

Faruqui show in Bengaluru cancelled; he says: hate has won, I'm done



Controversial figure, say police

KIRAN PARASHAR & IRAM SIDDIQUI
BENGALURU, BHOPAL,
NOVEMBER 28

ANOTHER OF stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui's shows was cancelled, this time in Bengaluru, with the city police citing law and order and calling Faruqui a "controversial figure". Faruqui, who earlier this year spent a month in Indore jail on charges of allegedly "insulting Hindu gods and goddesses" during one of his comedy shows, has been constantly targeted by rightwing groups, with his scheduled shows in Surat, Ahmedabad, Vadodra, Mumbai and Raipur being cancelled.

Faruqui, who was scheduled to perform in Bengaluru on Sunday as part of a show titled 'Dongri to Nowhere', said in a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



At the victims' home in Prayagraj on Sunday. Ritesh Shukla

UP Dalit family killing: Police now arrest youth from same community

Kin not convinced: 'In Hathras case, police changed version many times'

ASAD REHMAN
PRAYAGRAJ, NOVEMBER 28

A DAY after UP Police named 11 people from an upper-caste family in its FIR on the murder of a Dalit family in Prayagraj, and said that eight had been arrested, they issued a new statement Sunday stating that they have now arrested a youth "who belongs to the same community as the deceased" for the killings.

The police also said that the

rape of the girl, who was among those killed, has been confirmed.

In the statement issued Sunday evening, ADG (Prayagraj zone) Prem Prakash said: "The 23-year-old accused belongs to the same community as the deceased. He was harassing the girl by sending her messages on her mobile phone repeatedly. The girl was refusing (his advances). On the basis of the last message and circumstantial evidence, he was arrested."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WINTER SESSION BEGINS TODAY

Govt to push for farm laws repeal today, Opp demands MSP statute

PM skips all-party meet, Rajnath urges healthy debates



At the all-party meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. Prem Nath Pandey

LIZ MATHEW & SOURAVROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

WITH THE UNION government listing the introduction of a Bill to repeal the farm laws in the Lok Sabha for consideration and passage on Monday – the first day of the Winter session of Parliament – many Opposition parties as well as some of those friendly to the Bharatiya Janata Party, have demanded a statutory backing to the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of crops for farmers at an all-party meeting Sunday.

Joining the Congress in seeking legal guarantees on the MSP were Trinamool Congress,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



EXPLAINED: MSP DEMAND, COST TO GOVT PAGE 11

EXPLAINED

MSP is possible, but entails a cost

AT PRESENT, farmers cannot by right ask to be paid the MSP set by the government on crops. Their agitation has been as much about withdrawal of the farm laws as about a legal guarantee for MSP. The MSP entitlement can be met, but it entails a fiscal cost.

Eye on Omicron: Testing at airport for arrivals from 'at risk' countries

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M & DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28



Sanitisation at Kanyakumari SP office on Sunday PTI

WITH AN eye on reports from across the world about Omicron, the new Covid "variant of concern", the Central Government Sunday issued revised guidelines for international travellers arriving from Europe, including the UK, and 11 other "at risk" countries, mandating testing on arrival, home quarantine for seven days on a negative result, and a retest on the eighth day.

The Health Ministry directed all states to ensure that for international travellers from countries other than those labelled "at risk", five per cent of a flight's total number of passengers will have to undergo random-testing on arrival at airports.

The Centre has also decided to review the date of resumption of scheduled international commercial flights "as per the evolving global scenario". On Friday, the Ministry of Civil Aviation had announced the resumption of these flights from December 15, after a 21-month gap.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Five players in Jr World Cup, this India hockey story has a UP twist

MIHIR VASAVDA
BHUBANESWAR,
NOVEMBER 28

MOST OF Sharda Nand Tiwari's school summer breaks were spent working at grocery stores in Lucknow. Not wanting to impose the burden of his hobby on his father, a security guard, Tiwari saved every paisa of the Rs 700 or so he earned to buy hockey equipment.

A few hundred kilometres away, in Karampur, Uttam Singh was living his father Krishnakant Singh's dream. Krishnakant, an aspiring player, was forced to leave hockey and support the family after the untimely demise of his father. So the small-time



Uttam Singh, a speedy forward with an unerring eye for goal, hails from Karampur village in UP. Pic: Hockey India

farmer invested most of his meagre resources in making his son, Uttam, a player.

Not too far in Atagaon, Vishnukant Singh was just six

when he followed his sister Preeti, a national-level player, to the village ground. From that day, there's been no looking back.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

IDEA EXCHANGE

'If shortcomings, Opp should suggest changes. Govt must consider suggestions'

OMBIRLA, LS SPEAKER
PAGE 10

40% fatal crashes due to rear-end collisions: highway audit

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

REAR-END COLLISIONS account for around 40 per cent of fatal accidents on highway stretches, with driver "sleepiness and fatigue" behind many of these crashes, according to an audit initiated by the government to bring down fatalities on national highways.

The study -- a pilot audit of data on four highway stretches in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra totalling 557 km one way -- also found several engineering defects such as gaps in medians, missing crash barriers, concrete structures kept along the road etc, all of which added to accidents and resultant fatalities. In the Agra-Etawah stretch, for instance, 7,500 such engineering faults were identified. The other three corridors that were audited are Etawah-Chakeri in UP, and Pune-Satara and Satara-Kagal in Maharashtra.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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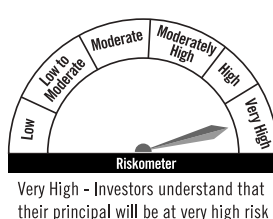
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VACCINATIONS IN
LAST 24 HOURS
1,23,901



		Total	Vacant
TOTAL CASES		13,507	13,340
HOSPITAL BEDS		2,791	2,762
ICU BEDS			
	Cases	Recoveries	Deaths
Nov 27	27	37	1
Nov 28	32	33	1
Total	288*	14,15,481	25,097
			Tests
			59,651
			53,515
			3,08,25,326

Total active cases

Schools reopen, but most say full bus services are not feasible



Despite schools returning to the offline mode, bus services have been much slower to restart. *Archive*

SUKRITABARUAH
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

WITH SCHOOLS reopening for all classes today, after being shut due to pollution, a handful of schools will also be resuming their bus services for students who wish to avail of it.

Schools had reopened for classes IX to XII on September 1 and for up to class VIII on November 1, only to close after two weeks due to the rising air pollution in the city. Despite schools returning to the offline mode, bus services were much slower to restart. While a few schools will resume their transport services with limited services from Monday, a majority of schools are yet to do so.

"It is a logistical challenge. Financially it can be a source of loss as expenses are incurred only for a few students who will use it. But we know many students can only come if bus services are available because dropping them is difficult for working parents. Between 60 and 70% of students have given their consent to come to school, of whom 15 per cent have asked for bus services. Depending on the location of these students, we have redrawn our bus routes and the buses will operate at a 50% capacity," said Kavita Soni, principal Venkateshwar Global School, Rohini.

Students are attending the

school on alternate days. According to Soni, while the school has not increased its transport fees, parents will be asked to remit the fees for the entire month even if the students only use it for half the working days.

At St. Thomas School Dwarka, only 10 per cent of the original bus users have opted to avail of bus services.

"The overall numbers are small but we have been receiving requests from parents since pick-up and drop are difficult for them. We are not starting the entire fleet of buses; just six buses on rationalised routes. We are still waiting to see what the actual turnout will be, but at some point in time we will move towards normalcy," said principal Meneka Singh.

According to Bharat Arora, General Secretary of Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools, an umbrella body of over 400 private schools in the city, less than 10 per cent of the schools are offering transport services.

"Some schools have little clarity due to a lack of SOPs regarding school buses. Conducting fitness tests of buses since they have been inactive for a year and a half is also a slow process. The cost involved is huge. However, the truth is schools can't wholly operate without restarting bus facilities," he said.

In new liquor policy, some hiccups

As the Delhi government's move to completely privatise the alcohol vends business begins to take shape, suppliers are running into some teething troubles. But officials are confident these are blips in a long-overdue process

MALLICA JOSHI
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

HALF-EMPTY SHELVES, shortage of several brands, and small protests — teething troubles seen in the first few days of implementation of the Delhi government's new excise policy persist at the private liquor shops that have opened across the city.

Ten days ago, the new policy, which saw the government pulling out of retail trade entirely, came into force. This was preceded by a month and a half of only government liquor shops being allowed to function as bidding for new private vends was underway.

At the new liquor shop in New Friends Colony, half the shelves lie empty. On Sunday evening, a supply truck reached the store, but with only a few cartons of liquor. Only a few brands of beer and wine were available at the store, which opened on November 17.

"Wholesalers are not being able to fulfil the demand at present. Stock is low. Part of this is because people who have opened shops now are trying to order as much as they can. If, for example, they needed 50 cartons, they are ordering 200 because there is panic. Many feel they will not get enough stock in the coming days and are over ordering. This means many others are not able to procure anything," said Sonu Kumar, the shop in-charge.

The swanky shop has a well-lit, multi-coloured walls, and back-lit shelves, though most are empty at present.

"Only a few brands are available in the market. Smaller brands of beer, for example, are available, but Kingfisher and Budweiser, for example, are not being supplied at all. We are hoping that things will improve in the coming week," he said.

The new policy

Last year, the Delhi government had set up a committee to make suggestions for a new liquor policy. The trade, which brought in revenue of about Rs 6,000 crore for the govern-



ment, was suspected to be steeped in corruption.

In March, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had announced that a new framework will be brought into place to change the trade and that the government will exit the business of selling liquor.

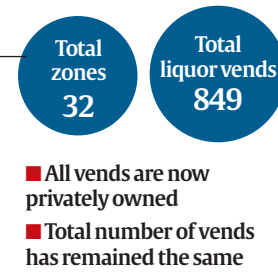
The new policy was aimed at increasing government revenue, improving consumer experience at liquor shops, and reducing corruption. Another aim was to redistribute liquor shops in an equitable way. Earlier, there were several municipal wards, where there were no authorised liquor vends and there were reports of bootlegging and illegal vends.

As per the new policy, only private liquor shops now run in the city and each municipal ward has 2-3 liquor vends. The government hopes this will stop illicit practices. Another big change was that a majority of the excise fee has been subsumed in the licence fee now. An estimated amount, based on the approximate bottles that are expected to be sold, has been charged at the time of giving licences. A small percentage will be collected based on the number of bottles sold. Sisodia had earlier told *The Indian Express* that since most of the money has been paid up front, there would be no incentive for corruption. After bidding, the government is expected to collect Rs 10,000 as

HARDLOOK

IN FIGURES

- Each zone has approximately 9 wards
- Liquor vend per zone: approximately 3
- Redistribution of vends has taken place across the city



NEW RULES

- Minimum area of one vend: 500 SQ FT
- No counter can open on to the street
- Safety and security is the responsibility of the shop owner
- CCTVs will have to be put up
- Licence fee has been increased manifold and has been collected at the time of bidding
- Expected revenue in a year: ₹10,000 crore

VENDS WERE EARLIER DISTRIBUTED UNEQUALLY

- 272 Total wards (except NDMC and Cantonment areas)
- There were more than 11 vends each in 14 wards
- 20% were over-served

revenue in 12 months.

Supply challenges

After reopening on November 27, private vends have faced a shortage in supply. The biggest hit seems to have been in the beer and wine selection, vendors say.

"The problem is at the supply end. Many vends are open but waiting for supply from wholesalers. Liquor shop owners usually hold a 15-day inventory. This means that if I sell alcohol worth Rs 1 lakh each day, I will have stock worth Rs 15 lakh in my inventory. Wholesalers and manufacturers usually hold on to a 10-day inventory. When the new policy came into being, this stock went empty for several days. Refilling it is the big challenge

now. If we look at beer, 60% of the market is held by Kingfisher and 20% by Budweiser. None of these are available. Some smaller brands are available, but even among those, there is no light beer in the market. The position is the same for wines," said a liquor trader who has been in the business for decades.

For many traders, ordering alcohol from wholesalers is proving to be a challenge. At Star City Mall in Mayur Vihar, trader Amit Bhadana has a long line of customers at his store, but shelves in his shop are only half full.

"The website through which we have to place orders has been slow for a long time. Several people are struggling to place orders. Those who have managed to get

through have placed large orders anticipating a shortage in future so there is not enough left for those who cannot place orders on time. Customers are back, but variety is missing in shops," he said.

The government believes the challenges in supply should be resolved in the coming two weeks.

"There have been some problems with the backend, but things are smoothing out slowly. The entire system is new and there have been a few initial hiccups. We are expecting the supply chain to improve in two weeks. There are just teething troubles," an excise department official said.

Meanwhile, in some places, residents and political parties have protested against the opening of new vends.



A shop in New Friends Colony (left) and a protest in Jangpura. *Gajendra Yadav*

While the number of liquor vends has remained the same as earlier, because of redistribution and retendering, liquor shops have now opened in new areas.

In Jangpura A, residents have gone to court demanding that the new vend not be allowed to function. On Sunday, 7-8 residents sat outside the shop holding placards and demanding that it be shut down and shifted to another area.

"There is a temple, a gurdwara, a church and a masjid close to where the shop is coming up. There is even a school and an ashram nearby. The road is narrow and there will be regular traffic jams here. How can a liquor shop be opened here? We filed a PIL in court that will be heard on December 3," said the group of residents sitting outside the shop.

In the shop inside, the manager says they had to send back the stock that they had bought because of the protests. "We will get a final answer only on December 3 now," he said.

Delhi government officials said that the protests were politically motivated. "Both BJP and Congress want to bring this issue up to get some support in the MCD polls. We made it clear that the number of vends has not increased, only redistribution has taken place. Things should smoothen out in the coming few weeks," said a senior official.

BRIEFLY

Air quality severe for 3rd day in a row

New Delhi: Delhi's air quality remained in the 'severe' category for the third consecutive day on Sunday, with the AQI at 405. According to the SAFAR forecasting system, local wind speed is likely to increase on Monday and Tuesday, leading to a slight improvement in air quality, though the AQI is likely to remain in the 'very poor' category.

Gautam Gambhir receives third death threat

New Delhi: BJP MP Gautam Gambhir allegedly received an e-mail Sunday from Karachi in Pakistan with death threats against him and his family, days after getting two similar messages. Sunday's message came from an email id called "ISIS Kashmir".

Sisodia takes up Punjab minister's challenge

New Delhi: Deputy CM Sisodia released a list of 250 government schools Sunday, and asked that Punjab Education Minister Pargat Singh also do the same to compare education models in both states. **ENS**

Site of proposed church vandalised in Dwarka, 1 arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

A WAREHOUSE where a proposed church is supposed to have been built at Dwarka was allegedly vandalised by a group of men, who have been accused of damaging the board outside and threatening people. Police said one person has been arrested.

Those present at the warehouse, where a signboard that read 'church' was put up over the weekend, alleged that members of a right-wing outfit interrupted the Sunday mass and indulged in vandalism. Police said cases have been registered against both sides, including under the DDMA Act, which prohibits large gatherings. Around 15-20 people associated with the church, Ankur Narula Ministries, were praying

when some men gathered outside, police said. A purported video of the incident shows some men sloganeering and damaging a board outside.

Shankar Choudhary, DCP (Dwarka), said in a statement: "A call regarding the confrontation between two groups was reported at Matiala road police station at Bindapur. Some people had gathered at a warehouse where they had put a board with word 'CHURCH' to which locals had objected as they claim it to have been done clandestinely. In this quarrel, some local miscreants tried to vitiate atmosphere by vandalising the said board. The miscreants ran away by the time police reached the spot. Cases have been registered against both groups under relevant IPC sections. No one was injured. One of them has been arrested..."

After years, free water supply to be extended to 3 NDMC areas

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

THE 20 KILOLITRES free water supply scheme of the Delhi government will be extended to houses in the B K Dutt Colony, East Kidwai Nagar and New Moti Bagh areas of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), where residents have not been able to avail the scheme so far.

In the B K Dutt colony area, new pipelines were laid but connections were not given. Tilak Chhabra, general secretary of the B K Dutt Colony RWA said that free supply of water had eluded the residents. "Pipes were laid, but connections have not been given yet... there were some objections, and the connections and setting up of meters never worked out. There are about 1,036 quarters in the colony," he said. According to a communication from the government, the

connection charges of Rs 7,500 had kept residents from taking connections.

At an NDMC meeting Sunday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal proposed that the connection charges be waived off in the area, and free connections and the free water supply scheme can be extended to residents in the colony. Kejriwal also said that residents will not be required to submit affidavits for water connection, and will only have to submit their ID proof and electricity bill.

Residents of multi-storey complexes in East Kidwai Nagar and New Moti Bagh who also could not avail of free water supply scheme due to bulk connections at these buildings, will now get personal water meters. Meters will now be installed at the outlet to provide 20 kilolitres for free. Kejriwal said that "residents suffered because the issue was not brought to the council."

Free water supply of up to 20 kilolitres per month is a scheme launched for all areas in Delhi with effect from January 2014. The Delhi Jal Board notification issued in January 2014 states that benefit of free water will be available only to consumers with functional meters.

Consumers who have used over 20 kilolitres per month will be billed according to tariff for the full quantity consumed.

Senior DJB officials said there is no clarity yet on whether the scheme to extend the benefit of free 20 kilolitres of water per household will be extended to housing colonies in other parts of city that have bulk connections.

NDMC employees' unions had written to the CM asking for a discussion on pay scale arrears. The CM said a meeting would be held to sort out grievances. Kejriwal also approved a proposal for mechanical sweeping at Connaught Place and Janpath.

46 SPEAKERS FOR CHILDREN AGED 4 TO 14

Bookaroo Children's Literature Festival returns to new venue

PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

UNTIL THE pandemic and the Central Vista Redevelopment Project reshaped the city and our relationship with it, for many children of Delhi, listening to some of their favourite storytellers bring alive tales of wonder and joy at the Bookaroo Children's Literature Festival, at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) at Janpath, had been a winter staple. The return of the festival after nearly two years, this

time at National Rail Museum at Chanakyaपुरi, since the old IGNCA complex has been razed, marks a return to a semblance of pre-pandemic lives. The two-day festival, which took off on November 27, will see 46 speakers—children's writers, illustrators, storytellers and publishers—hold sessions for children aged between 4 and 14 years.

On Saturday afternoon, the weekend buzz at the museum seemed to have gained further momentum, as long queues of parents and children snaked their way to the venue. At six different



At Bookaroo Children's Literature Festival, at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Janpath. *Paromita Chakrabarti*

venues, storytelling and art and craft sessions were in progress with veteran writers such as Ranjit Lal, Paro Anand, Deepa Agarwal and artists such as Savio Mascarenhas and Mistunee Chowdhury.

Even though this year's festival is at a smaller scale — 48 sessions as opposed to the 90 to 100 sessions over the weekend and an additional 25-30 on the preceding Friday — festival director and co-organiser Swati Roy said their efforts have gone into ensuring there is something for everyone at the festival. "As always, we have

a lot of new speakers. We have an ongoing activity called the Wall of Healing, based on the book, Somnath Hore: Wounds (by Likhla, Shambhavi Thakur and Kripa Bhatia, published by Art1st). Here, children and adults can come and express their pain and angst, guided by artists who have created the book," she said.

As children streamed in, poring over programme brochures to decide where to head to or made their way to the bookstore to pick up a book by an author they had just discovered, writers said they were delighted to be back. "It was

great to see kids' animated faces and chat with some who are going to make it good in spite of our education system which aims to garrot them," said Ranjit Lal, who had one of the opening sessions.

"Bookaroo showed children how to pack a punch in reading for pleasure. Its contribution to Indian kid-lit can't be measured, so intricately has it been linked to the rise of this glorious phase, in terms of getting more children interested in reading, and of providing a platform to celebrate books, creators and stories," said author Richa Jha, publisher of Pickle Yolk Books.

CM demands ban on flights from regions with new variant

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

DELHI CHIEF Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday, requesting him to stop international flights from regions seeing a rise in Covid-19 cases.

"Our country has fought a tough fight against corona for the last one and a half years. With great difficulty and due to selfless service of millions of our Covid warriors, our country has recovered. We should do everything possible to prevent the new variant of concern, recently recognised by WHO, from entering India. A number of countries, including the European Union,



Has written to PM

have suspended travel to the affected regions. I urge you to stop flights from these regions with immediate effect. Any delay in this regard may prove harmful, if any affected person enters India," he wrote.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, meanwhile, has

revised its guidelines for passengers arriving in the country. Upon arrival, passengers from countries under the category 'at risk' will be sent to 7-day mandatory home quarantine after RT-PCR test at the point of arrival. Passengers from other countries will be allowed to leave the airport and asked to self-monitor their health for 14 days post arrival. 5 per cent of the total flight passengers will undergo post-arrival testing at random at the airport on arrival.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority, which has been reviewing the Covid situation in the city since 2020, is also scheduled to meet on Monday to discuss steps to make sure the spread of the new variant is curbed.

On the agenda, officials said, is a discussion on quarantining passengers who enter Delhi from countries where the variant has been detected. Mandatory testing on arrival will also be discussed.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that all departments of the government are on high alert. "I appeal to people to not unnecessarily mingle and to take all necessary precautions... ADDMA meeting has been called on this. If even a single person carrying the new variant comes to Delhi, it will spread fast, so please do not mingle unnecessarily," he told reporters on the sidelines of a press conference Sunday.

AAP gets into MCD poll campaign mode

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

THE AAM Aadmi Party will launch its MCD campaign Thursday, with an emphasis on recruiting members ahead of the municipal polls.

Municipal elections in the capital are expected to be held in April next year. The 'MCD Badlaav Campaign' will see a special app to upload all campaign details. An in-charge will be appointed in each division, responsible for carrying out campaign activities, said AAP Delhi head Gopal Rai.

"In view of the MCD elections, we are going to launch a big membership drive soon. In this MCD Badlaav Campaign, we will upload the data through a special app for streamlining and efficient working. The district teams of the Party's State Organisation, observers, the

speaker and organisation ministers from each assembly were trained at the party office on how to carry the MCD Badlaav Campaign forward," he said.

Meetings will be held till December 1 at the Vidhan Sabha level where area in-charges and MLAs will be present. The agenda is to select mandal in-charges who will work alongside mandal presidents.

Party desks will be set up in each mandal in a week, Rai said. Outdoor campaigns, with party posters highlighting issues, will be put up through the week. New members will also be added.

"We have at least 8-10 people in every street for the campaign. These people will further our campaign and its awareness in their respective streets, to ensure good connectivity. New members will be identified to strengthen the organisation," Rai added.

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Tuesday, 30 November 2021 at 3:00pm
Venue:
Seminar Room, Library Building
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Google Meet Link: <https://meet.google.com/dkj-pecf-nwf>
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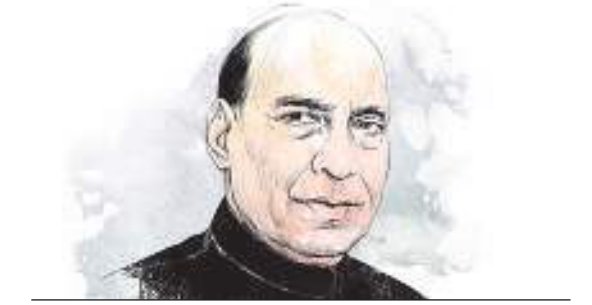
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6 GOVT & POLITICS



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FRIENDS, INDEED

DEFENCE MINISTER Rajnath Singh and Trinamool Congress MP Sudip Bandopadhyay shared a light moment after Sunday's all-party meeting, which saw some heated discussions between Union ministers and Opposition members. But in a far cry from the usual acrimony between leaders from the two sides, as Singh left Parliament premises after the meeting, he jovially tapped Bandopadhyay on his shoulders, leaving the TMC leader with a wide grin. Realising that he had interrupted Bandopadhyay's interaction with a reporter, Singh requested him to carry on as he left.

HISTORY ON HISTORY

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING Committee on Education created history last week when it invited a class IX student to depose before it. Tanish Venkatesh, a student of HDFC School in Gurgaon, gave his views to the panel on November 26 on how history textbooks should be changed, and the kind of reforms students would like in textbooks. Venkatesh had approached panel chairman Vinay Sahasrabudhe seeking an opportunity to give his views, and the chairman allowed him. Venkatesh, who designed a monogram on Maratha empire, expressed his views about content and design of history textbooks.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

WITH DEFENCE Minister Rajnath Singh present in Sunday's all-party meeting, CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas, who was a journalist in Delhi in the 1990s and early-2000s, reminded him how leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani, and Singh himself, used to treat Parliament sessions. But now, Brittas rued, Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not come to Parliament regularly. He also spoke on how Vajpayee used to refer to the way Jawaharlal Nehru respected and sat through sessions. Although Singh sat quietly listening to him, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi tried to interrupt. Brittas then told him, "Pralhad-ji, Rajnath-ji is patiently listening...", much to Joshi's embarrassment.

CJI: Need India-specific studies for diabetes care

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28CJIN V
Ramana

CHIEF JUSTICE of India N V Ramana on Sunday stressed on the need for India-specific studies targeting the local population for developing appropriate protocols for treatment of diabetes and called for standardising permissible blood sugar levels.

Delivering the inaugural address at the Ahuja Bajaj Symposium on Diabetes, the CJI said that though diabetes has been around for ages, it took the Covid-19 pandemic to show its deadly impact, as it was one of the main comorbidities that can affect the severity of illness when infected with the virus.

The CJI said the impact of diabetes over the Indian must be looked at and added "though abundant literature is available on this issue, unfortunately, most of it is based on western studies. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct India specific studies targeting the Indian population which shall help in development of appropriate treatment protocols".

CJI Ramana said it is a myth that the disease only affects the rich. "In the last two decades, a paradigm shift has been seen, with respect to the number of affected

persons -- from urban to rural areas. Due to lack of access to affordable health care and awareness, most of the cases go undetected for the longest amount of time. But, the reality is that this disease affects people across all classes and age groups," he said.

He added that it is unfortunate that we are still unable to standardise permissible blood sugar levels. "There is a lot of confusion due to different standards applied in different countries during different times. We must at least try to standardise the parameters within our country," the CJI said.

Justice Ramana also underlined the need for State support for those with diabetes, given the financial drain it can cause to the poor in their lifetime apart from the immense human cost and economic cost to the nation.

"Therefore, it is essential that the State provides support and subsidy for diabetic care. The government also needs to train and introduce more health care professionals to deal with this problem," he said.

BJP sweeps Tripura local polls, wins 217 of 222 seats contested

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, NOVEMBER 28

THE BJP on Sunday swept the Tripura civic body elections, winning 217 of the 222 seats and all 14 urban bodies that went to polls. The cherry on the top for the saffron party in its landslide victory was its complete dominance in the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC), which is without an Opposition for the first time since its inception.

The BJP had earlier won 112 out of the total 324 municipal seats across seven urban bodies uncontested. The elections for the remaining 222 seats across 14 urban bodies were held on November 25.

The CPI(M), which had won 18 out of 20 urban bodies in the last civic body polls, won only three seats across three urban bodies.

The TMC emerged as the party with second highest vote share after the BJP, though the party could win only a single seat across the state -- at the Ambassa Municipal Council. The remaining seat went to Tripura royal scion Pradyot Kishore-led TIPRA Motha at the Ambassa Municipal Council.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the sweeping victory has sent a message that the people of Tripura want "good governance". He tweeted, "The people of Tripura have given a clear message -- that they prefer politics of good governance. I would like to thank them for the unequivocal support to



BJP supporters celebrate in Agartala. Abhishek Saha

TMC LEADER ATTACKED IN TELIAMURA: POLICE

Agartala: The administration in Teliamura municipal area has imposed restrictions on public movement under CrP Section 144 after unidentified miscreants attacked a TMC candidate at Ompi Chowmuhani on Sunday. A Tripura Police officer said a team of TMC candidates and polling agents were being escorted to their homes by a police team when the miscreants attacked them. **ENS**

@BJP4Tripura. These blessings give us greater strength to work for the welfare of each and every person in Tripura."

Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb said this was a "historic" victory and the people of Tripura have given a "sothik jobaab" (apt answer) to its critics by casting votes which ensured that BJP won 98.50 per cent of the seats.

TMC leader Rajib Bhattacharjee accused the BJP of rigging the elections and said his party has emerged as the "main opposition". "BJP did scientific rigging during the polls. Despite that, Trinamool got 24 per cent of the votes on an average across all the

urban bodies. TMC received the second highest number of votes."

Tripura Left Front convener Narayan Kar said the civic polls were reduced to a "mockery", and alleged the state election commission and police had "consciously failed" to conduct free and fair elections.

Meanwhile, BJP's ally in Tripura, the IPFT, is set to hold a joint dhama with the TIPRA Motha at Jantar Mantar from November 30. Timed with the winter session of the Parliament, the tribal outfits will raise the demand for a separate state of Greater Tripaland to protect the interests of indigenous communities.

Advisers won't enjoy ministerial status: Gehlot

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday said the MLAs appointed as his advisers or those who will be made parliamentary secretaries won't get any ministerial status or perks. Last week, Gehlot had appointed six advisers, which included three Congress MLAs, and the BJP had objected to the appointments. "I am only taking advice... If they are not given [ministerial status], then what is wrong," Gehlot asked. **PTI**

Those giving patronage to mafia will be destroyed: Yogi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DEORIA, GORAKHPUR,
NOVEMBER 28

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday accused opposition parties of patronising criminals, saying those backing them are paving the way for their own destruction.

He also compared the mafia to Bhasmasur, a demon who could reduce anybody to ashes after touching on their head but ended up burning himself.

"All mafia are Bhasmasur. People who will give patronage to these Bhasmasur will pave the way for their own destruc-

tion. People are giving patronage to the Bhasmasur and Mahabhasmasur and hence it is needed to remain alert and careful from them," he said.

Attacking the rival political parties, Adityanath said the bulldozer is being run on properties of the mafia but some people are feeling bad. "People from the SP, BSP and the Congress are strongly opposing it," he said.

Without taking the name of SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, he said, "Do not be deceived by the dual character and colour changing nature of a chameleon. These people get themselves vaccinated without making much noise and say they have not taken

the vaccines. The public is requested to take the vaccine and do not fall prey to any rumours.

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, 'babua-bua [nephew and aunt]', 'chacha-bhatija [uncle and nephew]', 'bhai-bahan [brother and sister]' were in home isolation. The governments at the Centre and in the state, and BJP workers worked during the pandemic and I was travelling all over the state to help the people," he claimed.

Later, addressing an event in Bansgaon, Adityanath said those who gain success by cheating, treachery and devious means are never able to achieve a high position in life.

Tewari hits back at party colleague Adhir, shares tweets raising China issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

DAYS AFTER Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury criticised him and asked him to focus on China instead of the 26/11 attacks, Congress leader Manish Tewari on Sunday hit back at Chowdhury, sharing screenshots of his tweets directed at Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in which he raised the China issue.

Chowdhury last week had hit out at Tewari over his criticism of the UPA for its response to the 26/11 attacks, saying the ex-Union minister didn't raise it when he was part of the government.

Khattar: Call on farmer FIRs once matters reach final stage

Chandigarh: With farmer unions demanding withdrawal of cases lodged against them during the agitation against the three farm laws, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday said that the issue will be taken up once the matter reaches the final stage.

Soon after the announcement for repealing the laws, the farmers had demanded withdrawal of all cases registered against them during the agitation.

Khattar said, "This matter will be taken up when the entire issue will reach the final stage and after we see what the Centre has to say." **ENS**

Kisan mahapanchayat calls for BJP's defeat in elections

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 28

AKISAN mahapanchayat, held at Mumbai's Azad Maidan on the death anniversary of Jotirao Phule, called for the defeat of the BJP in all upcoming Assembly elections and the local body polls in Maharashtra.

The mahapanchayat, held under the banner of Samyukta Shetkari Kamgar Morcha (SSKM), celebrated the "historic victory" of the year-long farmers' protest to get the central farm laws repealed, and declared its determination to fight for the remaining demands.

These include a law to guarantee a just MSP and procurement, withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill, removal from the Cabinet and arrest of Union minister Ajay Mishra over the

MSP: Amid farm protests, Govt moved from 'no' to 'written assurance'

HARIKISHAN SHARMA,
LIZ MATHEW & MANOJ CGG
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28EXPLAINED
E The crops under the MSP system

WHILE THE Centre is yet to respond to the farmers' demand on making MSP (minimum support price) based on the comprehensive cost of production (C2+50%) a "legal entitlement of all farmers for all agricultural produce", records show that over the last two years, the government's stand on legal guarantee for MSP moved from a "no" to an offer of a "written assurance" on continuing the existing system.

Parliament records show that when DMK MP D Ravikumar sought to know whether the government was considering bringing a legislation on farmers' "right to sell at MSP", Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told Lok Sabha on July 16, 2019: "No".

But last year, following protests against the three farm laws, with farm unions also demanding legal guarantee for MSP, the government offered a written assurance on continuation of MSP. First, Tomar clarified in the Lok Sabha, during the monsoon session last year, that the MSP will continue; he reiterated this on several occasions later.

The demand for legal guarantee gained voice during the agitation against the farm laws. And it increased after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on November 19, announced the government's intention to repeal the laws.

Two days later, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha wrote to Modi: "MSP based on the comprehensive cost of production (C2+50%) should be made a legal entitlement of all farmers for all agricultural produce, so that every farmer of the country can be guaranteed at least the MSP announced by the government for their entire crop."

The Congress, while extending support to the farmers' agitation, stopped short of echoing their demand on MSP. The party said what the farmers need is a "guaranteed architecture" for grant of MSP.

In its 2019 poll manifesto, the party had promised "to establish

THE MSP system was introduced in 1965 to encourage farmers to grow foodgrains. It was initially declared for paddy and wheat, but later extended to 23 crops, including 7 cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, pearl millet, barley and ragi); 5 pulses (gram, tur, moong, urad, lentil); 7 oilseeds (groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, soyabean, sesamum, sunflower, safflower, nigerseed); and 4 commercial crops (copra, sugarcane, cotton and raw jute). However, the government mainly procures paddy and wheat, and less quantity of some other crops.

a permanent national commission on agricultural development and planning... The commission will subsume the existing Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and recommend appropriate minimum support prices."

Asked about the Congress's position, the party's communication department head Randeep Surjewala said farmers were not getting the MSP as the government had stopped procuring paddy. "There is a deliberate design to puncture and demolish the architecture of MSP on the part of the Modi government. This is a revenge seeking exercise against the farmers..."

Asked whether the Congress supported the demand for legal backing for MSP, he said: "The Congress believes there has to be a guaranteed architecture for grant of MSP. The guaranteed architecture comes with the intent of the government, capacity creation by the government for procurement as also deciding the MSP and dates and duration of procurement."

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Farmer leaders Tejinder Singh, Darshan Pal, Rakesh Tikait and activist Medha Patkar at the mahapanchayat. Ganesh Shirsekar

Lakhimpur Kheri deaths. Samyukta Kisan Morcha leader Rakesh Tikait accused the central government of running away from a debate on MSP and other issues. "Several issues related to farming and labour sectors need attention, and we will

travel all over the country to highlight them," he said.

Speaking to the media, Tikait said the Centre should bring a law to guarantee MSP. "Otherwise, January 26 (Republic Day) is not far, and 4 lakh tractors and farmers all are there."

IN MANN KI BAAT PROGRAMME, ALSO SPEAKS OF CONSTITUTIONAL DUTIES, CONSERVATION OF NATURE

Indians not only dreaming of being job seekers but also job creators: PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday said that if someone wants to start their own company, people are not sceptical but are excited, and this is a turning point in India's growth story.

Addressing the nation through his radio programme Mann Ki Baat, Modi said Indians were not just dreaming of becoming job seekers, but also job creators and that this would strengthen India's stature on the global stage.

"A few years back, if someone used to say that he wants to do business or wants to start a new

company, then the elders of the family used to say 'Why don't you want to do a job... There is security in the job, there is salary... But, if someone wants to start their own company today, then all the people around him are very excited and also supportive,'" Modi said.

"This is the turning point of India's growth story, where people are now not only dreaming of becoming job seekers but also becoming job creators. This will further strengthen India's stature on the global stage."

The Prime Minister emphasised that in a country with a large youth population, three aspects matter -- ideas and innovation, the spirit of taking risks, and the "can do" spirit. "...When these

three things combine, phenomenal results are produced, miracles happen," he said.

Modi said that till 2015, there were nine or 10 unicorns (start-ups with a valuation of over \$1 billion) in the country, but in the last 10 months, a unicorn was being raised in India every 10 days. "This is also a big thing because our youth have achieved this success in the midst of the pandemic. Today there are more than 70 unicorns in India," he said.

The Prime Minister spoke to a college student named Mayur Patil, who through his start-up, was working on improving mileage of vehicles and reducing their carbon emissions. Remembering Dr B R



BJP president J P Nadda listens to the Mann Ki Baat programme in Delhi's Vasant Vihar zone with senior party leaders and workers. Nadda said the BJP's target is to organise programmes for people to listen to Mann Ki Baat at every booth across the country by May 2022. Gajendra Yadav

Ambedkar ahead of his death anniversary on December 6, the PM underlined that the Constitution teaches us to remember our duties. "Baba Saheb had devoted his entire life in rendering his duties for the country and society. We the countrymen should never forget the basic spirit of our Constitution, that our Constitution expects all of us to discharge our duties. So let us also take a pledge that in the [Azadi Ka] Amrit Mahotsav, we will try to fulfil our duties with full devotion," Modi said.

The Prime Minister also spoke about Uttar Pradesh in multiple contexts. "All of us know of the huge contribution of Jhansi and Bundelkhand in our Fight for Freedom. Veeranganas, brave

hearts such as Rani Laxmibai and Jhalkaribai hailed from here... This region has given to the country legendary sports persons like Major Dhyan Chand too," Modi said.

The Prime Minister, however, underlined that bravery was not displayed only on the battlefield, narrating the story of the people from Jalaun, who rejuvenated a river in the region. "...This example of bravery shows the determination of our countrymen, and it also tells that if we take a resolve, nothing is impossible and that is why I say 'Sabka Prayas'...everyone's effort," Modi said.

The Prime Minister also laid stress on conservation of nature. "When we conserve nature, in return nature also gives us pro-

tection and security. We experience this in our personal life as well..." he said, narrating the story of Thoothukudi residents who prevented soil erosion by planting palmyra trees.

Modi also spoke about the viral picture of a boat which appears to be flying, but actually is on a Meghalaya river. "There are many areas where people have preserved the colours of their natural heritage. These people have kept the lifestyle of living in harmony with nature alive. This is an inspiration to all of us too. Whatever natural resources are around us, we should save them, bring them back to their actual form. In this lies the interests of all of us, interests of the world," Modi said.



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NEW MENU

A new public stocking policy centred on pulses, edible oils and vegetables is needed to manage unseasonal price hikes

WINTER IS USUALLY when tomatoes, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, capsicum, radish, peas, spinach and other greens become relatively affordable. It has to do with their plantings mostly happening during August-October. In tomatoes, these begin even earlier — from mid-June, with the monsoon rains, and up to late-September. Given that they are all 50 to 100 day crops — tomatoes take 110-120 days, but start yielding fruits from 70-80 days over 8-10 “flushes” at 4-5 day intervals — their arrivals peak over the winter, contributing to the familiar pattern of low prices at this time. Even the kharif onions planted in June-July are ready for harvesting during October-December. The same goes for the early-rabi potato that comes from the low hills of Himachal Pradesh, followed by Punjab, in November-December.

The current winter that has just set in is, however, turning out quite different. Tomatoes are retailing at upwards of Rs 60 per kg and onions at Rs 40, compared to their corresponding all-India levels of Rs 40 and Rs 30 three months ago. There's a simple reason for this: Erratic rains. Rainfall was overall deficient during the main kharif sowing season from mid-June through August, although less so in the major vegetable-growing hubs of Maharashtra and southern India. But Maharashtra recorded excess rains in September and October, hitting production of both kharif onions and tomatoes, cultivated especially in the Nashik belt. November turned out worse, more so in the South, with the standing kharif tomato crop — be it at Madanapalle and Ramasamudram in Andhra Pradesh's Rayalaseema region, Kolar, Chikkaballapur and Doddaballapur in Karnataka or Krishnagiri in Tamil Nadu — suffering extensive damage.

The above unseasonal price spike raises concerns on two counts. The first is the impact on inflation and, more important, inflation expectations among the public. At a time when the latter already stands elevated — thanks to the sharp increases in petrol, diesel, LPG and edible oil prices over the last one year — costlier tomatoes and onions would only add to the pain points. Incidentally, consumer price inflation for vegetables was minus 19.43 per cent in October. That rate rebounding in the opposite direction, most unusually in winter, makes it all the more difficult for the Reserve Bank of India to continue with its accommodative monetary policy stance. The second concern is more long-term, relating to climate change. This is a second successive year when the peninsula has had heavy unseasonal rains in September-October, destroying the harvest-ready kharif crops. It calls for a new public stocking policy — away from rice and wheat to pulses, edible oils and vegetables that are more vulnerable to climate and global price risks. Vegetable storage can even be in dehydrated/processed form such as potato flakes, onion paste and tomato puree.

NEW HORIZONS

The development turnaround in Nepal and Bangladesh is an inspiring story for South Asia

THE INCLUSION OF two more South Asian countries, Nepal and Bangladesh, for graduation into the category of “developing countries” marks a significant milestone for these two countries. The UN General Assembly resolution accepting the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council's Committee for Development that these two countries (and Laos), categorised until now as Least Developed Countries meet the criteria to be called “developing” countries is a measure of the success of their policies towards achieving some development goals. This year, as laid down by the CDP, the criteria were per capita Gross National Income of \$1,018 and above; a high score of 60 on the Human Assets Index, which includes a health index and education index; and a low score of 36 on the Economic & Environmental Vulnerability Index. Countries must meet at least two of the criteria in order to qualify for inclusion in the developing countries category. The markers for the “graduation” itself are higher.

However, the change in category is a double-edged sword. It could give rise to disruption in a country's development as the very enablers that have helped it come this far are no longer available to it. As an LDC, a country gets trade related concessions including market access, and development assistance, technical assistance and special pathways to participate in international processes. It is in recognition of the reality that withdrawing such benefits suddenly could plunge the country back into LDC conditions, that graduating countries are given a transition period during which most of the benefits available to LDCs remain available to graduating countries. Usually, the transition period is three years, but this time, in view of the economic, social and other disruptions caused by Covid-19, the UN General Assembly has taken the right step by giving five years.

The LDC category, created and formally endorsed at the 26th session of the UN in 1971, recognises that some countries suffer from structural impediments to growth, and that it is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that these countries do not get left behind. It is not acknowledged as often as it should be that the improvement in the economic and social prospects of the people of a country can only benefit other nations, particularly those in its neighbourhood. For a region that has received two big shocks this year, in Afghanistan, and Myanmar — both are LDCs — the stabilisation of India's population growth, the inclusion of Nepal and Bangladesh for graduation as developing countries, plus the scheduled graduation of Bhutan in 2023, are all positive developments.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Making the House work

When a government with a comfortable majority does not reach out, Opposition must step in



SUHASH PALSHIKAR

IT IS BECOMING more or less customary to assess Parliament's “performance” at the end of a session, typically in terms of bills discussed and passed. It is equally necessary to take stock of the issues facing the country and set expectations about what Parliament should be doing when the session is to commence. Such an exercise for the current session would surely be set against the backdrop of the hasty manner in which bills have been rammed through Parliament, and then sought to be repealed. In the current session, three Acts will probably be presented for repeal. They were passed earlier amidst demands to refer them to a select committee. It is not clear whether these laws will be mechanically and summarily repealed as the largesse of the majority party or if there will be a robust discussion delving into circumstances that led to their imminent repeal. To be sure, Parliament will now have an opportunity to wonder why its time — often erroneously counted in terms of rupees per minute — was wasted in the first place.

There has been enough media attention on the government's decision to repeal the three farm laws. It is also necessary to analyse the farm law episode from the standpoint of the parliamentary system and the functioning of Parliament in general. The announcement to withdraw these laws brings into sharp focus the rift between Parliament and protesters who have doggedly resisted the laws for over one year. As a result, these laws will have the distinction of having been passed but never implemented. Though not withdrawn, a similar fate hangs over the head of the CAA and the decision to prepare a national register of citizens. In fact, during the past two years, Parliament has passed quite a few bills whose constitutionality is in serious doubt and which are challenged by social sections affected by them. How can we understand this continuing disconnect?

This Lok Sabha — increasingly the Rajya Sabha as well — poses a riddle for the theory of representative democracy. The ruling majority has a handsome majority — a 300 plus representation in the Lok Sabha — and by the standards of the FPTP system, a reasonable vote share of over 37 per cent. In addition, if one considers the folklore generated around

We would not be raising these matters about a gap between Parliament and society if resilient protests had not taken place in the first place. Protests have played, and will continue to play, a critical role in forcing us to confront the issue of representation. In times, when it is becoming intellectually fashion to villainise the civil society, it must be reiterated that no democracy can exist without a robust civil society. Its tension-ridden relationship with party politics must be recognised. In that sense, the rising antinomy between Parliament and protests is more because of the unrepresentativeness of Parliament than due to the rebellious ways of civil society. All democracies have learnt this the hard way.

the PM's appeal, this should be considered a fairly popular government in recent history. Yet, this is also a government that has drawn severe criticism from multiple quarters. The current moment is marked by a slide in India's status in international rankings on democracy, human rights and press freedom, an ever-increasing number of sedition cases and spiralling UAPA cases.

To complicate matters, laws passed by Parliament are increasingly being seen as unacceptable. This non-acceptance is, perhaps, restricted to a small section. But the arguments put forward by them remain persuasive. The sustained anti-CAA agitation, a couple of years ago, did strike a chord with a section of people while the agitation against the farm laws actually forced the government to backtrack — something it is not known for. The “majority” government seems less representative than many minority governments of the past. The government may have the majority in numbers, but does not have the capacity to take the majority along. It seems to take its majority for granted.

At this juncture, an important responsibility lies with the Opposition. In Parliament, it will need to ensure coordination on common issues, strategise on parliamentary procedures and above all, endeavour to represent voices that have been suppressed by the current regime. In other words, the responsibility of representation now shifts to the Opposition. Acrimony might be unavoidable given that the current regime doesn't give adequate respect to differences of opinion. But it is incumbent on the Opposition to avoid creating pandemonium merely as a tactic. Noise and sloganeering cannot replace the responsibility to represent. Pandemonium is only a cover up for bad coordination and lack of homework.

While party politics implies that the Opposition needs to take up the responsibility to challenge and probe the government, the idea of representation requires that all MPs are sensitive to public opinion as well as to protests outside Parliament. The role of ruling party MPs is not merely to ram through the House whatever the government wishes but to also probe the executive delicately. In allowing the government to sidestep all op-

position, the MPs from the ruling party create an atmosphere wherein they lose any semblance of authenticity in their role as representatives. If the likes of Varun Gandhi keep doing in Parliament what they are doing or saying outside, that would certainly make Parliament a much more representative forum. Such independence of ruling party members is connected both to intra-party democracy and to intra-party factionalism. When parties have factions, they become democratic in their internal functioning. Whether Varun Gandhi is disgruntled is not the point. The issue is whether they have the courage to express their dissatisfaction. It is also important that they have an intellectual position of their own. Do MPs from the ruling party take their role and their constituents seriously for re-election or are they entirely dependent on party bosses for getting re-elected? The litmus test to their independence will be in how they express themselves in Parliament. In any case, for Parliament to regain its representative character, ruling party members need to be more sincere about the parliamentary system, and unafraid of executive power.

Finally, we would not be raising these matters about a gap between Parliament and society if resilient protests had not taken place in the first place. Protests have played, and will continue to play, a critical role in forcing us to confront the issue of representation. In times, when it is becoming intellectually fashion to villainise the civil society, it must be reiterated that no democracy can exist without a robust civil society. Its tension-ridden relationship with party politics must be recognised. In that sense, the rising antinomy between Parliament and protests is more because of the unrepresentativeness of Parliament than due to the rebellious ways of civil society. All democracies have learnt this the hard way. Such contestations alone constitute the core of democracy. Contrary to a typical policeman's wisdom, masquerading as security theory, civil society does not cause civil war — its suppression causes civil war.

The writer, based at Pune, taught political science and is currently chief editor of Studies in Indian Politics

GET TO BUSINESS

Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan should be first step to normalising links



PRABHASH RANJAN

THE RECENT PARTIAL opening of land borders between India and Pakistan signals a thaw in the troubled relations between the two South Asian neighbours. The two sides should capitalise on the moment and try normalising their imperilled trade relations. After the Pulwama terror attack, bilateral trade between the two countries plummeted from around \$2 billion in 2017-18 to a paltry \$280 million in 2020-21 (April to February). From the Indian standpoint, as a Centre for Policy Research report argues, a continuing freeze in relations with Pakistan will “enhance India's external vulnerability to other actors, in particular, China”. “Since India-Pakistan relations will remain adversarial for the foreseeable future, its effective management should be the main objective”, which in turn requires, among other things, fostering economic and trade relations. India is not averse to having normal trade relations with Pakistan, as stated by Hardeep Puri, the then minister of state for commerce and industry, in Parliament in March 2021.

However, the normalisation of trade relations would require the following steps. First, Pakistan needs to revoke the unilateral suspension of trade with India undertaken in August 2019 due to India's decision to dilute Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. This trade suspension by Pakistan is inconsistent with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement — the two international law instru-

ments that regulate trade between India and Pakistan. GATT, as part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), allows countries to adopt trade-restraining measures on certain grounds such as public health and conservation of exhaustible natural resources (Article XX) and for national security purposes (Article XXI). Likewise, Article 14 of SAFTA permits trade-restrictive measures for national security and other purposes such as public health. Neither the WTO nor SAFTA permits a country to suspend trade with another member country on grounds that it disapproves a domestic law enacted by the latter unless the law can be demonstrably linked to the general or security exceptions given in these treaties. The dilution of Article 370 is India's internal matter. Notwithstanding how vehemently Pakistan feels about downgrading J&K's special status under the Indian Constitution, it is unjustifiable to use this as the pretext to suspend bilateral trade relations.

Second, Pakistan also needs to reverse its practice of not according the most favoured nation (MFN) status to India. MFN is a principle of non-discrimination in trade given in Article I of GATT. Pakistan is in breach of Article I of GATT towards India since the formation of the WTO in 1995.

Third, India should restore Pakistan's MFN status that it revoked after the Pulwama terror attack by hiking the tariff rates on all Pakistani imports to an unfeasible rate of 200 per cent. Such a move by India will put the ball

in Pakistan's court. If Pakistan fails to reciprocate, India should exert pressure on Islamabad by mounting a legal challenge showcasing how Pakistan's actions violate international law obligations.

Fourth, both countries should dust off the GATT rule book and read Article XXIV.11 carefully. This Article allows India and Pakistan to enter into any special trading arrangement without fully complying with GATT conditions that typically apply to countries signing free trade agreements. The only requirement is that these special trade arrangements, in general, should be consistent with GATT's objectives. This merciful rule that only India and Pakistan enjoy, out of 160 odd WTO members, was incorporated in GATT to enable the two sides to overcome the economic hardships caused by Partition. Umpteen imaginative trade deals can be struck under this rule such as creating a trade corridor from Chandigarh to Lahore or signing a trade agreement on agricultural products like sugar and cotton.

Delhi should appreciate that the rise of China, not Pakistan, poses the graver threat. A working relationship with Pakistan will release scarce resources that can be deployed against China. Strengthening bilateral trade can be an important lever towards establishing a working relationship with Pakistan.

Ranjan is Professor and Vice Dean, Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University. Views are personal

NOVEMBER 29, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

NEPAL'S WORRY

THE QUESTION OF Nepal being declared a zone of peace was raised again on Saturday by Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa during his talks with External Affairs Minister P V Narasimha Rao on Saturday in Kathmandu. Rao assured Nepal that it had nothing to fear from India, which was deeply interested in its security and stability. The exchange of views on this subject and the strategic situation in the region took place at an unscheduled dinner that PM Thapa hosted at his residence. Nepal wants India to endorse its peace proposal as other countries like China, Bangladesh and Pakistan have done. Rao opined that the Treaty of Peace and

Friendship between the two countries ensured the security of Nepal.

CONG-S IN KERALA

THE CONGRESS-S WORKING committee may not endorse the decision of the Kerala Pradesh Congress-S committee to join hands with the Congress-I to form the government in the state, judging by the trend of the speeches made by the CWC-S meeting in New Delhi. After about seven hours of discussion in two sittings, the meetings adjourned without taking any decision on the matter. It will be taken up again today. Most leaders who did speak did not endorse the

Kerala unit's decision.

TIN BIGHA CORRIDOR

INDIA AND BANGLADESH achieved substantial progress in finalising the terms on the lease of a corridor to the Bangladesh enclaves of Dahagram and Angorpota at the secretary-level talks in Dhaka. A joint press release issued at the end of the two-day talks said the question of India giving on lease the Tin Bigha corridor would be finalised at the next secretary-level meeting to be held in Delhi in January. The release said the two sides held an “in-depth” discussion on the lease of the Tin Bigha Corridor.

9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Giving Henrietta Lacks her due

Undoing ethically wrong scientific research isn't possible but conditions that foster such impropriety must be addressed. Not doing so will demoralise honest scientists



PARTHA MAJUMDAR

WE CELEBRATED HER birth centenary on August 1, 2020. A few days later, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched its global strategy to accelerate the elimination of cervical cancer. She was only 31 years old when she died of cervical cancer. Last month, on October 4 — her 70th death anniversary — a bronze statue of her was installed in University of Bristol, the WHO gave her a posthumous award and her family sued a multinational pharmaceutical giant, Thermo Fisher Scientific.

Who was she? Her name was Henrietta Lacks, a Black tobacco farmer who lived in the US. Most scientists know her by the name of her cells, HeLa. But, of course, she is "more than a cell," as the inscription on her statue states.

HeLa cells have been critical for many biomedical breakthroughs. Jonas Salk used the cells to develop the polio vaccine, identify the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and develop the cervical cancer vaccine. HeLa cells have been used to understand how the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus infects humans. This has helped in the Covid-19 vaccine discovery. HeLa cells were sent on space missions to understand biological impacts of environmental stress.

Attempts by researchers to grow human cells in a petri dish that would keep dividing for a long time were miserable failures. The cells of Henrietta Lacks — a 30-year old mother of five diagnosed with cervical cancer in 1951 — had a remarkable property. Her cells not only grew outside of her body, but also divided rapidly. The number of her cells nearly doubled every day. Cells that grew indefinitely outside of the human body — an "immortal" cell line — enabled scientists conduct experiments that would have been impossible on a living person. Lacks passed away 70 years ago. But over 50,000 metric tonnes of her cells grown outside of her body have been distributed and continue to grow in many laboratories throughout the world. HeLa cells have been used in over 80,000 published biomedical research studies. Henrietta Lacks' cells have helped save "countless lives ... bringing us closer to eliminating cervical cancer," said Senait Fisseha, co-Chair of the WHO Director-General's expert advisory group on cervical cancer elimination.

Therefore, she deserves high respect from the present and future generations. Her life-story, based on 11 years of painstaking research, has been published; *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot in 2010, is a *New York Times* bestseller. The book was turned into a movie by George C Wolfe in 2017. "The biotech industry was born on the use of Henrietta Lacks' cells," Wolfe has said. "HeLa is this incredible medical phenomenon. And then a few blocks away, there was a family that knew nothing about it."

That the "family knew nothing about it," is a serious problem. A portion of Henrietta's tumour was given away by her cancer surgeon to a researcher without her knowledge or consent. Even though this was legal at that time, the action was unethical and unjust. The HeLa cell line was established in 1951, and has been commercially grown and sold by Thermo Fisher Scientific company. Total profits run into several million dollars. The Lacks



C R Sasikumar

family is asking the court to order the company to "disgorge the full amount of its net profits obtained by commercialising the HeLa cell line to the estate of Henrietta Lacks".

Past wrongdoings cannot be undone. Wrongdoings continue. But as Martin Luther King, Jr., has said "the time is always right to do what's right". Biomedical research on humans is guided by ethical codes that have evolved over a long period of time. Their roots can be traced back to the use of racial hygiene in Nazi Germany to promote the Aryan race. In 1929, the National Socialist Physicians' League was formed. Murderous and torturous human experiments were carried out in the concentration camps. In August 1947, the so-called "Doctors' Trial" was conducted in Nuremberg in which 20 physicians — accused of human experimentation — were tried. This trial resulted in the formulation of a code of ethics — the Nuremberg Code — the most fundamental of which is that obtaining voluntary consent is essential for enrolling a person into a research study and for collecting biospecimens.

Last year, the editor-in-chief, Dave Curtis, of the oldest human genetics journal — *Annals of Human Genetics* — resigned stating that "I think that there is ample evidence that doctors and scientists in China are involved in human rights abuses and I feel uncomfortable with having to consider submissions from China." As a part of surveillance and criminal control, the Chinese authorities — primarily law enforcement officials — have been collecting blood samples from residents of Xinjiang province without obtaining their consent and storing their genetic profiles with identifiable information. These profiles can later be used to violate the rights of an individual.

Eight of the 25 members of the editorial board of the journal *Molecular Genetics & Genomic Medicine* resigned because the journal had published a set of papers in 2019 on forensic genetics based on data generated from blood samples of persons without doc-

umented evidence of having obtained consent. Recently, two papers reporting results of blood analysis published in the *International Journal of Legal Medicine* were retracted. The Chinese authors had not obtained consent to collect blood samples from persons belonging to Tibetan, Uyghur (mostly Muslim) and Hui minority populations. These retractions are a scar on the scientific integrity of the authors and on the system.

Retractions have become a hallmark of scientific misconduct, which is growing at an alarming pace even in India. About 1,000 reports published by scientists from India have been retracted since 2010 as listed in the online database Retraction Watch. The growth of scientific misconduct is strongly associated with some modalities of professional recognition (such as, election to science academies, awards, medals, etc.) and promotion of scientists that are linked to the number of publications, especially in the so-called 'high-impact' journals. Some professional recognition is a precondition to being selected as directors of institutions, vice-chancellors of universities, secretaries of agencies, etc.

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The writer is distinguished professor, National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, Kalyani

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Taliban need to live up to their word to provide protection to the population they now rule as well as form an inclusive government to give representation to all including the Hazaras." — DAWN, PAKISTAN

The T-20 investment path

The young today are restless, want instant gratification. New avenues like crypto illustrate this aggressive, risk-taking appetite



MADAN SABNAVIS

FOR THE LAST four months or so, we have all been glued to the Star Sports channel with the IPL being followed by the World Cup. Quite clearly, the T-20 format has caught on. As a viewer, one would have also seen a lady in a track-and-field race suddenly sit down to get on to the mobile for some stock updates. The message is that we should not miss out on such opportunities and the race comes only second. In between, we saw another star smiling and telling you to make money on cryptos. Yes, this is the latest buzz in the market and there is money to be made. And then there are some cricketers, who may not have a graduate degree, but are smart enough to advise you that mutual funds are right, and you should invest carefully. Welcome to the new world of savings and investments, which mimics the changing interest or popularity of cricket formats.

Today, we do not have the patience to watch five-day matches. Those who swear by Test cricket are from the older generation. Much like the same generation which still goes in for savings in inferior bank deposits where returns are 2.75 per cent in a savings account or 5 per cent in a fixed deposit. The younger population sees the futility of these instruments as the economics does not gel. Everyone wants instant gratification, and why not, because even if you manage 5 per cent on the deposit, you could lose a third as taxes, which makes a mockery of such savings. Quite clearly, banks don't give us anything significant as a return. The alternatives are more tempting.

The cult of savers has changed into investors. They are looking for a good return and willing to take the risk. This is a major change we see today. Crypto exchanges assure you that they are safe. But it is the exchange that is safe, not the value of the coin, which will be driven by the market. The equity boom is on, and all the unicorns have delivered excellent results. Newspapers are full of founders of start-ups with beaming smiles as they enter the big league of billionaires. Today, no one is talking about investing in the Nifty companies. It is the new age start-ups that have seen the market nod in appreciation even if the ventures are loss-making. It is just like cricket. We remember who won the World Cup or the IPL or the Challengers Cup but may not recollect when India played West Indies or Bangladesh in a Test series. The stadia say it all, with audiences entering in larger

numbers anywhere in the world as the format of the game becomes shorter.

There is a new wave of savings and investments in the country that is evolving quite fast. Bitcoins have given amazing returns; the Sensex at 60,000 is what we like to be a part of. We don't want prodgers like Dravid on the field but Kohli, Jadeja and Pandya are delights to watch. That's why bank deposits are no longer on our plates. Interestingly, banks today are discouraging deposits with low rates as this is the only way they can manage their balance sheets. There are few deployment avenues and paying 5 per cent interest to savers and investing the deposits at 3.35 per cent in the reverse repo auction is a sub-optimal game.

One would have also noticed that there are no advertisements by banks on deposits. They do not want them. Instead, there are several pullouts on home loans at 6.5 per cent or auto loans at 7 per cent. One could never have dreamt of getting loans at such low rates. It sounds unbelievable but is true. You are not told to save for tomorrow but to borrow more for satiating your immediate needs.

From equities, there has been a swift shift to cryptos, which is still a grey area. The regulators/government are wondering what to do. The issue will be discussed in the winter session of Parliament. But investments have been made and there is no stopping this global wave. Making money on a currency that has no underlying asset like a metal or other currency and is traded on faith is unique; especially Bitcoin, whose originator is not known by face but by just a name. But people have ascribed a value to the currency and finally, in a market, if there are thousands who believe in the value, it gets subsumed.

If this has not been quite intoxicating (the World Cup matches have also had relentless doses of surrogate advertising for liquor and tobacco, which came as innocuous water and fresheners), there is another door to a new kind of gaming where you make money by making teams and following the matches. You pay to enter this game and the spoils are partly kept, the rest are distributed to the gamblers after paying taxes. The law was first silent, and then confused. But it finally accepted gaming as a skill. Logically, soon we should be able to bet on matches too, if all this is in order.

Cricket formats have engendered passion, and not just from the point of view of the game. But have they also fostered a change in the format of holding onto money, where savings get transformed to investment and risk appetite changes from conservative to aggressive? Will this change? Probably not, in the near future, as long as conventional deposits continue to give inferior returns.

The writer is an independent economist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DIGITAL MONEY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cryptopolitics' (IE, November 27). The lure of cryptocurrencies appears to be, strangely enough, their volatility, which brings with it a promise of high returns. When interest rates are low, or where economies are poorly managed, as in Venezuela and Zimbabwe, cryptocurrencies offer a way out for savers and investors. Central banks see their control over the monetary system threatened with the growing popularity of these currencies. In response, many are introducing their own digital currencies, which will have many features of cryptocurrencies, though they will be centralised and should, over time, draw away investors from cryptos, with their many drawbacks. If you can't beat them, join them seems to be the name of the game for central banks.

Hemant Contractor, Pune

BOYCOTT BACKFIRE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'What use a boycott?' (IE, November 27). The "staying away" by the opposition from the function in Parliament to mark Constitution Day is certainly not a wise step. The ill-timed move aimed at drawing attention towards the unconstitutional ways adopted by the ruling regime (and these are aplenty) does not serve the purpose. On the contrary, it paints the Opposition in poor light and gives credence to the BJP's propaganda of a frustrated Opposition "ganging up" against it. This myopic approach, propagated by the Congress, also shows that the grand old party is bereft of ideas, will and leadership to take on the BJP.

Vijai Pant, Hampur

VACCINE DEFENCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Safety first' (IE, November 27). Although the new Covid-19 variant B.1.1.529 is in its initial stage, it's already shaking up the world. Indians, with the experience of getting caught unaware by April's second wave, should understand better how a steep rise in infections can flatten the society and economy. So, we must take seriously the advice of South African scientists that this variant will dominate all earlier variants. Vaccination continues to be the best bet. Covid-19 is an agile enemy and we must fight it proactively rather than risking another devastating lockdown.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

POOR GOVERNANCE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Over 50% Bihar poor in new index based on health, education, standard of living' (IE, November 27). The result is based on the Niti-Aayog's Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI). After being assessed on these parameters Aayog has declared Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh as worst performers. Kerala, Goa, Sikkim and Tamil Nadu are the best. Recently, when Global Hunger Report 2021, lowered the Global Hunger Index (GHI) rank of India to 101st out of 116 countries, the Union ministry of women and child development rebuked and rejected it, calling it "devoid of ground reality and facts". Now the government's own report endorses that Bihar has the highest number of malnourished people followed by Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

L R Murmu, Delhi

Silencing the 55 per cent

Government has not allowed Opposition its rightful space in Parliament



RITESH PANDEY

WHEN I FIRST entered Parliament, they thought I was the driver. As I drove past the barricades of the Vijay Chowk entrance, the pompously-clad security detail ushered my car to the parking lot. As a first-time MP representing Ambedkar Nagar, a mainly agrarian and rural constituency in the heart of eastern Uttar Pradesh, I didn't know what to expect from the next five years. I didn't know if what I said in Delhi held any weight in Ambedkar Nagar, or if all they wanted was a sadak-kharanja-makaan — things that an MP cannot guarantee. Then there was the unfamiliarity of it all — the grandeur of the halls, the complexity of the rules, the nuances of MP culture — that would make any eastern UP chap feel out of place.

Much has changed since. We have had eight parliamentary sessions, and I have become the leader of my party in the Lok Sabha. And in this time, I have realised the sheer power of Parliament, the nation's largest Panchayat. To the armchair elite sitting in Delhi or Bombay, the relevance of Parliament is easily cast aside: Politicians are self-interested, MPs are busy all day playing petty politics on public funds, and shrill accusations seldom replace quality policy discourse.

But when I raised a Private Member's Resolution on the demands of anganwadi and

ASHA workers, I witnessed how advocating for their cause in Parliament strengthens the resolve of communities fighting for their rights. Anganwadi and ASHA workers form the backbone of health, nutrition, and education in rural India, but they are paid a paltry stipend of a few thousand rupees per month (when they are paid at all), and most of their centres don't even have adequate toilets. After I raised their demands in Parliament, about 500 members of the Anganwadi and ASHA Workers' Organisation visited my house, invigorated with the resolve to rally other MPs to support their fight. Additionally, proceedings of Parliament make the local news cycles — a vital avenue of intellectual engagement for rural youth who have little else available for such stimulation.

Parliament's extensive framework presents many opportunities for robust debate, discussion, and dissent. During the Question Hour, key data on the operations of the government is up for public scrutiny. Adjournment Motions allow members to propose urgent topics of national interest which, if admitted by the Speaker, are discussed and debated in lieu of any other agenda of the House. The process of passing a bill, on paper, is a powerful tool for MPs to represent diverse interests.

But all of these instruments of government accountability that are afforded to MPs have been weakened, eroded, and destroyed by the current ruling dispensation. For Parliament to have an impact, it must function normally. Mainstream media reported on the perceived lack of productivity during the monsoon session due to disruptions by the Opposition, and the government's subsequent appeals for order. But they failed to mention that Opposition parties were disrupting parliamentary proceedings because they were not given their rightful space to dissent within due parliamentary processes. A Calling Attention Motion on the government's Covid mishandling? Denied. A discussion on repealing the three farm laws? Forget it. Adjournment Motion on Pegasus? No — but we did get a defensive monologue by the very minister who was one of the software's targets.

Laws were passed, or in the words of my colleague MP Manish Tewari, they were "shamelessly and brazenly railroaded" by the NDA government without any opportunity for representation of the interests of the 55 per cent of the voters who did not vote for it. The laws that did pass through regular deliberations in previous sessions were bereft of inputs from the Opposition due to petty partisan politics — the BJP's brute majority and

yes-manism ensure that even amendments worthy of discussion are overlooked. When parliamentarians aren't given space to do what they are elected to do — represent the will of the people — bad laws are passed. Nowhere is this truer than the three farm laws that the Modi government was ultimately forced to repeal.

As climate change worsens rural distress and existing inequalities, we need leaders with the political will, and perhaps more importantly, the political ability to represent and advocate for the real growth and development of their constituents. Although disruption as a protest tactic has also been favoured by the ruling party in its time in the opposition, the status quo must change. In the upcoming session of Parliament, I hope that lessons have been learnt and a new page can be turned. I hope that grandiose idols will turn into regular people, and listen for a change. I hope that the parliamentary vehicle runs on both its wheels, the government and the opposition. On my part, I will be behind the wheel.

The writer is a Member of Parliament representing Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, and Lok Sabha Floor Leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

10 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

LOK SABHA SPEAKER OM BIRLA

‘If any shortcomings in govt decisions, Opp should suggest changes. Govt should also consider these suggestions’

The first-time Speaker talks about the role of Standing Committees and Opposition, addresses the absence of a deputy Speaker, reiterates the freedom of MPs to speak in House without fear of labels such as anti-national, and defends not telecasting protests inside Parliament

LIZ MATHEW: You have spoken about the lack of debate and discourse in the Monsoon Session of Parliament. How do you think the coming Winter Session will turn out to be?

I hope there is enough discussion and debate in Parliament during the Winter Session. I urge all parties to participate in an orderly manner. I also hope Parliament sees more productivity this time.

LIZ MATHEW: The repeal of the farm laws is going to be a major highlight of the Winter Session. The Opposition's complaint is that not just these laws but several major Bills have been rushed by the Modi government through Parliament without due discussion or reference to Standing Committees. What are your views on this?

It is up to the government to propose that a particular Bill be sent to a Standing Committee. When it does not want to send an issue to the Standing Committee, I try my best to ensure that there are exhaustive and long discussions on the issue. I ensure that the ministers and at least one member of each political party get to speak on the issue. If you take the farm laws, I let the discussions go on past the allotted time. While the time given was four hours, the discussions went on for five-and-a-half hours... whoever wanted to speak was allowed to do so. But it is for the government to decide which Bill goes to a Standing Committee and which one should be discussed in Parliament.

LIZ MATHEW: However, what is your own opinion regarding Bills being sent to Standing Committees, especially those that have a direct impact on day-to-day lives of people?

Every government, previous or present, irrespective of which party it belongs to, brings in Bills and laws for the benefit of people. No government elected for a five-year term wants to bring in a law that will not help people. The ideologies or perspectives might be different, but in my opinion, every government is driven by this motive. Therefore, governments decide to speed up the law-making process by putting up Bills for discussion in the public domain and Parliament, so that the common man benefits from these laws quickly.

LIZ MATHEW: What do you think is the role of the Opposition?

The Opposition plays a significant role in the country's politics. The stronger it is, the more accountable a government is. (But) The Opposition's objections should be factual for it to be an open debate, it should not object just for the sake of it. If there are any shortcomings in the government's decisions, the Opposition should suggest changes. Similarly, the government should also consider these suggestions to rectify the shortcomings of a law. A strong Opposition is a must for a strong democracy.

LIZ MATHEW: We haven't seen such a majority for a ruling party in Parliament in a long time. How difficult is the Speaker's role in such a House?

All the Speakers of our Parliament have been aware of the importance of their role. The Speaker's directions also become a part of the law-making process because it is understood that the Speaker has acted in an unbiased manner, for the benefit of the process. The House rules dictate the role of a Speaker so I will not comment on them in a personal capacity, but I try my best to uphold the dignity of the office and the House by upholding everyone's rights and ensuring a fair debate.

RAVISH TIWARI: The Supreme Court's suspension of farm laws without getting into the question of their constitutionality reinforced the impression that there wasn't enough discussion on them in Parliament. How do you respond to the charge that as Speaker, you have been intimidated by the government's brute majority and not been able to push back and ensure Bills are sent to Standing Committees?

A Speaker has to work within certain boundaries. The office has a certain dignity. I don't give suggestions to the government. I only make unbiased decisions regarding what happens in Parliament. As far as the (farm) Bills are concerned, the government introduced them and the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of



IDEA EXCHANGE

WHY
OM BIRLA

A three-term Rajasthan MLA and two-time Lok Sabha MP, Om Birla was a surprise choice for the post of Speaker in 2019 given his relative lack of seniority. Since then, he has earned the Opposition's appreciation several times for his efforts to give them a voice despite the BJP's overwhelming majority. However, the Monsoon Session, which was washed out amidst Opposition protests, had seen Birla lamenting the lack of discipline in the House. With the Opposition already indicating that the coming Winter Session will be stormy, Birla has his task cut out

the House allocated four hours for discussions on them. I let the discussions go on longer. Members from all parties and even the Independents weighed in. But it's not my job to suggest to the government (to do something). My job is to conduct the proceedings on the issues brought up in Parliament.

RAVISH TIWARI: But when there is a conflict of opinion between the ruling party and the Opposition over a Bill being sent to a Standing Committee,

your role becomes that of an adjudicator. Given the differences over the farm Bills, should you not have sent them to a Standing Committee for more scrutiny?

The rules don't allow the Speaker to direct that a Bill be sent to a Standing Committee. Either the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs or the minister concerned with the Bill can request

the Speaker to do so.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: You said you allowed more than the allocated time to debate the farm Bills. But the smaller parties get only two to three minutes to make their point. A bulk of the time allocated goes to the government. What according to you should the yardstick be to measure the time given to a Bill in Parliament? Should Parliament pass as many Bills as possible, or should the goal be to hold as many discussions as possible?

This is a good question, which must be raised. I had given every party close to 15 minutes to make their point on the

farm Bills, despite the BAC's total allotted time of four hours. I have that right and I have used it in the past, including for discussion over the Bill regarding Article 370. No MPs, even from Punjab (which has seen the maximum protests over the farm laws), felt that I did not give them enough time to speak.

RAVISH TIWARI: There is no deputy Speaker in the current House. Do you think it's ethically wrong to not have a deputy Speaker, who is chosen from among the Opposition ranks, and do you think one is needed? Doesn't not having one increase your load?

The government needs to propose a date for holding elections for the post of deputy Speaker. If they propose a date, I will definitely speed up the process.

HARIKISHAN SHARMA: The Prime Minister announced the repeal of the three farm laws after nearly a year of farmer protests. The farmer unions have claimed many farmers died during the agitation, while in Lakhimpur Kheri, we saw several being crushed to death for which a Union minister of state's son is facing charges. Could this have been avoided had the government considered the Opposition's views during discussions in the House?

This country is a democracy. In a democracy, there is a constitutional process in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies... Even in Standing Committees, there are differences, not every decision is taken by them unanimously, which is why there is a provision for dissent notes. After a Bill is brought to Parliament, there are discussions and then it gets passed... If the ruling party has a majority, it gets passed despite the dissent. The government that is elected frames the laws. This is a right granted by the Constitution.

LIZ MATHEW: As an occupant of a constitutional post in a House where

the ruling party has a huge majority, what is the legacy you would like to leave behind?

My attempt would be to... ensure there is healthy debate and discussion in the House. It's not our country's tradition to disrupt Parliament proceedings, shout slogans in the House... There are several ways to protest, but the honour of Parliament has to be maintained. Decency and discipline should be maintained. My effort will be to talk to everyone — to the government, Opposition — and my request to them would be to rise up to what is expected of them as people's representatives, to take up the issues and expectations of people in their constituencies. Each of them is not just an individual but an institution that represents lakhs of people. So they should bring their issues to Parliament and the government must hear them in all seriousness.

LEENA MISRA: Should there be a rule fixing minimum sittings for a Vidhan Sabha? I am from Gujarat and the Assembly sees very few sittings.

It's an issue that we need to think about seriously. We brought it up at the Presiding Officers' Conference (held in Shimla on November 17-18) and expressed our concern. It was suggested there should be a code of conduct based on the strength of the House. For instance, if a House has more than 100 or 200 members, it should function for an X number of days. But I am pained that the Houses see very few sittings. That is a matter of concern. All political parties should contemplate, debate this, and ensure

there are discussions on ensuring a minimum number of sittings. I think there should be a constitutional amendment on this. I have personally brought it up with all parties and told Speakers of state Assemblies that they should talk to the ruling and Opposition parties.

VANDITA MISHRA: This government has been quick to label people anti-national if they disagree with it. When that happens, the space for dialogue shrinks, the House shrinks,

your dignity shrinks. You are a protector of the House and its debates. What do you have to say to that?

In no debate or discussion in the House is anyone tagged anti-national. This is our privilege. Article 105 makes it clear that no debate or discussion that takes place in Parliament is anti-national. It's my responsibility to ensure that nothing spoken in the House is 'anti-national'. But, we have to maintain our dignity, that when we discuss, our discussion should not harm the nation. It has never happened that discussions in the House have been tagged as anti-national. This was debated during the time of the British and finally, when the Constitution was prepared, Article 105 was inserted to make it clear that members have a right to speak and express themselves. No Member of Parliament can be held liable in any proceedings before any court for anything said or any vote given by them in Parliament.

In the House, it is my responsibility. Only those words that are expunged from

the proceedings are removed, that too with the knowledge of the member. Otherwise, members have the right to speak.

RAVISH TIWARI: But this has come up often, where ruling party members have labelled Opposition counterparts anti-national.

Every person who comes to the House is an elected member who represents lakhs of people. To me, he or she is a *mananiya sadasya* (respected member). It's my responsibility to protect them. But what they say outside the House, I can't stop them, condemn them or protect them.

ABHISHEK ANGAD: In 2014, a few MLAs of Babul Marandi's Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajantrik) had joined the BJP. Marandi had raised the issue with the

Speaker, saying this was defection. The Speaker took five years to decide, by which time the government's term was nearly over. Now the current government is delaying the defection matter due to which Babul Marandi is not getting Leader of Opposition status. Shouldn't these decisions be taken in a time-bound manner?

At the Presiding Officers' conference, we said there are questions being raised on our fairness, on the delay in taking decisions, and courts have made several observations. This is not good for our presiding officers. We set up a committee that submitted its report but there was no consensus among presiding officers on the report. So now, we will take it up again and hold discussions. We all believe, the entire nation believes, that in the anti-defection law, cases should be disposed of in a timely manner. The process is on, I am hopeful that the result will be positive. We will also appeal to the government that there be a timeline fixed in the anti-defection law... The law was made in line with the demands of those times, but today's circumstances are different and there should be more clarity. This is my view. There will be efforts to build a consensus and we will suggest to the government that they bring in a law.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV show the proceedings in the Houses live so that citizens know what is happening in Parliament. But of late, there have been claims that the telecasts leave out the Opposition protests in the House.

Several of our presiding officers had decided that it wouldn't be in the nation's interest to show unruly scenes and sloganeering in the House — which is why some of my predecessors issued directions to this effect. I have also had members telling me, 'Show us protesting, shouting slogans, throwing papers'. But I don't think it's a good tradition. I am sure our earlier presiding officers took the decision after a lot of thought, with a lot of foresight, so that people's respect, faith for constitutional bodies is maintained.

I have not brought in any changes. I have not done anything to show (these incidents), but I haven't done anything to block (their coverage) either.

LIZ MATHEW: Coming back to the question, as Speaker, does the ruling party's overwhelming majority put you under pressure when it comes to discharging your duties?

I don't work under pressure from anyone. I do what feels just and right in the House, based on decisions taken by my predecessors and keeping in mind the honour of the House. My attempt always has been to give a chance to members to speak, give them enough time and opportunity, especially debutant members, women. If I hadn't tried from the start, several respected members probably would not have got to speak in the House. I made a list of those members who didn't get an opportunity to speak and urged them to talk about the issues of their constituencies or whatever else they want to talk about. I am happy that MPs from remote tribal constituencies got the chance to speak. I can give many such examples. So my attempt is to give everyone enough opportunities and time in the House, even if we have to work till late. It's rare that I wind up the House at 6 pm. If you look at the proceedings, only in 10% instances would I have wrapped up at 6 pm. I have always extended the sitting beyond our working hours.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey



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SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What meeting MSP demand would cost govt

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

UNION AGRICULTURE Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has said the Centre would table the Bill to repeal its three contentious farm laws "on the very first day" of the Parliament's Winter Session, which starts Monday. This follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's November 19 announcement on rolling back the agriculture reform laws, against which farmers – mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh – have been protesting on Delhi's borders for over a year.

Now that the three laws are set to be withdrawn, pressure is mounting on the government to implement the other, no less vociferous, demand by the farm unions: Providing legal guarantee for the minimum support prices (MSP) of crops.

Why are the unions seeking legal guarantee for MSP?

The Centre currently announces the MSPs of 23 crops: 7 cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi, barley); 5 pulses (chana, tur/arhar, moong, urad, masur); 7 oilseeds (rape-seed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower, nigerseed); and 4 commercial crops (sugarcane, cotton, copra, raw jute). While the MSPs technically ensure a minimum 50% return on all cultivation costs, these are largely on paper. In most crops grown across much of India, the prices farmers get, especially during harvest time, are well below the officially-declared MSPs. And since MSPs have no statutory backing, they cannot de-

mand these as a matter of right. The unions want the government to enact legislation conferring mandatory status to MSP, rather than it being just indicative.

How can that be implemented?

There are basically three ways. The first is by forcing private traders or processors to pay MSP. This is already applicable in sugarcane. Sugar mills are required, by law, to pay farmers the Centre's "fair and remunerative price" for cane, with some state governments fixing even higher so-called "advised prices". The Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 issued under the Essential Commodities Act, moreover, obliges payment of this legally-guaranteed price within 14 days of purchase. During the 2020-21 sugar year (October-September), mills crushed some 298 million tonnes (mt) of cane, which was close to three-fourths of the country's estimated total production of 399 mt (see table).

The second is by the government undertaking procurement at MSP through its agencies such as the Food Corporation of India (FCI), National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (Nafed) and Cotton Corporation of India (CCI). Such purchases accounted for nearly 50% of India's rice/paddy production last year, while amounting to 40% for wheat and over 25% in cotton.

Government agencies also bought significant quantities – upwards of 0.1 mt – of chana (chickpea), mustard, groundnut, tur (pigeon-pea) and moong (green gram) during 2019-20. Much of that was post the lockdown in April-June 2020, when rabi crops were being marketed by farmers.

PROCUREMENT AT MSP

(In lakh tonnes, except for cotton, figures for which are in lakh bales)

Crop	Procurement		Production		% Procurement	
	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21
Sugarcane*	2503.67	2984.24	3705	3992.53	67.58	74.75
Rice	518.26	600.78	1188.7	1222.7	43.6	49.14
Wheat	389.92	433.44	1078.6	1095.2	36.15	39.58
Cotton	105.15	91.89	365	353.84	28.81	25.97
Chana	21.43	6.3	110.8	119.9	19.34	5.25
Tur	5.36	0.11	38.9	42.8	13.78	0.26
Mustard	8.04	0	91.24	101.12	8.81	0
Groundnut	7.21	2.84	99.52	102.1	7.24	2.78
Moong	1.47	0.2	25.1	30.9	5.86	0.65
Sunflower	0.05	0.04	2.13	2.3	2.47	1.69
Soyabean	0.11	Neg.	112.26	128.97	0.09	0
Masur	0.01	Neg.	11	14.5	0.13	0

*Procurement by sugar mills Note: Figures are for agriculture year (July-June), and Oct-Sept for sugarcane. Source: FCI, Nafed, CCI, National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare

Procurement of these crops, however, fell in 2020-21. In the case of mustard, tur, moong, masur (yellow lentil) and soyabean, the need for procurement wasn't really felt, as open market prices largely ruled above MSPs.

Generally speaking, MSP implementation has been effective only for four crops (sugarcane, paddy, wheat and cotton); partly so in five (chana, mustard, groundnut, tur and moong) and weak/non-existent in the remain-

ing 14 notified crops. In livestock and horticultural produce – be it milk, eggs, onions, potatoes or apples – there is no MSP even on paper. The 23 MSP crops together, in turn, account for hardly a third of the total value of India's agricultural output, excluding forestry and fishing.

The third route for guaranteeing MSP is via price deficiency payments. Under this, the government allows all sales by farmers

to take place at the prevailing market prices. Farmers are then paid the difference between the government's MSP and the average market price for the particular crop during the harvesting season.

What would be the fiscal cost of making the MSP legally binding?

The MSP value of the total output of all the 23 notified crops worked out to about Rs 11.9 lakh crore in 2020-21. But this entire produce wouldn't have got marketed. The marketed surplus ratio – what remains after retention by farmers for self-consumption, seed and feeding of animals – is estimated to range from below 50% for ragi and 65-70% for bajra (pearl-millet) and jowar (sorghum), to 75-85% for wheat, paddy and sugarcane, 90%-plus for most pulses, and 95-100% for cotton, soyabean, sunflower and jute. Taking an average of 75% yields a figure – the MSP value of production actually sold by farmers – just under Rs 9 lakh crore.

The government is further, as it is, procuring many crops. The MSP value of the 89.42 mt of paddy and 43.34 mt of wheat alone bought during 2020-21 was around Rs 253,275 crore. To this, one must add the MSP value of pulses and oilseeds purchased by Nafed (Rs 21,901 crore in 2019-20 and Rs 4,948 crore in 2020-21) and kapas or raw un-ginned cotton by CCI (Rs 28,420 crore in 2019-20 and Rs 26,245 crore in 2020-21). Besides, the MSP value of the sugarcane crushed by mills (Rs 92,000 crore in 2020-21) has to be considered.

All in all, then, the MSP is already being enforced, directly or through fiat, on roughly Rs 3.8 lakh crore worth of produce. Providing le-

gal guarantee for the entire marketable surplus of the 23 MSP crops would mean covering another Rs 5 lakh crore or so. It would be even lower, given two things. The crop that is bought by the government also gets sold, with the revenues from that partly offsetting the expenditures from MSP procurement. Second, government agencies needn't buy every single grain coming in to the mandis. Mopping up even a quarter of market arrivals is often enough to lift prices above MSPs in most crops.

Is there a catch to all these calculations?

Yes. FCI's grain mountain is evidence of how cumbersome public procurement and stocking operations can be. This is not to mention the huge scope for corruption and recycling/leakage of wheat and rice. Also, while cereals and pulses can be sold through the public distribution system, disposal becomes complicated in the case of nigerseed, sesamum or safflower. Even when it comes to sugarcane, mills' huge payment arrears to growers are proof of the practical limitations of "legal MSP".

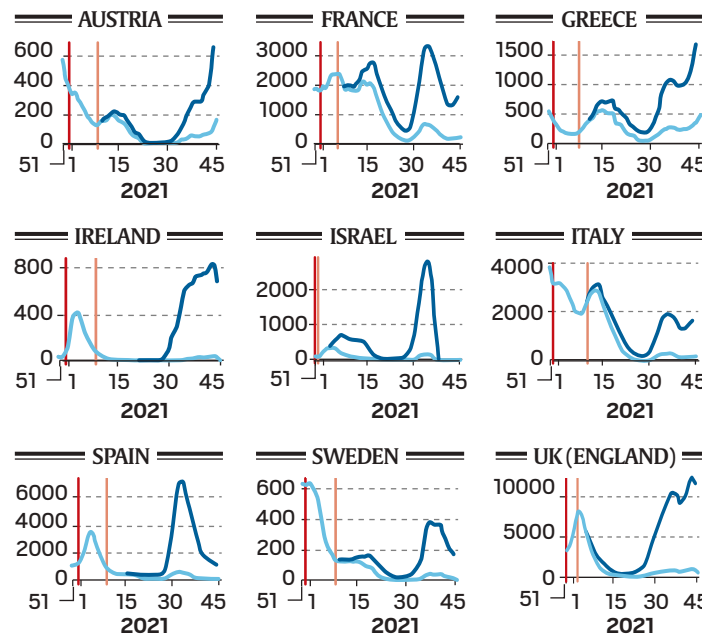
That leaves deficiency payments, which may be a more workable and fiscally feasible option in the long run. There is, in addition, a growing consensus among economists for guaranteeing minimum "incomes", as against "prices". That would essentially entail making more direct cash transfers either on a flat per-acre (as in the Telangana government's Rythu Bandhu scheme) or per-farm household (the Centre's PM-Kisan) basis.

(The writer is National Rural Affairs & Agriculture Editor of *The Indian Express* and currently on sabbatical with the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi)

TELLING NUMBERS

Covid vaccination saved 4.7 lakh lives of over-60s in Europe: study

A study by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and European CDC, in *Eurosurveillance*, estimates 470,000 lives saved among those aged 60 and over after Covid vaccination began in 33 countries in the WHO European Region. It calculates the difference between estimated deaths that would have happened without vaccination, and the actual reported deaths.

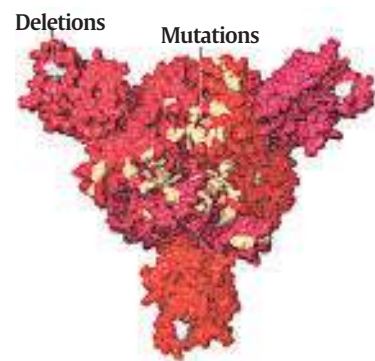


Observed and expected mortality in 60+ population and older, from week 51 of 2020 (Dec) to week 45 of 2021 (Nov). Source: [eurosurveillance.org](https://www.eurosurveillance.org)

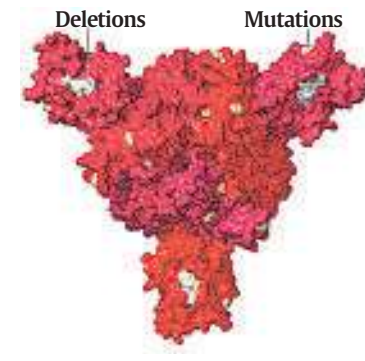
Legend: Mortality without vaccination (complete series), Observed mortality, Start Vaccination, First 10% doses administered (first doses only)

Coronavirus variants & their mutations

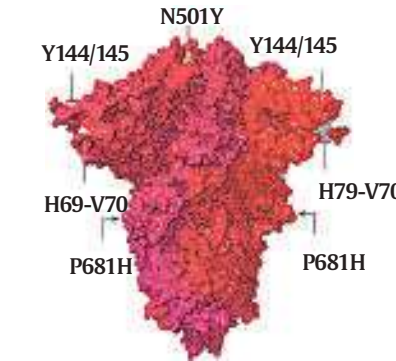
KEY VARIANTS



OMICRON: Has a range of mutations not seen in combination before, including D614G, N501Y, K417N, E484K



DELTA: Has among a dozen mutations, the two most prominent being L452R and E484Q (same location as E484K)



ALPHA: Mutations in B.1.1.7 include N501Y and P681H; deletions include H69-V70 and Y144/145

Why it has been named Omicron and not Nu or Xi

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, NOVEMBER 28

IN PICKING a name for the newest variant of SARS-CoV-2, Omicron, the World Health Organization (WHO) has skipped two letters of the Greek alphabet, one of which also happens to be a popular surname in China, shared even by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

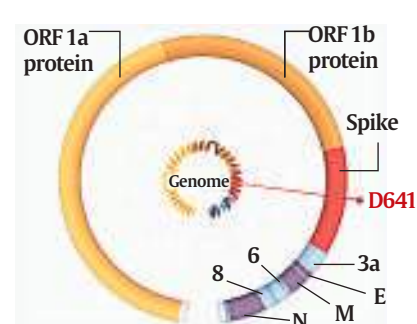
The WHO has been using Greek letters to refer to the most widely prevalent coronavirus variants, which otherwise carry long scientific names. It had already used 12 letters of the Greek alphabet before the newest variant emerged in South Africa this week. After Mu, the 12th named after a Greek letter, WHO selected the name Omicron, instead of Nu or Xi, the two letters between Mu and Omicron.

The WHO said Nu could have been confused with the word 'new' while Xi was not picked up following a convention. "Two letters were skipped – Nu and Xi – because Nu is too easily confounded with 'new' and Xi was not used because it is a common surname and WHO best practices for naming new diseases (developed in conjunction with FAO and OIE back in 2015) suggest avoiding 'causing offence to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional or ethnic groups', the WHO said in a statement.

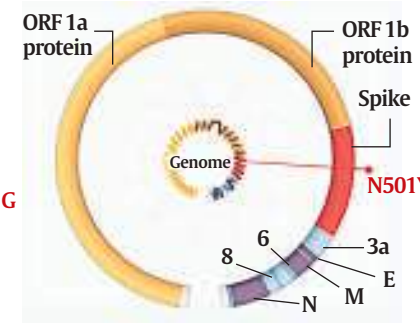
All variants are given scientific names that represent their parentage and the chain of evolution. Omicron, for example, is also known by its more scientific designation B.1.1.529, which shows that it has evolved from the B.1 lineage.

Since the scientific names are not easy to remember, the more prevalent variants started to be named after the country from where they were first reported: 'UK variant', 'Indian variant', 'South African variant', or 'Brazilian variant'. To remove the connection with specific countries, which was triggering name-calling and blame game, the WHO decided on a new naming system using Greek letters. The variant that earlier used to be referred as the 'Indian' thus got the name Delta, while the one being associated with the UK was named Alpha.

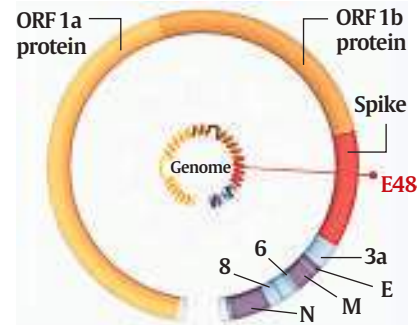
KEY MUTATIONS



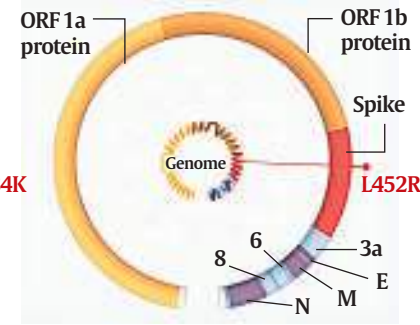
D614G: Emerged in China early in the pandemic and then spread; thought to make the coronavirus more infectious



N501Y: Arose independently in several variants of concern, including Alpha, Beta and Gamma



E484K: This mutation arose independently in multiple lineages, including Beta and Gamma



L452R: Appears in several lineages; it may give the virus an advantage over other variants in spreading

Illustrations and text: *The New York Times*

Vaccines should work, spread a concern: South African expert weighs in

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, NOVEMBER 28

A LEADING virologist in South Africa, where the Omicron variant has emerged, expects current vaccines will continue to protect those vaccinated against severe disease and death from Covid-19. Jeffrey Dorfman, Associate Professor in Medical Virology at Stellenbosch University, discussed the variant and its implications:

On optimism about vaccines

"This is because the protection [from vaccines] seems to be mediated by T cells, which can recognise any part of the virus, as opposed to neutralising antibody, which

is focused upon the receptor binding domain, a part of the spike protein. We do not know a lot about the variant yet. There is no 'direct' evidence of immune escape – but that should come over the next few weeks," said Dorfman, who has been researching HIV and other infectious diseases.

Too few people have been infected with Omicron and identified as such, he noted. "However, our previous experience suggests that the vaccines will still prevent hospitalisation and death from Covid – but we don't know exactly how well. Also, case numbers will go up faster and higher if previous infection with other variants does not prevent infection with this new variant very well – and having more virus around is more dangerous. We just don't know yet."



Jeffrey Dorfman

Dorfman said.

On breakthrough infections

Breakthrough infections in vaccinated

individuals tend to be mild, but will not always be so, especially in older people, he said. "We also see what seems like a younger average age of people getting severely ill from Covid. A lot of that is a result of targeting vaccination to older people... As variants get more contagious, more people get infected, and the ones who get sick are the ones who were not infected recently and not vaccinated (generally, not 100%). We also get more children getting sick as they return to school... I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that what we see is more than these effects," he said

On mutations in combination

Dorfman referred to the range of mutations in Omicron, many (but not all) of

which have been seen before – and never all together in the same variant. "We are concerned that protection, particularly protection from infection may be reduced. Also, it seems to be able to spread quickly, but the evidence for that is currently thin – there are about 70 or 80 cases detected in Gauteng province here in South Africa as of Wednesday last week," he said.

On travel restrictions

Asked travel advisories issued by countries, he said: "Restrictions will curtail spread, perhaps for a short while. But it is probably already too late."

"Estimates based upon the sequences we now hold suggest that Omicron came to be sometime between mid-September to

mid-October, enough time to spread where there is little surveillance. There is also a worrying case of a woman who returned home to Belgium from Egypt with the variant. The other reports that I have seen are all linked to southern Africa... If it is common enough in Egypt that a short-term traveller got it, then we should be worried," he said.

He said there is limited benefit to the delay that travel restrictions will give. "In the case of Delta, some countries were starting to vaccinate, and keeping Delta out for a couple of months while vaccination rates went up might be counted as an important benefit. Now, few countries are in that position, and the public health benefit to a delay is more limited," he said.

Thousands of people rallied in Belgrade on Sunday to demand an end to Serbia's alarming levels of air pollution. The rally came a day after another environmental protest in which demonstrators blocked bridges and roads in different parts of the country. The protesters, carried banners reading "The Air Is Dangerous" and "You Are Suffocating Us".



TOP OF THE WORLD



Kevin Strickland

USA

Over \$1.4 mn raised for man freed from jail after 43 years

MORE THAN \$1.4 million had been raised as of Saturday for a man who spent 43 years behind bars before a judge overturned his conviction in a triple killing. The Midwest Innocence Project set up the GoFundMe fundraiser as they fought for Kevin Strickland's release, noting that he wouldn't receive compensation from Missouri and would need help paying for basic living expenses. The state only allows wrongful imprisonment payments to people who were exonerated through DNA evidence, so the 62-year-old Strickland wouldn't qualify. Judge James Welsh ordered his release on Tuesday, finding that evidence used to convict Strickland had since been recanted or disproven. AP

SOUTH AMERICA

7.5-magnitude quake strikes northern Peru

THE US Geological Survey says a strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.5 has struck in northern Peru. The earthquake took place at 5.52 am Sunday local time (1052 GMT). While it was extremely strong, it was relatively deep, — measured at 112 kilometres — which usually reduces damage and casualties. The epicenter was 42 kilometres north northwest of the coastal city of Barranca. A 14-metre tower in a protected four-century-old church collapsed shortly after the quake, according to media and witnesses accounts. AP

CAMBODIA

Former premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh dies

CAMBODIAN FORMER prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the current king's half-brother who spent his later years in the political shadow of his one-time rival Prime Minister Hun Sen, has died in France. He was 77. The prince, whose royalist political party won elections in 1993, was ousted in a 1997 coup by coalition partner Hun Sen, who remains Cambodia's leader today. REUTERS

NEW CORONAVIRUS VARIANT ALSO DETECTED IN AUSTRALIA, DENMARK

Omicron spreads: 13 cases found in Netherlands

All 13 were passengers on flight from South Africa, say Dutch authorities; Israel says barring foreigners for two weeks

REUTERS & NYT
LONDON, AMSTERDAM, NOV 28

THE OMICRON coronavirus variant kept spreading around the world on Sunday, with 13 cases found in the Netherlands and two each in Denmark and Australia even as more countries imposed travel restriction to try to seal themselves off. British health officials said a third case of the new variant was discovered in the country, a day after it announced two confirmed cases on Saturday.

Dutch health authorities said the 13 cases of the variant were found among people on two flights that arrived in Amsterdam from South Africa on Friday. Authorities had tested all of the more than 600 passengers on those two flights and had found 61 coronavirus cases, going on to test those for the new variant.

The discovery of Omicron, dubbed a "variant of concern" last week by the World Health Organization, has caused worry around the world that it could resist vaccinations and prolong the nearly two-year Covid pandemic.

First discovered in South Africa, it has now been detected in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Botswana, Israel, Australia and Hong Kong.

Omicron is potentially more contagious than previous variants, although it is unclear whether it causes more or less severe Covid-19 compared to other strains.

Many countries have imposed travel bans or curbs on southern Africa to try to stem the spread. Financial markets dived on Friday as investors worried that the variant could stall a global recovery. Oil prices tumbled by about \$10 a barrel.

In the most far-reaching effort to keep the variant at bay, Israel announced late on Saturday it would ban the entry of all foreigners and reintroduce

SAFRICAN DOCTOR: OMICRON PATIENTS HAVE MILD SYMPTOMS

Johannesburg: A South African doctor who was one of the first to suspect a different coronavirus strain among patients said on Sunday that symptoms of the Omicron variant were so far mild and could be treated at home. Dr Angelique Coetzee, a private practitioner and chair of South African Medical Association, said that on Nov 18 she noticed seven patients at her clinic who had symptoms different from the dominant Delta variant, albeit "very mild". Coetzee said that unlike with Delta, so far patients with Omicron have not reported loss of smell or taste and there has been no major drop in oxygen levels with the new variant. REUTERS

counter-terrorism phone-tracking technology to contain the spread of the variant.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said the ban would last 14 days. Officials hope that within that period there will be more information on how effective vaccines are against Omicron.

The top US infectious disease official, Anthony Fauci, said Americans should be prepared to fight the spread of the new variant, but that it was not yet clear what measure such as mandates or lockdowns would be needed. He has said the variant is likely already in the country, although no cases have been confirmed.

In Britain, officials said the third case of the new variant was found in an individual who had spent time in central London, but was no longer in the country. Contact tracing was being performed, UK's health agency said, adding that the case was linked to travel in southern Africa.



Travellers at an airport near Tel Aviv, Israel, on Sunday. Israel approved barring entry to foreign nationals as part of its efforts to clamp down on the new variant. AP

China study warns of 'colossal' Covid outbreak if it opens up like US, France

REUTERS
BEIJING, NOVEMBER 28

CHINA COULD face more than 630,000 Covid-19 infections a day if it dropped its zero-tolerance policies by lifting travel curbs, according to a study by Peking University mathematicians. In the report published in *China CDC Weekly* by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the mathematicians said China could not afford to lift travel restrictions without more efficient vaccinations or specific treatments.

Using data for August from the United States, Britain, Spain, France and Israel, the mathematicians assessed the potential results if China adopted the same pandemic control tactics as those countries.



A guard directs people to scan a QR code to track their health status at a railway station in Shanghai. Reuters

China's daily new cases would reach at least 637,155 if it adopted the United States's pandemic strategy, the report said.

And daily cases would hit 275,793 if China took the same approach as Britain and 454,198 if it imitated France, it said. "The estimates revealed the

real possibility of a colossal outbreak which would almost certainly induce an unaffordable burden on the medical system," the report said. "Our findings have raised a clear warning that, for the time being, we are not ready to embrace 'open-up' strategies resting solely on the hypothesis of herd immunity induced by vaccination advocated by certain western countries."

The mathematicians cautioned that their estimates were based on basic arithmetic calculations and that more sophisticated models were needed to study the evolution of the pandemic if travel restrictions were lifted.

China has maintained a zero-tolerance policy towards Covid-19, saying the importance of containing local cases outweighs the disruptions it caused.

Merck says its antiviral pill less effective than initially reported

THE PHARMACEUTICAL company Merck said on Friday that in a final analysis of a clinical trial, its antiviral pill reduced the risk of hospitalisation and death among high-risk Covid patients by 30 per cent, down from an earlier estimate of 50 per cent.

The lower efficacy is a disappointment for the drug, known as molnupiravir, which health officials around the world are counting on as a critical tool to save lives and reduce the burden on hospitals. It increases the importance of a similar, apparently more effective, offering from Pfizer that is also under review by the US Food and Drug Administration. NYT

27 CHINESE AIRCRAFT ENTER TAIWAN'S AIR DEFENCE ZONE

Taiwan scrambles to see off China air force as Xi meets top brass

REUTERS
TAIPEI, NOVEMBER 28

TAIWAN'S AIR force scrambled again on Sunday to warn away 27 Chinese aircraft that entered its air defence zone, Taiwan's defence ministry said, the latest increase in tensions across the Taiwan Strait as China's President met his top generals.

Chinese-claimed Taiwan has complained for a year or more of repeated missions by China's air force near the democratically governed island, often in the southwestern part of its air defence identification zone, or ADIZ, close to the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands.

Taiwan calls China's repeated nearby military activities "grey zone" warfare, designed to both wear out Taiwan's forces by making them repeatedly scramble, and also to test Taiwan's responses.

Over a four-day period beginning on October 1, when China marked its national day, Taiwan said that nearly 150 PLA military aircraft entered its ADIZ.

The latest Chinese mission



Officers pose in front of a F-16V fighter jet in Chiayi, Taiwan. President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan earlier this month commissioned the first combat wing of F-16 fighters upgraded with US help to bolster the island's defences during rising tensions between Taipei and Beijing. Reuters

included 18 fighters jets plus five nuclear-capable H-6 bombers, as well as, unusually, a Y-20 aerial refuelling aircraft, the Taiwan ministry said.

Taiwan sent combat aircraft to warn away the Chinese aircraft, while missile systems were deployed to monitor them, the ministry said.

There was no immediate com-

ment from China. However, Chinese media reported that President Xi Jinping had held a three-day meeting which ended on Sunday with the country's top officers to discuss how further to strengthen the armed forces. While the read out of his remarks made no direct mention of Taiwan, Xi did stress the need to modernise the military.

Low expectations as Iran nuclear talks resume

JOHN IRISH, FRANCOIS MURPHY & PARISA HAFEZI
PARIS, NOVEMBER 28

WORLD POWERS and Iran return to Vienna on Monday for a last ditch effort to salvage a 2015 nuclear deal, but few expect a breakthrough as Tehran's atomic activities rumble on in an apparent bid to gain leverage against the West.

Diplomats say time is running low to resurrect the pact, which then-US President Donald Trump abandoned in 2018, angering Iran and dismaying the other world powers involved — Britain, China,

Hope, worry in bid to clinch key deal

EUROPEAN NEGOTIATORS are hopeful and optimistic that a deal will be reached with Iran. US officials appear more sceptical, according to reports, and they are weighing their options, including military action, in case the talks fail. Israel has been particularly worried by Iran's latest nuclear advances,

and has been pressing western powers to not lift sanctions until all of Iran's progress in this field has been reversed. With so many stakeholders and very high stakes, the result of these talks are most likely to have wide-ranging consequences not only for the region, but also the rest of the world.

France, Germany and Russia. Six rounds of indirect talks were held between April and June. The new round begins af-

ter a hiatus triggered by the election of a new Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline cleric.

Tehran's new negotiators have set out demands that US and European diplomats consider unrealistic. They are insisting that all sanctions imposed since 2017, including those unrelated to its nuclear programme, be dropped.

In parallel, Tehran's conflicts with the UN atomic watchdog have festered. Iran has pressed ahead with uranium enrichment and the IAEA says its inspectors have been refused access to re-install monitoring cameras at a site it deems essential to reviving the deal. REUTERS

France: Won't be held hostage by UK migration politics

JULIETTE JABKHIRO & NOEMIE OLIVE
CALAIS, NOVEMBER 28

FRANCE IS ready for a serious discussion with Britain on issues relating to illegal migration, but will not be held hostage to London's domestic politics, the country's Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said.

The two countries are already at loggerheads over post-



A makeshift camp in Calais, on Saturday. AP

Brexit trading rules and fishing rights and last week relations

soured further after 27 people died trying to cross the Channel. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote to President Emmanuel Macron setting out five steps the two countries could take to deter migrants from making the perilous journey. One of those — sending illegal migrants back to France — particularly angered Paris.

France responded by cancelling an invitation to British Interior Minister Priti Patel to attend a meeting on Sunday with European counterparts to discuss the issue after Johnson published the letter on Twitter. "Britain left Europe, but not the world. We need to work seriously on these questions... without being held hostage by domestic British politics," Darmanin told reporters in Calais. France had been handling the issue of illegal migration to Britain for 25 years and it was now time London woke up, Darmanin said. REUTERS

New Zealand politician cycles to hospital while in labour, gives birth

REUTERS
MELBOURNE, NOVEMBER 28

NEW ZEALAND Member of Parliament Julie Anne Genter got on her bicycle early on Sunday and headed to the hospital. She was already in labour and she gave birth an hour later.

"Big news!" the Greens politician posted on her Facebook page a few hours later. "At 3.04am this morning we welcomed the newest member of our family. I genuinely wasn't planning to cycle in labour, but it did end up happening."

The island nation of 5 million already has a reputation for down-to-earth politicians. Prime



Julie Anne Genter rides a bicycle to the hospital while in labour, in Wellington, New Zealand, on Sunday. Reuters

Minister Jacinda Ardern famously took maternity leave while in office and brought her

three-month old to a United Nations meeting as she was still breastfeeding.

"My contractions weren't that bad when we left at 2 am to go to the hospital — though they were 2-3 min apart and picking up in intensity by the time we arrived 10 minutes later," Genter wrote.

"Amazingly now we have a healthy, happy little one sleeping, as is her dad," said Genter, a dual New Zealand-US citizen who was born in Minnesota and moved to the Pacific country in 2006.

Genter — her party's spokesperson for transport issues and whose Facebook profile includes "I love my bicycle" — also biked to the hospital in 2018 to give birth to her first-born, local media said.

Josephine Baker is 1st Black woman to be honoured in French Pantheon

ARNO PEDRAM & SYLVIE CORBET
PARIS, NOVEMBER 28

FRANCE IS inducting Josephine Baker — Missouri-born cabaret dancer, French World War II spy and civil rights activist — into its Pantheon, the first Black woman honored in the final resting place of France's most revered luminaries.

On Tuesday, a coffin carrying soils from the US, France and Monaco — places where Baker made her mark — will be deposited inside the domed Pantheon monument overlooking the Left Bank of Paris. Her body will stay in Monaco, at the request of her family.



Charlie Chaplin congratulates Josephine Baker after a performance in 1953. AP

French President Emmanuel Macron decided on her entry into the Pantheon, responding to a petition. In addition to honoring an exceptional figure in French history, the move is meant to send a

message against racism and celebrate US-French connections.

"She embodies, before anything, women's freedom," Laurent Kupferman, the author of the petition for the move, told AP.

Baker was born in 1906, in St. Louis, Missouri. At 19, having already divorced twice, had relationships with men and women, and started a performing career, she moved to France following a job opportunity. "She arrives in France in 1925, she's an emancipated woman, taking her life in her hands, in a country of which she doesn't even speak the language," Kupferman said.

She met immediate success on the Theatre des Champs-Elysees stage, where she appeared toless

and wearing a famed banana belt. Her show, embodying the colonial time's racist stereotypes about African women, caused both condemnation and celebration.

Baker's career took a more serious turn after that, as she learned to speak five languages and toured internationally. She became a French citizen after her marriage in 1937 to industrialist Jean Lion, a Jewish man who later suffered from anti-Semitic laws of the collaborationist Vichy regime.

In 1939, as France and Britain declared war against Germany, Baker started working as an informant for the French intelligence, getting close to officials and sharing information hidden on her music sheets. AP

MARKET WATCH
M-CAP OF 9 OF TOP 10 VALUED COS FALLS
New Delhi: The market valuation of nine of the top-10 most valued companies eroded by Rs 2,62,146.32 crore last week in tandem with an overall weak broader market, where Bajaj Finance and Reliance Industries took the biggest hit. **PTI**

NEW COVID VARIANT KEY GOING FORWARD

FPIs net buyers in Nov so far despite market correction; invest ₹5,319 cr

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO investors (FPIs) have pumped in a net sum of Rs 5,319 crore in the domestic capital markets despite a massive correction seen in equities over the last fortnight.

In October, they were net sellers to the tune of Rs 12,437 crore.

As per depositories data, overseas investors put in a net Rs 1,400 crore into equities and Rs 3,919 crore into the debt segment between November 1-26.

This translated into total net investment of Rs 5,319 crore.

"Since FPIs have been holding large quantity of banking stocks, they have been major sellers in this segment. Sustained selling



The BSE, Mumbai. In October, FPIs were net sellers to the tune of Rs 12,437 crore. File

has made banking stocks attractive from the valuation perspective," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. He further

noted that sharp correction in the market on 26th November has been mainly triggered by concerns arising out of the new strain of the virus spotted in South

Africa, Botswana and Hong Kong. "Despite recent correction, the markets continue to be at elevated levels and hence FPIs would have booked profits," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar India. Trend reversal on a weekly basis has become a norm with respect to FPI flows in the Indian debt markets, he added.

FPIs would be closely watching the spread of the new coronavirus variant and its possible impact on the growth globally.

Higher valuation is also a concern which may continue to trigger profit booking at regular intervals, he said. "Future of FPI flows is expected to remain volatile given key events such as upcoming state elections, expectation of rise in interest rates

and concerns a new Covid variant will prompt fresh mobility restrictions, hindering economic recovery," said Shrikant Chouhan, head-equity research (retail), Kotak Securities.

During the last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex plunged by 2,528.86 points or 4.24 per cent.

Reliance Industries (RIL) saw its market worth tank by Rs 38,440.66 crore to Rs 15,30,109.51 crore. The valuation of Infosys took a hit of Rs 37,950.03 crore to reach Rs 7,10,925.34 crore and that of HDFC plummeted by Rs 33,067.68 crore to Rs 4,96,168.98 crore. In the ranking of top 10 firms, RIL remained the most valued firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Infosys, HUL, ICICI Bank, HDFC, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance and Bharti Airtel. **WITHPTI**

DIRECTOR GENERAL, CELLULAR OPERATORS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

'Spectrum prices at high levels, airwaves should be offered as a bundle'



SP Kochhar

have been trying to raise funds but nothing has materialised so far. As an association, does that worry you that investor confidence is still not there?

You have to go into the psyche of the investor as well as the timing of the reform. The reforms have just come. They are being studied and analysed. Coupled with this, the promoters have also announced that they will be putting in their own money. This gives a lot of confidence to external investors to put in their money. We will have to wait for some more time.

logue with the government. Having said that, the biggest help that the government can provide us right now is reducing the spectrum prices. They are at absurdly high levels right now and that can be looked into. We would like to see that the spectrum is seen as a bundle, which means that access and back-haul is given to us as one. Spectrum identification and harmonisation is essential. There have been talks between the empowered groups of secretaries and immediate plans have been announced about which bands are going to be used for 5G. That is in line with the inter-ministerial group recommendations.

What is the industry's reaction to the recent telecom reforms?

The industry had been bleeding and there were financial problems in varying degrees for all the three players and not just the two. We had been engaged with the government for a very long time that this needed to be looked into fast. Because with 5G approaching fast, the earlier it was resolved, the better it would for the entire ecosystem. In that context, these reforms have come very timely. They have far reaching effects. Yes, they are aimed at improving our liquidity but it also helps us to form business plans. Investments have to be made.

The four-year moratorium is a long period and, obviously, in these four years, if we have sound business plans, revenue should start shoring up. It is not a free lunch so to say. The government has recognised that there is an acute need of helping out the industry's revenues not as a grant but as postponement without removing the financial imperatives. This also shows the willingness of the government and industry to work shoulder to shoulder. It had always been adversarial so far.

Another set of telecom reforms are likely to be announced in the next 3-4 months. What more do you think can be done?

We believe that whatever could have been done standalone by the telecom department has been done. The next reforms could touch on things like spectrum pricing and GST (goods and services tax). Let us keep in mind that there will never be a situation that there will be no demands from the industry. There will always be dia-

Given the environment that has now been created and that all of the other players as well as government wanted a three-player market, things are looking up. The cards that are being played are in favour of Vodafone (Vi) rather than its exit. The investor will weigh pros and cons before putting in money. What they are seeing is that the first lot of reforms have been announced and there could be another on the way. So you are an investor, logically you would wait for the second set of reforms to come.

Do you think that things are going as per plan when it comes to 5G or is there a delay?

There have been numerous cases that a good product has lost market share just six months after being launched. And not just in telecom. That is the case with 5G. If you jump into 5G when it is being formulated and tried elsewhere, you will pumping in a lot of money and you may end up with the technology but no use case.

Personally, I would say that it is better to be at second rung than to implement any technology than be at cutting edge. While you get a feeling with cutting edge that we are at the front, but is there a use case? Is there an industry which is waiting for 5G? Even now the use cases are being developed. The return on investment will come only after the use case is there. Things would have been worse had 5G been here 3-4 years earlier. Trials will bring some use cases, which may not be adequate for the return on investment, but there will be something. The demand and supply on 5G is slowly merging and it will match in due course of time.

Vodafone Idea is the most stressed among the three private telecom players. They

Cross border insolvency: UN model allows automatic recognition of foreign rulings

KARUNJITSINGH
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

THE MINISTRY of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has published a draft framework for cross border insolvency proceedings based on the UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) model under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

Cross border insolvency proceedings

Cross border insolvency proceedings are relevant for the resolution of distressed companies with assets and liabilities across multiple jurisdictions. A framework for cross border insolvency proceedings allows for the location of such a company's foreign assets, the identification of creditors and their claims and establishing payment towards claims as well as a process for coordination between courts in different countries.

Current status of foreign stakeholders and courts in other jurisdictions under IBC

While foreign creditors can make claims against a domestic company, the IBC currently does not allow for automatic recognition of any insolvency proceedings in other countries. In the case of Jet Airways, when one of the company's aircraft was grounded in Amsterdam over non-payment of dues to a European cargo firm, the National Company Law Tribunal had declined to "take on record" any orders of a foreign court regarding domestic insolvency proceedings in the absence of en-

IBC STATUS

While foreign creditors can make claims against a domestic company, the IBC currently does not allow for automatic recognition of any insolvency proceedings in other countries

abling provision in the IBC.

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, however, permitted the recognition of Dutch proceedings as "non-main insolvency proceedings" recognising India as the Centre Of Main Interests (COMI) for the company.

However, current provisions under the IBC do not allow Indian courts to address the issue of foreign assets of a company being subjected to parallel insolvency proceedings in other jurisdictions.

The UNCITRAL model

The UNCITRAL model is the most widely accepted legal framework to deal with cross-border insolvency issues. It has been adopted by 49 countries, including the UK, the US, South Africa, South Korea and Singapore.

The law allows automatic recognition of foreign proceedings and rulings given by courts in cases where the foreign jurisdiction is adjudged as the COMI for the distressed company. Recognition of foreign proceedings and reliefs is left to the discretion of domestic courts when foreign proceedings are non-main proceedings.

The COMI for a company is determined based on where the company conducts its business on a regular basis and the location of its registered office.

The framework for cross border insolvency adopted in India may like in the case of some other countries require reciprocity from any country which seeks to have its insolvency proceedings recognised by Indian courts. This would allow Indian proceedings for foreign corporate debtors to be recognised in foreign jurisdictions.

Indian framework's difference with the model law

Many countries that adopt the UNCITRAL model law do make certain changes to suit their domestic requirements. A report by the MCA has recommended that the Indian cross border insolvency framework exclude financial service providers from being subjected to cross border insolvency proceedings, noting that many countries "exempt businesses providing critical financial services, such as banks and insurance companies, from the provisions of cross-border insolvency frameworks."

The report has also recommended that companies undergoing Pre-packaged Insolvency Resolution Process be exempted from cross border insolvency proceedings as the provisions for PIRP have been introduced recently, and the "jurisprudence and practice under the pre-pack mechanism are at a nascent stage".

The PIRP was introduced earlier this year under the IBC to permit speedy resolution of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

438 infra projects show cost overrun of ₹4.34 lakh cr

As many as 438 infra projects, each worth ₹150 crore or more, have been hit by overruns totalling over ₹4.34 lakh crore, as per a Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report



Of the 1,680 such projects, 438 reported cost overruns and 539 were delayed

Total original cost of implementation of the 1,680 projects was Rs 21,74,182.86

Delay in tie-up for project financing, delay in finalisation of detailed engineering, change in scope, delay in tendering, ordering and equipment supply, and law and order problems are among the other reasons

Source: MoSPI/PTI

FOR 837 PROJECTS NEITHER THE YEAR OF COMMISSIONING NOR THE TENTATIVE GESTATION PERIOD HAS BEEN REPORTED

crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 26,08,330.02 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,34,147.16 crore (19.97 per cent of original cost)

Expenditure incurred on these projects till October 2021 is Rs 12,64,545.31 crore, which is 48.48 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects

BANKING WATCH IWG PROPOSALS

Big biz in banking sparks fears of connected lending: What is the issue?

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 28

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) has kept in limbo the proposal of its Internal Working Group (IWG) for granting banking licence to big corporate houses amid fears over connected lending and self-dealing if they are allowed in the banking space.

What's the big worry?

While the main argument in favour of allowing corporate presence in banking is that they can bring in capital, business experience and managerial competence, there are apprehensions that it was not easy for supervisors to prevent or detect

self-dealing or connected lending as banks could hide connected party or related party lending behind complex company structures and subsidiaries or through lending to suppliers of promoters and their group companies. These loans can subsequently become bad assets of the bank.

What's connected lending?

Connected lending involves the controlling owner of a bank giving loans to himself or his related parties and group companies at favourable terms and conditions. Business groups need financing, and they can get it easily with no questions asked if they have an in-house bank. In short, companies can use the bank as a "private pool of readily available funds". Big business groups already account for a major chunk non-performing assets (NPAs) in the banking system even without becoming promoters of a bank.

Former Governors' opposition to the move

When the IWG released its report in November 2020, former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan and Deputy Governor Viral Acharya opposed the entry of business houses in banking, saying if industrial houses need financing, they can get it easily if they have an in-house bank. In August 2011, the then RBI Governor D Subbarao said in one of his speeches, "By far the biggest apprehension is about self-dealing..."

The story so far

Corporate houses were active in the banking sector till five decades ago when the banks promoted by them were nationalised in the late sixties. The

sector was opened up again post liberalisation, with the first round of licensing of private banks that was done in 1993. Since then, there were two more rounds - in 2003-04 and 2013-14 - culminating with the on-tap licensing regime of universal banks since 2016. However, business houses were not considered though prominent corporates houses including Aditya Birla Group, Anil Ambani's Reliance Capital and Bajaj group showed interest in 2013-14.

Can industrial groups hold bank stake?

The central bank says individuals and companies, directly or indirectly connected with large industrial houses, are permitted to participate in the equity of a new private sector bank up to 10 per cent and should not have controlling interest in the bank.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

Johri appointed CBIC chairman

New Delhi: Senior bureaucrat Vivek Johri has been appointed as the chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), an order issued on Sunday by the personnel ministry said.

Johri, a 1985-batch Indian Revenue Service (Customs and Indirect Taxes) officer, is currently working as the member in the board. He succeeds MAjit Kumar who completes his tenure this month end. **PTI**

BMW bats for lower EV duties

New Delhi: BMW believes that reduction in import duties on electric vehicles (EV) for a limited time or for a limited number of units will help create demand in order to help manufacturing of such vehicles in India and bring new technologies quicker to the country, according to a senior company official.

BMW Group India president and CEO Vikram Pawah told PTI: "... what we are seeking from the government is very simple thing, that yes, let us have some reduction in import duties, but only for limited time or limited quantities." **PTI**

Jio hikes prepaid tariffs by up to 21% from Dec 1

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

AFTER BHARTI Airtel and Vodafone Idea, Reliance Jio on Sunday announced up to 21 per cent hike in its prepaid tariffs from the next month.

Despite the increase in rates, Jio has kept the price of plans lower than Airtel and Vodafone Idea's which is expected to continue pricing competition in the industry.

The company still has kept its lowest rate for 28 days validity plan at Rs 91 for Jiophone users which is the lowest among private telecom operators. Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea have increased the entry level plan with 28 days validity to Rs 99. The tariff hikes entail JioPhone Plan, Unlimited Plans, and data add on, and range between 19.6 per cent and 21.3 per cent.

"In line with its commitment to further strengthen a sustainable telecom industry, where every Indian is empowered with

Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea have also increased rates

a true digital life, Jio today announced its new unlimited plans. These plans will provide the best value in the industry," Reliance Jio said in a statement.

The statement further said: "Upholding the Jio promise of providing the best-quality service at the lowest price globally, Jio customers will continue to be the biggest beneficiaries".

The new unlimited plans will go-live on December 1, 2021, and can be opted from existing touchpoints and channels.

The company announced tariff hikes across 15 plans which include one for JioPhone users, 11 in unlimited category and three in data top up category.

In the unlimited plan category, Jio has increased the price of its cheapest plan with 28 days validity to Rs 155 from Rs 129. **WITHPTI**

BRIEFLY

Depositor money

New Delhi: Customers of 16 stressed cooperative banks will get up to Rs 5 lakh deposit insurance cover on Monday by Reserve Bank of India's subsidiary Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation as part of its mandate under a new law. **PTI**

Xiaomi car plant

Shanghai: Chinese smartphone firm Xiaomi will build a plant that can produce 300,000 vehicles annually in Beijing for its electric vehicle unit, authorities in the capital has said. **REUTERS**

'Visa raises concerns of level playing field in India with US'

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

VISA INC has complained to the US government that India's "informal and formal" promotion of domestic payments rival RuPay hurts the US giant in a key market, memos seen by Reuters show.

In public Visa has downplayed concerns about the rise of RuPay.

But US government memos show Visa raised concerns about a "level playing field" in India during an August 9 meeting be-

tween U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai and company executives, including CEO Alfred Kelly.

"Visa remains concerned about India's informal and formal policies that appear to favour the business of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the non-profit that runs RuPay, "over other domestic and foreign electronic payments companies," said a USTR memo prepared for Tai.

Visa, USTR, Modi's office and the NPCI did not respond to requests for comment.

'Reliance-Future deal: Amazon asks CCI to revoke nod'

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 28

AMAZON HAS asked the antitrust regulator to revoke its approval for Future Retail's \$3.4 billion sale of retail assets to Reliance, saying it was "illegally obtained", violating an order suspending the deal, a letter seen by Reuters shows.

The approval was a "nullity in the eyes of law" as an arbitrator's order was still in force, according to the letter sent by Amazon to the Competition Commission of India (CCI) last week. The CCI, Amazon,

Amazon showed disregard: Future

New Delhi: Amazon has shown "utter disregard" to the fair trade regulator CCI by "walking out of the proceedings" and such act is a "display of outright contempt for an Indian statutory authority", Future group has alleged. **PTI**

Future Group and Reliance did not respond to requests for comment.

Luxurious Dubai



MIRACLE IN THE DESERT

Expo 2020 Dubai is the 35th world fair over the past 170 years, designed to showcase ideas, inventions, and innovations that address the world's most pressing questions.

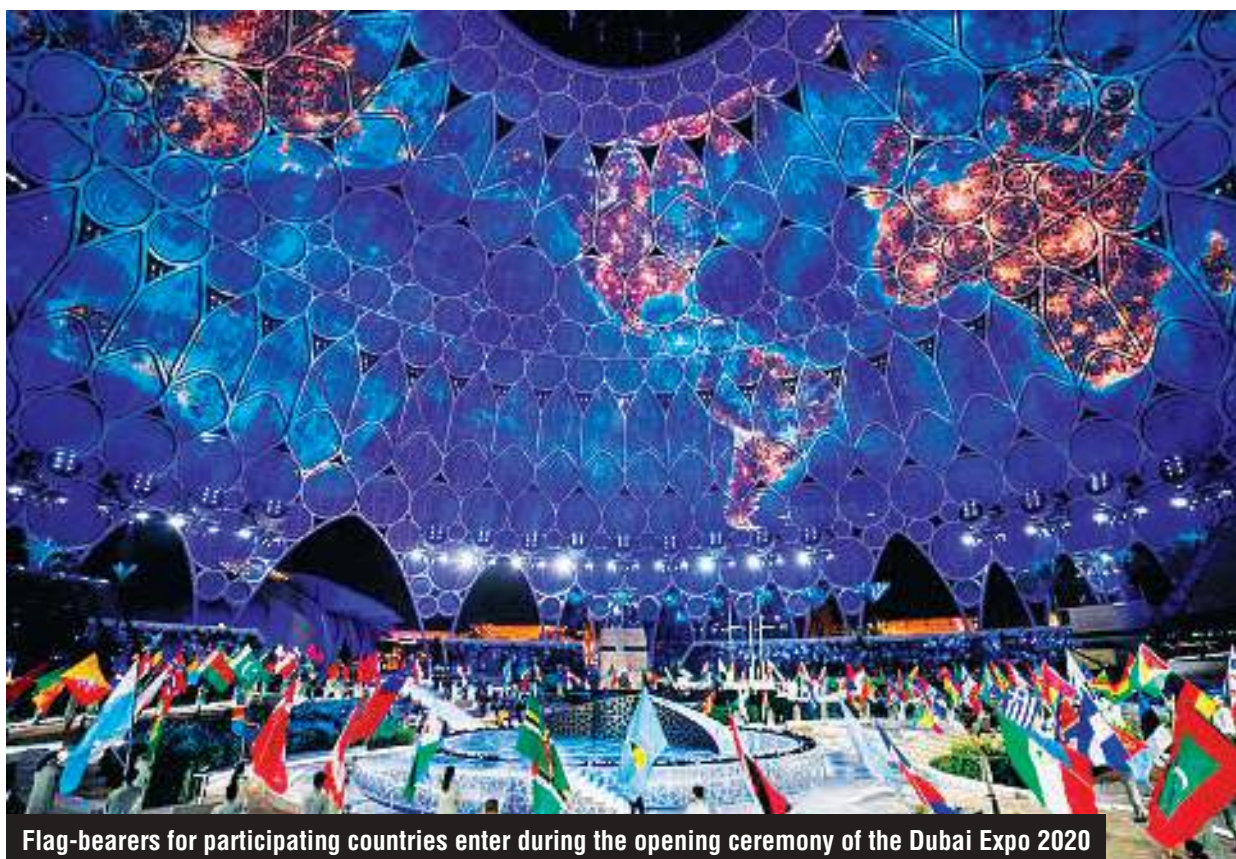
Pandemic or not, Dubai is successfully demonstrating by example how connected thinking is the perfect answer, says **Ivor Vaz**

LUXURIOUS DUBAI now has much more to exult about. Nearly a year after it was originally planned, the city finally opened its doors to Expo, the biggest exhibition/fair in the world, which had been delayed by a year due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The United Arab Emirates, one of the richest countries in the world, which coincidentally also celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, has poured more than USD 7 billion into the event, hoping to attract tourism and investments.

For the record, it's the first Expo ever to be held in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia (MEASA) region, with many reasons to be counted as one of the most important in exposition history. Dubai, the region's tourism, trade, and business hub, is hoping to boost its economy by attracting 25 million business and tourist visits to the world fair which has been built from scratch on 4.3 sq km (1.7 sq m) of desert. Many countries and companies are also looking to Expo 2020, the first major global event open to visitors since the outbreak of the pandemic, to boost trade and investment.

Over a total period of 182 days, Dubai is expected to host an estimated 25 million visitors from around the world. An unprecedented 192 countries are participating in the Expo, during which the UAE is hoping to impress visitors with its economic and technological achievements. Also, for the first time in World Expo history, every participating country will have its own pavilion. Participants and visitors can thus enjoy immersive cultural experiences and discover what makes each country unique as they explore hundreds of pavilions.

Dubai hopes that the Expo, an exhibition of culture, technology, and architecture, under its theme of 'Connecting Minds, Creating the



Flag-bearers for participating countries enter during the opening ceremony of the Dubai Expo 2020

Future' will serve as a demonstration of inventiveness, and a place where global challenges such as climate change, conflict, and economic growth can be addressed under a common roof.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai aptly summarised the vision behind Expo 2020. "Connected thinking is the best hope for progress, and for a successful and peaceful existence in the generations to come and ring true in all of the partnerships we have forged. By collaborating with our partners and all of our participants, we seek to build a better future for

everyone while creating real impact that transforms our dreams into realities."

The Expo was all set to roll last year when all humanity came to a standstill. It felt like the plot of a sci-fi story – an invisible enemy that brought the entire world to its knees. Like the rest of the world, Dubai went through denial; felt panic, and experienced loss. But Covid-19 also taught everyone the beauty of humanity, that there will always be kindness and light amid the chaos. Despite the one-year delay, the emirate's vision of 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future' resonates even more strongly as the world rebuilds.

In its 50th year, Dubai has a once-in-a-lifetime experience to bring the world together again. In a safe environment, Expo will provide a launchpad for the global collaboration the world needs most right now – a chance for humanity to convene in a spirit of optimism, hope and shared purpose to exchange inspiring new ideas and new perspectives, with an emphasis on its three subthemes – Opportunity, Mobility, and Sustainability. Hopefully, the event will spark innovations that will kick-start another 50 years of purposeful progress, contributing to the nation's continued prosperity and enabling growth in the region and beyond.

Grab Your Pass Now!

SEASON PASS

Six months to experience 192 countries and the best of art, music, architecture, sports and wellness, science, culture, and more.

Validity: From 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022

Price (Only for Adults 18-59 years): INR: 10,652.85 / AED: 495

Senior Citizens (60+ years): FREE

Children (6-17 years): FREE

People of Determination: FREE

MULTI-DAY PASS

No day at Expo 2020 is the same! Enjoy multiple visits to be entertained, eat your way around the world and make the most of all experiences.

Validity: Unlimited entries for 30 consecutive days from the first day of use, between 1st October 2021 and 31st March 2022

Price (Only for Adults 18-59 years): INR: 4,198.58 / AED: 195

Senior Citizens (60+ years): FREE

Children (6-17 years): FREE

People of Determination: FREE

FAMILY PACKAGE

Experience everything Expo 2020 has to offer with your whole family at the biggest cultural gathering in the world, with food and beverage discounts and entertainment for young and old alike.

(Includes Season Pass for 2 Adults, 1 Nanny, 1 Photography Voucher, Discounts on Food & Beverage at Select Outlets, and 25% discount on 5 Multi-Day Passes)

Validity: From 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022

Price (Only for Adults 18-59 years): INR: 20,390 / AED: 1,650

Senior Citizens (60+ years): FREE

Children (6-17 years): FREE

People of Determination: FREE

JUBILEE EXPERIENCE SEASON PASS

Celebrate the UAE's Golden Jubilee at Expo 2020. Get exclusive benefits, seamless access, and a lifetime of memories with the Jubilee Experience.

Validity: From 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022

Price: INR: 215,209 / AED: 22,000

Inclusions:

- Season Pass for 4 Adults
- 30 Multi-Day Passes
- 10 1-Day Tickets
- 2 24-Carat Gold-Plated Expo Pins & 2 Expo Passports
- 6 Vouchers for Exclusive Access to Jubilee Lounge by Emaar
- 5 Vouchers for Garden in the Sky, the Rotating Observation Tower
- 6 Photography Vouchers
- 10 Guided Tours Vouchers
- Fast Track Entrance for Member and 5 Guests on Every Visit
- Priority Access to Events, Discounts on Food & Beverage at Premium Outlets
- Dedicated VIP Parking & 10 Valet Parking Vouchers

HOW TO BUY TICKETS FOR EXPO 2020

Visitors can purchase tickets for Expo 2020 Dubai on Dubai's official website, <https://www.expo2020dubai.com/en/support/-/link.aspx?id=EDCB6A2EA506481B83379667FB9219BA&z=z>, or at the Expo 2020 entrance gates during the event. Tickets can also be bought from Expo 2020 Dubai's Authorised Ticket Resellers in each country. The Authorised Ticket Reseller in India is Akbar Travels.

Luxurious Dubai

THE GRANDDADDY OF ALL WORLD EVENTS!

Ever wondered why the world's longest-running and largest mega-event is a bigger draw than the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games? Here's the answer...



Mission Possible – The Opportunity Pavilion



Terra – The Sustainability Pavilion



Alif – The Mobility Pavilion

EXPO 2020 is already the most global Expo ever, offering unrivalled cultural experiences from more than 190 countries. Visitors in Dubai can join the greatest global gathering, meet innovators and entertainers, and taste flavours from around the globe, every day for six months. From the world's most renowned architects and creative teams behind blockbuster movies, the **Thematic Pavilions** bring to life the Expo sub-themes through experiences never seen before.

MISSION POSSIBLE – THE OPPORTUNITY PAVILION

See how even your small actions can make a big impact and be inspired to be a force of change. Join a global mission, and follow in the footsteps of mentors who are just like you, and pledge to make a better future for all.

TERRA – THE SUSTAINABILITY PAVILION

Creating its own electricity and water, Terra demonstrates the damage being done to our planet and how we can create new paths

for sustainability. Visitors explore underneath a dense forest, as the roots communicate with one another, and dive into the depths of the ocean to meet a giant fish disturbed by pollution of the ocean.

ALIF – THE MOBILITY PAVILION

Visit the House of Wisdom in ninth-century Baghdad and meet nine-metre-tall historical giants of mobility. Marvel at memorable moments designed by storytellers behind some of the top productions in the world such as 'The Lord of The Rings' and 'The Hobbit'.

THE WORLD'S MOST INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE

Explore the city of the future, designed for better, more sustainable, and human-centric living, filled with architectural and operational ideas on how we will exist. Visitors can experience the world's most visually striking and emotionally inspiring architecture, every day for six months.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SHOW

The most breathtaking

entertainment and events include concerts, theatre, and sports brought together during a six-month spectacle. Experience the world's best entertainment from local and international artists, every day for six months.

DIVERSE LIVE EVENTS & PERFORMANCES EVERYDAY

There'll always be something to get excited about, with a jam-packed programme of live performances including world-famous stars, comedy greats, local talent, and touring attractions. From roaming dance entertainment, acrobats, and street performers to poetry slams and theatrical performances, enjoy cultural experiences from five continents that'll excite your senses and touch your heart.

ENTERTAINMENT FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Enter a world of magic and discovery as the incredible and exciting work of International Participants is showcased, including brilliant cultural performances, theatre, art,

music, conferences, and much more. Over the course of the event's 182 days, there will be no shortage of excitement.

ONCE IN A LIFETIME IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Enjoy projection, light, and sound shows on the largest 360-degree projection surface in the world and immerse yourself in dining inspired by space, microbiology, and artificial intelligence. With Immersive Experiences, Projection Showcase, and Live Theatrical Shows, the Expo site is a playground for the senses, pulling us in multiple directions, creating worlds that are deep, unpredictable, and, of course, entertaining.

COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES AT EXPO 2020

The health and well-being of visitors and everyone living in and visiting the UAE is a top priority. Expo 2020 Dubai follows guidance from the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention and Dubai Health Authority and the latest information and advice from the World Health Organisation.

Grand Opening For Israel Pavilion @ Dubai Expo 2020



Jewish and Arab attendees celebrate the opening of the Israeli pavilion at Expo 2020 in Dubai

ISRAEL CEREMONIALLY OPENED its gleaming pavilion at the world's fair in Dubai, over a year after normalising ties with the United Arab Emirates and amid a pandemic that has disrupted much of tourist and cultural exchanges for nearly two years now.

The glittering ceremony saw high-profile Emirati as well Israeli officials in attendance. The inauguration was hosted by Israel's Minister of Tourism Yoel Razvozov and Elazar Cohen, Commissioner General of the Israel Pavilion. The pavilion's arch – chock-full of flashy videos promoting Israel's windmills, high-tech advances, and historic sights – came to life as night fell. Some Hebrew music played and patriotic balloons floated.

Razvozov said in his opening remarks: "I'm truly delighted to be standing here as a representative of the Israeli people and the Israeli government at the opening of Israel's National Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. Many things are happening here for the first time. For the first time in history, the Expo fair is being held in an Arab country. It is also the first

time there is an Israeli pavilion in a major fair on Arab soil. It is one of the most sound and robust steps towards cooperation between the United Arab Emirates and Israel in history."

"Peace allows us to forge a new reality in the Middle East that will bring prosperity, security, and stability to all. We believe that in order to reach a better tomorrow, one should choose practical and positive actions today. So, I'm delighted to invite each and every visitor, participant, and host at this Expo to come and visit our country. Come and see for yourself what Israel is really about. Tourism allows us to explore, learn from and accommodate each other. Tourism will build a human bridge to peace," he added.

Amir Halevi, Israel's Tourism Ministry's Director-General, said that he expects an influx of Israeli tourists to visit Expo 2020 in the coming months as travel restrictions ease.

The event concluded with a performance by Hamalgezot, an Israeli band playing traditional Israeli music, and Israeli DJ Abass playing for around 250 guests.

EXPERIENCE THE NEW ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS OF DUBAI

While you're in the emirate for the Expo, it would be worth your while to check out some of the eye-popping, space-age structures that represent the very best in world architecture.

THE MUSEUM OF THE FUTURE Sheikh Zayed Road, Trade Centre 2, Dubai, UAE



With an expected opening date in 2021 (delayed due to the pandemic), The Museum of the Future is rapidly taking shape in Downtown Dubai. Already dubbed one of the world's most advanced buildings, this curvaceous structure by Killa Designs has taken inspiration from the construction techniques of the aviation industry, using joint-free stainless steel and fibreglass panels to create a smooth elliptical shape. Once complete, the eye-catching oval will be inscribed with Arabic calligraphy, and will act as an incubator for innovation.

THE OPUS BY OMNIYAT Al A'amal Street, Business Bay, Dubai, UAE



Located in Dubai's Business Bay district, The Opus by Zaha Hadid for Omniyat is an architectural wonder. The first and only foray into Dubai for the legendary late architect Zaha Hadid, The Opus balances the sharp lines of a glass cube with a curvaceous void at its heart. This futuristic fantasy near the Burj Khalifa will house luxe residential properties, commercial zones, and a 93-room hotel from Spanish brand ME by Meliá, including 15 bars and restaurants. This daring design is a fitting legacy for Hadid, who was known as the 'Queen of the Curve' and was the first female architect to win the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize.

DUBAI FRAME Zabeel Park Jogging Track, Za'abeel, Al Kifaf, Dubai, UAE



The UAE's latest cultural landmark, Dubai Frame is an iconic structure that 'frames' impressive views of Old and New Dubai, while serving as a metaphorical bridge connecting the emirate's rich past with its magnificent present. Dubai Frame celebrates the story of Dubai from its early establishment to its ambitious plans for future development. Launched in January 2018, the project comprises a 150-metre-high, 95-metre-wide structure being built to resemble a huge picture frame, through which landmarks representing modern Dubai such as Emirates Towers and Burj Khalifa can be seen on one side, while from the other side, visitors can

view older parts of the city such as Deira and Karama. It is recognised as the world's largest picture frame by Guinness World Records.

THE GREEN PLANET City Walk, Al Wasl, Dubai, UAE



The Green Planet is the region's first bio-dome that recreates the enchanting world of a tropical forest with its rich biodiversity of over 3,000 plants and animals. The enclosed ecosystem offers visitors an immersive expedition into the tropics. The unique venue has four levels of interaction with fascinating animal and plant species to see from Sloths, Tucans, and Tree porcupines to South American plants, vines, reptiles, fish, and insects. The middle of the desert is one of the last places you'd expect to stroll through an Equatorial Rainforest, and yet architect Grout McTavish has achieved the impossible with this cutting-edge structure. It's a great destination for families and guests of all ages!

CAYAN TOWER Marina Promenade, Dubai, UAE

The world's tallest twisting tower – the 75-storey, 1,010-foot-tall Cayan Tower in Dubai, which rotates a full 90 degrees from base to top – is a monument to rational thought in the service of art and commerce. Designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, this majestic and unprecedented feat was achieved by rotating each floor 1.2 degrees clockwise so that the tower twists a full 90 degrees. When it was completed in 2013, it became the world's tallest residential tower, a feat that has since



been superseded. Today, it remains one of the most eye-catching structures in Dubai Marina, offering views over docked superyachts and Jumeirah Beach from its 495 apartments.

GEVORA HOTEL 101 Sheikh Zayed Rd, Trade Centre – DIFC, Dubai, UAE

Gevora Hotel is a 1,168 ft (356 m) tall hotel along Sheikh Zayed Road in the financial and trade district. That height has given the skyscraper the title of tallest hotel building according to Guinness World Records. The four-star hotel opened in February 2018 after a construction period of twelve years. With a flashy gold façade and pyramid at its summit, the 1,168-foot tower is home to 528 guest rooms spread over 75 floors and a number of facilities including five dining options, and an alfresco pool deck on top of its parking garage building overlooking the city.



COLM MCLOUGHLIN RECEIVES GULF BUSINESS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DUBAI DUTY FREE Executive Vice Chairman & CEO, Colm McLoughlin was honoured with the coveted Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2021 edition of Gulf Business Awards held on 23rd November at the Central Park Towers in Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC).

Organised by Motivate Publishing, the annual Gulf Business Awards recognise the most successful companies and industry leaders across different sectors in the GCC. The special recognition acknowledged McLoughlin for his outstanding contribution to the travel retail industry and his strong leadership of Dubai Duty Free since 1983.

Commenting on the award McLoughlin said, "I am thrilled and delighted that I have been selected to receive this special award. I attribute it absolutely and totally to our team of staff and the effort they make in making our business successful and, of course, to our Chairman H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin



COLM MCLOUGHLIN
Executive Vice Chairman & CEO of
Dubai Duty Free

Saeed Al Maktoum, who was also honoured with the same award in 2017."

McLoughlin now follows the footsteps of other UAE luminaries including H.E. Mohamed Alabbar, H.E. Sheikh Lubna bint Khalid Al Qasimi, H.E. Easa Saleh Al Gurg, and Sir Tim Clark, among others.

Salah Tahlak, Executive Vice President - Corporate Services of Dubai Duty Free accepted the award on behalf of Mr. McLoughlin. He was joined by other Dubai Duty Free officials including Sinead El Sibai, SVP - Marketing, Bernard Creed, SVP - Finance, Mona Al Ali, SVP - Human Resources, and Zayed Al Shebli, SVP - Loss Prevention & Corporate Security.

Special awards recognising the Sustainability Company of the Year, SME of the Year, Disruptor, and Businesswoman of the Year were also presented during the night.

The awards were adjudged by the Gulf Business team and a special independent judging panel that included well-known industry and business leaders.

Dubai Duty Free Marks Its Tenth 'Airport Retailer of the Year' Award

DUBAI DUTY FREE was named 'Airport Retailer of the Year' for a record tenth time at the Frontier Awards held on 27th October at the Hôtel Barrière Le Majestic in Cannes, France.

Held to coincide with the annual Tax Free World Association (TFWA) conference and exhibition, the Frontier Awards, which are often referred to as 'the Oscars of travel retail industry', celebrate the innovation, creativity, and excellence within the travel retail industry.

Commenting on the award, Dubai Duty Free Executive Vice Chairman and CEO, Colm McLoughlin said, "We are thrilled to receive our record tenth Frontier Airport Retailer of the Year Award. This award will always be treasured as it is a testament to our hard work and commitment despite the challenging year. I would like to thank the organisers and the judges for their support and I join our Chairman H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum in dedicating this Frontier award to each and every member of our staff."

Hosted by DFNI Frontier magazine, this year's distinguished panel of judges, which comprised of seven top executives from the industry who collectively boast a wealth of experience across a wide geographical area, chose from a large number of entries from all over the world.

Dubai Duty Free's continuing achievement both in terms of



H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority and Chairman of Dubai Duty Free and Colm McLoughlin, Executive Vice Chairman & CEO of Dubai Duty Free with the Frontier 'Airport Retailer of the Year' award.

its sales as well as strengthening its position as an innovative and expanding retail operation despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, were some of the key points noted by the judges before awarding the 'Airport Retailer of the Year' to the operation.

In addition, Dubai Duty Free along with other duty-free and travel retailers was also presented with a special collective award for 'Outstanding Contribution' to recognised frontline staff in the duty-free and travel retail industry.

Dubai Duty Free won its first 'Airport Retailer of the Year' award in 1985 - at the first Frontier Awards ceremony - and again in 2000, 2001,

2004, 2007, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2018. The operation has also won in other categories over the years including 'Best Marketing Campaign' in 1986, 1990, 2009, and 2015. In 1986, Colm McLoughlin was presented with the 'Duty Free Person of the Year' award and in 2004 a special 'Lifetime Achievement Award' was presented in recognition of his significant role within the duty-free industry. While former Dubai Duty Free President, George Horan was also presented with the same award in 2016 following his retirement in June, after 33 years of working in the company. In 2019, Dubai Duty Free's Emiratisation Officer, Muna Hassan was named as a recipient of the 'Talent of Tomorrow' Award.

THE IRISH VILLAGE @ EXPO 2020: CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF AWARD-WINNING HOSPITALITY

THE WORLD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR Expo 2020 Dubai and The Irish Village is proud to be part of it, having opened its doors to Expo visitors on 1st October 2021. The Irish Village is conveniently located in Jubilee Park, which will be the main hub for entertainment for six months. The look and feel of The Irish Village Garhoud have been recreated down to the weathervane on top of the clock and the Ballinasloe Post Office. Guests can enjoy sitting outdoors on the terrace listening to 'Graham Mills', a traditional Irish musician who has been flown in especially for the event - you can raise your glass to the world.

Recently, The Irish Village in Garhoud celebrated 25 years of award-winning hospitality, since opening in October 1996.



The Irish Village in Jubilee Park at Expo 2020 Dubai, outside terraces (on the ground) and the lovely rooftop terrace which is perfect for sundowners.



Pat Hennessy, Commissioner General of Ireland Pavilion (Expo 2020) joined Dubai Duty Free officials headed by Colm McLoughlin, Executive Vice Chairman & CEO of Dubai Duty Free and Dave Cattanaich, General Manager - The Irish Village complex at the cake cutting to celebrate the 25th anniversary of The Irish Village.



Dubai Duty Free executive team headed by Ramesh Cidambi, COO along with Sinead El Sibai, SVP - Marketing and Sharon Beecham, SVP - Purchasing accepted the award on behalf of Dubai Duty Free in Cannes France.

DUBAI DUTY FREE WINS MULTIPLE AWARDS AT THE 2ND VIRTUAL TRAVEL RETAIL EXPO

AT THE SECOND EDITION of the Virtual Travel Retail Expo, Dubai Duty Free (DDF) won multiple awards in two different awards ceremonies that took place online on the final day of the virtual expo on 15th October.

Organised by The Moodie Davitt Report Dubai Duty Free received four awards in the Middle East & Africa category for the inaugural Travel Retail Superstars Awards, while it received two awards in the eighth edition of The Moodies Travel Journey Digital Awards.

The Travel Retail Superstars Awards, which shone a spotlight on the frontline and behind-the-scenes heroes and heroines who have helped keep the industry going during the Covid-19 pandemic, Dubai Duty Free was awarded the 'Star Team - Shopfloor' for DDF Brand Ambassadors for Pernod Ricard, 'Star Team - Back Office' for Operations and HR Team, 'Star Individual - Shop Floor' for Sales Assistant, Ali Attia Ali Elsayed and 'Innovation - Back Office' for IT Team for Home Delivery Specials service.

Meanwhile, at The Moodies Travel Journey Digital Awards, which highlight campaigns and best social and digital media practices during the global pandemic, the retailer was awarded with the 'Best Use of Social Platforms' for DDF

pandemic response and the 'Best Creativity and Innovation during Covid-19' for DDF Home Delivery Specials service.

Commenting on these awards, Dubai Duty Free Executive Vice Chairman & CEO, Colm McLoughlin said, "We are thrilled that our efforts have been recognised through these two awards programmes held during the Virtual Travel Retail Expo. It's a testament of our commitment to our employees, customers, and retail partners in adapting our business despite the enormous challenges brought on by the pandemic, which included the launch of our Home Delivery Service and our continued effort to engage and serve our customers through social media platforms. I would like to thank the panel of judges who voted for Dubai Duty Free in these two award categories."

The group of dedicated DDF brand ambassadors for Pernod Ricard was awarded for demonstrating an incredible level of discipline and grit, wrestling control of the unprecedented situation of the Pandemic and transforming it into an opportunity for self-improvement. The DDF Operations and Human Resources Team was recognised for being at the centre of DDF's rapid response to the COVID-19 crisis by keeping the workforce

safe, engaged, productive, and resilient. Meanwhile, DDF Sales Assistant, Ali Attia Ali Elsayed was awarded for his extraordinary customer service skill and exemplary records making him as one of DDF's finest employees while the DDF Home Delivery Specials service was awarded for giving the experience and confidence needed to set up and operate a totally new revenue stream as an airport retailer.

The 'Best Use of Social Platforms' was awarded to Dubai Duty Free for its social media messaging which focused on nurturing the community as opposed to any hard sell through its Travel from Home series which helped foster engagement and stronger association with customers and travellers in general. Lastly, the 'Best Creativity and Innovation during Covid-19' was awarded to DDF Home Delivery Specials service which formed a part of the retailer's commitment to its customers to ensure they can enjoy its great range of products while staying safe at home.

The Virtual Travel Retail Expo, which took place from 11th-15th October is a pioneering virtual trade show and symposium designed to both mirror and enhance a real conference and exhibition which was launched last year, has already established itself as the largest virtual event in the global travel retail calendar, and the 2021 edition has set it to the next level with an even bigger and better offering.



Dubai Duty Free Sailing League Regatta Gets Underway

DUBAI DUTY FREE has returned to the high seas with its sponsorship of the Dubai Duty Free Sailing League Regatta to be held at Dubai Offshore Sailing Club (DOSC) from 1st-4th December, to coincide with the UAE National Day.

Hosted by DOSC, the event will follow a Sailing League format with a series of short 15-20 minutes races. A total of 24 teams, which includes 12 locals and 12 internationals will compete on SB20 keelboats in a tournament spread across four days and culminating in a four-boat final on Saturday, 4th December to determine the winners.

Commenting on this latest sports sponsorship, Dubai Duty Free Executive Vice Chairman & CEO, Colm McLoughlin said, "We are delighted to be on board as the title sponsor of the Dubai Duty Free Sailing League Regatta. Water sports have a very strong following in the region and the UAE sailing scene is very active with the DOSC at its core. We are looking forward to this event and I am confident that it will be a success."

Dubai Offshore Sailing Club Commodore, Simon Reeves added, "The Commodore of Dubai Offshore Sailing Club, Simon Reeves added: "We are proud to have the support of Dubai Duty Free as the title sponsor of this inaugural event, which is designed to showcase the fantastic sailing conditions that the UAE has to offer. I am sure that Dubai Duty Free will bring a lot of prestige to the event and its support will provide a world-class experience for all the participants."

Set against the backdrop of Dubai's golden coastline, the event is sure to



DUBAI DUTY FREE

Since its opening on 20th December 1983, Dubai Duty Free (DDF) has grown into one of the largest travel retail operators in the world with a turnover of US\$2.029 billion in 2019. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, DDF continues to achieve highlights both in terms of its sales as well as strengthening its position as an innovative and expanding retail operation.

Currently operating at Dubai International Airport, the operation has consistently raised the benchmark for airport retailing and it continues to grow. To date, DDF has received over 700 awards including the Frontier Awards for 'Airport Retailer of the Year' which was won by the operation for a record tenth time in 2021.

For more information on Dubai Duty Free please visit www.dubaidutyfree.com.

deliver action and excitement with the races of the two short laps to be held directly in front of Nessnas Beach providing a great view of the competition from the shoreline.

The inaugural event will set the standard as the DOSC is set to bid to host the SB20 World Championships in 2024.

Over the past three decades, Dubai Duty Free has developed strong links to several sporting events both in the UAE and abroad. By supporting so many events at the highest level and all around the globe, Dubai Duty Free is effectively promoting Dubai's sporting, leisure, and business facilities, which are second to none.

Dubai Duty Free



WORTH FLYING FOR

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Thousands of limited editions and travel exclusives.
Hundreds of the world's most desirable brands.
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