

# No country for procedural justice

Due process is widely seen as a hindrance to rough and ready solutions promising substantive justice



ANUJ BHUWANIA

In early December 2019, the Supreme Court heard a petition on the extrajudicial killing of four men who had been arrested on charges of rape and murder of a veterinarian near Hyderabad. Following the incident, the Telangana government had assured the courts that it had already initiated an investigation and inquest into the killing. The judges were surprised, however, that the FIR registered by the police was not against the policemen who had killed the four accused, but against the four men killed, for ‘attempt to murder’. The court found it “rather odd” as it is “obvious that no prosecution could be contemplated against dead persons who can neither be tried nor convicted”. What the court found odd has long been the norm in such extrajudicial killings – an FIR is usually filed against the killed, and not against the killers.

**Investigating encounter killings.** In a landmark judgment in *A.P. Civil Liberties Committee v. Government of A.P.* (2009), a five-judge Bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court recognised the perversity of such a practice. The Bench made it mandatory for the police to register an FIR against police officers after every ‘encounter’ death. The court held that the finding of the police after such investigation would be examined by a judicial magistrate, who would then decide the next course of action. The court said that the policemen were free to claim the right to private defence, but such a defence could not pre-empt the investigation and would only be decided upon by the judicial magistrate at the appropriate stage. However, the Supreme Court stayed this judgment soon after, when an appeal was filed against it by the Andhra Pradesh Police Officers Association. The appeal was kept pending in the Supreme Court for 10 years only to be disposed of in July 2019.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court



“Extrajudicial killings by the police are thought by many as just and necessary.” The scene of the extrajudicial killing of four men on the outskirts of Hyderabad. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

heard another appeal from the Mumbai High Court and framed guidelines to be followed in ‘encounter’ cases, in *People’s Union For Civil Liberties v. State of Maharashtra* (2014). These guidelines were ambiguously worded, however, and have been interpreted by the police to allow the practice of filing FIR against the dead to continue.

Additionally, the requirement of government sanction to prosecute police officers gives the police further legal immunity for ‘encounters’. In the case following the infamous Pathribal encounter in Anantnag district in 2000, the Supreme Court gave a particularly expansive meaning to the requirement of sanction. Although the Central Bureau of Investigation argued that cold-blooded murder by security forces would not require any sanction for prosecution, the court interpreted the requirement of sanction widely. As a result, unless the government concerned sanctions such prosecution, as happens rarely, the police enjoy impunity. In a few instances police officials have been convicted for such killings, but these have been few and far between.

The 2009 judgment of the Andhra Pradesh High Court was especially remarkable as the State has a bloody history of encounter killings, with more than 4,000 people allegedly killed in ‘encounters’ since 1968. This case itself stemmed from a series of writ petitions asking the court to order investigations against the police

in four different ‘encounters’, three of which were against alleged Naxalites. A report titled ‘Encounters are murders’, published by the Civil Rights Committee, documented 77 ‘encounter’ killings during the Emergency alone. These campaigns led to the passing of guidelines in 1997 by the National Human Rights Commission on the standard operating procedure in encounter cases, largely ignored by the States. While such killings had been condoned in the case of Naxalites, they slowly began to be carried out for other crimes too.

### Hierarchy of offences

In recent years, there has been a clamour for exceptional treatment for certain offences, resulting in stringent statutes for terror cases, narcotics offences, economic offences and sexual offences. These offences increasingly invite harsher punishments but more importantly lead to fundamental departures from the basic principles of criminal justice. From strict liability to presumptions of guilt to minimum mandatory sentencing to the question of bail, these offences are often deemed to require special treatment. Recently, while arguing for bail for former Union Minister P. Chidambaram, it was repeatedly argued that economic offenders cannot be given bail. In anti-terror and narcotics cases, in order to grant bail, the court has to be satisfied that the accused is not guilty even before trial, which is impossible. The cla-

mour for exceptional treatment of sexual crimes has reached unprecedented levels in recent times – as seen in the President’s wish that mercy petitions be withdrawn from child sexual abuse cases and the Andhra Pradesh government’s proposed law which requires rape cases to be completed within 21 days. There is a kind of a hierarchy of heinousness of offences within which this discourse of criminal reform has unfolded. The result is an acceptance of differential standards for such offences.

### Procedure seen as a problem

When these parallel tracks are adopted for these exceptional offences, procedure itself is seen as a problem. Already the dilution of procedural safeguards is seen as acceptable for heinous offences. But now even that is perceived as not going far enough. Extrajudicial killings by the police therefore are thought by many as just and necessary. The ideal of substantive justice dominates the Indian public sphere, with complete impatience for procedural justice. The language of judicial reform since the 1970s has embraced this disdain for procedure, as seen in tribunalisation, Lok Adalats, and Public Interest Litigation. Procedural safeguards have come to be seen as un-Indian, no less.

Popular cinema has long sensed this disdain for due process and has egged us on. Last year, for instance, began with *Simmba* in which the protagonist, a policeman, heroically murders two rape accused in his custody and gets away with it. Celebrations after the killing of the four accused in Hyderabad showed that due process is widely seen as a pesky hindrance to the rough and ready solutions promising substantive justice. Vigilantism is acceptable by many, their judgment in each instance predicated only upon the sociopolitical profile of the victim and perpetrators. Ideas of popular justice and legal justice have diverged so far in India that even the fig leaf of rule of law is disappearing fast, largely unnoted.

Anuj Bhuwania is the author of ‘Courting the People: Public Interest Litigation in Post-Emergency India’. He teaches at the School of Law, Governance and Citizenship, Ambedkar University Delhi

# Preparing for fires

Despite major fires, flagrant violations of building and fire safety norms continue unabated in India



DIPEN MEHTA

India saw at least three major fire accidents in 2019. The first, in a four-storey central Delhi hotel in February, killed 17 people. The second, at a coaching centre in Surat in May, killed 22 students. The third broke out in a factory in Delhi and resulted in the death of 43 workers. In the second and third instances, it was found that buildings authorised to be residential complexes were operating as commercial buildings instead. (According to the Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report of 2015, residential buildings are most prone to fire outbreaks.) Despite major fires in the past, flagrant violations of building and fire safety norms continue unabated and fire accidents take place with alarming regularity. It is high time safety is taken seriously and violators are brought to book. Past incidents show that most fire accidents take place due to three major reasons: electrical short circuit and gas cylinder/stove bursts, human negligence, and ill-formed habits. All three need to be addressed to make buildings safer.

### Adherence to National Building Code

So, what all can we do to reduce fire accidents? On the regulatory side, adherence to the National Building Code of 2016 should be made mandatory. This is a detailed set of guidelines for the construction, maintenance and operation of buildings of all kinds (residential, educational, institutional, assembly, mercantile, industrial, business, etc.) and includes a separate and comprehensive chapter on fire and life safety. The National Building Code specifies, for instance, how many exits should be provided in a specific kind of building and where they must be placed. In the case of the Delhi fire, it was not only reported that a residential space was operating as a commercial space, but also that the fire exits in the buildings were blocked, thus trapping people inside.

But before all that, the first stage towards a fire-safe building is to construct the building with fire-resistant/retardant materials and install smoke detection systems and fire alarms. A building’s fire alarm/detection system should be connected with the city’s fire system. Fire compartmentalisation (area/floor wise) should be made mandatory to restrict the spread of fire through horizontal

and vertical spaces. Further, a systematic procedure should be outlined for periodically assessing and monitoring fire risks. While the fire safety audit (FSA) is a good tool to assess fire safety standards of an occupancy, there are no clear provisions in any legislation regarding, say, the scope or periodicity of an FSA. FSAs should thus be made mandatory everywhere.

Once electrical and fire installations are in place, they should be certified by authorised persons and agencies. These will help identify and monitor risks of short circuits due to changes in building use, change in load pattern, etc. Only qualified persons and firms should be authorised to inspect buildings. No-objection certificates should be renewed only after verifying the originally intended use of the building being certified and any change in the building’s pattern.

In case fires break out despite all this, fire services should always be in place. This too is lacking in India. Data show that fire services are not at all adequate. In 2017, for instance, the Home Ministry told Parliament that in 2012 India had just 2,987 fire stations against the requirement of 8,559. It is hoped that there are more now. It is important to not only increase fire services but also modernise fire fighting departments.

### Building awareness

Awareness of fire safety is nearly absent in India. In schools, the curriculum should have a chapter on fire safety. Regular drills should be conducted so that children are prepared to handle such incidents. Communities managing housing and commercial premises need to regularly organise awareness programmes with assistance from authorised persons and agencies. These need to be not only on fire safety but also on other disasters such as earthquakes and floods.

Infrastructural changes are mandatory too. We need dedicated access lanes for quick movement of emergency vehicles. Under the Smart Cities Mission, ‘smart control rooms’ should be able to guide emergency vehicles through the shortest route and enable coordination among various departments such as police, traffic police, fire, ambulance, and security forces.

A lot of ground has to be covered before India can claim to be a fire-safe country. It is imperative that lessons are learned from the Delhi incident at least now. India can work towards a new goal this decade if everyone cooperates and takes precious lives seriously – the goal of a ‘surakshit Bharat’ (safe India).

Dipen Mehta is Chairman, Journal, Fire and Security Association of India

# The abiding power of protest

Nothing, it seemed, could unsettle the present leaders of India until the youth had spoken

PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

On the back of their improved majority in Parliament following the 2019 general election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have accomplished the unimaginable in a democracy of India’s size and diversity: they have negated nearly every potential political challenge to their ascendancy. Apart from the Opposition, potential challengers in a democracy with India’s characteristics are the media and corporate sector. The astonishing thing is that much of the negation has been achieved without obviously violating democratic procedures. It has been achieved either through parliamentary majority or using the legitimate powers of the Indian state.

### Impervious to criticism so far

However, democracy is also about norms unwritten, such as giving the Opposition time to respond and never using brute force in Parliament to push bills through or deploying the threat of criminal investigation outside it to rein in dissenting journalists, intellectuals and corporate leaders. Two areas where the Modi government has had remarkable success in having its way, or at least has so far remained impervious to criticism, are Kashmir and the economy.

One does not have to be an enthusiast of Article 370 of the Constitution to disagree with Mr. Modi’s policy in that area. First, however irrelevant an erstwhile provision, for the Centre to change the constitutional status of a State without so much as giving notice constitutes an abuse of power. Then came the simultaneous bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir and the conversion of the parts into Union Territories. Finally, the detention of its political leadership, who have not been charged with any wrongdoing, and the communication channels blockade are despotic.

The slowing growth of the economy does not even begin to capture the condition of the unemployed. There is also evidence that consumption expenditure may have declined. Unperturbed by evidence of these phenomena, Mr. Modi continues to assert that the economy is poised to attain the \$5 billion mark, and his government has shelved the report that

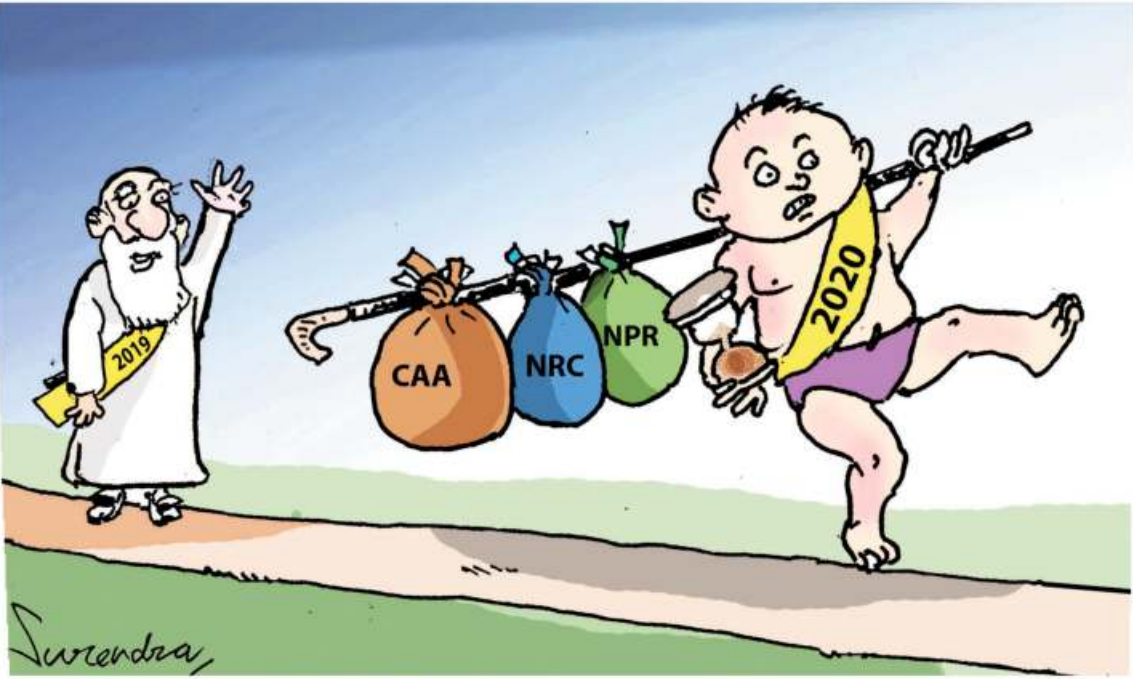
points to the decline in consumption on grounds of “adverse findings”. Few prime ministers have gotten away so easily. In the 1950s, in response to Rammanohar Lohia’s assertion that poverty was not declining, erstwhile Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru constituted a committee headed by India’s pre-eminent statistician to investigate the claim.

### Protests that show some truths

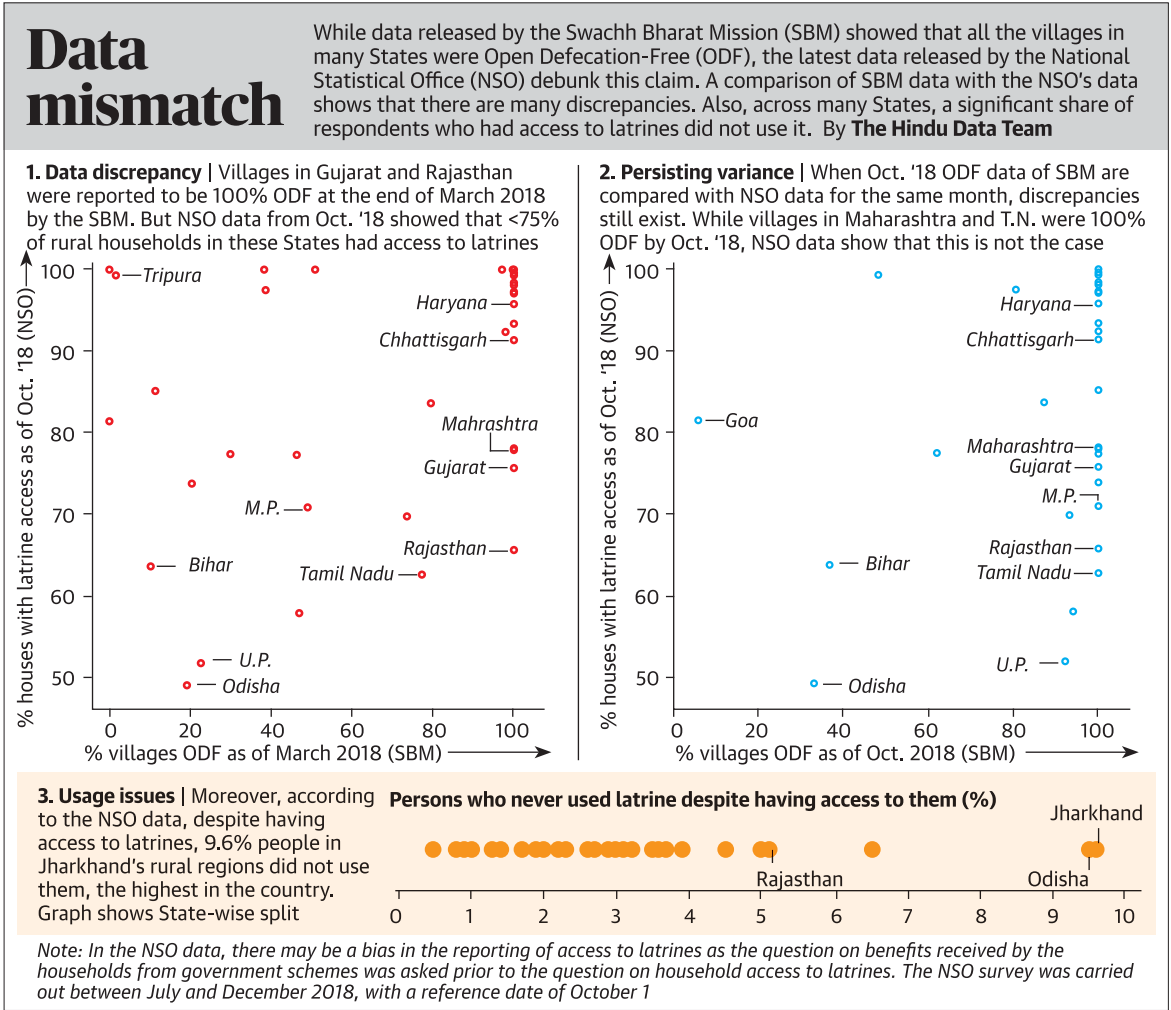
Nothing it seemed could unsettle the present leaders of India. That was until its youth had spoken. They have now, and we may be witnessing a transformation of India’s democracy. Starting at Delhi’s Jamia Millia Islamia students in campuses have arisen in protest. There has always been student participation in political movements, but in the past they may have been parochial, even when democratic ideals were at stake. In the 1960s the students of erstwhile Madras State had agitated successfully against the imposition of Hindi as the sole official language; later the students of Osmania University at Hyderabad had agitated for a separate Telangana; and in the 80s the students of Assam succeeded in bringing about the Assam Accord. Now students are agitating for a constitutional democracy expressing their dissent towards the Citizenship Amendment Act which they perceive as blatantly communal.

We cannot say where this will lead us, but their protest shows us some truths. First, it disproves the perception that the present generation is only concerned with entitlements. Many of the campuses on which the protests are taking place are solidly middle class, but the students are protesting the violation of democracy not agitating for privileges for themselves. Second, the campuses where the protests are occurring far outnumber Jamia and Aligarh Muslim University. This busts the idea fashionable in some circles that India has been irretrievably communalised. Finally, the student protests appear to be spontaneous. Political parties of every hue – the nationalists, the secularists and the identity mongers – could not but have taken note.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is Professor, Ashoka University and Senior Fellow IIM Kozhikode



### DATA POINT



## The Hindu.

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 2, 1970

### 1970 heralds political activity

Pakistan has woken into the New Year with resumption of full-scale political activity allowed by the military regime to prepare the people for the general election on October 5. Announcing the lifting of the ban on political activity from to-day, Radio Pakistan, however, said that political activity would be governed by the guidelines laid down by the martial law regulations which came into force to-day [Jan. 1]. Under the regulations, political parties are banned from causing any obstruction in or propagating against the elections. The regulations also prohibit any political party from propagating any opinion or acting in a manner “prejudicial to the ideology, integrity and security of Pakistan”. The Radio claimed that the regulations provided for the protection of freedom of the Press and conduct of all political controversies “at a high level of debate”. President Yahya Khan set the mood for the new political activity, curbed during his predecessor Ayub Khan’s 10-year rule which ended on March 25 last, when he told newsmen in Dacca last evening that the nation had to work hard and with sanity and toleration to reach its goal of returning to democracy.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 2, 1920.

### The Congress Day.

Madura, December 29. - Last evening a crowded public meeting was held at the Blackburn Memorial Light on the Palace Road presided over by Mr. Hajee Mahamad Moulana Saheb. Mr. R.S. Nayudu, Barrister-at-Law, moved the following resolution: “This citizens of Madura in public meeting assembled convey their heartiest congratulations to the Punjab leaders who have just been released from Jail after an unjust and cruel incarceration by the Martial Law administration in the Punjab, this meeting further demands that Messrs. Mahammad Ali and Shakaut Ali should be forthwith released by the Government of India; this meeting in reiterating the Resolutions of the public held on the Congress Day at Madras, expresses as its deliberate conviction that His Excellency Lord Chelmsford, Sir Michael O’Dwyer and General Dyer should be tried before the High Courts of Justice and the Parliament of England for the excessive crimes and manslaughter committed in that much harassed province of the Punjab.” Mr. M.S. Vanthareswara Sarma seconded the Resolution which was supported in a very elaborate and effective speech by Mr. Moulvi Syed Mustafa Saheb of Trichinopoly.



CM  
YK



# Modi calls up South Asian leaders

PM reiterates commitment to ‘neighbourhood first’, excludes Pakistan from his New Year dialling list

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka on Wednesday and conveyed India’s commitment to the principle of “neighbourhood first”.

During the talks, Mr. Modi conveyed his greetings to the leaders and discussed the upcoming regional interactions. The talks hint at India’s pursuit of a regional arrangement without the participation of Pakistan.

“He emphasised India’s commitment to the ‘neighbourhood first’ policy and



**Regional ties:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. ■ FILE PHOTO

the vision of shared peace, security, prosperity and progress for all of India’s friends and partners in the region,” an official press release said.

India’s ‘neighbourhood first’ policy was adopted soon after Mr. Modi took charge in May 2014 which led

to several key regional agreements including the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh.

Mr. Modi told his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina that India’s ties with Dhaka were a “priority” for his government. In recent

weeks, relations with the eastern neighbour were marred by negative references to the country by several leaders including Home Minister Amit Shah who justified the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 citing alleged persecution against minority religious communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Both leaders discussed the upcoming celebrations in Dhaka around the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March where the Indian leader is expected to be a leading speaker. Mr. Modi also spoke to Nepal PM K P

Sharma Oli. During 2019m both sides completed several bilateral projects including operationalisation of the Motihari Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline. Both leaders agreed to inaugurate an integrated checkpoint of Biratnagar through video conference.

In his talk with Bhutan’s king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, Mr. Modi discussed the visit of the ruler to India in 2020. Mr. Modi visited Bhutan soon after being sworn in for the second stint. The phone calls were in keeping with India’s recent attempts to create a regional grouping without Pakistan.

# Stir mutes New Year buzz in Assam

Many hotels withdraw programmes; tourists cancel travel bookings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The State-wide protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) dampened the New Year celebrations in Assam.

With popular singers and musicians taking the lead in the anti-CAA stir, very few functions were organised on New Year’s eve.

Many hotels avoided “confrontation with the agitators” by cancelling programmes.

The anti-CAA protests affected the popular year-end picnics that usually start around Christmas and end by mid-January on the Magh Bihu festival. This was mainly because of vigilantes attacking some picnic parties, including women, that were perceived to be indifferent to the movement.

“Videos of such attacks were posted on social media but we are yet to take any ac-



**Silent protest:** Asom Sahitya Sabha members at a protest in Guwahati on Wednesday. ■PTI

tion as no complaints have been lodged,” a police officer in Morigaon district said.

The protests have also hit the tourism industry hard. Jayanta Malla Baruah, chairman of the Assam Tourism Development Corporation,

said the protests had cost the State ₹1,000 crore in less than a month since December 11.

“Thousands of domestic and foreign tourists have cancelled travel and hotel bookings. We are anticipat-

ing a loss of ₹500 crore in January as countries such as the U.S., the UAE, Canada, the U.K., Australia, France, Israel, Taiwan, Russia, and Singapore have issued travel advisories to their citizens,” he said.

# Accused in assault case in custody

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

A court in Salt Lake in West Bengal has sent Avijit Dasgupta, who allegedly attacked eminent photographer and filmmaker Ronny Sen on Monday night, to two weeks’ judicial custody. The accused had moved a bail petition on Wednesday.

The petition was set aside by the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Bidhannagar (Salt Lake), Mr. Sen’s lawyers said. Mr. Dasgupta was arrested on Tuesday night.

The accused can effectively move another bail plea before January 15.

Mr. Sen, who participated in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens protests here, was allegedly assaulted with a machete on Monday night by the accused.

# Indigenous people’s rights will be protected: Sonowal

Assam CM says State has submitted recommendations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said here on Wednesday that protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act were premature since its rules had not been framed.

The recommendations submitted by the State government to the Centre for incorporating in the Act would protect the interests of the indigenous people of Assam, he told presspersons.

“No force can threaten the existence of the Assamese people as long as I am the Chief Minister,” Mr. Sonowal said.

“Rumours are being spread by the Congress and Left parties over the CAA. This is a national Act and not anything new. There is no truth in claims that the Act will bring in 1 crore to 2.5 crore Bangladeshis. Tea garden workers have been told foreigners will be settled on ceiling surplus land while villagers have been fed the



**Strong stand:** Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal addressing a press conference in Guwahati. ■PTI

fear that their vacant lands will be taken away by the beneficiaries of the CAA,” Mr. Sonowal said.

“There is no need to be afraid of the CAA. Our recommendations for framing the rules guarantee protection of the indigenous people,” the Chief Minister said, insisting that his government formed by the sons of the soil could not go against the people of Assam.

Alleging that rumours were fuelling anger against

the Act, the Chief Minister said no government in Assam had since the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 worked in the interest of the indigenous people.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s initiative led to the creation of the committee for implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord (seeking constitutional safeguards for the Assamese people). Our government will act as soon as the panel submits its recommendations,” he said.

# ‘States must implement CAA’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday said States had a constitutional duty to implement laws passed by Parliament. State governments that had announced that they would not implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) should seek appropriate legal opinion on constitutional provisions, he said.

The Law Minister’s comments came a day after the



Ravi Shankar Prasad

have come to power by taking oath under the Constitution are now making unconstitutional statements.”

The Parliament of India could make laws on subjects under the Union List which included citizenship, Mr. Prasad said and referred to Clause 2 of Article 245 of the Constitution.

“Article 245 (clause 2) states that no law made by Parliament shall be deemed to be invalid on the ground that it would have extra-territorial operation,” he said.

# India, Pakistan exchange lists of prisoners

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI/ISLAMABAD

India and Pakistan on Wednesday exchanged details of civilian prisoners and fishermen lodged in each other’s jails.

The External Affairs Ministry said India handed over to Pakistan the names of 267 Pakistani civilian prisoners and 99 fishermen in its custody.

Pakistan has given the High Commission of India a list of 282 Indian prisoners – 55 civilians and 227 fishermen – lodged in the country’s jails.

The lists were exchanged in keeping with the provisions of a 2008 agreement under which such lists of prisoners are shared on January 1 and July 1 every year.

# Govt. jobs in J&K must go only to locals, say Jammu parties

HC recalls notices inviting applications for its recruitments

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

The Lieutenant-Governor’s administration has rejected the Public Service Commission recommendations on recruitments in Jammu & Kashmir, but the High Court on Wednesday withdrew notices calling for application for posts in its offices from even people from outside the Union Territory.

“Applications invited for different posts in non-gazetted category in the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir stand withdrawn with immediate effect,” High Court Registrar Sanjay Dhar said.

The recommendations of PSC Chairman Latief-u-Za-

man Deva, accessed by *The Hindu*, showed that the commission with mandate to formulate recruitment and promotion policies had suggested a “separate employment policy” for J&K.

The panel, retained in the J&K Reorganisation Act, was made non-operational for unknown reasons on October 31. The PSC, headed by Mr. Deva then, had suggested that a local language test be made mandatory for all those applying for jobs in J&K. It recommended that only those who had been living in J&K for at least 15 years should be made eligible for jobs. In a place where the government is the biggest recruitment agency, the recent

advertisements of posts by the High Court, allowing outsiders to apply, evoked sharp reactions in Jammu’s Hindu belt.

J&K National Panthers Party chairman Harsh Dev Singh told *The Hindu* that the High Court decision was a “welcome move”.

“The jobs in J&K need to be restricted to local youth. And the government needs to come out with constitutional safeguards in this regard,” Mr. Singh said.

Sources said top BJP leaders in Jammu on Wednesday held meetings with party workers and informed them that the BJP would push for safeguarding the job and land rights of locals.

# Help Sri Lankan Tamil refugees return home if they want to: Vaiko

“Those who wish to remain in India should be granted citizenship”

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

Explaining his stand on the issue of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, MDMK general secretary Vaiko on Wednesday said citizenship should be granted to those who wanted to stay in India, and as regards those who wished to go back to their native soil, steps should be taken to facilitate their return.

“If they want to live on the land (Sri Lanka) on which they have lived for hundreds of years, they should be allowed to go back,” he said during his New Year’s interaction with mediapersons.

To the argument that if ethnic Tamils were not allowed to return to their land, their population in Sri Lanka would dwindle, Mr. Vaiko reiterated that he was in favour of sending them back to their home country.



Vaiko

“But those who want to live in India because they have lived here for so many years...they should be granted citizenship,” he said.

Recalling the resolution adopted by Germany and the US Senate, describing the killing of Armenians as genocide, Mr. Vaiko said Sri Lankan Tamils would also get justice one day, and he had already raised the issue in Brussels.

“The Sinhalese who had settled in Tamil areas should be evacuated to pave the way for the return of Tamils. Refugees all over the world always have an aspiration to return to their own soil. Sri Lankan Tamils, though they are living here, will have a desire to return, and we should not get in their way. But it may not happen now, since the country is ruled by Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Already, Hindu temples have been destroyed to build Buddhist temples,” he claimed.

When asked why the BJP government at the Centre had excluded Muslims from the ambit of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), Mr. Vaiko said the Act was shaped by the RSS’ hatred for Muslims ever since Partition. He felt it was not easy to abrogate the CAA.

# 2 soldiers die in gunfight along LoC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Two soldiers were killed in Pir Panjal valley’s Nowshehra Sector in Jammu on Wednesday after a gunfight broke out between the security forces and infiltrators close to the Line of Control (LoC).

Jammu-based Army Lt. Col. Devender Anand said a contact was established with infiltrators in a forest in Naushehra Sector in Rajouri on Tuesday night.

“The heavily armed terrorists retaliated with fire. Two soldiers of the Indian Army were critically injured and later succumbed to their injuries,” said Lt. Col. Anand. The deceased soldiers are Naik Sawant Sandip Raghunath, aged 29, from Maharashtra’s Satara district, and Rifleman Arjun Thapa Magar, aged 25, from Nepal’s Gorkha district.



# Protesters end siege of U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

We scored a huge win, which no one had done before; now, the ball is in Parliament's court, says spokesperson of Shia militia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BAGHDAD

Pro-Iran demonstrators left the besieged U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on Wednesday after the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force ordered them to withdraw a day after their dramatic incursion.

Thousands of Iraqi supporters of the largely Iranian-trained Hashed had encircled and vandalised the Embassy compound on Tuesday, outraged by U.S. air strikes that killed 25 Hashed fighters over the weekend.

They marched unimpeded through the checkpoints of the usually high-security Green Zone to the Embassy gates, where they broke through a reception area, chanting "Death to America" and spraying pro-Iran graffiti on the walls.

Iraq's caretaker Premier Adel Abdel Mahdi called on the angry crowd to leave the Embassy but most spent the night in dozens of tents set



● REUTERS

up outside the perimeter wall. On Wednesday morning, crowds of men brandished the Hashed's colours, torched U.S. flags and hurled rocks towards the compound. Security personnel inside responded with tear gas, wounding at least 20 people, the Hashed said.

By the afternoon, the Hashed called on its supporters to leave the Embassy and regroup outside the Green Zone "out of respect for the state".

"You delivered your message," it said in a statement. AFP's photographer saw protesters dismantling their

tents and leaving the Green Zone. "We burned them!" they said, streaming back out of checkpoints they had breezed through on Tuesday. Kataeb Hezbollah, the group targeted in the U.S. raids, initially told AFP it would stay at the Embassy. But the group's spokesman

Mohammad Moheyddin later said it had decided to abide by the Hashed's order. "We scored a huge win: we arrived at the U.S. Embassy, which no one had done before," he told AFP.

### Spiralling tensions

"Now, the ball is in Parliament's court," Moheyddin added, referring to lawmakers' efforts to revoke the legal cover for 5,200 U.S. troops to deploy in Iraq.

Tuesday's Embassy attack was the latest episode in spiralling tensions between the U.S. and Iran since Washington abandoned a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran in 2018.

Many of those tensions have played out in Iraq, which has close ties with both governments.

U.S. forces have faced a spate of rocket attacks in recent months, blaming them on pro-Iran Hashed factions. Last week, one of those at-

tacks killed a U.S. contractor, prompting the retaliatory U.S. air strikes that killed 25 fighters from Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades).

President Donald Trump and other US officials have blamed Iran for attacks on U.S. forces and the Embassy.

By Wednesday, Iraqi forces had reimposed normal security measures around the perimeter of the Green Zone, usually inaccessible without a badge.

U.S. officials were alarmed that protesters crossed checkpoints so easily on Tuesday.

An Iraqi special forces fighter assigned to guard the Green Zone told AFP his units had no orders to intervene. "If I had had orders to act, I could have fired and stopped the storming of the Embassy," he said. "But after what happened, our hands are tied. We can't prevent the situation from deteriorating," he added.

## Kim promises to unveil a 'new strategic weapon'

North Korea ends test moratoriums

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
SEOUL

Expressing deep frustration over stalled nuclear talks, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un warned of unspecified "shocking" action and that his country will soon reveal a new "strategic weapon" to the world as its bolsters its nuclear deterrent in face of "gangster-like" U.S. pressure.

Mr. Kim also said North Korea was no longer obligated to maintain a self-imposed suspension on the testing of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles, which President Donald Trump has touted as a major diplomatic accomplishment. But Mr. Kim gave no clear indication that a resumption of such tests was impending and appeared to leave the door open for eventual negotiations.

### Diplomatic stalemate

Mr. Kim has used the diplomatic stalemate to expand his military capabilities by intensifying tests of shorter-range weapons. His arsenal is now estimated to include 40-50 nuclear bombs and various delivery systems, including solid-fuel missiles designed to beat missile-defense systems and developmental ICBMs potentially capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

Mr. Kim has also strengthened his negotiating position, moving the diplomacy closer to an arms reduction negotiation between nuclear states rather than talks that would culminate in a unilateral surrender of the weapons he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Strategic weapons usually refer to nuclear-capable delivery systems such as ICBMs, but North Korea oth-



Kim Jong-un

erwise has been vague about what new arms it would display. It announced in December that it performed two "crucial" tests at its long-range rocket launch site that would further strengthen its nuclear deterrent.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the U.S. was deeply disappointed by North Korea's threat to resume nuclear missile tests but wants peace rather than confrontation with Pyongyang.

"If Chairman Kim has reneged on the commitments he made to President Trump it's deeply disappointing," Mr. Pompeo said after North Korean leader declared an end to moratoriums on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

"We have lived up to our commitments. We continue to hold out hope that he will live up to his," the top U.S. diplomat said.

"President Trump has taken an approach where we have tried to create a diplomatic pathway. We hope that the North Koreans will reconsider, that they will continue down that pathway.... We want peace not confrontation." Mr. Kim's comments were made at a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee. (With AFP inputs)

## Don't foresee a war with Iran, says Trump

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PALM BEACH

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he does not foresee war with Tehran, after pro-Iranian demonstrators stormed the U.S. embassy in Iraq.

"I don't see that happening," Mr. Trump said at his holiday retreat in Florida when a reporter asked about the possibility of war with the Islamic republic.

"I like peace," the President said before heading in to New Year's celebrations.

U.S. officials said there were no plans to evacuate the mission, and no U.S. personnel were reported in-

jured. Ambassador Matthew Tueller, who had been on holiday, was on his way back to the Embassy.

The U.S. reinforcements "got in there very quickly," Mr. Trump said. "I think it's been handled very well."

Earlier, Mr. Trump blamed Iran for the Embassy attack. "Iran will be held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities," Mr. Trump said on Twitter.

"They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat," wrote Mr. Trump, adding "Happy New Year!"

## Iran's Khamenei condemns U.S. 'malice' over Iraq strikes

U.S. had carried out airstrikes on Hashed al-Shaabi militants

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS  
TEHRAN

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday condemned U.S. air strikes on a militant group in Iraq.

"The Iranian govt & nation & I strongly condemn the U.S.'s malice," Mr. Khamenei said in a Tweet, referring to Sunday's deadly U.S. strikes on the Hashed al-Shaabi militants.

The U.S. carried out the strike in western Iraq in retaliation for rocket fire that



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

killed an American civilian contractor at a military base in northern Iraq on Friday.

In a tweet on Tuesday, U.S. President Donald

Trump accused Iran of "orchestrating" that day's storming of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

In response, Mr. Khamenei said: "That guy has tweeted that we (the United States) see Iran responsible for the events in Baghdad & we will respond to Iran".

"First, you can't do anything. Second, if you were logical - which you're not - you'd see that your crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan... have made nations hate you," he tweeted.

### IN BRIEF



#### Will create a prosperous country for all: Gotabaya

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, in his New year message, said that he would create a prosperous country for all communities to live in peace, adding that development is the answer to issues faced by the Tamils. PTI

#### Netanyahu to seek immunity in graft case

JERUSALEM  
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday said he will ask Parliament to grant him immunity from corruption charges, a step that is expected to delay his trial for months. AP

## Tear gas fired at Hong Kong protesters during march

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HONG KONG

A huge New Year's Day pro-democracy rally in Hong Kong ended in mass arrests and police firing tear gas at hardcore protesters, as demonstrators sought to carry their movement's momentum into 2020.

The Civil Human Rights Front, the umbrella group which organised the march, claimed that more than a million people participated in Wednesday's rally, which had approval from the authorities.

But after a peaceful start, violence erupted within hours, with police and masked protesters facing off in several neighbourhoods



● REUTERS

on the city's main island.

Police used pepper spray, tear gas and water cannon, while hardcore protesters lobbed petrol bombs, built makeshift barricades and vandalised property belonging to businesses they con-

sider pro-Beijing - including Starbucks and banking giant HSBC.

Police said around 400 people were arrested for offences, including "unlawful assembly and possession of offensive weapons".

## 16 inmates die in Mexican prison fight

REUTERS  
MEXICO CITY

Sixteen inmates were killed and five were wounded in a prison fight in the northern Mexican state of Zacatecas, authorities said, in one of the worst outbreaks of violence in the country's troubled penal system since President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador took power.

The fight broke out around 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon at the Regional Center for Social Reintegration in the town of Cieneguillas.

An inmate was arrested with a firearm, and three more guns were found in the prison, as well as various knives.

## Pope sorry for slapping devotee

Woman yanked him towards her, almost causing him to fall

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis apologised on Wednesday for slapping a woman, who had grabbed him as he greeted a crowd of devotees, shortly before he delivered a speech denouncing "every form of violence against women."

The image of a visibly annoyed Pope Francis slapping his way free from the clutches of an admirer as he walked by Catholic faithful on New Year's Eve instantly went viral on social media.

An apology followed. "We lose patience many times," the Pope confessed.

"It happens to me too. I apologise for the bad example given yesterday," the head of the Catholic church



● AFP

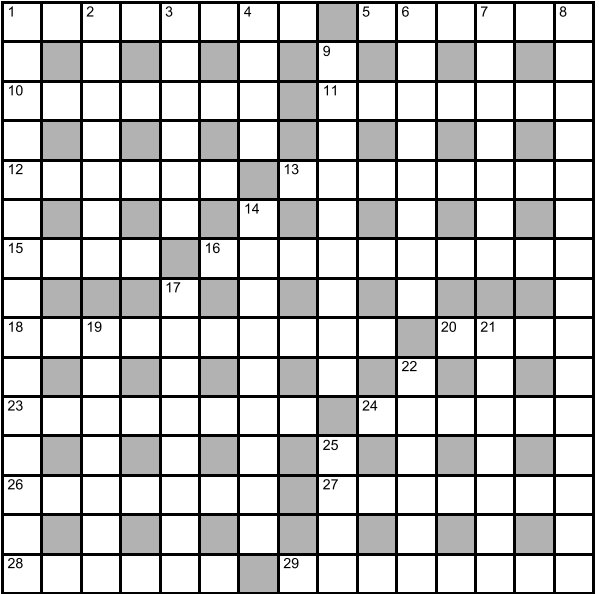
said before celebrating Mass at the Vatican.

The Pope was greeting children before the Nativity scene on Saint Peter's

square and was turning away when a woman cried out something, yanked his hand and almost caused him to fall.

### THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12822

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



#### ACROSS

- 1 State that keeps one away from Congress? (8)
- 5 Grandmother has setback in French town (6)
- 10 A half-proud star recreated computer images (7)
- 11 Rail crashes - in a bit of emergency, there's another transport (7)

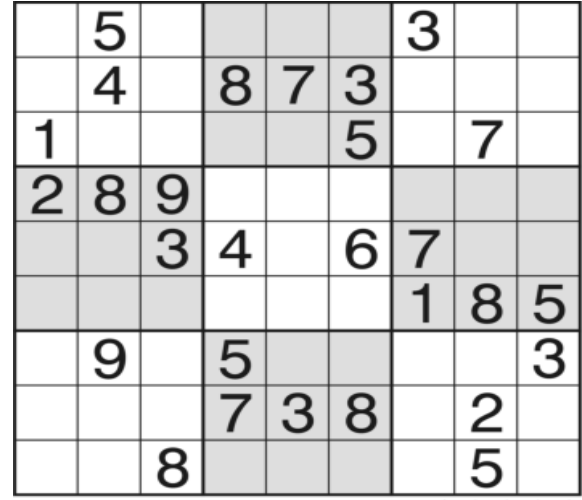
#### DOWN

- 1 With this, the hemline may go up or down (8,7)

(set by Gridman)

- 12 Bug good bright child (6)
- 13 Trained cadet due for reposting (8)
- 15 Vex a hill dweller in Assam (4)
- 16 Pitilessly batters ear of homeless child (6,4)
- 18 This old man is an annual figure appearing on the dot (6,4)
- 20 Turkish ruler overwhelms five of a group (4)
- 23 Facility - one working in part of building (8)
- 24 Swordsman is one who is undecided (6)
- 26 Beg with one politician for a different role (7)
- 27 One is held to entertain for a long period (7)
- 28 More irregular to go after new one signalling approval (6)
- 29 Engineer considered to be rescued (8)
- 2 Mother, suffering a setback, has zest. Wonderful! (7)
- 3 The endless chat about roofing material (6)
- 4 Mission teacher's first query (4)
- 6 Evil rot settles in Chennai, for example (8)
- 7 Knotty party game? (7)
- 8 Date that remains unchanged by girl (6,9)
- 9 Reveries that may still occur at night? (9)
- 14 Immediately, one working with editor is posted (9)
- 17 Thoroughly cooked! Congrats! (4,4)
- 19 Stumbled but gave information about ruler (7)
- 21 Announce: former wife's about to destroy mail (7)
- 22 The French notice to temporary owner (6)
- 25 That woman has nothing that goes on foot (4)

### SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

#### Solution to puzzle 12821

ALEWITFEP RANCER  
DENSOR S A B A A  
VENSO TORMENTED  
E A N O T T H I  
REPORT CARD COMA  
B T A A T S L T  
C T H I R D U M P I R E  
A A T I N G U A C S  
C O N N O I S E U R  
G O T T N E T S S  
R U E D E R G O M A N I A C  
E L T V C L R  
D R O P A H I N T E X I L E  
I P U C E C U E  
T H E A T R E T A K E S O N

#### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

5 1 8 9 2 4 3 6 7  
6 4 2 7 1 3 8 9 5  
7 9 3 8 5 6 4 1 2  
1 6 5 3 7 2 9 4 8  
2 3 9 4 8 5 1 7 6  
4 8 7 6 9 1 2 5 3  
8 7 4 2 6 9 5 3 1  
3 2 1 5 4 7 6 8 9  
9 5 6 1 3 8 7 2 4

### FAITH

## Bhooma came as Andal

The Lord is anxious to save jivatmas and grant them moksha, but this anxiety is even greater in His Consort, said M.A. Venkatakrishnan, in a discourse. When Rama is exiled to the forest, Sita insists on accompanying Him. She says She will walk in front on Him, and will trample down any thorns in the path, thus making the way smooth for Him. While this is certainly a mark of Sita's devotion to Lord Rama, it also has a symbolic meaning. She is indicating that She will soften the hearts of people, so that they become ready to receive Him.

With this characteristic anxiety for jivatmas, Bhooma Devi asks Lord Varaha to suggest some easy ways of reaching His feet. He has already given the world many ways of reaching Him. But these are too difficult for most people. So Bhooma Devi wants something easier. In reply to her question, Lord Varaha says that there are two easy ways of reaching Him - one is singing about Him; the other is to surrender to Him. But Goddess Earth is not content to merely know the answer to Her question. She aims to inform the world about what the Lord told Her in private. She wants to make the secret of liberation public, so as to benefit all mankind. So, She takes the avatara of Andal. Anantazhvan, a disciple of Ramana-jacharya, wrote a work titled Goda Catusloki, which records the greatness of Andal. Anantazhvan says that the Lord's Consort came as Andal, with the quickness of an arrow shot from a bow. Bhoo Devi's Gayatri mantra says She is dhanurdharAyai, that is the One who has a bow in Her hand. Anantazhvan must have had this in mind, when he described Andal's speedy descent to the earth. Andal's Thiruppavai contains the essence of the Vedas, and recitation of Her verses takes us nearer God.



To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code



MARKET WATCH		
	01-01-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	41,306	0.13
US Dollar	71.22	0.20
Gold	39,818	-0.41

NIFTY 50		
	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	377.65	11.65
Asian Paints	1793.20	8.25
Axis Bank	748.70	-5.40
Bajaj Auto	3150.10	-34.90
Bajaj Finserv	9378.45	-14.90
Bajaj Finance	4231.30	-3.45
Bharti Airtel	453.30	-2.50
BPCIL	491.65	0.10
Britannia Ind	3039.65	11.85
Cipla	475.90	-2.30
Coal India	211.95	0.60
Dr Reddys Lab	2879.40	4.85
Eicher Motors	22075.80	-439.45
GAIL (India)	121.20	0.15
Grasim Ind	742.50	-1.15
HCL Tech	571.95	3.85
HDFC	2433.95	21.40
HDFC Bank	1278.60	6.50
Hero MotoCorp	2432.55	-10.50
Hindalco	214.30	-1.85
Hind Unilever	1936.55	13.55
ICICI Bank	536.75	-2.15
IndusInd Bank	1484.30	-25.70
Bharti Infratel	254.45	1.95
Infosys	736.85	5.70
Indian OilCorp	125.95	0.40
ITC	238.10	0.40
JSW Steel	268.10	-1.95
Kotak Bank	1674.05	-10.30
L&T	1309.95	11.75
M&M	536.60	5.05
Maruti Suzuki	7311.70	-56.90
Nestle India Ltd.	14779.05	-6.30
NTPC	121.55	2.50
ONGC	127.45	-1.35
PowerGrid Corp	195.50	5.25
Reliance Ind	1509.60	-4.45
State Bank	334.45	0.70
Sun Pharma	434.30	1.75
Tata Motors	184.45	-0.70
Tata Steel	467.75	-4.30
TCS	2167.60	5.90
Tech Mahindra	762.10	-0.20
Titan	1154.75	-33.20
UltraTech Cement	4065.00	-18.95
UPL	588.25	3.75
Vedanta	154.60	2.15
Wipro	247.70	1.90
YES Bank	46.65	-0.30
Zee Entertainment	288.65	-3.55

EXCHANGE RATES		
Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on January 01		
CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	71.02	71.34
Euro	79.63	79.99
British Pound	94.20	94.64
Japanese Yen (100)	65.34	65.64
Chinese Yuan	10.20	10.25
Swiss Franc	73.30	73.77
Singapore Dollar	52.75	53.01
Canadian Dollar	54.63	54.89
Malaysian Ringitt	17.36	17.45

Source: Indian Bank

Infra projects cost overrun at over ₹4-lakh cr.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

As many as 388 infrastructure projects, each worth ₹150 crore or more, are among those that have been hit by cost overruns of more than ₹4 lakh crore owing to delays and other reasons, says a report.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation said of the 1,636 projects above the said size, 388 projects reported cost overruns and 563 projects, time escalation.

“Total original cost of implementation of 1,636 projects was ₹19,52,524.85 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be ₹23,53,108.80 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of ₹4,00,583.95 crore,” said the Ministry’s report for October 2019.

The expenditure incurred on these projects till October 2019 is ₹10.32 lakh crore, or 43.86% of the estimated project cost.

Auto sector trundles past in December

Maruti, M&M sales rise, Tata Motors, Hyundai clock decline; carmakers adjust deliveries ahead of BS VI


**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The year 2019 ended on a mixed note for the auto sector with carmakers such as Maruti Suzuki and M&M posting a growth in domestic passenger vehicle wholesales in December and players like Tata Motors, Hyundai, Honda and Toyota witnessing a decline as many manufacturers adjusted deliveries to dealers ahead of the transition to BS-VI vehicles.

Market leader Maruti Suzuki posted a 2.5% rise in its domestic passenger vehicle wholesales at more than 1.22 lakh units in December 2019 against 1.19 lakh units in the year-earlier month.

Mahindra & Mahindra too saw growth of 4% in domestic passenger vehicle sales to 15,691 units compared with

**Uncertain path**



- Tata Motors' PV sales drop 10% to 12,785 units
- Hyundai Motor sales down 10% to 37,953 units
- Toyota Kirloskar domestic sales drop 45% to 6,544 units
- Maruti Suzuki clocks a 2.5% rise in domestic PV sales to 1.22 lakh units
- M&M domestic PV sales rise 4% to 15,691 units

15,091 units. Its commercial vehicles (CV) segment, saw a decline of 5%, to 16,018 vehicles in December 2019 against 16,906 vehicles. Veejay Ram Nakra, chief of sales and marketing, automotive division, M&M Ltd., said, “As

we get into the new year, we are fully equipped to roll out our BS-VI products and have taken all requisite measures for a smooth transition over the next three months.”

Tata Motors reported a 12% decline in total vehicle

Mindspace Business plans REIT listing

Offer includes ₹1,000 cr. in fresh units

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
MUMBAI

Mindspace Business Parks has become the second entity – after Embassy Office Parks REIT – to plan a real estate investment trust (REIT) listing on the bourses.

The entity has filed the draft document for an REIT offering, comprising a fresh issue of units worth ₹1,000 crore, along with an offer for sale. The REIT is sponsored by K. Raheja Corp. group companies Cape Trading LLP and Anbee Constructions LLP, and is managed by K. Raheja Corp Investment Managers LLP.

According to a company statement, Mindspace Business Parks REIT owns com-

mercial space in the Mumbai Region, Hyderabad, Pune and Chennai, and its portfolio has five integrated business parks and five independent offices.

Further, its portfolio has total leasable area of 29.5 million square feet (msf), comprising 19.8 msf of completed area, 6.1 msf under construction area and 3.6 msf of future development area, as of June 30, 2019.

The portfolio has 173 tenants with no single tenant contributing more than 8.7% of its gross contracted rentals. Approximately 84.5% of its rentals were derived from multinational corporations and approximately 34.8% from Fortune 500 firms, the release said.

Park Hotels files papers for ₹1,000-cr. IPO

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
MUMBAI

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels has filed the draft red herring prospectus for an initial public offering worth ₹1,000 crore, comprising fresh issue of shares worth up to ₹400 crore and an offer for sale aggregating up to ₹600 crore by entities including Apeejay Surrendra Trust, Apeejay Pvt. Ltd., Apeejay House Pvt. Ltd. and RECP IV Park Hotel Investors.

A company statement said it was one of India’s top 10 hospitality firms in the upscale segment through ‘The Park’ brand.

It added that the firm owned and operated, as also managed, 22 hotels in 15 cities with 1,937 rooms.

sales in the domestic market to 44,254 units in December. Total passenger vehicle sales last month stood at 12,785 units against 14,260 units, down 10%, Tata Motors said.

Tata Motors president (PV business unit) Mayank Pareek said, “Our focus in December has been to drive retail and minimise the network stock to facilitate a smooth transition to BS-VI.”

**CV sales down**

The firm’s commercial vehicle sales in December 2019 stood at 34,082 units as against 40,015 units, down 15%.

Hyundai Motor India said it had sold 37,953 units last month compared with 42,093 units, down almost 10%. For the full calendar year (2019), the company said it had sold more than 5.1

lakh units, down 7.2% from the more than 5.5 lakh units in 2018.

The company’s director, sales, marketing and service, Tarung Garg said, “The year 2019 has been a challenging one for the Indian automotive industry. Even in such adverse conditions, Hyundai has launched four new benchmark products in different segments.”

Honda Cars India said it sold 8,412 units in the country in December 2019 against 13,139 units sold in December 2018.

Toyota Kirloskar Motor’s domestic sales in December 2019 stood at 6,544 units compared with 11,836 units, down 45%. New entrant MG Motor India posted retail sales of 3,021 units in December 2019.

(With PTI inputs)

₹700-cr. investment on hold, says Hero Electric


FAME II failed to deliver: MD Munjal

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Electric two-wheeler maker Hero Electric has put on hold investment of up to ₹700 crore for a year with the sector taking a nosedive as FAME II, the scheme aimed at promoting electric vehicles (EVs), has failed to deliver, according to a top company official.

Calling for a complete revamp of policy, the firm wants the Centre to include low speed two-wheelers for subsidy, arguing that for mass adoption of EVs in India, these cost-effective vehicles were critical.

“From an industry standpoint, there was a certain trajectory which was going on when we had FAME I... the manner in which FAME II was introduced, the



Naveen Munjal

whole industry took a downturn and [is] now recovering from that,” said Hero Electric MD Naveen Munjal.

As per Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles, sales of FAME II qualified electric two-wheelers fell 93.84% to 3,000 units in the April-December 2019 period as against 48,671 units a year earlier.

IRDAI fines Maruti, Hero broking firms

Authority says affidavits by officers of firms ‘contrary to facts’; fines total ₹5.18 cr.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has imposed a penalty of ₹3 crore on Maruti Insurance Broking (MIBL) and ₹2.18 crore on Hero Insurance Broking India (HIBIL) for not complying with the Motor Insurance Service Provider (MISP) guidelines.

In separate orders, the Authority directed the entities to make certain changes for compliance and improved governance.

Taking serious note of the affidavit filed by the respective Principal Officers of MIBL and HIBIL, the regulator said the affidavits were contrary to the facts. Hence, it directed the entities to not pay performance incentives



to the respective Principal Officer for one year, from the date of order.

The action against MIBL and HIBIL followed the regulator deciding to call for information, from select insurance intermediaries mainly involved in selling and servicing motor insurance policies through the motor dealers. Providing the backdrop

was the completion of one year since the MISP guidelines were issued.

**Conflict of interest**

IRDAI had also received complaints from some general insurance agents who sought to highlight the apparent conflict of interest in the role of MISPs in selling insurance policies and servicing and repairing motor vehicles. The “high claims ratio under the MISP channel, extra payments made to MISP by insurers, disparity of treatment to agents,” were cited.

The Authority also got complaints from insurance firms that insurance intermediaries have created a panel of insurers in violation of MISP guidelines.

Though separate orders, passed in the third week of December but made public recently, there were several common points, including a direction to both MIBL and HIBIL to “dismantle panel of insurers and empanel all insurers on platform, have full integration with insurers’ computer systems, ensure premiums quoted to customers come directly from insurer’s systems without any intervention by the broker.”

IRDAI directed the two entities to redesign the current system of seeking customer consent for purchasing motor insurance in such a manner that the customer exercises choice of selecting the insurer through an OTP-based system at the time of issuance of a new motor insurance policy and its renewal.

Pumpset makers edgy over energy norms

BEE approval getting delayed, they say

**M. SOUNDARIYA PREETHA**  
COIMBATORE

Pumpset manufacturers will have to meet a revised set of guidelines starting January 1 to get energy efficiency star rating for their products but there is a delay in getting the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) approval for the applications submitted, according to manufacturers here.

The manufacturers, including those making star-rated pumpsets, will have to get the entire range of products tested at an independent laboratory, get the results approved by the Bureau of Indian Standards and apply to the BEE for star-rating approval. The BEE had announced the new standards a couple of months ago. Even in pumpset-making hubs such as Coimbatore, Ahmedabad, and Rajkot, most manufac-



turers are yet to get BEE approvals, they said.

“Pumpsets will have to have the new star rating for energy efficiency. But we are yet to get required approvals. If a manufacturer had made 5-star rated energy efficiency pumpsets earlier, the same product will come to a lower category such as 3-star, now,” said V. Krishnakumar, president, Southern India Engineering Manufacturers’ Association.

FDI rises 15% to \$26 billion in April-Sept.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment into India grew close to 15% to \$26 billion during the first half of the current financial year, according to government data.

Inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) during April-September of 2018-19 stood at \$22.66 billion.

Sectors that attracted maximum foreign inflows during April-September 2019-20, include services (\$4.45 billion), computer software and hardware (\$4 billion), telecommunications (\$4.28 billion), automobile (\$2.13 billion) and trading (\$2.14 billion), the Commerce and Industry Ministry data showed.

Singapore continued to be the largest source of FDI in India during the first half of the financial year, with \$8 billion investments.

Reforms to spur recovery in 2020: India Inc.

Infrastructure push to help; industry moots sizeable cut in personal income tax

**PIYUSH PANDEY**  
MUMBAI

After a forgettable 2019, India Inc. is expecting a rebound in economic growth in 2020 due to the reforms announced by the Centre.

“We are bullish about the prospects for not just Vedanta but also for the Indian economy in 2020,” said Vedanta chairman Anil Agarwal.

“A lot of work, in terms of structural reforms that has happened in 2019, will start to bear fruit as we move ahead in the new year when we see India’s GDP growth picking up pace,” he added.

Last year, the government had announced a host of reforms, including reduction of corporate tax significantly from the more-than 30% to an effective rate of 25.17% and, for new manufacturing units, 17.16%.



Vikram Kirloskar

“2020 will be one of economic rebound; the expectation is that the economy will regain its dynamic growth trajectory once again and take its position to [reaching] \$5 trillion by 2025. Inflation conditions in 2020 will remain benign except for a few fluctuations because of weather disruptions, said D.K. Aggarwal, president,

PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry. At this juncture, he added, the focus of the government must be to refuel consumption demand with a significant reduction in personal income tax.

The government on Tuesday announced a detailed road map for ₹102 lakh crore worth of infrastructure investment over FY20-25, which is likely to spur economic activity and revive growth.

“It is a welcome move from the point of view of the infrastructure sector and reinforces the government’s commitment towards making India a leading world economy,” said Anshuman Magazine, chairman & CEO, India, South East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE.

According to industry body CII, a gradual recovery is

expected in 2020 as there are nascent signs that the economy is on a better footing than the year gone by.

With proactive measures taken by the government and the Reserve Bank of India, the industry believes that gradual recovery will soon take place.

**Signs of recovery**

“Nascent signs of recovery are noted in the form of improved PMIs of manufacturing and services, a jump in passenger air traffic and sharp moderation in the decline in sales of passenger cars, among others,” said Vikram Kirloskar, president, CII.

“Though we may continue to see a subdued GDP print in the third quarter, the quarters thereafter are likely to see a rebound,” he added.



JANUARY  
Watch the Brown-headed Gull migrate

To marvel at the large congregation of migrating Brown-headed Gulls, head towards **Nigambodh Ghat** on a boat ride you'd remember for a lifetime. A few male birds may also be seen in their breeding plumage.

PHOTO: RUSHEN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FEBRUARY  
See the Kulu Tree flowering

Once imagined to have been a part of the Delhi Ridge, the magnificent Kulu has almost disappeared from the city, but the Aravalli Biodiversity Park in **Gurugram** has a few blooming specimens. The tree stands out with its white chipping trunk, its branches spreading upward like that of a dancer's arms mid-pose. It displays khaki-coloured flower clusters, deep red-brown on the outside and green on the inside. The tree is also known to have medicinal uses. Locally, it is also called 'Kateela' or 'Kateera'. Aravalli Biodiversity Park, once an extensively mined and exploited region, has now grown into a small forest, with flora native to the Aravalli Range. It is no less than a marvel.

PHOTO: VIJAY DHASMANA



IN OUR BACKYARD  
Spaces and species  
Your round-the-year guide to going outdoors and engaging with nature



JULY  
Spot the Cinnamon Bittern

The onset of wet weather in the city is greeted by the arrival of an elusive bird called the Cinnamon Bittern, at the wetlands here. The bittern is fairly big and is cinnamon-coloured bird. **Okhla Bird Sanctuary** in Noida is perhaps one of the richest wetland-reed habitats in Delhi NCR. In July-August, you may often see these beautiful birds shying away in reeds or flying from one patch to another.

PHOTO: CLPRAMOD/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

AUGUST  
Watch the Common Mormon fly

The butterfly park at **Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary** plays host to a variety of butterflies at this time. Most belonging to the family of Swallowtails are large and brilliantly coloured with a tailed hindwing. Common Mormons are predominantly black with white markings on males, and females displaying some red on the hindwing.

PHOTO: RLEVSE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



SEPTEMBER  
Count the colours of the Indian Pitta

Commonly known as the Navrang in Hindi, the Indian Pitta has nine colours. It nests on trees in **Bhondsi Nature Park in Bhondsi, Gurugram**. The birds are shy, but when they start to pair on arrival from Southern India, they are vocal and visible.

PHOTO: ABHISHEK GULSHAN



OCTOBER  
Recognise a Zebra Blue

A small, fast and jittery butterfly from the family of Blues, the largest family consisting of over 6,000 species of butterflies. The butterfly has orange spots on the head-like tail to confuse predators. It is seen on ornamental **Plumbago** flowers at the **Hauz Rani city forest in Saket**.

PHOTO: ANAGHA DEVI/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



NOVEMBER  
Enter a reforested zone

The **Yamuna Biodiversity Park, in Wazirabad**, is located on the Yamuna riverfront and has been developed by the DDA and scientists of the University of Delhi into a haven for birds. Several migratory ducks (from Europe and other parts of Asia) like the Common Pochard come in winter to the wetlands. A diving or dabbling duck, fish, molluscs and aquatic plants are its primary source food.

PHOTO: DR. RAJU\_KASAMBE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



DECEMBER  
Visit a wetland

Sultanpur National Park in Sultanpur village, **Gurugram**, was first declared a Bird Sanctuary in 1972 when Peter Jackson, a prominent British ornithologist approached the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, for the need to protect the place for its Avifauna brilliance. Later in 1983, it was upgraded to a National Park. Before concretisation and the construction of drainage, the area was naturally waterlogged. Though this is now artificially maintained, it still attracts thousands of migratory birds like the Brown Goose, the Common Teal, the Northern Shoveler that flock together and spend their winter in this rich habitat.

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

MARCH  
Experience a Murmuration of Rosy Starlings

**Lodhi Garden**, with its historical monuments and old trees is where large flocks of migratory Rosy Starlings head in March-April. They are celebrated for their incredible aerial display known as a murmuration, where they fly together in large groups and change direction at the same time, avoiding a collision with one another. It's a sight so incredible it makes you fall in love with birds. If you like garden-hopping, drive to **Nehru Park** to see the Flame of the Forest, called **Dhak** or **Palash**, locally. It's a survivor, withstanding heat, frost, drought, and poor soil conditions. The bright orange flowers yield an orange dye, once used as a **Holi** colour. You'll also find a large tree near the entrance of **Teen Murti Bhawan**.

PHOTO: IMRAN SHAH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



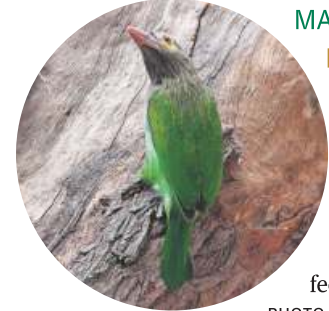
Blessed with rich and varied habitats, Delhi-NCR is very rewarding when it comes to both flora and fauna. The city caters to the needs of beautiful creatures in possibly every season. In summer, the resident birds breed in their preferred habitats; the monsoon attracts several birds and insects, and the winter is well known for migratory birds. Delhi's rich biodiversity is mainly due to the different kinds of habitats

it celebrates, such as scrublands and deciduous forests in the Aravallis and the Ridge; wetlands like **Okhla Bird Sanctuary**, and small grasslands, sometimes found adjacent to wetlands and scrublands. Each habitat is home to both generalist species as well as habitat-specialists. No wonder then that Delhi is an avifauna marvel and the second most bird-rich capital city in the world, after Nairobi in Kenya.

MAY  
Hear the calls of the Brown-headed Barbet

A loud cavity nester, the Brown-headed Barbet breeds in May in the lushness of **Sunder Nursery**, a 16th century heritage park, home to several old trees that have developed holes, and thus comfort cavity nesters. The loud green Barbet, with a brown head, is observed on tree tops, calling to attract mates. It starts pairing in April and breeds in May, where the males feed the females in cavities to keep them comfortable.

PHOTO: ABHISHEK GULSHAN



JUNE  
Discover the home of the Alexandrine Parakeet

Monuments like the **Qutab Minar in Mehrauli** have crevices for nesting birds especially parakeets. The largest of the kind in the city is the Alexandrine Parakeet. The birds were heavily traded to be kept as pets, and they're listed as a near threatened species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It is named after Alexander the Great, who exported several to Europe, where it was considered a sign of nobility. The elegant bird has a crimson patch on its shoulders, a unique identification mark.

PHOTO: ABHISHEK GULSHAN



APRIL  
Find the flower of the Sita-Ashok

Thought of as India's most beautiful tree for its fragrant, pale, apricot-coloured flowers that appear in clusters, borne directly from the main branches of the tree. The **Roshanara Bagh in North Delhi**, a Mughal era garden built by Roshanara Begum, daughter of Shah Jahan, proudly displays a row of 12 beautiful Sita-Ashok Trees. The tree is considered sacred and is surrounded by folklore, religious, and literary references.

PHOTO: ABHISHEK GULSHAN



Locations are only indicative of the area

# The method to making mad fun

Martin D'Souza talks about what it takes to be a professional clown

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of clowns? Several people actually find them creepy. It doesn't help that on screen these white greasepaint-donning figures are often people with damaged psyches and tortured souls, sinister creatures who scare the living daylight out of the audience. Examples are aplenty: *House of 1000 Corpses* has Captain Spaulding, *American Horror Story* has Twisty, *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* has... well, killer clowns from outer space. But the most popular of all creepy clowns, argua-



Happy act Martin believes in making people laugh • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

bly, is Pennywise from *It* (a movie adapted from Stephen King's book of the same title). When *It* was released in 2017, the then president of the World Clown Association (WCA), Pam Moody complained the movie is giving real-life clowns a bad reputation.

"What are clowns like in real

life?" we ask Martin D'Souza, who has been a professional clown, Mr Flubber, for three decades and has served as the vice president of WCA from 2016 to 2018. He was in Bengaluru over the weekend for the International Clown Festival.

"I have never come across a single child who has been scared of me," he says. "Of course, there are cases of excited parents shoving their two-year-olds to clowns and they obviously start crying." But of clowns being scary, he reckons it was all fanned by the movie industry. "I think, this hype (of coulrophobia) has completely died out."

Martin became a clown by accident. A physics graduate wanting to do something creative, Martin would moonlight as a party host. At a

party, in 1999, he was hurriedly asked to dress up as a clown. He did not have the time for deliberation. Within a few minutes, he was wearing brightly coloured clothes, make-up and fumbling without knowing what to do. But his mistakes caused merriment. The audience's laughter was motivational. "There are many entertainers like stand-up comedians who try to make people laugh. Most of them put people in a spot though. So, the laughter that comes out is from embarrassment. But when a clown performs, he creates an environment of joy and people join him in laughter. We do not chase laughter, we chase happiness."

Martin discovered soon that clowning was an art and it had its



own techniques. He studied clownology at the University of Wisconsin in 2004 and learnt the nuances of clowning – make-up, movement, theatrics among others. "There are two aspects of clowning – the operational part and the emotional part. The operational part includes make-up, costume, which depends on many things. For example, the weather – if it is too hot, you wear a certain kind of make-up and if you are going to be falling around, you wear a certain type of costume. The emotional or psychological part is about dealing with the audience."

With circuses dying out clowns are finding new avenues: five-star hotels, malls, schools. He says the best part of being Mr Flubber is the smiles he sees on people's faces. "When they come up to me and say, 'I have never laughed like this before', it is a mission accomplished for me."

## PRODUCTION

### The show goes on



The Masada National Park, the most popular park in Israel, which attracts more than a million visitors a year, now has a 45-minute nocturnal show titled *From Dusk to Dawn*. Presented by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, video mapping technology and advanced lighting and sound effects help create this showcase. Mount Masada serves as the 'screen'. The performance, scheduled every Tuesday and Thursday, includes a short film where visitors can get a glimpse of the archaeological excavations of Masada.

Contact us at [delhimetro@thehindu.co.in](mailto:delhimetro@thehindu.co.in)

## 5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



### PERFORMANCE

**Dance Utsav**  
Guru Ranjana Gauhar's Utsav Educational and Cultural Society is putting up a festival called Unbound Beats of India, which celebrates young classical dancers. The performing artistes include Ankita Bakshi (Odissi), Diksha Rawat (Kathak), Vani Ballah Pahwa (Mohiniyattam) and Chitra Dalvi Vartak (Bharatanatyam).  
**VENUE:** Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre  
**TIME:** 7 p.m.



### FOOD

**Winter menu**  
Guppy, the contemporary Japanese kitchen & bar has introduced #WinterGobble, an all-new winter menu, curated by chefs Vikram Khatri and Saurabh Sharan. The menu features Salmon Steak, Mentaiko (codfish roe), Grilled Artichokes, Soft-Shell Crab rolled in sushi, Baked Avocado, Grilled Lamb Chops, and Salt Pepper Calamari.  
**VENUE:** 28, Lodhi Colony, Main Market  
**TIME:** 12 noon-3:30 p.m.; 7 p.m.-1 a.m.



### MUSIC

**Jazz and R&B**  
The Great Jazz Guitar Trio will perform tonight at The Piano Man, Gurugram. The trio, led by guitarist Matt Ingeneri, will play Classic Hard Bop and Soul Jazz, combining Blues, Soul, and R&B with the sophisticated harmony of Jazz. They follow American jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery's style.  
**VENUE:** Sector 15 Part 2, Gurugram  
**TIME:** 9 p.m. - 11:55 p.m.



### THEATRE

**Comic act**  
The Central Club of Comedy is hosting a stand-up comic act called *Dus ka Dum - Ten Mins to Kill*, at Akshara Theatre this evening. A bunch of Delhi stand up comics namely, Saurabh Pandey, Ashish Kwatra, Gurinder Singh, and Kaustubh Agarwal, will be attempting with their new material to judge how funny they are.  
**VENUE:** 11-12 B, Baba Kharak Singh Marg  
**TIME:** 8 p.m. - 11 p.m.



### FILM

**French comedy**  
Alliance Française de Delhi will screen *Un Beau Voyou*, a 2019 comedy film, directed by Lucas Bernard. The plot revolves around Commissioner Beffrois, who waits for retirement with mixed enthusiasm, when the theft of paintings catches his attention. Beffrois goes after an unusual thief, who slips in and out, unnoticed.  
**VENUE:** M.L. Bhartia Auditorium, Lodhi Estate  
**TIME:** 6:30 p.m.



Montenegro

Only a country of its own since 2006, interest in Montenegro tourism has risen favourably over the last couple of years. Ashish Dhruva, vice president, ClearTrip, says that the country received over 9.5 lakh tourists in 2018. Besides the picturesque landscape, the Montenegrin weather is a major factor in attracting visitors. The best time to visit the country is between May and September, he notes. The coast – Montenegro’s 293-kilometre-long coastline is populated by 120 beaches that run for 73 kilometres – is the best place to be during the summer, as temperatures prevail around the warm 30 degrees Celsius mark. While the capital city is Podgorica, it is Kotor that attracts most tourists. A UNESCO world heritage site, Kotor is a medieval town. The Romanesque churches and fortified structures within the old city walls are among the sights to take in here. “Montenegro also has well-marked walking and cycling routes. Tourists can take easy routes around the lakes in Biogradska Gora and Durmitor national parks. Kayaking around the Bay of Kotor and on Lake Skadar (the largest lake in Southern Europe) is an option for adventure sport lovers. Cross-country skiing [during the winter months] is another adrenaline rush option,” Ashish says. For the spiritually inclined, there is also the Ostrog Monastery, which Ashish describes as an “unusual architectural wonder” – the monastery rests against the Ostroška Greda (a high rock), as if it was carved out of it. Travelling options are limited at the moment – if travelling from Delhi, stop-overs at Rome or at Doha and Vienna are required before heading to Podgorica.



Oh, the places you’ll go!

It is time to update your bucketlist of travel destinations, except make it a point to explore the offbeat trail this year – whether it is flyboarding, trotting around a medieval town, or eating whale blubber while scoping a glacier. Make it your Mission: 2020

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY AND PRADEEP KUMAR



Norway

It may not be the most affordable destination, but the charming fjords of Norway will make you believe every penny spent is worth it. Though Oslo may be the most visited as the capital city, this country has a mind-boggling selection that will make you want to extend your leave. Let us start with Tromsø, which lies above the Arctic Circle – meaning it is a natural winter wonderland, and the perfect base to explore the Northern Lights. This is also where you get to experience the Polar night phenomenon, when the sun remains below the horizon, and the sky is a beautiful ink-blue for the most part. Another place we are obsessing over is the Lofoten Islands. Henningsvær, one of the fishing villages here, has a football field that is cradled by the sea on one side and rugged cliffs on the other – a surreal landscape. Stay in a charming red rorbu (traditional fishermen’s cabin) – they sit on the waterfront, and offer sweeping views of the sea as well as the snow-covered mountains. In addition, activities like hiking, whale watching, kayaking, Arctic fishing and glamping make it an exotic destination.

■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO



Greenland

Remember when Donald Trump, the US President, fantasised, or ‘joked’ about his fantasy of, purchasing Greenland? Thanks in part to him, the world’s largest island is emerging as an offbeat tourist destination. The easiest way to reach is through flights, but the options are limited. “There are only two [international] airports – Narsarsuaq [in the south] and Kangerlussuaq [in the west]. Travellers can fly into Greenland’s capital, Nuuk, either from Canada or Iceland during summer. Flights are also available from Copenhagen (Denmark), Keflavik and Reykjavik (Iceland) or Iqaluit (Canada),” says Rajeev Kale, President and Country Head (Holidays, MICE, Visas), Thomas Cook India, adding, “Many travellers choose to visit Greenland via cruises as well. Luxury ships offer 10-24 nights stay, including stops in Iceland or Svalbard [in Norway].” A multiple-entry visa from the Danish Embassy is needed for the travel. June through September (summer) is the best time of the year to visit Greenland, which is home to the iconic Ilulissat Kangerlua (Icefjord) – a UNESCO world heritage site. Helicopters, small aeroplanes and ferries are the most feasible options for travel within Greenland. “There are multiple hotels, hostels and bed-and-breakfast guesthouses for the solo traveller. Camping is an option, but travellers who prefer luxury accommodations can explore staying in an igloo or an eco-lodge overlooking the Ekip Sermia glacier,” Rajeev notes. The local cuisine borders on the exotic – whale meat, seal and eider duck are the staples alongside dried cod. “The most popular [among Greenlanders] is Narwhal blubber (whale fat),” he adds.



Mauritius

Ever tried befriending a bottlenose dolphin? In Mauritius, you can do this, and also try your hand at fun water sports: sea kart, kite surf or flyboard like Hrithik Roshan in *Bang Bang!*. This sunny island, in the Indian Ocean, also owns a submarine that can take you 35 metres under water, and give a tour of shipwreck, corals and its rich marine life. “The Mauritian coast is (approx) 330 kilometres long with sandy beaches everywhere. The lagoons have crystal-clear water, and it is ideal for swimming and snorkelling,” says Arvind Bundhun, director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority. Le Caudan Waterfront is where all the action is, if you want to enjoy a night out, grab a few drinks, try your luck at the casino or just watch a movie. While Port Louis is the capital and its economic centre, there are other towns and villages like Grand Bay and Flic en Flac that demand attention. Not to forget, Mauritius is a hot favourite among golfers (as many as 60,000 of the annual one million visitors are golfers). “The island offers 18-hole courses (10) and 9-hole courses (three). They are set in natural environments, and have been designed for championships by renowned golfers such as Peter Matkovich, Peter Alliss, Rodney Wright,” Arvind adds. Quite a few Bollywood movies have been shot here, and, of late, Mauritius has become a destination wedding spot too. Considering its cheap exchange rate, Mauritius is also a pocket-friendly destination.

Poland

If dark tourism is what you are kicked about in the New Year, then Poland should be on your list. The country is home to the Auschwitz concentration camp, Museum of the Second World War (Gdansk) and the Mausoleum of Struggle and Martyrdom (Warsaw) – each a reminder of the pain, terror and suffering inflicted upon people by Nazi Germany. But the country also has a vibrant culture, food and entertainment scene. Over the last few years, the city of Kraków has emerged as a popular destination, especially among youngsters, what with its night life and shot bars. While Warsaw, Wrocław and Gdańsk are the most well-known cities, there are other spectacular spots too. Like the resort town of Zakopane, which lies in the foothills of the imposing Tatra mountains, and Wieliczka, near Kraków, which is famous for its salt mine lit by grand chandeliers, or Poznań – better known for the rows of pastel-hued houses in the Old Town. Poland is also comparatively cheaper than most other European cities. So, go ahead and splurge on another round of *krupnik* (local liqueur).



POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



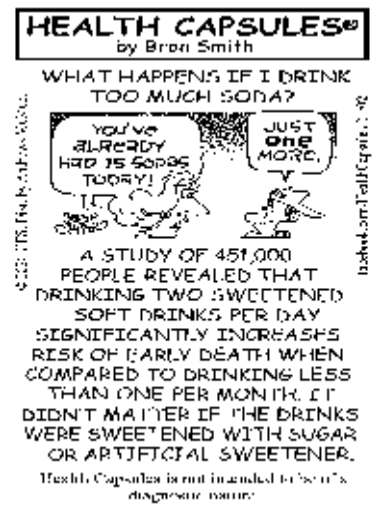
TIGER



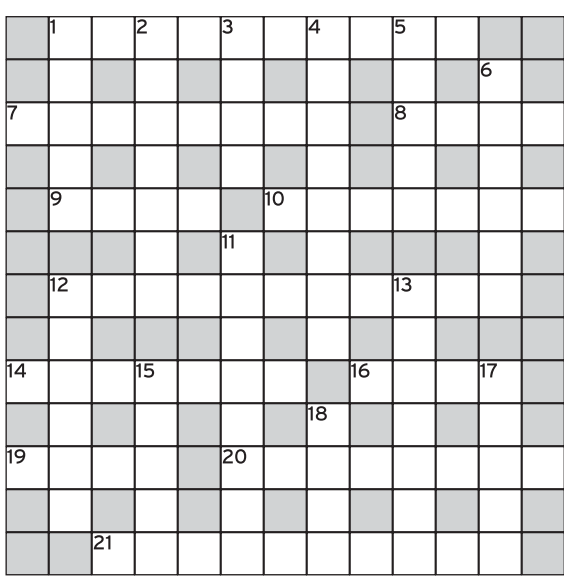
WUMO



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

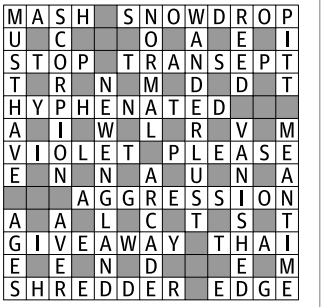


THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13266



- (4,2) 13 Brutal (7)
- 15 Citizen of a landlocked monarchy in southern Africa (5)
- 17 Message from Trump? (5)
- 18 Proverbially stubborn beast (4)

- Across
  - 1 Categorise (10)
  - 7 Cloudy (8)
  - 8 White tissue under the rind of citrus fruit (4)
  - 9 Profound (4)
  - 10 Liberty (7)
  - 12 Bestir oneself (3,8)
  - 14 Beetroot soup (7)
  - 16 Closed (4)
  - 19 Mountain lion (4)
  - 20 People from
- Down
  - 21 Merry (3,3,4)
  - 1 Covered with a firm surface (5)
  - 2 Article of clothing (7)
  - 3 Spoken (4)
  - 4 Threefold feat (3,5)
  - 5 Oversight (5)
  - 6 Powerful (6)
  - 11 Ban (8)
  - 12 Become an adult



The solution will appear on January 3, 2020. Solution No. 13265



# Sindhu targets Olympics gold

World No. 1 ranking and a clutch of Super Series titles also on her radar

## BADMINTON

**V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM**  
HYDERABAD  
World champion P.V. Sindhu said it is time to look ahead, leave the past, believe in herself and come back much more stronger.

Sindhu, a star campaigner for Hyderabad Hunters, is also looking at the Premier Badminton League starting on January 20 to fine-tune her game as she targets the top slot for India for the Tokyo Olympics.  
“Post the World championship gold last August, no doubt I have had a disappointing run. But it is not all over. I can always come back,” the 24-year-old Sindhu said in an exclusive interview with *The Hindu* as she shared her thoughts for the new year.

**Was 2019 better than 2016 when you won the Rio Olympics silver?**

In 2016, no one expected me to do well. Now there is a lot more recognition, expectations are high and with that comes bigger responsibility. So both years are different but with great memories.  
Essentially, I am keen to start off the new year on a high in the Malaysian Open and the Indonesia Masters this month though it is not possible always to keep winning every tournament.



**Aiming high:** P.V. Sindhu, while admitting that her performances stagnated after the World Championship win, is confident of doing well in 2020. ■ V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

**Is there a critical review of your game at the end of 2019?**  
Yes, of course. It is impor-

tant to know your mistakes and work on them. I am looking to be lot more patient now in my approach

**Essentially, I am keen to start off the new year on a high in the Malaysian Open and the Indonesia Masters this month**

even as the other aspects of the game are being taken care off during the daily training sessions.

**What are the three goals you are chasing now?**  
The Tokyo Olympics gold, World No.1 ranking and winning a few Super Series titles including the All England.

**Your thoughts on the PBL...**  
This is going to be a different PBL. There are a new set of players. Matches against World No. 2 Tai Tzu Ying (for Bengaluru Raptors) should be interesting, looking forward to them. The league has always been very interesting, lots of fun and excitement in the air.  
The whole atmosphere is different out there in PBL as you play for yourself and also for the team.  
The support too will be different and importantly you can correct mistakes, if any.

**On playing for Hunters.**  
We have to support each other and play like a team to clinch the title.

# New year dampener for Chelsea, Tottenham

Crucial win for Aston Villa at Burnley; high-flying Wolves lose to Watford

## PREMIER LEAGUE

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
LONDON

Tottenham and Chelsea slipped up in the Premier League's top-four race on Wednesday but Leicester tightened its grip on second spot during a busy programme of New Year's Day football.  
Chelsea remains in pole position to secure the fourth Champions League qualification place but Frank Lampard will rue conceding a spectacular late equaliser in the 1-1 draw against Brighton.

Those dropped points gave Jose Mourinho's Spurs the chance to crank up the pressure on Chelsea and Manchester United but it slipped to a 1-0 defeat at Southampton, while high-flying Wolves went down 2-1 at rejuvenated Watford.

**Early lead**  
Cesar Azpilicueta gave Chelsea the lead in the early kick-off on England's south coast.

The visitors missed chances to increase their lead but were indebted to goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga for producing a series of sharp saves at the other end.

**Leicester cruises**  
Leicester appears to have put a mini-slump behind it, beating Newcastle 3-0 courtesy of goals from Ayoze Perez, James Maddison and Hamza Choudhury after its



**Moment of magic:** Brighton's Alireza Jahanbakhsh pulls off a stunner to leave Chelsea's defence stranded. ■ REUTERS

with an overhead kick to give his team share of the points.

Tottenham travelled to Southampton with the chance to overtake Manchester United and move three points behind Chelsea but fell behind to a 17th-minute Danny Ings goal.

Mourinho was given an extra headache with 15 minutes to go, when Harry Kane limped off, clutching his left hamstring.

Earlier, Villa beat Burnley 2-1 despite seeing a Jack Grealish goal controversially chalked off by VAR – a result that lifted it out of the relegation zone. Wesley put Villa ahead in the 27th minute and captain Grealish doubled his side's advantage four minutes before the break as his powerful effort found the top corner.

Chris Wood pulled a goal back for Burnley with 10 minutes to go but Villa held on to secure all three points.

“It was massive. We've only had one away win all season before this,” Grealish told the BBC. “To come here, one of the hardest places in the league, it was well-deserved and well-needed.”

**The results:** Brighton 1 (Jahanbakhsh 84) drew with Chelsea 1 (Azpilicueta 10); Burnley 1 (Wood 80) lost to Aston Villa 2 (Wesley 27, Grealish 41); Newcastle 0 lost to Leicester 3 (Perez 36, Maddison 39, Choudhury 87); Southampton 1 (Ings 17) bt Tottenham 0; Watford 2 (Deulofeu 30, Doucoure 49) bt Wolves 1 (Neto 60).



**Right approach:** According to Ajinkya Rahane, the focus should be on the basics while playing in New Zealand and not think too much about technique. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

# We have to counter the breeze factor: Rahane

Getting used to the conditions will be the key, says India's Test vice-captain

## INDIA'S NZ TOUR

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Ajinkya Rahane doesn't fuss over technical issues but India's Test vice-captain feels that the breeze in Wellington and Christchurch needs to be factored in during the team's upcoming two-Test series against New Zealand next month.

India will be playing two Tests in Wellington (February 21-25) and Christchurch (February 29-March 4) after five T20Is and three ODIs.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Rahane spoke on a host of issues with regard to the upcoming tour where the current team has a good

chance of emulating the class of 2009 under M.S. Dhoni's captaincy.

“We played there in 2014... there is a breeze factor that is involved. I guess getting used to conditions will be the key as there will be more sideways movement because of breeze,” Rahane said when asked about the challenges.

“In the last tour, I played in Wellington but [in] Christchurch, we will be playing a Test match after long time. Getting used to conditions will be key,” he added.

**Bowler to watch**  
Rahane, who has been doing his homework for the tour, singled out left-arm fast bow-

ler Neil Wagner as the bowler to watch out for after his recent exploits against Australia and prior to that, England. “Wagner did well in the recent series (27 wickets from last 4 Tests). You can't take just one name. As a batting unit, you've got to respect every bowler.

**Natural game**  
“As a home team, they have an advantage knowing conditions well but, at the same time, we need to play our natural game also,” said the 31-year-old, who has scored 4112 runs in 63 Test matches.

With Trent Boult and Wagner looking to bring the ball back into the right-handers, Rahane feels that

standing outside the crease to counter the swing could be the way to deal with them but then, to each his own.

**Different ways**  
“There are different ways to counter different kinds of bowling. Everyone has a different method. Few players love standing outside the crease (to negate the swing) and some stand deep inside the crease.

“Some take middle-stump guard, few take leg-stump guard. Individual players should stick to their own strengths.”

In New Zealand, playing as close as possible to the body will be very important, said Rahane. “You have to focus

on the basics as you can't think too much about your technique. It's about keeping your game simple, playing close to the body, as late as possible and according to the situation. Pace and bounce will be different.”

**Ideal preparation**  
Rahane will be playing for India-A in the the second four-day ‘Test’ against New Zealand-A to prepare for the big series.

“I think it's a good idea to have shadow tours with India-A. So, before playing Test matches, if India-A matches are there, it's good preparation for us. It helps in acclimatisation.

# Malinga to lead Sri Lanka, Mathews back



**Angelo Mathews.**  
■ FILE PHOTO: AP

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka recalled former skipper Angelo Mathews to the T20 squad on Wednesday, after a 16-month absence from the shortest form of the game for the upcoming India tour.

The Sri Lankan Board said Mathews, 32, will be in the squad led by Lasith Malinga to play three matches in India. The squad will leave Sri Lanka on Thursday, the Board said in a statement.

Mathews played his last T20I against South Africa in August 2018 when he led Sri Lanka to a three-wicket victory but failed to impress with the bat, falling for a duck after facing three balls.

**The squad:** Lasith Malinga (Capt.), Danushka Gunathilaka, Avishka Fernando, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Kusal Perera, Niroshan Dickwella, Dhananjaya de Silva, Isuru Udana, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Oshada Fernando, Wainindu Hasaranga, Lahiru Kumara, Kusal Mendis, Lakshan Sandakan and Kasun Rajitha.

# 2008 under-19 World Cup an important milestone: Kohli

‘It helped us get a good platform and make our careers’

## REWIND

**ANI**  
DUBAI

India skipper Virat Kohli, on Wednesday, termed the 2008 U-19 World Cup as an important milestone in his career and said it gave us a good platform to build upon.

Kohli had led the Indian side to a U-19 World Cup win in 2008 after defeating South Africa in the final.

“The ICC U-19 World Cup was a very important milestone in my career. It helped us get a good platform to build on and make our careers from thereon, so it holds a very important place in my mind and heart. It is very important to understand and respect the opportunity it provides to you,” International Cricket Council (ICC) quoted Kohli as saying in a media release.

**Stand-out performer**  
The 32-year-old Kohli had gone on to score 235 runs in the tournament in 2008 at an average of 47. He went on to pick now New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson as the stand-out performer in that competition.  
“I remember playing against Kane Williamson. He was someone who always stood out in the team, his batting ability was very different from the other players who were around,” Kohli said.



**Fond memory:** Virat Kohli will always cherish India's victorious campaign in the under-19 World Cup in 2008. ■ AP

“It is good to know that so many people from that batch, like Kane and Steve Smith, have played for their respective countries,” he added.

This year's U-19 World Cup will start on January 17 and the Indian side would be led by Priyam Garg. India has been clubbed with New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Japan in Group A and the side will play its first match

against Sri Lanka on Jan. 19. India has won the tournament four times (2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018).  
**India U-19 WC squad:** Yashasvi Jaiswal, Tilak Varma, Divyaansh Saxena, Priyam Garg (Capt.), Dhruv Chand Jurel (Cice-capt. & wk), Shashwat Rawat, Divyansh Joshi, Shubhang Hegde, Ravi Bishnoi, Akash Singh, Kartik Tyagi, Atharva Ankolekar, Kumar Kushagra (wk), Sushant Mishra, Vidyadhar Patil.

# Kohli and Dhoni named captains in ESPNcricinfo's teams of the decade

**IAN'S**

NEW DELHI

India skipper Virat Kohli has been picked as captain of the Test team of the decade, while former captain M.S. Dhoni has been named as skipper of both the ODI and T20I teams of the decade announced by ESPNcricinfo.

Apart from Kohli, ace off-spinner R. Ashwin was the only Indian to feature in the Test XI which has the likes of Alastair Cook and Kane Williamson.

In the last decade, Kohli scored 7,202 runs at an average of 54.97 while Ashwin took 362 wickets at 25.36.

In the ODI XI of the decade, star opener Rohit Sharma and Kohli both found places besides Dhoni.

In the T20I XI, leading pacer Jasprit Bumrah made the cut, besides Dhoni and Kohli. As many as five West



**Consummate leader:** M.S. Dhoni was chosen skipper of both the ODI and T20I teams of the decade. ■ REUTERS

Indies players were named in the team, including ‘Universe boss’ Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Sunil Narine, Kieron Pollard and Andre Russell.

Former skipper Mithali

Raj and fast bowler Jhulan Goswami were named in the women's team of the decade picked for both the ODIs and T20Is. Australia's Meg Lanning was named the captain of the sides.

# PCB withdraws Naseem from under-19 WC team

**ANI**

LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has withdrawn pacer Naseem Shah from the upcoming U-19 World Cup squad and named Mohammad Wasim Jr. as his replacement.

Wasim Jr. took three wickets each in the ACC Asia Cup and on the tour of South Africa, while he bagged seven wickets on the tour of Sri Lanka.

In the domestic circuit, he played one U-19 one-day



**Naseem Shah.**  
■ FILE PHOTO

match in which he claimed three wickets, while he snapped up seven wickets in

three U-19 three-day matches.

PCB Chief Executive Wasim Khan said in a statement: “The ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup is a stepping stone for future stars and a platform for budding youngsters to graduate to international cricket.

**Glass ceiling**  
“Naseem has recently broken that glass ceiling and has established his credentials as an international cricketer. “As such, the PCB has ta-

ken a pragmatic approach and decided to withdraw him from next year's competition to provide this opportunity to another promising cricketer so that he can show his mettle and potential at a global stage.

“Naseem will now remain in Pakistan and continue to work on his skills under the watchful eyes of bowling coach Waqar Younis. Furthermore, he will remain available for the home series against Bangladesh,” he added.



TV PICKS

**NBA:** Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 6.30 & 9 a.m.  
**Big Bash League:** Sony Six (SD & HD), 10.10. a.m.

IN BRIEF



**Tendulkar shares inspirational video**  
NEW DELHI  
Sachin Tendulkar on Wednesday shared an inspirational video to help people kick start their New Year with a heartwarming video. He shared a video of a differently-abled boy named Madda Ram playing cricket. In the video, the boy can be seen scrambling for runs despite him not having legs. "Start your 2020 with the inspirational video of this kid Madda Ram playing cricket with his friends. It warmed my heart and I am sure it will warm yours too," Tendulkar tweeted. ANI

**Kubica named reserve driver for Alfa Romeo**  
PARIS  
Robert Kubica will be a reserve driver for Alfa Romeo in the 2020 season, the team announced on Wednesday. Kubica, 35, made his return to Formula One with Williams last season following a long absence caused by a life-threatening rally crash. He will be the back-up for Kimi Raikkonen and Antonio Giovinazzi. Kubica's return to the team formerly known as Sauber has been facilitated by a sponsorship deal between Alfa Romeo and his principal backer, Polish oil company PKN Orlen. AFP



**Laughlin first to scalp 100 wickets in BBL**  
CARRARA [AUSTRALIA]  
Brisbane Heat's pacer Ben Laughlin on Wednesday became the first bowler to scalp 100 wickets in the Big Bash League. He achieved the feat in the ongoing BBL match between Heat and Perth Scorchers. The pacer now has 100 wickets from 79 matches, while Sean Abbott of Sydney Sixers is second with 96 scalps from 74 games. Kane Richardson of Melbourne Renegades is third with 81 wickets from 64 matches. ANI

**Gold for Gurpreet Singh**  
BHOPAL  
Olympian Gurpreet Singh shot 587 and won the gold in men's 25m centre fire pistol in the 63rd National shooting on Wednesday. Gurpreet beat Yogesh Singh of Navy, who also shot the same score, with 299 out of 300 in the second stage. Anish Bhanwala won the bronze with 585, four points ahead of Rajkanwar Singh Sandhu. **The results: Men: 25m centre fire pistol:** 1. Gurpreet Singh 587 (22x); 2. Yogesh Singh 587 (17x); 3. Anish Bhanwala 585. **Team:** 1. Navy 1737; 2. Haryana 1729; 3. Maharashtra 1716.

**Domingo ready to tour Pakistan**  
DHAKA  
Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo is ready to tour Pakistan, provided the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) allows them. "If we have to, then I am going," Domingo told *New Age* as quoted by the ICC.



**Venus Williams pulls out of Brisbane International**  
BRISBANE  
Venus Williams pulled out of the season-opening Brisbane International on Wednesday after a "setback" during practice. The American veteran said she still hoped to play at the Adelaide International later this month ahead of the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the year. AFP

# A new nations tournament all set to take off

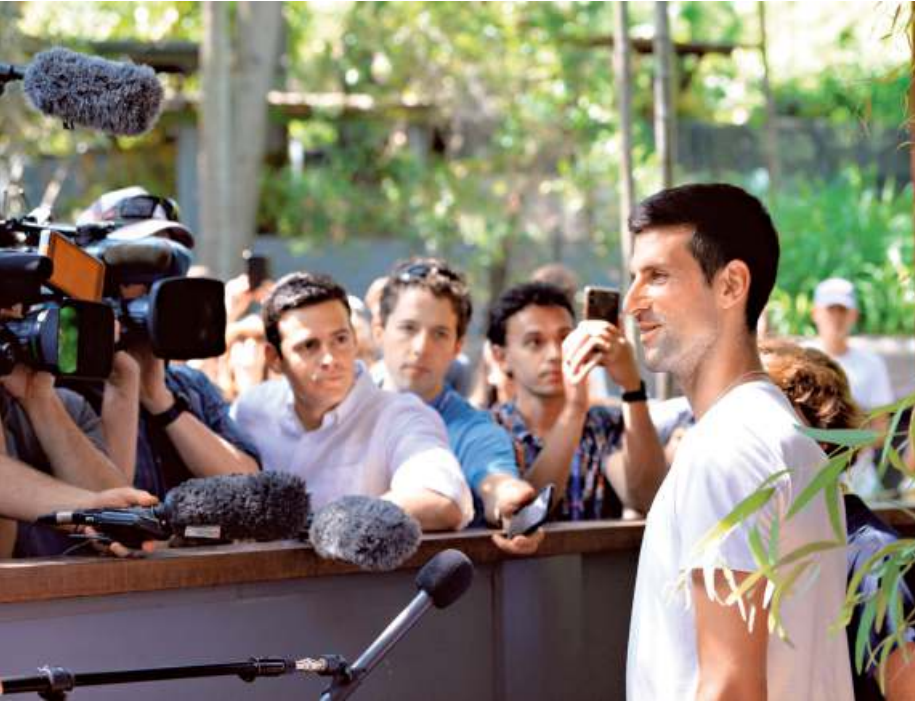
Djokovic says the event, featuring 24 countries, will truly make an impact

ATP CUP

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
SYDNEY  
The ATP Cup, the innovative new team championship kicks off the men's 2020 season on Friday, with Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic among those looking for a winning start ahead of the first Grand Slam of the year. The event will see 24 nations split into six groups across three Australian cities, with eight teams emerging from the round-robin to compete in a knockout phase until one country is left standing. It is the sport's newest tournament and the third men's team event competing for the hearts and minds – and dollars – of fans, along

with a revamped Davis Cup and the annual Laver Cup, which pits Europe against the rest of the world. But it has already suffered setbacks, with major Roger Federer opting to give it a miss and Andy Murray and Kei Nishikori pulling out injured. However, most of the world's top 30 are playing. Despite this, World No. 2 Djokovic said the move towards more team tennis was good for a sport best known for the individuality of its global superstars. "More than 90% of the time, we're playing as individuals and we don't have too many team events," said the Serbian, who also heads the ATP player council. "This is going to bring together a lot of nations and, for me personally, it will be a very nice and proud moment to represent my country. An event like this is truly going to make an impact." Sydney hosts the final, along with group games, which are also held in Brisbane and Perth with \$15 million in prize money and up to 750 singles and 250 doubles ATP rankings points at stake. With bushfires raging around Sydney and elsewhere in the country, tournament director Tom Larner said officials were ready in the event of air quality problems. The championship, from January 3-12, will feature two ties each day in the three cities during the round robin, comprising two singles matches then a doubles. Under the format, the second-ranked singles players

from each country face each other first, then the top-ranked men ahead of a potentially decisive doubles. A country winning two of three matches will claim the tie. As well as the players, some big-name former stars are captaining their countries, including Boris Becker (Germany), Marat Safin (Russia), Tim Henman (Britain), Lleyton Hewitt (Australia), and Thomas Muster (Austria). **The groupings: Group A (Brisbane):** Serbia, France, South Africa, Chile; **Group B (Perth):** Spain, Japan, Georgia, Uruguay; **Group C (Sydney):** Bulgaria, Belgium, Great Britain, Moldova; **Group D (Perth):** Russia, Italy, USA, Norway; **Group E (Sydney):** Austria, Croatia, Argentina, Poland; **Group F (Brisbane):** Germany, Greece, Canada, Australia.



**You see, mates...** Novak Djokovic, the world's top-ranked player, is thrilled at playing in the innovative tournament starting in three Australian cities on Friday. •GETTY IMAGES

## Competitive cricket returns to Karnail Singh Stadium

Pitches have been relaid and the dressing room refurbished as Railways gets back its home ground

**ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE**  
NEW DELHI  
The new year has brought in good news for Railways. The BCCI has given the green signal to the Karnail Singh Stadium, the traditional home ground of the Railways team, to conduct Ranji Trophy matches this season. The ground will host the contest between Railways and Madhya Pradesh from January 11, and the one between Railways and Karnataka from January 27.

The Board provided technical and financial assistance to spruce up the Karnail Singh Stadium and the ground in Palam, which is Services' home ground. Ashish Bhowmick, the East Zone curator from Assam, was sent to provide help; he worked alongside Rakesh Mehrotra, Railways' curator since 2003, to have the ground up to standard. The pitch at the centre and the ones for practice have been relaid. The pitch

was played on recently, in an U-23 contest. The outfield has a lot of grass now, and the dressing room refurbished. Saba Karim, GM (Cricket Operations), BCCI, visited the stadium recently and declared the venue fit to host matches. Last season, Railways played all its home games in Visakhapatnam after its pitch was deemed to be under-prepared and not fit to host BCCI's domestic games.

## Babar turns it around in Tests

Reveals that he corrected the mistakes and learned the nuances of the longer version



**Full of runs:** Babar says doing well in South Africa boosted his confidence. •AFP

CRICKET

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KARACHI  
Pakistan's top batsman and T20 skipper Babar Azam says he spent a good part of 2019 correcting the mistakes he made in Test cricket and now has a better understanding of the format's nuances. Babar said he wasn't living up to his own expectations in Tests for the last two years. **Finding his way** "This year, I worked on rectifying the mistakes I made in the format and was able to overcome some of them. That helped me make some runs. The more you play the longer format, the more you understand its nuances and find your way," said Babar. In six Tests, Babar scored 616 runs (three hundreds and three half-centuries) at 68.44 at a hugely impressive strike-rate of 72.30 last year while in 20 ODIs, he totalled 1,092 runs with three centuries and six half-centuries at 60.66. His strike-rate was 93.30. In 10 T20Is, Babar contributed 374 runs (four fifties) at 41.55 with a strike-rate of 136.99. He felt that getting runs in South Africa gave him immense confidence. "My innings in South Africa against Dale Steyn gave me great pleasure and confidence that I can get into the Test match zone. I also learned how to convert 60s and 70s into 100s. The century in Australia gave me confidence that I can make big runs in the format," he said. **Self-belief** Babar added that when a batsman gets runs in countries like South Africa, Australia and New Zealand against formidable bowling attacks, he gets self-belief and confidence. "I rate the century against Australia as my best innings of the year in the Test format," he said.

## There's a bright future for us: Misbah

Says that a few seniors may not return to the Pakistan side

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KARACHI  
Banking on young talent, Pakistan head coach and chief selector Misbah-ul-Haq hoped for better results in 2020 and indicated that a few seniors may not return to the national side. Misbah hailed the emergence of batsman Babar Azam and the pace duo of Naseem Shah and Shaheen Afridi in 2019, a year he

termed as "tough" for Pakistan in Test cricket. **Enough potential** "Going further we have to improve a lot of things in both red-ball and white-ball cricket. This team has enough potential and the new boys are also making their way into international cricket. There's certainly a bright future ahead for us," Misbah said.



Misbah. •FILE PHOTO

## National varsities athletics from today

**SPORTS BUREAU**  
MOODBIDRI  
Olympian Jisna Mathew, Abitha Mary Manuel, both quartermilers, and long jumper Rishabh Rishishwar are some of the prominent stars who will be seen in action in the 80th National inter-university athletics championships which begins at the Swarajya Maidan on Thursday. Nearly 4000 athletes, from around 400 universi-

ties, will figure in the five-day meet organised by Karnataka's RGUHS and Alva's Education Foundation. But life will not be easy for athletes with a huge number of entries in almost every event. The men's 100m, for example, has attracted more than 350 entries which means there could be more than 40 heats in this event. Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijju will inaugurate the championships.

## Chelsea suffers losses

**LONDON:** Chelsea recorded a loss of nearly £100 million for the year ending June 30, according to financial results published by the Premier League club on Tuesday. Turnover grew slightly to £446.7 million, with Chelsea

citing a lack of Champions League football, a record spend on players Kepa Arrizabalaga, Christian Pulisic, Mateo Kovacic and Jorginho, as well as the costs involved in changing manager, for the £96.6m loss. AFP

## Shotgun selection trials from January 20

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI  
The second and third shotgun selection trials to identify shooters for the national squad for the forthcoming season will be held at the Dr. Karni Singh Range here from January 20 to Feb. 1. The national selection trials will start with trap for men, women and juniors. There will be a training day followed by two days of competitions for the two sets of trials. The skeet men, women and juniors will have their training and competition from Jan. 27. All the matches will feature finals, as per the Olympic format. Entries will only be through the National Rifle Association of India's online system, and will close at 9.30 p.m. on Jan. 8. Entries with triple entry

fee will be accepted till 9.30 p.m. on January 12. After the National championship and the first selection trial thereafter, Prithviraj Tondaiman of Tamil Nadu leads the men's trap list. He is followed by Olympian Kynan Chenai and former World Champion Manavjit Singh Sandhu. In men's skeet, Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Asian champion Angad Vir Singh Bajwa are followed at the top by Gurjoat Singh, Mohd. Sheeraz Sheikh and Smit Singh. In women's trap, Shreyasi Singh, Shagun Chowdhary and Rajeshwari Kumari are in the top three, and are followed by Manisha Keer, Soumya Gupta and Kirti Gupta. In women's skeet, Ganemat Sekhon, Darshana Rathore and Areeba Khan are on top.



# I believe we can make Tokyo final: Manpreet

‘Looking back, 2019 has been very good for us’

## HOCKEY

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI  
The Indian men’s hockey team captain Manpreet Singh believes India has the capability of reaching the final of the Tokyo Olympics, provided a sense of discipline and consistency is maintained.  
Leaving behind a disappointing 2018 where India crashed out in the quarterfinals of the World Cup at home, the Manpreet-led side has managed to maintain its consistency and qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics under a new coach in Australian Graham Reid.

**Productive year**  
Reviewing the year gone by, Manpreet said 2019 has been productive for the team in terms of its performances despite not getting enough opportunities to compete in high-level international tournaments.

“Looking back, 2019 has been very good for us. We started the year in the fifth spot and managed to maintain that. The biggest aim for us in 2019 was to qualify for the Olympics and we have managed to achieve that under a new coach,” Manpreet said.

“Our main target in 2019 is to reach the finals of the Olympics and believe me it’s achievable. Throughout the year we have managed to maintain the No. 5 position in world rankings and there is no reason why we can’t climb from that. But for that, we have to maintain the consistency which we have showed in the entire 2019,” he added.

The ace midfielder, who has been nominated for the



**Reality check:** Manpreet feels matches against top teams in the FIH Pro League will give India an idea of where it stands.  
• FILE PHOTO

2019 FIH Player-of-the-Year Award, said encounters against top teams like the Netherlands, world champion Belgium and Australia in the upcoming FIH Pro league will give India a fair idea about where the eight-time Olympic champion stands.

India, which pulled out of the inaugural edition of the Pro League, will play the Dutch side on January 18 and 19 before hosting Belgium on Feb. 8 and 9, followed by two more home fixtures against Australia on Feb. 22 and 23.

“The FIH Pro League is our first step towards Olympic preparation. In the Pro League, we will get to face all the top teams of the world

before the Olympics and this experience will give us an idea where we stand before the Olympics.”

**Transition**  
The skipper said the biggest takeaway for the Indian men’s hockey team in 2019 was the transition of quite a few young players into the senior fold. “In 2019, we witnessed quite a few young players making it into the senior side.

“They performed to their potential at the international level and outsmarted some of the senior guys. It’s the biggest positive for us, especially in a busy year, where we will be competing at the FIH Pro-League be sides the Olympics,” Manpreet said.

## Lyon not for four-day Tests

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
SYDNEY

The ICC’s proposal to introduce four-day Tests has met with stiff opposition from leading Australia spinner Nathan Lyon, who termed it “ridiculous” while chief coach Justin Langer is also not in favour of tinkering with the traditional format.

“I’m totally against it and I hope ICC aren’t even considering it,” Lyon said on *The Unplayable Podcast*. “You look at all the big games around the world and some of the best Test matches I’ve been part of, they go down to the last day,” he added.

Langer during an interaction with reporters said that while the option can be looked at, from a personal viewpoint, he won’t like any changes.

“My preference – I’m a traditionalist and anyone who knows me, I don’t like to change too much – so I probably prefer five-day Test matches,” said Langer.

“But again, like with wickets and like with schedules, if four-day Test matches keeps Test cricket alive, then it worth looking at. But I love five days only because I’m boring and don’t like to change much.”

“It’s a challenge,” Lyon said on five-day Tests. “You challenge yourself in different ways – physically and mentally.”



Nathan Lyon. • GETTY IMAGES

# Can Ben stoke an English revival?

Visitors playing catch up after losing the first Test at Centurion

## ENGLAND IN SA

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
CAPE TOWN

Ben Stokes returns to the scene of one of his most spectacular performances but the circumstances are different going into the second Test between England and South Africa at Newlands on Friday.

### Sensational knock

Four years ago, Stokes thrashed 258 off 198 balls in a brutal display of power-hitting, collecting 11 sixes and sharing in a world Test record sixth-wicket partnership of 399 with Jonny Bairstow, whose 150 not out from 191 balls was scarcely pedestrian.

England went into that match 1-0 up in a four-Test series which it went on to win. This time it is the team needing to catch up after losing the opening encounter in Centurion.

South Africa was captained by Hashim Amla, who effectively acknowledged his lack of aptitude for the job by resigning from it after the match despite making a double century of his own to ensure a high-scoring draw.

### Poor away record

On this occasion, it is England’s captain Joe Root, who is under pressure because of his team’s poor recent record away from home. Stokes then was on his way to becoming England’s talisman, a status which he cemented during 2019 and ended with him being awarded an OBE in Britain’s New Year honours’ list.

Bairstow, though, has gone backwards. He seems unlikely to play at Newlands this time after falling for one and nine at Centurion, where he only played because of Ollie Pope’s illness.

Newlands in 2016 provid-

ed an unusually benign pitch for batsmen, with both teams scoring over 600 in a first innings which only ended late on the fourth day.

It is the only one of the most recent 11 Test matches at Newlands, going back to 2011, to have ended in a draw. South Africa has won nine of the other ten, losing once. Totals over 400 have been rare, with only four instances other than the 2016 run feast. There is a new groundsman but it seems reasonable to expect a fair contest between bat and ball this time around.

### Malan for Markram

After winning the first Test in Centurion by 107 runs, South Africa is likely to make one forced change with opening batsman Pieter Malan expected to win his first cap in place of the injured Aiden Markram.

England opted to go into the first Test without a spinner but Newlands is a ground where spin bowlers are usually needed. It is a dilemma for England, with Jack Leach having been ill virtually since the team’s arrival. Although he is now reportedly recovering and out of quarantine he is unlikely to be considered match fit.

Leg-spinner Matt Parkinson was unimpressive in two warm-up matches and off-spinner Dom Bess, flown out on standby because of the illness in the camp, could be selected, possibly ahead of James Anderson.

### The teams (likely):

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

**England:** Joe Root (Capt.), Rory Burns, Dom Sibley, Joe Denly, Ben Stokes, Ollie Pope, Jos Buttler (wk), Sam Curran, Dom Bess, Jofra Archer and Stuart Broad.



**Smashing success:** Ben Stokes, who made a brilliant 258 in the Cape Town Test in 2016, will be keen for an encore.  
• GETTY IMAGES

## Ready for a trade-off

Happy to swap 2019 success for father’s good health: Stokes

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
LONDON

Ben Stokes has insisted he would trade all the personal success he has enjoyed in 2019 if it meant his father was no longer in hospital.

The 64-year-old Ged was admitted to intensive care but his condition improved sufficiently for his son to play in a Test England lost by 107 runs.

Ged remains in hospital, with wife Deborah at his side.

“If someone could say ‘I’ll take everything away from you that happened this summer, but your dad is happy, healthy and watching you play cricket’ then I’d say yeah, swap it,” Stokes wrote in his column for *Daily Mirror* newspaper.

The 28-year-old all-rounder said his father had undergone an “unbelievable turnaround” but still had a way to go as he thanked medical staff for their “fantastic care”.

# Alonso set to become the first F1 champion to compete in Dakar Rally

‘The biggest challenge of my career’



**New goals:** Fernando Alonso wants to become a more complete and versatile driver. • FILE PHOTO

**IAN S**  
MADRID

Spain’s Fernando Alonso is set to become the first Formula One champion to compete in the Dakar Rally, which starts in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

“The biggest challenge of my career,” the 38-year-old Alonso said, referring to the world’s most grueling race, *Efe News* reported.

Alonso, who won the F1 title in 2005 and 2006, entered the Dakar Rally, whose 2020 edition leaves behind South America for Saudi Arabia, as part of his quest to become a more complete and versatile driver.

About 20 F1 drivers have competed in the Dakar Rally over the years, but Alonso is the first World champion to do so. Belgium’s Jacky Ickx became the first former F1 driver to win the Dakar Rally, finishing first in 1983 and second in 1986 and 1989.

### Expectations

The expectations for Alonso are comparable to those raised by French driver Sebastien Loeb, a nine-time World rally champion who competed in the Dakar Rally from 2016 to 2019, winning 13 stages but never finishing first overall.

“If Loeb still hasn’t won the Dakar, imagine me, who

**If Loeb still hasn’t won the Dakar, imagine me, who is coming from asphalt.**

— FERNANDO ALONSO

is coming from asphalt. I think the goal is more to approach the rally as an enriching experience for us,” Alonso said before leaving for Saudi Arabia.

The 45-year-old Loeb was unable to take home the bronze Touareg Trophy despite being the best driver in rally history and having skills that fit the Dakar Rally better than F1.

Even though Loeb did not have to make huge adjustments, he still came up short in his bid to win the Dakar, whose inaugural edition was held in 1979.

Alonso, who has always driven alone, will have veteran Marc Coma, a five-time rally champion in the motorcycle category, helping him navigate the route.

The Spanish driver has the triple crown of motor racing within reach.

In Saudi Arabia, a route covering nearly 8,000km, with more than 5,000km timed, awaits racers, who will start in Jeddah and finish in Qiddiyah. The Dakar Rally starts on January 5 and ends on Jan. 17.