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TO START FTA REVIEW: PATEL

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‘Dynasty kills democracy’

PM: It does not allow new talent to flow into politics

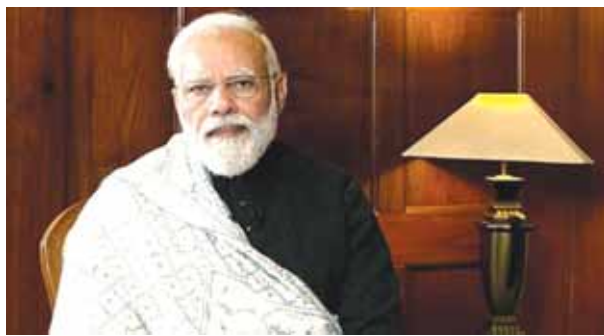
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On the eve of the first phase of Uttar Pradesh (UP) Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday slammed ‘family dynasties’ and lashed out at the Samajwadi Party (SP) for ‘perpetuating family rule’ in the State and asserted that the BJP will again triumph in UP.

In a televised interview to ANI, Prime Minister Modi said the BJP has changed ‘the old theory of *ek baar aao ek baar jao*’ and through its work created ‘pro-incumbency’ in whichever State it ruled. He claimed that the BJP will win in all five poll-bound States.

Hitting-out at dynasties in the country be it in ‘Punjab, Haryana, UP, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu’, the Prime Minister said ‘It did not allow new talent to flow into politics and posed the biggest danger to democracy and is its biggest enemy.’

Taking on the SP-RLD alliance led by Akhilesh Yadav and Jayant Chaudhary, the PM said the BJP had trounced the ‘two boys’ in the last Assembly polls too. ‘Do Ladkon wala khel



pale bhi dekha tha..”, he announced saying ‘*itna ahankar tha, Gujarat ke do gadhe kaha tha..*’, Modi said and went on to say that ‘*janta ne sabak sikhaya jab bua bhi thi..*’, a reference to BSP leader Mayawati.

Modi went hammer and tong at the SP saying, ‘*SP ka Samajwadi Puri Tarah parivarvad hain*’ and sought to know whether socialists Ram Manohar Lohia, George Fernandes or Nitish Kumar had a ‘*parivar*.’

He said 45 members of the family (Mulayam and Akhilesh Yadav) are in prominence in the SP and said he was told that all in the age group of 25 are contesting elections.

‘Such parivarvad is dangerous to democracy..there is no dynamics only dynasty’, Modi said. ‘*Beta kaisa bhi ho, adhyaksh ladka hi banega..*’, he said. He also pointed out dynasty rule in Jammu and Kashmir.

Asked about BJP too having family members in politics,

Modi said in the BJP just a few people (from family) go to politics but elsewhere ‘dynasty rains.’

Modi said for a larger part of the period since Independence the Congress ruled the country and set it on the destructive path that his party will not allow for a long time to come.

Asked since he is given credit for the poll victory, does he also take responsibility for defeats, Modi replied saying, ‘The BJP has seen many defeats...we learn from every election.. each election is a new university...it is our educational field.’

Modi heaped praise on UP CM Yogi Adityanath saying the SP is also wanting to take credit for his work in the State.

He refuted that Central agencies are acting in a vindictive manner saying ‘country is getting money by attacking corruption...’.

Taking a jibe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his criticism of the Government in

Parliament, Modi on Wednesday said he cannot reply to a ‘person who does not listen and does not sit in the House.’

On Rahul Gandhi’s questions on unemployment and the India-China issue, Modi said, ‘I have given facts on every subject and spoken on every subject on the basis of facts. On some subjects, our External Affairs Ministry and Defence Ministry have given detailed answers and wherever it was necessary, I had also spoken. How do I reply to a person who does not listen, and does not sit in the House?’

Modi said his Government believes in dialogue and does not attack anyone.

‘We don’t attack anyone, instead we believe in holding dialogue. At times, there are debates (*vaad-vivaad*), interruptions (*toka-taki*) (in Parliament), I welcome this and that is why I don’t have any reason to be miffed (on these subjects),’ Modi said.

In his first comment on Lakhimpur Kheri violence, Modi said the UP Government was working in a transparent manner and gave its consent for whatever committee Supreme Court wanted to form.

On Rahul Gandhi’s remarks that he didn’t need a certificate for his great grandfather from anyone and the PM is scared of the Congress, Modi said, ‘I did not speak against anyone’s father/grandfather. I said what a former PM had

said, it’s the right of the nation (to know). They say we don’t mention Nehru Ji. If we do, then also there’s a problem. I don’t understand this fear.’

The PM said he believed in the mantra of Unity in Diversity and refuted the allegation that the BJP didn’t respect regional aspirations.

‘We believe that for a country’s progress, we have to address regional aspirations. I was a CM too and understood the States’ aspirations. Earlier, leaders coming to India used to visit only Delhi, I took them to different States,’ the PM said.

Explaining further, the PM said, ‘We believe in unity in diversity. But some leaders followed the divide and rule policy. We identified over 100 aspirational districts in the country. Today, some of these districts have even crossed the national average in many parameters. This is a way to address regional aspirations.’

‘We start classification on caste basis during ticket distribution and discuss what vote percent would be given by which community. We should change it. We want to go ahead with the ‘sabka saath, sabka vikas’ mantra. Unity is important to take the nation forward,’ PM said on polarisation in polls.

Talking about the repealed farms laws, Modi said that he has always worked for the benefit of the farmers and always got their support.

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Western UP to choose its leaders today

First phase of
Assembly polls to seal
fate of 623 hopefuls

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh (UP) will see the first phase of polling for 568 seats in the Jat-dominated belt of Western UP on Thursday. The BJP has swept these seats in 2017, but this time around the Samajwadi Party (SP) hopes to stage a comeback due to its alliance with the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

As many as 623 candidates, including 73 women, are in the fray in the first phase of polling which will also decide the fate of nine Ministers in the Yogi Adityanath Government.

The Election Commission (EC) has made elaborate arrangements for the free, fair, and peaceful conduct of the first phase of the UP Assembly elections on Thursday.

The poll panel has also made arrangements for ensuring compliance with Covid protocols. Thermal scanners, hand sanitisers, face masks, face shields, PPE kits have been made available at each polling station. Central paramilitary forces will be deployed at each polling station and central forces will also guard the strong room where the EVMs will be



Polling officials at an election material distribution centre, a day before the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, in Noida, on Wednesday

stored after polling.

UP Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ajay Shukla said here on Wednesday that in the first phase of elections, 2.28 crore people are eligible to vote, which includes 1.24 crore men, 1.04 crore women and 1,448 voters from the third gender. For the first phase of polling 26,027 polling stations and 10,853 polling booths have been set up. Due to Covid the number of voters at each polling booth has been restricted to 1,250. The EC has also directed the district returning officers to provide the facility of drinking water, toilets and ramp at each polling station.

Polling for the 58 seats spread in 11 districts will be held between 7 am and 6 pm on Thursday. Of the 58 seats nine are reserved. The districts where the polling will be held

are Shamli, Hapur, Gautam Buddh Nagar, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura and Agra.

The CEO said besides the Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC) issued by the EC many other identity papers have been approved by the commission. These include the Aadhaar card, the MNREGA job card, passbook with photo issued by the banks and post office, health insurance smart card issued by the Union Ministry of Labour, driving licence, PAN card, Indian passport, pension papers with photo and identity card issued to the employees by the Central and State Governments and PSUs and public limited companies and the identity cards issued to MLAs, MLCs and MPs.

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‘Joblessness, financial distress drove 25 K people to suicide’

Deaths took place between 2018-20, Home Ministry tells RS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a shocking revelation, the Government on Wednesday disclosed that 25,000 people committed suicide due to bankruptcy, indebtedness and unemployment between 2018 and 2020 in the country. The Home Ministry informed the Rajya Sabha that over 16,000 people committed suicide due to bankruptcy or indebtedness while 9,140 people ended their lives due to unemployment between 2018 and 2020.



The Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said 5,213 people committed suicide due to bankruptcy or indebtedness in 2020, while 5,908 died by their own hand in 2019 and 4,970 in 2018.

A total of 3,548 people committed suicide due to joblessness in 2020, while 2,851 killed themselves due to unemployment in 2019 and 2,741 ended their lives in 2018, he said replying to a written question.

Continued on page 2

K’taka hijab row: Case referred to larger Bench

Justice Dixit was hearing batch of petitions against Hijab ban in classrooms filed by Muslim students

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The single judge of the Karnataka High Court hearing the case related to the Hijab ban in school-college campuses referred the matter to Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi on Wednesday with a view that he may decide on constituting a larger Bench to look into it.

Justice Krishna S Dixit who was hearing since Tuesday a batch of petitions against Hijab ban in classrooms filed by Muslim students from Udupi district, maintained that these matters give rise to certain constitutional questions of



‘Aliah University Muslim Students’ Federation activists holding a banner raise slogans, during a protest rally over the ‘hijab’ controversy in Karnataka, in Kolkata, on Wednesday

seminal importance in view of certain aspects of personal law.

‘In view of the enormity of questions of importance which were debated, the court is of the considered opinion that the Chief Justice should decide if a larger bench can be constituted in the subject matter,’ Justice Dixit said. Continued on page 2

CAPSULE

INDIA REJECTS PAK REFERENCES TO J&K

New Delhi: India on Wednesday firmly rejected the references to Jammu and Kashmir and an economic corridor passing through PoK made in a China-Pakistan joint statement, asserting that the region as well as the Union Territory of Ladakh ‘have been, are and will’ always remain integral and inalienable parts of India.

PAK’S SENIOR MINS WADE INTO HIJAB ROW

Islamabad: Pakistan’s senior Ministers waded into the ongoing hijab row in Karnataka, with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday saying that depriving Muslim girls of education is a grave violation of fundamental human rights.

₹6K/YEAR FOR POOR FARMERS:BJP U’KHAND

Dehradun: The BJP on Wednesday assured poor farmers ₹6,000 per year, in addition to what they get under the PM-Kisan scheme, in its Uttarakhand poll manifesto which also promised to increase the jail term under State’s anti-conversion law to 10 years.

Jaishankar leaves for Australia to attend Quad meet

Such ‘exclusive blocs’ create confrontation, says China

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As External Affairs Minister Jaishankar leaves for Australia on Thursday to attend the Quad Foreign Ministers’ meet there, China on Wednesday said such ‘exclusive blocs’ create confrontation and it should not drive a wedge in relations between regional countries.

Quad has a ‘cold war mentality,’ it added.

Quad is an alliance of India, the USA, Japan, and Australia to secure the interests of these countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

The heads of States of these countries held the first-ever ‘in person’ meeting in Washington last year, which was also attended by Prime



Minister Narendra Modi.

The four countries also held two Malabar series of naval exercises in the Indo-Pacific region last year. China had claimed the Quad will lead to the militarisation of the strategically crucial region.

Incidentally, Jaishankar is visiting Australia for the first time after assuming charge of the External Affairs Ministry. Giving details of Jaishankar’s forthcoming visit to Australia and the Philippines, the External Affairs Ministry said on Wednesday that the Minister will participate in the fourth Quad Foreign Ministers’ meeting on February 11 in Melbourne along with his counterparts from Australia, Japan, and the US.

Continued on page 2


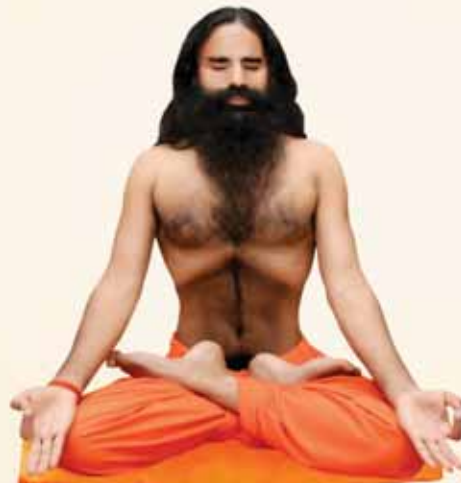
Next Covid variant will be more transmissible, deadly: WHO

New Delhi: Omicron wave may be subsiding world over, but the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned the nations not to let their guard down as the next Covid-19 variant will be more transmissible, and perhaps, more deadly than its predecessors.

The WHO warning comes in the backdrop of declining infections in India, below one lakh for the last over a week, where various states have started opening up the economic and social activities. India reported 71,365 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours ending at 8 am on Wednesday, taking the country’s active case-load to 8,92,828.

WHO epidemiologist and technical lead on Covid-19 Dr Maria Van Kerkhove stressed that the pandemic is far from over and future variants will be in some way more virulent than Omicron is now.

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Kerala logs over 23 K Covid cases in 24 hrs

Thiruvananthapuram: Daily Covid-19 cases in Kerala which saw a slight increase a day ago, again decreased on Wednesday with the State recording 23,253 fresh infections which raised the total caseload to 63,46,631.

The southern state had reported 29,471 Covid-19 cases on Tuesday.Kerala today also reported 854 deaths which raised the total fatalities in Kerala to 60,793, according to a government release.

Of the deaths, 29 were reported in the last 24 hours, 198 were those which occurred in the last few days but were not recorded due to late receipt of documents and 627 were designated as Covid-19 deaths after receiving appeals passed on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court, the release said.With 47,882 more people recovering from the virus since Tuesday, the total recoveries crossed 60 lakh in the state to reach 60,26,884.

As the number of recoveries were more than the new Covid-19 cases, the active cases in the state went down to 2,58,188, the release said.

On Tuesday, the number of active cases was 2,83,676.

As many as 84,919 samples were tested in the last 24 hours.

Among the 14 districts, Ernakulam recorded the highest number of cases with 4,441,

‘Hybrid immunity effective in aborting Omicron surge’

Kochi: Hybrid immunity is effective in preventing the spread of the Omicron, a variant of coronavirus, according to the findings of the study conducted by a team led by a Kerala doctor.

“The impact caused by Omicron in India was less compared to the crisis created in countries such as the US and the UK. Hybrid immunity present in Indian population is the one of the main reasons for low death rate compared to other countries,” said clinical immunologist and rheumatologist Dr Padmanabha Shenoy who headed the research.

Dr Sakir Ahmed of Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, was co-researcher.“Human body gains immunity through natural infection or vaccination.

following by Thiruvananthapuram (2,673), Kottayam (2,531) and Kollam (2,318).The remaining districts recorded less than 2,000 cases.

Of the new cases, 207 were health workers, 53 from outside the State and 21,366 infected through contact with the

Hybrid immunity is the immunity generated when a person with prior infection receives a vaccine,” Dr Shenoy told reporters here.

The research included about 2,000 patients with autoimmune rheumatic diseases at the Centre for Arthritis & Rheumatism Excellence (CARE).It was found during the initial studies that hybrid immunity generated antibody levels 30 times higher than those who have received two doses of vaccines.

While 60 per cent patients who had received two vaccine doses were able to neutralise the original Wuhan strain of virus, 90 per cent of people with hybrid immunity could neutralise the original strain. Even in Delta variant also, the figures were almost similar. **PTI**

source of it not being clear in 1,627, the release said.

There are currently 4,23,059 people under surveillance in various districts, of whom 4,14,865 are in home or institutional quarantine and 8,194 in hospitals, the release said. **PTI**

CBSC announces 2nd term Board exams through offline mode

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday announced that it will conduct second-term board examination for classes 10 and 12 in offline mode from April 26, officials said on Wednesday.

“The board after discussion with various stakeholders and taking into consideration the Covid-19 situation in the country has decided to conduct second-term board exams in offline mode only.

The theory exams will begin from April 26, 2022. The datesheet for classes 10 and 12 will be released soon,” CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said.

“The pattern of the question papers will be same as that of

sample question papers hosted on the board’s website. The students will appear in the examinations from the allotted examination centres as done during the preceding years,” he added.

The academic session was bifurcated into two terms after the board exams could not be conducted last year in view of the pandemic and the results had to be announced using an alternative assessment scheme.

The first-term exams were conducted in offline mode in November-December last year. The result of the first-term exams is yet to be announced.The board also warned the students that mes-

sages and information spreading on social media may be considered only after verifying the facts available on its website.--

Jaishankar leaves for Australia to...

From Page 1

It will be an opportunity for the Ministers to follow up on their virtual meeting held in February last year and exchange views on regional strategic issues given their shared vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

“The Ministers will review ongoing Quad cooperation and build on the positive and constructive agenda announced by the leaders at the two summits in 2021, to address contemporary challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, supply chains, critical technologies, climate change, and infrastructure,” the Ministry said in a statement.

Besides attending the Quad meeting, Jaishankar will also co-chair with his Australian counterpart Marise Payne the 12th India-Australia foreign ministers’ framework dialogue

on February 12.

On the same day, he will also co-chair with Payne the inaugural Foreign Ministers’ cyber framework dialogue.

The two Ministers will assess the progress made towards implementation of the India-Australia framework arrangement on cyber and cyber-enabled critical technology cooperation and the subsidiary plan of action which they signed in 2020.

After the Australian tour, Jaishankar will travel to the Philippines on a three-day visit. It will be also his first visit to that country as External Affairs Minister.

The visit to the Philippines from February 13 to 15 comes two weeks after India inked its first-ever defence export deal with the Southeast Asian country for Brahmos supersonic cruise missiles. The deal is worth over 375 million dollars.

He will hold talks with his counterpart, Teodoro L Locsin Jr, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, and review developments in bilateral relations since the meeting of the joint commission on bilateral cooperation that they co-chaired in the virtual format in November 2020.

“The visit is expected to impart further momentum to bilateral relations with our key partners in the Indo-Pacific, Australia, and the Philippines, which is also a leading member of ASEAN,” the statement said.

In Beijing, China said the Quad coalition has a “Cold War mentality”. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said as a “bloc,” it was trying to trigger confrontation unlike China, which stands for peace and development. The Ministry accused the US of forming “blobs” and attempting to force its “style” of democracy.

Beijing had earlier denounced the Quad as a Cold War construct and a clique “targeting other countries”.

Replying to a question on

Double engine Govt needed for development of UP, says Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the wheel of development must continue to roll in Uttar Pradesh and only the double engine Government of the Bharatiya Janata Party could ensure this, as “development was not possible without sound law and order situation” and the BJP alone could guaranty safety and dignity of women, farmers and the poor.

Addressing a virtual rally in Rampur, Yogi said that scores of people of Rampur had benefited from the wide-ranging welfare schemes of the BJP government in the last five years.

Earlier, Yogi was scheduled to address public meetings virtually in Bareilly and Moradabad but they were postponed for unavoidable reasons.

The Chief Minister said: “We have made a record payment of ₹1.59 lakh crore to sugarcane farmers in the state, of which ₹2,400 crore has gone to farmers of Rampur.

This is much more than what was paid to them during 10 years of Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party rule. Cane growers were paid a mere ₹653 crore and ₹1,400 crore respectively during the BSP and SP regimes.”

Raj CM Gehlot lays foundation stone of Constitution Club



Jaipur: Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that many decisions make history and Rajasthan will register its name in history with the construction of the Constitution Club of Rajasthan in Jaipur. MLAs of various political parties sitting in this club can have a meaningful discussion. This will strengthen democracy and constitutional values. He said that the MLA Housing Project is taking shape with the willpower of our Government.

Gehlot was addressing the foundation stone laying and ground breaking programme of the Constitution Club of Rajasthan as the Chief Guest on Wednesday. He thanked State Assembly Speaker Dr CP Joshi, Urban Development Minister Shanti Dhariwal and Leader of Opposition Gulab Chand Kataria along with all the

MLAs for their cooperation in making the dream of MLA Housing Project and Constitution Club come true.

The Chief Minister said that the problem of the house for MLAs was very old. The MLAs houses built at Vidhayak Nagar East and West and Jalupura have become very old and dilapidated. In such a situation, our Government resolving this problem of MLAs lying pending for years approved the MLA Housing Project.

The six-floor structure of the houses of MLAs getting ready in five months is commendable, he said. Directing to complete both the projects on time with quality, he said that the current and former MLAs will get the facilities of the Constitution Club.

Western... K’taka...

From Page 1

There are a total of 403 seats in the State. Campaigning for the first phase remained confined to the virtual medium due to a ban on road shows and physical rallies by the EC due to an increase in Covid cases across the country.

The Ministers whose electoral fate will be decided in the first phase are: Suresh Rana, Atul Garg, Shrikant Sharma, Sandeep Singh, Anil Sharma, Kapil Dev Agarwal, Dinesh Khatic, Dr GS Dharmesh and Chaudhary Laxmi Narain.

Though the main contest in the first phase is between the BJP and the SP-RLD, the BSP, too, has its influence in some seats. Last time, the BJP bagged 53 of the 58 seats while the SP and the Bahujan Samaj Party got two seats each. One seat went to the RLD.

The CEO said the EC has directed all political parties to publish the criminal record of the candidates fielded by them in newspapers. The political parties are also required to cite the reason for giving tickets to the person with a tainted record. He said it’s also the responsibility of the candidate to publish their criminal record three times 48 hours before the polling takes place.The CEO said for keeping a close watch on the situation, the EC has deployed 48 general observers, eight police observers, 19 expenditure observers, 2,175 sector magistrates, 284 zonal magistrates, 368 static magistrates and 2,718 micro observers.

It’s for the woman to decide what she wears, says Priyanka

NewDelhi/Lucknow: Whether it is a bikini, a ‘ghoonghat’, a pair of jeans or a hijab, it is a woman’s right to decide what she wants to wear, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Wednesday amid the ongoing hijab row in Karnataka. She asserted that this right is guaranteed by the

Constitution.

Incidents of stone-pelting and use of force by police were reported in Karnataka on Tuesday as the hijab ban row escalated and protests by students spread to more colleges, prompting the state government to declare a three-day holiday for all educational insti-

tutions.“Whether it is a bikini, a ghoonghat, a pair of jeans or a hijab, it is a woman’s right to decide what she wants to wear,” Vadra tweeted.

“This right is GUARANTEED by the Indian constitution. Stop harassing women,” she said using the hashtag ‘ladkihoonladsaktihoon’.

Asked about the controversy at a press conference in Lucknow, the Congress general secretary reiterated that a woman is free to choose what she wants to wear.

“Have I started the debate on the hijab? A woman has the right to choose whether she wants to wear a bikini, a hijab,

a ‘ghoonghat’, a saree or a pair of jeans. There is no politics in this and also there should be no politics. No one has any right to tell a woman what she can wear,” she said.Vadra further asked a journalist, “Should I ask you to take off your scarf?”

The journalist responded that he is at a press conference

and not in a school.

Replying to this, Vadra said, “I have no right to ask you to take off your scarf. The same way, no one has the right to decide what a woman will wear.”The hijab controversy first erupted in January at a Government PU College in Udupi. **PTI**

‘Dynasty kills... Next Covid...

From Page 1

Dr Van Kerkhove has cautioned that there is “no guarantee” the coronavirus will get weaker as it evolves and that although the world might hope that’s the case, “we can’t bank on it.”

“The next variant of concern will be more fit, and what we mean by that is it will be more transmissible because it will have to overtake what is currently circulating. The big question is whether or not future variants will be more or less severe,” she said.

She further warned that the next variant could more easily evade immunity, rendering vaccines less effective. However, she doubled down on the imperative of getting the job as it protects against severe illness and death, as exhibited during the Omicron wave.

“We expect that with the right interventions, the circulation of Covid-19 will be low. But even within those circulations, there will be flare-ups among people who are not pro-

tected by the vaccine or those who have waning immunity,” added Dr Van Kerkhove.

The Delta variant that was first detected in India in October 2020 was labelled a variant of concern by the WHO. Delta was spreading 50 per cent faster than the Alpha variant, which was 50 per cent more contagious than the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, more commonly known as the coronavirus.

Cut to six months later and the Delta strain had ravaged the country, causing a record-breaking number of daily cases and claiming lives. By June 2021, it was responsible for a fresh surge in cases in the UK, Israel, Russia, Australia and several other parts of the world.

Omicron, which was quickly tagged as a variant of concern after being detected in South Africa in late November 2021, has replaced Delta as the dominant strain in a much shorter interval. Though milder, Omicron is at least two to four times more transmissible than the Delta variant. It also possesses an enhanced ability to evade vaccines, on top of a reinfection rate five times that of Delta.

However, there is a silver lining too. A study conducted at Steve Biko Academic Hospital Complex in South Africa offers a possibility of Covid-19 ending in the near future.

Based on the results, the researchers suggested that “Omicron may be a harbinger of the end of the epidemic phase of the Covid pandemic, ushering in its endemic phase”.

These studies are, however, only indicative and conditional to the emergence of new variants. Omicron will not be the last variant and the next variant of concern is likely to be more transmissible, the World Health Organization has said, warning against complacency in following Covid-appropriate protocol. “Omicron will not be the last variant you will hear us speaking about. The next variant of concern will be more fit and what we mean by that is it will be more transmissible because it will have to overtake what is currently circulating. The big question is whether or not future variants will be more or less severe,” said Maria Van Kerkhove, Covid-19 technical lead at WHO. **PNS**

‘Joblessness, financial...

From Page 1

The Minister said the Government was taking steps to address the issue by focusing on mental health issues and creating employment opportunities.Replying to another question, the Minister said as many as 1,439 personnel belonging to seven central police organisations are facing criminal charges while 181 others have been slapped with corruption charges.

Rai said among those who were slapped either with corruption or criminal charges, 481 belonged to the Border Security Force (BSF), 401 were from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), 325 belonged to the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and 273 were from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). A total of 71 of those accused were from the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), 60 were from the Assam Rifles and seven were from the National Security Guard (NSG), he said in a written reply to a question.

DU to resume offline classes from Feb 17

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid continued protests by student outfits demanding resumption of offline classes at Delhi University, the varsity on Wednesday issued an order announcing commencement of classes in physical mode for all undergraduate and postgraduate courses from February 17.

The order said all students should plan to reach Delhi in such a manner that they can complete three days' isolation before reporting to their respective colleges or departments.

The student outfits, cutting across party lines, have been demanding that the Delhi University (DU) begin offline classes without any further delay. According to the order issued by the university, a committee was constituted by Delhi University vice chancellor Yogesh Singh to consider the decisions of reopening the campus. The committee deliberated upon the issue with the deans of faculties, heads of departments, principals of colleges, directors of institutions and provosts of hostels.

Noting that it is difficult for the students in different parts of the country to reach Delhi at a short notice in the prevailing pandemic situation, it said appropriate time is required for

studentsto arrange for their travel from their respective hometowns.

"Based on the recommendations of the committee, it is notified that offline classes for all undergraduate and postgraduate courses shall begin with effect from February 17. The outstation students are advised to plan reaching Delhi in such a manner that they are able to complete the isolation period of three days before reporting to their respective colleges/ departments," said the order.

The order further stated that libraries/laboratories and canteens of the university colleges/departments/centres shall be functioning with effect from February 17 by strictly adhering to COVID-19 guidelines issued by DDMA, MHA, MOHFW and UGC.

"The Deans of Faculties/Heads of the Departments/ Principals of Colleges/Directors of the Institutions/Provosts of Hostels shall ensure that all the teaching, non-teaching staff and students follow Covid appropriate behaviour (wearing of masks, maintaining social distancing, regular hand washing and use of sanitisers) at all times to prevent the spread of COVID-19," it said.

It also directed that authorities concerned ensure that the

premises of the departments/colleges, centres and hostels are properly ventilated and sanitised.

The order also said that the authorities shall encourage the teaching and non-teaching staff and the students get vaccinated if not already done at the earliest. DU VC Yogesh Singh had on Tuesday said that the campus would be opened soon.

"We are thinking of reopening and we will do it soon. The students are getting impatient. It is a big system. We are consulting with college principals. A meeting was held on Monday and they have started sanitising the colleges and then there are also hostels. Students are also outside and they will take some time. We will open before the end of this month," he had told PTI.

Delhi University colleges were closed on March 19, 2020 in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The varsity had given a go-ahead to resumption of practical sessions in February last year, but after the emergence of second wave, they were suspended in March.

In September, the university allowed final year undergraduate and postgraduate students to return to campus, but the attendance was thin. These offline classes were also suspended in view of rising coronavirus cases.

Delhi Govt to build electric vehicle charging stations at all State-run offices

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to make Delhi the "Electric Vehicle Capital of India", the city government has decided to build electric vehicle charging stations at all government offices in the national capital which will be ready in three months. Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said government employees will be able to charge their electric vehicles (EVs) during work hours.

"Electric vehicles are being promoted rapidly throughout Delhi in order to implement the vision of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. In Delhi, electric vehicle charging stations are being built speedily," he said, adding that these stations will now be installed in all government offices.

"The general public, in addition to government employees, will also be able to charge their vehicles here," the minister added. According to the order issued by the Delhi government, all departments under it must identify suitable locations and install public charging stations on their premises. Within three months, electric vehicle charging stations will be installed in all government buildings, it said.

A subsidy of Rs 6,000 per charging point will be provided for the establishment of an electric vehicle charging station through a discom-empanelled vendor, it said.

The transport department, in collaboration with Delhi discoms, has established a single point of contact. The single window process can be used to install EV chargers from discom-empanelled vendors at reduced and low tariffs. "All heads of departments are hereby directed to ensure installation of the EV charging stations at the premises of the respective government buildings, especially those offices with high public dealings within a period of 3 months for promoting electric mobility," stated the transport department order issued on Tuesday. The government office that install the chargers will get the subsidy and will not have to separately raise any further claim.

Delhi Police's Crime Branch arrests two members of sextortionist gang

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch has arrested two members of a sextortionist gang in the National Capital.

The accused have been identified as Samaydeen (28) and Munfed (26), both residents of Rajasthan.

The Crime Branch had arrested four persons of this sextortionist gang in July last year.

The accused had disclosed that the main leaders of the gang were Samaydeen and Munfed. The gang had cheated and extorted money from more than 200 victims.

According to Dheeraj Kumar, the Joint Commissioner of Police, Crime Branch, a team led by inspector Anil Sharma of IGIS, Crime Branch laid a trap and arrested both the accused persons on Tuesday.

The accused prepared fake ID with profile names and photographs of attractive girls on various social media and sent friend request to victims. After becoming friends, they shared their WhatsApp numbers and starts sexting, police said.

After trapping them through sexting, the accused persons offer their victims video calls and show them a girl stripping her clothes. They invite and deceive the victims to shed their own clothes, they said.

The victims removed their clothes and the accused recorded the event by screen recording application. During the episode, no voice calls were made and the victim believed that he was interacting with a girl.

Once the nudity is recorded, the sextortionists started demanding money, police said.

Court dismisses bail plea of accused in terror bid cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has dismissed the bail plea of a man arrested by Delhi Police in a case of alleged conspiracy to execute a series of terror attacks, including in Delhi, to create instability in the country.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana denied bail to Abu Bakar, who was arrested along with some others last year by special cell of Delhi Police.

The court noted in the order passed on February 8 that investigation in the case was still on and the period for concluding the probe was already extended by the judge earlier.

The accused had sought relief on the ground that he was languishing in Judicial Custody since September 14, 2021 and was undertaking not to tamper with the evidence, if any, or intimidate any witnesses related to the present case.

He also said he will co-operate with the police in the course of investigation and appear before the Investigation officer and court as and when required. The police had

opposed the bail application, claiming that considering the gravity of the situation, a multi-prolonged operation was launched and several teams were stationed at Mumbai in Maharashtra and Lucknow, Prayagraj, Rae Bareilly, Pratapgarh in UP simultaneously and accordingly, on September 14, 2021 on the basis of intelligence gathered through human as well as technical nodes, simultaneous raids were carried out in different states.

"Out of six arrested, two among them were trained in Pakistan recently. We got inputs from the central agency that plans across the border are being made to execute terror activities in several cities in India," police said.

Delhi Police said high-end imported weapons, Italian Pistols firearms, ammunition and explosive were recovered from the arrested persons. It said the arrested persons were likely to target the states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The arrested suspects were planning to carry out targeted killings and blasts across the country, the police said.

700 contractual workers of DJB get permanent jobs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Wednesday regularised 700 contractual staffers of the Delhi Jal Board.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal administered the regularisation of the employees and handed certificates to them on the occasion.

Kejriwal said this was the first mass regularization in the country. "Never in the history of Delhi, has any past government regularised contractual workers on such a large scale. Praises of steps taken by the Delhi Government will echo all over India; other state governments will be compelled to follow in Delhi's footsteps. Hope and pray that such regularisation takes place in every department of the Delhi Government; we have very limited power but pushing as much as we can. Entire country was of the opinion that governments are incapable of running schools and hospitals effectively. We have proved that if the government is strong willed and honest, it can run both schools and hospitals suc-

cessfully. Notion that once employees are regularised, they become lazy and complacent is a baseless hoax," said the AAP leader.

All 700 regularised employees will work twice as hard now that they have a sense of security. We have busted the myth that regular employees do not deliver well on their duties; Delhi Government is a prime example of this feat. The employees were extremely emotional after receiving the fruit of their hard labour and wholeheartedly blessed the CM for recognising their efforts.

"We came into power and proved that if the government is strong willed and honest, it can run both schools and hospitals successfully and efficiently," "If we work hand in hand with the government employees, address and solve their problems, then no one would work as hard as them," he added.

Along with the Chief Minister, DJB CEO Udit Prakash Rai and several high ranking officials of the government were present at the event.

Herbal hookah permitted subject to Covid appropriate protocol, Delhi Govt tells HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government Wednesday told the Delhi High Court that service of herbal hookah is permitted in bars subject to compliance with COVID-19 appropriate protocol and other relevant conditions.

Delhi government counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi told Justice V Kameswar Rao that the case of the petitioner -- a restaurant-cum-bar owner challenging the ban on servicing herbal hookahs -- is covered by the order passed by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority on February 4 which has allowed bars and restaurants to operate at 50 per cent seating capacity.

The counsel stated that the petitioners have to give an undertaking to the court that they would strictly follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour while serving herbal hookah in terms of the court's order passed in November last year. The judge stated that the order permitting the petitioner to serve herbal hookah shall be effective till the next date of hearing.

The petitioner M/S Punter House Cafe, represented by lawyer Anubhav Singh, argued that authorities interfering with the sale and service of herbal flavoured hookahs in restaurants was in violation of Articles 14 and 19(1)(g) of the Constitution of India.

70% of foreign prisoners in India under-trials: Data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seven in every 10 prisoners of foreign-origin in Indian jails at the end of 2020 were under-trials, with nearly half of such inmates being from Bangladesh, according to data released by the government. The recently released annual 'Prison Statistics India 2020' of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows there were 4,926 foreigners lodged in jails of the country in 2020, as against 5,203 in 2019 and 5,157 in 2018.

The number of Indian prison inmates in the country stood at 4.83 lakh by the end of 2020, stated the NCRB, which functions under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

"Among 4,926 prisoners of foreign nationality at the end of 2020, 4,135 were males and 791 were females. Among these foreign national prisoners, 23.1 per cent (1,140 inmates) were convicts, 70.4 per cent (3,467 inmates) were under-trials and 0.8 per cent (41 inmates) were detainees," the report showed. "Among the foreign convicts, the highest number of foreign convicts

were from Bangladesh (46.4 per cent, 529 convicts) followed by Nepal (18.1 per cent, 206 convicts), Nigeria (8.2 per cent, 94 convicts) and Myanmar (7.3 per cent, 83 convicts) at the end of 2020," it noted.

According to the NCRB, West Bengal has reported the highest number of foreign convicts lodged in its jails at 466 (40.9 per cent) followed by Uttar Pradesh with 127 (11.1 per cent) and Delhi with 73 (6.4 per cent) at the end of 2020. "Among the foreign under-trials, the highest number was from Bangladesh (47 per cent, 1,630) followed by Nigeria (17.7 per cent, 615) and Nepal (13.4 per cent, 463)," the report showed. West Bengal has reported the highest number of foreign under-trials lodged in its jails at 1,295 (37.4 per cent), followed by Delhi with 400 (11.5 per cent) and Maharashtra with 380 (11 per cent) at the end of 2020, it stated. The NCRB noted that the percentage share of foreign prisoners out of total prisoners has decreased from 1.1 per cent in 2019 to one per cent in 2020 (as on December 31 of each year).

HC grants bail to woman accused of duping jeweller by impersonating as cousin of Brunei King

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has granted bail to a woman accused of duping a jeweller to the tune of over Rs two crore by impersonating the cousin of the King of Brunei who wanted to visit political leaders in India and gift them jewellery.

Justice Subramonium Prasad stated that although the petitioner woman -- Nancy Gill -- was allegedly the mastermind behind the plan to cheat the complainant jeweller, she cannot be kept behind the bars endlessly.

The court noted that even after four years, the investigation was yet to be completed and directed that the petitioner be released on a personal bond of Rs one lakh with two sureties of the like amount. The court said, "the material on record discloses that the petitioner played a crucial role in the commission of the alleged offences" pursuant to "methodical and intricate planning" which involved the petitioner purchasing another SIM to impersonate the cousin sister of the King of Brunei.

"This Court is of the opinion that the Petitioner cannot be kept endlessly behind bars. When the right to a speedy trial is a concomitant of Article 21 of the Constitution of India, it can be presumed that one of the facets would also be that the accused cannot be kept in custody indefinitely. The Petitioner has already spent more than one-fourth of the maximum period of imprisonment in custody," the court said in its order passed on February 8. "There is weight in the submission of the learned Counsel of the Petitioner that even if she is convicted, the Petitioner would be subjected to imprisonment for a maximum of seven years, out of which she has already spent two years in custody. Even after four years, the investigation has not been completed," it added.

The court directed the body of a unknown man stuffed inside gunny bag found abandoned in north Delhi's Burari area

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A body of a unknown man stuffed inside a gunny bag was found abandoned in north Delhi's Burari area. Police said that the body is yet to be identified.

The body was found lying abandoned at Yamuna Pushta near Parsiram Enclave on Tuesday.

According to Sagar Singh Kalsi, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district, on Tuesday at around 5 pm, a call was received that at Yamuna

The Court directed that the petitioner be released on a personal bond of Rs one lakh with two sureties of the like amount.

petitioner to surrender her passport before the trial court and drop a pin location on Google Maps so that her status is available to the Investigating Officer at all times.

The court clarified that if any instance of the petitioner threatening her family members or the complainant comes to light or if false cases are filed against the complainant or his family members by her or at her instance, the bail would stand cancelled forthwith.

The petitioner sought bail in the matter on the ground that no recovery was made from her and the complainant along with her (Gill's) husband has conspired to falsely implicate her in the case.

The complainant jeweller alleged that in March 2015, the petitioner, who was known him, told him about a big project and dishonestly represented that the Prime Minister of India had started a programme pursuant to which the King of Brunei was going to start 14 super-specialty hospitals in the country.

The complainant claimed that the petitioner stated that she met the cousin sister of the King of Brunei who wanted to visit political leaders in India and gift them jewellery. He stated that he was subsequently induced by the petitioner to accept an order worth more than one crore rupee without taking any advance while agreeing to give her a five per cent commission.

After no payment was received by him for the jewellery, it was realized that the story involving the King of Brunei was concocted to dupe him, the complainant submitted. Consequently, an FIR was registered for the alleged commission of the offence of cheating under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code.

DU students' outfit protests against hijab restrictions in Karnataka college

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A students' outfit at Delhi University (DU) on Tuesday protested against hijab restrictions in a government pre-university college in Udupi in Karnataka.

The Muslim Students' Federation protested outside the Arts Faculty in DU North Campus. The gathering comprised 50 students, including women, who were wearing hijabs.

Carrying banners like "We, the people of Muhammad, will fight hate" and "In solidarity with the students of Karnataka", they raised their voice against the row which has erupted in the southern state.

Tension had prevailed at some educational institutions in Udupi, Shivamogga, Bagalkote and other parts of the state as they were rocked by protests for and against hijab on Tuesday, forcing the police and administration to intervene.

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday heard petitions filed by five girls studying in a Government Pre-university College in Udupi, questioning hijab restriction in college and the matter has been posted for Wednesday. The protest over dress code started in one school and has spread to other districts.

Protests over FYUP, CUCET and undemocratic policies of DU academic council

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Protests raged in North Campus for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, with student outfits adopting various ways to make the authorities adhere to their various demands. The Students' Federation of India (SFI) started 'Sadak Par Kaksha' campaign where Miranda House professor Abha Dev Habib spoke on the functioning of the university's academic council and upcoming changes in its educational system.

Habib highlighted the "undemocratic tendencies" of the academic council and called the introduction of four year undergraduate programme (FYUP) and Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) as "anti-student" policies.

"The authorities have not accommodated the opinions of various stakeholders and are imposing their decisions upon the student and teaching community in an autocratic fashion. Students are resolved to continue their fight for their rightful access to education," she said. Pritish Menon, SFI Delhi State Secretary, said, "We must not mystify the rea-

sons behind the push for online education by the Delhi University (DU) administration. It is amply clear that this is only in alignment with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, to dissolve the need for investment in infrastructure. "Keeping students off campus is only a deliberate action intended to aid the implementation of policies directed by NEP 2020, as protesting students are a nuisance to them," he said. The Sadak Par Kaksha campaign will continue outside 10 colleges of the varsity on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) continued its indefinite hunger strike for the second day over the matter. The Left-affiliated All India Students Association (AISA) organised a 'chakka jam' outside the Arts Faculty demanding the resumption of offline classes. The Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS) on Wednesday gheraoed Shastri Bhawan, which houses the office of Union Ministry of Education, to register their protest. Protestors also threatened their heads to mark the protest.

Over 5,500 posts of Constables vacant in Delhi Police stations: Govt

National Capital has a sanctioned strength of 21,244 constables, says Union Min

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 5,500 posts of constables were lying vacant in the police stations of Delhi, Union Minister Nitayanand Rai said on Wednesday.

Rai said in Rajya Sabha that there are 224 police stations in the national capital with a sanctioned strength of 21,244 constables.

Of the sanctioned strength for police constables, 5,543 posts are currently lying vacant, he said replying to a written question.

The minister said the vacancies arose due to several reasons, including retire-

ments.

He said creation of new posts is a dynamic process and accordingly filling up vacancies is also a continuous process. The Delhi Police has already initiated a recruitment process to fill up the vacant posts, he said.

Pushta near Parsuram Enclave, a body of a person, is lying abandoned in a sack.

"When our team reached the spot, it was found to be an unknown male body aged approximately 30 years, with no external injuries except some blood on the mouth and on right toe. The spot was also inspected by the crime team," he said.

A case of murder has been registered under section 302 of Indian Penal Code and an investigation is on to identify the deceased and solve the case, the DCP said.

ED attaches ₹1,621 crore of CIAL in coal block probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached properties worth ₹1,621.93 crore under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in the case of coal block investigation against Jharkhand-based Corporate Ispat Alloys Ltd. (CIAL).

The provisionally attached properties consist of one biomass power plant, two captive thermal power plants, one ferro alloys plant and Direct Reduced Iron Plant and parcels of land situated at Durgapur, West Bengal and Saraikela, Jharkhand of the Nagpur-headquartered company, the ED said in a statement.

The ED had initiated money laundering investiga-



tion on the basis of an FIR dated January 6, 2016 registered by the Economic Offences Wing of CBI, New Delhi, for alleged commission of offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and relevant provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act against CIAL, promoters of the company and others for alleged criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal misconduct by the accused

persons for obtaining coal block, it said.

"Investigation carried out under the provisions of PMLA revealed that the company fraudulently obtained the Chitarpur coal block through misrepresentation of facts.

Huge capital was later infused in CIAL in the form of equity shares so as to derive and obtain benefits/gains from

the allocated coal block," it said.

It said the shares were allotted at a huge premium. This entire infusion of capital ₹1,896 crore was done with an intention and in anticipation of undue benefits to be derived and obtained by CIAL in future.

"The proceeds derived from the issue of share capital were further invested in fixed assets and projected as untainted property and given colour of a genuine business investment, whereas, the entire process starting with the application for getting a coal block, to being awarded the Chitarpur coal block, to raising of funds on the strength of tainted property (allocation letter) was a consequence of criminal activities related to the scheduled offences," it added.

PC Financial: ₹288 crore seizure by ED under FEMA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Commissioner of Customs, Chennai, has confirmed the "full" seizure of ₹288 crore done by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under FEMA against Chinese-owned PC Financial Services Private Limited, a non-banking financial company (NBFC) by passing a speaking order.

The Commissioner of Customs, Chennai, is the designated Competent Authority under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) for confirming seizures made by the ED in that zone.

The ED had seized Bank/Payment Gateway funds worth ₹ 288 crore belonging to PC Financial Services (PCFS) vide three separate seizure orders issued under the provisions of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). The orders were issued on August 26, September 30 and December 15 last year for amounts of ₹106.93 crore, ₹

131.11 crore and ₹51.22 crore respectively.

The ED is investigating a number of NBFCs and Fintech companies under PMLA for providing online instant micro-loans using mobile applications (Apps) and then extorting high rate of interest by misusing the personal data of the customers and threatening and abusing them through call centers.

During the course of money laundering investigation, the ED also initiated investigation under FEMA against PCFS that provides instant personal micro loans through its mobile application 'Cashbean' for suspicious foreign outward remittances.

"PCFS is ultimately beneficially owned by Chinese National Zhou Yahui. Investigation further revealed that the foreign parent companies of PCFS brought in FDI worth ₹173 crore for lending business and within a short span of time, made foreign out-

ward remittances worth ₹429.29 crore to Chinese-controlled foreign-related companies, in the name of payments for non-existent software services," the ED said in a statement.

PCFS also showed high domestic expenditure of ₹941 crore. The ED has found that exorbitant payments were blindly allowed by the dummy Indian Directors of PCFS without any due diligence and on the instructions of the Country

Head Zhang Hong, who directly reported to Zhou Yahui residing in China, it said.

"PCFS had contravened FEMA provisions and equivalent assets were liable for seizure. Hence, seizure orders were issued. Further based on the ED investigation, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Income Tax Department have also initiated enquiry against the said NBFC. Further investigation is in progress," it added.

ED attaches assets worth ₹2 cr of Assam Rifles official

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth ₹2.22 crore belonging to Rajdev Singh Yadav, 2-I/C (Second-in-Command), Training Battalion, Assam Rifles Training Centre, Dimapur, Nagaland, under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The attached assets are in the form of Fixed Deposits (FDs) of ₹ 2.22 crore.

NSUI leader writes to Rahul Gandhi seeking justice for party worker

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh NSUI president Neeraj Pandey has written to former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi raising doubts on the death of one of his workers, Deepak Gupta, who succumbed to the injuries he received in an attack on him and his friends on January 4, 2022.

In his letter, the NSUI state chief has alleged that "influential Congress leaders" could have planned the attack on party's student activist.

Pandey has termed the death mysterious and urged Rahul Gandhi to ensure justice for Deepak.

NSUI leaders have alleged that there have been differences between the district unit of party and the NSUI ever since Pandey was appointed the chief of NSUI state unit.

According to letter, a NSUI program which was supposed to be addressed by Pandey in Surguja on November 14 last year was intercepted by district leaders and banners and posters put up to welcome the NSUI president was taken off. The program had to be conducted after adequate

police presence, the letter read.

Pandey also mentioned how several of his workers were targeted, their homes attacked following that.

On January 4, Gupta along with his friends Viraj Dubey, Yudhvir Singh and Vikas Singh were attacked in which he suffered serious injuries which he later succumbed to in the hospital, the letter reads, adding an FIR was registered in the Ambikapur police station which led to arrest of a "minor".

It's the arrest of a minor in the case that has raised questions on the intention and working of police in the district, with Pandey writing to Rahul Gandhi that the cops want to let the real culprits get away by arresting a minor in the case.

Over the past few months, the differences within Chhattisgarh unit of the Congress had come out open due to rift between two top leaders of the party. The fight for supremacy even reached the national capital with both Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and his cabinet colleague TS Singh Deo camp MLAs flexing muscle in front of the party high command.

Budget not for the poor, farm sector needs more attention: Opp

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Wednesday accused the Government of leaving out the majority of the poor in its Budget 2022-23 and not doing enough for the farm sector that employs a large number of people in the country.

During the second day of the discussion in Rajya Sabha on the Union Budget, Congress leader Kapil Sibal slammed the government for increasing excise duty on petrol and diesel, alleging its tax regime is worse than that of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.

Taking part in the discussion BJP member Sushil Modi said jobs are not created by doling out freebies, cash transfer or through income support.

Lauding the Narendra Modi government for providing income support and helping people during COVID-19 pandemic, the BJP leader said employment can only be created through capital expenditure and giving impetus to the manufacturing sector.

In four years, including 2023, India will be spending Rs 20 lakh crore in capital expenditure, he said, claiming it to be the biggest in the history of independent India.

Sibal said that in 2014, the price of petrol was Rs 71, and in January 2022, it

was Rs 95. "Central excise which we implemented in 2014 was 9.2 percent per litre. You made it 27 percent. How much increase does it lead to? 203 percent. Diesel price was Rs 55. The excise on it was Rs 3.46. Today the price is Rs 86 and excise is Rs 21 on diesel and the increase is 530 percent," Sibal said

During the discussion, Sibal made reference to 'jizya' tax which was introduced by Ahmad Shah and later abolished by Akhbar. "Then Aurangzeb came. He again implemented it in 1617 and said that it will not be applicable to people who are deprived, unemployed. It will not be applicable to poor people. It will not be applicable to those who protect us, army personnel.

This is what Aurangzeb said. This is worse than Aurangzeb. You have implemented it on everyone that too 530 percent and 203 percent," Sibal said.

The Congress MP said he was surprised to hear the prime minister talking about 'tukde tukde' in Parliament. "One who does 'tukde tukde' (dismembering) of culture, history, Constitution, brotherhood is the 'leader of the tukde tukde gang,'" Sibal hit back.

CPI leader Binoy Viswam alleged that the Budget was a "failure" and only intend-



ed to benefit "big corporate houses such as Tata, Birla, Ambani and Adani".

TRS leader K R Suresh Reddy lamented the "cut" in food subsidies and the "meagre" sum allocated for research in agriculture.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra's Modi's allegation that the Congress governments in states were the reason for migrants walking back home during the pandemic, Viswam said, "Was it Congress party which did the lockdown?" He said though his party CPI has lots of criticism against the Congress party as it started the disastrous policies of the economy, it is BJP that is doing much more damage.

Nominated member Narendra Jadhav termed the Union budget as "visionary" and said it is aimed at sustainable growth and

Major social media firms set up institutional structure, following guidelines: IT Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

Almost all the social media companies have set up an institutional structure and are publishing monthly compliance reports as required under the statute, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, Vaishnaw said to ensure that social media is safe and people can trust what is written on that, a very self-regulating regime, which was laid down in IT social media intermediary guidelines, was brought in last year.

In a supplementary question, BJP member Nishikant Dubey asked that since the Supreme Court has removed Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, whether the government is planning to bring any amendment in the IT Act against the SC verdict. Vaishnaw said the matter needs a "detailed debate" to arrive at a solution. With regard to social media intermediaries, Vaishnaw said, "Institutional structure has been set by almost all the significant social media intermediaries. All of them are also following the guidelines and publishing their monthly reports. The compliance has been good and whatever further steps are needed to make social media accountable, the government is open to those suggestions."

To a question by TMC member Kalyan

Banerjee on whether the government is thinking to bring any law restricting or prohibiting or regulating and penalising the concept of meme which embarrasses a person or criticise people's posts. "As and when governments try to increase accountability, increase regulations (of social media platforms) the question from civil society comes is whether we are taking away the freedom of expression.

"If we don't increase regulation, if we don't make the social media accountable then the safety and trust that citizens have on these media platforms that comes under a question mark. So it's a fine balance that we have to strike, we have to evolve and mold according to the changes," Vaishnaw said. The new rules require large social media platforms to follow additional due diligence, including the appointment of chief compliance officer,

nodal contact person and resident grievance officer. They are also required to publish on their website their status on compliance with the new digital rules every month. Non-compliance with rules would result in these social media companies losing their intermediary status that provides them exemptions and certain immunity from liabilities for any third-party information and data hosted by them. In other words, they could be liable for criminal action in case of complaints.

Over 31 lakh people served notice by EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the first phase of Uttar Pradesh Assembly is ready for poll on Thursday, the Election Commission has put on notice over 31.51 lakh people under the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 and 1097 FIRs registered for violation of model code of conduct in the state.

The EC-appointed surveillance and expenditure monitoring teams has seized ₹71.86 in cash; 13,40,368 litre liquor worth ₹ 37.40 crore and drugs and narcotics over 12235 kg worth ₹ 34.22 crore and 261 kg precious metals including jewellery and stones worth ₹30.67 crore so far. With over 12235 kg drugs and narcotics, Uttar Pradesh is top in the list, followed by Punjab with 3857.73 kg.

As per the data provided by the EC, over 31.51 lakh people have been put on notice either under section 107 (Security for keeping the peace in other cases) and under section 150 (Information of design to commit cognizable offences) of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973. The authorities has also recovered 8640 arms, 9030 cartoons, 214 kg explosives and 267 bombs from various parts of the state. The poll body has also seized 168 factories involving making of illegal arms and ammunitions.

The poll body data showed that

authorities has seized ₹12.57 crore in cash and ₹ 3.87 lakh litre from 58 assembly polls where the first phase elections will be held on Thursday. The first phase will cover the Jat-dominated belt of western UP. As many as 623 candidates are in the fray in the first phase. The first phase of polling will also decide the fate of nine ministers in the Yogi Adityanath government.

As per the data of EC till February 4, cash, freebies, liquor, precious metals, drugs and narcotics worth ₹535.26 crore has been seized in the five states so far. This includes ₹ 75.15 crore cash; 41.94 lakh litre liquor worth ₹ 50.68 crore; 13707 kg psychotropic substance worth ₹ 395.51 crore; 240 kg precious metals worth ₹ 12 crore and freebies worth ₹ 1.92 crore so far. As per official data compiled since the announcement of polls till January 28, 2017, UP has witnessed the maximum seizure of cash at ₹ 87.67 crore followed by Rs 6.60 crore from Punjab, ₹ 1.27 crore in Goa, ₹ 47.06 lakh in Uttarakhand and ₹ 8.13 lakh in Manipur. In U.P. these seizures were recorded at 8.01 lakh litre worth ₹ 20.62 crore followed by over 5 lakh litre spirits worth ₹ 2.69 crore seized in Punjab, over 36,000 litre liquor worth ₹ 93.91 lakh in Uttarakhand, 71,000 litre worth ₹ 81.80 lakh in Goa and beer and other hard spirits worth ₹ 15.14 lakh in Goa.

Govt seeks suggestions to draft new national cooperative policy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has sought suggestions and inputs from various Central Ministries and institutions like NAFED and cooperative lender-NCDC as it drafts the new National Cooperative Policy and schemes aimed to develop a cooperative based economy model focusing on achieving 'Make in India' mission.

"The new policy will address all developmental issues of cooperatives. Inputs / suggestions of the stakeholders including Central Government Ministries have been sought," Union Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah said in a written reply in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

The consultation with the stakeholders is being done to make cooperatives more transparent and efficient. Discussions are on relevant interventions viz. creation of a National database of Cooperatives, digitalisation of about 63,000 active Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS), he added.

The Minister explained that there were two types of co-operative structures in the country i.e. State Cooperative Societies and Multi-State Cooperative Societies. (MSCS). The Cooperative Societies functioning in one State only are governed by the laws of the respective State Government while the cooperative societies functioning in more than one state are governed by the Central law, 'the Multi-State Co-operative Societies

Act(MSCSA), 2002'.

"Any issues related to their administration are dealt with at respective levels. However, to give new dimensions and to further strengthen the cooperative sector in the country through policy and other interventions, the new Ministry of Cooperation has been created..." said the Minister.

The Government has been pinning hopes on the cooperatives to achieve its dream of 'atmanirbhar bharat'. The Government also plans to amend the MSCSA 2002 to establish a regulatory mechanism for MSCS and remove the loopholes in the existing act.

As per the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) data, as on 2018, there are 8.54 lakh cooperatives in the country. Some of the issues affecting accelerated and equitable growth of cooperatives, inter alia, are lack of effective governance, leadership and professional management in cooperative units, low level of technology adoption.

In fact, according to an official from the Ministry, complaints for non-repayment /misappropriation of deposits of investors against some of the MSCS in various states have been received. In case of delinquent societies against whom complaints are received, action for winding up process is underway in case of 77 societies under Section 86 of the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002. Most of the erring cooperatives are from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi and Odisha, as per the government data.

NIA special court convicts one JMB ultra in 2018 Bodh Gaya IED blast case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Special Court, Patna has convicted a Bangladeshi terrorist of Jamat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) in case of recovery and explosion of IED at Bodh Gaya, Bihar by the Bangladesh-based terror group.

The NIA Special Court, Patna pronounced the judgment against JMB terrorist Jahidul Islam alias Kausar, a Bangladeshi national, under sections of Indian Penal Code Sections relating to waging war against the nation, collecting arms with an intention to wage war against the Government of India, concealing with intent to wage war against India, using forged documents as genuine and provisions of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Explosive Substance Act and the Foreigners Act, the NIA said in a statement.

The NIA had registered the case on February 3, 2018 pertaining to planting of three IEDs in and around the premises of Bodh Gaya temple complex. After investigation, chargesheet was filed against three accused on September 27, 2018 and a supplementary chargesheet was filed on January 28, 2019 against remaining six accused persons.

SC to consider listing for early hearing of plea seeking quick trial of cases against politicians

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to consider listing for early hearing the PIL which has sought expeditious trial of criminal cases against lawmakers and speedy investigation by CBI and other agencies.

A bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana took note of the submissions of senior advocate and amicus curiae Vijay Hansaria that the plea needed to be listed for urgent hearing.

Hansaria said a fresh report, giving details of the pending cases against serving and former MPs, MLAs and MLCs, has been filed with the court and urgent, stringent steps are needed for expeditious disposal of the pending criminal cases. "We will see," said the bench which also comprised justices AS Bopanna and Hima Kohli.

As per the recent report, a total of 4,984 cases are pending against Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly/Council out of which 1,899 cases are more than five years old. The report stated that the total number of cases pending as of December 2018 was 4,110; and as of October 2020 it was 4,859.

"Even after disposal of 2775 cases after December 4, 2018, the cases against MPs/MLAs have increased from 4,122 to 4,984. This shows that more and more persons with criminal antecedents are occupying the seats in the Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies. It is of utmost necessity that urgent and stringent steps are taken for expeditious disposal of pending criminal cases," said the report filed through advocate Sneha Kalita. **PTI**

SC to consider hearing plea against continuation of Jharkhand DGP after retirement

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would consider listing for urgent hearing the pending contempt petition against the Jharkhand Government and Director General of Police (DGP) Neeraj Sinha alleging he has been occupying the post even after superannuation on January 31.

A bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana was told that the contempt plea, which was ordered to be listed in September last year, has not come up for hearing so far and, in the meanwhile, Sinha is continuing as Jharkhand DGP after his retirement.

The bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and Hima Kohli, said the courts have been hearing "restricted matters" due to Covid and would consider the plea for early hearing.

"This matter was last listed on September 3 last year and it was ordered to be listed after two weeks then. It never got listed. It concerns the top post of the Director General of Police (DGP) of Jharkhand," lawyer Apoorv Khator said.

"This is not the priority item. We know that we are hearing the restricted matters. We will see," the bench said. **PTI**

Alliance Air Mumbai-Bhuj flight's engine cowl detaches during take-off; DGCA orders probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An Alliance Air ATR aircraft landed safely at Bhuj from Mumbai after a part of the engine cowl fell down during take-off on Wednesday morning. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has initiated an inquiry to fix responsibilities for lapses. The cowl was recovered alongside the runway after the flight took off. The four-year-old aircraft had around 70 passengers on board.

The incident happened on Wednesday morning and was brought to the notice of airport authorities by a Mumbai Air Traffic Controller (ATC). Subsequently, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) started an investigation into the incident. Meanwhile, officials said that Mumbai ATC informed the airport that Alliance Air ATR aircraft, operating flight 91-625 (Mumbai-Bhuj) took off without the left engine cowl (cover).

Visuals of the aircraft, which were shared on social media, showed an exposed engine of the flight as the cowl, the removable outer part of the engine fell off on the run-

way. The aircraft, VT-RKJ took off from Mumbai airport at about 6.30 am. Later, the airline's engineering team reached the site and retrieved the engine cover from the runway. Flying without engine cowl may have an aerodynamic effect leading to marginal deterioration in the aircraft's performance, the official said.

Expressing regret at the unfortunate incident, the airline in a statement said that during the operation of Alliance Air flight 91-625 from Mumbai to Bhuj on February 9, the panel of the engine cowl was found on the runway post take off. "We have taken strict note of the incident and a thorough investigation has been initiated. The findings of the same shall be shared with the regulatory authorities and we shall ensure that all required corrective actions are put in place," the airline said.

It also said that "we are grateful that all passengers and crew onboard the flight safely landed and there was no damage to the aircraft due to this unfortunate incident." Alliance Air said, it follows laid down policies/ procedures as per the regulatory authorities.

DELIMITATION COMMISSION REPORT ‘J&K people not happy with report’

AIWC Gen Secy Nagma lashes out at BJP for anti-people policies

Jammu: The people in Jammu and Kashmir are not happy with the draft delimitation commission report, All India Women Congress General Secretary Nagma Morarji said on Wednesday, as she lashed out at BJP over its alleged anti-people policies and “dividing the country on communal lines.”

The actress turned politician also condemned the heckling of a hijab-clad girl by a group of men sporting saffron scarves at a college in Karnataka and said “such diversionary tactics are employed to hoodwink the public from the real issues”.

She also paid tributes to seven army personnel who lost their lives in an avalanche in Arunachal Pradesh.

“People (in Jammu and Kashmir) are not happy with the proposed draft delimitation commission report. You have seen hundreds of BJP workers protesting and submitting their resignation (to protest the proposed merger of Suchetgarh assembly constituency on Monday)... when the report is out, you will see more protests,” the Congress leader told reporters at the conclusion of her three-day visit to Jammu.

Nagma said she visited Suchetgarh sector near the International Border in the outskirts of Jammu on the first day of her three-day party programme and interacted with the people there. “They are feeling neglected and consider snatching of the assembly constituency as grave injustice.”

On a question about the heckling of a hijab-clad girl in a college in Karnataka, she said such incidents will affect the education of the girls but the people need to stand up together against this “hooliganism”.

“When the government has no developmental agenda to show to the public, they use such diversionary tactics to hoodwink the people. What happened to the ‘beti bachao, beti padhao’ slogan? Education of the girls is bound to get affected by such incidents and therefore we should not pay heed to diversionary tactics and stand up together against this hooliganism,” she said.

She said it was Congress governments in the past which had always tried to empower the women, while the Narendra Modi led government is only making promises.

Congress gave 50 per cent reservation to women in Panchayats and a bill to provide 33 per cent reservation for women in Lok Sabha is pending in the Parliament as the BJP despite enjoying majority is not

willing to pass it. They do not favour empowerment of women,” Nagma said, adding the women are half of country’s population and should get maximum representation in the legislature.

Criticising the policies of the BJP-led government, she said “we regret snatching the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir and transforming it into a Union Territory. They talked about Naya (new) Kashmir, normalcy and development. We do not see the development on the ground, while frequent militant attacks expose their claims of normalcy.”

Nagma, who also attended the Women Congress executive body meeting during her tour, condemned the recent acid attack on a woman in Srinagar and said the women are not feeling safe and are facing a lot of issues due to inflation and alleged callous attitude of the government.

“The inflation is all time high and it is very difficult to run a household. Asha workers and Anganwari workers are on the streets for enhancement of their monthly numerations and timely payments,” she said and demanded sanctioning of window pension to women below 40 years who have lost their husbands.

Claiming the growing

unemployment in the country, the Congress leader said J&K is one of the regions which tops the list with 22 percent unemployment as a result of which you can see the protesting youth on the roads every now and then.

“BJP is only making hollow promises as every section of the society has been affected by the policies of the Modi-led government over the past seven years. They failed to transfer promised money and create two crore jobs annually. The statistics show that 23 crore people lost their jobs and 700 farmers died during anti-agri law agitation, while only Rs 50 lakh compensation was given to people hit by COVID-19,” she said.She said they only know how to blame Congress for its failures.

The Congress leader also blamed the ruling party for dividing the people of the country and said “Hindu never felt their lives are in danger over the past 70 years but now they are made to think on these lines.”

“The communal forces are spreading disturbance by pitching Hindus against Muslims for winning elections. The people need to think before voting and show the door to such communal forces for a better future,” she said.

PTI

Rifleman from J&K among 7 killed in AP avalanche

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Rifleman Arun Katal, married barely three months ago in November 2021, was one among the seven Army personnel who made supreme sacrifice in the high altitude area of the Kameng Sector in Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday. The soldiers were on patrol duty when they were hit by an avalanche.

In his native village Jandore in Lakhampur area of Kathua district his newly wedded wife spent the whole day tightly clinging on to their wedding pix. On the other hand inconsolable family members and close relatives assembled at their residence spent the long day eagerly waiting for the arrival of his mortal remains. Arun had joined his duty shortly after attending his marriage ceremony. He was commissioned in the Indian Army in 2015.

Initially we were informed that the mortal remains would arrive on Wednesday but there was some delay due to technical reasons, now we are told the

dead bodies would reach here on Thursday”, a close relative informed local media in Kathua. Along with Arun Katal two more soldiers from Jammu region sacrificed their lives.

They have been identified as Havaladar Jugal Kishore, son of Ram Pal, resident of Dager village in Kharha Wali block of Khour and Sepoy Vishal Sharma son of Babu Ram (Ex-serviceman), resident of village Chak Malal in Khour Sub Division of Jammu district.

Rifleman Arun’s father, Praladh Singh himself an Army veteran was hopeful his son would survive. But on Wednesday he was informed about the recovery of dead bodies of all seven soldiers who were struck by an avalanche during a routine patrol duty at an high altitude area.

Ex Serviceman Om Prakash, father-in-law of Havaldar Jugal Kishore said, “I fail to understand why the soldiers were deputy on patrol duty when the high altitude area was witnessing heavy

snowfall”. He appealed to the higher authorities in the Indian army to avoid risking lives of soldiers during inclement weather conditions. Havaldar Jugal Kishore leaves behind his ageing parents, a four year daughter and wife. His elder brother, Gautam Sharma, a former sarpanch in the area said, ‘his parents were offering prayers seeking well being of his younger brother but now it has been confirmed he has not survived. “How can I tell them their son is no longer alive. I cannot face his wife and four year old daughter”. According to family members Jugal contacted his wife on Feb 5 for the last time. The family couldn’t stay in touch with him after wards as he proceeded on patrol duty and was later hit by an avalanche.

Sepoy Vishal also leaves behind his mother and a younger sister. His close family friends remembered him as a brave soldier who recently organised marriage of his younger sister.



The Gateway of Kashi Vishwanath corridor at Lalita Ghat, in Varanasi on Wednesday. This gateway will be open for devotees from February 16, as the construction work is nearly complete

PTI

Khadi’s employment drive transforms lives of tiger-widows of Sunderban’s Bali Island

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It is a historic transformation of the sleepy tiger-infested Bali island in the dense mangrove thickets of Sunderbans. The island, which was totally disconnected from the mainstream of development since Independence, is now bustling with Khadi activities.

Over a hundred tiger widows (Bag Bidhoba in local parlance) in the Bali island who were engaged with spinning activity by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 2018, can now boast of modern amenities, advanced equipment like charkhas and looms and marketing support to provide these women artisans with sustainable livelihood. To begin Khadi activities on the island, KVIC had set up a temporary structure three years ago, which has been converted into a permanent work shed now.

On Wednesday, Chairman KVIC Vinai Kumar Saxena inaugurated the newly built 3000 sq feet work shed and a

500 sq feet common facility centre for Khadi artisans at the Bali island. The “Tiger Victim Khadi Katai Kendra” is now equipped with 125 new model charkhas, 15 modern looms and provides employment to nearly 150 women artisans of the Bali island. KVIC has also provided these artisans with yarn dyeing machines and readymade garment manufacturing machines. The centre has been modernized at the cost of Rs 95 lakh which has been funded by KVIC under its Khadi Reforms and Development Program (KRDP) and Workshed Scheme for Khadi Artisans. The centre is being run by a local Khadi Institution of West Bengal.

Saxena said the Khadi activities on Bali island are inspired by Hon’ble Prime Minister’s vision of empowering the marginalized sections and reconnecting them with the mainstream of development. “Khadi activities on Bali island will ensure financial sustainability of the tiger wid-

ows who were staring at a dark future after having lost the breadwinners for their families in tiger attacks. While the self-employment activities will help rehabilitate these hapless women artisans; it will also encourage other families to take up spinning and weaving activities to earn a respectable livelihood. By taking up Khadi activities, these artisans will be able to earn up to Rs 200 per day. The idea is also to desist these families from venturing into deep water or thick mangroves for fishing and thus mitigate the threat of tiger attacks,” Saxena said.

Notably, KVIC had inaugurated the spinning centre at Bali island in 2018 and distributed 75 Charkhas to rope in local women artisans with spinning activity. KVIC had also distributed 500 Bee-Boxes with live bee colonies to empower the economically backward people of the island by providing them with self-employment. These artisans were also provided with comprehensive training by KVIC.

Youth killed in IED blast near Maoist posters

Phulbani: An 18-year-old youth was killed after an IED, suspected to have been planted by Maoists near their posters calling for boycotting the upcoming panchayat elections, exploded in Odisha’s Kandhamal district on Wednesday, police said.

The incident took place in Sadingia village in Phiringia police station area when Priya Ranjan Kanhar, a resident of Kiamunda village, was going to the forest, officer-in-charge P Shyam Sundar Rao said.

The body will be recovered from the spot after clearance from the bomb squad and forensic team, he said.

Locals, who fear there might be more explosives in the area, said that police had defused two Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) from near the posters on Tuesday, but the undetected IED, around 50 metres from the spot, claimed the life of Kanhar. The explosion took place barely four days after a local journalist was killed in the district in a similar manner when he was approaching Maoist posters.

PTI

2 terror modules busted in J&K’s Anantnag

Srinagar: Police in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir busted two terror modules of proscribed terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad by arresting 11 persons, including three “hybrid” terrorists, an official spokesman said here on Tuesday.

Incriminating material, including arms and ammunition, have been recovered from their possession, the spokesman said.

“Based on credible inputs

that proscribed terror outfit JeM is planning to carry out attacks on police/SF in Srigufwara/Bijbehara areas of Anantnag, multiple nakas/checkpoints were established at various locations,” the spokesman said.

He said during a checking at one of such checkpoints at Sakhras crossing, Srigufwara, three people riding a bike were intercepted.

They tried to flee but were apprehended.

Incriminating material, including arms and ammunition, have been recovered from their possession, the spokesman said

They disclosed that they are associates of proscribed terror outfit JeM and are in direct contact with Pakistan-

based handlers and at their behest, they were going to attack police/SF in the Srigufwara area.

“Upon their further disclosure two more terror associates were arrested,” the spokesman said.

He said police busted another terror module in the Bijbehara area by arresting six terror associates, including a juvenile, and recovered incriminating material from their possession.

PTI



Farmers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Balurghat on Wednesday

PTI

ED harassing vendors who worked at my daughter’s marriage: Raut Shiv Sena MP says agency’s act a direct attack on his right to speak in RS

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Alleging that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and other agencies were “continuously harassing” the vendors who provided service to his daughter’s wedding held in November last year, Shiv Sena MP and spokesperson Sanjay Raut has charged the harassment suffered by the decorators and other vendors concerned as a “direct attack” on his right to speak freely in Rajya Sabha and outside the Upper House.

In a letter shot off to chairman of Rajya Sabha and vice president of India Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday, Raut said: “my daughter got married on 29th November 2021. The ED and other agency personnel are summoning, intimidating and threatening the decorators and other vendors of the wedding event so as to extract statements from them that they received Rs 50 lakh from me in

cash. On refusal by these people to partake in such an endeavour, the ED and other agencies are continuously harassing them”.

Raut, who is the Shiv Sena Parliamentary Party leader, said that the ED and other agencies had so far “wrongly confined” 28 persons as part of the alleged witch-hunt being carried out against him. He said that the ED and other agencies had not only “confined” the 28 persons for hours together in its office, but had also gone to the extent of “threatening” these people that if they do not give a statement to the ED and other agencies, they would be arrested. “The ED and other agency personnel who are tasked with the duty to protect revenue and secure proceeds of the crime are now reduced to puppets of their political masters. In fact, the personnel from the ED and other agencies even confessed to the very people they are

summoning that they have been asked by their bosses to fix me,” Raut wrote in his letter to Naidu.

Maintaining that he was not scared nor was he going to bow down (to the Government). “I will continue to speak the truth, both in the House and outside the House. However, the Government using agencies like the ED and other agencies to harass my family members, friends, relatives and even those people who are not concerned with me speaks volumes of the ‘decay in our system”.

Raut said that as a Rajya Sabha member, he had the right as well the duty guaranteed by the Constitution to speak in the House. “As a citizen, I have the right to speak outside the House. I have the right to question the Government, its policies, decisions and right to dissent. I have the right to make alliances which will democrat-

ically fight what we all perceive to be against the state/national interest,” he said.

Raut, whose Shiv Sena severed its links with the BJP and aligned with the Congress and NCP to form the MahaVikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra in November 2019, said: “We have a right to have our own ideology which may necessarily in tandem with the political power in power at the Centre. However, that does not mean that our legislators, MPs, their family members, friends and acquaintances are threatened and harassed under the garb of conducting investigations and even arrested in cases of alleged money laundering”.

“However, transactions which are decades old and have nothing to with the money laundering are taken to investigations with the oblique and ulterior motive of harassing and terrorising political opponents in

the name of conducting investigation by ED and other central agencies,” he said. Raut urged the vice President “not just take note of the abuse of power to perpetuate intimidation and harassment on members of the Rajya Sabha but also to speak up and take action”.

Raut signed off his letter with the famed poem penned by the anti-Nazi German pastor Martin Niemoller who did not speak out against the Nazi rule at the right time and wrote confessional people as a token of poem that read thus: “First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a communist; Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a trade unionist; Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me”.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Knotty scarf

The Karnataka hijab case is complicated; it's a matter of several competing rights

The Karnataka hijab controversy case will take time to find a legal resolution. Being heard by a single Bench of the Karnataka High Court, it stands referred to a larger Bench because of the multiplicity and sensitivity of the issues involved. The High Court did not provide any interim relief to the petitioners — the Muslim girls asked not to attend classes in hijab — during the pendency of the case. The case is quite complicated. That is why it is important to get the sequence of issues right. Essentially, it is about the legality of a citizen's right to choose a religion of choice and the freedom to practice it. Several judgments uphold them. Then follows the right to privacy of the petitioners, that protects their decision to wear a hijab in class. The Kerala High Court had stated that the hijab is an essential religious practice in Islam. And finally comes the question of whether the State's interference in matters concerning essential religious practices is warranted. Four arguments exist here. One, whether a school or college management has the right to prescribe a uniform for all students without permitting any extra clothing or accessory that are essential religious practices. Secondly, since an earlier judgment of a High Court stated that the hijab is an essential religious practice in Islam, should it not be allowed, with or without a uniform, especially when accessories that form an essential practice of other religions are worn over and above the uniform? The Sikh 'patka' is an example.

Thirdly, the Karnataka Government said in its order upholding the ban on the hijab by the college authorities that public order must be preserved. It needs to be determined how wearing a hijab, which is a private affair, is a threat to public order. Rather, the public order was disturbed when a group of students entered the college wearing saffron shawls to protest some girls wearing the hijab. It needs to be clarified who threatened public order and how. Thus, the Government order itself becomes subject to legal scrutiny. Four, the case throws up the question of how to resolve a situation where two fundamental rights compete with each other. The reference is to the right of the college management to introduce a uniform and the right of the petitioner students to wear an item of additional clothing because it is an essential practice of their religion. There is a High Court order in another case that the individual interest (of the petitioner, in this case) must yield to the larger interest (of the management). The court needs to rule on which of the two — imparting education and maintaining public order — is the larger interest inside an educational institution. The immediate priority of the larger Bench which would now hear the case is to decide on the interim relief request of the petitioner girls so that they do not lose out on education more than they already have.



Students perform 'Surya Namaskar' during the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations, in Karad

A few reasons why Tollywood languishes

Bengali scriptwriters and directors were into making 'pure', intellectual, non-masala films which had talent but little success at the cash register

Mati-ul-Islam, a right-hand man of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and later the Finance Secretary of Bangladesh, first met Satyajit Ray to import some films for the benefit of Bangladeshis. The prices paid would astound today's generation. The maximum was for *Apur Sansar* — a handsome price of ₹25,000. In all, he purchased 12 films. This incident apart, the Bengal film industry, popularly called Tollywood, has not marketed its products as profitable as it might have. Or conversely perhaps, it has produced what is intellectually attractive but commercially not much viable.

Uncannily, Bengali men and women, in most segments of Bollywood, have played a role as big as any other community, including setting up studios. Bombay Talkies was founded by Devika Rani and her husband. Her role cannot be underestimated when one realises that Dilip Kumar aka Yusuf Khan was her exclusive find.

Bengalis sent nightingales, men and women of distinction, to the song and music world of Bombay, most notably Hemant Kumar, Manna Dey and the inimitable Kishore Kumar, not to forget Geeta Roy (later Geeta Dutt) and the veteran Juthica Roy, whose rendition of *Ghoonghat ke pat khol re, tohe piyaa milenge* resonates even today. We cannot also forget that the immortal KL Saigal was a product of New Theatres, founded by BN Sircar. So were Saigal's renditions *Babul mora* and *Jab dil hi toot gaya*, which still ring in our ears. Incidentally, Saigal had been singing Rabindra sangeet in Kolkata. The golden voice of *ghazals* in the Bombay film world, Talat Mehmood, also began his career in All India Radio, Calcutta, under the pen name of Tapan Kumar. One could conclude, and not without justification, that Tollywood has had talent but little success. The directors and filmmakers that come to mind are many, but let us mention the legendary Bimal Roy (who gave us *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Kabuliwala* and many other classics), Hrishikesh Mukherji,



Basu Bhattacharya and Shakti Samanta, among the prominent ones.

It is true that Tollywood has produced some Hindi and Urdu films such as *Devdas*, but the net cast by Bengali directors has been narrow and confined mainly to Bengali movies. By the same token, not many non-Bengalis got much space on the Tollywood screen. The reason is that unless one is a son of the soil, it is difficult to pick up spoken Bangla, which is first a melody and then a language. For example, one is pronounced 'Ayk' while 21 is 'ek'; 51 is 'ek anno' and 61 becomes 'ek suttii'. Not many who are not born in Bengal can cope with this variation of melody first and language later. Many of even those born on its soil are not conscious of this variation.

As a result, once Bollywood got going, Tollywood could not compete. Also, Tollywood selects subjects without any marketing strategy, and lacks a proper distribution network. The West Bengal Government is silent about promoting good cinema while other States pursue it seriously. Another reason may be that Tollywood did not traverse from the *zamindari* psyche to that of businesspeople and eventually to the respectable middle class. The



ANYONE WHO COULD DEAL IN MASALA STUFF AND WANTED TO MAKE MONEY HAD TO TAKE A TRAIN FROM THE ERSTWHILE BENGAL NAGPUR RAILWAY TO BOMBAY. BUT IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR TOLLYWOOD TO CATCH UP

Bengali *zamindar*, once *zamindari* was over, continued to look down upon business as an OBC occupation; he descended straight into the middle class. The contempt for business persisted as before. Occupationally, the *zamindar* took refuge in either intellectualism or trade unionism.

When it came to films, Tollywood's scriptwriters and directors produced 'pure' and intellectual films, without any masala being allowed to touch the *kadhai*, a la Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. Anyone who could deal in masala stuff and wanted to make money had to take a train from the erstwhile Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) to Bombay.

It is not too late for Tollywood to catch up. For this, the Kolkata film world needs to think anew, devise new strategies and join the race. The normal or run-of-the-mill explanation of financial paucity would not come in the way. As American businessmen say, "Money follows a bright new idea with the confidence to manage it. Ideas and management do not follow money." To take an example of a film that was a simple idea, which was followed by plenty of finance, it was *Gandhi* by Sir Richard Attenborough. From



PRAFULL GORADIA

the most elderly and learned intellectuals to the youngest of schoolchildren, everyone could identify with the classic movie and enjoy it. Why did we have to wait for an English knight to produce a classic on an Indian giant?

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, India produced any number of giants. The saga of Netaji Subhas remains an epic, for instance. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was poetry and music personified, besides being India's first Nobel laureate for Literature, for *Gitanjali*. Bankim Chandra was an inspiration for heroes, for 'Tollywood' or any other 'Wood' to produce movies on. Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda are spirituality epitomised.

Coming to themes, is there any shortage in West Bengal or any other part of India? Sandakphu, the Sunderbans with its Royal Bengal Tigers, the collieries and tea gardens are landmarks of the State. *Kapurush* deals with tea gardens, but not with tea-growing; they use these gardens as a stage for dubious romance.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)

Flighty course

The TN Government is playing with lives of the poor students by scrapping NEET

The farce being staged in Tamil Nadu over the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate medical courses basically is 'much ado about nothing'. The Bill adopted by the Tamil Nadu Assembly scrapping NEET was sent to Governor RN Ravi for approval. The Governor, after seeking legal counsel, sent it back to the Government stating that scrapping of NEET was against the interests of students, especially the rural and economically poor students. He also pointed out that the Supreme Court in the Christian Medical College Vellore Vs Union of India (2020) case had upheld NEET as it prevented economic exploitation of poor students. It is in this backdrop that one should see Tamil Nadu Government re-sending the Bill back to the Governor. Chief Minister MK Stalin knows well that the Governor would not sign the Bill and sit over it indefinitely. The NEET is a gift to the country by the Congress-led UPA regime in 2010 and the DMK was the second largest constituent of that Government. Though the then Chief Justice Altamas Kabir had pronounced the move as unconstitutional, a Constitution Bench unanimously ruled in favour of NEET, which was implemented by the Narendra Modi Government in 2016.

Tamil Nadu boasts of many private medical colleges where the admission was based on the management's discretion which used to sell each MBBS seat for ₹1 crore. The Dravidian parties portrayed isolated cases of suicide by students who failed to make it to the MBBS courses as fallout of the NEET fiasco. But the fact that many poor and economically backward students could get admission to MBBS courses has been conveniently blacked out from public knowledge by these outfits. The media in Tamil Nadu, which make a killing through advertisements issued by these private medical colleges, sing paeans to the management and the State administration. "The Government must find a permanent solution to eliminate the menace of capitation fee and profiteering by private medical colleges. More than ₹20,000 crore is collected annually by these colleges by way of capitation fees. Formulating an all-India policy for medical admissions is the need of the hour. NEET will solve the problem to some extent," a pro-DMK newspaper had said in 2016. The Tamil Nadu Government's failure to bring in much-needed reforms in its school education syllabus is not being discussed by anyone who matters.

RESOLVE THE HIJAB ISSUE PEACEFULLY

Sir — It is the need of the hour that there should be engagement with reason, fairness and common sense as Pakistan has already entered this unhealthy controversy which could have been avoided if an amicable solution were sought at an early stage. The episode revolves around just scarves, which is a pity and could have been resolved at the local level. Can religious symbolism in a person's appearance — a turban, a *tilak*, a crucifix around the neck be a threat to law and order? This is just one example of the confusion and conflict underlying the theme of "coexistence" in India.

Saffron scarves are symbols of Hindutva, but not quite on the same plane as hijab which, apart from customary use by the faithful, passed the Supreme Court's earlier "essence of religion" test. Yet, all courts approach such issues by the same route. Does secularism mean stopping girls from studying if they wear hijab? The High Court has referred the matter to a larger Bench and not given any interim relief. The State Government should ensure peace and harmony. Till the verdict, both sides should practice restraint in national interest. Utmost care is required to prevent the spread of such developments.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

WRONG TO BLAME THE CONGRESS

Sir — The Congress might have given free tickets to labourers at railway stations to go and "spread Coronavirus", but did the party workers operate the trains too? Besides, wageless starving bankrupt migrants were inhumanely charged high fares for their return home after getting stranded in alien places due to the instant lockdown for months. Therefore, the free tickets offered by the Congress actually worked as a balm on the wounds of the vulnerable working class. By offering to pay railway fares from the Congress fund, that "Italian" proved to feel the pain of the poorest of the poor migrants in India.

Perhaps the Government needs to urgently amend the meaning of "responsibility" in the dictionary. Thanks to the

Only pre-poll rhetoric



One may agree or not, but participating in the debate on the motion of thanks in Parliament, PM Narendra Modi's speech was not in line with the points raised by the Opposition, but with an eye on the upcoming mini election. Modi has shown his oratory skills but he forgets that people want to hear about current achievements, future actions and the points raised by the Opposition. Instead, Modi chose to accuse the Congress of being the "leader of the *tukde-tukde* gang" (in reality, the BJP is dividing the country on the basis of religion and language).

He even mentioned that "Mahatma Gandhi wanted the Congress dismantled because he knew what would happen".

Interestingly, though Modi called the Congress leader of '*tukde-tukde* gang', but when a question was put up in Parliament asking who the members of the gang are, the Minister concerned replied: "We have no data available on the *tukde-tukde* gang." Congress leader P Chidambaram has correctly called the NDA Government as the "No Data Available" Government because it doesn't have any data on medical oxygen shortage deaths, the bodies flowing in the Ganga in UP, how many migrants walked back to their homes or on doubling farmers' income, which should have been done in 2022. People are sorry to hear almost two election speeches in two days from PM Modi instead of clarifying his Government's position in terms of performance.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

sudden announcement of lockdown, the stranded poor not only found themselves without livelihood and food, lakhs of them were thrown out of their accommodation for their failure to pay rent. When sanity and humanity demand repeated apologies from the Centre for the unfathomable pain 'gifted' to poor migrants, we are made to believe that the Congress was a "super-spreader" of Coronavirus. It's time the Indian electorate learned to evaluate its leaders through their compassion, qualities and attitude, not race or birth which is nothing but mere destiny.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

OPPOSITION NEEDS TO MOVE FASTER

Sir — There is no denying that the Congress is a drowning ship because its policies have been challenged head-on by the BJP which emerged as a national party only in the 1980s. Since 2014, the BJP has left no political space for anyone else and is ruling with an iron hand. It has become so emboldened

that the Prime Minister does not think twice before criticising everybody else, particularly the Congress. Though there is no creditworthy achievement on any front by the BJP in more than seven years, there is nobody else to challenge it.

The Congress is struggling to win three-digit seats, and the way BJP is moving in northern States, its job is not easy. Mamata and Stalin do not like the BJP's rule at the Centre. In such a scenario, a united front is the only way to counter the BJP at the Centre. Since BJP is getting roughly 40 per cent of the vote share, there must be 60 per cent who are not supporting it. Unless it has a different plan, the Congress should not waste time in stitching an alliance with the regional parties and merge its identity. Not doing so would be a big loss for the Congress.

RK Arya | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

We believe that criticism is an essential part of democracy...but not blind opposition to everything.

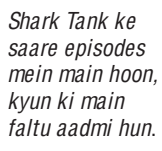


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



The reports about Pegasus, if they are true, are of a very serious nature.

Israeli Prime Minister — Naftali Bennett



Shark Tank ke saare episodes mein main hoon, kyun ki main faltu aadmi hun.

Founder and CEO, People Group and Shaadi.com — Anupam Mittal



I never said anyone had sexually assaulted me in any way. It's a huge misunderstanding.

Chinese tennis star — Peng Shuai

We would strive to implement NEP 2020, especially in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary areas of study.



JNU's first woman V-C — Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit

FIRST COLUMN

NORTH KOREA: THE STING IN THE TAIL

The Pyongyang-Washington tiff interests nobody



GWYNNE DYER

They want to have a deterrence system that is like a scorpion’s tail,” said Prof. Kim Dong Yup, a former South Korean naval commander. “North Korea’s main purpose is not to attack but to defend themselves.” They want a “diversified deterrent capability,” and who could blame them? It’s a welcome distraction from the daily warnings of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine, and even less likely to end in an actual war. North Korea test-fired seven different missiles in a month, US President Joe Biden retaliated with more sanctions against Kim Jong-un’s hermit state, and everybody got their warhorses out for a brisk trot around the track. The reality, however, is that nobody in a position of authority is in the least excited by this little back-and-forth between Pyongyang and Washington. Pyongyang hasn’t tested any nuclear weapons since 2017, but it is believed to



have 50-60 warheads by now. Neither has it test-launched its inter-continental ballistic missiles (the ones that can reach anywhere in the United States) since then. The January tests were of ‘hypersonic’ missiles, ‘intermediate-range’ missiles, cruise missiles and similar hardware. Most of those missiles can probably carry nuclear warheads too, but only as far as South Korea or Japan, America’s local allies. It’s a formidable investment for a small, quite poor country (same population as Australia, but one-sixtieth the size) - but it’s not that extravagant when you consider that all these nukes are intended to deter the United States. No American diplomat or military officer will admit publicly that North Korea’s fear of an American nuclear attack is justified, but the more intelligent ones realise that the rules of nuclear deterrence are exactly the same for democratic superpowers and dwarf tyrannies. If your enemy has nuclear weapons, then to be safe you must have them too. From the perspective of Pyongyang, American nuclear weapons are a mortal threat, and nobody can persuade the North Korean regime that they would never be used against it unless it attacked first. Americans wouldn’t forego nuclear weapons if China and Russia made such promises, nor would they take America’s word for it. Too much is at stake to take a chance.

This is the universal dilemma of nuclear weapons. North Korea has just as much right to worry about it as the United States, and it will never give its own nukes up so long as the current confrontation in the Korean peninsula persists. (71 years and counting.) Any meetings or ‘summits’ between US and North Korean diplomats or leaders will be driven by North Korea’s perpetual desire to end UN and US trade sanctions and/or America’s futile quest to get Kim to agree to unilateral nuclear disarmament. Neither is going to happen, but there is no crisis either. The North Korean regime is vicious, but it is not crazy. A reasonably stable cold peace has prevailed in the peninsula since the end of the Korean War in 1953, guaranteed since the first North Korean nuclear test in 2006 by mutual nuclear deterrence between the US and North Korea. There’s no urgent need to ‘fix it’ or ‘shore it up’ now. The United States cannot bring itself to publicly acknowledge this fact, but the Pentagon and the State Department privately accept that by now it is the long-established reality of the US-NK relationship. “They very much understand the significance of moving up the ladder on range,” a senior Biden administration official said on Sunday, implicitly recognising that the North Koreans had not tested any new missiles capable of striking the American homeland. There really is a mutual understanding. They just can’t talk about it.

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

Pak’s security policy is a flawed exercise



PK VASUDEVA

It is part of the focused effort to change the global perception of Pakistan as a ‘national security State’, obsessed with chasing an elusive parity with India

Pakistan recently released a public version of its National Security Policy (NSP) document. The document was authored by Moeed W Yusuf, previously Special Assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan on National Security and Strategic Policy Planning, later re-designated as the National Security Adviser (NSA). Drawing from his experience as former associate vice-president at the Asia Center at the United States Institute of Peace, Khan managed to provide a scholarly appeal to the document, with clever use of bombastic language that could impress amateur international audiences.

From Pakistan’s strategic perspective, the document feeds into the ongoing efforts of the ‘miltablistment’ (military establishment) to reinvent itself as a ‘change-agent’ of a new narrative, based on the prioritisation of geo-economics as the key driver on national priorities, rather than the earlier paradigm based in pure geo-politics. Essentially, given the precarious economic situation facing Pakistan, and its fallen international standing after the Taliban victory in Afghanistan, the reality has dawned upon the miltablistment that it cannot be business as usual, of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. Therefore, the NSP has to be seen as a part of the focused effort to change the international perception of Pakistan as a ‘national security state’, obsessed with chasing an elusive parity with India, and maintaining the dominance of its military in every sphere, at any cost.

The document has incorporated all the right terms that would appeal to Western audiences. Sample some: ‘safety, security, dignity and prosperity of the people’, ‘sustainable and inclusive economic growth’, ‘preservation of diverse cultural heritage’, ‘good Governance to strengthen the State-citizen contract’, ‘ensure transparency and accountability’, ‘strengthening the human security pillar of comprehensive national security’, ‘seeking a peaceful neighbourhood based on mutual co-existence, and so on. The repeated emphasis on enhancing trade, investment and connectivity is also given to make a mark in international business circles.

A finer reading of the document reveals that from India’s point of view, the publication is nothing but a sophisticated exercise in insincerity. Almost all direct and indirect references to India have a negative connotation. Perhaps, the only saving grace in the entire document is the line “Pakistan, under its policy of peace at home and abroad, wishes to improve its relationship with India” (page 36, under “India”), and the restoration of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution by India is not mentioned as a pre-condition in the context of any bilateral proposition.

The document has other references to domestic security issues, which are nothing but clever attempts to paper over the serious problems that have not been acknowledged, let alone acted upon with due sincerity by Pakistan, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The



THE EMPHASIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY ON DEFENCE. THE DOCUMENT IS OVERLOADED WITH CONCERNS OVER INCREASING ASYMMETRY IN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WITH INDIA. REDRESSAL IS SOUGHT IN THE GROWTH OF ECONOMY AS A NECESSARY PREREQUISITE. IF THE CONTRADICTIONS AND DEMANDS OF A DEPENDENT AND FRAGILE ECONOMY ARE FUNDAMENTAL, THEY HAVE TO BE SET RIGHT FIRST

(The writer is former Senior Professor, International Trade and Member, Vivekananda International Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)



most blatant ones concern terrorism and narcotics trafficking. In the discussion under “Terrorism”, one finds the absurd claim that “Pakistan pursues a policy of zero tolerance for any groups involved in terrorist activities on its soil” and “...with national resolve and dedication, Pakistan has fought one of the most successful wars against terrorism in the past two decades”. Subsequently, under “Narcotics and Organised crime”, it is claimed that “Pakistan has been declared a poppy-free country since 2001”. The vacuity of this statement is belied by the fact that a majority of Afghanistan-origin opium, heroin and methamphetamine is trafficked through Pakistan, with the tacit support of state agencies, primarily the Inter-Services Intelligence.

There is a major lacuna of the document in the absence of any serious proposition concerning addressing the serious human rights situation in Afghanistan. There is also a subtle endeavour to underemphasize the burgeoning dependence upon China on vital matters of national interest. The publication has already come under sharp criticism by domestic critics within Pakistan, who have called it high on platitude and low on substance. Despite its claim of bringing in the factor of “geo-economics”, alongside “geo-strategy”, the publication does not make any commitment to reduce or rationalize the unsustainable Defence Budget of Pakistan, which remains largely out of public scrutiny.

The document adopts a slick presentation style, summarising the discussion of its six thematic sections in Policy Objectives, at the end of each relevant chapter. There is, however, no discussion on the “hows” of the vaunted objectives listed in enigmatic language. It is a

major weakness of the document - in absence of even broad allusion to the main components of the Policy Objectives described, the infirmities of the discussion will only become magnified in time.

The document has been given a time frame of four years by the authors. As a sincere exercise in self-delusion, and a ploy for diverting the attention of the world from the real problems, which strike at the root of Pakistan’s anachronistic existence, the document may become redundant in less than half its intended time frame, on an optimistic note. For India, it is another proof in evidence that the insincere miltablistment of Pakistan will use every trick in the book to buy time and attempt to encash on tactical peace to achieve its unflagging grand strategic objective of remaining the ultimate arbitrators of Pakistan’s destiny.

The existing national security paradigm could provide neither state security nor human security to Pakistan. One wonders how a new concept of national security can emerge without critically drawing the right conclusions from past devastating military adventures. While keeping the failures of a moribund security paradigm under the carpet, the question must be asked, what is so new in the “first” national security policy document, on which so much self-praise is being showered?

It is being belatedly admitted that without ensuring economic security, “traditional security”, i.e., defence, is not possible. The fact of the matter is that under the burden of traditional security, an impoverished economy has collapsed. And, consequently, traditional military security has also come under mounting pressure. The published NSP document provides only an

abstract analytical and disjointed framework, although it is reluctant to unambiguously draw a line between traditional security and human security.

What ought to be the contours of a meaningful paradigm shift? In simple and clear words, human security, as opposed to the security of the state, demands the security of people based on their fundamental rights. But, this basic feature of any qualitative change is mentioned casually and superficially, and that too in the last chapter of the document. Five chapters deal only with traditional security and other matters related to it, another chapter covers foreign policy and one chapter deals with economic security.

The emphasis is undoubtedly on defence. The document is overloaded with concerns over increasing asymmetry in conventional weapons with India. Redressal is sought in the growth of the economy as a necessary prerequisite. If the contradictions and demands of a dependent and fragile economy are fundamental, they have to be set right first. Then, logically, all aspects of traditional security must be subjected to economic imperatives, which warrant peaceful coexistence, mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and recalibration and resolution of the “core issues” through protracted and patient negotiations. Rather than taking a maximalist approach towards the most intractable “core” issues, it would require taking a path towards a peaceful settlement of disputes with all neighbours, promotion of mutually beneficial trade and investment across borders, and building economic synergies to strengthen economic interdependence.

Conclusively, Pakistan’s NSP is a flawed exercise in futility.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

OWAISI’S SECURITY THREAT HAS BEEN REASSESSED AND THE GOVT HAS DECIDED TO PROVIDE Z-CATEGORY SECURITY TO HIM. — UNION HOME MINISTER AMIT SHAH



THE VALUE OF MY LIFE IS NOT MORE THAN THE LIVES OF 22 PEOPLE IN UP WHO DIED IN THE CAA PROTESTS. — AIMIM CHIEF ASADUDDIN OWAISI

Post-pandemic Railways at an interesting crossroad

The pandemic presented a unique business opportunity to Indian Railways to concentrate on its two most profitable business segments

Information about the working and the finances of the Indian Railways has become scarce in recent years. Discontinuance of a separate Railway Budget since 2017 has taken the limelight away from the Railways. Now it features as a single paragraph in the Union Budget.

As a result, little is now publicly discussed about new projects, new trains, or demands for new lines or projects by different states or politicians. High-profile or controversial subjects like the High-Speed Corridors, the Train-18 project, or the Private train Operations schemed to find occasional mention in the press, but a holistic view of the actual health, direction or growth of the Indian Railways - the biggest employer in the



SUSHIL K LUTHRA

(The writer retired as Chief Administrative Officer of one of IR’s Production Units. The views expressed are personal.)

country, and arguably one of the biggest enterprises in the world - is no longer available to the country at large. Since 2017, the Ministry does not even have a full-time Railway Minister. Both Piyush Goyal (on taking over from Suresh Prabhu in September 2017) and the present incumbent Ashwini Vaishnav have been given charge of other important ministries along with Railways, further exacerbating matters.

Consequently, the specific impact of Covid on IR, has not been sufficiently evaluated in the public domain. In the absence of an objective assessment about the rebound - if any - by the Railway sector, and in the run-up to the upcoming Budget presentation, an attempt was made to compile and compare available, provisional data on IR’s website for the 9-month period April-December 2021 with April-December 2019, two years back. This is considered the fairest possible comparison, considering the return of Covid in January 2022, which is again likely to vitiate comparisons.



Surprisingly, the numbers reveal a robust buoyancy in its freight business. Freight carried increased from 891 million MT to 1030 million MT in this

period, an increase of 15.6 per cent, and Freight revenues a very healthy 20.9

Per cent, from ₹86,706 cr. to ₹104,789 cr. over 2 years - a 10 per cent annual rise.

The passenger segment, however, is a very different story. While total passengers carried have reduced from 6278 million to 2300 million (- 63 per cent), revenue from passengers fell from ₹39,528 cr. to ₹27,092 cr. (- 31.5%), for the 9-month comparison period. The biggest reduction is in the suburban passenger numbers, which explains why the loss in revenue is disproportionately less in relation to the drop in numbers. The PRS segment - within which the sleeper class, AC-3 tier, AC chair car and AC-2 tier constitute almost 90 per cent of the total numbers

and almost 75 per cent of the segment revenue - has almost recovered fully in December 21 to the December 19 levels, while the non-PRS/Suburban continues to operate at less than 50 per cent of the December 2019 levels.

Freight, passenger and sundry earnings taken together show that IR’s earnings have fully recovered: earnings this year till December are ₹1,37,393 cr. against ₹1,32,931 cr. in 2019-20, a modest 3.4 per cent increase over the two-year pandemic period.

The improved freight performance may partially owe it to the reduced passenger operations, with more paths, more locomotives/crew available, and easier mobility possible. The pandemic’s adverse effect on the trucking business, and ele-

vated fuel prices, may also have favoured rail freight. These are advantages IR would do well to capitalise on, and build on further. The gradual, partial opening-up of the two Dedicated Freight Corridors are also adding capacity (they moved about 6 billion NTKMs till recently - a significant, although still a minuscule part of IR’s traffic). A sustained increase in freight, at a level higher than the GDP growth, as achieved in the last two years, will help win back much needed modal share of the major, non-coal commodities to rail.

The pandemic, and the phased recovery of the economy has presented a unique business opportunity to Indian Railways in that they are able to concentrate on their two

most profitable business segments - Freight and long-distance, reserved passengers - keeping the grossly subsidised and capacity guzzling suburban and short/medium distance ordinary passenger services to the bare minimum. The temporary suspension of many concessions on the passenger services would also have helped in adding to revenue, and in improving availability to full-fare paying passengers. All this offers clear clues to the Rail Ministry in long-term measures aimed at improving its revenues, profitability, and re-winning its importance and relevance. It is hoped that this windfall - which may be partially circumstantial, and not a positive act of the IR management - will not be allowed to wither away.

Iran unveils new missile with reported region-wide range

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran unveiled a new missile on Wednesday with a reported range that would allow it to reach both U.S. bases in the region as well as targets inside its archfoe Israel.

State TV reported that the missile uses solid fuel and has a range of 1,450 kilometers (900 miles). It is called the Khaibar-buster, a reference to a Jewish castle overrun by Muslim warriors in the early days of Islam.

The report said the missile has high accuracy, is manufactured completely domestically, and can defeat missile shield systems. The information has not been independently verified. Israel's closest point to Iran is some 1,000 kilometers (620

miles) away. Iran has missiles that can travel up to 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles). The report comes as negotiations continue in Vienna to revive Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

Iran, which has long said it does not seek nuclear weapons, insists its missile program is only a deterrent.

Earlier in January Iran tested an engine for a solid-fuel rocket designed to launch satellites. Satellite carriers usually use liquid fuel but solid-fuel rockets can be adapted for mobile launchers that can be driven anywhere on a major road or rail system.

Pure solid-fuel rockets are mostly associated with ballistic missiles systems.

Pakistan Air Force to induct first batch of JF-17 block III fighter jets

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) is all set to induct a first batch of next generation JF-17 Thunder block III fighter jets built jointly with China to upgrade its fleet by the end of next month, a PAF spokesperson has said, Arab News reported.

JF-17 Thunder, an advanced, light-weight, all weather, multi-role fighter aircraft with air-to-air and air-to-surface combat capabilities, was developed as a joint venture between the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) and the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation (CAC) in China.

The aircraft will replace Pakistan's current aging fleet, the report said. The first JF-17 prototype aircraft (called FC-1) was rolled out in May 2003. Basic flight testing was com-

pleted in 2007, which marked the arrival of the JF-17 Thunder aircraft in Pakistan, formally presented to the nation as a Pakistan Day gift on March 23, 2007. PAC has delivered nearly 120 JF-17 Block I and II fighter jets to PAF since 2009.

"JF-17 Thunder block III is the latest aircraft of this series and all taxi tests and flight tests have been completed," a PAF spokesperson told Arab News on Tuesday.

"It's first batch will become part of the PAF fleet by the end of March," he added, saying there would be a proper induction ceremony on the occasion, the report said.

The rollout ceremony of block III was held in December last year, the spokesperson said. The new JF-17 jets will also fly-past at the Pakistan Day military parade on March 23, he added.

Pak arrests 36 Indian fishermen

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's maritime authorities have arrested 36 Indian fishermen and seized their six vessels for allegedly fishing in country's territorial waters, officials said on Wednesday. The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) said that it apprehended intruding vessels on Tuesday during patrolling in Pakistan Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Baghel The PMSA ship 'apprehended 06 Indian fishing boats along with 36 crew, which were engaged in poaching inside Pakistani EEZ," it said in a statement. The boats were being towed to Karachi for further legal proceedings as per Pakistani Laws and UN Convention on Law of Sea, it said.

UN: Terror groups enjoy greater freedom in Af than any time in recent history

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

Terror groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history and there are no signs that the Taliban leadership has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorists in the war-torn country, a report of the UN Secretary-General has said.

The report says the dreaded Islamic State terrorist group aims to position itself as the "chief rejectionist force" in Afghanistan, expands into neighbouring Central and South Asian countries and is viewed by the Taliban as its primary armed threat.

The 14th report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIS to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat' notes that the security landscape in Afghanistan changed dramatically on August 15, following a Taliban military campaign that took control in the country, including Kabul.

"There are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country. On the contrary, Member States are concerned that terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history," the report said.

It, however, said that only a small number of foreign terrorist fighters are moving to Afghanistan.

The report said ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, continues to be led by Sanaullah Ghafari, an Afghan national, who was designated by the ISIS and al-

Qaida Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council in December last year. The US on Monday announced a reward of up to USD 10 million for information on Ghafari and those responsible for last year's militant attack on the Kabul international airport that killed at least 185 people. The US Department of Rewards for Justice (RFJ) issued notifications to this effect on Monday. "Rewards for Justice is offering a reward of up to USD 10 million for information on ISIS-K leader Shahab al-Muhajir, also known as Sanaullah Ghafari," it said.

According to the UN report, ISIS-K is taking advantage of the turmoil in the country, including by recruiting fighters from the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Turkistan Islamic Party, among other foreign terrorist groups. "It aims to position itself as the chief rejectionist force in Afghanistan and to expand into neighbouring Central and South Asian countries and is viewed by the Taliban as its primary armed threat," the report said.

The UN Member States are concerned that if Afghanistan descends into further chaos, some Afghan and foreign violent extremists may shift allegiances to ISIS, it said.

The UN Member States have assessed that the strength of ISIS-K has increased from earlier estimates of 2,200 fighters to now approaching 4,000 following the release by the Taliban of several thousand individuals from prison.

One Member State assessed that up to half the individuals are foreign terrorist fighters, it added.

"While Da'esh controls limited territory in eastern

Afghanistan, it is capable of conducting high-profile, complex attack such as the 27 August bombing at Kabul airport, which killed over 180 people, and several subsequent attacks, in particular against the Taliban and members of the Shia community," the report said.

The report said that during the second half of 2021, ISIS (Da'esh) continued to suffer leadership losses, while its affiliates maintained a high level of activity and attacks in Africa and gained in strength and visibility in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover.

The interrelated issues of foreign terrorist fighters, other ISIS fighters and their family members continued to concern Member States acutely.

The Member States in the South-East Asia region are also concerned about the "potential resurgence of a safe haven" in Afghanistan for international terrorist activity, as well as about social media messaging that "celebrates the Taliban victory", which could be used as a recruitment tool for violent extremism locally, the report noted.

National authorities in the South-East Asia region are not reporting any immediate uptick in attempted travel to Afghanistan, but are alert to this possibility.

The report said that both Indonesia and the Philippines reported significant counter-terrorism gains, leading to an overall decline in terrorist activity and cautious optimism that the operational capability of several groups in the region may be significantly degraded. At the same time, the threat of attacks by lone actors or inspired by radicalised individuals remains a concern, it said.

WHO: Global Covid-19 case counts declined 17% in latest week

AP ■ GENEVA

The World Health Organization says coronavirus case counts fell 17% worldwide over last week compared to previous week, including a 50% drop in United States, while deaths globally declined 7%. The weekly epidemiological report from the U.N. health agency, released late Tuesday, shows that omicron variant is increasingly dominant — making up nearly 97% of all cases tallied by international virus-tracking platform known as GISAIID. Just over 3% were of delta variant. "The prevalence of omicron variant has increased globally and is now detected in almost all countries," WHO said. "However, many of countries which reported an early

rise in number of cases due to omicron variant have now reported a decline in total number of new cases since beginning of January 2022." All told, WHO reported more than 19 million new cases of COVID-19 and under 68,000 new deaths during week from Jan. 31 to Feb. 6. As with all such tallies, experts say such figures are believed to greatly underestimate real toll. Case counts fell in each of WHO's six regions except its eastern Mediterranean zone, which reported a 36% jump, notably with increases in Afghanistan, Iran and Jordan. In Europe, case counts fell 7% — led by declines in places like France and Germany — even as countries in eastern Europe like Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia posted increases.

Israel strikes Syria in response to anti-aircraft missile fire

IAN S ■ JERUSALEM

Israel struck targets in Syria on Wednesday in response to an anti-aircraft missile launched from Syria, which exploded in mid-air, the Israeli army said. Sirens were heard in the Arab city of Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel as well as in the occupied West Bank, the army said in a statement. Residents reported large explosion sounds, Xinhua reported citing the Hebrew-language news outlet Ynetnews. There were no immediate reports of Israeli casualties. The alerts in Israel came as the Syrian state media SANA reported aerial defense systems in Damascus area had been activated and intercepted Israeli missiles.

Two killed in gunmen attack in south Nigeria

Lagos: As many as two people were killed when a group of gunmen attacked the convoy of a businessman in south Nigeria's Edo state, police said on Wednesday.

Kontongs Bello, the police spokesperson in Edo, said that the victims were drivers attached to the chairman of a petroleum marketers association in the state, Abdul-Hamid Egele, who was abducted by the gunmen after the attack, Xinhua news agency reported.

The gunmen intercepted Egele's motorcade near the town of Jattu of the state on Monday evening, killing the

driver of the car Egele was using on the spot, and wounding a security guard and another driver of the motorcade, said Bello.

He said the second driver, who was driving Egele's back-up car, died later because of the serious bullet injuries he suffered during the attack.

The police spokesperson said the police had begun a rescue operation in the area. Armed attacks have been a primary security threat in the most populous African country, leading to deaths and kidnappings in recent months.

IAN S

Unusual heat advisories issued for South California

IAN S ■ LOS ANGELES

Heat advisories have been issued for Southern California, including Los Angeles and other counties, with possibility of record high temperatures starting Wednesday and lasting through weekend.

"Heat Advisory now in effect from Wednesday morning through Sun afternoon. Highs will reach 85-90 degrees each day: 15-20 degrees above normal! This can lead to wintertime heat stress, especially those who are not used to this kind of heat. Take extra precautions this week," the National Weather Service (NWS) Los Angeles Office tweeted on Tuesday.

Ninety degree fahrenheit is over 32.2 degree Celsius. In Southern California, February's normal daily high temperatures are around 68 degree fahrenheit (20 degree Celsius), Xinhua news agency reported.

The NWS predicted that near record high temperatures are possible during peak of heat wave in winter. "This is unseasonably hot, so many people will not be acclimated to this heat leading to faster onset dehydration and heat stress.

Meta to crack down on hate and terror speech in Pakistan, UK

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Meta (formerly Facebook) announced to expand its flagship counter-speech initiative to Pakistan and the UK to tackle violent extremism, terrorism and organised hate speech on its platforms.

Meta's Redirect Initiative, already available in Australia, the US, Germany and Indonesia, is now entering Pakistan and the UK to "disrupt the connection between followers and the violent, extreme content they seek".

Now, when someone in Pakistan or the UK searches on Facebook using words associated with organised hate or violent extremism, the top search result will be a link to resources and support for how to leave violence and extremism behind. "We're partnering with Shaoor Foundation in Pakistan and Exit UK in the UK," said Meta.

Research shows that challenging violent, extremist views with positive counter-

speech is one of the most effective ways to combat hate and extremism.

"Counter-speech is only effective if it comes from credible voices, so we've partnered with various NGOs and community groups on multiple counter-speech initiatives around the world including community programs, toolkits and research," said Dr Nawab Osman, Asia Pacific Head of Counter-Terrorism and Dangerous Organizations at Meta.

Counter-speech involves responding to hateful, extremist narratives with empathy and alternative perspectives, rather than shutting these conversations down.

Shaoor Foundation has been working for many years, designing and implementing peace development programmes in Pakistan.

"Building a society that is inclusive, respectful and peaceful and involves engaging the entire community, enabling people to speak up and providing a safe, accessible space to get support.

Researchers on board for report on high-speed rail in Australia

IAN S ■ SYDNEY

A team of researchers from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) have come up with a new approach to making high-speed rail (HSR) cost-effective in Australia that involves factoring in the rise in land value among other "value uplifts".

The report released by UNSW's City Futures Research Centre on Wednesday showed that HSR stations along Australia's east coast, connecting the nation's three most populous cities Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, would generate a potential 140 billion Australian dollars (about US\$10 billion) in land value, Xinhua news agency reported.

"There are a lot of opportunities around HSR for Australia to build stronger connectivity between cities and inject significant wealth and job opportunities into the regions," said Director of UNSW City Futures Research Centre and lead author on report Christopher Pettit.

In past, proposed HSR projects have been ruled out given Australia's relatively small population -- compared to countries like Japan, China and Germany, which have established HSR networks.

A report delivered to the Australian government in 2013 proposed HSR development on east coast would cost 130 billion Australian dollars (about \$93 billion).

Pettit said their proposal shows that this cost could be almost entirely offset by value added in areas such as dwelling value, population growth, creating jobs in regional areas of Australia and providing greater access to cities.

"If you were to capture a substantial proportion of this value uplift, it could pay for a huge amount of the HSR," he said. Past proposals have attracted no shortage of criticism.

Experts have rebuked idea as having a benefit-cost ratio that would barely break even, and huge emissions costs from construction of thousands of kilometers of rail lines. James Abbott, managing director at Abbott Advisory and reviewer of UNSW report, told Xinhua: "I think that you need to

consider population we will have in 30 years versus population we have today.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that **Sh. Chetan Gadchik** (hereinafter referred to as the said **Mortgagee/Borrowers**) is purchasing **Third Floor, With Roof Rights, Property Bearing No. 14/11, area measuring 200 Sq. Yds., Block-14, Situated in the Aoadi of East Patel Nagar, New Delhi** from **Sh. Jagjit Singh Anand** who became owner of the said **floor vide Relinquishment Deed dated 25.02.2019, Sub-Registration-II Sada Bargar New Delhi**, as Doc. No. 2118, Book No. 1, Vol No. 24175, Page No. 118-122 on 25.02.2019 executed by **Sh. Charanjit Singh Anand 2 Sh. Ravdeep Singh Anand, 3. Smt. Kuljit Kaur and Now, Sh. Chetan Gadchik** has agreed to create mortgage in respect of the said property in favour of our clients **DFP FIRST Bank Limited**. Further, if any person, body, individual, institution having any claim, title, interest and /or objection in respect of or against or relating to or touching upon said property or part of the property by way of sale, exchange, lease, lien, mortgage, charge, encumbrance, gift, trust, easement, maintenance, inheritance, testamentary disposition or otherwise or having in their custody any title, documents pertaining the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at below mentioned address within 10 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim, of such person shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Any objections raised after the completion of the 10 days shall not be binding upon the said property or my Client & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 10 days of this publication to **Mr. Munesh Dhanraj / Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates)**, Law Veritas, Unit no 307, 9th Floor, GD-ITL tower, (B-08), Nehru Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at (M). 9056707172/9818228636

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that, My client has entered into an agreement to buy a property municipal no. 2569 -- 2570 -- 2571 ward - IV, (Near Gali Neem Wali), Dhanampura, Gali Anar, Kinari Bazar, Delhi-110006, (Title Deed is in the name of Late Shri Bhawani Shanker Mehra) from his grandson **Neeraj Shanker Mehra & others'** **Neeraj Shanker S/o Late Sh. Krishan Shanker Mehra R/o B-198 Prashant Vihar Rohini Sector 14 New Delhi-110085**. Any person having any right , title claim or interest in respect of the above property by way of sale, exchange, let, lease, mortgage or whatsoever nature, which contradicts the title absolute and sole ownership and possession of the existing land owner of the property is hereby required to make the claim, if any within 15 days failing which claim shall be treated as irrevocable and unconditionally waived of such person.

Enrl.No. D-27682020

Kartikay Bhaskar - Advocate
Harsh Bala 1238, Sant Nagar
Burari, Delhi-84 Ph:9540809890

UNITED LEASING AND INDUSTRIES LIMITED

Regd. Office : Plot No.66, Sector-34, EHTP, Gurugram, Haryana-122001.

CIN : L17100HR1983PLC033460, Website:www.uliltd.com, Email id: investorrelations@uliltd.com, Phone:011-26258237

Statement of Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter and Nine Months Ended December 31, 2021

(Rs. in lacs, except per share data)

Sl. No. (Refer Notes below)	Particulars	Quarter Ended	Nine Months Ended	Year Ended		
		31.12.2021 [Unaudited]	30.09.2021 [Unaudited]	31.12.2020 [Unaudited]	31.12.2021 [Unaudited]	31.03.2021 [Audited]
1	Total Income from Operations	176.16	53.61	33.84	302.11	314.13
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax and exceptional & extraordinary items	45.56	8.62	2.28	42.75	52.97
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax and exceptional & extraordinary items	45.56	8.62	2.28	42.75	11.88
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax	45.56	8.62	2.28	42.75	11.88
5	Total Comprehensive Income	-	-	-	-	-
6	Paid-up equity share capital	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00
7	Earning Per Share of Rs.10/- each (not annualised)					
	a) Basic	1.52	0.29	0.08	1.43	0.40
	b) Diluted	1.52	0.29	0.08	1.43	0.40

Notes :

The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter and Nine Months ended December 31, 2021 filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter and Nine Months ended December 31, 2021 are available on the Bombay Stock Exchange website www.bseindia.com and on Company's website www.uliltd.com.

For United Leasing & Industries Ltd.
Sd/-
Anil Kumar Khanna
Managing Director
DIN : 00207839

Place : Gurugram, Haryana
Dated : February 09, 2022

India is in discussion with ASEAN to start FTA review: Patel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is in discussion with the 10-nation bloc ASEAN for initiating the review of the free-trade agreement in goods between the two regions to seek more market access for domestic products, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said the market access issues and trade barriers being faced in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and China are being regularly taken up with individual countries through bilateral engagements.

"The Government of India is in discussion with ASEAN countries for initiating the review of ASEAN-India trade in goods agreement to seek more market access for Indian products," she said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

In a separate reply, she said that to increase exports including apparel exports, India is actively negotiating regional trade agreements (RTAs)/ FTAs with a number of countries including the UAE, Australia, Canada, Israel and the UK.

"Ongoing FTA negotiations will also provide more favourable market access to products exported from India," she said.

The Minister said that textile and apparel export growth has been facing adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and higher import tariffs in key markets such as the European Union and the United Kingdom as compared to zero duty access in these countries to competing countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia.

Replying to a question on export dues, she said the government has released ₹56,027 crore in order to clear pending

export incentive dues to exporters. This is for various schemes — Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (₹33,010 crore, Service Exports from India Scheme (₹ 10,002 crore), Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (₹5,286 crore), Rebate of State Levies (₹330 crore), and Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (₹2,568 crore) and other legacy schemes like Target Plus Scheme, Focus Product Scheme.

"It is estimated that such benefits would be disbursed to more than 45,000 exporters, out of which the majority would be in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) category," Patel said. Clearance of dues under these schemes is dependent on meeting the eligibility criteria by the applicant exporter, whose applications are scrutinised for any deficiency.

Govt open to 'some tinkering' in capital gains tax regime, says Revenue Secy

New Delhi: The Government is open to 'some tinkering' in the varied rates and holding period for computation of capital gains tax on shares, debt and immovable property, in a bid to make it simple, Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj said on Wednesday.

In the current fiscal, the revenues from capital gains tax is expected to jump 10-fold to about ₹80,000 crore.

Under the Income Tax Act, gains from sale of capital assets, both movable and immovable, are subject to 'capital gains tax'. The Act, however, excludes movable personal assets such as cars, apparels, furniture from this tax.

Bajaj said the current capital gains tax structure is "too complicated" in terms of varied rates and period of holding across the assets and hence needs a relook.

"We need to rework the capital gains structure for rates, holding periods. We would be open to some tinkering in it, the next time we get an opportunity," Bajaj said at a CII event.

Asking the industry chamber to also conduct a study on what are the prevailing rates of capital gains tax across the world, Bajaj said, the department has already studied the rates in other nations like India and the developed world.

"Number one is rate and number two is the period for which it is. I think it is too complicated... That we have created. For real estate, we have made it 24 months, for shares 12 months, for debt it is 36 months. We need to work on that," Bajaj said. Observing that when any such tinkering is brought

about, there would be a segment of taxpayers who would stand as gainers, while there would be a segment who would lose out compared to their present tax provision, the Secretary said, adding "that becomes the most difficult part".

Depending upon the period of holding an asset, the long-term or short-term capital gains tax is levied. The Act provides for separate rates of taxes for both categories of gains. The method of computation also differs for both the categories.

In general, when an asset is held for more than 36 months, it is termed as a long-term asset, otherwise short-term.

However, equity shares or units of equity oriented mutual funds held for more than 12 months are considered long-term, whereas house property has to be held for 24 months to be considered a long-term capital asset.

Short-term capital gains are chargeable to tax at normal slab rates applicable to the taxpayer, except where such gain is arising from sale of equity shares in a company or units of equity oriented mutual fund or unit of a business trust (where STT has been paid), which is chargeable to tax at the rate of 15 per cent, while long-term capital gains in excess of ₹1 lakh is taxed at 10 per cent.

Bajaj said in the current fiscal, the government is likely to collect good revenue from capital gains tax despite the fact that capital gains tax rates are much lower at 10 per cent and 15 per cent respectively for long-term and short-term.

Rupee falls to 74.84 before RBI monetary policy reveal

Mumbai: The rupee declined by 10 paise to close at 74.84 against the US dollar on Wednesday amid persistent foreign fund outflows and elevated crude oil prices.

Investors are cautious ahead of the RBI monetary policy to be announced on Thursday, analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 74.70 against the American dollar, and later witnessed an intra-day high of 74.68 and a low of 74.87 against the greenback. The local unit finally ended the day at 74.84, down 10 paise from the previous close of 74.74.

"Rupee remained fairly subdued ahead of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) monetary policy but slow depreciation has been seen in the last two days on back of foreign fund outflows from domestic equities and bonds," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

On the overseas front, dollar bulls remained in control with the greenback rallying from its 100-days moving average while equities managing to recover some lost ground.

"Spot USDINR is likely to consolidate in the range of 74.60 to 75.10 in the next couple of days," Parmar said.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six

currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent lower at 95.51.

"The rupee depreciated against the dollar for the second straight day on likely equity-related outflows and importer covering," said Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities.

Additionally, persistent foreign fund outflows from local equities also weighed on the local unit. FPIs have pulled out a net USD 1 billion (around ₹7,484 crore) from Indian stocks in six sessions this month.

However, lack of any major factor has kept the local unit in a small trading band from 74.50 to 75.05. Jateen Trivedi, Senior Research Analyst at LKP Securities said that the rupee traded little weak awaiting cues from RBI policy due on Thursday.

"With higher crude prices looking likely to sustain above USD 85 per barrel for this quarter, the rupee can feel the heat till the time it's weak below 74.00. Going ahead rupee can be seen in range of 74.60-75.05," Trivedi said.

According to Emkay Global Financial Services, the markets are waiting for the RBI MPC's decision on interest rates which comes against the backdrop of Budget 2022-23, inflationary concerns and evolving geo-political situation.

PM Gati Shakti: Sonowal reviews ports' efficiency initiatives

New Delhi: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday took a comprehensive review of initiatives taken by the various ports for facilitating ease of doing business (EoDB) and operational efficiency through technology (OETT) to boost growth under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, an official statement said.

Sonowal said integrated efforts which are being taken by ports and others will add speed to development works around the country.

PM Gati Shakti will help the people, farmers and fishing community and strengthen India's economy, the ports, shipping and waterways minister added.

According to the statement, Sonowal further urged the officials to put emphasis on promotion of the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission and skill development so that the youth of the country can be benefited.

PM Gati Shakti is driven by seven engines of growth -- roads, railways, airports, ports, mass transport, waterways and logistics. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is set to play a major role in the realisation of the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, the statement said.

All the senior officials assured the minister that they will move forward on the directions given by him so that the economy can be boosted and more people can get its benefits, it added.

We will be able to launch Beta version of ONDC in a few months: Goyal

New Delhi: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) will give an opportunity to small retailers to compete with big firms and its Beta version is likely to be launched in few months. As UPI is to the digital payment domain, ONDC is to e-commerce in India. It will enable buyers and sellers to be digitally visible and transact through an open network, no matter what platform/application they use.

Goyal said that over the past few years, large companies have almost taken a complete stronghold on e-commerce business and small retailers do not get equal opportunity to be able to engage with e-commerce due to weak financials and strong financial muscle of large firms.

Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, he said there are start-ups and small shops that are an important part of the ecosystem that provides retail shopping. "We are in the process of the governance structure of ONDC. We have taken technocrats to help

us to create the technology and in another few months, we will be able to do a beta launch and this system will give opportunity for small retailers to stand up in competition against big companies," Goyal said.

He added that the platform will provide opportunities for new start-ups to start creating a network of sellers, provide service to local areas, and increase competition.

Like "you can Google any information and get a series of options, the same way it (ONDC) will be easy for somebody who wants to procure any product to get a lot of options", he added.

ONDC received its certificate of incorporation as a private sector non-profit company on December 31, 2021. A number of established companies have integrated with the platform and the Government has already set up a nine-member advisory council, including Nandan Nilekani from Infosys and National Health Authority CEO R S Sharma, on steps required to design and accelerate the adoption of ONDC.

Tata Power net up 74% to ₹552 cr in Dec quarter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power on Wednesday posted a 74 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to ₹552 crore for the December quarter on the back of higher revenues.

This was the ninth consecutive quarter of PAT growth, it added.

"Consolidated PAT (profit after tax) up by 74 per cent YoY year at ₹552 crore vs ₹318 Crore in Q3 FY21 (October-December 2020) on the back of strong all-round business performance by all verticals," a company statement said.

Consolidated revenue also went up by 42 per cent to ₹11,015 crore, from ₹7,756 crore in Q3 FY21 due to expanded operation in Odisha discoms, higher project execu-

tion by Tata Power Solar Systems Ltd (TPSSL), and strong performance of all other businesses, it said. The company's CEO and Managing Director Praveer Sinha said, "Tata Power has delivered strong financial performance for the 9th consecutive quarter. All our business clusters have contributed significantly despite facing pandemic-related challenges, demonstrating tremendous resilience, strength and agility."

"We are committed to focus on key growth areas viz renewables, distribution, and new businesses comprising rooftop solar, solar pumps and EV charging. We'll focus on utilising technology to offer smart, green energy solutions and provide world class experience to our 12 million plus

customers," he added.

Its arm Tata Power Solar Systems Ltd (TPSSL) will set up a 4 GW solar cell and module manufacturing capacity with an investment of ₹ 3,400 crore.

The solar engineering, procurement and construction order book has crossed the Rs 10,000 crore-mark, it added. Renewable portfolio grew due to addition of 289 MW capacity and strong execution of both large scale and rooftop solar projects by TPSSL.

It has developed a network of 1,200+ EV (electric vehicle) charging points across India.

Tata Power is one of India's largest integrated power companies. Together with its subsidiaries and jointly controlled entities, it has an installed/managed capacity of 13,171 MW.

Sebi puts in place framework for conversion of private listed InvITs

New Delhi: Capital markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday came out with a framework for conversion of a private listed Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) into a public InvIT.

In addition, the regulator has issued guidelines for converting a private unlisted InvIT into a private listed one. In a circular, Sebi said a private listed InvIT may convert into a public InvIT on making a public issue of units through a fresh issue and/or an offer for sale.

A listed private InvIT has to comply with various requirements, including having at least 5 investors other than the sponsor(s), its related parties and its associates. Post issuance and listing of such units, the private listed InvIT will stand transformed and will be considered a public InvIT. Such an entity will be required to comply with all provisions of the InvIT rules prescribed for public InvITs. With regard to conditions for conversion, Sebi said a private listed InvIT will have to fulfill certain conditions, including obtaining approval from 75 per cent of the unit holders by value for such public issue of units.

In addition, a private listed InvIT need to be compliant with all the applicable listing obligations and disclosure requirements since the date of its listing or preceding three years, whichever is less.

However, the imposition of only monetary fines by stock exchanges on it or its investment manager will not be a ground for ineligibility for

issuance. Among others, a private listed InvIT should not have defaulted in making any distribution since listing from the date of its listing or preceding three years, whichever is less.

Also, Sebi said that minimum sponsor(s) contribution for the public issue of units will be either to the extent of 15 per cent of the units issued through the public issue or 15 per cent of the post-issue capital. Further, units offered towards minimum sponsor(s) contribution will be locked-in for 18 months from the date of listing of units allotted in such a public issue.

However, if any units are already locked-in and the remaining lock-in period is more than 18 months, the units will continue to be locked-in for such remaining period. With regards to restrictions on transferability of units, Sebi said units held by the sponsor(s) in excess of minimum sponsor(s) contribution will be locked-in for a period of one year from the date of listing of units allotted in the public issue.

"Units held prior to the issue, by persons other than the sponsor(s), shall be locked in for a period one year from the date of listing of units allotted in the public issue," Sebi said.

Maximum subscription from any investor other than sponsor(s), its related parties and its associates, in initial offer will not be than 25 per cent of the total unit capital on post-issue basis, as per Sebi.

Tesla recall: Heat pump won't defrost windshield fast enough

Detroit: Tesla is recalling nearly 27,000 vehicles in the US because the cabin heating systems may not defrost the windshield quickly enough, cutting visibility and increasing the risk of a crash.

The latest in a series of recent recalls covers certain 2021 and 2022 Models 3, S, and X, and some 2020 through 2022 Model Y vehicles. Tesla says it doesn't know of any crashes or injuries tied to the problem. Documents posted Wednesday say the electric vehicle maker will send out an online software update to fix the issue.

US safety regulators say in the documents that a software error can cause a valve in the vehicles' heat pumps to open unintentionally, trapping refrigerant inside the evaporator. That can reduce defrosting performance.

The problem can deplete the refrigerant in some parts of the heat pump, causing the compressor to stop working as a fail-safe measure. That can cause loss of cabin heating, largely when it's minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) or colder.

Tesla stores and service centers were to have been notified of the recall around Feb. 4. The recall is the 14th done by Tesla since January 2021, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration records.

Equities extend gains for second day amid global rally; RBI policy eyed

Mumbai: Market benchmarks marched higher for the second straight session on Wednesday, mirroring a sharp rebound in global equities amid signs of easing geopolitical tensions. However, a depreciating rupee and continued selling by foreign investors capped the gains, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 657.39 points or 1.14 per cent to finish at 58,465.97. Likewise, the NSE Nifty jumped 197.05 points or 1.14 per cent to 17,463.80.

Maruti was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 4.14 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Titan, HCL Tech, Wipro, and Bharti Airtel.

Only three counters closed in the red -- Sun Pharma, ITC and PowerGrid, dipping up to 0.72 per cent.

"The domestic market joined the global rally with all major sectors barring PSU Banks trading with gains. US stocks rallied yesterday shrugging off concerns over rising crude oil and rate hike ahead of the release of US inflation data.

"RBI's policy announcement will be the key focus tomorrow as domestic inflation and policy tightening by global central banks would pressurise the central bank to adopt a similar stance," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said, "Advance decline ratio has turned positive. Nifty has commenced its journey up ahead of the RBI MPC meet outcome on Thursday."

Russia-Ukraine tussle and reversal in oil prices have helped sentiments turn up across the globe. In case the RBI raises repo rate (and not reverse repo rate) the markets could take it negatively," he noted.

Barring oil & gas, all BSE sectoral indices finished higher. Auto climbed 2.18 per cent, followed by consumer durables, metal, finance, bankex and industrials. The BSE midcap and smallcap indices spurted as much as 1.23 per cent.

World stocks darted up as investors took heart from upbeat corporate results and signs of easing tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seoul and Shanghai ended in the positive territory.

ICICI Bank makes its InstaBIZ app for MSMEs interoperable; allows merchants to link account of any bank

Mumbai: Private lender ICICI Bank on Wednesday said it has made the MSME-focused digital banking app InstaBIZ interoperable to enable merchants to link their accounts with other banks to the platform.

Owners of grocery shops, supermarkets, restaurants, stationery stores and pharmacies and professionals like doctors and lawyers can create their UPI ID and QR code on the app to accept payments from customers.

The bank said merchants can also digitally apply for a Point of Sale (POS) device and a voice messaging device that confirms the receipt of the payments. ICICI Bank had launched the InstaBIZ app in July 2019 to allow MSMEs to access banking products and services through the app or website. "A large part of this (MSME) segment consists of retail merchants. It is our endeavour to support merchants—around two crores across the country—by offering them solutions that make their business easy," said Anup Bagchi, Executive Director, ICICI Bank in a statement.

The interoperability is backed by the online Know

Your Customer (KYC) process as merchants do not need to visit a branch nor upload any document, the bank said.

The initiative leverages ICICI Bank's APIs that digitally validate permanent account number or Aadhaar number which is required for verification of KYC.

"We believe that this new and unique digital offering resonates with merchants across the country, as it frees up their bandwidth to a large extent, which can devote to grow their main business," added Bagchi. InstaBIZ offers MSMEs overdraft facility of up to Rs 15 lakh, bulk collection and payments of funds through digital modes, automatic bank reconciliation and also undertake largely all of the export-import transactions like inward and outward remittances among others.

ICICI Bank had reported growth of its SME loan portfolio by 34.2 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 36,353 crore and 9.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) in its Q3 results in January. The growth came on the back of InstaBIZ and other digital efforts by the bank such as Merchant Stack, Trade Online and e-signing of disbursement documents through EasySign.



भारत सरकार, अंतरिक्ष विभाग
भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन
भारतीय सुदूर संवेदन संस्थान
4 कालिदास मार्ग, पोस्ट बॉक्स सं.135, देहरादून-248001



पेंशन अदालत
भारतीय सुदूर संवेदन संस्थान, देहरादून के स्वर्ण जंयती छात्रावास में 02.03.2022 (बुधवार) को 09.00 बजे से 14.00 बजे तक पेंशन अदालत आयोजित की जाएगी। इस संबंध में, भारतीय सुदूर संवेदन संस्थान, देहरादून से सेवानिवृत्त पेंशनभोगी/परिवार पेंशनभोगी किसी भी प्रकार की शिकायत यदि हो तो, उसके लिए अपने आवेदन प्रशासनिक अधिकारी, (स्थापना), कार्मिक एवं सामान्य प्रशासन, भारतीय सुदूर संवेदन संस्थान, देहरादून-248001 को उनके नाम एवं पीपीओ संख्या आदि विवरण संबंधित प्रलेखों के साथ 22.02.2022 तक या उससे पहले प्रेषित करें ताकि शिकायत की जांच की जा सके। आगे, यह सूचित किया जाता है कि, यदि आवश्यक हो तो, पेंशनभोगी/परिवार पेंशनभोगी पेंशन अदालत के दौरान अपनी कीमत पर अपनी शिकायतें ला सकते हैं। मामले/शिकायते जिनमें विधिवि बिन्दु यथा, उत्तराधिकार, नीति आदि संबंधित मामले, इस अदालत में नहीं लाए जा सकते हैं। पेंशन अदालत में उपस्थित होने वाले पेंशनभोगी/पारिवारिक पेंशनभोगियों को, कोविड-19 के प्रसार की रोकथाम हेतु भारत सरकार द्वारा जारी दिशा-निर्देशों का सख्ती से पालन करना अनिवार्य है।

प्रशासनिक अधिकारी (स्थापना)
का.एवं सा. प्रशा., भारतीय सुदूर संवेदन संस्थान, देहरादून



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Online tenders in two bid system are invited for the academic year 2022-23 on "All India Basis" for supply of (1) 70 GSM Map Litho paper in reels made of Type A paper as per IS 1848: 2018 from integrated pulp and paper mills.
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R.O. No.: 1043-DP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2021-22 Date: 09-02-2022
Sd/- S. Srinivasa Chary
Director

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that R.P. Singh & Company Private Limited is in the process of acquiring joint development rights/ marketing rights of Block L & Block M (measuring 7404.182 sq. meters) & commercial in stilt Type G (Block M) measuring 128.977 sq. meters, part of Group Housing Society situated in Village Jatheri, Sonipat, in respect of License No. 101 of 2014 dated 13.08.2014 presently held by Max Heights Township and Projects Private Limited and License No. 110 of 2008 dated 30.05.2008 jointly held by Max Heights Township and Projects Private Limited and Max Heights Developers Private Limited. In principle approval for the proposed change of Developer has been granted by District Town Planner (HQ) Town and Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh vide memo no. LC-1505-B-JE(MK)-2021/32554 on 22nd December, 2021, in accordance with the provisions of Rule 17 of Rules 1976.

In compliance with the above mentioned Rule 17, as required by the Office of Director General, Town and Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh, this public notice is hereby provided intimating the said transfer of Development rights to the proposed developer R.P Singh and Company Private Limited,.

Any person having objections in this regard may file his/ her objections in the office of District Town Planner within a period of 15 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which it shall be assumed that there are no objections for the proposed change of developer.

In case of any queries or clarifications, kindly contact Mr. Ashok Ahuja at email id maxheights1@hotmail.com and contact no. 011-27314646.

Further, this newspaper publication is also available of the website of the Company www.maxheights.in.

For MAX HEIGHTS TOWNSHIP AND PROJECTS PRIVATE LIMITED
Place: New Delhi
Date: 10.02.2022
Director

INDIAN WOMEN'S TEAM SUFFERS 18-RUN LOSS TO NZ

PTI ■ QUEENSTOWN

Batting let India down as they suffered an 18-run defeat to hosts New Zealand in the one-off women's T20 International here on Wednesday. Senior opener and vice-captain Smriti Mandhana did not play and her absence was felt badly as India fell short by 18 runs while chasing 156 for a win. Rookie Yastika Bhatia, who opened in place of Mandhana along with young Shafali Verma, did reasonably well with a run-a-ball 26 (2x4; 1x6) but India never looked like they could chase down the target against an impressive New Zealand bowling attack.

The opening stand was worth 41 runs in 6.3 overs and that was the highest partnership for India. Shafali was not at her best as she contributed just 13 runs from 14 balls with the help of two boundaries. Captain Harmanpreet Kaur, who made 12 from 13 balls, also looked off colour.

The onus was then on the lower order to give a push for the target. Inexperienced Sabbhineni Meghana, who top-scored for India, did well with a 30-ball 37, which had six fours in it, stitching 34 runs with Richa Gosh (12) for the fourth wicket.

That stand was the last flicker of hope for India and once Meghana was out, there was a batting collapse and the visiting side could only reach 137 for 8 in

ONE-OFF T20I



their allotted 20 overs.

When Meghana was out, India needed 55 runs from 5.1 overs which proved a tough ask for the lower order.

"We were in the game when we were

bowling but unfortunately the last few overs didn't go well for us. Even in batting, we did not have partnerships but we have learnt a lot from this match and hope we will improve ourselves in the

upcoming matches," Harmanpreet said at the post-match presentation.

"When we are playing in one venue, we can learn a lot. Playing in the same venue will definitely help us."

Jess Kerr, Amelia Kerr and Hayley Jensen took two wickets apiece for New Zealand, while Lea Tahuhu and Sophie Devine got one each.

Earlier, experienced all-rounder Deepti Sharma and Pooja Vastrakar scalped two wickets apiece to help India restrict New Zealand to 155 for 5 after Harmanpreet opted to field after winning the toss.

Vastrakar was tidy with her medium pace as she conceded just 16 runs from her four overs, while Sharma gave away 26 runs from her four overs of off-spin.

Senior left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad leaked 39 runs for one wicket in her four overs.

For New Zealand, captain Sophie Devine (31 off 23 balls) and her opening partner Suzie Bates (36 off 34) scored the bulk of the runs.

The duo gave the home side a flying start, stitching 60 runs for the opening wicket. India named Simran Bahadur and Meghana -- who are in the reserves for the 50-over World Cup -- in the playing XI while Mandhana did not start.

Simran dropped Devine off her own bowling in her first ball of the innings -- second over of New Zealand innings -- and that proved costly for the visiting side. Devine was on 1 at the time.

The New Zealand captain celebrated the reprieve by hitting Simran for two sixes in the fifth over as the home side took 20 runs from that over.

F1: Norris signs long-term deal with McLaren



IANIS ■ LONDON

McLaren have locked down one of Formula 1's most impressive young talents by handing Lando Norris a huge contract extension that keeps the Briton at the team until the end of 2025.

Norris will join team mate Ricciardo, whose three-year deal expires at the end of 2023, on Friday at McLaren's HQ in Woking to pull off the covers and reveal the British team's 2022 machine -- the MCL32.

The 22-year-old was linked as a potential successor to Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes before the F1 giants recruited George Russell from Williams. The 2021 F1 campaign was Norris' most successful to date thus far, managing three third-place finishes and a second-place podium at the Italian Grand Prix.

Norris, who has been part of the McLaren family since 2017, said, "Teams are about people, and I love the people and feel at home at McLaren. I have grown up in this team and I am part of this journey we're all on."

"Last season was another great step, both in my career and the team's performance, and I see and feel all the work, investment and commitment for the team to be in a position to challenge for wins and titles in the future. This all gives me huge confidence looking forward, so it was a natural decision to extend our relationship for the next few years," he added.

"The opportunity to extend our relationship with Lando reflects not only our commitment but our belief and confidence in his talent," said McLaren Team Principal Andreas Seidl. "It is also a strong sign of trust and commitment from Lando in us as a team and our journey to World Championship contention."

Kerala Blasters, Jamshedpur FC lock horns in marquee clash

ISL 2021-22



IANIS ■ BAMBOLIM (GOA)

Two teams vying for a place at the top of the table will cross paths when Jamshedpur FC and Kerala Blasters FC meet in the Hero Indian Super League (ISL) at the Athletic Stadium in Bambolim on Thursday.

Jamshedpur were stopped in their tracks in the last outing as Bengaluru FC got a win to end their three-game winning streak. They are

now out of the top four, placed fifth with 22 points from 13 games but head coach Owen Coyle will know all too well that a win will bring them right back into the fray.

Like Jamshedpur, Kerala have also played 13 games and are sitting second in the table having 23 points from 13 matches. The yellow army beat bottom-placed NorthEast United in the last game to get back to winning ways. Alvaro Vazquez grabbed

all the headlines with a stunning strike from halfway line and the Spaniard will once again be expected to lead the line against a much stronger Jamshedpur side.

One of the main talking points for Kerala last season was their vulnerability after taking a lead. The Blasters dropped 18 points from winning positions last time but things have taken a turn for the better, Ivan Vukomanovic's charges

dropping only two points from winning positions this term, the joint-best record of any club.

For Jamshedpur, Daniel Chima Chukwu found the back of the net again in the last game and made it two goals in two games, vindicating Coyle's decision to get him on board in the January transfer window. Chima's goal against Bengaluru after 46 seconds is the second quickest goal of 21-22 Hero

ISL. "Every game now is going to be a proverbial six-pointer because you are playing against a direct rival. So of course all big games. We need to make sure we are ready for it against a very good side. They have a good coach and some wonderful players. We drew the game the last time against them, we could have won," Coyle said. The last time the two sides met, it was a 1-1 draw. "We need to be clinical against Kerala. We

created a lot of opportunities in the last game and we need to be more clinical against a good Kerala side," Coyle added. Asked about the way forward in their bid to secure a top-four spot, the Englishman said: "The way forward is to gather more points. We need to do that by playing well. But we will take one game at a time and we are thinking about only Kerala now and nothing else."

PKL 8: Raiders shine as UP Yoddha beat Tamil Thalaivas



Bengaluru: Raiders Pardeep Narwal and Surrender Gill helped UP Yoddha beat Tamil Thalaivas 41-39 in the Vivo Pro Kabaddi League Season 8 match here on Wednesday. Both raiders secured Super 10s in a high-scoring game that was only decided in the final minute.

The result will help Yoddha increase their chances of making it to the Playoffs. Tamil Thalaivas matched UP blow for blow throughout the match but their lack of ALL OUTs eventually affected the outcome of the game. Manjeet scored a Super 10 (13 points) for the Tamil team.

The high-intensity first half saw both teams exchange the lead. Tamil Thalaivas, who did not have captain Surjeet Singh in the line-up, started on a positive note with their raiding duo of Ajinkya Pawar and Manjeet finding flaws in the UP defence. But Surrender Gill slowly initiated a Yoddha fightback.

Pardeep Narwal soon joined him with a 3-point Super Raid in the 9th minute to shift the balance. Three Thalaivas defenders followed UP Yoddha's Shrikant Jadhav to the lobby without a touch which gave Yoddha another three points. A Super Tackle by Himanshu slowed Yoddha down temporarily but they eventually got an ALL OUT in the 15th minute.

That opened a 2-point lead for UP but Thalaivas immediately fought back with Himanshu clinching a 3-point Super Raid in the final minute of the first half. At the interval, Thalaivas had a 2-point lead with the scores 22-20.

Thalaivas started the second half on a positive note, but their usually reliable defence crumbled after the early minutes. Pardeep Narwal picked his Super 10 as Yoddha clinched another ALL OUT. Despite the advantage in the number of ALL OUTs, Yoddha could not extend the lead because they kept conceding easy Bonus Points to Tamil raiders.

Himanshu's clever raids gave the Tamil team an extra weapon as they slowly staged another comeback. There was nothing to separate the sides with 5 minutes remaining as both sets of raiders slowed down the pace of their raids. Manjeet picked his Super 10 for Thalaivas but their defence, especially Abishek, made too many mistakes to give Yoddha a 3-point lead with a minute remaining. Surrender Gill picked his Super 10 in the process. That gap proved too much for the Thalaivas to fight back as UP clinched a well-fought victory. IANIS

Mumbai City FC captain Mourtada Fall signs contract

IANIS ■ MUMBAI

Indian Super League (ISL) defending champions Mumbai City FC on Wednesday extended captain Mourtada Fall's contract by a year, which will keep him with the Islanders until the end of the 2022/23 season.

The 34-year-old Senegalese centre-half, who joined Mumbai City from FC Goa in 2020, played a key role in the Islanders' 'grand double' in the previous season, winning the ISL League Winners' Shield and the ISL Trophy.

Ahead of the 2021/22 season, Fall was named the Mumbai City captain and has since made 13 appearances, scoring twice.

Fall featured for Moroccan club Moghreb Tetouan for three seasons and won the Botola Pro 1 campaign in 2011/12. He then moved to Kuwait's Al-Arabi SC and Morocco's Wydad Casablanca, enjoying plenty of success with the latter in 2016/17, winning the Botola Pro 1 and the CAF Champions League.

He made his ISL debut in 2018/19 with FC Goa, emerging one of the best defenders in the tournament, winning the 2019 Super Cup and the 2019/20 ISL League Winners' Shield.

"I am delighted to have extended my stay with the Mumbai City family. It's been a wonderful journey with the club so far. We enjoyed a successful sea-



son last year, and we are hopeful of making this season a memorable one as well. To lead a club like Mumbai City is a real honour for me. The coach, support staff and players have shown great faith in me.

"I am grateful for their support and I want to continue to give my best to this wonderful team. I look forward to making more great memories with the club and hopefully, we will be able to share them with our fans in the stands soon," said Fall after signing the contract.

Head coach, Des Buckingham said that Fall's leadership qualities and experience were an asset to the side.

Ashwell Prince quits as Bangladesh batting coach: Report

Dhaka: Former South Africa batter Ashwell Prince has resigned as the batting coach of Bangladesh men's team, said a report by ESPNcricinfo. Prince's resignation means that he will not be part of the Bangladesh support staff in their home series against Afghanistan followed by the tour of South Africa in March.

"We have received his resignation letter on email a few minutes ago. He has cited family reasons for his decision," said Jalal Yunus, cricket operations chairman at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Prince was appointed to the post initially for a short-term deal since last year's tour of Zimbabwe before taking up a permanent role that was supposed to run until this year's Men's T20 World Cup in Australia in October-November. For taking the permanent role with Bangladesh, Prince had resigned as head coach of domestic side Western Province in South Africa.

The 44-year-old's resignation



comes a month after former Bangladesh head coach Jamie Siddons was brought on board as a batting consultant in December 2021. At that time, BCB President Nazmul Hassan had said it was 'not yet finalised in which area he will work in, whether it is the High Performance, Under-19s or the senior team'.

Under his tenure, Bangladesh had a difficult time with the bat, especially during the Men's T20 World Cup in the UAE and Oman. But Bangladesh

managed to script a surprise eight-wicket victory over New Zealand in the Bay Oval Test.

Prince is the second member from Bangladesh's coaching staff to move on from the side in the past few weeks after ex-bowling coach Ottis Gibson joined England County side Yorkshire as their head coach.

The former left-handed middle-order batter had represented South Africa in 66 Tests, 52 ODIs and one T20I from 2002 to 2011.

IANIS

Fancied players bite the dust at Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger

Bengaluru: It was a bad day for the fancied players as all the four singles second round matches saw the exit of favourites.

First it was young Chun-hsin Tseng of Taipei who felled fourth seed Hugo Grenier of France in straight sets 6-1, 6-4 on centre court and minutes later qualifier Borna Gojo of Croatia sent third seed Australian Aleksandar Vukic home with a 7-5, 6-3 victory to advance to the quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger at the KSLTA Courts here on Wednesday.

Belgian Kimmer Coppejans after a long fought battle in the first set which he won 14-12 in a tie-breaker won the second set 6-3 to oust fifth seed Altug Celikbilek of Turkey to make it to the last eight stage along with another qualifier Gabriel Decamps of Brazil who labored hard to beat Italian Gian Marco Moroni 6-2, 5-7, 7-6 (3) in an epic 3 hour-5 min battle.

Borna Gojo, who single handedly had put Croatia's road to final in the Davis Cup and is yet to break into the top 200, lost his serve in the third game and was down 1-3 by the next. However, he made a brilliant recovery winning the next three games including a break and grabbed the first set by achieving another break in the 12th game. The second set went with the serves until the 23-year-old Borna broke his rival's serve to lead 4-2 and wrapped up the match at 6-3. "I didn't have much practice during the pandemic but of late my game is falling out of shape, but now I am playing well," said a visibly tired Borna.

IANIS

Argentina Open: Emotional Martin del Potro loses in opener



IANIS ■ BUENOS AIRES

Playing for the first time since March 2019, the injury-hit Argentine Juan Martin del Potro lost 6-1, 6-3 to countryman Federico Delbonis in the first round of the Argentina Open.

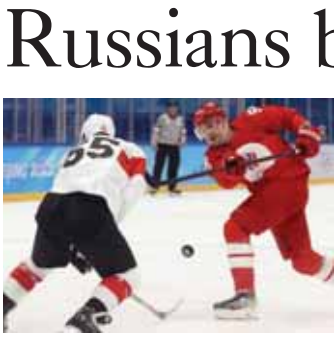
Following four right-knee surgeries, the former world No. 3 admitted he might have played his last match.

However his name is enlisted in the draw of this month's ATP 500 Rio Open. Last week, the former US Open champion (2009) hinted that his appearances in Buenos Aires and Rio Open may mark his final ATP Tour tournaments.

"I will speak to doctors again. I have to take care of my knee and then we will see. I will always leave the window open. (But) if today was the last time I will leave happy," he said after the match.

"It's difficult to explain how I felt on the court. So many emotions. The atmosphere was crazy, the people were crazy, and I had one of my best ever matches in my career with the crowd," he added.

After leaving the court, he had this message for fans hoping to see him play again, "I don't know if it's going to happen, because the pain in my knee is very high. But I will keep doing a big effort to fix the knee, and if I get that, maybe I will have another chance to play."



PTI ■ BEIJING

The Russian ice hockey team has started its defense of the Olympic men's gold medal with a 1-0 win over Switzerland in

Beijing. It wasn't the convincing start to the tournament the Russians may have hoped for as they were outshot 33-30 by a Swiss team not expected to contend for a medal.

The Russians, playing as the Russian Olympic Committee, had a slice of good fortune for the only goal.

A shot from former Edmonton Oilers forward Anton

Slepyshev took a double bounce off Swiss goaltender Reto Berra's pad and Enzo Corvi's leg on its way into the goal with 2.7 seconds left of the first period.

Fabrice Herzog

could have sent the game to overtime when he hit the frame of the goal late in the third period. Russian goaltender Ivan Fedotov had 33 saves for the shutout on his Olympic debut.

INDIA BEAT WI BY 44 RUNS

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India defeated West Indies by 44 runs in the second ODI to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series here on Wednesday. Invited to bat, India posted 237 for nine and then returned to dismiss the West Indies for 193 in 46 overs. Shamarh Brooks (44) was the top-scorer for WI as Prasadh Krishna (4/12) and Shardul Thakur (2/41) emerged as the most successful bowlers for the hosts.

Earlier, Suryakumar Yadav scored a 64-run knock while vice captain KL Rahul missed his half-century by one run after being run out as India posted 237 for 9. Deepak Hooda, who made his ODI debut in the previous match, scored 29 while all-rounder Washington Sundar contributed 24. For the West Indies, Alzarri Joseph (2/29) and Odean Smith (2/36) took two wickets each.

India will look to continue their domination and win the second ODI and seal the three-match series at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Wednesday. Since India didn't have much trouble in defeating West Indies in the first match, hosts are unlikely to make any changes in their playing XI.

However, the focus will be on vice-captain KL Rahul who has joined the team after a family engagement and was seen sweating it out in the nets ahead of the game. Ishan Kishan, who opened with Rohit in the first ODI did a decent job with a 36-ball 28 and both Deepak Hooda and Suryakumar Yadav also did well to finish the game for India.

If Rahul plays, then either of the three among Kishan, Deepak Hooda, and



Suryakumar would have to sit out to accommodate him as Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant and Rohit Sharma are certain to play. But the management might also choose to play the same XI and win the series and give Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, and Shahrulkh Khan a go in the last game of the series.

Eyes will be there also on Virat Kohli, who will like to get among the runs and reach his 71st century, which has been in waiting for over two years. In the bowling department, India had a clinical outing in the previous game, so the team management is unlikely to make any changes.

The likes of Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj, Yuzvendra Chahal, Prasadh Krishna, Shardul Thakur had restricted visitors to a below-par target in the first ODI.

On the other hand, West Indies, who

failed to play even 50 overs in the first ODI, will look to improve their form and get going in the series.

The Windies bowlers also need to be on the mark with line and length as well as the pace.

They were taken to task by the Indian batters, especially Rohit.

SQUADS

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), KL Rahul (vice-captain), Mayank Agarwal, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shikhar Dhawan, Virat Kohli, Surya Kumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Ishan Kishan (wicket-keeper), Deepak Hooda, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Deepak Chahal, Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohd. Siraj, Prasadh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Shahrulkh Khan.

West Indies: Kieron Pollard (captain),

Fabian Allen, Nkrumah Bonner, Darren Bravo, Shamarh Brooks, Jason Holder, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Nicolas Pooran, Kemar Roach, Romario Shephard, Odean Smith, Hayden Walsh Jr. Brief Scores: India: 237 for 9 in 50 overs. (S Yadav 64, KL Rahul 49; A Joseph 2/29, O Smith 2/36).

West Indies: 193 all out in 46 overs (Shamarh Brooks 44; Prasadh Krishna 4 / 1 2, Shardul Thakur 2/41).



India U19 heroes feted on sidelines of second ODI

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India's U-19 World Cup winning squad was on Wednesday felicitated by the BCCI on the sidelines of the second ODI here on Wednesday.

The U-19 heroes, wearing blazers, first watched the second ODI at the Narendra Modi stadium from the stands, as they had a joyous time seeing their stars in presence of head coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar and other members of the support staff.

The victorious squad members could not get to meet the senior India cricketers as they were part of the bio-bubble created for the three match series.

Former India batter and National Cricket

Academy head VVS Laxman, who was with the team in the Caribbean, was also present on occasion.

And so was BCCI secretary Jay Shah, treasurer Arun Dhumal and few other senior officials of the state cricket bodies.

The Board has already announced cash reward of Rs 40 lakh for the players and Rs 25 lakh each for the support staff. The India U-19 squad had returned home on Tuesday. The squad took the long flight back from the Caribbean with connections in Amsterdam and Dubai before reaching Bengaluru on Tuesday morning and the team then reached Ahmedabad.

More functions await the boys when they reach their respective hometowns by Thursday.

B'desh set to tour South Africa for ODI, Test series in March



PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Bangladesh are set to tour South Africa for three ODIs and two Tests as CSA on Wednesday confirmed the date and venues of the fixtures, starting March 18.

The tour, set to be played across four venues from March 18 to April 12, will be a part of ICC's ODI Super League and the World Test Championships.

"SuperSport Park will host two of the ODI matches, with the third taken by the Imperial Wanderers, while the coastal

cities of Durban and Gqeberha will take on the Test fixtures," CSA said in statement.

The two teams will begin the tour with the ODI series.

The first and third ODIs will be played on March 18 and 23, respectively, at the SuperSport Park in Centurion, while the second 50-over game is scheduled for March 20 at the Wanderers in Johannesburg. The ODI series will be followed by the first Test in Durban on March 31, while the final red-ball fixture is scheduled to begin on April 8 in Gqeberha.

Transition Starts: After Wriddhiman, Ishant out of reckoning

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ishant Sharma is set to skip the Ranji Trophy. Wriddhiman Saha has already withdrawn and the path does not seem too easy for Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane -- has the long due transition phase kicked in for India's Test team?

By the look of it, the wheels of change seem to have been set in motion keeping the upcoming home Test series against Sri Lanka in mind as Ishant's Ranji pullout also puts a huge question mark on his international future.

It is understood that even Pujara and Rahane, who are playing Ranji Trophy, will have to score more than just a stray century to be in reckoning as their bad patch has been a prolonged one and one good innings might not undo the damage that has already been done.

The 33-year-old Ishant is the most experienced player in the current Indian Test set-up with 105 Test matches and 311 wickets in his kitty but has gone off the boil since the tour of England.

On Wednesday, Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) selection committee met to pick the Ranji squad and despite the selectors as well as office bearers trying to get in touch with Ishant, they were unable to get a confirmation on his availability till evening.

"As and when, if he tells he wants to play, he will be included as he is a Delhi legend. But I don't know what has happened to him since he

has been incommunicado for the last week. He hasn't come for Ranji team's practice sessions. We don't know what's on his mind," a senior DDCA selector said. "We don't know if the Indian team management has told him something which may have led to a change in his mind-set," he added, rather confused.

The writing was on the wall when Ishant wasn't even considered among the top five pacers who played the three Tests in South Africa.

"Just like Wriddhi, even Ishant has got feelers that his India career might just be over. Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj are now India's No 1, 2 and 3 in priority list when all are fit," a senior BCCI source told PTI on

conditions of anonymity.

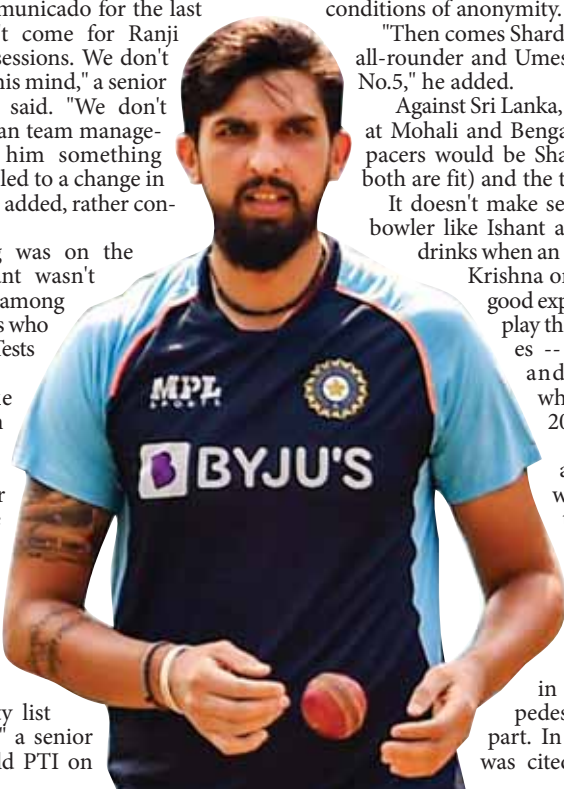
"Then comes Shardul Thakur, who is an all-rounder and Umesh Yadav was choice No.5," he added.

Against Sri Lanka, India plays two Tests at Mohali and Bengaluru where the two pacers would be Shami and Bumrah (if both are fit) and the third will be Siraj.

It doesn't make sense to take a senior bowler like Ishant and make him carry drinks when an Avesh Khan, Prasadh Krishna or Ishan Porel can get good exposure. India, in 2022, play three more Test matches -- two in Bangladesh and one in England which is part of the 2021 series.

Save the Test against England where they might think of fielding four pacers, Ishant is unlikely to fit into the scheme of things.

He played against New Zealand in Kanpur but looked pedestrian for the better part. In Mumbai, an injury was cited as reason for his



Three Indian pairs make Bengaluru Open quarterfinals

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The top-seeded Indian team of Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and Purav Raja moved to the doubles quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open after prevailing against Croatia's Borna Gojo and Bulgaria's Dimitar Kuzmanov, here on Wednesday.

The Indian team had to be on its toes as it eked out a tough 6-4 6-7 (2) 10-8 win over the alternate entrants.

Also moving to the last-eight pairs stage were Ramnkumar Ramanathan and Saketh Myneni and the team of N Sriram Balaji and Vishnu Vardhan.

Ramkumar and Myneni had an easy day, beating Markos Kalovelonis (GRE) and Toshihide Matsui (JPN) 6-3 6-3 but Balaji and Vardhan had to work hard in getting past Mathias Bourgue (FRA) and Kimmer Coppejans (BEL) 6-4 4-6 10-3.

In the singles, fourth seed Hugo Grenier of France lost 1-6 4-6 to Chun-hsin Tseng of Taipei and qualifier Borna Gojo of Croatia sent third seed Australian



Aleksandar Vukic home with a 7-5, 6-3 victory to advance to the quarterfinals.

Another qualifier Gabriel Decamps of Brazil ousted Italian Gian Marco Moroni 6-2 5-7, 7-6 (3) in an epic three-hour five minute battle.

"I didn't have much practice during the pandemic but of late I my game is falling shape and I am playing well," said a visibly tired Borna who has played four matches in a row.

Meanwhile, India's Prajnesh Gunneswaran will take on top seed Jiri Vesely of Czech Republic on Thursday.

Bopara fined 75 per cent match fees for ball tampering in BPL match

IAN S ■ SYLHET

England all-rounder Ravi Bopara on Wednesday was fined 75 per cent of his match fees for ball tampering in a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) match against Khulna Tigers on February 7, said The Daily Star citing a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) release.

The report also said that three disciplinary points have been added to the disciplinary record of Bopara, who was captaining Sylhet Sunrisers in the match against the Khulna Tigers. In the incident which happened during the ninth over of the match, TV cameras showed Bopara running his fingernails over the ball before bowling a delivery.

"The match referee Debabrata Paul initially handed a three-match suspension for Bopara but the final decision rested with the tournament technical committee A.S.M. Roquibul Hassan. The technical committee decided to sanction penalties and hand a lighter sentence following an appeal by Bopara on Wednesday (February 8)," said the report.

New Zealand-Australia T20 cricket series nixed

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand's three-match Twenty20 international cricket series next month against world champion Australia has been canceled because of COVID-19 border regulations.

Australia beat New Zealand by eight wickets in the final of the Twenty20 World Cup last November and the rivals were expected to play in Napier from March 17-20, in anticipation of a planned relaxation of border protocols.

But the arrival of the omicron variant in New Zealand has put back the re-opening of the international border and the series cannot take place because the Australian men's team



does not have places reserved in managed isolation.

"At the time we scheduled the visit there was a lot of hope that the trans-Tasman border would be open for those who met the right criteria," New Zealand Cricket chief executive David White said in a statement Wednesday.

"However, the advent of omicron has, unfortunately, changed everything at

the border and has made it impossible for us to continue with the series.

"It's disappointing but we know it's the same for businesses and individuals and other sports and we're grateful for the international schedule we have."

Australia, coming off a 4-0 win over England in the five-test Ashes series, is due to host Sri Lanka in a five-match T20 series starting Friday.

New Zealand is set to host the Women's Cricket World Cup starting March 4. The seven teams visiting for the World Cup - India, England, Australia, South Africa, West Indies, Pakistan and Bangladesh - will have to quarantine in New Zealand ahead of the tournament.

Pace greats Anderson, Broad part of England cull for Windies

AP ■ LONDON

James Anderson and Stuart Broad, England's two leading test wicket-takers of all time, were the headline names in a ruthless post-Ashes cull for next month's tour of the West Indies.

The fast-bowling greats received no assurances that they still had test careers, either.

England, on the heels of an off-field clear-out that accounted for the head coach, assistant coach and director of cricket, also dropped eight players following the 4-0 loss in the series in Australia.

As well as Anderson, Broad and vice-captain Jos Buttler, the following players were also omitted: Dawid

Malan, Sam Billings, Dom Bess, Rory Burns and Haseeb Hameed.

"With the start of a new cycle, it has allowed the selection panel to refresh the test squad with a particular focus on competing away from home," former test captain Andrew Strauss, who is acting as the interim director of cricket following the firing of Ashley Giles, said on Tuesday.

There were some telling words for the 39-year-old Anderson and the 35-year-old Broad, too.

"I want to emphasize this does not mean the end for them as England players," Strauss said.

"We feel that it is important to look at some exciting new bowling potential and give some added responsibility to other players who



have featured previously.

"No one doubts the quality and experience that James and Stuart

bring to the England set-up. It will be up to the new managing director and permanent head coach to decide

on whether they will be involved this summer and beyond."

The use of the phrases "draw a line" and "the start of a process and a journey" in the squad announcement hinted there might be no going back on some of the big decisions, though, with Buttler having also had a tough time Down Under.

Anderson has taken 640 wickets in 169 tests and Broad is second on England's all-time list of wicket-takers, with 537 in 152 matches.

Paul Collingwood will lead the team in the West Indies in place of the departed Chris Silverwood, whose assistant, Graham Thorpe, has also left this post.

As part of what is being labeled a "red-ball reset," seamer Matt Fisher

is a direct beneficiary of the reboot-bowling attack while opener Alex Lees was also called up for the first time in the 16-man squad.

Wicketkeeper Ben Foakes returns to the squad for the first time in nearly a year, when he played the fourth test against India in Ahmedabad in March.

England's squad leaves on Feb. 24 for the three-test series.

Squad:

Joe Root (captain), Jonathan Bairstow, Zak Crawley, Matthew Fisher, Ben Foakes, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Alex Lees, Saqib Mahmood, Craig Overton, Matthew Parkinson, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Ben Stokes, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood.

Mountaineer Arjun Vajpai sets sight on Mt. Annapurna and Mt. Dhaulagiri



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having already scaled six out of the 14 8000m summits successfully, India mountaineer Arjun Vajpai has now set his eyes on climbing Mt. Annapurna and Mt. Dhaulagiri. The 28-year-old was recently awarded by Guinness World Records for becoming the youngest person to climb two higher 8000ers (Mt. Everest in 2010 and summit Lhotse in May 2011). Vajpai now wants to become the first Indian to scale all the 14 8000m summits in the world and his first target is to climb Mt. Annapurna and Mt. Dhaulagiri, which will make him the first from the country to finish all the 8000m mountains of Nepal.

There are less than 40 people in the entire world who have ever climbed these 14 summits but no Indian has achieved the feat yet.

Vajpai has already scaled Mt. Everest, Mt. Lhotse, Mt. Makalu, Mt. Kangchenjunga, Mt. Manaslu, and Cho-Oyu, making several mountaineering world records.

"It is my dream to climb all 14 mountains above the 8000 meters and put India's flag flying high and become the only Indian to have achieved this feat. Right now my focus is on #Project8k and I am going to give my best in order to achieve this daunting task," he said in a release. In order to complete #Project8k, Vajpai has started a fundraiser on Ketto to crowd source funds to complete his expeditions.