



## GAUAHAR TIES THE KNOT

Actor Gauahar Khan marries beau Zaid Darbar on Christmas Day and shares photographs of the wedding

LEISURE P2



## OLI GOVT SHOW-CAUSED

Nepal's Supreme Court issues a show-cause notice to Prime Minister KP Oli-led government on dissolution of Parliament

INTERNATIONAL P10



## FOUR CHANGES

After Adelaide humiliation, India have made four changes in the team for the 2nd Test against Australia

SPORTS P12

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Yes, much before we bring a Bill, corporates come to know about it. You see, ours is a transparent govt.

## MAN KILLS PARENTS

NUAGAON: A man killed his parents over a land dispute at Bishupur under Nuagaon block in Sundargarh district Friday. The deceased were identified as Monbas Singh (65) and his wife Lila Singh (60). In the morning, he scolded his parents over a land issue when his younger brother Somen (35) opposed him. The accused lost his cool and attacked the couple with a vegetable-cutting instrument killing the two on the spot.

| WEATHER   |                         |        |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------|
|           | BHUB                    | CTK    |
| TEMP. MAX | 28.2°C                  | 27.8°C |
| TEMP. MIN | 24.0°C                  | 12.4°C |
| Humidity  | 93%                     | 77%    |
| Rainfall  | Nil                     | Nil    |
| Forecast  | Fog/mist in the morning |        |

# Centre contradicts itself on PM-CARES

### PM-CARES IS CONTROLLED BY GOVERNMENT, BUT DOESN'T COME UNDER RTI ACT, SAYS CENTRE IN NEW RESPONSE

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 25: In a new RTI reply, the Centre has said that the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) fund is "owned and established" by the government. This is in sharp contrast with the government's recent claim that the fund was private.

The government made the announcement while responding to RTI applicant Commodore (retired) Lokesh K Batra's query. However, it said that the fund does not come under the RTI Act as it is funded by private sources.

"This Fund (PM CARES FUND) is completely financed by donations received from individuals or organizations, CSRs (corporate social responsibility), foreign individuals, foreign organization PSUs and not at-all financed by the appropriate government and administered by the private individual as Trustees, which is a compulsory condition to invoke section 2(h) of the Right to information



## DODGING RTI

- The controversy over PM-CARES' ownership erupted after the fund's trust deed was made public
- A clause in the document called the fund a private entity, exempting it from RTI scrutiny
- However, the fund has been registered with the Revenue dept of Delhi, with the PM as chairperson

Act, 2005 and therefore, PM CARES Fund cannot be considered as a public authority," the government's response stated.

The controversy over PM-CARES erupted earlier this month after the fund's trust deed was made public. A clause in the document de-

scribed the fund as a private entity, exempting it from RTI scrutiny. The fund has, however, been registered with the revenue department of Delhi, with the prime minister as chairperson and senior ministers as trustees.

Opposition parties have repeatedly raised questions about the fund's transparency, and have questioned the need to create the reserve when Prime Minister's National Relief Fund already existed. This is not the first controversy surrounding the fund. The trust was registered March 27 this year and on the next day, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs issued an office memorandum qualifying PM-CARES as a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative to receive corporate donations.

According to documents accessed by RTI activist Anjali Bhardwaj, PM-CARES was defined as a "fund set up by the central government", in the corporate affairs memorandum. But the trust deed said it was not government-run, and thus was not eligible for corporate donations.

## Mohapatra appointed state's chief secretary

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: The state government Friday appointed senior IAS officer Suresh Chandra Mohapatra as the new Chief Secretary and Chief Development Commissioner, the CMO said. Mohapatra, a 1986 batch Indian Administrative Service officer, was currently serving as Development Commissioner of the state and working chairman of Temple Management Committee. He will succeed Asit Kumar Tripathy, who will retire from government service December 31.

Born February 4, 1962, Mahapatra started his career as Nuapada sub-collector in 1988. He has served as a collector in Bhadrakh, Kandhamal and Puri, chief administrator in Srimandir, MD of OMFED, CEO of CESU and CMD of GRIDCO.

He also served as secretary in the departments of Energy, Water resources and additional chief secretary in Forest and Environment department.

"I will try my best for the overall development of all people and areas of the state. I will work for revival of the livelihoods of the people in the post Covid-19 scenario," he said. Tripathy, a resident of Bolangir district in western Odisha, will be the new chairperson of the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC). He will be the first non-political person to hold the crucial post.



Suresh Chandra Mohapatra

Asit Tripathy will be the new chairperson of the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC)

Start Strong. Grow Stronger.

1800 266 266 1 (tollfree)

## Vaccine dry run in 4 states next week

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 25: To assess readiness of the mechanism laid out for the COVID-19 inoculation drive, a dry run has been planned by the Centre December 28 and 29 in four states -- Punjab, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

The exercise will include necessary data entry in Co-WIN, an online platform for monitoring of vaccine delivery, testing receipt and allocation, deployment of team members, mock drill of session sites with test beneficiaries, as well as reporting and evening meeting, the Union Health Ministry said Friday.

It will also include testing of cold storage and transportation arrangements for



- The mock drill will include review at block and district levels
- Focus will be on any possible adverse events following immunisation

COVID-19 vaccine, management of crowd at session sites with proper physical distancing, the ministry said. Each state will plan it in two districts and preferably in five different session-type settings -- district hospital, community health centre (CHC) or primary health care centre (PHC), urban site, private health facility and rural outreach.

# Royal. Radiant. Rare.

The wait is over. Get intricately crafted certified Gold & Diamond Jewellery at unmatched prices.

## END OF SEASON SALE

Upto 25% off\* on Diamonds

Upto 70% off\* on Gold Jewellery MC

Upto 60% off\* on Luxury Watches

KHIMJI Jewellers since 1936

84 YEARS TRUST IS TIMELESS

Open on All Days Toll Free 1800 3131 777 (10am to 8pm)

Follow us on [Social Media Icons]

Stores ONLY at:  
Bhubaneswar: 621, Saheed Nagar, Janpath | Bhubaneswar: 309 District Centre, Chandrashekarpur  
Berhampur: Venkatraju Arcade, Sano Bazar | Cuttack: 558/834, Cantonment Road | Rourkela: Kesar Bhawan, Main Road  
Jharsuguda: Sarbahal Road (Opening Shortly)

NOWHERE ELSE









The whole world yearns after freedom, yet each creature is in love with his chains; this is the first paradox and inextricable knot of our nature.

SRI AUROBINDO



### Lateral entry runs into a babu wall

Earlier this year, Arvind Panagariya, former vice-chief of the government NITI Aayog, wrote in his book 'India Unlimited - Reclaiming the Lost Glory' that Indian babus suffered from the socialist hangover...



#### BABUDOM BYTES

Dilip Cherian

The signs are already there. There have been no new appointments this year through lateral entry since the scheme was introduced last year to bring in domain experts from outside to fill the shortage of specialists in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy.

#### NDDB gets new chief

Until 2014, the chairmanship of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) was held by dairy professionals. But in its six years term at the Centre, the Modi sarkar has chosen to name only able senior administrators to the top post at NDDB.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

#### WISDOM CORNER

- If something is important enough, even if the odds are stacked against you, you should still do it. ELON MUSK
Don't be afraid to give up the good to go for the great. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER
People who wonder if the glass is half empty or full miss the point. The glass is refillable. UNKNOWN

#### WORDSWORTH

##### Bridegroom

A Groom is common as a short form of bridegroom. How the word that we now use for a man who looks after horses came to be linked to one half of a marrying couple is one of the classic stories of popular misunderstandings - folk etymology - that cause language to evolve in unpredictable ways.

##### Bridewell

In the early sixteenth century, what was modestly called lodging was built for Henry VIII on the banks of the Fleet River in London. It was actually a brick palace arranged around three courtyards. Its claim to fame is partly etymological and partly artistic.

#### LOL

##### Show him your badge



DEA officer stops at a ranch in Texas, and talks with an old rancher... He tells the rancher, 'I need to inspect your ranch for illegally grown drugs.' The rancher says, 'Okay, but do not go in that field over there,' as he points out the location.

any land... No questions asked or answers given. Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?' The rancher nods politely, apologizes, and goes about his chores.

#### SPECTRUM EDUCATION

## The magic of the syllabus

During the 2007-08 financial crises, many experienced what literary scholars call a 'crisis of representation.' Globally, more than \$15 trillion seemed to evaporate, and people wondered, 'Wait a second, what is money? How could all of this value just disappear?'

William Germano & Kit Nicholls

### LOSING MOST OF THE PHYSICAL MARKERS OF ACADEMIC HAS FORCED US TO QUESTION WHAT A UNIVERSITY IS AND WHAT HIGHER EDUCATION MEANS

Those of us who teach at universities are currently going through something similar because of Covid-19. Losing most of the physical markers of academic life - no classrooms or offices, and students instead beamed into our homes via Zoom - has forced us to question what a university is and what higher education means.

##### Steady fall

Sir, From being a caged parrot of the powers that be, the inability of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take investigation and prosecution in crucial and sensational criminals cases to their logical conclusion have bamboozled everyone.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

##### Roll on Brexit

Sir, The so-called Brexit deal between the UK and the EU has just reached the final stage at last with both the parties clinching the final deal. On the other part, there have been different stories and confusing signals from certain quarters about the deal.

P Senthil Saravana Durai, MUMBAI

#### FOCUS PEOPLE

## WHO IS AMERICA?



### One of former President Barack Obama's verbal tics was to declare that the baser instincts lurking in the darker corners of American life did not represent 'who we are.' But four years of Donald Trump's presidency, which is ending with an unprecedented spree of federal executions, suggest that millions of Americans disagree

Why would a US President in the last weeks of his administration want to start executing federal prisoners at a furious pace, even as he pardons four American mercenaries who murdered 14 Iraqi civilians in cold blood?



Ian Buruma

### THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S KILLING SPREE GOES AGAINST ALL RECENT NORMS AND TRENDS, WHICH HAVE REDUCED EXECUTIONS TO ALMOST NONE

The Trump administration's killing spree goes against all recent norms and trends, which have reduced executions to almost none. And the frenetic activity on death row is going on even as the lame duck administration is doing very little else, aside from angrily contesting the election results.

Is Trump's bloodlust due to a fit of pique because he lost the election? Or is it just a matter of personal malice? Or is it symbolic, a brutal gesture toward 'law and order,' setting up Biden as a softie if he carries out his promise to abolish the death penalty?

refinement. Few Presidents in history have his gift for English prose. Obama is not only a stylish writer; but a discerning reader. His behavior in office was always impeccable, and he and his wife, Michelle, are the model of a highly civilized couple.

And that is precisely what some of his opponents could never abide. Racists hated the very idea of being governed by a black man. But the fact that he was such a well-educated and cultivated black man made his ascent to the highest office even more intolerable.

to declare that the baser instincts lurking in the darkened corners of American life were 'not who we are' as Americans. Torturing prisoners in 'black sites' all over the world was 'not who we are.' Racist killings in black churches were 'not who we are.' And so on.

Obama was nothing if not an aspirational leader. He expressed in his books and his speeches a high ideal of the United States. In this respect, he followed the example of Martin Luther King, Jr. Both men were fully aware of America's coarse, violent, racist side.

Ian Buruma is the author, most recently, of 'The Churchill Complex: The Curse of Being Special', 'From Winston and FDR to Trump and Brexit'.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

## Letters

#### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST B-15, Rusaagarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010



# UNHAPPY FARMERS

The 2020 Indian farmers' protest is an ongoing protest against the three farm acts which were passed by the Parliament of India in September 2020. The acts have been described as 'anti-farmer laws' by many farmer unions, and farmer unions and politicians from the opposition also say it would leave farmers at the 'mercy of corporates'. Farmers, mostly from the Sikh-dominated state of Punjab, have been camped on the borders of New Delhi since last month, demanding Modi roll back the reforms intended to bring investment in the antiquated farm sector but which the farmers say will leave them at the mercy of big corporations. Angry farmers staged demonstrations near New Delhi after rejecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurances that the laws would double farmers' income. The farmers have been undeterred by the COVID pandemic and bone-chilling Delhi cold.

### THEIR DEMANDS

The key demand is the withdrawal of the three laws which deregulate the sale of their crops. The farmer unions could also settle for a legal assurance that the MSP system will continue, ideally through an amendment to the laws. They are also pressing for the withdrawal of the proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020, fearing it will lead to an end to subsidised electricity. Farmers say rules against stubble burning should also not apply to them.



### WHAT THE CENTRE SAYS

The Narendra Modi government says the new laws will give more options to the farmers to sell their crops and get them better prices. It has assured that there is no move to end the MSP system, and the new Acts do not refer to it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday (Dec 25) released over Rs 18,000 crore to more than nine crore farmer families under the 'Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi' (PM-KISAN). With the push of a button, Modi enabled the transfer of money at an event which the ruling BJP has made into a mega exercise to reach out to farmers by having its leaders interact with the farming community at more than 19,000 venues across the country and also listen to the prime minister's address. Modi released the instalment of Rs 2,000 to every farmer on the birth anniversary of former prime minister and BJP stalwart Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which is every year celebrated as 'Good Governance Day' by the ruling party.

### KEY PLAYERS

The 'Delhi Chalo' call was given by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee. Several other organisations including Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh and factions of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) came out in support. The march is being held under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha.

### EARLIER PROTESTS

Before 'Delhi Chalo' farmers in Punjab and Haryana held sit-ins and blocked roads in sporadic protests. Punjab farmer unions then announced a 'rail roko' agitation, which lasted for about two months, leading to a suspension of trains to the state and shortages in critical areas, including coal for thermal power stations.



THE YEAR 2020 WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING AND EXTRAORDINARY. THREE THINGS THAT DEFINED 2020 WERE THE PANDEMIC, ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN AND WIDESPREAD PROTESTS ACROSS THE WORLD. FROM BLACK LIVES MATTER IN THE US TO THE NRC-CAA PROTESTS AND THE FARMER PROTESTS IN INDIA NOW, THE YEAR SAW A WAVE OF PUBLIC ANGER. DESPITE THE GREATEST PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE IN OVER A CENTURY – AND THE VIRUS THREAT, LOCKDOWNS AND INCREASINGLY REPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT THEY TRIGGERED – PROTESTS REMAINED AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GLOBAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE. ORISSA POST TAKES A SHARP LOOK AT SOME OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVALS OF THE YEAR.

# PROTESTS AMID PANDEMIC

## WAVES OF GRIEF

### HK CLAMPDOWN

In June, a year after a massive wave of demonstrations, China imposes a sweeping new security law on Hong Kong that opponents say undermines the semi-autonomous city's liberties, promised under its handover from Britain in 1997. Pro-democracy lawmakers are ousted, harassed and arrested. In December, three prominent Hong Kong activists are jailed including Joshua Wong.



### THAI UPRISING

Students spark pro-democracy protests in July that roll on for the rest of the year calling for a new constitution, reform of the untouchable monarchy, and for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to resign.



### NAVALNY AFFAIR

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny is flown to Berlin in a medically induced coma after becoming violently ill from tea he drank as he boarded an internal flight to Moscow. Tests reveal he was poisoned with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok. Navalny accuses Russian President Vladimir Putin of trying to kill him.



### CHINA-US TENSIONS

2020 sees US-China relations nosedive, with Trump calling Covid-19 the 'China virus' and saying Beijing is responsible for 'a mass worldwide killing'. They also clash over the repression of Turkic speaking Uighur minority in the Chinese region of Xinjiang, as well as the national security law imposed on Hong Kong.



### NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Heavy fighting for the Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which broke away from Azerbaijan after a war in the 1990s, goes on for 45 days. Several thousand die after a Kremlin-brokered peace deal on November 9, with Armenians losing swathes of territory to Azerbaijan forces.

### ETHIOPIA: TIGRAY CONFLICT

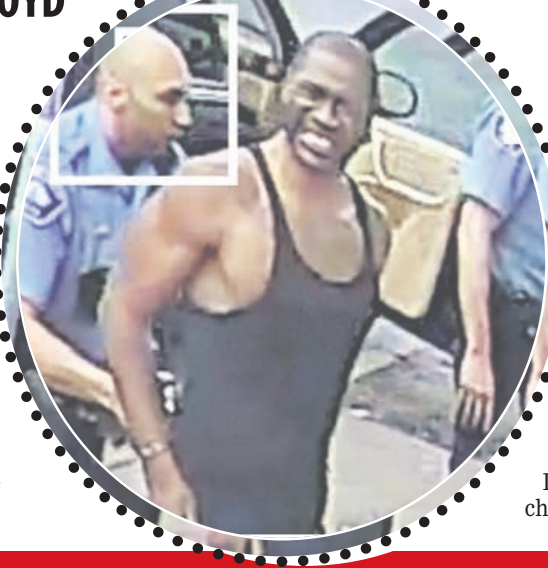
Ethiopian Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed orders a military response to attacks on federal army camps in the dissident northern Tigray region. The



Tigray People's Liberation Front -- which has dominated Ethiopian politics for nearly three decades -- denies responsibility and says the reported attacks are a pretext for an 'invasion'. Federal forces take the Tigrayan capital November 28.

## KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD

Racism has been called America's original sin. But it is a sin that extends beyond the United States. On May 25, George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old Black man, was arrested in Minneapolis for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. One of the arresting officers kept his knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and fifteen seconds, killing him. Floyd's death at the hands of officers whose mission is to 'protect and serve' followed on the heels of literally hundreds of similar police killings of Black Americans, including Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Breonna Taylor. Video of Floyd's killing triggered protests across the United States and sparked a long overdue national conversation about systemic racism.



But the protests and conversations about justice and equality went far beyond America's borders. From Paris to Nairobi to Rio de Janeiro, people took to the streets to protest Floyd's death and to highlight their own countries' racial inequalities. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that 'Racism is real. It's in the United States, but it's also in Canada.' But the same could be said of most other countries, including those like China and Iran that seized on Floyd's death as evidence of US hypocrisy on human rights issues. Injustice and inequality remain a global challenge.

## Anti-lockdown protests



Public health restrictions have become the latest contested symbol in broader conversations about how to align citizens' needs with government action

The wave of anti-government protests that roiled global politics over the past decade initially seemed to be an early casualty of COVID-19. Lockdown measures, especially stay-at-home orders and restrictions on mass gatherings, halted protests almost everywhere. Yet as the pandemic has dragged on, the increasingly strained relationship between governments and citizens in many countries has brought demonstrators back into the streets. While many renewed protests reflect anger over familiar issues like corruption, political repression and economic hardship, a striking new trend is afoot: citizens openly challenging the public health measures governments have taken to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Since March, more than 30 major protests in 26 countries have targeted coronavirus restrictions. Such demonstrations have emerged in every region of the globe, not only in wealthy countries like Australia, Germany and the United States, but also in poorer ones like Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria. Moreover, anti-lockdown uprisings are occurring in states with very different governance systems—consolidated autocracies and liberal democracies alike. These popular eruptions have generally occurred in two waves: An early one in April and May emerged soon after the virus spread around the world, and an ongoing second one started in early August in reaction to the extension of public health measures. As large demonstrations in the past month across multiple regions have made clear, their tempo is accelerating.

### CHAOS IN BEIRUT

On 17 October 2019, the Lebanese cabinet announced new tax measures to address an economic crisis. In response, tens of thousands of peaceful protesters took to the streets across the country calling for their social and economic rights, for accountability, an end to corruption, and the resignation of all political representatives. Although the cabinet resigned, many of the ruling figures who have dominated the Lebanese political scene for decades remained in power. In January 2020, a new cabinet was appointed, with little change to address the population's demands, and the protests continued. On 4 August, an explosion at the port of Beirut killed at least 190 people, injured more than 6,500, and left an around 300,000 people homeless. The blast was caused by 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate that had been stored unsafely in a warehouse. This tragic event, against the backdrop of a global pandemic, financial crisis, and political crisis, reignited the October protests on 8 August with calls for accountability and justice.

### TEACHER BEHEADING IN FRANCE



Thousands rallied following the murder of a teacher who showed cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in class

### ANTI-CAA PROTESTS



Protestors hurl brick-bats during clashes between a group of anti-CAA protestors and supporters of the new citizenship act, at Jafraabad in north-east Delhi

### 'COUNT EVERY VOTE'



Supporters of President Donald Trump pause for prayer during a rally outside the Maricopa County Records Office in Phoenix

### CRISIS IN BELARUS

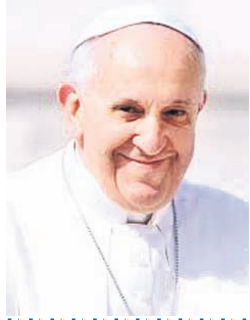


Belarus strongman President Alexander Lukashenko's disputed victory in August 9 elections sparks four months of anti-government protests, centred on his main rival, political novice Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. Opposition leaders were jailed or driven into exile.





# international



Vaccines are needed for everybody, especially for the most vulnerable and needy. We can't let closed nationalisms impede us from living as the true human family that we are  
POPE FRANCIS | HEAD OF CATHOLIC CHURCH

## MICHAEL JACKSON'S NEVERLAND RANCH SOLD TO BILLIONAIRE

Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch in California has found a new owner in billionaire businessman Ron Burkle, who views the 2,700-acre property in Los Olivos as a land banking opportunity



### of the day quote

(Having achieved the post-Brexit deal) we have taken back control of every jot and tittle of our regulation in a way that is complete and unfettered



I am pleased that the negotiators of the European Union and Britain have reached an agreement and that the future relations between the European Union and Britain are clearly regulated



The deal with the UK is essential to protect our citizens, our fishermen, our producers. We will make sure this is the case



## US lawmakers urge Pompeo to take up issue with India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Dec 25: A group of seven influential US lawmakers, including Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have written to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, urging him to raise the issue of farmers' protest in India with his Indian counterpart.

India has called the remarks by foreign leaders and politicians on protests by farmers as "ill-informed" and "unwarranted", asserting that the matter pertains to the internal affairs of a democratic country.

"We have seen some ill-informed comments...relating to farmers in India. Such comments are unwarranted, especially when pertaining to the internal affairs of a democratic country," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said earlier this month.

This is an issue of particular concern to Sikh Americans linked to Punjab, although it also heavily impacts the Indian Americans belonging to other Indian states, the lawmakers said in their letter to Pompeo dated December 23.

"Many Indian Americans are directly affected as they have family members and ancestral land in Punjab and are concerned for the well-being of their families in India. In view of this serious situation, we urge you to contact your Indian counterpart to reinforce the United States' commitment to the freedom of political speech abroad," they said.

In their letter, the lawmakers said that the US as a nation that is familiar with political protests can

## FARMERS' PROTEST IN INDIA



Remarks by foreign leaders and politicians on protests by farmers as "ill-informed" and "unwarranted", as the matter pertains to the internal affairs of a democratic country

This is an issue of particular concern to Sikh Americans linked to Punjab, although it also heavily impacts the Indian Americans belonging to other Indian states: US lawmakers

abroad who are currently protesting peacefully against agricultural laws that many Indian farmers see as an attack on their economic security," the lawmakers said.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and several other states have been protesting on various borders of Delhi since November 26, seeking repeal of three farm laws enacted in September.

Dubbing these laws as "anti-farmer", these farmers claim that the newly enacted legislations would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

However, the government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture. There have been multiple rounds of talks between representatives of the protestors and the Indian government but the log-jam continues.

In addition to Jayapal, the letter has been signed by Congressmen Donald Norcross, Brendan F Boyle, Brian Fitzpatrick, Mary Gay Scanlon, Debbie Dingell and David Trone. Over the past few weeks, more than a dozen US Congressmen have expressed their concerns on the ongoing protest by the farmers in India.

## PARLIAMENT DISSOLUTION

### Nepal's apex court issues show-cause notice to Oli govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, Dec 25: Nepal's Supreme Court Friday issued a show-cause notice to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government, asking it to submit a written clarification over its decision to abruptly dissolve Parliament.

The notice was issued after a preliminary hearing at the five-member Constitutional bench headed by Chief Justice Chandra Shumsher Rana on the writ petitions filed against the government's decision to dissolve the 275-member House of Representatives, according to court officials.

The bench sought the written clarification from the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and Office of the President as they are made defendants in all the writ petitions, they said.

The court has also asked the government to submit an original copy of the recommendations made by the government to dissolve the House and the decision made by President Bidya Devi Bhandari to authenticate the government's recommendations within 10 days.

Earlier, the apex court demanded an amicus curiae from Nepal Bar Association and Supreme Court Bar Association in connection with the hearing. Meanwhile, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda"-led faction of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) staged a protest rally in Kathmandu against the decision.



'Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Nepal, senior leaders Jhala Nath Khanal, spokesperson Narayan Kaji Shrestha along with the party's Central Committee members and members of the dissolved House gathered near the Prime Minister's Office for the protest. "We are here," "Reinstate the House of Representatives," and "dissolution of the House is unconstitutional," were the slogans raised by the protesters.

Around 300 Central Committee members of the NCP and nearly 100 members of the House were present in the protest rally. After staging a sit-in, the crowd marched towards the Election Commission (EC) office. The EC will decide which faction of the NCP is legitimate to carry the party name and election symbol.

"We have the support of the majority of the Central committee members. Therefore, we are going to the commission to prove and show that we are the legitimate faction," protesting leader Sunil Manandhar, who is also a Central Committee member of the NCP, told this news agency.

## SHORT TAKES

### 6.3-magnitude quake jolts Philippines

Manila: An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale Friday jolted the Philippines' Batangas province located on the main island of Luzon, authorities said. According to the Philippine Institute of Seismology and Volcanology (Phivolcs), the quake, which struck at 7.43 a.m. hit at a depth of 102 km, about 11 km southwest of Calatagan town, some 100 km south of Manila, reports Xinhua news agency. Metro Manila and nearby provinces of Batangas, Laguna, Cavite, Rizal also felt the tremor, the institute said.

### Italy in 'red zone' amid nCoV spike

Rome: Italy has entered a nationwide 'red zone' of very high risks in the wake of a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, which is set to remain in place through Christmas and New Year's Day to January 6, 2021. Red zone rules include a ban on travel between regions, a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew, closure of shops, bars and restaurants, as well as an urge for keeping holiday gatherings at home to a minimum of two adult visitors. To contain the second wave, the government has categorized Italy as three colour-coded areas, namely yellow, orange and red.

### Explosion rocks Nashville

Nashville (US): An explosion shook the largely deserted streets of downtown Nashville early Christmas morning, shattering windows, damaging buildings and wounding three people. Authorities said they believed the blast was intentional. The FBI is leading the investigation. Police spokesman Don Aaron said the 6:30 a.m. explosion was believed to be "an intentional act." Police earlier said they believe a vehicle was involved in the explosion.

### 2 Afghan army officers killed

Kabul: At least two Afghan army officers including a battalion commander were killed Friday when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in the northern Balkh province, the military said. Hanif Rezaie, a spokesman for the army in the country's north, said Capt. Mohammad Qasim Paikar and another officer were killed and two other soldiers were wounded in the explosion, which took place between Balkh and Char Bolak districts.

## HOLIDAY IN HOSPITAL



A medical worker in a protective suit works inside an intensive care unit for coronavirus patients at the San Filippo Neri hospital in Rome, Italy, on Christmas day

## A pandemic Xmas: Churches shut, borders complicated

Curfews, quarantines and even border closings complicated Christmas celebrations Friday for countless people around the globe

cases last week, and two new asymptomatic cases were reported Friday. One of several notices was posted at Beijing's St. Josephs' Church, which was built originally by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century.

Border crossing closures kept thousands of migrants from economically devastated Venezuela who live in Colombia from going home for Christmas. Colombia's government shut down the crossings in a bid to slow down the spread of Covid-19 infections. Those trying to return home for the holidays this year had to turn to smugglers.

Yakelin Tamaure, a nurse who left Venezuela two years ago, won't be going home and said there will be no gifts or new clothes for her two children, aged 10 and 15. Tamaure said that she hasn't been able to find work as a nurse because she still doesn't have a Colombia residence permit. Her parents are still in Venezuela.

Others successfully crossed borders elsewhere only to find themselves in quarantine. For their first



Christmas since getting married in March, Nattasuda Anusonadisai and Patrick Kaplin are cooped up in quarantine in a Bangkok hotel room. It wasn't great fun but they did make sure to get a Christmas tree.

They returned earlier this month from a 4 1/2-month trip to Canada and the United States, making a 32-hour journey from Montreal via Doha. One condition of entering

## CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR China backing away from promises made to Pakistan

AGENCIES

Islamabad, Dec 25: China appears to be backing away from its initial financial promises to Pakistan under Beijing-financed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$60 billion infrastructure building plan, amid rising corruption and terrorist attacks on Chinese engineers.

According to Asia Times, Pakistan Army is set to take near-total control of the CPEC in a bid to reassure Beijing that their investments will be more secure amid militant attacks: Report

The new Bill comes at a time when reports suggest that China is slowly retreating from its promises.

Overall lending by the state-backed China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China declined from a peak of \$75 billion in 2016 to just \$4 billion last year. Provisional 2020 figures show that amount shrunk to around \$3



Gwadar Sea Port

billion in 2020, according to data of Boston University researchers in the United States.

The belt-tightening is believed to be in line with Beijing's so-called "re-think strategy" for its \$1 trillion BRI, which is under broad fire for "structural weaknesses" including opacity, corruption, over-lending to poor countries resulting in "debt traps" and adverse social and environmental impacts, the Boston University researchers said.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan is also facing flak in his country for not prioritising and expediting big-ticket Chinese infrastructure investments.

## Pearl's murder accused to be released today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Karachi, Dec 25: British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, whose release in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl was ordered by a court here, would walk out of the prison on Saturday, police and lawyer said Friday.

In a surprise move, a two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court Thursday directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal".

According to the Jail Superintendent, the four men could not be released from Karachi's Central Jail Thursday as the prison authorities received orders from the Sindh High Court for their release very late.

The legal counsel for the four men said that they would now be



released Saturday as Friday is a public holiday in the country.

Meanwhile, the United States on Friday expressed "deep concern" over Sindh High Court's order to release Sheikh and his aides and said it will continue to monitor any developments in the case.

"We are deeply concerned by the reports of the December 24 ruling of Sindh High Court to release multiple terrorists responsible for the murder of Daniel Pearl. We have been assured that the accused have not been released at this time," the US State Department said in a tweet.

It said that the US will continue to monitor any developments in the case and will continue to support the Pearl family "through this extremely difficult process" while honouring the legacy of Pearl as a "courageous journalist".



