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News and articles for publication may please be submitted by December 23, 2020

to editor@theindianpanorama.com

Space for advertisements may please be booked by December 20, 2020.

Please email to salujindra@gmail.com

Offices of The Indian Panorama will remain closed on December 24 and 25. There will be no issue of the newspaper on December 25, 2020

India's Supreme Court says farmers have a constitutional right to protest, but urges talks

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Supreme Court on Thursday, December 17, said farmers have a constitutional right to continue with their "absolutely perfect" protest as long as their dissent against the three controversial agricultural laws does not slip into violence.

"We recognize the right to protest. There is no question of curtailing it. But it should not damage anybody's lives," a Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde observed. The court, however, said the purpose of the protesting farmers would not be served if they continued to sit without engaging in talks.

"Yes, there is a protest that is going on... Yes, the protest is constitutional as long as it does *contd on page 2*

Farmers protest on new farm law issue at Singhu border on Thursday, December 17



Republican Senate Majority Leader Acknowledges Biden's Win

WASHINGTON (TIP): More than a month after the election, top Republicans finally acknowledged Joe Biden as the next U.S. President, a collapse in GOP resistance to the millions of voters who decisively chose the Democrat. Foreign leaders joined the parade, too, including Russia's Vladimir Putin. *contd on Page 2*

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated the President-elect Joe Biden. "The Electoral College has spoken", he said.

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Hope to improve ties under Biden government: Putin



MOSCOW/ NEW YORK (TIP) Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday, December 17, said that he hopes the administration of the incoming U.S. President Joe Biden will work with Russia to resolve disagreements between their countries.

Mr. Putin told reporters at his annual end-of-year press conference that the two countries' relations had become "hostage" to U.S. domestic politics *contd on page 2*

"Some existing issues will be resolved", Putin said. Photo / courtesy Wikipedia



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CONTD FROM PAGE 1India's Supreme Court says
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protest, but urges talks

not damage property and lives. It is an absolutely perfect protest. But their [farmers'] purpose cannot be realized if they continue to sit without talking," the CJI observed.

The court reiterated its suggestion of forming an "impartial and independent committee" of experts in agriculture to hear both farmers and the Union government on the laws.

"If their [farmers] protest has a purpose other than just to sit in protest, we are thinking of an independent committee before whom both sides can state their case while the protest goes on... The committee can give its opinion after hearing them. We expect parties [farmers and government] to follow the committee's opinion. Meanwhile, the protest will continue without causing violence or damage on both sides," Chief Justice Bobde suggested.

Senior advocate P. Chidambaram, for Punjab, from where most of the protesting farmers hail, said the farmers actually wanted the Parliament to discuss amendments to the three laws.

Most farm leaders are not in favor of impleading themselves in the case, they said.

In a meeting of the committee plus the Punjab leaders this afternoon, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha has decided to consult with four senior Supreme Court lawyers -- Dushyant Dave, Prashant Bhushan, Colin Gonsalves, and HS Phoolka -- before taking any position on the case," said K.V. Biju, national coordinator of the Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh.

Farm leaders are worried about the legal precedent set during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) earlier this year. "When a PIL was filed on the anti-CAA protests, the court gave the order to vacate them. If the same thing happens, that will damage our movement," said one leader, who did not wish to be named.

They also argued that this issue is the domain of the executive, not the judiciary. "The grammar of democratic governance must be articulated by the Government. Constitutional institutions like courts exist for checks and balances, not as replacement of the obligations to be performed by the political executive," said a statement from the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee.

Republican Senate Majority Leader
Acknowledges Biden's Win

Speaking on Tuesday, December 15, from the floor of the U.S. Senate where Mr. Biden spent 36 years of his career, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated his former colleague

as President-elect. The two men spoke later in the day.

A similar shift unfolded in capitals across the world, where leaders including Mr. Putin and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador acknowledged Mr. Biden's win.

The moves came a day after electors nationwide formally cast votes affirming Mr. Biden's victory in last month's presidential election. And while that clears a more stable path for Mr. Biden to assume the presidency, it does little to stop Mr. Trump from continuing to try to undermine confidence in the results with baseless allegations that have been rejected by judges across the political spectrum.

As Republicans began discussing a Biden presidency more openly on Tuesday, Mr. Trump still pledged to press forward with almost nonexistent legal options.

"Tremendous evidence pouring in on voter fraud. There has never been anything like this in our Country!" Mr. Trump said in a tweet, just as members of his party were publicly recognizing Mr. Biden's victory.

The growing acknowledgement of reality in Washington was triggered by the Electoral College formally voting on Monday to seal Mr. Biden's win with 306 votes to Mr. Trump's 232, the same margin that Mr. Trump pulled together four years ago. The normally humdrum political ceremony didn't change the facts of the election but was nonetheless used as political cover by leading Republicans.

"Many of us had hoped the presidential election would yield a different result," Mr. McConnell said. "But our system of government has the processes to determine who will be sworn in on January 20. The Electoral College has spoken." (Source: PTI)

Hope to improve ties under Biden
government: Putin

and said he hoped that some existing problems "will be resolved under the new administration".

"We believe the U.S. President-elect will sort things out because he has both domestic and foreign policy experience," the Russian leader said.

However, Mr. Putin was one of the last leaders of major world countries to congratulate Mr. Biden on winning the U.S. presidential elections, saying earlier this week that he was ready for "collaboration". Mr. Biden is expected to take a tougher stand against Russia than outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump, who he slammed during the campaign for having "embraced so many autocrats around the world, starting with Vladimir Putin".

The Russian leader said he believes Mr. Trump is unlikely to leave U.S. political life after his term in office ends, saying the outgoing President has "a large base" of support.

Mr. Putin has already won four presidential elections and recently changed the constitution to allow him to remain President until 2036.

Mr. Biden will be the fourth U.S. president since Mr. Putin came to power in 2000.

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Indian American Time's Kid of the Year Gitanjali focuses on effective Covid-19 vaccine distribution

NEW YORK (TIP): Young Indian American scientist Gitanjali Rao, TIME magazine's first-ever 'Kid of the Year', has said she is brainstorming about solutions for the effective vaccine distribution to address a pressing challenge posed by the coronavirus, and has set her sights on preventing future pandemics.

In an interview with PTI, the 15-year-old inventor said she was focused on using technological tools to offer solutions for vaccine distribution, a challenge that confronts the world grappling with the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

Rao was named by TIME magazine this month as the first-ever 'Kid of the Year' for her "astonishing work using technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying". She was selected among over 5,000 nominees for the honor.

"I definitely do want to look at the pandemic. The next biggest problem we're going to face is vaccine distribution and prioritization. So I'm looking at my potential data and analytics approach towards that," Rao said.

"But I think the next biggest problem that I'll probably look towards solving is preventing future pandemics from happening because I think it's safe to assume that this isn't the last one and we probably will have another one before 100 years," she said.

Rao says she is still at a "brainstorming and observing" phase but is looking at the whole idea of vaccine distribution and how widespread it needs to be.

"Also, how important it is because everybody needs to receive this vaccine. So, I'm looking at how we can use predictive analytics and data models in order to create a plan of how vaccine distribution will roll out," she said.

TIME had said in its profile that "exceptional leadership" is what made the "brilliant" Rao stand out for the honor.

"Rao not only researches scientific tools such as artificial intelligence and carbon nanotube sensor technology and applies them to problems she sees in everyday life, like cyberbullying and water contamination. She also shows other kids how to tap into their curiosity, aspiring to create a generation of



In an interview with PTI, Time Kid of the Year, the 15-year-old inventor Gitanjali said she was focused on using technological tools to offer solutions for vaccine distribution, a challenge that confronts the world grappling with the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

innovators," it said.

Rao said it was very "exciting" to be named Kid of the Year "but more than that it's honoring and humbling to be that face of Generation Z as well as have the opportunity to be featured on the cover of TIME among so many other fantastic people. I'm so beyond humbled and I'm just excited to see where this keeps going".

The youngster, who through her work is an inspiration for many, counted her parents - Bharathi and Ram Rao - and the family as her "biggest inspirations".

Rao said she had always received an incredible amount of support from her parents.

"If I wanted to play a certain sport, learn something new, I had all the resources in front of me," she said.

Rao recalled how her mother brought nearly a dozen books for her in third grade on clouds when she wanted to learn about the subject.

"Experiences like that are what changed my life forever, having that support and being able to do what I love without any backlash," she said.

Rao said she was also "truly inspired" by scientists and inventors who go beyond themselves and innovate for positive change, particularly Jonas Salk, who invented the polio vaccine and never patented it.

"He never claimed it as his own because he wanted it

to be something that everyone could use, and I really aspire to be that selfless and put others before me," Rao said.

The young scientist, who has been featured in Forbes list of 30 Under 30 achievers, was named America's Top Young Scientist and is a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) promoter, wants to see more young girls being given opportunities to study and work in the field.

"I think another thing is just showing them role models in the field and I honestly aspire to be one of them," she said, adding that when she was in second grade, she did not know females could be scientists.

"I didn't know it was possible because everybody I had seen in the media and learned about was a male. I was excited personally to learn that a girl could be a scientist which is almost problematic because I was able to learn about that but what if people didn't have that inspiration, didn't have that opportunity for growth. We just need to involve more girls in STEM by showing them that they can do it," she said.

Rao has also been working tirelessly on creating a community of innovators and has so far mentored thousands of students. She runs workshops for students from across the globe who want to become innovators and solve global problems. "Everyone comes out of that workshop with one solution and a process that they can take to implement it in the real world. If I can do it, you can do it and anyone can do it," she says.

Rao says she is interested in working on several things in the future and wants to look at genetic research with product design involved.

"Hopefully, whatever I'm doing, I'm changing the world for the better," she said. For Rao, her own passion right now is working on solutions for the contamination of natural resources.

"I'm looking at water contamination specifically and water parasitic contamination is the biggest problem that I'm seeing out there today. I really want to find a way to prevent that from happening," she said, adding that she is using genetically engineered microbes to detect parasites in water. "I'm using living things to find living things which I think is a very interesting concept," she said. PTI

Guru Nanak Digital World Peace Conclave kicks off on December 20

NEW YORK (TIP): Delhi based The ImagIndia Institute is organizing Guru Nanak Digital World Peace Conclave 2020, and Young Leaders Award. The inaugural edition of the Conclave will be held on December 20, 2020, the 3rd Sunday after Gurupurab, via a livestream digital platform.



World Conclave 2020. The duration of the session will be 90 minutes, with total of five Speakers, and one moderator.

Those who wish to speak on the occasion may please contact

The theme of the conclave is to discuss and take heed from Guru Nanak teachings on:

1. How to meet challenges (social, political, public health) of a post-Covid world?
2. How to meet challenges (professional, business, innovation) of a VUCA world? and,
3. How to meet challenge of happiness 20/20, and peace of mind, peoples, and nations?

The conclave shall also finalize the setting up of a "Young Leaders Award" to recognize 551 young Sikh leaders from across the world, at the 2nd edition of the annual conclave in December 2021.

With objective to generate meaningful outcomes from the conclave, the discussion format lay special emphasis on co-thinking among the speakers in order to co-create solutions that are simple but effective, and that could have sustainable impact across cultures.

The Institute invites all to the Guru Nanak Digital

at info@imagindia.org. The conclave is organized by the Imagindia Institute and the global "Live and Let Live" campaign that is propagating the philosophy and culture of "live and let live" and co-existence, among humankind, with Nature, and the cosmos beyond. The co-organizer is Korea Peace Movement, Seoul.

The conclave is powered by Renaissance sf, a global community that imagines, accelerates, and encourages smart and sustainable happy futures, across cultures.

The conclave is supported by the ZerOrigindia Foundation, The Hague, the International Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, Dubai, and language support is provided by Indian Language Services, California.

The conclave shall have speakers and audiences from the United States, Europe, the Gulf, and Korea, among other countries, and shall be Livestream broadcast per following timings - PST= 8am-9.30am; EST= 11am-12.30pm; GMT=4pm-5.30pm; IST=9.30pm-11pm; KST=1am-2.30am.

To know more, please contact info@imagindia.org

India ranks 110 out of 162 countries on personal freedom index

Index put China at 129 rank, Bangladesh at 139 and Pakistan at 140

NEW YORK (TIP): A global ranking of personal, civil and economic freedom released on Thursday, December 17, placed India at 111 out of 162 countries.

The Human Freedom Index 2020, which uses data from 2008 to 2018, by the Cato Institute in the United States and Fraser Institute in Canada, noted a decrease in personal freedoms since 2008 globally. The index covered 76 indicators of personal, civic and economic freedom, a statement issued by the Cato Institute said.

India was ranked 110 in terms of personal freedom and 105 on economic freedom, with an overall score of 6.43 out of 10.

New Zealand was ranked one in the index, followed by Switzerland and Hong Kong. "Given the Chinese Communist Party's unprecedented intervention in Hong Kong in 2019 and 2020, the authors expect the territory's freedom score to decline notably in future editions of the index. The three least-free countries in descending order are Venezuela, Sudan, and Syria," the statement said.

The index put China at 129 rank, Bangladesh at 139 and Pakistan at 140.

Indian American Pentagon Official Kash Patel Files \$50 Million Defamation Suit Against CNN



Republican Kash Patel, currently the Chief of Staff to Acting US Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, filed the lawsuit in a Virginia court against CNN and several CNN reporters on Friday, December 11, according to Fox News.

WASHINGTON (TIP): Kash Patel, the highest-ranking Indian American in the Pentagon, has filed a USD 50 million lawsuit against CNN and several of its top reporters for allegedly defaming him by publishing a series of "false and defamatory statements".

Patel, currently the Chief of Staff to Acting US Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, filed the lawsuit in a Virginia court against CNN and several CNN reporters on Friday, according to Fox News.

In his lawsuit, Patel, who previously served in the White House before being moved to the Pentagon, alleged that CNN between November 24 and December 4 published a series of articles that "contain a series of false and defamatory statements" about him, according to the complaint reported by Fox News.

The CNN articles described Patel, who was previously a top aide to Republican Representative from California, Devin Nunes, as a pro-Trump conspiracy theorist, the report said.

"...publication of the defamatory statements is part of a general pattern of retaliation and discrimination against Kash... a larger conspiracy undertaken between 2018 and the present to discredit Kash through the publication of false statements and the promotion of unfounded left-wing political narratives," his attorney Steven S Biss said.

Patel "uncovered many inconvenient facts undermining the fake political narrative about collusion between members of the Trump campaign and Russians when he was counsel for Nunes, then-chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence," Biss said.

CNN did not immediately respond to a request for comment, Fox News said.

New York-born Patel has his roots in Gujarat. His parents are from East Africa - mother from Tanzania and father from Uganda. They came to the US from Canada in 1970.

87-year-old Indian-origin man first to get COVID-19 vaccine in UK

NEWCASTLE, UK (TIP): 87-year-old Hari Shukla is an Indian-origin man from the north east of England. He will become one of the first people in the world to get a vaccine against COVID-19 when he receives his Pfizer/BioNTech jab at a hospital in Newcastle on Tuesday.

Hari Shukla from Tyne and Wear said he feels it is his duty to receive his first of the two-dose vaccine. "I'm so pleased we are hopefully coming towards the end of this pandemic and I am delighted to be doing my bit by having the vaccine, I feel it is my duty to do so and do whatever I can to help," said Shukla.

Shukla was notified by the UK health authorities on the criteria set by the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization as part of a phased rollout plan based on those at the highest risk of death from the deadly



Hari Shukla from Tyne and Wear said he feels it is his duty to receive his first of the two-dose vaccine.

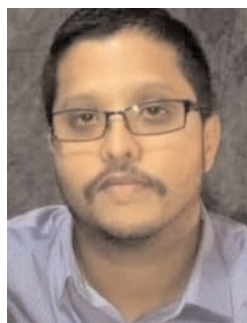
virus. People aged 80 and over, care home workers as well as NHS workers who are at higher risk will be first in line to receive the "life-saving jab".

UK will vaccinate people over-80s and frontline health and care staff receiving from today. The NHS said it is undertaking the biggest and most highly anticipated immunization

campaign in history at 50 hospital hubs, with more starting vaccinations over the coming weeks and months as the program ramps up after the first set of doses arrived from Pfizer's manufacturing site in Belgium.

Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine got the green light from the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) last week. The Pfizer/BioNTech formula is an mRNA vaccine that uses a tiny fragment of genetic code from the pandemic virus to teach the body how to fight Covid-19 and build immunity. It is delivered in two doses of 21 days apart and, according to experts, it has shown a strong immunity response kicking in after seven days of the second dose. The Pfizer vaccine needs to be stored at -70C before being thawed out and can only be moved four times within that cold chain before being used.

Indian American mechanic crushed to death at Chicago airport



Jijo George, 35, hailed from Kerala State of India. He was crushed to death in a horrific accident at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport

CHICAGO (TIP): Jijo George emigrated from India's Kerala state 17 years ago to make things better for his family.

But their American dream was dashed Sunday as the Indian American mechanic was crushed to death in a horrific accident at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

George, 35, died after being crushed by an "aircraft drivable pushback apparatus" at hangar 764, Chicago Sun Times reported citing the Cook County medical examiner's office.

Chicago police said they were called about 2 p.m. and found him unresponsive under the vehicle. George died less than two hours later at Resurrection Medical Center. An autopsy ruled his death an accident.

George earned an associates degree in mechanical engineering and landed a job as a mechanic at Envoy Air at O'Hare International Airport about two years ago, his family told the Times.

What's more, he and his wife had a 2-year-old child and were expecting another within the next month, his cousin Blesson George said.

"It took him 17 years to get where he is now - by working hard - and then suddenly it's all gone," Blesson George was quoted as saying.

Jijo George was the main provider for his Des Plaines household, which also included his parents and brother's family.

"He was taking care of everyone," Blesson George said. "They lost the person who had been taking care of them. They're all crying. ... Life was about to get better for him, and that's when this happened to him."

Jijo George's family was given few details about his death from Envoy Air, Blesson George said.

"That's the hardest part," Blesson George said. "The only thing we heard from them is that he got in an accident."

After pressing the company, the company told them he was crushed by a piece of equipment he was working on.

"Envoy, they never let us know anything," Blesson George told the Times.

"We were in the dark for hours after this tragedy. We tried to reach these people for 24 hours, and no one picked up the phone. Finally, they flew eight or nine people to investigate this matter. The company isn't ready to tell us what really happened."

As word of George's death spread in Chicago's Indian community, Nisha Eric, an organizer in the community, told the Times she felt compelled to help raise funds for the family.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian American Hindu community donates over 1.3 lakh kg food to needy during Diwali

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Hindu-American community donated more than 1,33,000 kilograms of food to the poor and needy as part of its "Sewa Diwali" drive.



The food drive, a collective effort of cultural and religious communities, yoga institutions, and numerous other organizations rooted in the Dharmic value, has been recognized by many states, cities and local governments, a belated community release issued said.

It said nearly 179 organizations and numerous individuals came together to collect food for food pantries across the country.

For over two months, 294,000 lb of food was collected across 26 states and 225 townships in the US, and donated to 199 pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters under the "SewaDiwali" initiative, the release said.

During this drive, hundreds of people made their homes "collection centers" for their neighbors to contribute. People were encouraged to donate canned goods and non-perishable items, which could be donated to food pantries or homeless shelters, it said.

Jennifer Apostol, department head, MCFOODS, NJ, said. "With 9,000 lb of food donated, the food pantries know they can have shelves stocked and ready for visiting families. Some families are still paying bills."

"This was a two-month program, with the plan to collect food and give it to the local food pantries," said Venkat Gade, president of Chinmaya Mission in Connecticut.

The initiative began in New Jersey in 2018, when over two dozen organizations collected 18,000 pounds of food during the festival of Diwali with the goal of supporting the local community. The project expanded to 11 states in 2019 and collected over 55,000 pounds of food items across over 40 townships throughout the northeast region, according to the release.

Indian American Rahul Dubey among Time 'Heroes of 2020'

WASHINGTON (TIP): Rahul Dubey, an Indian American healthcare worker, who opened the doors of his Washington DC home to demonstrators protesting the killing of George Floyd, has been hailed as one of "Heroes of 2020" by the TIME magazine.

"From citizens providing food and shelter to those in need to volunteers who protected their neighbors from natural disasters, these heroes went above and beyond the call of duty in 2020," the magazine.

Calling Dubey as "The Man Who Gave Shelter to Those in Need," Time recalled that Dubey was at his home, not far from the White House as demonstrators filled the streets of the capital on June 1.

After a 7 p.m. curfew, he noticed crowds in the street outside: police had set up barricades seemingly to trap protesters, and were pepper-spraying those who remained. Dubey decided to take action.

"I open my door, and I start yelling, 'Get in!'" Dubey, who works in health care, was quoted as saying.

"All these people were swarming in." Dubey estimates he gave 70 protesters



Rahul Dube has been hailed as one of "Heroes of 2020" by the TIME magazine.

refuge, housing them overnight to avoid curfew breaches.

"People were coughing, crying, strangers pouring milk into strangers' eyes," Dubey said as cited by Time. "They were sharing information, writing down numbers for bail bondsmen. It was this real camaraderie."

Dubey claims police officers made several attempts to breach his sanctuary that evening: posing as protesters trying to get inside, and attempting to intercept the pizza delivery he had ordered for his

houseguests.

The move to open his door was driven by instinct, Dubey told Time nearly six months later. "It's what was needed."

Dubey was hailed as a hero and savior by those he sheltered too. "Rahul saved lives last night," tweeted one Black Lives Matter activist.

"He ended this with an inspirational speech about not giving up and keeping up the peaceful fight. What a guy. Thank you, Rahul."

Dubey told BuzzFeed News that it wasn't a choice to open his door and provide refuge to the mostly young protesters.

"If you had seen what was going on in front of my eyes, there was no choice. People were getting pepper-sprayed and beaten and slammed to the ground," he said. "I hope that my 13-year-old son grows up to be just as amazing as they are," Dubey was quoted as saying by WJLA news.

Floyd, 46, died in Minneapolis on May 25 after a white police officer pinned him with a knee on his neck as he gasped for breath for nearly nine minutes, sparking the nationwide protests.

Indian American Ro Khanna named Democratic vice chair of Congressional India Caucus



Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents the Silicon Valley in the US House of Representatives, has been named as Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional India Caucus. The seat has been created for the first time since its formation in 1994.

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents the Silicon Valley in the US House of Representatives, has been named as Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional India Caucus.

The seat has been created for the first time since its formation in 1994.

Khanna, who was recently elected for a third consecutive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley, is being considered as a potential contender to fill the US Senate seat from California that will fall vacant in January after Kamala Harris is sworn in as the country's vice president.

"I believe Ro Khanna would be an outstanding Democratic Vice Chair," Congressman Brad Sherman, Democratic Co-Chair of the Caucus, said in an email to his Congressional colleagues on Wednesday.

Born in Philadelphia in 1976, Khanna is the youngest of the four Indian-American lawmakers in US House of Representatives. The other three being Dr Ami Bera, 55, who is the senior-most member of the so called 'Samosa Caucus', Raja Krishnamoorthi, 47, and Pramila Jayapal, 55.

Khanna's father is a chemical engineer who graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and the University of Michigan, and his mother is a former substitute school teacher.

Considered to be "dynamic" by his Congressional colleagues, Khanna is a strong supporter of India-US relationship. He previously served in the Obama Administration, as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department of Commerce under from August 8, 2009, to August 2011.

First elected to the US Congress in 2016 by defeating incumbent Mike Honda, he has made a mark for himself within the Democratic Party, but also at the national stage on key issues ranging from foreign policy, national security, environment, commerce and manufacturing jobs.

He identifies himself as a progressive capitalist and was a national co-chair of Bernie Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign.

Indian American Lawmakers Seek Immigration Overhaul

WASHINGTON(TIP): Influential American lawmakers, including IndianAmerican Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have urged President-elect Joe Biden to reverse the immigration policies of Donald Trump, as they introduced a resolution, seeking reform of the immigration system that is just, empathetic and fair.

Jayapal and several of her Congressional colleagues on Friday in a resolution urged Congress to create humane, community-based alternatives to detention, and revamp the current deportation system to include, among other things, guaranteed access to legal representation.

Jayapal along with congressmen Jesús "Chuy" García, Veronica Escobar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Judy Chu and Yvette Clarke unveiled a Roadmap to Freedom Resolution as a progressive vision to transform the immigration system to one that is focused on dignity and rooted in the needs and lives of impacted people.

The Roadmap to Freedom Resolution will be introduced at the beginning of the 117th Congress.

This immigration reform proposal develops and implements a Roadmap to Freedom by promoting citizenship, protecting and strengthening a fair process centered on family unity, promoting and preserving diversity and establishing a just, humane immigration system.

Additionally, it ensures federal immigration agencies are fair and accountable, establishes a humane and effective border policy, recognizes the value of all work and promotes healthy



communities.

The resolution also promotes social, civil and economic integration while modernizing and strengthening humanitarian pathways to the US. The resolution addresses root causes of migration as well.

"As a lifelong immigrant rights organizer and one of only 14 naturalized citizens serving in Congress, I know that we must do far more than simply reverse the harmful, xenophobic policies of the Trump Administration that inflicted maximum cruelty on immigrants and families," Jayapal said.

"Our immigration system has been broken for decades, and we must finally reform it in a humane way that focuses on respect, dignity, family unity and real opportunity for all immigrants," she said as she described the resolution as a bold, progressive vision for immigration reform that is fair, equitable, centers family unity and humanitarian protections, combats systemic injustices and works for everyone.

This comprehensive proposal was developed in close consultation with grassroots groups, immigration

organizers, labor advocates, civil rights leaders and racial justice activists.

The members of Congress, who are co-leading the resolution, represent the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus as the Roadmap works to address the diverse needs of every community while reflecting the diversity of America's immigrant community.

"Our immigration system is broken. Dreamers who have known no other home are at risk of deportation. Hundreds of migrant children are now permanently separated from their parents. Asylum seekers are being revictimized in refugee camps at the border," said Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

"The Roadmap to Freedom outlines a set of principles for creating an immigration system that is just, empathetic, effective and fair," she said.

The Trump administration hardened the immigration rules on those allowed to seek asylum in the US and advocated a merit-based immigration system to protect US workers.

His administration also tried ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2017, but the US Supreme Court blocked its attempt in June.

A federal court early this month reversed the decision of the outgoing Trump administration and ordered full reinstatement of the Obama-era program that protects undocumented immigrants brought to the US as minors from deportation.

Bhoomi puja for construction of the Eye Foundation of America - run "Green Goutami Eye Institute" Performed



"Only by doing good, can one benefit" - Rigveda

Model of the proposed premises

RAJAHMUNDRY, INDIA / NEW YORK (TIP): "Sarvendriyanaam Nayanam Pradhanam": with this objective, Dr. V.K. Raju, a world renowned Ophthalmologist - Cornea Specialist, Chairman of EFA (Eye Foundation of America) & GEI (Goutami Eye Institute) and Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology, West Virginia University, USA., has planned "Green Goutami Eye Institute" with the divine blessings of Sri Sri Bharathi Tirtha Mahaswami and Sri Sri Sri Vidhushekara Bharathi Swami of Sri

Sringeri Sarada Peetham, in the premises of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetham at Rajahmundry, as a Unit of the Peetham, with the help and involvement of many people. Sri V.R. Gowrishankar, Administrator and GPA Holder Of His Holiness Jagadguru Shankaracharya Mahasamsthnam Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri played a key role in making this dream project a reality. Bhoomi puja for construction of this premise of approximately one lakh square feet area was done on 10th December 2020.



Dr. V.K. Raju, world renowned Ophthalmologist - Cornea Specialist, Chairman of EFA (Eye Foundation of America) & GEI (Goutami Eye Institute) and Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology, West Virginia University, USA

The Institute will have DNB Ophthalmology Course, School of Optometry and Vision Care Technician Course. The Institute will also take up research to find new therapies for age old eye diseases hitherto not curable and also introduce Gene therapy in Retinal diseases, in coordination with the other Institutions from USA, who already have on-going projects on Gene therapy in devastating eye diseases in children, for a "World without Childhood Blindness".

The Bhoomi puja ceremony was conducted by Sri V.V. Kumar, M.D and Dr. Y. Srinivas Reddy, C.M.O along with five children who were treated and presented with vision by Goutami Eye Institute. Sri Mamidanna Seshagiri Rao, Dharmadikari of Sri Sringeri Sarada Peetham and Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Viswanadha Gopalakrishna Sastry graced the occasion. Dr. Ganni Bhaskar Rao, Chairman, GSL Medical College, Sri Madduri Siva Subba Rao and Sri Chundru Prasad, Governing Board Members of Goutami Eye Institute, Sri V. Bhaskar Ram, Managing Trustee of Virinchi Vanaprastha Ashramam, Sri Hota Sreeramachandra Murthy, Philanthropist and Sri P. Srinivasa Rao, renowned advocate and other staff of Goutami Eye Institute participated in the event.

This will be a Super Speciality Eye Hospital with world class equipment and facilities, to serve the needy, irrespective of socio-economic status.



NOW



THEN

Triplets - Prasanth, Susanth and Nisanth, who were treated by GEI three years ago and gifted vision for life, as ROP babies under GEMROP (Goutami Eye tele Medicine Retinopathy Of Prematurity) .



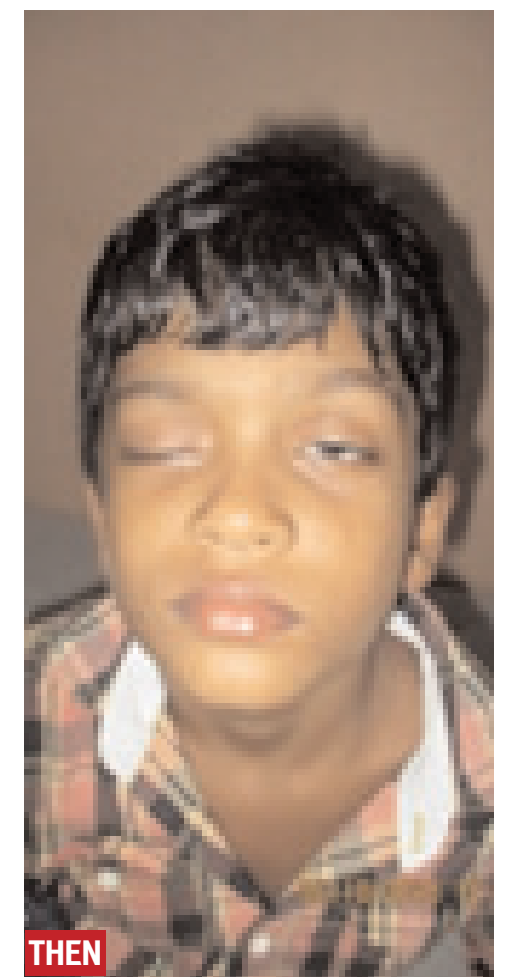
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NOW



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Mokshit who was treated and restored vision when his Right Eye was injured accidentally by an arrow, while playing, during October 2020.

< Naga Devi, who was treated and restored vision by GEI when her Right Eye vision suddenly stated going down gravely due to retinal condition during September 2020.



SIDHANT GANGWANI
PRESIDENT - INDIAN
STUDENT ASSOCIATION,
THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY



SHEREEYA VAITLA
PRESIDENT - INDIAN
STUDENTS ASSOCIATION,
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA



AAYUDH DAS
VICE PRESIDENT AND
TREASURER - INDIAN
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"Lessons of 2020 and hopes of 2021"

Our youth and children truly are the future of our society. What does our youth think of 2020? What are their hopes and wishes for 2021? This Saturday we welcome up and coming youth leaders as they reflect on this year and look to the future.

Child is the Father of Man
with **Robinder Sachdev**

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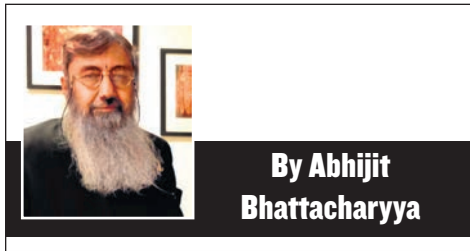
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AS I SEE IT

By Abhijit
Bhattacharyya

Liberation of Bangladesh: How Pakistan lost the plot

It was December 16, 1971 when Indian Army vanquished Pakistan army in Bangladesh and made it surrender. The day in India is observed as "Vijay Divas".

Abhijit Bhattacharyya writes on the historic war and why Pakistan lost. -EDITOR



Lt Gen AAK Niazi signs the Instrument of Surrender in the presence of Lt Gen JS Aurora on December 16, 1971.

Was the birth of the linguistic state of Bangladesh in 1971 a rare accident of history? Or was it owing to invisible and inexorable forces of history? It's the 'geography of the demography' that played a pivotal role, which, more often than not, has been ignored.

India rightly claims credit for her 'politico-military midwife' role in the creation of an independent Bengali-speaking state in 1971, despite apprehension and concern in some quarters as India's border areas are vulnerable to turbulence caused by China-aided and Pakistan-backed actors. Hence, the completion of 49 years of sovereign Bangladesh is all the more creditable if one assesses the overlapping physical contours of geographical Bengal as a whole.

The stark geography of the east was succinctly described by Dr Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharyya, an eminent historian of Dacca University, in *The History of Bengal*. How the Mughals faced problems in suppressing Bengal: "The task of conquest and consolidation was rendered more complicated owing to insuperable difficulties arising out of the nature of the country (side) and its peculiar geography. Bengal, with its numerous rivers, streams, nalahs, creeks, swamps, its damp and moist air, and its prolonged rains half the year, peculiar vegetation, absence of barley and wheat, it's no less peculiar language, foreign to Urdu and Hindi alike - all these made Mughal grandees intensely dislike service in Bengal." Did the Pakistani army repeat the Mughal history in 1971? Notwithstanding the brute force and savagery perpetrated on 'blacks of the east', as infamously referred to by its army brass?

'Blacks of the east', nevertheless were not the sole obstacle to Pakistan's forces. There existed something more deep-rooted. The geomorphology and terrain

being the biggest mismatch of demographic civility and civilizational chemistry between the eastern geography of Bengal and the non-eastern topography of South Asia, as gleaned from the monumental research work of Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray in his path-breaking *History of the Bengali people* (1950).

Thus described Yuan-ch'uang: "People of Pundravardhana (south of Brahmaputra) were straightforward, virtuous and had great respect for culture and learning... Tamralipti (coastal town Tamluk) people were brave, industrious, fond of learning but rough in their manner. People of Samatata (coastal area) were hard-working, while those of Karnasuvarna (central Bengal) were gentle, of fine character, and gave much support to scholarship."

On the linguistic front, however, things didn't appear optimistic. Bodhayana Dharmasutra didn't have good things to suggest on Bengali. "On return from Vanga (Bengal) to central lands, or Aryavarta, it was necessary to perform expiation" owing to "Vanga being barbarian territory and their people of low origin" (does it have an uncanny similarity with the views of the army of undivided Pakistan?) The contrary view, too, speaks for itself. The in-built contradiction and confrontation between Bengal and Aryavarta: "Aryan language

and culture had neither understanding of, nor respect for, the language, customs and culture of non-Aryan or pre-Aryan people of Gauda (Central Bengal), Pundravardhana and Vanga."

The uniqueness of Bengal's geography, therefore, constitutes an oft-forgotten reality. That a country's political boundaries and natural geographical boundaries may not always be the same even if there exists a common linguistic or homogenous ethnic group. Hence, the fertile land of Bengal invariably attracted those who hailed from a comparatively barren and less fertile land - for a better livelihood.

Another important scenario of the east pertained to language, literature and learning, traditionally the strongest features of the demography of Bengal. It's true that ancient India's learning is well known to have begun with Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads. "However, the learning and scholarship embodied in Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads, even in the Dharmashastras and Dharmashutras, had no effect on Bengal for quite a long time," according to Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray.

That said, there also existed a notable characteristic of the Bengali language: the flexibility to take/accept words, and usage, from the likes of Mon-Khmer and the Kola-Munda group of languages. The latter brought about by a stream of the Dravidian family of languages. Further came the language of the Tibetan-Burmese people. This introduction, acceptance and induction of diverse languages in Bengal, which began centuries before the birth of Christ, ultimately led to what one sees today as the rich and easy-to-learn and understand lingua franca of 32 crore people of the world. Thus, those known as Bengali today are not all from one, but diverse ethnic groups, their commonality and

When the former chief of Pakistan's Eastern Command, Lt Gen AAK Niazi, wrote in his 1998 book that "Bengalis had little chance of standing against my well-disciplined and experienced troops", it showed the undiminished and ingrained arrogance and ignorance of the vanquished General. A military junta's lack of knowledge led to an unprecedented disaster.

strongest bond being the Bengali language.

Regrettably, however, the historical challenge of geography, coupled with the depth of sensitivity and conviction of Bengali-speaking people, conspicuously remained incomprehensible to the gun-toting army rulers of Pakistan. Thus, when the former chief of Pakistan's Eastern Command, Lt Gen AAK Niazi, wrote in his book, *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* (1998) that "Bengalis had little chance of standing against my well-disciplined and experienced troops", it showed the undiminished and ingrained arrogance and ignorance of the vanquished General. Essentially, a military junta's lack of knowledge led to an unprecedented battlefield disaster. Little wonder the history of the Bengali-speaking demography stands tall, dwarfing the army of Pakistan before its former eastern wing. Sovereign Bangladesh has truly added a rich chapter to the history of South Asia. The change from the Karachi-Dhaka axis in the 1950s to the Delhi-Dhaka friendship of the 2020s appears impressive. At least for now.

(The author is Commentator and Author)

GUEST COMMENT

Failure to convene sitting of Parliament diminishes democracy

Citing a surge in Covid-19 cases, the Union government has decided not to hold the Winter Session of Parliament. A session, even a curtailed one, would have provided the lawmakers a much-needed platform to discuss pressing issues: the contentious farm laws and the prolonged agitation by the farmers who are demanding their repeal; the seven-month-old border standoff with China that is nowhere near resolution; and the action plan for the rollout of the Covid vaccine.

The argument for doing away with the session does not hold water as the daily coronavirus caseload of the country in general and Delhi in particular has come down significantly. It's not that the

government has no experience of conducting parliamentary proceedings during a raging pandemic.

The Monsoon Session was held in September, a devastating month which alone witnessed over 26 lakh infections nationwide, accounting for one-fourth of the total cases so far, and more than 33,000 deaths. Amid the challenging conditions, Covid protocols had been strictly enforced and the session was hailed as one of the most productive ever. The government needs to explain why similar measures can't be implemented in December, when the overall situation

is far better.

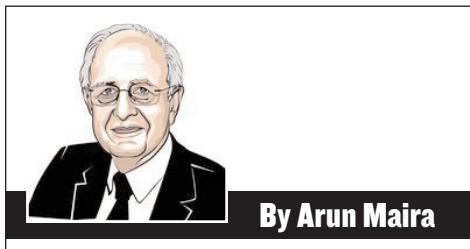
The irony is not lost on anyone: during the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the new Parliament building last week, PM Narendra Modi had underlined the importance of dialogue and hailed Indian democracy for its vibrancy. Holding the House sitting at this time would have affirmed the government's intent to encourage deliberations on thorny matters and look for solutions through consensus. However, it now seems that the ruling party is shying away from a debate with the Opposition. Such evasiveness does not augur well for

a democratic set-up.

The grim portents were visible during the Monsoon Session, when the government had rammed legislations through both Houses amid walkouts and boycotts by Opposition parties. The reluctance to take everybody on board is again evident now. And it doesn't really matter whether Parliament operates from an old building or a new one, or whether it is circular or triangular in shape. What matters is to create space for a healthy dialogue in the 'temple of democracy'.

(Tribune, India)

In agri-reforms, go back to the drawing board



By Arun Maira

"The 1991 reforms changed industrial licensing and trade policies - both subjects of the Union government. 'Factor market' reforms, in land, agriculture, and labor regulations, which are necessary to realize the full benefits of the 1991 reforms are State subjects in which States have jurisdiction too, and with good reason. They affect the lives of people on the ground, and differently, around the country. Therefore, the central government, no matter how strong it is, must not force these reforms onto the States."

Economists say fewer people must work on farms for farm productivity and incomes to be improved. Which begs the question how the millions displaced from farms will earn incomes. Indian industry is not growing much. There too, according to economists, humans should be replaced by technology for improving productivity.

Flip side of productivity

Landholdings are too small for mechanization to improve farm productivity, economists complain. Their solution is to 'scale up' farms. Since mechanization requires standardization of work, mechanized farming on scale requires monocropping. Large-scale specialization upsets the ecological balance. Reduced diversity of flora enables pests to spread more easily; soil quality is reduced; water resources get depleted. Solutions to these new problems require more industrial inputs, with more costs for farmers. The deleterious side-effects of this approach to improve agriculture productivity are very visible in Punjab now. Farm incomes have grown there while water resources have depleted and soils have been damaged.

In Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, political scientist James C. Scott documents the history of 'scientific forestry' in Germany. The clearing out of other vegetation to plant a single variety of commercially useful tree in neatly spaced rows enabled mechanization of timber production. However, the ecological imbalance made the trees more vulnerable to pests, and over time, the quality of the timber also reduced. Nature is a complex 'self-adaptive' system. It knows how to take care of itself. When Man tries to overpower Nature with his science and industry, without understanding how Nature functions, he harms Nature - and ultimately himself.

Twenty-first century challenges of environmental degradation and increasing inequalities require that the

The intended beneficiaries often understand the realities of the systems better; policymakers need to build trust

economic calculus shifts from 'economies of scale with standardization' to 'economies of scope for sustainability'. This will make large-scale mechanization more difficult. However, it will require the use of more 'flexible' human labor. In the long run, not only will this be good for the ecology, it will also increase employment and incomes for people in the lower half of the economic pyramid.

Market access

Farm incomes can increase with access to wider markets for farm produce, which is an objective of the agricultural reforms. The fear of Indian farmers is that they will not have adequate pricing power when pushed into large supply systems and less regulated markets. Connections into global supply chains can increase volumes of sales. However, the terms of trade will always favor the larger players in the supply chains who have easier access to capital. In her book, *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Power, and Politics of World Trade*, economist Pietra Rivoli reveals how small cotton farmers in Texas, unlike farmers in developing countries, became progressively richer as well as politically powerful in setting the rules of global trade. Texan farmers formed collectives to own upstream processing and marketing linkages when they joined global supply chains. Thus, they could obtain larger margins in trade. And their collective voice swayed national politicians.

Strengthen cooperatives

Institutions for cooperative ownership and collective bargaining must be strengthened to give power to small farmers before opening markets to large corporations. The Indian dairy sector is a good example. Its 'per person productivity is much lower than New Zealand and Australian dairy producers'. However, it provides millions of tiny producers with reasonable incomes which large-scale industrial dairy producers do not. Moreover, with its cooperative aggregation, the Indian dairy sector has also acquired political clout. It has compelled the Indian government to withstand pressure from trade economists who are urging it to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (of which New Zealand and Australia are members) to connect the Indian economy with larger supply chains.

The problem of low incomes in India's agriculture sector is a complex systems problem which cannot be solved by agriculture experts alone. Experts from many disciplines must collaborate to find systemic solutions. Also, the intended beneficiaries of the new policies must be included in the designing of the new policies right at the beginning. Often they understand the realities of systems better than experts do with their abstractions in mathematical equations of inputs,



Farmers protest on farm law at Singhu border on December 17, 2020

The purpose of agriculture reforms is to increase farmers' incomes. Farmers want the laws (the Farm Bills) repealed. The Supreme Court of India has called for discussions between the government and farmers around the country. It is time to go back to the drawing board about the purpose and the process of agriculture reforms.

outputs, and productivity. When policymakers say 'the people don't get it' after the policy is announced and the intended beneficiaries protest, it is an indication that the experts didn't get it.

The reforms of the 1990s

The stand-off in agriculture reforms, with farmers besieging the national capital demanding they be heard, has caused a flurry of discussions about democracy, consultation, and processes for economic reforms. Economists point, wistfully, to the firmness with which bold reforms were brought about in 1991, and how the government stood up to the 'Bombay Club' of industrialists who opposed them. They also complain that politics (and even democracy) comes in the way of good economics. This reveals an inadequate understanding of processes by which complex economic reforms are evolved.

The immediate beneficiaries of the 1991 reforms were all Indian consumers, rich and poor, who would benefit from access to better quality products from around the world. The principal opponents of the reforms were a few large industrialists whose products citizens were not satisfied with. Governments have more power over a few industrialists than they have over the masses.

With a stroke of the pen, policies could be changed in the early 1990s, the immediate benefits of which were clear to the masses. Hundreds of millions of citizens who hope to be beneficiaries of the 'big ticket' reforms, in agriculture, and

in industry too, now want to earn better incomes, to earn enough to buy all the good stuff they have begun to aspire for, and even to make both ends meet. They cannot see how the bold reforms being pushed through will result in improvement of their incomes. A trickle down is promised. When will that ever happen, they ask?

The 1991 reforms changed industrial licensing and trade policies - both subjects of the Union government. 'Factor market' reforms, in land, agriculture, and labor regulations, which are necessary to realize the full benefits of the 1991 reforms are State subjects in which States have jurisdiction too, and with good reason. They affect the lives of people on the ground, and differently, around the country. Therefore, the central government, no matter how strong it is, must not force these reforms onto the States.

Silo experts cannot help

India's policymakers must improve their expertise in solving complex, multi-disciplinary problems. They must apply the discipline of systems thinking, and not rely on siloed domain experts. Moreover, citizens around the country must be listened to at the very beginning, and throughout the evolution of policies; not communicated to at the end by experts who then complain that citizens are being misled by political forces.

Prof. Mark H. Moore says, in *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, "We might think of (the process of making policy) as helping to define rather than create public value. But this activity also creates value since it satisfies the desire of citizens for a well-ordered society, in which fair, efficient, and accountable public institutions exist." Trust is essential for a well-governed society. The lesson for India's leaders is: good processes for making public policies build trust between citizens and their governments.

(The author is a former Member, Planning Commission and the author of 'Transforming Systems: Why the World Needs a New Ethical Toolkit') (Source: The Hindu)

Af-Taliban delegation in Pak to push peace talks

ISLAMABAD (TIP): A high-level Afghan-Taliban delegation arrived here on Wednesday to hold talks with the top Pakistani leadership as part of efforts to push forward the reconciliation process amid growing incidents of violence in Afghanistan. The Taliban Political Commission (TPC), headed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, is on a December 16-18 visit to Pakistan, according to the Foreign Office (FO).

“During the visit, the delegation will meet the Foreign Minister and call on the Prime Minister,” the FO said.

The visit comes after a delegation, led by US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, on Monday met Pakistan's Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and discussed with him the ongoing Afghan peace process.

AP reported that Baradar and his delegation were summoned to Islamabad from Qatar, where they have been negotiating since September with Afghan government representatives, officials close to the talks said. According to a report in *The Express Tribune*, the delegation will discuss issues of mutual interest, in particular, problems of refugees, relaxation and facilitation of Afghan's movement to Pakistan, as well as issues faced by Afghan traders.

The visit of the TPC delegation is part of Pakistan's policy to reach out to key Afghan parties in the peace process with a view to facilitating the Intra-Afghan Negotiations that commenced in Doha on September 12, 2020. It is the second visit of the TPC delegation this year after it visited Pakistan in August. — PTI

Pakistani actress Firdous Begum dies at 73

LAHORE (TIP): Firdous Begum, the famous Pakistani veteran actress who shot to fame for her iconic role in 1970's movie ‘Heer Ranjha’, passed away here on Wednesday. She was 73.

Firdous was shifted to a hospital here on Tuesday due to a brain haemorrhage where she breathed her last here on Wednesday, according to her family. A leading lady of Pakistani films from 1970s to 1980s, Firdous started her film career in 1963 with a movie ‘Fanoos’ in which she had a supporting role. She got a break from movie ‘Malangi’ in 1965 and thereafter there was no looking back. Her iconic role in ‘Heer Ranjha’ made her the most sought-after actress in 1970s. Firdous performed in over 150 Punjabi, Urdu and Pashto films. She married to fellow actor Akmal Khan who died in 1967. Later she married actor Ijaz Durani who played male lead in ‘Heer Ranjha’. She is survived by her three children, two sons and a daughter. — PTI

‘The fear is intense’: Afghan ‘sticky bombs’, used by Taliban, on the rise

KABUL (TIP): Killings by small, magnetic bombs slapped under vehicles are unnerving Afghan officials, activists and journalists, who blame the Taliban for the attacks that are increasing despite peace talks aimed at ending two decades of war.

At least 10 government officials and their aides have been killed by “sticky bombs” in recent weeks, mostly in the capital Kabul. The tactic, senior security officials and Western diplomats say, is meant to instil fear while avoiding large-scale civilian casualties.

“Internal intelligence memos reveal that the Taliban are systematically eliminating mid-career, ambitious government officials and other prominent individuals who are clearly against their hardline stance,” said a senior Western diplomat responsible for Afghanistan.

“The rebels are not killing the government's top brass as they can't afford to generate large-scale furor, for it would impinge upon the peace process,” the diplomat told Reuters on condition of anonymity, as he is not authorised to speak to the press.

A Taliban spokesman said the group was behind some of the attacks but targeted only officials of the government that the group is both warring and negotiating with.

“We will continue to target the enemy and continue to eliminate important government figures, but not journalists or social activists,” said Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the militant group.

“We are directly attacking those people who are fighting against us either on the battlefield or those plotting against us from their government offices.”

Afghanistan's Interior Ministry blames the Taliban for all sticky bomb attacks.

Eight senior Afghan government officials, three local journalists and two female professors in Kabul told Reuters



they have recently changed their modes of transport and now regularly alter their routes to work.

Taliban leaders are in neighbouring Pakistan during a break in the peace talks in the Qatari capital Doha, which have taken three months to agree on procedural ground rules. The rise in violence mars the best hope for ending the war that has ravaged Afghanistan since the 2001 attacks on the United States. “Despite the talks, the militants were achieving desired the results of inculcating tremendous fear,” the diplomat said. The militants have also stepped up widespread attacks against government forces in the provinces in an effort to establish new strongholds.

QUICK AND DIRTY

Sticky bombs, assembled in Afghanistan, can be detonated remotely or with a time-delay fuse and are powerful enough to blow up a car. They have been used since the early years of the war to sow terror among Afghans and expatriates working to safeguard the economy and fragile democracy.

The devices can be crude or sophisticated — but planting them is cheap, simple and hard to defend against.

Recent arrests reveal that target vehicles were stuck in traffic, where attackers on motorbikes or on foot could attach a bomb.

“In most cases young men were also involved in sticking magnetic bombs for a small amount of cash,” said Rahmatullah Andar, a spokesman for the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's anti-terror agency.

Rising unemployment due to COVID-19 has made it easier for the Taliban to recruit young boys who wash cars on the side of the roads, vendors and beggars to collect information on intended targets, said another official at the directorate.

Although the sticky bomb attacks remain sporadic, they are having a psychological effect.

“After breakfast, I take a few minutes to think which route I should take to work to stay alive,” said Rahmatullah Rahim, a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Law and Justice, adding: “The fear is intense.” Reuters

Two smuggled Sumatran orangutans flown home from Thailand

BANGKOK (TIP): Two critically endangered orangutans smuggled into Thailand three years ago were returned to Indonesia on Thursday, where they will undergo rehabilitation before being released into the wild.

Ung Aing and Natalee, both four-year-old Sumatran orangutans, were taken from a wildlife rescue centre in Ratchaburi province to Bangkok's airport, before being put on a flight to Indonesia where they will initially stay at a rehabilitation centre in Jambi Province on Sumatra island.

Before being put on the flight, the pair were fed with bananas and green apples, and cleared of having COVID-19 after taking a test, said Suraphong Chawepak, a director at the Thai division to protect wild fauna and flora.

“This is the fifth repatriation of orangutans back to Indonesia since



2006,” Prakrit Vongsrivattanakul, an official at Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation said at the airport. A total of 71 orangutans have now been repatriated to Indonesia from Thailand.

The two great apes were seized on the Thai-Malaysian border in 2017 and after the smugglers were prosecuted, Thailand agreed to send them back to Indonesia, according to a joint statement from Thailand's wildlife and conservation ministry and Indonesia's embassy in Bangkok.

Orangutans are poached illegally from forests for food, to obtain infants for the domestic and international pet trade, or for traditional medicine.

There are only estimated to be around 1,00,000 Bornean orangutans left in the wild, according to the World Wildlife Fund while only about 7,500 Sumatran orangutans are thought to remain.

In addition to illegal poaching, populations have crashed because of habitat destruction due to large-scale logging and replacement of forests with cash crops such as palm oil. Reuters

10 ECONOMISTS WRITE TO TOMAR, SEEK REPEAL OF FARM LAWS

CHANDIGARH (TIP): As the stand-off between the agitating farmers and the BJP-led central government continued for the third week, top economists from some of the most reputed research institutions in the country, have raised serious concerns about the farm laws, and demanded their repeal.

Putting their weight firmly behind the agitating farmers, the economists -- DNarsimha Reddy, Kamal Nayan Kabra, K N Harilal, Ranjit Singh Ghuman, Surinder Kumar, Arun Kumar, Rajinder Chaudhary, R Ramakumar, Vikas Rawal and Himanshu, have said these laws are not in the best interests of small and marginal farmers, and demanded their revocation.

In a letter to the Agriculture Minister N S Tomar, these 10 economists have said while they believe that improvements and changes are required in the agricultural marketing system for the benefit of millions of small farmers, but the reforms brought by these Acts do not serve that purpose. "They are based on wrong assumptions and claims about why farmers are unable to get remunerative prices, about farmers not having freedom to sell wherever they like under the previously existing laws, and about regulated markets not being in the farmers' interests," the economists said.

They have come up five reasons on why these three Acts, brought in as a package by the government, are fundamentally harmful in their implications for the small farmers of India. "These undermine the role of



the state government in regulating agriculture markets, when more than 20 states have already amended their APMC Acts to allow private mandis, e trading, e NAM etc. Secondly, two different markets -- existing mandis and the private (unregulated) mandis that are proposed under the new laws -- will have two different sets of rules. If collusion and market manipulation are concerns inside the APMC markets, the same collusion and market manipulation are likely to continue in the unregulated market space. Within the regulated APMC markets, there exist mechanisms to address and prevent such market manipulation, whereas in the unregulated 'trade areas', the central Act contemplates no such mechanisms," they have said.

They have warned that even before these Acts came, a large percentage of the sale of agricultural commodities happened

outside the APMC regulated market yards. However, the APMC market yards still set the benchmark prices through the daily auctions and offered some reliable price signals to the farmers. Without these price signals, the fragmented markets could pave the way for local monopsonies. The experience in Bihar since the removal of its APMC Act in 2006 shows that farmers have less choice of buyers and less bargaining power, resulting in significantly lower prices compared to other states.

The 10 economists have also raised the issue of the huge asymmetry between the two parties, small farmers and companies, in the Contract Farming law, which is not addressed to provide adequate protection to the interests of the farmers. Besides, concern about domination by big agri-businesses is also worrisome, they have said.

(Source: *The Tribune, India*)

Kejriwal, AAP MLAs tear copies of Centre's farm laws in Assembly

NEW DELHI (TIP): In a show of solidarity with the agitating farmers, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, along with other Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, tore up copies of the Centre's three new farm laws in the Assembly on Thursday, Dec 17. The AAP government also passed a resolution in the Delhi Assembly seeking the repeal of the farm laws.

Addressing the Delhi Assembly, Kejriwal alleged that the laws "have been made for electoral funding of the BJP and not the farmers". "I am pained that I have to do this. I did not intend to, but I cannot betray the farmers of my country who have been sleeping on the streets in the cold when the temperature is just 2 degrees Celsius," Kejriwal said.

"I am a citizen of this country first, a chief minister later. This assembly rejects the three laws and appeals to the central government to meet the demands of farmers," he said.

"What was the hurry to get the farm laws passed in Parliament during pandemic? It has happened for first time that three laws were passed without voting in Rajya Sabha. I hereby tear the farm laws in this assembly and appeal Centre not to become worst than Britishers," Kejriwal said as he tore a copy of the farm laws.



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tears the copy of new farm laws in Delhi Assembly on December 17. (PTI Photo)

Raking up the issue of the death of farmers sitting at protest near Delhi borders, Kejriwal said, "I want to ask Centre how many sacrifices farmers will have to make, to get their voices heard. Every farmer has become Bhagat Singh. The government is saying that they are reaching out to farmers and trying to explain the benefits of Farm Bills. UP CM told farmers that they'll benefit from these bills as their land won't be taken away. Is it a benefit?"

BKU chief Naresh Tikait asks Centre to call all party meet to resolve farmers' stir

NEW DELHI (TIP): Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief and head of Baliyan Khap Naresh Tikait advised the Union government on Thursday, Dec 17, to resolve the issue of farmers' stir over three farm laws by calling an all party meeting.

Tikait was interacting with mediapersons after a meeting with khap heads in Baraut area of Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh. He later left for Delhi to attend the BKU's Mahapanchayat at Ghazipur border on Thursday, Dec 17.

Tikait said that the government should resolve the issue of protests over the farm laws through dialogue instead of adopting a stiff attitude. He added that since six rounds of talks between farmers and the government had yielded no results, the government should call an all party meeting to resolve the impasse.

The farmer leader accused the government of a stubborn attitude while farmers were braving acute cold under the open skies since the past 21 days. He said that the government wanted a confrontation between different groups of farmers. "They are farmers who want a solution for their problems, not confrontation, either with the government or with each other," he said and explained that the farmers might be associated with different organizations but they had a common goal.

Tikait's comments come at a time when Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar has reached out to protesting farmers with an open letter, saying a "misunderstanding" has been created among some farmer unions and "white lies" are being spread on the issue of minimum support price for crops.

Protesting farmers fear the new farm laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the 'mercy' of big corporations. However, the government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture.

Hundreds of farmers have been protesting on different borders of the national capital since November 26 against the three newly enacted farm laws- Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

(Source: *HT*)



DMK, allies begin hunger strike in support of protesting farmers

The DMK-led opposition in Tamil Nadu on Friday, Dec 18, embarked on a day-long hunger strike in support of farmers protesting against the three farm laws enacted by the Centre recently.

Farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, have been protesting outside Delhi for over three weeks against the central legislations.

On Friday, DMK chief and Leader of Opposition, MK Stalin, party MP Kanimozhi and leaders of alliance parties participated in the protest here.

Biden selects Native American Deb Haaland as interior secretary

WASHINGTON (TIP): In yet another first, President-elect Joe Biden nominated a Native American to be the Interior Secretary.

If confirmed, Haaland, 60, would become the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary. The pick is being cheered by progressives and would add to what Biden calls his "barrier-breaking" Cabinet.

Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo people, has represented New Mexico's 1st Congressional District, which comprises Albuquerque and many of its suburbs, since 2019. She is the chair of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. She and Rep. Sharice Davids of Kansas are the first Native American women to serve in Congress.

As interior secretary, Haaland would oversee an agency tasked with managing and conserving much of the country's federal lands and natural resources, including national parks and tribal lands, which have had a fraught history with the federal government.

Haaland has long been popular among



If confirmed, Deb Haaland would become the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary - Screen shot

progressive Democrats. In 2016, when she was the chair of the New Mexico Democratic Party, she traveled to the protests against the Dakota Access pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to show solidarity with the demonstrators. She also led an effort as her state's party chair to divest the party from investments in Wells Fargo, over the bank's ties to the pipeline.

Long thought to be a top contender for the post, Haaland received sterling praise as a potential Cabinet member earlier this week from House Speaker Nancy

Pelosi, D-Calif., who lauded the congresswoman as an "excellent choice" who "knows the territory" after rumors emerged that Democratic House leaders were concerned about losing a member of their caucus because of the thin majority they hold in the chamber. Haaland had received the strong backing of many Native American groups and progressive organizations, and many lauded her expected selection Thursday.

"With the historic appointment of Deb Haaland as Interior Secretary, Joe Biden chose the most qualified person and put a true movement progressive in his Cabinet," Stephanie Taylor, the co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said. "Deb's selection was a top priority for the progressive movement. Thousands of PCCC members and many Native American, climate, women, and other progressive activists worked hard for this victory."

If Haaland is confirmed, it would create a third House vacancy as Democrats will begin the new Congress with an already-slimmed majority.



Cyberattack on government still going on, say U.S. agencies

WASHINGTON (TIP): U.S. intelligence agencies have warned that a "significant" cyberattack on several federal departments uncovered over the weekend remains ongoing as the government rushes to assess the extent of the breach.

"This is a developing situation, and while we continue to work to understand the full extent of this campaign, we know this compromise has affected networks within the federal government," the FBI, the director of national intelligence and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said in a joint statement late Wednesday, December 16.

The March attack on software created by Texas-based IT company SolarWinds - in which hackers installed malware - continued for months until it was discovered by cybersecurity company FireEye.

Both companies have pointed the finger at hackers linked to the Russian government. Hackers reportedly breached software used by the U.S. Treasury Department and the Commerce Department, allowing them to view internal email traffic.

The agencies did not confirm the targets of the cyberattack. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also pointed to Moscow on Monday, saying the Russian government had made repeated attempts to breach U.S. government networks.

'Up to 18,000 customers'

SolarWinds said up to 18,000 customers, which included government agencies and Fortune 500 companies, had downloaded the compromised software updates, allowing hackers to spy on email exchanges.

The content the hackers sought to steal - and how successful they were - remains unknown at this time.

The FBI said it has opened an investigation to identify and pursue those responsible for the hack.

After the attack was detected, CISA ordered federal agencies to power down the breached software.

The agencies have created a coordination unit and emergency talks are being held at the White House on a daily basis to discuss the government's response.

U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien cut short a trip to the Middle East and Europe this week to deal with the fallout from the hack.

(Agencies)



The Wuhan Laboratory

WHO investigators to head to China to study COVID-19 origins

NEW YORK (TIP): A team of international investigators led by the World Health Organization (WHO) is likely to go to China in early January to study the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak, which first began in Wuhan, in southwestern Hubei province, late last year.

WHO officials said on Thursday, December 17, the composition of the team and where they would visit was being discussed with China. Babatunde Olowokure, the WHO's regional emergencies director in the Western Pacific, said at a press conference that China was "welcoming" the team and the visit was likely to happen in early January. How much access the team will have, and whether the visit comes too late, has become a point of contention. China has resisted calls for an independent international inquiry into the origins but has said it would be open to a WHO-led investigation even as the organization has come under fire, particularly from the U.S., over its handling of the outbreak in the initial stages.

A team of 12-15 experts will likely go to Wuhan "to examine evidence, including human and animal samples collected by Chinese researchers, and to build on their initial studies", Reuters reported. Thea Fischer, a Danish member, was quoted as saying the team would leave "just after New Year's" for a six-week mission, which would include two weeks of quarantine on arrival. Initial attention into the origins of COVID-19 had focused on the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, where an outbreak was first reported in December, although some Chinese health officials have since said the market may have not been the origin, but where the virus first spread.

FOCUS ON MARKET : The WHO investigation will likely focus on the market in an effort to reconstruct the outbreak, the South China Morning Post reported this week, noting that China had "released sparse details" about its studies into the market. Most scientists believe the SARS-CoV-2 virus, similar to the first SARS outbreak, likely came from a bat and passed to humans via an intermediary host. Whether that was one of the live animals sold at the market is among the issues the investigation will look into. The WHO investigation, although at an early stage, has already become politicized, with China resisting what it sees as any outside interference, seeking to remain in control over how much access international scientists will have, and officials and State media there increasingly backing a narrative suggesting the virus came to China from elsewhere.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)



FDA advisory panel endorses Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine, clearing way for authorization

WASHINGTON (TIP): An advisory panel on Thursday, December 17, recommended that the Food and Drug Administration issue an emergency use authorization for a Covid-19 vaccine developed by Moderna, all but guaranteeing the agency will do so.

The authorization, expected on Friday, will mark the second Covid-19 vaccine cleared by the agency - and amount to one more step toward curbing a pandemic that has infected an estimated 17 million people and killed more than 300,000 in the United States.

Both Moderna's vaccine and the one developed by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech, which was granted an EUA last week, use messenger RNA to instruct the body's cells to produce copies of the spike protein found on the exterior of the SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19. Those vaccine-induced proteins teach the immune system to recognize the coronavirus as an invader and attack it when an immunized person is exposed to the virus.

Clinical trials showed both vaccines were highly effective, about 94% or 95% in fact, though both trigger side effects in a portion of people vaccinated.

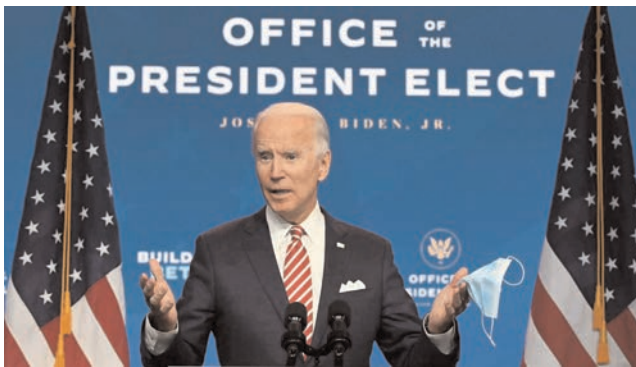
'Turn the page', President-Elect Joe Biden says

WASHINGTON (TIP): The bureaucratic transition from Mr. Trump's government to Mr. Biden's actually began weeks ago, despite the President's legal challenges. Still, the suddenly conciliatory stance from many Republicans could thaw the political deep freeze that has gripped Washington lately.

Mr. Biden has been trying to build momentum as he prepares to assume the presidency while facing the historic challenge of vaccinating hundreds of millions of Americans against the coronavirus. In some of his most forceful remarks since the election, Mr. Biden is calling for unity but also calling Mr. Trump's attacks on the voting process "unconscionable" and insisting it is time to "turn the page." "We need to work together, give each other a chance, and lower the temperature," Mr. Biden said in a speech on Monday, December 14.

Still, the shift coming so late in the tone from Republicans has left the President-elect with barely a month to finish building out key parts his new government. Some say the GOP about-face won't mean much at this point.

"Even them doing this now, the damage has been done because they've blocked, they've interrupted," said Anthony Robinson, a former Obama administration appointee who served several national



"We need to work together, give each other a chance, and lower the temperature," Mr. Biden said in a speech on Monday, December 14.

security policy roles, including during the transition to the Trump administration in 2016.

"I don't want to say, 'Who cares?,' but it definitely doesn't symbolize a smooth transition," said Mr. Robinson, who is now political director of the National Democratic Training Committee, which trains candidates and campaign staffers all over the country.

Mr. Biden's first priority will be the fair and efficient distribution of vaccines against the virus. The

President-elect said on Tuesday that he would follow the advice of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, who says that getting the President-elect himself vaccinated as soon as possible is a matter of national security.

Trust in the vaccine

"Dr. Fauci recommends I get the vaccine sooner than later. I want to make sure we do it by the numbers," Mr. Biden said, adding that he'd be immunized publicly, which could help build public trust in the vaccine.

Mr. Trump's continued opposition to Mr. Biden, meanwhile, may still present roadblocks, especially in the U.S. House where Republicans as recently as last week were introducing legislation to punish members of their party who might be seen as urging Mr. Trump to "concede prematurely." Other top Trump administration Cabinet officials haven't yet followed the lead of Mr. Pompeo, who plans to meet on Thursday with Mr. Blinken, Mr. Biden's Secretary of State nominee.

"The President is still involved in ongoing litigation related to the election," said White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, calling the Electoral College vote "one step in the constitutional process."

White House condemns desecration of Mahatma Gandhi's statue in Washington

WASHINGTON (TIP): A violent group of Khalistani separatists on Saturday, December 12, desecrated Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy during a demonstration by Sikh-American youths in support of farmers protesting against the Indian farm laws.

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany has described as "appalling" the desecration of Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy here and said his reputation should be respected, especially in the US capital.

A violent group of Khalistani separatists on Saturday desecrated Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy in Washington during a demonstration by Sikh-American youths in support of farmers protesting against the recently enacted agriculture laws in India.

Responding to a question about the incident during a press conference, McEnany said, "It's terrible. No statue or memorial should be desecrated and certainly not one like that of Gandhi who really fought for the values that America represents of peace, justice, and freedom."

"It is appalling that it has happened more than once and we believe the reputation of Mahatma Gandhi should be respected, especially here in America's capital," she said.

A State Department spokesperson said on Tuesday that they were aware of recent protests in front of the Indian Embassy in Washington DC.

"We take our responsibility to provide for the safety and security of foreign missions in the US very seriously and are discussing the recent incident with the Indian Embassy," the spokesperson said.

Hundreds of Sikhs from in and around Greater Washington DC area, Maryland and Virginia, along with many from other states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina, on Saturday undertook a car rally to the Indian embassy in downtown Washington DC, where they gathered to express solidarity with the protesting Indian farmers.



White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany described as "appalling" the desecration of Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy.

Photo / Courtesy AP-PTI

Peaceful protest hijacked?

However, the peaceful protest was soon hijacked by the separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags with anti-India posters and banners.

During the protest, many of the pro-Khalistan Sikh youths flashing kirpans jumped on the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and pasted a poster over it. The group raised anti-India and pro-Khalistan slogans.

The Indian embassy condemned the "mischievous act" by hooligans masquerading as protesters.

"The statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Plaza in front of the embassy was defaced by Khalistani elements on 12 December 2020. The Embassy strongly condemns this mischievous act by hooligans masquerading as protesters against the universally respected icon of peace and justice," it said in a statement.

The Embassy said it has lodged a strong protest with the US law enforcement agencies and also taken up the matter with the Department of State for an early investigation and action against the culprits under the applicable law.

The statue of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled by then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the presence of then US president Bill Clinton on September 16, 2000, after the US Congress passed a law in 1998.

This is for the second time that Gandhi's statue has been desecrated by miscreants this year.

The first such incident was reported on the intervening night of June 2 and 3 when unknown miscreants vandalized his statue outside the Indian embassy in the US with graffiti and spray painting, prompting the mission to register a complaint with the local law enforcement agencies.

Vandalism of the statue of the apostle of peace happened during the week of nationwide protests against the custodial killing of African-American George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. (Source: PTI)

U.S. imposes CAATSA sanctions on Turkey for S-400 Purchase

WASHINGTON (TIP):

The issue of sanctions by the U.S. for purchase of Russian arms is of particular interest to New Delhi, which is also in the process of buying the S-400 from Moscow.

The U.S. has imposed sanctions on NATO-ally Turkey for its purchase of Russia's S-400 missile defense system, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Monday, December 14. The issue of sanctions under Section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for purchase of Russian arms is of particular interest to New Delhi, which is also in the process of buying the S-400 from Moscow.

"Today's action sends a clear signal that the United States will fully implement CAATSA Section 231 and will not tolerate significant transactions with Russia's defense and intelligence sectors," Mr Pompeo said on Monday.

Sanctions were imposed on Turkey's main defense procurement agency the Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB) for "knowingly engaging in a significant transaction with Rosoboronexport (ROE), Russia's main arms export entity" the office of the US State Department spokesperson said in a statement.

These SSB sanctions comprise of a ban on granting specific U.S. export licenses and authorizations for any goods or technology, a ban on loans or credits by U.S. financial institutions totaling more than \$10 million in any 12-month period, a ban on U.S. Export-Import Bank assistance for exports and mandated U.S. opposition to loans by international financial organizations to SSB.

Additionally, sanctions will include full blocking sanctions and visa restrictions on SSB president Ismail Demir and other officials.

"We very much regret that this has been necessary, and we very much hope that Turkey will work with us to resolve the S-400 problem as quickly as possible," said the State Department's Christopher Ford, who is in charge of security and non-proliferation.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo - File photo

Ayodhya mosque stone to be laid on Republic Day

The blueprint of the mosque to replace the Babri Masjid will be unveiled this Saturday and its foundation laid on Republic Day on the five-acre land allotted for it here, members of the trust formed for its construction said.

"The trust chose January 26 for laying the foundation stone of the Ayodhya mosque as on this day our Constitution came into effect over seven decades ago. Our Constitution is based on pluralism, which is the leitmotif of our mosque project," said Athar Hussain, secretary of the Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF).

The blueprint of the mosque complex, which will include a multi-specialty hospital, a community kitchen and a library, will be unveiled by the IICF on December 19 as the plan for the project has been finalised by its chief architect, Professor SM Akhtar.



Rafale cruise missile range given key boost

Confronted with the prospect of having to fight an adversary each on both the western and eastern fronts, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has got the French missile manufacturer MBDA to recalibrate the software of the SCALP long-range, air-launched cruise missile to ensure the subsonic weapon can hit targets up to 4,000 metres above the sea level, Hindustan Times has learnt.

The missile with a range in excess of 300 kilometres and a 450-kilo warhead is part of the weapon suite on the IAF's Rafale omnirole fighter planes manufactured by France's Dassault Aviation SA.

In simple terms, it means the IAF's Rafale jets can demolish targets located in the mountains and high plateaus at an altitude of 4,000 metres, double the SCALP's previous calibration of 2,000 metres. MBDA has tweaked the software in consultation with the top brass of the IAF, people aware of the development said.

The development comes amid a military standoff between India and China in the eastern Ladakh theatre along the Line of Actual Control where troops of both countries have dug in for a harsh winter.

The next batch of three Rafale fighters are expected to arrive after the 2021 Republic Day, and plans have been made for the aircraft to be refuelled mid-air using the Airbus 330 multi-role transport tankers of the United Arab Emirates air force when they fly towards the Ambala airbase. As of now, seven Rafales are being used for training IAF pilots in France. The complete fleet of 36 aircraft is scheduled to reach India by the end of 2021. One squadron of this potent fighter will be based at Ambala.

Source: HT

COVID recovery rate in India among highest in world: Govt

NEW DELHI (TIP): India's COVID-19 recovery rate is amongst the highest in the world, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday, Dec 17, underlining that countries like the US, Brazil, Russia, and Italy are reporting lesser recovery rates.

With focussed strategy and proactive as well as calibrated measures of the Centre along with the States and UTs, India has sustained a very high COVID-19 recovery rate along with rapidly declining active cases and low mortality rate, it said.

"While the global figure for recovery rate is 70.27 per cent, India is recording 95.31 per cent. The USA, Brazil, Russia, and Italy are reporting lesser recovery rates," the ministry said.

Recoveries outnumbering new cases on a daily basis have ensured a high recovery rate amongst patients.

The total recovered cases are nearing 95 lakh.

"The gap between recoveries and active cases is also increasing consistently and presently stands at 91,67,374," the ministry said.

The rising recoveries have also led to a continuous contraction of India's active caseload which presently stands at 3,22,366 and consists of just 3.24 per cent of India's total infections.

Following the national pursuit, 18 states and UTs have a recovery rate more than the national average.

India has registered 33,291 new recoveries in a span of 24 hours.

The ministry said that 75.63 per cent of these new recovered cases are contributed by ten states and UTs.

With 5,728 persons recovering from COVID-19, Kerala has recorded the maximum number of recoveries. Maharashtra registered another 3,887 daily recoveries while West Bengal registered 2,767 new recoveries.

A total of 24,010 new daily cases were registered in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states and UTs have contributed



78.27 percent of the new infections.

Kerala reported 6,185 cases in a span of 24 hours. West Bengal recorded 2,293 new cases while Chhattisgarh registered 1,661 new cases yesterday.

Of the 355 new fatalities, 79.15 percent have been reported in a span of 24 hours by ten states and UTs.

Maharashtra reported 26.76 per cent of new fatalities. West Bengal saw a fatality count of 46 while Delhi reported 32 new deaths. India has registered a steady decline in the number of daily deaths. The case fatality rate is sustained at 1.45 per cent and is consistently decreasing. India's fatality rate is one of the lowest in the world, the ministry said.

India's total cases have risen to 99,56,558 with 355 new deaths. Total active cases now stand at 3,22,366. The total number of discharged cases.

53% Indian unsure about taking Covid vaccine

More than 50 per cent of India's population has expressed a caution

towards taking the virus vaccine, a new survey revealed.

The GOQii Covid-19- The Way Forward' survey was conducted with approximately 11,000 respondents to understand the openness to take the vaccine, the perception about the government measures to combat Covid-19, the possible future measures including a lockdown.

It revealed that 53 per cent of the population is unsure about taking Covid vaccine.

It added that 43 per cent of them are not sure and will only make a solid opinion post initial results about the effectiveness of the vaccine while 10 per cent are firmly against taking the vaccine as of now.

On an optimistic note, 47 per cent of the respondents said that they are willing to take the vaccine and are actually waiting for it.

Women are more cautious than men with 48 per cent of the male population willing to get vaccinated while the female readiness is around 42 percent.

Ladakh standoff

We expect further talks will help in achieving agreement on resolution: India

NEW DELHI (TIP): India on Thursday, Dec 17, hoped that further discussions with China will help both sides to achieve an agreement on a mutually acceptable solution for ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava told a media briefing the two sides continue to maintain communication through diplomatic and military channels and these discussions have helped both sides to enhance understanding of each other's positions.

Asked about reports that at least one member of the Chinese Community Party was recruited by Indian consulate in Shanghai, Srivastava said he was not in a position to independently verify the information.

"We have noted the media reports in this regard. We are not in a position to



independently verify the data. In certain countries, hiring of local staff requires the approval of local authorities. However, all our missions and posts ensure due security precautions in this regard," he said.

Responding to a media query on the matter, a Chinese embassy spokesperson said the allegation is "groundless".

Srivastava, when asked about the next round of Sino-India military and diplomatic talks on the over seven-month-long border standoff, did not give a direct reply but said India expects that further talks will help in reaching an agreement for complete disengagement of troops in eastern Ladakh.

"It is our expectation that the further discussions will help both sides to achieve an agreement on a mutually acceptable solution for ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western sector and full restoration of peace and tranquillity as early as possible," Srivastava said.

Nearly 50,000 Indian Army troops are deployed in a high state of combat readiness in various mountainous locations in eastern Ladakh in sub-zero conditions as multiple rounds of talks between the two sides have not yielded concrete outcome to resolve the standoff.

Centre encroaching on rights of states: Kejriwal on transfer of 3 IPS officers from WB

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Friday, Dec 18, accused the Centre of blatantly interfering in the West Bengal administration, saying its move to transfer police officers in the state was an "assault" on federalism.

The TMC government in Bengal led by Mamata Banerjee is strongly opposing the Centre's move to send three IPS officers, who were involved in the security of BJP chief JP Nadda during his recent visit to West Bengal, on central deputation.

"I condemn the Centre's blatant interference in the Bengal administration. Encroaching on the rights of states by attempting to transfer police officers to Centre just before elections, is an assault on federalism and an attempt to destabilize," Kejriwal tweeted.

The three IPS officers were responsible for the security of Nadda whose convoy was attacked during his recent visit to the state scheduled for Assembly polls in 2021.

The Centre wants them shifted on account of alleged dereliction of duty that led to the attack on Nadda's convoy in Diamond Harbour constituency of TMC MP and Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee.

India, Bangladesh ink 7 pacts, restore cross-border rail link

India and Bangladesh on Thursday, Dec 17, sealed seven agreements to broaden cooperation, and restored a cross-border rail link snapped in the 1965 war with Pakistan.

The restoration of the Chilahati-Haldibari rail link and signing of the pacts, providing for cooperation in areas of hydrocarbons, agriculture and textiles among others, came at a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina. Modi said the holding of the summit immediately after the celebration of Vijay Diwas (Victory Day) assumed "special significance" and noted that Bangladesh is a key pillar of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.

"Today, when Bangladesh is celebrating 49 years of independence, I pay homage to the soldiers of both countries who laid down their lives," he said. The two leaders are slated to meet three months later to celebrate the birth centenary of Bangladesh's tallest leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The two PMs jointly inaugurated a digital exhibition on Sheikh Mujibur and Mahatma Gandhi. The inauguration of the old rail route between Sealdah and Darjeeling used to be taken by the old Darjeeling Mail. *Source: Tribune India*

SC issues contempt notices to Kunal Kamra and Rachita Taneja

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Supreme Court on Friday, Dec 18, issued show-cause notices to stand up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja, on separate petitions seeking initiation of contempt of court proceedings against them for allegedly denigrating judiciary and judges.

The controversy erupted on November 11, when Kamra posted a series of tweets "mocking" the top court, Chief Justice of India (CJI) SA Bobde and justice DY Chandrachud, following which law student Skand Bajpai wrote to Attorney General KK Venugopal, seeking his consent that contempt proceedings be initiated against Kamra.

On November 12, Bajpai tweeted that the AG had given his consent for initiating contempt proceedings against the comedian and posted a letter from Venugopal which stated the same.

Kamra refused to apologise for his tweets and said they only stated his take on the Supreme Court of India making a "partial" decision. He was referring to the granting of bail to Republic TV editor Arnab Goswami in a 2018 case of abetment to suicide.

"The tweets I recently put out have been found in contempt of court. All that I tweeted was from my view of the Supreme Court of India giving a partial decision in favour of a Prime Time Loudspeaker."

"My view hasn't changed because the silence of the Supreme Court of India on matters of other's personal liberty cannot go uncriticized. I don't intend to retract my tweets or apologise for them. I



believe they speak for themselves," he added.

The AG also granted consent for initiating contempt against cartoonist Rachita Taneja for her tweets depicting the apex court as biased towards the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after Goswami was granted bail.

The first tweet depicts Goswami asking the SC if it knows who his father is. "The clear implication (of the tweet) would be that SC is biased towards the ruling party BJP and would tailor its judgments for benefit of the ruling party," Venugopal had said in his examination of the tweets.

The second tweet depicted the SC as "Sanghi Court of India", an apparent reference to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) with the flag of the BJP in place of the tricolour atop the court building. "The tweet is calculated to undermine public confidence in the independence and impartiality of the Supreme Court of India," Venugopal said.

The cartoonist's third tweet made a reference to the Ayodha title suit judgment delivered by the top court in November last year with the insinuation that this was delivered in favour of BJP in exchange for a favour.

'Time being wasted in discussing uniform': Rahul walks out from defence panel meeting

NEW DELHI (TIP): Members of the Congress party led by former chief Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday, Dec 16, walked out of a meeting of the parliamentary panel on defence.

The Congress MPs walked out with Rahul Gandhi alleging that the Parliamentary Committee on Defence's time was being wasted in discussing armed forces' uniform instead of crucial issues concerning national security like how to better equip the soldiers, PTI quoted sources as saying.

According to sources, during the panel's meeting today, Gandhi wanted to bring up the matter of Chinese aggression and better equipping soldiers deployed along the border in Ladakh. However, panel chairman Jual Oram (BJP) disallowed the Congress MP.

Gandhi had made his wish to speak on the issues known when the panel was



discussing uniforms of the Army, Navy and Air Force in the presence of Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat. The Congress MP said that instead of discussing the armed forces' uniforms, the political leadership ought to take up the issues of national security and discuss how to strengthen the forces who are fighting the Chinese in Ladakh.

With the panel chairman denying an opportunity to Gandhi to speak, the Congress leader chose to walk out of the meeting. Congress members Rajeev

Satav and Revanth Reddy decided to follow their leader.

It may be noted here that the Congress leader has been vocal in his criticism of the Narendra Modi government over the alleged mishandling of the now-months-long border standoff, during which India lost 20 soldiers in the June 15-16 Galwan Valley clash.

He has alleged that China has taken control of Indian territory in Ladakh with the Modi government choosing to close its eyes to the development.

BJP, GNLF join hands for Bengal polls

SILIGURI (TIP): The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) will contest the upcoming West Bengal assembly polls in alliance, the two parties announced on Thursday, Dec 17, a development that may impact the electoral dynamics in the Darjeeling hills of north Bengal.

The BJP, which has won the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat since 2009, was looking for a new ally after Bimal Gurung of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) switched his allegiance to chief minister Mamata Banerjee in October. The GNLF was a dominant force in the region since the 1980s because of its leadership in the movement demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland but lost most of its steam in recent years due to the rise of the GJM.

"We were allies of the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and our electoral partnership will continue," Ajay Edwards, GNLF's Darjeeling branch president, told HT. The BJP confirmed the development. "We will contest the coming polls with GNLF as our ally," Sayantan Basu, Bengal BJP general secretary, said. There are six assembly seats in the Darjeeling hills, of which the Trinamool Congress holds one and the BJP holds none. *Source: HT*

MARTYRDOM OF SAHIBZADAS

The four Sahibzade Khalsa warriors princes were the sons of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the of Sikhs during the Mughal empire (1526–1857). In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh (born Gobind Rai) created the Khalsa, an elite warrior band of initiated devout orthodox Sikhs to protect the innocent from religious persecution. Guru Gobind Singh had three wives and four sons: Ajit, Jujhar, Zorawar, Fateh. All four of his sons were initiated into the Khalsa and all were executed by Mughal forces before the age of 19.

Sikhism honors the illustrious martyred sons of Guru Gobind Singh in the prayer of ardas for their valor and sacrifice as "Char Sahibzade," the four princes of the Khalsa warrior order.

The martyrdom of the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the founder of Sikh religion is one of the most tragic and yet most glorious part of the proud community's history. The Sikhs have a long history of heroic struggle and sacrifice. The 5th Master of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev Ji and the 9th Master of the Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji made supreme sacrifices for humanity, at large. The 10th Master and the Founder of the Khalsa which means pure (that is how the Sikhs came to be known) made sacrifices that stood out in the realms of world history. The martyrdom of the four Sahibzadas, Guru Gobind Singh's sons, has to be seen in that glorious tradition that Sikhs take pride in and derive inspiration from.

The four young princes of genteel birth – The Char Sahibzade – is the term endearingly used for the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh, all of whom died as martyrs while still in their tender age. Their names are reverently preserved in Sikh memory and are recalled every time the Sikh Ardas or prayer of supplication is recited at every religious ceremony in a congregation and privately twice a day (after the



morning and evening prayer) by an individual. Sahibzada Ajit Singh, the eldest son of Guru Gobind Singh, was born to Mata Sundri at Paonta on 26 January 1687. The following year the Guru and his family returned to Anandpur. Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, the second son of Guru Gobind Singh, was born to Mata Jito-ji at Anandpur on 14 March 1691. From a very young age both brothers were taught the religious texts, philosophy and history alongside their training in swordsmanship, archery and horse riding. Soon they grew up into handsome young men, strong, intelligent and natural leaders of men.

In 1699 both Sahibzade Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, 12 years and 8 years of age respectively, received the rites of Khalsa initiation. Soon after the creation of Khalsa on 30 March 1699, Ajit Singh had his first test of skill. A Sikh Sangat coming from Pothohar was attacked and looted by Ranghars on the way, a short distance from Anandpur across the River Sutlej. Guru Gobind Singh sent Sahibzada Ajit Singh, then barely 12 years of age, at the head of about 100 Sikhs to punish the Ranghars and to recover the loot. The following year, 29 August 1700, when the hill Rajas, backed by Imperial troops, attacked Anandpur. Ajit Singh was made responsible for the defense of Taragarh Fort which became the first target of attack. Ajit Singh, assisted by Bhai Ude Singh, a seasoned soldier, repulsed the attack. On 15 March 1701 a column of Sikh devotees coming from Darap area (present Sialkot district) was waylaid by Gujjars and Ranghars. Sahibzada Ajit Singh led a successful expedition against them.

Instructed by his father, on 7 March 1703, he took out 100 horsemen to Bassi, near Hoshiarpur and rescued a young Brahman bride forcibly taken away by the local Pathans. During the prolonged

Continued on Page 17

Sahibzada Ajit Singh (1687–1699)

Birth

Ajit Singh was born on January 26, 1687 CE, according to the Sikh calendar called the Vikram Samvat (SV) on the fourth day of the waxing moon in the month of Magh, SV year 1743. He was Guru Gobind Rai's eldest son, and he was born to the guru's second wife Sundari at Paonta, and at birth named Ajit, meaning "Invincible."

Initiation

Ajit was given the name Singh when he was initiated into the Khalsa at the age of 12 and drank of the immortal nectar along with his family on the first Vaisakhi Day, April 13, 1699, at Anandpur Sahib, where his father took the name Tenth Guru Gobind Singh.

Martyrdom

Ajit Singh was martyred at the age of 18, on December 7, 1705 CE at Chamkaur, after he volunteered to leave the besieged fortress with five Singhs and face the enemy on the battlefield.

Sahibzada Jujhar Singh (1691–1705)

Birth

Sahibzada Jujhar Singh was born on Sunday, March 14, 1691 CE, in the seventh of the month of Chet, SV year 1747. He was the second eldest son of Guru Gobind Rai, was born to his first wife Jito at Anandpur, and at birth named Jujhar, meaning "Warrior."

Initiation

Jujhar was initiated at eight years of age along with his family and given the name Singh at Anandpur Sahib on Vaisakhi, April 13, 1699, when his father Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa order of warrior saints.

Martyrdom

Jujhar Singh was martyred at the age of 14, on December 7, 1705 CE at Chamkaur where he earned the reputation of being likened to a crocodile for his fierceness in battle, when he volunteered to leave the besieged fortress with five of the last Singhs standing, and all achieved immortality on the battlefield.

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh (1696–1699)

Birth

Wednesday, November 17, 1696, on the first day of the waning moon in the month Maghar, SV year 1753. The third son of Guru Gobind Singh, he was born to the Guru's first wife Jito at Anandpur, and at birth named Zorawar, meaning "Brave."

Initiation

Zorawar was given the name Singh at the age of five and was initiated along with his family members Anandpur Sahib in the first Amritsanchar ceremony held on Vaisakhi Day, April 13, 1699.

Martyrdom

Sahibzada Zorawar was martyred at the age of six,

at Sirhind, Fatehgarh, December 12, 1705 CE, on the 13th day of the month of Poh, SV year 1762. Zorawar Singh and his younger brother Fateh Singh were captured with their grandmother Gujri, the mother of Guru Gobind Singh. The sahibzade were imprisoned with their grandmother and put to death by cruel Mughal rulers who attempted to suffocate them inside a brick enclosure.

Sahibzada Fateh Singh (1699–1705)

Birth

Born on Wednesday, February 25, 1699 CE, the 11th day of the month Phagan, SV year 1755, the youngest son of Guru Gobind Rai was born to the guru's first wife Jito at Anandpur, and at birth named Fateh, meaning "Victory."

Initiation

Fateh was given the name Singh when initiated at the age of three along with his family members on Vaisakhi Day April 13, at Anandpur Sahib 1699, where he partook of baptism by the sword, created by his father, and his mother took the name Ajit Kaur, and brought sugar to sweeten the immortal Amrit nectar.

Martyrdom

Fateh was martyred at the age of six on Sirhind Fatehgarh, December 12, 1705 CE, the 13th day of the month of Poh, SV year 1762. Fateh Singh and his brother survived being bricked up alive, but then the order was given for them to be beheaded. Their grandmother Mata Gujri died of shock in the prison tower.

Continued from Page 16

siege of Anandpur, it became necessary to leave the city under the pressure of pursuing enemy. Both the Sahibzade were experienced warriors, strong and fearless, displaying qualities of courage and steadfastness. On the night of 5 December 1705 Guru Gobind Singh gave each of his sons the command of a band of brave Sikhs to wade through the flooded Sarsa river on horseback and head towards the Fort of Chamkaur. Amidst the fierce fighting in the darkness of night and the hazardous long journey the Guru and the Sikhs, together with his family and both the elder Sahibzade in command of their bands, made their way to Chamkaur.

Further reduced in numbers by casualties at the hands of the enemy they reached Chamkaur by nightfall on 6 December 1705 and took up position in the Garhi – high walled fortified house. The enemy, with extra reinforcements from Malerkotla and Sirhind and from among local Ranghars and Gujjars, threw a tight ring around the fort of Chamkaur. An unequal but grim battle commenced with the dawn of 7 December 1705 – in the words of Guru Gobind Singh's Zafarnama – 'a mere forty defying a million'. The Sikhs, after they had exhausted the meager stock of ammunition and arrows, made sally in batches of five to engage the encircling enemy with sword and spear. Sahibzada Ajit Singh led one of the sallies and laid down his life fighting in the bloody battle, followed by his younger brother Sahibzada Jujhar Singh who led the next sally. Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, 18 and 14 years old respectively, who like the other brave Sikhs, fell fighting heroically. The valour displayed by the young sons of Guru Gobind Singh has been sympathetically and vividly narrated in the poems of a devout Muslim, Allahyar Khan Jogi.

Today Gurdwara Qatalgarh Sahib (Shahid Ganj) is the main shrine at Chamkaur. This marks the site where the most fierce hand-to-hand combat took place on 7 December 1705 between the Mughal army and a handful of brave Sikhs, including Sahibzade Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, and three of the original Panj Piare (Guru's Five Beloved ones). Unfortunately, during the crossing of the flooded river Sarsa, Mata Gujri and the two younger Sahibzade Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, aged 9 and 7 years respectively, together with their cook, Gangu, were separated from the Guru and the Sikhs. Seizing the opportunity of a reward Gangu spied on them and handed them over to the enemy. Both the young Sahibzade were executed on 12 December 1705 in Sirhind. Sahibzada Zorawar Singh was born on 17 November 1696 and Sahibzada Fateh Singh on 25 February 1699. After the tragic death of their mother Mata Jito-ji (5 Dec 1700) they were brought up under the care of their grandmother Mata Gujri Ji.

Both the princes were closely attached to their grandmother. Mata Gujri took charge of both the princes as the column moved out of Anandpur. As Guru Gobind Singh evacuated Anandpur on the night of 5 December 1705, he was pursued by the host. In front ran the river Sarsa, swollen with rain water. Under cover of a quick rearguard action fought on the river bank, the Guru, his brave Sikhs and his family succeeded in crossing the Sarsa. Unfortunately, in the commotion of confused cries in the dark, Mata Gujri and the two younger Sahibzade, along with their cook, Gangu, were separated



from the Guru and his band. Not knowing where to go Gangu offered to shelter them at his house in village Kheri, now known as Saheri, near Morinda. The journey being hazardous and dark they reached Kheri the following night. Tired and hungry they were asked to rest in the attic. But Gangu proved deceitful. During the night Gangu stole Mata Gujri's saddlebag containing cash and valuables. In the hope of a reward from the government he spied on them. With the help of the village headman he betrayed

them to Jani Khan and Mani Khan, the Ranghar officials of Morinda.

The latter took Mata Gujri and the two Sahibzade into custody and in the morning dispatched them to Sirhind where they were confined in the Cold Tower – Thanda Burj – of the Fort. On the morning of 9 December 1705 Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, aged 9 and 7 respectively, were summoned before the faujdar, Nawab Wazir Khan. Wazir Khan tried to lure the Sahibzade to embrace Islam with promises of riches and

honors. But the brave and fearless sons of Guru Gobind Singh spurned the suggestion. He then threatened them with death but they remained undaunted. Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, a high ranking officer and chief of Malerkotla, who was also present in the court, intervened for the innocent children to be spared their lives; to be given some more time to ponder over the suggestion to convert. As a result the two Sahibzade spent another two days of severe winter in their grandmother's lap in the Cold Tower. Still adamant as ever, on 11 December 1705 Nawab Wazir Khan ordered their death by bricking them alive. Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan pleaded against the death sentence on the grounds that the boys were too young to be given such a harsh penalty.

They could not, in any case, be held responsible for the actions of their father. As Wazir Khan began to waver at the just reproof of his peer, Suchchanand put in a remark "The progeny of a serpent shall grow up as serpents, and should therefore be shown no mercy." Wazir Khan was encouraged by these words and thereupon reiterated his order for the children to be bricked alive in a wall. By Divine Will, as the masonry around their tender bodies reached chest high, it crumbled. Wazir Khan's anger at this failure ordered the princes back to the Cold Tower for another night. The next day, 12 December 1705, the Sahibzade were once again offered the choice to convert to Islam or face death by execution. The brave Sahibzade chose the latter and were executed. The aged Mata Gujri, who had all along been kept in the Cold Tower, only a short distance away, breathed her last as the news of the execution reached her ears. After the death of Mata Gujri and the two Sahibzade, Seth Todar Mall, a wealthy merchant and an influential citizen of Sirhind, made arrangements to perform the last rites. But no one would give him a patch of land in the locality to be used as cremation ground. Then one Chandhari Atta, a local resident, agreed to sell him a small plot.

He stipulated that Todar Mall could take only as much land as he could cover with gold nuggets, mohran. The Seth produced the mohran and bought the piece of land he needed. After the cremation a Sikh, Jodh Singh, of village Attevali buried the ashes. Sirhind suffered a full fury of Sikh ire when Banda Singh Bahadur marched upon it with his daring host. Wazir Khan was killed. Diwan Suchchanand, who explicitly championed the penalty laid upon the young Sahibzade, was captured and killed. Sirhind and the Fort were razed to the ground. A memorial was erected marking the spot where the two princes were executed. In 1764 Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala built the Gurdwara Fatehgarh on the site and ordered to search for and determine the exact spot where the three were cremated. At the spot, in 1843, the Gurdwara Joti Sarup was built. In 1888 Giani Thakar Singh started the annual Jor-Mela (fair) held during the last week in December to commemorate the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's mother, Mata Gujri Ji, and his two sons Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. A century later, in 1944, Maharaja Yadavinder Singh set up a committee for the improvement of Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib and Gurdwara Joti Sarup Sahib. Today Gurdwara Fatehgarh, with all the affiliated shrines, is administered directly by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

CHRISTMAS



Christmas Day, on December 25, is one of the most festive Christian holidays in many countries around the world. It celebrates Jesus' birth.

It is that time of the year again! You can feel it in the air. Around mid-December every year, the atmosphere slowly starts changing from mundane to festive. Those who live away from their family start packing their bags to get back home and those who can't make it start feeling nostalgic thinking about all the happy times. Home decorations take full steam and so does shopping for new clothes and presents for loved ones. Kids begin to get excited about a visit from a certain jolly saint dressed in red. No matter where you go, you get a hint that Christmas is just round the corner. Christmas is undoubtedly the world's biggest festival. It is celebrated with a lot of zest and enthusiasm all around the globe. After a year full of hard work, ups and downs, and the many challenges life brings with it, this is the time when people begin to forget all their worries and feel good and grateful for all that they have. Celebrated on a wide scale on December 25 to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, it is difficult to escape the Christmas festivities wherever you are in the world. It is a public holiday across most countries in the world.

While Christmas is celebrated on December 25 to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, the fact is that Jesus' birth date is actually unknown. According to the New Testament, Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem when Joseph and Mary took shelter there as there were no rooms available at the inn. Angels then proclaimed this news to shepherds who then disseminated the message of Christ's birth furthermore. Even though the date of the birth is not mentioned in the Bible, by the early to mid 4th century, the Western Christian Church placed Christmas on December 25 and the East slowly came to adopt the same date. Today, Christmas is commonly celebrated on December 25 as per the Gregorian calendar although some Eastern Christian Churches still follow the older Julian calendar, according to which Christmas date corresponds to January 7 in the Gregorian calendar. This day happens to fall one day after the Western Christian Church celebrates Epiphany. So, in order to be universal, the Church declared the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany to be one unified festal cycle thus giving significance to both the Western and Eastern dates of Christmas.

There are several hypotheses on why December 25 could have been chosen as the date for Christmas. The major and commonly accepted ones are that December 25 was the date of the winter solstice on the Roman calendar; it was about nine months after March 25, the date of the vernal equinox and a date linked to the conception of Jesus; and that it was the date of a Roman pagan festival in honor of the Sun god Sol Invictus. The winter solstice hypothesis gathered steam from Jesus' title as the 'Sun of righteousness'. It came to be believed that Jesus chose the shortest day of the year for his birth as he was the light of the world and the days after his birth kept increasing in length. The Calculation hypothesis proposed by French writer Louis Duchesne in 1889 is based on the celebration of Annunciation on March 25 which is the traditional date of equinox. Annunciation is the Christian celebration of the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. According to the the calculation hypotheses, an earlier holiday held on March 25 became associated with the incarnation thus making December 25 (nine months later) the day of Christmas. The third hypothesis called the 'history of religions' hypothesis suggests that December 25 was the date selected as Christmas in order to appropriate other Roman festivities held in honor of the Sun god Sol Invictus. In 1743, German Protestant Paul Ernst Jablonski argued that Christmas was placed on December 25 in order to correspond with the Roman solar holiday Dies Natalis Solis Invicti. He inferred that Christmas was therefore a paganization. As a counter



argument, Christians affirmed that, on the contrary, the Emperor Aurelian instituted the holiday of the Dies Natalis Solis Invicti in 274 as an attempt to give a pagan significance to an important date which had already gained prominence for Christians in Rome. A manuscript of a work by 12th-century Syrian bishop Jacob Bar-Salibi mentions that "It was a custom of the Pagans to celebrate on the same 25 December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and revelries the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day."

Santa Claus

Santa Claus, also known as Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, Saint Nick, Kris Kringle, or simply Santa, is a



legendary character originating in Western Christian culture who is said to bring gifts to the homes of well-behaved children on the night of Christmas Eve (24 December) or during the early morning hours of Christmas Day (25 December) and coal to naughty kids.

The modern character of Santa Claus was based on traditions surrounding the historical Saint Nicholas (a fourth-century Greek bishop and gift-giver of Myra), the British figure of Father Christmas, and the Dutch figure of Sinterklaas (himself also based on Saint Nicholas). Some maintain Santa Claus also absorbed elements of the Germanic deity Wodan, who was associated with the pagan midwinter event of Yule and led the Wild Hunt, a ghostly procession through the sky. Santa Claus is generally depicted as a portly, jolly, white-bearded man—sometimes with spectacles—wearing a red coat with white fur collar and cuffs, white-fur-cuffed red trousers, red hat with white fur, and black leather belt and boots and carrying a bag full of gifts for children. This image became popular in the United States and Canada in the 19th century due to the significant influence of the 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Caricaturist and political cartoonist Thomas Nast also played a role in the creation of Santa's image. This image has been maintained and reinforced through song, radio, television, children's books, films, and advertising.

Christmas Tree

The evergreen fir tree has traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals (pagan and Christian) for thousands of years. Pagans used branches of it to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as it made them think of the spring to come. The Romans used Fir Trees to decorate their temples at the festival of Saturnalia. Christians use it as a sign of everlasting life with God.

Nobody is really sure when Fir trees were first used as Christmas trees. It probably began about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe. Many early Christmas Trees seem to have been hung upside down from the ceiling using chains (hung from chandeliers/lighting hooks).

Other early Christmas Trees, across many parts of northern Europe, were cherry or hawthorn plants (or a branch of the plant) that were put into pots and brought inside so they would hopefully flower at Christmas time. If you couldn't afford a real plant, people made pyramids of woods and they were decorated to look like a tree with paper, apples and candles. Sometimes they were carried around from house to house, rather than being displayed in a home.

Holiday Traditions in the U.S.



In the U.S., we refer to the months of November and December as "the holiday season" because of the major holidays celebrated from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. The United States is a nation of many cultures that has adopted holiday customs from across the world, and we've developed a few of our own that stand out. Here's a handy guide to those traditions for international students in the U.S.

> BLACK FRIDAY

You may have seen it on TV - the day after Thanksgiving in the U.S., crowds gather at stores across the country in the early hours of the morning in search of the best discounts on presents for the holidays. The event got its name from a phrase used in business - "in the black" - which means that a company has made a profit.

> DRINKING EGGNOG

Eggnog is a sweet seasonal drink that has been popular around the holidays in the U.S. since its colonial days. The drink consists of milk, cream, sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg, and can be made with or without egg whites and rum/whiskey. While the drink originated in England, it's a treat reserved just for the holidays in the States.

> DECORATING HOUSES WITH LIGHTS



It's common to see houses decorated with everything from white lights to blow-up decorations across the country. Going beyond public parks and city squares, American families and neighbors (like this city block in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) often see their impressive house decorations as a point of pride and cause for bragging rights.

> EATING PUMPKIN DESSERTS

You may have heard the phrase, "as American as apple pie." It may be even more appropriate to say so for pumpkin pie. Every autumn in the U.S., farmers harvest pumpkins that bakeries and families turn into a variety of holiday treats between Halloween and Christmas. The most famous of these is pumpkin pie, a sweet and hearty dessert typically enjoyed with family after Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. Try a slice this year!



WATCHING THE BALL DROP ON NEW YEAR'S EVE IN NEW YORK



For over 100 years every New Year's Eve, thousands of tourists flock to Times Square in New York City to witness "the Ball drop." A 12-foot ball of Waterford crystals that weighs over 5,000 kg descends from the top of One Times Square as people in the U.S. count down to the new year. If you can't make it to New York to see it yourself, you can watch it on TV.

> THE MUMMERS PARADE

The Mummers Parade is thought to be the oldest folk festival in the U.S. The parade is a unique celebration on New Year's Day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and consists of a number of string bands who play music and wear homemade elaborate costumes to ring in the new year.

> TIME OFF IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY

Most U.S. schools and many businesses are closed between Christmas and New Year's Day so families can spend time together. For college students in the U.S., the holidays mean it's time for winter break, which usually lasts from mid-December to mid-January. Here's how you can spend your month off.

> MIXING CULTURAL TRADITIONS

The U.S. is home to people from all over the world, and holiday celebrations are no different.

Happy Holidays!

(The author is the Marketing Coordinator for International Affairs at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

(Source: [www.studyusa.com](https://www.studyusa.com/en/a/1812/a-guide-to-holiday-traditions-in-the-u-s))

DISHA PATANI TAKES A TRIP TO DUBAI WITH TIGER & HIS FAMILY

It is fairly evident that Disha Patani is quite close to rumoured boyfriend Tiger Shroff's family. She is often seen hanging with his family members, including Tiger's mom Ayesha and sister Krishna.

Now, Disha has reportedly accompanied Tiger, his sister Krishna as well as mother Ayesha Shroff on a trip to Dubai. Though none of them have posted a picture together, they shared individual photos and videos from the same hotel on their Instagram stories.

They are in Dubai for an event of Krishna and Tiger's venture Matrix Fight Night (MFN), reported India Today.

Disha posted a picture of a cake designed in the form of a purse. The Bharat actress tagged the hotel and wrote, "Thanks for the cutest cake (sic)."

Krishna posted several videos on her Instagram stories giving a glimpse from her hotel in Dubai. In the videos, she is seen wearing a black dress for an event. She also shared videos from the event of MFN.

Tiger Shroff posted a video on his Instagram stories informing his fans that he would be going live for MFN.

Disha finished shooting for Salman Khan's Radhe last month. Directed by Prabhudheva, Radhe also stars Randeep Hooda, Jackie Shroff, Megha Akash and Zarina Wahab in important roles. Disha will also feature in Ekta Kapoor's film KTina. She also has Ek Villain 2 coming up with Tara Sutaria and John Abraham. Tiger and Disha will soon be seen in a cold drink commercial.



Jacqueline flaunts washboard abs with pop philosophy

Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez flaunts a toned midriff in a new picture she shared on social media, and fans are thrilled. Along with the picture, she has shared some quick pop philosophy about human nature, too.

Jacqueline posted the picture on Instagram, where she is seen dressed in black gym wear. A huge mirror catches her reflection.

"They tell you to be yourself and then they judge you," she wrote alongside the image.

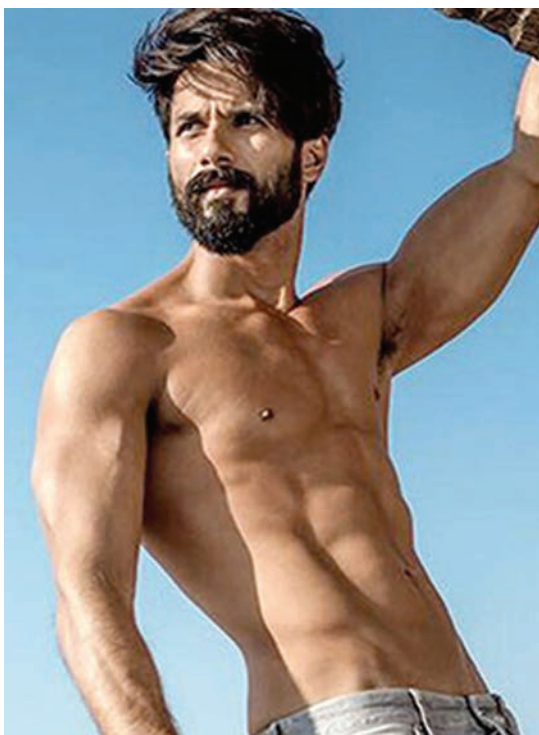
Jacqueline will be seen in films such as Bhoot Police, Bachchan Pandey and Kick 2.

She recently completed a long outdoor schedule for the horror comedy Bhoot Comedy in locations across Himachal Pradesh, along with the rest of the cast including co-stars Saif Ali Khan, Yami Gautam and Arjun Kapoor.

Shahid Kapoor wraps Jersey filming

Actor Shahid Kapoor and the team of his upcoming film, Jersey, have wrapped its shoot. The actor took to Instagram to share a picture.

He wrote: "It's a film wrap on #jersey 47 days of shoot during covid. Just unbelievable. I am so proud of the entire team. It's nothing short of a miracle. I want to thank each and every one from the unit for coming to set every day, putting themselves at risk and doing what we all love doing. Telling stories that touch hearts and make a difference. Jersey is a story that speaks of a Phoenix rising from the ashes. The triumph of an indomitable spirit. If there was ever a time I could connect with the underlying spirit of a film this was it. As we all fight through this pandemic. Let's always remember. This shall pass too. Here's to my best filmmaking experience yet. Here's to Jersey ... we shall overcome !!!! @gowtamnaidu @mrunalofficial2016 @geethaarts @amanthegill @srivenkateshwarareactions" The picture showed Shahid, standing with his back to the camera, inside a flood-lit stadium.



Arshad Warsi: I hug all the people who offer me non-funny roles

Known for being one of the top funny men in Bollywood, Arshad Warsi believes he has a lot more than just his impeccable comic timing to offer. While we have seen and adored him in comic roles in countless movies, Arshad Warsi is as powerful an actor when it comes to serious films as well. In this exclusive interview with mid-day.com's Parul Sharma, Warsi opens on life during lockdown, how he believes he's been under-utilised, and his latest release, Durgamati.

You know you can hold an easy conversation with a celebrity when the first thing you hear is their tinkling laughter when you compliment them. Arshad Warsi's easygoing nature shone through when he laughingly thanked his interviewer for calling him 'incredible', which he quite frankly is.

Then came the million dollar question - how did the lockdown treat him? Arshad Warsi shares, "You know, all the people who have suffered during the lockdown are going to hate me for saying this, I'm sorry, but I had a great time. I enjoyed myself. I loved being home, got to be with my kids. Good food was being cooked, I was chilling and I got to paint again. I was fine."





Lana Del Rey is engaged!

Lana Del Rey is reportedly engaged to Clayton Johnson. The 35-year-old singer is believed to have gotten engaged to her new beau Clayton after just months of dating, after a source reportedly confirmed the news to Us Weekly magazine this week.

Us Weekly claims to have been told the good news on Tuesday (15.12.20), following engagement speculation that has been circling Lana since the beginning of this week, when she was spotted wearing a ring on her finger during an appearance on 'The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon'.

The 'Summertime Sadness' singer confirmed her romance with Clayton on Instagram back in August, and the couple have been regularly posting snaps of each other ever since.

Lana's new romance comes after she split from 'Live PD' star Sean "Sticks" Larkin earlier this year, with the 46-year-old officer confirming their split in March.

He said at the time: "Right now, we're just friends. We still talk and whatnot, we just have busy schedules right now."

KYLIE JENNER TOPS FORBES 2020 LIST FOR HIGHEST-PAID CELEBRITIES

American media personality and reality TV star Kylie Jenner has been crowned the highest-paid celebrity of 2020 by Forbes.

As per E! News, the top-earning stars in the world earned a combined of USD 6.1 billion in 2020 with Kylie Jenner and Kanye West at the top of the list. Setting aside Kylie's history with Forbes, the financial experts there calculated her earning this year to be at USD 590 million after she sold a majority of her beauty brand's stake to Coty Inc.

Ranked at No. 2, on the list by making USD 170 million was American rapper and record producer Kanye West, who is also coincidentally Kylie's brother-in-law. The aspiring politician has his Adidas partnership to thank for this hefty payday.

According to E! News, in addition to Tyler Perry, Howard Stern, and Dwayne Johnson, A-lister athletes like Roger Federer, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Neymar helped round out the top 10.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the entertainment industry, this year's combined total of USD 6.1 billion was USD 200 million lesser than that of 2019.



Paris Hilton: Carter Reum is my 'Christmas wish'

Paris Hilton has praised her boyfriend Carter Reum as her "Christmas wish".

The 39-year-old businesswoman and socialite took to social media over the weekend to gush over her beau, also 39, in a sweet post that marked the start of the festive season.

Paris posted a video set to Mariah Carey's 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' in which she and Carter shared a sweet kiss, and captioned it: "My Christmas wish came true! Celebrating my favorite holiday with my favorite person in the world! (sic)"

The 'Simple Life' star is no stranger to professing her love for Carter on social media, as she previously said she's "never felt so close to another person".

Earlier this month, she wrote: "Happy 1 year Anniversary my love! I love that we celebrate our love every month! I can't believe it's only been a year. It feels like I've been with you a lifetime! I have never felt so close to another



person in my life. And that's because you're the first one who tore down the walls I built around my heart and opened up my heart in a way that I didn't know was possible. I truly believe that we were custom-made for each other and meant to be.

'ZOMBIE' ANGELINA JOLIE GETS 10 YEARS OF JAIL IN IRAN

Iranian social media influencer Fatemeh Khishvand, more popular as actor Angelina Jolie's lookalike, has been sentenced to 10 years in jail for 'disrespecting the Islamic Republic and corrupting the young people', reported the Guardian. Known on Instagram as Sahar Tabar, she made headlines in the year 2017 after sharing photos on social media in which she looked like the distorted version of Jolie. She was also deemed as 'zombie' Angelina Jolie for her shocking makeover. However, she later revealed in an interview that she would just paint her face in that manner to use art to express herself.

The 19-year-old influencer has been charged with "blasphemy, inciting violence, gaining income through inappropriate means, and encouraging youths to corruption," reported the daily. Her lawyers, however, have appealed to the court to consider her minor age at the time the offences were said to have been committed as the factor to provide her some relief.



FOMAA Leadership ensures endorsement to Immigration Bill HR1044 from NY State Senator Kevin Thomas, and support from Senator Chuck Schumer

BY ANIL AUGUSTINE, ATLANTA GA

NEW YORK (TIP): On this historic era of immigration momentum in American contemporary times, the congressional bill HR.1044/S.386 being at the verge of success as well the probable uncertainties there in; FOMAA L.i.Fe - the advocacy initiative of Malayalee diaspora, invoked and earned promises of support from NY State Senator Hon. Kevin Thomas.

Sen. Kevin, heartily appreciated the audacity and vision of Malayalee diaspora, patriotically coming forward assisting and reaching out to brethren suffering the agony of systemic abuse - GC backlog. It is noteworthy that FOMAA is the only diaspora Federal Association to have an advocacy initiative favoring this worthy a cause affirmatively impacting future Americans as well the Citizens mutually. Sen. Kevin assertively noted that we all are American immigrants; the only difference might be the time we or our forefathers are blessed in reaching the shores of this blessed land!

FOMAA leadership apprised Hon. Senator about the challenges faced by legitimate immigrants under the existing legacy law with Nationality based quota system aka Country Quota in Employment Based immigration. This law yields extremely length wait-time in obtaining Green Cards (GC), the permanent residency pathway to USA resulting indescribable agony and inequality among licit immigrants from large populous nations in both Family Based and Employment Based immigration to USA. It's worthwhile noting that there is no Country Quota while issuing work visas - the only legitimate pathway for any merited skilled professional to immigrate USA.

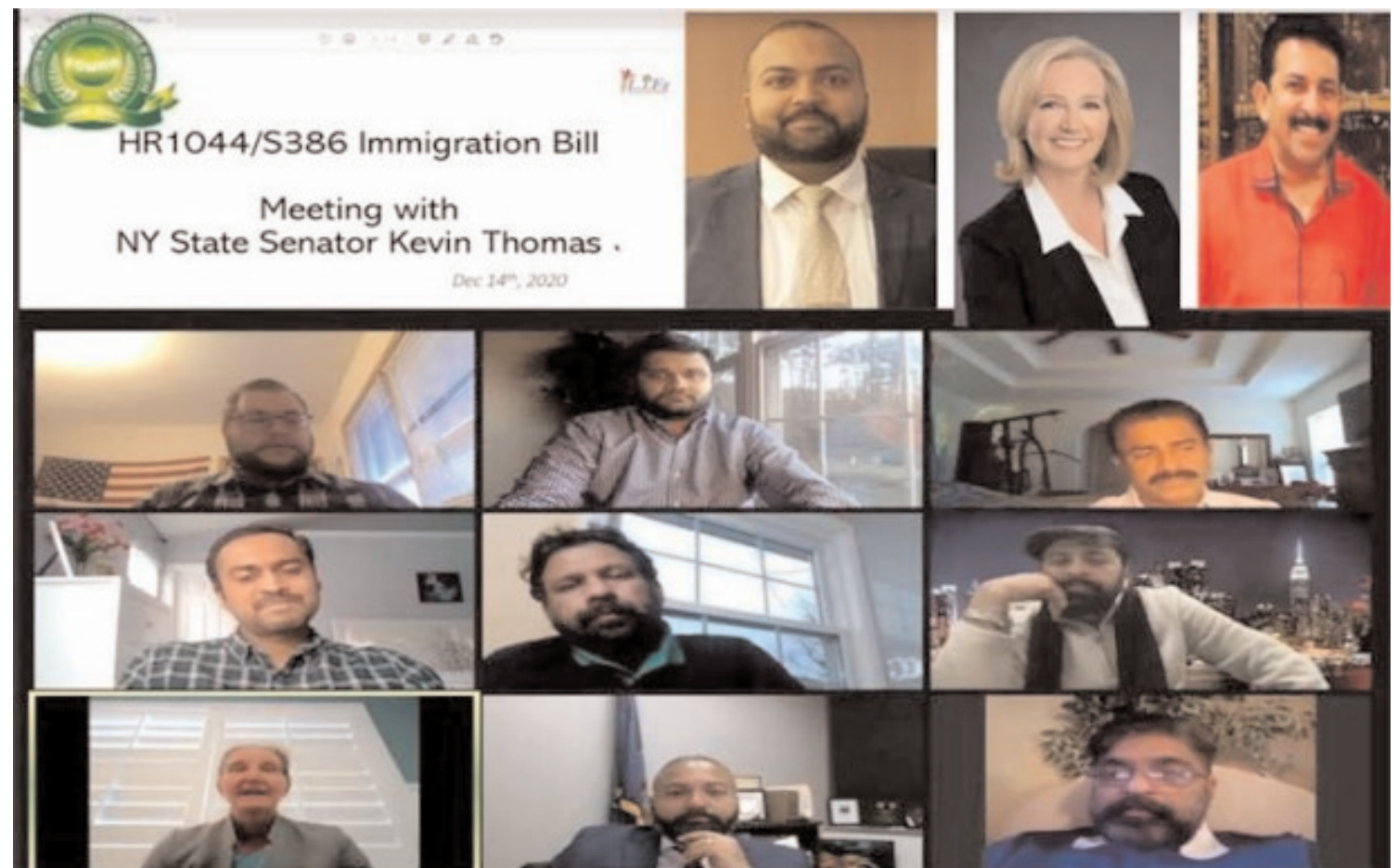
For Indians, the USCIS statistics denotes a grueling wait-time of 50 to 170 years, for anyone applying for GC as of this day; depending upon the Employment Category Employer applies the GC application. India being the largest credentialed talent-pool for American knowledge, Health, Education and Technology industry workforce and proven entrepreneurial success. Unduly advantaged with the Country Quota rule, folks from other countries (ROW) possess GC swiftly (6 months). In this era where Merit, Skill & credentials matters, no-one should be accounted based on country of birth. The GC delays results impacts dependent children aging-out at 21years; primary applicants unable change jobs during the GC process time and inability to visit friends & family back in India.

Honorable Congresswomen Zoe Lofgren, (D) of CA introduced the Bill HR.1044 "Fairness for the High-Skilled Immigrants act of 2019". This bipartisan bill had 116 original cosponsors, further yielded to a total 311 Hon. Congressmen sponsoring it and the bill passed the US

House with a historic 365 'yea' to a 65 "Nay" vote obtaining a historic mandate of success in July 2019.

FOMAA L.i.Fe. General Secretary Mr. Girish Sashankshekar, National Coordinator Mr. Vishakh Cherian

(L.i.Fe.) debuted with the National Immigration Convention, on November 2019. This bipartisan diaspora event was



Participants - Photo / Courtesy Getphoto

The bill is sponsored in the Senate by Honorable Senator Mike Lee, (R) of UT, earned 14 original cosponsors to a total of 36. (Vice President Elect Hon. Sen. Kamala Harris is one of the original cosponsors of S.386). This bill was passed the Senate with unanimous consent on this December 2nd, however, will have to go back to the House for reconciliation on the amendments incorporated by Hon. Senators Durbin, IL and Scott, FL, that the bill gets approval signed by President Trump, for it to becoming the law.

The current congressional term ends by January 3rd, 2021; however, December 18th being the last day for Congress to be in session, essentially the US House and Senate should approve the bill by this week. Towards accomplishing and avoiding uncomfortable circumstances Hon. Sen. Lee, and Hon. Rep. Lofgren, the sponsors of the bill in the respective chambers are said to be efforting to attach the bill to the Omnibus spending Bill by reconciling the stipulations.

For the success of HR.1044/S/386 FOMAA earnestly collaborated with many South-Asian diaspora associations as well exerted its advocacy efforts reaching out to Honorable leaders of both the chambers of law. Specifically obtaining the goodwill support of Hon. Senior Senator Chuck Schumer, being critical FOMAA Leadership liaison with Hon. Sen. Kevin Thomas, of NY State. FOMAA President Mr. Aniyam George, Joint Treasurer Mr. Biju Thonikadavil,

attended the Zoom'inar yesterday.

Eminent Esq. Stephanie Scarborough, FOMAA endorsed legal counsel candidly apprised the socio-legal implications and positive impacts of this bill affirmatively. Further Mr. Girish S. elaborated on to the personal and individual perspectives of the backlogged families. Esq. Scarborough expressed her confidence that if Sen. Kevin, succeeds convincing Sen. Schumer, that could be of much pleasant outcome, sooner. Herewith FOMAA gratefully recognize the immense professional goodwill value Esq. Scarborough is enabling FOMAA members vide timely consultations, virtual updates and broadcasts informing contemporary affairs on US immigration. <https://scarboroughlaw.com/>

Mr. Jose Abraham, FOMAA General Secretary of the previous service term, and the L.i.Fe Founding Board Director was instrumental as well assumed the primary advocacy personnel in liaising with Mr. Ajith Kochukudiyil Abraham, the Counsel of Hon. Sen. Kevin Thomas.

Critical functions of FOMAA L.i.Fe are administrated by Mr. Sam Anto (Chairman), Mrs. Smitha Thomas (Chairperson), Mr. Sudheep Nair (Jt. Sectary), Mr. Anil Augustine (PR), Mr. Babloo Chacko and Baiju Varghese (FOMAA LIFE Regional V.P).

Appreciably instituted during the service term 2018 - 2020 leadership, FOMAA Legal Immigration Forum

graced by Eminent InfoTech Scientist Dr. Sam Pitroda, as the Keynote speaker and Hon. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D) IL, Republican Party IL, State Chairman Mr. Tim Schneider, and many State Rep and Senators from IL. Chaired by Mr. Subash George, then FOMAA Regional delegate, this event was a definite milestone of the journey of the S.386 during the grueling yearlong hold by Hon. Senator Dick Durbin.

National President Mr. Aniyam George leads a consortium of diaspora associations in taking up this cause to the next level. Recently along with Immigration Forum an advocacy initiative led by Mr. Venkatram (Ven) Reddy of Chicago, a mass appeal effort cosigned by 22 expat associations was submitted to all the 435 Hon. Representative Leaders of the US House, favoring and representing this burning cause of our diaspora. FOMAA having a devoted immigration advocacy platform was honored representing Malayalee diaspora.

The FOMAA National Cabinet officials Mr. T. Unnikrishnan (General Secretary), Mr. Thomas T. Oommen (Treasurer), Mr. Pradeep Nair (Vice President), Mr. Jose Manakattu (Jt. Secretary), Mr. Biju Thonikadavil (L.i.Fe. Executive Board officio & FOMAA Jt. Treasurer) expressed wholehearted support and appreciations to this timely perspective.

HOLIDAY CHEER

BY MABEL PAIS



*Pattern Of Love: A beautiful true story about caring
Photo / Paula Fellingham*

PATTERN OF LOVE

BY JACK SMITH

I didn't question Timmy, age nine, or his seven-year-old brother Billy, about the brown wrapping paper they passed back and forth between them as we visited each store.

Every year at Christmas time, our Service Club takes the children from poor families in our town on a personally conducted shopping tour. I was assigned Timmy and Billy, whose father was out of work. After giving them the allotted \$4 each, we began our trip. At different stores I made suggestions, but always their answer was a solemn shake of the head, no. Finally I asked, "Where would you suggest we look?"

"Could we go to a shoe store, Sir?" answered Timmy. "We'd like a pair of shoes for our Daddy so he can go to work."

In the shoe store the clerk asked what the boys wanted. Out came the brown paper. "We want a pair of work shoes to fit this foot," they said.

Billy explained that it was a pattern of their Daddy's foot. They had drawn it while he was asleep in a chair.

The clerk held the paper against a measuring stick, then walked away. Soon he returned with an open box. "Will these do?" he asked.

Timmy and Billy handled the shoes with great eagerness. "How much do they cost?" asked Billy. Then Timmy saw the price on the box. "They're \$16.95," he said in dismay. "We only have \$8."

I looked at the clerk and he cleared his throat. "That's the regular price," he said, "but they're on sale - \$3.98 - today only."

Then, with shoes happily in hand, the boys bought gifts for their mother and two little sisters. Not once did they think of themselves.

The day after Christmas the boy's father stopped me on the street. The new shoes were on his feet and gratitude was in his eyes. "I just thank God for people who care," he said.

"And I thank God for your two sons." I replied. "They taught me more about Christmas in one evening than I had learned in a lifetime."

May love fill your heart and your home during this blessed holiday season!



H 2: Joshua Bell - Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

Joshua Bell with Pianist Jeremy Denk

Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 3PM EST

Joshua Bell is "a thoroughly serious, intelligent musician" (Financial Times, London ... Jeremy Denk) "played with tremendous verve and contagious brilliance" (The Los Angeles Times)

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) presents internationally acclaimed violinist Joshua Bell with Pianist Jeremy Denk on Saturday, December 19, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

These friends, who teamed on the recording "For the Love of Brahms" (Sony Classical) to critical acclaim in 2016, plan an emotionally engaging program for the NJPAC audience. The afternoon concert will showcase Mendelssohn's Piano Trio No. 1, an immediate success for its composer and featuring a passionate finale; Shostakovich's elegiac Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, a World War II-era lamentation; the expressive Trio élégiaque No. 1, written by Rachmaninoff at the age of 19, and the poetically seductive Piano Trio in A minor by Ravel.

Tickets :

For tickets, follow the link: njpac.org/event/joshua-bell-with-pianist-jeremy-denk



The Griswolds - Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

CHEVY CHASE & BEVERLY D'ANGELO

Saturday, December 19, 2020 Live on Zoom @ 8PM

Switch on the Christmas lights and join Chevy Chase (Clark Griswold) and Beverly D'Angelo (Ellen Griswold) for this online salute to the holiday classic, 'National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.' Expect the unexpected as these legends share a no-holds-barred trip down memory lane and unveil the behind-the-scenes secrets of the 'Vacation' film franchise. They'll also answer questions from the virtual audience during the live Q&A. So gather the family and cozy up on the couch as NJPAC streams the Griswolds directly to your living room for a virtual holiday celebration. Chestnuts and eggnog recommended!

Upgrade to VIP

TREAT yourself to an upgraded experience when you add on the VIP option. VIP ticket holders will have the opportunity to engage in a one-minute one-one video chat with Chevy and Beverly. The capacity for this experience is extremely limited and must be purchased in advance.

Tickets

For Tickets, visit passportshows.com/checkout2/cv-checkout-1219208

LEDISI

Friday, December 18, 2020 at 9 p.m. EST

Join NJPAC for a soulful live-stream concert with 'Ledisi: Live at the Troubadour.' The 13-time GRAMMY-nominated R&B powerhouse will perform songs from her new album, "The Wild Card," and favorites that span her career.

Ledisi is a chart-topping singer-songwriter known for infusing her signature R&B vocals with a distinctly jazzy touch. Ledisi also lent her talent to the acclaimed 2014 film Selma, in which she portrayed American music icon, Mahalia Jackson. Ledisi is not only a singer and actress, but she's also an author, playwright, film producer, and now CEO of her record label 'Listen Back Entertainment/BMG.'

For Tickets, follow the link boxoffice.mandolin.com/collections/ledisi-live-at-the-troubadour?oid=5&affid=16

KEEPING SAFE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Message from John Screiber, President & CEO of NJPAC

Thank you so much for joining us (Friday, December 11, 2020) for our virtual NJPAC Business Partners Roundtable @ Home with Governor Phil Murphy.

I hope that you were as engaged as I was by the Governor's frank and detailed assessment of how the state has managed the current health crisis so far, the precautions we all still need to take and, happily, the very good news about vaccines and other assistance that should arrive in our state in a matter of weeks.

I was particularly moved by the Governor's commitment to "never let this get impersonal" and his practice of reaching out to speak to teachers, business owners and especially the families of those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 to guide him as he makes the incredibly difficult and complex decisions involved in managing the pandemic.

His compassion, and his insistence on "checking partisan bias at the door" to work with leaders across the country to establish best practices for handling this unprecedented challenge, were both truly inspirational.

Until then, everyone here at NJPAC joins me in wishing you a happy and healthy holiday season! May the New Year bring better days for us all."

(Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, and Health & Wellness)

Nigeria's Boko Haram behind schoolboys' abduction

MAIDUGURI, (NIGERIA) (TIP): A man identifying himself as the leader of Nigeria's Boko Haram said on Tuesday the Islamist group was behind the abduction of more than 300 schoolboys, as anxious parents begged the government to secure their release.

Pupils who escaped kidnap on Friday, by jumping over the fence of the Government Science secondary school in Katsina state in northwestern Nigeria and fleeing through a forest, said the attackers were armed with AK-47 assault rifles and rounded up their victims before marching them off.

Boko Haram, whose name means "Western education is forbidden" in the local Hausa language, has waged an insurgency in the northeast of Nigeria since 2009 but has not previously claimed attacks in the northwest.

The claims in the audio tape, if true, could mark a widening influence of jihadist groups operating in northeastern Nigeria, political analysts said. They could also signal that jihadists have formed alliances with militant groups operating in the Sahel, which could further destabilise the impoverished north of Africa's most populous nation which plays a pivotal role in regional stability.

The United States on Tuesday condemned "in the strongest terms" the abduction and was investigating Boko Haram's claim, a spokesperson for the State Department said.

Katsina state authorities said about 320 boys were missing and Nigeria's government said it had spoken to the kidnappers, who have sought a ransom from at least one parent.

"We're begging the government to please try their best to get their release," Hajiya Ummi, whose 15-year-old son Mujtaba is among those missing, said by telephone from her home in Bakori town in Katsina.

"His friends told me he was sick in bed when the bandits struck. He could hardly move but they dragged him out with the rest of the abducted students," she said, her voice cracking with emotion. Katsina officials had ordered all of its state schools to close because they did not know the attackers' motives.

Neighbouring Zamfara state on Monday also ordered its government boarding schools to close, according to a circular seen by Reuters.

AUDIO CLIP: In an audio message which reached Reuters via a WhatsApp message, a man purporting to be Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau said: "We are behind what happened in Katsina."

"What happened in Katsina was done to promote Islam and discourage un-Islamic practices as Western education is not the type of education permitted by Allah and his holy prophet," he said. (Reuters)

In a first, UK court rules pollution as cause of child's death

LONDON (TIP): In a first in the UK and potentially the world, a British court made legal history after ruling air pollution as one of the causes of the death of nine-year-old Ella Kissi Debrah.

Following the ruling on Wednesday, it will now be stated in her death certificate that she died from the following causes: acute respiratory failure, severe asthma and air pollution exposure.

The coroner found that air pollution levels near Ella's home near a busy road in London exceeded the World Health Organization's (WHO) guidelines.

The principal source of her exposure was traffic emissions.

It stated that there was a recognised failure to reduce the level of NO2 that possibly contributed to her death.

He also recognised the lack of information given to Ella's mother, which possibly contributed to her death.

Ella's mother, Rosamund, gave evidence during the inquest and said her daughter had been taken to the hospital about 28 times during her life after suffering acute asthma attacks and seizures.

Hours before she died in February 2013, Rosamund said she had read to Ella in bed after the family had eaten a meal together on Valentine's Day evening.

"I had printed off Beethoven's love letters that day, so that was the last thing



I read to her." A few hours later her daughter woke and needed her asthma pump. She woke again struggling to breathe and her mother called an ambulance that took her to Lewisham hospital, where her condition deteriorated. "I begged the consultant, I knew we were in trouble," her mother said. But they were unable to save her daughter, she told the inquest.

Ella was declared dead at 3.27 a.m. on February 15.

Studies say 93 per cent of the world's children under the age of 15 breathe bad air and researchers have found that air pollutants can breach a mother's placenta and potentially reach fetuses in the womb.

The WHO estimates that in 2016, 600,000 children died from acute lower respiratory infections caused by bad air.

Currently, half the world does not have access to the necessary data to address the health threat while countries with air pollution laws regularly breach them.

In response to the ruling, Rosamund said: "Today was a landmark case, a seven-year fight has resulted in air pollution being recognised on Ella's death certificate.

"Hopefully this will mean many more children's lives being saved. Thank you everyone for your continued support." -- IANS

Indian Embassy in Beijing launches Bollywood 'cinemaSCOpe' series for SCO diplomats



'CinemaSCOpe' series, being exclusively screened for the diplomats and their families of the SCO countries, commenced on Saturday at the Indian Embassy premises with the screening of Aamir Khan starrer '3 Idiots'.

BEIJING (TIP): Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Vladimir Norov and diplomats from the member states of the bloc attended the inaugural session of a movie series-'cinemaSCOpe'-organized by the Indian Embassy here.

'CinemaSCOpe' series, being exclusively screened for the diplomats and their families of the SCO countries, commenced on Saturday at the Indian Embassy premises with the

screening of Aamir Khan's '3 Idiots'.

More than two dozen Indian movies including '3 Idiots', dubbed in Russian language, will be screened on a monthly basis till India's chairmanship of the eight-member SCO 'Council of Heads of State' meeting in 2023.

The event was jointly inaugurated by Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Misri along with Norov. SCO diplomats and their families attended the event. The SCO is an economic and security bloc in which India and Pakistan were admitted as full members in 2017. Its founding members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In his address to the gathering, Misri said a proposal from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a 'SCO Film Festival' is under consideration by the member states. Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy has decided to launch 'cinemaSCOpe' series for the SCO diplomats, he said.

Top Bollywood stars like Raj Kapoor, Mithun Chakraborty, Amitabh Bachchan are household names in the SCO countries especially the Central Asian Republics, part of the former Soviet Union where Russian language remained popular.

Norov, former foreign minister of Uzbekistan, in his address complemented the Indian Embassy for the initiative and highlighted the popularity of the Bollywood movies in the Central Asian countries.

Indian cinema industry is also one of the largest in the world, providing employment to thousands of people, he said, adding that its global influence remained unparalleled showcasing Indian culture and civilizational values.

China's spacecraft successfully brings home moon samples

BEIJING (TIP): China's Chang'e-5 probe successfully touched down on Earth in the early hours of Thursday, bringing home the first samples of the moon in over 40 years.

The spacecraft landed in Siziwang Banner in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, at 1:59 am (local time), according to the China National Space Administration (CNSA).

Zhang Kejian, head of the CNSA, declared the Chang'e-5 mission a success.

It marks a successful conclusion of China's current three-step lunar exploration programme of orbiting and landing, and bringing back samples which began in 2004, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

It is China's maiden attempt to retrieve materials from an extra-terrestrial body. The Chang'e-5 lunar probe was launched from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on November 24.

It was the first attempt to bring the moon samples in over 40 years after the US sent astronauts to the moon to collect samples. In the Soviet Union's unmanned lunar sampling missions, the spacecraft took off from the moon and returned to Earth directly.

The 8-tonne Chang'e-5 spacecraft has four independent but interactive components. This includes one to stay in lunar orbit as a docking station, one to go down to the moon's surface and drill for samples, one to take the material back to the dock station and another to bring the samples back to Earth.

The return capsule of Chang'e-5 separated from the orbiter about 5,000 km above the Atlantic. The capsule entered the Earth's atmosphere at an altitude of about 120 km. At about 10 km above ground, a parachute opened.

The capsule landed smoothly in the predetermined area and the search team recovered it, the report said.

The capsule is set to be airlifted to Beijing for opening, and the moon samples will be delivered to the research team for analysis and study, said the CNSA.

China will make some of the samples available to scientists in other countries,



Pei Zhaoyu, deputy director of the Lunar Exploration and Space Program Center of CNSA, has said.

Chang'e-5 is one of the most complicated and challenging missions in China's aerospace history as it touched down on the north of the Mons Rumker in Oceanus Procellarum, also known as the Ocean of Storms, on the near side of the moon on December 1, the report said.

This site was chosen because it had a younger geological age than the sampling areas of the US and the Soviet Union more than 40 years ago, and had never been sampled. The new samples reportedly weighing about two kg will be of great scientific value, according to Chinese space scientists.

Though lunar samples were brought back in the US and Soviet missions, scientists need more samples of different ages to piece together a complete history of the moon.

China is drawing up plans for future lunar exploration, including constructing a basic version of a scientific research station, he said.

"We hope to cooperate with other countries to build the international lunar scientific research station, which could provide a shared platform for lunar scientific exploration and

technological experiments," Pei said.

Meanwhile, China's Mars probe Tianwen-1 is currently more than 100 million kms away from Earth and is functioning normally, the CNSA said on Tuesday.

It will conduct several orbital corrections and will likely decelerate to enter the Mars orbit in mid-February next year, CNSA said.

The US, Russia, the European Union besides India have so far succeeded in sending missions to Mars, which is regarded as the most complex space mission.

India became the first Asian country to have successfully launched its Mars orbiter mission, Mangalyaan, which entered the orbit of the red planet in 2014.

India also became the first country to have entered the Martian orbit in its first attempt.

A commentary by Xinhua on Thursday on the moon mission said it is regrettable to see that some major countries are pushing forward controversial accord that allows signatories or companies to create exclusive "safety zones" on the Moon, and adopting strategies to accelerate the militarisation of space. PTI

New Zealand inquiry finds quarter of a million abused in state and faith-based care institutions

WELLINGTON (TIP): Up to a quarter of a million children, young people and vulnerable adults were abused in New Zealand's faith-based and state care institutions in the past several decades, a public inquiry revealed on Wednesday.

An interim report by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into historic abuse of children in state care estimated that up to 2,56,000 people were abused between 1950 and 2019. This accounts for almost 40% of the 6,55,000 people in care during that period.

"The hurt and anguish that has been caused in New Zealand's history is

inexcusable," said Minister for the Public Service Chris Hipkins, who described the report as a "difficult read".

"All children in the care of the state should be safe from harm, but as the testimony sets out all too often the opposite was true."

The report said most abuse survivors were aged between 5 and 17, but some were as young as 9 months and as old as 20. Most were abused over a five to 10 year period. The abuse included physical assault and sexual abuse, with staff in some psychiatric institutions forcing male patients to rape female patients. It also included the

improper use of medical procedures including electric shocks on genitals and legs, improper strip searches and vaginal examinations, and verbal abuse and racial slurs. "Sometimes I'd have shock treatment twice a day," said Anne, who at 17 was placed in a psychiatric institution in 1979. "The records (said) I went blind, then they gave me shock treatment again that night," she told the inquiry. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the Royal Commission in 2018 saying the country needed to confront "a dark chapter" in its history, and later expanded it to include churches and other faith-based institutions. (Reuters)

Open Enrollment Extended for Health Plans

NEW YORK (TIP): The deadline to sign up for a health plan through NY State of Health has been extended. New Yorkers have two more weeks (until December 31) to enroll in a health plan that begins on January 1. "As the pandemic continues, it is especially important for New Yorkers to have access to high-quality, affordable health insurance," said Donna Frescatore, NY State of Health Executive Director. Visit their website or call 1-855-355-5777 to enroll.

Australia describes couple's death as 'terrorism incident'

BRISBANE (TIP): Australian detectives suspect the deaths of an elderly couple in their Brisbane home is a "terrorism incident" perpetrated by a knife-wielding man who was shot dead by police, officials said on Friday.

Raghe Abdi, 22, threatened police with a knife before he was shot dead on a highway on the outskirts of Brisbane on Thursday morning, officers said.

The bodies of an 87-year-old man and an 86-year-old woman were found in their home later Thursday near where Abdi died, Queensland state Police Deputy Commissioner Tracy Linford said.

Linford declined to detail how they had died but homicide detectives had found evidence that Abdi had been in the house, she said.

Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said the known extremist had been acting alone.

"We had no choice but to declare this as a terrorism incident," Carroll told reporters.

Australia Federal Police suspect Abdi had been influenced by the Islamic State group. He was arrested on suspicion that he was trying to join extremists when he attempted to depart Brisbane Airport for Somalia in May 2019. He was released without charge due to insufficient evidence, but his passport was cancelled.

In June 2019, he was charged with further offences including refusing to give detectives the passcode for his phone.

He was free on bail and had been forced to wear a GPS tracking device, which he had cut off before he was shot. —AP

Canada continues to record soaring Covid-19 cases

Covid-19 cases continued to rise in Canada as 486, 393 new infections and 13, 865 deaths were recorded on Thursday, the media reported.

Ontario, Canada's most populous province, reported 2, 432 new cases of Covid-19 on Thursday, Dec 17, the highest number of cases recorded in a single day since the start of the pandemic in the country, Xinhua reported.

Thursday marked the third straight day in which the province logged more than 2, 000 cases of the novel coronavirus.

The Ontario Hospital Association called for a four-week lockdown in every public health unit where there is an infection rate of 40 per 100, 000 people or higher.

There are 75, 885 active cases across the country with a daily average of 6, 614 new cases reported in the past seven days, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada on Thursday.

2 doses of Oxford coronavirus vaccine provoked good immune response, data shows

Oxford University's coronavirus vaccine candidate provokes a better immune response when a two full-dose regime is administered rather than a full-dose followed by a half-dose booster, the university said. It citing data from early trials of its coronavirus vaccine.

The developers of the Oxford vaccine candidate, which has been licensed to pharmaceuticals company AstraZeneca, had earlier showed higher efficacy when a half dose is followed by a full dose, compared to a two full-dose regime. The latest data from the Oxford coronavirus vaccine Phase I and 2 clinical trials released on Thursday made no reference to the half-dose/full-dose regime, which Oxford has said had been "unplanned" but approved by regulators.

Once seen as the frontrunner in the development of a coronavirus vaccine, the British team has been overtaken by US drugmaker Pfizer, whose shots have been rolled out in Britain and the United States this month.

The data which was published earlier showed Oxford coronavirus vaccine was 62 per cent effective for trial participants given two full doses. It showed a more robust 90 per cent for a smaller sub-group when it was given half in the beginning, then a full dose of the coronavirus vaccine.



Global Covid-19 cases surpass 74.8 million: Johns Hopkins

The overall number of global coronavirus cases has topped 74.8 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 1.66 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Friday, Dec 18, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 74,875,300 and 1,660,132, respectively.

The US is the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 17,192,376 and 310,424, respectively, according to the CSSE.

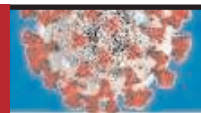
India comes in second place in terms of cases at 9,956,557, while the country's death toll soared to 144,451.

The other countries with more than a million confirmed cases are Brazil (7,110,434), Russia (2,736,727), France (2,483,524), Turkey (1,955,680), the UK (1,954,268), Italy (1,906,377), Spain (1,785,421), Argentina (1,524,372), Colombia (1,468,795), Germany (1,438,438), Mexico (1,277,499), Poland (1,171,854) and Iran (1,138,530), the CSSE figures showed.

Brazil currently accounts for the second highest number of fatalities at 184,827.

The countries with a death toll above 20,000 are Mexico (115,769), Italy (67,220), the UK (66,150), France (59,733), Iran (53,095), Spain (48,777), Russia (48,568), Argentina (41,534), Colombia (39,787), Peru (36,858), Germany (24,611), Poland (24,345) and South Africa (24,011).

TRACKING THE VIRUS



GLOBAL

Cases | Deaths
74,875,300 | **1,660,132**

INDIA

Cases | Deaths
9,956,557 | **144,451**



European leaders quarantine after Macron's Covid-19 diagnosis

BRUSSELS (TIP): In a statement on Thursday, Dec 17, the Elysee Palace confirmed the 42-year-old President's positive result, saying that he "will isolate himself for seven days" but "will continue to work and carry out his activities remotely", Xinhua news agency reported.

Macron attended a European Union (EU) summit in Brussels last week and an event organised by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris on Monday.

Following his diagnosis, several other European leaders also rushed into isolation.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, who met Macron on Monday during the OECD event, will be under self-quarantine until December 24, his Office said in a statement on Thursday.

"He will suspend all of his activity scheduled for the coming days in accordance with sanitary protocols," it said, adding that the Prime Minister would also "undertake a diagnostic test to know his situation and then depending on the results, to decide his agenda for the coming days".

European Council President Charles Michel, who had lunch with Macron on Monday, also went into self-quarantine on Thursday, the top EU official's spokesman Barend Leyts said.

Michel's self-quarantine is a



Macron touching people before he tested positive for Covid.

precautionary measure as he is not considered to have come into close contact with Macron, and he tested negative on Tuesday during a routine test, Leyts added.

OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said on Thursday that he was also quarantining.

"My thoughts are with President Emmanuel Macron for a speedy recovery," Gurría said on Twitter.

"In light of his involvement in the OECD's 60th anniversary on Monday and following medical protocols, I am quarantining and testing.

"All relevant steps are being taken to safeguard the wellbeing of guests and staff," he added.

Meanwhile, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa has been in self-quarantine following close contact with Macron.

Although Costa tested negative on Thursday, he will remain in "preventive prophylactic isolation" and undergo another test in the next few days, according to a statement from his office.

"The Prime Minister maintains all executive activity and the non-face-to-face work agenda," said the statement.

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FRENCH MANICURE IDEAS

A French manicure is as elegant as it gets. The classic French manicure involves a pale pink base, bright white tips and a top base. If you are doing this for the first time, here's what you need to do.

Things you need:

- A bowl of warm water
- Towel
- Base coat
- White nail polish
- Soft baby pink nail polish
- Top coat

Prep your nails

Like any manicure, be sure to remove all of your nail polish beforehand using acetone-free nail polish remover. Cut and file your nails into whatever shape you prefer (pro tip: oval nails look divine with French tips). Apply some cuticle oil and gently push back your cuticles. Finish with hand cream to give yourself a salon-worthy experience.

Paint the base layer

Pick out two different colors — if you're going classic, you'll want to pick a sheer nude color for the base and a white polish for the tips. Start with a base coat and wait two minutes for it to dry, then use the nude polish (or whatever color strikes your fancy) all over the nail, taking care to wait two minutes between coats. While you're painting, be sure to only do thin coats, and start at the bottom of your nail from the middle before painting the sides.

Carefully paint the tip

After you let the second coat dry, you'll paint the tip of the nail with white (or a statement color). You



can do this freehand or use guide strips to help you — just be sure that the second coat of polish is dry enough that the guide strips won't cause any indents. Wait another two minutes for the tips to dry, and seal it all in with a top coat.

How to strengthen nails?

Moisturizing is a well-known secret to healthy skin, but it's often overlooked in nail care. While dry, brittle nails can be the result of many factors, they're ultimately a cry for moisture, so consider proper moisture the foundation of your nail care routine. When applying hand lotion, give your nails a little extra attention. There are plenty of moisturizing nail products on the market, but applying moisturizer is really only half the battle—there's more to strong nails than a fancy cream or serum.

It's common practice to cut, push back, or try to get rid of cuticles altogether, but cuticles are not the enemy. In fact, the cuticle is the nail's natural protective seal. Messing with your cuticles can do far more harm than good

Avoid contact with water

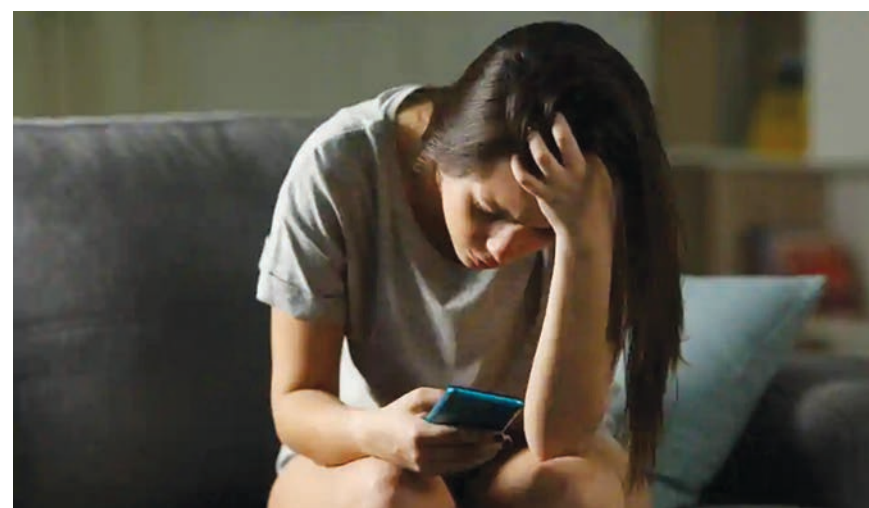
Don't stop washing your hands or shower with gloves on, but do pay attention to ways you can reduce the time your nails spend in contact with water, because excessive water contact can weaken nail structure. (Wet hair is especially vulnerable, and the same caution-when-wet approach you take to handling wet locks can apply to nail care, too.)

For example, consider wearing gloves while doing the dishes or other wet work.

Be cautious in and after a relationship

Sending intimate pictures used to be such a taboo thing to do—no one talked about it but everyone did it. Then people started realising sexting was a given, which led to more and more intimate pictures being sent, which led to women getting their pictures leaked on the internet. Kanika Khosla, psychologist, says, "It is quite common to send nudes and seductive pictures to one's romantic interest out of fear of being dumped, fear of hurting the loved one, fear of being bullied & being called a sissy or simply, as we now know it, FOMO (Fear of missing out)."

But, it's not okay for someone to share (or threaten to share) your intimate pictures without your permission. If they do, they've seriously broken your trust. This might leave you feeling scared, unsafe and worried about what will happen next. But the good news is there is a legal implication to this. Anirudh Tanwar, Advocate, says, "There is no doubt that leaking nudes or blackmailing a girl on the pretext of leaking her intimate pictures attracts penal



consequences under the Indian Penal Code and the IT Act."

He further stresses that a victim need not worry at all. He adds, "A victim can file a suit for damages. However, what constitutes nudes or a hot picture is yet to be decided by the courts, nevertheless, defaming or threatening a girl on the basis of a normal looking picture may also attract such penal provisions. Also, it's important to know your legal rights. Legal literacy is important

for everyone."

Having your nudes leaked is a really stressful and upsetting experience, so it's important that you look after yourself. Pulkit Sharma, relationship expert says, "People feel as if their life is ruined. But remember, social media has a short memory. Don't carry the notion that you are exposed. Also, remember you shared it in confidence so don't blame yourself."

Source: HT



By Tript Arora

CONNOISSEUR'S CHOICE



ZAFRANI KHEER

In traditional Indian cuisines, sweet dishes hold a special place. According to ayurveda, the food should have three elements ie. Salt, sour and sweet. Therefore, Every Indian meal is incomplete without a sweet dish. Kheer has always been a favorite of everyone. This recipe includes a tip which reduces cooking time and effort. I have taken full fat milk and added soaked and ground rice and almonds to it, thus making it an easy and quick recipe. For extra flavour saffron or Kesar has been added. To make it more rich some more dry fruits are added. Do try it once you will love the Royal flavours it has.

We need

- 1 Litre Full Fat Milk (8%)
- 75 gm Rice
- 50 gm Almonds
- 4 Green Cardamom / 1 Tsp Cardamom powder
- 75 gm Sugar
- Few Strands Of Saffron or Kesar
- Cashews and raisins to garnish

Let us get started

- Soak rice and almonds in water for 15 minutes.
- Boil 1 litre of milk in a thick-bottom pan. When it boils, keep the flame on low and let it boil for 5 minutes. Keep on stirring.
- Drain water from rice and almonds and coarsely grind them.
- Add these ground almonds and rice to the milk. Keep on stirring milk while adding them otherwise lumps of rice will be formed.
- Keep the pan on low flame for another ten minutes. Meanwhile keep on stirring the milk mixture. Scrap the milk which sticks to the side of the pan.
- Take two tbsp of warm milk and mix saffron strands to it. Keep aside.
- Crush cardamom and add it to the rice, almonds and milk mixture. Let it boil for another 2 minutes. Add the saffron milk to the pan and continue to stir for another 2 minutes.
- The Zafrani Kheer is now ready. Garnish it with chopped almonds, raisins and cashews. Refrigerate it for two hours and enjoy this Royal Zafrani Kheer.

Tip

- Keep on stirring the Kheer otherwise the milk will stick to the pan and will get burnt. This will spoil the taste



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FOODS TO AVOID IF YOU HAVE FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS

Not only have been worried about staying healthy this year from COVID, but for the past couple of months, you've also had to put the flu on your radar, as well.

If you feel like you've caught the flu, don't worry, rest, tea, and nutritious foods will help to keep your immune system strong as your body fends off the virus. With that said, there are also a few foods you can avoid to help expedite this process and even make your symptoms more manageable.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a diuretic, which means that you can become dehydrated quickly if you don't drink water in tandem with it. If you have an elevated temperature or the onset of a low-grade fever, dehydration is something you want to avoid, as Kacie Vavrek, MS, RD, CSSD notes in an article for The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. Opt for sparkling water or electrolyte-infused water to help stay hydrated.

Greasy foods

If you're experiencing gastrointestinal issues, you'll want to avoid fried, greasy foods. Why? These foods have a high saturated fat content, and are difficult for your body to break down. The last thing you want to do is add more stress on your gut when it's already feeling wonky.



Milk

The science around whether or not dairy milk causes the body to create mucus is inconclusive, however, for some it could help to alleviate pressure in their chest. If you're already feeling congested, consider ditching the cow's milk. And don't miss Major Recent Findings About Dairy You Should Know.

Sugary foods

Added sugars are known to cause inflammation in the body, which can suppress immune function. Avoid the candy, donuts, and other sugary foods (and drinks) until your symptoms subside. Instead, reach for nutrient-dense fruits that are rich in vitamin C to get your sweet

fix, including oranges and strawberries. Also consider incorporating kale into your diet, one cup (raw and chopped) offers roughly 80 milligrams of vitamin C, which is 89% of your daily value (90 milligrams).

Quinoa

Grains that are more difficult to digest should also be avoided when your stomach is feeling upset, such as complex carbs that are high in fiber such as wheat-based breads and pastas and even grains like quinoa—especially when it's not fully cooked. Instead, Vavrek recommends sticking to saltine crackers, toast, and pretzels.

Source: eatthis.com



Antibodies depleting faster in elderly patients: Study

A study conducted by the Transfusion Medicine Department of King George's Medical University (KGMU) has found that the antibodies are depleting at a faster rate among the Covid-19 survivors above 50 years of age.

The study further found that survivors in all the age groups, who were symptomatic for just one day, had stronger and more lasting antibodies in comparison to those who were symptomatic for more than a day.

These are the two interesting results thrown up for further research on 800 Covid-19 survivors who came for plasma donation after recovering from the disease.

The results of the study also revealed that antibodies were not only in sufficient numbers but also strong when the plasma was donated within 12-53 days post-recovery.

According to the head of the Transfusion Medicine, Prof Tulika Chandra, the department conducted the study during collecting plasma from Covid-19 patients, post-recovery, for the blood and plasma bank.

Of 800 plasma donors, 400 were not found suitable for donation. While 50 of them were anaemic or underweight or HIV positive and had other complications, 70 had contact history but never tested positive through RT-PCR method. About 53 were found unfit because they had come after the lapse of the three-month post-recovery period prescribed for donation.

However, the remaining 227 donors out of 400 'unfit' donors were such who fulfilled all the criteria -- they had confirmed positive, post-recovery period below three months and had no other disqualification but their plasma was not taken because antibodies were either not present or were in insufficient quantity.

"A majority of such donors, both male and females, were above 50 years of age. "We do not know yet whether antibodies were not formed at all or only short-acting antibodies were formed in these cases, but the result suggests that the threat of re-infection might be higher in people above 50 years," she said.

Further, the study revealed that the 'quality and quantity' of antibodies among the 400 fit donors was better in Covid-19 survivors who were symptomatic for a day in comparison to those who had symptoms for more days.

Prof. Chandra said these findings need further research to explain the phenomenon responsible for it and reach any conclusion.

One in four people globally may not get Covid-19 vaccines until 2022

Nearly one in four people may not get Covid-19 vaccines until at least 2022 because rich countries with less than 15% of the global population have reserved 51% of the doses of the most promising vaccines, researchers said.

Low- and middle-income countries - home to more than 85% of the world's population - would have to share the remainder, said researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the United States.

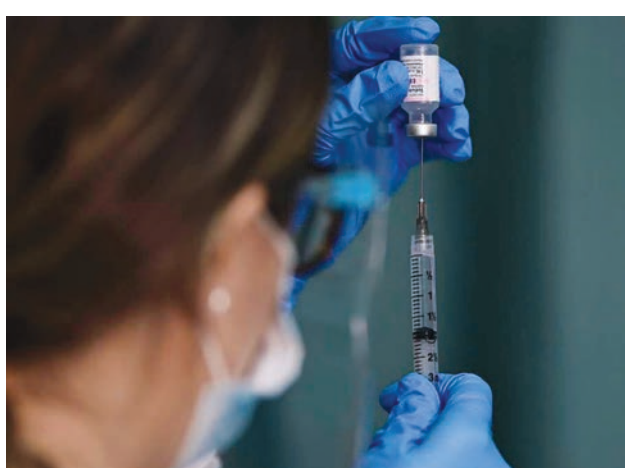
An effective response to the pandemic requires high-income countries "to share in an equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines across the world", they wrote.

"The uncertainty over global access to Covid-19 vaccines traces not only to ongoing clinical testing, but also from the failure of governments and vaccine manufacturers to be more transparent and accountable over these arrangements," they added.

As of November 15, high-income nations had pre-ordered nearly 7.5 billion doses of vaccines from 13 manufacturers, the paper said.

This included Japan, Australia and Canada who collectively have more than 1 billion doses but accounted for less than 1% of current novel coronavirus cases, it said.

Even if leading manufacturers' vaccines reach their projected maximum production capacity, nearly 25% of the world's population may not get the



vaccines for another year or more, according to the paper.

The People's Vaccine Alliance coalition last week said pharmaceutical companies should openly share their technology and intellectual property through the World Health Organisation (WHO) so that more doses can be manufactured.

The John Hopkins researchers said WHO's COVAX Facility could play a key role in ensuring fairer access to approved vaccines but it has only secured 500 million doses, far below its target of delivering at least 2 billion doses by the end of 2021.

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Microsoft building new password manager for Edge, Chrome

Microsoft is building a new passcode manager that will work across a slew of products like Edge, Chrome and mobile devices – Android and iOS.

According to a report in The Verge, the tech giant is in the process of creating a full password manager for its Microsoft 365 consumer service.

The new password manager will sync credentials across its Edge browser, Google Chrome, and mobile iOS or Android devices.

"A preview version of the password manager is now built into Microsoft Authenticator, a free mobile app that's used for multi-factor authentication," the report mentioned.

Autofill only works with consumer Microsoft Accounts and is disabled for enterprise users who are using the app for phone sign-in or multi-factor authentication.

"Passwords are synced from the Microsoft Edge browser, and can be shared across multiple devices using a Microsoft Account. You can also sync these passwords to Google Chrome, using a new Microsoft Autofill extension," the report mentioned.

Japan space agency confirms asteroid soil inside capsule

Japan's space agency said Monday it has confirmed the presence of black soil samples inside a capsule that the spacecraft Hayabusa2 brought back from a distant asteroid last week. The pan-shaped capsule, 40 cm in diameter, was dropped by Hayabusa2 from space onto a spot in a sparsely populated Australian desert on December 6. It arrived in Japan last Tuesday for research that will hopefully provide insights into the origins of the solar system and life on Earth. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said its scientists opened the capsule and found an unspecified amount of sandy black particles.

Samsung to release 4 folding smartphones in 2021: Report

Samsung is reportedly planning to launch four folding smartphone devices in 2021 with 5G support.

According to the South Korean news outlet ETNews, the smartphone manufacturer Samsung will release two variants of Galaxy Z Fold 3 and two variants of Galaxy Z Flip 2 and both these models will have support for 5G.

The report also stated that all four foldable phones are only planned to be launched in the second half of 2021. Therefore, do not expect these devices to be unveiled with the Galaxy S21 series.

Apple may embed antennas, Touch ID in future iPhone display

Apple is reportedly planning to bring iPhones with larger screens that could have Touch ID fingerprint reader and antennas embedded into the display.

The iPhone maker might be working on offering its users better signal reception while still providing a secure user authentication system as well. This would also lead to thinner bezels and notches, offering more screen estate to its customers, reports AppleInsider.

In the past, reports claimed that Apple is working on an in-display fingerprint reader for its Touch ID system. Various patents had surfaced over the course of last year, which touched on topics like acoustic imaging, infrared, and more.

Even the renowned Apple analyst Ming-Chi Kuo has predicted that Apple could bring the in-display



fingerprint sensor on Touch ID on future iPhone models.

In addition, a patent previously revealed that the RF antenna will be covered under several layers of the display.

The antenna needs to be exposed to be able to receive signals, which is why Apple patented something called the "Display Integratable Hybrid

Transparent Antenna".

Apple will use 'hybrid OLED' displays on iPads from 2022

According to the report, Apple has made the decision of introducing OLEDs to iPads from 2022. In fact, it has already made requests to suppliers like Samsung

Display and LG Display. What is interesting here is the new OLED tech that Apple is reportedly going to use.

Precisely, Apple will use "hybrid OLED" displays on the 2022 iPads. These are said to be thinner than typical OLED displays. Samsung will reportedly start supplying these panels in 2022 while LG Display will join a year later. A source for the report says Samsung has already started taking necessary steps for it.

Also, if another source is true, Apple will use Samsung's panel on one iPad model in 2022. Following this, both Samsung and LG will begin the full-scale supply from 2023. Speaking of which, the hybrid OLED panels will reportedly be a combination of flexible and rigid OLED. Basically, the terms refer to the rigid(glass) or flexible substrates that are being used.

Apple TV app is coming to new Chromecast with Google TV



Google has announced a sweet surprise for Chromecast users. The company announced the availability of the Apple TV app on Chromecast. The announcement follows the availability of Apple Music on Google's Nest smart speakers.

Up until now, the Apple TV app could only be accessed only on Apple devices. That is about to change as now new Chromecast with Google TV users will be able to access the Apple TV on their devices.

On the Apple TV app, users can access their entire library of movie and TV show purchases from Apple. They can also enjoy personalised and curated recommendations on Apple TV channels. Additionally, users will also be able to save their favourite shows and movies on their Watchlist. Google says that through Family Sharing, up to six

family members can share subscriptions to Apple TV channels using the new Chromecast with Google TV.

With Google TV, you'll be able to see Apple Originals in your personalized recommendations and search results, making it even easier to find your favorite shows and movies. And, you'll be able to save them to your Watchlist to catch up on later.

In addition to this, Google announced that Chromecast with Google TV users will also be able to access Apple TV+ on the connected devices. Of course, users will have to first download the app and get a paid subscription to use the service on the supported devices.

The catch, however, is that this feature will be rolled out to Chromecast with Google TV early next year. Other devices powered by Android TV OS will get this update in the future.

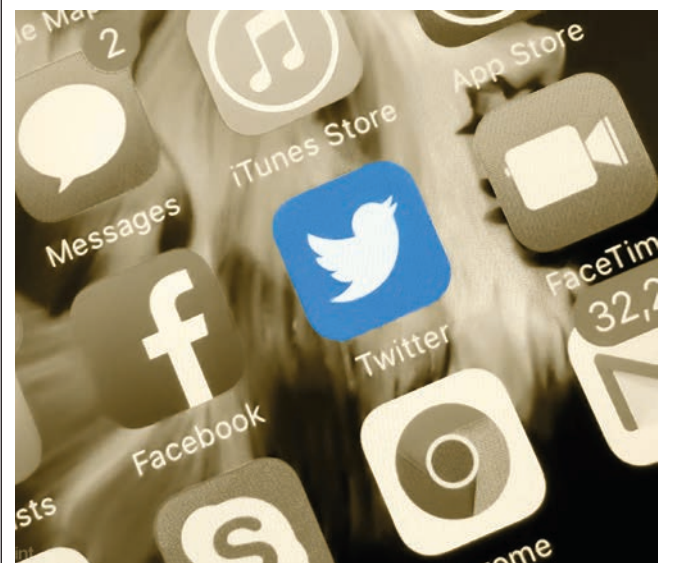
Twitter will no longer prompt users to quote tweets

Twitter is removing the quote tweet prompt it introduced in October. Retweets are going back to the way they were, Twitter announced. Twitter had introduced this quote tweet prompt in a bid to curb misinformation ahead of the US presidential election.

The reason behind Twitter introducing this was to encourage people to "consider why they are amplifying a Tweet." Twitter also shared what it observed with the quote tweets prompt. "The use of Quote Tweets increased, but 45% of them included single-word affirmations and 70% had less than 25 characters," Twitter said.

Twitter also highlighted that there was an overall 20% decrease in both retweets and quote tweets. The quote tweet prompt did "encourage" users to type something before retweeting it but you could leave it blank as well. Then the tweet is retweeted like it normally does. This renders the feature useless if no text is added along with the retweet. Users can still choose to quote tweets while retweeting them.

Along with quote tweets, Twitter also introduced another prompt of alerting users to read articles before retweeting them. Twitter is still keeping this feature saying that it "may be more effective than others." The company also said that prompting users to read articles leads to more informed sharing.



Coca-Cola to cut 2,200 jobs worldwide amid Covid challenges

Coca-Cola Co. is cutting 2,200 jobs worldwide, including 1,200 in the US, as the soda maker deepens its restructuring efforts amid ongoing shutdowns of soft-drink friendly venues like movie theaters, bars and stadiums.

The reductions, totaling 2.5% of the company's total workforce, involve a combination of voluntary buyouts and layoffs, a spokesman said Thursday via email. Coke had about 86,200 employees at the beginning of the year, including 10,400 in the US.

"We are in the process of building an organizational structure that will address" customers' needs and behaviors, the company said. "The pandemic was not a cause for these changes, but it has been a catalyst for the company to move faster."

GDP of India to contract 7.8 pc in FY 2021: Icra

Domestic rating agency Icra Ratings expects the technical recession in the country's economy to end in the fourth quarter of the current fiscal, limiting the contraction in the GDP to 7.8 per cent in the financial year 2021.

In the second quarter of financial year 2021, GDP contracted 7.5 per cent as against a decline of 23.9 per cent in the April-June quarter.

With a steady performance of the agricultural sector and a lagged recovery in the contact-intensive parts of the services sector, the agency forecasts a small contraction of one per cent in the Indian GDP in the third quarter of financial year 2021.

The rating agency's Principal economist Aditi Nayar said healthy procurement and a favourable outlook for the rabi season, as well as greater visibility of an approaching Covid-19 vaccine rollout, will strengthen demand and economic activity in the fourth quarter of financial year 2021.

4G spectrum sale cleared, reserve price lower than TRAI advice

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday, Dec 16, approved the sale of 2251.25 MHz of spectrum across seven frequency bands at a reserve price of Rs 3.92 lakh crore.

These auctions are only for 4G services, as the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is yet to finalise the spectrum bands for auction of 5G spectrum.

The notice inviting applications from telecom service providers will be issued later this month, and the government hopes to complete the sale by March 2021, Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

The new round of auctions is likely to provide a boost to government revenue collections.

Bitcoin surpasses \$21,000 for first time amid dizzying rally

Bitcoin surpassed \$21,000 for the first time, another milestone in what's been an eye-popping rally for the controversial digital asset this year.

The world's largest cryptocurrency surged as much as 10% to \$21,293 in New York on Wednesday, vindicating forecasts that were scoffed at months ago and leading to even higher prognostications. Bitcoin has almost tripled this year, with the rally accelerating Wednesday after breaching \$20,000 earlier for the first time.

"We have a new line in the sand and the focus shifts to the next round number of \$30,000," said Antoni Trenchev, co-founder and managing partner of Nexo, a crypto lender. This "is the start of a new chapter for Bitcoin. It's a narrative the media and retail crowd can properly latch onto because they've been noticeably absent from this rally."

Bitcoin has surged despite a severe crash in March that saw it lose 25% amid the coronavirus pandemic. Proponents have seized on the narrative that the coin could act as a store of wealth amid supposed rampant central-bank money printing, even as inflation remains mostly muted.

In addition, some Wall Street firms have taken a greater interest, with many seeking to capitalize on its gains in a



world of rock-bottom interest rates. Guggenheim Partners LLC, for instance, recently said it might invest up to 10% of its \$5.3 billion Macro Opportunities Fund in a Bitcoin trust.

Bitcoin's cross above the \$20,000 and \$21,000 levels were its latest milestones in recent weeks — the coin at the end of November reached a new high three years after setting a prior peak. It had traded at a few cents for several years after its late 2008 launch by an unknown

software developer in the wake of the global financial crash.

"People tend to pile into momentum trades, so Bitcoin could have more upside from here," said Ed Campbell, portfolio manager and managing director at QMA.

Peer coins also rose on Wednesday, with the Bloomberg Galaxy Crypto Index — which tracks some of the major cryptocurrencies — gaining as much as 7.2%. Dash and Litecoin each advanced at least 6%.

Google sued by states for abuse of search-market dominance

A bipartisan coalition of states sued Alphabet Inc.'s Google Thursday alleging broad antitrust violations in the online search market, marking the third US case against the search giant in two months.

The lawsuit, led by Colorado, Iowa and other states, marks the latest escalation of the antitrust battle against Google. It comes a day after 10 Republican state attorneys general led by Texas sued the company for anticompetitive practices, and follows an October complaint by the Justice Department.

"Combined with the other recent lawsuits filed against Google, never before have so many states and the federal government come together to challenge a company with such power," Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller said a statement. "Google has more data on consumers, and more variety of information, than perhaps any entity in history."

The lawsuit, filed by 38 attorneys general, accuses Google of illegally monopolizing internet search and search advertising through a series of anticompetitive contracts and conduct, hurting consumers and advertisers in the process.

The Justice Department and 11 Republican state attorneys general sued Google on Oct. 20 in the most significant monopolization case in more than two decades. That case focuses on Google's agreements with Apple Inc. and other device makers and partners to provide Google search as a default to users.



More trouble for Volkswagen in diesel scandal, loses case in top EU court

There appears just no respite for Volkswagen in the infamous 'Dieselgate' scandal and the car maker has now lost a case in the European Union's top court which ruled that it had breached the law by installing 'cheat' devices on its cars undergoing emission tests. It also ruled that the car maker's argument that the devices were used to protect the engines was on weak footing.

Volkswagen has been facing massive heat since the US Environmental Protection Agency first accused it of a software rig on its 'clean diesel' vehicles in the country. This was five years ago, five years of denial, admission and a whole lot of legal tussle and brand image deterioration.

Volkswagen did admit that millions of its vehicles - 11 million - had been fitted with such devices and that it was not in the US alone. The scandal has cost Volkswagen 30 billion euros (\$35 billion) in fines and civil settlements and led to the recall of millions of vehicles.

The EU top court on Thursday ruled that car makers cannot fit their offerings with devices which go on to help control figures of emissions for the purpose of passing a test.



Shree Ganeshaya Namah



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Chirag Bejan Daruwalla with his father late Bejan Daruwalla

**The Indian Panorama brings you Weekly and Birthday Horoscope from the World's most
trusted Vedic Astrologer Nastur Bejan Daruwalla.**

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE DEC 21 - 27, 2020

Aries

Ganesha says Moon will bring you positivity today. This week will bring you revival of loses incurred recently. You'd savings will be improved. You will be able to make some rigid decisions of some complicated business mess with the help of right guidance. Your cooperation and convincing skills will be appreciated. You will make some investments in share market which will bring you good gains later. You will not be able to spend more time with your family due to burden of work. You are likely to feel dull by the end of the week as your competitors will poke you and try to ruin your efforts and on the other hand you will have to deal with domestic dispute too. Strictly prohibit yourself from funding into a very large venture and lending on the last day of the week.

In the middle of the week, you will be able to execute your plans and gain effective results. Your health won't be a matter of concern this week but meditation will help you deal with your stressful times this week. People in love should avoid talking about close friends and family, spare this week for your personal time and make the best out of it. Week has a lot in store, unveil it with good hopes.

Taurus

Your week will be filled with surprises! You will get involved in activities you never thought you would participate in. The first three days will bring you opportunities you were waiting for but in the last two days you will feel uneasy and derailed from your schedule. Avoid gambling on Wednesday this week. This week you should be very selective avoid people you invest your emotions in as their possessive nature may harm you later. There will be dull moment due to transition of moon. Your aggressive behaviour will harm the people you love the most and you will regret overspending therefore control your emotional hype this week. Last week's messy situations will come grounded this week and help from your siblings will push you towards progress in career. Avoid being involved in any kind of litigation this week. Love will bloom in unexpected directions at unexpected timings, wait and watch!

You may have a little sleeplessness and feel tired due to hectic schedule. Your kid's and spouse's

health may concern you a bit but controlling their eating habits and exercise regime will help you maintain certain things.

Gemini

This week you will feel imbalanced and divided between your love life and work life. Your relationship will demand undivided attention and on the other hand, your work will be hectic. Your subordinates will let you work independently and you will find different approaches to meet your work demands. Your creative insight will gain you extra appreciation. You will feel confident and figure out a new way to earn money. You will bring good deals to your family business. The responsibilities of your current job will also increase and issues related to property will also be resolved. This week is fortunate for enhancing your business overseas.

On domestic fronts, your children's education and spouse's mental health would be a little issue but this will also give you enough time to connect to your nuclear family. People in love will take their relationship to another level and deal with hardship conveying their intentions to family. You will also be inclined towards charity and spirituality. Don't stress too much, time has a big basket of happiness ahead.

Cancer

There's good news for jobseekers as this is the week you will land on a good job. You will bring luxuries home and also manage to save for your comforts. In the middle of the week, a family function will occupy your time. You are likely to travel for business this week and Jupiter will bring you good deals from this travelling. Your communications skills will help in finding solutions to the issues your institution is facing. Along with that, you are likely to find a right guide who will help you stabilise your profits. On the negative side, you may harm some of the closest people in your life just by your harsh opinions so measure your words before you spill them. Negative thoughts will make you nervous but you are known to be someone who fight their fears. You will also feel urge to be detached from your responsibilities but gradually you will find your way back.

Your soulmate will find a way to change your

habits and turn you into the better version of yourself. Also, this is a lucky week for students. Wait and watch what plans does God have for you!

Leo

Your week is going to be filled with energy and enthusiasm as a blessing from Lord Sun. Disputes regarding assets and property with your siblings will be resolved. You will become more focused and attentive as the transition of Moon suggests. Your business network will expand bringing you enormous amount of guidance and resources. Your subordinates will appreciate your dedication towards your duties. But, the last three days of week will make you feel little dull and unfocused. During this period of time, try to stay inclined towards creativity and those activities will help you revive your thoughts. Your social status will also improve this week. Investments you mad in past few months will pay you today. On domestic fronts, there might be some issues related to marriage of your siblings but do not worry as peace is on its way to knock your door.

Following your intuition will be your mantra this week. Looking at the health perspective, you will face some minor issues like headache and back pain but you will be fit and fine real soon.

Virgo

Your week will start with dissatisfaction and unhappiness as a result of transition of moon. You are likely to make lots of mistakes and feel burden on your shoulders. Your work productivity will also decrease. You will be delaying your submissions and might have other issues on your professional fronts but your love life will bloom. You will confess your feelings to your partner and they will accept your proposal. You may have some issues in your married life due to difference of opinion with your spouse but things will be totally alright. It's a good week to channelize your funds in construction business and share market. Students pursuing higher degree are likely to receive good news from the Universities they have applied. On health fronts, you will face some minor issues in dealing with mental peace and you may also feel nausea at the end of the week. Apart from everything, this week may not go as good as you expected but next week will bring you better opportunities.

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE DEC 21 - 27, 2020

Libra

This week you will meet like-minded people and create company which will act as light in your darkness. Overbearing people could threaten to overwhelm you with conflicting plans and unreasonable demands, and the best thing you can do is take a patient, helpful attitude. This week some influential people will think of you as trustworthy and their belief in you will bring you great opportunities. Try to stay away from fire and water in excessive amount. Your peers will plan a surprise long distance trip but you should avoid it as Rahu is not in your favour.

When it comes to romantic relationships, your partner and you will be able to find solutions of your personal concerns. You will try things of each other's interest and will enjoy it. Marriage is not on the list yet but it will be soon.

Try to spend some time with your in-laws and family as they need some healing after how pandemic has affected you.

Scorpio

This week is bringing you a lot of better things. As you foresee the upcoming seven days, the losses incurred in last few weeks will be revived. You will earn trust of your partner and colleagues. The monotonous nature of your job will make you feel dull but this feeling is temporary. The last three days of the week will be a little bit challenging but this adventure of hardship will bring you growth. Income is going to increase and your family will support you in whatever you do.

Your love life is expecting some challenges as there will be some misunderstandings between your partner and you. Married life will be alright as you will take this week to reconnect with your partner.

Health is a matter of concern as you will feel nausea and your joints will ache. Your lack of seriousness towards mental peace will harm your physical health too. Join a group nearby and take guidance to stay calm. You will also break few of your bad habits and that would be the most

significant thing of the week.

Sagittarius

In the beginning of the week moon is going to knock your door. You are going to create a positive atmosphere around which will help you in many ways. You will be able to work hard. You will be able to connect more people around you to build new connections. Your positive attitude will boost you for a new start-up of business.

You even can start a partnership business with your siblings. You will receive many unneeded helps from the people you don't know by which you will get more closer to achieve your goals.

Singles can get ready to get a partner as loneliness is going to hell from your life.

People with serious relationships are blessed by god and they will be able to create stronger bond with the one they love. Good time has started its engine so just enjoy your life.

Capricorn

In the start of a week, you will feel uncomfortable the level of happiness will slowly go down. And because of that you can get aggressive. So, you are advised to control your mind and your speech. Your good speech can convert into harsh words and because of that you can end up with creating problems with your family.

You are advised to be calm or else your aggressiveness can drag you down words.

You will need to face financial problems and you even need to book some loses. People in love should really take care and should avoid arguments or else it will lead you to lose each other. In mid of the week Jupiter and moon will be at your doorstep. Things will slowly get under control. You will again be able to control your mind properly which will help you to come out of the bad phase of life.

You will work hard and hard work will reward you with very satisfied returns just don't presume situations in your head.

Aquarius

Last week's trouble will get over now. Things will start going in a positive way. You will get the reward of your hard work you did. You will give your best at work and it will give you a very handsome number of rewards in form of appraisals or promotions. On the other hand, you will end up taking decisions in haste which you will regret later. Your partner will ask for some personal space and time to grow individually and you must give it. Your spouse and you will make some big decisions about your kids and you must listen to your kid's opinions also. Your health will not be a major concern this week but the elderly people in your home will demand some attention. You are also likely to overspend on health products. Rather than doing over expenditure on health, develop good eating habits and follow workout regime.

Pisces

This week is going to be too buzzy for you; as a result, it is going to be positive week. Your destiny has a very great plans for your future. You will be bound to take many decisions and accordingly you will achieve great success. Sooner you are going to increase your sources of income and that will allow you to gain good standard of living. By your great leadership qualities your team will give you a very positive response. Your past issues with your life are going to get under control. As good times come you will get a little more occupied with work and for that you will not be able to give proper time to your family but don't worry, they will understand you and will support you for that.

By the end of week Moon and Jupiter will bewithyou. It will help you to be calm and to be patient. And you will generate good income from your past investments. As you will earn more it seems like you will be able to change yourself. You will also donate some amount to charity. And for couples, you may get the best news in terms of a baby.

Birthdate Horoscope December 21 to 27, 2020

Dec 21:

Despite being misunderstood and reviled, make excellent headway, receive sudden and probably secret help, get funds, have love, and are on your way to happiness.

Dec 22:

Ganesha says, this formation leads to expenses and a danger of being cheated or at least misled. It would be best not to take the easy way out but to get at the truth. Journey and ceremony make you happy.

Dec 23:

It favors very particularly lawyers, musicians, architects, pharmacists, film stars and directors

and producers, copywriters and visualizers, wholesale merchants, agriculturists and scientists. It means childbirth, financial augmentation and the luck of the draw.

Dec 24:

Excellent for money, journey, ceremony, publicity, marriage, long-distance connections and collaborations. In short, your efforts will bear fruit (pun intended).

Dec 25:

This moon helps you to grow, evolve, be tenacious and have the drive to succeed. Many of you will be marking new beginnings, following the policy of "run till done" or getting

it done completely. You will set high standards and love will claim you.

Dec 26:

There is nothing you cannot achieve. Be imaginative, old and take chances, at least that's what this solar-scopical reading does say. Financially it is a sizzling year. Romantically, it is an ecstatic year. Be happy.

Dec 27:

Ganesha says wishes will be fulfilled. Friendship, money and love, children and hobbies all come together for you. Give of yourself to others also is the astro-message. Thunderously happy birth year.

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GITA JAYANTI

The Bhagavad Gita is the most sacred, important Hindu script that influences numerous people, and Gita Jayanti is the birthday of Bhagavad Gita. This day falls on Shukla Ekadashi of the Margashirsha month. According to the English calendar, this festival occurs during November or December. It is that sacred day when Lord Krishna gave the immortal message to Arjuna in Kurukshetra. Followers of Lord Krishna all over the world celebrate this day.

Gita Jayanti is celebrated by reading the Bhagavad Gita and discussing it with learned priests and scholars about how it has been benefiting humanity even today. Followers of Lord Krishna also fast on this as it falls on Ekadashi. Many devotional songs are sung and danced on together. People perform puja and distribute sweets. The main purpose of celebrating Gita Jayanti is to recall the words of Gita and to apply it in our daily life. It allows individuals and families to lead a courageous as well as an active life that is productive.

Rituals of the Festival

- Temples dedicated to Lord Krishna celebrate this day with great enthusiasm, which includes performing puja along with special prayers.
- Devotees from different parts of India and abroad, like to visit Kurukshetra on this day and take a holy bath in the sacred ponds.
- Apart from holy bath, puja of Lord Krishna can be performed at home with aarti at the end.
- Since, it is celebrated on Ekadashi, it is important that devotees who fast on this day do not consume any kind of grains like rice, wheat, and barley.
- There have been many organized celebrations taking place to teach the value of Dharma to the youth of today through explanation of the Gita on this special day.
- Over the years, Gita Jayanti is being celebrated in not only India but also Singapore and Malaysia in large scale. Temples in India who have deity of Lord Krishna also celebrate this day. Observing this day allows individuals to act correctly for the near future because one reads the holy book of Gita. It has also increased the popularity of Hinduism all over the world. All temples of ISKCON in the globe celebrate this day with proper rituals and offerings to the God.

Gita, The Crux Of Indian Spiritual Wisdom

It is said that the Vedas are vast and not very direct when it comes to the conveyance of their message. Several scholars believe that Bhagavad Gita is actually the crux of Vedic wisdom and the summary of Indian Spiritual Knowledge. In fact, Bhagavad Gita contains an ocean of wisdom, which has influenced Indian tradition for the last several millennia. Thus, reading Gita is like knowing a lot about Indian spiritual and philosophical wisdom.

Sanjay's Narration Of Bhagwad Gita

The text in Bhagavad Gita is written in the 3rd person, as it was narrated by Sanjay to King Dhritarashtra as it went on between Lord Krishna and Arjun. Sanjaya, the assistant to the visually challenged king Dhritarashtra, was blessed by his Guru Ved Vyas.; Sanjay was given the power to remotely view things



on the battlefield as they were happening on the battlefield.

Importance Of Gita Jayanti Festival

On Gita Jayanti day, devotees read the Bhagavad Gita and discuss it with learned priests and scholars on how is the Gita relevant and most helpful even today. Krishna devotees also fast on this day as it falls on Ekadashi. People sing devotional songs and also dance together. They do puja and distribute sweets (as prasada). The chief purpose of celebrating Gita Jayanti is to remember the words of Bhagavad Gita and make use of its wisdom in practical living. Inspired by Gita, people lead a courageous and active life.

Gita Jayanti Date And Tithi 2020

- Date for Gita Jayanti: 25th December 2020
- Ekadashi Tithi Begins - 11:17 PM on Dec 24, 2020
- Ekadashi Tithi Ends - 01:54 AM on Dec 26, 2020

Lasting Influence

The Bhagavad Gita is not just an ancient scripture but also serves as an essential guide to better living, conducting business, and communicating to the modern world. The greatest quality of Bhagavad Gita is that it prompts an individual to think, to make a fair and right decision, and to look at life differently and refreshingly without surrendering one's identity. The Gita has been addressing contemporary issues and solving for everyday problems of humanity for millennia.

Kurukshetra, the Birthplace

This Hindu holiday is celebrated with

great devotion and dedication, across the country and around the world, especially in the city of Kurukshetra, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), where the famous epic battle of the Mahabharata took place. This place is sacred not only for the battle and the birthplace of the Gita but also because it is the place where the famous sage Manu wrote the Manusmriti and where the Rig and Sama Vedas were composed. Divine personalities like Lord Krishna, Gautama Buddha, and the Sikh Gurus' visit also consecrated this place.

Celebrations in Kurukshetra

The day is observed with the reading of the Bhagavad Gita, followed by discussions and seminars by eminent scholars and Hindu priests to throw light upon the various facets of the holy book and its perennial influence on humankind for generations. Hindu temples, especially those dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna, conduct special prayers and pujas on this day. Devotees and pilgrims from all over India

gather in Kurukshetra to take part in the ritual bath in the hallowed water of the sacred ponds - Sannihit Sarovar and Brahm Sarovar. A fair is also organized that lasts for about a week and the people participate in prayer recitals, Gita reading, bhajans, aartis, dance, dramas, etc. Over the years, the fair known as Gita Jayanti Samaroh has gained immense popularity, and a large number of tourists visit Kurukshetra during the event to participate in this sacred gathering.

Celebrations by ISKCON

At the temples of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) across the globe, Geeta Jayanthi is celebrated with special offerings to Lord Krishna. Mass recital of the Bhagavad Gita is performed throughout the day. Gita Jayanti is also celebrated as Mokshada Ekadashi. On this day, devotees observe fast and on Dwadashi (or 12th Day) fast is broken by taking a ritual bath and performing Krishna Puja.

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"If Hindus don't maintain Hinduism, who shall save it?"

"If India's own children don't cling to their faith, who shall guard it?"

"Indians alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one."

By Murli Menon

Winter is the best season to visit Allahabad. And there is no better way to experience the cold than to take a dip in the freezing waters of the Holy Ganges in the wee hours of the morning after spending a cold winter's night outdoors.

Prayag, which is at the confluence point of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, is an ideal destination for relaxation and leisure, especially if one is brave enough to bear the extreme cold during the peak of winter. One can experience calmness, serenity, peace and tranquillity, as one boats along the placid waters at Prayag. Travelling on a hand-paddled boat, is the ideal way to relax. One moves at a slow and leisurely pace, the musical sound of the paddle as it touches the water at periodic intervals breaks the silence of the dawn. The gurgling sound of the flowing river, the chirping of sparrows and the squeaking calls of sea-gulls are all that one gets to hear at dawn. With every paddle, one gets closer to one's destination and with every paddle, the darkness gives way to light. It is indeed an unforgettable memory. The biting cold, numbing one's fingers, the icy breeze cuts through one's face like. The anticipation of immersing oneself into the ice-cold waters at sunrise, sends shivers down one's spine.

However, the boat ride rejuvenates one's tired body and wearied mind. One of the most nature friendly spectacles at Prayag is to watch hundreds of migratory birds stopping over during their long migratory journeys from Siberia to India. As one is enjoying the tranquil boat ride, watching the sunrise, hundreds of birds descend around your boat in minutes. These Siberian Geese start swimming in the waters in large groups, floating across the waters in concentric formations. A few adventurous one's land on our boat and accompany us during our journey towards Sangam. The width of the waters at the confluence of the rivers is immense and one sees swirling waters all around. It is almost as if one is sailing in the middle of a gigantic lake or as if one is on an ocean cruise.

Minutes turn into hours as one's boat makes its way slowly yet steadily through the flowing waters. If one has to live in the present, there is no better way than to take this leisurely boat cruise at Prayag. The waters are covered in fog and mist and this makes the journey even more spectacular. As one enters the boat in pitch darkness and dense fog, the first part of the journey exposes one to the eco-friendly sounds at dawn. The shrill cries of the gulls, the hum of the flowing waters, the buzzing sound of the icy breeze.

The entire boat trip is hypnotic. One enters into a trance as thousands of geese land on the surface of the water in synchronicity and takeoff in unison towards the skies. These geese migrate to India for the winter from China. They are known to cover the distance from China to India in one flight. They generally fly at a speed of around 40 miles an hour, so, assuming no wind, a goose will cover the 600 miles to India in about 15 hours of non-stop flight, enabled to do this by flying in formation. It is a pleasure watching the young geese swimming behind their parents in small groups. Soon these small groups merge into the larger whole. The shrill cries of the geese breaks the morning air as they make their way towards the skies on seeing the appearance of the sun. There is a magical connection between the

BOATING WITH THE GEESE AT PRAYAG



appearance of the sun and the flight of these migratory geese! The sun is greeted with the chirping of sparrows and the musical sounds emanating from winged crooners who have made the thick groves that surround the rivers.

Watching life in slow motion aptly describes my early morning cruise from Prayag to Sangam. The journey lasted for a few hours but its memory will last a lifetime. The biting cold and a dip in these freezing waters in the wee hours of the morning made it more memorable. One beats the cold by sipping lukewarm herbal infusion made with ginger and basil. This unique combination stimulates the immune system and one becomes more energetic and active. Being a vegan who does not consume any products of animal origin, there are lots of options at Prayag. Boiled green peas lightly spiced and served with squeezed lime is available at the boat jetty. Boiled sprouts with freshly cut vegetables and peanuts are available everywhere. Small make-shift carts selling roasted baby potatoes are also an option for strict vegans. There are lots of boats parked at the jetty, but most of the activity picks up after 10:00 a.m. in winter. There are few boats that venture out at 5:00 a.m. in mid-January.

How to get there:

- Indian Airlines operates daily flights to Allahabad from New Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai.
- The to and fro drive from Allahabad to Prayag costs approximately Rs.200/- by jeep.
- Shared taxis are available on the return trip to Allahabad (Rs. 20/- per seat). Small rowing boats are available at Prayag to take you to



A pair of Geese swimming in the freezing waters.

the exact location of the Sangam, where the rivers meet. The two-hour to and fro boat ride costs Rs. 300/- (to charter a boat).

(Murli Menon is a travel writer, stress management consultant and author based at Ahmedabad, India. He is

the author of "ZeNLP-Learning through stories" published by The Written Word Publications, "ZeNLP-the power to succeed" published by Sage publications and "ZeNLP-the power to relax" by New Dawn Press. He can be reached at ceo@tips4ceos.com)

Wayne Rooney's 11-year-old son Kai signs for Man United academy

One of Wayne Rooney's sons has followed in his father's footsteps by signing for Manchester United. United's record goalscorer posted a picture on social media of the 11-year-old Kai, the oldest of his four sons, signing a contract to join the Premier League club's youth academy. "Proud day," Rooney posted on Instagram. "Kai signing for @manchesterunited. Keep up the hard work son."

The 38-year-old Rooney is currently interim manager of Derby in the second division. The former England striker had a glittering 13-year career at Old Trafford, scoring 253 times in 559 appearances. "Special night.... congratulations Kai," Rooney's wife, Coleen, wrote on Instagram. "I love you and I am so proud of you. Keep trying your best."

Russia banned from using its name, flag at next two Olympics

Russia was banned Thursday from using its name, flag and anthem at the next two Olympics or at any world championships for the next two years.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport's ruling also blocked Russia from bidding to host major sporting events for two years.

Russian athletes and teams will still be allowed to compete at next year's Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, as well as world championships including the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, if they are not implicated in doping or covering up positive tests.

The punishments are less than the four-year ban the World Anti-Doping Agency had proposed.

The case centered on accusations that Russian state authorities tampered with a database from the Moscow testing laboratory before handing it over to WADA investigators last year.

Australian Open to start on February 8

The Australian Open will start on Feb. 8, three weeks later than scheduled, the ATP Tour said on Thursday in releasing an update of its calendar for 2021 revising the first seven weeks of the season.

The start date of the main draw of the tournament was originally slated for Jan. 18 and Tennis Australia have been locked in drawn-out negotiations with local government over COVID-19 health security measures.

India shot out for 244 in first innings of Adelaide Test

ADELAIDE (TIP): India's tail-enders contributed precious little as the first innings folded at 244 early on the second day of the first day/night Test against Australia here on Friday, Dec 18.

Mitchell Starc (4/53 in 21 overs) and Pat Cummins (3/48 in 21.1 overs) dismissed the last four batsmen for an addition of only 11 runs to the overnight score.

In fact, India lost seven wickets for 56 runs starting with Virat Kohli's run-out engineered by a poor judgement call from vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane.

On Friday, Ravichandran Ashwin (15) got one to rear up from length as Cummins got his second wicket and India's seventh in the first over of the day.

Wriddhiman Saha (9) also didn't trouble the scorers getting out on his overnight tally chasing a wide delivery from Starc.

Umesh Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah hit a boundary each but that was just a tail-ender's bravado as the innings folded in just 25 balls on the second day.

If one goes by how pink ball matches at Adelaide have panned out, India have scored at least 75 runs less than what should have been a fighting first innings total. In the end, Kohli's dismissal cost them dearly.

6 wickets in 13.1 overs

The combination of second new ball and brilliant bowling from Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins spelt the doom for India as they lost four wickets in just 4.1 overs in the first session of Day 2 to get bowled out for 244 in the first Test against Australia in Adelaide.

Even after the unfortunate Virat Kohli run out due to a horrible mix-up between



him and vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane, India were in a comfortable position of 193 for 4 after 80 overs. That's when the second new ball was available and Australia captain Tim Paine did not waste any time to take it.

The game turned on its head from then on. Mitchell Starc dismissed Rahane and Hanuma Vihari fell soon after.

Saha and Ashwin made sure there were no further losses for India on Day 1 but they both of them failed to add to their overnight scores on Friday.

Mitchell Starc (4/53 in 21 overs) and Pat Cummins (3/48 in 21.1 overs) dismissed the last four batsmen for an addition of only 11 runs to the overnight score.

India lost six wickets in the second new ball for just 51 runs in 13.1 overs since the second new ball was taken. In fact, India lost seven wickets for 56 runs starting with Virat Kohli's run-out.

On Friday, Ravichandran Ashwin (15)

got one to rear up from length as Cummins got his second wicket and India's seventh in the first over of the day.

Wriddhiman Saha (9) also didn't trouble the scorers getting out on his overnight tally chasing a wide delivery from Starc.

Umesh Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah hit a boundary each but that was just a tail-ender's bravado as the innings folded in just 25 balls on the second day.

This was the 10th instance when India were bowled out for less than 250 runs in the 1st innings of a Test under Kohli's captaincy.

In the previous 9 instances, India won 5 matches, drawn 1 and lost three, two of them have come in 2020 vs New Zealand

If one goes by how pink ball matches at Adelaide have panned out, India have scored at least 75 runs less than what should have been a fighting first innings total.

Mohammad Amir retires from international cricket claiming 'mental torture'

Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir has retired from international cricket, the PCB has confirmed. Amir represented Pakistan in 36 Tests, 61 ODIs and 50 T20Is, and recently played in the inaugural Lanka Premier League for runners-up Galle Gladiators.

"Pakistan Cricket Board chief executive Wasim Khan spoke with Mohammad Amir this afternoon following reports that the fast bowler had announced his retirement from international cricket. The 28-year-old confirmed to the PCB chief executive that he has no desires or intentions of playing international cricket and as such, he should not be considered for future international matches," a PCB statement said. "This is a personal decision of Mohammad Amir, which the PCB respects, and as such, will not make any further comment on this matter at this stage."

The statement serves as another reminder of the extent to which relations between Amir and the current team management have broken down.



Lewandowski beats Messi, Ronaldo to win FIFA best men's player award

GENEVA (TIP): Robert Lewandowski won the biggest individual prize of his career Thursday, Dec 17, showing that a forward not named Messi or Ronaldo can be voted the world's best soccer player.

The Poland captain was named the FIFA Best Men's Player for 2020 after his 55-goal season lifted Bayern Munich to a sweep of international and domestic trophies.

Lewandowski topped a three-player shortlist that included Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. Voting was by a global jury of national team captains and coaches, plus selected journalists and fans. Lewandowski received 52 voting points, with Ronaldo second on 38 Messi third with 35.

Though FIFA hosted the virtual ceremony in Zurich, its president Gianni Infantino went to Munich to present the trophy in person.

"It's an incredible feeling" said Lewandowski, who at age 32 made



the shortlist for the first time.

Lewandowski joined Luka Modric, the Croatia and Real Madrid midfielder who won in 2018, as the only players in the past 13 years to deny both Messi and Ronaldo the victory.

"Today I am among them," Lewandowski said in comments translated from German. "It means I've always done the right things in my life."

Lucy Bronze was voted the best women's player to give England its first individual victory at the FIFA awards. A Champions League winner with Lyon, she has since joined Manchester City.

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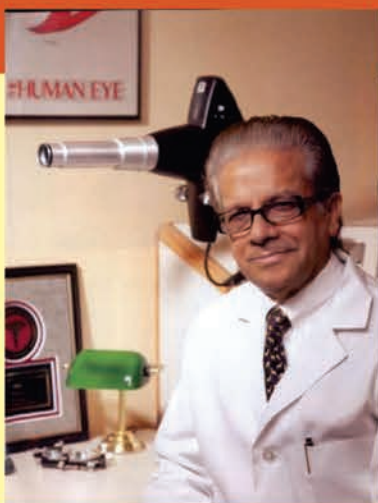
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