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MARRYING TRADITION
TO LOGIC IS HEALTHY

WORLD 8

NEW YEAR'S EVE MUTED BY OMICRON;
MANY HOPING FOR BETTER 2022

MONEY 9

COUNCIL PUTS ON HOLD
GST HIKE ON TEXTILES

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY JANUARY 1, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

the pioneer

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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INDIA
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India's first Omicron death in Pune

Massive spike in Covid cases in Delhi, Mumbai as 16,764 cases, 220 deaths in 24 hours in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI

India reported its first Omicron related death in Maharashtra Pimpri Chinchwad in Pune. Mumbai on Friday saw a massive 47 per cent jump in daily Covid cases reporting 5,428 infections in 24 hours even as the country reeled under the onslaught of rapidly-spreading Omicron variant. Maharashtra led the tally with 8,067 Covid cases, which is 50 per cent spike in daily cases. The State saw eight deaths in the same period.

Delhi recorded 1,796 fresh Covid cases, the highest single-day rise since May 22, while the positivity rate mounted to 2.44 per cent, according to data shared by the city health department.

On Friday, Maharashtra reported four cases of Omicron variant, taking the total case count of the "variant of concern" in the State to 454 as Omicron tally in India breached 1,000 mark to touch 1,280. At least 23 States have come in the grip of Omicron so



Workers arrange beds at a makeshift Covid-19 care centre with 1200 beds in Mumbai on Friday

AP

far.

While Omicron looms large over the country, daily Covid-19 cases too surged with India reporting a spike of 16,764 infections and 220 deaths during the last 24 hours.

States like West Bengal and Delhi are witnessing a huge surge in Covid-19 cases. Bengal witnessed nearly 50 per cent spike in corona cases with 3,189 people getting infected in the 24 hours intervening Thursday and Friday, sources in the State Health Department said. While, 1089 people were infected on Wednesday the number of infected patients went up to 2128 during the last 24 hours. The number of patients includes 5 people infected with Omicron variant leading the State's total number of Omicron

infection to 16.

Delhi is in the grip of Covid-19 in a big way. Delhi had recorded seven deaths due to Covid in November, four in October and five in September. As the positivity rate jumped to 2.44 per cent and new Omicron cases were detected with no travel history, Health Minister Satyendar Jain has warned the people about community transmission. Delhi has reported 320 cases of Omicron variant of Covid-19 till Thursday.

Meanwhile, The Centre has asked the States to pull up the socks to meet the challenges due to uptick in Covid-19 and Omicron cases and upscale health system as well as setting up the Rapid antigen Tests (RAT) centers for early detection of the cases.

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Delhi records 9 Covid deaths in Dec; highest in 4 months: Data

New Delhi: Nine Covid-19 deaths have been reported in Delhi in December so far this year, the highest count of fatalities due to coronavirus infection in the last four months in the national Capital, according to official data.

Delhi had recorded seven deaths due to Covid in November, four in October and five in September.

No fresh fatality was reported in the city on Thursday.

Covid-19 infection may trigger 'auto-antibodies' that can attack organs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Infection with the virus that causes Covid-19 can trigger an adverse immune response that lasts well beyond the initial infection and recovery even among people who had mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, according to a new study published in the Journal of Translational Medicine.

It found that people with prior infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, have a wide variety of auto-antibodies up to six months after they have fully recovered.

"These findings help to explain what makes Covid-19 an especially unique disease," said researcher Justyna Fert-Bober from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in the US.

"These patterns of immune dysregulation could be underlying the different types of persistent symptoms we see in people who go on to develop the condition now referred to as long Covid-19," Bober added.

The study said that when people are infected with a virus or other pathogen, their bodies unleash proteins called antibodies that detect foreign substances and keep them from

invading cells.

In some cases, however, people produce autoantibodies that can attack the body's organs and tissues over time.

For the study, the team recruited 177 people with confirmed evidence of a previous infection with SARS-CoV-2. They compared blood samples from these individuals with samples taken from healthy people before the pandemic.

All those with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection had elevated levels of auto-antibodies.

Some of the autoantibodies also have been found in people with diseases in which the immune system attacks its healthy cells, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

"We found signals of auto-antibody activity that are usually linked to chronic inflammation and injury involving specific organ systems and tissues such as the joints, skin and nervous system," said another researcher.

Some of the autoantibodies have been linked to autoimmune diseases that typically affect women more often than men. In this study, however, men had a higher number of elevated auto-antibodies than women.

WHO: Unscientific night curfew futile, doesn't stem spread



People queue in line for the coronavirus test at a temporary screening clinic for the coronavirus in Seoul, South Korea, on Friday

AP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of various States in India re-introducing night curfew to deal with the spread of Covid-19, WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan on Friday said such curbs were "not science-based" and it has no evidence of effectiveness. Instead, Swaminathan said, wearing masks and vaccination against the Covid-19 can help "reduce transmission".

Advising that Indians need to be prepared, but not panic, she also said that "politicians need to start balancing the scientific-based method to reduce the transmission and its impact on people, while at the same time keeping the economy open as people have suffered enough.

"Schools should be the last to be closed and first to be opened because prolonged school closure has a devastating effect on children and education."

"If 90 per cent of the population wore a mask the whole time, you would drastically reduce transmission. That we need to focus on. Keeping in mind that Covid-19 is not the only thing affecting our lives in terms of health," the WHO chief scientist told a news channel.

Many States like Delhi, Maharashtra, Odisha, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Assam have declared a ban on night movement and limits on gathering and warned of legal action against those who do not comply.

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Germany-based Sikhs for Justice booked for terror

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has registered a case under Indian Penal Code sections relating to criminal conspiracy and waging war against India as well as under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against Germany-based operative of banned Sikhs for Justice, Jaswinder Singh Multani and his other associates. The terror outfit is an unlawful association under the UAPA.

"This case relates to criminal conspiracy hatched by Multani with several other pro-Khalistani elements located abroad for radicalising, motivating and recruiting youths in Punjab on ground and online through social media platforms to propagate their ide-



ology with the aim to secede Punjab from the Union of India," the NIA said in a statement.

The outfit has been involved in raising funds to procure arms and explosives by using smuggling networks in Punjab to revive terrorism in Punjab, it said.

Multani has also been in contact with Pakistan's covert agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives to carry out terror attacks in Mumbai and other parts of India, it further said.

Continued on Page 2

FCRA registration for NGOs valid till Mar 31

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Friday extended the validity of the FCRA registration of NGOs by three months till March 31. However, organisations such as the Missionaries of Charity will not be eligible for the extension benefits as their applications for a renewal of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act registration have already been rejected, according to a notice issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The Centre, in the public interest, has decided to extend the validity of the FCRA registration certificates of NGOs up to March 31, 2022, or till the date of disposal of their renewal applications, whichever is earlier, in respect of only those entities that fulfill certain criteria, the notice said.

The NGOs with FCRA registration certificates expiring between September 29, 2020, and March 31, 2022, and that have applied for renewal on the



FCRA portal before the expiry of the certificates, in accordance with rule 12 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011, are eligible for the benefits.

"All FCRA registered associations are therefore advised to take note of the fact that in case of refusal of the application for renewal of a certificate of registration, the validity of the certificate shall be deemed to have expired on the date of the refusal of the application of renewal and the association shall not be eligible either to receive a foreign contribution or utilise the foreign contribution received," the notice said.

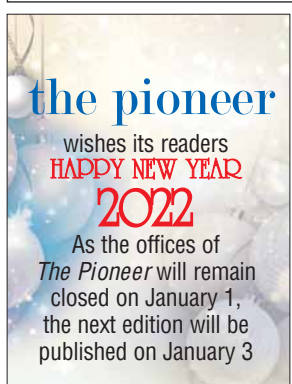
The NGOs that have valid registration certificates under the FCRA are eligible to receive funding from abroad.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

SACKED DALIT COOK REAPPOINTED

Pithoragarh: A Dalit woman cook was reappointed at a Champawat school in Uttarakhand, days after she was sacked as some students belonging to upper castes refused to eat midday meal cooked by her. Police have lodged a case against 31 people, six of which have been named in the FIR, for issuing threats and making casteist comments against her. The issue had snowballed into a controversy.



the pioneer

wishes its readers
HAPPY NEW YEAR
2022As the offices of
The Pioneer will remain
closed on January 1,
the next edition will be
published on January 3

Dec 31 deadline for filing ITR won't be extended

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said that the last date for filing Income Tax Return (ITR) will not be extended. Taxpayers must note that the due date for filing ITR will remain December 31, 2021.

Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj on Friday said that December 31 remains the official deadline for filing of income tax returns. He said returns filed so far are more than those filed in the previous year.

Bajaj said that he was expecting another at least 20-25 lakh returns to come by 12 in the night. "The figures that we were anticipating would have come...There is absolutely no proposal to extend the dates," Bajaj said.

To a query on the glitches on the I-T portal impacting fil-



Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman

Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

ing, Bajaj said "I'm okay (with extension) if the returns were less by 1 crore. But the returns filed is more than last year's... I'm watching the figures every hour... ITR filings are going up to 3 lakh (per hour)".

So far 5.62 crore ITRs have been filed till Friday. On Friday,

20 lakh returns were filed. Out of the total, three lakh ITRs have been filed in the last hour. The government has already extended the deadline for filing income tax returns for 2020-21 fiscal year (ended March 2021) by five months till December 31.

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Cong questions PM’s silence on China renaming 15 places in AP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'silence' on reports of China renaming 15 places in Arunachal Pradesh in their own language and calling the north-eastern state as South Tibet.

"A few days back, we were remembering India's glorious victory in the 1971 war. Wise and strong decisions are necessary for ensuring the security and victory of the nation. You cannot win with empty rhetoric," former Congress President Rahul Gandhi said on Twitter, referring to a news report on the Chinese move.

Congress Chief spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala described the Modi government as "weak" and

accused Prime Minister Modi of remaining "silent" on Chinese "threats" to India's territorial integrity.

"As the year ends, China threatens our territorial integrity and sovereignty. China has already transgressed & occupied Depsang Plains & Gogra Hot Springs in Eastern Ladakh. China has set up a village in Arunachal. Mr. 56" refuses to say a word. Weak Govt, Mum PM," Surjewala said the 56-inch-chest jibe being a reference to Modi's assertion during the 2014 parliamentary election campaign that he would adopt a strong policy on national security.

Addressing a press conference at AICC Congress spokesman Gourav Vallabh wondered when the Prime Minister would "look China in the eye" and take strong steps to counter its moves.

"Will our response be limited to banning Chinese apps, while India-China trade crosses the 100-billion-dollar mark," Vallabh asked.

He said the government should respond to Chinese moves strongly and assured the support of Congress in every such step.

According to a Chinese media report, the country's Ministry of Civil Affairs announced on Wednesday that it had standardised in Chinese characters, Tibetan and Roman alphabet the names of 15 places in Zangnan, the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh.

India had strongly rejected China's action and asserted that Arunachal Pradesh has "always been" and "will always be" an integral part of India and that assigning "invented" names does not alter this fact.

‘Firing ordered at kar sevaks during SP regime’

HM Amit Shah urges people to seek answer from SP why Lord Ram lived in tent for years

Ayodhya/Sant Kabirnagar: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked people here to seek an answer from Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav for the firing on 'kar sevaks' during his party's Government in the past and asked why Lord Ram had to 'stay in a tent' for years.

He was referring to the makeshift temple on the site, which was disputed in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi case.

Addressing a rally during the BJP's Jan Vishwas Yatra ahead of the UP Assembly polls, he alleged that the SP, BSP and Congress governments made efforts to stop the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"Do you remember that 'kar sevaks' were shot in Ayodhya and bodies were thrown into the Saryu," he said referring to a 1990 incident

during the SP regime while addressing a rally at Government Inter College in Faizabad.

He alleged that under the SP and BSP rule, "symbols of faith were not respected".

Today, PM Narendra Modi and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath are working for the glory of every faith, he said.

"When Akhileshji comes here, seeking votes in Ayodhya, ask him what was the crime of the kar sevaks? why did your government open fire on them? what is your objection to the removal of Article 370," he said.

"Akhilesh Babu, if your second generation also comes, neither Article 370 is going to come back nor the triple talaq," Amit Shah said.

He said the SP, BSP, the Congress and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee worked together to oppose the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir's

special status under Article 370.

"On August 5, 2019, Modiji uprooted Article 370 in Parliament," he said.

He also credited PM Modi with the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

On the other hand, he said, "Whenever the SP, BSP and the Congress were in power, they made efforts to stop this. Don't you remember that the 'kar sevaks' were fired upon, sticks were used on Ram's sevaks, Ram sevaks were killed and thrown into the mother Saryu."

"I want to tell all those who wanted to stop it, if you can, try and stop it because no one has the power to stop it. A grand temple will come up in a few months at the place where Lord Shri Ram was born," he said.

He also asked Why Ramlala had to "stay in a tent"

for years.

"It is time for the people of Ayodhya, citizens of the country and people of UP to think why Ramlalla had to live in a tent for so many years," he said.

Referring to the raids conducted by the Income Tax Department on the house of a perfume trader in Kanpur, Shah said bundles of notes were seized and the stench of the Samajwadi perfume has spread all over UP.

He said there used to be three "Ps" during the SP government--"pariwarvaad", "pakshpaat" and "palayan"--and today there are three 'Vs' "vikas", "vyapar" and "sanskritik virasat"--and Ayodhya is the biggest example of the three Vs.

Attacking the Congress, he said when it was in power at the Centre with the SP-BSP support, terrorists from Pakistan used to take away

heads of jawans but when Modi became the PM, air and surgical strikes eliminated terrorists.

At the rally, Shah started his speech amid the chants of "Jai Shri Ram". Earlier in the day, he offered prayers at the Ram Janmabhoomi and the Hanuman Garhi temples here.

Addressing another public meeting in the Khalilabad area of Sant Kabirnagar district, Shah said the previous SP government was known only for the rule of "bahubali" (strongmen) but BJP's Yogi government is working for the development of all sections of society.

Yogi Adityanath has worked to free UP from the mafia, he said.

Shah also raised the slogan, "Abki Baar-300 Paar", and called upon people to vote for the BJP in the 2022 elections.

Cong a dead snake: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Terming Congress a "dead snake" and the "root of terrorism, extremism, communal riots and corruption", Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said that with the cooperation of able leaders like Dinesh Pratap Singh, Aditi Singh, and new entrant Rakesh Pratap Singh, Bharatiya Janata Party was working towards the overall development of Rae Bareilly and "sweeping out" negativity along with Congress.

Addressing a public meeting in Rae Bareilly while inaugurating and laying the foundation stones of 381 developmental projects worth Rs 834 crore, the Chief Minister said, "After MLAs Dinesh Pratap Singh and Aditi Singh, Rakesh Pratap Singh from Harchandpur has also formally joined the BJP today. With his support, I am sure the task of uprooting the Congress from Rae Bareilly will be done and Rae Bareilly will witness overall development."

In a fierce attack on the Congress party, the chief min-

ister said that in Rae Bareilly, Rana Benimadhav never accepted foreign rule but despite this, why were the people compelled to wrap a dead snake-like Congress around our neck?"

Mounting an attack on the grand old party once again for falsifying the existence of Hindu gods, the chief minister said that when the Congress used to form government, it instigated hatred against Lord Ram and Lord Krishna and the people of the country should not have tolerated it.

"It was during the Congress rule in 2005 that people tried to demolish Ram Setu. Those who falsified the existence of Lord Ram are seeking public support.

But today, the public representatives are joining the BJP one by one because we respect the faith of the people," he said.

Taking a jibe at Samajwadi Party, the chief minister said that the people of the state now comment that Samajwadi Party means 'Jis gaadi me koi Sapa ka jhanda, samjho usme baitha koi gunda'.

Govt misusing public money to hold rallies, spread lies: Cong

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee president Ajay Kumar Lallu on Friday attacked the Bharatiya Janata Party government, alleging that Union Home Minister Amit Shah was only lying in the rallies being held with government money.

Lallu said that the BJP government made Uttar Pradesh number one in unemployment, inflation and atrocities on women and now under the leadership of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the people had made up their minds to throw out the Yogi Adityanath-led government.

According to a UPCC official communiqué released here on Friday evening, Lallu said that Union Home Minister Amit Shah was continuously lying in the rallies being held with government money. He said in the rallies of Amit Shah and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, instead of talking on the issues of public concern, unrestrained talk was going on that has nothing to do with the development of Uttar Pradesh. He said that BJP gave 30 per cent participation in ticket distribution to the family members of BJP leaders, on the other hand, Congress was going to give 40 per cent tickets to women. "Unemployment has increased so much that youth are forced to migrate to other states whereas Congress is promising to provide 20 lakh jobs if its government is formed in Uttar Pradesh, in which 40 per cent will be women's share," the UPCC chief said. Lallu said that before making any comment on Rahul Gandhi, Amit Shah must listen to the former Congress president's statement and also to the statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which Congress questioned burning the stove with drain gas. He said that Amit Shah was asking for five more years to make Uttar Pradesh number one whereas in the last five years, Uttar Pradesh had become number one in crime, atrocities on women and unemployment.

FCRA registration for ...

From Page 1

A total of 22,762 NGOs are registered under the FCRA and the renewal applications of about 6,500 have so far been processed. The MHA, on December 25, rejected the renewal application of the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa in Kolkata, for not meeting the eligibility conditions under the FCRA as some adverse inputs were received.

In a statement, the MHA also said it did not freeze any bank account of the Missionaries of Charity, but the State Bank of India had informed that the organisation itself had sent a request to the bank to freeze its accounts. Several political leaders, including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, slammed the Centre for the rejection of the Missionaries of Charity's FCRA registration renewal application.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik directed all district collectors on Thursday to ensure that no unit of the Missionaries of Charity operating in the State faces any financial crisis and, if necessary, to use the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to help them.

India's...

From Page 1

Of the total 1,270 Omicron cases in India, Maharashtra accounted for the highest number of cases across the country. Maharashtra has topped this tally with 454 cases, followed by Delhi (320), Kerala (109), Gujarat (97) and Rajasthan (69).

Alarmed at the rise in Covid cases accompanied by an increase in positivity rate in various parts of the country, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has advised the States to upscale testing as well as going for early testing of suspect patients and their contacts and isolating them to curb transmission of SARS-Cov-2 causative agent of Covid-19.

Setting up multiple RAT booths as well as encouraging use of self-tests/home tests have been advised for symptomatic individuals. Such seven home testing kits have been approved so far, said the letter. "No accreditation is required for undertaking RAT testing by any healthcare facilities," said the letter written by the Health Secretary.

According to the Government data, Maharashtra reported 198 new Omicron cases, including 190 in Mumbai alone, taking the total number of cases in the State to 450. Of the 198 Omicron cases reported by the National Institute of Virology (NIV) during the day,

only 30 have international travel history.

Haryana and Odisha have reported 14 Omicron cases each whereas West Bengal has reported 11 cases of the strain. States like Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Manipur and Punjab have also reported their first Omicron cases, as per Health Ministry data.

While Omicron continues to loom large, India has reported 16,764 new coronavirus cases, 7,585 recoveries and 220 deaths in the last 24 hours. While the active caseload currently stands at 91,361, the national Covid-19 recovery rate currently stands at 98.36 per cent, said the Ministry in a statement here.

With no let-up in the spread of the pandemic, the daily Covid-19 cases jumped up by as many as 2,699 cases to touch a tally of 8,067 cases in Maharashtra on Friday, even the Omicron cases dipped substantially to just four cases in the State.

On a day when it claimed eight lives in the State, the Covid-19 cases rose from 5,368 cases on Thursday to 8,067 cases, taking the total number of the cases from 66,70,754 to 66,78,821 cases. A day after the State recorded an all-time high of 198 omicron cases, the new Covid-19 variant cases dropped to four cases. With the latest tally, the total number of Omicron cases went up to 450 cases.

Mumbai bore the maximum brunt of the pandemic, as the Covid-19 infections jumped by 5428 cases and the metropolis did not record any Omicron cases on Friday.

With 5428 fresh cases, the total number Covid-19 cases jumped from 779031 to 784459 cases during the last 24 hours.

As 1766 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the State after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year increased from 65,07,330 to 65,09,096. The recovery rate in the State dropped from 95.55 per cent to 95.46 per cent.

WHO: Unscientific night curfew futile, doesn't stem...

From Page 1

Swaminathan said, "Countries should look at their own data: people who are dying, which vaccine did they take and how long ago did they have it, which population group should be targeted. This is how we learn about immunity. What we know now is the neutralizing antibody responses do wane over a period of time, at about 6 months."

On India allowing precautionary shots, Swaminathan favoured combining vaccines for boosters. She said, "So far that we have on this mix and match or combination have not included Corbevax. There is data on the Covavax that has been tried as a booster. Whether you take another shot of the same vaccine as a booster or administer a different one, you get a good boost."

Swaminathan said boosters give "good strengthening of the immune response as the memory cells get activated." "What WHO said is that what vaccine you pick as the booster dose really depends on different things such as what you have used in that country, what supplies are available, what is acceptable to the public, what the costs are, etc. Whatever it is, boosters give good strengthening of the immune response as the memory cells get activated," the WHO chief scientist said, according to the report.

"In fact, some studies have shown that it may be preferable to use a different vaccine as a booster.

Given the available data, I think countries can formulate their own policy based on their immune responses and other factors such as cold storage, affordability. But, I think India is in a good position regarding the number of vaccines available at hand," Swaminathan said.

The WHO chief scientist said "politicians need to start balancing the scientific-based method" to reduce the transmission and its impact on people. She said "schools should be the last to be closed and first to be opened" while stressing that vaccination should be given more preference.

"We need clinical studies and not just lab-based studies. So, what the WHO is really saying now is that our goals remain the same. We have to save the most vulnerable. Give them boosters.

But at the same time, we do not have enough evidence that the entire population needs boosters. This is why the WHO is calling for a science-based approach in a way that we protect the most vulnerable but at the same time don't deprive those who need the vaccine," Swaminathan said.

"What we can expect to see in India is a surge of Omicron cases, I think it is just beginning now in some of the cities and is going to infect a lot of people," the WHO scientist said.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

For the convenience of rail passengers, Railways have decided to increase the passengers carrying capacity by augmenting following Express Trains from the dates shown against each :-

AUGMENTED COMPOSITION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Name	Augmented by	Date w.e.f. (Originating Station)
22481/22482 Jodhpur Jn - Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur Jn. Express	3 Tier AC - 2 Sleeper - 1	Ex. Jodhpur Jn.: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
14724/14723 Bhiwani - Kanpur Central - Bhiwani Kailindi Express	3 Tier AC - 1 Sleeper - 1	Ex. Bhiwani: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Kanpur Central: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
22471/22472 Bikaner - Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Bikaner Express	1st AC cum 2 Tier AC - 1 Sleeper - 4	Ex. Bikaner: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla: 03.01.22 to 02.02.22
20473/20474 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Udaipur - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Express		Ex. Delhi Sarai Rohilla: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Udaipur: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
19615/19616 Udaipur - Kamakhya - Udaipur Kavi Guru Express	3 Tier Ac - 1	Ex. Udaipur: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Kamakhya: 06.01.22 to 03.02.22
19601/19602 Udaipur - New Jalpaiguri - Udaipur Express	3 Tier Ac - 1	Ex. Udaipur: 01.01.22 to 29.01.22 Ex. New Jalpaiguri: 03.01.22 to 31.01.22
12486/12485 Shri Ganganagar - Nanded - Shri Ganganagar Express		Ex. Shri Ganganagar: 01.01.22 to 29.01.22 Ex. Nanded: 03.01.22 to 31.01.22
12440/12439 Shri Ganganagar - Nanded - Shri Ganganagar Express	1IInd Class - 1	Ex. Shri Ganganagar: 07.01.22 to 28.01.22 Ex. Nanded: 09.01.22 to 30.01.22
14866/14865 14854/14853 14864/14863 Jodhpur - Varanasi - Jodhpur Marudhar Exp.	Sleeper - 1 1IInd Class - 1	Ex. Jodhpur: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Varanasi: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
19613/19612 Ajmer - Amritsar - Ajmer Express	1IInd Class - 2	Ex. Ajmer: 03.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Amritsar: 04.01.22 to 01.02.22
19717/19718 Jaipur - Daulatpur Chowk - Jaipur Express	Sleeper - 1	Ex. Jaipur: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Daulatpur Chowk: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
15065/15066 Gorakhpur - Panvel - Gorakhpur Express	3 Tier AC - 1	Ex. Gorakhpur: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Panvel: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
15159/15160 Chhapra - Durg - Chhapra Express	Sleeper - 1	Ex. Chhapra: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Durg: 02.01.22 to 01.02.22
15014/15013 Kathgodam - Jaisalmar - Kathgodam Ranikhet Express	3 Tier AC - 1	Ex. Kathgodam: 01.01.22 to 31.01.22 Ex. Jaisalmar: 03.01.22 to 02.02.22

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute and composition etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19, may please be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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CHANGE OF NAME

I GAGANDEEP SINGH DHINGRA S/O HARBANS SINGH R/O 86 GURU ANGAD NAGAR EXT. LAXMI NAGAR DELHI 110092 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO GAGANDEEP SINGH IN FUTURE

PD(9128)A

I Ramita Devi W/o Munish Kumar R/o H.No- C-1/7 , 3rd C Floor Galaxy Appat. Near Metro Pillar No 744 MohanGarden west Delhi 110059 have changed my name from Ramita Devi to Ramita Sharma.

PD(9129)A

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that TDI Porfolio Management Pvt. Ltd. are the owners of Land area measuring 52 Kanal 08 Marla (i.e. 26456.37 sq.mts) part of Rectangle no.94, Killa no.22/2(4-8), Rectangle no.115, Killa no. 22/4(0), 3min west(4-0), 8min(4-0), 12/2(3-4), 13/1 min west(4-0), 5(8-0) and Rectangle no.94 Killa no.18/2 Min West(1-0), 23 Min West(4-0) and Khevat 1,263 min, Kheal no.1692 min Mustali and Killa no. 115/3(2-4), 8/1(4-0), 13/1(2-12) and Khevat no.613 min, 1291 and Kheal no.844 min, 1726 Min, Mustali no. 94/ 18/21(0-3), 23/2(3-16), 24/2(1-3) situated at Village Murthal Khos, Tehsil and Distnt Sonapat Haryana purchased from Shri Nitin Arora vide sale deed 19.12.2017 (Doc No. 9239), whereas TDI Porfolio Management Pvt. Ltd. have lost two of the recitals:-

1. Sale Deed dated 15/12/2013 executed by Rajender, Rajat, Jai Pal, Rakesh, Sandeep and Santosh, in favour of Nitin Arora bearing registration no.14957

2. Sale Deed dated 13/7/2012 executed by Rami Prakash in favour of Nitin Arora bearing registration no. 5434

All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise however, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Shop No. 5 & 6, Pkt-E, CSC, Mayur Vihar-II, Delhi-91, Mob. 9810063351

DELHI JAL BOARD: DELHI SARKAR OFFICE OF THE ADDL. CHIEF ENGINEER (M)-11 ROOM NO. 101, JAI SADAN, SHIV MANDIR MARG LAJPAT NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110024 e-mail: acem11.djb@gmail.com Ph. 011-29810956

Press N.I.T. No 33(2021-22)				
S. N. O	Name of work	Estimated Cost (in Rs.)	Date of release of tender in e-procurement solution	Last date/time of receipt of tender through e-procurement solution
1	Installation/boring of 7 Nos. T/Wells at K-19 Block Sangam vihar under EE(M)-49 (AC-49).	42,90,794/-	2021_DJB_213871_1 31.12.2021	10.01.2022 up to 3.30 pm
2	Installation/boring of 6 Nos. T/wells at I-block Sangam vihar under EE(M)-49 (AC-49).	36,77,824/-	2021_DJB_213871_2 31.12.2021	10.01.2022 up to 3.30 pm
3	Installation/boring of 6 Nos. T/wells at H-16 Block Sangam vihar under EE(M)-49 (AC-49).	36,77,824/-	2021_DJB_213871_3 31.12.2022	10.01.2022 up to 3.30 pm
4	Installation/boring of 5 Nos. T/Wells at I-2 & K-1/18 Block Sangam vihar under EE(M)-49 (AC-49).	30,64,853/-	2021_DJB_213871_4 31.12.2021	10.01.2022 up to 3.30 pm
5	Re-boring of 4 Nos. T/wells against DEV-130, DEV-305, DEV-226 and DEV-291 at Different location in Sangam Vihar under AEE(M)-47 (AC-47) Devli.	31,70,845/-	2021_DJB_213871_5 31.12.2021	10.01.2022 up to 3.30 pm
6	Re-boring of 6 Nos. T/wells AT K-2nd, L-Block, L-1st, G-Block Sangam Vihar & 2 Nos. Devil Village in Devil Constituency under EE(South)III (AC-47) (RE-invited)	41,89,960/-	2021_DJB_213871_6 31.12.2021	10.01.2022 Up to 3.30 pm

Further details in this regard may be seen at (<https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>)

ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER)
Advt. No. J.S.V. 931 (2021-22)

"STOP CORONA, Wear Mask, Follow Physical Distancing, Maintain Hand Hygiene"

Sd/- (Arif Hussain) AEE(TJM)-11

Germany...

From Page 1

After the registration of the case, requisite actions as per law for the expeditious investigation of the case have been initiated, it added.Meanwhile, the NIA has conducted searches in Srinagar and arrested an operative of The Resistance Front in a case of radicalising, motivating and recruiting youth of Jammu and Kashmir by Lashkar-e-Tayabba (LeT).

After conducting the search operation on Thursday, the NIA arrested TRF operative Arsalan Feroz alias Arsalan Soub of Zaladgar, MR Gunj, Srinagar.The case relates to a conspiracy hatched for radicalising, motivating, and recruiting youth of Jammu and Kashmir to effect violent activities in the Valley and rest of India.

Hyderpora op was ‘transparent’: DGP

‘Those doubting clean chit submit evidence’

Jammu: Asserting that some people are engaged in ‘soft separatism’ by cleverly supporting militancy, Jammu & Kashmir DGP Dilbag Singh on Friday termed Hyderpora operation ‘neat and clean’ and asked political leaders questioning the ‘clean chit’ given to the forces to submit evidence to investigation panels.

He said he felt hurt over irresponsible utterances of a section of political leaders in Kashmir, adding that counting votes on the dead bodies is their mission.

“We definitely felt hurt over this kind of utterances. It is irresponsible on the part of certain people, who are not part of the investigation and do not know anything about the probe on the ground to make such remarks,” Singh said at a press conference here.

He was replying to questions on the statements made by political leaders against the probe by the local police in connection with Hyderpora encounter.

A Pakistani terrorist and three other persons were killed

in Hyderpora on November 15 and the police had claimed that all the slain men had links to militancy. The families of the three, alleging foul play, had said they were innocent, prompting the police to order the inquiry.

Separately, a magisterial probe was also ordered by Lt Governor Manoj Sinha in the encounter which was one of the rare operations carried out jointly by the Army and the Jammu and Kashmir Police within the city limits.

Meanwhile, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police Central Kashmir Sujit Kumar had Wednesday threatened legal action against the political leaders in Jammu and Kashmir for making “speculative” statements about the investigation.

JK DGP made it clear that the operation was neat and clean and done in a professional manner.

“We have made it crystal clear that the operation was neat and clean. It was transparent...,” he said.

The top cop also said the utterances by the political leaders were in violation of law.

“We have made it clear that those utterances are somehow violative of law. May be at some stage, if people do not mend their ways, law will take its own course,” he said. He also asked those raking up the issue to present the evidence before the investigation panels.

“... if anybody has any evidence, he can present it before two panels of the magisterial inquiry and SIT,” he said.

Asked if such people should be brought to book, Singh said if one looks at the cases registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is (UAPA), some of them have already been accounted for. “We will definitely be looking for more evidence against the people, who in any way have supported militancy,” he said.

“These people are into soft separatism. We have taken action against some of them. We will be looking for more evidence. No one is above law,” the DGP added. **PTI**

Omicron cases cross 100-mark in Kerala



Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala’s Omicron cases count crossed the 100-mark on Friday after registering the highest single-day increase of 44 cases of the new variant of COVID-19.

Addressing reporters here, State Health Minister Veena George said it has logged 44 more cases, taking the total number to 107. Of the 44 cases, 10 had come from high-risk countries and 27 from low-risk countries. Seven people were infected through contact, she said.

Of these, 12 were detected in Ernakulam district, 10 in Kollam, eight in Thiruvananthapuram, four in Thrissur, two each in Kottayam, Palakkad,

Malappuram and Kannur and one each in Alappuzha and Idukki, the Minister said. With this, the infections have been confirmed in a total of 107 people, she said.

While a total of 41 patients came from high-risk countries, 52 arrived from low-risk countries and 14 were diagnosed with the disease through contact.

Of the total 107 cases, 29 had come from the UAE and 23 from the UK. Raising the alert in the southern State, George said since Omicron is a fast-spreading variant of COVID-19, people should take all precautions and follow guidelines issued by the Health Department. **PTI**

Woman raped, murdered in UP, body found in sugarcane field

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational case of rape and murder, the naked body of an unidentified woman with multiple injuries was found in a sugarcane field in Sambhal district on Friday morning.

The body was packed in a sack and the police said the woman was possibly killed elsewhere and her body was dumped in the field in Musapur village.

The body was sent for autopsy to ascertain she was sexually assaulted or not.

Additional Superintendent of Police Alok Kumar Jaiswal said: “There were multiple injuries on the body. It appears she died of a head injury. The woman was killed at a different place and the accused then dumped the body in the field to conceal the crime. We have registered an FIR for murder and have sent the body for autopsy. Efforts are on to establish her identity.”

3 JeM ultras gunned down, 4 security personnel injured

Srinagar: Three Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militants were killed and four security forces personnel injured during an encounter in the Pantha Chowk area of the city here on Friday, police said.

One of the slain militants was involved in the December 13 attack on a police bus in the nearby Zewan area.

The three ultras were killed in the encounter at Pantha Chowk on the outskirts of Srinagar city, a police official said.

In the exchange of fire, three police personnel and a CRPF personnel were also injured, the official said, adding that they were rushed to a hospital for treatment.

Inspector General of Police, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar

182 terrorists killed in 100 successful operations in J&K in ‘21, says DGP Dilbag Singh

Jammu: A total of 182 terrorists, including 44 top ultras, were killed in 100 successful operations in Jammu and Kashmir in 2021, DGP Dilbag Singh said on Friday.

He also said that 134 youngsters joined terror ranks in the Union territory this year, with 72 of them been neutralised and 22 arrested.

“Infiltration down this year, only 34 terrorists have managed to infiltrate. Besides nine terrorists of JeM involved in the attack on a police bus in Pantha Chowk were eliminated in the last 24 hours,” he added. **PTI**



A fisherman rows his boat over the Hooghly river during the last sunset of 2021, in Nadia on Friday **PTI**

After failure last time, BJP’s ally I-T has raided SP MLA Pushpraj Jain: SP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Close on the heels of the Craids on Kannauj perfume trader Piyush Jain leading to seizure of huge cash, gold, silver and sandalwood oil, the Income Tax Department on Friday raided the premises of another perfume trader and Samajwadi Party MLC Pushpraj Jain Pampi at Kannauj and 50 other locations across the country.

The Opposition Samajwadi Party responded to the raids on Twitter: “After a huge failure last time, this time BJP’s ultimate ally IT (Income Tax Department) has finally raided the place of SP MLC Pushpraj Jain and other perfume traders of Kannauj. Open misuse of central agencies by the scared BJP is common in UP elections. People are watching everything, they will answer by vote.”

Later, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, who

was in Kannauj on Friday, said “we were expecting raids and it has happened.”

“The Bharatiya Janata Party is spreading the smell of hatred in UP. The impending defeat of the BJP in UP assembly elections has rattled the ruling party and they have gone berserk. The BJP leaders along with their allies like CBI, Enforcement Directorate, are now campaigning in Uttar Pradesh,” the SP chief said in Kannauj.

Akhilesh Yadav alleged that “SP MLC Pushpraj Jain has been targeted to malign the Samajwadi Party and the BJP has targeted the SP leader only to compensate for the mistaken raid on Piyush Jain who is close to BJP”.

Moreover, Akhilesh Yadav claimed that “the raids on perfume traders of Kannauj is a conspiracy to malign Kannauj and the perfume industry”.

He added, “The SP will form the next government in

UP and restore the glory of Kannauj and the perfume industry maligned by the BJP government.”

Asserting that the Vijay Rath of the Samajwadi Party would not stop and continue its journey, Akhilesh Yadav said, “I will take up the matter with the Election Commission of India and other authorities to apprise them that the BJP is deliberately targeting the opposition parties to malign them ahead of the UP assembly elections.”

Coming in the middle of a high-pitch election campaign, the raids have turned into a political slugfest with the BJP and SP accusing each other of backing the jailed perfume trader. The BJP had alleged that it was Piyush Jain who recently launched the Samajwadi perfume. Taking a swipe at the opposition party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Kanpur Nagar on Wednesday, “Boxes filled with notes have come out.

5 pm to 5 am ban on beaches, public places in Mumbai

Mumbai: Mumbai Police on Friday issued an order prohibiting people from visiting beaches, open grounds, sea faces, promenades, gardens, parks or similar public places between 5 pm and 5 am daily till January 15 in view of the prevailing coronavirus situation and the emergence of the Omicron variant.

DCP (operations) S Chaitanya issued the order under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), which came into force from 1 pm on Friday and will be effective till January 15, unless withdrawn earlier.

“The city continues to be threatened with COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the increase in cases and emergence of the new Omicron variant, and with a view to prevent danger to human life, health and safety and to curb transmission of the virus, people are prohibited from visiting beaches, open grounds, sea faces, promenades, gardens, parks or similar public places

from 5 pm to 5 am next day,” the order said.

In case of marriages, whether in enclosed or open spaces, the maximum number of attendees shall be restricted to 50 persons, the order said.

“In case of any gathering or programme, whether social, cultural, political or religious, whether in enclosed or open to sky spaces, the maximum number of attendees shall be restricted to 50 persons,” it said.

In case of the last rites, only 20 persons will be allowed to remain present.

Those flouting the order will attract punishment under section 188 of the IPC in addition to the penal provisions under the Epidemic Diseases Act and the National Disaster Management Act, the DCP said in the order.

The city police’s directive came after the Maharashtra government issued fresh guidelines on Thursday night capping the number of attendees at gatherings in open or closed spaces at 50, following



Policemen patrol an empty area of the Gateway of India amid restrictions imposed due to rising numbers of Covid-19 cases, on New Year’s eve in Mumbai on Friday **PTI**

Coir industry turnaround in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The Covid-19 pandemic that turned the State of Kerala topsy-turvy since 2020 has been beaten in one sector by women’s power—the coir industry. An economic activity which had only tragic stories to tell the world till five years ago has made a turnaround as workers and exporters are laughing their way to the Banks.

Coir, once rated as the Golden Fiber of Kerala as it used to earn high foreign exchange, the coir industry had hit the rock bottom because of the reluctance of political masters to change in tune with the new world order. Mechanization and digitization were portrayed as taboo and this resulted in small sectors ending up as sick units.

“Not any more. The last five years brought in a lot of changes because of the intervention of the Ministry of Small and Medium Industries. All small and medium units that shifted to power looms brought in revolutionary changes in the industry. It has

benefited women in a big way,” Sumi Shibui, a homemaker in Alappuzha’s Cherthala town who owns a small coir unit employing 20 women workers, told The Pioneer.

She said the coir units (small and medium) in the State owe it to the employment generation programme and Mudra Loan scheme of the Centre and the intervention made by Coir Board for this turn around. “More than 30 families linked to my unit could counter the economic slow down caused by the pandemic. This is the case with other units too because all of us shifted to power looms with the financial assistance offered by the Ministry of SME,” said Sumi,

The Coir sector will soon see new and premium products hitting the market. On the anvil is designer bags and carry bags made of coir which would oust the plastic bags from high end shops like star hotels, boutiques, jewellery shops and the likes, according to Doraiswami Kuppuramu, chairman, Coir Board. Speaking to The Pioneer at Coir House, the head quarters of Coir Board, Kuppuramu, said the Board’s horizon is expanding from Kerala and Tamil Nadu to pan-India. “We are out to make wealth from waste and soon come out with eco-friendly products. Earlier out attention was on exporting and somehow we missed the opportunities on domestic market. We

will exploit the hitherto unexplored segments like Coir Pith, Coir GeoTextiles which are sure to help the workers supplement their incomes in a big way,” said Kuppuramu.

Coir Piths are useful in saving water while coir geotextiles prevent soil erosion, he pointed out. “There are seven lakh workers directly employed by the Coir Industry as on date. Around 80 per cent of the workers are women and hence we are playing a major role in rural women empowerment,” said the Chairman.

Export of Coir and Coir products during 2020-2021 made record earning of Rs 3,800 crore, said Kuppuramu. He fully concurred with Sumi who said that Coir was the only

industry to register victory in the battle against Covid-19. A lot has changed in the coir industry thanks to the employment generation programme of the Union Government, said Sumi. But she had reservations against the Kerala Government’s callousness towards the sector. “Unless the industries department of Kerala starts serious initiatives, the sector would not grow in the State.

Coir Directorate should come forward and help the small and medium units to market their products and make fund available as loans for us to work,” said Sumi. She said that the industry would survive only if the administration chips in to increase the income from the sector. “Craftsmen should be encouraged and workers should be benefitted. That part remains with State Governments,” said Sumi.

It may be remembered that many workers in the sector who were left jobless by the recession had resorted to the extreme step by making use of coir. Not any more. Now coir helps lakhs to survive.

8,067 new Covid cases in Maha, Omicron dips to 4

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With no let up in the spread of the pandemic, the daily Covid-19 cases jumped up by as many as 2,699 cases to touch a tally of 8,067 cases in Maharashtra on Friday, even the Omicron cases dipped substantially to just four cases in the State.

On a day when it claimed eight lives in the state, the Covid-19 cases rose from 5,368 cases on Thursday to 8067 cases, taking the total number of the cases from 66,70,754 to 66,78,821 cases. A day after the State recorded an all-time high of 198 omicron cases, the new Covid-19 variant cases dropped to four cases. With the latest tally, the total number of Omicron cases went up to 450 cases.

Mumbai bore the maximum brunt of the pandemic, as the Covid-19 infections, jumped by 5428 cases and the metropolis did not record any omicron cases on Friday.

With 5428 fresh cases, the total number Covid-19 cases jumped from 779031 to 784459 cases during the last 24 hours.

As 1766 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year increased from 65,07,330 to 65,09,096. The recovery rate in the state dropped from 95.55 per cent to 95.46 cases.

The number of “active cases” in the state increased 18,217 cases to 25,509 cases. The fatality rate in the state stood static dropped from 2.12 to 2.11 per cent.

Mumbai accounted for a maximum of 11,441 cases, while there were 2566 active cases in Pune. There were 2,656 active cases in Thane, followed by Nashik (487), Palghar (413), Raigad (378), Ahmednagar (369), Satara (245) and Nagpur (19).

Of the 6,90,10,153 samples

sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 66,78,821 have tested positive (9.68 per cent) for COVID-19 until Friday. Currently, 1,55,592 people are in home quarantine while 1,079 people are in institutional quarantine.

Meanwhile, the State recorded four cases of Omicron, taking the total number of new Covid-19 variant cases to 454 cases.

One case each of Omicron was reported from Vasai-Virar, Navi Mumbai, Mira-Bhayandar and Panvel. The following is the break-up of a total 454 Omicron cases recorded in the state so far, Mumbai: 327, Pimpri-Chinchwad: 26, Pune rural --18, Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), Thane MC- 12 each, Navi Mumbai, Panvel and Kalyan Dombivli—7 each, Satara, Nagpur—6 each, Osmanabad—5, Vasai-Virar-4, Nanded—3, Aurangbad, Nanded, Buldhana, Bhiwandi-Nizampur—2 each.

Eco-no-money

The Government needs to balance its Omicron containment plan with thrust on economy

A fresh Coronavirus surge is finally upon us. The time for speculation is over. Curbs on partying mean a bland entry into the new year. Better bland than a grave welcome, considering that the Omicron-led surge advances rapidly when people's indifference to safety protocols is glaring and the economy is on road to a fragile recovery. The supply chains are stretched, the inflation rate is worrisome and we have not fully got past labour shortages. Strict restrictions have the potential to once again disrupt supply and demand: Productive capacities could get badly affected and people could be wary of continuing with economic activity, especially in sectors where physical proximity cannot be avoided. The Government has so far not indicated any preference for curbs that would impact commercial and industrial productivity. At the same time, businesses in sectors like travel, tourism and hospitality — which are the first to face the brunt — want the Government to plan for additional policy support. With scientific studies indicating that Omicron may transmit fast but is not infectious enough to cause death, the Governments across the world, including India, are favouring a situation where precautionary curbs do not lead to economic disruptions.

In the United States, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended cutting down the isolation time for asymptomatic infected people from 10 to five days so that they can return to work faster. In other countries, isolation guidelines for fully vaccinated employees in critical economic sectors — education, healthcare, transportation, grocery stores and sanitation — are being relaxed if they have mild symptoms. Spain is also reducing the quarantine period while Italy is relaxing the isolation period for those who have come into close contact with infected persons.

The UK is not inclined to issue fresh restrictions in the new year. In emerging economies like India, the Government has to strike a balance between containing the Omicron infections and keeping the economy going. A lockdown like in 2020 is out of the question unless the situation becomes dire. As it is, the consumer confidence index is far below pre-pandemic levels and the recovery largely depends not only on unimpeded productivity but also on the recovery of the poor keeping pace with the recovery of the non-poor. Workers are agitated with the curbs in place. Restricted travel on public transport looks odd when factories are operating at full capacity. Night curfews are impacting hoteliers and food suppliers. The Government needs to assuage them and come out with a policy statement for the third wave. Avoiding strict measures will mean, apart from a spurt in vaccinations, boosting testing, opening more vaccine sites, mobilising emergency response teams and closely tracking hospitalisation rates. Children can return to school if testing capacity is ramped up. It is easier to isolate those who test positive than keep all of them home for an indefinite period. We are better prepared now than in 2020 and that should reflect in our approach.



Fishermen on the Brahmaputra during the last sunset of 2021

Potayto, potahto

It may since have been rectified but calling Akbar Allahabadi as 'Prayagraji' bleeds one soul

Hindu ho Muslim ek hain dono, yaani aashnaai hain; Hum-watan hum-zubaan wa hum-qismat; kyun na keh du ki bhai-bhai hain... Thus spake Akbar Allahabadi. However, for a short period earlier this week, if any examinee in Uttar Pradesh didn't mention 'Akbar Allahabadi' as 'Akbar Prayagraji' in any test paper, her/his marks would have been deducted because the Uttar Pradesh Higher Education Services Commission decided in its wisdom to 'rechristen' him exactly a century after his death, following the BJP Government's notification regarding the change in Allahabad's nomenclature as Prayagraj. Going by this logic, the lyrics of the popular Hindi number "Mere khwaabo ki shehzaadi, main hu Akbar Allahabadi..." should also be amended to "...main hu Akbar Prayagraji...". What fun would that be! And doing this to Saiyid Akbar Hussain, aka Akbar Allahabadi, who was widely acknowledged for his satire and nationalist Urdu poetry? Giving a humorous touch even to love and politics, he was quite vocal about the cynicism and hypocrisy of colonial India's political leaders, often weaving English words into his shayari.

Now that Faizabad's name is proposed to be changed to Ayodhya, will 'Meraj Faizabadi' be called 'Meraj Ayodhyaavaasi'? Of course, even the Britishers did it, but can one discard or disregard history or banish it to the nether regions, however brutal or painful it may be. If it sets a precedent in the BJP-ruled States, one can only shudder to imagine the fate of popular Urdu-Hindi poets such as Firaq Gorakhpuri, Hullaad Moradabadi, Jigar Moradabadi and Majrooh Sultanpuri. Their personalities may be impervious to such shenanigans but the decades-old standing will certainly suffer a jolt, sort of a speed-breaker while negotiating their 'takhal-lus', just as an Aligarhi taala would retain its toughness and looks by any other name but will lose its soul. Merely changing signs bearing the name of Babur and Aurangzeb doesn't obliterate the suffering of Hindus during their reigns; rather these names should be kept alive so that it serves as a reminder to treat equally people of all religions, castes, communities, colour, creed and sexual preferences. Does the name change entail that the strays get a roti more these days, or does more warmth reach the body and heart of the homeless? Akbar Allahabadi put it beautifully: Duniya mein hu, duniya ka talabgaar nahi hu; Bazaar se guzra hu, khareedar nahi hu...

Marrying tradition to logic is healthy

The custom of marrying off girls young probably began with invasions from the northwest, due to the rapacious lust of sex-starved invaders

In West Bengal 50 years ago, an income-drawing girl began abolishing the need for her parents to pay a dowry. This phenomenon must have spread to other areas, too. Only a comparatively delayed marriage can enable a girl to get adequately educated to draw a lucrative income. That is where the introduction of 21 as the minimum age for marriage is an enabler. Although the current emphasis is on women, that an early marriage retards a man's studies is also a fact, perhaps more so because boys grow up somewhat later than girls.

The custom of marrying off girls young, in all probability, began with invasions from India's northwest, due to the rapacious lust of sex-starved invaders. Societal view was that an early marriage of girls would possibly distance her from the avaricious attentions of invaders. In Vedic times, for example, the custom was, at least for the upper classes, marrying off boys and girls at about the age of 25, because studies and learning for them were all-important.

Incidentally, the Islamic tradition was that a girl who crosses the stage of puberty made her ready for matrimony. That is because of Prophet Mohammad's injunction published in the *Mishkat-ul-Masbihi*: "Marry women who will be very prolific, for I wish you to be more numerous than any other people." Following this injunction may be appropriate for a community that does not encourage the employment of women. Such a practice excludes half the population from contributing to the national economy. There is another angle to this phenomenon, pointed out to me by one Anwar Ahmed, an artisan at Fatehpur Sikri, on our way to Agra. Ahmed's explanation for the educational backwardness of his community was that mothers in the community were comparatively less educated. He said an uneducated person couldn't know the value of education for her sons and daughters.

During my visit to Cairo in 1961, I came across a young lecturer at the Al Azhar University.



I happened to compliment Europe's civilisational progress. To which his response was: "Wait and see; the next century will be an Islamic century. You will see signs of this in your own lifetime. Lesser educated women do not prevent men from studying and thinking."

Coming back to India, young marriages have caused more problems than solving any. The eras of invaders and conquerors are long over, but the adverse consequences they left behind remain unsolved. This is partly because India has been one of the few countries with a mixed population. The clergy — whether Deobandi or Bareilvi — has been concerned that the youth of its community might be tempted to adopt secular ways and, in the bargain, overlook the 'glory' of Islam. Care should be taken to ensure that India does not fall into the trap of minority apprehensions retarding the progress of an entire nation.

Another advantage of relatively late marriage of a girl would ensure better health for her; most likely because of her having fewer children. The step of fixing the minimum marriageable age at 21 would also affect the onward march



IN VEDIC TIMES, THE CUSTOM WAS, AT LEAST FOR THE UPPER CLASSES, TO MARRY OFF BOYS AND GIRLS AT ABOUT THE AGE OF 25 BECAUSE STUDIES AND LEARNING FOR THEM WERE ALL-IMPORTANT

of population amongst the minorities. If the clergy or the menfolk object, they should be shown the example of France. Until 1905, Paris allowed the country total freedom as far as one liked, worship the way one wanted and generally conduct oneself as one chose to. The country's National Assembly brought in a law in order to enforce secularism quite strictly. For example, no French citizen was thenceforth allowed to display any symbol of his/her religion outwardly, and certainly not in public places, offices or institutions of education. A Christian could not wear a cross, nor a Jew wear a yarmulke, Muslims citizens of France could not wear a burqa in public; it was strictly banned in France during the tenure of Nicholas Sarkozy.

Different segments responded to the message of the law in different ways. By now, the situation in France has gone to the extent that quite a number of mosques have had to be shut down by the authorities. Only a fortnight ago, a prominent mosque in Beauvais, just 100 km north of Paris, was shut down by France's Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. The imam has been accused of propagating religious

hatred against Christians, Jews and homosexuals through his sermons, called *khutba* in Arabic. Do we want such measures to be resorted to in India? If not, we must beware well in time.

We in India have witnessed innumerable communal riots, including what BR Ambedkar had described as a "civil war", ie, the clashes that took place between 1920 and 1940. Much worse was to happen thereafter in 1946-47 and in 1948. Thereafter, we have seen four wars with Pakistan, beginning in Kashmir in 1947. Today, India does not have a High Commissioner residing in Islamabad.

In 1971, the eastern wing of Pakistan seceded and became Bangladesh. This new country is more Bengali and less religious and follows the scriptures in a much lighter way. Bangladesh has controlled the excessive growth of its population, as well as perceptively improved its economy, to the extent that its currency, the *taka*, is twice as valuable as the Pakistani rupee.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONTESTING ELECTIONS AT WHAT COST?

Sir — It's unfortunate that the Election Commission has been in favour of conducting the upcoming Assembly polls on schedule citing unanimous opinion of all political parties in favour, irrespective of the raging COVID-19 on the ground. The political parties and the Election commission have acted penny wise and pound foolish in this regard. The other day, the Allahabad High Court had advised the Government and EC to postpone them at least for three months, given the growing concern of the Omicron variant.

Heavens won't fall if the wiser advice is heeded and the elections of poll-bound States are deferred temporarily. The Prime Minister is asking every citizen to observe discipline and follow COVID-19 protocol. This is high time to be vigilant in containing further spread of the virus. All the resources should be utilised for a single cause now. The elections would take away focus from COVID-19 which may prove costly. The election rallies and mass contact programmes will create a fertile ground for the pandemic to flare up. It seems to be a wrong decision to have elections at this point of time anyway.

DVG Sankararao | Vizianagaram

IF ONLY WE BELIEVED IN SECULARISM

Sir — It must be realised that the actual poison exists in the heart of an individual which the religious zealots promptly exploit to meet their electoral interests. Thus, the original or greater sinners are the common people only without whose patronage, no evil power in the earth can succeed in their dirty mission of spreading hatred against the "other" and demonising them. In this very context, we should not give clean chit to the communal rabid section among Indians as if they are "innocent, gullible children" whose "unpolluted" minds get washed by the vested interests. Rather, they are the greatest offenders as just because of their disgraceful patronage, communal forces attain political power and create mayhem in the society.

Yes, no party/Government can make a society communal unless the general

Breaching the Centurion fortress



Team India recorded its first-ever win at Centurion, South Africa, and made sure that the team gets off to a resounding start in the three Test series. The year 2021 will go down as one of the greatest in Indian cricket with a number of victories at home and abroad. The pacy track saw 38 of the 40 wickets accounted by both the Indian and South

African fast bowlers. Ironically, the last two wickets were taken by the Indian ace spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who is running close for a chance to become ICC cricketer of the year in the bargain. The game of cricket was the winner at Centurion.

The Virat Kohli-led side enjoyed a winning streak and won in a handsome way after losing a day's play due to rain. The Indian pacers made up for the session lost to rain. KL Rahul set the scorecard rolling with a century and a brilliant partnership with Mayank Agarwal. It was a dream come true show by the Indian pace combination which made South African batsmen hop and jump and surrender their wickets at regular intervals. Even star off-spinner Ashwin's assistance was not much required. Ironically, he packed off the tail to record a facile win to go one up in the series as India battered out South Africa in the first innings after winning the toss.

CK Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

society chooses to walk the path of hatred and intolerance. When a party repeatedly gains power through free and fair elections despite engaging in communal politics in a secular country and associated with demolition of shrines, dastardly pogroms, killings in the name of a "Godly animal" and calling all sorts of names to particular communities — it gets clearly proved how immense popularity these merchants of hatred enjoy in present times. Had the society believed in secularism and religious brotherhood, these rabid divisive elements would have been electorally vanquished from the face of India.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

NEW YEAR REFLECTIONS

Sir — As we step into the New Year, we are in a ruminative mood. The whole world has been preoccupied with the pandemic since its outbreak two years ago. Apart from Coronavirus and its variants, including Omicron, a major challenge we have to address here and

now is the global phenomenon of climate change; we have to do it before it becomes too late to adapt to the changed climate and survive. As we enter the New Year, we don't know what life holds in store for us.

The future is in the womb of time. The unpredictability of life should change our outlook on life for the better. We can learn to be more humble and altruistic and deal with our personal and social problems wisely. We have our differences, but we should not place them over our common humanity or fight over them affecting human relationships or causing loss of life. Politics, religion, laws and ideology should be for man and not the other way round. It is a self-evident truth that we live in an imperfect world. Still we can make the world a better place by our individual and collective efforts.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Manufactured issues like anti-conversion laws are not what the people are going to be taken in with.



Congress leader —Randeep Surjewala

President Biden made it clear that the US and its allies will respond decisively if Russia further invades Ukraine.

White House spokesperson —Jen Psaki

I told Vin Diesel directly that I would not be returning to the *Fast and Furious* franchise.



Actor —Dwayne Johnson

There's nothing wrong with Virat Kohli's batting; it's just like he is getting out on his first mistake every single time.

Former Indian captain —Sunil Gavaskar

Akhilesh does not remember Kalyan Singh but Jinnah. Will you vote for those who eulogise Jinnah?




Union Home Minister —Amit Shah

FIRST COLUMN


DIDI'S POLL REFORMS CALL FOR A DEBATE

Management of the election process must take care of pre-poll alliances by recognised parties



AMITABHA SEN

There is a symbiosis between the maverick trait and the socio-political identity of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee who led the Trinamool Congress in turning the dream of Bharatiya Janata Party to win the state assembly election into a mirage. That inspires her dynamics of interspacing between BJP and grand old party Congress at the national level. Looking back three decades ago, remember her revolt against the secret vote to elect the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee president and resultant defeat in 1992 when she accepted it and remained in the party, several allurements notwithstanding. The 'born rebel', phrase coined by former President Pranab Mukherjee, immediately after her expulsion from Congress on December 22, 1997 dared to launch her own party Trinamool Congress (TMC) on January 1, 1998. Indeed, her aura cannot be explained nor ignored, as Mukherjee admitted in his autobiography. Against the backdrop of contemporary politics



of West Bengal and her decades long political experience, in 2002 Mamata suggested some sweeping reforms and fundamental changes in the political system of the country. In her book, Asubho Sanket (bad omen) published in 2012 after her ascendancy to power in West Bengal, Mamata put forward a radical and contemplative political stand suggesting that a State going to the polls be placed under President's Rule before the election and the EC be given absolute authority to oversee the pre and post-poll situations with decisive authority. To ensure a free and fair poll among other necessary measures being taken, the first and foremost thing is that the EC be made self-sufficient without seeking help from the concerned ruling party facing an election. Management of the election process must take care of pre-poll alliance by the recognized political parties. Her suggestion was that the President dismantle the incumbent government two months before the election and the EC frame comprehensive election codes for political parties. Violation of the codes will result in exclusion from the electoral process. To curb free flow and circulation of black money, full State funding of elections needs to be introduced.

In the national interest, if necessary, one percent surcharge from the people and five percent surcharge from the political parties could be imposed. Instead of financial help, the State funding authority would provide election materials to all EC-recognized parties. Mamata had forwarded her proposal about State funding to the President of India which was subsequently forwarded to the then Prime Minister. There was no response. A significant suggestion relates to restriction of votes cast to 75 percent of the total vote. Mamata said that polling between 35 and 65 per cent could be considered as a genuine polling trend. The balance is mostly fake. Only a fixed limit of voting could ensure a genuine poll. She believes there is open collusion between administration officials to rig elections and the EC keeps mum. On political turncoats playing free-style cross over of parties, Mamata observed it amounts to "hood-winking" and proposed no elected representative should be allowed to cross over to another party without resigning his or her seat. Mamata also suggested a reform in respect of elections in Rajya Sabha, suggesting an open election instead of a secret ballot to avoid chances of manipulation. To curb fake votes, she said that if any genuine voter discovered that his or her vote has already been cast, the genuine voter should be allowed to cast the vote and the fake one should be simultaneously deleted. Mamata's proposals on electoral reforms deserve a national debate in the interests of Indian democracy.

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

The OTT challenge to movie Mughals



PRASANNA K OJHA

The success of OTT is purely on the count that content is the new star. Small filmmakers, rich content and novel stories are the toast of these platforms

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IT MAY NOT HAPPEN THAT PEOPLE WILL GIVE UP WATCHING MOVIES IN THEATRES. MANY OF US HARBOUR THE DESIRE TO VENTURE OUT AND EXPERIENCE THE CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE IN THEATRES, EVEN IF IT IS ONLY ONCE IN A WHILE. OUTING PLUS CINEMA IS A CONCOCTION WHICH HAS ALWAYS WORKED IN THE PAST AND WILL WORK IN THE FUTURE ALSO. BUT DISAPPOINTING FARE WILL REDUCE THE DESIRE TO VISIT THEATRES

(The writer is a finance professional and a cinema and sports enthusiast. The views expressed are personal.)



go on endlessly, aimlessly like TV soap operas. OTT gives a peek at short movies (who don't have other platforms for release) as well. It presents us with huge canvas which stores old movies, documentaries, infotainment content.

The usefulness, convenience, content variety and affordability of OTT presents a big challenge to the movie makers and theatre owners. TV did give them a second chance, but they have frittered it away. What they have not quite understood is that no matter how big a star one may put in the movie, viewers will not relish sub-standard content. Bollywood seriously has to do a reality check and content check. They need to relook at the recent, forgettable efforts made by the jaded czars resulting in Bunty-Bubly-2, Sadak-2, Hungama-2. How on earth do they expect people to watch these movies even on OTT platforms, leave alone in a theatre @400 bucks.

These are dangerous time for multiplexes. The star bazaar is melting down. The success of OTT is purely on the count that content is the new star. Small movie makers, rich in content, telling novel stories are the toast of these platforms. The TV serial boom of the 80s gave us great stories and several good actors like Om Puri, Anupam Kher, Irrfan Khan, Raghuraj Yadav, Satish Shah, KK Raina, MK Raina. The OTT boom has also given us several new

actors, who have worked in web series and several quality films. There is place for everyone except jaded stars if they continue with their old, formula "tricks".

The business model needs a drastic change. A newly-released movie has just a 3-4-week window to milk out the maximum from the theatres, before it is parked on OTT. The stars will have to reinvent themselves or Bollywood will have to invent new stars to lend shine in their ventures. Right now, some of them are busy comforting themselves in dishing out ordinary web series following herd mentality. Here too, the initial promises shown in their earlier works have faded and the latest offerings are trash. A case in point being the series - "Inside Edge: season-3" which missed the outside edge of our collective brains. The big shots of Bollywood have to get their acts together for finding the right content and right scale. Big production surely knows that the big moolah is in theatre releases only and we have a pretty big network of multiplexes for leveraging.

All said and done, it may not happen that people will give up watching movies in theatres. Many of us preserve the desire to venture out, and experience the cinematic experience in theatres, even if it is once in a while. Outing plus cinema is a concoction which has always worked in the past and will work in future also, adjusting off-course for any adverse pandemic impact. But disappointing fare will reduce that desire to visit theatres.

The question is that can Bollywood make content which would lure us back to the theatres more often in current circumstances, given the fact that good, relatable, and decipherable-in-our-language stuff is available at our fingertips and we are spoilt for choices and convenience.

This formula of Star + any content = good opening + great returns does not work anymore. And it will not work on OTT also. They got away with "Suryavanshi" as viewers flocked theatres which had opened after a long time. But a similar "Chandravanshi" is going to be punished. We now have the power to punish and that's the biggest gain of having OTT - it has strengthened the market forces.

More realistically, they can check how the South Extension of Indian cinema combined star power with interesting content (eg. "Jai Bhim", "Pushpa"), which has worked massively on all forums and more importantly worked Pan-India. So, when 4 out of 5 persons whom you speak to, sound pessimistic about Bollywood then the concerned need to realise that there is something wrong.

But we, the viewers are not complaining. We have enough variety and quantity in our plate. And Bollywood should not complain afterwards either. They have had enough warnings.

No ambiguity; Amaravati is the Andhra Capital

Now that the repeal Bill got the assent of the Governor, any future steps of the Jagan Government notwithstanding, Amaravati will be the Capital

On December 27, the Andhra Pradesh High Court questioned the petitioners about the relevance of their petitions about the three-capitals formula of the state government in view of the state Governor giving his assent to the AP Decentralization and Inclusive Development of All Regions Repeal Bill of 2021.

Continuing the hearing on a batch of petitions challenging the two legislations — The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Repeal Act, 2020, and the Andhra Pradesh Decentralization and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act, 2020 — a three-member division bench headed by Chief Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra directed the petition-



AMAR DEVULAPALLI

(The writer is Advisor, National Media and Inter State Affairs, Government of Andhra Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)

ers to fill the note in 10 days.

The present status on record after the YSRCP Government of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy repealing the three Capitals Bill is that Amaravati stands good as the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

Where is the ambiguity? On the floor of the Assembly on November 22, the Chief Minister made clear the intentions of his Government and explained the reasons for the repeal of the Bill. He was unambiguous while presenting the case on the floor of the House.

Legal battles apart, the Jagan Government felt that some people with vested interests are disseminating misinformation ever since the policy was announced to have three Capitals for the residual



state of Andhra Pradesh after bifurcation of the undivided Andhra Pradesh State into Telangana and AP. In fact, the Government had informed the High Court just before the repeal bill was moved in the House and sought the consent and subsequently Governor had given his assent to the decentralization repeal bill. Keeping the development in mind, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday directed petitioners to submit a

note on the relevance of the petitions in view of the Governor's assent.

The main opposition, Telugu Desam Party, however, sponsored an agitation. Farmers of Amaravati marched to Tirupati, promptly drawing the attention of forces supporting the three Capitals move to organize a rally in the temple town to strongly ventilate their point of view.

In June 2020, the Jagan Government enacted two separate laws, the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development (Repeal) Act aimed at abolishing the authority created by the previous TDP government in 2015 to develop Amaravati as the state capital and the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions

Act aimed at establishing three capitals for the state — executive capital at Visakhapatnam, judicial capital at Kurnool and legislative capital at Amaravati. Now that the repeal bill got assent of Governor, notwithstanding any future steps of the Jagan government, Amaravati will be the Capital.

The AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act, 2020 was meant to have three seats of governance, namely Legislative, Executive and Judicial Capitals. It was initially passed in the Assembly in January 2020 but was then referred by the Legislative Council to a select committee, which was not formed due to the deep discord between the ruling and opposition parties. It was passed in the Legislative

Assembly for the second time in June 2020. Further, Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan gave his assent to the relevant Bills in July, 2020.

During course of hearing on the petitions in High Court, the Union Home Ministry has informed the Andhra Pradesh High Court in August 2020 that the capital city of Andhra Pradesh was a matter to be decided by the state government. The Centre has no role in it. An Under-Secretary in the Union Home Ministry, Lalita T. Hedao, filed a counter-affidavit in the AP High Court to this effect.

The counter-affidavit mentioned that under Section 6 of AP Reorganisation Act, 2014, the Union Government had constituted an expert committee on March 28, 2014

under the chairmanship of K.C. Sivaramakrishnan to study alternatives for a new capital for the state of Andhra Pradesh.

While this became history with the repeal of the bills in November last, the controversy is still going on as TDP has dreams to get political mileage in the name of supporting the agitation by a handful of farmers of Amaravati area.

It is on record what the Chief Minister said on the floor of the House on November 22, that his Government would bring a "comprehensive, complete and better" Decentralisation Bill. People who believe that Jagan Reddy would not go back on his word have no ambiguity on what is going to happen.

New Year’s eve muted by Omicron; many hoping for better 2022

AP ■ WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

Good riddance to 2021. Let 2022 bring fresh hope. That was a common sentiment as people around the world began welcoming in the new year.

In many places, New Year’s Eve celebrations were muted or canceled for the second straight year due to a surge of coronavirus infections, this time driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Even before omicron hit, many people were happy to say goodbye to a second grinding year of the pandemic.

But so far, at least, the omicron surge hasn’t resulted in the same levels of hospitalizations and deaths as previous outbreaks — especially among vaccinated people — offering a glimmer of hope for 2022.

Australia went ahead with its celebrations despite an explosion in virus cases. Thousands of fireworks lit up the sky over Sydney’s Harbor Bridge and Opera House at midnight in a spectacular display. Hours before the celebrations began, Australian health authorities reported a record 32,000 new virus cases, many of them in Sydney.

Because of the surge, crowds were far smaller than in pre-pandemic years, when as many as 1 million revelers would crowd inner Sydney. Neighboring New Zealand had earlier opted for a more low-key approach, replacing its fireworks show in Auckland with a lights display projected onto landmarks including the Sky Tower and Harbor Bridge.

While there hasn’t yet been any community spread of omicron in New Zealand, authorities still wanted to discourage crowds gathering. Because of where the international date line sits, countries in Asia and the Pacific region are among the first to usher in each new year. In Japan, writer Naoki Matsuzawa said he would



Fireworks explode over the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge as New Year’s Eve celebrations begin in Sydney, Friday, Dec. 31, 2021 (Dean Lewins/AAP Image via AP)

spend the next few days cooking and delivering food to the elderly because some stores would be closed. He said vaccinations had made people less anxious about the pandemic, despite the new variant.

“A numbness has set in, and we are no longer overly afraid,” said Matsuzawa, who lives in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo. “Some of us are starting to take for granted that it won’t happen to me.” Like many other people, Matsuzawa hopes that life will improve in 2022. “I hope the restrictions can disappear,” he said.

Across Japan, many people planned to take new year trips to spend time with their families. On New Year’s Eve, people thronged temples and shrines, most of them wearing masks.

Some appeared to be struggling off virus fears, however, by dining and drinking raucously in downtown Tokyo and flocking to shops, celebrating not only the holidays but a sense of exhilaration over being freed from recent virus restrictions. In South Korea’s capital, Seoul, the annual New Year’s Eve bell-ringing ceremony was canceled for the second straight year due to a surge in cases. Officials said a pre-recorded video of this year’s bell-ringing ceremony would instead be broadcast online and on television. The

ceremony had previously drawn tens of thousands of people. Last year’s cancellation was the first since the ceremony began in 1953. South Korean authorities also planned to close many beaches and other tourist attractions along the east coast, which usually swarm with people hoping to catch year’s first sunrise.

Omicron is now dominant variant in France, says its health agency

Paris: Omicron has become the main coronavirus strain in France where the number of infections has surged in the last few days, the country’s public health agency has said. “62.4 percent of tests showed a profile compatible with the Omicron variant” at the start of this week, compared to 15 percent the previous week, the agency said in its latest weekly survey published late Thursday. The Omicron variant’s advance was expected because it is highly contagious and has become dominant in other European countries including Britain and Portugal. The strain has contributed to the current flare-up in cases, which topped 200,000 in the 24-hour period from Wednesday to Thursday.

कार्यालय अशीक्षण अभियन्ता ड्रेनेज मण्डल, अलीगढ़							
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महासिध्द की राज्यपाल महोदय, उत्तर प्रदेश की ओर से निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु ऑन लाईन निविदाएं http://tender.up.nic.in के माध्यम से सिंचाई विभाग में वर्गीकृत श्रेणी में पंजीकृत टेकेंदारों से दिनांक 07.01.2022 को अपराह्न 12.00 बजे तक आमंत्रित की जाती है। जो दिनांक 07.01.2022 को रोपड़ 02.00 बजे अवरोहवासरी के कार्यालय में उपस्थित टेकेंदारों के समक्ष मुख्य अभियन्ता (गंगा) द्वारा पठित सविधि/गामित अधिकारी द्वारा टेक्नीकल विड ऑन लाईन खोली जायेगी। निविदा प्रश्न दिनांक 02.01.2022 प्रातः 9.00 बजे से दिनांक 07.01.2022 को अपराह्न 12.00 बजे तक वाजवलेट एवं अवलेट किचे जा सकते हैं। काइनेटिक्स विड खोलने की तिथि व समय को वेब साइट पर अधिसूचित कर ऑनलाइन खोला जायेगा। यदि किसी कारणवश निविदा खोलने की तिथि को कार्यालय बन्द होता है तो उस निविदा आगव कार्य दिवस में ऑनलाईन खोली जायेगी तथा निविदा खोलने का समय तथा वेबसाईट होनी। यदि आवश्यक स्थिति में निविदा खोलने के स्थान एवं समय में कोई परिवर्तन होता है तो उसे सूचना पटल पर प्रदर्शित कर दिया जायेगा।							
ऑन लाईन निविदा के साथ सिंचाई विभाग की निष्पत्ति श्रेणी में पंजीकरण प्रमाण-पत्र, जिलाधिकारी द्वारा निर्गत चरित्र प्रमाण पत्र (आईडीडी0-1), हेमिपत्र प्रमाण पत्र (आईडीडी0-2), स्वपोषण पत्र (आईडीडी0-3), जीओएलडी0पंजीकरण, अनुभव प्रमाण पत्र, बैलेंस शीट की स्कॅन्ड प्रति ऑन लाईन तकनीकी निविदा के साथ अपलोड करनी अनिवार्य होना एवं धरोहर धनराशि तथा निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य आन-लाईन जमा किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा एवं जिसमें निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य किसी भी स्थिति में वापस नहीं होगा एवं निविदादाता से अपेक्षा की जाती है कि निविदा डालने से पूर्व निविदा सूचना में अंकित समस्त शर्तों / शिष्टिपत्र शर्तों का गती-गति अध्ययन करने के फलस्वरूप ही निविदा अपलोड करे।							
जाट शीट	कार्य का विवरण	कार्य की अनुमानित लागत (लाख रु० में)	धरोहर धनराशि 2%	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि	निविदा प्रश्न का मूल्य रु० में	सिंचाई विभाग की पंजीकृत श्रेणी	कार्यकारी खाद्य का नाम
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02	सिकन्दाराज राजवाड़ा पर स्थित पक्की संरचनाओं की मरम्मत का कार्य	108.49	2%	90 दिवस	रु० 300+18% (GST) नियमानुसार + रु० 1000.00 स्टेशनरी चार्ज	‘ए’ अथवा उच्च	अलीगढ़ खाद्य गंगा नगर, अलीगढ़
03	Correcting Internal Section of Anoopshahar Branch & Construction of Retaining Wall at Existing V.R.B Between Km. 131.900 To Km. 205.950	262.25	2%	45 दिवस	रु० 300+18% (GST) नियमानुसार + रु० 1000.00 स्टेशनरी चार्ज	‘ए’ अथवा उच्च	अलीगढ़ खाद्य गंगा नगर, अलीगढ़
यह निविदा सूचना 0090 सरकार की वेबसाइट (http://upgovt.nic.in) तथा सिंचाई विभाग की वेबसाइट (www.irrigation.up.in , http://www.idup.upgovt.in) पर उपलब्ध है।							
नोट- 1. धरोहर धनराशि आन-लाईन जमा की जानी अनिवार्य होगी जो निविदा खोले जाने से तीन माह तक वैध होनी चाहिये।							
2. निविदा प्रश्न का शुल्क एवं रस पर जी0एस0डी0 शुल्क आन-लाईन जमा किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।							
0090 173195 दिनांक 30.12.21 विभाग वेबसाइट www.upgovt.nic.in पर उपलब्ध है।							
अशीक्षण अभियन्ता ड्रेनेज मण्डल, अलीगढ़							

ICICI Bank

Whereas

A housing loan facility was granted pursuant to a loan agreement entered into between ICICI Bank Limited ("Secured Creditor, which term shall include its successors and assigns) and the borrower & co-borrower, mentioned below ("Borrower(s)", which term shall include his/ its/ their respective [successors, assigns, heirs). The undersigned being the authorized officer of the Secured Creditor ("Authorized Officer") under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("Act") and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, ("Rules") has issued demand notices under Section 13(2) of the Act calling upon the borrowers / co borrowers mentioned below to repay the amount payable pursuant to the loan agreement and as specifically mentioned in the said respective demand notices within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notices.

The borrowers / co-borrower, having failed and neglected to repay the amount as claimed in the said demand notices, a notice is hereby given to the borrowers / co-borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13 (4) of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Rules. The details including date of symbolic possession of the properties are as mentioned below

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Harish Singh Mehta/ Karunwar Singh Mehta/ LBNOD00001649725	Plot No. B- 8, Part 2 Ews, Sector 12, Ramprastha Ghaziabad/ December 27, 2021	July 23, 2021/ Rs. 9,03,083/-	Delhi/ NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : January 01, 2022
Place: Delhi NCR

Authorized Officer
Secured Creditor

New virus driven by Omicron soar in Australia

AP ■ SYDNEY

New coronavirus infections soared again in Australia on Friday to a record of more than 32,000, just days after surpassing 10,000 for the first time.

Experts say the explosion is being driven by the highly contagious omicron variant and a recent relaxation of restrictions in Sydney and other areas.

More than 15,000 of the new cases were reported in Sydney. Another 5,000 cases came from elsewhere in New South Wales state, while almost 6,000 were confirmed in Victoria state, home to the second largest city of Melbourne.

While hospitalizations and deaths have been increasing from the surge, so far they haven't reached comparative levels seen in previous outbreaks.

And many cities were planning to go ahead with New Year's Eve celebrations, including the famous fireworks display from the Sydney Harbor Bridge and Sydney Opera House.

Authorities were expecting far smaller crowds than in pre-pandemic years, when as many as 1 million revelers would crowd inner Sydney. Prime Minister Scott Morrison remained upbeat despite the rising virus numbers and the many natural challenges the nation has recently faced.

"Despite the pandemic, despite the floods, the fires, continuing drought in some areas, the cyclones, the lockdowns, even mice plagues, Australia is stronger today than we were a year ago. And we're safer," Morrison said in a New Year's Eve message.

"We have one of the lowest death rates and the highest vaccination rates from COVID anywhere in the world," he said.

In New South Wales state, officials reported six new deaths while 763 patients were hospitalized, including 69 in intensive care.

The state hasn't been able to keep up with demand for tests, leaving people to wait for hours. But state Premier Dominic Perrottet said the health system was coping overall. "While the case numbers are substantially increasing, compared to where we were with the delta variant, our position remains incredibly strong," he said.

"Our number one priority here in New South Wales is to keep our people safe and that will continue to be our priority as we move through this next phase."

Parents selling kids shows desperation of Afghanistan

AP ■ SHEDAI CAMP, AFGHANISTAN

In a sprawling settlement of mud brick huts in western Afghanistan housing people displaced by drought and war, a woman is fighting to save her daughter.

Aziz Gul's husband sold their 10-year-old into marriage without telling his wife, taking a down-payment so he could feed his family of five children. Otherwise, he told her, they would all starve. He had to sacrifice one to save the rest. Many of Afghanistan's growing number of destitute people are making such desperate decisions as their nation spirals into a vortex of poverty.

Afghanistan's aid-dependent economy was already teetering when the Taliban seized power in mid-August amid a chaotic withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops. The international community froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted funding, unwilling to work with a Taliban government given its reputation for brutality during its previous rule 20 years ago.

The consequences have been devastating for a country battered by war, drought and the coronavirus pandemic. State employees haven't been paid in months. Malnutrition stalks the most vulnerable, and

Big event in country's life: Russia test-fires new hypersonic missiles

REUTERS ■ MOSCOW

Russia test-fired around 10 new Tsirkon (Zircon) hypersonic cruise missiles from a frigate and two more from a submarine, Interfax news agency said on Friday citing northern fleet.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has lauded the weapon as part of a new generation of unrivalled arms systems.

Putin has called a missile test, conducted last week, "a big event in the country's life", adding that this was "a substantial step" in increasing Russia's defence capabilities.

Some Western experts have questioned how advanced Russia's new generation of weapons is, while recognising that the combination of speed, manoeuvrability and altitude of hypersonic missiles makes them difficult to track and intercept.

Putin announced an array of new hypersonic weapons in 2018 in one of his most bellicose speeches in years, saying they could hit almost any point in the world and evade a U.S.-built missile shield.

SUPERFAST SPECIAL TRAIN

For the convenience of passengers, Railways have decided to run the following Superfast Special Train as per details given below:-

09523/09524 Okha- Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Okha Superfast Special Express (Weekly)				14 Trips
TRAIN NO. 09523		STATIONS	TRAIN NO. 09524	
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.
—	10:00	Okha	13:50	—
10:10	—	↓ Delhi Sarai Rohilla	—	13:20

Days of Run : 09523 Ex Okha on every Tuesday from 11.01.2022 to 22.02.2022 and **09524 Ex Delhi Sarai Rohilla** on every Wednesday from 12.01.2022 to 23.02.2022

Accommodation : AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Second Seating (Reserved).

Stoppages : Dwarka, Khambhalia, Jamnagar, Hapa, Rajkot Jn., Surendranagar Jn., Viramgam Jn., Mahesana Jn., Unjha, Siddhpur, Palanpur Jn., Abu Road, Falna, Marwar Jn., Beawar, Ajmer Jn., Jaipur Jn., Gandhinagar Jaipur, Bandikui Jn., Alwar Jn. and Rewari Jn. stations.

Note: The above Special Train will run with full reserved Accommodation

For any kind of information such as detailed Time -Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 may please be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

RailMadad Helpline No.	Visit RailMadad website: www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in
139	Download Railmadad App

75
Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav

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aid groups say more than half the population faces acute food shortages. “Day by day, the situation is deteriorating in this country, and especially children are suffering,” said Asuntha Charles, national director of the World Vision aid organization in Afghanistan, which runs a health clinic for displaced people near the western city of Herat. “Today I have been heartbroken to see that the families are willing to sell their children to feed other family members.”

Arranging marriages for very young girls is common in the region. The groom's family pays money to seal the deal, and the child usually stays with her parents until she is at least around 15.

Yet with many unable to afford even basic food, some say they'd allow prospective grooms to take very young girls or are even trying to sell their sons. Gul, unusually in this deeply patriarchal, male-dominated society, is resisting. Married off herself at 15, she says she would kill herself if her daughter, Qandi Gul, is taken away. When her husband told her he sold Qandi, “my heart stopped beating.

I wished I could have died at that time, but maybe God didn't want me to die,” Gul said, with Qandi by her side peering shyly from beneath her sky-blue headscarf.

China must stop growling: Tibetan government-in-exile rebukes Beijing

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL ■ DHARAMSHALA

The Tibetan government-in-exile on Friday asked China to "stop growling" over the Tibet issue and said if it is serious about the wellbeing of Tibetan people and then it should act positively to resolve the conflict through dialogue.

This comes as media reports stated that Chinese Embassy in Delhi expressed 'concern' over the participation of Indian Members of Parliament in an event hosted by the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile in national capital.

Reports said several MPs, across party lines, had attended the event last week in Delhi. Taking to Twitter, Tenzin Lekshay, the spokesperson of the Tibetan government-in-exile, slammed China, saying that "India's constant solidarity for Tibet makes China uneasy."

"As for All Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet, it was initiated by Shri MC Chagla in 1970 and now chaired by BJD MP Sujeet Kumar. Many great Indian leaders supported Tibet in the past, & many more supports now," he said in a tweet.

While rebuking Beijing, the spokesperson said "China must stop growling here and there all time." "If they are serious about wellbeing of Tibet and Tibetan people, time has come for them to act positively to resolve Sino-Tibetan conflict through dialogue," he added. Moreover, the spokesperson added Tibet issue is "certainly not an internal issue" of China.

Asia looks to China-focused trade bloc for virus recovery

BANGKOK: Members of a China-centered Asian trade bloc that takes effect Jan. 1 are hoping the initiative, encompassing about a third of world trade and business activity, will help power their recoveries from the pandemic.

The 15-member Regional and Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, includes China, Japan, South Korea and many other Asian countries. It does not include the U.S. or India.

The deal slashes tariffs on thousands of products, streamlining trade procedures and providing mutual advantages for member nations. It also takes into account issues such as e-commerce, intellectual property and government procurement. But it has less stringent labor and environmental requirements than those expected of countries in the European Union or the smaller Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes many of the same countries but not China.

RCEP is expected to boost trade within the region by 2%, or \$42 billion, both through increased trade and also through diversion of trade as tariff rules change, experts say. The accord is a coup for China, by far the biggest market in the region with more than 1.3 billion people.

Extra help will be needed: Two years of lockdowns, border closures, mandatory quarantines and other restrictions have cost millions of people

Germany shuts down half of its 6 remaining nuclear plants



BERLIN: Germany on Friday is shutting down half of the six nuclear plants it still has in operation, a year before the country draws the final curtain on its decades-long use of atomic power. The decision to phase out nuclear power and shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy was first taken by the center-left government of Gerhard Schroeder in 2002.

His successor, Angela Merkel, reversed her decision to extend the lifetime of Germany's nuclear plants in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan and set 2022 as the final deadline for shutting them down.

The three reactors now being shuttered were first powered up in the mid-1980s. Together they provided electricity to millions of German households for almost four decades.

One of the plants — Brokdorf, located about 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of Hamburg on the Elbe River—became a particular focus of anti-nuclear protests that were fueled by 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe in Soviet Union. The other two plants are Grohnde, about 40 kilometers south of Hannover, and Grundremmingen, 80 kilometers west of Munich.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMC/Line, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tender under Two Packet System for the under noted work:-

	POH (Periodic Overhaul) of BCM 332 machine at NR Track Machine Workshop including mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic, electrical cabin repair and other ancillary works.
1. Name of work and location	
2. Completion period of the work	120 days
3. Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 50.26 Lakhs
4. Earnest money amount (to be deposited online)	Rs. 1,00,600/-
5. Cost of Tender Document (to be deposited Online)	Rs. Nil
6. Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender	Tender document remain available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 07.01.2022 upto 15.00 hrs. on 28.01.2022. Tender Bids may be uploaded from 15.01.2022 & upto 15.00 hrs. on 28.01.2022 on IREPS website. The tender will be opened soon after 15.00 hrs. on 28.01.2022.
7. Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document	The detailed tender document is available on www.ireps.gov.in . Above tender document will be available for online submission of offer on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 15.01.2022 to 28.01.2022. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document. The detailed tender notice also can be seen on the Notice Board of the above office.

No.: 1-W-DyCETMCL-BCM332-06-21-22 Dated: 31.12.2021 3103/2021

Serving Customers with a Smile

their jobs while also contributing to disruptions in manufacturing and shipping that are snarling supply chains worldwide. Countries confronted with outbreaks of the fast-spreading omicron coronavirus variant have reined in recent moves to reopen to international travel.

Regional economies contracted by 1.5% in 2020. They've bounced back, with the Asian Development Bank forecasting growth at 7.0% this year — boosted by low year-before figures. But next year growth is expected to slow to 5.3%.

The pandemic slowed progress in ratifying the trade deal for some countries. China was the first to ratify RCEP, in April, after it was signed in November 2020 at a virtual meeting of leaders from its 15 member countries. Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines have yet to do so, though they are expected to ratify it soon. Myanmar, whose government was ousted by military on Feb. 1, ratified it but that is pending acceptance by other members.

Beijing is fully prepared for the new trading bloc, having already fulfilled 701 "binding obligations" for RCEP, Chinese vice minister for commerce Ren Hongbin said Thursday. "RCEP is of great significance building new development patterns and a milestone in opening up our economy," Ren said according to a transcript of a news conference on the ministry's website.

Biden talks sanctions, Putin warns of rupture over Ukraine

WILMINGTON, Del: President Joe Biden has warned Russia's Vladimir Putin that U.S. could impose new sanctions against Russia if it takes further military action against Ukraine, while Putin responded that such a U.S. move could lead to a complete rupture of ties between the nations.

The two leaders spoke frankly for nearly an hour Thursday amid growing alarm over Russia's troop buildup near Ukraine, a crisis that has deepened as the Kremlin has stiffened its insistence on border security guarantees and test-fired hypersonic missiles to underscore its demands.

Further U.S. sanctions "would be a colossal mistake that would entail grave consequences," said Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov, who briefed reporters in Moscow after the Biden-Putin phone conversation.

He added that Putin told Biden that Russia would act as the U.S. would if offensive weapons were deployed near American borders. White House officials offered a far more muted post-call readout, suggesting the leaders agreed there are areas where the two sides can make meaningful progress but also differences that might be impossible to resolve.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden "urged Russia to de-escalate tensions with Ukraine" and "made clear that the United States and its allies and partners will respond decisively if Russia further invades Ukraine."

Putin requested the call, the second between the leaders this month, ahead of scheduled talks between senior U.S. and Russian officials Jan. 9 and 10 in Geneva. The Geneva talks will be followed by a meeting of the Russia-NATO Council on Jan. 12 and negotiations at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna on Jan. 13.

White House officials said Thursday's call lasted 50 minutes, ending after midnight in Moscow. Biden told Putin the two powers now face "two paths": diplomacy or American deterrence through sanctions, according to a senior administration official.

Biden said the route taken, according to the official who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, will "depend on Russia's actions in the period ahead."

Russia has made clear it wants a written commitment that Ukraine will never be allowed to join NATO and that the alliance's military equipment will not be positioned in former Soviet states.

A NINE-MINUTE MESSAGE

SHREEDHAR BS aka SHRED’s animation film, *Reena Ki Kahani*, aims to create awareness about trafficking. In a conversation with SAIMI SATTAR, he talks about its similarity with Doordarshan’s films with a moral, the need to reach out to children and more



When Shreedhar BS (better known as Shred) was approached by the NGO Vihaan to make a film on trafficking, he took the animation route. The outcome *Reena Ki Kahani* was released on YouTube as, without a paywall, it was bound to have a better reach among the target audience. Shred will also be organising a free screening of the film in 1,000 Indian schools from the first week of January.

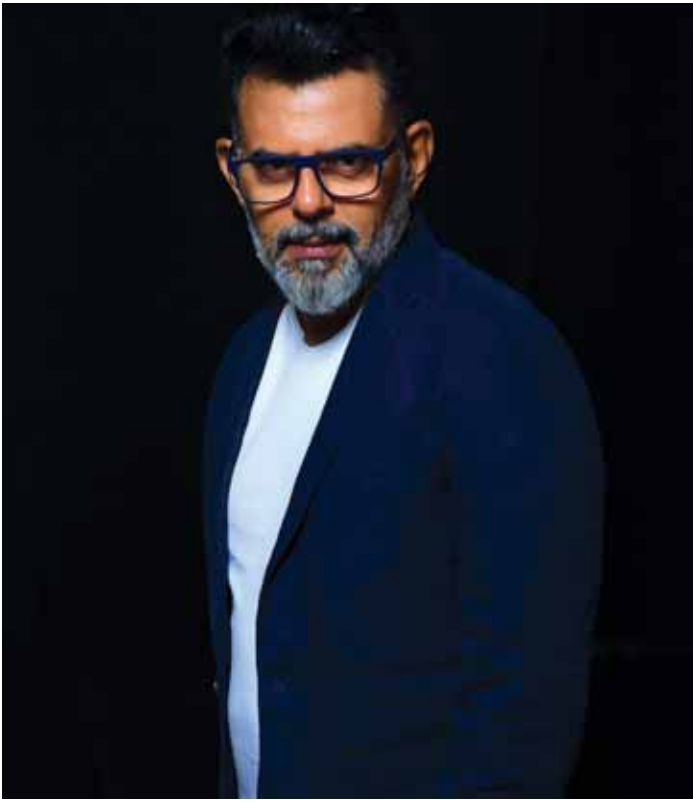
The nine-and-a-half-minute film focusses on the horrors of human trafficking and the way agents, which lurk amongst us, trap victims. The film also talks about how to understand potential threats of human trafficking and avoid them

Based on the real-life story of Reena, the film traces her path from being a girl with dreams to her entrapment into the flesh trade and subsequent rescue. It also sheds light on the different vulnerabilities that facilitate such crimes, like false promises and the lure of a better life for girls from the weaker sections of society. It showcases how traffickers connive to prey on possible vic-

times. At another level, this film is also a story of survival, giving insights into how such situations can be detected and avoided as well as the way to identify victims and oppressors.

It was not surprising that Vihaan, which has rescued over 4,700 survivors of human trafficking narrowed down on the director of Shred Creative Lab Private Limited to make this film to create awareness. Shred has over 22 years of experience in films, television, digital content, branding, and marketing. Known for innovative and disruptive ideas, Shred has worked closely with international brands such as Turner Broadcast UK, National Geographic - International, Fox, Ford - APAC, BMW - India, Sony Motion Pictures - London/USA and many more.

The winner of 43 National and International awards for creative excellence, SCL embodies Shreedhar’s vision to create innovative and path-breaking visual communication. Shred earlier was the director of Salt Studios Private Limited and creative director for the National Geographic Channel as



well as Fox International Channels. Earlier this year his documentary, *In Our World*, which highlighted the lives of three autistic children was the official selection and premiered at the 51st International Film Festival of India (IFFI) Goa. It also was screened in Bollywood Festival Norway and NYC Virtual South Asia Film Festival (SAFF) and is scheduled to screen in many forthcoming film festivals globally.

Excerpts from an interview:

Why did you decide to take the animation route for this film? Was it to ensure that it reached more people?

It was animated because I wanted parents to see it and wanted them to encourage children to see it. When the NGO approached me for this film, the first thought was to do a real-life documentary on the res-



cue of these children. But later the thought was that such a film would never reach children and they would not be aware of the dangers that lurk or the kind of dangers that they are exposed to. So, it was a better idea to make it animated while making it less morbid and more sensitive so that it could be seen by children. So, that was the entire thought behind making it an animation film.

So, is it primarily looking at children?

It is looking at everyone. Children, parents and adults. I didn’t want to isolate anyone when I was making it. I chose folk art as an art form for the animation so that it could relate to the region where the incident took place. Since it was in Bengal, we chose folk art from the State. We tried to connect with the children from that region and made it shorter because the virality is more. It was released on YouTube so that at least the link could be shared. It can be screened on mobiles and in schools. So, we had a lot of thoughts about the kind of art to use and the kind of animation to use.

How long did it take, from the storyboard to execution to make the film?

It actually took us longer than we thought. It took three-four months. Each of these boards was hand-drawn separately. Once the board was drawn, it was animated. We had to make it sensitive and talk about each topic that involves human trafficking. We had to do a lot of research, hear a lot of stories from them and find what kind of things had to be highlighted. So, we talked about all kinds of trafficking, what all leads to it. We chose Reena’s story because she was one of the people who were rescued and now she has moved on to a life of her own. We wanted to talk about something positive and bring the girl at the end of the film where she says that, ‘I am fine now. And people need to fight against this kind of crime,’ to give it some kind of completion.

You have used folk art from Bengal. Did you get actual practitioners on board?

I have a team of artists but we did refer to some artists in Mumbai who could draw this and guide us. We asked them for help.

The film had a very nostalgic Doordarshan vibe where we were reminded of films like Ek Chidiya, Anek Chidiya and others. Was that deliberate?

We miss those films, don’t we? I wanted to go back to that. This was a conscious effort where I wanted to make a film of that nature. It had to be linear storytelling. I did not want to dramatise

anything. The primary audience was children. We remember those films because they were not too non-linear or classy. It was a linear narrative and all of them taught us something. There was always a moral at the end. These were in our minds when we were making it. I am not denying that.

Several reports indicate that trafficking has increased during the lockdown as the financial situation became very desperate during the lockdown.

A lot of desperation set in for too many people. Many did not have work, others could not go out and work. There were several painful stories, that I heard from the NGOs, that parents gave away their children thinking that the girl would earn some money to run the house. The vulnerabilities were high during this period. People were available for exploitation because of a lack of money, parents losing their jobs. When emotional stress was high as parents wondered how they would run the house, children volunteered to go and look for work in Mumbai or Kolkata without realising the danger or what they are getting into. Such situations put people in a place where they are potential targets for these guys.

Future projects?

I am writing a Malayalam feature film on caste atrocities that happened in the early 20th century. This is a horror thriller is based on folklore. This is about the rise of communism and a police investigation into serial killing.

The 52nd edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) turned out to be a mega spectacle as top Bollywood stars celebrated 75 years of Indian Independence, its diversity, and the evolution of Indian Cinema. The ‘India 75’ evening was hosted by Karan Johar and Manish Paul. Popular actors like Salman Khan, Ranveer Singh, Shradhdha Kapoor, Riteish and Genelia Deshmukh, and Mouni Roy dazzled at this prestigious star-studded soirée.

Kapoor’s act celebrated the strength and achievement of Indian women through songs like *Aaj Main Upar*, *Kar Har Maidaan Fateh*, and *Des Rangila*.

Talking about her experience at India 75 - 52nd IFFI, the actress shares, “We have seen an absolute evolution in the way we tell stories on the screen, and it warms my heart that women have been a constant part of this process. I have grown up admir-

Dancing the unspoken pride

SHRADDHA KAPOOR pays tribute to the strength of Indian women, while MOUNI ROY portrays India’s diverse sub-cultures, through their power-packed performances at the 52nd IFFI Goa

ing our cinema but one thing that I have personally noticed is how women have shaped the growth trajectory. They have been an integral part of not just cinema but the overall growth of the nation. So, with my performance, *Shakti: The power of Indian women*, we are celebrating the strength and achievements of Indian women, their significance in the world of cinema, and overall evolution.”

Adding on to the festivities, Mouni Roy’s graceful portrayal of India’s diverse sub-cultures, showcasing the different shades and flavours of India



through her enchanting act to *Vande Mataram*, *Shubhaarambh*, and *Jiya Jale* won everyone’s heart.

Talking about her performance, Roy expresses, “With the inherent diversity of India, cinema here has grown to be the closest window to our rich culture. Cinema, today, is surely the most influential — a combination of a wide spectrum of art forms including music, dance, storytelling. Personally, I have always preferred dance to narrate my emotions, the grace, unspoken thoughts, and the ease to emotely add to the experience. My performance will showcase different shades and regional flavours of India. It’s all about celebrating the unity in diversity, fiery spirit of Indian cinema, and its timeless extravagant charm.”

(The celebration, in collaboration with Zee Live, a cine salaam, is scheduled to simulcast on Zee Cinema and Zee TV on January 2, 2022 at 8 pm.)



Final salute

Actor MANOJ BAJPAYEE plans to celebrate New Year at home with his family and close friends. By TEAM VIVA

The film industry is finally beginning to see hope and revival on the horizon after two long, challenging pandemic hit years. As theatres slowly begin to open, there is anticipation in the air with audiences eagerly awaiting the return of their favourite stars to the silver screen. Here is our pick of the films that we most want to see in the months to come.

Laal Singh Chaddha

Laal Singh Chaddha has been in the news for its diverse locations, long and gruelling shooting schedule, delays due to the pandemic and the perfectionist Aamir Khan’s unbelievable transformation into the titular character. This long-awaited comedy-drama is directed by Advait Chandan from a screenplay written by Eric Roth and Atul Kulkarni. The film is produced by Aamir Khan Productions, Viacom18 Studios and Paramount Pictures and is the official adaptation of the 1994 film *Forrest Gump* (based on Winston Groom’s 1986 novel of the same name). The film also stars Kareena Kapoor and Naga Chaitanya in his Hindi film debut.

Back to the screen

TEAM VIVA proffers a list of five multi-genre cinematic biggies to look forward to in the new year

Gangubai Kathiawadi

If the first trailer of this biographical crime drama is anything to go by, Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Gangubai Kathiawadi* will be a spectacle unlike any other. Powered by yet another unforgettable performance by Alia Bhatt, the film is produced by Bhansali himself and Jayantilal Gada. It also stars Vijay Raaz, Indira Tiwari and Seema Pahwa with Ajay Devgn and Emraan Hashmi featuring in extended cameo appearances. The story etches the journey of young Ganga who battles circumstances to become Gangubai, the madame who rules the red light area of Kamathipura with an iron fist. The film, loosely based on S Hussain Zaidi’s book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai* is set to release in Hindi and will be dubbed in Telugu as well. The film is scheduled for worldwide release in theatres on February 18, 2022.



Loop Lapeta

Loop Lapeta is the official Hindi remake of the 1998 German cult classic *Run Lola Run*. Directed by Aakash Bhatia and jointly produced by Sony Pictures Films India, Ellipsis Entertainment and Aayush Maheshwari, the film features Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin in lead roles. It will be interesting to see how the film reinterprets the premise of the Tom Tykwer original in the Indian context and how Taapsee’s ever reliable histrionics channel the character made famous by Franka Potente. We can’t wait to watch how the film captures a frenetic race against time and just how one determined woman defies the clock to save a loved one’s life.

Major

Major is a rousing tale of courage and recounts the events leading up to the ultimate sacrifice of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan during the 26/11 attacks in 2008. Painstakingly researched and filmed with great attention to Major Unnikrishnan’s extraor-

dinary life, this biographical action film is directed by Sashi Kiran Tikka and produced by Sony Pictures Films India, G Mahesh Babu Entertainment and A+S Movies. Shot simultaneously in Telugu and Hindi and later dubbed into Malayalam, the film stars Adivi Sesh in the titular role. Adivi is also making his Hindi film debut with *Major* and has even written the screenplay of the film.

RRR

RRR is an upcoming Indian Telugu period action drama directed by S S Rajamouli, and produced by D V V Danayya of DVV Entertainment. The film stars N T Rama Rao Jr, Ram Charan, Ajay Devgn, Alia Bhatt and Olivia Morris while Samuthirakani, Alison Doody, Ray Stevenson and Shriya Saran play supporting roles. This is a larger-than-life fictional narration of two Indian revolutionaries, Alluri Sitarama Raju (Charan) and Komaram Bheem (Rama Rao). Set in 1920, the film is expected to be a visual treat and a rousing entertainer.

Free-flowing spirit

RANVEER SINGH thinks it’s important to do characters that have an everlasting memory. By TEAM VIVA

With 83, actor Ranveer Singh has achieved new heights. His filmography exudes versatility, a risk-taking attitude and range that sets him apart from the rest. From *Band Baaja Baarat* to *Ram Leela*, from *Bajirao Mastani* to portraying Alauddin Khilji in *Padmaavati*, from *Simmba* to *Gully Boy* and now 83, in which he dissolves on screen to become the Indian cricketing legend Kapil Dev, the actor has wowed everyone with his shape-shifting artistry film after film.

Ask him what drives him to portray characters that have constantly etched their place in the his-

tory of Indian cinema, Singh says, “I have taken some really big risks. It does nothing for me if there is no high risk involved. Higher the risk, higher the pay-off. I am like a free flowing spirit. I don’t wish to be defined because I feel putting a person in a box is limiting. I am consciously and sub-consciously shaping my filmography. And I am going to do more of this because there is no other way. I am really hoping that the filmmakers continue to give me such roles where I can really do something.”

The superstar adds, “Today, its been 20 years plus for a film like



Lagaan but I remember *Lagaan*. I remember the film, the characters. So, for me, it’s important to do characters that have an ever-lasting memory and that continue to give joy to people over generations like my favourite film, *Life is Beautiful*, that I can watch n number of times, it still touches my heart. Films that can make you

laugh, cry and entertain you forever and ever — those are the films that I aspire to be a part of. I am an actor first, before being a star.”

Singh will be next seen in YRF’s *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*, Shankar’s remake of his blockbuster *Anniyan*, Rohit Shetty’s *Cirkus* and Karan Johar’s *Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani*.

Breaking the stereotype

The year bolstered PARINEETI CHOPRA’s belief in picking subjects that are remarkably ahead of the curve

For Bollywood actress Parineeti Chopra, 2021 was a memorable year as she reminded people that when it comes to risk-taking, cliché-shattering projects, she will always them head on. Parineeti, who had established herself as a stereotype breaking leading lady having started her career with films like *Ishaqzaade*, *Hasse Toh Phasee*, and so on, showed audiences her wide range of acting skills through acclaimed films like *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar*, *The Girl on the Train* and *Saina* this year.

Chopra shares, “It’s a year filled with gratitude for me. 2021 was the year I had been waiting for, having taken the biggest plunge of my career in the forms of *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar*, *The*



Girl on the Train and *Saina* and thankfully, each one of them paid off. 2021 made me realise that audiences expect me to be clutter-breaking and I couldn’t agree with them more; I am more thankful to them for showering me with all the love for my performances.”

She adds, “It’s been a year that has bolstered my belief in picking subjects that are remarkably ahead of the curve and present me in the most unique way on screen. I am blessed that makers, producers and my fans didn’t give up on me, and pushed me to do my best work.”

The actress will be seen next in films like *Uunchai* with Amitabh Bachchan, and *Animal* opposite Ranbir Kapoor.

TRAVEL BUG



NIRVANA WITH TEA & SEA

From the understated old-world charm of Ceylon Tea Trails near Hatton to the palm-fringed beaches of Cape Weligama, SAIMI SATTAR experiences and captures the Emerald Island in a variety of hues

EMI. Bills. Fees. Deadlines. Work. Office. Home. The rat-a-tat of the woodpecker in my head intruded my consciousness even as the vista of lush green in front of me vied for attention. The road, lonely and meandering with manicured tea gardens bordering it, stretched before me.

Lalith, the naturalist, assigned to show me around, egged me on with the promises of a delicious yet unique tea planter's tiffin lunch at a scenic spot. But then, this incident is strictly not in line with the way things unfolded chronologically during my visit to Sri Lanka. And this can be a slight irritant for a student of history who believes that the past casts its shadow (or in this case, lights up the road) on the present.

The previous evening I had landed at the Tea Trails, near Hatton, which comprises five restored colonial tea planter bungalows perched at an altitude of 1,250 metres. After being restored by Resplendent Ceylon, these became the first of the three resorts run by the Fernando family known as the founders of Dilmah Ceylon Tea. The three resorts under the banner — Ceylon Tea Trails, Cape Weligama and Wild Coast Tented Lodge, Yala — are the only Sri Lankan members of the Relais & Chateaux, the global fellowship of individually owned and operated luxury hotels and restaurants.

SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

The longish journey became even more circuitous as no direct flights were available. With travelling opening up to the Emerald Isle, with due precautions, everyone and their aunt were making a beeline to Sri Lanka. Thanks to that — and as just one flight from Delhi was operational by the island's national carrier — I found myself travelling via Mumbai to Colombo before undertaking a road trip of almost five hours across looping roads to reach Summerville, the bungalow that was to be my abode for two nights. It was way past dusk and the rain too obscured the view a bit as I alighted. But the warmth of the welcome, where umbrellas snapped open to shield me from the moisture even before I stepped out elicited a smile despite the exhaustion.

TIME TRAVEL

And we skipped to the good part... almost immediately. The bungalow's doors opened into a long corridor, that was flanked by rooms on either side. The carpeted floor — wherever exposed — was tiled in rust, the walls had myriad sketches of flora and fauna. But it was the living room that practically transported me back in time. It was reminiscent of the many bungalows in the Cantonment area of Kanpur (or Cawnpore, if you please) where I spent a good (and favourite) part of my childhood. A gramophone perched on a wooden side table, a Phillips radio with dials, a rotary phone were just some of the specific elements that heightened the feeling of reliving the days of the Raj. Classical English music, though played from an i-Phone subtly tucked away behind a corner, further upped the ante which had been set by the well-polished and comfortably upholstered furniture. Despite my modern attire, I could almost imagine myself as a pucca British parasol-carrying memsahib visiting an outpost of the Empire.

The bungalows — called Castlereagh, Norwood, Tientsin and Dunkeld besides Summerville — are between two and 15 km apart, with 27 rooms and suites in all. Overlooking the Castlereagh Reservoir, each has a staff of about 12-14 people to maintain it. One can take up the entire bungalow or just one room, each of which is named after a planter who lived and worked on one of the estates. Mine, called Goddard, opened out into a spectacular personal garden. The centrepiece, though, was the rather dreamy canopy bed.



"Exquisite," I muttered out a tad too loudly for it was absolute love at first sight. The elegant bathrooms with rust, black and white patterned tiles had fittings that were in sync with the place. Interestingly, unlike other hotels, there was no phone to call room service. One had to ring the bell to summon the butler to ask for practically anything under the sun... and it would materialise in a jiffy. Jagath, the bungalow executive, was my very own genie to do my bidding. The level of personalisation means that there isn't a set menu. The chef discusses and curates each as per your preference and taste. Despite that, nothing was over the top. It was subtle luxury that whispered class in hushed tones rather than proclaiming it from the top of gilded tables.

TASTE MATTERS

Since I was tired, I settled for a salad and the chef made a spectacular one. Suffice it to say, I could have munched on to it for every meal during my time here. At dinner, Kosala, the bungalow chef, also enquired about both my lunch and dinner preferences. I decided to go local to dive deeply into the culture and opted for the traditional hoppers (appam) paired with sambol, a savoury dish of grated coconut. Though delicious, it was the location that made it even more scrumptious. The table, set up in the verandah, overlooked the gardens and the vast expanse of the reservoir. Jagath told me about the place's India connect as all the tea gardens are owned by the Ambanis and are on a 99-year lease. But my attention didn't waver from the panorama before me and the invigorating whiff of greenery and flowers that were such a refreshing change from my life where screen time has primacy.

Post breakfast, descending some steps led me to a small jetty to board a powerboat which raced across the Castlereagh Reservoir to deposit me on the other side where I met Lalith, the naturalist. The human version of sunny side up, he pointed out plants and asked me to guess their names. His broad smile didn't waver when I failed miserably at the task.

The hike up went through manicured tea gardens, often bordered by trumpet vines in vibrant shades of pink, yellow, orange and white. The view of the reservoir against a backdrop of lush green mountains on the opposite side, made me wonder if anyone could dispute Sri Lanka being called the Emerald Isle. On our way up, we also visited Dunkeld and Castlereagh bungalows. While there was a general air of similarity to Summerville, each had a distinct personality that makes the place perfect for a revisit by just opting for a different bungalow each time.

But I was trekking further for something more substantial. No, not a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow but lunch that had been spe-



cially prepared and packed in tiffins just the way it was done in the days of yore for the planters in the region. When we reached the spot, a basic structure — with a sitting area and a table covered with a blue checks tablecloth and tiffin carriers placed on top alongside cutlery wrapped in napkins — greeted us. Each of the containers had a separate course — salad, mains and a dessert. As soon as I segregated them, a distinct aroma mingled in the moisture-laden air. The mains consisted of a parcel of food, cooked in a banana leaf which gave off a mildly woody smell. This mingled with the aroma of meat. The dish, called lamprais, is an addition to the Sri Lankan lexicon by the Dutch Burghers, a small group of European-origin settlers who have called the island-nation their home since the 16th century. I felt satiated as each of the taste buds and the olfactory had been invigorated. On cue, the mist rolled in lending the place a mystical aura. I made my way back in an almost drunken stupor as the food and the heady smells wafting from the tea shrubs and the plants were beginning to cast their spell. I saw some workers at the tea estate plucking tea. "Two leaves and a bud, two leaves and a bud," the woodpecker in my head was at it again as geography lessons from school made a special appearance.

Back at the resort, a seven-course

tea-infused meal awaited me. Yes, the entire spread can be altered as per your personal preference. Whether it was the caffeine in the tea or the excitement of the day, I had less than a restful night.

ALL ABOUT TEA

Waking up the next morning, a visit to the Dunkeld Tea Factory was in store. Aboard the powerboat, to cross the reservoir yet again, I felt a tinge of regret knowing that this was my last day here. At the factory, Bernard Holsinger, a tea expert, not only showed me around but also told me the finer nuances of growing tea, its origin in Sri Lanka and the details of the ideal size and feel of the leaves. Though retired, the affable manner of Holsinger — who has Dutch ancestors — ensures that the information does not seem like an overload but something that you just absorb naturally. He told me about the most expensive tea (Virgin White Tea, the flagship product of Herman Teas), the appropriate height of the shrub while debunking the romanticising of the 'two leaves and a bud' myth (sometimes just leaves are picked). After a tea tasting session, I boarded the powerboat to take me back.

A slight kerfuffle on the placid waters announced the arrival of a sea-plane bringing in guests at the bungalows. I looked at them wistfully, knowing fully well the lovely time that they were bound to have.

SEABOUND AHOY

However, my mood lifted as we drove towards Cape Weligama on the palm-fringed southern cliffs close to the popular retreat of Galle. Designed by one of Asia's most celebrated architects, Lek Bunnag who, closer home, has been associated with masterplan, architecture and interior space planning of The Trident Gurgaon and The Roseate,



New Delhi besides other properties.

The hotel is a combination of private villas and suites with stunning panoramas. My introduction to the property was through the Ocean Terrace, the restaurant which overlooks the sea. Reaching at dusk, I was privy to some spectacular drama unfolding in the sky. But a server hinted that the sunrise could beat it hands down if I did not laze around in my room and headed to the 60-metre crescent-shaped infinity pool. And boy, was he spot on! The pool turned from blue to a burnished orange as the sun gradually climbed up in the sky. I could have just sat there for some more time with the water lapping up at my ankles but there was work to be done. Well, sort of. The life of a travel writer isn't easy, you know!

CULTURE CURRY

I dipped my toes in the local culture which entailed a visit to the Kushtaraja Rock, the origins of which are shrouded in mystery. Myth has it that a king was cured of leprosy which prompted the sculpture's carving. Natasha Arumugam — assistant manager, experiences — and I unpeeled the layers of similarity in languages as we discussed how kushta in Hindi means leprosy. She also pointed out how this was the only statue with three figures of Buddha engraved on it making it unusual.

Natasha told me that this sculpture was a part of the Agrabodhi Raja Maha Viharaya, which we visited next, till it was separated thanks to a railway line. According to folklore, the first Bodhi (the tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment) saplings were being carried by a group that rested here one night. In the morning, they found that the Bodhi saplings had taken root. It was left undisturbed making the place revered.

We returned to the hotel to be accompanied by the enthusiastic Chamindra Goonerwardene, the director of sales and marketing, who gave us a low down on the history and geography of the region while placing it in the context of contemporary incidents and time in both Sri Lanka and India. We were headed to Galle known for its fort that has structures, built over several years, starting in 1588 by the Portuguese. It was fortified by the Dutch during the 17th century. The cobbled streets, street-side cafes, quaint shops lend the historical, archaeological and architectural heritage monument a charm that is unmatched. This was evident from the number of pre-wedding shoots that were taking place in the area. During the course of the hour that we were there, we counted nine couples in various stages of amorous encounters that were being captured for eternity in coordinated outfits!

Climbing on top of the parapet of the Fort, we had splendid views of the Galle International Stadium. Of course, during a match, spectators who don't wish to buy tickets can occupy vantage points here to watch it live.

IT'S A WRAP

After grabbing a quick lunch, I headed out on a sunset cruise along with a few others. As the wind picked up, the sail emanated a groan and snapped. But we were without a care and put our trust in the engine power. As the sun started to dip, the constant barrage of the outside world trying to intrude into my very own private haven had quietened down. Despite the shrieks of delight of my fellow passenger, the solitude was soul-calming. I took in the rays skipping on the waves. Finally, life seemed to be a lot more than work and deadlines.



India win U-19 Asia Cup

PTI ■ DUBAI

India reaffirmed their supremacy in the U-19 Asia Cup with a record eighth title as they hammered Sri Lanka by nine wickets in a rain-hit summit showdown here on Friday.

The Indian bowlers were all over Sri Lanka, who were gasping at 74 for seven in 33 overs, when heavy rain lashed the Dubai International Cricket Stadium and stopped play for more than two hours.

It became a 38-over-a-side contest when play resumed with Sri Lanka limping to 106 for nine. India were set a revised 102-run target in 38 overs via DLS method which they reached rather comfortably in 21.3 overs with opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi scoring an unbeaten 56 off 67 balls.

India's only loss in the competition came against arch-rivals Pakistan who lost to Sri Lanka in the semifinals.

The tournament provided valuable game time for the Yash Dhull-led side ahead of the U-19 World Cup, beginning in the West Indies from January 14.

After tournament's leading scorer Harnoor Singh departed cheaply in the chase, Raghuvanshi played sensibly alongside Shaikh Rasheed (31 not out off 49) to get the job done.



The opener, who could not make an impact in the earlier games, grew in confidence after playing a backfoot punch early on in the innings. His backfoot play was impressive against the pacers and his feet movement against the spinners was assured. Raghuvanshi's innings comprised six boundaries. Earlier, Sri Lanka

opted to bat though early morning showers made conditions ideal for seam bowling first up.

The Indian pace duo of Rajvardhan Hangargekar and Ravi Kumar made the ball talk though the former was a tad unlucky to not get a wicket.

Left-arm pacer Ravi got the first wicket of the match by

removing Chamindu Wickramasinghe in the fourth over. The left-hander opener went for a big hoick over mid wicket but ended up mistiming it straight into the hands of Raj Bawa at third man.

Wickramasinghe's opening partner Shevon Daniel tried to pull Bawa but the ball got big on

him, taking a faint edge to wicket-keeper Aaradhiya Yadav to leave Sri Lanka at 15 for two in the 11th over.

India looked a far superior team. Hangargekar was the most impressive pacer in the first 10 overs, generating good pace that hurried the batters besides extracting movement off the pitch.

The Sri Lanka batters looked completely at sea against the Indian bowlers, be it fast bowlers or the spin pairing of Kaushal Tambe (2/23) and Vicky Ostwal (3/11). Both off-spinner Tambe and left-arm spinner Ostwal got the odd ball to turn sharply.

Ostwal got two in one to leave Sri Lanka in dire straits at 57 for seven. Southpaw Dunit Wellagge attempted a slog sweep to break the shackles but ended up getting caught in the deep.

Two balls later Ranuda Somaratne missed Oswal's arm ball on the back foot, trapping him in front of the stumps.

With India set to bowl out Sri Lanka for a sub-100 total, heavy rain stopped play.

In the five overs Sri Lanka had, they managed 32 runs for the loss of two wickets.

Hangargekar got a much deserved wicket on the last ball of the innings with Raghuvanshi taking a diving catch at the square leg boundary to dismiss Matheesha Pathirana.

Rohit ruled out of ODI series in SA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Captain Rohit Sharma was on Friday ruled out of India's upcoming ODI series in South Africa due to a hamstring injury, forcing the selectors to appoint KL Rahul as skipper of an 18-member team for the white-ball leg of the tour.

All-rounder Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja were also not selected as they were not fit while senior pacer Mohammed Shami, who is in the team for the ongoing Test series, was rested.

Pacer Jasprit Bumrah was named as vice-captain of the team.

Rohit Sharma is not fit, he is in rehab and he is not going for the ODI series in South Africa. He is working on and building on his fitness. We never wanted to take chance with him," chairman of selectors Chetan Sharma said before announcing the team.

"We are looking to groom KL Rahul. He has proved his leadership qualities. KL is the best one who can handle the side.

"Yes, definitely, we are looking at KL Rahul at present, he is an all-format player and he has

got good experience of captaincy, and the most important (thing) is we can see he has proved his leadership qualities, this is what all selectors think.

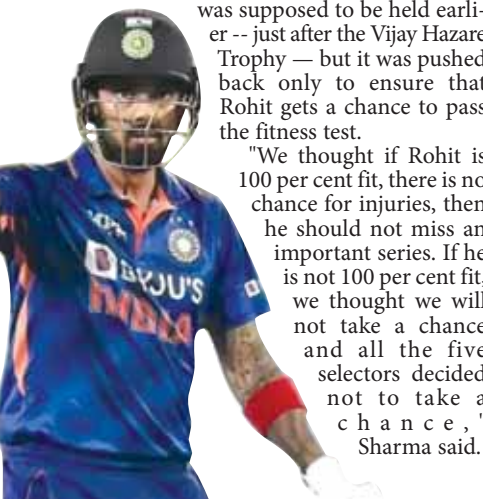
"Rohit is not fit, so we thought KL will be the best one, who can handle the side and that's why we have good confidence in (Rahul) and we are grooming him."

The three-match ODI series will begin at Paarl on January 19. The second match will also be played at Paarl on January 21 while the third one will be at Cape Town on January 23.

Rohit and Jadeja were rehabilitating at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru after being ruled out of the ongoing Test series in South Africa due to injuries.

In fact, the selection meeting was supposed to be held earlier -- just after the Vijay Hazare Trophy -- but it was pushed back only to ensure that Rohit gets a chance to pass the fitness test.

"We thought if Rohit is 100 per cent fit, there is no chance for injuries, then he should not miss an important series. If he is not 100 per cent fit, we thought we will not take a chance and all the five selectors decided not to take a chance," Sharma said.



Victory at Centurion testimony to India's all-round prowess: Kohli



PTI ■ CENTURION

The opening Test win over South Africa here is a testimony to the "all-round side" that India has become in the longest format, said skipper Virat Kohli, describing Centurion as the "the most difficult" among all venues in South Africa.

India wrapped up a memorable 2021 in style by bringing down South Africa's citadel, the Supersport Park, as they handed the Proteas a 113-run loss in the opening Test. It was a perfect end to the year in which the Indians outplayed Australia in their own backyard despite being plagued by injuries.

Test series in South Africa in any place is not easy and Centurion is obviously the most difficult of them all," Kohli told bcci.Tv.

While India's batters did well to ensure substantial leads in both innings, the pace unit ran through the South African batting line up, picking 18 wickets.

"We ended up getting a result in four days

is a testimony to the fact that we have become the side we have become today and strength of the squad was on full display," Kohli said.

"We were just looking for opportunities to win the game and that's how we play cricket now and given an opportunity at any stage we will pounce on it," he added.

Having never won a series in South Africa, Kohli feels the win is a "golden opportunity" for the Indian team to put pressure on the home side in the second Test and eke out a favourable result.

"It's a beautiful position to be in, to be 1-0 up away from home, put the opposition under pressure again in the second Test is a golden opportunity for us and something that every player is looking forward to.

"This sets us up beautifully for Wanderers, we can go out there and be more positive and optimistic."

Reflecting on the year gone by where India achieved historic success in Australia and are leading a Test series in England, which would be completed next year due to a COVID-19 outbreak, Kohli said the side is getting confident with each passing game.

"The new year is a very good marker to analyse how you played your cricket and I think we've played some outstanding cricket over the last 2-3 years, specially overseas.

"We are a side which is getting better and more confident with how much cricket we play."

Stand-in Test vice-captain KL Rahul, who was also adjudged the player of the match for his fabulous 123-run knock in the first innings, was also delighted by the win.

"Coming to a country like South Africa and beating them in their own fortress feels very special. "This is the second such victory for us, one was in Gabba and now one in Centurion. Hopefully we can build on this and win the series," Rahul said.

Ganguly discharged after COVID treatment, to remain in home isolation

PTI ■ KOLKATA

BCCI president and former India skipper Sourav Ganguly was on Friday discharged from a hospital here after being treated for COVID-19 but will remain in home isolation for the next two weeks.

The former skipper will be in home isolation under doctors' supervision and has not been infected with the Omicron variant, hospital authorities said.

"We have discharged Ganguly this afternoon. He will have to be in home isolation for the next fortnight under doctors' observation.

After that the next course of treatment will be decided," a hospital official told PTI.

The 49-year-old was rushed to the Woodlands Multispeciality hospital on Monday night as a precautionary measure after his RT-PCR test came positive for COVID-19.

"He is clinically stable...Dr Saptarshi Basu and Dr Soutik Panda will keep an watch on his health status," hospital's MD and CEO Dr Rupali Basu said in a statement.

Ganguly received the "Monoclonal Antibody Cocktail therapy" after admission.

He was admitted to hospital twice earlier this year and underwent emergency angioplasty after having complained of cardiac issues.

His elder brother Snehasish Ganguly had also tested positive for COVID-19 early this year.

New Year calendar welcomes Indian heroes of 2021 Tokyo Olympics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

2021 Tokyo Olympics was by far the best Olympics for India as India won one gold medal, two silver medals and four bronze medals.

After a gap of four decades India won a medal in Olympics Hockey.

Prof Vasisht has brought out a new year calendar to greet the Indian medal winners of 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

The calendar presents the photographs of Indian medal winners of 2021 Tokyo Olympics.



Humpy takes 5th spot, Vaishali ends up 14th

PTI ■ WARSAW

India's top player Koneru Humpy finished fifth in the women's event of the FIDE World Blitz championship while her compatriot R Vaishali, who was in second spot after nine rounds, slipped to 14th here. Humpy scored 11.5 points from 17 rounds to take the fifth place after finishing equal on points with two others. A loss to Polina Shuvalova (Russia) in the final round hurt Humpy's chances of a better finish. Vaishali also went down to Olga Girya (Russia) in the last round to slip out of the top 10.

In the open section, Vidit Santhosh Gujrathi was the best Indian performer, taking 18th place with 13 points, while Nihal Sarin, who also scored 13 points, finished one spot lower.

Eighteen-year old GM Arjun Erigaisi, who had held world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen to a draw, finished 24th with 12.5 points.

Teenager GM D Gukesh, who had finished 9th in the Rapid event, wound up with 12.5 points and finished 32nd.



All other Indians in the Open event finished outside the top 50 with P Harikrishna, the highest ranked from the country in the tournament, taking the 84th place and Harsha Bharathakoti (11 points) securing the 68th spot.

Among the women, Vantika Agrawal (9.5 points) finished 30th and Padmini Rout with 8.5 points took the 55th place.

France's Maxime Vachier-Lagrave edged out Poland's star player Jan-Krzysztof Duda in the tie-break to emerge champion while 17-year old Bibisara Assaubayeva dominated the Women's Championship and captured the title with a round to spare.

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star India batter Smriti Mandhana was on Friday nominated for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year award for her spectacular performances across all formats.

Mandhana was also nominated for Women's T20 Player of the Year on Thursday.

Mandhana was shortlisted for the top award along with Tammy Beaumont of England, Lizelle Lee of South Africa and Gaby Lewis of Ireland.

The award is given to the best overall performer in women's international cricket (Tests, ODIs and T20Is) during 2021. The winner will be announced on January 23.

The 25-year-old right-handed opening batter scored 855 runs in 22 international matches across formats during the year at an average of 38.86 with one century and five half-centuries.

In the limited-overs series against South Africa where India won just two of the eight matches at home, Mandhana played a major role in both of the wins. She scored 80 not out as India chased down 158 in the second ODI that helped them level the series and scored 48 not out in the final T20I win.

Mandhana played a sublime innings of 78 in the first innings of the one-off Test against England that ended in a draw. She played an important knock of 49 in India's only win in the ODI series.

Her 15-ball 29 and fifty in the T20I series went in vain, though, as India fell short in both the matches and lost the



Mandhana among four nominees for ICC Women's Cricketer of Year Award

series 1-2. Mandhana was in good touch in the series against Australia, starting with the ODI series where she scored 86 in the second ODI.

She scored a brilliant century in the only Test, the first of her career, and was awarded the Player of the Match. She scored her second T20I fifty of the year in the final match, though India fell short and lost the series 2-0. She made India's first-ever pink-ball Test even more memorable by smashing her maiden century (127) in the longest format of the game. The match ended in a draw and Mandhana was declared the Player of the Match.

With 872 runs in 21 internationals at an average of 48.44 with one century and eight half-centuries, England's Beaumont finished as the highest run-getter in the calendar year.

In the multi-format series against India, she started with

two consecutive half-centuries, the first one coming in the only Test and the second in a Player of the Match-winning effort of 87 not out in the first ODI. She scored her third half-century of the tour in the second T20I, though it came in a losing effort.

She bagged yet another Player of the Match award in the T20I series opener against New Zealand at home, missing out on a century by just three runs. She capped the limited-overs tour with a ton that helped England clinch the ODI series 4-1.

South African Lee scored 864 runs in 19 internationals at an average of 57.6 with one century and seven half-centuries.

She was in sensational white-ball form throughout the year, particularly in the ODIs where she finished as the highest run-getter in 2021 with 632 runs in 11 matches as well as the top-ranked Women's ODI batter in the ICC Rankings.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored a fourth goal in his last five Premier League games to help Manchester United beat Burnley 3-1 for its biggest win under recently hired manager Ralf Rangnick.

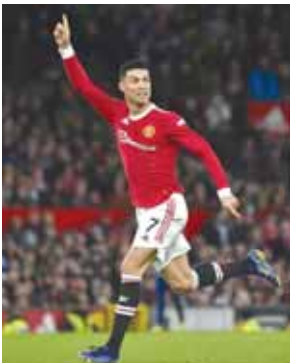
Ronaldo grabbed the third of United's first-half goals, tapping into an empty net in the 35th minute after Scott McTominay's long-range shot was tipped onto the post by Burnley goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey.

With 14 goals in all competitions this season, the Portugal forward has made a

strong start to his second spell at United and he was paired up front against Burnley with Edinson Cavani — a strike partnership with a combined age of 70.

United had far too much going forward for the visitors, who were playing their first game since Dec. 12 after seeing fixtures against Watford, Aston Villa and Everton get postponed since then because of COVID-19 outbreaks in opponents' squads.

McTominay, with a curling shot from the edge of the area, and an own-goal by Ben Mee — off his outstretched foot as he attempted to block Jadon



Sancho's shot — had set United on course for victory as Rangnick's team bounced back from a disappointing display in

a 1-1 draw at Newcastle on Monday.

In perhaps a signal of his displeasure about the Newcastle game, Rangnick made six changes including three in defense. One of them was Eric Bailly, who went off injured midway through the second half in a potential blow to Ivory Coast ahead of the African Cup of Nations.

Aaron Lennon capped an entertaining first half by finding the net with a shot into the far corner to reduce the deficit in the 38th with his first goal since September 2018.

By then, United had done enough to secure a third win in

four league games under Rangnick and climb above Tottenham into sixth place.

McTominay said he felt United's first-half performance was the best the team had played since Rangnick arrived. "We are learning and adapting," the Scotland midfielder said.

"The game against Newcastle was difficult and we had to bounce back from that. "The manager said we set the record for the most amount of turnovers in the league. We had to keep the ball better."

United is 19 points behind leader Manchester City, having played two games fewer.



against a spin attack of the highest calibre. Root continued his sublime form against India in the return leg of the Test series at home, aggregating 564 runs in four matches with three centuries to his name.

His performance also helped him reach the summit of the ICC Test Player Rankings for batting, where he would be eventually displaced by Marnus Labuschagne.

Despite failing to convert his starts into big scores, Root continued being England's best batter against Australia in the first three Ashes Tests.

As compared to Root, Williamson's 693 runs in 16 internationals at an average of 43.31 with one century was a modest total but the admirable Kiwi cannot only be judged on the basis of the runs he scored.

Rohit, Ashwin among four Indians included in Cricket Australia XI of 2021

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India's white-ball skipper Rohit Sharma and premier off-spinner R Ashwin were among four players from the country to have featured in the Cricket Australia (CA) XI of the year.

Besides Rohit and Ashwin, the other two Indians in the team were swashbuckling keeper-batter Rishabh Pant and left-arm spinner Axar Patel.

Rohit has been picked as an opener alongside Sri Lankan Dimuth Karunaratne, followed by Australian batter Marnus Labuschagne at number three. He is followed by England Test captain Joe Root, Pakistan's Fawad Alam and Pant in the batting order.

Having dominated white-ball cricket and his home conditions for years, Rohit conquered his final frontier this year by showing he can score big Test runs outside of Asia.

And a strong 2021 that saw him finish behind only Root for most runs could have been even better if the classy right-hander had translated multiple strong starts into big hundreds.

Rohit reached 20 or more in 14 of his 19 completed innings but posted two centuries – 161 in a total of 329 to set up a win in Chennai and a patient 127 at The Oval, his maiden Test hundred away from home.