

**OPINION 6**  
AFSPA IN THE N-E: IS STATUS QUO THE ANSWER?

**WORLD 8**  
HK EDITORS CHARGED WITH SEDITION, US CRITICISES RAID

**MONEY 9**  
GOVT SET TO BRING FISCAL DEFICIT DOWN TO 6.6%

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## Covid surge in Delhi, Mumbai unabated

Centre writes to States, UTs for measures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mumbai and Delhi on Thursday once again saw a massive spike in Covid-19 surge, driven by Omicron variant. The same alarming trend has been reported in eight States, 14 cities and districts, prompting the Centre to write to affected States to take immediate measures.

While Delhi and Mumbai have shown the maximum spike, other cities, including Gurugram, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Ahmedabad too have reported sharp surge taking the total caseload on Thursday to 13,154 fresh Covid cases and 268 deaths in a span of 24 hours.

While Delhi reported 1,313 new cases on Thursday, Mumbai logged 3,555 new cases. The Omicron infection tally too showed no let-up as it climbed to 961 across the nation. However, out of total Omicron positive, 320 have been discharged from hospitals. Fortunately, there has been no casualty reported so far due to the new variant in the country which has spread to 22 States.

About 423 recoveries in the last 24 hours were reported in Delhi and the positivity rate is



A health worker collects a swab sample of a passenger to test for Covid-19 as others wait their turn at a train station in New Delhi on Thursday

at 1.73 per cent. The active cases are at 3,081, while the total recoveries are 14,18,22.

The Delhi Government has issued an order to the effect that international passengers testing Covid-19 positive upon their arrival at Delhi airport will have to isolate at designated paid and free facilities, including hotels and districts' Covid care centres.

"In compliance with the guidelines for international arrivals dated November 30, 2021, issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, based on the risk assessment, it is

informed that the institutional isolation of Covid-19 positive passengers/ contacts arriving at the IGI airport, New Delhi, from foreign countries, will henceforth be done at the designated paid and free facilities," the DGHS order read. Teams deputed at the Delhi airport will transfer the patients accordingly.

In another order, of Health and Family Welfare Department, the Delhi Government ordered to link Covid Care Centres (CCC) with different city hospitals.

Meanwhile, the health authorities in Maharashtra

went into a tizzy on Thursday, as Omicron claimed first death in the State. The Covid-19 cases jumped from 3,900 cases to 5,368 and the Omicron variant infections rose from 85 cases to 198 cases during the last 24 hours in various parts of the State.

A 52-year-old man with a travel history to Nigeria died of a heart attack on December 28 at Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation's Hospital. This patient had diabetes for the last 13 years. The death of this patient is due to non-Covid reasons.

Continued on Page 2

Omicron accounts for 54% of total Covid cases in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Omicron is gradually spreading in the community and the new, fast-spreading variant of concern has been found in 54 per cent of the latest samples analysed in the national Capital, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Thursday.

He said stringent curbs have been put in place as part of the Graded Response Action Plan for Covid-19 to check the spread of the infection and the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) will decide on implementing more restrictions.

"The latest genome sequencing report showed 54 per cent of the cases are of the Omicron variant. These people include those who do not have any travel history. It means Omicron is now inside Delhi," Jain said.

"Indeed, the variant is gradually spreading in the community and its proportion will increase in the coming days," the Minister said when asked if Omicron will be the dominant variant in a possible third wave of the pandemic.

He also said of the 200 coronavirus cases in Delhi hospitals, only 102 belong to the city. Also, 115 are those who



A health worker administers a vaccine for Covid-19 to a passenger during a special drive at Anand Vihar Bus Terminal in New Delhi on Thursday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

were directly taken to hospitals from the airport.

Of the hospitalised Covid patients in Delhi, 115 do not have any symptoms and have been kept in hospitals as a precautionary measure.

None of the hospitalised patients is on oxygen support, Jain said.

The Delhi Health Minister had on Wednesday said many international travellers who tested negative at the airport are found to be Covid positive after a few days. During this period, they are infecting their family members, he said.

According to official figures, of the 8,965 dedicated Covid beds in Delhi, 262 or 2.92 per cent were occupied and 97 per cent were vacant on December 28.

## All parties in UP want polls on time: CEC

EC won't interfere in ongoing rallies, guidelines after MCC: Chandra

PREETAM SRIVASTAVA ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra on Thursday hinted on timely elections claiming all political parties in Uttar Pradesh urged that Assembly elections should be held on time amid strict Covid-19 norms.

He, however, said the EC would not interfere in the ongoing political rallies and would only come out with a complete guideline once the Model Code of Conduct comes into force.

Addressing the media after a three-day visit to poll-bound Uttar Pradesh for a review of the preparedness, Chandra said that the political parties are not in favour of a delay in the polls. Replying to a question on the High Court suggestion of postponing the polls, Chandra said that all aspects would be considered before making a final



call. It may be noted that elections are due for Legislative Assemblies of UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur in the next few months.

The CEC said Covid-19 guidelines and SOPs will be followed during the elections and added that the poll panel will ensure free and fair polls.

The final voters' list for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections will be released on January 5, he stated, adding any rectification could be made till the last date of nomination.

"The representatives of all political parties met us and told us that elections should be conducted on time following all Covid-19 protocols," the CEC informed the media. There has been speculation that amid surge in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant's spread, the ensuing polls in five States might be delayed.

Continued on Page 2

## Omicron likely to soon replace Delta globally: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Experts in Singapore have warned that the Omicron which is supposedly more contagious variant is likely to replace Delta over the coming weeks as the dominant global variant, with the virus being fitter and having a reproductive advantage.

While the Delta variant has 13 mutations with nine on the spike protein, Omicron has about 50 mutations not seen together before, and 32 of them are on the spike protein. Because of its mutations, the Omicron variant attaches more effectively to human cell receptors, causing it to be more infective, the researchers said.

The Omicron variant has made health authorities more concerned as the virus is even "stickier" because of its extra mutations, they added.

While Delta is still the



A medical worker wearing protective gear waits for people to receive the Covid-19 vaccine at makeshift vaccination centre in Belgrade, Serbia, on Thursday

most common variant in all continents except Africa, Omicron is spreading very quickly, said Dr Sebastian Maurer-Stroh, executive director of the State-owned Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Bioinformatics Institute.

Continued on Page 2

## Bengal bans flights from UK to Kolkata from Jan 3

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

Amid rise in Omicron cases, the demand to ban international flights got louder on Thursday after the Mamata Banerjee Government decided to ban all direct flights from the United Kingdom to Kolkata from January 3, 2022.

"...in view of the rising number of Omicron cases globally as well within the country, the State Government has decided to temporarily and until further orders suspend all direct flights from the United Kingdom to Kolkata with effect from January 3, 2022. Flights which is an at-risk country as notified by the Ministry of Health, will not be allowed in the State and any NOCs which have been issued stand withdrawn," BP Gopalika, additional Chief Secretary, Wes Bengal said in a letter to Rajiv Bansal, Secretary, MoCA on Thursday.

Continued on Page 2

## Amid review, Centre extends AFSPA for 6 months in Nagaland

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After setting up a committee to study the demand for withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), the Centre on Thursday extended the AFSPA in Nagaland for another six months. Issuing a notification, the Ministry of Home Affairs said that the extension of "Disturbed Area" under the AFSPA was extended for a period of six months from December 30, 2021.

Nagaland has been under the AFSPA since 1958. The AFSPA empowers security forces to conduct operations and arrest anyone without any prior warrant besides giving immunity from arrest and prosecution to the security forces if they shoot someone dead.

The State has been witnessing a clamour for withdrawal of the AFSPA over the



recent mistaken killing of 14 civilians by Special Forces tracking down Myanmar-based terror groups. The extension comes three days after the Union Government constituted a high-level five-member committee under the chairmanship of Registrar General and Census Commissioner Vivek Joshi with Additional Secretary in the Union Home Ministry Piyush Goyal as its member-secretary. The chief secretary and director general of police of Nagaland and the director general of Assam Rifles are the other members of the committee.

Continued on Page 2

## Pak buys Chinese jets to match up to India's Rafale

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has acquired a full squadron of 25 multirole J-10C fighter jets from its all-weather ally China in response to India's purchase of Rafale aircraft, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has said.

Speaking to the media in his home city of Rawalpindi on Wednesday, Rashid said that a full squadron of 25 all-weather aircraft comprising J-10C will attend the Pakistan Day ceremony on March 23, 2022.

Apparently, China has come to the rescue of its closest ally by providing J-10C, one of its highly reliable fighter jets.

The minister, who often characterises himself a "graduate of Urdu-medium institutions" to poke fun at his elite English-medium colleagues, incorrectly pronounced the name of the aircraft as JS-10

instead of J-10C.

"VIP guests are coming (to attend 23rd March ceremony) for the first time in Pakistan, the fly-past ceremony of JS-10 (J-10C) is being held... Pakistan Air Force is going to perform the fly-past of China's JS-10 (J-10C) aircraft in response to Rafale," said the Interior Minister.

The J-10C aircraft were part of the Pak-China joint exercise last year, where experts from Pakistan had the opportunity to have a close look at the fighter jets.

The joint exercises started on December 7 in Pakistan and lasted about 20 days, with China sending warplanes including J-10C, J-11B jets, KJ-500 early warning aircraft and Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft, while Pakistan participated with the JF-17 and Mirage III fighter jets.

## Taliban display 75 rare Kushan era antiques confiscated from Af babus

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Taliban have confiscated 75 rare antiques of the Kushan era, mostly from former bureaucrats who served under previous regimes, and displayed them at an exclusive museum in Kabul.

These antiques were plundered by Persian invaders from India, many of which were held by the bureaucrats and Afghan elites for smuggling through diplomatic baggage to European destinations aimed at making easy money, said experts tracking the unfolding developments in Afghanistan.

"The museum operationalised by the Taliban exclusively consists of antiques plundered by the Persian invaders, including Mohammad Ghor and Mohammad Ghazni. The drive to confiscate the antiques was launched about three weeks back and is continuing. Most of the seizures were made



from the bureaucrats and officials who served under various administrations in Kabul backed and funded by India," an Afghan origin security expert said.

While the decline of the Kushan dynasty in the fourth century AD, the Persian invaders took away the treasures to Afghanistan which was under their control at that time.

While the Indian treasures

have been kept at the museum, the Taliban have not displayed the Chinese artefacts smuggled by Uyghur revolutionary smugglers. The Uyghur smugglers are operating in tandem with the Taliban and the Chinese bureaucrats working in both Afghanistan and the bordering areas under Pakistani control.

The Uyghur syndicate continues to smuggle Chinese antiques to Afghanistan and all such items are transhipped to Europe via Iran.

While the Indian treasures have been kept at the museum, the Taliban have not displayed the Chinese artefacts smuggled by Uyghur revolutionary smugglers. It is also a pointer to the lack of initiative by the Indian official machinery that failed to take any initiative to retrieve such antiquities when New Delhi had leverage with the Governments that were in power before the Taliban took over power in August last year," conceded an official in the security establishment.

Meanwhile, the Taliban have prepared a list of 2 lakh employees of the former Government whose recruitment and loans are being scrutinised. Those found to be recruited through corruption or linkages with the Government officials or Ministers will have to shell out the salaries received by them till now to the deserving candidates who were denied jobs.

## Past Govts delayed projects of national importance: Modi

PNS ■ HALDWANI

The trademark of past Governments was to persistently delay projects of national importance. However, this is not the case anymore, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi after launching development projects worth ₹17,547 crore at an event in Haldwani on Thursday.

While addressing a large public gathering, the PM kept the main focus of his speech on development works and public welfare initiatives of the BJP-led Government in both Uttarakhand and across the nation.

Modi referred to the delays in execution of important projects under past Governments while citing the example of the 300 MW Lakhwar multi purpose project which will also provide irrigation and drinking water to Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and



Delhi, for which the foundation stone was laid during the PM's visit on Thursday.

He said, "The Lakhwar project was first conceived in 1976 and after being delayed for 46 years, its foundation stone was unveiled today."

Apart from this project, the PM also unveiled the foundation stone of the AIIMS satellite centre to be built in Udham Singh Nagar and 15 other projects worth ₹14,127 crore while inaugurating six projects worth ₹3,420 crore.

Stating that the abilities of

the people will make this decade that of Uttarakhand, the PM said the modern infrastructure being developed in Uttarakhand, the Char Dham road project and new rail routes will also ensure this.

He said, "From Gangotri to Gangasagar we are on a mission. With construction of toilets, better sewerage systems and latest facilities for water treatment, the number of drains emptying into the Ganga river is decreasing consistently."

Continued on Page 2

## CAPSULE

### 'PM WANTED BJP, NCP TO COME TOGETHER'

Pune: Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar has claimed Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted the BJP and the NCP to come together in Maharashtra to form Government in 2019, but he told the PM that "it was not possible".

### SIX TERRORISTS, ARMY JAWAN KILLED

Srinagar: Six Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militants, including two Pakistani nationals, involved in the December 13 attack on a police bus on the outskirts of the city, were killed in twin encounters in south Kashmir that also left an Army jawan dead, officials said on Thursday.

### KALICHARAN MAHARAJ ARRESTED IN MP

Raipur: Chhattisgarh Police arrested Hindu religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj from neighbouring Madhya Pradesh on Thursday in connection with his alleged derogatory remarks against Mahatma Gandhi, an official said.

### HOLD GST RATE HIKE ON TEXTILES: STATES

New Delhi: Ahead of the GST Council meeting, several States on Thursday flagged higher tax rate on textile products from January 1 and demanded that the rate hike be put on hold. In the pre-budget meeting chaired by Mirumala Sitharaman, States like Gujarat, West Bengal, Delhi, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu said that they are not in favour of a hike in Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate on textiles.

### BRAHMOS DEAL WITH PHILIPPINES SOON

New Delhi: India and the Philippines are set to formally seal a government-to-government BrahMos deal soon, capping years of negotiations for the supply of a batch of the supersonic cruise missiles for the Philippine navy, people familiar with the development said on Thursday.

### SHO BOOKED FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Kota: Days after his suspension, the SHO at Mahila police station in Bundi was booked for allegedly sexually harassing and stalking a 30-year-old dowry victim, police said. SHO Shaikat Khan was suspended on Monday on the orders of IG, Kota, Ravi Dutt Gaur, they said.

GOVT ON TIGER DEATHS

Tiger population taken from brink to assured path of recovery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Environment on Thursday said tiger population in the country has been taken from the brink to an assured path of recovery, which is evident in findings of the quadrennial All India Tiger Estimation conducted in 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2018.

“These results have shown a healthy annual growth rate of tigers at 6 per cent, which offsets natural losses and keeps tigers at the habitats carrying capacity level, in the Indian context,” it said.

The Ministry further stated that for the period from 2012 to 2021, one can observe that the average tiger deaths per year in the country hover around 98, which is balanced by the annual recruitment as highlighted by the robust growth rate.

Referring to a news report that out of 126 instances of tiger deaths, 60 tigers had died due to unnatural causes like poaching, accidents, man-animal conflict outside protected areas, the environment ministry said it can ascertain the cause of death only after a detailed analysis.

“In this light, it is pertinent to mention that the NTCA, through a dedicated standard operating procedure, has a stringent protocol to ascribe cause to a tiger death, which is treated as unnatural, unless otherwise proved by the state concerned through submission of necropsy reports, histopathological and forensic



assessments besides photographs and circumstantial evidences.

“It is only after a detailed analysis of these documents that the cause of death of 60 tigers outside tiger reserves

can be ascertained,” it noted.

The ministry asserted that “it is expected that the media will inform the aforesaid facts, to the country so that there is no sensationalism and citizens are not led to believe that there

is cause for alarm”.

It also said that certain media reports have highlighted the death of tigers during the year 2021 in a manner which is “a lopsided view of tiger conservation in the country”.

The ministry reiterated that NTCA has taken several steps under Project Tiger to control poaching and that the reports do not take into account the “gamut of processes that go into dealing with the tiger death in the country”.

“While it is appreciated that figures as available on the National Tiger Conservation Authority’s website have been used in these reports, the manner in which it has been pre-

sented causes alarm and does not take into account the gamut of processes that go into dealing with tiger death in the country and the natural gains that have been made in tiger conservation, as a result of sustained technical and financial interventions by the Government of India,” the statement said.

“The NTCA maintains the highest standards of transparency in so far as making tiger death statistics available to citizens through its website as well as a dedicated portal, so that people can make a logical assessment, if they desire,” it said.

Earlier in the day, an official from the NTCA told PTI

that the cause of the recent death of the tigers in Madhya Pradesh is being ascertained as it takes time to complete the scrutiny.

As many as 126 tigers have died in India in 2021, as per the NTCA with the maximum tiger deaths recorded this year in Madhya Pradesh (44) followed by 26 deaths in Karnataka and 14 in Karnataka.

A tiger was found dead in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday, taking this year’s toll in the state to 44. According to reports, a tigress died in the state’s Dindori area allegedly due to poisoning two days ago.



Tourists and locals walk on the Ridge ahead of New Year 2022 celebrations, amid concern over rising Omicron cases, in Shimla, on Thursday

Bengal bans flights from UK to Kolkata from...

From Page 1

Earlier, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stressed that the Centre must decide on imposing restrictions on flights from countries where Omicron cases are high. Bengal has reported 2,128 fresh Covid cases, 1,067 recoveries, and 12 deaths in the last 24 hours.

“With effect from January 3, 2022, all passengers coming from other non-at-risk countries by international flights to West Bengal will have to mandatorily undergo a test on arrival at their cost. The airlines will randomly select 10 per cent of the passengers for RT-PCR test and the balance 90 per cent shall undergo Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) at the arrival airport. Those found positive in the RAT test will have to further undergo RT-PCR tests as may be required by the health authorities,” read the letter.

All passengers have to mandatorily pre-book the test before boarding to reduce waiting time on arrival, which the airlines must ensure prior to allowing the boarding. Accordingly, the airport authorities may be asked to augment the holding capacity of the arrival lounge on the international side and also increase the number of testing counters so as to reduce the waiting time for the passengers at the air-

port.

Till on Wednesday Bengal had recorded a total of 11 cases of the Omicron variant. “We have sent more than a thousand samples and out of which 107 were tested yesterday ... out of that five more persons tested positive ... this takes the total Omicron count to 11,” a Health Department official said.

Meanwhile, the Kolkata Police on Thursday said an additional posse of 3,500 police personnel would be deployed at various points in Kolkata, particularly the historical Park Street area to keep a tab on the situation.

A Joint Commissioner of Kolkata Police on Thursday said, “The administration will strictly implement the corona protocol in the New Year enforcing social distancing ... if anyone is seen without mask then appropriate legal measures would be taken.”

“The airlines may be requested to evenly space out the flight arrivals in NSCB, Kolkata in consultation with the airport director and the State nodal officer so as to reduce waiting time,” read the letter.

In another development, the Goa Government said all international passengers, including those travelling from “non-high-risk” countries, will be tested for Covid-19 on their arrival at the coastal State’s lone airport. Earlier this month, the Delhi Government asked the Centre to stop international flights from those nations affected by Omicron.

All parties in UP want polls on time: CEC

From Page 1

Responding to a question on huge political rallies being held in Uttar Pradesh during the prevailing Covid-19 situation, CEC Chandra said they discussed the matter with the state health secretary. “When elections are announced, we will issue directions specifically on this issue looking at the situation then,” he said.

The CEC informed that the poll panel has increased by one hour the voting time keeping in mind the Covid-19 situation. Voting during the elections will be held from 8 am to 6 pm on the date of polling, the CEC informed. Keeping Covid in view, we have reduced the number of voters per booth from 1,500 to 1,200. In UP, the number of polling stations has increased by 11,000. The staff deployed at voting booths across the State will be fully vaccinated and those eligible will be given a booster dose.

“I have been told that 86 per cent of the people in the State have got the first dose and 49 per cent the second shot of Covid vaccine... We have been assured that in 15 to 20 days all eligible people will get their first dose,” the chief election commissioner said. “We have asked for increasing vaccination. The situation arising out of the spread of the Omicron variant of coronavirus was also reviewed. It has been noted that there was not much impact of the latest variant in the

State where only four cases were reported and three of them have recovered”, Chandra said. Thermal scanners, masks will be provided at all polling booths and special care will be on maintaining social distancing besides proper sanitisation of booths, he said.

To ensure free and fair elections and to ensure a level playing field, the election commission ordered the transfer of officials who have been posted at one place for over a year after various political parties cast their aspersions over this. Around 5,000 policemen have been transferred and the remaining will be transferred soon, the CEC said. There will be 4,030 model polling booths-- 10 at each constituency. Also, 800 all-women polling stations will be set up.

CEC Chandra further informed the following: “VVPATs will be installed at all voting booths. Live webcasting facilities will be available at around 1 lakh voting booths to ensure transparency in the election process.” The CEC said that the poll panel will reach the doorsteps of people above the age of 80 years, persons with disabilities and Covid-affected people who are unable to come to the polling booth. During the briefing, the CEC expressed concerns over the sliding voting percentage in Uttar Pradesh. “61 per cent voter turnout was recorded in 2017 UP Assembly elections. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, voter turnout in UP was 59 per cent. It is a matter of worry why the voting percentage is less in the State where there is high political awareness among people,” he said.

Kalicharan sent to 2-day police remand

Raipur: Religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj, who was arrested on Thursday and charged with sedition for allegedly abusing Mahatma Gandhi, has been sent to police remand for two days by a court. The self-proclaimed godman was arrested from Madhya Pradesh by the Chhattisgarh police in the early hours of Thursday. He was later brought to Raipur, and presented at a local court.

Kalicharan had used abusive language against Mahatma Gandhi while praising his assassin Nathuram Godse at a religious event — “Dharma Sansad” on December 25-26, in Raipur. He made the derogatory remarks against Mahatma Gandhi at the event in which leaders of both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were invited.

Kalicharan’s remarks against the Father of the Nation had irked Chhattisgarh’s ruling Congress party, and Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel instructed the police team to arrest the godman. IANS

Karol Bagh shop owner fined ₹50K for opening shop on wrong day

New Delhi: A shopkeeper in central Delhi’s Karol Bagh was on Thursday slapped a Rs 50,000 fine for violating Covid norms by opening a shop on ‘Even Day’, which led to a large gathering at the spot. The challan was issued two days after the Delhi government imposed a yellow alert, in view of the rising Covid cases, under which restrictions included shops selling non-essential items being only allowed to open on an ‘odd-even’ basis.

Karol Bagh’s Sub-Divisional Magistrate issued the challan to Prem Singh, who runs the shop in Beedanpura area of the leading market. The SDM, accompanied by Civil Defence volunteers, were on a surprise inspection when they caught Prem Singh running the shop on day he was not supposed to. “Shop was found open on an Even Day. It was the reason behind issuing the challan. The challan was issued for Rs 50,000,” said an official. IANS

Past Govts...

From Page 1

He further said that past governments had ignored connectivity and various aspects of national security. “Our armed forces and soldiers were simply made to wait. The land of Kumaon will not forget how past governments ignored this area despite it being a border region. Our government fulfilled the one rank-one pension demand of the servicemen and also strengthened the armed forces by making the latest weapons available. Now our forces do not have to wait for permission to give a befitting reply to the enemy,” said Modi. He also spoke in detail about the benefits of the projects launched on the occasion. Donning an Uttarakhandi cap, the PM also wished the people in Kumaoni language ahead of the New Year and Ghughutiya festival.

Earlier, welcoming the PM, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami praised the efforts being undertaken by Modi in the nation’s interests. He credited the Modi government for efficient management during the Covid pandemic, abrogation of Article 370 and paving the way for construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. He said how the state government has been able to resolve various issues with the help of the central government. Stating that the government is focusing on improving connectivity, he said that the dream of trains in the mountains seen by many generations now appears to be nearing fruition, adding that the Tanakpur-Bageshwar rail project is an example of this. Stating that the untimely demise of the late Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat is an irreparable loss to the nation and state, he recalled that the general had two main aims—strengthening the armed forces and development of Uttarakhand. He said that the state will work to fulfill his dreams.

Govt reviving flute industry in Pilibhit: Yogi

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday invoked Lord Krishna in Pilibhit and said his Government is reviving the flute industry in the district.

“Work is going on to restore the flute, which Lord Krishna had once played. Your flute was recognised almost 5,000 years ago by Lord Shri Krishna. But, the previous governments had forgotten this,” he said, according to a BJP statement.

Amid review...

From Page 1

The committee is supposed to submit its report within 45 days. The notification issued on Thursday said that the Centre “is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of the State of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary.” Now, therefore, in the exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No.28 of

1958) the Central Government hereby declares that whole of the State of Nagaland to be ‘disturbed area’ for a period of six months with effect from December 30, 2021, for the purpose of the said Act,” said the Home Ministry notification issued by Goyal, the member-secretary in the high-level panel.

Huge protests pushed the Nagaland Government to call a special one-day session on December 20 where the Assembly unanimously resolved to demand the repeal of AFSPA.

Covid surge in Delhi, Mumbai unabated

From Page 1

“Coincidentally, today’s NIV report reveals that he was infected with the Omicron virus,” a bulletin by the State Public Health department stated. As the State reeled under a threat of a third pandemic wave, the Covid-19 cases went up by 1,468 cases, while the Omicron cases more than doubled from 75 cases on Wednesday to an alarming 190 cases on Thursday. The Covid-19 deaths went up from 20 to 22 during the last 24 hours.

Mumbai bore the maximum brunt of the pandemic, as the Covid-19 infections jumped by 3,555 cases and the metropolis recorded 190 Omicron infections out of a total 198 cases registered in the entire State.

With 5,368 fresh infections, the total Covid-19 cases went up from 66,65,386 to 66,70,754, while the Omicron cases—with an addition of 198 fresh cases—rose from 252

cases to 450 cases in what is being seen as a mind-boggling increase in 24 hours.

As 1,193 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the State after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year increased from 65,06,137 cases to 65,07,330. The recovery rate in the State dropped from 97.61 per cent to 95.55 per cent.

The number of “active cases” in the State increased 14,065 to 18,217 cases. The fatality rate in the State stood static at 2.12 per cent.

Mumbai accounted for a maximum of 11,360 cases, while there were 2,226 active cases in Pune. There were 2,017 active cases in Thane, followed by Nashik (49), Raigad (378), Ahmednagar (361), Palghar (317), Satara (199) and Nagpur (168).

Of the 6,88,87,303 samples sent to various laboratories across the State so far, 66,70,754 have tested positive (9.68 per cent) for Covid-19 until Thursday.

Currently, 1,33,748 people are in home quarantine while 1,078 people are in institutional

Omicron likely to SOON...

From Page 1

Of the genome submissions sent to the Munich-headquartered GISAID, a data science initiative that provides the shared genome platform for Covid, the Omicron strain has comprised between 7 per cent and 27 per cent of new submissions over the past month, up until Tuesday. The figures refer to all continents except Africa. “From current data, it looks like Delta will go down over time relative to Omicron,” The Straits Times reported, quoting Dr Maurer-Stroh, who is part of the global team that maintains GISAID.

The new variant was first detected in South Africa on November 11, and then in Botswana and Hong Kong, before it rippled across more than 110 countries, as at last weekend.

Meanwhile, the State recorded an all-time of 198 cases of Omicron, taking the total number of new Covid-19 variant cases to 450 cases.

All the 198 Omicron recorded in the state have been reported from National Institute of Virology (NIV).

Warning that the increase of Covid-19 cases in India could be part of the global rise pushed by Omicron, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has written to the Health Secretaries of Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. Bhushan directed these States to take measures such as enhance testing, strengthen hospital-level preparedness, increase pace and coverage of vaccination as there has been an increase in Covid cases and lessening of doubling time.

The Center has also directed the States to enhance the testing in a focused manner with maintaining the ratio between RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen Test (RAT). The States have been advised to go for proactive contact tracing and isolation and quarantine of the

Omicron is already dominant in Australia, Russia, South Africa and the United Kingdom, noted Professor Dale Fisher, a senior consultant at the National University Hospital’s Division of Infectious Diseases. “We are seeing a global transition from Delta to Omicron because with a greater transmissibility, the virus is fitter and has a reproductive advantage,” said Dale Fisher.

But he added a caveat that the reports of Omicron rates may be biased as some countries do little gene sequencing, and those that do may be looking for a deletion in a specific spike gene to identify Omicron, instead of carrying out whole genome sequencing.

Singapore on Wednesday reported 170 new Omicron cases. According to Johns Hopkins University data, Singapore has recorded 278,750 Covid-19 cases and 826 deaths.

The rise and fall of new variants over time follows the

laws of nature and the survival of the fittest, Dale Fisher noted.

Dr Maurer-Stroh said the environment in which two variants compete will also help determine which is more successful. “As immunity in the population increases from both vaccination and natural infection, severity goes down but even slightly better escape from the prevalent immune response can give one variant the extra edge over another,” he said. “This is also what we see with different flu variants every year,” he said, adding because of the great benefit of vaccination, including boosters, we see less severe cases.

As Omicron and Delta continue to wrestle for dominance, some have wondered whether it would be possible to be infected with both strains at the same time. “This is possible but rare. And very quickly, only one variant would be the dominant infection in the body,” added Dr Maurer-Stroh.

contacts of positive cases, their testing and follow up.

The States have also been told to speed up the Covid vaccination coverage along with enforcing the Covid Appropriate Behaviour.

“There is an uptick which has been witnessed in the last few days as India’s daily cases jumped from around 6,000 on Tuesday to around 9,000 Wednesday to over 13,000 on Thursday,” Niti Aayog member (health) Dr VK Paul said at a Press briefing here on Thursday. “The present R-value in India is 1.22 which means cases are increasing and not shrinking. Deaths are stable in India as of now which is reassuring. It could be part of the global rise in cases pushed by Omicron, we believe. We are updating you on available information.”

“It takes time to identify the variant. We will continue to update you on the specifics of this. Omicron is a highly transmissible variant that perhaps explains the speed of the rise in the cases. The severity issue of the variant is unsettled. Hopefully, it remains mild but can’t be taken for granted,” Dr Paul said

As of now, Delhi and Maharashtra are the two States most affected by Omicron, among the 19 States where the variant has made an appearance. But Omicron cases are also increasing rapidly in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad. The variant has now been detected from 22 States and Union territories.

Among other States, Rajasthan and Kerala have reported 69 and 65 Omicron cases respectively. In Telangana, 62 people have so far tested positive for the variant while in Tamil Nadu the count stood at 45. Karnataka has logged 34 cases. Andhra Pradesh (16 cases), Haryana (12 cases) and West Bengal (11 cases) have all so far seen less than 20 infections of the variant.

Meanwhile, 320 of the 961 Omicron patients have been discharged, the ministry’s data showed. The count remained in single digits in Madhya Pradesh (9 cases), Odisha (9 cases), Uttarakhand (4 cases), Chandigarh (3 cases), Jammu and Kashmir (3 cases), Uttar Pradesh (2 cases), Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Manipur and Punjab (1 case each).

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# Not allowed to board, people block MB road DTC buses damaged over Covid restriction

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After not being allowed to board a vehicle which had exceeded the permissible passenger-carrying capacity set when Delhi is on "yellow" alert due to rising Covid cases, a group of people blocked the MB Road and damaged DTC buses on Thursday morning. Police used mild force to disperse the crowd and five people have been detained.

"Around 10:30 am on Thursday morning, some people blocked the MB Road and broke the glass of a DTC bus. Police dispersed the crowd. A case under relevant sections of the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act and IPC is being registered at Sangam Vihar police station and five people have been detained," said a senior police official.

"The incident occurred due to non-availability of seats in the buses in view of Covid-related restrictions," he said.

"On Thursday morning, several calls complaining about a traffic jam near Jamia Hamdard on the Mehrauli-Badarpur Road were received on Thursday. Police reached the spot and found that some commuters were instigating others to sit on the road as bus drivers and marshalls were not allowing more than 17 passengers to board following the latest guidelines of

The conductor of a bus, in a video, said, "We have instructions to allow only 17 commuters at a time. When there are 20 people, including the driver, conductor and marshal, on the bus, we do not stop it. If we stop and more people enter the bus, we will be fined ₹2,000"

the Delhi government," said Benita Marry Jaiker, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South district. Police tried to convince the people to let the traffic flow through the stretch. Later, people broke window panes of four to five buses, she said.

Police removed the protesters from the spot. In the melee, one police personnel also sustained injury, the DCP said. In videos of the incident that have emerged on social media, it was seen that a green and a red air-conditioned bus have been damaged. Windshields and side mirrors were broken.

The conductor of a bus, in a video, said, "We have instructions to allow only 17 commuters at a time. When there are 20 people, including the driver, conductor and marshal, on the bus, we do not stop it. If we stop and more people enter the bus, we will be fined ₹2,000."

"When we did not stop the bus today, people got agitated and started pelting of stones. However, nobody inside the bus was injured," he said.

# City set to ring in New Year in chilly weather, cold wave to severe cold wave likely till Jan 3

New Delhi: A cold wave swept Delhi on Thursday as people in the city gear up to ring in a chilly New Year with the weather department predicting similar conditions till January 3.

The minimum temperature at the Safdarjung Observatory, considered the official marker for the national capital, dropped sharply to 3.4 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal. On Wednesday it was 8.4 degrees Celsius.

The automatic weather stations at Delhi's Ayanagar and Narela on Thursday recorded a minimum temperature of 3.8 degrees Celsius and 3.2 degrees Celsius, respectively.

In the plains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) declares a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to 4 degrees Celsius. A cold wave is also declared when the minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than normal.

Delhi had experienced cold wave conditions on December 20 and 21 when the minimum temperature settled at 3.2 degrees Celsius, the lowest this season so far, and 4 degrees Celsius.

Thereafter, two back-to-back west-



ern disturbances and the resultant slowing down of cold northwesterly winds and cloudy conditions gradually pushed the minimum temperature up to 9.8 degrees Celsius.

Clouds trap some of the outgoing infrared radiation and radiate it back downward, warming the ground. The IMD has predicted cold wave to severe cold wave conditions in north-west India till January 3.

A "severe" cold wave is when the minimum temperature dips to two degrees Celsius or the departure from normal is more than 6.4 degrees Celsius. The weather department predicted the minimum temperature will start increasing from January 4 under the influence of an active western disturbance which is very likely to cause fairly widespread rainfall and snowfall over Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh between January 4 and 7.

It will also lead to "light to moderate scattered to fairly widespread" rainfall over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, north Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh between January 5 to January 7. **PTI**

# Int'l fliers testing +ve to be isolated at designated places

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

International passengers testing Covid-19 positive upon their arrival at Delhi airport will have to isolate at designated paid and free facilities including hotels and districts' Covid care centers, the Directorate of Health Services, Delhi government, said in an order issued on December 30. (Thursday).

"In compliance with the guidelines for international arrivals dated November 30, 2021, issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, based on the risk assessment, it is informed that the institutional isolation of Covid-19 positive passengers/contacts arriving at the IGI airport, New Delhi, from foreign countries, will henceforth be done at the designated paid and free facilities," the DGHS order read. Teams deputed at the Delhi airport will transfer the patients accordingly.

In another order, of Health and Family Welfare Department, Delhi government ordered to link Covid Care Centers (CCC) with different city hospitals.

As per the order, Terapanth Bhawan CCC having 100 bed facility will be linked with Ambedkar Nagar Hospital, Sardar Patel Covid with

100 beds linked to ITBP/ PT. Madan Mohan Malviya Hospital, CWG Akshardham 50, to be scaled up to 500 beds with Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital and IBIS Hotel 100 beds attached with Indira Gandhi Hospital, Dwarka.

"It is hereby re-iterated that the Linked Hospital will ensure proper monitoring of the CCCs attached to it and will ensure proper, timely and adequate supply of logistics as mandated by the orders passed by the Department," the order stated.

These orders came two days after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in view of the rising coronavirus cases, had said, "As the Covid-19 positivity rate has been above 0.5 percent for the past few days, we are enforcing Level-1 (yellow alert) of the Graded Response Action Plan."

Meanwhile Delhi on Thursday recorded huge jump in daily Covid-19 cases with 1,313 cases registered in last 24 hours.

According to Covid 19 health bulletin, the positivity rate recorded at 1.73 percent while 423 patients have been recovered and no death reported in past 24 hours. Delhi has total 8,835 beds, out of which 189 occupied and 8,646 vacant. 68,590 tests conducted in past 24 hours.

# IPS officer on UK trip contracts Omicron

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A senior Delhi Police official, who had gone to London to extradite an alleged international drug supplier, has tested positive for Covid-19's new variant 'Omicron'.

The Indian Police Service (IPS) rank officer of the Special Cell unit, was accompanied by two others who are also under home isolation, police said.

According to police, an extradition request against Harvinder Singh, a resident of Southall in London, was sent to the United Kingdom in 2020.

On the basis of extradition request, Singh was arrested by UK Police in February. The trial at Westminster Court was concluded in November

and Singh put forward his consent for Extradition to India. After the order, a team constituted by the Delhi Police Commissioner comprising Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Ingit Pratap Singh, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Rahul Vikram and Inspector Anuj Kumar was sent to London to take the physical custody of Singh, police had said.

On December 24, the team, along with Harvinder Singh, landed at Delhi. Due to the norms, the accused as well the entire team had to undergo Covid-19 screening tests at Delhi Airport as well as Heathrow Airport in London, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Rajiv

Ranjan Singh said.

After completion of his mandatory quarantine period, the accused will be taken in police custody remand from Tihar Jail and further investigation will be carried out, police had said. A senior police officer said that team landed on December 24. A DCP rank officer is tested positive for Omicron and is under home isolation. He is doing better.

In view of a rise in the number of coronavirus cases and that of its new variant Omicron, the Delhi Police on Wednesday had revised the standard operating procedure on health welfare for its personnel, stating that an officer of the rank of inspector and above should personally visit the hos-

pitalised personnel or their kin on a regular basis.

"The revised SOP is more elaborate and covers complete well-being of our personnel suffering from any disease and admitted in hospital for medical treatment. The DCPs and unit heads have been designated nodal health officers.

"The nodal health officers will ensure that an officer of the rank of inspector or above should personally meet the hospitalised personnel or their kin, on regular basis till she or he gets fit. In case of outstation cases, video-conferencing with the ailing or their family members be ensured with regular feedback on health of the ailing personnel," they had said.

# Father kills 4-yr-old son over feud with wife, tries to kill self

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A father killed his 4-year-old son after giving him poison and also consumed the poisonous substance to commit suicide over a domestic feud with his wife on Wednesday. However, he is undergoing treatment at a private hospital.

According to the police, 40-year-old Rajesh alias Bholu, a resident of village Jaudaula in Gurugram, was in domestic trouble with his wife Payal.

Rajesh had told his sister Mitlesh around 20 days ago about his wife, who left Rajesh's house with another man. "Mitlesh console Rajesh

that forgets his wife and lives his life with his two sons 10-year-old Mohit and 4-year-old Bharat but despite this Rajesh gave poisonous substance to his son and killed him and he consumes himself as well, he was admitted to a private hospital, where his condition remains critical.

"The matter is being investigated. Further action will be expedited after Rajesh recovers. If necessary, his wife will also be questioned. A case of murder was registered against Rajesh after a complaint was filed by his sister," Inspector Sunil Kumar, SHO of Farrukhnagar police station said.

# 2 held for stabbing 24-year-old to death in Seemapuri, video viral

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 24-year-old man was stabbed to death after being thrashed by three men in northeast Delhi's Seemapuri on Wednesday. Police said that they have arrested two accused.

A video clip of the incident shows one of the accused repeatedly hitting the victim with a metal chair, while another stabs him. When a woman tries to save the victim, the third accused stops her.

The victim was allegedly in a relationship with the married sister of one of the accused, police said, adding that the woman's brother was not happy about it and had hatched a plan to kill him.

According to R Sathiyasundaram, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Shahdara district, at around 5 PM on Wednesday, a police control room (PCR) call was received that in Old Seemapuri, a man was stabbed by three men.

"Police rushed to the spot to find out that the victim was already shifted to the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) hospital, where he was declared 'brought dead'. The victim was identified as Shahrulkh, a resident of Old Seemapuri," said the DCP.

"A case was registered at the Seemapuri police station under sections 302 (murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provisions of the Arms Act. The accused were identified as Zuber, Zafar and Aditya, all residents of Seemapuri. Teams were formed, multiple raids were conducted and Aditya (18) and Zuber (30) were arrested," said the DCP.

Police said that Shahrulkh involved in more than 40 cases, mostly pickpocketing in metro stations, were registered against him in Delhi and several cases in UP. He was released on bail from Dasna jail in UP a few days back.

The accused persons disclosed that an argument occurred between the accused and Sharukh on Wednesday. Later, Zuber, along with his Zafar and Aditya, planned to kill Sharukh, police said, adding that Zuber is a truck mechanic by profession.

On Wednesday evening, they attacked Sharukh with knife. Efforts are being made to arrest Zafar, police added.

# HC refuses to quash FIR against husband for dowry death



New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has refused to quash an FIR for dowry death on the basis of a settlement between a man and his deceased wife's family, saying that it is a grave and heinous offence which is actuated by a social evil and thus needs deterrence.

Justice Mukta Gupta, while dismissing the petition by the man and other accused family members for quashing of the FIR, said that the offence of dowry death is an offence against the society and noted that the Supreme Court has ruled that cases of serious cannot be closed on the basis of a compromise.

"In the present case a woman has committed suicide within five months of the marriage due to the harassment caused by the husband and his family members and the offence punishable under Section 304-B (dowry death) IPC is not only a grave and heinous offence but an offence against the society actuated by the social evil of demand of dowry, thus needs deterrence and, therefore, cannot be quashed on the basis of settlement arrived at between the accused and the complainant," the court said in a recently passed order.

"A three-judge bench of the Honble

Supreme Court... Has clearly laid down that where serious and grave offences are involved, the quashing of FIR cannot be allowed on the basis of the compromise," it added. In the present case, the woman's family alleged that after the marriage in March 2021, the petitioners started harassing her for dowry. Subsequently, in August, the family received a phone call that their daughter committed suicide. During the pendency of the investigation, the petitioners and the woman's family entered into a memorandum of understanding which said that they had arrived at a settlement without any coercion and without any transfer of money. The woman's family, in the settlement, said that they had no claim and grievance against the petitioners and would cooperate in the quashing petition while making sincere efforts in getting the petitioners released on bail. The petitioners argued before the high court that in view of the settlement, no useful purpose would be served in continuing the FIR and the consequent criminal proceedings against them.

The prosecution told the court that it has already filed a charge sheet against certain petitioners. **PTI**

# Covid curbs: Serpentine queues outside metro stations on day two

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Long queues of commuters were seen outside various Delhi Metro stations for the second consecutive day on Thursday morning after imposition of fresh curbs by authorities to check the spread of Covid-19 in the city.

Meanwhile, anticipating gathering of commuters on New Year's Eve, Delhi Metro authorities have decided that exit from the Rajiv Chowk metro station will not be allowed after 9 PM on that day. Every year, revellers gather at Connaught Place, the heart of New Delhi, adjacent to the metro station, to ring in the New Year. However, with new Covid restrictions and night curfew in place from 11 PM onwards in Delhi amid a scare of Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the crowd is likely to be small.

"To ease overcrowding on New Year's Eve, exit from the Rajiv Chowk Metro station will not be allowed from 9 PM onwards. However, entry of passengers will be allowed till the departure of the last train from the station. Commuters are requested to plan their journey accordingly," the DMRC said in a statement on Thursday.

'Yellow alert' category graded action was put in place by authorities on Tuesday, which also entails running of metro trains with only 50 per cent seating capacity and no pro-

vision for standing for commuters, in view of rising cases of COVID-19 in Delhi. In view of the latest guidelines issued by the city government for the containment of coronavirus in Delhi, travel inside the metro will be allowed, with certain restrictions, DMRC officials said.

Since the new restrictions came into force, the queues in the morning time, when metro services are used by a large number of office-goers, were again seen getting longer at some of the stations, officials said, adding they were doing their best to manage the situation to ensure compliance of Covid norms.

On Wednesday, long queues of commuters were seen outside stations at Laxmi Nagar, Akshardham, among others. Many also had taken to Facebook and Twitter to share pictures of such queues outside stations.

Sources said, as offices are open, and not many can afford a private car or other means of transportation every day, so they are bound to use public transport, and if 50 per cent seating capacity rule is in place, such queues will be seen.

Delhi resident Rameen Khan, who takes a metro to reach his office in Gurgaon, said, there was a 'massive queue' at the station.

Delhi Metro, in a statement, on Wednesday had said, as part of the intensified measures for containing COVID-19 spread, "15 flying squads were deployed across the Delhi

Metro network" to ensure that the Covid safety protocols are strictly adhered to by the passengers inside trains and on DMRC premises.

The frequency of checking drives is also being increased to ensure strict adherence to the guidelines, and offenders are also being penalised on the spot, a senior official had said. "Due to the strict reinforcement of social distancing norms, the passengers are advised to plan their journey in advance and allow for some additional time for their commute. They should travel by the metro only if absolutely essential," the official added.

The DMRC network's current span is nearly 392 km with 286 stations (including the Noida-Greater Noida Metro Corridor and Rapid Metro, Gurgaon). India saw the highest single day rise of 180 cases of the Omicron variant of coronavirus, taking the total tally of such infections in the country to 961, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

Delhi recorded the maximum number of 263 cases followed by Maharashtra at 252, Gujarat 97, Rajasthan 69, Kerala 65 and Telangana 62.

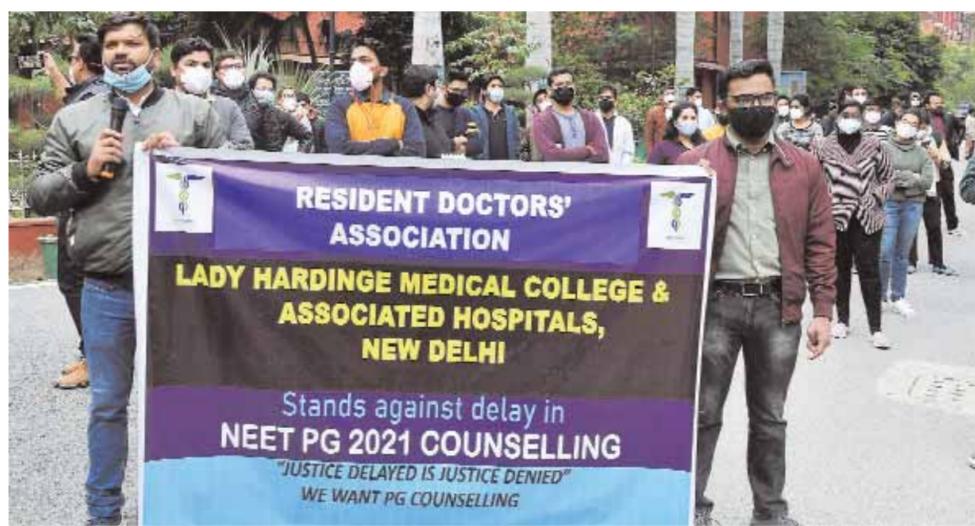
The national capital on Wednesday had recorded 923 fresh Covid cases, the highest daily rise since May 30, as the positivity rate again breached the 1 per cent-mark (1.29 per cent).

# Govt extends 20% reduction in circle rates till June 2022

New Delhi: The Delhi Government on Thursday said that it has decided to maintain the reduced circle rate of 20 per cent for residential, commercial, industrial and other uses till June 30, 2022.

Revenue Minister Kailash Gahlot said that the decision will help the long term recovery of the real estate. "We assure all Delhiites that we will continue to stand with our people in times of need," he added.

Gahlot tweeted "The 20% reduction in circle rates for all categories announced by Delhi Government will continue till 30th June 2022. Under Chief Minister Shri Arvind Kejriwal's guidance, we assure all Delhiites that we will continue to stand with our people in times of need." He added the third wave of Covid is approaching and we are taking such steps to reduce financial burden on the common man. This decision is expected to make it substantially cheaper for people to do property transactions and help revive the real estate sector. The Delhi Government had earlier decided to reduce the prevalent circle rates by 20 percentage points with effect from April, 2021 till September 30, 2021. **SR**



Resident doctors staging a protest at Lady Harding Hospital in New Delhi on Thursday. They were demanding justice for NEET-PG 2021 counselling. Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

# City Govt supports traders' protest against GST hike: Sisodia

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Government supports traders' protest against increase in goods and services tax on textile, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government will raise the issue in GST council meeting, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Thursday.

Several markets dealing with garment business remained shut in national capital on Thursday to oppose the central government's move to hike GST rates on textile from existing 5 per cent to 12 per cent from January 1.

"The protest by textile traders against hike in GST from 5 per cent to 12 per cent is justified. The AAP and Delhi government under leadership of Arvind Kejriwal have been in favour of keeping the tax rates low. I will demand keeping tax on textile low in the GST Council meeting tomorrow," tweeted Sisodia who is also minister incharge of Delhi government's Finance department.

The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) demanding withdrawal of the hike, called closure of textile and garment markets in the city in protest of the GST hike.

It is noteworthy that the GST Council had made certain recommendations for revision in GST rate, mostly to correct inverted duty structure and other anomalies. This includes revision of rates in the textiles sector which shall come into effect from the 1st January, 2022. Currently, a 5% tax on sales up to ₹1,000 per piece is charged. **PTI**

# HC asks city Govt to respond on plea to restrain authorities from interfering in herbal hookah sale

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has sought response of the City Government on a plea by two bar owners seeking to restrain the authorities from interfering with their business of serving herbal hookah as permitted by the court in November.

Justice Rekha Palli said the interim permission that was granted by the court is subject to the petitioner owners filing their individual undertakings before it that herbal hookahs, which they serve by using disposable pipes, will be absolutely nicotine free and that existing COVID-19 protocols will be strictly followed.

The court issued notice to the Delhi government and granted four weeks time to file a counter affidavit. It said that subject to filing of undertakings by the petitioners, they will be entitled to get the same benefit as others were granted via a November 16 order. The court listed the matter for further hearing on February 9. On November 16, the high court had passed an interim order on a batch of pleas, allowing for the time being the use of herbal hookah in restaurants and pubs in the national capital and said that COVID-19 restrictions cannot be permitted to continue at the cost of livelihood. The petitioners said they were filing an undertaking before the court, in terms of the November 16 order, that they will only serve flavoured hookahs with the use of disposable pipes while following COVID-19 protocols. **PTI**

# Rahul played for foreign trip before polls

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
With Assembly polls in five States, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has come in line of fire within and outside the party for flying abroad just when the high stakes Uttar Pradesh and Punjab polls are due early next year.  
A senior party leader rued the fact that recently ahead of the Winter Session of Parliament too Rahul had travelled abroad for almost a month and had returned a day before the commencement of the Session.  
"Rahul Gandhi is on a brief personal visit. BJP and its

media friends should not spread rumours unnecessarily," Congress chief spokesman Randeep Surjewala said.  
The party has not disclosed the place of visit and the date of his return. Rahul's visit abroad comes at a time when political parties are pacing up their campaigning for the upcoming polls in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur, which are due next year.  
He is also scheduled to address a party rally in Moga district of Punjab on January 3 to kick start campaigning in the State, where the party is already in power.  
AICC sources said the

Moga rally could be postponed. "With a delay in campaigning, it could seemingly impact the party's vote bank in the state and bring down chances of the party retaining power. We are really worried as BJP which has tied up with former Congress stalwart and a two time Chief Minister Amarinder Singh are also planning to kick start their campaign at the same time with Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to hold a rally on January 5," mentioned the sources.  
This will be the first rally of Prime Minister Modi in Punjab after the repeal of three farm laws. While the Congress

rally in Punjab will not begin till Rahul's return to the country.  
The former party chief had recently campaigned for the party in Goa and Uttarakhand.  
In the 2017 Punjab Assembly polls, Congress won an absolute majority in the state by winning 77 seats and ousted the SAD-BJP government after 10 years. Aam Aadmi Party emerged as the second-largest party winning 20 seats in 117 member Punjab Legislative Assembly.  
The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) could only manage to win 15 seats while the BJP secured 3 seats.



# Govt notifies new rules for consumer commissions

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) will now have jurisdiction to entertain consumer complaints where the value of the goods or services exceeds ₹2 crore as against the earlier limit of over ₹10 crore.  
According to the new rules, district commissions will have jurisdiction to entertain complaints up to ₹50 lakh worth value of goods or services as against the earlier limit of up to ₹1 crore, according to an official statement. The Centre has notified new rules to revise pecuniary jurisdiction for entertaining consumer complaints at district, State and national level commissions, a move aimed at fast disposal of cases.  
Earlier, the limit for them was more than ₹1 crore and up to ₹10 crore.  
The Centre has set up the E-Daakhil Portal, which provides a hassle-free, speedy and inexpensive facility to consumers to conveniently approach the relevant consumer forum, dispensing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievance

- NATIONAL BODY'S JURISDICTION ENHANCED**
- According to the new rules, district commissions will have jurisdiction to entertain complaints up to ₹50 lakh worth value of goods or services as against the earlier limit of up to ₹1 crore
  - The Centre has notified new rules to revise pecuniary jurisdiction for entertaining consumer complaints at district, State and national level commissions, a move aimed at fast disposal of cases
  - Earlier, the limit for them was more than ₹1 crore and up to ₹10 crore
  - The Centre has set up the E-Daakhil Portal, which provides a hassle-free, speedy and inexpensive facility to consumers to conveniently approach the relevant consumer forum, dispensing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievance

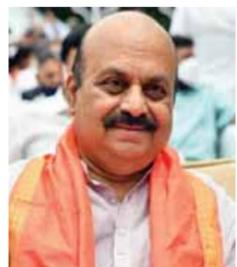


judicial mechanism for redressal of consumer disputes namely district commissions, state commissions and national commission. The Act stipulates the pecuniary jurisdiction of each tier of consumer commission.  
The Centre has set up the E-Daakhil Portal, which provides a hassle-free, speedy and inexpensive facility to consumers to conveniently approach the relevant consumer forum, dispensing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievance. Currently, the facility of E-Daakhil is available in 544 consumer commissions, which includes the national commission and consumer commissions in 21 States and 3 UTs.  
So far, more than 10,000 cases have been filed using the E-Daakhil Portal and more than 43,000 users have registered on the portal.

# Karnataka CM Bommai gets reprieve in State executive meeting

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
After Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai got a reprieve in the BJP State executive meeting this week amid speculation of his replacement on account of "health concerns", the Chief Minister is seeking to play "hard Hindutva" card by "freeing temples" through a legislation and bringing anti-conversion Bill.  
The State executive meeting that concluded on Wednesday was marked by the curious absence of former Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and his family who flew away to Dubai when the meet was underway.  
Besides, Bommai's political secretary MP Renukacharya added to the air of "uncertainty" by saying most legislators

in the party expected a "Gujarat-like overhaul" of the Karnataka Cabinet, and asking those who have been ministers for long to give chance to new faces.  
The Chief Minister's position seemed to have weakened after the BJP lost the bypoll from Hangal in his home district in November.  
State leaders and "dissidents" are taking BJP General secretary Arun Singh's assertion that "BJP will fight the 2023 Assembly elections under Bommai's leadership" with a pinch of salt given his similar comments before Yediyurappa's replacement, this year.



Bommai who carries a socialist legacy has recently been trying to secure his position within the BJP by introducing the anti-conversion Bill, and also another one to free an estimated 34,559 temples in the State from Government control. Bommai is taking lead in the South by bringing a law to "free Hindu temples" from the existing laws and rules that control them even as similar demands are made in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.  
(Uttarakhand Government has earlier already made an announcement to this effect.)

"Temples have suffered in the hands of bureaucrats. It will be freed by our Government. We will bring a law that enables temple management to look after their own development," Bommai said this week.  
He also said worship places of other religions except Hindu are not under any law of the Government.  
"Temple authorities did not have rights to utilise the Income generated from temples for their own development. It had to get nod from the senior bureaucrats. "This practice has to stop now," said the CM, trying to re-establish himself before the central BJP leadership. Reports of the Chief Minister taking Ayurvedi treatment for his knee problem and going abroad had earlier created speculation about his health as Bommai himself denied them.

# Covaxin has proven to be safe: Bharat Biotech

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech on Thursday announced that BBV152 (Covaxin), its whole-virion inactivated Covid-19 vaccine candidate, has proven to be safe, well-tolerated, and immunogenic in pediatric subjects in phase II/III study.  
In a statement issued here, it said that it had conducted phase II/III, open-label, and multicenter studies to evaluate the safety, reactivity, and immunogenicity of Covaxin in healthy children and adolescents in the 2-18 age group.  
Krishna Ella, Chairman and Managing Director, Bharat Biotech, said, "Covaxin's clinical trial data from the pediatric population is very encouraging."  
"Safety of the vaccine is critical for children and we are glad to share that Covaxin has now proven data for safety and immunogenicity in children. "We have now achieved our goal of developing a safe and efficacious Covid-19 vaccine for adults and children."

The clinical trials conducted in the pediatric population between June-September 2021 have shown robust safety, reactivity, and immunogenicity. The data was submitted to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) during October 2021 and received an emergency use nod for children aged 12-18 from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) recently.  
In the study, no serious adverse event was reported.  
A total of 374 subjects reported either mild or moderate severity symptoms, with 78.6 per cent getting resolved within a day. Pain at the injection site was the most commonly reported adverse event, the release said. For the trial, 976 subjects were screened for SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR and ELISA testing (enzyme-linked immunoassay).  
Out of these, 525 eligible participants were enrolled. Based on the age, participants were distinguished into three groups in an age-de-escalatory manner, said the statement.



A health worker collects a swab sample of a passenger to test for Covid-19 at a railway station in New Delhi on Thursday

# Subsidised rations for homeless soon: Govt

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Government will soon bring out a scheme to provide subsidised rations to homeless people and those who don't have ration cards.  
According to Sudhanshu Pandey, Secretary, Food and Public Distribution, the Government is in the final stages of developing a system to capture the data of homeless and the destitute having no ration cards, so that the benefit of subsidised foodgrains can be extended to them also.  
"That process is on, and the development of a system is in its final stages. Then it will be put to trial. The whole system is basically to capture all homeless, shelter-less destitute, who might not have ration cards," Pandey said while addressing a virtual press conference on Thursday. "The State Governments may not have issued them the ration cards for reasons of either lack of identity or lack of home address. All these issues will be addressed," Pandey said.  
Another Food Ministry official said States have lifted 11.21 lakh tonne of foodgrains in the current 2021-22 fiscal year for distribution to people not covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA). State governments purchased over 11 lakh tonne of foodgrains under the Centre's open market sale scheme (OMSS) in 2021-22.  
Over and above the subsidised foodgrains, the Government during the pan-



demic is supplying free foodgrains to NFSA beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). This scheme has been extended multiple times and is now valid till March 2022. Since homeless and the destitute have no ration cards in the absence of an identity card or residential address, they are not covered either under National Food Security Act (NFSA) or Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).  
Currently, the Government supplies highly subsidised foodgrains at ₹1-3 per kg to over 81 crore people having ration cards through public distribution system (PDS) as part of the NFSA. Over and above the subsidised foodgrains, the Government during the pandemic is supplying free foodgrains to NFSA beneficiaries under PMGKAY.  
The Food Secretary said the Government's food subsidy

is expected to be a little less than ₹4 lakh crore in the financial year 2021-22 as against ₹5.29 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. "We are expecting little less than ₹4 lakh crore food subsidy this year," Pandey said.  
About ₹2.25 lakh crore food subsidy is estimated for procurement and distribution of foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and an additional ₹1.47 lakh crore has been incurred for implementing the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), he said.  
During the 2020-21 fiscal, the Government food subsidy stood at ₹5.29 lakh crore. The secretary also said the year 2021 was "an extraordinary year" for many reasons as the Government made extraordinary efforts that were unprecedented in nature amid the pandemic circumstances.  
On the edible oil prices, he said that prices have come down in the past few days.

# BJP raps Didi after V-Cs appointed in 24 varsities without Guv's approval

**IANS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The BJP on Thursday alleged that the governance framework in West Bengal has been shredded to pieces by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.  
The remark came after West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar alleged that Vice-Chancellors were appointed in 24 universities across the State without his approval.  
West Bengal BJP co-incharge Amit Malviya said

there isn't a single institution in the state which Banerjee hasn't wrecked.  
"She (Banerjee) is temperamentally unfit to hold any public office," he said.  
Quoting Dhankhar's tweet, Malviya said, "The governance framework in West Bengal has been shredded to pieces by Mamata Banerjee. There isn't a single institution she hasn't wrecked. The task of rebuilding West Bengal from the ruins of her destruction would be an

arduous one. She is temperamentally unfit to hold any public office."  
Earlier in the day, Dhankhar had said that VCs in 24 universities were appointed without the approval of the Chancellor, the appointing authority, which is the Governor.  
"These appointments carry no legal sanction and would be forced to take action unless soon recalled," the Governor said.

Dhankhar is the ex-officio Chancellor of the state-run universities.  
Earlier this month, Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of private universities did not attend a meeting called by the Governor.  
"Education scenario @MamataOfficial worrisome as no Chancellor & VC of Pvt Univ turned up for meeting with Governor-Visitor. Shocking unionism," Dhankhar had tweeted.

# Fisheries sector records 10.87% growth

**THIS RECORD HAS GIVEN A STRONG SIGNAL THAT THE SECTOR HAS IMMENSE POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH**  
**IANS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The country's fisheries sector, which has seen double-digit average annual growth of 10.87 per cent since 2014-15, has recorded fish production of 142 lakh tonnes in FY 2019-20, which has become a new record, an official said.  
This record has given a strong signal that the sector has immense potential for growth, the official said.  
"Moreover, it has been instrumental in sustaining the livelihoods of over 28 million people in India especially for marginalised and vulnerable communities and has contributed towards encourage socio-economic development," the official added.  
India is the second largest fish producing country in the world accounting for 7.56 per cent of global production and contributing about 1.24 per cent to the country's Gross Value Added (GVA) and over 7.28 per cent to the agricultural GVA.  
Fisheries and aquaculture continue to be an important source of food, nutrition, income, and livelihood for millions of people. Export earnings from the fisheries sector has been ₹46,662.85 crore during 2019-20 with the sector providing livelihood support to about 280 lakh people at the primary level and almost twice the number along the value chain.



A collection of paintings by artists from Gurukul School of Art depicting major events of 2021, in Mumbai, on Thursday

# Cops killers among 6 ultras killed

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The perpetrators of terrorist attack on a police bus in Zewan area of Srinagar in which three police personnel attained martyrdom were eliminated along with four others in two separate encounters in the South Kashmir districts of Anantnag and Kulgam in the last 24 hours in Jammu and Kashmir. Out of four injured soldiers one army personnel succumbed to his injuries during treatment in the hospital. A total number of 24 terrorists including five foreign terrorists have been gunned down by the security forces in the month of December this year.

According to a police spokesman, during past 24 hours, two anti-terrorist operations were carried out in twin districts of South Kashmir resulting in elimination of six terrorists of proscribed terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) including 02 Pakistani terrorists. Among the killed terrorists, two terrorists were involved in gruesome terror attack on Police Bus at Zewan".

The first operation was launched in Nowgam Dooru



area of Anantnag by the joint team of J&K Police, 19RR and 164 Bn CRPF. In the initial exchange of fire, four security forces personnel including a policeman received gunshot injuries. One Army Jawan succumbed to his injuries and attained martyrdom. The security forces halted the operation to safely rescue trapped civilians around the encounter site. In the ensuing encounter, 03 terrorists of proscribed terror outfit JeM were killed.

They have been identified as Sultan @Rayees @Mavia (a foreign terrorist), Nisar Ahmad Khanday resident of

Dudwangan Kapran and Altaf Ahmad Shah resident of Nathipora Dooru.

As per police records, several terror crime cases were registered against them including attack on family of a police personnel at Kokagund in which his wife and daughter received injuries.

Addressing a joint press conference at 2-Sector Hqrs Wuzan by GoC 15 Corps Commander Lt. Gen. DP Pandey, IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar said that, the killed terrorists Altaf and Pakistani terrorist Sultan @Rayees @Mavia along with another ter-

rorist Suhail Rather were involved in the gruesome terrorist attack at Zewan Srinagar, in which 03 policemen attained martyrdom and 11 police personnel were injured.

In the second operation in Mirhama area of Kulgam, 03 terrorists of proscribed terror outfit JeM were gunned down by the joint team of 9 RR, 1B Bn CRPF and JKP. Thesalin terrorists have been identified as Shahid @Shahzaid resident of Pakistan (a foreign terrorist), Mohammad Shafi Dar resident of Tral and Uzair Ahmad resident of Mirhama.

As per police records, the killed foreign terrorist Shahid listed among the top most wanted terrorists operating in J&K while as the other two killed terrorists were also categorized terrorists linked with proscribed terror outfit JeM. As per police records, the killed terrorists were part of a group involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities. Security forces also recovered a huge cache of arms & ammunition including 02 M-4 rifles, 04 AK-47 rifles from the sites of encounters.

# PM's campaign in UP to shrink BJP's chances of winning polls: Gehlot

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday said the more PM Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah campaign in Uttar Pradesh, the less will be the BJP's chances of winning the Assembly polls there.

The CM also questioned Modi's silence over hate speeches in Haridwar and Raipur recently, asking why has he not condemned the acts.

Commenting on the BJP's election campaign in UP, Gehlot said the prime minister and the home minister have 'left all work and camping in UP'.

"They first faced a debacle in West Bengal and I think that the more they will do (campaigning), the less will be chances of their win as people understand everything," he said.

Questioning the PM's silence over hate speeches, Gehlot said, "The message of the prime minister matters. Why does the prime minister not appeal. He should have condemned what happened in dharma sansad (Haridwar) and in Raipur." "On one hand, you are adopting Gandhi and on the other, you are saying nothing on the kind of words which have been used about Mahatma. These two things cannot go along," he said addressing the media. Commenting on

the arrest of Hindu religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj for allegedly praising Mahatma Gandhi's killer Nathuram Godse in Raipur, Gehlot said people dare to say such things when such kind of atmosphere exists in the country. He said the situation in the country is dangerous and there is a need for correcting it.

"The Congress as the Opposition has been doing its duty and Rahul Gandhi has been taking up all issues, be it inflation, unemployment or coronavirus vaccine, and it is the responsibility of the ruling party to respect sentiments of the Opposition in the interest of all," he said.

Gehlot said the country will move forward only when there is unity, brotherhood and harmony, and the biggest responsibility to ensure this lies with the Union government.

"The opposition is fulfilling its duty. Rahul Gandhi is the person who had warned the government on coronavirus in February last year. He talked about vaccines, inflation, unemployment and other issues. It is the responsibility of the party in power to respect sentiments of the Opposition, in the interest of their own party, government and the country," he said. PTI

# Attack on Dalit girl in Amethi: UP Cong chief Lallu held for staging protest

Amethi (UP): Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu was arrested here on Thursday while staging a protest against the State Government over an incident of a 16-year-old Dalit girl being beaten up in the district.

Led by Lallu, Congress workers in large numbers started the protest demonstration from the Ramlila Maidan, which ended at the Rajiv Gandhi tri-section, where the protesters sat on a dharna. They also raised slogans against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the state and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Police subsequently arrested Lallu. Amethi Superintendent of Police (SP) Dinesh Singh said the state Congress chief was arrested for staging a protest without permission and squatting on the road.

In a tweet, Congress general secretary and the party's Uttar Pradesh in-charge Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had hit out at the Adityanath government over the incident and demanded the arrest of all the accused in 24 hours.

After a video clip of the Dalit girl being beaten up in a village under the Sangrampur police station in Amethi went viral on the social media, police filed an FIR against Rahul Soni, Suraj Soni and Shubham Gupta alias Sakal on a complaint from her father.

The three accused were arrested and sent to jail. PTI

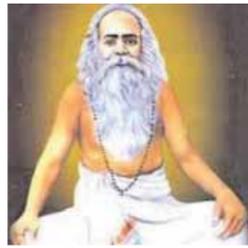
# Chattampi Swami works hit stands as debates on Kerala's history begin

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Cultural landscape of Kerala is getting ready for heated debates and discussions on the legend behind the creation of the State that finds mention in folklores and history. For the first time in South India, a collection of studies on the works of Chattampi Swami (Kunjan Pillai) by hundreds of spiritual leaders, historians, sociologists and literary critics has hit bookshelves across Kerala.

It was Chattampi Swami (1853-1924) who explained to Swami Vivekananda the meaning of Chinmudra and how to experience its impact. Swami Vivekananda was very much impressed by this exposition and remarked: "The most enigmatic ascetic I have had reason to acquaint with all my travels in India and abroad." Vivekananda was on a tour to Kerala in 1892 when he met Chattampi Swami.

The sage's argument that all languages spoken in the subcontinent owe their birth to a common language by name Aadi Dravida, the mother of all languages, did not get any recognition while he was alive. Now, nearly a century after his demise, the argument is back in the narrative. "Had this been recognised by this linguists earlier, we could have resolved the issue of the oldest lan-



guage in the world," said Prof Poojappura Krishnan Nair, a follower of Chattampi Swami's teachings.

Keralites would have to rewrite the legend behind the birth of their State as Chattampi Swami has demolished the theory of Parasuram creating the landmass from the sea. It is said that Parasurama threw his battle axe into the sea and a land mass was formed where the axe fell. Parasurama donated the land to Brahmins as an act of atonement for his slaughtering the Kshatriyas in retaliation for the murder of his father Rishi Jamadagni.

Chattampi Swami quotes Skanda Purana (written in eighth century) and says that the landmass of Kerala belonged to Cheras which in due course became Kerala. He ruled out the possibilities of Parasurama entrusting the land mass to Brahmins and has proved scien-

tifically that the geographical area belonged to the Nair community.

The sage is designated as the father figure of the renaissance movement and credited with the slogan that "Vedas belong to all" and there is no scientific evidence for the Chaturvarnya theory. He was the pioneer who launched the agitation against caste wall and untouchability which were dominant in the region, according to Swami Chidanandapuri, spiritual leader of Hindus and head of Adwaitha Ashram.

Christian theologians in Kerala have accepted the monk's "A Critique of Christianity", a criticism of the Christian religion. Prof C I Issac points out that till date no one has come forward to answer the query by Chattampi Swami that how come God created man (Book of Genesis) without him being warned about the existence of the forbidden apple? "The Abrahamic religions are handicapped by this kind of slavery and Chattampi Swami exposed it," writes Prof Issac. The monk is rated as Malayala language's first literary critic who through his writings and speeches gave it a modern outlook.

Kerala's cultural domain is expected to see a lot of sound and fury in months to come thanks to Studies on Chattampi Swami, a three-volume work edited by A M Unnikrishnan, noted critic.

# Army offers free medical service to villagers who helped Air Force chopper crash victims



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ NILGIRIS

Nanjappa Chatram village, in Tamil Nadu's Nilgiri district where the Indian Army helicopter ferrying the Chief of Defense Services General Bipin Rawat, his spouse Madhulika Rawat and 12 other Brave Hearts crash landed on December 8 leading to the martyrdom of all passengers, is yet to come out of the shock caused by the disaster.

But soldiers, officers and medical doctors belonging to the elite Madras Regimental Centre, Wellington, one of the oldest infantry units of the Indian Army descended on the remote village on Thursday morning despite the chilling cold as part of their mission to help the local community. A one-day long medical camp was held at the village under the auspices of MRC, which has adopted Nanjappa Chatram as a gesture of love and compassion to the residents who were the first to rush to the December 8 crash site to douse the flames and offer help to the passengers of the ill-fated chopper.

Lt Gen A Arun, General Officer Commanding, Southern Command of the

Indian Army, who called on the crash site on December 13 had declared that MRC Wellington, the army unit which has exhibited its prowess in sports, service and securing the borders of the nation, would adopt the village and attend to the needs of the villagers.

This is being done as the infantrymen's way of saying thanking to the villagers for their selfless service in the hour of extreme emergency.

A team of doctors, including lady medical doctors, nursing officers and para medical staff from Medical Hospital Wellington took part in the day long camp, offered medical consultations and administered medicines to the villagers. Those requiring specialized treatment have been recommended to Medical Hospital, Wellington.

The monthly camp would be held once in a month for the next one year with the active cooperation of the local government authorities, General Arun had said on December 13. MRC Wellington is continuing with service of providing free food to the people since the outbreak of Covid-19 in the hilly district of The Nilgiris.

# HNLC militant surrenders before BSF in Meghalaya

Khliehriat: A member of the proscribed outfit, Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), on Thursday surrendered before the Border Security Force (BSF) Meghalaya Frontier chief here.

The self-styled area commander of HNLC, Junel Tongper, surrendered before the IG BSF Meghalaya Frontier, Inderjit Singh Rana, at its Border Outpost at Umkiang in East Jaintia Hills district, a statement issued by the border guarding organisation said.

A resident of Lumphyllut village under Umkiang police station, Tongper had joined the outfit in 2010. He was arrested in 2015 but later released on bail. He absconded and re-joined the HNLC in November last year.

During the surrender programme, Tongper said he was based at Panaipunjee under the jurisdiction of the Kularua police station in Moulvibazar district in Bangladesh.

"I was misled and misguided due to lack of employment opportunities," he said. Taking advantage of his economic condition, the HNLC had lured Tongper to join the outfit, and exploited him for carrying out unlawful activities, the BSF IG said. He said the border protection force in Meghalaya is making all-out efforts to help such misguided youth return to the mainstream.

"BSF has also given an assurance that such people will be given the facilities of skill development, vocational training, and remunerative amount post surrender," Rana said.

In the case of Junel Tongper, BSF was continuously in touch with him for the past one year. "The restless and intense efforts of BSF bore fruits and finally Junel Tongper was motivated to join the mainstream. It is a huge blow to militancy in Meghalaya, and more such misguided youths will join the mainstream in times to come," the statement said.

# Kerala logs 2,423 fresh Covid-19 cases, 164 deaths

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala on Thursday logged 2,423 new COVID-19 infections and 164 deaths, which took the caseload to 52,32,672 and the fatalities to 47,441 till date.

Of the 164 deaths, 15 were recorded over the last few days and 149 designated as COVID-19 deaths after receiving appeals based on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court.

With 2,879 more people recovering from the virus since Wednesday, the total recoveries reached 51,76,535 and the active cases dropped to 19,835, an official press release said.

As many as 58,459 samples were tested in the last 24 hours. Among the 14 districts, Ernakulam recorded the highest with 455 fresh cases, followed by Thiruvananthapuram (416) and Kozhikode (266).

Of the new cases, 26 were health workers, 27 from outside the State and 2,262 infected through contact, with the source of it not being clear in 108.

There are currently 1,10,680 people under surveillance in various districts, of whom 1,07,074 are in home or institutional quarantine and 3,606 in hospitals, the release said. PTI



Tourists sit on a bench at Taj Mahal complex during sunset, in Agra, on Thursday. Tourists will not be able to visit Taj Mahal on the last day of the year owing to weekly closure on Friday

# Kerala ranks 5th in India in good governance, says CM

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala was ranked fifth in the country and first among southern states in the Good Governance Index (GGI) published by the central government, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Thursday.

The CM initially took to Twitter to announce the state's achievement and later put up a detailed post about it on his Facebook page.

"Kerala has been ranked 5th in the #GoodGovernanceIndex & made huge improvements in many areas including the ease of doing business and industrial growth, and also ranked 1st among southern states. This reflects the progress achieved during the last five years," he tweeted.

Later, in his Facebook post, the CM said that Kerala, which

recorded significant progress in the commercial and industrial sectors, increased its Ease of Doing Business Implementation score from 44.82 to 85.00. Except Punjab, Kerala was the only state to improve its score in such a significant manner, he added.

Vijayan also said that the state's combined annual growth rate in the industrial sector increased from 1.00 in 2019 to 7.91 in 2021.

Besides improving its Ease of Doing Business Implementation score, the state also improved its scores in human resource development, skills training and employment availability ratio, he said and added that Kerala topped in the public health and environmental sectors. PTI

# Suspended SHO booked for sexually harassing dowry victim in Rajasthan

Kota: Days after his suspension, the SHO at Mahila police station in Bundi was booked for allegedly sexually harassing and stalking a 30-year-old dowry victim, police said.

SHO Shaikat Khan was suspended on Monday evening on the orders of IG, Kota, Ravi Dutt Gaur, they said.

Superintendent of Police Jai Yadav said that Additional Superintendent of Police Kishorilal, who was deputed to probe the allegations against Khan, recorded the victim's statement on Wednesday evening.

A case was then lodged against the SHO under Indian Penal Code Section 354 (a) (sexual harassment) and 354 (d) (stalking or attempt to contact to foster

personal interaction), the SP said, adding that further investigation into the matter was underway.

The woman had met the IG, along with her parents and local Congress leader Charmesh Sharma on Monday and had submitted a complaint accusing Khan of sexually harassing her and forcing her into a relationship. She had also produced call recording, screenshots and screen recording of video calls with Khan.

Meanwhile, BJP MLA from Ramganj Mandi in Kota Madan Dilawar on Thursday released a video statement, accusing the Ashok Gehlot-led state government of failing to protect the dignity of the woman, its inability to provide her

justice and of shielding the accused. He alleged that the SHO was a close aide of a state minister.

He alleged that the accused was moving freely even two days after the victim lodged a complaint against him.

Dilawar said the people should open their eyes to what is happening under the Congress government in the state. "The protectors have themselves turned into predators," he alleged.

The woman, accompanied by her parents and the Congress leader went to the police station on December 18 to file a case of dowry harassment.

However, Khan allegedly misbehaved with the woman and forced her to chat with him on WhatsApp.

# Goa receives over 74,000 doses of Covaxin to inoculate 15-18 age group

Panaji: The Goa government on Thursday received the first consignment of Covaxin doses to inoculate over 74,000 children in the age group of 15 to 18 years against COVID-19.

Talking to PTI, state immunisation officer Dr Rajendra Borkar said the first lot of 74,200 Covaxin doses arrived in the state during the day.

"The vaccines will be administered to children between 15 and 18 years of age from January 3," the official said.

In order to cover maximum number of children, the state education department has



been roped in to ensure that children are administered the vaccine on campuses of educational institutions, he said.

A team of nurses will visit schools to vaccinate students after taking a written consent from parents, the official said, adding that the second dose of the vaccine will be given after a gap of 28 days.

Goa has witnessed a spike in COVID-19 cases over the last couple of days. The coastal state had recorded 170 new infections on Wednesday, with the positivity touching 5.25 per cent. PTI

# 70-year-old arrested for raping child in UP

Hamirpur (UP): A 70-year-old man was arrested for raping a four-year-old girl in Bharua Sumerpur area of district here, police said on Thursday.

However, the case is 24-days old, and the accused was arrested from his house on Wednesday only.

Earlier, the police had registered a case of molestation but after the medical examination and confirmation of rape and also the victim's statement in the court, the rape section has been added, SHO Ramendra Tiwari said. PTI



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Desi touch

The idea of 'Indianising' the legal system is finding an echo among apex court judges, too

At least two Supreme Court judges, one of them the Chief Justice, have in recent months suggested "Indianisation" of the legal system. Chief Justice NV Ramana's thought was limited to adapting the system to Indian "realities" and localising the justice delivery systems. Justice S Abdul Nazeer, however, wanted to "decolonise" the Indian legal system, emphasising that the ancient traditions of Manu, Kautilya or Yagnavalkya could not be neglected. He echoed former Chief Justice PN Bhagwati who once said our judicial thinking could not be "constricted" by reference to the law as it prevails in England. It is not the first such call. The Constituent Assembly debates touched upon this issue. In these times when nationalism is becoming almost a social grace, de-westernising Indian jurisprudence could as well be equated with a nationalist legal system. The history of India's legal system is sufficiently ancient, dating back to the Vedic period or even earlier. The Mahabharata has references to the institution of Dharma. In the Vedic times, the objective of the law was to preserve Dharma that consisted of both legal and religious duties. Manu Smriti prescribes the rules and regulations for defending Dharma. The courts recognised three systems of law — Dharma Shastra, Arth Shastra and Sadachara or Charitra. The principles of jurisprudence were well-defined with grounds of litigation, jury systems, laws relating to witnesses, classification of "vivada" (disputes) and even judicial psychology.



The legal tradition changed to one based around religious communities when the Mughals came in. While the Emperor's law was all-powerful and the Sunni Hanafi tradition was the official legal system, the Shia and Hindu legal traditions were also recognised and practised. In the British period, the law evolved from religious prescription to the common law system. The British started codifying the law and drafted the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and other statutes. When India became Independent, the Constitution steered Indian law away from colonial law to an organic one that has elements of secular law (once practised under the Mauryas) but predominantly rooting for social welfare to empower the weakest members of society. We need more clarity on what is meant by "Indianising" the legal system. It surely cannot be going back to the Vedic times. What exactly would we borrow from that period — the codification of law or the social ethos of that time that dictated the codification? For example, Indian law as we know it, does not, unlike the ancient law, distinguish between castes and communities. The current system stands for social justice and equality before law, not Brahminical interpretation of social code, rigid caste structures and patriarchy. Or, take the case of the Supreme Court judgment lifting the ban on entry of women of menstruating age into the Sabarimala temple. Would the ancient law have challenged a code backed by religion? A legal system can be tweaked but without diminishing its ability to serve justice in the times we live in.

The legal tradition changed to one based around religious communities when the Mughals came in. While the Emperor's law was all-powerful and the Sunni Hanafi tradition was the official legal system, the Shia and Hindu legal traditions were also recognised and practised. In the British period, the law evolved from religious prescription to the common law system. The British started codifying the law and drafted the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and other statutes. When India became Independent, the Constitution steered Indian law away from colonial law to an organic one that has elements of secular law (once practised under the Mauryas) but predominantly rooting for social welfare to empower the weakest members of society. We need more clarity on what is meant by "Indianising" the legal system. It surely cannot be going back to the Vedic times. What exactly would we borrow from that period — the codification of law or the social ethos of that time that dictated the codification? For example, Indian law as we know it, does not, unlike the ancient law, distinguish between castes and communities. The current system stands for social justice and equality before law, not Brahminical interpretation of social code, rigid caste structures and patriarchy. Or, take the case of the Supreme Court judgment lifting the ban on entry of women of menstruating age into the Sabarimala temple. Would the ancient law have challenged a code backed by religion? A legal system can be tweaked but without diminishing its ability to serve justice in the times we live in.

### PICTALK



A damaged road after water overflows due to heavy rain at Nedungulampond in Kanyakumari

PTI

## Voting for virus?

As Omicron cases spiral up, there's a need to think about the crowds at election rallies

The warning of an impending health crisis is pouring in from all quarters. The severest of these came on Thursday as Delhi reported 1,313 fresh cases of COVID — the highest tally since May 30. The Capital added 25 cases of the heavily-mutated Omicron variant and has so far recorded 263 Omicron cases, followed by Maharashtra (257), Gujarat (97), Rajasthan (69) and Kerala (65). The cases are rising steeply, with both the Delta and Omicron variants contributing to the tally. The State Governments have imposed restrictions and cautioned people against avoidable travel and partying as Omicron firms up its grip. But no restrictions have been issued for the election rallies and campaigns underway in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and other States ahead of the Assembly polls. The massive rallies have brazenly been violating social distancing norms amid growing concerns and warnings of a "deadly storm". The Election Commission (EC) and the Health Ministry are in talks on how to go about holding polls amid the threat but the guidelines are still awaited. According to Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, all political parties in poll-bound UP have said the upcoming elections should be held on time while ensuring COVID protocol.



"Our responsibility begins after poll dates are announced and the model code of conduct kicks in. Till then, the responsibility lies with the State Government and it would act as per recommendations of the State disaster management authority," Chandra added. A similar trend was seen earlier this year during the West Bengal Assembly polls when political parties shamelessly flouted social distancing norms and held massive election rallies amid mounting COVID-19 cases. It was followed by the catastrophic second wave in the country, the wounds of which are still fresh. It happened irrespective of the 178 notices issued to political parties — mostly to the Trinamool and the BJP — for protocol violation, cancellation of 448 public events and over 100 FIRs for poll-related COVID norm violations. This is exactly what political leaders should consider while addressing thousands of people. Instead, virtual rallies should be resorted to if postponing elections is not an option. The poll panel must take firm action against the violators. If the same mistake is repeated, the country would be dragged into irreparable misery.

# AFSPA in the N-E: Is status quo the answer?



DEEPAK SINHA

The recent Nagaland incident involving the Army Special Forces again underlines that such cases are unavoidable in the existing milieu

Much has already been written on the tragic incident that occurred recently in the Tiru-Oting area of Mon district, Nagaland. In a case of mistaken identity, six coal miners were killed by a troop of the Army Special Forces. Subsequent escalation led to more deaths, including that of a Special Forces soldier, murdered in retaliation by villagers. The Army was quick to express regret, though it does not take away from the fact that in the existing milieu, such incidents are unavoidable.

The truth is that the Special Forces personnel did their job with brutal efficiency. They were operating on supposedly credible intelligence and allegedly acted decisively once the vehicle transporting the miners did not stop, with tragic consequences. That they rushed two wounded miners to a civil hospital does suggest they acted in good faith.

One can only hope that the investigations being conducted by the State Government-appointed Special Investigation Team, and by the Army itself, will give us much-needed clarity on what went wrong and where accountability lies. That will allow authorities to initiate corrective measures and deal with the issue in a just and humane manner, enabling some sort of closure for the kin of those who tragically lost their lives.

Nagaland is in turmoil; its outraged citizens see themselves as victims of a barbarous and unprovoked attack. The Nagaland Police in their FIR have accused the Army personnel of "intention to murder and injure civilians". Within the media, politicians and civil society there are those who have left no stone unturned in an attempt to show the Army in poor light, as incompetent goons who use the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to cover their misdeeds, forcing legislators to demand for its withdrawal.

But let us be absolutely clear, there are no innocents here. We are all to blame for



what has transpired, be it the Central and State Governments, civil society, bureaucracy, security establishment and the Army as well. Every side has its own axe to grind and tribal loyalties, ego, personal aggrandisement, greed and sheer ignorance have held us hostage to the shenanigans of a minuscule group intent on feathering their own nests.

Context is important, and it would be fair to suggest that the earlier insurgency that had affected Nagaland ended, for all practical purposes, with the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975 between the Centre and the rebel Naga leadership. However, factions opposed to the accord continued with the armed struggle. In 1997, the Union Government was able to negotiate a Ceasefire Agreement with the most dominant rebel group, the NSCN (IM), for a cessation of operations for an indefinite period that still continues. This was followed up in 2015 with the signing of the Framework Agreement, details of which are not in public domain. Subsequently, the Centre also signed Ceasefire Agreements of varying periods with other rebel groups, such as the NSCN (NK), NSCN (R), NSCN (K-Khango) and the NSCN (K) Nikki Group.



**BUT LET US BE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR; THERE ARE NO INNOCENTS HERE. WE ARE ALL TO BLAME FOR WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED, BE IT THE STATE AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY, BUREAUCRACY, SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT AND THE ARMY AS WELL**

We would do well to understand that all insurgencies are political movements and can't survive in a stasis over long periods. They either gain momentum and ascendancy that lead to civil war and independence, or wither away without public support. Yet, the insurgencies we face in the Northeast, including in Nagaland, appear to be different. They seem to be in, what can best be termed, as the "business of insurgency" as they neither succeed nor wither away. With no distinct ideology and only limited public support, that too based on tribal loyalties and coercion, they have metamorphosed from insurgency into a serious law and order problem.

These groups thrive on their ability to control a range of illegal activities in conjunction with transnational criminal syndicates. These range from drugs and small arms smuggling to human trafficking and skimming Government developmental funds. This economic clout has enabled them to subvert elements within polity, bureaucracy and the security establishment. In addition, the open-ended ceasefire agreements, while ensuring a cessation of operations on the part of the Security Forces, have allowed the rebel groups to continue to indulge

in extortion and other criminal activities without any fear of reprisals.

The prevailing situation is still quite low on violence, which has allowed for a dangerous level of complacency to set in within the Government, both at the State and Central level. Despite development being stalled and governance being undermined by rampant corruption and probable Chinese meddling, we must ask ourselves: Is counter-insurgency the appropriate response? It is fairly easy to understand the motivation of local politicians, bureaucrats and police to maintain the status quo, but is the Army just a pawn in a much bigger game? After all, its deployment, with necessary safeguards like AFSPA, meant to provide security to people or to coerce them into accepting the status quo that enables the business of insurgency to thrive? Indeed, it is time the Army leadership gives this issue, not just in Nagaland but elsewhere in the Northeast as well, a deep hard look, if it is to avoid another such tragic incident.

(The writer is a military veteran, who is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A COSTLY REMEDY

Sir — It has been reported that Bengaluru's Manipal Hospital has charged more than the Government stipulated rates from COVID-19 patients. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) inspected the hospital and found evidence of overcharging. It has rightly asked the hospital authorities to refund to the patients the excessive amount collected. The Government rates are already too high for common people and the additional charges aggravate the burden. People with low earnings cannot afford the ward charges. This is in addition to the cost of medicines and treatment. The greed of the hospital management is difficult to fathom.

It is not enough if the hospital refunds the excess amount collected. Exemplary punishment has to be meted out to the hospital authorities for violation of rules. How can the poor labourers, vendors, workers working in private firms for paltry sums afford to incur the medical expenses with the ward charges costing more than ₹50,000? There is not enough data to see how many people died because of the cost of medicines and treatment. It goes without saying that most of the people who died of COVID-19 are poverty-stricken.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

### IIT-MADRAS TOPS THE CHARTS, AGAIN

Sir — It is a matter of immense pride and self-esteem for Chennaiites that for the third year in a row, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, has been ranked the most innovative educational institute in the country by the Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA). The IIT, Madras, also has the honour of figuring in the World University Rankings list, where it stood at 313 in 2013-14.

It is hardly any surprise that this premier and prestigious educational institution from Chennai continues to excel in scholastic achievements. At IIT, Madras, students get the right exposure to practical concepts of engineering. It has its own research park, which acts as

## Silver lining for Kerala travellers



According to its project report, the proposed 530-km Semi High-Speed Rail Line (SilverLine) in Kerala connecting Kasaragod in the north to the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram in the far south will reduce the travel time to less than four hours, compared with the present 10 to 12 hours. The SilverLine will move 46,000 travellers away from the roads and help gain 2,80,000 man-hours, apart from reducing the vehicular traffic on the arterial roads. By 2025,

Carbon dioxide emissions will drop by 2.88 lakh tonnes, in tune with the Glasgow Climate Pact. It is expected to provide direct and indirect employment to thousands of people while also improving connectivity to infoparks and providing a boost to the tourism industry.

The protests against the project are mostly political, and partly on account of misconceptions. Though debt and displacement are touted as the main reasons for opposing the project, the real concern of the Opposition United Democratic Front led by the Congress is its perceived electoral fallout in the 2025 Assembly elections, with the humongous Silver Line becoming a reality by then, even partly. However, the concerns surrounding the acquisition of private lands, the rehabilitation of the dislocated poor and the likely adverse effects on the environment needed to be addressed satisfactorily. The project has the potential to change the lives and livelihoods of the people in God's own country.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

a catalyst for far-reaching technological development, where every student can pursue his/her innovative ideas with continued support from the faculty. A faculty of international repute, a brilliant student community, excellent technical and supporting staff and an effective administration have all contributed to the pre-eminent status of IIT Madras.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

### DOES PSEUDO-NATIONALIST ATTITUDE HELP?

Sir — Despite the relentless anti-Nehru/Congress campaign armed with the coinage "Nothing happened prior to 2014", the fact remains that right from major dams and hydro-electric projects to steel plants and other industries, extensive railway infrastructure to reputed educational and medical institutions to the IT sector — the nation's entire infrastructure has been set up by the preceding Congress Governments led by the much-maligned Nehru-Gandhi family or PV Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh.

In contrast, the regime of 'Achhe din', far from coming up with a single constructive project worth mentioning, has devastated the carefully nurtured banking system, BSNL and airlines while the Indian Railways is also in tatters.

Even highway projects are being handed over to private players. While the policies of earlier regimes centred around job generation, the current regime is hell-bent on shrinking job opportunities. And then the ever-increasing unemployed lot is being advised by the Government of the day to start pakora shops! Perhaps the only "contribution" of the harbingers of "New India" is to divide it through brute communal polarisation, cuss words and violence with the religious minorities and Dalits being at the receiving end. God save India from such "restoration of national confidence."

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUNDBITE

The people of the BJP and RSS indulge in politics of religion because they have nothing else to show.



Rajasthan Chief Minister —Ashok Gehlot

Delta and Omicron are twin threats driving up cases to record numbers, leading to spikes in hospitalisation and deaths.

WHO Director-General —Tedros Adhanom

Unfortunately, I'm battling COVID-19. It has hit me real hard. Please stay safe and wear your face masks.



Actor —Nora Fatehi

It's been an amazing journey and I feel fortunate to have represented my country for as long as I have.

New Zealand batsman —Ross Taylor

We have seen time and again that this Government has rejected the rights of women.



Congress general secretary —Priyanka Gandhi



## FIRST COLUMN

### NUCLEAR TWILIGHT: A LOT TO WORRY ABOUT

India, Pakistan are so close together that only a very brief warning time is available



GWYNNE DYER

As a dreadful year draws to an end and the Omicron variant turns out to be less lethal than its predecessors, premature outbreaks of cheerfulness have been spotted in many quarters. As I am under a contractual obligation to keep the readers worried, I was at my wit's end — but then I interviewed Professor Alan Robock of Rutgers University. He's a renowned climate scientist, but recently he led a team of researchers who re-examined the phenomenon of 'nuclear winter'. That's not really a climate phenomenon. It would be the by-product of a superpower nuclear war, in which the smoke from a thousand burning cities blocks out the sun and leaves the world freezing in the dark for years. There are now other countries with nuclear weapons that don't seem immune to outbreaks of major war, like India and Pakistan. However, everybody assumed that the damage would be confined to their own region. If we don't let it escalate into a superpower clash, the rest of the world should be all right.



#### Wrong.

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear arsenals each amount to about 150 warheads now. That's a modest number compared to the thousands held by the superpowers, but it turns out to be quite enough to cause...let's call it a nuclear twilight. What makes this so worrisome is that India and Pakistan have already fought three full-scale wars and half a dozen major skirmishes since they got their independence. Another is entirely possible, and the risk of escalation to nuclear weapons would be very high, for two reasons. First, most of their nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles are still vulnerable to being destroyed on the ground in a surprise attack. Secondly, the two countries are so close together that only a very brief warning time is available. In these circumstances, a policy of 'launch on warning', with all the risk of mistakes that entails, is the only rational option for both sides. The first victims of such a war would be Pakistani and Indian civilians, because cities will be on the target lists: that's where the major ports, airfields and critical infrastructure are. Robock's team calculated that those burning cities would loft enough 'black carbon' into the stratosphere to create a shroud of soot over the whole world within a few weeks. It wouldn't be the full-dress nuclear winter of superpower war, with 'darkness at noon'. However, 300 nuclear explosions in the Indian subcontinent, most of them airbursts over cities, would dim the sun enough to drop temperatures and severely damage crop yields in the main food-producing regions of the planet. The worst-hit areas will be in the northern hemisphere north of latitude 30°N. The most important 'breadbaskets' of the planet — grain-growing areas that produce a big crop surplus for export — are the United States, Canada, and Europe (including European Russia) — and they are all just north of 30. The dimming effects of an Indo-Pak nuclear war in 2025, say, would drop the average global temperature by 5°C over all the continents, but in the key regions of North America and Europe it could reach 10°C colder. That maximum cooling would be reached in the fourth year after the war, and would gradually return to 'normal' by around year fifteen.

Tens, maybe hundreds of millions would starve in the poorer parts of the North, and scrambling for food in the cold and the dark would certainly take our minds off our longer-term problem: global heating. But when the effects of the local nuclear war in the Indian subcontinent finally faded, it would be right back to that bigger climate crisis. Just thought you'd like to know. Happy New Year.

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

# The Indian Railways deserves a makeover



SUDHANSHU MANI

The air and road travel would increasingly wean away committed train travellers and more value has to be added by the Indian Railway for them

In news recently was a meeting by the Minister for Railways on the plan for rolling stock on Indian Railways (IR) following which the Member (TRS) was shown the door as he attended it totally unprepared. The details are not out in the public domain but, assuming that this was the reason for his ouster, it set me thinking. Presenting a case for the future of trains and then following it up in earnest is the job of IR's Board members; sloth of executives who move on aimlessly following hypes of many kinds, without follow up on the announcements in the face of the stark reality of affordable and convenient air road travel in the country, cannot be ignored any more. Moreover, there is a need to counter a smug tribe of prophets of doom who do not see much future for IR.

If I were to present such a plan, I will first define the boundary conditions:

We have to have a clear vision about the mix IR trains should have 10 to 20 years from now and thence a plan. This excludes the shape High Speed and Metro trains would take as they are not within the purview of IR.

IR should not ignore its social obligation towards the common man. IR is notorious for overcrowding in its lower classes and even in lower-class sleepers, all you get is a berth but travelling in it in peak summer or winter can be punishing, what with the metallic coach heating up or getting chilled, depending on the season. There is an argument that IR charges very little for lower class travel and the level of comfort is commensurate with the fare. This argument is elitist. In the Prime Minister's words, the common man forms the core of an aspirational India. They indeed pay very little today but travel in abject conditions and they must get a better deal. For India to be a leading country of the world, it cannot have its people travelling in sub-human conditions.

Having said that, a tightrope walk is called for. The travellers in the premium and higher classes would help IR earn more to offset the inevitable subsidy for the lower classes. Air and road travel would increasingly wean away committed train travellers and more value has to be added by IR for them.

IR recently introduced a type of air-conditioned (AC) Economy coach with plans to build a large number of them for long-distance trains. While this new coach has 83 berths vis-à-vis 72 in a regular 3 AC Coach, the fare structure for this coach is 8 per cent lesser than the 3 AC Coach. This is in line with an announcement last year that IR would replace non-AC coaches from mail/express trains and this way all such trains in India would be fully air-conditioned. The initial reactions have indeed been mixed with a common refrain that IR is catering to higher income groups. This perception is strengthened when a welcome development like the AC Economy coach for mass travel is publi-



THE TRAIN SETS FOR THE FUTURE, SAY FIVE YEARS, MUST HAVE AN UPGRADED AVATAR, IN TERMS OF ALUMINIUM-BODY AND FEATURES LIKE TILTING FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY, DURABILITY AND FURTHER REDUCTION IN TRAVEL TIME. SUCH TRAIN SETS, RUNNING IN THE SPEED RANGE OF 160 TO 200 KM/H, ARE WITHIN THE REACH OF THE INDIAN RAILWAYS IN A DECADE

(The writer is retired General Manager, Indian Railways. The views expressed are personal.)



cized more for its luxury and not for its simple comforts.

The truth lies somewhere in between. The government is on the right path because, even if manufacture of non-AC coaches is totally stopped today and the useful life of such coaches is curtailed to some extent, we would see the last of non-AC coaches only in 2045. We must believe that everyone, including the poorest common man, would be able to afford long-distance train travel in AC comfort, say, twenty years from now. The economics? Two types of AC coaches, the AC III and AC Chair car, are already profitable. The growth of 3AC travellers has been much higher than even Sleeper class, which indicates aspirations to travel in better conditions. Stretching it a bit more, AC Economy coaches with 25% more accommodation with 25per cent lower fare are feasible. Similarly, AC Chair cars, without luxuries like reclining chairs etc., should also be introduced to cater to 40 per cent more passengers and 40 per cent reduction in fare. All this would tax IR's finances but within a reasonable limit of subsidy. So, AC travel for all is well within the realm of possibility without stressing the operating performance of railways. IR already subsidizes passenger segment by nearly 45 per cent from its freight earnings and it can migrate to only AC trains in next 10 to 15 years by simply continuing with this level of subsidy. Complete switchover to

manufacture of only AC coaches should, therefore, be the bedrock of our plan.

As for higher classes, the premium AC I and II classes are losing propositions and yet we do not charge the passengers enough. If higher charges would result in loss of clientele to flights, so be it, reduce these services, why provide subsidy to these high-end travellers? For IR to have its privileged clientele choose train over air travel, the modern semi-high-speed Train 18/Vande Bharat expresses, with proven reduced travel time and better comfort, are the answer. These trains have also proved to be profitable with high occupancy as passengers see value in them. A win-win for, IR in terms of higher revenues, and passengers for a comfortable alternative to air travel. The plans, therefore, must include enhanced production of such trains, which incidentally is in line with the recent announcement by the Prime Minister on August 15 that as many as 75 Vande Bharat trains will connect 75 cities in 75 weeks. It is essential that Rajdhani, Shatabdi and other premium trains be of this type and therefore speedy development of a Sleeper version of Train 18 is critical.

The trainsets for future, say five years, from must have an upgraded avatar, in terms of aluminium-body and features like tilting for energy-efficiency, dura-

bility and further reduction in travel time. Such train sets, running in the speed range of 160 to 200 km/h are within IR's reach in a decade, what the much-touted upgradation of Civil and allied infrastructure. This would further enhance their competitive edge with air travel. Simultaneously, IR should revive the project of concessions for private train set, so the burden of investment by IR would be reduced with more value for higher-end passengers.

Many inter-city Rapid Rail Transit Systems (RRTS) with train sets are proposed in the country. Train sets being the future for inter-city travel, RRTS cannot be kept divorced from IR. Even if RRTS continue as independent entities, given that they seek to offer comfortable travel experience to all with no discrimination, it calls for IR to align with their fare structure and level of comfort.

As for short-distance and suburban travel, the trains of Metros, associated with common city dwellers, are air-conditioned and so, why should it be inconceivable that all suburban EMU and short-distance MEMU trains be air-conditioned? This would require that their fares be made commensurate with Metro fares. If this switchover is planned over a long time, say, 15 years, it will not cost a government that much populist adversity. The bullet would have been bitten and everyone would be happy in the long term.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE AAP IS HYPING UP THE OMICRON THREAT WITH AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE TO GET THE ASSEMBLY POLLS POSTPONED. —PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI



CHANNI'S REMARKS ARE BASELESS AND IMMATURE. NIGHT CURFEW IS IMPOSED NOT JUST IN DELHI BUT OTHER STATES AS WELL. —AAP LEADER HARPAL SINGH CHEEMA

# Demand for judge removal raises point of law

Once the motion is adopted by both the Houses of Parliament, it is sent to the President who will issue an order for the removal of the judge

Recently, CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury wrote to the President of India to recall the Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir-Ladakh High Court, Pankaj Mishra, alleging that he violated the constitution and his oath and compromised the constitutional office held by him.

He referred to the comments of the Chief Justice at a seminar organized by the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad he found questionable.

By no stretch of imagination commenting a provision of the constitution or discussing its efficacy can be described as unconstitutional. The constitution itself provides scope for amendments; that means one can have a dif-



S KALYANASUNDARAM

(The writer is a retired banker. The views expressed are personal.)

ferent opinion on the existing provisions. When the erstwhile provision, which was without secularism and socialism, was not acceptable, the members of parliament thought it fit to amend the provision to include the same. Hence, the MPs differed with the earlier provision of the constitution and by extending the analogy of Yechury's allegation, should those MPs be branded as violators of the constitution?

It is all the more ridiculous to urge the President of India to recall a High court chief justice. There are various constitutional provisions for the removal of High Court and Supreme Court judges.

Article 124(4) of the constitution says that a Judge of the Supreme Court shall not



be removed from his office except by an order of the President passed after an address by each House of Parliament supported by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting has been presented to the President in the same session for such removal on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

Article 218 of the constitution says that application of certain provisions relating to Supreme Court to High Courts. The provisions of clauses (4) and (5) of Article 124 shall apply in relation to a High Court as they apply in relation to the Supreme Court with the substitution of references to the High Court for references to the Supreme Court.

There is also the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 which regulates the procedure for the investigation and proof of the misbehaviour or incapacity of a Supreme Court or of a High Court judge and for the presentation of an address by Parliament to the President and for matters connected therewith.

High Court and Supreme

Court judges can be removed only by following the prescribed procedure:

An impeachment motion may originate in either House of Parliament. To initiate proceedings: (i) at least 100 members of Lok Sabha may give assigned notice to the Speaker, or (ii) at least 50 members of Rajya Sabha may give a signed notice to the Chairman. The Speaker or Chairman may consult individuals and examine relevant material related to the notice. Based on this, he or she may decide to either admit the motion or refuse to admit it.

If the motion is admitted, the Speaker or Chairman will constitute a three-member committee to investigate the complaint. It will comprise: (i) a Supreme Court judge; (ii)

Chief Justice of a High Court; and (iii) a distinguished jurist. The committee will frame charges based on which the investigation will be conducted. A copy of the charges will be forwarded to the judge who can present a written defence.

After concluding its investigation, the Committee will submit its report to the Speaker or Chairman, who will then lay the report before the relevant House of Parliament. If the report records a finding of misbehaviour or incapacity, the motion for removal will be taken up for consideration and debated.

The motion for removal is required to be adopted by each House of Parliament by: (i) a majority of the total

membership of that House; and (ii) a majority of at least two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting. If the motion is adopted by this majority, the motion will be sent to the other House for adoption.

Once the motion is adopted in both Houses, it is sent to the President, who will issue an order for the removal of the judge.

One fails to understand the purpose of writing a letter to the President for recalling a high court judge without following the due process. But judiciary need not keep quiet and the judiciary can contemplate suo motu action against the complainant for unsubstantiated charges in public domain with questionable intent.

# Low-vaccinated Eastern Europe braces for Omicron surge

AP ■ SIBIU, ROMANIA

As the fast-spreading coronavirus variant omicron rages through Western Europe, officials and experts in low-vaccinated Eastern Europe anticipate a post-holiday explosion of COVID-19 cases in much of the region.

Many countries in Eastern Europe only recently emerged from infection waves that put a catastrophic strain on health care systems, and at times have tallied some of the highest pandemic death rates globally.

Now, with omicron already confirmed across the region and the winter holidays bringing more community gatherings and international travel, public health officials are predicting a sharp virus surge in the coming weeks.

Adriana Pistol, director of Romania's National Center for Surveillance and Control of Communicable Diseases, warned Wednesday that the country could see a peak of 25,000 new daily cases during the expected next wave. Romania is the European Union's second-least vaccinated member nation.

Noting that roughly 60% of Romania's people over age 65 or living with chronic diseases remain unvaccinated, Pistol said: "Even if the omicron strain does not have the same level of severity (...), the health system will be overloaded anyway and reach levels recorded this year in October."

Romania saw huge lines at borders before Christmas as hundreds of thousands of citizens flocked home, many from the West. The government started requiring travelers to complete passenger locator forms as of Dec. 20 to help track infections, but Pistol said

# UK health officials prepare for Omicron surge at hospitals

LONDON: England's National Health Service is building temporary structures at hospitals around the country to prepare for a possible surge of COVID-19 patients as the highly transmissible omicron variant fuels a new wave of infections.

The UK reported a record 183,037 confirmed new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, 32% more than the previous day. While early data suggests omicron is less likely to cause serious illness than earlier variants, public health officials think the sheer number of infections could lead to a jump in hospitalizations and deaths. In response, the NHS will begin setting up "surge hubs" this week at eight hospitals around England, each with the capacity to treat about 100

patients. Staff are preparing plans to create as many as 4,000 "super surge" beds should they be needed, the NHS said Thursday. "We do not yet know exactly how many of those who catch the virus will need hospital treatment, but given the number of infections we cannot wait to find out before we act, and so work is beginning from today to ensure these facilities are in place," NHS England medical director Stephen Powis said in a statement.

The number of people in England hospitalized with COVID-19 increased to 10,462 on Wednesday from 7,366 on Dec. 24, government figures show. Wednesday's number was highest since March 1. The figure is still well below peak of 34,336 recorded on Jan. 18.

many have failed to fill them out. Only 40% of Romania's population of around 19 million has been fully inoculated against COVID-19. Although booster doses are considered necessary to provide adequate protection against omicron, Pistol noted that three-quarters of the country's fully jabbed individuals have yet to receive an additional shot.

Romania's underfunded public health system teetered on the brink of collapse a few months ago, during the country's last explosion of virus cases. Hospital morgues ran out of space for bodies, and some patients were transferred

abroad for treatment because COVID-19 intensive care units were filled to capacity. Exhausted medical personnel watched with dread as countries with high vaccination rates such as France, Italy and the U.K. reported record cases as omicron spread in recent days.

"It's very clear that the fifth wave will probably hit us in January," Dragos Zaharia, a primary care doctor at the Marius Nasta Institute of Pneumology in Bucharest, said. "We just hope that there will be fewer deaths, fewer severe cases, and fewer hospital admissions."

# Hong Kong editors charged with sedition, US criticises raid

AP ■ HONG KONG

Two former editors from a Hong Kong online pro-democracy news outlet were charged with sedition and denied bail Thursday, a day after one of the last openly critical voices in the city said it would cease operations following a police raid on its office and seven arrests.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam defended the raid on Stand News amid a wider crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous city, telling reporters that "inciting other people ... could not be condoned under the guise of news reporting."

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called on Hong Kong authorities to release the detainees, and Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly said her country was deeply concerned



Hong Kong activist and music star Denise Ho is released from Western Police Station after more than twenty-four hours in custody Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021. Hong Kong police arrested her Wednesday in relation to colonial-era charges of sedition, because she was connected to Stand News, which closed Wednesday after police raided its office and arrested its senior staff. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

about the arrests, which included singer Denise Ho, a Canadian citizen and activist. According to a charge sheet, national security police filed one count each of conspiracy to publish a seditious publication against Chung Pui-ken and Patrick Lam, former editors at Stand News. Police also said they would prosecute the company for sedition. The cases were brought to West Kowloon court on Thursday, police said in a statement. Lam was not present in court because he was in the hospital.

Both were denied bail. The others have been detained for further questioning. They include four former Stand News board members, including Ho and former lawmaker Margaret Ng. Ho was released from police custody on Thursday afternoon. Chan Pui-man, a former editor at the pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper and Chung's wife, was also arrested.

# China hits out at irresponsible criticism of Hong Kong Media arrests

Beijing, China: Two senior editors of Hong Kong media outlet Stand News were charged with "conspiracy to publish seditious" material on Thursday, authorities said, following a raid that drew international condemnation over China's crackdown on press freedom in the city. China has tightened its control of Hong Kong since massive and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests engulfed the financial hub in 2019, using a sweeping national security law to clamp down on dissent. AFP

# Biden, Putin to hold call as Russia-Ukraine tension smolders

AP ■ WILMINGTON, DEL.

Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin are set to discuss the Russian troop buildup near Ukraine during their second call in recent weeks amid little progress toward ending the smoldering crisis.

Ahead of Thursday's call, the White House indicated that Biden would make clear to Putin that a diplomatic path remains open even as the Russians have moved an estimated 100,000 troops toward Ukraine and Putin has stepped up his demands for security guarantees in Eastern Europe.

But Biden will reiterate to Putin that for there to be "real progress" in talks they must be conducted in "a context of de-escalation rather than escalation," according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters ahead of the call. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The call, which was requested by Russian officials, comes as senior U.S. and Russian officials are to hold talks on Jan. 10 in Geneva. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that Putin would speak with Biden on Thursday but provided no details.

The official said Biden and Putin, who met in Geneva in June to discuss an array of tensions in the U.S.-Russia relationship, were not expected to take part in the coming talks.

The two leaders held a video call earlier this month in which their conversation focused heavily on Russia's troop movements that have unsettled Ukraine and other European allies. In that Dec. 7 video call, the White House

said Biden put Moscow on notice that an invasion of Ukraine would bring sanctions and enormous harm to the Russian economy. Russian officials have dismissed the sanction threats.

Moscow and NATO representatives are expected to meet shortly after the upcoming Geneva talks as are Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which includes the United States.

Earlier this month, Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back its military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The U.S. and its allies have refused to offer Russia the kind of guarantees on Ukraine that Putin wants, citing NATO's principle that membership is open to any qualifying country. They agreed, however, to hold talks with Russia to discuss its concerns.

As Biden prepared for talks with Putin, the administration also sought to highlight the commitment to Ukraine and drive home that Washington is committed to the "principle of nothing about you without you" in shaping policy that affects European allies.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Blinken "reiterated the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders."

# Ex-Afghan president says had no choice but to flee Kabul

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Afghanistan's former president said he had no choice but to abruptly leave Kabul as the Taliban closed in and denied an agreement was in the works for a peaceful takeover, disputing the accounts of former Afghan and US officials.

Former President Ashraf Ghani said in a BBC interview that he fled Thursday that an adviser gave him just minutes to decide to abandon the capital, Kabul.

He also denied widespread accusations that he left Afghanistan with millions in stolen money.

Ghani's sudden and secret departure Aug. 15 left the city rudderless as US and NATO forces were in the final stages of their chaotic withdrawal from the country after 20 years.

"On the morning of that day, I had no inkling that by late afternoon I would be leaving," Ghani told BBC radio.

His remarks conflicted with other accounts. Former President Hamid Karzai told The Associated Press in an interview earlier this month that Ghani's departure scuttled the opportunity for government negotiators, including himself and peace council chairman Abdullah Abdullah, to reach an 11th-hour agreement with the Taliban, who had committed to staying outside the capital.

After calling the government defense minister Bismillah Khan, the interior minister and police chief and discovering all had fled the capital, Karzai said he invited the Taliban into Kabul "to protect the population so that the country, the city doesn't fall into chaos and the unwanted elements who would probably loot the country, loot shops."

# World needs India to be at horseshoe table permanently, says Amb Tirumurti

United Nations: India's performance as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council indicates that the world needs India to be at the horseshoe table permanently, the country's envoy to the United Nations T S Tirumurti has said. "India took its place in the Security Council for the eighth time as an elected member... The highlight of our presence in the Security Council so far has been our presidency in August," Tirumurti, who is India's

Permanent Representative to the UN, said in a video. India's Permanent Mission to the UN Security Council indicates that the world needs India to be at the horseshoe table permanently, the country's envoy to the United Nations T S Tirumurti has said. "India took its place in the Security Council for the eighth time as an elected member... The highlight of our presence in the Security Council so far has been our presidency in August," Tirumurti, who is India's

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# Myanmar military reverts to strategy of massacres, burnings

BANGKOK: When the young farmhand returned to his village in Myanmar, he found the still smoldering corpses in a circle in a burned-out hut, the same with their limbs tied. The Myanmar military had stormed Done Taw at 11 a.m. on Dec. 7, he told the AP, with about 50 soldiers hunting people on foot. The farmhand and other villagers fled to the forest and fields, but 10 were captured and killed, including five teenagers, with one only 14, he said. A photo taken by his friend shows the charred remains of a victim lying face down, holding his head up, suggesting he was burned alive. "I am very upset, it is unacceptable," said the 19-year-old, who like others interviewed by the AP asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal. AP

### e-Notice for Request for Proposal

RFP No: RMSA/TL21-22/1561/2021/06 Dated: 30-12-2021

The proposals are inviting affixing court fee stamp of minimum value Rs.8.25/- containing (a) Qualification expression, (b) Technical Proposal, (c) Commercial Proposal in separate file/folder from reputed Organizations for the supply of equipment and gadget of Tinkering Lab and training to students and teachers to implement Tinkering Lab in 33 Government/Provincialised High and Higher Secondary Schools in Assam.

Detailed RFP may be seen at "https://assamtenders.gov.in/" for eligibility, scope of work, terms and conditions etc. The tender document can be downloaded from "https://assamtenders.gov.in/" up to 21/01/2022, 1:00 pm and making payment of non-refundable Tender Fee of Rs. 2,000/- (Rupees two thousand) only.

RFP are to be uploaded on the prescribed tender form along with (a) bid security or earnest money deposit (EMD) for an amount of Rs. 7,00,000/- (Rupees seven lakhs) only, valid for a period of 90 days from the date of submission, in the form of Demand Draft in favor of Mission Director, SSA, Guwahati payable at Guwahati. The RFP will be received upto 1:30 pm on 21/01/2022 and will be opened on same day at 2:30 pm at the Office of the Mission Director, SS (RMSA & SSA), Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam.

Samagra Shiksha, Assam reserves the right to amend or cancel the RFP without assigning any notice or reason thereof. Moreover, in case of non-availability of sufficient bidder (or less than three bidder), authority has to right to take decision without prior notice.

Sd/-Mission Director,  
Samagra Shiksha (RMSA&SSA), Assam  
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/CF/2638/21

### TO WHOM SO EVER IT MAY CONCERN

**RISHI PARKASH S/o Lt. Sh. Balbir Singh, R/o H. No. 838/21, Narender Nagar, Sonpat, Haryana -131001** declares that his name was wrongly written in 10th and 12th School Certificates as "RISHI PARAKSH". But his actual and correct name spelling is "RISHI PARKASH". It is further declared that "RISHI PARKASH" and "RISHI PARAKSH" is the name spelling of one and the Same Person.

If any dispute is found due to the said name spelling in future, my client will be sole responsible for the same.

**Abhishek Kaushik (Advocate)**  
Ch.No. 1328, Rohini Courts, Delhi-110085

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of **Suntime Traders Pvt. Ltd.**, who is the owner of Four Storey Commercial Property bearing no. 22-23 measuring 80 sq. yds. Situated in the area of Rani Garden, Shastri Nagar, out of Kharsa no. 24/10 in the area of Village Khureji Khas, Ilaqa Shahdara Delhi vide Sale Deed dated 05.11.2021 which is registered as Doc No. 9193 in the office of Sub-Registrar VIII and intend to mortgage the financial assistance from **Capital India Finance Ltd.** That the GPA, ATS & WILL dated 13.05.1996 executed by Mrs. Rafiqun Begum & Mrs. Samina Begum and also General Power of Attorney, ATS & WILL dated 28.01.1992 executed by Mr. Day Chand in favour of Mrs. Rafiqun Begum & Mrs. Samina Begum along with other documents are lost/misplaced. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person(s) having any objection regarding ownership and/or creating mortgage of the said property is/are hereby requested to intimate in writing to the undersigned.

**Lucem Legal LLP**  
269, Rama House, Ground Floor, Masjid Moha, Opp. Uday Park, South Ex II, New Delhi-110049  
Contact: 011-40046318

### EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY

#### e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited on behalf of the President of India for the under mentioned work:-

S.No. 1. Name of the work with its location: "Composite Work (Civil, Electrical, Mechanical & Telecom) involving Construction of Maintenance shed with elevated pit & Workshop bay shed with pitline jack system with Pre-Engineered Building (PEB), Extension of DEMU Shed, Landing of Foot Over Bridge and other ancillary buildings (Service building, Canteen, Control Room, Time office, Toilet Block, Scrap yard, Electric Sub station, Washing Apron with catwalk etc.), Water supply system, Drainage system, Track works, Road works, Fire fighting works, Dismantling of Existing Shed and Buildings, Electrification and illumination works, Retractable OHE Procurement and commissioning of specified Mechanical Machineries & Plant and other associated Civil, Mechanical, Electrical & Telecommunication works in connection with Setting up maintenance Depot for Trainsets at Shakurbasti, Northern Railway, Ender No. WPMech Trainsets-SSB-WT-23. 2. Approx. Cost of the work: Rs. 160,78,64,946.85. 3. Earnest money: Rs. 81,89,400.00. 4. Date and time for closing of tender: 21.01.2022 up to 13.00 hrs. 5. Website particular and notice board location where complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.: Tender can be downloaded from IRPES website [www.irpes.gov.in](http://www.irpes.gov.in) and detailed can be seen from the notice board at Office of CAO/WP, Chamber Bhawan, J.C. Road, Patna-800001

Any e-tenders which is sent by Post/Courier/Fax or by hand will not be accepted. All such manual submission of tender even if it is on firm's letter pad or received in time will not be accepted. The above e-tender document along with full information is available on website <http://www.irpes.gov.in>.

Dy. CME-I/WW  
Workshop Project Organization, Patna  
PR/01440/WPO/MECH/7/21-22/52

### PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE

**ICICI Bank** Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Physical Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Bibudhendu Panigrahi/ Nanditarani Mishra /A/c No.- LBDEL0002032049	Flat No-B- 828, 8th Floor, Tower T-6, Type-B, Ashiana Upvan, Village Chhajajari, Tehsil Dadril, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar Uttar Pradesh Indrapuram, Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh. 28-Dec-2021	25-Sep-2020 Rs. 58,60,889/-	Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: December 31, 2021  
Place: Ghaziabad

Authorized Officer  
ICICI Bank Limited

### MAHINDRA RURAL HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED

Corporate Office:- Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Ltd, Sadhana House, 2nd Floor, 570, P.B. Marg Worli, Mumbai 400 018 India, Tel: +91 22 66523500 Fax: +91 22 24972741

Branch Office: 3rd Floor 139-141 Mangal Pandey Nagar Opposite CCS University Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250002, Pradesh 201001

Branch Office: D-34, 3rd Floor Opp. GAUR Central Mall RDC Raj Nagar, ABOVE MAHARANI RESTAURANT, GHAZIABAD Uttar Pradesh 201001

#### PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION-CUM-SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

In exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (4) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (herein after referred to as "SARFAESI Act") and Rule 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 (hereinafter referred to as "Rules") for the purpose of recovering the secured debts, the authorized officer of the secured creditor M/s Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as "MRHFL") has decided to sell the secured asset (immovable property), the possession of which had been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor under S. 13 (4) of SARFAESI Act, described herein below as "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" and "AS IS WHAT IT IS BASIS" and the public and all concerned including the concerned borrowers/mortgagors, their representatives, as the case may be are hereby informed that the secured asset listed below will be sold by e-Auction through the Web Portal: <https://DisposalHub.com> for which the particulars are furnished hereunder:-

S.N.	Name of Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Mortgagors	Date & Amount of 13(2) Demand Notice	Date of Possession	Description of Property	Reserve Price		Property Inspection Date & Time	Date & Time of e-Auction
					EMD Bid Increase	Amount		
1.	Branch: BAREILLY Borrower: BABU ALI S/O Najeer, Partapur Chaudhary, Izzatnagar, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh -243001 Co-Borrower: AFSARI W/o Najeer Shah, Partapur Chaudhary, Izzatnagar, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh -243001 LAN: 898655/ XSEMBAR00736365	12-JAN-21 & Rs. 23,41,733/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Forty One Thousand Seven Hundred Thirty Three Only)	6-AUG-21 Physical Possession	Plot No.4, khasra No.738 Changora, Pipariya, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh -243001, North - P/O Seller South-p/o A.K Singh, East - P/o Seller, West - Rasta 15"	Rs.11,63,100/- Rs.1,16,310/- Rs.10,000/-	31/12/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM	2/2/2022 TIME 10:00 TO 3:00 PM	
2.	Branch: GHAZIABAD Borrower: ANJUN KUMAR S/O Vijay Raj Singh, H. No-54, Ghodi Bachheda Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh -201301 (2nd Address)R/o 134, Ghori Bachera, Distt Gautam Buddha Nagar,up Co-Borrower: NISHA RAVAL W/o Anuj Kumar, H. No-54, Ghodi Bachheda Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh -201301 (2nd Address)R/o 134, Ghori Bachera, distt Gautam Buddha Nagar,up LAN: 587509/ XSEMGZB00504274	24-DEC-20 & Rs. 16,76,993/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh Seventy Six Thousand Nine Hundred Ninety Three Only)	12-OCT-21 Physical Possession	Plot On Khasra No-306/ Chama Wali, Ramgash Pargana, Distt-dadri Gaudam Budh Nagar, ghaziabad,uttar Pradesh-20207, North - Plot Of 20207, South - Plot Of Smt Asha Devi, East -rasta, West- Plot Of Sumit	Rs. 8,10,000/- Rs. 81,000/- Rs.10,000/-	31/12/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM	2/2/2022 TIME 10:00 TO 3:00 PM	
3.	Branch: SAHARANPUR Borrower: HUMA PRAVEEN S/O 13/1666 MOHALLA MUTRIBAN, KAZI STREET SAHARANPUR PIN 247001 Co-Borrower: MOHD AMIR S/O 13/1666 MOHALLA MUTRIBAN, KAZI STREET SAHARANPUR PIN 247001 LAN: 1122117/ XSEMSAR00954647	3-DEC-20 & Rs. 9,47,589/- (Rupees Nine Lakh Forty Seven Thousand Five Hundred Eighty Nine Only)	5-AUG-21 Physical Possession	Part Of Plot No.25,26,27& 28 Khasra No.861,wake Dara Kottala Sawad Beroon Dar Abadi Defence, colony Sahaampur,uttar Pradesh -247001, North - Others Property, South - Others Property, East- Plot No. 25 New House Of Mr. Asif Khan, West- Rasta	Rs. 14,40,000/- Rs.1,44,000/- Rs.10,000/-	31/12/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM	2/2/2022 TIME 10:00 TO 3:00 PM	
4.	Branch: MEERUT Borrower: NARENDRA S/O Dal Singh, H.No.4 CC Shatabdi Nagar, Rithani, Meerut UP 250103 Co-Borrower: GEETA DEVI W/o Narendra Dhama, Vill- Aasifabad Narang Pur Meerut UP 250406 (2n Address --) W/o Narendra Dhama H.No. 4 Cc Shatabdi Nagar Rithani Meerut UP 250103 LAN: 634551/ XSEMMER00524294	3-DEC-20 & Rs. 6,80,875/- (Rupees Six Lakh Eighty Thousand Eight Hundred Seventy Five Only)	22-JUN-21 Physical Possession	Plot No.179, Khasra No 6411, mohala - Shri Ram Garden, Vill - Durgawalli Distt. Meerut Pin Code- 251013, North - Land Of Pipeline, South- Pramod Chairman, East - Road, West	Rs. 4,33,700/- Rs.43,370/- Rs.10,000/-	31/12/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM	2/2/2022 TIME 10:00 TO 3:00 PM	
5.	Branch: MEERUT Borrower: NIRBHAY SINGH NAGAR S/O Satpal Singh, H.no. 9 Nangla Sherkan URF Jain Pur Meerut,uttar Pradesh -250002 Co-Borrower: AJAY SINGH S/O Satpal Singh, Rachoht, Meerut,up-250106 GUARANTOR: SHIKA AGARWAL W/o Rajiv Agarwal, 278/7 Jagriti Vihar Sec-7, Meerut,uttar Pradesh -250004 LAN: 582727/ XSEMMER00489862	12-JAN-21 & Rs. 7,55,797/- (Rupees Seven Lakh Fifty Five Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety Seven Only)	10-APR-21 Physical Possession	Part Of Plot No 19 & 20 Khasra No 111,gram- Kunda Partapur, Meerut,uttar Pradesh - 250002, North - Remaining Part Of Plot No.20, South- Remaining Part Of Plot No.19, East- Khet Of Dhanpal, West - Rasta 20~ Wide	Rs. 1,80,000/- Rs.18,000/- Rs.10,000/-	31/12/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM	2/2/2022 TIME 10:00 TO 3:00 PM	

1. Last date of submission of sealed offers as well as online in the prescribed tender forms along with EMD is 1/2/2022 TIME 11.00 AM TO 6 PM at the branch office address mentioned herein above. Tenders that are not filled up properly or tenders received beyond last date will be considered as invalid tender and shall accordingly be rejected. No interest shall be paid on the EMD.

2. The detail terms and conditions of the auction sale are incorporated in the prescribed tender form. Tender forms are available on [www.mahindraruralhousingfinance.com](http://www.mahindraruralhousingfinance.com) and on the e-Auction Portal: <https://DisposalHub.com> as well as above branch office.

3. All the intending bidders are required to register their name in the Web Portal mentioned above in free of cost of their own to submit their bid as per the prescribed format along with EMD by way of Demand Draft in favour of Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Limited and KYC in a sealed envelope at the branch office mentioned herein above as well as upload online to participate in the e-Auction on the date and time aforesaid. For any enquiry the prospective bidders may contact Authorized Officer Deep Joshi on Mobile 8853265434 and Partner M/s. NexXen Solutions Private Limited, through [csd@disposalhub.com](mailto:csd@disposalhub.com) Tel. No. : +91 124 4 233 933, Mobile No. : +91 93100 29933.

4. Further interest will be charged as applicable, as per the Loan Agreement on the amount outstanding in the notice and incidental expenses, costs, etc., is due and payable till its realization.

5. The notice is hereby given to the Borrower and Guarantor, to remain present personally at the time of sale and they can bring the intending buyers/purchasers for purchasing the immovable property as described herein above, as per the particulars of Terms and Conditions of Sale.

6. The Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s) are hereby given 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002 to pay the sum mentioned as above before the date of Auction failing which the immovable property will be auctioned and balance, if any, will be recovered with interest and costs. If the Borrower pays the amount due to Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Ltd., in full before the date of sale, auction is liable to be stopped.

7. The immovable property will be sold to the highest tenderer. However, the undersigned reserves the absolute discretion to allow inter se bidding, if deemed necessary.

8. Company is not responsible for any liabilities upon the property which is not in the knowledge of the company. For further details, contact the Branch Manager, at the above mentioned Branch office address.

Place :- DELHI, NCR Date:-31.12.2021 Sd/- Authorised Officer Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Limited



My colleague and I entered the Oudh Restaurant at Ashoka Hotel to be greeted by an eye-catching tribal dance performance by regional troupes. Handicrafts and organic spices were displayed by the local artisans, showcasing their rich heritage, while the ceiling was decorated with colourful flags.

While during the pre-covid times, Ashok had hosted the Arunachal Pradesh Food Festival, this time, they went a cut above with their North-Eastern Cultural Festival. The festival celebrated the unique gastronomic delights and heritage of the 'seven sisters' states — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura — and Sikkim.

Inside the lounge, it was a well-lit buffet system and we quickly indulged in the wide variety of dishes it showcased.

In the starters, the soup warmed up our insides, and in a good way. It was very balanced with black pepper, spring onions, and noodles.

On the side, we had *Singju* which was basically salad made with banana stem that was chopped finely and banana flower, while *Iromba* was dry fish *chutney* that we paired with almost everything. Even though it was extremely hot, not exactly spicy, we couldn't stop eating. As my friend said, "I cannot get enough of it."

We started the main course with *Putu*, buckweed noodles that were bland, save one specific spice that made it taste well. It was excellent in the combination,



# FOOD PASTICHE

**KHUSHBU KIRTI** says the amalgamation of North Eastern cuisine with that of North was a unique experience at the culinary and cultural festival at Oudh Restaurant, Ashoka Hotel

along with the potato and cheese preparation. The *Assamese duck roast* had the flavour of warm duck distributed nicely, with very subtle spices. It was a speciality of Nagaland.

While *Chura pa* was fundamentally potato in yak cheese, *Kholar* a Naga-style kidney beans preparation, *Uti* was a dry peas preparation, which tasted average, I especially enjoyed the fish — all variations of it.

*Khorika* was probably my favourite. It was an Assamese delicacy and not only looked deli-



icious but tasted just as scrumptious. Server Vaishnav Kastoorti informed us about how the dish was prepared with papda fish which was marinated in ginger-

garlic paste and some spices (red chilli powder, turmeric and salt).

The fish had a bony structure, but it was very soft and since it was small, it was served whole. It mingled well with the *Manipuri cooked rice* they served in a banana leaf.

Chef Sanjay, the head chef at Ashok, explained, "To bring authenticity to the taste and give the Delhi-ites the authentic flavours of the rich North Eastern cuisines, we took help from the regional chefs who had organised some demos for us. They showed us the popular food items they

had. From those, we picked some. This process took about a month and a half."

He added, "The main challenge was to source the ingredients, like milk cheese, dried bamboo shoot flakes, since you don't get them here. But overall, it was a lovely experience to learn something new and unique and blend the cuisines."

We observed that 90 per cent of their food did not contain any oil. They used only organic food and ingredients they reaped for their food. Another aspect was that the food did not use any spice at all.

*Haah pura*, a colourful duck roast, with bones and dark-brown duck. It was soft and warm, and chewable.

Out of the desserts, the *Chak-khao kheer* or *Manipuri black rice pudding* triumphed the others by a huge margin. They were served in wine glasses and the luscious flavour of the kheer was soul-warming. It incorporated smashed *sabudana* in thick milk and the goodness of rice.

There was *Koat pitha* from Mizoram which tasted a lot like *gulgule*. The *Sel roti* had a tangy spice in it but mixed with sugar.

*Khapse* was like a sweet biscuit, from the Twang region. However, unlike the North, nothing had the pinnacle of sugar we were used to. The sweetness was extremely subtle. Probably good for health, eh?

Chef Arvind Rai, executive chef framed it well, "For someone who loves experimenting with food, Northeast India has a lot to offer, so much more than momos and noodles."

# Stat-eat-stics report

Swiggy reveals that this year, Indians ordered 115 biryanis per minute, samosas equal to the population of New Zealand, and enough tomatoes to play the Spanish Tomatina festival for 11 years. By TEAM VIVA

There is no denying that 2020 has left an indelible mark on the way we lead our lives. While masks, sanitiser and bottles of handwash were still added to carts in 2021, ever-lasting favourites like biryani, samosa and grocery staples like bananas reminded us that things are still somewhat normal. As another year of ups and downs draws to a close, Swiggy's sixth annual StatEAtstics replays what India ordered, ate, and ferried in 2021.

Note: The analysis is based on millions of orders received by Swiggy for food delivery, grocery on Instamart, pick up and drop service by Swiggy Genie and HealthHub between January and December, 2021. Their food delivery is present in 500 cities across India.

**Top food orders of the year**  
 The most binged snack of the year was the samosa with about five million orders — that's one Samosa for every New Zealander!

The *Desi samosa* was ordered six times more than chicken wings. Pav bhaji was India's second favourite snack with 2.1 million orders.

However, the order history of the night bingers saw a twist. Post 10 pm, India's night owls looking to satiate their cravings turned to cheese-garlic bread, popcorn, and french fries, more than any other eatables. Chips were the top item ordered then.

The rose-inspired dessert that rose to the top, with a total of 2.1 million orders, was the gulab jamun was the most ordered dessert. On the second position was ras-malai with 1.27 million orders.

**India's top dishes in 2021**  
 The mighty Biryani has topped the charts... well, for six years in a row! In 2020, 90 biryanis were ordered per minute and in 2021, India ordered 115 Biryani per minute, or two (1.91) biryanis per second.

Chicken Biryani is still the queen of our hearts and was ordered 4.3 times more than her humble vegetarian counterpart.

The most common first dish ordered? Over 4.25 lakh new users made their Swiggy debut by ordering a chicken biryani.

**Mondays and Thursdays are when India eats the healthiest**

While chicken biryani topped the charts in Chennai, Kolkata, Lucknow and Hyderabad, Mumbai ordered double the dal khichidi as compared to chicken biryani.

Bangalore emerged as the most health-conscious city followed by Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Keto orders grew by 23 per cent, 83 per cent in vegan and plant-based food orders.

**Grocery that India wanted**

Instamart delivered over 28 million packs of fruits and vegetables alone in 2021. Tomatoes, bananas, onions, potatoes, and green chilies were the top five fruits and veggies delivered in under 30 minutes.

This year, Indians ordered enough tomatoes to play the Tomatina festival in Spain for 11 years!

Talk about going bananas — The total bananas ordered on Instamart outweighed the Statue of Liberty by 2.6 times.



**SOS, need it now:** Over 70,000 packs of band-aid, 55,000 packs of diapers and three lakh packs of sanitary napkins were delivered in 15-30 minutes.

**War against Covid-19 continues:** One lakh masks and over four lakh soaps and handwashes were ordered online.

Over 80 per cent of customers opted to pay online, instead of paying by cash on delivery.

Note: Swiggy's express grocery delivery service Instamart was present in two cities at the beginning of 2021 and is currently present in 18 cities.

**Things India ferried in 2021**

Food items approximated 48 per cent of the total Genie orders. Interestingly, over 20,000 of these orders were for pet food.

**The long and short of it:** The maximum distance travelled by a delivery partner was 55.5 kms to deliver a food package in Bangalore. The shortest distance? To a store 200 meters away from a customer's doorstep to pick up a tongue cleaner.

**Despite a growing inclination towards veganism, Indians continue to enjoy their meat**

While Chicken was India's preferred choice of non-vegetarian food, ready-to-cook meats evolved into the new favourite category in meat this year.

**Believe it or not — 2021 edition**

Chennai turned out to be the most generous city where a delivery partner was tipped ₹6,000 for a single order.

Not only did Bangalore top the charts for ordering dosas, dosa batter was also very popularly ordered by people in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

A biryani lover in Kolkata made a delivery partner to travel 39.3 kms from home to bring her her favourite mutton biryani! 7-9 pm seemed to be the 'happy hours' for food lovers with maximum orders being placed then.

Pan Asian, Indian, and Chinese were the top three cuisines ordered, followed by Mexican and Korean.

In a single order, a customer in Kolkata ordered 15.4 kgs of Hilsa from Swiggy Meat Stores.

Comfort food has been integral to consumers since the Covid-19 outbreak. Chocolate, an innovative and fast-evolving segment that fits right into the comfort food bracket, is also growing at a healthy clip. On that sweet note, here are some trends and future predictions that will dominate the chocolate industry in 2022:

## Premium chocolate made convenient

The premium chocolate category is projected to grow in double digits. Consumers are embracing chocolates as a snacking option, and brands are catering to this shift with delicious, bit-sized snacking chocolate. Premium chocolates in different formats such as couverture chocolate dragees, pebbles, barks, bars, coated nuts are already gaining momentum, and ready to take the market by storm in 2022 as well. Going forward, premium chocolate



# The sweet truth

TEAM VIVA culminates chocolate trends that will rule the food industry next year

in numerous flavours will become a convenience food product, satiating hunger and the taste buds.

## Taste as the mother of invention

The growing and evolving consumer palate has helped chocolate brands experiment with flavours and formats. There has never been a better time for innovation in the chocolate segment.

As such, we're creating never-seen-before chocolate variants such as cashew and curry, spicy Indian chilli, star anise, and many more. The trend of unique and delightful flavours is very likely to continue well into 2022, as consumers demand more excitement from their chocolates.

## Catering to health-conscious choco lovers

Apart from just the taste, chocolate innovations will also be driven by the rising health consciousness among consumers. Post the Covid-19 outbreak, people also need to know how a food product is affecting their health. Dark chocolate has become popular since it is known to be healthier. We will also be seeing high fibre, high protein, low sugar, no sugar, and vegan chocolates as the consumer demand evolves further.

## Desserts and beverages galore

While chocolate bars, coated nuts, dragees, and



so on, are as popular as ever, chocolate-based beverages and desserts are also becoming big-time crowd pleasers. New-age brands are bringing forth signature cakes, cookies, cupcakes, macarons as well as hot cocoa mixes and chocolate-on-a-stick hot chocolate stir it ups that will be both the life of the party and the main attraction of a cozy night in. The segment is set to grow at an accelerated pace.

## Online v/s offline — it's a tie!

More than anything, brands will need to strike a balance between online

and offline sales simply because — the customers are present everywhere! Each business model will have its own market share in 2022. While chocolate sales were majorly occurring in the offline space, the online route opened up during the Covid-19 scenario in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, thus, both alternatives will be used by brands to achieve a wider reach. Brands will also need to enhance their delivery and last mile infrastructure to thrive in the online sales medium.

There is a high level of novelty in the chocolate space as brands continue to delight consumers with new and improved offerings. Chocolate lovers can, therefore, revel in the future of chocolate — there's a lot more where that came from!

(SMOOR is a Bangalore-based luxury chocolate brand that crafts the ultimate indulgence experiences with couverture chocolates.)

# R E C I P E S

## DRY APPLE MARTINI

- WHAT YOU NEED**
- Martini extra dry
  - Apple juice: ¼ part
  - Manzana verde: ⅓ part
  - Apple syrup: 1/8 part
  - Caster sugar: 2 tsp
  - Juice of half a lemon
  - Half a green apple



Courtesy: By Grey Goose and Martini

- METHOD**
- Shake all the ingredients with cubed ice.
  - Double strain into a chilled martini cocktail glass. Garnish.
  - Precede lunch with a *Dry apple martini* and enjoy.



## JALEBI CHURROS

- WHAT YOU NEED**
- For Rabri**
- Full cream milk: 100 ml
  - Khoya: 30 gm
  - Saffron: 5-6 strands
  - Sugar: 2 tbsp
- For Churros**
- Refined flour: 40 gm
  - Water: 45 ml
  - Butter: 15 gm
  - Vanilla essences: 2 drops
  - Sugar: 10 gm
  - Egg: 1
  - Dry nuts
  - Cinnamon sugar
- METHOD**
- Firstly, for *rabri*, take a pan and

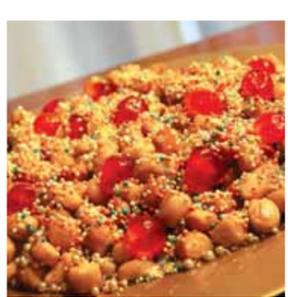
add full cream milk into it. Afterwards, add saffron, sugar, *khoya* and reduce till ¼ of mixture is left.

- Secondly, for churros, take a sauce pan and add water, alongside butter, sugar, vanilla essence. Later, boil it and add refined flour to make dough. Lastly, add an egg and mix it well.
- Make churros with the help of a piping bag and set it in the fridge.
- Fry churros till golden brown then place it on a plate. Sprinkle some cinnamon sugar, put in *rabri* and garnish with chopped dry nuts.

Courtesy: By Chef Ashish Singh of Dhansoo Cafe

## STRUFFOLI

- WHAT YOU NEED**
- Italian type 00 flour (or flour for cakes): 300 gm
  - Medium egg: 3
  - Sugar: 30 gm
  - Butter: 30 gm
  - Salt: 3 gm
  - Grated zest of: 1 orange, 1 lemon, and 1 mandarin
- To fry**
- Peanut oil: 1 l
- To garnish**
- Coloured sugar ball sprinkles: 20 gm
  - Candied citron (if unavailable, any other candied citrus peel): 40 gm
  - Candied orange: 40 gm
  - Honey: 300 gm



floured cloth trying not to overlap them so that they do not stick together.

- When you have finished, pour the peanut oil into a pan and bring it to 170°C (be careful not to bring it over 175°C). Sift the struffoli so they lose any excess flour and fry them a few at a time so as not to drastically lower the temperature of the oil.
  - When the struffoli are slightly golden, drain them with a slotted spoon and place them on a plate lined with absorbent kitchen paper. Continue until you finish frying all the dough pieces.
  - Combine the struffoli with the honey, as well as the candied citron and orange, cut into small cubes and toss to mix well.
  - Arrange the struffoli on a plate, in a pile or in a crown: to form a crown, place a jar or bottle in the centre of the plate. Arrange the struffoli all around, leave them for an hour and then gently remove the jar. Finish the preparation by garnishing with the sugar ball sprinkles.
- Courtesy: By Chef Fabio Di Domenico

# L I S T I N G S

## CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR IN A NEW ANDAZ

It's time to bid farewell and cheer in the new year with a luxurious and delightful experience only at Andaz Delhi. With tailor-made packages, a scrumptious spread of gourmet delights and ravishing beverages, Andaz Delhi is all set to become the ultimate destination for all your New Year's celebrations.

## Andaz Delhi's tailor-made New Year's celebrations

Andaz Delhi is delighted to become the host for your year-end dinner. With private studios on offer, along with unlimited food, a bar setup as well as a personal bartender, the intimate dinner can begin on December 31, 2021, from 7 pm onwards. Andaz Delhi can also tailor-make a package that is suited to your preferences, which is sure to elevate your holiday experience and ensure you celebrate this new year in style.

## New Year's at AnnaMaya Delhi

To bid a soulful goodbye, AnnaMaya, the food hall at Andaz Delhi, has thoughtfully curated an exclusive New Year's menu for guests. With a lavish and scrumptious spread of divine flavours, along with an evening full of the finest cocktails, guests can make wonderful memories while enjoying a hearty meal with their loved ones. This New Year's extravaganza will take place on December 31, 2021, from 7 pm onwards. Prices start at ₹6,000+ taxes per person. Another delightful spread starts at ₹2,750+ taxes for the brunch, ₹3,500+ taxes for a brunch with alcohol and ₹5,500+ taxes for a bubbly brunch. Guests can relish this wonderful brunch on January 1, 2022, from 12:30 pm onwards.

## MARK A NEW BEGINNING AT THE IMPERIAL NEW DELHI

It's that time of the year when we all look forward to novel experiences while we fill our bags with beautiful memories of the year gone by.

## Year-end celebrations galore at 1911 Restaurant

The finest selection of gourmet delights, include *Shepherd's pie*, *Sesame crusted yellow fin tuna Nicoise*, *Shredded tenderloin with bacon*, *blue cheese and tomatoes*, *sautéed mushrooms*, *steamed broccoli caramelised onions*, *roasted red pepper* and more. The buffet spread also features live Pasta and Risotto Bar, live dimsum and crepe stations, live grills and barbeque station to make sure you bid adieu to the year passing by with panache.

## New Year's Eve Buffet at 1911 Restaurant on December 31

7pm-11:45 pm  
 Buffet at ₹4,000+ taxes per person without alcohol and ₹2,300+ taxes per child

## LINDBERG CHOCOLATE PARADISE CONTEST AT BIGBASKET

Cosy up with warm blankets, boxes of treats, and hot cups of cocoa 'cause it's the time to be jolly. With ovens filled with cakes and goodies, holiday films on the telly, and carols echoing through the night, let's get into the spirit of the season! Prepare a chocolate-y dessert and stand a chance to win!

**When:** Till January 4  
**Where:** [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScW301X7vdjAW1v1XFczazH8kVNi8y-VtWE1HA6\\_UF\\_y0-A/viewform?\\_\\_sta=vhg.uosvpxlbsmmsqovosq%7CJQUH&\\_\\_stm\\_medium=email&\\_\\_stm\\_source=s martech](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScW301X7vdjAW1v1XFczazH8kVNi8y-VtWE1HA6_UF_y0-A/viewform?__sta=vhg.uosvpxlbsmmsqovosq%7CJQUH&__stm_medium=email&__stm_source=s martech)



A la carte dinner at a minimum spend of ₹8,000+ taxes per couple without alcohol.

## New Year Brunch at 1911 Restaurant on January 1, 2022

12:30 pm-3:30 pm  
 Brunch at ₹4,000+ taxes per person without alcohol and ₹2,300+ taxes per child.

Call 011-41116451/52 for Reservations



# Pace Aces!

Bumrah, Shami and Siraj bundle out South Africa



# India go 1-0 up in Test series

PTI ■ CENTURION

India's once-in-a-generation pace unit destroyed a listless South Africa with its relentless attack to fashion an emphatic 113-run win in the first Test here on Thursday, setting the team on the path towards an elusive series-victory in the Rainbow nation.

The 2021 started with India breaching the Fortress Gabbra Down Under and it couldn't have been a better end as they have now brought down SuperSport Park which has been a Proteas' citadel for the longest time.

The target of 305 on a track with a lot of uneven bounce was always out of question for a South African unit that is low on quality and the script unfolded as per the narrative set. The home team folded for 191 in 68 overs to give India a 1-0 lead in three-match series.

Such was the command of Indian pacers that they even took rain out of equation despite one full day being lost.

It was pity to see South Africa, that boasted of some great names of the yore, could-



n't even post 200 runs in the both the innings with skipper Dean Elgar's 77 off 156 balls not exactly being a saving grace.

Quinton de Kock will be missing from the line-up from the next Test as he will be on paternity leave and it will certainly make it easier for India to claim their first series win in

South Africa since they first toured here in 1992.

For India, the four pacers took 18 wickets between them and Ravichandran Ashwin wrapped up the South African tail just after the lunch session to complete formality.

The three men who won the match for India were, vice-captain KL Rahul for that first

innings hundred that gave the team platform, supremely talented Mohammed Shami (5/44 and 3/63) who had a match-haul of eight wickets and peerless Jasprit Bumrah.

Bumrah is perhaps Indian cricket's biggest gift, a freaky fast bowler, who can provide moments of magic as he did on fourth evening to close the

match for India.

Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur were the perfect supporting cast in one of the better and comfortable overseas wins for Virat Kohli's men.

"They bullied South Africa in their backyard and it's not often seen," said former South Africa pacer and broadcaster Morne Morkel.

Bumrah (3/50) set the tone for the final morning by removing the dogged Proteas skipper Elgar (77 off 156 balls) while Siraj (2/47) and Shami also got into the act knowing that there is forecast for some rain in the late afternoon session.

Having gauged the variable bounce of the track, skipper Elgar knew that survival isn't an option and he needed to counter attack right at the onset.

With the stodgy Bavuma for company, 36 runs were added in the first 45 minutes but the best part was that there was no let up in the intensity of the Indian attack as skipper Kohli and wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant were constantly

heard cheering the bowlers on.

Shami dropped Elgar off his own bowling but it was Bumrah, who kept on asking probing questions to the Proteas skipper.

One such delivery was angled into the left-hander as he shuffled way too much and leg before was one of the easiest of decisions that umpire Adrian Holdstock had to make in this match.

Hoping against hope, Elgar appealed for DRS but he already knew that he was gone for good.

Quinton de Kock (21) came in and hit couple of delicious shots off Bumrah, trying to knock off as many runs possible off the target.

The hardworking Siraj bowled one with the scrambled seam and just like first innings, tried to cut with very little room for execution with the ball coming into him.

Wiaan Mulder (1), who has had a forgettable match with no wickets to show for his efforts, got a delivery from Shami that was way above his skill-set.

The ball pitched on length while landing on seam. Mulder shaped for one that would come back but it straightened enough to kiss the outside edge off his bat into Rishabh Pant's gloves.

Margin	Venue	Season
123 runs	Johannesburg	2006-07
87 runs	Durban	2010-11
63 runs	Johannesburg	2017-18
113 runs	Centurion	2021-22

Captain	P	W	L	D	Success%
Graeme Smith (South Africa)	109	53	29	27	61.00
Ricky Ponting (Australia)	77	48	16	13	70.77
Steve Waugh (Australia)	57	41	9	7	78.07
Virat Kohli (India)	67	40	16	11	67.91
Clive Lloyd (West Indies)	74	36	12	26	66.21

FAISEL FEATURES

# Cricket fraternity hails India's win

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India recorded their fourth victory over South Africa in South Africa by winning the first Test match of the series by 113 runs on the fifth and final day at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Thursday

The cricket fraternity hailed India's maiden Test win at Centurion on Thursday, with Virat Kohli's bowling attack coming in for special praise from greats such as Sachin Tendulkar for its ability to "take 20 wickets anywhere in the world".

After memorable wins at the Gabbra and Lord's, team India wrapped up 2021 in style by bringing down South Africa's citadel, the SuperSport Park, as they handed the Proteas a 113-run loss in the opening Test.

India's fiery pace unit, including the world-class Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, picked up 18 wickets to make the country the first Asian team to win a Test match at the SuperSport Park. As expected, congratulatory messages for Kohli and Co. Poured in from the cricket fraternity.

Here are some of them:

■ Sachin Tendulkar: Superb bowling by an attack that can pick 20 wickets in a Test match anywhere in the world. Congratulations to #TeamIndia on a convincing victory!

■ Ravi Shastri: Wohoo Brisbane, Oval, Lord's and now Centurion... Congratulations @imVkohli, Rahul Dravid and the entire contingent on becoming the first Asian nation to win at Centurion #BoxingDayTest #TeamIndia

■ Venkatesh Prasad: A phenomenal 2021 in Test Match Cricket for #TeamIndia. To become the first Asian Team to win at Centurion, this is a special team and a special win. Shami was exceptional but KL Rahul's masterclass was a delight and the major difference #INDvsSA

for Team India in Test Cricket. Gabbra, Lord's, Oval, Centurion and who can forget the amazing fight to draw at Sydney. Wishing a happy and even better 2022 for #TeamIndia

■ Shikhar Dhawan: Perfect way to end a stellar year for Indian Test Cricket. Congratulations to the boys on being the first Asian team to win at Centurion! #BoxingDayTest

■ VVS Laxman: Began the year with great resilience at Sydney, followed by an incredible win at the Gabbra, the Lord's win was special and India end the year with a brilliant win at the Centurion. Has been a brilliant Test Match year for Team India. Congratulations on a wonderful win #INDvsSA

for the historic Test win #TeamIndia. What a brilliant performance to beat the hosts in such a grand manner! Raising hands #SAvIND.

■ Irfan Pathan: First step towards the history! Well done team India for winning the first test match of the series. #KLRahul #Bumrah #Shami were outstanding #INDvsSA.

■ Jay Shah: Congratulations to #TeamIndia on a fabulous victory at Centurion despite a day being washed out due to rain. 2021 has been a phenomenal year with many famous award Test wins in Brisbane, Lord's, and The Oval.

■ Suresh Raina: Congratulations #TeamIndia on winning the first test match of the series. Your performance was absolutely incredible, onwards & upwards! Raising hands #INDvsSA.

# Rasheed hits unbeaten 90 to guide clinical India to U-19 Asia Cup final



PTI ■ SHARJAH

Shaik Rasheed hit an unbeaten 90 as India dished out a clinical performance to thrash Bangladesh by 103 runs here on Thursday and set up a summit clash with Sri Lanka in the Under-19 Asia Cup.

One-down Rasheed made his runs in 108 balls to help India post 248 for eight after being invited to bat.

Rasheed paced his innings to perfection after India had lost both their openers -- Angkrish Raghuvanshi (16) and Harnoor Singh (15) -- inside the 50-run mark, in the 17th overs.

The Indian bowlers, then, produced a cohesive effort to bundle out Bangladesh for 140 runs in 38.2 overs.

Ariful Islam top-scored for Bangladesh with a 77-ball 42, while opener Mahfijul Islam made 26.

Bangladesh's chase never got going as the Indian bowlers picked up wickets at regular intervals, with only Ariful providing some resistance.

For India, Ravi Kumar (2/22), Vicky Ostwal (2/25), Raj Bawa (2/26) and Rajvardhan Hangargekar (2/36) shared eight wickets between them, while Kaushal Tambe (1/5) and Nishant Sindhu (1/25) picked up a wicket each.

Earlier, the Indian openers found the going tough and it was only after their dismissals that the run rate started to improve.

**Even though it wasn't an extravagant knock from Rasheed, he did enough to give the Indian bowlers a target to defend. He struck three boundaries and one six during his unconquered innings**

Hangargekar (16) also played useful hands to provide Rasheed support from the other end.

Even though it wasn't an extravagant knock from Rasheed, he did enough to give the Indian bowlers a target to defend. He struck three boundaries and one six during his unconquered innings.

For Bangladesh U-19, left-arm orthodox spinner Rakibul Hasan was the pick of the bowlers with figures of three for 41 from his 10 overs.

India will face Sri Lanka in the title clash in Dubai on Friday.

Sri Lanka defeated Pakistan by 22 runs in another semifinal clash.

Sri Lanka made a modest 147 all out after opting to bat and then restricted Pakistan to 125.

Brief Scores: India U-19: 243 for 8 in 50 overs. (Shaik Rasheed 90; Rakibul Hasan 3/41) beat Bangladesh U-19: 140 all out in 38.2 overs (Ariful Islam 42; Ravi Kumar 2/22, Vicky Ostwal 2/25, Raj Bawa 2/26, Rajvardhan Hangargekar 2/36) by 103 runs.

# ENGLAND CRICKET COACH MUST ISOLATE

AP ■ MELBOURNE

England cricket coach Chris Silverwood will be absent for the fourth Ashes test against Australia after a COVID-19 outbreak in the England team's camp grew to seven confirmed cases.

Silverwood needs to isolate following a positive test for the coronavirus among a family member of the touring party. There was no indication that Silverwood has the virus.

He will have to isolate for 10 days -- along with his family -- in Melbourne, where the third test was played. The fourth test starts in Sydney on Jan. 5.

England lost the third test, and with it the series, as Australia took an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match Ashes.

England said the positive test for what it



WILL MISS 4TH ASHES TEST

termed "one family member" happened on Wednesday. A further round of PCR tests will be administered on Thursday.

England's touring party has recorded seven positive cases -- three support staff and four family members -- since

a PCR testing regime was implemented on Monday. The players are due to fly to Sydney on Friday ahead of the fourth test.

Cricket Australia is confident the Sydney test can go ahead as planned, despite rising case numbers in the city and the outbreak in England's camp.

Both teams will fly to Sydney on a chartered flight on Friday morning, and have an entire hotel complex booked out for them in the city's eastern suburbs to minimize risk of contracting the virus. The fifth test is scheduled for Adelaide in mid-January.

# Captain and coach should have a say in team selection: Shastri

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri believes that the coach and the captain should have a say in the national team selection.

A captain sits in the selection committee to give his inputs but decision making power lies with the five-member selection panel while the coach doesn't have a seat on the table.

"I think it is extremely important that the captain and the coach should have a say in team selection. I think going forward, both should officially have a say. Especially if the coach is experienced enough, like I was and now how Rahul (Dravid) is," Shastri told Star Sports.

Head coach is part of selection panel in Australia and England.

According to Shastri, himself a former India all-rounder and former Mumbai captain, the skipper



must get to see the mindsets of the selectors.

"It should happen in a meeting - not on the phone or outside - where the captain is there, so that he gets to see the mindsets of the selectors.

"What happens in the meeting

when the convenor is there, all the big boys are there -- he should be in that meeting," added the 59-year-old.

Legendary Rahul Dravid has taken over as the coach of the India team from the last home series against New Zealand, succeeding Shastri.

# Veteran Ross Taylor to retire from international cricket



AP ■ WELLINGTON

Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor says he will retire from international cricket after the current domestic season.

The second test against Bangladesh next month, in which he likely will equal Daniel Vettori's record of 112 tests for New Zealand, will be his last.

Taylor won't play in the Black Caps test series against South Africa in February but will play one-day international series against Australia in Australia in February and against the Netherlands at home in late March and early April.

The fourth ODI against the Netherlands in Taylor's home town of Hamilton on April 4 will be his last match for New Zealand.

"It's been an amazing journey and I feel incredibly fortunate to have represented my country for as long as I have," Taylor said in a statement Thursday.

"It's been such a privilege to play with and against some of the greats of the game and to have created so many memories and friendships along the way. But all good things must come to an end and the timing feels right for me."

Taylor will retire as New Zealand's top-scorer in test and one-day international matches. He has 7,584 test runs and 19 centuries, second only to current captain Kane

Williamson, and 8,581 runs in ODIs, ahead of Stephen Fleming (8,007). His 21 ODI centuries also are a New Zealand record.

Taylor made his test debut against South Africa in 2008 and played the first of 233 ODIs against the West Indies in 2006. He has also played 102 Twenty20 internationals, becoming the first player to play more than 100 matches for New Zealand in all three formats.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead said Taylor unquestionably is one of the country's greatest players.

"Ross has always been a hugely respected member of the side and we're thankful for his contributions to the Black Caps over an incredible career," Stead said.

"His skills and temperament as a batsman have been world-class and his ability to perform at such a high level for so long speaks volumes of his longevity and professionalism."

Williamson also praised the achievements of his long-time batting partner.

"Ross has been at the core of the side for so long and can be extremely proud of having brought the game in this country to a better place," Williamson said.

"He's a world-class player, our best with the bat over such a long period of time and personally it's been a pleasure to be involved in so many partnerships with him across the formats.

# Breaching 90m will put me in list of world's best throwers: Neeraj

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An Olympic gold medal already in his pocket, star Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra has his eyes set on breaching the 90m mark which he feels will get him an entry in the list of world's best throwers.

Neeraj, who clinched the historic gold with a throw of 87.58m in his second attempt at the Tokyo Olympics, has been eyeing the coveted 90m for quite some time now. His personal best is 88.07m.

"Medal is one thing, distance is another. Crossing the 90m mark will put me in the list of the world's best throwers," Neeraj said during a virtual media interaction.

"I am close to it and can hit the mark soon, but I don't think about too much. But there is no pressure on me that if I don't reach the mark then 'gadbhad ho jaega'."



The 24-year-old is confident that the mark is around the corner and certain tweaks in his technique will help him achieve his goal.

"The gap is of about 2m. It's not too less also but I don't think it's impossible because my training is good. I don't think about it much but it's a barrier that I'd like to breach this year.

"No major changes in my technique, I'll need to improve what I am already doing. I'll also look to work on explosive strength, core strength and speed as these factors will add up and the distance will be covered," he added.

Neeraj, who had ended India's 100-year wait for a track and field medal in the Olympics, revealed that he gained over 10kg after the Tokyo Games.

"I ate everything I wanted to after I came back from the Olympics, I did not hold back

because I was controlling for so long. I had gained close to 12-13 kgs.

Neeraj had decided to end his 2021 season after the Olympics but having returned to training at Chula Vista, USA now, the 2018 Commonwealth gold medalist is back to his off-season weight but it wasn't an easy task.

"I've been training for about 22 days now and have cut down 5.5 kgs so far and now my weight is close to the off-season weight.

"The initial few days of training were hard, my body would hurt and the workouts felt very difficult. I had to put in a lot of effort.

I was always physically tired but I pushed through despite being exhausted. I'm training hard now so that I can get to javelin-specific training soon."

Neeraj, also a junior world champion, is now bracing up for a packed 2022 calendar that

includes the Commonwealth and Asian Games, World Championship and the Diamond League. He is well aware that the competition will be tough.

"There are a lot of athletes who have already thrown above 90m. Athletes from the junior (Worlds) are also there like Anderson Peters from Grenada. He is also near to 90m.

"Johannes Vetter is giving a good performance. So, competitions will be very tough. We'll see when the season starts what happens."

Asked what changes can be brought to the Indian sporting system to make it better, Neeraj said international exposure is a must for elite athletes doing well and also those who are coming up.

"I think elite level athletes should get more competitions and especially international competitions. Right now, only the best athletes get them.

## Hockey India picks 60 players for national camp

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Thursday announced a list of 60 players, selected for the senior men's national camp, beginning January 3 in Bengaluru.

The players have been selected based on their performance at the recently concluded Senior National Championship, Junior Men National Championship and other Hockey India sanctioned domestic events.

The 60-member list will be further pruned down to 33 players ahead of the team's preparations for the FIH Pro League 2022 matches.

"We are already in the new Olympic cycle now, so everything starts from zero. It's really important to move ahead and start afresh," said India head coach Graham Reid.

"With the FIH Pro League, Asian Games 2022, and various other top-level tournaments lined up ahead, it will be very crucial for us to have a strong pool of 33 as we gear up for the



challenging 2022 season."

Selected players:

Goalkeepers: Sreejesh P.R, Krishan B Pathak, Suraj Karkera, Prashant Kumar Chauhan, Pawan, Kamalbir Singh, Pankaj Kumar Rajak, Ayush Dwivedi.

Defenders: Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Surender Kumar, Varun Kumar, Gurinder Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Dipsan Tirkey, Mandeep Mor, Sanjay, Yashdeep Siwach, Dinachandra Singh Moirangthem, Abhisek Lakra,

Manjeet, Mohd Faraz, Parampreet Singh.

Midfielders: Manpreet Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Sumit, Hardik Singh, Jaskaran Singh, Rajkumar Pal, Shamsheer Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem, Mareswaran Sakthivel, Biju Ekka, Sheshe Gowda B M, Ashis Kumar Topno, Jugraj Singh, Bharath K R, Likhith BM, Keshav Tyagi, Sushil Dhanwar

Forwards: Simranjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Akashdeep Singh, Gursahibjit Singh, Shilanand Lakra, Dilpreet Singh, Maninder Singh, S. Karthi, Prabhjot Singh, Pardeep Singh, Abhishek, Abharan Sudev, Mohd. Raheel, Sukhjeet Singh, Pawan Rajbhar, Mohd Umar.

## Bansod, Manjunath clinch singles title at All India senior Ranking meet

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Second seed Malvika Bansod and eighth seed Mithun Manjunath registered convincing straight games victories to clinch the women's and men's singles titles at the All India Senior Ranking badminton tournament here on Thursday.

The mixed doubles combination of Rohan Kapoor and Sanjana Santosh bagged their second straight crown at the meet.

In women's singles final, Bansod upset top seed and last weeks senior ranking tournament winner Aakarshi Kashyap 21-15, 21-9 in 42 minutes while Mithun stopped former world junior No. 1 Aditya Joshi's run from



the qualifying round 21-15, 21-4 in the men's singles summit clash.

On a day when all the finals were decided in straight games, the wildcard combination of Kapoor and Sanjana were the only winners from the Chennai leg last week to finish on the top of the podium once again as they packed off Dhruv Rawat and Shikha Gautam 21-14, 21-13 in just 33 minutes to underline their overall development over the last year.

The women's doubles title went to the makeshift combination of Simran Singh and Khushi Gupta, who came together for this tournament after the former's regular partner Ritika Thaker was ruled out due to injury.

Khushi and Simran defeated Telangan's Vennala K and Shrivanshi Valishetty 21-16, 21-13 to clinch their first senior national title.

In the men's doubles final, Kerala's Ravikrishna PS and Sankarprasad Udayakumar made it to their second consecutive final after having to qualify for the main draw.

But just like in Chennai, they failed to cross the final hurdle as the experienced combination of Krishna Prasad Gagara and Vishnuvardhan Goud P got the better of them 21-9, 21-12 in the last match of the day. 2012 Olympic medallist Saina Nehwal was present at the prize distribution as the champions received an overall prize money of 10 lakh.

## Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova tests positive for Covid-19

AP ■ MELBOURNE

French Open finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova has tested positive for COVID-19, casting doubt on her place in the Australian Open beginning Jan. 17.

The 30-year-old Russian confirmed she has the coronavirus and is isolating after arriving in Australia on Tuesday. "I was fully vaccinated and was preparing for the start of the season in Dubai," Pavlyuchenkova said on social media Thursday.

"But we live in a very dif-

ficult and unpredictable time. Right now I am in complete isolation, in a special hotel and following all the protocols under the supervision of doctors. "Now it's important to take care of yourself and the health of others. I'll be back on court when it's safe for everyone." Pavlyuchenkova is coming off one of her best seasons.

After making her first Grand Slam final in June — a loss to Barbora Krejickova at Roland Garros — Pavlyuchenkova is now ranked a career-high 11th. Pavlyuchenkova, whose best



result at Melbourne Park is reaching the quarterfinals in 2017, 2019 and 2020, is still searching for her first major

singles title. The opening event of the women's season is the WTA 500 in Adelaide, starting on Sunday.



## Vaishali in 2nd place in women's section, Humpy joint third

PTI ■ WARSAW (POLAND)

Twenty-year old Indian player R Vaishali is in second place with 7.5 points from nine rounds in the women's section of the World Blitz chess championship here while her countrywoman Koneru Humpy is in joint third.

Vaishali, sister of the Indian chess prodigy and GM R Praggnanandhaa, scored impressive victories over Mariya Muzychuk (Ukraine) and Russia's Valentina Gunina on the opening day of the Blitz championship. At the end of nine rounds late on Wednesday, Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan is the leader with eight points.

In the ninth round, Vaishali put it across Polina Shuvalova (Russia) and faces Assaubayeva next. Humpy, the country's top player, has a share of the third place along with Russian Alexandra Kosteniuk, who managed to recover from a loss in the first round to Turkey's Ekaterina Atalik and another Kazakh player, 21-year old Zhansaya Abdumalik.

Humpy defeated Aleksandra Goryachkina in the ninth round and will meet Kosteniuk in the 10th round. Humpy had finished sixth with 7.5 points in the Rapid event. The other Indians - Vantika Agrwal and Padmini Rout are placed

32nd and 57th respectively with 5 and 4.5 points each. In the open event, defending champion Magnus Carlsen got off to a bad start, having suffered three losses on the first day and is a point and a half behind the tournament leader Levon

Aronian.

Sitting alone at the top on 10/12, Aronian (who in 2010 won the world blitz) lost just one game but beat all of his main opponents of the day. He is, however, yet to play the defending champion Carlsen as well as American Hikaru Nakamura (who has won the silver medal in the previous edition of the event). Eighteen-year old Indian GM Arjun Erigaisi held world No.1 Carlsen to a draw in the 12th round in a 72-move game with black pieces.

He has 8.5 points and is in 12th place, the highest among the Indian players in the Open event. Young GM D Gukesh, who finished a creditable 9th in the World Rapid championship, has scored 6.5 points in 12 rounds to be in 81st place.

Vidit Gujrathi, who share honours with compatriot Nihal Sarin in round 12, is the next highest placed Indian after Erigaisi with 8.5 points to occupy the 27th spot. Gujrathi (7.5 points) is 35th followed by P Harikrishna (7 pts, 48th).

The other Indians and their positions in the open section - Abhimanyu Puranik (6.5 pts, 60th), Hasha Bharathakoti (6.5, 64th), Raunak Sadhwani (6, 90th), Mitrabha Guha (6, 95th), S L Narayanan (5.5, 109th), Sankalp Gupta (5.5, 119th) and Aditya Mittal (3.5, 170th).

In the open event, Egypt's Bassem Amen has pulled off a big surprise so far, finishing day one alone in second place, with 9.5 points and is followed by the top Iranian player and former junior world champion Parham Maghsoodloo who is on 9 points.

## Barcelona's Covid-19 outbreak swells to 10 players

AP ■ BARCELONA

The number of confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the Barcelona squad swelled to 10 on Thursday, potentially jeopardizing the team's return to league play after Spain's winter break of nearly two weeks.

Sergio Dest, Philippe Coutinho and Abde Ezzalzouli are the latest players to contract COVID-19, Barcelona said. They are self-isolating at home and the team said they were "in good health." The club already announced this week that Ousmane Dembélé, Samuel



Umtiti, Gavi, Jordi Alba, Alejandro Balde, Clement Lenglet and Dani Alves had tested positive and were isolating. Barcelona is also depleted by injuries going into Sunday's match at Mallorca in seventh place.

Real Madrid said Wednesday that four players — Vinicius Jr., Thibaut Courtois, Federico Valverde and Eduardo Camavinga — tested positive for COVID-19 ahead of Sunday's game against Getafe.

During the break, Dest and Vinicius had posted photos on Instagram of their respective

trips to Miami. They included court-side photos at a Miami Heat basketball game and pictures with star Jimmy Butler. Vinicius' account included one of him with Heat guard Tyler Herro. They all wore masks in the photos. On Wednesday, the Heat was unable to meet the NBA's requirement of eight available players for the game against San Antonio, leading to it being postponed.

Miami had 12 players listed as out because of a combination of injuries and positive virus tests.

## City strengthens grip on EPL title by taking 8-point lead

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City's grip on its Premier League title hasn't been this strong all season.

A 1-0 win at Brentford on Wednesday, coupled with Chelsea conceding a stoppage-time goal to draw 1-1 against Brighton, left the defending champions with an eight-point lead heading into the new year.

It has been an almost perfect 24 hours for City, which saw Liverpool — another rival for the title — surprisingly lose 1-0 at injury-hit Leicester on Tuesday. Chelsea has moved a point ahead of third-place

Liverpool before their meeting at Stamford Bridge on Sunday, when at least one of the teams will drop points.

Liverpool has a game in hand, but will soon lose star forwards Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane to the African Cup of Nations.

City wasn't at its fluent best against Brentford — Pep Guardiola's team came into the match having scored 17 goals in its last three matches — but still did enough to earn a 10th straight win in the league.

"I am not going to believe you when you say it is already done," Guardiola said.



"There are 54 points still to play for" Yet City is even winning when not playing its best.

Phil Foden grabbed the only goal in the 16th minute, diverting a cross from Kevin De Bruyne into the net from close range. Video review showed Foden was just inside when he applied the finish.

It was the perfect way for Foden to mark his return to the starting lineup, alongside Jack Grealish, after both forwards were dropped to the bench for

City's last two games for disciplinary reasons.

"Around Christmas you have to keep your foot on the gas and keep focused," Foden said.

"This team is doing that."

"City concluded a calendar year when the team has set English top-flight records for the most victories (36) and the most away wins (19), while its tally of 113 goals is also a Premier League record.

## Bulls beat Hawks for 2nd time in 3 nights, run streak to 5

AP ■ CHICAGO

Zach LaVine scored 25 points and the Chicago Bulls beat the Atlanta Hawks for the second time in three nights, 131-117.

The Bulls extended their winning streak to a season-high five games. The Hawks, who are playing without 15 players due to the NBA's health and safety protocols and injuries, lost for the fifth time in six games.

The Bulls shot 61.9% and had a season-high with 38 assists. They beat the Hawks 130-118 on Monday night in Atlanta.

Trey Young scored 26 points for Atlanta, and Clint Capela added 18 in the opener of a six-game trip. "We got three-fourths of our team out," Young said. "I came to shoot around not knowing most of my teammates."

LaVine punctuated his performance with a 360 dunk that extended the Bulls' lead to 119-96 with 6:44 left.

Nicola Vucevic had 16 points and a season-high 20 rebounds for Chicago. DeMar DeRozan scored 20 points, and guard Coby White had 17 points and 12 assists. Reserve guard Ayo Dosunmu converted 6 of 7 shots and finished with 14 points, as did Javonte Green.

"I think people realize how good (LaVine) is," Bulls interim coach Chris Fleming said. "I think that secret is out. He's been an All-Star and has played at an extremely high level."

The Bulls made 40 of 43 field goal attempts in the first half (69.8%), including 6 of 10 three-point attempts. The Bulls had an 18-1 run to end the first half with a 74-53 lead.

They were credited with 24 assists in the first half without point guard Lonzo Ball, who is in health and safety protocols.