The return of the secular

Young protesters across India have brought Gandhi's vision of the secular into the public discourse



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

It was both touching and comforting to hear the reply of Nikhil, a young student from Jamia Millia Islamia, to an unexpected question put to him last week by a TV anchor - "What does Jamia mean to you?" After a long pause, he said, "It has given me tehzeeb (refined civility), an understanding of the *samvidhaan* (Constitution) and taught me to read, write and think. When I joined Jamia, I had no understanding of India. This university has made me understand my country. I will work to the end of my life to realise Gandhi's vision. I want my secular India back," he affirmed.

Mentioning Mahatma Gandhi was entirely appropriate. For, Gandhi's contribution to an everyday understanding of secularism is massive, one different from at least three other understandings. First, the political secularism of Western Europe and North America in which some form of separation between church and state is required to defend equality and individual liberty but has no room for the idea of fraternity or community, crucial in deeply diverse societies. Second, the more legal and philosophical, constitutional secularism of India, one that is immensely complex, nuanced and comprehensive, cognisant of deep diversity as well as oppression within communities. Here, the state is required to maintain a principled distance from all religious communities. This is concerned with preventing inter-religious domination as much as fighting religiously grounded hierarchies and fanaticism within religions.

Finally, the secularism practised in recent times by most political parties in India, what I have called 'party-political secularism'. This secularism does not really deserve to be called so because it is unprincipled and opportunistic, plays footsie with the most orthodox, bigoted and regressive elements of all religions, is concerned solely with seeking and maintaining power, and is willing to engineer riots or capitalise on intercommunal estrangement.



A protest in New Delhi against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act earlier this week. shiv kumar pushpakar

In contrast, Gandhi made secularism simple. All religious communities inhabiting a particular territory must live with continuing ease and comfort with one another. This is a people-dependent notion, one that Gandhi believed was already part of popular Indian consciousness but jeopardised in modern times by communal politics. To counter it, he felt, support was needed from the state that is not partial to any one particular religion. Moreover, whenever any estrangement or hostility ensued, then the state must help restore communal harmony. To perform its primary duty of maintaining fraternity, to prevent political alienation, the state must distance itself equally from all religions.

Against discriminatory laws

It was heartening to find so many young women and men all fired up about this Gandhian vision of secular India, and be out on the streets to defend their idea of constitutional secularism. Four things about what they conveyed are noteworthy. First, the fundamental injustice of policies with unambiguous discriminatory intent. This is unconstitutional. And offends the dignity not only of those discriminated against but also of every citizen in the polity. In major nationwide protests in which countless people participated, it was made clear that any law or policy that discriminates on the basis of religion is not acceptable. Besides, the whole idea of proving one's citizenship by producing documents before government officials is abhorrent – anyone born in India must be presumed to be an Indian citizen and should not be compelled to demonstrate this. Many protesting students are convinced that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) is discriminatory. Article 14 provides for equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Suppose that a foreign national from Europe commits a grave crime in India. Should he be treated differently from other Indians? Would the law be differentially applied simply because he is, say, a European Christian? No. Analogously, suppose that illegal immigrants fleeing persecution in their own country enter Indian territory, need to be identified and investigated for possible deportation. A uniform criminal law should apply here too. Either all should be given refuge or all deported by due process of law. No one within the territory of India, Indian citizen or foreign national, must be treated differently. The students appeared to have imbibed this logic.

Second, a rejection of the politics of hate and revenge. Such policies, the peaceful protesters seemed to suggest, disrupt peace and stability by generating a vicious cycle of resentment and mutual hostility. To be sure, conflicts and skirmishes have not been uncommon between communities in the past, but a deep division between them occurred only when a pernicious ethno-nationalist ideology was imported into India in the 19th century, with tragic results in 1947. Young people appeared to have realised that leaders of the current government have not learned any lessons from those dark events and continue with policies aimed at consolidating a pan-Hindu identity defined by hostility to the 'other'.

Third, the public acknowledgement by young Hindus of the contribution of Muslims to Indian culture and civilisation, to constructions of Indian notions of civility. Young women and men asserted that their religious identity is not defined against other religions. One can be Hindu without being anti-Muslim and vice versa. Indian citizens cohabit a shared social and public space not through mutual toleration but by actively accepting one another, and are committed to participating in each other's suffering and destiny. They conveyed that they shall not tolerate attempts to breach civic friendship.

Composite culture

Likewise, norms of public etiquette, civility and refinements in culture have been shaped in India by multiple religious traditions in which Muslims have played a prominent role. For example, the *qawwali* and the ghazal are as much a part of our culture as the bhajan. Are not some some of the greatest bhajans in Hindi films written by Sahir Ludhianvi and Javed Akhtar, sung by Mohammad Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar and others to compositions by Naushad and A.R. Rehman? It is not for nothing that even a known Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sympathiser, the actor Paresh Rawal, was compelled to remark that he was stunned by the 'idiocy' of the demand that Firoz Khan not be allowed to teach Sanskrit at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). There is a whole tradition of such scholarship alive today that harks back to Dara Shikoh and Amir Khusro, and continues in Modern India with renowned Sanskrit scholars such as Mohammed Hanif Khan Shastri and Pandit Ghulam Dastagir. Finally, the protesters made it clear that an obsession with religious identity takes focus away from pressing issues of everyday life. No more divide and rule, as one of the posters averred; the business of government is to facilitate a better everyday life for all ordinary citizens, including Hindus and Muslims, not to destroy it.

The reappearance of secularism in Indian public discourse, initiated by young Indian students, is surely a matter of relief and joy to those who aspire to protect India's diverse cultural heritage, defend India's Constitution and wish every Indian to have a better standard of living.

Rajeev Bhargava is a political theorist with the Centre for the Study of Developing

Indifferent State leadership caused BJP's Jharkhand loss

Issues like Ram temple and Article 370 had little appeal

HARISHWAR DAYAL

Seven months after winning a landslide victory in the parliamentary election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffered a humiliating defeat in the Jharkhand Assembly poll. The reasons can be deciphered by analysing the changes that took place in the State between these two elections.

One, the parliamentary election was contested in Jharkhand on the agenda of national security. The people, by and large, voted for the BJP, which had an alliance with the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) at that time, as they were convinced that only the BJP could promote national

pride and ensure the safety and security of the nation. By the time the State went for Assembly polls, local grievances and demands of the people surfaced, but the BJP failed to realise this. It concentrated instead on issues like Ram mandir, Article 370 and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which had little appeal

for the Jharkhand voters. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Congress-Rashtriya Janata Dal alliance, on the other hand, succeeded in mobilising the voters by appealing to their local aspirations. True, in its five years at the helm, the BJP had implemented many welfare schemes, with support from the Centre. However, the saffron party failed to mobilise voters on these grounds this time.

An inaccessible Chief Minister

Further Raghubar Das, in his five years as Jharkhand Chief Minister, could not emerge as a very popular leader. He was perceived to be inaccessible and arrogant, a factor that alienated him both from the people of the State and the party workers of the BJP. So, when it came to be voting for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the parliamentary election earlier in the year, voters opted for the BJP, but when it came to giving a mandate again to Mr. Das in the Assembly election, they voted against the party.

Two, issues linked to ticket allocation further alienated the BJP's State leadership from both its workers and voters. While some of the sitting MLAs and popular party workers were denied tickets, some new entrants were given tickets. Many old party loyalists, as a result, either became indifferent or worked against the official candidates, contributing to the poor performance of the party

Here, one of the worst miscalculations

made by the BJP was in denying ticket to senior leader Saryu Rai, who is known for his bold, honest and clean image. Mr. Rai, an old BJP lovalist and Minister in the erstwhile Cabinet, had his differences with Mr. Das because of his bold statements and uncompromising stand on some controversial issues. After having been kept waiting for party ticket for a long time, Mr. Rai contested as an independent and defeated Mr. Das in his home constituency, Jamshedpur (East).

This denial of ticket to Mr. Rai only added to the unpopularity of Mr. Das among party workers. This alienation was reflected in the form of poor booth management by the saffron party's officials.

On the other hand, while the BJP denied ticket to a leader known for his impeccable reputation, it gave tickets to some new entrants with allegations of corruption against them, dealing a severe blow to the party's

Further, the BJP's failure to forge an alliance with the AISU hurt both the parties. The AJSU,

whose voter base included the dominant OBC community of Mahtos, got more than 8% vote share, part of which could have helped the BJP in case the two parties had a pre-poll arrangement.

Seat-sharing arrangement

The JMM, the Congress and the RJD, on the other hand had a conflict-free seat sharing arrangement and kept their alliance strong. As a result, while the JMM was able to expand its reach, the Congress also improved

The results of the Assembly election could have some long-term implications for the State. Jharkhand, since its formation in 2000, has always been ruled by an alliance, usually post-poll coalitions of political parties and independents. But for the last government, none of the regimes could complete their full five-year terms. The winning alliance this time can possibly learn from history and provide stability. It should also try to address the unfulfilled demands and aspirations of the people. The most important challenge for the government will be to mobilise resources and to prepare a macro plan for their proper utilisation.

On its part, the BJP will need to analyse the reasons for its failures and strengthen its organisation at the grass-roots in the State.

Harishwar Dayal is a faculty member in St. Xavier's

EXPLAINER

Detention, 'not linked to NRC'

A facility to hold foreigners ahead of their deportation is to become functional in Karnataka

K.V. ADITYA BHARADWAJ

A Foreigner Detention Centre (FDC) is all set to become functional from January 1, 2020, on the outskirts of Bengaluru, in a building that was meant to be a student hostel. While this is being linked by many to the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), top Home Ministry officials have said that the facility will only be a 'transit home' for foreign nationals illegally in the country ahead of their deportation.

"The FDC coming up in the State is nationality-neutral and will act as a temporary detention home for foreign nationals illegally staying here and detained by police, till they are deported. The process to set up the facility began in 2009 following directions from the Union Government. There have also been directions from Karnataka High Court regarding this," said T.M. Vijay Bhaskar. Chief Secretary,

Karnataka. The topic of detention centres, and their possible connection with an NRC, has attracted multiple comments from top Central and State officials. While on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flatly denied the

news on the existence of any detention centre anywhere in the country, a few days later, Home Minister Amit Shah confirmed the existence of one such facility in Assam but said it had not yet become functional and had no connection with the Assam NRC. In Karnataka, while top officials and functionaries of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government said the facility is not connected to an NRC, no one was willing to speak on record for fear of attracting controversy.

Two categories of inmates

The Karnataka FDC is likely to host two categories of migrants: one, foreign nationals who have registered with Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) and have violated visa terms; and, two, those who do not have valid documents, are not registered with the FRRO and have been arrested for crimes. These mi-

centre till their deportation. In its current capacity, the FDC can host 24 persons, "not matched for a detention Centre required if NRC is implemented," an official pointed out.

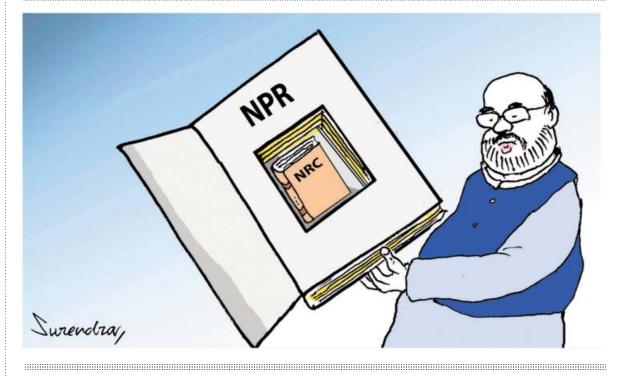
The Centre has the power to deport foreign nationals staying illegally in the country under Section 3(2) (c) of The Foreigners Act, 1946. State governments have also been entrusted under Article 258(1) of the Constitution to take similar steps. Arrested illegal immigrants being granted bail by the courts often become untraceable, making the state contemplate the need for detention centres. In line with this, the Union government issued directions to all States and Union Territories to build FDCs in 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2018. Delhi has three such detention centres, and Bengaluru began the process of setting up such one in 2009. But this was mired in differences on who should run the centre. This was resolved in 2017, following a High Court direc-

Later, the Karnataka High

Court, while hearing a bail petition of two Bangladeshi nationals in November 2019, pulled up the State government over the non-provision of FDC facility. On the court's directions, the State police

submitted an affidavit listing around 35 facilities in the State that could act as temporary detention centres. "This has only added to the confusion, creating a perception that the State wants to build a detention centre in every district, again being linked to NRC. But these are only temporary, a sort of contingency plan till the FDC becomes operational as directed by the High Court. They will cease to be so on January 1, 2020. Not a single foreigner has been lodged in any of the 35 centres," said a senior police official. While there is no data on illegal immigrants in the state, FRRO data says 837 foreigners from 20 countries registered with them are overstaying their visa tenures in the State. Most of them are African nationals and less than 200 of them are from Bangladesh.

grants would be detained at the adhitya.bharadwaj@thehindu.co.in



DATA POINT

Present perfect, but future tense

The Non-Performing Assets (loans overdue for >90 days) ratio for all commercial banks declined in FY19 after rising for seven consecutive years. However, in the first half of FY2O, stressed assets (potential NPAs) inched up. Moreover, the NPA ratio of Indian banks is the poorest among emerging economies. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

slippage ratio (indicating fresh accretion of NPAs in a year) also declined. Graph depicts GNPA Ratio Public sector All Scheduled Private banks Commercial sector banks Banks Mar-13 Mar-14 Mar-15 Mar-16 Mar-17 Mar-18 Mar-19

1. Bad loans down... | The share of Gross Non-Performing

Assets (GNPAs) among total loans declined to 9.1% in

FY19 after having risen for seven consecutive years. The

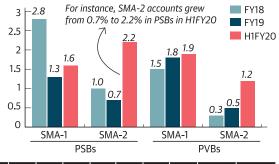
■ The banks recovered ₹70.819 cr. worth stressed assets in FY19 under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, compared to ₹4,926 cr. in FY18. This played a part in the GNPA's decline

The GNPA of private banks increased due to classification of IDBI

3. Worst among emerging economies India's Non-Performing loans ratio (%) is the worst among emerging economies. Table lists the ratio between 2011 and 2019. In recent years, the ratio improved for Brazil while it deteriorated in Russia, South Africa and Turkey. India's NPA ratio saw a surge in 2016 after the RBI carried out an expansive Asset Quality Review in the year before. The review resulted in identification of many large loan accounts which had gone bad resulting in a huge jump in NPAs in India

in large borrowal accounts (exposure of >₹5 cr.) rose in the first half of FY20. Special Mention Accounts-1 (loans overdue between 30 and 60 days) & Special Mention Accounts-2 (loans overdue between 60 and 90 days) rose in H1FY2O. Simply put, SMA accounts are red flags which, if not addressed, can become NPAs in the next cycle

2. ...but stressed assets up | While GNPAs are down, stress



	2011	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19:Q1	'19:Q2		
Brazil	3.5	3.4	2.9	2.9	3.3	3.9	3.6	3.1	3.1	3.1		
China	1	1	1	1.2	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8		
India	2.7	3.4	4	4.3	5.9	9.2	10	9.5	8.9	9.2		
Indonesia	2.1	1.8	1.7	2.1	2.4	2.9	2.6	2.3	2.4	2.4		
Malaysia	2.7	2	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6		
Mexico	2.1	2.4	3.2	3	2.5	2.1	2.1	2.1	2	2.1		
Philippines	2.6	2.2	2.4	2	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.7	2	2		
Russia	6.6	6	6	6.7	8.3	9.4	10	10.1	-	-		
South Africa	4.7	4	3.6	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.8	3.7	3.8	3.7		
Turkey	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.7	3	3.1	2.8	3.7	3.8	4.1		
Source: Trend and progress of banking in India, RB												

The Man Prindu. FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 26, 1969

Not in 14 languages

In spite of warnings from many responsible quarters against the introduction of all the regional languages as alternative media for the examinations of the Union Public Service Commission, the Government of India is going ahead with the proposal. That the option to answer in the regional languages is to be confined for the present to two papers, namely the Essay and General Knowledge, has not allayed the misgivings of anyone. Even the Estimates Committee of Parliament has held that the step would make a mockery of the competitive nature of the examinations. It is hardly surprising that the UPSC itself has now come out with a list of difficulties in the implementation of the scheme. The Commission has said that it is finding it very difficult to locate suitable examiners in the regional languages. The UPSC has also done well to point out the poor progress made in the various universities in making regional languages an effective medium of higher education. With grossly inadequate text-books, chaotically diverse terminology and no reliable reference books in the various academic disciplines, the projection of these languages as media of modern higher education, still less of the all-India competitive examinations, will have to remain a futile exercise for years to come.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DEC. 26, 1919 Colonisation of British Guiana Interview with Mr. Joseph A. Luckhoo

Mr. Swaminatha Iyer, Editor of the "Indian Emigrant" was good enough to bring Mr. Joesph A. Luckhoo to visit the Publicity Bureau. Mr. Luckhoo has come to India as a member of the deputation sent out from British Guiana to persuade the Government of India and the Indian public to facilitate and encourage free and voluntary emigration of Indians to British Guiana. With this purpose in view he wishes to make the Indian public acquainted with present conditions in British Guiana and the attractions which it is prepared to offer to Indian Emigrants. Not the least striking piece of information which Mr. Luckhoo gave is that which concerns himself and his family. Mr. Luckhoo's father emigrated from Calcutta at the age of six. Mr. Luckhoo's first brother is now a doctor in good practice in British Guiana, the second is a Solicitor and the Mayer of a Municipality and Mr. Luckhoo himself is a Barrister and the first Indian elected member of the Legislative Council of British Guiana.

FROM PAGE ONE

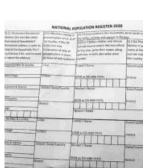
Media images of NPR forms spark confusion

The NPR exercise conducted first in 2010 and subsequently updated in 2015 collected details on the following 15 parameters name of person, relationship to head of household, father's name, mother's name, spouse's name (if married), sex, date of birth, marital status, place of birth, nationality (as declared), present address of usual residence, duration of stay at present address, permanent residential address, occupation/activity and educational qualification.

Places of parents

A "pre-test" form that was used to collect data from 30 lakh people in September this year sought details on additional columns. like "place of birth of father and mother, last place of residence" along with details like Aadhaar number, voter ID card number, mobile phone number and driving licence number. "This form seeking details like place of birth of father and mother was used in the trial stage in September. Before we take the final exercise next year, we need to train the enumerators and also seek feedback from those surveyed. On this basis we will decide the contents of the final NPR form," said an official.

Congress leader Ajay Maken who was Minister of State for Home when the data for NPR was first collated in 2010 tweeted the images of the 2010 form and the one used in September to say, "As MoS Home in 2010, I supervised the NPR! But Modi-Shah 2020 NPR is Totally Different. Please see



An image of the 'pre-test' form for NPR. ■TWITTER

2010 & 2020 NPR Forms. 2020 Version adds: 1) Date&Place of Birth of Parents 2)Last Place of Residence 3)Aadhaar ID 4)Driving Licence No. 5)Voter ID 6)Mobile NPR2020=NRC!!"

The Citizenship Rules, 2003, state clearly that the Centre, by issuing an order. can decide a date to prepare the NPR and also provide for the creation of NRC that will flow from data gathered in the NPR. No new law or rules are needed to conduct this exercise across the

According to the Rules, a person's citizenship status will be decided by local officials - whether or not the person will figure in the National Register of Indian Ci-

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved ₹3941.35 crore for updating the NPR.

The government has informed Parliament on multiple occasions since 2014 that the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) or NRC will be created based on the information collected under NPR by verifying the citizenship status of all individuals in the country.

Massive locust invasion + threatens Gujarat farmers

Aerial pests

At their prime, locust swarms, which are usually found in the Horn of Africa, West Asia and the Indian subcontinent, have the potential to damage the livelihood of a tenth of the world's population. The current locust invasion in Gujarat is the highest in recent times.



Gujarat, holding up locusts.

 Locust invasions usually occur in areas that receive less than 200 mm of rain annually. This is an area of about 16 million sq km, consisting of

The farmers under seige are

hiring workers and using

age old techniques like beat-

ing drums and vessels to

scare the locusts away with-

kmph, and swarms can cover 130 km or more in a day. Usually, there are 40 million, and sometimes as many as 80 million locust adults in each so km of

 The last major upsurge in India occurred in 1993, which saw the incursion of 172 locust swarms. India has only one locust breeding season — from July to October

 The primary method of controlling locust swarms is by spraying small amounts of concentrated insecticide using vehiclemounted and aerial sprayers. A total of 3,10,584 hectares have been treated up to the December 15, 2019

dia-Pakistan border," Banaskantha District Collector Sandeep Sangle told The Hindu. "We have started spraying pesticides to tackle the menace."

out much success. "It's a massive issue in Banaskantha, Patan, Kutch and parts of Sabarkantha and Mehsana. We are trying to help farmers in containing damage to their crops," Gujarat's Agriculture Minister R.C. Faldu said, adding the "government also explored the possibility of sprinkling pesticides and chemicals through choppers in affected areas."

Pesticides sprayed

Rather late in the day, the authorities have stepped in to combat the voracious in-

The State administration along with the central teams has launched huge pesticide-spraying operation to kill the insects.

"A massive swarm of locusts spread in approximately 10 square kilo metre area has arrived in Tharad, the last taluka before the In-

According to the Agriculture Ministry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), locusts are flying in from Pakistan's Sindh province and spreading in villages in Rajasthan and Gujarat where south western monsoon was prolonged this

Originally, the locusts emerged in February this year from Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's Red Sea Coast and travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the Sindh province and from there they moved into Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The government has now assured farmers that the administration will carry out a survey to assess the damages and will accordingly compensate farmers. However, farmers feel that the government's efforts are too little, too late.

Ajit Pawar tipped to be Deputy CM

NCP leaders say he is likely to get charge of two Ministries in the expanded Maharashtra Cabinet

MUMBAI

A much-awaited expansion of the Maharashtra Cabinet due at the end of the year will most likely see Nationalist Congress Party leader Ajit Pawar play a prominent role in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government.

Senior NCP leaders said the all-important Home Department may go to the party's Dilip Walse Patil, while Mr. Pawar could be again appointed Deputy Chief Minister along with charge of two Ministries.

Indispensable part

"Any expansion of the MVA government is not possible without including Mr. Ajit Pawar in it. He will definitely be part of the extended Cabinet of the MVA," senior NCP leader and Cabinet Minister Jayant Patil said.

On November 23, Mr. Pawar was sworn in as Deputy



Winning side: NCP leader Ajit Pawar after the Sena-led government won the floor test in

Chief Minister along with Devendra Fadnavis of the Bharatiya Janata Party as Chief Minister. However, Mr. Pawar had, in a surprising turn of events, resigned from the government in less than 80 hours, resulting in the fall of the BJP-led government. "We are happy to

share some of these responsibilities as keeping so many portfolios has only resulted in extra work pressure on us," a Sena Minister said. Senior leaders in the government said key portfolios temporarily allotted as of now will be shuffled, with Mr. Patil tipped to be Home

Minister. Mr. Pawar may also be accommodated in a prominent role, said a MVA leader. The tripartite government of the MVA will go in for a full-fledged expansion of its Cabinet.

The Cabinet currently has a strength of six while Maharashtra can have 43 Ministers, including a Chief Minister, since the size of the council of ministers can be up to 15% of the strength of the 288-member Assembly, officials said.

Currently, Mr. Patil and Chhagan Bhujbal between them hold the portfolios of Finance and Planning, Housing, Public Health, Cooperation, Food and Civil Supplies, Labour and Minority Affairs, Rural Development, Irrigation and Welfare.

Congress leaders Balasaheb Thorat and Nitin Raut hold Revenue, Energy, Public Works, Tribal Affairs, and Women and Child. The plum portfolios remain with the Sena, but are likely to be shared with the NCP. The Securrently manages Home, Urban Development, Industries, Mining, Agriculture, Technical Education, Tourism, Parliamentary Affairs and Environment.

Hemant Soren calls on Sonia and Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (IMM) leader and Chief Minister-designate Hemant Soren called on Congress president Sonia Gandhi at her residence on Wednesday to invite her to his swearing-in scheduled for December 29.

Former party chief Rahul Gandhi also met Mr. Soren and confirmed his presence at the swearing-in.

Asked about the possible composition of the government of the three-party alliance along with the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Mr. Soren said, "Once the government is formed, you will get to know everything, but don't worry, our alliance will last the full five years with great strength."

Mr. Soren said he would also invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Former HC judge denies taking up BJP membership

MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.

Justice M. Jaichandren, a retired judge of the Madras High Court and now chairman of the Puducherry Human Rights Committee, on Wednesday denied having become a primary member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at a mega membership drive in the presence of Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on July 6.

In a press release, he refuted news reports of having taken up BJP member-

ship.
"I make it clear, by this statement, that I had never intended to do so in the first place," the communique read.

When The Hindu contacted him, he explained that the five-month delay in explaining his stand was because he had initially considered it a non-issue. However, with every passing day, as acquaintances began inquiring about his reported affiliation with a political party, he thought he should make his stand

He said he was social and active as a lawyer and lecturer of law before 2005. He was also an office-bearer of the Madras Bar Association. "However, I suddenly turned into a caged bird since December 10, 2005 when I was appointed as a judge of the Madras High Court. When I retired from service after 12 years of judgeship, which I would call an exile, I began trying to get back to society and mingle with all," he said.

Modi launches Atal scheme on groundwater

Project to be implemented in 8,350 gram panchayats

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Wednesday Modi on launched the Atal Bhujal scheme to strengthen the institutional framework for participatory groundwater management and bringing about behavioural changes at the community level for sustainable groundwater resource management in seven States.

The scheme will be implemented in about 8,350 gram panchayats in 78 districts of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Of the total outlay of ₹6,000 crore to be provided from 2020-21 to 2024-25, 50% will be in the form of World Bank loan to be repaid by the Central government. The remaining part will be made available via Central assistance from regular budgetary support.

The entire World Bank's loan component and the Central assistance will be passed on to the States as grants. The Prime Minister said the scheme, or the guidelines related to the Jal Jeevan Mission, were big steps in proving the resolve to deliver water to every household in the country by 2024. He said the country had to prepare itself for dealing with every situation of water crisis, for which the government had been working at five levels.

Mr. Modi said a comprehensive and holistic ap-

knead dough to make bread,





In reflection: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah at a praver meeting at the memorial to former PM A.B. Vajpayee in New Delhi on Wednesday. • PTI

proach had been adopted with the setting up of the Jal Shakti Ministry, which this monsoon made extensive efforts for water conservation.

He said the Jal Jeevan Mission would work towards delivering piped water supply to every house and Atal Bhujal scheme would pay special attention to those areas where groundwater was very low.

To incentivise gram panchayats, the Prime Minister said those with better performance would be given more allocation under the scheme. He said both the Central

and State governments would spend ₹3.5 lakh crore on water related schemes in the next five years.

The Prime Minister also named the tunnel under the Rohtang Pass after Vajpayee. The tunnel connects Manali in Himachal Pradesh to Leh, Ladakh and Jammu and

Mr. Modi said the tunnel would help promote tou-

CDS will bring in synergy, say experts

'He has to take service chiefs along'

DINAKAR PERI NEW DELHI

The government's approval for the creation of the post of Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) is a welcome move to bring in synergy among the three Services at the higher level and optimise resource utilisation, say experts. However, it needs a change in the mindset of all stakeholders, and the CDS has to take the three Service Chiefs along to achieve the mandate, they observed.

The CDS will be a fourstar General with salary and perquisites equivalent to a Service Chief. The CDS will head the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to be created within the Defence Ministry and function as its Secretary and the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).

Political trajectory

It has taken 18 years and a long political trajectory from Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Narendra Modi for the creation of the post, said Cmde C. Uday Bhaskar (retd.), Director, Society for Policy Studies, while terming the creation of a new department, DMA, with the CDS at the helm and the dual roles as Secretary to the Government of India and Permanent Chairman, COSC, as "very innovative".

"Wearing two hats, he will also be functioning as a Secretary in the MoD that already has four Secretaries. Evolving a stable hierarchy and equivalence for the CDS with the civilian bureaucra-

he will also be functioning as a Secretary in the MoD that already has four Secretaries CMDE C. UDAY BHASKAR (RETD.)

Wearing two hats,

Director, Society for Policy Studies

cy will call for some deft give-and-take by all the principal stakeholders," he told The Hindu.

Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda, former General Officer Commanding in Northern Command, said the government's intent seems to be the long-term restructuring as the responsibilities include establishment of theatre commands. Another positive step, he said, was the three-year time frame to the first CDS to bring about jointness in several areas including operations, logistics, transport and training. "If the CDS is able to do that, it will be a positive step and will lead to further integration," he said. "The Services will have to slightly change t from a Service-oriented mindset to a more joint approach."

Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia (retd.), Director, Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, said the post has the requisite mandate and authority. He said the CDS should consolidate the headquarters of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and the charter and has to "carry the three Services along as the first among equals and ensure that the DMA is keyed into the apex decision making level."

Clear link connects CAA, NRC, NPR, says JD(U) leader

Prashant Kishor faults Congress leadership for not doing enough to repeal amendments when it was in power

make bread, you may say

If you knead dough to

that the two — kneading and

making bread — are separ<u>ate</u>

the dough is an

announcement of the

processes... But the kneading of

NISTULA HEBBAR

Janata Dal(U) vice-president Prashant Kishor termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement - on there being no discussions on the National Register of Citizens (NRC) within the government – a "tactical retreat" because of widespread protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the BJP's commitment to a nation-wide NRC.

Speaking exclusively to The Hindu, Mr. Kishor said, "I see it [Prime Minister Modi's statement] as a tactical retreat to douse the fire after the massive protests we are seeing across the country." He said there was a

straight connection between the CAA, the NRC and the National Population Register (NPR). "As far as this whole effort

to separate the National Population Register (NPR) and NRC too, let me explain how they are connected. If you

you may say that the two kneading and making bread are separate processes; you may not finally bake the bread. But the kneading of the dough is an announcement of the intent to bake bread. So the whole idea of saying that the NPR process is not connected to NRC is useless. If you want to dispel doubts, say plainly that there will be no NRC after the NPR process. Currently the government has only said that there have been no discussions over the NRC. Neither Prime Minister Modi nor Home Minister Amit Shah has said there will not be any NRC, while the Cabinet has cleared a budget for NPR," he said.

The JD(U) leader was also sharply critical of the Congress for not going the whole hog on the CAA-NRC issue.

"Many Chief Ministers have said they will not implement the NRC. That is the only credible way of stop-

intent to bake bread PRASHANT KISHO ping this. In fact, a couple of Chief Ministers, Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala, have stopped the NPR process too, which is the starting point for NRC. Congress' Chief Ministers too say this, but there is a problem there. While Banerjee, Jagan Mohan Reddy, Naveen Patnaik are Chief Ministers, they are also heads of their parties. In the case of the Congress, the CMs per se are not the head of their parties; the party's policy is decided by the Con-

gress Working Committee

(CWC) and the Congress pre-

sident... All I am saying is that if you are so opposed, what is stopping the Congress president from issuing a single line official statement that States under Congress rule will not implement NRC?" he asked.

'Roots lie in 2003'

On the current issues surrounding the CAA, he said the roots were in the 2003 amendments to the Act, which tasked the government with preparing an NRC. Mr Kishor questioned why the Congress had not repealed the amendment 2004 and 2014. Beyond 2014, in the last

when it held power between

couple of days we are hearing from Congress leaders that Prime Minister Modi and Mr. Shah have contradicted their own stance, after having declared their intention of carrying through the NRC. Show me, even one occasion when the Congress has protested when Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah made these public statements of their intent to go through with the NRC. Yes, questions were asked in Parliament, to which the government has said that they are going to go forward with an NPR and NRC, what was Congress doing then? Did citizens hear any vociferous opposition from the Congress to even the statements of the

government?" On his own party's vote for the CAA in Parliament and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's declaration later that the NRC will not be implemented in the State, Mr. Kishor said while the vote was a fact, "credit" should be given to Mr. Kumar for his stand on the NRC.

"I have personally said, together with many other colleagues, that this is not consistent with the party's stance in the past. After the vote though, consultation or pressure has had a bearing, and now Nitish Kumar ji has said on record that he is against the NRC and there will be no NRC exercise in Bihar. It is very important for your readers to also understand here that CAA per se, discriminatory as it is, is not as problematic as it is when clubbed with the NRC. Unless the process of NRC is completed there is no way that the government can discriminate against people, a provision that comes through the CAA. Thus even those who voted for the CAA in Parliament can stop the discrimination that the NRC will engender," he said.

Kin aghast as Meerut FIR names 3 dead

Post-mortem of a victim mentions bullet injury; family says doctors refused to treat gunshot wounds

JAGRITI CHANDRA

"I was offering namaaz around 3 p.m. on Friday when incessant firing in the vicinity interrupted me. I immediately rushed downstairs to enquire if my son Mohsin had returned home," Nafeesa Parveen says, recounting the events of last Friday.

An hour later, Mohammad Mohsin, 28, was found lying outside a local restaurant barely 300 m from home, bleeding profusely in Meerut's Lisari Gate area. He had allegedly sustained a bullet injury in the police crackdown on protesters against the Citizenship (Amend-

Mohsin, a scrap collector, was rushed to a government hospital. But doctors there refused to attend to bullet injuries, citing orders from the administration. Soon the youth succumbed to injuries, according to his brother Mohammad Imran.

According to eyewitnesses

NHRC seeks

U.P. violence

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

has issued notice to the Di-

rector-General of Police of

Uttar Pradesh over the vio-

lence during protests against the Citizenship

Seeking a report within

four weeks, the commis-

sion said a complainant

had alleged many incidents

of human rights violations

by authorities in Uttar

the Internet has been sus-

pended and the police

themselves are destroying

public property. The right

to peaceful assembly has

also been violated. The

complainant has requested

for intervention of the

Commission," the NHRC

alleged that in the last few

days, numerous reports

have come from all over

the State that 19 deaths,

mostly of young persons,

primarily from bullet inju-

ries have occurred."

"The complainant has

"Youth have been killed,

Amendment Act.

Pradesh.

report on

NEW DELHI



protesters lost their lives in its jurisdiction. • JAGRITI CHANDRA

West Bengal BJP chief

takes a U-turn on NRC

Centre will think about it, says Ghosh

Dilip Ghosh

defeat.

Central government will

think about it," said the BJP

ber of the RSS, always advo-

ber's defeat in three As-

sembly bypolls, he had said

it was 'premature' to hold

the NRC responsible for the

changed his position within

24 hours after Home Minis

ter Amit Shah said "there is

no discussion" about a pan-

However, he

cated the NRC in Bengal.

Mr. Ghosh, a senior mem-

Even after last Novem-

and residents of Lisari Gate, a large crowd had gathered outside the Baghwali mosque after Friday prayers to demonstrate against the CAA, when policemen lathicharged them. The protesters retaliated by throwing stones at the police, who responded with rubber bullets, tear gas shells and subse-

quently live rounds of fire. While the families of the

SUVOJIT BAGCHI

After repeatedly campaign-

ing for the National Register

of Citizens (NRC) in West

Bengal, BJP State president

Dilip Ghosh said on Wednes-

day that the NRC was "a

matter of future", indicating

that the party would not

pursue it in Bengal. Exactly

a year ago, Mr. Ghosh told

The Hindu that the NRC was

inevitable in Bengal and the

party had publicly advocat-

Asked about its imple-

mentation, Mr. Ghosh said,

"When would it take place

and what would happen is a

"The NRC was imple-

mented in Assam owing to a

Supreme Court order. Rajiv

Gandhi made the agreement

saying they will do the NRC.

The BJP did not make the

agreement [and] it went to

court. On the basis of the

court order, it was imple-

mented [in Assam], this has

to be made clear," Mr.

Ghosh told journalists in Jal-

paiguri. "If there is a need

for countrywide NRC, the

matter of future."

ed for it.

victims are unable to seek post-mortem reports or lodge police complaints, the police have lodged FIRs against at least three of the deceased and launched a search for thousands of unknown persons named in the complaint. Until Wednesday, Meerut reported six deaths in the police crackdown the highest number of casualties across various districts in U.P. after the Friday crackdown. *The Hindu* met families of three of those killed – Mohammad Mohsin, Zahir Ahmed and Asif.

The Hindu has also accessed a copy of an FIR lodged at the Lisari Gate police station in which Zahir, Asif, and Mohsin have been charged with attempt to murder, rioting, and stopping a public servant from doing his duty among other sections. Police said the FIR was filed on the day of the incident and before the deaths were reported.

Police pressure

Mohsin was buried in a hurried funeral under police pressure in the darkness of dawn the following day. "We were bathing Mohsin's body and preparing for namaaz just before the funeral procession when there were loud knocks on our door, asking us to hurry up," recalls Ms. Parveen.

While the family shows

pictures of Mohsin with an alleged bullet injury and the local medical administration confirmed to The Hindu that there were deaths from gunfire, the police have refused to share the post-mortem report. SP (Meerut City) A.N. Singh confirmed that the post mortem report showed bullet injuries. However, an SHO at one of the police stations said the deaths were due to "crossfiring".

SANDEEP PHUKAN

Ten days after Assam erupt-

ed in protests over the Citi-

zenship Amendment Act

(CAA), Leader of the Opposi-

tion in the Assam Assembly

and Congress leader Deba-

brata Saikia on Wednesday

accused the BJP-led govern-

ment in the State of "deliber-

ately targeting" Congress

workers by slapping serious

charges of "sedition and

waging war against the In-

iversity, Dibrugarh Universi-

ty and Cotton University

came out on the streets on

their own because the CAA

is unconstitutional and vio-

lates the Assam Accord," Mr.

Saikia said in an interview

spontaneous people's move-

ment and it must continue

until the CAA is repealed.

But the government is selec-

tively targeting the protes-

ters. Young boys of Youth

Congress and NSUI [National

Students Union of India]

have been booked under

Section 121 of the Indian Pe-

nal Code which means wag-

ing war against India. They

are targeting' some and leav-

"The protests started as a

with The Hindu.

"Students of Gauhati Un-

dian state".

In the same neighbourhood, 32-year-old Asif also sustained bullet injuries during police action. He was rushed to four hospitals, which again turned him away. He, too, succumbed to

Zaheer, 40, had stepped out to buy cigarettes and was sitting outside a shop when he was shot. He died on the spot. "We can't ask for the post-mortem report. Zaheer is mentioned in the FIR. If I go, they say I was with the accused at the time of the incident," says his friend Nasim.

J&K looks to revive tourism through Bollywood connect

'Kashmir a paradise of tourism'

PEERZADA ASHIQ

The J&K administration used popular Bollywood singer Muhammad Rafi's 11th award ceremony to woo back filmmakers in its first such outreach post abrogation of special status on August 5.

"Kashmir is not a place of terrorism, but a paradise of tourism. Unfortunately a negative perception has been created to the outside world while the ground reality is entirely different. To see the reality, you will have to visit the place and I am sure you will find it as peaceful as any other part of the country," Farooq Khan, advisor to Lieutenant Governor of J&K, told audience, including directors, actors and producers, in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Mr. Khan was speaking at a function organised by 'Spandan Arts' in connection with the presentation of the awards

This is the first major bid to woo the industry at a time when the tourism industry is going through a rough patch. Official figures suggest



Bollywood shooting location in the 1980s.

that Kashmir witnessed 87% dip in tourist footfall this year - from 2.49 lakh tourists visiting Valley in 2018.

Referring to Bollywood's frequent shootings in the 1980s, Mr. Khan said the film industry had a very cherished and affectionate relationship with Kashmir in the eighties and early nineties but due to various reasons that connection had been lost in the past few years.

"The film fraternity should renew that old connection by starting to explore the Union Territory with new dynamism by shooting films at virgin locations in and around Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Kashmir was a popular

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

warned its employees of disciplinary action for "indulging and participating in political activities" on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp

strike by some four lakh Assam government employees on December 22 in protest the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The Sadou Asom Karmachari Parishad had

The office of the Director of Elementary Education, Assam, issued a letter to all district elementary educa-

tion officers on December 24 seeking action against government employees, including contractual workprovisions of Assam Services (Discipline & Appeal) Rules, 1964, for taking to social media to express dissent.

abandoned the interest of the indigenous Assamese people," he said. **Detention camps** Mr. Saikia took on Prime Mi-

warning its employees

against putting any political

posts on social media, Mr.

Saikia said Chief Minister

Sarbananda Sonowal should

remember his past as a stu-

dent leader and must not

curb the freedom of

ten that he was an AASU pro-

duct and is now totally in the

fold of the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh. He has

"Mr. Sonowal has forgot-

expression.

nister Narendra Modi for his statement that there were no detention camps in the "As on July this year, there

were 1,145 inmates in six detention camps. And as per data provided in the Assam Legislative Assembly, 28 inmates have died so far. Only three had cited that their permanent address was in Bangladesh, the remaining 25 were residents of various areas in Assam and they died in these camps after being labelled as Bangladesh-

Government employees warned against political posts

Assam govt. targeting Cong.

workers: Debabrata Saikia

Opposition leader says sedition charge slapped on them

Debabrata Saikia

ing out others," he said.

Apart from serious charg-

es against Opposition party

workers, the State govern-

ment has booked Krishak

Mukti Sangram Samiti

(KMSS) leader and RTI acti-

vist Akhil Gogoi under the

stringent Unlawful Activities

(Prevention) Act and handed

over to the National Investi-

gation Agency to investigate

charges of inciting violence.

the State government was

behind a few "safety valve

protests to manage people's

anger", but did not name

they should realise that they

cannot play with people's

emotions and self-respect.

They will soon get exposed,"

Asked about the latest As-

"All I want to say is that

any particular group.

Mr. Saikia said.

Mr. Saikia also hinted that

Move follows a strike in protest against the CAA

The Assam government has

The warning follows the called the strike.



who violate the

One of Assam's oldest churches has curtailed Christmas celebrations as a

mark of protest against the

The Nagaon Baptist Church in central Assam was established in 1846 by Miles Bronson, an American missionary who played a key role in conserving and promoting Assamese. "We did not take out the customary pre-Christmas cultural procession and curtailed all celebrations today (December 25) apart from the church service," a spokesperson of the church said.

The All India Bengali Organisation s demanded indigenous status for Bengalis of Assam while slamming CAA as a design to convert Hindu Bengalis into refugees.

Will not implement CAA in M.P., says Kamal Nath

Chief Minister says BJP has combined NRC and NPR

STAFF REPORTER

Terming the Citizenship (Amendment) Act "anti-people", Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Wednesday said the law would not be implemented in the State, and the BJP had showed its "real intention" by clubbing together the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR).

Calling upon citizens to protect the Constitution, Mr. Nath told presspersons that the BJP was attempting to mislead people.

"Even we want the NPR, but Union Home Minister Amit Shah himself has said in Parliament that the NRC would be implemented across the country. By clubbing them together, he has made his intention clear."

Led by Mr. Nath, Congress workers from across Madhya Pradesh took part in a rally here against the Act and the proposed nationwide NRC.

"They are running a campaign to divert everyone's attention. Madhya Pradesh is the heart of the country, and from here we want to highlight the Centre's attempts at imperilling the future of generations," he said.

More than 50,000 workers from the districts, along with Cabinet Ministers, marched down the 1.5-km



against the CAA in Bhopal on Wednesday. • A.M. FARUQUI

stretch from the Rangmahal Square to the Minto Hall (Old Vidhan Sabha complex). The Congress had given a call to district party presidents to mobilise workers for the "Samvidhan Bachao Nyaya Shanti Yatra".

Mr. Nath said any law that was "anti-people, anti-Constitution, anti-social and anti-religion would never be implemented in the State under the Congress regime".

He added, "It's no more about what is included in the Act, but what is left out. This is no more about its use but misuse."

BJP campaign

The BJP has announced it would launch a campaign next month to "clear the air" around the Act and attempt to "delink" it from the NRC among people in the State. Assailing Mr. Nath for tak-

ing out the rally, former Chief Minister and BJP vicepresident Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, "According to the Constitution, the right to grant citizenship is exclusively with the Centre. When both Houses of Parliament have passed the law, does a Chief Minister have the right to launch a march in the name of peace and intimidate people? How can he say such a law will not be implemented in the State?" Whether it was Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee or Mr. Nath, he said, "they should first demit office and then take out such marches."

Denied visa by Bangladesh, says Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

West Bengal Minister and influential Muslim leader of the State Siddiqullah Chowdhury on Wednesday alleged that he has been denied visa by Bangladeshi

authorities. Mr. Chowdhury, who heads the State unit of the Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind, said that despite following due procedure, his application was rejected.

Mr. Chowdhury told *The* Hindu that he had got clearance both from the Chief Minister and the Union government.



'forcibly drafted'

Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny said one of his allies had been forcibly conscripted and sent to serve at a remote Arctic base, in a move his supporters said amounted to kidnapping. Ruslan Shaveddinov went missing on Monday after authorities broke into his Moscow flat. On Tuesday, he resurfaced at an air defence Ocean, Mr. Navalny said. AFP

Japan lawmaker arrested over alleged casino bribes

A Japanese lawmaker was arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes from a company that wanted to build a casino, prosecutors said. Tsukasa Akimoto, a former member of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling party, received three million ven in cash in 2017 (\$27,400 at the current rate), they said. AFP

Activists continue Hong Kong protests despite Christmas

They marched through shopping malls, chanting pro-democracy slogans

Hong Kong anti-government protesters marched through Christmas-decorated shopping centres on Wednesday, chanting pro-democracy slogans and forcing one mall to close early, as the police fired tear gas to disperse crowds gathering on nearby

The protests have turned more confrontational over the festive season, though earlier in December they had been largely peaceful after pro-democracy candidates overwhelmingly won district council elections.

Despite the embarrassing results, Hong Kong's pro-Beijing leaders have made

"Confrontation is expected, it doesn't matter if it's Christmas," said Chan, a 28vear-old restaurant worker who was part of a crowd



Pinned down: Riot police detaining a protester during a demonstration in Hong Kong on Wednesday. • AP

which exchanged insults with the police outside a shopping centre in the Mong Kok district.

"I'm disappointed the government still didn't respond to any of our ... demands. We continue to come out even if we don't have much hope," said Mr. Chan, who only gave his surname.

The riot police patrolled dressed in black and wearing neighbourhoods several while tourists and shoppers, face masks, descended on shopping malls around the Chinese-ruled city, shouting popular slogans such as "Liberate Hong Kong! Revolution of our times!

The police arrested several people in a shopping mall in the Sha Tin district after pepper-spraying them. The mall closed early.

Christmas ruined: Lam Baton-wielding police fired tear gas on Tuesday at thousands of protesters who barricaded roads and trashed a Starbucks cafe and an HSBC

The city's leader Carrie Lam said in a Facebook post on Wednesday that many Hong Kongers and tourists were disappointed that their "Christmas Eve celebrations have been ruined".

"Such illegal acts have not only dampened the festive mood but also adversely affected local businesses.

Typhoon Phanfone batters Philippines, thousands hit

Tropical storm blacks out many cities and towns, say officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MANILA

Typhoon Phanfone pummelled the central Philippines on Christmas Day, bringing a wet, miserable and terrifying holiday to millions in the mainly Catholic nation.

The police said six people were missing as the typhoon leapt from one small island to another for the second day - crumpling houses, toppling trees and blacking out cities and towns, includ ing in popular resorts like Boracay.

At the height of the festive season on Wednesday, tens of thousands were stranded at shuttered ports or evacuation centres, while the rest of the region's population cowered in rain-soaked homes.

Though weaker, Phanfone was tracking a similar path to Super Typhoon Haiyan, the country's deadliest



highway in Ormoc City in Philippines on Wednesday. • AFF

cyclone on record which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.

More than 16,000 people spent the night in improvised shelters in schools, gyms and government buildings as the typhoon first made landfall on Tuesday, civil defence officials said.

"It was frightening. The glass windows shattered and we took cover by the stairs." Ailyn Metran said after she and her four-year-old child took refuge at the state weather service office in Tacloban city, where her husband worked.

More than 25,000 people remained stranded at ports on Christmas Day with ferry services still shut down, the coast guard said. Scores of flights to the region also remained cancelled, though the populous capital Manila has so far been spared.

Pope Francis appeals for peace in global flashpoints

Injustice spurring migration, says 83-year-old pontiff

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Pope Francis appealed for peace in many of the world's hotspots, singling out the crises in the Middle East, Venezuela and Lebanon as well as armed conflicts ravaging many African countries.

"May Christ bring his light to the many children suffering from war and conflicts in the Middle East and in various countries of the world," the 83-year-old pontiff said in his traditional Christmas message at the

"May he bring comfort to



Powerful message: Pope Francis delivering the 'Urbi et Orbi' (To the City and the World) speech in Vatican on Wednesday. • AFP

the beloved Syrian people who still see no end to the hostilities that have rent their country over the last decade," he said, urging the international community to find solutions to allow the peoples of that region to live together in peace and security." He used his "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) speech to call for a resolution to the crisis in Lebanon, where he hoped for a "harmonious return to

In the Middle East, notably Iraq and Yemen, the Pope lamented that "so many people – struggling but not discouraged – still await a time of peace, security and prosperity."

many wearing Santa hats or

reindeer antlers, strolled

past. There were no major

clashes, but with impromptu

crowds forming to shout ex-

pletives at the unpopular of-

ficers, who have been ac-

cused of using excessive

force, the police briefly fired

tear gas in Mong Kok, a pop-

Hundreds of protesters,

ular protest area.

The Argentinian Pope, noting that in South America "a number of nations are experiencing a time of social and political upheaval," urged that "the beloved Venezuelan people... receive the aid they need."

Attack on Christians

Pope Francis denounced attacks on Christians in Africa and prayed for victims of conflict, natural disasters and disease in the world's poorest continent.

The pontiff urged "comfort to those who are persecuted for their religious faith, especially missionaries and members of the faithful who have been kidnapped, and to the victims of attacks by extremist groups, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria."

He prayed for migrants undertaking a perilous and potentially deadly sea crossing to Europe to seek a better life, saying: "It is injustice that makes them cross deserts and seas that become cemeteries.

"It is injustice that forces them to ensure unspeakable forms of abuse, enslavement of every kind and torture in inhumane detention camps. It is injustice that turns them away from places where they might have hope for a dignified life, but instead find

35 civilians killed in terrorist attack in Burkina Faso

80 extremists and seven soldiers also died in double attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE OUAGADOUGOU

Burkina Faso was in mourning on Wednesday after jihadists killed 35 civilians, almost all of them women, in double attacks in the north. in one of the deadliest assaults in nearly five years of violence in the West African

Seven soldiers and 80 jihadists also died in Tuesday's simultaneous attacks on the town of Arbinda and its military base in Soum province, which lasted "several hours" and was of a "rare intensity", the army

Burkina Faso, bordering Mali and Niger, has seen regular jihadist attacks which have left hundreds dead since 2015 when militant violence began to spread across the Sahel region.

"A large group of terrorists simultaneously attacked the military base and the civilian population in Arbinda," the army Chief of Staff said in a statement.

"This barbaric attack resulted in the deaths of 35 civilian victims, most of them women," President Roch Marc Christian Kabore said on Twitter, praising the "bravery and commitment" of the defence forces.

Government spokesman Remis Dandjinou later said 31 of the civilian victims were women, adding around 20 soldiers and six civilians were wounded.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but jihadist violence in Burkina Faso has been blamed on militants linked to both the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State groups.

Iran clamps down on Net ahead of commemorations

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A wave of Internet outages was imposed in Iran on Wednesday, ILNA news agency reported, a day becommemorations called for on social media for those killed in unrest last month.

The cut came on the orders of security bodies, the news agency said, citing what it called an informed source at Iran's Information and Communications Technology Ministry.

"This restriction on Internet access solely includes international traffic of mobile phone lines," the source was quoted as saying. It also ex-

cluded what the source called "internal traffic", indicating only domestic websites would be accessible.

The outages come ahead of planned commemorations for people killed in street violence that erupted last month during demonstrations against fuel price hikes. At the time, authorities imposed a week-long Internet blackout as police stations were attacked, shops looted and banks and petrol stations torched.

Officials in Iran have yet to issue an overall death toll for the unrest, but human rights group Amnesty International has put the number at more than 300.

No let up in anti-govt. protests in Iraq

Demonstrators have been demanding the ouster of the entire political class

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Iraqi anti-government protesters again hit the streets on Wednesday, angered by an activist's death and an attempt on the life of a popular TV satirist.

The latest rallies in Baghdad and cities, including Basra and Karbala, came after a night of unrest that saw protesters torch the headquarters of two pro-Iran militias in the country's south.

The demonstrators have rallied for almost three months to demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the oil-rich yet poverty-ridden country



Mourners carrying the coffin of a civil activist during the funeral on Wednesday.

in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion which overthrew dictator Saddam Hus-

The mostly youthful acti-

vists accuse Iraq's leaders of enriching themselves, mismanaging the economy and being beholden to Iran, an influential actor in Iraqi politics.

'Bid to silence us'

Passions were inflamed when popular TV satirist Aws Fadhil was targeted on Tuesday by unknown assailants, with three bullets hitting his car.

Mr. Fadhil posted footage of the bullet holes on social media and declared: "They are targeting those who support the revolution, to silence them ... But we are continuing our revolution."

He added that "we have already achieved a goal", referring to a parliamentary vote on Tuesday to approve an electoral reform law, in line with the demands of the protesters. Lawmakers will from now be elected in firstpast-the-post contests within electoral districts, rather than through a complex system using provincial party lists and proportional representation.

Despite the reform steps, protesters again rallied on Wednesday – including in the city of Diwaniyah, where they marched under a large Iraqi flag to mourn a prominent activist, Thaer al-Tayeb.

27 Afghan peace activists abducted by the Taliban

REUTERS

Taliban militants have kidnapped 27 peace activists from a highway in Afghanistan's western Farah province, local officials and peace activists said on Wednesday.

Massoud Bakhtawar, the Deputy Governor of Farah, said the activists were travelling in six cars from Herat to Farah on Tuesday evening when their convoy was stopped by the Taliban on a highway and taken to an unknown location.

Bismillah Watandost, a member of the group, said the activists had planned to travel to various parts of Fa-

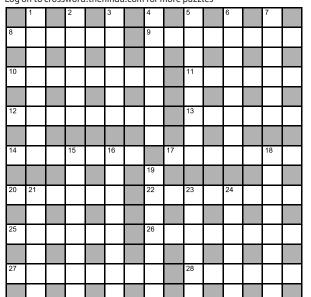
rah to call for peace and a ceasefire between the warring parties in Afghanistan.

The group, People's Peace Movement, was formed to protest against violent attacks after a car bomb exploded at a sport stadium in Helmand province last year killing 17 civilians. The activists have travelled to various parts of the country, often marching through Taliban-controlled areas to demand a ceasefire between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The Taliban has previously accused the activists of being financed by the Kabul government, which the group has denied.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12816

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles





To play an interactive version of this crossword

8 Bond's interest in money? (6)

10 Save second professor at Hogwarts? Not quite! (8)

ACROSS

9 Discounted off or as on-going stock (3,1,4)

11 Drop inhaler in between

work-out (6)

12 She's spoken for, we hear, in error (8)

contained trickery (6)

13 Know how text messages

14 Ram's short? (7)

17 Charged member involved in crooked deal (7) 20 Stopped broadcasting after a

devouring love liaison (6)

22 It's hard to miss terribly tedious person, per Spooner

25 Several services for one burning in North America (6)

26 Conversely, America and France took time about female right to vote (8)

28 Reason parasite's found in report (6)

27 Step 1: Due training for

DOWN 1 Without closure, many forfeit

delegate (8)

love - it stings (8)

2 Copies cycling race (6)

(set by Hypatia)

3 Either of two articles on top of kid's jacket (6)

4 Nile's not connected? (3-4) 5 Project advertisement by a

student about healthy

cooking method (8) 6 So, came up with naughty clue

about a time to kiss (8) 7 Kept near India Gate, helmet's tribute taken from the top

15 Gradually trim down shape (8)

16 Outstanding lady in Greek architecture? (8)

18 Stretch the tag - no length

secured when pulled up (8) 19 As he had assumed, graduate

21 Animal raised at emergency ward perhaps, rose (6)

23 Once again, smelt garbage (6)

was shy (7)

24 Favourite student lacking courage (6)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12815 Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

С	Ε	R	Е	Α	L		Ρ	R	0	В	Α	В	L	Υ	6	5	7	3	1	2	4	8	9
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0	U	Τ	s	ı	Ь	ш		ш	Х	Τ	Α	J	s	Т	9	7	2	8	5	6	3	1	4
R		Ε		0		Α		Ζ		0		Α		Ε	-	-	-	=	~	~	~	-	=
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FAITH

His auspicious qualities

As great devotees, azhwars are drawn and moved to emotional heights when contemplating the Lord's countless names that reveal His inexhaustible and auspicious qualities. There is a rich repertoire of experience of God in their hymns and that is why many are able to share and empathise with their devotional fervour, pointed out Kalyanapuram Sri Aravamudhachariar in a discourse. One common aspect of the Lord's nature is His neutrality, that is, He is equally disposed to all beings and objects in His creation. This impartiality is governed by His boundless compassion which is His outstanding trait.

He is known as "sarva bhuta suhruth," one who is always keen on bestowing the best on all beings. He alone can help all and He helps without expecting any return. So, it is accepted that as far as He is concerned, He has no enemies. Nammazhwar is quick to point out that though He has no direct enemies, He cannot brook any harm to His devotees and the good, as they are ever dear to Him. Nammazhwar waxes eloquent about the Lord's Saulabhya and Saushilya that easily draw many devotees to Him. He alludes to the many instances when out of His Sankalpa He descends from His abode in Vaikunta and assumes various appropriate forms to protect His devotees. He takes the most unique and unheard of form of Narasimha to protect His devotee Prahlada from Hiranyakasipu's wrath.

As Krishna He comes to the rescue of those who dwelt in constant dread of Kamsa. Azhwar is overwhelmed that the Supreme Lord easily becomes one with the common folk such as the cowherds and Gopis without any reserve and affords the highest benefit of God experience to them, an attainment that is hard for even the most realised souls.

online, scan the QR code

NCLAT rejects tax dept. plea against Jio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The NCLAT has dismissed petitions filed by the Income Tax Department, against the approval for Reliance Jio Infocomm's scheme to hive off its fibre and tower businesses into two separate units.

The Ahmedabad-bench of the National Company Law Tribunal had earlier this year granted permission for the demerger. The I-T department challenged it before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, claiming that by this arrangement, Reliance Jio Infocomm had sought to convert redeemable preference shares into loans, which would cause a revenue loss to the Department. The NCLAT dismissed it, saying the NCLT had already dealt with the issue. "The mere fact that a scheme may result in reduction of tax liability does not furnish a basis for challenging," its validity.

NITI member bats for 2 GST slabs

Frequent rate changes cause problems, annual review okay, says Ramesh Chand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Government think-tank NITI Aayog Member Ramesh Chand on Wednesday made a case for only two slabs under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime as against the current multiple slabs, and said rates should be revised annually, if required.

The GST, which replaced almost all the indirect taxes, came into force on July 1, 2017 and the tax rates have been revised several times

Currently, there are four GST rate slabs – 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%. Several items fall in the exempt or nil duty category. Besides, cess is also levied on five goods.

Teething problems

Mr. Chand said that when a large taxation reform such as GST is brought in, there are always 'teething problems' but soon they stabilise. He said most of the countries took a long time for GST stabilisation.



Bigger picture: GST issues are much larger than merely asking for rates, according to Ramesh Chand. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

The NITI Aayog Member, who looks after the agriculture sector, is also strictly against frequent changes in GST rates as it leads to pro-

The GST Council, presided over by the Union Finance Minister and comprising State Finance Ministers, decides the rates for particular goods and services.

Besides frequent demand for reduction in the rates on various goods and services, there has also been a clamour for a slash in the number of tax slabs

"It has become a tendency of every sector to ask for lower GST. I feel GST issues are much larger than asking for rates," Mr. Chand said.

And, "we should not fiddle with rates or change rates frequently... We should not have many rates. Have only two rates," he said.

Mr. Chand said the focus should be on steady increase in revenue collection from the new indirect tax regime rather than tinkering with rates. He prescribed that if at all rates needed to be changed, it should be done annually.

On demands for lower GST on processed food such as dairy products, Mr. Chand, an agri-economist, said the 5% GST on such products was "very, very reasonable."

Mr. Chand said that while every sector was demanding a lower rate, they should also understand governments need revenue to spend on development works.

"We always ask from the government and forget to give back. This trend is not good. From where will the government get the money to spend for development?" asked Mr. Chand, who is also a member of the 15th Finance Commission.

He said in the agriculture sector alone, the Central government was providing a subsidy of ₹1.2 lakh crore and the States, put together, spend about ₹1 lakh crore.

NTPC to invest ₹50,000 cr. for 10 GW solar capacity

Power major eyes 2022 deadline; green bonds to fund plans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

State-owned power giant NTPC is planning to add 10 GW of solar energy generation capacity by 2022, which entails an investment of around ₹50,000 crore, to be funded mainly by green bonds, a source has said.

At present, NTPC has installed renewable energy capacity of 920 MW, which constitutes mainly solar energy. It has formulated a long-term plan to become a 130 GW company by 2032 with 30% non-fossil fuel or renewable energy capacity.

"The company will complete tendering of 2,300 MW of solar energy capacity by the end of this fiscal. Thereafter, it has planned to add 4 GW each in 2020-21 and 2021-22," the source said.

The source added that NTPC was "open to any borrowing option in the market. which is economical. Howev-

er, it would mainly rely on green bonds which are offered for pure clean energy projects. The company wants to raise money through domestic as well as overseas green bonds."

NTPC's plans to add 10 GW solar energy capacity assume significance in view of India's ambitious target of having 175 GW of clean energy by 2022.

The source said that the power major would also set up some of its solar energy

projects under a scheme where it gets viability gap funding to keep the tariff below the ₹3-per-unit level.

Besides, the company will also set up solar energy projects without long-term (25 years) power purchase agreements as it aims to sell the electricity to industrial as well as commercial consumers and also at energy exchanges, the source said.

The Central Electricity Regulatory Authority has already approved the realtime power market, which is expected to kick in by April 1, 2020. There would be 48 sessions of half an hour each in a day, to allow consumers to get the desired power supply within an hour of buying at the exchanges. Power is now traded for two hours in a day from 10 a.m. to 12 a.m., where a consumer can schedule delivery a day in advance.

Mid- and small-cap stocks may shine in 2020

Surge in benchmark indices have come amid weak macroeconomic factors

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR MUMBAI

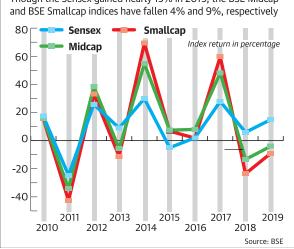
While the current year has seen the benchmark indices - Sensex and Nifty - touch record levels, the coming year could see the side counters finally coming into the limelight after staying low for two consecutive years.

Most market participants are ready to bet on mid-cap and small-cap stocks at a time when the surge in the benchmarks have been witnessed amid weak macroeconomic factors, including growth numbers at multiyear lows.

"Valuations have turned expensive thanks to the recent run-up in equities making the time ripe for increasing allocation in quality mid-cap companies," said Sharekhan, in its outlook report for 2020.

"After the recent run-up, the benchmark indices are not cheap any more and India trades at substantial premium to the MSCI Emerging there is a case for increasing

Too much money chasing too few stocks? Though the Sensex gained nearly 15% in 2019, the BSE Midcap and BSE Smallcap indices have fallen 4% and 9%, respectively



allocation in quality mid-cap companies for relatively better returns in the next 12-24 months," it added.

While the 30-share Sensex has gained nearly 15% in the current calendar vear till date, the BSE Midcap and BSE Smallcap indices have 4% fallen and 9%

A similar trend was seen

in 2018 when the Sensex gained nearly 6% and the broader indices lost between 13% and 24%.

valuation risk should not divert us from the core bottom-up issue in India, however – that of sharp polarisation in valuations 'high-quality' between ed in the huge valuation discount that Indian small-caps are trading at," highlighted BNP Paribas in its outlook report for 2020.

'Sensex may hit 44,500'

The French financial major is currently overweight on India and has a target of 44,500 for the Sensex in 2020 as it plans to focus on "quality and select attractively-valued turnaround candidates among consumer and consumer proxies."

In a similar context, ICICI Securities expects "small-/ micro-caps to outperform mid-caps as the former asset classes have much higher margin of safety in terms of risk-spread large-caps.'

"Widening of risk-spreads is a result of significant underperformance of smalland micro-caps to large-caps since the peak of January 2018. Risk spreads for microcaps over large-caps in particular have risen considerably and become very attrac-

Centre promises free Wi-Fi to 48,000 villages till March 2020

'2.5 lakh gram panchayats to be connected via optical fibre'

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

To promote uptake of the Internet in rural areas, Telecom and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday promised free Wi-Fi to 48,000 villages, are connected through the government's flagship Bharatnet project, for the next three months. "We have already con-

nected 1.3 lakh gram panchayats through Bharatnet... Our target is to take this to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats... To promote utilisation of Bharatnet services, we will provide Wi-Fi for free in all villages connected through BharatNet till March 2020," the Minister said. With the BharatNet initiative, the Centre aims to connect all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through optical fibre. Till now, about 48,000 villages have been connected to Wi-



Ravi Shankar Prasad

auguration of Digital Village Gurawara in Rewari (Haryana). Mr. Prasad added that the government is aiming to convert at least 15% of the total villages to digital village in the next 3-4 years.

Digital Village, which was conceptualised by the Common Service Centre (CSC) SPV under he Ministry of Electronics and IT, is a village where citizens can avail He was speaking at the intral and the State govern- 2.25 lakh gram panchayats.

players. These include banking, insurance, tele-medicine, pension and e-governance services. Such villages are also equipped with LED bulb assembly unit, sanitary napkin unit, and rural-Wifi infrastructure. CSC SPV CEO Dinesh Tya-

ments, as well as of private

gi said, initially, the scheme was unveiled at five locations as a pilot. "Considering the success of the pilot, we have been given the task of setting up 700 Digital Villages across the country, one in every district."

In the interim budget this year, then Finance Minister Piyush Goyal had announced the government's target of one lakh villages as Digital Villages over the five years. This, he had said, would be achieved by expanding the reach of CSCs in the country. Mr. Tyagi said there were about 3.6 lakh CSCs in the country covering

GST watchdog fines J&J ₹230 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The National Anti-profi-

The NAA said that the methodology adopted by J&J to pass on GST rate cut benefits to consumers was "unreasonable, arbitrary and incorrect and thus can not be accepted."

Soap-makers' body urges tech adoption

Convenes meet on modern methods

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Small Scale Soap & Detergent Manufacturers Association (TANSD-MA) is educating its micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) members to adopt modern technologies in a bid to combat competition from larger corporates.

"Unlike other industries, we don't face any problem from the unorganised sector. Every region has a specific brand.

"We urge them to use modern technology and the latest equipment so that they also thrive and the industry gets bigger. It is our way of combating large corporates," said V. S. Manimaran, member, executive committee," TANSDMA.

"We represent MSMEs, having currently about 600 members," said K. Dhanapal, president, TANSDMA. "The total revenue of our members from Tamil Nadu is about ₹1,500 crore to ₹1,700 crore," he added.

Market share

According to him, membercompanies of the association command a cumulative market share of 60% in detergent cakes in Tamil Nadu, while the rest is held by the large corporates.

In the case of detergent powder and liquid, it is the reverse.

To combat competition, the association, as a first step, has convened a nation-



al conference on modern techniques in soaps and detergents in Chennai on December 29 and 30.

Mr. Manimaran said the industry witnessed a phenomenal growth from 2016 to 2019. It was time for them to

Low-cost product

"Our president is bent upon helping swadeshi companies go in for expansion and produce quality soap and detergent products at a low cost. They have presence in Tamil Nadu and this would enable them to expand to neighbouring States too," Mr. Manimaran said.

He added that earlier, the industry had been paying taxes at 28% and that this had come down substantially due to availability of input tax credit under the Goods and Services Tax.

"We have been growing at 10% every year and would be hitting the ₹2,000-crore mark in revenue soon," he added.

India eyes 60% share of global ship recycling business, says Minister

'Contribution from such activities to GDP will reach \$2.2 bn'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

With a new legislation in place, India aims to garner at least 60% of the global ship recycling business and emerge as a key destination for recycling warships and other ships, Union Minister Mansukh Lal Mandaviya

Holding the independent charge of the Shipping Ministry, Mr. Mandaviya also exuded confidence that contribution from ship recycling activities to the country's GDP would reach \$2.2 bilWith the Recycling of Ships Act, 2019, the likes of Japan, U.S., Europe could send their ships for recycling to India

lion, almost double compared to the current level. According to Mr. Mandavi-

ya, Gujarat's Alang, the world's biggest shipyard, was ready to cater to the projected increase in the number of ships for recy-

Currently, India recycles

around 300 of the 1,000 ships which are demolished per annum globally.

However, the likes of Japan, the United States and Europe were not sending their ships for recycling to India in the absence of ratification of a global convention. That scenario is set to change with the Recycling of Ships Act, 2019.

The Act ratifies the Hong Kong convention and would facilitate an environmentfriendly process of recycling ships and adequate safety for yard workers.

Leap India to deploy more pallets

Firm buoyed by growth in demand for warehousing

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Warehousing player Leap India has announced plans to expand the number of pallets it provides on lease to customers.

This comes on the back of increased demand for warehousing coming from FMCG, beverages, auto parts, food, e-commerce and large logistics entities that prefer palettised cargo for efficient handling and storage as well as distribution consignments.

The demand for palletson-lease is estimated to go up to four million pieces this year, an increase from the three million deployed last year. LEAP India, with 70% market share in pallets and foldable large containers (FLC), is planning to deploy a bulk of it, it said. Leap's network comprises

22 warehouses, 25 contract manufacturing centres and a team of 450 employees serving over 550 customers at over 7,000 touch points in

The company currently has 55,000 FLCs deployed across India, it said. Increasing demand for warehousing from both domestic and international players is driving demand for efficient and international practices of storing and moving goods.

Internationally, goods are stored and moved with the help of forklifts which drives

the demand for storing and transporting goods in pallets, it said.

Sunu Mathew, MD, Leap India, said, "Achieving the milestone of three million pallets is very encouraging. With this, we have become a leader in bringing palletisation to the country and are happy to work with each and every leading brand from FMCG, beverages, automobiles, food, e-commerce and large logistic players in the

"We see enough opportunity in both pallets and FLCs. We are all geared up to tap this huge opportunity as we are well positioned to expand our pallets base," he

teering Authority (NAA) has asked Johnson & Johnson(J&J) India to deposit a little over ₹230 crore with the Centre and States for making profits by not passing the GST benefits to consumers. J&J has been asked to deposit the amount in three months.

As per the order, when GST rates were reduced from 28% to 18% on products sold by J&J from November 2017, the company did not fully pass on the financial benefits to customers. NAA said the benefits of input tax credit should have been passed on to the recipients by way of com-

Travelling eastward

Film-maker Mike Pandey speaks about his new series on the Northeast and why conservation in the area is paramount

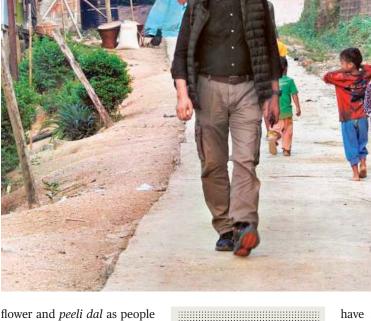
MADHUR TANKHA

With his baritone, tall frame and ability to face the dangers of the wild, Mike Pandey is probably India's answer to Bear Grylls. However, Mike, who saunters into jungles like we do malls, sporting his beret, did set the benchmark in wildlife filmmaking in the 1990s, with the documentary Earth Matters. He's friends with Jane Goodall, and like her, can carry on a light-hearted conversation with an ape or two.

Raised in Kenya's Nairobi National Park, Mike's father worked in the forensic department of Scotland Yard in Kenya, and would often take him into the jungles. "Once I witnessed two silver back gorillas fighting and tearing at each other," he recalls. Today, he works

for its preservation with the locals. He is right now making a film on marsh lions in Kenya. His current project explores the rich biodiversity in India's Northeast through a 13-part series Explorer of Mystery Mountains on DD National and DD Arun Prabha (newly launched Northeast channel) that will air in January. The hope is that this will lead to a conservation

Mike believes that the region is home to varieties of herbs and shrubs that can be a big source of medicine for people across the country. "Foxtail millet is being revived in Nagaland. I savoured this gluten-free millet, in porridge a couple of times," he says, talking about various delicacies from the area. "We ate the local rice, mostly sticky rice, beans, cauli-



have altered their diet a bit. The non-vegetarians kept their bellies full with fish cooked in banana leaves."

Excerpts from an interview: What kind of research study did you undertake before exploring the Northeast?

Dr. Chander Mohan, a professor working as an adviser at JNU, is our key resource person. He connects me with other scientists. Facts collected by our in-house research team get authenticated by the professor. For the past four years, we have been making a film on snow leopards only in Ladakh and Sikkim. It is one of the rarest and most endangered cats that is found in the Himalayan belt extending from Ladakh to Kazakistan. We also have researchers with experience in working for National Geographic.

What was the brief given to you by DD for the series?

The film should be awareness generating and empower people so that they can become partners in protection. So we are making the film by involving the people. When people's lives improve they automatically get interested in chipping inThe falcons and gibbons

The tailless Hoolock Gibbon is the only ape in India, of which the crew discovered 13 families living near Jorhat in Assam. Its powerful arms are twice the size of its limbs, and while the gorilla is more powerful, the gibbon is the most powerful in the Himalayan region. The primate will be featured in episodes on Assam and Meghalaya

Amur Falcons that come to Nagaland from Mongolia and go to South Africa, come in thousands. These smaller falcons feed on insects. Farmers have realised that these migratory birds are important for protecting their livelihood. These birds will be showcased in an episode on Nagaland.

to conservation. Conservation cannot be done in isolation. So we are encouraging people to directly come forward to preserve their biodiversity and heritage. The locals have begun to realise the value of natural heritage like herbs, shrubs. Hunter-gathering communities have respect for nature and take only what they need. In Manipur, rare herbs are being protected. The old Chizami weave is being revived by Seno Tsuhah of North East Network.

Would you say the Northeast is richer in biodiversity compared to other parts of India?

The North East is the home of one of the oldest, primordial jungles and diverse eco-systems in the world. Its diversity has no parallel. It has the largest number of rare ad endangered orchids found anywhere in the world. The rarest is Lady Slippers that became extinct but are now being revived by scientists and concerned citizens. If we need a stable world we need to protect our diversity. The medicines of the future will come from our forests. The world is tired of antibiotics, which cure one disease but give rise to other medical concerns. Medicines have to come from natural sources.

What kind of challenges did you encounter?

For this series, we faced financial constraints, yet did not compromise. We used drones where needed to capture the treasures of the impenetrable

forest. Our locations were hazardous, very cold, but this is one of the most amazing places on the planet. We faced a lack of time while shooting inside sanctuaries. Those who run our forests should see us as scientists and not as tourists. Leeches in the forest mean that poachers are kept at bay. However when we had to film we had to be extra cautious. Leeches drop from the canopy of trees. So I wore special boots and socks soaked in salt. We

Which part of shooting there memorable?

converted our challenges into

positives.

On the way to Tawang Valley, we explored Eagle's Nest. The place got its name as eagles make their nests in high altitudes. Bugun Liocichla (a bird species) is found in a 2 km patch of forest. The Begun people are so sensitive that they discontinued cultivation after they became aware that 100 rare birds are living there. They gave up their land to the government. Similarly in Assam to put an end to human-animal conflict, Pradip Bhuyan grew

(Clockwise from extreme left) Mike Pandey at Damparengpui village, Mizoram; rowing at Loktak Lake, Manipur; in Siju Caves, Meghalaya; with a forest guard at Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Napier grass and lure crops like banana plants to divert the attention of rampaging elephants. He discontinued rice cultivation. Earlier, pachyderms would destroy crops and kill members of the Karbi tribe. This year, a number of lives got saved and people thanked Pradip. In Sikkim, I loved to visit their kitchens and the way ladies sat on the floor. Home stays are affordable. A couple can stay for a day with all meals within ₹1,500.

Some would say tourism is the beginning of degrading the environment. Would you agree?

It is heartening that the Northeast is slowly opening up. One of the agendas of this project is that when tourists visit the Seven Sisters the economic status of locals improves. We are making this film in a way that the viewers in Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and other metros understand that the North East is an important part of India. They will get a feel of this rich biodiversity and if they believe in sustainability then they will definitely visit it. I agree that uncontrolled tourism can devastate any place and can even erode it. Commercialisation can change the demographics of any place. In Sikkim, there is restricted tourism. Like in Bhutan, only a certain number of tourists are allowed. Locals run their own taxis. Tourism is slowly being now controlled and monitored.

IN OUR BACKYARD

A tale of two Champas

The Frangipani and White Frangipani are two very different Champa flowers — and only one of these has flowers through December

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

One of the most well known trees in India is the Champa, which is rife with symbolism for the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cultures. Featuring heavily in movies, literature and pop culture, it is no wonder that this flower is well recognised by adults and children alike.

While growing up, I would immediately recognise this tree because of its round blunt leaves and the fragrant flowers. However, I would also see very similar looking flowers with pointed leaves and try and figure out what they were. There was definitely some family



resemblance. It was only when I became a naturalist, did I realise that there were two kinds of Champa trees in Delhi-NCR, one called Frangipani, the other, White Frangipani (Safed Champa).

Both have served as avenue trees and were brought by travellers from the Atlantic islands and other tropical regions. Pradip Krishen's



ers hot, coastal regions. Though they belong to the same family, they have subtle differences. The Safed Champa is the one with rounded leaves, with the other's pointed but both have leaves of the same texture. They mostly have white flowers with yellow centres, though hybrid varieties bearing coloured flowers.

Champa (Plumeria rubra) is a small deciduous tree that sheds its leaves in winter (beginning December), and the Safed Champa is a small nearly evergreen tree that remains green throughout the year. In botany and horticulture, the term deciduous means 'falling off'. It is a function carried out to conserve water and to survive better in winter conditions.

There are two forms of the Safed Champa found in the city, Plumeria obtusa and plumeria sericifolia. In late February, the leaves of this tree might blacken and fall off if there is an extreme winter wave. The tree mostly flowers in April, then again in the rains but it is quite common to see flowers even in late Decem-

Pristine white

left) Plumeria

rubra ■ WIKIMEDIA

COMMONS

(Clockwise from

obtusa; Plumeria

The flowers mostly have five petals with the petals narrow and hardly overlapping. The tree fruits in May, with each fruit looking like a pair of dark, shiny pods joined at

The writer is the founder of NINOX -Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme



Pet-friendly

Over nine NGOs, like the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations, People of Animals, and the World Wildlife Fundwill participate at the Pet Fed, a pet festival happening in Delhi this weekend. The two-day event will have a pet fashion show, cosplay, and an agility ring display. Akshay Gupta, founder of the festival, says that over their six-year-run so far, the crowds have been most attracted to the Police Dog Show. "This year we are doing the Police Dog Show with the Delhi police's crime branch," he says, adding that "there will be 12 dogs and 22 officers on the stage for a 30-minute-long demonstration. Edited excerpts from an interview

What brands will be participating?

We have about 150 brands [of the pet food industry] coming in from different parts of the country and abroad. [These include] Nestle and Mars International. From Thailand, we have Goodies, Jerhigh, SmartHeart, from Germany we have Heiniger. There are pet-grooming brands like Himalaya, Captain Zack, and Petlogic which are into health and hygiene of a pet.

There's an adoption camp at the festival. What's the process or criteria to adopt?

The process involves filling a questionnaire, from which the NGO understands what you are as a pet owner and how comfortable your household is with a pet. After the event, the NGOs each have a screening process, during which they visit your house to determine whether you

can keep the pet. This takes about two weeks, and only after this is the pet sent over.

Pet Fed, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on 28th and 29th December, at NSIC grounds Okhla. For tickets, petfed.org/events;

SUPRIYA RAMESH

Contact us at delhimetro@thehindu.co.in

5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



Mixed-media

Anant Art has organised a solo exhibition titled Family is Plural, which showcases the recent works by artist Probir Gupta. Curated by Shaheen Merali, the paintings, sculptures and installation works on display depict the artist's attempt to repair the existing social, environmental and structural distortions.

VENUE: Bikaner House, Pandara Road TIME: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.



IHC is hosting 12th Guru Debaprasad Nritya Parampara, a festival of Indian classical dance and music. This two-day event, which begins today, will feature a Odissi recital by Dr. Gajendra Panda & group, a Kuchipudi recital by Guru Jayarama Rao & group, and a Kathak recital by Pt. Birju Maharaj & Kalashram group. **VENUE:** Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre



Festive menu

Monkey Bar has launched Jolly Good Fellows, a festive menu which offers plates and desserts inspired by the dishes from Anglo-Indian homes across the country. The menu includes Panko Fried Crepes filled with chicken mince, Maka Pao De, bread and butter with a Portuguese twist, and Pain Perdu Toast, a French-inspired dessert. **VENUE:** Local Shopping Complex, Vasant Kunj TIME: 12 noon - 12:30 a.m.



Art and music

DLF Cyberhub is hosting Hub Fest, a two-day event to celebrate art and music, which begins today. The festival features a live painting demo by doodle artist Santanu Hazarika, sand art by Rajat Kumar, ghatam and sarod music by Ujjwal Kumar and Rohan Prasanna, besides a workshop conducted by chef Anchal Bhalla.

VENUE: DLF Phase 2, Gurugram TIME: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.



Festive offer

Premium lifestyle & food store, Foodhall has come up with a wide range of Christmas goodies and treats, chocolates, candies, for the holiday season. Valid till 31st December, the food section offers Plum Cake, Christmas Cupcakes, Nutella Babka, while the vegetable section has coco strawberry parfaits, and strawberry desserts. **VENUE:** Available at all outlets in Delhi/NCR TIME: 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.





Reykjavik, Iceland

Icelanders take their bonfire parties, a tradition that has been on since 1791, very seriously. On New Year's Eve, Reykjavik witnesses at least 10 such events, where locals and travellers can huddle around a crackling fire to enjoy a drink or two, and watch around 500 tonnes of firecrackers light up the night sky. "Iceland has a ban on fireworks except for this one time of the year. It is allowed from December 28 to January 6," says Sigríður Dögg Guðmundsdóttir, manager, Visit Iceland & Creative Industries. People also gather around the iconic Hallgrímskirkja church or go up to Perlan (a futuristic-looking museum atop the Öskjuhlíð hill) to partake in the festivities. Temperature dipping down to -10 degrees Celsius is hardly a deterrent. In case it is, there are bus tours and sea cruises that arm revellers with Champagne, and take them on bonfire excursions across the capital. The bars open right after midnight, and the party continues. Sigríður says that over the years, there has been an increase in the number of passenger airplanes landing on December 31. "From 16 in 2014, it went up to around 56 in 2018," she adds. Other than the Viking-inspired celebrations, there is always the lure of the awe-inspiring northern lights that traipse across the black sky this time of the year.

Berlin, Germany

The German capital is one of the coolest places to be on the midnight of New Year's Eve, or Silvester as the Germans call it (December 31 is observed as Saint Sylvester's Day). The highlight is the "party mile" – extending between two Prussian-era monuments in the Brandenburg Gate and the Victory Column – were over a million dancing people let their hair loose and indulge in fun and booze. "The most popular (club) is the Berghain, but there is an abundance of other good clubs in the neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Mitte," says Peter Hermann, an architect who resides in Berlin, adding, "Berlin is probably among the top three centres for sub-culture, party and gay life in the West."

The Germans have a strange Silvester tradition – watching an English comedy sketch from the 1960s (titled Dinner for One). "For some reason, it has become a cult thing to watch on TV on Silvester. It is also televised in many bars," says Hermann. But before the corks come off the bottles, try a bit of raclette, Ragout fin and Swiss fondue, keeping in line with the tradition. Hermann also recommends a stroll down the shopping avenues of Kurfürstendamm, Tauenziehen and Friedrichstraße, sneaking into stores for street food and hot wine. Germany is also one of the few European Union nations which permits citizens to light

firecrackers. And Germans have been known to indulge (over €130 million was spent on fireworks last year by private individuals). "Germans are crazy for it. Especially at

midnight, the city is literally drowned in [sounds] and smoke. You either love it or hate it. There is no in-between," Hermann adds.

Edinburgh, Scotland

At midnight, 19 pyro-technicians take their positions. Three... two... one... and they get to work, shooting fireworks 300 metres into the Edinburgh sky. "There is a nine-kilometre-long wire connecting up to 136 modules, delivering 3.5 tonnes of fireworks," says Kate Bouchier-Hayes, senior publicist, The Corner Shop PR, a UK-based agency dedicated primarily to the arts.

That is not all. There are more than 4,200 fireworks containing over 16,500 shots and hundreds of thousands of stars in a gamut of colours. "Nearly 13 tonnes of equipment in four lorries and five vans will be used," she adds. This is just a sneak peek of what is expected at the Hogmanay festival this year.

Spread over three days, the event takes places at various venues in the city, including a massive street party that turns the venues into a showcase for street performers from around the globe. It also has four stages showcasing a mix of international and local artistes – like the popular *ceilidh* (a social gathering where people dance to traditional folk music) - all under the watchful eyes of the imposing Edinburgh castle that is seated grandly on a hill. This year, the fireworks at midnight have been specially choreographed to go with DJ Mark Ronson's (the headliner) new soundtrack.

An evening earlier, on December 30, people convene on the streets for the torchlight procession. It makes for great photographs. "Its origins reach back to the celebration of the winter solstice among the Vikings, with wild parties in late December," says Kate.

On New Year's Day, an intrepid lot takes the party to the Firth of Forth (an estuary). Dressed in



mostly outrageous outfits, they march through the streets led by bagpipers and drummers, before plunging into the freezing waters. That is Loony Dook for you. "The tradition was conceived in a pub during the Christmas of 1986 by a group of locals, as a novel way to cure their inevitable Hogmanay hangovers," explains Kate.

A bucket list favourite, last year, Hogmanay saw 1.60 lakh participants from different parts of the globe. And if you are wondering, 'what of the mess on the streets after all the intense revelry?', Kate has an answer. "Once 2020 has arrived, a team of over 30 people from Titanium Fireworks and Historic Environment Scotland will work through the night to clear in eight hours what took five days to set up."

Samoa

Imagine having bragging rights for the whole year just because you celebrated New Year before your friends and family back home in India, or New Zealand, or Australia and Japan. Given its geographical location in the South Pacific, the

independent state of Samoa is one of the first in the world to usher in the New Year. Add to that parties, a firework show that debuts this year, and the pristine settings, and you have a lot for Instagram too. Even though December is monsoon here, the temperature is a comfortable 29°C. "The peak season is normally May to October but it has changed recently due to to high influx of visitors," says Iulai Lesa of Samoa Travel. "In 2017/18 alone, we welcomed 1.72 lakh

visitors whereas the population of Samoa is 1.96 lakh," he notes. If you are feeling adventurouscelebrate the New Year twice by hopping on a flight to American Samoa, 45 minutes away. "Even though nearby, Samoa is 24 hours ahead of American Samoa," says Iulai.

Rio, Brazil

For La réveillon (how Brazilians refer to New Year's Eve) last year, over two million people turned up to party at the Copacabana beach, says Hari Ganapathy, co-founder of PickYourTrail. "One tradition is to dress in white on the day," he says. It was popularised by Afro-Brazilian religious groups, who give a spiritual offering of white flowers and candles to the goddess of the sea, Yemanjá. "Also, at midnight, jump seven waves at the sea. The locals believe it brings good luck," he adds. If you stay longer, there are many trails to explore. "You can also head towards Ilha Grande, an island with beaches and hillsides concealed in lush tropical forests," says Ashish Dhruva, vice president, ClearTrip Further, Ganapathy adds that "Rio is also the place to go to for a gastronomic experience." The Pão de

queijo, made of tapioca, is an example. Dhurva reccomends the local churrascaria (barbecue restaurants) for meat loversWith Brazil proposing a visa-free regime for Indians, it's time to pack.

POOCH CAFE





PEANUTS







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Solution will appear in The Hindu dated

December 27, 2019.

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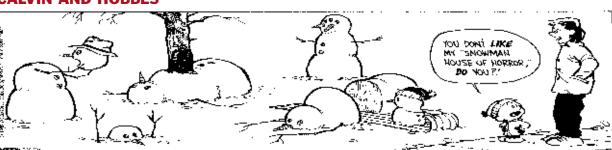
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HAGAR THE HORRIBLE





CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER







WUMO Why am I not surprised? I just paid my mortgage off yesterday

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE









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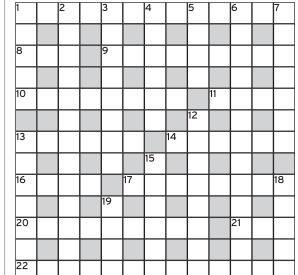
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A A A G A A E G A V O T T E L Y C R A E E I N A H R D E L I C A T E S S E N Picture of Dorian Grav

Boult's return adds teeth to Kiwi attack

Smith looks to get back to form after falling to short deliveries in his last two innings

NZ IN AUSTRALIA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MELBOURNE

New Zealand made two changes on Wednesday for the Boxing Day Test against Australia with fast bowler Trent Boult back from injury and Tom Blundell replacing Jeet Ravel at the top of the

The dangerous Boult missed the first Test in Perth, where his team crashed by 296 runs, with a rib injury that also kept him out of the Kiwis' final clash against England.

But he has worked his way back to fitness, desperate to play in the Black Caps' first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1987, with a crowd of more 75,000 expected on day one.

Blundell likely to open

Williamson also confirmed Blundell, usually a middleorder batsman, would open alongside Tom Latham in place of the out-of-form Ravel.

"He's a positive player and a smart cricketer so it's just trying to adapt to the conditions. It's important he goes out and plays his natural game," Williamson told reporters of Blundell.

New Zealand has had 10 days to recover from its Perth day-night Test thrashing, which saw it being shot out for 166 and 171.

Williamson said they had learned from their mistakes. "Perth was tough and Aus-



Ready for it: Skipper Tim Paine may bat at No. 6 if Australia decides to play five bowlers in the Boxing Day Test. • AFF

tralia are very good and tactically sound," he said after his team were put through their paces in the nets on Christmas Day.

"It's important we learn from some bits of Perth but turn our focus to Melbourne and changing conditions and perhaps not be too reactive to that performance."

Williamson was also keen to ensure his players do not get carried away with playing in front of such a big crowd during one of the most prestigious days on the cricket calendar.

Sense of romance

"I guess there's a sense of romance about being involved in the Boxing Day Test... at the same time it's about removing a little bit of that and bringing the focus back to the cricket and making those improvements we need to."

Meanwhile, Australia could play five specialist bowlers captain Tim Paine said, with the decision being left until the last moment.

The MCG track has been lifeless during the past two Boxing Day Tests, making it hard to take 20 wickets, although a Sheffield Shield match there this month was abandoned due to a dangerous pitch.

With this in mind, Paine

said a decision would only be made after a late inspection.

But one scenario could be a five-pronged attack, in which Queensland seamer Michael Neser is likely to makes his debut.

"We'll find out tomorrow. The wicket is a bit unknown... but we've got a plan in place for both scenarios (with five bowlers or without)," Paine told reporters on Wednesday.

If they go down this route on Thursday, Neser is set to line-up alongside Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon, with James Pattinson replacing the injured Josh Hazlewood.

Travis Head is expected to be the fall guy, with wicketkeeper Paine moving up the batting order to six.

Good record

Australia heads into the Test on the back of three wins at home this summer - two against Pakistan before its 296-run thrashing of New Zealand.

Marnus Labuschagne has its star batsman, smashing his third century in a row at Perth before a second-innings 50.

In contrast Steve Smith, its hero during the Ashes against England this year, has managed only 43 and 16 in his last two innings, out twice to short balls from Neil

"I've been facing a fair bit of short stuff in the nets because I'm expecting a bit (in

Selectors' input forces Gujarat to not play Bumrah in Ranji match

Don't make him bowl extended spells was the request

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Jasprit Bumrah was expected to test his match fitness in the Ranji Trophy game between Kerala and Gujarat that got underway at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium here on Wednesday. That was not

Now, according to sources, the India spearhead would be playing "some cricket" before the T20I series against Sri Lanka, which begins at Guwahati on January 5.

It was widely reported that Bumrah, who had been out of action for the last three months because of his back injury, would be playing against Kerala, but the Gujarat team



Game time: Jasprit Bumrah is expected to play 'some cricket' before joining the Men in Blue for the T20I series against Sri Lanka. • FILE РНОТО: К.R. DEEPAK

management wasn't happy with the National selectors' request that he should not be made to bowl extended spells.

"We felt that making him bowl just six overs per day would have helped neither him nor us," said a source in the Gujarat team.

"He, of course, would have been an asset for us in this match, and it was a tough decision to take."

Stokes rejoins **England team**



Ben Stokes. ■AP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

All-rounder Ben Stokes practised with the England team on Wednesday ahead of the first Test against South Africa, starting at SuperSport Park on Thursday.

A statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board said that Stokes' father, Ged, remained in intensive care in a Johannesburg hospital but had responded positively to treatment and was in a stable condition.

Ged Stokes, who had travelled to South Africa to watch the cricket, was admitted to hospital on Monday with what was described as a serious illness. Ben missed practice on Tuesday to be at his father's bedside.

The statement said the Stokes family thanked people for their support of the family and the medical practitioners who had treated Ged.

Everybody loves MS!

The International Cricket Council (ICC) decided to leave it to the fans to pick their favourite captain of the decade. And the fans made it clear -Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The veteran Indian wicketkeeper, who retired from Test cricket in 2014 and relinquished captaincy in limited-overs cricket in 2017, has remained the undisputed leader of his IPL side Chennai Super Kings. "Fav Captain Fav WK Fav player One man @msdhoni!" said one fan. "MS DHONI all the way... the best-ever Indian

captain and one of the best

in world cricket..." said another. The two ICC trophies that

India won in the decade came under Dhoni's captaincy – ICC World Cup in 2011 and the Champions Trophy in 2013. "If he had been made

captain for time-being for WC2019, we could have won it for 3rd time," said one fan.

Dhoni also found some support from across the border. "MS Dhoni #Love and #respect from Pakistan," said a fan. While other mentions were a minority, it was still there. Some said that Dhoni should be the best captain for ODIs, Rohit for T20Is and Kohli for Tests.



M.S. Dhoni... captain par excellence. • FILE РНОТО

Ganguly won my heart, says Saqlain



Sourav Ganguly. • AFP

NEW DELHI

Pakistan spin legend Saqlain Mushtag hailed former India captain Sourav Ganguly on his current role as president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The two have faced each other a few times on the pitch and Saqlain shared an interesting anecdote about Ganguly from their playing days.

"When India was touring England, I was playing for Sussex. They had a three-day practice match in Sussex and Sourav (Ganguly) was not playing that match. Sussex won the toss and decided to bat," Saqlain said in a video on You-

"I think this happened in 2005-06. I had undergone surgery on both knees and was bedridden for 36-37 weeks. I was both

down and depressed. "I was making a comeback in that post-surgery period and Sourav had come to watch the match. When Sussex was batting, Sourav had seen me from the balcony. I did not see him because our dressing room was facing the other

direction. "Ganguly then came to our dressing room and offered me a cup of coffee and enquired about my

"Then we just started talking. He sat with me for 40 minutes and ended up winning my heart."

Saqlain said that Ganguly was a great captain for

"Ganguly had done a tremendous job captaining India and I am sure he will go a long way in taking cricket forward in his country as the BCCI presi-

South Africa hopes to end year on a high The home team is short of experience, especially in the batting department

ENGLAND IN SA

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

South Africa will seek a happy ending to what has been a miserable year when it plays England in the first match of a World Test Championship series, starting here on Thursday.

Fortress

South Africa will be playing at a ground which has been its fortress - winning 19 of the 24 Tests.

England, though, has bucked the trend, being involved in four of the five matches at the ground which have not ended in victory for South Africa – a win, albeit in contrived circumstances, and three draws.

South Africa has not vanquished England in a home series since 1999-2000.

The team is short of experience, especially in batting, while the bowling stocks



Longevity: James Anderson is set to become the second Englishman after Cook to appear in 150 Tests. • STU FORSTER/GETTY IMAGES

have been hit by injuries and the decision of several good players to take up Kolpak contracts in England.

Meanwhile, James Anderson is set to become only the second England player after Alastair Cook to appear in 150 Test matches. Having recovered from a calf injury, he will look to improve on a modest Test record in South Africa – 25 wickets in eight matches at 39.92.

The likely teams:

South Africa: Faf du Plessis (Capt.), Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Zubayr Hamza, Rassie van der Dussen, Quinton de Kock (wk), Dwaine Pretorius or Andile Phehlukwavo, Vernon Philander, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje.

England: Joe Root (Capt.), Rory Burns, Dom Sibley, Joe Denly, Ben Stokes, Ollie Pope, Jos Buttler (wk), Chris Woakes or Sam Curran or Jack Leach, Jofra Archer, Stuart Broad, James An-

Williams helps ATK beat BFC for the first time

The Kolkata side now shares the top spot with FC Goa

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA

David Williams' spectacular finish, early on in the second half, proved the difference as host ATK prevailed over defending champion Bengaluru FC by a solitary goal in their ISL contest at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Wednesday.

The Australian's goal also

enabled ATK beat Bengaluru for the first time in the league and saw the Kolkata side share the top spot with FC Goa (18 points) though it has played one match more.

In the opening half, ATK had the better of the exchanges as it came up with quite a few moves.

It had its first opportunity in the second minute when Williams sent a perfect lob to fellow striker Roy Krishna.

The latter, who had broken free of the Bengaluru defence, was ruled on-side but the Fijian forward made the mistake of running too deep.

ATK continued to make inroads and had another chance in the 17th minute when Jayesh Rane was set up inside the Bengaluru box by another chip from Williams. But the former failed to beat BFC goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.



Joy unbound: David Williams' goal proved the difference for ATK against BFC. • RAJEEV BHATT

The host's resolve to find the target paid off immediately after the break when Rane made a vital interception and set up Williams. It was Krishna who started the move when his pass, meant for Williams, reached the Bengaluru defender Rahul

Rane's contribution

Even before Bheke could clear, Rane took possession of the ball and released Williams on the right with a diagonal pass. The Australian unleashed a powerful angular drive that found its way past the far post, beating Sandhu's desperate dive.

Bengaluru had a chance to equalise at the hour-mark but Dimas Morgado's volley, off a Harmanjot Khabra cross, went wide.

Though Bengaluru coach Carles Cuadrat brought in fresh legs in attack, introducing Ashique Kuruniyan and Thongkhosiem Haokip midway through the second half, the visitors failed to alter the scoreline.

The result: ATK 1 (David Williams 47) bt Bengaluru FC 0.

2020 Sportstar ACES Awards

Readers will have a chance to pick their favourites for the 10 Popular Choice Awards. The top two contenders from each category, based on popular vote, will be sent to a jury, which will decide the winner

SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR (INDIVIDUAL SPORTS)

THE NOMINEES



VINESH PHOGAT

Compound archer V. Jyothi Surekha cornered a rare double at the World Championships in 's- Hertogenbosch, Netherlands, by securing bronze medals in the individual and women's team events. The 23-year-old joined hands with Muskan Kirar and Raj Kaur to help India beat Yesim Bostan, Gizem Elmaagacli and Ipek Tomruk of Turkey in the team bronze medal match. Later, she defeated World No. 2 Yesim to claim the individual bronze, as well.

V. JYOTHI SUREKHA

(ARCHERY)

(WRESTLING) Vinesh Phogat's double delight

after securing an Olympic quota place and her maiden World Championships medal a bronze, in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, was the outcome of her sheer determination. The 25-year-old, who switched from 50kg to 53kg earlier this year, won gold medals at the Grand Prix of Spain, the Yasar Dogu event in Turkey and the Poland Open, plus a bronze at the Asian Championships. Phogat's World Championships medal made her the fifth Indian woman to do so, joining her cousins Geeta and Babita to form a unique family club of Worlds medallists.



knees, life and family.

India, and will emulate that success as BCCI president.

dent. All the best to him."



APURVI CHANDELA (SHOOTING)

Apurvi Chandela won gold medals in the individual 10m air rifle event at the Munich and Delhi ISSF World Cups and the mixed team event (with Deepak Kumar) at Rio de Janeiro. Apurvi, who has won a quota place for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, won a silver medal in the mixed team event with the same partner in Munich. Chandela also combined with Elavenil Valarivan and Anjum Moudgil to land the women's team silver at the Asian Championships in Doha.

To vote, log on to https://sportstar.thehindu.com/aces-awards

Late start due to solar eclipse

The solar eclipse on Thursday morning has pushed the start of the second day's play of most of the Ranji Trophy matches.

The Tamil Nadu-Madhya Pradesh game at Indore, being telecast live on Star Sports, will start at 11.30 a.m. The first session will last till 1 p.m. while the second and third sessions will be from 1.40 to 3.10 p.m. and 3.30 to 5.30 p.m. There will be only 75 overs during the day.

The Karnataka Himachal Pradesh match at Mysuru will begin at 11.15 a.m. (Revised timings: Morning: 11.15 to 12.00; Post lunch: 12.40 to 15.10; Post tea: 15.30 to

The other Ranji matches, too, will start late following a communication from the BCCI.

TV PICKS

Australia v New Zealand: 2nd Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 5 a.m. NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 6.30 & 9 a.m. **Ranji Trophy:** Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m. I-League: DSport, 12 p.m.

Big Bash League: Sony Ten 3 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m. **South Africa v England:** 1st Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 1.30 **Premier League:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 6 p.m. onwards;

SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 8.30 p.m. onwards ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Hafeez suspended from bowling in all ECB competitions

Pakistan and Middlesex all-rounder Mohammad from bowling in all English cricket's domestic competition after his action was found to be illegal following an independent bowling-action assessment. Hafeez, who had signed on mid-season as a replacement for AB de Villiers, had his action reported on August 30 after the T20 Blast match in Taunton between Somerset and Middlesex following which he underwent independent assessment at Loughborough University. IANS



Jorge Jesus to stay on as Flamengo boss

Flamengo head coach Jorge Jesus has confirmed that he will see out his contract with the Rio de Janeiro club amid reports linking him with a return to Europe. Jesus guided Flamengo to the Brazilian Serie A and Copa Libertadores titles in 2019, less than six months after taking charge of the Rio de Janeiro club, reports Xinhua news agency. "I'm staying. I have a contract and I'm going to honour it. I'm going back to Brazil on January 24," the 65-year-old told reporters in Lisbon, where he arrived on Tuesday to begin a monthlong vacation in his homeland. IANS

Mandzukic to join Qatari side Al Duhail

Former Croatian forward Mario Mandzukic has left Italian giants Juventus to join Oatari side Al Duhail. Juventus is yet to confirm the move, but a post on the Qatari club's official Twitter account showed Mandzukic putting pen to paper on his new contract. IANS

Dhawan's unbeaten ton props up Delhi

Hyderabad bowlers make good use of the conditions to rattle the host

RAKESH RAO

Shikhar Dhawan singlehandedly wrested the initiative from Hyderabad with an unbeaten 137 and placed Delhi in a position of comfort on a cold and breezy opening day of their Ranji Trophy match at the Ferozeshah Kotla ground here.

Tottering at 128 for five, Delhi recovered to 269 for six at stumps. Dhawan, who hit two sixes and 19 boundaries, stitched two half-century stands in the second half of the day..

Early strikes

Put in, after bad light forced a one-hour delay to the start, Delhi struggled in conditions that assisted swing bowling. After Siraj Mohammad sent back opener Kunal Chandela and Dhruv Shorey with just four runs on the board, Dhawan was constantly engaged in the repair job for the rest of the day, with the other batsmen playing second

In fact, had medium pacer Ravi Kiran been a shade less unlucky, Hyderabad would have ended the day in a better position.

He managed to 'dismiss' Nitish Rana and Dhawan, on



Captain's knock: Shikhar Dhawan led from the front with a disciplined innings to bail Delhi out after a stuttering start. ■R.V. MOORTHY

14 and 67 respectively, but off no-balls. In between, he had to leave the field after being hurt in his attempt to take a return catch offered by Ionty Sidhu.

On this day, Dhawan's astute batting sense pushed into the background the lack of application or poor strokeselection of some of his young teammates.

He saw off the difficult first session and played far more freely in the second. He curbed his flamboyance and refrained from driving away from the body.

In fact, Dhawan moved from 69 to 110 off just 29 balls, hitting two sixes and five boundaries in the pro-

The over before tea produced 16 runs as Dhawan reached his century with a couple and then scored nine more runs in celebration.

Importantly, what kept Hyderabad at bay were the useful, two-digit partnerships that all added up to help Delhi breath a bit easy.

Dhawan added 45 with Rana, 51 with Jonty Sidhu, 84 with Anuj Rawat and another unbeaten 57 with Kunwar Bidhuri until bad light halted play 51 minutes before rescheduled close.

Later, former cricketer Sunil Chaturvedi was honoured to mark his 100 First Class match as a Match Referee. Dhawan, Ishant Sharma and Hyderabad skipper Tanmay Agarwal were among those felicitated who Chaturvedi.

The scores:

Delhi -1st innings: Kunal Chandela c Sumanth b Siraj 1, Shikhar Dhawan (batting) 137, Dhruv Shorey lbw b Siraj O, Nitish Rana c Sumanth b Milind 25, Jonty Sidhu lbw b Mehdi 15, Lalit Yadav c Mehdi 19. Anui Rawat lbw b Mehdi 29, Kunwar Bidhuri (batting) 22; Extras (b-4, lb-12, nb-4, w-1) 21; Total (for six wkts. in 66 overs): 269.

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-4, 3-49, 4-100, 5-128, 6-212.

Hyderabad bowling: Siraj 16-2-60-2, Kiran 14.5-2-57-0, Milind 13-1-34-1, Mehdi 17.1-2-61-3, Thyagrajan 4-1-25-0, Chaitanya 1-0-16-0. Toss: Hyderabad.

RANJI SCORES: ROUND 3, DAY 1

GROUP A

At Kolkata: Bengal 241/4 in 83 overs (Abhishek Raman 110 batting, Manoj Tiwary 46) vs

Toss: Andhra. New Delhi: Delhi 269/6 in 66 overs (Shikhar Dhawan 137

batting) vs Hyderabad. Toss: Hyderabad Surat: Gujarat 127 in 38 overs (Jalaj Saxena 5/26) & 1/0 in

one over vs Kerala 70 in 35.5 overs (Roosh Kalaria 4/20). Toss: Kerala. Nagpur: Vidarbha 196/6 in 67

overs (Ganesh Satish 88 batting) vs Punjab. Toss: Puniab.

GROUP B

Mysore: Karnataka 166 in 67.2 overs (Karun Nair 81, Kanwar Abhinay 5/37) vs Himachal 29/3 in 17 Toss: Karnataka

Indore: Tamil Nadu 149 in 59 overs (V. Ganga Sridhar Raju 43, B. Aparajith 61 n.o., Ishwar Pandey

6/26) vs Madhva Pradesh 56/3 in 20 overs.

Toss: MP. Mumbai: Mumbai 114 in 28.3

overs (T. Pradeep 6/37) vs Railwavs 116/5 in 37 overs (Arindam Ghosh 52 batting) Toss: Railways.

Rajkot: Saurashtra 322/8 in 90 overs (Harvik Desai 54, Cheteshwar Pujara 57, Sheldon Jackson 57, Saurabh Kumar 4/ 79) vs Uttar Pradesh. Toss: Saurashtra.

59/1 in 18 overs vs Assam

GROUP C Jammu: Jammu & Kashmir

Toss: Assam.

Jamshedpur: Haryana 274/6 in 87 overs (Ankit Kumar 53, Chaitanya Bishnoi 75 retd. hurt, Shivam Chauhan 53, Harshal Patel 44 batting) vs Jhark-

Toss: Haryana. Pune: Maharashtra 238/6 in 78 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 108, Vishant More 49 batting, Veer Pratap Singh 4/56) vs Chhat-

Toss: Maharashtra. Cuttack: Uttarakhand 117 in 48.4 overs (Basant Mohanty 6/

17) vs Odisha 98/3 in 39 overs. Toss: Odisha Delhi: Tripura 126 in 48.4 overs (Nirupam Sen 54, Diwesh

> Services 23/2 in 8 Toss: Services. PLATE Dibrugarh: Manipur 196 in 87 overs (Al Bashid Muhammed

40, K. Priyojit 43,

Pathania 5/36) vs

Karkir Taye 4/25) vs Arunachal Pradesh 10/0 in 4 overs.

Toss: Arunachal Pradesh.

Patna: Bihar 260/5 in 85 overs (Babul Kumar 131 batting, Shasheem Rathour 69) vs Goa

Kolkata: Mizoram 73 in 27.4 overs (Sagar Udeshi 4/6) vs Pondicherry 286/3 in 58 overs (Paras Dogra 135 batting, K.B. Arun Karthick 86 batting).

Toss: Pondicherry. Bhubaneswar: Sikkim 274 in 74.4 overs (Iqbal Abdulla 94)

vs Nagaland 45/1 in 11 overs. Toss: Nagaland.

Dinda suspended for misconduct

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA

Bengal veteran Ashoke Dinda was the notable absentee in the Bengal team that took field against Andhra in the Ranji Trophy match here on Wednesday. Dinda, who has claimed 420 wickets from 116 First Class matches, was dropped from the team on disciplinary grounds. The veteran was hauled up for "misconduct" against the team bowling coach Ranadeb Bose during an incident in the dressing room after the home side had its pre-match practice on Tuesday.

Dinda had a run-in with the team management a

few months back when he was dropped from the Bengal team announced for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. According to the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) officials, the player this time abused Bose, apparently unhappy with the coach having a private chat with captain

Abhimanyu Easwaran. After the incident was reported officially, the CAB convened a meeting to hear Dinda's "misconduct" and decided to axe the player on disciplinary grounds. According to sources, CAB officials approached Dinda and asked him to apologise after the incident but the player remained adamant.

"We have taken a decision and there will be no change during the match. The CAB had given him a chance to apologise but he didn't," said the CAB joint secretary Debabrata

"This is a very unfortunate that Dinda is not playing. He was the right choice for this kind of wicket (at Eden Gardens). He has been suspended on disciplinary grounds and CAB will be taking a decision on his future. For the time-being this will give a good opportunity to the youngsters in the team to prove their worth," Bengal's coach-cum-mentor Arun Lal said.



Ashoke Dinda... in the line of fire FILE PHOTO: PRASHANT NAKWE

AIFF invites clubs for Futsal Club Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The All India Football Federation has invited clubs from the Indian Super League, I-League and Second Division League to confirm their participation in the inaugural edition of AIFF Futsal Club Championship.

In a letter to all the clubs, AIFF General Secretary wrote: "Futsal is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, and has been increasing popularity with the AFC Member Associations as well.

"Futsal is also seen as a complementing sport with football for player development. There could be an opportunity for the champion club of this tournament to represent India for the subsequent AFC Futsal Club Championship." Das said that the AIFF is

planning to start the tournament in July/August next year. "The players could be from the Senior, Reserve or Under 18 teams of your Club," Das said in the letter.

The decision comes after the AIFF Executive Committee meeting on December 10, which decided to introduce a Futsal Club Championship in the calendar.

U-19 WC: Ijaz wants Naseem to join squad

Pakistan under-19 head coach Ijaz Ahmed wants Naseem Shah to join the World Cup squad as he is the first-choice bowler for the side.

"He is important not just because he played Test cricket, but he was always the first-choice bowler for us in the World Cup. He was named in the squad and even the PCB chairman had given him the clearance. Having him will give our squad a major boost and having him around us will motivate the other boys," ESPNcricinfo quoted Ijaz as saving.

Vardy dilemma for Leicester

Champion-elect Liverpool lies in wait

PREMIER LEAGUE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Leicester City faces runaway Premier League leader Liverpool on Boxing Day knowing its own title hopes are very much in the balance.

Thursday's match will see the second-placed Foxes, the shock 2015/16 champions, kick off 10 points adrift of Liverpool, which will arrive in the East Midlands fresh from winning a maiden Club World Cup title following a 1-0 victory over Brazilian side Flamengo in Qatar.

One of the more remarkable statistics in English football is that it is nearly 30 years since Liverpool was last crowned domestic champion in what was then the First Division.

But Premier League silverware is now in sight following a successful 2019 that has also seen Liverpool take the Champions League and UE-FA Super Cup trophies back to Anfield as well as the Club World Cup.

One of the enduring peculiarities of the English game that has not changed, however, is the packed programme of matches that take place during the Christmas and New Year holiday period. The congested schedule is again causing headaches for managers, with Foxes boss Brendan Rodgers saying the fixture list is a "nonsense."

Leicester kicks off against Liverpool on Thursday before it plays West Ham on Saturday.

'Game about money now' It then completes four games in 10 days with a trip to Newcastle on New Year's Day, be-



Brendan Rodgers wonders how often he can field Jamie Vardy, the league's leading scorer so far this season. •AP

fore hosting Wigan in the FA Cup on January 4.

This presents Rodgers with a problem about how often to field Jamie Vardy, the league's leading scorer so far this season, given the striker is now aged 32.

"The game is about money now. You can't say it's about the welfare of players," insisted Rodgers, himself a former Liverpool manager who added that Vardy, for all he has scored 16 goals this term, had "no chance" of being involved throughout the festive

This season sees the Premier League experimenting with a 'winter break' that will see all teams get a weekend off in February.

But that pales into insignificance compared to the Bundesliga's long-established winter break.

The German top-flight

closes down for several weeks in December and January, with Rodgers saying the English break was a "let's pretend" version.

Liverpool will be without Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain after the midfielder suffered an ankle injury against Flamengo as Jurgen Klopp's side, unbeaten in the Premier League this season, bid to go 13 points clear and all but end the title-race before by the halfway stage.

Fourth-placed Chelsea, fresh from a 2-0 win away to Tottenham Hotspur marred by allegation of racist abuse, is at home to Southampton while Spurs will be without the suspended Son Heungmin for the visit of Brighton.

Mikel Arteta's reign as Arsenal manager starts away to Bournemouth, while new Everton boss Carlo Ancelotti is in charge at home to Burnley.

Chelsea wants to keep Willian faith against Saints AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Willian's performance at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium last weekend highlighted just why Frank Lampard is keen to see the Brazilian's fu-

ture at Chelsea resolved. While much of the focus this season has been trained on the outstanding contribution of the youngsters in Blues manager Lampard's squad, Willian's performances on the right of a front three have been consistently

excellent. The winger appeared to have lost his way in recent seasons, particularly last term when he struggled for consistency under Maurizio Sarri and appeared in danger of leaving the London club.

This campaign has been different, though, and Lampard will hope the player can inspire a return to home form when Southampton visits Stamford Bridge on Thursday following Chelsea's impressive 2-0 defeat of Jose Mourinho's Spurs.

Season of transition

Willian was certainly the stand-out performer in a display Lampard admitted was probably his side's best of the season after a worrying run of form that had brought four defeats in the previous five Premier League games, included home losses to Bournemouth and West

There were always going to be frustrating periods for Lampard and his players in what is a season of transition for Chelsea, which is nevertheless now fourth in the Premier League.

The task of bedding in a number of graduates from the club's academy against

No more doubts: Willian has maintained impressively high levels, appearing rejuvenated under

the backdrop of the pre-season transfer embargo has inevitably presented challenges.

Willian, though, has main-

the club's new manager Frank Lampard. • AFP

tained impressively high levels, appearing rejuvenated under the club's new manager. Lampard appears to have found the key to drawing the

best out of the 31-year-old whose work on the right has contributed to striker Tammy Abraham making such a significant impact in his breakthrough season at west London club Chelsea. Willian's work ethic had

been questioned previously,

with his failure to track back and support his full-back at highlighted times This time around, there can be no doubt about his

willingness to put in the hard vards And he has strengthened his hand in his contract neseeks a new deal that will keep him at Chelsea beyond the end of this season.

Willian's existing deal runs out at the end of the current campaign, along with those of fellow thirtysomethings Pedro and Olivier Giroud.

With Chelsea's two-window transfer ban having been halved, leaving the club to bring in new recruits next month, Giroud is likely to leave in a bid to find the regular football he believes will boost his chances of being a member of hosts Franc-

e's squad for Euro 2020. Pedro has been reduced to a fringe player and is also expected to move on at the end of the season.

Possible exception

Willian, though, is a different matter and while Chelsea is notoriously reluctant to offer extended deals to players over the age of 30, the Brazilian gotiations with the club as he could become an exception.

For his part, Lampard has made it clear he wants the South American to stay.

And while the manager has no intention of shifting his policy of promoting young players, he knows the value of experience. "He's a very important

member of the club and of course I want it to be done but obviously both sides have to be happy for that," said Lampard when asked last month about Willian's future.

Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta faces a late fitness test following a hamstring problem sustained at Spurs.

Meanwhile the Saints, flirting with the relegation zone, could be without Shane Long for the whole of the busy Christmas programme because of a knee injury the striker suffered during last week's win at Aston Villa.

Long run: Leander Paes, who is the most successful doubles player in the history of Davis Cup with 44 wins, recently dropped out of top-100 for the first time in 19 years. • REUTERS

Leander Paes to retire in 2020

Prepares for one last roar in a farewell year

TENNIS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indian tennis icon Leander Paes on Wednesday announced that he will bring the curtains down on his illustrious career in 2020, which will be his farewell season on the Pro-circuit.

His cupboard overflowing with hundreds of trophies, that include 18 Grand Slam doubles titles, the 46-year-old has been enduring a lean patch for some time.

Paes, who is the most successful doubles player in the history of Davis Cup with 44 wins, recently dropped out of top-100 for the first time in 19 years.

"I want to announce 2020 as my farewell year as a pro tennis player," Paes wrote in a statement, which he posted on his twitter handle.

'Select tournaments'

"I am looking forward to the 2020 tennis calendar where I will be playing a few select tournaments, travelling with my team and celebrating with all my friends and fans around the world," the statement read further.

"It is all of you who have inspired me to become me and I want to take this year to say "Thank You" to you."

Paes is targeting to be the only tennis player in the his-

It is all of you who have inspired me to become me and I want to take this year to say "Thank You" to you.

tory of the sport to play eight successive Olympics.

In a career spanning nearly three decades, during which he also overcame a brain tumour, Tokyo Olympic Games (provided he qualifies) is expected to be his swansong.

He is the only tennis player from the country to have won a singles Olympic medal as he grabbed a historic bronze at the 1996 Atlanta Games, beating Argentina's Fernando Meligeni in the play-off.

With compatriot Mahesh Bhupathi, he created an awe-inspiring partnership during which they dominated the circuit in late 1990s, winning three Grand Slam titles together and claiming the number one rank.

In their partnership, they also weaved a a record 24-match unbeaten streak before splitting as a team due to difference of opinion.

India's Davis Cup hero thanked his parents Dr Vece Paes and Jennifer, both of whom represented India at the highest level, for giving him sports genes.

"I want to thank my parents for their genetics, guidance, discipline, environ-

ment they created and unconditional love they've always shown me throughout my life, I would not be who I am without your unstinting support and belief in me, I love you."

He also thanked his two elder sisters and daughter Aiana.

Favourite memories

Paes asked fans to share their favourite memories of him over the years using #one last roar.

"2020 is going to be an emotional one and I look forward to seeing all of you out there rolling with me.

"It has been an honour being your lionheart," he concluded.

Committed to host C'wealth shooting event before 2022 CWG: NRAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The National Rifle Association of India has expressed its commitment to host a separate Commonwealth Shooting Championships in 2022 and endorsed the Indian Olympic Association's idea of adding medals won in that event to the Birmingham Games tally.

NRAI president Raninder Singh was part of a recent meeting, held in Munich on December 5, between the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) and Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF). The meeting had discussed ways to make up for the sport's exclusion from the roster of the 2022 Birmingham Games.

Having got an encouraging response to its proposal to host a separate shooting event just before the 2022 CWG, Raninder wrote to IOA president Narinder Batra, assuring its full commitment to hosting the tournament and seeking the apex body's cooperation in helping it submit a "formal proposal" to the CGF.

"The NRAI is willing to host a Commonwealth Shooting Event in India at an appropriate venue commencing on the 14th of March 2022, to coincide with the occasion of Com-

monwealth Day," Raninder said in the letter.

Brief outline

Making a brief outline of the proposal, he wrote, "...this offer is made to the CGF... that upon completion of its regulatory and administrative review process, the competent authority of CGF accords its approval & acceptance to medals awarded at this proposed event being accorded equal protocol as any medals won by a competing nation at the main event conducted later in the Birmingham CWG.

"In essence, these medals would be treated in nature as an opening balance for each competing nation to build upon by competing in those other events in Birmingham. Thus affording nations the capability to maximise their medal potential at the CWG, an issue central & so established by the IOA to the CGF," he added.

The NRAI chief said the organising committee of the Birmingham CWG will be, in no way, involved in financing the shooting tournament in India, even though by implication (of medals won there are proposed to be added to the final tally) may be considered a part or extension of the 2022 CWG.

Abhishek-Yashaswini duo finishes on top

Haryana shooters on the prowl in mixed air pistol, clinch all three gold



Delightful day: The mixed air pistol medallists — Harshada Nithave and Aniket (silver), Abhishek Verma and Yashaswini Deswal (gold), and Deepak Sharma and Annu Raj Singh (bronze). *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SHOOTING

SPORTS BUREAU

Haryana dominated the mixed air pistol competition, winning all the three gold medals in the 63rd National shooting championship on Wednesday.

The Olympic quota winners Abhishek Verma and Yashaswini Singh Deswal bagged the gold, beating Harshada Nithave and Ankiet of Maharashtra 16-10.

Problem of plenty

It was a problem of plenty for Haryana as it also had Manu Bhaker, who had won all the four World Cup gold medals this season, with Saurabh Chaudhary. Manu had won the Asian championship gold with Abhishek Verma, and won the World Cup Finals gold as well with Russian Artem Chersounov.

Manu had to, however, be content competing in the junior section of the mixed air pistol, and clinched the gold with Sarabjot Singh. The duo defeated Punjab's Khushseerat and Arshdeep Banga 16-8.

Manu had earlier won the air pistol gold medals in both the women's and junior sections of the National championship, apart from the silver in the 25-metre sports

pistol and the junior gold. Haryana completed its

domination as Shiva Narwal and Shikha claimed the youth gold in mixed air pistol, beating Maharashtra's Ajinkya Chavan and Janhavi Deshmukh 16-10.

Anjum dominates again

In the women's rifle 3-position event, Anjum Moudgil continued her domination as she beat Gaayathri Nithyanandam to the gold by a 2.6 point margin after topping qualification with 1172. Nischal won the bronze, ahead of Bhakti Bhaskar Khamkar, Kajal Saini, Shriyanka Sadangi, Raj Chaudhary and Megh-



The final three: Anjum Moudgil, flanked by Gaayathri
Nithyanandam and Nischal, the women's rifle 3-position
medallists. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The other leading shooters like Elizabeth Susan Koshy (1159) and World Cup silver medallist Lajja Gauswami (1157) failed to make it to the final.

Nischal went on to win the junior gold for Haryana, pipping Bengal's Ayushi Podder by 0.8 point.

The results:

10m mixed air pistol: 1. Haryana (Abhishek Verma, Yashaswini Singh Deswal) 16 (393, 578); 2. Maharashtra (Harshada Nithave, Aniket) 10 (387, 568); 3. Air India (Deepak Sharma, Annu Raj Singh) 16 (383, 575); 4. SSB (Yogita, Vikram) 10 (380, 571). Juniors: 1. Haryana (Manu Bhaker, Sarabjot Singh) 16 (381, 577); 2. Punjab (Khushseerat, Arshdeep Banga) 8 (383, 563);

3. Uttar Pradesh (Sharvan Kumar, Himanshi) 16 (379, 567); 4. Rajasthan (Aadhya, Aman) 12 (380, 557).

Youth: 1. Haryana (Shiva Nar-

wal, Shikha) 16 (383, 568); 2. Maharashtra (Ajinkya Chavan, Janhavi Deshmukh) 10 (381, 556); 3. Uttar Pradesh (Monu Kumar, Devanshi) 16 (376, 575); 4. Punjab (Rajkanwar, Navdeep Kaur) 6 (374, 556).

50m rifle 3-position: Women: 1. Anjum Moudgil 449.9 (1172);

2. Gaayathri Nithyanandam 447.3 (1161); 3. Nischal 434.3 (1160); **Team**: 1. Punjab 3467; 2. Haryana 3465; 3. Maharashtra 3462.

Juniors: 1. Nischal 451.9 (1160); 2. Ayushi Podder 451.1 (1159); 3. Prasiddhi 436.1 (1158); **Team:** 1. Madhya Pradesh 3446; 2. Maharashtra 3414; 3. Punjab 3413.

BCB firm on not playing Tests in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA

Refusing to budge from its stand, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said it was ready to play only T20 Internationals in Pakistan, preferring a neutral venue for the planned Test series. The message was conveyed by BCB chief executive Nizamuddin Chowdhury on Tuesday.

His comments come a day after Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Ehsan Mani asserted that there was "absolutely no doubt" they would play all home series in the country.

"We stand firm on our ground. We only want to play T20Is in Pakistan. The stakeholders related to the series do not want us to play longer-version cricket in Pakistan," Nizamuddin was quoted by *The Daily Star.* "Actually, we have no other option here. We can play the T20Is but if we are to play Tests then it should be in a neutral venue."

In an e-mail to the BCB, Mani asked the Bangladesh Board to give "acceptable reasons" for refusing to send its team to Pakistan for the two matches of the ICC World Test Championship, scheduled from January 18, 2020.

Real Kashmir all set for its first home game this season

Faces holder Chennai City which has made a slow start



Ready to roll: Real Kashmir coach David Robertson, centre, will be keen to upstage Akbar Nawas' Chennai City FC. •PTI

I-LEAGUE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Real Kashmir FC takes on defending champion Chennai City FC in its first I-League home match of the season here on Thursday in the first big sporting event in the valley since it became a Union Territory.

Two draws

Real Kashmir has played only two matches this season, both away and ending in draws, against East Bengal and Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU) of Imphal.

The Snow Leopards have let a one-goal advantage slip in the final 13 minutes of both their matches, conceding an equaliser in the 77th and 78th minutes against

East Bengal and TRAU respectively. Although TRAU went 2-1 up against Real Kashmir later, Mason Robertson scored a quick equaliser to snatch a point.

Assessing his team's last outing, Real Kashmir head coach David Robertson said: "In the second-half, TRAU had a go at us and we defended well. We had a great chance when Krizo was one on one with the goalkeeper and we could have killed the game. In football, these things happen. I am proud of my players and we could have scored more."

Mason's impressive outing in Imphal asserted the value he brings to the squad.

His two-goal show featured a clinical finish that went in off the inside of the woodwork for his first and a textbook header that levelled the scores for his second.

Asked about his son's per-

Asked about his son's performance, David Robertson said: "Mason is a valuable player. He is very versatile. We are lucky to have him at Real Kashmir. As a father, I am delighted for him plus it makes it easier to pick your son if he is doing well."

Chennai City, on the other hand, has made a slow start. It has just five points from four games, with the only victory coming against TRAU in its opener at Coimbatore.

Captain Roberto Eslava said: "We have shown intensity, so the points that we have dropped, have not been for the lack of it.

"We have shown this desire (to fight) in every game, and the next against Kashmir won't be any different."

Railways and Kerala women remain unbeaten

Make last-eight stage along with Telangana, Delhi, MP and Punjab

NATL. BASKETBALL

SPORTS BUREAU

Railways and Kerala women reached the quarterfinals, staying unbeaten in their groups in the 70th National basketball championship at the Guru Nanak Dev Stadium on Wednesday.

The two were joined by Telangana and Delhi from Group A while Madhya Pradesh and Punjab qualified from Group B.

The Karnataka women sneaked into the pre-quarterfinals beating Tamil Nadu which failed to win a match. The Maharashtra women, too, made the grade with a win over Madhya Pradesh.

From the lower groups, Chandigarh and Rajasthan entered the pre-quarterfinals.

TN men on a roll

In the men's section, Tamil Nadu maintained its unbeaten record as it outplayed Telangana 95-29. Punjab, which also remained unbeaten, was joined in the quarterfinals by Services, Railways, Karnataka and Uttarakhand.

The Kerala men beat Rajasthan 62-59 to advance to

ge along with

AP and Punjab

the pre-quarterfinals while

Karnataka defeated Harva-

na 97-74, forcing the latter to

compete in the pre-quarter-

finals.

Kerala and Karnataka will meet Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh which progressed to the pre-quarterfinals from the lower groups.

The results:
Men: Punjab 68 (Amritpal Singh 16, Arshpreet Singh 12)

bt Haryana 37.
Karnataka 97 (Aravind Arumugam 22, Issac Thomas 18, Abhishek Gowda 13, Jitendra Singh 12, Anil Kumar 11, S. Karthikeyan 11, M. Harish 10) bt Haryana 74 (Yudhvir Singh 24, Abhishek 18, Vikas Kumar 14).

31, Joginder Singh 23, Hemanth Sheoran 15, Mahipal Singh 11) bt Railways 81 (Gagandeep Singh 18, Rajan Sharma 16, Lovneet Singh 13). **Women:** Delhi 73 (Nishita Sa-

Services 64 (Nikhil Kumar

barwal 13, Aparna Saini 13, Sushanthika Chakraborty 12) bt Chhattisgarh 44 (Sangeetha Kaur 23). Telangana 69 (Divya 31, Gulbasha Ali 18) bt Maharash-

tra 39 (Shreya Dekhdar 17).

Karnataka 64 (Lopamudra Timmaiah 18, varsha Nandini 17, Vinaya Joseph 13, Anusha 10) bt Tamil Nadu 57 (S. Rajeshwari 23). Kerala 70 (P.S. Jeena 21, P.G.

Anjana 20, Stephy Nixon 12, Kavitha Jose 11) bt Punjab 30 (Anmolpreeth Kaur 12).

Qatar 2022 could be last chance for Messi to win World Cup: Veron

FOOTBALL

IANS

FUZHOU (CHINA)
Former Argentina star mid-

fielder Juan Sebastian Veron says he still believes Qatar 2022 could represent the last chance for compatriot Lionel Messi to win a World Cup trophy. "The 2022 Qatar World Cup may be his (Messi) last chance.

"As the last chance, he will have to see how to reach the goal," Veron told *Xinhua* during his recent China tour.

Being a brand ambassador for the inaugural FISU University World Cup, which was held in Fujian Province between November 21 and Dec. 1, Veron unveiled the trophy for the tournament.

"For me it is a new experience, especially seeing boys and girls who are not going to have the possibility of playing at the FIFA World Cup. "It is an important university championship," said the 44-year-old.

Veron now serves as the chairman of Argentina's Estudiantes de La Plata FC. He successfully persuaded compatriot Javier Mascherano to join the home team after serving out his contract with Chinese Super League side Hebei China Fortune.

"We are good friends. Javier wants to take care of his family," said Veron.

Support for Pochettino
The former Argentina international, who had 73 caps



The missing one: Messi will have to think about how he would reach the goal of winning World Cup, feels Veron. • REUTERS



demand results

for the country, also voiced support for former teammate Mauricio Pochettino, who was replaced by Jose Mourinho as manager of

ham Hotspur last month.

"Football, in a way, is ungrateful.

"For me, Mauricio did a

Premier League side Totten-

great job at Tottenham, but many times they demand results.
" Now it's up to Jose Mou-

"Now it's up to Jose Mourinho, another great coach. Hope he has more luck," he said.

A ND-NDE