

OPINION 6
FOLLOWING NEGATIVE
TACTICS UNRESERVEDLY**WORLD 8**
EUROPE RECORDS OVER 100 MN COVID
CASES SINCE PANDEMIC: REPORT**MONEY 9**
INDIA TO LOG 'ONE OF HIGHEST
GROWTH RATES': ASHIMA GOYAL

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JANUARY 3, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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Capital problem! India heads for 3rd wave

Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi see major spike; India records 1,525 Omicron, 27,553 Covid cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Densely-populated Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata are witnessing a major surge in Covid-19 cases as the country battles the initial phase of third wave that threatens to infect far more people than the previous two phases.

Mumbai registering 8,063 of the fresh infections (27 per cent higher than Saturday), Delhi logged 3,191 cases, and Kolkata recorded around 3,194 cases. India on Sunday reported yet another spike in daily Covid-19 infections with 27,553 fresh cases being logged in the past 24 hours. Infections have sharply risen for a fifth consecutive day.

As many as 22,775 new cases were reported on Saturday. On December 20, 2021, India had reported 5,326 Covid cases. This has sharply jumped to breach 27,000 cases as on January 2, i.e. Sunday.

Up by 21 per cent cases on Sunday, the total caseload is now 3,48,89,132. Omicron too followed the suit with the nationwide tally of the hyper-mutated variant of coronavirus further climbing to 1,525, with Maharashtra topping the charts with 460 cases.

Delhi is the second-most contributor of the highly transmissible Omicron with 351 cases, followed by Gujarat (136), Tamil Nadu (117), and Kerala (109). Major cities like Raigarh and Raipur across the

People visit the street vendors weekly market Sadar Bazar operating on the odd-even system as per guidelines set by the Delhi Government, in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

country have witnessed a surge in their Covid count.

A total of 23 States and Union Territories have reported cases of the new variant, namely Telangana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh,

Manipur and Punjab.

Warning that the rise in cases seen globally and India could put "stress on health infrastructure", Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan had on Sunday wrote to the States to create additional isolation beds, makeshift hospitals, field hospitals and pediatric care units. The States have been asked to follow up with those

in home isolation and gear up their control rooms that would coordinate with people requiring a bed and an ambulance.

India's total caseload of the Covid-19 infections have surged to 3,48,89,132, with active cases comprising less than 1 per cent (0.35) of the total cases, the Ministry said. The country reported 284 Covid-19 fatalities in the last 24

hours, taking the total death toll to 4,81,770. This pushed the active case tally to 1,22,801, according to data from the Union Health Ministry.

With 9,249 people recovering from the disease in the last 24 hours, total recoveries climbed to 3,42,84,561. The recovery rate currently stands at 98.27 per cent.

Continued on Page 2

Over 6 lakh registration for vax of 15-18 yrs age group

Mandaviya asks States to set up separate centres for kids to avoid jab mix-up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day before the launch of a countrywide exercise to vaccinate millions of children aged between 15 and 18 against Covid-19 with the CoWIN platform till Sunday evening recording over six lakh registrations, the Centre has cautioned the State Governments against mixing up of shots with those being given to the adult population.

Children will be given only Covaxin, while the adult population of the country is being administered Covishield and Sputnik V besides Covaxin. The doses will be administered at schools, hospitals and through special camps to begin from January 3.

In a meeting held with the States online, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya asked them to take necessary measures, including setting up separate vaccination centres, to avoid mixing-up of Covid vaccines during administration of shots to those in the 15-18 age



A health worker shows Covaxin vial during preparation for 15-18 age group vaccination drive, in Patna, on Sunday

PTI

group. Data on the Cowin dashboard showed 3,15,416 registrations for this age group until 11.30 pm Saturday.

Mandaviya appealed to parents to register their eligible children. "If the children are safe, then the future of the country is safe," he tweeted.

This began a week after the Prime Minister's announcement that Covid-19 vaccination will start January 3 for children.

"To ensure smooth implementation of the guidelines, Mandaviya held an online

interaction with Health Ministers and principal secretaries and additional chief secretaries for health of States and Union Territories (UTs). He advised them to ensure orientation of vaccinators and vaccination team members for the inoculation exercise for those in the 15-18 age group and for identification of dedicated vaccination session sites for this category of beneficiaries," said an official from the Health Ministry.

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Positivity rate shoots to 4.59%, but 99.78% Covid beds in Delhi vacant

No need to panic as cases very mild, don't need hospitalisation, says Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi registered 3,194 fresh cases of coronavirus on Sunday and the positivity rate rose to 4.59 per cent. By all accounts, this seems to be an alarming scenario, experts feel.

The active caseload in the city now stands at 8,397, according to the Delhi State Health Covid-19 bulletins. One person succumbed to the infection in the last 24 hours.

Addressing the media virtually, Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal said though the number of daily Covid-19 cases and active cases are increasing in the city, there is no need to panic as those are very mild and do not need hos-

A health worker conducts Covid-19 testing of a woman amid concern over a third wave of coronavirus pandemic, in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

pitalisation.

"99.78 per cent Covid beds are vacant in Delhi hospitals while only 0.22 per cent have been occupied. Patients coming to hospitals not requiring oxygen support; 37,000 beds being prepared to stay ahead of the virus," he said.

Kejriwal cited the data of the Delhi State health department and claimed that despite an increase in the number of cases, bed occupancy in hospitals is even less than one per cent and is very low as compared to last year's deadly second wave of coronavirus in April.

"Active Covid-19 cases rose from about 2,000 on December 29, 2021, to 6,000 on January 1, but the number of patients in hospitals dipped during this period. On December 29, 2021, as many as 262 beds were occupied while on January 1 it was 247 only," said Kejriwal, adding, "On March 27 last year, Delhi had 6,600 active cases and 1,150 oxygen beds were occupied. As many as 145 patients were on ventilator compared to five now."

"Currently, the number of active cases in the city is 6,360, and today (Sunday) 3,100 new cases are expected to be reported. All cases are mild and in most of the patients don't need hospitalisation," the CM said.

According to the Delhi Government's database, only 82 oxygen beds have been occupied; most patients recovering at home, "Only 5 patients on the ventilator at present while 231 were on ventilators in April 2021," he added.

Schools, colleges shut, night curfew in Bengal as + ve cases touch 6,153

Offices, metro, local trains, cinema to run at 50 per cent

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal Government on Sunday announced near-lockdown-like curbs after corona positivity rate leaped up to 16 per cent and daily infections count reached 6,153 in the State.

Kolkata accounted for 3,194 new cases, a health department bulletin said. The State had recorded 4,512 Covid-19 cases on Saturday, with the metropolis alone reporting 2,398 of them. The bulletin said eight people died of coronavirus on Sunday, while nine such patients had perished the previous day.

A total of 19,781 people have died of the disease so far, according to the bulletin. West



Bengal State Chief Secretary HK Dwivedi ordered the closure of educational institutions, imposition of night curfew, and shutting down of all tourists spots, gyms, salons, swimming pools, and spas.

The attendance in theatres, cinema halls, and other amusement spots will be half the capacity. Local trains, including

the metro railways, will run with 50 per cent passengers whereas the Government and private offices will work with half their total staff strength.

"In view of rising corona cases, attendance at all government and private offices in the State will be capped at 50 per cent.

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CAPSULE

AI'S H1FY22 NET LOSS RISES OVER 43%

New Delhi: Just before the final procedures of divestment, national carrier Air India's 2021-22 first half (H1FY22) net loss rose over 43 per cent on a year-on-year basis. The airline's net loss rose to ₹5,422.6 crore during the period under review from ₹3,779.26 crore reported for the previous corresponding period.

PM TO LAUNCH PROJECTS IN MANIPUR, TRIPURA

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Manipur and Tripura on Tuesday to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of several development projects in the two States.

YOGI GOVT STOPPING CRIMINALS' GAMES: PM

Meerut: Hitting out at the previous Governments in Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said gangsters and criminals used to play their own games here earlier but the Yogi Adityanath Government now plays "jail-jail" with them.

Contact us if your phone targeted by Pegasus spyware, says SC-appointed body

In ad, panel asks people to contact them by Jan 7

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People who suspect that their mobile phones were targeted using Israeli spyware Pegasus and are willing to cooperate with the investigation can now approach a Supreme Court-appointed committee probing the scandal. In an advertisement in major newspapers, Justice Ravendran panel asked the people to contact them by January 7.

The Pegasus scandal had triggered a controversy last year and the Israeli spyware was believed to have been used to target Opposition politicians, journalists, and Constitutional post-holders,



among others. Among the suspected victims were Rahul Gandhi and several politicians, including Cabinet Ministers, industrialists Anil Ambani, and Judges like Justice Arun Mishra.

The panel has asked citizens who have "reasonable cause to suspect" that his or her mobile phone has been compromised due to "specific usage" of the NSO Group Israel's Pegasus software to contact them.

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Foiled BAT infiltration: Indian Army

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Accusing Pakistan of breaching ongoing ceasefire understanding arrived between the Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs) in February 2021, the Indian Army on Sunday claimed they have foiled an infiltration or BAT action by eliminating a heavily armed intruder along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Keran sector of North Kashmir's Kupwara district.

The Indian Army has also asked the Pakistan Army to take back the body of the intruder. Interestingly, the incident was reported barely hours after both the armies had exchanged packets of sweets on New Year. As per the statement, "An infiltrator, dressed in Pathani suit and black jacket, was detected moving from areas under the control of Pakistan Army across the LoC around 3.00 pm on 1 Jan 21".

Detailed report on P5

Centre defends ₹8L annual income cap for EWS quota in SC

Centre's move ahead of SC hearing in NEET PG admissions case to be held on Jan 6

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing in the NEET postgraduate admissions case to be held on January 6, the Centre has filed an affidavit defending its ₹8 lakh annual income cap for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation.

The apex court is hearing petitions challenging the Centre and Medical Counselling Committee (MCC) July 29 notice providing 10 per cent for the EWS category for NEET admissions. Counselling for NEET postgraduate (PG) and undergraduate (UG) had been stopped by the Centre pending review of the EWS criteria income cap



policy forced by the court.

The Central Government said in the affidavit filed before the Supreme Court that it has decided to stick to the existing criteria of ₹8 lakh annual income limit for determination of EWS with respect to the ongoing admissions to the NEET postgraduate courses. The Government informed that an expert committee constituted by the Government to reassess the criteria suggested that the existing criteria may be continued for ongoing admissions while the revised criteria suggested by the committee may be adopted from the next admission cycle.

Continued on Page 2

Govt blocks Bulli Bai app after political outrage

IT Minister says CERT, police coordinating further action

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After outrage on social media, the Centre has banned the controversial Bulli Bai app. Union Information and Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has said GitHub, the hosting platform, has blocked the user and Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) is coordinating with police for further action.

This after Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi, Asaduddin Owaisi, and Shashi Tharoor termed "Bulli Bai" as "communal targeting", misogynistic, and urged action.

Six months after the derogatory "Sulli Deals" site



surfaced, the new app targeting Muslim women by the name of "Bulli Bai" emerged on January 1, with a number of pictures of women including journalists, social workers, students, and famous personalities, accompanied by derogatory content.

It sparked widespread outrage. Both Delhi and Mumbai police registered cases against the app developer hosted on GitHub. Taking to Twitter, many Muslim women, on Friday, shared screenshots of

their social media photos being shared on GitHub, allegedly allowing users to participate in an 'auction'. The uploading of pictures on the "Bulli Bai" app was similar to the "Sulli Deals" upload in July last year.

Once opened, a Muslim woman's face was randomly displayed as "Bulli Bai". Muslim women with a strong presence on Twitter, including journalists, have been singled out and their photos uploaded.

Continued on Page 2

Yogi playing jail-jail with criminals: Modi at Meerut rally

PM lays sports varsity foundation stone, pays visit to Augharnath temple

PNS ■ MEERUT

The double engine Government of Uttar Pradesh has been consistently taking initiatives to build a world-class sports infrastructure and develop a sports culture in the state unlike previous Governments when mafias and criminals played their tournaments of illegal grabbing of properties, forcing people to flee the State, abandoning their ancestral properties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday.

The Prime Minister came to Meerut from Delhi by road, covering a distance of 75 km in dense fog. Prior to visiting the site of the public meeting at Sargana, Prime Minister Modi offered prayers at Augharnath Temple and also paid homage to the martyrs at Amar Jawan Jyoti.

Modi is the first Prime Minister to visit the Augharnath Temple that played a key role during the revolt of 1857. Also present with him were UP Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya.

The Prime Minister also visited the Swatantrata Museum and interacted with sports persons prior to addressing the rally.

Addressing a huge gathering after laying the foundation stone of Major Dhyan Chand Sports University in Meerut, the Prime Minister said that the previous Governments were too engrossed in their own games to care for sports and sports persons.

"In those days, criminals who passed lewd comments on girls in Meerut had no fear of the law while daughters felt unsafe outside their homes. Today, the situation has changed completely. Yogi is playing 'jail-jail with criminals and mafias. Today, daughters of Meerut are going out freely and making the country

proud in the field of sports," the prime minister remarked.

He added that there had never been a dearth of sports talents in India and all time great hockey player, Major Dhyan Chand was a brilliant example of this as despite being under foreign rule, India could manage to win major hockey tournaments because of him.

"However, previous Governments neglected sports. Besides, there was nepotism, corruption and lack of transparency in selection of players in almost every sport due to which India could not achieve what it should have in the field of sports. We had to wait for decades to win medals", the prime minister said.

According to the prime minister, now talents are spotted in remote villages under Khelo India Khelo programme in order to hone their skills. Stadiums, which existed only in cities, are also being built in villages in order to encourage villagers to play a sport of their choice.

He said that the Major Dhyan Chand Sports University with its world-class facilities would serve as a nurs-



ery for promising talents to blossom into perfect sports persons, adding that Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand were very rich in terms of sporting talents.

The Prime Minister said that the country's future lay in the hands of the youth of the country and that he was confident that India would lead the world in future.

Modi said that Meerut had a special place in the history of India right from the ancient period of Indus Valley Civilization to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, India's first war of independence.

"It's a cultural centre that has cradled freedom fighters. It is a 'kranti nagari' and it will become now a 'khel nagari' with the opening of the university. Our goal is also to achieve self-reliance in production of sports items."

Modi said that the Yogi Government had handed over property ownership papers to 23 lakh people in UP's villages, which would help the youth of the State to get loans in order to start businesses and other ventures. He added that the UP Government had made record payment to the sugar cane farmers and had also set up new sugar mills. He said that a number of steps had been taken to strengthen the rural economy.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the historic performance of sports persons in the Tokyo Olympics and Tokyo Paralympics bore testimony to the Central

Government's concrete steps to promote sports in the country.

Expressing his gratitude to the Prime Minister for naming the university after the great hockey player of yesteryear, Major Dhyan Chand, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the State Government under the guidance of Prime Minister Modi had taken significant steps to promote sports in the state.

"We are working on having a playing field in every village. We are also building stadiums in villages. Besides, we have set up Eklavya Sports Fund to train and prepare sports persons for national and international championships," Yogi remarked.

The Chief Minister said that the State Government had also decided to give government jobs to those sports persons who win medals at major national and international events. He added that the Government would give ₹6 crore and ₹4 crore to those who win gold and silver medals respectively at the Olympics.

Yogi said that Meerut had got sports items under the

One District One Product (ODOP) scheme.

Spread over 91.38 acres, the Major Dhyan Chand Sports University will be built at an estimated cost of ₹700 crore and promote the Uttar Pradesh Government's ongoing mission to build sports culture in the state. The sprawling campus of the university will boast of an indoor stadium, synthetic running track stadium, separate courts for basketball, handball and lawn tennis, hostels for boys and girls with a capacity to accommodate 1,200 students, shopping complex, guest house, gymnasium and a multipurpose hall among others.

The university will have a total of 1,080 seats, including 540 each for men and women. The proposed courses for the university are: physical education, health & applied sports sciences, sports management & technology, sports coaching, sports journalism & mass media & technology and adventure sports. The university will offer a three-year Bachelor in Sports degree course, besides diploma as well as Master's and PhD courses.

Shivpal to contest elections under Akhilesh's leadership

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Shivpal Singh Yadav, the estranged uncle of Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, said that no one could come between chacha and bhatija and he would contest the upcoming elections together under the leadership of Akhilesh Yadav.

"Our aim is to defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party, get a clear majority and form the next government. People have made up their mind," Shivpal Yadav said.

Recently, he patched up with his nephew Akhilesh and decided to contest the assembly polls together.

It was exactly five years back that the family feud in the Yadav clan made national headlines and Shivpal Yadav

formed his own Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia).

Shivpal Yadav, however, evaded the question whether he would contest the poll on the election symbol of Samajwadi Party.

"More than the symbol, it is important to contest the elections together with Akhilesh. We will be putting up a united fight against the BJP. No one should worry about our party symbol as I am and will continue to be a samajwadi. As for the symbol, the decision will soon be taken while sitting together in Lucknow," he said.

Shivpal Yadav said the alliance forged by the Samajwadi Party with small political parties would benefit all of them and there would be no problem in seat sharing with small parties.

"I have worked for decades in the Samajwadi Party and I know how to take everyone along," Shivpal Yadav claimed.

Shivpal Yadav said that the morale of the PSPL cadre was high and they are not disillusioned over their political future over joining hands with the Samajwadi Party. He said tickets would be given only to winnable candidates. He claimed that there was no dissatisfaction and all would be suitably adjusted after the SP led government was formed.

He said no decision had been taken whether his son Aditya Yadav would contest the assembly election. He said there was no dearth of posts for Aditya as he was the chairman of PCF (Pradeshik Cooperative Federation) as well as District Cooperative Bank, Etawah.

2 more held for killing BJP workers, driver in Lakhimpur violence

Lakhimpur Kheri: Two more persons have been arrested in connection with the killing of two BJP workers and a driver during the October 3 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

They were held by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Saturday evening.

With this, six persons have been arrested in connection with FIR number 220 which pertains to the killing of BJP workers Shubham Bajpai and Shyam Sundar Nishad and driver Hariom by an agitated mob after a car ran over four farmers. A journalist was also among the eight killed in the violence.

"Those arrested on Saturday in FIR number 220 were identified as Kawaljeet Singh of Khairatiya village under Tikunia police station

area and Kamaljeet Singh of Babaura under Palia police station," the SIT said in a statement. FIR number 220 invoked several sections of IPC including murder (302).

The other four arrested in this case include Vichitra Singh, Gurvinder Singh, Ranjit Singh and Avtar Singh. All the accused are in jail. Violence had erupted in Lakhimpur Kheri on October 3, 2021, when farmers were protesting the visit of Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya.

Four agitating farmers were run over by a vehicle. Ashish Mishra son of Union minister of state for Home Ajay Misra was arrested in the case. Ajay Misra is currently the MP from Kheri Lok Sabha seat.



Devotees undergo thermal screening as they stand outside Darshani Deodi while on their way to Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, in Reasi district on Sunday morning. At least 12 people were killed and 20 others injured in a stampede at the shrine triggered by a heavy rush of devotees on Saturday

Schools...

From Page 1

All administrative meetings will be conducted via virtual mode," Dwivedi said, adding the "local trains will take in passengers 50 percent of their sitting strength... and local train service (barring staff specials) will run till 7 pm only."

While flights from the UK have already been suspended, the Government also ordered 10 percent RTPCR tests for the air traffic passengers coming from "non-risk" countries. All the passengers will have to undergo a mandatory Rapid Antigen test. Flights from Delhi and Mumbai had been slashed

to twice a week (only on Monday and Friday), the Government said.

"There will be a complete restriction on movement --- except essential services --- between 10 pm and 5 am," the Chief Secretary said adding all large gatherings would be restricted to 200 people. Only 50 people would be allowed in marriage ceremonies while 20 would be allowed for funeral, Government ordered.

The situation was so grim that Calcutta National Medical College --- one of the top Government medical colleges --- saw 48 out of 93 medical staff getting infected, sources said adding at least 39 of the OPD patients were found infected. The Government-run Chittaranjan Sishu Seva Sadan saw 36 medical staff getting infected whereas 24 doctors of R. Ahmed Dental College and Hospital a Government facility were down with corona. Meanwhile, the Opposition parties like the BJP and the Left attacked the Government for delaying the restrictions and allowing "for petty political reasons" mid-night revelry and mass gathering on Christmas night and on New Year Eve allowing corona graph to skyrocket.

Capital problem! India...

From Page 1

Meanwhile, Maharashtra logged 11,877 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, 29 per cent higher than Saturday, with Mumbai registering 8,063 of the fresh infections (27 per cent higher than Saturday). The State saw nine Covid deaths since Saturday.

Maharashtra recorded 50 new cases of the new Omicron variant, most of the cases (38) have been reported from Pune. Mumbai reported one new Omicron case. Maharashtra's overall Omicron count now stands at 510, including 328 cases from Mumbai.

The State, which has logged the highest overall cases in the country, has 42,024 active cases, including 29,819 from Mumbai. Mumbai is one of the major cities besides Delhi that are witnessing a massive surge in coronavirus cases believed to be driven by the Omicron variant.

Over 6 lakh registration for vax of 15-18 yrs age group..

From Page 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 25, 2021, had announced that the vaccination for the age-group 15-18 years is scheduled to begin from Jan 3 while administration of precautionary third dose for the vulnerable categories is to commence from January 10, 2022. As per guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry "all those whose birth year is 2007" or before, shall be eligible.

He said that over 19.81 crore balance and unutilized COVID-19 vaccine doses are presently available with States and Union Territories.

Further, the Ministry informed that more than 152.31 crore (1,52,31,16,865) vaccine doses have been provided to States/UTs so far through the Government of India, free of cost channel, and through direct State procurement category.

Under the Nationwide Covid vaccination drive, 145.44 crore vaccine doses have been administered so far. India's national vaccination programme has been one of the most successful and largest vaccination programmes compared with the many developed western nations with significantly low population base to vaccinate, the official added.

Centre defends ₹8L annual income cap for EWS quota...

From Page 1

Changing the EWS criteria midway will lead to complications, opined the Committee. The Committee recommended the introduction of revised EWS criteria from the next academic year. "The Central government has decided to accept the recommendations of the Committee including the recommendation of applying the new criteria prospectively," said the affidavit of Central Government.

The three-member committee headed by former Revenue Secretary AB Pandey was constituted by the Centre after the Supreme Court had expressed serious reservations about whether any study was conducted at all before fixing the 8 lakh limit for determining EWS.

The current gross annual family income limit for EWS of 8 lakh or less may be retained. In other words, only those families whose annual income is up to 8 lakh would be eligible to get the benefit of an EWS reservation. The definition of 'family' and income would remain the same as those in the OM dated January 17, 2019. EWS may, however, exclude, irrespective of income, a person whose family has 5 acres of agricultural land and above.

However, it concluded that making the above changes during the ongoing admission process may result in inevitable delay and avoidable complications. "When the existing system is ongoing since 2019, no serious prejudice would be caused if it continues for this year as well. Changing the criteria midway is also bound to result in a spate of litigations in various courts across the country by the people/persons whose eligibility would change suddenly," the committee's report said.

Contact us if your phone targeted by Pegasus spyware, says SC-appointed...

From Page 1

Those approaching the panel have been asked to provide "reasons as to why you believe your device may have been infected with Pegasus malware". They should intimate whether they would be in a position to allow the technical committee to examine the device," the committee said.

Such people who suspect her/his device is infected should send an email to the panel at inquiry@pegasus-india-investigation.in before noon of January 7. "In case the committee feels your reasons for suspicion of the device being infected with the malware compel a further investigation, then the committee shall request you to allow examination of your device," the committee said.

It also said the committee will give an acknowledgement for having received the device and also make and give the complainant a digital phone image. The collection point would be in New Delhi and the mobile phone would be delivered back on completion of the investigation.

The Supreme Court had constituted the expert panel to investigate whether the Centre used the Pegasus spyware to snoop on citizens, saying that the government cannot always get a "free pass" by raising the spectre of "national security".

The members of the panel were National Forensic Sciences University's Dean Naveen Kumar Chaudhary, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham's Professor Prabaharan P and IIT-Bombay Professor Ashwin Anil Gumaste.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

E-Tender Notice No.: NER-LJN-GS-NTV-2021-03

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Divisional Manager Office, Lucknow for an on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender from interested eligible parties with a provision of Two packet tender system for repair/redevelop and maintenance of existing/additional facilities at Goods shed at Nautanwa (NTV) of Lucknow Division through Private Investment for period of 10 Years.

E-Tender Notice No.: NER-LJN-GS-NTV-2021-03, Description of Works: Contract for repair/redevelop and maintenance of existing/additional facilities at Goods shed at Nautanwa (NTV) of Lucknow Division through Private Investment for period of 10 Years. Tender Value (in Rs.): ₹ 8,24,01,640/- (Eight crore Twenty four lakh one thousand six hundred forty only), Tender Document Cost (in Rs.): ₹ 10,000/-, Time period: 10 years.

(1) Date & Time for submission of NER-LJN-GS-NTV-2021-03 Tender up to 01-02-2022 at 15:00 Hrs. through online www.treps.gov.in only. Tender will be opened on the same day after 15:00 hrs. (2) All the information related to above tender of Minimum qualification, Term and condition are available on website of Railway www.treps.gov.in Before uploading the e-tender form, Tenderer make sure it is related to the tender to take note of the corrigendum (if any) available on the website.

Divl. Comm. Manager (Comm.) CPRO/Vanjiya-115 Lucknow

About any passenger amenity complaint SMS on Mob. No.: 09794545955

Do not smoke Bid/Cigarette in train.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

THANKSGIVING

Thankyou St jude for all blessings Celine

Thankyou Holy Spirit for all blessings Celine

Thankyou Mother Mary for all blessings Celine

Thankyou St. Expedite for all blessings Celine PD(9130)C

Govt blocks Bulli Bai app after political outrage...

From Page 1

In a tweet late on Saturday evening, Vaishnav said, "GitHub confirmed blocking the user this morning itself. CERT and Police authorities are coordinating further action".

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) is the nodal agency that deals with cyber security threats. He did not elaborate on the action being taken. Vaishnav tweeted: "Govt. Of India is working with police

take cognisance of the offence and take action. Some said they had little faith in Delhi Police acting against the culprits. Delhi Police work under the Union Home Ministry.

"Have spoken to @CPMumbaiPolice and DCP Crime Rashmi Karandikar ji. They will investigate this. Have also spoken to @DGPMaharashtra for intervention. Hoping those behind such misogynistic and sexist sites are apprehended," Chaturvedi had tweeted. "I have repeatedly asked Hon. IT Minister @AshwiniVaishnav ji to take stern action against such rampant misogyny and communal

targeting of women through #sullideals like platforms. A shame that it continues to be ignored," Chaturvedi had tweeted on Saturday.

On July 4, 2021, several reports emerged about an app named 'Sulli Deals' that was created by an unidentified group on a code hosting platform - GitHub. The app displayed a Muslim woman's face and a tagline below it that read "Sulli deal of the day". 'Sulli' is a derogatory term used against women. The app creators would use the photos illegally obtained from the women's social media handles and convince people to take part in the "auction".

Cold wave warning for some Odisha districts announced

Bhubaneswar: The Meteorological Centre here on Sunday issued a cold wave warning for some places in Odisha over the next two days.

A yellow warning, predicting cold wave conditions, has been set for Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sundargarh, and Bolangir, from 8.30 am on Monday till Wednesday morning.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) declares cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to at least 4 degrees

Celsius in the plains, or below 10 degrees Celsius with at least 4.5 notches less than normal.

The forecast came on the day when Kirei in Sundargarh district recorded the lowest minimum temperature of 7.2 degrees Celsius, followed by Daringbadi hill station (8 degrees Celsius), and Keonjhar (9.6 degrees Celsius).

Bhubaneswar recorded a minimum of 14 degrees Celsius while it was 13.2 degrees Celsius in Cuttack, it said.

Delhi's air quality dips to 'very poor'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi air quality deteriorated on Sunday with the overall air quality index (AQI) recorded 381 micrograms per cubic on the National Ambient Air Quality Index (NAAQI).

According to the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), a unit of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), the AQI indicated very poor air quality.

"Prevailing cold wave conditions in the north-west region with moderate winds blowing from west/northwest direction degrade air quality. However, maximum temperature shows a tendency to increase slightly for the next 2 days (3rd, 4th). Mixing layer height continues



to be about 1.0 km. The net effect is likely to keep AQI in 'higher end of Very Poor' for the next 2 days. On 5th, AQI may touch 'severe' due to a likely drop in maximum temperature and consequent reduction in ventilation," SAFAR said in

its short range air quality forecast. Meanwhile, values of Suspended Particulate Matters (SPMs) - Particulate Matters (PM) 10 and 2.5 on NAAQI were recorded at 337 and 225 micrograms per cubic.

FIR registered on journalist's complaint over doctored photos

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has registered an FIR against unknown persons for allegedly uploading a doctored picture of a woman journalist on a website, officials said on Sunday.

The journalist had lodged an online complaint and she shared the copy of the complaint on Twitter.

The case was registered at the Cyber Police station of the southeast district on Saturday night, the police said.

A senior police officer said the case has been registered under sections 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) and 354 A (sexual harassment and punishment for harassment) of the Indian Penal Code on the complaint of the journalist alleging that she is being targeted by an unidentified group of people on "Bulli Bai" portal.

The police said no arrests have been made in the case so far and a probe is underway.

According to the complaint, the woman, who works with an online news portal, sought immediate registration of an FIR and investigation against an unknown set of people who are "seeking to harass and insult Muslim women" on social media.

"I was shocked to find out this morning that a website/portal called bullibai.Github.io (since deleted) had a doctored picture of me in an improper, unacceptable and clearly lewd context. This needs immediate action, as the same is clearly designed to harass me and other similarly situated independent women and journalists," the woman said in the complaint.

"I enclose snapshots of the said tweet directed at me here in as well as of other tweets. The term 'Bulli Bai' itself seems disrespectful and the content of this website/portal (bullibai.Github.io) is clearly aimed at insulting Muslim

women as the derogatory term 'Bulli' is used exclusively for Muslim women and the entire website seems to have been designed with the intent of embarrassing and insulting Muslim women," she added.

Responding on Twitter, the Delhi Police said taking cognizance of the matter, officials concerned have been directed to take appropriate action.

Earlier in July, a case was registered by the Cyber Cell of the Delhi Police after it received a complaint about an unidentified group uploading photos of Muslim women on an app. Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal had said, "Acting on a complaint received on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal regarding 'Sulli Deals' mobile application, a case under section 354-A of the Indian Penal Code has been registered on Wednesday and investigation taken up."

City's transport dept grants one year extension to RTVs

New Delhi: In view of the Covid-19 and lockdown effects, the transport department has granted one year extension to rapid transit vehicles (RTVs) that serve as an important component of last mile connectivity in the city.

This extension will be valid from January 1 to December 31, 2022, a circular from the transport department issued recently, stated.

Owners and unions of mini RTV stage carriage buses had in the last few months made numerous appeals to the department to increase the validity of permits from 10 years to 15 years.

They said these vehicles did not move during the lockdown.

"The request of the mini RTV stage carriage bus owners has been considered by the department and after taking all factors into consideration, mainly lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic being a calamity, the Secretary-Cum-

Commissioner, Transport, is pleased to grant approval for one time extension of permit for mini RTV stage carriage buses for one year only," the document stated.

This extension will be subject to the condition that the total validity of the permit will not stretch beyond 11 years and the vehicle must have valid certificate of fitness (COF) to ply on the road and must fulfill all the conditions under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, it said.

The circular specifically mentioned that the extension of permit is "without prejudice to any claim what so ever for future purposes or any claim towards the permit which has already completed 11 years".

"The said exemption has been granted purely keeping in view the natural calamity faced due to COVID-19 as an administrative policy decision," it stated.

Business Blasters first leg concludes, school students bag investments

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The first leg of Business Blasters, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government's start-up programme concluded on Sunday.

In these episodes, the country witnessed the success stories of students from Delhi Government schools and their businesses.

In the last episode students were seen pitching business ideas to judges, Mekin Maheshwari of Udhyan and Shreyasi Singh of Harappa Education, who were accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, Manish Sisodia.

The first team to go on the floors was Digital Suraksha. Members of this start-up belong to an area where theft is common. With Business Blasters, the team decided to make a shutter alarm

system which not only goes off with a siren when the shutter is moved but also alerts the owner with a phone call. They have aptly called this alarm 'Chor machaye shor'. Wowed by the ideas of the students, the judges invested a grand total of ₹1.75 lakhs in their business with 1 lakh coming from Maheshwari and the rest from Singh.

Rainbow Home Industries was the episode's second team. This start-up, led by girls from Delhi government schools, makes hand-knitted products such as bedspreads, sweaters, and ponchos. They actually started whilst also hiring and training local housewives, who now work on a commission basis with the team to complete the orders. The girls not only managed to get an investment of ₹ 25,000 from Maheshwari but also advanced orders of 40 bedsheets from both

the judges. The judges also offered support to the students to help them connect to NGOs that can get them more hands to work with and sales opportunities.

The Mobility Transformers were the third team. This start-up created a prototype of a low-cost motorised wheelchair in order to provide a solution for the specially abled. They can even personalise the wheelchairs based on the user's requirements. Hospitals and wholesalers have already approached this start-up for orders! The judges were floored by the invention of these government school students and they offered an investment of ₹1.75 lacs to the team with ₹50,000 coming from Singh and the rest from Maheshwari.

Eight episodes of BB saw young entrepreneurs receive over Rs 25 lacs in funding.

Court lambasts Gurugram police for delay in FIR against real estate firm

Gurugram: A Gurugram court lambasted a station house officer (SHO) of a city police station who was appeared before the court on Sunday for replying over delaying an FIR against MGF Development Ltd alleged case of cheating and forgery despite the court order passed on December 30.

The SHO had requested three days to register an FIR against the realty firm as the place of occurrence has not been specified mentioned by the complainant M3M India Pvt. Ltd. and hence no FIR was registered by him.

Meanwhile, the court again strictly directed the SHO to submit the copy of FIR on or before January 3 at 1 PM. and also direct the police commissioner to ensure compliance with the court order.

The court also observed that the complaint placed the copy of the E-mail forwarded by them to the commissioner of police, Gurugram. "This shows that the commissioner of police, Gurugram has complete knowledge that the court has passed an order dated December 30 but despite that no FIR has been lodged by

SHO city, Gurugram."

In connection with the matter, M3M India Pvt Ltd filed a complaint of Rs 88 fraud alleged against MGF on December 28.

The company had filed a petition in the court against MGF Development Ltd, its directors and others for cheating.

A spokesperson of MGF Development Ltd could not be reached for comment.

The complainant stated that they had agreed to develop a parcel of land of the accused of residential, commercial, retail, entertainment, mixed land use and recreational project and as per a cooperation agreement, Rs 88 crore as a security deposit in 2016 had been paid.

The complainant alleged that the accused persons delayed starting the work and in December 2021, they found that the accused had sold the land to some other party. "We had moved an application for contempt proceedings against the concerned police officers as they were not registering an FIR despite the orders of the court," Kuldeep Yadav, counsel for the complainant, said.

City witnesses rise in power demand in 2021 after a dip in 2020

New Delhi: Delhi's peak power demand surged to 7,323 MW in 2021, only a shade lower than the all-time high of 7,409 MW in 2019 but considerably higher than the corresponding demand of 6,341 MW in 2020, official statistics on power demand in the national capital reveal.

Power distribution companies officials attribute this demand for power in the capital to a devastating second wave of COVID-19 and adverse weather conditions for a prolonged period here. On a day-to-day basis, Delhi saw a rise in power demand on 227 days of 2021 compared to similar days of 2020, implying that on 61 per cent days of 2021, Delhi needed higher power than what was needed in 2020.

The national capital did not experience only cold waves at the beginning and end of the year but also witnessed an intense monsoon that persisted till late October. The city recorded 1,512.4 mm of rainfall till December 29, the second-highest ever.

"It was a year of



extreme weather events and records being broken in the capital each month this year. This, along with the Covid related restrictions and their easing had an impact on the city's power demand," Discom officials said. In 2021, Delhi's peak power demand was higher on 227 days compared to 2020, officials said, adding this implied, in percentage terms, Delhi's peak power demand in 2021 was higher on 61 per cent of days, compared to the corresponding days of 2020. A month-wise analysis shows that Delhi's peak power demand in

December 2021 was higher on 58 per cent or 18 corresponding days vis-a-vis those of December 2020. For November 2021, it was higher on 50 per cent days, 58 per cent in days in October, 20 per cent in September, 68 per cent in August, 68 per cent in July, 77 per cent June, 65 per cent in May, 93 per cent in April, 77 per cent in March, 36 per cent in February and 74 per cent days in January, they said.

Delhi's peak power demand during 2021 was 7,323 MW, 6,431 MW in 2020 and an all-time high of 7,409 MW in 2019. The highest peak

power demand recorded in December 2021 was 4,685 MW which was higher than the 4,671 MW recorded on December 30, 2020. The peak demand in December crossed 4,000 MW on 16 occasions during the month, discom officials added.

Ensuring reliable supply in any season is as much the function of proper power arrangements as also the forecast of accurate demand and a robust distribution network, they said.

The back-bone of BSES' power-supply arrangements during the winter months includes long-term agreements from power plants, including Hydro and Delhi-based gas-fuelled generating stations, said a BSES spokesperson.

Additionally, BSES is also receiving over 440 MW of solar power from SECI, 250 MW of wind power, nearly 25 MW from Waste-to-Energy generation. It is also being helped by over 118 MW of roof-top solar power panels installed in South, West, East and Central Delhi, he added.

DU allocates ₹10 cr for its centenary celebrations

New Delhi: The Delhi University has allocated ₹10 crore for its centenary celebrations and has plans to bring out a coffee table book to mark the occasion.

The university development fund committee, comprising former pro vice-chancellor Professor PC Joshi and Registrar Vikas Gupta, in its report stated that the occasion should be commemorated in a grand way. The panel has decided to allocate ₹10 crore from the fund.

"The committee noted and took on record that the University of Delhi would be completing 100 years of glorious service to the nation in May 2022. The university has grown from strength to strength since its inception in the pre-independence era in 1922. The committee endorsed the decision of the university to commemorate and celebrate the occasion in a grand way," the report said. It has been decided to allocate "an amount of Rs 10 crore for expenditure to be incurred on the centenary year celebrations of the university", it said. The recommendations of the committee were accepted by the Executive Council, the highest decision making body of the varsity, in its meeting held on December 17.

The centenary celebrations will commence from May 1 and the varsity has planned several events in a year-long celebration that will cul-



minate on May 1 next year. "The university has plans to bring out a coffee table book on the occasion which will contain old photographs right from the time the varsity came into existence. There are also plans to felicitate its former vice-chancellors too. How the plans will pan out will depend on the COVID-19 situation at the time," a senior official said. In 2011, Delhi University vice-chancellor Yogesh Singh had said there will be constructive events to mark the occasion.

"While celebrating the centenary year, we, at the University of Delhi and its constituent and affiliated colleges, forming an integral part of the university community, may envisage programmes and constructive events which create ample memorable moments for all of us to rejoice not only during the centenary year but also for the next century as well," Singh wrote in his New Year message on Saturday.

Delhi Police assures HC of security to liquor vend

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has assured the Delhi High Court that adequate security would be provided to a liquor vend and its employees, "ingress and egress", and no interference would be caused in its functioning by some people protesting outside the outlet.

Demonstrations are being held outside several liquor vends across the city to protest against their opening near residential areas or in vicinity of religious places and educational institutions. The police made the submission during the hearing on a petition by the liquor shop's owner who sought a direction to authorities to take adequate steps so that the business could be run without any hindrance from "unlawful" protestors sitting outside the shop and damaging it. Noting the stand of the police, Justice Rekha Palli disposed of the petition saying no further orders are called for. "It is clarified that this order will, however, be subject to the continued validity of the liquor

license in favour of the petitioner," the court said.

The Delhi government's standing counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi and advocate Arun Panwar, representing the State and Delhi Police, assured that the concerned SHO of the area will ensure adequate security is provided to the petitioner and its employees for ingress and egress to the liquor vend. The counsel further assured the court that steps will be taken to ensure that no interference is caused in the smooth functioning of the liquor vend.

Petitioner Universal Distributors, running a liquor vend at Ambe Garden Extension, Libas Pur here, said it has a valid liquor licence and is seeking direction to the authorities to provide adequate security. The petitioner's counsel said they have made various representations to the SHO of the Samaypur Badli police station seeking adequate security for the petitioner and its employees for ingress and egress to the liquor vend but no action has been taken till date.



A family sits near a small fire to warm themselves on a cold winter morning in New Delhi on Sunday

Delhi Police solves 68 missing person cases pending for past 20 years

New Delhi: Under its operation "Talash", the Delhi Police in the north district checked for unsolved cases of the past 20 years for a fresh effort to trace missing people and 68 such cases have been worked out in the last two months, officials said on Sunday.

The operation was started by the north district on November 1, 2021 and under it, the Delhi Police claimed to have reunited over 60 such missing people in the last two months from different parts of the country, including the national capital.

According to data, among 68 cases, 22 were related to minors and 46 were of adults. There were 20 men and 48 women. There were 22 cases of kidnapping and abduction and 46 of missing, the data said. Most of the people were reunited from Delhi 59 followed by Punjab four and one each from Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Noida (UP) and West Bengal, the data showed.

"We checked the unworked out cases of the last 20 years for a fresh effort to trace the missing people. We wanted to try one more time to trace out and reunite the missing person. We got to know that in 124 cases, the people were traced and reunited, but police were not informed about it," Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) Sagar Singh Kalsi said.

"Among 68 other cases, the maximum were from 2021 followed by 2020 and there were one case each of 2014 and 2015," he said. Kalsi said there were also eight to 10 complaints from other districts received and they have also been worked out. In December, a 39-year-old mentally unstable man, who came to Ambala in Haryana from Bihar around eight years ago and later reached the national capital, was reunited with his family, the police said.

In another case, keen to see Delhi, especially its historic monuments, a 12-year-old boy cycled 26 km from his home in Uttam Nagar to reach the Red Fort, only to later realise that he had forgotten his way back home.

Calling Omicron natural vaccine a dangerous notion: Experts

It doesn't take long Covid into account

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The notion that Omicron is a "dangerous idea" spread by irresponsible people who don't take into account "long Covid" about which very little is understood, experts have said.

The Omicron variant of

Covid-19, which is said to be much more infectious than the other variants, is, however, causing milder infections, less hospitalisation and deaths which is leading to the notion that it can act as a natural vaccine. Recently, a Maharashtra health official also claimed that Omicron will act as a natural vaccine and may help in

Covid-19's progression towards the endemic stage.

Noted virologist Shahid Jameel, the former head of the advisory group to the Indian SARS-COV-2 Genomics Consortia (INASACOG), said those who advocate this don't take into account "long Covid" about which very little is understood. "Especially in India, where malnutrition, air pollution and diabetes are rampant, to willingly let people be exposed to a virus about which you understand little is not good science and public



health," he said, as per a news agency.

Giridhara R Babu, the head

of Lifecourse Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India, urged people to stay

away from this misinformation, saying there have been deaths and hospitalisations due to the Omicron variant.

"Compared to vaccination, natural infection cannot protect the population (against death or hospitalisation) against any variant (Alpha, Beta, Gamma or Delta). Proponents of herd immunity are saying it again that Omicron would provide herd immunity. Evidence matters, not opinions," he said.

Shuchin Bajaj, founder-director, Ujala Cygnus Group

of Hospitals, cautioned about the long term effects of the disease.

"It has been shown that it can be seen persisting for more than six months in various other organs in addition to lungs, like heart and brain and kidneys etc, even after very mild infections. So we don't really know what long term effects it can cause. We are already seeing a lot of long COVID patients with brain fogging, inappropriate sinus tachycardia," he said as per the news agency.

Nadda to visit Bengal on Jan 9 to sort out internal tussle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As BJP's sharp political conflict with the Trinamool Congress goes on unabated and the party cadre turn restless, the BJP national president JP Nadda is to visit the State on January 9 to address the newly formed state executive and to sort out internal differences.

The two-day tour to West Bengal is significant as Municipal corporation elections in Bidhan Nagar, Chandannagar, Asansol and Siliguri are to be held on January 22.

Post-Assembly elections, TMC has poached many BJP MLAs who have moved back to Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee. TMC has further fortified itself by winning all bypolls in the state and thereby sentout a message to those who went to the BJP before TMC's Assembly victory.

The BJP state unit has been coping with internal dissensions over appointments and other issues.

According to party leaders, Nadda is visiting the state to assure the BJP unit of full backing by the central leadership and also to set discipline among leaders.

The BJP president would work out a fresh political programme with the state leaders to counter TMC and to give a morale booster to the party workers who are being intimidated by the ruling party, they said.

TMC emerged as the largest party in the recently concluded Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections, gaining victory in 134 out of a total 144 wards of the local body.

BJP ran second in the polls, winning in only three wards. Left and Congress won two wards each.

Naidu visits desi aircraft carrier Vikrant

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the first indigenously designed and built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant is undergoing rigorous sea trials prior to its likely induction into the Navy in August this year, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu visited the ship on Sunday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to dedicate the aircraft carrier to the nation in August.

The Cochin Shipyard Limited is building this ship and Naidu was briefed on the uniqueness of the project and progress of construction. He was also briefed about efforts being made towards ship's delivery and commissioning prior August 2022 to commemorate 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

The Vice President was appreciative of the nation's capability in designing and constructing an Aircraft Carrier and lauded it as a shining example of our quest for 'Atma Nirbharta' or self-reliant India, navy officials said here.

Underlining the need for an aircraft carrier, they said the Indian Navy is a formidable resident maritime power in the Indian Ocean Region and the Aircraft Carrier Battle



Group remains central to its concept of operations.

Vikrant will provide the Indian Navy with the requisite flexibility, mobility, reach and combat power in pursuance of national interests and also serve as a strong catalyst for peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

An Aircraft Carrier also holds a position of strategic and technological eminence, and is rightly considered the pinnacle in the domain of warship design and construction. With the construction of Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, India will

enter into select band of countries having niche indigenous capability for designing and building of an Aircraft Carrier. At present, India has one Russian made aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya.

The Indian shipbuilding industry has come a long way since the 1960s with Vikrant being the hallmark of India's indigenous industrial capability. The indigenous content in construction of the ship is close to 76% of overall project cost of Rs 19,341 Crores.

The ship has large number of indigenous materials such as

steel, besides other equipment and systems manufactured by Indian industrial houses and about 100 MSMEs. The indigenous construction of the carrier has generated employment opportunities not only within the shipyard but also for many other industries supporting the project externally.

This has resulted in a "plough back" effect on the domestic economy. Close to 2,000 shipyard and 13,000 non-yard personnel have been employed per annum towards construction of the aircraft carrier.

During the visit, Naidu was accompanied by Governor of Kerala Arif Mohammed Khan, Chief of Staff Southern Naval Command Rear Admiral Antony George, Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) chief Madhu S Nair, and other senior officials of Navy.

The Vice President was briefed about the contribution of the indigenous technologies and capabilities during the walk around of the carrier and he expressed satisfaction and appreciated the efforts of the Indian Navy and Cochin Shipyard towards strengthening our Indigenous warship building capabilities. He also expressed satisfaction at the progress of work made so far despite COVID related imponderables.

Later, Naidu visited Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and unveiled Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Memorial. He also laid the foundation stone of a Towed Array Integration Facility and handed over an Automated Sonar Trainer to the Navy.

Naidu is on a three-day visit to Kerala and arrived at Kochi Naval airport on Sunday morning, after his tour of Lakshadweep.

Taliban issue guidelines to rein in unruly armed cadres

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Taliban has issued a set of stringent guidelines to rein in unruly armed cadres and inculcate a sense of discipline in their ranks. The violation of some provision of the guidelines can lead to shooting dead the violator or put them behind bars.

According to the guidelines, shoot at sight orders have been issued for irresponsible behavior displayed by an operative of the ruling Taliban, firing in the air has been banned and any operative will not be allowed to move around without a valid identity card, sources said.

In addition, no Islamic slogan or photograph should be displayed on the vehicles of the Taliban member. The Taliban armed cadres have also been

advised against any involvement in traffic accident dispute intervention. Armed cadres cannot check documents of citizens or drivers, they said.

The Taliban members have also been asked to refrain from going to areas beyond their respective jurisdiction with guns. In case, any Taliban member is found to be loitering in areas beyond his operational jurisdiction, he will be jailed. Only identity cards issued by the National Intelligence Directorate, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence and a national identity card will be valid for identification of armed cadres. Any armed person without one of these identity cards will be shot dead, they further said.

The Taliban armed cadres have also been directed against

harassing Czech citizens or checking their identity cards.

"The move has been dictated by reports of several incidents of unruly behaviour by the armed cadres of the outfit, denting the image of the Taliban. The Taliban was also compelled to issue the guidelines as a number of armed cadres have been reported to be indulging in unauthorized house searches and extortion, leading to lawlessness and avoidable disenchantment against the outfit amongst the general public," counter-terrorism expert Dr Rituraj Mate told *The Pioneer*.

Strict enforcement of the guidelines is also aimed at establishing a semblance of governance on the ground and an image makeover of the Taliban in the eyes of the international community, Dr Mate added.

PM to visit Manipur, Tripura tomorrow

To gift many development projects to poll-bound States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit poll-bound Manipur besides Tripura on Tuesday to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of 22 Developmental Projects worth over Rs 4800 crore in Imphal and thereafter, to inaugurate the new Integrated Terminal Building at Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport at Agartala.

He will also launch two key development initiatives.

Security has been beefed-up in the region with the Border Security Force enhancing its vigil on the borders in view of the Prime Minister's visit.

In Manipur, the Prime Minister will inaugurate 13

Projects worth around Rs. 1850 crores and lay the foundation stone of 9 projects worth around Rs 2950 crore.

These projects relate to road Infrastructure, Drinking Water Supply, Health, Urban Development, Housing, Information Technology, Skill Development, Art and Culture, among others.

The Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of construction of five National Highway Projects to be built at a cost of more than Rs 1700 crore. The construction of these highways with a cumulative length of more than 110 kilometres, will be a major step to improve the road connectivity of the region.

Another important infra-



structure that will enhance seamless year-round connectivity to Silchar from Imphal and reduce traffic congestion, is the construction of Steel Bridge built over Barak River on NH-37 built at a cost of over Rs 75 crore.

In health sector, Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of 'State of the Art Cancer Hospital' in Imphal worth around Rs. 160 crore on PPP basis.

To boost the Covid related infrastructure in the State, the

Prime Minister will inaugurate '200 Bedded Covid Hospital at Kiyamgei' which has been set up at a cost of about Rs. 37 crore in collaboration with DRDO.

Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for construction of Manipur Institute of Performing Arts at Gurgaon, Haryana. The idea of such a cultural institute of Manipur in Haryana was first mooted in 1990 but it could not materialize for the last many years.

The institute will be built at a cost of more than Rs 240 crore and will promote the rich art and culture of the state. Further strengthening the rich cultural heritage of the state, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the refurbished and renovated Govindajee Temple at Imphal.

He will also inaugurate the INA complex at Moirang that will showcase the significant role played by Indian National Army in India's Independence

Movement, according to the Prime Minister's office.

To strengthen the handloom industry in the State, Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of two projects worth Rs. 36 crore namely, 'Mega Handloom Cluster' at NongpokKakching in Imphal East District helping 17,000 workers.

In Tripura, Modi will inaugurate the New Integrated Terminal Building of Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport and launch key initiatives: Mukhyamantri Tripura Gram Samrididhi Yojana and Project Mission 100 of Vidyajyoti Schools.

New Integrated Terminal Building of Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport, built at a cost of about Rs 450 crore, is a state of art building spread over 30,000 square metres having modern facilities and supported by the latest IT network integrated system. Eom

Civil Aviation Ministry releases aero sports policy draft

It will help promote aero sports culture in country, seeks comments from public till Jan 31

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In good news for aero sports enthusiasts in the country, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has come out with a draft of National Aero Sports Policy-2022 and sought comments from the public till January 31. This will help to promote aero sports culture in the country.

The new policy would enable Bir-Billing in Himachal Pradesh, Gangtok in Sikkim, Hadapsar in Maharashtra, or Vagamon in Kerala to be declared as 'central zone' for all sports. Besides, there is a possibility that Ranikhet in Uttarakhand, Nandi Hills in Karnataka, Kamshet in Maharashtra, Yelagiri in Tamil Nadu and Shillong in Meghalaya can also emerge as major paragliding hubs in the country.

This would also ensure hassle free flying by air sports enthusiasts without creating any risk to national security or safety of other manned aircraft. This is the first time that the ministry is planning to formulate a national air sports policy as well as set up an apex

body for air sports, and aims to make India one of the top air sports nations by 2030.

The draft policy has included aerobatics, aeromodelling, amateur-built and experimental aircraft, ballooning, drones, gliding, hang gliding and paragliding, micro-lighting and paramotoring, skydiving and vintage aircraft. The new draft policy came days after a parliamentary standing committee on transport, tourism and culture expressed its displeasure that the government was not doing enough to encourage aero sports in the country.

As per the draft report, the government may consider encouraging domestic manufacturing of certain high value air sports equipment by way of a Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme. The incentive may be linked to value addition in India. The plan is to promote air sports by making it "safe, affordable, accessible, enjoyable and sustainable", according to the ministry. Domestic design, development and manufacturing of air sports equipment will be promoted in line with the



Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, it mentioned. Under the policy, an Air Sports Federation of India (ASFI) will be established as the apex governing body while associations for each air sport will handle day to day activities.

The policy requires all people and entities providing air sports services to register as members of the respective air sports associations. They will also have to register the key equipment used for air sports with the respective air sports association.

The draft has been prepared by a committee comprising senior officials from the Union government, Indian armed forces, Aero Club of India, National Cade Corps and air sports experts. The youth of India represent the future of air sports. Programs

aimed at raising interest towards air sports and a career in air sports will be encouraged. Schools, colleges and universities will be encouraged to have air sports included in their curriculum. Students will be encouraged to participate in Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI)'s international competitions conducted periodically for children in different age categories. Aero modelling and drone sports will be promoted at schools and NCC.

The air sports associations will be accountable to ASFI with respect to the regulatory oversight. Further, ASFI shall represent India at FAI and other global platforms related to air sports. The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland is the

world governing body for air sports. "The vision is to make India one of the top air sports nations by 2030," the ministry said.

An airspace map of India published on aviation regulator, Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) DigitalSky platform, segregates the airspace of India into red, yellow and green zones, which will allow air sports practitioners to rely on this easily accessible map for guidance. Operation in red and yellow zones requires permission from Central Government and the concerned Air Traffic Control authority respectively. Operation in green zones for aircraft with all-up weight up to 500 kg does not require any permission.

A parliamentary standing committee on transport, tourism and culture headed by T G Venkatesh in its recent report, presented in Parliament has expressed its displeasure that the government was not doing enough to encourage aero sports in the country despite the fact that there is a tremendous potential in the country keeping in view the diverse scenic locales. The report said it was "disappointed" to note that a mere token allocation of Rs one crore was made for the 'development of aero sports'.

WhatsApp banned 1.75 mn Indian accounts in Nov, '21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

WhatsApp banned 1,759,000 Indian accounts while 602 grievance reports were received between November 1, 2021- to November 30, 2021.

In its compliance report, WhatsApp said 17,59,000 Indian accounts were banned in November. WhatsApp also said it has received 602 user reports, spanning across account support (149), ban appeal (357), other support (21), product support (48) and safety (27) during November 2021.During this period, 36 accounts were "actioned" under the ban appeal category based on the reports received.Taking action denotes either banning an account or a previously banned account being restored as a result of the complaint.

The Facebook-owned messaging platform, in its latest report stated that more than 95% of bans are due to the unauthorised use of automated or bulk messaging (spam). Over 2 million Indian accounts were banned by WhatsApp, while 500 grievance reports were received by the messaging platform in October.

"WhatsApp is an industry leader in preventing abuse,



among end-to-end encrypted messaging services. Over the years, we have consistently invested in Artificial Intelligence and other state-of-the-art technology, data scientists and experts, and in processes, in order to keep our users safe on our platform," the spokesperson said.

Previously, the Facebook-owned company had stated that more than 95% of bans are due to the unauthorised use of automated or bulk messaging (spam).

WhatsApp explained that "Accounts Actioned" denotes reports where it took remedial action. Also, reports may have been reviewed but not included as 'Actioned' for many reasons, including the user needing assistance to access their account or use some features, user-requested restoration of a banned account and

the request is denied, or if the reported account does not violate the laws of India or WhatsApp's Terms of Service.

The new IT rules—which came into effect in May—require large digital platforms (with over 5 million users) to publish compliance reports every month, mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken.

Previously, WhatsApp had emphasised that being an end-to-end encrypted platform, it has no visibility into the content of any messages. Besides the behavioural signals from accounts, it relies on available unencrypted information, including user reports, profile photos, group photos and descriptions as well as advanced AI tools and resources to detect and prevent abuse on its platform, it had said.

Will give ₹20L credit to youths in Goa: TMC-MGP

Allaince says if voted to power, it will allow youth to avail credit facility up to ₹20L

Panaji: The TMC-MGP alliance in Goa on Sunday said youngsters will be provided with a credit facility up to ₹20 lakh sans any collateral if the two parties are voted to power in the Assembly elections, due next month.

Under the 'Yuva Shakti Card' scheme, youths can avail of a credit facility up to Rs 20 lakh with four per cent annual interest. Those who will avail of this card will not be required to provide any collateral to the bank as the government will stand as guarantor for them, said Trinamool Congress Party (TMC) leader Yatish Naik.

TMC leaders Churchill Alemao, Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco and Kiran Kandolkar, and Maharashtra Gomantak

Party (MGP) leader Sudin Dhavalikar were present on the occasion.

"This scheme will be implemented if the TMC-MGP alliance is voted to power. This scheme will help youngsters to either be gainfully employed or to start a new business," Naik said.

He said the new government will tie up with financial institutions, and the difference between the actual interest rate and the four per cent rate would be borne by the government.

"This credit facility will help youth for skill-oriented learning, launching a start-up or upgrading business," he said.

Naik said that the people in the 18-45 age group can apply, irrespective of their annual income, for the 'Yuva Shakti Card'.

According to Naik, this scheme will put an annual burden of Rs 350 crore to Rs 1,100 crore on the state exchequer, which he said is achievable. **PTI**

Vaishno Devi shrine board meeting held

L-G review factors leading to stampede, takes steps on safety of pilgrims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A day after 12 pilgrims were killed and 16 others received injuries in the stampede in the cave shrine of Mata Vaishno devi Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday chaired a special meeting of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) at Raj Bhavan, wherein several important decisions were taken to ensure safety of the pilgrims.

The Lt Governor, who is also the Chairman of SMVDSB, critically reviewed the causative factors leading to the stampede incident and the various steps taken immediately thereafter by the management of Shrine Board.

The board was briefed by the CEO Shrine Board that 35,000 pilgrims were allowed to proceed for the Yatra on December 31 and January 01 as against the National Green Tribunal's cap of 50,000 a day, keeping in view the pandemic.

Instead of sending out a stern message and fixing the accountability of the erring officials the Board appreciated the commendable post-incident efforts of Shrine Board, District Administration and



Police personnel towards the quick rescue and timely shifting of injured to Shrine Board's Hospital at Kakryal. The Board felt that as a consequence of these efforts, a number of lives were saved.

After the meeting the Board directed the Chief Executive Officer, Shrine Board for taking urgent action on diverse fronts including effective crowd management, augmentation of infrastructure, making booking of yatra 100% through online mode; working out plans for decongestion of the entire track, particularly the Bhawan area, separation of entry and exit routes at Bhawan.

The Lt Governor also emphasized on appropriate use

of technology and putting in place RFID Tracking system for effective crowd and queue management. The Lt Governor advised for roping in technical experts and adopting best crowd management practices.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Ashok Bhan; Justice (Retd) S.K. Sharma; Sh K.K. Sharma; K.B Kachru and Vijay Dhar- Members of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, and Ramesh Kumar, Chief Executive Officer, SMVDSB.

Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary and Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor were special invitees to the meeting.

While reviewing the status of release of compensation amount to the victims, the Board decided to provide an additional amount of Rs 5 lakhs each to the next of kin of the pilgrims who lost their lives in the unfortunate tragic incident. An ex-gratia of Rs 10 lakhs was already announced by the Lt Governor on January 01.

The Board directed the CEO for making concerted efforts towards early implementation of the Master Plan for the Bhawan area in a phased manner strictly in accordance to the timelines and also reiterated for expediting construction work and early completion of Durga Bhawan for

Probe panel asks people to submit videos of shrine

Jammu: A high-powered committee, constituted to probe the stampede at the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, has appealed to the general public to share videos, if any, or record statements about the incident that took place on Saturday.

The public notice was issued by Jammu Divisional Commissioner Raghav Langer, who is one of the members of the committee constituted by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to probe the incident.

"It is for the information of the general public that any person who desires to furnish any facts, statements, electronic evidence etc. Regarding the incident (stampede) may share the same," the notice read. **PTI**

the pilgrims.

Directions were issued for carrying out required improvisations in 2nd and 3rd Phase of

Master Plan to take care of all foreseen challenges. The Board discussed the modalities for suspension bridge and skywalk for effective queue management, besides identifying more halting spots to cater to large crowds at Bhawan and Katra.

The Board also considered various suggestions for making requisite improvements that can be carried out to safeguard against similar mishaps in future.

Discussions were also held on exploring possibilities of ropeway from Katra for the aged and infirm pilgrims.

The CEO was asked to consider resumption of the token/group number system that was discontinued six years ago. The Board also directed for early undertaking of an exercise for critically examining the safety audit of physical infrastructure and fire safety at main Bhawan, shopping complex and other important areas. The Members of the Shrine Board will monitor the implementation of directions and works to be undertaken.

The meeting ended with two minutes of silence, praying for the pilgrims who lost their lives in the stampede.

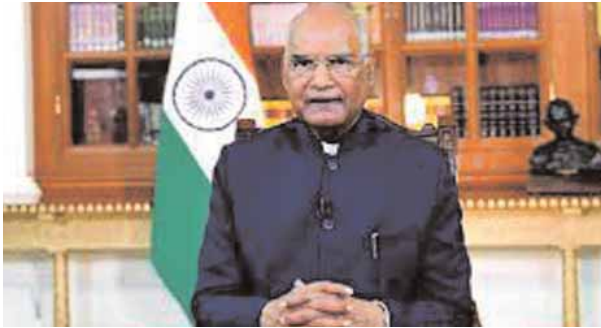
Prez humiliated on his Kerala visit: BJP

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

More than a week after President Ram Nath Kovind paid an official visit to Thiruvananthapuram, a controversy has broken out in the State that the First Citizen of the Nation was humiliated by the CPI(M)-led Kerala Government.

The President unveiled a statue of G N Panikkar, the father figure of Kerala's Library Movement on December 24, 2021. Though he had no official functions to attend to after this event, he had to stay in the Raj Bhavan for a day as the Kerala Government developed cold feet in the eleventh hour to award the First Citizen with a DLitt degree.

There were two more incidents allegedly because of official apathy that cast shadows over the President's State visit. The car of Arya Rajendran, Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, created a stir as she drove into the cavalcade of



the President in her bid to be part of the entourage. Similarly, no water was provided in the rest room earmarked for the President at the venue where he unveiled the statue of Panikkar.

The Pioneer was told by sources in General Administration Department of the State that Governor Arif Mohammed Khan in his capacity as Chancellor of the Kerala University had told Vice Chancellor V P Mahadevan Pillai that the President should be awarded an honorary DLitt degree. The Vice Chancellor

reportedly agreed it on the spot but Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his cabinet colleagues shot down the plan in the eleventh hour because of the President's past link with the RSS. The CPI(M) had declared on each and every occasion that it can never compromise on its declared enmity towards the RSS.

The mix-up in connection with the DLitt is being used by the BJP to put the CPI(M) government in a spot. Minister of State for external affairs V Muraliedharan charged on

Sunday that the CPI(M) humiliated the First Citizen who is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces because of his Harijan origin.

But Leader of the Opposition V D Satheeshan is on record blaming the Governor for the faux pas. "The Governor has no right to summon the Vice Chancellor and order him to honour anybody with honorary degrees like DLitt. I am in the same page with the CPI(M) over this issue," said the Leader of the Opposition.

But by Sunday, more beans seem to have spilled out of the cupboards of the State's higher educational institutions when it was revealed by at least ten students pursuing post graduation in Kannur University has not passed their graduate examinations. The new charge comes at a time when Kerala and Calicut Universities are faced with charges of awarding PhD degrees to students who plagiarized research papers of scholars from other universities.

TV serial 'Marimayam' evokes laughter, introspection in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A mirror held towards the Kerala society, images of which make viewers laugh at themselves and force them to introspect is what Marimayam, a comedy serial being aired by Manorama TV channel does. The crew describe the work as a big laughter on small issues. Marimayam is the trend setter in Malayalam TV channels.

This serial, an exception to the run-of-the mill stuff being beamed by other satellite channels, occupies the prime position in an average Malayalee's life and has become the numero uno programme in Malayalam. It has completed more than 500 episodes and continues to remain the best TV programme in Malayalam television.

The script is based on social issues faced by the State's population. The story line focusses on people who frequent village offices, taluk offices, electricity board offices,

police stations, government-run hospitals and local body offices and how the people manning these establishments behave in a callous and indifferent manner to the customers. "Make life difficult to others and that is our brief," say characters portraying village officers, revenue board officials and the likes.

Though the cast is sans of any big or popular names from Malayalam film industry, artists in Marimayam have become household names. Sathyaseelan, Koya, Moidu, Mandodari, Manmathan, Seethalan, Valsala madam, Syamala, Unni and Sugathan portray the average Malayali and their small big worlds.

"There is no pre-written scripts and dialogues. We ourselves develop the story line through discussions among us. The only directive is that the dialogues should be neat, clean and free of anything that is obscene," said Pattambi

Manikantan who portrays Sathyaseelan.

Most Malayalam serials and all comedy shows stand out for the stream of vituperative dialogues and words with double meanings. Marimayam's production team has not resorted to that route in any of its 500 episodes. "It could be the reason why the programme has become popular," said Thiruvalla based Bindu Sajiv, an avid Marimayam watcher though she is not yet to get addicted to aerials.

The dilemma and helplessness faced by prison authorities who are forced to dance to the whims and fancies of prisoners serving imprisonment for goonda activities have been vividly portrayed in an episode. The political masters who rule the Department of Home force prison officials to function as the servants of the goondas. The message is conveyed without hurting any political parties.

Armed intruder eliminated at LoC

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Accusing Pakistan of breach- ing ongoing ceasefire understanding arrived between the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO's) in February 2021, the Indian Army on Sunday claimed they have foiled an infiltration or BAT action by eliminating a heavily armed intruder along the Line of control in the Keran sector of North Kashmir's Kupwara district.

The Indian army has also asked the Pakistan Army to take back the body of the intruder via 'hotline communication'.

Interestingly, the incident was reported barely hours after both the armies had exchanged packets of sweets on

the occasion of New Year 2022 on Saturday. "In a complete breach of the ongoing ceasefire understanding between the two armies across the line of control, an infiltration or BAT action was attempted in the Keran Sector of Kupwara district on 01 Jan. Swift action by the troops deployed at the Line of Control foiled the bid and eliminated the terrorist", the Indian army said in a written statement. As per the statement, "an infiltrator, dressed in Pathani suit and black jacket, was detected moving from areas under the control of Pakistan Army across the Line of Control at around 3.00 p.m on 01 Jan 21". "Ambushes were laid along likely routes that could be adopted by the intruder and movement was fol-



lowed till 4.00 p.m. The ambush was sprung at the opportune moment and the infiltrator eliminated. The body of the slain infiltrator was recovered along with one AK 47 and a large quantity of ammunition including seven grenades", the senior army

officer told reporters.

The intruder was later identified as Mohd Shabir Malik, a Pakistani national, equipped with weapons, ammunition and warlike stores. The incident site, located on the Pakistani side of the Anti Infiltration Obstacle System, was kept

under surveillance by the Indian Army to effectively counter any nefarious activity by the infiltrators or Pakistan Army.

The Indian army is carrying out surveillance of the area to prevent any exploitation of the bad weather conditions prevailing in the area. According to a senior Army officer the route adopted by the terrorist was similar to the one adopted on 04 Apr 20 during Op Rangadori Bhaikh in which five terrorists were eliminated.

The Indian army has also recovered a Pakistani National identity card and vaccination certificates (issued by the Ministry of National Health Services Regulation & Coordination Government of Pakistan) identifying him as Mohd Shabir Malik.

Pune to give 10K vax doses to teens between 15-18 today

Pune: A total of 10,000 Covaxin doses will be administered to teens in the 15-18 age group in Pune city at 40 locations under the COVID-19 vaccination drive that will begin for this segment on Monday, an official said.

These 40 centres are spread across the 15 wards of Pune Municipal Corporation, Suryakant Devkar, the civic body's chief immunizations officer, said on Sunday.

"Each centre will have 250 doses. Half the doses will be for those registering online and the rest for on spot arrivals. Mayor Muralidhar Mohol took stock of the situation today.



On Monday, a symbolic drive will take place at a local hospital for children in the presence of Municipal Commissioner Vikram Kumar," he added. **PTI**

Mumbai logs 8,063 new cases as pandemic looms large over Maha

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With the emerging pandemic crisis looming large over Maharashtra, Mumbai on Sunday once again threatened to emerge as the Covid-19 capital of India, as the metropolis accounted for a staggering 8063 fresh cases.

Mumbai, which had remained second worst Covid-19 city in the country after Pune in the first and second Covid-19 wave periods, appeared to be reeling under the third pandemic wave, given the shocking increase in the number of fresh cases in the metropolis day after day during the last one week.

Concerned by the rapid increase in the number of Covid-19 infections during the last five to six days, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner I S Chahal appealed to all the home quarantined patients to strictly abide by home quaran-

tine guidelines so as to contain the spread of virus in Mumbai at the earliest possible.

"Today 8063 new Covid-19 cases have been detected in Mumbai out of which 89 per cent were found to be totally asymptomatic and total number of active cases in Mumbai is now 29819. However, out of 8063 new cases today, only 503 have been hospitalised out of which 56 cases have been put on oxygenated beds. As on today 90% of hospital beds in Mumbai are vacant," Chahal said in a statement issued in the evening

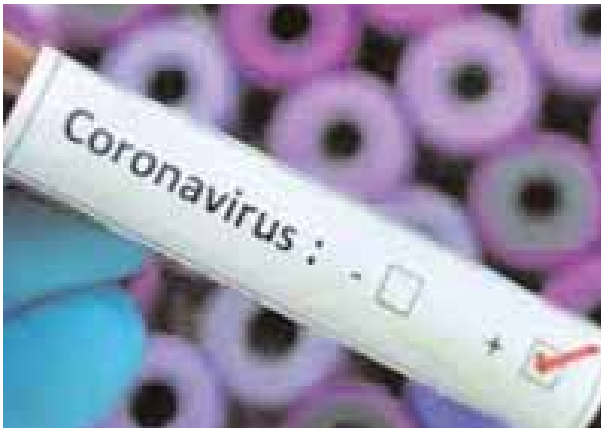
"There is no reason to panic but at the same time all of us have to be extremely cautious and exercise extreme Covid appropriate behaviour. Mask is mandatory in public domain and citizens should refrain from going to crowded places. All of us must join hands to tide over this new wave of Covid pandemic," the Mumbai civic chief said.

On a day when it claimed nine lives in the state, the Covid-19 cases rose from 9170 cases to 11,877 casxes, taking the total number of the cases from 66,87,991 cases to 66,99,868 cases

As 2,069 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 65,10,541 to 65,12,610 cases. The recovery rate in the state dropped from 97.35 per cent to 97.21 per cent.

The number of "active cases" in the state increased 32,225 cases to 42,024 cases. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 2.11 per cent.

Mumbai accounted for a maximum of 42,024 cases, while there were 4669 active in Thane. There were 3274 active cases in Pune, followed by Palghar (806), Raigad (746),



Nashik (638888888), Ahmednagar (431), Nagpur (322) and Satara (275).

Of the 6,92,59,618 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 66,99,868 have tested positive (9.67 per cent) for COVID-19 until Friday.

Currently, 2,43,250 people are in home quarantine while

1,091 people are in institutional quarantine.

Meanwhile, the State recorded 50 cases of Omicron, taking the total number of new Covid-19 variant cases to 510 cases. Of the new Omicron cases reported on Sunday, 38 have been reported by the Indian Institute of Science and Research (IISER) and 12

patients have been reported by the National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS).

Of the 50 omicron cases reported in the state on Sunday, Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) accounted for 356 cases, followed by Pimpri-Chinchwad-8, Pune rural, Sangliu - 2 each, Mumbai and Thane one each.

The following is the break-up of a total 460 Omicron cases recorded in the state so far, Mumbai: 328, PMC-49, Pimpri-Chinchwad--36 Pune rural --23, Thane MC- 12 each, Navi Mumbai, Panvel - eight each, Kalyan Dombivli--7, Satara, Nagpur--6 each, Osmanabad - 5, Vasai-Virar-4, Nanded--3, Aurangbad, Nanded, Buldhana, Bhiwandi- Nizampur--2 each, Sangli-2 each, Latur, Ahmednagar, Akola and Kolahpur--1 each.

Of the total cases, 183 patients have been discharged after a negative RT-PCR test.

In a related development, the authorities said the total number of passengers who arrived at Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur airports since December 1 was 2,17,836 (31,546 from At-risk countries and rest 1,86,190 are from other countries), while passengers whose RT-PC tests have been done are 47,913 (31,646 are from high-risk countries and 16,267 are from other countries). Similarly, RT-PCR positive and samples sent for genomic sequencing was 446 (286 are from at-risk countries and 160 are from other countries).

Additionally, field surveillance of all international passengers who have arrived since 1st November is underway. "Through airport and field surveillance, 2284 samples have been sent for genomic sequencing. The results of 134 are awaited so far," the daily health bulletin said.

"We still believe that as long as there's life, there's hope for changing course for the better in the life of individuals and for nations," the letter read.

Altogether 14 civilians in Nagaland's Mon district were killed in three consecutive episodes of firing by security forces, the first of which has been claimed to be a case of mistaken identity.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had told the Lok Sabha that the army had received information on the movement of insurgents in Mon and '21 Para Commando' unit had laid an ambush. "A vehicle was signalled to stop but it tried to speed away. Suspecting the presence of insurgents in the vehicle, the security personnel opened fire, leading to the death of six of its eight occupants," Shah said.

FIRST COLUMN

LOOKING BACK AT AN EVENTFUL 2021


Need to end the ‘one step forward and two steps backward’ approach to environment protection



KOTA SRIRAJ

With yet another eventful year drawing to a close, one cannot help but notice how humanity has been forced to undergo a steep learning curve to survive the ever-worsening COVID-19 situation on one hand, and rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions on the other. In fact, this year's multiple extreme weather events have helped firmly put "climate change" in the common man's lexicon in addition to the Coronavirus-related terminology.

The year 2021 began quite ambitiously for India as the nation was hopeful of bouncing back from previous year's COVID-19 hammering. This zeal reflected even in the environmental commitments to achieve net zero emissions by 2070. But these lofty targets were left in a lurch as they were not followed up with suitable actions on the ground. The dilution of environmental laws giving polluting units a free run rendered these targets meaningless. The year also saw instances where forest land was diverted to non-forest uses.



The amendment of the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, stripped away the ecological protection of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and pushed palm oil cultivation in northeast India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The government did make up by announcing the National Hydrogen Mission for clean energy and global Solar Green Grids initiatives to wean India away from coal.

However, the vacillating stands only baffled environmental experts and laid bare the truth that the Indian environmental protection and conservation initiative in 2021 was lacking a cohesive strategy to protect the environment against climate change. This state of affairs is unfortunate as India has already experienced two cyclones, a deadly glacier collapse in the Himalayas, a sweltering heatwave and killer floods. Given these conditions it was critical for the government to be clear about the positive impact of its environmental policies.


The government's one step forward and two steps backward approach regarding environmental conservation continued during the year and it announced an amendment to the Environmental Impact Assessment 2006 framework whereby the requirement for a public hearing regarding a project was done away with if 50 per cent of the project was completed. This adversely impacted the livelihoods of the local population and compromised ecological conditions. An amendment was also sought in the Coastal Regulation Notification to exempt oil and natural gas exploration and development activities from obtaining mandatory prior clearances. Needless to say, this has created a real-time threat to delicate maritime and coastal ecology.

In contrast, PM Modi at the COP26 Summit, Glasgow, listed out commitments of India to combat climate change. These commitments voiced abroad mean a lot for a beleaguered environment but they need to be followed up by sufficient, verifiable action at the home front.

One of the first environmental resolutions India can adopt for 2022 is to eradicate social injustice. A recent study described how redlining and residential segregation led to unequal access to nature, excess pollution and biodiversity loss. These practices brought in highways and industries that harm environmental quality in marginalized communities. They also left neighbourhoods with fewer parks and trees that are crucial in cooling the ambient environment and retaining and recharging the ground water table. Additionally, the government can turn the tide and support the environmental conservation in a major way by adopting the resolution of Environmental Policy Impact Assessment for the new year whereby the government openly and fairly assesses the effectiveness and positive impact of its policies on the environment.

(The writer is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

A countdown not to deny but defy gravity



BALAKRISHNAN SATYAM

It's soon going to be time when we think of base camps in space on the moon or on another planet or asteroid in quite the way we operate an Antarctic station

Stories from many ancient cultures have described events like a great deluge which rinses out the continents and readies them for a fresh recipe of life. This time it's a rapidly melting polar icecap. Seas rising to submerge some island groups and affecting many coastal cities too. In those ancient sagas, a part of humanity gets rescued by a leader or a prince in a sizeable boat. This time around, it could well have to be a fleet of spacecraft.

As fears of a large catastrophe rise on Earth, the questions would be about whether a global disaster preparedness team can do something to mitigate its impact and save even 75 crore people, which is about 10% of the current world population and be able to nourish them and rebuild civilisation and restore it technologically, socially, and psychologically.

Let's also consider that about five lakh people (considering a 25-year horizon, this number could be at least tenfold if you add twenty more years) will manage to leave on space shuttles and similar long-distance transport towards nearby satellites or asteroids on which some habitation may be managed.

Now if you had the money and are rather good at packing your family's travel cases, which of these options would you pick? Which seems to you to be a better bet or the more appealing proposition?

On the one hand, a familiar topography, a sky whose clouds and colours are usually reassuring and in which familiar birds and a few airplanes fly. Ponds, wells, and reservoirs of water. On the other, an escape far from the disastrous effects of an asteroid hit, nuclear blasts, submergence of many vast plains, overcrowding, food scarcity and social disintegration. Away and away into a challenging situation of innovation and adaptation. The further way forward from an outbound flight or on a nearby surface in our solar system will surely emerge under pressure. We will hope!

The idea of getting elevated into a better location in space also appeals to those who note with concern that the countries which show 2.5% annual growth (nearly the average for the African continent) or higher in their population are also known for backwardness and strife while the most advanced ones have less than 0.5% population growth or even are in the negative. As the pressure mounts, at least the elite may crave for a celestial sanctuary from the rabble! It may all be an evolutionary push towards space travel to increase humanity's migration opportunities.

Given the promising signs of success during the past year on the Space frontier, this could be a good time to give your measurements for a space suit, and even put aside Rs.5.5 lakhs for a family member to gain some 'no gravity' experience in a flight. Pay up about Rs.25 lakh and you can even go on an orbit trip (like Frank Borman in 1968 on the Apollo 8) around the moon - which surely redefines the concept of a honeymoon cruise.



THE MOST IMPORTANT BREAKTHROUGH THAT WILL BE REQUIRED WILL BE THAT OF FOOD PRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE. ANY SIZEABLE COLONY OF TERRESTRIALS IN SPACE WILL HAVE TO DEPEND ON SUPPLIES REACHING FROM EARTH AND THE ABILITY TO SOLVE THE NUTRITIONAL SUSTENANCE QUESTION WILL PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN OPENING UP POSSIBILITIES FOR US

(The writer is a creative director, advertising faculty, and an amateur epistemologist. The views expressed are personal.)



Flight operators also expect that a trip to Mars could cost as little as ₹7.5 lakh as economies of scale start to kick in. Also, on the accommodation front, for those who want to experience a space holiday before considering a shift of residence outside Earth, a 12-day orbiting hotel stay package is already on offer.

It's going to be several more decades before any of this is going to really get middle-class where we will have our season tickets, and carry our own *theplas* and *khakhra*s or our *amla* pickle on board though. On the other hand, the clear and present dangers on Earth are much closer to affecting us drastically and push us to deal with them collectively.

A great recent lesson in crisis tackling has come our way through a global pandemic. Civic leaders have had to take firm and swift decisions and issue strict directives. There has been compliance to a very great extent despite the murmurs, conspiracy theories and a few claims made for quack remedies. If only ecological perils such as air pollution, toxicity in water, soil damage from pesticide, emissions, deforestation etc. could be attended to with similar alacrity the country would have much less vulnerability to threats developing from them.

In the last few years, segregation of waste has got implemented, odd and even number plates, sprinkler irrigation in gardens, cab pooling,

CNG bus services, electric bus shuttles, solar panels, river cleaning, some reduction in plastic bags, energy saving fridges... a beginning does seem to have been made, but a lot more is needed urgently.

More tree cover needs to be spared from the axe and so development plans will need to be redrawn. Remember that shers are the holders of the forest, and not your corporate shareholders. The tendency in business circles to consider the ecological viewpoint as a nuisance that curtails profitability has to be replaced with a willingness to be flexible, and a commitment to redemptive action wherever there is a compromise.

In terms of upcoming opportunity, given our advancement in Space programmes, when the world boasts of some twenty spaceports which have regular departures and arrivals, 2-3 of them could be located in India. This would mean transit passengers to cater to, and an opportunity for the airline sector to fly space travellers in and out from these centres.

The way to prepare for this new chapter in history would include introducing space-related courses in university curricula — there are many aspects to research and design for, as it is an uncharted arena. A lot of engineering knowledge will have to be adapted for a new context and a different set of operating conditions. It's also an opportunity to gear up our think-tanks, build planetariums and labs

for the Space Race, to be ahead or on par with the rest of the advanced world.

Planning for the first spaceport could give the whole thing a fillip. Identifying a location with a support zone around it, and creating the needed ancillary infrastructure for it will mean that some of the main global operators would start taking interest in using our facilities. We have only to look back at how humble the origins of the automobile industry were, or even how the early days of aviation were, to realise that we are not a whole century away at all from regular space travel.

The most important breakthrough that'll be required will be that of food production outside the Earth's atmosphere. Any sizeable colony of terrestrials in space will have to depend on some supplies reaching from Earth, and the ability to solve the nutritional sustenance question will play a vital role in opening up possibilities for us. It's soon going to be time when we think of Base Camps in space on our moon or on another planet/asteroid in quite the way we operate an Antarctic station.

When we realise the scarcity of human-habitable surfaces in this galaxy, we become more heedful about ecological balance! The countdown actually begins when and where we start to count. Both to save our environment from further degradation, and to reach the next horizon.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE WILL GIVE 300 UNITS OF FREE ELECTRICITY TO ALL HOUSEHOLDS IN UP EVERY MONTH IF VOTED TO POWER. —SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV



ALMOST ALL HOUSEHOLDS WERE IN THE DARK DURING YOUR REGIME AND PEOPLE STILL PAID ELECTRICITY BILLS. YOU SHOULD APOLOGISE FOR THAT. —UP CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH

Freedom of religion does not equal right to convert

Conversion has always been anathema to the Hindu mind because unlike other religions, Hinduism does not claim an exclusive right to divinity


The passage by the Karnataka Assembly of the Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021 (or Anti-Conversion Bill) has once again brought the contentious issue of religious conversion to the forefront compelling us to introspect on the matter.

First, is the right to convert a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution?

Secondly, does religious conversion conform to our civilizational morality?

To fully evaluate an anti-conversion bill (now in existence in eight other states), we need to understand its historical background, test its constitutional validity and analyze its moral legitimacy.

India has a long history of anti-conversion laws that pre-



VIVEK GUMASTE

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date the rise of the BJP. In pre-independent India several princely states restricted religious conversions by law.

After Independence, the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh tasked the Niyogi Committee headed by Bhawani Shankar Niyogi, a retired Chief Justice, to investigate Christian Missionary activity. The Committee said: Enormous sums of foreign money flow into the country for missionary work, comprising educational, medical and evangelist activities. Conversions are mostly brought about by undue influence, misrepresentation, etc., or in other words not by conviction but by inducements.

Schools, hospitals and orphanages are used to facilitate proselytization.



Tribals and 'Harijans' are the special targets of aggressive evangelization for the reason that there is no adequate provision of hospitals, schools, orphanages and other social welfare services in the scheduled or specified areas.

The Committee recommended that "Suitable control on conversions brought about through illegal means should be imposed. If necessary Legislative measures should be enacted."

This led to the enactment of anti-conversion laws that are now in force in eight out of twenty-nine states; several of these were introduced by non-BJP governments, including the Congress.

Article 25 of the Indian Constitution states: "Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion."

However, the right to propagate is not co-terminus with the right to convert. In the case of Rev. Stainislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh (1977), a Supreme Court Bench unequivocally ruled: "It has to be appreciated that the freedom of religion enshrined in

the Article (25) covers all religions alike. ...What is freedom for one, is freedom for the other, in equal measure, and there can therefore be no such thing as a fundamental right to convert any person to one's own religion."

Additionally, the apex court invoked the 'public order' and highlighted the focus on 'forcible conversion' to uphold the validity of both the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam, 1968, and the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 (two of the first anti-conversion Bills).

In short, the Constitution does not guarantee a fundamental right to convert and anti-conversion bills in general have been scrutinized and validated by the SC.

Conversion has always

been anathema to the Hindu mind because unlike other religions, Hinduism has never claimed an exclusive right to divinity. The ability to realize that there could be more than one way to God has pervaded our scriptures for centuries. Truth is one; the wise call it by different names is an old quote from the Vedas.

Mahatma Gandhi said: "I came to the conclusion long ago, after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions are true.... and whilst I hold my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism...."

When one is willing to concede that all religions are equal, the concept of conversion becomes redundant.

In another message

Gandhi concludes, "It was impossible for me to believe that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian...."

Gandhi's views on conversion were equally blunt: "I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another. My effort should never be to undermine another's faith but to make him a better follower of his own faith."

He was even against propagation: "But no propaganda can be allowed which reviles other religions. For that would be negation of toleration."

Anti-conversion bills are therefore backed by the spiritual might of the Mahatma. He once unequivocally declared: "If I had the power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing."

Europe records over 100 million Covid cases since pandemic start: Report

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ■ PARIS

Europe has recorded over 100 million coronavirus cases, more than a third of all infections worldwide, since the start of the pandemic, an AFP tally Saturday showed.

The continent has once again become the pandemic's epicentre in recent months, and is battling an upsurge of cases spurred on by the highly transmissible Omicron strain of the virus.

The European region, including 52 countries and territories from the Atlantic coast to Azerbaijan and Russia, has recorded 100,074,753 infections of Covid-19 over the past two years, an AFP tally of official figures showed at 1845 GMT.

That is equivalent to more than a third of the 288,279,803 cases declared worldwide since the outbreak of the pandemic in late 2019 in China.

Of the European infections, more than 4.9 million have been reported over the past seven days alone, with 17 out of 52 countries or territories beating their previous record of most cases in a single week. France alone has



France alone has recorded more than one million new cases over the past week (file)

recorded more than one million new cases over the past week, which is equivalent to 10 percent of all positive cases it has announced since the start of the pandemic. The countries with the highest ratio of infections per 100,000 inhabitants in the world were all in Europe. Denmark scored worst with 2,045, followed by Cyprus with 1,969 and Ireland with 1,964.

AFP's calculations are based on official figures, but some infections could have gone undetected, for example if patients were asymptomatic. Covid-related deaths are however decreasing in Europe. Europe recorded on average 3,413 coronavirus deaths a day

over the past week, a seven percent drop from the previous week. At its worst, that average saw 5,735 deaths a day in January last year.

People on the European continent are now, on the whole, more vaccinated than the worldwide average. Sixty-five percent of Europeans are partially vaccinated, while 61 percent are fully vaccinated - more than 58 and 49 percent respectively worldwide, according to the "Our World in Data" website. Taking into account excess mortality linked to Covid-19, the World Health Organization estimates the overall death toll worldwide could be two to three times higher.

Thousands gather in Amsterdam despite demonstration ban

AP ■ AMSTERDAM

Thousands of people in the Netherlands defied a ban on assembling and demonstrated Sunday against the Dutch government's coronavirus lockdown measures, gathering on a central square before marching toward a park in Amsterdam. A small group of demonstrators briefly clashed with riot police as officers worked to clear the crowd from Museum Square based on an order from Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema. Reporters at the scene saw at least one person being detained.

The local government had outlawed the protest, saying police had indications some demonstrators might be planning to attend "prepared for violence." The municipality later issued an emergency order for people to leave square, and riot police marched across grass to clear area, sending

the demonstrators into nearby streets. Before officers moved in, some participants unfurled a banner that read, "Less repression, more care" near the Van Gogh Museum. A group of people in white overalls and white masks held up signs, including one that said: "It's not about a virus, it's about control" on one side and "Freedom" on the other. One person walked through crowd carrying a "Trump 2024" flag. There was a heavy police presence on square and in nearby streets. The municipality designated area as a security risk region, giving police authority to frisk people preventatively. After marching through city, demonstrators began gathering at a western Amsterdam park for a rally of populist Forum for Democracy party. The demonstration came on same day Dutch police said they would take action to protest increasing demands of their work.

Cost will be great many infections: Israel on Omicron herd immunity

Jerusalem: A surge of Omicron infections could see Israel reaching herd immunity, the country's top health official said on Sunday as daily cases continued to climb.

The highly transmissible Omicron variant has brought a surge in coronavirus cases across globe. Worldwide infections have hit a record high, with an average of just over a million cases detected a day between Dec. 24 and 30, according to Reuters data. Deaths, however, have not risen in kind, bringing hope new variant is less lethal.

Until late December, Israel managed to stave off Omicron to some degree but with infection rates now gaining pace, daily cases are expected to reach record highs in coming three weeks. This could result in herd immunity, said director-general of health ministry, Nachman Ash. "The cost will be a great many infections," Ash told 103FM Radio. *Reuters*

France sixth country with more than 10 million Covid infections

Paris: France became the sixth country in the world to report more than 10 million COVID-19 infections since the outbreak of the pandemic, according to official data published on Saturday.

French health authorities reported 219,126 new confirmed cases in a 24-hour period, the fourth day in a row that the country has recorded more than 200,000 cases. France joined the United States, India, Brazil, Britain and Russia in having had more than 10 million cases.

Saturday's figure was the second highest after the 232,200 record on Friday when French President Emmanuel Macron warned the next few weeks would be difficult.

In his New Year's Eve address, Macron did not mention a need for more restrictive health measures than those already announced, adding that the government should refrain from further limiting

individual freedoms. But the government said earlier on Saturday that from Monday wearing masks in public spaces would be mandatory for children as young as six versus 11 before.

And some big cities, including Paris and Lyon, have re-imposed wearing of masks in the street for everyone. The seven-day moving average of new cases in France, which smoothes out daily reporting irregularities, rose to an all-time high of 157,651 - jumping almost five-fold in a month.

The number of people hospitalised for COVID-19 has increased by 96 over 24 hours, standing at a more than seven-month peak of 18,811. But that figure is still almost half the record 33,497 reached in November 2020. The COVID-19 death toll increased by 110 over 24 hours to 123,851, the 12th highest globally.

Israel hits Hamas positions in Gaza after rocket attacks

Israel's military said it launched air attacks on Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip, a day after rockets fired from Gaza landed in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Israeli military said the attacks late on Saturday hit a rocket manufacturing facility and a military post for Hamas. "As fireworks lit up the skies to celebrate New Year 2022 around the world, a different type of fire came from Gaza-terrorist rocket-fire toward Israel," the Israeli military said in a tweet on Sunday.

"In response, we just struck Hamas sites in Gaza, incl. a rocket manufacturing site & military posts used for terrorist activity."

It was not clear whether the rockets from Gaza on Saturday were meant to hit Israel, but Gaza-based groups often test-fire missiles towards the sea.

Hazem Qassem, a spokesman for Hamas, told Al Jazeera that some of the areas targeted by the Israel strikes include agricultural lands. "Our resistance will continue to perform its duty to defend our people and liberate our land and sanctities," Qassem said. "We will stick to our right of resistance until achieving the goals of our people with liberation and return." There were no reports of casualties from Saturday's attack. No sirens

were sounded and Israel's Iron Dome rocket interception system did not deploy, the army said in a statement.

Apart from a single incident in September, there has been no cross-border rocket fire since a ceasefire ended an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in May. The ceasefire, brokered by Egypt and other mediators, has been fragile. Hamas says Israel did not take serious steps to ease the blockade it imposed on Gaza with Egypt's help when the group seized control of the coastal enclave in 2007.

More than 260 Palestinians, many of them civilians and children, and 13 Israelis were killed in the May assault on Gaza, during which Israel carried out relentless air raids across the coastal enclave, prompting Gaza fighters to fire rockets towards Israeli cities. Israel keeps Gaza under blockade, tightly restricting movement out of the territory that is home to two million Palestinians.

Egypt also maintains restrictions on the enclave. Both cite threats from Hamas for the restrictions. The blockade restricts the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza and has ravaged the territory's economy and harmed the population of two million. *AGENCIES*

European Union flag removed from French monument after outrage

Paris: A large European Union flag attached to Arc de Triomphe in Paris on Friday to mark start of France's six-month presidency of the bloc was removed on Sunday after it drew outrage from far-right and right-wing leaders.

Junior European Affairs Minister Clement Beaune, who on Friday had said flag would remain for "several days", said it had been taken down as planned. "It was scheduled that flag was to be taken down this Sunday, we hadn't established an exact time", Beaune told France Inter radio.

He dismissed idea that government gave in after far-right leader Marine Le Pen on Saturday said she would appeal to France's Council of State to remove EU flag. "The government has been forced to remove EU flag from Arc de Triomphe, a beautiful patriotic victory at start of 2022", Le Pen said on Sunday. "We didn't back down, there was no change of plan...I fully assume France's destiny is in Europe," Beaune said.

He said Le Pen and other leaders had got it all wrong when they said EU flag had supplanted French flag as latter is not permanently displayed on Arc de Triomphe. French President Emmanuel Macron, who has yet to say if he will run for re-election in April, defeated Le Pen in a 2017 run-off by 66%-34%.

Iran calls for UN action on US over killing of Qassem Soleimani

Tehran, Iran: Iran has called on the United Nations to take formal action against the United States for the assassination of its top general two years ago.

Iran says Qassem Soleimani, the then-commander of the elite Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was in Iraq's capital Baghdad on a diplomatic mission when his convoy was destroyed by missiles fired from a US drone.

In a letter to the UN General Assembly published late on Saturday, the legal department of Iran's presidential office called for "all legal initiatives in its power, including issuing a resolution" to condemn the US government and discourage similar moves in the future.

The letter said US governments have, for years, displayed an "excessive unilateralism" in their actions that has granted them the power to violate international laws and agreements.

The missile comes shortly ahead of the second anniversary of Soleimani's killing on January 3.

Former US President Donald Trump, who ordered the killing, said at the time that Soleimani was "the world's top terrorist" and "should have been terminated long ago". Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and several others were also killed in the



Iranian officials are planning multiple events to mark the second anniversary of Soleimani's assassination and the missile launches against US bases [File: Majid Asgaripour/WANA via Reuters]

attack. The UN rapporteur for extrajudicial killing in July 2020 concluded in a report that Soleimani's assassination was "unlawful" and "arbitrary" and violated the UN charter.

Interpol notices requested

Last year, Iran requested Interpol "red notices" against dozens of US officials, including Trump who also had an arrest warrant issued by an Iraqi court.

Soleimani's killing brought Iran and the US to the verge of war. The IRGC launched 12 missiles at two US bases in Iraq in the largest ballistic missile attack ever against the Americans. No casualties were reported but more than 100 US service members were reported to have suffered traumatic brain injuries. On Sunday, Iran's Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had promised "harsh revenge" for Soleimani, said in a speech that the perpetrators of his assassination will be consigned to the "landfill of history" after "they pay their worldly dues".

Iranian officials are planning multiple events to mark the second anniversary of Soleimani's assassination and the missile launches against US bases.

On Monday, an event is being organised in the capital Tehran, which is expected to be attended by top government and military officials.

President Ebrahim Raisi and other top figures are expected to address the televised event. Ending a week of ceremonies will be an exhibition of Iran's missile capabilities on Friday. In Iraq, thousands gathered on Sunday to mark Soleimani's killing. *AL JAZEERA*

US removes Ethiopia, Mali and Guinea from AGOA trade prog



US says it is 'deeply concerned' by the gross human rights violations being perpetrated by the government of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other parties in northern Ethiopia [File: Ben Curtis/AP Photo]

The United States has cut Ethiopia, Mali and Guinea out of a duty-free trade programme over alleged human rights violations and recent coups. In a statement on Saturday, the US Trade Representative (USTR) said it terminated the three countries from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) "due to actions taken by each of their governments in violation of the AGOA Statute". It said the US was deeply concerned "by the gross violations of internationally recognised human rights being perpetrated by the government of Ethiopia and other parties amid the widening conflict in northern Ethiopia", as well as by "the unconstitutional change in governments in both Guinea and Mali". There was no immediate comment from the Washington

embassies of the three African countries. The AGOA trade legislation provides sub-Saharan African nations with duty-free access to the US if they meet certain eligibility requirements, such as eliminating barriers to US trade and investment and making progress towards political pluralism.

In 2020, 38 countries were eligible for AGOA. In its Saturday statement, the USTR said Ethiopia, Mali and Guinea may still rejoin the pact if they met the statute's provisions. "Each country has clear benchmarks for a pathway toward reinstatement and the Administration will work with their governments to achieve that objective," it said. US President Joe Biden had announced in November that Ethiopia would be cut off from

the duty-free trading scheme provided under AGOA due to alleged human rights violations in the country's north. The war in Ethiopia's Tigray region broke out in November of 2020 amid a power struggle between the Tigrayan leadership and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Abiy. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the 13-month-long conflict, while about 400,000 are facing famine in Tigray alone.

The conflict has also destabilised the region, sending tens of thousands of refugees into Sudan, pulling Ethiopian soldiers out of war-ravaged Somalia and using the army from the neighbouring nation of Eritrea.

The US decision to suspend Ethiopia's trade benefits threatens the country's textile industry, which supplies global fashion brands, and the country's nascent hopes of becoming a light manufacturing hub. It also piles more pressure on an economy reeling from the conflict, the coronavirus pandemic, and high inflation.

Ethiopia's Trade Ministry said in November it was "extremely disappointed" by Washington's announcement, saying the move would reverse economic gains and unfairly affect and harm women and children. *AGENCIES*

Fire ravages South Africa's Parliament complex; 1 detained

AP ■ CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

A major fire ripped through South Africa's Parliament complex on Sunday, gutting offices and causing some ceilings in the building that houses the national legislature to collapse. As firefighters struggled to tame the blaze, a dark plume of smoke and flames rose high into the air above the southern city of Cape Town.

Around 70 firefighters were still battling the fire more than seven hours after it started in the early morning, Cape Town's Fire and Rescue Service spokesman Jermaine Carelse said. Some of them were lifted up on a crane to spray water on the blaze from above. No injuries have been reported and Parliament itself had been closed for the holidays.

Visiting the scene, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said a person was "being held and is being questioned" by police in connection with the blaze. "The fire is currently in the National Assembly chambers," Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Patricia de Lille told reporters as smoke billowed behind her from the roof of the historic white building with grand entrance columns. "This is a very sad day for democracy, for Parliament is the home of our democracy." *AGENCIES*

EU draft on financing nuclear and gas plants raises ire

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Draft European Union plans that would allow nuclear and gas energy to remain part of the bloc's path to a climate-friendly future came under immediate criticism over the weekend from both environmentalists and some governing political parties in EU member nations.

In draft conclusions seen by The Associated Press, the EU's executive commission proposes a classification system for defining what counts as an investment in sustainable energy. Under certain conditions, it would allow gas and nuclear energy to be part of the mix.

The plans would have a huge impact on nuclear-fired economies like France and on Germany's gas-fueled power plants since they might have had to fundamentally change their strategies.

Energy use accounts for about three-quarters the greenhouse gas emissions produced in the EU and is thus instrumental to the 27-nation bloc's efforts to meet its commitments for curbing global warming.

The plans still need the backing of a large majority of the 27 member states and a simple majority in the European Parliament. But the initial thrust from the EU Commission is a key element of the procedure for passage. "Classifying investments in gas and nuclear power as



Steam rises from the cooling tower of the nuclear power plant of Gundremmingen, Bavaria, Germany, Friday, Dec. 31, 2021. Draft European Union plans that would allow nuclear and gas energy to remain part of the bloc's path to a climate-friendly future came under immediate criticism over weekend from both environmentalists and some governing political parties in EU member nations. Germany shut three plants, including this one, at the end of last year (Stefan Puchner/dpa via AP)

sustainable contradicts the Green Deal," the EU's initiative that is intended to make the bloc climate-neutral by 2050, said Ska Keller, the president of the Green group in the European Parliament.

France has asked for nuclear power to be included in the so-called "taxonomy" by the end of the year, leading the charge with several other EU countries that operate nuclear power plants and want to make it eligible for green financing.

French Minister for European Affairs Clement Beaune said the proposal is good on a technical level and insisted on Sunday that the bloc "cannot become carbon neutral by 2050 without nuclear energy. Germany, the EU's biggest economy, is heading the other way, Germany shut down half

of the six nuclear plants it still had in operation on Friday, a year before the country draws the final curtain on its decades-long use of atomic power.

Gas is a polluting fossil fuel, but it is still considered a bridge technology by the EU to reach a cleaner energy future.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck criticized the plan to classify investments in gas and nuclear power plants as climate-friendly.

"The EU Commission's proposals water down the good label for sustainability," Habeck, who represents the Germany's environmentalist Greens in the country's coalition government, told German news agency dpa. "We don't see how to approve the new proposals of the EU Commission," he

said. "In any case, it is questionable whether this greenwashing will even find acceptance on the financial market," Habeck stressed, referring to the practice of painting investments as sustainable when they actually are not.

In Austria, Climate Protection Minister Leonore Gewessler from the Greens also sharply rejected the proposed regulation, saying "the EU Commission took a step towards greenwashing nuclear power and fossil gas in a night and fog action."

"They are harmful to the climate and the environment and destroy the future of our children," Gewessler said. The environmental NGO Greenpeace called the Commission draft proposals "a licence to greenwash."

"Polluting companies will be delighted to have the EU's seal of approval to attract cash and keep wrecking the planet by burning fossil gas and producing radioactive waste, said Greenpeace's Magda Stoczkiewicz.

Especially nuclear power remains extremely controversial in Europe, where many are still vividly remember the fear following the 1986 nuclear accident in Chernobyl, Ukraine. In Germany, children weren't allowed to play outside anymore for months, couldn't go mushroom hunting for years and the farmers had to destroy their entire harvest the year it happened.

India to log ‘one of highest growth rates’: Ashima Goyal

New Delhi: Eminent economist Ashima Goyal on Sunday said India is likely to have one of the highest rates of growth in the world as there are gradual moves towards normalisation, even as stimulus and support for vulnerable sectors continue.

Goyal further said sticking to the announced consolidation path by the government in the upcoming budget will give a good signal of control and predictability.

"India has come out of a very difficult time with good macroeconomic parameters. It is likely to have one of the highest rates of growth in the world, while inflation remains within the tolerance band," she said.

Goyal, who is also a member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI, in an interview to PTI said monetary-fiscal coordination has worked well and stimulus has been adequate but not excessive.

"There are gradual moves towards normalisation, even as some stimulus and support for vulnerable sectors continues," she said, adding that the financial sector is healthy.

The RBI has lowered the growth projection for the current financial year to 9.5 per cent, while the IMF has projected a growth of 9.5 per cent in 2021 and 8.5 per cent in the next year.

On threat from the new COVID-19 variant to the economy, Goyal said the recovery should be durable, with productivity enhancing reforms and the appropriate policy support.

"The country is now



much better prepared to face another wave, if it happens. In the second wave, disruption to the economy was lower because there is less supply chain disruption with localised lockdowns," she noted.

The new potentially more contagious B.1.1.529 variant (Omicron) was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on November 24.

Asked about going with fiscal consolidation or continuing with stimulus in the coming budget, the eminent economist said "sticking to the announced consolidation path will give a good signal of control and predictability".

"Reforms such as more transparency should continue," she said, adding that this improves the credibility and accuracy of the budget figures. According to Goyal, revenue buoyancy gives the space to finance essential expenditure consistent with medium-term consolidation on the

announced path, which already builds in some stimulus.

She noted the improvement in the quality of expenditure adds to the stimulus as does using the financial sector through warranties that do not add to current borrowing requirements.

Goyal pointed out that improving the quality of expenditure implies a shift towards high multiplier and high job creation items such as investment, human capacity creation, supporting vulnerable sections and the greening of the economy.

On high inflation, Goyal said high WPI reflects high import prices, especially commodity prices, which may not persist beyond the winter.

"The Covid situation is making them exceptionally volatile and multiple shocks have occurred. CPI inflation, however, remains within the tolerance band and is expected to soften next year," she opined.

PTI

Housing sales up 71% in 2021 in top 7 cities

Sales down 10% from 2019 pre-Covid level

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales across top seven cities rose 71 per cent year-on-year in 2021 to 2,36,530 units, but demand fell short of pre-Covid levels by 10 per cent, according to Anarock. Housing sales stood at 1,38,350 units in 2020 and 2,61,358 units in the 2019 calendar year.

Mumbai-based Anarock attributed the rise in housing sales to very low interest rates on home loans, pent-up demand, surge in aspiration for home ownership, cut in stamp duty by a few States including Maharashtra and discounts offered by builders.

The fourth quarter contributed nearly 39 per cent to overall sales during the last year, on festive demand and other positive factors.

According to the Anarock annual data, housing sales in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) rose 72 per cent to 76,400 units in 2021 from 44,320 units in the previous year.

Sales in Hyderabad jumped nearly three-folds to 25,410 units last year from 8,560 units during 2020.

Delhi-NCR witnessed 73 per cent rise in sales to 40,050 units in 2021 from 23,210 units in 2020. Housing sales in Pune increased by 53 per cent to 35,980 units in 2021 from 23,460 units in 2020.

Bengaluru saw 33 per cent increase in sales to 33,080 units in 2021 from 24,910 units in the previous year. Housing sales in Chennai were up 86 per cent to 12,530 units in 2021 from 6,740 units in 2020.

In Kolkata, sales increased to 13,080 units in 2021 from 7,150 units in 2020.

"Extrapolating on the performance in 2021, 2022 will see very satisfactory growth as long as the coronavirus pandemic

remains in check in India," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said.

He hoped sales to reach pre-COVID level in 2022 and noted that demand would further consolidate towards trusted developers.

"Input cost pressure and supply chain issues may induce a 5-8 per cent increase in property prices," Puri pointed out. On supply side, Anarock said that new launches increased 85 per cent to 2,36,700 units across these seven cities in 2021 as against 1,28,000 units in the previous year.

The new launches have reached pre-pandemic 2019 levels. In 2019, new launches stood at 2,36,570 units. In the MMR market, new launches rose 88 per cent to 56,880 units in 2021 from 30,290 units in the previous year.

New launches in Hyderabad jumped over two-folds to 51,470 units in 2021 from 21,110 units in the previous year.

The Delhi-NCR market saw 71 per cent increase in fresh housing supply at 31,710 units in 2021 from 18,530 units in 2020.

The new launches in Pune went up 67 per cent to 39,870 units in 2021 as against 23,920 units in the previous year.

Bengaluru witnessed 43 per cent rise in new home launches to 30,650 units in 2021 from 21,420 units in the previous year.

The new launches in Kolkata jumped nearly four times to 13,750 units in 2021 from 3,530 units in the previous year.

Chennai saw a 35 per cent increase in new launches to 12,370 units in 2021 as against 9,170 units in the previous year.

Anarock, which is one of the leading housing brokerage firms in the country, had clocked an 18 per cent growth in its revenue at around ₹305 crore during the 2020-21 financial year. It is targeting ₹450 crore turnover during this fiscal year.

PTI

Jet fuel price hiked by 2.75%, LPG cut for 1st time since Oct

New Delhi: Halting a declining trend of last month, jet fuel or ATF price has been hiked by 2.75 per cent on firming international oil prices, while cooking gas LPG rate has seen the first decline since October.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price has been hiked by ₹2,039.63 per kilolitre, or 2.75 per cent, to ₹76,062.04 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

The increase in rates comes on back of two rounds of price cuts seen in December that reflected a drop in international oil prices during the second half of November and mid-December.

Thereafter, international rates have firmed up, leading to the hike in ATF price.

ATF price had peaked to ₹ 80,835.04 per kl in mid-November before it was cut on December 1 and 15 by a total of ₹6,812.25 per kl or 8.4 per cent.

Jet fuel prices are revised on 1st and 16th of every month based on average price of international benchmark in the preceding fortnight.

Unlike ATF, commercial LPG rates are revised on 1st of every month after taking the average price in the preceding month. The price of a 19-kg LPG cylinder, which is used in commercial establishments like hotels and restaurants, has been accordingly cut by ₹102.5.

This is the first reduction since October 6. Rates had gone up from ₹1,734 per 19-kg cylinder to ₹2101 on December 1.

However the price of LPG used in domestic kitchens remains unchanged at ₹ 899.50 per 14.2-kg cylinder. This rate has not changed since October 6, prior to which it had gone up by almost Rs 100 since July 2021.

Petrol and diesel prices too have not changed for almost two months now. Petrol costs ₹95.41 a litre in Delhi and diesel comes for ₹ 86.67 per litre.

While the rates are to be revised on a daily basis based on a 15-day rolling average of the benchmark international fuel, prices have not changed since November 4, 2021 when the Union government had cut excise duty on the two fuels.

Prices had eased from an all-time high on November 4, 2021 after the Union government had cut excise duty on petrol by ₹5 per litre and diesel by ₹10 a litre.

States too cut local sales tax or VAT on the two fuels - BJP ruled states on the same day and some others at differing dates thereafter. But other than these two, the basis rates have remained unchanged.

Petrol used to cost ₹110.04 a litre in Delhi on November 3, 2017 and diesel was priced at ₹ 98.42 a litre. The current rate after accounting for a cut in excise duty and VAT.

PTI

NBFCs to witness revival in growth this year; may see slight uptick in NPAs

Mumbai: Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) showed resilience in 2021 despite the coronavirus pandemic woes and are expected to witness continued momentum in growth this year.

This year, the growth will be driven by the uptick in the economy, stronger balance sheet, higher provisions and improved capital positions of NBFCs. On the other hand, gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of NBFCs are likely to rise, following the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) move to tighten the NPA norms in November 2021.

"Our baseline assumption is that the worst is behind them (NBFCs) and things will start improving here on. We expect NBFCs to show higher growth and they will benefit from the economy moving up," Crisil Ratings Ltd Senior Director and Deputy Chief Ratings Officer Krishnan Sitaraman said. The asset under management (AUM) of shadow banking players is expected to grow at 6-8 per cent in the current financial year and 8-10 per cent in the next financial year, Sitaraman said.

Recently, the Trends and Progress of Banking of India in 2020-21 report released by the RBI said, "With increased pace of vaccinations and the broadening revival of the economy, the NBFC sector is expected to remain buoyant." ICRA Ltd Vice-President and Sector Head A M Karthik said the NBFC

sector, including housing finance companies (HFCs) but excluding infra-focussed and government-owned entities, experienced a roller-coaster trend in the past 12-18 months.

The rebound in the second-half of FY2021 on the back of the pent-up demand and after relaxation of the COVID-19 lockdown supported growth and earnings performance, he said.

Karthik also said this fragile recovery was hindered by the second wave of the pandemic in the first quarter of FY2022. The impact was relatively limited vis-a-vis the past fiscal, with the sector bouncing back in the second quarter of FY2022 in terms of disbursements and AUM (asset under management) growth, he added.

Mortgage financier Indiabulls Housing Finance's Deputy Managing Director Ashwini Kumar Hooda said, "I think 2022 will be a very good year. Already, we have seen that real estate (sales) has picked up and volumes are almost 30-50 per cent higher than the previous year."

With lower interest rates, rising income and stable property prices, there will be demand for home and home loans.

"So, the growth in home loans will be at least 15-20 per cent during the year 2022," he said.

In the current cycle, all home sales are backed by end-user demand and there are no investors in the market, he added.

PTI

Indian streaming industry expected to grow USD 13-15 billion over next decade

New Delhi: The Indian OTT streaming industry is expected to grow to USD 13-15 billion over the next decade at a CAGR of 22-25 per cent, according to a joint report on media and entertainment.

The OTT (over-the-top) industry is constantly growing and is one of the most competitive amongst emerging markets with over 40 players representing all types of content providers, said the report from industry body CII and Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

This has been led by "strong tailwinds" from basic enablers being in place for digital video streaming such as affordable high-speed mobile internet, doubling of internet users in the last six years, increased adoption of digital payments.

Moreover, it has been also helped by India specific price points offered by global players here such as Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+ offering plans in India at 70-90 per cent cheaper than the US.

Besides, the OTT sector is also witnessing a rise in investments in Indian original content. This has led to growth in hours of original content available to users.

"Strong content also helping capture eyeballs outside India," the report said, adding Indian OTT can cater to international demand by targeting the Indian diaspora and markets that have language similarities.

There has been a remarkable surge over SVOD (subscription video on demand) content over the last few years and is expected to overtake AVOD (advertising-based video on demand), it added.

"This strong growth in the subscription is due to various ini-

tiatives taken to expand the user base through bundling and pricing innovations, amply supported by significant investment in content," said the report titled "Blockbuster Script for the New Decade: Way Forward for Indian Media and Entertainment Industry".

The major players in the Indian OTT industry include - Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, SonyLIV, Alt Balaji, Zee5, Eros Now and Disney Hotstar Plus. It has been additionally helped by a predominance of a younger population, with 50-55 per cent population under the age of 30, it added. "Indian OTT has progressed from early-stage to scaling stage with Transitioned from AVOD to SVOD model, growth in disposable income to drive subscription growth and investing in premium and original content," it said.

Now, it will enter into a mass stage, which will witness, Pay-TV cord cutting, high SVOD penetration with consumers subscribing to multiple services and live OTTs. Moreover, the pricing of global streaming services in India has been made affordable to drive adoption. The report expects that "the growth story will continue and accelerate Key drivers" such as increased content spends, pricing innovations and rise of alternate formats as short-form video".

"Short-form video grew at 150 per cent + CAGR, driven by Indian short-form video players post TikTok ban," it added. Now the OTT players are creating content to cater to regional demand with a "strong focus due to untapped market potential".

कार्यालय नगर निगम, देहरादून

पत्रांक : 627 / भूमि-2021, दिनांक : 01 / 01 / 2022

नगर निगम क्षेत्रान्तर्गत विभिन्न स्थलों पर युनिफोल् / होडिंग के माध्यम से विज्ञापन प्रदर्शित करने हेतु दिनांक 01.02.2022 से दिनांक 31.01.2024 तक कुल कुल 02 वर्ष हेतु निविदा प्रकाशन की तिथि से दिनांक 25.01.2022 की अपराह्न 2.00 बजे तक ई0 निविदायें आमंत्रित की जाती है:-

क्रम सं०	मार्ग का नाम	युनिफोल्/होडिंग हेतु कुल साईट	निगम द्वारा विज्ञापन हेतु आरक्षित निविदा घनराशि
1	राजपुर रोड-70 साईट, मसूरी डाईवर्जन से मेन राजपुर तक-08 साईट, चकराता रोड-47 साईट, जीएएमएसरोड-10 साईट, गांधी रोड-10 साईट, सहारनपुर रोड-16 साईट, हरिद्वार बाईपास रोड-02 साईट, रायपुर रोड-03 साईट, सहस्त्राचार रोड-10 साईट, देसाकोर एण्ड रैस्ट कैम्प-03 साईट, ई0सी0 रोड-04 साईट तथा कैन्ट रोड-01 साईट	184	6,36,92,851 / -

निविदा के साथ निविदा सूचना प्रपत्र में निर्धारित घनराशि रू0- 63,69,285 / -की एफ0डी0आर0 / सी0डी0आर0 जो नगर निगम, देहरादून के नाम प्लेज होगी। निविदायें ई0निविदा के माध्यम से निर्धारित तिथि एवं समय उपलब्ध करायी जायेगी। निविदादाता को निविदा में अंकित समस्त तकनीकी दस्तावेजों एवं निर्धारित घनराशि की एफ0डी0आर0 / सी0डी0आर0 को मूल रूप में दिनांक 24.01.2022 की अपराह्न 4.00 बजे तक निगम कार्यालय में जमा कराना अनिवार्य होगा जिसका परीक्षण दिनांक 25.01.2022 की सांय 4.00 बजे गरित समिति के समक्ष किया जायेगा। तकनीकी निविदा के परीक्षण के उपरान्त तकनीकी निविदा में सफल निविदादाताओं की वित्तीय निविदा समिति द्वारा खोली जायेगी। निविदा प्रपत्र एवं शर्तें विज्ञापित प्रकाशन की तिथि से यू0कै0टैन्डर की वेबसाईट से भी डाउनलोड की जा सकती है अथवा किसी भी कार्यदिवस में नगर निगम कार्यालय से दिनांक 22.01.2022 सांय 4.00 बजे तक प्राप्त की जा सकती है। निविदा ई0निविदा के माध्यम से www.uktender.gov.in पर उपलब्ध करायी जायेगी।

नगर आयुक्त
नगर निगम, देहरादून

NOTICE OF LOSS OF SHARES OF HINDUSTAN UNILEVER LIMITED

(Formerly Hindustan Lever Ltd.)
Regd. Off. Hindustan Unilever Limited, Unilever House, 8 D Savant Marg, Chakala, Andheri (East) Mumbai-400099

Notice is hereby given that the following share certificates have been reported as lost/misplaced and the Company intends to issue duplicate certificates in lieu thereof, in due course.

Any person who has a valid claim on the said shares should lodge such claim with the Company at its Registered Office within 15 days hereof.

Name of Holder	Folio No.	Distinctive No. (s)	Certificate No. (s)	No. of Shares
Ashish Singhal	HL2910963	1141965971	5252917	170
		1141966140		(Rs.14)

Place : Delhi Date : 01-01-2022

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to bring to the notice of the general public that One (01) ID Card of Mr. Sachin issued by ICICI Bank Ltd. having ID card no.2145078 has been found missing and/or lost on 29.12.2021. Anyone who finds the said ID card is requested to return the said ID card to the Manager Debt Services & Management Group, ICICI Bank Limited, Debtor Analysis, Therefore all the customers of ICICI Bank Limited are hereby notified not to make any payment to any unauthorized person holding the said ID card no. 2145078. Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ID card shall do so at his/ her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payment.

Date: 30.12.2021
Place: Delhi For ICICI Bank Limited

Office of the Superintending Engineer

2nd Circle, Public Works Department, Nainital-263002

Phone/Fax: 05942-235728 Email: sepwdnti@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 13/ 41M-2/2021-22 Dated : 01/01/2022

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tender)

The Superintending Engineer, 2nd Circle, Public Works Department Nainital on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tender in two bid system through e-tender for the following Civil Engineering works. All related information will be available online in <https://www.uktenders.gov.in> from Dt. 03.01.2022

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (₹ in Lacs)	Cost of Tender form (in ₹)	Validity of Tender (Days)	Period of Completion (Month)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	Canal Covering and Road Construction work by shifting electricity and water line Supply from Chinpur to RTO road area in Constituency Kaladhungi of District Nainital. (Anticipation of Sanction)	3.57	5000 + GST	120	12 Month	Registered in Class 'B' and above in any State Govt. /Central Govt. or any Govt. undertaking in Road works.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

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.	Dinesh Arora/ Chetna Arora/ LBDEL00005332891/ LBDEL00002016940	Flat No- 182 1st Floor, LIG Dda PKT GH 5 and 7, Paschim Vihar Delhi/ December 28, 2021	September 25, 2021/ Rs.7,03,377/-	Delhi / NCR
2.	Jitendra Prasad/ Surendra Prasad/ LBDEL00001789772	Flat No- A-16- S, 2nd Floor Delhi Police CGHS Ltd Plot No-9, Mayur Vihar, Phase-I, Delhi/ December 29, 2021	July 06, 2021/ Rs.7,69,480/-	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 03, 2022 Place: Delhi/ NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

NEW YEAR, NEW GOALS

TEAM VIVA puts together a group of women entrepreneurs who give advice on expanding business

The pandemic didn't miraculously disappear. Though the year was still a shaky one in so many ways, it was a definite improvement from 2020. The good news is — we did it! Let's take a moment and celebrate the positive parts of it.

As a new year begins, here are a few quotes from some strong women entrepreneurs on their journey and learnings from the previous year:

Take control of your monetisation and career growth

From the onset of the pandemic, there has been a spotlight on influencer marketing as a crucial part of the marketing mix. The rapid growth of the creator ecosystem over the last few years collided at light speed with the overnight realisation of marketers everywhere that most of their traditional mediums were obsolete in the Covid world. The result was not just a 'trend' towards influencer marketing, but more of a paradigm shift. Digital content & influencer strategy is now top of mind from the very beginning of the media planning phase for most brands and agencies. All this has happened at the same time when the platform and social media ecosystem has seen seismic shifts as well. With the exit of Byte Dance from India, multiple India homegrown video sharing and social commerce platforms have seen tremendous growth, and some global platforms have also seen exponential growth like Snapchat which recently surpassed 100 million users in India. Meanwhile, Facebook/Instagram and Google/YouTube continue to capture a supermajority of all digital ad spends and remain the most popular platforms for content/influencer marketing campaigns. The surge in demand from brands, and the increasingly complicated platform landscape has left the creator/influencer ecosystem in need of two things — support and organisation. The community needs support to navigate all the format and platform choices, to collaborate with other creators more regularly, and to create content — especial-



ly video content — more efficiently. The community needs organisation to maximise their earnings and to amplify their content at scale. ...in other words, to take control of their own monetisation and career growth! This is what MissMalini, and our partners, will be spending our time on in 2022 and beyond, and we can't wait to show the community what we have in store!

(The author, Malini Agarwal, is the founder and creative director of MissMalini Entertainment & Girl Tribe.)

Focus on customer-centricity

The previous years were focussed on customer-centricity. As we have been consistently standing strong by our customers and understanding their needs at length, we have been rewarded generously in terms of sales, growth and visibility. Especially, post our millionth source-dough sell-out moment and successful launch of The Dose We Knead campaign, we witnessed a swelling demand for our products with 250 per cent growth.

If you are expecting a similar growth and self development pattern this year in

your business — start internally. Plan to formulate new products that makes at-home baking an easy effort for future chefs and bakers and also complementary categories like dips, juices, et al. Secondly, driving automation in more and more processes to increase efficiency at the production level should be in the pipeline. That will further increase the production capacity.

Further, with handmade products making it to mainstream, our new year goals should include leveraging our customer-driven marketing pattern through sampling availability at stores. With the launch of our recent stores, we have come to a realisation that sampling stations at the stores really helps customers in making the final purchase call, and also treats them with an experiential/personalised service format by the brand through the respective store teams.

(The author, Aditi Handa, is the head baker and co-founder of The Baker's Dozen.)

Change is not constant. The faster we adapt to change, the better

The last two years have been a har-binger of perpetual and significant changes. Funnily, change is not constant — the faster we adapt to change, the better — like adjusting to the WFH situation. Now that we are used to working in e-office structures, interacting with colleagues in physical office spaces, especially with those we have met only via zoom calls, may also take some time adjusting. Change is never comfortable or easy and hence mental well-being was one of the most significant rising issues during the pandemic, people are now grasping the benefits of having a mentor or a coach.

Here is an analogy — when children are weak in math or if they desire to learn and be competitive in tennis or piano, their parents will seek the best tutor or coaching school. Furthermore, those suffering from a headache, cold or a stomach bug will visit a doctor and take care of their physical health. Along these same lines, the concept of a coach or a mentor is equally important, not only if there is an issue, but for general mental wellness. This coming year, I would like to see widespread awareness about mental wellness and more people naturally taking on coaches as a mentor or a reflector who holds a mirror to them and enables them to enhance their life journey.

(The author, Geeta Ramakrishnan, is an ontological coach and author.)

Women support women

2021 was an inspirational year. India rode the Covid wave and broke all records in terms of vaccinations. That had a very positive impact for us at Zouk, where consumers restarted their travel and hence needed new bags and wallets. This trend will further ramp up demand for the products.

The year also saw a big shift towards supporting local businesses. The Vocal for Local push really nudged consumers to proudly support an Indian brand. Lastly, we saw some phenomenal IPOs of companies run by women leaders such as Nykaa, Bector Foods which is inspirational for women entrepreneurs like me to build a large business and receive public market support. I expect even more such listings this year and support for women-led Indian businesses by consumers globally. Personally, we aim to expand our collection and take our Proudly Indian story to the world.

(The author, Disha Singh, is the founder and CEO of Zouk.)

Hopeful, once again

The first quarter of 2021 was slightly slower due to the second wave of Covid-19. Nobody wanted to sound unethical, and we, too, were very sensitive about it because that wasn't the right time to market anything.

However, things picked up in the second quarter of the year and now, everything is more or less opening up, looking hopeful once again. Brands have started to allot their commercials into diverse streams now, which is amazing. I expect this year to be a game-changer since the previous one has set the stage for countless new opportunities. This year, we had influencers and talent coming up with their own products, NFTs taking over the world by a storm and much more — the scenario is changing completely, which is why I am very excited.

Apart from that, I am also eager about the upcoming trends. For instance, till today, the digital world was a 2D idea, but now, it is on its way to transform into an immersive 3D experience. Additionally, the creator economy is also heading towards bigger and greater things like investment and so much more. 2022 will be a groundbreaking year for everyone with all that it has in store.

(The author, Khushi Govil, is the associate vice president of Talent - MissMalini Entertainment.)



Constant scattering of attention

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI suggests giving time and priority to meditation to get over the chronic distractedness

A recent study done by a group of behavioural scientists showed that in the last one decade, human attention span has fallen to the lowest level, courtesy technology (precisely, the internet). We all have been experiencing this that today everything is becoming fast. Whether it's the food that we eat, or the entertainment that we watch, or even the way we work. In short, the pace of life is accelerating. Indeed, there seems to be an insatiable desire to continually speed up the rate of change. If we look at the reality show participants for example, it is evident that these participants become extremely famous for a year or two and then vanish into oblivion, as the public's appetite for novelty for its own sake grows. A similar trend is observed in new tech gadgets, where we see a new model coming out every week, pushing a weak model out of the market and out of the consumer's mind. This hunger for the new has a slight air of desperation about it — perhaps it is an attempt to compensate for the ongoing destruction of economic, religious and political certainties. Whatever its source, this hunger contributes to the scattering of attention; another source is the proliferation of channels of communication email, instant messaging, SMS, and so on, with the consequent opportunity to chat endlessly about all the new things under the sun. This constant shifting of attention may seem relatively harmless, but it conceals a subtle danger: it can undermine humanity's capacity to focus, and to make wise decisions, on the many difficulties that we face in life. This scattering of attention takes place not only in leisure time, but also during work.

A recent study made by a prestigious university, reflected the experience of educators with the changing skills of young people. It was observed by them that, while their skills at accessing information, particularly in visual form, have increased, there is also evidence that their tolerance for ambiguity and complexity is decreasing. Similarly, a group of prominent psychologists did a sample study with 100 university students, to find about the effects of various types of media on their intelligence and learning ability. At the end of study, they concluded that every digital or new tech medium develops some cognitive skills within us, but at the expense of others. What they found was that our growing use of the internet and other screen-based technologies has led to the widespread and sophisticated development of visual-spatial skills. But those gains go hand in hand with the weakening of our capacity for the kind of deep processing that underpins mindful knowledge acquisition, inductive analysis, critical thinking, imagination, and reflection. In simple words, one can say that we are getting technologically richer but emotionally poorer.

Psychologists and behavioural experts say that our mind is like a parachute and it works best when it's open. It is also like a canvas upon which we can consciously create our life. The mind has tremendous power over our body and it directs everything in our body. According to medical experts, 70 per cent of our diseases can be changed by changing the mind, because they originate from there. So much is its capacity that in its most powerful stage, our mind could even transform the outside negative vibrations and situations into positive ones. So, in order to get over the chronic distractedness, we must give time and priority to meditation. For that, we need to first of all take a pause to check what kind of thoughts are being created in our mind, for these will decide the degree of our happiness and satisfaction. And these will shape the kind of world we are creating for ourselves every moment. So, monitor your thoughts to see what you are creating and what is being destroyed; what are the tendencies that are being watered and which are the ones that are being allowed to droop. Take charge to consciously create positive thoughts and destroy the evil ones. Take charge to create well what you would receive a few steps away from now.

Ruqaya Jan, a resident of North Kashmir's Baramulla district, had married when she was thirty-six. In India, where girls are forced to marry as a child, Ruqaya's decision to focus on her career was a tough one. With less opportunities in the valley, she had to migrate to Delhi. Today, she is a forty-one-year-old, struggling to conceive.

"Between 2007 and 2012, I worked at a private company in New Delhi. Nine years ago, after my father passed away, I had to return to look after my mother as there was no one to take care of her. Here, in my own hometown, I started looking for a decent job and the struggle went on till I turned thirty-six. It was already too late to get married," said Ruqaya who is now a homemaker and has been struggling for the last five years to become a mother.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) for 2019-21 shows that in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, there has been a sharp fall in the total fertility rate (TFR) — the average number of children a woman bears in her lifetime — from two to 1.4, far below the national average of two since 2015-16, when the last such survey was conducted.

As per the experts, late marriages, which have become extremely common in Jammu and Kashmir, has led to increasing infertility in the valley. Besides, there are other contributing factors as well.



Kashmir's well-known gynaecologist, Dr Farhat Jabeen, explained that there are various factors responsible for the decline in fertility among men and women in Kashmir. "Infertility is on the rise in Kashmir, especially among women who are suffering from stress or hormonal imbalances," she informed.

As per NFHS, at least 60 per cent of married Kashmiri women report polycystic ovar-

ian syndrome or more reproductive health problems, which is higher than the national average of 40 per cent, affecting the birth of a child.

Dr Jabeen further added that poverty, unemployment and desire for economic prosperity are the main reasons behind late marriages. "As far as possible, late marriage should be avoided as the chances of conceiving gets reduced after the age of 35," she suggested.



Low fertility rates are equally caused by mental health disorders. Women who are not able to conceive are also suffering from such disorders. According to Dr Mushtaq Margoob, valley's noted psychiatrist, conflict has taken a toll on the mental health of people in Kashmir, which also leads to infertility. There are many patients who are suffering from depression and it is affecting their physical and reproductive health.

In 1991, The TFR in Jammu and Kashmir was 3.6 which in 2019-20, reduced to 1.4. This indicates that women here give birth to less than two children in a lifetime. While the national average fertility rate is two per cent, with Bihar having the highest at three per cent, Jammu and Kashmir has a 1.2 per cent TFR in urban areas and 1.5 per cent in rural areas. This decline in TRF, however, is also viewed positively in terms of family

planning by some doctors and experts as people have become more conscious of the use of contraception.

Thirty-eight-year-old Adeeba Jan from Srinagar does not prefer having more than two children. A teacher by profession, Adeeba has two children aged eight and five. "Nowadays, it gets extremely difficult to take care of more than two children, especially for working professionals," expressed Adeeba.

Likewise, Saima Jan, a research scholar of sociology in Kashmir, pointed out how urban areas have witnessed more decline in TFR than rural areas in the valley. "In urban areas, women are more empowered and are able to make choices whether its career or personal life. They are also well aware of the use of contraceptives. Most couples don't prefer more than two children," she opined.

The drop in the TRF in Jammu and Kashmir has received a mixed response. This requires a thorough analysis of both positive and negative factors. As Dr Rehana Kausar, who works at Jammu and Kashmir's Health Department, puts it, "Low TFR in the UT is contributed by several reasons, but we need to find how much does each factor contribute." Without proper examination and research, it might have an adverse impact on the economic and social aspects of Jammu and Kashmir.

—Charkha Features

Re-examine all you have been told. Dismiss what insults your soul.
—Walt Whitman

WEIGHT LOSS CAN HELP PREVENT COVID

A Cleveland Clinic study shows that among patients with Obesity, prior weight loss achieved with bariatric surgery was associated with a 60 per cent lower risk of developing severe complications from COVID-19 infection. The research was published in the journal *JAMA Surgery*.

Numerous studies have established obesity as a major risk factor for developing serious illness from an infection of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Obesity weakens the immune system, creates a chronic inflammatory state, and increases risk for cardiovascular disease, blood clots, and lung conditions. All of these conditions can complicate COVID-19.

The aim of this study was to examine whether a successful weight-loss intervention in patients with obesity prior to contracting COVID-19 could reduce the risk of developing a severe form of this disease.



BATTLE OF SEXES BEGINS IN THE WOMB

Cambridge scientists have identified a key signal that the fetus uses to control its supply of nutrients from the placenta, revealing a tug-of-war between genes inherited from the father and from the mother. The study, carried out in mice, could help explain why some babies grow poorly in the womb.

As the fetus grows, it needs to communicate its increasing needs for food to the mother. It receives its nourishment via blood vessels in the placenta, a specialised organ that contains cells from both baby and mother.

Between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of babies grow poorly in the womb, often showing reduced growth of blood vessels in the placenta. In humans, these blood vessels expand dramatically between mid and late gestation, reaching a total length of approximately 320 kilometres at term.

They've identified one way that the fetus uses to communicate with the placenta to prompt the correct expansion of these blood vessels. When this communication breaks down, the blood vessels don't develop properly and the baby will struggle to get all the food it needs.



ANXIETY AND HYPERTENSION DIRECTLY RELATED

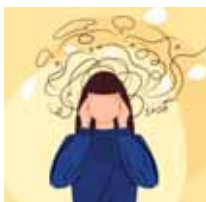
Anxiety and high blood pressure can be symptoms of each other. Anxiety may lead to high blood pressure, and high blood pressure may trigger feelings of anxiety.

Additionally, having long-term high blood pressure, or hypertension, can cause people to feel anxious about their health and future. Severe hypertension can also cause a person to experience anxiety.

Researchers conclude that early detection and treatment of anxiety are particularly important in people with hypertension.

Anxiety-induced increases in blood pressure are usually temporary and subside once the anxiety lessens. Regularly having high levels of anxiety, however, can cause damage to the heart, kidneys, and blood vessels in the same way that long-term hypertension can. It can also cause behavioural changes in individuals, such as stress eating, which may indirectly contribute to hypertension.

One can make lifestyle changes, like exercising, eating well, practising mindfulness, to help reduce feelings of anxiety.



DIETARY FIBRE HELPS MELANOMA PATIENTS

Melanoma patients receiving therapy that makes it easier for their immune system to kill cancer cells respond to treatment better when their diet is rich in fibre, according to a large, international research collaboration that includes the Oregon State University College of Pharmacy.

Published in *Science*, the study led by the University of Texas and the National Institutes of Health is a promising development in the fight against multiple types of cancer including melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, the researchers said. Nationwide, melanoma is the fifth-most common cancer.

Melanoma kills by metastasising, or spreading, to other organs such as the liver, lungs and brain. The new study focuses on a therapeutic technique called immune checkpoint blockade, or ICB, which has revolutionised the treatment of melanoma, and cancer in general.



CURE FOR ACUTE LUNG INFLAMMATION

The pandemic highlighted the devastating impact of acute lung inflammation (ALI), a part of the acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). It's the dominant cause of death in COVID-19. A potential new route to the diagnosis and treatment of ARDS comes from studying how neutrophils — the white blood cells responsible for detecting and eliminating harmful particles in the body — differentiate what materials to uptake by the material's surface structure, and favour uptake of particles that exhibit 'protein clumping', according to new research, published in *Nature Nanotechnology*.

Researchers investigated how neutrophils are able to differentiate between bacteria to be destroyed and other compounds in the bloodstream, such as cholesterol particles. They tested a library consisting of 23 different protein-based nanoparticles in mice with ALI which revealed a set of rules that predict uptake by neutrophils.



Kohli's India ready to roll over SA for elusive series win

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

India's formidably consistent match-winners have a date with history in the New Year when they take on an out-of-sorts South Africa in the second Test here from Monday in pursuit of a coveted first-ever series win in the 'Rainbow Nation'.

If the 'Boxing Day Test' was used to breach the Proteas' fortress at the Centurion, the New Year's game will be all about stoutly defending the 'Bull Ring' bastion which has been a 'home' away from home for the Indian team.

Also, it was right here in 2018 when the foundation of one of India's

greatest Test teams was laid with a solid win on a track that bordered on under-prepared and perhaps gave this unit self belief to take on the world.

They have been doing that for nearly four years now and are in no mood to stop.

For captain Virat Kohli, a Test victory at the Wanderers would reaffirm his status as one of the greatest Indian captains of all time in the traditional format with series wins in three of the four SENA nations barring New Zealand.

There cannot be a more opportune time to achieve the feat against a South African side that lacks Graeme Smith's grit, Hashim Amla's class, Jacques Kallis' manic consistency, Dale Steyn's x-factor and Morne Morkel's relentlessness.

To be fair, this South African team will find it incredibly difficult to compete against the current Indian line-up leave alone harbour dreams of a win.

Yes, they have a Kagiso Rabada, who is carrying the load, and Lungi

Ngidi, who has looked good, but Quinton de Kock's sudden retirement from the toughest form of cricket at the age of 29 is another reminder of a tough transition period that never seems to end for the Proteas.

So even if Ryan Rickleton, the 25-year-old dashing keeper-batter who is slated to make his debut, created some noise, he will find that scoring runs at the domestic level is very different



from facing Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami with the red Kookaburra.

Even Duanne Oliver, likely to replace Wiaan Mulder who was out due to a hamstring injury in the first Test, will find it extremely difficult against a seasoned Indian batting line-up which would like to give a better account of itself compared to the first Test.

On a personal note for Kohli, it would be the ideal breathing space that he will require, now that it's official that he is no longer the establishment's blue-eyed boy after his much publicised battle of "your truth versus mine" with no less than BCCI president Sourav Ganguly.

Kohli the batter is still insulated from the heat despite that missing 'three-figure mark' for last two years but 'King Kohli is metaphorically "wearing a crown

MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WON'T EVER DISCUSS CLASSIFIED INTERNAL MATTERS, DAVID HAS ALREADY DONE ONE ROUND OF DOUSING THE FIRE

of thorns".

He didn't face the media before and after the first Test and now head coach Rahul Dravid is literally living up to his 'The Wall' moniker as he is set to appear as a fire-fighter ahead of the second Test.

Having already made it clear that he won't ever discuss classified internal matters, Dravid has already done one round of dousing the fire and on Sunday, he is expected to keep the topic of discussion to strictly cricketing.

However, it is very difficult to imagine that India would be ringing in changes to their winning combination considering Kohli's obsession with five bowlers.

Even with that, India were docked a WTC (World Test Championship) point for slow over-rate and Ravichandran

Ashwin will be as integral to the visitors' bowling plans on a seamer-friendly wicket as their four fast bowlers.

Obviously, Shardul Thakur is the weakest link in this attack with Umesh Yadav being more potent but the Mumbaikar's knack of picking wickets and also relatively stronger batting ability keeps him in the mix.

But on a lively Wanderers track, Umesh won't be a bad option even though that could mean playing an extra batter, which hasn't exactly been Kohli's template.

As far as the batting line-up is concerned, unless anyone reports unfit on the match day, all the five specialist willow-wielders along with Rishabh Pant, whose run-a-ball-34 was a special contribution in Centurion, will again feature in the line-up.

Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane won't be dropped yet as Dravid will give them enough chances to succeed unless he shifts his faith on Shreyas Iyer and Hanuma Vihari, which might not be the case if batting coach Vikram Rathour's last media interaction is to be believed.

The three big guns are due for a big score and it would be Proteas' worst nightmare coming true if they all fire in unison at the 'Bull Ring'.

It would then be a cakewalk for India.

Squads:

India: Virat Kohli (captain), KL Rahul (vc), Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Ajinkya Rahane, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Jayant Yadav, Priyank Panchal, Umesh Yadav, Hanuma Vihari, Ishant Sharma.

South Africa: Dean Elgar (captain), Temba Bavuma (vice-captain), Kagiso Rabada, Sarel Erwee, Beuran Hendricks, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Lungi Ngidi, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Keegan Petersen, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Marco Jansen, Glenton Stuurman, Prenelan Subrayen, Sisanda Magala, Ryan Rickelton, Duanne Olivier.

Match Starts 1:30 pm.



NZ 328, B'desh 175-2 in reply, day 2, 1st Test

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI (NEW ZEALAND)

Bangladesh had one of its best days on tour in recent years Sunday when it won all three sessions on the second day of the first cricket Test against New Zealand.

The tourists' bowlers first captured New Zealand's last five wickets for 70 runs, dismissing the home side for 328 after it had resumed at 258-8.

Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Najmul Hossain Shanto then made half centuries in a 104-run partnership for the second wicket which occupied most of the last 1 1/2 sessions and guided Bangladesh to 175-2 in its first innings at stumps.

Shanto lived up to his considerable reputation with his second half century, to go with two centuries in his 12 tests to date. He was out for 64 within sight of stumps and his innings was punctuated by several classy shots through the off side.

Joy played the innings anchor and compiled his first test 50 from 165 balls in more than 3-1/2 hours. He was 70 and had batted almost five hours by stumps when he had been joined by captain Mominul Haque, who was on 8.

Though New Zealand still leads by 153, the initiative the match has shifted to Bangladesh after its confident, deliberate approach on day two.

The Bangladesh spinners first wrapped up the New Zealand first innings in 25 overs before lunch. Joy then combined in a 43-run opening partnership with Shadman Islam which blunted the new ball and allowed the second wicket pair to strongly consolidate the innings.

The pitch at Bay Oval has only provided assistance for the seam bowlers in the first hour Saturday when Bangladesh cap-

tured the wicket of New Zealand captain Tom Latham and had the home side 1-1.

Devon Conway's 122, his second century in four Tests, gave New Zealand slightly the upper hand at the end of day one. But the failure of the tail, in spite of the efforts of Henry Nicholls who was the last man out for 75, tipped the balance of the match slightly in the tourists' favour.

After Shoriful Islam removed all-rounder Rachin Ravindra (4), off spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz quickly captured the wickets of Kyle Jamieson (6), Tim Southee (6) and Neil Wagner who was out for a first ball duck.

Mominul bowled only four overs of orthodox left-arm spin but captured the two big wickets of the New Zealand innings, removing Conway and Nicholls and finishing with 2-6 from 4.1 overs. Mehidy had 3-86 after being wicketless on day one and Shoriful took 3-69.

Joy and Shadman steered Bangladesh through three overs before lunch and then to drinks in the middle session when the tourists were 43 without loss. But Shadman was out to the first ball after the break for 22, undone by Neil Wagner who lured him into a false stroke and dived forward to claim a sprawling catch off his own bowling. Wagner had 2-27 from 16 overs at stumps.

Wagner was again the best of New Zealand's bowlers, mostly bowling fuller and finding a little swing away from the right handers. But for the last two sessions Bangladesh largely defied the attack that won the World Test Championship final in June.

Kyle Jamieson, a prodigy who took 52 wickets in his first 10 tests, struggled in unrewarding conditions Sunday and finished the day with 0-35.

Kohli has been phenomenal despite all noise: Dravid



PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

India Test skipper Virat Kohli has been phenomenal despite "all the noise around him" and will soon be scoring big runs, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Sunday, backing the superstar batter who has been locked in a war of words with the BCCI over the way his white-ball captaincy tenure ended.

What has added to the drama is Kohli not turning up for pre-match media interactions ever since contradicting BCCI president Sourav Ganguly's description of the sequence of events that followed his decision to relinquish T20 captaincy and subsequent removal as ODI skipper.

"I know there's been a lot of noise on other issues outside of the group, even leading into this particular Test match. But honestly, in terms of keeping the morale high, it's not been very difficult because it's been led by the skipper himself," Dravid said on the eve of the second Test against the Proteas here.

"Virat has been absolutely phenomenal over the over the last 20 days that we've been here. The way he's trained the way he's practised the way he's connected with the group. He has been phenomenal and I could not speak more highly of him," added the former captain.

Asked why Kohli has not addressed the media so far in the tour, Dravid said, "There is no specific reason for that. I don't decide this but I am told he will be speaking on eve of his 100th Test."

Then you can ask all the questions on his 100th Test." Kohli's 100th Test would be the third match against South Africa in Cape Town from January 11.

He kicked up a storm before the tour by stating that he was never asked to recon-

sider leaving T20 captaincy as asserted by BCCI President Sourav Ganguly. His statement was recently met with a rebuttal from chief selector Chetan Sharma who said that Kohli was requested to hold his decision by everyone in the Board at least till the end of the T20 World Cup.

Another issue has been batting form. India lead the ongoing series 1-0 but Kohli's inability to convert starts over the last two years and his play outside the off stump has remained the talking point.

"As coach, there's not really too much you can do once the game starts... There's not too much that you can control in the results...We're really looking to prepare well and get the team into a good space," Dravid said.

"...The way he's committed to his own preparation, his own practice.

And also just the way he's connected with the group over the last two weeks on and off the field. He has truly been a fantastic leader.

"So, that's really helped in creating a really good space leading into the first Test match. A lot of that was led by Virat and his leadership really came to the fore. It's been a pleasure to work with someone like him."

Dravid sees Kohli back to scoring hundreds very soon, something he has not done in over two years.

"Even personally, he's in a really good space and even though he sort of batted well and couldn't convert those starts, I feel there's going to be big runs, really good scores coming in from someone like him.

"Just observing him around the group, how relaxed, how calm he has been and how he's preparing and how switched on he is, it (big score) might not happen in the next game. I would really hope it happens in the next game.

Elgar wants Proteas to handle De Kock's Test retirement in professional manner

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa skipper Dean Elgar says he was initially "shocked" at Quinton de Kock's sudden retirement from Test cricket but insisted that the team will take the setback in its stride and strive to level the ongoing series against India.

De Kock, only 29, announced his retirement from the traditional format at the end of the opening Test against India, which the hosts lost by 113 runs at SuperSport Park on Thursday.

"I was pretty shocked. But sitting down with Quiney (Quinton de Kock), he explained his reasons and I respect and fully understand his



decision," Elgar said at a virtual press conference on the eve of the second

Test.

"I don't think there will be any," Elgar responded when asked if there be any hangover on the players about his retirement.

"The responsibility for us is to carry and conduct ourself as international players. We still have to be professional around this. We still have a Test series to level, so I don't think there will be any hangover or shock over Quiney's retirement."

"Players respect the environment. We realise that we had a few setbacks in recent times and we need to obviously have to be clever around it and get over it. I don't see this affecting the players of still being shocked about his retirement."

Babar, Saqlain had recommended foreign coaches for national team: Raja

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief Ramiz Raja has said that captain Babar Azam and interim head coach Saqlain Mushtaq had recommended foreign coaches for the national team.

Even wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan is in favour of bringing in experts from overseas.

"During my discussions with Babar, Rizwan and later Saqlain they all said it would be better to integrate foreign coaches in the national team's dressing room," the former Test captain said.

Raja had brought in Australian Matthew Hayden and South Africa's Vernon Philander as batting and bowling consultants in the Pakistan dressing room for the T20 World Cup where the team lost in the semi-finals to eventual champions Australia after remaining unbeaten in the super-12 stage.

Raja said his view, which he conveyed to the trio, was that more local coaches should be with the team on away tours so that they get a chance to groom themselves and gain experience and exposure. "My thinking is also that you only need regular coaches if you want to have the best



dressing room environment and I think we already have that in our team."

He also disclosed that he had intentionally not appointed a full support staff of technical coaches for the tour of Bangladesh and the home series against West Indies recently as he wanted to see the team stand on its own feet with its own thinking.

"I believe that a player only attains greatness in a team when he has to work hard in a difficult situation to perform without any sup-

port." The PCB has already advertised for the position of five coaches including a power-hitting batting coach and high performance centre head coach, a position left vacant after the resignation of New Zealand's Grant Bradburn.

After Raja became the PCB chairman, the Pakistan team's head coach since late 2019, Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis, resigned abruptly after returning from the tour of the West Indies and just before the T20 World Cup.



England training session cancelled after net bowler tests Covid +ve

PTI ■ SYDNEY

England's preparations for the fourth Ashes Test against Australia took another hit on Sunday after one of their net bowlers tested positive for COVID-19, leading to cancellation of their training session with other net bowlers deemed as close contacts.

Having already conceded the series after three successive defeats, England suffered the latest blow just hours after the tourists planned to draft former one-day captain Adam Hoolioake into the team's coaching staff, stated media reports here.

The fourth Test is scheduled to start on January 5. Earlier in the week, members of the England set-up had cleared a round of COVID-19 testing just before Day 2 of the Ashes Test at the MCG after two from their support staff and two from their families returned positive for the virus.

As a result of the positive cases, the start of play was delayed. The visitors are preparing for the fourth Test with a skeleton coaching staff after head coach Chris Silverwood was forced into isolation when a family member tested positive for COVID.

Pace bowling coach Jon Lewis, spin mentor Jeetan Patel and strength and conditioning specialist Darren Veness have also tested positive.

It has left assistant coach Graham Thorpe in charge of the squad for the upcoming match.

Former England batter Thorpe is being supported by Nottinghamshire's Ant Botha and ex-England wicketkeeper James Foster.

Hoolioake, a former England one-day captain who lives on the Gold Coast, had been asked to join the tourists in Sydney.

However, media reports stated on Sunday that a close contact of the 50-year-old Hoolioake has subsequently tested positive.

Australia has seen a spike in COVID cases in recent weeks much like the rest of the world.



US WINS OVER CANADA EASILY, RUSSIA BEATS FRANCE AT ATP CUP

AP ■ SYDNEY

The United States beat Canada and defending champion Russia defeated France at the ATP Cup on Sunday, with the Americans taking a much easier route.

John Isner and Taylor Fritz beat their Canadian singles opponents and then clinched the match in doubles for a 3-0 win.

Isner beat Brayden Schnur 6-1, 6-4 in 66 minutes to give the Americans the early lead.

Schnur was a late replacement for Denis Shapovalov, who withdrew from the opening singles match Sunday due to fatigue. The Canadian is recovering from having contracted COVID-19 at a recent tournament in the Middle East.

Fritz then came from a set down to beat No. 11-ranked Felix Auger-

ALIASIME 6-7 (6), 6-4, 6-4 and clinch the match before the Americans won the doubles 6-4, 6-4 over Auger-Aliassime and Shapovalov.

Russia, meanwhile, needed the deciding doubles match to clinch victory over France.

Roman Safiullin beat Arthur Rinderknech of France 2-6, 7-5, 6-3

before No. 35-ranked Ugo Humbert evened the match for France with an upset 6-7 (5), 7-5, 7-6 (2) win over No. 2 Daniil Medvedev.

But Medvedev and Safiullin came back to beat two fresh opponents in the doubles — Fabrice Martin and Edouard Roger-Vasselin — 6-4, 6-4.

In night matches, Britain and Italy took early leads. Daniel Evans beat Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff 6-1, 6-2 while Italy's Jannik Sinner defeated Australia's Max Purcell 6-1, 6-3 in opening singles.

Isner saved the only break point he faced against his Canadian opponent.

"I surprised myself with how well I played out here," Isner said in his on-court interview. "You always work hard in the offseason, but you never really know what could happen in that first match of the year."

Isner broke twice in the first set and used his strong serve to capitalize on the advantage. The American hit 10 aces and won 46% of his return points.

"I actually really like this court. It's not too fast, which I prefer. It gives me a little time to swing out on my shots being so big. That helps me out a lot," Isner said.

On the opening day Saturday, Argentina and Spain both cruised to 3-0 victories over Georgia and Chile, respectively. Serbia, despite playing without No. 1 Novak Djokovic, beat Norway 2-1 and Poland took advantage of Stefanos Tsitsipas' injury-enforced absence in singles to beat Greece 2-1.

The 16 teams are divided into four groups, with the winners of each group advancing to the semifinals on Jan. 7 and 8. The final is scheduled for Jan. 9.

Jansen gets maiden ODI call-up for India series

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Young fast bowler Marco Jansen on Sunday received his maiden ODI call-up as South Africa named a 17-member squad for the three-ODI series against India beginning January 19.

The 21-year-old Jansen, who had snapped five wickets in his maiden Test last week, was picked in the squad led by Temba Bavuma with Keshav Maharaj as his deputy in the white-ball series.

Experienced pacer Anrich Nortje will miss the ODIs as well after being left out of the Tests due to a hip injury.

Wayne Parnell, Sisanda Magala and Zubayr Hamza also retained their spots in the squad which also includes former skipper Quinton de Kock, who retired from Test cricket following the loss in the first Test against India.

"This is a very exciting group and the Selection Panel and I are eager to see what they will produce," CSA Convenor of Selectors, Victor Mpitsang said.

"For many of our players, it does not get bigger than playing against this powerhouse Indian team and this will be the biggest series of their young lives so far.

"We are looking forward to seeing what they bring to the table and wish Temba (Bavuma) and Mark (Boucher) all the best for the series."

The first (January 19) and second ODIs (January 21) will be played at Boland Park, Paarl while the third and final match (January 23) will be held at Newlands, Cape Town.

India on Saturday announced their 18-member squad for the ODI series with KL Rahul named as captain with Rohit Sharma yet to regain full fitness.

Squad: Temba Bavuma (C), Keshav Maharaj (VC), Quinton de Kock, Zubayr Hamza, Marco



Jansen, Janneman Malan, Sisanda Magala, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Wayne Parnell, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne.

Contract of Neeraj's coach extended till 2024 Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra will continue to train with his German coach Klaus Bartonietz till the 2024 Paris Games, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) said.

Bartonietz took charge as Chopra's coach from compatriot and former world record holder javelin thrower Uwe Hohn during the youngster's rehabilitation and recovery process after an elbow surgery in 2018.

The AFI also said that the 400m coach Galina Bukharina will also remain at the helm of affairs till the end of this year's Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

Under Bukharina's watch, the men's 4x400m relay team of Mohammed Anas Yahiya, Noah Nirmal Tom, Arokia Rajiv and Amoj Jacob set an Asian record during the Tokyo Olympics.

The AFI had recently presented the Annual Calendar for Training and Competition to the Sports Ministry.

The AFI had recently presented the Annual Calendar for Training and Competition to the Sports Ministry.



Playing against South American teams gave us confidence ahead of Asian Cup: Manisha

PTI ■ KOCHI

Indian women's team forward Manisha Kalyan believes that playing against technically superior sides in South America in the lead-up to the AFC Asian Cup has raised the side's confidence level ahead of the continental showpiece.

Speaking during a live chat with AIFF TV, Manisha delved into the three matches that India had played against Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela a little



over a month.

"Playing against those sides was truly a unique experience for us. These are teams that have players who are technically more superior to us, and just keeping up with the pace of the games was so incredibly difficult," said Manisha.

"We had to stick together and fight like one unit, and I think we gave a good account of ourselves in those three games. That gave us a lot of confidence at the end of the day," she added.

Senior national camp to return to Kolkata after nine years

PTI ■ KOLKATA

After a long gap of nine years, the national camp for the senior recurve archers will return to the SAI Eastern Centre here in Kolkata ahead of the upcoming season.

According to the calendar released by the Archery Association of India on Sunday, SAI Eastern Centre, which had been the recurve archer's address till London 2012 Olympics, will host the first Senior National Camp from February 25-March 31.

During the camp, the first phase of the selection trial for the Asian Games will be held from March 7-10. The Asian Games are scheduled to be held in Hangzhou, China from September 10-25.

The AAI calendar also confirmed Jammu and Kashmir as the venue for the 41st Senior Nationals from March 18-27.

"The Asian Games trials will be held in three phases with the second and third phases slated in June and July," AAI's high performance director and Dronacharya Awardee Sanjeeva Singh told PTI.

The season will get underway with the Stage I of the World Cup in Antalya from April 18-24.

The team selected in the first phase trial is likely to represent India in the season opener World Cup in Antalya.

Kolkata used to be the venue for the senior national camp under the AAI secretary general Paresh Nath Mukherjee.

But after he stepped down following the London 2012 debacle and the camp shifted base to the Army Sports Institute in Pune where they have erected an Olympic simulated range and display.

"We have now decided to bring back the camps to the SAI centres so as of now Kolkata would be the venue for the recurve camp, while Sonapat will continue to host the compound archers," Singh concluded.

Juniors to train in Lausanne, Camp for apara archers in Dubai

Messi among 4 PSG players who test positive for Covid-19

AP ■ PARIS

Seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi remains back home in Argentina after being among four players in the Paris Saint-Germain squad to have tested positive for the coronavirus ahead of the team's French Cup game on Monday night.

PSG added that one staff member also had COVID-19 in a statement on Saturday night. None of them were named at that point, but in a further statement on the team's medical news Sunday the club named Messi, left back Juan Bernat, backup goalie Sergio Rico and 19-year-old midfielder Nathan Bitumazala.

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is uncertain when Messi will be able to return to France, or whether he can recover in time to play away to Lyon in the league next Sunday.

"We've been living with the virus for nearly two years now and everyone knows what they must do to avoid a contamination. But a lot about how the virus functions is still unknown," Pochettino said Sunday at a pre-game news conference.

"With regards to Leo, he's in contact with our medical service. I don't know if he'll be able to play in Lyon. He tested positive in Argentina (and) until he's negative, he won't be able to travel to France. We'll see when he gets back."

Title-holder PSG is playing at third-tier Vannes, and Pochettino was asked if he's concerned the virus may have spread among other players after training resumed late this week.



"It's the risk everyone runs in football on a world scale. Contact is unavoidable in football, it's obvious that there are more risks," he said.

"We've taken all the steps necessary to avoid a player transmitting the virus to another. I do what the medical service personnel tell us to."

Last year's runner-up Monaco was in action later Sunday at second-tier Quevilly-Rouen in one of 13 games scheduled for the day as sides bid to reach the last 16.

Monaco said Saturday that seven players had COVID-19 but none showed any worrying signs and are isolating.

Govt to formulate air sports policy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government plans to formulate a national air sports policy as well as set up an apex body for air sports.

The civil aviation ministry has sought comments from the public on the draft National Air Sports Policy (NASP 2022) till January 31.

The plan is to promote air sports by making it "safe, affordable, accessible, enjoyable and sustainable," according to the ministry.

The policy will cover sports like aerobatics, aeromodelling, amateur-built and experimental aircraft, ballooning, drones, skydiving and vintage aircraft.

Under the policy, an Air Sports Federation of India



(ASFI) will be established as the apex governing body while

associations for each air sport will handle day to day activities.

The air sports associations will be accountable to ASFI



GETAFE ENDS REAL MADRID'S 15-GAME UNBEATEN STREAK

AP ■ BARCELONA (SPAIN)

Getafe ended Real Madrid's 15-game unbeaten streak after beating the Spanish league leaders 1-0 in the capital derby on Sunday.

Striker Enes Unal took the host's winner in the ninth minute after he stole the ball from Madrid defender Eder Militao near the goal and beat Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid went no closer to an equalizer than Luka Modric's strike that hit the crossbar in the 17th. Eden Hazard and Marcelo came on as half-time substitutions but could not spark a comeback.

Madrid's previous loss came on Oct. 3 when it fell 2-1 at Espanyol. Since then, it had

won 13 and drawn two across all competitions.

Second-place Sevilla visits Cádiz on Monday nine points behind Madrid.

Courtois started the match after it was determined that his positive COVID-19 result from earlier this week was erroneous. Madrid was without in-form winger Vinicius Junior after he tested positive for the coronavirus.

The match was the first to be played since Spanish health authorities put back in place caps on attendance after the steep rise in COVID-19 infections. All games are limited to 75% of capacity, with some regions like Catalonia and the Basque Country applying even lower limits.