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## EC extends poll rallies ban till Jan 31

Public meetings  
with 500 people  
for Ph 1 allowed  
from January 28

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the third wave of Covid-19 in the country, the Election Commission (EC) on Saturday extended the ban on physical political rallies, roadshows, pad-yatras, cycle and bike rallies and processions till January 31 in five poll-bound States — Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Punjab and Uttarakhand.

This is the second time the commission has extended the ban after the first one was announced on January 15 and the second on January 22. The poll panel also increased the five-person limit for door-to-door campaigning to 10 and allowed video vans for publicity at designated open spaces with coronavirus restrictions.

"No roadshow, padyatra, cycle/bike/vehicle rally and procession shall be allowed till January 31, 2022," the EC said. The decision was taken following a virtual meeting to take stock of the Covid-19 situation with all stakeholders, including the Union Health Secretary, Chief Electoral Officers, Chief Secretaries, and State Health Secretaries of the five poll-bound States.

"Since contesting candi-



dates for Phase 1 elections will be finalised on January 28, 2022, the commission has decided to allow physical public meetings of political parties or contesting candidates in designated open spaces with a maximum of 500 people or 50 per cent of the capacity of the ground or the prescribed limit set by State Disaster Management Authorities, whichever number is lesser, from January 28, 2022, till February 8, 2022 (excluding the silence period)," it added.

The EC said that limit of five persons for door to door campaign has been enhanced to 10 people, excluding security personnel and video vans for publicity permitted at designated open spaces with Covid restrictions.

## Cong 'new avatar'! 70% fresh faces in UP polls

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Making a conscious effort to shun the old baggage and present her party in a "new avatar" in Uttar Pradesh, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has hand-picked over 70 per cent new faces among the total 166 candidates for the high-stakes State Assembly election.

Besides sticking to her promise of 40 per cent women candidates, Priyanka has overwhelmingly given a chance to debutants with an aim to build

a new leadership in the Hindi heartland, which had slipped from the party hands in recent years.

Of the total 166 names declared so far by the Congress, 119 candidates will be making their electoral debut, party spokesman Anshu Awasthi told PTI. With the candidature of Sangeeta Tyagi, wife of party leader late Rajiv Tyagi, from Sahibabad seat, Priyanka has made an earnest effort to break the mould and create new leadership in the century-old party which has faded into political oblivion.

## Akhilesh to fight from home turf

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Saturday confirmed that party chief Akhilesh Yadav will contest the Assembly poll, his first, from Karhal constituency in Mainpuri district, which is in his family's home turf.

Karhal has voted for Samajwadi Party candidates in every election since 1993, except in 2002, when the BJP wrested it. It returned to the SP in 2007 and is currently held by Sobaran Yadav.

By contesting from Karhal, the current and long-time Lok Sabha seat of his father Mulayam Singh Yadav, Akhilesh is trying to secure his party's fortress of the Yadav belt where the BJP has made inroads.

Buoyed by the success of the huge turnout in Vijay Rath Yatra, Akhilesh had decided not to contest the Assembly election and concentrate on campaigning. Two events, however, forced him to change the strategy — ban of campaigning by the EC (now extended till January 30) due to the third wave of Covid-19 pandemics, and BJP deciding to field Yogi Adityanath from Gorakhpur.

In a loud and clear message to the electorate that the BJP is leading the battle from the

## Shivpal to contest polls on SP ticket

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Akhilesh Yadav's uncle Shivpal Yadav on Saturday announced that he will be contesting the upcoming assembly elections from his old seat Jaswantnagar. Shivpal said he will be contesting on SP's ticket instead of his own party Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party.

front, the saffron party announced Yogi's name in the very first list of its candidates even when the polling in Gorakhpur will be held in the sixth phase of election on March 3.

Karhal constituency has a high population of Yadavs. The SP won it in 2017 with a margin of more than 38,000 votes despite the BJP wave in the State. Karhal town is just a 15-minute drive from the Yadav family's native village, Saifai, in the Etawah district. With Akhilesh taking the plunge into Assembly elections, the SP is trying to send a larger message in the entire Yadav belt from Firozabad to Kannauj to rally behind the party in these elections.

## Omicron not last variant: WHO

3,37,704 Covid-19 cases, 488 deaths in 24 hrs in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From one case on December 2 last year, the Omicron tally in the country has crossed the 10,000-mark! India recorded a total of 3,37,704 Covid-19 new cases of the novel coronavirus, along with 488 deaths due to the infection in the past 24 hours. India's daily Covid cases have remained over 3 lakh for the 3rd day in a row.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that "to suggest that Omicron will be the last variant is unwise...this virus is circulating at a very intense level around the Earth globe and it's still evolving... Absolutely critical we continue to track, monitor & assess variants".

"We're hearing a lot of people suggest that #Omicron is the last variant & that it's over after this and that is not the case... This virus is circulating at a very intense level around the world," said Maria Van Kerkhove, infectious disease epidemiologist; Covid-19 Technical Lead of the WHO.

"We must keep working to reduce Covid-19 transmission," she added.

According to the data



Workers pack Covid-19 home isolation kits at Victory playground in Hyderabad on Saturday. Nearly 1 crore kits will be packed and sent across Telangana PTI

shared by the Union Health Ministry, the country saw a total of 2,42,676 discharges in the last 24 hours, taking the total recovery rate at around 93.50 per cent, and total recoveries data reached to 3,63,014.

The total active cases of Covid-19 in India have risen to 21,13,365, the Ministry data showed today. The total death toll in the country is now at 4,88,884. In India, the first death due to the Covid pandemic was reported in March 2020.

Additionally, the tally of Omicron cases reached 10,050 on Saturday with an increase of 3.69 per cent since yesterday. The daily positivity rate is at 17.22 per cent today.

## 60% Goa MLAs disloyal: ADR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Goa's MLAs who were elected in the 2017 Assembly polls do not seem to have any allegiances to the party which fielded them in the elections. As many as 24 MLAs in Goa, which is 60 per cent of the 40-member Assembly, shifted their loyalties in the last five years, the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) said in a report.

Goa has set a unique record, which is "unparalleled" in the history of Indian democracy. Assembly polls in Goa will be held on February 14.

"In the five-year tenure of the current Assembly (2017-2022), as many as 24 MLAs have changed their parties, which is 60 per cent of the total strength of the House. It has never happened anywhere else in India. A clear reflection of utter disrespect to the mandate of voters. A callous approach to ethics and discipline overborne by uncontrolled greed at its worst," the report stated.

It said the list of 24 MLAs did not include the names of Vishwajit Rane, Subhash Shirodkar, and Dayanand Sopte, who had resigned as Congress MLAs in 2017, and

## Goa ex-CM Laxmikant Parsekar to quit BJP

New Delhi: Former Goa CM Laxmikant Parsekar to quit the BJP. He said, "I was a member of BJP for years but the party took me for granted. I have prepared to dissociate myself from the BJP and have decided to contest independently. I will come out with this declaration in a couple of days."

joined the ruling BJP, before contesting polls on its tickets.

At least 10 Congress legislators had crossed over to the BJP in 2019. They included the then leader of opposition Chandrakant Kavlekar (Quepem constituency). Other Congress MLAs who had switched over to the BJP are - Jennifer Monserrate (Taleigao), Francisco Silveria (St Andre), Filipe Nery Rodrigues (Velim), Wilfred Nazareth Menino D'sa (Nuvem), Clafasio Dias (Cuncolim), Antonio Carano Fernandes (St Cruz), Neelkanth Halarankar (Tivim), Isidore Fernandes (Cancona), Atanasio Monserrate (who won the Panaji by election in 2019 after death of Manohar Parrikar).

## Gandhi's favourite 'Abide with Me' left off Beating Retreat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mahatma Gandhi's favourite tune "Abide With Me" will not figure in this year's Beating the Retreat Ceremony on Rajpath on January 29.

This hymn played at the annual ceremony since 1950 was omitted in 2020 but was included later following criticism from various quarters.

Incidentally, this development on Saturday came a day after a political slugfest over the shifting of the Amar Jawan Jyoti from the India Gate to the newly constructed National War Memorial (NWM).

Veterans and Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi said the extinguishing of the Amar Jawan Jyoti was an insult to the fallen soldiers. However, the Government refuted the charge and said the flame was not extinguished and instead merged into the eternal flame at the NWM.

"Abide With Me" is a hymn that was written by Scottish Anglican Henry Francis Lyte in 1847 while battling tuberculosis. It is a prayer urging God



to remain with the speaker through life and in death.

A favourite of Gandhiji, this tune is played at the end of the Beating the Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk every year. The Retreat, an ancient military tradition, signals the end of fighting for the day, with soldiers sheathing arms and withdrawing from the battlefield. The hymn is set to the tune of Eventide by William Henry Monk.

This year's ceremony will begin with "Fanfare" by Buglers, followed by "Veer Sainik" by the Massed Bands and six tunes by the Pipes and Drums band. Bands of the Central Armed Police Forces will play three tunes, followed by four tunes by the Air Force Band, which will include a special "Ladakoo" tune, by Flight Lt L S Rupachandra.

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## CAPSULE

## 60% DEATHS IN 3RD WAVE AMONG UNVACCINATED

New Delhi: A study by a private hospital has said that 60 per cent of the patients who died during the current wave of Covid-19 pandemic were either partially or fully unvaccinated. The study by Max Healthcare said the deaths reported were largely among those aged over 70 and those suffering from multiple co-morbidities such as kidney diseases, heart diseases, diabetes, cancers, etc.

## RAPE ACCUSED SHOT DEAD OUTSIDE COURT

Gorakhpur: A rape accused was shot dead in front of the district courts here on Friday. The deceased has been identified as Dilshad Hussain, a resident of Muzaffarpur (Bihar). Two security guards and the vehicle stand manager nabbed attacker.

## 7 killed, several injured in Mumbai skyscraper blaze

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

At least seven persons were killed and 23 others injured when a massive fire broke out in a 20-storey Kamala building located in front of Bhatia Hospital at the bustling Nana Chowk-Gowalia Tank area of Grant Road in south Mumbai on Saturday morning.

The fire erupted on the 18th floor of the high-rise building around 7.15 am. Of the 30 persons injured in the fire, seven succumbed to burn injuries, while the condition of six persons was reported to be "critical".

While six persons, including two women, died in the



early part of the day, one person succumbed to burn injuries in the evening. The injured have been admitted to Kasturba, Nair, Masina, Bhatia and Reliance hospital. Of the injured, seven were treated and allowed to go home.

The Mumbai Fire Brigade designated it as a Level-3 (major) fire. In all, 13 fire tenders, seven water tankers, and snorkel ladders were involved

in the fire fighting operations. The fire brigade extinguished the fire at 12.20 pm.

Though the cause of fire has not been established, the massive plume of smoke emanating the fire-hit building enveloped south Mumbai skies, causing considerable anxiety among the residents in the neighbourhood.

While Prime minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh each from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF), the Maharashtra Government has announced an ex-gratia of ₹5 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased.



# Anganwadi workers say selling sanitary napkins is torture

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Anganwadi workers have claimed that despite the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami's announcement of providing free sanitary napkins to women, the department of Women Empowerment and Child Development (WECD) has given them thousands of napkins to sell in their respective areas which is akin to torture for them. The president of Anganwadi Workers Association, Rekha Negi said that the officials are asking the Anganwadi workers to pay for all the napkins in advance when in fact, most of the women are not buying these sanitary napkins due to inferior quality. She said, "First of all, many Anganwadi workers in rural areas feel embarrassed to sell sanitary napkins by approaching women door to door as everybody knows everyone in the villages. Secondly, women are not ready to buy them again despite the cheap prices due to their inferior quality. Many

even question us why we are selling them when the government has announced to

take these napkins but if they have to spend money to buy them, they will definitely buy

napkins either on their heads or book an autorickshaw to take them to their centres. "The

sanitary napkins provided to us. The department has directed us to sell each packet of the napkin at Rs six and the profit of Rs one is given to the Anganwadi workers. The whole process of selling the napkins is torturing all Anganwadi workers across the state," stated Negi.

She also said that the department has asked the Anganwadi workers to update them with the daily activities that require internet. She said, "The price of internet recharge has increased in the last few months but the department has not paid us any amount for the mobile recharge. Also, over 1,000 mobiles provided by the department are damaged and those workers cannot work without them. There are several of such issues that need the department's attention."

Negi said that she has written a letter to WECD about the issues and hopes that officials will take cognisance of the matter.



provide them for free. Distributing them for free would be easier and those who desperately need them will

the better quality napkins that last longer." She said that Anganwadi workers have to carry big boxes of sanitary

workers get no remuneration for carrying such big boxes to the centres. Also, we are being asked to pay in advance for the

# U-khand expects tableau to be centre of attraction at R-Day parade

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand is expecting its tableau to be the centre of attraction in the Republic Day parade at Rajpath this year. The state tableau's nodal officer KS Chauhan said that the state's entry had passed through a long process to secure a place in the final selection. Out of the 29 proposals, Uttarakhand's tableau is among the tableaux of 12 states selected for the Republic Day parade. However, before reaching this stage, the meetings began in September last year. There were three meetings with the expert committee apart from meetings for design selection, model selection and presentation for the music selection. A total of 16 artistes from Champawat, Almora and Pithoragarh will display aspects of



Uttarakhand's folk culture along with the tableau which will display Badrinath temple, Valley of Flowers, all weather road, Hemkund Sahib Gurudwara, Dobra-

Chanthi bridge and the Tehri dam. Chauhan said that since the creation of Uttarakhand, the state's tableau has been part of the Republic Day parade 13 times.



Visitors frolic on a mountain slope after fresh snowfall in Nainital on Saturday

Pioneer photo

# Man caught with heroin & smack worth Rs 62 lakh



PNS ■ HALDWANI

In a major seizure of illegal drugs, the police arrested a man with heroin worth Rs 60 lakh and smack worth Rs 2.6 lakh in Haldwani on Saturday. The police are currently undertaking special measures to check the movement of contraband in view of the ensuing Assembly elections in the state. A joint team of the Mukhani police station and

Nainital special operation group (SOG) was conducting checks on the route from Block trijunction to Bhagwanpur Road when they caught Somdutt, a resident of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. On checking him, the police recovered about 541 grammes of heroin and 26 grammes of smack. The police said that the heroin is worth Rs 60 lakh while the smack is worth Rs

2.6 lakh.

The Kumaon DIG Nilesh Anand Bhatnagar announced a cash reward of Rs 20,000 while Nainital senior superintendent of police Pankaj Bhatt announced a cash reward of Rs 10,000 to the team which apprehended the man smuggling the narcotics.

# Businessman accuses Roorkee mayor of seeking bribe

PNS ■ ROORKEE

A prominent businessman of the city has lodged a police complaint accusing the Roorkee mayor Gaurav Goel of seeking Rs 25 lakh bribe for renewing land lease. Businessman Subodh Gupta filed the complaint in the Kotwali seeking action in the case. He has stated in the complaint that during

application for renewal of the lease in the Municipal Corporation of Roorkee (MCR). However, the MCR didn't hold a board meeting and his application was not addressed. He then approached the Uttarakhand high court which directed the MCR to hold its board meeting. Gupta said that before the

that Goel sought Rs 25 lakh bribe, saying that even Rs 20 lakh would do. Gupta said that he had received calls from two different phone numbers in which he was told that he would lose land worth crores of rupees if he didn't pay the amount. He further alleged that the proposal for renewing his lease was deferred purposely in the board meeting to pressurize him to pay the bribe sought.

The Kotwali in-charge Devendra Chauhan said that a case will be registered and the allegations will be investigated. On being asked about the matter, the mayor said that he had no information about any such police complaint. He added that if such a complaint has been lodged, it should be investigated impartially.



1942-57, through three separate documents, the municipality had allocated a land in Rajputana to him, Mathura Das and Om Prakash. Later, the land was transferred in his name and has been so since then. The lease of the land was to expire in 30 years so he submitted an

board meeting held on January 8, he met the mayor to explain the whole matter. He alleged



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— Covid - 19 —

# Seven deaths, 4,759 new Covid cases in U'khand

## Positivity rate at 12.48 % active cases- 28907

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The infectivity and the fatality of the third wave of the pandemic of Covid-19 is continuing to increase in Uttarakhand. After eight deaths and 4,964 new cases of

from the disease on Saturday.

The cumulative count of Covid-19 patients in the state is now at 3,96,674 while a total of 3,52,076 patients have

from Covid-19. The recovery percentage of the disease further dropped to 88.76 per cent on Saturday while at 12.48 per cent the positivity rate continued to remain high on Saturday.

The authorities reported death of four patients from Covid-19 at Mahant Indresh hospital Dehradun while one patient each died at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh, Himalayan hospital Dehradun and Sushila Tiwari government hospital Haldwani on Saturday.

The state health department reported 1,802 new patients from Dehradun, 607 from Haridwar, 565 from Nainital, 395 from Udham Singh Nagar, 259 from Pauri,

243 from Chamoli, 176 from Pithoragarh, 159 from Rudrapur, 143 from Almora, 120 from Bageshwar, 112 from Champawat, 108 from Tehri and 70 from Uttarkashi on Saturday.

The active case count of Covid-19 in the state has now jumped to 28,907. Dehradun with 11,965 cases is at the top of the table of active cases while Nainital has 3,791 active cases of the disease which is followed by Haridwar district with 3,568 active cases. Uttarkashi is at the bottom of the table with 230 active cases of the disease.

In the ongoing vaccination drive 33,337 people were vaccinated in 1032 sessions in the state held on Saturday.



the disease on Friday the state health department reported 4,759 cases and seven deaths

recovered from the disease so far. A total of 7,475 people have died in the state so far

# U'khand hit hard by price rise in BJP regime- Congress

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Congress party has claimed that the price rise has affected Uttarakhand more than the rest of the country. According to it the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 8.1 per cent in the state as compared to 6.2 per cent of the country.

Addressing the media persons here on Saturday the national spokesperson of the Congress party Gaurav Vallabh said that the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is at an all time high of 12 years and the CPI too is increasing in the country with no reprieve to the general public in sight. To add to the woes of the people the GST on many essential goods was hiked from 5 to 12 per cent from January 1.

Giving a comparative account Vallabh said that the excise duty on petrol in the year 2014 was Rs 9.80 which has now jumped to Rs 27.90. Similarly the excise duty on the diesel has risen from Rs 3.56 to Rs 21.80 during this period.

He claimed that the wealth of 98 richest people of the country is more than the combined wealth of 55.20 Crore Indians. "In the development model adopted by Modi, the wealth of 84 per cent of Indians decreased in the year 2021 but the income of one of his friends increased eight times while the income of another friend doubled," he



said.

The Congress spokesperson claimed that the double engine has given a gift of 30 per cent more price rise to the people of Uttarakhand as compared with the rest of the country. Giving examples he said that the prices of pulses, edible oil and vegetables increased substantially in the last one year. Vallabh said that the prices in villages of Uttarakhand are 15 per cent more than the cities of the state. "While the prices in the cities of Uttarakhand are more than the rest of the country, the general prices are 15 per cent

more in villages than cities," he claimed. Vallabh added that the price of a cooking gas cylinder has increased by Rs 325 in the last one year.

Launching an attack on the double engine government the Congress spokesperson said that the BJP government has scored well on two accounts, unemployment and price rise in which Uttarakhand is on top and in all other things the government has failed completely. He said that the BJP should answer the questions on price rise posed by the Congress party.

Congress leader Gurdip

Sappal said that during the Modi regime the number of billionaires has increased by 23 per cent but the number of poor people has increased by 4.60 crore. He said that the Monmohan Singh government worked hard to lift people above the poverty line but now more and more people are becoming poor. He said that on one hand the government is hitting people by price rise. It is systematically destroying Public Sector Undertakings (PSU). The employment opportunities are getting reduced.

# Internal issues prolong wait for Cong candidates list

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Congress party has lagged behind other parties in campaigning as it could not declare its much anticipated list of candidates for the ensuing assembly elections by Saturday night till the time of this report being filed. The nomination process for the polls has already started but the Congress contenders are still awaiting the official party list.

The internal squabbling



and toughening of stance by the camps led by the former chief minister Harish Rawat and

Mukul Wasnik in the selection procedure. The Congress

sources claim that the party could release the list of 55 candidates late on Saturday night. However Congress came at the receiving end of the jokes over its list over the various social media platforms. One user said that the list has got wet in the rains and the Congress leaders are drying the list while another said that the list which is on the way from Delhi has got stuck in a traffic jam.

It is worth mentioning here that the BJP has already taken a lead over the Congress by announcing candidates for 59 seats on Thursday.

# Heavy rain/snowfall alert issued for six districts today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State meteorological centre has issued a yellow alert regarding the possibility of heavy rain/snowfall at isolated places in Dehradun, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudrapur, Nainital and Pithoragarh districts on Sunday. Further, thunderstorm accompanied with hail and lightning is likely to occur at isolated places in Dehradun, Haridwar, Pauri, Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat and Nainital districts whereas cold day conditions are likely to occur at few places in the mountains and at isolated places in the plains of the state. Apart from this, light to moderate rain/snowfall is likely to occur at most places in the districts of the state today while snowfall is likely to occur at places located at altitudes of

2,000 metres and above. The alert comes on a day when many parts of the state received light rain and snowfall which resulted in colder conditions.

The provisional state capital Dehradun is forecast to experience partly to generally



cloudy sky with the likelihood of a few spells of light to moderate rain/thundershowers. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 13 degrees Celsius and 10 degrees Celsius respectively

on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded at various places in the state on Saturday were 14.6 degrees Celsius and 9.5 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 17.6 degrees Celsius and 7.1 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 1.5 degrees Celsius and 0.4 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 6.2 degrees Celsius and 2.4 degrees Celsius respectively in New Tehri. Between 8:30 AM and 5:30 PM there was 2.1 millimetres rain in Dehradun, 0.7 millimetres rain in Pantnagar, 1.5 millimetres in Mukteshwar, 1.6 millimetres in New Tehri, 12.5 millimetres in Narsan, 11.5 millimetres in Bhagwanpur, four millimetres in Jankichatti, two millimetres in Bhimtal and 2.5 millimetres in Laksar.

# Badrinath covered in 3-feet snow, higher reaches blanketed by snow



PNS ■ JOSHIMATH

Badrinath has been experiencing snowfall for three consecutive days. The temple township is covered in more than three feet of snow with the snowfall continuing. Along with Badrinath, snowfall is being experienced in the Valley of Flowers, Hemkund, Niti and Mana valleys. The high Himalayan peaks including

# Covid fallout- AIIMS- Rishikesh to close general OPD from Jan 24

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In view of the increasing cases of the Covid-19 being witnessed during the ongoing third wave of the pandemic, the administration of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh has decided to close the general OPD of the hospital. This decision will come into effect from Monday (24 January). However the emergency services, trauma

will be closed from January 24 but emergency services will be kept operational round the clock. He said that the facilities of chemotherapy and radiotherapy for the treatment of cancer patients will continue as before. Dr Dalal said that patients should take advantage of the telemedicine services of AIIMS to avoid unnecessary hassle. He said that every



treatment, and radiotherapy would continue uninterrupted in the hospital. The patients can get the services through the telemedicine OPD which will be available from 9 am to 1 pm on every working day.

Giving information about the decision, the Medical Superintendent (MS) of the AIIMS Rishikesh Dr Ashwani Kumar Dalal, said that General OPD services

person has to understand the seriousness of the Covid-19 infection and follow the Covid guidelines issued by the Central and State Governments.

**Telemedicine Number AIIMS-Rishikesh**

1- 7302895044, 7454989545, 9621539863  
2- Toll Free Number- 18001804278

# Kothiyal appeals women voters to choose AAP for better future

PNS ■ DEHRADUN



The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief ministerial candidate colonel (retd) Ajay Kothiyal said that women have played an important role in the formation of Uttarakhand but their situation has deteriorated with each passing year in over two decades. He said that women must choose AAP for their better future in the state. Addressing women voters on

Saturday during the party's virtual campaign Navparivartan Samvad, he said that from sacrificing their lives for the state and from preserving villages to saving culture, women have contributed immensely at every front but it is shameful that there is still no significant improvement in the conditions of women. "Many women lost their lives or their babies due to lack of medical facility in the mountainous areas. Both BJP and Congress who have alternatively formed governments in the state have failed to provide basic medical facilities for women in the past 21 years," stated Kothiyal. He asked women voters to remember their issues and think which party can provide health facilities, quality

# Brother of late CDS requests people to vote for BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The late Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat's brother Colonel (retd) Vijay Rawat who recently

India had done commendable work for the honour of the armed forces. The government took steps like implementing one



joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, has appealed to ex-servicemen, families of soldiers and people of Uttarakhand to vote for the BJP in the ensuing Assembly elections. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done commendable work for soldiers and for the security and prestige of the nation. Considering this, the people should vote for the BJP in the Assembly elections for development, security and prosperity of the state.

Addressing the media here on Saturday, Rawat said that he had joined the party after being influenced by PM Modi's leadership and the BJP's nationalist ideology. He said that he had been unable to work in society for a long time due to health reasons but is now eager to serve the people of Uttarakhand and the nation through politics.

The brother of the late CDS said that under PM Modi's leadership, the Government of

rank-one pension and various steps for modernisation of the armed forces. "Modi understood the requirements of the jawans posted on the borders and got them equipped with the latest equipment. There was a time when army officers had to look towards Delhi to respond immediately to the enemy at the border but now they have the full authority to give a befitting reply in such situations. PM Modi has facilitated granting of equal rights to women in the armed forces while increasing their recruitment with permanent commission," said Rawat. He further said that Uttarakhand has borders with two nations considering which a network of roads is being laid under the Bharatmala project for strengthening the borders. The BJP state spokesman Suresh Joshi, Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee chairman Ajayendra Ajay, Rajiv Talwar and other office bearers were also present on the occasion.

# Public will forget Congress in Uttarakhand as they did in Delhi, says AAP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Calling Congress leader and former chief minister Harish Rawat the captain of a sinking ship, Delhi MLA and state in-charge of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Dinesh Mohaniya said that people of Uttarakhand will also forget Congress as they did in Delhi after AAP came to power. He said that Rawat is making the same mistake

that Congress did in Delhi after staying in power for 15 years. Congress assumed that no new party can make the government in Delhi but today, nobody even remembers them, said Mohaniya. He added, "We will repeat the history here too and would eliminate both Congress and BJP for the redevelopment of Uttarakhand."

education and other facilities to empower women while they cast their votes on February 14.

# Woman arrested with stolen jewellery worth Rs 12.50 lakh

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police caught a woman with stolen jewellery worth Rs 12.50 lakh while investigating a complaint lodged by Old Survey Road resident Rohit Sharma. The 21-year old Anchal, hailing from Bijoor district of Uttar Pradesh used to work as a domestic help in Sharma's home. She was arrested on a tip off from the Dalanwala area on Saturday. During questioning, the police recovered the jewellery stolen from the complainant's home from her. She was to be presented in the court later during the day.

# Four men nabbed in US Nagar for aiding absconding Punjab bomb blast accused



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) has arrested four accused from Udham Singh Nagar for allegedly giving shelter to one of the absconding accused of the Punjab bomb blast at Pathankot in November last year. According to the STF, the arrested accused and the absconding criminal were also in touch with a Canadian resident who is associated with Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF).

The officials informed that a team was working on the secret inputs associated with the bomb blast incidents in Punjab last year under the guidance of the Director General of Police (DGP) of Uttarakhand, Ashok Kumar. The STF arrested four accused

on Friday from Udham Singh Nagar who had allegedly provided shelter to the accused of the bomb blast Sukhpreet and helped him to seek a safe hideout from the authorities. The arrested accused include two 24-year-old men Harpreet Singh and Gurpal Singh who belong to Ramnagar village in Udham Singh Nagar and Rampur district in Uttar Pradesh respectively. The other two accused are 26-year-old Shamsher Singh and 30-year-old Ajmer Singh and both belong to Udham Singh Nagar. The STF also recovered a pistol and a car that was being used to take the absconding accused Sukhpreet from one place to another. The officials informed that the four accused

were also connected with some dubious people from Canada, Australia and Serbia through international WhatsApp calls and Sukhpreet was also connected to them. The STF has filed an FIR against the arrested accused in Pantnagar police station for providing shelter to absconding Sukhpreet alias Sukhi and making arrangements to send him to a safe hideout under Section 19 Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and Section 25 in Arms Act. The STF informed that information revealed by the four men is being shared with national agencies and the state police and not much can be revealed publicly in view of the national interest.



# PM: Backward dists now catalyst for development

Govt backing such districts, Modi tells DMs via video address

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stating that the districts which were earlier ‘tagged’ as backward districts have now become a ‘catalyst’ for the nation’s development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that “hand holding” of these “aspirational districts” is in the sharp focus of his Government.

Modi, who was interacting with District Magistrates (DMs) of various districts via video conferencing, said the “success of aspirational districts which in the last 75 years were tagged as backward” and left behind have now become a catalyst to nation’s development and progress”.

He said “even Chief Ministers would accept the remarkable role and achievements of the aspirational districts” which also “reflected increasing federal cooperation between states and the Centre”.

He hailed “direct connect between people in aspirational districts and the government” as also use of “technology and innovation” in these areas.

Modi cited examples of Assam, Bihar and Telangana where, he said, “many success stories have emerged” ending “malnutrition”.

The Prime Minister was



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with the DMs of various districts via video conferencing on Saturday

PTI

addressing top officials along with the state Chief Ministers regarding the implementation of the key Government schemes. He complimented Chief Ministers for appointing “young and sharp” officials in the aspirational districts and also “ensuring their full tenure” in the regions.

Modi said “handholding of these districts is in focus” of his government.

While admiring inspired leadership in aspirational districts, the Prime Minister also called for “recognizing strength of aspirational districts and combining people’s desire to progress with that of government’s efforts”.

“District administrations have an important role in good governance. It helps govt to implement the schemes in a better way. Detail guidelines should be made for field visits and inspections,” said the Prime Minister.

Modi further stated that every district needs to learn from the success of others and also evaluate their challenges.

The Prime Minister also called for a direct, emotional connection between administration and public to ensure ‘top to bottom’ as well as ‘bottom to top’ governance flow.

During the interaction, Prime Minister took direct feedback about the progress and present the status of the implementation of government schemes and programmes in the districts.

“The interaction will help review the performance and ascertain the challenges that are being faced,” the PMO had earlier said in an official statement.

The meeting comes ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections in five states. The five states that are going to the polls are Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa, and Manipur.

# Forces all set to enthrall audience

16 marching contingents, 17 military bands to take part in R-Day parade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Army will field 16 marching contingents while 17 military bands comprising the three Services will enthrall the audience at this year’s Republic Day parade. The annual event will also see 25 tableaux of various States, departments and armed forces.

The Army will be represented by a mounted column of cavalry, 14 mechanised columns, six marching contingents and a fly past by advanced light helicopters of its aviation wing. The mechanised columns of the Army will show one PT-76 tank, one Centurion tank, two MBT Arjun MK-1 tanks, one APC TOPAS armoured personnel carriers, one BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle and two BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, officials said here on Saturday.

One 75/24 Pack howitzer, two Dhanush howitzers, one PMS bridge-laying system, two Sarvatra bridge-laying systems, one HT-16 electronic warfare system, two Taran Shakti electronic warfare systems, one Tiger Cat missile system and two Akash missile systems will also be part of the mechanised columns. The six marching contingents include Rajput Regiment, Assam Regiment, Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry, Sikh Light Infantry, Army Ordnance Corps Regiment and Parachute Regiment. One marching contingent each of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy will also participate in the parade.

Five marching contingents of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Police

## Full dress rehearsal parade to be held at Central Vista

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People witnessing the Republic Day parade this year will get to see major changes along the stretch in terms of the new look of Rajpath and facilities created under the Government’s ambitious Central Vista redevelopment project.

Red granite walkways spreading 1.10 lakh square metre with greenery all around, 133 light poles along the Rajpath, 4,087 trees, 114 modern signages and stepped gardens will be part of the redeveloped Central Vista in the national capital.

Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, who visited the Central Vista Avenue, said that a full dress rehearsal parade will be held here on Sunday.

According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, there will be a total of 915 light poles, including those

Force (CISF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Border Security Force (BSF) will also participate.

Overall, there will be 16 marching contingents from the armed forces, central paramilitary forces, Delhi Police, National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Service Scheme (NSS) along with 17 military bands, pipes and drum bands at the

in gardens and along the Rajpath between the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the India gate, a move aimed at making the Central Vista more pedestrian-friendly round the clock.

“In spite of (recent) rains, etc., all the work is complete,” Puri told reporters, adding that only 25 trees have been relocated and of them, 22 trees have been shifted to another location and three are here. Although temporary bridges on water bodies along the Rajpath have been set up as part of the Republic Day parade arrangements, a total of 16 permanent ones will come up.

According to an official document, eight amenity blocks are being constructed while four pedestrian underpasses will come up in the entire stretch. It shows that on the developed stretch, ‘Tree Avenue’ has 4,087 trees, but the earlier number was 3,890. The stretch also sports 422 red granite benches.

Along the Rajpath, the new red granite walkways spreading 1,10,457 sqm have been created, replacing bajri sand that lined the ground earlier. As many as 987 concrete bollards have been installed on the Rajpath. A total of 1,490 modern-look manholes have replaced the earlier ones.

On January 11, Puri had said the recent record rainfall had delayed the Central Vista Avenue redevelopment project by “a day or two, but not more”. Shapoorji Pallonji and Company Limited is executing the redevelopment work of the Central Vista Avenue. The redevelopment project of the Central Vista -- the nation’s power corridor -- envisages a new triangular Parliament building, a common central secretariat, revamping of the three-km Rajpath, a new prime minister’s residence and prime minister’s office, and a new vice president’s enclave.

Major General Alok Kacker, Chief of Staff Delhi Area, will be the second-in-command of the parade. The parade will start from Vijay Chowk and end at the National Stadium through the traditional route of Rajpath, it said.

The Indian Navy’s tableau will depict the 1946 naval uprising, which contributed in the country’s independence movement, and its marching contingent will be led by a woman officer Lt Commander Aanchal Sharma. The tableau will also show the navy’s theme of ‘Combat Ready, Credible and Cohesive’.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation tableau is showcasing its “Udan” scheme (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) this year. In the aircraft shaped tableau, the front part showcases women pilots depicting women power in India’s aviation, as India tops in women commercial pilots, globally.

The rear portion of the tableau shows symbol of Buddhism and motto of UDAN- Sab Uden, Sab Juden.

The middle portion showcases Buddha circuit, featuring, Buddha Statue at Gaya where He attained enlightenment, Dhamekh Stupa, Sarnath where He delivered his first sermon (Dharmachakra Parivartan) and the Mahaparinirvana Stupa, Kushinagar where He attained Mahaparinirvana.

Both sides of the middle portion of the tableau depict heritage sites- Humayun tomb from North, Konark sun temple in East, Hampi temple chariot in South and Ajanta caves in West, connected with air services.

# 2K ultras who signed ceasefire pact to cast vote in Manipur polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Around 2,000 cadre of various militant groups living in designated camps under a tripartite Suspension of Operation (SoO), a ceasefire pact, with the State and Central Governments in 2008, will now cast their votes in the forthcoming Assembly polls in Manipur.

Although they will not go to the polling stations to cast their vote, they have been allowed to vote through Postal Ballots.

The Election Commission (EC) has allowed members of Manipur militant groups that signed ceasefire agreements with the government, whose names are listed in the electoral rolls and who are currently residing at various designated camps to vote in the forthcoming assembly polls by postal ballot. The state polls are scheduled to be held in two phases on February 27 and March 3.

According to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur, the EC has allowed the cadres of the pro-talks militant outfits which are under ceasefire agreements with the government and those who are currently residing at various designated camps in the state to cast their votes.

The decision was made considering that a number of persons belonging to the SoO and MoU groups living in the 14 designated camps in Manipur have been

enrolled in the electoral rolls of various assembly constituencies of the state. The poll panel has taken the decision in exercise of powers conferred by clause (c) of Section 60 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and in consultation with the central government and state government.

According to officials, over 20 Kuki militant groups operating in the state under two conglomerate groups — United People’s Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO) — had signed a tripartite Suspension of Operation (SoO), a ceasefire pact with the state and central governments in 2008.

The EC has directed that these electors shall be allowed to vote by postal ballot, taking into account the right of franchise of such electors as they cannot move out of the said designated camps, the statement said.

The notification further mentioned that a survey shall be made for appropriate location of Postal Ballot Facilitation Centers (PBFC) for distribution, recording, collection of PB in different camps of SoO and MoU groups.

Manipur has a total of 60 Assembly constituencies. In the first phase, elections will be held for as many as 38 constituencies and the remaining 22 constituencies will vote in the second phase.



Security personnel examine Rajpath on the eve of full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

# Long Covid affecting human nervous system, says expert

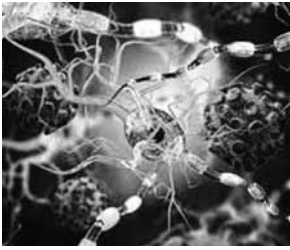
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Long Covid is affecting human brains and nervous systems at a deeper level and there is an urgent need for significant research into identifying the full extent of its complications and underlying causes, according to researchers.

The viewpoint of Avindra Nath, an Indian-American scientist who specialises in neuroimmunology, has been published in the prestigious Science journal.

Nath, who is clinical director of the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), along with Serena Spudich from Yale School of Medicine, Connecticut, said that the medical community needs to carefully study individuals with Long Covid categorized by their specific symptoms.

“It is crucial to the development of diagnostic and therapeutic tools to identify and



treat what is becoming an ever-increasing public health concern,” emphasized Nath.

Neurological symptoms that have been reported with acute Covid-19 include loss of taste and smell, headaches, stroke, delirium and brain inflammation. “There does not seem to be extensive infection of brain cells by the virus, but the neurological effects may be caused by immune activation, neuroinflammation and damage to brain blood vessels,” they wrote.

Long Covid can include a wide variety of symptoms in the brain and nervous system that range from a loss of taste

and smell, impaired concentration, fatigue, pain, sleep disorders, autonomic disorders and/or headache to psychological effects such as depression or psychosis. Nath and Spudich have outlined the current scientific understanding of the potential body responses to acute Covid-19 infection and how those responses could lead to Long Covid symptoms.

They also drew parallels between the symptoms experienced by individuals with Long Covid to those living with multiple sclerosis (MS), encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) or post-Lyme Disease, which suggests there could be common risk factors involved.

“Owing to the significant variability in symptoms from person to person and the fact that many individuals with LongCovid were healthy prior to a relatively mild Covid-19 infection”, the scientists have highlighted the urgent need for global research efforts.

# NIA raids places in Punjab in Jalalabad IED blast case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has conducted searches at multiple locations in Punjab in the 2021 bike IED blast case of Jalalabad.

The agency conducted searches at five locations in Taran Tarn, Fazilka and Ferozepur districts of Punjab, the NIA said in a statement.

During the searches that continued till late on Friday, electronic gadgets, ammunition, documents and other incriminating materials have been seized. Further investigation in the case is continuing, it said.

The case relates to an explosion in a Bajaj Platina bike near Punjab National Bank, Jalalabad City, police station Jalalabad, Fazilka in which one person namely Binder Singh died on the spot.



“Initial investigation revealed that accused were in touch with Pakistan-based terrorists/smugglers and were recruited for carrying out terrorist attacks in crowded areas by triggering explosive devices,” it said.

The case was first registered as FIR No 205/2021 dated September 16, 2021 under various sections of the Explosive Act at the police station City Jalalabad, Fazilka, Punjab. The NIA had re-registered the case on October 1 last year. Till now five accused persons have been arrested in the case, it added.

# Rahul: Govt trying hard to snatch public rights

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit out at the Modi Government accusing it of trying to destroy public rights.

Rahul said that the world’s largest democracy is nothing without public rights and asked people whether they can imagine India without fundamental and public rights.

“What’s the point of the world’s largest democracy without public rights? The Modi government has been trying to destroy the rights of the public from the beginning. Can you even imagine India without these rights including the fundamental rights?” he said in a social media post.

Rahul further listed out the basic rights. “Right to food – so that no one has to face hunger. Right to Education- Today every child goes to school, makes a better tomorrow for



himself and for the country. Right to Employment- Despite the BJP’s staunch opposition, the UPA gave employment security. Right to Information- Transparency is another name of democracy. People have the right to question and get answers. RTI was also given by UPA. Which of these rights does the PM object to? And why?” he asked.

The Congress leader also recalled a desperation by a section of UPSC aspirants demanding extra opportunities. “A delegation of UPSC aspirants met me recently and shared their serious concerns. The Centre must find a viable solution in

dialogue with all stakeholders so that time and opportunities lost during the two years of pandemic don’t cost our youth their future,” Rahul said on Twitter with a special mention Justice for Students.

Addressing the media while launching the party’s youth manifesto for Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections a day earlier, Rahul had criticised the BJP government for depriving the youth of opportunities. “Youth is the biggest strength of India. They are called demographic dividend; Narendra Modi and the BJP has converted it into a demographic disaster....India needs a new vision and only the Congress party can give that vision to the country...The BJP’s vision is not of the country’s vision,” he said.

He had also accused the BJP government of taking the unemployment rate to a record high in the last 40 years.

# Ukraine tensions: Russia toughens its posture

**Moscow:** With tens of thousands of Russian troops positioned near Ukraine, the Kremlin has kept the US and its allies guessing about its next moves in the worst security crisis to emerge between Moscow and the West since the Cold War.

Amid fears of an imminent attack on Ukraine, Russia has further upped the ante by announcing more military drills in the region. It also has refused to rule out the possibility of military deployments to the Caribbean, and President Vladimir Putin has reached out to leaders opposed to the West.

The military muscle-flexing reflects a bold attempt by the Kremlin to halt decades of NATO expansion after the end of the Cold War. In talks with the United States, Russia demands legally binding guarantees that the alliance will not embrace Ukraine and other former Soviet nations, or place weapons there.

It also wants NATO to pull back its forces from countries in Central and Eastern Europe that joined the alliance since the 1990s. Putin has described NATO membership for Ukraine and the others as



Members of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces, volunteer military units of the Armed Forces, train in a city park in Kyiv, Ukraine, Saturday. Dozens of civilians have been joining Ukraine's army reserves in recent weeks amid fears about Russian invasion

well as the alliance's weapons deployments there as a red line for Moscow, warning that he would order unspecified "military-technical measures" if the demands aren't met.

Putin pointed to NATO drills with the Ukrainian military, increasingly frequent visits of the alliance warships in the Black Sea and the flights of US bombers near Crimea to emphasize the urgency of Russia's security demands. He argued that by creating training centres in Ukraine, Western powers can establish a military foothold there even without its

joining NATO.

"We have nowhere to retreat," Putin said. "They have taken it to the point where we simply must tell them: Stop!" Russia, which annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, has denied it intends to attack its neighbour. Last year, however, Putin issued a stark warning that an attempt by Ukraine to reclaim control of the areas in the east controlled by Russia-backed separatists would have "grave consequences for Ukrainian statehood".

# Baltic nations to ship Washington-endorsed arms to Ukraine

AP ■ HELSINKI

The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will send US-made anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine in a move that Washington says it is fully endorsing amid Kyiv's escalating tensions with Russia.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a tweet posted on Saturday that Washington saluted the three NATO nations and former Soviet republics "for their long-standing support to Ukraine".

"I expedited and authorized and we fully endorse transfers of defensive equipment @NATO Allies Estonia Latvia Lithuania are providing to Ukraine to strengthen its ability to defend itself against Russia's unprovoked and irresponsible aggression," Blinken said in another tweet.

Dmitry Peskov, spokesperson for Russian President Vladimir Putin, earlier this week described western arms supplies to Ukraine as extremely dangerous and said they "do nothing to reduce tensions."

Moscow has massed tens of thousands of troops at the border with Ukraine, leading to fears of an invasion.

The West has rejected Moscow's main demands - promises from NATO that Ukraine will never be added as a member, that no alliance weapons will be deployed near Russian borders, and that it will pull back its forces from Central and Eastern Europe.

A meeting Friday between Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov ended with no breakthrough.

In a joint statement published late Friday, the defense ministers of the three Baltic states said they "stand united in our commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in face of continued Russian aggression."

They said Estonia would provide Ukraine with Javelin anti-tank weapons while Latvia and Lithuania were sending Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and other related equipment to bolster Kyiv's defensive military capabilities.

# Biden, Kishida agree to 'push back' China's attempts to change status quo in East China Sea, SCS

**Washington:** US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida have agreed to "push back" against China's attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and highlighted the importance of the Quad grouping as a critical forum for promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

During the 80-minute virtual meeting on Friday, their first formal summit meeting, Biden said the age-old alliance between the US and Japan is the cornerstone of peace and security in the strategic Indo-Pacific region and across the world.

"It was an honour to meet with Prime Minister Kishida to further strengthen the US-Japan alliance - the cornerstone of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and around the world," Biden said in a tweet after the meeting.

"As Indo-Pacific powers, the United States and Japan are united in a shared purpose to sustain and enhance our commitment to the region," the White House said in a readout of the meeting.

"The two leaders resolved to push back against the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea," it said.

The US, India and several other world powers have been talking about the need to ensure a free, open and thriving Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China's aggressive military manoeuvring in the region.

The Chinese military is actively eying the strategic Indian Ocean region to step up

Beijing's influence. China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all claim parts of it.

Beijing has built artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea. China also has territorial disputes with Japan in the East China Sea. The US maintains it will support its regional allies in the defence of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

The Japanese government said in a statement that "the two leaders shared the intention to coordinate closely under the strong Japan-US alliance and to deepen cooperation with like-minded countries such as Australia, India, ASEAN, and Europe, toward realising a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'".

Biden and Kishida said they remain committed to working closely with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

The two leaders highlighted the importance of the Quad - Australia, Japan, India, and the United States - as a critical forum for promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region, according to the White House readout.

They also decided to ensure that the Quad delivers practical results in areas such as COVID-19 response, climate and clean energy, and infrastructure.

In 2017, India, Australia, Japan and the US gave shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the "Quad" or the Quadrilateral coalition to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the strategically-vital Indo-Pacific region.

# 2 prominent activists sentences to death by Myanmar court

**Bangkok:** Two prominent political activists in military-ruled Myanmar have been sentenced to death for alleged involvement in terrorist activities, an army television station has reported.

Myawaddy TV said on its evening news broadcast on Friday that Kyaw Min Yu, better known as Ko Jimmy, and Phyo Zeyar Thaw, also known as Maung Kyaw, were convicted under the country's counter-terrorism law.

They were found guilty of offenses involving explosives, bombings and financing terrorism.

Both have been detained since their arrests, unable to comment on the allegations, and no lawyer ever emerged to comment on their behalf. Min Yu's wife, Nilar Thein, in October denied the allegations lodged against her husband.

Details of their trials were unavailable because the proceedings were carried out in a closed military court. It was unclear if their two cases were linked.

Modern-day Myanmar has a record of rarely carrying out death sentences.

The two are among the



most prominent activists to be given death sentences since the military in February last year seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Its takeover sparked wide-scale popular protests, which have since turned into a low-level insurgency after nonviolent demonstrations were met with deadly force by the security forces.

Almost 1,500 civilians are estimated to have been killed, and more than 11,000 arrested carried out for political offenses.

Some resistance factions have engaged in assassinations, drive-by shootings and bombings in urban areas. The mainstream opposition organizations generally disavow such activities, while supporting armed resistance in rural areas, which are more often subject to brutal military attacks.

AP

# IS-K bigger threat than TTP in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: province police chief

**Peshawar:** The Islamic State's Afghanistan affiliate, dubbed Islamic State Khorasan or IS-K, posed a bigger threat to peace and integrity of Pakistan's restive province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa than the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the provincial police said on Saturday.

The IS-K, which has stepped up attacks in several cities in Afghanistan after the Taliban seized power in Kabul in August last year, was also responsible for carrying out a spate of terror attacks against Pakistan's security officials in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

"I see IS-K as a bigger threat to peace and security in the province compared to the TTP in near future," Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police chief Moazzam Jah Ansari said.

In October last year, IS-K had also claimed responsibility for the killing of a well-known Sikh hakeem named Sardar Satnam Singh (Khalsa), who practised Unani medicine here in the provincial capital.

At least three police personnel were killed in different parts of the province in the months of October and November.

Ansari said following these sustained attacks, police had



busted a cell of the IS-K in Peshawar on December 20 last year.

While both TTP and IS-K were responsible for attacks on security forces in Pakistan, Ansari believed that the latter posed a great threat because when one of its cells became dysfunctional, another cell began operations.

"These [militant] outfits are operating in small groups and the neutralisation of one cell does not end the possibility of another cell resorting to similar acts," Ansari explained.

He said that there had been security issues in North and South Waziristan tribal districts, but the security officials had acted swiftly to enforce the writ of the state.

Ansari said the provincial and federal governments were focusing on development of

tribal areas and creating employment opportunities for the youth.

"These efforts will motivate the people to support government efforts for peace," he opined.

The police chief said his force had completed the training of 17,000 out of 27,000 Levies and Khasadar Force personnel in the tribal districts.

The police force was working in tandem with Pakistan's armed forces for bringing peace back in the region, Ansari added.

According to a US State Department's report, IS-K received funding from its parent organisation, the militant Islamic State group (IS), with additional funding coming from "illicit criminal commerce, taxes and extortion activities."

# US-backed fighters chase IS gunmen near prison in Syria

**Beirut:** Kurdish-led fighters advanced slowly Saturday under the cover of US-led coalition air power in Syria's northeast. Intense clashes with Islamic State militants took place around a prison where thousands of extremists were held, officials said.

Fighting broke out Thursday night when IS unleashed its biggest attack in Syria since the fall of its "caliphate" three years ago. More than 100 militants assaulted the main prison holding suspected extremists in the northeastern city of Hassakeh, sparking a battle with US-backed Kurdish fighters that has so far left dozens dead.

Despite their defeat in Syria nearly three years ago, IS sleeper cells have carried out deadly attacks against US-backed fighters of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces as well as government forces on the west bank of the Tigris River in eastern Syria.

The group's territorial control in Syria and Iraq, where they once declared their "caliphate" was crushed by a years-long US-backed campaign. But its fighters continued with sleeper cells that have increasingly killed scores of

Iraqis and Syrians in past months.

The US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces brought more reinforcements into Hassakeh in an attempt to regain control of areas taken by IS, residents said. More civilians fled the areas of fighting as sounds of explosions echoed in the city and black smoke billowed from the Gweiran Prison area on the southern edge of Hassakeh.

Hassakeh Governor Ghassan Khalil told Syrian state media that some 4,000 civilians have fled to areas controlled by Syrian government forces in the city and its suburbs.

The IS attack targeted Gweiran Prison, the largest of around a dozen facilities run by US-backed Syrian Kurdish forces holding suspected IS fighters. Gweiran holds some 5,000, including IS commanders and figures considered among the most dangerous.

"The battles are taking place on the edge of the prison," SDF spokesman Siyaman Ali told The Associated Press, adding that most of the prison is under their control apart from a small part that is held by rioting prisoners. He added that fighting is also ongoing in

the nearby Zuhour neighbourhood, where IS fighters were holed up.

Ali said SDF fighters and US-led coalition aircraft targeted a technical academy building where dozens of "Daesh terrorists took positions". Ali, who used an Arabic acronym to refer to IS, said SDF fighters are advancing slowly in order to protect the lives of civilians as IS gunmen are holed up in alleys and in residential homes.

Ali said some 45 IS gunmen were killed in the fighting, adding that a statement will be issued later about the casualties among SDF fighters.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said that since Thursday night, 78 people have been killed, including 45 IS gunmen, 28 Kurdish fighters and five civilians. The Observatory added that SDF fighters were using loud speakers to call on IS fighters to surrender but the extremists refused.

On Friday, the SDF's top military commander, Mazloum Abadi, said IS mobilised "most of its sleeper cells" to organise the prison break.

# Stray bullet kills English astrophysicist visiting Atlanta



**Brookhaven (US):** A stray bullet struck and killed an English astrophysicist while he was inside an Atlanta-area apartment, and police say the death was the result of "reckless" gunfire by random individuals.

Matthew Willson, 31, of Chertsey, Surrey, England, was shot once in the head while laying in bed, Brookhaven police announced Thursday. The shooting happened early Sunday morning.

Willson was in Brookhaven visiting his girlfriend, Katherine Shepard. She told WSB-TV that the bullet came through the wall of her apartment, from a neighbouring apartment complex. She called 911.

"I held him for another 20 minutes while we waited for the ambulance," she said. "And while we were waiting, there were more gunshots fired."

Willson was taken to a hospital and later pronounced dead.

# NYC police officer killed, 2nd critical in Harlem shooting

**New York:** A New York City police officer lay in a hospital Saturday after being critically wounded in a shooting in a Harlem apartment that left a fellow officer dead, authorities said.

The man who shot them with a stolen gun was also in critical condition, wounded by a third officer who fired at him as he tried to flee, officials said.

The two officers were shot Friday night while answering a call about an argument between a woman and her adult son.

Officer Jason Rivera, 22, was killed, and Officer Wilbert Mora, 27, was critically wounded, authorities said.

Police had no update on Mora's condition Saturday morning but said he remained hospitalised.

The man police say shot them, 47-year-old Lashawn J. McNeil, also was critically wounded and hospitalized, authorities said.

Authorities said the three officers went to the apartment after a call came in from a woman needing help with McNeil, her son. Officers spoke with the woman and another son, but there was no mention of a weapon.

Rivera and Mora walked from the front of the apartment down a hallway, and McNeil swung open a bedroom door

and opened fire, Chief of Detectives James Essig said.

As McNeil tried to flee, a third officer who had stayed with McNeil's mother in the front of the apartment shot at McNeil and wounded him in the head and arm, Essig said.

They were among the four officers shot in the city in as many days, prompting an emotional response from Mayor Eric Adams.

"This was just not an attack on these brave officers," Adams said Friday night. "This was an attack on the city of New York."

Rivera joined the force in November 2020. Mora has been with the NYPD for four years.

Adams, three weeks into his job, called for federal authorities to do more to round up stolen guns like the one used in Friday's shooting.

Police said the gun used in Friday night's shooting, a .45-caliber Glock with a high-capacity magazine capable of holding up to 40 extra rounds, had been stolen in Baltimore in 2017.

# Pak YouTuber gets just 1 year jail term for justifying lynching of Sri Lankan citizen

PTI ■ LAHORE

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court has sentenced a 27-year-old man to one year of imprisonment and imposed a fine for justifying and lynching of a Sri Lankan citizen in a video, which went viral on his YouTube channel.

On December 3 last year, a mob of over 800 men, including supporters of hardline Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), attacked a garment factory in Sialkot district, some 100 km from Lahore, and lynched its general manager Priyantha Kumara, 47, and burned his body over allegations of blasphemy.

# Indian-origin scientist among UBC researchers unveil world's 1st molecular-level analysis of Omicron

**Toronto:** A team of researchers, including an Indian-origin scientist at the prestigious University of British Columbia, has become the first in the world to conduct a molecular-level structural analysis of the Omicron spike protein, which could help accelerate the development of more effective treatments against the variant.

Spike protein helps the virus enter

and infect cells. Dr. Sriram Subramaniam, professor in UBC faculty of medicine's department of biochemistry and molecular biology, said that Omicron has greater binding affinity than the original SARS-CoV-2 virus, with levels more comparable to what seen with the Delta variant.

<b>JASCH INDUSTRIES LIMITED</b> Regd. Off. : 502, NDM-II, NSP, Pitampura, Delhi 110034    CIN : L24302DL1985PLC383771 Website : <a href="http://www.jaschindustries.com">www.jaschindustries.com</a> , Email : <a href="mailto:accounts@jasch.biz">accounts@jasch.biz</a>										
<b>Extract of Reviewed Ind AS Financial Results for the Quarter &amp; Nine Months Ended 31st December, 2021.</b> (Standalone And Consolidated Financial Results under Regulation 47(1)(B) Of Listing Regulations) (₹ in Lakh)										
Sl No	Particulars	Standalone					Consolidated			
		Quarter Ended		Nine Months Ended		Year Ended	Nine Month Ended		Year Ended	
		31.12.21	30.09.21	31.12.20	31.12.21	31.12.20	31.03.21	31.12.21	31.03.21	
		Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Audited	Unaudited		
1	Total Income from Operations.	6351.96	5285.32	4449.16	15341.49	8583.05	13567.63	15341.49		
2	Profit before Interest, Depreciation & Taxes (EBITDA)	984.53	621.48	642.62	2118.71	1155.10	1909.27	2118.71		
3	Net Profit for the period (before Tax & Exceptional Items)	894.45	535.88	561.14	1860.70	892.04	1561.97	1860.70		
4	Net Profit for the period before Tax (after Exceptional Items)	894.45	535.88	559.61	1860.70	890.51	1561.97	1860.70		
5	Net Profit for the period after Tax (after Exceptional Items)	664.37	415.88	394.22	1382.10	641.83	1135.20	1382.10		
6	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [(Comprising Profit) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	664.37	415.88	394.22	1382.10	641.83	1135.20	1382.10		
7	Equity Share Capital	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00		
8	Reserves	7200.94	6536.57	5298.40	7200.94	5298.40	5818.84	7200.94		
9	Earnings Per Share (of ₹10/- each)	5.86	3.67	3.48	12.20	5.66	10.02	12.20		
Basic & Diluted:										
<b>Notes :</b>										
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosures Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results are available on the website of Stock Exchange at <a href="http://www.bseindia.com">www.bseindia.com</a> and also on Company's website at <a href="http://www.jaschindustries.com">www.jaschindustries.com</a> .										
2. The financial results of the Company have been prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS).										
3. Figures for the previous periods have been regrouped, wherever necessary, to conform to the current period's classification.										
<b>Sonipat, 22nd January 2022</b>					<b>sd/- (J. K. GARG) MANAGING DIRECTOR</b>					



# TAAI seeks ‘One India One Tourism’ approach in Budget

**Mumbai:** The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has sought ‘One India One Tourism’ approach, which is inclusive of ‘One Tax Structure,’ in the forthcoming Union Budget to revive the pandemic-hit domestic travel, tourism and hospitality industry.

Besides, the Association has sought bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) under the ambit of GST to make air travel “more viable” for all stakeholders as well as extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

There are several aspects which can be expected in the upcoming Budget to support the entire sector of ‘travel tourism and hospitality,’ which will help in making this sector revive and survive, TAAI, which is headed by Jyoti Mayal, said in a statement on Saturday. “For this, it is extremely important for both the central and state governments to work in tandem to facilitate this sector and support it to be included in the concurrent list to get Industry status to make it more structured,” the Association said.

TAAI said the Government should strive to increase the disposable income of the middle classes to spur that discretionary spending. According to the travel agents body, concrete steps should be taken to improve cash flows and reduce the working capital burden on startups, existing



MSMEs and SMEs along with access to easy credit, reducing income tax rate and GST rate, abolishment of tax collected at source (TCS) and wage support with ease of business.

Besides, strengthening MSMEs, creating a fund of funds scheme for technology adoption for use in industry 4.0, reviving the Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS) for technology upgradation are the other steps TAAI is expecting in the forthcoming Union Budget, it said.

To revive this struggling sector, “we need ‘One India One Tourism’ approach inclusive of ‘One Tax Structure,’” TAAI said in the statement, adding that, important points to be considered are e-visa fees waiver for all tourist visas for 2022-2023, to support inbound revival export status for tourism export earnings.

It has also sought double expenditure allocation for the tourism ministry to enable intensive global reach-out to support the inbound revival as

well as domestic income tax travel credit for Indian citizens and Indian companies to support domestic retail and domestic MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) pick-up. The Association is also looking at a global bidding fund in the Union Budget 2022-23 to enable bidding support to Indian MICE companies to bring global MICE events to India, as per TAAI. Lastly

and most vital is a structured mechanism to secure travel agents’ payments to ensure security for travel agents and operators’ survival, it said.

TAAI added that travel agents’ payments to principals are unsecured credit and there is need to ensure that some form of mechanisms, whether escrow or guarantee or underwriting based mechanisms, are in place for securing travel agents money. **PTI**

## Industry Speaks: Make travel expenses deductible under IT returns in Budget FY23

**New Delhi:** India’s hotel and restaurant industry has urged the Centre to make travel expenses deductible under IT returns in Budget FY23.

Notably, the sector has been heavily battered due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions imposed to check the infections’ spread.

According to Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, since foreign travel is at least 12-15 months away from returning to the pre-pandemic levels, Centre should give impetus on domestic travel.

“We have requested Finance Minister to allow

domestic travel for individuals and corporates to be a deductible expense in their IT returns. This tax incentive could be offered for a fixed number of years until hospitality comes back to pre-pandemic conditions,” Kohli told IANS.

“The move will encourage the 28 million-plus people who otherwise travel out of the country, to holiday in India. We also ask for a review of the decision to introduce LTC cash vouchers in lieu of LTC fare to the Central Government employees.”

Besides, the hospitality industry has asked the Centre to be granted the infrastructure status.

# Public wifi hotspots have potential to generate 2-3 cr jobs this year: Telecom Secretary

**New Delhi:** Setting up of 1 crore public wifi hotspots across the country by this year as envisaged under the present telecom policy has the potential to create 2-3 crore job opportunities, a senior government official said on Saturday.

Telecom Secretary K Rajaraman while speaking at Broadband India Forum (BIF) event called upon wifi equipment makers to lower the cost of their products for the expansion of Prime Minister’s Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) scheme which aims to set up wifi hotspots across the country.

“Given by conservative estimate of each hotspot enabling 2-3 direct and indirect employment opportunities, the creation of 10 million hotspots as per the NDCP (National Digital Communications Policy) target by 2022 would potentially generate 20-30 million job opportunity in the small and medium scale sectors,” Rajaraman said.

Public wifi hotspots have immense potential to act as catalysts for rural economy and as a means of rural livelihood besides propelling socio-economic growth by providing employment opportunities for millions of small local and village entrepreneurs. “Sprawling manufacturing units will be needed to produce millions of access points for PM WANI which is the core of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission and would lead to therefore more job creation,” Rajaraman said.

According to the PM-WANI portal, over 56,000 wifi hotspots have been



deployed across the country till date. Rajaraman said that he wants more entrepreneurs to join PM-WANI programme facilitated by C-DoT.

“We also want local communities to join PM-WANI scheme wholeheartedly. We will be happy to facilitate existing entrepreneurs in local neighborhoods especially local cable operators, internet service providers, tourism operators etc to come forward and help proliferate WANI access points across the country,” he said.

BIF announced the launch of BIF Connectivity Accelerator Programme in partnership with Meta (formerly Facebook) to enable entrepreneurs and startups build innovative connectivity solutions and support the public wifi ecosystem.

“This (BIF Connectivity Accelerator) virtual programme will give startups the opportunity to partner with BIF to help develop relevant use cases and help scale their businesses. We appeal to all stakeholders to come together and join hands with us to expeditiously and effectively implement this national mission,” BIF president TV Ramachandran said. **PTI**

# FabIndia plans ₹4,000 cr IPO; promoters to gift over 7 lakh shares to artisans, farmers

**New Delhi:** Lifestyle retail brand FabIndia plans to raise up to ₹4,000 crore through an initial public offer and in a novel approach, the company’s promoters also plan to gift more than 7 lakh shares to artisans and farmers.

On Saturday, the company filed the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with markets watchdog Sebi for the offer that will include fresh issue of shares worth up to ₹ 500 crore. Besides, there will be an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 2,50,50,543 shares. Market sources said the Initial Public Offer (IPO) is expected to be worth around Rs 4,000 crore.

In order to “reward and express gratitude to certain artisans and farmers engaged with the company or its subsidiaries”, FabIndia’s two promoters -- Bimla Nanda Bissell and Madhukar Khara -- intend to transfer 4,00,000 shares and 3,75,080 shares, respectively, to them, subsequent to the filing of the DRHP.

“Our promoters, namely, Bimla Nanda Bissell and Madhukar Khara have opened their respective demat accounts and have transferred 4,00,000 equity shares and 3,75,080 equity shares, respectively, that are proposed to be transferred by way of gift to the artisans and farmers,” the DRHP said.

Proceeds from the fresh issue of shares will be utilised for voluntary redemption of the company’s NCDs (Non Convertible Debentures), pre-payment or scheduled re-payment of a portion of certain outstanding borrowings and general corporate purposes.

In the DRHP, the company has mentioned about its ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) initiatives, saying it believes that “enabling and uplifting the people we work with, taking care of the environment, and being ethical in our conduct with have a long and lasting positive impact”.

“We have aimed to create social impact and foster well being for our artisans, communities, employees and investors, using environmentally responsible and ethical means,” it added. **PTI**

# Jio completes 5G coverage plans for top 1,000 cities in country



**New Delhi:** Jio has completed 5G network coverage planning for top 1,000 cities in the country and is augmenting its fibre capacity as well as running pilot across sites, a senior company official said during a presentation.

The company has created teams to focus on dedicated solutions for 5G deployment in India, Reliance Jio Infocomm President Kiran Thomas said on Friday evening.

“5G coverage planning has been completed for 1,000 top cities across the country. Jio has been doing trials on advanced use cases across healthcare and industrial automation on its 5G network,” Jio said in a statement.

Thomas during the presentation said that the company is running a 5G pilot in multiple cities and network planning for the roll out of 5G using 3D maps and ray tracing technology is going on. “We are using the most modern approaches towards network planning, especially 3D maps and ray tracing technology because 5G is pretty unique technology, which requires

very advanced network planning techniques, and we are undertaking that for all of India, so that as and when the approvals are received for us to roll out this network, we will be well geared-up to prioritise our rollout, where we can make the maximum contribution,” Thomas said.

Auction for 5G spectrum is expected to be held in the first quarter of the next financial year.

Reliance Jio reported to close the third quarter which ended December 31 with net addition of 1.02 crore customers year-on-year (YoY) at 42.1 crore.

The subscriber base, however, declined on a quarter-on-quarter basis. “We closed the quarter at 42.1 million subscribers. That was a reduction of 8.4 million, but the gross addition continued to be very strong 34.6 million. And the reduction was really on account of SIM consolidation and some of the less active customers, now with tariff increases, etc, looking at consolidating uses in a single SIM,” Reliance Jio head of strategy Anshuman Thakur said. **PTI**

On a reported number basis, Jio’s ARPU remained almost flat but the company’s average revenue per user (ARPU) increased by 8.4 per cent to ₹ 151.6 on a year-on-year after making adjustments interconnection usage charges (IUC) which it had to pay to other operators. The IUC charges have become nil from January 1, 2021.

Jio Platforms posted an 8.8 per cent increase in net profit at ₹3,795 crore for the third quarter ended December 2021.

It had posted a net profit of ₹3,486 crore in the same period a year ago. Gross revenue from operations increased by 5.76 per cent to ₹24,176 crore from ₹ 22,858 crore in the October-December 2020 period.

Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd (RJIL), the telecom services arm of Jio Platforms, posted a 9.8 per cent rise in net profit at ₹3,615 crore for the quarter, compared to ₹3,291 crore in the year-ago period.

RJIL’s revenue from operations increased 4.62 per cent to ₹19,347 crore from ₹ 18,492 crore earlier. **PTI**

# ICICI Bank Q3 consolidated profit jumps nearly 19% on NII growth, lower provisions

**Mumbai:** Private sector lender ICICI Bank on Saturday reported a nearly 19 per cent jump in its consolidated profit to ₹6,536 crore for the quarter ended in December 2021, helped by higher net interest income (NII) and lower provisions.

The bank had posted a profit after tax of ₹ 5,498 crore in the year-ago period.

“It was an all-round growth. We had an NII growth of 23 per cent and core operating profit also grew by 25 per cent. Our provisions declined by 27 per cent,” the lender’s Executive Director Sandeep Batra told reporters here.

However, total income was lower at ₹39,865.80 crore in the third quarter this fiscal compared to ₹ 40,419.08 crore in the same quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing. On a standalone basis, the profit after tax jumped by 25 per cent to ₹ 6,194 crore in the third quarter of FY2022 compared to ₹4,940 crore in the same quarter of FY2021. Total income increased to ₹ 27,069.67 crore from ₹24,416 crore in the year-ago period.

Net interest income (NII) jumped by 23 per cent year-on-year to ₹12,236 crore compared to ₹9,912 crore. Net interest margin (NIM) stood at 3.96 per cent compared to 3.67 per cent in the year-ago quarter.

Fee income grew by 19 per cent year-on-year to ₹4,291 crore from ₹ 3,601 crore in the same period of the previous fiscal.

Treasury income declined to ₹88 crore during the reporting quarter compared to ₹ 766 crore in Q3 FY2021. The treasury income in Q3 FY2021 included a gain of ₹329 crore from sale of shares of ICICI Securities, the lender said in a release.

Gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio was at 4.13 per cent in the third quarter as against 4.38 per cent in the year-ago quarter. Net NPA stood at 0.85 per cent from 0.63 per cent in the year-ago period.

Speaking of the impact of the third wave of Covid-19, Batra said, “As things stand today, the third wave may have created local disruptions. We do not anticipate, at this point of time, any significant economic disruptions to the portfolio that we have.”

The lender has a Covid provision of ₹6,425 crore, which it did not release during the December quarter, he said. Provisions (excluding provision for tax) declined by 27 per cent to ₹2,007 crore from ₹ 2,742 crore. The gross addition to NPAs during the quarter was about ₹4,018 crore compared to around ₹ 5,500 crore in the September quarter. Of that, retail was about ₹ 3,853 crore and corporate and SME was about ₹ 165 crore.

Recoveries and upgrades of NPAs, excluding write-offs and sale, were ₹ 4,209 crore. The gross NPAs written-off in the quarter were ₹ 4,088 crore. Its restructured book stood at ₹ 9,684 crore or 1.2 per cent of total advances as of December 31, 2021. The bank’s total capital adequacy as of December 31, 2021 was 19.79 per cent.

Total advances increased by 16 per cent year-on-year to ₹8,13,992 as of December 31, 2021. The domestic advances grew by 18 per cent y-o-y. Its retail loan portfolio grew by 19 per cent.

Total deposits rose by 16 per cent year-on-year to ₹10,17,467 crore as of December end.

Batra said the value of credit card spends in Q3 FY2022 was 2.2 times the value of credit card spends in the year-ago period.

Meanwhile, the bank on Saturday informed exchanges that Vibha Paul Rishi has been appointed as its Additional (Independent) Director for a period of five years with effect from January 23, 2022. **PTI**

# Yes Bank Q3 profit zooms 80 pc as provisions decline

**Mumbai:** Yes Bank on Saturday reported 80 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at ₹265.76 crore for December quarter 2021-22, helped by a fall in the provisions for bad loans.

The bank’s core net interest income declined 31 per cent to ₹1,764 crore, despite a 0.25 per cent expansion in net interest margin to 2.4 per cent but limited by the loan growth being suppressed at 4 per cent.

On a standalone basis, the profit jumped 77 per cent to ₹ 266.43 crore in the quarter under review. Given the de-bulking exercise where it has reduced high value loans and also de-leveraging exercises by corporates, the bank has reduced its FY22 loan growth guidance to 10 per cent from the earlier 15 per cent, Managing Director and CEO Prashant Kumar said.

The provisions declined 82 per cent to ₹ 375 crore from the year-ago period’s ₹ 2,089 crore, helping the bottom line.

The share of gross non performing assets (NPAs) in the overall loan portfolio declined to 14.65 per cent from 15.36 per cent in the year-ago period and quarter ago’s 14.97 per cent, as the fresh slippages got contained at ₹978 crore. The bank management said ₹435 crore came from corporate loans, ₹388 crore from retail and ₹123 crore from small businesses.

The quantum of restructured loans increased to ₹6,878 crore from the quarter ago’s ₹6,184 crore, which Kumar attributed to some projects facing a delay in date of commencement of commercial operations and also the COVID-2 restructuring.

Kumar said the bank’s plans for floating an asset reconstruction company (ARC) to house the entire quantum of its ₹50,000 crore in stressed advances seem to be getting delayed by a quarter due to the fresh outbreak of COVID cases. **PTI**

# E-mobility start-up, VAAN Electric Moto, launches e-bikes in India

**Kochi:** Indian lifestyle e-mobility startup VAAN Electric Moto Pvt Ltd has launched its electric bicycle-Urbansport in the country.

Union Minister of State for Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Electronics and IT, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, launched the Van Electric Moto brand in India in a virtually held event in Kochi on Friday. The e-bike is available in two variants- Urbansport and Urbansport Pro, priced at ₹59,999 and ₹69,999 respectively and will initially go on sale in Kochi, before being launched in other high-potential markets like Goa, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Delhi in the future.

According to VAAN, the vehicles offer a maximum assistance (top speed) of 25 km/h, and a pedal assisted range of 60 kilometres. VAAN claims that a full charge would require just half a unit of electricity, costing around ₹4-5. The removable battery pack, with a net weight of 2.5 kg, would offer added convenience and would require 4 hours for a full charge.

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan and the Chairman and Managing Director of OilMax Energy Pvt. Ltd, Kapil Garg jointly launched the VAAN e-bikes in the Indian market. Ernakulam MP Hibi Eden unveiled the VAAN brand logo in the event in which former MP Chandran Pillai was also present.

Both the electric bikes get, compact 6061 aluminium unisex frames, saddle, rims and handlebar designed by Benelli Biciclette, the e-bike vertical of the Italian brand.

“VAAN has tied with them for engineering and supply chain and has worked closely with the Benelli team for the development of the Urbansport duo,” the group said in a release. VAAN claims that its removable battery is a first in this segment, adding that the bicycles come

with Shimano Tourney 7 speed derailleur gear system, front and rear disc brakes and Spinner USA front shocks.

“The electric pedal assist system consists of a 250W hub mounted electric motor, a 48 Volt, 7.5 Ah removable Lithium-ion battery, and a total of 5 electric ‘gear levels,” it said.

VAAN Urbansport e-bikes get a Smart LCD display serving all necessary information, that can also be used to control front and rear lights. “The Urbansport is the most practical of the two and gets 20 inch spoke wheels, a carrier that can carry up to 15 kilograms and an exposed electric motor. Urbansport Pro is a more stylish and premium e-bike that offers alloy wheels and an electric motor that is neatly integrated into the rear hub,” the release said.

The company’s plant at Ernakulam has a capacity to assemble 2,000 cycles a month, and are initially targeting sales of 8,000 to 10,000 cycles a year. “We targeted a young crowd earlier but are now looking at even those in the age group of 40-55 years who need not be cycling enthusiasts, considering the advantages of our product that comes with three modes,” Jithu Sukumaran Nair, Chief Executive Officer and founder of VAAN Electric Mobility said. He said the e-cycle has a power-assisted mode with five electric gears and a full-throttle mode ratcheting up a speed of up to 25 km per hour.

VAAN says the lithium-based removable battery weighing around 2.50 kg with a two-year warranty can be fully charged in around four hours and lasts for 50 km to 60 km depending on the mode in which the cycle is used. KTM-owned KISKA GMBH, Austria handles branding for VAAN an Indian lifestyle e-mobility start-up. It was globally launched at the EICMA motorcycle show in Italy. Vaan has technology partnership with the well-known motorcycle producer brand Benelli. **PTI**

# Asia’s first-ever Email Excellence Awards

**New Delhi:** Asia is going to witness its first-ever email excellence award show “For the Love of Emails - Awards 2022” on February 25, 2022. The FTLOEA 2022, being organised by Asia Inc.500 and martech solution giant Netcore Cloud, offers a unique opportunity to recognise and celebrate the email marketing industry. “The event will virtually bring together the new-age email marketing communities, said Anshika Purwar, global head, strategic alliances & partnerships, Asia Inc.500.

# PFS could not hold board meeting in absence of independent directors

**New Delhi:** Power solution provider PTC India arm PTC India Financial Services (PFS) board could not hold its scheduled board meeting on Saturday in the absence of all independent directors, a source said.

On Wednesday, the three independent directors -- Kamlesh Shivji Vikamsey, Santosh B Nayar and Thomas Mathew -- resigned enmasse from the board of PFS citing corporate governance issues. The source told PTI that the PFS cannot hold board meeting in the absence of all three independent

directors as per the norms of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The source also stated that now the company will have to seek SEBI permission or exemption for holding its board meeting.

The queries sent to PFS remained unanswered. Earlier on Friday, PTC India CMD Rajib Kumar Mishra had told in a virtual press conference that PFS board will be meeting on Saturday. However, he had not divulged the details about agenda of the meeting saying it was confidential.

At present, there are three members on board of the PFC, Rajib Kumar Mishra (CMD of PTC India), Pankaj Goel (CFO of PTC India) and PFS MD and CE Pawan Singh. Earlier this week, independent director of the PTC India, Rakesh Kacker, in his resignation letter, had said that despite best efforts, the “independent directors could not convince the management of PTC and PFS to take proper action to run the company in accordance with what we considered the correct course of action”. **PTI**

# Confirm willingness to fund debt owned to lenders: FRL independent directors to Amazon

**New Delhi:** Future Retail’s independent directors have asked e-commerce giant Amazon if it is willing to fund Rs 3,500 crore to repay the retail company’s lenders. Notably, the question to Amazon was posted after the e-commerce giant in an earlier letter to independent directors objected to the sale of Future Retail Ltd (FRL)’s small-format stores.

“FRL is in need for cash infusion urgently in order to repay its lenders. FRL is required to pay its lenders ₹3,500 crore by January 29, failing which it will be classified as an NPA,” said the letter dated January 21.

“Since you are objecting to the sale of

small-format sales, the proceeds of which were to be used to repay lenders and thereby avoid NPA classification, please confirm that you are willing to fund this amount by Monday through an unsecured, long-term loan, subordinated to FRL’s existing lenders or any other mutually suitable and legally acceptable structure.”

Besides, the letter to e-commerce giant said, “If you do so, FRL will use such funds in order to repay FRL’s existing lenders. Alternatively, you are also free to engage with the lenders so that we do not fall foul of our OTR process or obligations.” Accordingly, the independent

directors asked the e-commerce giant to provide the confirmations for such funds by January 22, 2022.

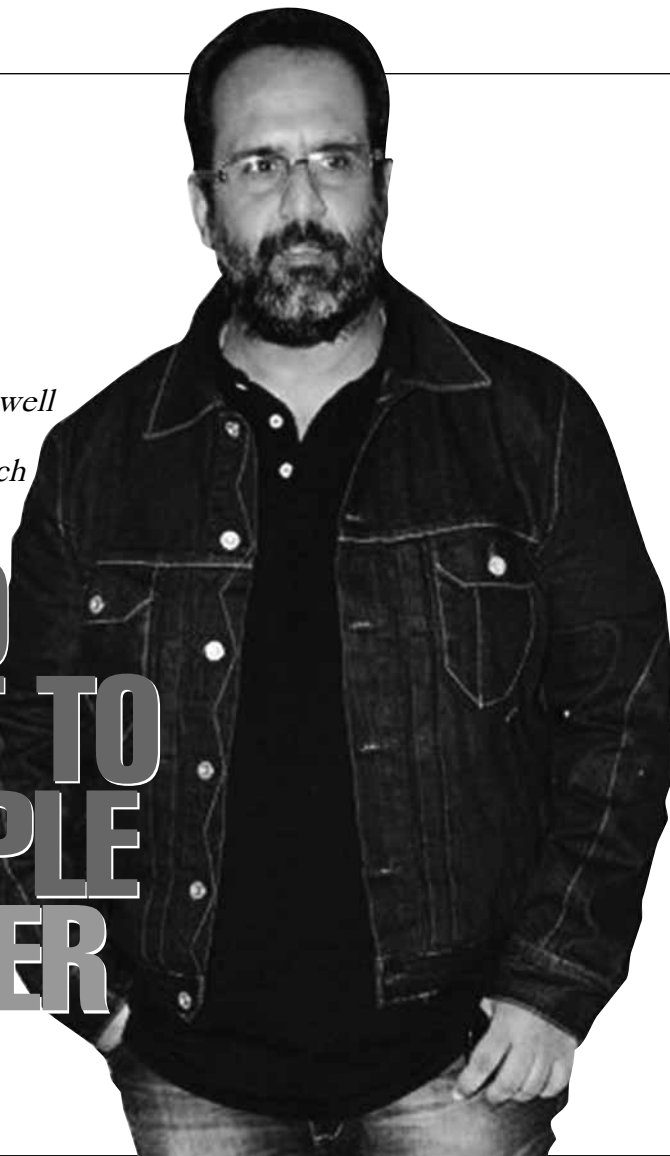
“Once you have provided these confirmations in writing and agree to infuse ₹ 3,500 crore in order to repay FRL’s lenders by January 29, 2022, we would be happy to assess a detailed proposal and meet Amazon India Head Abhijeet Mumundar.”

Furthermore, the letter asked Amazon, “Coming to the specific aspects of your proposal -- we note that your letter refers to a potential transaction between Samara Capital and FRL as a ‘solution.’”



## ANAND L RAI

**'I WANT TO  
REACH OUT TO  
MORE PEOPLE  
WITH BETTER  
STORIES'**



I always knew I am walking on thin ice. But I wanted to tell this story. I wanted to bring out something which is as central to *Atrangi Re*. May be subconsciously a story like this was not happening around us. Nobody was working on a script like this. I wanted to tell a father-daughter story with a perspective in this film. I am happy

“

Now that this film is over, I will be taking a break for a few days. In fact, I am on my break at present. Once I am back, I will officially start working on the post-production for *Raksha Bandhan* since the shoot is complete. The same is for *Good Luck Jerry*. The shoot is complete. Final edit changes are being done. *Action Hero* will go on floor in the next few days. I am working on different stories. I am really looking forward to 2022. My production house Colour Yellow Productions has so much to offer.

add a classic flavour base to  
ness to the dish.

Several small objects are visually appealing than a single piece. You could arrange clusters of earthen pots in different sizes and even two pairs of cushions in different patterns.



d much more, all with just a  
they have introduced multiple  
il business cards and trendy  
data transmission between  
d an unpowered tag, all by  
rani, Entrepreneur and Data  
CEO of OnetapHELLO. His  
ng tools that have a lower

Most coleus plants require about 6 hours of sunlight in the morning hours with shade being preferred all afternoon.



The present pandemic has once again thrown a curve ball. Music is the purest form of medium that resonates with everyone. Swarna Swar Bharat, a reality show on Zee TV, is a step in this direction, says SHALINI SAKSENA

What is even more interesting is that through fictional narrative being portrayed through magical realism, this show will bring us the stories of some of our immortal Gods and Goddesses like Lord Vishnu, Goddess Laxmi, Narad Muni, Ganapathi and Hanuman from the vedic texts and



Kher tells you that there a couple of reason how and why he came on

— PADMASHRI KAILASH KHER

aren't healthy however much you may have risen professionally, there is no point in running after things

Swarna Swar Bharat premiered on January 22, 2022; it will air every Sat-Sun at 8 pm

❖ **Why do you think introverts need constant validation?**

I am not saying that introverts need constant validation. It's me who needs constant validation. It's not constant but driven by validation. Introverts have their own battles to fit in. Just like in an extroverted world, most introverts don't fit. For example, I remember going to do see an IPL match. And there

# 'We need to redefine success'



were like 30-40 thousand people shouting Sachin and going crazy over him. I loved it but after a while I just wanted to go home and watch the same match on TV without 30 thousand people screaming into my ears. Introverts find that overwhelming and if you

If you are happy, God bless you. May you always be happy. But if you are not happy or you are struggling with something, get to the bottom of it and discover yourself. Maybe, you are a diamond and are embarrassed of the fact that you shine so much.

Bollywood vibes  
Fillhaal 2 (BPraak, Jaani)  
Galat (Asees Kaur)  
Jaane De (Atif Aslam)  
Aaj Bhi (Vishal Mishra)  
Kaise Hua (Vishal Mishra)

English Vinglish  
Goosebumps (HVME)  
Blinding Lights (The Weeknd)  
Dynamite (BTS)  
SugarCrash! (Elyotto)  
Hold On (Justin Bieber)



# India may try different options to avoid humiliation

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Indian team's strategy is expected to undergo paradigm shift with some players getting a subtle yet stern message to lift their games as they face an embarrassing possibility of a clean sweep against South Africa in the third ODI, here on Sunday.

India's strategy looked completely out of sync with modern day white ball game as the batters failed to keep the momentum in the middle overs and more importantly the bowlers, save Jasprit Bumrah, looked club class and without ideas of getting breakthroughs.

In two matches, India have been only able to pick up seven wickets -- four in the first game when Proteas batted first and only three in the second. Ravichandran Ashwin and especially Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the two senior-most bowlers looked far from threatening and the young Proteas batters like Rassie van der Dussen, Janneman Malan along with seniors like Quinton de Kock have feasted on the pedestrian stuff dished out by them.

With the two having flopped



completely, it needs to be seen whether Rahul Dravid, the man who is currently calling all the shots as far as tactics is concerned, takes a dim view and at least try out Jayant Yadav and Deepak Chahar in the next game

which would lend some freshness to the attack.

Worse, the first two games were played on a Boland Park strip that didn't have a lot of pace and bounce and even skipper KL Rahul admitted that

conditions were more familiar with what they get back home, compared to what they are used to getting in South Africa.

However at Newlands, there will be more pace and bounce on the track

and the Indian team that has been perennially struggling would want to avoid the ignominy of a 0-3 loss.

For skipper Rahul, the whole tour, save his match-winning hundred in the first Test, has been a nightmare. Although he is being seen as a long-term future leader, there hasn't been any spark whatsoever in his leadership that would make anyone sit up and feel that he is the one cut out for the job. There hasn't been any tactical improvisations in the two games so far which would inspire confidence in his leadership abilities.

Add to that, his own style of batting at the top of the order is outdated in modern ODIs and his inability to rotate the strike for the better part is also creating pressure on the later batters, who aren't as adept at maneuvering the strike.

It is a foregone conclusion that once Rohit Shara is back in action, Rahul will lose his spot at the top of the order with Shikhar Dhawan scoring runs and at a better clip compared to his younger partner.

Virat Kohli may have scored 51 in the first game but what is visible is his lack of energy on the field having been sacked from ODI captaincy.



## Sindhu enters final of Syed Modi

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu reached the women's singles final of the Syed Modi International badminton tournament after her fifth seeded Russian opponent Evgeniya Kosetskaya retired hurt midway into their semifinal here on Saturday.

Sindhu, the top seed, easily pocketed the first game 21-11 before Kosetskaya conceded the second women's singles semifinal match. Former world champion Sindhu will face com-

patriot Malvika Bansod in the summit clash on Sunday.

Malvika defeated another Indian, Anupama Upadhyaya, 19-21 21-19 21-7 in a tough three-game contest.

It was expected to be an easy outing for Sindhu going by form, world ranking as well as head-to-head record.

Ranked seventh in the BWF rankings, Sindhu had defeated world number 28 Kosetskaya twice before Saturday's tie, and the Indian ace once again came out on top to extend her dominant record against the Russian.

## IPL will start in last week of March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI is set to conduct the 2022 IPL from last week of March to end of May and efforts would be made to host the lucrative event in India as per the wishes of team owners, Board secretary Jay Shah said on Saturday.

If sources are to be believed, the tentative start date is March 27.

"I am delighted to confirm that the 15th season of the IPL will start in the last week of March and will run until May end. A majority of the team owners expressed their wish that the tournament be held in India," Shah was quoted as saying in a press note issued by the BCCI.

He also made it clear that the board's first preference is to host the event in India.

"The BCCI was always keen on staging the 2022 edition that will see two new teams --



Ahmedabad and Lucknow -- in India. I can tell you that we will leave no stone unturned in ensuring that IPL stays in India," Shah said.

While the UAE and South Africa are back-up options as per sources who attended the meeting, Shah stressed that the health safety of all stakeholders including players, match officials is paramount for the board.

"The BCCI has not compromised on the health and safety of its stakeholders in the past and will concurrently work on Plan B since the COVID-19 sit-

uation with new variants remains fluid.

"The mega IPL Auction will take place on February 12-13th and we will lock in venues before that," Shah further added.

The BCCI was initially mulling two start dates for the next IPL with some preferring a March 27 kickoff and few other influential people wanting the mega event to begin on April 2, which conforms to the Lodha Committee ruling.

"Some of the owners prefer March 27 start but India play their last international game against Sri Lanka, a T20I at Lucknow on March 18, and then you need a 14-day gap as per Lodha rule which is why April 2 is also an option for start date," a senior BCCI official told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

It is understood that the India players will also be exhausted after staying in three back-to-back bubbles in South

Africa (away) and at home against West Indies and Sri Lanka.

"The BCCI must take bubble fatigue of players into account if they start IPL in less than 10 days of completion of Sri Lanka tour," a BCCI source said.

However, after Shah's statement, it looks like March 27 will be locked in.

It is also learnt that all the 10 IPL owners, including the two new teams from Lucknow and Ahmedabad, want India as the host country for the 2022 IPL, with Mumbai and Pune being the two preferred cities.

Their second choice is the United Arab Emirates where the IPL has been organised thrice while the final option is South Africa where the mega event was held back in 2009.

However, the UAE and South Africa will only come into the picture if the COVID-19 situation in India worsens.

## Sri Lanka and South Africa secure Super League quarterfinal spots

PTI ■ BASSETERRE (ST KITTS)

Sri Lanka sealed their qualification for the T20 World Cup after a dramatic three-wicket victory over West Indies while South Africa defeated Ireland by 153-runs to also book their place in the quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup.

Dunith Wellalage took three wickets as Sri Lanka restricted the hosts to 250 before Sadisha Rajapaksa (76) Anjala Bandara (40) and Ranuda Somarathna's unbeaten 28 guided the Group D winners to a three-wicket success on Friday.

WI openers Shaqkere Parris and Matthew Nandu ensured they made a steady start, reaching the end of the fifth over for 20 without loss before Treveen Mathew removed the latter for seven.

Parris was then bowled by Wellalage for 16 before Teddy Bishop and Kevin Wickham combined for a fruitful partnership, taking the West Indies to 102 for two after 26 overs.

Bishop was eventually removed on 45 but Jordan Johnson picked up where his team-



mate left off as he raced to 26.

Wickham reached his half-century before falling for 56.

Two wickets in three balls in the 45th over stunted the hosts' momentum, though, with Wellalage accounting for Johnson as he fell three runs short of his fifty before Giovante Depeiza was run out moments later by Anjala Bandara without scoring.

In response, Sri Lanka lost opener Chamindu Wickramasinghe in the first over. Sadisha Rajapaksa and Shevon Daniel got their side back on track before Daniel was removed for 34.

Rajapaksa powered on regardless as he reached his fifty. Anjala Bandara contributed 40 before his wicket fell with Rajapaksa (76) also falling the same bowler in the 40th over.

With 51 needed off 60 balls for victory, Shiva Sankar removed Wellalage (15) to set up a tense finale.

Mckenny Clarke bowled Raveen De Silva (13) but a nerveless 28 from 27 balls from Ranuda Somarathna saw Sri Lanka home. In the day's other game, a blockbuster century from captain George Van Heerden propelled his side towards the Super League quarter-finals as South Africa defeated Ireland by 153 runs in Tarouba.

Van Heerden made 111 from 93 balls while Dewald Brevis better known as 'Baby AB' contributed 96 to take South Africa's total of 315 for seven from their rain-reduced 47 overs before bowling out Ireland for 158.

## There has been discussions on how I need to play shots: Pant



PTI ■ PAARL

Rishabh Pant understands the value of his wicket and the reason why the team management often asks him to use his discretion in shot selection during important phases of various matches.

Pant was out to an atrocious shot during the second Test in Wanderers, which led to lot of criticism from all quarters and former skipper Virat Kohli stating that they have had a word with the talented southpaw.

"There are always positive talks that as an individual what I can do. All the strokes are there but how can I play with patience and according to the situation. So a lot of discussions happen," Pant, who since then had scored a hundred in the third Test at Cape Town and followed it with career-best 85 in the second ODI, told reporters during a virtual interaction.

"And whatever we discuss, we practise and after that try to implement in the match," he added. According to Pant, who made a career-

best 85, the team management has entrusted him with responsibility of batting at four, to ensure right-left combination

"The reason to bat at number four was if a left-hander gets a chance to bat in the middle, then it becomes easy to rotate strike, with the left-right combination, especially in the middle overs when leg-spinners or left-arm spinners bowl.

".....So that is why the team management felt that a left-handed batter should bat and that is why that role was given to me," he said.

Pant also said that the team is learning from the mistakes in its endeavour to get better.

"I think as (from) a batting point of view, we are fine, we are going fine. We are learning from our mistakes and every day as the Indian cricket team we strive to improve our cricket and that is the only thing we are looking forward (to)." Pant believes that Shardul Thakur's batting in both games (50no and 40 no) has been one of the biggest positives in the series so far.

"One more positive was the way Shardul (Thakur) batted down the order, in both the matches, that was also a positive. The way Venky (Venkatesh Iyer) bowled, he conceded more runs in one or two overs, but still it felt that he could bowl (at this level). So, there are a lot of positives, which we can take as a team."

Pant admitted that Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram and Tabraiz Shamsi bowled better than Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal in the two games.

"I think they (SA spinners) were more consistent in their lines and lengths and they are used to playing in these conditions," he said.

## RIP Subhas Bhowmick



PTI ■ KOLKATA

A fearless competitor who fused brain and brawn in equal measure, Subhas Bhowmick was one of the most fascinating characters in Indian football through the 1970's with his muscular build and equally expressive carefree opinions.

On Saturday morning, Bhowmick, who was undergoing dialysis for a long time breathed his last at the age of 72, survived by his wife, son and daughter and the legions of fans, who loved and lived the moments left by him both on and off the field.

"He had to undergo dialysis regularly for about three and half months. He also underwent bypass surgery about 23 years ago. Recently, he was admitted to a private hospital in Ekbalpur

with a chest infection," a family member said.

While India had some of the finest international footballers in 1960's which include Pradeep Banerjee, Chuni Goswami, Tulsidas Balam, Jarnail Singh, Arun Ghosh, Peter Thangaraj to name a few, the numbers quote dwindled in the 70's save two Bengalis, who were thought of international standard. They were pint-sized right back Sudhir Karmakar and 'bulldozer' winger Bhowmick, who were both part of the 1970 Asian Games bronze winning Indian football team. Bhowmick, in fact, scored in the tournament and in his 24 games for India had nine goals including a hattrick in the Merdeka Cup (Indian teams were regular feature in 60's and 70's) along with goals in the Asian Games in Bangkok.

## Medvedev wins over Aussie crowd in win over Dutch opponent

AP ■ MELBOURNE

As Daniil Medvedev sat court-side trying to rehydrate during a changeover, an image of nine-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic flashed up in the stadium behind him.

It was in the third set Saturday, and it was like the absent No. 1 was looking over the shoulder of the player who is effectively the No. 1 seed at the year's first Grand Slam tournament. Medvedev, who lost last year's Australian Open final to Djokovic but avenged that with a victory over the Serb for the U.S. Open title, reached the fourth round for the fourth straight year at Melbourne Park with a 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 win over Botic van de Zandschulp.

The 25-year-old Russian was a conspicuous fan favorite on Margaret Court Arena, too, two days after being unsettled by the boos and jeers of a parochial crowd on Rod Laver Arena when he ended the run of mercurial Aussie Nick Kyrgios.

He was critical of a lack of respect in that match -- mostly about the noise between first and second serves -- and this time offered some relationship



advice to the crowd.

"Every good relationship must have its ups and downs," he said in his on-court TV interview, explaining that he planned to be back on court quite often in the future.

"I hope it's going to be more good times than bad times, otherwise it doesn't work."

Medvedev later clarified he didn't have a problem with the Australian crowds and had been fully expecting to have them against him when he played Kyrgios -- just not while he was

in his service motion.

"The other night I was playing against an Australian player, very electric Australian player," he said.

"After the match, I think it was, yeah, straightaway pretty actually fun for everybody.

"That's how I felt, and I didn't see actually a lot of let's say negative reactions." Medvedev avoided a showdown with Djokovic after the world's top-ranked player had his visa canceled and was deported on the eve of the tournament.

## Villa rub salt into Toffees' wounds

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Everton's change of management did not result in a change of fortunes as Aston Villa manager Steven Gerrard enjoyed a winning return to Merseyside with a 1-0 victory at Goodison Park.

Emiliano Buendia's header in first half stoppage time separated the sides to leave the Toffees still just five points above the relegation zone in 16th.

Duncan Ferguson took temporary charge of Everton following the sacking of Rafael Benitez last weekend after a run of just one win in 13 league games.

Ferguson was unbeaten in three matches as caretaker boss against Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal before Carlo Ancelotti took charge just over two years ago.

But he could not replicate that success as former Liverpool captain Gerrard got one over on his old rivals. Ferguson bought a round of drinks



for fans in a pub next to the stadium before kick-off and got the raucous atmosphere he was looking for.

Both sides flew into tackles, but there were few clear-cut chances in the

first half. Ollie Watkins should have done better when he prodded wide with just Jordan Pickford to beat.

Another former Liverpool midfielder Philippe Coutinho was quiet on his

first Villa start since joining on loan from Barcelona, but had a part to play in the only goal.

The Brazilian's header was tipped over by Pickford.

From the resulting corner, Lucas Digne came back to haunt his former club just weeks after leaving Everton as his corner was flicked in by Buendia.

Digne and Matty Cash were hit by a bottle thrown by the home fans as they celebrated the goal.

Everton should have salvaged at least a point after the break in their battle to beat the drop.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Richarlison started together up front for the first time since August and both the Toffees star men were guilty of missing big chances to equalise.

Richarlison headed over before Calvert-Lewin failed to make a good connection to Anthony Gordon's teasing low cross.

## India eye goals in must-win game against Chinese Taipei



PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Hosts India will need to be more clinical with their finishing when they face a struggling Chinese Taipei in a must-win group match of the women's Asian Cup here on Sunday.

India were held to a goalless draw by lower-ranked Iran in their tournament opener, while Chinese Taipei were blanked 4-0 by eight-time champions China.

A FIFA World Cup play-offs spot within their grasp, India are seeking to meet their head coach Thomas Dennerby's 'realistic target' of making the quarterfinals, for which they will need to win the next match at all costs, as the home team is scheduled to play Group A heavyweights China in its last league fixture.

A win for India, which is hosting the continental showcase for the second time after 1979, will virtually send the country into the quarter-finals of the 12-nation tournament.

Besides the two top teams, two third-placed sides across the three groups will also qualify for quarterfinals.

All the semi-finalists of the ongoing tournament will directly qualify for the 2023 FIFA World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

Two more teams from the remaining four quarterfinalists will also get direct berths to the World Cup if Australia make it to the semi-finals of this tournament, which is highly probable.



# the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE

## Dynamics of Karma & Destiny

As we create the world along with our cravings and attachments, these are apparently writing our destiny, through us

2

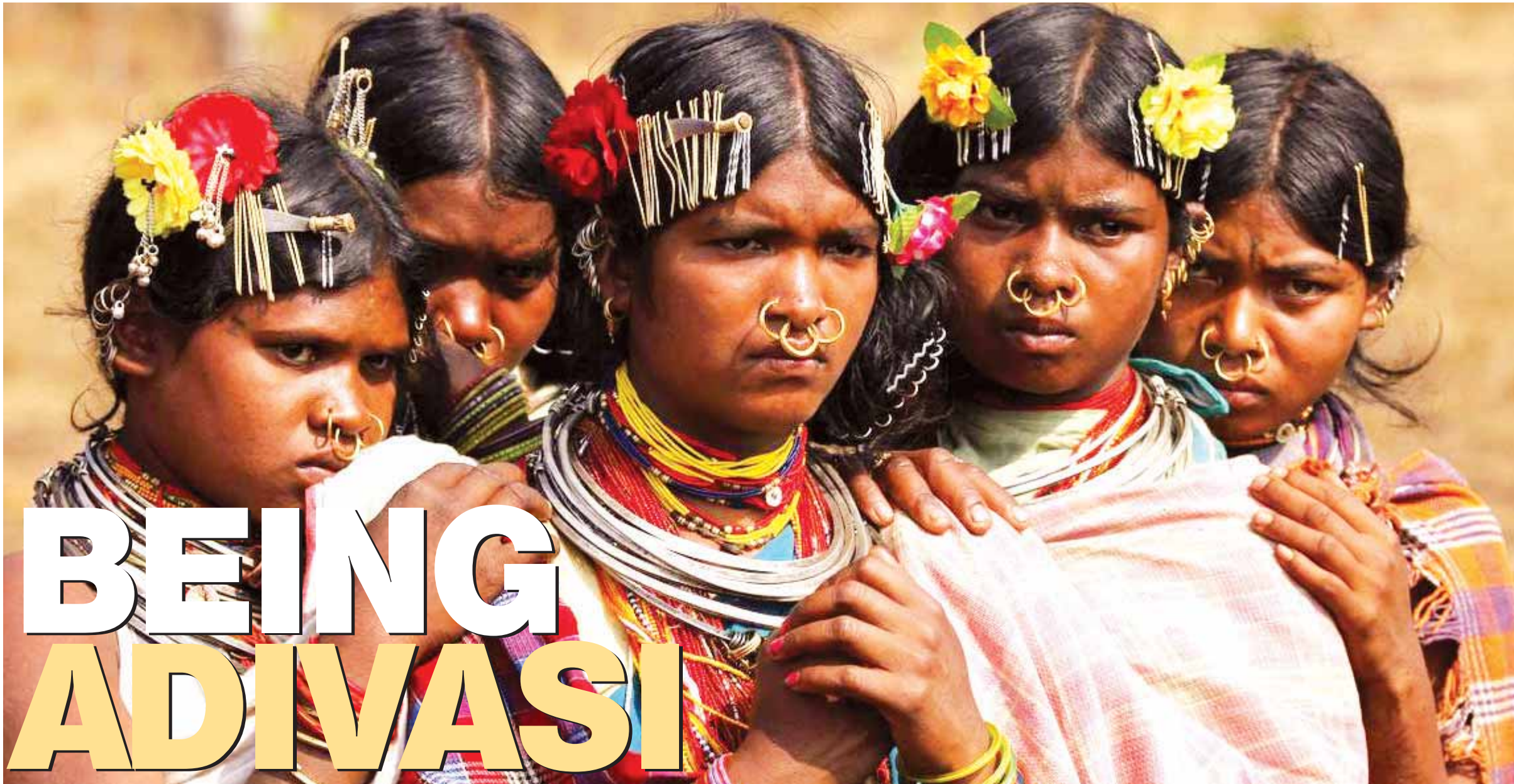


4

## Life: Harmony of opposites

Creation is a result of convergence of the opposites. So, reconciling dualities of life is called for

I like to be in the spotlight once in a while, and then I like to be in the shadows. It's really regenerating — Monica Bellucci



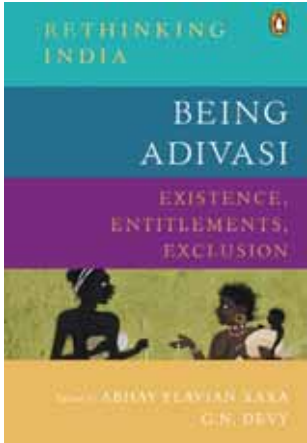
# BEING ADIVASI

As G.N. DEVY, the editor of *Being Adivasi* with the late Abhay Xaxa, shares in his introduction: ‘I would like to hope that it is received not just as a publication or academic exercise but as a prelude to change that is now overdue, a change that will bring to the Denotified & Nomadic communities at least some measure of justice and human rights that they expect to get as citizens of a democratic country & to Adivasis the understanding of their distinct identity. We, the people of India, owe it to them as the indigenous people of India’. An edited excerpt:

If the awareness of Adivasis and their concerns is scant among the non-Adivasi population of India, knowledge about communities described as ‘Denotified Tribes’ is almost absent. Lest the term be misunderstood as ‘some kind of Adivasis’ or ‘officially non-recognised Adivasis’ — which is not unusual among even those who know something about Adivasis — I would like to offer the following brief description of the Denotified Tribes. During the nineteenth century, after the British had more or less secured authority over all princely states in India, they found it necessary to disarm the disbanded soldiers of the vanquished armies of Indian princes. The British also wanted to ensure safe travels in Indian states for commercial purposes. In order to accomplish the two objectives, they appointed William Henry Sleeman to detect the use of arms by unauthorised individuals. Sleeman made copious notes and listed instances of armed clashes on highways in central India. In the process, he gave rise to the idea of ‘thuggee’. The idea attracted readers of his books back in England. The list of persons and their communities came to be associated with the idea of thuggee or communities that make looting and crime their profession. The 1871 Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) was based on this notion. It listed communities as ‘criminal communities’, implying that being born in any of those communities made one automatically criminal tendency. The CTA provided for ‘reformatory settlement’, which were soft prisons. The listed communities were interned in these settlements, with severe restrictions placed on their free movement. Sleeman’s list had many flaws in it. Most of the communities had been traditionally nomadic in habit, an age-old social phenomenon in India. Members of the interned communities were put to hard labour, in most instances unpaid labour.

It is difficult to estimate as to how many perished due to the stress of labour. The members of these communities continued to live in the settlements for several generations spread over eight decades. In 1952, two years after India adopted the Constitution, the ‘notified’ communities were ‘denotified’. They continued to be described as Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT), while very few of them found a place in the official lists of *jan-jatis*, the ‘indigenous peoples’ or Adivasis. The stigma of criminality continued to stick to them despite the slight change in the label. Not being included in the lists of STs and SCs, with a few exceptions, they continued to languish without land, livelihood or access to schools and healthcare. Not having fixed

addresses, their minimum rights as citizens too were not safeguarded. The stigma around their name often causes harassment from villagers and the urban population even to this day. There have been widespread incidences of mob lynching of members of the DNT communities. Governments have been generally indifferent to the plight of the DNTs as they do not form even a substantial minority, though their total population in the country is by no means insignificant. When Dr Manmohan Singh’s United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government appointed me as chairman of the Technical Advisory Group for the Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Communities, I found that the population of the DNTs could be close to seven-eight crore. That was in 2008. At present, the number may have gone up and may be close to ten crore. The Census of India has never carried out any clear counting of the DNTs. And since the numbers are not officially ascertained, the locations of these communities are not properly documented and no systematic thought has been given to their livelihood requirements and their human rights; they continue to remain in India’s imagination as the invisible nowhere people. The present volume includes an introductory essay on the DNTs. For several decades following Independence, ‘Adivasi’ was an anthropomorphic ‘type’ cast in sentiment and piety, or else dismissed as historical baggage worth leaving behind in India’s march to modernity and nationhood. Though the complexities of Adivasi society received attention in scholarships related to the theme, the popular attitude to Adivasis was severely restricted by the acronym ‘ST’. Excessive pity and excessive contempt are both equally potent instruments of ‘othering’ people. It is therefore that Archana Prasad’s analysis of the class-currents within Adivasi communities becomes important as an antidote to the ‘othering’ processes. She concludes, after presenting a nuanced analysis of the tensions and textures in Adivasi contemporary identity discourse: “... the multifarious manifestations of neoliberal policies have also created diverse forms of Adivasi politics with different social basis. It is therefore important to distinguish between identity based struggles which have been led by those who are situated within the working class and those whose motive has been to get incorporated within the current power structure. Further, the culturally exclusive character of Adivasi politics is also hegemonic and camouflages the inequalities within the Adivasi society. On the other hand, non-culturally exclusive class politics has had to come to terms with the persistence of identity-



“FOR SEVERAL DECADES FOLLOWING INDEPENDENCE, ‘ADIVASI’ WAS AN ANTHROPOMORPHIC ‘TYPE’ CAST IN SENTIMENT AND PIETY, OR ELSE DISMISSED AS HISTORICAL BAGGAGE WORTH LEAVING BEHIND IN INDIA’S MARCH TO MODERNITY AND NATIONHOOD



based politics by adopting a more nuanced approach towards it. This collaboration has been facilitated by the intensifying communal polarisation and economic crisis, leading to the transformation of Adivasi politics, both class and identity based. Such a development is not only positive, but also essential to take on an authoritarian and neo-liberal government and the challenges that it poses to all progressive forces within the country.”

It needs to be mentioned that the facts of Adivasi political expression, cultural production and major social struggles over the last half century, all go to show that the general perception of Adivasis and their participation in modern India’s process of becoming falls woefully short of reality. The new-generation Adivasis are keen to create a more realistic view, one that is from the perspective of Adivasis. Abhay Xaxa states in clear words: “Apart from development issues, there was also a demand for a stringent anti-conversion law which has been used as a tool to divide the Adivasi communities on the lines of religion. The communal agenda of these organisations has gradually created a fear among people who don’t subscribe to the dominant discourse of assimilating the Adivasis in the Hindu fold. As a result, the harmonious relationship between various Adivasi and forest dependent communities have been broken and communal violence is also increasingly experienced in Adivasi areas.”

In order to obtain this view, the UPA-II government appointed the Committee headed by Virginius Xaxa. Abhay Xaxa refers to the Xaxa Committee report and points out that: “The panel recommended radical changes to the laws, regulations and rules to protect Adivasi communities from land alienation and to ensure their rights over resources are handed back and protected. The report also laid out an overhauled, expansive and detailed framework for providing better education, health and opportunities to tribal communities across the country. If the recommendations of the Xaxa committee are implemented, it will surely have an empowering effect on Adivasi communities.”

On the other hand, N.C. Saxena’s essay presents a deeply sympathetic but somewhat predictably simplified view. Dr Saxena’s historically important contribution to Adivasi development and the role he played inside government bureaucracy in favour of Adivasis are of a legendary proportion. Yet, seen from an Adivasi perspective, his overview is likely to be read as slightly less than a full view of what is happening today inside the minds of Adivasi communities

in India. Saxena states: “The oppressed tribals, unlike other disadvantaged groups, generally suffer and endure their exploitation silently. In some areas, however, they have taken to armed insurgency. The middle path of agitational politics by organising bundhs, taking out processions, and putting pressure on the politicians, so successfully adopted by other groups in India to articulate their grievances, is alien to the tribals and has historically been unknown to them. Civil society needs to play a big role here, and government too should not brand all tribal activists as Maoists.”

These comments need to be read together with fictional works by Mahasweta Devi in order to understand that the silence of Adivasis is not the absence of voice but rather a powerful statement which we have not yet begun grasping. The ‘silence’ is extremely powerfully articulated by Vikrant B.: “... stunted reading of social, economic and political realities created a host of mythologies and prejudices with respect to Adivasis and tribes in India. They were perceived to be isolated, self-sufficient, animist, under-developed and backward. Seemingly harmless, these mythologies have had serious policy and political implications. For example, tribes are seen as inter-linked with castes in India, by policymakers, academics, and even in popular perception. At one level, it is perhaps necessary to denote common subalternity, so as to emphasise the State’s obligation to their upliftment and empowerment. However, this manufactured equivalence glosses over the fact that while the Dalit question is relatively centre stage in the nation’s consciousness, the Adivasi question is not.”

The last clause of this paragraph sums up the purpose of this volume. It is, in the simplest words, to present ‘the Adivasi question’. It includes the question of Adivasis in the context of modern India, the questioning of the nation’s ideas of development by Adivasis and also the manner in which Adivasis pose their questions within the much-misunderstood framework of their understanding of what democracy means. Or, in other words, the Adivasi is the question handled by this volume, the Adivasi manner of questioning too is its concern and the questions raised by Adivasis before the Indian nation too are its paramount concern.

Extracted from *Being Adivasi: Existence, Entitlements, Exclusion* by Abhay Xaxa (Editor), Ganesh N. Devy (Editor) & run with due permissions from Samruddha Bharat Foundation and publishers Penguin Random House India







# Blot on American rights claims: Gitmo turns 20

The infamous Guantanamo Bay military prison completed two decades of its operations this January 11, 2022. Many say that this secret jail is truly an ethical failure of the American justice system. Besides, the last twenty years in Guantanamo have been a catastrophic legal misstep that is bringing home more problems and disgrace than credible solutions. It is increasingly becoming a symbol of torture. The military prison in Cuba is now left with only 39 inmates. During its peak time, it housed nearly 800 prisoners. Indeed, some media reports say that it is symptomatic of CIA-sanctioned torture cells carried out in stealth. Today another critical question looms large over the Biden Administration: Is it worth guarding 39 prisoners with one of the most sophisticated ring of 1,500 commandos? It is felt that the taxpayers' dollars must be spent judiciously at a time of global pandemic like the Covid-19.

The Guantanamo detention camp, also called Guantanamo Bay, Guantanamo or Gitmo, is in the Southeastern part of Cuba. The horrible prison is located at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base of America. It was created by then US President George W Bush in the year 2002 after September 11 terror attacks on the country. And the prison was especially designed to host the inmates who were caught as a part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Though the prison was first used in 2002, the American Government has been maintaining a military naval base there since 1903. Interestingly, the original prison was named Camp X-Ray. In fact, after the terror attack on September 11, the prison facility was made ready for immediate use in just 96 hours. Shortly after the Bush administration dethroned the Taliban Government headed by Mullah Omar in Afghanistan, the facility came into being as the most secure prison. The first batch of detainees was brought to the prison on January 11 the very next year and they were classified as "enemy combatants".

Most of the inmates of Guantanamo Bay were from those nations who were either a part of the GWOT or those who had helped harbouring terrorists. Precisely, the majority of them belonged to the countries of West Asia. The worst part of the Guantanamo saga was that these prisoners were captured on foreign soil but were not charged on any particular crime. Further, they



In this February 6, 2002, file photo a detainee is led by military police to be interrogated by military officials at Camp X-Ray at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. At the time the image was taken there were 158 al-Qaida and Taliban prisoners being held at Camp X-Ray

AP

were detained in this secluded prison for an indefinite period and were denied access to any legal counsel. Another important point to be noted here is that the GWOT is not an official war as there was no declaration of war by the US Congress. On November 13, 2001, barely two months after the terror attack, President Bush announced a military order, officially permitting these actions: it authorised the detention and trial by the Military Commission of any current or former member of the al-Qaeda and anyone who aids or abets its work or harbors its members. Thus, the GWOT has no scheduled end date, and it has handed down an indefinite mandate to the powerful armed forces to carry out the operation as long as the real culprits are not held. And when Osama bin Laden, the brains behind 9/11, was killed by American forces in 2011 during the Obama administration, in a way, the biggest

milestone of the operation was already achieved.

Now, America's withdrawal from Afghanistan was completed last year by handing over the reign to the same Taliban, the butchers against whom America and other liberal nations fought for nearly two decades. Now, there is no point of maintaining the Guantanamo Bay. In fact, the terror has come home all the way. It is ubiquitous now.

Now, the most pertinent questions are: Why Guantanamo was chosen and why is it still open? First of all, the US strategic experts and security agents wanted to keep the global terror suspects outside the purview of public and, most importantly, the constant media glaze. Also, when they are housed far away from the US mainland, these detainees will not be able both to demand and enjoy the protection of rights under the country's justice system. Another critical point to note here is that the

117-square kilometre base had enough space and facilities to hold the prisoners for a long time. Many human rights advocates say that this Bay is not technically a part of the US territory, but rather an "island outside law". Second, it is still open as there are tough Congressional roadblocks to close the jail.

Global experts condemn unrelenting human rights violations at Guantanamo Bay. The detention centre is internationally known for its human right violations committed there. The saddest part is that the international community has failed to discharge their responsibilities to get the prison shut by using pressure on the successive US Government since 2002 or by enforcing international human rights obligations. Rights advocates say that the American actions at the prison violate its obligations under the Third Geneva Convention, the International Covenant for Civil and Political

Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the customary international law. It is widely recognised that violations at Guantanamo Bay include illegal and indefinite detention, inhuman conditions, torture, unfair trials (military commissions), etc.

Today, the prison has become a symbol of American injustice and torture. In a nutshell, Gitmo was prepared just to torture the detainees, mostly belonging to the al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Today, this island prison bears the testimony of what many call the first war of the 21st century. This war was a different kind of a war against a different kind of enemy. The GWOT highlights the fact that the enemy is not a nation, but the enemy is massive global terror network that threatens the way of life of all peaceful people.

Frankly speaking, it is clear now that there had been and also continues to have flagrant

violations of international human rights of the detainees inside the prison complex. As the prison has been kept completely out of global media glaze, a very few of the tragic incidents that took place inside were brought to the notice of the outside world.

The maintenance of Guantanamo Bay prison is an insult to American democracy and the liberal ethos that Washington has been preaching for decades. President Biden can finally put an end to the extra-judicial and abhorrent system that has existed in Guantanamo for the last twenty years. If one flashes back and observes, they can single out how different US Presidents attempted to deal with the Guantanamo crisis differently after the exit of Bush in 2009. Barack Obama, a Democrat, who took over the reign from the Republican Bush, indeed pledged to shut it down during his first campaign for office. During his electoral march, he

once said: "In the dark halls of Abu Gharib and the detention cells of Guantanamo, we have compromised our most precious values." An eloquent speaker as he used to be, but he found it too difficult to put an end to the tragedies of the prison. Even though he signed an executive order to close the prison within a year, he failed to do so. Sadly, the Congress maintained such restrictions that barred Obama from closing the prison in the first two years of his time in office. And these two years have recorded a Congress, largely controlled by the Democrats. Interestingly, liberal veterans like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren voted against easing Congressional restrictions in the Senate in the year 2013. But Obama reduced the number of inmates from 242 to 41 during his tenure, by transferring some of them to the United Arab Emirates. When Donald Trump came to office, he maintained the status quo.

Is there any hope that Biden will be able to close down the prison? At present, the Democrats have a razor-thin majority in the Congress. And this is the only golden chance to bring an end to Gitmo, which Obama miserably failed despite his tall promises. If Biden wants to do something on the issue, first he must repeal long-held restrictions on shutting down the prison as the US Congress brings two legislations each year, namely, an annual defence authorisation bill and a Government spending bill. These are legal hurdles that Biden needs to overcome at the moment.

On record, Biden has also pledged to close Guantanamo. But the irony is that those Congressional impediments that prevented Obama are still in the books. However, Biden should give a final push. He must not postpone. This collective scar on American democracy should be buried with full presidential might and by taking all legal nuances. Hope, Biden, a matured and a patient listener to the woes of the world, would be able to fix the rights problem.

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**It's high time US President Joe Biden closed the books on the Guantanamo Bay prison which is infamous for its unrelenting human rights violations. The continuation of the Guantanamo prison is an insult to American democracy and the liberal ethos that Washington has been preaching to the world for decades**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# India should use cash crops to its strategic advantage

**Tobacco farming is suffering due to the actions of vested groups advocating high taxes on FCV tobacco to achieve tobacco control goals by making cigarettes unaffordable**



JAVARE GOWDA

World Bank has held its growth outlook for the Indian economy at 8.3 per cent despite a global pandemic. To support growth, there would be greater demand on natural sources where agriculture holds a pivotal role. Today, we are expecting agriculture to provide alternative fuel and sustainable energy sources. In India, agriculture remains the largest source of employment. It is imperative for India to actualise the PM's vision for farmer welfare at the core of agri development.

Farm production must be aligned with good market infrastructure to enable farmers to sell their produce at reasonable prices and improve the flow of much-needed private investments in the sector for crop development and farm practices.

Many government initiatives in this regard are laudable such as National Agriculture Market (eNAM) to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities, National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) for enhancing agricultural productivity in rainfed areas, and digitisation.

Cash crops like tea, coffee, tobacco, cotton have a strategic role in India's international agriculture play. Take for example tobacco crops which are one of the largest foreign exchange earners with exports of ₹6,500 crore in 2021. Indian FCV tobacco has a new opportunity in the global market due to new-found usage in medicines for several autoimmune and inflammatory diseases, including diabetes. But for this to happen, we must invest in R&D to produce value-added tobacco products that capture growing buyer interest and thus improve the country's position as the 2nd largest exporter of tobacco.

### Challenges faced by FCV farmers

Unfortunately, tobacco farming is suffering due to the actions of vested groups advocating high taxes on FCV tobacco to achieve tobacco control goals by making cigarettes unaffordable. This has resulted in reduced crop size with a decline in the acreage of land under tobacco cultivation. According to industry sources, tobacco use in legal cigarettes registered a sharp decline in the

last few decades when illicit cigarettes gained market share. This contributed to shrinkage in FCV crop size by sharp 39 per cent from 316 million kg per annum to 218 million kg per annum between 2013-14 and 2021-22. Our country has also witnessed a big decline of 1 lakh hectares in FCV tobacco acreage between 2013-14 and 2020-21 which led to 35 million man-days of employment loss.

Also, FCV tobacco exports from Indian have become uncompetitive globally losing share to countries like Zimbabwe, which is catering to the international tobacco market despite its small size.

Today, legal cigarettes have become unaffordable in India. Cigarette in India cost amongst the highest in the world as a percentage of per capita GDP at 7.70 per cent in comparison to 0.46 per cent for the USA and 1.14 per cent for China (WHO Report). This is even though cigarettes are only 8 per cent of tobacco consumed in the country while 92 per cent is other forms of tobacco. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the world where tobacco is synonymous with cigarettes

representing 90 per cent of tobacco consumption.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in a report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic 2021 has acknowledged that the affordability of legal cigarettes in India reduced sharply from 11.10 per cent in 2010 to 13.78 per cent in 2020. These findings were further corroborated with the results of the American Cancer Society study which observed that India has one of the lowest per capita cigarette consumptions in the world.

The above situation is stressing the farm community as consumers shift to smuggled cigarettes that do not use domestic tobacco. This is besides revenue loss to the exchequer which further limits the government's ability to invest in R&D which means farmers are not able to refine their products to meet international standards or come up with other farm innovations which can increase demand for Indian tobacco.

As per FICCI CASCADE's study, the total loss to the economy because of cigarette smuggling has been ₹16,138 crore while the total employ-

ment opportunity lost in the sector is about 3.34 lakh.

### Vested groups and flawed research reports

The problem lies in misleading data, which the policymakers are bombarded with, which limits their capacity to make informed and prudent decisions. Take for instance two separate studies conducted in 2018 and 2020 and cited in certain media articles which claim that the illicit cigarette sales figures are exaggerated.

The first study uses empty packs picked from retailers to compare legal and illegal cigarette sales, in total disregard of the fact that retailers would be hesitant to disclose that they are selling illegal cigarettes. No retailer in his right mind would save the empty pack as there is a deep fear because of coercive laws against them. Our custom laws put the onus on retailers to prove that the product being sold is a legal product. So, the researchers using this technique to understand illegal cigarette sales will only get a lopsided view.

The second study, on tax gaps, confirms a steady increase in consumption of

illegal cigarettes between two time periods. Also, the proportion of illegal cigarettes as a percentage of legal ones in the two studies has a difference exceeding 100 per cent, raising doubts as to which of the figures are accurate.

It is unquestionable that smuggled cigarettes are a raging phenomenon not only in India but all international markets. It has been established through studies by reputed research firms that India is the fourth largest and fastest-growing illegal cigarette market in the world.

As per Euromonitor International, illicit cigarette volumes in India registered a whopping 44 per cent in a decade from 19.5 billion sticks in 2011 to 28.1 billion sticks in 2020. This takes the market share of illicit cigarettes in the country from 21.3 per cent in 2015 to 27.6 per cent in 2020.

It is noteworthy to know that a recently released report by Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) states that one of the largest global cigarettes MNC as part of its market expansion strategy has been using smuggling as one of the distribution

channels to increase their market penetration. Unfortunately, vested groups do not share such market developments with the policy makers.

Despite this, the move to project in studies low penetration levels of illicit cigarettes below international markets (which are better regulated) is an obvious mis-projection.

Such grossly unreliable studies should be looked at with caution as they give a skewed picture of the illegal cigarette trade in the country and downplay the severity of the illegal cigarette trade in the country.

India has the option to use cash crops like FCV tobacco to its strategic advantage given the huge potential of tobacco in newer applications. We should not let this opportunity slip and extend all necessary policy support to the FCV tobacco farmers in earnest to capture the growing tobacco market.

*(The writer is president of Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), a non-profit federation whose mission is to support the farming community in India and create a sustainable future for farmers)*



