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2020 WENT
WELL AS AN
ACTOR: NAWAZ
12 VIVACITY

Govt plans breakthrough in kisan talks

Agri Ministry invites 39 unions for dialogue, lists farmers' all concerns in 5-page letter

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Agriculture on Sunday sent out an invite to 39 farmers' unions to join discussion with the Government again to provide details of their remaining concerns and doubts and asked them to fix the date of the meeting at Vigyan Bhawan according to their convenience to end the protests.

Earlier in the day, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said there has been progress in talks with farmers and the next round of discussion by farmers' unions is likely to be held on Monday or day after.

"I am not exactly aware of the timing but Tomar is likely to meet the representatives of farmers on Monday or the day after to discuss their demands," Shah said while addressing a press conference in Bolpur, West Bengal.

Referring to the Government's earlier written proposal on December 9 for amendments that the farmer groups had rejected, Ministry of Agriculture's Joint Secretary and CEO PM-KISAN Vivek Aggarwal said: "I request those previously invited protesting union leaders to provide details of their remaining concerns and doubts and suggest a date as per convenience for the next round of talks. Please inform us of your remaining concerns and inform us of a

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

date convenient to you for a meeting at Vigyan Bhawan so that a solution can be arrived at and the present agitation ends soon."

Previous five rounds of formal talks between the Government and 40 farmers' unions failed to break the deadlock with the farmers insisting on repeal of the

Centre's three laws and are camping at various border points of Delhi for over three weeks now.

In a five-page letter, Aggarwal said the Centre is making all efforts to find appropriate solution to resolve all the issues raised by the farmers with an open mind. In the letter, the Government has sent

a detailed proposal to farmers incorporating all their concerns and apprehensions. The letter also highlighted the previous meetings held with farmers' unions. At the same time the Government is continuing talks with representatives of different farmers groups to remove their concerns.

Farmers intensify stir, to hold relay hunger strike at protest sites

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Despite the Government making efforts for a breakthrough in talks with the farmers' unions, the agitating farmers on Sunday announced to intensify their protest against the three farm laws.

Besides a day-long relay hunger strike at all protest sites along national Capital on Monday, they decided to halt toll collections in Haryana from December 25 to 27.

"Farmers will begin a day-long relay hunger strike on Monday at all sites of protest against the new agri laws. It will be started by a team of 11 members at protests sites here," Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav said at a press conference at the Singhu Border. He also urged people demonstrating against the laws across the country to observe a day-long hunger strike at their respective protest sites.

Announcing the next move, farmer leader Jagjeet Singh Dalewala said, "On December 27, during Prime Minister Modi's Mann Ki Baat,

we would appeal to everyone to beat 'thali' at their homes during the programme."

Farmers' leader Rakesh Tikait, who was also part of the press conference, along with Yadav and Dalewala, said that farmers protesting the new agri laws will celebrate Kisan Diwas on December 23 and "we request people to not cook lunch for a day".

On Sunday, the agitating farmers paid tribute to the farmers who lost their lives during this agitation, and condolence meets were organised at different places. Punjab farmer leader Gurvinder Singh, associated with the BKU, said tribute is being paid to the farmers who lost their lives during the agitation while fighting for their basic rights. As many as at least 30 farmers have died since the protest started.

Protesting farmers' unions had earlier responded to PM Modi and Agriculture Minister Tomar in an open letter saying their statements were "factless" and that the Centre has zero sympathy with farmers.

Oli gets Parliament dissolved, Opp cries Constitutional coup

Nepalese students affiliated with Nepal Student Union burn an effigy of Nepalese Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli during a protest in Kathmandu on Sunday
AP

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" within the ruling dispensation.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament's House of Representatives at Oli's recommendation and announced mid-term general election in April-May, a decision termed "unconstitutional, impulsive and autocratic" by the Opposition and dissidents in the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Expressing dissatisfaction

over Oli's move to dissolve the House, seven ministers, belonging to the Prachanda faction, announced their resignation in a joint statement issued during a press conference here.

Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Oli decided to recommend the President for the dissolution of Parliament, a senior Standing Committee member of the NCP told PTL.

The first phase of the mid-term election will be held on April 30 and May 10 for the second phase, the Rashtrapati Bhawan said.

Continued on Page 6

Men more vulnerable to Covid death

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Men are not only highly vulnerable to catching coronavirus disease compared to women, the hospitalised male Covid-19 patients have a 30 per cent greater risk of dying compared to women of the same age and health status, a study has found. The study is published in the Clinical Infectious Diseases.

Hospitalised patients who were obese, had hypertension or poorly managed diabetes also had a higher risk of dying compared to those who did not have these conditions, said the study.

Those aged 20 to 39 with these conditions had the biggest difference in their risk of dying compared to their healthier peers.

For the study, the researchers evaluated nearly 67,000 hospitalised Covid-19 patients in 613 hospitals across the United States to determine the link between certain common patient characteristics and the risk of dying from Covid-19.

"Predicting which hospitalised Covid-19 patients have the highest risk of dying has taken on urgent importance as cases and hospitalisations in the US continue to surge to record

high numbers during the month of December," said the study authored among others by Anthony Harris, Professor at University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) in the US.

"Knowledge is power in many ways, so I think understanding which hospitalised Covid-19 patients are at high-risk of mortality can help guide difficult treatment decisions," Harris said.

For example, higher-risk patients may be considered for closer monitoring or ICU admission. Healthcare providers may also want to consider these risks when

determining which Covid-19 patients could benefit the most from the new monoclonal antibody therapies that, if given in the first few days of the infection, can reduce the risk of hospitalisation.

Age remained the strongest predictor of mortality from Covid-19. Overall, nearly 19 per cent of hospitalised Covid-19 patients died from their infection with the lowest mortality among pediatric patients, which was less than 2 per cent. Mortality rates increased with each decade of life with the highest mortality, 34 per cent, among those aged 80 and older.

Continued on Page 6

Shah blows 'Parivartan' bugle in Bengal rally

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
BOLPUR/BURDWAN

Tomake marbe je araaale barche shey... Ebar era gelo (Your terminator is growing under cover... now these people are gone). Karim Mollah, a small time tailor craned his head out of his small window to watch the overflowing humanity and unthinkingly uttered these "unlikely" words. Unlikely because you would not usually hear a Muslim man quoting lines from Mahabharata — presaging Lord Krishna's arrival to eliminate Kansha the cruel king.

No living person in Bolpur remembers when for the last time such a large sea of human-

ity marched down the one-mile connector between Dak Bungalow Crossing and Bolpur Circle.

True, seldom has Bolpur seen a crowd explode like the one it did on Sunday when Union Home Minister Amit Shah led a huge road show calling for a second Parivartan (political change) in Bengal.

"This large crowd will herald the Parivartan... Parivartan to stop infiltration, to finish tolabazi (extortion) and end political violence so that we can transform Didi's Bengal into Sonar Bangla as envisaged by the likes of Subhas Babu (Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose)."

Continued on Page 6



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow ahead of West Bengal Assembly polls 2021 at Bolpur in Birbhum district on Sunday

PTI

European countries ban flights from UK as Covid strain 'out of control'

AP ■ BERLIN

Several European Union Nations on Sunday banned flights from the UK and Germany was considering limiting such flights to make sure that a new strain of coronavirus sweeping across southern England does not establish a strong foothold on the continent.

The Netherlands banned flights from the UK. For at least the rest of the year while Belgium issued a flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight and also halted train links to Britain, including the Eurostar.

Austria and Italy said they would halt flights from the UK but did not give details on any timing of the ban.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Twitter that the Government was preparing the measure "to protect Italians" from the new coronavirus variant.

About two dozen flights were scheduled to arrive in Italy on Sunday, most in the northern region of Lombardy but also in Veneto and Lazio, which include Venice and Rome respectively.

Continued on Page 6

CAPSULE

NOIDA: 1st FLIGHT LIKELY
BY DEC 2023, JAN 2024

Noida: Work on the upcoming Noida

International Airport is progressing as scheduled and the first flight is expected to take off by December 2023 or January 2024, a senior

Government executive said on Sunday. Also, the resettlement and rehabilitation of over three thousand families who are getting displaced due to the mega greenfield project is likely to be completed by May 2021, Noida International Airport Limited (NIAL) CEO Arun Vir Singh said.

Pakistan-sponsored TRF declares jihad against J&K Police

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Pakistan-sponsored the Resistance Front (TRF), a terror group floated by the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), has said the police is its prime target in Jammu & Kashmir and next on the radar is the Government.

TRF commander Irfan said, "The war we have waged is in particular against the State police because they are our real enemies and then the occupying India."

Urging his family not to trace him, he exhorted the youth of Kashmir to be ready for jihad.

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Oppn spreading misinformation about new farm laws: Yogi ‘Farmers’ income to be doubled by 2022’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Reiterating the commitment of the government to double the income of farmers by 2022, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday sought to make it clear that all the endeavours of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre and his government in the state were aimed towards this and the overall welfare of the farmer community.

He said it was for everyone to see and realise that ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, the welfare of farmers had always been on top of the agenda.

“I appeal to you to not be misguided by the misinformation campaign unleashed by the opposition and be assured that we are not going to leave a single stone unturned to ensure your betterment,” the chief minister said while making an impassioned appeal to farmers during his interaction with the farmers at Acharya Narendra Dev Agriculture University, Kumarganj in Ayodhya.

The UP chief minister laid the foundation stones and dedicated 40 projects worth about Rs 90 crore for agriculture, agriculture science and research, animal husbandry, fishery and irrigation in Ayodhya, Gorakhpur, Basti, Bahraich, Barabanki, Balrampur, Siddharth Nagar, Ambedkar Nagar, Amethi, Sultanpur, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Mau, Chandauli and Sonbhadra.

The chief minister announced on this occasion that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would transfer in the accounts of nine crore farmers a total sum of Rs 18,000 crore under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi on December 25, the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Out of these, as many as 2.30 crore farmers belong to Uttar Pradesh.

Yogi Adityanath made it

Yogi initiative helps micro, small units

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The initiative taken by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to support the industries during the COVID-19 pandemic has paid rich dividends because as many as 5,12,000 micro and small units of Uttar Pradesh have availed of loans amounting to Rs 22, 800 crore to further increase their businesses.

“With this money, the industries not only increased production in the coronavirus pandemic period but also made a stronghold in the market,” a government spokesman said.

The MSME sector, considered to be the backbone of the country, may have faced a lot of problems during the COVID-19 period, but due to government’s policy the micro and small units in the state have got a lot of relief.

An official said the chief minister himself distributed the loans to the MSMEs several times through loan fairs and issued instructions to banks that businessmen should not face problems in getting loans.

clear that contract farming was the need of the time and it was not going to hurt the interests of the farmers in any way and would instead increase their incomes considerably.

He said the government was already giving guarantee that the farmers would get the right price for their produce.

“The farmers also have the liberty to sell their produce wherever they get the best price and the government will not have any kind of interference with their decision and will also ensure that they do not have any kind of loss,” he added.



“As a result, the micro and small units under CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) have reached the first position in taking loans in the country,” he said.

CGTMSE CEO Sandeep Verma said that under this scheme, loans were guaranteed to small-scale entrepreneurs so that entrepreneurs who did not have bank guarantees and wanted to grow their business

could get loans under this scheme and increase their business further.

“Since loans are guaranteed under the CGTMSE scheme, therefore banks do not face any problem in giving loans. The Uttar Pradesh government has done fabulous work under this scheme,” Verma said.

The CGTMSE scheme is being operated under the joint initiative of the Ministry of

“Some people are trying to misguide the farmers and spreading rumours that the minimum support price (MSP) will be quashed and the mandis will be closed. Time and again our prime minister is assuring that nothing of this kind is going to happen and it is our continuous endeavour that the farmers get the best returns for their produce and their income is doubled,” Yogi asserted.

The chief minister also attacked the opposition parties and said they had no interest in the well-being of the farmers, adding that earlier middlemen and brokers had the upper hand.

“As a result, the micro and small units under CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) have reached the first position in taking loans in the country”

Micro and Small Industries, and SIDBI of the Central government.

The CGTMSE scheme compensates the loss of loan amount received from banks by micro and small-scale industrial units working in the country.

It is worth mentioning that the top eleven states that have provided the maximum amount of loans to the industries are Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

be upgraded to centres of excellence so that the latest studies and researches reach the farmers in the right earnest,” he pointed out.

Recalling that his government in its first cabinet meeting in 2017 had decided to waive loans of the farmers he said loans amounting to Rs 36,000 crore loans were waived, benefiting about 86 lakh farmers.

“Even during the COVID-19 times, the state government continued its efforts for the betterment of the farmers and 26 lakh MT of wheat and 52 lakh MT of paddy has been purchased so far,” he added.

CM pushes for robust logistics infrastructure

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued directions for further strengthening of the investor-friendly industrial ecosystem and for building a robust logistics infrastructure in the state.

The chief minister’s response comes in the wake of keen interest evinced by the investors and investments worth several hundred billion rupees being in the pipeline due to the industry-friendly policies of the state.

The state government has nominated Additional Chief Secretary (Infrastructure & Industrial Development) Alok Kumar as state nodal officer for developing the integrated state logistics plan aimed at overall development of logistics sector. Kumar will head a newly created state logistics cell to function in sync with national logistics division for development of supply chains and warehousing facilities for industries.

The officials of state government departments like Planning, Transport, Civil Aviation, Revenue, PWD, Export Promotion Bureau, UP Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) will be the key members on board, and nodal officers from Central agencies like National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Airports Authority of India (AAI), Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), etc. will be special invitees to the cell.

The state government will also set up a state logistics coordination committee under the chairmanship of the chief secretary to monitor the

progress and implementation of the logistics plan.

UP’s Industrial Development Minister Satish Mahana said in a statement here on Sunday that, “In the backdrop of Atmanirbhar Bharat mission for building a self-reliant India and in response to supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, such an integrated plan would ensure coordinated action and focused attention towards logistics and supply chain issues in the state.”

Additional Chief Secretary (Infrastructure & Industrial Development) Alok Kumar said that in addition to granting industry status to the logistics sector and drastically reducing cost of land and operations, the state government had already made numerous new provisions to give impetus to this sector.

As a result, Uttar Pradesh is attracting sizable investments in the warehousing and logistics sector. So far, six proposals worth approximately Rs 438 crores of investment have been received in the sector.

Kumar said the state government would work on six improvement parameters, viz. ease of arranging logistics at competitive rates, quality of logistics infrastructure, quality of logistics service providers, safety and security of cargo movement, efficiency of regulatory procedures and state coordination and facilitation to strengthen the logistics infrastructure in UP.

It is pertinent here to mention that the UP government had launched its incentive policy for warehousing and logistics in 2018. Moreover, recently the Uttar Pradesh government ratio-

nalised its land use policy to facilitate land for the logistics sector at lower prices and lower conversion fees.

The development authorities in the state are accordingly amending their zoning regulations, master plans and by-laws to apply industrial land use and industrial land use conversion charges for logistics parks and units besides lowering the eligibility limits from 50 acres to 25 acres for setting up logistics parks across the state.

With a network of expressways and the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC) and the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) intersecting at Dadri in Greater Noida, it is envisaged to be the largest logistics hub in India. The state is coming up with multi-modal logistics/ transport hubs at Boraki and Varanasi. Uttar Pradesh is one of the pioneering states to come up with a private logistics park policy.

The upcoming Noida International Airport at Jewar in Greater Noida, which will be one of the largest international airports in India, has added to the state’s advantage. Together with the upcoming National Waterways-1 to ferry cargo from the eastern seaport of Haldia to Varanasi, the connectivity web of air, water, road and rail network created in the state will help the industries and manufacturing units switch seamlessly between different modes of transport as they send their goods to markets in India and abroad.

Being one of the focus states under UDAN Regional Connectivity Scheme, over 25 routes have been identified in the state to strengthen the local air connectivity.

SP’s one-seat offer a cruel joke: Shivpal Yadav

Lucknow (PNS): Shivpal Singh Yadav, who heads Pragatishheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia), termed Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav’s offer to leave one seat for his uncle’s party in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls “a cruel joke”.

Shivpal Yadav and nephew Akhilesh fell out politically following a protracted Yadav family feud over the control of the party when Akhilesh was the chief minister of UP.

Shivpal said his party was looking for a handful of winnable seats for the PSPL to enter into any alliance with SP.

Shivpal said in Etawah on Sunday that he would launch his party’s poll campaign with a rally in Meerut on Monday and from December 24 onwards his party would launch a state-wide village-level contact programme over farmers’ issues.

The day before Diwali, Akhilesh Yadav had said in Saifai, Etawah that his party would make an “adjustment” and leave Shivpal’s Jaswantnagar seat. He said



he would also make Shivpal Yadav a cabinet minister when the SP returned to power in the state.

Shivpal is the sitting MLA from Jaswantnagar.

In response, Shivpal dismissed the offer. “The one-seat offer is a joke. So far as the idea of being accommodated as cabinet minister is concerned, I have been a cabinet minister several times. So, it is not a big deal. What we are looking for is a handful of winnable seats,” he said.

He reiterated that all socialist parties must come on a single platform if they wished to defeat the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Cong gheraos BJP lawmakers to protest farm laws

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Spearheading a campaign against the three agriculture laws, UP Congress leaders on Sunday gheraoed the Bharatiya Janata Party legislators and parliamentarians in several districts across the state.

Where the BJP legislators were not available at their residences, the Congress leaders pasted a memorandum on the gates.

In several districts, the Congress leaders were detained and put under house arrest when they were going to meet the BJP legislators.

The Congress approached the BJP legislators in Gorakhpur, Shamli, Kaushambi and Basti. In Sonbhadra district, the Congress leaders were detained and put under house arrest while in Prayagraj district, they were arrested.

The Congress workers staged a demonstration opposite the residence of the BJP MLA in Etawah and raised slogans denouncing the three legislations. Police had to use a mild force in Ayodhya district where the Congress workers tried to mob the BJP MLAs.

UP govt preparing attractive packages for tourists

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

On the lines of travel and tour majors like Make My Trip, Go Iibbo, the Yogi Adityanath government is preparing the most unique and attractive package for tourists in collaboration with the Forest Corporation and Tourism department.

The package will include forest destinations besides UP’s favourite destinations.

“Through these packages, the state government will promote those places which have the potential to become a tourist destination but due to the neglect of the previous governments, till now they have been away from the eyes of tourists,” a government spokesman said.

He said the government was now preparing to make these places a hot destination for tourism. These packages will also provide car facilities for tourists to live, eat and move around.

The government will also provide a guide facility to explain the importance of tourism areas and to tell their history.

“The Forest department has prepared this

proposal. With the approval of the Tourism department and the state government, it will be offered to the tourists,” the official said.

For these packages, the state government is trying to promote the home stay scheme as well. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath plans to bring people living in rural and forest areas into the mainstream of employment through a home stay scheme.

In the chief minister’s review meetings, top officials of the government have also been instructed to link local people with employment and the development of the tourism industry, especially, the areas that have their own historical significance.

The Forest department is also running the scheme to promote home stay. The scheme is being started in the districts of Terai as well as in Bundelkhand and Vindhya region.

According to a senior Forest department official, the package for tourists will be arranged from Lucknow, Delhi and Noida. Tourists will also make their booking for the place. From there the car will take them to their destinations.

Tractor march in support of farm laws

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With Delhi witnessing protest for the past 23 days against the new farm laws, farmers and members of Hind Mazdoor Kisan Samiti in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday took out a 46-kilometre-long tractor march from Meerut to Ghaziabad in support of the Centre’s three farm laws.

The activists who participated in this tractor march sang patriotic songs and raised slogans of Jai Hind during the entire route. There were more than 500 tractors in the march.

After the tractor march, the Hind Mazdoor Kisan Samiti held a rally at Ramliha ground in Indrapuram in Ghaziabad, where the speakers made the farmers aware of the benefits of the new farm laws.



आवश्यकता

आवश्यकता

किरणलता सिंह महाविद्यालय कौड, असोसर फतेहपुर (कॉलेज कोड 02040) सम्बन्ध-प्रो राजेन्द्र सिंह (रज्जू मइया) विश्वविद्यालय प्रयागराज (उप्रप्रो) में प्राचार्य-योग्यता-55%, पीएचडी/डी. फिल, अनुभव-महाविद्यालय में 15 वर्ष का शिक्षण अनुभव सहायक आचार्य - विषय-हिन्दी साहित्य, अंग्रेजी साहित्य, अर्थशास्त्र, शिक्षा शास्त्र, गृह विज्ञान, समाज शास्त्र, इतिहास, भूगोल, संस्कृत व ड्राइंग एंड पेंटिंग, योग्यता सर्वांगीण विषय में परास्नातक 55% व Net / SLET / P.H.D. वतनमान-यूजीसीसी के मानकानुसार, नोट - इच्छुक अर्हथी अपनी 04 फोटो, समस्त शैक्षिक प्रमाण पत्रों सहित 15 दिनों के अन्दर महाविद्यालय के हेड आफिस 371 हरिहरगंज, फतेहपुर (30900) में सीधे जमा करें या पंजीकृत डाक से भेजें। प्रबन्धक - संजय कुमार सिंह, मो-9515032705, 9838327225

JCP inspects exam centres

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Naveen Arora, along with a team, inspected the centres where exams for the posts of jail wardens, firemen and for Arakshi Ghudsawar were held on Sunday. Similar arrangements were also in place during the exams on Saturday.

Arora inspected the exam centres in Sarojininarayan and Krishnanagar and kept seeking details of every development from his subordinates at other exam centres.

A spokesman said the exams were conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner. He said 72 inspectors, 180 sub-inspectors, 435 head constables/constables and 76 women constables were deployed on duty.

“DCPs, ADCPs, ACPs and station house officers of all the zones in the city, PRV vehicles, polygon, pink mobile teams, large number of policemen and LIU officials remained on the duty to keep a close watch on the exam centres,” he said.

Under the arrangements, the police had kept door-frame metal detectors and cameras at the exam centres while there was also provision for biometric attendance. Ambulances and fire tenders were also

deployed and the exam was conducted while adhering to Covid protocols.

More than 31,000 candidates appeared for the exams. The papers were taken to the exam centres and then to Reserve Police Lines under heavy security arrangements.

ONLINE MATHS QUIZ

An online mathematics talent hunt quiz competition was organised by the Mathematics department of BBAU on the occasion of National Mathematics Day and birth anniversary of great mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. This quiz competition is being conducted in two phases and the first phase was held on Sunday.

“In this phase, 20 multiple choice questions were asked from participants through Google Sheets. As many as 209 participants from across the country participated in the contest. The 20 best performing contestants have been selected for the second round and they have been notified by email,” the BBAU spokesperson said. The second phase of the competition will be held on December 22 through Google Meet. The best three participants will be awarded. Besides, e-certificates will be awarded to all the participants in the second phase.

CITYBRIEFS

QUANTA-2020



On the third and concluding day of International Science Olympiad ‘Quanta-2020’, organised online by City Montessori School, Chowk Campus, the participating students from Brazil, Germany, Jordan, Bangladesh, Russia and various states of India displayed outstanding knowledge of science in a quiz held on Sunday. At the same time, the participants from India and abroad presented a view of the future world which would be based on the latest technology and advances in science. The participants’ performance in this competition drew massive appreciation by the audience. The quiz was held online and conducted in two rounds. The winners of the written round got the opportunity to participate in the final round. Earlier, CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi said that time has come for the student community to unite and create an ideal world order.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

SHGs to be make supplementary nutritional food

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the aim to empower women, the Uttar Pradesh government has made plans to provide permanent livelihood by linking women self-help groups associated with the UP State Rural Livelihood Mission with supplementary nutritional food production units.

In the first phase, nutritional food production units will be set up in Fatehpur and Unnao at a cost of Rs. 40 lakhs where women will make refreshments with modern machines.

“The operation of this modern production centre will be entirely in the hands of women. They will meet the demand of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to supply supplementary nutritious food to the beneficiaries,” a government spokesman said.

It May be mentioned here that through Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission, the women of sup-

plementary nutritional food groups will be distributed in 204 development blocks of 18 districts, including Prayagraj, Sultanpur, Aligarh, Lucknow, Mirzapur, Unnao, Etawah, and Gorakhpur. For this, similar production units equipped with modern machines will be installed. The UP State Livelihood Rural Mission will set up 15 to 20 women of SHGs to micro enterprises. The women associated with it will also do the work of PAN card and bank account opening.

According to officials of the National Rural Livelihood Mission, more than 3,000 groups of women will become entrepreneurs under this project. They will have permanent self-employment. Each woman will get more than 240 days of employment in a year. The women will be able to earn up to Rs 6,000 per month.

Apart from this, women will also be given a share in the benefits received on supplementary nutritious food distributed to Anganwadi centres.

PNS ■ **LUCKNOW**

Early dip in temp raises concern for crop damage

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

"Expected rains during this period may harm vegetables like tomato and potato which are prone to diseases like Alternaria blight. Rains will increase humidity and low temperature promotes diseases. Fungicide spray and light irrigation can protect these plants from frost as well as the disease. Irrigation plays an important role in protecting plants during low-temperature exposure at night," he said. He added that many of the ornamental plants are also uncomfortable during winters due to low temperature. "Several of them can withstand the freezing temperature whereas there are good numbers of plants that may die due to exposure to extreme cold. These are to be protected from exposure to cold wave. Winter annuals enjoy low temperature but most of the green plants are sensitive to low temperature during the night and require protection by covering them with cloth or polythene cover. This can reduce the chance of injury by insulating foliage from the cool air," he said.

Cowin portal set up for vaccination process

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Process underway for establishing east-west corridor of metro

PNS **LUCKNOW**

Mayor Sanyukta Bhatia inspecting a colony in Chandan Nagar on Sunday

DRM office bags prestigious awards

Energy and Additional Sources of Energy Shrikant Sharma. The Energy saving campaign was organised by Uttar Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Development Agency (UPNERDA). DRM Monica Agnihotri congratulated senior DEO Dhananjay Mishra and his team for the success and said these awards are recognition of special efforts done by Lucknow division of NER in the field of energy conservation.

Lucknow shivers at 4 degree Celsius

PNS **LUCKNOW**

Thick fog cover in Lucknow on Sunday morning

Ayurvedic experts have suggested ways to keep the cold at bay. "Hot ginger, cardamom

Husband of gram pradhan shot

PNS **LUCKNOW**

Reports said Ali Husain (22) of Sitapur fell down around 10 am and suffered injuries to the leg and head. His brother Sadiq said he was informed of the incident by an official of the company getting the construction work done. "My brother has been admitted to a hospital and his condition is serious. He had not been provided with safety gadgets, including a belt for protection," he alleged.

Zoo selected by CZA for universal accessibility

Lucknow (PNS): Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Zoological Garden is one of the three zoos in India selected by Central Zoo Authority for universal accessibility. Lucknow zoo director RK Singh said that this is aimed at increasing accessibility to all categories of the disabled. "Various enabling features will be set up at Lucknow zoo to help the disabled roam around. Only three zoos have been selected by the Central Zoo Authority and the other two are Bhopal and Mysore zoos. "Only the zoos with unique features have been selected. Lucknow zoo is unique because it is run by a society," Singh said.

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CIRCLE HEAD

सबका साथ, सबका विकास, सबका विश्वास

धान खरीद

वर्ष 2020-21

अब तक कुल 7,20,904 किसानों से
रु0 7022.60 करोड़ मूल्य के 38.56 लाख
मीट्रिक टन धान की खरीद की जा चुकी है।

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एवं ग्रेड 'ए' रु. 1888/- प्रति कुन्तल

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1

कृषक पंजीकरण एवं
सत्यापन के संबंध में

2

क्रय केन्द्र
बन्द पाया जाना

3

क्रय केन्द्र पर धान
की तौल न होना

4

क्रय केन्द्र पर धान
रिजेक्ट किया जाना

5

धान का भुगतान
समय से प्राप्त न होना

6

क्रय केन्द्र पर टोकन
प्राप्त न होना

अथवा अन्य किसी समस्या के संबंध में खाद्य आयुक्त कार्यालय स्थित
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Dense fog grips Varanasi Junction (Cantt.) railway station on Sunday morning

Pioneer

Foggy conditions affect normal life

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Dense foggy conditions till the late morning hours have affected the normal life badly here on Sunday, slowing down the speed of trains and road transportation apart from delaying the arrivals of several flights, scheduled to land especially during the morning hours. Foggy condition also affected the life at the internationally famous ghats as only thin attendance of visitors was seen there.

Due to foggy conditions,

the Railways has already cancelled many trains and as only a limited number of trains are being run on the tracks, the commuters and others are facing a lot of inconveniences. It may be mentioned that though after lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of coronavirus many trains have been restarted but regular train service has yet not been resumed as most of the trains are being run as special trains.

In absence of running of passengers trains, the people are mainly depending on the

buses and other road transportation. The foggy conditions also slowed down the speed of buses.

Besides, the flight services have also been affected badly. According to information received from Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babatpur, over a dozen flights scheduled to arrive here during morning hours were delayed. These included SpiceJet (SG-250, SG-704), Vistara (UK-621), GoAir (G8-513), Sri Lankan Airlines (UK-3612) and Air India (AI-695) flights

from Mumbai apart from G8-101, GE-2136 (IndoGo), AI-406 from Delhi, G8-707 from Ahmedabad, 6E-397 from Bengaluru, 6E-216 from Hyderabad and 6E-513 from Chennai.

Meanwhile, as the minimum temperature has dropped around 6 degree Celsius due to continuous snow fall in northern India region, resentment has started brewing up among the poor vendors and rickshaw pullers as Nagar Nigam has yet not made arrangements for bonfires.

Shringar of Maa Annapurna with paddy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The attractive shringar (decoration) of temple of Maa Annapurna, Goddess Mother of Food, was done here on Sunday with paddy earrings which marked the conclusion of the 17-day Mahavrat and to fulfill their vows, many did 51 parikarmas while some 501 on the occasion. The festival is celebrated every year when the farmers offer their first crop of paddy to Goddess Annapurna.

On the occasion, the entire temple premises and idols were decorated with 11 quintals of paddy. In the wee hours, the temple premises was washed and then Upmahant (deputy priest) bathed the idol of Maa Annapurna and others and it was followed by the shringar with paddy earrings. Later, the gates of the temple were opened for the devotees. As per the tradition, not only the paddy growers of Varanasi but also of many other districts of Purvanchal (eastern UP) offer their first crops to the Goddess



Shringar of Maa Annapurna temple with paddy crops in Varanasi on Sunday

Pioneer

for her blessings.

It is believed that Lord Shiva himself had asked for alms in front of Maa Annapurna and since then there is no shortage of food and the local believe that due to

blessings of Maa Annapurna, no one sleeps empty stomach in this holy city. As per tradition, the paddy earring will be distributed on the second day to the devotees as 'prasad' who keep the same in their granary.

Mahant Rameshwapuri said that this Mahavrat removes one's all kinds of sufferings and brings prosperity. He also prayed to the Goddess to help the people get an early rid of global coronavirus pandemic.

45 more test positive in Varanasi

VARANASI (PNS): As many as 45 new patients have been detected in the district on Sunday, increasing the total number to 20,643. The day also saw two more deaths, increasing the toll to 343. During the day, the follow-up negative reports included 62 and all of them have been recovered from home isolation, increasing the number to 16,986. As no patient has been discharged from any hospital, the number of recovered patients from the

hospitals remained at 2,898 respectively. The total number of patients who have been recovered so far is 19,884, leaving 416 active cases. The recovery rate is 96.32 per cent while the mortality rate is 1.66 per cent.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh has informed that in the first report of the day, 29 positive patients were found out of 2,166 reports received. Till then, the total test reports received were 4,87,022

and the results of 2,928 are awaited. Out of them, 4,66,395 were negative, while 20,627 positive. The total number of samples collected was 5,08,115. With the addition of six new red zones, the total number of hotspots has increased to 2,603 including 204 red zones. There are 2,399 green zones with two 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 66 and 56 tests conducted there respectively have been found negative. Besides, all the 142 tests have been found negative at Shree Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Hospital, Kabirchaura apart from 31 at CHC Shivpur, 105 at LBS Hospital Ramnagar, 137 at Government Women's Hospital, 72 at Swami Vivekanand Hospital, Bhelupur and 92 at SSH BHU.

on Sunday staged a token dharna at Shastri Ghat, here and demanded, the government should repeal the black laws. The government at Centre brought the agriculture laws to benefit the capitalists and it is denying roll backing these black laws under their pressure, the agitated activists blamed adding, the SBSP will continue supporting the farmer's stir until these laws are repealed. No government could survive while showing the attitude of dictatorship, they said blaming, the Yogi Government is working under the pressure of the Central Government. They justified the act of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to tear the copies of farm laws. Among those who joined the token dharna were Shashi Pratap Singh and Jagdishwar Rajbhar.



Ganga Parikrama Yatra arrives in Varanasi on Sunday

Pioneer

Ganga said, 'the motive behind the parikrama is to spread the message to protect and conserve river Ganga from pollution as it is one of the most polluted rivers in the world.'

All the arrangements at the Subeh-e-Banaras were conducted by 3 UP Armd Sqn

NCC, BHU, Varansi Officer, JCO, PI Staff & civil staff.

DHARNA: Extending their support to the ongoing agitation of the farmers at the borders of national capital in protest against the three farm laws, the activists of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP)

After Ayodhya, it is turn of Kashi & Mathura: Saraswati

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

After Ayodhya, it is the turn of Kashi-Mathura. After the construction of the grand Ram temple, Kashi and Mathura will also be freed. Jagadguru Vasudevanand Saraswati, a member of the Ram Janmabhoomi Tirthakshetra Trust, spoke to reporters after attending the VHP saint conference on Saturday.

Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati said that first the temple will be constructed at Ram Janmabhoomi. After the construction of the Ram temple, work will be done to free the Krishna Janmabhoomi of Kashi Vishwanath and Mathura. Nobody can stop it. Mahant Narendra Giri, president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, also discussed the agenda of liberating Kashi-Mathura.

The president of the Akhara Parishad said that a grand Ram temple will be built in Ayodhya with public participation. But, after the construction of the Ram temple,



Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati delivering his speech during Sant Sammelan at VHP office in Prayagraj

Pioneer

the monks have a big responsibility to free Kashi and Mathura as well. He said that the sadhus-sant wants to liberate Kashi and Mathura and build grand temples again on those two shrines. Mahant

Narendra Giri said that a strategy is being chalked out for this move.

Kashi and Mathura will be liberated in a constitutional manner with the cooperation of all Hinduist organisations

and sages. These two shrines were occupied and mosques were once built. In such a situation, they will be freed and brought back to their old condition, added Vasudevanand Saraswati.

Govt to give 60 crore doses of vaccine to protect people from Covid infection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Choubey said that the government is preparing to give 60 crore doses of vaccine to protect people from Covid infection. For this, 29000 cold chain points have been made. Efforts will be made for this purpose at the booth level. The Election Commission will help in vaccination. Covid vaccination will be done under the same strategy as it is to win the election. The Union Minister said that 20 per cent of the vaccine dose will be given to the poor countries along with the needy, health workers, corona warriors and the elderly.

In a press conference at the Circuit House held recently,

Minister Ashwini Choubey said that vaccines will be sent in the same way as we have supplied medicines for Covid treatment abroad. He said that preparations for giving doses of Covid vaccine to 300 million people in the last six to eight months are in the final stages. For this, the task force of officers is working day and night to form and monitor teams. He said that the vaccine trial is in the final stage. Five companies are engaged in this work. Orders have been given to all. At the same time, The Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also encouraged scientists by visiting pharmaceutical companies.

The Union Minister of State said that the corona vaccine will protect against infec-

tion. For this, more than 29,000 cold chain points and 85,634 devices are available. In the first phase, one crore health workers will be given the benefit of vaccination to the corona warriors and the sick, elderly. Marking work is being done for this purpose. During the talks, MP Kesari Devi Patel, CGHS AD Chaudhary, CMO Dr Prabhakar Rai and others were present.

Union Minister of State for Health Ashwini Choubey also targeted all political parties on the issue of farmer agitation. He was more aggressive in Congress. He said that the work done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the interest of farmers is visible on the ground. Political people who were missing from the

Parliament during the debate are now cooking political loaves. People without issue are spreading confusion among the farmers. The work which could not be done in the Congress regime in the 70 years, the BJP did that within a few years and this is unbearable for the opposition, he added.

The Union Minister said that the cases of farmer suicides are worrisome. We are troubled, but those who tell it are forgetting, its graph was much higher at the time of their government. He said that the Central Government has made a provision of ₹3500 crore to provide relief to sugarcane farmers. This amount will go directly to the accounts of the farmers.

67 new Covid cases in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Corona on Saturday night gripped a total of 67 persons into its grip. This included Professor of Saidabad-based Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Degree College, Vigilance Officer of Railways, Branch Manager of PNB. With this, the total number of corona patients in the district has increased to 27,802. Dr Rishi Sahai, the Nodal Officer of Corona confirmed this.

On the other hand, according to the information released by CMO Dr Prabhakar Rai, 26,686 people have been infection-free so far against the infected people. 35 people have become infection free on Saturday. Home isolation of 24 people has been completed among them. However, 11 people have been discharged. In this, 10 people have been discharged from Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital and one person was discharged from a private hospital after his report tested negative. At present, the number of active cases is 749.

There are 60 people admitted in SRN Hospital, 48 in Beli and 19 in private hospitals. Whereas, 622 infected are in home isolation. A total of 5,873 people have been screened on

expressing dissatisfaction with the district administration's guideline on the rescue of Corona during the Magh Mela.

A division bench of Justice Siddharth Verma and Justice Ajit Kumar, hearing the corona infection case, has said that after tireless efforts, there has been a decrease in the number of corona infections in Prayagraj. If people are allowed to come from outside the city without negative reports, then all the efforts of infection control so far will be in vain. The court said that the 18-point guideline that has been drawn is just the guide line on awareness. The court has suggested to the government that not only the fair area should be monitored but also attention should be paid to the banks of Ganga and Yamuna in the city.

On the direction of the court, the police of Meerut, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar, and Lucknow submitted the report and filed a list with the names of the police personnel deployed to implement the Corona guidelines. The lawyers said that the police personnel who have been deployed are not monitoring them properly. The court has directed the police officers to be more active and make their subordinates

also aware of the issue.

Additional Solicitor General of India SP Singh gave the information received in the court quoting the Drug Controller General of India. It was informed that the Serum Institute of India, Pfizer India Limited has sought permission to use the emergency of the vaccine. For this, a duly constituted committee is studying the data of clinical trials. Only after the report of the committee, a decision will be made on allowing the use of the vaccine. The committee has asked for more data from the Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech, while Pfizer has asked for time.

The court took information about the vaccine from video conferencing from Joint Director of Drugs Controller General of India, Dr PBN Prasad and LA Consultant Rishi Kant Singh. He said that clinical trials are still being done.

The court said that the vaccine is not visible at the moment. Struggle continues with the Covid infection. The court has asked the school colleges to work with minimum staff and students with safety measures. Because there is no vaccine yet and the corona infection continues.

PDA team faces opposition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The PDA team, which reached the Civil Lines to shift the idol from the Hanuman temple near the High Court, faced tremendous opposition. The team had to return after the protest by the local people. Angry people shouted slogans too. However, the police continued to deny any such incident.

Locals said that the Prayagraj Development Authority wants to remove the temple while they are opposing it. They said that the temple is

the centre of faith for thousands of people as well as advocates. Local people said that the PDA erected a platform under the tree next to the temple from 4 o'clock on Saturday morning. Around 11 am, PDA employees tried to shift the idol from the temple to the platform but could not succeed due to the protest.

Around 5 o'clock in the evening, the PDA workers again reached the temple. On seeing this, the local people gathered and started protesting. Seeing their outrage, PDA employees had to return.

During this, angry locals also shouted slogans. Laxmikant Mishra, who was among those who protested, said that playing with faith will not be tolerated.

In this case, CO Ajit Singh Chauhan said that he has not received any information related to such an incident.

SAXENA SABHA RELEASES MAGAZINE: The Saxena Sabha, a registered society has successfully released its silver jubilee magazine online on Sunday. President of Saxena Sabha, Pramod Kumar, IPS released the souvenir and con-

gratulated the editorial board especially chief editor Aruna Asthana

General secretary Kaushal Saxena said that it is a matter of pride for the Saxena Sabha that the silver jubilee souvenir is being published this year. Aruna Asthana, the editor-in-chief of the souvenir, said that the publication of the souvenir in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic was a very challenging task which could be completed with the help of Rakesh Kumar, Anjani Saxena, Vijay Laxmi, Kaushal Saxena etc.



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Raj Shekhar addressing the Outer Ring Road meeting at his camp office

Pioneer

DC asks NHAI to modify outer ring road alignment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar, while addressing a meeting on the proposed outer ring road at his camp office here, directed the NHAI and consultant team to modify the alignments as per the preliminary discussions in the next 72 hours.

He said once this was done the consultant team would visit Kanpur Nagar next week and remain stationed for two days to finalise the alignment in consultation with the KDA

and the district administration.

He said once this was done, the next meeting with the NHAI chairman and the chief secretary would be arranged by the administration in Delhi and Lucknow respectively.

He said meanwhile the NHAI, district administration and KDA officials would work out various models to finance the project and to make it more viable.

The presentation on the proposed alignment was mad by the NHAI team before the divisional commissioner and the detailed discussions

focused on the pros and cons of both.

The second proposal of 101 km was found suitable with some officials suggested changes in the alignment.

The DC said that the outer ring road would have seven railway over bridges (ROB) and five small bridges and would involve around 103-108 villages depending upon on the final alignment.

Shekhar said that out of the total 101 km proposed alignment, the Mandhana to Bhauti 22-km stretch would be taken up as priority section.

Later the team visited both sites of Mandhana and Bhauti along with all NHAI and other officials concerned.

The DC said the alignment was found to be good and had been done keeping in view the minimum removal of existing structures or avoiding them .

Prominent among those who formed the team were KDA VC, ADM (FR), ADM (LA), NHAI regional officer, KDA chief engineer, NHAI project directors of Kanpur and Kannauj, officials of NHAI consultant, and KDA town planner.

KPSA takes hardline stance on fees issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Private Schools Association, during its maiden annual convention at KDMA, decided that for the teaching work to be carried out smoothly in schools it would strictly adopt the principle of 'no fees no examinations, no promotions, no TCs'.

It said that if this principle was not adopted then it would lead to grave financial problems for the schools.

National Independent School Alliance President Kulbhushan Sharma said that although the COVID-19 era was a crisis for every segment of the country and to recover from it was a big challenge, yet teaching work had been done efficiently in coordination with parents, school management and government.

He said the new education policy was welcome but it failed to take note of how to preserve the right to education in times of disaster.

He said the biggest problem while imparting online education was that the poor children who did not have access to electronic devices



The first annual convention of KPSA being held at KDMA.

Pioneer

were deprived of their right to education and this had to be considered in the right earnest while maintaining the quality and continuity.

Addressing the meeting, Rahul Kesarwani, secretary, the Confederation of Schools, Meerut, mooted the formation of such organisations and appealed for full support from the parents. He added that similar approach was expected from the tutors as well.

The other members took up the issue of financial crisis faced by schools which had fees as the sole means to run the

institution. They also said over 50 per cent of the teachers had been retrenched and the existing teachers were working on salary between 50 per cent and 80 per cent.

They said when the government school teachers were getting full salary since March 2020, then why were the private school teachers forced to suffer although the quality of education was far more superior in private schools.

World Education Council founder Sunita Gandhi praised the NEP.

CBSER, Etawah, coordinator Ram Mohan also

addressed the meeting.

KPSA general secretary and CBSE coordinator Balwinder Singh read out the report.

Prominent among those who took part in the meeting were Nagendra Swarup, Mukhtarul Amin, Kumkum Swarup, Yusuf Baig, Subodh Katiyar, Prateek Katiyar, Gurcharan Singh, Bhawna Kapoor and Dipendra Chauhan.

PENSIONERS' DEMANDS : Members of Pensioners Forum have unanimously decided to send a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to apprise him about their problems.

In a virtual meeting held on the occasion of Pensioners Day, forum's general secretary Anand Awasthi they were demanding increase of 20 per cent pension after 20 years of retirement in four instalments, LTC facility after retirement, treatment of pensioners under ESI scheme, hike in pension as per the recommendations of the Koshiyari Committee 2012 and release of dearness allowance lying suspended since January.

41 more test positive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar reported 41 more coronavirus positive cases on Sunday evening. Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil K Mishra said that 41 more people had tested positive for coronavirus infection between Saturday evening and Sunday evening taking the tally of confirmed cases to 31,831 cases. He said that 4 patients were discharged from hospital. He said no COVID-19 death in the city was reported till Sunday evening keeping the death toll to 809. The CMO said at present 655 active cases were undergoing treatment. Dr Mishra said 3313 samples were sent for testing in the city. Two deaths dated November 21 and 24 had been missed on the portal which were included putting the total to 811 as on date.

COVID-19 vaccination teams formed: CMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Chief Medical Officer Dr AK Mishra said that as per the directive of the government, the administration had formed 100 teams for the COVID-19 vaccination drive and in the first phase, 50 teams would be deployed and their number would be increased gradually.

He said the details of all those who would be vaccinated would be fed in the COVINapp.

The CMO said in the first phase, GSVM Medical College, private medical colleges, CHCs, PHCs, urban PHCs had been included and the sites had been earmarked. He said the first phase of the vaccination drive would take off from January 1, 2021 and continue till January 4, 2021.

He said after 28 days of the vaccination, the drive would be relaunched on January 29, 30 and 31 , 2021. He said each person would get two doses at a gap of 28 days.

He said all necessary preparations had been made and the moment the government gave a green signal, the campaign would take off.

He said 900-litre ice lined refrigerator (ILR) was ready and five more ILRs were about to reach the city in a short time.

He said the drive would also be carried out in the rural areas as well and would be under strict monitoring of the officials.

He said the special training on vaccinating a person had been completed and the team was waiting for the government nod.

Fire guts house

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A fire broke out in a house in Agujaini under Govind Nagar police station due to leakage in cooking gas cylinder on Sunday morning.

The fire gutted the entire household goods. The local residents somehow managed to throw the burning LPG cylinder out on the street and controlled the flames.

Rickshaw-puller Ram Kishore is a tenant in the house of Dipu in Gujaini A Block. On Sunday morning, when he was cooking, the gas exhausted. After replacing the cylinder, when he lit the stove, a fire broke out due to gas leakage. The fire soon spread to other parts of the room and gutted the household goods.

When Ram Kishore raised an alarm and ran out of his house, the local residents rushed to the spot and after informing the police control room, made efforts to extinguish the fire.

Scared of sudden explosion of the cylinder, nobody dared to enter the house.

The neighbours extinguished the fire by pouring water from their submersible pumps after around one hour.

NER GM inspects mechanical workshop

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

General Manager of North Eastern Railway (NER) Vinay Kumar Tripathi made a thorough inspection of the mechanical workshop here on Saturday. On the occasion Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Arvind Kumar Pandey, Chief Workshop Engineer BS

the methodology of air brake overhauling of LBH and MEMU coaches and also inaugurated the computerised DB test bench. While inspecting the shell shop, the GM gave instructions for the change of composite head stock and better maintenance of various elements of welding, safety equipment and water tank. During the inspection, GM inaugurat-



Dohare, Chief Workshop Manager/Mechanical Workshop Atul Chandra Besra along with senior railway officials were present.

At the beginning of the inspection, GM Vinay Kumar Tripathi inaugurated the cutout of steam loco and observed the 3D model of the mechanical workshop. While inspecting the machine shop of the mechanical workshop he inaugurated the hydraulic shock absorber testing machine by cutting the ribbon. He inspected the maintenance of LHB coaches and conversion of NMG coaches in smithy shop. Inspecting the wheel shop, Tripathi instructed the officials concerned to complete the maintenance work of wheel turning and roller bearing by ensuring quality. He made a thorough inspection of the computerised greasing work in roller bearings and observed the springs used in LHB coaches in the spring shop as well as directed the officials concerned to pay special attention with caution to its tagging and painting. While inspecting the bogie shop Tripathi expressed happiness over the maintenance of the ultra-modern flat bogie. For giving information to the depot concerned online the GM dedicated the FBIMS software on the occasion. While inspecting the air brake shop he observed

ed the renovated air-conditioned staff canteen for the convenience of the workshop workers as well as observed the heritage coach established in the mechanical workshop. The GM closely inspected the Quality Control Department and the Chemical and Metal Laboratory (CMT Lab). During the last phase of the inspection, the GM by planting sapling in the park of the administrative building showed his commitment towards environmental protection. After this in a meeting with the principal chief mechanical engineer, chief workshop manager, chief workshop engineer besides senior railway officials of the Mechanical department, he gave very important suggestions to increase the quality and productivity of mechanical workshop.

While addressing the meeting, Tripathi said that production and other works in the workshop were satisfactory. In order to make LHB spring failure negligible he instructed to find new ways and the cause along with Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO). He said that no failure of bearings was a proof of good working of the workshop. The mechanical workshop was not short of resources, he said. "We had so many resources that we can build anything," he

MP's directive to officials

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

MP Anupriya Patel has directed the officials to take the advice of farmers too in running the canals and incorporate their suggestions before finalising the schedule. These views were expressed by the MP while chairing the meeting of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee in the meeting hall of Jila Panchayat on Saturday.

Addressing the meeting the MP made it clear that those seeking pension under welfare schemes should not be harassed at any stage and all applications should be dealt with transparency and all of them should be compiled at the block level. The MP directed Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Prabhu Dayal Gupta to take the ANM centres and ensure their stay at their respective headquarters positively. The CMO was directed too to expedite the preparation of



MP Anupriya Patel holding the meeting at Jila Panchayat on Saturday

golden cards and distribute them to the genuine beneficiaries. The BSA was directed to get the high-tension electric wires removed from the school buildings as a drive and contact her if there was any problem in the work. The MP made it clear that the suggestion of the people's representatives should be sought in the developmental activities taken under Prime Minister Mining Area Welfare

Scheme. In the meeting all points related to welfare and development were discussed and the MP directed the officials concerned to ensure the availability of benefits to the eligible persons. The meeting was also attended by District Magistrate Sushil Kumar Patel, 'Chief Development Officer (CDO), Avinash Singh, PD, DRDA, Rishimuni Upadhyay and other district level officials.

Valuables worth lakhs stolen

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Valuables worth lakhs were stolen from a jewellery shop in Purushottampur market under Chunar police station. According to a report, Ramsagar Singh, a resident of Sahaspura village has a jewellery shop in Purushottampur market.

After closing it on Friday he went to his house. On Saturday when he opened it he was taken aback when he found someone had sneaked into it from the rear side by drilling a hole in its wall and valuables were lying scattered there. He informed the area police about it and gave a list of the stolen items, ₹65,000 in cash. The police registered a case in this connection and was investigating it.

ROADS INAUGURATED: MLA City Ratnakar Mishra while inaugurating four roads costing more than ₹1 crore in Rajarshinagar Colony on Saturday claimed that in all the projects their quality had been kept on priority. He appealed to people to inform him if any project was found

Sweaters distributed in Sanskar Kendras

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

Under the guidance of the chairperson of Jyotsana Mahila Samiti of Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL)'s headquarters Sangeeta Sinha, its vice-chairperson Dr Sunita Kumari, Suchandra Sinha and Lakshmi Dubey sweaters were distributed in CETI, Jagmorwa and Kolan Basti-situated Sanskar Kendras recently. This distribution was done keeping



in mind the increasing cold. A total of 97 children were benefited. The Jyotsana Mahila Samiti had in the past too done many works to cater to the needs of children in Sanskar Kendras. On the occasion the children were made aware of the methods to avoid cold and advised to wear masks, wash hands frequently and follow social distancing to prevent Covid-19.

PM to deliver inaugural address at India Int’l Science Fest on Tue

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver the inaugural address at the India International Science Festival (IISF) on Tuesday via video conferencing, the Prime

Minister's Office (PMO) said on Sunday.
To promote scientific temper in society, the Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences in

association with Vijnana Bharati conceptualised the India International Science Festival.
Prime Minister Modi will deliver the inaugural address at

the India International Science Festival-2020 on December 22 at 4:30 pm via video conferencing, the Prime Minister's Office said.
Union Minister Harsh

Vardhan will also be present on the occasion, it said.
Launched in 2015, the IISF is a celebration to promote science and technology.
The aim is to engage the

public with science, celebrate the joy of science and show how Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) can provide solutions to improve lives.

The goal of India International Science Festival-2020 is to help the youth develop 21st century skills, with a focus on scientific knowledge, creativity, critical thinking,

problem-solving, and team-work.
A long-term objective is to encourage students to study and work in scientific fields.
PTI

All eyes on outcome of DDC polls in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After the successful conduct of the eight phase long district development council polls, which recorded over 50 percent voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir, all eyes are now set on the performance of the candidates belonging to the Bharatiya Janta Party and the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD).

Ahead of the counting of votes on December 22, Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha Sunday congratulated the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the election machinery for the successful conduct of District Development Council (DDC) and Panchayat Elections in the Union Territory.

“Despite harsh weather conditions, the polling stations across the UT witnessed long queues of enthusiastic voters and people came out to vote in large numbers, with the voter turnout percentage even in the traditionally low

percentage areas registering manifold increase as compared to earlier held Parliamentary elections, which itself manifests that faith of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the democratic process has deepened”, he added.

He further said that with the culmination of DDC elections, the people of J&K will, for the first time in history, see a truly empowered grass root democracy entailing direct funding and decentralized decision making in the planning and development of rural areas.

Compared to the Kashmir region, where voter turnout between 35 to 40 percent was recorded, the Jammu region recorded 65 to 70 percent polling.

Among all other political parties in the fray the Bharatiya Janta Party ran a high voltage campaign centered around the performance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The entire poll campaign was micro

managed by the core group of the party to ensure victory for their party candidates.

BJP is also hoping to win a majority of seats in Jammu region as West Pakistani refugees, members of the Valmiki community and Gorkha community participated in the polls for the first time. In Kashmir valley, party is expected to improve its tally by making inroads in several pockets of central and North Kashmir. Inside reports claimed, BJP may end up winning around 10-14 seats across 10 districts of Kashmir valley while it is expected to win majority seats across six districts of Jammu region.

On the other hand, PAGD is expected to garner majority votes in Kashmir valley. Congress and Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party ran a relatively lacklustre campaign and may end up securing third and fourth place in the final tally.

During the month long campaign, BJP parachuted

star campaigners and union ministers to woo the electorate and on the other hand central Congress leaders stayed away from the campaign.

Barring J&K Unit incharge Rajni Patil no other central leader visited Jammu and Kashmir to address poll meetings. JKPC Chief GA Mir and Jammu based congress leaders were left to fend for themselves. Even the top brass of the National Conference including the father son duo of Dr Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah stayed away from the campaign meetings while former party MLA's ex-ministers ran the party campaign in their absence. Omar was relatively more active on the social media while Dr Farooq Abdullah only posted video messages urging voters to elect PAGD candidates to defeat divisive agenda of the BJP.

Political observers tracking the DDC polls told The Pioneer, “Impressive voter turnout of over 50 percent in these polls has silenced all those critics who were raising question marks over the timing of the polls amid growing unrest among the Kashmiri population in the aftermath of reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and creation of two Union Territories on August 5, 2019”.

In their election campaign meetings BJP leaders maintained, “The fight is between who will carry the Tiranga in Jammu Kashmir and who will not protect it”. BJP leaders also targeted PDP leaders claiming they are openly saying that they will not hoist the national flag until Article 370 is restored. “They are seeking Chinese and Pakistani support for restoration of Article 370,”

“The fight is between nationalist forces and forces who want disturbance in J&K and also between those who want normalcy and those who don't want it. This is a

very special election where on one hand, the BJP is fighting for the national flag while the others are Chinese and Pakistan lovers.”

BJP leaders also tried to expose the agenda of the PAGD leaders and accused them of diverting development funds meant for the welfare of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The party also sought votes on the development plank and performance of the Modi government at the centre.

BJP leaders also wooed the women electorate in a big way across Jammu region to consolidate its hold over its vote bank.

They roped in Smriti Irani and other local women leaders who campaigned aggressively and exposed the PAGD alliance which collectively deprived women of their property rights during their term in office. On the other hand, PAGD leaders focused on restoring statehood and special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

More ‘innocent’ Delhi riots accused get bail with our help: JUH

New Delhi: At least two dozen “innocent” accused in the February riots in northeast Delhi which broke out following clashes over the CAA have managed to secure bail with legal help from the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the organisation said.

JUH President Arshad Madani said: “Our legal struggle will continue for justice to all innocent people.”

The Jamiat, in a statement,

said that the Delhi High Court has granted conditional bail to Rehan Pardhan, Arshad Qayyum, Irshad Ahmed, Muhammad Rehan, Reyast Ali, Shah Alam, Rashid Saifi and Zubair Ahmed while accused Zubair Ahmed has been released from jail.

Earlier, bail was granted to Ali, Shah Alam, Saifi, Qayyum, Mohammad Shadab, Mohammad Abid and other accused by the Karkarduma

Sessions Court.

Advocate Zaheer-ud-Din Babar Chauhan and his assistant, Advocate Dinesh, appeared for the accused on behalf of Jamiat.

Welcoming the bail to 24 accused, Madani said that the Jamiat's intention is not only to secure release on bail, but “an attempt to bring justice to the innocent people who have been arrested in the riots on false charges”.

He said that their team of lawyers is working on this point and release of the accused on bail is the first success of the lawyers “but our legal struggle will continue until such people are given complete justice”.

Madani also contended that reports of some newspapers and human rights group like Amnesty International have uncovered the “true story” of the Delhi riots.

“The truth has come out to

the world that in the name of investigation and action, the real culprits have been saved by the police, and the innocent people who did nothing in the riots have been arrested. Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind could not remain silent on this blatant injustice, so it decided to provide free legal aid to the victims and formed a regular panel of experienced professionals,” he said.

The JUH chief said that his

organisation has, for the last 70 years, been demanding a strict law against violence, atrocities and riots based on religion in which the district administration should be held accountable. He said that “there is no doubt that Delhi riots were planned and communal forces were working behind it, but it was unfortunate that the investigation file was almost closed by arresting innocent people”.
IAN S

Shah blows ‘Parivartan’ bugle in Bengal rally

From Page 1
The Mamata Banerjee Government epitomised “politicisation of administration, criminalisation of politics and institutionalisation of corruption”, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday told reporters launching a blistering attack on the Bengal ruling party Trinamool Congress.

Calling for a change of power the Home Minister singled out the Trinamool

Men more vulnerable to Covid death

From Page 1
“Older patients still have the highest risk of dying, but younger patients with obesity or hypertension have the highest risk of dying relative to other patients their age without these conditions,” said the study lead author Katherine Goodman, a postdoctoral fellow at UMSOM.

“Doctors may want to be paying extra attention to these younger patients when they're hospitalised to ensure they detect any complications quickly,” the study said.

The researchers also found some good news in their study findings. Death rates among hospitalised patients have fallen dramatically since the early weeks of the pandemic in April.

This is likely due to the availability of new treatments and more knowledge in the medical community on how to properly manage and care for hospitalised patients.

CRPF trooper hurt

IAN S ■ SRINAGAR

A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) trooper was injured in a militant attack in J&K's Anantnag district on Sunday, police said. Militants hurled a grenade at a unit of the security forces in Achabal area of Anantnag in the evening.

Congress' bid to focus on its achievements saying despite tall claims Bengal had remained a laggard in every field and it was only Prime Minister Narendra Modi who could restore the State to its former glory. He also said a son of soil will be BJP' Bengal CM candidate.

Though at a little distance district Trinamool Congress president Anubrata Mondal making a desperate attempt to squeeze out some attention from Shah's rally — with a counter street march not even one-tenth in size of the first one — dismissed the saffron procession as one “filled with people ferried in from outside,” the chock-a-block balconies and brimming terraces said it all.

“BJP aschei ... bhai ebaar guchiye phel, (the BJP is definitely coming-nong arrange for your exit),” Samir Roy, a TMC worker from Nichupatti, said in desperation: “Eshob CP(M)er khela (this is all CPI(M)'s game plan).”

The women like Pragya showed concerns for the Home Minister's security wondering “what is the need to move in an open vehicle ... there are bad people in the prowl,” even as her companion Gayitri said “the security people must have sanitized the entire area ... each person is undersurveillance.”

Arindam, a school teacher Bandh Goda, said “if the crowd significancesomething then we will be able to taste our vote ... we have not been able to do so for the past several years.” His friend from DangaliKali Tola said “Bolgpur was earlier known for Shantiniketan ... today it is known for a local TMC politician who openly threatens to bomb police vehicles and chop off opposition hands ... One hopes the Home Minister will be able to stop this.”

But then others people in the crowd like the gentlemen from NatunPalli and Sri Niketan wondered whether the BJP would be able to bringabout change because in 2016 too we saw Left rallies longer and bigger than that of the Trinamool but people like us were never allowed to vote.”

One of them --- a worker at a local rice mill --- who refused to share his name informed how “Bolgpur has a minority vote share of about 35 per cent” and how in the 2019 Parliamentary elections the BJP and TMC fought neck and neck with the former leading in 5 out of 11 Assembly seats.

“The TMC was barely 3 per cent ahead of the BJP ... if this huge turnout means something then this time they will overwhelm Mamata Banerjee

Govt plans to measure depth of Himalayan glaciers to assess water availability

New Delhi: As global warming affects the Himalayas, the Ministry of Earth Sciences is planning to measure the depth of glaciers in the region to assess their volume and gauge the water available in them, officials said on Sunday.

The project will start next summer, sometime in June-July, said, M. Rajeevan, the ministry's secretary.

Ravichandran, the Director of the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), which will execute the project, said the country's remote and high-altitude research centre, Himansh, is

also studying the Himalayan climate. The centre was established in 2016. “The plan is to first study seven glaciers in the Chandra river basin,” he said. The Chandra river is a major tributary of the Chenab river which itself is a tributary of the Indus. The Himalayan glaciers are a major source of water for rivers originating from there. The Himalayan rivers are also a lifeline for the Indo-Gangetic plains, home to several million people.

The NCPOR director said while the area of the glaciers is already known with the help of satellites, what needs to be

known is the volume. “The purpose of studying the depth of the glaciers is to understand the volume. This will also help us understand the availability of water and whether the glaciers are increasing or shrinking,” Ravichandran added.

He said they will be using a radar technology that uses microwave signals. It can penetrate through the ice and reach the rocks, something which the satellite images cannot do. The signals, after reflecting on the rocks can help understand the depth.
PTI

PENSIONERS CAN SUBMIT LIFE CERTIFICATES TILL FEB 28: UNION MINISTER

New Delhi: In a major relief to central government pensioners amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the date for submission of life certificate has been extended up to February 28 next year, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday.

“This decision has been taken considering all the sensitivities to avoid pandemic risk emanating from gathering of crowds at the pension disbursing banks,” said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel.

PTI

European countries ban flights from UK as Covid strain ‘out of control’

From Page 1
German officials, meanwhile, were considering “serious options” regarding incoming flights from the UK, but have not yet taken action.

The Czech Republic, meanwhile, imposed stricter quarantine measures from people arriving from the U.K.

The EU governments say they are acting in response to tougher measures imposed Saturday in London and its surrounding areas by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. He immediately put those regions into a new Tier 4 level of restric-

tions, saying that a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70 per cent more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

“There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness,” Johnson said, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said Sunday said he was issuing the flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight “out of precaution.” “There are a great many

questions about this new mutation and if it is not already on the mainland,” he said. He hoped to have more clarity by Tuesday. The World Health Organisation tweeted late Saturday that “We're in close contact with UK officials on the new #COVID19 virus variant.”

It promised to update governments and the public as more is learned about this variant.

The new strain of coronavirus was identified in south-eastern England in September and has been circulating in the area since, a WHO official told

the BBC on Sunday.

“What we understand is that it does have increased transmissibility, in terms of its ability to spread,” said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19.

Studies are under way to better understand how fast it spreads and whether “it's related to the variant itself, or a combination of factors with behavior,” she said.

She said the strain had also been identified in Denmark, Netherlands and Australia, where there was one case that did not spread further. **AP**

Oli gets Parliament dissolved, Opp cries Constitutional coup

From Page 1
The move comes as the intra-party feud reached dimax in the ruling NCP which has been witnessing months long tussle between two factions, one led by 68-year-old Oli and Party's chairman and another led by 66-year-old “Prachanda”, also the executive chair of the party and former premier.

Expressing dissatisfaction over Oli's move to dissolve the House, seven ministers from his Cabinet resigned in protest. Those who put in their papers are minister for science and education Giriraj Mani Pokharel, minister for energy and water resources Barshaman Pun, minister for agriculture Ghanashyam Bhushal, minister

for labour and employment Rameshwor Raya Yadav, minister for tourism Yogesh Bhattarai, minister for forest and environment Shakti Basnet and minister for drinking water and sanitation Bina Magar.

The seven ministers, belonging to the Prachanda faction, announced their resignation in a joint statement issued during a press conference here.

The Nepali Congress (NC), the main Opposition in Parliament, said that Oli's recommendation to dissolve the House was against the provisions and spirit of the Constitution, and the party will strongly oppose the move. “We have taken this move as

Oli's final attempt to fulfil his authoritarian desire,” the NC said in a statement issued by party's spokesman Bishwa Prakash Sharma.

“It is condemnable to push the country towards instability because of intra-party conflict amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.” The party also called the decision “unconstitutional and impulsive”, and appealed to President Bhandari to fulfil her role as a guardian of the Constitution by rejecting it.

Spokesperson of the NCP Narayankaji Shrestha termed Oli's move as “undemocratic, anti-constitutional and autocratic”. Meanwhile, the NCP's Standing Committee meeting termed Oli's move as “uncon-

stitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim”, and recommended to take a disciplinary action against the prime minister, Standing Committee member Ganesh Shah told PTI.

The recommendation for action will be forwarded to the Central Committee meeting which will be held on Wednesday, he said. Of the total 44 members of the Standing Committee, 27 were present. Oli and his supporters skipped the meeting.

The leaders have consulted about the problems caused by the decision of PM Oli,” said Prachanda's press advisor Bishnu Sapkota. Prachanda had visited Oli's residence on Sunday

morning, but he had returned without meeting the Prime Minister, media reports said.

Senior NCP leader and former premier Madhav Kumar Nepal termed the move as unconstitutional.

Constitutional experts have also termed the move as unconstitutional. As per the Constitution, there is no provision of dissolving Parliament by the Prime Minister of a majority government, they said, adding that it is likely to be challenged in court.

As long as there is a possibility of forming the government, there is no provision to dissolve the House, said constitutional expert Dinesh Tripathi. Another expert Bhimarjun

Acharya termed it a constitutional coup. Former premier Dr Baburam Bhattarai said: “By inviting political uncertainty like before, this decision has torn apart our effort to improve the system from the Constitution Assembly. This is against democratic values and the Constitution”.

The Prachanda and Madhav Nepal faction had been urging Oli to quit the post of Prime Minister amidst growing accusation and counter-accusation between the two factions in the NCP.

In June, Oli, known for his pro-China leanings, claimed that efforts were being made to oust him after his government redrew the country's political

map by incorporating three strategically key Indian territories. India had termed as “untenable” the “artificial enlargement” of the territorial claims by Nepal after its Parliament unanimously approved the new political map of the country featuring Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura areas which India maintains belong to it.

The NCP, formed after the merger between Oli led CPN-UML and Prachanda-led CPN (Maoist Centre) in May 2018, is divided along the two factions led by Oli and Prachanda. The Prachanda faction enjoys a majority in the nine-member Secretariat, the highest decision-making body of the party.

Cong deal for Rahul?

It looks like the reconciliation with dissenters is intended as a tradeoff for supporting Rahul as party president



The Congress, battered as it is as a non-performing party externally and a non-transformative one internally, stopped short of just teetering over the edge by agreeing to give a listen to senior dissenters who have been insisting on an “active and visible leadership”. Even the normally intransigent Rahul Gandhi, who has been steadfastly refusing to lead the party given the growing clamour for an elected chief and organisational overhaul, softened somewhat, saying that he was willing to “work for the party as all desire”. Read it against senior party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala’s remark that “99.9 per cent” of the Congress

men wanted Rahul as their leader. Also, considering the role of the party’s first family loyalist Kamal Nath in setting up a meeting with the dissenters, one wonders whether the meeting was indeed called to resolve issues or cut a deal. One where both sides agreed to hold elections to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), giving a semblance of inner party democracy, and then have the elected office-bearers endorse Rahul without him going through the process of voting; or even if an election is held for public perception, to ensure that Rahul is the unanimous choice of the elders. It is no secret that incumbent Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has been holding on to justify the continuity of the Gandhi legacy at the helm. In fact, it was her unwillingness to hand over the leadership to a non-Gandhian that had stagnated decision-making within the party for a long, long time, causing much damage to the party’s electoral prospects as it lost State after State and fortune-hunting members to the ruling BJP. In fact, after the party’s disastrous performance in Bihar, well-meaning party leaders took the decisive step of writing a letter and then publicising it enough to build a case for organisational elections, widening the representational berth from the grassroots, ending the *status quo* and coterie *raj* and rewarding talent. So the meeting among Sonia, Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra and the so-called “rebels” was meant to assuage the latter — considering all 23 of them have political weight and have built the party. And, by promising to address their grievances, she may have bought their support for Rahul.

The rapprochement became necessary as the Gandhis realised that they were being seen as despots, where their one-time courtiers had even lost their right to constructive criticism. Worse, Sonia even sidelined them within the party. And for all the cadres’ hopes on Priyanka, who is much more active in field campaigns than Rahul, the party is still fumbling around in Uttar Pradesh. Without political manifestation, her best efforts have made the Congress a largely non-profit organisation. How much sense will hardselling the Gandhi tag make now? That, too, at a time when senior leaders like Jitin Prasada and Raj Babbar, who had signed the dissent note, had been dropped from the State election panels despite working the ground for years. Senior loyalist Salman Khurshid will lead the team, which also includes Nirmal Khatri and Naseeb Pathan, to formulate the Congress manifesto. While Khurshid has the experience, both Khatri and Pathan have been clearly rewarded for opposing the “dissenters” who had written to party president Sonia Gandhi. Even if a compromise is reached, there is a deliberateness with which the leadership is conveying a strict message — “Stand with us or else face doom.” And should Rahul be re-anointed in much the same manner as earlier, it will legitimise the family’s priorities as the party’s own, never mind the impact it has on electoral prospects. If last year was difficult, the run-up to 2022 will be even more difficult, given the BJP’s propaganda machinery and the RSS’ rapid network. Besides, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has scored quite a bit on perception value post-pandemic, UP being the first State to facilitate movement of migrants, providing jobs and now climbing the charts steadily on the ease of doing business. If he manages an economic recovery and meet public health challenges, the Congress would find it difficult to play issue-based politics and cannot draw on dynastic sustenance. The day the UP poll panels were set up, nine expelled party leaders wrote to Sonia and asked that the party “rise above the affinity for the family”. Rahul has to self-correct, rise above ego, value honest counsel and appear selfless in the interests of a larger political legacy.

They all fall down!

Third day’s play at Adelaide saw the scores of Indian batsmen reading like a telephone number: 4, 9, 2, 0, 4, 0, 8, 4, 0, 4, 1



At the end of the day, there was shock, disbelief, disappointment. Having had the better of the exchange with hosts Australia during the first couple of days of the Adelaide day-night Test, suddenly, it seemed, the knees of the Indian batting line-up crumbled and the entire team collapsed in the course of amassing a minuscule total of 36 runs. The team, however, did manage to create a dubious record: Its lowest ever total in Test matches. India started its quest to repeat the 2018-19 historic feat against Australia in their own backyard in the worst possible manner when the pace attack led by Josh Hazlewood demolished Indian batting within 15.2 overs on the third morning of the game. Before the game,

there was a lot of hype around Indians’ handling of the Oz pace troika of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood under lights with Kookabura pink ball and, for the first two days, India was 53 runs ahead after the first essay but what happened on Saturday was completely unbelievable. No one could have imagined India getting out in just one session; that too from the position where it looked like dominating the proceedings. What India was supposed to do on the third day was to just keep the scoreboard ticking, bat the entire day and build on the lead. But before anything of that sort could happen, Australia showed why they are a team to fear. Hazlewood, who has often drawn comparisons with Aus legend Glenn McGrath for his on-the-spot bowling, produced the most iconic spell of modern times which forced Indian batsman to commit same mistakes repeatedly and it was quite visible on the scoreboard as well, with four of his five scalps coming in an identical fashion (caught behind by Tim Paine, in what looked like an action replay of the previous wicket). And to complement him, there was Pat Cummins, who got rid of two best batsmen — Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara — to set the stage. The way Indian batsmen failed to answer any of the questions posed by the Aussie bowlers will certainly create a moment of panic in the Indian dressing room as now they have to do it without skipper Virat Kohli, who is returning to India, and this makes the task a lot more complicated.

With Kohli not available for the rest of the series and an injured Shami ruled out, India has plenty of questions to answer and the biggest of all is who’ll take the initiative to not just lift the team’s mood but also show the intent to take on the feisty Kangaroos. A morale-boosting win of this stature will not only give Australians the belief to take revenge of the last series’ humiliation but will also cause more insecurity in the Indian team’s dressing room as there was not one particular batsman to be blamed but it was a collective failure, yet again. Save the 2018 series in Australia, the Indian team has had way too many batting collapses including six on the trot, starting with New Zealand early this year, when it suffered a 0-2 whitewash. The score of 36 is not something that is expected from the Indian batting line-up but when Indian skipper during the post-match conference urged people not to “make a mountain out of a molehill”, it certainly raised a lot of eyebrows. The last time India toured Oz and won the first series Down Under in 71 years, the Indian skipper himself rated it as “bigger than a World Cup win for us”. So now that the team has done something which no other team of the past did, why this attitude?



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

What’s common among the Great Indian Hornbill, Indian Laburnum Cassia that blooms on the Golden Shower Tree, Coconut Tree, Elephant and Pearlspear? These are all designated as the State bird, State flower, State tree, State animal and State fish, respectively, of Kerala. Another important common factor is that all of them are facing the threat of extinction due to widespread environmental destruction and massive deforestation.

Also, there has been no major industrialisation drive in the State as entrepreneurs think many a time before investing in the State. Kerala may be the only State in the country where industrialists and entrepreneurs commit suicide because of the indifferent attitude of the babus and their political masters. The State which claimed that it has eradicated the pandemic on the 100th day of the reporting of the first incident is all set to face the third wave, with Health Minister KK Shailaja asking the people to get ready for self-lockdown. This is the situation in the State a day after the results of the local body elections were announced.

One is reminded of a cartoon drawn by the legendary RK Laxman in the early 1980s when K Karunakaran was the Chief Minister. In a wordy duel between two Cabinet Ministers, one is seen shouting at the other: “I am more honest than you are. There are eight corruption charges against you and only six against me!”

The situation is no different in 2020 as the Ministers in the CPI(M)-led Government face charges of corruption, impropriety and scams. Legislative Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan had to convene a Press meet and threaten the Opposition that he would initiate legal action against all who linked his name to Swapna Suresh, the gold smuggling kingpin.

Tourism Minister Kadakampally Surendran, who visited the UAE Consulate General’s office in Thiruvananthapuram, claims that he had called on the Consul General to discuss the traffic congestion problem in front of the consulate! Much has already been written about KT Jaleel, the Higher Education Minister and a former leader of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).

As I write this article, news channels flash the news that CM Raveendran, the additional private



secretary to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, is being interrogated by the Enforcement Directorate officials about the disproportionate assets amassed by him and his wife during the past 20 years.

M Sivasankar, former principal secretary to the Chief Minister, has been sent to jail and he is yet to secure bail. Sivasankar, described as the ‘conscience keeper of the Chief Minister’, was arrested by the Customs and ED for his alleged links with Swapna Suresh, Sarit and Sandeep Nair, the kingpins of the gold smuggling racket through diplomatic channels. If the pattern of investigation by the Central agencies continues like this, Pinarayi too is likely to be grilled.

The Chief Minister has alleged that the Centre is misusing agencies like the ED and DRI to tarnish his Government’s “good image” by spreading falsehoods. Besides gold smuggling, the agencies are investigating *hawala* and reverse *hawala* transactions, the LIFE Mission kickbacks (one of the flagship programmes of the CPI(M)-led LDF Government) and K-Fone (Kerala Fibre Optic Network) project. Sadly, all the development schemes declared by the Government are enmeshed in scams and graft.

Kodieryil Balakrishnan had to step down as the party’s secretary in-charge of Kerala following the arrest of his younger son Binish Kodieryil by the ED and NCB on the charges of drug trafficking, *hawala* transactions and money laundering.

It is in this background that the local body polls were held in three phases. The CPI(M) was literally fighting with its back to

the wall because at no point in its history, the party has faced so many corruption charges. The Chief Minister himself asked New Delhi to depute Central agencies to probe the allegations. He would not have expected the intensity of the probe and now everything associated with the CPI(M) is being seen as illegal by the State’s people. Sadly, the Uralunkal Labour Credit Cooperative Society (ULCCS) — an NGO launched in 1925 with the blessings of Malabar’s great social reformer Vagbhathananda to uplift the lives of the suppressed and oppressed classes — was hijacked by the CPI(M) and degenerated as a money laundering centre for the party. The ED is grilling Raveendran, popularly known as Kerala’s super Chief Minister, for his alleged role in the illegal dealings of ULCCS.

A close scrutiny of the local body election results throws up some interesting facts. Though the CPI(M)-led LDF won five of the six municipal corporations, it would be able to wrest control in two only through horse trading or with the support of the Congress. The Grand Old Party, which had more than 30 seats in the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation, has been decimated and had to be content with just 10 seats.

In most of the seats won by the CPI(M), the BJP-led NDA is the runner-up. The BJP has failed to win any district *panchayat* as the LDF walked away with 10, leaving four for the UDF. The Congress and its allies won 45 of the 86 municipal councils while the LDF ended up with 35. The NDA retained the Palakkadu

Municipal Council while it wrested the Pandharam municipality from the CPI(M). Of the 941 village *panchayats*, the LDF won 514, the UDF 375 and the NDA 23. Twenty 20, a political entity promoted by entrepreneur Sabu M Jacob in 2015, not only retained its home turf of Kizhakkambalam but won three more village *panchayats*, shocking the established political parties.

But the talking point is the debacle suffered by the Congress-led UDF. The front which literally swept the Lok Sabha election in May 2019 by winning 19 of the 20 seats from the State has lost heavily in this election. “It is a reflection of the Congress high command’s weakness. It is true that Congress is at the crossroads. The UDF won the 2019 election because of the consolidation of the minority vote. You may want to remember the Assembly poll results in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in November 2018, which were all won by the Congress. The minorities in Kerala were under the impression that this would be replicated in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections but that turned out to be incorrect. So the minorities, especially the Christians, have started moving away from the Congress,” said P Rajan, a renowned political commentator and author. He said the Church, especially the bishops, doubt the soft approach of the Congress towards Islamic terrorism and Love Jihad.

Sreejith Panicker, a cyber security specialist who is a keen follower of the voting pattern in Kerala, says that the UDF’s base has been eroded over the

past year. “In most places, the BJP has finished the runner-up. This is a change which signals the beginning of a political process that would result in the formation of a Third Alternative in Kerala. What has happened is that traditional UDF votes have gone to the NDA. The Congress should have a rethink on its approach towards Islamic extremist parties like the Welfare Party of India and SDPI. The secularism propagated by the Congress and the UDF should be thoroughly discussed as the Christian minorities in the State have started doubting their intentions. It’s for the national leadership of the Congress to initiate this discussion,” said Panicker. He also said that the Kerala Congress is facing a leadership crisis. “There is not a face other than Oommen Chandy’s who is acceptable to all sections but Chandy is plagued by ill health,” he added.

Though the BJP has reached a position from where it could play a crucial role in the State’s politics but Kerala’s wait for a Third alternative would not end soon. “It may materialise after the 2021 Assembly elections, provided the BJP plays its cards smartly,” said Rajan. Till then, Keralites may have to wait like the Great Indian Hornbill for the occasional rain with which it quenches its thirst.

PS: The BJP too is not free from factionalism and groupism. The truth is that there are no capable leaders in the party to guide it at this crucial hour. Moreover, the party has its own share of Saritha Nairs and Swapna Sureshs.

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

SOUNDBITE

The police notices to 600 party leaders were in total violation of the Constitution which allows for freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.

TDP national president
—N Chandrababu Naidu



The UK and the EU will continue the post-Brexit trade talks, but there remains a gap that needs to be bridged. We always want to keep talking.

British Prime Minister
—Boris Johnson



I have quit eating sweets but I had to pose with a *rasgulla* and *gulabjamun*, and was asked to express how tasty it feels to eat them! There can’t be a bigger torture than this.

Bollywood actor & icon
—Amitabh Bachchan



I still think the pink ball is at a very nascent stage of where Test cricket should head forward. But I am sure it is very exciting for a lot of people watching the game.

India off-spinner
—R Ashwin



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A farmer is an optimist

Sir — Most of the people in our country are poor and earn their living from farming; and by reforming agriculture, we can overcome poverty. Will Rogers, an American actor and humourist, once said: “The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn’t be a farmer.” Let’s not snatch that optimism from him.

The ongoing farmer crisis is in no way either new or unique: 11.2 per cent of all suicides in India are by farmers. Anti-farmer laws, high debt burdens, poor Government policies, corruption in subsidies, crop failure and mental health, all take a toll on them.

The Government introduced the farm laws to improve the lot of farmers and has assured them that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) will stay. This reform was overdue as it could have been implemented in 1991 when the new economic reforms were introduced. As most people in rural India earn their livelihood from farming, any improvement in the conditions of this sector will directly help alleviate the poor condition of the farmers.

Yash Pal Ralhan
Jalandhar

BJP pulls out all the stops for ‘Mission Bengal’

This refers to the editorial ‘*Blow to Mamata*’ (December 19). Verily speaking, the political track started becoming difficult for the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Bengal since the very induction into politics of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s nephew Abhishek Banerjee, who is supposed to be her political successor as well, and whom the party cadres are not happy with.

As regards the BJP’s tremendous show in the State during the last parliamentary election when the party won 18 seats to the TMC’s chagrin, the BJP seems to have a pan-India plan in mind. During Home Minister Amit Shah’s two-day visit to Bengal, the party engineered desertions by prominent State leaders — including TMC stalwarts Suwendu Adhikari, Shilbadra Dutta and minority cell leader Kabirul Islam — from the ruling party’s ranks.

All these machinations are coming handy in the consummation of the BJP’s political dream in Bengal. Now, Shah’s claim to winning 200 of the 292 seats in the upcoming Assembly polls in the State has also ruffled a few feathers in political corridors. It will come as another blow to Mamata if the BJP’s chief strategist succeeds in parading the TMC’s defectors in front of the media.



However, the BJP faces a pestering question as to who it should present as the chief ministerial face in the Assembly elections due in April-May next year even as former cricketer Sourav Ganguly’s name is doing the rounds in this regard. However, even he is no match for Didi’s political stature and the sway she holds over the State’s people. Given that politics is a game replete with bizarre twists and turns till the last minute, any prediction may fall flat on its face. Hence, let’s wait and watch which way the political cookie crumbles in Bengal this time around.

Azhar A Khan
Rampur

Brace for the cold wave

Sir — Across north India, the chilly weather intensifies in December-January. The coldest day in Delhi in a century was recorded last winter. This year, November is said to be one of the coldest Novembers in the Capital’s history.

Amid such harsh weather

conditions, the plight of the impoverished homeless and the destitutes is unimaginable. Even those with roofs over their head suffer since Indian houses, unlike those in the western countries, are not constructed to endure severe cold conditions.

Arranging food, shelter and warm clothes for the lakhs of homeless is a demanding, but

inevitable, task for any Government. Philanthropists are already on their toes; food and blankets will be the need of the hour for the homeless and the stray animals exposed to the chill. Temporary shelters require to be put up to protect the shelterless against the dangerous cold.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Punish Hathras culprits

Sir — It’s heartening to know that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a charge sheet against four accused in the alleged gang rape-murder in Hathras in September. Under pressure following a nationwide outcry, the UP Government had recommended a CBI probe into the case on October 2.

The victim’s dying declaration on September 22, in which she had claimed that she was gang-raped by four youth of the village, was the basis of the CBI charge sheet. This after the State police had said that “no rape or gang rape took place”. All the youth named were arrested by the local police by September 26. The case hit the headlines after the victim’s family alleged that her body was hastily cremated by the local administration after midnight without their consent.

Now the courts must award death to the four accused and they must hang as early as possible to provide a semblance of justice to the victim and her family.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Hope amid despair

No revival or turnaround can take place unless some people believe that it can happen. The WEF's report is a nudge in the right direction



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Finally the commentaries in the printed and the audio-visual media have begun to change from what it is today, to what a year it has been and how things will be in the year to come. Whereas nothing on the ground has substantially, changed (and indeed many territories of the world are still passing through very demanding times even for the COVID-era,) there is a growing realisation that hope is a no choice situation. Of the many basic truths of life, the biggest is that one gets tired even of despair. Fantasy is born in many seedbeds and one of them is excessive despair.

The global havoc caused by COVID-19 will someday be assessed. As of now, some are still trying to swim underwater and there are others trying to build a fortune by fishing in troubled waters. They are doing remarkably well as they understand that people pay and pay disproportionately high (if they can afford to) when the going gets tough. This cannot be an occasion for pontificating. One can only say: To each his own! Meanwhile, strained relationships in families, misconstruction and misunderstanding of otherwise simple activities are taking a toll. This is bound to happen if there is refraction of meaning through an overstrained mental capacity. Be that as it may, one of the brighter signs on the horizon is the strong mind of some people who still make sense through their sheer capacity of mindfulness. The first defining characteristic of mindfulness is recognition that one cannot project one's insecurities on others. No matter how wonderful or strong the foundations of the relationship, no one can carry anybody else's burden endlessly. Especially of those people who do not know how to control themselves.

This has nothing to do with the uniqueness of the COVID-era. It is a common human feeling which behavioural scientists have not offered many solutions to, perhaps because the indicators are weak and defences which people put up are formidable. Along with that comes the propensity to hold on to one's frameworks of reference and plans. The reality perception of many can be weak. An amalgamation of such propensities creates a devastating cocktail.

Perhaps, the problem could be handled by an approach which travels from outside-in rather than inside-out. Plus, we need to grant that humans are complex beings and there is real difficulty in even understanding oneself, let alone others. Any attempt at "understanding" should be the end of a process rather than the beginning. The thought of travelling the route of understanding from outside-in creates a hierarchy of efforts which helps to make it progressively more effective and capable of handling increasingly more complex situations. Applying that frame of reference to the present situation of human reaction to the pandemic (and often intractable complexity and anxiety) leads to some possible conclusions. One of them is to start understanding possible responses of the economy to material conditions and then gradually move to inner layers.

Mercifully, that process seems to have begun. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has come out with a special edition of its *Global Competitiveness Report: 2020*. It ostensibly talks of how countries are performing on the road to recovery. It will be read and reread over its 90 plus pages as indeed it deserves.

In the limitations of space of this column it is not possible to provide a substantive critique. In India the partner to this effort was an institution which is not so widely-known and yet seems to have collaborated with competence. Territories from Albania to Uruguay have contributed through some institution and that itself is a commendable canvas. The partner institutes helped to administer "the executive opinion survey and advance the competitiveness agenda in their respective economies." There were other institutions which pitched in with different competencies including what goes into composing the WEF's index. From collecting the data to analysis and more, was a huge organisational exercise. That itself deserves high praise. More substantially, the contents while not being revolutionary, have helped to redefine the meaning of competitiveness in a changed world context. It was pleasing to see that disruption and resilience were treated in the same section. The concept of the pandemic has made its mark on the literature on economics. More efforts in the genre will surely come. For the present it may suffice to mention that it is a great attempt of analysis of the past decade and of future trends. The pleasing thing in the WEF's report is the focus on the idea of the "road to recovery." Obviously, for any meaningful journey, it must begin somewhere. No revival or turnaround can take place unless some people believe that it can happen. The WEF's report is a nudge in the right direction. The scientific method would require some instruments of measurement. All that would involve a cushioning crucible of faith and belief in it being possible. This should be not only an interesting but a worthwhile journey.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

I CANNOT BETRAY THE FARMERS OF MY COUNTRY WHO HAVE BEEN SLEEPING ON THE STREETS WHEN THE TEMPERATURE IS 2 DEGREES CELSIUS.
—DELHI CHIEF MINISTER
ARVIND KEJRIWAL

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



IN CASE THE SITUATION IN DELHI WORSENS, ARVIND KEJRIWAL SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR IT.
—DELHI BJP'S IT CELL CHIEF
ABHISHEK DUBEY

Growing a better future

Away from the raging storm in Delhi-NCR is a small group of women farmers from Satara who are managing a farmer producer company to help alleviate the woes of others like them



MOIN QAZI

There is a tempest in India's farmlands even as their tillers wage an extraordinary crusade for alleviating age-old distresses. Away from the bustle of the raging storm in the Delhi-National Capital Region is a small semi-literate group of women farmers in a remote hinterland who are assiduously managing a farmer producer company (FPC) to help alleviate the woes of other women growers in Satara.

The Mann Deshi Farmer Producer Company (MDFPC) plans to organise 12,000 small and marginal growers (70 per cent of whom are women) to secure better prices for their agricultural produce. The MDFPC was founded by Chetna Gala Sinha, the well-known social entrepreneur who is shepherding a rural revolution in western Maharashtra. The epicenter of this movement is Mhaswad, a large village that nestles in Satara district, on the placid banks of the Manganga River, some 300 km south-east of Mumbai. A 45-year-old woman farmer Vanita Pise is the co-founder of the MDFPC. However, she does not let the fact that she is semi-literate stop her from trying to better the lot of growers like her.

On account of adversities at home, Vanita couldn't study beyond class IX. She married a farmer in Mhaswad when she was 17. Within a week she was required to take charge of the family poultry. She had never entered a poultry shed before. With persistence and tenacity, she was able to grasp the entire operations. When the poultry business had to be wound up after an outbreak of bird flu, she became a daily wage labourer. The failed business left the family with a debt of ₹55,000. It was at this time that Vanita came to know of Mann Deshi Bank and its work with rural women. She approached them and secured a loan for a buffalo. Luckily for Vanita, within a week the buffalo delivered a calf. The enterprising woman started selling the milk. With her earnings, she repaid the loan in six months. Vanita took another loan and bought a machine for manufacturing paper cups. Six months later 10 women of her village, impressed by Vanita's success, approached her to help them set up similar units.

Sadly, their ventures could not succeed and she had to face a backlash from them. Undeterred by this setback, Vanita went back to the Mann Deshi, and took a course in financial management from their business school. Her experience in business, farming and grassroots community mobilisation came in handy when the group decided to set up the MDFPC. It was clear to Vanita that the future of small farmers lay in collectivising themselves. In this model, scattered small farms are systematically aggregated and provided centralised production, post-harvest and marketing services. This helps reduce the transaction costs of the farms for accessing the value chains and makes it easier for small farmers to access inputs, technology and the market.

The task was not easy. Vanita and her team faced several challenges, most of them related to the contentious issue of categorisation of women as farmers. In the registration process, they were told by the officials concerned that since women did not own farms they could not be classified as farmers. Similar hiccups continued but now that they have been able to make this venture a success. Vanita now wants to spread the word so that other women farmers like her can replicate her success. "Women have come a long way in several fields. They are also the mainstay of farming, doing much of the primary

VANITA AND HER TEAM FACED SEVERAL CHALLENGES, MOST OF THEM RELATED TO THE CONTENTIOUS ISSUE OF CATEGORISATION OF WOMEN AS FARMERS. IN THE REGISTRATION PROCESS, THEY WERE TOLD BY THE OFFICIALS CONCERNED THAT SINCE WOMEN DID NOT OWN FARMS, THEY COULD NOT BE CLASSIFIED AS FARMERS. SIMILAR HICCUPS CONTINUED BUT NOW THAT THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THIS VENTURE A SUCCESS, VANITA WANTS TO SPREAD THE WORD SO THAT OTHER WOMEN FARMERS LIKE HER CAN REPLICATE HER SUCCESS



work in the fields. Ironically they cannot claim themselves to be farmers because they don't own the land they till. It is in the name of their husbands. This makes a huge difference to their economic and social status and disqualifies them from several official development benefits," avers Vanita.

The FPC was finally registered when the husbands certified that their wives were coparceners in their land parcels. Since then the MDFPC has been trying to make women farmers coparceners in their husband's property and registering these women as members in the FPC. Vanita's work as the team leader is very challenging. She has to oversee all major operations at the company. She has to supervise aggregation of the farm produce and the entire intermediate operations leading to despatch of consignments to the market. This includes sorting and grading and organising the logistics in the supply chain. Vanita explains her business model: "Our model of procurement is different and is done through weekly farm bazaars. Women farmers are contacted and we send vehicles to their homes to procure the agricultural produce. In addition to vegetables and grains we also deal in processing and manufacturing products including hard toffee, syrups, flaxseed chutneys, amla candy, pickles among other products."

Though the FPC was formed two years ago, it has been operating informally for the last couple of years. The company deals in both perishables and non-perishables. About four truckloads of vegetables are sent to Mumbai daily and these are supplied to 5-star hotels and local retail outlets. The MDFPC's formal journey began in September 2018 with onions, a highly uncertain and volatile crop. The reason for severe and frequent price

shocks for onions is the production fluctuations and changes in the nature of demand. The FPC helped the farmers grow high quality onions so that they could get a better price. "We struggled a great deal but succeeded in our efforts albeit partially. Getting a market was difficult because Mhaswad is geographically not well-connected and we face several logistical impediments," admits Vanita.

"Bringing women farmers on a common platform, designing appropriate crop patterns, aggregating and marketing the produce requires rigorous planning and execution. Some enterprising women have been able to sell their produce in Mumbai markets and got good value for it, too. But it is important to get more women farmers enrolled in the collective and make them align their crop pattern with the market," says Vanita.

Meanwhile, the FPC inked an agreement with a leading company that wanted to export okra. The members were excited with the opportunity and 16 women joined the project. Unfortunately, things didn't work as per the plans. The agreement, which was worded in technical English, stipulated that agronomists would visit the farmers and guide them on quality control, which actually didn't happen. The FPC had to compensate the counter party because they couldn't fulfil the contractual commitments. However, the women learnt an important lesson: When you want to survive and prosper despite the competition, you have to maintain quality and honour every term of the contract. In addition, timely delivery is important.

This learning came handy in a recent contract. The FPC received an order for 11,000 kg of pulses. The grain was to be supplied in 22,000 packets of 500 grams each. The FPC approached the women

farmers in Latur, who grabbed the opportunity. In just eight days, the women coordinated the entire chain consisting of harvesting, aggregating, packaging and other logistics. At the last moment, the team found a bug in one of the cartons. They decided to recheck the entire consignment. It took the women an entire day but it made them understand the importance of quality and the credibility of the seller that hinges on the consignment.

"During this project, I found that many women farmers store pulses at home and not in warehouses because of the logistical and transport issues. These women would prefer warehouses if they could be assured of a loan against the pledge of warehouse receipts," adds Vanita.

She believes that the best gift for farmers would be to initiate practical solutions for their basic problems. The Government has introduced three new farm laws. And there has been a mixed reaction to them. Vanita feels this can work only if proper infrastructure is created through warehouses, cold storages and other support systems. Farmers are capable of producing good quality crops if they get the required extension services, such as soil-testing, advisory in agro-economics and so on. Instead of grandiose reforms, the farmers need solutions to their fundamental problems. This cannot be done by NGOs alone. The Government will have to actively invest in it. It is also important to build the capacity of FPCs. In the Budget last year the Finance Minister had announced a plan to form 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) over a period of five years. This will require extensive Government support.

(The writer is a well-known development professional of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

The real idea behind moral policing

Realising their inability to address and resolve real problems, politicians opt to present themselves as guardians of other things such as morality



NADEEM PARACHA

A single theme runs across the movies of the British documentary film-maker, Adam Curtis. He has scripted and directed over a dozen documentaries for the BBC. They are mostly sardonic laments on how, ever since the late 1970s, governments have allowed their roles to recede in addressing various issues.

Curtis often tries to demonstrate that, in the wake of increasing economic, social and political complexities, governments that were once at the forefront of providing leadership and solutions, began to shrink from this responsibility. This happened particularly once the paradigm that they had established in this context

began to shift, especially after the 1973 international oil crisis.

According to Curtis, governments began to outsource their responsibilities to large private operators such as banks and big businesses, which had furnished loans and services to them when they had been badly impacted by a series of economic downturns triggered by the crisis.

The role of the State continued to shrink. To Curtis, politicians and civil servants who were once expected to lead and plan their countries' progress and well-being, simply became nothing more than props. However, from the mid-2000s, all eyes and expectations fell upon the Government again when major financial scandals and economic recessions exposed the dangers of overtly banking on the private sector to provide services which were once the domain and purpose of State institutions.

In the July 24, 2012 issue of *The Guardian*, the British philosopher Julian Baggini writes that governments struggled to come to terms with the economic and social fall-

out of the new recessions. What's more, by then, the public had also lost their trust in the private sector. According to Baggini, unable or feeling helpless to address and resolve the problems, politicians began to look to present themselves as guardians of other things. If they were unable to prevent economic declines, they posed that they were now there to halt moral declines.

Baggini writes that the most fundamental problem with morality is that society still lacks a sense of where it comes from and who is qualified to make claims for it. There is great irony in politicians, a naturally amoral lot, speaking of morality. Baggini is right to observe that most people are highly sceptical of politicians in this regard. And it is also a fact that those whose domain it was to define and judge morality — i.e. priests, clerics, pandits and so on — lost their credibility after the rapid emergence of modernity.

Therefore, according to Baggini, "the danger is that we will either fall back on the old authorities or allow new moral leaders to emerge, who may well base their pronouncements

on little more than populist sentiment." This is exactly what has been happening in various countries since Baggini wrote his essay eight years ago. Unable to control economic declines, various heads of governments in Europe, South and North America and in South and East Asia, have increased their talk about morality, in an attempt to distract the attention of the polity from larger and less-abstract issues.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised economic miracles but, after being in power for almost six years, there has been more talk of temples, mosques, cows and the Hindutva identity than about the country's faltering economy. US President Donald Trump, before his defeat in this year's presidential election, continued to surround himself with animated evangelists, while completely failing to control the spread of COVID-19 and the devastating impact it has had on the country's economy.

Governments in Brazil, the Philippines, Turkey, Pakistan, Hungary and Poland are adopting similar tactics. For example, in the

face of the rising criticism on his regime's chaotic style of governance and its mishandling of the economy, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan constantly reminds everyone how he overcame the dangers of Westernisation and colonialism to become a man of impeccable morals. He says this after milking everything there was to be about such 'immoral' Westernisation when he was a popular lifestyle liberal, before he turned 40 and "rediscovered his faith." As Pakistan's economy continues to nosedive and Opposition parties prepare to oust him after accusing him of incompetence, Khan can often be seen lecturing young people on what Islam is, what the poet-philosopher Iqbal meant, and how to understand Sufism through Turkish soap operas! To most sociologists, the idea of morality largely derives from and attracts the urban middle-classes. It is this class that is most receptive to Khan's moral posturing. In a 1993 essay for the *Wilson Quarterly*, the American political scientist and sociologist Allan Wolfe writes that the "old middle class" that experienced some

form of economic prosperity in the 1960s because of the developmental economics that was all the rage at the time, was less concerned with morality as an issue. After the 1973 oil crisis, when global economies began to cave in, a new middle class emerged. But this one had to struggle more than the previous one.

According to Wolfe, there are, therefore, two competing ideas of middle-class morality. Coming of age in uncertain times, the middle class that appeared from the turmoil of the 1970s tries to save moral capital rather than economic capital. Wolfe writes that it is a lot more conservative than the older middle class and wants morality to take centre stage in political and social discourses. But he also writes that this may include those who would rather exhibit morality in public while largely ignoring it in private, creating cognitive dissonance.

A report published in the April 2, 1977 issue of the now-defunct Pakistani evening *Leader*, quotes a young shopkeeper in Karachi who was taking part in the movement against the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

regime. He tells the reporter that "Bhutto (with his socialist policies) had usurped the dignity of the country's middle classes."

He also adds that the regime was doing this by spreading immorality and obscenity, even though he was interviewed while coming out from a cinema after enjoying a Hollywood film. Post-1970s generations of the urban middle classes in Pakistan, too, are examples of cognitive dissonance in this context.

But this is how they address it. Khan tries to rationalise this dissonance by suggesting that it is actually a mandate of the country's majority faith that morality be highlighted in public and episodes of immorality be kept private and not spoken about.

This idea of middle-class morality thus absolves him of hypocrisy, comforting him to go on lecturing without having to bother about the irony attached to it and, without addressing more tangible issues, such as a depressed economy and political polarisation.

(Courtesy: Dawn)

Additional borrowing permission granted

₹16,728 CR FOR 5 STATES

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Centre has granted permission for additional mobilise additional financial resources to the tune of ₹16,728 crore through open market borrowings to five States.

The permission has been granted as the state have so far completed the stipulated reforms in the ease of doing business. These states are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, said a Finance Ministry statement.

In view of the resource requirement to meet the chal-

lenges posed by the pandemic, the government had on May 17, 2020 enhanced the borrowing limit of the states by 2 per cent of their GSDP. Half of this special dispensation was linked to undertaking citizen centric reforms by the states.

The four citizen centric areas for reforms identified were implementation of 'One Nation One Ration Card' system, ease of doing business reform, urban local body or utility reforms and power sector reforms.

So far 10 states have implemented the One Nation One Ration Card system, five States have done 'ease of doing business' reforms, and two states have done local body reforms.

Besides additional borrowing permissions, the states

completing three out of the four reforms are entitled to get additional financial assistance under the "Scheme for Financial Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure".

Under the scheme, an amount of Rs 2,000 crore is earmarked for this purpose.

To facilitate more states to undertake the reforms and avail additional borrowings, the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance had recently extended the deadline for the states to complete citizen centric reforms in various sectors. Now, if the recommendation from the nodal ministry concerned regarding implementation of the reform is received by February 15, 2020, the state will be eligible for reform linked benefits, said the statement.

Our investment plans in India on track: Saudi Arabia

Indian economy has strength to bounce back

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, on Sunday said its investment plans in India are on track, noting that the Indian economy has the strength to recover from the adverse impact of the coronavirus crisis.

In February last year, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced that Saudi Arabia would invest over USD 100 billion in India in petrochemicals, refining, infrastructure, mining and manufacturing, agriculture and several other sectors.

"Our plans to invest in India are on track and we are in discussion to prioritise investment opportunities in several sectors in both coun-

tries," Saudi Ambassador Dr Saud bin Mohammed Al Sati told PTI in an interview.

Stating that Saudi Arabia values India as a strategic partner and a close friend, Al Sati identified ongoing cooperation in areas of training, knowledge sharing and combating terrorism as key elements of the partnership in defence and security sphere.

Al Sati complimented India's measures to revive its economy in view of the impact of the pandemic and said the economic recovery of both countries will help elevate other economies in the region as well.

"The economic relief package provided by India for its most prominent sectors is commendable. As the fifth-largest global economy and the largest economy in South Asia, the Indian economy has the impetus to recover from the impact of the ongoing pandemic," he said.

Without commenting on Army Chief Gen MM Naravane's visit to Saudi Arabia

last week, the Ambassador said the setting up of the Strategic Partnership Council by the two countries opened new avenues of cooperation in several sectors including defence and security and counter-terrorism."The Strategic (Partnership) Council set up by the two countries in 2019 has opened new avenues on partnership in strategic areas like defence, security counter-terrorism, energy security and renewable energy," he said.

Gen Naravane on Sunday held extensive talks with Commander of Royal Saudi land forces Gen Fahd Bin Abdullah Mohammed Al-Mutir as he began a two-day rare visit to the Gulf country to lay the ground for deeper military ties.

In the first-ever visit by a head of the Indian Army, Gen Naravane travelled to Saudi capital city Riyadh last week where he held talks with top military brass.

The two sides set up the Strategic Partnership Council

during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Riyadh in October last year. The council is mandated to monitor the progress of strategic relationships in a whole range of key areas.

"The current decade has witnessed a remarkable stride in the relations between Saudi Arabia and India. What was once viewed as ties between two friendly countries is now a strong strategic partnership between two formidable economies," Al Sati said.

"From energy cooperation, security and defense, burgeoning trade relations to health cooperation, the nature of this relationship has diversified immensely allowing for expanded growth. The leadership on both sides have heralded this transformation for Saudi - India ties," he said. On trade partnership, the envoy referred to the decision by Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) to invest approximately USD 1.3 billion in Reliance Retail and USD 1.5

billion in Reliance's Jio platforms."Saudi Aramco is committed to investing in India's energy sector. Aramco's decision to buy a stake in Reliance Industries Oil to Chemical business and Aramco's commitment to invest in the West Coast refinery petrochemical project signifies the interest Saudi Arabia places in the development of India's energy sector," he said.

Apart from this, Al Sati said Saudi Arabia is continuing to explore new investment opportunities in India. The envoy also highlighted Saudi Arabia's recent Labor Reform Initiative (LRI), saying they will further help Saudi Arabia and India to cement their economic relationship.

"It will enhance the contractual relationship between workers and employers, and will support the Kingdom's vision of establishing an attractive job market, empowering and developing labour competencies and developing the work environment," he said.

Corporate Affairs Min defers implementation of CARO order

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has deferred implementation of the strict disclosure requirements for auditor reports of companies by one year, a move that comes amid the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, the Companies (Auditor's Report) Order, 2020 would come into effect from financial years commencing on or after April 1, 2021, according to a notification issued by the corporate affairs ministry.

The ministry is implementing the companies law. Sanjeev Singhal, Partner at S R Batliboi and Co LLP, said the coronavirus pandemic has caused significant disruptions forcing the companies to focus on ensuring business continuity.

"Deferral of CARO 2020 by one year will give the much-needed relief to companies and they will be able to use the additional time to prioritise allocation of resources and better prepare for the enhanced

requirements.

It will be equally helpful for the auditors as well," Singhal said.

Earlier, CARO 2020 was to come into force from financial year starting on or after April 1, 2020.

The CARO requires companies to comply with stricter disclosure requirements on various issues, including whistle blower complaints and default in repayment of borrowings.

"CARO 2020 would necessitate enhanced due diligence and disclosures on the part of auditors of eligible companies, and has been designed to bring in greater transparency in the financial state of affairs of such companies," the ministry had said in February this year.

Under this stricter framework, auditors are required to provide detailed disclosures about loan defaults, amount of cash losses and immovable properties as well as other aspects about companies in their annual reports.

Reliance, BP to get Govt capped price of USD 4.06 for new gas from KG-D6

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Industries and its partner BP will get only USD 4.06 a unit for the new gas they have started to produce from the eastern offshore KG-D6 field even though they have discovered a higher rate in an open market auction, sources said.

Reliance-BP in November 2019 auctioned initial gas from the R-Series field at a biddable percentage of Brent crude oil price.

If Brent crude oil stays in the current range of USD 50 to 51 a barrel, the price comes to USD 4.2 to 4.4 per million British thermal unit, two sources at the buyers of R-Series gas said.

Even though operators have pricing freedom, they can't sell gas at a rate higher than the cap the government notifies every six months. The cap for six months to March 31, 2021, is USD 4.06 per mmBtu and so Reliance-BP would get only that amount for the remainder of the current fiscal, they said.

Essar Steel, Adani Group and state-owned GAIL in November 2019 bought the

majority of the initial 5 million standard cubic meters per day of gas planned to be produced from R-Series in the KG-D6 block by bidding between 8.5 and 8.6 per cent of dated Brent price.

Emails sent to Reliance and BP for comments remained unanswered.

The rate discovered in the November 2019 auction at the lower end of the Brent price band is the same as the one that Reliance got in the first five years of production from Dhirubhai-1 and 3 and MA fields in the KG-D6 block. These fields ceased to produce a few months back.

Reliance got USD 4.205 per mmBtu for gas from D1 and D3 and MA fields during April 2019 and March 2014. It would have got double of that rate if a new formula proposed by the Rangarajan committee was approved but the new BJP government scrapped it and brought a new formula on pricing gas at rates prevalent in export surplus nations such as the US and Russia.

The rates came to USD 5.05 in 2014 and are currently at USD 1.79 per mmBtu.

Sources said the govern-

ment in 2016 allowed a higher price for any new gas to be produced from a difficult project such as the deep sea field. R-Cluster field fell in that definition and gas from it was free to be sold but subject to the price cap.

The price cap for October 2020 to March 2021 period is USD 4.06 per mmBtu, down from USD 5.61 in the previous six months.

Reliance and BP had on November 18 stated that they have the commencement of natural gas production from Asia's deepest gas project, R-Cluster or R-Series. The two firms are investing USD 5 billion in bringing to production three deepwater gas projects in block KG D6 - R-Cluster, Satellites Cluster, and MJ - which together are expected to meet about 15 per cent of India's gas demand by 2023. R-Cluster will have a peak output of 12.9 mmscmd while satellites, which are supposed to begin output from the third quarter of 2021 calendar year, would produce a maximum of 7 mmscmd. MJ field will start production in the third quarter of 2022 and will have a peak output of 12 mmscmd.

NE India can be an ideal tourist destination post-Covid: Experts

FIANS ■ GUWAHATI

Due to its close proximity with five countries, unique culture and traditions besides picturesque beauty of its mountains and lush green landscapes, northeast India could be an ideal tourist destination post-Covid, experts and administrators said on the final day of the North East Festival (NEF) here on Sunday.

The two-day 8th edition of NEF concluded after setting the NE growth agenda as its priority with businessmen, administrators and experts expressing their strong confidence on the travel and tourism industry's revival in post Covid situation, by showcasing potentials of the region.

Assam Tourism Secretary Razvee Hussain said that Covid-19 can be a blessing in disguise.

"All northeastern states can be a great tourism destination. Focus on tea tourism where old bungalows can get converted to boutique hotels. Experiencing the life of a tea planter here can be a tourist attraction. Chopper

service availability from Guwahati to Kaziranga, Majuli etc will also help the tourism industry here," he said.

Assam Tourism Department Director Deba Kumar Mishra said that focus on local tourism, more from domestic tourists, creatively planned projects for establishments of good tourism would attract and appeal more people.

Mishra said: "Northeast region shares borders of different countries and it is an incredible boon.

Assam has 'Chicken-Neck' with West Bengal and five international frontiers along the eight northeastern states are best for tourism.

Stress on eco-cultural tourism, flourishing more local commodities, local lifestyle and food could boost the tourism industry."One more major focus is in 'Medical Tourism'. Need to welcome high level and leading tours from Mumbai, Telangana, Delhi and other big states. We are blessed with resources, we have to think with regional perspective," the Director added.

Consumer confidence improves in Dec: Report

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

As economic activities gather pace and hopes of vaccines to counter the coronavirus pandemic rise, confidence among Indian consumers has also improved.

The monthly Refinitiv-Ipsos Primary Consumer Sentiment Index (PCSI) for India, has inched up by 2.1 percentage points in December 2020, said an Ipsos statement.

The monthly PCSI, which is driven by the aggregation of the four weighted sub-indices, has shown improvement across the four indices, in December.

The PCSI Employment Confidence Sub-Index is up by 0.6 percentage points, the Economic Expectations Sub Index, is up by 1.1 percentage points. The Current Personal Financial Conditions Sub-Index and the Investment Climate Sub-Index have increased by 4.2 percentage points and 3.3 percentage points respectively."The consumer sentiment has further improved in December, which shows there is confidence in jobs, ability to spend and save and there is confidence in the economy," said Amit Adarkar, CEO, Ipsos India.

Amazon India adds 1.5 lakh sellers in 2020

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Amazon India on Sunday said 1.5 lakh new sellers joined its platform this year, and over 70,000 Indian exporters in its global selling programme have crossed USD 2 billion in cumulative exports.

Amazon India, in its SMB Impact Report 2020, noted that it works with more than 10 lakh small and mid-size business (SMBs) including sellers, delivery and logistics partners, neighbourhood stores, enterprises, developers, content creators and authors work with the company in the country.

"This year has been unprecedented and has impacted the way we work and live. Yet, we remain inspired by the undying entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, resolve and trust in us of businesses, creators and authors to overcome challenges and grow," Amazon India Senior VP and Country Head Amit Agarwal said.

He added that technology adoption and digitisation will continue to play a crucial role in offering expanded access and opportunities to SMBs, and that the company remains committed to invest and partner in success of SMBs in India.

Earlier this year, Amazon had pledged to invest USD 1 billion to digitise 10 million SMBs, enable e-commerce exports worth USD 10 billion and create 1 million incremental jobs by 2025.

The SMB Impact Report 2020 said 1.5 lakh new sellers joined Amazon.In in 2020 with over 50,000 registering in Hindi and Tamil.

"(A total of) 4,152 Indian sellers surpassed Rs 1 crore in sales in 2020 and the number of crorepati sellers grew 29 per cent year-on-year," it added.

Amazon has over seven lakh sellers on its platform.

Amazon.In has unveiled the top 10 states and union territories with most number of sellers. With more than 1,10,000 sellers, Delhi has the largest number of Amazon.In sellers in the country, followed by Maharashtra (87,000) and Gujarat (79,000).

South Central Rly bags 3 National Energy Conservation awards

FIANS ■ ARRAYHYDERABAD

South Central Railway has won three national energy conservation awards announced by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Power, Government of India.

These awards were declared for the year 2020 as part of the National Energy Conservation week being celebrated from December 14 to December 21 throughout the year.

The awards are announced every year to recognize the efforts of various industrial units/establishments/organizations who have shown exemplary performance in conservation of energy and effective utilization of available energy.

Diesel Loco Shed, Vijayawada got the first prize in

the industry/railway workshops category.

Lekha Bhavan (SCR Accounts Office building) got the second prize in the building/government offices category. South Central Railway (SCR) zone also got the Certificate of Merit in transport/zonal railways category.

SCR being at the forefront in energy conservation has been winning these awards from the union ministry of power for the last nine years consistently.

The zone has been able to bag these awards through relentless efforts in the area of energy efficiency and green initiatives by all the divisions, workshops, field units of all the departments, even with the stiff competition from various ministries, PSUs and corporate sectors, SCR said.

ONGC starts oil production in Bengal Basin

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) has commenced oil production from the Asokenagar-1 well, Bengal Basin in West Bengal's 24 Paragana districts. In a statement, the public sector energy major said that Union Petroleum & Natural Gas Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday dedicated the Bengal Basin, the eight producing basin of India to the nation. With the development, the Bengal Basin has joined the ranks of Krishna-Godavari (KG), Mumbai Offshore, Assam Shelf, Rajasthan, Cauvery, Assam-Arakan Fold Belt and Cambay. Pradhan, while dedicating the Asokenagar discovery to the nation, said that the discovery would play a role for India's energy security.

Need multiple bad banks to address NPA issue: CII to Govt

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has urged the government to consider creation of multiple bad banks to address the adverse impact of non-performing assets accumulated by public sector banks in the recent past, and which have got further accentuated during the pandemic.

In its pre-budget memorandum submitted to the government, the industry body has recommended the government to consider enabling Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) and Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) to purchase NPAs.

CII President Uday Kotak said: "In the aftermath of Covid, it is important to find a resolution mechanism through a market determined price discovery. With huge liquidity,

both globally and domestically multiple bad banks can address this issue in a transparent manner and get the credit cycle back in action."

As per the industry body, a robust market-based mechanism will encourage public sector banks to sell their bad loans, without fear of questions being raised later. With cleaner balance sheets, PSBs should be able to raise capital from the market, obviating the need for re-capitalisation by government, a bill which the government can ill-afford to foot at this point of time, it said.

The government has put in Rs 80,000 crore in bank recapitalisation in FY18, Rs 1.08 lakh crore in FY19 and Rs 70,000 crore in FY20. In September this year, the parliament approved another Rs 20,000 crore of capital infusion into PSBs.

4,000 Indian sellers surpass sales worth ₹1 cr in 2020 on Amazon

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Business of small and medium enterprises selling products on Amazon.in witnessed growth amid the pandemic and around 4,152 Indian sellers surpassed sales worth Rs 1 crore in 2020 on Amazon.in, said a report by the e-commerce major.

The report noted that the number of 'crorepati' sellers on the platform grew 29 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

It said that emerging brands on Amazon Launchpad saw their business grow by 135 per cent YoY. Further, the number of women entrepreneurs under 'Saheli' programme saw their business grow nearly '15x', and weavers and artisans part of 'Karigar' program saw their

business grow by 2.8 times. Amazon.in on Sunday published the 2020 Small and Medium Business (SMB) Impact Report. The report marks some of the achievements made by the SMBs working with Amazon and highlights the impact of digitisation on entrepreneurs and businesses across sectors.

Amit Agarwal, Senior VP and Country Head for Amazon India, said: "It's humbling to see over 10 lakh small businesses associated with Amazon in India. This year has been unprecedented and has impacted the way we work and live." Yet, we remain inspired by the undying entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, resolve and trust in us of businesses, creators, authors, etc. to overcome challenges and grow," he said.

Gold imports decline by 40 per cent in Apr-Nov to \$12.3 bn

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports declined by 40 per cent to nearly \$12.3 billion during the April-November period as demand weakened amid the pandemic, as per Commerce Ministry's data.

During the same period of the last financial year, gold imports stood at nearly \$20.6 billion.

However, imports of the yellow metal witnessed a 2.65 per cent growth last month, at over \$3 billion, compared to \$2.94 billion in November 2019.

Silver imports during



April-November this fiscal plunged 65.68 per cent to \$751.92 million, from nearly \$2.2 billion during the year ago period.

In November 2020, silver worth only \$9.30 million was imported, compared to \$90.39 million in November 2019.

This decline in gold and silver imports has led to the narrowing of India's trade deficit.

Top 5 Indian cities capture 25% of smartphone market in October

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

As India's smartphone market registered a massive year-over-year (YoY) growth of 42 per cent in October shipping 21 million units, 25 per cent of the market sat in top tier cities -- New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata -- registering more than 50 per cent YoY growth in October. According to the IDC, the next set of emerging markets, namely Jaipur, Gurgaon, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Bhopal and Coimbatore, also grew by nearly 50 per cent YoY.

However, the rest of the states (up-country markets) registered slower growth (aver-

age 25 per cent), primarily owing to looming economic concerns and consumer spending narrowing to essentials only, according to the International Data Corporation (IDC) India Monthly Smartphone Tracker. The leading 50 cities accounted for 55 per cent demand nationally. Despite delayed deliveries due to restrictions in several zones, consumers went for online purchases, especially on third party e-Tailer platforms, registering 23 per cent YoY growth with 50 per cent share," the report showed.

Bigger cities leaned heavily towards online channels, with 57 per cent online share in

the top 5 metros."But supply constraints remained, impacting offline channel sales as a result of fewer retail walk-ins." While Xiaomi led in 34 of the major 50 cities within the online channel, Vivo led in 44 of the major 50 cities within the offline channel. Half a million 5G devices were sold, with almost 80 per cent from the top 10 cities of India. "Though 5G is a driver from a technological advancement standpoint, uncertainties on spectrum availability, clear use cases and high prices might restrict its uptake to few bigger cities initially," said Sachin Mehta, Market Analyst, Client Devices, IDC India.

Digital training of blue-collar employees on the rise, says experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Even when faced with challenges of connectivity and bandwidth, companies across sectors embraced digital training or learning and development (L&D) for blue collar staff, which witnessed from nearly nothing to double fold growth, as the pandemic fast tracked adoption of technology by two decades, says experts.

"Specific to blue collared staff, the thinking was always that they will not be able to learn effectively using technology.



A Nepalese protester burns an effigy of Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli in front of the parliament building in Kathmandu on Sunday

KP Oli — remarkable journey of student Communist leader to Nepal's power centre

Kathmandu: Veteran Communist leader K P Sharma Oli kindled hopes for much-needed political stability in Nepal when he assumed power for the second time in 2018 after the Left alliance swept the historic parliamentary polls.

However, his surprise move to recommend the dissolution of Parliament after weeks of power tussle within the ruling Nepal Communist Party dashed all hopes, once again created political instability and paved the way for a possible split in the largest communist party of the country.

Oli, who joined politics as a student activist in his teenage and spent 14 years in jail for opposing the now-abolished monarchy, became Nepal's Prime Minister for a second time in 2018 as a joint candidate of the Left alliance.

The alliance between the CPN (Unified Marxist–Leninist) and Pushpa

Kamal Dahal-led CPN (Maoist Centre) won a majority in the House of Representatives and in six of the seven provincial assemblies in the 2017 elections. After their victory, the two parties formally merged in May 2018.

Known for his pro-China stance, 68-year-old Oli had earlier served as the country's prime minister from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016 during which Kathmandu's ties with New Delhi had strained.

During his first term, Oli had publicly criticised India for interfering in Nepal's internal matters and accused it of toppling his government. He, however, promised to forge a partnership with India to move forward the country towards the path of economic prosperity ahead of assuming office for the second term.

In 2015, when Nepal adopted a new Constitution that split it into seven states, the

ethnic Madhesi group, mostly of Indian-origin, protested for months, saying they were not getting enough territory in one of the provinces and were also facing discrimination. The issue had strained Indo-Nepal ties.

During his second term, Oli claimed that efforts were being made to oust him after his government redrew Nepal's political map by incorporating three strategically key Indian territories, a move that strained ties between the two countries.

India had termed as “untenable” the “artificial enlargement” of the territorial claims by Nepal after its Parliament unanimously approved the new political map of the country featuring Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura areas which India maintains belong to it.

Oli accused his rivals within the party of making efforts to topple his government. **PTI**

Pearl murder accused claims he is scapegoat: Lawyer

Islamabad: A lawyer representing the parents of slain US journalist Daniel Pearl has produced a handwritten letter in Pakistan's Supreme Court in which the key accused in the case claimed that he was a “scapegoat” arrested under “US pressure” and the real mastermind was a Karachi-based terrorist.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda.

British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of Pearl. In April, they were exonerated by the Sindh High Court and an appeal against their acquittal is being heard in the Supreme Court.

According to a Express Tribune report on Sunday, Faisal Siddiqui, counsel for Pearl's parents, has produced



the handwritten letter in the Supreme Court in which Sheikh claimed that the real culprit was a militant, Attaur Rehman, from Karachi.

Siddiqui told the apex court that the letter was submitted to the Sindh High Court on July 19, 2019.

In the letter, Sheikh claimed that he was “a scapegoat” arrested on the “US pressure” and that the real culprit was Rehman.

The letter was produced during a hearing of the appeals against the acquittal of the four accused in the Pearl murder case. A three-judge special bench led by Justice Mushir Alam heard the appeals of the Sindh government and Pearl's

parents, Ruth and Judie Pearl, against the high court ruling.

Siddiqui contended that the bench must consider it. However, the apex court will decide on it on the next date of hearing on January 4, the report said.

Sheikh further said in his letter that he had been in prison under the death sentence since 2002, charged and convicted for the abduction and murder of Pearl. However, it was on public record that neither did he abduct Pearl nor did he murder him and it had been acknowledged by the US government and by Pakistan's former president Pervez Musharraf in his book.

Sheikh said his role in this case was a relatively minor one, which did not warrant the death sentence, adding that he had already served in prison — most of which has been in illegal solitary confinement.

According to the letter, the pressure on the Pakistan government at the time (in 2002) by the US was so intense that Sheikh was used as a “scapegoat” to lessen that pres-

sure.

“Therefore, evidence was fabricated against me to convict me of the abduction and murder of Daniel Pearl,” Sheikh claimed.

“Later, when the person (Rehman alias Naeem Bukhari) who actually abducted Daniel was arrested, he was not charged with the case because to do so would have exposed the lies and perjured evidence that the Musharraf government used to convict me,” he added.

The letter claimed that despite Rs 1 million reward money on Rehman — because of his role in the case — he was not produced in court but was kept in secret illegal custody of the Rangers for five years, then in Sukkur jail for two years and charged only with a fabricated case of possession of drugs.

After Rehman's release, he is alleged to have organised some of the most devastating attacks Karachi has ever seen, including blowing up of the Rangers Headquarters in Nazimabad, where he was pre-

viously secretly held, Sheikh claimed.

The letter also claimed that if Ata was executed then the evidence, which would prove the truth about Pearl's case, would be lost forever. Therefore, Sheikh requested the court to pass a stay order that would ensure that Rehman was not executed until testified in the Pearl case.

“The court is also requested to arrange for the hearing of this appeal without further delay on a day to day basis and to summon both me and Rehman to the court for hearing so that I may be exonerated of the fabricated charges against me and given an opportunity to clarify my actual role in this matter so that my sentence may be reduced, accordingly to one which is consistent with the requirements of justice,” the letter stated.

Two days after the Sindh High Court overturned Sheikh's conviction in April, the Sindh government invoked the Maintenance of Public Order to keep the four convicts in jail. **PTI**

Car bomb kills 9, hurts 20 in Kabul

Kabul: A car bomb blast that rocked Afghanistan's capital Sunday morning killed at least nine people, according to the Afghan Interior Ministry.

Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi told reporters at the site of the attack that the attack wounded around 20 others, including a member of parliament, Khan Mohammad Wardak. Andarabi said the lawmaker was in “good condition.”

The interior minister added that the casualty toll could rise further.

The attack happened while

the lawmaker's convey was passing through an intersection in Kabul's Khoshal Khan neighborhood. The blast set afire surrounding civilian vehicles, as well as damaging nearby buildings and shops.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement condemning the attack, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the Taliban should stop violence against civilians and accept a ceasefire, to facilitate the current peace process.

PTI



Afghan security personnel oversee the removal of damaged vehicles after a bombing attack in Kabul on Sunday

Santa Claus bikers parade in Tokyo against child abuse

AFF ■ TOKYO

Harley Davidson bikers dressed in Santa Claus costumes rode through the streets of central Tokyo on Sunday for their annual parade against child abuse, saying more children were vulnerable in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The parade, followed by a toy run to donate toys to kids, is a global tradition around Christmas time. In Tokyo, the event is held by members of the “Harley Santa Club”, founded in 2008.

At the parade, bikers said this year's event meant more, because more children were vulnerable to domestic violence during the coronavirus year.

“Especially because of the coronavirus pandemic this year, I think there are many child abuse cases out of sight,” said Takashi Mine, director of the event.

“It is very likely now that

parents will take the stress out on their children after losing their jobs, so I think particularly during the pandemic we have to do the parade,” he said.

The number of child abuse cases in Japan per month rose up to 20% between January and March versus the same period last year, as more families spent time at home because of the pandemic, the daily Asahi Shimbun reported.

The number of reported child abuse cases was a record high last year, according to the health ministry.

Normally hundreds of motorcyclists take part in the parade, but because of coronavirus only about 100 rode this year.

Still, riders proudly roared their engines to bring Christmas joy to kids living in children's homes. Riders plan to visit four homes in Tokyo this year to donate toys and candy to about 400 children.

Trump floats Sidney Powell as special counsel: Sources

Washington: President Donald Trump floated naming lawyer Sidney Powell, who was booted from his campaign's legal team after pushing unfounded conspiracy theories, as a special counsel investigating allegations of voter fraud.

During a Friday meeting at the White House, Trump went as far as discussing getting Powell security clearance, according to two people familiar with the meeting, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

It is unclear whether Trump intends to move forward with the effort. Under federal law, the US attorney general, not the President, is responsible for appointing special counsels. And numerous Republicans, from outgoing Attorney General William Barr to Governors and state election officials, have said again and again that there is no evidence of the kind of mass voter fraud Trump has been alleging since he lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden.

That Trump is even enter-



taining the idea of installing Powell underscores the increasingly desperate steps he has been weighing as he tries to reverse the results of the election and remain in power.

Trump has increasingly entertained conspiracy theories and outlandish ways to stay in office, egged on by allies like former national security adviser Michael Flynn and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the president's personal attorney.

Indeed, at the meeting, Giuliani pushed Trump to seize voting machines, which the Department of Homeland

Security made clear it had no authority to do. It is also unclear what that would accomplish, given that the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security have both looked into the issue. Paper ballots are also retained under federal law.

Flynn, whom Trump recently pardoned for lying to the FBI, went even further, discussing the idea of imposing martial law and using the military to re-run the election. Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and White House counsel Pat Cipollone voiced their objections. **AP**

Mexico President speaks with US President-elect Biden on phone

Mexico City: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he spoke with US President-elect Joe Biden by phone on Saturday, five days after he sent a tardy and somewhat chilly letter of congratulations to Biden.

“We reaffirmed our commitment to work together for the good of our peoples and our countries,” López Obrador wrote in his social media accounts.

López Obrador and Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, finally congratulated Biden only after the Electoral College vote confirmed his victory.

The two were the last major Latin American leaders to send congratulations. Both López Obrador and Bolsonaro were seen as friendly to President Donald Trump.

The Mexican president has stressed that maintaining good relations with the United States — Mexico's northern neighbour and by far its top trading partner — is one of his top priorities. **AP**

Thousands line up for tests amid Thailand virus outbreak

Samut Sakhon: Thousands of people lined up for coronavirus tests in a province near Bangkok on Sunday, as Thai authorities scrambled to contain an outbreak of the virus that has infected nearly 700 people.

Triple lines of mainly migrant workers stretched for around 100 metres in one location alone, at Mahachai in Samut Sakhon province, as health officials in mobile units methodically took nasal swabs. There were three locations in total in the area.

Nearby, razor wire and police guards blocked access to the Klang Koong, or Central Shrimp, seafood market -- one of Thailand's largest -- and its associated housing, the epicentre of the new cluster.

Thailand's Disease Control Department said on Sunday that they found 141 more cases linked to the market outbreak.

On Saturday, the department reported 548 cases,

Thailand's biggest daily spike, sending shockwaves through a country that has seen only a small number of infections over the past several months due to strict border and quarantine controls.

The new outbreak has been traced to a 67-year-old shrimp vendor at the seafood market.

Health officials say most of those who have been infected are migrant workers from Myanmar.

The workers live close to the market in crowded accommodations, raising fears that the virus could spread exponentially.

Samut Sakhon is 34 kilometres (21 miles) southwest of Bangkok, the capital. Samut Sakhon's governor has imposed a night curfew and other travel restrictions until January 3.

Many public places in the province, including shopping malls, schools, cinemas, spas and sports stadiums, have been ordered closed. **AP**

More students abducted in Nigeria but are quickly rescued

Maiduguri (Nigeria): Gunmen in Nigeria abducted more than 80 Islamic school students in northwestern Katsina state on Saturday night, but the pupils were quickly rescued by security forces after a fierce gun battle, police announced on Sunday.

The foiled abduction comes less than two days after the release of 344 schoolboys who were kidnapped in the same area on Dec. 11. The incidents have highlighted the insecurity in northern Nigeria.

Saturday night's attempted kidnapping took place in Dandume, about 64 kilometers (40 miles) from Kankara, the town where the earlier kidnapping of schoolboys occurred.

The bandits had already abducted four people and stolen a dozen cows when they ran into the schoolchildren who were on their way home from a celebration, Katsina state police spokesman, Gambo Isa, said early on Sunday morning. Police and a local community self-defense group rescued the children from the



bandits after a gunfight, he said.

“The teams succeeded in dislodging the bandits and rescued all the 84 kidnapped victims and recovered all the 12 rustled cows,” said Isa in a state-

ment.

“Search parties are still combing the area with a view of arresting the injured bandits and/or the recovery of their dead bodies.”

Dandume, an area bordering the northern part of Kaduna state, is one of the region's hotspots for banditry and kidnapping, according to residents.

The teams succeeded in dislodging the bandits and rescued all the 84 kidnapped victims and recovered all the 12 rustled cows

“Dandume is a no-go-area for many of us because of the high level of crimes and insecurity being perpetrated by armed bandits,” said Saidu Lawal, an official of a local civic group in Katsina, told The Associated Press.

“Despite Government efforts to open up the area by constructing roads leading from the metropolitan locations to the hinterlands of Dandume ... The banditry still persists,” said Lawal.

“On many occasions, the bandits block the Dandume-Sabuwa highways to attack travelers. It was based on that reason that many people have abandoned the new route.” **AP**

Kuwait's key reformer, son of late emir, dies at 72

Dubai: Kuwait's Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al Sabah, the eldest son of the late emir, who emerged as an influential reformer in the oil-rich Gulf sheikhdom, died on Sunday, the country's state-run news agency reported. He was 72.

Sheikh Nasser, who held various government posts over the years including minister of defense and deputy prime minister, had been considered a top contender for crown prince following the death in September of his father, the 91-year-old Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah.

Although he drew popular support for his ambitious mega-projects and anti-corruption efforts, he was passed over for his uncle, Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, a more cautious choice of heir apparent at a turbulent time for Kuwait's politics and the wider region. The KUNA state-run news agency did not specify how Sheikh Nasser

died, but he was known to be in fragile health after having a lung tumor removed two years ago.

In a country that depends on oil for some 90% of its revenues, Sheikh Nasser championed bold plans to diversify Kuwait's economy by building up a business hub with a free zone and deep sea port in the country's north. But with many in Kuwait's parliament committed to the status quo, his ideas repeatedly ran aground even as fears mounted that the country was falling behind its more powerful and better-developed neighbors, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Last year, Sheikh Nasser's public allegations of government corruption vaulted him into the national political scene, as he pressed for investigations into the suspected embezzlement of hundreds of millions of dollars from a military fund. **AP**

Nepal's private airline flew 69 passengers to wrong destination: Report

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Passengers bound for Nepal's Janakpur were in for a surprise after they ended up in Pokhara, 255 kilometres away from the actual destination, after a rare flight mix-up by a leading private carrier, according to a media report on Sunday.

The incident happened on Friday to 69 passengers travelling on Buddha Air, The Kathmandu Post reported.

The weather was not quite favourable for the flights on Friday so carriers were making use of every available weather window to take the passengers on board as quickly as possible and take off, the report said.

Buddha Air's flight U4505 was cleared to take off for Janakpur airport in the plains. Passengers were taken in and the plane took off, with its estimated arrival time at Janakpur by 3:15 pm.

TrendSlazer

‘This year went well as an actor’

Actor **NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI**, who had two big releases this year — *Serious Men* and *Raat Akeli Hai*, said due to the pandemic this year went by like how it was for others but as an actor it went well.

In 2020, Nawazuddin was seen in two projects seen playing Jatil Yadav in *Raat Akeli Hai* and Ayyan Mani in *Serious Men*, which have been two of the most memorable characters in the Indian OTT space, in a year when visual entertainment has been defined by digital content.

Looking back at his 2020 journey, Nawazuddin said, “As a human being this year has gone by like the others. But as an actor, if we see, two films released *Serious Men* and *Raat Akeli Hai*.”



‘Friends, how come we have made ourselves so vulnerable in front of terrorists and foreign powers?’

Every single day I have to justify my intention, whereas I am a patriotic person. What is Diljit Dosanjh and Priyanka Chopra doing? Why doesn’t anyone question them? If I am doing *rajneeti* (politics) by talking in favour of the country, what kind of *neeti* are these people doing? Please ask them.’
—**Kangana Ranaut**

Actor **RAVEENA TANDON** is returning to the city after what she reveals has been one of the longest outdoor schedules in her near-three decade career. Raveena was shooting in Himachal Pradesh for an forthcoming project.

She shared a selfie from her flight, posing in a face shield and mask. The actor wrote: “On the way back home!! After one of the longest outdoor schedules I’ve ever done in my entire career! Longest ever away from home, I am headed back finally!”

In several of her posts, she even compared Himachal Pradesh with Switzerland.

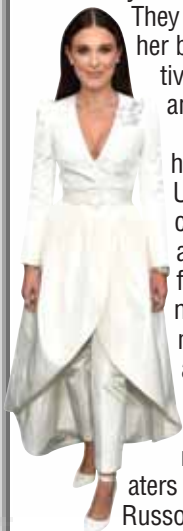


Millie to star in *The Electric State*

Actor **MILLIE BOBBY BROWN** has been roped in to star in the science-fiction film, *The Electric State*. The film is produced and directed by Anthony and Joe Russo.

Set in an alternative future, the story revolves around a teenage girl (played by Brown) who realises that a strange and sweet robot, who comes to her, has been sent by her missing brother. They then set out to find her brother in an imaginative world of humans and robots.

“We’re thrilled to have this deal with Universal who has committed to a theatrical release of the film. This is incredible news for us as filmmakers, and for the audience around the world, who want an opportunity to experience films in theaters again,” said the Russo brothers.



RESCUING RAHIM

Layers of soot and lime-wash had obliterated the 17th century patterns in most parts of the Abdur Rahim Khan-I-Khanan’s tomb but especially in the main chamber. To ensure no damage occurs to the underlying plaster patterns, craftsmen took over a year to clean the domed ceiling. Finally, the mausoleum has been opened for the public

Standing only a few hundred yards south of the mausoleum of emperor Humayun is the monumental tomb built by Abdur Rahim Khan-I-Khanan for his wife — Mah Banu. Built in 1598 AD, this would be the first monumental tomb built for a lady in Mughal times and, on his death, Rahim was also buried in the mausoleum. Son of Bairam Khan-I-Khanan, a close associate of Emperor Humayun and the regent of the young Akbar, Rahim was also the greatest of Akbar’s nobles; a statesman, courtier, linguist, humanitarian, patron and above all, poet.

Despite the historical, architectural and archaeological significance of the structure, by the 21st century, Rahim’s Tomb was in a ruinous condition with a risk of complete collapse. Though an estimated six million people drive past the mausoleum annually, very few are aware that the ruin is the tomb of the legendary Rahim. The marble and sandstone cladding on the dome, facade, flooring of the terrace and the tomb, the parapets, lattice screens have largely been stripped of the building over the years including significant loss of fabric in the 20th century.

In-line with the vision of reviving heritage monuments in the country, InterGlobe Foundation and Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) announced the completion of restoration work on Rahim’s tomb in the Nizamuddin area. The foundation supported the project being executed by AKTC for the physical restoration of the Rahim’s tomb and cultural revival of Rahim and his poetry. Archaeological Survey of India, the custodian of the monument was a key



supporter and partner in the project, which started in 2014.

The physical revival included repairs to the major damaged structures on the interior and exterior of the mausoleum dalans, canopies (*chattris*), dome, façade and landscape, along with the wall and ceiling surfaces. The landscape around Rahim’s tomb has been restored to original slopes and height. The conservation of the dome has been completed with a symbolic addition of marble cladding.

Commenting on the project completion, Rohini Bhatia, chairperson, InterGlobe Foundation, said, “India is known for its cultural heritage, hence, the preservation of our art and culture is essential for our identity. We are pleased to be a part of restoration of Rahim’s mausoleum. In addition to physical restoration, we are also establishing the relevance of sites and creating awareness among communities towards the need for preservation of culture and heritage. We strive to conserve the cultural heritage of our nation.”



TODAY IS THE DAY



Fashion designers **SHANTANU** and **NIKHIL MEHRA** share that this pandemic has taught them a lot about being disruptive and fearless

Designers Shantanu and Nikhil Mehra feel the post-COVID era will be all about being disruptive and fearless. “I feel that this pandemic has definitely taught us a lot and I think all the young budding designers, artists from whatever walks of lives, they should feel a lot more fearless. No one is going to judge you for what you are or how you plan to pursue your career as a brand,” Shantanu said.

“Just be a little disruptive, even if you feel you can’t make it on your own, have the guts and the courage to go seek a job because today everybody is looking for some talent. So if you have it in you or even if you feel that you do not have the talent or courage to start your own business, brand or entrepreneurship journey because the pandemic has given you that suffering or pain points, don’t hesitate in going back to the drawing board and say okay I think I’m going to work for a bit. Just give it a try,” he shared.

“Give some value to the person who is employing you and at the same time get some value that yes, you can again restart and reshape my journey. I think it’s going to be about that disrupting self,” he added.

Nikhil said, “This is a great moment in our lives when for the first time when you talk about true democracy, it’s happening across the world to every human being.”

He continued, “It’s a time that will give us a chance to understand why we are here. A lot of times we spend a lifetime trying to figure that out or we can never do that and we pass away but this gives us an opportunity to really dig deep inside and understand why we are here.”

“I find this year or this moment to be a blessing so that it can help us to understand we are humans, we have emotions and it’s not just the greed that we need to go after but really ourselves. I hope this gives us all an opportunity to be humans again,” shared the designer in an episode of Lakshmi Manchu’s show *Coming Back To Life With Lakshmi Manchu*, which is available on SouthBay channel.

—IANS

WEBBED



THE MIDNIGHT SKY

George Clooney is getting in the director’s chair to adapt Lily Brooks-Dalton’s novel *Good Morning, Midnight*. He also stars in the film, playing a (heavily bearded) scientist, isolated in the Arctic in a post-apocalyptic world, who sets out to stop a space crew led by Felicity Jones from returning to a catastrophic Earth. It releases on December 23 on Netflix.



BRIDGERTON

Shonda Rhimes is finally coming to Netflix. The showrunner’s first release is an adaptation of Julia Quinn’s romance novel series about the wealthy, English Bridgerton family and their affairs. Julie Andrews is among the stars. It releases on December 25.



BEST LEFTOVERS EVER!

Do you just nuke your leftovers in the microwave, or otherwise let them go to waste? Then you could learn a thing or two from the cooks on this competition series who are masters in leftover cooking and take on challenges that give new life to old meals. It releases on December 30 on Netflix.

According to reports published in different national newspapers, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is likely to announce a three trillion electricity distribution reform programme in the Union budget. As per the report, the objective is to help reduce losses and improve the efficiency of power distribution utilities. The reliability and quality of power supply will also be improved as part of the reform. This step certainly brings hope for the people residing in rural and remote areas of the country awaiting to receive power supply for decades now.

"We have just one question — when will the power crisis end in the Dhara Panchayat? When will the grid wires come down from the trees? Since 1950, we have seen control shifting from one government to another, but the concerns of people like us who are residing in rural and remote areas go unheard," shared Abdul Hafeez, a 39-year-old resident of Dhara Panchayat located in Mandi tehsil in Poonch district in the recently announced Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Poonch is often in news for the incidences of ceasefire violations that transpire at the Line of Control. The region is recognised as a conflict zone whose tough geography and extreme weather conditions make life of its inhabitants even tougher. Of many development issues, the area suffers extreme power crisis. Here, the demand for power is met with erratic supply and frequent power cuts.

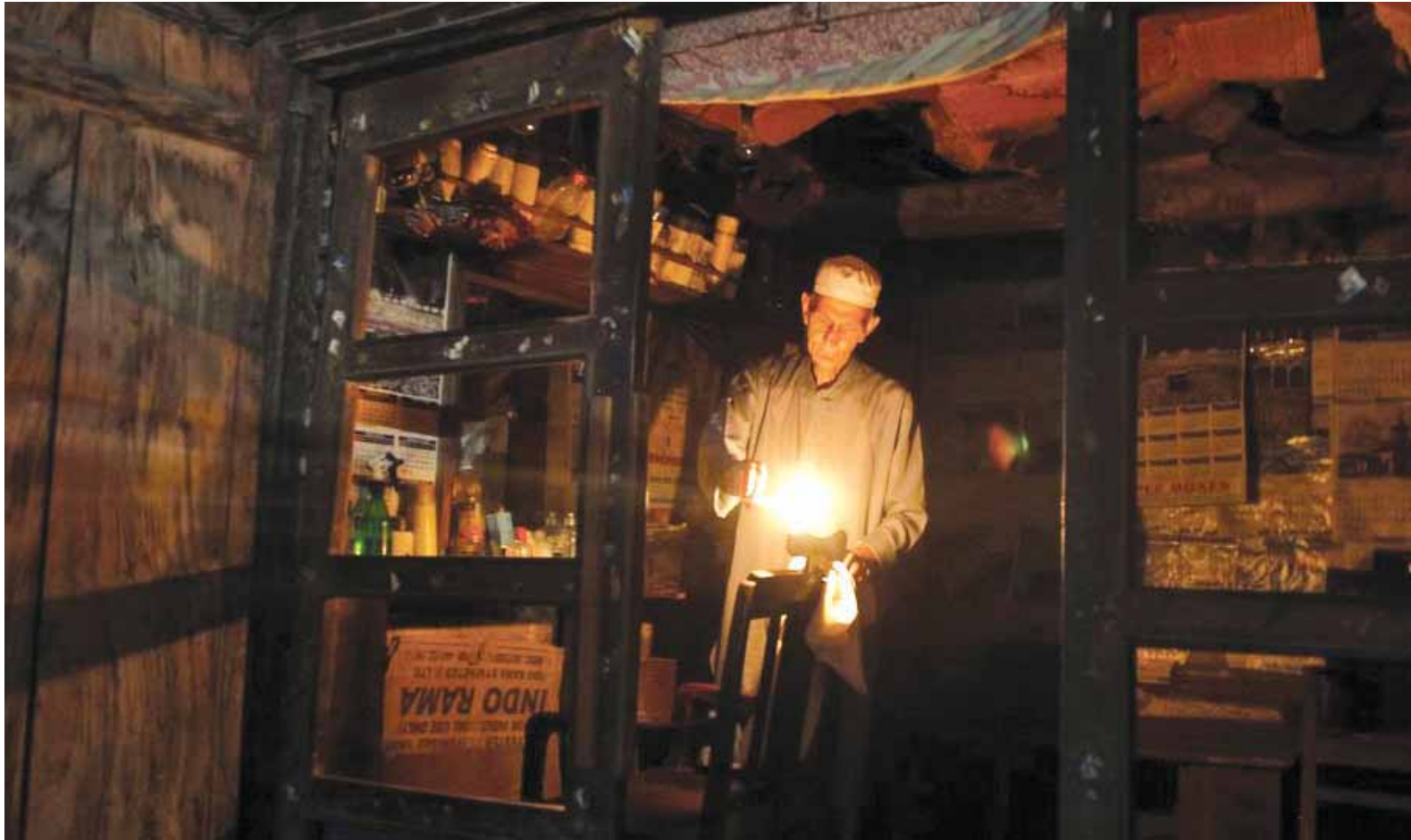
For many years, the residents of Thapla Mohalla of Dhara Panchayat have been worried about the inconsistent power supply. With few exceptions, many households get electricity either through single, crate or other inappropriate wires which are unsafe and have full potential of causing electric fire accidents. In past, Mandi tehsil has suffered accidents due to power outage, but no concrete steps have been taken by the concerned department till date.

In 2018, under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana which aims at providing continuous power supply to rural India, the power department had surveyed the mohalla. As a part of this scheme, a new power line was to be installed along with a transformer in this village. Till date, however, the work of installing the wires and the poles lies incomplete.

When people in other parts of the country enjoy benefits of power supply, people here are still living in the dark age. As sun sets, the life here comes to a full stop. Students cannot read or write here. "I am almost 85. Before independence, we would bring water from distant places. Today, our younger generations are doing the same. Similar is the case of power supply. Earlier, we used handmade lamps at night. The only change I see today is that now we use battery operated torch light. I have been

A RAY OF HOPE

The new electricity distribution reform programme brings hope for the people residing in rural and remote areas of J&K who have been awaiting power supply for decades now. By SALMA RAZI



hearing since 1965 that our region will get the power supply, but we are still fighting for poles, wires and transformers to reach our village," shared Afsana Rashid (name changed), an elderly woman from the mohalla.

In Morban, the situation is a little better as a transformer and poles have been installed here under the Din Dayal Yojana. However, the village is yet to be blessed with power supply. As per the Junior Assistant working at the power department, lockdown due to the ongoing pandemic had interrupted the installation work. "Now, we are waiting for the harvesting season. As soon as the crops are harvested and the land is vacant, we will install the power lines," he shared.

The contract for the work under the

said scheme has been given to a third party who shared that at present, work is divided into four phases. "Of four phases, Hari Badha and Morban are about to be completed. As soon as we install 39 power poles in Morban and 29 in Thapla Mohalla, the work will be completed in these two areas. Work in Fatehpur region has not started yet but we are working on the action plan," he informed.

In the past few years, the government has taken several concrete steps towards ensuring electrification of remotest of villages. This new electricity distribution reform programme will not only trim electricity losses but with improved reliability and efficiency, it may finally bring light to these distant villages.

—Charkha Features



A BETTER WORLD

We should make a resolution to invest our time, money and energy for peace and harmony, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Since ages, philosophers across the world have argued that the concept of happiness can be defined or analysed simply in terms of 'individual contentment' or by being satisfied with one's life. So in simple words, one can say that in order to be happy, one needs to be content. But is it really possible in today's time and age? Well, in the present world, one would hardly find a man who is not discontented. There may be many reasons behind that, of which one of the major ones is his financial challenges. Other than this, it may be related to the personal, social, economic, political and moral issues. As a result of this, man is weighed down with despair, indifference, tension, animosity, even fury and mental agony. Hence, his plans and acts go wrong and this leads to fights. Some people also have a habit of building castles in the air. As a result, they fail to understand that it is only by hard work that a man can make both ends meet. Hence, we should remember that just like food sustains the body, in the same way your mind find sustenance in happiness. So, the saying goes: there is no food as good as happiness. And, to be happy, you have to be contented. As Alfred Nobel has rightly said that 'Contentment is the only real wealth', we should therefore not run after securing another kind of wealth to lose the wealth of contentment.



Contentment is as good as a means of happiness as wealth is considered to be. Is it proper, therefore, to lose the wealth of contentment in order to secure another kind of wealth? The right course of conduct is that man should be calm in the present crisis and at the same time, find a systematic method of mending or ending it. Considering the present to be the consequence of our own actions, we should thus be careful about the future. We must remember that the world is subject to change and every human being reaps as he sows. Hence, man should play his part and do good deeds so that he doesn't faces any undesirable situations later in life.

Contentment, purity and peace are the trios which make one's life worth living. They appear on in life after one has been pursuing spiritual studies and practising meditation. Without Yoga, one cannot attain and sustain inner peace and tranquility. However, people generally think that spiritual studies are uninteresting, boring, tedious and are mainly based on faith, accompanied by rituals and repetition of mantras. But this is not the truth. Spiritual studies are as interesting as any other subject and meditation is neither a ritual nor does it involve the repetition of a sacred Sanskrit formula. It is as simple as reflecting, remembering and feeling, with a bit of guidance in the beginning. Meditating should be considered as an investment for gaining high dividends in the form of contentment and peace, which are the most valuable prizes that life offers. Today, if we look around, how many people would we find who are spending their time, money and energy for peace and harmony in society? Unfortunately there aren't many. It is high time we make a resolve to put our time, money and energy for peace and harmony because if we wish to have a peaceful and harmonious world around us, then it should begin with each one of us.

THE YOUTH DIALOGUE

The COVID-19 pandemic has effectively rendered most forms of education obsolete. It has brought a relatively new form of education — online. The common forms of parting this education, Zoom and Google classrooms are championing the battlefields, but it has been a harrowing time for many students and teachers to adapt to the new system, especially with the suddenness of cut-offs. Over 1.2 billion students in over 180 countries are now out of school and are affected by the school closures. All schoolgoers are turning to what was once just another tool in a vast repertoire but now turns up as the only tool available; the online education. As per the latest UNICEF report, one in three children worldwide do not have access to the internet, summing up to a grand total of over two billion children without the means to access their education.

However, despite these depressing statistics, the pandemic has had some positive impact as well. EdTech seems to be rising steadily, and the industry is gearing up to hit 350 billion USD worth in the next five years. With Open Source Education like Khan Academy and YouTube, millions of lives

The future we seek

The availability of information and technology makes online education a better option. But we need new policies to develop and integrate ed-tech and life skills into the curriculum, says NEIL BINOY



are transforming for free. During the pandemic, we are finding ourself with more time

on our hands, and various people are turning to courses on sites like EdX, Udemy and

Coursera to earn certifications. The practise of reading frequently has increased, under

the fiercely watchful eyes of at-home parents and buffeted by the fact that many children are cut off from most activities, like extended television speers, or any outdoor activity. It has proven a solace and many became accidental readers. From Mahatma Gandhi to Nelson Mandela, Obama to Nehru, Bill Gates to Elon Musk, Anne Frank to Greta Thunberg, there is one thing they have all in common: reading. Gates has reported devoting much of his day to reading, even opening a section in his website GatesNotes, devoted entirely to his musings on books. School children could start with storybooks before they get into further reading. Through this column, I intend to introduce a book every fortnight for kids to encourage them to read. This week, I would recommend a book I had read and reviewed recently — *Unfair* by Rasil Ahuja. Set in the sweltering suburbs of Delhi, the book explores discrimination in our schooling system. It is a perfect pick for beginners.

Issues such as safety, high fees and peer pressure have made the educated parents opt for more reliable home schooling. From one million in two decades to the two million

children currently registered in the NIOS evidence it. The availability of information online and technology make this form of education a better option. The government should formulate new education policies, to evolve itself, to develop and integrate ed-tech and life-skills into its curriculum. Ranjitsingh Disale recently won the million-dollar Global Teacher's Prize. This Maharashtrian teacher learned Kannada and converted the school textbooks into a more digestible structure for his students. Utilising QR codes, interactive, lively teaching, and technology like tablets, mobile phones and computers, he has transformed the lives of his students. If an individual teacher can embrace such novel education methods, why can't the governments do the same? Well, secure internet access and devices to empower the children in remote and rural areas would be a good start, but only a start. As Queen Rania of Jordan says, "In education, technology can be a life-changer, a game-changer, for kids who are both in school and out of school." (The writer is founder of Voice of Kids and Gold medal winner at the International English Olympiad.)

Peace begins with a smile.
—Mother Teresa

MALE COVID PATIENTS AT HIGHER RISK

Hospitalised male COVID patients have a 30 per cent greater risk of dying compared to women of the same age and health status, revealed a new study that identified several risk factors for mortality from the disease.

Hospitalised patients who were obese, had hypertension or poorly managed diabetes also had a higher risk of dying compared to those who did not have these conditions, said the study published in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases.

Those aged 20 to 39 with these conditions had the biggest difference in their risk of dying compared to their healthier peers.

For the study, the researchers evaluated nearly 67,000 hospitalised COVID-19 patients in 613 hospitals across the US to determine the link between certain common patient characteristics and the risk of dying from COVID-19.



ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS MAY UP DEATH RISK

Consuming a high amount of ultra-processed foods may increase the risk of death from any cause by 26 per cent, and 58 per cent specifically from cardiovascular diseases, say researchers.

Supermarket shelves are increasingly flooded with foods produced by extensive industrial processing, generally low in essential nutrients, high in sugar, oil and salt and liable to be overconsumed.

Now a study from IRCCS NEUROMED — Mediterranean Neurological Institute in Italy, confirms that these foods are harmful to health.

Published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, the study was conducted on over 22,000 people participating in the Moli-sani Project.

By analysing their eating habits and following their health conditions for over 8 years, the researchers were able to observe that those consuming a high amount of ultra-processed foods had an increased risk of death.



VAPING LINKED TO INCREASED SMOKING

Researchers have now claimed that kids who use e-cigarettes are more likely to take up smoking or smokeless tobacco.

The study, published in the journal Addictive Behaviors, says teenage boys who vaped were almost three times as likely to start smoking as other teen boys with similar risk profiles and more than two times as likely to try smokeless tobacco.

"For an ideal study, from a purely scientific perspective, we'd give everybody an e-cigarette, follow them for a few years and see if they start smoking, then rewind the clock and don't give them an e-cigarette," said study author Brittny Keller-Hamilton from Ohio State University in the US.

"Or we'd randomly assign kids to vape or not to vape. We can't do either of those things, obviously," Keller-Hamilton added.



STUDY SUGGESTS VIRUS ENTERS BRAIN

Researchers have now claimed that more and more evidence is coming out that people with COVID-19 are suffering from cognitive effects, such as brain fog and fatigue.

The study, published in the journal Nature Neuroscience, found that the spike protein, often depicted as the red arms of the virus, can cross the blood-brain barrier in mice.

This strongly suggests that SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19, can enter the brain.

"The spike protein, often called the S1 protein, dictates which cells the virus can enter. Usually, the virus does the same thing as its binding protein," said lead author William A Banks from the University of Washington in the US.

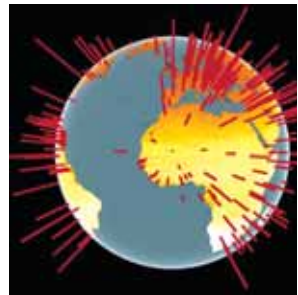


CORONA SPREAD LINKED TO UV VARIATIONS

Natural variations in ultraviolet radiation (UV) influence the spread of COVID-19, but the influence is modest compared to preventive measures such as physical distancing, mask-wearing, and quarantine, say researchers.

"Understanding the potential seasonality of Covid-19 transmission could help inform our response to the pandemic in the coming months," said study author Jonathan Proctor from the Harvard University in the US.

These findings, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, suggest that the incidence of COVID-19 may have a seasonal pattern, spreading faster in the winter when it is darker than in the summer.



GILL, KL, PANT GET READY FOR BOXING DAY

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and young opener Prithvi Shaw are unlikely to be picked for the remaining Tests in Australia as India look to ring in wholesale changes after the batting debacle in Adelaide.

It is understood that young Shubman Gill, after a couple of impressive knocks in the warm-up games, is seen as a replacement of Shaw as senior star Rohit Sharma will not be available until the third Test match in Sydney.

With Saha's batting not giving any confidence to the dressing room, the team management will certainly look at Pant, who had scored a hundred Down Under during his previous tour, as keeping might not be a factor on pitches with firm and even bounce.

KL Rahul and Mohammed Siraj are the two others in fray to enter the playing XI and those would be forced changes due to the absence of skipper Virat Kohli and senior pacer, Mohammed Shami, who is out with a fractured wrist.

The 36-year-old Saha could well be running the last lap of his international career as young and feisty Pant is set to be preferred by the team management over the next three Test matches and if he does well, against England, too.

As far as Saha is concerned, his inept batting in SENA countries hasn't gone unnoticed (he doesn't have a half-century there), but former chairman of selectors MSK Prasad said that during his regime, certain plans were chalked out on the Saha-Pant conundrum.

"Look, our committee was clear that Rishabh Pant will be our first choice keeper in places like England and Australia. Only when we are looking at matches in India where you don't need batting after number six most times, you can have a specialist keeper," Prasad told PTI on Sunday.

"I believe Rishabh has



Virat closes gap with Smith

PTI ■ DUBAI

India may have suffered an embarrassing defeat in the series-opener against Australia but its skipper Virat Kohli fractionally closed the gap with top-ranked Test batsman Steve Smith, following his 74-run knock in the first innings in Adelaide.

Kohli gained two points for his half-century to get to 888 while Smith (911) lost 10 points in the table after scoring 1 and 1 in his two innings.

Marnus Labuschagne's innings of 47 and 6 in the low-scoring match pushed him to a career-best 839 points in the latest ICC rankings for Test batsmen.

Australia skipper Tim Paine's player-of-the-match innings of 73 not out has lifted him to a career-best 33rd with 592 points.

His previous best was 45th in December of 2018.



Further down, Joe Burns' unbeaten 51 saw him move into 48th place, the first time he has been in the top 50 since 2016.

Spinner R Ashwin has now become India's top-ranked bowler after taking four wickets in Australia's first innings. Ashwin, now ranked ninth, overtook pacer Jasprit Bumrah.

Ravindra Jadeja, who did not play the Adelaide Test, was unchanged at number three in the all-rounders' list.

Australian fast bowler Pat Cummins gained six points for his seven-wicket haul as he moved from 904 to 910 for a comfortable lead over Stuart Broad in second place.

Cummins' pace colleague, Josh Hazlewood's figures of 5/8 in India's second innings helped him gain four spots and move back into the top five with 805 points, the first time since March 2018.



Cummins wants sporting MCG wicket

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

One of the architects of India's humiliating loss in the pink-ball series opener, Australian pacer Pat Cummins acknowledged the help offered by the lively track here and wants a similar "sporting" pitch for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

Cummins (4/21) and Josh Hazlewood (5/8) produced a sensational performance as India collapsed to their lowest-ever Test score of 36, paving the way for an eight-wicket win and a 1-0 lead in the series for the home team.

"I thought the Ashes Test (2017-18) and the Indian Test at the MCG a couple of years ago were pretty flat wickets," Cummins was quoted as saying by 'cricket.Com.Au'.

"As a bowler, last year against New Zealand, it was a really good wicket, a bit of sideways movement and a bit of pace and bounce, so, hopefully, much the same (this year).

"Not only as a player but as a fan, they are the best wickets - when it is good battle between bat and ball. You feel like if you do your skill well, you can have a big impact on the game."

Cummins had taken the prized scalp of Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara, who will be expected to take a lot of responsibility in the remainder of the series as the India skipper returns home for the birth of his child.

Talking about Pujara's wicket, Cummins said: "One of the biggest helpers was the wicket, it felt like there was a bit of sideways movement.

"We could just challenge his defence over and over again and having a bit of bounce in the wicket certainly helped," Cummins said.

The Australia vice-captain also praised off-spinner Nathan Lyon for bowling well to Pujara in the first innings.

"I thought Lyno (Nathan Lyon) bowled beautifully to him in the first innings. But, for sure, we are really clear what we want to do to him. We saw we probably brought an extra man to the leg side as well to try and really attack his stumps," he said.

"I thought he batted really well in the first innings. We bowled well enough for the scoreboard to not go anywhere. If he hasn't gone on to that big score, you are right in the game."

SCG remains preference for 3rd Test: CA

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Cricket Australia on Sunday said the SCG remains its preferred venue for the third Test against India after reports emerged that the governing body is contemplating swapping the last two games of the four-Test series due to growing COVID-19 cases in Sydney.

Australian cricket officials were put on high alert last week after an outbreak of the virus in the northern beaches in Sydney, which will host the third Test from January 7.

There were reports that the CA was mulling options and "swapping the third and fourth Tests between Sydney and Brisbane was the top alternative".

However, CA's interim chief executive officer Nick Hockley said he is hopeful of staging the third Test between Australia and India at the SCG.

"We have made no changes to our schedule and our preference remains to play the match at the Sydney Cricket Ground," Hockley was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald' in a statement.

"Cricket Australia has developed a solid track record of delivery throughout this most challenging of summers and will continue to make appropriate and proportionate decisions in consultation with our biosecurity team, governments, state and territory associations, the Australian Cricketers' Association, our partners and venues."

With cases growing, star Australia opener David Warner and pacer Sean Abbott — both recovering from injuries - were on Saturday flown from Sydney to Melbourne, which will host the Boxing Day Test from December 26.

The governing body's coronavirus working group was also due to meet on Sunday to take stock of the impact of Sydney's northern beaches virus cluster on the third Test.

With the number of cases shooting to 71, Victoria and South Australia have already announced tighter border controls, while the New South Wales state government have also imposed fresh restrictions.

Under the current circumstances, there are concerns that Queensland state may close its border with New South Wales, which will mean players and broadcasting crews will not be able to travel from Sydney to Brisbane between the third and fourth Tests.

Hockley said the governing body is prepared for such contingencies.

"CA has prepared for the possibility of COVID-19 hotspots and state border closures over the course of the summer and the protocols that we have put in place have been effective in ensuring the safety and success of the men's and women's domestic and international programs to date," he said.

According to the report, "Hosting the next two Tests in Melbourne, where the series will resume on Boxing Day after Australia took a 1-0 lead in Adelaide, is another option..."

Good chance for Oz to go for clean sweep: Ponting



PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The humiliation in Adelaide has opened up "serious wounds" for India and Australia now have a "good chance" of inflicting on the visitors a whitewash in the four-Test series, reckons former captain Ricky Ponting.

India were bundled

out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy.

"Now there's some serious wounds opened up. There could be a good chance (of a sweep)," Ponting told

cricket.Com.Au.

"Let's hope we do get a result in Melbourne and if we do, I think India's going to find it really hard to bounce back and win a game."

India will miss skipper Virat Kohli in the remaining three Tests as he returns home for the birth of his child and

Ponting said it will be a real test for the visitors as they look to pick up the pieces under the captaincy of Ajinkya Rahane.

"We'll learn a lot about them, won't we? With Kohli not being there as well there's almost no one to pick them back up after a loss like that," Ponting said.

Black Caps wrap T20 series



AP ■ HAMILTON

Opener Tim Seifert carried his bat for 84 in an unbroken 129-run partnership with Kane Williamson to steer New Zealand to a nine-wicket win over Pakistan in the second Twenty20 international Sunday and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Williamson finished 57 not out in his return to the short format as New Zealand overtook Pakistan's total of 163-6 with four balls to spare.

Seifert took his runs from only 63 balls with eight fours and three sixes, unleashing a wide variety of shots on a flat wicket against a Pakistan attack that struggled to find consistently challenging lengths.

Williamson was scratchy at first, then became unstoppable, reaching his 12th T20 international

Amir blames management for early retirement

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pacer Mohammad Amir has held the Pakistan team management responsible for his decision to quit international cricket at 28 and slammed coach Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Yousif for "spoiling" his image.

Speaking on his official Youtube channel, left-arm pacer Amir made it clear that his problem was with Misbah and Yousif.

"These people have been trying to slowly poison people's minds by saying that I didn't want to play Test cricket and only wanted to play in T20 leagues to earn money. They built a narrative that I had let down the team despite all the investment in me," Amir said.

"They have tried to spoil my image and it takes a lot of hard work to build your image."

"It was a very hard decision for me but I think the time has come



when one shouldn't keep quiet. I took this decision to raise this issue and let people know what is happening."

"Obviously I was very hurt when they didn't select me even in 35 players for New Zealand. If I only cared about playing in leagues then I would not feel bad at being dropped for the New Zealand tour nor would I have reacted," he stated.

Simranjeet, Manish win Gold in Cologne WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian women boxers Simranjeet Kaur (60kg) and Manish (57kg) notched up Gold medals with contrasting final wins in the Cologne World Cup in Germany.

Manish defeated compatriot Saskhi 3-2, while Simranjeet got the better of German Maya Klienhans 4-1 to finish on top in their respective categories.

India finished the competition at the second spot overall after claiming three gold, two silver and four Bronze medals.

On Saturday, Asian Games champion Amit Panghal (52kg) had claimed the sole Gold among men. He got a walkover in the finals.

Veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) had to settle for a silver after an injury forced him to withdraw from the finals.

Sonia Lather (57kg), Pooja Rani (75kg) Gaurav Solanki (57kg) and Mohamed Hussamudin (57kg) had claimed the bronze medal in their respective categories.

The event featured boxers from the host country, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland and Ukraine.

Injured Babar could miss 1st Test

PTI ■ KARACHI

Recovering from a thumb injury, Pakistan captain Babar Azam could miss the opening Test against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui beginning December 26.

Babar, who has been Pakistan's top run-scorer across all three formats since last year, suffered a fracture in his thumb during a throw-down session in Queenstown on December 12 which ruled him out of the

three-match T20 series.

"Babar is under rehab and has done some light training but whether he will be 100 percent match fit in time for the first test is a long shot," a source aware of the developments in New Zealand said.

Babar has also been given a 12-day rehab and rest period to be fit again but the source said the Pakistan captain's injury was taking time to heal and he was still unable to hold a bat properly.

Spurs suffer second successive defeat

AP ■ LONDON

Jamie Vardy's penalty and Toby Alderweireld's own-goal propelled Leicester to a 2-0 victory over Tottenham and up to second in the Premier League, moving ahead of the north London club on Sunday.

Tottenham's once-blossoming title challenge has faltered over the last eight days, with only one point collected by Jose Mourinho's side from three games.

But Leicester, the surprise 2016 title winner, is now only four points behind current defending champion Liverpool after 14 games.

A first half lacking clear-cut chances ended with Vardy putting Leicester ahead with the final kick from the penalty spot in stoppage time after Tottenham defender Serge Aurier barged Wesley Fofana over.



Tottenham had an escape early in the second half when James Justin's long ball over the top was artfully brought down by James Maddison before netting - only for VAR to spot a tight offside.

But Leicester was gifted a second on the hour when Vardy's header across goal was deflected into his own net by Alderweireld, who was under no pressure.

It enabled Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers -

al half century from 37 balls on the same ground where he scored a test-best 251 in his last innings.

"It was a good surface, good for the bowlers but obviously if you could build partnerships you could get there," Williamson said.

Hafeez came to the last over 82 not out, hit three singles, a six and a four and was 93 not out with only one ball left in the innings. He did the best he could, hitting the final delivery for six to finish just short of a maiden century.

Tim Southee, Trent Boult and Kyle Jamieson also returned, giving New Zealand an all-new pace attack. Southee made his presence felt, taking 4-21 from his four overs to weaken the Pakistan innings.

Boult took 0-33 and Jamieson 0-43 but New Zealand generally bowled well after losing the toss.

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