

## OPINION 6

RESTORE DETERRENCE  
ALONG LAC FOR PEACE

## WORLD 9

WESTERN NEW YORK HIT BY COLD,  
STORM; DEATH TOLL UPS TO 28

## MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY RISE FOR 2ND DAY AS  
BANKING, METAL SHARES SHINE

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 28, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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# Hold local body polls sans OBC quota: HC to UP Govt

Yogi says 'will hold  
elections only after  
ensuring quota', UP  
Govt to move SC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court on Tuesday quashed the State Government's draft notification on urban local body elections and ordered holding the polls without reservation for the OBCs. The verdict passed by a division bench of Justice DK Upadhyay and Justice Saurav Lavaniya annulled the December 5 draft notification issued by the Uttar Pradesh Government providing reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the urban local body elections.

The bench ordered the State Election Commission to immediately issue notification for the election.

Unfazed by the HC order, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the elections would not be held before the grant of reservation to the OBCs and the State would go to the Supreme Court to challenge the High Court's order for immediate notification of elections, if need be.

"The UP Government will



constitute a commission as directed by the Allahabad High Court that will conduct a survey of OBCs as per the SC guidelines. We will not go for the elections without ensuring reservation for the OBCs. If required, we will go to the Supreme Court against the High Court's order," Yogi said.

The verdict comes in the light of PILs challenging the preparation of the OBC reservation draft without following the triple test formula prescribed by the Supreme Court.

The petitioners had pleaded that the State Government must follow the apex court formula and constitute a dedicated commission to study the political backwardness of OBCs before fixing the reservation.

The State Government contended that it had con-

ducted a rapid survey and said it was as good as the triple test. But the HC brushed aside the argument that a rapid survey was as good as the triple test.

The UP Government had earlier this month issued a provisional list of reserved seats for mayors of 17 municipal corporations, chairpersons of 200 municipal councils and 545 nagar panchayats and sought suggestions/objections within seven days.

According to the December 5 draft, four mayoral seats — Aligarh, Mathura-Vrindavan, Meerut and Prayagraj — were reserved for OBC candidates. Of these, the mayor's posts in Aligarh and Mathura-Vrindavan were reserved for OBC women.

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## SP, BSP, Congress tear into Yogi Govt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Congress launched a scathing attack on the Yogi Adityanath Government over the decision of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, which ordered holding the local body polls without reservation for the OBCs.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav slammed the Government and said it was the result of a conspiracy by the BJP Government to deprive the backward classes of reservation.

"The Allahabad High Court directing conduct of the urban local body elections without OBC quota is unfortunate. Relevant facts were deliberately not placed before the bench of the Allahabad High Court by the Uttar Pradesh Government. The OBCs who constitute 60 per cent of the population have been deprived of their constitutional right of reservation," Yadav said on Tuesday.

He added that the "BJP manipulated the issue of reservation for

the OBCs only for its political interests."

BSP supremo Mayawati tweeted that the State Government had to finalise the process of elections by fixing the system of OBC reservation on the basis of a triple test, following the instructions of the Supreme Court with full devotion and honesty, which didn't happen.

"The OBC society will definitely punish the BJP for this mistake," she said.

The Backward Classes Department of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee too slammed the Yogi Government, alleging that the present BJP Government is systematically denying the backwards and Dalits their rights in the civic elections.

Manoj Yadav, president of the backward classes department of UPCC, said the BJP and the Yogi Government wanted to end reservation. He said that under the guise of the HC order, the BJP was determined to end the reservation system for the deprived communities in the elections.

## No foul play in citizens' death: Russian embassy

Antov, vocal against  
Putin's Ukraine  
attack, and his  
friend, found dead  
in 2 days in Odisha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As mystery shrouds the death of two Russian citizens within a span of two days in Odisha at the same hotel, the Russian embassy said here on Tuesday the local police have not found any criminal link in the deaths.

This assertion came against the backdrop of reports alleging foul play.

The two deceased were identified as Pavel Antov and Vladimir Bidenov. Their post-mortem was conducted on Monday.

Authorities and the Russian Embassy are treating it a suicide case.

Antov, a multi-millionaire and elected politician, was reportedly highly critical of President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and called it "terror".

"We are in constant contact with the relatives of the deceased as well as with local authorities. As we know, police do not yet see a criminal component in these tragic events," the Russian Embassy said.

Antov, 65, was found dead in a pool of blood at a hotel in Odisha's Rayagada district on



Saturday, December 24. Reports say he fell from the terrace of the hotel and died.

Antov was in Odisha for his 66th birthday celebrations.

He was travelling with 61-year-old Vladimir Bidenov, his associate, and a couple, Mikhail Turov and Natalia Panasenka. They were also accompanied by an Indian tourist guide.

Bidenov was found dead in the same hotel just two days before Antov's death. He was found lying unconscious in his room on the first floor of the hotel.

As per police, Bidenov died due to a stroke and was cremated. His friend, Antonov, was depressed after Vladimir's death and he too died on December 25, the police further said.

The police are investigating

Pavel's death from all angles, including the possibility that he has fallen from the terrace accidentally.

"First tourist was found unconscious, after medical examination he was found dead. Second tourist was mentally disturbed after his friend's cremation, he was found lying on hotel premises. When taken to hospital, he was found dead," the owner of hotel Sai International in Rayagada, where the Russian tourists stayed, told the media.

Pavel Antov is not the first high-profile Russian to have died a mysterious and sudden death. In September this year, oil boss Ravil Maganov died after falling to his death from the sixth floor of a hospital in Russia. He was reportedly on antidepressants.

## China ends Covid ban on foreigners' arrival from Jan 8

PTI ■ BEIJING

Days after it faced nationwide anti-government protests against its stringent zero-Covid policy, China in a major shift of its coronavirus response policies has announced that it will scrap quarantine for international travellers from January 8 next year as it reopens its borders and comes out of international isolation after nearly three years.

The National Health Commission (NHC) on Monday announced that Covid-19 management will be downgraded from Class A to B from next month, in the same category as less-severe diseases, such as dengue fever.

China will cancel inbound quarantine for international arrivals starting from January 8, 2023, it said.

Previously passengers coming from abroad had to mandatorily stay in over two weeks of quarantine in government accommodations, which was gradually reduced to five days with three days' of observation.

These announcements come at a time when the country is grappling with a sudden spurt in coronavirus infections fuelled by the Omicron variant after the Xi Jinping regime relaxed its stringent zero-Covid policy earlier this month following a wave of anti-government protests.

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## Nationwide mock drills assess Covid combat readiness

IMA, top doctors  
urge Govt to allow  
people to take  
2nd booster dose

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday held Covid response mock drill across the country as part of precautionary measures to check its preparedness to deal with any surge in cases with Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya cautioning that the country might witness a spike in cases and there is a need to be on the guard.

"It is important that the entire Covid infrastructure in terms of equipment, processes and human resources are at a state of operational readiness", Mandaviya said after reviewing the Covid response mock drill at the centre-run Safdarjung Hospital here to check its readiness to deal with any increase

in the number of coronavirus cases.

"I reviewed the Covid response mock drill at Safdarjung Hospital. This mock drill was necessary to know how prepared our hospitals are," the minister said.

"Covid cases are rising all over the world and India might witness a spike in cases too. Hence it is important that the entire Covid infrastructure in terms of equipment, processes and human resources are at a state of operational readiness," he stated.

Meanwhile, representatives of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and other top doctors and public health experts on Tuesday urged the Minister to allow people to take their second coronavirus booster doses.

The meeting, over a video conference, was called to discuss the preparedness for any possible surges in the outbreak.

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Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya speaks with a doctor as a medic collects swab sample of a woman, during a nationwide mock drill for Covid-19 preparedness, at Safdarjung hospital in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

## On rethink, BJP to contest MCD mayor, deputy polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a U-turn on its earlier stand on not contesting the mayoral elections in Delhi, the BJP on Tuesday named Rekha Gupta and Kamal Bagdi as its candidates for the posts of mayor and deputy mayor of the MCD. Gupta is a three-term councillor from Shalimar Bagh, while Bagdi is a first-timer from Ram Nagar.

The elections for the post of mayor and deputy mayor will be held on January 6.

The BJP has also named Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Gajendra Daral and Pankaj Luthra for the standing committee member posts.

The AAP has named Dr Shelly Oberoi and Aaleq Mohammad Iqbal for the mayor and deputy mayor posts.

The AAP ended the BJP's 15-year-rule in the MCD winning 134 of the 250 wards in the civic body polls earlier this month. The BJP managed to win 104 wards. One indepen-



dent candidate joined the BJP on Monday. The Congress has nine councillors, while there are two independent councillors.

The BJP's mayor candidate, Gupta, has been a general secretary and member of the party's national executive. She was the president of the Delhi University Students Union from 1996 to 1997. She has a stronghold in North Delhi's

Pitampura area.

Gupta, after filing her nomination, asserted that she will contest the election with full strength. "I appeal to all the councillors that vote for the development and betterment of Delhi. I hope they will choose the right mayor for the city by listening to the voice of their conscience," she said.

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## Maha resolution plans to merge Marathi-speaking K'taka villages into State

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Reiterating its stand that it would pursue its litigation in the Supreme Court for inclusion of 865 disputed border villages in the State, the Maharashtra Assembly on Tuesday adopted a resolution urging the Centre to implement the decision taken at the recent joint meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah with the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Eknath Shinde and Chief Minister of Karnataka Basavaraj Bommai in New Delhi.

In its resolution passed unanimously in the ongoing winter session of the State Legislature in Nagpur, the Maharashtra Assembly expressed its solidarity with the Marathi-speaking people in border areas and asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah to seek an undertaking from the Karnataka Government for the safety of its people living in the

border areas.

Condemning the Karnataka Government for its acts of "oppressing and terrorising the Marathi population" and also for its "anti-Marathi" stand in the border areas, the Eknath Shinde Government reiterated its claim for inclusion of 865 Marathi-speaking areas in Maharashtra.

While moving the resolution on Maharashtra-Karnataka border issue, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said, "All the necessary efforts would be made in the Supreme Court for inclusion of Belgaum, Karwar, Nipani, Bhalki, Bidar towns and 865 Marathi-speaking villages of Karnataka in Maharashtra under any circumstance."

The resolution said, "The Maharashtra Government stands firmly with the Marathi-speaking people in 865 Marathi-speaking villages in the border areas."

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## Modi's brother, family injured in road accident near Mysuru

PTI ■ MYSURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brother Prahlad Modi and family members sustained injuries when the car in which they were travelling met with an accident near here, police said on Tuesday.

According to sources, other than the driver, Prahlad Modi, his son, daughter-in-law and a grandchild were in the car.

They are said to have suffered some injuries and have been shifted to JSS Hospital for treatment.

As per the police, the injuries are said to be "minor" in nature.

The incident happened near Kadakola around 1.30 pm when their car, on the way to Bandipur, is said to have hit the road divider.

Mysuru Superintendent of Police Seema Latkar has visited the spot and the hospital, sources said.

A doctor at the hospital said, "all were stable with minor injuries when they came, they



Wrecked remains of the car after an accident in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brother Prahlad Modi and family members were reportedly travelling, in Mysuru on Tuesday

PTI

were immediately attended and are out of danger without any major bleeding. X-rays and CT scans have been done...Only the child has suffered a small fracture on left leg tibia, but it is not major and is being treated."

Member of Parliament

from Mysuru-Kodagu constituency Pratap Simha, who visited the hospital too, said the family that was on a private visit had sustained "minor" injuries, and the child has suffered a minor fracture, and is undergoing treatment.

Continued on Page 2



**NCR-PULSE**

**TATA POWER-DDL INKS MOU WITH NTPC BUSINESS SCHOOL**  
**New Delhi:** In line with its vision to create a large reservoir of qualified and trained manpower in the energy sector, Tata Power-DDL has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NTPC School of Business. This partnership will address the training and human resource development needs of the power distribution personnel, bringing together the expertise and resources of two industry leaders for the overall benefit of the sector.

**GOONS ROB CASH COLLECTION AGENTS OF ₹24 LAKH**  
**Noida:** Two unidentified goons allegedly chased two motorcycle-borne employees of a cash collection agency on another two-wheeler and robbed them of over Rs 24 lakh at Chakkarpur village here, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place near Radha Krishna Temple around 2.50 pm on Monday.

**COURT GRANTS BAIL TO ACCUSED IN EXTORTION CASE**  
**New Delhi:** A Delhi court has granted bail to an accused in an extortion case, saying "bail cannot be denied by taking merits into consideration as a punishment". Special Judge Shailender Malik granted relief to one Anuj Srivastava, accused of extorting money from a 85-year-old man by threatening to falsely implicate him in a rape case.

**SCHOLARSHIP FOR GIRLS FOR MEDICAL, ENGINEERING**  
**New Delhi:** Lotus Petal Foundation is inviting applications from across India for the Winnie Sun Scholarship Programme for deserving girl students from low-income families, whose combined income is less than 5 Lakh per annum, to pursue higher education in the fields of medicine, engineering, nursing, and pharmacy. The scholarship provides financial aid up to Rs 65,000 per annum to 50 meritorious girls who apply by January 15, 2023.

# 30-yr-old woman, son die in wall collapse in Delhi

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
**NEW DELHI**

A 30-year-old woman and her three-year-old son died, while another seven-day-old son was critically injured when the roof of an old building in the walled city here collapsed on them on Tuesday.

According to a senior police official, the deceased have been identified as Ruksara and her son Alia, they added.

The Chandni Mahal police station registered a call regarding the incident of roof collapse in a building at Pahari Rajan, Chitli Qabar.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Shweta Chauhan said Ruksara was staying at her father's house with her five children.

"Ruksara and her son Alia were brought dead to a hospital, while her son Junaid is in a critical condition. The other children are fine," the officer said.

Police said the incident occurred in the morning hours when the occupants of the house were asleep.

Ruksana had recently given birth to twin babies -- Junaid and Judera, a girl. The two other children are named Abdul Rehman (5) and Subhan (1), police said.



A police team rushed to the spot and evacuated the residents of the building as well as those living in the adjacent buildings.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) said the residential building consisted of a ground floor, a first floor and a partly-constructed second floor. It was constructed "nearly 100 years ago".

"From a local inquiry, it has been observed that the inside portions of the 'parchhatti' was in a dilapidated condition and repair was to be carried out at the level of the owner or the occupier. The MCD has no role to play in the matter," the civic body said in a statement.

After the incident was reported, a junior engineer, along with subordinate staff, went to the site and found that the "red stone" parchhatti at the ground-floor level of the prop-

# India-backed projects in Myanmar, Af hit by pol-eco situation: MEA

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

India-backed projects have suffered setbacks in Afghanistan and faced numerous challenges in Myanmar due to the current political and security situations in these countries, the Ministry of External Affairs has informed a Parliamentary panel.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs chaired by BJP MP P P Chaudhary noted that there has been a reduction in allocation in aid to Afghanistan.

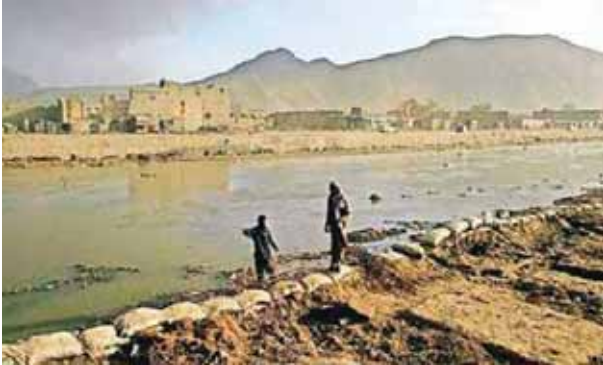
In an action taken report tabled in Parliament last week, the Ministry of External Affairs said it has noted the parliamentary panel's observations and will work towards

addressing them.

India's development partnership with Afghanistan includes more than 500 projects spread across each of its 34 provinces and in various sectors.

"Several proposals in this regard are already under process. Due to the political and security situation in Afghanistan, projects implementation has suffered setbacks," the ministry said in the report.

Responding to the parliamentary committee's observations on allocations to Myanmar, the ministry said despite the ongoing political situation in the country, India has completed and handed over a capacity building institution each on information technology and agriculture



research in March this year.

Talking about the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the ministry said its waterways component has been completed. While the construction work on its road component has been slow, "mainly due to the security situation on the

Myanmar side and the delay caused due to COVID-19 pandemic."

"Given the current security and political situation in Myanmar, implementation and execution of the above projects have been met with numerous challenges," the ministry said.

## Law student held for death of delivery man in hit & run



**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
**NEW DELHI**

A 20-year-old law student has been arrested over the death of a food delivery executive here after his motorcycle was hit by a speeding car bearing the sticker of "judge" on its bonnet, the Noida Police said Tuesday.

There were two more law students in the car at the time of the accident but they are at large. All three are friends of the son of a family court judge and had taken the car to go to Ghaziabad when the accident took place, an official said.

The 27-year-old Zomato delivery executive was near Parthala Chowk when the Toyota Corolla car with registration in Prayagraj hit it around 1.30 am on Monday.

The delivery executive, identified as Parvinder Kumar, was taken to a private hospital in Bisrakh area but was pronounced dead on arrival, the police said. The occupants of the car had also fled the spot after the crash, leaving the damaged vehicle behind, according to the police.

On Tuesday, a Noida Police spokesperson said, "Suyash Mishra, the driver of the car has been arrested. The delivery executive had got hit by the negligently-driven car, causing him severe injuries that led to his death on the spot."

Mishra, a native of Gwalior district in Madhya Pradesh, was arrested from his current place of residence in Shakti Khand area of adjoining Ghaziabad district, the official said.

## Minor girl found hanging, kin allege rape & murder

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

In a suspected case of rape and murder, the body of a minor girl, who was the daughter of a sweeper living in Dharamshala market area of Gorakhpur, was found hanging. The bereaved family members created a ruckus, alleging that police refused to register a case and forced them for cremation after sunset.

The victim's father, a native of Padrauna area in Kushinagar district, is a sweeper at a hospital in Gorakhpur. He has been living with his wife and 16-year-old daughter (now dead) in a rented room in Dharamshala market area for the last four years. His wife also works as a labourer.

The victim's father went to his village (Padrauna) along

## BJP: AAP snatched morsel of 20L elderly by not giving them pension since July

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
**NEW DELHI**

Delhi BJP accused the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for snatched the morsel of 20 lakh elderly people by not giving them the pension since July and not accepting the new application for it for the past five years.

"Kejriwal, who calls himself Shravan Kumar, has snatched the morsel of 20 lakh elderly people in the capital. The Delhi government is not giving pension to the elderly since July this year. New applications for old age pension were not accepted in Delhi for the last five years. Lakhs of elders are completely disappointed due to the inefficiency of this government," said Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, while addressing the

media.

"BJP Legislature Party had submitted a memorandum to the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on October 11 this year, stating that since 2018, the Delhi government has put a hold on new applications for old age pension," LoP stated.

Bidhuri said that every year in the budget of the Delhi government, a provision is made for the pension of the elderly, but still the pension is not being issued.

"Whatever the Delhi government has said in response to the memorandum given to the L-G is very shocking and disappointing. It has been replied from the Chief Minister's Office that the decision regarding further pension has not been taken yet and this decision has to be taken by the Cabinet," the LoP claimed.

## China ends Covid ban on foreigners'...

**From Page 1**  
Officials argue that the Omicron variant was not as lethal as the Delta strain, which caused massive casualties all over the world.

Covid-19 has been managed as a top category 'A' infectious disease since 2020, putting it at par with bubonic plague and cholera, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Under Chinese laws, authorities must impose the toughest restrictions such as quarantine and isolation of the

infected and their close contacts, and lockdowns to contain those diseases.

At the border, the infected must be isolated and those who might be infected quarantined, depending on the incubation period.

The NHC also stopped announcing daily Covid cases from Sunday.

The novel coronavirus first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019 before it turned into a pandemic.

## Nationwide mock drills assess Covid combat...

**From Page 1**  
According to sources,

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Mandaviya, exhorted the experts to join the fight against Covid by providing accurate information to allay fears and "prevent an infodemic".

Clinical readiness at hospitals is crucial, Mandaviya said while noting that Governments as well as private hospitals are undertaking mock drills. State Health Ministers are reviewing the drills in their respective states, he said.

Cautioning against complacency, he urged everyone to follow Covid appropriate behaviour. He also asked people to refrain from sharing unverified information and ensure a high level of preparedness.

There are enough funds allocated for Covid and States have been given funds to make

all arrangements, he added.

Dr BL Sherwal, the Medical Superintendent of the Safdarjung Hospital, said, "All symptomatic patients shall be screened, assessed and tested right there in the Covid centre. The report shall be made available within one to two hours following which the decision on admission or discharge shall be taken. Until that time the patient can be monitored. All beds have oxygen facilities."

Similarly, civic and government hospitals in Mumbai conducted mock drills to check their Covid-19 wards and facilities available for patients.

Dr Chandrakant Pawar, medical superintendent of the civic-run Kasturba Hospital which treats patients with infectious diseases, also said they checked their readiness to handle any situation.

The Brihanmumbai

Municipal Corporation (BMC) has identified 10 civic hospitals, three government hospitals and 21 private hospitals having 2,124 isolation beds, of which 1,523 are functional. In Goa too, health authorities reviewed health infrastructure at designated hospitals, including the super speciality block at the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), as part of the mock drill.

Similarly, Gujarat State Health Minister Rushikesh Patel said they have prepared a comprehensive plan and reviewed the preparedness of the existing health infrastructure in case of any eventuality on the pandemic front.

At least one lakh beds and 15,000 ICUs with ventilators are ready to be converted for the use of Covid-19 patients if needed in Gujarat as the state reviewed operational readiness

on Tuesday during a mock drill conducted across various health facilities, he added.

Tamil Nadu Health Minister Ma Subramanian, who oversaw a mock drill at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital said the state had a sufficient stock of medicines, beds, equipment and oxygen to tackle any spike in Covid-19 cases. Also, district-level health officials have been told to inspect the facilities to assess the preparedness and submit a report to the health department soon, he said.

Reiterating that the state machinery is fully prepared to face another wave of the pandemic, Subramanian said that the RGGGH has six months' stock of medicine, 1,954 million tonne oxygen, besides 1,75,291 beds at all the government and private hospitals across the state.

## On rethink, BJP to contest MCD mayor, deputy...

**From Page 1**  
Kamaljit Sehrawat remained a councillor from 2017-22 and during that time also worked on the posts of Mayor and Leader of the House. In 2015, while being the president of Mahila Morcha, she came to the political headlines by surrounding Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at the New Delhi railway station and presenting him with bangles.

Earlier contrasting statements came from the BJP leaders regarding contesting mayor and deputy mayor posts after the MCD poll debacle.

BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya

had suggested the mayor's election was still an open game. "Now over to electing a mayor for Delhi. It will all depend on who can hold the numbers in a close contest, which way the nominated councillors' vote, etc. Chandigarh has a BJP mayor, for instance," he had tweeted.

Days later, then Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta announced that the BJP would not contest for the mayor and deputy mayor post and the next mayor will be from AAP as it had won the election. "BJP will play the role of a strong opposition in

the MCD," he had stated.

Councillors are free to vote for anyone in the mayoral polls, irrespective of party affiliations since the anti-defection law does not apply. The election will be held by secret ballot.

The electoral college for the election of mayor includes 250 councillors, 10 members of Parliament from Delhi, and 1/5th of the members of the Assembly (14) nominated by the Speaker by rotation annually. The Delhi Assembly Speaker on Friday nominated 13 AAP and one BJP lawmaker for representation in the MCD.

## Hold local body polls...

**From Page 1**  
In 2021, the Supreme Court had decreed that the States should hold a "triple test" survey to have contemporary data on OBCs before deciding on the percentage of quota. The argument was that the yardstick for political quota is different from the one for jobs and education, and a survey was required to fix the nature and pattern of backwardness.

"Social and economic backwardness does not necessarily coincide with political backwardness," the SC had said.



# Mock drill for Covid held in Govt-run hospitals in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Post an advisory by the Centre, hospitals across the national Capital on Tuesday conducted mock drills to assess their preparedness, including the availability of beds and manpower, to deal with any surge in Covid-19 cases.

The drill took place in Delhi government-run facilities like LNJP Hospital and private hospitals in the capital. The mock drill will assess bed availability, manpower, referral resources, testing capacity, medical logistics, telemedicine services and medical oxygen availability, among other aspects.

Real-time data on the availability of beds, oxygen cylinders and ventilators will be available for the public on a Delhi government portal from Tuesday, officials have said.

"The Delhi government hospitals are fully prepared for any situation ahead. Lok Nayak Hospital has a total number of 2,000 beds, out of which 450 beds have been reserved for Covid patients.

If needed, we will increase the number of Covid beds to 1000+ by using the hospital's resources. The hospital is fully prepared to fight Covid this time also and we have ensured that there is no shortage of beds," said Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, after inspecting the



Delhi Health Minister Manish Sisodia with Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital (LNJP) Medical Director Suresh Kumar during a mock drill for COVID-19 preparedness, at LNJP hospital in New Delhi on Tuesday

mock drills at LNJP hospital. Sisodia said that the availability of medical oxygen at LNJP hospital has increased manifold as compared to last time. "Five PSA plants have also been installed here.

He told that the preparation of the hospital is of such a level that within 5 minutes of the arrival of a patient, he will be taken to the designated place in the hospital where he needs treatment and the required procedure will start immediately," he said. Speaking about the Delhi Government's preparations for Covid-19, the Deputy CM said

that at present 8,200 Covid beds are reserved in Delhi Government hospitals and if needed, the capacity of beds will be increased from 25,000 to 36,000.

"In addition, the Delhi government has more than 6,000 oxygen cylinders, oxygen tankers to transport oxygen, and 928 metric tons of medical oxygen storage capacity," Sisodia underlined.

The deputy chief minister asked people not to panic, saying primary data suggests that the new BE.7 sub-strain of the coronavirus, which is causing a

surge in infections in other countries, is similar to previous variants. However, the LNJP Medical Director Dr Suresh Kumar said, "We are all set for the drill which will assess our preparedness to deal with any emergency situation related to COVID-19."

COVID-19 testing is also likely to be ramped up soon. At present, around 2,500 to 3,000 tests are being conducted daily in the city, an official said.

Apollo Hospital in south Delhi's Sarita Vihar is among the private hospitals where the drill will be held, sources said.

# Delhi 'cooler' than Nainital! Mercury plunges to 5.6° C

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital shivered on a severe cold day on Tuesday as its minimum temperature fell below that of Dehradun, Dharamsala and Nainital, affecting road traffic and train movement. In comparison, the minimum temperature in Dehradun was recorded at 7 degrees Celsius, Dharamsala at 6.2 degrees Celsius and Nainital at 7.2 degrees Celsius. The visibility was lowered to just 50 metres.

With a high windchill factor -- a measure of the rate of heat loss from skin that is exposed to the air -- in play, the weather office predicted a cold day. At least 15 trains to and from Delhi were reported running late while two were rescheduled, a Railways spokesperson said.

At 5.6 degrees Celsius, Delhi's minimum temperature was less than that of Dharamsala (6.2 degrees Celsius), Dehradun (7 degrees Celsius), and Nainital (7.2 degrees Celsius). According to IMD, cold day conditions prevailed in some parts of the city such as Palam and Jafarpur.

The humidity in the weather of the capital on Tuesday was recorded 97 per cent at 8:30 am and 70 per cent at 5:30 pm, the weather station stated.

As per the data released by the weather station, the obser-



Commuters ply on the road a cold winter morning in New Delhi on Tuesday

RANJAN DIMRI | PIONEER

vatories at, Ayanagar, Palam, Ridge, Jafarpur, Pitampura and Lodhi Road recorded minimum temperatures of 4 degrees Celsius, 5.6 degrees Celsius, 4.4 degrees Celsius, 5.7 degrees Celsius, 8.7 degrees Celsius and 5.2 degrees Celsius, respectively.

A cold day is when the minimum temperature is less than or equal to 10 degrees Celsius below normal and the maximum temperature is at least 4.5 degrees below normal. A severe cold day is when the maximum is 6.5 degrees or more below normal.

The windchill factor is based on wind speed -- the higher the wind speed during cold weather, the colder it feels on the skin if a person is out-

side. Delhi clocked a top wind speed of 16 kilometres per hour on Tuesday. The national capital shivered under a 'severe' cold day on Monday, with the maximum temperature dropping 10 notches below normal at some places.

The Safdarjung observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, recorded a maximum temperature of 15.6 degrees Celsius on Monday, six notches below normal and the lowest day temperature in December since December 17, 2020.

On Tuesday, Safdarjung logged a minimum temperature of 5.6 degrees Celsius -- a notch below normal. The maximum temperature settled at 17.2 degrees Celsius, three

notches below normal. Meteorologists attributed below-normal day temperatures to frigid north westerly winds barrelling through the plains and reduced sunshine due to foggy weather.

Mahesh Palawat, vice president (meteorology and climate change), Skymet Weather, said a western disturbance led to a fresh spell of snowfall in the mountains on December 25-26 and cold northwesterly winds are now sweeping through the plains after its retreat.

He said the wind chill factor was also high. Palawat said coldwave conditions in north-west India would abate from Wednesday under the influence of a fresh western disturbance.

# DDMA withdraws order to deploy teachers on Covid duty at IGIA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A section of teachers on Tuesday wondered, burdened as they are with academic work, why they were chosen over civil defence volunteers for COVID duty at IGI Airport, even as the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) withdrew its order that asked for their deployment at the Delhi Airport. The DDMA had on Monday issued an order directing government school teachers' deployment at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport to enforce COVID protocols. After facing criticism from teachers, the DDMA on Tuesday withdrew its order that was meant to be enforced from December 31 to January 15, and exempted teachers from the COVID duty. The new order said teachers and other teaching staff, who were to be deployed, are exempted from airport duty for the period of December 31 to January 15.



"Further, in case required, civil defence volunteers from district west may be deputed on call out duty basis," the order issued by the district magistrate (west) stated.

The original order had been issued by the district magistrate (West) on behalf of the DDMA. District Secretary

(West-A) of the Government School Teachers Association Sant Ram said that teachers should not be involved in duties other than academics and that government staff apart from teachers should have also been deployed at the airport.

"Why involve the teachers in duties other than academics?

We understand that there might have been requirements by the authorities but in that case, why were government staff apart from teachers deployed for airport duty?" Ram asked.

Neeru Vijh of Government Girls Senior Secondary School in Vasundhara Enclave wel-

comed the cancelling of the order and said people from civil defence should have also been included for the airport duty. "I welcome the move that the order has been withdrawn by the DDMA. However, more people from the Civil Defence should have been included in such duties.

"Teachers should be given some respite from their regular duties, many of them will be taking remedial classes during the winter vacations too," she said. "Even teachers need to look after their social boundaries," she added.

Deepak Chauhan, one of the teachers whose name was listed for duty at the airport, concurred with his colleagues and said teachers should only be involved in duties related to academics. "I have remedial classes listed for January 2 to January 15 as well and so was not sure why I was deployed for airport duty. I think teachers should only be involved in duties related to academics," Chauhan said.

# Contractor of gutted parking lot to pay for loss, says MCD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Tuesday said that the firm in charge of maintenance of the multi-level parking in Delhi's Subhash Nagar where 22 cars were gutted will have to pay for the loss, if any.

According to reports, 22 cars were destroyed at Subhash Nagar parking lot on Monday which was gutted after a 23-year-old man allegedly set fire to one of the vehicles there.

An MCD official said that the contractors are responsible for maintaining the safety and security of a building. In general, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) awards contracts to concessionaire firms for maintenance of its parking facilities. "We are investigating the matter. It will not be a simple case as it is a matter of arson. The contrac-



tor is responsible for the safety and security of a building. So if any compensation has to be paid, it would be borne by the contractor," an MCD official said.

Another senior official said that the agency is waiting for the police to complete their initial investigation for further action. The concessionaire firm could not be contacted for comment. The youth who started the fire in the parking

lot was identified as Yash Arora, a resident of Subhash Nagar. He was arrested after he was captured on CCTV. Police said Arora set the car -- a Maruti Ertiga -- on fire as he was upset with the car owner over his relationship with one of his family members. During interrogation, he told police that he had a personal grudge with the owner of the car and he had burned it to take revenge from him.

# Now, postmortem can be conducted at night in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Postmortem will be conducted even after sunset in the national Capital. The Delhi Government on Tuesday approved the postmortem of dead bodies possible even after sunset in the national Capital.

It also asked the hospital in-charges to ensure all necessary infrastructure at the post-mortem house.

This will not only change the situation for the relatives of the deceased who often have to wait a long time to receive the dead body but will also encourage organ donation and transplantation. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia directed the officials of the Health Department to conduct the postmortem even at night in hospitals with adequate facilities.

Sisodia said that due to the availability of postmortem facilities at night, people in the city will not have to wait long for the postmortem of the dead bodies. This will give a lot of relief to the relatives of the deceased.

"Earlier the dead bodies were kept safely in the mortuary during the night. The bereaved relatives had to wait the whole night to claim and bury the dead bodies. This made their pain worse. But now the dead bodies coming to the postmortem house at night will be attended immediately," he stated.

Sisodia said. "However, in the case of deaths where there is suspicion of murder, suicide, rape, or foul play, a provision has been made to examine the dead bodies only during the day," he said.

"The Delhi government had sent a proposal to the Government of India for approval to conduct post-mortems in hospitals after sunset. Such postmortems shall be carried out in hospitals that have adequate facilities to conduct them on a regular basis," said Deputy CM.

"Postmortem cases related to organ donation will be done on a priority basis. Earlier the dead bodies were kept safely in the mortuary during the night. The bereaved relatives had to wait the whole night to claim and bury the dead bodies. This made their pain worse. But now the dead bodies coming to the postmortem house at night will be attended immediately," he stated.

Sisodia underlined that to avoid any doubt or confusion, video recording of all the post-mortems will be done throughout the night and it will be preserved for future reference for legal purposes. "Apart from friends and relatives of the deceased, this new process will also promote organ donation and transplantation, as organs can be retrieved within a stipulated time after the procedure," Deputy CM added.

# Delhi Govt acquires Metro's 100 e-buses

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government will soon take over the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's fleet of electric buses to strengthen last-mile connectivity. The Cabinet recently decided to take over 100 existing electric buses of the DMRC and also operate an additional 380 feeder buses under the Transport department in 2023.

"DMRC has been operating feeder E-buses in East and North Clusters since December 2019, from Shastri Park and Majlis Park depots. These buses will be run by the Transport Department through Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System (DIMITS)," said a senior transport department official.

# LG transfers DUSIB CEO

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has transferred Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) CEO K Mahesh, a 2009 batch IAS officer to the Union Territory Civil Services (UTSC) as Special Director and is "contemplating further action" against him for alleged dereliction of duty. Garima Gupta, Secretary (Social Welfare), has been given the charge of DUSIB.

This comes after Lt Governor's visit to night shelters run by DUSIB at ISBT and Hanuman Mandir on December 23 (Friday) where it was found that, while all the shelters at the location had a total capacity of only about 600



beds, there were thousands who were forced to sleep on the pavements in bitter cold.

During his visit, Saxena had also flagged the issue of inhumane sanitary conditions for the occupants, as indeed for other homeless, forced to reside on streets under open sky. Due to severe lack of toilet

facilities attached to the Night Shelters, the occupants and others were forced to defecate in the open, mostly on the adjacent Yamuna bank. This, apart from polluting the river, also posed severe health hazards to an already marginalized people forced to live on streets.

K. Mahesh, who has been CEO (DUSIB) since May 31, 2022 had been tasked in the month of June, 2022 with the responsibility of providing adequate temporary toilet facilities to the slum dwellers at Jailorwala Bagh, adjacent to the DDA land where the ambitious world class nursery project -- Vaishnavi, is being developed as per directions of the Lt Governor, immediately after he took over.

# Noida socities in grip of fear after leopard spotted in vicinity

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Panic gripped residents of a Greater Noida society early Tuesday when some people raised an alarm claiming to have spotted a leopard in the vicinity. Housing societies in Greater Noida West of Gautambudh Nagar in Uttar Pradesh issued a high alert after a leopard was spotted in the area.

As per the a notice released by a housing society the leopard was seen near Ajnara Le Garden society and the residents were requested to stay in flats. / "A leopard/tiger was seen near by Le Garden society all are requested to stay n their



flats" Societies requested its residents to stop further movements to avoid any untoward incident. The police and forest Department officials have launched a search operation to

catch the leopard but they failed to catch so far. We got a call at 10.10 AM informing us about a leopard being spotted in Greater Noida (West). By 10.30 AM, our teams had

reached the spot and started a search for the leopard," Divisional Forest Officer Pramod Kumar Srivastava said. "However, on the basis of our searches and inspection so far, it appears to be a false alarm. Still, our teams are at work," Srivastava added.

Security guards at the Ajnara Le Garden group housing society alerted residents about the possible sighting of a leopard in the area and urged them to be careful when venturing out.

This came after some people in the locality claimed to have seen the feline. At the society, panic was palpable. "Right now, the search opera-

tion by the forest department is underway," said Mukesh Gupta. "We got a notice from the maintenance department of our society informing us of this finding. The notice also suggested that we take caution while venturing out," he said.

Meanwhile, the maintenance department officials also issued an advisory in several high rise societies situated in the area regarding the issue.

The facility office of Supertech Ecovillage I have issued the advisory stating that leopard/tiger has been seen near Le Garden society, so all are requested to stay in their flats.

"Request all residents that

please stop movement till further update. Sorry for the inconvenience," it advised.

Rajat Singh, a resident of the Supertech Ecovillage I said that this very serious matter as children play outside in the play area which is open and no guard is posted to keep an eye on them. "I am working as Zomato delivery personnel and it is very worrying that a leopard is running out in the open," he said.

Abhijit Sharma, another resident of the Supertech Ecovillage I said that Greater Noida is an area dotted with extensive barren fields lined up with the tree, making it easier for a leopard to hide.



# BJP slams Khurshid for likening Rahul with Ram

Stop using Lord Ram's name, riding roughshod over Hindu sentiments, says BJP to Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid comparing Rahul Gandhi "going out in T-Shirts in freezing cold" for his Bharat Jodo Yatra to 'Lord Ram' and describing him a 'yogi doing tapasya', the BJP on Tuesday lashed out at him asking "if he would make similar analogies with other faith" and for putting "parivaar ki bhakti" (devotion to family) above "bhagwaan and rashtra ki bhakti" (devotion to God and nation).

The BJP also alleged that the Congress, when in power, had questioned the existence of Lord Ram and accused its leaders of repeatedly riding roughshod over Hindu sentiments.

"Will Salman ji ever make similar analogies for other faith? Can he?" BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla tweeted. It is important to note that this is the same Congress which has doubted the existence of Lord Ram and has filed an affidavit in the court stating that Sri Ram does not exist and is a mythological character, he said.



Hitting out at the opposition party leaders for their show of "sycophancy", the BJP said comparing a person out on bail in a corruption case, a reference to the National Herald probe, to a God worshipped by so many people not only hurts the feelings of Hindus but also the entire society.

BJP leader and SC advocate Nalin Kohli accused the Congress of "conveniently accepting and refusing the existence of Lord Ram". "Congress should resist from taking Lord Ram's name into

all this. They use the name of Sri Ram according to their convenience," he said. Khurshid had on Monday said: "Rahul Gandhi is superhuman. While we are freezing in cold and wearing jackets, he is going out in t-Shirts for his Bharat Jodo Yatra. He is like a 'yogi' doing his 'tapasya' with focus."

Khurshid, a former Cabinet minister, also likened Congress workers to Lord Ram's brother Bharat. "Lord Ram's 'khadau' (wooden slipper) goes very far. Sometimes when Ram ji is not able to reach, Bharat takes his 'khadau' and goes to places. Like that, we have carried the 'khadau' in Uttar Pradesh.

Now that 'khadau' has reached Uttar Pradesh. Ram ji will also come, this is our belief," he maintained while responding to a question about

the Gandhi-led yatra not passing through Uttar Pradesh till now. Asked about BJP's reaction to his remarks, Khurshid told reporters on Tuesday, "If I believe somebody is following the path shown by God, then what will I say if I have to praise him? How do you praise a person if he has attained such a height? Isn't this said that he is like God? No one can replace God but everyone can try to walk the path shown by him.

"Why should anyone object if I say someone is following that path and that people can again see the story they associate with God. If the BJP has never seen a good man, then it's their problem."

The yatra will enter Uttar Pradesh on January 3 through Lonni in Ghaziabad. It will then pass through Baghpat and Shamli to enter Haryana.

## ‘Kattar paapi’ Sonia, Rahul should break silence on Vadra’s graft: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Demanding that Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi break their "silence" on corruption and money-laundering allegations against Robert Vadra, the BJP on Tuesday dubbed the Gandhi family as 'kattar paapi parivaar'.

It cited the Rajasthan High Court's rejection of Vadra's plea to quash a money laundering probe against him. The Congress slammed the BJP questioning why the ED has not filed a chargesheet in the case in the last eight years.

The Rajasthan High Court had last week rejected a petition seeking the quashing of an Enforcement Directorate investigation into the purchase of land in Bikaner by a company (Skylight Hospitality), linked to Vadra and his mother, through alleged shady means.

BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia described the purchase of land in Bikaner as fictitious and a complete fraud and facilitated by the Congress state government to benefit Vadra at the instance of the Gandhi family. Vadra is married to

Rahul's sister and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi. The Congress has often claimed that the corruption charges against Vadra are politically motivated.

"This is a 'kattar paapi parivaar' (extremely immoral family) of India. Its only work has been to do corruption and grab land to hand over to Vadra," Bhatia alleged and rejected the Congress's claim of a witch hunt against Vadra, claiming that it amounted to casting aspersions on the judiciary which has refused to quash charges against him.

"They are the most corrupt family in Indian politics. Three members of the family are out on bail in corruption cases. It is a serious matter of concern for a government with zero tolerance for corruption," he said, in reference to the corruption probe against Sonia and Rahul, both former Congress presidents, in the National Herald case.

Bhatia cited the details of the case against Vadra in Rajasthan and said the Congress government there during 2008-13 acquired land and allotted it to non-existing people. Huge parcel of land

ended up in the ownership of the company in which Vadra and his mother were partners through a maze of transactions involving fictitious entities, he alleged.

"The then government headed by Ashok Gehlot bypassed laws and rules to appease Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law," he claimed, alleging that Vadra became the lead of a land mafia.

Gehlot is the current chief minister as well. Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala slammed the BJP and questioned why the ED has not filed a charge sheet in the case in the last eight years.

He claimed that the BJP is working overtime to throw spanners and obstacles in the way of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, from a malicious disinformation campaign about the Yatra and Yatris to taking cover behind Corona to secretly block the Yatra, and now, to level false allegations against the Congress government in Rajasthan and Vadra.

"Objective is clear – distract, mislead and misinform – from the focus on the issues of Inflation, unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth

and politics of hate," the Congress Rajya Sabha MP said.

Taking on the BJP's charge, Surjewala said, "BJP today indulged in fakery by stating two things. First, they said that between 2008-13 Congress snatched 1,000 bighas of land in Bikaner from farmers and allotted the same to two people – Hariram and Natharam, both of whom are fictional people. An FIR was then registered."

"Secondly, this land was then sold to Skylight Hospitality of Vadra and the Rajasthan High Court has rejected a case to quash the FIR," he said. "These are devious and bogus attempts at fakery and to peddle lies.

The Congress government in Rajasthan did not take an inch of the land of farmers between 2008 and 2013 or allot it to Hariram and Natharam," he said, adding that the land was sold during the BJP government in Rajasthan.

Surjewala claimed it was the BJP government that allotted land in Bikaner's Gajner village in February 2007 to Hariram and Natharam.

## EC begins delimitation of Parliamentary, Assembly seats on 2001 census in Assam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday initiated the delimitation process of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in Assam and will use the 2001 census figures for the readjustment of seats.

The move follows request received from the Union ministry of law and justice. In its order, the EC said a ban has been put in place effective January 1, 2023 on the creation of new administrative units in the state till the exercise is completed.

Delimitation is the process of fixing limits or boundaries of the territorial constituencies in a country or a state with a



legislative body. The term of the current Assam Legislative Assembly will end on May 20, 2026. The state has 14 Lok Sabha, 126 assembly and seven Rajya Sabha seats.

Sources said that earlier this month, the Assam government has written to the Centre saying that the law and order scenario in the state is now conducive for the EC to carry out the delimitation exercise to redraw the boundaries of its parliamentary and assembly constituencies. Muslim voters in Assam account for about 37% of the state's electorate.

The current assembly of 126 MLAs has as many 30 Muslim legislators - 16 from Congress and 14 from AIUDE.

Muslim voters hold the key in six of the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state. "As mandated under Article 170 of the Constitution, census figures (2001) shall be used for the purpose of readjustment of parliamentary and assembly constituencies in the state.

Reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be provided as per Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution of India," the poll panel said in a statement.

"Under the provisions of the Delimitation Act, 1972, the last delimitation of constituencies in Assam was effected on the basis of 1971 census figures by the then Delimitation Commission in 1976.

The move to redraw the assembly and parliamentary seats of Assam as per Section 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 has been initiated following a request from the Union Law Ministry," it said. There will be a complete

ban on the creation of new administrative units with effect from January 1, 2023 till the completion of delimitation exercise in the state.

The delimitation of Assam's assembly constituencies is long overdue. The Delimitation Commission, which was set up in 2002 to readjust the division of assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies on the basis of the 2001 Census figures, completed the exercise in 25 states and Union Territories.

But the work was suspended in Assam following stay orders of the Gauhati High Court on a PIL challenging the validity of the 2001 Census report in 2007.

On February 28, 2020, the central government cancelled its earlier notifications which deferred delimitation in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh due to security issues, saying the exercise could be carried out "now" as previous circumstances cease to exist.

## More training on extradition matters needed: MHA Secy

New Delhi: Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Tuesday inaugurated Interpol Liaison Officers Workshop organised by CBI here. The theme of conference was "LRs/MLAT AND Extradition Matters".

The participants including Interpol Liaison Officers (ILOs) from States, Union Territories, other Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and officers from CBI attended Workshop. Addressing workshop, Bhalla said Union Home Ministry has designed a new online portal on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) / Letter Rogatory (LR) requests which can be utilised for purpose and assured further assistance, if needed.

For effective law enforcement in respect of crimes having transnational footprints, Bhalla emphasised the need to further impart training on LRs and MLATs to the personnel in law enforcement chain and offered all assistance, including organising workshops/conferences in States. The Union Home Secretary further stressed

that requests from other countries for legal assistance should also be treated on priority as part of reciprocity. He invited feedback and practical suggestions towards improving efficacy of international cooperation channels for assistance in criminal matters.

It was underlined that LEAs should make use of informal channels of police cooperation for seeking and sharing information on I 24X7 platform of Interpol through CBI as NCB India (National Central Bureau). The workshop also focussed on utilising Interpol Notices and drafting requests on crime investigation cooperation.

The daylong workshop deliberated on subject "Presentation on Guidelines of MLA/LRs & Procedural aspects of drafting LRs/MLA requests; Presentation on new MLA/LR portal, Presentation on extradition guidelines & procedural aspect of drafting extradition requests; Informal Cooperation through Interpol and points to be kept in mind while making urge for Interpol Matters".

## Centre, Manipur ink peace pact with ZUF towards making NE insurgency-free

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday signed a peace agreement with a Manipur insurgent group, which agreed to give up violence and join the peaceful democratic process. The tripartite agreement was signed by the Central and Manipur Governments and the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) rebel group which mostly operated in Manipur.

In a statement, the Union Home Ministry said fulfilling the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of an 'insurgency-free and prosperous Northeast' and under the guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the government of India and the government of Manipur entered into a cessation of operation agreement in New Delhi with ZUF that had been active for more than a decade. Representatives of the



armed group agreed to abjure violence and join the peaceful democratic process as established by law of the land, the statement said.

The agreement provides for rehabilitation and re-settlement of the armed cadres. A joint monitoring group will be constituted to oversee enforcement of the agreed ground rules. This will be a significant boost to the peace process in Manipur, the statement said.

The agreement was signed by senior home ministry officials and the government of Manipur and the representatives of ZUF in presence of Chief Minister N Biren Singh.

## Plea in SC against KGB panel to examine grant of SC tag to converts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the formation of a commission headed by former CJI K G Balakrishnan to examine giving Scheduled Caste status to people who claim to have historically belonged to the SCs but have converted to Christianity or Islam.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 (amended from time to time) says that no person professing a religion other than Hinduism or Sikhism, or Buddhism can be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.

The plea filed by advocate Pratap Baburao Pandit contended he was a Christian of Scheduled Caste origin belonging to the Mahar community. The petitioner submitted that



the Union government has formed multiple commissions over the years and the appointment of a new commission will further delay the hearing of the issue in the apex court.

The top court is already seized of a number of petitions which were filed in 2004. "The petitioner is aggrieved because the main Writ Petition (Civil) No. 180/2004 and related petitions are pending for the past 18 years. The apprehension of the petitioner is that if the pre-

sent commission is allowed, the hearing on the main petition may be further delayed causing irreparable damage to the Christians of Scheduled caste origin, who are denied this SC privileges for the last 72 years.

"It is also affecting the fundamental rights of the affected community, giving speedy justice is mandatory as per Article 21," the plea, filed through advocate Franklin Caesar Thomas, said. Besides Balakrishnan, the three-member panel includes retired IAS officer Ravinder Kumar Jain and member UGC Professor Sushma Yadav, according to a gazette notification issued by the Social Justice and Empowerment ministry.

The panel will examine the matter of giving Scheduled Caste status to new persons, who claim to have historically

belonged to the Scheduled Castes but have converted to a religion other than those mentioned in the Presidential Orders issued from time to time under article 341 of the Constitution.

The Centre had earlier told the apex court that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 does not suffer from any "unconstitutionality" and the exclusion of Christianity and Islam was due to the reason that the "oppressive system" of untouchability was not prevalent in either of these two religions.

The government had said it has not accepted the report of the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission, which had recommended inclusion of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims in the Scheduled Castes list, as it was "flawed".

## SC to hear on Jan 2 pleas challenging State laws regulating conversions due to inter-faith marriage

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on January 2 a batch of pleas challenging controversial State laws regulating religious conversions due to interfaith marriage.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha is scheduled to hear the PILs filed by advocate Vishal Thakre and an NGO 'Citizens for Justice and Peace'.

The Supreme Court will also hear a plea by Muslim body 'Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind' which it had allowed last year to become a party to the petitions as it claimed a large number of Muslims are being

harassed under these laws across the country. As per the office report uploaded on the apex court website, so far no reply has been filed by the Centre or any of the states which have been made parties to the litigation.

On February 17, 2021, the top court had permitted the NGO to make Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh the parties to its pending petition by which it had challenged some controversial state laws regulating conversions due to interfaith marriages. The apex court had on January 6, 2021 agreed to examine certain controversial new laws of Uttar

Pradesh and Uttarakhand regulating religious conversions due to such marriages.

It had, however, refused to stay the controversial provisions of the laws and issued notices to both the state governments (Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) on the petitions.

The pleas, filed by Thakre and the NGO, have challenged the Constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 which regulate religious conversion of people in interfaith marriages.

### IN SHORT

#### MHA OK'S NAME CHANGE OF 2 PLACES IN UP

New Delhi: The MHA has given its consent to change the names of two places - Mundera Bazaar municipal council in Gorakhpur and Telia Afghan village in Deoria district - in Uttar Pradesh, following recommendations from the state government. The MHA issued no-objection certificates to change name of municipal council to Chauri-Chaura and that of village to Telia Shukla

#### SC STAYS NGT ORDER OF FINE ON KENDRAPADA

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has stayed an order of National Green Tribunal imposing a penalty of Rs 24 lakh on Odisha's Kendrapara municipality for failing to control discharge of waste water into Gobari river. A bench of Justices K M Joseph and BV Nagarathna issued notices to Centre, Odisha government and others while seeking their replies to plea.

#### EAM CONGRATULATES KUWAITI NEW FOREIGN MIN

New Delhi: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday congratulated his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on his appointment as the foreign minister, saying he looks forward to working together for strengthening bilateral ties. In October this year, Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

#### YATRAS ON ANAEMIA AWARENESS IN 5 STATES

New Delhi: The Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Societies of India is undertaking a yatra across five States to raise awareness about mitigating the rising incidence of anaemia among women.

## Inspection of Maiden Pharma held over quality concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the controversy surrounding the quality of the cough syrup produced and exported by Haryana-based Maiden Pharma to Gambia, the DCGI along with State drugs officials has started conducting joint inspection of identified drug manufacturing units to ensure high standards of quality compliance with respect to drugs manufactured in the country. Though officials in the Union Health

### Drugs Controller General of India

Ministry said that the step was initiated following directions from Union Health Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya and it had nothing to do with the Maiden Pharma case, sources said that the move comes amidst a Gambian Parliamentary Committee allegations that concluded that the cough syrups imported from India linked to

the deaths of 70 children were contaminated with toxic substances. "The Select Committee is convinced that Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd is culpable and should be held accountable for exporting the contaminated medicines that was linked to the death of at least 70 children in The Gambia in 2022," the Parliamentary panel had said.

The Union Health Ministry officials, however said, the joint inspections are being conducted all over the country as per the Standard Operating Procedures. The serious complaint from the Gambia parliamentary committee had come days after the Union Health Ministry virtually gave a clean chit to the pharma firm.

A committee of two Joint Drugs Controllers has been constituted at CDSCO (HQ) to monitor the process of inspection, reporting & subsequent action so as to ensure compli-

ance to the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules. This will ensure high standards of quality compliance with respect to drugs manufactured in the country, said the official. An action plan for nationwide inspection of manufacturing units which are identified to be at the risk of manufacturing Not of Standard Quality (NSQ) /adulterated/spurious drugs was made prior to carrying out inspections. The objective of drug regulation is to ensure safety, efficacy and quality of drugs available in country.

## Consider posting staffer with 85% hearing disability to native place: Centre to Depts

New Delhi: The Centre has asked all its departments to explore the possibility of posting one of its employees with 85 per cent hearing disability to his native place in Kerala, according to an official order. The case relates to Vishnu S Nair (a person with benchmark disability or PwBD) with 85 % hearing disability in both ears.

Nair, a regular Section Officer of the Central Secretariat Service, is presently posted in the Ministry of

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). He had requested for a transfer to his native place Ernakulam district in Kerala due to his hearing disability.

Nair had also approached the Commission for Persons with Disabilities for its intervention to arrange for his posting in any government organisation near his home district, said the order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT). PTI



# AIADMK will lead mega alliance for 2024 LS polls: Palaniswami

PTI ■ CHENNAI

AIADMK interim general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami on Tuesday urged party members to strive hard and improve the tally in the 2024 Lok Sabha election and said the party would lead a mega alliance for the poll.

Palaniswami, who is confronted by estranged colleague O Panneerselvam over the leadership tussle, hopes to resurrect the party, surmounting all odds, and steer it to victory, a senior leader said.

"His agenda is to form an alliance and win the Lok Sabha polls decimating the DMK," he said.

At the district secretaries meeting held here, Palaniswami told the functionaries that the AIADMK will forge a mega alliance and that the party

members should strive hard to ensure victory at the hustings.

The party should be strengthened at the booth level and the members should focus more on people's issues, Palaniswami said at the meeting attended by several senior leaders.

The AIADMK leadership would decide on the number of seats to be allocated to the alliance constituents, he said.

"The year 2023 is very crucial for us. We hope to make a turnaround in our political fortunes and ensure the AIADMK registers a huge victory in the 2024 Lok Sabha election," former state minister D Jayakumar said.

Speaking to reporters after the district secretaries' meet, Jayakumar reiterated that the alliance would be formed under the AIADMK leader-



ship.

Asked about the constituents, he replied, "there's still a year to go. You will come to know about those parties."

"Honestly speaking there was no discussion about O Panneerselvam, V K Sasikala or T T V Dhinakaran at today's meet. Our sole objective is to

face the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and to defeat the DMK," Jayakumar said.

At the meeting, senior leader and former state minister Natham Viswanathan echoed the general feeling among the party members on not taking back Panneerselvam into the AIADMK.

# Value education should be included in curriculum: Murmu

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday stressed on the importance of teaching value education to children to make them good citizens.

Murmu, who addressed the students and faculty members of the Keshav Memorial Educational Society at a function organised as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav here, said parents also, in view of competition, focus on children studying the syllabus taught in their books.

"I say everywhere that value education should be added in our curriculum, our system, our syllabus," she said.

If value education is imparted from the beginning, it will help in ushering in a good society, she said.

She was responding to a query from a student that the absence of study of ethical val-



ues is leading to unwanted incidents in the society.

In her speech, she expressed confidence that the implementation of National Education Policy 2020 will create a learner-centric education system to foster critical thinking and creativity.

This shift in focus will not

only benefit the students as individuals, but will also contribute to the overall progress and development of the nation, she said.

Emphasising on the importance of reading, the President said the habit of reading is one of the most effective means for self-development. It is a skill

that would serve students well throughout their life, she said.

"In an age of internet and social media when attention span is getting shorter and communication is limited in characters, I will urge you to read more in order to improve your understanding and widen your perspective," she said.

# Principals, teachers face CBI-ED in Bengal job scam

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A number of college principals and lecturers may soon come under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation for their alleged role in the multi-crore school level recruitment scam.

According to sources the agencies have stumbled upon the names of some professors and college principals during the course of investigation and are preparing a list of these persons who have allegedly acted as intermediaries in the SSC and TET recruitment scam.

According to sources many of these functionaries had concluded with then TET chairman and Trinamool Congress MLA Manik Bhattacharya and then SSC chairman Subires Bhattacharyya.

Both of these persons are currently in jail along with former Bengal Education Minister Partha Chatterjee who was also the second senior most minister in the Mamata

Banerjee cabinet.

"Though their exact role is not known it seems that these people acted as conduits who presented the names of would be appointees and also probably reached the cash they paid to the people higher up in the chain ... this was easier for them to do as they came from the same education department ... besides they were on high posts which increased their credibility," agency sources said.

Scores of illegally appointed people have already lost their jobs following directives issued by the Calcutta High Court.

Thousands of people purchased jobs in schools in what is being called a multi-layered scam.

While lakhs of aspiring candidates appeared for TET and SSC exams in successive years several thousands of them managed to purchase their jobs as school teachers in the primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary

levels. On the other hand many eligible candidates despite having qualified the exams were bracketed in the waiting lists.

The scam also took place in the appointment of Group C and D employees.

The candidates' marks were arbitrarily increased whereas thousands of OMR sheets written by them were destroyed in a bid to obliterate the footprint of the crime.

Notwithstanding, the investigating agencies in due course of investigation managed to recover a few thousand OMR sheets and hard discs of various exams from Uttar Pradesh.

While many of these OMR sheets showed that some candidates had obtained "Zero" mark. Mysteriously however, their marks were artificially increased in the website of the SSC.

According to sources these jobs were sold for anywhere between Rs 5 and Rs 30 lakh.

Meanwhile, Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu



Adhikari on Tuesday said that the big thieves of Bengal who had masterminded the scams would go to Tihar jail.

Asking the people to prepare for the panchayat elections Adhikari said "soon the biggest fishes that had perpetrated cattle smuggling, coal smuggling, teachers' scam and even usurped the poor people's houses in the PM Awas Yojna scheme would be banished to Tihar Jail.

"The ill-gotten cash from all these scams had finally found their ways to Kolkata where the TMC's top leadership gobbled

them up ... these people will never be spared ... you take care of the smaller thieves in the villages during the panchayat elections and we will take care of the bigger thieves."

In a parallel development in a major blow to the ruling Trinamool Congress the Birbhum district vice president of the party Biplab Ojha on Tuesday joined the BJP.

He has been close to Birbhum TMC strongman and party national executive member, Anubrata Mondal who is currently in jail on charges of cattle smuggling.

# I&B Min buildings' audit led to vacating 11 lakh sqft space in 20 cities: Thakur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Tuesday said a space audit of buildings of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting led to vacating space of over 11 lakh square feet across 20 cities. During an informal interaction with reporters, Thakur said a space audit and efficient management of buildings carried out as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan also led to earnings of about Rs 22 crore. The space audit was started on September 29 by Thakur's visit to Doordarshan Kendra in Ahmedabad and concluded in Bhopal on Monday.

Personal inspection by Thakur in buildings housing offices of the ministry in Mumbai led to clearing of 90,000 square feet of space at prime locations which, if rent-



ed out, could earn the government crores in revenue. The vacated space is spread across 20 cities -- Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kurnool, Chennai, Thrissur, Thiruvananthapuram, Jabalpur, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Coimbatore, Panaji, Amritsar, Sambalpur, Bhawanipatna, Puducherry, Mangaluru, Berhampur and Bhopal.

The Ministry now plans to co-locate its various offices in the space vacated during the audit to bring about greater synergy among sister organisations and effective dissemination of information through integrated publicity plans, Thakur said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also mentioned the space audit carried out by the ministry in his 'Mann ki Baat' programme on December 25.

# BSF jawan murdered by 7 members of family in Guj

## He had gone to accused house to protest against daughter's objectionable video posted online

PTI ■ KHEDA

A 42-year-old Border Security Force jawan was murdered allegedly by seven members of a family in Gujarat's Kheda district after he went to their house to protest while holding one of them responsible for circulating an objectionable video of his minor daughter on social media, police said on Tuesday.

The incident took place at around 10 pm on Saturday and the seven accused were arrested on Sunday, they said.

BSF jawan Melaji Vaghela, his wife and son went to the house of Dinesh Jadav at Chaklasi village in Nadiad taluka of the district to protest against the objectionable video of Vaghela's daughter, which they claimed was circulated on



social media by Jadav's son.

"After a heated argument over the issue, Jadav and his six other family members attacked Vaghela and his family members with sticks and sharp weapons," Nadiad's Deputy Superintendent of Police V R Bajpai told reporters.

Vaghela received injuries on his head and other body parts and died on the spot, he said.

His son Navdeep too suffered severe head injuries and his wife was also injured, the

official said.

An FIR was registered on Sunday night at Chaklasi police station under various Indian Penal Code Sections including 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult) and 143 (unlawful assembly), he said.

All the seven accused were arrested. They were sent to judicial custody on Monday, the official said.

An investigation was on into the incident. A forensic team was in the process of collecting evidence, he said.

The incident took place when Vaghela was visiting his family on a holiday before his transfer to Barmer in Rajasthan from Ambasan in Mehsana, Superintendent of Police Rajesh Gadhiya said.

# Deshmukh to walk out of jail, HC refuses stay on his bail

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh is likely to walk out of jail on Wednesday as the Bombay High Court on Tuesday refused to extend its stay on an order granting him bail in a corruption case registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Justice M S Karnik had granted bail to the 73-year-old Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader on December 12, but stayed the order for 10 days as the CBI sought time to challenge it in the Supreme Court.

The probe agency moved the apex court but the appeal would be heard only in January 2023 as the court is closed for vacation.

Last week, the high court had extended the stay till December 27 on the CBI's request.

On Tuesday, the central agency sought another extension.

Deshmukh's lawyers Aniket Nikam and Inderpal Singh claimed that the CBI was trying to "overreach" the earlier order of the HC which had stated that under no circumstances another extension will be granted.

"They are failing to make out any urgency in the Supreme Court, and coming here seeking stay. This cannot be permitted," Nikam argued.

The vacation bench of the High Court, after hearing the arguments, said that "no further extension can be granted".

With the court refusing to extend the stay, Deshmukh could be released on bail on Wednesday, his lawyers told PTI.

The high court, while granting bail to Deshmukh, had noted that except for dismissed police officer Sachin Waze's statement, no testimony recorded by the CBI indicated that money was being extorted from bar owners in Mumbai at the behest of the NCP leader.

Deshmukh approached the high court after a special CBI court rejected his bail plea last month. He sought bail both on medical grounds and merits of the case.

He has been in jail since November 2021 after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested him in an alleged money laundering case.

In April this year, the CBI arrested him in a corruption case.

Deshmukh, who has denied the allegations levelled against him, is in judicial custody at the Arthur Road Jail in Mumbai.

In October, the high court had granted him bail in the ED case.

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh in March 2021 alleged that Deshmukh, the then home minister, had given a target to police officers to collect Rs 100 crore per month from restaurants and bars in Mumbai.

Former assistant police inspector Waze, who was



arrested in the case of an explosives-laden vehicle found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house in Mumbai last year, also levelled similar allegations.

The high court in April 2021 directed the CBI to carry out a preliminary inquiry.

Based on this inquiry, the CBI registered an FIR against Deshmukh and others for alleged corruption and misuse of official powers.

The NCP on Tuesday welcomed the court's decision.

In a statement, Mahesh Tapase, chief spokesperson of the party, said, "It has been

proved that Anil Deshmukh was wrongfully framed in a fake case and he will come out of the jail tomorrow after spending more than one year behind the bars. We will take his case to the people and make them aware of the injustice meted out to him."

The allegations against Deshmukh were politically motivated and no "money trail" was found, he said.

"The party extends its support to Deshmukh and we will continue to fight against the people who falsely framed him," Tapase added.

# TMC's Mondal arrested for cattle smuggling gets bail in attempt to murder case



PTI ■ DUBRAJPUR

A court in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Tuesday granted bail to TMC leader Anubrata Mondal in an attempt to murder case.

Mondal, arrested by the CBI in August in the cattle smuggling case, was booked by the police under IPC sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 325 (causing grievous hurt) and 307 (attempt to murder) on the complaint of a TMC worker

who alleged that he was assaulted.

The sub-divisional court in Dubrajpur granted bail to Mondal when he was produced, after the expiry of his seven-day police custody.

Public prosecutor Rajendra Prasad Dey said, "The investigating officer prayed for police custody but the court after examining the case diary and other records granted him bail. On behalf of the state, I opposed the bail petition."

# Vijayan meets Modi in Delhi

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/NEW DELHI

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the latter's official residence in New Delhi, an official source said.

The Chief Minister's Office shared photographs of the meeting which is being held in the wake of farmers and residents of areas close to forested parts of the southern state protesting against implementation of the one-kilometre eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) in those places.

Other than photographs of the meeting, no other details were released by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

An official source on Monday had said that the ESZ issue was likely to be discussed during the meeting.

Besides that, the delay in getting the Central govern-



ment's clearance for the semi-high speed rail project SilverLine, connecting Kasaragod in the north to Thiruvananthapuram in the south, and the financial crisis that has gripped the state during the time of COVID-19 pandemic may also be topics of discussion, the source had said.

The state government has

blamed the occurrences of natural disasters and pandemic, distorted policies of the Centre, the implementation of the GST without much contemplation, delayed distribution of GST compensation and imposition of cuts in the borrowing limit of the state by the Union government for the economic crisis.

# Kashmiri Pandit staff move CAT challenging order prohibiting transfer from Valley

PTI ■ JAMMU

Protesting Kashmiri Pandit employees have approached the Central Administrative Tribunal against a Jammu and Kashmir administration order stating those granted employment under the prime minister's special package cannot be transferred.

The move to approach the CAT's Srinagar bench comes days after Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha announced that the striking employees would not be given salaries, a statement criticised by all major political parties.

Kashmiri Pandit employees have been on a strike for over seven months to demand their "relocation" from the Valley in view of targeted killings by terrorists.

The protesting employees



have also sought interim relief from being forced to join work at their respective postings till the government provides them a secure work environment and releases their pending salaries.

The petition filed by Boopinder Bhat and Yogesh Pandita is likely to be listed for hearing after the tribunal resumes functioning on

December 30.

They have challenged sub-rule 4 of rule 4 of the Jammu and Kashmir Kashmiri Migrants (Special Drive) Recruitment Rules, 2009, which provides that "in case the appointee migrates from valley again for any reason whatsoever, he shall lose the job without any notice and shall stand terminated".



## National parties?

Both the BJP and Congress units in Maharashtra and Karnataka have opposite views on land dispute

MAhharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has upped the ante by presenting a resolution on the decades-old border dispute with Karnataka in the state Assembly. It enunciates Maharashtra's resolve to contest the pending case in the Supreme Court with full strength for the inclusion of each and "every inch" of 865 villages including Belgavi, Karwar, Nipani, and Bidar Bhalki. This is reminiscent of the resolution that both houses of our Parliament unanimously adopted on February 22, 1994, stressing that Jammu and Kashmir was an integral part of India, and that Pakistan must vacate parts of the state under its occupation. But Pakistan is an enemy nation that has illegally grabbed our territory; in the present instance, both states involved are Indian and following the Indian Constitution. In both states, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which prides itself on its nationalist credentials, is in power. Such a resolution is an affront to national unity. To be fair to Shinde and his deputy, Devendra Fadnavis, their Government was apparently responding to an equally deplorable resolution passed by the Karnataka Assembly a few days ago. Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai moved the resolution which was unanimously adopted by a voice-vote. "There is no compromise on the matters relating to Karnataka's land, water, language and Kannadiga's interest. The feelings of Karnataka's people and members [of the Assembly] is one of this subject, and if it is affected, we are all committed to unitedly take constitutional and legal measures to protect the interest of the state."

Since both resolutions were unanimously adopted in the respective Assemblies, all parties, including the BJP and the Indian National Congress, consented to their contents. A question arises: where do these *national* parties stand on the land dispute between the two states? The state units of BJP and Congress Maharashtra believe that "every inch" of the land in dispute belongs to Maharashtra; similarly, the state units of BJP and Congress Karnataka believe that "every inch" of the land in dispute belongs to Karnataka. What, pray, do the BJP and the Congress believe — that is, if they believe in anything other than power? For how long can national parties keep pandering to the groups which thrive on sentimentalism, be it region, linguistic, or religious? Governance is a serious business, which must be carried out with reliance on facts, commonsense, and reason; it cannot be allowed to run amok, following the vicissitudes of demagogic politicians. But, unfortunately, that is exactly what seems to be happening. Former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray is of the view that the Centre should declare "Karnataka-occupied Maharashtra" areas as a Union Territory. Despite the inappropriate description of the dispute areas, his suggestion is worth examining; it can be a UT till the Supreme Court decides over the matter. It is, however, not just the duty of the Centre to sort out the dispute but also of the two national parties.

### PICTALK



Snow-covered Himalayas mountain range after fresh snowfall, seen from Shimla

PTI

## Nature's wrath

Extreme weather is playing havoc in the USA where such a big chill is being witnessed after decades

At least 48 people have already died and thousands of flights have been canceled in the USA due to storms and severe cold conditions which are being touted as one of the biggest chills in decades. The cold is so stark that it is posing danger not only to humans but to entire ecosystem. Though it has been over a week there are no signs of any let-up and it is feared that the worst is yet to come. Buffalo, New York is one of the severest hit areas by the storm which is causing high-speed wind, rains, and snow across the US. According to the forecasts, the extreme cold settling over the US this week will be biting, as a blast of arctic air and strong winds threaten to plunge several regions into subzero temperatures. Roughly 150 million people across the US are facing the frigid conditions, posing life-threatening dangers to anyone without shelter, wrecking havoc on holiday travelers and causing power outages, and blocking supply lines. Since this extreme weather is not normally witnessed in the USA it is not as prepared to face it as Canada where sub-normal temperatures are routine. Govt agencies across the country are urging households to prepare for the worst, with strong winds adding to the possibility of disruption in power supply. People are being advised to keep extra supplies, including blankets, to face any eventuality. This could be life saver.



Ironically, worldwide stark winters are becoming less common. The dramatic and sudden shift in temperatures, can have a profound effect on adaptation, especially for plants, animals, and ecosystem.

The extreme weather and storms may be direct consequence of upheaval in climate change, and fall out of human actions and interference. But it's clear that the underlying impacts caused by global heating may make them harder to endure. The abruptness of the drop in temperatures is also expected to impact aquatic life. It may be intriguing to know that such conditions can prevail in warmer climates like ours as some scientists are indicating. What has been the reason for such a sharp decrease in such a short span of time is still being debated but the reason for so many deaths can be attributed to a lack of preparedness and lesser tolerance for extreme cold conditions. This extreme winter is also a reminder that no matter how technically advanced you might be, you cannot beat nature which can take away what it gives. Life!

# Restore deterrence along LAC for peace

A 'Snow Leopard' style operation is needed to dissuade China from doing another Yangtse. The lasting peace can come only through quid pro quo.

Ram Madhav, once a powerful RSS voice who counted in the government, recently remarked that Indian action at Yangtse was only defensive but India is now prepared for China, adding that only Operation Snow Leopard against China was proactive. On the 15,000 feet high Yangtse plateau, the LAC follows Yangtse Ridge, the watershed where Indian border posts are located along a stone wall. Overlooking the plateau are the Yangtse heights which command a towering 360-degree view, especially of Tawang bowl 30 km away extending to Sela Pass where a tunnel is being built. It is one among several disputed areas resulting from the patchy marking of the McMahon Line on an 8-inch map and perhaps the only disputed area in Indian possession. This riles China as it was occupied by the bold actions of local commanders in Tawang when PLA infiltrated across LAC into Wangdung/Sumdorong Chu in June 1986. Over time, Tawang developed into a fortress. It has the 341-year-old Galden Namgye Lhatse monastery, second only to Lhasa's Potala monastery, the world's largest Tibetan Buddhist place of worship. More importantly, the 6th Dalai Lama was born in Tawang which Tibet administered till 1950.

For China, the succession of the 14th Dalai Lama is linked to the status of Tibet and its control over Tawang. During the talks starting in 2005 over finding a political settlement to the border, skipping LAC identification, three clauses turned out to be key: 'not to disturb settled populations'; 'political compromise'; and 'national sentiment'. India's claim to Tawang's 'settled population' was trumped by China's use of 'national sentiment' and 'political compromise'. The Chinese offer in the 1950s of a border solution was a swap: India conceded Aksai Chin while China accepted the McMahon Line. Unfortunately, this Chinese position has hardened from concessions in the west to concessions in the east, mainly in Tawang. In no way

China will compromise on Tawang and will by hook or



crook, even by use of force, try to retake Tawang which was under its possession for two months in 1962. China's new border law 2022 equates territory with sovereignty and makes recovery of lost territory sacred.

The PLA's attempt to unilaterally alter the status quo at Yangtse is not their first. They've done so regularly since 2016 to assert China's claim over disputed territory. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, supported by satellite imagery Dec 2022 of Planet Labs, Chinese infrastructure has improved significantly in one year with a road now 150 m short of LAC with new villages coming up close by. China's infrastructure development along LAC has created an 'escalation trap' for India which it tries to compensate for with increased readiness and surveillance to reduce the risk of accidental escalation. On 9 December, the PLA operation started around 3 am in foggy conditions, expecting to overwhelm Indian troops who were forewarned and beat back intruders with clubs and sticks. Through these attempts, says ASPI, China is testing Indian willingness and readiness to resist while eroding the status quo.



INDIA HAS GONE SILENT ON DOKLAM IN BHUTAN WHERE IN 2017, INDIAN TROOPS ALLEGEDLY 'ILLEGALLY CROSSED LAC' INTO CHINESE TERRITORY TO PREVENT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROAD TO THE DISPUTED TRI-JUNCTION INVOKING ITS TREATY OBLIGATIONS WITH BHUTAN

India has gone silent on Doklam in Bhutan where in 2017, Indian troops allegedly 'illegally crossed LAC' into Chinese territory to prevent the construction of a road to the disputed tri-junction invoking its treaty obligations with Bhutan. Following an agreement, the Indian and Chinese disengaged after 73 days. But the Chinese feigned withdrawal and soon returned. According to Planet Labs, imagery obtained this month Chinese village 9 km east of Doklam at Pangda is inside Bhutan with now a bridge over Torsa Nullah. This will create a new red-line situation for India with Indian troops at Dokla just meters away from PLA at Doklam. India has allowed the Doklam front to reopen as Bhutanese would any day settle their differences with China but for India's security concerns in Chumbi valley.

It is increasingly clear China will neither clarify LAC nor settle the border question. It will repeat its 2020 tricks in East Ladakh in other areas as its infrastructure expands further. After withdrawal from Hot Springs in September, China said it would not accept the status quo of 2020 created by India's 'illegal crossing of LAC'. This fiction China has

used after every clash with Indian troops in shifting the onus of blame to India. High time India paused to rethink its China policy of diplomacy which has hit a cul de sac. PM Modi's handshake at Bali with President Xi Jinping has made little difference. Last week's 17th round of military talks produced a blank with zero progress on friction points Depsang and Demchok. It is the end of Disengagement without any Deescalation.

Madhav is wrong claiming India is prepared for China. Far from it. Deterrence has broken down and military diplomacy has also failed. The government's resolve to keep Parliament in the dark and Modi's reluctance to utter the 'C' word add to the complexity of the LAC dilemma. China is extracting maximum advantage from it. One way to rebuild deterrence is through QPQ (Quid Pro Quo) operations like Snow Leopard. Political will is needed for QPQ but so is a worthy allocation to next year's defence budget to boost deterrence.

(The writer, a retired Lt Gen, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, & founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff; views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT ANYWAY?

Sir — This is in response to Prafull Goradia's article titled "The life & career of Mohammad Ali Jinnah" (December 24). Though it would be unfair to say that the Partition of India was the handiwork of MA Jinnah only, the whole world knows that the Muslim League leader played a pivotal role in that gory episode. Had Pakistan been achieved by taking resort to non-violence dialogues debates and the population of the sub-continent not got adversely affected; perhaps a favorable case could have been made for Jinnah.

But the fact remains that it was Jinnah's call of "Direct Action Day" that provoked the year-long Great Calcutta Killings and resulted in thousands of innocents being butchered to death. Jinnah's dream of Pakistan got fulfilled at the expense of the lives of millions. And those who survived the mayhem found themselves raped, widowed, orphaned, uprooted, and homeless overnight. After achieving his goal, Jinnah acted pious by promising equality for all Pakistanis, irrespective of their religious affiliation! But that rhetoric is not enough to absolve Jinnah of the deadly crime that he had perpetrated against humanity. So painting him as "originally secular" is meaningless in the context of his future deeds.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

### NEW GOVT IN NEPAL

Sir — Instability in Nepal for the last few decades has cast an ugly shadow on both its internal and external affairs. The November general election failed to produce a single candidate as no party could claim to form the govt despite Nepali Congress emerging as the single largest party. However, in a dramatic turn of events after weeks of speculation and negotiations were put to rest as former Maoist rebel leader Pushpa Kumar Dahal, Prachanda, is set to become the PM of the Himalayan state. His previous two terms in 2008, 2009 and 2015-16

## A good decision



The decision or initiative of the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who invited Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati and Jayant Singh of Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) to participate in the Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY), as per

sources for the unity of the country is a welcome step. A formal letter has been written by the Congress leader but its not received consent from these leaders.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra will resume on January 3 from Ghaziabad in UP and it is said that Congress wants all like-minded parties to participate in the Yatra which is already successful in other states with a very large participation of people from all castes, communities, and religions. Earlier, many non-Congress leaders and celebrities including actor and politician Kamal Haasan joined the yatra. It is high time leaders of political parties must join the Yatra irrespective of different ideologies.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

were marred in controversy owing to a political crisis over sharing of power. His decade-long armed struggle from 1996 to 2006 only ended with establishing peace in November 2006 by means of an agreement.

In a nation clouded by political and economic instability where smaller parties role as brokers by siding either with Mr Deoba or Mr Oli, it is no surprise then that its pressing problems like maintaining law and order, fighting corruption, creating jobs, improving economic conditions, providing health and quality education remain as elusive as ever. The new govt has its task cut out. The political changes may not bode well for India as the guerrilla leader's proximity to China and his pro-China stance will pose problems for a healthy relationship.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

### SPORTSPERSONS' CAREERS

Sir — Sportspersons' careers often hang on slender threads, waltzing amidst swings in fortunes. None can be a better example of this fact than the two soccer giants - Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, whose contrasting campaigns were the highlights in the recently con-

cluded FIFA 2022 World Cup. While Messi reached the pinnacle of glory by winning the cup, in contrast, Ronaldo's extraordinary career has undergone a sudden, undeniable, and maybe irreversible shift. It is really sad that the Portugal star, post world cup, has been relegated to a state where he has millions of die-hard fans, yet still being lonely. Imagine a football giant, who everyone came to watch, yet was stuck on the bench often because of the rift in the relationship between him and Coach Fernando Santos. Or precisely, being Cristiano Ronaldo, yet not being wanted now.

Hitting the football into the net with regularity was what Ronaldo had been doing for years. But when he can't do that anymore, his value plummets. Sadly, just in the space of one world cup, Ronaldo's legacy has been battered beyond repair. As for Messi, completing the set of trophies with the summit clash of the game is not only phenomenal but also like cutting through the knife in the heart of Ronaldo.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

## SOUND BITE

He (Vajpayee) was a rare combination of a politician, poet, fearless human being, and sympathetic leader who had no enemies, like Ajatshatru.

Former President — Ram Nath Kovind



I wished (Modi) a successful G20 presidency...now I count on India's participation in its implementation. I also thanked (him) for humanitarian aid and support in the UN.

Ukrainian President — Volodymyr Zelensky

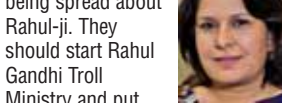
... I was coming out of some serious cinema with Uri, Bhoot. As an actor, even I was hungry to explore.

Actor — Vicky Kaushal



I feel honoured to have been assigned this responsibility by the PCB Management Committee and will have no stone unturned in fulfilling this responsibility to the best of my abilities.

Pakistan cricketer — Shahid Afridi



A lot of lies are being spread about Rahul-ji. They should start Rahul Gandhi Troll Ministry and put Smriti Irani as the in-charge. She does not talk about when atrocities are committed against women.

Congress Social Media incharge — Supriya Srinetra



FIRST COLUMN

HEALTHY, FIT INDIA IS MUST FOR WELLBEING

Govt is addressing numerous critical health challenges



MONIKA ARORA

Health is the building block for the prosperity of a nation. The Covid-19 has brought the focus back on healthy living and the need for robust health infrastructure, and the Indian government has been quick to respond. Even before the pandemic struck, the government was emphasising on the holistic health and well-being of all. With programmes like Ayushman Bharat and Mission Indradhanush, the government has been addressing numerous critical health challenges and promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Another important but often ignored area for health programming has been women and adolescents. The health of the nation depends on the health of its women, children, and youth but health-seeking data among them in India is less than one per cent as per a study. Similarly, only a few adolescents (5 per cent young men and 8 per cent young women) are aware of AFHC in India. Health Promotion among adolescents is the need of the hour as their empowerment is crucial to address the looming burden of overweight – obesity and NCDs among adolescents alongside the unfinished agenda of malnutrition and communicable diseases. POSHAN Abhiyaan is a path-breaking government flagship programme to improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.



CNNS data has highlighted huge overweight-obesity prevalence among 10-19 years in India with five per cent in both girls and boys. Over 17 million children, aged 5-19 years in India are affected by obesity. If left unchecked, these numbers will increase to 27 million by 2030-34. Thus, addressing the food environment to enable healthy choices for children and adolescents is crucial. Findings of a recent study conducted by the PHFI's research team with support from the WHO country office for India in 2021 highlighted that the advertising environment in and around schools is obesogenic, despite government and educational institutes guidelines on restricting the availability and accessibility of HFSS foods. Another PHFI study conducted a content analysis of food advertisements on popular television channels among children and youth in India. The results revealed that a total of 88.6 per cent of 1735 food advertisements were for HFSS foods and a higher proportion of food advertisements were seen on children's channels (38 per cent) than on youth channels (23 per cent). The study highlighted that the majority (90-95 per cent) of advertisements broadcast on television channels targeting children and youth were of HFSS foods. These studies laid the foundation for designing and initiating the 'Let's Fix Our Food' (LFOF) campaign to combat an obesogenic environment for children and youth. Better adolescent health can only be achieved by meaningfully engaging adolescents in intervention design and implementation. Recently, when multiple stakeholders convened nationally on the issue of addressing obesity among children and adolescents in India, it was noted that adolescents' voices were missing in these academic and scientific debates. It led to the launch of the 'LFOF initiative, which is co-created with adolescents. Under this initiative, their meaningful engagement in creating a healthy food environment in the country and leading to ownership of issues as campaigns are designed and delivered by the youth themselves. It will create health-promoting norms among adolescents, in families, and communities and will also support policies that will enable addressing malnutrition by addressing both ends of malnutrition: obesity and undernutrition. The time is ripe to come together and work towards the nation of our dreams, a healthier and happier India, by bringing all the relevant stakeholders for strengthening awareness and adoption of healthy behaviours around nutrition and physical activity among adolescents. (The author is Vice-President, Public Health Foundation of India)

# Teachers should play role of friend, parent

A teacher's job is to equip the students to overcome the travails they face in their later life

There was a time when a teacher was looked upon as a role model by students. Apart from imbibing knowledge, students also copied their teacher's attitude and character in their private life. A teacher is considered at par with God; whatever they deliver is considered divine by the students and the parents. They were the sole provider of knowledge for students. Before the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, corporal punishment by teachers was never considered a punishable act.

There are instances where parents supported the action of the teachers, for they knew that teachers punish students only for their betterment. Situations have changed recently, and parents consider even compelling a student to learn as a grave crime! If a student commits suicide, authorities make the teacher a culprit, and the media also goes against the teachers. A true teacher should act as a guiding light in the life of students, correcting them when they make mistakes and acting as a philosopher to provide tips to manage the travails in life.

But in today's digital era, the public perception of teachers has changed a lot. They are no longer considered a provider of knowledge. For today's generation, Google and YouTube are the knowledge sources. Even a kindergarten child knows how to use these on a laptop and smart-phone. Today's children learn to attain every skill through the internet. They learn foreign languages, learn music and other skills easily using apps available on the internet.

Suppose the purpose of a university is to facilitate the advancement of knowledge and the development of high cognitive skills in the community. In that case, Google can aptly be called a 'Google University'.

In this era of 'Google University', a teacher is considered secondary, mostly to act as an intermediate between humans and machines. For teachers to survive in this new world is challenging, especially for school and college teachers.

Teachers in the earlier generations ranked based on their knowledge in their domain and their attitude. Today if a teacher has to earn respect in the knowledge domain, they need to overpower the 'Google University'. This is a difficult task for many. The attitude of a teacher in the present generation is hard to define. Indian society gives high respect to teachers and the teaching profession. Our tradition considers teachers at par with God, and hence they expect some qualities from a teacher that a student can emulate.

Truthfully speaking, most teachers are just moving with the trends of the society and never try to keep their individuality at the forefront. They try to satisfy the needs of the present generation of students.



IN THIS ERA OF 'GOOGLE UNIVERSITY', A TEACHER IS CONSIDERED SECONDARY, MOSTLY TO ACT AS AN INTERMEDIATE BETWEEN HUMANS AND MACHINES. FOR TEACHERS TO SURVIVE IN THIS NEW WORLD IS CHALLENGING, ESPECIALLY FOR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TEACHERS

(The author is a science communicator and academic)

Many of today's teachers try to be friends with students to be in their good books and be among them. Partying with students, dancing with them and being with them on social media are new means of impressing students. There are hardly very few students who expect their teachers to be a knowledge repository.

Everyone in our society, be it students or teachers, has become an attention seeker through social media. Seeking attention is the basic human instinct. Toddler seeks attention from their parents; a student seeks attention from their teachers; a teenager from friends of the opposite sex, a professional from their peers; in every sphere of life and every stratum of society, people have become attention seekers.

The quantum of posts available on various social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or Pixstory is ample proof of this. A teacher being a part of this new digital society is no exception. Teachers dancing with students, partying with students, or even dating students and posting their photos and videos on social media has become a new norm in this new world. Many teachers play appeasement politics with their students for their survival.

Of course, like any other person, a teacher has a professional as well as private life. There is no need to intrude into their private life. That doesn't make sense to have the teacher and student consuming alcohol together or taking a smoke together. There are excellent teachers who have their tempta-

tions like any other person. The authorities should check whether the teacher is doing their profession judiciously.

Even though a good teacher should be a friend to a student, they should know where to draw the line. They should know how to keep a distance from students. Too much closeness to students may be misused by some.

Many institutions have put forth a dress code for teachers, driven mainly by the prevailing traditions in that society. The dress code also gives dignity to the profession and helps demarcate teachers from students. Otherwise, it would be tough to identify a young teacher from a student. Imagine how our army men/ women would look without proper uniforms.

The unwritten rules and codes of ethics formulated by society are based on the experience our ancestors gained through their experience. The teachers are dealing with students, who are mostly in the age group of adolescents or teenagers. Their brain is fluid and is driven by the temptations caused by body chemicals. Many times the outward behaviour a student expresses is beyond their control. It's the duty of every teacher not to instigate their physiological status to extremes. In a recent affidavit filed by the Kerala University of Health Sciences at the Kerala High Court, it was stated that "absolute freedom on attaining the age of 18 may not be appropriate and good for the society, and maturation is fully accomplished at the age of 25".

In this digital communication world, a teacher must be more cautious in their attitude and behaviour on social media, as their students are constantly monitoring them. In this era, it is the duty of teachers to teach students how to behave on social media and how to tackle crimes associated with it. They should teach students how to use the internet judiciously.

With the emergence of AI technologies, all creative things like writing, drawing, compositions, etc., where human brains need to be used, can be done using the internet within minutes. In this situation, evaluating a student and developing content for teaching is an arduous task for the teachers.

A teacher's job is not only to complete the syllabus or pass examinations but to equip the students to overcome the travails they face in their later life. A good teacher should play the role of a good student, friend and parent. Only if they consider themselves a student will they be curious to learn more from their domain. Similarly, they should be a good friend to students, listening to their concerns. They should also play the role of parents showing empathy and correcting them when they make mistakes.

The problem we face in our education system is that we lack teachers who are passionate about the profession. Many have taken up the job either by accident or by peer pressure.

Teaching is a divine profession, and teachers should show divinity by inculcating the spirit gained from our rich heritage.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

YOU CHANGED THE ENTIRE [PCB] CONSTITUTION TO BRING IN ONE PERSON, NAJAM SETHI, AND TO ADJUST HIM. I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.  
— EX-CHAIRMAN OF PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD  
RAMEEZ RAJA



THE CRICKET REGIME HEADED BY RAMIZ RAJA IS NO MORE. THE 2014 PCB CONSTITUTION STANDS RESTORED. THOUSANDS OF CRICKETERS WILL BE EMPLOYED AGAIN. THE FAMINE IN CRICKET WILL COME TO AN END.  
— CHAIRMAN PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD  
NAJAM SETHI

# Next year will be crucial for India on several counts

Economy, politics and foreign affairs will hog limelight with keen global interests in 2023

What is in store for the year 2023? Will it be good or bad? For the past three years, the world has faced an unprecedented pandemic, Covid-19, which has devastated the globe. Crystal-ball gazers are hoping for a better scenario next year. They expect the economy's health will be restored and hope to resolve the war-like situation in Ukraine.

But the famous French astrologer Nostradamus predicted that in 2023 the Ukraine crisis might lead to a world war. He foretold a temperature rise and heralded the arrival of a new Pope, a civil war in America, civil unrest in the world, and a Mars landing.

The Economist magazine notes the global interlocking challenges, including the war



KALYANI SHANKAR

(The author is a senior journalist)

in Ukraine, food and fuel prices, the fight against inflation, the transition to renewable energy, and China's uncertain post-pandemic path. India might overtake China as the world's most populous country next year. It has the world's largest youth population.

On foreign policy, India will host the prestigious 18th G20 Heads of State and Governments summit on September 9-10, 2023 in New Delhi. As part of the Summit, India will hold more than 200 events spread across major metro cities. Prime Minister Modi plans to showcase himself and India in a grand show to project himself as a world leader ahead of the 2024 polls.

The coronation of King Charles 111 is a colourful

event next year. Politically, for India, the upcoming nine state elections are the most significant in 2023. It will decide the fate of several parties and their leaders, including Congress, the BJP, and other regional parties. The strength of Rahul Gandhi will be tested in these polls after his current Bharat Jodo yatra ends in February.

Nine states will go to polls over the next 12 months. They are—Meghalaya, Tripura, and Nagaland in February; Karnataka in May; Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Telangana, and Rajasthan in November. The government might also hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir. The results will be a precursor for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Who wins and

who loses will impact the electorate and the workers' morale.

The ruling BJP is making all efforts to expand its base. For the Opposition, it is vital to ensure that non-BJP parties win to stop the BJP juggernaut. There is a direct fight between the BJP and the Congress in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. In Karnataka, there will be a triangular contest between BJP, Congress, and JDS. In Telangana, a triangular fight will be between TRS, Congress, and BJP. In Tripura, too, there will be a triangular fight between the BJP, the Congress, and the Left Front.

Of these, the BJP rules Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. Both are critical for Congress and the BJP. And so are Chhattisgarh and

Rajasthan, the only two states Congress currently holds. The BJP wants to wrest Telangana from chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, who fancies himself as the challenger to Modi. Confident because his party has maintained over 40 per cent vote share, establishing its formidable position in Telangana, KCR wants to perform a hat trick. Though he has finished the Congress and Telugu Desam, to his dismay, the BJP has emerged as the main opposition party in the space vacated.

The immediate focus is on Karnataka. The BJP has high stakes as that is the only state the BJP is ruling in the south. The Congress-JD(S) combine has a chance to wrest the government from the BJP.

Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram are poll bound in the Northeast. The BJP currently rules Tripura. In Meghalaya and Nagaland, the BJP-backed governments are in power. The Mizo National Front government is ruling in Mizoram. The once pre-eminent Congress is almost finished now.

Will Congress revive its strength? Will Rahul Gandhi emerge stronger? The Himachal Pradesh win this month has boosted the morale of the Congress. It has allowed a chance for Congress to unite the Opposition.

The opposition parties have realised that Modi will get a third term unless they combine. They will decide on the prime ministerial candi-

date only after the polls. There are at least half a dozen contenders, mostly the egoistic regional satraps like Mamata Banerjee, KCR, and Arvind Kejriwal.

The return of covid with a new variant is a new threat. India managed to contain the pandemic by vaccinating a billion plus people. Still, the government should be on guard against any new variants.

On the economy, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on February 1. Inflation and price rise are two critical issues. The World Bank expects India's GDP growth to be better than expected, but inflation would stay above 7 per cent.

Overall, 2023 might bring us better prospects in most spheres.



# Russia says it shot down Ukrainian drone near airbase

AP ■ KYIV

The Russian military reported Monday that it shot down a Ukrainian drone approaching an air base deep inside Russia, the second time the facility has been targeted this month - again revealing weaknesses in Russia's air defenses.

Russia's Defense Ministry said debris killed three servicemen at the Engels air base, which houses Tu-95 and Tu-160 nuclear-capable strategic bomber planes that have struck Ukraine with missiles in the 10-month-old war.

Russia's Baza news outlet reported that four people were wounded and said a fire had broken out, with explosions, sirens and flashes on a video it posted on its Telegram channel. The Defense Ministry claimed no Russian aircraft were damaged. It wasn't clear whether the drone had been launched from Ukraine or Russian territory.

If the drone had been launched from Ukraine, it would have traveled more than 600 kilometers (370 miles) to reach Engels, located in Russia's Saratov region on the Volga River. Shooting the drone down

after such a long trip inside Russia again raises questions about the effectiveness of Russia's air defenses, particularly those intended to protect its most strategic military assets such as warplanes capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

In keeping with the Kyiv government's long-standing practice of not confirming cross-border attacks but welcoming their results, Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat didn't directly acknowledge his country's involvement in Monday's incident in an interview on Ukrainian television, but said: "These are the consequences of Russian aggression."

He added: "If the Russians thought that the war wouldn't affect them deep behind their lines, they were deeply mistaken."

Russia has suffered numerous cross-border attacks during the war on its main territory, as well as on the Crimean Peninsula, which it illegally annexed in 2014. The incidents have outraged Russian military bloggers who say they show the country's weak air defenses and security systems in general.

In another cross-border



incident that couldn't be independently confirmed, Russia's Tass news agency reported Monday that the country's security forces had killed four Ukrainian saboteurs attempting to enter the Bryansk region from Ukraine. The report claimed the infiltrators carried explosive materials when they were caught Sunday.

The cross-border attacks on Russian military and other strategic sites prompted Russian President Vladimir

Putin to order almost weekly missile and weaponized drone attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing widespread blackouts that also knocked out heating and water supplies in increasingly frigid weather. The attacks, which began in October across much of the country, have been occurring as ground fighting focused on Ukraine's southern and eastern regions.

In eastern Ukraine on Monday, Luhansk's Ukrainian

governor, Serhiy Haidai, said Russian forces have withdrawn from their military command operations post in the town of Kreminna as Ukrainian forces were approaching after months of intense fighting. Russia's Defense Ministry didn't comment on the withdrawal claim.

Russian forces relocated to Kreminna and several other areas in September after they pulled back from the Kharkiv region in eastern Ukraine.

Kreminna is in the eastern

Luhansk region, which is almost entirely under Moscow's control, and is on an important supply route for Russian forces and serves as a gateway for movement into other strategic positions.

Earlier, Haidai reported that Russia had withdrawn its occupying government administration from Svatove, 51 kilometers north of Kreminna.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Monday that "the situation there is difficult, painful. The occupiers are expending all the resources available to them - and they are considerable resources - to squeeze out at least some advance."

Haidai told Ukrainian television on Monday that Russian forces in the region are "suffering huge losses and medical facilities are overwhelmed with wounded soldiers." The Russian army is redeploying paratroopers from the Kherson region to the area, he added.

In neighbouring Donetsk region, partially occupied by Russia, fierce battles continue around the city of Bakhmut, which Russian forces have been trying to seize for weeks to consolidate their grip on Ukraine's

east. Zelenskyy said last week Bakhmut was the hottest spot on the war's 1,300-kilometre front line.

Ukrainian officials have maintained ambiguity over previous high-profile attacks, including drone strikes on Russian military bases earlier this month.

On Dec. 5, unprecedented drone strikes on Engels and the Dyagilevo base in the Ryazan region in western Russia killed a total of three servicemen and wounded four others. In retaliation, Russia launched a massive missile barrage in Ukraine that struck homes and buildings and killed civilians.

Elsewhere on the battlefield, at least four civilians were wounded in Russian shelling of five Ukrainian southeast regions over the past 24 hours, according to the deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko. Overall, the intensity of the shelling from Sunday night into Monday was significantly lower.

For the first time in weeks, Russian forces didn't shell the Dnipropetrovsk region, which borders the partially occupied southern regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, its governor,

Valentyn Reznichenko, reported on Telegram.

"This is the third quiet night in 5.5 months since the Russians started shelling" the areas around the city of Nikopol, Reznichenko wrote. Nikopol is located across the Dnieper River from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which is under the control of Russian forces and whose six reactors are shut down.

Ukrainian-controlled areas of the neighboring Kherson region were shelled 33 times over the past 24 hours, according to Kherson's Ukrainian Gov. Yaroslav Yanushevich. No casualties were reported.

On Sunday, Russian forces attacked the city of Kramatorsk, where Ukrainian forces are headquartered. Three missiles hit an industrial facility and damaged residential buildings, but no casualties were reported, according to local officials.

On Saturday, a deadly attack on the city of Kherson, which Kyiv's forces recaptured last month, killed and wounded scores of people. Local residents are lining up to donate blood for the wounded, Yanushevich said Monday.

## Ukraine FM aims for February peace summit

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's foreign minister said Monday that his nation wants a summit to end the war but he doesn't anticipate Russia taking part, a statement making it hard to foresee the devastating invasion ending soon.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told The Associated Press that his government wants a "peace" summit within two months at the United Nations with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as mediator.

The UN gave a very cautious response.

"As the secretary-general has said many times in the past, he can only mediate if all parties want him to mediate," UN associate spokesperson Florencia Soto Nino-Martinez said Monday.

Kuleba said Russia must face a war-crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow. He said, however, that other nations should feel free to engage with Russians, as happened before a grain agreement between Turkey and Russia.

The AP interview offered a glimpse at Ukraine's vision of how the war with Russia could one day end, although any peace talks would be months away and highly contingent on complex international negotiations.

Kuleba also said he was "absolutely satisfied" with the results of President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy's visit to the US last week, and he revealed that the US government had made a special plan to get the Patriot missile battery ready to be operational in the country in less than six months. Usually, the training takes up to a year.

Kuleba said during the interview at the Foreign Ministry that Ukraine will do whatever it can to win the war in 2023.

"Every war ends in a diplomatic way," he said. "Every war ends as a result of the actions taken on the battlefield and at the negotiating table."

Commenting on Kuleba's proposal, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told the state RIA Novosti news agency that Russia "never followed conditions set by others. Only our own and common sense."

A Kremlin spokesman said last week that no Ukrainian peace plan can succeed without taking into account "the realities of today that can't be ignored" - a reference to Moscow's demand that Ukraine recognise Russia's sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which was annexed in 2014, as well as other territorial gains.

Kuleba said the Ukrainian government would like to have the "peace" summit by the end of February.

"The United Nations could be the best venue for holding this summit, because this is not about making a favour to a certain country," he said. "This is really about bringing everyone



on board."

At the Group of 20 summit in Bali in November, Zelenskyy made a long-distance presentation of a 10-point peace formula that includes the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression and security guarantees for Ukraine.

Asked about whether Ukraine would invite Russia to the summit, he said that Moscow would first need to face prosecution for war crimes at an international court.

"They can only be invited to this step in this way," Kuleba said.

About the UN Secretary-General's role, Kuleba said: "He has proven himself to be an efficient mediator and an efficient negotiator, and most importantly, as a man of principle and integrity. So we would welcome his active participation."

The UN spokesman's office had no immediate comment.

Other world leaders have also offered to mediate, such as those in Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

The foreign minister again downplayed comments by Russian authorities that they are ready for talks.

"They (Russians) regularly say that they are ready for negotiations, which is not true, because everything they do on the battlefield proves the opposite," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed few days ago that his country is ready for talks to end the war in Ukraine, but suggested that the Ukrainians are the ones refusing to take that step. Despite Putin's comments, Moscow's forces have kept attacking Ukraine - a sign that peace isn't imminent.

Zelenskyy's visit to the US was his first foreign trip since the war started on February 24. Kuleba praised Washington's efforts and underlined the significance of the visit.

Ukraine secured a new USD 1.8 billion military aid package, including a Patriot

missile battery, during the trip.

Kuleba said that the move "opens the door for other countries to do the same."

He said that the US government developed a programme for Ukrainian troops to complete training faster than usual "without any damage to the quality of the use of this weapon on the battlefield."

While Kuleba didn't mention a specific time frame, he said only that it will be "very much less than six months." And he added that the training will be done "outside" Ukraine.

During Russia's ground and air war in Ukraine, Kuleba has been second only to Zelenskyy in carrying Ukraine's message and needs to an international audience, whether through Twitter posts or meetings with friendly foreign officials.

On Monday, Ukraine called on UN member states to deprive Russia of its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and to exclude it from the world body. Kuleba said they have long "prepared for this step to uncover the fraud and deprive Russia of its status."

The Foreign Ministry says that Russia never went through the legal procedure for acquiring membership and taking the place of the USSR at the UN Security Council after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"This is the beginning of an uphill battle, but we will fight, because nothing is impossible," he told the AP.

## Amid Ukraine conflict, COVID-inflicted crises, India emerges as voice of Global South

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India emerged as a voice of the Global South during its two-year term in the powerful UN Security Council, which acrimoniously deliberated on Russia's invasion of Ukraine that led to unprecedented levels of global food and fuel insecurity as the world continued to grapple with inequalities amplified by the pandemic.

Before relinquishing its non-permanent seat in the 15-member Council on December 31, 2022, India presided over the powerful UN body in December with the country's first woman Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj sitting in the President's seat at the horse-shoe table.

Just about two months into India's second year of its 2021-2022 term on the Council as elected non-permanent member, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a 'special military operation' in eastern Ukraine on February 24.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made a direct and strong appeal to Putin to "stop your troops from attacking Ukraine" and give peace a chance as the UN chief called the invasion the "saddest moment in my tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations."

As the Russian invasion unfolded, India's then UN



envoy Ambassador T S Tirumurti in February underscored New Delhi's call for urgent de-escalation of tensions and cautioned that the situation was in danger of spiralling into a major crisis.

In statements in the Council and the General Assembly throughout the year, India consistently called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and an end to violence. New Delhi emphasised that dialogue and diplomacy are the only way forward and actions that exacerbate the conflict should be avoided.

"Our world faced many trials and tests in 2022 - some familiar, others we might not have imagined just one year ago," Guterres said, adding that even in the brutal war in Ukraine, the power of determined, discreet diplomacy has helped people and tackle unprecedented levels of global food insecurity.

India abstained on most

resolutions related to the Russia-Ukraine war in the Security Council, General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, including on a Security Council procedural resolution to convene a rare emergency special session of the General Assembly.

The 193-member General Assembly, the most representative body of the United Nations, convened the rare emergency session on February 28 on Russia's aggression against Ukraine, only the 11th such emergency session of the UNGA since 1950.

Kamboj, who took charge of India's Permanent Mission in New York in August, has asserted that in the course of the Ukraine conflict, India has "spoken in one voice that we are for peace. Peace is also a side and we favour diplomacy and dialogue... We are among the few countries, dare I say, which are speaking to both sides."

## Assassination bid on Imran 'planned conspiracy', says JIT



PTI ■ LAHORE

The assassination bid on Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan during his long march to Islamabad last month was a "well-thought-out conspiracy," according to the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) probing the incident.

Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, suffered bullet injuries in the right leg on November 3 when two gunmen fired a volley of bullets at him and others standing on a container-mounted truck in the Wazirabad area (some 150-km from Lahore), where he was leading the long march to press for snap polls.

Briefing the media on the findings of the JIT headed by Lahore police chief Ghulam Mahmood Dogar, Punjab Home Minister Omar Sarfraz Cheema said on Monday that

the gun attack on Khan was "organised one and well-thought-out conspiracy."

He said the JIT investigation found that more than one attacker tried to assassinate 70-year-old Khan in the rally.

Police had arrested the prime suspect, Muhammad Naveed, who has been in the JIT custody on a physical remand till January 3 for interrogation.

The minister said Naveed is a "trained assassin and he was present at the crime scene with his accomplices."

He said Naveed also failed a polygraph test. Naveed had told police he wanted to kill Khan as music was played during Azan time during his long march/rally.

Naveed's cousin Muhammad Waqas has also been in the JIT's custody till January 3 for a controversial

social media post. Waqas on November 3 had tweeted "something big is going to happen today in Imran Khan's rally".

Khan had blamed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and Major General Faisal Naseer of ISI for hatching a plot to assassinate him.

The Punjab police had registered the FIR in connection with the assassination attempt on Khan but didn't mention the high-profile suspects including ISI's top man Khan held responsible for the attack.

Khan dismissed the FIR, saying without nominating Sharif, Sanaullah, and ISI Counter Intelligence Wing head Maj-Gen Faisal in the FIR it is a mere "piece of trash".

The Punjab police said they nabbed Naveed from the crime scene and he had confessed to his crime. Naveed in his confessional statement said that he wanted to kill Khan as music was played during Azan time during his long march.

Indirectly blaming the powerful military establishment, Khan had said: "I wonder if I, being former Prime Minister of Pakistan, can't get an FIR registered in connection with the attack on me and other PTI workers what will happen to the common man."

## Sharif pledges to eliminate terrorism from Pakistan



PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

As Pakistan reels from multiple incidents of terrorism, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed his vow to eradicate the menace amid criticism from ousted premier Imran Khan on the government's "failure" to curb militancy during its eight-month stint.

Addressing a gathering in the Dera Ismail Khan district of the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday, Sharif said that the menace of terrorism was on the rise and the state would crush it very soon, the Dawn newspaper quoted him as saying.

He said that with the help of provincial governments and security forces, the government would eliminate terrorism in all its forms.

Sharif said that a meeting of the National Security

Committee (NSC) would be summoned in a few days to take stock of the security situation.

Commenting on the attack on a security compound claimed by the outlawed Pakistani Taliban (TTP) terror group in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district last week, Sharif said it was heart-breaking and added that the law enforcement agencies conducted a successful operation, killing all terrorists who had taken over the compound.

Meanwhile, former prime minister Khan, who wants snap polls in the country at all costs and is likely to dissolve Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies, lambasted the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government for its "failure" to rein in terrorism after coming to power

in April this year.

During a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf meeting at his residence in Lahore, Khan, the chairman of the party, claimed that his government had "controlled terrorism and was proudly leading the country towards making it one of the world's top tourism destinations".

He expressed his concern over the situation at the Pakistan-Afghan border as well. He claimed there was a 52 per cent increase in terror incidents since April and chided the government for the resurgence of terrorism.

"At least 52 per cent increase has been recorded in terrorism cases across the country that claimed some 270 precious lives and left over 550 people injured," the former premier said.

Separately, PTI party leader Fawad Chaudhry told reporters that terrorism was returning to Pakistan.

He said that during its tenure, the PTI government was proudly projecting Pakistan as the world's top tourist destination, and now the nation was being pushed into the "fire of terrorism, and the embassies were issuing advisories to their employees to avoid five-star hotels" in Islamabad.



## Pakistan makes 'special' security plan for Islamabad amid terror alert

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Police on Tuesday announced special security measures, including setting up 25 new check-posts, to tighten security in the federal capital here after several countries, including the US, UK, Saudi Arabia and Australia asked their citizens to restrict their movement, warning of a possible terror threat.

According to the security plan, shared on Islamabad police's official Twitter account, entry points of the Red Zone will be recorded via Safe City cameras while video surveillance of metro bus passengers would also be conducted.

Pakistani citizens as well as foreign nationals have been asked to carry their identification documents with them.

"Special security plan issued in view of the current

security situation in Islamabad. Temporary security check posts have been established at 25 different locations in Islamabad," it said.

Police also advised the local people to register tenants and employees at the nearest police station and warned that those employing unregistered local or foreign workers will be investigated.

All motorists have been instructed to ensure their vehicles had number plates issued by the excise office. People have been asked to inform authorities of any unusual activity on the highway.

The security plan comes in the wake of the US, UK, Saudi Arabian and Australian governments issuing advisories to their respective citizens in Pakistan to restrict their movements due to possible terror threats.



# Western New York hit by cold, storm; death toll ups to 28

AP ■ BUFFALO

Buffalo residents hovered around space heaters, hunted for cars buried in snow drifts and looked for more victims Monday, after 28 people died in one of the worst weather-related disasters ever to hit western New York.

The rest of the United States also was reeling from the ferocious winter storm, with at least another two dozen deaths reported in other parts of the country.

Up to 9 more inches of snow (23 centimeters) could fall in some areas of western New York through Tuesday, the National Weather Service said. "This is not the end yet," said Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz, calling the blizzard "the worst storm probably in our lifetime," even for an area accustomed to punishing snow.

Some people, he noted, were stranded in their cars for more than two days.

President Joe Biden said his prayers were with the victims' families, and offered federal assistance Monday to the hard-hit state.

Those who lost their lives around Buffalo were found in cars, homes and snowbanks.

Some died while shovelling snow, others when emergency crews could not respond in time to medical crises.

Melissa Carrick, a doula, said the blizzard forced her to coach a pregnant client through childbirth by telephone. An ambulance crew transported the woman to a hospital about 45 minutes south of Buffalo because none of the closer hospitals were reachable.

"In any other normal Buffalo storm? I would just go because that's what you do — just drive through the snow," she said. "But you knew this was different."

Scientists say the climate change crisis may have contributed to the intensity of the storm. That's because the atmosphere can carry more water vapour, which acts as fuel, said Mark Serreze, director of the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Victor Gensini, a meteorology professor at Northern Illinois University, likened a single weather event to an "at-bat" — and the climate as your "batting average."

"It's hard to say," Serreze said. "But are the dice a little bit loaded now? Absolutely."



Utility trucks line up in Buffalo, N.Y., where thousands remain without power after blizzard conditions on Monday

AP | PTI

The blizzard roared across western New York Friday and Saturday. With many grocery stores in the Buffalo area closed and driving bans in place, some people pleaded on social media for donations of food

and diapers.

"It was like looking at a white wall for 14 to 18 hours straight," Poloncarz, the county official, said.

Relief is coming later this week, as forecasts call for tem-

peratures to slowly rise, said Ashton Robinson Cook, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Cook said the bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in

a strong storm — has weakened. It developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions including heavy winds and snow.

Some 3,410 domestic and international flights were cancelled Monday as of about 3 p.m. EDT, according to the tracking site FlightAware. The site said Southwest Airlines had 2,497 cancellations — about 60% of its scheduled flights and about 10 times as many as any other major US carrier.

Southwest said the weather was improving, which would "stabilize and improve our situation".

Based on FlightAware data, airports all across the US were suffering from cancellations and delays, including Denver, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Seattle, Baltimore and Chicago.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul toured the aftermath in Buffalo — her hometown — on Monday, calling the blizzard "one for the ages". Almost every fire truck in the city became stranded Saturday, she said.

Hochul noted the storm came a little over a month after the region was inundated with another "historic" snowfall. Between the two storms, snow-

fall totals are not far off from the 242 centimeters the area normally sees in an entire winter season.

The National Weather Service said the snow total at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport stood at 1.25 metres at 10 am Monday. Officials say the airport will be shut through Wednesday morning.

Shahida Muhammad told WKBW that an outage knocked out power to her 1-year-old son's ventilator. She and the child's father manually administered breaths from Friday until Sunday when rescuers saw her desperate social media posts and came to their aid.

In a makeshift hut in her living room, Trisha LoGrasso was still huddled around a space heater Monday with three of her children and her eldest daughter's boyfriend. The temperature inside her Buffalo home was 5.5 degrees Celsius. She was without heat because of a gas leak, and burst pipes left her with no running water.

"I've lived here my whole life, and this is the worst storm I've ever seen," the 48-year-old said. Melissa Osmon and her husband James were without

power for more than 72 hours in the Buffalo suburb of Williamsville, and would retreat to their car to stay warm for hours at a time.

"We even watched the Buffalo Bills game on our phone," Osmon said, speaking by phone from her GMC Acadia. "You can see your breath inside the house," she said. "That's how cold it is."

The storm knocked out power in communities from Maine to Seattle.

Storm-related deaths were reported practically nationwide, including at least eight killed in crashes in Missouri, Kansas and Kentucky. A woman fell through Wisconsin river ice, and there was a fatal fire at a Kansas homeless persons camp.

In Jackson, Mississippi, crews struggled Monday to get water through the capital city's beleaguered water system, authorities said. Many areas had no water or low water pressure. On Christmas Day, residents were told to boil their drinking water due to water lines bursting in the frigid temperatures.

"The issue has to be significant leaks in the system that we have yet to identify," the city said in a statement Monday.

# More Rohingya refugees reach Indonesia after weeks at sea

AP ■ PIDIE

A second group in two days of weak and exhausted Rohingya Muslims landed on a beach in Indonesia's northernmost province of Aceh on Monday after weeks at sea, officials said.

At least 185 men, women and children disembarked from a rickety wooden boat at dusk on Ujong Pie beach at Muara Tiga, a coastal village in Aceh's Pidie district, said local police chief Fauzi, who goes by a single name.

"They are very weak because of dehydration and exhaustion after weeks at sea," Fauzi said. They were taken to the village hall and will stay there while they receive help

from residents, health workers and others.Fauzi said that immigration officials and police were trying to identify the refugee to determine if they were from the group of 190 Rohingya who were reported by United Nations to be drifting in a small boat in the Andaman Sea for a month.

The UNHCR on Friday urged countries to rescue the refugees, saying reports indicated they were in dire condition with insufficient food or water.

"Many are women and children, with reports of up to 20 people dying on the unseaworthy vessel during the journey," the agency said.

Also on Friday, another group of 58 Rohingya — all



Indonesian soldiers help ethnic Rohingya women and children to step out of a military truck upon arrival at a temporary shelter after their boat landed in Pidie, Aceh province, Indonesia on Monday

AP | PTI

men — arrived in Ladong village in Aceh Besar district.

Azharul Husna, who heads the Aceh brach of KontraS, an Indonesian rights group, said Monday that the men in the group all carried UNHCR cards from refugee camps in Bangladesh and had left in search of a better life in Malaysia.

Citing one of them, Husna said the 58 refugees left Cox's

Bazar in Bangladesh, where more than 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar had fled, to work on plantations in Malaysia. Their boat was damaged and the engine failed, leaving them drifting at sea until they came ashore in Aceh.

Since 2017, Myanmar security forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and burning of thousands of homes belonging to Rohingya.

# UN agency probes origin of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia

AP ■ PIDIE

A United Nations agency is seeking information about the voyage of over 100 Rohingya Muslim refugees who landed on an Indonesian beach this week, and warned Tuesday that they will likely be more.

A distressing video circulated widely in social media showed the dehydrated and exhausted Rohingya, crumpled weakly and emaciated, many crying for help.

At least 185 men, women and children disembarked from a rickety wooden boat Monday at dusk on Ujong Pie beach at Muara Tiga, a coastal village in Aceh's Pidie district, said local police chief Fauzi, who goes by a single name.

"They are very weak because of dehydration and exhaustion after weeks at sea," Fauzi said.

Muhammad Rafki Syukri, the Protection Associate at United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

said the agency would provide Rohingya language translators and counselling to determine if they were from the group of 190 Rohingya who were reported by United Nations to be drifting in a small boat in the Andaman Sea for a month.

"With prolonged-conflict and insecure situations in their country of origin, it is possible that the movement of refugees to find safe places will continue to grow," he said.

Chris Lewa, the director of the Arakan Project, which works in support of Myanmar's Rohingya, confirmed Tuesday that the boat that landed Monday on Ujong Pie beach was from the group of 190 Rohingya. But Syukri said the UNHCR could not verify that information and was still coordinating with governments in the region.

"But we will continue to search for further information to ensure the actual data," Syukri told reporters on Tuesday while visiting the Rohingya refugees.

# Israeli air force veterans say incoming government a danger



AP ■ JERUSALEM

Over 1,000 senior Israeli air force veterans, including a former Israeli chief of staff, on Monday urged the country's top legal officials to stand tough against the incoming government.

In a letter to the chief of Israel's Supreme Court and other top officials, they said the alliance of religious and ultranationalist parties threatens Israel's future. The letter was delivered days before the new government is to take office.

"We come from all strata of society and from across the political spectrum. What we have in common today is the fear that the democratic state of Israel is in danger", the letter said.

It called the legal officials "the final line of defence" and implored them to "do everything in your reach to stop the disaster that is affecting the country."

Among the nearly 1,200 signatories were Dan Halutz, who served as military chief from 2005-2007; Avihu Ben-

## Israeli doctors reject Netanyahu ally's anti-LGBTQ remarks

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's largest medical centre and healthcare workers from hospitals around the country have spoken out against remarks by allies of Benjamin Netanyahu calling for a law to allow discrimination against LGBTQ people in hospitals and businesses.

It was part of a broader blowback against remarks made this week by Religious Zionism politicians calling for legal discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Netanyahu's new government — the most religious and hard-line in Israel's history — is made up of ultra-Orthodox parties, an ultranationalist religious faction, and his Likud party. It is to be sworn in on Thursday.

Nun, a former commander of the air force and Amos Yadlin, a former head of military intelligence.

All three are former fighter pilots. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ultra-Orthodox and far-right partners captured a parliamentary majority in Nov. 1 elections.

# Foreign firms happy as China ends quarantine

AP ■ BEIJING

Foreign companies welcomed China's decision to end quarantines for travellers from abroad as an important step to revive slumping business activity while Japan on Tuesday joined India in announcing restrictions on visitors from the country as infections surge.

The ruling Communist Party's abrupt decision to lift some of the world's strictest anti-virus controls comes as it tries reverse an economic downturn. It has ended curbs that confined millions of people to their homes and sparked protests, but hospitals have been flooded with feverish, wheezing patients as the virus spreads.

The announcement late Monday that quarantines for travellers from abroad will end Jan. 8 is the biggest step toward ending limits that have kept



most foreign visitors out of China since early 2020. Quarantines were reduced last month from seven days to five.

Also Monday, the government downgraded the official seriousness of Covid-19 and dropped a requirement for people with the virus to be quarantined. That added to a rapid drumbeat of steps to dismantle controls that had been expected to stay in place at least through mid-2023.

"It finally feels like China has turned the corner" the

chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, Colm Rafferty, said in a statement. He said ending the quarantine "clears the way for resumption of normal business travel." Business groups have warned companies were shifting investment away from China because foreign executives were blocked from visiting.

The American chamber said more than 70% of companies that responded to a poll this month expect the impact of

the latest wave of outbreaks to last no more than three months, ending in early 2023.

The British Chamber of Commerce expressed hope China will restart normal processing of business visas to allow "resumption of crucial people to people exchanges." It said that will "contribute to restoring optimism and reinstating China as a priority investment destination."

The move "will potentially boost business confidence," but companies are likely to "wait to see how the situation on the ground evolves" before making long-term decisions, the European Chamber of Commerce in China said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Japan announced visitors from China will undergo virus tests starting Friday as a "temporary emergency measure."

Public Notice

This is to inform general public that Mrs. Nita Parti has acquired the Ground Floor (Without Roof Rights), "Said Floor", Built on Property Bearing No. F-271 Land area measuring 125 Sq. yds. Situated in the Layout Plan of New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi vide Relinquishment Deed dated 14.01.2013. Do no 254. Now, Mrs. Nita Parti is intending to sell above said property to Mr. Lakshay Rajee, Mr. Mohinder Rajee and Mrs. Sunita Rajee and further Mr. Lakshay Rajee, Mr. Mohinder Rajee and Mrs. Sunita Rajee are mortgaging the above said property with "SBI Bank Ltd. & n case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 07 days of this publication to Mr. Muneesh Dhawan/ Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Law Vertas North, Unit no 307, 8th Floor, G3-ITL Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 96667071729816228636 (H).

Public Notice

My client Shri Ram Lal/s Late Shiv Lal r/o 603, Sunlight Colony-II, New Delhi-110014, hereby disown his (1) grand-son Shri Tarun Kumar s/o Shri Harbans Lal, (2) grand-daughter-in-law Smt. Anita, w/o Shri Tarun Kumar, both r/o 619, Sunlight Colony-II, New Delhi-110014, and debar them from inheriting any share in entire property No.619, Sunlight Colony-II, New Delhi-110014, belonging to my client, as my client Shri Ram Lal has already transferred the said property in favour of his son Shri Harbans Lal. Anyone dealing with the said Shri Tarun Kumar & Smt. Anita will be doing so at his own risks and consequences.

Kapil Gupta, Advocate  
525 A, Jangpura B, New Delhi-110014

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, अनुराखण्ड खण्ड, उत्तराखण्ड

उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान

लेन नं.-1, तरुण विहार, मोपरिवाला रोड, देहरादून-248001

Phone/Fax No.: 0135-2671940, E-mail - eemdujs@rediffmail.com

पत्रांक: 4312/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23

ई-निविदा संशोधन दिनांक: 27.12.2022

इस कार्यालय पत्रांक सं.- 4010 / ई - निविदा सूचना / 2022 - 23 दिनांक 09.10.2022 से आमंत्रित निविदा को पत्रांक सं.-4163 / ई - निविदा सूचना / 2022 - 23 दिनांक 19.12.2022 एवं पत्रांक सं.-4251 / ई-निविदा सूचना / 2022-23 दिनांक 23.12.2022 के द्वारा संशोधित किया गया अपरिहार्य कारणों से उक्त निविदाओं की तिथियाँ में निम्नानुसार संशोधन किया जाता है।

**निविदा समर्थ साधनी (मुख्य तिथियाँ) निम्नवत् हों:**

क्र.सं.	विवरण	अनुसूची
1	ऑनलाईन प्रकाशन की तिथि	30.12.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
2	निविदा प्रपत्र डाउनलोड करने की तिथि	30.12.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
3	प्रो-बिड मीटिंग की तिथि	03.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
4	बिड ऑनलाईन जमा करने की प्रारम्भ तिथि	07.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
5	बिड ऑनलाईन जमा करने की अन्तिम तिथि	12.01.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
6	ऑफ लाईन रूप से जमा किये जाने वाले प्रपत्र (निविदा प्रपत्र हेतु निर्धारित बुल्क, बिड सिक्योरिटी, स्टैंडिंग पेपर एवं अन्य सम्बन्धित दस्तावेज)	12.01.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
7	तकनीकी बिड खोलने की तिथि	13.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
8	वित्तीय निविदा खोलने की तिथि	सूचना पृथक से दी जायेगी

शेष नियम एवं शर्तें निविदा के अनुसार यथावत रहेंगे।

**‘जल संघर्ष-जीवन संघर्ष’** अधिशासी अभियन्ता

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, अनुराखण्ड खण्ड, उत्तराखण्ड

उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान

लेन नं.-1, तरुण विहार, मोपरिवाला रोड, देहरादून-248001

Phone/Fax No.: 0135-2671940, E-mail - eemdujs@rediffmail.com

पत्रांक: 4254/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23

ई-निविदा संशोधन दिनांक: 23.12.2022

इस कार्यालय पत्रांक सं.-4010/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक 09.10.2022 से आमंत्रित निविदा को पत्रांक सं. 4163/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक 19.12.2022 से जर्जीवन निशान कार्यक्रम के अन्तर्गत कटा पथर परेजल योजना में नालूप अधिष्ठान, उर्बल जलाशय निर्माण, राइसिंग मेन, पावर लाइन बिछाने एवं पम्पिंग स्टेशन सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य हेतु आमंत्रित ई-निविदा को अपरिहार्य कारणों से निरस्त किया जाता है।

राजेश्वर पाल  
अधिशासी अभियन्ता

Public Notice

BIHAR BANDHU CO-OPERATIVE GROUP HOUSING SOCIETY LTD Flat No.3, Pocket-5, DDA Flats, Sector-12 Dwarka, New Delhi-110075

In accordance with rule 19(2) of DCS rules, 2007, it is to inform publicly that the 2 members of the Bihar Bandhu CGHS Ltd. have resigned from the society and they have been paid their share money & contributions. The names of resigned member are

1. Sh. Mahesh Chandra Pant (M. No. 129) and 2. Sh. Anshu Sharma (M. No. 237).

If anyone who is having objections, may lodge objections at the society office, which is located at Flat No.3, Pocket-5, DDA Flats, Sector-12,Dwarka, New Delhi-78, or at the RCS office,Parliament Street, New Delhi within 7 day from the date of publication of the public notice.

Secretary - Bihar Bandhu CGHS Ltd.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that **Mrs. Rama Chauhan W/o. Mr. Arun Kumar Chauhan** who is/are purchasing the Fourth Floor, built up on Eastern Side Portion, area measuring 75 Sq. ft. part of Property bearing Municipal No.XV/1980, 1981, 1983 & 1984, Ward No. XV, comprised in Khasra No.375 (743/19/216) and 376 min. situated at Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055; from (1) Mr. Anil Kumar and (2) Mr. Parveen Kumar both S/o Late Mr. Ramesh Chand vide Relinquishment Deed dated 08.10.2018, vide Document No.9221, registered with the office of Sub-Registrar-II, Asaf Ali Road, Delhi, registered on 15.10.2018 and same to be finance & mortgage by Vastu Housing Finance Corporation Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/ title/ interest/ creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

Lucern Legal LLP  
136, Basement Floor, Uday Park, near Mother Dairy, New Delhi-110049 Contact: 011-40046316, 41667327

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM

GHINGARIKHAL, RANKHET, DISTT- ALMORA 263645

Letter No.: 3052/Nivida/247

E-Tender Notice

Date: 26-12-2022

1. Name of the work:- CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSE SURFACE PARKING AT MAJKHALI, DISTRICT- ALMORA.
2. Estimated Cost:- Rs. 49.81 Lakh
3. Period of Completion:- 8 Month
4. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 27-12-2022 (17.00hrs)
5. Online Bid submission: End date :- 16-01-2023 (17.00 hrs)
6. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 18-01-2023 (11.00 hrs)
7. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid :- Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Rankheth.
8. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Places: 30-12-2022 (11.00 hrs)
9. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal [www.uktenders.gov.in](http://www.uktenders.gov.in)

**PROJECT MANAGER**

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited

Regd. Office: PFSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001

Corporate Identification Number(CIN):U40109PB2010SGC033813

Website [www.pspcl.in](http://www.pspcl.in); e-tendering portal: <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

Contact No.: 96461-19383, 96461-11036

Tender Enquiry No. QQ-243/PO-C

Date: 27.12.2022

Chief Purchase Officer/M/M, Central Purchase Organization, PSPCL, 2nd Floor Multi-storey Building, The Mall Road, Patiala, invites E-tender for procurement of 15.3 MT ISI Marked Polypropylene yellow colored rope, 3 strand, Hawser Laid, conforming to IS:5175-1992 (with latest amendments) and PSPCL Specification QQ-243 for 10mm, 16mm & 20mm sizes.

For detailed NIT & Tender specifications please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 06.01.2023 from 11:00 PM onwards.

**Notes:** Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at: <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

C 490/22 PR-Advt. No :-76155/12/1308/2022/20022

UJVN LIMITED

H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006

Telephone.: 0135-22763808 Fax: 0135-2763808

CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866 Website [www.ujvnl.com](http://www.ujvnl.com)

RO No. 961

Tender Notice

Date: 27.12.2022

Office of the Executive Engineer (Test), Dhakrani invites Tenders from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below: Tender No.08/EE (Test)/DKN/2022-23

Name of work : Supply, Installation, and Testing & Commissioning of 48 Volt /20 Amp. Float and float cum boost charger and 48 V/100AH Plant's Battery Bank for Kulhal Powerhouse.

Estimated cost: Rs. 13.00 Lakh (GST extra)

Date of Availability of bid document on website: 27.12.2022

Last date for submission of bids: 18.01.2023 up to 16:00 hrs

For fuller & further details, kindly visit our website: [www.ujvnl.com](http://www.ujvnl.com).The tender document can be downloaded from the Nigam's website "www.ujvnl.com".

**Executive Engineer (Test), Dhakrani**

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"



# Govt tweaks GST rules for claiming input tax credit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST taxpayers will be required to reverse by November 30 the input tax credit (ITC) claimed in the last fiscal in case their suppliers fail to deposit the due tax by September 30, the Finance Ministry has said.

The taxpayers, however, can reclaim the ITC later following the deposit of taxes by the supplier.

The ministry has inserted Rule 37A in Central Goods and Services Tax rules to give effect to the new provision.

"Where input tax credit has been availed by a registered person..., but the return in Form GSTR-3B for the tax period corresponding to the said statement of outward supplies has not been furnished by such supplier till September 30..., the...Input tax credit shall be reversed...On or before November 30 following the end of the such financial year," the ministry said.

KPMG in India, Partner Indirect Tax, Abhishek Jain said insertion of Rule 37A merits attention as the same provides for the instances and the manner where ITC is required to be reversed in case of non-payment of tax by the supplier.

"Companies should take note of these changes and align business practices accordingly," Jain said.



AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said this change would benefit only select cases in litigation due to two reasons.

"Firstly, it is a prospective change only that will not curate any benefit till fiscal 2021-22. Secondly, very few cases will be able to qualify the conditions stipulated in these rules," Mohan said.

Saurabh Agarwal, Tax Partner, EY, said while the GSTR 1 would capture the details of supplies made by the seller to multiple buyers, it

would be very difficult for the buyer to ascertain whether the tax has been discharged by the seller on GSTR 3B against their invoices or not as the said return doesn't capture invoice wise tax payment.

"The amendments made would further increase the onus of compliance on the recipient of goods/services. It is advisable that industry should look at digitalising this process of compliance either through IRP or through ASPs in order to avoid undue leakages in the system," Agarwal added.

# Sensex, Nifty rise for 2nd day as banking, metal shares shine

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for a second straight day on Tuesday on gains in banking, IT and metal shares following a firm trend in the global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 361.01 points or 0.60 per cent to settle at 60,927.43. During the day, it rallied 420.26 points or 0.69 per cent to 60,986.68.

The broader NSE Nifty climbed 117.70 points or 0.65 per cent to end at 18,132.30.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Wipro, Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra and Titan were the major winners.

Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Mahindra & Mahindra and Nestle were the laggards.

"With strong support from global peers, the domestic market is attempting to recoup its previous week's losses. Metal stocks shone amid hopes of a demand revival in China on reports of loosening Covid restrictions. This, along with fears over supply disruptions from winter storms in the US, resulted in oil prices rising," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

"Markets gained over half a per cent in a range bound ses-



sion, tracking firm global cues. After the initial uptick, the Nifty surrendered all the gains in no time however buying in select index majors pushed the index to the day's high again as the day progressed," said Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.46 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.78 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, metal jumped 4.59 per cent, commodities climbed 2.34 per cent, telecommunication (1.54 per cent), industrials (1.38 per cent), realty (1.38 per cent) and power (1.15 per cent).

FMCG remained the only laggard. Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai ended with gains.

Equity exchanges in Europe were trading in the positive territory in mid-session deals. Markets in the US were closed on Monday.

# Indian banks' GNPAAs decline to 5% in Sept 2022: RBI

## 'But current situation can impact health'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian banks' gross non-performing assets declined to 5.8 per cent, but the present macroeconomic environment can impact lenders' health, the Reserve Bank said on Tuesday.

The GNPAAs, which touched a peak in FY18 following the asset quality review, have been declining sequentially to reach 5 per cent in September, the RBI said in the 'Trends and Progress of Banking in India' report for FY22 released on Tuesday.

The number stood at 5.8 per cent in March 2022, according to the report which also had a strong commitment by the RBI to be not complacent, given the present environment.

"Although presently the Indian banking sector remains robust and resilient with improved asset quality and strong capital buffers, the policymakers remain mindful of dynamically evolving macroeconomic conditions that may impinge on the health of regulated entities," the report said.

The decrease in the GNPAAs was attributed to lower slippages and also a reduction in outstanding GNPAAs through



recoveries, upgradations and write-offs, the report said.

However, the restructured assets ratio increased by 1.1 percentage points for all the borrowers and by 0.5 percentage points for large borrowers, the report said, adding that the efforts to help individuals and small businesses with the loan recast scheme has been successful.

In what can be called as a divergent trend between the state-run lenders and the private lenders, the report said, the reduction in the stock of GNPAAs was due to write-offs in the public sector banks in FY22, while in the case of private banks, upgradation of loans was the primary driver for asset quality improvements.

Interestingly, all the bank groups showed a decline in the

GNPAAs, except the foreign banks, where the loss assets increased in FY22 to 0.5 per cent from 0.2 per cent in FY21.

The reliance on large borrowers for loans seems to be going down with the increase in the retail business and accounts of over ₹5 crore accounted for 47.8 per cent of the outstanding credit in FY22 as against 48.4 per cent in FY21.

However, such accounts' contribution to overall dud assets improved more substantially to 63.4 per cent of the overall NPAs in FY22 as against 66.4 per cent in FY21.

An acceleration in income and contraction in expenditure boosted the profitability of SCBs in 2021-22, measured in terms of return on equity and return on assets, the RBI said.

# 'Coal India to meet 700 MT production target of FY23'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coal India Chairman Pramod Agrawal on Tuesday exuded confidence that the PSU will achieve the production target of 700 million tonnes for the current financial year.

Coal India (CIL) accounts for over 80 per cent of the domestic coal output." I am confident...Coal India will achieve the 700 million tonne coal production target this financial year," the chairman was quoted as saying in a statement.

Addressing virtually a team of CIL-arm MCL, Agrawal congratulated company officials for registering a growth of 15.9 per cent over the targeted production of coal, which is almost 19 million tonne.

Stating that the demand for power will increase in coming days, Agrawal said,"There will be

increased demand for coal from Coal India, and MCL, which is successfully supplying about 435,000 tonne of coal daily to the power sector, will have to increase its contribution."

## Quality of domestic coal increased considerably: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Tuesday said the quality of domestic coal has increased considerably as the grade conformity of fossil fuel has improved to 69 per cent in the current fiscal. The Government and the coal companies, including Coal India, have taken several steps to achieve the objective of supplying quality coal to all consumers.

# Rupee falls 25 paise against US dollar on forex outflows

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 25 paise to close at 82.90 against the US dollar on Tuesday, as month-end dollar demand from importers and significant foreign fund outflows sapped investor appetite.

Moreover, the risk-off mood among investors and firm crude oil prices in the international market weighed on the rupee, forex dealers said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened lower at 82.71 against the greenback and witnessed an intraday high of 82.69 and a low of 82.90.

It finally settled at 82.90, down 25 paise over its previous close of 82.65.

"Month-end dollar demand from oil importers and year-end rebalancing foreign fund outflows weighed on the Indian rupee in Tuesday's trade as it surrendered



Monday's gain. The surge in crude and precious metal prices also weighed on the local unit," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

The rupee has been stuck in the range of 82.40 to 82.90, lacking the directional move ahead of the year-end.

"In the near term, the rupee is expected to trade between 82.40 to 82.90 against the dollar. The bias for the local currency remains weak as long as it trades below 82.40," Parmar added.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.27 per cent lower at 104.02.

Global oil benchmark

Brent crude futures rose 0.83 per cent to USD 84.62 per barrel.

The 30-share BSE Sensex ended 361.01 points or 0.60 per cent higher at 60,927.43, while the broader NSE Nifty climbed 117.70 points or 0.65 per cent to 18,132.30.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in capital markets on Tuesday as they sold shares worth ₹867.65 crore, according to exchange data.

The gold price rose ₹173 to ₹55,074 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid gains in precious metal internationally, according to HDFC Securities.

According to an official announcement on Monday, China will scrap quarantine for international travellers from January 8 next year, as it reopens its international borders and comes out of international isolation after nearly three years.

# Sebi bans Moneytree Research, its proprietor from securities mkts for three yrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has barred Moneytree Research and its proprietor Narendra Madan Rathod from the securities markets for three years for providing unauthorised investment services.

The order came after Sebi received a complaint against Moneytree and Rathod. Thereafter, the regulator examined the matter and subsequently issued a show-cause notice to Moneytree Research and Rathod in August 2021.

Moneytree Research and Rathod are collectively referred to as noticees.

In its order, the regulator found that noticees was never registered with Sebi in any capacity as an intermediary.

By operating as an 'investment adviser', without obtaining a registration from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the regulator found that noticees have violated the IA (Investment



Adviser) rules.

The noticees had received a total amount of ₹41.07 lakh during June 2017 to November 2018, Sebi said in its order passed on Friday.

Sebi has directed the noticees to refund, within three months, the money received from investors in respect of their unregistered investment advisory activities.

Also, the regulator has debarred the noticees from accessing as well as dealing in the securities markets for a period of three years from the date of completion of refunds to clients along with depositing of the balance amount with Sebi, whichever is later.

# Gold rises ₹173; silver zooms ₹926

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price rose ₹173 to ₹55,074 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid gains in precious metal internationally, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had ended at ₹54,901 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also zoomed ₹926 to ₹70,205 per kilogram.

"Gold price continue to trade higher, helped by a softer dollar," Navneet Damani, Senior VP - Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

In the international market, gold was trading higher at \$1,807.60 per ounce while silver was up at \$24.19 per ounce.

"Comex gold prices rose in the asian trading hours supported by a softer dollar, although trading was thin after the long Christmas weekend," an analyst at HDFC Securities said.

# Punjab & Sind Bank board to consider fundraising of ₹ 250cr on December 30

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

City-based Punjab & Sind Bank on Tuesday said its board will meet on December 30 to consider a proposal for raising up to ₹250 crore by various modes, including equity and bonds issuance, the bank said on Tuesday.

The bank said it plans to raise capital up to an amount and aggregating to ₹250 crore in any combinations of equity shares or debt in the form on Basel III compliant bonds.

The capital will be raised in one or more tranches within a period of 12 months from the date of approval by way of issue of these instruments, the lender said.

# Govt proposing to grant status of national importance to IIFT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is proposing to declare the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) as 'institution of national importance' with an aim to empower it to attain standards of global excellence. IIFT has three branches in New Delhi, Kolkata and Kakinada. The institute is a deemed university.

It was set up in 1963 by the government as an autonomous organisation to help professionalise the country's foreign trade management and increase exports by developing human resources, analysing and disseminating data and conducting research.

According to the draft bill posted on the commerce ministry's website, all the Indian Institutes of Foreign Trade would be declared as 'institutions of national importance with a view to empowering these institutions in attaining standards of global excellence in international trade (management and international economics) and allied areas of knowledge'.

The draft — The Indian Institutes of Foreign Trade Bill, 2022 — stated that the director would be the chief executive officer of every institute, and would be responsible for proper administration.

# Govt mulls offloading 15-20 lakh tons of wheat from FCI to contain prices in 2023

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is considering releasing 15-20 lakh tonnes of wheat next year from the FCI stock for bulk consumers like flour millers, under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to contain rising retail prices, according to official sources.

According to the data maintained by the consumer affairs ministry, the average retail price of wheat was at ₹32.25 per kg on December 27, higher than ₹28.53 per kg in the year-ago period. Wheat flour (atta) price too remained higher at ₹37.25 per kg than ₹31.74 per kg a year ago.

Under the OMSS policy, the government allows state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) to sell foodgrains, espe-



cially wheat and rice, at pre-determined prices in the open market from time to time to bulk consumers and private traders. The purpose is to boost the supply during the lean season and moderate the general open market prices.

An official source said,"The nodal Food Ministry has moved an OMSS policy for 2023 for wheat and the plan is to release 15-20 lakh tonnes from the FCI for bulk users under the OMSS."

Wheat grown in the last two crops will be issued from

the FCI stock and the rate has not yet been decided, the source said.

Another source said there is a possibility of releasing wheat under the OMSS as the government is comfortable with the foodgrains' stock position. Moreover, the new wheat crop prospect is seen to be bright as total acreage has been higher so far.

Even the flour millers have demanded the government offload wheat stocks from the FCI godowns to meet the shortage in the open market which has pushed up both wholesale and retail prices of wheat and wheat flour.

As of December 15, around 180 lakh tonnes of wheat and 111 lakh tonnes of rice were available in the central pool.

# Hindustan Power Exchange crosses one billion units power trading-mark

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindustan Power Exchange (HPX) on Tuesday said it has reached the milestone of one billion units of power traded within six months of its launch.

With more than 360 market participants, HPX has also raced to register participants comprising 80 per cent buy volume of overall Day Ahead Market (DAM); 90 per cent sell volume of Green DAM and 70 per cent buy of Real-Time Market (RTM), an HPX statement said.

HPX — promoted by PTC India, Bombay Stock Exchange and ICICI Bank — has reached the milestone of one billion units of power traded within six months of its launch, it stat-



ed. It is now the number two exchange of the country in the contingency segment, and the total settlement registered on its platform was ₹1,250 crore, it claimed.

Though eastern entities have contributed about 51 per cent in this amount since the commencement of operations of the exchange, the participation from Southern entities has increased in the last two months, and they contributed 41 per cent in December.

# Max Healthcare partners with genomics biotech firm Anuva

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Max Healthcare on Tuesday said it has entered into a partnership with genomics biotech firm Anuva to conduct genomic-based research on various communicable and non-communicable diseases in India.

The two partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a five-year engagement, Max



Healthcare said in a statement.

The objective of the research will be to identify insights for precision medicine application across diseases including breast cancer, lung

cancer, diabetes, cardiac disease, kidney disease, drug resistant tuberculosis, and others, it added.

Under the collaboration, Max Healthcare will provide its expertise in clinical research and will serve as the clinical centre for data and/or sample collection from individuals who consent to share their data for the purpose of research.

"There is a lot to discover

in the field of genetic and lifestyle diseases. With the coming of precision medicine and genomics, it has the potential to provide efficient solutions and transform the way we look at modern medicine today," Max Healthcare Group Medical Director, Sandeep Budhiraja said.

Anuva CEO Jonathan Picker said the promise and potential of genomics to transform medicine is enormous.

# Airbag industry in India to grow to ₹7K cr by FY27: Icra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The industry size of airbags, a key safety feature in vehicles, is expected to grow to up to ₹7,000 crore by FY2027 in India, from the current levels of around ₹2,500 crore, according to ratings agency Icra.

The growth in the airbag industry, which is one of the fastest growing auto component segments, is expected to be fuelled by the increase in content per vehicle arising

from higher regulatory requirements and voluntary increase in the number of airbags per vehicle for enhancing safety, Icra said in a statement.

"The mandatory content per vehicle for airbag manufacturers is expected to rise from ₹3,000-4,000 currently to ₹8,000-10,000 by October 1, 2023. The average number of airbags per car sold is about three currently, and this is expected to increase signifi-



cantly post the mandatory implementation of six airbags per car from October 1, 2023," Icra Vice President and Sector Head Vinutaa S said.

Accordingly, Icra said it expects the industry to grow to

₹6,000-7,000 crore by FY27, from the current levels of ₹2,400-2,500 crore, at a four-year CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 25-30 per cent.

The ratings agency pointed out that earlier, only one airbag per car (driver airbag) was mandatory from July 2019. This increased to two airbags (dual front airbags) for category M1 vehicles (vehicles that can seat up to eight passengers and weigh less than 3.5 tonne) manufactured from Jan 1, 2022.



# REDS MAKE FLYING START ON PL RETURN

AP ■ BIRMINGHAM

Liverpool got off to the flying start they craved on the Premier League's return from the World Cup as a 3-1 win at Aston Villa on Monday cut the gap on the top four to five points.

Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk put the Reds in a commanding position before half-time.

But Jurgen Klopp's men had to endure some nervy moments in the second half after Ollie Watkins pulled a goal back for Villa before teenager Stefan Bajcetic came off the bench to secure the three points with his first senior goal.

Liverpool struggled to match their standards of recent seasons during the first part of the season, but looked refreshed to inflict Unai Emery's first league defeat since taking charge of Villa.

Salah is one of a number of Klopp's key players who was not involved in Qatar and took just five minutes to net his 15th goal of the season.

The Egyptian swept home Andy Robertson's pass after Trent Alexander-Arnold's through ball had opened up the Villa defence.

Emery's men were left to rue a host of big chances to get immediately back on level terms



as Liverpool showed no sign of remedying their defensive issues so far this season.

Leon Bailey and Watkins were both guilty of wasteful finishing.

At the other end, Darwin Nunez was even more profligate despite causing chaos with his powerful running in behind the Villa backline.

The Uruguayan headed over Robertson's inviting cross and then fired straight at Villa's stand-in goalkeeper Robin Olsen with just the Swede to beat after Ezri Konsa's error.

Van Dijk was not so forgiv-

ing to finally give the visitors a two-goal cushion as the Dutch defender calmly steered home Salah's pass from a corner.

But Villa refused to accept their fate in a breathless second half.

Watkins had the ball in the net within three minutes of the restart but had just strayed off-side before firing into the far corner.

John McGinn also fluffed his lines with just goalkeeper Alisson to beat before the home side got the goal their start to the second half deserved.

Watkins made one of his

more difficult chances count with a brilliant header back across goal to halve Villa's arrears.

Liverpool's relative lack of strength in depth compared to their competitors for a place in the top four was exposed by Klopp needing to turn to two teenagers off the bench as 17-year-old Ben Doak also made his first Premier League appearance.

But 18-year-old Bajcetic showed a maturity beyond his years with a calm finish after Nunez had been denied once more by Olsen.

## Liverpool agree deal for Gakpo

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool appear to have won the race to sign Dutch international forward Cody Gakpo after PSV Eindhoven announced an agreement with the English giants on Monday.

Gakpo, who scored three goals at the World Cup for the Netherlands, had previously been linked with a move to Liverpool's rivals Manchester United.

"PSV and Liverpool FC have reached an agreement on the proposed transfer of Cody Gakpo," PSV said.

"The 23-year-old attacker will leave for England imminently where he will be subjected to the necessary formalities ahead of the completion of the transfer."

PSV general manager Marcel Brands said the transfer fee would be a club record for the Dutch club.

According to reports, the fee could rise to as much as 50 million euros (\$53 million, £44 million).

# Arsenal comeback opens up 7-point lead on top

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal opened up a seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League after coming from behind to beat West Ham 3-1 at the Emirates on Monday.

Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli turned the game around in the space of five second half minutes before Eddie Nketiah stepped up in the absence of Gabriel Jesus to seal all three points.

Said Benrahma's first half penalty had given the Hammers the lead, but David Moyes' men remain just one point above the relegation zone in 16th.

Arsenal's momentum towards a first league title since 2004 could have been halted by a six-week break for the World Cup.

Mikel Arteta made no allowances for his stars that have been away in Qatar as William Saliba started just eight days after being part of the French squad that lost the final on penalties to Argentina.

However, that decision backfired when Saliba hesitated to allow Michail Antonio latch onto a ball over the top and then dived in on Jarrod Bowen.

Despite Bowen not going to ground immediately, referee Michael Oliver pointed to the spot and Benrahma confidently dispatched the penalty.

Arsenal thought they had a spot-kick of their own in first half stoppage time but Oliver reversed his initial decision



after seeing a replay of Martin Odegaard's shot come off Aaron Cresswell's head rather than the left-back's arm.

The Gunners got the break they needed to turn the tide eight minutes after the break when Odegaard's mishit shot fell perfectly into the path of Saka to sidefoot home.

Martinelli added the second goal moments later with the help of West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski, who was far too easily beaten at his near post.

A prolonged injury layoff for Jesus had raised doubts over Arsenal's ability to maintain their title challenge in the coming months with games against Newcastle, Tottenham

and Manchester United to come in January alone.

But Nketiah grabbed his opportunity on his first Premier League start of the season with a brilliant spin and low finish into the far corner from Odegaard's pass 21 minutes from time.

Manchester City can reduce the gap at the top to five points and move back above Newcastle into second place with victory when they travel to Leeds on Wednesday night.

However, another show of resilience from Arsenal showed the fight that lies ahead of the defending champions if they are to retain the title once more in the second half of the season.

## Behardien calls it a day

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

South African white-ball specialist and former T20I skipper Farhaan Behardien announced his retirement from professional cricket on Tuesday.

The 39-year-old, who played 59 ODIs and 38 T20Is and captained the Proteas in a three-match T20 series against Sri Lanka in 2017, took to social media to announce his decision to retire.

The all-rounder said the decision to quit professional cricket after playing for more than 18 years was tough, and the last couple of weeks were especially tough for him.

Predominantly a batter, he made 1074 ODI runs and 518 T20I runs, though it was his prolific run-scoring in domestic cricket which stood out. Behardien made his first-class debut in 2004 and scored more than 7,000 runs in 125 games with his highest being an unbeaten 150. He had to wait eight years to make his South Africa debut and became a regular in the white-ball sides.

He was part of the Proteas' T20 World Cup campaigns in 2012, 2014 and 2016 as well as the ODI World Cup in 2015.

## Gardner new No.1 in women's T20I all-rounders' ranking



PTI ■ DUBAI

Australian all-rounder Ashleigh Gardner has overtaken West Indies skipper Hayley Matthews, India's Deepti Sharma and New Zealand captain Sophie Devine to attain a career-best No.1 spot in the latest ICC Women's T20I player rankings for all-rounders released on Tuesday.

Following a closely-fought five-match T20I series, which Australia won 4-1, Gardner, who was named Player of the Match in the last game for her 32-ball unbeaten 66 and bowling figures of 2/20, has topped

the all-rounders' list for the first time after moving up three spots.

Gardner (417 points) holds a big advantage over Devine (389) and Deepti (387) in second and third spots respectively, with Matthews dropping two places (381) to fourth.

The 25-year-old Australian is also up two places to a career-best seventh position among batters and progressed three places to a career-best 14th among bowlers in the latest weekly update.

Deepti Sharma, who is third on the all-rounders' list with 387 points, is also maintaining a similar position in the T20I bowlers' ranking, while her 34-ball 53 in the fifth and final T20I sees her move up three places to 29th in the batting rankings.

Among batters, India's Smriti Mandhana is third with 727 points with Australia's Tahlia McGrath leading the charts with 814 points, followed by country-mate Beth Mooney (760 points). India's Jemimah Rodrigues has slipped two places (607) to 12th in the ranking for batters.

# Saina named for selection trials of Asian Mixed Team C'ship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Commonwealth Games champion Saina Nehwal has been named for next month's selection trials of Asian Mixed Team Championships, to be held in Dubai from February 14 to 19.

The senior selection committee had a virtual meeting on December 25 to finalise the trials for picking the team for the Asian event.

Based on their superior world rankings, the committee decided to give direct entry to singles players Lakshya Sen, HS Prannoy, PV Sindhu and men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

The rest of the 14-member team will be picked in the selection trials, scheduled to be held in Delhi on January 2 and 3.

"The members unanimously agreed that since it is a big competition with limited number of entries, only BWF rankings from 16-50 should be considered for inviting players for the trials for the



rest of the available spots," the BAI said in a letter.

In women's singles, apart from Saina, Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap have been invited for the trials, while in men's doubles -- Arjun/Dhruv Kapila, Krishna Prasad Garga/Vishnuvardhan Goud P and Ishaan Bhatnagar/Sai Patheek K were named.

For the two spots in women's doubles, Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treasa Jolly and Gayatri P Gopichand, Sikki Reddy and Ashwini Ponnappa, Ashwini Bhatt and Shikha Gautam and Haritha Manazhiyil and Ashna Roy were invited.

Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto, Venkat Gaurav

## HS Prannoy regains career-best rankings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian shuttler HS Prannoy regained his career-best number eight position in the latest BWF world rankings issued on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old from Kerala, who has been in good form this year, had achieved the number eight ranking in 2018 for the first time before slipping to 34 in 2019.

However, some memorable performances in the season, including the Thomas Cup win, seven quarterfinals, two semifinals and a runner-up finish at the Swiss Open, saw him rise like a phoenix in 2022.

Among others, Lakshya

Sen remained static at world number seven, while Kidambi Srikanth lost a place to be at the 12th position.

P V Sindhu slipped a place to world number seven in women's singles, while Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty were steady at number five.

The fast-rising pairing of MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila gained three places to be world number 21, while women's doubles combination of Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly, which had won a bronze in Birmingham CWG, climbed a place to world number 17.

In mixed doubles, Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto also moved two places to achieve the 18th spot.

Prasad and Juhvi Dewangan and Rohan Kapoor and Sikki Reddy were invited for the tri-

als which will pick the one mixed doubles pair for the event.

# Djoker, Nadal to kickstart bid for 2023 supremacy in Australia

AP ■ SYDNEY

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal kickstart their 2023 campaigns this week in Adelaide and Sydney respectively, with the superstar veterans and great rivals eyeing up yet more Australian Open glory.

With the pair sharing 43 Grand Slam titles between them -- Djokovic has 21 and Nadal 22 -- the scene is set for an epic showdown at Melbourne Park in January.

Nadal is the defending Australian Open champion and Djokovic is a nine-time winner.

Djokovic returns Down Under for the first time since being sensationally detained and then deported ahead of the 2022 Australian Open because of his refusal to get vaccinated for Covid-19.

He starts his bid for an incredible 10th Australian Open title at the Adelaide International from Sunday, following a troubled and truncated year in which he missed two majors because of his vaccine status.

Djokovic was initially barred from entering Australia before 2025, but a new government in Canberra reversed the ruling and is now gunning for more silverware at his most successful Grand Slam venue.

"Over the years I've been really fortunate to start very strong in Australia and I love playing



there," said the world number five in Dubai last week, after ending 2022 with a record-equalling sixth ATP Tour Finals crown.

"After obviously what happened earlier this year, hopefully I can have a decent reception there and hopefully that can help me play some good tennis."

He will face a top-notch field

in Adelaide, including Felix Auger-Aliassime, Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev, ranked six, seven and eight respectively.

In Djokovic's absence this year, Spanish great Nadal swept past Medvedev to win the Australian Open in an epic five-setter -- then backed it up with a

14th French Open.

Nadal will begin his preparations in Sydney at the United Cup, a new mixed-teams event, where a blockbuster showdown with Australian showman Nick Kyrgios will test his credentials.

Eighteen countries will compete in the event across 11 days from Thursday, with Brisbane,

## DJOKOVIC RETURNS DOWN UNDER FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE BEING SENSATIONALLY DETAINED AND THEN DEPORTED AHEAD OF THE 2022 AUSTRALIAN OPEN BECAUSE OF HIS REFUSAL TO GET VACCINATED FOR COVID-19

Perth and Sydney hosting group games in a round-robin format.

Ties comprise two men's and two women's singles matches and one mixed doubles.

The finals series will be played in Sydney.

World number three Casper Ruud and Germany's Alexander Zverev, who is returning from a serious ankle injury, will participate.

Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz will warm up at the Kooyong Classic exhibition in Melbourne from January 10-12 as he battles back from the abdominal injury that shortened his pre-season training block.

The 19-year-old Spaniard, a major threat to Djokovic and Nadal, missed the season-ending ATP Finals and Davis Cup Finals

with a muscle tear, but is confident he will be ready.

"I would say the key is to practise a lot, spend a lot of hours on court," he said this month.

"I will be ready and 100 percent heading into Australia."

Italy's Jannik Sinner and world number nine Taylor Fritz, among others, will also use Kooyong to fine-tune.

Women's world number one Iga Swiatek will acclimatise in Perth with her Polish teammates at the United Cup on the back of winning the French Open and US Open in 2022.

The three-time Grand Slam champion is targeting a first Australian Open title after losing in the semis this year to Danielle Collins, who then crashed to Ashleigh Barty in the final.

Swiatek inherited the top ranking following the shock retirement of Barty in March, and has been dominant ever since.

American world number three Jessica Pegula and resurgent French world number four Caroline Garcia, fresh from beating Aryna Sabalenka to win the WTA Finals, also feature at the United Cup.

Four of the other top 10 women begin the year in Adelaide, with second-ranked Ons Jabeur, world number five Sabalenka, world number eight Daria Kasatkina and world number nine Veronika Kudrmetova all entered.

## Novak due to return to Australia, tennis boss says

AP ■ SYDNEY

Former world number one Novak Djokovic was due to return to Australia on Tuesday, almost one year after he was deported for refusing to be vaccinated against Covid-19, the country's tennis boss said.

Nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic was initially banned from the country for three years after losing a high-stakes legal battle earlier this year over his vaccine status.

Australia has since lifted its requirement for visitors to show proof of vaccination against Covid.

The government confirmed in November that the unvaccinated Serb was no longer banned and had been granted a visa allowing him to play in the next Australian Open, which starts in January.

Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley said he hoped local fans would embrace Djokovic's return.

"We welcome him back to Australia," he told reporters.

"I think as we speak he's landing in Adelaide and I think that he is going to be again the player to beat.

"I have a great deal of confidence in the Australian public. I have a lot of confidence that the fans will react how we hope they will react."



# DIDN'T FEEL PRESSURE OF REPLACING KULDEEP: UNADKAT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jaydev Unadkat did get his much-awaited chance with the red ball and he kept his "promise" with a spirited effort in his first Test for India after 12 years.

His love for the longer version of the game became apparent more than ever in January when he typed a tweet that went viral.

"Dear red ball, please give me one more chance... I'll make you proud, promise!" the left-arm pacer had posted.

"Everyone thought that I was referring to a national comeback. I was just missing red ball cricket in general as Ranji Trophy was postponed for a second time (due to COVID)," Unadkat said after his arrival from Bangladesh.

The 31-year-old, who had played his first and only Test way back in 2010 with the great Sachin Tendulkar and current head coach Rahul Dravid being his celebrated teammates, featured in his second outing last week in remarkable circumstances.

Having not been on selectors' radar despite a record-breaking performance in the 2020 Ranji Trophy, a national recall came for Unadkat when he expected it the least.

He was not even part of the India A side that toured Bangladesh before the Test series, so one could not fault



him for keeping his hopes to bare minimum.

Eventually, his patience and perseverance prevailed as he was flown to Bangladesh as a backup pace option, with Mohammad Shami not regaining full fitness for the series.

The visa delays meant he could only reach Chattogram after the start of the first Test

but against all expectations, stand-in skipper K L Rahul gave Unadkat the big break he was waiting for while toiling on the domestic circuit for years.

The opportunity came at the expense of spinner Kuldeep Yadav, whose exclusion after an eight-wicket haul in the series opener triggered a selection controversy.

The scoreboard would show that Unadkat took three wickets in his comeback Test but his impact was bigger in the game.

With years of first-class experience under his belt since his Test debut in South Africa, Unadkat relished the pressure. Getting the most out of flat tracks in Rajkot is something

Unadkat had done for years and the Porbandar-born cricketer found himself in similar territory in Mirpur.

It did not take long for him to make his presence felt as he removed previous game's centurion Zakir Hasan with a ball that jumped from good length. That was his maiden wicket in Tests and Unadkat says that moment will remain the most special of his career.

"I was trying to extract bounce off length and I felt I could do that. The feeling (when it happened) will remain one of the most special memories of my cricketing career. Getting a Test wicket is something I visualised 1000 times," said Unadkat.

Did he feel the pressure of replacing Kuldeep?

"Absolutely not. When you don't expect things and they happen, I take it in my stride. I just wanted to contribute. If not take a wicket then create pressure from the other end. That was the thought.

"Domestic cricket has helped me immensely that way. You always have a role to play as a bowler even when you aren't getting the wickets. You can create pressure and put batter in doubt and other bowlers can capitalise on that."

What worked for Unadkat was his ability to bowl long spells on flat decks. 12 years from his debut, he was also a much wiser man having cap-

tained Saurashtra to unprecedented success.

"I got my chance as the management felt I was suited to the pitch. Like you said the conditions were similar (to Rajkot), not a lot of pace off the wicket and you will have to extract whatever you can by hitting the length hard.

"I knew if I will stick to my strengths, there will be something coming my way and that is how I got that extra bounce."

Unadkat could be the next left-arm pacer India have been looking for years but he is not thinking about that. When Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Shami are back, finding a spot in the XI will be much tougher.

"I was pretty young when I made my debut. All these years (at Ranji level) I never felt like a veteran. I am still 31 and at my peak. These four to five years would be the peak of my career and I want to continue as much as I can."

Does he see himself retaining his place for the Border Gavaskar Trophy beginning next month?

"I don't want to expect things as that has been helping me honestly. I am looking forward to the next round of Ranji (against Delhi), and that is all I am thinking about. If it has to happen, it will happen.

"I hope India dominate Australia. It is going to be a great series," he said.

## India beat SA by 54 runs

PTI ■ PRETORIA

The Indian U-19 women's cricket team produced an all-round effort to beat South Africa by 54 runs in the first T20I of the five-match series here on Tuesday.

The series serves as preparation for both teams ahead of the ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup to be held in South Africa from January 14 to 29.

Opener Shewata Sehrawat and Soumya Tiwari scored 40 each off 39 and 46 balls respectively to guide India to 137 for five after being asked to bat.

But the start was far from rosy for the Indians as they lost skipper Shafali Verma in the first delivery of the match.

But Sehrawat and Tiwari then joined hands and stitched 70 runs off 74 balls for the second wicket to set the platform for India's total.

While Sherawat decorated her innings with five boundaries, Tiwari hit three fours and six.

Besides the duo, wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh made 15, while Titas Sandhu (13 not out) and Hurley Gala (11 not out) also played useful hands towards the end.

Kayla Reyneke (2/13) and Ayanda Hlubi (2/22) picked up two wickets each for the home team.

Defending the modest



total, medium pacer Shabnam Shakil (3/15) shone bright with the ball as Indian bowlers picked up wickets at regular intervals to restrict South Africa to 83 for eight.

Shakil struck in her opening two overs to reduce South Africa to 10 for 2 inside three overs, a position from which the hosts never recovered.

Besides Shakil, off-spinner Archana Devi (3/14) also sparked with the ball in the middle overs.

Hurley Gala (1/13) and Sonam Yadav (1/15) also chipped in with a wicket each.

Only three South Africa batters -- Kayla Reyneke (20), Madison Landsman (10) and Jemma Botha (10 not out) -- managed double digit scores.

The second match of the series will be played here on Thursday.

## Warner retires in pain after making 200 in 100th Test



AP ■ MELBOURNE

David Warner battled through searing heat to hit an epic unbeaten 200 in his 100th Test on Tuesday before retiring in pain as Australia consolidated their advantage against South Africa at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

On a scorching day, the hosts were 386-3 at stumps on day two of the second Test, leading by 197 after the Proteas were dismissed in their first innings

for 189.

Travis Head was not out 48 with Alex Carey on nine.

Steve Smith (85) and Marnus Labuschagne (14) were the only wickets to fall. But worryingly for Australia, Cameron Green, who took 5-27 in South Africa's first innings, also retired hurt after a nasty rap on the finger from Anrich Nortje.

Smith and Warner's 239-run partnership took the game further away from South Africa, whose bowlers toiled in temper-

atures touching 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit).

Opener Warner, 36, snapped a near-three-year century drought in typically aggressive and gritty fashion, reaching three figures for a 25th time after coming into the game under pressure on a lean run.

It was his first Test hundred since January 2020 and as the opposition bowlers tired, he battled the elements and converted it to 200 for only the third time.

His wife Candice told host broadcaster Fox: "You'd think by now people would know writing David Warner off is the wrong thing to do."

But it was an exhausting effort, as he passed 8,000 Test runs en route.

Chairs had to be brought out for Warner and Smith to rest on in the drinks breaks, with towels draped over their heads and ice-packs on their shoulders.

Warner needed treatment for cramp several times and retired in pain after reaching 200 and dropping to his knees, eventually helped from the field by support staff.

"The boys were cramping left, right and centre," Smith told reporters. "So, difficult (conditions) but nice to get us to the position where we are now. I think we're in a nice spot."



## England to tour B'desh for white-ball series in March

PTI ■ LONDON

The England men's team will undertake its first tour of Bangladesh since 2016 when it travels to the country to play three One-day Internationals and an equal number of T20Is in March next year.

The tour will commence with three ODIs, the first two matches taking place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka on March 1 and 3. The final match of the series will take place on March 6 at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

The three-match T20I series will start on March 9 in Chattogram, with the final two matches, on March 12 and 14, scheduled to be played in Dhaka.

The last time the teams

played a series was in 2016, when England won the ODIs 2-1.

The England squad is expected to play two warm-up fixtures ahead of the ODIs, the dates for which will be announced in due course, said an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement.

"It is exciting that the England Men's white-ball squad will return to Bangladesh for the first time since 2016. The atmosphere generated in Dhaka and Chattogram for this eagerly-anticipated tour will be fantastic," said ECB interim CEO Clare Connor.

"There is a great passion for cricket across Bangladesh, and we expect a tough challenge against a side who have an excellent record in home conditions."

## Conway, Latham take New Zealand to 165-0

AP ■ KARACHI

New Zealand's opening pair of left-handed batters responded with a solid 165-0 in the first cricket Test on Tuesday after Agha Salman had scored his first Test century and led Pakistan to 438.

Devon Conway and Tom Latham batted confidently against the challenging spin of Abrar Ahmed on a dry wicket to remain unbeaten on 82 and 78, respectively, at stumps on the second day.

New Zealand trails by 273 in its first Test tour to Pakistan since 2002.

Conway also completed 1,000 Test runs in 19 innings, taking the national record previously held by John F. Reid.

Both batters used their feet well against Abrar, who took 17 wickets in two Test matches against England earlier this month. Conway reached his half century off 89 balls with nine fours, including four against Abrar.

Latham followed in reaching his 50 off 96 balls with six fours as both batters grew in confidence and didn't hesitate to even reverse sweep on a wicket which still has some turn for the spinners.

Pakistan's weakened pace



attack in the absence of injured Shaheen Afridi, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah, didn't offer a challenge to Conway and Latham with the new ball as both batters took New Zealand to 41-0 by tea before adding 124 more runs in the final session.

Leftarm fast bowler Mir Hamza, recalled after four years since playing his only Test against Australia in 2018, and Mohammad Wasim, also playing only his second Test, couldn't break through.

Earlier, the 29-year-old Salman batted resolutely in

the company of tailenders to score 103 with 17 fours. He was the last batter to be dismissed when Pakistan was bowled out an hour after lunch.

Tim Southee, the Kiwis' new test captain, picked up his 350th Test wicket and wrapped up the innings when Salman tried to play across the seamer,

was struck on the back leg and was ruled out leg before wicket. Southee was the pick of the bowlers with 3-69 while three spinners -- Michael Bracewell (2-72), Ish Sodhi (2-87) and Ajaz Patel (2-112) - shared six wickets.

## Avesh picks four as MP bowl out Railways for 274

PTI ■ INDORE

Avesh Khan took four wickets as defending champions Madhya Pradesh bowled out Railways for 274 on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy Group D match here on Tuesday.

Avesh returned with figures of 4 for 69, while Saransh Jain and Puneet Datey (2/52) shared four wickets between them as Madhya Pradesh took 87.4 overs to fold Railways' innings.

Besides, Kumar Kartikeya (1/57) and Shubham Sharma (1/8) picked up a wicket each.

Electing to bat, Railways did not have the best of starts as Avesh struck in the fifth delivery of the match, removing Vivek Singh.

The India pacer came back in the 16th over to account for the wicket of Shivam Chaudhary (21) before Shubham Sharma dismissed Rahul Rawat (29) to reduce Railways to 68 for 3 in the 25th over.

Mohammad Saif (39) and Shubham Chaubey (24) added 44 runs for the fourth wicket before both the batters departed.

Skipper Upendra Yadav top-scored for Railways with a gritty 61

off 123 balls and hit eight boundaries in the process.

Towards the end, Akash Pandey (24 not out) and Adarsh Singh (24) played useful hands to take Railways past the 250-run mark.

### SAMARTH'S TON DRIVES K'TAKA

**Porvorum:** Opener R Samarth's fine knock of 140 and his century partnerships with skipper Mayank Agarwal and Vishal Onat powered Karnataka to 294/3 against Goa in their Group C match.

Agarwal won the toss, opted to bat and provided a strong start for the team by adding 116 runs with Samarth. The two looked untroubled against the Goa attack and completed a century stand after a cautious start.

Agarwal appeared set for a big score before he fell LBW to Lakshay Garg for 50, which included five boundaries and two sixes. Samarth and Onat (73 batting, 172 balls, 9 fours) built on the platform provided by the opening partnership and piled on the Goa bowlers' misery.

The home team attack comprising Arjun Tendulkar, Garg,



Darshan Misal and Mohit Radkar was taken to the task by Samarth and Onat.

Samarth raced to a ton and was batting on 120 at tea. He added 20 more runs to his score before being dismissed by Tendulkar (1 for 30). It was a third straight first-class century for Samarth, after having done so against Services and Puducherry in previous games.

At Thumba, Kerala ended the day at 100 for 2 after having dismissed Chhattisgarh for 149 in under 50 overs with the experienced spinner Jalaj Saxena picking up five wickets.

### TN RESTRICT DELHI

**New Delhi:** In-form Dhruv Shorey blew away an opportunity to score his third successive hundred in as

many innings as Tamil Nadu restricted hosts Delhi to 212 for six on opening day of a Group B Ranji Trophy game here on Tuesday.

Shorey (66, 168 balls) and left-handed Jonty Sidhu (57, 107 balls) added 105 runs for the third wicket but the home team could hardly dominate on a Feroz Shah Kotla track which became good for batting after the first hour and half.

But the manner in which Sidhu and Vaibhav Rawal (11) were out defending slow bouncers from pacer Sandeep Warrier (3/59 in 22 overs) was embarrassing to say the least.

Warrier and fellow seamer L Vignesh (3/42 in 19 overs) were disciplined as they bowled a probing line and hit good lengths time and again.

### DHAPOLA TAKES 8

**Dehradun:** Uttarakhand seam bowler Deepak Dhapola breathed fire on the opening day of their Group A match, grabbing eight Himachal Pradesh wickets as the visitors were bundled out for 49 runs on Tuesday.

Dhapola, 32, dismissed three players for duck and returned figures of 8/35 off 8.3 overs as Himachal could not weather the storm and were dismissed inside 17 overs.

At stumps on day one, Uttarakhand were batting on 295 for six, having taken a massive 246-run first-innings lead. Aditya Tare (91 not out) and Abhay Negi (48 not out) showed there were no demons in the pitch as they batted with confidence.

But the highlight of the day was Bageshwar-born Dhapola's bowling. The seamer, who made his first-class debut in 2018 and is playing only his 15th game, had a previous best bowling figures of 7/50 in an innings, but on Tuesday he bettered his personal best as Himachal batters made a beeline to the dressing room.

Dhapola's feat did not miss the attention of the BCCI secretary Jay Shah who termed it as one of the finest bowling performances of the tournament.

"Ranji Trophy has time and again helped bring out raw home-grown talent onto the forefront. This time it's Deepak Dhapola! His 8/35 against Himachal is one of the finest bowling performances of the tournament. Long way to go!" tweeted Shah.

Dhapola, who was the leading wicket-taker for his state in the group stage of the 2018-19 Ranji Trophy with 44 dismissals in seven matches and finished the tournament with 45 wickets in eight games, will look to improve his best bowling figures in a first-class match (12/96) when he comes out with the red cherry in the second innings.