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Farm protests swell Opp ranks

Prez gives his assent to three farm Bills amid farmers' protests

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday gave his assent to the three farm Bills passed by Parliament even as the farmers' organisation and Opposition parties continued to rally against the controversial legislations. One of BJP's oldest allies and a founding member of the NDA, the Shiromani Akali Dal, on Sunday called for unifying the Opposition to take on the BJP.

The Opposition had earlier urged the President to return the Bills to Parliament saying the Bills were anti-farmer and had been rammed through the Rajya Sabha without a division of votes. SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Sunday called upon all political parties and organisations to close ranks for a united fight to protect the interests of farmers, farm labour and farm produce traders in the country, especially in Punjab.

"We are ready to join or follow any struggle in the overall interests of the farmers, farm labour, Arhatiyas and other farm produce traders," said Badal, while making his first public speech after the party broke alliance with the NDA on Saturday night. Badal received instant support from the Trinamool Congress. "We support Sukhbir Singh Badal and Akali Dal's stand with the farmers. Fighting for farmers is part of Trinamool DNA. In 2006, Mamata Banerjee risked her life on a historic 26-day fast for farmers' rights. We oppose Farm Bills 2020 as they endanger States' role, MSP, PDS procurement, TMC leader Derek O'Brien tweeted.

Thanking Derek for his support, Sukhbir tweeted, "Derek — your stand against the Agriculture Bills in Parliament is well known. Appreciate your support." He said the country needed to



Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal addresses a gathering of party workers and farmers to mobilise them for October 1 Kisan March, which would commence from all three Sikh religious Takhts in the State to Mohali, in Ropar district on Sunday. PTI

understand and empathise with the farmers and farm labour in view of the pathetic conditions in which they were living. Reiterating his party's firm commitment to preserving peace, communal harmony and fraternity in Punjab at all costs, Badal said, "We must not flinch from the ideals of keeping our struggle for people's rights absolutely peaceful and democratic. I must caution against attempts to defame our struggle by disturbing peace but that should only strengthen our resolve to safeguard the age-old values of Punjab: fraternity and the path to peaceful democratic struggle."

He again advised the Chief Minister to issue an Ordinance to declare the whole State a Mandi (Principal Marketing Yard) to save farmers from "black laws". Badal was addressing gatherings of party workers and farmers at Ropar,

SAD's exit may dent image of BJP's sabka saath, sabka vikas

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

The exit of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), one of the oldest allies of the BJP from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), would not impact the strong majority of the 303-member BJP in the Lok Sabha but it may dent its own catchy and all-season political slogan of "sabka saath, sabka vikas".

The NDA has now been reduced to a conglomeration of Janata Dal (U), JLP, AIADMK, Jana Natyak Janata Party, Apna Dal and a handful of regional outfits in North-East.

The SAD has only two members in the Lok Sabha, including Harsimrat Kaur, who resigned from the Modi Government following SAD's protest over three farm Bills recently passed by Parliament.

The three Rajya Sabha members of the SAD are Balwinder Singh Bhunder,

Naresh Gujral and Sukhdev Singh Dhinsa.

On the eve of Lok Sabha polls in 2019 and soon after the poll victory, the BJP had claimed to have 36 NDA allies which included major parties like Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Shiv Sena and SAD, Janata Dal-United (JD(U)) and several other assorted regional outfits across the country.

The departure of SAD in a year when Shiv Sena too "lost patience" with the BJP and less than two years following the TDP's decision to move out of the NDA in 2018 reflects that the BJP is increasingly asserting itself with its plans and programmes after its sweeping victory in the Lok Sabha.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of Mehbooba Mufti in Jammu & Kashmir and Uppendra Kushwaha's RSP in Bihar, left the NDA due to dif-

ferent political reasons. The NDA which started in 1998 under Atal Bihari Vajpayee has transformed considerably since 2014. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah taking a tight grip over the affairs of the Government and the party and setting the BJP with an aim of "speedy expansion" in the States and introduce its policies the allies have reasons to feel threatened.

The protest against the too much of centralisation of decision-making in the NDA had also created rumblings in the North-East with Asom Gana Parishad walking out of the NDA to protest Citizenship (Amendment) Bill but it rejoined later. Another regional NDA ally Bodo People's Front too had differences with the BJP which were ironed out by State leadership.

As reports of coronavirus re-infection in the country emerge, the Minister said such cases are under investigation.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With an average over 85,000 cases per day during the last fortnight, India on Sunday crossed the six-million mark of the coronavirus cases. The second-most-affected country by the numbers of active and total cases, and third by the fatality count, India has added 6,72,564 cases since September 20. The last one million cases for India have come in just 12 days.

With this speed, India will surpass the United States (7,290,347) in the next 15-20 days.

The fatality cases will cross one lakh in the next 5-6 days with an average of 1100-1200 cases per day. According to the Health Ministry's data, 10 States and UTs — Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Delhi, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh — account for 80 per cent of the new cases reported in a day.

The five most affected States by total cases are Maharashtra (13,39,232), Andhra Pradesh (6,75,674), Tamil Nadu (5,80,808), Karnataka (5,75,566), and Uttar Pradesh (3,81,491). There are five States with the biggest 24-hour jump in total cases are Maharashtra (1,80,056), Karnataka (9,543), Kerala (7,445), Andhra Pradesh (6,923), and Tamil Nadu (5,791).

A total 76 per cent of the new recovered cases are found in 10 States and UTs — Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Odisha, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and West Bengal. Maharashtra continues to top this list.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Sunday said the Indian population is still far from reaching herd immunity against Covid-19 as shown by the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) second Sero Survey.

As reports of coronavirus re-infection in the country emerge, the Minister said such cases are under investigation.



A medic plays with a child at CWG village Covid-19 Care Centre near Akshardham in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Covid reinfection cases negligible, but ICMR examining, says Vardhan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sunday the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is actively

researching on reports of Covid-19 reinfection and although the number of such cases is negligible at this moment, the Government is fully seized of the importance of the matter.

Travellers from Dubai, UK added to Covid spike: IIT

NEW DELHI:

Travellers from Dubai and the UK were primary sources of Covid-19 importations into India, according to an analytical study done by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi.

Delhi records 46 deaths, highest in over 70 days

New Delhi: The national capital reported 46 COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, the highest in over 70 days, taking the number of deaths to 5,193, while 3,372 fresh cases pushed the infection tally to 2,67,822, authorities said.

Bihar's ex-DGP Gupteshwar joins JD(U), to fight Assembly election

PTI ■ PATNA

Former Bihar DGP Gupteshwar Pandey, who was all over national TV for the last few months, joined the State's ruling JD (U) on Sunday amid indications he would contest the Assembly polls beginning next month.

Pandey joined the party in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who is also the JD (U) president, less than a week after taking voluntary retirement from service.

His much-anticipated induction took place a day after he met Kumar and insisted there was nothing political in their conversation.

The 1987 batch IPS officer had strongly defended Kumar

on the issue of institution of a CBI probe into the mysterious death of Sushant Singh Rajput, the Patna-born talented film star.

The voluble officer had reminded actor Rhea Chakrobarty, Rajput's girlfriend and the main accused in the abatement to suicide case being probed by the CBI, of her 'augat' (status) to question Kumar, when she suggested that there was politics behind the Bihar Government's decision to push for a CBI probe.

Pandey's application for VRS was accepted by Governor Fagu Chauhan on September 21, five months before the 1987 batch IPS officer was to superannuate, and in a rare gesture, a three-month cooling

off period applicable to bureaucrats was waived in his case.

"I have a long, loving association with Kumar. He personally called me and offered party membership. I have a public profile and connect with people...people love me. But I don't know anything about politics. I will do what I am asked to do," he later told journalists.

"Pandey also turned up at a Press conference at the JD (U) headquarters where he was welcomed into the family by Ashok Choudhary, a Cabinet Minister who was earlier in the day appointed the working president of the State unit.

All households to pay sewage charges in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a new move, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has approved a proposal to collect annual sewage pollution charge from all households, irrespective of whether they are located in areas with or without sewer network.

According to a National Green Tribunal order, every individual household causing pollution by the release of sewage into an open environment or in the sewer network is liable for payment for its treatment as per 'polluter pays' principle.

At present, the utility collects sewage charges only from those households which have

water connections and a functional sewer network.

The money is utilised for maintenance, upkeep and to upgrade the sewer network. But many households get water from the DJB and generate sewage but have not been paying sewage charges as there is no sewer network in their area, according to an official.

The DJB has 25.20 lakh active water consumers, of which 19.94 lakh come under areas with sewage connection. Sewage charges are levied in their water bills.

"Earlier, we had been collecting sewage charges from households which come under sewerage areas and have an active water connection.

Covid-19 IN INDIA

TOTAL

CASES: 60,50,875

DEATHS: 95,101

RECOVERED: 49,93,558

ACTIVE: 9,61,365

STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	13,21,176	35,191	10,16,450
Andhra Pradesh	6,75,674	5,708	6,05,090
Tamil Nadu	5,80,808	9,313	5,25,154
Karnataka	5,75,566	8,582	4,62,241
Uttar Pradesh	3,87,065	5,594	3,25,088
Delhi	2,71,114	5,235	2,36,651
West Bengal	2,47,425	4,781	2,16,921
Odisha	2,09,374	850	1,73,571
Telangana	1,85,833	1,100	1,54,499
Bihar	1,78,882	888	1,64,537
Kerala	1,75,385	678	1,17,917
Assam	1,69,985	655	1,38,307
Gujarat	1,33,219	3,417	1,13,240
Rajasthan	1,28,859	1,441	1,07,718
Haryana	1,23,782	1,307	1,05,990
Madhya Pradesh	1,22,209	2,207	97,571

CAPSULE

FACING ISIS, REMAINING SIKHS, HINDUS LEAVE AF KABUL: Afghanistan's dwindling community of Sikhs and Hindus is shrinking to its lowest levels. With growing threats from the local Islamic State affiliate, many are choosing to leave the country of their birth to escape the insecurity and a once-thriving community of as many as 250,000 members now counts fewer than 700.

2 ULTRAS SHOT IN J&K, INFILTRATION BID FOILED: Jammu: Two terrorists were gunned down by the joint team of security forces in Sambora area of Awantipora on Sunday while alert jawans of the Border Security Force foiled a major infiltration bid by at least five heavily armed terrorists along the International border in Samba sector of Jammu frontier.

Vajpayee's Man Friday Jaswant Singh no more

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Six years after a head injury he suffered from a fall at his home confined him to the hospital bed, former Union Minister Jaswant Singh, a close associate of ex-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, died on Sunday. He was 82.

A former Army officer, Singh had been ill following the accident since August 2014. He had been in and out of the hospital since then. Three months ago, he was back to the hospital — for one last time. "It is with profound grief that we inform about the sad demise of Major Jaswant Singh (Retd), former Cabinet Minister of Government of India at on September 27, 2020.

Punjab CM terms presidential assent to farm Bills as unfortunate

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Terming the President's assent to the Farm Bills as unfortunate and distressing, Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday said his government is exploring all options, including possible amendments to the state laws, to protect the interests of the farmers.

All farmer organisations and other stakeholders would be taken into confidence before taking any decision on the way forward, the Chief Minister said, adding that the state government was committed to the procurement of every single grain of the farmers without compromising on the pricing. His government was already in consultation with legal and agricultural experts, and all those impact-



ed by the Central Government's calamitous legislations, to decide on the future course of action, he said. Besides legal recourse, his government would look into other options to scuttle the Centre's new Agriculture laws that are designed to ruin Punjab's farmers and economy, said the Chief Minister, who is scheduled to sit on dharna against the draconian legislations on Monday at Khatri Kalan, SBS Nagar, after paying

tributes to Shaheed Bhagat Singh at the Samadhi Shal of the martyr.

Capt Amarinder expressed disappointment and anguish over the decision of President Ram Nath Kovind to give the nod to the three unconstitutionally and anti-farmer Agriculture laws, without giving the Congress and other Opposition parties the opportunity to put their concerns before the Parliament.

The President's assent had come as a big blow to the farmers who are out on the roads protesting against the Centre's assault on their interests, he said. Implementation of these dangerous new laws in the current form would destroy Punjab's agriculture — the life-line of its economy, said Capt Amarinder.

Continued on page 4

Haryana CM meets Shah, triggers speculations about Cabinet expansion or reshuffle soon

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal on Sunday met Union Home Minister Amit Shah amid the speculations of a cabinet expansion or reshuffle in the state.

A day before, the Chief Minister had met Punjab president JP Nadda in New Delhi. The Chief Minister also met BJP national general secretary BL Santosh on Sunday.

The series of meetings in New Delhi have triggered speculations of a possible cabinet expansion or reshuffle in the coming days. Sources said that besides discussion on the overall political scenario in the state, issues of cabinet expansion and upcoming Baroda by-election were also discussed.



Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala's Jannayak

Janata Party is an alliance partner of the Manohar Lal Khatter-led Haryana Government. The JJP, with its 10 MLAs, has last year allied with the BJP in October after the assembly election results threw up a fractured mandate. Apart from the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, there are currently 10 council of ministers comprising one from its alliance partner and an independent in the Cabinet.

The cabinet can have 14 members, including the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, with two slots kept for the future expansion. Notably, Haryana is on a border due to farmers' protest over the issue of farms' threat. A threat to the political alliance between the BJP and JJP in Haryana is looming large after the SAD broke decades old alliance with the BJP in neighboring Punjab over the farms' bills.

SAD DEPARTS FROM NDA

Sukhbir calls for closing ranks for united fight to save farmers

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To protect the interests of farmers, farm labour and farm produce traders in the country, especially in Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Sunday called upon all political parties and organizations to close ranks for a united fight.

"We are ready to join or follow any struggle in the overall interests of the farmers, farm labour, and farm produce traders," said Sukhbir, while making his first public speech after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Saturday night.

He said that the country needed to understand and empathize with the farmers and farm labour in view of the pathetic conditions in which they were living.

"Anything like the new farm bills which increases the uncertainty over the fate of the farmers' produce can have disastrous implications not only for economy but also for social stability in the country. The farmers' economic plight affects the entire economy. Therefore what we are fighting for is to protect the country's

wider national interests," he said.

Reiterating his party's firm commitment to preserving peace, communal harmony and fraternity in Punjab at all costs, he said: "We must not flinch from the ideals of keeping our struggle for people's rights absolutely peaceful and democratic. I must caution against attempts to defame our struggle by disturbing peace but that should only strengthen our resolve to pursue the age-old values of Punjab's fraternity and the path of peaceful democratic struggle."

He again advised the Chief Minister to issue an ordinance to declare the whole state a Barid (Principal Marketing Yard) to save farmers from 'black laws'.

Sukhbir was addressing gatherings of party workers and farmers at Ropar, Hoshiarpur and Phagwara on Sunday, to mark the 100th birth anniversary of Kisan March, which would commence from all three regions Takht Sahib in Punjab and culminate at Mohali.

Later, Sukhbir said: "If we stand united, we will force the farmers' economic plight before farmers and repeal the three bills. These bills were passed in the Parliament with

sheer stubbornness after muzzling our voice."

BREAKING 'MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE' WITH BJP CAN'T TURN SAD INTO A HOLY COW: RANDHAWA

Senior Congress leader and Punjab Cabinet Minister Sukhinder Singh Randhawa on Sunday asserted that SAD cannot wash its hands off the "sins" it committed even after ending its "marriage of convenience" with the BJP owing to "political compulsions as well as pressure mounted by the farmers' agitation". In fact, the Minister maintained that the Badal clan owes a public apology for casting aspersions on Dr Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister, the instigation of the saffron party.

The Badals were equal partners in the NDA Government which brought the economy to its lowest ebb which was earlier put on upward trajectory by the UPA Government under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh with great efforts. By acting as puppets in BJP's hands, the Akalis continued personal criticism of Dr Manmohan Singh, said Sukhbir. He added that despite granting various financial spurs to Punjab, Dr Manmohan Singh never got a word of

gratitude from the SAD.

Randhawa added that with breaking of alliance with BJP, Akali Dal cannot claim itself to be a holy cow as the party is an equitable ally in crime during wrongs committed against the State of Punjab. Minorities and the farmers during NDA regime. He also challenged SAD to come clean on BJP's statements regarding Akalis in loop over the farm ordinances as well as duty assigned by the saffron party to bring the farmers on board.

SUKHBIR SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RESIGN AS SAD PREZ: BAJWA

Punjab Rural Development and Panchayat Minister Triph Rajinder Singh Bajwa on Sunday asked the Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal to immediately resign as party chief because his party, despite of being a long time ally in Narendra Modi Government, failed miserably to protect the interests of Punjab. "He no longer has the moral and political right to remain as president of Shiromani Akali Dal," said Bajwa adding that the decision to sever ties with the BJP and come out of the NDA was in fact a "confession" of the Akali

Dal. He said that SAD had not severed ties with BJP out of any principle or morality but due to political compulsion because the Punjab's completely ignored the SAD's call of 'chakra jant' on September 25 and shown that they would no longer be fooled by the Akalis. Termining SAD's decision to start Akali March from the great thrones of the Sikh Panth on October 1 as unfortunate, Bajwa said that Akali Dal should refrain from using religion as a cover for its politics.

SAD QUITS NDA "OUT OF COMPUSSION": DHINDSA

Dissident Akali leader Sukhvir Singh Dhindsa on Sunday said that SAD snapped ties with the NDA "out of compulsion" as farmers were angry with it over the farm bills. "They (SAD) have done it out of compulsion as farmers are upset with them," said Dhindsa, a Rajya Sabha member.

He said that the Akali Dal initially supported the bills with even party stalwart Parkash Singh Badal speaking in favour. "They then took a U-turn, saying that it is not in the interest of farmers. Were these bills not bad for farmers

earlier?" he asked, while alleging that the SAD has lost support at the ground level in the state. Dhindsa, who had formed the SAD (Democratic) party, said that his political outfit has been supporting farmers from the beginning over the issue. "From day one, we have been supporting farmers and standing with them. Our party wants the issue to be resolved at the earliest," he said.

AFTER JAITLEY, NO ONE IN BJP UNDERSTANDS PUNJAB'S PSYCHE: GUJRAL

A day after the SAD announced to quit the NDA over the farm Bills issue, senior party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Nareish Gujral on Sunday said that after former Union Minister and BJP stalwart Arun Jaitley's demise, no one in the BJP understands the psyche of Punjab. Underlining that all sections of people in Punjab are extremely angry over the farm Bills issue, Gujral said: "I hope that even at this late stage, the Centre would show some sensitivity in dealing with the Punjab situation before it gets out of control. I hope that the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre will show 'some sensitivity' in dealing with the

situation in Punjab." The decision to break the alliance was taken based on the feedback from party cadre. Being a cadre-based party, the SAD respects their wishes," he said. **NOW, BJP DOESN'T LISTEN TO OUR CONCERNS ABOUT PUNJAB, FARMERS: BHUNDER**

Senior Akali leader and Rajya Sabha MP Balwinder Singh Bhunder on Sunday said that the alliance between the SAD and BJP continued for four decades, but the equation has now changed. "We came together to fight against the atrocities of the Congress. The Akali Dal was always consulted on issues of farmers and Punjab. But now BJP didn't listen to our concerns about Punjab and issues related to farmers," he said. Bhunder said that unlike former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's rule, allies have not been given due weightage in the current NDA dispensation.

BJP LEADERSHIP WANTED TO GET RID OF AKALIS: JAKHAR

Reacting over SAD's decision to quit the NDA, BJP Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar on Sunday said that Akalis had it coming for a

while now. "Fearful of farmers' wrath on one hand and being equally scared of antagonizing the Prime Minister on the other, Akalis tried to do a balancing act," he said.

"Akalis didn't want to break their ties with BJP and were keen to keep up this pretense of an alliance, which is evident from their not walking out of the BJP-led NDA even when they were shown the door out of central Cabinet and afterwards Harimart Badal still insisting that she was not calling these laws anti-farmer and only farmers had termed these as anti-farmer," Jakhar said.

Maintaining that the Akalis were desperately waiting for some sign of re-approach from the BJP, he said: "No senior leader in the saffron party was willing to even meet them and their calls for seeking positive change in the current NDA dispensation. We saw through their game and were in no mood to accept a kind of loose arrangement akin to a 'live in relationship' being proposed by the Akalis. We were waiting for a sign of the Akalis but didn't want to be seen as initiators of this 'break-up'."

Haryana reports 16 deaths, 1,515 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana has reported 16 COVID-19 related fatalities on Sunday as 1,515 fresh cases surfaced pushing the total infections in the state to 1,23,782.

The death toll reached 1307 in the state. In the last 24 hours, three deaths each were reported in Hisar, two fatalities each in Faridabad, Ambala, Kurukshetra and Yamunanagar

and one death each in Kaithal, Ferozabad, Sirsa, Panchkula and Bhiwani, the Haryana Health Department's evening bulletin stated.

"Out of 1515 fresh cases reported on Sunday, a big spike of 274 positive cases was reported in Gurugram. The daily reported COVID-19 cases, Rohtak reported 100 cases, Hisar reported 116 cases, Sonapat 97 cases, Yamunanagar 86 cases. Out of 358 critical patients admitted in the hos-

pitals, 306 patients were on oxygen support while 52 were on ventilators, the bulletin stated. The worst-affected districts in the state, Faridabad had till now reported 19301 positive cases and 215 deaths while Gurugram has reported 19928 cases and 170 fatalities in the past week. Punjab is far ahead from many states like Himachal Pradesh, and Bihar in terms of contact tracing.

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To break the chain of spread of COVID-19 virus, Punjab Health Department has traced up its efforts for contact tracing drive under which 7.6 contacts of every COVID-19 patient have been traced and 170 tested in the past week. Punjab is far ahead from many states like Himachal Pradesh, and Bihar in terms of contact tracing.

Nodal officer of the rank of Additional Deputy Commissioner has reviewed the progress of teams deputed to urban zones. In addition to this, block level teams have also been formed under SDMs to cover rural areas coordinating with the respective Senior Medical Officer. Initially, when a case comes positive, the source of infection may not be known immediately as the patient may not recall the people met and places visited, said the Minister.

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Growth rate of Covid infections declines in Chandigarh

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The average growth rate of Covid-19 infection has declined from 4.4 percent to 2.2 in the past ten days in Chandigarh. Despite a spike in the daily cases and death toll in September in Chandigarh, the positive cases are now showing a steady decline.

The growth rate of COVID-19 infection which was highest in Chandigarh across the nation during the initial days of September has now declined to 2.2 percent. The average growth rate essentially means the speed at which COVID-19 infections increase.

The daily growth rate of COVID-19 cases, averaged over the seven-day period in Chandigarh, however remains higher than the worst affected states of Maharashtra (1.5), Tamil Nadu (1.0), Andhra Pradesh (1.1) and others in the country. The growth rate of positive cases in neighboring states of Punjab and Haryana stood at 1.7 percent and 1.9 percent respectively.

Other parameters of COVID-19 have also seen improvement over the past ten days in the city.

The recovery rate of COVID-19 positive cases in Chandigarh stood at 78.9 percent. The active ratio of cases stood at 19.9 percent which means for every 100 confirmed cases, 19 are currently infected

in the city. As far as testing is concerned, a cumulative test positivity rate of 15.5 percent was recorded in the city.

Both the recovery rate and test positivity rate in Chandigarh were the worst in the country nearly two weeks back.

The total cases in the city were 11553 while 2303 were active cases on Sunday. 9103 positive cases have so far recovered from COVID-19 in the city.

TWO DEATHS, 173 FRESH CASES IN CHANDIGARH

The union territory of Chandigarh on Sunday reported two deaths as 173 fresh positive cases were reported.

According to the Chandigarh Health Department's evening Bulletin, "A 70 years old female resident of Ram Darbar, a comorbid has expired at PGIMER on September 26. An 81 years old male resident of Sector 52, a comorbid expired at GMCH 32 on September 27."

In the last 24 hours, a maximum of 14 positive cases were reported in Manimajra, seven cases each were reported in Sector 20 and Sector 44 among other cases.

As per the health bulletin, the fresh cases were reported in Sector 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 56, 63, Sector 38 west.

STUBBLE BURNING

Punjab appoints 8K nodal officers, sets up dedicated call centre

23,500 more machines to be provided to farmers for in-situ paddy straw mgmnt

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a series of measures to check the menace of stubble burning in the ongoing Kharif season, Punjab Government has appointed 8,000 nodal officers in the paddy-growing villages of the State, with 23,500 more machines being given to farmers for in-situ management of paddy straw.

At the same time, the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has also appealed to the farmers not to burn the crop residue, as it could aggravate COVID-19 conditions apart from leading to pollution spread.

Seeking the support and cooperation of the farmers in

preventing stubble burning amid the pandemic, the Chief Minister said that the State had warned it could have serious implications for the vulnerable people, already suffering from lung and other diseases.

Capt Amarinder said that while he had been repeatedly following up with the Prime Minister for compensation to the farmers for defraying the cost on management of paddy straw, the State was also taking various steps to educate the farmers about the problem.

"The State Government has been seeking from the Centre Rs 100 per quintal as compensation to enable the farmers to manage the paddy

straw without burning it," he said.

The nodal officers, who will be working in the villages till November 15, will work in close coordination with the staff of Cooperation, Revenue, Rural Development and Panchayats, Agriculture, Horticulture and Soil Conservation Departments, as well as the Punjab Pollution Control Board and the Guardians of Governance.

Armed with a Super SMS system, these officers will also prepare lists of owners who have given their land on rent (theke) and then call each land owner on phone with the warning that a red entry shall be made in their land record if they fail to ensure that no paddy straw is burning.

The nodal officers will create awareness in villages

through CRM (crop residue management) machines, distribution of pamphlets or leaflets, announcements from Gurudwara or by other modes, personal interaction with village schools for organizing rallies and awareness lectures to students who can create further awareness among their parents and other farmers in their villages.

The Agriculture Department has also deputed a dedicated team at the Call Centre on toll free no 1800-180-1551 for quick resolution of the queries of farmers about farm machinery for paddy straw management.

"As part of the state's stubble management strategy, the Agriculture Department, headed by me, 23,500 more agri-machines are being provided this year to farmers, either

individually or in groups or through cooperative societies at a subsidy ranging from 50 to 80 percent. This is in addition to 51,000 paddy straw in-situ management machines provided over the past two years," said the Chief Minister.

Further, various sites have been identified or earmarked in the districts for collection of residues in Common Lands or Cattle Ponds and Gushals, where farmers or any entrepreneur can store paddy straw. This stored biomass residue can be transported to places where it can be used as cattle fodder, said the Chief Minister, adding that the District Administration had been directed to facilitate the logistics for transportation of the straw from these sites.

Punjab Government has, in

fact, approached the Chief Secretaries of the adjoining States for procurement of this paddy straw and queries had been received so far from the state of Uttarakhand, said the Chief Minister. The state Additional Chief Secretary (Development) Anirudh Tiwari said that the State Government was also taking appropriate legal and administrative measures, besides creating awareness among people, to curb the menace of paddy stubble burning in view of pandemic.

Notably, paddy has been grown over 27 lakh hectares of land in Punjab this year, including cultivation of Basmati on seven lakh hectares. Cumulatively, this is expected to yield paddy residue of 16.50 million tons.

Haryana Women's Commission to document women achievers of State

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana State Commission for Women has planned to put together untold stories of women of different fields- education, sports, information technology, business, politics, industry, social activity among others who have performed exceptionally well in the country and abroad.

These women have taken giant strides, breaking barriers and setting new benchmarks over the past few decades. Their stories will be documented as part of a research initiative of the Commission, which will bring out a coffee table book on 100 phenomenal women, both known and unknown, said Women's Commission acting chairperson Preeti Bhardwaj Dalal while talking to "The Pioneer" over the phone.

She said that the purpose of the initiative is simple. There is a significant contribution of many women in the development of society but that has not been recognised properly in the absence of written work. In this situation, the future generations

won't be able to recognise their contribution. "The Commission will write a letter to all deputy commissioners and district magistrates to collect names of such phenomenal women for the same purpose," Dalal added.

The chairperson said that women in the State have taken giant strides, breaking barriers and setting new benchmarks over the past many years. From business to politics, academic, technology and industry, they have successfully shattered all stereotypes, and glass ceilings. Their stories will be documented as part of a research initiative of the Commission, which will bring out a coffee table book on 100 phenomenal women, both known and unknown, said Women's Commission acting chairperson Preeti Bhardwaj Dalal while talking to "The Pioneer" over the phone.

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an akhanda and wrestled with the boys of her village. Bagging India's first medal at the Rio Olympics 2016, Malik has since been bringing glory to the nation. She showed the World that women no longer stand behind men in the arena of wrestling.

Dalal said, "We are committed to safeguarding the rights and rights of the women as the Commission's preliminary function is to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws. The chairperson said that the Commission is collaborating with Chaudhary Bansi Lal University Bhiwani in the project and will collaborate with one or two more universities so that a proper research can be undertaken at the ground level. "We have met Chaudhary Bansi Lal University Vice-Chancellor RK Mittal to explore possibilities of a collaboration for the research work," she added.

Dalal said, "Our research team will not be limited to just a few decades but we would like to look for those women too



Kalpana Chawla



Chandrawati



Rani Rampal



Sakshi Malik



Sushma Swaraj

who have performed well during the freedom struggle of the country. We will also look for best women village sarpanches, block pramukhs, district pramukhs, social workers among others who have ensured development in their localities.

Meanwhile, the performance of many women from the State has already been recognised widely. The Women's Commission chief cites examples of three sisters. Keshni Anand Arora, Meenakshi Anand Chaudhary and Urvasi Gulati - from the State who reached the post of

Chief Secretary to contribute in the field of administration. Arora is the current Chief Secretary of Haryana. Dalal also recalls politician Sushma Swaraj who had become the youngest-ever minister in Haryana's Janata Party government in 1977 after being elected to the Assembly at the age of 25 and later became Union External Affairs Minister.

Freedom fighter and politician Sucheta Kripalani who was born in Ambala was India's first woman Chief Minister, serving as the head of the Uttar Pradesh government from 1963 to 1967.

She had exemplary leadership qualities. On her name, Sucheta Kripalani Hospital has been set up in Delhi.

Our young generation should know the great personalities and freedom fighters' sacrifices to attain the independence from the British Raj and take it as an inspiration.

The 48-year-old Deepa Malik was diagnosed with a spinal tumour in 1999 and went through three surgeries after that. With 183 stitches in her shoulder blades for a period of 14 years, Malik was left paralysed from the waist down. Paralysis, however, wasn't

strong enough to stop her. She then decided to become a swimmer, athlete, biker and adventure junkie.

In 2016, she was one of India's Paralympians at the Rio Olympics in 2016.

Other women achievers include wrestler Phogat sisters, hockey player Rani Rampal, educationist Sajida Zaidi, poetess and singer Zohrabai Ambalewali, astronaut Kalpana Chawla, actress Manushi Chhillar, first woman member of Haryana Vidhan Sabha Chandrawati and business woman Kiran Chopra. But now the commission-appointed team will also look for unknown women achievers. For example, there is an Anganwari worker, Jagmati Malik, from Rakhi Khas village of Hissar district who has fought for over 50,000 fellow workers and helpers of anganwadis during the past two decades.

There are others like Santosh Dahiya, a professor of Kurukshetra University, who is campaigning against purdah and female foeticide in Haryana. Dahiya has adopted a village, Muijapur, of Hissar district in 2015 when she came to know that the village child sex ratio is just 273.

BIHAR ELECTION

Cong gives ultimatum to RJD, begins talks with local parties



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has initiated talks with local parties like RILP, VIP, NCP and even with the former Union Minister in Vajpayee Government Yashwant Sinha to forge an alliance for the Bihar Assembly elections, starting next month. At the same time, it has given an ultimatum to its old nemesis RJD to make up its mind by this month end over the issue of seat sharing.

Sources said the Congress

leadership has conveyed to RJD to come to the negotiation table and finish the seat sharing process so that enough time remains for the grand alliance to campaign.

RJD chief Tejashwi Yadav is likely to go to Ranchi to discuss further on the Bihar Assembly polls with his father, RJD patriarch Lalu Yadav, who is lodged in jail in Jharkhand in connection with the fodder scam.

The Congress has also shared its list of 'bastion' seats, some of them believed to be common for both the RJD and

Congress which had fought the last assembly polls together and registered impressive wins to form the Mahagathbandhan government including JD (U), Nitish Kumar had later switched sides to BJP and formed the NDA Government.

Congress sources said it has agreed to project former Deputy CM and RJD chief Tejashwi Yadav as the Chief pointman candidate of the alliance but in lieu of more say in the choice of seats.

"We have already shared a list of 75 constituencies to

Dr Ajoy Kumar rejoins Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Ajoy Kumar rejoined Congress after he quit the party to join the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The former MP and former president of Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee had joined AAP in

September 2019. Congress General Secretary R C Venugopal, in a statement, said, "Congress president Sonia Gandhi has approved the proposal for the re-joining of Dr Ajoy Kumar, Ex-MP and former President, Jharkhand PCC, to the Congress party."

RJD which is the bone of contention between both the parties to begin the negotiations," said a senior Congress leader looking after the Bihar affairs.

He shared that Congress is also in talks with NCP, Yashwant Sinha, VIP and former Union Minister Upendra Kushwaha's RILP in case the alliance with RJD does not materialise. A resentment in Kushwaha is also palpable for his objection to Tejashwi Yadav's projection as the CM face of the alliance.

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, in the meantime, on Sunday announced the names of a few candidates for the assembly by-election in

Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

With former Congress colleagues and friends Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot ranged on opposite sides, the Madhya Pradesh bypolls have now become a high-pitched electoral clash between the two and both the Congress and BJP on 28 Assembly seats.

Pilot is campaigning for the party candidates in the by-elections for 28 Assembly seats in the state, most of which are in the Gwalior-Jabalpur region, considered to be the bastion of Scindia. Most of the seats for which Pilot has been called have a large number of

Home Ministry orders dispatch of 300 companies of paramilitary forces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Sunday ordered the immediate dispatch of 300 companies of paramilitary forces for poll-bound Bihar.

These paramilitary are from various units of CRPF, BSF, CISF, SSB, ITBP and RPF. The State Government was asked to submit detailed deployment plans for the poll duties of the 300 companies across the State. One company consists of 135 jawans and officers.

With 80 companies, CRPF has the highest number of its personnel deployed in Bihar. BSF will send 55 companies, CISF 50, and SSB 52 companies. While 30 companies are from ITBP, the RPF will



send 15 companies for the poll bound State.

The Union Home Ministry directed the paramilitary forces

to adhere strictly to the Covid-19 guidelines during transportation, deployment and logistics.

Gujarat voters and Congress hopes to use Pilot to woo them.

Of the 28 seats, 25 were vacated by Congress MLAs who switched to the BJP to

facilitate the comeback of Shishu Choudhary as Chief Minister, while three fell vacant due to the death of sitting MLAs.

Congress announced can-

didates for 9 more seats in Bihar. Three of the latest candidates are ex-BJP leaders. The party had announced the first list of 15 candidates on September 11.

Grant leave liberally to jawans, paramilitary officers told

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of casualties of six personnel due to suicide or fratricide in the last few months, the Central paramilitary forces have issued orders to its officers to liberally grant leave to the jawans, expeditiously resolve any issues being faced by them, timely clear their allowances and formulate a proper duty roster.

The move comes following a directive from the Union Home Ministry after the Confederation of Ex Paramilitary Force Welfare Association raised concerns over the rising shootout and suicides and demanded instructions to the Forces to check the trend.

During the last few months, jawans of paramilitary forces like CRPF, BSF, SSB and ITBP have resorted to fratricidal killings leading to the death of six jawans. This dangerous trend is continuing and in the majority of the cases, enquiries have concluded that domestic discord was the reason for such incidents.

Apart from existing measures already in place to check such incidents in the ranks, the

Forces have issued a fresh set of guidelines to contain any such trend in the future.

The officials commanding their respective formations have been specifically asked to adopt a liberal approach in granting leave to the jawans. A suitable roster of duty of jawans can be formulated. Payment of allowances and entitlements should be made at the earliest and without any hassles. Officials at different levels have further been asked to give sincere hearing to the problems being faced by the jawans and make every possible effort to resolve their issues, officials said, adding the latest directive has been circulated across all the formations of these paramilitary forces.

While the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is engaged in a variety of internal security roles like anti-terrorism and counter Naxal operations, the Border Security Force (BSF) is tasked to secure the frontiers along Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) is securing the borders with China and the Sashstra Seema Bal is deployed along the boundary with Nepal and Bhutan.

PM Modi lauds farmers' resilience during 'mahamari'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lauding the farmers for showing "tremendous resilience" during the Coronavirus pandemic and their contribution to 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that they would benefit from the new agriculture-related Bills once these become laws. He also spoke about the rich Indian tradition of story-telling which, he said, was needed to rejuvenate the family system.

Addressing the 69th edition of his monthly radio address 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi pointed out that farm growers had benefited when fruits and vegetables were taken off the ambit of the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act in 2014 and now other farmers would benefit too. "The Prime Minister noted that in the recent past, the agriculture sector has been liberated from many restrictions

The Prime Minister noted that in the recent past, the agriculture sector has been liberated from many restrictions

were excluded from the APMC Act, which "benefited him". Farmers would be able to send their produce wherever they want without old restrictions and get a good price, said the prime minister.

He also talked about Tamil Nadu Banana farmers' company, a collective of farmers, which purchased hundreds of metric tons of vegetables, fruits and bananas from nearby villages during the lockdown, and supplied a vegetable combo kit to Chennai. He mentioned the 'Krishi Farmer Producer' group from Lucknow who, during the lockdown, procured fruits and vegetables directly from the cultivators' fields, and sold directly in the markets of Lucknow, free from the middlemen.

Talking about India's rich tradition of storytelling, PM

Modi said that "our stories are gaining popularity again."

"We have had a tradition of storytelling. This is an ancient method of narrating stories. Kathakali, Shebam has also been part of this. Different types of folklore are prevalent in our country," he said.

"But there are issues with some of the families. Some families have lost touch with their values," he said, adding that stories can help reinvigorate such families.

"There has been a thriving tradition of telling stories in India. There is an important tradition of storytelling in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is called Kathakali and Puppets. TVD to capture the incidents of stories prevailing in northern states. On the other hand, farmers have alleged that they do not have machinery to stop stubble burning."

As per the data compiled by Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modeling from Space, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), Punjab has reported 568 stubble burning incidents between September 16 and 18. Haryana has reported 31 incidents; Uttar Pradesh 12 and Delhi one incident so far. The data showed that inci-

Stubble burning may worsen air quality in coming days

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Due to increasing cases of stubble burning in Punjab, the air pollution in northern India is likely to get worse in the coming days. Between September 21st and 25th, at least 612 paddy crop residue burning incidents have been reported while only 215 such incidents were reported during this period last year. The number of incidents reported from Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Patiala.

Besides NASA satellites, the agencies are using eight satellites like Metop-1, Metop-2, Noaa-18, Noaa-19, Terra-1, Aqualis, S-NPP and Drought TVD to capture the incidents of stubble burning in northern states. On the other hand, farmers have alleged that they do not have machinery to stop stubble burning.

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dents of paddy crop residue burning have increased since September 18.

Presently, Delhi and NCRs air quality is moderate. If wind directions change from Punjab side to Delhi, the air pollution will be poorer. Currently, wind direction is from Punjab to Pakistan.

According to IARI data, there were 61,332 instances of stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh between October and November, 2019. There were 75,532 instances in 2018, 88,948 in 2017 and 127,774 in 2016, according to data sourced from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

In late September and October each year, farmers mainly in Punjab and Haryana burn an estimated 35 million tons of crop waste from their paddy fields.

The Prime Minister's Office recently held high level meetings in advance with concerned states to tackle this

issue ahead of the stubble burning season. As per data, total funds of ₹11,78.47 crore were provided in the year 2018-19 and 2019-20 to Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. In 2020-21, ₹600 crore has been provided in the budget for the scheme and ₹548.20 crore has been released to the states well before time to ensure they can take up the activities in advance.

Every winter, not just Delhi but also large parts of north India are frequently enveloped in a thick blanket of smog, caused by air pollution from vehicular and industrial emissions mixing with fog. The burning of post-harvest paddy stubble in the agricultural fields of Haryana and Punjab is often cited as a major cause of this unhealthy smog.

This year, health experts fear that the effects of COVID-19, which primarily causes respiratory problems, would be worsened by heightened air pollution due to smog and smoke from the annual stubble burning.

The burning of stubble emits large amounts of toxic pollutants like Methane, Carbon Monoxide and carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

'Indian population still far from achieving herd immunity against Covid'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising number of Covid-19 cases and fatalities, Union Health Minister Dr Harshvardhan on Sunday cautioned that Indian population is still far from achieving herd immunity against COVID-19 as shown by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) second Sero Survey and there is no room for complacency.

Dr Harsh Vardhan also said that the ICMR expert panel is examining reinfection cases. A total of 88,600 new cases and 1,124 deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours in the country.

While interacting with social media users during 'Sunday Samsad-3', the Minister said: The findings of the second sero survey are going to be released

soon. "But second sero survey indications are that we are far from having achieved any kind of herd immunity which necessitates that all of us should continue following COVID appropriate behaviour."

"The first sero-survey of May 2020 revealed that the nationwide prevalence of novel coronavirus infection was only 0.73 per cent," he said. The Minister also talked about the cases of reinfections being reported from the country saying that the "ICMR is also actively investigating and researching reports of reinfection and although the number of reinfection cases is negligible at the moment the government is fully seized of the importance of the matter."

Dr Harsh Vardhan discouraged the wide usage of investi-



gational therapies such as remdesivir and plasma therapies.

"Government has issued regular advisories regarding the rational use of investigational therapies. The private hospitals have also been advised against routine use of these investigational therapies:

The doctors in the States/UTs are being made aware of the therapies."

The Union Health Minister also dispelled fears regarding the phased opening of schools and advised on proper protocol to be followed while visiting salons

and hair-spa.

India has been recording higher number of recoveries than the new cases for several consecutive days in the recent past. In the last 24 hours, 92,043 new recoveries have been reported in the last 24 hours in the country; 76 per cent of the new recovered cases are found in 10 States/UTs, said a senior health official adding that Maharashtra continues to top this list. Haryana alone contributed more than 23,000 followed by Andhra Pradesh with more than 9,000 cases.

Ten States/UTs account for 77 per cent of the new confirmed cases. Maharashtra contributed more than 20,000 followed by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh with more than more than 8,000 and 7,000 cases respectively.

C'garh, Haryana and Telangana get ₹19,944 cr for paddy purchase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Centre announced commencement of paddy procurement at the minimum support price (MSP) with immediate effect in the country, the Ministry sanctioned the early arrival of the kharif crop in these two States, the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), an apex financing organisation under the Union Agriculture Ministry, sanctioned ₹19,944 crore as the first instalment to Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Telangana for a smooth purchase process.

Chhattisgarh got the high-

The NCDC loan is supposed to assist the States or the State Marketing Federations in undertaking paddy procurement

est amount at ₹9,000 crores while for Haryana, the sanctioned amount is ₹5,444 crores. These States account for nearly 75 per cent of paddy production in the country. However, Punjab is yet to get any sanctioned amount.

The Centre has fixed MSP

for 'common variety' paddy at ₹1,868 per quintal and for 'A' grade variety at ₹1,888 per quintal for the current year. On Saturday, the Centre had announced purchase of the crops at MSP to placate the farmers across the country who were up in arms against the recently passed Farmers Bill, which has got the President's sanction on Sunday.

The NCDC loan is supposed to assist the States or the State Marketing Federations in undertaking paddy procurement operations in a timely manner through their respective cooperative organizations.

Govt mulls eco-friendly CNG/LPG boats at tourist places

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is mulling to substitute petrol, diesel and kerosene in boats operating at tourists spots across the country with environment-friendly CNG/LPG fuel. This was stated by Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan at a virtual event held here on the occasion of World Tourism Day marked on Sunday.

Talking about sustainable environment, the Minister said

that he was keen to take it further by substituting petrol, diesel, kerosene etc in operating boats at tourist spots with CNG/LPG which are pollution-free.

In fact, in Varanasi an initiative has already been undertaken in this regard with the local administration after consultation with the locals are planning to replace the pollution causing petrol driven boats at over 84 ghats of the Ganga river with the



green pet CNG.

Pradhan also emphasised upon using battery operated vehicles in and around tourist spots.

With Covid-19 playing spoilsports with the international travel, Union Tourism Minister Prahlaad Singh Patel urged every citizen to visit at least 15 destinations in the country by 2022 to promote domestic tourism.

He said that the Ministry has launched the Dekho Apna

Desh (DAD) initiative early this year with the objective of creating awareness among the citizens about the rich heritage and culture of the country, encouraging citizens to travel widely within the country and enhancing tourist footfalls leading to development of local economy and creation of jobs at the local level.

To create mass awareness, the Ministry has also launched an online DAD pledge and Quiz on the MyGov.in platform.

The online pledge and Quiz are open to all for participation.

Pradhan further said that the programme will help in enhancing the overall experience of the tourists, who would benefit from the knowledge of the local tourist facilitators and it will also help in creating employment opportunities even in the remotest parts of the country.

This year United Nations World Tourism Organisation

(UNWTO) has designated 2020 as the Year of Tourism and Rural Development. "This Year is an opportunity to promote the potential of tourism to create jobs and opportunities."

It can also advance inclusion and highlight the unique role tourism can play in preserving and promoting natural and cultural heritage and curbing urban migration," said a senior official from the Ministry.

Kerala logs 7,445 new corona positive cases

5,791 afflicted in Tamil Nadu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI/KOCHI

As the number of Covid-19 patients touched an all-time high in the State, Kerala Minister for Health K K Shyllaja blamed the people for not following the guidelines and safety measures recommended by the Government and warned about a possible total lockdown. Neighbouring Tamil Nadu showed a decline in the number of new patients tested on Sunday as well as the total number of patients.

On Sunday, 7,445 new persons were diagnosed with Covid-19 in the State and this took the total number of patients in Kerala to 56,709. The last 24 hours saw 21 patients succumbing to the pandemic. According to a bulletin issued by Tamil Nadu Government, 5,791 new patients were diagnosed with Covid-19 on Sunday while the total Covid-19 cases were 46,341. There were 80 deaths reported in the State during the last 24 hours. There are 10,368 more patients in Kerala than in Tamil Nadu.

Shyllaja said the relaxation in the lockdown ordered by the Government for Onam holidays led to the increase in the number of patients. "The Opposition parties which are staging unnecessary and unwanted agitations across the State are equally responsible for this situation," said the minister who was rated as the world's top thinker in the year 2020 by Prospect, a British magazine. Despite being a closed hol-

2 terrorists killed in J&K's Awantipora

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Two terrorists were gunned down by the joint team of security forces in Sambora area of Awantipora on Sunday while jawans of the Border Security Force (BSF) foiled a major infiltration bid by at least five heavily armed terrorists along the International border in Samba sector of Jammu frontier. Till the time of filing the report, search operations were still going on at the encounter site in Awantipora Sector. However, twitter handle of the Kashmir Zone police while confirming the reports posted an update, "one more 'unidentified' terrorist eliminated in the ongoing operation, total two so far, search operations still going on".

Meanwhile, in Jammu BSF spokesman in a statement said, "Alert BSF troops foiled another major infiltration bid from Pakistani side in the Samba sector close to the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday".

The terrorists retreated to the Pakistani soil following the exchange of fire. Following repeated incidents of cross border firing and arms dropping using drones close to the International border across Jammu frontier the border security grid has been kept in a state of high alert to foil these nefarious designs of Pakistan.

of the darkness, five heavily armed terrorists tried to enter into Indian territory but were engaged by the alert BSF troops. They reached close to the IB taking advantage of dense growth of wild grass. The BSF personnel ordered the terrorists to stop, but they started firing at the troops. Pakistan Rangers personnel provided cover fire to these terrorists. However, the alert BSF troops started retaliatory firing at the terrorists," he said. The terrorists retreated to the Pakistani soil following the exchange of fire. Following repeated incidents of cross border firing and arms dropping using drones close to the International border across Jammu frontier the border security grid has been kept in a state of high alert to foil these nefarious designs of Pakistan.

Tamil Nadu farming hero V Kannan succumbs to virus

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Covid-19 claimed yet another Cunsing hero of Tamil Nadu, Kattumannarkoil V Kannan late Saturday night. He was 72 and succumbed to the pandemic in a corporate hospital in Chennai. Hailing from Cuddalore district, Kannan, a postgraduate with degree in law, took to farming from his young age and was the vice-president of Cauvery Delta Farmers Association.

His was a life dedicated to the farmers of Tamil Nadu. He had only one ambition in his life - to see the major rivers of the country interlinked through a network of canals so that no farmers anywhere in the country would be denied irrigation facilities even amidst drought. Kannan had distinct and unique ideas for regaining the status of farmers and farming. "We do not want any charity from the State or Central Governments. Make loans available to us at reduced rates of interest and ensure that the agriculture produces get minimum support price assured by the Government. Also allow us to sell the farm produce to the buyers of our choice. This together with the interlinking of rivers would make life easy for us," Kannan said before he was quarantined early this month. Kannan is survived by wife, a son and daughter. A great scholar of Tamil classics, Kannan would be missed badly by the farming community, according to Pon Radhakrishnan, former union minister who was a close friend of the farmers' leader.

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Mukul reaches out to Rahul Sinha as discord in BJP intensifies

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after senior BJP leader Rahul Sinha expressed his displeasure over the appointment of Trinamool Congress defectors to high party posts at the cost of the "veteran time-tested" saffron leaders newly appointed party vice president Mukul Roy reached out to the discontented leader saying Sinha and BJP were identical in Bengal.

Roy himself a founder member of the Trinamool Congress who left the party following his differences with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and joined the BJP a few years ago said, "Rahula is the face of BJP in Bengal without whom the party would not have come this far... his contribution to the party is not less than anyone else."

Sinha a former State party president was dropped as the party national secretary and was replaced by another Trinamool Congress discard Anupam Hazra a former MP. Hazra too struck a conciliatory note saying "all issues in the party can be sorted out through discussion," adding he would approach the doors of all the leaders for better performance.

The major reshuffle in the party on Saturday Sinha had exploded saying that he was hugely disappointed by the development. "I will speak up details 10-12 days later but for now I can say that I am extremely disappointed by the new arrange-

ment where TMC defectors have been honoured with reward posts... This is the reward I got for serving the party for the past 40 years?" he said adding "nothing can be more unfortunate and disappointing than this."

The top-level schism tended to reach the grassroots with Hazra's car on Sunday being gheraoed by angry saffron workers at Baruiipur in South 24 Parganas where the discontented workers complained against TMC men occupying important posts in the party.

"The TMC workers who have joined the BJP are getting important responsibilities where as we are being ignored by the district leadership... this is unacceptable," a party man-

Overcrowded UP jails emerge as hotspots of coronavirus

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

Overcrowded jails of Uttar Pradesh have emerged as Covid-19 hotspots. Even 71 jails of the UP are overcrowded up to 3 to 4 times its capacity which gives rise to unhygienic conditions and impossible to maintain social distance. 17 prisoners were found Coronavirus positive in Aligarh and 128 in Fatehgarh jail. According to DG jail Anand Kumar, more than 140,000 prisoners were tested for corona in UP's 71 jails in which 7000 were found positive including jail staff.

Dr. Kafeel and Sharji who were in jail for the protest of CAA told that the capacity of one cell is 40 in which more than 130 prisoners were confined. There is no social distancing in the cell.

Prashant Kumar, social activist, said that even 71 jails including Aligarh, Mathura, Agra, etc are the hotspots of the COVID virus which is like a COVID live bomb and can be blast anytime if the government will not take any Covid-19 preventive action. The way district prisons are facing the increasing cases of coronavirus, the AMU student leaders who had been jailed had already warned about this new hotspot of the coronavirus.

With film City just 131 km away, Aligarh's talents will get a platform

Aligarh: Famous stars of India like Bharat Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan Gopal Das Neeraj, Javed Akhtar, Rishi Masoom Raza, Shahryar, and Ravindra Jain to Alka Yagnik have shone in the sky from the land of Aligarh who have made the film world in the seven notes of their song and music. They gave many famous songs which are still alive in the hearts of the people. Now, the film city is going to establish at just 131 km from Aligarh which will be a great platform for the actors of Aligarh.

The top-level schism tended to reach the grassroots with Hazra's car on Sunday being gheraoed by angry saffron workers at Baruiipur in South 24 Parganas where the discontented workers complained against TMC men occupying important posts in the party. "The TMC workers who have joined the BJP are getting important responsibilities where as we are being ignored by the district leadership... this is unacceptable," a party man-

dal workers said even as two groups engaged in fistfistic sources said. About half a dozen party men had to be hospitalised, insiders said. Similar skirmishes took place at Basirah where the party men revolted against district party president Tapan Ghosh holding him guilty of getting sold out to the Trinamool Congress. "Our district president is sold out to Prashant Kishore and is doing nothing. He has with him a few hundred workers which is why the party is not taking any programme in the district," angry workers said even as they vandalised the interiors of a tent where a party programme was to be held.

Bird sanctuary Shekha lake cries for attention

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH

Shekha Lake, located 16 km from Shekha, near Jallai town is the largest bird sanctuary of the district. In the winter season, foreign birds from Siberia, Poland, Bhutan, China, and Russia are tweeting, in which more than 150 species of birds including Graylag Goose, Bar-headed Goose, Mallard, Mallard Teal and others come here but year by year they are getting extinct.

In a lake spread over 40 hectares, Rs 30 is charged from tourists, but the toilets are dirty, with no supply of water from the tanks. Over 400 tourists in summer and around 100 tourists in winter visit here daily. Dr. Salim Ali, the country's first bird scientist who came to Aligarh in 1954, discovered this place and during the honor ceremony in AMU in 1977, he proposed this place to the Wildlife Department as a suitable place for research on the birds. On 8th February 2014, former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav declared it as a bird sanctuary and released Rs 3 crore 4 lakh for the construction of a boundary wall, main gate, office, canteen, and parking. Since then, the Government of Uttar Pradesh, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, ordered the cleaning of the lake.

Ladakh group withdraws call for boycotting autonomous body polls in Leh

New Delhi: An influential organisation of Ladakh on Sunday withdrew its call for the boycott of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Leh, after the Central government assured it that the demand for protection of language, demography, ethnicity, land and jobs of the locals will be considered positively within 15 days of the polls.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah also assured a delegation of the People's Movement for Constitutional Safeguard Under Sixth Schedule for Ladakh and Union Home Ministry would commence after 15 days of the culmination of LAHDC, Leh elections. Any decision so reached in this regard would be in consultation with the representatives from Leh and Kargil," the statement said. The statement said the central government is committed to empower the LAHDC of Leh and Kargil and would safeguard the interests of the people of the Union Territory of Ladakh.

77 deaths, 4,403 fresh coronavirus cases in UP

Lucknow: Seventy-seven more people died from coronavirus in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday as the state's daily infection tally crossed 4,400.

So far, 5,594 people have died from the disease in the state, according to a health bulletin. Of the 77 fresh deaths, Lucknow reported 11, followed by seven in Kanpur, six in Gorakhpur, five in Kushinagar and four in Allahabad. As far as fresh cases are concerned, Lucknow reported the maximum 549 infections, followed by Allahabad (463), Ghaziabad (229), Gautam Buddha Nagar (204), Meerut (191), Kanpur (179) and Varanasi (163). The count of active COVID-19 cases in the state stands at 84,19 per cent," Additional Chief Secretary (Medical and Health) Amit Mohan Prasad told reporters. He said over 96 lakh samples have been tested in the state till now. PTI

SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT DEATH-RELATED DRUG CASE

Karan Johar's ex-aide Kshitij sent to NCB custody till Oct 3

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after his arrest in the Sushant Singh Rajput death-related drug case, a Mumbai holiday court on Sunday remanded Kshitij Ravi Prasad, a former executive of Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) till October 3. Amid an allegation by Advocate Satish Maneshinde, the lawyer of Kshitij, that the NCB "is bent upon falsely accusing Kshitij" has taken some top officers of Dharma Productions, Metropolitan Magistrate V J Dongre agreed with the investigation agency's plea and said that "the custodial interrogation of the present accused (Kshitij) is justifiable to reveal the truth". In his order remanding Kshitij in NCB custody till October 3, Magistrate Dongre said: "It further reveals from the remand papers that the present accused (Kshitij) has taken delivery of Ganja from the accused Karmjeet (Singh) and his associate who are directly connected with (late Sushant's house manager) Samuel Miranda. From the above facts, the link of the present accused seems to be connected with the present crime in which other accused (have already been) arrested".

"So considering the seriousness of the offence in which the accused (Kshitij) has been arrested, I think the detailed custodial interrogation of the present accused (Kshitij) is justifiable to reveal the truth. Therefore the accused is remanded to the custody of the NCB till 03.10.2020," the Magistrate stated, as he directed the NCB to produce Kshitij before the Special court at the next hearing. In its remand application, the NCB demand application gadgets were taken for further investigation. "On the basis of a voluntary statement made by him" that he had procured hashish from accused Ankush Arjeja, Kshitij was arrested. In a 7-page remand application, the NCB Joint Intelligence Officer Murari Lal said that Sanket Patel, a peddler who had been arrested earlier, had supplied Ganja to Kshitij on the orders of another co-accused Karmjeet Singh Anand. Patel, who is currently on bail, admitted that "on the instructions of accused Karmjeet", he had delivered the Ganja to Prasad outside his home in Adani Building, Mumbai, between May 2020. For each consignment of 50 gms, Prasad paid him Rs. 3,500 - coming to a total of 600 gms Ganja worth Rs.42,000 in that period. "On the basis of his voluntary statement and alleged involvement in dealing of illicit drugs, accused Sanket Hukam Chand Patel was placed under arrest. Presently he is on bail," the remand application said. Karmjeet's residence, the NCB recovered 17 grams of Ganja, 4 grams of Charas and Rs 6 lakh in cash. In a statement given to the NCB, Karmjeet has admitted that he had supplied contraband to Samuel Miranda several times. In a significant disclosure, Karmjeet has told the NCB that he was linked to late Sushant, accused Rhea and her brother Showik in connection with the search and sometimes received payment by cash/Google pay. Based on his confession and alleged links with drug deals,

Karmjeet was arrested and is currently in judicial custody. The NCB also told the court that Kshitij was indirectly connected with Anuj Keshwani - one of the earliest arrests made by the NCB - from whom commercial quantities of narcotics were seized. At the time of Kshitij's arrest, the total number of persons arrested in connection with the Sushant death-related drug case has gone up to 20. Those arrested so far comprised: actress Rhea Chakraborty, her brother Showik Chakraborty, Abbas Lakhani, Karan Arora, Zaid Vilatra, Abdul Basit Parihar, Samuel Miranda, Dipesh Sawant, Kaizan Ebrahim, Anuj Keshwani, Ankush Arjeja, Karmjeet Singh Anand, Sanket Patel, Sandeep Gupta, Aftab Ansari, Dwyane Fernandes, Suryadev Malhotra, Chris Costa, Rahil Vishram and lastly Kshitij Prasad. While some of them are in NCB custody, others are in judicial custody. Three or four of them are currently on bail. Meanwhile, appearing for Kshitij, advocate Satish Maneshinde alleged that the NCB had "harassed, blackmailed", even given a third degree treatment" to elicit statements from his client (Kshitij). Maneshinde said that the

team that raided Kshitij's house did not find anything except the NCB's search papers, a cigarette butt in the balcony. He told the court that the NCB team began insisting it was a ganja joint even though there was nothing to suggest that even drew up a panchnama, which effected despite his protests. "Upon his wife's insistence, the word 'believed' to be a ganja joint was inserted in the panchnama," Maneshinde said. Maneshinde alleged that his client (Kshitij) was categorically informed by key investigating officer in the presence of several other officers, that since he was associated with Dharma Productions, they would let him off if he implicated either Karan Johar, Somel Mishra - Rakhi, Apoorva, Neeraj or Rahil falsely alleging that they consumed drugs. "Kshitij refused to comply with this despite the pressure being mounted on him as he did not know any of these people personally and did not wish to falsely implicate anyone," he said. "It can be seen from the remand application and the statement of Kshitij Prasad that NCB is bent upon falsely implicating KJo or some top officers of Dharma Productions," Maneshinde alleged.

India drowns out Pak

Modi seizes the solemnity of the UNGA session to prioritise pandemic management as Imran Khan gets stuck on Kashmir



The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session this year is significant in more ways than one. It is the first virtual session, the first being held under the shadow of the pandemic and the first reset effort when de-globalisation and protectionism spin the narrative of the day as the world stands divided between polarities. It also happens to be the 75th anniversary of the august institution, and, therefore, a time to step back for member-countries and redefine their participatory role and contribution in a post-pandemic world. The theme is resonant of our times and at the same time loaded with possibilities, "The Future we want, the United Nations

we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism — confronting COVID-19 through effective multilateral action." But Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan overrode the solemnity of the occasion and the geopolitical re-adjustment it demands by raising the Kashmir issue again and launching a diatribe against its changed status, ramming the same paragraphs of his earlier speeches. The world has accepted the constitutional space within which India abrogated Article 370 and has long turned a deaf ear to Khan's persistent chorus. But that has not stopped him from trying to "internationalise" the issue, even at the risk of appearing petty in the middle of an unprecedented world crisis. India's First Secretary in the Permanent Mission to the UN, Mijito Vinito, walked out when Khan started his rant and availing the right of response, made a pointed retort. As all the video speeches by world leaders had been pre-recorded, India did have an inkling of what was to come. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi left the rebuttal to officials and himself claimed the high moral ground by highlighting India's role as a "pharmacy to the world" while elaborating on its contribution to global cooperation against COVID-19 by aiding more than 150 countries. He also prioritised India's role as a South-South development partner, especially in the context of the India-UN development partnership fund and reiterated the pledge to take on global terrorism. By highlighting India's global commitment to welfare and respect of rule-based laws, he even negotiated a better role for India in the UN and sought reforms. This was a smart move, aligning India's objectives with the world imperatives and dismissing Pakistan's moves as unworthy of reaction from Modi himself. Khan's provocation has clearly not worked up either opinions or compelled Modi to dignify that with a reaction. And except Turkey, which echoed similar concerns on Kashmir, there was no taker for Pakistan's fresh tirade against us. That, too, because the latter has convinced the former that together they need to set the agenda for a neo-Islamic world as modern nations, considering the Arab world had accepted India and had been co-opted by the US to establish a working relationship with Israel.

Running promptly out of alliances and friends, and given the US' pro-India tilt, Pakistan is progressively getting aggressive on territorial gains for itself. It desperately wants to legitimise its illegal hold on Kashmir to counter India's abrogation of Article 370. That's the reason why it announced elections for the legislative assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan on November 15. Of course, India has protested against this forced conversion of a military occupied territory into an autonomous political entity but the fact is Pakistan wants to justify it as a reaction to India's move and is hoping to internationalise the issue once again. Besides, elections would also give legitimacy to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which runs through Gilgit-Baltistan, thereby riling up India further. This follows its earlier declaration to redraw its maps and appropriate what it fancifully feels India owes it, parts of Kashmir, Ladakh and Junagadh in Gujarat. This is not backed by any credible reasoning, support groups, historical reasoning or legal validity. That's why Pakistan's cartographic offensive seems part of a larger Chinese design in the region and not just its independent move as it clearly shows that Kashmir shares a border with China. Held off by India on Ladakh that seems to have driven a wedge in China's greater plan to control the Karakoram by squeezing us with salami-slicing, Pakistan's territorial claims are clearly intended to exhaust our capacities and opening up a second flashpoint along our borders. Pakistan is simultaneously heating up the Line of Control (LoC); its ceasefire violations and infiltration bids have gone up by about 60 per cent this year. If recent reports are to be believed, then the Chinese have had a series of meetings with their Pakistani counterparts in Gilgit-Baltistan and have been aiding Pakistan clandestinely to revive old terror networks against India. Chinese drones have been deployed for surveillance missions along the LoC. Debt-trapped by China, Pakistan forgets that such unilateralism will begot unilateralism from the Indian side as well. And hurt its interests. The new map is nothing but an adventurist version of its 1947-48 map and negates all bilateral agreements that came after it, including the 1972 Shimla Agreement. What then would be the cascading impact on all subsequent treaties, like those on water-sharing? What about our valid land claims? Pakistan doesn't realise that its Kashmir strategy is not working anymore and exported militancy is tiring out in the Valley. And China may use it for posturing but apart from nagging India with its proxy, will delink itself and go for a one-on-one strategic engagement with us for its larger concerns. Pakistan has misread its transactional and inscrutable all-weather friend.

Much needed closure

The Government should accept the arbitration verdict and draw a line under the Vodafone issue



Parab Mukherjee was a consummate politician and when the man, who was India's 13th President, passed away recently, he was fondly remembered by all across the political spectrum. Yet, one of Mukherjee's legacies as Finance Minister was the unfortunate retrospective tax legislation that he included in one of the Finance Bills he presented. This singular piece of legislation, for which the entire Cabinet of the time, including Dr Manmohan Singh, must share responsibility, ruined India's reputation as an investment destination. It was in May 2012 that the Parliament passed the Finance Act under which various provisions of the Income Tax Act,

1961, were amended with retrospective effect to tax any gain on transfer of shares in a non-Indian company which derived substantial value from underlying Indian assets. And the exemplar of this legislation was the case the Government fought against British telecom giant Vodafone. Despite losing the case in the Supreme Court, tax authorities and the Government doubled down and the case went to arbitration in London, where even the member appointed by the Indian Government was found in Vodafone's favour. The international arbitration tribunal ruled that India's demand in past taxes was in fact a breach of fair treatment under the bilateral investment protection pact. Vodafone India was later on merged with Aditya Birla Group's telecom company Idea.

Mukherjee had logic on his side when he wanted to tax deals where entities operating in the Indian market were bought and sold, even if they were not "based" in India. However, to make any act of legislation retrospective is not only unfair, it is also a confidence buster for investors, the thinking being that if it can be done once, it can be done again. When Narendra Modi said that he wanted to make doing business easier in India, he should have started by withdrawing the case against Vodafone and some other companies like Cairn. Maybe it wasn't done lest he be accused of being friendly to industrialists or the tax authorities thought that they had a good case (as they always think) but now that the arbitration case has been lost, it is time to end this once and for all. This was a clear instance of tax terrorism and India's reputation suffered as a result. At a time we need to roll out the red carpet for all investors, that is the least that can be done right now.

opinion 06

Free market or Company Raj?

Corporations and agro-processors can demand graded products for MSP. Otherwise they may not buy at all or at reduced prices. Where will the small farmer go then?



INDIRA SHEKHAR SINGH

A Bharat bandh, millions of farmers on the streets, eight Opposition leaders demanding National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners and Rashtriya Swamasevak Sangh (RSS) affiliates openly rebelling against the Government, these scenes have been dominating our news cycles. Yet Prime Minister Narendra Modi is content that the three farm Bills are good for India.

Theoretically, the Bills appear well-intentioned but the devil is always in the implementation. Overall, they aim to empower farmers to sell from farm gate but in the process end up empowering corporations and traders to expand their businesses and swamp the farm to fork chain. A new wave of liberalisation just rumbled into rural India. But many suspect the real agenda is generating "agri-dollars" and in the words of dissenting (Telangana Rashtra Samithi) MP Dr Keshava Rao, to "make an agriculture country into a corporate country".

The Government argues that farmers are not free to sell anywhere because of a "corrupt and middlemen-infested Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC)". Hence, break the APMC and free the farmers. Now corporations and any other person with a PAN card can directly procure produce from farm gate. Business companies can enter into contracts with them. But what complicated matters was the lack of substance in the Bills, no mention of a guaranteed price for farm pick-ups in case of a bad year or excess yields and the Government's cavalier manner of handling the Rajya Sabha last Sunday, negating debate and passing the Bills by voice vote. This naturally raised more doubts. Indian farmers have had centuries of slavery under the Company Raj and perhaps that's why a muffled voice of MP SR Balasubramanian, who evoked the "Champanar Satyagraha", rang the loudest. APMC will be replaced by the corporate market as there is no fair agreement between two unequals, the Government has to be right after all as a David and Goliath can never have a fair agreement. Neither can sheep and wolves co-operate, nor can a corporation and a marginal Gond farmer in Madhya Pradesh.

Today the farmer is weak, highly indebted and trapped in the cycle of over-production and low-income. His monthly household surplus is under ₹1,500 per month. This has already been destroyed by COVID-19. Each harvest season, his input and production costs rise, yet he cannot even sell at a minimum support price (MSP). As per reports, only six per cent farmers sell at MSP, the remaining 94 per cent are dependent on markets and traders outside the APMC. Reality check — small and marginal farmers cannot even reach the APMC as they don't have any means of transportation, forget selling outside their geographic limits. The majority of farmers are marginal. This means they only grow enough to feed their families and sell a little surplus to the markets. From the village field, away from the town, they sometimes find it convenient to sell to local traders.

Most of them begin the sowing season by taking credit for seeds and fertilisers and repay them through post-harvest sale. The tenant farmers are worse off. They want to sell at MSP but due to the trader-cum-corporate farmer relationship and market forces, which have an upper hand in price fixation, they cannot.

So, on the face of it, liberalisation seems to be a good step as "farmers can sell anywhere". But is it? Here we must go by the warning given by MP Professor Manoj Jha to the Rajya Sabha:



"You have replaced the rohu and the hisla with the sharks. You will bring the East India Company back to India." He was referring to traders as the small fish and the big agri-business corporations as "sharks" that have no personal connection with farmers.

In fact, most farmers still trust their eco-system of licensed commission agents as they deliver on prices and guarantee sales.

Given agri-dollars in their pockets and new reform policies, food majors can break any market and create monopolies, forcing the farmers to sell cheaper or let their produce rot. Not convinced? Let's go back to the dal scam of 2015. After an investigation by the IT department, a scam valued at ₹2.5 lakh crore was unearthed. The consumers paid the price by buying arhar dal at ₹10/kg. It was reported that a cartel of agri-business companies was responsible for buying pulses at low prices through the supply chain networks and hoarding it overseas, creating artificial scarcity and profiting immensely by selling the stocks back to Indians at high prices. The Government used the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) to bust hoarders and recovered 75,000 metric tonnes of dal. But now, even the ECA limits on hoarding and stocking are being done away with.

In 2006, Bihar removed the APMC regime and the real incomes of farmers in the State have fallen while private investment

is yet to move into the State. Only traders are carting produce from Bihar all the way to Punjab to sell in mandis.

Many vouch for APMC reforms and not its destruction as the regulated market is still the farmer's best chance at getting MSP. This is evidenced by Punjab. Won't rural India be engulfed by corporate markets that will ruin APMC systems and farmers' rights as the growers will be left unprotected overnight without a transitional and transparent system codified? The Samajwadi Party MP Professor Ram Gopal Yadav, asked if these reforms can assure the farmers' good prices? No, because the difference between APMC and corporate markets would be of "BSNL and Jio", he said. It was Biju Janata Dal MP Dr Amar Patnaik, who had first warned against "cartelisation". In effect, the private sector will be a phoenix rising from the ashes of our public infrastructure.

The biggest problem in procurement, as we have seen globally, is grading. Corporations and agro-processors can demand graded products for MSP and if the gunny bag is ungraded, they may not buy at all, or at a reduced price. This is common practice, which results in huge losses for farmers and food security of the world. Traditionally traders graded the produce. With them gone, will farmers bear grading costs? Naturally, if they do, MSP can never be realised.

There are also serious questions on post-harvest infrastructure and warehousing in rural India. Will the farmers, due to bad storage facilities, make distress sales? The new reforms favour the big farmers and agri-businesses but are detrimental for small and marginal farmers (below two hectares) that constitute 86.21 per cent of our total land holdings.

Further, once the market forces evolve, unless MSP is made a legal right or Government procurement increases, achieving it will be a challenge. Contract farming is species. Agri-business in the US model is enough to deduce how the contracting parties (agri-business firms) force the farmers to buy their recommended seeds, fertilisers and other inputs, often from their allied stores or vendors and at their prices. They also force the farmers to buy more equipment, increasing the cost of production each year. If the farmers don't deliver, they don't buy the produce and legal proceedings follow.

In India, the poultry sector is a good example of how the owners have been reduced to farm hands on their own property. And to take two steps back, PepsiCo filed a case against Gujarat farmers unfairly. PepsiCo has got more flak as many potato farmers committed suicide due to their procurement policies in West Bengal. The stories of contract used to exploit farmers are endless.

The next big problem is no small and marginal farmer has access to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and District Magistrate. How many of them will be able to go to the already over-burdened official to settle trade disputes? Even their journey will become a nightmare given their literacy levels and manipulation by the bigger parties. The companies or traders will not be criminally liable; this is a regressive step favouring big agri-businesses.

Modi needs to critically think about rising farmer suicides and doubling farmers' income by 2022. He ought to dispel the farmers' doubts and insist on specifics and mechanisms like ensuring the retail buyers do not go beneath a cut-off price. Otherwise, the haze of silence can be ominous. One fears the day when the words of Dravidu Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP TKS Elangovan come true — "To sell the farmers' thumb as stakes to the big industrial houses... It will kill the farmers and make them a commodity".

(The writer is programme director for policy and outreach, National Seed Association of India)

SOUNDBITE

Establishing constructive relations between Japan and North Korea will not only serve the interests of both sides but will also greatly contribute to regional peace and stability.

Japanese Prime Minister
—Yoshihide Suga



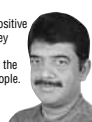
Always live a positive life, never give up, strive, work hard and do your *riyaz* (practice) daily. If I can sing at 88, it is only due to *riyaz*.

Singer
—Asha Bhosle



Sixty eight BJP workers throughout Goa tested positive during the pandemic. They tested positive precisely because they were out in the field, in the service of people.

Goa BJP president
—Sadanand Shet Tanavade



We need to get better with our lengths, lines and pace. We are bowling good deliveries, but we are giving away the boundary deliveries bit too often.

Cricketer
—MS Dhoni



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protect the voters

Sir — Dates for the Bihar Assembly elections have been announced with special provisions, keeping in mind the ongoing pandemic. To make sure that the polling doesn't become a super-spreader event, the Election Commission (EC) has issued a slew of measures. The election will be held in three phases. Polling or paramedical staff will conduct thermal screening of voters at the entry point of each polling station, the guidelines said. They will have more than seven crore single-use gloves for voters to put on before using the electronic voting machine to cast their vote. Over seven lakh units of hand sanitiser and about six lakh personal protective equipment (PPE) kits have also been arranged. For Covid patients and those with high fever, the EC has arranged an extra voting hour under the strict supervision of health authorities.

This will be the first major election since the outbreak of the worldwide Coronavirus crisis and it is yet to be seen if the above provisions will be enough to keep the voters safe. Bihar has

Hasty passage of farm and labour Bills

Given that the putative benefits of big structural reforms such as demonetisation and GST are not within sight, it is difficult to judge the likely impacts of the new farm and labour Bills. These moves will have enormous implications irrespective of whether they have any great merit or not.

What is more important is the timing of these reforms. It is ironic that they come in the middle of a pandemic-hit economy. At a time when the overall national income has already shrunk 24 per cent and the economy faces massive demand compression, people cannot understand the logic of making these hasty moves. Structural reforms should be made when the economic agents are prepared for the change. Also, it is of paramount importance that a democratic Government communicates with people before enacting and enforcing new laws. There is no point in beginning communication exercise after committing the act.

The corporatisation of agriculture and the provision for more flexibility to companies to freely hire and fire



workers will adversely affect both farmers and labourers. There is also a greater chance that the cartelised industry giants will dictate the terms in both cases. In that sense, they could still end up being exploited as before. Obviously, these laws are only aimed at benefiting big corporate giants.

Venu GS
Kollam

tunate and the truth behind it needs to be exposed but people should not fall prey to the political drama surrounding it.

Urvil Jain
Ujjain

Bihar elections

Sir — With the dates of the Bihar Assembly elections being announced, the fate of the ruling Janata Dal (United) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Government, headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, will be decided. Under fire for badly handling the Covid outbreak and the returnee migrants, Nitish Kumar might find staying in power rather challenging. This can also mean a transfer of a huge chunk of voters to Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), which along with the rest of the Opposition bloc, the Congress and smaller allies, faced a humiliating defeat in last year's parliamentary polls. The stakes are also high for the Congress as the verdict will decide whether the grand old party can improve its tally of 27 legislators.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Mixed feelings and hard reality

It is the best of times, it is the worst of times.
 Each day brings forth its old cacophony of contradictory claims and overwhelming statistics



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The global pandemic has sired some new phrases and expressions. One of them is "the new normal" is the ever-changing normal and another is "progressive digitalisation". Between "the changing normal" and "progressive digitalisation" is endemic anxiety over a situation totally out of our control. One doesn't know where it began and frankly one doesn't know where it could end. In the meanwhile, the act of governance of 130 billion people continues to spawn a large number of contradictions. It began with the slogan "jaan hai, toh jahan hai" (health is wealth). All shutters were closed in a matter of hours and events were allowed to run their course. Many in the power circles claimed to be surprised at the mass exodus on foot the lockdown triggered. Teenage daughters and pre-teen sons were seen pedalling their fathers and mothers on bicycles and tri-cycle carts to destinations they thought of as home, hundreds of kilometres away. A child perched on a suitcase on wheels was seen being pulled by a mother on a 700 km-long journey home. The distressing images were so many that even those who sensationalise such things in the media failed to call them "haunting images."

Some news channels launched a campaign to extend the period of the lockdown when the first three weeks were about to end. The powers that be obliged. The believers celebrated the extension of the lockdown period, which was then prolonged all over again. By the time the actual unlocking process started, many had almost forgotten how to begin again. This time around, the new slogan was "jaan bi, jahaan bi" (health as well as wealth). There were various permutations of the early "un-lockdown". Inter-State barriers got diluted, inter-district constraints played havoc and many "innovative" constraints surfaced.

Even today, in a city which is the proverbial centre of power, pick up a phone and call a landline of the metropolitan telephone service. The ring is preceded by a recorded voice message, which when translated into English, goes something like this: "In the entire country, the process of un-lockdown has begun. In such circumstances, move out of the house only when it is totally necessary...". The political masters proclaim that the "un-lockdown" phase is necessary to encourage economic activity. One is not quite clear how such telephonic alert on ringing out of the house would encourage economic activity. When this question was posed to the head of an information technology company, he chuckled and said, "Surely this is to encourage online business!" Pointing out that internet capacities are stretched to the limit, several communication platforms have drafted their amateurish connectivity regulations. This is something few have patience with. The endless webinars often get interrupted and the screen blinks that the "internet connectivity of xyz is weak."

Underlined, the economically weaker sections, desperate to keep the learning of their kids alive, scout around for second hand smartphones. To borrow from a much-celebrated English novel: "People were all going to heaven and all of them were going the other way. It is the best of times, it is the worst of times." Each day brings forth its old cacophony of contradictory claims and overwhelming statistics. One news channel proclaimed that 17 per cent of the world's total cases of Covid are in India — among the highest figures country-wise. Practically no virus-detection test claims to be definitive. Being positive needs an interpretation on where you could stay to get cured. Being negative leaves open the possibility of you still being infected. A statistician commented that a similar situation was reported 100 years ago when the Spanish Flu struck Mumbai and subsequently the rest of India. Indeed, the colonisers were to "blame" for that sorry state of affairs. After so much fanfare over "the great revolution" the Indian healthcare system has undergone, the tally of victims today remains similar in global percentages to that in the times of the Spanish Flu. In the meanwhile, one witnesses a spate of policy reforms in education, administration, maritime-related matters and of course agriculture. Each intervention threatens a "new dawn." Believing in it is a great source of joy. One may suffer from COVID-19 or simple pharyngitis. One may or may not have access to a simple medical advice, which may or may not be clear or effective, but the sheer joy of living in such "pulsating digital times" is surely a "unique" experience.

In the meanwhile, a few business houses move from being successful to being even more successful. Mandis to ports are variously covered. We should be "grateful" their enterprises keep the wheels of the Indian economy lubricated. That apart, the poor pensioner — especially if he is on Government benefits — has not had his pension revised for several years since the last Finance Commission while other groups of employees have raked in their increments. Yet in the true Indian spirit, we firmly believe that "we shall overcome."

(The writer is a globally-acclaimed management consultant)

WE SEE ATTEMPTS ON PART OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES TO USE THE CURRENT SITUATION TO SETTLE SCORES WITH AN UNDESIRABLE GOVERNMENT OR COMPETITORS.
 —RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER
 SERGEY LAVROV

POINT COUNTERPOINT



SHAME ON MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WHO TOOK THIS OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON POLITICAL GRUDGES RATHER THAN THE ISSUE AT HAND.
 —US AMBASSADOR
 KELLY CRAFT

Bills to grow farmers' income

Reforms will have a net positive impact as the agricultural sector moves from a subsidy-centric to a market-oriented approach, encouraging the agripreneurial aspirations of the growers



BINDU DALMIA

Tough times are testing the most resilient of leaders globally. Despite the nation being confronted with serial adversities, Modi 2.0 retains and compounds the Prime Minister's political capital by powering on with the reforms agenda, regardless of the clamour by "compulsive contrarians", as the late Arun Jaitley referred to the Opposition.

Since the lockdown, the Centre has pressed ahead with a series of incremental reforms. From the *Atmanirbhar* series to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the trilogy of agriculture reforms. Then there are the three new Bills intended to consolidate social security for migrant labourers, which will impact 80 per cent of the population employed in the informal sector. The series of post-pandemic legislations cannot be viewed in silos but must be seen as a set of structural and incremental reforms aimed at rebooting the economy and improving the ease of doing business (EODB) for farmers.

The post-Corona "new normal" challenges every vector of economic growth to optimise and conserve resource efficiencies. This is so that each vertical of the economy turns self-sustaining and profitable. Agriculture is one vertical that has been constantly dependent on subsidies, doles and welfareism. This has been a constant drain on the exchequer as it was compelled to fund an uneconomic sector. To make matters worse, the farm sector delivered only subsistence — less than the farmers, a point validated by the NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) estimates which show that rural indebtedness escalated by 12 per cent between 1993 to 2013.

Mitigating agrarian distress requires reducing dependency on cultivation as a source of livelihood and moving towards broad-based manufacturing. Because, a whopping 58 per cent of our workforce is dependent on farm income, but contributes only 17 per cent to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At present, agriculture can only deliver a growth rate of 3.4 per cent per annum, whereas we need the sector to increase its productivity potential to 6-7 per cent in order to lift rural India out of poverty. Increasing per capita earnings can only happen through expansion of economic activity by firing equally on all four cylinders of the economy: Agriculture, manufacturing, exports and services.

Essentially, the intent of any reform must be gauged by the degree of inclusivity embedded in its blueprint." Considering that 500 million of our workforce is engaged in farming, the landmark reforms will have a net positive impact as the agricultural sector moves from a subsidy-centric to a market-oriented approach, encouraging the agripreneurial aspirations of the growers.

The agri-reforms, though politically sensitive, were much needed after 73 years of Independence in order to transit towards a "One Nation, One Market." Each farm Bill enables this transition differently. But this article specifically focusses on the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, which will increase efficiencies in the low-profit agriculture sector by opening it up to contract farming.

Why is corporatising agriculture a farmer-friendly reform? India, having matured to a food-

“EVENTUALLY, THE CENTRE MUST AIM AT BUILDING CONSENSUS BY ASSUAGING APPREHENSIONS OF FARMERS. THOUGH AGRICULTURE IS NOT IN THE CONCURRENT LIST AND REMAINS A STATE SUBJECT, AS THE NEW LAWS DEAL WITH INTER-STATE TRADE, IT BECOMES A CENTRAL SUBJECT. THIS SHOULD HOLD UP TO LEGAL SCRUTINY. THE CENTRE IS THEN WELL WITHIN ITS RIGHTS TO ENACT LAWS AND NO STATE GOVERNMENT THAT CHALLENGED THIS PROVISION HAS WON IN THE PAST”



surplus economy, is today more in need of focussing on "surplus-management" to decrease wastage. This will increase farmers' profitability by ramping up cold storage facilities and food-processing infrastructure that will lead to value-added manufacturing. The annual agri-wastage is estimated at ₹92,000 crore, so corporatisation of the sector will enable building a seamless farm-to-consumer supply chain.

Contrary to allegations that the legislation is loaded in favour of corporates, I wish to substantiate through empirical evidence how corporatising the sector benefited farmers. It profited growers by underwriting their successful produce through a negotiated pre-fixed price with corporates that offered income surety. It also encouraged a shift from mono-cropping to crop diversification, bought in new technologies and helped in financing and modernisation. On how pursuing a successful Chinese-style farming are seen from the outcomes of the Amul paradigm, the *e-chaulas* and the Patanjali models of sourcing from farmers' collectives.

The active involvement of farmers in shared initiatives creates a sense of co-ownership as seen in the successful prototype of the Amul cooperative which was legendary in leading the White Revolution. Today, India is the largest milk producer, and Amul is the largest food product FMCG outfit with a ₹52,000 crore turnover. The winning philosophy of Amul's strategy is that it treated the dairy farmer as a stakeholder by offering him higher prices for the produce while purchasing, yet sold it to the consumers at marginal profits.

I am guilty of being politically incorrect by validating another example — "Islamisation" process. Even though it treated the dairy farmer as a stakeholder to benefit India, too. In 2016, the State Council of China officially made rural e-commerce a national strategy in its anti-poverty drive, which

decreased poverty rates from 10.2 per cent to 1.7 per cent in last six years. And one of the ways it achieved this was by uplinking farmers onto Alibaba's e-commerce platforms of the Taobao Village.

The Bill on contract farming is a win-win for both suppliers and marketers. The collectives gain by tapping into multiple synergies derived from the corporates' ability to support post-harvest logistics, processing, packaging, branding, retailing and their access to a wide distribution network. Marginal and small farmers own less than five hectares of land, so when they form collectives, the aggregation favours regular income, and, in fact, serves to enhance their collective economic and bargaining power.

Narendra Modi had promised to double farmers' income by 2022. The *status quo* in their earnings will remain if this incremental reform is not in the Concurrent List and remains a State subject, as the new laws deal with inter-State trade, it becomes a Central subject. This should hold up to legal scrutiny. The Centre is then well within its rights to enact laws and no State Government that challenged this provision has won in the past.

Besides, over time, once farming turns into a lucrative industry, it holds the potential of widening the taxpayer base and could then be considered for being transferred to the Union list. The Centre should in fact aim at taxing farmers thus far exempt from taxation. Especially the rich growers with over 10 acres of land. A fair yardstick of evaluating taxation herein would be to take three-year averages, as there are annual variations in produce due to climate-risks.

Ultimately, India must harness the potential to transform into a mega food processing hub by optimising efficiency, as the farmer, too, aspires to move up in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and go beyond the Congress era slogan of "roti, kapra aur makaan" (food, clothing and housing) "to partake in a thriving modern economy."

enter the sector, they bring enormous benefits to the growers as they are able to align production with market demands. Because, at the end of the day, increased crop productivity alone is not sufficient to raise farmer incomes if market needs do not support such production.

Eventually, the Centre must aim at building consensus by assuaging apprehensions of farmers, who are being misled through fear-mongering by vested interests, lest they succeed in sabotaging a progressive legislation, as in the case of aborting the Land Acquisition Bill. Though agriculture is not in the Concurrent List and remains a State subject, as the new laws deal with inter-State trade, it becomes a Central subject. This should hold up to legal scrutiny. The Centre is then well within its rights to enact laws and no State Government that challenged this provision has won in the past.

When demand-driven value chains

(The writer is author, columnist and Chairperson of the National Committee for Financial Inclusion at the Niti Aayog.)

When the ugly past comes knocking

People wonder how did Pakistani society come to accept for 11 years the draconian laws and ordinances that Zia passed during his rule?



NADEEM PARACHA

Recently, when social media in Pakistan exploded, condemning the rape of a woman on the Lahore motorway and the insensitive words used by Lahore's Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) — the victims there were also folks who suggested that the punishments for *zina* (rape and premarital sex) introduced in 1979 by the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship, were successful in curbing sexual assaults in Pakistan. It wasn't hard for those who disagreed with this perception to produce figures and facts to negate this claim.

But this piece is not about that. Instead, it is a response to those who were left baffled after learning the dynamics and technicalities of Zia's laws in this context and inquired how society had accepted such laws for 11 years — the number of years the dictator General Zia was in power.

First of all, since women were most affected by these laws, which actually

saw scores of them ending up in jail while their tormentors were set free, there was constant resistance from various women's organisations against Zia. In fact, bodies such as the Women's Action Forum (WAF) found themselves pushed on to the frontlines of the resistance, after many mainstream bodies' outcries opposed to Zia were neutralised through arrests, jail sentences, disappearances, torture and exile.

Zia extracted power from above by being part of the military establishment and through the support that he received from the US and Saudi Arabia. To draw political support from below, he nourished those segments and constituencies that had been developed and activated by religious parties during the 1977 movement against the ZA Bhutto Government from 1972-77.

One can assume that had he failed to cultivate support from these segments, he would have struggled to introduce the series of controversial laws that his regime imposed in the name of faith.

Nevertheless, in 1988 when he passed away, he left behind a country where, after many years of military rule, the growth of militant sectarian and "Islamist" outfits whose leaders were brought into the mainstream to preach and practise armed jihad, a rise in hate

crimes against minority sects and other religions, an onslaught on women's rights and a generation of young Pakistanis ravaged by drug addiction, gun violence and embroiled in deadly ethnic and sectarian conflicts. Corruption in State and Government institutions, too, increased when the regime repealed anti-corruption laws enacted in 1973. Zia introduced "development funds" for members of his hand-picked national and provincial Assemblies and wrote off bank loans taken by his supporters. Many senior officers of the armed forces and members of Zia's Cabinet were reported to have been involved in the narcotics trade and money laundering cases.

So why did so many Pakistanis go along with the charade of a regime which promised them a "new Pakistan" by claiming that it was going to finally create an "Islamic State" that it insisted was what Pakistan's founders had committed to deliver?

An increase in the rate of literacy from 1972 onwards meant that more urban Pakistanis were exposed to the writings and theories of scholars operating outside the intellectual and political realm of the "Muslim Modernism" of the country's founders. By the late 1970s, they had begun to question the

sincerity and feasibility of the modernist project. Because of the impact of the loss of East Pakistan in 1971, many tended to agree with the anti-modernists that the project had been engineered to keep an economic and political elite in power. An increase in the literacy rate saw young wo/men from the small towns and villages furthering their studies in colleges and universities of main urban areas. When they arrived to take their place in educational institutions in cities such as Karachi and Lahore, the ethos of their traditional upbringing — blunted and even threatened by the vocal Left and liberal groups on campuses. Consequently, they were embraced by Right-wing religious outfits.

Many of these students would go on to graduate and settle in cities and become part of urban Pakistan's emerging new petty bourgeoisie and trade classes. What's more, when these classes came out on the streets during the 1977 anti-Bhutto movement, they were backed by the industrialist and business classes, who were repulsed by the "Left-leaning" Bhutto regime. The movement's slogan was Shahrah Laq. So in Zia's promise of an Islamic system, they could identify with what they believed was their true heritage and call-

ing, whereas the industrialists and the businessmen yearned for a strong ruler who would reset the country's economic direction back to what it had been before Bhutto's chaotic "Socialism."

According to Riaz Hassan in the anthology, *Pakistan at Seventy*, an increase in the literacy rate had also had important social and political consequences. A large segment of the increasing population led a precarious existence, subjected to all kinds of hardships. This frustration generated a considerable amount of disillusionment with modernist governments and their policies of economic and social development. The persistent insecurity of urban existence over the years resulted in the emergence of various religious movements. The number of mosques in the cities multiplied and, through them, religious influence and power permeated social life. This was shaped into a powerful segment and constituency by the religious parties and then nourished and expanded by the Zia dictatorship.

These segments provided considerable support for Zia's so-called "Islamisation" process. Even though those protesting against Zia's programmes and laws often managed to embarrass the regime by getting their point of view published in some

Western newspapers, most human and civil rights activists and political workers went unheard even in the most liberal and democratic European countries.

This was because of the fact that much of the efforts of the media in these countries and of their governments were focussed on the civil war in Afghanistan. The US and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) largely looked the other way when the Zia regime was using religion to commit open human rights violations and intense political repression. The most the West was willing to offer at the time was political asylum to those thrown out or volunteering to move out of Pakistan because of the oppressive atmosphere here. For the US and its European allies, Zia was too important an asset to upset in the Cold War against "Soviet expansionism."

These are some of the prominent factors behind the dictatorship's success in unleashing laws and Ordinances which, today, would be almost impossible to enact without being vehemently challenged within and outside the country. However, attempts to retain and re-ignite them are still very much part of Pakistan's political playbook even today. (Courtesy: Dawn)



FOREIGN EYE

AUSSIES DON'T GET INTIMIDATED
 Concern is warranted that Zhenhua Data has profiled the children and partners of prominent Australians with photographs, news articles and criminal histories. The risk of online impersonations, deep fakes and other distressing forms of disinformation attack is real. But one must suggest, politely, that if the intent of authoritarian China is to exert influence over Australians to blackmail them, then their investment may reap more returns elsewhere. (The NYT editorial)

FIRST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

How Trump, Biden are preparing

Washington: Ahead of the first debate-stage matchup between President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger Joe Biden, each campaign is promising a stark contrast in policy, personality and preparation.

Trump has decided to skip any formal preparation. And while Biden's team believes the significance of the debate may be exaggerated, the Democratic nominee has been aggressively preparing to take on the president.

Biden's campaign has been holding mock debate sessions featuring Bob Bauer, a senior Biden adviser and former White House general counsel, playing the role of Trump, according to a person with direct knowledge of the preparations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy. Bauer has not actually donned a Trump costume in line with Trump stand-ins from his previous campaign but he is representing his style and expected strategy.

"I'm sure the president will throw everything he can at (Biden). My guess is that they're preparing for that — bombarding him with insults and weird digressions," said Jay Carney, a former aide to Biden and President Barack Obama.

"I think it's an important moment — I think it's really important for President



Trump, because the direction of this election has been pretty stable for a long time now, and he needs to shake it up as any candidate would who's behind," Carney added.

"The question is, can that work?" Trump and Biden are scheduled to meet on the debate stage for the first time Tuesday night at Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. The 90-minute event moderated by Fox News host Chris Wallace is the first of three scheduled presidential debates. Vice President Mike Pence and California Sen. Kamala Harris, Biden's running mate, will also debate in October.

For some, the debates represent the most important moments in the 2020 campaign's closing days, a rare opportunity for millions of



voters to compare the candidates' policies and personalities side-by-side on prime-time television. Trump has been trailing Biden in the polls for the entire year, a reality that gives the president an urgent incentive to change the direction of the contest on national television if he can.

Others, including those close to Biden's campaign, do not expect the debates to fundamentally change the race no matter what happens, given voters' daily struggles with the pandemic and the economy. They also point to high-profile debates in past elections thought to be game-changing moments at the time but that ultimately had little lasting effect.

Those with knowledge of Biden's preparations suggest he will not take the fight to Trump if he can avoid it. But on Saturday, at least, he was on

the attack when he discussed his strategy on MSNBC. "I'm prepared to go out and make my case as to why I think he's failed and why I think the answers I have to proceed will help the American people, the American economy and make us safer internationally," Biden said, arguing that Trump won't persuade voters with broadsides because "the people know the president is a liar." He also compared Trump to Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, saying, "He's sort of like Goebbels."

You say the lie long enough, keep repeating, repeating, repeating. It becomes common knowledge," Biden said, noting that he expects Trump to articulate a detailed vision for a second term. "He doesn't know how to debate the facts, because he's not that smart," Biden continued. "He doesn't know that many facts. He doesn't know much about foreign policy. He doesn't know much about domestic policy. He doesn't know much about the detail."

While Biden has said he will try to be a fact checker of sorts on stage, the Democrats is being advised to avoid direct confrontations and instead redirect the conversation to more familiar campaign themes of unity and issues that matter most to voters: the economy, health

care and the pandemic.

Arguing over what he's saying is accurate, that is not winning to Biden," said Jen Psaki, a former Obama aide who is close to Biden's team. "This is an opportunity to speak directly to the American people. His objective should be to speak directly to them, but not be pulled in by Trump. That is hard." Trump has not been doing any formal preparation, according to aides and allies who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

No set has been constructed and aides refused to say whether anyone is playing Biden. Trump, instead, has maintained that the best preparation is doing his job — particularly his frequent and often contentious interactions with reporters. White House aides also scheduled an ABC town hall last week in which Biden was expected to real-time question Trump for the first time in months in preparation for the second debate.

Privately some aides and allies are worried that Trump's formal preparation will lead him to fall into the same hubris trap as other incumbents in their first general election debate. Obama, for example, famously struggled in his first matchup against Mitt Romney in 2012. AP

He's like Goebbels: Biden compares Donald to Nazi propagandist

AFP ■ WASHINGTON

US Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said he expects "personal attacks and lies" from Donald Trump in their first televised debate on Tuesday, comparing the Republican president to Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels.

"It is going to be difficult," the former vice president acknowledged in an interview broadcast Saturday on MSNBC.

"My guess is, it's going to be just straight attack. They're going to be mostly personal. That's the only thing he knows how to do," he said of Trump.

The debate Tuesday in Cleveland, Ohio will be the first time the 77-year-old veteran politician has faced the president he has promised to unseat. The men will meet again for two more debates before the November 3 election, to expose fear that Biden, who is prone to blunders and slip-ups, may waver in these televised duels under the rhetorical blows of the Republican billionaire — who also has promised to blunders and slip-ups, but who is far more aggressive.

"He doesn't know how to debate the facts. He's not that smart," Biden also claimed. "He doesn't know much about foreign policy, he

doesn't know much about domestic policy. He doesn't know much about the detail."

As a result, Biden predicted, "it'll be mostly personal attacks and lies, but I think the American people are on to him."

Trump himself never ceases to mock what he says is his rival's lack of dynamism, nicknaming him "Sleepy Joe" and attacking his mental acuity.

"He's sort of like

Goebbels," Biden said. "You say the lie long enough, keep repeating it, repeating it, repeating it, it becomes common knowledge."

"It's not like it's going to come as a surprise. And so I'm prepared to go out and make my case as to why I think he's failed and why I think the answers I have to proceed will help the American people and the American economy, and make us safer internationally."

Biden urges Senate not to confirm Trump's court pick before polls

Washington, United States:

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden on Saturday called on the US Senate to refrain from confirming President Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee until after the November 3 election.

"The Senate should not act on this vacancy until after the American people select their next president and the next Congress," Biden said, just moments after Trump announced his nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to replace the late liberal justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Trump predicted that



Barrett, a staunch conservative, will get a "very quick" confirmation in the Republican-controlled Senate. AFP

Fighting erupts between Armenia, Azerbaijan, 16 killed

Yerevan (Armenia): Fighting erupted anew on Sunday between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over the disputed separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh and a top territorial official said 16 people were killed and more than 100 wounded, while Azerbaijan's president said his military has suffered losses.

Armenia also claimed that two Azerbaijani helicopters were shot down and three Azerbaijani tanks were hit by artillery, but Azerbaijan's defense ministry rejected that claim.

Heavy fighting broke out in the morning in the region that lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since 1994 at the end of a separatist war. It was not immediately clear what sparked the fighting, the heaviest since clashes in July killed 16 people from both sides.

Nagorno-Karabakh authorities reported that shelling hit the regions of Ganakert and the towns of Martakert and Marznik. Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Artur Hovhannissyan also said Azerbaijan shelling hit within Armenian territory near the town of Vardenis.

Artur Sarkisyan, deputy head of the Nagorno-Karabakh army, said that 16 people were killed and more than 100



Armenian army destroys Azerbaijani tanks at the contact line of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan on Sunday. AP

wounded. It wasn't immediately clear if the figure included both soldiers and civilians. Earlier, the Armenian human rights ombudsman said a woman and child had been killed in the shelling.

Another Armenian Defense Ministry spokeswoman, Shushan Stepanyan, said "the Armenian side" shot down two helicopters and hit three tanks. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev ordered martial law be imposed in some regions of the country and called for a curfew in major cities.

In a televised address to the nation, Aliyev said that "there are losses among the Azerbaijani forces and the civilian population as a result of the

Armenian bombardment," but didn't give further details. He also claimed that "many units of the enemy's military equipment have been destroyed."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov "is conducting intensive contacts in order to induce the parties to cease fire and start negotiations to stabilize the situation," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, called on the sides to stop fighting.

The long-unsuccessful negotiations for resolving the territory's status has been conducted under OSCE auspices. AP

S Korea returns Korean War remains of 117 Chinese soldiers



Beijing: The remains of 117 Chinese soldiers who died in the 1950-53 Korean War were returned to China on Sunday in an annual repatriation delayed this year by the coronavirus outbreak.

South Korea handed over the remains at a ceremony at Incheon airport outside Seoul, and a Chinese military transport plane flew them to Shenyang, a northeastern Chinese city near the North Korean border.

Chinese soldiers fought on the North Korean side against U.S.-led forces in the South during the war on the Korean Peninsula.

Most of the 117 remains were found in the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea. It was the seventh annual repatriation, and the largest since the 437 returned in the first one in 2014. In all, the remains of 716 Chinese soldiers have been sent back.

This year's return, originally planned for the spring, was postponed for several months because of the spread of COVID-19. AP

North Korea accuses South of intrusion to find dead official

Seoul: North Korea accused South Korea of sending ships across the disputed sea boundary to find the body of a South Korean official recently killed by North Korean troops, warning Sunday the intrusion could escalate tensions. South Korea denied the accusation.

"We urge the South side to immediately halt the intrusion across the military demarcation line in the West Sea that may lead to escalation of tensions," the official Korean Central News Agency said. "It arouses our due vigilance as it may lead to another awful incident." Along with its denial, South Korea proposed a joint investigation to resolve discrepancies in each country's account of the South Korean official's death last week.

Officials in Seoul have said the 47-year-old was likely attempting to defect before North Korean troops aboard a boat fatally shot him and buried his body.

According to Seoul, North Korea on Friday sent a message including a rare apology by leader Kim Jong Un for the shooting death of the official, who was found floating on an object in its waters.

The North Korean message distributed by South Korea

said its troops shot the official because he attempted to flee after refusing to answer to questions. It said North Korea maintained troops were unable to find the official's body and burned the object he was floating on in line with anti-coronavirus rules.

Sunday's KCNA report confirmed North Korea notified South Korea on Friday with its account of the incident, but it didn't say whether the notification included an apology from Kim.

South Korea's military and coast guard responded to North Korea's claim of a border incursion by saying their ships and aircraft have been searching waters south of the disputed area since Friday to find the official's body drifts back.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in met with his National Security Council on Sunday. Moon's office said the country viewed Kim's apology positively and proposed a joint investigation with North Korea to find out what happened to the official.

Senior presidential official Suh Choo-suk said South Korea internationally recognized the incident and proposed to restore a suspended military hotline between the nations to facilitate communications. AP

100,000 march in Belarus capital on 50th day of protests



A demonstrator wearing a face mask to protect against coronavirus waves an old Belarusian national flag during an opposition flag protest to protest the official presidential election results in Minsk, Belarus on Sunday. AP

Kyiv: About 100,000 demonstrators marched in the Belarusian capital calling for the authoritarian president's ouster, some wearing cardboard crowns to ridicule him, on Sunday as the protests that have rocked the country marked their 50th consecutive day.

Protests also took place in nine other cities, underlining the wide extent of dismay and anger with President Alexander Lukashenko, who has stifled opposition and independent news media during 26 years in power.

The protesters were joined after the Aug. 9 presidential election that officials said gave Lukashenko a sixth term

in force with a crushing 80 per cent of the vote. The opposition and some poll workers say the results were manipulated.

Lukashenko has defied calls for him to step down and many prominent members of a council formed with the aim of arranging a transfer of power have been arrested or have fled the country. The protests have persisted despite the daily detentions of demonstrators. AP

Macron says longtime Belarus leader 'must go'

Paris: France is stepping up the pressure on Belarus' longtime leader Alexander Lukashenko, with President Emmanuel Macron telling a prominent French weekly that "Lukashenko must go."

The European Union said Thursday it does not recognize Lukashenko as president of Belarus because of large-scale protests by Belarusians who question the results of last month's presidential election that Lukashenko claims he overwhelmingly won.

Opposition members and some poll workers in Belarus say the vote was rigged.

Ahead of a trip Monday to Lithuania and Latvia, Macron was quoted in Sunday's *Journal du Dimanche* newspaper as saying "it's clear that Lukashenko must go."

"What's happening in Belarus is a crisis of power, an authoritarian power that can't manage to accept the logic of democracy and is clinging on by force," the newspaper quotes Macron as saying.

In a speech Saturday to the virtual U.N. General Assembly, Belarus' foreign minister warned Western nations against interfering or imposing sanctions over the country's disputed presidential election and the government's violent crackdown on protesters. AP

Police arrest dozens during unauthorised Maryland car rally

Ocean City (US): More than 100 people have been arrested on criminal and traffic offenses during an unauthorised car rally in a Maryland city, where confrontations between participants and police were captured on video.

The Baltimore Sun reports that police from neighbouring jurisdictions helped Ocean City police officers with crowd control at the H2of' rally in the beach town.

Ocean City Police Chief Ross Buzzaro said in a statement Sunday that the rally participants came to the city "to disrupt, destroy and disrespect our community and our law enforcement officers." "This is not a car show and the majority of these visitors are not car enthusiasts," he said.

"Our policing philosophy is to be friendly, fair and firm. Unfortunately, the disorderly behaviour and unruly crowds left no choice but to shift our philosophy and take additional steps to protect our officers and our community."



A video posted online shows an officer from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Police grabbing a man walking in a crosswalk and forcing him to the ground. A department spokeswoman said the man was arrested for disorderly conduct and that police were "gathering more information" about whether the officer followed the proper protocol.

Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan has vowed to end the annual event. To deter people from coming, legislators allowed the city to create a zone with reduced speed limits and increased fines for infractions such as racing, skidding and wheel-spinning. AP

Final whale saved from grim Australia mass stranding

Sydney: A lone whale was rescued from among hundreds of carcasses Sunday, taking to 110 the number of creatures that survived a mass stranding in southern Australia.

The country's largest-ever mass stranding saw around 470 pilot whales become stuck in a remote harbour on Tasmania's rugged western seaboard last week, sparking a major effort to save the animals.

It was "absolutely remarkable" another whale was found alive six days after the pod was first discovered, a Tasmania environment department spokeswoman told AFP, adding that it had been taken back out to sea.

More than 100 rescuers toiled for days in chilly waters, with many volunteers and conservationists have now packed up as efforts turned to disposing of the remaining carcasses.

There has been a tremendous team effort and this combined commitment has allowed us to get as many whales as we can back out to



sea," Parks and Wildlife Service manager Rob Buck said of the "complex rescue".

With more than 300 carcasses spread across a 10-kilometre area (about 6 miles), authorities shifted their focus Sunday to a mass sea burial. Boats have begun towing the dead whales into the open ocean, where they will be released over several days. AP

UN: Yemen's warring sides to swap more than 1,000 prisoners

Cairo: The United Nations said Yemen's warring sides agreed Sunday to exchange more than 1,000 prisoners, marking the first phase of a release plan reached earlier this year.

The UN mission in Yemen said the internationally recognized government that was driven from the capital six years ago and the Houthis rebels agreed to "immediately release a first group of 1,081 conflict-related detainees and prisoners in accordance with the lists of agreed-upon names."

The prisoner swap deal was seen as a breakthrough during 2018 peace talks in Sweden. Both parties agreed then to several confidence-building measures, including a cease-fire in the strategic port city of Hodeida.

Implementation of the tentative peace plan, however, stumbled amid ongoing military offensives and distrust between the two sides. The conflict in the Arab world's poorest country erupted in 2014, when the Iran-allied Houthis seized the capital and much of

the country's north. A Saudi-led coalition, determined to restore President Abed Rabu Mansour Hadi's government, launched a military intervention months later.

"Today is an important day for over a thousand families who can expect to welcome back their loved ones hopefully very soon," said the UN. Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, Sunday's deal came at the conclusion of a week-long meeting in Gland, Switzerland that was co-chaired by Griffiths' office and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The UN said the deal was built on a plan that both sides agreed on in February. Griffiths urged both parties to "move forward immediately with the release and to spare no effort in building upon this momentum to swiftly agree to releasing more detainees." Fabrizio Carbone, ICR's director for the Middle East, urged the parties to swiftly move to move the agreement "from signatures on paper to reality on the ground." AP

Pradhan calls for switching to 100% clean fuels

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

On the occasion of World Tourism Day, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday urged for switching prime tourist destinations to 100 per cent clean fuel.

He was addressing a virtual meet on tourism and rapid development along with Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel, an official statement said here.

Pradhan commended the Ministry of Tourism for its novel initiative 'Dekho Apna Desh' that promotes and encourages local heritage and tourist sites.

He spoke about India's rich culture, history and ancient architectural marvels which offer immense scope for the growth of the tourism industry.



Tourism industry, he said, offers immense job opportunities and called for weaving sustainability with tourism and collaborating to switch prime tourist cities to 100 per cent clean fuels, which will further help protect monuments and ensure a cleaner environment for tourists.

'Economic disruption to deter RBI from quantifying FY21 growth forecast'

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The dynamic economic upheaval unleashed by Covid-19 pandemic might hinder the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from giving a pin-pointed forecast in the upcoming monetary policy report, experts opined.

The existing legislations mandate the RBI to come out with a growth and inflation forecast twice in an interval of six-months in the monetary policy report, experts opined.

Given the continuing uncertainty on the economic revival, it is difficult to say whether RBI will come out with clear forecasts on the GDP print for FY21, said Suman Chowdhury, Chief Analytical Officer at Acuite Ratings and Research.

"It has, however already highlighted the risks of a material contraction in economic output in the previous MPC report. As regards inflation, it is likely to reiterate its expectation of a moderation in the CPI inflation over the next few months due to lesser supply constraints, higher crop output in kharif season and also the favourable base effect kicking in."

According to Brickwork Ratings said: "With uncertainty regarding the pandemic looming large, the RBI may not provide a GDP forecast for FY21 in the upcoming MPC meeting. As in the previous statements, the RBI may continue to talk about economic contraction without quantifying its magnitude."

"Given the continued surge in Covid-19 cases in the country's major hubs, which is hindering the recovery process, we expect the Q2FY21 GDP to shrink by 15.3 per cent."

In April, the RBI's Monetary Policy Report said that the global economy may slump into recession in 2020.

The report noted that the coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and the expected contraction in global output will weigh heavily on the growth outlook. The actual outcome would depend upon the speed with which the outbreak is contained and economic activity returns to normalcy, said the Monetary Policy Report for April 2020.

As per the report, due to the highly fluid circumstances in which incoming data produce shifts in the outlook for growth on a daily basis, forecasts for real GDP growth in India are not provided in the Monetary Policy Report, awaiting a clear picture on the intensity, spread and duration of Covid-19.

It is widely expected that persistently high inflation fanned in part due to supply side disruptions along with seasonal factors will deter the

◆ **The report is slated to be issued with the upcoming policy review on Oct 1. The report was last issued in Feb**

◆ **The RBI's MPC is expected to release its resolution on the monetary policy after their meet on September 29 to October 1, 2020**

Reserve Bank to administer a dose of lending rate cut during the upcoming monetary policy review.

Notably, the expected move will come at a time when industrial output is at historic low due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The RBI's MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) is expected to release its resolution on the monetary policy after their meet on September 29 to October 1, 2020.

Vodafone Idea starts upgrading 3G users to 4G in key markets

IANS ■ MUMBAI

Vodafone Idea Limited (VIL) has started upgrading its 3G users to 4G in key markets.

In a statement on Sunday, the company said that it has substantially enhanced 4G capacity by consolidating the Vodafone and Idea networks

and deployment of latest technologies enabling it to upgrade large chunks of 3G spectrum to 4G. "VIL will now be able to offer faster 4G data speeds to its 3G users on the Vi GIGANet network. The company's enterprise customers currently using 3G based services will be upgraded to 4G and 4G based IoT applications and services, in a phased manner," it said.

While the company will continue to offer basic voice services to its 2G users, 3G data users will gradually be upgraded to 4G in a phased manner across all markets.

According to Ravinder Takkar, MD & CEO, Vodafone Idea Limited, "With highest quantum of spectrum in the country and large part of it already refarmed for 4G, VIL is now best placed to upgrade our 2G/3G users to high speed 4G data services."

"As our integration nears completion, we have already expanded our 4G coverage to 1 billion Indian population who can now avail faster data services pan-India. We believe our latest move will further catalyse the digital revolution in the country."

To switch to the high speed 4G GIGANet network, 3G users will need to upgrade to Vi 4G SIM card and 4G smartphone. The company offers a range of bundled offers to upgrade to 4G, it said.

Diesel prices down for 3rd straight day

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Diesel prices continued to dip for the third straight day on Sunday on the back of subdued crude oil prices globally.

In the national capital, diesel was priced at ₹70.80 per litre, 14 paise down from ₹70.94 a litre on Saturday.

Similarly, its price fell in other metros as well. In Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, the fuel was sold at ₹77.22, ₹76.27 and ₹74.32 respectively on Sunday, compared to the previous levels of ₹77.36, ₹76.40 and ₹74.46 per litre. Oil marketing companies, however, kept petrol prices unchanged for the fifth consecutive day. In Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, petrol was priced at ₹81.06, ₹81.14, ₹81.14 and ₹82.59 per litre respectively.

The recent fuel price fall is on the back of expectation of slowing demand for oil globally as a second wave of coronavirus spike threatens further derailment of economic activity.

Brent crude price is also subdued around \$42 a barrel. For domestic auto fuel consumers, the price fall has been a bonanza amid the current tough economic conditions. With the price cut on Sunday, diesel has now become cheaper by ₹2.76 per litre in Delhi this month.

NTPC invites bids for biomass pellet procurement

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

State-run NTPC Ltd has invited bids for procurement of biomass pellets for its various thermal plants on domestic competitive basis (DCB) as part of its endeavour to reduce burning of crop residue on farmlands that cause air pollution.

The power producer has envisaged consumption of five million tonnes of pellets in the current year at its 17 power plants including NTPC Korba (Chhattisgarh), NTPC Farakka (West Bengal), NTPC Dadri (Uttar Pradesh), NTPC Kudgi (Karnataka), NTPC Sipat (Chhattisgarh), and NTPC Rihand (Uttar Pradesh).

NTPC had first undertaken this initiative on pilot basis in 2017 for biomass co-firing by replacing some of the coal with pellet-based fuel at NTPC Dadri, Uttar Pradesh. Post successful implementation, it now plans to replicate the model in 17 of its plants.

The invitation for bids would be done through e-tendering at SRM Portal. The bidding process will be followed by the 'Single Stage - Two Envelopes' Bidding System.

"NTPC is confident that co-firing will help create large scale rural employment opportunities in processing as well as

supply chain for biomass," the company said in a statement on Sunday. The power producer will give preference to bids from suppliers from Punjab and Haryana.

NTPC had fired 100 tonnes of agro residue-based pellets at Dadri, Uttar Pradesh in 2017. The test-firing was carried out in four phases, with gradual increase in percentage of firing from 2.5 per cent to 100 per cent along with coal. Till date, the company has fired more than 7,000 tonnes of agro residue pellets. As per estimates, about 145 MMTPA of crop residue remains utilised and the open of its is burnt in India in the open fields, creating severe air pollution that leads to health issues.

During the same period, a considered a major contributor to the surge in PM 2.5 in northern India in the post-harvesting season.

"With its gross calorific value comparable to the bituminous coal, the power producer has the potential of the entire 145 MMTPA biomass burnt through co-firing in coal-based power plants is equivalent to 28,000 MW of round-the-clock generation of renewable power. The biomass has the same amount of electrical energy as can be produced from solar capacity of 125,000-150,000 MW," the NTPC statement said.

India's Aug crude steel output falls 4%, China logs 8% rise



IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Production of crude steel in India in August declined 4.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis to 8.48 million tonne (Mt), according to data from the World Steel Association.

During the same period, last year, India had produced 8.87 million tonne of crude steel.

Globally, however, crude steel production marked a marginal rise and China recorded a 9.4 per cent increase to 94.8 million tonne.

In a statement, the World Steel Association said that total steel production for the 64 countries reporting to it was 156.2 million tonne in August 2020, a 0.6 per cent increase compared to August 2019.

It further noted that due to the ongoing difficulties presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the estimates have been revised with next month's production update.

"China produced 94.8 Mt of crude steel in August 2020, an increase of 8.4 per cent compared to August 2019. India produced 8.5 Mt of crude steel in August 2020, down 4.4 per cent on August 2019," it said.

Japan produced 6.4 million tonne of crude steel in August 2020, down 20.6 per cent compared to August 2019. South Korea's steel production was 5.8 million tonne in August, down by 1.8 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

Germany produced 2.8 million tonne of crude steel in August 2020, down 13.4 per cent.

The US produced 5.6 million tonne of crude steel in August 2020, a decrease of 24.4 per cent compared to August 2019.

Food and Civil Supplies Min Bharat Bhushan Ashu kick-starts paddy procurement in Punjab

Chandigarh: Punjab Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu today kick started paddy procurement at Jajpur Grain Market. Reiterating that Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh led state government always stood by the farmers, he averred that every effort would be made for the withdrawal of the anti-farmer bills passed by the Union Government. He was accompanied by MLA Rajpura Ghanour Mr. Madan Lal Jalalpur, Punjab Mandi Board Senior Vice Chairman Mr. Vijay Kalia and Food and Civil Supplies Director Anindita Mitra.

Interacting with the media persons after starting government procurement operations, Ashu said, following the directives of the Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, the state government has made elaborate arrangements for the procurement of expected arrival of 170 lakh metric tonnes of paddy across the state, adding that state government was committed to procure every grain of the produce because it was the fruit of six months of hard work of the farmers. "Punjab Government has made all out efforts to ensure the smooth and uninterrupted procurement of paddy crop in all the Mandis of the state keeping in view the COVID-19 pandemic," he added.

The Food Minister said that due to the early arrival of paddy crop, the state government has started the procurement of paddy from today and will ensure early payment of the crop to the farmers. He said that this time, Punjab Mandi Board has set up 4033 self-excess centers in the state including 1872 official centers, where 30x30 feet space has been earmarked in wake of Corona. Besides this, masks and soap and sanitizer for hand washing are being provided to farmers and arrangements for labour, gunny bags and transport for lifting of crops have also been completed.

Ashu appealed to the farmers not to set fire crop residue in the fields as it will exacerbate COVID situation in the state and bring only dry produce to the mandis for easy and hassle-free procurement. He said that



■ Punjab government stands firmly with the farmers: Bharat Bhushan Ashu

■ State government made elaborate arrangements for procurement in view of COVID-19 pandemic: Ashu

■ State gears up for procurement of 170 Lakh Metric Tonnes of Paddy at 4033 procurement centers in Punjab

■ Says, Thirty lakh metric tonnes of wheat and rice moved to other states this month to evacuate godowns similar to the wheat season, farmers would be able to bring their produce in the Mandis by obtaining the passes given to them through commission agents and these would be of different colors for various days.

Raj is better than other States under corona control: CM

Jajpur: Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that all classes have played an important role in the fight against corona infection in the State. With the help of public representatives, leaders of various parties, NGOs, social workers, religious leaders, Bhamashahs and Corona Warriors, the State Government has succeeded in controlling the corona infection to a great extent in the State, with the death rate from corona also being minimal. He said that in this war against Corona, the entire state remained united and everyone's cooperation was saved in saving the lives of people and their livelihood. In the future, all will fight together against Corona.

Gehlot was holding a video conference from the Chief Minister's residence on Saturday to discuss the steps taken so far for the Covid-19 epidemic with the leaders of various political parties and representatives of voluntary organizations. He also sought suggestions from leaders of all parties and representatives of voluntary organizations.

He said that corona management in Rajasthan has been very good. The state is in a much better position than other states on various parameters of epidemic control.

The Chief Minister said that for the last few days, there has been a concern expressed by the public representatives,

public and various organizations on the growing transition. He said some states had previously imposed a lockdown two days a week. But the Rajasthan government says that two days a week lockdown is not useful to prevent infection. Due to the long lockdown in the past, livelihood crisis has arisen in front of the livelihood workers. He said that to prevent infection, the state government has imposed Section 144 in 11 cities of the state and prohibited the gathering of more than five persons.

Gehlot said that no more than one person should visit the patients admitted in the Covid Care Centers. The risk of infection increases with more than one family visiting patients. He instructed to issue advisory in this regard. During the video conference, representatives of social organizations and NGOs also suggested to create greater awareness about health protocols among the general public. Everyone gave suggestions regarding strict adherence to social distancing and applying mask.

Medical Minister Dr. Raghu Sharma said that adequate oxygen beds, ventilators and ICU beds are available in the state. He said that the state's testing capacity has exceeded 51 thousand per day. In the coming time, 4500 tests will be done daily with Cobas machine in SMS hospital.

CAIT calls for early roll out of e-commerce policy

CAIT is all set to launch its e-commerce portal 'Bharatemarket' in Oct

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has called upon Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal to roll out the e-commerce policy at the earliest to curb "malpractices" of large e-commerce players in India.

In a statement, the traders' organisation said: "Indian e-commerce ecosystem has been greatly vitiated by large e-commerce companies and in the wake of steep rise of e-commerce share in the Indian domestic trade, it is all the more necessary to have a robust and well-defined e-commerce policy so that small businesses do not suffer at the hands of large e-commerce companies having deep pockets and enormous resources."

Further, it said that CAIT is all set to launch its e-commerce portal 'Bharatemarket' in October. CAIT has also demanded formation of a regulatory authority for regulating and monitoring e-commerce business and having adequate powers to penalise offenders of the e-commerce policy. It has also suggested that there should be no relaxation in FDI policy for e-commerce players.

Inner Wheel Club celebrates the United Nations 75th Anniversary

International Inner Wheel is one of the largest women service voluntary organizations in the world and is active in more than 104 countries with the objective to promote true friendship and service to everyone to live better lives. International Inner Wheel involves the United Nations (ECOSOC and UNICEF) with a consultative status.

The Inner Wheel Club (IWC) Delhi Main conducted a Webinar on 21.09.2020 to celebrate the UN 75th Anniversary.

This webinar was attended by more than 200 IWC members. Inner Wheel Clubs world over takes part in a wide range of works for charities and causes with the aim of helping everyone to live better lives.

International Inner Wheel has their representatives in the UN who assist the work sessions of the commissions regarding important themes as: Human Rights, Rights of the Children, conditions of Women, the family, the Elderly and Drugs. Webinars were addressed by four past International Inner Wheel President (PIIWP).

Demand for dairy products yet to reach pre-Covid level

HAREKRISHNA MISRA AND SANJIV DAS

The success of the 'Operation Flood' led to India emerging as the highest milk producing nation in the world. India became self-sufficient in milk production mainly attributed to the role played by dairy cooperatives such as Amul (Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation), Nandini (Karnataka Milk Federation) etc.

After the announcement of lockdown in March to curb spread of the COVID19, it resulted in disruption of supply chain associated with the various sectors of Indian economy. However, the dairy cooperatives continued with their operations of procuring milk from the members (as well as non-members) and distributing it to the consumers notwithstanding operational challenges faced.

While many private stores organised dairy players stopped or reduced milk procurement from farmers because of lockdown, the co-operative dairies have continued to collect milk from dairy farmers to ensure milk supply to their members. This has resulted in surplus stock of Skimmed Milk Powder (SMP) and butter with the co-operative dairies. On one hand the milk procurement has increased and on the other the

SOME OF THE TARIFF AND NON-TARIFF BARRIERS IMPOSED ON INDIAN DAIRY PRODUCTS EXPORTS

European Union	Does not approved Indian dairy plant under pretext of Veterinary control, Antibiotic and Pesticide residue etc
USA	high import duty of 40 to 60% on dairy products
China	The world's largest importer of dairy products does not permit import from India due to ban imposed by India because of presence of melamine in dairy products imported from China
Russia	Requires their own Veterinary team to approve plants. In the last four years, no approval has been granted for Indian dairy industry for last many years
Canada	Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) does not permit import of dairy products from India. In case of some approval, import duty imposed as high as 250%.
Australia	Do not permit import of dairy products from India due to Food and Mouth Disease. Only reformed products are permitted.
South Africa, Mexico, Venezuela	No permit import of dairy products from India
Sri Lanka and Bangladesh	30% import duty on dairy products
Thailand	More than 40% import duty

demand for the dairy products is yet to reach the pre-Covid level.

It is estimated that the dairy cooperatives currently have around 1.5 lakh tonne of SMP stocks, which implies around 1.5 million tonne of milk stock (conversion ratio of SMP to liquid milk 1:10). This stock is far more than the SMP stocks held with the cooperatives a year ago. With the onset of flush season (milk production goes up) from October, dairy cooperatives have been asking the government to provide incentives under the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme so that around 50,000 tonne of SMP could be exported.

INDIA' DAIRY PRODUCTS EXPORTS

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 (April-July)
Volume (tonne)	102,312	180,681	111,145	34,198
Rs/crore	1954	3375	1982	677

A number of countries which imports large quantity of dairy products are not permitting import of dairy from India applying various tariff and non-tariff barriers. The European Union (EU) does not approve dairy imports from India under the pretext of various issues like pesticide and antibiotic residue etc. The United States had a high import duty of 40 to 60% on dairy products. China, the world's largest importer of dairy products does not permit import from India after it imposed a ban on the imports of milk and milk products from China years back because of presence of toxic chemical - melamine in Chinese dairy products. Russia's guidelines stipulate that their own veterinary control team approves dairy plants in India prior to imports. In the last four years, Russia has not granted any approval for Indian dairy plants.

Trend Slazer

'Climate change is an undeniable threat'

Actor and environmentalist **BHUMI PEDNEKAR** feels education is the significant channel to raise awareness on climate conservation.

"The changes we are observing are an undeniable threat to our civilisation. This year we have witnessed the Australian bushfires, oil spill in Russia's Arctic region, the Uttarakhand forest fires, Cyclone Amphan in West Bengal and Odisha, and California wildfires," she said.

"The effects will be catastrophic unless we act now. We need everyone to join hands to ensure that we leave behind barrels of hope and prosperity for the generations to come. Education is the significant channel to achieve this goal," added Bhumi.



'I would love to be running around trees and I love to play the demure girl, which I have played in a few of my south films. My point is that I want my character to be important to the plot. If you take away the character from the story, will the story still work? Sometimes, yes. But I want my character to be a memorable one.'

—Adah Sharma

ACTOR KIRTI KULHARI

has reminisced about her character Jannat in *Bard Of Blood* on the one-year anniversary of the web series, saying it is the kind of role an actor lives for.



"Even when I utter the character's name, it hits me how gorgeous she is as a character. The character has been quite strongly etched in the people's minds and hearts," said Kirti.

"It's a character that anyone would fall in love with. Who wouldn't want to play a role that people just fall in love with? It was the kind of role an actor lives for," added she.

Billie introduces newborn son

Actor **BILLIE LOURD** and her fiancé, Austen Rydell, announced the birth of her son. The announcement came as a surprise, since Lourd's pregnancy was not made public.

The *American Horror Story* star shared a photo of their son's feet. The caption read, "Introducing Kingston Fisher Lourd Rydell" with blue heart and crown emojis. In June, Rydell announced their engagement with a series of photos and a video of the couple. His caption read, "She said yes! (Actually she said Duhhh) But I guess that's even better than yes!"



We all know that the persistence of the novel Coronavirus is one of the few things that are here to stay. Hence, we must learn to accept the new normal, be it about everyday lifestyle changes or even fashion. And looking at the new garments and trends which are becoming staples in our wardrobe, the first would be gloves, which seem to be back in fashion. Designers are gradually introducing interesting pairs, which would hopefully help the people regain the human touch.

Various types of gloves have been introduced now such as disposable, anti-bacterial, hypo-allergenic, environment-friendly and many more. The global demand for disposable gloves has suddenly skyrocketed as compared to their sales before the pandemic. These protective gears have become the latest additions in our wardrobes in the last few months.

Of course, we are not mentioning the latex surgical ones in which hands sweat like in saunas. The protective gear in our hands is somewhat a beautiful expression of our indomitable spirits in the face of contagion. Gloves have definitely been an overlooked accessory used for practicality, although it has gone down in history as the most universal item in fashion. They have become a necessary trend amid the pandemic due to the additional protection that they can offer other than masks and sanitisation. Celebrities and fashion influencers are now taking to social media to exhibit their collection of gloves, which are accessorised with nail-paints and rings. The latest accessory of fashionable gloves actually came into development just before the outbreak and designers were seen exploring their potential on fashion runways.

You can sport hand-embroidered gloves, anti-bacterial crocheted ones or printed, colourful ones to meet your different types of moods. There's one for every place — while you are set to hit the gym or an aerobics class, to the supermarket or while travelling. Gloves made of anti-microbial fabrics and fibres are the latest innovation that gives a long-lasting protection from microbes even after multiple washes. These fabrics protect your hands from various viruses and bacteria that are much required amid this unprecedented phase.

Nelson Jaffery, Head of Design, Liva, shares a few noted trends:

EXHIBIT THE RIGHT COLOURS WITH OUTFITS

Colours play an integral part not only in fashion but also in our life as they add happiness, distract us from negative thinking, change actions and cause reactions. The type of colour combinations that we choose for ourselves reflects our personal self. The bright colour reflects happiness and adds positive vibes, while the dull shades reflect the tedious mood. As we are already mindful about matching our accessories on what we wear, choosing the right colour as per the outfit will help you create a new style statement.

While at work, gloves can get soiled and stained, at this point the colours that you choose can turn out to be life savers. Choosing darker shades is the best way to embrace the style of being carefree. A few timeless shades to select from are: **Bittersweet chocolate**: This deeply divine shade can match almost every outfit, making all the difference.

Dark lavender: The shade has cer-



REGAIN HUMAN TOUCH

While we wear gloves essentially as protective gear, there's no reason why they cannot become our fashion accessory. Designers suggest that choosing the right colour according to your outfit will help you create your style statement. By TEAM VIVA

tainly made a comeback in fashion as it is bright and vivacious, giving us the right summer vibe. It goes well on light colours like white, pink and off-white. **Gallery red**: Also known as rose red, with a tint of pink, it adds class to any outfit that you opt to wear.

ADD SOME CUTWORK

Cutwork style is back in vogue. The vintage technique and the intricate style lends a see-through look to the garment. Done by cutting away the fabric and binding the edges with buttonhole stitches, the technique emerged in the 14th century in Italy, and ever since, overcoming the top trends like laces and flares. Well, cutwork gloves can be worn for special occasions to give your attire a chic and more elegant look.

To keep the protection quotient intact, it's recommended to use latex/plastic gloves underneath the cutwork.

PRINT FOR A LITTLE DRAMA

Wearing print and patterns can be



intimidating as compared to solid colour gloves. Mixing prints has always been a top fashion trend. Prints have evolved throughout and now have become the priority when we think of something



trendy. Even though many women prefer to live in a terminal state of simplicity out of fear of looking too complicated or frumpy but bold prints are more wearable than they seem. It's just about

making the right choice. If you end up choosing too many prints at a moment, it can look chaotic rather than stylish. Hence, choosing simple prints can be the must-have in gloves.

PUFF AND VOLUME

When we get a little overexcited or think of dramatising our mood into our attire, puff style is something to go about without any doubts. When we started to see the puff trend rising, it seemed like just the season's newest must-have. And ever since, it's been re-imagined in so many iterations and has returned season after season, becoming more than just a fleeting trend.

These are usually worn during the winters, however, with the ever-evolving style statement, gloves are becoming a more casual and go-to style.

Safety garments like gloves and masks are here to stay no matter how far we come with the pandemic. Hence, choosing the right and comfortable fabric like viscose will always be a great option to sustain this virus in the best possible way.

The power of words

Through a series of lockdown workshops, actor **BOMAN IRANI** offers a learning opportunity to budding writers, amateurs and professionals from different walks of life to master the nuances of screenwriting

It has been actor Boman Irani's endeavour to break down the craft of cinema for brilliant minds of all ages. The actor, who is known for his path-breaking performances in *3 Idiots* and *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, has answered his call as a storyteller by devising *Spiral Bound*, a series of screenwriting workshops for eager learners. This initiative by the actor has clocked in 150 online screenwriting sessions during the lockdown.

Through these workshops, Irani offered a learning opportunity to budding writers, amateurs and professionals from different walks of life to unite and learn the nuances of screenwriting. What started for him as a step towards being a student of cinema, has now resulted in an incredible journey of mentoring hundreds of students.

Happy to have arrived at the milestone of hitting 150 sessions, Boman took to his social media to express gratitude towards artists and filmmakers, who showed their support to *Spiral Bound*. In the caption, he wrote, "One hundred and fifty sessions on screenwriting in just about 165 days right through this lockdown. Writers, directors, actors, designers, beginners, all... with heart. All with the intention to learn and grow. Not allowing the chains of these lockdowns to shackle and get the better of us. If at all



we were shackled, it was with each other. Bound by the spiraling shackles of learning, love and friendship. Proud of each and every one of you! Grateful too!"

He said, "Spiral Bound began with the idea of jamming on stories and refining them. We have over 100 people attending the sessions every day and now clocking in 150 sessions leads me to think that what we're offering these minds is really working for them."

The first workshop was conducted by Alexander Dinelaris, Oscar-winning film *Birdman*'s screenwriter and dear friend to Boman. This was before the lockdown when the actor launched his production house — Irani Movietone. He shared that he wanted to write his screenplay but couldn't. He was looking for some guidance, so he went to New York in search of it. And he met Alexander there. That's how it all started.

Boman believes that these workshops will produce some great films in the future. He said that it's all about the power of screenplay. "No camera can do wonders, if the screenplay isn't worthwhile. It has the power to make or break great films," added he.

On the work front, the actor looks forward to the release of *83*, where he will be portraying the role of a former Indian cricketer Farokh Engineer, and *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*.

WEBBED

SERIOUS MEN

When a slum dweller spins a web of lies in pursuit of the upward mobility he has long craved, his ruse could be especially dangerous for his young son. Starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Nasser and Aakshath Das, the film releases on October 2 on Netflix.



GINNY WEDS SUNNY

Eager to marry but constantly rejected by women, a bachelor hopes to win over a former crush by accepting help from an unlikely source: her mother. Starring Yami Gautam, Vikrant Massey and Suhail Nayyar, the film releases October 9 on Netflix.



REBECCA

A young newlywed moves to her husband's imposing estate, where she must contend with his sinister housekeeper and the haunting shadow of his late wife. Starring Lily James, Armie Hammer and Kristin Scott Thomas, the film releases on October 21 on Netflix.



THE ROAD TO DREAMS

The Indira Awas Yojana in the Poonch district of Jammu & Kashmir might be promising houses but the villagers are demanding roads first.
By QADIR ASHRAFI



Last month, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Manoj Sinha, reviewed the progress of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in a meeting held at Raj Bhavan in Srinagar. While stressing upon maintaining the quality of roads, he directed the concerned officials to strictly adhere to the project timelines. The focus of the LG reflects not only the strategic significance of the territorial connection

in remote, hilly regions but also stresses upon roads being an important indicator of development. It is through roads that people residing in these tough, mountainous corners of this newly-announced Union Territory will be able to participate in development of the country. However, the condition of roads in several difficult-to-reach areas needs immediate attention of the administration.

In the border district of Poonch, located 250 km from Jammu city, many villages still lack road connectivity. Malhan, the smallest Panchayat of Surankot tehsil in Poonch, is one of the many areas where road connectivity has been one of the most pressing issues for several years now. In 2012, the initiation of work for road construction between the Sehri Khawaja to Ziarat Sharif Maifan had brought a new ray of hope for the vil-

lagers. The idea of not having to go through difficult mountainous trails during extreme weather conditions provided a sense of comfort to them. But the happiness was short-lived as due to some internal reasons, the construction was put on hold. Now, it's been eight years, and people here are still awaiting that road construction to go on the floors again and connect them with the town.

"We had given up our land for the department to pave the road. Villagers sacrificed their fields and gardens for the larger good of the entire community that faces several challenges while commuting through the *kutcha* roads," shared the villagers who have not received any compensation for the land they had given up. According to them, officials from the department visit the area only to leave after giving them assurances, which have not yet been materialised into anything concrete in the last eight years.

During his Poonch visit in July this year, the former LG Girish Chandra Murmu, the predecessor to LG Manoj Sinha, had also focussed on the construction of roads. That time, the chief of the concerned department had visited the village and had promised the villagers that the matter will be resolved at the earliest and the road will be completed, however, only to no relief.

"The road belongs to my ward. Its incomplete construction has become a hindrance in other works of development in the entire Panchayat. To attract the attention of the concerned authority, this Panchayat had even boycotted the second phase of the programme, 'Back to Village' run by the Central Government, but to no avail," explained Shamim Akhter, the Panch of Ward No 5.

Adding to the complication, the Panchayat has recently received guidelines from the district department that the construction of houses under Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) should be completed within three months. The beneficiaries of the scheme were waiting for the road to be constructed as without it building a house will be quite difficult. If they do not obey the orders, they will have to return the installment that has come into their accounts along with an interest. "That's the dilemma. If the road issue isn't resolved soon, I will not be able to benefit from the IAY scheme. Construction of roads need to be completed first and then the houses should be built," shared Abdul Khaliq, one of the beneficiaries of the IAY scheme.

Not just construction of the houses but the development challenges of such isolated villages can be addressed easily once they are connected via roads. Reaching schools, hospitals and town for work and other needs will become easier. The emphasis of the current administration on construction of roads in rural areas is surely a positive sign. It is this belief in the government that people of the village were waiting patiently for their dreams to be fulfilled.

—Charlha Features



The foolproof law

Instead of seeking short-term rewards through corrupt deeds, let us respect karma and live a righteous life, reaping the fruit of joy and well-being, says

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

It's often said, "Honesty is the best policy." Which is the reason why a kind and an honest person would never approve of someone who reaches heights by foul means or through corruption. To them, life often seems unfair and the result, at times, turns out to be revengeful. However, one fails to understand an important fact that the law of karma is eternal and on the simple principle of cause-and-effect — "as you sow, so shall you reap."

Corruption in India has stirred many political debates and agitations in the history, attracting extensive coverage in the Indian media too. Bribery, scams and misuse of public money are becoming common. Many a times, those involved in these activities go scot-free, lead a luxurious life and enjoy many privileges without being accountable for their nefarious deeds. But we forget that the law of karma is infallible and immutable. As per this law, every act or expression by a human being will be experienced by him/her in the same degree and nobody can escape the effects of this law. What we cannot see most of the time is how and when an action is punished or rewarded, due to which we get disillusioned. However, as per the karmic law, sometimes the result of an action may be carried over to the next life and hence, it says that there is always justice in whatever happens. The fact that there are all kinds of differences — physical, economical and social — is the very evidence. It's because of the consequences of our previous karma which are carried over and experienced in the next birth.

We hence should perceive life in a deeper and a more holistic way. First, we must realise that the doer of karma is not the body but the being or the soul, which is immortal. The eternal law of karma facilitates and shapes the continuous journey or evolution of the human soul. We are here to experience true nature and experience the reward of that. Our expressions may be a subtle feeling or thought or they may be a visible action.

It is unfortunate that most people today are blind to their spiritual identity and law of karma, as a result of which they believe that they are here for one lifetime and so they can eat, drink, make merry and indulge in all pleasures through right or wrong means. But the fact is that such people may have wealth but they lack peace of mind, health and true joy. This narrow-minded limited view of human life has spawned vices such as lust, greed, ego and attachment. In the pursuit to have more, enjoy more and possess more, people have become totally callous about values like honesty, compassion, sharing and cooperation. Even when people suffer the result of their bad karma, they do not realise that they have to improve themselves instead they blame others and become even more corrupt and vicious. If people could see in advance that each corrupt deed they commit would be transmuted into a painful suffering or loss for them either in this life or in the future, they would never commit something wrong again. But they neither have the wisdom nor the strength to live a life of total moral integrity. We must realise that the richness of one's character is the most essential and real wealth that raises the value of human life.

Today, people have lost faith in god and good karma. But the law of karma is the most foolproof one that guarantees good return to those who do good. The time and place and the source from where it will come vary. But the wheel of divine justice never fails. So, instead of seeking short-term pleasures and rewards through corrupt deeds, let us live a righteous life and reap the fruit of abundant joy and well-being.



On a quiet road in India's capital, tucked away on a wide, red-bricked sidewalk, kids sidrift by the country's COVID-19 lockdown are being tutored.

The children, ages four to 14, carry book bags more than two kilometers (a mile) from their thatched-roof huts on the banks of the Yamuna River to this impromptu, roadside classroom. There, they receive free lessons in Math, Science, English and Physical Education, taught by a former diplomat and his wife.

It all began when Veena Gupta's maid, who lives on the bank of the river, complained that with schools shut, children in her impoverished community were running amok and wasting time. "If they stayed at home doing nothing, they'd become drifters," said Dolly Sharma, who works at Veena's high-rise apartment, which overlooks the lush riverbank.

Veena, a singer and grandmother of three, and her husband, Virendra Gupta, decided to go out to the street and teach the kids so they are not left behind when school reopens. "They don't have access to internet, their schools are shut and they don't have any means to learn," said Veena, who bought books, pencils, notebooks and other teaching materials and set up the small, open-air classroom



under the shade of a leafy banyan tree.

The country's stringent lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19 shut schools across the country in late March. Most remain closed as the number of cases has surged past five million, making India second to hit in the world by the Coronavirus.

While many private schools switched to digital learning and online classes, children in most government-run schools either don't have that option or don't have the means to purchase dig-

A new gurukul

A couple runs street-side classes for some underprivileged students as digital learning isn't an option for them

ital learning tools like laptops or smartphones. "There is only one mobile phone in my family and it is usually with my father. I can't study online," said Nitin Mishra, a ninth grade student in Virendra's math class. Mishra's

mother works as a part-time maid and his father is unable to find employment.

The street-side classes have grown as dozens of children showed keen interest. Now the Guptas — with help from their



driver, Heera — teach three different groups thrice a week, morning and evening. After class, the children are treated to homemade lemonade and cookies prepared by Veena.

The two say teaching the kids makes them feel closer to their grandchildren, who live abroad. "My father would make me spend my summer vacation learning the next year's curriculum in advance," said Virendra, who served as Indian ambassador to several countries including South Africa. It really boosted my confidence

and made me interested in schoolwork. And that is what I am trying to do with these children, so when their school reopens, they are slightly ahead of their class."

Veena said she hopes to recruit more volunteers to teach the street-side classes. "It is not about the money that people can contribute and give, it is about their time," she said. "They should take out little bit of their time, an hour or so, if not every day, every alternate day, and come and help these children." —AP

I was willing to accept what I couldn't change.
—APJ Abdul Kalam

VITAMIN D CUTS DEATH RISK IN COVID PATIENTS

A new research adds to the growing body of evidence that patients with sufficient levels of Vitamin D are less likely to experience complications and die from COVID-19. As per a study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, hospitalised COVID-19 patients who were vitamin D sufficient, with a blood level of 25-hydroxyvitamin D of at least 30 ng/mL (a measure of Vitamin D status) had a significantly decreased risk for adverse clinical outcomes and death. In addition, they had lower blood levels of an inflammatory marker (C-reactive protein) and higher blood levels of lymphocytes (a type of immune cell to help fight infection). "This study provides direct evidence that Vitamin D sufficiency can reduce the complications, including the cytokine storm (release of too many proteins into the blood too quickly) and ultimately death from COVID-19," said study author Michael F Holick from the Boston University in the US.



COVID PREGNANCY DOESN'T AFFECT NEWBORNS

Researchers have found that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 during pregnancy was not associated with complications in the newborn child. For the study, published in the journal *JAMA*, the research team have examined the association between a positive SARS-CoV-2 test during pregnancy and complications in mothers and their newborn babies. Almost two out of three pregnant women who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 were asymptomatic and the researchers found no higher prevalence of complications during delivery or of ill-health in the neonates. However, preeclampsia was more common in infected women. "One possible reason for the latter is that both preeclampsia and COVID-19 impact several organs and can present similar symptoms," said study lead author Mia Ahlberg from Karolinska University Hospital in Sweden.



MODEL DETECTS MUTATIONS IN BREAST CANCER

Researchers have developed a computational model which is effective in detecting and identifying genetic mutations in breast tumours. The study included results from over 3,200 patients with breast cancer. The researchers used RNA sequencing, a sensitive, precise tool which has very gradually started to be applied clinically, although not yet for breast cancer. The study, published in the journal *EMBO Molecular Medicine*, used breast tumours for analysis from the unique Swedish SCAN-B project. "We hope that SCAN-B RNA sequencing will be in clinical use as early as next year, mainly to help in the identification of which breast tumours are high-risk and which are low-risk," said study researcher Lao Saal from Lund University in Sweden. When the team analysed the genetic mutations in the breast tumours of the patients in the study, they found that almost 87 per cent had at least one mutation for which potential drugs already exist.



DIABETES DRUG LOWERS HEART ISSUES

Drugs known as sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors are associated with a lower risk of major heart problems in patients with type-2 diabetes than dipeptidyl peptidase-4 (DPP-4) inhibitors, say researchers. As per a study, published in the journal *The BMJ*, previous trials have shown that SGLT2 inhibitors can reduce the risk of heart conditions such as heart attack, stroke, and heart failure compared with placebo. But some of these trials had important limitations, making it difficult to interpret the results, and data on the effects of individual SGLT2 inhibitors on the heart are limited. The research team from McGill University, Canada set out to compare the risk of cardiovascular events between SGLT2 inhibitors and DPP-4 inhibitors among adults with type-2 diabetes in a real practice setting.



EXCESS BELLY FAT UPS EARLY DEATH RISK

Researchers have found that excess fat stored around the abdomen is associated with a higher risk of early death from any cause, regardless of overall body fat, whereas larger hips and thighs are associated with a lower risk. The results, published in the journal *The BMJ*, suggest that measuring central fatness may be a more reliable indicator of risk of death from excess weight, and could be used alongside body mass index to help determine the risk of premature death. Body mass index (BMI) is a simple measure widely used to assess people's weight. But its reliability is often criticised, as it does not distinguish fat from muscle and does not tell us where body fat is stored. "It is already well known that being overweight or obese is linked to a greater risk of heart disease, certain cancers, kidney disease, and neurological disorders," said study authors from Semnan University of Medical Sciences in Iran.



We were probably 20-30 runs short and then it would have been a good game. If you don't put the right total on board, it's going to be hard to defend.

The plan was simple. I was there to get set and see my team through. Total wasn't that big. So it was important for me to stay there. As a batting unit, I think we all did well.

Rahul Chahar is a fantastic leg-spinner and has had a brilliant last season and he is looking in good form. As far as matches are concerned, it is a matter of time, things fall in place

I've practiced power hitting a lot in the past couple of years. I think it was really important for our team to get this win

BATTING MAYANKLASS

PTI ■ SHARJAH

Mayank Agarwal outshone his Kings XI Punjab captain KL Rahul with a maiden IPL hundred as the duo pummelled the Rajasthan Royals bowlers into submission to post an imposing 223 for 2 here on Sunday.

Agarwal (106) and Rahul (69) stitched 183 runs for the opening stand, the highest partnership for any wicket so far this season as they took apart the Royals bowlers who were also wayward in their line and length.

The duo just missed the record of highest opening wicket partnership in IPL history by a mere two runs when Agarwal was hit for 17th over after hitting 10 fours and seven sixes during his magnificent 50-ball knock.

Nicholas Pooran then hit 25 not out from just eight balls while Glenn Maxwell also remained unbeaten on 13.



Mayank Agarwal plays a shot during Indian Premier League match between Rajasthan Royals and Kings XI Punjab held at the Sharjah Cricket stadium BCCI

PTI ■ DUBAI

Royal Challengers Bangalore would be looking to address their pace-bowling concerns when they face defending champions Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

RCB started on a winning note but then their star-studded attack against Kings XI Punjab, resulting in a humbling 97-run defeat.

After scores of 14 and 1, Kohli is due for a big one and would be itching to spend more time in the middle order.

Opener Devdutt Padikal, who started his IPL career with a classy half-century, did not do much against KXIP and will be aiming for consistency.

Australian limited over captain Aaron Finch would be hoping to convert starts into match-winning performances while AB de Villiers, who has looked in god touch, will be expected to provide the late fireworks again with the lower-order not inspiring a lot of hope.

It is still not clear whether RCB will have the services of

It's Rohit vs Kohli

South African all-rounder Chris Morris, who sat out of the first two games due to a side strain.

In the bowling department, Yuzvendra Chahal, as always, will be the man with pacers, barring Navdeep Saini, leaking runs.

Dale Steyn and Umesh Yadav have proved expensive so far. The South African great is likely to retain his place in the playing eleven but the same can't be said about Yadav, who could make way for Mohammad Siraj.

England all-rounder Moeen Ali will be a welcome addition to the middle-order but with Josh Philippe keeping wickets regularly, he can only replace Steyn.

Mumbai Indians, who ticked all the boxes in their comfortable win against Kolkata Knight Riders, are

Southern Stars wrap T20 series

IAIS ■ BRISBANE

Australia women came out with yet another incredible performance, both with bat and ball, as they defeated New Zealand by eight wickets in the second T20 on Sunday, thereby securing the three-match series.

Australia first bundled New Zealand for 128 in 19.2 overs, with the innings punctuated by another contentious White Ferns dismissal and then chased down the target with more than three overs to spare. Chasing the target, Alyssa Healy, who earlier in the first innings went past MS Dhoni to take over record for maximum dismissals in T20Is – gave a solid start to the Aussies along with Beth Mooney. The pair added 51 runs in 4.3 overs before Healy got out after scoring 33 runs off just 17 balls, which included five 4s and a six. Soon Mooney also went back to the pavilion after contributing with 24 runs.

However, skipper Meg Lanning (26*) and Rachel Haynes (40*) didn't allow any further wickets to fall and saw the hosts go across the line in 16.4 overs.

Focus will be on talent like Shafali : Neetu David

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Newly-appointed women's chief selector Neetu David says her team's focus will be on unearthing more young talent like 16-year-old Shafali Verma, who became an overnight star with her rare six-hitting ability.

One of the finest spinners to have come out of India, David, very much understands the requirements of modern-day limited-overs cricket.

Opening batter Shafali was 15 when she earned her maiden-call up last year's series and six months after making her India debut, she played a major role in the team's march to the T20 World Cup final in March.

"The way cricket is being played, it is quick and for that we need more players like Shafali. Earlier, the approach was different but now you see batters trying to be aggres-



Kwili Class: New Zealand pacer Trent Boult chats with former great and Mumbai Indians bowling coach Shane Bond during Mumbai Indians nets session

HARDIK KEEN TO BOWL

Mumbai Indians Director of Cricket Operations Zaheer Khan on Sunday said Hardik Pandya is keen to bowl but the team management needs to listen to his body as the all-rounder is playing after a lengthy layoff due to a back injury. "We are all expecting him (Hardik) to bowl and he is someone who really changes that balance of any side when he is bowling and he understands that," Zaheer said when asked about Hardik's bowling. "But we have to listen to his body and that is something the conversation which we have been having in consultation with the physios. "We are looking forward for him to bowl, he is very keen and really wanting to bowl, we just have to wait and be patient and listen to his body. At the end of the day for any bowler injuries play a huge role."

DC HAVE A GOOD BALANCE

Having played a vital role in Delhi Capitals' emphatic 44-run win against the Chennai Super Kings, South African pacer Anrich Nortje will look to continue the same run of form in his debut IPL season. "It's just unbelievable. It's great to get a wicket finally, I mean after not getting one in the first game. I felt like to come in and run in today, just give it my best, control what I generally do and I think at the end it paid off. So, I was just trying to do my thing at the end," said Nortje on being able to break the deadlock.

AFRIDI MISS PAK PLAYERS IN IPL

Pakistan's former captain Shahid Afridi has rued the absence of top players from his country in a "big platform" like the Indian Premier League. In a report published in the Pakistani media, Afridi said that the IPL is a big platform for any player to get exposure, gain experience and improve. "The IPL is a big brand and I know that if our players like Babar Azam and others get a chance to play in it they would learn to play under pressure situations. Unfortunately, due to the existing policies, our players are not getting that big platform," he said.

POINTS TABLE						
		P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1	DC	2	2	0	+1.100	4
2	KXIP	2	1	1	+2.425	2
3	MI	2	1	1	+0.993	2
4	RR	1	1	0	+0.800	2
5	KKR	2	1	1	-0.767	2
6	CSK	3	1	2	-0.840	2
7	RCB	2	1	1	-2.175	2
8	SRH	2	0	2	-0.730	0



David Goffin plays a shot against Jannik Sinner

Goffin exits Roland Garros

AP ■ PARIS

Top-seeded Simona Halep won 10 straight games in beating Sara Sorribes Tormo 6-4, 6-0 to reach the second round of the French Open on Sunday and extend her winning streak to 15 matches.

Wearing thick black leggings and a long-sleeved pink jersey to combat the chilly conditions on Court Philippe Chatrier, the 2018 champion made a series of unforced errors and trailed 4-2.

But then she found her center, clinching the first set with a hold to love and sealing victory on her first match point when her Spanish opponent slipped a forehead wide.

She is ranked second but seeded first at Roland Garros because defending champion Asa Barty skipped coming to Paris because of coronavirus concerns.

Halep won titles on clay in Prague and Rome and her winning run - interrupted by the pandemic - dates to February.

Over on Court Suzanne Lenglen, U.S. Open runner-up Victoria Azarenka experienced a vastly different treatment to Flushing Meadows only two weeks ago.

The tenth-seeded Azarenka fumed when match officials didn't immediately send her and opponent Danka Kovinic back to the locker-room during a rain interruption.

Goffin, a former quarterfinalist here, was the first seeded player to be knocked out when he lost 7-5, 6-0, 6-3.

His countrywoman Elise Mertens - the 16th seed - fared better in beating 122-ranked Russian Margarita Gasparian 6-2, 6-3.

Super Suarez

AP ■ SHEFFIELD

Suarez set up a goal two minutes after coming on as a substitute, his sumptuous pass finished off by Marcos Llorente, before scoring himself with a powerful header at the back post.

He added another in injury time following up his own shot to make it six for rampant Atletico at the Wanda Metropolitan.

Diego Costa had earlier given the home team the lead. Angel Correa and the impressive Joao Felix, who was perhaps the best player on the pitch put Granada out of sight, before Suarez stole the show.

Suarez might have had a hat-trick given he also won a penalty and had the ball under his arm to take it, only for the decision to be reversed by referee Javier Estrada.

But Suarez's performance off the bench completed the perfect start to the season for him and for Atletico, who might start to believe the scoring problems of last term could be behind them. It was not only Suarez's contribution that would



have pleased Diego Simone but the displays of his other forwards, with Costa and Felix, perhaps invigorated by the Uruguayan's arrival, looking sharper.

Felix was excellent. If the 20-year-old can find some consistency this season after a stop-start opening year, Atletico could challenge for the title.

They might have been two up in the first quarter of an hour as Costa did well to head in Correa's cross before Felix won a penalty, his dancing run into the box drawing a foul from Domingos Duarte.

But Saul Niguez's shot was brilliantly saved by Rui Silva, with Felix booting the ball into the stand in frustration, suggesting he might have been keen to take it.

Bayern beaten in 2020

AP ■ SINGHEIM

Hoffenheim ended Bayern Munich's 32-game run without defeat on Sunday with a 4-1 win in the Bundesliga.

Bayern's former reserve team coach, Sebastian Hoenes, coached a concentrated relentless team effort from his new side and was rewarded with goals from Ermin Bicakcic, Munas Dabbur and two including a penalty from Andrej Kramaric.

It was Bayern's first defeat in any competition since a 2-1 loss at Borussia Mönchengladbach on Dec. 7, 2019, and Hansi Flick's third as coach since he took over the Bavarian powerhouse on Nov. 3, 2019.

Bicakcic opened the scoring in the 16th minute with a header into a corner, and Dabbur made it 2-0 eight minutes later. Hoffenheim goalkeeper Oliver Baumann's long kick seemed to catch Bayern's defense by surprise.

Benjamin Pavard attempted to win the ball from Kramaric, but instead it fell kindly for Dabbur, who calmly lobbed the ball over Bayern's advancing goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Joshua Kimmich pulled one back in the 36th, letting fly from outside the penalty area inside the far top corner, giving Baumann no chance.

Flick brought on star striker Robert Lewandowski and midfielder Leon Goretzka for the last half hour, then Kingsley Coman and the 17-year-old Jamal Musiala with a little more than a quarter-hour remaining.

Better late than never

AP ■ MILAN

Two goals in the final three minutes saw Inter Milan come from behind to beat Fiorentina 4-3 in Serie A.

Romelu Lukaku and Danilo D'Ambrosio scored late to help Inter get its season off to a winning start on Saturday.

Fellow title hopefuls Atalanta and Lazio also won their first matches.

Inter finished last season a point behind Juventus, which won a record-extending ninth successive Serie A. The Nerazzurri also lost the Europa League final to Sevilla. That final prompted Inter to receive a delayed start in Serie A.

Fiorentina took the lead with less than three minutes on the clock as some woeful Inter defending allowed Christian Kouame to play a one-two with Giacomo Bonaventura on the edge of the six-yard box and in.

Lautaro Martinez leveled on the stroke of halftime, curling in the ball.

Inter took the lead early in the second half. Martinez bamboozled Sofyan Amrabat on the edge of the box and his shot from a tricky angled was turned by Fiorentina defender Federico Ceccherini into his own net.

Fiorentina leveled in the 57th with a well-worked counter started and finished by Gaetano Castrovilli.

That was assisted by Franck Ribery, and the Fiorentina winger was again inspirational six minutes later with a delightful pass to send



Inter Milan's Danilo D'Ambrosio, left, celebrates after scoring his side's fourth goal

Federico Chiesa clear. The youngster lobbed the onrushing Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic.

Arturo Vidal and Achraf Hakimi came off the bench to make their contribution, just as Inter appeared to be heading for defeat, the home side turned the match around.

Hakimi knocked on Radja Nainggolan's ball over the top for Lukaku to side-foot in from close range in the 87th, and D'Ambrosio headed in Alexis Sanchez's cross following a short corner two minutes later.



AP ■ SOCHI

Valter Bottas won the Russian Grand Prix on Sunday after his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton's race was ruined by penalties, in front of the largest crowd of the pandemic-hit season.

Hamilton had been looking to match Michael Schumacher's record of 91 wins in Formula One but had to settle for third behind Bottas and Max Verstappen. Bottas built a sizeable lead

over Verstappen with ease and cruised to his first win since the season-opening Austrian Grand Prix.

Hamilton was already under investigation by the stewards when he started the race from pole position. Before the race he twice stopped to perform practice starts at the exit of the pit lane, rather than in the designated

area. That eventually earned him two five-second penalties, dropping him as low as 11th at one stage.

"Where's that in the rule book?" he asked the team, and called the situation "ridiculous."

Hamilton had asked Mercedes over the radio if he could perform the starts there, and was told he could.

Bottas wins Sochi race

It was the second time in three races that a team blunder cost the British driver a shot at victory.

Hamilton was leading at the Italian Grand Prix when he was given a penalty for entering the pit lane while it was closed, after a radio message from the team warning him was sent too late.

Hamilton's champi-

onship lead over Bottas was cut to a still-healthy 44 points with seven scheduled races remaining on a calendar heavily modified because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Bottas, who also claimed the bonus point for fastest lap, said he wanted to "thank my critics" after ending a run of eight races without a win despite having, with Hamilton, by far the fastest car.

He tried to take the lead off Hamilton at the start

using the slipstream but braked too late for the second turn, allowing Hamilton to retake first. Bottas later said he felt the bench to make the race more of a "massive bee or something" had obstructed his vision at the critical moment.

Two first-lap crashes brought out the safety car as McLaren's Carlos Sainz clipped a barrier while trying to rejoin the track from a run-off area and Lance Stroll's Racing Point spun into a barrier after contact with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.