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ATTAIN DURABILITY: REPORT

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Covid 3rd wave to peak on Jan 23: IIT-K study

'Cases to remain below 4L/day, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata past peak'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With 2,82,970 new coronavirus infections, including 8,961 Omicron variant cases, India's active cases have increased to 18,31,000, the highest in 232 days. The infections are likely to spike further till January 23 when the third Covid-19 wave in the country may peak with daily cases likely to remain below the four lakh mark, said Manindra Agarwal, a scientist at the Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur and one of the researchers associated with the Sutra Covid model.

Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata have already reached their peak in case numbers in the past seven days, he said.

According to Agrawal, Covid-19 cases will peak in Maharashtra, Karnataka, UP, Gujarat, and Haryana this week, while States like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Tamil Nadu may peak next week.

"The daily cases are projected to peak on January 23 in India and stay below the four



A crowded subway at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus railway station amid concern over rising cases of Omicron variant of Covid-19 across the country, in Mumbai on Wednesday PTI

lakh mark. Metro cities Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata have already peaked," Agrawal said.

Agrawal had earlier predicted that the Covid-19 third wave will peak by January end.

"Across the country, the trajectories are changing significantly. I speculated earlier that it is due to ICMR guidelines for a changed testing strategy. However, at many places, these guidelines are not yet implemented and still, the trajectory has changed!" he said.

According to a new Govt advisory, individuals under-

taking inter-State domestic travel and contacts of confirmed Covid cases do not need to get tested unless identified as "high risk" based on age or comorbidities. In his view, there are two plausible reasons for the change in the Omicron-led case trajectory in India.

"There are two groups in the population, one with less immunity against Omicron and the other with more. The mutant first spread in the first group causing a sharp rise. Now the first group is exhausted and so the spread is slower," he explained.

Agrawal noted that there was a lot of concern when the Omicron variant started spreading in November last year.

However, he said, in the last week or so, people almost everywhere have concluded that the variant causes only "mild infection" and have decided to handle it with standard remedies instead of getting tested.

The death toll in India has climbed to 4,87,202 with 441 fresh fatalities. There has been a 0.79 per cent increase in Omicron cases since Tuesday, the Ministry said.

MSY's daughter-in-law, first CDS Rawat's brother join BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the season of shifting political loyalties in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, the BJP on Wednesday won over Samajwadi Party (SP) patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Aparna Yadav. Aparna joined the saffron outfit here at BJP headquarters.

Aparna is married to Prateek Yadav, son of Mulayam Singh Yadav's second wife. SP president Akhilesh Yadav is his son from his first marriage.

Meanwhile, Colonel Vijay Rawat, the brother of India's first Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, joined the BJP on Wednesday in Uttarakhanda ahead of the State polls. "My father (Gen Laxman Singh Rawat) after retiring from the Army, was with the BJP. Now I have got an opportunity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is special. All his work is for the progress of this nation. That is what encouraged me to join the BJP. His plan for Uttarakhanda is a product of a great vision," Colonel Vijay Rawat said. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami was also present.

General Bipin Rawat, who was born in Uttarakhanda, his wife, and 12 others died last month after their chopper crashed in Tamil Nadu's Coonoor.



Aparna Yadav, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law, joins THE BJP in the presence of UP Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya (L) and State BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh (R), at party HQ in New Delhi on Wednesday PTI

Aparna, in her early thirties, who was making overtures to the BJP for long, joined the party in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and BJP nState chief Swatantra Dev Singh.

The BJP may be fielding her in the UP Assembly polls, though a seat 'fitting her political background' is yet to be decided, sources said.

Praising Aparna, Maurya said she had been from time to time expressing views that showed her inclination towards the BJP.

The Uttar Pradesh BJP president lambasted

Samajwadi Party for its alleged support to criminals in its ticket distribution in western Uttar Pradesh. Farmers and women never felt safe when the Samajwadi Party was in power, he alleged.

Singh said Aparna has faith in good governance of Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and her induction in the BJP will boost the party.

Expressing her admiration for Modi, she said the nation's interest has always been a priority for her and praised several schemes of the BJP Government for cleanliness, woman empowerment and

employment. The switch, a shot in the arm for BJP, comes at a time when a number of OBC leaders have quit the BJP and joined the SP.

Aparna had contested the 2017 Assembly polls on the SP ticket from Lucknow Cantonment but lost to BJP's Rita Bahuguna Joshi, now a Lok Sabha member.

Bahuguna is now herself pitching for a seat for her son and written a letter to the BJP president JP Nadda to the effect saying she may quit her Lok Sabha seat if the party were to stick to one member one ticket guideline.

State adds 11,607 Covid cases

991 children among infected 145 new Omicron cases reported

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State on Wednesday registered 145 new cases of Omicron. With this, the total tally increased to 347, the Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar said. The ILS conducted genome sequencing of 249 samples, from which the traces of Omicron strain was found in 145. Besides, the State recorded 11,607 new Covid-19 positive cases in all 30 districts and the State pool, surging the total tally to 11,67,094. Among the freshly-infected were 991 children in the age group of 0 to

18 years. Notably, the State had recorded 11,086 Covid cases on Tuesday. Out of the new cases, 6,728 cases were from quarantine and 4,879 local contacts. Khordha district recorded the highest 4,347 cases followed by Cuttack with 898, Sambalpur 390, Baleswar 305, Balangir and Rayagada 229 each, Jharsuguda 219, Nayagarh at 206, Koraput 196, Rayagada 187, Subarnapur 153, Nayagarh 149, Angul 139, Nabarangpur 137, Bhadrak 132, Bargarh 125, Ganjam 116, Nuapada 104, Gajapati 93 Boudh 83, Malkangiri 54, Deogarh 53 and Kandhamal 51. Besides, 877 fresh cases were reported from the State pool. The active cases stood at 80,914. However, 6,785 more patients recovered, increasing the total recoveries to 10, 80,562.

In Sambalpur IT professional duped of Rs 5L by cyber fraud

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR

An IT professional belonging to Sambalpur district has been duped of Rs 5 lakh by a cybercriminal while he was searching for the customer care number of a bank in search engine Google.

Sanjib Kumar Padhi, who is employed in New Delhi, is now working from home here due to the Covid pandemic. A few days back, he had problem in operating his account in the ICICI Bank from his mobile. Hence, he searched for the customer care number of the bank in Google. And a number came from Google search, to which

Padhi called up to solve his problem. But to his misfortune, it was a number of the cyber fraudster, who impersonated himself as the bank's customer care representative. And as per the criminal's instruction, Padhi installed an App 'Anydesk application' in his mobile, which enabled the fraudster to know the OTP and other details sent to Padhi from the bank including from his other accounts.

By the time Padhi knew that he was cheated, the fraudster had already withdrawn Rs 5 lakh from his bank accounts. Following this, he lodged a complaint at the cyber police station.

Panchayat polls Code violation complaints rising; SEC forms panel

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Ahead of the panchayat polls, the State Election Commission (SEC) is receiving a lot of petitions from political parties on violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

So, the SEC has formed a Screening Committee headed by Chief Secretary SC Mahapatra to examine proposals relating to MCC. Principal Secretary GA and PG Department has been appointed as a member of the panel while another member will be ACS or Secretary of the concerned Department of which the proposal is related.

After examining the proposal, the panel will send it

to the SEC for necessary action. No proposal shall be forwarded to the Commission directly without the prior approval of the Screening Committee. Meanwhile, the SEC has asked the Excise Department to impose a ban on sale and distribution of liquor during the polling days. SEC Secretary RN Sahu has written a letter to the Principal Secretary, Excise Department, for this purpose. In the interest of free and fair election, the Commission directed that no spirituous, fermented or intoxicating liquors or other substances of like nature shall be sold, given or transported to or distributed at hotels, eating houses, tavern, shops or any other place, public or private within

the respective wards during the period of 48 hours preceding the poll up to the day following the poll day, the letter said. The Excise Department was asked to issue necessary orders in this regard to the field level officials. The Commission expects that the above restrictions shall be vigorously enforced by the concerned authorities. No arms and fatal weapons will be allowed to the booths; people carrying licenced guns and other weapons are prohibited from moving around near those places from February 14 (5PM) to March 1 (5PM), the Commission ordered the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Home Department.

However, the election of officers, polling officers, police officers and any other person appointed to maintain law and order at a polling station, who is on duty at polling station can go armed as defined in the Arms Act, 1959 of any kind within the neighbourhood of the polling station set up in every ward. The SEC has warned of stern action against the persons who would violate its orders.

In order to facilitate the voters in these areas to exercise their franchise, the SEC asked the State Government to grant paid holiday to all Government employees and those working in Government undertakings/boards, corporations and apex bodies etc. on the day of poll for their respective local area.

Heads of Af neighbours, Modi to discuss situation

India hosting conclave in virtual mode on Jan 27

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Situation in Afghanistan and in the neighbourhood will figure prominently in the first summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and heads of State of five Central Asian nations on January 27. India is hosting the conclave in the virtual mode.

Leaders of the five nations were to be invited as chief guests for the Republic Day parade this year. The raging corona pandemic forced India to change the schedule. The Republic Day parade for the second consecutive year will not have any foreign country chief guest.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was the chief guest for last year's parade, but he had to cancel the visit due to surge in pandemic in his country. Giving details of the forth-

coming high-profile event, the Ministry of External Affairs said here on Wednesday the Prime Minister will host the first India-Central Asia Summit. Leaders are expected to deliberate on steps to take forward relations to newer heights as well as the evolving regional security situation.

The virtual summit will be held with the participation of the five Presidents - Kazakhstan's Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Uzbekistan's Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Emomali Rahmon, of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Sadyr Japarov of Kyrgyz Republic. Most of these countries share border with Afghanistan. India has lot of stakes in the restive country. This will be the first engagement of its kind between India and the Central Asian countries at the level of leaders, the Ministry said in a statement.

The first India-Central Asia Summit is a reflection of India's growing engagement with the Central Asian countries, which are a part of India's

"extended neighbourhood". Modi paid a visit to all Central Asian countries in 2015. Subsequently, there have been exchanges at high-levels at bilateral and multilateral forums.

During this summit, the leaders are expected to discuss steps to take forward India-Central Asia relations to newer heights. They are also expected to exchange views on regional and international issues of interest, especially the evolving regional security situation.

The summit is symbolic of the importance attached by the leaders of India and the Central Asian countries to a comprehensive and enduring India-Central Asia partnership, the statement said.

The inception of the India-Central Asia Dialogue at the Foreign Ministers' level, the third meeting of which was held in New Delhi from December 18-20, 2021, has provided an impetus to India-Central Asia relations, the statement said.

Female elephant in Surajpur dies of electrocution

STAFF REPORTER ■ SURAJPUR

A female elephant died of electrocution after it came in contact with a high voltage electric wire in Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district, a Forest Department official said.

The incident took place on Wednesday at around 2 am in a forest near Darhora village when a herd of four elephants was passing through, Surajpur Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) BS Bhagat said.

Soon after being alerted by locals, forest personnel rushed to the spot and a postmortem was done, he said.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the female elephant, aged around 49, came in contact with an 11 KV power transmission line which was sagging at a low height in the forest and got electrocuted, he said. The electricity department has been informed for necessary action, he added.

According to the Forest Department, as many as 43 elephants died in Chhattisgarh, mainly in the northern part, between January 2019 and November 2021 due to various reasons, including electrocution.

1,414 infections in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

State capital Bhubaneswar on Wednesday registered 1,414 Covid-19 cases, with which the total tally in the city rose to 1,37,212. The active cases were 10,177. Of the new cases 1,370 were local contacts and 44 quarantine cases. However, 733 more patients recovered, increasing the total recoveries to 1,26,409. So far, 1,105 persons have succumbed to the disease in the city.

SC summons Bihar, Andhra CSs for delay in clearing Covid death claims

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the personal presence of Chief Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar via video conference at 2 pm over non-payment of ex-gratia compensation to kin of those who died of Covid-19.

The court ordered them to disburse compensations in three days and review rejected applications. At 2 pm the CS of AP appeared through the virtual mode and assured the SC that whoever has not received the Covid compensation will have their applications reviewed or else he is "ready to face contempt".

The bench of Justices MR Shah and Sanjiv Khanna later noted in its order that, the "CSs of AP and Bihar turned up through virtual mode. It is reported that by now AP has received 49,292 applications, 31,000 were found eligible and 6,000 were rejected. AP says payments to 28,000 claimants have been made. Another 10,000 is remaining out of which 5,000 clearance is there



and payment will be there in the next three days. Also, 6,000 rejected claims will be examined by the grievance redressal committee suo motu. If it is found that the rejection has been incorrect, the State shall reach out to all those claimants and give them the opportunity to remove defects. The AP CS has assured the court that AP shall ensure that not a single claimant who is eligible for compensation shall be deprived of it. We trust and hope that the CS will stand by what he has assured to this court."

The CS of Bihar could not speak to the bench despite being connected due to audio issues.

However, the advocate appearing assured the SC that all attempts will be made to reach the poor and illiterate so that they can submit their applications. "Looking into the peculiarity of the State, more effort is needed by the State of Bihar to reach the eligible persons, /kin/ family members of the ones who succumbed to Covid-19," the court ordered. The top court further ordered that "no claims be rejected on technical grounds."

State gets 50,000 OmiSure kits Energy Dept officials' appointment stirs hornet's nest

To be used in 4 cities initially

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Amidst the rising Covid-19 cases, the State on Wednesday received a first lot of 50,000 OmiSure kits, which are now being used in the country to detect the new Omicron variant.

The Health and Family Welfare department said that in the first phase, the kits would be used in four cities, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Brahmapur and Rourkela. Sharing details, Health Services Director Bijay Mohapatra said that after arrival of the kits, a dry run of them has already begun. "The kits will first be used for internal study and later be despatched to districts which are reporting high



numbers of Covid cases. The kits will be of great help to detect the new Omicron variant easily," he said. Mohapatra further said that the R value would remain high in some places as the virus transmission rate is high in the State. However, he urged people not to panic and get themselves tested even if

they develop mild symptoms. Efforts are afoot to increase the number of testing as per the Centre's guidelines, he said.

On the possibility of another lockdown, he said that as of now, no such situation has arisen in the State to impose restrictions like lockdown or shutdown.

Rampant flouting of parameters, nepotism alleged

SAROJ MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The lack of transparency and the flouting of parameters in appointment of senior officials in the Energy Department have left many eligible officers upset.

Take the case of the Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited (OPTCL) Director Finance Samir Ranjan Swain, whose service was terminated by the State Government on December 31, 2021 stating, "His further continuance is detrimental to the interest of the organisation." Later, Swain moved the Orissa High Court against the



order and managed to get a stay on it. However, insiders said Swain's appointment itself in the OPTCL was controversial as he was not qualifying the recruitment criteria which stated that if a candidate is from the private sector, the com-

pany in which he is working should be listed in the stock exchange. Swain was earlier employed as Additional Vice President, BSES, Rajdhani Power Ltd., a Joint Venture of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Government of NCT of Delhi. The aforesaid company is not listed in the stock exchanges. So his application for the OPTCL Director Finance post should have been rejected. The sources further

alleged that during the tender process for various contracts he favoured certain companies. He also showed undue favour to defaulting companies of executing agencies, who had left the works incomplete or executed it poorly. For this, the

OPTCL had deducted 10 per cent funds. But Swain waived the rules and paid the money to the defaulting companies. The appointment of Rajendra Senapathy and controversial functioning as Vice President and Director HR of Odisha Power Generation Corporation (OPGC) was also under the scanner.

The appointment of Odisha Coal and Power Limited Managing Director Sariputa Mishra also raised many eyebrows. He further appointed a couple as DGM (Civil) and Deputy Manager (HR) which raised many questions. The appointment of OHPC Managing Director Amaresh Kumar has also come under the lens. Due to these controversial appointments, other officers are feeling demoralised, let down and concerned about the organisations functioning and their future.

Companies Act violation Utkal Chamber directors penalised by RoC

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL) is embroiled in a fresh controversy relating to violation of provisions of the Companies Act with the Registrar of Companies (RoC) imposing penalty on the UCCIL as well as seven of its eight directors. Acting upon a petition of one of its members, the RoC who had been appointed as the Adjudicating Officer by the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs to enquire into the alleged violation of the Companies Act by the Chamber, has held that UCCIL had violated Section 12(3)(c) of the Act and liable for penal action.

The company regulator in its order dated January 14, 2022 had imposed a penalty of Rs 76,000 on the UCCIL and a similar amount on each of the seven directors including its president. The violation relates to publication of the

chamber's name wrongly in the Bhubaneswar edition of a national daily in a joint advertisement along with another company. UCCIL president Brahmananda Mishra had pleaded that the alleged offence was not intentional and the advertisement was published inadvertently by the other company. Only one director was exonerated and spared from penalty as he had submitted that he was ignorant about the publication of the advertisement and the matter had never come up before the Board of Directors of the chamber for discussion. This is a repeat violation by UCCIL as RoC had also pulled up the chamber and its directors for commission of similar violation relating to printing of its name in its official letter heads. For the last one and half years the chamber is embroiled in one controversy or other. On October 4, 2021, the Orissa High Court while disposing of two petition filed by the president of the chamber and

two members had observed that the controversial annual election of the directors-cum-office bearers of the chamber in January 2021 had been conducted neither as per the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 nor as per its own Article of Association. The individual directors of the chamber had also come under the scanner of the RoC earlier for violation of other provisions of the Companies Act. RoC had launched a prosecution against the directors in the Court of Additional Chief Judicial Mag-

istrate (Special) in this regard and they had been summoned to appear before the court to answer the charges. A petition praying for declaration of the January 2021 annual election of the chamber as null and void is also pending before in the National Company Law Tribunal, Cuttack. The existing Article of Association of the chamber has so far failed to obtain the approval of RoC as it did not fully conform to the provisions of the Companies Act.

strate (Special) in this regard and they had been summoned to appear before the court to answer the charges.

A petition praying for declaration of the January 2021 annual election of the chamber as null and void is also pending before in the National Company Law Tribunal, Cuttack. The existing Article of Association of the chamber has so far failed to obtain the approval of RoC as it did not fully conform to the provisions of the Companies Act.

'Remove posters with CM photos'

BJP submits memo to SEC

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP on Wednesday alleged that still hoardings, banners and posters with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's photo are seen everywhere in schools, panchayat offices, Government offices and public places and these advertisement campaigns are influencing voters.

A delegation of the party submitted a memorandum to the State Election Commissioner (SEC) drawing attention of the Commissioner on the alleged violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC)



now in force, by the ruling BJD leaders. They complained that even BDOs and Collectors by misusing

their power are supporting the ruling party, despite their role of enforcement officer. All along during the last few months officials supported in reservation of seats and preparing the voters list in favour of BJD, they alleged.

In Block offices entire system is working for BJD. Even GRS and Panchayat secretaries are influencing voters for BJD, they said.

Unit-I Haat shifted to new location

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Unit-I Haat (vegetable market) in the capital city was on Wednesday shifted to the Unit-I Boys' High School playground to ensure decongestion and social distancing amid the rise in Covid-19 cases.

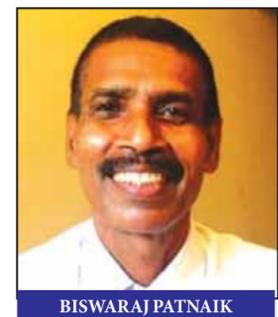
The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has asked the vendors to maintain a minimum distance of eight feet between two shops. Marks have been created on the ground for customers to maintain social distancing of six feet among themselves. The shopkeep-



ers have been directed to make sure that the customers adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines while buying vegetables from their shops.

Use of masks and hand sanitisers has also been mandated by the BMC, which has warned of stringent action against violation of the Covid-19 norms at the market.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE Local self-governance would fail if polls are party-linked



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

A gram panchayat, headed by a Sarpanch, is typically responsible for the administration of agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, drinking water, sanitation, roads, primary healthcare, small-scale industries, social welfare and education in the village. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has granted enormous power to the 'Sarpanch' who used to be kicked around by the BDO and as much as by the Village Level Worker (VLW), the lowest ranking public official, because Sarpanches, more specifically women among them, would know nothing about governance. A majority of the PRI officials, vastly ignorant of inherent powers, are only proxy creatures being ruthlessly controlled by the local MLAs or MPs depending upon who wields greater power by flexing financial or physical muscles. These puppets would never be told they are empowered formally to be boss of their affairs in the domains mentioned in previous lines.

Gandhi had dreamed of the much-coveted and widely-tested 'Gram Swaraaj' strongly in place since the ancient times under all kinds of monarchies, compassionate, cruel and indifferent. The idea of forming large groups or factions of people to advocate for their shared interests is fairly ancient. This leads to form political parties with their own people-friendly ideologies and pre-election manifestos. In ancient times, more than the villages, townships were heavily politicised like in Classical Athens during the days of Plato and Aristotle. The modern-day political parties emerged around the end of the 18th century only. They first appeared in Europe and the United States of America. The United Kingdom's Conservative Party and the Democratic Party, both frequently called the world's "oldest continuous political parties", have inspired people to form political outfits to serve the common folks. Local self-government in India essentially refers to governmental jurisdictions below the level of the State. India is a federal republic with three distinct spheres of government, Central, State and Local. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments give recognition and protection to local governments and empower States to have their own local government legislations. The 1992 historic amendments have given full autonomy to two very distinct forms, urban localities having Nagar Palikas that de-

rive powers from the individual State Governments the same way as the rural localities derive absolute authority as formalised under the panchayati raj system.

Since ancient times, the village governance in India was shouldered by the 'Panchas' meaning five publicly-accepted wise leaders. The village community would select, rather than elect, the Panchas unanimously to govern its affairs. The critical qualities looked for in the Panchas were character, truthfulness, benevolence, non-favouritism and skills of delivering justice without prejudice or bias. This practice remained in place until the Constitutional amendments emboldened the chosen local leaders. Thus, the neighbourhood guy or girl, known for being knowledgeable and do-gooder, is kind of forced to take the reins of power. It so happened until the recent times of wicked, corrupt political activities became the rule. The fellows chosen by the community would hide lest he or she should fail to deliver to the fellow beings' expectations. The founding fathers of independent India, while drafting the Constitution, did discuss the critical local governance issues but never gave any formal sanctity to making elections party-less and nonsectarian. Successive rulers left the matter hanging. Fortunately however, most States ensured local government elections were fought without any party affiliation or support. No one knows why the Biju Patnaik Gov-

CUO reopens today

PNS ■ KORAPUT

The Central University of Odisha (CUO), Koraput offices will reopen on Thursday after a Covid-related closure for seven days. The administrative office, library and laboratories will function in a full-fledged

day under the chairmanship of Vice-Chancellor Prof SK Palita, who urged non-teaching staffs to resume work in physical mode. The VC said, "Any employee even with minimum symptoms of Covid-19 should immediately inform the university doctor and Nodal Officer."

No bragging of Govt achievements in R-Day fest

SEC issues norms for dignitaries

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Election Commission (SEC) has issued detailed guidelines for hoisting of the National Flag and taking salute by the Ministers and State dignitaries on the occasion of the Republic Day this year.

After receiving letters from various quarters about attendance of political dignitaries in the Republic Day celebrations, the Commission has decided that there is no objection to Chief Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of the State doing honour in the Republic Day functions at various locations subject to the condition that in their speeches, they should confine themselves to extolling the achievements of freedom fighters and martyrs in securing freedom of the country, glorification of the nation,

etc. and so on. They are strict restrictions on harping on Government's achievements, it has decided. "Under no circumstances, should the occasion become a platform for political campaigning or for highlighting the achievements of the State Government," Commission Secretary RN Sahu told all senior officers including PS of Chief Minister and Ministers. Further, the Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State or any other political functionary cannot do the honours at any location on Republic day function within their home district. The Commission has also decided that there shall be no highlighting of the achievements of the Government or any department during the celebrations.

Sahu said the Commission has no objection to the organisation of cultural functions in connection with the Republic Day celebrations and being attended by the Chief Minister, Minister and other political functionaries.

In Cuttack Honey-trap racket busted; 3 held

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Commissionerate police busted a honey-trap racket and arrested three persons for their alleged involvement in Cuttack on Wednesday. The cops also seized Rs 25,000 in cash, three mobile phones and an ATM card from the accused. However, a woman, who was also involved in the racket, was still at large. The accused were arrested on

the charge of luring a person and later blackmailing him for money. The Lalbag police raided the area and arrested the accused including a fourth class employee of a college. "The accused chatted with a youth for some time and trapped him with the help of a woman. Then, they called him to a place and forcibly took away his ATM card. The accused also beat the youth mercilessly and got the pin number of his ATM.

'Hold polls for S'pur, R'kela along with other ULBs'

Forum writes to CM, SEC
PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
The Sambalpur Development Forum has demanded before the Chief Minister and the State Election Commissioner (SEC) to conduct elections in the two municipal corporations at Sambalpur and Rourkela with other urban local bodies (ULBs).
In its letter the CM and SEC, president of the forum Dr

Aditya Prasad Padhi and vice president Prof Sankar Prasad Pati mentioned that the State Government is going to hold election for the three tier PRI system and for 107 NACs and Municipalities of the State. But Sambalpur and Rourkela are excluded from the list since some cases are subjudice for these two places. "Hence, the State Government and State Election Commissioner should take necessary steps to solve the legal problems and facilitate scope for election for these two corpora-

tions," wrote Dr Padhi and Prof Pati in their letter.
Sambalpur Municipality was converted to Municipal Corporation in the year 2013 and nine years have passed since then. But the people here have not been able to elect a council for them which can solve their problems better and the Government is also not showing any sincerity or interest for election here, they told. The result being developmental activities are going on at a very slow pace all over the corporation area, they wrote. Since

two months are in hand for the ULBs election, the State Government and SEC can also take up the matter with court to lift the stay and comply with the other necessities suitably so that election could be possible here too, they urged.
"We hope CM Naveen Patnaik and SEC Aditya Padhi will take up this matter with all seriousness, so that people of these two cities of Western Odisha can also see elected bodies who can look after their development better," they said.

In Baleswar 224 road deaths in 430 mishaps in yr

194 seriously injured
PNS ■ BALESWAR
In the past one year from December 2021 to December 2022, 224 deaths have taken place out of 430 road accidents in the district. Further, 194 serious injured cases and 64 minor injured cases were reported in road mishap related cases.
For exhibiting good Samaritan works including ferrying road accident injured persons to hospitals, six people were felicitated. Addi-

tional District Magistrate (Revenue) Bhabesh Nayak and Chief District Medical Officer Dulalsen Jagdeo were among the officials present in the meeting. Concerns were expressed for non-repair of damaged and dilapidated roads which were identified to be taken up on a war footing since they were potential hazards for causing accidents. It was stressed to submit a joint report after spot verification within 24 hours of accidents. Emphasis was laid on displaying signage particularly at the entry point to Baleswar town from Bhubaneswar end and

Bampada, besides adequate illumination. The speakers also stressed on the repair of service roads. It was decided that 'No helmet No petrol' rule will be strictly enforced, besides CCTV installation at major points, strict checking of rash and negligence driving, minor, drunk driving and overloading etc.
Further, decisions were taken not to allow heavy vehicles plying on the rail flyover bridge till completion of its repair and constructions of truck terminals for avoiding parking of trucks and lorries on the National Highway.

In Chhatrapur BJD, Cong leaders join BJD



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
A ceremony was held at the BJD Ganjam district office here on Tuesday to welcome the leaders from the BJP and the Congress, who under the leadership of Chhatrapur MLA Suresh Behera recently joined the BJD in the presence of the Chief Minister's political adviser Gopabandhu Das at the Bhubaneswar State office.
BJD district president Ramesh Chandra Chaupatnaik, vice-presi-

dent Sanjit Panigrahi, general secretary Manoj Mohapatra and secretary P Ashwini welcomed the newcomers, who are from the Chhatrapur Assembly constituency.
These leaders are P Dharma Reddy, Braja Mohan Acharya, Gopal Rao, Badal Behera, Manoj Padhy, Feroj Behera, N Wardha Raju Reddy, Aswini Behera and Rabindra Sahu. Their joining the BJD has added to the strength of the ruling party in the Chhatrapur constituency.

Nachika files papers for ZP seat



PNS ■ JEYPORE
Tribal leader and Chasi Mulia Adivashi Sangha (CMAS) chief Nachika Linga on Wednesday filed nomination papers to contest for the Narayanpatna Zilla Parishad seat in Koraput district.

He filed his nominations at the Sub-Collector's office. In the 2017 panchayat polls, Nachika had filed his nominations for the same seat through his lawyer Gupta Prasad Panigrahi as he was lodged in the Koraput Circle Jail in connection with 45 different cases, including

the attack on the Narayanpatna police station on November 20, 2009. He surrendered before police in October 2014.
After spending six years in jail, he was released on bail granted by the Orissa High Court in November 2020.

BJD declares nominees for 18 K'mal ZP zones

PNS ■ PHULBANI
The Kandhamal BJD on Tuesday declared candidates for 18 Zilla Parishad zones. The names were declared in presence of Phulbani MLA Angad Kanhar and party's district president Saroj Karna.
District Saha Prabhari Kishore Meher was also present. BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik recommended the names, a list of which

was sent in a sealed cover and the same was declared in a huge gathering of workers. For Nuagan block, zone 1 Anita Mallick, zone 2 Susant Kanhar, Khajuripada block, zone 3 Mamata Mallick, zone 4 Subhasree Nayak, G Udayagiri block, zone 5 Lilima Pradhan, Chakapad block, zone 6 Mamatarani Behera, Tikabali block, zone 7 Sadhabaani Nayak, zone 8, Namita Kanhar, Tumudibandh block, zone 9, Nabin

Patra, Daringbadi block, zone 10 Ranjan Kumar Pradhan, zone 11, Ramakant Majhi, Phiringia block, zone 12, Nilagiri Digal, zone 13, Jayashree Kanhar, phulbani block, zone 14, Chandrama Mallick, Balliguda block, zone 15 Nalini mallick, zone 16, Asis Digal, Raikia block, zone 17 Sunanda Behera, zone 18 Mamatarani Pradhan. All the candidates will file their nomination on January 20 and 21.

In Balangir Pangolin seized; 1 held

PNS ■ BALANGIR
A joint team of Special Task Force (STF) of the Crime Branch and Forest Department officials arrested a youth and seized a live pangolin from his possession at Bargaon Chhak in Balangir district on Tuesday evening.
The accused Ajit Kumar Budek belongs to Tamian of Patnagarh block in the district. Acting on a tipoff, the joint team conducted a raid. During the search, the pangolin



and incriminating articles were recovered from Budek's possession.
After medical checkup, the pangolin would be released into the wild. Further investigation was on. Notably, since 2020, the STF during its crackdown against the illegal wildlife trade has rescued 20 live pangolins.

Save nature to fight pandemic: Environmentalist

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR
Sexagenarian environmentalist and founder of Aryabhata Foundation Sudhir Kumar Rout said the Covid 19 pandemic and the climate change are closely linked.
The pandemic has set the alarm bell ringing. If mankind especially the affluent ones fail to respond timely, it will wreck havoc in cataclysmic proportion, Rout added. Just as the global warming is the result of ever-

increasing economic activity and over exploitation of Nature, it is clear now that outbreaks of infectious diseases are also hidden cost of economic development, brought about by changing land use and human intrusion upon wildlife habitats. Indeed, both are effects of ever increasing acceleration in the insatiable thirst for accumulation of wealth and power, he added. In that sense climate change driven events and the pandemic are cognate phenomena, he told.
"The rich countries with high

per capita income and advanced health care system suffered the worst. The per capita income of Vietnam, for example, is far less compared to wealthier nations (with global ranking in income 126 out of 189 countries). Yet, despite sharing a long border with China, Vietnam had very few Covid-19 cases. Many poor east and southeastern countries suffered the least. The affluent nations like Italy, Spain, France, and including UK and US with most developed healthcare system are worst sufferers of the

pandemic. Does the Nature selectively take revenge on the worst perpetrators, Rout questioned? Hence, it is time to wake up," he told.
Rout with his consistent efforts spanning over 14 years has covered 10 bald hills with vegetation. Rout's daily foot march aims to spread awareness among the people to save Mother Earth. It can be possible by massive plantations, saving water bodies from pollution, and getting rid of single-use plastics, Rout said.

Youth kills cousin sis before PS!

Over family row
PNS ■ SAMBALPUR
Over a prolonged family dispute, a youth killed his cousin sister in front of the Kisinda police station. The incident took place on Wednesday evening when Kumari Meher (30) was coming

to lodge an FIR against her uncle's family over a silly matter of cow destroying crops. Iriked, her brother Khirod Rohidas (20) followed her in a bi-cycle and an axe in hand. He stopped his sister from making a police complaint but she declined. Soon, Khirod pounced upon her attacking her

with the axe. The girl collapsed dead at the spot in front of the police station. The police staff and the public rushed to rescue the girl but in vain. Rairakhol SDPO Prasant Meher went to the spot as the IIC of the Kisinda was on leave. Khirod fled the spot after the incident.

In Brahmapur Job racket busted; couple held

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
A couple was arrested by the Gosaninagaon police from the Brahma Nagar here for allegedly duping 40 job aspirants of around Rs 10 lakh. The arrested couple Krushna Chandra Sethi and his wife Simple Sethi are residents of Medical Bank Colony in the city. The police also seized 10 personal computers, a laptop, identity cards, bank accounts and incriminating documents. The couple opened an organisation by the name of 'KS

Real Estate Services' at Brahma Nagar and issued an advertisement for different posts like district manager and recruited 40 unemployed youths in an organisation named 'Bhanwariya Infra Project Private Limited'. They signed an agreement with the youths and also issued them identity cards. The police began probe into the couple's activities basing on an FIR lodged by Vijaya Kumar Thakur, an employee of the Bhanwariya Infra Project, and arrested the couple.

Lobby on in BJD for BeMC Mayor post

Party has a bunch of hopefuls to choose from
KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR
After the Government gave a green signal for the election to local urban bodies like corporations, municipalities and NACs in the State and notified the reservation of seats on January 15, hectic lobby among the key aspirants is on for Mayor ticket in the ruling BJD here.
The Mayor post of the

Bherampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) is reserved for women candidates this time. But the decision is being opposed vehemently by the BJP and Congress. Former Ganjam district BJP president KC Pati said that the reservation of BeMC Mayor post for women is contrary to the rulings of the Supreme Court. The SC in its historic ruling has approved only 50% reservation for women. Out of Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, and Brahmapur municipal corporations, Mayor position for two corporations has been reserved for women which constitute 70%, which is unjust.

If the Government does not reconsider its decision, the BJP however will give a befitting suitable woman candidate for the position, Pati pointed out. Similarly, Ganjam District Congress president and MLA of Sanakhemundi Ramesh Chandra Jena criticised the Government for frequent and deliberate change of the quota list to suit its interest. The Government in order to avoid internal conflict of the ruling BJD is contemplating to change the list once again, sources said.
In case the reservation list is not changed and the position is

made unreserved, Congress party is having more than six highly qualified and competent woman candidates and the party after due consultation with the senior leaders will declare the name of the appropriate candidate at the appropriate time, said Jena. Though both BJP and Congress are having many prospective candidates, but their organizations are very weak. They neither have significant contributions for the public, nor have rapport with the public; hence it would be difficult for them to face the voters. They have kept a strict vigil on the

finalisation of candidate of the ruling BJD. Meanwhile speculations are made about the finalisation of names from among a few hopefuls like Mamata Bisoyi, Madhabi, Sanghamitra Dalai and Sonali Gantayat in the BJD. Sources said that, the ruling BJD is trying to pick up someone having strong organisation capability and leadership quality.
Notably, in the last municipal election in 40 wards, the ruling BJD had captured 21, BJP had won 2, Congress had won 16 and the remaining one had gone to Independent candidate.

Opp States against Centre's sway over IAS babus

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

The Centre's effort to impose "supremacy" over the IAS, IPS officers, particularly those discharging duties within their respective State/UT cadres, seems to run into rough weather. Only the BJP-ruled States are ready to accept the 'Proposal for Amendments in IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954'.

The proposed amendment states that an officer whom the Centre wants on deputation would "stand relieved" from his or her respective cadre, even if the state government concerned disagreed or didn't give its consent within the specified time.

Top sources in the government said that not even the JD (U)-BJP alliance government in Bihar is not ready to comply with the latest diktat of Centre on top level of Indian bureaucracy. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has already written a protest letter

in this regard to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Sources also said Mamata is believed to have spoken to some Opposition-ruled states to vehemently protest this order.

States like Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Punjab and Chhattisgarh have made up their mind to turn down the Centre's proposal.

DOPT sources mentioned that the amendments will be tabled in the budget session of Parliament. "I feel that only the BJP-ruled States will oblige. Though the move is good as the Centre will finally have its supreme authority on its IAS even in cases of punishment, but States will have its own reservation," said a top serving IAS of a State.

Another top IAS told The Pioneer that the proposal is nothing but a move to force the officer dñance to the tune of the Centre. "When the officer, like in the case of West Bengal

Chief Secretary, will not meet Centre's expectations then her-will end up being harassed at the Centre," remarked the officer. The move is understood to have come by the Centre after West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay, did not acknowledge the central government orders to report just a day before his retirement, which was issued after Mamata Banerjee and the chief secretary failed to attend PM Modi's Cyclone Yaas review meeting.

The January 12 proposal is an amendment to the existing one which has consent of the States or UTs before the officer reports to Centre as guided by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

A top DoPT official justified the changes as proposed as it is being done to overcome the shortage of IAS officers in the central government. The letter is an extension of an earlier amendment proposal that was sent to the states three weeks ago. In the first proposal, the

Centre asked the states to specify a certain number of officers whom they would relieve for central deputation. The first amendment proposal was sent to the states on December 20 and they were asked to respond by January 5. Subsequent reminders seeking a response were sent on December 27 and January 6. Now the January 12 letter to States has sought them to respond before January 25.

The initial draft proposal said the "actual number of officers to be deputed to the central government shall be decided by the central government in consultation with the state government concerned".

And in the case of disagreement with the concerned state, "the matter shall be decided by the central government, and the state governments concerned shall give effect to the decision of the central government within a specified time". However, in the latest letter, the Modi government has tweaked its draft proposal. "In specific

situations, where services of cadre officers are required by the central government in public interest, the central government may seek the services of such officers for posting under the central government... and the state government concerned shall give effect to the decision of the central government within the specified time," the latest letter states.

"...wherever the state government concerned does not give effect to the decision of the central government within the specified time, the officers shall stand relieved from cadre from the date as may be specified by the central government," it adds.

Calling the amendment "against the spirit of cooperative federalism", Mamata wrote: "The amendment upsets the time-tested harmonious arrangements which have existed between the Centre and the states in the matter of posting of IAS and IPS officers."

Renewable energy gets ₹1,500 cr boost

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved the equity infusion of Rs 1,500 crore in Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA).

The Cabinet also approved the payment of ex-gratia amount of Rs. 973.74 crore pertaining to remaining claims submitted by Lending Institutions and approved extension of National Commission for Safai Karmchairs (NCSK) for three years.

Briefing media, Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said that infusion of Rs.1500 crore in IREDA will generate approximately 10200 jobs per year



and CO2 equivalent emission reduction of approximately 7.49 Million Tonnes CO2/year. "To lend Rs.12000 crore approximately to the RE sector, thus facilitate the debt requirement of RE of additional capacity of approximately 3500-4000 MW.

To enhance its network which will help it in additional RE financing, thus contributing better to the Government of India targets

for RE. To improve the capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR) to facilitate its lending and borrowing operations," said Government in a statement.

"By granting ex-gratia payment of difference between compound interest and simple interest during the six month moratorium period to distressed/vulnerable category of borrowers, irrespective of whether the borrower had availed of moratorium or not, the scheme would equitably help small borrowers bear the stress on account of the pandemic and get back on their feet.

Operational guidelines for the scheme are already issued with the approval of the Cabinet. The said amount of Rs. 973.74 crore will be disbursed in accordance with the said operational guidelines," said Government.

Israel discuss widening scope of bilateral industrial R&D and technological innovation fund

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Experts from India and Israel deliberated on widening the scope of the bilateral Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F), approved three joint research and development projects worth USD 5.5 million and suggested measures to create a broader collaborative ecosystem between the two countries, the science and technology ministry said on Wednesday.

The discussions took place virtually on Tuesday in the presence of officials from the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Israel Innovation Authority (IIA), GITA and various industries partners. The experts from the two countries deliberated on widening the scope of the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) at its eighth governing body meeting. They approved three joint research and development projects worth USD 5.5

million and suggested measures to create a broader India-Israel collaborative ecosystem.

"The I4F programme has a lot of potential. This board meeting will give us new thoughts, new directions on how to go forward," said S Chandrasekhar, Secretary, DST and India Co-Chair, acknowledging the contributions made by Israel in the field of science and technology.

"So far, the priority areas have been agriculture, security and other important areas. There is further scope of increasing the quantum of projects received, which calls for the need to conduct more online meetings amongst the startup ecosystems of Israel and India," he said in a statement. A m i r a m Appelbaum, Co-Chair, Israel and chairman of the board, IIA, said despite the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to continue with the efforts of collaboration.

"I4F is one of the examples of collaborations which we want

to carry forward. We look forward to go through interesting applications of projects submitted in this programme," he said. The governing body ratified the minutes of the seventh board meeting, which was followed by giving its approval to the three research and development projects with an overall budget of USD 5.5 million. The projects were "Centrally Monitored IoT Nanosensors for Molecular Diagnostics in Healthcare and Screening Applications", "NoMoreMos - a mosquito control biological solution" and "IoT-enabled satellite communication for real-time collection of agriculture and environment data across India".

The members further discussed the status of the ongoing projects under the I4F since 2018. The Israeli side introduced the new I4F website and match-making platform developed as a measure to increase the popularity of the joint programme and presented a list of programmes planned for 2022.

China's PLA abducts boy from inside Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh: MP Tapir Gao

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has abducted a 17-year-old boy from inside Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Siang district, state's MP Tapir Gao said on Wednesday.

Gao said the teenager, identified as Miram Taron, was abducted by the PLA from Lungta Jor area under Siyungla area on Tuesday. Taron's friend Johnny Yaifying, who managed to escape, informed the authorities about the kidnapping by the PLA, Gao told PTI over phone from Ziro, the district headquarters of Lower Subansiri district. Both are local hunters and belong to Zido village. The MP said the incident took place near the place where Tsangpo river enters India in Arunachal Pradesh. Tsangpo is called as Siang in Arunachal Pradesh and Brahmaputra in Assam. Earlier, Gao tweeted: "Chinese #PLA has abducted Sh Miram

Taron, 17 years of Zido vill. Yesterday 18th Jan 2022 from inside Indian territory, Lungta Jor area (China built 3-4 kms road inside India in 2018) under Siyungla area (Bishing village) of Upper Siang dist, Arunachal Pradesh". "His friend escaped from PLA and reported to the authorities. "All the agencies of Govt of India are requested to step up for his early release," he said in another tweet and posted pictures of the abducted boy. Gao also said that he has informed Union Minister of State for Home Nisith Pramanik about the incident and requested him to take necessary action in this regard. He tagged Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the Indian Army in his tweets. In September 2020, the PLA had abducted five youths from Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri district and released them after about a week.

Jaishankar discusses ties with Finnish, Mexican counterparts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday had discussions with his Finnish counterpart Pekka Haavisto on a host of issues, including Afghanistan. In a tweet, Jaishankar said in his wide-ranging discussions with Haavisto, he noted the steady growth of bilateral cooperation.

"Agreed that we would work to strengthen the ties further in 2022," he said. "Exchanged views about Afghanistan in detail. India and Finland have cooperated in the past on humanitarian support there," Jaishankar said. "Expect to work closely with each other in international organisations, including the UN Human Rights Council," he added.

Later, in another tweet, Jaishankar said he had a warm conversation with Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon.

Miffed over denial of ticket, BJP leaders quits party, joins BSP

PTI ■ MATHURA UP

Pained over the denial of a ticket for the upcoming Assembly polls, senior BJP leader S K Sharma resigned from the primary membership of the party and joined the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Wednesday.

His close aide Niraj Rawat also followed suit. Sharma had contested the 2017 Assembly elections on the BJP ticket from Mant constituency. "The BJP has deceived me twice and the party has lost its earlier character," Sharma told reporters. Sharma said though he wanted to contest from Mathura in 2017, the BJP leadership compelled him to enter the fray from Mant and assured him a berth in the legislative council in case he lost. Though he was not offered a seat in the Upper House, Sharma said, he was instructed to work in Mant and the leadership assured him a

ticket from the same constituency this time. However, that was not to be the case. Sharma said he did not seek a "single penny" from the BJP but mentioned that he had given enough to the party. "Now, I have resigned from all positions in the BJP and joined the BSP. Not only this, I will also contest as the BSP candidate from Mathura," Sharma, who is expected to file his nomination papers on Thursday, said. Meanwhile, alliance partners Samajwadi Party (SP) and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) seem to have locked horns over the Mant Assembly seat. Despite the pact between the two parties, SP's national spokesperson Sanjai Lathar claimed that the party has given him a go ahead to contest from the constituency while RLD candidate Yogesh Nauhar has already filed his nomination papers claiming that he is the official candidate of the alliance.

Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra shot up by 4,490 cases

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The daily Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra shot up by 4,490 cases to touch a tally of 43,697 cases on Wednesday, even as the pandemic cases went up in Mumbai by 883 cases to reach the daily tally of 6,032 cases. The State, meanwhile, recorded 214 fresh Omicron cases during the day, taking the total number of the new Covid variant registered to 2074.

On a day when the Covid-19 claimed 49 lives as against 53 deaths registered on Tuesday, the state recorded 43,697 fresh infections as against Tuesday's tally of 39,207 deaths. With fresh infections, the total number of Covid-19 cases in the state went up from 72,82,128 cases to 73,25,825

cases. Mumbai, which has been witnessing drop in the number of cases for the last few days, witnessed an increase in the fresh Covid-19 cases from 5,149 cases on Tuesday to 6,032 cases on Wednesday. With the fresh tally of fresh cases, the total Covid-19 cases rose from 10,11,967 cases to 10,01,7999 cases. As 46,591 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 68,68,816 to 69,15,407 cases. The recovery rate in the state rose from 94.32 per cent to 94.4 per cent. The number of "active cases" in the state increased from 2,67,659 to 2,64,708. The fatality rate in state dropped from 1.94 per cent to 1.93 per cent.

BJP will contest UP polls with Apna Dal, Nishad Party: Nadda

DEEPAK UPRETI ■ New Delhi

BJP National President JP Nadda on Wednesday announced that his party will contest the upcoming Uttar Pradesh polls jointly with Apna Dal and Nishad Party.

The party will contest on 403 seats, he said. However, the seat-sharing formula is yet to be finalised and spelled out.

The announcement was made after a BJP Central Election Committee meeting that was held here with Union Ministers Amit Shah, Anurag Thakur, UP CM Yogi Adityanath, BJP national president JP Nadda, Apna Dal (S) leader Anupriya Patel and Nishad Party chief Sanjay Nishad attending it. "Today a big change is being seen in UP under the leadership of Modi ji and due to the tireless efforts

of Yogi ji. Be it education, connectivity, investment, everywhere work has been done on a large scale", Nadda said during the address. Welcoming the alliance of all three parties, Patel said, "Through the alliance of BJP, Nishad Party and Apna Dal, we will contest and win the UP assembly polls, and will steer the state in the direction of development".

Ahead of this announcement, the working president of Apna Dal (Sonelal) Ashish Patel had on Tuesday said that their focus is to get "winnable seats" during seat-sharing talks with BJP. "Our complete focus is to get seats that are winnable. This is our priority," Patel said.

"Some of these seats include Pratapgarh Sadar, Vishvathganj, Shohratgarh, Sevapuri, Chhanbey, Soraon, Jahanabad," he said.



The Naval brass band performs during a rehearsal for the Beating Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

PTI photo

Omicron variant may reduce incidence of severe Covid disease

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Omicron variant of coronavirus may reduce the incidence of severe Covid-19 disease, and the infection may become less disruptive to individuals and society in the future, according to a study conducted by researchers in South Africa.

The findings of the yet-to-be peer-reviewed study are consistent with the previous observations of Omicron displacing Delta since the variant can elicit immunity which neutralizes Delta.

The researchers from Africa Health Research Institute observed in samples from 23 people infected with Omicron in November and December that the variant escapes neutralising immunity elicited by Delta infection.

This indicates that Omicron can re-infect Delta-infected individuals but not vice-versa, giving Omicron an advantage over Delta, they said. "The implications of such displacement would depend on whether Omicron is indeed less pathogenic than Delta. If so, then the incidence of Covid-19 severe disease would be reduced and the infection may shift to

become less disruptive to individuals and society," the authors of the study noted. The finding is an update to the study by the same research team which found enhancement of immunity against Delta variant with Omicron infection. "We were able to add study participants to see more clearly the effect of vaccination," Professor Alex Sigal, from Africa Health Research Institute tweeted on Tuesday.

The earlier part of the study, posted on the pre-print repository MedRxiv, used data from 15 previously vaccinated and unvaccinated people who were infected with the Omicron variant.

The scientists used plasma, a blood product which contains antibodies, from the participants to test the ability of the antibodies to control both Omicron and Delta in the lab - a so-called 'neutralisation' test. The results show a developing antibody response to Omicron, with neutralisation increasing 14-fold over this time.

However, the team also observed that the participants developed some enhanced immunity against the Delta variant, with Delta neutralisation increasing 4.4-fold.

DGCA extends suspension of int'l flights till Feb 28

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the rise in Omicron Covid cases, the Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has extended the suspension on scheduled international passenger flights till 28 February 2022. Flights under air bubble arrangements will not be affected, it said.

"The authority has decided to extend the suspension of Scheduled International commercial passenger services to/from India till 2359 hrs IST of 28th February 2022," reads an official order of the DGCA. The decision comes as the world is braving a fresh wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, driven by Omicron, the latest variant of COVID-19.

The DGCA had on November 26, 2021, announced that India will resume scheduled international passenger flights from December 15, 2021. Just a day later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the Civil Aviation Ministry and the DGCA to review its decision in wake of the rising concerns of the COVID-19 variant Omicron.

On December 1, 2021, the DGCA revoked its November 26 decision without saying how long the suspension of scheduled international flights will continue. International flights were first suspended in March 23, 2020 after a nationwide lockdown was imposed to tackle the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The suspension was extended every month allowing emergency international travel under the air bubble agreements.

India has air transport bubbles with Afghanistan, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tanzania, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, US and Uzbekistan. The agreements allow both-way air travel under some terms and conditions. No direct air travel is allowed to countries not covered under air travel bubble agreements.

Handbook on good practices for cooperatives released

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

To help cooperatives in India and abroad innovate and adopt best practices to not only stay competitive but also distinguish themselves as successful commercial entities, a policy recommendation handbook on SAHAKAR PRAGYA Good Practices for Cooperatives was released here.

The handbook which was jointly released by ICA AP President Dr Chandra Pal Singh Yadav and NCU President Dileep Sanghani is based on a 'Brain Storming Session on International Good Practices Platform for Cooperatives' conducted earlier by Laxmanrao Inamdar National Academy for Cooperative Research and Development (LINAC) of NCDC. After releasing the

document, newly elected ICA AP (International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific) President Dr Chandra Pal Singh Yadav pointed out that "the cooperatives have inherent advantages in tackling the problems of poverty alleviation, food security, and employment generation—a path to self-reliance.

This has also been reflected during the Covid-19 times. "I am certain that this handbook will be a beacon of light for many cooperatives looking to contribute to Atmanirbhar Bharati self-reliant India".

Yadav who is the first Indian to head ICA Asia-Pacific as its President, was of the view that energy of the youth should be channelized for the development of the country through the cooperatives. If we showcase success stories of the cooperatives among them, they will be

encouraged to venture into the cooperative sector and become job providers instead of job seekers in the corporate world.

MD NCDC Sundeep Nayak and National President Sahakar Bharati DN Thakur were also present at the event.

A compendium of guidelines, resources, methodologies, key learning, case studies of the best performing cooperatives in India and abroad and the outcome and impact, the handbook would serve as an action plan that can help these entities to achieve the goal of self-reliance.

On the occasion, NCDC-LINAC and ICAAP also signed a pact intending to assimilate and develop further on the core strengths, experience and institutional objectives of the respective parties in the interest of advancement

of research, study, documentation and training for development of the cooperative sector. Dileep Sanghani said, "It is heartening to note that, taking a cue from Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, NCDC-LINAC and International Co-Operative Alliance Asia And Pacific (ICA AP) have come together to set up a platform to share their wide experience and ideas for transmitting Indian good practices of cooperatives abroad and vice versa."

"The handbook has been developed by LINAC-NCDC in consultation with eminent experts and leading organizations in the domain of cooperatives.

The consultation process for the Handbook was initiated in November 2021 inspired by the ideas of the Union Cooperation Minister," said Nayak.

Kerala Govt calls situation grave after 2 yrs of Covid-19 breakout

37% people found +ve after testing over 91K in 24 hrs: Min
KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

For the first time since Covid-19 broke out in Kerala in 2020, the Kerala Government has termed the situation grave as well as serious and called for urgent restrictions and regulations. Veena George, health minister, who addressed the media on Wednesday after a Cabinet meeting said that 34,199 persons were diagnosed with the pandemic after testing 91,983 samples during the last 24 hours. The death toll reached 51,160 as 49 persons succumbed to Covid-19 during the last 24 hours as Kerala is experiencing the death continuing its "Thaandav"

across the State, according to a Government doctor. The Test Positivity Rate on Wednesday was 37.17 per cent. A review meeting has been called for Thursday in which ministers, department secretaries as well as health professionals would take stock of the present situation. "The meeting scheduled for Thursday would decide whether to shut down schools and colleges in the State. We will consider bringing in night curfew and week end shut down," said Veena George. The minister denied the allegations made by Leader of the Opposition that the CPI(M) district conventions and the Mega Thiruvathiras (traditional dance and song programme presented by hundreds of women at Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur and Ernakulam praising Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan) were responsible for the spurt in the number of patients.

She said the double attack by the delta variant of the Covid and the Omicron were responsible for the shooting up of the pandemic cases in Kerala. Pinarayi Vijayan, suffering from a serious ailment, is undergoing treatment in a United States Hospital and would be back only by the end of January. There are 645 Omicron patients in the State, according to the Health Minister. Though she said that only 3.2 per cent of the 1.68 lakh Covid patients have been admitted to the hospital, a Kerala Government Medical Doctors association said that they were under orders not to admit patients tested positive to the hospital. "The attempt is to portray all well in the State and we do not know how long this would succeed," said a Government physician in General Hospital, Ernakulam.

WhatsApp rebellion on in Bengal BJP

Rebel faction holds secret talks; 30 leaders meet to chalk out future plan

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

WhatsApp rebellion continued in Bengal BJP with the rebel faction of the State party unit holding secret meetings with at least 30 saffron MLAs, inside sources said adding the leaders met virtually on Tuesday to chalk out future plans. Curiously the rebel faction of the party is being led by junior Union Minister Shantanu Thakur who has already threatened to launch a movement for implantation of the Citizenship Amendment Act. According to sources the rebel faction of the State BJP unit ---including former State vice president Jayprakash Majumdar, Ritesh Tewari, Sayantan Basu --- held a secret

meeting with the 30 legislators "to know their views about the new office bearers who had been inducted in the State unit of the party." Out of the 77 seats won by the Bengal BJP in this year's election it lost 5 to the ruling TMC on account of resignations and defection. The rebel leaders are likely to hold meeting with the BJP MLAs of Bankura and Purulia later this week before taking a 'final decision'. On what the final decision could be one of the senior leaders of the rebel group said "this does not mean that we are quitting the party and going to the Trinamool Congress ... we want the party State unit to function properly ... we want to save the BJP from dissolution in Bengal as some of the



leaders are trying to do ... these leaders are sold out to the TMC leadership... they are hand-in-glove with the Trinamool which is why they are misleading the national leadership into taking decisions not favourable to the party in Bengal." Some rebel leaders were likely to visit Delhi where later this month may meet national functionaries, sources said. "We will tell how some of the

leaders are trying to sell out the party to the TMC," one of the leaders said apparently aiming at former BJP State president Dilip Ghosh. The Bengal BJP underwent a massive reshuffle last month with a number of leaders losing their jobs giving way to new faces. Many leaders see Ghosh's hand in the reshuffle. The rebellion had started about a month ago when one after the other at least 10 MLAs from North 24 Parganas and Bankura left the designated party WhatsApp group. When asked, Ghosh said he was not concerned with what was going on in WhatsApp. "I am a man of the people and don't get much time to peep into what is happening in the WhatsApp," he said.

Netaji tried to convince Aparna not to join BJP, claims Akhilesh

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav tried hard to convince his daughter-in-law Aparna Yadav to not join the BJP, party chief Akhilesh Yadav said on Wednesday and expressed his happiness that the SP's socialist ideology is expanding its reach. Akhilesh Yadav, who sent his sister-in-law best wishes for her move to the BJP, also addressed speculation on whether he would contest the assembly elections and said he would consult the people of his parliamentary constituency Azamgarh. "If I contest the assembly election, it will be after taking permission from the people of Azamgarh who have elected me as MP," he told reporters when asked if he would enter into the electoral fray for the

coming elections. In his first response to Aparna Yadav joining the BJP, Akhilesh Yadav said he would like to congratulate her and extend her his best wishes. "I am also happy that our socialist ideology is expanding. I hope that our ideology will reach there and work to save the constitution and democracy," the SP president said. "Netaji (Mulayam Singh Yadav) tried very hard to convince her," he said when asked if efforts were made to stop Aparna Yadav from joining the ruling party. Aparna Yadav is married to Prateek Yadav, the son of Mulayam Singh Yadav's second wife, while Akhilesh Yadav is his son from the first marriage. She joined the BJP in the presence of Uttar Pradesh

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and its state chief Swatantra Dev Singh. Expressing her admiration for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she said the nation's interest has always been a priority for her and praised several schemes of the BJP government for cleanliness, woman empowerment and employment. There had been much speculation about her joining the BJP, and the development highlights the rift in the SP's ruling family at a time Akhilesh Yadav has been working to rally the party's base in the run up to the state assembly polls beginning next month. Maurya was also quick to attack Akhilesh Yadav, saying he has not been successful in his family and was also "unsuccessful" as chief minister and MP. **PTI**

Omicron causing hospitalisation, deaths: WHO chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid an ongoing resurgence across the world, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is causing hospitalizations and deaths the world over, and the narrative that it is a mild disease is misleading. The global coronavirus caseload has topped 333.5 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.55 million and vaccinations to over 9.68 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University, India on Wednesday reported 2,82,970 fresh Covid cases in the last 24 hours, which is a rise of over 18 percent from the previous day's count. "Make no mistake, Omicron is causing hospitalizations and deaths, and even the less severe cases are inundating health facilities," the WHO chief said late on Tuesday. "Omicron may be less

severe, on average, but the narrative that it is a mild disease is misleading, hurts the overall response, and costs more lives," he added. According to Tedros, Covid is circulating far too intensely with many still vulnerable. "For many countries, the next few weeks remain really critical for health systems. I urge everyone to do their best to reduce the risk of infection so that you can help take pressure off the system," he emphasized. Tedros said that we can still significantly reduce the impact of the current wave by sharing and using health tools effectively and implementing public health and social measures that we know work. "Every variant of the COVID-19 virus, including Omicron, is dangerous and can cause: severe disease, death, further virus mutations and jeopardize the effectiveness of the tools we have to fight it," said the WHO.

PM Modi to lead poll campaign in Uttar Pradesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead the Bharatiya Janata Party's election campaign for Uttar Pradesh as the party released the list of its 30 star campaigners, excluding the mother-son duo of Maneka Gandhi and Varun Gandhi. Besides the prime minister, the high profile list includes the names of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP national president JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and 26 others. However, the mother-son duo of Maneka Gandhi and Varun Gandhi has been excluded from the list. Both have won elections many times from Sultanpur and Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh. Of late Varun Gandhi has criticised the government policies. The BJP released a list of 30 names who will campaign for the party's candidates in UP in the first phase of the elections.



The others in the list include Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP state president Swatantra Dev Singh, Unions ministers, Dharmendra Pradhan, Smriti Irani, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Deputy Chief Ministers Dr Dinesh Sharma and Keshav Prasad Maurya. Radha Mohan Singh and Sanjeev Balyan are also on the list. Elections to the 403 assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh will be held in seven phases starting February 10. The polling in Uttar Pradesh will be held on February 10, 14, 20, 23, 27 and March 3 and 7 in seven phases. The counting of votes will be taken up on March 10.

Akhilesh still evasive on contesting Assembly poll

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday refused to confirm reports that he has decided to contest the February-March Uttar Pradesh election. He was also evasive when asked to specify the constituency for his poll debut in UP. Yadav is presently MP from Azamgarh. "I will seek the permission of the people of Azamgarh if I decide to contest the election. I need to seek their permission because they elected me from there," the SP chief said. He was replying to media questions on whether he would contest the election from a constituency in Azamgarh from where he is Lok Sabha member. Akhilesh Yadav is under tremendous political pressure to contest the assembly election as the Bharatiya Janata Party has already announced that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be the party candidate from Gorakhpur.



A crew member onboard a water taxi service 'Sea Pro I' during a trial-run at Mazgaon Domestic Cruise Terminal, in Mumbai on Tuesday. The water taxi service, scheduled to operate from mid-February, will reduce travel time from two hours to 30 minutes. Currently, road and rail are the only modes of transport between Mumbai and Navi Mumbai **PTI**

36 guns, 1K bullets buried in Bengal decade ago recovered

PNS ■ KOLKATA

In a frightening development the police on Wednesday recovered at least 36 guns and 450 gun parts and more than a 1000 bullets kept hidden underground in Goaltore block of West Midnapore. The arms and ammunition were reportedly buried more than a decade ago, police sources said even as war of words ensued between former rulers Left Front and the ruling Trinamool Congress. "The source of the recovered items have not been known yet ... but it seems they are pretty old and further investigations will reveal their age and make," as senior district official said. While TMC state spokesperson said that "the age of the arms will suggest who might have kept them and why they hid them apprehending their fall ahead of 2011 Assembly elections." Former Bengal minister and West Midnapore MLA Sushanto Ghosh hit backsaying "everyone knows that TMC were in alliance with the Maoists before they came to power ... and after they came to power the Maoist People's Committee (Maoist-backed) leaders were given top political posts in Jangalmahal area ... so it is clear who might have kept these items."

Melody queen Lata Mangeshkar still in ICU in Mumbai hosp

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar, who was admitted to the Breach Candy Hospital for treatment of Covid-19 and pneumonia on January 8, continues to be in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital. Dr Pratit Samdhani, who is attending to her at the hospital, said: "Singer Lata Mangeshkar was admitted to our hospital on Saturday night. Apart from Covid-19, she is suffering from pneumonia. Lata ji is still in the ICU. We are trying our best to ensure that she recovers soon. Pray for her recovery." **PTI**

COVID BULLETIN

Over 4K Covid-19 cases logged in Maha; Mumbai records 883 alone

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The daily Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra shot up by 4,490 cases to touch a tally of 43,697 cases on Wednesday, even as the pandemic cases went up in Mumbai by 883 cases to reach the daily tally of 6,032 cases. The State, meanwhile, recorded 214 fresh Omicron cases during the day, taking the total number of the new Covid variant registered to 2074. On a day when the Covid-19 claimed 49 lives as against 53 deaths registered on Tuesday, the state recorded 43,697 fresh infections as against Tuesday's tally of 39,207 deaths. With fresh infections, the total number of Covid-19 cases in the state went up from 72,82,128

cases to 73,25,825 cases. Mumbai, which has been witnessing drop in the number of cases for the last few days, witnessed an increase in the fresh Covid-19 cases from 5,149 cases on Tuesday to 6,032 cases on Wednesday. With the fresh tally of fresh cases, the total Covid-19 cases rose from 10,11,967 cases to 10,01,79,999 cases. As 46,591 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 68,68,816 to 69,15,407 cases. The recovery rate in the state rose from 94.32 per cent to 94.4 per cent. The number of "active cases" in the state increased

from 2,67,659 to 2,64,708. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.94 per cent to 1.93 per cent. Of the total recorded cases, Mumbai accounts for 31,856 active cases, while there are 68,834 cases in Pune followed by 55,570 active cases in Thane, Raigad (15,743), Nagpur (14,296), Nashik (12,759), Palghar (8701), Ahmednagar (6777) Satara (5443) and Aurangabad (4493). Of the 7,25,31,814 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 73,25,31,814 have tested positive (10.10 per cent) for COVID-19 until Wednesday. Currently, 23,93,704 people are in home quarantine while 3,200 people are in institutional quarantine. **PTI**

BJP bags 24 of 97 seats in Maha civic polls

Mumbai: The Opposition BJP emerged number one in the Nagar Panchayat elections in Maharashtra, by capturing power 24 out of the 97 urban local bodies for which results were declared on Wednesday. Of the 106 Nagar Panchayats that went to polls, results were declared in 97 urban local bodies, while the results in the remaining nine would be announced on Thursday. The BJP, which expanded its base in the urban areas when it was in power between 2014 and 2019, emerged number one by capturing power 24 Nagar Panchayats and winning 384 out of the total 1638 seats in 97 urban local bodies. The Sharad Pawar-led NCP came second by capturing power in 16 Nagar Panchayats and sinning 344 seats out of total seats. The Congress close third by capturing power in 14 urban local bodies and bagging 316 seats out of the total seats. Shiv Sena emerged in the fourth place by capturing power in 11 Nagar panchayats and winning 284 seats out of the total seats. Expressing their happiness over their party's performance in the Nagar Panchayat polls, State BJP president Chandrakant Patil and Maharashtra's former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said that while their party had on its own captured power in 24 urban local bodies, it had the support of other parties to take control of six other urban local bodies. **PNS**

Cong no more secular, has degenerated into Hindutva party: CPM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Indian National Congress is no more a secular party and it has degenerated into a Hindutva party, according to CPI(M) strongman Koderi Balakrishnan. Speaking to media persons, Balakrishnan, the Kerala secretary of the party said that the recent declarations by former AICC President Rahul Gandhi MP exposed the Hindutva agenda of the Congress. "Rahul Gandhi has said that India belonged to the Hindus and only Hindus could become rulers of the country. This proves beyond any doubt that the Indian National Congress is playing the Hindu card and it has alienated the minority communities," charged Balakrishnan. The CPI(M) leader claimed that minorities, especially the Muslims have started ditching the Congress and joining the CPI(M). "The Muslim community is upset with the Congress leadership for the statement by Rahul Gandhi and also the side-lining of senior Muslim leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Salim Khurshid and a host of other prominent faces," he said. Balakrishnan's charge comes within days of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan (who is under treatment in a hospital in USA) that the Congress has no capability of its own to

take on the BJP's Hindu agenda. But the Congress in Kerala retaliated within seconds terming the CPI(M) secretary's statement as a precursor to anoint Mohammed Riyaz as the Chief Minister of Kerala in the event of any eventualities. "Balakrishnan is to Vijayan as what Amit Shah is to Narendra Modi. Balakrishnan knows that Vijayan's only mission is to get Riyaz elevated as the chief minister of Kerala after him and the new found love of the CPI(M) towards the Muslim community was with this agenda," said K Muraleedharan MP who is a former KPCC president. Muraleedharan, son of former chief minister K Karunakaran, said that the Congress does not have any issues in the CPI(M)'s agenda or missions. "They do have clear mandate to rule the State till 2016. But Koderi Balakrishnan should not forget that it was he who warned the people of Kerala that if the Congress-led UDF wins the 2021 assembly election, a Muslim would become the chief minister of the State," said Muraleedharan. Mohammed Riyaz is the second husband of Veena, elder daughter of Pinarayi Vijayan. Riyaz was the president of the CPI(M) youth wing DYFI and a first time MLA and a minister holding the important portfolio of Public Works Department and Tourism in the council of ministers led by his Mama (uncle).

'Modi' remark row: BJP MLA asks Maha Cong chief to publish pic of 'goon'



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Latur: Former Maharashtra minister and BJP MLA Sambhaji Patil Nilangekar has termed "false" state Congress president Nana Patole's clarification on the "Modi" reference in his controversial speech, which has triggered protests from BJP workers across the state. Patole has kicked up a controversy with his purported remark in a video that he could "beat up, bad mouth Modi". He later clarified that he was referring to a local goon named Modi in Bhandara district, and was not talking about Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Nilangekar issued a statement demanding that Patole publish the photograph of the said man and share his details. "The language used by Maharashtra Congress president is frightening. He is not talking about holding the rule of law, which is the testimony to the current law and order scenario in the state. Patole's language shows that the idea of the rule of law is not acceptable to Congress." **PTI**

30% people lose vaccine acquired immunity against Covid after 6 months: Study

Hyderabad: As much as 30 per cent individuals lose vaccine-acquired immunity after six months, according to a study conducted by AIG Hospitals along with the Asian Healthcare Foundation on Vaccine Immunity. The study was conducted on 1,636 healthcare workers who were fully vaccinated against COVID-19, a press release from AIG Hospitals said. "Our study results were at par with other global studies where we found that almost 30 per cent individuals had antibody levels below protective immunity level of 100 AU/ml after six months. These individuals were majorly above 40 years with co-morbidities like hypertension and diabetes. Out of the total, 6 per cent did not develop any immune protection at all," Dr D Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman, AIG Hospitals said. The results clearly indicat-

499 police personnel in Maha found infected in 24 hrs

Mumbai: As many as 499 police personnel were found infected with coronavirus in Maharashtra in the last 24 hours, an official said on Wednesday. The infected personnel include 95 police officers. He said 821 police officers and 3,269 police personnel (total 4,090) currently remain admitted at various facilities, including home isolation, in Maharashtra. The total number of infected police officers in Maharashtra is 5,854 since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. A total of 40,959 police personnel, ranging from the rank of the constable to assistant sub-inspector, were found infected in the state, he added. "Until now, 46 officers and 459 personnel of the Maharashtra police force have succumbed to COVID-19," he said. **PTI**

30% people lose vaccine acquired immunity against Covid after 6 months: Study

ed that with age, immunity waning is directly proportional which means that younger people have more sustained antibody levels than the elderly population. One of the most important results of the study showed that people above 40 years with co-morbidities like hypertension and diabetes have significantly less antibody response after six months of getting fully vaccinated, the release further said. Individuals above 40 years with diabetes and hypertension of both genders may be at a higher risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and these individuals should be prioritised for a booster dose after six months, AIG said. At present, the nine-month gap for a precaution dose benefits 70 per cent of the population who can retain enough antibody levels beyond six months. **PTI**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Food for thought

Starvation deaths remain a stark reality even in this time and age, and the Govt must not shut its eyes

The Attorney General of India told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that no one died of starvation in recent times. That is a sweeping statement considering, as the court pointed out, the officer was relying on old data. The court was hearing a petition seeking a national community kitchen policy to avoid starvation deaths. The officer replied that the Centre has to depend on the States reporting starvation deaths, and they have not reported a single death in recent years. The court came back asking him about media reports on a starvation death in Tamil Nadu. The last reported starvation death occurred in Villupuram in Tamil Nadu on December 19, 2021, where the victim was a five-year-old boy and the autopsy revealed no trace of food in the intestine; that meant the boy had had no food for at least two days before his death. In July 2018, three children died of starvation in Delhi. Authorities performed a second post-mortem to doubly confirm the cause of death. The children had not eaten anything eight to nine days before their deaths. There is no way of saying that starvation deaths do not occur. Current data indicates the presence of pre-starvation stages among children. A total absence of food leads to starvation. Intermittent availability of food leads to hunger which in turn leads to malnutrition that harms children by stunting their developmental milestones. What the hungry need is not just any food but nutritious food.



That is the key to India's food security policy that sees hunger as an aspect of malnutrition. A person having meals of only rice may not feel hungry but will develop nutritional deficiencies. Millions of people are out there today who have to make do with a single meal or skip meals altogether. The pandemic has made access to food more difficult. Surveys show a shocking amount of food and perishables are thrown away in Indian homes every year while tonnes of grains rot in godowns across India. The Government must ensure diet diversity and adequate and subsidised animal source foods to the poor. An elementary, nutritious diet apparently costs around ₹30 per person per day. The cash transferred to the poor at present cannot sustain a family of four for a month. That is why the food policy must be rational. India today has surplus food grains. The poor can, therefore, access thrice their normal monthly rations, irrespective of ration or Aadhaar cards. The public distribution system can expand from grain and pulses to include essentials such as eggs, milk and fruits. Some States already provide eggs to mothers and children through the Anganwadi system. It is worthwhile exploring alternative foods using millets and legumes which contain nutrients and can store for long periods. We can do without religious controversies in making eggs mandatory in mid-day meal schemes; fruit or milk being the option for non-egg eaters. Nutrition, not merely food, is the great equaliser.

PICTALK



Enthusiasts take part in a boat race at Dumas beach, in Surat

PTI

Poll heat

As the Assembly election battle enters the last lap, the campaign is getting fiercer

As the dates for Assembly election to five States steadily approach, the electoral arena is agog with activity in all quarters. The Election Commission is busy taking swift decisions aimed at ensuring maximum voter participation while making sure that all the stakeholders are kept out of harm's way, lurking at every corner in the form of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the Coronavirus family. The political players, as is their wont, are busy raking up mud at their opponents and running one another down, and the candidates are leaving no stone unturned to woo the voters and weighing their options to switch allegiance to another party that may form the next Government in their State. From the looks of it, the BJP — which is in power at the Centre and in most of the States going to polls over the next 50 days — is under considerable pressure because it has the most at stake. Even central leaders such as Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have been forced to unleash their charisma in the hinterland as they well realise that it is the virtual semifinal before the 2024 general elections.



Of course, the saffron party is playing covertly, too, to ensure that it has the upper hand in political exchanges. After going through a series of setbacks in the shape of some of its OBC leaders recently joining the SP camp, it recently staged a coup of sorts when it took into the fold Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Aparna in Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous and one of the most politically crucial States. Meanwhile, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav is deeply involved in a fierce battle of the ballot and pulling out all the stops to cement the place of his party in the Assembly and the Government. While the BJP is hesitant of naming any chief ministerial candidates, apparently for fear of triggering a factional feud, the young AAP has gone ahead and announced that its leader Bhagwant Mann would be the Chief Minister if the party comes to power in Punjab. To give it credit, the AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal really went by people's choice (or so he claims) after nearly 15 lakh people responded to the his party's 'Janta Chunegi Apna CM' drive, in which the party had asked people to name their choice for the Punjab CM. With just days to go for voting, it's really down to the wire.

The Ummah and its Israeli connect



BHOPINDER SINGH

The ever-present shadow of Israel looms large over the goings-on in the Islamic world, sometimes for real and at other times only in imagination

Fixation with Israel haunts the Ummah (pan-Islamic community), sometimes credibly so, other times imagined rather creatively. Even the distant, multicultural and multi-confessional (with Muslim majority) Malaysia insists on its passport with the inscription: "This passport is valid for all countries except Israel." With no territorial or commercial disagreement besetting any Israeli-Malaysian dimension, yet former Malaysian leader Mohammad Mahathir had called it a "State of robbers", "the enemy" and described Jews as "hook-nosed", "rule this world by proxy" etc. At the heart of this deep-rooted angst is the emotive and unresolved issue of Palestine by a narrow stretch of country, Israel, with a population of less than 7 million Jews, that irks and rangles many in the global Ummah of nearly 2 billion. Even as the Ummah itself remains mired in disagreements of sectarian, ethnic and political nature — almost all within attribute the overt or covert hand of Israelis a la 'Zionist Conspiracies', that contextualises their perceived problems. Indeed, Israeli spy agency Mossad does play a hyper-intrusive role in safeguarding its sovereign interests, but perhaps not as fantastically as popularly imagined.

Three recent, simultaneous and completely unrelated incidents in distant lands illustrate this Israeli-Jewish fascination. A US citizen of Pakistani origin, MIT-trained neuroscientist Dr Aarifa Siddiqui, currently convicted for 86 years in the US on charges of shooting at US Army and FBI officers while in custody in Afghanistan, was at the centre of a hostage drama. The intensely followed and disputed trial had all the elements of intrigue, counterespionage and murky trails and the Pakistan Government was forced to defend her case publicly, in vain. However, during the long-drawn court proceedings, she had tried to fire her lawyers as they were Jewish and she explicitly wrote to the courts that Jews were "cruel, ungrateful and back-stabbing" people! Recently, a gunman in a small town in Texas took four



hostages at a synagogue, including the resident Rabbi — the hostage taker's singular demand was the purported release of the incarcerated 'Lady Al Qaida' Dr Aarifa Siddiqui. The telltale symbolism and conflation of the synagogue, rabbi and hostage drama for a convicted terrorist of Pakistani descent picked up from Afghanistan — usual admixture, somehow commingling Israel/Jews into the same, perhaps unwarrantedly.

Around the same time, as part of the longstanding sectarian shadowboxing between the Shia Iranian leadership and the Sunni Saudi Arabian royal family, an unprecedented accusation by Gen Alireza Tangsiri, Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy, seeks to shame the other. He implied that the Saudi royal family is descendants of Jews who fought the holy Prophet, "We cannot bear to see injustice in a Muslim country that is perpetrated by the Zionists and the seeds of the Jews", adding, "These are the very same Jews, and I'd better say Zionists, whose hearts have never aligned with Islam, and even with the Prophet in his time". Again, the political blame game within the Ummah was sought to be set-



ISRAEL OFFICIALLY DENIES ANY PERNICIOUS ROLE IN THE TUMULT WITHIN THE UMMAH, THOUGH IT HAS MADE STRATEGIC INROADS WITH THE NOW-EXTREMISM-WARY SHEIKDOMS IN THE ARAB WORLD

led by invoking the familiar watermarks of Zionism and Jews, following the taint and hate associated with the same, irrespective of factual history or the modern-day State of Israel has anything to do with the same.

Concurrently, another eerie spectre of the fabled Israeli connect (more indelibly so this time) unfolded within the Ummah's irreconcilable adherents with the mysterious landing of a private plane belonging to the notorious Libyan warlord, Khalifa Haftar, at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport. Embroiled in violent clashes with various factions (backed by various international powers) for the spoils of Libya in the post-Gadhafi era, Khalifa was supposed to be supported by powers like Syria, Russia and, incredulously, even the UAE, who would rather have a Gadhafiesque dictator in Khalifa to keep the extremists out. So, while Khalifa's nemesis and current Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Mohammed Dbeibeh is believed to have recently met Mossad director David Barnea to 'normalise' relations with Israel — yet it is the surreal landing of Khalifa's plane in Israel to seek its support for his presidential candidature, that speaks volumes of the Israeli

acquiescence in the Ummah's muddle. The clear sign of the importance of garnering Israel's support in any domestic power bid, even if thousands of kilometres away, is unmistakable.

Israel officially denies any pernicious role in the tumult within the Ummah, though it has made strategic inroads with the now-extremism-wary Sheikdoms in the Arab world. It has tellingly opened an Embassy in the UAE and plans to do so in Bahrain and Morocco soon (it already has one in Jordan and Egypt). Saudi Arabia's heir apparent, Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS), also had to unconvincingly deny reports that he last year secretly met the then Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at the Red Sea port of Neom. Clearly, a lot of backroom plotting, machinations and emotions are vested in the 'Israeli connect' that underlie the regional turmoil — how much of it is real or imagined, remains unanswered but what is true is that the issue of Palestine is on the backburner, and Israel looks stronger than ever.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PUBLIC INTEREST VS PERSONAL CHOICE

Sir — The Centre's statement in the Supreme Court that it does not want to implement forced vaccination has sparked off a debate over balancing "public interest" with "personal choice". The Government further said that though the Union Health Ministry urged everyone to take the anti-COVID vaccine, it never forced anyone to get "vaccinated against their wishes". Likewise, the Centre does not advise making a vaccine certificate mandatory for any purpose. While the Centre's stand on vaccination is fair in terms of people's rights, it must be noted that many States have made vaccination more or less compulsory. The vaccination certificate is compulsory in several parts of the country where infection is on the rise.

Such restrictions are accepted by people because these are imposed in public interest. Hence, people need to comply with vaccination rules as well. There is no denying that people's freedom and rights must be preserved. On the other hand, reckless behaviour on flimsy pretext cannot be tolerated. While forcing people to get vaccinated without their consent is against personal liberty, being unvaccinated poses a threat to public health. It must be understood that several countries have made vaccination compulsory. Public interest and personal choice must be properly balanced. There must be exemptions where required. Public safety is more important than personal liberty when there is a health crisis.

Venu GS | Kolkata

MUTED R-DAY CELEBRATIONS

Sir — There will be no chief guest for the second year in a row at the Republic Day parade as the plan to host foreign leaders has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to news reports, the plan to host the heads of five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — has been cancelled owing to the pandemic conditions in India as well as in these respective countries.

Meanwhile, the number of people permitted to attend the Republic Day

Humans are humans, above all



With Australia winning the Ashes in Hobart, the cricketers were posing with the 'urn' in front of the camera amid a champagne shower. Noticing the absence of Usman Khawaja in the huddle due to his religious reservations about alcohol, captain Pat Cummins instructed teammates to put the bottle away and invited him to join in the celebrations! And now the frame has no trace of champagne bottles; rather Khawaja is seen embraced in the middle of the front row just beside the captain, with all heartily laughing and sharing the joy. Can

there be any better picture of divinity, humanity and brotherhood in these communally vitiated times where feelings of hatred with dominant mindset have been turned into synonyms of 'masculinity' and 'nationalism'.

Recently, Ajaz Patel had praised the atmosphere in the New Zealand cricket team and the country as a whole where his religious sentiments are given special consideration, with his right to offer *namaz* fully respected. While Patel had taken birth in Mumbai as an Indian Muslim, Khawaja was born in Islamabad. Yet both have been embraced into Australian/New Zealand society warmly with due rights, equality and dignity. Instead of zealously beating their trumpet of 'liberalism', Indians should draw inspiration from such instances and learn to treat human beings as human beings by transcending the petty barriers of religion, ethnicity or nationality.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

parade this year is likely to be curtailed to approximately 5,000-8,000 due to the health situation, which is quite dangerous and serious, with seats reserved for construction workers, frontline health workers and others, according to senior officials of the Defence Ministry. This proves that the Republic Day celebration is there now just for the sake of name. With these developments, it is high time that the Republic Day celebration must be cancelled altogether for the next few years, until the health scare goes away from our country.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

EC'S HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

Sir — The Election Commission has shown a good gesture by accepting the demand of all political parties to defer the date of Punjab election from February 14 as the Guru Ravidas Jayanti falls on February 16, and lakhs of devotees visit Varanasi to pay obeisance on Magh Purnima every year.

SOUNDBITE

Goa wants a change and the AAP has been getting a tremendous response in the coastal State.

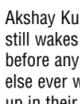


Delhi Chief Minister — Arvind Kejriwal



I thank Verizon and AT&T for agreeing to delay 5G deployment around key airports.

US President — Joe Biden



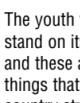
Akshay Kumar still wakes up before anybody else ever wakes up in their life.

Actor — Lara Dutta



When you go towards a stump mic it doesn't look good, so that was something avoidable.

Former India captain — Sunil Gavaskar



The youth wants to stand on its feet and these are the things that make a country strong.

Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

INFLATION MUST NOT IMPACT ECONOMY

Debt management is a priority for the Government



SHSHANK SAURAV

US Economist Milton Friedman had said that inflation is taxation without legislation. A price rise hurts most to those who sit at the bottom of the pyramid in the social structure. Recent data released by the government shows that consumer price index (CPI) has increased to 5.59 percent in December. If we just see the data on the face of it then it will appear that rural inflation crossed 5 percent and food inflation has also peaked to 4 percent in December. In a way this is worrying because CPI numbers are reaching the RBI mandated upper limit of 6 percent. But the Devil lies in the details. A closer look at the data reveals that inflation has gone down in December as compared to previous month and the index has shown a decline of 1.18 percent. Despite the pandemic and the farmers' protest, food prices have increased moderately but skyrocketing prices of edible oil needs to be kept under control. Initiatives like National Edible Oil



Missionare good for long run but immediate measures must be taken to contain the increasing price. Providing free ration to large part of the population has certainly helped the lower class which faced issues of job loss and decline in income. Wholesale price index (WPI) for December has shown price rise of 13.6 percent. The stark divergence between CPI and WPI is another point which indicates the strong domestic demand. It can be taken as a positive indicator where Indian manufacturers are using their pricing power and the volume is allowing retailers to make profit even after absorbing some of the wholesale price rise. There can be counter arguments that such kind of divergence between these two indicators means retailers are losing their profit margin but the increased indirect tax collection doesn't support this view. In pandemic, people used more goods as compared to services and therefore price rise in goods were more. WPI covers only goods and therefore this divergence includes this aspect also. All the major economies of the world are facing inflationary trends and US inflation hit 39 years high in December when it touched 7 percent. There are concerns that Federal Reserve will hike the interest rate and pandemic era stimulus will be cut back. If this happens then it will impact India also and capital outflow can be seen. Our foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover such short-term impacts. This situation is not all bad from Indian perspective. Action taken by US Fed will have impact on exchange rate also and in all likelihood, INR will weaken against USD, if RBI doesn't intervene. This situation will be favorable for Indian exporters, particularly IT and ITES industry.

RBI is entrusted with the responsibility of managing the inflation rate within the given range of 2 to 6 percent. Recent surge in inflation is transitory in nature and it is largely due to increase in input prices (cost push) caused by interruption in global supply chain. In the current scenario, the central bank should continue to prioritize growth and employment over inflation. Real interest rate in India is near to zero and a low borrowing cost is good for a developing economy. The Government has increased the spending in the pandemic era and increased borrowing but RBI's balance sheet expansion cannot continue forever in the same manner and debt management should be one of the priorities for the government. The pandemic is still not over and therefore the low interest regime should continue to push the growth as governments alone can't shoulder the expansion.

(The writer is a Chartered Accountant, and public policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

The lives of train passengers matter

Even if a derailment does occur, in spite of all the precautions and measures, the damage the coaches suffer should be minimal to reduce casualty figures



SUDHANSHU MANI

Nine passengers died and nearly forty were injured following the derailment of several coaches of Bikaner-Guwahati Express around 5 PM on January 13 at Domahani in Mainaguri area of West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district. The derailment caused many of the twelve coaches which derailed to capsize or climb over another coach. Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced that he was personally monitoring the rescue operations. An ex-gratia of ₹5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased, ₹1 lakh for those injured grievously and ₹25,000 for those who suffered simple injuries was announced.

The safety record of Indian Railways (IR) has improved in recent years. Without going into the nitty-gritty of statistics, it is clearly seen that the number of fatalities has come down drastically if we leave aside run-over and level crossing accidents for which IR is not directly culpable. This has become possible due to many factors, like greater stress on upkeep of track and allied infrastructure and large-scale induction of LHB coaches.

The LHB coaches were developed by Linke-Hofmann-Busch of Germany. They are considered to be "anti-telescopic", which means they do not get turned over or flip in case of a collision (chiefly head-on). These coaches are made of stainless steel and the interiors are made of aluminium which make them lighter as compared to conventional rakes. They come equipped with "advanced pneumatic disc brake system" for efficient braking at higher speeds. These modern coaches offer a higher carrying capacity, have higher speed potential, lighter in weight and have increased coal life.

This accident has, however, brought into focus once again, the issue of avoidable fatalities in an accident by switching over to a safer coach design. The causes of the accident can be many, which incidentally, in this case is a traction motor of the locomotive falling down, something which is rather bizarre as this equipment is secured very strongly. The idea should be that even if a derailment does occur, in spite of all the precautions and measure, the damage it causes to the affected coaches should be so controlled that it causes minimal casualties.

It is being said that had the train been provided with LHB type coaches instead of the vintage ICF (Integral Coach Factory) type, no life would have been lost. This premise in itself is correct as successive accidents have shown that whenever ICF type coaches are involved in derailment at high speeds, coaches climb and capsize causing heavy casualties whereas similar accidents with LHB coaches have practically no casualties and certainly no fatalities.



THE RAILWAYS CAN DECIDE TO USE ITS FUNDS MORE MEANINGFULLY, TAKING THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BITE THE BULLET AND LET THE OLD MAKE WAY FOR THE NEW, WHICH WOULD NOT ONLY MEAN MORE LHB TYPE COACHES BUT ALSO MORE MODERN TRAIN SETS LIKE TRAIN 18 AND THEIR UPGRADED ALUMINIUM BODY

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



IR principally employs two types of coaches. One is the ICF type which is based on a design imported in 1950s. The other is the LHB type which follows a German design imported in the late 1990s. For common understanding, the latter coaches are designed with a coupler, which gets strongly interlocked with the coupler of the adjacent coach, preventing relative sideways and vertical movements of the coaches with respect to each other and, therefore, coaches do not climb or capsize, even if there is a derailment. ICF type coaches, on the other hand, have no such restraining arrangement, causing them to mount each other or capsize individually when facing absorption of kinetic energy in case of a derailment. At the same time, the more recent Train 18 type coaches are even safer with their semi-permanent type couplers, anti-climbing feature and safer structural designs.

After such an accident occurs, much ado follows berating the IR for delaying faster proliferation of LHB type coaches. Railways, however, huffed and hawed on the issue till 2017, when a series of such accidents forced it to stop manufacture of ICF type coaches, switching over completely to LHB types as far as new manufacture was concerned. The problem of a large legacy fleet of ICF type coaches with years of useful life

still remained, given that an ICF type coach has a useful life of 25 years. As of today, the number of coaches on IR is around 40000 ICF type and 25000 LHB type which means that a large number of even faster trains run with ICF type coaches.

The crescendo which has built up, just as in the past when such an accident took place, runs down ICF type coaches calling them coffins on wheels. This is an exaggeration as this type of coaches have served the country well since 1950s. Lives of railway passengers always mattered, but in recent years, perhaps due to the penetration of social media, they matter much more and rightly so. Some drastic measures are, therefore, called for. The solution is rather plain. Scrap ICF type coaches in a greater haste and increase the pace of manufacture of LHB type coaches to replace them.

The order is not tall; thanks to some measures taken by railway Production Units, particularly Integral Coach Factory since 2016, IR can be geared to manufacture 9000 coaches per year. If that is achieved from April 2022, as many as 25000 oldest ICF type coaches can be replaced, prematurely, by safer LHB type coaches or train sets, relegating the balance to inferior services which can then complete their full useful life without putting lives of passengers

to danger. IR is a large system and some derailments of passenger trains would occur even if the rail infrastructure is improved further but more and more LHB type coaches would mean that the risk of fatalities in such derailments would be greatly reduced.

The inevitable question would be about the extra ₹15000-20,000 crore that it would cost. First of all, it is not a big amount given that it would definitely save hundreds of lives in the years to come. Second, IR has shown unprecedented haste in abandoning and stabling a large fleet of its functioning diesel locomotives, speeding up electrification and manufacturing a large number of electric locomotives to showcase its commitment towards use of green energy; that the power consumed by its electric locomotives is hardly green is another matter.

IR can, therefore, decide to use its funds more meaningfully, taking this as an opportunity to bite the bullet and let the old make way for the new, which would not only mean more LHB type coaches but also more modern trainsets like Train 18 and their upgraded version in aluminium body. Modern train sets would not only mean safer travel but also more comfortable passenger experience. It is time for IR to decide on a bold initiative to provide safer travel to its passengers.

POINT COUNTER POINT

ITNA JHOOTH TELEPROMPTER BHI NAHIN JHEL PAYA (NOT EVEN THE TELEPROMPTER COULD HANDLE SUCH LIES).

—CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI



DON'T THOSE GETTING EXCITED AT THE TECH GLITCH REALISE THAT THE PROBLEM WAS AT WEF'S END?

—BJP LEADER TAJINDER PAL SINGH BAGGA

Area planning better alternative to guaranteeing MSP

India's experience with cropping patterns is overproduction of a commodity that causes an abrupt fall in prices and heavy losses to farmers

The committee set up by the Union Government at the end of the long-drawn farmers' protest to decide on the issue of MSP should consider dismantling the discriminatory price policy and instead adopt the Area Planning approach with an inbuilt guarantee of MSP.

This will reduce the huge Government expenditure and help in optimum utilisation of our scarce land and water resources, fertilisers and other inputs by controlling overproduction.

The practice of Area Planning, already adopted as the alternative mechanism by developed countries like the USA, Australia and the UK, is a tested approach and has proven its worth. In Australia, the departments of agricul-



BRIJUENDER SINGH PANWAR

(The writer is a senior journalist and Chairman, Panwar Group of Institutions, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

ture and food provide information and advice to the Australian Planning Commission and local governments to ensure strategic planning at the farmers' level for the growth of agriculture as per demand of domestic human and animal requirements and industrial use and exports.

In the US and Australia, the zoning process regulates the types of activities that can be accommodated on a given piece of land as well as the amount of space devoted to those activities. Subsidies are also linked to area allocated under a crop. In case of the UK, all farms above five hectares have to get approval for use of land, not only for growing crops but also for constructing buildings, carry out excavations and engineering operations for



allied activities.

In India, we have been observing that the overproduction of any commodity causes an abrupt fall in prices and heavy losses to farmers. If procurement is done by the Government, it leads to heavy loss to the exchequer when international prices are lower. Implementation of Area Planning can take care of both these problems and also save on costs of inputs and post-harvest management. Besides,

Area Planning will help in optimising the use of scarce resources such as water and fertilizers by preventing a glut in the production of individual commodities.

Before appraising the new approach, we have to understand the ground realities of MSP at the all-India level. As per the estimate reported by NSSO (77th round) in the Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of agri-households for the agricultural year July 2018 to June 2019, just 8.8 per cent of them sold any crop to the government agencies at MSP. The value of that agri-produce was just 8 per cent of the total value of agriculture (crops plus livestock).

Going by the Census and National Accounts data, the percentages come down to 5.6

and 2.2, respectively. At the national level, that translates to less than one per cent in most of North-Eastern states to as high as 50 per cent in Chattisgarh, 30 per cent in Telangana, 28 per cent in Punjab, and 23 per cent in Haryana.

Past experience indicates that farmers from Punjab and Haryana have benefitted the most from the MSP regime because they are more organised and enjoy a lead in resources and production due to the onset of Green Revolution in the 1960s. Of late, procurement has spread in states like Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh for wheat. It has resulted in lopsided production. Even though MSPs are announced for 23 commodities,

the price support essentially runs for wheat and rice and that too in selected states. We see a highly distorted picture of incentive structure which favours the wheat and rice producing states.

Agricultural economists and experts say MSP distorts the basic logic of the supply-demand mechanism, slows down the process of diversification and is economically a very expensive and inefficient policy instrument besides leading to massive leakages and corruption. It cannot augment incomes of small and marginal farmers who represent almost 87 per cent of the total farming community. With an average holding size of 0.9 ha, unless farmers move rapidly towards high-value agriculture, there is not much scope to

achieve better incomes for small land holders in an economically efficient and sustainable way.

It is much better to directly help small and marginal farmers with an income policy or through a diversification package towards high value agriculture, the experts advise. The issue of optimum utilisation of land, water, fertilisers, labour and other inputs also needs to be considered. With a growing population, we have limited land which meets the basic needs of cereals, pulses, oils, milk, meat, fruits, vegetables, clothing, fuel and shelter. The cropping system should be tailored to local consumption patterns rather than for only getting the maximum price, irrespective of whether the produce has a demand or not.

Major airlines cancel, change flights to US over 5G dispute

AP ■ DUBAI

Major international airlines cancelled flights heading to the US or changed the planes they're using Wednesday, the latest complication in a dispute over concerns that 5G mobile phone service could interfere with aircraft technology.

Similar mobile networks have been deployed in dozens of other countries-sometimes with concessions like reducing power of networks near airports, as France has done. But in the US, the issue has pitted FAA and airlines against Federal Communications Commission and the telecoms companies.

Japan's All Nippon Airways said that FAA "has indicated that radio waves from 5G wireless service may interfere with aircraft altimeters."

Omicron wave may cut future severity of COVID disease: S African Study

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

The Omicron variant of coronavirus may reduce the incidence of severe COVID-19 disease, and the infection may become less disruptive to individuals and society, they authors of the study noted.

Israel minister denies police used NSO spyware on protesters

AP ■ JERUSALEM

An Israeli Cabinet minister on Wednesday dismissed claims that police used controversial spyware to surveil protesters, a day after a newspaper investigation prompted outraged lawmakers to seek a formal inquiry.

Beijing grapples with Delta, Omicron infections as more Covid-19 cases surface ahead of Winter Olympics

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese capital Beijing reported five new COVID-19 cases of the Delta variant on Wednesday, days after the first Omicron case was detected in the city bracing to host the Winter Olympics from next month.

Influential fashion journalist André Leon Talley dies at 73

New York: André Leon Talley, the towering former creative director and editor at large of Vogue magazine, has died. He was 73.

influence on fashion world, and his bold looks. In a 2013 Vanity Fair spread titled "The Eyeful Tower," Talley was described as "perhaps industry's most important link to past."

more soulful than you were." In his 2003 memoir, "A.L.T.: A Memoir," Talley focused on two of most important women in his life: his maternal grandmother, Bennie Frances Davis and late fashion editor Diana Vreeland.

Blinken urges unity to fight 'relentless' Russian aggression

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged western nations Wednesday to remain united in the face of what he called "relentless" Russian aggression against Ukraine and reassured Ukraine's leader of their support.

thanked Blinken for the assistance, which was approved in late December but not formally confirmed until Wednesday, as well as for his visit and assurances of support.

Pakistan's election commission orders declassification of key documents in Imran Khan's party's foreign funding case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's election commission has ordered the declassification of key documents linked to the foreign funding case against the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, a move that could potentially spell more trouble for Prime Minister Imran Khan, a media report said on Wednesday.

China asks Taliban to meet 'expectations of international community' for recognition

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has asked Taliban's interim administration in Afghanistan to meet "expectation of international community" in response to Islamist group's appeal to Beijing to help it get the global recognition.

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS DUE TO NON-INTERLOCKING WORKS. In order to upgrade the infrastructure & enhance safety standards, South East Central Railway will undertake the Pre-Non-Interlocking & Non-Interlocking Works in connection with commissioning of 3rd line connectivity at Jaithari in Nigaura - Jaithari - Chhulha double line electrified section of Bilaspur Division.

कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियंता, लोक निर्माण विभाग, रायपुर मण्डल क्रमांक 2 (छत्तीसगढ़) ई-प्रोक्चुरमेंट निविदा सूचना

निम्नांकित कार्यों हेतु ऑनलाईन निविदा "डी" श्रेणी एवं अधिक श्रेणी के ठेकेदारों हेतु निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है, एन.आई.टी. क्रं- 118 एवं 119 (द्वितीय आंशिक) डाउनलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि 01.02.2022 एवं एन.आई. टी. क्रं-120 से 121 तक (तृतीय आंशिक) डाउनलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि 27.04.2022 है।

Mallya faces prospect of bailiffs knocking on doors of his luxury London home any time now

PTI ■ LONDON

Embattled liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya, who is based in Britain for over five years, faces the prospect of bailiffs knocking on the doors of his luxury London home any time now after a British court ruled that a bank pursuing its unpaid dues can take charge of the high value property.

UN agency: Palestinians in crisis-hit Lebanon need funds

AP ■ BEIRUT

A UN agency appealed Wednesday to international community to donate tens of millions of dollars to help improve living conditions for Palestinians in crisis-hit Lebanon. The appeal by agency for Palestinian refugees, or UNRWA, is asking for an additional USD 87.5 million is to provide Palestinian refugees with cash assistance to poorest, cover hospital expenses, as well as transportation for children so that they can go to school.

THE BATALA COOP.SUGAR MILLS LTD.,BATALA DISTT.GURDASPUR(PUNJAB) BCSM/Sugar/2021-22/01 Website:www.smbatala.com Email: batalacsm@rediffmail.com e-Tender Notice Sale of Sugar

Economic recovery yet to attain durability: Report

Mumbai: Rating agency Icria on Wednesday said while there is some evidence of the economic recovery becoming broad-based in the third quarter of fiscal 2022, it is yet to attain the durability being sought by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) as a precursor to policy transmission.

The agency expects the real GDP to expand 6-6.5 per cent year-on-year in the third quarter of FY2022 (+8.4 per cent in Q2 FY2022). It also sees the RBI maintaining the status quo in the upcoming monetary policy review to be held in February. Its Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said economic activity rebounded in December 2021, even as many sectors continued to trail the performance recorded in October 2021.

Encouragingly, the quarterly data suggests a modest broad-based recovery in Q3 FY2022, relative to Q2 FY2022, when compared to respective pre-COVID-19 volumes. "However, the onset of the third wave of COVID-19

has triggered state-wise restrictions, which have expectedly interrupted the momentum in the ongoing month, reiterating that the recovery is yet to attain durability," Nayar said in a report released on Wednesday. The agency said the y-o-y performance of 10 of the 15 high-frequency indicators improved in December 2021 compared to November 2021. These include generation of GST e-way bills, non-oil merchandise exports, electricity generation, two-wheeler output as well as aggregate deposits and non-food credit of scheduled commercial banks.

The report further said the y-o-y performance of nine of the 15 high-frequency indicators in December 2021 trailed the growth seen in October 2021.

FASTag toll collections and retail payments rose to all-time highs in December 2021, while the monthly mobility for retail and recreation rose above the level of baseline period for the first time since the onset of

COVID-19, it said.

Nayar further said that following the re-imposition of state-wise restrictions to curb the third wave of COVID-19, the early data for January 2022 is expectedly weak.

The daily average generation of the GST e-way bills dipped to 2.1 million during January 1-16, 2022, from 2.3 million in December 2021.

After a y-o-y growth in December 2021, the sales of petrol and diesel of state refiners slipped back to a contraction in the first half of January 2022. Even, the y-o-y growth in electricity demand eased to 1.9 per cent during January 1-16, 2022, from 2.8 per cent in December 2021, she said.

The agency said that with the fresh uncertainty triggered by Omicron and the associated restrictions, it expects a status quo on the stance of the monetary policy as well as the reverse repo rate in the upcoming RBI policy meeting, in spite of the rise in the retail inflation in December 2021. **PTI**

Economy needs more nursing; Budget shouldn't focus on fiscal consolidation alone: SBI

Mumbai: House economists at the nation's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) have urged the government to budget for nursing the pandemic-ravaged economy and not to focus too much on fiscal consolidation as there is a need for more stabilisation measures to sustain the fledgling recovery.

And one of the best ways to begin the new fiscal is to complete the share sale of LIC this fiscal. This can go a long way in repairing the overstretched balance sheet which in turn will bring down fiscal deficit to a much lower 6.3 per cent in FY23 as the public coffers will be left with a cash surplus of at least Rs 3 lakh crore to begin the new fiscal, SBI chief economist Soumya Kanti Ghosh said in a pre-Budget note on Wednesday.

He said the Budget should not correct the fiscal deficit by more than 30-40 bps as most sectors of the economy still need support.

Pencilling in a 6-6.5 per cent fiscal deficit for FY23, down from 6.8-7.1 per cent from FY22, he said the Budget should also allow for very

gradual fiscal consolidation. For FY23, the fiscal consolidation should remain limited to 30-40 bps from the current fiscal.

He also cautioned against any new taxes like wealth tax or others at this point as that could do more harm than benefit.

Assuming the government keeps the expenditure growth at 8 per cent over FY22 estimates at Rs 38 lakh crore in FY23 and receipts (minus borrowing and other liabilities) would grow by 10.8 per cent, it would lead to fiscal deficit of around ₹16.5 lakh crore or 6.3 per cent of GDP in FY23.

If LIC share sale passes through in FY22, the government might be ending fiscal with a large cash balance of ₹3 lakh crore. This can come handy in supporting a large part of government fiscal deficit without taking recourse to market borrowings, as per the note.

Against this background, the net market borrowings of the Centre is likely to be around ₹8.2 lakh crore and with repayments of ₹3.8 lakh crore, gross borrowings is expected at

₹12 lakh crore (73 per cent of the fiscal deficit and same as in FY22 and FY21), Ghosh said. Overall gross borrowings by the Centre and states are likely to be around ₹21 lakh crore (₹19.7 lakh crore in FY22) and net borrowings at around ₹14.8 lakh crore (₹15 lakh crore in FY22). Ghosh also pointed out that unlike in FY22, when RBI has done OMOs of around ₹2.6 lakh crore, helping government borrowing programme without disruptions, in FY23, such support is not likely.

He specifically called for continuing support to MSMEs saying the 6.33 crore of such units contribute 29 per cent of GDP, employing over 11 crore. And one of the ways to help them is let bank lend them more by verifying their cash-flows seamlessly through GST 4/TR on real-time basis.

Another step could be extending the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) till end FY23 to enable completion of the entire targeted ₹4.5 lakh crore of credit flow under it. **PTI**

Sensex crashes 656 pts, Nifty cracks below 18K tracking global rout

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The BSE gauge Sensex plummeted over 656 points and the NSE Nifty dropped below the key 18,000-mark on Wednesday as global market rout cast a shadow on domestic equities.

Starting off on a positive note, the BSE benchmark gave up its early gains and briefly slipped below the psychological 60,000-barrier before closing at 60,098.82, tumbling 656.04 points or 1.08 per cent - its weakest level since January 7.

Likewise, the NSE barometer Nifty plunged 174.65 points or 0.96 per cent to close at 17,938.40 as 35 of its stocks closed with losses.

Infosys fell the most among Sensex stocks, declining by 2.77 per cent. Among other major laggards were Asian Paint, HUL, Nestle, Bajaj Finance, Wipro and Kotak Bank - falling as much as 2.71 per cent. On the Sensex, 22 shares suffered losses.

Among gainers were SBI, Tata Steel, Maruti, Axis Bank,

Tech Mahindra, PowerGrid, M&M and Reliance Industries.

In the broader market, BSE Midcap declined by 0.34 per cent while Smallcap ended almost flat.

Sectorally, BSE IT index dropped 1.95 per cent, Teck fell 1.79 per cent, Bankex was down 0.52 per cent and Telecom was 0.97 per cent lower. Market breadth was largely negative as 1,827 stocks out of 3,495 trading stocks declined while 1,579 stocks advanced and 89 ended unchanged on the BSE.

"Globally, risk sentiments took a blow as rising inflation resulting in elevated bond yield along with the on-going geopolitical tensions and surge in oil prices weighed on investor confidence. This along with consistent FII selling forced the domestic market to trade in favour of bears for the second consecutive day," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

NSE world's largest derivatives exchange for 3rd straight year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Stock Exchange of India has emerged as the world's largest derivatives exchange for the third consecutive year in 2021 in terms of the number of contracts traded, according to the Futures Industry Association (FIA).

In addition, the exchange was ranked fourth by the number of trades in cash equities, as per the statistics maintained by the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) for 2021.

In a statement on Wednesday NSE said it has ranked as the largest exchange globally in equity derivatives as well as currency derivatives by the number of contracts traded. "It is a matter of great pride for us and our country that NSE has emerged as a global leader and achieved the distinction of being the largest derivatives exchange in the world for the 3rd consecutive year and the 4th largest exchange in cash equities by the number of trades," Vikram Limaye, MD & CEO, NSE, said.

The year 2021 witnessed the total registered investor

base on NSE surpassing the 5-crore mark to reach a count of 5.5 crore investors. In the last 10 years, the equity derivatives daily average turnover increased by 4.2 times from ₹33,305 crore in 2011 to ₹1,41,267 crore in 2021. During the same period, the cash market daily average turnover surged by 6.2 times from ₹11,187 crore in 2011 to ₹69,644 crores in 2021.

In currency derivatives, the daily average turnover increased by 83 per cent from Rs 14,252 crore in 2011 to ₹26,017 crore in 2021. Academic research has shown that a well-functioning derivatives market can offer a variety of benefits, including improved liquidity and enhanced price discovery for the underlying assets, the exchange said.

NSE has recently announced the launch of derivatives on the Nifty Midcap Select index from January 24, 2022. The midcap segment has come into focus in the recent equity market rally with broad-based participation from all classes of investors, resulting in improved liquidity in these stocks.

Cut import duty gradually on alcoholic beverages under India-UK FTA; not unfairly: CIABC to Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The apex body for liquor firms Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) has urged the government not reduce customs duties on British alcoholic beverages under the proposed India-UK free trade agreement to support domestic players unless Indian liquor manufacturers get a fair deal.

CIABC has also suggested the government to ensure that the UK allows the selling of domestic whiskies as 'Indian Whisky', irrespective of whether they are made from malt, grain spirits or molasses-based spirits.

India and the UK have formally launched negotiations for an FTA, under which duties would be reduced or eliminated on several goods traded between the two countries.

They should also remove the condition of a minimum three years maturation period for whisky and rum, the body said in a letter to the commerce ministry.

"The domestic alcoholic beverages industry only seeks just and fair level playing field for Indian producers and help them achieve global scale and success...It is therefore vital that the interests of the domestic industry are not compromised, and opportunities are created for Indian products to

reach out and conquer the world," CIABC Director-General Vinod Giri said.

He added that the alcoholic beverages industry contributes Rs 2.5 lakh crore annually in taxes to the states, employs 20 lakh people and supports 50 lakh farmers.

"We urge our government to ensure (in the FTA) that Indian alcoholic beverage industry is permitted a truly level playing field by way of an effective customs duty that is reflective of the higher cost of production driven by the regulatory restrictions and capital cost in India; equal opportunities are created for export of Indian products to the UK, and measures are put in to prevent dumping or predatory price exports to India," Giri added.

Giri also informed that the UK has imposed non-tariff barriers, related to product recipe and ageing, on Indian alcoholic beverages, which prevents most domestic products from accessing the British market. "These must be removed to ensure genuine quid pro quo," he said in the letter.

On January 13 this year, India and the UK formally launched negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), which is expected to help double bilateral trade to over \$100 billion by 2030 and boost economic ties between the two countries.

Rising premium growth, Govt reforms to strengthen insurers' profitability: Report

New Delhi: Post-pandemic recovery will sustain growth in insurance premiums, improving profitability amid favourable government reforms in the state-owned insurance sector, according to a report.

"The Indian insurance industry's growth prospects are favourable, underpinned by an expected 9.3 per cent GDP expansion in fiscal 2021, which ends March 2022, and by strong demand for health insurance in the wake of the pandemic," Moody's Investors Service said in the report.

Total premiums grew nine per cent in the first nine months of fiscal 2021, slightly ahead of the 8.6 per cent increase in fiscal 2020, with general insurance premiums (including health) up 11 per cent and life new business premiums rising seven per cent, it said.

Robust premium growth is positive for insurers' profitability, which is currently weak because of persistently low prices and the rising cost of

claims, it said. Meanwhile, the Government's plans to recapitalise India's dominant state-owned insurers and list the country's biggest insurer, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), on the stock market will encourage a more disciplined approach to underwriting in the respective general and life insurance sectors, it said.

This will pave the way for price increases across the market, further supporting insurers' profitability, it said.

It added that rising premiums and prices, in turn, will help insurers absorb higher claims. This pushed the average net loss ratio for general insurers to 95 per cent in the first three months of the financial year 2020-21 from 81 per cent in the previous year.

In anticipation of profitable growth opportunities, the report said that 20 of India's 34 general insurers and four of its 24 life insurers raised capital in the financial year 2019-20. **PTI**

Rupee snaps 3-day losing streak, settles 14 paise higher at 74.44 against USD

Mumbai: The rupee snapped its 3-day losing streak to settle 14 paise higher at 74.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking positive regional peers, even as the domestic equity market settled with significant losses.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened lower at 74.70 a dollar, registering a decline of 12 paise from the last close. During the day, it pared losses and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.32.

The domestic unit finally settled at 74.44 (provisional) against the American currency, up 14 paise over its last close. On Tuesday, the rupee slumped by 33 paise to close at a two-week low of 74.58 against the US dollar. "The Indian rupee gained the most in a week following stronger regional currencies. Domestic bond markets saw a recovery on suspected intervention by the central bank, which helped in rupee recovery," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Also, the relentless selling of dollars from corporates caused speculative unwinding of positions, Parmar said. **PTI**

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General Public is hereby informed that one person **Named: Lalit Gupta, S/o: Satyanarayan Gupta, R/o: H.No. 2013/4A, Street No. 14, Prem Nagar, Delhi** has been missing/kidnapped since **24.12.2021** in the area of **P. S. Patel Nagar, Delhi**. In this regard a case vide **DD No. 60-A dated 30.12.2021** has been lodged at **P. S. Patel Nagar, Delhi**.

The description of the missing person are as under: **Age: 45 years, Height: 5'6", Hair: Black & long, Face: Round, Complexion: Shallow, Build: Thin, Wearing: Blue colour coat, white colour shirt, blue colour pant and white colour shoes in his feet.** Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing person but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this missing person kindly inform to the following.

Website: http://cbi.nic.in
E-mail Id - cic@cbi.gov.in **SHO**
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641 **P.S. Patel Nagar, Delhi**
Fax No. 011-24368639 **DP/1201/CD/2022** **Tel.No. 011-25872637, 8750870434**

SEARCH OF MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General public is hereby informed that one female (depicted in the photo), **Named: Komal, W/o: Udhham Singh, R/o: Jhuggi No-95/255 Phase-I Shahzada Bagh Indorok, Delhi** Aged: 26 years, has been missing from her residence, since 28.09.2021. In this regard a case **FIR No. 585/21 u/s 365 IPC Dated 30.09.2021**, has been lodged at **P.S. Sarai Rohilla, Delhi**. Her physical description is as under:

Height: 4 Feet, Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Build: Thin, Clothing: Yellow Colour Suit and Pajami and Cream Colour Chappal on Foot. Any person is having any information/clue about this missing female, may inform **SHO, Sarai Rohilla, Delhi** at **E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in** or **website: <http://cbi.nic.in>** **Tele No. : 011-23014046 (Direct), 23015229 & 23015218.**

SHO
P.S. Sarai Rohilla, Delhi
Ph. 011-23691106, 23693611

DP/1633/N/2021

SEARCH OF MISSING

General public is hereby informed that one girl (depicted in the photo), **Named: Rinki, D/o: Dhanna Lal, R/o: H.No. E-60/183, Jhuggi Sunder Nagri, Delhi** Aged: About 23 years, has been missing from her house since 20.12.2021 In this regard vide **DD No. 53-A, Dated 28.12.2021**, has been lodged at **P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi**. Her physical description is as under:

Complexion: Fair, Height: 5'1" Feet, Face: Round, Build: Thin, Wearing: Yellow Colour Saree and Bare Foot. Any person is having any information/clue about this missing girl, may inform **SHO, Nand Nagri, Delhi** at **E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in** or **website : <http://cbi.nic.in>** **Tele No. : 11-24368638 or 24368641**

SHO
P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi
Ph.: 011-22585985, 22583307

DP/1286/NE/2022

Tata Investment Corp posts 42.8 pc jump in consolidated PAT to ₹39.7 cr for Dec quarter

New Delhi: Tata Investment Corporation Ltd on Wednesday reported a 42.86 per cent jump in consolidated profit after tax to ₹39.73 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, 2021.

The company had posted a consolidated profit after tax of ₹27.81 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year, Tata Investment Corporation said in a regulatory filing. Its consolidated total revenue from operations during October-December 2021 stood at ₹50.97 crore as against ₹27 crore in the year-ago period, it added.

The company, which is primarily involved in investing in long-term investments such as equity shares and equity-related securities, said its total expenses during the quarter under review stood at ₹6.01 crore as compared with ₹5.04 crore a year ago. In a separate filing, Tata Investment Corporation said its board of directors approved the appointment of Farida Khambata as an additional director (non-executive, independent) with effect from January 19, 2022, up to December 11, 2024. **PTI**

Digital payments record 40 pc annual growth at Sep-end 2021: RBI data

Mumbai: Digital payments across the country registered a growth of nearly 40 per cent in a year through September 2021, as per the RBI's latest index that measures the adoption of online transactions.

The newly constituted RBI's digital payment index (RBI-DPI) stood at 304.06 during September 2021 as against 270.59 in March 2021 and 217.74 in September 2020.

"The RBI-DPI Index continues to demonstrate significant growth in adoption and deepening of digital payments

across the country" the RBI said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Reserve Bank had announced construction of a composite Reserve Bank of India - Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI) with March 2018 as base to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country.

The RBI-DPI comprises 5 broad parameters that enable measurement of deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over different periods. **PTI**

UJVN LIMITED

H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006, Telephone.: 0135-2763808, Fax- 0135- 2763508, CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

दिनांक 19.01.2022

Corrigendum

Tender No. 10/EE(E&M)/(SHP)/Rishikesh2021-22 and 11/EE (E&M)/(SHP)/Rishikesh/ 2021-22 invited by the office of Executive Engineer (E&M-SHP). In both tender Section-3 SSC Clause no 11 Performance Guarantee (a) is here by amended and shall be read as "The successful tenderer shall be required to furnish performance guarantee in form of CDR/FDR/BB issued by any Nationalized/ Scheduled Bank (Other than Co-operative and Regional Rural Bank) equal to 10 % (Ten Percent) of value of contract in the given format at the time of signing of contract". Other terms and conditions of the tender will remain unchanged.

For fuller & further details, kindly visit our websites. The tender documents can be downloaded from the Nigam's website www.ujvnl.com

Executive Engineer (E&M-SHP), Rishikesh

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

NORTHERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

1. TENDER NOTIFICATION
Name of work: Miscellaneous repair and maintenance works of MEMU coaches in MEMU Car shed Saharanpur for 02 years.

Tender Notice No.-1/2021-22

1.1 **General:-** UMB division of northern railway invites Open tender through E-tendering system from eligible agencies who fulfill qualification criteria as stipulated in tender document for "Miscellaneous repair and maintenance works of MEMU coaches in MEMU Car Shed Saharanpur for 02 years".

1.2 The key details are as follows:

Open Tender No.	30-EL-MEMU-T-01-21-22
Name of works	Miscellaneous repair and maintenance works of MEMU coaches in MEMU Car Shed Saharanpur for 02 years.
Approximate Cost	Rs. 11,61,351/-
Earnest Money	NIL
Completion Period	24 months from the date of issue of the letter of acceptance.
Validity of offer	45 days
Date of closing/opening	09.02.2022 at 10.30 Hrs./thereafter
Cost of tender document	Free

NOTE:-
 1) Tenderer must provide validity of the offer for 45 (forty five) days from the date of opening of tender.
 2) Public procure order 2017 issued by Rly. board vide L. No. 2015/RS(G)/779/5 Dt. 16.03.2018 shall be followed.
 3) The tender can be seen or upload on web portal as under:
Website portal: <https://www.treps.gov.in> **119/2022**

Serving Customers with a Smile

DDA HOLDS MEETING

Delhi Development Authority held a meeting on January 18 through video conferencing under the chairmanship of Shri Anil Bajjal, Hon'ble Lt. Governor, Delhi/Chairman, DDA attended by Shri Manish Kumar Gupta, IAS, Vice Chairman, DDA and other members including Shri Vijender Gupta MLA, Shri Somnath Bharti MLA and Shri O P Sharma MLA.

The following major decisions were taken:

◆ **DDA unveils a sustainable development-oriented budget:** The Authority approved the annual budget for 2022-23, with an annual outlay of ₹7,935 crore and receipts have been projected at ₹7,943 crore.

The main highlights of the budget are given below: -

◆ **Civic Infrastructure**

1. A total allocation of ₹2,922 crore has been made in BE 2022-23, for the development of land and physical infrastructure which includes roads, sewerage, water supply, power lines and drainage mainly in the sub-cities of Narela, Dwarka and Rohini.

2. DDA has signed a MoU with NHA for the Construction of Urban Extension Road - II (UER) by NHA as a national highway. This road will significantly enhance the connectivity of the sub-cities of Dwarka, Rohini, Narela and the proposed land pooling areas with the rest of Delhi and the neighbouring states. By connecting the major national highways, it will contribute significantly towards easing heavy traffic congestion on Delhi roads and improving the air quality. Out of the approximate Project Cost of ₹7,700 crore (approx.), DDA has agreed to provide the viability gap funding of ₹3,600 crore which is to be released in a phased manner. ₹1,787 crore out of this will be funded from Urban Development Fund and the rest by DDA. As the work on the project has gathered pace, ₹900 crore have been released during 2021-22. For this, BE 2021-22 of ₹100 crore has been enhanced and a sum of ₹725 crore has been kept in BE 2022-23 for this project.

3. DDA is committed to providing ₹1,000 crore as a grant to

DMRC in a phased manner for the Delhi Metro Phase-IV project. In BE 2022-23 also, provision of ₹240 crore has been provided for this purpose.

4. Provision of ₹47.49 crore in BE 2022-23 has been made for the construction of sewage water drain at Sector-8, Dwarka to cater the discharge of drain water from Airport and Development and Rehabilitation of Trunk Drain No. 2 and Trunk Drain No. 5 for reusing the drain water for horticulture purpose. Once completed, this project is expected to comprehensively address the problem of inundation of IGI Airport, every time there is heavy rainfall.

◆ **Housing Projects & In-situ Rehabilitation for Slum Rehabilitation**

◆ **Housing:** -An allocation of ₹2,543 Crore has been provided in BE 2022-23 for the completion of the ongoing housing projects. DDA has launched a special Housing Scheme 2021 on December 21 consisting of its existing inventories of around 18,000 flats. In addition, several projects are also likely to be completed during 2022-23 in Dwarka and Narela, DDA has projected revenue of ₹2,761 crore from the sale of flats in BE 2022-23.

◆ **In Situ Rehabilitation:** For in-situ rehabilitation of slum dwellers, the following Housing Projects are in progress:

KALKAJI EXTENSION: Construction of 3024 EWS dwelling units on Design and Build Model. Provision of ₹46 crore & ₹30 crore has been provided for this in RBE 2021-22 & BE 2022-23 respectively.

JAILORWALA BAGH: Construction of 1,675 EWS dwelling units on Design and Build model. Provision of ₹120 crore & ₹168 crore has been made in RBE 2021-22 & BE 2022-23 respectively.

In addition to the above, DDA has floated RFPs of six projects comprising 10 JJ Clusters.

◆ **Environmental initiatives: Parks, Water Bodies and Yamuna River Front**

1. The work for the development

of the iconic Bharat Vandana Park with a project cost of ₹560 crore in Dwarka Sub-city is already in progress. The project spread over an area of 80 hectares is being executed by NBCC. Provision of ₹280 Crore has been provided in BE 2022-23.

2. DDA has played a key role in the overall development and management of green spaces in the city. DDA has prepared an action plan for rejuvenation of water bodies across Delhi accordingly a provision of ₹17.90 crore has been provided in BE 2022-23 under this head.

3. DDA has also undertaken the work of rejuvenation and restoration of the floodplains of River Yamuna at a total cost of ₹928.92 crore. The work is being taken up in a phased manner as 10 separate sub-projects. A sum of ₹35.77 crore has been provided as BE 2022-23.

4. An outlay of ₹77 crore has also been provided towards development, up-gradation, modernisation and maintenance of city parks maintained by DDA. In addition to this, there are 787 parks under DDA having a total area of 11,258 acres the total maximum average daily water requirement is 34.3 ML per day. The work of setting up Decentralised STPs/Wastewater Treatment Plants to close bore wells supplying water to the city parks is being taken up in a phased manner and steps are also being taken to recharge the bore wells. Provision of ₹7.90 crore has been provided in BE 2022-23 for setting up STPs.

Promotion of Sports: A sum of ₹546 crore has been provided in BE 2022-23 for the promotion of sports in Delhi by DDA. This includes expenditure on the ongoing project of construction of three new sports complexes at Dwarka, one at Rohini and a Golf Course at Dwarka. Apart from this, DDA is also maintaining the existing 18 sports complexes and two golf courses.

◆ **Other projects:**

1. DDA has undertaken the integrated development of the East Delhi Hub project at Karkardooma with mixed land usage based on "Transit-Oriented Development norms" with mixed land usage on 30

hectares of land. This project is being executed by NBCC and involves the construction of 1524 houses in the first phase with a project cost of ₹1,168 crore. Provision of ₹426 crore has been made for the year 2022-23.

2. DDA has planned a dedicated corridor track for cyclists and pedestrians. The Delhi Cycle Walk project is being planned with the objective to take a large number of car rides out of the Delhi roads. The work on Phase 1 of the Delhi cycle walk with a dedicated corridor for cyclists and pedestrians named "Neelgai line" from Badarpur to Malviya Nagar is in progress and a provision of ₹6 crore has been made in BE 2022-23.

3. DDA has identified three commercial centres namely, Nehru Place, Bhikaji Cama Place and Basant Lok Community centre for upgradation. While the work of upgradation of the Basant Lok Community Centre has already been completed, the work in respect of Nehru Place and Bhikaji Cama Place is in progress and a provision of ₹26.60 crore has been made in BE 2022-23.

4. Provision of ₹6 crore has been made in BE 2022-23 for construction of Utsav pandals at Madangir, Dwarka, Rohini and CBD Shahdara Utsav Pandal.

◆ **Extension of Time for Addl FAR and Use Conversion Charges:**

The Authority has also approved the extension of time up to June 30 for applicability of existing rates in respect of following as it is felt that enhancement of rates at this stage may not be in the larger public interest during the Covid 19 pandemic period:

- i) Additional FAR for residential properties, Coop. Group Housing, Mixed-Use/ Commercial streets and commercial properties (excluding hotel and parking plots) arising out of MPD 2021; and
- ii) Use conversion charges for Mixed-Use/Commercial Use of Premises and Shop-cum-residence plots/Complexes later designated as LSCs Now, it shall be forwarded to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India for approval.



Police should be prompt and sensitive: CM Ashok Gehlot

Rajasthan Chief Minister Shri Ashok Gehlot said that strong law and order and effective prevention of crimes are top priority of the State government. Police officers should work readily and with sensitivity for this. Any crime should be investigated thoroughly in the shortest possible time and the culprit should be punished. Police should work without any pressure, with fairness and positive thinking.

Shri Gehlot was addressing the review meeting of the Home Department through VC at the Chief Minister's residence. He said that as a result of steps for preventing crimes against women, the average time for disposal of cases of POCSO Act and women atrocities has come down considerably. The research time in rape cases has come down from 211 days in 2018 to 86 days in 2021. Due to the constitution of the Special Investigation Unit under an additional superintendent of police in the districts, the number of pending cases of atrocities against women has come down from 12.5 per cent to 9.3 per cent. He directed that this should be further reduced.

◆ **Speedy punishment in 510 cases of POCSO**

Shri Gehlot expressed satisfaction that the police have punished criminals in 510 cases of the POCSO Act in 2021, out of which death penalty has been awarded in four cases and life in 35 cases. Several cases were

solved in record time. **Cases registered by courts decreased from 30 to 16 per cent**

Shri Gehlot said that the policy of compulsory FIR registration has yielded better results in the state. In 2018, more than 30 per cent rape cases were registered through courts. It has come down to 16 per cent which shows the policy's success. He directed the police to follow this policy irrespective of the increase in the number of registered crimes to ensure justice.

◆ **Dedicated unit to prevent the illegal trade of narcotics**

The Chief Minister directed the setting up of a dedicated unit to check the illegal trade of narcotics, drugs and narcotics in the state. He said that police should use IT and social media.

◆ **Action against organised crimes**

The Chief Minister directed the police to take action against frauds by credit cooperative societies and organised crimes. He appreciated the self-defence training by the police to women and girls and said that more women should be trained. So far, more than 4,40,000 women and girls have been trained.

◆ **Timely promotion and service benefits to Police Personnel**

Shri Gehlot said that police personnel discharge their responsibilities in difficult circumstances and, to maintain their morale, they should be encouraged, given promotions and other service benefits on

Home, Shri Rajendra Singh Yadav, said that continuous monitoring is ensured to strengthen law and order. He said that Rajasthan Police is better than other States in terms of innovations and team spirit.

Chief secretary Shri Niranjan Arya said that mandatory FIRs are important for improving the law and order.

◆ **Autonomous rooms in 674 police stations**

Additional chief secretary, Home, Shri Abhay Kumar said that the percentage of pending cases in Rajasthan is much less than the national level. In 2019, Rajasthan has been ranked second in the least pending cases and in 2020, it is third. To strengthen the police 497 sub-inspector police and 4,748 constables have been appointed.

Director-general of Police Shri ML Lather said that the noose around gangs involved in organised crime had been tightened. Reception rooms have been set up in 674 police stations and work is in progress in 147.

ADG Crime Mr RP Mehra, ADG SOG Mr Ashok Rathod, ADG Civil Rights Mrs Smita Srivastava, ADG Telecom Mr Sunil Dutt, ADG Security Mr S. Sengathir gave a detailed presentation regarding innovations, achievements, challenges and departmental activities. Principal secretary, Finance, Shri Akhil Arora and other senior officers were also present.



RITES signs MoU with CSIR-CRRI RITES Limited

RITES signs MoU with CSIR-CRRI RITES Limited, a leading Transport Infrastructure Consultancy and Engineering company has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

with CSIR-Central Road Research Institute (CRRI) to explore opportunities for cooperation in the infrastructure sector. Under this agreement, RITES and CSIR-CRRI will collaborate for technical services, including consul-

tancy assignments, knowledge sharing, R&D and more. The partnership foresees the development of innovative and sustainable solutions that will drive the sector forward and can deliver significant value to associated stakeholders.

POWERGRID rated 'Excellent' in MoU FY 2020-21 signed with Ministry of Power

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a 'Maharatna' Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under Ministry of Power, Government of India has been rated 'Excellent' (Score 98.41) in Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for FY 2020-21 signed with Ministry of Power (MoP). POWERGRID has been consistently rated 'Excellent' under MoU since the first MoU for FY 1993-94.

As of December 2021, POWERGRID owns and operates about 1,72,192 ckm transmission lines and 264 Sub-stations with a transformation capacity of about 4,69,607 MVA. With the adoption of the latest technological tools and techniques, enhanced use of automation and digital solutions, POWERGRID has been able to maintain average transmission system availability >99 per cent.

CISF organises special Covid vaccine booster dose camp

CISF personnel working at DMRC, Delhi are at the forefront in ensuring smooth operations of the lifeline of Delhi-Delhi Metro. More than 12,000 personnel are deployed in the DMRC unit of CISF to ensure the safety of passengers and property of Delhi Metro that connects Delhi to neighbouring districts of UP and Haryana and provides mass rapid transit to more than 35 lakh passengers in Delhi.

To combat the raging wave of the Covid pandemic and to ensure the safety of its personnel performing duties at Delhi Metro, a special drive camp for administering Covid vaccine booster has been organised at Shastri Park campus of CISF unit DMRC. The camp was inaugurated on January 9. A team of doctors from East Delhi District along with civil defence volunteers are running two centres for the administration of booster dose to CISF personnel. More than 2,500 personnel of CISF Unit DMRC have been administered booster dose of vaccine to date. CISF aims to cover all eligible personnel of DMRC under



the protection of the booster vaccine by January 20.

At the Shastri park camp, an additional counter for vaccination of eligible wards (children between age 15-18) of personnel has also been opened.

CISF has already vaccinated

over 9,000 of its personnel with the Booster Dose across the country. The booster dose vaccination drive is running across all the 353 CISF Units including 64 airports which will ensure that 100 per cent of eligible personnel are inoculated at the earliest.

CLW turns out 350 electric locomotives in the FY 2021-22

Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) scripted history by producing 350 electric locomotives in the current Financial Year 2021-22 in record 223 working days. This is the fastest in terms of working days in any Financial Year. This feat was possible under the leadership and guidance of Shri Satish Kumar Kashyup, General Manager/CLW and with his continuous motivation and encouragement to the workforce of CLW.

Shri Satish Kumar Kashyup, General Manager congratulated the entire team of CLW and appreciated their commitment and progress of production. With this trend in production, it is expected that CLW will achieve another milestone of producing the highest number of locos in a financial year.

Feminisation of poverty

Women are yet to attain freedom from the patriarchal setup, says ESHITA SINGH

Poverty is not just a lack of income and the inability to purchase, it is a deeply-rooted multifaceted complex structure comprising economic, social, demographic, cultural, political, and psychological factors.

◆ **Feminisation of Poverty and Responsibilities**

More women are affected by poverty as compared to males. This has not happened overnight. The condition of women in poor families is pathetic. Along with all the other responsibilities, they carry the financial burden of raising their children along with helping other family members. They get minimal financial support from their family members. Sometimes their close family members are their worst foes.

◆ **Feminisation of lack of education, malnutrition and poor healthcare**

Most families in the low-income group have many children due to a lack of awareness and absence of any responsibility towards themselves and the nation. So, they can't afford education and well-being of all their children equally. They prefer to invest their limited resources into providing nutrition and education to their male child. The girl carries the burden of this malnutrition and illiteracy throughout her life.

Social factors such as gender inequality,

dowry, female foeticide, illiteracy, lack of sanitation, malnutrition and more are the result of the prevalent social belief that expenditure on women is useless. Women face a lack of sanitisation and poor healthcare facilities and are more prone to infection than males. A woman deserves proper hygiene during the menstrual cycle. They also need proper nutrition as they carry a child during pregnancy. Proper postnatal care is of utmost importance for the health of the mother and the baby.

◆ **Women's liberation: truth or illusion?**

Associating earning a livelihood with women's liberation and equality is inappropriate. The achievements made by women are undervalued. With patriarchy entrenched into the core value system, women getting a share in the family inheritance is restricted or negligible. Earning a livelihood is not enough to solve women's problem. The struggle and deprivation they face are much more in comparison to the small amount of money they can earn. They are struggling for basic minimum survival, dignity and support from their family, society and the country. This has to change as it is damaging the basic foundation of our rich culture and heritage. Only then, can we attain freedom in the true sense.

(—The author is manager, State Bank of India, Jaipur.)

BHEL's Coal to Methanol (CTM) plant dedicated to nation

As part of the ongoing Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, Hon'ble Union Minister for Heavy Industries, Dr Mahendra Nath Pandey dedicated India's first, BHEL-built Coal to Methanol (CTM) pilot plant, to the Nation. Dr Nalin Shinghal, CMD, BHEL, Shri Jeetendra Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Heavy Industries, Functional Directors on the Board of BHEL and senior officials of the Ministry of Heavy Industries and BHEL were present in the virtual ceremony.

Dr Pandey also inaugurated an exhibition on 'Products Developed under Aatmanirbhar Bharat' organised at BHEL's Hyderabad unit. In addition, an audio-visual presentation was made on the 'Unsung Heroes of the Indian Freedom Struggle' belonging to the Telangana Region. BHEL employees joined the programme virtually.

The Minister said that one of the important goals of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision is to build a self-reliant nation. The role of the manufacturing sector will be crucial in this. The capital goods industry is the backbone of the manufacturing sector. As



announced by our Hon'ble Prime Minister, in the recently concluded COP26 meeting, BHEL — as the largest engineering and manufacturing enterprise — will have to play an important role.

Dr Nalin Shinghal, CMD, BHEL, while enumerating the initiatives undertaken by BHEL during the 'AKAM Iconic Week'

celebrations, thanked the Ministry of Heavy Industries and the Government for supporting BHEL. He said that R&D has always been one of BHEL's core strengths and the organisation is focussed on playing a role to achieve the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

Notably, the 0.25 TPD capacity CTM pilot plant, indigenously designed, developed and installed by BHEL, is currently producing methanol with a purity of more than 99 per cent from high ash Indian coals. This conversion of high ash coals to methanol through gasification is the first of its kind technology demonstration in India.



The ICSI elects its New President and Vice President for the year 2022. CS Devendra V. Deshpande, elected as President and CS Manish Gupta, elected as Vice President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India for the year w.e.f. January 19

South Africa go 1-0 up after India self-destruct in first ODI

PTI ■ PAARL

India's inexplicable middle-order collapse ensured that fine half-centuries from Shikhar Dhawan and Virat Kohli did not count for much as the team was handed a 31-run defeat by a resolute South Africa in the opening ODI here on Wednesday.

Chasing a challenging 297, India were cruising at 138 for one before wickets fell in a heap dashing the hopes of the visitors who trail 0-1 in the three-match series. India's innings ended at 265 for eight.

South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma (110 off 143) and Rassie van der Dussen (129 not out off 96) had scored contrasting hundreds en route to their 204-run stand to take South Africa to 296 for four after opting to bat. India were comfortably placed to get home when Kohli (51 off 63) and Dhawan (79 off 84) were in the middle but it all came crashing down with the end of their 92-run stand.

India have been guilty of relying too much on their top three in the past and once again, the middle-order could not capitalise on the platform provided by Kohli and Dhawan after they lost skipper K L Rahul (12) cheaply.



Chase master Kohli, playing his first game since his captaincy tenure ended across formats last week, hardly broke a sweat in reaching his half-century before a sweep shot off Tabraiz Shami, a stroke he doesn't play regularly, led to his downfall leaving him in disbelief.

Dhawan looked in sublime touch during his stay and played the Test series' rising star Marco Jansen rather comfortably, collecting five of his 10 fours off the tall left-arm pacer.

The stage was set for the likes of Rishabh Pant (16), Shreyas Iyer (17) and debutant Venkatesh Iyer (2) to get

the job done but they fell in quick succession, leaving India at 188 for six from a strong 138 for one.

While Pant was stumped by a lightning quick Quinton de Kock, the shot selection of Shreyas and Venkatesh could have been better.

Shardul Thakur (50 not out off 43) tried his best towards the end but the damage had already been done.

Earlier, Jasprit Bumrah (2/48) was the stand out bowler for India in an otherwise ordinary bowling effort.

After a sluggish start, van der Dussen and Bavuma shared the second highest partnership ever against India in ODIs to ensure a competitive total for the home team.

South Africa opted to bat on a slow surface at the Boland Park.

The white ball did a bit early on with both Bumrah and Bhuvneshwar Kumar getting to move it off the pitch as well as in the air.

restricting the flow of runs. De Kock (27 off 41), playing his first game since announcing his Test retirement, and Bavuma found the going tough with the ball not coming on to the bat.

De Kock perished while trying to break the shackles. Ashwin, featuring in his first ODI since June 2017, found de Kock's stumps with a slider as the opener went for a cut shot.

It became 68 for three in the 18th over when Aiden Markram got run out from a direct hit by Venkatesh after he went for a single that was not for the taking. At that stage, it seemed South Africa would find it tough to get past 200 but a fighting stand between Van der Dussen and Bavuma changed the course of the innings.

Indian bowlers looked rather ordinary in the middle overs with the well-set South African pair rotating strike regularly besides picking up an odd boundary. Van der Dussen was the aggressor in the partnership from the word go as Bavuma played anchor.

Van der Dussen used the reverse sweep for four runs off Yuzvendra Chahal to put the leg spinner under pressure before using the conventional sweep twice to collect more boundaries.

Yash Dhull test positive for COVID

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

India Under-19 skipper Yash Dhull, his deputy Sheikh Rasheed and four of their teammates have tested positive for COVID-19, forcing them out of the Group B World Cup game against Ireland here on Wednesday.

Apart from Dhull and Rasheed, batter Aaradhya Yadav, Vasu Vats, Manav Parakh, and Siddharth Yadav were also found infected with the virus, because of which India barely managed to field an XI against Ireland.

"Three Indian players had tested positive yesterday and were already isolated. In the morning before match our captain and vice captain also tested positive in Rapid Antigen Test which is not (not considered) conclusive," a BCCI official told PTI.

"So they, as precautionary measure, were pulled out. The players included skipper Yash Dhull and his deputy Shaikh Rasheed. We only had 11 available players and six isolated,"



the official added.

While skipper Dhull and Rasheed featured in the opening game against South Africa, Aaradhya was not part of that game. Nishant Sindhu led the team in the absence of Dhull on Wednesday.

India are scheduled to take on Uganda on Saturday and it remains to be seen whether that match goes ahead. "In case all players remain in isolation, some of the stand-by players could make the main list.

NZ's white-ball tour of Aus postponed

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

The Black Caps' white-ball tour of Australia scheduled to start from January 30 has been postponed indefinitely after the New Zealand government could not guarantee relaxation in mandatory hard quarantine upon return of players back home in view of COVID-related restrictions.

The tour comprising three ODIs and one Twenty20 International was scheduled to be played between January 30 and February 8, but it now stands postponed until further notice as there is no guarantee as to when the players could return to New Zealand.

A change of stance from the New Zealand government to impose a hard 10-day mandatory quarantine in response to the Omicron wave of COVID-19 infections meant New Zealand Cricket could not secure guarantees that the Black Caps players would be allowed back into the country.

"The BLACKCAPS tour of Australia, initially scheduled for January 24-February 9, has been postponed until further notice, due to the lack of certainty over when the squad would be able to return to New Zealand," the country's cricket board said in a statement. The players were originally scheduled to depart on Monday. No tour squad had been announced.

No managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) spots had been booked for the players and team



management when the tour was confirmed last year, in anticipation of quarantine-free travel between the two countries in February.

"Despite a proposal from New Zealand Cricket and Cricket Australia to extend the length of the tour so that the BLACKCAPS could return home at a time more manageable for the MIQ process, the Government confirmed today it had no capacity to meet the request," the NZC added.

Discussions are now continuing with Cricket Australia over when the postponed fixtures will be played. NZC and Cricket Australia officials had discussed the possibility of rescheduling the matches to push back the date the Black Caps would be looking to return home in the hope of either an easing of

restrictions or increased availability in spots in the country's overburdened managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) system.

NZC chief executive David White said the tour was initially scheduled last year, after the Government signalled its intention to relax MIQ restrictions relating to the trans-Tasman border. "As we now know, the advent of Omicron prompted a change of strategy from the Government, resulting in a hard 10-day mandatory isolation period being imposed on all incoming travellers," said White. "NZC and CA had explored a proposal to expand the tour and to push out the date on which the squad might return to New Zealand, in the hope that might be more achievable for the Government.

Rahul third player to captain India in ODIs without captaincy

PTI ■ PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA)

In-form batter KL Rahul, who is leading India in the ongoing first ODI against South Africa, has become only the third player to lead his country in 50 overs game without having captained in 'List A' cricket previously.

The other two India players, who achieved this rare feat are wicket-keeper Syed Kirmani and flamboyant opener Virender Sehwag.

Rahul was handed the captaincy for the three-match ODI series after newly-appointed skipper Rohit Sharma wasn't fit for the series and the selectors had decided to move on from Virat Kohli, after he had resigned as the T20 captain.

KL Rahul, who hails from Karnataka, is also captaining India for the first time in his 39th ODI and the last time a player led the country before playing 50 ODIs was Mohinder Amarnath in October 1984.

It was 'Jimmy' Amarnath's 35 ODI, when he captained the side.



South Africa has decided to bat first in the ongoing game and Madhya Pradesh all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer will make his ODI debut.

Laughable to blame The Hundred for England's Ashes defeat: Morgan

PTI ■ BARBADOS

Limited overs skipper Eoin Morgan feels it's "laughable" to use The Hundred as an excuse for England's recent Ashes debacle and insisted that Test cricket has "always been the priority."

England's Test side slumped to 0-4 Ashes series defeat in Australia last week. They were completely outplayed in four games by the hosts, while Joe Root and his men managed a draw in the fourth Test by the skin of their teeth.

Morgan's comments come after Test skipper Root urged the ECB to 'prioritise' his side following the Ashes defeat, implying there has been too much focus on limited-overs cricket since 2015.

"People that use that as an excuse don't watch cricket," Morgan told 'talkSPORT'.

"Test match cricket has always been the priority - it's the format for our elite players. Obviously times at the moment have been tough down in Australia during the Ashes but they always are. We've lost the last two series 4-0," he added.

Root has argued for changes in the domestic structure to incorporate more red-



ball matches at the height of summer when The Hundred - the ECB's professional franchise 100-ball cricket tournament -- takes place.

"It's laughable to point the finger at The Hundred. The Hundred is an unbelievable success," Morgan said.

He added that the domestic structure in England is similar to that of Australia's. "Our formats in county cricket and the Hundred, in the way they're structured, are exactly the same as Australia's. "People need something to blame so they'll point at probably the furthest point to reality because nobody wants to say, 'You

know what, we've not had the prep we'd have liked, we probably haven't played as we'd have liked, and we've lost.'

"That happens in all formats, but I stress Test match cricket has always been the priority." It has been claimed that Morgan has been given full-strength squads throughout the last two years in preparation for T20 World Cups but the limited overs skipper pointed out that the white ball side has often not had the luxury of a full strength team available. "As a white-ball group, we've gone on tours and played in series at home where we haven't had our full-strength side available.



Mandhana named in ICC T20I women's Team of the Year

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star India opener Smriti Mandhana was on Wednesday named in the ICC T20 women's Team of the Year for her superlative show in the format in 2021 but no Indian made the men's side.

The stylish Southpaw, who is the Indian team's vice-captain in the format, was the country's highest scorer in the format in 2021 with 255 runs at an average of 31.87.

The 25-year-old scored two fifties in the nine matches she played and got her team off to rapid starts regularly, as evident up by her

strike-rate of 131.44. While Mandhana was the only Indian, several members of the English side feature in the team with Nat Scriver being named captain.

The experienced England all-rounder produced many impactful performances throughout the year. Batting in the middle-order, Sciver scored a total of 153 runs, including one fifty, and she also picked up 10 wickets at an excellent average of 20.20.

Accompanying Mandhana at the top is England's Tammy Beaumont.

The 30-year-old's reliable presence at the top of the order

helped England off to steady starts regularly. She played nine matches and amassed 303 runs at an average of 33.66, including three fifties.

Danni Wyatt, wicketkeeper Amy Jones and spinner Sophie Ecclestone are the other English players in the side. Gaby Lewis of Ireland, South African trio of Laura Wolvaardt, Shabnim Ismail and Marizanne Kapp and Zimbabwe's Lorny Phiri make up the rest of the playing XI.

There was no Indian representation in ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2021, which featured three Pakistanis including skipper Babar

Azam, who has been named captain.

Apart from Azam, opener Mohammad Rizwan and Shaheen Afridi, who had a sensational T20 World Cup were name in the squad.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh and pacer Josh Hazlewood, who played a vital role in winning Australia's maiden T20 World Cup title, featured in the team while the trio of South Africans Aiden Markram, David Miller and Tabraiz Shamsi also made it to the playing XI. Flamboyant wicketkeeper batter Jos Buttler was the sole member of the England team.



'Never edgy', Langer ready for contract extension talks with Cricket Australia

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Content" after guiding Australia to its maiden T20 World Cup title and a dominant Ashes victory, head coach Justin Langer is looking forward to the impending contract discussion with the country's cricket board which has been subject to a lot of speculations.

Langer was appointed head coach in the aftermath of the ball-tampering scandal in 2018 to overhaul the team's culture and regain the respect of the Australian public. His contract is due to end in June.

"I'm never edgy (about his future)," Langer told 'SEN Radio' on Wednesday. "Before the World Cup and before the Ashes, we've never ever been better prepared. So it's not a coincidence I don't think that we've had the success that we've had," he said.

Langer faced criticism for his coaching methods from the players but in the past four months, he has guided Australia to a maiden Twenty20 World Cup title and a 4-0 Ashes series victory.

"Whatever happens from now on, we can all be incredibly proud of this little period. We had two missions: To win the World Cup and to win the Ashes," he said.

"To do that in such a short period is a monumental effort and we're all really satisfied with that, we're all really happy about that, we're all really, really proud of that." Langer says he feels "really content" about Australia's recent achievements.

"I sit here at the moment feeling really content with the last two series," Langer said. The former Test opener's job had been under the scanner since Australia's disappointing loss to India in Tests last year but he was backed by Cricket Australia (CA) chief executive officer Nick Hockley.

PTI ■ BASSETTERRE (ST KITTS)

Captain Tom Prest struck a run-a-ball 93 before helping in with three wickets to help the former champions England register a 106-run victory over Canada in a group A league match of the ICC U-19 World Cup here.

Asked to bat first, Prest hit 10 boundaries in his entertaining innings though he missed a century by just seven runs as the 1998 edition winners England reached 320 for seven in 50 overs on Tuesday.

Alongside left-arm pacer Joshua Boyden (4/44) and fellow spinner Jacob Bathel (3/45), Prest (3/38) then produced a clinical performance as England bowled out Canada for 214 in the 49th over to register their second win of the tournament.

Canada kept on losing wickets at regular intervals as their batters failed to capitalise on their starts. Gurnek Johal Singh was the top scorer with a 40 ball-44.

Earlier, coming at number three after England were 26 for

1 in the seventh over, Prest shared a 90-run stand for the second wicket with opener George Thomas (52) to lay the foundation of a big total.

William Luxton (41 off 32 balls) and George Bell (57 off 37 balls) played aggressive innings down the order to take England well past the 300-run mark.

For Canada, Kairav Sharma was the most successful bowler with three scalps for 51 runs while Sheel Patel (2/52), Parmveer Kharoud (1/34) and Ethan Gibson (1/63) were the other wicket takers.

South Africa log comfortable 121-run win over Uganda

South Africa's Dewald Brevis smashed a century to help his side register a comfortable 121-run win over Uganda in their group A match in Port of Spain.

South Africa were restricted to 231 for nine by Uganda after skipper George Van Heerden chose to bat.

U 19 World Cup updates

Skipper Prest stars in England's victory over Canada, SA and Afghanistan too log comfortable wins



The South African bowlers performed as a cohesive unit as all seven of them picked up at least

a wicket each.

Earlier, one-down Brevis, who struck 11 fours and one six

during his 110-ball knock, played a lone hand as he did not get any support from his team-mates

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

SANIA MIRZA TO END CAREER AFTER 2022 SEASON

Trailblazing India tennis star Sania Mirza on Wednesday announced that she will hang up her racquet at the end of 2022 season as her body is "wearing down" and the motivation and energy for everyday grind is not the same anymore.

Winner of six Grand Slam titles, including three mixed doubles trophies, Sania will retire as India's most accomplished woman tennis player.

The 35-year-old made the retirement announcement after losing the Australian Open women's doubles first round with partner Nadia Kichenok.

They lost to Slovenia's Tamara Zidansek and Kaja Juvan.

"There's a bunch of reasons for it. I do feel my recovery is taking longer and considering my son is three years old, I do feel I am putting him at risk by travelling so much with him. Unfortunately the pandemic is making us take certain decisions for the well-being of ourself and family," Mirza said at the post-match press conference.

"Also, my body is wearing down. My knee was really hurting today and I'm not saying that's the reason we lost but I do think that it is taking time to recover as I'm getting older," she said.

Sania, who became world number one in doubles during her successful partnership with Swiss legend Martina Hingis, said there were a certain issues that influ-

enced her decision.

"Also for me to find that motivation everyday to come out, the energy is not the same anymore. Right this minute, it's there but there are days where I don't feel like doing that.

"I've always said that I will play until I enjoy that grind, the process and not just winning but you have to enjoy the process and I am not sure I'm enjoying it anymore.

"I am enjoying it enough to play this season. I've worked very hard to come back, get fit, lose the weight and try to set a good example for mothers, new mothers to follow their dreams as much as they can. Beyond this season, I don't feel my body doing it. It's beat," said the world number 68.

She reached top-30 in singles with 27 being her career best rank. Sania quit singles after a wrist

injury to focus on doubles and enjoyed exceptional results.

Sania said she feels that she was playing at a decent level but she always knew that 2022 will be her last season and Wednesday's defeat was no trigger for it.

"I am playing at a good level. First week in Adelaide (event), we (she and Kichenok) beat top-10, 20 players. I am playing at a decent level. I was pretty sure this is my last season, if I do finish it. I am sure I am not coming to Melbourne to play Australian Open again.

"I had great memories here, singles, doubles and mixed doubles.

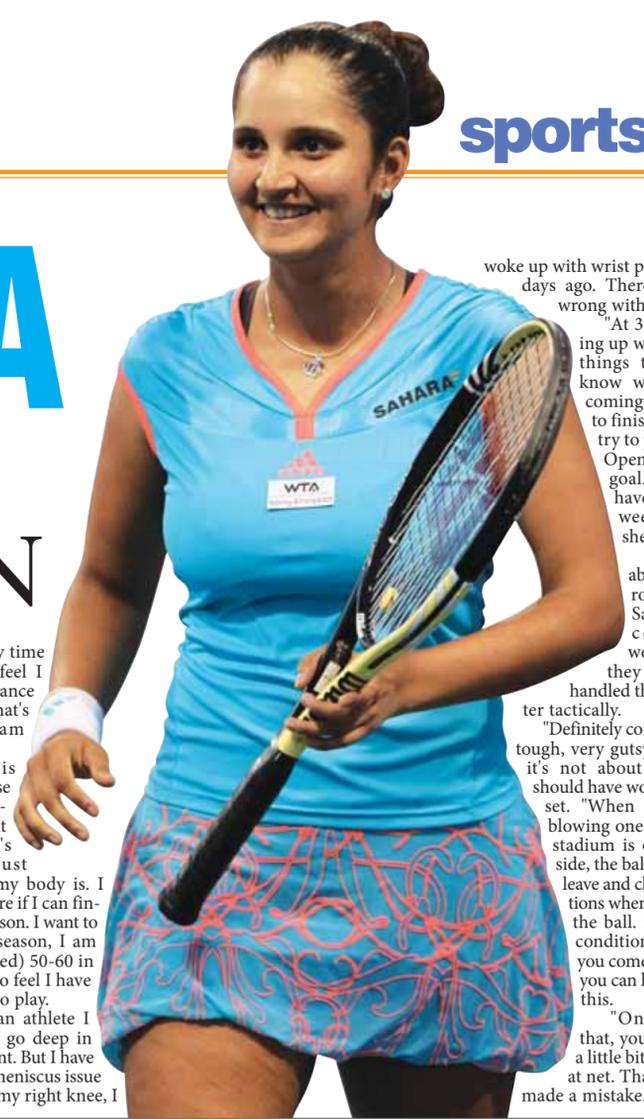
"It's been a great journey. I am not looking forward to June or July, I am literally going week to week, with my body, with virus, there is so much uncertainty."

"I've always said that I will play until I enjoy that grind, the process and not just winning but you have to enjoy the process and I am not sure I'm enjoying it anymore."

"Every time I play, I feel I have a chance to win, that's why I am here."

"It is not because of disappointment of today's match. Just the way my body is. I am not sure if I can finish the season. I want to play full season, I am still (ranked) 50-60 in world, I do feel I have the level to play.

"As an athlete I feel I can go deep in tournament. But I have a bit of a meniscus issue going on my right knee, I



woke up with wrist pain couple of days ago. There is nothing wrong with it.

"At 35, I am waking up with couple of things that I don't know where they're coming from. I want to finish the season, try to play until US Open, that is my goal. But I still have to take it week-to-week, she said.

Talking about her first round match, Sania said the conditions were tough but they could have handled the match better tactically.

"Definitely conditions were tough, very gutsy, sometimes it's not about tennis. We should have won the second set. "When the wind is blowing one side and the stadium is on the other side, the ball bounced on leave and changed directions when I was hitting the ball. It was tough conditions but when you come to Australia, you can have days like this.

"On days like that, you should take a little bit more charge at net. That's where we made a mistake."

Sindhu cruises into second round of Syed Modi International

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu stormed into the second round of the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament with a dominating win over compatriot Tanya Hemant in the women's singles competition, here on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad, who lost in the semifinals at India Open Super 500 last week, thrashed Tanya 21-9 21-9 in a lop-sided contest at the Babu Banarasi Das Indoor Stadium.

A former world champion, Sindhu will square off against USA's Lauren Lam, who managed to get past a fighting Ira Sharma 15-21 21-16 21-16.

In other women's singles matches, Samiya Imad Farooqui, who had won the Bulgarian International and finished runners-up at Polish Open last year, overcame a stiff resistance from Shruti Mundada 17-21 21-11 21-10, while Sai Uttejitha Rao



Chukka, a quarterfinalist in 2018 edition, trounced Anjana Kumari 21-9 21-12 in all-Indian matches.

Samiya will square off against compatriot Kanika Kanwal, who saw off USA's Disha Gupta 21-15 16-21 21-6, while Sai will cross swords with Aakarshi Kashyap, who had reached the quarterfinals at India Open.

Prerana Neeluri, Smit Toshniwal, Anupama Upadhyaya, Kriti Bharadwaj also entered the second round of women's singles.

In the men's singles, Kaushal Dharmamer, Chirag Sen, Mithun Manjunath and Raghu Mariswamy also made winning starts to their respective campaigns.

Title contender Supanida Katethong, who had reached the finals of India Open Super 500 event last week, and fifth seeded Russian Evgeniya Kosetskaya also entered the second round.

and Raghu edged out Siril Verma 21-19 13-21 21-18 in another match.

Kaushal, who had won the Myanmar International series and Maldives International challenge in 2019, will meet Malaysian June Wei Cheam.

Chirag, who claimed the Kenya International title in 2020, faces Russian Sergey Sirant and Mithun is pitted against Malaysian Soong Joo Ven.

Raghu takes on France's Lucas Claerhout next. Lucas defeated Siddharth Pratap Singh 21-15 21-8 in 33 minutes.

Seventh seed Indian pairing of Tressa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand Pullala brushed aside Mahek Nayak and Saumya Singh 21-1 21-4 in women's doubles competition.

Title contender Supanida Katethong, who had reached the finals of India Open Super 500 event last week, and fifth seeded Russian Evgeniya Kosetskaya also entered the second round.



With eye on quarterfinals spot, India seek winning start against Iran

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

A FIFA World Cup play-offs spot within their grasp, hosts India would seek a winning start against Iran in their women's AFC Asian Cup campaign opener here on Thursday.

Hosting the continental showpiece for the second time after 1979, India would look to script history by qualifying for the quarterfinals of the 12-team tournament, which will see some of Asia's and world's best players in action.

India had finished runners-up twice -- in 1979 and 1983 -- and third in 1981.

A win against Iran at the DY Patil Stadium will assure India of at least a third-place finish in Group A. Besides the two top teams, two third-placed sides across the three groups will also qualify for quarterfinals.

Iran are the lowest ranked team in the group which also has China and Chinese Taipei. They are ranked at 70th in the world as against India's 55th. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian team had the luxury of a good number of exposure tours and international matches last year, including against former World Cup runners-up side Brazil.

These international match experience is expected to keep Thomas Dennerby's team in good stead even though the hosts are playing without star striker Bala Devi who is recovering from a surgery.

On the other hand, debutants Iran, who began their journey in international football only in 2005, have not played any international match in the last six months.

Dennerby understands the importance of Thursday's match in the home side's bid for a knock-out berth.

"Our first target is to get to quarterfinals, we have a realistic chance to do that. Anything can happen from there on," the experienced Swede said. "They (Iran) have strong defence and it's going to be a challenge for us to score. It's not going to be an easy game. We are hoping that with some creative and good passing game, we can break down their defence," he added.

Two members of Indian team test COVID positive on eve of tournament

PTI ■ MUMBAI

COVID-19 breached the Indian women's football team's bio-security bubble here on Wednesday ahead of the AFC Asian Cup with two members testing positive for the virus, forcing the organisers to shift them to a medical facility for isolation.

"Two members of the Indian Women's Senior National Team for the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 have tested positive for COVID-19, and are currently in isolation at a designated medical care facility," the All India Football Federation (AIFF) tweeted.

"The AIFF prioritises the health and safety of its players, and are following all the necessary health protocols as have been laid down by the AFC," the organising federation wrote in another tweet.

One of the members (a player) would have featured in the starting XI in the campaign opener against Iran, a source close to the AIFF said.

Osaka, Barty advance towards Australian Open showdown

[Ticket price hike for World Cup final in Qatar reaches 46%](#)



AP ■ DOHA

The cost of attending the World Cup final is up to 46% higher in Qatar than the previous tournament in Russia, fans discovered Wednesday as tickets went on sale.

The steep rise in the prices for the FIFA showpiece match contrasts with the group stage seeing a reduction in the cost of some tickets, which fans can apply for online.

The most expensive tickets on general sale for the Dec. 18 final at Lusail Stadium are 5,850 Qatari riyals (\$1,607), up 46% from the \$1,100 for the 2018 final won by France.

Category-two tickets are 3,650 Qatari riyals (\$1,003), up 41% from \$710 for the final four

years ago. Category-three tickets — the cheapest available for international fans — are 2,200 Qatari riyals (\$604), one-third more expensive than the \$455 last time. The category-four final tickets for local residents soars from the equivalent of \$110 in Russia to 750 Qatari riyals (\$206).

The cheapest seats on general sale internationally to watch the host nation open the World Cup on Nov. 21 soar 37% to \$302 (1,100 Qatari riyals) from \$220 in Russia. There's a rise of 13% for category-two tickets to \$440 (1,600 Qatari riyals) from \$390 and a similar jump from \$550 in Russia to \$618 (2,250 Qatari riyals) for the most expensive opening-game tickets.

For other matches in the group stage, Qatari residents can buy tickets for 40 Qatari riyals (\$11) — the cheapest for locals since the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. The cheapest tickets on international sale are the lowest prices since the 2006 World Cup in Germany at 250 Qatari riyals (\$69). Category-one tickets have risen marginally from \$210 to \$220 (800 Qatari riyals) while the category two will remain at \$165.

Supporters requesting to attend matches at the Middle East's first World Cup will only discover if they are successful based on a random draw at the conclusion of the first application phase which runs through Feb. 8.

Top javelin thrower under dope scanner

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A top Indian javelin thrower has been provisionally suspended after failing an out-of-competition dope test and is awaiting a hearing by the National Anti-Doping Agency's Disciplinary Panel.

According to sources tracking the development, the test was conducted after the Tokyo Olympics when there was no national camp in operation. PTI is withholding the identity of the athlete in question as no official is willing to confirm it at this point.

His name was there in the list of athletes announced by the Sports Authority of India for the camp from October 15 to December 31. But he was dropped when the camp was extended till March 31 this year.

"He failed an out-of-competition test during the around two month period from the end of Tokyo Olympics and start of the national camp.

He is now under provisional suspension pending a NADA hearing," a source privy to the development told PTI on condition of anonymity.

It is learnt that the athlete is an Asian Championships medallist and an Olympian as well.

The banned substance found in the javelin thrower's sample was not known. It is also learnt that the athlete has been a part of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme.

His samples were sent abroad for testing as the National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) was suspended last year and that could be the reason for the delay in getting the results.

Nobody in the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is willing to say anything on the matter which is likely to be heard by the NADA Panel soon.



Osaka, Barty advance toward Australian Open showdown

AP ■ MELBOURNE

For the first set, Naomi Osaka's rediscovered love of the game meant it was anything but fun for Madison Brengle in the third round of the Australian Open.

The defending champion conceded only four points in the first four games Wednesday and rifled forehand winners seemingly at will as she breezed to 6-0 in a mere 20 minutes.

The second set started with Brengle celebrating a service hold like she'd finished a long-distance race, but gradually the No. 54-ranked American ground down Osaka to a stage in the seventh game where she finally converted a break-point opportunity — after missing her first nine chances.

That triggered a change in the former No. 1-ranked Osaka, who responded by breaking back immediately and winning the last nine points to complete a 6-0, 6-4 victory. She will next face Amanda Anisimova,

a 20-year-old American who beat Olympic gold medalist Belinda Bencic 6-2, 7-5. The winner of that is likely to face top-ranked Ash Barty in the fourth round.

Osaka won the Australian Open last year, her fourth Grand Slam title, but then withdrew from the French Open and skipped Wimbledon as she took a break for her mental health. She then was ousted early at the U.S. Open.

After a long off-season to reset, she's unbeaten in five matches in Australia this year. Asked how she rated her form, Osaka said that's not how she's approaching things. "Honestly I'm trying not to do that," she said in an on-court TV interview.

"I'm a bit of a perfectionist. If I compare myself with the past, I'll never be satisfied. "The goal for me is just to have fun ... (and) I think we're accomplishing that." Since the draw for the first major of the year was made, a big focus has been on a potential encounter between Osaka and Barty, the



2021 Wimbledon and 2019 French Open champion who is aiming to be the first Australian woman since 1978 to win her home championship.

Barty was front and center when the tournament celebrated its inaugural First Nations Day, albeit only for 52 minutes as she beat 142nd-ranked qualifier Lucia Bronzetti 6-1, 6-1.

"It was nice for me to be a part of it in a way that I feel most comfortable," Barty, who has Indigenous heritage, said of the day dedicated to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.

"Out on the tennis court is how I express myself as an athlete, it's how I'm able to express myself as a person as well.

"On a day we're bringing cultures together, bringing people together ... It was great for me to be able to play a small role doing what I love."

Rafael Nadal didn't get it all his own way in the subsequent match on Rod Laver

Arena, needing five match points before beating 126th-ranked German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann 6-2, 6-3, 6-4.

The sixth-seeded Nadal, aiming for a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title, had two match points on Hanfmann's serve and two more on his own in the next game before finally clinching a spot in the third round when his rival sent a forehand long. Nadal converted only four of his 16 break-point chances, including one of eight in the third set, but only faced two break points on his own serve and fended them both off.

For the 35-year-old Nadal, after fatigue and injuries curtailed his 2021 season following the French Open, time on court is more important than anything else.

"I said here before the tournament started, things are not going to be perfect, but every day that I'm going to spend on court, the chances to play better are higher," he said.