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Federal Front staggers

Post tepid response from TMC and BJD, KCR hopes hinge on SP, BSP

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/
OMER FAROOQ ■ NEW
DELHI/HYDERABAD

After lukewarm response to his proposed Federal Front from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her Odisha counterpart Naveen Patnaik, TRS supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao is in Delhi hoping that his proposed meeting with BSP chief Mayawati and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav will help his effort to prop up non-BJP non-Congress alliance for the next year's Lok Sabha polls.

Sources said KCR is expected to meet Mayawati and Akhilesh on Wednesday, but so far the meetings are not confirmed. While Mayawati is in Delhi, SP sources in Lucknow said Akhilesh has not yet planned any visit to Delhi. It is interesting to watch the moves of KCR as his counterpart in Andhra Pradesh and TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu is also meeting Opposition leaders as part of his effort to form an anti-BJP grand alliance that will also include the Congress.

KCR is in the national Capital to also call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Union Ministers to talk about issues related to Telangana where he retained power last week.

The Congress which is spearheading an assortment of Opposition parties, includ-



ing the BSP, SP and TMC, has accused the TRS of being a BJP agent and feels that his proposed front cannot rescue the BJP as the front constituents will State specific anti-BJP alliance.

Criticising the TRS chief's efforts to forge a Federal Front of regional parties, the Congress said it is an attempt to help the BJP return to power after the next general elections. Claiming that the Chief Ministers of different States, whom KCR met would not fall for the idea of a third front, as the leaders of regional parties

would join a broad coalition with the Congress, leaving only TRS in the Federal Front.

"KCR's attempts to rope in regional parties and State Chief Ministers to be part of the Federal Front will only help the BJP," said Congress leader Rajeev Gowda.

Gowda further said the Congress would ensure that a *mahagathbandhan* (grand alliance) was formed with all regional, secular and progressive parties. "This federal front idea... The truth behind it is nothing but an attempt to ensure that BJP and 'Modi

Sarkar' come back to power," he alleged.

Meanwhile, reports from Hyderabad said even as KCR's mission to bring regional parties together to form a Federal Front reached New Delhi after passing through Bhuvaneshwar and Odisha, it was clear that the leaders whom he met so far have not made any direct commitment about their future course of action.

According to the sources in TRS, both Naveen and Mamata remained non-committal about the stand they would take on the formation of a front which

will not involve the Congress. Significantly, Mamata did not make any comment after meeting KCR in Kolkata on Monday. It was only KCR who promised that a concrete result of the deliberations will come out soon.

Sources said while KCR repeatedly asserted the need for all the regional parties to come together and offer an alternative to both the Congress and the BJP, the other regional leaders indicated that they would like to wait and watch till the 2019 polls were over.

"Some of the leaders want to keep their options open till after the elections and take a final decision depending on the election results," sources said.

"At the moment it appears that any third front or Federal Front will have to wait till the elections are over. At best it would be a post-poll arrangement, not any pre-poll alliance," said a TRS leader.

Meanwhile TRS member of Parliament Vinod Kumar said the idea of Federal Front is not new as KCR had thought about it back in 2006.

"Both NDA and UPA are seeking to rule the country on their own while KCR wants that the power should be in the hands of the regional parties to meet the aspirations of the people", he told the media. "If the regional parties had responded positively back in 2006, Telangana State would have become a reality then only," he said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi strolls on the Bogibeel Bridge, the longest rail-cum-road bridge on Brahmaputra river, after it was inaugurated by him in Dibrugarh on Tuesday

PTI

NDA Govt changed latkane bhatkane work culture of past, says PM Modi

PTI ■ KARENG CHAPORI (ASSAM)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his Government has changed the "dilly-dallying" work culture regarding implementation of development projects.

Addressing a rally here after inaugurating the country's longest rail-cum-road bridge, at Bogibeel in Assam, he said completion of projects within a given time frame is no longer confined to paper but has become a reality. "We have changed the earlier *latkane bhatkane* (dilly-dallying) work culture... Completion of projects within a time frame is no longer confined to paper but

has become a truth in the real sense," he said in an apparent dig at the previous Congress-led UPA Government. If former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a second term, Bogibeel bridge would have been ready by 2008-09. After his Government, no attention was paid to the project till 2014, the Prime Minister said.

Asserting that the Bogibeel bridge will strengthen the country's defence prowess with movement of vehicles and trains, he said, it is not only a bridge, it is a lifeline for crores of people in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The bridge will cut down rail distance (between Dibrugarh in Assam to Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh) to below 200 km from 700 km now, Modi said.

After inaugurating the bridge, the prime minister flagged off the Tinsukia-Naharlagun Intercity Express, which will run five days a week and use the 4.9-km bridge to cut down the train-travel time between Tinsukia in Assam to Naharlagun town of Arunachal Pradesh by more than 10 hours. Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh is just over 15 km from Naharlagun.

CAPSULE



A cyclist dressed like Santa Claus rides through dense fog on a cold Christmas morning in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

NORTH INDIA REELS UNDER COLD WAVE

New Delhi: There was no respite from cold wave conditions on Christmas in north India with dense fog partially stalling flight operations at Delhi airport, officials said.

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Bank strike today over mergers, 2nd in less than a week

New Delhi: Services of State-owned banks are expected to be impacted on Wednesday due to a nation-wide strike call given by unions to protest against the proposed amalgamation of Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with Bank of Baroda.

This will be the second bank strike in less than a week.

Last Friday (December 21), an officers' union of State-run banks observed a day-long strike to protest against the merger and also demanded immediate settlement of wage negotiations.

Most of the banks have already informed customers about the strike. Private sector banks will continue to function as usual.

The strike is being organised by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella organisation of nine unions, including the All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC), the All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBE), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE) and the

National Organisation of Bank Workers (NOBW). The UFBU claims membership of 10 lakh officers and staffers.

According to AIBEA General Secretary C H Vekatachalam, the conciliation meeting called by Additional Chief Labour Commissioner did not lead to any assurance and so the unions are going ahead with the strike.

During the meeting, neither the Government nor the concerned banks came forward to assure that they will not go ahead with the merger, he added.

The unions claim that the Government wants banks to grow in size by such mergers but even if all public sector banks are bundled into one, the merged entity will not find a place among the top 10 globally.

The Government in September approved the amalgamation of Bank of Baroda (BoB), Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank — the first three-way merger in the public sector banking space.

Odd-even may return as Capital battles toxic air

Air quality in Delhi remains in severe category for 4th consecutive day

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

After pollution level in the National Capital reached to severe level for the fourth consecutive day, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Tuesday the Delhi Government will implement odd-even scheme to regulate plying of private vehicles in the city, whenever it is required.

He said the Delhi Government was taking several steps for reducing pollution levels in the Capital. In view of the city's 'severe' air quality, the Supreme Court-appointed Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) on Monday banned industrial activities in pollution hot spots and construction work across Delhi-NCR till Wednesday.

"Whenever the odd-even



(scheme) is required, we will definitely implement it," Kejriwal told reporters here. "We all have to be participants in reducing pollution. The Delhi Government is taking several steps. We have carried out large-scale tree plantation drive. The Government will procure 3000 buses soon. Also, we sanctioned a large phase of Metro... We are making all efforts on our part," Kejriwal said. Asked about the Centre's role in reducing pollution levels, the CM said the Union Government should call a meeting of neighbouring States as "air has no boundary".

"In October and November,

there are around 20-25 days when pollution level increases in Delhi due to stubble burning (in neighbouring States). Until the Centre takes steps, nothing cannot be done," Kejriwal said.

The city is facing its worst pollution crisis since Diwali. While the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed the overall air quality index (AQI) at 'severe' level of 416, the Centre-run

System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) recorded an AQI of 423. Authorities have advised people to minimise outdoor activities and avoid use of private vehicles.

Engineer charred to death after moving car goes up in flames

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

A 45-year-old engineer died after being trapped in his car when the moving vehicle caught fire in early hours of Tuesday in Greater Noida. The incident happened just half kilometre from his home. The deceased has been identified as Pavan, a native of Amba in Himachal Pradesh.

According to a senior police official, a passerby informed police regarding the incident at around 5.30 am on Tuesday following which a team rushed to the spot.

"By the time police reached the spot near the DPS Society, under Kasna police station within limits, the vehicle, a Ford Ikon, was already in flames and the body was later found inside," said the senior police official.

"The man was working in a private company here. He was returning after a night shift when the incident took place," said Greater Noida 1st Circle Officer Nishank Sharma.

He said the identity of the deceased was confirmed after matching the details of regis-



tration number of the car.

"After initial investigation, it appeared that the car had caught fire and the man could not eject himself out in time. Short-circuit and problems with the blower appear to have triggered the fire but an investigation is underway," said Sharma, adding that the body has been sent for post-mortem.

"During probe it was also revealed that the deceased had sent Christmas greetings to friends and relatives in the morning, around 5 am. Everything was fine till the fire broke out accidentally," said Ramphal Tomar, Station House Officer, Kasna police station.

Firms to face action if staffers offer namaz in parks, says Noida Police

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

Citing concerns that communal harmony could be disturbed, especially in the run-up to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in 2019, Uttar Pradesh's Noida Police has issued orders to offices and establishments in Sector-58 to direct their Muslim employees to stop offering Friday prayers in open areas such as parks.

According to a notice issued last week by police in Noida, companies will be held liable if their employees are found violating the directive.

"A notices were sent to many companies in our area after several complaints regarding a large number of people offering namaz in the afternoon especially on Fridays," said Pankaj Rai, Station House Officer (SHO) of the Sector 58 police station, from where the initial round of notices were issued.

"Since most people offering prayers are employees in companies nearby, we have sent notices to those companies to ask their employees to either offer namaz in a masjid, Eidgah or within the office compound on the roof etc," Rai added.

Sadaiv Atal dedicated to nation on 94th anniv

Vajpayee statues to be installed in Patna, Lucknow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Tuesday turned a rallying point for political leaders as 'Sadaiv Atal' (immortal Vajpayee), a memorial of the late leader, was dedicated to the nation here on Tuesday on his 94th birth anniversary. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Chief Ministers also announced that a statue of Vajpayee would be installed in Patna and Lucknow.

With the whiff of 2019 Lok Sabha polls in the air, Vajpayee returned to the posters outside



LK Advani pays homage to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 94th birth anniversary in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

the BJP headquarters along with other party veteran LK Advani. In the auditorium of party's headquarters, though, Vajpayee and Advani have long

been replaced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party president Amit Shah adorning the dais.

President Ram Nath

Kovind, Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu and the Prime Minister were among the dignitaries who paid floral tributes to the former statesman at the memorial built near the 'Rashtriya Smriti Sthal', where his mortal remains were consigned to flames on August 17.

The memorial is enclosed by nine bas-relief walls having inscriptions of poetries penned by Vajpayee who was known for his rhythmic poems, repartees and one-liners.

Vajpayee passed away in Delhi on August 16 after a prolonged illness and was cremated with full State honours.

"Tributes to Atal Ji on the Jayanti. We reiterate our commitment towards creating the India he dreamt of," Modi tweeted on Tuesday.

Noted singer Pankaj Udhas recited devotional songs at the memorial while the dignitaries paid tributes. Sadaiv (always) Atal memorial will be managed by a trust headed by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan.

A vacant piece of land was made available for the memorial at the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal here by the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry. Spread over 1.5 acres of land, the memorial was constructed by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) at a cost of Rs 10.51 crore.

The project was funded by the Atal Smriti Nyas Society. The founding members of the society include Mahajan, Bihar Governor Lalji Tandon, Gujarat Governor OP Kohli,

Karnataka Governor Vajubhai Rudrabhai Vala, BJP leaders Vijay Kumar Malhotra and Ram Lal.

A rush has begun to get closer to Vajpayee's political legacy with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath promising statue of Vajpayee in Lucknow. "A 21-metre tall statue of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee will be installed inside Lok Bhawan in Lucknow," Adityanath said.

"Atalji had strong ties with Uttar Pradesh. He started his public life from Balrampur in the State and represented Lucknow as an MP for five terms," the Chief Minister said, adding that a number of schemes are being launched in the name of the former Prime Minister.

Probe against dons goes at snail’s pace

IIT-R director on leave

PNS ■ ROORKEE

Days after the police had booked two professors of IIT Roorkee in the alleged sexual harassment case involving two students, the police investigation has allegedly been going on at a snail’s pace. Under pressure mounted by Bhim Army and others on police, a case had been registered against accused professor Vikas Pruthi on two charges while a single case had been registered against P Gopinath. Meanwhile, the controversy dogging the esteemed institute, the director IIT Roorkee has gone on leave. Police said that the absence of the director is one of the reasons behind the investigation not gaining the desired speed.

Following complaint lodged by a research scholar belonging to the Scheduled Caste from Gujarat- a student of the Centre of Nanotechnology since 2015- according to which she was being harassed both physically and mentally by a professor over the past two years, an FIR had been lodged against Pruthi. The row had deepened further after another student of Biotechnology department of the same institute had lodged a complaint against Pruthi, resulting in the second case being registered against him. Quizzed over the investigation being irritatingly slow, SSP Haridwar Riddhim Agarwal said that things were not so. “Vikas Pruthi has been booked under section 354. He has also been tagged to sexual harassment case on the basis of



the second complaint filed. We are trying to get direct evidences through interrogation of the professors and the students. We have already recorded the statements of the com-

plainants.

Things are moving steadily. There is no reason to think that the probe has got stuck or is not making headway,” she said and added that till the

director returned from the leave the investigation team would remain engaged in obtaining direct evidences from the teachers and the students of the institute.

Rock Day celebrated with X-mas at RK Mission



PNS ■ HARIDWAR

December 25 observed worldwide as Christmas is not just special for one community – Christians- but it has special significance for the followers of the all- Inclusive Hindu religion which the 19th century monk Swami Vivekananda propagated across the world with unparalleled zeal. It is observed as Rock Day as the cyclonic monk meditated on the rock at Kanyakumari for three days beginning from Christmas in 1892 and sought answers from deep within the solutions to the problems which were plaguing India at the time. The saints associated with Ramakrishna Mission Sewashram said that during his wandering years, Vivekananda had experienced the sufferings and problems his countrymen were facing. “Poverty, lack of self-respect and lack of education caused him pain and he was resolved to restore the long lost self-respect and self-confidence of the people India. For the

three days, the swami’s mind was obsessed with the need of the Indians and means to charge them up again with the fire of self-faith to look the world in the face based on the glorious history the nation had lived for millennia. This is why December 25 is observed as the Rock Day,” said Swami Dayadhipananda while speaking to *The Pioneer*. “While recounting those days, Vivekananda said he had reached Kanyakumari on December 24 1892. However, his mind was still wavering over how he could help his countrymen bogged in distress. While at Kanyakumari, he swam across the ocean to reach a large mid-sea rock where he meditated on India’s past, present and future for three days from December 25 to 27. Here, the ‘vision of one India’ unfolded and he came up with a solution in the form of resolution which is popularly known as the Kanyakumari resolve of 1892,” he said. The general secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Swami Nityashuddhananda said that

Vivekananda had realised the need of food for the survival of the body. “An empty stomach being no good for religion, the poverty-lashed Indians must be fed first. The day is thus marked with feasting with the poor in all the Sewashrams spread across the country,” he said. He further said, “We have a long tradition of celebrating Christmas in the temple located in Sewashram premises. It started with Swami Atulananda whose pre-monastic name was Cornelius, a western devotee from Holland. He spent his last days in the mission in 1965. He inspired the ashram inmates to the tradition of celebrating Christmas. We accepted it heartily as our mentor Sri Ramakrishna embodied the principle of harmony of all religions. We have been celebrating major festivals of other religions too and of course, Christmas holds a special significance. The message of Jesus to ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ needs to be reinstated in today’s era of religious conflicts.”

Mercury settles at 4 degree in Dehradun, likely to sink further

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Cold wave condition now sweeping across Uttarakhand, the regional meteorological department has forecast light rain and snow in some districts of Uttarakhand on Wednesday. In the forecast issued on Tuesday, the centre said that it might rain and snow in some places across Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Pithoragarh and Rudrapur districts on the day. The climate would remain dry in the rest of the state, though the sky would be generally to partly cloudy. Meanwhile, the cold is turning more and more biting nearly every passing day in Dehradun and elsewhere in the state. The mercury dropped to 4 degree Celsius in the city on Tuesday and it might plummet further in the coming few days, the Met officers said. As per the weather forecast issued by the regional meteorological department on Tuesday, the climate would remain gen-

erally dry and the sky would be mostly clear to partly cloudy. Mist might form in several areas in the plains and the consequently visibility is likely to drop substantially particularly in the morning hours. The mercury in Dehradun dipped further on Tuesday with the minimum settling at 4.2 degree Celsius-two notches below the normal- while the maximum hovered around 21 degree Celsius. The Met officers said the mercury is likely to sink further in the coming few days. In other places of the state, the maximum and minimum temperatures were recorded at 20.4 degree Celsius and 2.8 degree Celsius respectively in Pantnagar on Tuesday. At Mukteshwar, the maximum and minimum temperatures were recorded at 12.2 degree Celsius and 1.7 degree Celsius. In New Tehri, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded were 14 degree Celsius and 2.6 degree Celsius respectively on the day.

Cong pays tributes to Malaviya

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Floral tributes were paid to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali on their anniversaries at Rajiv Bhawan, the state Congress headquarters, on Tuesday. Offering garlands on the portraits of the leaders, the Congress leaders called both of them as stalwarts who had enhanced the glory of the country before the world. Senior Congress leader Vijaypal Sajwan said that Malaviya had set up Kashi Hindu University to ensure that the culture of the country was preserved in those difficult times. “He also guided the youth to build their character and serve the nation,” he added. Other speakers on the occasion also dwelt on several facets of the life of the legendary educationist and leader. They said that Malaviya had understood the momentous role of education in nation -building and he was firmly convinced that an educated person alone could understand his right in a much better way. They said that Malaviya had acted as an inspiration for many universities and recalled that the great leader had a spe-

cial affinity with the region now Uttarakhand. Terming Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali, the famous hero of Peshawar incident hailed for directing Garhwali troops not to fire on unarmed Pathan protesters as one who had enhanced the pride and bravery of Uttarakhand, the Congress leaders said that he is a fount of inspiration for the whole country. They said that the people of Uttarakhand take pride in the courage Garhwali exemplified. Among those present on the occasion were the former MLA Rajkumar, Mahanagar president Lal Chand Sharma and the state party spokespersons R P Raturi and Garima Dasgupta.



Malaviya plays important role in Independence movement: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya was the only person in India who was honoured with the title of ‘Mahamana’, said chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat. He was speaking at a function organised on Malaviya’s birth anniversary here on Tuesday. He said that with attempts through journalism, advocacy and social change Malaviya inspired the youth to strive for the independence of the nation. His aim behind establishing the Banaras Hindu University was

Literature can help people become better citizens: Deepak Kumar

JASKIRAN CHOPRA ■ DEHRADUN

It is not very often that one comes across a Government official who is a lover of art and culture, a man of letters passionate about writing and also making people aware of the advantages of education and a knowledge of literature. However, when one does come across such a person, one’s curiosity is aroused due to this rare combination. Meet **Deepak Kumar**, an official in the Uttarakhand Government who believes in giving vent to his creativity along with fulfilling his official role to the best of his abilities. In a quiet corner of the Uttarakhand Secretariat in the Doon valley, in the office of Finance under secretary Deepak Kumar, *The Pioneer* had an interesting conversation with him regarding the role of literature in improving people and society.

Expressing his views, Kumar said that it would make a great difference to society if people could love literature and learn all that it could teach. “People are out of touch with this amazing tradition, this great heritage which we call literature. They need to get back in touch with it to become better human beings and citizens. Society is moving towards materialism and becoming too mechanical. People are also turning almost into machines. I feel very strongly about this, as a lover of literature and a writer.”

When asked about what he feels about the status of government officials regarding reading, he says that they needed to read much more in order to become sensitive. “I always had an interest in reading and have read masters like Munshi Premchand, Sahir Ludhianvi, Rajendra Yadav and Gopaldas Neeraj. My restlessness as a person is best expressed in my writing. I have written lyrics as well as short stories in Hindi which are now being published. Reading and writing take up all my free time.”



Deepak Kumar believes that the education system should be value -based and impart ethics as well as a love for literature. “Only then can these aspects become part of the personality of our youth and help them become responsible citizens. Self awareness comes from reading good works of literature and philosophy. In my life, I happened to be alone for a while and this solitude gave me an opportunity for introspection. That was when I realised that I wanted to write.”

He is not just a writer but also a singer and music composer. This has made him turn towards Mumbai and he has started writing lyrics and composing music. He has learnt music from Murlidhar Jagudi. “My songs are also aimed at creating awareness about social issues, just like my stories are. I give voice to the voiceless, the underprivileged and marginalised people in our society.”

Asked about the growing interest of film makers in Uttarakhand, Kumar says that compared to some other places, Uttarakhand is a state where film makers face little difficulty. “They can get permission easily and on easy terms. However, what we need to do is to have studios and very good hotels in the areas where they choose to shoot. I think good work is being done in this direction and more will be taken up.”

This officer’s dynamism and calmness together create

a personality that can be developed only through creativity and thinking out of the box. He has been able to strike a good balance between finance work and literature, between official duties and flights of imagination. The best part is that his writing is deeply connected to society and its burning issues like the rural-urban divide, the helplessness of the poor and sick, the social taboos and superstitions.

His feelings for the country are strong too. His message for the youth is that they should acquire a good education and think for the country even while making a career for themselves. “They should have the thought of serving the nation. I feel that this thought is vanishing now. I again say that reading good books is a must for everyone, young or old.”

Meanwhile, Kumar is busy with his work and accomplishing his dream of being a writer of meaningful songs and stories. In fact, he combines the print and visual media by creating videos based on his short stories. His message that awareness about reading should be promoted among government officials needs to be heeded if sensitivity in administration has to be enhanced.

All in all, the conversation turned out to be quite varied and intriguing. It made one think once again of the power of the written word, the power of creativity.

Guv presides over Malaviya Jayanti at Rishikul

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

Governor Baby Rani Maurya urged the people to follow the path shown by the great men while speaking at Mahamana Jayanti organised at Rishikul Ayurvedic College on Tuesday to mark the birth anniversary of Madan Mohan Malaviya. The students presented cultural programmes with patriotic flavour. Sunil Kumar Batra and Satish Chand Jain of Haridwar Nagrik Manch presented Nagri sapling to the Governor on the occasion of Tulsi Diwas which is observed the same day. Governor said that Malaviya had been known as an educationist, editor, social reformer, lawyer, great patriot and social reformer. She added that Malaviya founded the Banaras Hindu University. He believed that education had an important role in the all-round development of life. He had also emphasised

on intellectual development as well as character formation, recalled the governor. Later, the Governor visited Shankaracharya Rajra jeshwarashram at Kankhal. She is understood to have discussed means to strengthen the financial condition of the state. The Shankaracharya is learnt to have asked her to pave way for the formation of a separate ministry for enhancing tourism in the state. The ascetic is of the firm view that formation of a separate ministry which caters to the interests of tourism exclusively would go a long way in boosting the economy of the state which is known as tourism state. He is understood to have told the Governor that the focus should be trained on spiritual tourism rather than on the conventional tourism, the State being exalted as Devbhumi, the abode of Gods.



U'khand launches health cover for all scheme

People hail Atal health scheme

All 23 lakh families to get health cover of ₹5 lakh

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With the ceremonial launch of Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand (AAYU) Yojana on 94th birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Tuesday, Uttarakhand has become the first State in the country where every resident family has come under the umbrella of a health cover amounting to ₹5 lakh annually.

Addressing a mammoth gathering after launching the scheme, chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said that it is highly appropriate that the scheme is being named after the former PM Vajpayee and is being launched on his birthday as he is adored as the creator of Uttarakhand.

Saying that providing better health care facilities in a state like Uttarakhand is a major challenge, CM said that inspired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he had decided on the day Ayushman Bharat Yojana was launched that the benefit of the scheme should be extended to every family of the state.

“The objective of the scheme is that no one should be left out for dearth of money as far as the best treatment is concerned. Under the scheme, a cashless facility is available and in view of practical problems, it is being run on a trust mode instead of involving insurance company in it,” he said.

Amid loud applause, the CM said, “It is observed that many people are forced to sell their land or jewellery to avail good treatment but following the launch of the scheme, this would be a thing of the past.”

Dwelling on the AAYU, he said that all 23 lakh families residing in the state would be covered under the scheme which would provide treatment of 1350 diseases in 99 government and 66 private hospitals empanelled under it. CM further said that one of the unique features of the scheme is incentive granted to the government hospitals.

He opined that the scheme would encourage many private institutes to open hospitals in the mountainous areas. Rawat declared that the soon the children and the elderly would also be provided benefit of free OPD.

He declared that from January 26, all the government employees and registered journalists would also be brought under the ambit of the scheme.

Congratulating CM, Haridwar MP, Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said that the day would be written in golden words in the history of the state.

The state BJP president Ajay Bhatt also congratulated the state government for the launch of the scheme. He also narrated many memoirs of the former PM Vajpayee on the occasion.

The CM and other guests launched mobile app and website of the AAYU scheme on the occasion. Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with many private hospitals were also inked in the presence of the CM.

The programme was attended among others by Tehri MP, Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah, cabinet minister Prakash Pant, minister of state for higher education Dhan Singh Rawat, MLAs- Vinod Chamoli, Harbans Kapur, Ganesh Joshi, Umesh Sharma Kau, Khajan Das, Mahendra Bhatt, Shahdev Singh Pundeer, Munni Devi Shah, Pranav Singh Champion, chairman of state health authority D K Kotia, chief secretary Utpal Kumar Singh and director general (DG) of police Anil Kumar Raturi.



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The sprawling ground of Bannu School where the Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana was formally launched on Tuesday was packed with people who looked anxious to know about their status under the universal health insurance scheme.

Islam Khan, a daily wage earner and resident of Sahaspur area of Dehradun, was standing in a queue outside a counter set up by the health department at programme site for providing golden cards of the scheme. When inquired, he said, “To me this scheme appears the best one to cater to the problem of lakhs of people like me who live from hand to mouth and spend a fortune for medical treatment is solved.”

‘To me this scheme appears the best one to cater to the problem of poor. People like me work hard to earn two square meals a day and have to borrow money at high interest rates from money lenders when someone in the family is admitted at hospital. Now with this scheme this problem of lakhs of people like me who live from hand to mouth and spend a fortune for medical treatment is solved’

Someone in the family is admitted at hospital. Now with this scheme this problem of lakhs of people like me who live from hand to mouth and spend a fortune for medical treatment is solved,” he said.

Satish Kumar of Nehru colony, echoed the same as he was seen asking the officials about the scheme when the names of all the major private hospitals of Dehradun were being mentioned. “I was told

that patients would have to first visit a government hospital from where they would refer to private hospitals if need arises. It is fair enough,” he said.

Intzar Ali of Mohabbewala of Dehradun said that he had recently spent a sum of Rs 2 lakh on the treatment of his wife when she developed a heart problem. He said that the scheme is a blessing for poor who do not know where to go when someone in family is

seriously ill. Ali, however, cautioned about effective implementation of the scheme. “On paper, this scheme is good but there is a lot of difference when one faces things on the hard ground,” he said guardedly.

Anita Devi who had come from Doiwala said that the chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat must be hailed for his historic decision to provide a health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh for every family of the state.

A medical officer of state health services said that the provision of giving 15 percent incentive to the doctors and 10 percent to nurses and other staff is a master stroke which would ensure a marked improvement in the functioning of the government hospitals.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE FROM JAN 26

All ambulances of 108 fleet to be replaced: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In a major step which would provide succour to the patients requiring immediate medical help, the Uttarakhand government has decided to start air ambulance facility. These air ambulances would start ferrying patients from January 26. The chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said on Tuesday that at present this facility is being provided by the government with the help of some companies.

But from January 26 onwards, the dedicated air ambulance facility would be launched which would help people living in the far-flung areas.

CM also declared that the process of replacing the fleet of the 108 emergency ambulance service is in progress. He said that the state government has decided to replace all 139 ambulances of the 108 services.

“We have already provided 61 new ambulances to the 108 service and have cleared purchase of 50 more vehicles. Gradually the entire fleet of the ambulances would be replaced,” he said.

The declarations of CM on air ambulance service and replacing the entire fleet of the 108 ambulance services has assumed significance as in the absence of transport facility, a large number of patients, especially those from the in mountainous areas of the state, face problems.

It is a common observation that many patients die midway before they reach the hospital they are headed.

The problem of ageing vehicles has been compound-

It is a common observation that many patients die midway before they reach the hospital they are headed

ing the problems the 108 emergency ambulance services has been facing for quite some time now.

Launched in 2008, the 108 services is a vital cog in providing emergency care in all the parts of the state.

The services are also catering to important task of transporting pregnant women for safe deliveries in the hospital.

The 108 ambulance service has a fleet of 139 ambulances and apart from these vehicles, the service also operates a boat ambulance in Tehri lake.

These new ambulances are expected to infuse a new lease of life into the fleet of the 108 service as most of the vehicles in the fleet are old and at least 75 percent of the fleet needs immediate replacement.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) mandates that the ambulances should be replaced after three years or they cover 1.5 lakh kilometres whichever occurs first. Interestingly, all the ambulances of the emergency 108 services have surpassed both these parameters.

Ninety ambulances of the 108 service were purchased in 2008 while 18 and 32 more ambulances were purchased in the years between 2010 and 2011. Almost all vehicles of the service have covered a distance of more than three lakh kilometres.

Various events held as part of ongoing Khel Mahakumbh

Dehradun: Various events were held on the second day of competitions in the under-14 age group for the Raipur block as part of the Khel Mahakumbh on Tuesday. Among the events, 1,500 metres race was held for boys and girls. In kabaddi for girls, Raipur team won the first place followed by Navada and Saroni in the second and third positions respectively. In the volleyball match for boys, Navada secured first place by defeating the Raipur team. In the first football match of the day, Nehrugram team defeated Natthanpur team while in the second match Yamuna football club won the match against Tapovan Tigers by 1-0. The third match saw Young Boys Raipur defeating the Nehrugram IC team by 2-0 while in the fourth match Yamuna football club faced SBN Academy. The Yamuna football club team defeated their rivals by 4-3. The final match was played between RSA and Young Boys Raipur in which RSA managed to win the match by 2-0. For the third position the Yamuna football club defeated Nehrugram IC by 5-4. Badminton matches were also played in the girls and boys categories on the occasion. **PNS**



Locals light up candles outside a church in Dehradun on the occasion of Christmas on Tuesday

Pioneer photo

CM attends launch of Selfie with Kamal



Dehradun: Chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, Bharatiya Janata Party state president Ajay Bhatt and others participated in the launch of 'Selfie with Kamal' campaign at the party state office on the occasion of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary on Tuesday.

The BJP State president Ajay Bhatt said that the 'Selfie with Kamal' campaign will be conducted at the booth level till December 30.

Earlier, the CM paid tribute to Vajpayee and recalled his contributions in the service of the nation and strengthening the BJP. Vajpayee's birth

anniversary is observed as Good Governance Day. To mark the occasion, the state government had also launched the Atal Ayushman Uttarakhand Yojana. Stating that the scheme will benefit 23 lakh families in the state, he stressed that all the intended beneficiaries receiving the benefit of this scheme will be the real tribute to Vajpayee.

During the Selfie with Kamal programme along with the CM and party state president, the minister of state Dhan Singh Rawat, Dehradun mayor Sunil Uniyal 'Gama', MLA Khajan Das and party workers were also present. **PNS**


Illegal construction continues in Nainital, allege locals

PNS ■ NAINITAL


Building construction is being carried out in green belt of the Lake Development Authority area in Nainital despite a prohibition on the same. Locals allege that such dubious activities are being carried out by persons in connivance with officials of the Lake Development Authority.

Observers point out that in the recent past, the authority had conducted a campaign and acted against illegal constructions. However, despite this, building construction is continuing on the sly in various locations of Nainital town. Dozens of goods carriers from Haldwani and Kaladhungi are arriving daily in Nainital with construction material. Despite there being a prohibition on approval to building layouts in the green belt and danger zone, the builders are confident enough to continue their activities in violation of the directions of the local administration, lake development authority and even the high court. Though no new building maps are being passed and neither are registries being done, those involved in illegal constructions have apparently not been affected by such prohibitions.


It should be mentioned here that as in other urban areas of the state, population pressure coupled with unplanned developments have posed problems in Nainital too. Observers blame various problems ranging from improper garbage disposal and traffic congestion to danger from landslides on such unplanned developments. The landslide in Balianala area which also elicited the focus and directions from the high court also recently brought focus to the threat faced by the people and a portion of the town. However, as some locals allege, these factors have not affected a complete stop on illegal construction activity in the lake city. It now remains to be seen whether the officials concerned ensure that necessary effective action is taken not only to stop such illegal constructions but also to ensure that the same are not undertaken in the future.



सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्रालय
सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता विभाग, भारत सरकार



नरेन्द्र मोदी
प्रधानमंत्री



मैनुअल स्केवेंजर्स की पुनर्वास

सहायता और जागरुकता शिविर

दिनांक - 26 दिसम्बर, 2018 समय - दोपहर 1:00 बजे

स्थान - ऋषिकुल परिसर, आयुर्वेद विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार, उत्तराखंड

सभी सादर आमंत्रित हैं

मैनुअल स्केवेंजर्स के पुनर्वास के लिए योजनाएं


- प्रत्येक परिवार को 40,000/- रुपये की नकद सहायता।
- स्व-रोजगार के लिए 15 लाख रुपये, जिसमें 3.25 लाख रुपये की सब्सिडी।
- 3 हजार रुपये प्रतिमाह स्टाइपेन्ड पर 2 वर्ष तक कौशल विकास प्रशिक्षण।

मुख्य अतिथि
थावरचंद गेहलोत
सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्री, भारत सरकार

अध्यक्षता
मदन कौशिक
मंत्री
शहरी विकास मंत्रालय, उत्तराखंड सरकार

विशिष्ट अतिथि
डा. रमेश पोखरियाल निशंक
सांसद
हरिद्वार, उत्तराखंड

आयोजक: नेशनल सफाई कर्मचारी फाईनैस एंड डेवलेपमेंट कारपोरेशन
सहयोग: जिला प्रशासन/समाज कल्याण विभाग, हरिद्वार, उत्तराखंड



Union Min: Need law to check population

PTI ■ NOIDA (UP)

Union Minister Giriraj Singh here Tuesday advocated for a law to control the population in the country, noting that it was becoming an impediment for development and social harmony.

The Minister of State, Independent Charge, in the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) also threatened to resign over the issue, saying he could go to "any extent" for it.

Singh was here to participate in a programme organised by the Jansankya Samadhaan Foundation, its activists and office-bearers handed over a memorandum to him seeking support for the law.

Citing different sources, he said India's population is equal to that of China, higher than 125 crore as believed, but resources like land and water are limited.

"For development and social harmony in the country, controlling the population is important," Singh, Lok Sabha MP from Bihar's Nawada, told reporters.

"Development is also hampered by overpopulation and it

is evident if you go to any road (traffic), school, hospital, and is also impacting employment opportunities. That is why it is very important that a law is framed in the country to control population," he said.

Noting that population control programmes were being carried out in 22 Islamic countries and it was only in India where such initiatives are linked to religion, he said the law should be such that it applies to all the communities and action taken against violators, including revoking their voting rights.

"If the law says only two children are allowed, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, and all others should follow it. Those who do not follow the law, their voting rights should be revoked, action on their finances be taken, legal proceedings initiated against them.

"Until that happens, the country would face reducing land, water, worsening environment and limiting of other resources," he said.

Asked if he would "resign" to press for such a law, as mentioned in a press statement by the foundation, he said, "I am

ready to go to any extent for people's awakening."

He said he was "ideologically" with the foundation, which has held rallies in Amroha, Baghpat and Ghaziabad and plans to go to 34 more districts to press for the issue "from streets to 'sansad' (Parliament).

The minister also made references to Kairana, a town in Shamli which had witnessed exodus of over 200 Hindu families due to fear of "majority community", to say social harmony is witnessed only in areas where Hindus are present in majority.

"Wherever in the country the population of Hindus has gone down, social harmony has suffered a setback there," he said, claiming there were around 54 districts in the country and 21 in Uttar Pradesh, which have witnessed a drop in the Hindu population over the years.

Earlier Tuesday, the venue of the event had to be changed at the last minute after it appeared that the NGO was denied permission for the programme with the Union minister as its chief guest at the city magistrate's office in Sector 19 here.

Despite Vajpayee's efforts for friendship, Pak continued funding terror: Naidu

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said Tuesday that though former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a lot of initiatives to have a "proper friendship" with Pakistan, the latter has continued with its "old disease" of funding terror.

While addressing an event to commemorate the 94th birth anniversary of Vajpayee, Naidu said even Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited leaders of all SAARC countries for his swearing-in ceremony.

He recalled Vajpayee's statement that 'You can change your friends but you cannot change your neighbours. India wants to be friendly with all countries'.

"That is why Narendra Modi invited all SAARC countries for his swearing in and all came. We want to have a friendship with all, including Pakistan. We can work together. We want to live together happily. We want to progress together but unfortunately they are continuing with their old disease of aiding, inhabiting and funding terror. They must give it up," he said.

Lahore bus yatra, Agra

Talk, even earlier Samjhauta Express - all the initiatives were taken by Vajpayee to have a proper friendship with Pakistan, he said.

Naidu said Vajpayee led the country ably through difficult times. He said despite the world imposing restrictions on India, he successfully conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1998, which was also depicted on the celluloid.

"It was the time when the country gave a fitting reply in the Kargil war and also overcame devastation caused during the Gujarat earthquake in 2001. The attack on Parliament was a testimony to how dangerous cross border terrorism could be," he said.

The vice-president said the coming generations will remember Vajpayee for bringing connectivity revolution and paving the way for development and growth.

"He will be remembered after Sher Shah Suri for connectivity - air connectivity, rail connectivity, rural connectivity, port connectivity... He brought such a political connectivity in the country and brought 23 political parties of the country together," Naidu added.

Rajnath lays foundation stones of 576 projects

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stones of 576 projects worth Rs 161 crore at a function on the occasion of the 95th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow on Tuesday.

The Union Home Minister's announcements were greeted with applause and enthusiastic Bhartiya Janata Party workers raised slogans in praise of the late Prime Minister.

BJP Lucknow city unit chief Mukesh Sharma said that Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stones of international infrastructure to give shape to the dreams of Vajpayeeji, who dreamt of development of Lucknow.

He said that Lucknow was slowly but steadily moving towards acquiring the status and stature that the former Prime Minister had thought of.

Rajnath Singh inaugurated projects worth Rs 2 crore from CSR (corporate social responsibility) fund of GAIL, worth Rs



Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh with UP Dy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma and others lays the foundation stone of projects worth Rs.168 crores to mark the 94th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow on Tuesday

15 crore from MP Local Area Development Fund, 158 projects worth Rs 17 crore besides inaugurating Vishram Sadan having 210 beds at King George's Medical University from CSR fund of Power Grid Corporation at the medical university.

On this occasion, KGMU Vice-Chancellor ML Bhatt urged the Union Home Minister to fund the construction of a three-storey building at Vishram Sadan and of a multi-level parking on KGMU premises. The Union Home Minister gave an assurance to the VC in this regard.

On this occasion, Rajnath Singh also inaugurated 17 projects worth Rs 2 crore undertaken by CSR fund of GAIL and 418 projects other projects. Singh attended a the tihri bhoj organised at Kudia Ghat in Lucknow.

The programme was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, ministers Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Brajesh Pathak, Mahendra Singh, Mohsin Raza, MLA Pankaj Singh, Suresh Srivastava, Neeraj Bora, Union Home Minister's representative Diwakar Tripathi and several others.



Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama addresses a gathering at Kalachakra ground in Bodhi Gaya on Tuesday

PTI

Akhilesh: BJP Govt in UP has failed to create jobs

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said that the Bhartiya Janata Party government in Uttar Pradesh had failed to create jobs for the youths and ensure remunerative prices of crops to the farmers.

Akhilesh claimed that people belonging to all sections were facing problems.

"Debt-ridden farmers are committing suicide. The future of the youths is in the dark. The BJP is out to crush the dreams of the younger generation," the SP chief said at a programme in Lucknow on Tuesday.

Referring to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Akhilesh said, "The CM does not like opposition. Students who raise pressing issues are sent jail

"Debt-ridden farmers are committing suicide. The future of the youths is in the dark. The BJP is out to crush the dreams of the younger generation"

and even girl students are subjected to police action."

Last year, a group of students, including two girls, associated with SP's student wing blocked Yogi's convoy in Lucknow and waved black flags. They were detained and sent to jail. A court granted them bail after 20 days.

Hry CM launches 485 schemes under 'Digital Haryana' initiative

Karnal : Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal on Tuesday launched 485 schemes and services of 37 departments under the 'Digital Haryana' initiative. He said through the medium of e-governance, people could be provided with good governance. On 94th birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, 'Good Governance' programmes were organised in the state and the chief minister inaugurated 22 'Antyodaya Saral Kendras' for all district headquarters from Karnal.

PNS

Climate change hits crops, farmers alike

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Climate change has hit agrarian Uttar Pradesh very hard and experts claim that crop yield in over a dozen districts across the state has been adversely affected and might result in a drop in production and financial losses to farmers.

"Global warming is accelerating severe changes in the agriculture of the state. There are dry spells in monsoon. Small rivers get flooded because of freak rains and winters are either very severe or hot winds blow in December,"

pointed out Dr SP Pandey of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development.

Dr Pandey said that the freak weather affected the economy of the farm sector as agriculture was the largest employment provider and provided direct employment to 35.5 million people.

He is not off the mark as a joint study by Arvind Kumar, KK Singh, AN Mishra and Pratigya Tripathi maintains that climate change resulting in increase in temperature could lead to possible low yield of rice in eastern UP by 1.0 to 1.1 per

cent per hectare.

Similar fall in production is expected if there is a fall in temperature. The yield of rice may go down by 1.5 to 1.9 per cent per hectare.

The researchers said that similarly, wheat production might go down by 5 per cent in neighbouring Bihar due to increase in maximum temperature.

Eastern Uttar Pradesh comprising 28 districts would be the worst affected. An estimate said that around 10 districts, with a population of around 90 million, would be affected.

"The production of rice,

wheat and pulses are likely to go down. This will not only impact crop production but also the economy of villagers," KK Singh said.

The impact of climate change is being felt in the state as there has been a greater frequency of droughts and floods. Figures available with Meteorological department suggest that the region has experienced double the number of monsoon depressions, causing heavy rainfall and flooding across Uttar Pradesh.

The state has been divided into nine agro-climatic zones. Around 90 per cent of the pop-

ulation of the state is engaged in agriculture and allied activities of which majority are small farmers, who are solely dependent on agriculture.

Area of agriculture has worsened over the years. The prevailing situation of drought and flood due to its physical formation and natural calamities of last 10 years are indicative of bigger crisis.

Agro-scientist Vishal Saraswat told this reporter that of late, eastern UP has witnessed flash floods which was also because several rivers originating in Nepal flow down to the state causing immense damage.

Akalis vandalise statue of former PM Rajiv Gandhi

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Politics over statue kicked off in Punjab on Tuesday as the Akalis, staging protest against the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, vandalised the statue of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Ludhiana. Taking serious note, the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh ordered that action must be initiated against those involved in the act.

Capt Amarinder has directed Ludhiana district police to immediately identify the culprits responsible for the violence and take stringent action against them, as per law.

By the evening, the Ludhiana Police's CIA staff succeeded in taking into custody one of the two youth Akali leaders, Gurdeep Singh Gosha, involved in the vandalism of Rajiv Gandhi's statue.

The development came days after the SAD's senior leader and general secretary in-charge of party's youth wing Bikram Singh Majithia demanded complete withdrawal of Gandhi family's name

The development came days after the SAD's senior leader and general secretary in-charge of party's youth wing Bikram Singh Majithia demanded complete withdrawal of Gandhi family's name on airports, social schemes and awards in the country, saying that "a name synonymous with butchering innocent Sikhs in 1984 riots does not deserve this honour"

on airports, social schemes and awards in the country, saying that "a name synonymous with butchering innocent Sikhs in 1984 riots does not deserve this honour".

In the back-to-back acts of symbolism by SAD and the Congress on Tuesday, the protesting Youth Akali Dal workers in Ludhiana's Salem Tabri blackened Rajiv Gandhi's bust and coloured the statue's hands red — holding him responsible for 1984 riots, while the irate Congress workers, who gathered at the spot soon after the news spread, cleaned off the bust with milk and water — indicating that the late Congress leader was innocent.

While doing the act, youth akali dal leaders — Meetpal Dugri and Gurdeep Singh Gosha—get their photographs clicked, which was later shared in the social media. They termed Rajiv Gandhi responsible for killings of Sikhs, while demanding to withdraw Bharat Ratna from the former prime minister.

Gosha said: "We don't have any fear from the law. Despite the Congress government in power, we dare to blacken Gandhi's statue. If the police want to arrest us, we don't have any fear. It is our emotions attached with the Sikhs and their families who were killed in the past."

He said that they would

also blacken other statues in the city to express their anger against Rajiv Gandhi.

Ludhiana Congress president Gurpreet Singh Gogi said that the culprits would not be spared, case would be registered against them, and a complaint has been lodged with the police.

A Congress worker said that the act of defiling a former Prime Minister's statue is "pathetic. The Congress workers will not let the Akalis rest and they will protest against this goondaism at all costs".

Congress leader Gursimran Singh Mand cleaned the statue, blackened by Youth Akali Dal, with his

turban.

Large number of Sikhs was killed following former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's death in 1984, and the issue was back in news again after the Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was convicted in the matter, and Kamal Nath, named in the Nanavati Commission report probing riot cases, took oath as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister.

Although Nath doesn't face criminal charges, he was named by several eye-witnesses as being a part of the mob that killed Sikhs.

The controversy spilled over to New Delhi when the Delhi Assembly passed a resolution demanding swift justice to the victims of the massacre. An amendment in the resolution, which was not passed by the Assembly, also urged the Centre to take back the Bharat Ratna conferred posthumously on the late Prime Minister.

The Akali Dal, which is in Opposition in Punjab, also made a similar demand.

Freezing cold conditions prevail in Hry, Punjab

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Freezing cold conditions gripped parts of Punjab and Haryana as the minimum temperatures, which have been hovering below normal limits over the past two weeks, further plummeted on Tuesday.

Amritsar and Adampur reeled as the mercury plunged to identical minimum temperatures of 0.4 degrees Celsius, a Meteorological Department (Met) official said here. It was also the season's coldest night so far in Amritsar, where the minimum dropped three notches below normal limits, he said. Among other places in Punjab, Pathankot recorded a low of 2.9 degrees Celsius, Ludhiana 2.8 degrees Celsius, Faridkot 3.8 degrees Celsius, Gurdaspur 3.5 degrees Celsius, Bathinda 4.5 degrees Celsius and Halwara registered a low of 3 degrees Celsius.

Patna zoo closed after tests confirm strains of bird flu in Dead peacocks

PTI ■ PATNA

The zoo here was closed on Tuesday "until further orders" after strains of avian influenza virus were found in six dead peacocks, Forest officials said.

Morning walkers and Christmas picnickers were in for a disappointment as they found the gates of the 'Sanjay Gandhi Jaivik Udyan' shut with notices affixed on the walls.

According to D K Shukla, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Bihar, samples of the dead peacocks were sent to Kolkata and Bhopal for tests which confirmed the presence of H5N1 virus.

"We are not sure how the peacocks contracted the virus. Birds from outside tend to fly inside the sprawling campus. That could be a possible reason but that is a matter of investigation," Shukla said.

"Although not fatal, the virus spreads rapidly and the

"We are not sure how the peacocks contracted the virus. Birds from outside tend to fly inside the sprawling campus. That could be a possible reason but that is a matter of investigation"

decision to temporarily shut down the zoo was taken to minimise the possibility of catching the infection. The zoo is being thoroughly sanitised and experts would examine the campus after five days. Only after it is certified that it was safe for people, would the zoo be again thrown open for visitors," he made it clear.

Last week outbreak of the bird flu was confirmed in some villages of Munger district, about 200 km from here, where culling of birds had been ordered by the administration.

High attrition hits CRPF hard

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In an alarming trend in attrition, as many as 25,288 officers and jawans of the CRPF have resorted to voluntary retirement and resignations since 2011 besides 10,362 personnel who left the force due to superannuation, invalidation, dismissal and termination.

Hard and harsh working conditions including 12 to 14 hours of job daily without proper leave is one of the reasons for the attrition. Deployment of the Force's personnel in far-flung areas and contonious deployment away from home, home sickness and the pitfalls of nuclear family besides personal problems and family disputes are other reasons for the attrition. Better job opportunities and less harsh working conditions outside the Force also contribute the personnel resorting to voluntary retirement, according to inputs with the Union Home Ministry.

Against a housing satisfaction fixed at 25 per cent of the personnel (88,168) out of the sanctioned strength of 3,24,093 at the static locations



like group centres, training institutions and battalions raised on unattached patterns like Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), Rapid Action Force (RAF), Mahila Battalions is only 11.83 per cent.

Out of the authorised 88,168 houses, 37,801 have been contructed and 12,014 are

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Grand Total
Dismissal from service:	672	570	516	361	208	182	103	2612
Invalidation	55	33	34	41	49	57	34	303
Resignation	940	793	740	562	593	453	523	4604
Superannuation	857	744	734	674	934	1181	1157	6281
Termination	3	119	246	281	264	135	118	1166
Voluntary Retirement	2757	5160	3757	2195	780	3346	2689	20684
Grand Total	7295	9431	8040	6128	4843	7370	6641	35650

Par panel: Big religious institutions serving free meal out of GST, why?

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Parliamentary panel has questioned the Government's motive to waive off the GST under its six-month-old 'Sewa Bhoj Yojna' for the big religious institutions serving free meal to more than 5,000 people per month while depriving the smaller ones from similar financial benefits even though "they are more likely in need of it."

The Committee headed by Rajya Sabha MP, Derek O'Brien, has recommended that the eligibility criteria of serving free food to above 5,000 people should be reconsidered by the Union Culture Ministry.

The Modi Government had launched the Sewa Bhoj Yojana on June 1, 2018, exempting charitable organisations that provide free food from paying Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST)/Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on the raw materials used. The scheme followed demand from the BJP ally, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), in Punjab which had sought exemption of langar from GST.

While appreciating the scheme which reimburses the CGST/IGST for only those religious institutions that serve



food to at least 5,000 people in a calendar month, the panel, which has submitted its report in Parliament recently said it fails to understand the reason for this eligibility criterion since smaller religious institutions are more likely to be in need of this Scheme.

Moreover, ascertaining the number of people to whom food is served by a religious institution in a month is difficult and could lead to religious institutions in actual need of the support being left out.

The Committee also felt that instead of carrying out inspection every year at least in 5% of the cases as decided under the scheme, the Government should scrutinise at least 10% of the cases.

The Committee feels that the proper utilization of funds is very important in the implementation of all schemes and this scheme could be maliciously exploited for getting reimbursement of taxes by commercial food outlets.

under construction and the net deficiency is 38,353.

A Parliamentary panel has noted that such a poor level of housing satisfaction level could be one of the major reasons for high attrition in the paramilitary. While directing the government to expedite the under construction 12,014 houses without time and cost overruns, the panel also advised the Centre to chalk out an action plan to achive the objective of constructing the remaining 38,353 quarters within the stipulated timeframe.

The Force personnel suffer casualties not only due to countering the insurgents in the Naxal areas, Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir but also while operating in hostile terrain and inhospitable working

conditions which generate "extreme stress and strain on their physical and mental health. During the last eight years since 2010, more personnel have been killed due to diseases than in action. As many as 798 personnel have been killed due to heart attack but the casualties during operation stood at 391 during the period between 2010 and 2017. Likewise, cancer took a toll of 334 personnel followed by 94 deaths due to cerebral malaria and six casualties due to snake bite.

Central Reserve Police Force is the world's largest paramilitary force and the designated agency for anti-Naxal operations, countering terrorists in Jammu & Kashmir and insurgents in the Northeast.

RaGa attacks Modi for ignoring BJP worker's question

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for reportedly ignoring a BJP worker's question on the middle class' struggle with the taxation policy, saying forget a Press meet, he cannot even hold a poll booth workers' conference.

Rahul Gandhi was apparently referring to an incident that took place last week during Modi's interaction with "booth workers" from northern districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. He also said "BJP-vetted" questions is a superb idea, but the party should also "consider vetted answers".

The Congress chief cited a media report that claimed Modi faced embarrassing moments during his interaction with BJP workers from Tamil Nadu when a worker sought to know why his administration was busy collecting taxes from the middle class but not interested in taking care of them.

The report claimed that the prime minister during his video interaction chose not to answer the question raised by

HUMAN ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN ASSAM, BENGAL TEA GARDENS ITA holds meet to resolve crisis

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concerned at the increasing human-elephant conflicts (HEC) in Assam — nearly 800 lives have been trampled by wild jumbos between 2006 and 2016 — tea estate firms have come together under the umbrella of Indian Tea Association (ITA) to explore ways to mitigate the crisis in the Northeastern State and West Bengal.

In this regard, said Dr Dipankar Ghose, Director, Species and Landscapes programme, WWF-India, a first-of its kind meet was organised by the ITA in Kolkata to plan an industry- wide collaboration to address HEC faced by the tea gardens of Assam and West Bengal.

The WWF-India is implementing 'The Sonitpur Model' in two districts of Assam in collaboration with the State Forest Department where locals are trained and equipped to form 'Anti Depredation Squads' that can drive the wild elephants back using searchlights, fire-



crackers and kunki elephants. Kunkis are trained elephants that can help the Anti Depredation Squad members in driving back wild elephants.

In fact, Apeejay Tea, a tea firm and WWF-India have partnered (2015-18) to implement HEC management measures in its tea plantations in Sonitpur.

Dr Ghose said, "Through intensive conflict management strategy in the conflict prone plantations, a range of initiatives have been implemented which were found to be successful in reducing losses related to HEC in four of Apeejay Tea estates namely Borjuli, Ghoirallie,

Dhulapadung and Sessa Tea Estates.

Under the project, low cost solar power fences were installed across the tea estates, a scalable bio fence, using thorny bamboo was also introduced to prevent the entry of wild elephants into vulnerable areas of the tea garden when ready. Regular village level meetings and interaction were held to create awareness on elephants and HEC management.

"We believe that we will be able to scale up these initiatives in Assam with the ITA's participation in effectively managing HEC along with other stake-

holders," he added.

Karan Paul, Chairman of Apeejay Tea and member of ITA who had initiated the meeting said that they were perhaps the first tea company to fund an intensive conflict management strategy in Sonitpur because four of our gardens were in the hot zone.

Vivek Goenka, ITA Chairman added, "The ITA has studied the Project Outcomes of Apeejay Tea - WWF collaboration and is sensitive to the issue. I believe that a multi-stakeholder collaboration including the Government will aid implementation of large scale interventions across the tea sector. This was our first meeting involving tea companies and we are hopeful of a collaborative approach emerging to take this forward."

According to Government data, Assam with an elephant area (15,050 square km) is the country's prime elephant range State, having 5,719 jumbos, the highest population of wild elephants after Karnataka.

GUJARAT-PAK BORDER

Only 616 border fencing light poles out of 2,061 functional

New Delhi: Out of the 2,061 Border Fencing Light poles along the international border in Gujarat's Bhuj and Gandhinagar Sector, only 616 are "functional", the BSF has told the CPWD, according to the minutes of an inter-departmental co-ordination meeting held in November.

Border Security Force officers also informed the CPWD that out of 82 diesel gensets, only 38 are "functional", "affecting operational duties" by the troops on the sensitive international border, the minutes stated.

The meeting was held at BSF Headquarters in New Delhi, during which senior officers of BSF and CPWD, the government's largest construction agency, discussed several projects.

BSF Director General Rajni Kant Mishra and Central Public Works Department DG Prabhakar Singh also attended the November 16 meeting.

India's border with Pakistan runs through four states, Jammu and Kashmir (1,225 km, which includes 740 km of Line of Control), Rajasthan (1,037 km), Punjab (553 km) and Gujarat (508 km).

"Out of 2,061 BFL poles, only 616 BFL poles are func-



tional (along the international border in Bhuj and Gandhinagar Sector). Out of 82 DG sets, only 38 DG sets are functional.

"CPWD (was) requested to carry out necessary repair at the earliest as it is affecting operational duties performed by the troops deployed on the sensitive international border", stated the meeting's minutes prepared by the BSF and sent to the CPWD director general on December 12.

There have been several attempts of infiltration by terrorists who cut the border fences to enter India from the Pakistani side.

BFLs are maintained by CPWD in Bhuj and Gandhi Nagar Sector.

According to the minutes of meeting, the CPWD intimated that work of repairing of BFLs and DG sets in Bhuj and Gandhi Nagar Sector are in progress and will be handed over to BSF after proper rectifications.

It also stated that in Jammu, out of the 28 command posts in non-composite Border Output Posts, so far only three command posts have been completed and 17 are under-construction with "very slow progress" while work on eight have not yet started.

It added that out of the 43 High Mast Lights in river-line gaps, so far work on 25 HML has been completed while three are under construction with "very slow progress" and 15 HML work has not started yet. **PTI**

India's largest cancer institute in Haryana's Jhajjar to open in Jan

New Delhi: Touted as the largest cancer hospital in India, the National Cancer Institute in Haryana's Jhajjar district would be opened to public by the third week of January, Union Health Minister JP Nadda said on Tuesday.

The institute, being considered as a landmark in the field of cancer research in the country, shall lessen the deficit of tertiary cancer care in the northern region.

"The National Cancer Institute in Jhajjar would be dedicated by the third week of January," Nadda said at an event in AIIMS hospital in Delhi.

The institute will have 710 beds, out of which 200 beds will be dedicated for translational research on India-specific cancers.

Out patient department or OPD services were partially started last week.

Different facilities such as surgical oncology, radiation oncology, medical oncology, anaesthesia and palliative care and nuclear medicine will be available at the institute. It will also have the first-of-its-kind tissue repository in India.

The institute, which will operate under the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, was approved by the Manmohan Singh government in 2013 and has been built at a cost of Rs 2,035 crore.

There will be 372 units of flats and 1,080 hostel rooms for staff members. A night shelter



with a capacity of 800 units meant for patient attendants have also been planned.

There are more than 80 lakh cancer patients in the world. Nearly 29 lakh of them are in India. About 11 lakh cancer cases are detected every year.

With a view to prevent and cure cancer, the government decided to set up the new institute of advance research activities.

The institute, coming up in Badhsa village, will operate on the lines of National Cancer Institute in the US and German Cancer Research Centre (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum) DKFZ as a nodal centre for indigenous research, promotive, preventive and curative aspects of care and human resource development.

The institute is aimed to plan, conduct and coordinate research on cancers which are more specific to India — like tobacco-related cancers, cancer of the uterine cervix, gall bladder cancer and liver cancers. The focus will be on understanding and analysing the cause and genesis of these type of cancers, the Government has said. **PTI**

CBI books Delhi-based kidswear retailer for cheating Union Bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked the chief managing director of Delhi-based kids-wear retailer, Catmoss Retail Pvt Ltd Ashwini Kumar Chawla, for allegedly cheating Union Bank of India of ₹20 crore. The company and its officials allegedly fabricated balance sheets to avail a loan which was not repaid to the bank, CBI officials said.

Following a complaint by the bank, the CBI has registered a case of criminal conspiracy and cheating against the company Catmoss Retail Pvt Ltd, Chawla, his wife and guarantor Asha Rani Chawla and the firm's directors Reena Chawla

and Asha Rani Chawla, they said.

In its complaint to the CBI, Union Bank of India alleged that the company furnished "forged and fabricated" balance sheets with an intention to cheat and cause wrongful loss to it.

"CMD of Catmoss Retail Pvt Ltd Ashwini Chawla, in pursuance of a well knitted criminal conspiracy to fraudulently avail loan facility from the complainant bank by furnishing forged and fabricated balance sheets, has committed offences like cheating, forgery, forgery for purpose of cheating and using as genuine a forged document, it said.

It is alleged that Chawla had

approached the bank in 2011 seeking a sanctioned credit limit of ₹10 crore.

The company furnished balance sheets for the financial years 2009-10 and 2010-11 to the bank which were audited by a chartered accountant.

The account was declared a non performing asset on March 31, 2013, having an outstanding of ₹10.92 crore.

The bank extracted a portion of its loan amount by auctioning some properties which it had held as guarantee.

During the inquiry, the chartered accountant, who had purportedly signed the balance sheets, told the bank that it was not the case.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after paying tributes to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 94th birth anniversary in New Delhi on Tuesday **PTI**

BJP under pressure as its allies deserting coalition: Pilot

Jaipur: Exuding confidence that the Congress will form the Government at the Centre in 2019, Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot claimed that the BJP is under pressure as its allies are deserting the coalition.

He alleged that the BJP's allies were quitting the NDA due to the arrogance of saffron party leaders and it was now under pressure which recently reflected in the seat-sharing in Bihar.

"Upendra Kushwaha has quit the NDA, the TDP has already left and the Shiv Sena is also not with them. Now the BJP is under pressure and therefore they gave 17 seats in Bihar to the JD(U) which has



only two MPs. What can be a fine example of insecurity than this," Pilot said.

He said the BJP leaders used to point fingers towards the Congress by saying that the party was struggling for its survival but results of the recent-

ly held Assembly polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have sent out a strong message.

"This full majority Government at the Centre has become so weak that it has given nearly half of Bihar (Lok Sabha seats) to a party having just two MPs just because of the fear that people are not voting for the BJP and also its allies are daring them. This happens when the government is weak," he told PTI here.

Pilot said the BJP should accept the fact that it has faced a severe blow in three states and should take responsibility of the defeat.

"(BJP's) Nitin Gadkari has

already spoken that the party leadership should take the responsibility for the defeat.

When the Congress had suffered defeat, the party president Rahul Gandhi had humbly accepted that but the BJP leadership is so arrogant that despite facing defeat in three states, it is unwilling to take the responsibility," he said.

Pilot said there was a swing of 12.5 per cent votes in Rajasthan and the Congress gained 99 seats in 2018 from 21 Assembly seats in 2013.

"We won 21 (Assembly) seats in 2013 and the number of seats has increased five times in 2018. Swing of votes is 12.5 per cent. BJP's vote share has decreased by 6.6 per

cent and ours increased by six per cent. It's a rare swing," he said.

Pilot, who is also the party's Rajasthan unit chief, said the victory of the Congress has boosted the morale of party workers and they have started preparing for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"We have formed the government and along with delivering on our promises, we are focusing on the upcoming elections. Meetings in the party have already started. The party will register a thumping victory in the Lok Sabha polls and the Congress will form the Government at the Centre," he said.

Rajasthan has 25 Lok

Sabha seats and at present, 22 are with the BJP, one with the Congress and two are vacant.

The BJP had won all the 25 seats in the 2014 general elections but it lost two seats to the Congress in bypolls held earlier this year.

Two sitting MPs — Raghu Sharma (Congress) and Harish Meena (BJP) — won the recently held Assembly polls and they have resigned as the MP thus making their seats vacant.

BJP's Harish Meena, who was director general of the Rajasthan Police, had defected to the Congress before the assembly polls and contested on Congress ticket from Deoli-Uniara Assembly constituency and got elected. **PTI**

Bus falls in pit; cleaner dies; 24 children hurt

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

One person was killed and 24 school students were injured when an overcrowded bus returning from a picnic in Madhya Pradesh met with an accident Tuesday morning in Gujarat's Panchmahal district, said police.

The private luxury bus, hired by an Ahmedabad-based school for picnic, fell into a road-side pit after the driver lost control over the vehicle at Parvadi village near Godhra, around 130km from here, said Police Sub-Inspector MV Jotana.

According to an FIR lodged at the Godhra taluka police station, the bus was hired by the Vivekanand Hindi Higher Secondary School, situated in the Narol area of Ahmedabad.

The mishap took place when the bus, packed with 107

passengers, including school-children and teachers, was returning to Ahmedabad from Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, where they had gone for a picnic.

While the cleaner of the bus, Balram Bhadoria, died in the accident, its driver fled the spot, said Panchmahal District Superintendent of Police Leena Patil.

"The bus slipped into a roadside pit after the driver lost control over the vehicle. While 24 students received minor injuries, the cleaner died as he jumped from the moving bus to save his life," said Patil.

The injured students were shifted to the Godhra Civil Hospital for treatment, she said.

Primary investigations by the police revealed negligence on part of the school management as the bus was carrying 107 passengers, way beyond its capacity, said Patil.

"The bus driver fled from the spot after the accident. The bus was indeed overcrowded. Apart from students, there were teachers and their family members in the bus. We have lodged a case against the driver and others," said the SP.

Based on a complaint filed by one of the parents, Radheshyam Prajapati, the Godhra taluka police lodged the FIR against the unidentified driver, bus operator Sitaram Sharma and the school owner, Panjablil, said the police.

They were booked under various sections of the IPC, including 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 279 (rash driving) and 337 (causing injury by rash act). According to PSI Jotana, the capacity of the bus was just 58, against which 107 people, including 70 students, were in the vehicle at the time of accident.

Man booked for raping minor daughter in Raj

Kota: A 40-year-old man has been booked for allegedly raping his 13-year-old daughter twice in two days in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district, police said on Tuesday. Based on a complaint by the girl, a case was filed against her father at women police station in Jhalawar on Monday under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for allegedly raping her, sub inspector (SI) and police station in-charge Ramesh Chand Meroth said.

According to the minor's complaint, she was first raped by her father on Saturday when they were headed to her aunt's home in Samrai village, he said. The girl alleged that her father took her to a mustard village and raped her. When she started crying and shouting, he threatened her with dire consequences, the SI said. The accused allegedly raped his daughter again on Sunday on the way to her maternal grandmother's place in Chotaraipur village, Meroth said.

PTI



People visit the replica of Taj Mahal at Echo Park, Rajarhut-New Town city near Kolkata on Tuesday

PTI

Bigger allies should respect small parties: NDA ally Apna Dal(S)

PTI ■ MIRZAPUR

Small parties should be respected and given due importance by their bigger allies, Ashish Patel, national president of Apna Dal(S) party, a constituent of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), said on Tuesday.

He also cautioned the saffron party that a tie-up between the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh would pose a challenge to it in 2019 Lok Sabha election.

"We small parties, like the Apna Dal(S), want some respect to be shown to us. We, our leaders and workers feel hurt if due importance is not given to us," Ashish Patel told mediapersons here.

He added that his party was not happy with the behaviour of the BJP-led state government with Union Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel, also his wife.

The Apna Dal(S) chief claimed that she was not given adequate importance and not even invited for inaugurations of medical colleges.

Ashish Patel's remarks come days after Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RSLP) Chief Upendra Kushwaha walked out of the NDA. He was upset with the BJP after it asserted that the RLSP would not be given more than two seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Earlier in March, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) ended its four-year-old alliance with the NDA over the Centre's refusal to grant Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh.

Asked how many seats his party would like to contest in in Uttar Pradesh in 2019 Lok Sabha election, Ashish Patel said it would be revealed when the time comes.

He asserted that the Apna Dal(S) had widened its base during the last five years.

The party's candidates Anupriya Patel and Harivansh Singh won from Mirzapur and Pratagarh respectively.

Responding to a question, Ashish Patel denied that the BJP's defeats in the recently concluded assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh had weakened the party.

Nitish pays moving tribute to Vajpayee

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday paid a moving tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary and said the late leader would always be remembered for art of successfully running a coalition government.

Kmar said he relished memories of having worked with Vajpayee as a minister holding important portfolios like Railway, Agriculture and Surface Transport and fondly recalled the love he always showered on me, something I would never be able to forget.

Atal ji shall always be remembered for the role he played in national politics and the manner in which he upheld social harmony. I have personal regard for him. I have worked under his leadership as a ministerreceived his ashirwad (love and blessings), he told reporters on the sidelines of a function organised here on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Vajpayee who passed away in August this year.

The positive manner in which he dealt with his alliance partners is a memory to be cherished. Even the dignity with which he treated those in



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar pays tribute former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary at Sri Krishan Memorial hall in Patna on Tuesday

PTI

the opposition used to be a sight to behold, Kumar who heads the Janata Dal (United) said.

He earned respect from all segments of society. No other politician has been able to match his popularity in the recent past. We have decided to

hold a state function every year in his memory. A statue of his will also be erected in Patna for which a proper spot will be identified, the Chief Minister added.

The function, held at the Sri Krishna Memorial Hall, was attended among others by

Governor Lalji Tandon, Deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi, Assembly Speaker Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, ministers Nand Kishore Yadav, Mangal Pandey and Vinod Narain Jha and a number of other members of the states bicameral legislature.

BMAC appeals to Muslims not to react to inflammatory remarks

Zafaryab Jilani said appeal was issued at a meeting

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) Tuesday appealed to Muslims to refrain from reacting to any inflammatory statement on the Ram temple issue ahead of the resumption of hearing in the case in the Supreme Court next week..

BMAC convenor Zafaryab Jilani said the appeal was issued at a meeting of the action committee here.

The meeting expressed sat-

isfaction over the progress of the matter in the court.

The top court had in October rejected an urgent hearing after the Uttar Pradesh government argued that it was a 100-year-old dispute that should be taken up on priority.

The decision to move the case to January was seen by many to have dimmed hopes for a verdict before the Lok Sabha election a few months hence.

It triggered loud demands for an ordinance within the BJP and various groups linked to its ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh to pave way for the construction of the

Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The apex court is scheduled to take up a batch of petitions for hearing in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute case on January 4.

The matter is listed before a bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice SK Kaul.

The bench is likely to constitute a three-judge bench for hearing as many as 14 appeals filed against the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment, delivered in four civil suits, that the 2.77-acre land be partitioned equally among three parties -- the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla.

Pilot hints at Cabinet expansion to accommodate miffed leaders

Jaipur: A day after Cabinet formation, Rajasthan Congress chief Sachin Pilot Tuesday hinted at its expansion in near future, saying several leaders will be given a chance to work.

The statement comes amidst growing resentment among some senior Congress leaders who were apparently left fuming after being denied ministerial berths in the new government.

"Every division of the state has been given representation in the Council of Ministers. It was the first expansion. Another expansion may happen in sometime. Several people would be given a chance to work on various posts," Pilot told reporters.

On Monday, 23 ministers, including 13 cabinet and 10

state ministers took oath in the presence of Governor Kalyan Singh, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot.

A total of 18 fresh faces were inducted in the state cabinet even as senior leaders like C P Joshi and Deependra Singh abstained from attending the ceremony held at Raj Bhawan.

Various other senior leaders including Brijendra Ola, Parasram Mordiya, Rajendra Pareek, Mahesh Joshi were not inducted in the state cabinet.

Hours later, supporters of Congress legislator from Kaman, Zahida Khan and legislator from Guda Malani, Hema Ram Chaudhary took to the streets and raised anti-government slogans for not giving their leaders a ministerial berth.

PTI

17-yr-old girl, gone missing in Kedarnath, restored to family

PTI ■ ALIGARH

In a fairy tale ending of a real-life story, a 17-year-old, mentally challenged girl, who had gone missing in Kedarnath during 2013 deluge there, has been reunited with her family in Aligarh after five years.

Elated over the return of their long-lost grand-daughter Chanchal, her grandparents parents Harish Chand and Shakuntla Devi, residents of Bannadevi locality here, said, "This reunion is nothing short of a miracle."

Chanchal had gone to Kedarnath on a pilgrimage with her parents when the tragedy struck, sweeping away her father, while her mother

Chanchal, then 12, was feared dead but some good samaritans handed her over to an orphanage in Jammu, said director Gyanendra Mishra of NGO Childline Aligarh which helped in bringing the girl home

returned home after some-time, Harish Chand told media persons here Monday.

Chanchal, then 12, was feared dead but some good samaritans handed her over to an orphanage in Jammu, said director Gyanendra Mishra of

NGO Childline Aligarh which helped in bringing the girl home.

For the last few months, the orphanage management had been observing that the girl often tried to communicate something about Aligarh city through her limited verbal skills, Mishra said.

They somehow got in touch with Aligarh city legislator Sanjiv Raja who then took Mishra's assistance. Mishra, in turn, managed to identify the family of the lost girl with the help of police, and restored her to it.

Chachal still misses her long-lost father Rajesh and keeps remembering him, Harish Chand said.



Artistes dressed up as cartoon characters, perform during Christmas celebrations in Jaipur on Tuesday

PTI

BJP must clear stand over remarks on Hanuman: Seer

PTI ■ MATHURA

Swami Adhokshjanand Deo Tirth Tuesday said Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other leaders have vitiated the atmosphere in the country by linking Lord Hanuman to various castes and communities.

He demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top leaders of the BJP should clear the party's stand and bar party functionaries from disrespectful remarks about gods and goddesses.

The seer's reaction came after Uttar Pradesh Religious Affair Minister Laxmi Narayan Chaudhary dubbed Lord Hanuman as a Jat, saying like Jats, the deity never tolerated injustice towards anybody, anywhere.

The minister made the remark Friday after a Bharatiya

Janata Party Memeber of Legislative Council (MLA) from the state, Bukkal Nawab, dubbed Lord Hanuman a Muslim on the ground that his name rhymed with Islamic names like Rahman, Arman, Qurban etc.

During an election rally in Rajasthan, Adityanath had termed the deity a Dalit.

"On one side the BJP, from time to time, has been bringing up the Ram temple issue and on the other, its leaders are making absurd remarks on Hindu gods and goddesses, hurting religious sentiments," Sh a n k a r a c h a r y a Adhokshajanand Deo Tirth said here.

"The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be incomplete without Lord Hanuman as Ram had himself praised Hanumanji calling him like his brother Bharat," he said.

If the remark made by Nawab has the BJP high-command's approval, "then the party will have to get a mosque constructed for Lord Hanuman", the seer said.

The chief minister had hurt religious sentiments by terming Lord Hanuman a Dalit, even as his office later issued a clarification, claiming that Adityanath was misquoted, the shankaracharya said.

"Adityanath and other leaders' remarks on Hanuman have vitiated the atmosphere in the country," the seer said.

Lord Hanuman has been termed a Jat, Thakur, a sportsman and even a Muslim, even though gods and goddesses are above caste and religion, he stated.

Uttar Pradesh Sports Minister and former cricketer Chetan Chauhan had said on

Sunday that Hanuman was a sportsperson.

However, he had dismissed his party colleagues' attempts at identifying the deity's caste and said gods don't have castes.

The seer asked the BJP to clear its stand on the remarks and claimed no clarification was issued by the party on the statements on Lord Hanuman.

"The silence by BJP higher ups and RSS functionaries (on the remarks on Lord Hanuman) indicates that for the BJP, the Ram temple is a tool to garner votes," he said, adding that the temple in Ayodhya will be constructed by seers and dharmacharyas.

At a meeting held in Vrindavan, the coordinator of the Mathura Nagar Nigam Tara Chandra Goshwami also condemned the remarks of BJP leaders on Hindu gods and goddesses.

‘Pappu Pass Ho Gaya’

If 2019 will be the year that defines Rahul Gandhi as a politician, 2018 will be remembered as the year he became comfortable in his skin



Let us get one thing straight, it is not easy being Rahul Gandhi. To have lost your grandmother and your father to highly publicised assassinations is not something that anyone can even empathise with. But to then enter the political picture in India and immediately be portrayed as a ‘Clown Prince’ and a *pappu* (idiot) by the Opposition and doing yourself no favours by slips of the tongue (far too many) and being painted as an arrogant capo of the Lutyens mafia, must have taken a personal toll. It says a lot about Rahul Gandhi that he brushed aside the insults and innuendoes and even embraced his image as a *pappu*, with Congressmen themselves spreading ‘*Pappu Pass Ho Gaya*’ stickers on WhatsApp after the State election results a few weeks back. Of course, there is no doubt that a rejuvenated Congress is good for Indian democracy, but it should be noted that a series of missteps by the Bharatiya Janata Party and severe anti-incumbency had their roles to play in the Congress’ recent electoral success. But 2019 will be a different dilemma altogether for Rahul Gandhi and a very different challenge from the one that Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces. Rahul Gandhi has to play the unifying force of a disparate group of political characters from Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee to Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati, many of whom harbour their own ambitions of becoming the Prime Minister. One thing is certain: It is becoming increasingly difficult to predict who will occupy 7, Lok Nayak Marg come end-May 2019.

Frankly, this was not predictable this time last year as Rahul Gandhi ascended to the top post of the Congress. He was back then still *pappu* and portrayed as someone born with a big, fat silver spoon in his mouth. But he has managed to dispel that notion through a combination of diligent work, smart electoral strategy and allowing the Congress to swallow some pride when it comes to allies. There is no doubt that some of the allegations that he has made might not stick to Narendra Modi, notably questions on the Rafale deal, but to his credit, he single-handedly made it an issue which caught the Government off-guard. Rahul Gandhi has realised that Modi and Amit Shah are politicians who can fight on the offensive but fail miserably on defensive strategy, again the Rafale deal being a case in point. The Congress and, indeed, Rahul Gandhi’s strategy of painting Modi as financially, morally and ethically corrupt is working, but it might not work fast enough to defeat the BJP at the hustings. However, some of the mud is certainly sticking. With Modi disavowing intellectual talent in his Cabinet and elsewhere in the Government along with avoiding any critical media, more and more mud is sticking. This, coupled with a denial of obvious disasters like Demonetisation, makes the BJP vulnerable in 2019, not something that anyone predicted between 2014-17. Indeed, some even believed that India’s version of a thousand-year Reich was upon it. But much like that Reich, this one might also be hoist by its own petard. It remains to be seen if Rahul Gandhi will be the fourth generation of his storied family to govern India. Some of the disparate alliances he might have to form are with people who either dislike him or out and out hate him. Will the recent defeats mellow down the BJP when it comes to its allies and potential partners, and will Modi realise that his first term might become his only term if he doesn’t use his last 10 weeks in office before the elections are announced to do something significant that doesn’t involve a temple? But 2018 has certainly seen the coming of age of *pappu*. Pappupedia, a pejorative website run by BJP surrogates, might indeed need an update or two, come 2019.

Out in the cold

People sleeping on Indian streets is the shameful reality we may have to live with unless we act soon



Though a tad late, winters have finally arrived and a cold wave is sweeping much parts of the country, affecting all and sundry, but discriminatorily. For the well off, these conditions may just be a matter of inconvenience. Some can win the war against cold by using room heaters, not minding the heavy electricity bills, or by adding more layers of woollens to keep themselves warm. For the poor though, extreme weather conditions always spell trouble — be it harsh winters or scorching summers. There is far little comfort for the poor, who

spend most nights sleeping on rough Indian streets, pavements, abandoned drainpipes, temple staircases and what not. Not to forget, there are others, too, with unseen and untold miseries. This time round, though no cold wave deaths have been reported as yet, the sheer number of people taking refuge in shelter homes speaks volumes about homelessness. Consequences far outweigh the poor being just under the grip of cold. It’s the profound effect of poverty, joblessness and declining physical and mental health that act as a potent mix for cold wave deaths. It’s not as if the situation is inevitable. In fact, it is totally avoidable but for the lack of a comprehensive strategy to tackle homelessness. Despite the sheer number of welfare schemes, only a few sections benefit actually on the ground level. Compared to other States, though Delhi has fared much better in providing *rainbaseras* to the homeless, it is a travesty that there are few takers, the reason being that the shelter homes with inhuman conditions have become a place for endless indignities. Besides having to do with the filthy conditions, the homeless also run the risk of falling prey to pick-pockets or becoming victims of theft from their very own peers. Worse, those among the homeless like migrant labourers, earning their bread and butter doing menial jobs like working at construction sites, also have to share the space with drug addicts and hardened criminals. The only saving grace then is that there are a few civil society groups and other people who have been doing their bit by providing them with food and woollens that thankfully reach the intended beneficiaries. While this may be the case in Delhi, the same may not be true in other States which lack in providing a roof for the homeless, even at the expense of flouting Supreme Court orders. As the cold wave now takes a toll on the toxic air we breathe, with a thicker layer of smog engulfing the atmosphere, there is little hope that we can save ourselves from the worsening situation. Until, of course, the Government, as well as the people wake up to the shameful reality and do their bit by acting responsibly.

opinion08

Clutching at straws

While the Government may wish to dream away its problems or throw insults at the Opposition to run away from uncomfortable questions, it will be exposed at some point of time



AJOY KUMAR

The Supreme Court last week delivered its judgement on the issue of whether a probe to look into the Rafale controversy needs to be constituted or not. In its decision, the court stated that it does not think that the matter, as argued before it, requires any intervention. While I cannot speak for the petitioners in the case that was filed before the Supreme Court in this matter, the Congress has consistently maintained its stand that the appropriate forum for an examination of the issues raised against the Rafale deal is not the Supreme Court but a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). In this week’s article, I will briefly speak about how the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) attempts to claim the decision of the top court as “clean chit” is unfounded and ill-advised.

At the outset, it is imperative to state that the apex court, while passing its order, stated clearly that its decision is from the standpoint of the exercise of jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution of India. This examination by the apex court, as I am sure the Government fully knows, is limited to the extent that the court, under its Article 32 jurisdiction, cannot summon/examine all the relevant file notings, examine witnesses on oath and have the Prime Minister and Defence Minister answer questions on propriety. As stated by the Supreme Court itself, there are broadly three issues that the Supreme Court was required to examine, (1) the process of procurement of the Rafale jets from Dassault Aviation; (2) the issue of pricing of the jets; and (3) the selection of Anil Ambani as the offset partner for Dassault Aviation.

All of these issues and the allegations against the Government warrant and require a thorough examination. Only a detailed examination of the deal, as is being demanded by the Congress and increasingly by the people of the country, can help actually determine whether there was any instance of wrongdoing. Therefore, the claim of the BJP that the decision of the Supreme Court on the basis of the limited information placed before the court constitutes a clean chit from it is a little far-fetched. Separately, the essential question before the BJP is whether a limited examination and an absolute clean chit can go hand in hand?

One would think it couldn’t because a limited examination and an unequivocal clean chit are a contradiction in terms. The Finance Minister and industrialist Anil Ambani of course believe otherwise, judging by the statements that we have seen in the few days since the pronouncement of the decision of the court. It was fairly poetic that within a few hours of the judgement, the BJP was forced to curb its enthusiasm and answer some uncomfortable



questions because of an especially troubling paragraph in the judgement of the apex court, which stated that as per the Centre, the pricing details, with respect to the Rafale jets, were shared with the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and that the report was examined by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). This was a shock to the Congress as the PAC Chairman Mallikarjun Kharge received no such copy of the report.

In a situation, frankly approaching the absurd, the Government of India then moved an application before the Supreme Court saying that the statement of the Centre had been “misunderstood” because of a grammatical error, and stated that in fact the PAC had never actually examined this report. The convenience of the explanation aside, the relevant question that must be asked is: How much of this obfuscation the Government engaged in while presenting its arguments before the Supreme Court?

At the end of the day, the Supreme Court only examined the questions posed by it from a limited perspective and placed reliance on the statements of the Government on face value to some extent. But now this recent ‘gaffe’, which appears to be a slender ‘fig leaf’, clearly raises questions about

“WHEN THE BJP WAS IN THE OPPOSITION, IT INSISTED ON JPCs ON THE 2G AND BOFORS ISSUES. SO, WHAT ACCORDING TO THE FINANCE MINISTER MAKES THE RAFALE DEAL ANY DIFFERENT?”

”

the authenticity and honesty with which this Government has approached the court and placed facts before it. The Government could argue that the public should trust it to place authentic facts before the court and that its statements should be taken at face value. However, the Government’s tactics of obfuscation as evidenced through its entire term do not inspire any trust.

So, in light of the limited examination of the Supreme Court and the manner in which it has been misled by the Government, the question that arises is what is the best way forward to deal with this entire episode? While this may come as a surprise to the readers, I would actually like to offer the Government a word of advice to help them get out of this mess: Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

At the end of the day, the Government has been posed with some uncomfortable questions and, therefore, the BJP must come forward and answer these three questions and expose the present Rafale controversy to the required disinfectant of proper scrutiny: i) If there is nothing to hide, why not constitute a JPC? ii) If the new Rafale jets are indeed cheaper, why did the Government only purchase 36 as opposed to the original requirement of 126?

iii) Why doesn’t the Prime Minister hold a press conference and answer questions on the deal from journalists?

Of these questions, the question as to why a JPC should not be constituted, is perhaps the most pertinent. The Finance Minister’s response to this question was that Parliament cannot question the judgment of the highest court of the land. This seems like a convenient excuse. For starters, the Supreme Court itself has stated that this is only a limited examination and, therefore, there appears to be prohibition on a JPC to look into the matter in greater detail. Further, when the BJP was in the Opposition, it insisted on a JPC on the 2G case and the Bofors matter as well. Then what according to the Finance Minister makes the Rafale deal so special?

It is, therefore, apparent that if the BJP wants to get this Rafale-shaped monkey off its back, it will have to ultimately relent and allow for a thorough examination of the deal. While the Government may wish to dream away its problems or throw insults at the Opposition to discourage and dissuade these uncomfortable questions, it must be aware that at some point it will be exposed to sunlight. (The writer is Jharkhand PCC president, former MP and IPS officer. Views are personal)

SOUNDBITE

The solution for air pollution is a holistic plan where individuals have to take part — start using public transport — less use of cars.

Delhi Chief Minister
—Arvind Kejriwal

US pulling out troops from Afghanistan will embolden terrorist outfits. India should deal strongly with Pakistan as far as training camps and terrorist launchpads are concerned.

Former J&K DGP
—K Rajendra Kumar

What I do or how I think, I am not going to take a banner and explain that this is who I am and you need to like me or stuff like that.

Indian skipper
—Virat Kohli

Content of a film decides its budget. If your content is strong and if your audience is able to connect with it then, it will do well.

Actor
—Rajkummar Rao

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Electoral politics

Sir — This refers to the editorial, “Genuinely Silly Tax” (December 18). It is a fact that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) is posing problems both to the people and businesses. A uniform lower rate for all products, including fuel, under GST will be a better option. The Congress has been asking for a cut in GST rates for a long time. It is obvious that with the general election just around the corner, the BJP is resorting to politics of compulsion.

Najmul Huda
Mumbai

Hold banks accountable

Sir — This refers to the article, “Business plan for the banking sector” (December 22) by Sudhansu R Das. If banks continue to get capital (easy money) from the Government, without much fuss to carry on their operations, why would they change their daily operating procedures, strengthen their working capital and improve their project finance credit appraisal system? Until the Government makes the banks

accountable for every single penny they lend, the exchequer’s money will keep going down the drain.

Bal Govind
Noida

Half-hearted reform

Sir — This refers to the editorial, “Genuinely Silly Tax” (December 18). The

Government’s decision to slash GST rates for 23 items is welcome; though it has an eye on the 2019 Lok Sabha poll. While there is some amount of relief for the consumers, a lot more needs to be done. Most important of all, fuels must be brought under the ambit of GST. The loss of revenue to this effect can be compensated by better compliance and higher turnovers that will come

A case against surveillance

This refers to the editorial, “Snooping silently” (December 24). The Centre’s blanket surveillance order was in contravention of the Supreme Court’s landmark ruling, holding the right to privacy as a fundamental right. The Ministry of Home Affairs order vesting 10 Central agencies with the power to snoop on computers and phones of citizens will institutionalise surveillance. It is evident from the wording of the order — “to intercept, monitor and decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer” — that it is amenable to be used indiscriminately.

As ordinary people, we cherish our privacy and find the retrieval of our personal data from our computers dehumanising. Moves like this cumulatively nudge the country to slide into a surveillance state. We cannot allow the Government to trample on rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution in its

bid to create the facade of a strong state. Since the right to privacy is inalienable, inviolable and paramount, the Government should rescind its snooping order forthwith.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

as an outcome of this step that will also boost the economy.

Mahesh Kumar
Via email

Wait for the right time

Sir — This refers to the editorial, “Federal Express” (December 25). Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and TRS pres-

ident K Chandrasekhar Rao, the doyens of politics, have something in common. This is why they have joined hands to fight the two mainstream parties — the Congress and the BJP. The federal front, as proposed by the leaders, is soon to become a reality. Rumours are doing the rounds that other political parties, albeit minnows, too would be roped into the federal front. But how far will the regional parties succeed in their efforts would be anybody’s guess. Banerjee is a local leader with a national stature. She has all the requisite charismatic leadership qualities. KCR, though a political figure who is not so alluring as Banerjee, is a man with shrewd ideas. What is intriguing is Banerjee’s hasty attempt to cobble a coalition from scratch to somehow defeat the prospects of the two national parties. So, what has kept up their sleeve will only be unfolded at the right time. Let us all keep our fingers crossed.

TK Nandanam
Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

The Kurds betrayed again

For the Syrian Kurds, the question is: Would you rather be conquered by the Turks or by Assad? There is no third option. Dream of independence is long dead



GWYNNE DYER

The Kurds are like Kleenex. You use them, and then you throw them away. The Kurds of Syria are now frantically digging trenches around their cities and towns just south of the Turkish border, because Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said this week that US President Donald Trump gave a “positive response” to his plan for an invasion of Kurdish-controlled territory in Syria. On Wednesday, Trump confirmed it by announcing that he will pull all US troops out of Syria within 30 days. Erdogan would have invaded long ago if the US Army and Air Force were not protecting the Syrian Kurds, but at that time the US depended heavily on the Kurds in its campaign to eliminate the Islamic State. IS controlled the eastern third of Syria, and from 2015 on it was the Kurdish ‘People’s Protection Units’ (YPG) who provided most of the ground troops for that campaign. There were some 2,000 US troops in eastern Syria too, but it was the Kurds who bore the brunt of the fighting and the casualties. Indeed, a principal role of the US forces was to deter Turkey from attacking the Kurds, because Turkey, at war with its own big Kurdish minority, strongly opposed the Syrian Kurds’ ambition for independence.

But now Islamic State has been destroyed (or at least so Donald Trump believes), and the US has no further need of the Kurds. Time to throw them away. Deprived of US air support, the Syrian Kurds have little hope of resisting a Turkish invasion. As Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said: “They can dig tunnels or ditches if they want. They can go underground if they want. When the time and place come, they will be buried in their ditches.” So where can the Kurds turn? Only to Damascus, where Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has sworn to recover “every inch” of Syrian territory from the various rebel militia forces that controlled different parts of the country. All that remains to fulfill that ambition is the recovery of Idlib province in the northwest, still held by Turkish-backed Islamist extremists – and of the Kurdish-controlled north-east of the country.

For the Syrian Kurds, reeling from the American betrayal, the urgent, unavoidable question has become: Would you rather be conquered by the Turks or by Assad? There is no third option: The dream of independence is dead. When Turkey conquered the much smaller Kurdish-majority enclave of Afrin in north-western Syria last February, almost every Kurd in the territory was driven into exile. Assad’s rule is unattractive, but the Syrian Kurds have carefully avoided fighting his forces (they only fought IS), and they might be able to cut a deal that left them some local autonomy. After all, Assad doesn’t want the Turks taking control of eastern Syria either. The Kurds aren’t fools, and as the likelihood of an American defection grew in the course of this year they sent several delegations to Damascus to see what Assad would offer. They came back disappointed, because Assad did not want to do anything that would open the door to a federal state in Syria, and he quite rightly thought that he had the upper hand. But now that the US pull-out from eastern Syria and the Turkish invasion of the same region have both become imminent realities, he may want to think again.

This is a part of Syria rich in oil, water and wheat. Assad needs its resources to rebuild the country, and a Turkish occupation could be a long-lasting affair. It’s therefore possible that he will make a deal with the Syrian Kurds to keep the region in Syrian hands. The return of the Syrian Army would be tricky to manage, since it would have to arrive in each part of the region after the Americans left (to avoid clashes) but before the Turks arrived. Moreover, the Syrian army is seriously short of manpower, and this operation would require a lot of it. All the more reason to give the YPG a continuing role in the region’s security, the Kurds might argue, and it’s not impossible that Assad might buy that argument provided that the Kurdish militia became (at least in theory) a part of the Syrian army. So the Russians may be right. When Trump revealed *via* Twitter that he was going to pull all American forces out of Syria, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova responded that the US decision could result in “genuine, real prospects for a political settlement” in Syria. And it’s true.

Turkey could be convinced (by the Russians) that letting Assad take control of Kurdish-majority parts of Syria is enough to end the alleged Kurdish ‘threat’ to Turkish security. Then only the single province of Idlib would remain beyond Assad’s reach, and that’s not really a critical issue. In fact, the fix could be in already. We’ll know shortly. But no matter what, the Kurds lose again. Of course.

(The writer is an independent journalist)

I FAVOUR TAKING CARE OF COMMON PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL FOLLOW ITS DUTY TO DO SO AS WELL. *CHALIYE PUDUCHERRY KO VANAKAM.*

—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



VANAKAM PUDUCHERRY, THAT’S MODI’S ANSWER TO THE STRUGGLING MIDDLE CLASS. BJP-VETTED QUESTIONS IS A SUPERB IDEA.

—CONGRESS PRESIDENT RAHUL GANDHI

Terror drones: A matter of time

Following the criminal use of drone attack which created widespread disruption at the Gatwick Airport, it has now become a question of when, not if, UAVs will be used by terrorists



RICHARD WALTON

MATTHEW SPARKES

As head of Scotland Yard’s Counter Terrorism Command between 2011 and 2016, I looked in some depth at the threat posed by drones during the London 2012 Olympic Games. It was clear to us then that it was one of the potential scenarios we faced — for instance a Fathers 4 Justice drone coming into the stadium.

A comprehensive report by the Combating Terrorism Center in the United States set out in 2016 how drones have been used in the terrorist context for a number of years, including by the Hizbullah and the Islamic State.

At the time when the report was published, I had said that this has to be one of the biggest concerns for the West, because sooner or later, terrorists will use it here. It was always a question of when, not if. But drones are a very difficult threat in a civilian context, and there is sadly no foolproof solution.

In relation to this, many people are asking this question: Why the drone can’t just be shot down? Unfortunately, it’s not that straightforward. If a marksman were to shoot a drone down and its debris were to kill someone, potentially the officer could then face a manslaughter charge.

Over a runway, of course, the chances of it landing on anybody are remote but you’ve still got the challenge of a marksman hitting such a fast-moving object, which is not easy. Jamming electronic signals works in some cases but that’s not always the case. It would also jam everything else in the vicinity.

There are also net systems that can catch and immobilise drones, which, however, depends on being in proximity to them.

These difficulties aside, the Government should have been much more vigilant to this threat. Clearly, for example, there needs to be more effective deterrents. A five-year prison sentence for endangering aircraft or breaching the restrictions on operating drones is not enough. It should be a 20-year sentence. Those who use drones for malicious purposes need to know that they are going to be hit hard with lengthy jail sentences.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) itself admitted that rules and regulations around drone use are ‘evolving’ but this is the state of play at the moment: Drones are classified as “unmanned aircraft.” The CAA was keen to point out that they are most certainly a type of aircraft and “not toys.” This, because lands man-



aged for public enjoyment and biodiversity are not appropriate places for their use. There are concerns, too, that the legal 50m distance and full control cannot be guaranteed. If your drone weighs over 20kg then it’s only legal to use it in certified ‘danger areas’ such as Parc Aberporth aerodrome in West Wales.

Those using a drone weighing less than 20kg for commercial use — receiving payment of any sort — are required to seek permission from the CAA. To get permission, you will have to show that you are “sufficiently competent”. This is less clear-cut than for manned aircraft, where there is a well-established licensing procedure. If your drone is under 20kg and you’re not using it for commercial reasons, you still have some rules to follow.

i) Anyone filming with a drone for their own purposes must avoid flying it within 150 metres of a congested area and 50 metres of a person, vessel, vehicle or structure not under the control of the pilot.

ii) You will also need to fly the aircraft within sight. This means you can’t go above 400ft in altitude or further than 500 metres horizontally. If you want to exceed that limit, you’ll again need to seek explicit permission from the CAA.

I also know that pilots have been asking for a five kilometre exclusion zone for drones around airports. They should have been given that.

It was too long before the drone flying above Gatwick was seen as a national major incident and treated accordingly, and it was too long before the Whitehall machine got involved. If a drone is near any critical national infrastructure, it should

“IT WAS TOO LONG BEFORE THE DRONE FLYING ABOVE GATWICK WAS SEEN AS A MAJOR NATIONAL INCIDENT AND TREATED ACCORDINGLY. AND IT WAS TOO LONG BEFORE THE WHITEHALL MACHINE GOT INVOLVED. IF A DRONE IS NEAR ANY CRITICAL NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE, IT SHOULD BE TREATED AS A MAJOR INCIDENT

be treated as a major incident. I’m surprised there wasn’t a ministerial Cobra meeting within six hours. From the outset, it was clear that it would cause chaos.

Two people have been arrested in connection with the criminal use of drones which has caused widespread disruption to flights at the Gatwick Airport. Sussex Police said the people were arrested just after 10pm on the night of December 21.

Superintendent James Collis of Sussex Police said: “Our investigations are still ongoing, and our activities at the airport continue to build resilience to detect and mitigate further incursions from drones by deploying a range of tactics.

“We continue to urge the public, passengers and the wider community around Gatwick to be vigilant and support us by contacting us immediately if they believe they have any information that can help us in bringing those responsible to justice.

“The arrests we have made this evening are a result of our determination to keep the public safe from harm, every line of inquiry will remain open to us until we are confident that we have mitigated further threats to the safety of passengers.”

No more details about the suspects were released. Anyone with any information was asked to call and cooperate with the police.

Unfortunately, we are now likely to see ‘copycat’ incidents. And the ease with which a major UK aviation hub was brought to a standstill will not have escaped the attention of terrorist groups who will be wondering, Why they have not tried using drones before? Ministers who are scrambling to protect Britain against

potential “copy-cats” drone attacks fear that the chaos at Gatwick could be replicated at other transport hubs across the country.

Whitehall sources said the authorities were “very concerned” about attempts to repeat the paralysis at Britain’s second busiest airport, which saw around 140,000 passengers delayed, and were taking urgent steps to safeguard others against the threat.

Gavin Williamson, the UK Defence Secretary, who is among ministers liaising with authorities and airport chiefs, told *The Sunday Telegraph*: “The Armed Forces stand ready to assist the civilian authorities whenever they are required.”

This is not just an airport issue, it is a threat issue which needs to be seen in the broadest context. There is little in place to stop these drones from being flown over Downing Street or Buckingham Palace or other highly sensitive areas. Also, they can be used to drop anything from great heights, including explosives. We saw a chaotic response to this incident because drones are a relatively a new threat and no single organisation believes that it is their responsibility to respond to the threat they pose.

When something like this happens, where hundreds of thousands of people are affected, there is a lot of serious economic damage. No one has died as a result but there is a huge amount of impact on the nation. It’s a serious major incident, which was unfortunately not treated as such.

(Richard Walton is Director of Counter Terrorism Global Ltd. Matthew Sparkes is Deputy Head of Technology)



FOREIGN EYE



REMEMBERING THE POWERLESS

Today new ‘Slaughter of the Innocents’ is looming, ominously in the land from which one of the Three Wise Men are said to have travelled: The nation of Yemen. Thousands of children there are threatened with death by starvation and bombing inflicted by the neighboring Saudi Arabia. Bringing urgent news of this kind to the world requires efforts of many brave and devoted, souls. (Washington Post editorial)



KALYANI SHANKAR

As 2018 comes to a close, it will be pertinent to look back and see how the year fared, politically. The year was especially important because it taught a few lessons to political parties of all shades. Until a few months back, no one expressed doubts about Prime Minister Narendra Modi coming back to power in 2019. But now, it looks like the next general election will no more be a cake-walk for the Prime Minister. More importantly, the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) juggernaut was haulted during the year, at least temporarily, giving a jolt to the Modi Government and the BJP in particular.

The saffron party’s defeat began with it losing the battle in Karnataka. Its defeat in the just concluded

Assembly polls in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, that for long remained the ruling party’s bastion, dealt a further blow, making it clear that the Prime Minister was no longer invincible. Besides, results to these three Hindi heartland States also showed that the BJP could not escape anti-incumbency even in its bastions.

Second, post the Congress’ victory in these States, its electoral fortunes are said to be looking up. Congress chief Rahul Gandhi and his party received a major boost after registering impressive wins in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Rahul Gandhi emerged as a leader in his own right. The Grand Old Party has now become the biggest party in relatively five large States — Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. So, the idea of a ‘Congress-mukt bharat’ is no longer a reality. The Congress has also shown that it has strong regional leaders in these States.

The tide began to turn from December 2017, when the BJP won by a narrow majority in Gujarat. Then in

May 2018, the Congress, in its bid to stop the Saffron Party’s surge, surprisingly backed the Janata Dal (Secular) JD(S) to form the Government in Karnataka. The efforts of the Congress proved that coalition could well be the best bet for the Opposition.

The picture of senior Opposition leaders, which included UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, former Prime Minister Deve Gowda, Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and Rashtriya Lok Dal president Ajit Singh among others, joining hands during JDS leader HD Kumaraswamy’s swearing-in ceremony, flaunting a ‘show of unity’, was telling. Since then, Rahul Gandhi and the once-dithering Congress, appear to be more focused and consistent. Post this development, the Opposition has been making efforts to forge a common anti-BJP front for the 2019 polls.

Third, the BJP’s alliances are showing signs of strain. Most of its allies have voiced concerns about the party’s ‘big brother’ attitude. Some even abandoned the NDA fold dur-

ing the year. Most important of them all was the Telugu Desam Party’s (TDS) decision to break alliance with the NDA in March. Bihar’s Rashtriya Lok Samta Party, (RLSP) led by Upendra Kushwaha, was the latest one to quit. What’s worse is that both leaders have now joined the Congress’ ranks. What was also strange was the tie-up between the Congress and the TDP in the Assembly elections in Telangana. The two parties remained bitter rivals ever since the 1980s.

Earlier in year, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-BJP experiment in Jammu & Kashmir, too, collapsed, thus proving that unnatural alliances cannot work in Indian politics for long. The BJP lost the support of Jitan Ram Manjhi’s Hindustani Awam Morcha in Bihar. On top of that, the Shiv Sena has been threatening to quit the alliance in Maharashtra. Pawan Kalyan’s Jana Sena also quit in Andhra Pradesh. The Congress, on the other hand, did the unthinkable by joining hands with the TDP and the JD(S).

Fourth, today, the BJP and its allies

are ruling in seven States. This is indeed a big change from the earlier days when the Congress ruled the ‘seven sisters’ for long. The BJP has proved that it has become a pan national party by spreading its wings in the west, east and central India, besides having roots in Karnataka. The North-East has become Congress-mukt now.

Fifth, agrarian crisis has led to more than 3,00,000 suicides among farmers in the last 20 years. The BJP is in denial mode even after suffering electoral losses in some States. Agrarian crisis is going to be one of the biggest issues in the 2019 polls. The party should have taken note of it when 30,000 farmers came knocking at the doors of the national capital in October-November. Few of their demands included unconditional loan waiver, implementation of the recommendations of the MS Swaminathan Commission, *et al* — a demand ignored by successive Governments. The Opposition as well as the ruling dispensation will have to come up with a new narrative. Farm loan waivers are not an answer to their problems. More

innovative solutions are needed.

Sixth, the issue of demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST), too, needs to be addressed. It is clear that the former hit the people hard. Even two years after demonetisation, the informal and agricultural sectors are suffering. Demonetisation also resulted in job losses and a decrease in labour force participation rate.

Seventh, Mayawati cannot be ignored politically. The year 2019 will see more and more parties running after her for alliance.

Eighth, national parties have not been able to defeat regional satraps, as was proved by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) chief K Chandrababhan Rao. Also, the BJP has not been able to expand its base in the south. The year 2019 will show how much the political parties will address the lessons learnt in 2018. It will be visible in the poll results but both the NDA and the UPA need to move from the existing machinery and build a new narrative to woo the voters.

(The writer is a senior political commentator)

Hospitals in West run by public donations: Jaitley

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hospitals, universities and other institutions in developed countries receive large endowments due to factors like inheritance tax, which is not the case in India, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said on Tuesday.

Analysing the means of funding for India's healthcare and educational bodies as against the global ways, Jaitley said such institutions in the country receive donations from religious groups and CSR programmes. "Most hospitals internationally have some of the largest endowments. Most educational institutes have some of the largest endowments. Those endowments come to the educational institutions from their alumni, who have benefitted from the quality of that institutions.

"Once they are successful in life, they keep supporting the institutions with those endowments. Some IITs have started that experiment now in India. But still it's not very largely prevalent," Jaitley said at an event in AIIMS here.

He said the endowments



received by some major hospitals in the US and Europe run into billions of dollars, which are provided by people and patients who have benefitted from them.

"So I was analysing that why that condition doesn't exist in our country. And one of the reasons I found out was that those societies have very large inheritance tax. Therefore a lot of people in their old age prefer to go for charitable donations in order to get around that inheritance tax. Since we don't have that inheritance tax in India, our charities are not in terms of such endowments," he said.

The finance minister said charities in India depend on social endowments.

"Educational institutions, hospitals are set up by religious groups, caste groups by com-

munities and so on. The social sector in India gets funded more on a community basis, except for this new beginning that we started in the last four years when we started the corporate social responsibility," he noted.

Under the Companies Act, 2013, certain class of profitable entities are required to shell out at least 2 per cent of their three-year annual average net profit towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities.

Inheritance tax is levied on the wealth inherited by the legal heirs of a deceased person. Also known as estate tax, it is levied by governments of most western countries, including the US and the UK.

India too had this tax, but it was abolished by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1985.

RBI to soon release new ₹20 bank note



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will soon introduce a new ₹20 currency note with additional features, according to a document of the central bank.

The central bank has already issued new look currency notes in the denominations of ₹10, ₹50, ₹100, and ₹500, besides introducing ₹200 and ₹2,000 bank notes.

The new look notes are being introduced since November 2016 under Mahatma Gandhi (New) series. These are different in size and design compared to the notes issued previously.

The currency notes, except for banned ₹500 and ₹1,000, issued under old series continue to remain legal tender.

According to the RBI data bank, there were 4.92 billion pieces of ₹20 note in circulation as on March 31, 2016. The number more than doubled to about 10 billion pieces by March 2018.

Govt defers auction of 2 iron ore mines in Odisha



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has deferred the auction of two iron ore mines having reserves of 93.87 million tonnes in Odisha, according to a Mines Ministry report.

The Government has not given any reason for deferring the auction of the mines.

While the Chandiposhi iron ore block in Sundergarh, Odisha, has reserves of 47.07 million tonnes (MT), the Purheibahal block has reserves of 46.80 MT, the report said.

The notice inviting tender for both the mines was released

on February 23.

The ministry is also planning to auction two limestone blocks in Chhattisgarh next month. Both the mines have "no end-use reservation", the ministry said.

The Government so far has auctioned 50 mines, including 23 limestone, 17 iron ore, four gold, two each of manganese and graphite blocks and one each of bauxite and diamond block. From the 50 mineral blocks auctioned so far since 2015, the Government will earn a revenue of ₹1.81 lakh crore over the lease period.

To ensure transparency in

the mineral sector, Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2015 was passed by Parliament in 2015.

In a bid to give a push to the auctions, the Centre had earlier said it was considering granting all approvals, including environmental clearance, to mineral blocks before putting them up for sale.

The Government had earlier said unless issues related to green clearances and land rights are addressed upfront, India may not make much progress in auctioning mineral blocks in the future.

IoT to unlock revenues worth \$11.1 billion by 2022: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a hyper-connected India, Internet of Things (IoT) has the potential to reach an estimated 2 billion connections, unlocking revenues of \$11.1 billion by 2022, according to a new report.

"Fast forward to India 2022, 5 new mobile connections per second are estimated to join the power of internet. Nearly 50 per cent of the households are likely to be connected through fixed broadband," said the joint study by ASSOCHAM-EY.

Connectivity will move beyond people to connect billions of devices, vehicles, household appliances and machines, the study said estimating that in a hyper-connected India, the Internet of Things (IoT) has the potential to reach 2 billion connections, and unlock revenues of \$11.1 billion by 2022.

The joint report highlights that while India holds a huge potential, this promising market currently lags behind the US, China and South Korea in connectivity via optical fibre.

Fiberisation of towers is critical in India, it said, adding that only 25 per cent of telecom towers in India carry optical fibre whereas the corresponding share in the US, China and Korea is about 65-80 per cent.

NTPC for single window registration for MSEs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyed by over 36 per cent of its procurement from micro and small enterprises (MSEs), power giant NTPC has pitched for their universal registration for supplies to all CPSUs in India.

"To promote ease of doing business for MSEs, NTPC Chairman Gurdeep Singh has proposed a single window registration for MSEs across CPSUs," a senior company official told PTI.

As against the government mandate for minimum 25 per cent procurement from MSEs, NTPC has achieved 36 per cent procurement from MSEs in the current fiscal till November 2018, the official added.

NTPC's total procurement reaches around Rs 1,000 crore in a year from 3,500 vendors. Last fiscal, it stood at Rs 1,163 crore.

"NTPC's endeavour is to better its contribution in association with MSEs year on year. Therefore, Singh proposed on different fora that there should a one registration for all MSEs for procurements by CPSUs. But it is the MSME ministry which would take



final call on it," the official added.

Singh reiterated his proposal for single window registration of MSEs at the National Vendor Meet of Micro and Small Enterprises organised by NTPC last week at its Power Management Institute.

As many as 225 MSE representatives (both material suppliers and service providers) attended the meet.

The meet was organised to understand concerns of vendors and get first hand feedback on business dealings with NTPC and support required from the company for increasing the participation of MSEs in its procurement.

NTPC has taken several initiatives for MSEs like MSE Registration Portal (single window registration for 358 reserved items for MSEs), vendor invoice tracking portal/app and NTPC Tenders info app.

Nissan American exec Greg Kelly released on bail in Japan

AP ■ TOKYO

Nissan Motor Co. Executive Greg Kelly was released from detention in Japan on Tuesday after being granted bail over the alleged underreporting of his boss Carlos Ghosn's pay.

The late-night release of Kelly, who is American, followed the Tokyo District Court's approval earlier in the day of a bail request filed last week by his Japanese lawyer.

Kelly was freed on 70 million yen (USD 635,600) bail, ending his detention after more than a month.

Television footage captured the bespectacled Kelly, wearing a beige jacket, slowly walking out of the detention centre and getting into a black car. The vehicle drove past reporters waiting outside of the gate as cameras flashed. Kelly was expected to go straight to a hospital for treatment of his chronic neck problem, according to local media.

Kelly and Ghosn were detained in Tokyo immediately after their November 19 arrest. They are charged with underreporting Ghosn's pay by about 5 billion yen (USD 44 million) in 2011-2015.

Kelly's Japanese lawyer sought bail after the court dismissed prosecutors' request



for more detention for the two to investigate their second allegation of underreporting Ghosn's 4 billion yen (USD 36 million) pay.

Charges for an underreporting allegation in more recent years are pending, and no trial date has been set.

Ghosn will be detained until January 1 or longer since he also faces breach of trust allegations.

Prosecutors say Ghosn and Kelly are flight risks. After his release, Kelly will have to follow rules set by the court, including those regarding his residence and travel, prosecutors have said.

The arrests of Ghosn, who is an auto industry icon, and his right-hand man have triggered international attention and raised concerns about the

Japanese practice of extended detentions.

Nissan has removed Kelly as representative director and Ghosn as chairman, but they are still company board members. The board of Renault SA, the French ally of Nissan, has retained him while naming an interim chair. Mitsubishi took a measure similar to Nissan.

Kelly, 62, joined Nissan North American in 1988 and worked in legal counsel and human resources at the company, and has been a member of the automaker's board since 2012.

His American lawyer, Aubrey Harwell, has said he is innocent and that he only acted according to the law and according to company policy. Ghosn has also denied the allegations and told

lawyers that he is determined to prove his innocence in court, according to Japanese media reports.

The scandal also raised concerns over the Japanese automaker and the future of its alliance with Renault, which in 1999 sent Ghosn to turn around Nissan, then on the verge of bankruptcy. He has since led Nissan's rise to the world's second-largest automaker. Ghosn's downfall is seen by some as a maneuver by others at Nissan to gain power in the alliance.

Kelly's wife, Donna, had made a plea to the Japanese authorities for her husbands' early release in a video message carried Tuesday by Japanese public broadcaster NHK and others. She said that her husband was "framed" by Nissan and that he also should be released to get his neck problem treated.

"Release Greg and allow him to come home and have the surgery he needs," she said. "That is our family's Christmas wish." Kelly reportedly suffers from spinal stenosis, a condition of a narrowing of the spaces in the spine that can cause pain, tingling or numbness.

He had been scheduled to undergo surgery in Nashville in early December, according to media reports.

Women fashion brand Lickouture organises fashion show

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lickouture, the new and enterprising name, with its tagline 'Unapologetically Sexy', organised a fashion in New Delhi.

Malika Arora — Defying time and defining beauty...walked the ramp at Lickouture's inaugural fashion show.

Addressing the event, Maya Gurjar and Meeta Chopra said, "We always had a very clear idea of the kind of clothes that defined us, but finding them in the market was almost impossible. There are so many well established brands in India that provide a beautiful and sensual aesthetic for traditional clothes. However, in order to find a dress or gown for a special



occasion we felt it was necessary to travel outside of the country. In order to find an easier and faster way to address this, we started to make our dresses ourselves. Very soon, we had friends and even strangers asking where they could buy the outfits they saw us wearing — which is how the business actually started. We soon realised we

had tapped into a gap in the Indian market. Suddenly, we were selling our dresses and the demand kept increasing, and so we had to hire more and more staff to keep up! Our only vision from the beginning has been to dress for a woman's personality. We want women to be bold, be sexy, be unapologetically sexy!"

Jivi launches range of feature phones

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Jivi Mobiles launched traditional handsets — feature phones — Banana 6, N444, X03, N4332.

These basic phones are equipped with all the latest features like to name a few whatsapp, facebook, google interphase, good quality of camera and music players too which give the users a feel of modern smart phone.

Jivi Mobiles, a homegrown feature and smart phone brand, has brought old memories back for the feature phone lovers.

Brand also runs moving theatre Caravan in the rural and semi urban areas of the country and showcase movies daily in the villages which do not have availability of big screen.

Speaking about the new range Harsh Vardhan, Marketing Head, Jivi Mobiles, said, "Jivi Mobiles enjoys a great reputation in feature phone segment. In the era of smart-phones market, most of



us want or carry a secondary phone for frequent calls and as well as for privacy. But there is hardly any design level advancement which brands do which makes these phones less attractive. To fill this gap Jivi is bringing back the iconic designs of feature phones in a modern way which are stylish & trendy, colorful, handy, easy to use and have the internet friendly too. We hope that it will bring back the old memories and will attract new customers also. This will also help us to strengthen our reach in the market across the country".

MSME Ministry for setting up governing council to boost exports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The MSME Ministry has proposed to establish a governing council to ensure efficient delivery of all export-related interventions as part of its action plan to boost shipments from micro, small and medium enterprises.

The Ministry has recommended a detailed analysis of various trade agreements, including FTAs and bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, to identify areas of concern for MSMEs in the strategic action plan titled 'Unlocking the Potential of MSME Exports'.

It said a study will be conducted of special economic zones and export promotion zones in the country to reassess their role and objectives as these are an essential constituent of Foreign Trade Policy and it is important to harness their potential.

Moreover, a tech-enabled online portal shall be developed featuring country-wise list of global products and services in

demand and information on how to enter specific foreign markets. It will also have details on loans and credit offered by various financial institutions.

A formal platform may also be created by the ministry to ensure that it is involved in all bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations which have an impact on the enterprises.

The governing council shall be chaired by Secretary, MSME and co-chaired by Development Commissioner in MSME Ministry. It shall comprise senior officials and members from MSME Ministry, Commerce Ministry, MSME Export Promotion Councils, Export Development Authorities, Commodity Boards, etc., the MSME Ministry said.

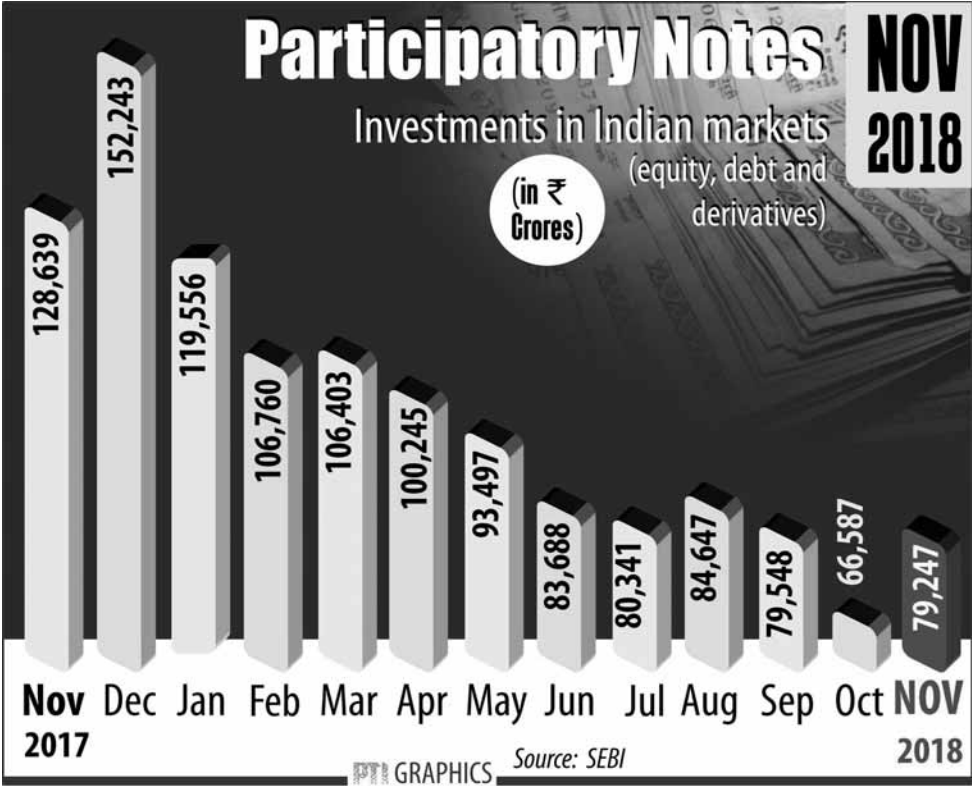


As part of the action plan, National Resource Centre for MSME Exporters will engage with various international agencies including UN organisations to promote procurement from Indian MSMEs and further enhance their capabilities.

A guide or handbook shall also be developed to help the export community to understand the processes involved in export business, access the potential markets etc. The guide shall consists of practical information which will be useful for exporters.

LAGGARDS

Scheme	NAV	1Yr %	UTI LT Adv Fund-III(G)	13.08	-14.64	Index Fund(G)		Tata Ethical Fund(G)	153.71	-6.76	Tata Banking & Financial	16.77	-2.42
HDFC Infrastructure Fund(G)	15.63	-30.84	Franklin Asian Equity Fund(G)	18.88	-14.55	Motilal Oswal Long Term	16.30	-9.98	HDFC Capital Builder	281.09	-6.70	Services Fund-Reg(G)	
Sundaram Small Cap Fund(G)	79.38	-30.10	Principal Global	24.26	-14.46	Equity Fund-Reg(G)		Value Fund(G)			Reliance Banking Fund(G)	260.55	-2.32
Sundaram LT Micro Cap Tax	8.79	-29.79	Opportunities Fund(G)			Principal Personal Tax saver	186.90	-9.98	JM Tax Gain Fund(G)	15.76	-6.33	Invesco India Largecap	26.61
Adv Fund-Sr IV-Reg(G)			Motilal Oswal Midcap	23.79	-14.42	Fund		ICICI Pru Value Fund-3(D)	10.16	-6.29	Fund(G)		-2.06
Sundaram LT Micro Cap Tax	10.32	-29.67	30 Fund-Reg(G)			Franklin India Opportunities	69.16	-9.96	Edelweiss Multi-Cap	13.65	-6.25	DSP US Flexible Equity	21.75
Adv Fund-Sr III-Reg(G)			IDFC Focused Equity	34.82	-14.25	Fund(G)		Fund-Reg(G)			Fund-Reg(G)		-1.96
IDFC Infrastructure-Reg(G)	14.31	-27.20	Fund-Reg(G)			Principal Multi Cap Growth	136.14	-9.91	IDFC Core Equity Fund-Reg(G)	43.50	-6.14	Reliance Large Cap Fund(G)	32.67
Aditya Birla SL Emerging	12.59	-25.85	Invesco India Multicap Fund(G)	45.55	-14.01	Fund(G)		Tata Large & Mid Cap Fund(G)	190.12	-6.10	HDFC Top 100 Fund(G)	455.54	-1.72
Leaders Fund-7-Reg(G)			Tata Mid Cap Growth Fund(G)	130.39	-14.00	ICICI Pru Exports & Services	53.61	-9.88	Aditya Birla SL Tax Relief '96(G)	30.27	-6.02	Invesco India Growth Opp	32.18
Sundaram LT Micro Cap Tax	8.63	-25.80	IDFC Sterling Value Fund-Reg(G)	50.14	-13.97	Fund(G)		Mirae Asset Emerging	49.51	-5.99	Fund(G)		-1.71
Adv Fund-Sr V-Reg(G)			Sundaram Select Small	13.29	-13.93	SBI Tax Advantage Fund-III-Reg(G)	22.53	-9.70	Bluechip-Reg(G)			Mirae Asset India Equity	47.44
SBI PSU Fund-Reg(G)	9.69	-25.72	Cap Series-III-Reg(G)			Franklin India Focused	37.59	-9.66	Principal Dividend Yield Fund(G)	51.21	-5.98	Fund-Reg(G)	
Aditya Birla SL Emerging	14.43	-25.70	L&T Emerging Businesses	24.60	-13.80	Equity Fund(G)		Franklin India Equity	77.02	-5.90	UTI Mastershare-Reg(G)	114.64	-1.34
Leaders Fund-4-Reg(G)			Fund-Reg(G)			Tata India Tax Savings Fund-Reg(G)	16.66	-9.57	Advantage Fund(G)			ICICI Pru Multicap Fund(G)	277.11
Aditya Birla SL Emerging	13.89	-25.40	Templeton India Value Fund(G)	240.22	-13.64	DSP World Gold Fund-Reg(G)	10.61	-9.51	Sundaram Value Fund-II-Reg(G)	15.23	-5.88	Parag Parikh Long Term	22.99
Leaders Fund-3-Reg(G)			Sundaram Select Small	13.33	-13.31	SBI Magnum	135.25	-9.46	Edelweiss Emerging Markets	11.27	-5.85	Equity Fund-Reg(G)	
Sundaram Select Micro	13.09	-25.28	Cap Series-IV-Reg(G)			TaxGain'93-Reg(G)		Opp Eq. Offshore Fund-Reg(G)			DSP Global Allocation Fund-Reg(G)	11.32	-1.26
Cap-Series X-Reg(G)			Aditya Birla SL Mfg. Equity	13.16	-13.25	Motilal Oswal Multicap	24.72	-9.31	ICICI Pru Value Fund-8(D)	10.19	-5.83	ICICI Pru India Recovery	16.92
DSP Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	52.61	-25.25	Fund-Reg(G)			35 Fund-Reg(G)		Aditya Birla SL Focused	55.48	-5.78	Fund-4(G)		-1.23
ICICI Pru Smallcap Fund(G)	23.10	-23.96	Reliance Focused Equity	43.88	-13.04	ICICI Pru Value Fund-2(D)	10.46	-9.30	Equity Fund(G)			UTI Dividend Yield Fund-Reg(G)	62.42
Aditya Birla SL Small Cap	33.91	-23.76	Fund(G)			Templeton India Equity	43.50	-9.24	HDFC Growth Opp Fund-Reg(G)	107.34	-5.78	UTI MNC Fund-Reg(G)	197.07
Fund(G)			ICICI Pru Dividend Yield	16.15	-13.03	Income Fund(G)		IDFC Large Cap Fund-Reg(G)	30.20	-5.77	Sundaram Large and Mid	32.67	-0.96
Aditya Birla SL Pure Value	50.95	-23.64	Equity Fund(G)			Reliance Value Fund(G)	70.00	-9.19	ICICI Pru Value Fund-15(G)	10.30	-5.76	Cap Fund(G)	
Fund(G)								Sundaram LT Tax Adv	13.96	-5.76	Baroda Banking & Fin	20.81	-0.95
Aditya Birla SL Infrastructure	30.35	-23.38						Fund-Sr II-Reg(G)			Serv Fund(G)		
Fund(G)								SBI BlueChip Fund-Reg(G)	36.60	-5.72	ICICI Pru Global Stable	13.79	-0.93
Sundaram Infra Advantage	30.18	-23.28						Motilal Oswal Focused 25	20.40	-5.72	Equity Fund(G)		
Fund(G)								Fund-Reg(G)			Canara Rob Equity Diver	123.84	-0.89
Reliance Power & Infra Fund(G)	95.32	-21.94						Sundaram Fin Serv Opp Fund(G)	37.62	-5.66	Fund-Reg(G)		
Reliance Tax Saver (ELSS)	53.76	-21.42						Sundaram Global Advt(G)	15.34	-5.60	ICICI Pru LT Equity Fund	355.36	-0.71
Fund(G)								Kotak Tax Saver Scheme(G)	40.72	-5.59	(Tax Saving)(G)		
Canara Rob Infrastructure	42.50	-21.34						BNP Paribas Large Cap Fund(G)	81.70	-5.52	Sundaram Select Focus(G)	165.32	-0.45
Fund-Reg(G)								HDFC Equity Fund(G)	617.34	-5.51	DHFL Pramerica Global	15.36	-0.13
SBI Small Cap Fund-Reg(G)	49.46	-21.21						Aditya Birla SL Equity Fund(G)	689.92	-5.33	Equity Opp Fund(G)		
Kotak Infra & Eco Reform	18.78	-20.76						L&T Equity Fund-Reg(G)	78.56	-5.32	DHFL Pramerica Large	11.79	-0.05
Fund(G)								Baroda Large Cap Fund(G)	13.40	-5.30	Cap Fund-2-Reg(G)		
UTI Transportation & Logistics	101.75	-19.83						Sundaram LT Tax Adv	12.97	-5.22	Canara Rob Consumer	36.92	-0.03
Fund-Reg(G)								Fund-Sr I-Reg(G)			Trends Fund-Reg(G)		
SBI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	13.95	-19.82						ICICI Pru R.I.G.H.T Fund(G)	41.15	-5.16	Edelweiss Large Cap Fund(G)	33.12	0.21
Invesco India PSU Equity	16.45	-19.28						Franklin India Equity Fund(G)	564.06	-5.11	JM Large Cap Fund(G)	64.49	0.28
Fund(G)								Reliance Quant Fund(G)	24.07	-5.10	ICICI Pru Business Cycle	14.16	0.35
SBI LT Advantage	12.35	-19.07						DHFL Pramerica Large Cap	153.79	-5.00	Fund-2(G)		
Fund-I-Reg(G)								Fund(G)			Axis Focused 25 Fund(G)	26.42	0.38
SBI Magnum Comma Fund-Reg(G)	33.71	-18.87						ICICI Pru Value Discovery	139.08	-4.97	Kotak India EQ Contra	49.06	0.55
DSP India T.I.G.E.R Fund-Reg(G)	84.52	-18.85						Fund(G)			Fund(G)		
BNP Paribas Mid Cap Fund(G)	30.72	-18.72						Principal Nifty 100 Equal	69.04	-4.96	Mirae Asset Great	33.69	0.77
L&T Business Cycle Fund-Reg(G)	14.52	-18.59						Weight Fund(G)			Consumer Fund-Reg(G)		
Sundaram Select Micro	30.73	-18.48						Reliance Capital Builder	12.34	-4.96	Franklin India Feeder-Franklin	24.60	0.79
Cap-Series I-Reg(G)								Fund-II-B(G)			U.S. Opportunities Fund(G)		
Reliance Vision Fund(G)	505.43	-18.39						IDBI Diversified Equity Fund(G)	20.61	-4.85	Canara Rob Equity Tax	60.53	0.98
Tata Infrastructure Tax	22.85	-18.20						Tata Large Cap Fund(G)	203.05	-4.82	Saver Fund-Reg(G)		
Saving Fund(G)								SBI Focused Equity Fund-Reg(G)	130.09	-4.77	IDBI Nifty Index Fund(G)	19.63	1.29
SBI LT Advantage Fund-II-Reg(G)	12.66	-18.20						Aditya Birla SL MNC Fund(G)	739.82	-4.76	SBI Magnum Equity ESG	97.21	1.41
Sundaram Select Micro	30.72	-18.10						Kotak US Equity Fund(G)	14.10	-4.75	Fund-Reg(G)		
Cap-Series II-Reg(G)								Franklin India Bluechip	440.61	-4.70	ICICI Pru US Bluechip	23.24	1.44
UTI LT Adv Fund-IV(G)	10.10	-18.04						Fund(G)			Equity Fund(G)		
L&T Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	15.50	-18.03						Aditya Birla SL Banking &	26.88	-4.68	Canara Rob Bluechip	23.04	1.54
SBI Magnum MidCap Fund-Reg(G)	70.26	-18.01						Financial Services Fund-Reg(G)			Equity Fund-Reg(G)		
Franklin India Smaller	51.77	-17.91						Edelweiss Large & Mid Cap	29.27	-4.66	Aditya Birla SL Index Fund(G)	104.44	1.59
Cos Fund(G)								Fund-Reg(G)			Franklin India Index	84.34	1.63
Kotak Small Cap Fund(G)	68.38	-17.85						DSP Top 100 Equity Fund-Reg(G)	193.26	-4.52	Fund-NSE Nifty(G)		
Tata Infrastructure Fund(G)	51.76	-17.45						Aditya Birla SL Frontline	212.25	-4.31	Axis Long Term Equity Fund(G)	42.31	1.72
Sundaram Select Micro	30.41	-17.43						Equity Fund(G)			ICICI Pru Nifty Index Fund(G)	102.64	1.82
Cap-Series III-Reg(G)								Franklin India Taxshield(G)	539.96	-4.14	Reliance Index Fund -	17.81	1.93
SBI LT Advantage	12.18	-17.18						Invesco India Contra Fund(G)	45.40	-4.08	Nifty Plan(G)		
Fund-III-Reg(G)								Reliance Japan Equity Fund(G)	11.58	-3.86	SBI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	91.31	2.24
Sundaram Select Micro	28.94	-17.17						Kotak Bluechip Fund(G)	217.13	-3.82	Aditya Birla SL Intl. Equity	18.60	2.25
Cap-Series IV-Reg(G)								ICICI Pru Focused Equity	28.53	-3.71	Fund-A(G)		
Reliance Small Cap Fund(G)	39.36	-17.05						Fund(G)			Axis Midcap Fund(G)	34.99	2.37
Edelweiss Gr China Equity	22.33	-16.97						L&T India Large Cap Fund-Reg(G)	25.13	-3.54	Tata Index Fund-Nifty Plan(G)	64.18	2.55
Off-Shore Fund-Reg(G)								Reliance Multi Cap Fund(G)	94.26	-3.48	UTI Nifty Index Fund-Reg(G)	69.23	2.69
UTI Infrastructure Fund-Reg(G)	49.10	-16.97						ICICI Pru Growth Fund-1(DP)	10.52	-3.44	HDFC Index Fund-NIFTY	96.57	2.74
Invesco India Infrastructure	16.15	-16.84						Sundaram World Brand	12.70	-3.28	50 Plan(G)		
Fund(G)								Fund-Sr III-Reg(G)			Reliance US Equity Opp	12.70	2.78
Aditya Birla SL Midcap Fund(G)	279.93	-16.77						Sundaram World Brand	12.55	-3.26	Fund(G)		
Sundaram Mid Cap Fund(G)	453.88	-16.39						Fund-Sr II-Reg(G)			UTI Equity Fund-Reg(G)	133.94	2.80
DHFL Pramerica Midcap	17.37	-16.37						IDBI Equity Advantage	26.21	-3.18	IDFC Nifty Fund-Reg(G)	21.96	2.90
Opp Fund-Reg(G)								Fund-Reg(G)			Reliance Pharma Fund(G)	147.14	3.36
Tata Resources & Energy	13.41	-16.19						SBI Consumption Opp	114.45	-3.08	Aditya Birla SL Global Real	17.80	3.54
Fund-Reg(G)								Fund-Reg(G)			Estate Fund(G)		
HDFC Focused 30 Fund(G)	73.73	-16.05						UTI Value Opp Fund-Reg(G)	57.58	-3.06	ICICI Pru Growth Fund-2(DP)	11.38	3.83
SBI Contra Fund-Reg(G)	102.93	-15.96						Aditya Birla SL India	78.56	-2.94	Reliance Index Fund -	17.45	4.75
Edelweiss Mid Cap	25.32	-15.95						GenNext Fund(G)			Sensex Plan(G)		
Fund-Reg(G)								Mirae Asset Tax Saver Fund-Reg(G)	16.44	-2.93	Axis Bluechip Fund(G)	26.63	5.17
IDBI Small Cap Fund(G)	9.33	-15.95						UTI India LifeStyle Fund-Reg(G)	25.39	-2.80	HDFC Index Fund-Sensex(G)	313.25	5.25
Aditya Birla SL Dividend	154.92	-15.65						ICICI Pru Banking & Fin	59.68	-2.80	Tata Index Fund-Sensex	87.09	5.31
Yield Fund(G)								Serv Fund(G)			Plan(G)		
UTI LT Adv Fund-V(G)	9.37	-15.57						Invesco India Financial	51.57	-2.79	Axis Multicap Fund-Reg(G)	10.72	5.51
UTI Focussed Equity	12.70	-15.42						Services Fund(G)			ICICI Pru FMCG Fund(G)	233.11	5.58
Fund-I(G)								Principal Focused Multicap	60.61	-2.78	SBI Banking & Financial	16.40	6.83
UTI Mid Cap Fund-Reg(G)	98.55	-15.40						Fund(G)			Services Fund-Reg(G)		
Baroda Mid-cap Fund(G)	8.67	-15.33						ICICI Pru Value Fund-5(G)	14.87	-2.68	Franklin India Technology	145.62	11.90
IDBI Midcap Fund(G)	10.46	-15.30						Invesco India Tax Plan(G)	48.13	-2.67	Fund(G)		
ICICI Pru Infrastructure Fund(G)	48.21	-15.26						Kotak Standard Multicap	32.75	-2.67	Aditya Birla SL Digital India	48.94	14.86
DSP Natural Res & New	31.18	-15.20						Fund(G)			Fund(G)		
Energy Fund-Reg(G)								ICICI Pru Bluechip Fund(G)	39.79	-2.59	ICICI Pru Technology Fund(G)	55.41	18.09
Aditya Birla SL Equity	382.32	-15.05						Tata India Consumer Fund-Reg(G)	17.46	-2.54	SBI Technology Opp	59.05	18.25
Advantage Fund(G)								Tata India Pharma &	8.58	-2.47	Fund-Reg(G)		
Baroda ELSS 96(G)	41.84	-14.98						Healthcare Fund-Reg(G)			Tata Digital India Fund-Reg(G)	13.90	26.09



43 killed in Kabul Govt compound attack

AFP ■ KABUL

An hours-long gun and suicide attack on a Kabul government compound killed at least 43 people, the health ministry said on Tuesday, making it one of the deadliest assaults on the Afghan capital this year.

No militant group has claimed responsibility for the raid, which caps a bloody year for Afghanistan as long-suffering civilians and security forces are slaughtered in record numbers.

Another 10 people were wounded in Monday's massacre on a site where the Ministry of Public Works and an office that handles pensions and benefits for war veterans are located, spokesman Waheed Majroh said.

Gunmen stormed the compound mid-afternoon after detonating a car bomb at the entrance, sending terrified government workers running for their lives. Some jumped from windows several floors high to escape the militants.

Hundreds more were trapped inside buildings for hours as heavily armed security forces swarmed the area, engaging the attackers in a fierce gun battle punctuated by multiple explosions.

At least four militants, including the suicide bomber, were killed and more than 350 people freed, officials said. Most of the dead and wounded were civilians, who have borne the brunt of the 17-year war.

It was the deadliest assault in the Afghan capital since a suicide bomber blew himself up in the middle of a religious



Injured men receive treatment at a hospital after Monday's Christmas Eve attack in Kabul, Afghanistan on Tuesday

gathering last month, killing at least 55 people.

President Ashraf Ghani, whose government has been skewered over its security failures, said "terrorists attack civilian targets to hide their defeat on the battleground".

Afghanistan's de facto prime minister Abdullah Abdullah also sounded a defiant note as he blamed the Taliban for the attack.

"Every attack they carry out against our people, our resolve is further strengthened to eliminate them," he said.

But their statements belie the grim reality on the battlefield where the Taliban have the upper hand.

Afghanistan's largest militant group has made significant territorial gains this year as its fighters inflict record casualties on government forces.

The raid followed a tumultuous few days in Afghanistan where officials are reeling from US President Donald Trump's plan to slash troop numbers, which many fear could harm efforts to end the conflict with

the Taliban.

It also comes after a major security shake-up in Kabul that has placed staunch anti-Taliban and Pakistan veterans in charge of the police and military. While there has been no official announcement of a US drawdown, the mere suggestion of the United States reducing its military presence has rattled the Afghan capital and potentially undermined peace efforts.

General Scott Miller, the top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, said Sunday he had not received orders to pull forces out of the country.

Trump's decision apparently came Tuesday as US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad met with the Taliban in Abu Dhabi, part of efforts to bring the militants to the negotiating table with Kabul.

Many Afghans are worried that Ghani's fragile unity government would collapse if US troops pulled out, enabling the Taliban to sweep back into power and potentially sparking another bloody civil war.

Attackers hit Libya foreign ministry, killing at least 3

AFP ■ TRIPOLI

Suicide attackers stormed the Libyan foreign ministry in the capital Tripoli on Tuesday, killing at least three people including a senior civil servant, the authorities said.

Ten other people were wounded in what the foreign ministry said was a suicide attack carried out by "terrorists".

A car bomb exploded near the ministry, prompting security forces to rush to the scene, said special forces spokesman Tarak al-Dawass, accusing the Islamic State jihadist group (IS) of responsibility.

A suicide bomber then blew himself up on the second floor of the building while a second attacker died when the suitcase he was carrying exploded, he said.

A third assailant, who was unarmed and wearing a bul-

letproof vest, was killed by security forces outside, Dawass added.

At least three people were killed and 10 wounded, according to the health ministry.

A civil servant who headed a department in the foreign ministry was among the dead, security sources said.

Plumes of smoke were seen rising from the building as ambulances, paramedics and security forces gathered outside.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Torn apart by power struggles and undermined by chronic insecurity, Libya has become a haven for jihadists since the ouster and killing of Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

Two competing administrations, rival militias, tribes and jihadists have been competing for control of territory and the country's vast oil wealth.

IS took advantage of the chaos to gain a foothold in the coastal city of Sirte in 2015.

Forces loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) regained control of the city in December 2016 after eight months of deadly fighting.

Since then, some jihadists have returned to the desert in an attempt to regroup and reorganise.

In September, IS claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on the headquarters of Libya's National Oil Company in the heart of Tripoli which left two dead and 10 wounded.

Four months earlier, it claimed an attack on the electoral commission's headquarters which left 14 dead.

In April, the GNA launched an operation to track down IS fighters operating in areas of western Libya under its control.

Last month IS claimed responsibility for an attack on militia forces in southeastern Libya in which at least nine people were killed.

The US military has regularly carried out strikes on jihadists in Libya, particularly south of Sirte.

The GNA was set up under a 2015 UN-brokered deal, but a rival administration based in the country's east aligned with military strongman Khalifa Haftar refuses to recognise its authority.

Rival Libyan leaders had agreed to a Paris-brokered deal in May to hold a nationwide election by the end of the year. But instability, territorial disputes and divisions have delayed plans for elections.

Two days of meetings last month in Italy laid bare deep divisions between key players in the crisis with some delegates refusing to sit side by side.

GLOBE TROTTER

27 DEAD AFTER BUS, TRUCK COLLIDE IN CONGO

Kinshasa (Congo): A Congolese health official says at least 27 people are dead after a bus and a truck collided west of the Capital, Kinshasa. Dr Sylvain Yuma with the health ministry says the accident occurred overnight and that excessive speed was to blame.

13 NEPALESE WOMEN RESCUED FROM INDIA

Kathmandu: At least 13 Nepalese women, who were allegedly being trafficked on the pretext of jobs, were rescued from hotels in India by an NGO and have been brought back to the country. Maiti India, an NGO has brought eight women from Bangalore and five from Ahmedabad to Kathmandu on Tuesday. Balkrishna Pandey, a representative of the organisation, said.

Pak lawyer to return home to defend Christian woman

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani lawyer who successfully fought a legal battle to acquit a Christian woman in a high-profile blasphemy case says he will return home to represent her whenever the country's Supreme Court takes up a review petition against her.

Saiful Malook, who fled to Netherlands following threats to him from radical Islamists after the October 21 acquittal of Asia Bibi, said Tuesday that no date has been set by the court to hear the petition.

The announcement by Malook came as the 54-year-old mother of five celebrated Christmas amid security despite being freed.

Bibi had been on death row since 2010 on charges of insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

The radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik political party held violent nationwide protests demanding her public execution after her release.

10,500 arrests ahead of B'desh poll: Opposition

AFP ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh police have arrested more than 10,500 opposition activists in a crackdown ahead of elections this week, opposition parties said on Tuesday.

The figures were released after the United States urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government to do more to ensure free polls on Sunday when she is aiming to win a record fourth term.

Opposition parties said the arrests since the election was called on November 8 were intended to create a "climate of fear".

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), whose leader Khaleda Zia is serving a 17-year jail term, said 7,021 of its activists had been detained.

Its Islamist ally, Jamaat-e-Islami, said more than 3,500 followers were in custody. Jamaat-e-Islami is banned from contesting elections but has candi-

dates taking part as individuals with the BNP.

"Every day 80 to 90 of our activists have been arrested nationwide. These arrests have created a climate of fear," Jamaat secretary general Shafiqur Rahman told AFP.

Police spokesman Sohail Rana did not confirm any figure for arrests, but said they did not make "unnecessary arrests" without warrants.

"We never target any individual unless they break the law. These people have specific warrants against them," he told AFP.

Rizvi Ahmed, a BNP spokesman, said the charges laid against party activists were "fictitious" and "ghost" cases, aiming for "a lopsided election" in favour of Hasina.

Hasina and Zia have been political foes since the introduction of democracy in 1991. They have traditionally alternated in power but Hasina's current rule has lasted since 2009 and Zia's jail term this year

prevented her from taking part in the election. The BNP and its allies have also accused police and ruling Awami League party activists of attacking their activists and candidates.

The BNP had hoped the deployment of 30,000 troops on Monday would improve security across the Muslim-majority country of 165 million.

"The Awami League activists along with the law enforcing agencies attacked our candidates at 28 constituencies (in the last 24 hours).

Nineteen of our candidates and over 100 activists were injured in the attack," Ahmed told a press briefing.

He said that since the election campaign started at least 152 BNP candidates were attacked and hundreds of activists were injured in clashes. Police spokesman Rana denied police had attacked any opposition activists, acknowledging only that "isolated incidents" were possible.

Sharif shifted to Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif was shifted to the Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore amid tight security on Tuesday, a day after an anti-corruption court sentenced him to seven years in prison in a graft case linked to the high-profile Panama Papers scandal.

Sharif, 69, was sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills graft case but was acquitted in the Flagship Investments case by the Accountability Court in Islamabad on Monday.

The three-time former prime minister, who was taken into custody by police following the court judgement, was taken to Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Monday.

Upon reaching Adiala jail, jail doctors carried out a medical examination of the PML-N leader and found him physically fit.

On Tuesday morning, Sharif was taken to Nur Khan Air Base amid tight security. Sharif was then flown to Lahore, where he was shifted to

the Kot Lakhpat jail. Tight security had been put in place around the jail and Rangers were deployed at the police checkpoints established on the route to the prison.

Shortly after his conviction in the National Accountability Court's Al-Azizia corruption case Monday, Sharif's counsel requested court to shift him to Lahore jail instead of Adiala since the veteran leader is a heart patient and his personal physicians and family members are stationed in Lahore. The request was granted.

The Punjab province government approved the provision of "better class" jail facilities for Sharif. The better class prisoners are provided with a mattress, a study table and chair in addition to a TV set and newspaper.

A large number of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supporters gathered outside the jail to have a glimpse of their Quaid (supreme) leader. However, due to high security they were not allowed to come close to the prison. Police also baton charged the PML-N workers

for trying to reach the jail.

According to the jail administration, Sharif is provided with "better class" facilities.

Sharif has been shifted to the barrack where former president Asif Ali Zardari was also kept in corruption cases in 1990s.

Upon reaching Kot Lakhpat jail, doctors carried out a medical examination of Sharif and found him physically fit.

Tuesday also marks Sharif's 69th birthday. The PML-N's provincial secretariats have planned celebrations, along with Christmas celebrations.

The party members also cut a cake in front of the Kot Lakhpat jail.

Commenting on the verdict on Monday, Sharif said his conscience was clear as he was never involved in any kind of corruption.

"I was never involved in misuse of authority and corruption so my conscience is at peace," he said.

Sharif's lawyers said the accountability court's verdict will be challenged in the

troops in a controversial decision, arguing that the Islamic State has been defeated.

"May the international community work decisively for a political solution... So that the Syrian people, especially all those who were forced to leave their own lands and seek refuge elsewhere, can return to live in peace in their own country," he said.

He also said he hoped for renewed peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians "that can put an end to a conflict that for over 70 years has rent the land chosen by the Lord to show his face of love."

Russian envoy: Bad relations with US unlikely to improve

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Russia's UN Ambassador says Relations between Moscow and Washington are "practically non-existent," which he says is bad not only for both countries but for the world — and he sees little prospect for improvement anytime soon.

Vassily Nebenzia said in a recent wide-ranging interview with a small group of journalists that the Trump administration should offer some incentives to North Korea to move forward toward denuclearization, saying the situation "is stalemated at the moment."

Russia and China have backed an easing of sanctions to spur momentum, but the U.S. Insists that North Korea must first make major steps toward eliminating its nuclear program. "I'm concerned that it doesn't roll back" to the 2017 era of increasing nuclear and missile tests and escalating rhetoric, Nebenzia said.

"I think that the US Hopefully is starting to understand that the situation

may go (back)."

As for Iran, Nebenzia said he worries about U.S. Strategy if its sanctions don't bring about the changes in behaviour the Trump administration wants. He sees "a danger if they go to the limits."

"I'm worried if anybody wants to go to war with Iran, and that is the enigma and the question — what is the strategy about Iran?" Nebenzia asked.

He said the U.S. And Russia need to talk about global issues including strategic stability, terrorism, narcotics and regional conflicts, and he thinks President Donald Trump "understands pretty well that it's better to cooperate."

But he said because Russia has become a major issue in U.S. Domestic policies — accused of hacking and interfering in the 2016 U.S. Elections which is being investigated by special counsel Robert Mueller — "and given the vulnerabilities that drift around this administration, I don't see too bright prospects for improving (relations) any time soon."

Turkey 'determined' to drive out Syrian Kurdish forces

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Turkey said Tuesday it is working with the United States to coordinate the withdrawal of American forces but remains "determined" to clear US-allied Kurdish fighters from northeastern Syria.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters that "if Turkey says it will enter, it will," in comments carried by private DHA news agency.

For weeks, Turkey has been threatening to launch a new offensive against the Kurdish fighters, who partnered with the US to drive the Islamic State group out of much of northern and eastern Syria.

Ankara views the Kurdish forces as terrorists because of their links to an insurgent group inside Turkey.

President Donald Trump announced the planned withdrawal of US forces after a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan earlier this month.

The minister also said Ankara and Washington have agreed to complete a roadmap on the northern Syrian town of

Manbij until the US withdraws. Under the June deal, Kurdish forces would leave Manbij, in the western Euphrates valley, but delays have infuriated Turkey.

"It is crucial that the US doesn't appear as not having kept its promises," Cavusoglu said.

He argued that Turkey has the "strength to neutralize" IS on its own and criticised France, which has promised to stay in Syria despite the US decision.

Cavusoglu warned it would not benefit France if it was staying in Syria to protect the YPG, the main Kurdish militia in Syria.

Erdogan, speaking to reporters in Ankara, said Turkey was taking into account Trump's announcement on Syria rather than French President Emmanuel Macron's decision.

The future of the international coalition against IS, which includes Turkey, the US and France, remains unclear.

The Turkish president also announced that a delegation was heading to Moscow and that he would meet with

Russian President Vladimir Putin. Turkey has been negotiating on behalf of the Syrian opposition with Russia and Iran, which support the Syrian government, as part of efforts to end the nearly 8-year civil war.

A top Russian official says that Moscow expects that a hotline between Russia and the US military will be kept in place despite the impending US withdrawal from Syria.

Trump announced last week that the US will withdraw all of its 2,000 forces in Syria, a move that will leave control of the oil-rich eastern third of Syria up for grabs.

Russia launched its military operation in Syria in 2015 to back its longtime ally President Bashar Assad.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryakov said Tuesday in an interview with the RIA Novosti news agency that it would be a "big mistake" to dismantle a hotline that Russia and the US use to prevent potential clashes in Syria pending the US withdrawal and said he sees no indications the Americans would do that.

Britain bans puppy and kitten sales by pet shops

AFP ■ LONDON

Britain is forbidding puppies and kittens from being sold by pet shops in a bid to crack down on animal exploitation and abuse.

The government said it will roll out the legislation next year after holding public consultations that showed 95-percent support for the ban.

"This will mean that anyone looking to buy or adopt a puppy or kitten under six months must either deal directly with the breeder or with an animal re-homing centre," the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said on Sunday as part of its Christmas animal welfare push.

The measure is commonly called Lucy's Law in honour of a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel who was rescued from a puppy farm in Wales in 2013.

She had spent most of her life in a cage and was no longer able to breed because her hips had fused together from lack of movement.

An icon of Christmas cheer went dark, some parks close

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The lights were not twinkling. The toy trains were not whirring. Even the nearby bathrooms were locked.

The national Christmas tree, symbol of a country's seasonal cheer, instead stood as an icon of a government in paralysis, as the partial shutdown stretched into the holiday with an array of federal services frozen, some 800,000 public servants either idled or about to be and the disruption to the broader public bound to grow when the quiet spell ends later this week.

Already facilities at many national parks were shuttered, if the parks were accessible at all, and thousands of federal buildings were to remain closed when the work week resumed unless President Donald Trump and members of Congress quickly break through a budget impasse that the White House said could drag on into 2019.

Under cloudy skies in a brisk wind on the third day of the shutdown, the capital put on little holiday wonder for visitors like Greg Forcherio of

Columbia, Maryland, a government contractor with no office to work in after the holidays as long as federal buildings stayed closed.

He, his wife and their toddler on Monday came to see the giant, glittering spruce tree brought from Colorado to serve as the national Christmas tree, normally a focal point for Washington holiday visitors.

But a locked chain-link fence blocked access to the site and the nearby White House visitor's center and its bathrooms were closed, with a hand-scrawled sign directing visitors to portable toilets, which also were chained shut. "Kind of annoying when you've got young children," Forcherio said.

Access to the site was restored later Monday and finally, as night fell on Christmas Eve, the lights returned.

The government had announced a day earlier that it would be sealed off because of the shutdown and because repairs had slowed after an episode of vandalism on the tree before the weekend. It reopened with money from the National Park Foundation, a charity.

A statement made 2,500 years ago stands relevant even today. More so, for the start-up ecosystem that goes hand in hand with dynamism, agility, and innovation. With every year that passes, it witnesses the influx of cutting-edge technologies and ingenious approaches that solve long-standing market challenges. And in the due process, change the market entirely. However, it is important to note that this change is primarily driven by the building blocks of the startup ecosystem, for example: The industry professionals. If you are one of them, or are planning to become one, here are some of the hiring trends of 2018 that you surely must know:

■Blockchain eco-system
Blockchain technology has proven itself to be a game-changer for an array of industry applications. Just before 2018, India revealed its own plan to develop a blockchain network called IndiaChain which will be interlinked with IndiaStack and help in reducing frauds, speed up contract enforcement, increase transparency, and



HIRING TRENDS 2018

MANISH KHERA lists five hiring trends in the start-up eco-system that dominated this year

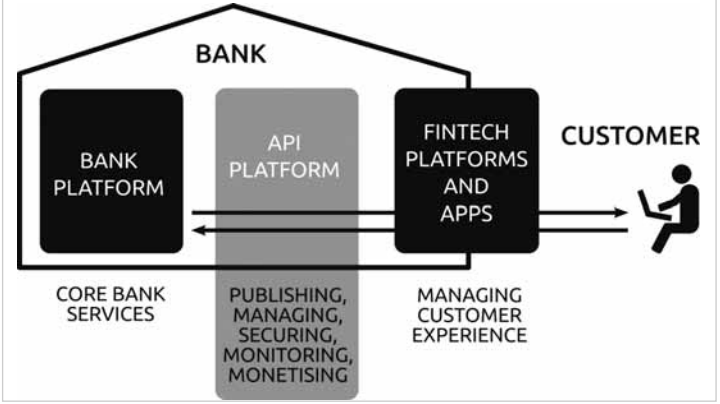
boost economy. A report suggests that India can add \$5 billion to its economy within five years just by implementing blockchain. So, blockchain was one of the prime focus areas amongst startups throughout 2018 and will continue to remain the same for the coming few years.



■Artificial Intelligence
Another area of focus during this year has been Artificial Intelligence (AI). Startups are typically known to have a very lean team which has to manage across-the-board operations. AI is now enabling them to streamline these operations through process automation while also extending deeper insights within their area of deployment. The technology, at the same time, also eliminates human errors, omissions, and negligence. Given these advantages, the adoption of technology, and so, the recruitment of related talents, was quite high during 2018.

■Open banking
The ongoing digitisation drive in India is truly transforming the regular Indian lifestyle. Now, people from all walks of life are looking towards digital services to meet their everyday needs including banking. The Indian regulatory has also been very supportive of the change and is readily promoting its open banking infrastructure. With it, banks are also joining forces with fintech startups to lever-

THE INDIAN REGULATORY HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF THE CHANGE & IS PROMOTING ITS OPEN BANKING INFRASTRUCTURE. WITH IT, BANKS ARE JOINING FORCES WITH FINTECH START-UPS TO LEVERAGE THEIR TRAILBLAZING, TECH-DRIVEN APPROACHES IN A RANGE OF APPLICATIONS



age their trailblazing, tech-driven approaches in a range of applications. This was the main reason why the demand for talent within the fintech domain was specifically high.

■Cybersecurity
Digital technologies, though

adding tangible value to the broader ecosystem, also come with their own downsides. Cyber attacks have been mounting on India for quite some time now — which grew from 49,000 in 2015 to 50,000 in 2016 and 53,000 in 2017 (according to CERT-In) — and were expected to reach 58,300 in

2018. Start-ups, as they are mostly based on digital technologies, have adopted a prudential approach and started recruiting cyber security talent apart from leveraging MSPs (Managed Service Providers). Cyber security challenges are also being addressed right from the ground up with startups adopting DevSecOps instead of the typical DevOps.

■Information Technology
At present, India is facing acute skill shortage with more than 140,000 jobs being vacant within the IT industry. This is despite fresh graduates constantly entering the job market every year. The situation is expected to further worsen in the future as more than 1.4 million new IT jobs will be created by 2027 (Cisco and IDC report). Forward-looking start-ups are now trying to tackle the situation by collaborating with different educational institutions. They are helping shape the curriculum of various institutions as per market-facing applications and future needs. It is also enabling them to recruit candidates who can deliver and solve market challenges.

These have been some of the most prominent trends that were witnessed during 2018. It will be interesting to see how the grand scheme of things change in the year about to come. But now, it's time to prepare for its arrival and revel in festivities!

The writer is CEO, Happy Loans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A study on the Indian AI industry by Great Learning indicates that there are over 4000 positions related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India that remain vacant due to shortage of qualified talent at the mid and senior levels. This is despite the industry growing by close to 30 per cent in the last one year to \$230 million in size.

These opportunities do not include the slew of new jobs that are advertised every month but refers to opportunities that have been vacant for a period of 12 months. The key reason behind this is the massive shortage of AI talent at the middle and top level. Out of current working professionals in India, almost 55 per cent have less than five years of total work experience. Only 23 per cent of this workforce has over 10 years of total work experience.

Contrary to this, as per the report, around 57 per cent of organisations that are hiring for AI in India are looking for candidates with more than five years of experience. This supply-demand gap indicates huge opportunity for mid and senior level professionals across industries like IT, finance, healthcare and e-commerce, who are looking to transition into AI, over the next

Report on AI industry

few years.

Another big challenge being faced by companies when recruiting in India is the lack of talent that is experienced in the AI domain. As per the report, the average AI experience of Indian professionals stands at a mere three years, with almost 67 per cent AI professionals in India having joined/ transitioned to their current role, only in the last two years.

When it comes to remuneration, the median salary of AI professionals in India is ₹14.3 lakhs across all experience level and skill sets. Around 40 per cent of AI professionals have an entry-level salary of ₹6 lakh onwards. Around 4 per cent of AI professionals in India command a salary higher than ₹50 lakhs, reflecting the massive demand for mid and senior level AI talent in the country. The study also points out that the salary trends across various industries like finance, e-commerce and healthcare are also improving steadily.

A city-wise remuneration comparison reveals that Mumbai is the highest paymaster in AI at almost ₹15.6 lakhs per annum, followed

by Bengaluru at ₹14.5 lakhs. Chennai on the other hand, is the lowest paymaster at ₹10.4 lakhs.

DEMAND SIDE VIEW

On the demand side, the 10 leading organisations with the most number of AI openings this year are — IBM, Accenture, Amazon, Fractal Analytics, Societe Generale, SAP Labs, 24/7 Customer, Atos, Nvidia and Tech Mahindra. The top skill sets that AI employers are looking for are Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing, Neural Networks, Analytics, Cloud Computing and Pattern Recognition.

More than 1,000 companies claim to work on AI in some form. This includes a small number of companies into products (Chatbots, AI-powered visual search and recommendation engine) and a larger chunk offering either off-shore, recruitment or training services. There is a 30 per cent year-over-year increase in the number of companies setting up dedicated AI teams in India. That said, India still has a long way to go with us contributing only 10 per cent

to the global AI job openings.

A breakup of AI talent across companies reveals an even spread across enterprises, mid-sized companies and start-ups. Almost 37 per cent of AI professionals in India are employed with large-sized companies (total employee base of 10,000 plus). Mid-size organisations (total employee base in the range of 200-10,000) employ 29 per cent of all AI professionals, while start-ups (with less than 200 employees) employ 34 per cent of AI professionals in India.

Bengaluru is the front runner when it comes to AI action in India, housing almost 31 per cent of AI firms. It is followed by NCR that houses around 25 per cent of AI firms. Mumbai comes third housing 14 per cent of AI players. In terms of workforce, 33 per cent of AI professionals in India are working in Bengaluru, followed by 30 per cent in Delhi/NCR.

Hari Krishnan Nair, co-founder, Great Learning said: "AI is in nascent sector. The industry is facing a skill gap. The field offers great potential for working professionals who are looking to transition into newer technologies. AI will make a huge dent across sectors like IT, healthcare, fin-tech and e-commerce. This is the right time to enter the field and be at the forefront of these changes."

are passionate about. Today, the average student just wants a job, any job, because he has no idea. And because he is not driven about it, he isn't doing much to equip himself. Despite the numerous courses available online, only a tiny percentage of students take these up," Ladhani said and believes if every young person is allowed and given support to work on their passions and interests, they will themselves ensure that they build the rights skills for the job. "One has to show them the way and cheer them on. And if each person becomes skilled for careers that exist today and will exist in the future, our country will be able to harness its biggest advantage, the large youth population in the country," Ladhani said.

Talk on earthquake engineering

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Department of Earthquake Engineering and The Indian Society of Earthquake Technology (ISET) organised the 16th Symposium on Earthquake Engineering to discuss and evaluate the current earthquake resistant design practices and suggest enhancement/modifications to various agencies in the country for implementation.

The symposium aims to evolve key guidelines, for communication to various agencies. It acted as a platform for researchers, professionals, planners and policy makers associated with

earthquake engineering to share views and exchange professional experience and recent technological advances in earthquake engineering and allied fields. The event, held once in four years, attracted a galaxy of internationally renowned experts presenting cutting-edge research and practical applications in this field.

The event focused on evolving appropriate strategies to enhance the knowledge on earthquake resistant construction for the end-users & draw an agenda for future course of action, in the wake of damaging scenarios due to the recent earthquakes faced by the country.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Class X students of Shiv Nadar School, a not-for-profit initiative of the Shiv Nadar Foundation in K12 education, showcased their innovative technology projects at recently held Colloquium 2018.

The winner for this year's competition was Team Silverlane from Shiv Nadar School Noida that comprised students — Romsha Singh, Arvind Raja, Archisha Arun, Shoumya Barua, Rishit Dhyani and Aaryaman Singha.

The team developed first of its kind walkcum-steeper for senior citizens to enable them to climb and descent stairs unassisted. The annual conference provides a platform to students, who work

Innovation by students

on a year-long tech project to solve a real-world problem.

The competition follows a two-tier selection process, where student projects are first scrutinised by a sub-jury, followed by a presentation and interaction with an external jury who judge the efficacy and viability of the projects. While a total of 15 projects from both Shiv Nadar School, Noida and Gurugram were presented to the sub-jury, only seven made it to the final jury round. The external jury comprised Deep Kalra, founder, chairman

and CEO, MakeMyTrip; Rajiv Makhni, India's Tech Guru and Managing Editor of Technology, NDTV and Vineet Nayar, founder, chairman and CEO, Sampark Foundation.

Apart from the winning project, the other innovations showcased at this year's Colloquium included:

■**Eatabowl**: Provided an alternative to plastic disposables in the food industry. The students made edible sporks and bio-degradable cups. The spork is a hybrid between a spoon and a fork. The sporks

are made by baking a mixture of flour and water. The cup has a seed and fertiliser embedded at the bottom.

■**Posture Perfect**: A device that helps in early detection of incorrect sitting posture in modern workspaces. They have built an intelligent system that uses a camera to calculate and collect the user's posture data while they work on their machines to determine and suggest postural improvements.

■**MoodBox**: Reduce the stress levels of teachers under 180 seconds by making them play a game in the staff room using brainwaves. The team designed a game that requires users to consciously generate more Delta Waves as part of its game play to unconsciously relax themselves.

■**Enkindle**: A block-chain based eco-system designed to ensure timely and righteous payments supply chain management in the agricultural sector.

■**ZILEO**: Creation of a device for electronically masking noise for schools and hospitals through dynamic usage of white noise.

■**Sophros**: The students have designed an organic air purification unit which also acts as an aesthetic indoor air cleaning device. The device involves a unique usage of dust to filter particulate matter along with usage of plants and moisture sensors for constant oxygen supply and filtration of gases and VOCs while keeping them hydrated automatically.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Great leaders harness personal courage, capture the hearts and minds of others and empower new leaders to make the world a better place

— **Maxine Driscoll**

Founder, Think Strategic for Schools

DIGITAL MARKETING— SEO
Digital Vidya has launched a new programme in digital marketing— SEO Executive Training Programme.

The course is targeted at making fresh graduates build a rewarding career in the field of digital marketing. The organisation has tied up with major agencies in India who are willing to hire the successful pass-outs of this course.

Selection process: The candidate needs to apply for the course and upon acceptance, he has to clear an hour-long communications and analytical abilities exam to be able to enroll. The greatest benefit of this comprehensive SEO Training Programme, which is a 12-week course, is that every successful candidate is guaranteed a job.

For more details, log on to www.digitalvidya.com.

DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP

The Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), New Delhi, invites application for admission to its one-year full-time Post Graduate Programme in Development Leadership (PGP-DL).

It's curriculum develop an in-depth understanding of the development sector and its management practices, all rooted in value-based transformational leadership. The programme is co-developed by large social purpose organisations and is designed and driven by practitioners and eminent leaders from the sector.

The sector has career opportunities for a varied range of professionals as job profiles include strategy building, communications and engagement, fund raising, being part of the CEOs office (strategy, data-based decision making, planning), managing M&E, programme leadership, CSR, partnerships and alliances, social entrepreneurship, operational leadership and many others.

Scholarship: The institute is offering a scholarship of ₹1,00,000 for all applicants who would apply before December 23, 2018 and is also offering up to 100 per cent scholarship on a need basis with up to 50 per cent discount on the living expenses.

MBA

The Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) invites application for admission to Master of Business Administration (MBA) for the academic session 2019-20 offered by the School of Business, Public Policy and Social Entrepreneurship.

The fees for the two-year MBA programme payable is ₹2,84,760 for Indian students and ₹5,06,520 for foreign students.

Around 85 per cent of the seats are reserved for candidates belonging to the NCT Delhi and the remaining 15 per cent of seats are for candidates from all over India.

Deadline: The last date for application is February 11,



2019. The entrance exam will be held on February 24, 2019. To apply, log on to www.aud.ac.in.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has launched certificate programme in Spanish Language and Culture. The admission to this new course is open.

This certificate course is meant for learners who are interested in learning Spanish language and who desire to receive cultural information about the Spanish-speaking countries. Learners will get the opportunity to acquire language skills as well as socio-cultural competence that will enable them to communicate effectively with the Spanish-speaking world in the activities related to daily life.

The Certificate in Spanish Language and Culture is a tightly structured multimedia integrated bilingual programme (Spanish and English). The contact sessions are a very important aspect of this programme which will be conducted at designated Study Centers of IGNOU on weekends.

Eligibility: Aspiring students should have passed Class XII or equivalent and should possess some knowledge of English.

Deadline: The last date to apply is January 15, 2019.

BTECH

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham's School of Engineering has announced admissions open to its various B'Tech degree courses offered at its all five campuses — Amritapuri (Kollam), Bengaluru, Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), Coimbatore and Chennai.

Students can apply for online entrance examination to be held from April 22 to 26, 2019. Simultaneously, written examinations will be held at 27 centres across Tamil Nadu. However, only students of Tamil Nadu will be eligible to take the written examination. Specific dates, centres and time for counselling, to be held in May 2019, will be intimated to successful students by email.

Eligibility: Candidates should be born on or after July 1, 1998. Aspirants should have passed Class XII or its equivalent examination, securing an aggregate of 60 per cent marks in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry with not less than 55 per cent in each of these three subjects.

Seat allocation will be done separately for candidates of AEEE 2019 and JEE Mains 2019. To apply online, students can log on to www.amrita.edu/admissions/btech-2019

Online education in India is estimated to be a \$1.96 billion industry by 2021. KSHITIJ JAIN shares online education trends that are mostly likely to dominate in the coming year

ONLINE EDUCATION TRENDS

Online education, that was once considered humble cousin of mainstream education, has witnessed an upward swing in the last few years. The change has been brought in not only by various technological innovations but by innovative newage content and curriculum that online education providers offer to the learners. The industry in India is estimated to be a \$1.96 billion industry by 2021, according to a research conducted by KPMG, with insights from Google search. According to the report, the paid user base is likely to grow six-fold — from 1.6 million users in 2016 to 9.6 million users in 2021.

Increased penetration of internet and smart phones, factors such as convenience, increased reach and personalised content offered by online education providers have led to the growth and expansion of online education market to tier-II and tier-III cities. Online education modules today allows distant learners to join in virtual lectures, pose questions to professors, chat with fellow students and take virtual exams. Most of the programmes are career-focused helping students to chalk a career path and set goals. Here are some trends that are likely to dominate online education.

Emergence of cloud computing: According to Technavio analysts, emergence of cloud computing will be one of the major trends that we will witness in the coming year. The cloud computing technology enables online education providers to save significant

amount of content and data on a single platform. This makes it easier for users and providers to process, obtain, access and manage information from anywhere at any time.

Focus on future-ready career skills: With a changing world, the online educational institutions are trying to keep a balance between learning and skills required by enterprises and industry. They are offering new courses which help students become well equipped for the jobs of tomorrow. In 2019, we are likely to witness launch of more such courses and career programmes.

Many institutions are offering online degrees in specialised areas like AI, IoT, business management, data science and digital marketing. These courses have been designed to equip the students with skills that are likely to dominate in the years to come.

Game learning: The trend is likely to catch up as it makes the learning process more interesting and effective. Game learning techniques ensure higher level of involvement and interaction from students, offers them opportunity to experiment and introduce new technological innovations.

The modern business environment is becoming complex every day. With the help of game techniques, it is easier to explain these. During the interactive sessions, participants make decisions, develop strategies, immediately observing their influence on the financial position of the company.

Project-based learning: This



IN 2019, TRAINING WILL BECOME MORE SPECIFIC & PERSONALISED. THE ONLINE COURSES WILL NEED TO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN CREATING A ROADMAP THAT LEADS FROM BASIC KNOWLEDGE TO EXPERTISE IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME

allows students to demonstrate skills by developing apps and product. Many a time, it requires constant instructor feedback and multiple attempts if a student fails to meet the criteria. Project-based education is the foundation of the curriculum of some online educational institutions. Students create several projects over six-12 months and receive regular feedback to earn a degree.

Blended e-learning programmes: These courses with offline touch points are increasingly gaining popularity amongst individuals and organisations looking to upskill their employees. E-learning providers have witnessed a 25-30 per cent jump in companies opting for blended model over 100 per cent e-learning courses. The model facilitates discussions and collaborative learning, offers flexibility to learners has better completion rate.

Increase in interest in AR and VR: Though AR and VR are yet to reach their full potential in online learning, these technologies are expected to have a impact. Engagement, that has been one of

the weakest aspects in many e-learning platforms, can be increased using these technologies. Use of AR and VR in online learning platforms have shown significant increase in engagement and improved results.

Adapting existing content: Not everyone can incorporate the latest technologies into their learning processes. In most cases, users are only looking for information that is important. Therefore, online educational institutions should review their existing study material, in terms of how useful, relevant and detailed the information is. They must be prepared for constant changes.

In 2019, training will become more specific and personalised. The online courses will need to play a key role in creating a roadmap that leads from basic knowledge to expertise in the shortest possible time. The focus will remain on people who want to learn about specific skills and not waste time learning about everything. The decisive factor will depend on the person's motivation to regularly devote time to self-education.

The writer is Vice-President, Career Education Business, NIIT Ltd

'Tech help for specially-able'

Learning is for everyone and lack of infrastructure should not be a barrier. Technology can help specially-abled students to compliment classroom learning, says RAJSHEKHAR RATREY

Around six lakh children with special needs, between the ages of 6 to 13 are out of school. This isn't just a statistic, this is the result of an ancient assumption that still operates in the classroom; one approach fits all. Our infrastructure can't facilitate the allocation of specialised teachers to every class. This has led such students to question their ability to learn in such an environment. But learning is for everyone and infrastructure should not be a barrier. That's where technology can be used to compliment classroom learning.

Select the pace and space: In a classroom of 60, it's hard for students with special needs to understand every concept. They may take time to learn, depending on their grasping power. Before they can start to break the concept down, the teacher has already moved on to the next one. Every student's pace is different and technology provides for that uniqueness. Video lectures give students the power to pause a lecture, rewind it or even select the speed of the explanation. With e-learning apps available on any mobile device, students can choose to study in an environment that suits them best.

Adaptive learning: Adaptive learning, a feature that is transforming the way students learn, is embedded in most e-learning platforms. This can help specially-abled students, teachers and parents understand how much they have grasped. They are given a question, depending on their answer, they will be given another question of either a higher difficulty level or a lower difficulty level. The practice questions adapt to the student's ability. This ensures constant assessment. This ensures there are no gaps in the student's understanding.

Interactive and quality content: Technology has opened the doors to quality content and teachers. With a simple video conferencing, children can learn from experts, anywhere in the world. Ed-tech has bought content designed for specially-abled students to smartphones and computers. The use of animation in videos have made lectures interactive, rather than just instructive. Children can actually play with objects in 3D and see



visual representations of a lecture in the form of videos, diagrams, graphs and images.

Help 24x7: Doubts are very bothersome and students need someone to solve them instantly. It becomes difficult for children with special needs to raise a doubt in front of people. Ed-tech is bringing them support around the clock! Students can ask their doubts on a chat platform and experts in that subject, will patiently explain the concept, until it's grasped. To make it easier for the students, they don't even have to type, they can simply send a picture! Now help is just a click away.

Better engagement with gamification: It can be challenging for a teacher to keep all the students engaged. It's especially difficult to engage students with ADHD or other conditions. Gamification is making this task easier with badges, leaderboards and experience points.

Each time students complete a set of tasks, they are rewarded a badge for their performance, speed, accuracy, consistency and other factors. This is even making learning fun, increasing participation from students with a short attention span. Thus, leading to better engagement and participation.

It is an indispensable truth that: This life is yours. Take the power to choose what you want to do and do it well. Isn't it a beautiful feeling to know that you have the power to create the life of your dreams? The world is waiting for your gift.

All of us have the nascent powerhouses burning inside us just waiting to be unleashed. We already have that inner strength. Unfortunately, a lot of people are not activating it because they are living with a victim mentality. This 'poor-me' attitude encourages the abandonment of responsibility. It feeds off of the deceitful belief that no one has control over their own life.

However, the only way



Tata Motors has launched the Season-6 of Tata Delight Star Scholars under the Tata Delight loyalty program with a prize money of ₹25,000. The company has also gone a step ahead and offered a special prize of 40 Tablets for women applicants based on their performance to encourage education for girl child.

This special programme is designed to make a meaningful contribution towards the upliftment of the trucking profession, constantly striving to reward, recognize and delight the commercial vehicles customer, making every interaction a rewarding one.

The programme over the last five editions has helped fulfill the dreams and aspirations of over 1,000 deserving children by ensuring that they receive adequate support to pursue their right to higher education. The company to date has granted scholarships to over 1,000 students, amounting to approx ₹1.5 crores to all the beneficiaries.

The Fox International Fellowship is available for students of Yale University or from students of any of the exchange partner institutions in Fox International Fellowship network. Applicants of all nationalities

are eligible to apply for scholarship.

Eligibility: The fellowship places a strong emphasis on communicative competence in the host country language(s) to truly engage colleagues and establish long term personal relationships with people from the Fox Partner University and the larger community of that University and the overall Fox alumni/ae network.

English language requirements: Candidates must demonstrate sufficient mastery of national or regional language skills relevant to their research projects as well as to thrive in the local and larger communities of the Fox Exchange partner university. For English-speaking countries with strong local or regional language bases, candidates with evidence of familiarity and interests in those languages, as relevant to their research and larger cultural engagement, may receive some competitive preference, like Hindi and or Gujarati. Students without these language skills are also welcome to apply.

How to apply: Submit application online through the Student Grants and Fellowships Database at Yale University. Application must have: Statement of interest, leadership statement, recent curriculum vitae, and two letters of recommendation.

Application deadline: The last date to apply is February 13, 2019.

STUDY CENTRES

Off late, India has become a hotbed of medical tourism given the fact that we have some of the best doctors who are providing treatment at reasonable cost. Medical tourism providers or facilitators should have good knowledge of the topography of various places and hospitals offering medical tourism. A career in medical tourism involves providing facilities for a client to travel, financing options for visas, arranging the hospital, boarding, lodging, best treatment, and tourism after treatment. To begin with MBA graduates with work experience can earn anything between ₹30,000-₹50,000 per month. A few colleges where one can study:

- **NBA School of Health Care Management**, New Delhi. **Course:** Graduate Diploma in Health Care Management, Hospital Operation Management and Medical Tourism
- **Agra College of Management and Technology**, Firozabad. **Course:** MBA Medical Tourism
- **Academy of Business and Management Studies**, Kolkata. **Course:** MBA Medical Tourism
- **ICRI Health Campus**, New Delhi. **Courses:** PGD in Medical Tourism, Diploma in Medical Tourism



MINDIT

Ways to unleash the power houses within you:

Make an effort to align with your inner power every single day: This can be achieved by Yoga & Meditation. Never forget that you are powerful beyond measure. When you allow your light to shine you give others the permission to do the same. It's time to claim your power!

Know what you want: Having direction and clarity of mind will help you move forward with confidence. If you row the boat in direction of the winds, the sail will be smoother & faster.

Discover your strengths: As with any venture, it is best to work from a solid foundation. Think of your confidence as a table top that is supported by four legs. Each leg needs to be solidly planted to support the table top. What are your strengths? What are you good at? Maintain your focus on what you are good at, not on what you perceive to be your shortcomings.

Eliminate the what-ifs: This type of thinking is equivalent to getting under that table top and shaking a leg or two. It will

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AT IMAGINE MARKETING
Location: Delhi
Stipend: ₹15,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16946
Application deadline: December 31, 2018

OPERATIONS AT THE ENERGY AND RESOURCES INSTITUTE
Location: Delhi
Stipend: ₹3,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16947
Application deadline: January 1, 2019

CONTENT EDITING AT LIMEROAD
Location: Gurugram
Stipend: ₹10,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16948
Application deadline: December, 31, 2018

GRAPHIC DESIGN AT LETSDISKUSS.COM
Location: Delhi
Stipend: ₹3,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16949
Application deadline: January 2, 2019

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) AT TETRAHEDRON MANUFACTURING SERVICES
Location: Delhi
Stipend: ₹5,000-₹10,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16950
Application deadline: January 3, 2019

WEB DEVELOPMENT AT GOPLANNR
Location: Bengaluru
Stipend: ₹10,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16951
Application deadline: January 3, 2019

STRATEGIC RESEARCH AT ANJALLI RAVI KUMAR
Location: Work From Home
Stipend: ₹20,000 per month
Link: internshala.com/i/16952
Application deadline: January 4, 2019

IN BRIEF

ONLINE INTERNSHIP FAIR

Internshala has launched an online internship fair for degree students from tier-II cities. The initiative is to create awareness on internships and to bring opportunities closer to the students. The online internship fair is a nine-day internship drive which will be live from December 19-27, 2018. The drive brings exclusive internship opportunities for the

students pursuing BBA, BCom, BA, BSc and similar degree courses in tier-II cities like Jaipur, Indore, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, and many more. Through this drive, students will get an opportunity to intern with a company for two-six months and earn a stipend of up to ₹10,000 per month. For more details visit: <https://internshala.com/internship-s-in-your-city>.

FASHION SHOW ORGANISED

K hazani Women's Vocational Institute organised — Fashion Fiesta — as part of its annual curriculum, at Talkatora Stadium. The creations were showcased under 13 categories — from casual to formal executive wear, wedding attires to club wear. The show was a platform for the students to showcase their creative talent, while creating a bridge between the students and commercial markets. Bijendra Chaudhary chairman-founder Khazani Educational Society

said: "Women are ahead in every field and make them self-reliant. Women empowerment is a major contribution in the progress and advancement of the nation. Our focus is to make each girl of our institution self-reliant and give the wings to their dreams."

NEW PG DIPLOMA IN PLANT PROTECTION

The Sharda University, Greater Noida, and Dhanuka Agritech Limited signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch a one year Post Graduate Diploma in Plant Protection. The students will be taught the theory, practical and business aspects of pests, diseases and weed problems of field and horticultural crops and their management at the university. They will also be given a two-month field training who will also pay a stipend and allowances to the students. The

15 students, after completion of course and evaluation process, will be placed on permanent roll of the company as frontline staff in BD or sales department as per the band and compensation structure of Dhanuka Agritech Limited. The programme is a unique collaborative course depicting an Institute-Industry interface directed towards the growth of the agribusiness sector and at the same time addressing the unemployment problem in relation to the agricultural science graduates.

INT'L COLLOQUIUM

Amrita's UNESCO chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the Centre for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality at the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham hosted a three-day first ever International Colloquium for Women's Empowerment in partnership with the United Nations Democracy Fund Women Empowerment team at Amritapuri campus, Kollam. It was decided that the Israeli Consulate of India will assist the Sustainability Development Officer (SDO)-Pilot, CWEGE in launching a new position for key women in a community to protect, monitor and report on natural resources especially water and waste management. In addition to international delegates, more than 90 women from 21 villages across 18 States in India joined the discussions and celebrated the successful completion of a joint-project.

ANNUAL DAY

The Junior DPS celebrated its Annual Day — Sitare-The Shining Star — at Janakpuri Delhi Haat auditorium with the aim of promoting safe childhood, education in society and women empowerment. The function included Talent Show, Ramp Walk, Group Dance, and Rapping by the students. Director and Founder of Junior DPS Vishwa Deepak Gupta extended a warm welcome to the dignitaries present. Students and teachers gave brilliant performances on relevant topics like yoga, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao and gave awareness among the people present there.

MAYANK, VIHARI TO OPEN IN BOXING DAY TEST

India axe out of form KL Rahul and Vijay while Aus include Mitch Marsh for third Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A desperate India will punt on the rookie opening pair of Mayank Agarwal and Hanuma Vihari in their bid to regain momentum against a rejuvenated Australia when the 'Boxing Day' Test starts on Wednesday. After being deflated by 146 runs in the second Test at Perth, India after a week's break will be putting their best foot forward, an indicator of which is the decision to finally drop their out-of-form openers KL Rahul and Murali Vijay.

While there was temptation to play all-rounder Hardik Pandya, a fit-again Rohit Sharma will give the cushion of an extra batsman.

Indian team management in a departure from its convention announced their playing XI, a day prior to the match ending speculations about the possible team combination.

Time had already run-out for Rahul, who had scored only 48 runs in four innings this series, including a highest of 44 in the second innings at Adelaide.

In this year's overseas cycle alone, his average had dropped down to 20.94 in nine Tests with only one fifty-plus score.

Vijay had done no better previously scored 49 runs in four innings this series, including a highest of 20 in the second innings at Perth. Overall in 2019, he only averages 18.80 in eight Tests, with one hundred against Afghanistan.

Otherwise his highest score this year is 46 in the first innings against South Africa at Centurion. In this year's overseas cycle, his average drops down to 12.64 in seven Tests.

The sheer numbers indicated that the two couldn't be persisted with as they had become 'walking wickets' for the Australian new ball bowlers.

Chairman of selectors MSK Prasad, who is present in Melbourne indicated that Vihari is being looked as a stop-gap solution (with Prithvi Shaw injured).

Agarwal though has earned his place by sheer weight of runs in domestic cricket as well as for India A and couldn't be ignored any further by



INDIA - AUSTRALIA AT MELBOURNE					
Team	M	W	L	D	Success%
Australia	110	63	30	17	65.00
India	12	2	8	2	25.00

RESULTS OF INDIA-AUSTRALIA TESTS	
Season	Result
1947-48	Australia won by 233 runs
1947-48	Australia won by an innings & 177 runs
1967-68	Australia won by an innings & 4 runs
1977-78	India won by 222 runs
1980-81	India won by 59 runs
1985-86	Match drawn
1991-92	Australia won by 8 wickets
1999-00	Australia won by 180 runs
2003-04	Australia won by 9 wickets
2007-08	Australia won by 337 runs
2011-12	Australia won by 122 runs
2014-15	Match drawn

Faisel Features

either selectors or the team management.

While Vihari bats at number three for Andhra, he has previously opened for Hyderabad earlier in his first-class career.

It suffices to say that he has impressed the team management sufficiently in his two Test outings thus far to be handed this responsibility against Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.

Even so, this new strategy from the think tank again puts the spotlight on Rohit Sharma, who will be eager to make an impression after yet another batting order shuffle to accommodate him.

In the past, India have dropped Cheteshwar Pujara (Sydney, 2014), moved Ajinkya Rahane to number three (Colombo, 2015), and even skipper Virat Kohli has batted at number three (St Lucia, 2016) to make way for Sharma in the line-up.

The batsman continues to underwhelm with his indifferent Test form, albeit he did score an attacking 37 runs at Adelaide out of India's first innings total of 250.

India's third change is pertaining to their bowling attack.

After getting the balance awfully wrong in Perth, they have included a spinner along with Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah.

Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja has recovered sufficiently from his shoulder stiffness and takes Umesh Yadav's spot in the playing eleven.

This was after off-spinner R Ashwin was ruled out of this third Test, as he still needs more time to recover from his left abdominal strain.

Australia too have made one change to their playing eleven.

Peter Handscomb, who is short of runs, makes way for all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, albeit the latter isn't in the best form himself.

The hosts have made this change keeping in mind the placid nature of the MCG pitch, which was rated poor by the ICC after a drab draw played out against England here in December 2017.

The pitch for this 'Boxing Day' Test sported some grass on the top surface, and both teams talked about the possibility of some moisture in the wicket as well.

However, Australian coach Justin Langer and opener Marcus Harris have previously warned about the grass being not too productive here unlike in Adelaide and Perth, and with the sun beating down, the wicket could yet turn out to be a flat surface thus explaining their one change to bolster the bowling unit.

TEAMS

India (XI): Virat Kohli, Mayank Agarwal, Hanuma Vihari, Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Shami.

Australia (XI): Tim Paine, Marcus Harris, Aaron Finch, Usman Khawaja, Travis Head, Shaun Marsh, Mitchell Marsh, Nathan Lyon, Starc, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood.



Ravindra Jadeja trains during practice session ahead of third Test *BCCI*

'Jadeja was fit when selected for Aus Tests'

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Chairman of selectors MSK Prasad on Tuesday made it clear that his committee picked Ravindra Jadeja for the Test series based on the fitness report where he was declared absolutely fit.

Jadeja, who had a shoulder stiffness couldn't feature in the second Test in Perth and coach Ravi Shastri told the mediapersons that the player was carrying the niggle from India.

Prasad however wanted to set the record straight on the eve of the Boxing Day Test, which will feature the Saurashtra all-rounder.

"On the eve of any selection meeting, the selection committee is given a fitness report of all the players. In that report, Jadeja was absolutely fit. So we picked him. After we picked him, he went and played Ranji Trophy also, where he bowled 60 overs. So there is no question of him being unfit at the time of selection (for Australia)," Prasad said.

"Whenever a health issue comes up, we have a group in which it is being placed. All that is looked after by the physio and they have very clearly given it in the statement," he said.

On a different note, Prasad said that Mahendra

Singh Dhoni's return in the T20 squad for New Zealand tour was on expected lines as he was only rested for the six T20 Internationals against West Indies and Australia.

"With regard to MS, even while resting also, we categorically told that he was going to be rested for those six matches so that we can give more game-time to Dinesh Karthik and Rishabh Pant. That is the very reason. Now they have played quite a few matches, so we thought that we should bring back MS into the squad," Prasad reasoned, even though it is clear that Dhoni won't be part of 2020 World T20 in Australia.

Prasad said the decision to drop Rishabh Pant from the ODIs against Australia and New Zealand was to keep him fresh for bigger battles ahead. He assured that the young keeper is still in scheme of things for the 2019 World Cup.

"With regards to Rishabh, given the intensity of this series that we are playing right now, so after this series, we want to keep him fresh. Give him a break and he will have a very good game-time of five matches against the visiting England Lions. Definitely a part of our World Cup plans (sic)," Prasad said.

SINGLES

FUTURE HOPE WIN KOLKATA KBD JR LEG

KOLKATA: In a test of strength and passion for kabaddi, the KBD Juniors season 2 Kolkata finale witnessed Future Hope School emerging victorious by thrashing Khalsa High School 31-11. Future Hope School had an unbeaten run to lift the trophy. In a brilliantly orchestrated game with decisive precision, the students from Future Hope School demonstrated skill and strength on the mat, which led them to the victory. Prior to the city finals, the two semi-final matches witnessed Monu Memorial High School test their mettle against Future Hope School and Khalsa High School took on Khalsa English High School. Among the schools in the fray for the coveted title of the Kolkata city champions were Saifee Golden Jubilee Public School, Monu Memorial High School, St Aloysius Orphanage School, Future Hope School, Khalsa High School, Rani Rash Moni High School, St Aloysius Day School and Khalsa English High School.

IRAN HELD TO 1-1 DRAW BY PALESTINE

TEHRAN: Iran's national football team conceded a last-minute equalizer as the team drew 1-1 with Palestine in a friendly match. Iran striker Mehdi Taremi was on target five minutes into the second half but Jonathan Cantillana levelled the match in the injury time. The friendly match was held at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha, Qatar as part of the preparation for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. Iran will also meet Qatar on December 31 before travelling to the UAE for the Asian Cup. Iran has been drawn with Yemen, Iraq and Vietnam in Group D. They will start their campaign with a match against Yemen on January 7 at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium, Abu Dhabi. The 2019 AFC Asian Cup will be held in the United Arab Emirates from January 5 to February 1.

ROJAS SIGNS OLIMPIA CONTRACT

ASUNCION: Olimpia, this year's two-time Paraguayan football champion, has announced the signing of forward Rodrigo Rojas, who until now had played for Cerro Porteño but who returns to the club where he got his start and with which he will contend for the Copa Libertadores title in 2019. "Rodrigo Rojas has already signed and is once again with the Expreso. Welcome once again to the King of Copas, 'Rorro'!" the Asuncion club posted on its website on Sunday night. Rojas, 30, thus leaves Cerro Porteño, Olimpia's biggest rival and where he has played since January 2015, reports Efe news. After that, he did stints at Chile's O'Higgins and Universidad de Chile before landing at Cerro Porteño. His return to Olimpia has been among the plans of the club's management for the new season after the success last year, when the team triumphed in both the Apertura and Clausura tournaments.

SHIPULIN QUILTS BIATHLON AMID PROBE

MOSCOW: Russian biathlon star Anton Shipulin on Tuesday announced he had lost 'motivation' and would retire from the sport, weeks after Austrian prosecutors announced a doping probe into his team. Shipulin has always rejected claims against him but he and other top sports stars were barred from the Winter Olympics this year as part of a ban on Russia for state-sponsored doping. "This race will be the last of my career," the 31-year-old said of a competition in Germany's Gelsenkirchen on December 29, according to Russian news agencies. "There's no sense in carrying on torturing myself, my fans and my loved ones. I can't find in myself the motivation that I need," he told a press conference in Moscow.

Agencies

KOHLI URGES BATSMEN TO COMPLEMENT BOWLING UNIT

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Their patchy performance has stuck out like a sore thumb during the first two Tests and skipper Virat urged his batsmen to complement the superb effort of his bowling unit in the upcoming Boxing Day Test.

While Kohli gave a batting masterclass on a challenging track in Perth, Cheteshwar Pujara had played a decisive role in team's win in Adelaide but other batsmen have not contributed much unlike bowlers, who have picked 40 wickets in four innings.

"It is very important for batsmen to stand up, because as everyone can see, our bowling has been performing really well. Otherwise, the bowlers won't be able to do anything with the totals that we have been compiling," skipper Kohli said on the eve of the third Test.

"If we are batting second, we will try to take the lead or get as close to the opposition total as possible. If you equal a big score, then it becomes a second-innings match and if you take a good first-innings lead, then you can capitalize on that.

"The batsmen must step up collectively. I won't say individually whether someone needs to do that or not, but as a batting



unit, we have to definitely put up a better performance," Kohli sent out a loud and clear message for his batting unit.

The Indian captain made it clear that neither his team's Adelaide victory nor the Perth defeat will have any bearing when Melbourne Test starts.

"As a team, I don't think whether you are 2-0 up or 2-0 down or 1-1, what's hap-

pened in the past has no significance at all to what's going to happen in the next two Tests or what's going to happen in the next Test which is quite immediate." The key is to stay in the moment, stay in the present, understand and remember why you won the first Test, which was because of us being in the present moment," the skipper reiterated what he has often stressed.

Australian team is still work in progress: Paine

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Buoyed by team's comprehensive victory in the second Test, a cautious Australian skipper Tim Paine believes that his inexperienced side has the potential to get ahead of India but is still a work in progress.

"I don't feel like we are on top of them. We feel like we are getting better with every Test," Paine said on the eve of the Boxing Day Test.

"We are improving with every game but we need to keep stacking up good days and play good Test cricket. If we can do that for the next 4-5 days I think we will be in the thick of it again," Paine said.

"Certainly when you have an inexperienced team and you get a big win like in Perth against the number one team in the world, guys are going to grow in confidence a little bit and come to Melbourne feeling better than when we did to Perth," the skipper



said.

India have made three changes for the Boxing Day Test but Paine is not bothered about changes in opposition rank.

"India's changes don't really bother us because we have done our homework on all of their players for a number of weeks now. We have been pre-

pared for all of them to play. What they do is their business, and we will keep focussing on what we are doing," Paine said.

As is the norm, Australia named their playing eleven with Mitchell Marsh coming in the side replacing Peter Handscomb.

Paine said that the change is to do with bowling and it would help out their four-bowler attack, before adding that Handscomb could be back for the Sydney Test.

"We did it last year during the Ashes as well and majority of this decision is based on the fact that it will be hot and the bowlers have had a big role play. We think Mitch can come in and do a good job with the bat and will be a great support for our bowlers as well.

"Peter knows that there are things we would like him to improve. Going into Sydney, where it spins, I think he will come back into it quickly because he is our best player of spin."

Steelers, Tamil play out thrilling tie

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tamil Thaliavas and Haryana Steelers played out an exciting 40-40 tie in Vivo Pro Kabaddi League season 6.

Haryana Steelers avoided defeat as they scored two points in the last minute. Monu Goyat top scored for Haryana with 17 points and put in a stellar performance.

Ajay Thakur was in fine form for Tamil Thaliavas and he too scored 17 points. Haryana ended their league campaign on a positive note as did Tamil Thaliavas. Both teams finished bottom of the table in their respective zones.

Tamil Thaliavas began strongly and led 3-0 after three minutes with Ajay Thakur picking up a raid point. Haryana Steelers came back to trail 3-4 after five minutes. It was a close affair in the first 10 minutes.

Monu Goyat picked up a two-point raid in the 7th



minute to level the match at 6-6.

Haryana Steelers forced a super tackle in the 13th minute as they tied the match at 11-11. Anand was the star raider for Thaliavas in the first half.

He picked up three raid points in two minutes as they led 16-14 at the end of the first half.

Tamil Thaliavas inflicted an all out at the start of the second half to lead 19-16. Haryana Steelers weren't

deterred by the all out and kept picking up points.

In the 26th minute Haryana inflicted an all out to lead 27-23. Ajay Thakur made a super raid in the next minute to bring Thaliavas back in the match. In the 29th minute, Thaliavas inflicted an all out to lead 32-28.

It was a closely fought encounter with both teams level on 36-36 after 36 minutes. Ajay Thakur picked up two raid points in two minutes to give Thaliavas 39-37 lead after 38 minutes.

Final day surprises in Ranji

Mumbai play epic draw to secure three points against Saurashtra; Himachal win by 9 wickets to punch TN out of k/o race

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former champions Mumbai and Saurashtra featured in an exciting draw on Tuesday after both teams squandered chances to win the contest on the fourth and final day of their Elite Group A game.

Mumbai, champions on 41 occasions and ahead of the visitors by 46 runs on the first innings, declared their second innings closed in the morning session at 238 for 8, leaving Saurashtra a target of 285 in 72 overs.

Saurashtra were sailing along merrily after being 79 for two with the 113-run third wicket stand between Viswarajsinh Jadeja (71 in 129 balls) and Sheldon Jackson (57 in 118 balls) bringing them closer to the target.

Jadeja was run out by a direct throw from point by Jay Bista to break the stand at 192 and then a double strike with the use of short balls in one over by medium pacer Minad Manjrekar put the skids on Saurashtra.

Manjrekar got rid of both Jackson, caught slashing at deep point when Saurashtra needed 55 in ten overs, and Prerak Mankad (24 in 21 balls) three runs later to raise visions of a Mumbai victory.

Manjrekar got two more wickets in that spell to send back Arpit Vasavada and rival captain Jaydev Unadkat after which Saurashtra downed the shuttlers with Chirag Jani holding fort at one end.

After four balls in the final over, the game was called off as a draw with the visitors on 266 for 7, needing 19 more runs to pull off what would have been a come-from-behind win.

Jani (9) and Dharmendra Jadeja (8) were the unbeaten batsmen at the crease when the match ended.

Manjrekar finished with impressive figures of 4 for 39, while Shivam Dube got 2 for 50.

Mumbai secured three points to boost their tally to 11 and are 14th out of 18 teams in the combined A and B Groups standings with two matches left.

Saurashtra secured one point to remain on top of the combined standings with 26 points with one game in hand.

Meanwhile at Shivamoga, hosts



Karnataka bowler K Gowtham celebrates his sixth wicket in the Ranji Trophy match against Railways in Shivamogga; Saurashtra batsman Jackson celebrates his fifty runs against Mumbai

PTI

MUMBAI SECURED THREE POINTS TO BOOST THEIR TALLY TO 11 AND ARE 14TH OUT OF 18 TEAMS IN THE COMBINED A AND B GROUPS STANDINGS WITH TWO MATCHES LEFT. SAURASHTRA SECURED ONE POINT TO REMAIN ON TOP OF THE COMBINED STANDINGS WITH 26 POINTS WITH ONE GAME IN HAND

Steyn believes there is more to come

AFP ■ CENTURION

Fast bowler Dale Steyn on Monday said he is looking beyond breaking the record for most Test wickets for South Africa in the forthcoming series against Pakistan.

Steyn currently shares the record of 421 wickets with former captain Shaun Pollock, who retired in 2008, and needs one more wicket in the first Test against Pakistan, starting at SuperSport Park on Wednesday, to hold first place on his own.

"I have a lot more wickets in me than just one more," he said. "I haven't saved myself just to take one more wicket than Polly (Pollock), there is a bigger goal at the end of the day."

He admitted that the past two years, during which he has had several setbacks had been frustrating.

"I do think it will be a beautiful thing to happen, if it happens. It has taken a



MOST TEST WICKETS					
Rank	Wickets	Player	M	Avg	Years
1	421	Dale Steyn	87	22.42	2004-present
2	421	Shaun Pollock	108	23.11	1995-2008
3	390	Makhaya Ntini	101	28.82	1998-2009
4	330	Allan Donald	72	22.25	1992-2002
5	306	Morne Morkel	85	27.74	2006-2018

long time and these records are great things to achieve.

"I will be highly honoured but I will get back to my mark and try to take the next one."

The 35-year-old, who will be playing in his 89th Test, seemed set to take the record when he played in two Tests in Sri Lanka earlier this year but could only take two wickets to tie with Pollock.

"It's just nice to have a red ball in my hand again," he said.

"Sri Lanka was tough conditions for the fast bowlers, but by the looks of things - the way the nets have been playing out in the middle — there is some spice."

"I am looking forward to getting out there and playing five competitive days of cricket."

Steyn is currently joint eleventh in the all-time list of wicket-takers in Test cricket. Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, who retired in 2010, heads the list with 800 while the top fast bowler is current England opening bowler James Anderson with 565.

The first Test match of three match Test series will start from 26th December at SuperSport Park in Centurion followed by second in Cape Town from 3rd Jan.

Mooy ruled out of Asian Cup

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's Asian Cup defence has been dealt a blow with Huddersfield midfielder Aaron Mooy ruled out of the tournament after a second opinion on a knee injury confirmed the worst.

Mooy has been in top form this season, but suffered ligament damage in his right knee playing against Arsenal earlier this month.

Huddersfield initially sidelined him until February, but he is such a key player for Australia that they insisted on getting a second opinion from an independent specialist.

"It is disappointing to lose Aaron for the tournament," said Socceroos coach Graham Arnold in a statement late Monday.

"However, it was important that we left no stone unturned in exploring every option to get Aaron on the pitch for Australia in the United Arab Emirates."

Mooy needs at least another month to recover and with the Asian Cup starting on January 5, Arnold decided it wasn't worth risking him.

"In a best-case scenario, this would mean he would not be ready to play until after the quarter-final stage," he said.

"With so many games in such a short period we felt it would be



best to bring in a player that is fully fit and ready to go from the outset."

James Jeggo, who plays the Austrian Bundesliga for FK Austria Wien, has been added to the squad as cover.

Australia are in Group B, along with Jordan, Syria and Palestine. They are due to assemble in the UAE from December 26.

REVISED SQUAD

Mustafa Amini, Aziz Behich, Martin Boyle, Milos Degenek, Alex Gersbach, Rhyan Grant, Chris Ikonomidis, Jackson Irvine, Matthew Jurman, James Jeggo, Robbie Kruse, Mitch Langerak, Mathew Leckie, Massimo Luongo, Awer Mabil, Jamie Maclaren, Mark Milligan, Andrew Nabbout, Josh Risdon, Tom Rogic, Mathew Ryan, Trent Sainsbury, Danny Vukovic.

Understanding with Sunil is telepathic, says Jeje

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Indian football team forward Jeje Lalpekhlua on Tuesday said he has developed a "telepathic understanding" with ace striker Sunil Chhetri.

Jeje first caught the attention by scoring a hat-trick against Pakistan at the age of 19 — in his first tournament. Since then, despite scoring regularly, he was in and out of the national squad till 2015, when he cemented his place.

"I played with Sunil-bhai when I made my debut. Since then we have been playing together. I feel, together we fit in well, and complement each other's styles," Jeje stated.

"He has helped me a lot on and off the field. We have a telepathic understanding on the pitch. I know where he is, and he always knows where I am," he added.

India take on Thailand in their opening match of the AFC Asian Cup 2019 and Jeje sounded confident.

"This team is a strong one as we have put in a lot of good work so far," the Mizo player said.



"We are confident in our abilities and feel that we can take on any challenge."

He stated that the side has been improving steadily, and that the progress is there for everyone to see.

"Compared to when I made my debut, there is a lot of difference in the National Team. With every match, we have been getting better and have achieved a lot in between," he felt.

"I'm very happy to be a part of this team. We worked hard to qualify for the Asian Cup. It is

the biggest tournament for us, almost like a World Cup. We hope to do well, and strive for bigger things," he stated.

"In fact, there is still a lot we can do and the AFC Asian Cup is the next step along the way."

Jeje also spoke about the role played by coach Constantine in the recent upsurge.

"The entire team has put in a lot of hard work. He has had the most crucial role to play. When he came in, he had told us that our target was to qualify for the Asian Cup, and we did it."



Relish rather than fear Old Trafford, Ole tells Utd

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United return to Old Trafford for the first time under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's management against Huddersfield on Boxing Day with a new-found swagger after scoring five goals in the Premier League for the first time in five years.

The Norwegian's caretaker spell in charge until the end of the season got off to a dream start as United threw off the shackles, that led to turgid football and deteriorating results under Jose Mourinho, to thrash Cardiff 5-1.

United still face a huge challenge to make up an eight-point gap just to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish.

But for now the luxury of just being able to enjoy watching a side play with freedom and the attacking principles that have underpinned the club's history is enough to excite United fans again.

"I think the boys are looking forward to playing at Old Trafford and that's important. We should be looking forward to that, they are the best fans in the world," said Solskjaer when questioned whether some of the current United squad have been inhibited by the pressures of playing at home in the famous red shirt.

Solskjaer is certainly a favourite of the United faithful having scored 126 goals in 11 seasons as a player, including the one that famously won the Champions League final in 1999.

He was serenaded throughout by the visiting fans in the Welsh capital at the weekend as United hit five for the first time since Alex Ferguson's final game in charge.

"I just hope in the next five months I do a good enough job for them to keep singing my name when someone else comes in," added Solskjaer, whose pos-

Man Utd vs Huddersfield
Live from 8:30pm IST
STAR SPORTS NETWORK

itivity has immediately lifted a squad downtrodden by Mourinho's mood swings.

"Just to be positive. Take risks," said Jesse Lingard, who scored twice in Cardiff, at what Solskjaer's message has been.

"If you lose the ball, win it back, and play the United way - attacking football, entertaining football. For us as players, we enjoyed it today."

Rarely has enjoyment ever been top of Mourinho's list of priorities, even in his most successful spells with Porto, Chelsea and Inter Milan.

'WORK HARDER'

However, the levels of commitment he demanded from those sides was not evident in the current United squad.

For the first time this season, United outran their opponents against Cardiff.

"A Man United team should never ever be outworked," said Solskjaer to highlight the minimum he expects.

"Doesn't matter which team you play. You should run more than them and then your skills will give you the chance to win the game."

A good work ethic should be the minimum required of a Manchester United team, but Mourinho's tactics also didn't help his side's running statistics.

Too often the Red Devils were set up to sit deep and try and counter-attack. Solskjaer instead seems intent on implementing the United way he learned at the heel of Ferguson for so long.

"I said the same to these lads as I do back in Molde: work harder than them, enjoy yourselves, pass it forward, run forward, if you lose it, I don't mind as long as you work to win it back and they did."

"When you've got players like this with the quality you are always going to create chances."

