

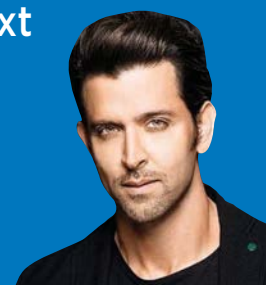
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WINDOWS



Actress Deepika Padukone at the promotion of her film *Chhapaak* in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI

Minor fire at PM's residential complex, house not affected

New Delhi: A minor fire broke inside the residential complex of the Prime Minister, but his residence and office were not affected by it, the PMO said. The fire has been brought under control, the PMO added. "There was a minor fire at 9, Lok Kalyan Marg caused by a short circuit. This was not in PM's residential or office area but in the SPG reception area of the LKM complex," the PMO tweeted. Full report on Page 4

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COUNTERPOINT



Let's spend lavishly tonight... how about onions for dinner?

WEATHER

Max: 11°C
Min: 3°C
RH: 75%
Rainfall: 10%
Forecast: Mostly sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Panchami till 4.03 pm
Star: Satabhisham till 1.27 am (Wednesday)
Varjyam: 6.48 am to 8.34 am
Durmuhurmat: 9.01 am to 9.45 am; 11.01 pm to 11.53 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.13 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.54 AM
MOONSET TODAY 10.19 PM

Fogged-out Delhi sees coldest day in 119 years

500 flights delayed; 6 die as car skids into canal in Greater Noida

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

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Severe cold conditions have been prevailing in most parts of northern India since December 15, and these conditions have further intensified in the last four days, with the maximum temperature dipping down to 8-12 degrees Celsius. Delhi



The mangled remains of a car after it fell into a canal in Greater Noida on Monday. — PTI

has also been witnessing its most unforgiving winter in the past 22 years, with minimum temperatures falling to around 3 degrees Celsius for the past few days. On Saturday, the Safdarjung observatory, whose reading is considered the official marker for Delhi, recorded the season's lowest minimum temperature at 2.4 degrees Celsius. The next day, the average minimum tem-

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Priyanka hits out at Yogi raj: 'No place for revenge'

SREEPARNA CHAKRABARTY
with agency inputs
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I urge our Congress party workers to meet the victims' families and provide all possible assistance

— Rahul Gandhi, Cong leader

the memo said, is "unbefitting of a force that is duty-bound to safeguard and protect citizens' rights".

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Govt picks Gen. Rawat as India's first CDS

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In a historic but long-expected move, Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat was on Monday appointed as India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), who will have the challenging task of synergising the operations of the Army, Air Force and Navy to prepare them for future wars.

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until further orders," said a government statement.

Gen. Rawat was to retire as Chief of the Army Staff on December 31. The government has extended the services of Gen. Rawat till he holds the post of CDS.

Lt. Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane will take charge as Chief of the Army Staff on Tuesday.

The Centre had on Saturday notified the retirement age for the CDS at 65 years. This means Gen. Rawat, who turns 62 in March 2020, can have a tenure of a little over three years as



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Gen. Rawat will be the principal military adviser to the defence minister on tri-services (involving Army, Navy and Air Force) issues.

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The CDS will assign inter-services prioritisation to capital acquisition proposals of the Army, Navy and Air Force based Turn to Page 4

Kerala tops Niti SDG index, Bihar last

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According to 'SDG India Index 2019', Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and

Sikkim have shown maximum improvement, but states like Gujarat have not shown any progress vis-a-vis 2018 rankings.

"Kerala retained its rank as the top state with a score of 70. Chandigarh too maintained its top spot among the UTs with a score of 70.

Himachal Pradesh took the second spot while Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana

shared the third spot, the report said.

Bihar, Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh are the worst performing states in this year's Index for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"The United Nations' SDG target of 2030 can never be met without India... We are fully committed to achieving UN's SDG target," Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said

at the launch of the report.

Speaking at the event, Niti Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar said southern states have done well in health.

"West Bengal (rank 14) has also done well in Niti Aayog's SDG Index 2019, but given the education level (in the state), West Bengal should be in top 3 performing states," Mr Turn to Page 4

Taliban denies rumours, says 'no ceasefire plans' in Afghan

Kabul, Dec. 30: The Taliban on Monday denied agreeing to any ceasefire in Afghanistan after rumours swirled of a potential deal that would see a reduction in fighting after more than 18 years of war.

The statement from the insurgents comes as local and international forces brace for another bloody winter amid renewed US-Taliban talks, after President Donald Trump called off the negotiations earlier this year over insurgent attacks. "In the past few days,

The insurgents have repeatedly stated that any truce will only be ironed out after US troops withdraw from the country

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gested the group was on the verge of announcing some type of temporary truce.

The United States and the Afghan government in Kabul have long called for a ceasefire with the Taliban, including during the year of negotiations between Washington and the militants that were abruptly called off by Mr Trump in September.

However, the insurgents have repeatedly stated that any potential truce will only be ironed out after US troops withdraw from the country. — AFP

Pawar Jr back as Maha deputy CM Uddhav inducts son, 35 others in ministry

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 30

Thirty-six ministers, including senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar and Shiv Sena's Aaditya Thackeray, were sworn in as Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray expanded his Cabinet on Monday. State governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari administered the oath of office and secrecy to 10 Cabinet and four ministers of state (MoS) of the NCP, eight Cabinet and four MoS of the Shiv Sena, and eight Cabinet and two MoS of the Congress at Vidhan Bhavan.

The NCP now leads the council of ministers with a total of 12 Cabinet ministers while the Shiv Sena and Congress have 10 each. Also, Ajit Pawar was sworn in as deputy chief minister, who enjoys the rank of a Cabinet minister. The chief minister and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar were among those present at the swearing-in ceremony.

However, contrary to expectations, the allocations of portfolios did not happen on Monday, with the CM making it clear that it would be done in a day or two. "The Cabinet



Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray greets Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari during the swearing-in ceremony for state Cabinet expansion at Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI

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expansion has been done as per our plans and the allocation of portfolios also be done by tomorrow (Tuesday) or a day after (Wednesday)," he added. The expansion took place more than a month after the Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas

Aghadi (MVA) government took over.

In a major move, the Shiv Sena dropped five ministers who were part of the earlier Devendra Fadnis-led government — Ramdas Kadam, Diwakar Raote, Deepak Kesarkar, Tanaji Sawant and Ravindra Waikar. Instead, it has included new faces such as Anil Parab and Abdul Sattar along with Aaditya Thackeray. The Sena also included allies Shankarrao Gadakh (Krantikari Shetkari Paksha) as a Cabinet minister, and Rajendra Patil Yadravkar

Turn to Page 4

Navy bans use of Facebook, smartphones to deter spying

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

In an attempt to prevent online espionage, the Indian Navy banned its personnel from using Facebook and prohibited the use of smartphones in bases, dockyards and warships.

This directive comes after the Andhra police earlier this month claimed it had busted an espionage racket with links to Pakistan and arrested seven Navy personnel who allegedly passed sensitive information like locations of naval ships and submarines to a Pakistani handler. All the seven sailors had allegedly fallen into a honeytrap.

"A recent case of inimical elements targeting naval personnel over social media to elicit sensitive/operational information is a matter of serious concern necessitating stringent correctives," said an order by the naval headquarters last week. The order had banned the use of Facebook for all personnel. More on Page 3



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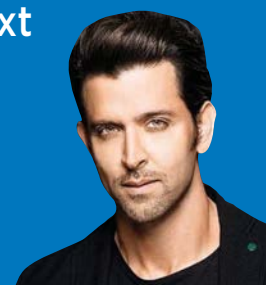
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Shah in Jodhpur

Shah to address rally in Jodhpur on Friday to spread awareness on CAA

Aaditya's induction divides observers

Some say inclusion into Maharashtra Cabinet premature, others feel it'll give him time to learn ropes

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, DEC. 30

One of the prominent names in the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government was his son Aaditya's, who was inducted into the state ministry as a Cabinet minister in his very first term as an MLA. The move proves the fact that the Thackeray scion is expected to play an important and active role in the government.

Political circles are divided over the Shiv Sena's decision to induct Aaditya into the state Cabinet. While some said the move was made too early, some were of the opinion that it would give him enough time for him to understand people's problems and the nitty-gritty of government proceedings.

"Aaditya has a sharp mind and his grasping power is great. He has a clear vision about his development plans and he wants to implement them properly. So, it was a correct decision to give him a chance in the state Cabinet," said a Sena leader.

The 29-year-old won the October 21 Assembly polls with a thumping majority from Mumbai's Worli constituency. A pass out of the Bombay Scottish School in suburban Mahim, Aaditya is a graduate in English Literature from St Xavier's College in south Mumbai and has a law degree from KC

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▶ The state government's decision to ban single-use plastic is partly credited to his anti-plastic campaign.

College. The Maharashtra government's decision to ban single-use plastic is partly credited to his campaign against the widespread use of the material. He also proposed the revival of Mumbai's nightlife by allowing malls and restaurants to be open all night.

His first book of poems, 'My Thoughts in Black and White' was released in 2007 by Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

The Yuva Sena leader is now likely to make his party, which was rooted in the 'sons of the soil' agenda and later embraced the Hindutva ideology, more inclusive and broad-based.

In the run-up to the Assembly election, Aaditya also conducted several roadshows, foot marches and raised issues such as the felling of trees in Aarey Colony and said he wants to make the constituency a 'model of development.'

He also reached out to non-Marathi voters in the constituency to romp home to a big win.



(Above) NCP leader Ajit Pawar being greeted by chief minister Uddhav Thackeray during the swearing-in ceremony for Maharashtra Cabinet expansion at Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai, Monday; Mr Pawar, his wife Sunetra and cousin Supriya Sule at the ceremony. — PTI

'Dada' returns as deputy CM for fourth time

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, DEC. 30

"The chief minister might be from any party like the Congress, BJP or Shiv Sena, but the post of deputy chief minister will remain with Ajit Pawar only..." and similar such comments took social media by storm as the NCP stalwart took oath as deputy chief minister in the Uddhav Thackeray-led government Monday.

This is the fourth time that Ajit Pawar was sworn in as the deputy CM.

Earlier, he was the deputy CM twice during the 15-year reign of the Congress-NCP government from 1999 to 2014 and barely over a month ago, he caused an earthquake in Maharashtra politics by revolting against his party and joining hands with former chief minister Devendra Fadnis of the BJP to form the government in the state.

However, his gamble did not pay off and he had to resign from the post of deputy CM within just three days. Following the formation of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government though, Ajit Pawar was tipped as NCP's obvious choice for the post of deputy CM.

According to sources, the development underlines the clout that Ajit Pawar enjoys within his party. Despite his rebellion, a majority of party MLAs were of the opinion that he should lead the NCP in the legislature.

A tough administrator and an immensely popular face in his Assembly constituency Baramati, Ajit Pawar is also a maverick who doesn't shy away from being on a different page than his party, NCP sources said.

Fondly referred to as Dada, Ajit Pawar cut his teeth in politics at the grass root-level under uncle and mentor Sharad Pawar in the early 80s. He took the plunge into electoral politics by contesting a bypoll in 1991 from the Baramati Assembly seat and has since retained the family bastion seven times in a row. His winning the October 21 Assembly election with the highest margin of 1.65 lakh votes only affirmed his iron grip on his seat.

Those who live in India but abuse it and hail Pakistan have no right to stay here.

— Giriraj Singh, Union minister

Priyanka backing goons: UP Dy CM

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma countered Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on her remarks against chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday and accused her of denigrating Hinduism. Addressing a press conference barely two hours after the Congress general secretary made certain remarks against Adityanath, before returning to New Delhi after winding up a four-day visit to the state capital, Mr Sharma said, "Priyanka Gandhi stands with those who indulged in (anti-CAA) violence." Ms Gandhi hit out at the chief minister on Monday, saying there was no place for violence or "revenge" in the country. — PTI

SPG chief Sinha gets extension

New Delhi: Senior IPS officer Arun Kumar Sinha was on Monday given over one year extension as the Director of Special Protection Group (SPG), mandated to guard the prime minister and former PMs, an order by the personnel ministry stated. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved extension in deputation tenure of Mr Sinha from March 19, 2020 to July 30, 2021, it added. The Central government has recently amended the SPG Act, 1988. — PTI

States bound to enforce CAA: ASG

Shimla: All states, including Punjab and West Bengal, are bound to implement provisions of the Citizenship Amendment Act, said additional solicitor general of India Satya Pal Jain here on Monday. Talking to media-persons, Mr Jain said, "The CAA is a central act and all states, including Punjab and West Bengal, are bound to implement its provisions." Also a member of the BJP's national executive and a former MP, Mr Jain said the Union government had framed the CAA as per powers under Article 11 of the Constitution. He termed the statements of the Punjab and West Bengal CMs politically motivated. — PTI

RAJASTHAN BJP CHIEF FIRES SALVOS AT CM

Jaipur: Launching a personal attack on Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, state BJP president Satish Poonia on Monday said he is suffering from "short-term memory loss" and "mental depression". In a press release here, he said the chief minister is left with no work other than chanting the names of RSS, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah. Mr Poonia said Gehlot is feeling "insecure" about his chief ministership because the Congress is divided in the state and suggested him to visit a good doctor. He claimed there is no development in the Congress rule in the state and the chief minister is making uncalculated statements against the RSS and the BJP to hide his "failure". "The chief minister has got the disease of short-term memory loss. Looking at him, I had gifted him a book on RSS but now it seems that making incorrect statements against the RSS has become a part of his daily routine," the release quoted Mr Poonia as saying. He accused the chief minister of trying to divert public attention from the failure of the Congress government by making statements against the RSS. — PTI

Mamata calls for isolation of BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, DEC. 30

West Bengal (WB) chief minister Mamata Banerjee Monday called on political parties and civil society to "isolate" the BJP in the country to add more teeth to her movement against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC). Taking her campaign to the districts, she made it clear that those who want to "displace" others do not have any "place" in the country.

"A heinous conspiracy is underway to drive out the



Those who want to displace others do not have any place in our country.

— MAMATA BANERJEE, West Bengal chief minister

people of the country in the name of the NRC. I call upon all to be united and get prepared and isolate the BJP everywhere in the country. Those who want to displace others do not have any place in our country. The way they started the NPR... we have stopped it here. It will not happen here," Ms Banerjee said after leading a protest in Purulia.

Predicting that the BJP would be ousted from other states too after Maharashtra and Jharkhand, she pinned hopes on these two states to join WB and Kerala in the league against the National

Population Register (NPR) implementation.

Comparing the BJP's rule with that of the Congress and others at the Centre, she asked, "Nothing can be more shameful than this. How many times have they been voted to power? How many times did they have a PM? We voted for them to be the PM. So many governments were run. But now people are asked to leave the country. Will the BJP exist only while others flee? All have seen how the people drove them out of power in Jharkhand and Maharashtra after getting a chance," she said.

Meerut SP did what cops should do: Giriraj

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Union minister Giriraj Singh on Monday backed Meerut SP Akhilesh Narayan Singh, who is at the centre of a row for his "go to Pakistan" comments to some protesters, saying he did what a police officer and a patriot should do.

"The SP did what police should do, what a patriot should do... Those who live in India but abuse it and hail Pakistan have no right to stay here," the BJP leader said.

"I urge those speaking against the SP to look at the entire incident or people of the country will ask questions from them," he said.

Those who raise "Pakistan zindabad" slogans in India cannot be garlanded and action should be taken against them, the minister added.

His remarks came after another Union minister, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, said peace and not provocation should be priority and that action should be taken against the SP if the video of the officer making those remarks was true.

Mr Singh said Mr Naqvi might not be aware of the entire incident. Several BJP leaders, including Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, have defended Mr Narayan. — PTI



West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and his wife Sudesh Dhankhar interact with the budding dancers during the inauguration of Dipti Dev Memorial National Cultural Festival-2019, at ICCR in Kolkata, Monday. — PTI

Top cop must face action if video authentic, says Naqvi

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

Union minority affairs minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi Monday reiterated his stand on the utterances of Meerut SP City Akhilesh Narayan Singh that if a video is true, appropriate action should be taken. A video surfaced showing a top police officer in Meerut saying that the protesters can "go to Pakistan", drawing sharp criticism from various quarters. The police officer in the video made these remarks on December 20 at Lisari Gate. Mr Naqvi said, "At any



Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi

level, peace should be the priority and not provocation. There should be no misinformation campaign on the Citizenship Amendment Act and no provocative activity should take place." He said that Muslims are not living in India out of compulsion

but out of commitment. Their social, economic, religious and constitutional rights are absolutely safe and secure, he said. Mr Singh however said that he remarked about the people shouting slogans in support of Pakistan during the protest. "I advised them to go to the place in support of which they were raising slogans," he said. Interestingly, Mr Singh did not provide any conclusive evidence about who was shouting the pro-Pakistan slogans and there was no video released prior to his utterances.

Accuses Kerala gov of violating protocol Indian History Congress condemns police action

AGE CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 30

Indian History Congress which was in session in Kannur north Kerala on Monday passed a resolution condemning the police action in Kashmir and Jamia Millia Islamia University Delhi.

The police action was aimed at curbing the democratic rights of the people.

The Congress also passed another resolution to protest against the attempts being made by the powers that be to distort history. Another one was against the commercialisation of historic monuments in the country.

The organisers also



Irfan Habib

accused governor Arif Mohammad Khan of violating protocol during the inaugural session. They said the governor should have given an unbiased address during the inauguration. However, he violated the protocol by taking sides.

The people on the dais had only questioned the alleged biased attitude of the governor. There was no protocol violation in

Irfan Habib registering his protest during the Governor's address.

Meanwhile, Mr Habib refuted Kerala governor's allegation that he tried to assault him. At 88 years of age, how can I assault anyone? he asked.

Mr Khan had accused Mr Habib of attempting to manhandle him on the stage during the inauguration of Indian History Congress in Kannur on Saturday. The governor had tweeted a picture to support his allegation.

The inaugural session on Saturday had witnessed protests from a section of delegates when Mr Khan spoke in support of the Central government and the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act.

Questions hatred for BJP 'Opposing mega events hinders development'

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, DEC. 30

A day after All Assam Students Union (Aasu)'s intimidating remark that they are keeping a close watch on two mega-events — T20 and Khelo India, Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday said that he sought the cooperation of all agitating groups in holding the T20 match in Guwahati between India and Sri Lanka on January 5.

In an obvious reference to remarks of the student leaders, Mr Sonowal reiterated that such events help in the development of the state so any opposition to them would be highly counter-productive.

Earlier, Mr Sonowal while addressing a peace rally said that the protesters now need to tell the people of the state the reasons for their "sudden dislike" for the BJP-led government in the state. He also asked why BJP



Manoj Anand

leaders, from the panchayat to Union ministry level, were being made the target of attacks.

Mr Sonowal said, "Since we formed the government in 2016, we have been working tirelessly, committed to the development of Assam and for the protection of its indigenous people. But, all of a sudden what did we do that our panchayat members, MLAs and Union ministers have been made targets? The protesters have to answer this before the people of Assam."

Mr Sonowal asserted, "I have not committed any mistake. None of my ministers have also made any mistakes. Then why they have hardened stand against us. The people of Assam need to know the answer."

Ms Vadra had written to the officer on December 28 complaining that the police circle officer (CO) in Lucknow had threatened her security personnel while warning of restricting her movements on the same day.



Irish PM's new year

Ireland PM Varadkar, who has his roots in India, to celebrate New Year in Goa



There is no question of giving away even an inch of land to Maharashtra

— B.S. Yediyurappa, Karnataka chief minister

Navy bans smartphones and FB on 'key locations'

Move aims to stop espionage attempts by foreign elements

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 30



In an attempt to prevent online espionage, Indian Navy has banned its personnel from using Facebook and prohibited use of smart mobile phones in bases, dockyards and warships.

This directive comes as Andhra Pradesh police claimed to have busted an espionage racket with links to Pakistan when arrested seven personnel of the Indian Navy for allegedly passing sensitive information like locations of naval ships and submarines to a Pakistani handler.

Recent case of inimical elements targeting

naval personnel over social media to elicit sensitive/operational information is a matter of serious concern necessitating stringent correctives," said an order issued by the Navy headquarters last week. The order banned use of Facebook for all personnel.

saging apps, networking, blogging, content-sharing, hosting and e-commerce sites, are under promulgation," it added. In October, Indian Army had also warned its men against honey-trap by Pakistan spies who create fake female profiles on the social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The Army had also

asked its personnel not to post pictures in uniform on social media, avoid accepting friend requests from unknown people, avoid suspicious websites and not to take calls from or chat with unidentified people. It has advised its men to change the privacy settings on Facebook and other apps to "only friends" so that unknown people are not able to check their profile and pictures.

In November, Rajasthan Police had arrested two Indian Army personnel, Lance Naik Ravi Verma and Sepoy Vichitra Behera, for sending sensitive information to Pakistan.

Both of them were honey-trapped by Pakistani spies posing as woman on Facebook with the name "Seerat".

BJP questions Kishor's Bihar seat-sharing statement

AGE CORRESPONDENT PATNA, DEC. 30

BJP's defeat in Jharkhand has sparked off a debate in the NDA as to which party would get more seats to contest in the 2020 Assembly elections in Bihar.

A day after poll strategist and JD(U) leader Prashant Kishor said that the party should contest on more seats, the BJP reacted strongly and said that the "issue will be discussed during a meeting between top leadership".

In a statement on Monday, BJP spokesperson Nikhil Anand said, "BJP believes in maintaining decorum, discipline and not to make any public statement which has only news value. All decisions in the NDA related to 2020 Assembly election is a matter of discussion between our top leaders."

"NDA is sure to sweep 2020 Bihar polls and defeat the Grand Alliance."

Poll strategist and JD(U) leader Prashant Kishor had raised the political pitch by saying that chief minister Nitish Kumar is the leader of the NDA in Bihar and so the party should get more seats to contest in the Assembly polls scheduled in November 2020.

No question of budging on Belagavi border issue: BSY

Bengaluru: Accusing his Maharashtra counterpart Uddhav Thackeray of raking up the Belagavi border issue once again for political gains, Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Monday declared that not even an inch of state's land will be given away. "It has been decided in the Mahajan report what has to go to Maharashtra and Karnataka. For political benefit the chief minister there is trying to create confusion. I condemn it. There is no question of giving away even an inch of land," Yediyurappa said. Some of his Cabinet colleagues also attacked the Maharashtra chief minister besides targeting the Congress. — PTI

2 killed in Gujarat chemical blast fire

Gandhidham: At least 4 persons were killed on Monday while as many others went missing apparently after a methanol storage tank of a private firm located near Kandla Port in Gujarat's Kutch district caught fire after an explosion, a police officer said. The Deendayal Port Trust (DPT) stated that the roof of the tank blew away after a fire erupted in a storage tank. The fire broke out around 12 noon and has been raging since the last eight hours. The incident occurred when an employee of M/S IMC terminal, located around 16 kms away from Gandhidham in Kutch district, and three labourers were conducting a routine inspection of the storage tank, the officer said. — PTI

Another tourist dies in Sunburn festival

Panaji: A tourist, who arrived in Goa to participate in the Sunburn Electronic Dance Music (EDM) Festival, died after feeling uneasy near the event venue, police said on Monday. With this, the total number of tourist deaths in last three days after collapsing at the EDM festival venue has gone up to three. On Sunday night, a visitor from Bengaluru, Sandip Kotta, complained of "extreme uneasiness" at the festival venue at Vagatore beach in North Goa district, a senior police official said. "An ambulance was called at the venue and he was rushed to a state-run hospital," he said. — PTI

Price rise: 'Calcutta paan' to cost more

Aurangabad: Betel leaf used to make the popular "Calcutta paan" has got costlier in Aurangabad in Maharashtra, leaving a bitter taste in the mouth of patrons. These leaves come from Medinipur in West Bengal and rates have now touched ₹1200 for a bundle of 100 against ₹500 till some days ago, paan merchant Mohammed Sharfuddin told PTI. A tour of shops here showed prices of "Calcutta paan" had gone up from ₹8 to anything between ₹12-20 depending on other ingredients. "Paan prices had to be increased here because of the betel leaves getting costlier," Mr Sharfuddin said. — PTI

VIGIL ON WOMEN ENTRY AS SABARI SET FOR OPENING

New Delhi: As the Sabarimala temple reopens on Tuesday, an outfit spearheading the stir against allowing women of all ages to enter the shrine said that it will continue its vigil in and around the temple to ensure that religious sentiments are not hurt in any manner. The All India Sabarimala Action Council (AISAC) said on Monday that it was relieved that "no women of menstruating age (10-50 years) visited" the hill temple of Lord Ayyappa in the just concluded Mandalam season (December 27). The Lord Ayyappa temple in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala reopens on Tuesday for pilgrims for the "Makara vilakku" season. The Council is hopeful that the sanctity, traditions, rituals and customs of the shrine, where the presiding deity is a celibate yogi, will be protected at any cost, AISAC general secretary S.J.R. Kumar said. "We will continue our vigil in and around the temple premises to ensure that the pilgrims' sentiments and religious beliefs are not hurt in any manner," Mr Kumar told PTI over phone from Cochin. He also expressed happiness over the observation made by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde. — PTI

Odisha IAS officer held for taking ₹1L bribe

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 30

Odisha Vigilance department sleuths on Monday arrested IAS officer Bijay Upadhyaya for allegedly accepting a bribe of ₹1 lakh. The 2009-batch IAS officer is serving as the director of horticulture, Odisha government.

The bureaucrat's office, residence and other places were searched by the anti-corruption agency officials following his arrest.

A few days ago, Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik had announced his government would not tolerate corruption in any form. Naveen's former Cabinet colleague Dr Damodar Rout had earlier alleged that over one hundred crore rupees were siphoned off by unscrupulous officers of the horticulture department in the name of planting fruit saplings.

Dr Rout had even sent details of corruption to the chief minister and recommended strong action against the accused officers. During the year 2018, 182 trap cases have been registered against 195 persons, including 192 public servants and 3 private persons. The trap cases have been registered against 12 Class-I officers, 10 Class-II officers, 161 Class-III employees, 9 Class-IV employees and 3 private persons for demand and acceptance of bribe amounting to ₹16.90 lakh. Notably, during 2018, there was a perceptible increase in registration of trap cases by the Vigilance department.



A Sikh fire-eater performs as he takes part in a procession ahead of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh in Jammu on Monday. — PTI

5 J&K political figures freed after 4 months

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, DEC. 30

The Jammu and Kashmir government on Monday released five second-rung leaders of three mainstream political parties after they reportedly signed bonds assuring the authorities that they will not indulge in any activities prohibited in the documents.

The five belonging to the National Conference (NC), People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Congress are among hundreds of Kashmiri political leaders and activists from both separatist and mainstream camps detained ahead of the Centre's abrogating special status given to J&K under Article 370 and splitting the state up into two Union Territories on August 5. The released leaders include Ishfaq Jabbar and Ghulam Nabi Bhat

CBI conducts raids in gun licence case

Srinagar: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Monday conducted raids at the residences and other properties of several former senior government officers across Jammu and Kashmir and also at the mini secretariat in the Union Territory's winter capital Jammu in connection with a case pertaining to alleged irregularities in issuance of arms licenses. (NC), Bashir Mir (Congress) and Zahoor Mir and Yasir Reshi (PDP), the official sources here said. They were among 36 detainees kept initially at the Centaur Lakeview Hotel and later shifted to MLAs Hostel here.

Nagaland disturbed, Afspa is extended for 6 months

New Delhi, Dec. 30: The entire state of Nagaland has been declared a "disturbed area" for six more months, till June-end, under the controversial AFSPA which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice. In a notification, the home ministry said that the central government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole state of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary. "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of

The area comprising the whole state of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary, says home ministry

the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), the central government hereby declares that whole of the said state to be a "disturbed area" for a period of six months with effect from December 30, 2019 for the purpose of that Act," it said. A home ministry official said the decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as "disturbed area" has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going on in various parts of the state which necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there. There have been demands from various organisations in the Northeast as well as in Jammu and Kashmir for repealing the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which, they say, gives "sweeping powers" to security forces. The AFSPA has been in force in Nagaland for decades. — PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE INVITING TENDER. Name of work and its location: 30-ELECT-57-T-19-20-E3 "Hiring of truck capacity 9.0 MT or equivalent for loading/unloading of Railway material of SSE/OE&P/SSB depot over Delhi division for three years." Approx. Cost of the works in: ₹27.73 lakh. Address of the office: Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi. Earnest Money: ₹55,500.00. Date & Time of submission of tender: 29.01.2020, 15:00 hrs. Opening of tender: 29.01.2020, 15:00 hrs. Website & Notice board: www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi. 4165/19

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DELHI POLICE SHANTI SEWA NYAYA. Drunken Driving Can Be FATAL. DON'T DRINK & DRIVE. ALCOHOL REDUCES THE ABILITY TO SEE DISTANT OBJECT BY 25%. LOOK FOR ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION, CALL A CAB OR LET THE SOBER DRIVE. DRUNKEN DRIVING NEW PENALTY ₹10,000/- or Imprisonment of upto 6 months + Disqualification for 3 months. BE A TRAFFIC SENTINEL. Download App from App Store / Google play. 24 HRS. TRAFFIC HELPLINE 011-25844444/1095. Follow us on: https://www.facebook.com/dtpttraffic, https://twitter.com/dtpttraffic. e-mail to CP, Delhi at: cp.amulyapatnaik@delhipolice.gov.in. Write to: CP, Delhi at P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi.



No gifts please

Puducherry L-G Bedi asks visitors on New Year Day to avoid mementos & shawls



Effort should be to work tirelessly till caste discrimination is eradicated

— Venkaiah Naidu, Vice president

IN BRIEF

2 Nobel laureates in Science Congress

Bengaluru: Two Nobel laureates will be among policy makers, academicians and other delegates to take part in the 107th Science Congress, to be inaugurated here on January 3 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “Nobel laureates Stefan Hell from Max Planck Institut Germany and Ada E. Yonath, an expert in structural biology from Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel, will take part in the event. The president of Nanyang Technological University, Subra Suresh, a material scientist from Indonesia, and renowned cardiologist C.N. Manjunath, will also be present,” Indian Science Congress general president Prof K.S. Rangappa said. — PTI

Man dead, 1 hurt as bomb goes off

Hyderabad: A 23-year-old man died and his brother was injured on Monday when a country made bomb they were carrying on a bike, exploded in Utnoor village of Adilabad district of Telangana, the police said. Mani Rao died on the spot, while his sibling Shani Rao, both from Maharashtra, was injured. He has been hospitalised. The police said the bomb went off when the bike skidded and they suspected that it was meant to kill wild boars to prevent them from damaging agricultural crops. An inquiry was on to ascertain how the duo got hold of the bombs, the police said. — PTI

Two thieves die in freak accident

Hisar (Haryana): Two men, alleged to be thieves, died and their third accomplice got injured when they fell off their “speeding” motorcycle trying to flee upon hearing a police siren on Monday, police said. The incident happened on Loha Mandi-Balsamand Road area of Hisar district. Around 4 am, three persons broke the locks of a few shops. The trio tried to break open one such outlet when they found that its owner was sleeping inside, who woke up and raised an alarm. When the men heard the sirens of a police patrol team, the thieves tried to escape on their bike but met with the accident. — PTI

India’s forest, tree cover up by 5,188 sq km: Report

Increase of 544 sq. km of forest cover in 140 hill districts

New Delhi, Dec. 30: The forest-and-tree cover in India has risen by 5,188 square kilometres in the last two years, said the India state of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019, which showed Karnataka growing the maximum cover of 1,025 sq km.

The biennial report by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), which is an assessment of the country’s forest resources, was released by Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar on Monday, who revealed that the total tree-and-forest cover in the country includes an increase of 3,976 sq. km (0.56 per cent) of forest cover and 1,212 sq. km (1.29 per cent) of tree cover, compared to the 2017 report.

According to the report, the top three states in terms of forest cover are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

While Karnataka grew the maximum forest-and-tree cover at 1,025 sq km, Andhra Pradesh grew a 990-sq. km cover and a 823-

Report revealed that the total tree-and-forest cover in the country includes an increase of 3,976 sq. km (0.56 per cent) of forest cover and 1,212 sq. km (1.29 per cent) of tree cover compared to 2017

sq. km of forest cover was created by Kerala in the last two years. Two other states that followed are Jammu and Kashmir, which grew a 371-sq. km forest cover, and Himachal Pradesh, where a 334-sq. km forest area was created. “Forest cover in the hill districts of the country is 2,84,006 sq. km, which is 40.30 per cent of the total geographical area of these districts. The current assessment shows an increase of 544 sq. km (0.19 per cent) in 140 hill districts of the country,” the report said.

It specified that the forest data of Jammu and

Kashmir, recorded through satellite imaging, “covers areas outside LoC that is under the illegal occupation of Pakistan and China”.

However, the north-east did not show positive results as the current assessment showed a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 765 sq. km (0.45 per cent) in the region. “Except Assam and Tripura, all states in the region show a decrease in the forest cover,” Mr Javadekar said, while reading out the salient findings of the report.

According to the report, the total forest cover of India is 7,12,249 sq. km, which is 21.67 per cent of the geographical area of the country. The tree cover of the country is estimated at 95,027 sq. km, which is 2.89 per cent of the geographical area.

“The total forest-and-tree cover of the country is 8,07,276 sq. km, which is 24.56 per cent of the geographical area of the country,” it said.

The report also showed that the mangrove cover in the country had increased by 54 sq. km (1.10 per cent), as compared to the previous assessment. The minister said after seeing the report, he was confident that India was on track to achieve its climate goal of creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes under the Paris Agreement. Mr Javadekar said there was an increase of 42.6 million tonnes in the country’s carbon stock as compared to the last assessment of 2017.

“This report gives us confidence that we are on track to achieve our Paris Agreement goals,” he said.

According to the present assessment, the total carbon stock in India’s forests is estimated at 7,124.6 million tonnes. “There is an increase of 42.6 million tonnes in the carbon stock of the country as compared to the last assessment of 2017. The annual increase is 21.3 million tonnes, which is equivalent to 78.1 million tonnes of CO₂. — PTI



A Japanese tourist reacts as he prepares to take a dip in the Ganga during a cold morning in Varanasi on Monday. Dense fog across the Indo-Gangetic belt, which hinders sun rays from reaching the ground, and the continuous flow of icy northerly winds aggravated cold conditions across the plains of north India that in some places recorded temperatures lower than hill stations, meteorologists said on Monday. — PTI

Minor fire at PM Modi’s residence, office not affected

Caused due to short circuit, no casualties

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

A minor fire broke out at 9 am in Lok Kalyan Marg inside the residential complex of the Prime Minister but his residence and office were not affected by it, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said.

The fire has been brought under control, the PMO added.

“There was a minor fire at Lok Kalyan Marg caused by a short circuit. This was not in PM’s residential or office area but in the SPG reception area of the LKM complex. The fire is very much under control now,” the PMO tweeted.

The special protection group (SPG) is mandated to guard the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister resides at 7 Lok Kalyan Marg. His residential complex also has an office of the SPG where the fire broke out. Delhi fire service offi-



“As per the protocol, fire tenders were rushed along with senior officers to the site. However, fire tenders were returned from the main gate as the fire was doused by the internal security staff, he said.

Eight fire tenders were rushed to the site but they were returned from the main gate as the fire was doused by the internal security staff, he said.

“As per the protocol, fire tenders were rushed along with senior officers to the site. However, fire tenders were returned from the main gate. It seems this call was given as a precautionary measure. As per information available there was a small fire in UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply),” Mr Garg said.

Naravane will take charge as Chief of Army Staff today

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Lt. Gen. Manoj Naravane will take charge as the Chief of Army Staff today succeeding Gen. Bipin Rawat.

Gen Rawat is retiring today as Army chief after a three-year stint. He is widely expected to be appointed as the country’s first chief of defence staff.

Official sources said the file relating to appointment of the CDS has been cleared by the competent authority on Monday but the government is yet to make an official announcement about it.

Lt Gen. Naravane is currently serving as vice chief of the Army.

Before taking charge as vice chief of the Army staff in September, Lt. Gen. Naravane was heading the Eastern Command of the Army which takes care of India’s nearly 4,000-km border with China.

In his 37 years of service, Lt. Gen. Naravane has served in numerous command and staff appointments in peace, field and highly active counter-insurgency environments in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast.

He has also commanded a Rashtriya Rifles Battalion in Jammu and Kashmir and an infantry brigade on the eastern front.

He was also part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka and had served as India’s defence attache at the Indian Embassy in Myanmar for three years.

Lt. Gen. Naravane is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy. — PTI

Kota infant deaths: Toll rises to 91, BJP sends probe panel

Kota (Raj), Dec. 30: Fourteen more infants have died at the J K Lon hospital here in the last five days, taking the number of deaths to 91 this month at the facility, officials said on Monday.

“The 14 infants, including six newborns, died in the period between December 25 and December 29 in NICU and PICU units of the hospital,” the newly appointed superintendent of the hospital, Suresh Dulara, said.

Earlier, 77 infants had died till December 24, including 10 within 48 hours on December 23-24,

he said. On the cause of deaths, Amrit Lal Bairwa, head of department of paediatrics, said that they are analysing the reasons behind the 77 deaths till December 25. Out of the 14 infants, who died later, four succumbed to severe pneumonia, one to meningococcal pneumonia, three to congenital pneumonia, and one to respiratory disorder, he said.

Rajasthan medical education secretary Vaibhav Galariya said a three-member team comprising Dr Amarjeet Mehta, Dr Rambabu Sharma and Dr Sunil Bhatnagar that is probing the infant deaths will submit its report in two days following which action will be taken.

The BJP, which has targeted the Congress government in Rajasthan over the child deaths, said it has formed a committee comprising four MPs to look into the matter. The panel comprising Lok Sabha MPs Jaskaur Meena, Locket Chatterjee and Bharati Pawar, and Rajya Sabha MP Kanta Kardam has been asked to submit its report within three days to the party’s working president J.P. Nadda. — PTI

‘No waitlisting on Del-Mumbai, Delhi-Kol trains’

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Trains running on the Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Kolkata routes will be free from waitlisted tickets in the next five years, chairman railway board, Vinod Kumar Yadav said on Monday.

Speaking at a press briefing, Mr Yadav said the railways is working on three additional dedicated freight corridors at an estimated cost of about ₹12.6 lakh crore over the next 10 years which will help the national transporter free up the current tracks to run enough pas-

senger trains so that no traveller gets wait-listed.

“Passengers could expect to be free of waiting list within the next five years on the two busiest routes of Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah, where dedicated freight corridors (DFC) construction is under works and is expected to be completed by 2021,” Mr Yadav said. He said the vision of railways was that when DFC is completed, the existing routes will be completely free of freight as a result of which passenger trains

Rly is working on three additional freight corridors which will help free up the current tracks to run enough passenger trains so no traveller gets wait-listed

can be run on demand. “The work to upgrade (train speed) on the route to 160 kmph has already been sanctioned and will be done in the next four years,” he said. He also said the thrust of the rail-

ways would be to commission DFCs. While the Bhadan-Khurja section (194 km) of Eastern DFC has been completed and commercial trials have started from October 2019, the Rewari-Madar section (305 km) of Western DFC has also been completed and commercial trial runs have started from December 27, 2019.

Mr Yadav also said that approval to increase average speed of passenger trains by 60 per cent has been given which will make journeys by Rajdhani train fully

overnight. He also said 194 trains have been upgraded to Utkrisht standard in 2019-20, and 78 new train services have been introduced between April-October 2019.

As many as 120 pairs of Integral Coach Factory (ICF) trains have been converted to faster and safer Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) by utilizing 156 LHB rakes, and 104 passenger trains have been converted into Mainline Electric Multiple Unit (MEMU), he said. — PTI

Delhi sees coldest day in 119 years

Continued from Page 1 The new air traffic control tower, thermal imaging cameras and first-of-its-kind 24x7 social media command centre are being used to manage operations during the reduced visibility conditions.

The poor visibility also caused major problems for commuters, with many people driving slow on the main roads. At several places, commuters were seen driving with emergency lights on as visibility on roads plunged below 50 metres. “I had a harrowing experience while driving from my house in Noida to my workplace in Gurgaon,” said Ankita Sharma, who works with a private IT firm. Even Delhi’s Air Quality

Index (AQI) continued to be in the severe zone at 448 in the morning. In neighbouring areas of Ghaziabad, the AQI was 439, Faridabad (465), Noida (471), Greater Noida (448) and Gurgaon (344). An AQI between 0-50 is considered good, 51-100 satisfactory, 101-200 moderate, 201-300 poor, 301-400 very poor, and 401-500 severe. Above 500 is the severe-plus emergency category.

The severe cold weather is likely to remain over northern India for two more days. Regional Weather Forecasting Centre (New Delhi) head Kuldeep Srivastava said this December has been the second coldest December since 1901. “Usually, January is the

coldest winter month, but this time the mercury has broken decades’ records in December itself,” he added.

Minimum temperatures have fallen significantly from December 26 onwards, leading to severe cold wave conditions over Rajasthan, Punjab, Delhi, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh and north Madhya Pradesh.

Mr Srivastava, however, said that there could be a slight increase in temperatures in the next few days, as cold north-westerly winds are slowly getting replaced by easterlies, due to a change in the wind direction. “But the conditions would still remain very cold,” he added.

In its latest forecast, the IMD is expecting a fresh

spell of rainfall and/or snowfall over Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh over the next four days and scattered rains over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, due to a western disturbance which has impacted the western Himalayan region.

Private weather forecasting agency Skymet meteorologist Mahesh Palawat said there could be hailstorm and lightning at isolated places over the region, including Delhi, over the next two days during the new year. “Since there is change in the wind direction, the fog may also reduce in intensity, but the enhanced moisture will create foggy conditions after January 4,” he further said.

Gen. Rawat is India’s 1st CDS

Continued from Page 1 on the anticipated budget and will work to reduce wasteful expenditure. The CDS will enable the armed forces to implement coordinated defence doctrines and procedures and to foster jointmanship among the three services.

Gen Rawat is an alumnus of St. Edward School, Shimla, and was commissioned into the 11th Gorkha Rifles of the Indian Army in December 1978, from IMA Dehradun. He had assumed charge as Chief of the Army Staff on December 31, 2016.

As an Army commander, he had vast experience in operations across a wide spectrum of conflict and terrain profiles. He commanded an infantry battalion along the Line of Actual Control in the eastern sector with China; a Rashtriya Rifles sector; an infantry division in the Kashmir Valley and a corps in the Northeast.

Priyanka hits out at Yogi raj

Continued from Page 1 denotes Hinduism, a religion that does not advocate violence or “revenge”.

Rahul Gandhi has asked party members to visit people injured in the anti-CAA protests and provide help if needed. All across India, many young men and women were injured and some even killed while protesting against the CAA, he said. “I urge our Congress party workers to meet the victims’ families and provide all possible assistance,” he tweeted.

On Saturday, during his visit to Assam, Mr Gandhi met the families of two young men killed during the protests

against the CAA. The Telangana Congress has decided to take up the issue of the withdrawal of SPG cover to the Gandhis during the protests against the CAA in the state. Speaking to this newspaper, Congress in-charge for Telangana R.C. Khuntia said “the government deliberately withdrew the security given to the Gandhis to that they can be targeted by the police”.

On Sunday, Ms Vadra alleged she had been manhandled by the UP police when she had tried to visit a protester.

However, talking to the media on Monday, she said her own security was not a big issue.

“The question of my security is not a big one. It is a small question, on which there is no need to hold any discussion. I will not raise the issue of security as it is a trivial matter. It has nothing to do with the public,” she said.

“The issue is the safety of the common man in UP. This is the country of Lord Krishna — who was the symbol of compassion. Lord Ram was the symbol of compassion. Everybody dances in the marriage procession (baraat) of Lord Shiva. There is no place for ‘hinsaa’ (violence), ‘badlaa’ (revenge) and ‘ranj’ (anger) in the country’s soul”.

Uddhav inducts son, 35 others in ministry

Continued from Page 1 (Independent) and Bacchu Kadu (Prahar Janshakti Party) as ministers of state. Senior NCP leaders Nawab Malik and Anil Deshmukh, who were ministers in the previous Congress-NCP government, however, found places in the ministry. And former Assembly Speaker Dilip Walse-Patil and former Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Dhananjay Munde were also sworn in. While senior Congress leaders Ashok Chavan and Vijay Wadetiwar took the oath as Cabinet ministers, senior leader and former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan did not find a place in Uddhav Thackeray’s ministry. There is speculation that he may lead the state Congress unit. The MVA government was

formed on November 28, and Balasaheb Thorat and Nitin Raut of the Congress, Eknath Shinde and Subhash Desai of the Shiv Sena and Jayant Patil and Chhagan Bhujbal of the NCP took the oath of office along with Mr Thackeray on that very day.

Dynasty continues rules the roost in the state, as several ministers of the new Cabinet are from political families. Apart from Aaditya

Thackeray, who is the son of the CM, young leaders like NCP’s Aditi Tatkar, who is the daughter of NCP’s Raigad Lok Sabha MP Sumil Tatkar, and Congress leader Amit Deshmukh, the son of former chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh, also found a place in the Cabinet. Another Congress leader, Vishwajit Kadam, is the son of party leader late Patangrao Kadam.

Kerala tops Niti Aayog’s SDG index

Continued from Page 1 Kumar added. The Niti Aayog vice-chairman also said the Modi government will not leave any stone unturned to make sure India achieves SDG Agenda 2030.

According to the report, India’s composite score improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019 with major success in water and sanitation,

industry and innovation. However, nutrition and gender continue to be problem areas for India, requiring more focused approach from the government.

The report said while three out of five states in the top spots perform equal to or better than the country average on 12 goals, the other two states do the same on 11 goals.

“Only three states were placed in the category of Front Runners (with a score in the range 65-99, including both) in 2018 — Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. “In 2019, five more states joined this league — Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Sikkim and Goa, taking the total tally to eight,” it noted. — PTI

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Jan Sangh will have no truck with Communists

Chankyanagar, (Patna): Jan Sangh President Atal Behari Vajpayee today reiterated his party's determination to have no truck with the Communists.

Speaking at the concluding sitting of the party's 16th session here, Mr Vajpayee called upon party workers to prepare themselves for meeting the challenge posed by the critical situation facing the country.

He pointed out that the economic policy resolution passed by the session had given the lie to the critics who used to harbour a misconception that the Jan Sangh had no economic policy.

Strongly refuting the allegation that his party was conservative, the Jan Sangh leader said all they wanted was to sift the best out of the past while working for a brighter future — for the India of their dreams.

The three-day session, attended by over 20,000 delegates, adopted resolutions on the political situation, economic policy and the internal situation in the country.

Mr Vajpayee called upon the delegates to return home to spread among the masses the decision of the "historic" Patna session.

He said the resolutions that had been adopted and the trend of the discussion showed that the Sangh was not a party of conservatives but of constructive approach and change.

Mr Vajpayee said that the political situation in the country was in utter confusion. The Congress had split into two, the Communists into three and the Socialists into four.

All eyes on 'new way' in Kim Jong-un's New Year speech

Claire Lee

focus

■ Speculation has mounted that Pyongyang could abandon its moratorium on intercontinental ballistic missile tests. US national security adviser Robert O'Brien said that Washington would be 'extraordinarily disappointed' if Pyongyang carries out a long-range missile test.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump

Seoul: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will give his set-piece New Year speech on Wednesday, an opportunity to flesh out the nuclear-armed nation's threat to seek a "new way" forward after the expiration of its year-end deadline for US sanctions relief. Ahead of the address, Kim told a meeting of top ruling party officials that "positive and offensive measures for fully ensuring the sovereignty and security of the country" were needed, the state news agency KCNA reported Monday.

Nuclear talks between the North and the US have been largely stalled since the collapse of a February summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in Hanoi.

Pyongyang has been demanding the easing of international sanctions imposed on it over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, while Washington is insisting it takes more tangible steps towards giving them up. The North has not so far specified the "new way" it would adopt if the US does not offer fresh concessions by the end of the end, and Kim is expected to make it clearer.

Earlier this month China and Russia — the North's biggest economic partners — proposed loosening UN sanctions against Pyongyang, and analysts say Kim is likely to seek to exploit rivalries between Washington, Beijing and Moscow. The "new way" was more likely to be an old way with denuclearisation

firmly off the table, said Henri Feron, Senior Fellow at the Center for International Policy in the US. "What North Korea refers to as a new path is new in the sense that it will differ from its relatively engaging posture in the past two years, but will actually be a return to the posture it maintained notably in the Obama era," he told AFP. "It will focus on developing its military leverage and economic resistance to sanctions, while demanding unconditional peace and normalisation before there can be any talk on denuclearisation."

Speculation has mounted that Pyongyang could abandon its moratorium on intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests — although its ominous

threat of a "Christmas gift" to the US appears to have fizzled. US national security adviser Robert O'Brien said that Washington would be "extraordinarily disappointed and we'll demonstrate that disappointment" if Pyongyang carries out a long-range missile test. "But we have a lot of tools in our toolkit, and additional pressure can be brought to bear on the North Koreans."

FIRE AND FURY 2.0?

Wednesday's speech will be Kim's eighth New Year address, after he revived the tradition started by his grandfather — North Korea's founding leader Kim Il Sung — but discontinued during his father's rule. It is a key moment in the

North Korean political calendar, reviewing the past and setting out goals for the future, and printed in full in the *Rodong Sinmun* mouthpiece newspaper.

"Kim's delivery of New Year's speeches has evolved over time, from standing before a pulpit in a party uniform in his early years, to sitting in an office in a Western-style suit and tie in 2019," said Rachel Minyoung Lee, senior analyst at specialist site NK News.

Pyongyang has been ramping up the pressure with static tests at its Sohae rocket facility and a series of weapons launches, some described as ballistic missiles by Japan and others — which are banned under UN resolutions.

Lee told AFP North Korea was likely to resume testing longer-range missiles including ICBMs in 2020, and potentially even nuclear blasts, and could also carry out "military provocations against South Korea". But an ICBM launch would represent a rapid escalation and risks angering China — which always stresses stability in a region it regards as its own backyard.

And Trump would not want to go back to his previous "fire and fury" rhetoric, preferring to reach a deal with Pyongyang, said Joseph Yun, a former US special representative for North Korea under both the Republican and his predecessor Barack Obama. "Without doubt, the highest priority for President Trump is getting re-elected," he said.

As such, going back to past confrontation "would sully his reputation as a dealmaker, especially as he has few deals to show, having pulled out of the Iran nuclear agreement and the Paris Climate Accord".

— AFP

Radio most accessible medium for rural population

Hema Mehta
meanwhile

In 2018, a report by market research firm Nielsen claimed radio to be the second-most accessed media platform, outpacing social networking and losing only to television. The research, surprisingly, was conducted in one metro and one non-metro city — these are the spaces in which one would assume social networking sites to be the most accessed platform given the easy availability of mobile data services. If we talk at a larger level, a report in the Hindu suggests that radio reaches 99 per cent of the Indian population with most of the rural population relying for information on radio programmes. However, in remote rural areas, radio has established itself as a medium that not just provides relevant information but has helped sustain the traditions of culturally rich and socially diverse places.

The northern Himalayan state of Uttarakhand is one such place where radio, especially community radio programmes, have played a crucial role during critical times. This state is known for its unique environment, traditions, heritage, culture and communal harmony and its inhabitants believe that development should also be based on these characteristics. One thing that makes this cultural diversity even stronger is the exchange of intense dialogue between rural communities that helps promote community-led development. And this holds true for both Kumaon and Garhwal — administratively and geographically distinct regions of Uttarakhand.

In Kumaon, people celebrate a festival called "Hudki Bol" during plantation of rice in paddy fields. This festival is a form of entertainment for villagers who, while working hard in the fields, sing folk songs using a folk instrument called "Huduka" (a percussion instrument). Similar festivals are a part of Garhwali culture as well. However, in the last few decades, the popularity of such festivals has decreased, leading to loss of dialogue between rural communities. As observed, one reason for this could be the increasing competition between the communities and the other, more threatening,



is the ever-increasing inclination of rural communities towards materialism. Communities that earlier's existence are now growing distant to one another.

Re-establishing this culture of dialogue between communities is of great concern and understanding the need for address-

ing it, The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), had started a community radio station called "Kumaon Vani" in 2010. Today, nine years later, this station has created a niche for itself in the lives of Kumaoni people. Broadcasted in the regional Kumaoni language, this radio has become a part of the everyday lives of its people. By broad-

casting programmes based on local culture and tradition, this radio station is trying to re-establish a link among rural communities. Not only this, by providing information on government sponsored schemes and other relevant issues, it has also attempted to bridge the gap between government and remote communities.

This community radio station, through its participatory programmes, allows villagers to participate, ask questions and even share their experiences with other listeners. Villagers also get an opportunity to listen to the government, non-governmental and other stakeholders associated with important organisations in the region.

EVOLUTION OF RADIO PROGRAMMES

Over the years, role of radio programmes has evolved in these rural societies. Today, besides being a platform for cultural exchange and keeping communities updated about relevant governmental and non-governmental information, it is

running successful social campaigns targeting specific beneficiaries. Understanding the effectiveness of dialogue-exchange among communities, these social campaigns are also based on the same.

In the year 2016, Kumaon Vani started a programme on women's health and nutrition. Media for Community (M4C), with help from the department of science and technology (DST), assisted in programme production. They also helped in conducting a survey of 1,000 women — all above the age of 16. A total of 1,005 women from 320 villages were directly contacted and their details were documented. The findings of this health survey were shared with an advisory committee constituted by a team from Kumaon Vani and was led by the chief medical officer of the region. The title of the programme was also decided by the committee — "Mahakta Anchal". Accepting the challenge of broadcasting one programme every day, the radio successfully broadcasted 365 episodes with great coordination.

This programme not only created awareness among women regarding their own health but encouraged them to talk about health issues which they earlier hesitated discussing even with their own family members. Issues that had social stigma attached to them like venereal diseases and reproductive and menstrual health were discussed by women freely on this platform. An expert panel comprising of 10 doctors from government hospitals in Nainital and Almora districts and from non-governmental health institutions got associated with this initiative and promised to contribute to future health programmes as well. ASHA workers also contributed to the programme quite effectively.

Recognising the success of the 365 episodes broadcasted through their programme, "Mahakta Anchal", the health department of Nainital district honoured Kumaon Vani. This has once again proven the fact that radio, despite the advent of various media platforms, still remains the most accessible medium for our rural population. Radio has and will continue to play the important role of bringing together different stakeholders to contribute towards the socio-economic and cultural development of people residing in the remote regions of our country.

— Charkha Features

Without libraries, what have we?
We have no past and no future.

All empty souls tend
toward extreme opinions

THE ASIAN AGE

31 DECEMBER 2019

In UP, police gains CM's sanction for brutality

There appears to be a one-on-one correspondence between the well-documented brutal and communal conduct of the police in Uttar Pradesh in dealing with the protests against the triad of CAA-NRC-NPP — now evidently a key aspiration on the RSS' to-do list (after securing the emasculating of Article 370, Ayodhya, and triple talaq) — and the rants of UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath, a wolf in monk's clothing, which appear to border on criminality and insanity.

Recently, the SP of Meerut was caught on video yelling in the bylanes of a Muslim locality, asking people "to go to Pakistan", and informing them in no uncertain terms that he knew how to "fix them". The district police chief didn't deny this, explaining to the media later that some in the crowd had raised pro-Pakistan slogans. If that is correct, he should have booked the persons in question under relevant provisions of the law, not responded with communal hollering.

An IPS officer — or for that matter any official of the state acting in the name of our Constitution — is not expected to amplify the ideological vision of the elected representatives in office at any given time. As an object lesson, the errant officer deserves to answer questions under the service rules.

The CM shows some gall as his rants come after the murder by the UP police of two dozen protesters in police firing. The presumption is that protesters are Muslims, which is false.

Regrettably, his police superiors see nothing wrong with the SP's conduct. This is no surprise if we consider the UP chief minister's disposition. He speaks as though he were a senior Taliban functionary.

In a series of tweets, the CM's office said last Friday: "Every rioter is shocked. Every demonstrator is stunned. Everyone has been silenced after seeing Yogi Adityanath government's strict actions. Do whatever now, compensation will be taken from anyone who damages public property. Every violent protester will cry now because there is a Yogi government in Uttar Pradesh." This and another disgraceful tweet had the hashtag "The Great CM Yogi".

Such vituperation is unthinkable in a democracy. In a Western democracy, a trial might have ensued on far less a misdemeanour by an elected leader. Even in Communist China, where Uighurs have been sent to ideological "training camps", there has not been any official talk of making protesters "cry", or the government "extracting revenge", as CM Ajay Singh Bisht, who parades as the monk Adityanath.

The CM shows some gall as his rants come after the murder by the UP police of two dozen protesters in police firing. The presumption is that protesters are Muslims, which is false. But the dead do belong to a particular community, and that tells its own story — one of the police given the licence to shoot when protesters may be identified "through their dress", as Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted not long ago. Another datum for comparison — in Hong Kong, rocked by violent protests for seven months, no protester has died in firing by the Chinese police, although there were violent confrontations, and young protesters have shouted pro-America slogans, which should be anathema to Beijing.

As for the confiscation of protesters' property, the government must satisfy the high court with proof. It must also explain why the UP police went about destroying property.

Triumph in adversity

India's Grandmaster Koneru Humpy sealed a great year for Indian women in sport by winning the world rapid chess title in Russia, beating China's Lei Tingjie. At 32, mother of a two-year-old daughter, she fulfilled her ambition of winning a senior world title, even if it wasn't in the classical 64-square format, which much like Test cricket is the declared favourite of players, compared to the T20-like hustle of rapid chess.

Shatranj may not seem action-packed, but it requires hours of rigorous dedication. It's the commitment of Indian women to stick to sport that must be admired given the societal prejudices that never allow families to think of a career in sport for girls till recently.

2019 will be remembered most as the one in which sportswomen outshone their male counterparts. The golden streak that changed everything was P.V. Sindhu's victorious run in the badminton world championship, where she beat her nemesis Nozomi Okuhara in the final in Switzerland. The lanky Telangana star has been bearing the brunt of unreal expectations of a nation of spectators ever since she won silver in the Olympics in Rio in 2016, and then two silvers in the world championships.

The question is, as with trail-blazing Saina Nehwal, whether Indian women had it in them to be world champions by winning the events that really matter. The breakthrough for Sindhu was a vital moment for women in Indian sport as she found her subliminal moment in conquering the highest of peaks demanding the calmest of nerves. Today, on the eve of a change of decades in the new millennium, we toast the women of India for their indomitable spirit to triumph against all odds.

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Subhani



CAA: Belated justice for orphans of Partition?



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

As the year peters out with both the bang of clashing beliefs and the whimper of injured innocents, a feeble flicker of hope is still evident amidst the chaos and confusion. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act is anathema to thousands of protesting Indians as well as to some foreign governments and international organisations. But whatever the intent, the CAA must be welcomed as the harbinger of a more merciful world order that promises belated justice to the orphans of Partition who have been neglected all these 72 years.

With the violence at home matched by protests in unlikely places like Boston, Chicago and The Hague, India enters 2019 with its image as the world's largest liberal democracy more than a little tarnished. Global opinion, which had once hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the architect of reconstruction, now sees him steeped in bigotry. Despite the wounded idealism of India's youth and the alarm of harassed Muslims, even a misunderstood CAA would not have created that impression if it hadn't been for what came before and after. The abrogation of Article 370 — and, even more, the stringent clampdown that followed — was proof of New Delhi's intolerance of political and religious pluralism. The Ayodhya verdict confirmed that impression. Official waffling over the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register only increased the fears about a police state.

The CAA is wrongly blamed. The US Commission on

International Religious Freedom says that using religion as the path to citizenship betrays "religious pluralism", and demands sanctions against Union home minister Amit Shah. One of the two resolutions tabled by Rashida Tlaib and Pramila Jaypal in the House of Representatives criticised India for unilaterally changing "the status of the Kashmiri people without a direct consultation or consent of the Kashmiri people", thereby breaking with the US practice of treating Kashmir as India's internal matter. With key Democrats like Adam Schiff and James McGovern also condemning India, the US-India strategic alliance based on "democracy, individual liberty, rule of law, freedom of expression and practice of religion and protection to minorities" faces stormy weather.

With 27 European Union delegates as New Delhi's honoured guests in Jammu and Kashmir at a time when domestic politicians couldn't set foot there, the EU was less outspoken. But stressing "the importance of steps to restore the rights and freedoms of the population in Kashmir", it didn't forget to include its disapproval of the CAA. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation inevitably accuses the CAA of discriminating against Indian Muslims. Equally predictably, China joined Pakistan to oppose "any unilateral sanctions that complicated the situation". Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delayed his visit pleading conditions in Assam. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad lamented the "withering of secularism" in India.

Perhaps critics do have a point in accusing the

Modi-Shah duo of not being moved by any lofty ideal in enacting the CAA. Perhaps with one state after another slipping out of their grasp, they wanted to assure the Sangh Parivar voters that the holy grail of Hindutva is alive and well. That might explain the Muslim panic and — what is infinitely worse for it casts aspersions on the National Democratic Alliance's credibility — the reportedly brutal response by a police force that has from colonial times always been ready to anticipate its master's wishes. But however mala fide the intention, the liberal new citizenship regulation cannot be faulted even though the immediate beneficiaries will be only the 25,447 Hindus, 5,807 Sikhs, 55 Christians, two Buddhists and two Parsis — 31,313 in all — who fled to India before the deadline.

But once the principle is accepted, 17 million Hindus in Bangladesh — mainly peasants and fisherfolk of the Namasudra and Majhi castes — can expect to be rescued if the need arises. That hope is shared by 2.5 million Hindus languishing in Pakistan, where many people attribute Bangladesh's secession to a "Hindu conspiracy". Surprisingly, too, since New Delhi has no residual obligations in a country that was not a part of British India, the CAA covers over a thousand Hindus in Afghanistan. Another surprise is the listing of Parsis and Christians as also being eligible for fast-track citizenship. Since British India was divided on religious lines, Sikhs, Buddhists

India cannot contemplate the idylls of breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dinner in Kabul that Dr Manmohan Singh once spoke of as long as this human legacy of Partition haunts us

and Jains can be bracketed with Hindus, but the inclusion of Parsis and Christians seems odd, like extending the right to people in Afghanistan.

However, this is not the time of year to be niggardly about saving people from the disaster they may be facing. The long-overdue CAA suggests that we may be nearing the conclusion of a dismal argument that started before the first inter-dominion conference on stranded minorities that took place in Calcutta in April 1948. One suggestion was a population exchange, as between Greece and Turkey under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which uprooted two million people. "That the transfer of minorities is the only lasting remedy for communal peace is beyond doubt", was Dr B.R. Ambedkar's view. Indian citizenship for all Hindus in Pakistan, which was also mooted, would be wonderful news for people like the Hindu East Bengal refugee who was reluctant to return after the Bangladesh war. Asked whether he regarded himself as Indian or Bangladeshi, he shot back astutely: "Consider me an Indian national resident in Bangladesh!" A third suggestion was that East Pakistan should cede territory west of the Padma as a homeland for its unwanted Hindus.

Whatever their motives, in framing the CAA, Mr Modi and Mr Shah lived up to the hospitable legacy they inherited: having given refuge to 29,500 "hill country Tamils" from Sri Lanka and 100,000 Tibetans, India cannot contemplate the idylls of breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dinner in Kabul that Dr Manmohan Singh once spoke of as long as this human legacy of Partition haunts us. They were Indians once. Their ghar wapsi in the new year is worth celebrating.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS
MODI PRAISES YOUTH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done well to spare a thought for the youth of the country. In his last *Mann ki Baat* radio programme of the year, Mr Modi showered bouquets on the younger generation for their courage in questioning the system when it did not respond appropriately. The Prime Minister's observations come in the wake of protests by students and political parties against the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC). Citizens would also do well to consider Mr Modi's appeal to buy locally made items seriously.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

IN CHEAP TASTE

IT IS unfortunate that the UP police allegedly manhandled Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who was on her way to pay a visit to retired IPS officer S.R. Darapur at his residence. As the police tried to stop her vehicle from proceeding further, Priyanka hoodwinked the police by riding on a two-wheeler and reaching her destination. While the reprehensive act of the police is condemnable, the UP traffic police have now fined the owner of the two-wheeler ₹6,100 as Priyanka and Dheeraj Gujjar had been riding without helmets! This appears to be revenge by the UP police and is definitely in cheap taste.

Tharcus S. Fernando
Chennai

JOYOUS NEW YEAR

NEW YEAR is a time for celebration. New Year is a time to celebrate the start of something new. It is a time to make new promises, some to be broken, and some to be kept. It is also a time to look ahead and try to change things for the better. New Year is a joyous time of the year because we feel like we get to start all over again. On New Year's Day, people are happy.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: letters@asianage.com Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002



Zeenat Hisam

A growing problem: Moral harassment at the workplace

The recent verdict by a French court on the "moral harassment" of employees has set a major precedent in an era of turbulent global economic liberalisation. While the criminal trial against France Télécom exposes tactics of corporate culture — merciless downsizing leading to workers' suicides — the verdict reveals the strength and role of trade unions in holding corporations accountable.

Cynics might ask what a First World dispute between managerial staff and employers has to do with most developing countries, where the managerial cadre is largely deprived of the basic right to form a union, where trade unionism is no more than a weak whimper and labour disputes take years to decide. Well, it gives us hope — an increasingly rare commodity these days — that the verdict might make corporations across the globe rethink "corporate social responsibility". Suicides due to workplace stress have increased sharply in developed countries as the

United States, Japan and Australia in the past two decades. Earlier this year, 189 cases of attempted suicides and other stress-related health issues of Amazon warehouse employees came to light. In Japan, such suicides have a specific term — "karojisatsu", or suicide from overwork. Workplaces are getting cruel and unjust day by day, and this phenomenon cut across class: highly skilled, educated and professional workforces are also facing the consequences of unbridled corporate greed.

France Télécom, once a state monopoly, got rid of 22,000 workers in three years when it was privatised, restructured and rebranded as Orange in 2006. Between 2008-09, 19 employees took their own lives, 12 attempted suicide, and eight were diagnosed with severe depression. The employees' suicides and the follow-ups kept France and the global corporate sector on tenterhooks for a decade. The trial, which began in May 2019, lasted just two months. However, the process leading to the trial took 10 years and

involved the probing of harassment claims at France Télécom SA in 2010 by the prosecutor's office, the labour inspectorate's inquiries into cases, a stress-monitoring survey of the employees, a judicial investigation into the restructuring programme of the company, and filing of the cases by trade unions on behalf of the victims' families. As public servants, the employees at France Télécom could not be fired so the management adopted a strategy to "encourage" them to leave. The senior management established a "system of institutional harassment" by creating an atmosphere of anxiety through transfers to faraway cities, setting unachievable goals, tracking employees' movements and psychological bullying. The court was told that the CEO said he would "get them out one way or another — through the door or through the window". The former CEO and two senior executives were given one-year sentences plus fines; four other executives charged with complicity were also punished. Moral harassment is

a crime in French labour law and defined as "repeated acts having as their object or effect a deterioration of an employee's working conditions". Those found guilty of moral harassment can face one year of prison and fines. In addition to a robust body of laws to protect employees, France's trade unions are strong and well-known for using strikes and protests. Though union density in France is low (11 per cent in 2016) compared to other European countries, their strength comes from the statutory powers their representatives enjoy as joint managers along with employers in work councils in firms with more than 50 staff members.

So, the question is: why are workers not treated with dignity and respect despite relatively better labour laws and strong presence of unions in developed countries? There are many reasons. For instance, small French firms often choose to hire no more than 49 employees in order to avoid work councils. And where work councils exist, consultations are

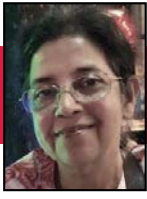
not always productive. But coming down to the brass tacks, it is the greedy tactics used by corporations that chip away at workers' status. The difference is that the workforce in the West is educated, skilled, informed, laced with the know-how of institutional mechanisms and able to fight back. They do fight back even if they do not win. Like French trade unions are doing just now: fighting President Macron's plan for a single points-based pension system which would eliminate separate schemes that offer early retirement for public-sector workers.

There is little difference between the management style of France Télécom SA of 2009 — bent upon pushing the workers out by hook or by crook — and the "seth mentality" of owners-employers that pervades in many of our industries, as well as the façade of corporate social responsibility and corporate codes of conduct put up by multinationals here.

By arrangement with Dawn



CAA & NRC are a wake-up call for all Indians



Nilofar Suhrawardy

As the year ends, by snatching Jharkhand from the BJP's command, the Congress is probably having the last laugh. Anti-BJP protests and demonstrations across the country against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have certainly punctured the larger-than-life image projected about Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It has deflated electorally also in Jharkhand. Hopefully, the Jharkhand results will not make the Congress over-confident about its prospects in the forthcoming Assembly elections, particularly in Delhi. At present, the party needs to pay strategic importance to its anti-BJP campaign even if this demands an alliance with a regional party. Regarding Jharkhand, the Congress acted shrewdly by allying with a regional party prior to the Assembly elections than choos-

ing to deliberate on its options after the declaration of the results. Besides, its protests against the CAA and the NRC has apparently not been ignored by voters.

Amit Shah needs to perhaps deliberate on his confidence about remaining in power for 50 years because of the 2019 parliamentary victory. One needs to view his 50-year "obsession" from another angle. He may be around, but there is no guarantee that he'd still be in power.

There is also a severe temporal lapse in the BJP's drafting of the NRC as well as the CAA. The selection of the year 1971 for registering citizens in keeping with the NRC, which has so far not extended beyond Assam, is fairly puzzling. The framers of the NRC presumed that they will take little time in implementing it beyond Assam. India is not Assam, nor is it just Gujarat or Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Some importance should also be given to this nation's functioning in keeping with its Indian Standard Time.

Everything does not get done in time here. So, I am wondering, by the time some designated officials land up at the houses of those born before 1971, on the basis of God knows which data, there is no guarantee that those persons would be around. Okay, digital technology is assumed to have made everything a lot faster. But it was not around in the 1970s and earlier. How will midwives (*dais*) responsible for the birth of many prior to the 1970s be traced? Also, I have not heard of midwives having kept any record of the births they assisted in. With respect to those born in hospitals prior to 1971, the possibility of their certificates being retrieved from there is as good as non-existent. Besides, there is the "name" issue.

Nowadays, even a minor difference in spelling of names in various identity cards one is supposed to have can spell a major headache. Earlier, usually, only nicknames were decided at the time of birth. The birth certificates of many, if they exist, prior to the 1970s don't have the same name which was later chosen formally. Most educated and urban Indians are at present loaded with too many identity cards and documents required for verification: Driving license, birth-certificate, educational certificates, passport, PAN card, bank-statement, proof of having paid income tax, voter-ID and of

The unity being voiced by Indians against the CAA and the NRC cannot be taken lightly. It is a wake-up call for all. And this is not a laughing matter. The new generation is charting a new chapter for the coming years!

course the Aadhaar card. The last needs to be linked with registered mobile numbers, PAN cards, bank accounts and I am not aware if new rules would include some other documents, including verification by neighbours with documents to prove their identity.

It is really mind-boggling as to how many more identity cards each Indian is likely to be commanded to have. When Aadhaar cards were made compulsory, we ensured that all family members got theirs, by using the services of private agents. Since an elderly member was bedridden, the agent came home for his photograph, fingerprints, etc and his card was made. Earlier, the concerned government unit was approached to facilitate the same service. It took more than a year to respond and got in touch with us after the member had expired. This is just a mild indicator of the lapses still prevalent in the Indian

system, because of which it is impossible to expect immediate, accurate as well as complete data to be officially recorded about each and every citizen.

This writer has also learnt of cases of the Aadhaar card displaying the incorrect gender. No person — male, female, transgender or of any gender — would like to be identified wrongly, gender-wise. Of course, these errors have been corrected but not instantly or just within a few days.

Even if the present leaders remain confident about the NRC and the CAA being prepared in 50 years, as per IST, why don't they look into the

future; and start keeping records from 2020 than waste money and time in digging up the past?

It may be wiser for the government to give some importance to keeping a record of the blood group of each citizen. It should. It must. This will save time when, God forbid, any person reaches the stage of needing blood supply. Blood group is not decided by race, religion, caste, class and/or any other ethnic division. All my family members have different blood groups. Being accident-prone, they have needed blood more than once. Who knows, which and how many Indian citizens' blood

flows through my veins? I just know that it is Indian. Only in films, siblings with the same blood group turn up to save their parent from the jaws of death and thus get reunited.

The unity being voiced by Indians against the CAA and the NRC cannot be taken lightly. It is a wake-up call for all, including ones obsessed by a 50-year syndrome. And this is not a laughing matter. The new generation is charting a new chapter for the coming years!

The writer is a journalist with specialisation in communication studies and nuclear diplomacy. She is also the author of several books.



'It's just what I wanted! How did you know?'

India's Satya isn't Sundar; that's our ugly truth



Sriram Karri

It was an extraordinary year for India's greatest technology exports ever — Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai — two individuals who have achieved the absolutely highest positions in the world of technology. While Mr Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, was declared the "Person of the Year" by the *Financial Times*, Mr Pichai was named the CEO of Alphabet, the principal company which owns Google, of which Mr Pichai has been the head for quite a few years.

What an achievement for all of us Indians to be proud of, right? Wrong, actually. We have nothing to be proud of, and a lot to think about, if not to be ashamed of.

Actually, we Indians, those of us living in India, have achieved something different, though no less extraordinary — we have given the dead poet John Keats something to rethink; his chiasmus in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, when he declared, "beauty is truth, truth beauty". Translated, Satya is Sundar, and Sundar is Satya. In our case, it is not.

For us Indians to boast about their success as an Indian achievement is not true — their achievements are as un-Indian as it can get in our idea of India today — and the underlying truth is ugly.

Immigrants' success: The foundational value of their success is the idea of America, the great melting pot, where people of any country can come and make their tomorrow better. Now, if America implemented a citizenship law disallowing non-Christians into their land, we can only speculate about Satya Nadella, general manager, and Sundar Pichai, project manager, in two Indian companies.

Rejection of inheritance: The rise of these two, even after reaching America's shores, would not have been possible if Bill Gates and Steve Balmer, or Larry Page and Sergey Brin, had an Indian weakness for familial inheritance of positions. Put any Indian in place of these four and their succession planning would have included son, daughter, son-in-law, nephew, niece, and a long-extended set of cousins taking up the positions.

The final rise of Mr Nadella and Mr Pichai was further made possible by the most un-Indian of values — to create something and make way for someone else to hold the reins based only on talent, a far cry in a nation where even political parties are passed down as family treasures — just as their initial success was based on a liberal immigration policy.

For a nation that takes pride in those Indians, who have achieved something after they left our country, unable to find the opportunities they aspired for at home, is fake pride. For a nation that takes pride in the achievements of Indians overseas without having created such platforms itself — Wimbledon, the Oscar awards, the Nobel Prizes, or the Booker or Pulitzer prizes — it is a falsely premised pride. And top the pride cake with a cherry — quickly google the caste of newest achiever abroad and feel the chest fill with pride if it matches.

To be truly deserving to feel pride in the achievements of Satya Nadella or Sundar Pichai, we need to also become a country whose Sahitya Akademi prize is aspired for by authors or poets across the world, and aspire to become a nation where a Bangladeshi Muslim can migrate, become a citizen, join a company and become its CEO.

Little wonder that we may prove Keats wrong, but we also prove Joseph Heller right — to be proud of something we must be ashamed of is a trick that never fails. Not in India, not in our India, not in today's India.

Drop resolutions! Be spontaneous



Amrit Sadhana

tomorrow to have its own being. Let it come in its own way! Let it bring its own gifts. Resolution means you will allow only this and you will not allow that. Resolution means you would like the sun to rise in the west and not in the east. If it rises in the east, you will not open your windows: you will keep your windows open to the west. Resolution is struggle. Resolution is ego. Resolution is saying, 'I cannot live spontaneously'. And if you cannot live spontaneously, you don't live at all — you only pretend. So let only one resolution be there: I will never make any resolutions. Drop all resolutions! Let life be a natural spontaneity. The only golden rule is that there are no golden rules."

And naturally, the question will arise if we don't make new resolutions, how do we change our old habits, bring some-



thing new in our lives? To understand the real meaning of Osho's comment, we have to go deeper into the mechanism of the mind. It is the rational mind that is behind the new resolutions that we make. They spring from our past and unconscious behaviour. Before deciding to

make a new resolution, try to understand the nature of the habit and behavioural science. A habit has strong roots in the body and mind; therefore, habits are automatic, conditioned responses. Brain researchers say that it takes at least 66 days to form a new habit or change an old one. This is too long a gap between our resolution and the actual change of the pattern. Nobody has patience and perseverance to wait till the habit changes by itself. That's why we think we have failed, and wow, that we will never resolve

again. But the key is that the resolution has to be done by the heart, not by the mind. The mind is always indecisive, and the heart is ever resolved, undivided. Because the heart is not divided, it can determine unwaveringly. Another suggestion: If you want to be successful, don't have big goals, start with small actions, they are easy to fulfill. Instead of saying "exercise more", decide not to use the elevator, or walk for 20 minutes. Don't order yourself to eat healthier, have fresh fruits, and veggies for lunch. If your heart is in the decision, your success rate will be very high.

Amrit Sadhana is editor of Osho Times International. She facilitates meditation workshops based on Osho insights around the country and abroad.





Budget Pixel

Leaked renders of the Google Pixel 4a smartphone suggest a punch-hole display with no Soli chip

BEST PC GAMES OF THE DECADE

Not only has the decade gone by saw gaming technology improve by leaps and bounds, the games, thanks to powerful systems, implemented these technologies to provide a hyper realistic game. Here are a few of the best PC games of the decade

MINECRAFT

To understand the game's impact, one only needs to see the millions of Minecraft videos floating across social media. It has been told to be the digital version of Lego

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION V

It's strange to think that the elder of the two currently played Civilization games came out nearly 10 years ago, what with it still being the 25th most actively played game on Steam.

CRUSADER KINGS 2

This medieval strategic sandbox puts you in charge of a noble dynasty. You preserve your bloodline across generations, through historical events like crusades and plagues as well as endless emergent challenges that arise over the years.

ROCKET LEAGUE

Low gravity rocket-fuelled cars and football may seem like strange bedfellows, and utterly banal if you're interested in neither racing or football. Rocket League is a gestalt of these two things, creating a new sport altogether that's been a phenomenon since it came out in 2015.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Few will dispute the idea that this majestic RPG, set in one of the most atmospheric open worlds in gaming, is at its best on PC.

Divinity: Original Sin 2

While previous games in the series were always hampered by publisher and budgetary problems, Kickstarter crowdfunding let Larian off the leash, setting them free to make two of the deepest, most rewarding RPGs of all time.

PORTAL 2

Portal 2 is a first-person puzzle game where you use one of the greatest guns in gaming to progress through a series of increasingly difficult and mind-bending obstacles.

DARK SOULS

It's a game that dared to be formidable and uncompromising, and rewarded those of us who persevered through its initial obscurity with an inimitable sense of suspense and satisfaction.

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

There's something comforting about the fact that the best RPG and game of the decade wasn't a high-fantasy outing from a long-established publisher

Workers adapt as robots take over

Keeping up with the pace of AI is taking a toll on human workers' health, safety and morale

Washington, Dec. 30: Guess who's getting used to working with robots in their everyday lives? The very same warehouse workers once predicted to be losing their jobs to mechanical replacements. But doing your job side-by-side with robots isn't easy. According to their makers, the machines should take on the most mundane and physically strenuous tasks. In reality, they're also creating new forms of stress and strain in the form of injuries and the unease of working in close quarters with mobile half-ton devices that direct themselves.

"They weigh a lot," Amazon worker Amanda Taillon said during the pre-Christmas rush at a company warehouse in Connecticut. Nearby, a fleet of 6-foot-tall roving robot shelves zipped around behind a chain-link fence.

Taillon's job is to enter a cage and tame Amazon's wheeled warehouse robots for long enough to pick up a fallen toy or relieve a traffic jam. She straps on a light-up utility belt that works like a superhero's force field, commanding the nearest robots to abruptly halt and the others to slow down or adjust their routes.

"When you're out there, and you can hear them moving around, but you can't see them, it's like,

"Where are they going to come from?" she said. "It's a little nerve-racking at first."

Amazon and its rivals are increasingly requiring warehouse employees to get used to working with robots. The company now has more than 200,000 robotic vehicles it calls "drives" that are moving goods through its delivery-fulfillment centers around the U.S. That's double the number it had last year and up from 15,000 units in 2014.

Its rivals have taken notice, and many are adding their own robots in a race to speed up productivity and bring down costs.

Without these fast-moving pods, robotic arms and other forms of warehouse automation, retailers say they wouldn't be able to fulfill consumer demand for packages that can land on doorsteps the day after you order them online.

But while fears that robots will replace human workers haven't come to fruition, there are growing concerns that keeping up with the pace of the latest artificial intelligence technology is taking a toll on human workers' health, safety and morale.

Warehouses powered by robotics and AI software are leading to worker burnout by adding more work and upping the pressure on workers to speed



up their performance, said Beth Gutelius, who studies urban economic development at the University of Illinois at Chicago and has interviewed warehouse operators around the U.S.

It's not that workers aren't getting trained on how to work with robots safely. "The problem is it becomes very difficult to do so when the productivity standards are set so high," she said.

Much of the boom in warehouse robotics has its roots in Amazon's \$775 million purchase of Massachusetts startup Kiva Systems in 2012. The

tech giant re-branded it as Amazon Robotics and transformed it into an in-house laboratory that for seven years has been designing and building Amazon's robot armada. Amazon's Kiva purchase "set the tone for all the other retailers to stand up and pay attention," said Jim Liefer, CEO of San Francisco startup Kindred AI, which makes an artificially intelligent robotic arm that grasps and sorts items for retailers such as The Gap.

A rush of venture capital and private sector investment in warehouse robot-

ics spiked to \$1.5 billion a year in 2015 and has remained high ever since, said Rian Whitton, a robotics analyst at ABI Research.

Canadian e-commerce company Shopify spent \$450 million this fall to buy Massachusetts-based startup 6 River Systems, which makes an

autonomous cart nicknamed Chuck that can follow workers around a warehouse. Other mobile robot startups are partnering with delivery giants such as FedEx and DHL or retailers such as Walmart.

Amazon this year bought

another warehouse robotics startup, Colorado-based Canvas Technology, which builds wheeled robots guided by computer vision. Such robots would be more fully autonomous than Amazon's current fleet of caged-off vehicles, which have to follow bar codes and previously mapped routes within warehouses.

The tech giant is also still rolling out new models descended from the Kiva line, including the Pegasus, a squarish vehicle with a conveyor belt on top that can be found working the early-morning shift at a warehouse in the Phoenix suburb of Goodyear, Arizona. A crisscrossing fleet of robots carries packaged items across the floor and drops them into chutes based on the zip code of their final destination.

All of this is transforming warehouse work in a way that the head of Amazon Robotics says can "extend human capability" by shifting people to what they are best at: problem-solving, common sense and thinking on their feet.

"The efficiencies we gain from our associates and robotics working together harmoniously what I like to call a symphony of humans and machines working together allows us to pass along a lower cost to our customer," said Tye Brad

— AP

NEW INTEL CPUS TO MULTITASK MUCH BETTER

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs HYDERABAD, DEC. 30

In 2020, chip manufacturing giant, Intel, will hope to put its troubles behind them. And if the leaks are to be believed, the budget 10th generation of Core desktop processors will play a major role as it would see the biggest improvements, reports Engadget.

The report, which cites Informatica Cero and VideoCardz, said that the Comet Lake-S CPU lineup is likely to include Hyperthreading.

If the report is true, users will no longer need to buy a Core i7 or better to wring truly strong multitasking performance out of their system.

After that, it would be more about subtler but still welcome improvements. The flagship 3.7GHz Core i9-10900K (base clock of 3.7GHz) and its non-K variant (2.8GHz) would support a Velocity Boost feature that would hike clock speeds as long as the thermals allow.

Otherwise, the user have to make do with 'just' the regular Turbo Boost. These high-end parts would tout 10 cores and 20 total threads.

Beyond that, these would represent modest but welcome refreshes of the lineup.

Baidu takes AI language crown

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs HYDERABAD, DEC. 30

In 2019, nearly all companies made a play for artificial intelligence. Yet, Chinese search engine, Baidu, seems to have won the race for the year, reports said.

According to a report on The Independent, Baidu, in a competition designed to test how well a machine can understand human language, achieved the highest ever score in the General Language Understanding Evaluation (GLUE) - widely considered to be the benchmark for AI language understanding.

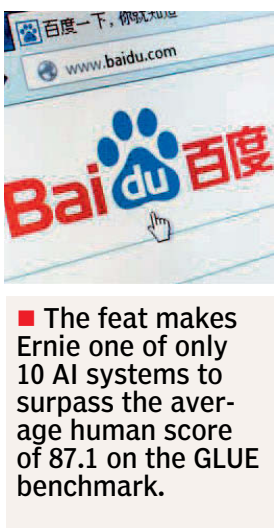
The firm's Ernie model became the first to score above 90 on the test, topping a leaderboard dominated by US tech firms and universities.

The feat also makes it one of only 10 AI systems to surpass the average human score of 87.1 on the GLUE benchmark.

Ernie used a method similar to Google's Bert, which transformed natural-language understanding for AI when it was created last year.

Both the models interpret meaning by examining the words that appear both before and after a word in a sentence in order to fully establish context.

Speaking to MIT



The feat makes Ernie one of only 10 AI systems to surpass the average human score of 87.1 on the GLUE benchmark.

Technology Review, Baidu Research's chief architect, Hao Tian, said "When we first started this work, we were thinking specifically about certain characteristics of the Chinese language. But we quickly discovered that it was applicable beyond that."

Baidu is already using the model to improve results for its search engine and make its AI assistant Xiao Du more accurate.

A paper detailing how Ernie was trained for the language test will be presented at the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence conference next year.

ADVANCE IN GAMING TECH

Since 2010, a lot has changed in the world of video games. Here are a few key technological advances that have had a huge impact.

RAY TRACING

The technology, as the name suggests, involves tracing the paths of individual light rays to create a lifelike depiction of how light works in the real world. Ray tracing, for long, has been used in the world of movies. However, it grabbed the headlines after Nvidia launched its GeForce RTX graphics cards in 2018

MOTION CAPTURE

Motion capture is nothing new. The process of capturing the movements of human actors to make for more realistic looking characters in games has been around since the 90s. However, in the past decade, motion capture has become a swift and painless process, developers will be able to more easily utilize it, and have more time freed up to hone visual details and animations

LIVE STREAMING

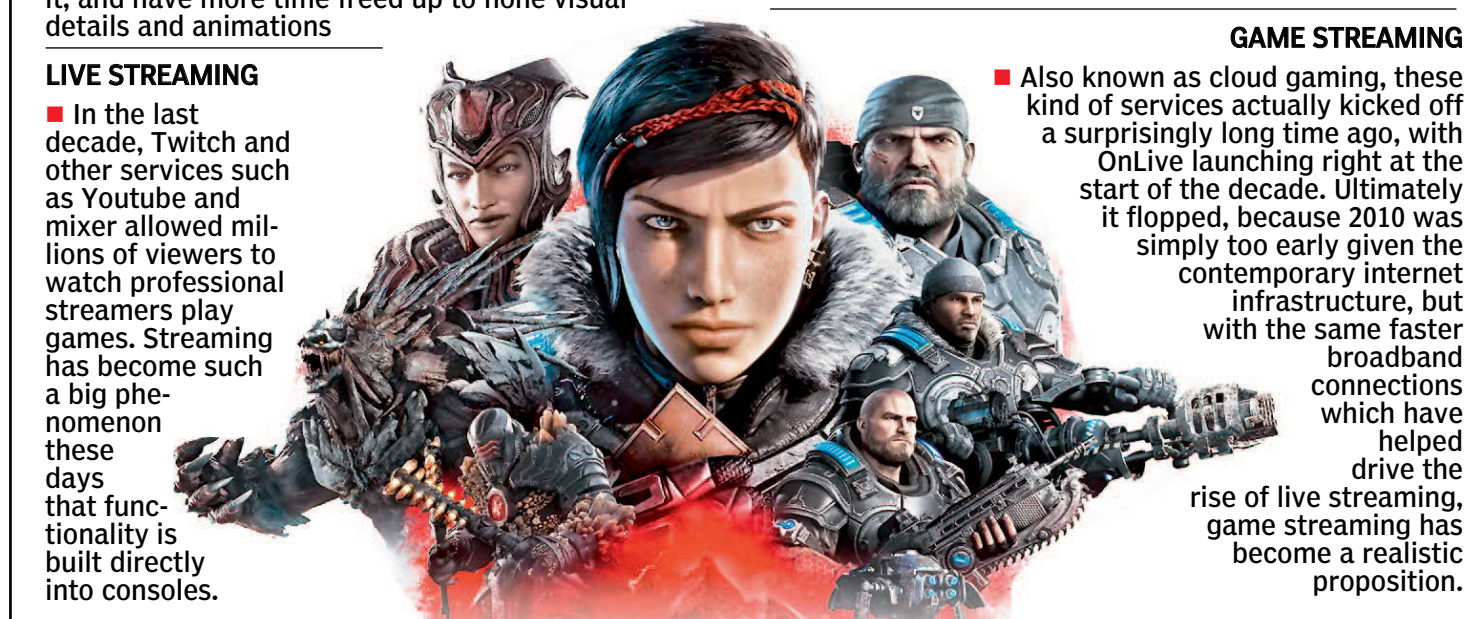
In the last decade, Twitch and other services such as Youtube and mixer allowed millions of viewers to watch professional streamers play games. Streaming has become such a big phenomenon these days that functionality is built directly into consoles.

ADAPTIVE SYNC

Nvidia's G-Sync and AMD's rival FreeSync were introduced in the middle of the last decade, and are monitor technologies designed to combat screen tearing and stuttering. In other words, they aim to give you a smoother gameplay experience, particularly with the likes of fast-paced shooters where any such stuttering effects could put off your aim. The technologies are no longer confined to just monitors. As 4K TVs have matured, we've seen the introduction of Variable Refresh Rate (VRR) with HDMI 2.1. Smooth gameplay and fluid frame rates are as big a deal as realistic and immersive graphics, particularly when it comes to playing online games competitively.

GAME STREAMING

Also known as cloud gaming, these kind of services actually kicked off a surprisingly long time ago, with OnLive launching right at the start of the decade. Ultimately it flopped, because 2010 was simply too early given the contemporary internet infrastructure, but with the same faster broadband connections which have helped drive the rise of live streaming, game streaming has become a realistic proposition.



Economic slowdown fails to buck smartphone demand

New Delhi, Dec.30: The economic slowdown may have clipped sales of cars and biscuits in 2019, but smartphones bucked the trend as urban and rural users continued to buy, and even upgrade to, expensive handsets — a trend likely to pick up pace in the coming year.

The growth in smartphone adoption was further fuelled by the government's push to position the country as a global hub for manufacturing and coax Apple and other leading brands to produce and export more phones from India.

Experts say that phone shipment is expected to see high single-digit to double-digit growth in India as smartphones aiding everything from shopping to banking to social media and, yes, perfect selfies! Counterpoint Research Associate Director Tarun Pathak expects India's smartphone market to grow by 9 per cent this year, and in

double digits (by 12-14 per cent) in 2020. By 2022, over 700 million people are expected to have a smartphone in India, and over a billion devices will be sold over the next four-five years, he said.

A back of the envelope calculation shows that over 115 million units smartphones were shipped in India in the first three quarters of 2019 with Xiaomi, Samsung, vivo, Oppo and realme making up the top five tally.

Interestingly, there has been a significant rise in the average selling prices (ASP) of smartphones this year — rising from ₹5,000-10,000 to ₹10,000-15,000 now.

As per International Data Corporation (IDC), while more than 80 per cent of the market is sub-₹200, the \$300-500 category has witnessed multi-fold growth with flagship devices of players like Xiaomi, Oppo and OnePlus. According to IDC India Associate Research

NEW AVENUES

A new area of action for smartphone makers was the smart TV space. Players like OnePlus, Motorola and Nokia launched their smart TVs — and priced them aggressively — to compete with giants like Sony, LG and Samsung.

Wearables also proved to be a provide major growth for smartphone makers

Manager (Client Devices)

Upasana Joshi, this segment is essentially for the "upgraders" who aspire for flagship-like design and specifications at nominal prices.

The government on its part brought a new electronics manufacturing policy to woo global investors to target manufacturing of one billion mobile phones by 2025. It also relaxed foreign direct investment (FDI) for single brand retail - a move that made Apple announce willingness to open its maiden

retail store in India.

Also, corporate tax rate was reduced to 22 per cent and a lower 15 per cent rate offered to new manufacturing units.

This massive outreach helped as Apple began making iPhone XR in India, while Salcomp committed investments to the tune of ₹2,000 crore. Salcomp — which the world's largest manufacturer and a major supplier of chargers to Apple for iPhone — has inked an agreement to take over the facility of Nokia in a spe-

cial economic zone (SEZ) near Chennai that was closed for nearly 10 years. The facility will be made operational from March 2020, and is expected to employ about 10,000 people.

For consumers, 2019 saw smartphones sporting more cameras with powerful sensors, higher memory and even a folding form factor. Ending months of wait, Samsung brought to India its 'Galaxy Fold' featuring a foldable display and priced at ₹1.65 lakh. Motorola has also introduced its foldable 'Moto Razr' though there is no clarity on its India availability.

Another area of action for smartphone makers was the smart TV space. Players like OnePlus, Motorola and Nokia launched their smart TVs — and priced them aggressively — to compete with giants like Sony, LG and Samsung.

Xiaomi India Head of Online Sales and Categories Raghu Reddy

said the smart TV accounted for 18 per cent of the total TV market in India in the first quarter of 2018, which expanded to 43 per cent a year later.

Another area of ultra-sonic growth was the wearables category. While previous years saw a number of fitness bands and smart watches making their way into the Indian market, 2019 was the year of 'hearables'. This category, according to Faisal Kawoosa (founder and Chief Analyst at techARC), will make up two-thirds of the wearables sales in 2020 by volume.

While smartphone manufacturing and consumption is scaling new heights, industry experts flag certain challenges.

In a recent meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the industry sought clarity over recent reduction in export incentives and demanded rationalisation of tax structure, including GST on

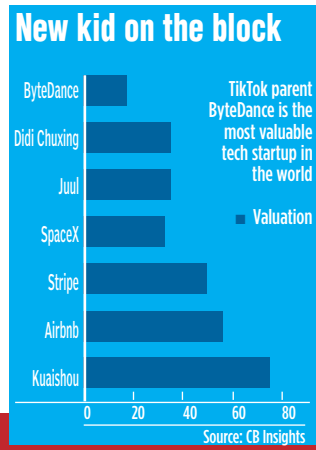
handsets.

"...we still depend on imports of many essential parts... which will take few more quarters before everything starts to be sourced locally. The hindrances to this are non-availability of resources, skilled labour, infrastructure etc." IDC India's Joshi said.

For further long-term growth, it is essential to build a strong and robust ecosystem of manufacturing, lowering dependency on imports and giving attractive export subsidies to these brands, she added.

That said, consumers' voracious appetite for smarter, more powerful phones riding on newer technologies like 5G will keep players busy in 2020. In the meantime, for one, plans to bring in 5G products for Indian consumers as early as the first quarter of 2020 and advises prospective buyers and tech enthusiasts to "stay tuned".

— PTI



Air India may crash-land if no buyer turns up

Air India might be forced to shut down by June next year unless it finds a buyer, as "piecemeal" arrangements cannot be sustained for long, a senior airline official said, adding that there is also a need for funds to restart operations of 12 grounded narrow-body planes. The airline has a debt burden of around ₹60,000 crore and the government is still working on the modalities for the disinvestment. The official said Air India might well go Jet Airways way if a prospective buyer does not come on board by June.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	41,575.14	1.00
Nifty 50	12,245.80	0.98
S&P 500	3,240.02	0.00
Dollar (₹)	71.32	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	93.54	0.29
Euro (₹)	79.86	0.41
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	39,882.73	-0.18
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	\$68.16	0.04
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.500	-0.076
US 10-Yr T-bill yield	1.877	0.04

* As of 9:30 pm IST

RattanIndia Power closes ₹6.5K cr debt

Private power producer RattanIndia Power said it has closed one-time settlement of Rs 6,574 crore debt raised from a consortium of lenders led by SBI and PFC. Under the settlement deal, existing lenders have assigned the principal debt to new investors and lenders, including Goldman Sachs and Varde Partners for Rs 4,050 crore.

SBI external benchmark rate cut by 25 bps



State Bank of India reduced its external benchmark-based rate by 25 basis points to 7.80 per cent per annum from 8.05 per cent with effect from January 1. With this, interest rate for existing home loan customers and MSME borrowers who have availed of loans linked to external benchmark-based rate would come down by 25 basis points, the bank said.

RBI buys ₹10K cr securities in special OMO

In the second special open market operation (OMO), the RBI bought Rs 10,000 crore worth long-term government securities and sold Rs 8,501 crore of three short-term bonds. The RBI had announced simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities last week. Though it offered to sell four securities in the auction, it accepted only three bids only.

Prince Pipes tanks over 7% on debut

Shares of Prince Pipes And Fittings made a weak debut at the bourses and closed over 7 per cent lower from its issue price of Rs 178. The scrip listed at Rs 160, down 10.11 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. During the day, it touched a high of Rs 177.95 and a low of Rs 152.60. It finally closed at Rs 166.60, down by 6.40 per cent. The Rs 500-crore IPO was subscribed 2.21 times.

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₹22 L cr created and ₹27 L cr destroyed in last 2 years

Polarised market creates, destroys massive wealth

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 30

The top 30 companies had created wealth worth Rs 22 lakh crore for investors between January 2018 and December 2019 while there has been wealth destruction to an extent of Rs 27 lakh crore across 1,100 out of 1,300 companies listed on the NSE during the two years, according to a study. "It was found that top 30 companies by market cap had created wealth worth Rs 22 lakh crore in the last two years, suggesting a massive polarisation, of funds moving towards extreme perceived safety," the study by Prospero Tree Financial Services said.

In 2019, the polarisation in the market has also got a boost from easy global liquidity that led to robust inflows into equities. Abhishek Bansal, chairman, ABans Group of Companies, said, "The Nifty has gained 12 per cent in 2019, with half the index stocks in the green but just one-third have gained more than 15 per cent. Most of this rally has been driven by foreign inflows through ETFs, which favours



heavyweight stocks." "Companies that seem to be valuable but lack earnings growth will continue to be ignored and underpriced. The broader market will want to see an earnings recovery," Bansal said. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,00,844 crore till December 30 in calendar year 2019, going by data from national depository NSDL. "Indian investors' investing mindset is also evolving, as they are learning some lessons the hard way. Markets are getting polarised day by day in terms of volumes and market cap. A lot of intra day

opportunities is exploited by teams of arbitrageurs or algo traders. The contribution, in percentage terms, of top 5 companies and top 10 companies by market cap to total market cap has gone up over the years from 9.7 and 14.4 per cent, respectively," said Deepak Jasani, head-retail research, HDFC Securities. Even though Sensex and Nifty have performed pretty well over the past 24 months, many investors are brutally injured in this period due to a wide fall in the stock market. While the top 25 companies market cap-wise gained 22 per cent on an average between

January 2018 and December 2019, the next 25 companies i.e., 25 to 50, in terms of market cap gained only 4 per cent.

Performance turned negative by 13 per cent for the next 50 companies i.e., 51-100, and by minus 8 per cent for the next 150 companies, i.e., 101 to 250. Companies ranked 251 to 500 have given 34 per cent negative return while those in the 501 to 1,329 rank have returned minus 57 per cent on an average.

"However what is perceived to be safe may not really be safe over a long period. In today's context, quality companies are getting completely mixed up as quality investments," the study by Prospero Tree Financial Services said. "The one thing that comes between quality companies being called as quality investments is the price at which those investments are made," the study warned. There are many companies doing credible work in their respective sectors, having a decent probability of adequate success and are now available at attractive price, the study further said.

RBI seeks to tighten lending rules for urban co-op banks

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, DEC. 30

In a bid to prevent PMC Bank-like scams, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday proposed to cap the loan exposure of urban co-operative banks to a single entity and a group of borrowers to 10 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, besides also raising the priority sector lending targets for them.

The RBI, in the draft circular, stipulated "that the prudential exposure limits for UCBs for a single borrower/party and a group of connected borrowers/parties shall be 10 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, of their Tier I capital and that at least 50 per cent of their loan portfolio shall comprise loans not more than Rs 25 lakh per borrower/party."

Jyotindra Mehta, president of the National Federation of Urban Co-operative Banks and Credit Societies, told FC, "The new limits that are being proposed for UCBs are similar to the ones that small finance banks (SFBs) have to follow. The co-operative banks should respect the regulator's prescribed formula when enforced."

However, the chairman of another UCB told FC:

"The hidden agenda of the RBI is to force UCBs to convert to SFBs. Two years ago also the RBI had asked UCBs to voluntarily convert to SFB, but there were no takers. So now the RBI is forcing UCBs to follow the same norms"

"If you read in between the lines, then you will understand that the hidden agenda of the RBI is to force UCBs to convert to SFBs. Two years ago also the RBI had asked UCBs to voluntarily convert to SFB, but there were no takers. So now the RBI is forcing UCBs to follow the same norms and later convert to SFBs."

The revised exposure limits shall apply to all types of fresh exposures taken by UCBs. Once the final norms are issued, UCBs will have to bring down their existing exposures which are in excess of the revised limits to within the aforesaid revised limits by March 31, 2023. However, where the existing exposure comprises only term loans and non-fund based facilities, while no further

exposure shall be taken on such borrowers, these facilities may be allowed to continue as per their respective repayment schedule / till maturity the central bank said.

Further the draft norms also proposes to increase the overall priority sector lending target for UCBs from the present level of 40 per cent of adjusted net bank credit or credit equivalent amount of off-balance sheet exposure, whichever is higher to 75 per cent by March 31, 2023. Currently, primary (urban) co-operative banks (UCBs) are permitted to have exposures up to 15 per cent and 40 per cent of their capital funds to a single borrower and a group of borrowers, respectively.

The RBI said large exposure of banks to single borrowers/parties or groups of connected borrowers/parties leads to credit concentration risk. When large exposures to a few single parties/groups become non-performing, it affects the capital/net worth of the concerned bank significantly and, at times, leads to liquidity and solvency risk for the lender.

The central bank said that the comments on the draft circular can be forwarded to it till January 20.

MDR waiver: Payments industry says it's like nationalisation

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 30

The government's proposal to waive merchant discount rate (MDR) charges for RuPay and UPI transactions will virtually kill the digital payments industry by drying up its revenue stream. The move will also lead to slowdown and job losses, says the industry.

"The zero MDR on RuPay and UPI will kill the industry and make the business model unviable. It's like nationalisation of the payments industry. If the government wants to drive digitalisation, then it should bear the cost," said Vishwas Patel, chairman, Payments Council of India. PCI, the representative body of merchant acquirers and aggregators, also said scrapping MDR will

lead to job losses, stymie innovation and slowdown the expansion of digital payments, as the move will spell the end of customer incentive spends by participants. Service providers will start withdrawing POS terminals to cut their losses if there is no revenue from 500 million active RuPay cards.

With a view to drive digital payments, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had a couple of days back asked the industry not to charge MDR on payments using RuPay, UPI from January 1. This applies to all companies with a turnover of Rs 50 crore or more. This was mentioned in its last budget.

MDR is a charge levied for making card transactions and is distributed among all the parties

involved, including the card companies, banks and the POS terminal providers. As per the industry, about 80-90 per cent of the revenues for POS terminal providers comes through MDR. Some in the industry want the cost to be borne by the government instead of banks, as they would not have any incentive to promote digital payments without MDR revenues.

"Incentivising digital payments to push for less cash economy is a good move. However, clarity is required on who will foot the MDR cost," said Rishi Gupta, MD & CEO, Fino Payments Bank.

"From the point-of-view of the government, this will aid in accelerating the adoption of digital/cash-less payment systems

along with reducing the transaction cost of digital payments. However, this move may impact the private players in the digital payments space as MDR is a source of their revenue models along with impact," said Ankur Pahwa, partner and national leader-e-commerce and consumer internet, EY India. "It is important to keep in mind that this is mandated only for companies above Rs 50 crore turnover and hence will not impact the smaller merchants, which form a larger volume base," he said.

"If government wants to push digital payments, then making MDR zero is not the solution, but a lower, controlled MDR along with added tax benefits to merchants will go a long way," Patel said.

Kia Motors plans electric version of Seltos SUV

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, DEC. 30

After racing to the top in the sports utility vehicle (SUV) sales chart last month, Kia Motors now plans to bring to India an all-electric Seltos SUV to cash in on its popularity in Asia's third biggest economy.

The new model has been internally codenamed SP2 EV and is being road-tested internationally.

The Seltos EV will join the Seltos petrol and diesel line-up globally. South Korea's Kia Motors is the world's eighth biggest car maker.

"We have plans to launch a new car every six months and the electric vehicle is part of that plan for the Indian market," Manohar Bhat, head, marketing and sales at Kia Motors India told Financial Chronicle without divulging more details. This means five new cars in three years after Kia Seltos SUV was introduced in August 2019.

But industry sources said if everything goes as per the plan, Kia Motors

the electric Seltos would be introduced next year, with production beginning in the second half of 2020. It would be made exclusively available for the Asian markets initially, starting with South Korea.

According to sources the Kia Seltos EV is likely to have the same drivetrain as the Hyundai Kona EV. The range of the Seltos EV could be around 400 km.

When launched in India, Kia Seltos EV will compete directly with recently unveiled British MG ZS EV for the sheer SUV-like size of the vehicle. The MG ZS EV, powered by 44.5kWh lithium-ion battery, can go up to 340 kilometers on a single charge. At present Kia Motors India has its hands full with aggressive marketing activities lined for its second product in India - the premium Carnival multi-purpose vehicle to be launched in the first half of next year.

The company is also readying a sub-four-metre compact SUV, which would hit the roads in the second half of 2020.

Huawei gets nod to join 5G trials

New Delhi, Dec. 30: The government has allowed Chinese telecom company Huawei Technologies Co. to participate in trials for 5G networks, as part of its decision to include all players in the trials.

"We have taken a decision to give 5G spectrum for trials to all players," Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said on Monday.

An in-principle decision has been taken in this regard, Prasad said at an event here. "5G is future, it is speed. We will encourage new innovation in 5G," he added.

The government's stand implies that all operators, backed by equipment vendors they have decided to partner with, will be able to participate in the upcoming 5G trials.

A Huawei spokesman also confirmed the news. The nod to Huawei comes at a time when the global rollout of 5G technology has been complicated by US sanctions against the company. The United States has been lobbying allies not to use Huawei's network equipment in their 5G networks. The trials will be held in January, according to a senior telecom ministry



official. The telecom department will meet operators on Tuesday to confirm the timing for 5G trials, a

news channel reported. Sources said all vendors, including Huawei, will be covered in trials. Sources had recently

said the government has received seven applications for 5G trials and added that all operators and vendors (including Nokia, Ericsson, Huawei, ZTE and Samsung) are keen to participate.

Huawei rivals western equipment makers, such as Ericsson, and is banned in the US. Many countries, however, have allowed telecom service providers to use Chinese gears. And now, India has also indicated its unwillingness to keep any company out of 5G trials.

—Agencies

China's vice-premier to visit US for phase-I deal

K. J. M. VARMA
BEIJING, DEC 30

China's vice-premier Liu He, who is also the chief negotiator for trade talks with the US, will lead a delegation to Washington this weekend, during which he is expected to sign a phase one deal to significantly de-escalate the trade war between the two biggest global economies, a media report said on Monday. "Washington has sent an invitation and Beijing

has accepted it," Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted an official as saying.

The Chinese delegation, headed by Liu, which would leave on Saturday is expected to stay "a few days" in the US, the report said.

However, neither side has officially confirmed the trip. China's Ministry of Commerce was not immediately available for comment. The signing of a phase one deal during Liu's trip

would mark a point of truce in the ongoing bitter trade war.

On December 13, China and the US have agreed on the text of a phase one economic and trade agreement to end the 18-month-long trade war.

According to an official statement, both the sides have agreed to complete their necessary procedures, including legal review, translation and proofreading, as soon as possible.

—PTI

Exports may touch \$330-340 bn, says Fieo

New Delhi, Dec 30: The country's exports are expected to touch \$330-340 billion during the ongoing fiscal on account of uncertain global situation and rising protectionism, exporters body Fieo said on Monday.

During April-November 2019-20, exports dipped by about 2 per cent to \$212 billion.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (Fieo) president Sharad Kumar Saraf said the global situation is becoming extremely challenging as rising protectionism is leading to uncertainty in global trade, which will have adverse impact on India.

He said despite having a moderate share in global trade, India's exports have always followed the trend in global imports.

"Therefore, when global imports are declining, our exports are also likely to take a hit. Currently, exports during April-November 2019 are down by about 1.99 per cent. Therefore, we feel our goods exports may touch \$330-340 billion in the current fiscal," Saraf said in a statement.

"If the global situation improves, which is likely in the first half of 2020, we may look for 15 per cent growth in exports during the next financial year," he said.

However, he said exports have to be aligned with changing import patterns of the global economy.

About 50 per cent of the global imports is accounted by electrical and electronics products, automobiles, machinery, petroleum products and plastic products. "Unfortunately, the share of such products in our exports is less than 33 per cent despite having petroleum products accounting for roughly half of it. Our global share in such products is much less than 1 per cent," he said.

—PTI



Be prepared

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called for his military and diplomats to prepare unspecified offensive measures to protect the country's security and sovereignty



Biden's vote to authorise Iraq War worst foreign policy decision

— Pete Buttigieg
Democratic presidential candidate

BRIEF

Thief throws stolen cash in air

DENVER: A man with a white beard was being held on \$10,000 bond for allegedly robbing a Colorado bank and throwing the stolen cash into the air while shouting, "Merry Christmas" to passersby, police and local media reported on Tuesday. David Wayne Oliver, 65, was arrested at a nearby Starbucks coffee shop after he held up the Academy Bank in Colorado Springs on Monday afternoon, according to a police report. Police said the suspect had "threatened the use of a weapon" and left the bank with an undisclosed amount of cash. A police spokesperson could not immediately be reached.

French tourist hurt by shark

Victoria (Seychelles): A French tourist was seriously injured after being attacked by a shark while swimming in the Seychelles, a popular tourist destination, the French ambassador said on Monday. The attack on the 45-year-old woman took place on Sunday night off the island of Praslin, the second-largest in the picturesque archipelago famed for its pristine beaches. The victim was injured in one arm and was transported to a hospital. "She underwent an operation last night and her life is not in danger," Ambassador Dominique Mas told news agency AFP. The attack comes during the high tourist season for the Seychelles, an archipelago of 115 islands located off the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean.

Mom forgets to record daughter

ALBUQUERQUE: A future mother-in-law tasked with making a phone recording of her future son-in-law proposing to her daughter apparently missed the moment. She ended up recording a selfie on her reaction to what she was seeing. KOB-TV reports Susan Griego somehow took a selfie video of herself watching Benjamin Steele Bacon propose to her daughter. She did capture the moment Bacon popped the question to Amber Griego by the penguin exhibit at the Albuquerque Biopark. The couple said the selfie video made the proposal more memorable. "People have asked about it. I feel like that's kind of our relationship. Something wacky and random," Amber Griego said. "It's the perfect start to this." Her mother admitted she's probably "not very good at photography."

THAI RIVALS TO RUN AGAINST DICTATORSHIP

Bangkok, Dec. 30: More than 10,000 people have registered for a "Run Against Dictatorship" in Bangkok next month while supporters of the Thai government plan to stage a rival walk on the same day, organisers said on Monday.

The twin events, set for January 12, point to the rising political temperature in Thailand, though there is no immediate sign of any return to the violent street protests that have roiled the Thai capital over the past two decades. Opponents of the government say it manipulated an election held in March to extend the rule of junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha and they now fear that authorities will move to dissolve the vocal opposition party Future Forward.

"We want to show the government the discontent that citizens have with the administration," university student Tanawat Wongchai said.



A skycrane drops water on a bushfire in scrub behind houses in Bundoora, Melbourne on Monday. New Year's Eve fireworks in Australia's capital and other cities have been cancelled as the wildfire danger worsens in oppressive summer heat. Sydney will set off its iconic fireworks display after being granted an exemption.

Australia's columns of fire force mass evacuation

RFS Volunteer firefighter killed trying to battle bushfires in Albury

Sydney/Melbourne, Dec. 30: A volunteer firefighter was killed battling Australian bushfires on Monday as "columns" of flames generating their own dangerous weather systems bore down on a tourist region, prompting the evacuation of tens of thousands of people.

The firefighter, and two others who suffered burns, were working on a fire about 70 km (45 miles) east of Albury in New South Wales (NSW) when, it is believed, their truck rolled after being hit by strong winds, authorities said on Twitter.

The incident took the death toll from the country's raging bushfires to nine and added pressure on authorities to reconsider New Year celebration plans for the city of Sydney.

Around 100 fires are burning across Australia,

with as many as 14 "emergency" warnings in place for Victoria while fires are also threatening homes and infrastructure in South Australia and Tasmania.

Tens of thousands were evacuated as "columns of fire" fuelled by extreme heat and high winds bore down on the popular tourist region of East Gippsland in Victoria state in Australia's southeast.

Wildfires that have plagued the country's eastern coast for weeks flared again to danger levels in East Gippsland, an area encompassing two national parks, lakes and coastal plains that is half the size of Belgium.

By late afternoon, officials warned holiday makers to stay off the roads because of thick smoke and unpredictable, fast-moving fires, adding that

Tens of thousands were evacuated as "columns of fire" fuelled by extreme heat and high winds bore down on the popular tourist region of East Gippsland

Bushfires have destroyed more than 4 million hectares (10 million acres) — an area the size of Japan — across Australia in recent weeks.

It was now too late for people who had not left the region to do so.

"Leaving now would be deadly," authorities said.

The state's Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp said "columns of fire" were punching into the atmosphere and generating their own erratic

weather systems. "There's lightning coming out of these columns," Crisp told reporters. "It is unpredictable, it's dangerous out there."

With some firefronts stretching more than 1,000 km (620 miles) and temperatures reaching as high as 43 Celsius (109 Fahrenheit), Crisp said the danger will remain high into the evening.

Bushfires have destroyed more than 4 million hectares (10 million acres) — an area the size of Japan — across Australia in recent weeks.

At the Wallagarauh River Retreat in Mallacoota, a coastal town in East Gippsland, owner Lynette Sykes told Reuters her property was evacuated this morning.

"We were not going to take any risks with people's lives," Sykes said. A video posted on social

media site Facebook showed tourist Nicholas Costanzo escaping from the Victorian bushfire on a narrow two-way road dotted with fire trucks as thick smoke blurred vision. "Please pray for us," he said.

Authorities across Australia's south, including fire-ravaged South Australia, warned that dry lightning could spark further flare-ups overnight even as the temperature is forecast to cool.

Dry lightning occurs when a storm forms from high temperatures, but the much-needed rain evaporates before reaching the ground.

Large parts of Australia have suffered through several years of drought that has created tinder dry conditions, leaving bushland ready to ignite.

— Reuters

Greta a victim of depression: Dad

London, Dec. 30: Greta Thunberg may have become the new global climate icon, but the 16-year-old Swedish teenager struggled with depression for three to four years and received no support from her father for skipping school for activism, a bold decision that has inspired millions to join her in raising awareness on environmental issues.

In an interview to the BBC, Greta's father Svante Thunberg said he thought it was "a bad idea" for his daughter to take to the "front line" of the battle against climate change.

Thunberg said he was "not supportive" of his daughter skipping school for the climate strike.

As part of the same broadcast, guest-edited by Greta for Radio 4's Today programme, renowned naturalist and broadcaster David Attenborough told her she had "woken up the world" to climate change and "achieved things that many of us who have been working on the issue for 20 years have failed to do".

Greta was nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, after spearheading a global movement demanding world leaders take action over climate change. It led to co-ordinated school strikes across the globe.

Thunberg said his daughter had struggled with depression for "three or four years" before she began her school strike.

"She stopped talking... she stopped going to school," he said, adding



Greta Thunberg

I did all these things. I knew they were the right thing to do... but I didn't do it to save the climate, I did it to save my child. She stopped talking... she stopped going to school.

SVANTE THUNBERG
Greta Thunberg's father

that it was the "ultimate nightmare for a parent" when Greta began refusing to eat.

To help her get better, Thunberg spent more time with Greta and her younger sister, Beata, at their home in Sweden. Greta's mother, opera singer and former Eurovision Song Contest participant Malena Ernman, cancelled contracts so the whole family could be together.

Then they began discussing and researching climate change, with Greta becoming increasingly passionate.

"I did all these things. I knew they were the right thing to do... but I didn't do it to save the climate, I did it to save my child," Thunberg told presenter Mishal Husain in Sweden.

— PTI

Cat meets owner 2 yrs after disaster

Tampa, Dec. 30: A cat that went missing two years ago in Florida during Hurricane Irma has been reunited with the pet's owner.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office tweeted late last week that the cat showed up at one of its offices in the Tampa area and deputies were hoping to find the owner.

"The cat seems very domesticated, and may be from a house or apartment nearby," deputies posted.

The sheriff's office provided an update on Friday, saying that the owner had been traced via microchip after deputies took the cat to a

Hurricane Irma hit Florida in 2017, and the cat disappeared during the same time, when Irma's path cut through the middle of the US east coast state.

local veterinarian. The sheriff's office didn't identify Eva's owner but said the cat disappeared during the 2017 hurricane whose path cut through the middle of Florida.

"Tonight, the owner was reunited with Eva," the sheriff's office tweeted. "Eva is now living in luxury. MOW, that is a great story!"

— AP

2019 WAS HOTTEST YEAR ON RECORD FOR RUSSIA: REPORT

MOSCOW, Dec. 30: This year was the hottest ever registered in Russia, the country's weather chief said on Monday, as climate change pushes global temperatures to record highs.

"This year in Russia was the hottest for the entire period of instrumental observations," the head of the Gidrometsentr weather service, Roman Vilfand, told Russian news agencies.

He said Moscow's average temperature for 2019 had hit 7.6-7.7 degrees Celsius (45.7-45.9 degrees Fahrenheit), beating the previous record by 0.3

Moscow's average temperature for 2019 had hit 7.6-7.7 degrees Celsius (45.7-45.9 degrees Fahrenheit), beating the previous record by 0.3 degrees.

Weather records have been kept since 1879 in Moscow and since 1891 in Russia as a whole.

Global warming has sent temperatures rising around the world, with the United Nations saying earlier this month that 2019 was on course to be one of the three hottest years on record.

— AFP

Tourists flee as heatwave fans blaze



An aerial scene shows fires burning and smoke rising close to properties in Bundoora, Victoria state, on Monday.

Sydney, Dec. 30: Tourists and firefighters were forced to flee vast fires burning in southeastern Australia on Monday, as a heatwave rekindled devastating bush blazes across the country.

Authorities said "quite a number" of the 30,000 tourists visiting the usually picturesque southeast tip of the continent had heeded calls to evacuate.

More than a dozen blazes are raging in the East Gippsland countryside, some so intensely that hundreds of firefighters were pulled back beyond a firefront estimated to stretch 1,000 kilometres (600 miles).

It was deemed "unsafe" for them to remain in bushland areas, Gippsland fire incident controller Ben Rankin said.

It is the latest emergency in Australia's devastating summer fire season, which has been turbocharged by a prolonged drought and climate change.

Ten people have been killed, more than 1,000 homes destroyed and more than three million hectares (7.4 million acres) — an area bigger than Belgium — have been scorched. Conditions worsened on Friday with high winds and temperatures soaring.

— AFP

OUT OF BOUNDS ■ Tours of the Canyon usually run out of bookings in a matter of months or even weeks

No more photo-only tours at Antelope Canyon



PHOENIX, Dec. 30: Photographers will have to throw away their shot at snapping photos of the globally recognized Upper Antelope Canyon in Arizona.

Tour operators of the slot canyon, known for its red-orange sandstone walls, on the Navajo Nation announced last week that photo-only tours will cease. The Arizona Republic reported.

Antelope Canyon Tours, which is owned by members of the Navajo tribe,

announced the decision on its website. The photographer-only tours have led to long wait times as professional shutterbugs try to get that picture-perfect shot. Visitors with cell-phones and cameras on the regular tours can still take photos. But tripods will no longer be permitted.

Guided tours are the only way tourists can reach upper or lower Antelope Canyon near Page in northern Arizona. Photo-tours are not avail-

able at Lower Antelope Canyon. The upper and lower canyons are managed by the Navajo Parks and Recreation Department. No one at the agency was immediately available Friday to respond to a call seeking comment.

Tours of Antelope Canyon usually run out of bookings in a matter of months or even weeks in advance. Social media has undoubtedly played a role in the slot canyon's ability to draw millions of tourists a year. Antelope

Canyon is a perfect photo opp for a Facebook or Instagram post.

Some tour operators are considering leading photography tours in other slot canyons on the Navajo Nation.

Adventurous Antelope Canyon Tours will begin photo tours to Rattlesnake, Owl and Mountain Sheep canyons early next year. These spots may not have the coloring of Antelope Canyon, they do have the swirling walls.

— AP



Progressive step

Angela Merkel discussed efforts to reach a diplomatic solution for the Libyan conflict in two separate phone calls with Turkish President Erdogan and Russian President Putin



Americans have you in their thoughts and prayers as you face this fight

— Nancy Pelosi on John Lewis cancer

BRIEF

Iraq warns of tough reply to US

Baghdad: A top Iraqi militia leader warned of a strong response against US forces in Iraq following air strikes in Iraq and Syria overnight that killed at least 25 people. The air strikes against the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia group was in response to the killing of a US civilian contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base, officials said. Iraqi security and militia sources said at least 25 militia fighters were killed and at least 55 wounded. "The blood of the martyrs will not be in vain and our response will be very tough on the American forces in Iraq," senior commander Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim, said.

Turkey arrests 70 ISIS suspects

Istanbul: Turkish police detained 70 people suspected of ties to Islamic State in nationwide raids early on Monday, ahead of New Year celebrations, state media said two months after the killing of the group's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Police have rounded up jihadist militants in late December in the last two years, since New Year's Day in 2017 when a gunman killed 39 people in an Istanbul nightclub in an attack claimed by the militant group. Counter-terror police ramped up intelligence activities and carried out the operations in the central provinces of Ankara, Kayseri and Adana, and Batman in the southeast, state-owned Anadolu news agency reported.

Sudan: 27 Intel agents get death

Cairo: A court in Sudan on Monday sentenced 27 members of the country's security forces to death for torturing and killing a detained protester during the uprising against Sudan's longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir earlier this year. The death of protester Ahmed al-Khair, a school teacher, while in detention in February was a key point — and a symbol — in the uprising that eventually led to the military's ouster of al-Bashir. Monday's convictions and sentences, which can be appealed, were the first connected to the killings of protesters in the revolt. The rally in Sudan was held to protest the soaring cost of bread.

PAK TALIBAN COMMANDER SHOT DEAD

Kabul: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander Qari Saifullah Mehsud has been shot dead by gunmen in Afghanistan, the group confirmed. Qari Saifullah Mehsud was killed outside the Guloon camp in Khost province, the group spokesperson said in an audio message. The spokesman claimed that the attack was carried out by the Haqqani network, as they had killed three terrorists belonging to the TTP's Hakimullah Mehsud group in the area a few days ago. The TTP was founded in 2007 by Baitullah Mehsud and is currently divided into four factions — Swat group, Mehsud group, Bajaur Agency group, and Darra Adamkhel group. Qari Saifullah Mehsud was among the terrorists wanted by Pakistani authorities for his involvement in various attacks in the country. In an audio message, Mehsud had claimed that his group conducted 75 terror attacks this year, mostly targeting local elders in North and South Waziristan districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Mehsud's death is a big jolt for TTP as he was attempting to unite all the four factions. — Agencies

A 2020 dance



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (centre right) dances with TV host Polina Shuba during Vienna Ball ahead of New Year celebration in Minsk, Belarus.



Robert O'Brien

US READY FOR ACTION AGAINST NORTH KOREA

Washington, Dec. 30: National security advisor Robert O'Brien has said that the United States is ready to take action as North Korea delivered a threat.

O'Brien's remarks come in response to Pyongyang threatening a 'Christmas gift' unless US did not provide concession on denuclearisation talks by its self imposed year-end deadline.

"If Kim Jong Un takes that approach, we'll be extraordinarily disappointed and we'll express that disappointment," O'Brien said. North Korea has set a year-end deadline for the United States to change what it says is a policy of hostility amid a stalemate in efforts to make progress to end its nuclear programme and establish lasting peace. Pyongyang warned US last week over a Christmas gift as the deadline looms.

Kim and Trump have met three times since June 2018 but there has been no substantive progress in dialogue and the government in Pyongyang has demanded that international sanctions be lifted first.

Last week, North Korea said the US would 'pay dearly' for taking issue with Pyongyang's human rights record and that Washington's 'malicious words' would only aggravate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The US envoy for North Korea Stephen Biegun visited South Korea and China, last week, making a public and direct call to North Korea to return to negotiation. North Korea has conducted a number of test-launches of short-range missiles in the months since. — ANI

Scientist who edited babies' genes jailed

China convicts 3 researchers illegal medical practice

Beijing, Dec. 30: A Chinese scientist who set off an ethical debate with claims that he had made the world's first genetically edited babies was sentenced on Monday to three years in prison because of his research.

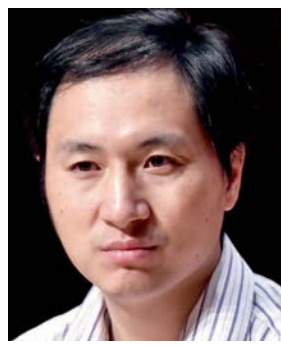
He Jiankui, who was convicted of practicing medicine without a license, was also fined 3 million yuan (\$430,000) by a court in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. Two other researchers involved in the project received lesser sentences and fines.

The verdict said the three defendants had not obtained qualification as doctors, pursued fame and profits, deliberately violated Chinese regulations on scientific research and crossed an ethical line in both scientific research and medicine.

The court said the researchers were involved in the births of three genetically edited babies to two women, confirming reports of a third baby. It also said they had fabricated ethical review documents.

He, the lead researcher, shocked the scientific world when he announced in November 2018 that he had altered the embryos of twin girls who had been born the same month.

The announcement sparked a global debate over the ethics of gene editing. He said he had used a tool called CRISPR to try to disable a gene that allows the Aids virus to enter a cell, in a bid to give the girls the ability to resist the infection. The identity of the girls has not been released, and it isn't clear if the experiment succeeded.



He Jiankui

Dr. William Hurlbut, a Stanford University bioethicist whose advice He sought for more than a year before his experiment, said he felt sorry for the scientist, his wife and two young daughters.

"I warned him things could end this way, but it was just too late," Hurlbut wrote in an email to the director of the US National Institutes of Health, Dr. Francis Collins, and gene-editing pioneer Jennifer Doudna at the University of California, Berkeley.

He studied in the US before setting up a lab at the Southern university of science and technology of China in Shenzhen, a city in Guangdong province that borders Hong Kong. The verdict accused him of colluding with Zhang Renli and Qin Jinzhou, who worked at medical institutes.

It wasn't clear if the three-year prison term includes any of the time he has already spent in Chinese custody.

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Putin marks 20 years in power

Trump thanked for Kremlin terror alert

Moscow, Dec. 30: As Russian President Vladimir Putin marks two decades in power, he boasts about his achievements but remains coy about his political future — a reticence that fuels wild speculation about his intentions.

Putin points to the revival of Russia's global clout, industrial modernization, booming agricultural exports and a resurgence of military as key results of his tenure that began on Dec. 31, 1999. On that day, Russia's first President Boris Yeltsin abruptly stepped down and named the former KGB officer his successor, paving the way for his election three months later. Critics accuse Putin of rolling back post-Soviet freedoms to establish tight control over the political scene, marginalise the opposition and stifle critical media. They hold him responsible for tensions with the West after Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, which bolstered his approval ratings but triggered US and European sanctions. — AP



Vladimir Putin

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Protesters take to the streets for a march in Hong Kong.

Protests on NYE in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, Dec. 30: Hong Kong will end 2019 with multiple protests planned for New Year's Eve and New Year's day aimed at disrupting festivities and shopping in the Asian financial hub, which has seen a rise in clashes between police and protesters since Christmas. Events dubbed "Suck the Eve" and "Shop With You" are set for New Year's Eve on Tuesday in areas including the party district of Lan Kwai Fong, the picturesque Victoria Harbour, and popular shopping malls, according to notices on social media.

A pro-democracy march on Jan. 1 has been given police permission and will start from a large park in bustling Causeway Bay and end in the central business district. Organisers civil human rights front were behind the peaceful million-plus marches in June and held a mass protest earlier in December, which they said around 8,00,000 people attended.

"On New Year's Day, we need to show our solidarity to resist the government. We hope Hong Kong people will come onto the streets for Hong Kong's future," said Jimmy Sham.

The protests began in June in response to a now-withdrawn bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China, where courts are controlled by the Communist Party, and have evolved into a broader pro-democracy movement. Police said they would deploy crowd control patrols and urged marchers to remain peaceful. — Reuters

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE

The Sr. DME/Diesel, Northern Railway, Diesel Loco Shed, Tughlakabad for and on behalf of President of India invites e-tenders for the following work. The tender will be accepted online only in the prescribed tender document.

Name of work	"PU Painting of 37 (Thirty Seven) Nos. (WDP4D & WDP4B) HHP Diesel Locomotives at Diesel Shed, Tughlakabad".
Place of work	Diesel Shed, Tughlakabad, New Delhi-110044
Completion period	36 Months
Approximate cost of work	Rs. 48,98,996/- (Rs. Forty Eight Lakhs Ninety Eight Thousand Nine Hundred And Ninety Six Only) including GST @ 18%
Tender Document Cost	Rs. 3,540/- (Rs. Three Thousand Five Hundred Forty only)
Earnest Money	Rs. 98,000/- (Rs. Ninety Eight Thousand only)
Eligibility Criteria (Special)	As per approval of competent authority, tenderer must have eligibility of successfully "PU Painting carried out in transport sector i.e. Rail Transport (EMU/MEMU/DMU/locomotive/Wagons, ICF/RVF built coaches), Road Transport (Public carrier buses) and Civil aviation (Aeroplane/Chopper)".
Website to download and upload e-tender document	ireps.gov.in
Due date & time of uploading of Tender by tenderer	22.01.2020 upto 12:00 Hrs.
Place of opening of tender	Divisional Railway Manager office, State Entry Road, New Delhi.
Date & Time of Tender opening	22.01.2020 after 12:00 Hrs.
Validity of offer	45 days from opening of tender

Tender Document can be downloaded from Indian Railway website www.ireps.gov.in For details of work experience, scope of work and terms & conditions please see Tender document. TENDER NOTICE NO.: DSL-TKD-PU-PAINT-HHP-RT-19 Dated: 30.12.2019. 4161/19

PAWERGRID POWERGRID

NOTICE

Approval under regulation-86 of CERC (Conduct of Business) Regulations' 1999 and CERC (Terms and Conditions of Tariff) Regulations' 2019 for i) Truing up of Transmission tariff for 2014-19 tariff block and ii) Determination of Transmission tariff for 2019-24 tariff block for **Petition 1**: Various assets under Transmission system associated with Krishnapatnam UMPP - PART B, **Petition 2**: For Asset 1: 765 kV Line Bay and 240 MVAR Switchable Line Reactor at Jabalpur Pooling Substation for 765 kV S/C Jabalpur-Bina ckt-III (IPTC), Asset 2: 765 kV Line Bay and 240 MVAR Line Reactor (Non-switchable) at Bina Sub-station for 765 kV S/C Jabalpur-Bina ckt-III (IPTC), Asset 3: 765 kV Line Bay and 240 MVAR Line Reactor at Jabalpur PS and 765 kV Line Bay and 330 MVAR Switchable Line Reactor at Dharamjygarh Substation for ckt.#3 of 765 kV D/C (ckt.#3 & #4) Dharamjygarh - Jabalpur PS Transmission line (IPTC), Asset 4: 765 kV Line Bay and 240 MVAR Line Reactor at Jabalpur PS and 765 kV Line Bay and 330 MVAR Switchable Line Reactor at Dharamjygarh Sub-station for ckt.#4 of 765 kV D/C (ckt.#3 & #4) Dharamjygarh - Jabalpur PS Transmission line (IPTC) under "Line Bays and Reactor Provisions at POWERGRID Sub-stations associated with System Strengthening common for Western Region and Northern Region" in Western Region.

1. The beneficiaries of the above mentioned Transmission system are: (1) Madhya Pradesh Power Management Company Ltd. (2) Madhya Pradesh Power Transmission Company Ltd (3) Madhya Pradesh Audyogik Kandra Vikas Nigam Ltd, Indore (4) Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd, (5) Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Ltd, Mumbai (6) Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd (7) Electricity Department, Government of Goa, Panaji (8) Electricity Department, Administration of Daman & Diu, Daman, Vadodra, (9) Chhattisgarh State Electricity Board, Raipur, (10) KPTCL (11) APTRANSCO (12) KSEB (13) TNEB (14) Electricity Dept. of Puducherry (15) APEDCL (16) APSPDCL (17) APCPDCL (18) APNPDCL (19) BESCOM (20) GESCOM (21) HESCOM (22) MESCOM (23) CESC (24) Electricity Department, Administration Of Dadra Nagar Haveli (25)Chhattisgarh State Power Transmission Co. Ltd, (26) Chhattisgarh State Power Distribution Co. Ltd (27) Sterlite Technologies Limited, New Delhi (28) Adhunik Power & Natural Resources Limited, Kolkata, (29) Corporate Power Limited, Jharkhand, (30) Essar Power (Jharkhand) Limited, Mumbai (31) West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited, (32) Mv Power (Madhya Pradesh) Limited (33) DNH Power Distribution Corporation Limited.

2. Tariff details:

Petition 1	Asset	True up Transmission Tariff for 2014-19				
		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Asset A	10633.71	11816.85	12422.61	12605.15	12732.96	
	807.79	12038.01	13159.53	14044.20	14707.54	
	Asset C	-	-	1,902.60	2,046.55	2,110.57
Petition 2	Asset 1	427.78	928.9	974.04	1031.71	1069.79
	Asset 2	206.45	546.16	576.86	578.54	599.48
	Asset 3	--	637.66	1200.97	1220.09	1251.43
	Asset 4	--	601.24	1126.47	1144.84	1190.98

a) 2019-24 Block

DOCC	Tariff for 2019-24 block				
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
Petition 1	03.10.2014	31688.38	31392.43	31007.35	30662.34
Petition 2	27.04.2015	3559.87	3480.52	3403.03	3301.60

3. A copy of the application made for determination of tariff is posted on the website of the applicant at www.powergridindia.com.

4. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the application be filed by any person, including the beneficiary before the Secretary, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, 3 & 4 floor, Chandrakot Building, Janpath, New Delhi-110 001 (or other address where the office of the Commission is situated), with a copy to the applicant at the address of its corporate office "Saudamin", Plot No.2, Sector-29, Gurgaon-122 001, Haryana within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place: Gurgaon Sd/-
Date: 24.12.2019 Dy. General Manager (Commercial)

POWER GRID CORPORATION OF INDIA LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)

Corp. Office: "Saudamin", Plot No. 2, Sector-29, Gurgaon-122001, (Haryana) Tel: 0124-2571700-719
Reg. Office: B-9, Outab Institutional Area, Katkari Sarai, New Delhi-110 016. Tel: 011-26560112, 26560121
www.powergridindia.com CIN: L40101DL1989G0138121

A Maharatna PSU



Farewell

Neil Innes, the English writer, comedian and musician, passes away aged 75



Grateful I found one person (husband Matthew Koma) who gets sad at X'mas.

— Hilary Duff, American actress

IN BRIEF

Sharon blocked from dating app Bumble

Los Angeles: The online platform said there had been several reports of a fake profile, the 62-year-old posted on Twitter. "Hey @bumble, is being me exclusionary?" the star of the 1992 film Basic Instinct asked the online app, which matches those looking for romance based on location, BBC reported. Bumble say they have now unblocked her account so she can get "back to Bumbling". "Trust us, we definitely want you on HIVE," said Bumble's editorial director Clare O'Connor. Stone rose to fame in 1980s and 1990s. — Agencies

Chhapaak gets 'U' certificate

Mumbai: Filmmaker Meghna Gulzar's *Chhapaak*, starring Deepika Padukone in the lead, on Monday received a 'U' certificate and was cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification with no cuts. The movie, based on the life of acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal, is slated to be released on January 10. Meghna said getting a 'U' certificate is an "immense validation", especially for a film like *Chhapaak* which could have been perceived as "graphic". — PTI



Julia Garner, Mark Foster get married

Los Angeles: *Ozark* actor Julia Garner and musician Mark Foster have tied the knot. The couple got married on December 27 and took to Instagram on Monday to make things social media official. Garner, 25, and Foster, 35, had an intimate wedding at New York City Hall, with family members in attendance. Both the newlyweds shared the same black-and-white picture on the photo-and-video sharing site with a caption: "12/27/19". Designer Zac Posen shared a few behind-the-scenes photos. — PTI

THOUGHT I WOULD DO DRUGS & DIE, SAYS BOYEGA

Los Angeles: Actor John Boyega says the idea of becoming famous after his debut in *Star Wars* franchise scared him. The actor, who joined the movie series as Finn in *The Force Awakens* and followed it up with *The Last Jedi* and *Rise of Skywalker*, said he used to feel that the pressure of fame would push him into drugs. "It was stressful to think 'I'm going to be famous and then it's all going to be over'. I thought I would lose myself, do drugs and die," Boyega, 27, told *Sunday Mirror*. He shared: "The downside? You'll sometimes get it while walking on the street. I don't see myself as a celebrity. I walk on the street because I have always walked on the street. Sometimes somebody will ask for a selfie and it's not the right time. I have no problem being polite. But you're not always going to get the best response. Some people think: that's your job. That is understandable. But you know." The actor, however, is coming to terms with his celebrity status and wants to produce films at some point in future. John, 27, has previously spoken about his struggles with fame, as he insisted he doesn't see himself as a celebrity. — PTI

Dalrymple book among Obama favourite reads

The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company finds a spot in former-US President's 2019 list

Washington: Barack Obama has released his eagerly-awaited annual list of favourite books that made 2019 "a little brighter" for him, continuing what the former US President said has become a "fun little tradition".

The list comprises 19 fiction and non-fiction titles on subjects ranging from surveillance capitalism and the attention economy to feminism and race in Britain, and has two volumes specifically tagged for sports fans.

"This has become a fun little tradition for me, and I hope it is for you, too. Because while each of us has plenty that keeps us busy — work and family life, social and volunteer commitments — outlets like literature and art can enhance our day-to-day experiences," Obama, 58, wrote in an Instagram post on Sunday.

The first black President of the US, who is himself an author and an avid reader, said literature and art were the "fabric that helps make up a life".

"The album that lifts us up after a long day, the dog-eared paperback we grab off the shelf to give to a friend, the movie that

► The list comprises 19 fiction and non-fiction titles on subjects ranging from surveillance capitalism and the attention economy to feminism and race in Britain, and has two volumes specifically tagged for sports fans

► 1st black President of the US, who is himself an author and an avid reader, said literature and art were the 'fabric that helps make up a life'

► Obama began publishing lists of book recommendations in 2015, while he was still in office. He served as the 44th President of the United States from 2009 to 2017.

► Other books which made the cut are *Age of Surveillance Capitalism* & *Furious Hours*



makes us think and feel in a new way, works that simply help us escape for a bit," he said.

Obama's eclectic list includes: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* by Shoshana Zuboff; *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* by William Dalrymple; *Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee* by Casey Cep; this year's Booker Prize-winning author

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and *Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli among other interesting titles.

The list has books "for the sports fans": Jim Rooney's *A Different Way to Win: Dan Rooney's Story From the Super Bowl to the Rooney Rule* and Andre Iguodala's *The Sixth Man*. Obama began publishing lists of book recommendations in 2015, while he was still in office. He served as the 44th President of the United States from 2009 to 2017. — PTI

Asia's first LGBT-focused streaming service GagaOOLala tackles taboos

Singapore: A rom-com about a lesbian flight attendant and a romance in a gay spa are among the shows featured on Asia's first LGBT-focused streaming service, which is pushing boundaries in an often highly conservative region.

GagaOOLala brings more than 1,000 feature films, shorts, web series, and documentaries to people across Asia, where censorship and traditional attitudes mean there has been little in the way of gay content in the mainstream media.

After launching in 2017 in Taiwan, a beacon for gay rights since becoming the first place in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage, it has expanded to 21 territories including several that still criminalise homosexuality.

"One of the main impetuses for me to create GagaOOLala, (is) to kind of dispel a lot of the myths and misconceptions that a lot of people might have about LGBT people," said Jay Lin, a prominent LGBT rights activist in Taiwan who founded the platform.

"We're not all living really tragic lives — we're entrepreneurs, we're fathers," the 46-year-old, who is raising twin boys with his partner in Taipei, told AFP.

With about 2,80,000 mem-



bers, made up mainly of gay people but also including a significant number of straight women, its success comes as some progress is made on LGBT rights in parts of the region.

As well as Taiwan's move to legalise same-sex unions in May, India's Supreme Court last year struck down a colonial-era ban on gay sex.

But the gay rights situation remains dire in other countries where the platform operates — making its presence in those markets all the more important, supporters say.

Gay sex is still banned in Singapore as it is in Malaysia, where in the past year women and men have been caned under Islamic laws for having same-sex relations.

influencers for promotion instead of advertising openly.

Lin's team started by building up GagaOOLala's library with Western content, but has since branched out, making an effort to find content from across Asia.

Earlier this year GOL Studios, a sister platform, was launched to help LGBT filmmakers find talent and funding, as well as distribute and market their work.

The platform ramped up its production of original content this year, making its first Thai film, its first lesbian feature film in Japan and a Germany-Spain co-production.

"As we have developed... we have realised that actually a lot of Asians also want to see Asian faces, and watch Asian stories and watch films take place in places or cities that they're familiar with," said Lin.

For streamers focusing on niche areas like GagaOOLala, original shows are key to building their brands.

Lin said interest in the platform jumped after the recent release of the *Handsome Stewardess*, a series about a Taiwanese, tomboyish lesbian who takes a job as a flight attendant to pursue her new love interest to Singapore. — AFP

Black & white version of movie Parasite coming in 2020

Los Angeles: A black-and-white version of South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's acclaimed black comedy thriller will be presented at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January.

The movie gala, to be held in South Holland, will run through January 22 to February 2. According to the festival's official website, the complete festival programme, including all film descriptions, trailers and the schedule per day, will be available on January 15. Bong previously experimented with the medium in 2013, having presented a black-and-white reimagining of his 2009 drama *Mother* at the Mar Del Plata International Film Festival.

At a later Q&A session about the format, the director said he was inspired by the potential of shooting in the manner after watching a screening of FW Murnau's 1922 silent horror movie *Nosferatu*.

The Blu-ray version of *Parasite* hits the screens on January 28, almost a week ahead of the 2020 Oscars. Featuring Song Kang-ho, Lee Sun-kyun, Cho Yeo-jeong, Choi Woo-shik and Park So-dam, the genre-defying class drama is South Korea's official entry as the Best International Feature Film at the 92nd Academy Awards. — PTI

NEWS NUGGETS

MRI MAY PREDICT INTELLIGENCE IN CHILDREN: STUDY

Moscow: Magnetic Resonance Imaging — a common technique used to obtain images of human internal organs and tissues — may help predict intelligence levels in children, a study suggests.

Scientists from Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology in Russia used ensemble methods based on deep learning 3D networks to analyse whether the intelligence level can be predicted from an MRI brain image.

They used the US National Institutes of Health database containing a total of over 11,000 structural and functional MRI images of children aged 9-10. — PTI

MEXICO CITY ZOO WELCOMES YEAR'S 2ND BABY GIRAFFE

Mexico City: The Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City is celebrating its second baby giraffe of the year, already as tall as a full-grown human.

The female giraffe was unveiled last week after a mandatory quarantine period following her Oct. 23 birth. She will be named via a public vote to generate empathy with the little cow, zoo director Juan Carlos Sánchez Olmos said Sunday.

The 96-year-old zoo welcomed 170 baby animals this year including six Mexican gray wolves. "A new birth of a character as unique, as charismatic as a giraffe becomes emblematic — a flag for conservation, for the prestige of zoo," said Olmos. — AP

EFRON BACK HOME FOR HOLIDAYS AFTER FALLING SICK

Los Angeles: Actor Zac Efron is healthy and back home to the US after being struck down with an infection while filming television show *Killing Zac Efron* in Papua New Guinea.

The *Greatest Showman* actor, who was flown to a hospital in Brisbane, Australia, after he contracted a "form of typhoid or similar bacterial infection", took to Instagram to thank his well-wishers



for the concern. "Very thankful to everyone who has reached out. I did get sick in Papua New Guinea but I bounced back quick and finished an amazing 3 weeks in P.N.G. 'I'm home for the holidays with my friends and family. Thanks for all the love and concern, see you in 2020," Efron wrote. — PTI

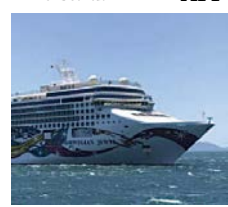
Aussie man missing after he 'jumped' off cruiseliner

Wellington: A 62-year-old Australian man is missing off the coast of New Zealand after he was seen jumping overboard from a cruise liner, search officials said Monday.

Three helicopters and two nearby container ships searched unsuccessfully for several hours for the man before the search was called off because of deteriorating weather.

The passenger went overboard the Norwegian Jewel at about 7:00pm on Sunday near Napier on the east coast of the North Island.

In a statement issued to New Zealand news media, the Norwegian Cruise Line said CCTV footage and witness statements indicated the man "deliberately jumped" off the ship. "Unfortunately, the guest has not been found. Our thoughts and prayers are with the individual's family during this difficult time," shipping line said. — AFP



Court to rule in Michelin restaurant bible cheddergate controversy today

Nanterre: A mistaken verdict or a legitimate critique? A French court will rule Tuesday if the authoritative Michelin restaurant guide must hand over its secret reasonings for stripping a chef of his third Michelin star, just a year after the coveted award was won.

Marc Veyrat launched the unprecedented lawsuit after his Maison des Bois restaurant in the French Alps lost the third star — the top ranking — in January 2019.

It was a shock demotion after Veyrat's remarkable comeback, nine years after he was forced to stop cooking because of a skiing accident, and three years after his restaurant was destroyed



in a fire. The showman chef, known for his ubiquitous black Savoyard hat as much as his "botanical" creations from local herbs and produce, claimed "incompetent" inspectors were out to get him — not least by claiming his use of English Cheddar cheese in a soufflé.

At a stormy meeting in

March with the guidebook's new director Gwendal Poullennec, named just a few months before the 2019 listings, the chef was told a scallop's texture was "scotony" — Veyrat says it was in fact a dish of local fish.

"I have a lot of respect for Michelin in France... But they made a mistake in my case, and they need

to recognise it," Veyrat told AFP recently.

After failing to be removed from the guides for good, he wants to see Michelin forced to reveal the proof that inspectors ate at his restaurant and the written notes of their tastings.

Veyrat, 69, also wants a symbolic \$1.12 in damages for a depression that followed the verdict.

If Veyrat wins the case, and forces Michelin to hand over its judging notes, it could upend the world of fine dining, potentially setting a precedent for other disgruntled chefs.

"I really don't need them," Veyrat said, saying business is up seven per cent over the past year. — AFP

TEMPORARY CANCELLATION / DIVERSION / RESCHEDULING / REGULATION OF TRAINS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF ROAD UNDER BRIDGE

In order to further Strengthen the Infrastructure and to enhance rail and road users safety, Northern Railway will undertake the construction work of Road Under Bridge in lieu of Level Crossing No. 97 at Shahabad Markanda Railway Station between Shahabad Markanda - Mohri Railway Stations on Delhi - Ambala Section. To execute this work traffic Block will be taken for the duration of 05 hours from 10:45 hrs. to 15:45 hrs. on 01.01.2020. Consequently the following trains will temporarily be affected as under:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No.	Train Name	Date of Cancellation (from originating station)
12460/12459	Amritsar - New Delhi - Amritsar Express	01.01.2020
74994/74993	Ambala Cant Jn - Kurukshetra Jn - Ambala Cant Jn DEMU	01.01.2020
64546/64545	Ambala Cant Jn - Kurukshetra Jn - Ambala Cant Jn MEMU	01.01.2020

DIVERSION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name	Diversion Route	Date of passing
22429 Delhi - Pathankot Jn Superfast Express	Diverted via Delhi - Rohtak Jn - Jakhhal Jn - Dhuri Jn - Ludhiana Jn	01.01.2020
22430 Pathankot Jn - Delhi Superfast Express	Diverted via Ludhiana Jn - Dhuri Jn - Jakhhal Jn - Rohtak Jn - Delhi	01.01.2020
15708 Amritsar - Katihar Jn Express	Diverted via Ambala Cant Jn - Sahranpur - Meerut - Kurja Jn	01.01.2020

RESCHEDULING OF TRAINS	
22942 Jammu Tawi-Indore Jn Superfast Exp.	will be rescheduled at 08.00 hrs. instead of 05.00 hrs. on 01.01.2020.
12046 Chandigarh-New Delhi Shatabadi Exp.	will be rescheduled at 14.00 hrs. instead of 12.00 hrs. on 01.01.2020.
12549 Durg - Jammu Tawi Express	will be rescheduled at 14.00 hrs. instead of 12.00 hrs. on 31.12.2019.

REGULATION OF TRAINS	
Train No. & Name	Regulation of Trains at Station
12926 Amritsar Jn - Banda Terminus Paschim Express	Train will be Regulated for 90 minutes at Ambala Division on 01.01.2020
12925 Banda Terminus - Amritsar Jn Paschim Express	Train will be Regulated for 150 minutes between New Delhi - Kurukshetra Jn on 31.12.2019
14649 Jaynagar - Amritsar Jn Saryu Yamuna Express	Train will be Regulated for 70 minutes between New Delhi - Kurukshetra Jn on 31.12.2019
12715 Hazur Sahib Nanded - Amritsar Jn Sachkhand Express	Train will be Regulated for 70 minutes between New Delhi - Kurukshetra Jn on 31.12.2019
12549 Durg - Jammu Tawi Express	Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes between Adarsh Nagar Delhi - Kurukshetra Jn on 31.12.2019

Note:- For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

Integrated Helpline No. 139 | Security Helpline No. 182

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DELHI SPECIAL

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 31 DECEMBER 2019

MATINEE

People

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Katrina's
Dharma
sankat



SPORT | Cricket

Ponting picks
Virat as captain
of his Test team

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SPORT | Hockey

2019, the year of
hope and optimism
for Indian hockey

15

GUIDE TO FORTUNE

Tick the answer and check them below.

1 What is John Leach famous for making?

- Paintings
- Pottery
- Sculptures

2 When did the Cold War end?

- 1989
- 1990
- 1985

3 Which country is the Cresta Run located in?

- Switzerland
- Greenland
- Finland

SHORT TAKE

4 arrested for burgling house

New Delhi: Four people, including a 36-year-old woman, were arrested for allegedly burgling a house in South Delhi's Greater Kailash area, the police said on Saturday. Jewellery valued over ₹2 crore, watches worth around ₹4 lakh, and other valuable articles were recovered from their possession, the police said. The accused have been identified as Raju (40), his wife Pinky (36), Hunny Kumar Gupta (23), all residents of Sultan Puri; and Sageer (50), a resident of Chirag Delhi. On December 20, a complaint was received at Greater Kailash police station regarding the theft and burglary in a house, a senior police officer said. "During investigation, CCTV camera footage was analysed. In one of the footages, the police saw Raju, following which he was arrested on Wednesday," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said. On his instance, his wife Pinky and two other accused were nabbed, the DCP said.

2 doctors missing since X-mas day

New Delhi: A man and a woman, both doctors, have been missing from the national capital since Christmas evening, police said on Monday. A police complaint was lodged by Dr Sridhar who reported his wife, Dr Hima Bindu, and a friend, Dr K. Dileep Satya, to be missing. In his complaint, he said Satya visited him from Chennai on December 25 at around 9 am. The complainant was on duty and last spoke to his wife at 11.30 am when she told him that she was going to church. Since then, he has had no contact with either of them, the FIR stated. According to police, they have already registered a case under section 365 (kidnapping) on December 25 at Hauz Khas police station.

Police reunites kid with family

New Delhi: The Delhi police PCR unit reunited a six-year-old missing child with his family in Begumpur area. DCP (PCR) Sharat Kumar Sinha said, on Sunday night, that the PCR staff comprising of HC Dinesh and CT. Kuldeep received a call about a missing child from Begum Vihar area. The staff started searching for the child along with his family. The staff also announced the description of the missing child through the public address (PA) system. During search operation, the missing child was found roaming near a bus stop in Begumpur area. He was identified by his family. The child also recognised his parents. He was handed over to his parents in the presence of the local police.

6 of family killed as car falls into canal in Greater Noida

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, DEC. 30

Six male members of a joint family from Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh were killed when their car skidded off the road and fell into a canal in Greater Noida on a foggy Sunday night, police said.

Five other occupants of the car suffered injuries in the accident that took place around 11.30 pm when they were on their way to Delhi for a house-warming ceremony, the police said on Monday.

"Eleven people were on board the Maruti Ertiga. The car fell into the Kherli canal in the Dankaur area. They were taken to a hospital, where doctors declared six of them dead, while the remaining five are undergoing treatment," a police spokesperson said. The deceased have been identified as Ram Khiladi (75), Kishan Lal (50), Netrapal (40), Mahesh (35), Neeresh (17) and Mallu (12).

Five other occupants of the car suffered injuries in the accident that took place around 11.30 pm when they were on their way to Delhi for a house-warming ceremony. The deceased have been identified as Ram Khiladi (75), Kishan Lal (50), Netrapal (40), Mahesh (35), Neeresh (17) and Mallu (12).

The accident appears to have taken place due to low visibility caused by fog, the official said. There was one more car, another Ertiga, accompanying this vehicle which had the female members of the family on board. UP CM Yogi Adityanath has expressed his condolence over the loss of life.

Neeresh (17) and Mallu (12), they said. Further proceedings are underway, police said. The accident appears to have taken place due to low visibility caused by fog, the official said. There was one more car, another Ertiga, accompanying this vehicle which had the female members of the family on board, a family member said.

"Around 20 people in two cars, both Maruti Ertiga, had left from Sambhal in UP to Delhi where they were to participate in a house-warming ceremony on Monday," Ramdas, the father of deceased Neeresh, said. He said he was in the other car at a distance of one or two km when his teenage son called him up

and said, "Our car has fallen into a river, come fast and help us." He said by the time they reached the spot, the local police was already there and efforts were being made to rescue those stuck in the car.

"It was only after a JCB had come and ropes were used that all car occupants were brought out and taken to a hospital, and it all happened in about two hours," he said. Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath has expressed his condolence over the loss of life, a statement issued by the office of the chief minister said.

UP CM directed the officials to ensure that the injured persons get proper and adequate treatment. He also directed district magistrates, SSPs and SPs to make necessary arrangements for safe transportation in accident-prone areas in their respective districts, the statement said.

'Fake registrations on DDA website for regularisation of illegal colonies'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, on Monday, asked Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri how ownership rights will be given to people living in unauthorised colonies without regularisation.

Referring to Mr Puri's tweet, in which he said that within eight to ten days people will get registry for ownership of their respective areas in unauthorised colonies, Mr Sisodia said he has a simple question on whether regularisation of unauthorised colonies is taking place or not.

"I have a simple question for you — are the unauthorised colonies of Delhi and houses becoming regularised or not? Yes or no? I have a direct question, give a straight answer — yes or no. Do



Manish Sisodia

not play with words," Mr Sisodia said.

"How will they give ownership to the people if they don't authorise the colonies? BJP should stop fooling the people," he told reporters.

"If Bharatiya Janata Party is serious about regularising unauthorised colonies then they should make it clear on DDA's website. The website clearly says that the PM-UDAY scheme won't regularise these colonies," he said.

Mr Sisodia had, on Sunday, shared FAQs (frequently asked questions) on the unauthorised colonies from DDA's (Delhi Development Authority) website.

"Fake registration is happening on the website to fool the public," he said, rejecting Union housing and urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri's claim that 35,000 people have registered themselves on the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) portal and submitted documents.

Regularisation of unauthorised colonies has emerged as a major poll plank for the upcoming Assembly elections in Delhi.

While on the one hand BJP has promised to regularise the unauthorised colonies, Aam Aadmi Party has called it a "blatant lie" of the Centre.

Will make city pollution-free in next 5 yrs, says Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday promised to make the national capital pollution-free in the next five years if re-elected in the upcoming assembly polls, saying that though a lot of work has been done by his government in the last five years, much more needs to be achieved in the coming years.

Addressing his third town hall meeting at Durgapuri chowk in West Jyothi Nagar, Kejriwal said his government took a number of steps to tackle pollution and managed to reduce it by 25 per cent.

"But if re-elected, I will make Delhi pollution-free in the next five years," Arvind Kejriwal said in a meeting.

"We took a number of steps. The first step was providing 24-hour electricity which reduced the use of generators and reduced pollution caused by them... We also held tree plantation drives that helped in increasing tree cover," he said.

"But in the next five years a lot more needs to be done," the chief minister added.

Responding to a question, Mr Kejriwal promised to make bus rides free for students after elections.



AAP leader Gugan Singh Ranga (centre) joins BJP in presence of Prakash Javadekar, Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari and MP Parvesh Verma in New Delhi on Monday. — BIPLAB BANERJEE

Kejri not like Castro, Che as people earlier believed: BJP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

Union minister Prakash Javadekar, on Monday, took a swipe at AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal saying that people believed him to be a great revolutionary like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in 2015 but now he was exposed.

Mr Javadekar was speaking after Aam Aadmi Party leader Guggan Singh, who was the party's Northwest Delhi candidate in the Lok Sabha polls, returned to BJP.

Mr Singh joined Bharatiya Janata Party in the presence of Union minister Mr Javadekar, Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party president Manoj Tiwari, Lok Sabha member Parvesh Verma, and former Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party president Vijay Goel ahead of the Assembly polls in the national capital.

Mr Javadekar, who is Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party's Assembly election

What he says, he does not do. He was sleeping for last four years and now he has woken up from the past six months. BJP under the leadership of PM Modi will come to power in Delhi — Prakash Javadekar, Union minister

in-charge, asserted that his party will form the next government in Delhi on its own.

"What he says, he does not do. He was sleeping for four-and-a-half years and now he has woken up from the past six months. Earlier, he complained that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not let him work. So, how is he working now?" he said.

He added that Mr Kejriwal's empire of lies will be over and BJP will be in power after the

Assembly polls in Delhi.

He said Mr Kejriwal's empire of lies will be finished and Bharatiya Janata Party will be in power after the Assembly polls in Delhi. "The Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and programmes of his government will come to power in Delhi," the Union minister said adding that Delhi will be powered by a triple engine of development after Bharatiya Janata Party forms the government here as it already rules at the Centre and the three municipal corporations in the city. Mr Singh had quit BJP and had joined Aam Aadmi Party in July 2017.

The dalit leader was defeated by Bharatiya Janata Party's Hans Raj Vans with over 5.9 lakh votes in the Lok Sabha elections for the reserved seat. Previously, he was elected as the MLA from Bawana in 2013 on a Bharatiya Janata Party ticket.

Govt to pay board exam fees of NDMC, Delhi Cantt schools

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

The Delhi government will pay the board exam fees of schools under the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and the Delhi Cantonment, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Monday.

He said the decision was taken at a cabinet meeting held on the same day.

The government will also hold extra classes to focus on teaching mathematics, he said.

The government had earlier said it will pay the board exam fees of all government school students, following a hike in the fees by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). "It was decided that the

Delhi government will bear the board examination fees of all the students belonging to the Delhi government schools.

Now, the Delhi government schools situated in the NDMC and Delhi Cantonment areas are also included under the purview of this decision."

Mr Kejriwal, who was earlier a council member of the civic body, said at a press conference.

This announcement comes ahead of the Delhi polls to be held early next year.

Sharing details, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said the cabinet approved a revised budget of ₹61.32 crore in order to provide

Woman, five kids suffocate to death in Ghaziabad

Ghaziabad, Dec. 30: A woman and five children died of suffocation after an electrical short-circuit caused a fire in the room they were sleeping in Loni area of Ghaziabad, police said on Monday.

The children were aged between 5 and 12, they said.

The woman, Praveen, 40, and the children were sleeping in the room on the first floor of the three-storey building in Maulana Azad Colony when the incident happened Sunday night.

It came to light Monday morning when other family members got down from the second and third floors to wake the children up for school but did not get a response from inside, deputy superintendent of police Raj Kumar Pandey told PTI.

All six died of suffocation, Mr Pandey said. Police found electronic appliances gutted and the room filled with smoke.

The children have been identified as Fatima (12), Razia (10), Sahima (8), Abdul Azeem (8), Abdul Ahad (5) died.

46-yr-old, son held for killing man after fight

New Delhi, Dec. 30: A 46-year-old man and his son have been arrested in outer Delhi's Bawana area for allegedly killing a person after an altercation with him, police said on Monday. Vijay Kataria and his son Chirag (18), who are residents of Bawana, were nabbed near Hanuman temple on Saturday, they said.

The victim, Rahul (32), lived in the same area and was shot dead at around 8.15 pm on Friday, the police said. Investigation revealed that Kataria was in an inebriated state and abusing anyone passing

in front of his house. Soon, he slapped a passerby and got into a fight with him, said B.K. Singh, additional CP (crime).

Rahul was present there and tried to intervene in the scuffle. Kataria then called his son outside, who allegedly shot dead Rahul with a country-made pistol, Mr Singh said. After the incident, both Kataria and Chirag fled, the officer added.

Rahul, who worked as a data operator, was rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him brought dead, Singh said. —PTI

High security in city for New Year's celebrations

AGE CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, DEC. 30

If you are heading out for celebrations on new year's eve, be prepared to face traffic diversions as elaborate security arrangements have been made with heavy police presence to maintain law and order in areas where high footfall is anticipated, such as Connaught Place, officials said on Monday.

Security has been beefed up across the national capital especially in the vicinity of markets, malls, five star hotels, restaurants, pubs and bars, in order to ensure orderly celebra-

Security has been beefed up across the national capital especially in the vicinity of markets, malls, five star hotels, restaurants, pubs and bars

tions. All PCR vans, Raftaar motorcycles and Prakhar vans will be dynamically deployed at vulnerable points, they said. Fire tenders have been deployed in 10 major

heavy-footfall areas to attend to emergencies, the police said.

In addition to maximum mobilization of personnel from districts, 20 coys of additional force including four coys of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) will be deployed to bolster the visibility of police, a senior police official said.

Excise inspectors will be deployed to prevent violations of excise laws and prohibitory regulations, along with doctors to check drunk driving, he said.

The public shall not be allowed to exit from Rajiv Chowk Metro Station

gates after 9 PM on December 31, he added.

Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate arrangements across the national capital with special emphasis on areas surrounding Connaught Place, India Gate and Delhi Zoo.

In an advisory issued, the Delhi Traffic Police said specific restrictions will be imposed from 8 pm onwards on December 31 in the vicinity of Connaught Place till the conclusion of New Year celebrations.

No vehicular traffic will be allowed in inner, middle or outer circle of Connaught Place.

THE ANSWERS TO TODAY'S GUIDE TO FORTUNE

- Switzerland
- 1989
- Pottery





Faf hits out

South African cricket captain Faf du Plessis believes cricket needs more, not fewer, elite nations, as he criticises the move to play a series involving 'Big Three'

ICC to consider making four-day Tests mandatory

Melbourne, Dec. 30: The International Cricket Council (ICC) could make four-day Tests mandatory from 2023 as part of the World Test Championship, primarily to free up the crowded calendar. The ICC's cricket committee will formally consider trimming Tests to four days from five for the 2023-2031 cycle. ICC wanting to stage more global events, the BCCI's demands for an expanded bilateral calendar, proliferation of T20 leagues around the world and cost of hosting a five-day game are some of the factors contributing to the need for a four-day game, reported *ESPNCricinfo*. If four-day Tests were held during the 2015-2023



Members of the ICC Cricket Committee.

cycle, it would have freed up 335 days of scheduled cricket. A four-day Test is not a new concept with the last one played between England and Ireland earlier this year. South Africa and Zimbabwe too played one in 2017. It is an issue that is likely to attract a contrasting view from the game's stakeholders. Cricket Australia chief Kevin Roberts feels four-day Tests should be definitely considered. "It is something that we have got to seriously consider this week. It is something that can't be driven by emotion, but it needs to be driven by fact. We need to look at what's the average length of Test matches over the past five-ten years in terms of time and overs," Roberts told *SEN Radio*. "We need to look at it very carefully and perhaps it is more likely than not in the mid-term future. What we absolutely will do is that over the next 12 to 18 months, is make sure the cricket calendar is nailed down for the years

2023 to 2031. "What we are committed to doing is working with all the ICC members — nobody is saying it is easy but what we are doing is looking at it holistically and we are committed to doing that." However, Australian captain Tim Paine was not enthused by the idea following his team's 247-run win over New Zealand in the Boxing Day Test. "We might not have got a result if we'd done that in the Ashes, I think every game went to a fifth day," said Paine. "That's the point of difference with Test cricket, it is five days, it's harder mentally, it's harder physically, and it tests players more than the four-day first-class fixtures do." — *PTI*

It would allow for more Test series to played over three or five matches. It will help host boards and broadcasters get a greater share of the higher revenue-raising early days of a Test without having to budget for a fifth day. Matches played over four days would likely see the increase of the minimum overs in a day from 90 to 98, meaning that over four days only 58 scheduled overs would be lost.

BENEFITS

- It would allow for more Test series to played over three or five matches.
- It will help host boards and broadcasters get a greater share of the higher revenue-raising early days of a Test without having to budget for a fifth day.
- Matches played over four days would likely see the increase of the minimum overs in a day from 90 to 98, meaning that over four days only 58 scheduled overs would be lost.



Did Warnie ever want a rest and give Stuart MacGill a go?

Nathan Lyon shoots down a suggestion from Shane Warne that he take a rest for the Sydney Test

SHORT TAKES

Short replaces injured Abbott

Melbourne: Australia on Monday called up explosive opening all-rounder D'Arcy Short in place of injured pacer Sean Abbott in their ODI squad for the upcoming tour of India. The tour begins on January 14 with the first One-day International in Mumbai. The second and third ODIs will be held in Rajkot and Bengaluru on January 14 and January 19, respectively. Short has been included in the squad after a side strain during a Big Bash League game ruled out Abbott for four weeks. With fast bowlers Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Kane Richardson already in Australia's ODI squad, selectors have called in Short, a top-order batter who also bowls wrist spin, to replace pacer Abbott. "It is extremely unfortunate for Sean, who is very much a part of our white-ball squad plans leading into the ICC T20 World Cup and the World Cup," selection convener Trevor Hohns was quoted as saying by Cricket Australia. — *PTI*

Australia squad: Aaron Finch (capt), D'Arcy Short, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey (wk), Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Kane Richardson, Steven Smith, Mitchell Starc, Ashton Turner, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

DDCA seeks time to elect president

New Delhi: The strife-torn Delhi and District Cricket Associations (DDCA) on Monday sought time till the state assembly polls in February to conduct election for the post of its president. The DDCA also made it clear that former India opener Gautam Gambhir, whose name was doing the rounds, will not be eligible to contest for president's post as per Lodha recommendations. "Ombudsman Deepak Verma will be requested to give some extension to conduct election for president's post. Election is slated for January end but a request will be put that it is held after Delhi's assembly election in February," DDCA general secretary Vinod Tihara said. — *PTI*

Rahane, Shaw to play vs Karnataka

Mumbai: Test specialist Ajinkya Rahane and young prodigy Prithvi Shaw will turn up for Mumbai in their Ranji Trophy game against heavyweights Karnataka. The two were named in the 15-member squad announced by the association on its website on Monday. The game will be played at the Bandra Kurla Complex from January 3. Both Shaw and Rahane played the previous games against Baroda and Railways. Shaw had hit a blazing double hundred against Baroda in the lung-opener but faltered in both the essays against Railways at Wankhede Stadium. Rahane also had a horrendous time with the bat against Railways. Mumbai had won the game against Baroda while lost to Railways by 10 wickets. Rahane, who has played 63 Tests, will be playing consecutive Ranji games after a long time. Shreyas Iyer and Shivam Dube have been not named in the squad. — *PTI*

INDIAN CRICKET IN 2019

The King rules on field, The Maharaj off it

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Virat Kohli and Indian cricket remained an enduring love story while Sourav Ganguly held out promise for a path-breaking reign off the field in a year during which the country finally embraced Pink Ball Tests. There were the heartbreaks, the biggest one being a World Cup semifinal exit, and not to forget the anxious wait on what Mahendra Singh Dhoni might do next after being on a sabbatical for half the year.

In a World Cup that was decided by boundary count-back, India were in for quite a bit of pain when New Zealand knocked them out in the semifinals. The Kiwis then had to bear a lot of agony of their own when England became champions for a better boundary count after regulation as well as super over scores ended tied.

The very affable Kane Williamson's painfully blank expression after that crushing loss made for the perhaps most poignant picture of the year. In the neighbouring Australia, Steve Smith and David Warner began their redemption in earnest after hitting nadir in 2018 due to the ball-tampering scandal. Smith had a memorable Ashes campaign which also presented world cricket with a potential superstar in the young Marnus Labuschagne. South African cricket lost most of its revered performers during a year of decline with the only consolation being a win against England at the fag end.

Test cricket was back in Pakistan with the Sri Lankan Test squad touring for the first time since the 2009 terror attacks but the response was at best lukewarm. It was also a year when Glenn Maxwell put the spotlight on the mental stress that international cricketers endure. He took a break to deal with his mental health issues and found support from all quarters. Kohli was among those who threw their weight behind Maxwell and revealed that one time in his own life when he battled "end of the world" thoughts.

The period being a rare slump in form during the England tour of 2014. Maxwell since then has recovered and has also clinched a cool million-dollar IPL deal with Kings XI Punjab. Back to Indian cricket. If winning a Test series in Australia for the first time in over seven decades was the crowning glory for India, the fifteen minutes of self destruction in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand stuck out like a sore thumb continuing the national team's now six-year-old jinx in ICC tournaments.

Amid all this, Ganguly, known for taking charge in Indian cricket's difficult times, became the unanimous choice to become the 39th president of the BCCI after three controversy-marred years under the Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators. And Ganguly immediately showed his penchant for taking "on your feet" decisions by convincing an unsure Kohli to play the first ever 'Pink Ball Test' against Bangladesh.

There was no stopping Kohli on the field and he was the highest scorer across formats with 2,455 runs. The Indian pace bowlers — the best to have ever bowled in tandem in the country's cricketing history — fetched the current team the tag of gutsy travellers even though Ganguly thinks that their biggest Test is yet to come. — *PTI*



PONTING PICKS VIRAT AS CAPTAIN OF HIS TEST TEAM

Melbourne, Dec. 30: Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting on Monday picked India skipper Virat Kohli to lead his all-star Test team of the decade, which featured four English players.

Ponting's Test team of the 2010s doesn't feature any other Indian apart from Kohli, who is currently ranked No.1 in both ICC Test and ODI rankings for batsmen. The Englishmen in his team include all-rounder Ben Stokes, batsman Alastair Cook, and the pace duo of Stuart Broad and James Anderson. Among the Australians he has opted for Steve Smith and David Warner along with spinner Nathan Lyon.

"Everyone's picking teams of the decade so I thought I'd join in the fun," Ponting wrote on his twitter handle. "This would be my Test team of the 2010's: David Warner, Alastair Cook, Kane Williamson, Steve Smith, Virat Kohli (c), Kumar Sangakkara (wk), Ben Stokes, Dale Steyn, Nathan Lyon, Stuart Broad, James Anderson."

Kohli has already amassed 70 international hundreds and is only behind Ponting (71) and Sachin Tendulkar (100). The 31-year-old from Delhi, who averages more than 50 in all formats, is also third in the list of leading run-scorers of all time with 21,444 runs, behind Ponting (27,483) and Tendulkar (34,357). — *PTI*

KOHLI, BUMRAH IN WISDEN'S T20 TEAM OF DECADE

London, Dec. 30: India skipper Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah were the only two Indians who found a place in Wisden's T20 International team of the decade, which didn't feature Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Australia's limited overs captain Aaron Finch was named captain of the team, which has two more Australian in Shane Watson and Glenn Maxwell, two England cricketers — Jos Buttler and David Willey, two Afghanistan all-rounders — Mohammad Nabi and Rashid Khan, and New Zealand's Colin Munro and Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga.

On Kohli, Wisden said: "While Kohli's record in domestic T20 cricket is patchy, the same cannot be said of T20Is. Kohli's average of 53 was the best in the decade, and while his consistency compromises his strike-rate slightly, he is still able to score at a good rate, even if not exceptional.

"Strong against pace and spin, and rapid between the wickets, Kohli is an ideal player at No.3, able to fight fires when an early wicket is lost and stabilise the innings, but also accelerate when a platform is set. Following a huge first-wicket partnership, Kohli will slide down the order in this XI," it said on its website.

Kohli, who ranks third in the list of leading run-scorers of all time with 21,444 runs, was also included in Wisden's Test and ODI teams of the decade. — *PTI*

TOP-5 TEST BATSMEN

Player	Pts
● Virat Kohli (Ind)	928
● Steve Smith (Aus)	911
● Kane Williamson (NZ)	822
● Marnus Labuschagne (Aus)	805
● Cheteshwar Pujara (Ind)	791

TOP-5 TEST BOWLERS

● Pat Cummins (Aus)	902
● Neil Wagner (NZ)	859
● Kagiso Rabada (SA)	832
● Jason Holder (WI)	830
● Vernon Philander (SA)	800

TOP-5 ODI BATSMEN

● Virat Kohli (Ind)	887
● Rohit Sharma (Ind)	873
● Babar Azam (Pak)	834
● F du Plessis (SA)	820
● Ross Taylor (NZ)	817

TOP-5 ODI BOWLERS

● Jasprit Bumrah (Ind)	785
● Trent Boult (NZ)	740
● Mujeeb Ur Rahman (Afg)	707
● Kagiso Rabada (SA)	694
● Pat Cummins (Aus)	693

TOP-5 T20 BATSMEN

● Babar Azam (Pak)	879
● Aaron Finch (Aus)	810
● Dawid Malan (Eng)	782
● Colin Munro (NZ)	780
● Glenn Maxwell (Aus)	766

TOP-5 T20 BOWLERS

● Rashid Khan (Afg)	749
● Mujeeb Ur Rahman (Afg)	742
● Mitchell Santner (NZ)	698
● Imad Wasim (Pak)	681
● Adam Zampa (Aus)	674

FOCUS SHOULD BE ON WICKET-TAKING OPTIONS: KUMBLE

New Delhi, Dec. 30: Former captain Anil Kumble feels the Indian team's focus should be on exploring wicket-taking options even if that means playing more fast bowlers than all-rounders in the T20 World Cup. India will play more T20Is in 2020 in order to prepare for the T20 World Cup starting in October. "I certainly believe that you need wicket taking bowlers and someone like a Kuldeep and Chahal need to be a part of that in my view. Yes, there are instances where you know the ball gets wet because of the dew, then is it right for two wrist-spinners to be there," Kumble told *CricketNext*.

"It is very important that you need to start looking out for wicket taking options. If it means that you need to bring in just fast bowlers who you believe will pick up wickets," Kumble added. — *PTI*

South Africa coach Boucher remains a fighter

Centurion, Dec. 30: During a playing career of 147 Test matches, Mark Boucher had a reputation as a fighter, always prepared to take on a challenge.

It's a character trait which looks likely to continue in his new career as South Africa's head coach. It was a "great feeling" to be in a winning Proteas dressing room after the first Test against England on Sunday, seven years after his playing career ended prematurely with a freak eye injury ahead of a Test series in England in 2012. "Just watching the guys walk in, there were a couple with lumps in their throats. It means a lot for them to win a game of Test cricket," he said. But it was only a beginning.

"There's still a lot of work to be done for the rest of the series." Boucher gave two indicators of his coaching philosophy when he discussed wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock and fast bowler Kagiso Rabada, in both cases stressing a preference for taking the fight to the opposition. De Kock's first innings of 95 turned the match in South Africa's favour.

In the second innings he hit three sixes off England's fast bowling hope Jofra Archer in a brief but spectacular statement of intent.

Rabada took seven wickets in the match despite seeming to struggle for rhythm and consistency.

Boucher approved of De Kock's seemingly cavalier batting style. "I'm all for counter-punches on the type of wicket we had. If you just hang around there to try and bide your time you are probably going to get a good one that gets you out. The English bowled really well in the first

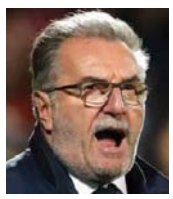
innings until Quinny came along. (Then) they maybe changed their lines and lengths, which was good for us because of the pressure we put on them."

Of the second innings assault, Boucher said: "You can have one Quinny in your side, you probably can't have eleven. You don't want to hold a guy like him back because he can take the game away from the opposition very, very quick-

ly." Boucher's attitude towards Rabada was similarly straightforward. "It's just about getting him into the game. Sometimes as individuals you feel like you're under a bit of pressure and you start worrying about your action and where you are putting the ball," he said. — *AFP*



Mark Boucher >>>



Perfect start

Ante Cacic made a winning start as coach of Pyramids, who beat fellow Egyptian club Al Masry 2-1 to take control of a CAF Confederation Cup group

Lakers trump Mavs

Davis turns in a stellar show with 23 points

Los Angeles, Dec. 30: Anthony Davis had 23 points and nine rebounds as the Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Dallas Mavericks 108-95 on Sunday at Staples Center.



Jerami Grant (top left) of Denver Nuggets defends against Buddy Hield of Sacramento Kings in the first half of an NBA basketball game in Denver, on Sunday. The Denver Nuggets won 120-115. — AP

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope came off the bench to score 19 points while LeBron James, who turns 35 on Monday, finished with a double double, 13 points and 13 assists.

James became the ninth player in league history to reach 9,000 career assists.

Luka Doncic, who entered the contest as the NBA's third-leading scorer at 29.1 points per game, had 19 points on five-of-14 shooting and seven assists.

The Mavericks got a scare in the second quarter when Doncic was slammed to the ground by Lakers Dwight Howard, who was hit with a foul on the play.

Doncic was driving to the basket and in the air when Howard reach in with his left arm sending Doncic crashing to the floor.

This is the second vicious hit by Howard on Doncic this season. In November, Howard bloodied the 20-year-old Slovenian with an elbow to the head.

Delon Wright added 14 points off the bench, while Kristaps Porzingis managed 11 points on 4-of-10 shooting.

The Lakers outshot the Mavericks 48.7 percent to 36 percent.

The Mavericks also played most of the game without Tim Hardaway who left the contest with 5:26 remaining in the first quarter after suffering a hamstring injury.

Hardaway, who had 25 points in the Mavericks' win at Golden State on Saturday, seemed to hurt himself after a dunk.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander nailed the go-ahead jump shot with 36 seconds left and equalled his career best with 32 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder edged the defending NBA champion Toronto Raptors 98-97.

Chris Paul scored 20 of his 25 points in the second half as the red-hot Thunder won their sixth game in their last seven.

Paul added 11 rebounds and eight assists, Nerlens Noel tallied 13 points and Darius Bazley scored 12 for Oklahoma City.

Kyle Lowry and Fred VanVleet each scored 20 points for the Raptors. Patrick McCaw added 13 points, Serge Ibaka had 12 and 14 rebounds while Terence Davis had 11 points in the loss.

The Raptors pressed late and the game was tied 47-47 at halftime.

and James Harden, who sat out with a sore toe. Harden is averaging a league best 38.3 points per game.

Westbrook sat out because the Rockets were playing two games in as many days after beating New Jersey 108-98 on Saturday.

Danuel House scored 22 points, Eric Gordon added 20 to lead the Rockets.

— AFP

Brandon Ingram and Lonzo Ball scored 27 points each as the host New Orleans Pelicans defeated the injury-hit Houston Rockets 127-112.

Jrue Holiday and E'Twaun Moore added 25 each and Derrick Favors had 12 points and 16 rebounds as the Pelicans won for the fifth time in six games.

The Rockets played without Russell Westbrook

and James Harden, who sat out with a sore toe. Harden is averaging a league best 38.3 points per game.

Westbrook sat out because the Rockets were playing two games in as many days after beating New Jersey 108-98 on Saturday.

Danuel House scored 22 points, Eric Gordon added 20 to lead the Rockets.

— AFP

Margaret courts a controversy

Melbourne, Dec. 30: Australian tennis great Margaret Court has again condemned transgender athletes, while claiming the devil controlled the media and government, in fiery comments just weeks before she is honoured at the Australian Open.

The 24-time Grand Slam singles winner, now a church pastor, drew fire in 2017 for saying she would avoid Qantas over the airline's support for same-sex marriage, which is now law in Australia following a referendum.

She later claimed, in comments that were widely derided, that tennis was "full of lesbians" and that transgender children were the result of a Nazi-style "plot" to brainwash the minds of young people.

The 77-year-old doubled down on her controversial views regarding sexuality during a sermon at her Perth church at the weekend, which came to light on Monday.

"Children are making the decision at seven or eight years of age to change their sex ... no, just read the first two chapters of Genesis, that's all I say. Male and female," Court said in a video of the sermon.

"It's so wrong at that age because a lot of things are planted in this thought realm at that age, and they start to question 'what am I,' she added.

"And you know with that LGBT, they'll wish they never put the T on the end of it because, particularly in women's sports, they're going to have so many problems."

"You have got young people taking hormones and having changes, by the time they are 17 they are thinking, 'Now I'm a boy and really I was a girl'. Because you know what, God made us that way."

Court also highlighted the difficulty of talking about her religious beliefs, claiming "the devil" had control over the media and government.

"The devil gets in and the media and the political, the education, TV — he wants to control a nation so he can affect people's minds and mouths," Court said.

After her previous comments on homosexuality and gay marriage, players like Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova called for the Margaret Court Arena at Melbourne Park — home of the Australian Open — to be stripped of her name.

— AFP

— AFP

— AFP

— AFP

— AFP



Roger Federer of Switzerland hits a return against Alexander Zverev of Germany during their men's singles match at the Hangzhou Tmall Tennis Invitational Tournament in Hangzhou, China, on Sunday. Federer won 6-1, 6-7, 6-2. Earlier, Federer had teamed up with Zverev but lost to America's Mike and Bob Bryan 6-7, 6-7 in their off-season exhibition tour. — AFP



I am dissatisfied not to be able to begin my season as hoped for in January.

— Kei Nishikori, on pulling out of Australian Open

SHORT TAKES

Italian club Roma for sale

Milan: Italian football club Roma on Monday confirmed negotiations with US billionaire Dan Friedkin to buy the Italian club. "The Friedkin Group are in negotiations related to a potential transaction involving NEEP Roma Holding Spa and its subsidiaries - including AS Roma," the club said early Monday. It follows reports that the 54-year-old Texas-based businessman will imminently take over as majority shareholder from fellow American James Pallotta in a deal worth up to 780 million euros (\$872 million). "AS Roma informs that no definitive agreements concerning a transfer — have been formalised to date and that any potential transaction with The Friedkin Group remains subject to a successful completion of a legal due diligence upon the AS Roma Group," the statement continued. According to several media reports, a preliminary agreement has been reached with Friedkin to take over from a US consortium led by Pallotta, who bought two-thirds of Roma's shares in 2012. Since then Pallotta, 61, has been pushing for the construction of a new stadium in Rome, but it remains at a planning stage. — AFP

Ichi declared overall winner

Sydney: Australian yacht Ichi Ban won the bluewater classic Sydney-Hobart handicap honours for being the boat that performed best according to size, race officials announced Monday. The gruelling 628-nautical mile (1,163-kilometre) race down Australia's east coast, which started in Sydney Harbour on December 26, awards trophies for a line honours winner and an overall handicap winner. The TP52 Ichi Ban, skippered by Matt Allen, crossed the finish in 11th place on Saturday night, about 12 hours behind line honours winner Comanche. "This is Matt's third win — twice as a skipper, one as a crew member back in the '80s — so we are delighted to announce that really well deserved victory," Cruising Yacht Club of Australia commodore Paul Billingham said. Ichi Ban, which first won the Sydney-Hobart in 2017, finished in two days, six hours, 18 minutes and five seconds. But the crew had to wait until others completed their race to find out if they had the best corrected time to lift the Tattersall Cup, which they eventually did on Monday morning. — AFP

FOOTBALLER DIES DURING SEVENS GAME

Malappuram (Kerala): Footballer Dhanarajan Radhakrishnan, who represented Kolkata heavyweights Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, died while playing a match in Perintalmanna, Kerala after reportedly suffering a cardiac arrest. Playing a Sevens (seven-a-side) match for FC Perintalmanna against Sastha Medicals FC Thrissur on Sunday evening, the defender collapsed midway during the game and was immediately rushed to a hospital nearby. The 39-year-old died at 10.20 pm, hospital sources said. He collapsed in the 27th minute of the match, raising his left hand before collapsing. Radhakrishnan who began his career at erstwhile Chirag United, played professional football for 11 years. Besides being part of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, he has also represented Mohammedan Sporting from 2012-14. The All India Football Federation on Monday consoled the death of Dhanarajan, who also played for the Bengal in the Santosh Trophy. — PTI

Renewed hope for hockey

New Delhi, Dec. 30: If 2018 was all about missed opportunities, Indian hockey experienced a renewed sense of optimism this year with both the men's and women's teams qualifying for next year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

In 2019, the Indian teams grabbed most of the opportunities that came their way — the biggest among them was securing their Tokyo tickets.

In terms of high-level results, there weren't any major tournaments lined up for the Indian teams in 2019 and they mostly competed in bilateral series and one-off International Hockey Federation (FIH) events.

But the biggest takeaway from the year was the progression of some junior players into the senior fold under new chief coach Graham Reid, who took charge of the senior men's team in April this year.

While top sides like Australia, world champions Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Argentina were busy with the first edition of the FIH Pro League, the Indians largely played against lower-ranked sides this season. For the men's team, the



Indian hockey star Manpreet Singh Pawar in action in this file photo.

year started with the FIH Series Finals in June in Bhubaneswar, where the Manpreet Singh-led side left no stone unturned and emerged victorious by thrashing South Africa 5-1 in the final to qualify for the FIH Olympic Qualifiers in grand style. In the lead up to the FIH Olympic Qualifiers, the Indian men participated

in the Tokyo Olympics test event in August involving hosts Japan, Malaysia and New Zealand. The Indian men again came out victorious, defeating the Black Sticks 5-0 in the summit clash. They then went on an exposure tour to Belgium to play five matches — three against reigning world champions

Belgium and two against Spain. The Manpreet-led side passed with flying colours beating Belgium 2-0, 2-1 and 5-1 and then vanquished Spain 6-1 and 5-1.

But the biggest test awaited them in the year-ending final round of Olympic Qualifiers where the team enjoyed a relatively easy outing, handing Russia an 11-3 drubbing on aggregate to seal their Tokyo tickets.

The Indian men's hockey team's biggest gain this year was the emergence of some talented fresh faces.

With no big tournaments lined up, India tested a number of youngsters under Reid and the move paid rich dividends, throwing up talent like Vivek Sagar Prasad, Hardik Singh and many more.

In rankings, India started the year in the fifth spot and managed to maintain that throughout the season. "We have nine months (before Olympics). Just get better and better, that's our plan. Focus on the process, result will take care of itself," Reid had said after the Olympic Qualifiers in Bhubaneswar in November. — PTI

IT'S ALL COVERED UP AT BANGLA BODYBUILDING

Dhaka, Dec. 30: Bangladesh's first women's bodybuilding championship was won by a 19-year-old student in a contest where most of her muscle was covered up to prevent controversy in the Muslim-majority nation.

While skimpy bikinis are the norm at international bodybuilding contests, Awhona Rahman and her 29 rivals kept their brawn under wraps in front of the crowd of hundreds.

Rahman and the other competitors struck poses on stage wearing tight leggings and body-hugging outfits during the three-day event that finished on Sunday and was held in the capital Dhaka. "I am really happy, I really worked hard for this," Rahman said.

"It never entered my mind that someone might criticise me for showing my body. My brother, who runs a fitness centre, has always encouraged me," she added.

"We were told there would be proper dress code and the outfit provided was perfect from a Bangladeshi perspective," Rahman further added. — AFP

Nishikori out of Australian open

Perth (Australia), Dec. 30: Japanese star Kei Nishikori pulled out of the Australian Open and the Aussie Open, the inaugural ATP Cup Monday as he continues to struggle with an elbow injury that has kept him out since the US Open.

The former world number four, who has slipped to 13, said he was disappointed not to be able to begin his season as hoped for in January.

"Unfortunately I have to pull out of the ATP Cup and the Aussie Open," he said in statement.

"Today, together with my team, we have made this decision as I am still not 100 per cent ready or healthy to compete at the highest level. "This decision was not taken lightly as Australia is one of my favourite places to compete," he added. Nishikori's elbow needed surgery in October and he has not played since. Yoshihito Nishioka will

replace him as the top-ranked player in Japan's ATP Cup team in Perth. Yasutaka Uchiyama also withdrew from the event earlier this week, with Toshhide Matsui called up instead.

Nishikori's absence follows Britain's Andy Murray also pulling out of both tournaments over the weekend with a pelvic injury.

The innovative ATP Cup, from January 3-12, offers \$15 million in prize money and a maximum of 750 singles and 250 doubles ATP rankings points in the new men's warm-up tournament for the opening Grand Slam of the year.

It will see 24 nations split into six groups, with eight teams emerging from the round-robin stage to compete in the knockout phase. Sydney will host the finals, along with group games which will also be held in Brisbane and Perth. — AFP



Happy return

Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba set to return for their Premier League visit to Arsenal on New Year's Day after sitting out of Saturday's game as a precaution



Who cares about points in December? We just created a basis which we will work with from now on, that's all.

— Jurgen Klopp, Liverpool manager

SHORT TAKE

Kramnik to hold camp in Chennai

Chennai: Fourteen young Indian chess players including D Gukesh, the world's second youngest Grand Master, and R. Praggnanandhaa will be coached by former world champion Vladimir Kramnik at a 10-day camp here from January 8. The camp, the second organised by Microsense, will also see Boris Gelfand, a former world title challenger, impart training to the Indian players. Kramnik had conducted a camp for eight players in August in France. Eight of the participants are Grand Masters while the rest are International Masters. Two girls would also be part of the residential camp. Kramnik was quoted as saying in a release that he was happy to be coaching the Indian youngsters again.

"After the first camp which we held in Chens-Sur-Leman, France, I am glad that we are having the second camp once again. This time it is even more exciting because it will be held in Chennai, and from six students, we will be having 14. "I am also very excited that I will be joined by Boris Gelfand to train these youngsters. Incidentally, the last time I was in India was back in 90s for a match against Boris! Once again I will be in India working alongside him," said Kramnik. — PTI



Vladimir Kramnik

COUNTRY PROUD OF BOTH MARY, NIKHAT: RIJJU

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijju on Monday said not much should be made of the "ugly spat" that marred the trial bout between M.C. Mary Kom and Nikhat Zareen and the country is proud of both the six-time world champion and her promising challenger. Mary Kom defeated Zareen 9-1 in the trials held on Saturday to make the squad for Olympic Qualifiers in China in February. The bout was marred by acrimony as the two boxers didn't shake hands after the contest and Mary Kom ignored an attempted hug by Zareen.

"Mary Kom is a legend who has achieved what no other boxer has ever achieved in the world amateur boxing. Nikhat Zareen is an amazing boxer who has the potential to follow the footsteps of Mary Kom. India is proud of both of them. Period." Rijju tweeted. "...Passions & emotions are the souls of Sports! The only point to bear in mind is, in professional sports, the players & money matter more whereas in amateur sports it's the nation. The ugly spat (sic) shouldn't have adverse effects on players while representing India," he added. Zareen had approached Rijju with an open letter when the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) flip-flopped on a stated policy and announced direct selection of Mary Kom for the Olympic qualifiers. Rijju had steered clear of the matter at that time citing the Olympic charter.

On Saturday, Mary Kom said she was upset about being dragged into the selection controversy as the call on selection was not hers to take. The Manipuri icon defended her refusal to exchange post-bout pleasantries with Zareen, saying that the former junior world champion will get her respect only if she "herself shows respect to others". — PTI

City blunt Blades

Aguero, De Bruyne score as Pep's men go past Sheffield

Manchester, Dec. 30: Manchester City shrugged off a tight turnaround from defeat at Wolves to beat Sheffield United 2-0 on Sunday thanks to second-half strikes from Sergio Aguero and Kevin de Bruyne. City boss Pep Guardiola had lambasted the scheduling that saw the English champions kick off less than 48 hours after playing the majority of Friday's 3-2 defeat at Molineux with 10 men.

Fatigue seemed to get the better of City in the first half as the Blades enjoyed the better of the chances and had a Lys Mousset goal ruled out after a VAR review for offside.

However, the greater individual quality at Guardiola's disposal decided the game as De Bruyne teed up Aguero to smash into the roof of the net seven minutes after the break.

De Bruyne then rounded off another excellent display by scoring the second himself with a fine finish eight minutes from time to inflict United's first defeat away from home for

nearly a year and bring City back to within 14 points of runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool.

"Today I understood why Sheffield United are in the place they're in the table," said Guardiola.

"In the first half we had problems, we changed some things and the second half was much, much better."

Despite claiming that the crowded Christmas scheduling showed the Premier League and broadcasters "don't care" about player welfare, Guardiola made just three changes to the side that started against Wolves.

City's sluggish start should have punished the visitors with Mousset particularly wasteful.

The Frenchman spurned a glorious early chance to put United ahead when he got on the end of a floated Callum Robinson cross but headed wide.

United thought they had claimed the lead on 29 minutes

THE RESULTS

Liverpool (Mane 42)	1
Wolves	0
Manchester City (Aguero 52, De Bruyne 82)	2
Sheffield United	0

when Mousset raced onto a long ball from John Fleck and fired home.

LIVERPOOL'S 'BRILLIANT' 2019 JUST A BUILDING BLOCK FOR KLOPP

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp insists the European champions must build on a "brilliant" 2019 to turn a 13-point lead at the top of the table into a first Premier League title in 30 years.

Klopp's men were not at their flowing best and needed the help of two VAR reviews to continue their relentless march towards the title with a 1-0 win

over Wolves on Sunday. Liverpool have now won 18 of their first 19 league games of the season and lost just once in the calendar year in the league, on top of winning the Champions League, Club World Cup and Uefa Super Cup.

"2019 was brilliant but it's not important because we count seasons, not years, so the 2019/20 season is not over," said Klopp. "We are halfway there, we still have 19 games to play and probably 18 or 19 of them will be like this tonight, for different reasons. Who cares about points in December? We just created a basis which we will work with from now on, that's all." — AFP

MOYES RETURNS IN A BID TO RESCUE WEST HAM

London, Dec. 30: Struggling West Ham said on Sunday they had appointed David Moyes as manager for the second time in a bid to safeguard their place in the Premier League.

Moyes, whose career has never recovered from a deeply unsuccessful spell as Manchester United boss in 2013-14, succeeds Manuel Pellegrini, who was sacked after a 2-1 defeat to Leicester on Saturday that left the Hammers just one point above the relegation zone.

The 56-year-old has been without a club since leaving West Ham after a six-month spell in the 2017-18 season.

Moyes guided West Ham to safety that season after Slaven Bilic was dismissed in early November and will be



David Moyes

tasked with doing the same for a second time.

"It's fabulous to be back," said Moyes in a club statement.

"I'm feeling very proud that I'm back here at West Ham. But I think more importantly I'll be looking to see what I can do and what I can make improvements to. I do believe that the squad of players I've got here is a better squad of players than when I took over before, so I am looking forward to working with them." — AFP



Manchester City's Sergio Aguero (left) scores against Sheffield United in their English Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Sunday. — AP

WORLD RAPID AND BLITZ CHESS



Norway's Magnus Carlsen in action on Monday. — FIDE

Carlsen, Lagno keep Blitz titles

Moscow, Dec. 30: Norway's Magnus Carlsen and local girl Kateryna Lagno emerged the winners of the World Blitz Chess Championships here on Monday.

Carlsen needed to play a tiebreak with Hikaru Nakamura, who had also finished on the excellent score of 16.5 points after 21 rounds, to win the crown. The world champion in classical, rapid, and blitz drew the first, and then won the second.

Vladimir Kramnik took the bronze medal with 15 points. It was all the more impressive as the 14th world champion retired from classical chess in January of this year and only played a handful of games at faster time controls since.

Like Carlsen, Lagno managed to keep her World Blitz title as well. She finished on 13 points after 17 rounds, half a point more than Ukrainian Grandmaster Anna Muzychuk. China's Tan Zhongyi, who beat Muzychuk in the final round, took bronze with 12 points.

Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy finished joint 12th with 11 others at 10.5 points.

Earlier, Humpy stayed in the hunt for a second title after being placed second along with three others in the blitz competition here.

The 32-year-old Indian, who won the Rapid title on Saturday, started the two-day blitz competition by winning her games in the



Kateryna Lagno

five rounds to share the top position at one stage.

Humpy drew the next two games before winning against Monika Sacko in the eighth game.

She, however, lost to day one leader Lagno of Russia in a dramatic battle in the final round of the opening day.

Lagno showed great determination to defend her 2018 title as she scored 8 points out of 9 to grab the top position.

Lagno was chased by four players — Alexandra Kosteniuk, Humpy Koneru, Daria Charochkina, and Alina Kashlinskaya — all on seven points.

Humpy had claimed the World Women's Rapid Chess Championship title after drawing the Armageddon game against Lei Tingjie of China here on Saturday. — Agencies

BOXING | TRIALS

Vikas in squad for Oly qualifiers

Bengaluru, Dec. 30: Accomplished comebackman Vikas Krishan (69kg) claimed a slot in the Indian men's boxing squad for next year's Olympic qualifiers after winning his final trial bout along with two others here on Monday.

The former world championships and Asian Games medal-winner, who competed in the middleweight 75kg category for a long time, is back to the 69kg division after recovering from a back injury sustained during his short undefeated stint in the professional circuit.

The 26-year-old, already a two-time Olympian, out-punched national medalist Duryodhan Singh Negi in a unanimous decision in the trial finals. Also making the squad for the Asia/Oceania zone qualifiers, scheduled from February 3 to 14 in Wuhan, China, were Commonwealth Games medal-winning duo of Gaurav Solanki (57kg) and Naman Tanwar (91kg).

While Solanki defeated Mohammed Hussamuddin, Tanwar edged past



Vikas Krishan (left) lands a punch on Duryodhan Singh Negi (Blue) on his way to a 9-0 win in the 69 kg final at Inspire Institute of Sports in Bellary on Monday.

Naveen Kumar. Both the bouts were split verdicts.

"It was good to see how strongly Gaurav Solanki came back against Hussamuddin in the tough bout," said Indian men's boxing's High Performance Director Santiago Nieva.

"As for Vikas, he is very focussed and we have high hopes from him," he

added. On Sunday, Asian silver-medallist Ashish Kumar (75kg), veteran Satish Kumar (+91kg) and Sachin Kumar (81kg) booked their places in the squad.

Ashish defeated reigning national champion and South Asian Games gold-medallist Ankit Khatana in a unanimous verdict.

Satish booked his berth with a split verdict triumph over Narendra.

Sachin claimed the 81kg spot with a victory over Brijesh Yadav.

Amit Panghal (52kg) and Manish Kaushik (63kg) have already claimed their place in the team after winning medals at the world championships in September. — PTI

India to bid for either 2026 or 2030 edition

IOA withdraws boycott calls for 2022 CWG

New Delhi, Dec. 30: The Indian Olympic Association on Monday withdrew its threat to boycott the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham over shooting's exclusion while announcing that the country will bid to host either the 2026 or the 2030 edition.

During its Annual General Meeting here, the IOA, on the advice of Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), also decided to submit a formal proposal to host a Commonwealth Shooting Championships before the main Games, an idea mooted by both the national and international shooting bodies to make up for the sport's exclusion from 2022 CWG.

"In the AGM, we have taken back the decision to withdraw from the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. Our country's contingent will go for the 2022 CWG," IOA secretary general Rajeev Mehta said after the AGM. CGF president Dame

Louise Martin welcomed India confirming participation at the Birmingham Games.

"The CGF and the entire Commonwealth Sport Movement are delighted India has confirmed their intent to participate at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games during their Annual General Meeting in New Delhi," Louise Martin said in a press release.

In New Delhi, with IOA chief Narinder Batra by his side, Mehta said, "We are also bidding for either the 2026 or 2030 Commonwealth Games. The House passed a resolution on this bid."

The country's apex body for Olympic sports will next approach the government for the necessary clearances to host the

multi-sport event. The country hosted the 2010 edition in the national capital, the build-up to which was marred by one controversy after another.

The host city of the 2026 Games was supposed to be finalised at the 2019 CGF General Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda, but was postponed, and will now be announced next year.

In July, Batra had written to the Sports Ministry, proposing boycott of the 2022 CWG for dropping shooting from its roster.

After a visit by CGF president Louise Martin and CEO David Grevenberg last month to India, Batra had indicated that the IOA may reconsider the withdrawal call and had said at the time that a decision will be taken at the AGM. — PTI

