pushed aside when the going was tough and played a crucial role in turning the BJP's fortunes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. At the same time, Shah is keeping up the heat on her with the Home Ministry insisting on recalling three Bengal IPS officers for Central deputation, the idea being to unsettle the cosy equation she has developed with them. Besides, the police machinery comes in handy for any party, which wants a "friendly" supervision of the poll exercise. Mamata, of course, is not giving up and is likely to approach the Supreme Court. The one thing going for her, of course, despite the anti-incumbency, is her personal connect and sincerity of doorstep campaigns. So Shah is focussing on mathematical certainty and working on consolidating the tribal and Dalit vote in the State. This is necessary if the BJP wants to hold its voters from 2019, who had given it a commanding position in 143 of the 294 Assembly seats. With his lunch diplomacy at a tribal home, Shah laid the primary ground rule for the BJP's roadmap to transfer votes in its favour. Bengal's Dalit population stands at 1.85 crore, of which 80 lakh are Matuas, who are settlers and have a sizeable influence in Assembly seats in Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas districts. And although they threw in their lot with the BJP last year, they feel short-changed by it on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register for Citizens (NRC), none of which helps their refugee status. The biggest concern for the BJP is to have an iconic face as its chief ministerial candidate. Its own core members lack the charisma required and its cadres are anyway upset by the TMC imports taking up positions of importance. Shah, of course, has been trying to toy with the idea of bringing in cricketer Sourav Ganguly but he, too, is no match for Didi's cross-sectoral and earthy appeal.

Can EC help?

Since a mass COVID vaccination drive will be similar to general elections, the Govt must consider using its strengths



Having conducted the Bihar Assembly elections in the middle of a raging pandemic while avoiding a superspreader event, the Election Commission (EC) and its machinery have acquired a depth of experience in getting crowds to keep to COVID-appropriate behaviour. And given its proven credentials in conducting the general elections, its architecture seems to be the most suitable for administering the vaccine in phases across the country. Apart from the immunisation drives for women and children, India has no precedent for an adult inoculation drive. So Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora is open to the prospect of offering assistance, if sought by the Government, in dosing the country over

the first half of next year. Of course, the EC is not mandated to operate outside its core area of expertise but extraordinary times do call for extraordinary measures and its curated drills and logistical expertise can be relied upon to inoculate India's heaving population. This needs to be done fast to break the chain of transmission, with experts predicting that given our population density, we could be subjected to unexpected waves of infection. Truth be told, there is not much of a difference in the vaccine administration process. There will be vaccination booths with COVID-safe protocols and social distancing in place. No more than 100 people will be allowed per session at each site. There will be a recovery enclosure where those given the shot will be watched for allergies over half an hour and attended to in case of an adverse reaction. This seamless mapping and mobilising staff and candidate flow are frankly the EC's forte. While getting vaccinated for COVID-19 will be voluntary, the turnout is still expected to be huge given the disease burden and co-morbidities in a large part of our population. Besides the Health Ministry has advised that each citizen gets a complete schedule of the anti-Coronavirus vaccine irrespective of past history as this will help in developing a strong immune response against the disease. It also said that a protective level of antibodies generally develops two weeks after receiving the second dose. Currently, the EC has the wherewithal to manage such a graded response system.

With the Health Ministry planning to vaccinate 20-30 per cent of the population to reach a critical mass for herd immunity and Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla claiming that by September-October next year, there would be enough vaccines for everyone, everybody is getting drill ready. The challenges, of course, are many. One is to ready an effective awareness campaign on the virtues of the vaccine and counter the myths about its utility. This public service message needs to be rolled out right away. Then there are the logistics of the supply chain, the safety of the vials, avoidance of wastage and ensuring enough trained health workers to administer the vaccine and monitor its effects on the recipients. Also, a two-shot vaccination drive would mean double the effort. The delicacy of maintenance and administering doses requires a sophisticated and expensive infrastructure that even our cities will find difficult to mobilise. But the EC, used to guarding EVMs and deploying personnel according to the sensitivities concerned, can ensure that safety standards are maintained. The only question is that with the Assembly elections in Bengal and Tamil Nadu around the corner, how much of its resources can the EC spare?

Reforms ain't magic tricks

The farmers' fear that MSP will be discontinued is irrational. But panic and irrationality take over when didacticism replaces consultations in any set-up



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

Remunerative jobs for farmers might sound incongruous when remunerative pricing for their products is the argument of the season. Believe it or not, the Narendra Modi Government is currently looking for two seasoned persons whose main profession would be farming, who could be leaders of the Kisan movement. It is a Level 14 post in the pay band of ₹1,44,200-2,18,200. Counterintuitively, they will not be deployed to win over the agitating farmers to the side of the Government. They will contribute towards determining the Minimum Support Prices (MSP), which the Government currently offers on 24 agri products, including rice, wheat and coarse grains.

For several years now, the Commission of Agricultural Cost and Prices (CACP) has gone without two unofficial members on its panel. Is that really news under this Government where many institutions have gone headless for years on end or held as additional charge by senior bureaucrats? This writer recently found out through an application under the RTI Act, 2005, that a position under Article 350-B of the Constitution of India viz. Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities has been vacant since February 2016. The Commission resultantly has not been able to file a single annual report of its activities before Parliament in the past four years. These two advertised positions are meant to fill vacancies in the CACP. The farmers had flagged this vacancy issue way back in February 2018. However, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare notified these only last month.

The Modi Government, to its credit, has substantially increased the MSP on most of the agri products since taking office. However, it perhaps felt that appointing two unofficial members, representing the farming community, into the CACP was redundant. This mindset, one is afraid, is discernible in the formulation of the three agricultural laws as well. They were introduced through the Ordinance route on June 5. There is no evidence of any consultation with the State Governments, farmer unions, agri economists and allied stakeholders.

One can argue that consultations are lengthy processes. However, to obtain durable results, there is no shortcut to this grind. The consensus over the Goods and



Services Tax (GST) was institutionalised through a GST Council comprising the Finance Ministers of various States. Though agriculture marketing is indeed in dire need of reforms but everything cannot be a surgical strike. Pulling rabbits out of the hat might not be the best way to pursue reforms. Having failed to drum up support from the States on the Model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Marketing (APLM) Act, 2017, and also the Model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Contract Farming Act of 2018 that the Centre had circulated, it decided to cut the Gordian knot by promulgating the three agricultural laws.

It cannot be gainsaid that the Modi Government initiated several welfare measures for the farmers. It would be sad to see them drowned in the din of the agitation. However, if only the Government had gone into consultative mode rather earlier, it could have linked certain national agricultural goals with the issue of remunerative pricing. These goals could be identified as crop diversification, reducing dependence on chemicals in farming, water conservation, reducing the regional imbalance in procurement, reforms in the APMC Act, increasing IT literacy in farmers to take advantage of eNAM (National Agriculture Market),

improving the terms of trade with industry and so on. The Government could have generated a trust surplus rather than deficit as at present. It could have made the farmers an ally in its mission. However, at present, the Government is shy of quoting from its flagship commission report. The 14-Volume Report of the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income (2017-2018) chaired by Ashok Dalwai, IAS, is nowhere in the Government's discourse. This begs for an explanation.

The farmers, fearing the MSP will be withdrawn, want it to be legally guaranteed. The truth is that MSP itself has never been legally defined. Even the CACP, the commission which recommends the MSP every marketing season, is not a statutory body. However, it is the Siamese twin of co-born Food Corporation of India (FCI), a statutory body. The FCI, being established under the Food Corporation of India Act, 1964, on the same day as the CACP (January 1, 1965), should be considered guarantee enough.

Without procuring food grains in both Kharif and Rabi marketing seasons, the Government will not be able to run its Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and manage allocations under the Integrated Child

Development Services (ICDS) scheme and Mid-Day Meal for long. These three are statutorily guaranteed under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The TDPS alone reaches out to 80 crore people through 24 lakh ration cards. Without the Government being sincere about TDPS, it would not have implemented the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' project. Thus as long as the FCI Act, 1964, and the NFSA, 2013, are in currency, the farmers have little to fear about the MSPs which have actually been significantly enhanced in the past six years.

However, this MSP-oriented rice-wheat agrarian culture has become the bane of Punjab despite contributing to its material prosperity. Punjab is reluctant to diversify its agriculture. With 75 per cent of its population relying on farming as a source of livelihood directly or indirectly (as per Punjab's Agriculture Department's website), which is far above the national average, the progress of industrialisation has been stymied. The introduction of rice cultivation on a commercial basis since early 1970s had led to the exploitation of groundwater and poisoning of soil through excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Water is a big issue in Punjab, which is why the Sutlej-

Yamuna Link has been lying defunct for the past 40 years. However, Punjab virtually exports a huge quantity of water in every grain of rice it produces, meant largely for consumption by people outside the State. That Punjab's wheat and rice contain the highest concentration of chemicals is also a cause for concern. The Government could promote crop diversification, like cultivation of pulses and oilseeds, which is likely to fetch higher profits through the MSP route.

The Supreme Court's proposal of forming a committee having representation from the Government and farmers' unions raises hope. A good way to defuse the farmers' agitation would be to follow the repeal and re-enact principle. Merely repealing the three new farm laws — particularly the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 — might appease the agitating farmers. However, then the much-needed reformation in agricultural marketing would be left without a future roadmap.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

SOUNDBITE

I politely requested the chairman many times to allow me to complete my intervention. But he refused. I had no option but to leave the room.



Congress leader
—Rahul Gandhi

Did we leave the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty? We didn't... then our colleagues (the US) withdrew from the INF Treaty ... and Open Skies Treaty.



Russian President
—Vladimir Putin

When lockdown started, I used the time to work on vocals for my new songs. I am eager to perform my new set of songs whenever live gigs start. I really want to meet my fans, live!



Singer
—Jubin Nautiyal

I have been preparing myself mentally and physically to compete in 2021. We are not too far away and we will all have to adapt, train and give our best in Tokyo.



Indian shuttler
—PV Sindhu

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Must listen to the SC

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Stop blockades' (December 18). The Supreme Court has rightly said that the farmers protesting against the new farm laws have the constitutional right but cannot block a city and destroy property or endanger life. But who forced these farmers to sit on protest and block the Capital's borders?

It is the Central Government which did not consult them on the laws, then didn't listen to their grievances, ignored their demands and dictated its own terms and conditions to try and crush their protest. Despite many rounds of talks between the farmers and the Centre, the dialogue failed every time due to the rigidity of the latter. The idea of setting up an impartial and independent committee by the Supreme Court is a good one and both the parties can offer their sides of the story to resolve the impasse.

But the growers are bent upon protesting until the Government repeals all the three laws. It is time that the Supreme Court puts a stay on the three laws and their implementation till the issue is completely resolved.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Spent force Cong needs to stay united in Goa

In the event of any debacle, the search for a scapegoat to pin the blame on continues to this day unabashedly. In the modern-day parlance, 'witch-hunting' is a term one usually associates with this abominable practice indulged in by political parties to keep their slate clean. The resignation of Girish Chodankar as the Goa Pradesh Congress Committee (GPCC) chief is one such instance.

Let us for once understand that the Congress in Goa is today a political dispensation that fails to justify its stature as the nation's grand old party. Mutilated beyond recognition, the party's Goa unit is virtually gasping for breath. Seriously in need of rehabilitation, efforts should have been made to revive its fortunes in a gradual and phased manner. But the Congress has been guilty of behaving as if things were normal and believing that the series of setbacks it has been suffering since the saffron wave swept the State and the nation is just a temporary phase in its 'glorious' existence and would have no bearing on its electoral fortunes.

An occasional victory for its candidates here and there only accentuated the complacency. Although the party's senior leaders would not want to admit it, but the infig-



ing infesting the party has had a cancerous effect. The blame game within the party continues as if there is no end to it. Besides, the young brigade bemoaning the domineering attitude of many a senior leader and a spate of resignations by the minority leaders have hit the party hard and thrown up a big question mark over the democratic functioning within. As good as a fledgling in the State's political scenario, the Congress has to literally claw its way back into recognition, and only a united effort will help.

Pachru Menon
Margao

Tomar's forked tongue

Sir — I am unable to understand why Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar suddenly changed his stance? Hardly two days ago, he sounded egoistic in an interview while saying: "Our (BJP) 303-seat mandate was given to the Government not just to stay in power but to effect change."

Two days later, his tone changed when Tomar wrote in an eight-page open letter that those stopping trains carrying supplies to soldiers at the borders, especially at a time when the situation in Ladakh was "challenging", cannot be farmers. It's nothing but a ploy to kill two birds with one stone: Creating anger among the public against the roadblock; and to

create confusion among the farmers about its justification.

A convenient argument that if there's a blockade around Delhi, the supply chains of our forces at the borders will suffer. But have these farmers become a threat to national security? Shame on the Centre for such poor preparedness!

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee
Faridabad

Needless controversy

Sir — The reports that the Government is planning to arm itself with powers to interfere with the functioning of the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are disconcerting as the move can only harm them.

The HRD Ministry was apparently provoked to take this step after the decision of the IIMs to introduce one-year degree course for experienced working professionals. The Ministry wants to call it a diploma. The world over, business schools offer a one-year degree course for working professionals. Besides, it is ridiculous that the Government considers the terminology of an award a matter serious enough to be taken up with the IIMs.

It is worse that the issue has turned into a ground for stand-off and the Ministry threatens to launch an inquiry against the IIM Board. Such an interventionist attitude by the Government is unfortunate and cannot aid the growth and development of academic institutions.

Shovanlal Chakraborty
Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A deepening malnutrition crisis

The effects of COVID-19 will be felt for generations to come, so systems must act now collaboratively to address all these challenges



SAHIL SHARMA

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit incomes, social systems and the world economy. The management of this dual burden has put pressure on the Indian healthcare system which has limited resources in terms of equipment, protective gear and essential medical supplies. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown strategies in many countries around the world, including India, had a crippling impact on jobs, housing, migration and, most importantly, nutrition. The *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report produced by five UN bodies estimated that almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019, up by 10 million from 2018 and one billion people in the world still do not have access to a healthy food supply. Estimates show that by the end of this year, the figure is likely to go up. Malnutrition increases the chances of individuals becoming susceptible to infections because of a weakened immune system and eventually dying, setting in motion a vicious cycle for future generations. Those experiencing malnutrition and diet-related diseases in particular face the brunt of COVID-19 and malnutrition. When families face grave challenges in the form of food price hikes, unemployment, restricted mobility and disruption to health and social services — regardless of whether they are directly affected by the virus — their nutritional intake and, therefore, health will be harmed if urgent action is not taken to address the barriers they face in accessing healthy food.

As per the *Global Nutrition Report 2020*, the global prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM), was 7.3 per cent in 2018, compared to 7.9 per cent in 2012, validating negligible progress towards the five per cent target set for 2025 in the 2012 World Health Assembly. India is home to half of the wasted children globally. Even before COVID-19, one of the most impacted groups when it comes to access to nutrition-related schemes has been the marginalised section of women and children everywhere. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), malnutrition indicators have worsened, with the proportion of children with stunting rising in 11 out of 18 States, cases of those with wasting going up in 14 and of those with anaemia in 17 States. One study interprets that the contagion may result in health system disruption, collapse and decrease in access to food, which will further increase child and maternal deaths. The least severe scenario over six months would result in 2,53,500 additional child deaths and 12,200 more maternal deaths. A most severe scenario over six months would result in 11,57,000 additional child deaths and 56,700 more maternal deaths. The increase in wasting prevalence would account for 18-23 per cent of additional child deaths.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of India has been 6.1 per cent in 2018, 4.2 per cent in 2019 and 1.9 per cent this year. Fitch rating slashed the country's economic growth prediction to 0.8 per cent for April-March 2020-2021. Part of this probably is the effect of the outbreak and the subsequent lockdown. Consumer spending has fallen to 0.3 per cent from 5.5 per cent a year ago. This is twice the 2009 recession. In 2018, people from the lowest income quintile from India spent 35.1 per cent of their income on food whereas in the highest quintile, food expenditure was 8.2 per cent. So if the food prices increase by 20 per cent, the effect on the lowest quintile will be disproportionately high. New data released by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on food prices showed that barring cereals, the cost of all other food items has increased three times since April. Prices of pulses are likely to rise due to the unavailability of labour to peel the lentils. This relation between income elasticity and food intake shows that some degree of increase in malnutrition is inevitable during the outbreak. Besides a drop in income during the lockdown, there have been many issues related to a supply chain breakdown and the unavailability of fruits and green vegetables. Transport limitation, closure of shops and markets, too, led to an increase in food prices. Seasonal variation on the availability of food in the summer has compounded the issue further.

Key strategies to combat malnutrition and COVID-19 together involve building a resilient future to also face shocks of future pandemics. These include ensuring continuity to provide critical community-based nutrition services, using innovative and digital delivery systems for basic services such as promotion of breastfeeding, micronutrient supplementation and basic primary healthcare, including immunisation. In India, the need for pushing Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition guidelines by the Centre is the need of the hour. Emergency supply of fortified food, scaling up of public distribution systems and health promotional outreach activities on COVID-19, reiterating the need for social distancing while continuing to safely breastfeed infants and emphasising the need for healthy diets, basic nutrition services such as vitamin A supplementation and immunisation, should be intensified. The effects of COVID-19 on malnutrition will be felt for generations to come, so systems must act now collaboratively to address all these challenges for healthier outcomes.

(The writer is a Food Technologist and a Public Policy Consultant. The views expressed are personal)

THE BJP IS SPENDING CRORES OF RUPEES TO BRING IN A PARTY FROM HYDERABAD TO DIVIDE MUSLIM VOTES IN WEST BENGAL ELECTIONS.

—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

MAMATA BANERJEE

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



NEVER WAS A MAN BORN WHO CAN BUY OWAISI WITH MONEY. SHE SHOULD WORRY ABOUT HER PARTY. MANY TMC PEOPLE ARE GOING TO THE BJP.

—AIMIM CHIEF

ASADUDDIN OWAIISI

Master of post-modern game

Modi's post-modern politics took root not by replacing his modernist development agenda but by working around it and mediating the universal development through particularist identities



JYOTIRMAYA TRIPATHY

Thinking of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a post-modernist is a little intriguing for intellectuals but a no-brainer for both, his admirers and detractors. For the former, Modi carries the hopes and aspirations of millions and there is little that he cannot do, so there is no reason why he cannot be a post-modernist. For the detractors, he epitomises everything that ails India, so it is not a stretch to assign a post-modern dimension to him. Given that the latter group has already assigned the choicest of adjectives to Modi that establish his limitless power and absolute control over the Indian body politic, they cannot deny a mere post-modernist tag to him.

That said, Modi's supposed post-modernity may evoke surprise and even derision from the intellectual class who, for the first time, see themselves as powerless and realise that the cliché "speaking truth to power" is just an honourable trope. For them, the very idea of yoking Modi with post-modernity is an act of violence and may be a cruel joke that compromises the emancipatory promise of post-modernity and completely de-intellectualises the concept.

In fact, they could imagine this proposition as a game plan to control knowledge. Having been forced to cede political space to Modi, they had retired to their comfort zones of universities and NGOs. The possibility of Modi's post-modernity may appear to them another strategy to rob them of their safe spaces and legitimise him intellectually.

Modernisation first: Let me assure them I have no such objective and that the present engagement comes from within the same thinking class. I would much rather identify the shift in Modi's politics that makes his post-modernity an eminently believable idea. Before Modi became the phenomenon that he is today, he was a moderniser. After an accidental ascension to the Chief Minister's chair, he capitalised on the entrepreneurial community of Gujaratis and channelised their success to a pan-Indian aspiration, to be known as the "Gujarat model", though critics would still find many contradictions within that claim.

In terms of Hindu consolidation against an aggressive Mandalisation of politics and the division of Hindu society along caste lines, BJP veteran leader LK Advani had already sought to unify Hindus through the Ram Mandir agitation. Modi took this unification strategy from Advani and gave it a developmental idiom. Whether it was intended to arrest the fragmentation of Hindus for cultural or political reasons is anybody's guess, but what we can agree on is the fact that Modi went beyond Hindu unity and created a developmental unity.

As a modernist he was both, disruptive in terms of breaking away from traditional politics and constructive, as in ushering in a new type of politics that was the beginning of development. His modernity was palpable when he invested his political future in the idea of development as universal with the hope of neutralising particularist assertions.

If secularism was the master code of the pre-Modi era, his counter master narrative was development. The slogan "*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas*" articulated a new India's resolve for the 21st century. This is not to gloss over alleged incidents of atrocities against minorities after his rise as Prime Minister, though they are not unique to his era. As Chief Minister, Modi had shown his resolve in infrastructure develop-

“MANDAL POLITICS HAD POLITICISED A FEW DOMINANT CASTES. MODI IS TAKING IT TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION BY BREAKING THE MONOLITH. SIMILARLY, THE SINGLE VOTING BLOCK OF DALITS IS OVER AND POLITICIANS AND INTELLECTUALS CANNOT COMPLAIN AGAINST SOMETHING THAT THEY THEMSELVES CHAMPIONED”



ment, even by demolishing many Hindu temples in Gujarat's Capital Gandhinagar.

Modi took upon himself the responsibility of creating a new political culture where nationalism is no longer a bad word and development is the master legitimator of contemporary politics. His rationalisation of development as the new mantra may be dismissed as reflective of a post-World War mentality but the fact that India continues to be underdeveloped is the reason behind Modi's success as a moderniser. His promotion of women's empowerment (through the '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*' initiative), more seats for women candidates in IITs and the 'Ujjwala Yojana' for rural women, among others, created development as the new universal and legitimated development as the new catch-all category of Indian politics. So much so that all parties reimagined themselves as development-oriented ones.

The post-modern turn: The Opposition had understood that to keep their hopes alive they had to reclaim Backward communities from Modi and bring them to make common cause with minorities. The fact that non-BJP parties had benefitted heavily from this so-called Backward-Dalit-Muslim unity, something which development started eroding steadily, made them jittery.

Theirs was a post-modern challenge that survived on dissociating Dalits, OBCs, women, Muslims from the modernist project of development. Modi needed a new strategy to reinvent himself and he found one, to beat his critics in their own game. His modernist thrust had created a catch-all and all-encompassing category such as development that appeared to have replaced politics. Now began Modi's post-modern politics, not by replacing

his modernist development agenda but by working around it and mediating the universal development through particularist identities.

The mistake many intellectuals make is imagining that Modi and his party as intellectually challenged. They too, imagined the strategy of fragmentation as the bulwark against Modi's juggernaut (that depended on universals such as nationalism and development) and highlighted difference, fragmentation, particularism and so on. If Modi spoke of Hindutva, the post-modern impulse was to highlight caste difference; if he spoke of nationalism, the post-modern impulse was to offer regional and religious challenge; if development promised equal opportunity, the post-modern alternative was to highlight development's religious and caste blindness. Modi used their tool of fragmentation to fragment further.

Most politicians and intellectuals were convinced that particulars such as Dalit or Muslim or Other Backward Classes (OBC) can never be another universal, but Modi knew better. He criminalised triple *talaq* and broke the Muslim universal and its inherent patriarchy, something that had been avoided by most political parties.

The Mandalisation of politics had created the greatest monolith of OBCs but Modi knew that OBC is a political construct and so can be refashioned. More than 50 per cent of the country's population cannot be a monolith and that it cannot be a cohesive unit. In 2018, the Rohini Commission recommended splitting of the OBC quota of 27 per cent because about 25 per cent of the 27 per cent OBC quota is usually gobbled up by around 10 dominant castes and the remaining 1,000 castes are largely left out. Modi instinctively understood that these silent groups can be persuaded to see the irony of OBC

reservation and can be the site of a counter-OBC formation.

He also worked around the creamy layer among the OBCs (mostly the salaried and middle-class) who are usually vocal about rights. He knew that their exclusion from the OBC umbrella would dilute the narrative of OBC assertion. So far as Dalit votes are concerned, every State has a few dominant castes (Jatavs, Mahars, Madigas depending on the region) who are heavily politicised to the extent of hijacking the Dalit movement away from marginal Dalit communities.

Now Modi and the BJP are actively working with these marginalised castes and are integrating their practices in the Hindu cultural sphere. They are also actively empowering them through mobilisation at the grassroots level.

Conclusion: Mandal politics had politicised a few dominant castes. Modi is taking it to its logical conclusion by breaking the monolith. Similarly, the single voting block of Dalits is over and politicians and intellectuals cannot complain against something that they themselves championed. On top of that, Modi's introduction of the Economically Weaker Section quota was a masterstroke that brought class rather than caste into distributive politics, something Indian communists had chosen to ignore.

Intellectuals and politicians did not have the foresight to see the vulnerability of their position. In their enthusiasm, they had forgotten that though the minority/Dalit/OBC difference can threaten the universal nation, the former is equally vulnerable to contradictions within. Modi beat them in their post-modern game.

(The writer is Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras and a cultural critic. The views expressed are personal)

The RBI should be ready for a balancing act

The Central bank needs to adopt a cautious approach as far as monitoring inflation and pushing for growth are concerned



MEENAL SHARMA JAGTAP

The National Statistical Office's estimates for the second quarter (Q2) (July-September) of 2020-21 came as a relief to all, raising hopes of the much-talked about V-shaped recovery. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant (2011-12) prices in the Q2 of 2020-21 is estimated at ₹33.14 lakh crore, as against ₹35.84 lakh crore in the Q2 of 2019-20, showing a contraction of 7.5 per cent as compared to 4.4 per cent growth in the Q2 of 2019-20. This contraction of 7.4 per cent as against a contraction of 23.9 per cent in Q1 is a tremendous improvement

and at current prices it turns out to be only four per cent.

Reviewing the macroeconomic and financial developments of the domestic and global economy as well as the evolving outlook for the Indian economy, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at four per cent, the Bank Rate and Marginal Standing Facility Rate (MSF) unchanged at 4.25 per cent and the reverse repo rate at three per cent.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at 7.6 per cent in October is higher than the mandated two-six per cent inflation target. The mandate set in 2016 requires the Central bank to keep the headline inflation at the mid-point of its range at four per cent. For most of the year, retail inflation has been outside the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) tolerance limit, mainly due to supply-side pressures owing to the lockdowns.

The sticky CPI inflation has prevented the RBI from announcing further rate cuts. In the absence of

much direct fiscal support, the RBI did most of the heavy lifting by reducing rates by a cumulative 115 basis points this year and pumping ample liquidity into the system.

The RBI's flexible inflation targeting will be up for review after March 2021 and some economists think that the Central bank should keep a watch on overheating rather than trying to keep inflation within a targeted range. The US Federal Reserve, too, has indicated that it would actively seek and tolerate higher inflation in America.

Reviewing the inflation target for the RBI may give it the much-needed leverage as pressure builds on it to do more to revive the economy. The RBI has rendered support through its monetary policy and used a host of unconventional monetary policy tools to support the Government's fiscal measures. It has made efforts to ensure liquidity in sectors with multiplier effects, nudged the bond markets to respond to the signals from the RBI in the

conduct of its monetary policy and debt management. One of the unconventional monetary policy tools to be adopted by the RBI was the 'Operation Twist'. This refers to the purchase of Government securities of longer maturities and selling of an equal amount of securities of shorter maturities under Open Market Operations (OMO). The procedure is designed to exert downward pressure on longer term interest rates by lowering long-term yields. Besides, measures to enhance liquidity support to targeted sectors, it has been taking initiatives to deepen the financial markets, conserve capital among banks and NBFCs through regulatory support, strengthen supervision through strengthening audit function, ease external trade and expand financial inclusion.

Going forward, the primary challenge for the Central bank is going to be dealing with sticky inflation while its eye is firmly set on the recovery of the economy. In the December 3 Monetary Policy, the

RBI pegged CPI inflation at 6.8 per cent for Q3 of 2020-21 and to 5.8 per cent for Q4. These projections were owing to the likely persistence of food prices at elevated levels and cost-push pressures on core inflation.

Apart from some cheer coming in with the Q2 GDP figures, there is a fear about the uncertainty of the macroeconomic conditions and the fact that the current upturn may be only due to the pent-up demand, the festival season and initial easing of the supply chain.

The results of the Consumer Confidence Survey by the RBI also showed that consumer confidence remained very low in November as compared to a year ago. However, it showed marginal improvement from its all-time low recorded in the previous cycle (September).

Low consumer confidence is reflective of the people's insecurities regarding the job scenario, employment levels, household incomes and economic recovery in the country. However, the households remain

optimistic about the scenario one year ahead as reflected by the Future Expectations Index. Hence, managing inflation is critical to sustaining the growth stimulus spurred by the policy stimuli of the Government and the Central bank.

Till now, the RBI's efforts for liquidity injection as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to support the Government's fiscal responsibility, have achieved their purpose, as assessed by the it.

Liquidity influx with Foreign Portfolio Investment and Foreign Direct Investment has been high and the RBI has been sterilising them with reverse repo operations. Going forward, the Central bank needs to adopt a cautious approach as far as monitoring inflation and pushing for growth are concerned. It should be ready to do the balancing act.

(The writer is Joint Director, the National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development, Niti Aayog. The views expressed are personal.)



FOREIGN EYE



NEED OF THE HOUR IN UK

Supporting schemes to make roads outside schools car-free is one thing; confronting the motor industry and getting serious about the kinds of shifts in behaviour and technology that are needed to reduce congestion and pollution is another. Increasing the cost of driving and giving more space to people on bicycles is not popular. But it is the need of the hour in the UK. (The Guardian editorial)

Sensex, Nifty make new highs as FIIs maintain buying spree

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Markets darted up to fresh peaks on Friday, capping off a stellar week where equity benchmarks closed at record highs every session on unabated foreign fund inflows.

After opening at its lifetime intra-day high of 47,026.02, the 30-share BSE Sensex succumbed to selling pressure but rebounded in fag-end trade to finish at a record 46,960.69, up 70.35 points or 0.15 per cent.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty rose 19.85 points or 0.14 per cent to 13,760.55 -- its new closing record.

IT stocks hogged the limelight as better-than-expected results from Accenture Plc enthused investors.

Infosys was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, jumping 2.64 per cent, followed by Bajaj Auto, SBI, ICICI Bank, HCL Tech, Titan, Asian Paints and TCS.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, ONGC, HDFC Bank, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv and Bharti Airtel were among the main losers, skidding up to 3.30 per cent.

During the week, the Sensex rallied 861.68 points or 1.86 per cent, while the Nifty surged 246.70 points or 1.82 per cent.

Continuing their buying spree, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) purchased shares worth a net Rs 2,355.25 crore on Thursday, according to provisional exchange data.

FPIs have been net buyers in the domestic capital markets in each session this month so far, following record inflows of Rs 60,358 crore in November.

“Domestic equities recovered from today’s low in tandem with recovery in banking stocks. IT index was top performer today with strong buying in many IT counters due to strong performance and upbeat commentary from Accenture.

₹ rises by 3 paise to 73.56 on forex inflows, weak dollar

Mumbai: The rupee appreciated by 3 paise to close at 73.56 against the US dollar on Friday amid sustained foreign fund inflows and positive domestic equities. Traders said weakness in the American currency in the overseas market supported the domestic unit. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.55 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 73.49 and a low of 73.57. It finally ended at 73.56 against the American currency, registering a rise of 3 paise over its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee settled flat at 73.59 against US dollar.

RBI Board reviews prevailing economic situation

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said its Central Board on Friday reviewed the current economic situation in the backdrop of global and domestic challenges.

The Central Board met under the chairmanship of Governor Shaktikanta Das through video conferencing. It was the 586th meeting of the Central Board.

“The Board reviewed the current economic situation in the backdrop of global and domestic challenges and various areas of operations of the Reserve Bank including the customer education initiatives and resolution of customer complaints,” it said in a statement.

The Central Board also discussed the draft report on trend and progress of banking in India, 2019-20.



It also noted the change in the central bank’s financial year from July-June to April-March and the changes in the unit of presentation from millions / billions to lakhs / crores.

Besides the deputy governors, directors of the board N Chandrasekaran, Ashok Gulati, Manish Sabharwal, Prasanna Kumar Mohanty, Dilip S Shanghvi, Satish K Marathe, S Gurumurthy and Revathy Iyer attended the meeting.

Tarun Bajaj, secretary, Department of Economic Affairs and Debashish Panda, secretary, Department of Financial Services, also attended the meeting.

Govt rules out cut in cane prices, asks sugar mills to be efficient, profitable

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said the government cannot reduce the FRP, the minimum price at which sugar mills buy cane from farmers, and asked the industry to be efficient, profitable and diversify product portfolio with less dependency on the central subsidy.

Addressing the 86th annual general meeting (AGM) of industry body ISMA, Goyal, who is also the railway and commerce minister, said the government’s decision to provide Rs 3,500 crore subsidy for exports of 60 lakh tonnes of sugar in the current marketing year 2020-21 (October-September) will help in liquidating surplus sugar stocks.

On the industry’s demand that the sugarcane purchase price be linked with sugar price realisation, he said it is not practical to reduce the fair and remunerative price (FRP) and told the industry leaders to produce more ethanol as well



as other bye-products to boost their income.

“Let’s be practical about it. We cannot reduce the FRP. It’s an institutional mechanism going on for several years,” he said. Goyal also expressed concern about some mills being profitable and others in bad shape and asked the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) to undertake a gap study to make mills efficient and competitive. He said a holistic assessment should be made to find a sustainable solution, which is workable and make industry efficient as well as profitable with “least stress” on the government’s subsidy. On the government’s decision to give a subsidy of Rs 3,500 crore to sugar mills for the export of 60 lakh tonnes of the sweetener during the ongoing marketing year 2020-21, the minister said this will “give some comfort to industry in disposing surplus sugar stocks”. He said the sugar output is expected to rise 20 per cent in the current marketing year.

Goyal said the food ministry will also soon clear the subsidy worth Rs 5,361 crore of previous marketing year, to mills pertaining to exports and ethanol programme.

India Inc's overseas investments at \$12.25 bn during Apr-Nov: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Corporate India has invested USD 12.25 billion overseas during the first eight months of the current fiscal,

most of which has gone into the firms’ wholly-owned subsidiaries in the US, Singapore or the Netherlands, according to data collated by Care Ratings. In the whole of FY20,

total foreign direct investment (FDI) by domestic companies was USD 13 billion, while FDI inflows had hit a record USD 76 billion, according to the ratings agency.

Of the total USD 12.25 billion outward FDI during April-November this fiscal, the actual outflow was USD 6.35 billion, of which USD 2.97 billion was through equities and USD

3.38 billion in loan commitments and the balance USD 5.90 billion was in the form of guarantees, the agency said quoting RBI data. As against this, during the first five

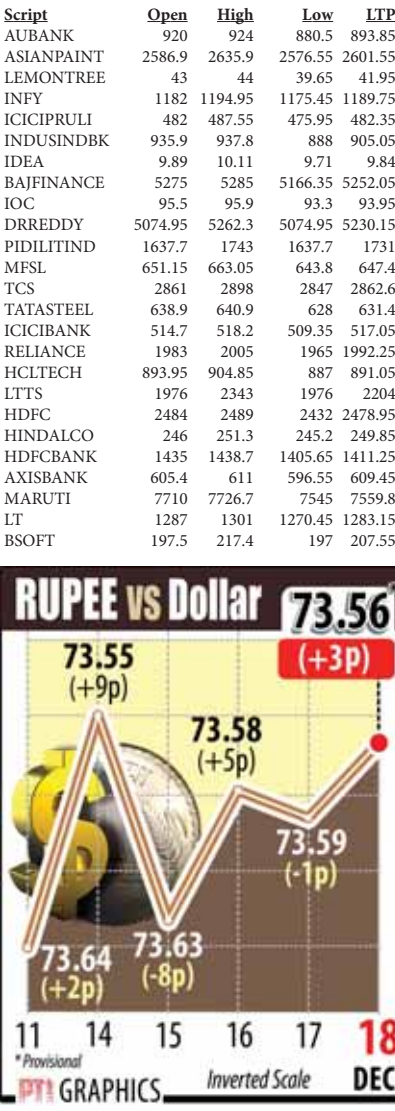
months of the current fiscal, total FDI inflows rose to USD 35.73 billion, the highest-ever for the period, and 13 per cent higher than same period in FY20 when it stood at USD

31.60 billion. This was primarily driven by the string of deals that Reliance Industries clinched for its telecom and retail arms. For the full FY20, inflows stood at USD 76 billion,

which after adjusting for repatriation of around USD18 billion, meant USD 56 billion of foreign direct investment, which was the highest achieved on record.

NIFTY 50						
SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE	
NIFTY 50	13,764.40	13,772.85	13,658.60	13,760.55	19.85	
DREDDY	5,080.00	5,262.85	5,078.15	5,243.00	170.15	
BAJAJ-AUTO	3,275.90	3,363.00	3,270.90	3,352.20	81.75	
INFY	1,182.85	1,195.00	1,175.60	1,186.00	26.8	
WIPRO	338.95	365.8	357.5	363	61	
CPLA	784.25	796	781.5	795.15	11.95	
HINDALCO	246.7	251.4	245.2	249.3	3.45	
SBIN	267.7	271.95	265	271.35	3.65	
TITAN	1,502.00	1,525.00	1,497.10	1,522.00	20.05	
HCLTECH	894.75	905	886.65	890.35	11	
UPL	456	462	454	460.52	5.52	
ICICIBANK	514	518.25	509.15	515.95	5.55	
GAIL	124.5	125.5	121.2	125.9	1.45	
HEROMOTOCO	3,101.00	3,144.00	3,101.00	3,139.35	26.7	
ASIANPAINT	2,577.00	2,636.00	2,575.35	2,596.95	21.9	
ITC	213.1	215.95	209.75	214.75	1.7	
SBILIFE	859	864	852.8	863	6.65	
HINDUNILVR	2,322.00	2,343.90	2,312.00	2,332.00	16.7	
RELIANCE	1,980.10	2,004.90	1,965.00	1,998.10	12.5	
EICHERMOT	2,459.00	2,490.00	2,425.20	2,481.25	14.65	
SHREECEM	24,500.00	24,732.05	24,301.80	24,648.95	138.55	
AXISBANK	604.4	611	596.5	608.6	3.2	
TCS	2,868.00	2,898.00	2,846.20	2,875.95	13.75	
M&M	726.1	737.95	722.55	734	3.35	
SUNPHARMA	574	576.9	568	573.8	2.45	
TECHM	935	947	928.3	932	1.9	
POWERGRID	193.3	194.8	192.05	193.5	0.2	
HDFCLIFE	656.3	656.3	640	655.2	0.65	
DIVISLAB	3,837.30	3,859.00	3,782.00	3,820.00	-4.7	
NESTLEIND	18,395.00	18,599.00	18,158.00	18,238.30	-67.05	
IT	1,283.95	1,301.00	1,270.00	1,273.00	-5.8	
GRASIM	912	916.75	902	908.45	-4.25	
BPCL	398	399	389.25	393.5	-1.9	
ULTRACEMCO	5,140.00	5,214.00	5,110.50	5,136.35	-35.45	
TATAMOTORS	180.9	181.5	176.65	180.4	-1.3	
NTPC	104.55	104.8	102.85	103.6	-0.85	
JSWSTEEL	368.3	368.95	357.7	362.2	-3.8	
BAJAJFINSV	9,249.90	9,315.00	9,125.00	9,260.80	-77.3	
TATASTEEL	638.25	640.85	628	629.5	-5.5	
HDFC	2,482.00	2,489.00	2,431.00	2,472.80	-21.8	
BHARTIARTL	513.9	514.9	505.05	510	-5.9	
BRITANNIA	3,738.00	3,759.80	3,690.00	3,692.95	-36.8	
BAIFINANCE	5,250.00	5,284.95	5,165.00	5,229.95	-56.75	
COALINDIA	143.45	143.65	139.45	141.85	-1.6	
ADANIPORTS	467.75	472.95	458.5	462	-5.75	
KOTAKBANK	1,963.80	1,963.80	1,921.35	1,941.10	-24.35	
IOC	95.4	95.75	93.3	94.1	-1.3	
MARUTI	7,714.00	7,727.00	7,541.75	7,560.00	-134	
ONGC	101.5	102.3	98.15	99.5	-2	
HDFCBANK	1,435.00	1,439.70	1,406.30	1,408.95	-32.85	
INDUSINDBK	935.8	937.5	887.55	906.75	-29.05	

BSE 500



Script	Open	High	Low	LTP
AUBANK	920	924		
ADANI	2586.9	2635.9		
ASIANPAINT	43	44		
LEOMONTREE	43	44		
INFY	1182	1194.95		
ICICIPRULI	482	487.55		
INDUSINDBK	935.9	937.8		
IDEA	9.89	10.11		
BAJFINANCE	5275	5285		
IOCL	95.5	95.9		
DREDDY	5074.95	5262.3		
PIDILITIND	1637.7	1743		
MCS	651.15	663.05		
TATATEEL	638.9	640.9		
ICICIBANK	514.7	518.25		
RELIANCE	1983	2005		
HCLTECH	893.95	904.85		
LTTS	1976	2343		
HDFC	2484	2489		
HINDALCO	246	251.3		
HDFCBANK	1435	1438.7		
AXISBANK	605.4	611		
MARUTI	7710	7726.7		
BSOFT	1287	1301		
LI	197.5	217.4		
GAIL	124.2	125.3		
ADANI	467.85	472.75		
ADANI	1449	1461.55		
PEL	5178	5700		
HAWKINCOOK	651	678.8		
JUSTDIAL	2280	2360.35		
PIIND	64.6	67.3		
HINDCOPPER	1216	1227.4		
MUTHOOTFIN	103.1	105.1		
SPIECHEI	2470	2484		
EICHERMOT	226	226.6		
HINDPETRO	3121	3145		
HINDMOTOCO	77950	78219.6		
MRF	405	413.8		
BANDHANBNK	368.65	368.65		
JSWSTEEL	37.45	37.5		
IDFCFIRSTB	972	977		
LUPIN	5577	5610.1		
SRF	940.2	943.85		
DEEPAKNI	177.7	178		
M&MFIN	500.75	500.75		
SUNTV	2180	2246		
ICALAB	1404	1444		
PVR	18394	18600		
NESTLEIND	455	461.95		
UPL	2528	2623.2		
COFORGE	461.8	464.45		
ADANI	2579.8	2650.05		
DMART	511.55	513.6		
DABUR	55.65	57.85		
VAKRANGEE	5178	5213.5		
ULTRACEMCO	104.7	104.95		
NTPC	104.7	104.95		
NAUKRI	4600	4670		
GRANULES	378.2	379.95		
HEG	900	929.7		
RAYMOND	362.3	362.3		
COMUMINSIND	589.25	615.75		
DCBBANK	122.7	124.35		
TATACONSUM	579.7	582.2		
ADANIPOWER	46.8	47.6		
APOLLOPHOS	2424	2425.5		
VOLTA	830	836.7		
MAANUPPURA	174.1	175.45		
LAURUSLABS	345.5	355.5		
ACC	1644.4	1654.55		
BERGEPAINT	713.95	719.95		
BATAINDIA	1592	1600		
INDIAMART	5880	6151		
NMDC	115.6	116		
SCI	85.2	87.15		
JKPAPER	108.8	112		
AUROPHARMA	874.35	888.7		
DIXON	13850	13965.95		
MGL	1306	1056.2		
NAVINFLOOR	2561	2625		
GUJALKALI	350.5	374.75		
KNRCON	326.5	346.95		
RECLTD	130.95	138.85		
GRAPHITE	300	307.85		
HDFCAML	2857.05	2899		
ADANITRUGS	752.5	769.5		
PETRONET	259.2	261.9		
TRIDENT	9.7	9.75		
HDFCLIFE	657	657.1		
NCC	57.6	57.6		
KALKRISIND	1637.15	1650.8		
AAMARAJABAT	940	959.45		
AAITINDIA	1229	1268.4		
TORNTPHARM	2761	2814		
GLENNMARK	521.4	522.8		
CADILAH	478	479.25		
KPITTECH	111.6	121.4		
SBICARD	847	849.2		
GRASIM	920	920		
ATUL	6159	6300		
PFCE	117.25	119.4		
BLISSGVS	178	172		
BOMDEYING	80.95	80.95		
TATAELXI	1633	1662.7		
ADANIGREEN	1040.05	1058		
ALOKTEXT	23	23.35		
BRITANNIA	3759	3759.2		
GODREJPROP	1365	1380.95		
BIRLACORPN	724	729.7		
EXIDEIND	191.75	192.75		
SIEMENS	1523.5	1556.45		
CROMPTON	375	387.05		
DELTAACEL	166.65	166.65		
ICGL	480.1	481.7		
DGMSHRIRAM	388	440.9		
MARICO	414	418.5		
HAL	870	878.6		
RADICO	463.6	475		
CHOLAFIN	377	377.2		
IBREALST	147	153.75		
POWERGRID	193.35	194.85		
ORIENTCEM	83.9	84.8		
UNIONBANK	31.85	31.85		
WHIRLPOOL	2190	2329.95		
TRENT	705	709		
CENTRALBK	14.2	14.25		
GMVINFRA	27.3	27.25		
AMRINT	540	553		
INOXLEISUR	283.95	284.95		
BOSCHLTD	13375	13420		
STAR	761	792.9		
COLPAL	1601.05	1624.1		
JKTYRE	76.7	77.1		

INDIAL	124.2	125.3	121.3	125.05
ADANIAPORTS	467.85	472.75	458.5	463.1
PEL	1449	1461.55	1419.25	1442
HAWKINCOOK	5178	5700	5145.5	5671.05
USTDIAL	651	678.8	645.7	652.25
PIIND	2280	2360.35	2247	2296.1
HINDCOFFER	64.6	67.3	61.4	63.85
MUTHOOTFIN	1216	1227.4	1199.95	1210.05
SPICEJET	103.1	105.1	101.15	101.6
ICHERMOT	2470	2484.8	2425.55	2478.35
HINDPETRO	226	226.6	222.2	223.9
HIMROMTOCO	3121	3145	3105.05	3136.8
BMRF	77950	78219.6	77662.2	77960
BANDHANBNK	405	413.8	404.3	409.15
SWSTEL	368.65	368.65	357.75	363.55
DFCFIRSTB	37.45	37.5	36.2	36.95
LUPIN	972	977	955.9	972
SRF	5577	5610.1	5485	5529.45
DEEPAKFIN	940.2	943.85	909.55	922.8
MAFKN	177.7	178	173.5	175.9
SUNTV	500.75	500.75	478.55	483
PCPCALAB	2180	2246	2144.4	2232.5
PVR	1404	1440	1385.65	1434
NESTELEIND	18394	18600	1819018347.25	
UPL	455	461.95	451	460.3
COFORGE	2528	2623.2	2528	2556.55
ADANIENT	461.8	464.05	451	453.5
OMART	2579.8	2605.05	2555.5	2638.6
DABUR	51.55	513.6	503.2	509.15
KANGRAXEE	55.65	57.85	54.6	57.3
ULTRACEMCO	5178	5213.5	5117.05	5141.95
NAUKRI	104.7	104.95	102.85	103.7
GRANULES	378.2	379.95	368.2	369.55
HEG	900	929.7	885.2	922.85
RAYMOND	362.3	362.3	343	353.6
COMUMINSIND	589.25	615.75	584.85	612.1
OCBBANK	122.7	124.35	113.95	119.45
ADANICONSUM	579.7	582.2	567.45	572.4
ADANIPOWER	46.8	47.6	45.1	45.35
APOLLOHOSP	2424	2425.5	2367.4	2387.15
VOITAS	830	836.7	819.25	828.5
MANAPPURAM	175.1	175.45	170.8	174.15
AUCRUSALBS	344.5	355.5	334.9	354.05
BCE	16444	1654.55	1626	1650.3
BERGPAINTE	517.9	719.95	704.7	708.3
INDIAINDIA	1592	1600	1576.95	1583.2
INDIAMART	5880	6151	5817.6	6095.05
NMDC	115.6	116	113.25	115.5
ICI	85.2	87.15	82.55	86.55
KPAPER	108.8	112	105.15	110.55
AUROPHARMA	874.35	888.7	863	886.9
DIION	13850	13906.95	13285.8	13345.6
MGL	1036	1056.2	1026.5	1042.5
UNIVINFUOR	2561	2625	2511.2	2620.85
GAJALKALI	350.5	374.75	341.35	368.3
KNRCOR	320.5	346.95	317.1	326.3
RECLTD	136.95	138.85	134.85	137
GRAPHITE	300	307.85	294.25	304.3
AAFCAMD	2857.05	2899	2838.6	2861.55
INDIADRUGS	752.5	769.5	740	741.85
PETRONET	259.5	261.9	255.3	257.45
TRIDENT	9.7	9.75	9.19	9.4
DEDFCLIFE	657	657.1	639.9	654.05
NCC	57.6	57.6	56.05	56.45
BALKRISIND	1637.15	1650.8	1606.05	1613.2
MANARAJABAT	940	959.45	937.75	955.45
ARTIIND	1229	1268.4	1205.25	1217.7
FORNTPHARM	2761	2814	2719.85	2775.3
GLENMARK	521.4	522.8	506.9	516.05
CADILAH	478	479.25	470	476.35
SPITTECH	111.6	121.4	110.5	119.55
GRASIM	847	849.2	834.25	841.5
ATUL	920	920	902.3	910
BLISSGVS	6159	6300	6100	6287
PFL	117.25	119.4	115.7	117.3
INDSVING	178	178	172.2	175.75
BOMDYEING	80.95	80.95	77.55	78.9
DATAELSI	1633	1662.7	1630	1634.4
INDANGREEN	1040.05	1058	1002	1016.15
ALOKTEXT	23	23.35	22.25	22.65
BRITANNIA	3759	3759.2	3691.55	3722.3
GODRE/PROP	1365	1380.95	1343	1371.7
LACORPN	724	729.7	713	723.55
EXIDEIND	191.75	192.75	187.95	190.25
SIEMENS	1523.5	1556.45	1522.58	1538
CROMPTON	375	387.05	361.55	375
DELTACORP	166.65	166.65	160.2	163.05
IGL	480.1	481.7	471.7	477.05
OCMSHRIRAM	388	440.9	382.1	426
MARICO	414	418.5	407.2	408.95
HAL	870	878.6	855.6	864.1
RADICO	463.6	475	453.4	457.25
COLAFIN	377	377.6	362.8	375.35
DICAL	147	153.85	147	150.15
BREALEST	75	75.75	72	73.05
POWERGRID	193.35	194.85	192.2	193.15
ORIENTCEM	83.9	89.4	83	86.5
INDIANBANK	31.85	31.85	30.75	31.1
WHIRLPOOL	2190	2329.95	2162	2264
TRENT	70.5	70.9	69.8	69.55
CENTRALBK	14.2	14.25	13.5	13.71
GMRINFRA	27.3	27.7	26.65	26.85
AVANTI	540	553	529	548.6
NOVILESH	283.95	284.95	275.05	281.5
SCSCHILD	13375	13420	13160	13208.3
STAR	761	792.9	761	778.2
COLPAL	1601.05	1624.1	1588	1599.45
KTYRE	76.7	77	72.1	73.05

US overwhelmingly OK'd Moderna vaccine: Trump

Washington: President Donald Trump on Friday said that the United States has authorized a second coronavirus vaccine, jumping the gun on regulators who have yet to give it the formal green light.

"Moderna vaccine overwhelmingly approved. Distribution to start immediately," he wrote on Twitter.

This follows a recommendation by an expert panel on Thursday to grant emergency use approval for Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine in the United States.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to issue formal approval Friday. This would make Moderna's vaccine the second to be approved in a Western country following the one developed by Pfizer-BioNTech.

Trump's announcement came as US Vice President Mike Pence and his wife received the Covid-19 vaccine live on television, in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the measure.

Pence indicated that formal approval for Moderna would be a matter of hours.

"We have one, perhaps within hours two, safe and

effective coronavirus vaccines," he said.

Thursday's hearing came as the number of deaths from the coronavirus quickly approaches 310,000 in the country with the world's biggest Covid-19 outbreak, which this week began vaccinating health care workers and long-term care residents with the Pfizer vaccine.

Both of the frontrunner

vaccines are based on cutting-edge mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) technology, which had never been approved prior to the pandemic, and both are two-dose regimens.

The US, which has recorded more than 17 million cases of the virus, will probably become the first country to approve the Moderna vaccine. **AFP**

US inmate scheduled to be executed tests Covid positive

Washington: A federal prisoner scheduled to be executed just days before President-elect Joe Biden takes office has tested positive for coronavirus, his lawyer has said.

The Bureau of Prisons notified attorneys for Dustin John Higgs on Thursday that their client had tested positive for the virus, his attorney Devon Porter said during a court hearing Thursday afternoon.

The revelation comes amid concern about an exploding number of coronavirus cases in the federal

prison system and specifically at the complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, where the executions are carried out. It is the only federal death row.

Higgs is scheduled to be executed on January 15, just five days before death-penalty opponent Joe Biden's inauguration. Higgs is the last of those currently scheduled to be executed in a series of federal executions that began in July. The Trump administration will have executed more people in a single year than any other administration in more than 130 years. **AP**

Half of Belgium's Covid-19 deaths in rest homes



Brussels: More than 10,000 elderly people living in Belgian rest homes have died from Covid-19 since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Yves Van Laethem, a spokesman at Belgium's coronavirus crisis center, told a news conference on Friday that the death of 10,270 rest home residents accounts for 56 percent of all the victims.

In a report published last month, Amnesty International said Belgian authorities "abandoned" thousands of elderly people who died in nursing homes and did not seek hospital treatment for many who were infected, violating their human rights.

One of the hardest-hit countries in Europe, Belgium has reported more than 618,000 confirmed virus cases and 18,371 deaths linked to the coronavirus. During the first wave of the epidemic last spring, the European nation of 11.5 million people recorded a majority of its Covid-19-related deaths in nursing homes. Van Laethem said the situation has improved, but remains "precarious and difficult." **AP**

Rickshaw bomb kills 15 kids in eastern Afghan

Kabul: A bomb rigged to a rickshaw killed at least 15 children and wounded 20 others in a Taliban-controlled area in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, a provincial official said, as violence in the war-weary country continued to surge.

The bomb went off after a man driving a motorised rickshaw entered a village in the Gilan district to sell goods and was soon surrounded by kids, according to Wahidullah Jumazada, spokesman for the Ghazni provincial Governor.

He said the casualty toll could rise further. No one

immediately claimed responsibility for the attack and Jumazada said an investigation was underway into why children were targeted.

However, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid sent a message to the media claiming that the explosion was caused by the remains of unexploded ordnance in the area, which the children had allegedly picked up and brought to the merchant.

Mujahid gave a lower death toll, saying 12 children were killed.

The conflicting reports

could not be reconciled as the area is under Taliban control and off limits to reporters.

Violence in Afghanistan has spiked in recent months even as the Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war.

Earlier this week, US Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, held an unannounced meeting with Taliban leaders in Doha, Qatar, to discuss military aspects of last February's US-Taliban agreement. The agreement, signed in

Qatar where the Taliban maintain a political office, was intended to set the stage for direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

It also provided for the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. President Donald Trump has ordered the reduction of US Forces in Afghanistan from 4,500 to 2,500 by January 15, just days before President-elect Joe Biden is to be sworn in as Trump's successor. The troop levels are now at about 4,000 and are expected to reach the 2,500 target on time. **AP**

Iran builds underground nuclear facility amid US tensions

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran has begun construction on a site at its underground nuclear facility at Fordo amid tensions with the US over its atomic programme, satellite photos obtained on Friday by The Associated Press show.

Iran has not publicly acknowledged any new construction at Fordo, whose discovery by the West in 2009 came in an earlier round of brinkmanship before world powers struck the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.



Students stage a sit-in outside the Fenelon High School in Lille, northern France on Friday

AP

Freed Nigerian schoolboys welcomed after week of captivity

Katsina: More than 300 schoolboys kidnapped last week in an attack on their school in northwest Nigeria have arrived in the capital of Katsina state in celebration of their release.

The boys were abducted one week ago from the all-boys Government Science Secondary School in Kankara in Katsina state village.

Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadist rebels claimed responsibility for the abduction, saying they attacked the school because it believes Western education is un-Islamic, factional leader Abubakar Shekau said in a video earlier this week.

More than 800 students were at the school at the time of the attack. Hundreds escaped, but it was believed that more than 330 were abducted by the attackers.

The boys met Friday with Katsina Governor Aminu Bello Masari, who said late Thursday that the kidnappers had released 344 students and turned them over to security officials. The government had said it was negotiating with the attackers. The governor told The Associated Press that no money was paid for the boys' release, though it wasn't clear if other negotiations were made. The boys will have physical examinations before being reunited with their families, he said. **AP**

Biden's close adviser tests virus positive

Washington: Congressman Cedric Richmond, a close adviser to President-elect Joe Biden, has tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the transition team.

He developed symptoms on Wednesday and took a rapid test which came out positive, Transition Spokeswoman Kate Bedingfield said on Thursday.

Richmond, 47, has been named as the White House Senior Adviser and Director of the Office of Public Engagement in the incoming Biden administration.

"Richmond was not in close contact, as defined by the CDC (Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention), with the President-elect. President-elect Biden underwent PCR testing for COVID-19 today and COVID-19 was not detected," Bedingfield said. On December 15, Richmond travelled to Georgia for a campaign event with the Ossoff and Warnock campaigns. Neither the candidates nor any member of the Ossoff or Warnock campaign teams were in close contact with Richmond, nor were Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, Stacey Abrams or Nikema Williams, who also attended the Tuesday event, she said. **PTI**

Chinese citizen journalist to face trial for reporting on Covid in Wuhan

Beijing: A citizen journalist detained in China after reporting from the Covid-19 ground zero of Wuhan will face trial later this month, her lawyer said Friday, as fears grow for her health.

The coronavirus first emerged in central China late last year, and Beijing has faced accusations that it covered up the initial outbreak and silenced early whistleblowers.

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, travelled to Wuhan in February and livestreamed her experiences on social media. She also wrote essays critical of the government's response —

including the strict lockdown of millions of people.

Zhang was detained in May and is accused of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," according to a court notice seen by AFP — a charge routinely used to suppress dissidents, with a maximum prison sentence of five years.

The 37-year-old's lawyers received notice earlier this week that the hearing will take place in a Shanghai court on December 28.

Zhang began a hunger strike in June, her lawyers said, and has been force-fed via a nasal tube. **AFP**

French teenagers protest after transgender classmate's suicide

AP ■ LILLE

About 100 teenagers rallied in northern France on Friday to pay homage to a transgender student who killed herself this week after facing tensions with school officials around her gender identity.

The case has drawn indignation on social media.

The students held a sit-in and a moment of silence outside the entrance to the Fenelon High School in Lille as school started Friday, expressing their anger and distress at the suicide of their classmate Fouad.

1 in 5 prisoners in US has had Covid, 1,700 have died

Little Rock (US): One in very five state and federal prisoners in the United States has tested positive for the coronavirus, a rate more than four times higher than the general population. As the pandemic enters its

10th month — and as the first Americans begin to receive a long-awaited Covid-19 vaccine — at least 2,75,000 prisoners have been infected, more than 1,700 have died and the spread of the virus behind bars shows no sign of slowing. **AP**

FROM PAGE 1

ANOTHER JOLT TO TMC, ONE MORE MLA RESIGNS FOR BJP

Even as a video showing Mandal holding a closed-door parley with Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh went viral, the Marxist outfit promptly expelled her from the party where after she said, "It had become impossible to work with the CPI(M) and so I am leaving the party."

She too is likely to join the BJP in presence of Shah on Saturday.

When contacted CPI(M) legislative party leader Sujana Chakrabarty said, "She must have done what she has done either out of some pressure or some lure ... no it is for her to explain her stance to the people and not the party... currently the TMC and BJP are engaged in a dirty game of leader swapping that may not go down well with the people of the State."

Meanwhile, Trinamool Congress top brass on Friday met at the Kalighat residence of Mamata apparently to weigh up the present political situation in Bengal against the backdrop of frequent desertion by party leaders.

The meeting that started late in the evening was had battle plans for the 2021 elections prime on its agenda said sources, adding efforts would also be taken to assuage the ruffled feelings in the party.

LAC PARLEYS INCONCLUSIVE BUT BOTH AGREE ON DISENGAGEMENT

The two sides agreed that based on the guidance provided by senior leaders and the agreements reached between the two Foreign Ministers and Special Representatives, they would continue to work towards ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western Sector at the earliest.

The two sides noted that the 7th and 8th rounds of Senior Commanders meetings held on October 12 and November 6 respectively had in-depth discussions in this regard and that these discussions had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground.

Both sides agreed to maintain close consultations at the diplomatic and military level. They agreed that the next (9th) round of Senior Commanders meeting should be held at an early date so that both sides can work towards early and complete disengagement of troops along the LAC in accordance with the existing bilateral agreements and protocols, and fully restore peace and tranquility.

Airing more or less same views, the official Chinese communiqué also said the two sides had candid and in-depth exchange of views on the situation along the LAC.

The two delegations agreed to earnestly implement the five-point consensus reached between the foreign ministers of both countries at the Moscow meeting. The talks also focused on the disengagement of front-line troops and take concrete measures to deal with the issues on the ground to further deescalate the border situation. The two delegations also reiterated their commitment to continue dialogue at the military and diplomatic level.

India on Thursday had stressed the need for further discussions with China for a mutually acceptable solution for complete disengagement at the LAC.

COVID-19 CASES CROSS 1-CR MARK

Meanwhile, ICMR DG (Prof) Balram Bhargava has tested positive for COVID-19 and been admitted to AIIMS trauma centre on Friday.

The Covid-19 cases in India are steadily coming down while the case-load of infection in many parts of the world is experiencing a second or even a third peak. The global tally of coronavirus cases stands at 75,456,940. While 53,012,389 have recovered, 1,671,822 have lost their lives. Meanwhile, the US continues to be the worst-hit country with 17,628,578 cases.

According to the health ministry's data, the five most affected states by total cases are Maharashtra (1888767), Karnataka (9,07,123), Andhra Pradesh (8,77,806), Tamil Nadu (8,04,650), and Kerala (693866).

Kerala has reported 5,456 fresh case in the last 24 hours, highest in the country, taking the total number cases to 6,93,866; even as 4,701

patients have recovered from the disease. Meanwhile, 23 deaths in the last few days were confirmed, taking the death toll in the state to 2,757.

Maharashtra's coronavirus tally has reached 18,88,767 after 3,994 people tested positive for the infection in the last 24 hours. With the death of 75 patients, the fatality count went up to 48,574. A total of 4,467 patients were discharged after recuperating, taking the recovery count to 17,78,722. Mumbai division, which comprises Mumbai city and its satellite towns, reported 1,250 new cases, taking its total to 6,46,756. As many as 18,809 people have died so far in the region due to the infection, the official said. Mumbai city reported 642 new cases, which pushed its overall count to 2,85,632, while its death toll rose to 10,970 as nine patients succumbed to the infection during the day.

West Bengal has reported 2,239 fresh cases, taking the total tally to 5,32,695. With 42 deaths, the total fatalities rose to 9,277.

With 1,418 fresh COVID-19 cases and 37 deaths in the last 24 hours, the number of total cases has touched 6,14,775 and death toll rose to 10,219 in Delhi.

Karnataka reported 1,222 new cases in a single day, 1,039 discharges and 8 deaths, taking the total tally to 9,07,123 active cases and 11,989 deaths so far.

Tamil Nadu has reported 1,134 new COVID19 cases, 1,170 discharges, and 12 deaths in the last 24 hours. The total number of coronavirus cases rose to 8,04,650 in the state.

COVID CURBS MUST BE ANNOUNCED IN ADVANCE: SC

"One must be transparent in number of testing and declaring the facts and figures of the persons who are Corona positive. Otherwise, the people will be misled and they will be under impression that everything is all right and they will become negligent," the bench noted.

"Another issue is the fatigue of the frontline healthcare officials. They are already exhausted physically and mentally due to tireless work for eight months. Some mechanism may be required to give them intermittent rest," the apex court said.

BJP, MVA lock horns over Metro car shed relocation

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A fresh war of words broke out between the Opposition BJP and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government on Friday over the latter's proposal to shift the Mumbai Metro III car shed from Kanjurmarg to a location earmarked for the proposed Bullet terminus at Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) in north-central Mumbai. The Shiv Sena, which heads the three-party government in Maharashtra, lent credence to the reports in a sections of the media that in the wake of the Bombay High Court's stay on the Mumbai Metro-III car shed project at Kanjurmarg, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had asked the senior officials to explore if the car shed project could be re-located at BKC.

Shiv Sena spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut ticked off the BJP — which in the wake of the high court's ruling felt vindicated — over its earlier stand on the Mumbai Metro-III car shed project — when he confirmed that the reports that the plot at BKC for re-locating the Mumbai Metro-II was being considered.

Talking to media persons here, Raut said: "(In the wake of the high court's stay on the high court's stay on the Mumbai Metro-III car shed project at Kanjurmarg), the Opposition need not get worried about the location of the car shed project. Today reports have been published that the state government is considering re-locating the car shed at BKC. Yes. We are examining that venue for re-location".

Incidentally, the plot of land where the Uddhav Thackeray dispensation is considering to re-locate the Mumbai Metro-III car shed is a state-owned land unlike the Kanjurmarg land which is trapped in litigation.

Maharashtra's Urban Development Minister Eknath Shinde also confirmed that the state government was considering the BKC plot for relocating the car shed project. "We are studying the Bombay High Court order. At the same time, we have asked officials to the land at the BKC as an alternative for the car shed project".

The BJP -- which had opposed the the Uddhav Thackeray dispensation's decision to shift the car shed project from Aarey colony at Goregaon in north Mumbai to Kanjurmarg in north-east Mumbai — has not taken kindly to the Maharashtra government's move to re-locate the project at BKC, as it feels that the car shed project would jeopardise the terminus location Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet Bullet Train project.

Former chief minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis hit back at the Shiv Sena-led MVA government describing the move as "ridiculous" since it would involve exorbitant costs. "Whoever is advising the state government is doing a bad job. The advisor is out to deplete the state exchequer. This is because the BKC plot is a price land. In all, the car shed project needs 25 hectare land. Going by the current land rates there, the land itself would cost as much as Rs 1000 crore"

"The bullet train terminus that is coming up there is going to be three levels under the ground. Above the ground, an international business centre is coming up. When it was decided to build the bullet train terminus, we realised it would cost Rs 5,000 to 6000 crore. If we decide to locate the metro car shed, which currently costs Rs 500 crore, it would cost Rs 5 to 6,000 crore if we decide to locate it underground. Plus, the annual maintenance cost would go up five to six folds. Hence it is not feasible to locate the metro car shed project at BKC," Fadnavis said.

Another BJP leader Ashish Shelar was equally critical of the Uddhav Thackeray government for its move to re-locate the project at BKC. "Just because the metro car shed project has run into rough weather because of the high court's ruling, the MVA government is now spokes into the Bullet train project by choosing the same venue for metro car shed project.

The latest exchange of barbs between the Ma government and BJP comes in the wake of Wednesday's order of the Bombay High Court's further staying implementation of a Mumbai collector's land allotment order dated October 1, transferring the Kanjurmarg land to the state-run Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) for the project. The high court has put a stop to all construction activities at the Kanjurmarg site. Though the Shiv Sena-led state government

is also considering moving the Supreme Court against the high court's order, it is now trying to arm twist the Centre into having its way.

It may be recalled that during the end of October this year, the BJP-led NDA government had opposed the re-location of the Mumbai Metro-III car shed project at Kanjurmarg in north-east Mumbai.

Nearly three weeks after the Maharashtra scrapped the previous BJP-led government's decision to locate Metro phase-III car shed at Aarey colony at Goregaon and moved the project to Kanjurmarg, the Centre's Department of Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT) had shot off a letter to the state government opposing the location of car shed project at Kanjurmarg would be "against the interest of the Government of India". The DPIIT also claimed ownership of the 102-acres land there.

Lodging a protest with the state government against the move to relocate the car shed project at Kanjurmarg, DPIIT Secretary Guruprasad Mohapatra said: "The improper and unilateral action of the Mumbai Suburban District Collector and Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority has caused severe loss" to the DPIIT and the Government of India".

The latest move by the Sena-led MVA government to relocate the Mumbai Metro III at BKC is being seen a tit-for-tat act against the Centre for its earlier opposition to the relocation of the car shed project at Kanjurmarg.

Maharsahtra reports 3,394 fresh cases, toll 75

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a marginal increase in the Covid-19 infection and fatality tallies, as many as 3994 people tested positive for Coronavirus while 75 more people died of the pandemic in various parts of Maharashtra on Friday. A day after it logged 3880 fresh Covid-19 infections and 65 deaths, Maharashtra witnessed 3994 new infected cases and 75 deaths.

With 3994 fresh infections, the total infections in the state climbed from 18,84,773 to 18,88,767. Similarly, with 75 new deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Maharashtra rose from 48,499 to 48,574. As 4467 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March this year rose to 17,78,722. The recovery rate in the state rose marginally from 94.14 per cent to 94.17 per cent.

With 10 new deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Mumbai came down from 11,013 to 10907 because of reconciliation of death figures, while the infected cases went up by 642 to trigger a jump in the infections from 2,84,990 to 2,85,632.

Meanwhile, the number of "active cases" total cases in the state dropped from 60,905 to 60,352. The fatality rate in the

state stood at 2.57 per cent. Pune district, which continued to be the worst-affected city-district in Maharashtra, saw the total number of cases increase from 3,65,101 to 3,65,652, while the total number of deaths in Pune increased from 7654 to 7667. Thane district remained in the third spot --after Pune and Mumbai — after the total number of infections rose from 2,48,979 to 2,49,436 while the total deaths climbed from 5424 to 5475.



PANKAJ TRIPATHI
Shakeela is a compelling story, told truthfully. I had a great time essaying the role. This story will surely entertain people but will also make them think of the double standards we have pertaining certain characters who have been wrongly boxed into being someone, without knowing their real life story.



JUBIN NAUTIYAL
Before the lockdown started, I was one of those singers who were always on-stage, doing around 20 live gigs in 30 days. It was a different high! So when lockdown started, instead of feeling upset, I utilised the time to work on vocals of new songs. I would have not done that if I was just hopping from one stage to another.



DHANUSH
Elated to announce that I will be joining the team of Netflix's *The Gray Man* starring Ryan Gosling and Chris Evans, directed by The Russo Brothers. Looking forward to being a part of this wonderful action packed experience. My sincere thanks to my dearest fans for all the love and support you have been showing me throughout these years.



ARJUN MATHUR
It's been a tough and unhealthy year, but I'm glad to be back on track now and all that energy I have stored because of sitting at home has got me raring to go. It's great that its finally happening, I can't wait to be back on sets as Karan Mehra in the second season of *Made In Heaven*.



DEEPIKA PADUKONE
Whether in love or war, Mastani was fuelled by her passion, unafraid to write her own destiny, no matter how perilous the path. She always stood her ground with a fierce dignity and a love so strong that its burning embers seared through every societal constraint, to join both her and her lover's names.

CONVERSATION 45 MINUTES

The dream of a space telescope took 20 years to realise. Now, 30 years on, comes the incredible story of one of the most complex machines ever made. The Hubble space telescope has made more than 1.3 million observations and enabled over 15,000 scientific papers to be written. Its history has been dramatic. A triumphant launch that turned into disaster. Astronauts risking their lives to fix it. But ultimately, it's an invention that opened up the universe in unimaginable ways. This anniversary film, *Hubble: Wonders of Space Revealed*, tells the whole story and meets the scientists and astronomers who use Hubble on a daily basis as well as astronauts from each of the missions that have serviced and updated it. We talk to Steve Crabtree, the executive producer of the film, to know more. Excerpts:

What prompted you to bring up a film like *Hubble: Wonders of Space Revealed*?
The film was to celebrate Hubble's 30th birthday, really. It coincided to mark the 30 years since the telescope was launched into space. So that was the simple reason. We thought to make a special shot, telling the whole story of Hubble, what is often referred to as the one of the most productive scientific instruments that has ever been invented.

The film includes real astronauts who work on Hubble daily. How was the experience of filming with them?
I'm the executive producer of the film. So this time round unfortunately, I didn't get to meet the astronauts, the director David Briggs met them. They were super friendly and helpful. I have interviewed astronauts before and what I love about them is their training means that they're very precise and very accurate with anything you ask them. They're almost like sorts of space journalists in a way. They're always amazing and way friendly. And, you know, it's a real feeling, a real privilege to work with them, but there's not many of them out there.

How did you go about curating the stories and choosing the people set to feature in this film?
We sat down for a long time along with the director and we tried to work out how to structure a programme such as this. And what we settled on was to tell the story through each of the service missions. There were five service missions in total. Each service mission then led to a new discovery because each mission was basically an upgrade which led to a new discovery. So we knew that we wanted to structure the film in that way. The first job was to make sure that we had astronauts from each service mission. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to tell that whole story. Luckily, they were very kind to give us their time. Then, once we knew we had astronauts, we just focussed on one of the discoveries that each service mission had led to. That helped us decide which sciences to pick, I mean, obviously, in real life, there were hundreds of discoveries but in an hour long programme, you can only pick one. So we just picked some that we thought was great. If you watch the first one, what actually happens is as the film plays, each discovery is further and further out into the universe until the last one, which is



A DRAMATIC HISTORY

The Hubble space telescope has made more than 1.3 million observations and enabled over 15,000 scientific papers to be written. It's an invention that opened up the universe in unimaginable ways. Executive producer STEVE CRABTREE digs deeper and shares secrets. By TEAM VIVA

basically the farthest Hubble can see. So there's quite a little narrative there as well.

What were the challenges involved during the making of the film?
The big challenge for us in the UK was that we wanted the programme to tie in with the actual 30th anniversary of Hubble. And on every birthday what NASA does is that they release a very special picture that Hubble has taken and we sort of tried to get hold of that picture earlier because we were making a TV programme. We got that finally and we got to see Hubble's 30th anniversary photograph exactly the same time as everybody else did, which was about six or eight hours before our film was going to be broadcast by the BBC. So me, the director and the editor were in an edit suite together, just waiting for this photograph to be given to us. Once we got the photograph, we then cut the picture and re-finish the entire film, and then gave it to BBC to go on the television. It also



means that there is a sort of another version of the film without the picture in it that's never been seen by the audience because we managed to use the proper pic-



ture at the end. So that was quite a challenge, really. I haven't had to do that very often in my television career. I feel live television is very different. But I don't generally work in live television. So this time was quite interesting.

You have also been a core part of the show *250 Million Pound Cancer Cure*, can you provide some insights into the show?
That show was really close to me. I was

the editor for horizon when we started making it. But then I'd left by the time we finished it because it took about two years to put the show together. Initially, I was involved in the making and the engineering part of the technology and then left it midway for the team to finish the show. In 2014, five-year-old Ashya King's parents were arrested. Unwilling to accept that their son's brain tumour was incurable. They took him to Europe against the doctors' advice for Proton Beam Therapy. In

this treatment, high-energy protons travel at two-thirds the speed of light through a patient's body. It can transform treatment for children with inoperable cancers. But bringing it to the UK needs a £250 million investment, and one of the world's best facilities. A nuclear bunker with six-metre-thick walls. Nearly 2,000 tonnes of kit squeezed under the streets of London and Manchester. Horizon goes behind the scenes of a super-sized engineering challenge. It's an amazing piece of technology and all of the engineering that goes into it is just awe inspiring.

What is the future of Proton Beam Therapy in India?
In India? I don't know. All I know is that it seems to be very successful in the UK. They're doing many treatments now. So, you know, it just seems like it's a really good piece of technology. But I don't know the future of it in India.

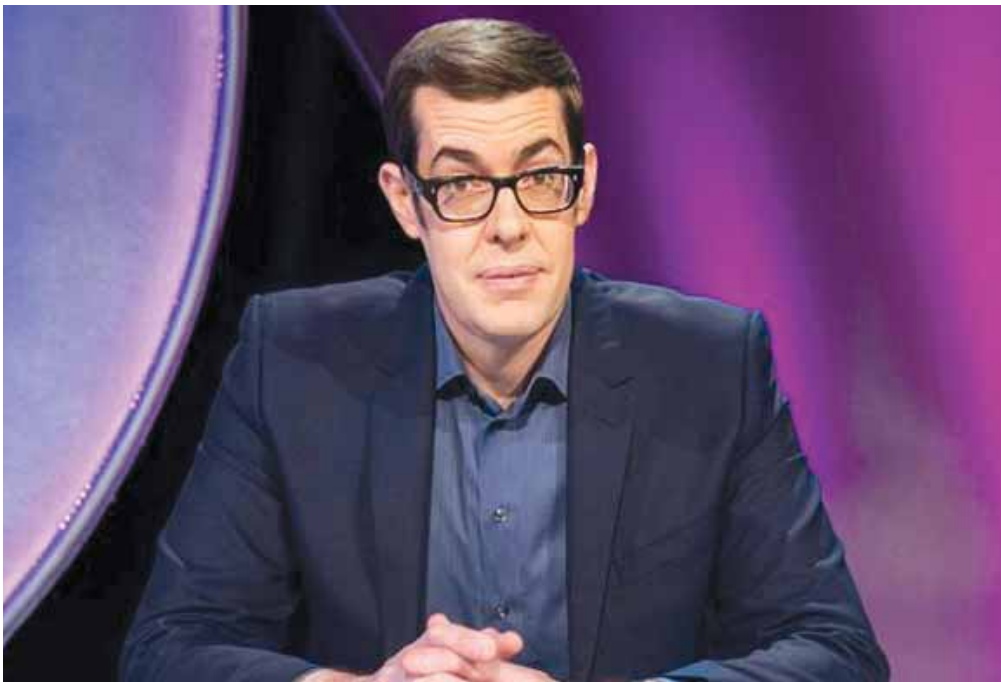
Any message for the Indian audience?
I would just say that both of these programmes, in very different ways, go down to show that not only how important science, technology and engineering is, but also how they can sort of bring people together. For the Hubble film in particular, those amazing images that we see of the universe and the cosmos are inspiring for young people, especially who may want to have a career in science, technology or engineering. I mean, if you were to boil both films down to their core ingredients, what we're talking about is amazing scientists and engineers, building incredible machines that help humanity. I think that's something that we can all aspire to. They spread a positive message to say, look, what we can do together when we invent amazing things.
(The film premieres today at 9 pm on Sony BBC Earth.)

READING LIST

A light read

The Thursday Murder Club by author RICHARD OSMAN is difficult to fit into genres. Thriller is one way to look at it. Slice of life is another, says KAVITHA MURALI

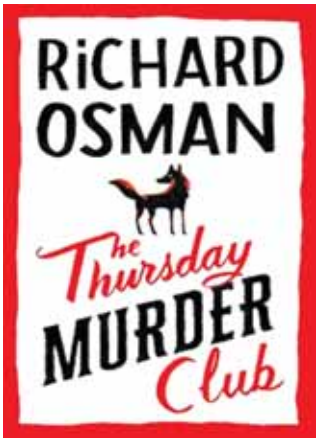
The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman is difficult to fit into genres. "Thriller" is one way to look at it. "Slice of life" is another. "The quaint countryside contemporary classic," if ever there was such a genre might fit in too. Ever so slightly. We have septuagenarian and octogenarian protagonists in this unlikely murder mystery set in a hep and happening retirement community. Well, if Pilates is



"hep and happening" that is. Elizabeth is a methodical crucifier. Joyce, poor little Joyce, is a people pleaser, perhaps, there's more there than what meets the eye. Ib is an analyst with a difference while Ron, a firebrand activist. What happens when these four get together? Some good old

wine, choice desserts and jigsaw puzzles. Only, the jigsaws are of the police file kind. Having access to unsolved mysteries from decades ago, our foursome meet every Thursday trying to puzzle out the solution. And then suddenly, one day, they have a murder in their midst.

Or two. Perhaps three. Leveraging seniority in age and frailty of body, these alert and fertile minds of the Thursday murder club get access to information and people the police aren't able to worm out themselves. This strange group then solves the mystery, trading info with the



police and jumping into the fray and action many a time without warning the police. But, that's not even half of what this book is about. While the mystery is getting solved, friends are dying of old age, spouses getting dementia. Sometimes, flowers are all that one needs to wase through an uneventful day. If you are curious to know what happens when Miss Marple meets Holmes meets Nancy Drew, all in a quiet little English countryside consuming almond flour cake and mint tea, this is the book for you. A light and adorable read, perhaps, a befitting end to this horrible year.

Packed slate for Yami in 2021

Having marked her debut with *Vicky Donor* in 2012, which won her wide acclaim, there has been no looking back for actor Yami Gautam. Her film choices have proved her versatility. A self-made actor who has worked her way up through sheer talent and dedication, she has been hailed for her scintillating screen presence and playing her characters with a rare elegance and restraint. After a slew of box office successes in 2019 with *Uri: The Surgical Strike* and *Bala*, Yami is all set to have another eventful year as she has a bunch of projects lined up for 2021. A source reveals that she will have a packed slate in the forthcoming year. "Yami has now been approached with eight interesting scripts and she has locked in as many as six films for which she will start shooting in 2021. The offers are quite overwhelming and Yami is taking up dynamic roles that will challenge her as an actor," says the source. Her recent release, *Ginny Weds Sunny* co-starring Vikrant Massey, proved to be yet another massive entertainer. She recently wrapped up the Dharamshala schedule of *Bhoot Police* which also stars Saif Ali Khan, Arjun



Kapoor and Jacqueline Fernandez. As she gears up for a choc-o-bloc 2021, we are definite that she is all set to surprise her fans with her forthcoming projects. Needless to say, 2021 is surely going to be Yami's year!



Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan



TWO YEARS OF DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVICE

PWP : Public Welfare Portal (Jan Kalyan Portal) Launched on December 18, 2020

: The only portal of its kind where all information is available at one place :
Information of eligibility, conditions, benefits etc. in all government schemes
Information of achievements and innovations of the government
Collection of useful circulars/orders for the general public



Indira Rasoi Yojana – Arrangement of food at Rs 8 to needy in all urban bodies across the state. Over 1.12 crore plates of food have been made available to people uptill now. The State Government provides subsidy of Rs 12 per plate.



A financial burden of Rs 310 crore was borne by the State Government due to the relaxation given in depositing bills to 1.05 crore domestic electricity consumers and 14.50 lakh agriculture and other consumers because of COVID.



Subsidy of Rs 27,229 crore provided to farmers and Rs 968 crore to domestic consumers in electricity bills in the last two years. Decision taken not to increase the electricity tariff for agriculture for five years. New 1.61 lakh agriculture connections have been issued.



For better marketing arrangements of agriculture crops, 643 **Gram Seva/Kray Vikray Sahakari Samities** and warehouses of Rajasthan State Warehousing Corporation have been given the status of private sub-yards (Mandies).



Rajasthan Agro-processing, Agro-business and Agro-export Promotion Policy – 2019 : Provision of subsidy to the tune of Rs 2 crore to farmers on capital and interest cost. A fund of Rs 500 crore created for easy loans.



Interest-free crop loans of Rs 19,323 crore disbursed to 61 lakh loanee units of cooperative banks, which include 12.67 lakh new farmers.



Waiver of crop loan from cooperative banks of 20.85 lakh farmers amounting to Rs 8,000 crore.



With the aim to have medical colleges in every district, new medical colleges have been sanctioned in 15 more districts, now 30 out of 33 districts will have 31 government medical colleges.



Assistance of Rs 1,144 crore provided to 33 lakh destitute and helpless families at the rate of Rs 3,500 per family.



Rajasthan became the model state for excellent management of corona. Free of cost testing and treatment facility at government hospitals in all the districts. Health infrastructures strengthened. Substantial increase in oxygen beds, ICU beds, ventilators, oxygen plants was ensured.



Over 713 types of medicines and 90 kinds of tests have been made free. Medicines for serious diseases such as cancer, heart, respiratory and kidney diseases are also free. Centralised oxygen pipeline in 20 sub-district and 21 district hospitals.



Ayushman Bharat Mahatma Gandhi Health Insurance Scheme started. Free of cost treatment facility to 1.10 crore families with the addition of 10 lakh new families.



Over Rs 10,579 crore spent on construction/development of 24,100 km roads. These include 3923 km new roads costing Rs 1,650 crore.



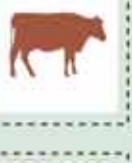
Exemption from any kind of approval and inspection for three years on setting up new Micro, Small and Medium Industry. **'One Stop Shop'** for all kind of facilitation to industries. **Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme-2019** implemented.



For 43,000 crores refinery project being set up at Pachpadra (Barmer), works to the tune of Rs 5,000 crores completed and work order of Rs 25,000 crores issued.



'Rajasthan Samajik Suraksha, Laghu Evam Simaant Vradhhan Krashak Samman Pension Niyam-2019' issued. Over 2.80 lakh farmers benefitted.



Free of cost availability of maximum useful medicines for livestock, treatment to 567 lakh and vaccination to 786 lakh livestock.



10% Reservation to the Economically Weaker Sections. Condition of immovable property in EWS quota abolished and income of Rs 8 lakh per annum considered as the only basis.



Assistance of Rs 822 crore granted to Gaushalas till now. Subsidy of Rs 2 per litre on milk collection to cattle raiser farmers.



State's first underground Metro Rail made operational in Jaipur.



Rajasthan Silicosis Policy-2019 : Provision for assistance of Rs 3 lakh for rehabilitation of the affected person and pension of Rs 1500 per month.



Rajasthan Solar Energy Policy-2019 and Rajasthan Wind and Hybrid Energy Policy-2019 : A big step towards environment conservation, promotion of investment and employment.



Rural Development Panchayati Raj : Construction of 5 lakh houses have been completed, out of 6.43 lakh houses sanctioned under Pradhan Mantri Grameen Awas Yojana. A total of Rs 5,410.31 crore spent on construction of houses, First prize awarded to state for completing maximum houses. New 57 Panchayat Samitis formed.



Reservation increased to 4% from 3% for specially-abled persons in government jobs. Increase in pension of elderly persons, widows and single women.



Government jobs provided to 79,761 youths. Over 1,519 dairy booths allotted to unemployed youths.



Rajasthan is the first State to have organised State Games. Medal winning 29 sports persons were given jobs on out of turn basis (6 DSP rank jobs). In addition 250 cases are in process.



Priority to creation of permanent assets in MNREGA. Payment of 99.82% wages in 15 days.



Rajasthan is the first State in India to give assistance of Rs 50 lakh to the family of the government employees (including contractual employees), in case of death on corona duty.



Supply of potable drinking water to 5,000 villages/hamlets and 14 cities (partial) from surface water sources through 9 large drinking water projects.



Jan Soochna Portal – Nearly 261 types of information are available for 94 schemes.



201 **Mahatma Gandhi Government Schools** (English Medium) opened for better education to all boys/girls and 68,540 students have been enrolled. 90 new government colleges opened.



Farmers Welfare Fund : Fund to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore created.



Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojana : Financial assistance of Rs 6,000 to every pregnant women becoming mother for the second time and foster mother in 4 tribal districts.



Special Investigation Unit set up to deal with crime against women in each police district and officer of DySP rank posted. Reception counters set up at police stations. ACB strengthened and Helpline 1064 started.



New system of FIR registration at SP offices, established, if Thanas fail to register FIR. Substantial decrease in lodging of FIR through court under section 156(3) after enforcing compulsory FIR registration at Thanas.



Over 450 public utility services available at 80,000 **e-mitra** kiosks near to the homes.

Bowlers put India in control

Ashwin & Co bowl out Aus for 191 in 1st innings before losing Shaw late; overall lead of 62

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin produced one of his most memorable overseas performances as Indian bowlers collectively terrorised Australia into submission, bowling them out for 191 on the second day of the opening Day/Night Test here on Friday.

Courtesy Ashwin's 18-3-55-4, India successfully managed to neutralise a sub-par first innings score of 244. Rival skipper Tim Paine (73 off 99 balls) was the only home batsman to show stomach for a fight.

With a handy first innings lead of 53 runs, India found their opener Prithvi Shaw's defence being breached again before ending the day at 9/1 — with an overall lead of 62 runs.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah (21-7-52-2) played the night watchman's role after Shaw's dismissal, giving company to Mayank Agarwal (5) when stumps were drawn.

Indian magnificent bowling effort during the day could be segregated into three phases.

In the early afternoon, Bumrah bowled the fuller length to make the first inroads.

Ashwin then took charge of late afternoon with his perfect length and made use of the additional bounce to blow away the middle-order.

And then under lights, Umesh Yadav (16.1-5-40-3) was brilliant with the old pink kookaburra as he bowled back of the length to get rid of the dangerous Marnus Labuschagne and Pat Cummins.

Mohammed Shami (17-4-41-0) was also immaculate with his length but he was let



Ravichandran Ashwin celebrates with skipper Virat Kohli after taking wicket of Australian batsman Tim Paine. BCCI/Twitter

1st Test, Day 3
Live from 9:30am IST
SONY TEN 1, 3 & SIX

It is certainly not our best performance but credit to them (India). They bowled really well, put us under pressure, we just could not get any momentum or any partnerships together, we couldn't quite do that today, but our top order has done a good job for a fair while now.

TIM PAINE

into a defensive shell in their 72.1 overs on second day.

It was one of the most 'Un-Australian' batting by a team that prides itself on intent. Save for Labuschagne (47 off 119 balls), who couldn't capitalise on three reprieves, and skipper Paine, no other batsman seemed to know how to bat on a surface, which picked pace on the second day.

After Bumrah removed the two openers in the first session, Ashwin did the star turn in the second session.

Ashwin set up Smith with a few that were flighted with the angle and then bowled one that straightened and bounced a touch more. Smith, expecting turn, squared up and Ajinkya Rahane at first slip made no mistake.

Travis Head (7) wasn't reading Ashwin well and the left-hander got a flighted one that took the leading edge of his bat, which ended in a chest-high return catch for the bowler.

Debutant Cameron Green (11) would curse himself as his was a long hop asking to be pulled but the extra bounce got the top edge and captain Virat Kohli pulled off a fabulous catch at mid-wicket, diving full-stretch to his right.

SINGLES

SCG TEST STILL ON, CA MONITORING SITUATION

MELBOURNE: Cricket Australia on Friday asserted that the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India is not threatened by a fresh Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney even though the situation is being closely monitored. Australian cricket officials were put on alert after the number of cases in the northern beaches outbreak in Sydney reached 28 on Friday. The third Test at the SCG is scheduled to get underway on January 7.

PEREZ TO RACE WITH RED BULL IN 2021

MILTON KEYNES: Mexican driver Sergio Perez will race alongside Max Verstappen at Red Bull next season, the Formula One team said on Friday. Perez, who will replace Alexander Albon, became Mexico's first F1 winner in 50 years with his victory this month at the Sakhr Grand Prix in Bahrain. Red Bull said that historic performance helped make Perez the "favored choice" over Albon, who will remain with the team as a test and reserve driver. Perez has a one-year contract.

SIMRANJEET ENTERS COLOGNE WC FINALS

NEW DELHI: World championship Bronze-medallist Simranjeet Kaur (60kg) stormed into the finals of boxing's Cologne World Cup in Germany, defeating Ukraine's Marianna Basanets on Friday. The Asian Silver-winner prevailed 4-1 to assure herself of a place in the summit bouts to be held on Saturday. Earlier, two-time world medallist Sonia Lather (57kg) set up a clash against compatriot Manisha in the semifinals by beating Ukraine's Snizhana Kholodkova 3-2.

SCHALKE FIRES BAUM, RECALLS HUUB

GELESENKIRCHEN: Schalke fired Manuel Baum as coach on Friday and turned once again to the experienced Huub Stevens. The Dutch coach is returning to Schalke for his fourth stint for the last two games of the year. Schalke is last in the Bundesliga standings with four points from 12 games and trying desperately to end its club-record 28-game run without a win in the league.

PHL POSTPONED TO NEXT YEAR

NEW DELHI: The inaugural edition of the Premier Handball League (PHL) was on Friday postponed to next year due to concerns over health and safety of players amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The league was earlier scheduled to be held at the Savai Mansingh Indoor Stadium in Jaipur from December 24 to January 10. The new dates are yet to be announced.

HEGERBERG SIGNS NEW LYON DEAL

LYON: Former Ballon d'Or winner Ada Hegerberg extended her contract with European champion Lyon on Friday. The club said the 25-year-old Norwegian forward signed a three-year deal through June 2024. Seeing out the contract would complete a decade for Hegerberg at the dominant women's team in world football. Hegerberg has scored 220 goals in 184 games for Lyon, which has won five Champions League titles, six French leagues and four French Cups since she joined the club.

RASHFORD LEADS MAN UNITED COMEBACK

SHEFFIELD: Hours after being honored for his impact off the field, Marcus Rashford also delivered in front of goal. The striker scored twice to lead Manchester United's recovery to beat Sheffield United 3-2 in the Premier League on Thursday. His goals at Bramall Lane lifted United to sixth in the league, five points behind leader and champion Liverpool with a game in hand.

Agencies

NZ start series with 5-wicket win

AFP ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan in the first T20I at Auckland's Eden Park on Friday.

The Black Caps ended on 156/5 with seven balls to spare after losing the toss and being set a target of 154.

Tim Seifert top-scored for the hosts with 57, while debutant paceman Jacob Duffy took 4/33.

Pakistan never recovered from a slow start, despite a fighting 42 from stand-in captain Shadab Khan. Haris Rauf was the tourists' best bowler, taking 3/29.

Player of the match Duffy made a sensational start, dismissing opener Abdullah Shafique for a duck in his first over. He then claimed the scalps of Mohammad Rizwan and



Jacob Duffy celebrates after taking wicket during 1st T20I against Pakistan. ICC

Mohammad Hafeez in his second as Pakistan lost three wickets in three balls to slump to 20 for four.

Khushdil Shah was out for 16 when he mistimed a ball from Ish Sodhi straight to Martin

Guptill in the field. Khan tried to rescue his side's innings, smashing 42 from 32 balls before Duffy coaxed a top edge to Sodhi.

Pakistan's attack made early inroads as two quick wickets from Rauf restricted New Zealand to 72/3 at the 10-over mark.

Seifert brought up his half century off 35 balls but was out on 57 after a sharp catch from Ashraf, who then dropped an easy chance sitter to give Mark Chapman a life. Mitchell Santner steered his team to victory with a six to seal the win.

The second and third T20s will be played in Hamilton and Napier on Sunday and Tuesday, with the first of two Tests starting in Mount Maunganui on December 26.

Lewa wins Fifa's 'The Best' award

AFP ■ GENEVA

Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski was named men's player of the year on Thursday at Fifa's 'The Best' awards ceremony in Zurich.

The 32-year-old Lewandowski, top scorer in Europe and winner of the Champions League with Bayern, came out ahead of the other two nominees, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

England defender Lucy Bronze took the women's award, seeing off the challenge of Wendie Renard and Pernille Harder.

It is the first occasion for both Lewandowski and Bronze to win the award, with the Pole only the second player after Luka Modric in 2018 to break a 13-year Messi-Ronaldo hegemony.

"I am very proud and very happy," said Lewandowski. "I have to honestly say that it is a great day for me and for my club. It is an unbelievable feeling. Winning an award ahead of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo

means a lot to me."

Lewandowski's stellar season for all-conquering Bayern has already been recognised by UEFA who awarded the Polish striker European player of the year in October.

His Bayern teammate Manuel Neuer was chosen as 'The Best' Fifa men's goalkeeper.

Bronze, 29, who succeeds last year's winner Megan Rapinoe, won the Champions League with Lyon in August before moving back to England to play for Manchester City.

France and Lyon's Sarah Bouhaddi capped her fine career with The Best Fifa women's goalkeeper award.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp was named men's coach of the year while current Dutch women's national team boss Sarina Wiegman took the women's award for the second time in her career following her 2017 success.

The Puskas Award for best goal went to Tottenham's South Korean striker Son Heung-min for a mazy, individual goal he scored against Burnley in the Premier League in December 2019.



STRONG ROOTS

SUMIT PRATIHAST has been singing since he was a young boy, and is now redefining fusion music



I guess the glitter and glamour of the stage really appealed to me", Sumit Pratihast, the lead singer for the band 'Desi Roots', tells me about why he started singing at a very young age. But it was a Maithili singer singing at his neighbourhood Durga Puja that really inspired him. "I think I've always had a knack for the performing arts," he adds.

As a trained filmmaker, he doesn't just add his voice to the band's music, which explores multiple Indic genres of music alongside rock; he also curates the band's music videos and has a hand in poster design as well.

Hearing Sumit talk about his musical influences can make one understand his band's music. Introduced to Md Rafi and Kishore Kumar by his father at home at a young age, by the time he was a teenager, he was listening to Arctic Monkeys, Radiohead, Coldplay, Red Hot Chili Peppers and the like. More recently, he has been listening to Arijit Singh's music but also drawing inspiration from western musicians like Charlie Puth and Jacob Collier. He says that artists like The Weeknd and even Justin Bieber have been coming out with some great new music. "You can call it fusion because the lyrics I write are in Hindi and the music that accompanies it is mostly on western instruments. In essence it is fusion, but it isn't traditional fusion where you try to mix Indian Classical and

Western Classical. We try to take it as far as we can. We sang 'Main Kyon Chahoon' which is a sort of a 'punk' song. There are songs where there are downtempo, almost psybient, elements and others with jazz and blues. In the sense, my attempt is to get the best of both the worlds."

With the distribution channels changing thanks to online platforms, Sumit believes that 2020 will be the last "tough" year for Indian 'indie' (independent) bands. "There is a lot of good music coming out; there is a hunger. Look at some bands' videos getting millions, maybe tens of millions, of views." He argues that if a band is good, they will get their market although he feels that there are opportunities for the distribution channels and particularly the management side. There could be innovations that would make music in India independent of movies. "You see Hip-Hop really picking up in India and so many new

THERE IS A LOT OF GOOD MUSIC COMING OUT; THERE IS A HUNGER. LOOK AT SOME BANDS' VIDEOS GETTING MILLIONS, MAYBE TENS OF MILLIONS, OF VIEWS [...] YOU SEE HIP-HOP REALLY PICKING UP IN INDIA AND SO MANY NEW LABELS COMING UP FOR INDIAN HIP-HOP



labels coming up for Indian Hip-Hop."

Talking of some other Indian bands whose music he enjoys, he mentions Bengaluru-based band Parvaaz, the duo Shadow & Light and Advaita.

Sumit really likes performing at colleges: "I remember there were a couple of shows we played at the Haldia Institute of Technology near Kolkata, the Ansal Institute and Brijmohan Munjal University near Gurugram. All these colleges were not just great hosts but had great crowds." Yet with the lack of audiences in 2020, thanks to the pandemic, he admits that times have been tough but not just for him, for everyone. "I've been trying to stay strong mentally, spending more time with my family and taking care of my cat Ore and, well, focussing on 2021." But with the vaccine coming out, he does expect there to be a much better situation in 2021.

As we listen to 'Dekho Na', one of Desi Roots' own tracks on the Kia Sonet's BOSE audio system, Sumit explains his theory of songwriting. "Well, I do not necessarily take inspiration from real life but I imagine a scenario and how it plays out in my head. And it is good if it rhymes," he says. The song, which explores the issue of toxic love, sends out the message about how bad such a relationship is for both partners.

As for the advice he would give youngsters getting into music: "Well, it is not a conventional career and you have to set your goals early. You should know what you want to achieve and spend a lot of time and effort, at least four-five hours, every day with music. With practice comes perfection but fundamental training is really important."

But 2020 has not been a terrible year for cars, as we saw the introduction of the new Kia Sonet, and Sumit who admits to liking cars also found the audio system very good. Listening to his own band's music, he said: "The sound in the car was sharp, crisp and well-balanced. This is by far the best set-up of sound I've heard in a car. You don't need anything else." But Sumit is even more thrilled about the Intelligent Manual Transmission (IMT) in the Sonet. He was the first musician who saw the IMT and knew what it was, and couldn't wait to try it out. "I get the thrill of changing gears and I get off the awful clutch, and in city traffic that can be really irritating on your left knee. If you would take a test drive on an IMT, you would definitely love it." ■

