

OPINION 6

AFGHAN WOMEN'S
RIGHTS ARE STILL FAR

WORLD 8

CHINA RAPS US MISSILE
SANCTIONS AS HYPOCRISY

SPORT 12

SOUTH AFRICA HAND 'OUT OF
SYNC' INDIA'S SERIES DEFEAT

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RANVEER
10 VIVACITY

703 die, 3.5L infected in a day as corona marches on

Kerala positivity
rate soars to 43%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday recorded 3,47,254 new cases of Covid-19, including 9,692 cases of the new Omicron variant, while 703 fatalities were reported in the last 24 hours. The active cases have increased to 20,18,825, the highest in 235 days, the Union Health Ministry data showed. The active cases comprise 5.23 per cent of the total infections.

The Test Positivity Rate surged to 43.76 per cent in Kerala, painting a gloomy picture about the Covid-19 situation in the State which recorded 41,668 fresh cases during the last 24 hours on Friday. The samples tested on Friday stood at 95,218.

By far this is the highest positivity rate recorded by any State in India ever since Covid-19 spread in the country. Positivity rate is the percentage of people who test positive of those overall who have been tested.

The Kerala Government suffered a setback on Friday as a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court asked the Kasaragod district adminis-



A student stands for verification as a health worker administers a Covid-19 vaccine to another at a private school in Kolkata on India, Friday

The Government on Friday increased the limit of registering the number of people on Co-WIN using one mobile number from four to six to cover maximum number of beneficiaries

tration not to allow any public meetings attended by more than 50 persons. Though the District Disaster Management Authority had issued an order limiting the number of persons that could assemble for any meeting to 50, the district collector reportedly under polit-

ical pressure issued a new order stating that the number of persons that could be allowed to attend public meetings should be decided based on the Test Positivity Rate as well as the number of beds available in the district.

Neighbouring Karnataka too is battling massive surge in Covid-19 cases. The State reported 48,049 new Covid-19 cases along with 22 deaths and 18,115 recoveries on Friday. Bengaluru registered 29,068 infections and six deaths.

The Karnataka Government on Friday decided to lift the weekend curfew that was in place with an aim to control the spread of Covid-19 infections. However, the night curfew hours between 10 pm and 5 am everyday will continue. This comes as Karnataka registered a steep spike in Covid-19 cases on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Delhi reported 10,756 new Covid-19 cases, 17,494 recoveries and 38 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Continued on Page 2

Amar Jawan Jyoti merger stirs row; India Gate to get Bose's statue

Rahul raps Govt
for moving flame
to War Memorial

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amar Jawan Jyoti on Friday was merged with the eternal flame at the newly constructed National War Memorial (NWM) here. Some veterans and political leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, however, criticised the move and said it was an insult to the fallen soldiers.

In a short military ceremony, the flame at the Amar Jawan Jyoti at the India Gate was taken and merged with the War Memorial about 400 metres away in the afternoon. Chief of Integrated Defence Staff Marshal BR Krishna presided over the ceremony that included a parade and salute.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, meanwhile, announced that a statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose will be installed at India Gate as a symbol of India's indebtedness to him. This announcement came ahead of Bose's 125th birth anniversary.

Until the installation is completed, a hologram of Netaji will be projected at the site of the statue, the Prime Minister said. "I will unveil the



Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's statue (that is yet to be installed) at India Gate area in New Delhi, to mark his 125th birth anniversary



hologram statue on 23rd January, Netaji's birth anniversary," he tweeted.

"At a time when the entire nation is marking the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, I am glad to share that his grand statue, made of granite, will be installed at India Gate," Modi tweeted on Friday. "This would be a symbol of India's indebtedness to him."

The statue will be installed under the grand canopy near which the Amar Jawan Jyoti flickers. The canopy, which was built along with the rest of the grand monument in the 1930s by Sir Edwin Lutyens, once housed a statue of the former king of England George V. The statue was later moved to Coronation Park in Central Delhi in the mid-1960s.

The National War Memorial, built in 2019, will now be the single point for military ceremonies and tributes to fallen soldiers.

Continued on Page 2

Parrikar's son quits BJP to fight as independent from coveted Panjim

PTI ■ PANJI

Denied ticket from Panaji, his late father's constituency, former Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar's son Utpal Parrikar on Friday quit the BJP.

He would contest the February 14 Assembly elections in the State from Panaji as independent, he announced here.

The day before, the ruling BJP nominated from Panaji — which Manohar Parrikar had represented for over two decades — its sitting MLA Atanasio Monserrate, one of ten legislators who had joined the saffron party in July 2019 after quitting Congress.

"I was left with no other choice. I have resigned from the party and I would be contesting as an independent from Panaji," Utpal Parrikar told reporters.

He also said that resignation was a formality but the BJP will "always remain in my heart."

"It is a difficult choice for me, I am doing it for the people of Goa. No one should be worried about my political future, people of Goa will do it," he said.

The BJP had offered him "other options" (constituencies other than Panaji), Parrikar said.

"I am fighting for the values which I believe in. Let people of Panaji decide. I cannot negotiate with my party," he added.

Asked whether he would seek support of other political parties, he said the only platform for him was the BJP.

"If not BJP, then I would go for (contesting as) independent. I will not go for any other political party," Parrikar said.

On Thursday, the BJP's Goa in-charge Devendra Fadnavis had said while releasing its first list of candidates that the party offered some other seats to Utpal, but he was not willing to contest from any of them.

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said his party, which had formed a tie-up with the NCP for Goa elections, would support Parrikar if he promised not to back the BJP post elections.

On Thursday, Aam Aadmi Party leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had slammed the BJP for adopting "use and throw" policy regarding the Parrikar family, and invited Utpal to join his party.

Priyanka pitches herself as CM candidate in UP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Friday pitched herself as the party's Chief Ministerial face in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls as she released a "youth manifesto" for the State, along with her brother Rahul Gandhi.

Priyanka, who has been leading from the front in the crucial poll-bound State, however, evaded queries on whether she would contest the Assembly polls. At the same time, she said the Congress would be open to a post-poll alliance if the need arose. Rahul on his part chose to attack the BJP alleging that those preaching Hindutva are spreading hatred in the cyber world.

"Do you see any other face from the Congress party?" Priyanka said when asked who would be the party's Chief Ministerial candidate in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. "You are seeing my face everywhere," the Priyanka added while addressing the joint Press conference with Rahul to release the "Bharti Vidhan"



Congress party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra speaks during the release of the Congress party's manifesto for the upcoming State election in Uttar Pradesh, in New Delhi, on Friday

(recruitment document) manifesto that promises a new vision for youth in the State and the creation of 20 lakh jobs, including eight lakh for women.

To a question on whether she would herself contest the Assembly polls, Priyanka said, "We have not yet decided." She said it would be known once that is decided.

Continued on Page 2

Aditi Singh in BJP's 3rd list of 85 names for UP elections

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday announced its third list of 85 candidates for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh elections that includes Aditi Singh — who recently quit the Congress — fielded from Rae Bareilly.

The BJP has also given ticket to Asim Arun, who recently resigned from the IPS, in its third list of candidates.

The list also includes incumbent MLA Hariom Yadav, a relative of Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav. Hariom Yadav had quit the Opposition party recently and crossed over to the BJP.

The BJP has named both Aditi Singh and Yadav from their current seats of Rae Bareilly and Sirsaganj respectively, while Arun, a Dalit, will contest from Kannauj, a reserved seat.

The Rae Bareilly Assembly seat is part of the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency which is represented by Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

Uttar Pradesh Assembly Deputy Speaker Nitin Aggarwal, who had also left the SP to join the BJP, will fight

from Hardoi.

Other key candidates include former BSP leader Ramveer Upadhyay from Sadabad, Archana Pandey from Chhibramau, and Satish Mahana from Mahrajpur.

Riya Shakya, daughter of Bidhuna MLA Vinay Shakya who joined the SP, has also got a ticket to contest from her father's seat.

With the fresh list of candidates, which includes 15 women, the total number of names announced by the party for the seven-phase election to the 403-member assembly has reached 195.

Last week, the BJP had released its first list of candidates for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. It was announced that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will contest the polls from the Gorakhpur seat and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya from Sirathu.

Uttar Pradesh elections for the 403 Assembly constituencies are slated to be held in seven phases starting from February 10. The counting of votes will take place on March 10.

LG rejects Govt's proposal to reduce Covid restrictions

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Friday rejected Delhi Government's recommendations on the lifting of weekend curfew and reducing Covid-related restrictions. The Kejriwal Government proposed relaxation in curbs as the positivity rate has come down from 31 per cent to 17 per cent.

The Delhi administration had also proposed the removal of odd-even restrictions imposed on shops and other commercial establishments in the city.

Bajjal clarified that existing restrictions should remain in force until the Covid-19 situation further improves. He, however, allowed Delhi Government's proposal that private offices should operate at 50 per cent capacity.

"A status quo remains with regards to the opening of markets as the case positivity rate of Delhi is still above 21 per cent and the number of daily coronavirus cases being reported is over 12,000," the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) noted.

Continued on Page 2

What DDMA order says

Restaurants and bars will remain closed across Delhi. Online delivery has been permitted. Private offices have been allowed to function at 50 per cent capacity, however offices must be situated outside the containment zone. Cinemas, theatres, spas, and gyms will continue to be shut. All educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and

universities, will remain closed till further orders. Shops in markets, market complexes, and malls are allowed to run on an odd-even basis between 10am and 8pm. Only one authorised weekly market can function with an upper limit of 50 per cent vendors at a time. Delhi Metro and buses can continue to run only at full seating capacity with no standing passenger

Domestic fliers can't carry more than one hand baggage

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic air passengers will no longer be allowed to carry more than one hand baggage. In a bid to reduce congestion at airports, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has asked the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) to strictly implement the rule which mandates that only one handbag is allowed per passenger.

The CISF has said flyers with more than one cabin handbag are choking the security check-in counters at airports as well as causing delays, congestion and inconvenience to passengers. CISF guards all



key airports in India.

Interestingly, BCAS's own rules allow passengers to carry one hand baggage, the existing rules permit a passenger to carry one laptop bag, one ladies' handbag, and one blanket, gift item purchased from duty-free shop, umbrella, and a reasonable amount of reading material on board an aircraft.

In a letter to Director General, BCAS, the CISF's IG/Airport Sector Vijay Prakash pointed out that it has been seen that passenger on

average carries two to three handbags to the screening point. This has led to increased clearance time as well as delays, congestion in PESC points, and inconvenience to passengers. "As per BCAS AVSEC Circular Nos. 06/2000 & Lt12000, no passenger should be permitted to carry more than one handbag other than those items already listed in the circular including lady's bag," the CISF said, adding, "All airlines and airport operators may be instructed to take steps to implement 'One Hand Bag rule' meticulously on the ground to ease the congestion and other security concerns."

Continued on Page 2

Harak Rawat joins Congress

PNS ■ DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI

Expelled BJP leader and former Uttarakhand Minister Harak Singh Rawat on Friday joined the Congress in Delhi along with his daughter-in-law Anukriti Gusain in the presence of party campaign head for Uttarakhand Harish Rawat, PCC president Ganesh Godiyal, Leader of Opposition in Uttarakhand Assembly Pritam Singh.

Harak, who represented the Kotdwar seat in the Uttarakhand Assembly, was among the 10 MLAs who had rebelled against the then Chief Minister Harish Rawat-led State Government in 2016 and joined the BJP.

Harak was expelled from the BJP five days back.

35 YouTube, 2 Twitter accounts blocked for anti-India canards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Acting on intelligence inputs, the Government has blocked 35 YouTube channels, two Twitter accounts, two Instagram accounts, two websites, and a Facebook account for spreading anti-India propaganda and spreading fake news in a "coordinated manner" on the Internet from Pakistan.

Talking to the media, Apurva Chandra, secretary Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry, said these YouTube accounts had a total subscriber base of over 1.20 crore, and their videos had over 130 crore views. The Government last month had



blocked 20 YouTube channels and two websites for spreading anti-India fake and divisive news and other content.

According to Chandra, the 35 YouTube accounts blocked by the Ministry were all operating from Pakistan and were identified to be part of four coordinated disinformation networks. These include Faisal Tarar Speaks, Apni Dunya TV, Haqeeqat ki Dunia, Shahzad Abbas, Mera Pakistan with

Shahab, Khabar with Ahmed, HR tv, Sabee Kazmi, Such tv network, Saqib Speaks, and Salman Haider Officials.

The Apni Duniya Network operates 14 YouTube channels, and Talha Films Network operates 13 YouTube channels. A set of four channels and a set of two other channels were also found to be acting in synchronisation with each other.

The channels were used to post divisive content in a coordinated manner on topics like Kashmir, Indian Army, minority communities in India, Ram Mandir, General Bipin Rawat, etc. One of the groups identified on YouTube was "Naya Pakistan".

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

CLUBHOUSE APP CHAT CASE: 3 ARRESTED

Mumbai: The Mumbai Police has arrested three persons from Haryana in connection with the chat on Clubhouse app, in which obscene comments were allegedly made against Muslim women, an official said on Friday. In a tweet posted early on Friday morning, Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi praised the city police for the arrests in the case.

R-DAY REHEARSAL: TRAVEL ADVISORY ISSUED

New Delhi: The Delhi Traffic Police on Friday issued an advisory on the arrangements and traffic restrictions in place for the smooth conduct of full dress rehearsal in national Capital on January 23 for the Republic Day parade.

R-Day

fests

Guv

chief guest in BBSR in CM's presence

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal will unfurl the National Flag and take salute at this year's Republic Day function in State capital Bhubaneswar with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik sitting by his side on January 26.

Official sources here said that such presence of the Governor-Chief Minister duo would be a new feature at the Republic Day ceremonies in different State capitals. Like the two previous years, the Repub-

lic Day would be celebrated across the country amidst the Covid pandemic. The State Government on Friday allotted different districts to Ministers to hoist the Tricolour and take salute. Niranjan Pujari is assigned for Sambalpur, Bikram Keshari Arukha for Cuttack, Prafulla Kumar Mallik Nayagarh, Ranendra Pratap Swain, Padmanabha Behera Bargarh, Pratap Jena Angul, Arun Sahoo Subarnapur, Sudarm Marndi Keonjhar, Susanta Singh Sundargarh, Naba Kisore Das Nuapada, Tukuni Sahu Ganjam and

Jagannath Saraka Malkangiri Dibya Shankar Mishra is for Rayagada, Ashok Baleswar, Samir Ranjan Dash Kendrapada, Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi Jagatsinghpur, Premananda Nayak Kandhamal, Raghunandan Das Puri, Padmini Dian Nabarangpur and , Tusharkanti Behera Koraput.

Besides, the concerned RDCs and DMs have been assigned for Brahmapur, Rourkela, Khordha, Balangir, Bhadrak, Boudh, deogarh, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Jajpur, Jharsuguda and Kalahandi.

Cop's wife

duped of 50K by cyber frauds

Under pretext of activating credit card

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Cyber criminals have cleaned up around Rs 50,000 from the bank account of an Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police's (ASI) wife on the pretext of credit card activation.

The ASI Bijay Kumar Bahali has lodged a complaint with the Cyber Cell after Rs 49,600 was fraudulently withdrawn from the bank account of his wife in Bhadrak. Recently, some bank staffs had approached Bahali's wife over phone for availing a credit card. Though she initially refused, she agreed for the same after the callers narrated the benefits of the credit card which also had health

insurance and other benefits along with the credit facility.

Later, the woman received another call in which she was told that her credit card would become invalid if she didn't activate it. She told the callers that she would visit the bank for the same. Later, she again received a call and she shared the OTP as she did not think it could be a trap as the miscreants posing as bank officials revealed her name, date of birth and other confidential information to her. Police suspect involvement of some bank staffs in leaking crucial information of customers to the cybercriminals. The ASI of Police said that after a complaint was lodged, the concerned bank has suspended the staffs, who had called his wife for the credit card.

OCPL

wins Corp Excellence Award



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

State-owned Odisha Coal and Power Limited (OCPL) won the

Thick fog

hits life in Bhubaneswar

Western disturbance to cause rains in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A thick blanket of fog in Bhubaneswar on Friday morning led to a decrease in the visibility and disruption in the vehicular traffic movement.

The fog started enveloping the State capital since midnight and was witnessed till 9.30 am. The visibility was reduced to as low as 10 metre in different parts of the city. Meanwhile, the Regional Office of the Indian Meteorological Department here predicted that under the impact of western disturbance, several parts of the State are likely to

Corporate Excellence Award, Brand of Odisha on Friday. Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal handed over the trophy in gold category to OCPL CEO Sariputta Mishra in a function here.

It may be noted that the OCPL is going to surpass its production target of 4.5 million tonne in this financial year which has been set by the Union Ministry of Coal. During the coal crisis in the country, the OCPL supplied quality coal to the Coal India and nearby industries. Under the present CEO, the company has made the turnaround and achieved

150% growth than the previous year. In recent meetings, the Coal Ministry Secretary has praised the OCPL's contribution to meet the coal crisis.



experience light to moderate rainfall for next four days. "A western disturbance will pass through the northward location. Under its effect, several districts of Odisha will experience light to moderate rain-

fall from January 21-24," said IMD Regional Director HR Biswas. "Coastal districts, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj will experience light rainfall today. Some places of Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh,

Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Deogarh and few parts of the north interior districts will see light to moderate rainfall on Saturday," said Biswas adding that the rainfall activities are likely to increase on Sunday. Moderate rainfall is likely to occur in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada on Sunday. Other districts will experience light to moderate rainfall in few isolated places, said Biswas.

"The intensity of rainfall is likely to decrease on Monday. But coastal areas and adjoining districts of interior Odisha may witness rainfall activities in isolated places. Bhubaneswar will also experience light to moderate rainfall on January 23 and 24," he added.

In Cuttack

Bizman

held on money laundering charge

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday arrested city-based businessman Pawan Kumar Jajodia on the money laundering charge. Earlier, the agency had carried out searches in various premises of Jajodia. Later, ED officials said several incriminating documents were seized during the raids and they have got significant

evidence against the businessman. "Documents of buildings worth Rs 23 crore, various plots and properties were unearthed during the searches," added the agency officials. Earlier, the Odisha Vigilance Directorate and the Economic Offence Wing of the Crime Branch had lodged a case against Jajodia under Sections 420 and 120B of the IPC. In the FIR, it was alleged that Jajodia has caused Rs

21.86 crore loss to Government exchequers by fake billings, fictitious addresses for companies and also using fake IDs. The ED initiated a money-laundering probe on the basis of this case. The ED moved the court seeking custody of Jajodia for interrogation. The court granted them six days remand of Jajodia to extract more information from him. Further investigation into the case was on.

'Attack on Dhinkia villagers to avenge Posco fiasco'

Cong charges BJD Govt of using police for party interest

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress on Friday accused the Government of being in hand in glove with a private company to establish a steel plant even when there is no environmental clearance for the project.

In a Press meet here, party leaders Manoranjan Dash, Nishikant Mohapatra and Deepak Mohapatra alleged that to avenge on people of Dhinkia for failure to set up Posco plant, the Government is using police to attack the protestors in Dhinkia. Das said even there were provisions of Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and

Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR Act, 2013) to return land to the original owner if the acquired land is unutilized for five years but they were not followed in letter and spirit. They said the Jagatsinghpur SP and Abhayachandpur police station IIC who lathicharged Dhinkia villagers inhumanly were accused of custodial death of one K Ramesh under Baselisahi police station in Puri

district in 2020 and they were sent back to police headquarters.

The Congress leaders accused that the BJD Government was using police force to settle a score against the Posco opponents to suit the interest of a new company which is proposed to be set up in the same area where land was being acquired for the South Korean steel maker.

Pandemic is nature's search for a better world

The choices we make today shall design our future



DINESH PRASAD SWAIN

will soon complete imprisoning us for two whole years. Within this long period, we have faced various kinds of problems that had possibly never occurred before. Certainly, years back in history, our ancestors might have tackled conditions of similar kind, but the current generation has never.

As a yoga professional, I interact with a lot of people with different backgrounds. What I've observed is that scholars of various ages, students, small businessmen, almost everybody, is now suffering from physical and psychological problems that are indeed worth our worry. Most college students find online classes to be tedious and are more indolent than unable to join these classes. Due to financial crises, lower and middle class people undergo diverse adversities just to manage their day-to-day lives.

Many children are turning out to be violent, the result of the impact that the pandemic has left them with. Teens are now highly addicted to internet surfing and glued to their mobile phones with earphones plugged in ears. On one hand, the financial crises haunt us; and on the other, there are these teenagers' demands; a constant source of indignation indeed. These kids are becoming slothful with each passing day, reluctant to even lend a hand to their parents in managing the household chores. In fact, this is one of the majorly contributing reasons for familial uproars and parents' bewilderment. This is leading to both the parents and the ward taking irrevocable steps that one can't turn right such as cases of suicide that have risen noticeably high in the last one and a half years. With a new morrow approaching us, we're stepping back into the despair of the shutdown after a few months of liberty and are going to struggle against the third wave of the pandemic, emphatically nature's warning for the wayward humankind. The State and Central Governments, scientists, researchers, health experts, doctors, all are engaged in lending ample hands to overcome this deadly parasite for humankind. However, the fact to note here is that this is neither an

earthquake nor a flood that it is easy enough to determine when this death-dealing pandemic shall end. As our Covid warriors give their best trying to restore normalcy once again, we can't just lay back and enjoy the view from inside our homes. Humans were born free but, indeed, are in chains; and that's what nature, in the form of the pandemic, has proved to us again.

The doctors, researchers, scientists, all are toiling towards creating a safe and healthy environment for our physical being to survive, but the pandemic has indubitably taken a serious toll on our mental wellbeing as well. We can't go on with the rotten headspaces that we've begun harbouring endlessly and then dare to dream of a utopian perfect earth for ourselves. It is high time for us all to take these trivial matters into our own hands and resolve these minor issues before they enlarge enough to haunt the existence of life on earth once more. The first steps begin from within our closest surroundings. Parents and teachers must channelise the energy in a positive direction in students when they have absolutely nothing to be inspired from within the closed barriers of their homes. Teachers, professors and educationists have to think of ways to steer the stu-

dents in a productive manner. We have to assign them physically-strengthening tasks and give them the same importance as the core subjects of a student's career. Students can be indulged in a couple of simple breathing practices, physical exercises and meditation in their leisure periods to break the limits of the average student mind.

As mentioned in all my previous articles, simple practices that can be performed within a 6 x 4 feet area are the most compatible practices for us at the moment. Asanas like Surya Namaskar, a couple of forward and backward bending, spinal twisting and pranayamas like Nadi Shodhan, Kapalbhati and Bhastrika can do wonders for us in the midst of the pandemic while we have absolutely nothing to rely on when it comes to keeping fit. Yoga Nidra and meditation are highly-recommended practices that help bring mental balance and peace. These simple yet effective practices can divert us from our torpid lifestyles and morph us into more constructive minds. This teaches us how to maintain our inner equilibrium irrespective of external circumstances like pleasure and pain; success and failure; joy and sorrow; optimism and pessimism in such a

trying time. As a result, it develops our intrinsic abilities. The pandemic is nothing more and nothing less but nature's way of reminding us that it's not us that all-powerful and we too are replaceable. For us to maintain our identities and existence, we must prove ourselves worthy of it. This pandemic is a final call for as we step into newer times and what the pandemic aims for is prosperity in the end; and it can be with or without us. The pandemic is nature's search for a better world. The prerequisite for our survival is the construction of a better world.

What we seek is seeking us. Therein, we must work harder in this direction and shape the future with our own actions. It is alright to hope for the best but we ourselves have no idea of what the worst can manifest into. So, it is for the better that we're prepared to overcome all of this. This is no longer the time to ponder over things as matters get worse every day. This is indeed high time for us to take matters into our hands and let go of our benighted selves. The future is ours to build and ours to live for. (Dr Swain is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health and Wellness, Sri Sri University. dinesh@srisriuniversity.edu.in Phone: 77894424506

In Puri

Bus operators

charging excess fares

Connivance of RTO officials alleged

PNS ■ PURI

The buses plying from Puri to various places are illegally charging excess fares from the passengers than those approved by the State Government.

Due to the excess fare collected by the conductors, the passengers have to shell out 25 per cent to 50 per cent more on each ticket. Surprisingly, there has been no increase in fares recently by the State Government. The plea behind the fare hike is rise in fuel prices and loss suffered by the bus operators due to the Covid pandemic. Despite repeated complaints, the Puri RTO has turned a deaf ear.

It is alleged that due to the nexus between the RTO officials and the bus owners, the fares have been hiked arbitrarily, which is burning in

a hole in the pockets of the passengers. Sources said that after relaxation of Covid restrictions on public transport, all the buses from and to Puri have been operating in different routes as usual. Due to fear of infections, the numbers of passengers travelling by bus have decreased compared to the pre-Covid-19 period.

The Government has fixed fare of 87 paise per kilometer for ordinary buses while it is 91 paise for Express and Rs.1.25 for Deluxe services. So, as per ordinary bus fares, passengers from Puri to Kalpana Square in Bhubaneswar which is 60 Km, should pay Rs 52.20 and Rs 69.60 to Barmundas for 80 Km. But the passengers are being charged Rs 70 to Kalpana Square and Rs 80 to 90 to Barmunda Bus-Stand. Same is the case in the other routes where the fare is in excess than the Government approved rates.

When extortions made in name of Puja donations

Cases in Dhenkanal
KRUSHNA KUMAR MISHRA ■
DHENKANAL

These days the Government has restricted mass celebrations and pujas due to the fear of Covid-19 infection. But even during this time, the Puja committees are involved in forcible collection of 'chanda'. In Dhenkanal headquarters town, Laxmi Puja is celebrated with traditional fervour and gaiety and the town has a name for the fest.

The worshipping of earthen idols of Goddess Durga, Goddess

Mahalaxmi and Goddess Kali at public places were started in Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Bhadrakh and Kendrapada long ago. It all started with the initiative of a few progressive minded persons from business community and subsequently, it assumed the shape of mass festivals with involvement of people from all shades and variety. Apart from traders, common people irrespective religion, class and creed participated suo motto with the organisers to celebrate the festivals in a better way. Contributions from members, business people and lo-

cal residents were collected the make the pujas bigger. In Dhenkanal, the unique Laxmi Puja is celebrated by various bazaars and puja committees. Even though not registered bodies, these committees have some self declared office bearers who behave in an autocratic manner. These committee members decide the subscriptions to be made by individuals, traders, make shift shops, dollas, zoo, junk food sellers and also the exhibitor of acrobatics, including the 'Maut ki Kuan'.

Even they do not fear police or administrative system while vir-

tually extorting the people. Curiously, the district administration invites the puja committee members for discussion for peaceful celebration of the festival and immersion of idols. However, as it is not mandatory for audit of puja funds, the committees spend the money the way they like. Earlier the festival organisers were arranging opera shows, palla, daskathia for the puja revellers at night. Presently they spend in lakhs for golden medha, silver medha, melody, dances and also for consuming meat and liquor. Recently a puja

committee did not allow a builder to construct his own residential building until he gave commitments to pay Rs 27 lakh for silver medha to a puja committee.

The same puja committee also stopped the construction work of a medicine wholesaler forcefully. He was allowed to continue construction work only after he agreed to pay Rs 6 lakh for a silver medha, Rs 1 lakh for Ganesh puja and another Rs 1 lakh to an unsocial person who was pressurising the medicine wholesaler to give the money.

Centenarian freedom fighter no more

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Jitendriya Pradhan, 102-year-old freedom fighter, of Panimura village in Bargarh district passed away at his residence on Friday.

Pradhan was the last freedom fighter of the village out of as many as 32 who took part in th 1942 Quit India Movement and courted arrest. After the country's Independence, the village

turned into a pilgrimage for the people, including those from abroad.

Pradhan, a bachelor, adopted a relative, Prakash, as his son. His last rites were performed with full national honour where the Minister from the district Susant Singh and senior officers were present. A guard of honour was given by the district administration as mark of respect to the freedom fighter.

S'garh police to take conman in remand

Presently cooling his heels for cheating woman cop
Also facing more similar allegations

MALAY RAY ■ SUNDARGARH

A conman from Baleswar district, who had duped a Sundargarh woman police of Rs 4.50 lakh for buying her a plot of land at Bhubaneswar and was arrested by Sundargarh police about a week ago, cooling his heels in jail now, will be brought on remand by Sundargarh police as a number of allegations against him have started surfacing. It is alleged that the conman

has duped about 16 persons from different districts in the State of more than Rs 30 lakh. Chaturbhuj Tarai alias Deepak Panda alias Manas Das, a resident of Jugdih of Baliapal of Baleswar district, had introduced himself through Whatsapp to Hemangini Gardia, IIC, Lephripa police station of Sundargarh district, as Deepak Panda, working as a Sub Inspector of Baisinga police station of Mayurbhanj district, and had duped her Rs 4.50 lakh on the plea of buying her a plot of land in Bhubaneswar. When Hemangini had come to know that she had been duped, she lodged a complaint and managed to get her arrested in Sundargarh. According to sources, after his arrest by Sundargarh police, about ten youths including a

few women who had become victim of his cheating in different districts, started bringing allegations against him. They alleged that Chaturbhuj was either introducing himself as Deepak or Manas and had taken Rs 1 lakh each from them by giving them fake appointment letter for Forest Guard job. One Bimal Toppo of Rasrajpur of Sadar police station of Sundargarh district alleged that Chaturbhuj had contacted eight persons including him and had told them that he would give them job of Forest Guard and would take Rs 1 lakh each. Further three youths from Gajapati district, five youths including one Ganesh Pradhan of Riamal area of Deogarh district had also been taken for a ride by the accused.

JSW-BPSL pond beaches in S'pur



Farmlands flooded: security guard missing
Company assures compensation

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■
JHARSUGUDA

The boundary wall of a tailing pond in the JSW-BPSL premises at Thelkoloi in Sambalpur collapsed on Thursday evening, causing complete destruction in the adjoining farming fields and a poultry farm while a security guard is missing.

Iron-infused toxic chemical mix slurry from the pond spread deep into the fields, ponds, homes and agricul-

ture fields of Benjiverrna village. It caused the fish in the ponds to die almost instantly. The Thelkoloi police station IIC reached the spot to look into the incident, which has angered the villagers, many of whom have demanded compensation from the factory for collateral damage. Two meetings have already taken place between the representatives of the factory and villagers; yet, there was no resolution to the issues.

When asked to share the company's response on the matter, JSW Bhushan Power & Steel VP (Administration) of DK Sinha said a cleanup of the plant was underway. "We assure that all affected villagers would be given their due compensation for the damages as per advice by the district administration," he added.

Solidarity for Kotia polls

3 major parties to give consensus candidates

PNS ■ KORAPUT

Showing solidarity for the fight for Odisha's land Kotia against Andhra Pradesh, all three major political parties in the State, BJD, BJP and Congress, on Thursday came together and decided to give consensus candidates for Kotia in the panchayat elections.

The decision was taken at an all-party meeting held here in the presence of BJD Koraput district president Ishwar Panigrahi, senior BJP leader Jairam Pangti and district Congress president Minakshi Bahinipati. It was decided that one candidate for each post of Ward Member, Sarpanch and Panchayat Samiti Member and Zilla Parishad Member of Kotia panchayat would be announced with mutual understanding and the concerned candidates would resign from their political parties. Meanwhile, Koraput Collector Md Abdaal Akhtar said elections would be held as usual in all the 13 wards

of Kotia and stern action would be taken against those who try to disrupt the poll process.

There are more than 5,000

voters in the 13 wards of 28 revenue villages and 12 other villages in the panchayat which will go for voting on February 18.

Avg 3 murders, 7 dowry cases a month in Rourkela

AUROBINDA DAS ■ ROURKELA

As many as 141 people have been murdered during last 47 months (January 2018 to November 2021) under Rourkela Police District (RPD), reveals data. These include male, female, students and children too. Most of the cases are due to failure or one side love, business enmity, family feud due to land dispute or other reasons. Though in many cases police have arrested accused persons but, there are also in many cases, in which the police are groping in the dark.

Sources said while in 2018 the

figure was 40, it was 31 in 2019, in 2020 and till 25 November 2021 it was 25. According to records while in Koira Police Station highest number of cases with 19 (2018-4, 2019-5, 2020-7 and 2021-3) were registered, it is followed by Lahunipara PS with 18 cases (2018-11, 2019-3, 2020-2 and 2021-2), Bisra PS with 16 (2018-7, 2019-2, 2020-5 and 2021-2), K Bolanga PS with 16 (2018-3, 2019-4, 2020-4 and 2021-5), Bonai PS with 13 (2018-1, 2019-4, 2020-7 and 2021-1) and Brahmani Taranga PS with 12 (2018-2, 2019-3, 2020-4 and 2021-3).

Similarly, while during last 47

months 11 cases were registered in Raghunathpalli PS, eight cases were registered in Plant Site PS, six each in Gurundia and Chandiposh PSs, 4 each in Bondamunda, Tikayatpalli and Sector-7 PSs, two cases in Jhirpani PS, and one each was registered in Lathikata and Sector-19 PSs. Significantly no murder case was registered within these periods in Sector-3. Sector 15 and Chhend Police Stations said source. Similarly, during these periods total 332 dowry torture cases were registered under Rourkela Police District. While 78 cases were registered in Mahila Police Station, 58 cases were registered in Uditnagar, 30

in Bonai, 26 each in Sector-7 and Raghunathpalli, 16 in Koira, 11 each in Brahmani Taranga and Bondamunda, nine in Jhirpani, seven each in Plant Site and Bisra, six in Chhend, five each in Lahunipara and Sector-15, four in Lathikata PS, three each in sector-3 and Sector-19 and only one case was registered in tribal dominated Gurundia PS. Significantly no case was registered in two police stations i.e. Chandiposh and K Bolanga which are also tribal dominated.

The data also reveals during these periods total 1,515 accident cases were registered in different police stations.

Passing out parade at INS Chilka



PNS ■ KHORDHA

Total of 2,929 trainees of Indian Navy and Coast Guard of batch 02/2021 graduated from the INS Chilka in a ceremonial passing out parade on Friday. The parade was reviewed by Lt Gen Satinder Singh AVSM, Commandant, Army Air Defence College, Gopalpur.

The General awarded medals and trophies to meritorious trainees. He exhorted the outgoing trainees to hone their skills further and develop a strong foundation

of knowledge, willingness to learn and commitment to excel in their respective careers that lay ahead. Earlier on Thursday, a valedictory function was held, during which a cultural programme was put up that showcased the talents of the trainees. The winter edition of "Ankur", the bilingual trainees' magazine of INS Chilka, was also released by Commodore NP Pradeep, NOIC Odisha and Commanding Officer, INS Chilka and Bindu Pradeep, President NWWA, Chilka.

Basic amenities denied

2 JSpur villages threaten to boycott poll

KAHNU NANDA ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

Demanding supply of basic amenities and good governance, residents from two villages in Jagatsinghpur district have threatened to boycott panchayat polls. They have apprised the district administration in this regard on Thursday.

While there is excitement in air over the upcoming Panchayat elections and nomination filing has been underway since January 17, the residents of Jhatipari village under Japa Panchayat in Erasama block have refrained from any participation in the election. They stay aggrieved as they don't have road connection, drinking water facility, health service, cyclone shelter, school building and PDS ration supply. The children and villagers have to cross water bodies and go to a nearby village to attend school and bring ration from a PDS shop.

"Our issues have been neglected for years. So we have unanimously decided to boycott the elections," informed Niranjana

Mandal, a villager. "In the last election in 2017 too, we had threatened to boycott the Panchayat polls, but we were assured of fulfillment of our demands. But after the polls, nothing happened," lamented Alok Maiti, another villager. Sources informed that about 170 families comprising a population of 600 have been reeling under several problems. The village gets disconnected during monsoon. The ambulance cannot reach the village to shift patients. After the Super Cyclone in 1999, a cyclone shelter had been built in the village but now that is in dilapidated condition. Nobody is bothered about its renovation and repair.

The boycott threat has also been given by residents in Odisso Panchayat ward 11 under Jagatsinghpur block. In the Panchayat which is mainly tribal, the ward member post has been reserved for the ST. Here nobody turned to file nomination. The residents have grievances over caste certificate.

Mobile network demand

Deogarh villagers boycott panchayat polls

Don't allow anybody to file nomination

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■
SAMBALPUR

People of five gram panchayats of the Deogarh district are very much determined not to cast their vote if the mobile network of their locality is not improved.

Mobile is not a luxury now, rather it is a necessity. And Covid has enhanced its utility further. Particularly, students are more dependent on it to take lessons when study is imparted online. The residents of these Gram Panchayats of Tileibani block of the district are deprived of mobile service as there is network problem. Not a single company is able to provide the network service satisfactorily. In protest, they have decided to boycott

the panchayat elections. To ventilate their anger, they did not allow a single person to file nomination for the post of Ward Member, Sarapanch and Zilla Parishad Member. They also held dharna in front of the GP offices and Block headquarters at Tileibani to ensure that not a single person can file nomination.

In order to break the ice, Deogarh Collector SM Samal sent a team of senior officials of the district to the dharna spot at Jharagoga. They tried to convince the villagers, but to no effect. They informed the villagers that the district administration has taken all initiatives for installation of mobile towers in the non-accessible Panchayats. The work will also start very soon. However, the villagers were not prepared to believe them and remained firm on their decision for boycotting vote.

PD DRDA of the district Lucas Pradhan invited their representatives to come to the district headquarters town and practically see that a process has begun by the administration to instal mobile towers. But the agitators declined. The result being the election process for the Panchayat and Zilla Parishad is yet to begin in the district. One women candidate took a nomination form from the authority to file for Sarapanch. But amid protest, she couldn't do it and returned the papers. Friday was the last day for filing nomination papers.

When contacted, Collector Samal said: "We hope that people will change their decision on the last day and facilitate the election process. Administration is also approaching them accordingly to end the stalemate as we are sincere to their demand."

Masks not for children below 5 years: Revised guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In what should come as a huge relief for both parents and children, wearing of masks is not recommended for children aged 5 years or below according to the revised Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry. Those aged 6-11 years may wear it depending on the ability of the child to use a mask safely and appropriately under direct supervision of parents. Ensuring that the kid masks up properly has been of much concern to parents while masking up didn't go too well with children who felt suffo-

cated. As per the 'Revised Comprehensive Guidelines for Management of COVID-19 in Children and Adolescents (below 18 years)', those aged 12 and above should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, the guidelines said. It also said that use of antivirals or monoclonal antibodies is not recommended for those less than 18 years of age, irrespective of severity of Covid infection, and if steroids are used, they should be tapered over 10 to 14 days, subject to clinical improvement. The guidelines were reviewed by a group of experts in view of the current surge that

is mainly attributed to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which is also a variant of concern. The available data from other countries suggests that the disease caused by the Omicron variant is less severe. However, there is a need for a careful watch, as the current wave evolves, the ministry said. It categorized cases as asymptomatic, mild, moderate and severe. According to the guidelines, COVID-19 is a viral infection and antimicrobials have no role in the management of uncomplicated COVID-19 infection. In asymptomatic and mild

cases, antimicrobials are not recommended for therapy or prophylaxis while in moderate and severe cases, antimicrobials should not be prescribed unless there is clinical suspicion of a superadded infection. In case of septic shock, empirical antimicrobials, according to body weight, are frequently added to cover all likely pathogens based on clinical judgement, patient host factors, local epidemiology and antimicrobial policy of the hospital, it said. The guidelines stated that steroids are not indicated and are harmful in asymptomatic and mild cases of COVID-19.

They are indicated only in hospitalised severe and critically ill COVID-19 cases under strict supervision, the guidelines said. Steroids should be used at the right time, in the right dose and for the right duration, they stated. Steroids should be avoided in the first three to five days since onset of symptoms as it prolongs viral shedding, the guidelines stated. Anticoagulants are not indicated routinely and all hospitalised children should be evaluated for risk of developing thrombosis and monitored for development of thrombosis, the ministry said.

As far post-COVID-19 care is concerned, the guidelines stated that children with asymptomatic infection or mild disease should receive routine childcare, appropriate vaccination (if eligible), nutrition counselling, and psychological support on follow up. In addition to the above, parents or caregivers of children, who suffered moderate to severe Covid, during discharge from hospital should be counselled regarding monitoring for persistence or worsening respiratory difficulty and explained the indications for bringing the child back to the facility, the guidelines stated.



MHA to allow arms manufacturers to enhance weapon production

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Friday amended the rules to enable arms manufacturing companies to enhance their production of firearms and ammunition. Under the Arms (Amendment) Rules, 2022, the arms manufacturers, however, will have to submit online every month details of the firearms manufactured, sold or transferred or consumed for the month. "The manufacturer who has been issued licence in Form VII under these rules shall be permitted to have enhanced annual production of firearms or ammunition or caliber wise revision of his licensed capacity by giving intimation to the licensing authority and also to the State Government concerned within ninety days from the end of the financial year and for which no further endorsement on the licence as to capacity shall be required," the MHA notification said. While applying, the manufacturer has to submit a detailed proposal for enhancement of manufacturing capacity or caliber wise revision of licenced capacity, project outlays, means of finance and justification for economic viability and market demand projections, duly certified by the authorised signatory of the company. Monthly online returns, detailing the produc-



The manufacturer who has been issued licence in Form VII under these rules shall be permitted to have enhanced annual production of firearms or ammunition or caliber wise revision of his licensed capacity by giving intimation to the licensing authority and also to the State Government concerned within ninety days from the end of the financial year and for which no further endorsement on the licence as to capacity shall be required

tion, sold, transfer and consumed shall be submitted by the manufacturer by close of business hours of the last day of the month, the notification said. Prior approval of the licensing authority will be mandatory for any change in control, either directly or indirectly, of the company or in case of any change in shareholding or beneficial interest in the shareholding, resulting into

dilution of promoters shareholding below 10 per cent. However, prior approval will not be required if there is increase in shareholding of a shareholder, who held less than 10 per cent in the share capital of the company, to 10 per cent or more provided that for transfer of share holding between the two promoters which is already approved by the licensing authority.

AG OK's contempt proceedings against Yati

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Attorney General KK Venugopal on Friday granted consent to activist Shachi Nelli for initiation of criminal contempt of court proceedings against controversial Yati Narsinghanand over his recent derogatory remarks against the Supreme Court. The AG found that Narsinghanand's statement "those who believe in this system, these politicians, in the Supreme Court, and in the Army will all die the death of a dog", was a direct attempt to lower the authority of the Supreme Court in the minds of the general public. As per Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act, the consent of Attorney General is required before the Supreme Court can hear a criminal contempt of court petition filed by a private individual. The complainant Nelli wrote to the AG seeking his consent for the same. In her letter seeking consent, Nelli had stated that in an interview given by Narsinghanand which went viral on social media was total-



ly contempt for the Supreme Court and the Constitution of India clear by saying, "We have no trust in the Supreme Court of India and the Constitution. The Constitution will consume the 100 crore Hindus of this country. Those who believe in this Constitution will be killed. Those who believe in this system, in these politicians, in the Supreme Court, and in the Army will all die the death of a dog." Narsinghanand's statements were made in response to questions posed about the court proceedings in the Haridwar hate speech cases. He was arrested for the vitriolic speeches at Haridwar Dharam Sansad.

SC refuses to entertain plea to censor Kangana posts

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking censorship of actress Kangana Ranaut's all future statements on social media, clubbing multiple FIRs lodged against her for remarks against the Sikh community and investigation by Mumbai police. It asked the petitioner either to ignore the utterances made by her or avail remedy under law. The top court also said that the petitioner, a member of the Sikh Community, as a public cannot seek clubbing of multiple FIRs, and only the accused or informant can seek such remedy. A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Bela Trivedi told petitioner Sardar Charanjeet Singh Chanderpal, an advocate, appearing in person that remedy which he was seeking cannot be granted under Article 32 petition and he has to pursue relief under the criminal law. "There are two possible solutions. Either you ignore the utterances made by her or avail remedy under law. We respect the communi-



ty. We respect your faith...By speaking these utterances you are doing more disservice to the cause. Don't try to prejudice the mind of the court. Don't politicise it. We have read these utterances in your file. You don't need to speak up", the bench told Chanderpal, when he tried to read the remarks which Ranaut had made on social media. Chanderpal said that he has filed an intervention application in the FIR quashing petition of Ranaut and is pursuing it. The bench then ordered, "As regards to first relief is concerned, the petitioner-in-person states that he has already adopted proceedings for the

purpose of availing of his remedies in accordance with law by instituting a private complaint. In view of the invocation of the remedy by the petitioner in person, we, therefore, request this court to treat the petition in so far prayer A (censoring social media posts) is concerned as being disposed of without being expressed any opinion by this court at the present stage". Chanderpal said that the actress is going on and on with her "outrageous" and "defamatory" statements that "Sikh Farmers were Khalistani Terrorists" and tried to portray the community as "anti-national". **PTI**

'Goof up by bank led to wrongful deposit': SC sets aside National Consumer Commission order

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday set aside a National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission order, in a matter connected with wrong deposit and withdrawal, from an account at State Bank of India. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Bela M. Trivedi said that calling for the report by the National Commission on its own from the officer of the bank was absolutely unwarranted. "Be that as it may, the impugned order passed by the National Commission solely relying upon the suo moto report called for from the respondent-bank during the pendency of the revision application, being highly erroneous, deserves to be set aside and is accordingly set aside. The order passed by the State Commission is restored," it said. The matter is connected with the withdrawal of Rs 3 Lakh from petitioner Sunil Kumar Maity's account at State Bank of India. Maity found that the money, which was deposited through cheque, was withdrawn from the account. Later, it was found the bank had given him the account number of another person by name of Sunil Maity, which led to this goof-up. The bank refused to address Maity's grievance. He moved the district consumer forum, which allowed his complaint. The West Bengal State Commission noted the bank should have accepted its mistake, by crediting the cheque amount to the account of Sunil Maity, who had the account at the same branch. The top court noted: "There was no way that the appellant would have known that the second respondent namely Sunil Maity had an account in the same branch. No sane person would deposit cash or cheque meant to be



deposited in his account in an account number belonging to another person with similar name." It pointed out that the National Commission exceeded its revisional jurisdiction by calling for the report from the bank and made it the basis to conclude that the two fora below had erred in not undertaking the requisite in-depth appraisal of the case. The top court said the report that tries to absolve the bank of its liability is based on surmises and conjectures, as it holds that bank has every reason to believe that wrong account number was intentionally inserted by the petitioner himself for reasons best known to him or on account of negligence by him by not keeping the passbook in proper custody. "The suppositions are contradictory as well as incredulous and fanciful," said the bench. The National Commission, allowing a revision petition by the bank, said the complainant can move the competent civil court under the law. The petitioner submitted before the top court that he did not know Sunil Maity, the second respondent, and would not have known his account number unless it was given by a bank officer. **IANS**

194 schools registered for affiliation with Sainik School Society

New Delhi: A total 194 schools have been registered till now for affiliation with the Sainik School Society and application process is underway, the Ministry of Defence said on Friday. The Ministry said that marching ahead in tune with National Education Policy (NEP), the government has decided to provide an increasing focus on value-based education enabling children to develop pride in the rich culture and heritage of this nation, effective leadership with character, discipline, sense of national duty and patriotism. In a paradigm shift to the existing pattern of Sainik Schools, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its meeting has approved the proposal for launching of affiliated Sainik Schools under Sainik Schools Society, Ministry of Defence. These schools will function as an exclusive vertical which will be distinct and different from existing Sainik Schools of MoD. In the first phase, 100 affiliate partners are proposed to be drawn from states, NGOs and private partners. Scheme is aimed at providing Sainik School pattern of education to a larger cross section of aspiring students all over the nation. Sainik Schools Society has forwarded application forms to all such applicant Schools which have registered themselves upto January 15, 2022. The application forms are required to be filled up and submitted back to Sainik Schools Society through online mode by January 12, 2022. **IANS**

Backlash forces Nestle to discontinue KitKat bars with Hindu deities on wrappers

New Delhi: A furious backlash in India has forced Nestle to discontinue a range of KitKat bars covered by wrappers with images of Hindu gods on them, the Daily Mail reported. The range has sparked worries that the chocolate bars adorned with the images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Mata Subhadra would inevitably be thrown away in bins and on the streets, the report said. It is only recently that the KitKat wrapper with a picture of Lord Jagannath came into the spotlight, sparking reactions on social media. "Kindly remove the pictures...they might even get stepped on unintentionally," one Twitter user posted. Another Twitter user commented that it is an honour to have "Odisha culture and Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra on KitKat, but throwing the wrappers in dustbin or stepping on them accidentally would be an insult to the deities." The bars were introduced to "celebrate the culture",



according to Nestle. The company has since issued an apology, and withdrawn the bar range. A Nestle spokesperson said: "We do understand the sensitivity of the matter and regret if we have inadvertently hurt anyone's sentiment. We had already withdrawn these packs from the market last year. We thank you for your understanding and support. "We wanted to encourage people to know about the art and its artisans. We do understand the sensitivity of the matter and regret if we have inadvertently hurt people's sentiments." **IANS**

Ventura case: ED attaches assets worth ₹2 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth Rs 2.37 crore of Jeevendra Poddar and Shipra Singh under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in the offence of money laundering initiated against Ameet Savant and others. The attached assets are in the form of a flat in Goa, Office Space in Gera Imperium Grand in Goa and BMW cars among others. The ED had initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of FIRs dated August 21, 2019 and December 12, 2019 registered by Goa Police under various sections of IPC and Goa Protection of Interest of Depositors (In Financial Establishments) Act, 1999 against Ameet Savant, Jeevendra Poddar, Shipra Singh, and others for duping of investors to the tune of approximately Rs 21.38 crore by promising fixed returns of 2 to 5 percent per month. Investigation by ED revealed that Ameet Savant, as Authorized Representative (AP) of Ventura Securities Ltd. had collected money to the tune of Rs 21.38 crore from the complainants between 2015 and 2019. Instead of depositing the same in the demat accounts of investors maintained with Ventura Securities Ltd., had misappropriated the same by depositing in the accounts of his own similarly named proprietorship firm, VENTURA, the agency said in a statement. Savant had further laundered the money received from complainants for gambling/speculation in the securities market and lost money to the tune of Rs 9.86 crore approximately between 2016 and 2018, it further said. Further, Savant had transferred Proceeds of Crime (POC) to the tune of Rs 5.45 crore in the bank accounts of Jeevendra Poddar and Shipra Singh as commission/brokerage for sourcing clients for him, it added.

ED files chargesheet against IREO Group's MD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed Prosecution Complaint (chargesheet) before Special Court at Panchkula, Haryana against Lalit Goyal, Vice-chairman cum Managing Director of IREO Group of companies named in the Panama Papers leak, and others under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA) in a case related to multi-crore real estate scam. The ED investigation, inter-alia revealed that over 1,050 homebuyers/investors of IREO Projects were duped of Rs 1,225 crore. The Special Court, Panchkula on Friday took cognizance of the present prosecution complaint. The ED had initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of FIRs under



various Sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) registered at various police stations across Gurugram, Panchkula, Ludhiana and Delhi. As many as 30 FIRs have been identified

in the case so far, the ED said in a statement. "The ED investigation inter-alia revealed that over 1050 homebuyers/investors of IREO Projects, namely IREO

Fiveriver, The Corridors, IREO City, Gurgaon Hills in Haryana and IREO Waterfront Township in Punjab, among others, had made advance payments but are yet to receive their booked flats/plots despite a lapse of more than 4-5 years," it said. Investigation further revealed that IREO Group of companies could not complete the projects due to diversion and siphoning of funds. Customer receipts to the tune of Rs. 1,225 Crore have been diverted outside India in the form of redemption / purchase/transfer and buy-back of shares violating the FDI policy and other laws, it said. "The modus operandi adopted by the group includes routing of funds to India from various entities based in tax havens like British Virgin Islands, Mauritius, recording of fictitious expenses in the books

of account, writing off project in progress, interest free loans and advances to sister concerns and round tripping of funds through shell companies and creation of assets within and outside India," it said. Investigation further revealed that Lalit Goyal is "settler and named beneficiary" of an overseas Trust which owns and controls entities holding assets outside India. Recent Pandora Papers Leak has also named four entities (which are beneficially owned by Lalit Goyal) which are holding assets of more than USD 77.73 million (Rs. 575 crore approximately) overseas, it said. Goyal, was arrested on November 16 last year after a Look Out Circular (LOC) was issued against him and has since been in judicial custody. In the matter, searches were also conducted on November 22, it added.

GOOD GOVERNANCE INDEX

J&K first UT to have GGI

Union HM Amit Shah to release index for 20 districts today

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is set to witness cut throat competition among different district headquarters as the Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah is set to release the District Good Governance Index for 20 Districts on Saturday.

The exercise on formulation of District Good Governance Index was set in motion in July, 2021 which has now been completed and Jammu & Kashmir will become the first Union Territory in the country to have Good Governance Index.

The index of Good governance has been prepared after assessing the different aspects of development and district administration in sectors such as agriculture, commerce and industry, human resource development, public health, public infrastructure and util-

ities, economic governance, welfare and development, public safety, judiciary, and citizen-centric governance.

The maiden event is being organized jointly by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), GOI and Jammu & Kashmir Institute of Management, Public Administration & Rural Development in association with the Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad.

Manoj Sinha, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir and Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions are also expected to address the event.

The District Good Governance Index of Jammu and Kashmir was prepared by DARPG in collaboration with Government of Jammu and Kashmir in pursuance of the announcements made in the “Behtar e-Hukumat – Kashmir

Aelamia” resolution adopted on July 2, 2021 in the Regional Conference on Replication of Good Governance Practices held at Srinagar.

The District Good Governance Index of Government of Jammu and Kashmir represents a major administrative reform in benchmarking good governance at District level and a significant step for timely collation and publication of statistics at State/ District level. The District Good Governance Index is a milestone and it is expected that it will provide a robust framework for evidence based assessment of the performance of all the districts in Jammu & Kashmir.

The Chief Secretary Government of Jammu & Kashmir Arun Kumar Mehta and V. Srinivas, Secretary DARPG, Government of India will also be addressing the event. The event will be attended by Senior Officials of

Government of Jammu and Kashmir, District Collectors and Chief Planning Officers of Districts. Secretaries of Planning and Secretaries of Administrative Reforms of all State/ UT governments and District Collectors of non-election bound States have also been invited to participate in the event by video conferencing.

During the occasion, a presentation on formulation of District Good Governance Index will be made by Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad. This will be followed by district presentations by selected 12 District Development Commissioners, who will be showcasing achievements of various sectors. Thereafter a panel discussion will be held on DGGI-A Way Forward for futuristic 2.0 version of DGGI for measuring and benchmarking performance and improvement of Districts in future as well.

‘Netaji statue a damage control exercise’

TMC not happy with Centre’s move to erect statue at India Gate

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress continued to attack the Narendra Modi Government for ‘ignoring Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’ even after the Centre’s decision to install a granite statue of the legendary freedom fighter at the iconic India Gate in the national Capital.

When asked to comment on the latest development senior TMC leader and MP Saugato Roy said, “today they are installing Netaji’s statue ... if they have so much of respect for him then why they did not allow the Bengal Government to prepare a tableau on him to commemorate his 125th birth anniversary,” adding the belated decision (to install his statue) had been taken as a damage control exercise.

Similarly Forward Bloc leader Naren De said ‘simple installation of Netaji’s statues will not suffice ... you have to follow his principles and ideas ... otherwise there are thousands of statues of this great

It’s a nice gesture, better late than never: Bose’s daughter

Kolkata: The daughter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Anita Bose-Pfaff, on Friday hailed as “a nice gesture” Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s announcement about installing a statue of the iconic freedom fighter at India Gate, and hoped it will put to rest the controversy over rejection of West Bengal’s tableau for the Republic Day parade.

Welcoming the decision as “better late than never”, Bose-Pfaff said the announcement took her by surprise.

“I am very happy about the decision. It is very good location. I am certainly glad that his

statue would be put up at such a prominent place. What surprises me is it came all of a sudden now. One might have prepared a bit earlier, but better late than never, I must say. I hope that the controversy about the tableau can also be put to rest in a satisfactory manner,” Bose-Pfaff told PTI over the telephone from Germany, where she lives.

When asked if she thinks that the decision was taken to end the tableau controversy, she said she is not in a position to comment on it.

“I don’t know. Let’s put it that way”, she said. **PTI**

leader throughout India ... If you really have to respect Netaji then you should follow his ideals ... he was a leader who respected all the communities ... he never mixed religion with politics.” Bose had joined and built Forward Bloc after leav-

ing the Congress.

Congress leader of Lok Sabha Adhir Chowdhury too attacked the Centre for politicizing the Netaji issue. “Why have they announced the decision to install the statue of Netaji now a day before his

birth anniversary ... why was it not installed earlier ... they are doing it as a face saving exercise,” he said.

Chowdhury would not spare the Trinamool Congress either. He attacked the Bengal ruling out fit on different issue --- for destroying the anti-BJP forum led by the Congress in India.

“Everyone knows that only Congress can take on the BJP with the kindout outreach it has through the length and breadth of the country ... TMC cannot do a fraction of what the Congress can do to dislodge the BJP ... yet they are trying to harm the Congress by entering the States like Goa, Meghalaya where the Congress has a good support base ... The TMC is doing this to weaken the Congress and strengthen the BJP”.

On the TMC keenness to ally with the Congress in Goa Chowdhury who is also the Bengal Pradesh Congress president said “today they are talking of alliance when they know that they will be rejected by the people of Goa”.

BULLI BAI APP CASE

3 accused denied bail; court says their acts defamed womanhood

Mumbai: A court in Mumbai denied bail to three students arrested in the Bulli Bai app case by stating that the trio had committed serious acts of “defaming womanhood” and, therefore, in the larger interest of society the personal liberty of the accused can be curtailed.

The Bulli Bai app had made public the details of several Muslim women in a bid to malign them, allowing users to participate in their ‘auction’.

Vishal Kumar Jha, Shweta Singh and Mayak Rawat were denied bail by Bandra Metropolitan Court Magistrate Komalsingh Raj on January 20, but a detailed cop of the order was made available on Friday.

While Singh and Rawat were arrested by the Mumbai police’s cyber cell from Uttarakhand on January 5, Jha was nabbed from Bengaluru on

January 4.

“No doubt accused persons are students of tender age and they have fundamental right to life and liberty, but those rights are subject to reasonable restrictions. They were arrested for collection of evidence relating to non-bailable offence and, hence, their arrest is not in violation of any law,” the magistrate said in the order.

“They were found to have committed serious acts defaming womanhood. The larger interest of society is at stake. Therefore, their personal liberty can be said to be curtailed following due process of law,” the magistrate said.

The court also noted there was “some ill-intention” on part of the creator and followers of the app as well as persons propagating and disseminating information about women of a

particular religion.

Stating that, prima facie, the involvement in of the accused is noticed, the court said, “The disputed fact is only in respect of exact role played by them. It is contended on behalf of the applicants that they are just followers and disseminated the information containing its link. Even if it is presumed they are just followers/subscribers of the application, at this stage it cannot be said they are innocent.”

The court further said records showed their ‘active involvement’ in propagating and disseminating the information/data relating to the women.

Meanwhile, accused Vishal Kumar Jha has moved sessions court for bail, and his plea is likely to be heard on Monday.

In the bail application, moved through his lawyer

Clubhouse App chat case: Mumbai Police arrests three from Haryana

Mumbai: Mumbai police have arrested three persons from Haryana in connection with the chat on Clubhouse app, in which obscene comments were allegedly made against Muslim women, an official said on Friday. Personnel of the cyber police station of the Mumbai crime branch made the arrests late on Thursday night, he said. Two of the accused will be produced in a local court later in the day, the official said. In a tweet posted early this morning, Shiv Sena’s Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi praised the city police for the arrests in the case. “Kudos @MumbaiPolice, they have got cracking on the Clubhouse chats too and some arrests have been made. Say no to hate. #Clubhouse,” she said in the tweet. On Wednesday, the Delhi police had written to the Clubhouse app and search engine Google, seeking details about the organiser of the alleged audio group chat in which “obscene comments were made against Muslim women”. **PTI**

Shivam Deshmukh, the accused claimed he had been “falsely implicated in this case”.

“The accused hails from a respectable family hav-

ing deep roots in the eyes of society and any such act as alleged by the present complainant is beyond imagination,” Jha’s plea said. **PTI**

Security situation in J&K reviewed ahead of R-Day

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the Republic day celebrations a Core Group consisting of top officials of Civil Administration, Intelligence Agencies and security forces Friday reviewed the security situation in Kashmir at Badami Bagh Cantonment. The meeting was co-chaired by the General Officer Commanding, Chinara Corps, Lt Gen DP Pandey and Director General of Police, Dilbag Singh.

The core group discussed fresh strategies of the terrorist organizations and their handlers including use of Hybrid terrorist and targeting of soft targets. 15 terrorists killed in 2021 were fresh names not on the security forces radar.

The officials stated that the ceasefire has improved the security situation along the border, however, intelligence inputs of terrorist launch pads

and terrorist training activities in Pakistan indicate the need to be alert along the Line of Control. On the Line of Control, late snow has kept the infiltration routes open for a longer time, however effective domination has ensured decrease in overall infiltration including those from South of Pir Panjal. The vigil on the Line of Control against infiltration of men, drugs and weapons is continuing.

According to a Defence spokesman the officials shared the challenge of propaganda of the nexus through internet and social media. Sadly, these efforts include propaganda to legitimize killing of Kashmiri civilians by the terrorists. “Deliberations were also focused on the use of social media to spread disinformation. The officials present in the meeting observed joint efforts were needed to counter it by exposing fake news, booking of



radicals trying to foment unrest and proactive sharing of information by state agencies.

The spokesman said, “The setting up of the State Investigative Agency and the increased booking by NIA is showing the impact of focused intelligence and investigation efforts. These efforts have been effective in targeting drug, hawala and the OGWs networks. Legal action on those willfully harbouring terrorists is being increased as the harbourers have direct involve-

ment in terror activities.

The DGP and the Corps Commander commended the officials present on improved security indicators. They appreciated that post the abrogation of Article 370, certain benchmarks were set which have been achieved successfully for the restoration of peace and prosperity in the region. The DGP stated that reduction in local terrorist recruitment is one parameter that all must approach with continued focus. A special mention was made

on the measures taken to minimize the collateral damage in operations despite risk to own soldiers. He recommended continued efforts to give chance of surrenders to local terrorists to give them a second chance at living a fruitful life. The Corps Commander called upon all to treat 2022 as a transformative year where common man used to zero civilian casualties in 2021 should see 2022 as the year when things turned for good for the long term. He cautioned the trend of the terrorists to use urban areas with thick built up area for operations as they provide more avenues to hide or escape and puts higher onus in security forces to exercise restraint to avoid collateral damage. He called for continued efforts along with the civil society to counter the separatist propaganda and break the cycle of violence for long term peace in Kashmir. **PTI**



An artist prepares a sculpture of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ahead of his 125th birth anniversary, in Kolkata on Friday **PTI**

COVID BULLETIN

Covid-19 cases continue to rise in Kerala, over 41K logged in 24 hrs

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Though Kerala’s Department of Health brought down the number of samples tested on Friday to 95,218, the Covid-19 cases continued to remain unabated in the State. A total of 41, 668 persons were diagnosed with the pandemic during the last 24 hours and the Test Positivity Rate surged to 43.76 per cent. A total of 51, 607 persons succumbed to the pandemic in the State till Friday evening, according to a release issued by Veena George, minister of health.

The Government of Kerala suffered a setback on Friday as a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court asked the Kasaragod district administration not to allow any public meetings attended by more than 50 persons. Though the

District Disaster Management Authority had issued an order limiting the number of persons that could assemble for any meeting to 50, the district collector reportedly under political pressure issued a new order stating that the number of persons that could be allowed to attend public meetings should be decided based on the Test Positivity Rate as well as the number of beds available in the district.

A Public Interest Litigation filed in the High Court on Thursday had pointed out the restrictions were compromised possibly to facilitate CPI(M) district meetings. It has been argued by the petitioner that the Chairperson of the Disaster Management Authority can only amend his orders on certain new circumstances for the purpose of prevention of dis-

asters or their mitigation.

The Kasaragod district meeting of the CPI(M) was underway at Kasaragod in violation of all safety protocols when the High Court delivered its interim order. “What is so special about the political party meetings? The number of persons who could attend the Republic Day itself has been restricted to 50,” said the Division Bench.

Taken aback by the High Court order, the State leadership of the CPI(M) decided to hold the Thrissur district committee meeting which began on Friday. Though Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was scheduled to be present in Thrissur for the three day event, his hospitalization in USA has led to the cancellation of the public meetings which were to be held on Friday and Sunday. **PTI**

Meghalaya CM tests +ve day after meeting Amit Shah

Shillong: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Friday tested positive for COVID-19, a day after meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Delhi. Sangma urged everyone who has come in contact with him to isolate themselves and get tested if necessary. “I have tested positive for COVID-19. I am isolating myself for the required time. I have mild symptoms. All those who came into contact with me last few days are requested to observe their symptoms and test if necessary,” he tweeted.

Sangma and Sarma had met Shah on Thursday to submit reports on the amicable resolution of dispute in a few areas along the Meghalaya-Assam inter-state boundary. **PTI**

Daily Covid positivity rate shoots up to 30% in AP as over 13,000 test +ve in 24 hours

Amaravati: The daily infection positivity rate shot up to 30 per cent as 44,516 tests turned out 13,212 Covid-19 positive cases in Andhra Pradesh in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday. Consequently, the number of active cases climbed to 64,136.

The state reported five fresh Covid-19 fatalities and 2,942 recoveries in 24 hours, the latest bulletin said.

The cumulative case count is now 21,53,268, recoveries 20,74,600 and deaths 14,532, the bulletin added.

Visakhapatnam district reported the highest of 2,244 fresh coronavirus cases and three deaths in 24 hours.

Chittoor district registered 1,585 more cases and one death.

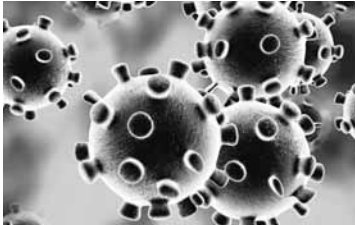
Anantapuram added 1,235, Srikakulam 1,230, Guntur 1,054 and SPS Nellore 1,051 new cases. SPS Nellore also reported one death in a day. Kurnool logged 961, East Godavari 816, Prakasam 772, Vizianagaram 681, Kadapa 649, West Godavari 596 and Krishna 338 fresh positives. **PTI**

Curbs imposed amid case surge in Valley

Srinagar: Authorities on Friday afternoon imposed restrictions on the non-essential movement of people across Kashmir as a 64-hour lockdown began in the union territory in view of an exponential rise in the number of coronavirus cases since the beginning of the new year, officials said.

Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday recorded 5992 fresh cases of coronavirus -- the highest single day spike since the pandemic began. There are 31,044 active cases in the UT. Police vehicles fitted with public address systems announced the restrictions at several places across the valley in the afternoon after the government ordered complete restriction on non-essential movement during from 2 pm on Friday till 6 am on Monday in the entire Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said.

Shops and other business establishments in the city and elsewhere in the valley -- which had opened this morning -- were forced by police to shut in view of the restrictions, they



said.

The police closed the markets and asked people to return to their homes. After the movement of people early in the morning, the police erected barricades at several places in the city here and other areas of the valley and the movement of public was restricted, the officials said.

They said only employees and emergency cases were allowed to move and all other non-essential movement was restricted.

The district authorities appealed to the people to cooperate with the administration and curtail their movement in view of the rising cases. **PTI**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The medium

To teach in English or in mother tongue?
A multilingual approach is the answer

The Telangana Government has decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction in Government schools from the next academic year. The State language, Telugu, will be parallelly available as the other medium of instruction. On the face of it, there is a readymade explanation for the change. More and more parents of children in Government schools of Telangana feel the kids, when they reach the college level, fail to catch up with the standards of English-medium students. Secondly, private schools, hitherto limited to the urban centres with their English-medium education, have of late mushroomed across rural Telangana offering education in the English medium. That has led to a near-exodus from Telugu-medium Government schools, many of which have either closed down or merged with bigger schools, or relocated for want of students. The Government in any case runs a few residential schools with English medium and thinks offering English medium across the State would not be much of an issue. The problem the Government faces is finding teachers who can teach in English. They are scarce. The majority of the teachers is proficient in Telugu. The Government has to re-train these teachers — a tough task — and encourage prospective teachers to take up B Ed courses in English. But by and large, not many eyebrows are being raised as the English medium creeps into the Government school system in Telangana where 'going to America' is a popular cry and Telugu-medium students shell out big money to enrol in private English-language courses.

The issue, however, points to a disturbing fact. Even after 75 years of Independence, we are stuck with basic stuff, like what should be the medium of education in our schools. We are still debating whether children should be taught in English or their mother tongue. We

are also not sure whether mother tongue constitutes languages or dialects, too. For instance, millions speak Bhojpuri but it is considered a dialect of Hindi. Only last year, a Minister in Bihar mooted the idea of making the "mother tongue of the region" the medium of teaching. It just shows India never had an exhaustive debate on the subject. Linguists backing cognitive education insist that children learn skills in their mother tongue, a language they grow up with. The aspirational, social-empowering, rights-based argument favours English because it is the language that works in the world. Thus, the medium of instruction carries the baggage of ideology and elitism in the world's largest multi-lingual federation that is India. In contrast to parents' eagerness for their children to be taught in English, the Centre's National Education Policy (NEP) largely prefers the mother tongue. The answer is a bilingual or, preferably, a multilingual approach. Technology makes it possible. In a country where most children live their lives in two or three languages, multilingual teaching methods provide a level playing field for diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds while reconciling the desires of both parents and the NEP.

PICTALK



A troupe of folk singers during a rehearsal on the Red Road for upcoming R-Day function, in Kolkata

PTI

Ill at ease

As Kerala grapples with rising COVID cases, its 'immaculate health care' balloon has burst

As the number of daily COVID-19 cases soared to 46,487 on Thursday, Kerala's boast of being a role model for health care came crashing down like a pack of cards. The death toll in the State till Thursday stood at 51,501. Kerala has not been free from the pandemic's onslaught since India's first COVID-19 case was diagnosed in the State in early 2020. However, the State administration-sponsored media blitzkrieg portrayed an "all is well" image. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is currently recuperating in a US hospital, had addressed the media daily to tell the world that Kerala was the only State taking on the pandemic by the horns. The daily briefings, which were telecast by all satellite news channels, were used by Vijayan to campaign for the 2021 Assembly election. He claimed that Kerala was receiving global acclaim for its health care system and other countries were emulating its example. But after the LDF retained power following the 2021 Assembly election, he discontinued the practice of addressing the media daily; the opportunist in Vijayan the politician chose to ignore people as the next major election is due only in 2024.

When the cases of COVID-19 surged, the Government turned to blaming people for the transmission of the virus. The truth, however, is that no worthwhile efforts were made to study the pattern in the spread of the disease. The State Government continued to tom-tom and live by its past laurels, when some agencies had praised the Kerala model of health care. The health department was complacent throughout this period, and manipulated figures failed to cover up the administration's malpractices. A 600-bed COVID hospital at Kasaragod, built by the Tatas and handed over to the Government in early 2021, is yet to become fully operational. The Government doctors were on a path of agitation for the last one year, demanding restoration of allowances which were cancelled citing financial crunch. The much-touted Kerala model was virtually a red herring spawned by friendly media. EMS Namboodiripad and C Achutha Menon, the Communist Chief Ministers of the State, used to fly to Romania and East Germany for medical treatment while Vijayan and his conscience-keeper Kodiya Balakrishnan prefer the "imperialist" US as their medical caretaker. It's time for the Comrades to see the writing on the wall, isn't it already?

Afghan women's rights are still far

The Taliban's recent announcements fail to inspire confidence and don't go far enough to impress the international community



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Two news items, published in newspapers on January 20, 2022, merit attention. The first by *AFP*, carried in the Delhi edition of a leading daily, is about Acting Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund's appeal on January 19 to Muslim countries "to take the lead and recognise us officially". He was speaking at a conference to address Afghanistan's massive economic problems. The second, by *PTI*, featured in the Delhi edition of *The Pioneer*. It cited Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Xiao Lijian as saying at a media briefing on January 18 that he hoped that the Afghan side would respond further to the international community's expectations that it would "establish an open and inclusive political architecture, adopt moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies, firmly combat all sorts of terrorist forces" and be "on friendly terms with other countries, especially its neighbours and integrate into [the] international family at an early date".

The statement, made following a mention of the Taliban seeking China's help to get global diplomatic recognition, clearly indicated that the world did not think that they had established an "inclusive" Government or that their policies towards women would not be a repeat of the horribly repressive ones that marked their earlier stint in power from 1996 to 2001. And this, when they had promised that women would enjoy all the rights to education and work available under Sharia law.

In fact, the UN and its bodies have, on several occasions, asked the Taliban to implement their promises and made critical observations about their actions. Its secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, told reporters on October 7 last year, "I am particularly alarmed to see promises made to Afghan women and girls by the Taliban being broken." He added, "I strongly appeal to the Taliban to keep their promises to women and girls and fulfil their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law." Speaking at the Human Rights Council, an inter-govern-



mental body within the UN system responsible for promoting and safeguarding human rights, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said on September 13, 2021, "My office has received credible allegations of reprisal killings of a number of former ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces) personnel, and reports of officials, who worked for previous administrations, and their family members being arbitrarily detained.... In some cases, the officials were released and, in others, they were found dead." Bachelet also highlighted "deeply troubling information" about Taliban raids on offices of some advocacy groups.

The UN bodies have acted. On September 17, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution asking the Taliban to establish an inclusive Government that has "the full, equal and meaningful participation of women" and upholds human rights. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on October 7 to have, from March 2022, a special rapporteur, supported by UN experts, on the ground to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

There are some indications

“THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT DOESN'T MENTION THE PRECISE DATE WHEN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES WILL REOPEN, NOR DOES IT MENTION WOMEN'S RIGHT TO WORK. CLEARLY, NEITHER ANNOUNCEMENT MEANS MUCH

that the Taliban are reacting. Abdul Baqi Haqqani, Minister for Higher Education, announced at a press conference in Kabul on January 12 that the Government would soon reopen public universities for male and female students. He also announced that these students would be segregated and cited Afghanistan's economic crisis and the lack of separated classes for male and female students, as reasons for the delay.

Earlier, in a decree on December 3 in the name of the Acting PM, the Taliban had stated that a "woman is not a property, but a noble and free human being; no one can give her to anyone in exchange for peace...or to end animosity". Both women and men, it had added, "should be equal" and that "no one can force women to marry by coercion or pressure". The decree also enabled a widow to re-marry 17 weeks after her husband's death — against the longstanding Afghan tribal custom of her marrying one of her husband's brothers or relatives after his death. Further, the Taliban leadership has reportedly ordered Afghan courts to treat women fairly, especially in cases of widows seeking inheritance as next of kin. The announcement also cites the

Taliban as saying they had asked their Ministers to spread awareness about women's rights across the population.

Significantly, the first announcement does not mention the precise date when public universities will reopen. Nor does it mention women's right to work. The third *sura* of the *Koran* (ayats 193 and 194) forbids the wasting of anyone's — whether a man or woman's — labour. The fourth *sura* (ayats 36 and 37) says, "To the men a share of what they have earned,/ and to the women a share of what they have earned..." (translation from *The Koran Interpreted* by Arthur J Arberry). The second announcement says nothing about women's right to education and work, which are crucial issues with the international community. Also, the rights the decree announces regarding marriage have all been enshrined in Islamic jurisprudence since the time of Prophet Mohammad. Clearly, neither announcement means much and is unlikely to impress the international community sufficiently for the purse strings to be loosened generously or recognition to be forthcoming soon.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAJOR MIDAIR COLLISION AVERTED

Sir — A major midair collision was averted earlier this month in Bengaluru's skies as two aircraft of the same airline, which had taken off almost simultaneously from the city's Kempegowda International Airport, almost brushed against each other. While one of the planes was headed for Kolkata, the other aircraft was flying passengers to Bhubaneswar. It was a really shocking incident as to how the two aircraft were allowed to take off at the same time. It is a matter of grave concern as to how the planes were in this dangerous situation; besides, the air traffic control (ATC) didn't even report this incident nor made a record of it in the log book.

Luckily, an alert radar controller spotted the potentially grave error and immediately alerted both the pilots, thus saving hundreds of lives. In recognition of his presence of mind, both the radar controller and his swift action should be applauded and he should be suitably rewarded, too. The Government should order a thorough probe into this matter and ask the DGCA to conduct an in-depth investigation, which should be followed by taking necessary action in what could easily have been one of the biggest air safety lapses at the Bengaluru airport and in the country in recent history.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

ANOTHER BLOW TO SPIRIT OF FEDERALISM

Sir — It appears that the BJP Government at the Centre is determined to curtail the powers of the States by introducing controversial Acts and amendments to the Constitution and other existing regulations, despite protests from the States concerned. Before the din on the undemocratic denial of the participation of the tableaux from non-BJP ruled States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal in the upcoming Republic Day parade on flimsy grounds could die down, the Centre has now proposed changes to the IAS cadre rules which, when implemented, would remove power from the States and their rights as far as transfer/deputation of the

Respect history, and monuments



I'm not at all surprised to hear that after burning for five decades, the Amar Jawan Jyoti will be put out at India Gate, and merged with the National War Memorial 400 metres away. The Jyoti has a cenotaph and a monument to honour our fallen soldiers, on a marble pedestal, with a rifle and a soldier's helmet on it. The flame, lit to pay tributes to the soldiers martyred in the 1971 war, was inaugurated by then Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi on the Republic Day of 1972. Actually, one can learn from PM Narendra Modi how to kill two birds with one stone. Just as the nation commemorated 50 years of the 1971 war, the Defence Ministry announced that the Jyoti will be put out.

Similarly, in August 2021, Modi suddenly renamed the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna as Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna. All this is nothing but an attempt at "freeing" India of the Gandhi-Nehru name and legacy while, at the same time, rewriting history in favour of Modi by decisions such as building the Central Vista. Sadly, the Modi Government seems to have forgotten that respecting history involves conservation of the old while building new institutions. Hence, instead of extinguishing one memorial after the other, the Government will do better to make sincere and concrete attempts to spark the fire of patriotism among all countrymen.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

IAS cadres to the Centre are concerned.

This amendment would entail the Union Government to transfer IAS officers without the consent of the States, which is clearly against the spirit of cooperative federalism. Though many Chief Ministers have raised their voice against this amendment and termed it draconian, it is alleged that the BJP Government, as usual, is going to implement the amendment unmindful of the objections. This amendment, if implemented, will be another blow to the democratic norms and cooperative federalism the country has been cherishing all these years.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

OBC QUOTA IN NEET UPHELD

Sir — The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of reservation for OBC candidates and it is a right step in the right direction. While upholding the constitutional validity of reservation for OBCs in AIQ seats, the court elaborated on the concept of merit and

observed that it is not of one's own making. It noted that "reservation is not at odds with merit" in open competitive exams. While open examinations present equal opportunity to candidates, reservation ensures distribution of such opportunities, the court said.

It added that privileges of forward classes include not just having access to quality schooling and good coaching centres but also social networks and cultural communication, including good speaking skills, accent and academic accomplishments. All these ensure that children from forward classes take up jobs commensurate with the family's standing whereas first-generation learners from Other Backward Classes, who lack these, are placed at a disadvantage. Marks alone are not an indicator of merit, but also the resilience required to uplift oneself from the conditions of deprivation.

MR Jayanthi | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

An agreement on extending a \$190 mn Line of Credit from India to Mauritius will be exchanged.

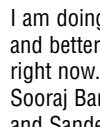


Prime Minister —Narendra Modi



I think Vladimir Putin will move in on Ukraine but (he) does not want a full-blown war.

US President —Joe Biden



I am doing bigger and better projects right now. I have a Sooraj Barjatya film and Sandeep Vanga's next with Ranbir Kapoor.

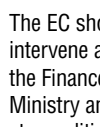


Actor — Parineeti Chopra



Only the captain has the answer as to why Venkatesh wasn't bowled even once.

Former India captain —Sunil Gavaskar



The EC should intervene and direct the Finance Ministry and ED to stop politically motivated raids (on Punjab CM's relatives).

Congress leader —Randeep Surjewala

FIRST COLUMN

QUICK COMMERCE: A NEW RETAIL MANTRA

Essentially large warehouses, dark stores enable fast delivery of goods in localities



MICHAEL CHANDA UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

A wise person can create ‘The Advantage of Adversity’. And you can very much learn this from retail marketers at this crucial juncture. Coping with the crucial situations of COVID-19, retail marketing is scaling newer heights. Business climate for retail marketing is getting conducive as there is a win-win situation for both the marketers and the clients. Today, retail industries are resorting to varied strategies to meet up consumers’ demands. Moreover, the modus operandi of delivering the goods and services is becoming digitalized and even fast-paced. Consequently, understanding and innovating the retail has become a new business mantra. So much so Amazon, Flipkart, Ola, Uber, Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy, Dunzo, Bigbasket and other business units are surprisingly found to be engaged with quick commerce companies. Owing to fasten the business, dark stores have been founded in the local area for treading



purposes. Essentially, dark stores are large warehouses that are the central points of retail distribution. They cater exclusively to local needs through online shopping. Quick commerce is indeed the next generation of e-commerce. It is an international business process that caters to the wishes of the consumers to bring instant delivery of goods. It provides instant support to the modern communities which are in dire need. Groceries, stationaries hygiene products etc., are coming under the ambit of quick commerce activities. Quick commerce websites are used to provide an online platform for various trading in the country. However, this business method helps the online shoppers to make safe purchases for their stores. Such a business model wants to be the biggest kirana store in the urban colony. It should be expressed that a dark store hits a frequency of more than 200 orders per day. The unit economics depends on the fact that there is a mixture of perishable and non-perishable in transaction. Tellingly, quick commerce remains a new and evolving business management with the effective inclusion of information technology. Many e-commerce companies are turning to social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram to showcase their vast array of products. Customization is the key of this trade. It will facilitate speed and efficiency. Quick commerce addresses are meaningful. The customers can use their mobile devices for shopping. However, quick commerce can invite online fraudulent activities. Credit card frauds are persistent in online businesses. It is apparent that quick commerce or electronic commerce is above all a commercial transaction over the Internet. It is a space mainly to watch out for logistics and e-commerce players. The expectations are likely to settle in at a sweet spot of thirty minutes’ delivery or so. According to industry players, ten minutes’ delivery model will see rationalization over time. Subscription-based e-commerce is another new venue that is being explored. It customers to subscribe to a product on a recurring basis depending on their need. However, the local kirana stores in the local area lose business due to the rise of dark stores that modernises the trading process. The local businessmen cannot afford to make big capital for having dark stores. These stores are losing customers due to the higher discount offerings of the companies. The companies have appointed a number of bikers and cyclists to deliver the commodities to the customers from dark stores. The corporate giants should pay minimum heed to the interest and survival of owners of kirana stores.

(Chanda is an author-activist and works as an advocate at High Court, Calcutta. Chakraborty teaches at Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal.)

Cinema ticket pricing vs bloated film costs

The Andhra Govt has issued an order fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, *nagar panchayats* and village *panchayats*

Two controversial Government Orders issued by the Andhra Pradesh Government related to entertainment and culture have created a lot of heat. The first GO issued in April 2021 was aimed at regulating film industry. The second one was recently issued banning a popular and message-oriented stage play ‘Chintamani.’ Both the issues could have been dealt with skilfully had the Government consulted the stakeholders before taking the decisions.

The Government of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy which has been dabbling in controversies of all kinds has added two more, involving the film industry and stage plays.

About 170 of the 950-odd theatres in Andhra Pradesh have been closed since the GO was issued. The exhibitors say they lost hugely due to Covid during 2021 when the theatres were completely shut. They were reopened with 50 per cent occupancy on July 31, 2021. Even before that, the State Government issued GO 35 fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, nagar panchayats and village panchayats under economy, deluxe and premium classes for multiplex, AC theatres and non-AC theatres.

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma met AP Information, public relations and cinematography minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) and told him that the Government has no business to intervene in this issue. It is for the exhibitors and audience to decide the price of tickets. Pawan Kalyan, film hero-cum-politician (president of Jan Sena which has alliance with the BJP) was rather aggressive in his criticism. He said since the Government has no money, it is indulging in online ticketing and fixing ticket prices. Minister Nani asked the actor why would the government which has no money would reduce the ticket price instead of increasing. Senior actor, Pawan Kalyan’s elder brother and former union minister Chiranjeevi tried to break the ice when he travelled to Amaravati to meet Jagan Mohan Reddy over lunch on last Thursday. Some news channels and newspaper said Chiranjeevi was offered a Rajya Sabha seat by the YSRCP chief which was promptly and curtly denied by the mega star. He said the problem would be resolved soon.

What is the problem? Is it peculiar to Tollywood? So, it appears. The problems in the industry started with stardom. At least six stars today charge a fee of ₹45 crore each for a movie. Heroines also are paid in crores, though their remuneration is nowhere near the actors’. Directors donot take all the remuneration by cheque or cash but ask for share in the revenue area wise. Together they eat away three-fourth of the budget.

Persons working in 24 crafts in films get a pittance. The presence of Chiranjeevi, Prabhas, Mahesh, Pawan Kalyan, NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja makes the budget



THE PRESENCE OF CHIRANJEEVI, PRABHAS, MAHESH, PAWAN KALYAN, NTR (JR) AND RAM CHARAN TEJA MAKES THE BUDGET OF ANY FILM CROSS ₹100 CRORE. IN ORDER TO EARN THAT KIND OF MONEY, THE EXHIBITORS ORGANISE BENEFIT SHOWS AND EXTRA SHOWS TO COLLECT MORE. FOR BENEFIT SHOWS, THE PRICE OF THE TICKET WOULD BE ABOVE ₹1,000 FOR BIG-TICKET MOVIES

(The writer is Editor, Primepost, the news website based out of Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal.)



of any film cross ₹100 crore. Each actor acts in one movie in one or two years.

In order to earn that kind of huge money the exhibitors organize benefit shows and extra shows to collect more. For benefit shows, the price of the ticket would be above ₹1000 for big-ticket movies in which one of these stars acts.

If you have two stars like NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja and a star director such as Rajamouli of Bahubali fame, as in RRR (Raudram, Ranam and Rudhiram), the budget would be around ₹300 crore. The film RRR was supposed to be released on January 7 after three postponements. Some other films slated to be released on Sankranti postponed their dates thinking that RRR would be released by then. The release of SarkaruvariPaata (featuring Mahesh Babu) was put off till April 1 and BhimlaNayak (Pawan Kalyan, Rana) till February 25. It happened because when a big budget film, such as RRR, is released, it is exhibited in most of the theatres for one week with special shows and higher ticket prices to earn back the huge investment. The poor and the middleclass among the audience are made to pay through their noses to pay to the stars. During that week no theatres would be available for other films.

Small cinema which used to flourish earlier has been thoroughly discouraged. Small producers have to depend on OTT platforms or sale of the cyber rights. The remuneration for artists is far less in Kannada, Malayalam and

Marathi movies.

Once late Raj Kumar, the Kannada Kanteerava, invited all Kannada producers, directors and exhibitors to his residence, gave them sumptuous dinner and politely asked them permission to raise his remuneration by ₹25,000 since he has a number of children. The guests were stunned and told him he could enhance his fee by lakhs.

The late NTR acted for twenty years for less than a lakh of rupees for a film. The days of NTR, ANR, Sobhan Babu and Krishna were golden for Tollywood. Beside the heroes, actors, directors, technicians and other craftsmen used to live happily. If the prices of tickets are low, small movies can get theatres and reasonable revenue. Some exhibitors went to AP High Court which asked the government to appoint a committee to study the issue. In the absence of compliance, the HC has stayed the operation of the GO. Then the government organized raids on theatres which were running without proper license and selling refreshments at higher prices. The result is bad blood between the government and the industry.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Government has agreed to the demand of the film industry and allowed fixing of ticket prices by the producers and exhibitors. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao did not want any trouble on this count. The ideal solution would be for both the chief ministers of Telugu States to sit with the important persons from Tollywood to sort out the matter once for all. The remuneration of the stars, the stranglehold of four families on hundreds of theatres in both the States (Families headed by Dil Raj, Allu Aravind, Daggubati Suresh and Sunil Narang) and the unethical exploitation of the film lovers, scope for small budget film producers to survive and the welfare of technicians and others (estimated to be more than 50 thousand) have to be discussed threadbare to arrive at a comprehensive and amicable solution. Sooner it is done the better for both government and film industry.

The ban on Chintamani, the popular stage play, imposed by Rajat Bhargava, the Principal Secretary through a GO, was not warranted although the complaint of a community is genuine. The original play written by social reformer, writer and poet Kallakuri Narayana Rao, exactly one hundred years ago, was sophisticated and enlightening. It was a critique of the Devadasi system. Subbi Shetty, a character in the play, is a vaisya (bania), who loses his wealth to Chintamani and his character is used to engage the audience through his teasing chat with Chintamani’s mother Srihari and sister Chitra. It is true that some actors introduced vulgarity and obscene dialogues between Subbi Shetty, Chitra and Srihari, hurting the sentiments of a community.

The Andhra government should have allowed the play to run with a condition that vulgar characters and dialogues are removed. Even today, the play has great relevance. The AP Government’s decision needs to be revised.



RAMACHANDRA MURTHY KONDUBHATLA

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE DOUBLE-ENGINE GOVT PEOPLE ARE DISMANTLING EACH OTHER’S WHEELS. THE DELHI CAMP HAS SHUNTED THE CM TO GORAKHPUR. —SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV



THOSE NOT GETTING TICKETS TO RIDE THE DOUBLE ENGINE ARE BUYING TICKETS IN BLACK TO RIDE THE BICYCLE. —UP BJP CHIEF SWATANTRA DEV SINGH

Will Russia play the ‘Cuban card’?

But Russia stopped being Communist 30 years ago

After a week of intense discussions about ‘security’ between Russia and the NATO countries, this is the week when the Western allies will send their written replies to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Various pundits, some of whom have actually been to Russia, warn us that there will be ‘War in Europe’ if Putin’s demands are not met.

(You there, at the back. Stop giggling! This is no laughing matter! Peace is hanging by a thread!)

Historians keen for a moment in the limelight are being wheeled out to draw parallels with past diplomatic disasters like the Munich conference of 1938 (appeasement of Hitler) and Yalta in 1945 (carving up Europe and giving Stalin the eastern half in 1945).




GWYNNE DYER

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

And this just in! Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, just back in Moscow from the talks, told Russian television that if the talks failed, he could “neither confirm nor exclude” that Russia would send “military assets” to Cuba and Venezuela.

Wow! A dagger - no, two daggers - pointed at the heart of America (although they’ll have to work on the length of the Venezuelan dagger, since it’s 2,000 km. from Caracas to Miami). If that does not force the Americans to give in, what will?

I’m sorry. That’s enough sarcasm. It’s just that all this prancing around and mugging for the camera gets tiresome. This is a minor diplomatic spat that has been deliberately inflated far beyond its merit, and it is being taken much too seriously. Let’s start with Russia play-



ing the ‘Cuban card’. Cuba is still a Communist country, and Maduro’s regime in Venezuela also has aspirations in that direction - but Russia, in case you’ve forgotten, stopped being Communist thirty years ago.

Putin’s regime in Moscow is nationalist-populist, and Cuba has absolutely no motive to host Russian troops and risk triggering a confrontation with the United States. In any case

(which is where they are now).

The grown-up American answer to that would be “Who cares?” In real life, there are a number of troglodytes in the US Congress who would work themselves up into a lather about Russian troops in Cuba - but since the Cubans would not agree to it in the first place, it’s really quite irrelevant.

Well, then, what about the alleged historical precedents: Munich and Yalta? They were both about granting a ‘sphere of influence’ in Europe to a great power (Germany in 1938, the Soviet Union in 1945) that could easily enforce its wishes on the ground.

Russia is effectively demanding a comparable sphere of influence in its old ‘satellite’ countries, which would not be allowed to have friendly foreign troops on

their soil even though they are NATO members, but it’s a complete non-starter. Russia lacks the military capacity to enforce its will on the ground.

So will there be ‘War in Europe’, as the feverish headlines suggest? Not in the sense they imply: massive armoured forces rolling across whole countries, with the threat of nuclear war looming in the background. But there might be some shooting on or just inside Ukraine’s border with Russia.

Of course, there’s already a little bit of shooting along that border, in the Russian-backed breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. As Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Friday, Putin may now be planning to cause a little more.

Kirby warned that Russia “has pre-positioned a group of

operatives to conduct what we call a false-flag operation, an operation designed to look like an attack on them or on Russian-speaking people in Ukraine, as an excuse to go in.” He may be right - and he may be wrong. The satellites can see their location, but not their intentions.

Something has got into Putin, and he’s seeking concessions that he should know he cannot extract, with threats that he cannot enforce.

It is possible that he could blunder into a local clash that would bring harsh sanctions down on Russia.

It is extremely unlikely that he would try to conquer all or even half of Ukraine.

It is almost inconceivable that this will end up with Second World War-style battles between large armoured forces.

China raps US missile sanctions as hypocrisy

AP ■ BEIJING

China on Friday criticised Washington for imposing sanctions on Chinese companies the US says exported missile technology, and accused the United States of hypocrisy for selling nuclear-capable cruise missiles.

The United States announced penalties on three companies it said were engaged in unspecified "missile technology proliferation activities."

It said they were barred from U.S. Markets and from obtaining technology that can be used to make weapons.

"This is a typical hegemonic action. China strongly deplores and firmly opposes it," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian. "China urges the United States to immediately correct its mistakes, revoke the relevant sanctions and stop suppressing Chinese enterprises and smearing China.

"China accounted for about 5 per cent of global weapons exports in 2016-20, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

The United States was the top global exporter, accounting for 37 per cent of the total in 2016-20.

Cruise missiles and long-range ballistic missiles are regarded as among China's



Workers wearing masks stand near missiles produced by China Aerospace Space and Industry Corp. displayed during the 13th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, also known as Airshow China 2021 on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021 in Zhuhai in southern China's Guangdong province. China on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022 criticized Washington for imposing sanctions on Chinese companies the U.S. says exported missile technology and accused the United States of hypocrisy for selling nuclear-capable cruise missiles (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

strengths in weapons technology. Zhao defended Beijing's controls on weapons exports.

He said China opposes proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and strictly controls exports of missiles.

"Normal cooperation between China and relevant countries doesn't violate any international law and doesn't involve proliferation" of weapons of mass destruction, Zhao said.

Zhao pointed to U.S.

Plans to sell Australia's government Tomahawk cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"The United States has overtly pursued double standards," Zhao said. The latest U.S. Penalties apply to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

First Academy, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp. Fourth Academy and Poly Technologies Inc. And their subsidiaries.

America sanctions Ukrainian officials alleged to help Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US Treasury Department levied new sanctions on Thursday against four Ukrainian officials, including two current members of parliament who administration officials say are part of a Russian influence effort to set the pretext for further invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions name parliamentarians Taras Kozak and Oleh Voloshyn and two former government officials. According to Treasury, all four have been intimately involved in disinformation efforts by Russia's federal security service, known as the FSB.

The new sanctions were announced less than 24 hours after President Joe Biden said he thinks Moscow will newly invade Ukraine. He warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that his country would pay a "dear price" in lives lost and a possible restrictions in access to the global banking system if it does.

Biden faced criticism from Republicans and Ukrainian officials that he invited a limited Russian invasion by suggesting in comments to reporters on Wednesday that US Would react with a measured response if there was only a "minor incursion" of Ukrainian territory. Administration officials sought to clarify his remarks late

Wednesday and Thursday. The White House last week warned that Russia has stationed operatives in and around Ukraine possibly to create pretext for an invasion. US And Ukrainian officials have also been concerned about Russian weaponising of disinformation.

"The United States is taking action to expose and counter Russia's dangerous and threatening campaign of influence and disinformation in Ukraine," said Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement. "We are committed to taking steps to hold Russia accountable for their destabilizing actions."

Kozak, who controls several news channels in Ukraine, is accused of amplifying false narratives about Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's inner circle and the 2020 elections.

Voloshyn has worked with Russia's FSB to undermine Ukrainian government officials, Treasury says. Treasury officials say Voloshyn also worked with Konstantin Kilimnik, a Russian national who was previously sanctioned for allegedly attempting to influence 2016 presidential election and passing on information to Russian intelligence. Treasury also sanctioned Ukraine's former deputy secretary for national security and defense councils, Vladimir Sivkovich.

Vaccines to Africa must have good shelf lives, says expert

AP ■ ABUJA

At least 2.8 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines donated to African countries have expired, the Africa Centers for Disease Control said Thursday, citing short shelf lives as the major reason.

Donors of vaccines to the continent should send them with a realistic shelf life of about "three months to six months" before their expiration, Africa CDC director John Nkengasong told an online briefing. More African nations are now refusing to accept donations of vaccines that have only one or two months before their expiration, he said.

Although the number of expired doses is only about 0.5% of the total number donated to Africa, Nkengasong said he is unhappy to see any become invalid. "Any dose of vaccine that expired pains me because that is a life that can potentially be saved," Nkengasong said.

Just over 10 per cent of Africa's population of 1.3 billion people are fully vaccinated, he said. The continent's 54 countries have confirmed 10.4 million COVID-19 cases and 235,000 deaths. The continent's omicron wave appears to be receding, with new confirmed cases down by 20 per cent from the previous week and deaths dropping by 8 per cent, the World Health Organization's Africa office announced Thursday. More



A man receives an AstraZeneca vaccination against Covid-19, at a district health center giving first, second, and booster doses to eligible people, in the low-income Kibera neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya on Thursday. At least 2.8 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines donated to African countries have expired, the Africa Centers for Disease Control said on Thursday, citing short shelf lives as the major reason (AP Photo/Brian Inganga)

than 60 per cent of the 572 million vaccine doses African countries have received have already been administered, Nkengasong said. The "big fight" for African countries will be "logistics and getting doses to the population even as more supplies arrive," he said.

"We've seen remarkable uptake of vaccines in settings where we engage the community ... and religious leaders," Nkengasong said, urging countries to use innovative ways to "bring vaccines to the population and not only require that the populations should go to where the vaccines are." In Nigeria, for instance, an increasing number of vaccination centers are being set at public facilities such as markets and motor parks and health authorities are collaborating

with opinion leaders to fight hesitancy. Vaccines are Africa's "best defense" against severe illness, death and overwhelmed health systems, Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO Africa director said at another online briefing Thursday. "Africa must not only broaden vaccinations but also gain increased and equitable access to critical COVID-19 therapeutics to save lives and effectively combat this pandemic," Moeti said.

"The deep inequity that left Africa at the back of the queue for vaccines must not be repeated with life-saving treatments." In 2022, more testing is needed to fight the pandemic, said Harley Feldbaum of the Global Fund. "We need to bring testing and treatment together in a much more rapid fashion," said Feldbaum.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement System)
Assistant Materials Manager, Northern Railway, DSI., Stores, Depot, Shakurbasti, Delhi-110034, for and on behalf of the President of India invites e- tender through e-procurement system for supply of the following item.

| S. N. | Tender No. | Brief Description | Qty. | Closing Date |
|-------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| 01 | 42205012B | Medium Carbon Steel seamless smoke tube size-57.15mm,outer dia 2.946mm thickness & 5900mm length.As per Specn.ASME-SA-210/ASTM-A-210 Gr.-1 for BG Steam Locomotives | 786 Nos | 19.02.2022 |

NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.
2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

42205012B/DSU/SSB/2022 Dated 20.01.2022

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Email Id: premiummerchants123@gmail.com, website:www.pmltd.com

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the meeting no. 05/2021-22 of the Board of Directors of the Company will be held on 10th February, 2022 (Thursday) at the registered office of the Company at Omaxe Square, Plot No. 14, 5th Floor, Jasola District Centre, Jasola, New Delhi-110025 at 4.00 P.M to discuss the following agenda items:

i. To take on record the Unaudited Financial Results of the Company for the Quarter ended on 31st December, 2021 in terms of Regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing Obligation and Disclosure Requirement) Regulation, 2015.

ii. To discuss any other business with the permission of Chair.

By Order of the Board

For Premium Merchants Limited

Date: 21.01.2022

Place: New Delhi

DIN:00027438

Sd/-
(Balbir Singh)
Director

छत्तीसगढ़ शासन, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन विभाग
कार्यालय वनमण्डलाधिकारी
दन्तेवाड़ा वनमण्डल, दन्तेवाड़ा, जिला दक्षिण बस्तर दन्तेवाड़ा (छ.ग.)
सारां. (दु.) 263222, ईमेल- 252355 निरास- (07856) 252439 Email-dfoindrt@rediffmail.com, dfo-dantewada.cg@gov.in

// रुचि की अभिव्यक्ति सूचना //

एतद् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि, दन्तेवाड़ा वनमण्डल के अन्तर्गत वित्तीय वर्ष 2021-22 में प्राकृतिक चिकित्सा केन्द्र के निर्वर्तन, निर्माण, सहकार एवं मार्केटिंग, एफ. आर. सस्करदर संयंत्र निर्माण एवं रख-रखाव, पारिस्थितिकी पर्यटन विकास, मार्ग, कुटीर, मार्केटिंग, रोमांचक गतिविधियों के सुस्था, मैनेजमेन्ट, रख-रखाव बनाने में सहयोग एवं मार्केटिंग, तथा अन्य कार्य सामग्री सहित रुचि की अभिव्यक्ति आमंत्रित की जाती है। रुचि की अभिव्यक्ति से संबंधित निविदा प्रपत्र एवं विस्तृत शर्त कार्यालयीन दिवार में अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय में राशि रुपये 1,000/- का डिमाण्ड ड्राफ्ट/बैंकर्स चेक जो वनमण्डलाधिकारी दन्तेवाड़ा, वनमण्डल के नाम से देय हो जमा कर प्राप्ता कर सकेंगे है।

निविदा प्रपत्र हेतु नगद राशि स्वीकार नहीं की जावेगी। विवरण निम्नानुसार है:-

| विवरण | प्रथम निविदा | प्रथम निविदा असफल होने पर द्वितीय निविदा | द्वितीय निविदा असफल होने पर तृतीय निविदा |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| निविदा फार्म प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि | दिनांक 21.02.2022 समय 5.30 बजे तक | दिनांक 24.02.2022 समय 5.30 बजे तक | दिनांक 02.03.2022 समय 5.30 बजे तक |
| निविदा फार्म जमा करने की अंतिम तिथि | दिनांक 22.02.2022 समय 2 बजे तक | दिनांक 25.02.2022 समय 2 बजे तक | दिनांक 03.03.2022 समय 2 बजे तक |
| निविदा खुलने की तिथि | दिनांक 22.02.2022 समय 4 बजे | दिनांक 25.02.022 समय 4 बजे | दिनांक 03.03.2022 समय 4 बजे |
| निविदा स्थल | वनमण्डल कार्यालय दन्तेवाड़ा (अंतरामाटार) | | |

R.O. No - 67027/4
R.O. Date - 21/01/2022

हस्ता / -
वनमण्डलाधिकारी
दन्तेवाड़ा वनमण्डल, दन्तेवाड़ा

Nepal imposes tough restrictions as coronavirus cases set record

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's capital shut schools, Nordered citizens to carry vaccination cards in public, banned religious festivals and instructed hotel guests to be tested every three days as it battles its biggest COVID-19 outbreak. The chief government administrator of Kathmandu issued a notice on Friday saying all people must carry their vaccination cards when they are in public areas or shop in stores.

Nepal, however, has only fully vaccinated 41 per cent of its population. The notice did not say how unvaccinated people will be able to pay utility bills or shop for groceries.

The government says it has enough vaccines in stock, but a new wave of COVID-19 cases propelled by the omicron variant has created long lines at vaccination centers, with many people unable to receive shots.

All public gatherings and meetings will be banned and cinemas and theaters will be closed. Gymnasiums, pools and other sporting venues will also be shut. No public religious festivals or events will be allowed, the notice said. It did not say how long restrictions would last. Authorities also halted in-person classes at all schools and indefinitely postponed university examinations. Wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing in public will be mandatory.

Australia records deadliest day of pandemic with 80 persons deaths

AP ■ CANBERRA

Australia on Friday reported its deadliest day of the pandemic with 80 coronavirus fatalities, as an outbreak of the Omicron variant continued to take a toll.

But Dominic Perrottet, premier of the most populous state, New South Wales, said a slight decrease in hospitalisations gave him some hope about the strain the outbreak is putting on the health system. The previous record of 78 deaths was set on Tuesday. There have been just under 3,000 coronavirus deaths in Australia since the pandemic began.

New South Wales, home to Sydney, reported a record 46 deaths. They included a baby who died from COVID-19 in December, one of several historical cases that were investigated. The news came after the premier of Western Australia state, Mark McGowan, backed down on a promise to reopen the state to the rest of the country on Feb 5.

In a late-night news conference on Thursday, McGowan said reopening the state as planned would be "reckless and irresponsible" given the large number of COVID-19 cases in other states. No new date has been set for when the state might relax its border closure. The border decision means neither Prime Minister Scott Morrison nor opposition leader Anthony

Family of four, believed to be Indians, frozen to death along US-Canada border; man charged with human smuggling

PTI ■ TORONTO/NEW YORK

In a heartbreaking tragedy, a family of four, including a baby, all believed to be Indians, has died from exposure to cold weather on the Canadian side of the border with the US in an apparent human smuggling operation, according to media reports.

Manitoba Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on Thursday said that the bodies of four people - two adults, a teen and an infant-were found on the Canadian side of the U.S./Canada border near Emerson on Wednesday.

US officials say the dead are believed to be a family from India. They are thought to have been attempting to cross into the US, according to media reports.

RCMP Assistant Commissioner Jane MacLachy shared the discovery with reporters in a news conference on Thursday. "What I am about to share is going to be difficult for many people to hear," she said, calling it "an absolute and heartbreaking tragedy."

"At this very early stage of the investigation, it appears that they all died due to exposure to the cold weather," MacLachy said, adding RCMP believe the four people are connected to the group that was apprehended on the U.S. Side of the border. She said all four were located within 9-12 metres of the border. MacLachy said that the group was "on their own in the middle of a blizzard" and

"faced not only the cold weather but endless fields, large snowdrifts and complete darkness". Police are referring to them as victims, as there are concerns the group's attempted border crossing was facilitated in some way, and that they were left out in the extreme cold, Global News reported.

MacLachy said work is underway to ID the victims, but at this stage, it appears they all died from exposure to the cold, the report said. Manitoba RCMP was notified by US Customs and Border Protection on Wednesday morning that a group of people had crossed into the U.S. Near Emerson, and that one of the adults was carrying items intended for a baby, but there was no infant with the group.

An immediate search began on both sides of the border, and by that afternoon, the bodies of an adult man, an adult woman, and an infant were found. The body of a boy believed to be in his mid-teens was found shortly afterwards.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota issued a release late Thursday afternoon and said 47-year-old Steve Shand of Florida had been arrested and charged with human smuggling in connection with the incident. Shand was driving with two passengers determined to be undocumented foreign nationals from India, according to the release.

Taliban to organise meeting in Norway next week

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

A Taliban delegation will travel to Norway for talks with the Norwegian government, meeting with representatives of the Norwegian authorities and several allied countries but also with civil society activists and human rights defenders from Afghanistan.

The Norwegian Foreign Ministry said Friday that it has invited representatives of the Taliban to Oslo from Jan. 23 to Jan. 25. The statement didn't say which other countries would take part in the meeting.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt said that "we are extremely concerned about the serious situation in Afghanistan." She said there is "a full-scale humanitarian catastrophe for

millions of people" in the country. She stressed that the meeting was "not a legitimization or recognition of the Taliban."

But we must talk to those who in practice govern the country today. "We cannot let the political situation lead to an even worse humanitarian catastrophe," she said.

The Foreign Ministry said that the Taliban delegation meetings also will include Afghans with backgrounds "from various fields and include women leaders, journalists, and people who work with, among other things, human rights and humanitarian, economic, social and political issues."

It said that earlier this week, a Norwegian delegation visited Kabul for talks on the precarious humanitarian situation in the country.

EU nations request stronger borders to ease migration pressure

Vilnius: Interior ministers from European Union nations experiencing pressure from unauthorised migration asked Friday for more action to strengthen and protect the bloc's external borders. Ministers from countries that included Greece, Poland, Italy, Austria and France, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, participated in a border security security conference in Lithuania's capital along with European Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson. They said that reinforcing the EU's borders and cracking down on people smugglers would protect EU citizens and the lives of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa who undertake hazardous journeys to reach Europe. "We must protect our borders from aggression, and we need to protect our people," Johansson told conference participants. AP

100 ISIS terrorists mount deadly attacks in Syria, Iraq; dozens killed

AP ■ BAGHDAD

More than 100 militants from the Islamic State group carried out a complex attack on Syria's largest prison holding suspected extremists, officials said Friday, as members of the group in Iraq stormed an army barracks, killing 11 soldiers as they slept.

The prison break in Syria is believed to be the largest since the militants lost the final sliver of territory they held nearly three years ago. In recent months, IS sleeper cells have become more active in both countries, claiming attacks that killed scores of Iraqis and Syrians. In Iraq, IS gunmen attacked an army barracks in a mountainous area north of Baghdad early Friday, killing 11 soldiers as they slept, the Iraqi military and security officials said. The officials said the attack occurred in the Al-Azim district, an open area north of the city of Baqouba in Diyala province. The circumstances of

the attack were not immediately clear, but two officials who spoke to The Associated Press said IS militants broke into the barracks at 3 am local time and shot dead the soldiers, before fleeing. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to issue official statements.

An Iraqi military statement said the dead included an officer with the rank of lieutenant and 10 soldiers. The brazen attack more than 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of the capital, Baghdad, was one of the deadliest targeting the Iraqi military in recent months.

Spectacular prison breaks are a hallmark of militant attacks. IS militants launched multiple prison breaks during their surge in 2014 before swarming territory in Iraq and Syria. In Syria, more than 100 IS fighters using heavy machine guns and vehicles rigged with explosives attacked the Gweiran Prison in the north-eastern city of Hassakeh where

some 3,000 suspected IS militants are being held, according to a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Farhad Shami.

He said seven US-backed Kurdish fighters were killed and several others were wounded. At least 23 IS attackers were also among the dead, he said.

"This is the biggest attack not only in Syria but also in Iraq and the region," Shami said in reference to attacks carried out by IS since the militant group's was defeated in Syria in March 2019.

"The prisoners include commanders and are among the most dangerous." The complex attack was mounted on Thursday evening and aimed to free fighters from the group incarcerated there. Syrian Kurdish-led forces who control the Gweiran Prison said prisoners inside the facility rioted simultaneously and tried to escape while a car bomb went off outside prison and gunmen clashed with security forces.



Sindhu enters semifinals

Sindhu will face fifth-seeded Russian Evgeniya Kosetskaya in the semifinals.

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu rallied from a game down to eke out a hard-fought win over Thailand's Supanida Katething to enter the semifinals of the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament here on Friday.

The top-seeded Indian beat her Thai rival, seeded sixth in the tournament, 11-21 21-12 21-17 in a quarterfinal match that lasted one hour and five minutes.

Sindhu will face fifth-seeded Russian Evgeniya Kosetskaya in the semifinals.

In the men's singles, however, HS Prannoy crashed out of the tournament with a straight-game defeat to Arnaud Merkle of France in the quarterfinals.

The fifth-seeded Indian, a former top 10 player, lost 19-21 16-21 to his French opponent

in a 59-minute quarterfinal match.

Mithun Manjunath, however, advanced to the semifinals after beating Sergey Sirant of Russia 11-21 21-12 21-18 in a quarterfinal match that lasted one hour and one minute.

Manjunath will face Merkle in the semifinals.

In the mixed doubles event, the Indian pair of MR Arjun and Treasa Jolly beat the eight-seeded French duo of William Vileger and Anne Tran 24-22 21-17 in the quarterfinal match that lasted 42 minutes.

Arjun and Jolly will face compatriots and seventh-seeded pair of Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto in the semifinals.

In the women's doubles quarterfinals, India's Ramya Venkatesh Chickmenahalli and Apeksha Nayak conceded a walkover to eight-seeded Malaysian pair of Anna Ching Yik Cheong and Teoh Mei Xing.

Milan, Juventus return to San Siro after recent losses

AP ■ MILAN

Both AC Milan and Juventus have recent bad memories of San Siro ahead of their eagerly-anticipated Serie A match at the iconic stadium on Sunday.

Juventus lost the Italian Super Cup to Inter Milan last week, when Alexis Sánchez scored the winner with the last kick of the match at the end of extra time.

Milan's last match at its home stadium was on Monday when a refereeing error cost it dearly in a dispiriting 2-1 loss to relegation-threatened Spezia.

"It's hard to lose like that. It's a missed chance that no one wanted, we've missed an opportunity," Milan coach Stefano Pioli said.

"Unfortunately we didn't manage to bring home the win, but now we'll think of the next matches."

"The season is still long, everyone can have an off day. It's good for us that now we have two difficult matches because that will give us great motivation and we'll find the strength to bounce back."

Milan could have moved above league leader Inter Milan with a win but Spezia scored in stoppage-time shortly after a potential winner from Junior Messias was disallowed for Milan because the referee whistled a foul on Rossoneri forward Ante Rebic in the buildup, just as Rebic was passing the ball to Messias. Referee Marco Serra apologized.

“Unfortunately we didn’t manage to bring home the win, but now we’ll think of the next matches.”

Milan now finds itself two points behind Inter, which it plays the following weekend. Defeat to Juventus could see Milan head into the derby five points behind its bitter rival and having played a match more. Inter hosts relegation-threatened Venezia this Saturday.

Napoli is also only two points behind Milan and plays last-placed Salernitana. Pioli will be hoping Milan recovers its attacking prowess after uncharacteristically stuttering against Spezia. The Rossoneri missed several opportunities to put the game to



bed long before the controversial finale.

Milan has the second best attack in Serie A, having netted 47 times this campaign. Juventus has scored only 34 goals – fewer than any of the top 10 teams in the Italian league, apart from Torino – but there are signs the Bianconeri are beginning to get into their stride after struggling at the beginning of the season under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri.

In the top five European leagues, only Real Madrid has scored as many goals as

Juventus in 2022 (12) and Allegri's last loss in the league was back in November, against Atalanta.

That left Juventus seventh in the league, seven points behind fourth-placed Atalanta and the final Champions League spot. It has now moved to within one point of Atalanta.

"We are doing well and we have achieved many good results," Juventus forward Paulo Dybala said.

Simeone losing magic touch in his 10th year at Atlético

AP ■ BARCELONA

This season was supposed to be Diego Simeone's chance to firmly establish Atlético Madrid as Spain's top team and cap his incredibly successful decade as its coach.

While Barcelona lost Lionel Messi and Real Madrid had to replace coach Zinedine Zidane, Atlético strengthened its championship squad with the return of Antoine Griezmann and the signing of attacking players Rodrigo de Paul and Mathieu Cunha.

It looked like the perfect scenario to repeat as Spanish league champions for the first time since 1950 and maybe even win the Champions League title which Simeone has twice come oh-so-close to grasping. It has-



n't gone Atlético's way. Atlético hosts Valencia on Saturday in fourth place in the league, trailing Madrid by 16 points with one more game to play. It is also out of the Copa del Rey and barely advanced from the Champions League group phase. Atlético has lost six of its last 10

games across all competitions.

It was dumped from the Copa del Rey's round-of-16 in a 2-0 loss at Real Sociedad on Wednesday, following a 2-1 loss to Athletic Bilbao last week in the Spanish Super Cup played in Saudi Arabia.

In December, it lost four in a row in the Spanish league, falling to Mallorca, Madrid, Sevilla and Granada. Previously, Atlético had never lost more than two consecutive league matches since Simeone became its coach in December 2011.

"Last season was magnificent and this one is proving to be very difficult," said Simeone, who has led Atlético to two Spanish league titles, one Copa del Rey, two Europa League titles, and two Champions League final appearances.

"We still have opportunities in the league and the Champions League.

I am not going to just sit still. I can promise you that."

Most surprisingly, Atlético has lost its formidable defense. Loyal to Simeone's vision of building a team on a strong defense, it is accustomed to leading the league in fewest goals allowed. This season, eight league teams have allowed fewer goals than the 24 conceded by Atlético. Atlético has also faltered up front. Except for a goal against a third-tier opponent in the Copa del Rey, Luis Suárez hasn't scored since a 3-3 draw at Valencia on Nov. 7. Griezmann was playing well enough until a muscle injury sidelined him for all of but one match since mid-December.

NCAA adopts new policy for transgender athletes



AP ■ INDIANAPOLIS

The NCAA has adopted a sport-by-sport approach for transgender athletes, bringing the organization in line with the U.S. And International Olympic Committees.

Under the new guidelines, approved by the NCAA Board of Governors on Wednesday, transgender participation for each sport will be determined by the policy for the sport's national governing body, subject to review and recommendation by an NCAA committee to the Board of Governors.

When there is no national governing body, that sport's international federation policy would be in place. If there is no international federation policy, previously established IOC policy criteria would take over.

"Approximately 80% of U.S. Olympians are either current or former college athletes," NCAA President Mark Emmert said in a release. "This policy alignment provides consistency and further strengthens the relationship between college sports and the U.S. Olympics." The NCAA policy is effective immediately, beginning with the 2022 winter championships.

NCAA rules on transgender athletes returned to the forefront when Penn swimmer Lia Thomas started smashing records this year. She was on the men's team her first three years, but she is competing for the women this season after transitioning. The Board of Governors is suggesting NCAA divisions allow for additional eligibility if a transgender student-athlete loses eligibility based on the policy change.



Terrific attack has Strasbourg in rare air in French league

AP ■ PARIS

As Paris Saint-Germain waits for the trio of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappé to reach its full potential, another combination is taking the spotlight in the French league.

Ludovic Ajorque, Habib Diallo and Kevin Gameiro aren't global names but together with midfielder Adrien Thomasson — whose clinical efficiency has bagged seven goals and four assists — they have made Strasbourg one of the most potent teams in Europe this season.

The Alsatian quartet has 31 goals out of the team's total of 41 in 21 matches. Only PSG has done better, with a total of 42 goals.

This attacking verve has brought dividends, with Strasbourg sitting in fourth place after winning at Clermont 2-0 in a rescheduled match midweek. It's the club's best league position at this stage since 1997.

Ahead of a trip on Sunday to struggling Bordeaux, Julien Stephan's team are just two points behind Marseille, with qualification for a European tournament in sight. Marseille plays at Lens this weekend, with second-placed Nice traveling to Metz, and runaway leader PSG hosting Reims. Stephan became the coach when he replaced Thierry Laurey following a season of struggle.

"Being fourth doesn't change much, but it does validate the players' hard work," Stephan said. "Above all, it's our third victory in 2022, all of them won in different contexts, and that is extremely promising. We remain very humble."

Strasbourg has 15 goals in its last six matches while conceding just five, with Stephan widely credited for the team's metamorphosis.

In his previous stint, Stephan secured Rennes' first trophy in 48 years and led the Brittany club to the Champions League.

He preaches a fluid passing game.



Medvedev withstands Kyrgios, crowd to advance in Australia

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Daniil Medvedev faced a hostile crowd and a full array of Nick Kyrgios' outbursts and tricks, and still remained calm for long enough to reach the third round at the Australian Open.

The 115th-ranked Kyrgios worked up the crowd, hit 'tweeners and drop shots, mixed up the pace of his groundstrokes and tossed in an under-arm serve in a bid to ruffle the second-ranked Russian.

Medvedev kept his composure, taking a quick trip to the locker room after losing the third set and recovering to win 7-6 (1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 Thursday on a rowdy Rod Laver Arena.

In an on-court TV interview with former champion Jim Courier, Medvedev was asked how he managed to stay so composed.

"That's the only choice when you get booed between first and second serve," he said, triggering some boos from the crowd. "It's not easy."

The (service) games I lost, on the break points, it was the case.

It's tough to play. Kyrgios usually likes to play on John Cain Arena,

known locally as the People's Court because fans with ground passes can get in and the singing and chanting is always less restrained than the two main show courts.

He managed to turn the all-ticketed stadium court into something more akin to a soccer stadium.

In the seventh game of the third set, Kyrgios got two break-point chances when he bunted away a backhand from Medvedev directed at his body and then took off on a circular run behind the baseline to celebrate like he had scored a goal.

When he converted the break, he danced in the change-over and worked up the crowd. Medvedev managed to lower the volume with two service breaks in the fourth set.

It was Medvedev's first win over Kyrgios following two losses in 2019.

And there were cheers later when Courier suggested a new crowd favorite for the rest of the tournament.

Medvedev was the runner-up last year but avenged that loss by beating Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open final.

He's the quasi No. 1 now, anyway, because Djokovic was deported on the eve of the tournament for failing to meet

Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination regulations.

Another contender in his half of the draw had a more routine run to the third round, with fourth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas beating Sebastian Baez 7-6 (1), 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 in a match featuring two former top-ranked junior players.

Five-time runner-up Andy Murray only lasted two rounds. Two days after winning his first match at the Australian Open in five years, the former No. 1 lost to 120th-ranked Taro Daniel 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

Other winners among the men included No. 5 Andrey Rublev, No. 15 Roberto Bautista Agut, No. 20 Taylor Fritz, 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic and No. 32 Alex de Minaur. No. 24 Dan Evans moved on when the player he was supposed to face in the second round, Arthur Rinderknech, pulled out with an injured wrist.

Australian wild-card entry Chris O'Connell upset 13th-seeded Diego Schwartzman 7-6 (6), 6-4, 6-4.

There were surprises in the women's draw on Day 4, with No. 3 Garbiñe Muguruza becoming the highest-seeded player to exit only minutes after No. 6 Anett Kontaveit lost.

Friday's ISL game between Mumbai and Jamshedpur postponed

PTI ■ BAMBOLIM

The Indian Super League match between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC, scheduled for Friday, has been postponed as many players representing the teams are down with the COVID-19 virus.

"Hero Indian Super League (ISL) Match No. 67 between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC scheduled for Friday, January 21, 2022, at Athletic Stadium, Bambolim, stands postponed," the league organisers said in a statement.

"The decision was taken considering advice from the League's medical team on Jamshedpur FC's inability to safely field a team and prepare for the match," the ISL added in its statement.

On Monday, the ISL match between Hyderabad FC and Jamshedpur FC was also postponed



due to COVID-19, and so was Thursday's game between Kerala Blasters FC and ATK Mohun Bagan due to unavailability of enough players in the former's ranks after being hit by COVID-19 inside the bio-bub-

ble. Three days back, Jamshedpur FC's match against Hyderabad FC was postponed hours before kick-off after the Jharkhand-based club failed to field a team due to COVID-19 cases in its ranks.

Dominant India waste chances galore to play out goal-less draw

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

The Indian women's team wasted innumerable chances in a completely dominating performance as Iran held them to a goal-less draw in their Asian Cup opening match here on Thursday.

Head coach Thomas Dennerby will be disappointed with the outcome of the match as a win against lower-ranked Iran would have put his side in a comfortable position in its bid to qualify for the quarterfinals.

But he must be happy in part as his wards dished out some fine display of possession and passing football, especially in the second half, at the DY Patil Stadium.

He will hope that his team continues in the same vein and score goals in the second match on Sunday against Chinese Taipei, who were thrashed 0-4 by China in the day's earlier match, to keep their quarterfinals prospects alive.

The Indians would have expected Iran to be defensive in their approach but it turned out to be the opposite in the initial period.

Iran, ranked 70th as against India's



55th, were the better side in the opening minutes during which they got two scoring chances, including a hit on the crossbar, but the home team took control of the Group A match midway into the first half and dominated till the end.

Iran had two chances in the period they dominated with captain Behnaz Taherkhani's header off a Samaneh Chahkandi free-kick ricocheting off the crossbar after beating goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan in the 12th minute.

Though captain Ashalata Devi was rock solid at deep defence, Iran almost took the lead in 19th minute when an Indian defender's header went backward and fell before Negin Zandi, who, however, sent the ball wide under pressure.

After absorbing the initial pressure, India settled down and came on their own. Indumathi, however, could not keep her volley down in the 24th minute while Manisha Kalyan's free

header six minutes later also sailed over the bar.

But the best chance for India came in the 32nd minute. Pyari Xaxa's scuffed shot fell kindly for Indumathi, but her toe-poke took the ball over the bar.

India dished out a fine display of passing football in the second half and they were all over a rattled Iranian side who had nothing to do but defend desperately.

Dennerby's side were unlucky not to have scored any goal and win the match easily. Iranian goalkeeper Zohreh Koudaei made saves after saves to deny the Indians full three points.

As India pressed for a goal, Iran defended doggedly while facing a deluge of attacks. The Indians were all over — crosses, shots, toe-pokes, headers — all inside Iran box but a goal still eluded the home side.

In the 51st minute, Manisha Kalyan sent a fine low cross from the left but Pyari Xaxas toe-poke went just wide. A minute later, Xaxa again could not reach the ball off a lovely pass from Sandhya Ranganathan, as an Iranian made a last-ditch defending.

SOUTH AFRICA HAND 'OUT OF SYNC' INDIA SERIES DEFEAT



PTI ■ PAARL

A young South Africa punished a jaded Indian team for its outdated approach, handing it one of the most comprehensive series defeats in recent times with an easy seven-wicket victory in the second ODI here on Friday.

A target of 288 was below-par on a flat track and the seasoned Quinton de Kock (78 off 66 balls) in the company of rising sensation Janneman Malan (91 off 108 balls) added 132 for a match-deciding opening stand.

The home team eventually reached the target in 48.1 overs to take an unsailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

KL Rahul's captaincy ambitions and head coach Rahul Dravid's wish to see him being anointed in the long run, however, suffered a rude jolt following back-to-back defeats in 50-over games on a track, which was more Indian than South African in nature.

India's archaic approach, a very '90s safety first mind-set, hurt the team as has been the case for a while now in the white-ball format.

INDIA'S ARCHAIC APPROACH, A VERY '90S SAFETY FIRST MIND-SET, HURT THE TEAM AS HAS BEEN THE CASE FOR A WHILE NOW IN THE WHITE-BALL FORMAT.

A tour that started with a great Test win at the Centurion is now in tatters and the Indian contingent would be looking to board the charter flight back home on Monday after the inconsequential third ODI at the Newlands, which would be a spicier track compared to the one at Boland Park.

The batting, save Rishabh Pant's cavalier style, was too defensive starting with skipper Rahul, whose 55 off 79 balls was an innings of bygone era, which cannot align with the fearless cricket that teams want to associate with now.

The match slipped away from India's grip during their innings once Pant was gone as the others simply failed to get going when the ball didn't come on to the bat and it was not a track that offered firm and even bounce.

It's not a new malaise to plague Indian cricket but what should be worrying is that nothing has been done to address the issues.

A veteran like Bhuvneshwar Kumar (8-0-67-0) was swept as well as pulled for sixes by De Kock while Malan would come down the track to hit him through the covers signalling that his early 130 kmph speed, with lack of variations, was simply not working.

For Shardul Thakur (40 not out and 5.1-0-36-0), the quality batting show won't save him if he doesn't curtail the number of bad balls that he is bowling per spell.

And Ravichandan Ashwin (10-1-68-0)'s second coming in white ball cricket might end in a whimper even before it gathers enough wind to sail through.

Yuzvendra Chahal (10-

0-47-1) tried his best but his confidence, after being unceremoniously dumped from the T20 World up final squad, has been in tatters.

Venkatesh Iyer (22 off 33 balls and 5-0-28-0) is still a work in progress and his fast-tracking in the limited overs set-up is less of pragmatism and more desperation to find a fresh version of injury-plagued Hardik Pandya.

Iyer might develop into a good cricketer but he is a far from finished product and may be some time away from being a success at the international level in all conditions.

As of now, he is not a natural No.6, who can be a finisher like Pandya was in his best days before injury.

Had Pant not played the role of an enforcer to perfection, even a target of 288 wouldn't have been possible. And this was after it seemed India would score close to 315 when he was having a steady stand of 115 with his skipper.

But there dismissals in quick succession saw Proteas make a comeback on a Boland Park strip where stroke-making wasn't an easy proposition for a new batter.



Devoid of options, Covid-hit India to take on Uganda

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Rattled by a COVID-19 outbreak but through to the last-eight stage, India will have just 12 players to choose from in their final Under-19 World Cup group B clash against Uganda on Saturday as five of their six isolated squad members returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR tests, here.

Only Vasu Vats came out negative but it is likely that the team management will field the same playing XI that thumped Ireland by 174 runs on Wednesday and secured a place in the quarterfinals. Skipper Yash Dhull, his deputy Shaikh Rasheed, and Aaradhya Yadav, all of who tested positive in the Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT), have been confirmed positive in the latest RT-PCR reports along with Manav Parakh, who had tested negative in RAT.

Sidharth Yadav had already tested positive in the RT-PCR test before the Ireland game. Fortunately, India already have two victories in pocket and an easy opponent to tackle in the final Group game on Saturday.

Considering that Uganda is not a strong team, India, despite limited options, is expected to steamroll the minnows from the African region and finish on top of Group B. If the team does that, all the infected players, including the worst-affected Dhull, are expected to be back in the reckoning for selection for the January 29 quarterfinal.

National Cricket Academy Head VVS Laxman had lauded the players for the way they responded to the situation ahead of the Ireland game.

"Tremendous show of character and maturity from the U-19 team. With just 11 players available, to go out and express themselves the way they did was phenomenal. Can't say how proud I am of them! The Ireland match is one they will cherish for life," Laxman had tweeted.

The game against Uganda is inconsequential mathematically for India but it would have been ideal if the affected players got some time in the middle to be ready for the knockout stage.

The team would have obviously preferred to have all its best players on the park as it eyes a fifth trophy.

So far, openers Harnoor Singh and Angriksh Raghuvanshi have shown terrific form and are likely to continue in the same vein but the following middle-order batters need to score at better pace.

Not surprised at Kohli's decision to quit captaincy: Pietersen

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former England skipper Kevin Pietersen has suggested that the "harsh" bio-bubble life could be one of the reasons for Virat Kohli's stunning decision to quit Test captaincy and backed Rohit Sharma to lead India in all formats of the game going forward.

Kohli stunned the cricketing world by stepping down from the Test captaincy following India's 1-2 series loss to South Africa. He had relinquished T20 captaincy after the World Cup last year, and was subsequently removed from ODI leadership, leading to a war of words with the BCCI on the sequence of events leading to these developments.

"People who are critical of the modern day sportsmen I think are foolish because these bio-bubbles are very hard to play in," the former England star batsman told PTI in a group interaction on the sidelines of the Legends League Cricket here.

"It will be very unfair to be too harsh, to be critical. Because you have not looked at Virat Kohli.



Kohli needs crowds, he gets going (from it), he is an entertainer.

"I think it's very difficult for his personality to perform to the best of his (Kohli's) abilities (in the bubble)," he reasoned as he reflected on sportspeople's life in a COVID-scarred world.

The 33-year-old Kohli held the record for most Test wins by an Indian captain (40) with only Graeme Smith, Ricky Ponting, and

Steve Waugh having won more matches than him.

Pietersen said he was not surprised when Kohli quit captaincy from all formats.

"A lot of players have suffered. It is the greatest job in the world. But when you put them in a bubble, it's certainly not the greatest job because there is no fun," the 41-year-old said.

"I'm actually not surprised that

Stupid to blame IPL for England's Ashes debacle

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former captain and batting star Kevin Pietersen has said that it's "stupid" to blame the Indian Premier League for England's embarrassing 0-4 loss to Australia in the recently-concluded Ashes series.

England great David Gower was "annoyed" after their Ashes defeat and said current skipper Joe Root had players who were "unavailable" because of the IPL.

Pietersen, an Ashes winner in 2005, 2009, 2010-11 and 2013, laughed at the remark.

"It is stupid. You can't blame the IPL for the demise of Test cricket in England. It's crazy. I've commented on it quite a lot. It's the system, it's the county cricket system, which is poor. So there's no blame," Pietersen, who is representing World Giants in the Legends League Cricket here, said during an interaction here on Thursday.

"It's crazy to blame the Indian Premier League because if you have a look at the Test team, there's only maybe (Ben) Stokes (Jonny) Bairstow and (Jos) Buttler who play the IPL..."

"Hardly any of the Test team players play the IPL... So how can you blame the IPL? You can't blame the IPL. It's crazy," a former captain of the IPL's Delhi franchise added. Off-



the-field, the English cricketers were also mired in a controversy after a report claimed that there was a "drinking culture" in the team with the players and coaches drinking late into the night before police broke up the session. Pietersen said there was no harm in it as the players are affected by the strict bio-bubble restrictions.

"It's stressful. It's incredibly stressful. I've never played in a bubble. I can't imagine but I think it must be very lonely.

"You're not allowed to go to coffee shops. You're not allowed to go down to the restaurants, you're not allowed to do anything. And what else do you do?

PTI ■ DUBAI

In a blockbuster T20 World Cup opener for India, the team was on Friday drawn to clash with arch-rivals Pakistan on October 23 at the iconic MCG as the International Cricket Council (ICC) released the fixtures.

India had lost to Pakistan for the first time in an ICC tournament when the teams clashed in last year's T20 World Cup in Dubai.

India's second Super 12 match in Group 2 will be on October 27 in Sydney against a qualifier (runner up of Group A) and will be followed by matches against South Africa (October 30 in Perth) and Bangladesh



(Adelaide Oval on November 2). The Men in Blue's last Super 12 match is scheduled for November 6 against the winners of Group B at the MCG. The Super 12s -- round two of the tournament, with two groups -- will begin on October 22 with hosts and defending champions Australia playing New Zealand at the SCG on

October 22 in a re-match of last year's men's T20 World Cup final.

The Black Caps will also face England at The Gabba on November 1 in a re-match of their epic semi-final encounter at the 2021 event. In Super 12s, Australia are in Group 1 with world number one England, New Zealand, Afghanistan plus the

West Indies U-19 get two COVID-19 replacements



PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN

The ICC's Event Technical Committee of the U-19 World Cup has approved Kevin Wickham and Nathan Edward as replacements for Onaje Amory and Jaden Carmichael in the West Indies squad.

Wickham and Edward are temporary replacements for Amory and Carmichael who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are undergoing isolation.

"A COVID replacement can be temporary, in that once the player has recovered he would be eligible to return to the squad in position of the player that replaced him," said the ICC in a statement.

The replacement of a player requires the approval of the Event Technical Committee.

India to open T20 WC campaign against Pakistan

PTI ■ DUBAI

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winner of Group A and the runner-up in Group B from the first round.

The semi-finals will be played at the SCG and Adelaide Oval on November 9 and 10, respectively. It will be the first time the Adelaide Oval will host a World Cup semi-final.

The MCG will host the final, which will be contested under lights on November 13.

In the first round, 2014 champions Sri Lanka and Namibia will play the opening match at Kardina Park, Geelong on October 16. They'll be joined by two qualifiers in Group A.

Two-time champions West Indies will also start in the first round, joined in Group B.

U19 World Cup Updates

England, Pakistan cruise to quarterfinals, Bangladesh bounce back with win

PTI ■ BASSETTERRE (ST KITTS)

Skipper Tom Prest smashed 154 as former champions England cruised to the Super League quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup with a thumping 189-run win over the UAE here.

Continuing his incredible run of form, Prest powered England to a mammoth 362 for six after electing to bat.

The English bowlers, led by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed (4/30), then put up a disci-

plined effort to bowl out UAE for 173 in 38.2 overs.

Prest blasted 13 fours and four sixes in his scintillating 119-ball innings, while Jacob Bethell (62), William Luxton (47) and George Thomas (41) also chipped in as the 1998 edition winners England put up an imposing total.

Bethell and Thomas gave England a blistering start, adding 69 runs in 11.5 overs.

The Young Lions' total always looked like it would be a big ask to overhaul and the



UAE were reeling when they were reduced to 61 for five in the 15th over.

Ali Naseer's counter-attacking 54 off 44 balls helped reverse some of the momentum as he put on 59 with Nilansh Keswani for the sixth wicket. But when Nilansh departed, the last four wickets fell for 53 runs as leg-spinner Rehan excelled in his first outing in the West Indies with four for 30 from his allotted ten overs. Pakistan qualify for quarter-finals with win against Afghanistan

Pakistan too booked their place in the Super League quarterfinals with a 24-run victory over Afghanistan.

Afghanistan did well to restrict Pakistan to a modest

239 for nine in the group C match at Brian Lara stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad.

However, the Afghans got the pace of their innings all wrong in reply, managing 215 in the designated 50 overs.

The top three soaked up far too many balls in pursuit of the target.

It took them 170 balls to bring up 100 runs with Bilal Sayedi (42 off 81), Nangeyalia Kharote (12 off 32), and Allah Noor (28 off 49) managing strike rates under 58.

Despite the slow start, Afghanistan took the contest deep although their innings was characterised by some wild running between the wickets, with three run outs as well as a number of near misses.

[Pursuant to rule 30 the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014] Advertisement to be published in the newspaper for change of registered office of the Company from one state to another Before the Central Government/Regional Director Eastern Region, Kolkata In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013, Section 13(4) of Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30(6) (a) of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014 AND In the matter of Uttaranchal Engineering Private Limited having its Registered Office at Beldita, Pattamundai, Kendrapara Kendrapara, Odisha-754215.....petitioner Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the Company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra Ordinary General Meeting held on Tuesday, 18th January, 2022 to enable the Company to change its Registered Office from "In the State of Odisha to In the NCT of Delhi". Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the Company may deliver or cause to be delivered or send by registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition to Regional Director, Eastern Region, Nizam Palace, II MSO Building, 3rd Floor, 234/ 4, A.J.C. Bose Road,Kolkata-700020 within fourteen days from the date of publication of this Notice with a copy of the applicant Company at its registered office at the address mentioned below: " Beldita, Pattamundai, Kendrapara Kendrapara, Odisha-754215" For and on behalf of the Board UTTRANCHAL ENGINEERING PRIVATE LIMITED PRADEEP TRIPATHY Director DIN : 01050899 Address: Pattamundai, Pokhariapara, Kendrapara, Pattamundai, Odisha-754215 Place : Odisha Date : 21.01.2022