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PERSONALLY:
ABHISHEK
10 VIVACITY



Sacrilege deaths shake Punjab

CM appeals
for calm after
2nd lynching
in 24 hours

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Two back-to-back incidents of lynching over attempted sacrilege, in less than 24 hours, have sent shockwaves across Punjab. Hours after the shocking incident of an unidentified youth being beaten to death for attempting sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib in the Sikhs' holiest shrine — the Golden Temple, another person was killed on Sunday morning by a mob at a village Gurdwara in Kapurthala for suspected theft and attempted sacrilege, reportedly in the presence of policemen, three of whom were left injured in the melee.

While the State Government has set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the Golden Temple 'sacrilege' incident with directions to submit its report within two days, the police officials on Sunday claimed that there was "no visible sign of sacrilege" in the second incident at the Kapurthala Gurdwara.

"There is no visible sign of

sacrilege at Gurdwara sahib. An FIR registered under Sections 295A of the IPC (Indian Penal Code) has been filed. Information about the attack is with the police, and the identity of the man killed is being verified. If it appears to be murder, then the FIR will be registered accordingly," said Inspector-General (IG) Jalandhar Range, Gurinder Singh Dhillon, while addressing the media.

IGP Dhillon said that people's sentiments had been running high after the Golden Temple incident, and "as it was a sensitive issue, the police used restraint. Those people, who managed to do this, were more in number than the police." As per officials, the man was beaten to death by the locals for allegedly disrespecting the 'Nishan Sahib' (the Sikh religious flag) at the Gurdwara in village Nizampur in Kapurthala district. The residents claimed that the man disrespected the sacred flag and tried to run away from the spot.

As per the information available, soon after the youth was caught by the people at the Gurdwara in the morning, the police officials, including Kapurthala Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Harkamalpreet Singh Khakh, rushed to the spot. The cops directed the locals to hand over the youth with the assurance that the police would



Police at the Golden Temple ahead of Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi's visit, in Amritsar on Sunday. A man was beaten to death on Saturday after he allegedly attempted to commit a 'sacrilegious' act inside the historic temple PTI

investigate the matter, but they refused. Amidst several viral videos of the incident, the police officials and the locals, mainly the Sikhs, were seen exchanging heated arguments over the custody of the youth, who had been detained in a room inside the Gurdwara.

Later, the police reportedly entered the room forcefully, followed by the Sikh activists who were staging a protest outside the Gurdwara, demanding custody of the "accused" to "teach him a lesson". However, a scuffle ensued, following which the mob allegedly killed the youth with a sword.

SSP Khakh later said that the mob had gathered after the video went viral. "They killed

the youth even as the police tried their level best to handle the situation. We will register a criminal case under charges of murder against those who killed the youth," said Khakh adding that the investigation, so far, indicated that no sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib was committed.

The incident took place mere hours after a man was beaten to death at the Golden Temple in Amritsar for attempting sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib inside the sanctum sanctorum.

Alarmed, Punjab Deputy Chief Minister-cum-Home Minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa has issued directions to the State Director General of Police (DGP), all

Commissioners of Police, and the Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) to strengthen round-the-clock security around all Gurudwaras, Temples, Mosques, or Churches and other religious places.

"At religious places, the CCTVs should be functional in the complexes where Guru Granth Sahib is placed besides other religious scriptures in all religious places," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister added that the police should have active liaison with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), and all Gurudwaras committees and ensure that "Guru Granth Sahib should not be left unattended at any time".

Cold wave continues to hold North India in its grip

North-westerly winds bring minimum temp down for 2nd day running

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

North India remained in the grip of severe cold on Sunday as the chilly north-westerly winds with speeds of up to 15 kmph brought the minimum temperature below the freezing point in several cities for the second-consecutive day.

Severe cold wave conditions swept parts of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh for the second day in a row.

Delhi witnessed the season's coldest morning on Sunday with the city recording a minimum temperature of 4.6 degrees Celsius, according to the weather department.

The maximum temperature is likely to settle around 18 degrees Celsius, said the India Meteorological Department



Workers huddle in the back of a vegetable truck as they travel on a cold and foggy morning in Jammu. AP

(IMD). According to the IMD, there would not be any let-up in the cold wave condition over the next three days. "Cold and dry north-westerly winds, gusting up to 15 kmph, are likely to continue over the plains of northwest India till Tuesday enhancing the adverse impact of the cold wave and cold day conditions", it said.

As per the IMD data, Churu in Rajasthan reported the lowest minimum temperature of minus 2.6 degrees Celsius in northwest India followed by Sikar (minus 2.5 degrees Celsius) and Amritsar (minus 0.5 degree Celsius).

"No significant change in minimum temperatures likely over most parts of Northwest India, Gujarat and Maharashtra during the next two days and rise by two-three degrees Celsius thereafter. Gradual fall in minimum temperatures by two-three degrees Celsius very likely over most parts of East and adjoining Central India during the next three days and no significant change thereafter," said an IMD bulletin issued on Sunday.

Dense fog is predicted in a few regions of Uttarakhand over the next two days and in Punjab and Haryana on December 23 and 24, it said.

CAPSULE

YAMUNA: STUDY ON MICROPLASTICS SOON
New Delhi: In a first-of-its-kind survey by a Government body in the national Capital, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee will conduct a study to ascertain the concentration, distribution and composition of microplastics in River Yamuna, besides soil, vegetables and other edible products.

The pollution control body will also examine if the soil in the floodplains of River Yamuna is fit for agriculture, according to officials.

NO DISCLOSURE OF REPORTS BY SBI: CIC
New Delhi: Central Information Commission dismissed an appeal seeking disclosure of reports submitted by State Bank of India to the Centre and Reserve Bank of India, regarding sale and encashment of electoral bonds.

Two political murders within 12 hrs rock Kerala

Police on high alert; 11 SDPI activists, 2 BJP cadres held

PNS ■ KOCHI

The Police have arrested 11 activists of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), an Islamic extremist outfit, and two BJP cadres in connection with double murders in a span of 12 hours in Kerala's Alappuzha district.

Motorcycles-borne assassins hacked to death Sreenivasan, secretary of Kerala OBC Morcha, on Sunday morning in his house. The killers struck when he was preparing to go for a morning walk. Around one dozen people barged into his house and



carved him with knives, swords and hatchets.

CCTV visuals collected from the neighborhood of Sreenivasan's residence showed 12 persons riding towards his house in six motorbikes and leaving after the murder.

The police suspected that

Sreenivasan was murdered in retaliation for the killing of Shaan, an SDPI leader on late Saturday night. But K Surendran, president of Kerala BJP said his party has no role in the murder of Shaan.

"The police are trying to implicate BJP and RSS workers

in this incident at the instance of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan," he said while speaking to reporters at Kozhikode on Sunday. The police have taken into custody two BJP workers in connection with the murder of Shaan.

Earlier in February, Nandu, a young district-level RSS leader was murdered by unidentified people. The police are yet to arrest the culprits. With Sreenivasan's murder, the number of RSS/BJP activists who were killed by the Islamic terrorists this year has gone up to four.

Senior BJP leader and Raja Sabha member Dr Subramanian Swamy, who was in Palakkad on Sunday morning, asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah to dismiss the Kerala Government as law and order in the State has totally collapsed.

"The Popular Front of India, the political arm of the SDPI, was trying to implement Talibanism in Kerala while the CPI(M) government was offering all support to the Islamic extremists. The only option to save Kerala is to dismiss the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Government," Dr. Swamy told reporters at Palakkad.

Arif Mohammed Khan, Governor of Kerala expressed his anguish and shock over the frequent murders happening in the State. He said that all talks about development were futile so long as political murders claimed lives of people. "We should have trust in the judiciary which would resolve the issues. Violence is no solution for any issues," said the Governor who has expressed his grief over the law and order situation in the State many times in the recent past.

KMC polls: Sporadic violence reported; 63.63% turnout

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Sporadic violence marked Sunday's high-profile Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections that saw 63.63 per cent of voters exercising their franchise when reports last came in at 5 pm.

The Opposition BJP promptly demanded re-election as exit polls showed the ruling Trinamool Congress winning 131 out of 144 seats, and the saffron outfit bagging barely 13. The Left and the Congress that jointly clinched 22 seats in a violence-torn election in 2015 could draw a blank, the exit poll by Bengali channel ABP Ananda said.



Nearly two dozen people were injured in cases of violence and booth capturing.

Among the injured are BJP candidate Rajarshi Lahiri and CPI(M) candidates Fayaz Khan and Sujata Saha. All of them were hospitalised. Akbar Hussein, a polling agent of a Congress candidate, was also shifted to a hospital.

Rush aid to Af: India, 5 central Asian nations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern over the situation in Afghanistan, India, and five Central Asian countries on Sunday appealed for making available immediate humanitarian aid to the people there. The six countries also said the Afghan territory should not be used for fanning terrorist activities.

This assertion was made after the Foreign Ministers of India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan held talks here as part of the third India-Central Asia Dialogue. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar hosted the high-profile event. Incidentally, the heads of these five States may be chief guests at the Republic Day parade next year.

In his opening remarks at the Dialogue, Jaishankar pitched for finding ways to help the Afghan people. "We all share deep-rooted historical and civilisational ties with Afghanistan. Our concerns and objectives in that country are similar," he said. He listed the formation of a truly inclusive and representative Government, the fight against



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with his Central Asian counterparts during the third India-Central Asia Dialogue of Foreign Ministers, in New Delhi PTI

terrorism and drug trafficking, ensuring unhindered humanitarian assistance and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities as key priorities in Afghanistan. "We must find ways of helping the people of Afghanistan," Jaishankar said.

In the Dialogue, the six Ministers focused on the scourge of terrorism and said Afghan territory must not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist activities. They also reiterated that providing safe havens to terror groups, use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism, terror financing and dissemination of a radical ideology go against the basic principles of humanity and international relations.

Referring to regional con-

nectivity initiatives, the countries asserted that such projects should be based on the principles of transparency, broad participation, local priorities, financial sustainability and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. A joint statement said the Ministers stressed perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of terrorist acts must be held accountable and brought to justice in accordance with the principle of "extradite or prosecute".

On the situation in Afghanistan, the Ministers reiterated strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan while emphasising the need for respecting sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Covid booster can provide 85 per cent protection against severe illness: Study

New Delhi: Amid an ongoing debate whether booster shots should be administered or not, a team of researchers from the UK has said booster doses could provide around 85 per cent protection against severe illness.

According to reports, the booster dose-protection is a bit less than vaccines given against earlier versions of Covid. But it means the top-up dose should still keep many people out of the hospital. The modeling, from the team at Imperial College London, is based on limited information on Omicron.

The researchers said there is a high degree of uncertainty until more real-world information is gathered about this new variant that is spreading quickly.

Experts are still trying to figure out how mild or severe Omicron will turn out to be, the report said.

While various countries like the USA and the UK have started giving booster doses to their vulnerable population, India has made it clear that vaccinating the adult population with both doses of the Covid vaccine will be its first priority --- ahead of booster doses.

Omicron cases in India surge to 147

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's Omicron count surged to 147 on Sunday after two people, including a teenager, tested positive for the variant after recently returning to Gujarat from the United Kingdom. Maharashtra with six more Omicron patients on Sunday tops the list of the worst-hit State taking its tally to 54. As many as 22 active cases of Omicron are from Mumbai.

Ringing the alarm bell, Bhramar Mukherjee, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Michigan, tweeted that "Omicron being highly transmissible, vaccines (with-out booster), past infections provide only modest protection, so, a huge portion of the Indian population may be susceptible again".

"Instead of just highlighting the possibility of Omicron being clinically mild, we need to recognise that a very large number of infections over a short period of time may lead to the same number of people needing hospital beds as the second wave: absolute numbers matter, not just rates," she tweeted on Sunday.

The WHO has already warned that the Omicron coronavirus variant cases are doubling in 1.5 to 3 days in areas with community transmission.



A worker prepares a bed for Covid patients in the Commonwealth Games Village in view of the rising Omicron cases, in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

India reported the first two cases of Omicron in Karnataka on December 2 after the heavily mutated variant of the coronavirus was first reported in South Africa on November 24. Since then the virus is spreading fast in India, some cases are being reported in travellers from South Africa while many others have no travel history, indicating community transmission of the disease.

On Saturday, India reported 30 fresh cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana. On Friday, there were 26 new Omicron cases in the country on Friday and 14 on Thursday and there were 12 infections on both Tuesday and Wednesday.

Delhi sees 107 new Covid cases, Omicron tally soars to 22

New Delhi: Amid concerns that cases of Omicron variant of Coronavirus may rapidly grow, Delhi on Sunday reported 107 Covid-19 cases of coronavirus in 24 hours. This is the highest daily spike in nearly six months.

On June 25, the national Capital had recorded 115 cases in a day. So far, Delhi has detected 22 cases of Omicron with a rise of 12 new infected patients on Sunday. On Sunday, Delhi also reported one related death - a first in 10 days. 25,101 Covid patients have died so far in Delhi. The case positivity rate of the national capital is now 0.17 per cent - on a gradual rise from 0.13 per cent yesterday. On Wednesday, 57 cases were recorded in Delhi with a positivity rate of 0.10 per cent, according to the health bulletin.

There are currently 540 active Covid-19 patients in Delhi with 255 in home isolation. The number of Covid cases recorded in Delhi so far has reached 14,42,197. Over 14.16 lakh patients have recovered from the disease, with 50 people being discharged in the last 24 hours.

Guest Column

The Legacy of Neecha Nagar and Uttarakhand



Lokesh Ohri
HILLBILLY

With the release in 1955 of Satyajit Ray's debut, Pather Panchali, an eloquent and important new cinematic voice made itself heard all over the world. A depiction of rural Bengali life in a style inspired by Italian neo-realism, this poetic evocation of a number of years in the life of a family introduces us to both little Apu and, just as essentially, the women who will help shape him: his independent elder sister, Durga; his harried mother, Sarbjaya, who, with her husband away, must hold the family together; and his kindly and mischievous elderly aunt, Indir. All

characters were vividly crafted with Ray bringing out deftly the layers amongst all his characters. With resplendent cinematography informed by its young protagonist's perpetual sense of discovery, Pather Panchali, which received an award for Best Human Document at Cannes, is undoubtedly an immersive cinematic experience and a film of elemental power.

Works from great masters such as Satyajit Ray need to be celebrated for the global recognition they brought to Indian cinema, and given their due. However, while acknowledging the master from Bengal and others, we must not forget to celebrate the only Indian film to win the Palme d'Or thus far. The film I refer to is Chetan Anand's directorial debut, Neecha Nagar, a film made in 1946, almost a decade before Ray's masterpiece. Even more significant for film buffs in the state of Uttarakhand should be the fact that five individuals closely associated with the project were, at that point in time, connected with and living in the Himalayan mountains.

To begin with, Chetan

Anand himself worked at the Doon School from 1940 to 1944. During his tenure as a teacher in Dehradun, he taught history, while also training students in the then eight-year-old school in English theatre and tennis. During this time, he was also visited by his more famous brother, Dev Anand, at an impressionable twenty years, who had not yet taken to acting.

Chetan's first love was cinema, and he would soon give up teaching to move to Bombay to direct Neecha Nagar, which had in its cast Mohan Segal and Zohra Segal, who were then part of the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre, established by the globally acknowledged dance maestro Uday Shankar at Simtola, Almora. In fact Zohra Segal began her illustrious career as a choreographer with this film. Also in the cast was Chetan Anand's wife, Uma. The music direction was by Pandit Ravi Shankar, who had also joined his brother Uday Shankar in Almora as a student.

Chetan Anand's debut film, Neecha Nagar, or lowly city, was based on Maxim Gorky's best-known play, The Lower Depths (1902), and stands

proudly amidst a triad of films that released in 1946. Along with KA Abbas's Dharti Ke Lal and V Shantaram's Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani, it can, in retrospective be celebrated as a film that pioneered the parallel cinema movement in India.

A stark portraiture of social realism, and as relevant now as it was in that time, the film was ahead of its time. Today, when just being selected for the showcase at Cannes is big news for any film, few remember that Neecha Nagar is the only Indian film to have won the coveted Palme d'Or at the very first edition of the Cannes Festival. Yet, while internationally nominated films and filmmakers continue to be felicitated in India and abroad, Neecha Nagar did not even get a wide commercial release.

Made in the final years of the British Raj, the film provides valuable insights into the mood of the nation then, especially of its restless and revolutionary young, who were prepared to make any personal sacrifice for achieving the country's independence. It is worth pondering over how its

protagonists – the Gandhi-clad Balraj (Rafiq Anwar) and his charkha-spinning sister Rupa (Kamini Kaushal) managed to escape the British censors. These visual reminders apart, Balraj's non-cooperative campaign against the modern rulers, the corporate elite, shown wearing Western attire and driven by a tyrant capitalist mindset, closely echoed the Mahatma's methods of protest.

The film effectively argues that a turn towards leftist idealism is probably the only solution to the common man's problems and struggles. Chetan Anand and his group of actors and technicians were influenced by the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), a prominent cultural outfit that had supported Neecha Nagar.

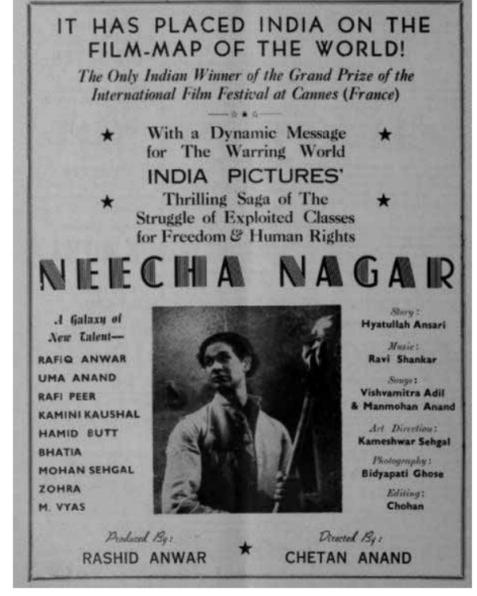
Another interesting factor in the film is that it appeals to the innate good in every human being, rich or poor. This can be directly attributed to Gandhi's faith in the power of non-violent protests to achieve amity between the oppressed and the oppressor by appealing to the soul of the latter. The industrialist being named Sarkar, meaning government, is no mere coincidence. It

showed that the corporate class, and not the elected representative, is vested with decision-making powers. The film innovatively blended documentary footage with enacted scenes, Chetan Anand's signature style, which lends it the feel of a researched docu-drama. The film's characters come from the world of theatre, but credit goes to the director that he has desisted from making his film or its characters over the top, loud and theatrical.

A valuable social document, the concerns of Neecha Nagar are as relevant today as at the time of its making. The film remains a prominent achievement by one of the most experimental auteurs of Indian cinema who never got his due. Such is the impact of his debut that it will compel any serious student of cinema to delve further into his eclectic oeuvre ranging from India's first war film Haqeeqat, made in 1966 to Hindi cinema's first musical drama, Heer Ranjha shot in the 1970s.

Uttarakhand would do well to commemorate, in some form, the making of this film that brought global recognition to Indian cinema, especially

because so many of its cast and crew lived and worked here. (The writer is an anthropologist, author, traveler & activist who also runs a public walking group called Been There, Doon That? Views expressed are personal)



Patanjali presents comprehensive plan for agricultural development

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

Under the guidance of Swami Ramdev and leadership of Acharya Balkrishna along with the efforts of about 150 scientists of Patanjali Research Institute (PRI), a comprehensive plan has been prepared to solve the problems related to Indian farmers and agriculture. This has been presented in the book 'Nav Harit Kranti-An Agro Vision'. A round table discussion was presided over by Balkrishna in which through this compilation, the future plans for solving the basic problems related to agriculture, simplifying agriculture and increasing the income of farmers was considered. Speaking on the occasion, Ramdev said that the Patanjali has future plans to uplift farmers' status. Beginning from organic farming training to organic fertilisers, high quality seeds and minimum priced fertilisers will be made accessible to the farmers. Now even in the technical field, Patanjali has developed

technological interventions in form of apps to help the farmers, for geo-mapping of land, geofencing and weather forecast so that basic essential information will be made easily assessable to all farmers. Balkrishna said that Patanjali has worked to diminish the gap between farmers and government. If 'Nav Harit-Kranti An Agro-Vision' is implemented on ground then it will definitely benefit the



farmers. Through this agro-vision our Prime Minister's aim of soil testing, agriculture digitalization and PM-Kisan Scheme will be implemented to

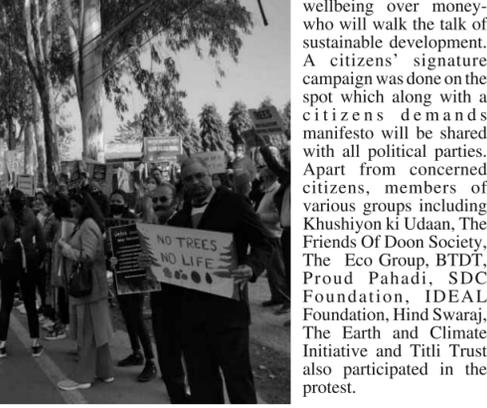
benefit the farmers. Secretary and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) director general Trilochan Mohapatra said that Patanjali has strong infrastructure, a strong team of agricultural scientists and the passion to do something for the farmers. Its future plans in the field of agriculture are commendable. NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said that NITI Aayog has not done as much work in one year as done through this book. It is not just a book but a complete encyclopedia. It includes the present status of agriculture, problems related to it, their technical solution etc.

Our vote for greenery, stress concerned citizens

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A number of concerned citizens and public groups staged a protest demonstration on Sahastradhara Road against the planned felling of 2,200 trees for road widening on Sunday. The people staged a peaceful protest on the call given by Citizens For Green Doon (CFGD). The protesters pointed out that 11,000 trees are in the process of being felled for Delhi-Dehradun expressway while 2,200 trees are marked for felling on Sahastradhara Road and more are expected to be chopped for other ill-conceived projects. They said that tourist's convenience is taking precedence over the environment and life quality of Dehradun residents. The government broadens roads for more and more tourists unmindful of the fact of this small valley

town's carrying capacity and its rising air and noise pollution. A protest had been held by citizens here earlier on September against the planned felling of trees. The protest on Sunday was organised following media reports last



week about tenders being invited for the road widening for which the trees will be axed. The citizens demanded to be heard by their leaders. Many in attendance said they are forced to rethink who they will bring back to power, who will choose their city's health and wellbeing over money-who will walk the talk of sustainable development. A citizens' signature campaign was done on the spot which along with a citizens demands manifesto will be shared with all political parties. Apart from concerned citizens, members of various groups including Khushiyan ki Udaan, The Friends of Doon Society, The Eco Group, BTDT, Proud Pahadi, SDC Foundation, IDEAL Foundation, Hind Swaraj, The Earth and Climate Initiative and Titli Trust also participated in the protest.

Sharma chosen for Asia's Social Innovator Award

The secretary of Society of Pollution and Environmental Conservation Scientists (SPECS) Brijmohan Sharma has bagged Asia's Social Innovator Award 2020-21.

PNS ■ DEHRADUN



He is the first person from Uttarakhand to get this award for which he was chosen taking into consideration the fact that he has touched over 50 lakh lives through his interventions across the remotest parts of the country. The long citation that will be presented

to Sharma during the award presentation ceremony to be held later refers to his journey of the water testing campaign starting from the year 1990. It also mentions his food adulteration testing that started in 1996 to create awareness as well as stop food adulteration. Sharma also has a passion for popularising science through field-based interventions among the various sections of society including children. Significantly, as part of his commitment towards environment conservation in the year 2020-21, under his leadership, villagers of Doiwala block in Dehradun planted 2.10 lakh fruit trees in their fields. Even during Covid-19 lockdown, employment was generated for 68 marginalised women who stitched 62,000 face masks which were distributed to Covid warriors. In addition, 325 PPE kits, 5,000 reusable and 4,600 single use masks along-with a cheque for Rs one lakh was donated to CM of Uttarakhand.

BIS to start checking for non-compliance of gold hallmarking norm

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) will start conducting inspections against the jewellers for non-compliance with the mandatory gold hallmarking norms in Uttarakhand. The bureau will start this initiative from Dehradun as the maximum number of BIS certified jewellers are from here. The central government made hallmarking on gold jewellery and other related items mandatory under the BIS Regulations from June 16 for jewellers with annual turnover above Rs 40 lakh. Since BIS recognised Assaying and Hallmarking (A and H) Centres are currently present in Dehradun and Pithoragarh districts so far, only the eligible jewellers of these districts will be inspected this month. The head of the Dehradun branch office of BIS, Sudheer Bishnoi informed that his teams have already started taking random samples from jewellers who claim to sell hallmarked jewellery to verify their claims. He said that the bureau aims to take at least 100 samples by the end of this month to check the authenticity of the gold jewellery being sold in the district. "We will also conduct inspections to check whether jewellers with over Rs 40 lakh

annual turnover are selling pieces of gold jewellery without a hallmark. The bureau will take action against such violations in the district," stated Bishnoi. Informing about the current status of BIS certified jewellers in the state, he said that there were only about 300 BIS certified jewellers in the state but now this number has increased to about 1,200 in six months. He informed that there are over 500 BIS certified jewellers in Dehradun alone and only a few in Pithoragarh as numbers of jewellers are less there. "Since many consumers have also started demanding hallmarked jewellery, jewellers from other areas like Haridwar, Roorkee and Rudrapur are also selling hallmarked jewellery. Many jewellers who are exempted from the mandatory BIS hallmarking rule have also registered for BIS certification voluntarily," stated Bishnoi. He said that to facilitate the BIS registration for jewellers, a new A and H Centre is also ready to operate in Srinagar. He informed, "We will get the license for the centre this week and remaining formalities are almost done. Jewellers will be able to apply for BIS registration in Srinagar too by the end of this month."

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Singh forges ahead after becoming youngest mentor at Google OSPs

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Askirat Singh who studied computer science at UPES and became the youngest mentor at the Google open-source programmes currently spends most of his time doing research and development in collaboration with different professors across the globe. He is working as a research intern at IIT-Delhi and has contributed on multiple types of research at UPES. Singh says, "After serving as a GCI mentor I got the opportunity to mentor at GSoC and Google Mentor Summit. This was a great achievement for me. I remember spending months networking, researching, and meeting

new people at Google HQ, California, USA. My journey from failing at a Google Coded In contest to becoming the youngest mentor at Google Open-Source Programmes has been great. I have gained immense learning and experience from industry veterans, and I hope to continue contributing and developing great technology worldwide."

He has also been mentoring and administrating young-minded people across the globe within major Google development programmes. He has had the opportunity to work with people like the vice president at The Linux Foundation and a former MIT director.



BJP national spokesman and Uttarakhand assembly election co-in-charge RP Singh paints the party symbol on the parapet of the bridge across the Nayar at Satpuli in Pauri district where he toured various constituencies during his week-long stay

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, निर्माण शाखा, उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल संसाधन विकास एवं निर्माण निगम, भिकियासैण (अल्मोड़ा)
ई-मेल :- eecd.bksain@gmail.com

पत्रांक : 2747 / विविध-5 / 429 दिनांक : 13.12.2021

अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना

अध्यक्ष, उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल संसाधन विकास एवं निर्माण निगम की ओर से अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल निगम अथवा उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से निम्नलिखित निर्माण कार्य हेतु एकल निविदा प्रणाली के अन्तर्गत अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है:-

| क्र. सं. | कार्य का नाम | विकास खण्ड | बिड सिक्योरिटी (धरोहर धनराशि) (₹00) | निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य | कार्य की अवधि | पंजीकृत ठेकेदार की श्रेणी |
|----------|---|------------|---|-------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम जाख पेयजल योजना में रेट्रोफिटिंग कार्य। | सल्ट | ₹0 | 2500.00 + GST | 03 माह | विभाग में 'डी' व उच्चतर |
| 2 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम बुराशपानी पेयजल योजना में रेट्रोफिटिंग कार्य। | स्याल्दे | ₹0 | 3000.00 + GST | 04 माह | विभाग में 'सी' व उच्चतर |
| 3 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम चरीक्यारी पेयजल योजना में रेट्रोफिटिंग कार्य। | सल्ट | ₹0 | 2500.00 + GST | 03 माह | विभाग में 'डी' व उच्चतर |
| 4 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम धनोली तल्ली एवं धनोली मल्ली पेयजल योजना में श्रोत, जलाशय, पाईप लाईन एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य। | भिकियासैण | ₹100 के नोटरी किये हुए स्टाम्प पेपर में बिड डिक्लरेशन फार्म जमा किया जाना है। | 2500.00 + GST | 03 माह | विभाग में 'डी' व उच्चतर |
| 5 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम केहेडगाव, सोटापानी एवं परथोला में रेट्रोफिटिंग कार्य। | स्याल्दे | ₹0 | 4000.00 + GST | 04 माह | विभाग में 'सी' व उच्चतर |
| 6 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम हरनोली एवं तिरमोली, पेयजल योजना में श्रोत, जलाशय, पाईप लाईन एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य। | भिकियासैण | ₹0 | 4000.00 + GST | 04 माह | विभाग में 'सी' व उच्चतर |
| 7 | जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत ग्राम तिमली चवरोदी फेज-2, पेयजल योजना में रेट्रोफिटिंग कार्य। | स्याल्दे | ₹0 | 4000.00 + GST | 04 माह | विभाग में 'सी' व उच्चतर |

नोट :- निविदा से सम्बन्धित Key-Dates नियम शर्तों, शुद्धिपत्र एवं निरस्तीकरण आदि www.uktenders.gov.in पर अथवा किसी भी कार्य दिवस में कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, निर्माण शाखा, उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल निगम, भिकियासैण में देखी जा सकती हैं।

Key Dates

| | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | Date of Calling of Tender | 13.12.2021 |
| 2 | Date of Online Publication | 21.12.2021 at 10.00 hrs. |
| 3 | Document download : Start Date | 21.12.2021 at 12.00 hrs. |
| 4 | Document download : End Date | 29.12.2021 at 17.00 hrs. |
| 5 | Bid Submission : Start Date | 21.12.2021 at 12.00 hrs. |
| 6 | Bid Submission : End Date | 29.12.2021 at 17.00 hrs. |
| 7 | Offline submission of documents (Cost of bidding document, Bid Security, Original Affidavits & all the Supporting Documents in Support of Qualification) | 30.12.2021 at 17.00 hrs. |
| 8 | Date of Tender Opening | 31.12.2021 at 12.00 hrs. |

(सुनील जोशी)
अधिशासी अभियन्ता

"जल संयंत्र - जीवन संयंत्र" "कृपा जल स्रोतों को प्रदूषित होने से बचाइये"
"जल स्रोत बताइये-पेयजल योजना पाइये" "जल स्रोतों को प्रदूषित करना दण्डनीय अपराध है"

Thakur launches Kumaon leg of Vijay Sankalp Yatra

PNS ■ BAGESHWAR

Keeping the focus on development achieved in the state and nation by the Bharatiya Janata Party governments compared to past governments of the Congress, Union minister Anurag Thakur said that the BJP will comfortably win the coming Assembly election in Uttarakhand. Thakur said this while addressing a large public gathering at the launch of the Kumaon leg of the party's Vijay Sankalp Yatra in Bageshwar on Sunday. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama, BJP State president and other senior party leaders were also present at the launch of the party's Yatra.

Thakur said that there were various scams during the term of the Congress-led UPA government whereas the NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has focused on expediting development works during its term in office so far. "We have given a corruption-free, development oriented government. The Modi government did the work of providing free ration to 80 crore

people for 20 months. The work of constructing toilets and pucca houses for the poor is also being done consistently. India is steadily moving towards self reliance," he said.



Addressing the gathering Kaushik said that the Congress frequently lies to the public while also accusing the Aam Aadmi Party of deceiving the public.

CM Dhama said that the large crowd gathered at the launch of the Vijay Sankalp Yatra in Bageshwar substantiates the belief that the BJP will win the assembly polls with a strong majority. He reiterated that necessary work is being done to execute all the announcements made by the state government. Consistent effort is being undertaken to ensure that both Uttarakhand and the nation keep on moving ahead on the developmental path. Dhama said that the recruitment to vacant government posts is being expedited with 24,000 posts slated to be filled soon.

It will be recalled that BJP national president JP Nadda had launched the Garhwal leg of the Vijay Sankalp Yatra from Haridwar on Saturday.

BJP doesn't intend to provide free electricity in U'khand: AAP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chief ministerial candidate of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Ajay Kothiyal said that the recent statement of the cabinet minister Harak Singh Rawat stating the central government is not approving the project of providing 100 units of free electricity, has cleared BJP's stance on giving free electricity to the public. He said that chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has no intention of giving free electricity to people. Addressing mediapersons in a Press conference in the party's state office in Dehradun, he said that Rawat had said that the state government made the plan to provide 100 units of free electricity but the central government is not approving it. He stated, "On one hand, he says that the public here need 100 units of free electricity, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic hit many across the state. On the other hand, he says that the state made the plan but the centre is not approving it. I do not understand why they need the

centre's permission for the execution of this announcement. If they cannot execute it, why are they trying to mislead people with the free electricity announcement?" Kothiyal said that as per Rawat's statement, if BJP will provide free electricity here, they will have to do the same in other states with BJP government which, according to him, the BJP does not know how to achieve. He said that BJP is also claiming that many

proves this statement. AAP can show lakhs of such bills in Delhi where the amount in bills is zero because we know how to do it." He also invited opposition leaders to Delhi along with him to show how AAP executed its plans and promises. He said, "I am going to Delhi on December 21 and since opposition leaders question AAP's credibility to fulfill the announcements here, I would like to invite BJP and Congress leaders to show them



were provided with free electricity when the pandemic hit the state which is obviously bogus. He said, "I demand that the government show me a single electricity bill that

how AAP has executed its promises across Delhi in every field. Unlike them, we have a proven record to show we are capable of fulfilling the promise we make in elections."

MCD to build hi-tech public toilets

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With the aim to get the city into the top 50 cleanest cities of Swachh Survekshan 2022 (SS22), the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) is gearing up to build Uttarakhand's first three hi-tech public toilets. After making it to the top 100 cleanest cities by achieving 82nd position in SS21, the officials are now working on attaining a place in the top 50. The availability of public toilets is one of the important components of SS22 but the city only has 46 toilets so far. The corporation is having issues in finding places to build more toilets and it also had to

postpone its project of building pink toilets for women due to a lack of space in the required areas. The officials said that the health section is working on finding space near places with the most footfalls and for now, the corporation has decided to build three hi-tech public toilets in the city. "We are considering constructing hi-tech toilets at three locations in Dehradun. These toilets are currently proposed to be built near Maharana Pratap Sports College in Raipur, Mussoorie diversion road and in the ISBT area. However, we are still looking for other locations and no site has been finalised yet,"

stated the senior municipal health officer Dr RK Singh. He said that besides having all the upgraded sanitation facilities, these toilets will have a waiting room where visitors, especially those who are in the city for only a few hours, can wait and take a shower along with using other facilities. This is the reason these toilets are proposed to be built in such locations where people visit frequently throughout the day. "We have prepared a detailed project report (DPR) and will send it to the state administration for approval by the end of this month," added Singh.

Sisodia promises to end 'Raid Raj', seeks support of businessmen

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will end Raid Raj to provide a safe ambience for businessmen if it wins 2022 Uttarakhand assembly elections. AAP leader and Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said this during his interaction with local businessmen in the Devbhoomi Business Dialogue event organised by the party in Rudrapur on Sunday. Sisodia, who is also Delhi's finance minister, said that condition of businessmen and industrialists has deteriorated in over two decades and the governments here have only used them as a means of collecting funds rather than taking businessmen-friendly decisions. He asserted that AAP's



government will provide relief to the businessmen from the Raid Raj under which tax inspectors raid business premises as per their own will which puts unnecessary pressure on businessmen and often leads to their exploitation and corruption. He said, "We took such initiatives in Delhi which has eliminated the unnecessary fear exerted by officials

among the businessmen. The businessmen will also not have to go to different government offices for different types of paperwork as the employee of the department concerned will come at the doorstep to carry out such works." Sisodia asserted that Uttarakhand has sufficient resources that can do wonders for public in every field if used wisely with right intentions. He said, "People of Delhi have forgotten about BJP and Congress since they elected AAP. Give us a chance and people here will forget about them too." Sisodia's four-day tour to Kumaon region ended on Sunday and he returned to Delhi in the evening.

Winter Tourism

Yamuna Temple, Kharsali (Uttarkashi)

The beginning point of the Chardham Yatra is Yamunotri. During winters Maa Yamuna comes down to a small village known as Kharsali which lies a kilometre away across the river Yamuna from Janki Chatti.

Mukhimath Temple, Mukhba (Uttarkashi)

The Mukhimath temple in Mukhba is the winter seat and place of worship of Goddess Ganga. During winter season when the doors of Gangotri temple are closed, the idol of Goddess Ganga is brought to Mukhba from Gangotri, where Goddess Ganga is worshiped during winters.

Yogadhyana Badri Temple, Pandukeshwar (Chamoli)

During winters when the doors of Badrinath temple are closed, Lord Badri Vishal is worshiped in Yogadhyana Badri temple. Yogadhyana Badri temple is the abode of the Utsav Doli of Uddhav ji and Kuber ji. The Doli of Adiguru Shankaracharya stays in Nirsimha temple during winters.

Onkareshwar Temple, Ukhimath (Rudraprayag)

Onkareshwar temple at Ukhimath is the winter seat of Lord Kedarnath. During winters the Utsav Doli of the idol of Lord Kedarnath is brought to Ukhimath and worshiped here at the Onkareshwar temple for six months.

Tapovan, Joshimath

Auli, Joshimath

Onkareshwar Temple, Ukhimath

Yogadhyana Badri Temple, Pandukeshwar

Nirsimha Temple, Joshimath

Harsil Valley, Uttarkashi

Shani Temple, Kharsali

Aadi Badri Karnaprayag

Vishwanath Temple, Uttarkashi

Deoria Tal, Ukhimath

Chopta, Rudraprayag

Bhavishya Badri Temple, Joshimath

Triyuginarayan Temple, Rudraprayag

Gangnani (Hot Water Spring), Uttarkashi

Pak floats new terror outfits in Valley to carry out attacks on forces

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

In the ever-evolving terror dynamics in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistani terror groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) have floated new outfits, including one comprising stone-pelters to ramp up terrorism in the Valley.

The Tahreek-e-Sangbaz is one of the latest avatars of the Pakistani terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad to carry out hits, including lone-wolf attacks, especially against security forces.

In the last few months, attacks against the security forces including Jammu and Kashmir Police have witnessed a surge, particularly in Srinagar.

Sangbaz means stone-pelters and the Tahreek-e-Sangbaz could be mainly recruiting stone-pelters, released earlier by the government as a goodwill

gesture, to carry out hits in Kashmir.

The activities of the Tahreek-e-Sangbaz have been noticed by the agencies soon after The Resistance Front (TRF) suffered a major blow with the liquidation of its top commander Abbas Sheikh who was driving the terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir capital Srinagar.

Sheikh was the key terrorist maintaining a large network of over ground workers (OGWs) as also terror cadres and his killing by the Forces dealt a major blow to the Jaish project, officials from Srinagar said.

New terror entities like Kashmir Tigers and Islamic State Wilayat Hind are also part of the latest Pakistani strategy to ramp up terrorism in the Valley, they said.

Amid the spiraling terrorist violence in the Valley, the Centre had in October



despatched over 5,000 more troops (50 companies, 25 each of the BSF and CRPF) to quell the terrorist violence there

including in capital Srinagar, against both civilians and Forces, as reported earlier by The Pioneer.

Last week, the Jammu and Kashmir administration effected a major reshuffle in the district police hierarchy across the Valley and, transferred and posted 27 Senior Superintendents of Police (SSP), Superintendents of Police (SP) and Additional Superintendents of Police (ASP).

The Kashmir Tigers is also a Jaish Front and had claimed responsibility for the Kakapora police station grenade attack in Pulwama. The ISWH had claimed responsibility for carrying out a lone wolf hit and wounding a traffic policeman in Rajouri Kadal area of Srinagar. The pistol used to target a non-local Hindu street food vendor in Srinagar in October was also used in the lone wolf attack in Rajouri

Kadal.

ISWH is also a Pakistani project to keep the terror pot boiling and also deny its role in the same. The Islamic State is essentially engaged in radicalization and recruitment of cadres for its territorial ambitions in Afghanistan, Syria and Libya among other countries. The IS does not have any known intention to grab territory in the country, experts said.

Likewise, the United Liberation Front (ULF) had claimed responsibility for the attack on migrant workers in south Kashmir's Anantnag in October.

The attacks against non-Muslim migrants was also part of the shifting terror tactic in terrorism in the Valley being mounted in the Union Territory by Pakistan Army-ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) combine in concert with their terror cohorts like LeT and JeM, officials added.

Upper House productivity falls to 37.6%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The productivity of Rajya Sabha hit a low of 37.60 per cent during the third week of the ongoing Winter Session owing to disruptions and forced adjournments over the issue of suspension of 12 members of the House. The continued disruptions pulled down the cumulative functionality of the House for the first three weeks to 46.70 percent, the RS secretariat said. According to the data collected by the secretariat, the productivity of Rajya Sabha was 49.70 % and 52.50 % during the first and the second week, respectively.

During the third week, of the total scheduled sitting time of 27 hours 11 minutes, the House could function only for 10 hours 14 minutes, losing 62.40 % of available time on account of disruptions and forced adjournments and the issue of suspension of 12 members of the House, the officials said. "During the third week,



Question Hour which is meant for seeking the accountability of the Government has suffered the most with only four of the 75 listed Starred Questions orally answered by the concerned ministers," the RS secretariat said. Only 11.40 % of the time available for Question Hour was utilised during the week, while 62.70 % of the functional time has been spent on the government's legislative business.

Three bills were passed and returned during the week

after discussing for a total of 6 hours and 25 minutes in which 33 members participated. A Short Duration Discussion on the 'situation arising out of the cases of Omicron variant of COVID-19' taken up during the week remained inconclusive. This discussion is listed for resumption Monday, the officials said. Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu had adjourned the House on Friday after 17 minutes of Zero Hour, urging the government and the Opposition parties to resolve

the stalemate on the suspension issue.

During the 15 sittings of the first three weeks of ongoing winter session, the House functioned for less than an hour per day for six sittings, according to official data. About 42 % of the functional time of the House has been spent on the government's legislative business passing a total of eight bills so far, while only about 18 % of the time has been spent on the Question Hour with only 56 of the 217 listed questions orally answered, said the secretariat. So far, 81 Zero Hour and 47 Special Mentions were made in the House during the three weeks of winter session. The Mediation Bill, 2021 seeking to promote resolution of disputes including commercial is listed for introduction on Monday in Rajya Sabha. The Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Bill, 2021 as passed by Lok Sabha has been listed for consideration and passing on Monday.

BJP to hold protest over KMC polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst charges of rigging in Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) polls, BJP's national information and technology department head and party's co-in-charge in West Bengal Amit Malviya on Sunday announced that the party would protest "death of democracy" in the TMC-ruled Bengal.

Sharing videos showing alleged malpractices and police heavy-handedness, Malviya said TMC has violated polls with intimidation and threats.

"This is how voting has happened in KMC polls. No functional CCTV cameras. No police protection. No EC officials. No VVPAT. No CAPF deployment.

Both SC and HC turned down the pleas. Movement of voters and BJP leaders restricted by Kolkata police. Well done, Mamata Banerjee," he tweeted sharing a video where voting is allegedly cast in favour of the TMC candidate with



apparently no EC official around.

"Free and fair KMC polls? Here Kolkata Police can be seen manhandling Brajesh Jha, BJP candidate from ward 7. At whose behest are they intimidating BJP candidates? Home minister Mamata Banerjee or her nephew, who is now super

CM? WB Election Commission and Courts must take note," another of his tweet said. Malviya said the TMC has "violated KMC polls, bombing voters, murder and rape threats, intimidation, assaulting media, using police and civil administration to bend rules. They have done it all. BJP

Bengal to launch protests across all districts of WB to highlight the death of democracy in the State," Malviya further tweeted.

He accused Kolkata police being hand-in-glove with the TMC leaders in intimidating BJP workers and rigging the polls. Eom

Cong accuses Assam CM of grabbing land

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday accused Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family of "grabbing" 18 acres of land meant for the landless, and demanded his immediate dismissal along with a Supreme Court monitored probe by a special investigative team. The party would raise the matter in Parliament as well as on the streets.

Addressing a joint press conference, Congress leaders Jitendra Singh, Gaurav Gogoi and Gourav Vallabh alleged that Sarma misused his official position to illegally transfer government land for landless people in favour of RBS Realtors from 2006 to 2009, when he was a powerful minister in the then Congress government.

The Congress leaders were accompanied by party MPs Ripun Bora and Abdul Khaleque, who alleged that the chief minister was aiding the land mafia in usurping the land for the landless.

Vallabh and Singh alleged that the Assam chief minister, on one hand is showing high-handedness by evicting poor and deprived families on the grounds that no one has the right to illegally take over government land, but has himself handed over such land worth crores to his family members.

They said as per independent investigations, real estate company RBS Realtors, co-founded by Sarma's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, is allegedly occupying around 18 acres of government land intended for landless individuals and institutions.

"We demand that Sarma, who along with his family, is involved in usurping land for the landless people, should be immediately sacked from his position," Vallabh told reporters.

"A sitting chief minister, whose family is directly involved in land grabbing, has no right to remain in power. He must be immediately sacked from his position," he



said, adding that he hopes Prime Minister Narendra Modi will sack such a "land mafia chief minister".

The Congress leader added that the "EC/I-T/CBI/FSIO are expected to investigate all such friends who have no right to constitutionally and morally hold the positions they are occupying".

Jitendra Singh, who is AICC in-charge for Assam, said the Congress hoped Modi, who has said that he would not allow anyone to indulge in corrupt practices, will carry out an independent investigation into the alleged land deals and cancel the same.

"We want that the prime minister should conduct a probe by an SIT under the monitoring of a sitting Supreme Court judge," he said.

Singh further alleged that one has seen that probe agencies like Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Income Tax (IT) department have acted like BJP functionaries by initiating action against political opponents of the saffron party, and should now investigate people who are corrupt in the BJP too.

Taking a dig at the ruling party, Gogoi asked what "washing machine does the BJP have that when it takes leaders from other parties who are facing corruption charges, turn clean after they join the BJP?" He alleged that Sarma was facing corruption probes against him in Louis Berger and Sharda scams before joining the BJP, but turned "clean" after joining

the saffron party.

Gogoi said the Congress has four demands for the Modi government -- an SIT be constituted immediately under the supervision of a sitting judge of the Supreme Court to investigate the matter and the SIT must carry out its investigation in a time-bound manner".

He said the ED, CBI, IT, Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) and all other investigative agencies must be asked to file a complaint and initiate an investigation of all such similar unlawful land transfers in the state of Assam.

Giving more details, the party leaders alleged that RBS Realtors Private Limited acquired most of the 18 acres in two stages, first in 2006-2007 and then in 2009.

"Individuals that are landless and needy are granted ceiling surplus land by the Assam government and are prohibited from selling that land for a 10-year period, but in 2009, a total of 11 bigha three katha and four lessa (3,01,674 square feet or 6.92 acres) of ceiling surplus land in Bongora intended for and allotted to supposedly needy individuals by the government of Assam, was bought by the company, violating the 10-year lock-in period," they said.

The Congress demanded that all unlawful land transfers to the aforementioned realtors must be immediately cancelled and provisions made to provide alternative land to the landless and needy people whose land was unscrupulously taken away.

Urban unemployment 9.1%, highest in 4 mths

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The urban unemployment rate stood at 9.1 per cent as on December 18 which is the highest since August. The all India unemployment rate recorded 7.6 per cent as on December 17 which is also high as compared to 7 per cent in November. The rural unemployment rate stood at 6.9 per cent as compared to 6.44 per cent in November. Unemployment is going to be a major poll issue in the upcoming assembly polls in five states.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), which tracks the labour market

with proprietary tools, showed that with 29.3 per cent Haryana is in the top among the states and union territories in unemployment, followed by Jammu and Kashmir with 21.4 per cent and Rajasthan with 20.4 per cent. Bihar (14.8 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (13.6 per cent), Tripura (13.4 per cent), Goa (12.7 per cent) and Jharkhand (11.2 per cent) are among those states having double digit unemployment in December. The unemployment rate in Delhi is recorded at 9.3 per cent.

The data showed the unemployment rate declined from 7.8 per cent in October to 7 per cent in November; the

employment rate rose by a whisker from 37.28 per cent to 37.34 per cent. This translated into employment increasing by 1.4 million, from 400.8 million to 402.1 million in November 2021.

India's unemployment rate at the national level stood at 7.75 per cent in October, 6.86 per cent in September, 8.32 per cent in August, 6.96 per cent in July, 9.17 per cent in June and 11.84 per cent in May. The Urban unemployment rate stood at 7.38 per cent in October, 8.62 per cent in September, 9.78 per cent in August, 8.32 per cent in July, 10.08 per cent in June and 14.72 per cent in May. The

rural unemployment rate stood at 7.91 per cent in October, 6.06 per cent in September, 7.64 per cent in August, 6.34 per cent in July, 8.75 per cent in June and 10.55 per cent in May.

According to the CMIE, the data in November showed the labour participation rate (LPR) has slipped. It fell from 40.41 per cent in October to 40.15 per cent in November. This is the second consecutive month of a fall in the LPR. Cumulatively, the LPR has fallen by 0.51 percentage points over October and November 2021. This makes it a significant fall in the LPR compared to average changes seen in other months if we exclude the

months of economic shock such as the lockdown.

As per the CMIE, the creation of additional jobs pushed up India's employment rate to 37.87% in September as compared to 37.15% in August. Further, the employment rate in rural India jumped by 0.85 percentage points to 39.53% in September as against 38.68% in August while that in urban India grew to 34.62% compared with 34.15% in August. Of the 8.5 million additional people employed in September, 6.5 million or 76.5% of the total employment generation was in rural India," CMIE stated in its weekly labour market analysis early this month.

Initiative to boost 'golden hour breastfeeding'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid declining breastfeeding rate mainly due to rise in cesarean delivery in the country, a unique initiative 'National Accreditation Centre for Breastfeeding Friendly Hospitals' has been launched here to boost 'golden hour breastfeeding' by helping the would-be-mothers to choose from hospitals that offer best maternity services.

As per experts, breastfeeding in the first hour of birth of the baby, also called as golden hour, helps regulate the baby's temperature, helps control their respiration and lowers the risk of low blood sugar. The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), engaged in protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and Association of Healthcare Providers of India (AHPPI), representing around 12,000 private hospitals including maternity centres, have entered into a strategic partnership and launched this initiative.

Of around 20 maternity hospitals from across the country who have applied for accreditation so far, Chennai-based Bloom Healthcare has become the first one to get the certificate. Dr Kavitha Gautham, Director of Bloom Healthcare, said that mothers are losing out on the opportunity to breast feed during the golden hour due to C-section. "At our hospital, we ensure basic needs of mother and babies are met and bond is established between them," she added.

Dr Arun Gupta, brain child behind the scheme and founder of the BPNI added, "With the new practices in place, babies born at the hospital can spend more time at their mother's bedside. The staff is educated about the



primary requisite care needed for mom and newborn."

According to the latest NFHS-5 survey the percentage of children under age 3 years of age who were breastfed within one hour of birth remains around 41.8 per cent in India. The growing number of Caesarean sections could also contribute to delay in breastfeeding, say the experts. Caesarean sections have gone up from 17.2 per cent to 21.5 per cent. While this has gone up from 40.9% to 47.4% in private sector facilities, it has gone up from 11.9% to 14.3% in public sector facilities.

While exclusive breastfeeding has improved across states, with overall increase to 63.7 from 54.9 per cent, early initiation of breastfeeding remains stagnant at 41.8 per cent and complementary feeding shows slight incline (42.7 in 2015-16 to 45.9 in 2019-21).

Dr Gupta stressed on creating awareness among mothers about breastfeeding in golden hours.

He said, before the pandemic only 41% of babies in India breastfed within an hour of being born, a number that has slid lower during the pandemic. The reasons are numerous, but chief among

them is the widespread separation of mother and baby at birth because of confusion over guidelines and deep fear.

However, these are myths, Dr Gupta said as he cited WHO revised guidelines stating that the benefits of breastfeeding outweighed any risks of covid-19 infection.

Absence of breastfeeding increases the risk of illness in the infant from infectious diseases: 53 per cent hospitalizations occur due to diarrhoea, 27 per cent low respiratory tract infection that can be reduced through breastfeeding, as per reports.

'Goa would have been liberated earlier had Sardar Patel lived longer'

Panaji: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that Goa would have been liberated from Portuguese rule much earlier had Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel lived for some more time. Modi was speaking at an event to celebrate Goa Liberation Day, observed on December 19 every year to mark the day Indian armed forces freed the coastal state from Portuguese rule in 1961.

Had Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel been alive for a little more time, Goa would have been liberated earlier, Modi said. Patel, deputy PM in the Nehru cabinet, died on December 15, 1950. He is credited with the liberation of

Marathwada region in Maharashtra from erstwhile Nizam's rule. On his recent visit to Rome, Modi said, "Some time ago, I went to Italy and the Vatican City.

There I also had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis. I invited him to visit India, to which Pope Francis said "This is the greatest gift you have given me." This is his love for India's diversity, our radiant democracy," Modi lauded freedom fighters, including those from outside Goa, who fought for the state's freedom.

When India got Independence, they still continued the fight to liberate Goa, he added. "They ensured that the struggle to liberate Goa

did not end after India's independence," he said. Modi also congratulated the Goa Government for topping in various parameters of good governance.

The state has topped on parameters like per capita income, exclusive toilet facility for girls in schools, tap water in every household, door to door waste collection, and food security, he said. Modi remembered former Goa Chief Minister late Manohar Parrikar, saying he had understood the potential of the state and nurtured it for welfare of the people.

Parrikar, who was the Defence Minister during the first term of the Narendra



Modi Government, died on March 17, 2019 after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. During the Liberation Day event, Modi felicitated freedom fighters and veterans of Operation Vijay operation

undertaken by the Indian military to liberate Goa. Modi said Goa came under Portugal rule when a major part of the country was ruled by Mughals, but centuries later, neither has Goa forgotten its Indianness, nor

has India forgotten Goa. The PM, who reached here this afternoon to participate in the celebrations marking 60 years of the coastal state's liberation from Portuguese rule, also witnessed a fly past and sail parade at Miramar. Modi inaugurated multiple development projects, including the renovated Fort Aguada jail museum, super speciality block at the Goa Medical College and new South Goa district hospital. The super speciality block at the Goa Medical College and Hospital has been constructed at a cost of over ₹380 crore under the 'Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana' scheme.

The new South Goa district hospital, built at a cost of

around ₹220 crore, is equipped with modern medical infrastructure, including OPD services in 33 specialties, latest diagnostic and laboratory facilities and services like physiotherapy and audiology. The re-development of the Aguada Fort jail museum as a heritage tourism destination under the 'Swadesh Darshan Scheme' has been done at a cost of over Rs 28 crore.

Before Goa's liberation, the Aguada Fort was used to incarcerate and torture freedom fighters. The museum will highlight the contributions and sacrifices made by prominent freedom fighters who fought for the liberation of Goa and will be a befitting tribute to

them. Modi also inaugurated an aviation skill development centre at the Mopa airport and a gas insulated substation at Dabolim-Navelim in Margao.

He laid the foundation stone for the India International University of Legal Education and Research of the Bar Council of India Trust at Goa. He also released a Special Cover and Special Cancellation to mark the commemoration of Indian armed forces freeing Goa from Portuguese rule. Modi's visit to the coastal state came ahead of Goa Assembly elections scheduled early next year and the ruling BJP's attempts to ward off challenge by new entrant TMC and other parties. **PTI**

2 held on espionage charges in Rajouri

Jammu: Two persons were arrested on charges of spying for Pakistan in a village in border district of Rajouri in Jammu & Kashmir, officials said on Sunday.

A man working as a porter with the Army and his relative, both residents of Nowshera, were picked up by a joint team of the Army and police on a specific information late Saturday night, they said.

They said the duo is accused of taking videos of vital and sensitive security installations and sharing these with their handlers outside the country in lieu of money.

A case under relevant sections of law was registered and further investigation is going on, the officials added. **PTI**

Those speaking in different voices will come together with the goal to defeat BJP: Tharoor

Kolkata: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Saturday exuded confidence that the Opposition parties which have been speaking against the grand old party will come together as they share the same goal of defeating BJP.

The former Union Minister mocked the NDA Government at the Centre over its decision to observe Good Governance Week and said the 'substance of good governance' is missing for the last seven years as the politics of slogans and symbolism have replaced good governance.

Tharoor, who was speaking at the launch of his book 'Pride, Prejudice & Punditry', said "Free voices are being stifled in the country presently." The book launch programme was organised

by Prabha Khaitan Foundation. "In politics even one week is a very long time. So there is still two and a half years to go for the next Lok Sabha poll. We are hopeful that those who are speaking in different voices will come together to defeat BJP. The goal is to defeat not just the BJP but also its policies and politics," he said at the sidelines of the event.

Several opposition parties, including TMC have attacked Congress for its failure to put up a fight against the BJP.

Asserting that good governance has been missing in the country for the last seven years since the BJP-led NDA came to power at the Centre, Tharoor said "My big problem with this government is that there is no good

governance for 52 weeks of the year. So having good governance for just one week may not be enough. They (NDA) need to get their act together and serve the entire time of the year and not just once,"

Keeping up his attack, Tharoor said "The problem with this government is that all these (Good Governance Week) are gestures, the politics of symbolism, the politics of slogans. What you need to see is the substance of good governance, which has been missing. All we have is politics of slogans and symbolism".

The Centre will launch a nation wide campaign on Monday for redressal of public grievances and improvising service delivery, especially in rural areas as part of the Good Governance Week. **PTI**

People suffer as power strike amid sub-zero temp hits J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid harsh weather conditions, a power crisis deepened across the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday as the standoff between the striking employees of the Power development department and the Government representatives lingered on for the second consecutive day even at the end of several rounds of negotiations.

Responding to the crisis situation, the Divisional administration in Jammu province late evening sought assistance from the Indian Army to assist in the restoration of essential services. The situation in Kashmir, where sub zero temperature conditions prevailed across different district headquarters, a large section of the population was facing numerous hardships in the absence of power supply.

Over 20,000 Power employees launched their indefinite strike past Friday midnight

to press for their four-point demands, including shelving a proposed joint venture between the Jammu & Kashmir Power Transmission Corporation Limited and the Power Grid Corporation of India Limited.

The employees, from all Unions and Associations, from linemen to senior Engineers, decided to go on indefinite strike after failure of talks with the Government and staged demonstrations in the twin capital cities besides various district headquarters. On Sunday, the two rounds of talks failed to end the deadlock following which the UT administration came into action mode.

Till late evening, army personnel from the Military engineering services were deployed across different grid stations to restore the snapped power lines while large number of technical teams were deployed along with policemen to restore the power lines as early as possible.

Situation in J&K worsened after abrogation of Article 370: Mehbooba

Jammu: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday claimed the situation in Jammu & Kashmir has worsened after the abrogation of Article 370 and called on the people of the union territory to stand up for their "snatched" rights.

Addressing a party convention in Poonch district, Mehbooba termed the Centre's decision to revoke Article 370 "wrong, unconstitutional and undemocratic" and alleged it played with the dignity and honour of the people of Jammu & Kashmir.

She also cast doubts on the Centre's intention to hold assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. The Centre revoked the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two union territories on August 5, 2019.

"In view of the prevailing situation, the biggest responsibility lies with the youth. The situation has worsened after the abrogation of Article 370 and they (Centre) are not only taking away our land and jobs but have also played with our honour and dignity. They will not stop till they finish our existence," Mehbooba said.

If people want to keep Jammu and Kashmir alive, the only option before them is to stand up for their "snatched" rights with determination and unity, "otherwise they (Centre) will loot everything from us", she said.

"Our struggle did not end on August 5 (2019), instead it was the day when it actually started. We need your support to take this struggle to its logical conclusion in a peaceful manner, without picking up guns and stones," she added.

The PDP leader alleged the youth of Jammu and Kashmir are driven to frustration so that they can ruin their lives by taking to drugs or picking up guns to get killed.

On the Centre's announcement to hold assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir after the completion of the delimitation exercise, Mehbooba said, "I do not know whether polls will be held because they will not conduct the elections till they are 100 per cent sure of dividing the majority vote."

"They have already separated the Hindus and are browbeating Dalits. Now they want to divide Muslim votes on the lines of various names, parties and sects. They have already created many parties and their only intention is to gain a majority in the assembly so that they can justify the August 5, 2019 decision," she said.

"They want to weaken our case against the August 5 development in the Supreme Court," she said. Mehbooba also defended her father Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's decision to join hands with the BJP to form the government in Jammu & Kashmir, saying his only desire was to end the bloodshed and resolve the Kashmir issue.

"We have not lost hope and will continue to strive for the resolution of the Kashmir issue to usher in peace and development in J&K," she said, adding "we acceded to Gandhi's India and not his assassin Godse's India".

Referring to the anti-encroachment drive, Mehbooba said people are being "deprived" of land they have had for generations "on the pretext that it is state's land".

This land is being used for constructing buildings for the security forces in the Valley and outsiders in the Jammu region, she claimed. **PTI**

CPM's Sky Line Rail project runs into rough weather

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala is getting isolated in getting its dream Sky Line Rail Project implemented as Opposition is growing by the day to the ₹65,000 crore project even from the constituents in the Left Democratic Front. The CPI, the second largest partner in the LDF has made its opposition known to the project which connects Kasaragod in the north with Thiruvananthapuram in the south by a semi-high speed rail which could be covered in less than four hours.

According to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the 530 km semi-high speed rail corridor connecting Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram would bring down the travel time between the northern and southern ends of Kerala to less than four hours against the present 12 hours.

Though this is music to the ears of the layman, environmentalists and transport experts have come out in the open questioning the feasibility of the project. "This would lead to massive eviction of people, destruction of lush green paddy fields and destruction of the already fragile environment of Kerala. The truth is that there is no need for such a project in Kerala," said E Sreedharan, former chief of Delhi Metro Corporation and the nation's leading authority on rail projects.

He said he would have supported the project had it helped Kerala economically, ecologically and in emerging as a developed State. "But this is a project which would destroy the State in all sense," said Sreedharan.

N K Premachandran, four time MP and former minister of Kerala, who is regarded as a supporter of any development initiatives, too made it known that the K-Rail project exposed the double standard of the CPI(M). "The CPI(M)'s 2018 resolution after the party's all India Congress says that it opposes the Bullet Train project connecting Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The party staged demonstrations across the country condemning the project. How come they are pushing for the K-Line project? The truth is that what Kerala needs right now is not a semi-high speed rail project to be built by acquiring land belonging to the poor. If the Kerala government is serious about connecting Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram, it could be done by modernizing the signal system and laying additional tracks along the present route," Premachandran told The Pioneer.

He pointed out that a detailed study proves that the proposed rail line could not be completed with ₹65,000 crore. "Experts with whom we held discussions say that the project would require more than Rs two lakh crore to complete", said Premachandran who was

an ally of the CPI(M) once. Saturday saw the Congress-led opposition staging demonstrations across the State demanding the dropping of the K-Rail. Former Chief Minister Oommen Chandi said the Congress was totally against any project which would throw 35,000 people into the streets. Out of the 1,383 hectare land required for the project, 1200 hectare land was with poor people.

"Let the Government come out with a detailed project report and environmental impact analysis. Then we will see the futility of the project," said Premachandran.

V Muraleedharan, Union Minister of state for external affairs, said at Thiruvananthapuram that the project was yet to get approval either from the Railway ministry or from Union government. The K-Line project is already in the news because of the Kerala Government's decision to appoint relatives of ministers, MPs and party leaders in top positions. It was announced last week that wife of John Brittas, the CPI(M)'s Rajya Sabha MP, has been appointed as deputy general manager on deputation basis to K-Rail. This comes at a time when there are charges against the CPI(M) for appointing wives/close relations of at least a dozen senior leaders as associate professors and assistant professors in violation of all norms in various universities in the State.



A tiger plays inside its enclosure at Lucknow zoo on Sunday

PTI

Maha: 36 fall ill after eating prasad in Panvel; sweet shop owner booked

Thane: Thirty-six people fell ill after having prasad in a village in Panvel, an official said on Sunday.

The prasad was distributed at a temple in Rithghar on Saturday on the occasion of 'Datta Jayanti', Panvel tehsildar Vijay Talekar told PTI.

"Thirty-six people complained of giddiness, nausea and stomach problems after having prasad. They were admitted in a hospital and many have been discharged too. All are stable at the moment. A medical team is in the village to monitor the situation," he said.

Panvel taluka police station senior inspector Ravindra Duandkar said the owner of the Khopoli-based shop from where the sweets distrib-

The prasad was distributed at a temple in Rithghar on Saturday on the occasion of 'Datta Jayanti', Panvel tehsildar Vijay Talekar said.

uted as prasad were bought has been booked under IPC sections 273 (sale of noxious food or drink) and 336 (act endangering life or personal safety of others).

No arrest has been made in the case, he added. **PTI**

Guest lecturer arrested for harassing girl student in K'taka

Mangaluru: A guest lecturer at a Government college in Dakshina Kannada district has been arrested for allegedly sexually harassing a 20-year-old girl student of the institution.

The arrested person has been identified as Vignesh (40), police sources said.

The victim, who is a final year degree student at the college, used to get unwanted messages from the lecturer for the last one year after online classes. The messages stopped when the girl warned him that she would present the matter before the principal.

Of late, the man started following the girl on the college campus asking her to marry him and allegedly threatened her against filing a complaint.

The girl lodged a complaint at the Shankaranarayana police station, after which the man was arrested on charges under Section 354 of IPC. He was produced before the magistrate and was granted bail, the sources said. **PTI**

Will be with you to fight injustice: Rahul to scribes

New Delhi: Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday pledged his support to journalists whenever there is any injustice or violence against them.

He talked about media freedom in a tweet where he shared reports about attacks on journalists in the country.

"Sad! Many media colleagues only show the face of only one person, suppress the voice of the opposition and do not allow it to reach to the public. Did that person ever raise a voice for you?" Gandhi said.

The Congress leader has been accusing the media of siding with the prime minister and the ruling BJP and of not giving space to the voice of the



opposition.

"Do whatever you feel is right, but if there will be injustice or violence against you, then I will always be with you in future, as I have been in the past," he said in a tweet in Hindi, using the hashtag #PressFreedom". **PTI**

Maha: 20K illegal structures to be razed in 3 mths in Kalyan-Dombivali

Thane: Around 20,000 illegal constructions within Kalyan Dombivali Municipal Corporation limits in Thane district will be demolished in the next three months, civic chief Vijay Suryavanshi said on Sunday.

He said he had held a meeting with officials recently to prepare an action plan for the razing work, which is expected to begin in a couple of weeks.

"These structures include shops, restaurants, hotels, as well as chawls where extra rooms have been built. We have issued notices to 15,000 people connected to these unauthorized structures. Over 350 cases have been filed over unauthorized constructions in KDMC limits," he said. **PTI**

Our 'Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon' campaign forced other parties to talk about women, says Priyanka

Rae Bareli (UP): Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday accused rival parties of ignoring women, saying they started talking about women only after her party gave the slogan of 'Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon (I am a girl and I can fight)'. Addressing the 'Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon -- Shakti Samvaad' organised here under the party's women empowerment campaign, she said the Congress' one small initiative has awakened all the political parties".

She also took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the elaborate arrangements at his rally venue, and for

using tele-prompter. "The programme venues of the Prime Minister fully resemble a film set and they are organised in that manner. The prime minister reads prominent (Sanskrit) shlokas, and everyone feels he knows them. But, there is a tele-prompter from which he reads."

She also accused the Prime Minister of "selling" Government properties to his "capitalist friends". "It seems Modi has realised for the first time in his political life that he has to do something for women else he will not get their votes. Hence, a large meeting is going to take place and women will

be brought in buses. All of them will be wearing yellow sarees, and the prime minister will deliver his speech."

Talking about her party, she said she has "strengthened" the Congress here. "Tell me which is the party in Uttar Pradesh whose 18,000 workers have gone to jail in the past one-and-half years? It is the Congress."

She also called on the women to unite to change the course of the country's politics. "You give us strength, we will stand up together to fight, then nobody will be able to stop us." **PTI**

didates in the upcoming Uttar Pradesh polls. 'Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon is one of the slogans it has given to underscore women power. "The impact of my initiative was so much that now all political parties are talking about women," Vadra told the event. "Day after tomorrow, the Prime Minister is going to hold a public meeting in which only women have been invited. Now, all the political parties have started speaking about women."

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using tele-prompter. "The programme venues of the Prime Minister fully resemble a film set and they are organised in that manner. The prime minister reads prominent (Sanskrit) shlokas, and everyone feels he knows them. But, there is a tele-prompter from which he reads."

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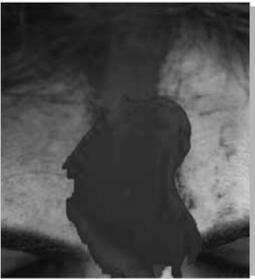
PAPER WITH PASSION

Fair sex?

The SC, Govt may have been brushing it under the carpet but marital rape must be punished

That marital rape is not criminalised in the 21st century India tells us how incomplete a woman's quest for her rights still is. The rights women have or are yet to have, are expected to protect their dignity, privacy, consent and choice. Exception 2 of Section 375 of the IPC tramples on all of them. It says sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is 15 or above, is not rape even if it is without her consent and against her will. Marital rape is the worst form of exploitation of a woman and is a crime. Yet, in India, a parliamentary standing committee says because child marriages still take place, Exception 2 protects such brides from marital rape if they are under 15 years of age. The Government says marital rape cannot be applied in the Indian context because of factors like illiteracy, social customs, values and the people's mindset towards marriage. The Law Commission views the revocation of Exception 2 as "excessive interference with the marital relationship". Such attitudes need to go because a woman is not the property of the husband after marriage. The call for revoking Exception 2 becomes shriller after the Supreme Court's two historical orders; one that bodily autonomy is part of one's right to privacy and, two, that right to privacy is a fundamental right. These rights back consent for sex after marriage. It is time the Supreme Court, which on several occasions in the past chose not to deal with the issue, revokes Exception 2 so that it does not mock the rights women enjoy.

The Gujarat High Court last week took a step in the right direction by issuing notices in a plea challenging the legality of Exception 2. The court noted that the rule "could be termed as manifestly arbitrary and makes a woman's fundamental right to sexual autonomy subject to the whims of her husband". Ideally, the Supreme Court should intervene at this juncture and review Exception 2. At the same time, it serves the cause of women better if the Government also launches a nationwide debate on the issue. The point is, laws are made every day but in reality they do not always bring relief to the beneficiaries. Laws dealing with social issues cannot be effective without the committed support of people. If we call ourselves modern, educated and socially aware, we should by now already be calling for revoking Exception 2. What an irony that laws protect a married Indian woman from rapists but not rape by her husband. If a woman can decide when to marry, whom to marry and when to have a child, she should also have the right to consent to sex with her husband. Sexual intimacy between a couple is delicate, with no place for force and coercion. The husband must realise that consummation requires him to respect the dignity that marriage confers on both of them equally.



PICTALK



A Sikh guard holds a spear as devotees arrive at the Golden Temple

AP

Brrrr...

The year may be ending but the hardships it has thrown our way are seemingly far from it

If the early signs are anything to go by, most of the nation is going to experience a chilly winter this year. The year 2021 has seen extreme vagaries of nature. On the one hand, there was Corona taking a heavy toll on lives; on the other, there were nature-related hardships. From a scorching summer to massive rains, 2021 had it all. While a heavy downpour played havoc with people's lives down south, the chilly winter is already sending a shiver down the spine in the north. A cold wave has gripped northern India with record low temperatures being recorded across States. And, mind it, we are not yet past New Year's eve and January is supposed to be the coldest month. In some parts of the country, the temperatures have plummeted below zero. The Capital and the NCR are already in the grip of extreme cold conditions. A minimum temperature of 4.6°C was recorded in the Safdarjung area, as per the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data. The Capital on Saturday already recorded its first official 'cold day' of the season in mid-December. When the minimum temperature is less than or equal to 10°C and the maximum temperature is at least 4.5°C below normal, it is said to be a 'cold day'.

The cold wave is caused by winds blowing from snow-covered Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Noteworthy minimum temperatures were also recorded in Fatehpur (Sikar) and Churu in Rajasthan at -3.3°C and -1.1°C, respectively. On Saturday, extreme cold conditions were observed across Uttarakhand. Ranichauri recorded the coldest day of the year so far on Friday, at 2.7°C. According to the IMD, the minimum average temperature in Uttarakhand on Saturday was 3.8°C, three degrees lower than normal. It is time the Governments across the States in north India woke up to the onslaught of an extreme winter this year and in 2022. Most cold countries generally do not have to make any special arrangements as it is a recurring phenomenon but, here in India, this sudden dip in temperature albeit for a short period can prove to be fatal. Neither the commoners nor the administration can cope with the extreme weather. The 'rainbaseras' (makeshift tents for the homeless) need to be in place before people start succumbing to winter. The authorities must brace up to protect our vulnerable citizens from the cold conditions; as if Corona wasn't deadly enough for people.



On the freedom of speech, expression

The right has been provided for in the Constitution, but it comes with responsibilities. It is to be exercised under reasonable restrictions



JS RAJPUT

The moral fibre and ethical conduct of a people is put to test in tough times; it could be a war, pandemic, natural disaster or national tragedy. Over the years, India has witnessed frequent and upsetting instances of decay in decency and decorum, as also in morals and ethics in public life. This is, however, defended in Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution: "All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression." Vested interests invariably ignore completely the well-established fact that it is not an absolute right; it is to be exercised under reasonable restrictions. Conscious of its possible misuse, the Constitution makers allowed the Government to frame laws to ensure its use only in the right spirit, and under no conditions in a manner that could in any way jeopardise the integrity and sovereignty of India.

In the last couple of years, we have witnessed blatant and shameful misuse of these provisions; some young people went to the extent of shouting slogans in public: "Bharat tere tukde hong" and, not surprisingly, found prominent political luminaries supporting them. An analysis of their support base would indicate it emanates from amongst those who just cannot think beyond electoral advantage even at the cost of adversely impacting the impressionable minds. The increase in the freedom of expression may be seen in social media where there are practically no restrictions, and even vulgar language can be used without any hesitation. Two instances of the recent past could be an eye-opener to the uninitiated.

Could Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, or JP, ever imagine a former Chief Minister publicly stating that let the PM stay in Varanasi for a couple of months, as people do in their last days? Could a junior Union Minister pounce upon a journalist and abuse him? Could he ever think how Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyaya would have reacted? A wrong is a wrong even if the whole world endorses it. One is indeed worried how irresponsible utterance



and uncivilised behaviour in public life would impact the lives of young people. The manner an elected representative expressed his views on rape victims in the Karnataka Assembly on December 15, 2021, and the way most MLAs were seen enjoying it shall make everyone hang his head in shame. Did the MLA and his colleagues ever ascertain how it would impact the adolescents? Talk to teachers of any stage, they will come out on why unacceptable behavioural changes are taking place in their institutions. Over the last five decades, the manner Parliament and Assembly proceedings are impacting young behaviour requires serious study, analysis and a consequent rethink.

In this background, let one painfully recall the tragic helicopter crash that extinguished the life of CDS General Bipin Rawat, his wife and 12 other defence personnel. It shook the entire nation; people of India have so much faith in our defence systems and personnel. People wondered whether there could be a lapse in the flight protocol, or if it was just a natural disaster. It was indeed so poignant that the departure of this distinguished couple sad-



CONSCIOUS OF ITS POSSIBLE MISUSE, THE CONSTITUTION MAKERS ALLOWED THE GOVERNMENT TO FRAME LAWS TO ENSURE ITS USE ONLY IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT, AND UNDER NO CONDITIONS IN A MANNER THAT COULD IN ANY WAY JEOPARDISE THE INTEGRITY AND SOVEREIGNTY OF INDIA

dened every family, from the little ones to the elderly. While the tragedy shocked every right-thinking Indian, there was something extremely disgusting, too. The so-called social media revealed the ugly face of certain fringe elements that survive on defaming India and its armed forces. Their venomous presence circulated in the social media as they rejoiced and celebrated the heart-wrenching departure of India's first CDS. Obviously, such observations could come from the enemies of India, from outside India. It hurts far more when, in the name of freedom of expression, insensitive utterances come from within! It is no secret that certain elements have social unrest, communal tensions and even vulcanisation of India on their agenda.

Sadly enough, such acts and actions are encouraged and sponsored by frustrated elements that are keen on getting political advantage. They do not understand how to get to the set of power following the right path indicated by Dr Ambedkar who had very clearly stated that in framing the Constitution, they were not merely "laying down a mechanism to enable people to come and capture power";

it was much more than that. Every right has a corresponding duty. When Gandhiji was consulted on the Draft of the World Charter of Human Rights, which was being framed by the Unesco in its initial years, he wrote to Director General Julian Huxley: "The very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world. Every other right can be shown to be usurpation hardly worth fighting for." Interestingly, in this very letter, Gandhiji had also mentioned who initiated him in these views: "I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done." Clearly, learning begins at home, continues in schools and colleges, and this prepares one for lifelong learning; the most emphasised objective of education in the 21st century. The right to freedom of speech mentioned in Article 19(1) (a) has to be coupled with the fundamental duties contained in Article 51(A) of the Fundamental Duties, which was not included in the original Constitution. (The author works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HOGGING ALL THE HONOURS, PM MODI

Sir — The Government of Bhutan has conferred the country's highest civilian award — the Order of the Druk Gyalpo — on PM Narendra Modi on Bhutan's 114th National Day. It reflects Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's growing stature as a global statesman. When Narendra Modi took over as the 14th Prime Minister of India, the first visit he undertook was to Bhutan. He is also the first foreign Head of Government to receive Bhutan's highest civilian award. This has added to PM Narendra Modi's long list of prestigious international awards from various foreign Governments and organisations across the globe.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conferred with many prestigious global civilian honours by several nations. These recognitions are a reflection of his leadership and vision which has strengthened India's emergence on the global stage politically and economically. It also reflects India's growing ties with countries around the world. With these several prestigious global honours, Narendra Modi has joined some reputed global leaders who are the recipient of such coveted awards.

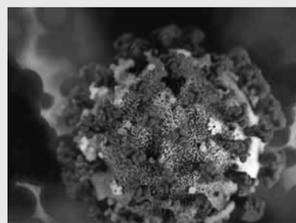
Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

CRYPTO CAN HELP, BUT USE CAUTION

Sir — The central bank of India is still considering changes to the cryptocurrency framework. Cryptos represent an opportunity for the development of the economic infrastructure of India. But the RBI is in complete favour of putting a ban on cryptocurrency as many nations believe that the social and political values of cryptos are too high. However, this digital asset can support our economy, promote investment and innovation and also help deal with the rising inflation.

Primarily, we should focus on education about the risks, non-insurance crimes and cyber attacks relating to cryptocurrency. As the global cryptocurrency market is as big as the entire Indian economy, we should not say no to such

Clear and present danger



According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Omicron variant of Coronavirus has spread to 89 countries and it could soon outpace the Delta variant. The new variant of concern is spreading significantly faster and the number of cases is doubling in a span of 1.5 to 3 days in areas with community transmission. US President Joe Biden's warning of a 'winter of death' among the unvaccinated strikes a very frightening note. The G7 has described the latest variant as the 'biggest threat to

world health'. Experts caution that India faces the alarming prospect of Omicron-driven third wave in February. It is feared that it may even necessitate lockdowns, further exacerbating the recent economic downturns.

People with weaker immunity run the risk of developing severe illnesses. The greatest worry is that Omicron could partially escape immunity from vaccines and past infections. The variant is still in its 'nascent' stage to comprehend and assess fully its impact on health. Given the interconnections between different parts of the world, COVID-19 has to be combated both locally and globally. Vaccine inequity gives room for the virus to mutate into new forms. The Omicron threat is real in India as in the rest of the world. It is cause for concern that the number of Omicron cases are on the rise in India. Over 120 Omicron cases reported so far could increase exponentially. We must be alert to this possibility and be prepared for such an eventuality.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

an opportunity. Instead, we should be detecting and preventing the risk factors of the investment in cryptocurrencies. Also, new crypto tokens and Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs) should not be allowed for now because it will be risky for the public due to lack of knowledge and experience about frauds. Cryptocurrency can be a building block for our economic infrastructure but only if it is based on education and regulation with essential safety measures.

Swati Pandey | Ujjain

KANCHI DESERVES HERITAGE STATUS

Sir — Kanchipuram, which is a primeval town in southern Tamil Nadu, deserves heritage status as the town has a sustained history and monuments covering over 2,000 years. Even today, the town bears testimony to the history of its rich art despite decades having rolled by. When one talks about Kanchipuram, its ancient temples, world renowned silk

sarees, and of course, the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham or the Kanchi Mutt — all occupy the mind instantly. The town's history dates back to the third century. It was the seat of power for Pallavas, Cholas and Vijayanagara empires. With each dynasty adding to its glorious architectural heritage through temples, Kanchipuram naturally became an important pilgrim centre and is counted as one of the seven sacred cities of Hinduism. This most ancient of south Indian cities, for all its glory, truly deserves to be declared as a Unesco Heritage City for preserving its rich heritage of arts from time immemorial. Kanchi has a glorious history which has successfully been carried over for centuries, a Unesco heritage status will help in making it known even more.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

SOUNDBITE

That is the reality of me fighting in Amethi. It was a revolt against a system that did not function.



Union Minister —Smriti Irani

Since I came to exile in India as a refugee, I found the practice of non-violence and religious harmony to be excellent here.



Tibetan spiritual leader —Dalai Lama

At the end of the day, if your films are not doing well, nobody's going to put money on you.



Actor —Abhishek Bachchan

Can someone please smack Nathan Lyon? An off-spinner with zero variations and bowling on the world cricket's flattest road.



Former England batsman —Kevin Pietersen

Show me a State which generates more than ₹3,000 crore from sand mining, Kejriwal knows nothing about Punjab.



Punjab Congress chief —Navjot Singh Sidhu

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN
FOSSIL FUEL MAY SOON BE 'STRANDED ASSET'

There will be enough cuts in fossil fuel use soon enough, giving nightmares to producers globally



GWYNNE DYER

An article with the innocuous title 'Reframing Incentives for Climate Policy Action' in the scientific journal 'Nature Energy' is explosive. It explains why about half of the world's oil and gas industry will die in the next 15 years, while the other half enjoys one last frenzied round of growth.

Lead author Jean-François Mercure of Exeter University told The Guardian: "People will keep investing in fossil fuels until suddenly the demand they expected does not materialise and they realise what they own is worthless." Stranded assets, in other words. But that won't happen everywhere in fifteen years' time; just in some places.

The authors of the article took the national pledges of 'Net Zero by 2050' that have proliferated across the planet recently, worked out what that implies in terms of declining demand for oil and gas, and identified which oil and gas exporting countries will still be in the game by the mid-2030s.



Not all the Net Zero pledges will be kept in full, of course. Even the big emission cuts that are made as promised will be back-end loaded so that most of them happen after 2030, not on the watch of the people who are now making these promises.

There will be still enough cuts in fossil fuel use, soon enough, to create a nightmare of falling global demand for all the fossil-fuel producers of the world. Anybody can see that. It takes a little more work to calculate who goes under and who doesn't; or at least not right away.

For the sake of completeness, the authors do offer one scenario where all the world's oil and gas producers, or at least OPEC, get together and cut their production in lock-step. Their incomes will all go down, but at least the pain will be shared equally.

What they foresee is that the lowest-cost producers, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, will go for broke. Nobody can compete with them on price (they can make a profit even when oil costs only \$20 a barrel), so they will flood the world market with cheap oil.

They haven't done that in the past because they could make much more per barrel if the supply stayed tight. But that's a long-term perspective, and there is no long term for fossil fuels any more.

If it is clear that a lot of oil and gas assets are going to stay in the ground forever because of shrinking demand, then it is your patriotic duty to make sure that the stranded assets belong to other countries, not to yours.

So, drop your price to \$20 a barrel, drive all the higher cost competitors out of the market, and sell as much you can before demand collapses entirely.

The authors of the paper calculate that Saudi Arabia, for example, could earn \$1.7 trillion before demand completely dries up if it goes the 'fire sale' route, compared to only \$1.3 trillion if it cooperates with all the non-Arab members of OPEC and tries to hold oil and gas prices up. \$400 billion is a big difference, so which way do you think they'll jump?

Who goes to the wall first in this scenario? High-cost producers working in tar sands, oil shales, deep water and Arctic areas, so Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Russia. But even the lowest-cost producers go broke by 2050, if all those 'Net Zero by 2050' pledges come true.

The predictions about oil and gas are quite persuasive, but if too many players realise their assets are stranded at the same time, we could get the mother of all market crashes out of this.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'The Shortest History of War'. The views expressed are personal.)

China: A nemesis that NATO wouldn't want



NISHTHA KAUSHIKI

While the US and Britain have decided to boycott the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, the EU has refrained from taking a collective stand on the issue

The mention of China as a potential challenger to NATO first emerged in one of its documents in 2019, and by 2020-21, it has become its "systemic rival". From a Euro-Atlantic perspective, Russia is a direct military threat that does not shy away from a head-on clash. Its primary focus is on its immediate strategic backyard- Eastern Europe and Central Asia. On the other hand, China has violent tendencies towards its neighbours and politically intimidates the countries of other regions by actively using its economic and political clout. Further, it has forged strategic partnerships with authoritarian countries, attempts to change the existing security architectures by challenging the freedom of navigation of commercial ships by buying or financing strategic assets worldwide. Thus, it has a global strategic agenda and is far more dangerous than Russia for the EU and NATO.

There has been an upward trend of trade between the EU and China. During the first nine months of 2020, the bilateral trade between the two was Euro 425.5 billion. Simultaneously, the EU-US trade saw a downward trend of -11.4 percent for imports and -10 percent for exports. With regard to the Chinese BRI, in 2018, China marked its strategic presence in North-Western Europe with the takeover of Zeebrugge terminal in Belgium and Greece's Piraeus seaport, followed by crucial infrastructural development projects in Spain, Italy and Greece. Germany's Duisburg inland port should not be missed either. The EU and NATO essentially see the 17+1 format as a leapfrog approach by Beijing that threatens the region's security.

In 2019, two significant developments took place. First, at the EU-China summit in April 2019, a few states opposed a standard EU stand against China, given its strategic influence. Second, Italy was the first G7 country to join the BRI. Thus, the cracks in the solidarity of the EU began to appear. In the investments sector, the regulatory preferences for the 5G rollout have been chiefly guided by the US. The EU security concerns have vetted the domestic legal guidelines of individual states, and hence, all efforts have been made to sideline Huawei, which is primarily seen as a "Trojan Horse". As China aims to become a world leader in Artificial Intelligence by 2030, the penetration of Huawei and other such critical technologies such as biotechnology and robotics, the propaganda warfare through disinformation campaigns challenges both Europe and the US. The additional challenge 'democratic backsliding' due to the Chinese influence over the fragile partners of the EU and the 'potential members' can also not be missed. In light of this, the 2021 summit communiqué acknowledged the evolving nature of warfare involving the malicious use of AI apart from simultaneous attacks with hypersonic missiles. The threat has



AS CHINA AIMS TO BECOME A WORLD LEADER IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BY 2030, THE PENETRATION OF HUAWEI AND OTHER SUCH CRITICAL TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS BIOTECHNOLOGY AND ROBOTICS, THE PROPAGANDA WARFARE THROUGH DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS CHALLENGES BOTH EUROPE AND THE US

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The views expressed are personal.)



thus become three-fold -- a fully modernised conventional attack with the potential of a supplemented nuclear attack apart from the emerging contours of hybrid warfare and the questions of the continuance of supply chains. In a nutshell, the Chinese policies of geostrategic and geo-economic penetration apart from its Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) strategy constitute the core of its "systemic challenge".

During the Cold War, it was asserted that the security of Western Europe depended upon the containment of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, with the 'unipolar moment' gradually coming to an end with the US overstretch with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the incorporation of Russia in the Atlantic partnership would probably have allowed NATO to geographically and politically cross the barriers of Eurasia. Consequently, today from "spoiler states", Russia and China have rapidly transformed themselves into "revisionist states", and the role of China is a much profound one. With Joint exercises of both the countries in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea and Beijing's recent outreach to Equatorial Guinea to establish its first permanent military mission in the Atlantic, the Euro Atlantic insecurities will increase all the more.

Had the Sino-Russo strategic convergences been nipped in the bud itself by strategic re-evaluation and the inclusion of Russia in NATO, the story of geopolitics perhaps could have been fundamentally different, both for the EU

and as for South Asia. Acceptance of Russia as an "equal" would have probably done away with the heartburns that Moscow has right now. The inability to accept that hybrid warfare (4th and 5th generation) would necessitate politically expanding the horizons of deterrence against a new rising power (China) has done more harm than good to NATO. The visionary approach of including Russia in NATO was discouraged when Russia's request to join the organisation was turned down by the US. Not once but thrice, leading to the creation of new political faultlines. It also led to strengthening the Sino-Russo alliance apart from leaving a geopolitical vacuum in which China and Russia could attempt to downplay the EU and NATO. Today, the takeover or annexation of the Crimea, the Ukrainian crisis, the refugee dispute between Poland and Belarus, and the inclusion of the EU countries in the BRI Corridor have become the larger geopolitical testers of a 'United EU and NATO', apart from the US sphere of influence.

There is still a lack of political cohesion on the methodologies to tackle China in this direction. While the US and Britain have decided to boycott Beijing 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the EU, on the other hand, has refrained from taking a collective stand on the issue. Given the increasingly intertwined stakes that the Union has with China, it is hesitant to take a joint stand fearing its retaliatory "economic coercion". France's position is contrary to the US, which is well grasped in the

backdrop of the formation of the AUKUS and the severed deal between Canberra and Paris. Such emerging diverging approaches within the EU that China would possibly try to use in its favour to increase its strategic foothold, thereby weakening the Atlantic alliance.

Early this year, G7 partners announced the 'Build Back Better World Initiative' (B3W), followed by the 'Global Gateway' initiative that aims to mobilise Euro 300 billion between 2021 and 2027. As one can see, the developments are similar to the 'Greek-Turkish Aid Bill' — the US initial response to contain Communist expansion. However, in the contemporary scenario, additions such as hybrid warfare, hostile economic takeovers, and dual-use ports have ushered in new dimensions of geopolitics. A full-blown 'New Cold War' is in place.

China and Russia would probably seek to militarily distract the EU and the US with small but essential 'hotspots' such as Taiwan and Ukraine. The risks of escalation and misjudgement have increased the chances of open hostilities all the more, but, given the constraints of economic dependencies, especially the questions of the continuance of supply chain routes, one can be still doubtful of the NATO response. Nevertheless, territorial nibbling would also not be taken lightly by NATO. The vicious circle thus seems to continue with more of trade wars, sanctions, and hostile takeovers, thereby creating sharp polarisations throughout the globe and regional and other organisations such as the EU and NATO.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE 'DOUBLE ENGINE' GOVERNMENT IS RUNNING THE STATE WITH FULL FORCE. UP+YOGI, BAHUT HAI UPYOGI (VERY USEFUL). —PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



CAN'T EXPECT ANYTHING FROM THE 'UNUPYOGI' (USELESS) GOVERNMENT. THE BJP CAN ONLY RUN 'WHATSAPP UNIVERSITY'. —SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV

Exemptions to Govt agencies in draft data Bill warranted?

The provisions in the 2019 Bill do not align with the Puttaswamy judgment and are also incompatible with the effective privacy regulation

The Joint Committee of Parliament on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, has adopted the draft report of the Bill on personal data protection three years after the Justice Srikrishna Committee of Experts crafted the draft. But the Draft Bill falls short of the standards set by the Committee, based on the landmark Puttaswamy judgment on privacy. The important divergence from Justice Srikrishna's draft Bill is the latitude provided to the Union Government to exempt its agencies from the application of the Act.

It is to be noted that the 2019 Bill places heavy reliance on members of the executive in the selection for the Data Protection Authority. The



KSHITIJ GOYAL

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2019 Bill has "public order" as a qualifier in section 35(i) to exempt a government agency from the Act, above and beyond, only providing for those reasons to be recorded in writing. This is in contrast to the 2018 Bill that provided exemptions to the state institutions from acquiring informed consent only in cases relating to the "security of the state". The 2018 Bill also called for a law to provide judicial approval and parliamentary oversight of non-consensual access to personal data. Section 12(a)(i) of the 2019 Bill grants blanket exceptions to the government agencies from the provisions of consent. While the private agencies/companies would be given two years to migrate to the new data protection



regime, no such stipulation was required from the government agencies.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh in his dissent note pointed out that Section 35 gives unbridled powers to the Central government agency from the entire Act. He asked the Centre to get Parliamentary approval from exempting any of its agencies and asked to remove the ground of 'public order' from Section 35(i) given its prone to misuse.

The Court in Superintendent, Central

Prison v. Ram Manohar Lohia, while interpreting the term "public order," read it in an exclusive sense to mean safety, public peace, and tranquillity. This was in contradistinction to national upheavals, such as civil strife and war, revolution, affecting the security of the State. Subsequently, the Court in Madhu Limaye v. Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Monghyr, held that the expression 'in the interest of public order' is wider than the 'maintenance of public order' and 'public order' has within itself not only the absence of those acts that disturb the security of the State or the absence of riot, insurrection, turbulence, or crimes of violence, but also the absence of acts, which are breaches of the peace, and disturb public tranquillity. So,

the Supreme Court has given a wider interpretation to the term 'in the interest of public order,' which can be prone to misuse. That is why the term 'public order' in Section 35(i) of the 2019 Bill found its way in the dissent notes submitted to the chairperson of the JPC.

Under the 2018 Bill, the exemption was approved for the security of the State, subject to such processing of personal data being (i) per the procedure laid down by law; (ii) authorised bylaw; (iii) necessary; and (iv) proportionate to the interest being achieved by the law. This four-stage process embeds the principles laid down in the case of Puttaswamy. This was the first step towards determining the State's surveillance powers, even though the

recommendation of the Srikrishna Committee concerning the ex-ante judicial approval of the entire process was not included in the Bill. Under the present 2019 Bill, section 35 provides that the Central Government may exempt its agencies if it is contented that it is 'necessary'. There has to be a written order exempting any government agency from the application of any of the provisions of this Bill in respect of the processing the personal data subject to such safeguards, procedure, and oversight mechanism as may be prescribed.

Section 12(a)(i) of the 2019 Bill also grants total exceptions to the government agencies from the provisions of consent for providing any function of the State autho-

risied by law. The provision of any public services should not be a complete exemption to the consent requirement. The conditions for the non-consensual processing of personal data should also be based on proportionality and not solely on necessity.

By doing away with the four-pronged test, the provisions in the 2019 Bill do not align with the Puttaswamy judgment and are also incompatible with the effective privacy regulation. The concerns enunciated by the dissenting JPC members over the report are valid. In this year of the Pegasus spyware controversy, it is not unnatural that opposition members in the JPC are perturbed over the report submitted to Parliament.

Typhoon deaths in Philippines top 100; Mayors plead for food

AP ■ MANILA, PHILIPPINES

The Governor of an island province in the central Philippines said on Sunday at least 100 people died in the devastation wrought by Typhoon Rai in more than half of the towns that managed to contact him, bringing the death toll in the strongest typhoon to batter the country this year to at least 146.

Gov. Arthur Yap of Bohol province said 10 others were missing and 13 injured, and suggested the fatalities may still considerably increase with only 33 out of 48 mayors able to report back to him due to downed communications. Officials were trying to confirm a sizable number of deaths caused by landslides and extensive flooding elsewhere.

In statements posted on Facebook, Yap ordered mayors in his province of more than 1.2 million people to invoke their emergency powers to secure food packs for large numbers of people along with drinking water. Both have been urgent-



In this photo provided by the Philippine Navy, damaged houses and toppled trees lie in Dinagat Island, Surigao del Norte province, southern Philippines on Friday. AP

ly sought in several hard-hit towns. After joining a military aerial survey of typhoon-ravaged towns, Yap said "it is very clear that the damage sustained by Bohol is great and all encompassing." He said the initial inspection did not cover four towns, where the typhoon blew in as it rampaged through central island provinces on Thursday and Friday.

The government said about 780,000 people were affected,

including more than 300,000 residents who had to evacuate their homes. At least 64 other typhoon deaths were reported by the disaster-response agency, the national police and local officials. Most were hit by falling trees and collapsed walls, drowned in flash floods or were buried in landslides. Officials on Dinagat Islands, one of the southeastern provinces first pounded by the typhoon, separately reported 10

deaths just from a few towns, bringing the overall fatalities so far to 146. President Rodrigo Duterte flew to the region Saturday and promised 2 billion pesos (\$40 million) in aid. He met officials in Maasin City in Southern Leyte province where he was born. Duterte's family later relocated to the southern city of Davao, where he served as a longtime mayor before rising to the presidency.

"The moment I was born into this world, I told my mother, 'Let's not stay here because this place is really prone to typhoons,'" Duterte told officials.

At its strongest, the typhoon packed sustained winds of 195 kilometers (121 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 270 kph (168 mph), making it one of the most powerful in recent years to hit the disaster-prone archipelago, which lies between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea.

Floodwaters rose rapidly in Bohol's riverside town of Loboc, where residents were

trapped on their roofs and in trees. They were rescued by coast guard the following day. On Dinagat Islands, an official said the roofs of nearly all the houses, including emergency shelters, were either damaged or blown away entirely. At least 227 cities and towns lost electricity, which has since been restored in only 21 areas, officials said, adding that three regional airports were damaged, including two that remain closed.

The deaths and widespread damage left by the typhoon ahead of Christmas in the largely Roman Catholic nation brought back memories of the catastrophe inflicted by another typhoon, Haiyan, one of the most powerful on record.

It hit many of the central provinces that were pummeled last week, leaving more than 6,300 people dead in November 2013.

At Vatican, Pope Francis expressed his closeness Sunday to people of Philippines, referencing typhoon "that destroyed many homes."

Turnout down as Hong Kong votes in 'patriots'-only election

HONG KONG: Hong Kong Government efforts and last-ditch campaigning by candidates were struggling on Sunday to boost turnout in an overhauled "patriots"-only legislative election, the first under a sweeping new security law.

After eight hours of voting, turnout was more than 10 percentage points below the previous Legislative Council election five years ago.

The election - in which only candidates screened by the government as "patriots" can run - has been criticised by some activists, foreign governments and rights groups while mainstream pro-democracy parties are not participating.

Turnout is a central issue, as observers consider it a barometer of legitimacy in an election where pro-democracy candidates are largely absent, more than a third of the seats will be selected by a committee stacked with Beijing loyalists and a crackdown under a China-imposed national security law has jailed scores of democrats.

Civil society groups have disbanded. "Clearly, the government's objective is to secure a high turnout. Otherwise it may delegitimise this election," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a professor of political science at Hong Kong Baptist University.

The government on Saturday sent blanket text messages to Hong Kong residents urging people to vote, and some critics calling on people to stay away as a protest. It is a crime in Hong Kong to incite someone not to vote or to cast an invalid vote.

Hong Kong leaders say the poll is representative. They insist the overhaul, like the security law imposed last year, was needed to ensure stability after protracted protests that

rocked the Asian financial hub in 2019. Security was tight around the city, with 10,000 police and some 40,000 government election workers deployed. After eight hours of voting, official figures showed 21.02% of the electorate had voted, down from 31.16% at the same point in 2016. That previous turnout ended up at 58%, while the 43.6% in 2000 was the lowest since Britain returned the city to Chinese rule in 1997. Polls close at 10:30 p.m. (1430 GMT), with results expected on Monday.

'SITUATION CRITICAL'

Shortly before casting her ballot, university language teacher Tam Po-chu, 79, said the vote would promote stability and she hoped the new council would be responsive to the public.

"There's no use if they do not think of the Hong Kong people," she said. Chief Secretary John Lee, a former security chief, urged people to turn out, saying those excluded were "traitors" who wanted the vote to fail.

By midafternoon volunteers were still pressing flyers on passersby near quiet polling booths, lampposts festooned with flags.

"The situation is critical," Starry Lee, the head of the largest pro-Beijing party DAB said in a recorded loop played on a loudspeaker in the working class Wong Tai Sin district. "I urge everyone to vote."

Lee's appeal did not convince local fruit seller Jack Ng, who said he would not join an election that was neither fair nor democratic. "I don't understand why she is campaigning. She will win for sure, it is absurd," said Ng, who is in his 20s. Others who said they would not vote expressed anger

at the changes that some said had turned the poll into a "selection" and the legislature into a "puppet". With transport operators offering free train, bus and tram rides, many stations were significantly busier than the polling booths.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, among the first to vote, told reporters at a polling station in the suburban Mid-Levels district that the government "had not set any target" on the turnout rate, and she was not aware of any set by the Chinese leadership.

"I don't have any particular expectation," she said, adding "there is a combination of factors that will affect voter turnout rate in any election." Beijing's Liaison Office in the city did not respond to Reuters requests for comment on voter turnout.

Before Lam spoke, several protesters from the League of Social Democrats opposition group chanted demands nearby for full universal suffrage and waved a banner reading "forced to be silent ... spirit of freedom, vote with your conscience".

In the run-up to the election, 10 people were arrested for allegedly inciting people to cast blank ballots, including people who had reposted social media posts from others, according to government statements.

Since China's parliament in March announced the sweeping changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, including reducing the number of directly elected seats, many opposition figures have declined to run, left the city or been jailed.

Of the 153 candidates contesting the 90 seats, around a dozen say they are not aligned with the pro-Beijing or pro-establishment camp.

Agency

Death toll climbs to 17 in Pakistan's Karachi blast

PTI ■ KARACHI

The death toll in the powerful blast that ripped through a building of a private bank in Pakistan's financial capital of Karachi has gone up to 17 after another injured person died at a hospital on Sunday.

The blast took place in a gas pipeline running through a sewage drain on Saturday, killing at least 16 people and wounding 15 others while causing immense damage to the building constructed atop the drain, a spokesperson for the Karachi Police said.

The spokesperson said that there was no lead suggesting that the blast might be linked to terrorism.

Another victim of Karachi's Shershah blast succumbed to his injuries at a hospital Sunday morning, pushing the death toll from the explosion to 17, Geo News reported.

The dead also included the father of Alamgir Khan, a member of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party.

Expressing grief over the loss of lives, Prime Minister Imran Khan said in a tweet: "My heartfelt prayers [and] condolences go to all the families of victims of the twin blasts at Sher Shah Paracha Chowk, Karachi."

I am especially saddened to hear of the loss of our MNA Alamgir Khan's father who also perished in the blast. May Allah give him the strength to bear this loss." Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has directed the commissioner Karachi to conduct an inquiry

into the incident and submit a report over its findings, a spokesperson of the chief minister said. "Police officers should be included in the inquiry so that all aspects [of the blast] can be investigated," the chief minister said. The explosion occurred a day before Pakistan was hosting the 17th extraordinary meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) foreign minister in Islamabad to tackle the situation in Afghanistan.

The police believe that the blast occurred inside the sewerage line in Shershah due to the accumulation of gas. A case has been registered in connection with the blast on the behalf of the state through a police inspector.

According to the Dawn newspaper, the blast in a Shershah building emerged as a grim reminder of unchecked encroachment on government and municipal facilities for commercial purposes, unplanned expansion of concrete structures in Karachi and illegal use of government land and facilities continuing unabated for the past many years.

Investigators, rescue operators and municipal authorities strongly believe that the explosion is caused by the sewer gas accumulated in the sewage drain over which a two-storey structure was raised, it said.

The theory is further strengthened as the official inquiries are apparently aimed at finding the cause of the explosion while keeping in view the illegalities involved in the incident, it added.

President Erdogan seeks to boost ties at Turkey-Africa summit

AGENCY ■ ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Turkey is aiming to deepen economic and military ties on Africa, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in remarks at a major summit of African heads in Istanbul, and called for a seat representing the continent at the UN Security Council.

Heads of state from 16 African nations, along with more than 102 ministers and representatives of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States are attending the summit in Istanbul.

The Third Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit follows a flurry of activity by Turkey aimed at boosting ties with the continent. In October, Istanbul hosted business leaders and dozens of ministers from African states for a summit aimed specifically at increasing trade.

The same month, Erdogan visited Angola, Nigeria, and Togo. "One-point-three billion people live on the African continent and it is not represented at the Security Council," Erdogan said on Saturday. "This is a huge, flagrant injustice."

I am still excited and thrilled every time I visit the continent," Erdogan said, adding that he had made more than 50 trips to the continent and visited more than 30 countries since 2004.

"This summit is a testament to the fact that Turkey is interested in Africa and Turkey's interest in Africa is not a temporary interest, it is a maintained commitment. Our African brothers and sisters are showing they are interested in better cooperation with Turkey."

Mass anti-coup protests in Sudan mark third uprising anniversary

AP ■ CAIRO

Sudanese took to the streets in the capital of Khartoum and elsewhere across the country for mass protests Sunday against an October military takeover and a subsequent deal that reinstated Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok but sidelined the movement.

The demonstrations mark the third anniversary of the uprising that eventually forced the military removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019. Sudan then followed a fragile path toward democracy and ruled by a joint military-civilian government.

The October 25 coup has rattled the transition and led to relentless street protests. Video footage circulated online purported to show tens of thousands of protesters marching in the streets of Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman on Sunday. Protesters were seen waving the Sudanese flag and white ones with printed images of those killed in the uprising and ensuing protests.

Ahead of the demonstrations, Sudan's authorities tightened security across capital, barricading government and military buildings to prevent protesters from reaching military headquarters and presidential palace.

They also blocked major roads and bridges linking Khartoum and Omdurman across Nile River. Security forces used tear gas to disperse protesters headed toward palace on bank of the Blue Nile in heart of Khartoum, according to activist Nazim Sirag. The Sudan Doctors Committee said some protesters were injured,



People take part in a protest against October military takeover and a subsequent deal that reinstated PM Abdalla Hamdok but sidelined movement in Khartoum, Sudan on Sunday. AP

but didn't provide a tally. Activists described chaotic scenes, with many protesters rushing to side streets from the tear gas. Later, footage showed protesters at one of the palace's gates chanting: "The people want the downfall of the regime" — a slogan heard in the Arab Spring uprisings that began in late 2010. Those movements forced the removal of leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association, which spearheaded the uprising against al-Bashir, called on protesters to gather outside the palace and block roads with make-shift barricades.

There were also protests in elsewhere in the country, such as the coastal city of Port Sudan and the northern city of Atbara, the birthplace of the uprising against al-Bashir.

The protests were called by the pro-democracy movement that led the uprising against al-Bashir and stuck a power-sharing deal with generals in months that followed his ouster. Relations between generals and civilians in transitional government were shaky and capped by military's Oct.

Omicron cases are doubling at least every 3 days: WHO

Geneva: The Omicron variant of the coronavirus is spreading significantly faster than the Delta strain in countries with documented community transmission, with the number of cases doubling in 1.5 to 3 days, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said.

In an update on Saturday, the United Nations' health agency said Omicron has been reported in 89 countries. The highly mutated variant is spreading rapidly in countries with high levels of population immunity, the WHO said, but it is unclear if this is due to the virus' ability to evade immunity, its inherent increased transmissibility or a combination of both.

The agency designated Omicron a variant of concern on November 26, soon after it was first detected by scientists in South Africa, and much is still not known about it. Scientists remain uncertain how dangerous it is, but early data suggests it can be more

resistant to vaccines and more transmissible than the Delta variant.

"There are still limited data on the clinical severity of Omicron," the WHO said in its update. "More data are needed to understand the severity profile and how severity is impacted by vaccination and pre-existing immunity."

It added, "There are still limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron." On Friday, a non-peer reviewed study by Imperial College London said the risk of reinfection with Omicron is more than five times higher and it has shown no sign of being milder than Delta.

The research cast doubt on the cautious optimism of some experts, based primarily on the anecdotal accounts from South Africa, that the new strain may not be as virulent and not overwhelm healthcare systems. AP

Germany tightens travel restrictions on Britain

AP ■ VIENNA

Germany is tightening travel restrictions for people coming from Britain in response to rapid spread of the omicron variant there. The country's national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, added Britain to its list of "virus variant areas" late Saturday.

This means anyone traveling from the U.K. to Germany must enter a mandatory quarantine for 14 days, regardless of vaccination status.

The new restrictions, which will go into effect at midnight Sunday, come as the U.K. reports a record high number of new coronavirus infections. On Saturday, the country saw 90,418 new cases.

The UK joins eight African countries, including South Africa, on Germany's list of "virus variant areas." The Robert Koch Institute's announcement comes in wake of tightened restrictions for other countries across Europe as continent faces a fourth wave of infections.

Islamic world unites to aid desperately poor Afghanistan

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The economic collapse of Afghanistan, already teetering dangerously on the edge, would have a "horrendous" impact on the region and the world, successive speakers warned Sunday at the start of a one-day summit of foreign ministers from dozens of Islamic countries.

The hastily called meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Islamabad brought together dozens of foreign ministers with the special representatives on Afghanistan of major powers, including China, the U.S. and Russia.

The gathering also included the U.N. undersecretary general on humanitarian affairs as well as the president of the Islamic Development Bank Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, who offered several concrete financing proposals. He said the IDB can manage trusts that could be used to move money into Afghanistan, jump-



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, center, speaks during 17th extraordinary session of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021. The economic collapse of Afghanistan, already teetering dangerously on edge, would have a "horrendous" impact on region and world, successive speakers warned Sunday at start of a one-day summit of foreign ministers (AP Photo/Rahmat Gul)

start businesses and help salvage the deeply troubled economy. The dire warnings called for the U.S. and other nations to ease sanctions, including the release upward of \$10 billion in frozen funds following the Taliban takeover of Kabul on Aug. 15. Speakers also called for a quick opening of the country's banking system and col-

lectively, with the United Nations and international banking institutions, assistance to Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan directed his remarks to the US, urging Washington to drop preconditions to releasing desperately needed funds and restarting Afghanistan's banking systems. Khan seemed to offer Taliban a pass on the limits on education for girls, urging the world to understand "cultural sensitivities" and saying human rights and women's rights meant different things in different countries.

Still other speakers, including the OIC chairman Hussain Ibrahim Taha, emphasized the need for protection of human rights, particularly those of women and girls. The new Taliban rulers' acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in attendance in the grand hall of Pakistani Parliament, where dozens of foreign ministers from many of the 57-nation OIC had gathered.

Thousands in Central Brussels protest against Covid restrictions

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Thousands of peaceful protesters demonstrated in central Brussels on Sunday for a third time against reinforced COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Belgian government to counter a spike in infections and the emergence of the worrying omicron variant.

A strong police presence was deployed on streets in anticipation of crowds, given how previous protests had sometimes descended into violence, arrest and injury.

The marchers — some with placards reading "free zone," "I've had my fair dose" and "enough is enough" — came to protest government's strong advice to get vaccinated, and included Belgian health care workers who will have a three-month window in which to get vaccinated against coronavirus from Jan. 1 or risk losing their jobs. On Sunday, the Brussels-based European

Commission agreed with Pfizer-BioNTech to accelerate the delivery of vaccines starting in a few weeks. The pharmaceutical giant will deliver an additional 20 million vaccine doses January through March to European Union member states.

The Belgian protest comes one day after similar protests in other capitals including Paris and London. Nations across Europe moved to reimpose tougher measures to stem a new wave of COVID-19 infections spurred by highly transmissible omicron variant, with Netherlands leading way by imposing a nationwide lockdown.

The World Health Organization reported this weekend that omicron variant of coronavirus has been detected in 89 countries, and COVID-19 cases involving variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days in places with community transmission and not just infections acquired abroad.

Iraq military: Two rockets strike inside Green Zone

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Two rockets struck Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, home to the U.S. embassy, causing property damage but no casualties, Iraq's military said early Sunday. One rocket was destroyed by the embassy's C-RAM defense system.

Another fell near a national monument, causing damage to two civilian vehicles, the statement said. An investigation was launched by Iraqi security forces.

Along with US embassy, the Green Zone houses other foreign diplomatic missions and Iraqi government buildings. The zone is a frequent target of rocket and drone attacks that American officials blame on Iran-backed Iraqi militia groups. Iran-aligned groups have vowed revenge on the U.S. for a 2020 drone strike that killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Netherlands going into lockdown again to curb omicron

AP ■ LONDON

Nations across Europe moved to reimpose tougher measures to stem a new wave of COVID-19 infections spurred by the highly transmissible omicron variant, with the Netherlands leading the way by imposing a nationwide lockdown.

All non-essential stores, bars and restaurants in the Netherlands will be closed until Jan. 14 starting Sunday, caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte said at a hastily arranged press conference Saturday night. Schools and universities will shut until Jan. 9, he said.

In what is surely to prove a major disappointment, the lockdown terms also rein in private holiday celebrations. Residents only will be permitted two visitors except for Christmas and New Year's, when four will be allowed, according to Rutte. "The Netherlands is going into lockdown again from tomorrow," he said, adding that the move

was "unavoidable because of the fifth wave caused by the omicron variant that is bearing down on us." It wasn't just the Dutch seeking to slow the spread of omicron. Alarmed ministers in France, Cyprus and Austria tightened travel restrictions. Paris canceled its New Year's Eve fireworks. Denmark has closed theaters, concert halls, amusement parks and museums. Ireland imposed an 8 p.m. curfew on pubs and bars and limited attendance at indoor and outdoor events.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan underscored official concern about climbing cases and their potential to overwhelm health care system by declaring a major incident Saturday, a move that allows local councils in Britain's capital to coordinate work more closely with emergency services. Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin captured the sense of continent in an address to nation, saying the new restrictions were needed to protect lives and livelihoods from the resurgent virus.

CII: CEOs expect 9-10% growth in current fiscal

New Delhi: Indian economy is all set for a strong rebound in the current fiscal posting a growth rate of 9-10 per cent, says a CEOs poll conducted among the members of the CII National Council.

A large number of CEOs polled, however, appeared worried about the impact of the new Covid variant Omicron on services and the manufacturing sector.

As regards growth, about 10 per cent of the CEOs polled believe that it could even exceed 10 per cent during 2021-22, the CII said in a release on Sunday.

"Government's strong emphasis on public works, timely interventions to boost liquidity and several reforms carried out in the recent months including easing regulations, Production Linked Incentives scheme, RoDTEP and several other bold reforms have buoyed the optimism on higher economic growth," said CII President T V Narendran.

The poll is based on responses of about 100 CEOs.

On the impact of Omicron on business, 55 per cent of the CEOs polled expect that the services sector would get adversely impacted due to the

spread of the new variant of coronavirus, while another 34 per cent of the CEOs indicated that it could adversely impact manufacturing activities.

According to the CEOs poll, 56 per cent of the respondents indicated that the economy would grow in the range of 9 per cent to 10 per cent during 2021-22, while another 10 per cent polled expected the growth rate in excess of 10 per cent this fiscal year, CII said.

The respondents were also upbeat on sentiments regarding their business, with 35 per cent of the CEOs indicating that the increase in revenue this year in the range of 10-20 per cent when compared to pre-COVID year (2019-20), while another 33 per cent expected a bigger jump of more than 20 per cent.

It further said that about 35 per cent of the CEOs polled expected more than 20 per cent increase in gross profits when compared to the pre Covid year, while another 17 per cent indicated an increase of 10 per cent to 20 per cent. This optimism among the CEOs is despite more than a third of them (70 per cent) observing that supply chain

bottlenecks were causing problems in the movement of goods in their industry sector, the release said.

Further, given the pick-up in business activity this year, 59 per cent of the CEOs noted that capacity utilization in their companies was currently in the range of 70 per cent to 100 per cent, while 18 per cent of them felt that it could be more than 100 per cent.

Nearly a similar proportion (62 per cent) of the CEOs polled projected capital expenditure in their companies for the year 2022-23 to be up to Rs 500 crores.

Additionally, 71 per cent of the CEOs polled indicated that they did not raise resources in the Indian or global markets in the past year, while 18 per cent of them said that they had raised debt and another 11 per cent said that they raised equity in the Indian or global markets in the past year.

On expected growth in exports, 35 per cent of the CEOs polled indicated up to 20 per cent increase in exports when compared to pre Covid year 2019-20, while 24 per cent felt that it would remain the same as in FY20. **PTI**

CIC dismisses appeal seeking disclosure of reports by SBI to Centre, RBI regarding electoral bonds

New Delhi: Central Information Commission dismissed an appeal seeking disclosure of reports submitted by State Bank of India to the Centre and Reserve Bank of India, regarding sale and encashment of electoral bonds in 2018 which are withheld by SBI on grounds of personal information held in fiduciary capacity.

Nearly three years after an appeal was filed with the Central Information Commission (CIC), the highest adjudicator of RTI matters, Information Commissioner Suresh Chandra noted that there appears to be "no public interest" in further prolonging the matter as there is no substance in the appeal calling for intervention by the Commission.

"The Commission after advertent to the facts and circumstances of the case, hearing both the parties and perusal of records, feels that due information has been given to the appellant," he said.

The case pertains to an RTI application filed by activist Venkatesh Nayak seeking denomination wise details of electoral bonds sold by State Bank of India (SBI) in March and April 2018, total number of buyers, application forms submitted for buying the bonds, reports submitted by SBI to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government on sale and encashment of bonds, in his eight pointer application.

The SBI provided the data on electoral bonds sale through various branches, but did not give details on application forms submitted for purchase of the bonds and the reports submitted by the bank to RBI and the government, citing two exemption clauses -- information being held in fiduciary capacity and information being personal in nature -- to deny the information.

Nayak approached the CIC in 2018 with his appeal against the SBI's denial of information.

He argued that the Electoral Bonds Scheme, 2018 was not a legislation duly enacted by parliament or any state legislature.

It was merely an instrument brought into existence by the Government of India in exercise of the powers conferred on it by

subsection(3) of Section 31 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (2 of 1934), he said.

He cited the reply of SBI on his query on the methodology applied by the bank to ascertain whether or not a political party redeeming electoral bonds with any of authorised branches had secured at least one per cent of the votes polled during the last round of general elections, as required under the electoral bond scheme.

The SBI had said it referred to Election Commission of India (ECI) website to prepare the list based on votes polled for the party in last election.

Nayak, in between, had also filed another RTI application before ECI which said they do not compile such information.

He alleged that the reply given by the SBI was misleading. "The appellant (Nayak) reiterated that there were sufficient public interest grounds to require the disclosure of the information, to ensure transparency of action in order to make the government and its instrumentalities accountable to the governed," Chandra noted in his order.

After three hearings, Information Commissioner Chandra agreed with SBI, saying the bank emphasised that the Supreme Court had already seized of the matter relating to the electoral bond scheme and had refused to stay the said scheme vide their order dated March 26, 2021, and since there were no specific directions to make the information public, the said scheme continued to be valid and continued to cast an obligation and duty on the respondent to maintain confidentiality and not to disclose information with respect to contested points of the application.

"The authorities have claimed exemption by virtue of the provisions under section 8(1)(e) (fiduciary) and (j) (personal) of the RTI Act. The claim of the respondent has been buttressed by the law laid down by the Supreme Court in K S Puttaswamy case," Chandra said while dismissing the appeal. **PTI**

Foreign investors pulled out ₹17,696 cr from markets till mid-Dec

New Delhi: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have pulled out ₹17,696 crore from the Indian markets in December so far amid uncertainty due to a new coronavirus strain, Omicron, and expectations of faster tapering by the US Federal Reserve.

According to the depositories data, FPIs took out ₹13,470 crore from equities, ₹4,066 crore from the debt segment and ₹160 crore from hybrid instruments between December 1-17.

In November, FPIs were net sellers to the tune of Rs 2,521 crore in Indian markets.

There continues to be uncertainties on the global as well as domestic fronts, said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India.

The concerns over the highly transmissible Omicron variant of coronavirus persist and have impacted global growth outlook, he added. "Also, the economic growth has also been relatively slow, and India's earnings have not grown much," he added.

If the situation worsens, it could further prompt them to redeem investments from emerging markets like India which are considered to be more prone to turmoil in the global markets.

"Since banking constitutes the largest FPI holding, it is bearing the brunt of FPI selling," V K Vijayakumar, Chief investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services said. Sustained FPI selling has made the high quality banking stocks attractive from the valuation perspective, he added.

With respect to other emerging markets, Shrikant Chouhan, Head - Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities said South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia, witnessed inflows of USD 1,870 million, USD 1,707 million, USD 297 million, USD 94 million and USD 57 million, respectively. "FPI flows are expected to remain volatile given key events such as upcoming state elections and monetary tightening by developed countries," he added. **PTI**

Majority of consumers have strong intent to buy vehicle in next 12 months: Survey

New Delhi: There is a strong intent to purchase a vehicle among a majority of consumers in the next 12 months, in what would be a good news for the auto industry, according to a survey by Mobility Outlook.

As many as 83 per cent of respondents confirmed the intent to purchase a vehicle in the next 12 months, while another 13 per cent indicated they may buy and just 4 per cent said no to buying a vehicle, as per the survey by Mobility Outlook -- a brand of CarTrade Tech -- which sought responses from nearly 2.7 lakh customers across India.

The strong intent to purchase a vehicle reflected a healthy recovery in overall spending habits, it added.

While the intent to purchase new vehicles is strong, used vehicles also seem to enjoy increased interest, it added.

As many as 52 per cent of respondents wanted to buy a new personal car and 33 per cent were looking for a new scooter or motorcycle.

Interestingly, 13 per cent of the

respondents said they intended to buy a used personal car, while 3 per cent were inclined towards the purchase of a used scooter or motorcycle.

Value for money, cheaper than new vehicle, good deals and warranty from used car dealers and getting upper segment vehicle for the same price were some of the reasons for consumers leaning towards used vehicles, according to the survey.

When it comes to budget allocation for vehicle purchase as a result of Covid-19, 49 per cent of the respondents said it has remained the same as before the pandemic, while 14 per cent said they have increased the budget by up to 20 per cent.

As far as ownership type is concerned, 74 per cent of respondents still preferred owning directly through normal purchases from dealerships, while 17 per cent were looking for long-term leasing for 1-4 years, 5 per cent opted for short-term leasing of less than a year, while 3 per cent of the respondents were looking for vehicle subscription service. **PTI**

India's coal import declines 27% to 16 mn tonnes in October

New Delhi: India's coal import registered a decline of 26.8 per cent to 15.75 million tonnes (MT) in October over the same month a year ago.

The country had imported 21.50 MT of coal in October 2020, according to data compiled by mjunction services.

"India's coal and coke imports in October 2021 through the major and non-major ports are estimated to have decreased by 26.8 per cent over October 2020," it said.

Mjunction -- a joint venture between Tata Steel and SAIL -- is a B2B e-commerce company and also publishes research reports on coal and steel verticals.

However, coal import in October was up 6 per cent as compared to 14.85 MT imported during September 2021, the data show.

Of the total import in October 2021, non-coking coal was at 9.47 MT, against 14.46 MT imported in October last year.

Coking coal import was at 4.05 MT, lower than 4.92 MT imported in October 2020.

During the April-October period of the ongoing fiscal, total coal import stood at 123.09



MT, about 5.4 per cent higher than 116.81 MT in the year-ago period.

During the April-October period, non-coking coal import was at 79.54 MT, slightly higher than 77.67 MT imported during April-October of the previous fiscal. Coking coal import was at 30.51 MT, against 23.89 MT imported during the year-ago period.

Commenting on the coal import trend, Vinaya Varma, MD and CEO, mjunction, said, "While there was strong demand for coal from the power sector during the festive season, firm prices in the seaborne market restricted import volumes. Going forward, improved domestic supply in the coming months is likely to keep import demand low." **PTI**

CSC, Infosys tie-up to upskill 6 crore citizen in rural India

New Delhi: CSC e-Governance Services India and IT giant Infosys have collaborated to impart digital skills among six crore students of the age of 10 to 22 years, mainly in rural areas in the country.

"Common services centres (CSCs), an SPV under the Ministry of Electronics and IT, has tied up with leading IT company Infosys to empower students in the age group of 10 to 22 years with digital skills through Infosys Springboard, a digital platform that helps accelerate reskilling and improves employability," according to a statement.

According to the statement through this engagement, CSC and Infosys will work together to upskill students and learners from underprivileged communities in rural and semi-urban areas across India and help them develop vocational and professional skills.

CSC e-Governance Services India Managing Director Dinesh K Tyagi in the statement said, "The foundation of CSC is based on education. We have a mandate of training six crore rural citizens in digital skills under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)."

He added that Infosys Springboard will help us bridge the digital divide and add value to its goal of inclusive education through CSCs. Amid an

increasing need for skill enhancement of students to boost market readiness and employability in a digital era, Infosys and CSC will work together to bridge the digital divide, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, through high-quality learning programmes, Tyagi added.

Thirumala Arohi, senior vice-president and head (education, training and assessment) at Infosys, said, "The future of a truly digital India relies on the digital literacy of today's younger generation. We are thrilled to embark on this skilling initiative with CSC and contribute to the development of a digital economy."

Arohi added that providing equitable access to educational resources and ensuring technology adoption at the grassroots are vital, not only to equip young Indians to be future-ready but also to nurture long-term social and economic prosperity.

"We believe this collaboration with CSC will help us provide meaningful opportunities for millions of learners from underserved communities across the country," Arohi said.

FORM NO. RSC-4
(Pursuant to Rule 3(i))
Before the National Company Law Tribunal (Principal Bench at New Delhi)
Company Application No. 194/66/PB/2021
Devshakti Free Electric Private Limited - Applicant

Publication of Notice

Notice may be taken that an application was presented to the Tribunal at Principal Bench on the 25th day of November 2021, for confirming the reduction of the share capital of the above company from ₹ 40,88,41,680 to ₹ 14,88,41,580.

The notices to individual creditors have been issued. The list of creditors prepared on the 31st day of July 2021 by the company is available at the registered office of the company situated at House No. 63, First Floor, H-3 Block, Vikaspuri, New Delhi - 110018 for inspection on all working days during 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. until December 31, 2021.

If any creditor of the company has any objection to the application or the details in the list of creditors, the same may be sent (alongwith supporting documents) and details about his name and address and the name and address of his Authorised Representative, if any, to the undersigned at House No. 63, First Floor, H-3 Block, Vikaspuri, New Delhi - 110018 within 15 days from date of this notice.

If no objection is received within the time stated above, entries in the list of creditors will, in all the proceedings under the above petition to reduce the share capital of the company, be treated as correct.

It may also be noted that a hearing has been fixed for Thursday, 13th January 2022 on which the Tribunal shall hear the application. In case any creditor intends to attend the hearing he should make a request along with his objections, if any.

Sd/-
Sanjay Agarwal
Authorised Representative for the Company

With PLI schemes & global demand recovery, Indian exports likely to fly high in New Year

New Delhi: After staging a strong recovery from Covid-induced slowdown in 2021, India's exports are likely to extend the growth story to the New Year also on increased demand in the global markets, boost in domestic manufacturing due to production-linked incentive schemes and implementation of some interim trade pacts.

Expectations of positive growth in the country's exports are also backed up by the outlook of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which predicts a 4.7 per cent expansion in the global merchandise trade volume in 2022.

Exporters believe that the

outbound shipments would cross USD 400 billion mark in this fiscal going by the current momentum and may reach USD 475 billion in 2022-23. However, the growth and global demand will also depend on whether the countries would be able to contain Covid-19 and the new variant Omicron through massive vaccination worldwide, they suggest.

According to a Reserve Bank of India survey, released in September, exports of software services, including services delivered by foreign affiliates of Indian companies, stood at USD 148.3 billion in the fiscal year to March 31, 2021. This is more than USD 145.3 billion the

Power CPSEs register 45% growth in capex investment

New Delhi: Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) have registered 45 per cent growth in investment on capital expenditure over the previous year, the power ministry has said.

For FY2021-22, the capital expenditure (capex) target of the CPSEs, under the Ministry of Power, is Rs 50,690.52 crore, a power ministry statement said.

Power sector CPSEs incurred a capex of Rs 22,127 crore till November 2020, which was 49.3 per cent of the total expenditure for the fiscal.

However, it stated that during 2021-22, the CPSEs have so far invested capex of Rs 32,137 crore, which is 63.4 per cent of the annual capex target.

Thus, the capex performance of the ministry in absolute as well as relative terms is better compared to the previous year. In absolute

terms, it has shown a growth of 45 per cent over last year's performance, it stated.

Even in the schemes for infrastructure development, the ministry has been making good progress. It has spent Rs 1,593.72 crore in IPDS, Rs 1,007.51 crore in DDUGJY and Rs 890 crore in transmission development schemes for North Eastern region.

Hence besides the expenditure of Rs 32,137.37 crore by CPSEs, an additional amount of Rs 3,491.23 crore has been invested in infrastructure through development schemes of the ministry, it added.

In all, till end of November, the power ministry has invested Rs 35,628.6 crore in infrastructure development, it stated.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Unit No. Q-601 was allotted to Mr. Gagandeep Singh Oberoi, Unit No. K-1103 was allotted to Mrs. Asha Ahuja, Unit No. A-803 was allotted to Mrs. Varinder Kaur Khurana, Unit No. L-1103 was allotted to Mr. Amrnt Gandhi, Unit No. L-1401 was allotted to Mr. Manish Kumar Sharma, Unit No. L-1101, was allotted to Mrs. Kavita Dubey, Unit No. 1107 was allotted to Mr. Tanveer Alam, Unit No. L-304 was allotted to Mr. Rakesh Kayash, and Unit No. L-1607 was allotted to Mrs. Mrudula Sharma in project Blossom County (Logix Infrastructure) Plot No.2, Sector-137, Noida Expressway, Noida-201305. Pursuant to repeated reminders the allottees has defaulted making payments and taking possession of the said unit.

This to intimate that in case nothing is heard from the concerned allottees within 2 working days of this public notice, the unit's shall stand cancelled without any right or lien of the allottees and Logix shall be free to deal with the said unit.

For Logix Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd.
Authorised Signatory
Contact No. 89597 9125

ONGC scripts turnaround of its subsidiaries, OPaL reports 1st profit

New Delhi: India's top oil and gas producer ONGC has scripted a sharp turnaround in fortunes of its subsidiaries with its petrochemical unit reporting its first ever profit, a top official said.

ONGC Petro additions Ltd (OPaL), the venture ONGC floated for downward integration and expansion into petrochemical field by utilizing its naphtha stream from Hazira and Uran and C2+ components from imported LNG, has been steadily seeing operational profit or EBITDA improvement since 2016-17 but the lopsided capital structure with high-debt servicing cost and high depreciation during the initial period of capitalisation led to incurring net losses.

"During the first half of the current fiscal (April to September), OPaL made a profit after tax of ₹18 crore," ONGC Chairman and Managing Director Subhash Kumar said. Kumar, who pivoted the turnaround story with his finance background, said OPaL is in the process of exiting from the SEZ which would improve the profitability by ₹ 800

crore per annum and about ₹ 600 crore of more profits will be added if the Government were to approve a proposal for the company becoming a unit of ONGC or is merged with it.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) during 2002 to 2006 conceptualized several joint ventures to diversify in other than exploration and production (E&P) business with an objective of value addition, downstream integration and monetisation of its own stranded gas assets. These projects - OPaL, ONGC Mangalore Petrochemicals Ltd (OMPL) and ONGC Tripura Power Company (OTPC) were successfully implemented and are now operating at full capacity.

ONGC as promoter played lead role in selection of LSTK/PMC contractors, execution of various feedstock and off-take agreements, resolution of various complex techno-commercial, regulatory and taxation issues crept during execution and commissioning of these projects. **PTI**

DELHI ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION
Viniyamak Bhawan, C- Block, Shivalik, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017
Website: www.derc.gov.in
TeleFax: +91-11-26673608, +91-11-41080417

PUBLIC NOTICE
CORRIGENDUM

REFERENCE DERC TENDER NOTICE DATED 22/11/2021 REGARDING APPOINTMENT OF C&G EMPANELLED AUDITORS FOR REGULATORY AUDIT OF BOOKS OF ACCOUNT OF DISCOMS IN NCT OF DELHI FOR TRUE-UP OF FY 2020-21

1. A corrigendum to bid document has been issued and uploaded on DERC website based on the discussions/suggestions of the prospective bidders during pre-bid meeting held on 8/12/2021.

2. Further, Commission extends the timelines for submission of Bid Document as follows :

| Sr. No. | Activity | Date |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Last Date of Receipt of Bid Proposals | 7/01/2022 at 13:00 hours |
| 2 | Opening of Technical Bids | 7/01/2022 at 15:00 hours |

3. Copy of the corrigendum can be downloaded from DERC website (www.derc.gov.in)

Sd/-
DIP/Shabdarth/0505/21-22 Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission
WEAR FACE MASK WASH HANDS REGULARLY MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi - 110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CALL AUTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immoveable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Ltd. will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", as per the brief particulars given hereunder:

| Sr. No. | Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No. | Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any | Amount Outstanding | Reserve Price Earnest Money Deposit | Date and Time of Property Inspection | Date & Time of Auction |
|---------|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| (A) | (B) | (C) | (D) | (E) | (F) | (G) |
| 1. | Sonu Kumar (Borrower), Shiv Kumar (Guarantor) Lan No. LBNOD0002252451 | G/ Uh-801 8th Floor, Tower- G Urban Homes, Shahpur Bamhetta, NH- 24 Ghaziabad, 201001 Super Area: 585 Sq. fts | Rs. 18,11,383/- as on December 14, 2021. | Rs. 17,10,000/- 1,71,000/- | January 14 2022, From 12:00 Noon to 01:00 PM | January 27, 2022, From 12:00 Noon to 01:00 PM |

The online auction will be conducted on website ([URL Link-https://disposalhub.com](https://disposalhub.com)) of our auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited. The Mortgagors/noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till **January 25, 2022** before **05:00 P.M** else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh, Delhi-110005 and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before **January 25, 2022** before **05:00 P.M** along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh, Delhi-110005 on or before **January 25, 2022** before **05:00 P.M**. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi.

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited on 8126013708 or M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited on 9710029933/9810029926/01244233933

Please note that Marketing agencies 1. M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited. 2. Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property.

The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s

Date: December 20, 2021
Place: Delhi/ NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited



Bollywood
 'Cannot wait to re-explore New York City, the city of dreams. It is an exciting escape.'
 —Sara Ali Khan

CHANGING TIMES

Director VISHAL FURIA, on the release of *Chhorii*, tells SAIMI SATTAR that the horror genre is no longer about sleaze and tropes



While Vishal Furia might have worked predominantly in Malayalam film industry, his Hindi debut — *Chhorii* — has made waves. The director shot to fame with his 2017 hit Marathi film, *Lapachhapi* and has a taste for horror, crime and thriller genres. *Chhorii* is the official remake of the Marathi film. He helmed *Criminal Justice* season 1 as co-director and will soon have another crime drama film *Forensic 2022* with Radhika Apte and Vikrant Massey.

The director spoke more about the genre and how the industry is evolving.

Horror, as a genre, earlier had a lot to do with sleaze. How has it changed now?

The genre took a little beating due to its categorisation as a B-genre sometimes in Bollywood, especially, when muddled with the Bollywood tropes. Worldwide, it has undergone a great evolution. We lagged here a bit. But the audience is ready and hungry for Indian horror. They don't need it to come with sleaze anymore. They need pure horror and good stories. So the times are changing.

What powered the change?

The evolution of horror in the

other industries with films like *Get Out*, *It* etc is now being watched here as well. The exposure to such stories is creating a demand for similar rich horror content here.

Why did you decide to do a remake as your first outing?

It happened by accident as a couple of other projects did not materialise and *Chhorii* became my debut. In fact, I am extremely happy to be able to start my Bollywood journey with the story that's closest to my

heart. Also, I had a few more things to add to my existing film and I was looking forward to telling that story to a pan-India audience.

A remake is often compared to the original. Are you apprehensive about that?

Not at all. Both films have been made with extreme love and hard work by the teams and collaborators. They both have their independent place for the audience that they were meant to be catered to.

What are the challenges of shooting a horror film/series?

It is a challenging genre to work with. It needs the right collaboration from every department. Even a moment gone wrong or the tiniest detail gone wrong can make this genre laughable. So a director needs to be very careful while attempting horror. Writing a horror script is very challenging. It can easily slip into cliches. Actors are most important as only a good performance can help the

audience feel scared as well. Location, production design along with the right camera work help each frame and each moment look dreadful. Sound design and BGM add the final touches to the visuals. A director needs to be extremely confident and sure of the story and the technical aspects as well for the horror storytelling.

Has the coming of the OTT been a game-changer in terms of content?

Yes, they have helped makers like myself tell stories which otherwise were impossible to tell due to economic challenges. There is no pressure to get the biggest stars or box office numbers and that really helps to tell an honest story. The theatres and OTT should coexist to provide a wide range of all types of content to the audiences.

Have stars become irrelevant in the existing set-up?

Not really. India is a nation that worships stars, so they will stay. And why not, they have worked to be where they are. What has changed is that every star will need to give their best every time because the competition is now open and any good actor can become a star. Everyone is replaceable now.

Crime based on real-life is a genre that has a growing market... Is it voyeurism?

Or just a fascination with a real crime? Everyone wants to experience crime while not being a victim of it. So this genre thrives as it gives that experience while keeping the viewer safe

WEBBED



BEING THE RICARDOS

The American biographical drama film follows the relationship between *I Love Lucy* stars Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. The couple faces a crisis that could end their careers and another that could end their marriage. *Being The Ricardos* starts premiering on December 21 on Amazon Prime Video.



YEARLY DEPARTED

Hosted by Yvonne Orji, joining this year are some of the world's funniest ladies to deliver eulogies to our least favourite parts of 2021, including two-time Academy Award-winning actor Jane Fonda and *B99* star Chelsea Peretti. It will premiere on December 23 on Amazon Prime Video.



ATRANGI RE

Atrangi Re is an upcoming Indian musical romantic drama film directed by Aanand L Rai. It stars Akshay Kumar, along with Dhanush as Vasu and Sara Ali Khan as Rinku. The latter two are forced into an unexpected union which they both are eager to break from. It starts premiering on December 24 on Disney+Hotstar.

Attack v/s Spider Man — No Way Home

The grand visuals of JOHN ABRAHAM's high-octane action entertainer will indeed be a treat to watch on the big screen

The makers of John Abraham, Jacqueline Fernandez, and Rakul Preet Singh starrer *Attack* have taken an interesting route of attaching the action-packed entertainer teaser of the film with the worldwide superhero film *Spider Man — No Way Home* on the big screen. Abraham's *Attack* has cre-

ated massive anticipation since the first poster and now, with the recently launched teaser, has built an enormous amount of curiosity/excitement amongst the audience. The fans are waiting with bated breath to watch the daring rescue mission led by a lone ranger Officer.

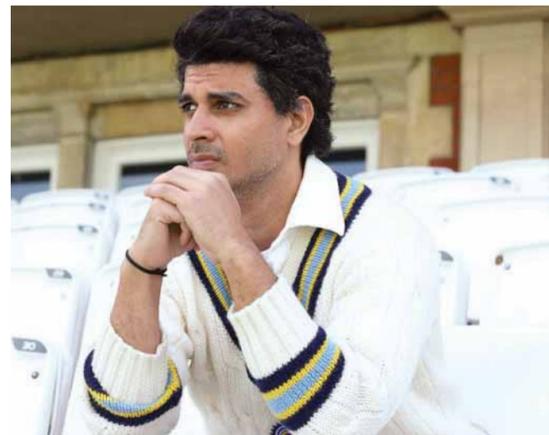


Entertainment, and Ajay Kapoor Production have formulated a remarkable strate-

gy by attaching a Bollywood movie teaser *Attack* to the prints of *Spider Man — No Way Home* in cinemas in India. The grand visuals of the high-octane action entertainer will indeed be a treat to watch on the big screen for the viewers.

Dr Jayantilal Gada (Pen Studios), John Abraham (JA

Entertainment), and Ajay Kapoor Productions present the Indian super soldier John Abraham's entertainer with superhero Tom Holland's *Spider Man — No Way Home*. The JA entertainment film, directed by Lakshya Raj Anand, will release worldwide in cinemas on January 28, 2022.



Need of the hour

TAHIR RAJ BHASIN believes that a big event film like *83* will recharge the Hindi film industry

Versatile actor Tahir Raj Bhasin feels *83* will put up a massive collection at the box office. Bhasin says, "Event films like *83* are the need of the hour to pull people back to the theatres. It is a great feeling to be a part of a film that has the ability to re-ignite the engines of entertainment industry and act as a catalyst for business to return to the levels of pre-pandemic era."

He continues, "I think *83* will connect to people across all age groups, across India because it is a true blue underdog story. It has patriotism, cricket, a surge of emotions and a pan-Indian connect

because the *83* team was truly an amalgamation of Indian cricketers talent who wanted to fight till the last ball, to do something that had never been done in the history of this country, to win the World Cup!"

The *Mardaani* star adds, "I'm eagerly waiting to watch it on the big screen with my family. My parents had goosebumps when they saw the trailer and my father was really emotional about reliving India's magnificent win. I'm proud to be a part of cinema history that will give them this experience. I don't think I will be able to fight back my emotions when they finally watch the film."

Whether it's cuddling up together in front of a crackling fireplace or sipping on hot chocolate on a winter morning, dating during the winter holidays can feel extra romantic. With the year coming to an end and beginning of the holiday season, dating apps are an ideal place for that sporadic meet-cute.

While breaking the ice can be exciting, it is sometimes stressful, especially when you want to roll out something more than just a 'hey' and holiday greetings! To help navigate pressures of the perfect conversation starter, here are a few conversation starters that are sure to get you making the most of dating during the holiday season and add that spark to your opening game:

Fire up and find out your type

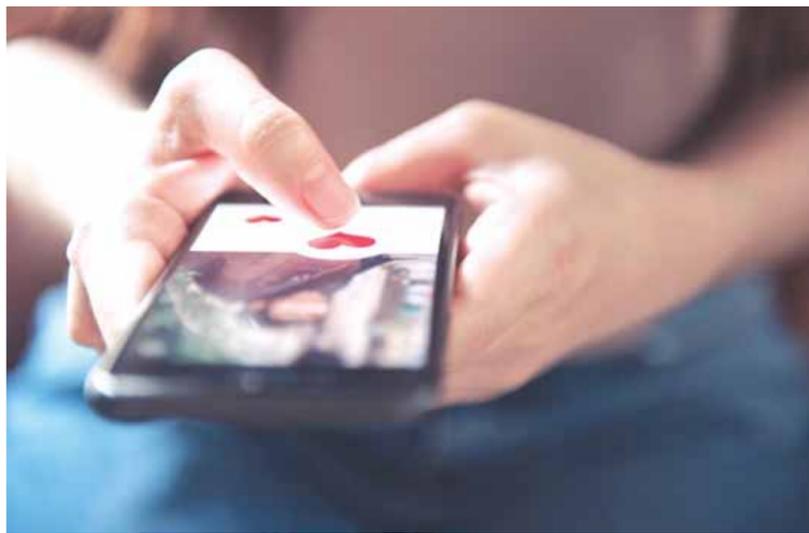
Travel mode on Bumble switched on? Someone's profile caught your eye and you matched? Ask them if they would partake in a quick rapid-fire round with you. Make it fun! It's fair to say that for any connection to succeed, you've got to know the person better, including their preferences and hobbies.

New year resolutions

What is that one resolution they always make but never keep? Everybody loves a good list of goals to accomplish and a good conversation starter can be learning about the ones that are individually hard to keep.

Songs we love to hate

The holidays are a time when special music playlists take over



Dating apps: New meet-cutes

Planning to date this holiday season? SHAHZEEN SHIVDASANI lists some conversation starters that will help you make the first move

every platform. Ask each other about your favourite holiday playlist.

Compliments go a long way

Pay attention to their profile. Notice anything unique? If you like something about someone's profile, compliment them or ask them further questions about some-

thing that catches your eye.

Don't miss out on their holiday plan

Instead of asking what they are doing for Christmas or New Year eve this year, ask your match, 'How are you celebrating the holidays this year?' Crank it up a notch by inviting them to a new years eve

party and see if they'd be open to a twinning date. Do they have any family holiday traditions? Share with each other the unique things you do with your time during this season.

Make the first move festive

With these opening lines to get your match in the spirit of the sea-



son:

-If you could only listen to one festive song for the rest of your life, which one would it be?

-What's your favourite holiday tradition?

-What was the best gift you were given over the holidays as a child?

-What's your favourite holiday movie? I need recs!

-I think this tells a lot about a person: do you buy holiday gifts in advance or at the very last minute?

-Hey! Love the travel pics on your profile. Have you got any winter vacation plans?

December can be a great time to be proactive and get to know someone. Remember, do not put pressure on yourself, always be your authentic self and just have fun with it.

(The author is a relationship expert at Bumble.)

TRENDBLAZER

ABHISHEK ON BEING REPLACED

ABHISHEK BACHCHAN opened up about being replaced in the films. "I've been replaced in films and, sometimes, not been told. I've literally shown up at the shooting and somebody else is shooting there. I had to just quietly turn around and walk away. People don't take your call. And that's normal. Every actor goes through it. I've seen my father go through it," he shared.

"I've gone to a public function and made to sit in the front row. But then a bigger star shows up and they are like, 'Get up, move to the back'. It's a part of showbiz. You can't take it personally," the *Bob Biswas* star said.

fairtalk SAHIL KHATTAR



We (Ranveer Singh and I) are both crazy and our energies are very similar. It's almost like when a volcano meets a tornado. Ranveer used to see my humour as unprecedented. He has seen a lot of my videos, the first time we met, I was like 'Hi, I am Sahil' and he was 'I know'. We also made lots of parodies together. It was with unfiltered songs, and he used to call me Messi and I would call him Ronaldo."

dailytalk KABIR KHAN



'I thought she dialled me by mistake because I was saying 'Deepika, Hello', and there was silence. She was not being able to speak and was choking up. She said 'I'm so sorry. I'm just too overwhelmed, and I said, 'You don't need to say anything more. What you've said in this one line and the way you said it, I know exactly the way you felt about the film, *83*.'

REEVES ON NIRVANA IN THE TRAILER

In the trailer of *The Batman*, starring ROBERT PATTINSON, MATT REEVES has used the darker rendition of Nirvana's *Something In The Way*.

Reeves opened up on the link between Nirvana's song. "When I write, I listen to music. As I was writing the first act, I put on the song. That's when it came to me. Rather than making the playboy version we've seen before, there's another version that went through a great tragedy and become a recluse," he expressed.





MUSHROOM MAN OF MUZAFFARPUR

From migrating to Delhi in search of employment to offering livelihood opportunities to many, SHASHI BHUSHAN has come a long way, says PHOOLDEV PATEL

Like every other youth, Shashi Bhushan Tiwari set off to Delhi in search of a lucrative career. After working at a private firm at Azadpur Mandi which could barely suffice his needs, Bhushan returned to his village and started a mushroom cultivation unit, creating jobs for many. Today, he earns lakhs by supplying button mushrooms to his district and other states and is known widely in his area for its cultivation. He named his unit Nanda Mushroom Farm.

On discovering that mushrooms are easily available at any vegetable market in Delhi, he gathered information about its cultivation from regions near Delhi like Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and more. To begin with, he started working at a mushroom production centre in Haryana and learned everything about its cultivation. After a few months, he decided to start a mushroom production unit in Bihar. He came back to his village and leased one acre of land to start mushroom cultivation. He laid its foundation in June. Today, a little over five months later, the unit is producing 1,400-1,500 kilos of mushroom every day.



The demand for mushrooms has increased. Currently, a kilo of mushrooms costs ₹150-200. There is also a rise in supply from Nepal, Assam, Bengal and other states. At the regional level, besides Muzaffarpur, the demand for mushrooms is also rising in Bettiah and Motihari in Champaran district, Vaishali and Patna district," informed Shashi. Presently, 75 women and 50 men work with Bhushan. This, in turn, means that 600-700 families are supported by his unit. According to him, it takes around 30 days to grow mushrooms and 20-25 days to prepare its manure. The compost is made up of wheat husk, coconut sawdust, soil and more.

Bhushan about his unit. He also provides training to people to generate employment through mushroom cultivation. Small scale farmers and unemployed youths like Paramjeet, Sanjeet, Akhilesh, Prakash Singh, Mala Devi, Rinku Devi, Sonali Kumari, Aarti Kumari, Rukhsar Khatoun, Afsa Khatoun, Momina Begum and others are currently training in the unit. Bhushan informed that mushroom cultivation can be done even with low capital investment. Eventually, the capital and production can be increased to generate more revenue. He pointed out that without proper training there is always a possibility that cultivation and marketing-related problems can arise. "People should get mushroom cultivation and marketing training from any agriculture university or Krishi Vigyan Kendra before starting. Alongside, information on government schemes on related topics should be collected from the agriculture department," suggested Shashi. Ravi Shankar, the project manager of Nanda Mushroom Farm, informed that mushrooms are cultivated at temperatures between 20-22 C. He stressed the lack of awareness around mushroom cultivation in Bihar. "With proper training and information, the youth can start small-scale mushroom production from their homes and earn a living. They don't have to migrate to other states to find jobs," reflected Ravi. While talking about it as an alternative livelihood, he also highlighted mushrooms' health benefits. "Deficiency of essential nutrients can be prevented by consuming milk with mushroom powder," he added. On the other hand, Poonam Devi, the district councillor of the area, assured that she would demand more such small-scale industries from the Bihar government so that not only poverty and hunger are eradicated from rural areas but migration of people for employment is also prevented. "It is a great pleasure that mushroom cultivation is being practised in the form of a small-scale industry in my District Councillor Area-1," she said. Over recent months, Bhushan's production centre has gained immense popularity in the district. Often, groups of youngsters visit the centre to learn the methods of training and production, while preparing themselves to be self-reliant through mushroom cultivation. —Charkha Features



Peace within

The different countries of the world can come in harmony, if each individual strives to achieve it with all human beings, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

For ages, people, communities and countries across the globe have longed for world peace and, in many ways, everyone has been trying to achieve it. Similarly if one looks at the prime message of most religious founders, then it would be very clear that most of them preached about following the path of non-violence and brotherhood. They preached love over hatred, tolerance over dissent. But as time passed, religions lost their original purity and were reduced to rituals. They then began to be associated with their unique practises and customs, rather than their core principles that had universal appeal. As a result, paths that were initially meant to create harmony came to be misused by vested interests for further polarising society. By the time countries collaborated on a common platform, such as the United Nations, the idea of 'world peace' had largely become synonymous with avoiding war and diffusing political tensions. But even that looks tough to achieve today because while heads of state may rally behind world peace at international forums, they continue to stockpile and refine weapons of mass destruction in their backyard. Though initially well-meaning and elevated, most such endeavors have reached nowhere close to their desired aim of peace and harmony. As a result, today we live in a world of pieces fragmented by geography, ideologies, disagreements and discord. And, in the absence of any major bridges of values, the rule of the jungle has taken over. When groups or nations come together today in an attempt to reconcile or to collaborate, it is still an arrangement, a deal to make things temporarily cordial between otherwise separate and differing parties. World peace is thus an aim far higher, and cannot be achieved with such narrow-mindedness. Hence every nation in the world should realise that world peace cannot be achieved unless we stand on a common base and join hands as one and not separate people. That one common point is our spiritual identity. As spiritual beings and children of one, we belong to the same spiritual family. All of our souls are unique while our spiritual core —comprising the qualities of purity, peace, love, happiness and truth — is the same. If we use our common roots as the foundation of all our endeavors, it will bring harmony to the world. This is the only way out. Our progress on this journey is always upward and closer together. This is the only route on which the differences we acquire through our bodily costumes — of gender, nationality, religion, colour, class — do not stand in the way. The awareness, belief and loyalty to this common ground, the relationship to our common Supreme Parent, and the feeling of belongingness to our larger spiritual family is the only means to harmonise our thoughts and create oneness in the world. Also, when we forge a link of love with the Supreme, as souls, which means we connect our mind to Him in the awareness of His true identity and ours, we draw abundant purity, peace, power and love. This calms us down and we become more patient and kinder and also inspire others around us to be so. Remember! Universal peace is the total of the vibrations of people who are at peace with themselves and others. When the collective energy of a critical number of souls in the world reaches a high degree of peace, purity and spiritual love, universal peace will be achieved simply. That will pave the path for the coming new world order where 'right' would not just be 'right, but would become 'might'.



The euphemism of 'cow belt' was indicative of the lower gender equity norms, with women reporting lower rates than men across development indicators. This symbolic stigmatising draws from the BIMARU configuration — a disparaging acronym generated for the World Bank by some bureaucrat in the 1970s-80s. It might have appeared funny then as it was the time of the rule of the elitist mindset; the 'othering' and stereotyping rampant in framing global policy. The acronym translated to 'sick' and comprised four northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Each state carries the tags of lower literacy, lower formal employment rate, lower rates of industrialisation, and consequently lower per capita income, and lower indices of women's autonomy. As the state gears for elections in 2022, post the global pandemic COVID, it is definitely time to talk of women as a constituency of interest and its needs; especially as the NDA government at the centre has treated and built on women as an important and separate electorate. Food remains at the centre of survival for a large population of women, children, and men. The biggest saving grace of the COVID-19 disaster in Uttar Pradesh was the access to food for really poor segments of the population. While migrant labour had no social security nets to provide them basic food and shelter in rich cities of Maharashtra and Delhi and was left waiting for the escape bus and train to come back home to UP and Bihar. UP was able to

Women as an election constituency

Gender is not the only determinant of the way half of Uttar Pradesh's population will vote, says DR SHWETA SINGH

feed its people for almost four months of the pandemic. In low-income group families, this remains the single most important issue. With Integrated Child Development Scheme and other nutrition and health being prioritised in conventional health, data on nutrition continued to look robust in Uttar Pradesh. The continuity of this benefit would be essential to the strata most affected by poverty and in non-salaried employment. The ability to access food is a statement of the administration's efficiency and its enhanced accountability to people. The oxygen, bed, and medicine crisis were an outcome of a system in need of an overhaul, a large population, and an unprecedented crisis. Maternal and child survival and family existence are contingent on access to food, shelter, and health services. For women migrating from villages to cities like Lucknow, and for women staying back, the need is still the same. And the fulfillment of this need is a function of resources and accountability in resource distribution. Women assess who has a higher probability of delivering the basic needs to them and their families. With 57 per cent of women who work in India still employed in agriculture — and with only 24 per cent in salaried work, 17 per cent in the industry — working women remains



a broad category with working conditions unpredictable even in formal sectors. Nevertheless, the commonality is the aspirational identity of a large and increasing section of women in 2021. Women from the middle class have traditionally left the state for higher education and employment since the 90s with the advent of liberalisation, while earlier it was more an upper-class phenomenon. While women from rural and semi-urban lower classes migrated as labour to bigger cities, the investment in standardised professional colleges, expanding the scope of skill-based work, an actual increase in industry and education work opportunities would be key considerations for women setting priorities in elections in Uttar Pradesh. Education and work are no longer seen as population control tools of fertility studies but have meaning for women across socio-economic classes. With UP still ranked 31 with ₹70,000 as per capita income, and intense disparity, 75 years later, finally the policy space seems to be rife with movement on economics and women's position in it. If the sheer number of migrant labour escaping Mumbai and Delhi in 2020 is any indication, the need for industrial-economic development in these four states cannot be overstated. Unlike what a plethora of media stories carrying NCRB data would like to identify, women across classes (high, medium and low) don't really prioritise violence over other issues. This is because as research tells us, the risk and perception of risk vary in women as far as being subjected to violence is concerned. Also, domestic violence — despite the enormous amount of work undertaken at the global and national levels and highlighting the significance of it — remains a private issue instead of a public issue in most parts

of India. Even though violence against women in West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, remains a critical and prevalent issue, its relevance has not been at the level of Delhi and Nirbhaya due to the heterogeneity of affected populations of women. Religion and caste do not appear to be important markers for women as a voting constituency. Women with political affiliations and ambitions are few and more likely to engage around religious and caste affiliations. These are also more likely to be women from political families. A reason why women find themselves unattached to caste and religious identities is that, for women, these have been systems of control in public space. In private space, their religious practises are a source of strength as they continue across classes to be embedded in roles and relationships in collectivist mindsets. Similarly, caste has been a source of kinship identities and essential to a sense of belonging to a community with their own sense of practises around social systems like marriage. Even the latest data on values show that women reject NRI grooms if they appear too distant from the Indian values norms. Essentially, it remains a personal issue. (The author is a policy analyst, author and coach.)

“When you consider things like the stars, our affairs don't seem to matter very much, do they?” —Virginia Woolf

EXERCISE PREVENTS EFFECTS OF AGEING

Researchers have discovered an enzyme that is the key to why exercise improves our health and protects us against the consequences of ageing. The research has been published in the *Science Advances Journal*. Importantly, this discovery has opened up the possibility of drugs to promote this enzyme's activity, protecting against the consequences of ageing on metabolic health, including type 2 diabetes. The proportion of people worldwide over 60 years old will double in the next three decades. The incidence of type 2 diabetes increases with age so this ageing population will also result in an increased incidence of the disease globally. One of the main reasons for the increased prevalence of type 2 diabetes with age is the development of insulin resistance or an inability for the body to respond to insulin, and this is often caused by reduced physical activity as we age.



TARGETED THERAPY TO TREAT IBD

A team of researchers has proposed a way for drugs to be more effective against inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in which the intestine undergoes inflammation. IBD, a chronic inflammatory disease of the intestine, includes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. It is commonly treated with one of several available biological drugs that block an inflammatory molecule called Tumor Necrosis Factor Alpha, or TNF-alpha, from binding to two receptors, TNFR1 and TNFR2. Only about 50 per cent of patients are helped long-term by this treatment. "TNF-alpha does drive much of the inflammation and tissue destruction in IBD," said researcher David D Lo from the University of California - Riverside. "It is why it is targeted by drugs. Our interest in this study was to look for a more targeted therapy that might have a better impact than the existing approach, which is to block all TNF-alpha," Lo added.



IMPACT OF COVID BOOSTER SHOT ON OMICRON

UK researchers have analysed the likely impact that a Covid booster shot will have on Omicron and say it could provide around 85 per cent protection against severe illness. The protection is a bit less than vaccines gave against earlier versions of Covid. But it means the top-up dose should still keep many people out of hospital. It comes as a record 8,61,306 booster jabs and third doses were given in the UK on Thursday. The modelling, from the team at Imperial College London, is based on limited information on Omicron. The researchers say there is a high degree of uncertainty until more real-world information is gathered about this new variant that is spreading quickly. Experts are still trying to figure out how mild or severe Omicron will turn out to be. People in the UK are being advised to have a booster dose to build up higher antibody levels to fight the virus.



DIET AFFECTS TASTE SENSITIVITY, PREFERENCE

To maintain ideal health, animals require a balanced diet with optimum amounts of different nutrients. Flies require macronutrients such as sugars and amino acids for survival. They use the gustatory system, the sensory system responsible for the perception of taste, to sense these nutrients and begin feeding. In their experiments in the lab, researchers fed adult flies three different diets. They ensured that the diets were similar in total caloric content and tested the flies daily for a week to examine modifications in their food choice and taste sensitivity. The researchers reported that diet affected dopamine and insulin signalling in the brain, which, in turn, affected the flies' peripheral sensory response, which is comprised of neurons directly involved in detecting external stimuli. This response then influenced what the flies eat next.



SELF-COMPASSION CAN LOWER HEART RISK

Middle-aged women who practised self-compassion had a lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease, irrespective of other traditional risk factors such as high blood pressure, insulin resistance and cholesterol levels. A lot of research has been focused on studying how stress and other negative factors may impact cardiovascular health, but the impact of positive psychological factors, such as self-compassion, is far less known," said Rebecca Thurston, PhD, professor of psychiatry, clinical and translational science, epidemiology, and psychology at Pitt. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, are gaining popularity among adults. Exhausted from a barrage of stressors at work and in their personal life, people increasingly choose to turn inward to help manage their moods and emotions.



India thrash Japan 6-0 in Asian Champions Trophy

PTI ■ DHAKA

Defending champions India crushed Japan 6-0 to remain unbeaten in the round-robin stage of the Asian Champions Trophy men's hockey tournament here on Sunday.

Harmanpreet Singh (10th and 53rd minute) scored a brace, while Dilpreet Singh (23rd), Jarampreet Singh (34th), Sumit (46th) and Shamsher Singh (54th) also registered their names on the scoresheet for India at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

India, who have already sealed a semifinal berth, ended the round-robin stage of the five-nation tournament at the top of the standings with 10 points, ahead of Korea (6), Japan (5), Pakistan (2) and hosts Bangladesh (0). This was India's third win on the trot. Held to a draw by Korea in their lung-opener, the Manpreet Singh-led side turned things around defeating Bangladesh 9-0, while also getting the better of arch-rivals Pakistan



before easily overcoming the Japanese challenge.

India's semifinal opponent was yet to be decided.

The dominant victory will be a huge boost for India as they head into the business end of the tournament full of confidence.

They completely outperformed Japan, the Asian Games

gold medalists, in all departments.

India dominated the first half. They earned two back-to-back penalty corners within the first six minutes of the first quarter but were unable to convert either.

Soon after Japan also wasted a penalty corner as their striker fired the shot wide. India kept on attacking and received another PC, this

time Hardik Singh injecting the ball to perfection for Harmanpreet to flick it home and give the holders a 1-0 lead.

The scoreline could have been 2-0 towards the end of the first quarter had veteran Lalit Upadhyay not missed a sitter.

Just after the five-minute mark in the second quarter, Japan were

handed a PC, India referred the decision but the TV umpire found no conclusive evidence to deny Japan. In the 23rd minute, the trio of Mandeep Singh, Shilanand Lakra and Dilpreet combined well as Dilpreet doubled India's lead.

Japan, too, attacked but the Indian defence foiled their attempts as the Olympic bronze medalists headed into the break with a two-goal lead.

Japan began the second half on the offensive but it was India who scored their third goal courtesy Jarampreet's clean strike.

A crucial PC coming their way in the 36th minute, Japan looked to capitalise on the chance but India keeper Suraj Karkera, who shone in the absence of regular custodian P Sreejesh, pulled off a superb save to deny them.

Japan tried to up the ante as they attacked in numbers. With India a man down, Japan looked to create an opportunity with Kenta Tanaka breaking the Indian defence with a solo run, but, once again, Karkera foiled the attack.

Srikanth wins silver in BWF World Championships

PTI ■ HUELVA (SPAIN)

Kidambi Srikanth's fine run in the BWF World badminton Championship ended with a silver-medal finish after he lost the men's singles summit clash to Singapore's Loh Kean Yew in straight games here on Sunday.

Srikanth went down 15-21, 20-22 in 43 minutes.

Former world number one Srikanth lost the first game after leading 9-3, as his opponent from Singapore staged a fine comeback.

The Indian lost the first game in just 16 minutes.

Srikanth fought better in the second game but Yew was too good on the day, emerging the winner.

The 24-year-old Yew stunned world number one and reigning Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen in the first round of the men's singles



event at the prestigious championships.

Nevertheless, Srikanth still etched his name in the history books by becoming the first

Indian man to reach the finals of the championships after his come-from-behind win over compatriot Lakshya Sen on Saturday.

Nath, Rinku guide UP to quarter-finals with five-wicket win over MP

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Experienced Akshdeep Nath's stroke-filed 78 and a responsible unbeaten 58 by Rinku Singh formed the cornerstone of Uttar Pradesh's five-wicket win over Madhya Pradesh in the pre-quarter-final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Sunday.

With the win, Uttar Pradesh qualified for the quarter-finals of the national ODI championship and will now take on Himachal on December 21. First, despite Shubham Sharma's responsible 83, Madhya Pradesh were bundled out for a sub-par 234 as UP bowlers wreaked havoc on their lower order.

Nath then anchored the chase and Rinku gave the finishing touches as they saw their side home.

Put into bat at the Jaipuria Vidhyalaya ground here, Madhya Pradesh was teetering at 0/1 after ace speedster Bhuvneshwar Kumar (2/46)

castled opener Abhishek Bhandari (0) in the first over.

Rameez Khan (35 off 68 balls) and in-form Shubham Sharma (83 off 99 balls) then rallied the innings with their 73-run stand for the second wicket.

The duo took on the Uttar Pradesh attack with gusto, while Rameez hammered four fours, Sharma's patient knock was laced with 10 boundaries.

When it looked like the duo would score big, Khan was run-out in the 20th over, with MP poised at 73/2.

Sharma then found an able ally in experienced campaigner Rajat Patidar (46 off 49 balls; 3x4; 1x6) as the duo then conjured 78 runs for the third wicket and rallied the innings.

While Sharma was the cynosure of eyes and toyed with the UP attack, Patidar, who came two-down, played his part to perfection.



Karnataka beats Rajasthan by eight wickets

Karnataka rode on half-centuries from K V Siddharth (85 not out), skipper Manish Pandey (52 not out) and R Samarth (54) to sail into the quarterfinals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy with a comprehensive eight-wicket win over Rajasthan here on Sunday.

Chasing 200 for victory in the pre-quarterfinal, Karnataka eased home with more than six overs to spare.

Earlier, sent in to bat, Rajasthan's total of 199 was built on a brilliant counter-attacking knock of 109 (nine fours and five sixes) by captain Deepk Hooda after the team slipped to 19 for 5.

Karnataka, bolstered by the return of K Gowtham, Devdutt Padikkal and Prasad Krishna, had Rajasthan in all sorts of bother at 19 for 5 in the eighth over.

Krishna struck the first blow, having the in-form Abhijeet Tomar, who has scored over 300 runs including a ton in the tournament, caught by Padikkal for 5.

Right-arm medium-pace Vijaykumar Vyshak (4/22) scalped the next four wickets, including that of Mahipal Lomror (4), as Rajasthan was staring down the barrel, losing half the side in the eighth over.

Hooda, who had come in at the fall of the second wicket (Manender Singh), was joined by Samarjit Joshi and the duo began to rebuild. While the captain wasn't afraid to go for the big hits, Joshi (33 off 63 balls) gave him ample support.

The two added 118 runs for the sixth wicket to give some hope to Rajasthan against a strong Karnataka side. The team hundred came up in the 24th over as Hooda and Joshi began to play with confidence.

Australia nears win, England slips to 82-4 in 2nd Ashes test

AP ■ ADELAIDE

Mitchell Starc removed England captain Joe Root in the last over as Australia pushed for victory in the second Ashes test after setting a record target of 468 runs on Sunday.

Root, who was struck hard in the groin by Starc in his penultimate over on the fourth day, edged the leftarm paceman after scoring 24 in the last over that left England stuttering at 82-4.

England need to create history to win. The highest successful fourth-innings test run chase is the West Indies' 418-7 against Australia in 2003.

The highest successful fourth-innings chase in Adelaide is Australia's 315-6 to beat England in 1901-02.

Struggling England opener Haseeb Hameed yet again flopped when Jhye Richardson found the glove of the opener in his first over and sent him packing without scoring.

Rory Burns (34) and Dawid Malan



(20) shared 44 runs before Australia struck three times in the last session. Malan, who was dropped by captain Steve Smith in the lone slip off Nathan Lyon, didn't last much longer and was out lbw to fast bowler Michael Neser in the next over. Burns successfully over-

turned an lbw decision against him, but Smith plucked a magnificent low-handed catch in the slips to overcome his earlier blemish when Richardson found the edge of the left-hander's bat.

Earlier, Australia declared its second innings at 230-9 during the mid-

dle session. First-innings centurion Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head top-scored, making 51 apiece, with Cameron Green adding an unbeaten 33 as Australia sought quick runs in the evening session.

England's bowlers took three early wickets to stall Australia's push for victory, despite an injury in the warm-up for Root that prevented the England captain from taking the field for the start of play.

Resuming Sunday at 45-1, Australia lost opener Marcus Harris, Smith and nightwatchman Neser early, before a rally by Labuschagne and Head guided Australia to 134-4 at the break, with a lead of 371 runs.

Before play, Root was hit in the lower abdomen while batting in the nets and was taken to hospital for further assessment. He was cleared of any serious injury and returned to the field later in the session.

I hope fast bowlers can give us 20 wickets in every Test against South Africa: Pujara

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Senior India batter Cheteshwar Pujara is confident that his team's fast bowling unit will keep up the good work and get 20 wickets in every Test match in the upcoming series against South Africa, starting December 26.

The Indian team has already started its skills training with all the premier batters having a quality net session on Saturday.

"Our fast bowlers are our strength and I hope that they will be able to utilise these conditions and give us 20 wickets in every Test match. They have been the difference between the two sides whenever we have played abroad," Pujara told local media. "If you look at the Australia



series, even if you look at the England series, we have done exceptionally well as a bowling unit and I am sure that will be the case even in South Africa," said the veteran of 92 Tests and 6589 runs.

The pacers have played a key role in India's success in abroad series in recent past.

There aren't any practice games due to the cramped sched-

ule and the scare of new COVID-19 variant Omicron has already led to the tour being shortened and the four T20 matches being postponed for a later date.

"The good thing is we played a couple of Test matches in India," Pujara said.

"So most of the guys are in touch, and when it comes to preparation, the support staff has been excellent. They have been supporting us well and we have five or six days more before we head into the first Test," he added, referring to head coach Rahul Dravid and his team.

India arrived in the Rainbow Nation on December 16 and Pujara believes that 10 days is good enough time to get ready for the Boxing Day Test at the Centurion.

Injury-hit Leeds thrashed again in EPL, 4-1 by Arsenal

AP ■ LEEDS (UK)

Injury-hit Leeds slumped to its second alarming loss in five days, 4-1 at home to Arsenal in the only English Premier League match to take place because of a wave of pandemic-affected postponements.

The match on Saturday was marred by an allegation of racial abuse from a spectator toward Arsenal's players. It was reported to officials by Arsenal, manager Mikel Arteta said.

Coming off a 7-0 thrashing at Manchester City on Tuesday, Leeds — down to nine senior players and with a 15-year-old on the bench amid an injury crisis — was ripped apart in the first half as Gabriel Martinelli scored twice and Bukayo Saka added another.

Leeds even lost another player, Jack Harrison, to injury before halftime and manager Marcelo Bielsa had his head bowed as he walked back to the dressing rooms, with his team having allowed 15 shots on goal in a chaotic display.

The home side was better organized in the second half and managed a consolation when Raphinha converted a penalty after 19-year-old striker Joe Gelhardt was tripped by Ben White, Arsenal's former Leeds center back.

Substitute Emile Smith Rowe's 84th-minute goal, after he was played through by Martin Odegaard, piled on the



misery for Leeds, which is five points above the relegation zone having played three games more than third-to-last Burnley.

Arsenal consolidated fourth place in the race for Champions League qualification and is four points above fifth-place West Ham having played 18 of 38 games.

Arteta said the incident involving the alleged racial abuse happened during the first half.

Arteta said it was a "single person" who aimed the alleged abuse apparently toward one of Arsenal's substitutes.

"Very disappointed because we have done so much in football to try to avoid it," he said, "but it is a single person. I don't think that merits that a full stadium pays the price."

clubs to understand what happened."

Sevilla beats Atlético to close on leaders; Gavi leads Barça Lucas Ocampos' late goal helped Sevilla beat Atlético Madrid 2-1 and keep the pressure on Spanish league leader Real Madrid, while Barcelona's young talents got it a much-needed win.

Ocampos blasted a ball that came off the crossbar past Jan Oblak with two minutes remaining to clinch the victory over the defending champions.

Second-placed Sevilla moved to within five points of Madrid before it plays Cádiz on Sunday without several virus-infected players.

Barcelona has long been out of contention for the title, but its fans could at least believe in a brighter future for the team after 17-year-old Gavi Páez teamed with two more youths to

beat a resilient Elche 3-2 and end a three-game winless run.

Ferrán Jutgà and Gavi scored their first goals for Barcelona to give it a 2-0 half-time lead.

Elche rallied with two goals early in the second half, but Gavi assisted 19-year-old Nico González to score the 85th-minute winner.

"The only thing I was thinking was that that ball had to go in one way or another," Nico said about his winner.

"We are very happy. At 2-2 we knew we were facing a tough rival and recently things have not been going our way."

SEVILLA SURGE

A Sevilla missing several players due to injury got off to a good start after Ivan Rakitic scored a screamer from well outside the area seven minutes after kickoff. Atlético defender Felipe Augusto headed in a corner kick served by Thomas Lemar to level the score in the 33rd. Atlético had the better of Sevilla for most of the second half but could not go ahead.

YOUNG GUNS

Jutgà, 22, who made his Barcelona debut as a substitute in the last round, was a surprise choice by Xavi Hernández to start as a false nine in place of injured striker Memphis Depay.

The choice paid off when Jutgà headed home a cross from Ousmane Dembélé following a corner kick for the 16th-minute opener.

India squad for U-19 World Cup announced, Delhi's Yash Dhull to lead

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi batter Yash Dhull will lead a 17-member Indian squad in the Under-19 World Cup, which is scheduled to be held in the West Indies from January 14 to February 5, the BCCI announced on Sunday.

Four-time winners India are clubbed with South Africa, Ireland and Uganda in Group B.

Dhull's appointment was on expected lines as he was also named captain for the upcoming Asia Cup, to be held in the UAE from December 23.

Dhull will have Andhra's SK Rasheed as his deputy for the premier tournament in the Caribbean.

"The All-India Junior Selection Committee has picked India's squad for the upcoming ICC Under 19 Men's Cricket World Cup to be played in the West Indies from 14th January to 5th February 2022 across four host countries," the BCCI said in a press release.

The 14th edition of the tournament will see 16 teams competing for the trophy across 48 matches.

India are the most successful team having won the title four times -- 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018.

India have also been runners-up in 2016 and in the previous edition of the tournament



held in 2020 in New Zealand.

Dhull, a right-handed middle-order batter, was a leading run-getter in the Vinoo Mankad Trophy earlier this year. He averaged 75.50 for his 302 runs for the Delhi Districts & Cricket Association (DDCA) in the five matches that the team played during the tournament.

Delhi player Dhull thus joins the great Virat Kohli in captaining the junior side in the marquee tournament. He has previously led the Delhi U-16, U-19 and India 'A' U-19 sides.

Rasheed was also impressive in the Vinoo Mankad Trophy, including scoring a match-winning century.

The format will see the top two teams from each of the four

India to host Denmark on grass courts in Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will host Denmark on grass courts at the Delhi Gymkhana Club in a bio-security bubble in the Davis Cup World Group I tie on March 4-5 next year, AITA sources confirmed on Sunday.

The Indian team management after consulting the players decided to have the matches on grass courts, where the Danish players won't be comfortable.

"A home tie means that you can create conditions that suit your players. The players and the management felt that Indian team will be stronger on grass courts against Denmark players since they are more used to playing on slow hard courts and clay courts," an AITA source privy to the developments told PTI.

The PTI had reported on December 9 that hosting the tie on grass courts is a possibility.

India's top-ranked singles player Ramkumar Ramanathan, of late, has developed a decent serve and volley game and comeback-man Yuki Bhambri is also comfortable playing on grass courts.