

OPINION 6

CRICKETERS NEED TO
UP THEIR GAME A LOT

WORLD 8

AUSTRALIA, JAPAN SIGN DEFENSE
PACT AS CHINA CONCERNS LOOM

MONEY 9

OMICRON TO HIT Q4 GDP BY 0.40 PC
DENT FY22 GROWTH BY 0.1 PC: REPORT

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY JANUARY 7, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

the pioneer

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ELGAR ANCHORS
SOUTH AFRICA
TO 7 WICKET WIN
11 SPORT

CAPSULE

INDIA HITS OUT AT
CHINESE EMBASSY

New Delhi: Over a week after the Chinese embassy wrote to several Indian lawmakers after they attended an event hosted by the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile, India on Thursday asked the mission to refrain from hyping up normal activities by MPs and said the substance, tone and tenor of the letter were "inappropriate".

FORMER J&K CMS TO
LOSE SSG SECURITY

Srinagar/New Delhi: Four former Chief Ministers of Jammu & Kashmir, including National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah and Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, are likely to lose their Special Security Group (SSG) protection as the Union Territory's administration has decided to "right-size" the elite unit established in 2000, officials said on Thursday.

SC TO HEAR MATTERS
IN VIRTUAL MODE

New Delhi: Amid the sudden spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the Supreme Court on Thursday decided to hear all matters in virtual mode from Friday. According to a circular issued by the SC administration, with effect from January 7, the benches will sit at the residential offices. "Only extremely urgent 'mentioned' matters, fresh matters, bail matters, matters involving stay, detention matters and fixed date matters will be listed before the courts w.e.f (with effect from) January 10, 2022 till further orders," the circular said.

Corona's incursion unabated, cases grow 55%

Maharashtra, Delhi,
Bengal, Kerala, TN,
K'taka account for
nearly 80,000 cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

India on Thursday registered a steep surge in Covid cases which crossed 90,000-mark, a significant rise from the previous day's 58,097 infections in a span of 24 hours while Omicron tally reached 2,630 — the most in Maharashtra with 797 cases, followed by Delhi with 465 cases.

Several States have announced restrictions like night curfew as Covid cases continue to race across the metros as well as small cities.

Just six States — Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka — accounted for nearly 80,000 cases on Thursday. This means, when India reports its number on Friday, it would easily cross 1.2 lakh.

Maharashtra added 36,265 new cases (Mumbai 21,081) to India's massive spike, followed by West Bengal and New Delhi. While Bengal registered 14,021 cases, Delhi logged 15,097 new cases in a day.

Gujarat recorded 4,213 new cases of coronavirus on Thursday, taking its tally to 8,44,856, while one patient succumbed to the infection in the State, the Health

Department said.

In south, Karnataka reported 5,031 fresh Covid-19 cases, 1 death in the last 24 hours. Kerala recorded 4,649 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday after testing 68,325 samples, taking its Test Positivity Rate (TPR) to 6.80 per cent. Tamil Nadu reported 4,862 Covid-19 cases. Chennai topped the list with 2,481 cases.

Alarmed at the spike, the Centre has asked States to ensure setting up of district, sub-district control rooms for Covid management with adequate staff, doctors, infrastructure, monitoring of beds availability, making outbound calls to patients in home isolation.

The aim is to ensure ease of access to services like ambulance transportation and hospital beds, said an official from the Union Health Ministry. "All States and UTs must ensure that the daily status report of the home isolated persons are collated by the control rooms at the district and sub-district levels in accordance with the new guidelines," said the Ministry in a letter dated on January 1, 2022.

In continuation of that letter, the Ministry on Thursday asked the States and UTs to ensure adequate staff and medical doctors at the control rooms in view of a rise in the case. The Ministry has asked the district administration to allot the dedicated ambulances for each control room.

Continued on Page 2



Workers place oxygen cylinders at a Covid care centre of the Commonwealth Games (CWG) village as part of the preparations for the third wave of Covid-19, in New Delhi, on Thursday

Delhi crosses 15,000 cases a
day mark, positivity 15.34%

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Thursday registered 15,097 fresh Covid-19 cases and six deaths in the last 24 hours, 41 per cent jump over the previous day count. According to the Delhi health bulletin, the positivity rate jumped to 15.34 per cent.

On Wednesday, 10,665 cases were reported and on Tuesday 5,481 cases, according to official figures.

The huge spike in fresh cases over the past several days here is being recorded amid a significant jump in cases of the new Omicron variant of the virus. The death toll due to the coronavirus infection in Delhi has now risen to 25,127.

The number of cumulative cases on Thursday stood at 14,89,463. Over 14.32 lakh patients have recovered from the infection.

During the height of the

second wave of the pandemic, 28,395 cases, the highest-ever single-day tally here, and 277 deaths were recorded in Delhi on April 20 last year, according to official figures.

Nine Covid-19 deaths were reported here in December last year, and seven in November, according to official data. Delhi had recorded four Covid-19 deaths in October and five in September.

Continued on Page 2

125 fliers from Italy test
+ve on arrival in Amritsar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 125 passengers or almost 80 per cent of those traveling from Italy to India on the non-scheduled charter flight (YU-661) tested positive for the coronavirus on arrival at Amritsar airport on Thursday.

The flight, operated by a Portuguese company, EuroAtlantic Airways, landed at Amritsar's Sir Guru Ram Dass Ji International Airport around 1.30 pm on Thursday with 179 passengers.

This comes amid heightened testing at all airports across the country. India earlier identified several European countries, including Italy, "at risk" in the wake of the outbreak of Omicron.

Taking to Twitter, the Amritsar airport authorities stated that they have taken all necessary actions to stop the spread of Covid-19. "In today's flight 125 passengers tested positive, and are being attended by State health officials. Rest 35 tested negative, and have been advised self-monitoring and would be under supervision," the airport noted.

VK Seth, the airport director at Amritsar, said as many as 125 passengers tested positive out of the 179, who were flying in a chartered flight from



Air travellers check their documents to get themselves registered for Covid-19 test, at T-3 terminal of Indira Gandhi International Airport

Milan. Of them, 19 were either children or infants so they were exempt from on-arrival RT-PCR testing.

Officials said the passengers who have been tested Covid positive have been sent to institutional quarantine in their respective districts.

Chaotic visuals from the Amritsar airport showed a large number of passengers waiting to leave and in some videos, passengers were seen arguing with the authorities. After the test reports came in, a number of the passengers were not satisfied with the results and created a hue and cry at the terminal building. The passengers who tested positive for Covid-19 were reluctant for admission in the isolation ward of any of the city hospitals and were pressing upon the authorities to let them go.

Continued on Page 2

PM calls on Prez, apprises him
of 'security breach' in PunjabPM's life threat
'gimmick' aimed
at toppling my
Govt: Punjab CM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday briefed President Ram Nath Kovind about the security breach during his visit to Punjab as the President expressed concern over a "serious lapse".

At the same time, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday minced no words in saying that the Prime Minister's "life threat gimmick" was aimed at toppling a democratically-elected Government in Punjab.

"President Ram Nath Kovind met Prime Minister Modi at the Rashtrapati Bhavan today and received from him a first-hand account of the security breach in his convoy in Punjab yesterday. The



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets President Ram Nath Kovind to give a first-hand account of the security breach his convoy faced in Punjab, at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi

President expressed his concerns about the serious lapse", the President's secretariat said.

In a "major security lapse", the Prime Minister's convoy was stranded on a flyover due to a blockade by protesters in Ferozepur on Wednesday. He returned from poll-bound Punjab without attending any event, including a rally.

Taking to Twitter, Modi said, "Called on Rashtrapati Ji. Thankful to him for his con-

Punjab forms 2-member
panel to probe lapses

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab Government on Thursday constituted a two-member panel comprising Justice (retired) Mehtab Singh Gill and the State Principal Secretary (Home Affairs and Justice) Anurag Verma to carry out a thorough probe into the lapses that occurred during the PM's visit a day before.

The panel has sought the response from State Director-General of Police (DGP) and all others involved in the PM security. While the State police chief has been asked to submit the response to the queries raised by 5 pm on Friday, others have been given time till 9

am Friday.

As per the orders, the committee will submit its report within three days. However, the BJP rejected the Government-constituted panel alleging that Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi was the "ringleader of conspiracy".

Punjab BJP president Ashwani Sharma, after meeting Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit, said, "We reject the committee set up by the Punjab Government to investigate the matter... This committee, formed by the Chief Minister will never be able to find out anything because he himself is the ringleader of this conspiracy."

cern. Grateful for his good wishes, which are always a source of strength."

Earlier, Vice President M

Venkaiah Naidu spoke to Modi about the incident and expressed his deep concern.

Continued on Page 2



Navy personnel during rehearsals for the Republic Day parade on a cold winter morning in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

India ramps up road, bridge work to counter China

Govt monitoring
Chinese activity
at Pangong lake
closely: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has ramped up its efforts to build roads and bridges in the border areas to face any threat from China.

India's response has come after reports that China bolstered its infrastructure, especially in the Ladakh region, and also built a bridge recently on the strategically important Pangong Tso (lake).

Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said here on Thursday that "as regards reports about a bridge being made by the Chinese side on Pangong lake, the Government has been



monitoring this activity closely. This bridge is being constructed in areas that have been under illegal occupation by China for around 60 years now. As you are well aware India has never accepted such illegal occupation."

He also said the Government has been taking all necessary steps to ensure

that India's security interests are fully protected. "As part of these efforts, the Government has also, in the last seven years, increased significantly the budget for the development of border infrastructure and completed more roads and bridges than ever before. These have provided much-needed connectivity to the local population

as well as logistical support to the armed forces. The Government remains committed to this objective," he said.

This reiteration came two days after the media, including *The Pioneer*, reported the construction of a bridge by the Chinese army at the Pangong lake. The bridge links the north and south banks of the lake and will enable the Chinese to swiftly deploy their troops.

The stand-off two years back started from the Pangong lake when the Chinese troops blocked an Indian patrol leading to an exchange of blows.

The situation later turned serious with the Chinese troops transgressing the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at several points culminating in a bloody clash in the Galwan valley in 2020. Twenty Indian Army personnel, including the commanding officer, died in the brawl. China is yet to officially announce the number of casu-

alties it suffered. Indian security establishment says more than 40 Chinese soldiers were killed.

On the bridge across the 135-km long strategically crucial Pangong Lake, satellite footage and ground reports indicate the bridge is coming up at the narrow part of the lake in a region called Khurnak in the Chinese area, sources had said here on Monday.

Nearly complete and connecting the northern and southern banks of the lake, it will reduce the distance by more than 150 km for the Chinese, they said.

The bridge was built with prefabricated structures with the objective of denying any advantage to India to dominate the southern and northern banks, including the hilltops. The Indian Army in 2020 captured the dominating heights weeks after the Galwan clash.

Continued on Page 2

Now a candidate
can spend ₹95L for
LS and ₹40L for
Assembly elections

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Following the recommendations of the Election Commission, the Ministry of Law and Justice on Thursday revised the maximum expenditure limit from ₹28 lakh to ₹40 lakh for a candidate in Assembly polls and ₹70 lakh to ₹95 lakh for Lok Sabha polls.

For Puducherry, Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Goa and Arunachal Pradesh, the maximum expenditure limit for Assembly elections has been revised from ₹20 lakh to ₹28 lakh and from ₹54 lakh to ₹75 lakh for Lok Sabha elections. The expenditure limit is the amount an election candidate can legally spend for his election campaign.

Continued on Page 2

SC reserves order
on EWS quota in
NEET-PG admission

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its order on a plea related to the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota in connection with the NEET-PG admissions.

A bench of justices DY Chandrachud and AS Bopanna asked the parties to file their written submissions for consideration. "We have been hearing this matter for two days, we must start counseling in the national interest," said the SC.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the apex court that he would like to clear up the confusion that there is a change in the rules of the game mid-

way. "Firstly, there is no change in the rules of the game. The regime which is the subject matter of this challenge is in force since 2019 except in the All India Quota," he said.

Senior advocates Arvind Datar and Shyam Divan appeared for candidates. Senior advocate P Wilson appeared for the Tamil Nadu Government.

The Centre had told the SC it would not accept a position whereby those falling in the OBC or the EWS category, whether before or after the exercise of revisiting the criterion of ₹8 lakh annual income, are deprived of something that is legitimately due to them.

Continued on Page 2

SIT summons 12 kisan in Lakhimpur lynching case

Three BJP workers were lynched in Kheri violence

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After submitting charge-sheets against 14 accused, including Union Minister's son Ashish Mishra, the special investigation team (SIT) on Thursday summoned 12 farmers in connection with the alleged lynching of three Bharatiya Janata Party workers during the violence in Lakhimpur Kheri that took place on October 3 last year.

Most of these farmers had earlier stated that they were present at the spot but were not

involved in the attack. They were, at that time, charged under bailable sections such as 'rioting' and 'voluntarily causing hurt' and were let off by the SIT officials under Section 41 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Seven farmers have been arrested in the case so far and the SIT is looking for more suspects.

A SIT member said, "We have issued summons to record statements of the farmers who were present on the spot and were part of the mob. A few of them appeared before us earlier but none were arrested."

Advocate Harjeet Singh, who is representing the farmers, said, "A few farmers were earlier summoned for questioning under lenient sections as they were part of the mob but were not involved in the violence. The farmers who

received the summons now are the ones who are witnesses in the case of the murder of farmers. We are waiting for the SIT to find the two other accused in the convoy who managed to escape."

Four farmers and a journalist were allegedly mowed down by the convoy of Union Minister Ajay Misra. Angry farmers had then in retaliation allegedly killed three BJP workers and torched two SUVs that were part of the convoy.

Cross FIRs were registered in the case and the SIT submitted a charge-sheet in which 14 people, including Ashish, who are in jail for the death of the farmers, have been named. Seven farmers have been arrested in the lynching case. The investigation in the latter case is ongoing.

Tweet on CM's wife sparks row in Maha

Objectionable tweet calls Rashmi Thackeray 'Marathi Rabri Devi'

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

An "objectionable" tweet describing Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's wife Rashmi Thackeray as "Marathi Rabri Devi" sparked a controversy on Thursday, with the Mumbai police calling a BJP social media functionary for questioning over the tweet.

In a development that saw the ruling MVA leaders hit out at the BJP for the controversial tweet put out by its social media functionary Jiten Gajaria, the the Cyber Cell of the Crime Branch-CID of Mumbai Police called Gajaria for questioning over his description of Rashmi Thackeray as "Marathi Rabri Devi".

In his tweet put out along

with photograph of Rashmi Thackeray, Gajaria has likened her to Bihar's former chief minister Rabri Devi, who had taken over the reins of the northern state after her husband and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav resigned in the wake of his involvement in the fodder scam.

Through his tweet, Gajaria has indirectly referred to the health issues faced by chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is recouping from a cervical spine surgery that he underwent at HN Reliance Hospital here on November 12. Uddhav's health issues should be seen in the context of the fact that the winter session of the Maharashtra Legislature – for the first time in the history of the State Legislature -- came to be convened in Mumbai instead of Nagpur in view of the chief minister's delicate condition and the fact that the doctors attending on him have advised him to go out of Mumbai.

Confirming that his client and party colleague Gajaria had been called for questioning, Mumbai BJP secretary and Advocate Vivekananda Gupta said: "Gajaria has been called for questioning by the police. He has not been arrested. Nor has any FIR been registered against my client".

Shiv Sena leader and current Maharashtra Legislative Council chairperson Dr Neelam Gorhe condemned the tweet saying that "it was objectionable", "We can not tolerate this kind of insults," she said. BJP's state women's wing vice president and activist Chitra Wagh disapproved tweet by saying: "I am not supporting it". She however, said: "At the same time, we should also take note of the fact that the police have not taken any action against Shiv Sena leader and water supply and sanitation minister Gulabrao Patil, who compared the roads in his constituency in Jalgaon district to yester year actress and MP

Hema Malini's cheeks.

A couple of day ago Shiv Sena leader and minister Abdul Sattar, had said that Rashmi Thackeray, if made chief minister, was capable of running the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in the state. State BJP president Chandrakant Patil had said Uddhav's wife Rashmi Thackeray or son Aaditya Thackeray, who is state tourism, environment and protocol minister, should be made the chief minister of the state in view of the health condition of the chief minister.

It may be recalled that on March 1, 2020 Rashmi Thackeray had replaced Uddhav as the editor of the Shiv Sena's official mouth-piece "Saamana", a Marathi daily newspaper,

The change in guard in "Saamana" set-up was expected as Uddhav had quit as the editor of the party's official mouth-piece after taking over as the chief minister of Maharashtra in November

2019. Uddhav Thackeray had taken over as the Editor of "Saamana" after the death of Shiv Sena chief and his father Bal Thackeray on November 18, 2012. After having been its editor for eight years, Uddhav resigned as the editor of Saamana, before taking the oath as the chief minister on November 28, 2019. So much so that Uddhav's name had disappeared from the print line of the newspaper.

In a public notice issued in the newspaper by publisher of "Saamana" Madhukar Bhagwat under the Regulations of Newspapers on Sunday, Rashmi Thackeray was named as the Editor of the Sena's official mouth-piece.

'Saamana' began its publication on January 23, 1988, with late Thackeray as its founding editor. 'Dopahar Ka Saamana', a Hindi afternoon edition of "Saamana" was launched by the Shiv Sena on February 23, 1993.

<div></div> <div>DELHI JAL BOARD OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER(M)-7 NANGLOI PH-III, NEAR SURAJMAL STADIUM METRO STATION NEW DELHI- 110041 NIT No. 68/EE(M)10/ACE(M)7/(2021-22) Short Press Notice Tender</div>						
S. N	Name of Work	Amount Put to tender (Rs.)	EMD	Tender Fee's	Dt. of release of tender procurement solution/I.D.No.	Last dt./time of receipt of tender through E-procurement solution
1	Replacement of old/deteriorated sewer line in A-1 Block Sultanpuri in Sultanpur Mazra Constituency (AC-10) under ZE-IV/EE(NW)	27,11,806/-	54,300/-	500/-	05/01/2022/ 2022_DJB_214076_1	14-01-2022 at 3.00 P.M.
Further details in this regard can be seen at https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in						
ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER) Advt. No. J.S.V. 967 (2021-22)		*STOP CORONA: Wear Mask, Follow Physical Distancing, Maintain Hand Hygiene"			sd/- (Himanshu Agarwal) EX. ENGINEER(M)10	



Office Of Executive Engineer, Maintenance Division
Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan
Lane No-1, Tarun Vihar, Mothrowala Road, Dehradun-248001
Phone No/Fax. 0135 2671940, E-mail - eemdujs@rediffmail.com



Letter No. 3996/E-Tender notice/2021-22 Date: 06.01.2022

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING E - Tender Notice

On behalf of the Chief General Manager, Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan, Dehradun online tenders in **Two Bid System**, on item rate contract basis (inclusive of all materials) are invited for the following works in District Dehradun (Uttarakhand) under **Jal Jeevan Mission** from technically and financially capable bidders, registered with Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan/Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam in appropriate class & category up to prescribed date & time on the portal as mentioned in terms and conditions.

Bid No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Rs.)	Cost of Bid Document (in Rs.)	Period of completion of works
01	Construction of Jagthan Burayala Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete.	153300.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
02	Construction of Chatra Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete.	134300.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
03	Construction of Tuna Mangtar Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete.	80000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	09 months
04	Construction of Bhugtar Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	204000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
05	Construction of Bhugtar Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	46000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	09 months
06	Construction of Chhutau Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	60000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
07	Construction of Koti Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	86000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
08	Construction of Kuroli Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	174000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	12 months
09	Construction of Lalau/Masrad Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete	64000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	09 months
10	Construction of Maletha Water Supply Scheme Construction of Clear Water Reservoir, Supply, Fixing, Laying, Testing & Commissioning of Gravity Main, Distribution System & Providing of House Hold Connection etc Complete under Kalsi Block	56000.00	₹ 4000.00 + GST	09 months

The tender time schedule (Key Dates) is as follows:-

S. No.	Description	Time Schedule (Key Dates)
1	Date of Online Publication	11.01.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
2	Document download : Start Date	12.01.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
3	Pre-Bid Meeting : Date	16.01.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
4	Bid Submission : Start date	19.01.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
5	Bid Submission : End date	25.01.2022 upto 17:00 Hrs
6	Offline Submission of Documents (Cost of bidding Document, Bid Security, Original affidavits and all supporting Document in support of qualification).	25.01.2022 upto 17:00 Hrs
7	Date of Bid Opening	27.01.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
8	Date of Financial Bid Opening	To be intimated later

"जल संवय-जीवन संवय" Executive Engineer

Corona's... India ramps up road...

From Page 1

"One of the core responsibilities of the control rooms shall be to collate the daily status report of all patients under home isolation in their jurisdiction and submit the same to the district administration," reads the letter.

The control rooms will be responsible to make calls to the patients under home isolation for regular monitoring of the status report.

Along with enabling the infrastructure to provide unintended connectivity, the control rooms will remain functional round the clock to provide support to the patients. The control rooms need to ensure a mechanism for the allotment of beds.

Data has shown that the average daily rise of Covid this time is almost 21 per cent faster than during the second wave in March-April.

A seven-day moving average showed that the cases have shot up from 56 to 199, said the official.

From Page 1

The bridge will now reduce a 150 km loop from Khurnak to the south banks through Rudok, sources said. The bridge will reduce the route from Khurnak to Rudok to 40-50 km instead of 170 km, they said.

China has two-thirds of the 135 km Pangong Tso and India has the remaining part. The region has seen stand-offs in the past few years with Chinese aggressive patrolling on foot and by boats. Besides the bridge, the Chinese army has also built a road leading to the bridge for quicker deployment of troops and weapons, sources said.

The region saw a prolonged face-off between the Indian and Chinese troops from September 2020 till February 2021. Following prolonged military and diplomatic level talks, the two sides disengaged from the southern banks of the Pangong Tso in February.

Despite the stand-offs and talks, China ramped up its infrastructure development, including roads, bridges and helpads besides military garrisons near the Pangong lake and other flashpoints in the last few months. At present, more than 50,000 troops each from both sides are deployed in Eastern Ladakh.



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (THC), MPPGCL, SIRMOUR
Email:eehgtbc@gmail.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
M.P. Power Generating Co. Ltd. invites e-tender from reputed/established Contractor/Service Provider/Security Agency/Firm/Joint venture under tender no. **2021_MPPGC_169448_1** for Annual work contract for Deployment of 25 Nos. Unarmed Guards for security of Tons Hydrel Complex Sirmour with estimated cost of **Rs. 43.10 Lakh**. Last date & time for online submission /opening of tender is **07/09 02.2022**. For details and PQR conditions please visit website www.mptenders.gov.in.
(R.B.S.Tiwari)
// Save Electricity // Addl. Chief Engineer (THC), Sirmour.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE
30-Elect-12-T-2021-22-E3
Illumination with dynamic facade lighting of office building (Rail Bhawan, Baroda House, HN2M station, Anand Vihar station & DRM Office New Delhi) on the occasion of Republic day 2022 & Independence day 2022 as per Railway Board/H.Q.instructions.
Approx cost of the works in Rs. 51.69 lacs
Address of the Office Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Earnest Money Rs.103400.00
Date & Time of Submission of Tender 21.01.2022, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of Tender 21.01.2022, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & Notice Board www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
No: 30-Elect-12-T-2021-22-E3 Dated: 06.01.2022 27/22
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, ड्रेनेज मण्डल-गाज़ियाबाद
सिंचाई एवं जल संसाधन विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश, विकटोरिया पार्क कॉलोनी, मेरठ
:- शुद्धि पत्र :-

इस कार्यालय द्वारा आमंत्रित निम्नलिखित अल्पकालीन निविदा सूचना संख्या 07/एस.ई./2021-22 को अपरिहार्य कारणवश वेबसाइट पर अपलोड न किये जाने के फलस्वरूप निम्नानुसार संशोधित की जाती है -

क्र. सं.	कार्य का नाम	इस कार्यालय का पत्रांक	पूर्व में अपलोड / डाउनलोड किये जाने एवं खोलने की तिथि	संशोधित अपलोड/डाउनलोड किये जाने एवं खोलने की तिथि
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शेष समस्त नियम तथा शर्तें पूर्ववत रहेंगी।

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ड्रेनेज मण्डल, गाज़ियाबाद

SC reserves order EWS reservation...

From Page 1

The NEET-PG candidates, who have challenged a July 29, 2021 notification for the implementation of the OBC and the EWS quotas from the 2021-22 academic year, opposed the Government's justification of applying the ₹8 lakh income criterion, saying no study has been conducted on it.

Large-scale protests were held by resident doctors of various hospitals under the banner of the Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA) in Delhi and other parts of the country over the delay in the NEET-PG counseling, which has been postponed due to the pendency of the case and the Centre deciding to revisit the criterion for the determination of the EWS quota.

125 fliers from Italy test +ve...

From Page 1

Officials from the health department tried to convince them to get admission in the isolation ward in any of the hospitals they desired in Amritsar.

Earlier, Air India has rubished reports stating passengers on board its flight to Rome tested positive for coronavirus on arrival at the Amritsar International Airport.

The airline clarified that it didn't operate any flights from Rome as of now. "Several media houses have reported that passengers of Air India flight from Rome to Amritsar have been tested Covid positive. This is wrong and baseless. Air India doesn't operate any flight from Rome currently," Air India tweeted.

Delhi crosses...

From Page 1

A total of 98,434 tests — 80,051 RT-PCR tests and 18,383 rapid antigen tests — were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said.

Health Minister Satyendar Jain said, "Patients infected with Omicron can be treated at home. People should not panic and go to the hospital only if the symptoms are severe." Jain also said lockdown will not be imposed in the national Capital.

He said as per the new guidelines if the SPO2 level is above 93 per cent, there is no need to go to the hospital. He said no one has died as a result of the new Omicron variant and no Omicron patient has yet required oxygen or ventilator support. He urged Delhi residents not to visit the hospital unless they were in immediate need. "There are enough beds in Delhi's hospitals, so there is no need to panic. If the symptoms are minor, there is no need to go to the hospital. Only go to the hospital if your symptoms are severe," he said.

According to the new guidelines of the Health Ministry, patients with mild symptoms and asymptomatic patients do not need to go to the hospital. Asymptomatic patients can be treated at home.

if the protestors were more than a kilometer away from him.

"At the place where the cavalcade of PM stopped, not even a slogan was raised...then how his life was threatened," said Channi reminding the PM that Punjabis have sacrificed life for unity, integrity, and sovereignty of the country and they can never pose any danger to life and security of the PM.

"The PM is a respected leader of the nation but it doesn't behove a leader of his stature to indulge in such cheap theatricals. The thin presence of the public in the rally has exposed BJP's poor position in the State which is not going down well to its entire leadership," said Channi.

Citing a comparison, Channi said: "Weather was poor yesterday also and is poor today too. But, there were very few takers for BJP's rally on Wednesday whereas today's rally of the Congress across the State is swelling with people."

"Yesterday's gimmick by the PM and his coterie is aimed at imposing the President's rule in the State," he said while reminding the Prime Minister that Punjab can be won only by love and not by pressure. Punjabis will vehemently oppose any such move to destabilise democracy in the State, he added. The Chief Minister also urged the PM to stop defaming the State and its people for vested political interests.

"Punjabis have played a key role in the socio-economic development of the country besides safeguarding its borders. The slanderous campaign, launched by the BJP is an insult of all the Punjabis, which is unwarranted and undesirable," he added.

Now a...

From Page 1

The new expenditure limits for assembly polls, revised in view of the rise in cost inflation index and the size of the electorate, will be applicable to the upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa, and Manipur.

The poll expenditures are mainly expenses towards use of vehicles in the campaign, campaigning equipment, election rallies, electronic and print media, banners, pamphlets and field visits.

Social media and publicity are becoming the biggest areas of expenditure.

The poll panel had set up a committee under its Director General Umesh Sinha and ex Indian Revenue Service officer Harish Kumar in 2020 to examine the existing expenditure limits for election candidates in view of the increase in number of electors and rise in Cost Inflation Index, among other factors.

"Having regard to demand from political parties to raise existing election expenditure limit for candidates and increase in electors from 2014 to 2021 from 834 million to 936 million (up by 12.23 %) and rise in Cost Inflation Index from 2014-15 to 2021-22 from 240 to 317 (up by 32.08%), the Committee furnished its recommendations to enhance the ceiling limit.

The Commission has accepted the recommendations of the Committee and has decided to enhance the existing election expenditure limit for candidates," the EC said.

BULLI BAI APP CASE

Police nab ‘mastermind’ engineering student

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of Delhi Police has arrested a 21-year-old engineering student believed to be the “mastermind” and creator of the “Bulli Bai” app from Jorhat in Assam on Thursday. Police said that he was brought to the national Capital where he confessed to his role.

The accused identified as Niraj Bishnoi is the fourth person to be arrested for their alleged involvement in the app that has listed hundreds of Muslim women for “auction”. The other three, nabbed by Mumbai Police, include a 19-year-old woman from Uttarakhand, also alleged to be a prime accused in the case.

Bishnoi, a resident of Jorhat who studies in Bhopal, is the creator of the “Bulli Bai” app on the platform GitHub as well as the main Twitter account holder of “Bulli Bai”, police said.

According to K P S Malhotra, the Deputy

Commissioner of Police (DCP), ISFO, Bishnoi is the mastermind and the person who had created this application on Github.

“He has confessed about the creation of the application... forensic remnants of the creation have been found in his laptop. He was arrested early Thursday morning from Jorhat,” the DCP said, adding that IFSO worked out the case using technical analysis, IPDR (Internet Protocol Detail Records) and other gateways.

Bishnoi is a second year B Tech student at the Vellore Institute of Technology in the Madhya Pradesh capital, the DCP said.

Of the four people arrested, three are 21 years old, two are studying engineering and one is aspiring to, and two are from Uttarakhand.

The three arrests made by the cyber cell of Mumbai Police are Uttarakhand teen Shweta Singh, who has passed her Class 12 exam and is planning to study engineering, 21-year-

old Mayank Rawal, also from Uttarakhand, and Bengaluru-based Vishal Kumar Jha, a second-year engineering student like Bishnoi and aged 21 too.

According to a senior Mumbai Police officer, Singh is a prime accused who had created the Twitter handle of the app. Mumbai Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale told reporters on Wednesday that some more people are likely to be involved in the matter.

Hundreds of Muslim women were listed for “auction” on the “Bulli Bai” mobile application with photographs sourced without permission and doctored. The app appeared to be a clone of “Sulli Deals” which triggered a similar row last year.

On Saturday, Delhi Police registered an FIR against unknown persons for allegedly uploading a doctored picture of a woman journalist on a website. The journalist had lodged a complaint and shared a copy on Twitter.

HC asks Delhi Govt about Omicron status, preparations

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the city Government to apprise it of the position of Covid-19 new variant Omicron in the national Capital, including how many patients are in ICU, on ventilator support and with oxygen beds in hospitals.

“We want to know the position of Omicron,” a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, said he will get instructions and come back with the figures.

The court also sought to know as to out of the total number of Covid-19 patients in Delhi, how many are of Omicron, on ventilators, in ICU and with oxygen support in hospitals.

“So your Chief Minister is also down with Covid-19,” the bench said. “What is the position otherwise? Hospitalisation is not much.”

Giving the statistics, Mehra said there were 10,986 active cases of Covid-19 as on January 3.

He then said the

period of home isolation has been now reduced to seven days from 10 and the Governments, both central and state, are closely looking at the situation.

The high court listed the matter for further hearing on February 1. During the hearing, Central government standing counsel Anurag Ahluwalia informed the court that the Centre has already come with the policy on ‘precautionary dose’ of Covid-19 vaccine. The court said since the government has already declared the policy regarding ‘precautionary dose’, no further consideration on this aspect is called for at this stage.

The issue of whether to administer a booster dose of Covid-19 vaccines has cropped up amid the new Omicron variant of coronavirus.

The Centre had in December told the high court that expert bodies were deliberating on the need and justification for booster doses and at that time, there were no guidelines on it. **PTI**

Delhi Police: Green corridor created for transportation of heart

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Thursday created a green corridor was created from Terminal 1 of Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport to transport a live heart which was flown from Chandigarh for a patient in AIIMS here.

According to Vivek Kishore, the Joint Commissioner of Police, Traffic, a distance of about 12 KM from airport T-1 to AIIMS Hospital was covered within 11 minutes for transportation of live Heart which otherwise takes almost 40-50 minutes.

“On Thursday at 10 am, a call was received from Prof. Aarti Vij, Head of the Dept. ORBO AIIMS for creating Green Corridor to facilitate the transportation of live Heart from IGI Airport, Terminal-1 to AIIMS Hospital which was brought by air from Chandigarh by IndiGo Flight,” said the Joint CP.

“Despite the engagement of the traffic staff in connection with the VIP Route and Traffic regulations, a green corridor was provided to the ambulance from IGI Airport, to AIIMS Hospital and the live Heart was transported successfully,” he said.

Fire breaks out at New Lajpat Rai market

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Around 60 “khokas” (kiosks) were engulfed after a fire broke out at New Lajpat Rai market opposite the National Capital’s Red Fort in Chandni Chowk early on Thursday. Officials said that there were no casualties in the incident.

According to Atul Garg, the Director, Delhi Fire Services (DFS), a call about the fire at New Lajpat Rai Market was received around 4.43 AM and 13 fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

“The fire has been doused and the cooling process is underway,” he said.

Sagar Singh Kalsi, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district said that the fire was brought under control by 7 AM.

“Prima facie, a short-circuit seems to have caused the fire. Legal action will be initiated as per complaints,” said the DCP.

New Lajpat Rai market is famous for clothes and utensils. Rajiv Aggarwal, one of the traders who owns a travel agency in the Central Market at Chandi Chowk claimed this was the first time that a fire-related incident took place at the 50-year-old market of New Lajpat Rai.

Covid surge puts a brake on Delhi Govt’s pilgrimage scheme for elderly

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The surge in Covid-19 infections has put a brake on the Delhi Government’s Mukhya Mantri Tirth Yatra Yojna under which the elderly are taken to various religious sites, with a train scheduled to leave for the Velankani church in Tamil Nadu on Friday having been cancelled, officials said. Eleven train trips that were planned in January have been affected due to the pandemic. The train to Velankani on January 7 stands cancelled, said Kamal Bansal, chairman of Tirth Yatra Vikas Samiti.

“Further, trains of pilgrims, including those for Kartarpur Sahib route as well as Amritsar, Ayodhya and Rameshwaram later this month, have also been cancelled,” Bansal said.

“The decision to suspend the scheme for the time being has been taken due to the rising number of Covid across the country. It will restart when the conditions are suitable,” said a



senior Delhi Government officer.

Under the Mukhya Mantri Tirth Yatra Yojna, people aged 60 years and above are sent on pilgrimage on 15 routes fully

sponsored by the Delhi government. The Government pays for travel, accommodation and other expenses of each pilgrim who can also take along an attendant with them.

‘Doctors for you’ starts free 100-bedded Covid Care Centre in Gurugram

Gurugram: Amid a surge in cases of Covid-19 and Omicron, M3M Foundation with support of the district health department, Gurugram and ‘Doctors For You’ has started a free 100-bedded Covid Care Center in Sector-67 Gurugram.

Patients can avail of the facility by contacting the free helpline number 0124-4085480. The centre is fully equipped with all the medical facilities, doctors and medical staff.

“The cases of the Omicron are rising exponentially and swift collaborative actions are required to ensure the gains against the pandemic are not lost. The covid care centre will support the

patients in the city battling the disease and will be a great support to the people from various communities who don’t have access to medical care. Being a responsible organization, we will take every possible step to support the country, frontline workers and citizens in these testing times,” said Dr Payal Kanodia, Trustee, M3M Foundation.

M3M Foundation had previously established a 300-bedded covid care centre during the second wave of covid which helped many patients combat the disease.

The Center is a part of the organisation’s “Kartavya” initiatives that seek to empower the underprivileged.

DTCP recommends FIR against 58 offenders for developing illegal colonies

Gurugram: To tighten the noose on offenders who are indulging in developing illegal colonies in several parts of Gurugram, the District Town and Country Planning (DTCP) department have recommended FIR against such 58 offenders.

The officials said the department has served notices in connection with developing illegal colonies to them and even the department has also conducted demolition drives in such areas.

“We used to organise awareness campaigns from time to time so that the innocent people could not invest their hard-earned money in such illegal colonies. These offenders are involved in public at large. We have recommended FIR against them in different police stations of Gurugram,” DTP R.S. Bath said.

According to data shared by the department, these offenders were involved to develop illegal colonies in Kherki Mazra,

Farrukhnagar, Sultanpur, Gadoli Kalan, Baskhusla and Bhaorakalan, Pataudi.

The officials assume that they used to develop colonies between 2 acres to 10 acres of land.

During a recent demolition drive in village Bhaorakalan, Pataudi by the DTCP, 4 unauthorised colonies in approximately 10 acres were demolished with the help of earthmovers. All four colonies were at initial stages and demarcation of plots by way of DPCs, boundary walls was being done. A total of 10 under construction structures, dealer office was demolished and approximately 50 DPCs, sewer line and road network was demolished.

The second demolition drive was conducted in Baskhusla near IMT Manesar where a 10-acre colony was being carved out.

The officials said at the same location they had demolished 20 shops and rooms, 50 DPCs and a boundary wall and road network.

Air quality improves to ‘poor’ after rain; max temp 21.1 deg C



New Delhi: Delhi’s air quality improved to the “poor” category on Thursday due to intermittent rains while the city’s maximum temperature settled at 21.1 degrees Celsius, two notches above the season’s average. The 24-hour air quality index (AQI) of Delhi read 258 at 4 pm on Thursday, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. The AQIs of its neighbouring cities -- Faridabad (219), Noida (252), Gurugram (224) -- were also recorded in the “poor” category.

However, the AQI in Greater Noida (182) and Ghaziabad (179) was recorded in the “moderate” category. The national Capital’s AQI at 8 am on Thursday was 339, which falls in the “very poor” category. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered “good”, 51 and 100 “satisfactory”, 101 and 200 “moderate”, 201 and 300 “poor”, 301 and 400 “very poor”, and 401 and 500 “severe”.

“The AQI has improved today (Thursday) to ‘poor’ category due to yesterday’s intermittent rain spells causing wet deposition of particulate matter. On January 8, it is likely to rain with high wind speeds leading to improvement in AQI due to wet deposition and strong dispersion resulting AQI to be in

‘lower end of poor’ or ‘moderate’ category,” the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR) said.

It predicted that January 9 onwards, the air quality is likely

to worsen due to gradual decrease in maximum and minimum temperatures as well as wind speed, all contributing to low dispersion of pollutants.

The national capital witnessed a cloudy morning on Thursday and recorded minimum temperature at 11.7 degrees Celsius, five notches above the season’s average. The day’s maximum temperature settled at 21.1 degrees Celsius, two notches above the season’s average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

“It will be generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle on Friday. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to hover around 21 degrees Celsius and 12 degrees Celsius respectively on Friday,” the weather office predicted.

The IMD said the city received 9 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours between 8.30 am on Wednesday to 8.30 am on Thursday.

The relative humidity at 5.30 pm was 71 per cent in Delhi, IMD said. **PTI**

Delhi Govt to deploy volunteers at fair price shops to ensure adherence to Covid norms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With a steep rise in coronavirus cases, the Food and Supply Department has decided to deploy volunteers to ensure health guidelines are followed by beneficiaries and the staff at all fair price shops in Delhi, an official statement said.

These instructions were issued by Food and Supply Minister Imran Hussain after a high-level meeting of the department with other stakeholders of the public distribution system on Thursday.

“The minister directed the Food & Civil Supplies department officials to ensure that civil defence volunteers deputised at FPSs should monitor all the beneficiaries are wearing masks and are following social distancing norms,” the statement said.

It added that Hussain also directed officials to ensure that FPS dealers adopt Covid-appropriate behaviour at all times during the ration distribution.

He also said that coronavirus pandemic guidelines should

be followed while lifting ration from godowns.

“The minister asked transporters to adequately sensitise truck drivers and their helpers in scrupulously following the guidelines of Covid-19 and adopt Covid-appropriate behaviour while transporting food-grains,” the statement said.

Delhi on Thursday recorded 15,097 fresh Covid cases, the highest single-day rise since May 8, and six deaths while the positivity rate mounted to 15.34 per cent, according to data shared by the city health department.

The number of new cases recorded on Thursday is 41 per cent more than the figure the day before.

In the meeting Hussain reviewed the distribution of free ration under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) beneficiaries. He also reviewed the progress of distribution of 5 kg of food grains to non-PDS beneficiaries (without ration card) in Delhi.

The minister said that the Arvind Kejriwal

Government has extended the period for free ration supply to the beneficiaries for another six months i.e upto May 2022 to mitigate the economic hardship caused by the Pandemic Covid-19.

Hussain also said the Delhi government is keeping a close watch on the price trends of essential commodities. He said that wherever felt necessary the government will undertake market intervention for the stabilisation of prices of essential commodities in Delhi during the pandemic time.

The minister also asked the department to keep a strict vigil on the availability and movement of prices of essential commodities.

“The minister directed intelligence teams should also gather information about instances of hoarding and black marketing of essential commodities during the corona pandemic so that the concerned departments could initiate necessary action against them under the essential commodities Act,” the statement said.

Delhi Govt extends application deadline for nursery admissions in private schools

New Delhi: The Delhi Government has extended the application deadline for nursery admissions in private schools by two weeks in view of the prevailing Covid situation, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Thursday.

The process of nursery admissions in nearly 1,800 private schools across the national capital began from December 15, and the application window was scheduled to close on January 7.

“Keeping in view the prevailing Covid conditions, the last date for filing applications for admission in nursery and entry level classes in private schools of Delhi is being

extended for further two weeks,” Sisodia tweeted.

The Directorate of Education (DoE) had last month notified the admission schedule. The admission to entry-level classes for the previous academic session began in February 2021, after a delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this year, the schedule was in line with previous years.

As per the notified schedule, the first list of selected children will be put up on February 4. This will be followed by a second list on February 21 and a subsequent list for admission, if any, on March 15. The entire admission process will conclude on March 31. **PTI**

PICTALK



Youth BJP workers burn an effigy during their protest outside the Congress office over breach in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s security in Punjab, in Gurugram

PTI

Maha, TN, UP, Raj, Guj, Delhi Covid hotspots

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh—which are currently seeing a significant surge in coronavirus infections—are the hotspots for the prevalent Covid-19 pandemic in India, according to a study by the researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi.

Pointing out that as international migration is a significant factor in these States, the researchers advised that the Government should carefully monitor travel to and from these states in future cases of pandemic outbreaks.

They also called for strict precautionary measures in districts near large bodies of water before the monsoon season begins as water bodies have a strong influence on a region's microclimate in terms of temperature and humidity, contributing significantly to regional climate change, and subsequently rise in cases.

The study, published in peer-reviewed journal Current Science, was performed on 640 districts from April 1 to December 25, 2020.

For the study, results of which were released on Thursday, the team found common patterns between the Spanish Flu (1918-1919), H1N1 (2014-2015), Swine Flu (2009- 2010), and Covid-19 (2019-2021) outbreaks and Covid-19.

They also found that "There has been a striking similarity in the focal point and route of transmission of different epidemics in India, such as Spanish flu, H1N1, Swine flu and Covid-19. Mostly all the pandemics have started and found their epicentres in the northern, western, and southern parts of India," said Dr. Sarita Azad, Associate Professor, School of Basic Science, IIT Mandi, in a statement.

Furthermore, the researchers examined the temperature variations across districts that are close to large bodies of water to understand the spread of Covid-19 in these areas.

The average minimum and maximum temperatures in these districts are about 3 and 5 degrees Celsius lower than neighbourhoods in July, which is attributed to the lake effect. The cooler climate conditions may have contributed to the increase in cases in districts that are close to water bodies.

"We also found that districts with direct access to large water bodies had a sudden increase in cases during monsoon (as high as 800 per cent) compared to the preceding season. Hence, strict precautionary measures should be imposed in these districts before the beginning of monsoon season during an outbreak, Azad added.

In addition, the researchers estimated R0 values for these districts until August 31, last year, and the results indicated that their R0 values are much higher than those of the primary hotspot states.

In epidemiology, the basic reproduction number, commonly known as R0, quantifies the disease spread and finds the expected number of cases directly generated by one case in a population.

Omicron variant less severe than Delta: US study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a cause for optimism to the people rattled by the Covid-19 fueled by Omicron variant, White House chief medical adviser Dr Anthony Fauci has said that a growing body of data indicates that the Covid omicron variant is less severe than the Delta strain.

However, he cautioned that hospitals could still face stress through the unprecedented number of new infections sweeping across the U.S. His comments come amid an exponential rise in Covid cases in India on Thursday when the infections breached the 90,000

mark with the majority of States reporting huge spikes in the cases.

The doctor cautioned against complacency, urging the public to follow public health guidance by getting vaccinated, boosted and wearing a mask.

"Multiple sources of now-preliminary data indicate a decrease in severity with omicron," Fauci told the public during a Covid update from the White House response team, according to reports. "However, we really do need more definitive assessment of severity with longer-term follow up here and in different countries."

Fauci cited a study from Ontario, Canada, that found the risk of hospi-

talization or death was 65% lower among people infected with omicron compared with individuals who caught delta.

The risk of admission to an intensive care unit or death from omicron was 83% lower, according to the study.

He also pointed to a study from South Africa that found about 5% of infections during the omicron wave resulted in hospital admission, compared with 14% during delta. Patients admitted to the hospital during the omicron wave were 73% less likely to have severe disease compared with the delta wave, according to the data.

Fauci also said the lung infection

from omicron appears less severe than previous variants, citing recent animal studies of mice and hamsters.

"It was shown that the virus proliferates very well in the upper airway and bronchi, but actually very poorly in the lungs," Fauci said. While this does not definitively prove omicron is more mild, it is consistent with the variant transmitting very quickly but causing less severe lung infections," he said.

Fauci warned that even if omicron proves less severe, the variant is spreading so quickly that it could still produce a large number of patients who do require hospital care, straining the nation's health-care system.

EC reviews Covid situation in poll-bound States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday reviewed the Covid-19 situation with the Union Health Secretary and health experts and emphasised the need for vaccination of all eligible people in five poll-bound States. In a separate meeting, the poll panel also discussed the law and order situation in the five states - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab and Manipur - with Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla ahead of the announcement of the poll dates



in the next few days .

Besides Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, the meeting to assess the Covid situation was also attended by AIIMS director Randeep Guleria and

ICMR's Balram Bhargava, sources aware of the interactions said. Bhushan and other health experts briefed the poll body on the present situation. This is the second time that when Bhushan briefed the top officials of the EC on the emerging Covid situation in the country and poll-bound states in particular.

According to sources, the EC is preparing to tighten Covid-19 guidelines for the upcoming assembly elections including bringing in stronger accountability.

In the separate meeting,

the poll panel also discussed the law and order situation with Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla. The meeting in the law and order situation assumes significance in the backdrop of the security breach of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Punjab on Wednesday.

The poll panel carried out a "complete review" of the Covid status in five states and took inputs from medical experts on "safety measures to be ensured" during campaigning and polling. It stressed to the health secretary the need to ensure complete vaccination

for all eligible persons, the sources said.

In an earlier meeting with Bhushan on December 27, the poll panel had asked him to ramp up the vaccination drive in the five states. Several health experts have advised the government to postpone the Assembly elections and doubts were raised as to whether elections should take place amid a surge of COVID cases after the Allahabad High Court observations urging the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the poll body to postpone the assembly polls and ban rallies in Uttar Pradesh.

After deliberating with all stakeholders and representatives of all political parties in the state, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra on December 30, 2021, had stated that representatives of all political parties, who met him during his visit to Lucknow, have said that the Assembly elections should be conducted on time following all Covid-19 protocols. The Chief Election Commissioner's statement came as a clear indication that there will be no postponement of the elections in the poll-bound states.

States mull postponing elective surgeries amid Covid surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the highly transmissible Covid variant Omicron surges through the cities, various State Governments have started mulling to cancel or postpone elective surgeries as well as considering closing down OPDs services as a desperate measure to divert the health system operating for rising Covid-19 hospitalisations amid staff shortages.

However, this has not gone down well with the health activists and medical professionals who feel that the move will leave non-covid patients, particularly those having serious health issues or chronic ailments such as cancer, a harassed lot as they would be deprived of timely treatment.

Referring to the recent decision of Delhi's AIIMS administration to convert the AIIMS Trauma Centre also

known as Jai Prakash Narayan Apex Trauma Centre into a Covid Care facility, a senior government doctor said that the Government has had 2 years to fix the health infrastructure. "Elective" means surgery isn't needed within 24 hours. Many are suffering and many will die, he said.

Taking the lead, the Delhi's AIIMS Resident Doctors Association (RDA) has already written to their director not to

convert the AIIMS Trauma Centre also known as Jai Prakash Narayan Apex Trauma Centre into a Covid Care facility, saying trauma services should not be ignored as most of the trauma victims are of young age who are the sole breadwinners of their families.

In March last year, JPNAT was converted into a full-fledged Covid-19 center and normal trauma services were recently restored there, the

global road safety body said in a statement.

Similarly, the International Road Federation (IRF) president emeritus KK Kapila has written to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya urging him to step in and not to allow reconversion of JPNAT into the Covid-19 center.

Kapila pointed out that it has been the only center in the country providing 24x7 qual-

ity patient care with all specialities catering to injured patients. "The center also catered to complicated trauma victims referred from other hospitals, patients from central armed police forces injured in action, patients of mass and multiple casualty incidents.

The AIIMS RDA said that instead of disrupting services in the Trauma centre, the Government could have utilized its three nearby newly

functional buildings that have 710 beds and most of them are unused.

Another doctor from another Government hospital who refused to be quoted said that because of the disruption of services many patients like those suffering from diabetes or neuro patients die at home waiting for treatment for their chronic conditions.

Some diseases like cancer can't wait.

Cong accuses PM of insulting Punjab

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lowering India's image and insulting Punjab and 'Punjabiyat' by suggesting that his life was in danger in the poll-bound State.

"You went to Pakistan suddenly. You feel safe there. Because of the hatred you have for your own people, you are defaming the whole region... You cannot demonise, insult Punjab and Punjabiyat," Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said at a press conference.

While the Punjab government cleared its stand on the issue the same day, Congress ruled States' CMs Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel too criticised the BJP and the PM for bringing a bad name to the security aspects including the elite SPG and above all shaming the country for cheap politics.

Taking exception to Modi's purported comments to officials to thank their Chief Minister for him reaching Bhatinda airport alive, Khera said, "Modi is not just BJP's Prime Minister but the whole country's. People of Punjab know the value of their Prime Minister's life... The bravehearts, who sacrificed their lives, have been wrapped in tricolour more than the number of times the BJP-RSS waved the tricolor."

The Congress's attack came as BJP fanned senior leaders across the country to hold 'Mahamrityunjay Jaap' for the long life of Modi, who was stuck on a fly-over in Punjab following a security breach due to farmers blocking a road. Several BJP leaders like External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who tweeted a Sanskrit verse with a hashtag #ModijijyoHazarSaal (1,000 years for Modi), took to social media as part of a campaign.

As the BJP sought to put the Congress in a spot over the security breach in party-ruled Punjab, Khera said India was not a banana republic and no one should dent the morale of security forces.

He said the Prime Minister could have waited for 15 minutes to allow the Punjab Police to clear the protesters from the road but he instead chose to defame Punjab. He said former PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had on such occasions engaged with protesters but Modi "hates questions, pro-



testers, Opposition and accountability."

He referred to a few incidents in which Modi faced protests during his visits and getting stuck in traffic jams. He said Modi never made comments like the one he did in Bhatinda airport when girl students of Banaras Hindu University protested during his visit to Varanasi in September 2018 or when his cavalcade had taken a wrong route in December 2017 in Uttar Pradesh.

Highlighting an incident in which Modi got stuck in Delhi traffic, Khera said the BJP had then celebrated it as ending the VIP culture. "Modi did not say thank you Chief Minister then," he said.

Recalling the 2017 Gujarat poll campaign, he said Modi had accused former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Vice President Hamid Ansari and former Army chief General Deepak Kapoor, among others of conspiring with Pakistan.

"Late Arun Jaitley had to express regret in Parliament for this. When the polls are around, just see how some people lower the standards," he said.

Gehlot said the responsibility of the SPG and IB should be fixed as they are primarily responsible for the PM's security. He said the local police only works in their coordination.

ATTACK ON CONVOY OF ASSAM RIFLES NIA announces cash reward on 10 wanted terrorists

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has announced rewards against 10 wanted terrorists of PLA and MNPF in connection with the attack on the convoy of Commanding Officer of Assam Rifles on November 13 last year with arms and explosives near Sialsih village of Indo-

NIA books five Qaeda operatives in conspiracy to carry out IED blast in UP

New Delhi: The NIA has chargesheeted five Al-Qaeda operatives in the case relating to conspiracy to carry out IED blast by Al-Qaeda in Uttar Pradesh. The five arrested accused persons chargesheeted are Museeruddin of Madioan, Lucknow, Minhaj Ahmad of Kakori, Lucknow, Shakeel of Wazirganj, Lucknow, Mustaqeem of Sitapur Road, Lucknow and Mohammad Moid of Thakurganj, Lucknow, under IPC Sections relating to waging war against India and criminal conspiracy among others besides provisions of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act. The NIA filed the chargesheet before the Special Court, Lucknow. The case relates to FIR No. 10/2021 dated July 11, 2021 filed at police station ATS, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh which was registered by NIA on July 29.

Myanmar Road of Churachandpur district of Manipur.

The case was registered on November 27 under various sections of the Indian Penal Code relating to murder, attempt to murder, grievous hurt, and waging war against India among others besides provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act.

Ten terrorists of PLA and MNPF are wanted by the NIA in connection with attack on the convoy of CO of 46 Assam Rifles on November 13, 2021 which resulted in the death of five Assam Rifles personnel including Commanding Officer, his family members and injuries to six Assam Rifles personnel, the NIA said in a statement.

The NIA has declared cash reward against these 10 cadres of People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and Manipur Naga People's Front including self-styled Lt Col Chaoyai alias Pukhrambam Mani Meetei, 46, of Kakching District and self-styled Lt Col Sagolsem Inaocha alias Ranjit Naorem alias Inaocha alias Anganba Mongang of Imphal West with Rs 8 lakh reward on each of the two and Rs 6 lakh on self-styled Lt Sanatomba of district-Thoubal.

Other self-styled lieutenants Khaba, Khwairakpa (Imphal East), Nongyai alias Nongphai (Address not known), Joseph, (Address not known), Balin, (Address not known), Kanta alias Santa (Address not known) and Rocky carry a reward of Rs 4 lakh each.

BREACH IN PM'S SECURITY SC to hear plea against Punjab Govt today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will on Friday hear a plea seeking a thorough investigation into the breach in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security in Punjab and ensuring there is no such event in the future.

A bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana took note of senior advocate Maninder Singh's submission that a serious breach in the Prime Minister's security took place in Ferozepur, Punjab, on Wednesday. It led to the stalling of his cavalcade in Bathinda.

"Serve the copy (of the petition) to the state government. We will take it tomorrow as the first item," the bench, also comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, said on Thursday when the issue was mentioned for urgent hearing today itself.

Singh, who at the outset sought an urgent hearing of his petition, said a direction should be passed to the district judge of Bathinda to take possession of all the evi-

dence on security arrangements made by the Punjab Police for the Prime Minister's visit. "Given the situation in Punjab, there should be a fair probe into the lapse and accountability fixed so that such a situation does not arise again in future," the senior lawyer said. "What is it that you are expecting from us?" the bench asked. "We want that such an incident is not repeated," the lawyer said, adding that "professional and effective investigation" was needed into the police 'bandobast' under the supervision of the court. It would be appropriate given the atmosphere today.

"The record has to be taken by the district judge, and thereafter your lordships may decide what steps are to be taken. Please consider passing an order today itself," he submitted. The senior lawyer was mentioning the plea filed by 'Lawyers Voice' which said the breach in security was intentional and raised questions on national security and the role of present state government authorities.

RPF saved 601 lives, rescued 630 in 2021

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways on Thursday said that as part of its 'Mission Jeewan Raksha' the Railway Protection Force (RPF) saved the lives of 601 people and rescued 630 others from human traffickers during 2021.

While it retrieved luggage worth over Rs 23 crore it also escorted 522 oxygen special trains last year when the country needed additional medical oxygen supply at the peak of



second phase of Covid pandemic.

As per a statement, the RPF also ensured implementation of Covid-appropriate behaviour at trains and stations.

"26 RPF personnel died after contracting Covid while on duty," the statement said.

It also informed that Head Constable Gyan Chand laid down his life while saving a woman attempting to commit suicide in March 2021 at Bharwal Railway Station, NCR (Uttar Pradesh).

Under "Mission Jeewan Raksha," the RPF has saved the lives of 1,650 people in the last four years. RPF is also an immediate responder in cases of human trafficking through

rail transport and plays a key role in curbing this menace, rescued 630 people, including 54 women, 94 girls, 81 men and 401 boys.

It also rescued more than 11,900 children in need of care and protection. A total of 132 child help desks are functional across the country.

Last year, the RPF arrested more than 3,000 criminals involved in offences against passengers and handed them over to the GRP/police.

A total of 8,744 people

were arrested for damaging railway property and over 4,600 people involved in illegal ticketing were apprehended in 2021.

With the arrest of 620 drug peddlers, the RPF seized narcotics worth Rs 15.7 crore.

The RPF personnel also apprehended more than 25,000 people unauthorisedly travelling in the coaches reserved for women and 9,307 people from the coaches reserved for persons with disabilities during 2021.



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

marine warfare (ASW) training and excellence, culminates in over 270 hours of in-flight training ranging from tracking simulated targets to the final problem of tracking a live US Navy submarine.

During classroom training sessions, pilots and flight officers from all countries build plans and discuss tactics incorporating the capabilities and equipment of their respective nations.

Each event will be graded, and the nation scoring the highest total points will receive the coveted Dragon Belt award. Last year, the Royal Canadian Air Force won last year's belt and will bring it back to Sea Dragon 2022 to defend the title. The exercise is an annual event.

CBI registers 4 separate cases in bank fraud of ₹940 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered four separate cases related to bank fraud of around Rs 940 crore and conducted searches in each case.

One of these cases was registered on complaint from Bank of India against Ahmedabad-based private firm Electrotherm (India) Ltd and others including its directors, unknown public servants and unknown others on the allegations of causing loss of Rs 631.97 crore to Bank of India in the matter of various credit facilities, the CBI said in a statement.

It was further alleged that during the period 2012 to 2016, the directors of the borrower company were enjoying fund based and non-fund based credit facilities from Bank of India.

The Forensic Audit of the company (conducted by the bank) revealed that the company was allegedly involved in diversion / siphoning off funds through its subsidiary / associate companies which were having common directors, it said. The company was also allegedly involved in transactions with suspicious dealers involved in issuing false bills without actual delivery of goods.

It was also alleged that the company started facing liquidity problems and failed to pay the dues to the bank. Subsequently the account was classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA) with outstanding amount of Rs 631.97 crore, thereby, causing loss to the Bank of India.

The second case was registered against a private company based at Prakasam (Andhra Pradesh) BK Threshers Pvt Ltd and others including its chairman; five directors, two more firms, unknown public servants and unknown private persons on complaint from Union Bank of India, Vishakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), the CBI said. It was alleged that the accused private company and its directors in conspiracy with others fraudulently availed credit facilities by submitting false/manipulated financial statements, diverted loan proceeds and thereby caused loss of Rs 228.02 crore to the Bank, it said.

4 J&K ex-CMs to lose Special Security Group

Farooq, Azad to still avail of NSG; Omar, Mehbooba to continue with Z+ security in J&K

Srinagar/New Delhi: Four former Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir, including Farooq Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Azad, are likely to lose their Special Security Group (SSG) protection as the Union Territory's administration has decided to 'rightsized' the elite unit established in 2000, officials said on Thursday.

The move comes a little over 19 months after the Centre had issued a gazette notification -- Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020 -- on March 31, 2020, amending the Special Security Group Act of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir Government by omitting a clause that provided former chief ministers and their families with SSG security.

Officials said the decision was taken by the Security

Review Coordination Committee, a group that oversees the threat perception of important leaders in Jammu and Kashmir.

The officials said the SSG will be 'rightsized' by reducing the number of the elite force to the 'bare minimum'. It will be headed by an officer below the rank of Superintendent of Police as against Director, who is of the rank of Inspector General of Police and above.

However, the officials feel there was a re-think over the downsizing of the SSG as some experts within the police force feel that this may hamper the preparedness of the elite unit.

The SSG will now be entrusted with the security of serving Chief Ministers and their immediate family members.

The decision will entail the withdrawal of the security cover of Farooq Abdullah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and two other former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti at a time when a number of terror incidents have taken place in Srinagar.

All these former Chief

Ministers except Azad reside in Srinagar. However, Farooq Abdullah and Azad will continue to be provided the security cover of the National Security Guard, also known as Black cat commandoes, as both of them are Z-plus protectees.

Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba will continue to have Z-plus security cover while in Jammu and Kashmir, but are likely to have reduced security outside the Union Territory.

The leaders will be provided security by the district police as well as the security wing based on the threat assessment, the officials said.

Some of the SSG personnel would be posted with the security wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police for 'close protection team', they said.

The officials said the remaining SSG personnel are likely to be posted to other wings so that the police force can make the best use of their training and knowledge.

Vehicles and other gadgets will be transferred to the security wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police. **PTI**

PM's security breach is Centre's failure: Kharge

Bengaluru: Senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday alleged that the 'major security lapse' due to road blockade by some protesters which forced Prime Minister Modi to return without attending a public meeting at Ferozepur in Punjab, was 'failure' of the Centre.

Modi was stuck on a fly-over for 15-20 minutes on Wednesday due to the blockade, an incident the Union home ministry described as a "major lapse" in his security.

However, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi expressed regret after Modi had to cut short his visit to the state, but asserted that there was no security lapse.

Speaking to reporters here, Kharge said: "It is the failure of the Centre which is armed with Special Protection Group, Intelligence Bureau and other central agencies".

He said, "How can you (Modi) say (that it's a security lapse) when you are protected by police, SPG, IB, para-military forces and many other central agencies? By giving such statement you are insulting the people of Punjab."

NCP seeks judicial probe into security lapse in Punjab

Mumbai: The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Thursday demanded a judicial probe to fix responsibility for the breach in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security during his visit to poll-bound Punjab.

NCP spokesperson Nawab Malik said it is very important to know whether it was the fault of the central agencies or the Punjab government in the security lapse. "It is important to probe this," said Malik, who is also a Maharashtra Cabinet Minister. If the Centre probes the matter, then the Punjab Government will find faults in it. **PTI**

He also rejected "security threat to the Prime Minister because he is protected much more" compared to the security cover given to the then Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

"The PM has the security 10 times more than Nehru, Indira and Rajiv. He (Modi) has the best foreign made bullet-proof car. Yet, they (BJP) are blaming the Punjab government," Kharge said.

Accusing the BJP of trying to charge people emotionally, Kharge said the J P Nadda-led party wants to unseat Channi, who is a Dalit CM.

Kharge also alleged that the PM's office changed the minute-to-minute programme in 20 minutes and opted reaching Ferozepur by road instead of helicopter.

Defending the Punjab government, the veteran Congress leader said Channi has ordered a probe by a retired High Court judge and a retired chief secretary and promised to initiate action based on the outcome of the report.

"There was no malafide intention behind the development as has been projected by the BJP leaders and their spokespersons. Modi is our Prime Minister and we respect him. We may talk politically but we are committed to respect and protecting him," Kharge said. **PTI**

'Hindus expelled from Pak, B'desh given land in UP'

Lucknow: Hindus expelled from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and living in Uttar Pradesh, have been accommodated in the land that the State Government freed from encroachers, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Thursday. He also said his government has introduced transparency in all government exams, thereby marking a paradigm shift in the recruitment process from the previous regime.

"Hindus, who were living in Meerut for decades after facing expulsion from Pakistan and Bangladesh, could not afford to build their own houses or buy lands. We have given 63 such Bengali Hindu families two acres of land and 200 square yards for housing per family in Kanpur Dehat. These lands were freed from 'bhu mafia' (land grabbers)," he said.

Each of the 63 families is also given ₹1.20 lakh under 'Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana', Adityanath said at a programme organised to distribute appointment letters to candidates selected for various posts

in government services.

The Chief Minister said all the land freed from 'encroachers' was brought under a 'land bank' and these pieces of land will be used for setting up schools, industries and other businesses. "Many facilities of the Defence Industrial Corridor have also been built on these recovered lands," he said.

According to the chief minister, the state government currently has 64,366 hectares of the recovered land and it is being allotted for the poor to build houses. Adityanath had earlier said in the Legislative Council that the anti-land mafia task force had freed 67,000 acres of land belonging to the revenue department.

Speaking about introducing transparency in recruitment to government services, the Chief Minister said without taking any names, "Before 2017, whenever vacancies were announced, the uncle and nephews used to carry out extortion up to the village level. While they used to extort, the officials involved in the recruitment process were made the scapegoats. **PTI**

Catch-22 situation for Kerala CPI(M) over tie with Cong

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Despite the CPI(M) leaders in Kerala making critical statements about the Indian National Congress and eulogise the regional parties, seasoned political commentators in the State are of the view that there would be a marked change in the former's attitude to the Grand Old Party in the coming months.

The CPI(M)'s Kerala secretary, Kodyiyeri Balakrishnan, who is the de facto general secretary of the party is on record stating that the INC has lost its relevance and the regional parties would play a crucial role with the Left forces in dethroning the "communal and Fascist" BJP and Sangh Parivar in the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

"Though the national leadership of the CPI(M) has expressed its stance that only a combination of Lefts, the INC and regional parties would be able to defeat the BJP, the Marxists are caught in a Catch-22 situation in Kerala," said P Sujathan, veteran scribe and columnist.

He pointed out that the Congress was the main rival of the CPI(M) in Kerala unlike the rest of the country where both are on the same sides of the fence. "The question faced by the CPI(M) leaders in the State is how to convince the cadre who are moulded in an anti-Congress platform," said Sujathan. He said as the CPI has made it known that no viable alliance would be possible against the Hindu parties without the inclusion of the Congress, the CPI(M) is likely to make amendments in its triennial congregation, the Party Congress, which meets in Kannur shortly.

It is in the Party Congress the leaders of the CPI(M) come out with its stance on all global, national and state level issues. Other Left parties like the RSP and the Forward Blocks are for a strong united front that include the INC against the "communal" BJP, pointed out Hari Kartha, former chief editor of Janmabhumi, the Sangh

Parivar mouthpiece.

"We should understand ground realities. Indian National Congress is the only pan-India party which is consistent in its stance on secularism, federalism and Constitutional institutions. We should forge a national alliance with the Congress in the forefront," Kanam Rajendra, general secretary of the CPI's Kerala unit told The Pioneer.

The CPI's mouthpiece Janayugam in its editorial on Tuesday reiterated that no viable alliance would be possible against the Fascist forces without including the Congress in the initiative. "The Congress has its own stance on economic issues. But the present situation needs a collective to safeguard secularism, democracy and freedom of speech. That could be regained only by aligning with the Congress," opined the editorial.

Meanwhile Cherian Philip, who returned to the Congress after a brief stay in the CPI(M) asked the CPI to dump the Marxists and forge an alliance with the Congress. "That's the need of the hour. The CPI was in alliance with the Congress for decades and there is nothing new in such a relation," said Philip, a close confidante of Oommen Chandi, former chief minister.

There is a discernible change among the CPI(M) cadre vis-a-vis the INC. The rallies held across the State as part of the district conventions reverberated with slogans against the BJP and its Hindu policies while the cadre were silent about the Congress. Deshabhimani, the mouthpiece of the CPI(M) too has toned down the criticism and opposition against Congress leaders. "It looks more like a friendly match and I feel there exists a strong possibility of the parties coming together for a common cause," said Kartha.

Sujathan reminded that the CPI(M)-Congress alliance functioned effectively at the Centre during 2004 to 2009 though the former withdrew from the friendship following India's decision to sign the Nuclear Energy Pact with the US.

No plan to change Bengal Board exam schedule: Authorities

Kolkata: There is no plan to change the schedule of upcoming offline Board exams in West Bengal for now, given the fact that the dates decided upon are some three to four months away and the COVID-19 situation could improve by then, authorities said on Thursday.

Class 12 exams are slated to be held from April 2 to April 20 and Class 10 exams between March 7 and March 16.

The president of Council of Higher Secondary Education, Chiranjib Bhattacharya, told PTI, "Conducting online exams is not feasible. A large number of students in the rural areas won't be able to afford smartphones with high-speed Internet. We would like to

hold the exams offline. There is no plan to change the schedule as of now.

"He also said that the council was hopeful students this year "wouldn't have to struggle like those that did over the past two years".

"We cannot predict the turn of events. We can only hope things will get better," Bhattacharya stated.

Kalyanmoy Ganguly, the president of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, said it would not be wise to speculate about the mode of examination this early. "We won't be thinking of any alternative evaluation criteria for the time being. Arrangements for holding offline tests are in full swing," he said. **PTI**



Sand artist Sudarshan Pattanaik creates a sand sculpture on Covid-19 vaccination at Puri beach on Thursday

PTI

Silver line rail project to bring environmental disaster to Kerala: Metroman Sreedharan

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Dr E Sreedharan, former chief of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation and who designed and built Konkan Railway, said on Thursday that the proposed 593 km long Silver Line Semi High Speed Rail (popularly known as K-Rail) to be built by the Kerala Government would lead the State to an ecological and environmental disaster.

"Out of the 593 km long Rail, 393km long stretch needs high rise walls on both sides to prevent animals and human beings trespassing into the tracks. This is sure recipe for ecological disaster. The entire 393 km track would swallow waterways which in turn would lead to a deluge in the event of heavy rainfall," warned Sreedharan in a statement.

Meanwhile Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said at the capital city on Thursday that come whatever may, there was no question of the Government going back in its word.

The country's pioneer Rail expert was reacting to Vijayan's statement on Wednesday that

the Silver Line Semi High Speed Rail would not lead to any ecological or environmental imbalance. But the Chief Minister said that it was not the time to disclose the Detailed Project Report which is kept as a classified document by the Kerala Government.

Sreedharan asked the Government what was so secret about the DPR. "I myself headed many projects and had prepared their DPRs which were never hidden from the public. There is something which the government wants to hide and that is the reason behind this secrecy," said Sreedharan.

He said the Government of Kerala is cheating the people of the State by showing manipulated figures as the cost of production.

"The Government is not transparent in its claim that no additional land would be required for the K Rail. If they want to constrict Rail Over Bridges and underground tunnels, then they would be forced to acquire more lands than what they have claimed," said Sreedharan.

Ashok Gehlot tests positive for Covid-19

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot Thursday said he has tested positive for coronavirus, the second time that he contracted the virus.

"This evening I got my Covid test done which came positive. I have very mild symptoms and no other problems. All the people who came in contact with me are requested to isolate themselves and get their Covid test done," Gehlot tweeted.

This is the second time that the 70-year-old has been infected with the virus. Recently his son Vaibhav Gehlot has also been tested positive for Covid.

In series of tweets, the chief minister urged people to follow all health protocols.

"According to the doctors, one of the rea-

sons for the problem related to the artery blockage I had in August, 2021 is also the post-Covid problems. Therefore, taking Omicron too seriously, follow the Covid protocol and get both doses of the vaccine," Gehlot said.

He said that post-Covid problems can include asthma, frequent headaches, lung diseases, kidney problems and even heart disease. He also warned about the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

"There is a belief among the general public that the Omicron variant of Corona is not fatal, so people are being careless. Experts are of the opinion that post-Covid problems after recovery from Omicron can be as severe as the earlier variants," he said. **PTI**

Kalicharan Maharaj held for hate speech, sent to judicial custody

Pune: A court here on Thursday remanded religious leader Kalicharan Maharaj, arrested for allegedly making inflammatory speeches during an event in the city, in judicial custody.

He was produced in the court after his one-day police custody got over. Judicial Magistrate (First Class) M A Shaikh remanded him in judicial custody. The police did not press for more custody. A bail application was also filed, and it would be heard on Friday, said his lawyer Amol Dange. Pune Police had arrested Kalicharan alias Abhijit Sarag from Raipur.

A case has been registered against Kalicharan Maharaj, right-

wing leader Milind Ekbote, Captain (retired) Digendra Kumar and others at Khadak police station here. They are accused of making inflammatory speeches and hurting religious sentiments during 'Shiv Pratap Din' program organised by Ekbote-led Hindu Aghadi outfit on December 19, 2021, to celebrate the killing of Adilshahi commander Afzal Khan by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in 1659. The FIR was registered under IPC sections 295 (A) (outraging religious feelings), 298 (deliberate intention of wounding religious feelings) and 505 (2) (false statement, rumour made in place of worship. **PTI**

Court issues non-bailable warrant against Raj Thackeray in 2008 case

Beed: A local court in Parli of Maharashtra's Beed district has issued a non-bailable warrant against Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray for failing to appear before it in a 2008 case registered against him.

A case was registered against Thackeray and MNS activists under sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 427 (mischievous causing damage) and other relevant provisions of the IPC over an incident of stone pelting at Dharmapuri village in Parli taluka.

A case was registered against Thackeray and MNS activists under Sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 427 (mischievous causing damage) and other relevant provisions of the IPC over an incident of stone pelting at Dharmapuri village in Parli taluka

Thackeray was arrested on October 22, 2008, following which MNS activists had staged a protest and pelted

stones on MSRTC buses in Dharmapuri village, damaging one of the vehicles.

The Parli police had investigated the case and filed a chargesheet against Thackeray and his supporters in court.

The MNS chief and activists were granted bail in the case. However, Thackeray had failed to appear before the Parli court consistently.

Taking a serious note of his absence, First Class Magistrate M M More-Pavde issued a non-bailable warrant against Thackeray. **PTI**

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PAPER WITH PASSION

A new low

Rabble-rousing politics can debase democratic values, and the proof is Capitol’s ‘insurrection’

On January 6 last year, thousands of Americans formed a mob and forced their way into the US Capitol in Washington. The joint session of Congress was at that time trying to formalise the victory of President-elect Joe Biden. The rioters assaulted police officers and vandalised property as the complex went into lockdown. The march to Congress, called an “insurrection”, followed provocative speeches by outgoing President Donald Trump who refused to accept his defeat. Trump told his supporters, “You do not concede when there is theft involved”, and asked them to go to the Capitol but did not join them. Trump escaped impeachment by a whisker but the question is asked even today: If this is a court of law, did Trump cross the line? The violent attack was the culmination of a series of incendiary exhortations that marked Trump’s presidency. It also fundamentally changed Congress and raised concerns about the resilience of American democracy. Democracy is perhaps the scapegoat for the real ills that plague the United States — extreme economic inequality, brittle race relations, trigger-happy gun policies, issues of social exclusion and, of course, the tussle



for power between the elected administration and the mammoth industrial complex. Trump ensured the transformation of the Republican Party into a forthright right-wing association harbouring extreme views about inclusivist politics. If the Democrats were unprepared for the extent he could go to in riling up the public, traditional leaders among the Republicans were equally flustered at one individual sweeping the rug of complacency from under their feet.

Yet, when Trump stirred controversy, it was attributed to the democratic right to freedom of speech. Just like taking the Fifth Amendment to avoid telling the truth or using self-defence as an excuse for buying a gun is seen as evidence of a thriving American democracy. And yet, when Trump acted divisively when the vote went against him, and when January 6 happened, Americans did not know how to respond. It was the kind of unrest they had till then read about in papers or saw on TV happening in far-off lands; it was now happening right in the middle of Washington. January 6 is evidence that rabble-rousing politics can debase democratic values but was still insufficient to derail democracy completely. Opinion polls screamed that people’s belief in democracy was waning, but their politicians were meanwhile trying to respect that “ideal”. The “insurrection” had led to a call for setting up a military quick reaction force but the people’s representatives vetoed it. Surprisingly, it was a Republican duo, a Senator and a US Representative, who issued a statement insisting the Capitol Complex must remain the “responsibility of federal civilian law enforcement”, and adding: “We cannot and should not militarise the security of the Capitol Complex.” That should answer the cynics even though the American people are still in two minds whether the “insurrection” was an attempt to undermine democracy or the result of dangerous partisan politics.



An aerial view of Manali after fresh snowfall

PTI

Kudos, Congress

The party has shown respect for human life by deciding to put off big campaign rallies in UP

The ‘grand old party’ has finally started showing some spark after staying moribund for a long, long time. A couple of sprightly decisions within a matter of hours, after lying inert for years altogether, point to this rejuvenation in the core of the Congress: One, the party has decided to put on hold public rallies and political functions in Uttar Pradesh in view of the deepening health scare in the country. Two, party president Sonia Gandhi spoke to Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s security breach and sternly told him to fix accountability and take suitable action. But first things first. Owing to the sudden spurt in Coronavirus cases (mainly its Omicron variant) across the country, the Congress has decided to put on the backburner all major campaign rallies; the decision is said to have been taken by senior All India Congress Committee (AICC) leaders in consultation with the UP PCC brass “in view of public safety”. It indeed is a matter of record that the COVID-19 situation in the country is worsening by the day and major political rallies — which draw crowds of thousands — have the potential of turning into super-spreader events, especially in view of the anticipated third COVID wave.

To reach out to voters, however, the Congress has sought permission from the Election Commission for door-to-door campaigns and small gatherings. The Samajwadi Party, too, followed suit. However, the BJP, AAP and BSP are yet to announce their stand officially though they have cancelled a few rallies. For his part, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday cancelled a Government function in Gautam Buddha Nagar district. But the same doesn’t hold true for the BJP’s star campaigner, Modi, who recently addressed a massive rally in Manipur and was cut short by circumstances beyond his control from attending another huge rally in Punjab’s Ferozepur on Wednesday. It’s indeed a matter of shame that the horrifying memories of the second wave — huge political rallies turning into super-spreaders; lack of oxygen cylinders and hospital beds; crematoria struggling to cope with incoming dead bodies; and bodies floating in the Ganga — have not deterred parties from operating as businesslike as usual. In this context, the Congress certainly deserves a loud ‘cheer’ for taking the lead in respecting the value of human life over its share in ballot boxes.

Cricketers need to up their game a lot

The current competitive phase of the game shows that there is a dearth of all-rounders as well as of ambidextrous bowlers who can swing a match

As I watched the second day of the second Test against South Africa, I found that the fast bowlers had not been able to take a wicket for quite a few hours. Yet none of them tried to bowl, for a change, with his left arm. Or a leg cutter, like Fazal Mahmood of Pakistan used to successfully bowl in his day. Or even try a different type of slow delivery as Gary Sobers of the West Indies used to try when his opening spell was over. He was otherwise an opening pacer.

In the current competitive phase of cricket, why are there so few all-rounders? One of the few rays escaping through the clouds is of all-rounders, while there is sunshine of specialists. A right-handed batter can be a left-arm bowler. Why cannot a left-arm bowler, slow, medium or fast, bowl with his right arm? The brain or the technology of bowling is the same. The bowler is left-arm opener but he won’t try his other arm when his left fails to take a single wicket. The answer might be that he was not trained to bowl with both arms. True, but why cannot a young player of 22 make up by getting trained at this not-old age? Is it his fear of diluting his expertise with his left arm? Or is it just a plain mindset? Jaspreet Bumrah appears to have experimented with some batting lately. So probably has Mohammed Shami, although a little too late.

To say that India is a large country is an understatement, and particularly so, when said in the context of cricket. Australia, Sri Lanka and the West Indies are tiny by comparison. Yet each of them fields a Test team of 11 players; no more, no less. No nation fields, say, two or three teams. The same is the case with the 50-over one-day and the Twenty-20. In all, no country fields more than a total of 33 players on any single day. Sri Lanka, with 25 million people, and India, with 1,400 million, are weighed on the same scale. In the bargain, Indian cricketers are stifled with a miniscule scope for a career rise in recog-



nised international cricket. One also knows that Indian players or their training academies do little to make youngsters more competitive.

For those young boys and girls who are ambidextrous, there are clearly five talents they could conceptually cultivate. This is batting and bowling with both hands and arms. Fielding is the fifth ability. Here, too, why not learn to throw with both hands, which would make for a maximum of six faculties? If one goes by the example of Gary Sobers, there is the choice of fast bowling as well as slow-medium. This should be the simplest option.

This plea for all-rounders or versatile players is not merely for players and their training academies, but also for India. The boom in cricket began first with the introduction of one-dayers and, a few decades later, the advent of the Twenty-20 matches. Another great boost has been the innovation of the Indian Premier League (IPL), which has given a great deal of scope to young men all over India to obtain recognition and many of them do even-

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A RIGHT-HANDED BATTER CAN BE A LEFT-ARM BOWLER. WHY CANNOT A LEFT-ARM BOWLER, SLOW, MEDIUM OR FAST, BOWL WITH HIS RIGHT ARM? THE BRAIN OR THE TECHNOLOGY OF BOWLING IS THE SAME. THE ANSWER MIGHT BE THAT HE WAS NOT TRAINED TO BOWL WITH BOTH ARMS

tually reach the international arena. Without the IPL, a number of our cricketing flowers would not have been able to blossom so gloriously. The gardener who conceived this League is by now unfortunately forgotten in some lesser known corner of the globe where he cannot be located and recognised! Indeed a great pity.

What we can apprehend is that in the absence of a continually expanding scope for players, they may at some future date consider emigrating to smaller countries. Suppose a small country like New Zealand runs short of talented cricketers, it might tempt a few Indian players to migrate. I suppose there is nothing wrong with such a development. But I find it unwelcome if it is a result of our failure to foresee the future.

Something inexplicable needs to be mentioned here; which is that certain tournaments attract crowds, while others just do not. Take the Ranji Trophy, named after the distinguished batter Jam Ranjitsinhji, who innovated the behind-the-wicket stroke as a deliberate scoring attempt. Especially the leg-

cut, the sweep etc, were not played until Ranji showed in England, mainly in the County Cricket tournaments, how to play these shots. Even the off-side cuts were not very common; the frequent scoring style was in front of the wicket, whether on the leg or the off side. Yet Ranji Trophy matches in India do not draw crowds. They never have, although playing for one’s State should arouse enthusiasm.

In sharp contrast, the Pentangular and, before it, the Quadrangular tournaments used to enjoy mass popularity. This was in the 1930s and 1940s. The latter comprised a Hindu, a Muslim, a Parsee and a European team. Thereafter, a ‘Rest of India’ team was added to give Christians, Jews and others an opportunity. This popular tourney ended with rioting in many parts of the country, followed by Partition. The 50-over One-Day Internationals and Twenty-20s have revolutionised cricket in this context.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISREGARD JALLIKATTU THIS YEAR

Sir — As the third COVID wave spreads fast, the Tamil Nadu Government should not allow *jallikattu* to take place during Pongal this year. It may be argued that this rural sport is the cultural pride of Tamil Nadu and symbolises the State’s unity, and so on. In reality, however, it is a maddening and barbarous sport, wherein many a youth lose their precious lives in the pursuit of momentary hormonal rush and display of foolish bravado.

Living in these challenging times of the pernicious virus and fighting for our lives with our back to the wall, we should not allow unbridled passion and sentimental feelings towards a simple matter of tradition to take precedence over common sense and prudence, especially when lives are already at stake. If our rural youth wish to display their valour, they can always join the Army and serve the nation with pride and distinction rather than taking part in a sport like *jallikattu* and risking their lives. Meanwhile, it will not be too long before animals too would have their rights in the real sense of the word and then they would no longer be subservient to humans.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

POLITICIANS NEED TO PAY HEED

Sir — Ideally, political parties are expected to make public their manifestoes ahead of elections, assuming their intentions are genuine. Ironically, however, the *raison d’être* of every party seems to be the capture of power by hook or crook. Hence, every election sees leaders of all hues leading the public up the garden path. But after being voted to power, they consign their commitments to oblivion. Interestingly, the same leaders are jolted out of their prolonged slumber in the next election year.

As regards the ongoing invocation of different names of Almighty God by certain leaders during campaigning, it sounds gratuitous in view of the fact that the mix of politics and religion would be ill-advised. Moreover, these leaders can-

Punjab incident may cost Cong



This refers to the report, “Breach in PM’s security in Punjab, Modi skips event” (Jan 6). In an unprecedented event in Independent India, no Prime Minister has ever been subjected to such humiliation as Modi, when his cavalcade was made to halt for nearly 20 minutes on a flyover in Punjab. The Punjab Chief Minister, along with the Chief Secretary and the DGP, are responsible for this *faux pas*. As if this ignominy was

not enough, Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala has unabashedly said there were vacant seats at the Ferozepur meeting venue, which made Modi decide to skip it and take a U-turn from the flyover.

The million-dollar question is: Does anyone of the Chief Minister, CS or the DGP have the audacity to bypass the PM’s security orders? The answer is a flat ‘no’. These orders might have come from the top echelons of the party ruling in the State. Had the incident happened either with Sonia Gandhi, Rahul or Priyanka, all hell would have broken loose and the likes of Arvind Kejriwal, Mamata Banerjee and Asaduddin Owaisi would have been protesting from the rooftops. It’s clear that it was a deliberate act on part of the Congress, and it will give advantage to the BJP not only in Punjab but elsewhere also, besides brightening the prospects of its ally, the Punjab Lok Congress in the Assembly polls.

Sagar Singh | Muzaffarnagar

not inveigle themselves into public favour with such political manoeuvrings; the voters want holistic development in the country, involving solicitude for wellbeing of people from all social strata alike irrespective of their religion, region, colour, language, sect, caste and creed. Hence, the country’s progress and development must be the top priority of every political party and, for this to happen, maintenance of peace, law and order is the prerequisite.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

AWARENESS IS NEED OF THE HOUR

Sir — Our country is on the verge of coming in the severe grip of the third wave of COVID-19 in the form of the Omicron variant as these cases are skyrocketing by the day. Going by reports made available by scientists, even the vaccination regimen undertaken by our huge population can’t shield it against the Omicron variant and also possible future virus attacks because of the unexpected

mutations of the virus. In this scenario, it is people’s responsibility to maintain calm and follow COVID-appropriate behaviour at all times.

The Government and NGOs must step up awareness programmes regarding the aftermath of the virus attacks, which can lower the spurt in the number of cases. The citizens, especially the lower middle class, should be educated about the viruses. Besides, daily wage earners and roadside vendors, among others, should be given reasonable financial assistance by the Governments in the form of soft loans to make their ends meet. Since prevention is better than cure, proper awareness and assistance would be a powerful weapon against the dreaded viruses; otherwise the ever-increasing caseloads could strain even a ramped up healthcare system.

V Nagendra Kumar | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The tyres of the double-engine Government in the State have punctured and fallen down.

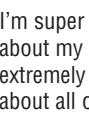


Tripura Opposition leader —Manik Sarkar



When people see we are in lockdowns because of the risk posed by unvaccinated people, they get angry.

Canadian Prime Minister —Justin Trudeau



I’m super thrilled about my films and extremely hopeful about all of them.

Actor —Janhvi Kapoor



Now he (Virat Kohli) is definitely getting better and I feel that he will be fit very soon.

Indian batter —Cheteshwar Pujara



I pray for your speedy recovery, @ArvindKejriwal ji. Get well soon and take care of yourself.

West Bengal Chief Minister —Mamata Banerjee

FIRST COLUMN

BUILDING UP ON INDO-FRENCH TIES

The bilateral partnership must drive the shared vision for a free and fair Indo-Pacific region



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

France took over the European Union (EU) presidency this week for a period of six months. This development can have significant impact on QUAD and AUKUS, whose member-countries are actively seeking a dominant voice vis-a-vis China in the Indo-Pacific belt. This will also be a significant force in France's own bilateral engagements with each of the global powers and through multilateral bodies such as EU. France has a slightly altered sense of the Indo-Pacific stretching from East of Africa to the US west coast whereas for many in the QUAD group Indo Pacific is an extension of the Pacific Ocean. India, though part of QUAD, is more aligned with France's version of the Indo Pacific, which puts India in the center of the Indo-Pacific sphere of influence. France is currently facing an embarrassment in its bilateral and multilateral relationship with the US, the UK and Australia, after the down south country formed a military alliance for procuring sophisticated nuclear capability submarines patrolling the Indian ocean. This is a lost economic opportunity for France who earlier was the preferred partner for Australia to provide weaponry. This has also led to France withdrawing its diplomats from Washington in nearly 250 years and souring of relationship between the US and EU on whole bunch of multilateral issues. France and India have robust bilateral defense and security relations and have shared interest in global and multilateral platforms on whole bunch of issues. In the last two months of 2021, India and France have had several high-level bilateral meetings, including one between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of G20. France has a significant presence in India's defence equipment sector, the latest being the induction of nuclear capable Rafale fighter jets into India's front end strike capabilities. In December, French armed forces minister Florence Parly had reiterated on strengthening industrial cooperation and co-manufacturing of defence equipment. This is a perfect fit into India's vision of self-reliance on strategic equipment production (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and France's desire to expand its economic partnership with key allies such as India in the Indo-Pacific. It is the centrality of placing India in the Indo-Pacific strategy which could be of great benefit in the next six months. Last month, the French president defined the way forward for the European Union in the Indo-Pacific with a focus on promoting multilateralism, cooperation and information sharing on security, cyber space and emerging technologies. This also includes the emerging situation in Afghanistan, and stability in Indian Ocean Rim countries where China has suddenly started to make aggressive overtures. The Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi has been on a whirlwind tour to Comoros, Kenya, Eritrea, Maldives and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean Region. Countering China's push for greater say in the Indian Ocean region is a shared interest of India and France and to a large extent of the entire EU. India and EU have not had lucrative trade relations for nearly a decade now, and in a post-Covid world looking to build resilient supply chains, having a rim of allies for shared prosperity is a priority. Many experts point out that India may restart engagement on BTIA (Bilateral trade and investment agreement) with EU. There could be a challenge for getting the undivided attention of the French president on many of these multilateral matters on the EU platform, as he faces a stiff challenge for re-election back home. That aside, the strategic partnership should be utilized to its full potential to drive the shared vision for a free and fair Indo-Pacific region.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Social justice forays into medical education

Healthcare is a matter of national importance, a key to Swasth Bharat, and the resident doctors are crucial for the entire healthcare system



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

The matter of introducing 27 per cent reservations for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs) in medical education both at Under Graduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) levels is at crucial stage of hearing before the Supreme Court. The medical students and the entire nation are waiting with bated breath for the judgement of the apex court as it is a matter of vital importance involving and intertwining social justice and quality medical education.

A group of resident doctors has challenged before the Supreme Court the government notification providing the impugned reservations. On July 29, 2021, the Union government had issued a notification introducing the above two new reservations for undergraduate and post-graduate medical and dental courses beginning from the current academic year 2021-22. The notification reserves 27 per cent seats for the OBC and 10 per cent seats for the EWS under All India Quota (AIQ). The NEET-UG examination for admission to the MBBS course is conducted by the National Testing Agency, Ministry of Education while the National Board of Examination (NBE), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare conducts the NEET-PG examination for medical and dental courses in the country.

The NEET-PG exam was supposed to be held in the month of January 2021 but was postponed to April 2021 and, in the meanwhile, owing to the evolving Covid-19 situation, the exam was further postponed to September 2021. The exam results came out in October. The counselling was to start from the end of October itself but it could not start as the notification was challenged in the Supreme Court by some doctors and the matter is sub-judice. The petitioners also challenged the reasonableness of the annual income ceiling of ₹. 8 lakh fixed to determine EWS status. Another important aspect is the fate of those candidates who have secured higher ranking in the order of merit but would be deprived of admission due to these two new reservations unless additional seats are created for them.

Although the resident doctors have called off the strike on the personal intervention of the Union Health Minister, the problem of inordinate delay in admissions and the inevitable denial of admission to meritorious students continues to be a cause of serious concern and worry. The problem needs speedy and amicable resolution in view of the looming threat of yet another but far contagious wave of the pandemic and the possible enormous swell in patients. The resident doctors were protesting since November 27 against the multiple postponements of the NEET-PG 2021 counselling and the resultant delay in admission of the fresh batch of doctors in medical colleges.

The All-India Quota (AIQ) scheme was introduced in 1986 under the Supreme



ALTHOUGH THE RESIDENT DOCTORS HAVE CALLED OFF THE STRIKE ON THE PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF THE UNION HEALTH MINISTER, INORDINATE DELAY IN ADMISSIONS & THE INEVITABLE DENIAL OF ADMISSION TO MERITORIOUS STUDENTS CONTINUE TO BE A CAUSE OF WORRY. THE PROBLEM NEEDS SPEEDY AND AMICABLE RESOLUTION IN VIEW OF THE LOOMING THREAT OF YET ANOTHER BUT FAR CONTAGIOUS WAVE OF THE PANDEMIC

(The writer is a member of Delhi Bar Council. The views expressed are personal.)



Court's direction to provide for domicile-free merit-based opportunities to students from any state aspiring to study in a good medical college in any of the states. The AIQ consists of 15 per cent of the total available UG seats and 50 per cent of the total available PG seats in government medical colleges. Prior to 2007, there was no reservation in the AIQ scheme. In 2007, the Supreme Court introduced 15 per cent reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and a 7.5 per cent quota for the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the AIQ scheme. When the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act came into force in 2007, it provided for the first time 27 per cent reservation to the OBCs. It was implemented by all the central medical educational institutions but not applied to the AIQ seats of the state medical and dental colleges. The 103rd Constitution Amendment made in 2019, provided for 10 per cent reservation for the EWS category in all central educational institutions. The number of seats in the medical and dental colleges was increased to accommodate this additional 10 per cent EWS reservation without affecting the seats of the unreserved category.

On a petition, the Madras High Court ruled in July 2020 that the OBCs but struck down 10 per cent reservation for the EWS. However, with the passage of the 103rd Constitution Amendment, the reservation for the EWS has been constitutionally guaranteed, albeit

decided to provide 27 per cent reservation for OBCs and 10 per cent reservation for EWS in the AIQ seats for all the UG and PG courses from the current academic year 2021-22. Given the enormous delay in holding NEET-PG-21 counselling, the government could have taken a decision to implement these reservations from the academic year 2022-23. But no popular government can afford dithering and prevaricating on a highly emotive and inflammable issue of social justice, more so when elections are round the corner. The clarion call of social justice is seen as a potentially powerful tool to secure political power. There were times when the politics of Mandal and Kamandal were at loggerheads but today a blend of both is perceived as sure recipe for electoral triumph. The report of Mandal Commission was pulled out of hibernation all of a sudden by then Prime Minister VP Singh as a counter-measure to save his government. P V Narasimha Rao, short of a full parliamentary majority, introduced 10 per cent reservation for the EWS apart from 27 per cent reservations for the OBCs. The notification was challenged, and the Supreme Court in the famous Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, 1992, upheld 27 per cent quota for the OBCs but struck down 10 per cent reservation for the EWS. However, with the passage of the 103rd Constitution Amendment, the reservation for the EWS has been constitutionally guaranteed, albeit

some institutions of national excellence and pioneering research in matters of national and strategic importance have been kept beyond the ambit of reservations.

The resident doctors want NEET-PG-21 Counselling to start without further loss of time, which has been delayed unconscionably and inordinately for multiple reasons. The academic session 2022-23 is only a few months away and given the severe constraints of infrastructure and faculty, approximately 90,000 PG students cannot be catered to by the system meant for 45,000 students per academic year. Besides causing avoidable mental agony and strain to the students, it will have adverse cascading effect on teaching and patient-treatment. To overcome the shortage of teachers, the Medical Council of India (now Medical Commission under the new Act) increased the professor-teacher ratio from 1:2 to 1:3 from the academic session 2018-19. The professors are already overburdened and the simultaneous running of two batches, under the circumstance, would pose formidable challenge. Yet, the nation needs new batches of meritorious PG doctors. Healthcare is a matter of national importance, a key to Swasth-Bharat, and the resident doctors are so crucial for the entire healthcare system. Hopefully, the judgement of the Supreme Court will resolve the matter amicably in the best and long-term interest of the nation as we can ill-afford strikes by our doctors.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WHAT HAPPENED IN PUNJAB IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE CHAOS AND DISORDER THERE. SUCH SERIOUS LAPSE IN THE PM'S SECURITY IS UNFORGIVABLE. —UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH



THE PM WAS NOT ATTACKED AND THERE WAS NO THREAT TO HIS LIFE. IT'S WRONG TO SAY THAT THERE WAS A SECURITY LAPSE. —PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI

China: No more 'Mr Nice Guy'

The limited free speech and tolerance of dissent that prevailed for 20 years under Xi Jinping's predecessors have been systematically eroded

More than 200 Hong Kong police raided and shut down one of the last pro-democracy news websites in Hong Kong recently, in the latest sign that the Beijing regime will no longer tolerate dissent of any kind. It was total overkill - a couple of cops with a court order would have sufficed - but they were 'sending a message' to other 'malcontents'.

Chief Secretary for Administration John Lee defended the police operation (which also arrested current and former editors and board members in their homes) in fluent Orwellian Newspeak: "Anybody who attempts to use media work as a tool to pursue their political purpose contravenes the law. They are the evil elements that damage



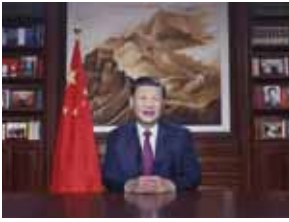
GWYNNE DYER

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

press freedom." It's not just Hong Kong: all of China is closing down. The limited free speech and tolerance of dissent that prevailed for twenty years under President Xi Jinping's predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, have been systematically eroded, and Xi is now effectively president-for-life.

He even encourages a personality cult, something the Party had managed to avoid since the catastrophe of Chairman Mao Zedong. And there's no velvet glove on the iron hand any more: uppity ethnic groups like the Tibetans and Uyghurs are just overwhelmed by imported majorities of Han Chinese, and those who complain get sent to concentration camps.

It's the same abroad. 'Wolf



warrior' diplomats berate the foreign countries they are stationed in for any criticism of China, and the crushing of Hong Kong's liberties signals the abandonment of any notion of seducing Taiwan into unification under the banner of 'one country, two systems'. When the time comes, it will be annexed by force.

But the question is: why now? Xi's personality is authoritarian, to be sure, but that is pretty standard among

the 'princelings' who grew up as part of the second and third generation Communist aristocracy. Yet for decades they supported term limits on the leadership because that protected them from being victimised by another Mao figure.

If they now accept Xi's elevation to supreme and perpetual power, it cannot just be because they are afraid of him. He's only one man. There also has to be some sense among others in the Party's leadership that it will need a tough autocrat to ride out the coming storms and preserve its rule. So, what storms might those be?

It has been evident for years that Beijing was cooking the books and overstating China's economic growth rate.

It was obvious from previous examples where industrialising countries enjoyed high growth rates by exploiting cheap labour flooding into the cities from the countryside that this was a once-only bonus. The 10 per cent growth never lasts more than one generation; then it falls back to the 'normal' 2-3 per cent. Recent examples are Japan (1955-85) and South Korea (1960-90).

Like it or not, China has had its 30 years of high-speed growth (1985-2015), and behind a facade of lies its real growth rate has already been falling for at least half a decade. In the last few quarters, indeed, China's Gross Domestic Product has grown at half the rate of the American GDP.

That is partly due to a

surge in US production while the economy recovers from the Covid lockdowns, but the published Chinese growth rates have been fictions for at least the past five years. Realistic estimates, 'reverse-engineered' from electricity consumption and other proxies, have been more like 3-4 per cent, and growth is destined to fall further.

The Chinese birth rate has collapsed: each new age cohort entering the workforce will be much smaller than the one before, which will hit demand very hard. Moreover, the debt incurred by reckless over-investment in housing, roads and other infrastructure, just to keep the employment and growth statistics up, is already a major burden on the economy.

Two implications of this are long-term threats to Communist rule in China. The Party's promise to overtake the US economy and make China the world's dominant power will probably never come to pass, nor will its promise to raise Chinese living standards to a developed-world level. (Current GDP per capita is only \$9,000.)

If the Communist Party can't deliver on those two promises, what gives it the right to monopolise political power in China? It's certainly not delivering on its old promise of equality either.

No wonder Xi Jinping is battering down the hatches politically, and no wonder the nomenklatura (to use the old Soviet word) are going along with it. Stagnation awaits.

Computer model predicts Omicron to increase transmission, immune escape

PTI ■ BOSTON

Mutations in Omicron can strengthen the affinity of the coronavirus variant for the human cells, which could increase its infectivity and evasion of antibodies, according to researchers.

The scientists from Boston College in the US developed a computer model that can predict mutations in the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and provide insights into future variants of concern before they emerge.

The team used the model to develop an initial set of predictions about the role of mutations on infectivity and immune response evasion of Omicron and other SARS-CoV-2 variants with human host cells.

"We find that Omicron has not reached its full potential to bind human host cells," said Babak Momeni, Assistant Professor at Boston College.

"We identify mutations that can strengthen the virus affinity for the human cell, which could increase infectivity and evasion of antibodies," said Momeni, lead researcher on the project.

The Omicron variant of the coronavirus is suspected to be the most infectious yet by binding to human receptors better than the Delta variant.

The yet-to-be peer-reviewed research posted on the preprint repository bioRxiv found that Omicron may have the potential to continue to evolve even stronger binding to increase transmission and infectivity.

The spike protein of the coronavirus binds to a receptor on the host cells, called ACE2, which allows the virus to enter the cells and infect it.

Binding is the first step for infection, and several mutations in previous variants of concern have been shown to be important for increasing the

spike's binding to human ACE2.

"We use a fully quantum mechanical model to theoretically assess how different mutations in the spike can contribute to its increased, or decreased, binding strength to human ACE2," said Momeni.

"The modelling shows that Omicron binds to receptor proteins stronger than the Delta variant," he said.

The model predicts what mutations allow better binding to host receptors and better evasion of antibodies, the researchers said. Such mutations can potentially lead to a future variant of concern, they said.

"Having this knowledge from our model would help with readiness for detecting and preventing, as well as treating, emerging and future variants," Momeni added. He, however, cautioned that increased infectivity is only one important

aspect in variants of concern. It is also important to monitor the severity of symptoms and the ability of the variant to evade antibodies and vaccines, the researcher said.

The study found that Omicron's spike proteins bind better than the Delta variant to the human ACE2 receptor.

However, not all mutations in the spike protein's targeting system -- known as a receptor binding domain -- are beneficial for binding.

This suggests factors other than binding may also be involved in determining how the variant evolves.

One possible explanation is that the variant has acquired mutations to evade host antibodies, Momeni said. Such mutations can be detrimental to its binding to the host receptor and were followed by additional compensatory mutations to recover, or even improve, its receptor binding.

US urges COVID boosters starting at age 12 to fight omicron

The U.S. is urging that everyone 12 and older get a COVID-19 booster as soon as they're eligible, to help fight back the hugely contagious omicron mutant that's ripping through the country.

Boosters already were encouraged for all Americans 16 and older, but Wednesday the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention endorsed an extra Pfizer shot for younger teens -- those 12 to 15 -- and strengthened its recommendation that 16- and 17-year-olds get it, too.

"It is critical that we protect our children and teens from COVID-19 infection and the complications of severe disease," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC's director, said in a statement Wednesday night.

"This booster dose will provide optimized protection against COVID-19 and the Omicron variant. I encourage all parents to keep their children up to date with CDC's COVID-19 vaccine recommendations," she said. Vaccines still offer strong protection against serious illness from any type of COVID-19, including omicron -- what experts say is their most important benefit. But the newest mutant can slip past a layer of the vaccines' protection to cause milder infections. Studies show a booster dose at least temporarily revs up virus-fighting antibodies to levels that offer best chance at avoiding symptomatic infection, even from omicron. Earlier Wednesday, the CDC's independent scientific advisers wrestled with whether a booster should be an

option for younger teens, who tend not to get as sick from COVID-19 as adults, or more strongly recommended.

Giving teens a booster for a temporary jump in protection against infections is like playing whack-a-mole, cautioned CDC adviser Dr. Sarah Long of Drexel University. But she said extra shot was worth it to help push back the omicron mutant and shield kids from missed school and other problems that come with even a very mild case of COVID-19. More important, if a child with a mild infection spreads it to a more vulnerable parent or grandparent who then dies, the impact "is absolutely crushing," said panelist Dr. Camille Kotton of Massachusetts General Hospital.

"Let's whack this one down," agreed Dr. Jamie Loefer of Cayuga Family Medicine in Ithaca, New York. The vaccine made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech is only option for American children of any age. The CDC says about 13.5 million children ages 12 to 17 -- slightly more than half of that age group -- have received two Pfizer shots. Boosters were opened to 16- and 17-year-olds last month.

Wednesday's decision means about 5 million of younger teens who had their last shot in spring are eligible for a booster right away. New U.S. guidelines say anyone who received two Pfizer vaccinations and is eligible for a booster can get it five months after their last shot, rather than six months previously recommended. AP

China lashes out at America over support for Lithuania

AP ■ BEIJING

China lashed out at United States on Thursday over its support for European nation of Lithuania in its feud with Beijing over relations with Taiwan. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Washington was using Baltic state to "use Taiwan to contain China."

"The US side has defended Lithuania's erroneous act of creating 'one China, one Taiwan,' and attempted to put together a small clique condoning Taiwan independence forces," Wang said at a daily briefing. His remarks came after top US and German diplomats on Wednesday said Chinese pressure against Lithuania was unwarranted.

Lithuania broke with diplomatic custom last year by letting Taiwanese office in Vilnius bear the name Taiwan, instead of Chinese Taipei, which most other countries use to avoid offending Beijing.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory with no right to diplomatic recognition, and Lithuania's move infuriated Beijing, which withdrew its ambassador to Vilnius and expelled Lithuanian ambassador to Beijing. Lithuania has since closed its embassy in Beijing. Constant Chinese pressure has reduced number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic allies to just 14, although it has robust informal relations with U.S., Germany and most other major nations.

Lithuania, a country of 2.8 million people, is a member of European Union and NATO and a close U.S. ally. Wang also blasted Taiwan's move to create a \$200 million investment fund for Lithuania to offset China's economic reprisals as "dollar diplomacy," adding that "soliciting foreign support to Taiwan independence will only lead to a dead end."

Australia, Japan sign defense pact as China concerns loom

AP ■ SYDNEY

The leaders of Japan and Australia signed a "landmark" defense agreement Thursday that allows closer cooperation between their militaries and stands as a rebuke to China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met in a virtual summit to sign the Reciprocal Access Agreement, the first such defense pact signed by Japan with any country other than the United States.

The agreement follows more than a year of talks between Japan and Australia aimed at breaking down legal barriers to allow the troops of one country to enter the other for training and other purposes.

"Japan is our closest partner in Asia as demonstrated by our special strategic partnership -- Australia's only such partnership," Morrison said. "An equal partnership, shared trust between two great democracies committed to the rule of law, human rights, free trade and a free and open Indo-Pacific." Kishida hailed the agreement as "a landmark instrument which will elevate security cooperation between the nations to new heights."

While China wasn't mentioned, its significance at the signing was implicit. Japan's ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, said that "in light of the deteriorating security environment, what Japan and Australia can do together is first of all to increase deterrence."

Morrison said the agreement "will form an important part of Australia and Japan's response to the uncertainty we now face and will underpin greater and more complex



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, right, and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison seen on screen, attend a virtual summit to sign Reciprocal Access Agreement, at Kishida's official residence in Tokyo, Japan Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. The leaders of Japan and Australia signed a "landmark" defense agreement Thursday that allows closer cooperation between their militaries and stands as a rebuke to China's growing assertiveness in Indo-Pacific region (Issai Kato/Photo via AP)

engagement in operability between the Australia Defense Force and Japan Self-Defense Forces." He called the pact a "pivotal moment for Australia and Japan and (for) the security of our two nations and our people."

Malcolm Davis, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said the agreement recognized the importance of establishing firm defense partnerships to deter an increasingly aggressive China.

"Japan is breaking away from its post-war constitutional constraints on the use of military force because Tokyo recognizes the challenges it is facing from China," he told Sky News.

"There is a territorial dispute between China and Japan ... and more significantly there is a growing concern China will make a move over Taiwan in the next few years."

The pact builds on the strategic dialogue known as "the Quad," which includes Japan, Australia, the United States and India.

Dozens of protesters, 12 police dead in Kazakhstan stir

AP ■ MOSCOW

Security forces killed dozens of protesters and 12 police died during extraordinarily violent demonstrations in Kazakhstan that saw government buildings stormed and set ablaze, authorities said Thursday. One police officer was found beheaded in escalating unrest that poses a growing challenge to authoritarian rule in the Central Asian nation.

Despite the severe response by authorities, protesters took the streets again in the country's largest city, Almaty, a day after breaking into the presidential residence and the mayor's office there. Police were out in force again, including in the capital of Nur-Sultan, which was reportedly quiet, and Russian troops were on their way.


Russia's Sputnik news service reported that shots were fired as police surrounded one group of about 200 protesters in the city. So far, 2,000 people have been arrested, the Interior Ministry said.

In the unrest on Wednesday, "dozens of attackers were liquidated," police spokeswoman Saltanat Azirbek told state news channel Khabar-24, using a term common to describe the killing of people thought to be extremists by law enforcement. Twelve police officers were killed in the unrest and 353 injured, according to city officials cited by the channel.

Tens of thousands of people, some reportedly carrying clubs and shields, have taken to the streets in recent days in the worst protests the country has seen since gaining independence from the Soviet Union three decades ago. Although the demonstrations began over a near-doubling of prices for a type of vehicle fuel.

China plans space station completion, many launches in 2022

BEIJING: China has recommitted itself to completing its orbiting space station by end of year and says it is planning more than 40 launches for 2022, putting it roughly level with United States. Launches would include those of two Shenzhou crewed missions, two Tianzhou cargo spacecraft and station's additional two modules, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Thursday, citing a recent announcement by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation known as CASC. Named Mengtian and Wentian, the science modules will join the Tianhe core module that is currently home to a three-person crew. The launch schedule shows how China's traditionally cautious program is increasing cadence of its missions as it seeks to take a leading role in space exploration. AP

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पत्राक:पीईआर / 2022 / 924 दिनांक 06/01/2022

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Online Applications are invited from eligible candidates for the post of Professor (Adv. No. 919; Dated 06.01.2022) Associate Professor (Adv. No. 920; 06.01.2022) and Assistant Professor (Adv. No. 921; 06.01.2022) in various departments of the Kumaun University, Nainital. The details regarding vacancies, qualifications, experience and screening guidelines etc. are available on the University website www.kunainital.ac.in. The link for online application is available on the University website www.kunainital.ac.in from 07.01.2022 to 27.01.2022. The candidates are required to fill up the online application form and also submit the self attested printout of the online application form along with the required/ relevant documents in support of their eligibility. The same should reach the office of the Registrar, Administration block, Kumaun University, Nainital-263001 by 12.02.2022 till 4:00 pm.

REGISTRAR

NKOREA CLAIMS 2ND SUCCESSFUL TEST FLIGHT OF HYPERSONIC MISSILE

AP ■ SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

North Korea claimed Thursday to have conducted the second successful test flight of a hypersonic missile, days after leader Kim Jong Un vowed to bolster his military forces despite pandemic-related difficulties.

Wednesday's launch, the North's first known weapons test in about two months, indicates country will press ahead with plans to modernize its nuclear and missile arsenals rather than return to disarmament talks anytime soon. The official Korean Central News Agency said Central Committee of ruling Workers' Party expressed "great satisfaction" at results of the missile test, which was observed by leading weapons officials. Hypersonic weapons, which



This photo provided by North Korean government, shows what it says a test launch of a hypersonic missile in North Korea Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022. Independent journalists were not given access to cover event depicted in this image distributed by North Korean government. The content of this image is as provided & can't be independently verified. Korean language watermark on image as provided by source reads: "KCNA" which is abbreviation for Korean Central News Agency (Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP)

fly at speeds in excess of Mach 5, or five times speed of sound,

could pose crucial challenges to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

It's unclear whether and how soon North Korea could manufacture such a high-tech missile, but it was among a wish-list of sophisticated military assets that Kim disclosed early last year, along with a multi-warhead missile, spy satellites, solid-fueled long-range missiles and underwater-launched nuclear missiles.

Wednesday's test was the second of its kind since North Korea first launched a hypersonic missile last September.

"The successive successes in test launches in hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance in that they hasten a task for modernizing strategic armed force of the state," a KCNA dispatch said.

Israeli military: Forces kill Palestinian gunman in raid

TEL AVIV, Israel: Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian who had opened fire on them during an arrest raid in occupied West Bank city of Nablus early Thursday, the Israeli military said. The military said it was carrying out an operation to arrest a suspect when armed men began firing on troops. It said forces killed one of gunmen. No soldiers were wounded and suspect was arrested, the military said. The official Palestinian news agency, Wafa, identified the man as Bakir Muhammad Musa Hashash, 21, saying he was critically wounded in clashes with military and later died. The clashes came amid a spike in Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent weeks. Last month, a Palestinian gunman opened fire on a car filled with Jewish seminary students next to a West Bank settlement outpost.

Yehuda Dimentman, 25, was killed and two others were wounded near Homesh, which is considered illegal by Israeli government. Also last month, a Palestinian attacker stabbed and seriously wounded an ultra-Orthodox Jew outside Jerusalem's Old City. And just over a week before that, a Hamas militant opened fire in Old City, killing an Israeli man. AP

Ex-NBC executive Turness named CEO for BBC news, current affairs

AP ■ LONDON

The BBC announced Thursday that it has appointed Deborah Turness as its new chief executive for news and current affairs, bringing to the broadcaster a vastly experienced journalist who previously held senior leadership positions at the news division of American TV network NBC.

Turness, 54, comes to the BBC from British media company ITN, where she is currently CEO. The native of England will replace Fran Unsworth, who is leaving at the end of January.

"In the U.K. and around the world there has never been a greater need for the BBC's powerful brand of impartial, trusted journalism," Turness said in a statement.

"It is a great privilege to be asked to lead and grow BBC News at a time of accelerated digital growth and innovation, when its content is reaching more global consumers on more platforms than ever before," she added. BBC Director-General Tim Davie said Turness "brings a wealth of experience, insight, first-class editorial judgment and a strong track record of delivery" to her new role.

France eases rule for vaccinated travelers from South Africa

AP ■ PARIS

France is allowing vaccinated travelers from South Africa to enter its territory without having to observe a coronavirus quarantine.

The French government published a decree Thursday that removed South Africa from the list of places subject to highly restricted travel rules.

Unvaccinated people coming from South Africa still must quarantine in France for 10 days under supervision from local authorities.

France almost completely banned travel to and from South Africa after the first COVID-19 cases involving the omicron variant were detected in South Africa in November.

The highly contagious variant has since spread around the world, causing record daily cases in the United States and parts of Europe. French Prime Minister Jean Castex said Thursday that omicron is now estimated to represent 70% to 80% of all infections in France.

France, which has one of Europe's most-vaccinated populations, reported more than 332,000 new virus cases on Wednesday. The number set a European record for the highest single-day national count of confirmed cases.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR DIRECTORATE OF FLORICULTURE SRINAGAR KASHMIR

Tel-0194-2474234 Fax - 2482032 - email :- kashflori@rediffmail.com

Gist of e- Tender Notice No. 36 of 2022 Dated:- 04/01/2022

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, e-tenders are invited from Registered Growers/Floral Nurserymen/Distributors of reputed Agencies for supply of different kinds of Hybrid Flower Seeds (Summer and Winter) as indicated in the detailed tender notice/BOQ:-

S.No. 1, Value of CDR/Security Deposit :- Rs.20,000/- (Rupees Twenty Thousand only) Pledged to Accounts Officer, Floriculture Department, Kashmir, **Cost of tender documents :-** Rs.1000/- in the shape of e-Chillan favoring to Accounts Officer, Department of Floriculture, Kashmir.

The bidding document (s) consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specification, terms and conditions and other details can be seen/downloaded from the website www.jktenders.gov.in/www.dirflorikmr.in as per schedule of date given below:

1.	Period of downloading of bidding documents	05/01/2022 from 11:30 AM to 24/01/2022 up to 02:00 PM
2.	Bid submission Start Date	05/01/2022 from 03:00 PM
3.	Bid submission End Date	24/01/2022 up to 02:00 PM
4.	Date and time of Opening of Tenders (Online)	28/01/2022 at 02:00 PM

In case of any eventuality (Online) opening date will be considered on other convenient working day.
Sd/- Accounts Officer (Member secretary)
No. DIPK-16255/21 Dated:- 05-01-2022

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PHED CIRCLE BARMER

Phone No 02982-220253 E-mail:- edphed@gmail.com Scircle barmer@rajasthan.gov.in No: SE/PHED/BMR/NIT-83-94/2021-22/10041-58 Date:- 28.12.2021

NIT No : 2021-22/63-94

Online tenders are invited on behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan for the following works after giving prescribed earnest money, the tender documents can be downloaded from the web site <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>. Details of this tender notification and pre-qualification criteria can also be seen in Nit exhibited on web site. www.dipronline.org, <http://sppp.raj.nic.in>. tender are to be submitted online electronic format on web site <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> and will be opened in the office of the Superintending Engineer. PHED Circle Barmer (rajasthan)

NIT No	Name of work	Estimated cost (Rs in lac)	Bid security Amount (Rs in lac)	Tender fee	Processing fee	Time period
	Transportation of water on annual rate contract basis					
83/21-22	From Department or Private hydrants under UWSS Balotra (UBN PHE2122SLRC11102)	25.00	0.50	1000/-	500/-	12 month
84/21-22	From Private hydrants under Sub Division Balotra (UBN PHE2122WSRC11103)	50.00	1.00	1000/-	1000/-	12 month
85/21-22	From Private hydrants under Sub Division Sindhari (UBN PHE2122WSRC11104)	70.00	1.40	1000/-	1000/-	12 month
86/21-22	From Private hydrants under Sub Division Siwana (UBN PHE2122WSRC11105)	160.00	3.20	2500/-	1000/-	12 month
87/21-22	From Private hydrants under Sub Division Pachpadra (UBN PHE2122WSRC11106)	70.00	1.40	1000/-	1000/-	12 month
88/21-22	In PHED Siwana CWR of Siwana from hydrant Moothli and / or private sources / hydrant (UBN PHE2122WSRC11107)	180.00	3.60	2500/-	1000/-	12 month
89/71-22	From Departmental hydrant under Rural area of City Division Barmer (UBN PHE2122WSRC11108)	35.00	0.70	1000/-	500/-	12 month
90/21-22	From Departmental hydrants under UWSS Barmer (UBN PHE2122WSRC11109)	10.00	0.20	500/-	500/-	12 month
91/21-22	From private / Departmental hydrant under Sub Division Gida (UBN PHE2122WSRC11110)	240.00	4.80	2500/-	1000/-	12 month
92/21-22	From private / Departmental hydrant under Sub Division Baytu (UBN PHE2122WSRC11111)	130.00	2.60	2500/-	1000/-	12 month
93/21-22	From Departmental hydrant under Rigepp Division Barmer (UBN PHE2122WSRC11112)	100.00	2.00	2500/-	1000/-	12 month
94/21-22	From Departmental hydrant under Distt Division South Barmer (UBN PHE2122WSRC11113)	35.00	0.70	1000/-	500/-	12 month

Last Date & time of downloading and bid submission: 11.01.2022 up to 6.00 pm Date & time of opening of technical bid: 12.01.2022 at 2.00 pm Last Date & time of physical submission of document: 12.01.2022 up to 2.00 pm Date & time of opening of financial bid: Sh all be intimated later through online.

Sd/- (Bharat Singh)
Superintending Engineer
PHED Circle Barmer
DIPR/C/93/21

SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN

Northern Railway will run following single trip Superfast Express Special Train as per the programme mentioned below:-

02420 Delhi Safdarjung - Puducherry Superfast Express Special Train		1 Trip
STATIONS ↓		Train No. 02420
		Arr. Dep.
Delhi Safdarjung		-- 19:00
Virangana Lakshmibai		01:10 01:20
Itarsi Jn.		07:20 07:25
Nagpur Jn.		12:25 12:35
Balharshah		15:25 15:35
Vijayawada Jn.		22:05 22:15
Gudur Jn.		02:35 02:45
Perambur		05:00 05:05
Villupuram Jn.		07:40 07:45
Puducherry		08:45 --

Days of Run: 02420 Ex Delhi Safdarjung from 09.01.2022
Accommodation: Second Class 3 Tier Sleeper

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

NOTE: Passengers are therefore, advised to please check the detailed Time-Table of above trains through RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or the NTES App.

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23/02/22

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GREEN ENERGY CORRIDOR

Cabinet approves ₹12,000 crore for second phase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the second phase of the Green Energy Corridor with an outlay of ₹12,031 crore to facilitate grid integration and power evacuation of about 20 GW of renewable energy projects in seven States. Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi also approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Nepal for construction of a bridge over Mahakali River at Dharchula in Uttarakhand.

"The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, today approved the scheme on Green Energy

Corridor (GEC) Phase-II for Intra-State Transmission System (InSTS) for addition of approximately 10,750 circuit kilometres (ckm) of transmission lines and approx. 27,500 Mega Volt-Amperes (MVA) transformation capacity of sub-stations," an official statement said.

The scheme will facilitate grid integration and power evacuation of about 20 GW of renewable energy (RE) projects in seven states -- Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Announcing the decision, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said the second phase will be implemented during 2021-22 to 2025-26 fiscal years. Thakur added that 80 per cent

of the phase one work has been completed. The outlay of the first phase was ₹ 10,142 crore.

I&B Minister said the MoU between India and Nepal will be signed in the "near future" and the bridge will be completed within three years. "The construction of the bridge will help people living in Dharchula in Uttarakhand and in the territory of Nepal," he said.

Thakur said as close neighbours, India and Nepal share unique ties of friendship and cooperation characterized by an open border and deep-rooted people-to-people contacts of kinship and culture.

The diplomatic relations between the two countries will further improve with the signing of the MoU, an official statement said.

Omicron to hit Q4 GDP by 0.40 pc, dent FY22 growth by 0.1 pc: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Omicron variant spread will impact the January-March quarter GDP by 0.40 per cent and shave off 0.10 per cent from the FY22 growth, as many states resort to restrictions to limit infections, a domestic rating agency said on Thursday. "Curbs in various forms such as reducing the capacity of market/market complexes and night/weekend curfews to check human mobility/contact have already started in several states, which are impacting economic activities," India Ratings and Research said in a note.

The surge in cases seen over the last fortnight will have an adverse impact on the fourth-quarter GDP and the growth will come at 5.7 per cent during the quarter, which

is 0.40 per cent lower than the earlier estimate of 6.1 per cent. For the entire FY22, the GDP is expected to clock a growth rate of 9.3 per cent, 0.10 per cent lower than what was estimated earlier.

The revision in estimates comes amid a massive surge in COVID infections across the country, especially in the metro. A majority of the new cases are suspected to be that of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which is suspected to be spreading fast and also evades prior vaccinations.

Indications so far suggest that the infections are milder and mostly not life-threatening, the rating agency said, adding that the curbs imposed by local governments will be less disruptive than those during the first two waves of COVID.

Telecom industry seeks RoW rules amendment to include provisions on 'small cell deployment' for 5G readiness

New Delhi: The telecom industry has battled for amendment of Right of Way (ROW) rules to incorporate provisions on 'small cell deployment', as India gears up for the roll-out of futuristic 5G networks.

Global telecom industry body GSMA has forecast that 5G technologies will make an overall contribution of about USD 450 billion to the Indian economy (0.6 per cent of GDP by 2040) and will reach 88 million 5G connections by 2025.

Simply put, small cells refer to low cost, low powered radio access nodes, and the deployment of 'small cells' is being seen as a critical element of 5G networks. The GSMA report 'Paving the way for 5G readiness in India: A guide for effective policymaking on small cell deployment' released on Thursday has made suggestions, including an amendment to RoW rules to incorporate provisions on small cell deployment and ensuring uniform implementation of rules

across states, Union territories and municipal bodies.

Other suggestions include reducing approval timelines for small cells to 15-30 days with an automatic deemed nod after 30 days (through online portals); effective use of spare capacity on existing backhaul networks; and encouraging sharing of passive infrastructure to lower costs.

"As mentioned previously, small cells deployment and right of way contribute significantly to enhancing the broadband connectivity of the country. This is likely to attract much more FDI (foreign direct investment) in a country that already struggles with such incentives due to low ARPUs (average revenue per user) and high regulatory costs," the report said.

It would also allow India to harness the potential for 5G driving a post-pandemic recovery and contributing to India's efforts in becoming a USD 5 trillion economy. **PTI**

HC junks Swamy's plea seeking to set aside Air India disinvestment process

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday dismissed BJP leader Subramanian Swamy's plea seeking to set aside the Air India disinvestment process on the allegation that the methodology adopted by the government in the valuation of the national carrier was "arbitrary, illegal and against public interest". The order was passed by a bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh.

Swamy has sought to set aside and revoke any action or decision or grant of any further approvals, permissions or permits by authorities with respect to the Air India disinvestment process. On January 4, the court heard the arguments put forward by Swamy, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and senior advocate Harish Salve, who appeared in the matter on behalf of Talace Private Limited, and had reserved the order.

Swamy also sought a CBI investigation into the role and functioning of authorities and the submission of a detailed report before the court. Reacting to the Judgment, Swamy later said that he will approach Supreme Court after studying the Delhi High Court's order.

FinMin releases 10th installment of revenue deficit grant to States

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry on Thursday released monthly revenue deficit grant to 17 States totalling ₹ 9,871 crore. So far, an amount of ₹98,710 crore has been released to 17 states as post devolution revenue deficit grant in the current financial year.

"The Department of Expenditure today released monthly Post Devolution Revenue Deficit (PDRD) grant of ₹9,871 crore to 17 states. This was the 10th instalment of the PDRD grant released to the states," the ministry said in a statement.

States which received this grant are Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The grants are released as per the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission in monthly installments to meet the gap in revenue accounts of states post devolution. The Commission has recommended this grant to 17 states during 2021-22.

The eligibility of states to receive this grant and the quantum of grant was decided by the Commission based on the gap between assessment of revenue and expenditure of the state after taking into account the assessed devolution for 2021-22.

"The 15th Finance Commission has recommended PDRD grant of ₹1,18,452 crore to 17 states in financial year 2021-22. Out of this, an amount of ₹ 98,710 crore (83.33 per cent) has been released so far," the statement added. **PTI**

CII pitches for coordinated actions by Centre, States to minimise Omicron impact

New Delhi: Amid fears that the new coronavirus variant may disrupt normal business activity, industry chamber CII on Thursday pitched for coordinated actions by the Centre and state governments to minimize the impact of Omicron on the economy.

"There is obviously some concern about Omicron but I think the general feedback we have is, it is spreading fast but the health impact is milder," CII President T V Narendran told PTI in an interview. The economic impact of the third wave can be minimized if there is a coordinated response between the central and the state governments, he said.

The CII President observed that overall, the recovery in 2021 has been strong for most sectors. However, sectors like hos-

pitality, travel, MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) and some services were significantly affected by the first and second wave of COVID.

Sharing estimates for economic growth, he said CII's view is that this financial year's growth will be 9.5 per cent and next financial year's growth will be 8.5 per cent. The current fiscal ends on March 31.

Asked about the Centre's decision to roll back the three farm laws and whether this affects investor sentiment in terms of policy stability, he said: "I think the (government's) direction is clear, obviously as you move in that direction there will be times when you may have to pause a bit, I think in the Agri Laws it is more like that."

He further noted that "... At CII we had support-

ed the fact that we felt these (laws) would help in the long run, but we respect the government's decisions on these things."

He stressed that overall, the intent of the government, the commitment is positive, it is towards reforms. "I also think across the political spectrum and between the Centre and states there is greater recognition that you do need private sector investments to come in if you want to create jobs," Narendran said. Sharing CII's Budget wishlist, he emphasized that focus on investment and infrastructure must continue, because while the private sector investment is coming back, the economy needs to be supported by government investment particularly with focus on infrastructure. **PTI**

Jio users can now set standing instructions for tariff plans via UPI auto-debit

New Delhi: Jio users can now set standing instructions for auto-debit for their tariff plans through UPI after a tie-up between the telecom player and NPCI.

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and Jio in a joint announcement on Thursday said UPI AUTOPAY has now been introduced for the telecom industry with Jio.

This will enable Jio customers to set standing instructions on the MyJio App, using UPI AUTOPAY for their favourite tariff plans and has-

le-free recharging experience. Jio's integration with UPI AUTOPAY has made it the first player in the telecom industry to go live with the unique e-mandate feature that was launched by NPCI, the entities said in a release.

For recharge amounts up to Rs 5,000, customers do not even have to enter the UPI PIN on the execution of the recharge, the release said, adding users can also create, modify as well as remove the e-mandate for the tariff plans as per their requirements through UPI AUTOPAY. "We

believe our collaboration will change the way Jio customers experience the renewal of their mobile tariff plans.

With UPI AUTOPAY, it's our constant endeavour at NPCI to provide an extra layer of comfort and convenience to all the customers for their recurring spends and payments," Kunal Kalawatia, Chief of Products, NPCI said. Jio users will no longer need to remember their recharge renewal date or bill payment date and perform manual, Kiran Thomas, Director, Jio, said. **PTI**

Digital revolution in wedding industry

New Delhi: Covid-19 pandemic has not only affected millions of people but has affected their life also, and wedding is no exception to that. Indian wedding industry has seen a drastic change in these two years, with wedding planning moving online. It is the era of online wedding aggregators, wedding websites and gift registries. Distant family and well-wishers join wedding celebrations via Zoom calls and YouTube live streaming. "Like work, weddings have been celebrated adopting a hybrid model, to ensure safety and precautions. With travel restrictions, the wedding industry has evolved and embraced many aspects of technology," said Divyata Shergill, founder of ShaadiWish. **PTI**

DPIIT to come out with revised FDI policy to facilitate LIC disinvestment: Secy

New Delhi: The commerce and industry ministry is making changes in the foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to facilitate disinvestment of the country's largest insurer LIC, after taking views from the finance ministry, a top government official said on Thursday.

Anurag Jain, secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), said the current policy related to the sector will not facilitate the disinvestment process of LIC and, hence, needs to be revised.

"We are working on further simplification of the FDI policy. A very important point for further simplification is required urgently as we have to do the LIC disinvestment. So, we would be coming out with a revised FDI policy which will facilitate LIC disinvestment," he told reporters here.

The matter is being discussed with the Department of Financial Services and Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM).

"We have had two rounds of discussions at my level and now, we have (DPIIT, DFS and DIPAM) come on the same page. So, we are in the process of drafting those changes in the FDI policy. We will go to the Cabinet (for approval)," he said. According to the current FDI

policy, 74 per cent foreign investment is permitted under the automatic route in the insurance sector. However, these rules do not apply to the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), which is administered through a separate LIC Act.

As per Sebi rules, both FPI and FDI are permitted under public offer. However, sources said that since the LIC Act has no provision for foreign investments, there is a need to align the proposed LIC IPO with Sebi norms regarding foreign investor participation. The Cabinet had in July last year approved the initial public offering (IPO) of LIC and the stake sale is being planned in the current March quarter.

Further, talking about the long-pending e-commerce policy, the secretary said the DPIIT is in the final stages of "giving touches" to the e-commerce policy and the national retail trade policy.

The e-commerce policy "is finalised at my level and we have circulated that to other departments. Now we will have a higher level discussion... We will have discussions with departments on that and then we will finalise it...A lot of work has been done", he said. He added that FDI is allowed in only the marketplace model and "I do not see any change in view on that". **PTI**

Rupee dips 4 paise to 74.42 against USD

Mumbai: The rupee on Thursday dipped 4 paise to close at 74.42 against the US dollar, tracking the strength of the greenback in the overseas market after hawkish US Fed minutes.

Investors saw minutes from the Federal Reserve meeting as a sign that the US central bank might hike interest rates faster than anticipated to cool inflation, and this could lead to outflows from the domestic markets, forex traders said.

According to minutes from the Fed's December 14-15 policy meeting, policymakers believe the US job market is nearly healthy enough and ultra-low interest rates are no longer needed.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened weak at 74.44 and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.32 and a low of 74.51 against the US dollar. The domestic unit finally settled at 74.42, down 4 paise over its previous close of 74.38.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent up at 96.22.

"Dollar gained against most Asian currencies as the market assessed the US Fed's hawkish views. Rupee also felt the heat along with other Asian currencies and depreciated, but the pace was relatively lower as Reliance Industries received good response for their dollar bonds," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities. Reliance Industries Ltd, the nation's most valuable company, on Thursday said it has raised USD 4 billion (around ₹30,000 crore) in debt through the largest-ever foreign currency bond issuance by an Indian entity. **PTI**

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mr. Sachin Ajmani who is owner of the Entire First Floor, without roof rights, portion of built up Property bearing Municipal No. WZ-34-A, built on freshhold Plot No.2, Area measuring 78 Sq. Yards, in Block-D, along with undivided 1/4th rights of still parking floor, situated in the area of Village Bassai Darapur, known as Saraswati Garden, New Delhi; having purchased the same from Mr. Jasvinder Singh vide Sale Deed dated 02.09.2021 (vide Document No.9070, registered at Sub-Registrar, II, New Delhi) and intend to mortgage against the financial assistance from **Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited**, That the Surviving Member Certificate of Late Mr. Harnam Singh Jandu is not available in respect of abovementioned property. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person(s) having any objection regarding ownership and/or creating mortgage of the said property is / are hereby requested to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 7 days at below address.
Lucern Legal LLP
269, Rama House, Ground Floor, Masjid Moth, Opp. Uday Park, South Ex-II, New Delhi-110049
Contact # 011-40064616

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

Short Term Tender Notice Dt 06-01-2022
Office of the Executive Engineer, Maintenance Chilla (Pauri-Garhwal), invites sealed tenders from experienced firms for following works/supply for Chilla Power House:-
1- T-34/EEM/2021-22: Repairing work of 2No's sator coolers of Power House.
2- Estimated Cost : Rs. 5,38,318.00 (Taxes Extra).
3- Date of availability of Tender document on website : 06-01-2022. (17:00 Hrs.)
4- Date of Receipt of the tender : 20-01-2022 upto 17:00 Hrs.
For all details, bidders are advised to visit our website **www.ujvnl.com**
Executive Engineer(M), Chilla Power House
"Avoid Wasteful use of Electricity"

North Eastern Railway
E-Tendering Tender Notice No. 01/2022
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.), N.E. Railways, Izatnagar for and behalf of President of India invites "OPEN" e-tender through online (E-Tendering) for the following work:
S.No. : 1, Description of Works :
Construction of Limited height subway (LHS) in place of Level Crossing no. 226/C Km 297/0-1 between STH-BPR station in Pilibhit - Bhojpur section by shifting casted box segments from LC no -212 in BPR-PBE section and execution of remaining work at LC no-226 in BPR-PBE section (Under sanctioned work of Construction of LHS in place of total LCs 17 nos. in Sr. Den/1 section). **Approx. Value : Rs. 2,94,99,672.67, E.M.D. Money : Rs. 2,97,500/-, Cost of Tender Forms : Rs. 0.00, Completion time/period from the date of issue of acceptance letter : 06 Months.**
1. Online e-tender can be submitted upto 15.00 hrs. of dated 28.01.2022.
2. For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways **IREPS** website **www.ireps.gov.in**.
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.) CPRO/W-338 Izatnagar
About any Passenger Amenities complaint SMS on Mob. No. 9979484595
Do not travel with inflammable article in train

UJVVN Limited
H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephone: 0135-2763808, Fax No.: 0135-2763508
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Executive Engineer(M), Chilla Power House
"Avoid Wasteful use of Electricity"

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

e-tender Corrigendum Notice Rtg 06.01.2022
Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M-IILWR), Vyasi Project, Dakpathar, UJVVN Ltd. Invites Tender Specification No. 09/EE(E&M-IILWR)/VP/2021-22 - Annual operation of 2x800 KVA, 11 KV substation of Vyasi Project Dam site Juddo, Vikasnagar amendments has been made in the following clause:
ITB SI no-2 page-05, clause no-4.2, page no-9, Technical Specifications Clause no-30m to q page-14
Other terms and condition of tender unchanged.
For any details, addendum, modifications etc., Bidders are kindly advised to regularly visit at **www.ujvnl.com**
"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity" **Executive Engineer (E&M-IILWR)**

Punjab State Power Corporation Limited
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001)
Corporate Identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813
Website: www.pspcl.in (Contact Number: 9646123323)

Tender Enquiry No.PPR-2/2022 Dated: 05-01-2022
Chief Engineer/ PR&R Organization, Shed No. D-3, Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala invites E-tender under three part bid system for banking of power from interstate utilities/ traders, Traders having valid inter State Trading License issued by CERC for interstate trading of energy, State Electricity Boards, State Electricity Utilities, States from **10th June 2022 to 15th May 2023**. For detailed NIT & tender specifications please refer to **http://eproc.punjab.gov.in** and official website of PSPCL i.e. **www.pspcl.in** from **05-01-2022** onwards.
Note:- Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at **http://eproc.punjab.gov.in**
76155/12/630/2021/12210 **C-08/22**

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one male was found dead at Faridabad Bus Stand under Flyover Ring Road, Kashmere Gate, Delhi. In this regard a **DD No. 60A, u/s 174 CrPC, Dated 01.01.2022** has been lodged in **P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi**. The description of the dead body is given as under: **Name:** Unknown, **S/o:** Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** 28-30 Years **Height:** 5'5" **Feet Face:** Oval, **Complexion:** Shallow, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Grey Checkdar Shirt and Black Jacket and Black Pant.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the information about the dead male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one is having any information about this dead male please inform the undersigned.

S.H.O
P.S. Kashmere Gate, Delhi
Ph.: 011-23967889, 23968730
DP/1867/N/2022

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank
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.	Gulab Singh/ Anjna Singh/ LBMAT00003245385/ LBMAT00005128314	House on Part of Plot No. 55, Having Municipal No 248/21, Dharam Lok Nagar, Mauza Mathura/ Bangar, Uttar Pradesh/ January 03, 2022	August 30, 2021 Rs. 18,76,082/-	Mathura/ Delhi

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 07, 2022
Place: Delhi/ NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

A CONTEMPORARY FOOD JOURNEY

SAIMI SATTAR samples the new menu at the Farzi Cafe and discovers old favourites with a twist

Modern Indian cuisine, as a food genre has been having its moment in the sun for quite some time. From fine dining, it has now graduated to a bistro format. And Zorawar Kalra's Farzi Cafe was one of the first ones off the block which attempted to bring a more contemporary version of the country's food and make it a preferred choice for a generation that was equally at home digging into a pizza as a *makki ki roti sarson da saag*. So the aim here is to create an amalgamation of traditional global cuisine, with Indian influences, contemporary presentations, culinary styles and ambience.

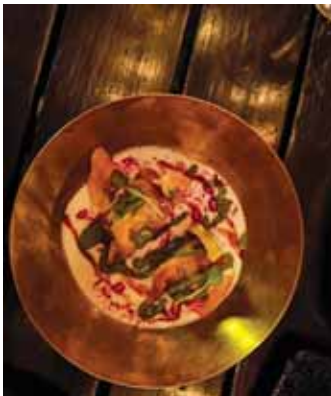
The bistro has recently introduced a new menu that takes you on a culinary journey of traditional cuisine from different parts of the country in a contemporary version. So, you could dig into a *Sweet potato chat* with foam chutney and wafer on top or have a *Mutton galouti kebab* wrapped in a blanched *sheermal* (yes, you read that right).

So, we headed to the Connaught Place outlet of the restaurant to find out what the fuss was all about. The place, done primarily in wood with warm lights, had an inviting hue. We settled down strategically in a place that was not likely to see too many foot-falls and glanced around appreciatively at a set-up that was clearly for live performances loaded as it was with musical instruments. But that was the ambience.

Coming to the food, the *amuse-bouche* arrived with enough drama to catch our attention. A thick nitrogen fog poured out from a basin and when it cleared a bit, it revealed two small vessels containing *Mishti doi sphere with strawberry reduction*. Eaten in one slurp, the taste was tantalising enough to almost make me ask for a second round but we decided to let Chef Jagdeep Rana take charge of the meal rather than being swayed by my gluttony.

The chef suggested that we try a few starters and since these have become my second-favourite part of the meal, after dessert, I was more than willing. While we waited for the food, we sipped on to our mocktails, *Farzi OK* and *Litchi panna desire*. Despite the first being a signature drink, it was the latter that found favour among both of us.

But soon enough, plates in different shapes and sizes bearing food made their way to the table. The *Sweet potato chaat*, *chutney foam* and *crisp wafer* replicated the street side delight where the chutney foam and the wafer added a contemporary twist. The *Jaitooni paneer tikka*, *keeper's raita* was succulent but what made it truly stand out was that none of the flavours was overpowering. The blend ensured that the taste of the cheese



was not smothered by that of the spices. The *Rock prawns*, *thecha*, *pepper* and *peanuts* used the coarsely pounded Maharashtrian condiment with green chillies and garlic in a presentation that looked absolutely modern. Biting in, the familiar flavour of *thecha* kicked in and we realised that it could go as well with the prawns as *bhakri* (millet flatbread).

We moved on to something more hearty and a *Mutton galouti*, *sheermal* *cannelloni* was waiting for us. While the *galouti* was tender, just the way it should be, for someone from the Awadh-belt, who can

write a thesis on the finer nuances of *sheermal* variants served in Lucknow, Kanpur and what masquerades as one in Delhi, the *cannelloni* did not quite make the cut — more *cannelloni* than *sheermal*. It was a watered-down version of the much-loved bread. The *Chicken candy*, *gondhoraj* sauce with a dip that was reminiscent of butter chicken gravy was really filling and we could hardly finish even one. The hint of lemon, so popular in Bengali cooking added a whiff of freshness to the dish.

Moving to the main course, we had the *Exotic mushroom gassi*,

ajwaini lacha paratha which was spectacular. The balance of flavour and the mushrooms cooked to perfection ensured that we wiped the bowl clean. The *Prawn Alleppey curry*, *steam rice* was equally flavoursome. A little tart flavour which was offset by the slightly sweet taste of the coconut perfectly complemented the prawns.

The *Yuzu malai*, *pistachio crumb* was a fitting finale to the meal. The creamy texture tickled the taste buds while the citrusy flavour gave it a fresh blast.

We returned with our tummies full and the palate satiated.



Albert Camus, one of my favourite philosophers, had once said, "In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer."

That could, in brief, summarise my visit to the Hungarian Wine festival at The Claridges this winter. During the cold wind, when everyone donned woolen coats and boots, with glasses of wine to warm their insides, it was an evening to be remembered. I found a summer within myself that day.

As I entered the premises, the aroma of the wine tingled the senses. It was fresh and fascinating.

People have often talked about the four S's in wine-tasting — swirl, sniff, sip and spit, and, forgive me, I've never been able to abide by it, especially the last part!

The fine collection of wine at the Claridges garden, from Tokaj, Somlo Villan and Szekszard Hungary, was arranged in a circular placement of a buffet-styled view.

The wine journey

The white wine's peculiar taste complemented the cheese and the charcuterie, which comprised the *Milano salami*, *Parma ham*, *Chicken mortadella*, and so on, along with some condiments. The selection of cheese was extravagant — from edam, emmental to gruyere and smoked scarozza.

I tried the *Chicken mortadella* slices, with focaccia bread, which tasted very similar to salami — the right balance between lightness and taste. It was pleasant. Riesling, paired with the cold meat and cheese, made for a heavenly combination. The ham, however, was moist and sweet and salty at the same time, not so much to my taste.

As I moved ahead, happy with the appetisers, to the second menu, an enthusiastic white guy was pointing to a map and explaining which wine had come from which part of Hungary. I stood there, engrossed in the conversation for a while. "The sweet wine you're drinking," he paused to point at a man with a glass of Barta, "is from Hegyalja, one of the seven larger wine regions of Hungary," he said.

The red wine was light bodied, which went well with the grills, sea food and meat. I went with the Tundertane, blended with merlot and kekfrankos. T'was fruity in taste. Along with it, I'd picked up the *Herb rubbed lamb chops*, which was

I saw, I swirled, I sipped

KHUSHBU KIRTI embarks on a chic wine journey at the Hungarian Festival held at The Claridges



sweet wine for the dessert," he explained.

Sure enough, finally, the heavy bodied wine, Rhapsody, of the third menu was rich and had a more complex flavour, which augmented the taste of food in the main course. Tarty and slightly sour, the drink would trickle down the throat and create a chill-effect. I chose roasted fish with barbeque sauce, which made for a great companion. The tannin in the wine compensated with the richness of the red meat.

The end of the journey held the best surprise. The dessert wine was sweet and gelled amazingly with the warm *Chocolate and walnut brownie* or just as much with the *Apple strudel*.

In a conversation with Andras Laszlo Kiraly, the ambassador of Hungary, he expressed, "We want people to have a great evening because they deserve it. After all the suffering and neglect, it is time for the people of Delhi to have a relaxing evening."

Kiraly added, "Hungarian embassies have a duty to promote their wine. When we're promoting the wine, we're promoting Hungary, and also tourism. Because, the best way to enjoy the authentic taste is to visit the cellars in Hungary itself. Claridges makes for a central and great location and we are happy to be here."

R E C I P E S

CHILEAN CHERRY & PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM CHAAT

WHAT YOU NEED

- Spring onions: 1 tsp
- Chopped red chillies: ½ tsp
- Sliced/quartered mushrooms: 1 cup
- Pitted Chilean cherries: 1 cup
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Coriander powder: ½ tsp
- Cumin powder: ½ tsp
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Turmeric: 1 pinch
- Chaat masala: ½ tsp
- Lemon juice: 1 tsp

METHOD

- Heat olive oil in the pan, throw the spring onions, ginger, *mirsch* and red chillies, add the mushrooms and the cherry then add the spices.
- Toast well, seasoned to taste and sprinkle with lemon juice and finish it fresh coriander.
- For the cherry yogurt dressing, add half a cup of Greek yogurt, three-four pitted Chilean cherries, salt to taste, chaat masala, cumin powder a pinch and red chilli powder.
- Blend all of the above to make the cherry yogurt dressing and for the tamarind cherry, take half a cup of tamarind chutney, three-four cherries, salt and pepper to taste and half a teaspoon of chaat masala so all the three elements are there.
- Spoon the chaat on the plate and then swirl both the yogurt and chutney and garnish with fresh coriander.

Courtesy: Vicky Ratnani



AMRITSARI ALOO WADIYAN

WHAT YOU NEED

- Peeled potato wedge: 700 gms
- Wadi Amritsari: 250 gms
- Ghee: 65 ml
- Jeera whole: 4 gms
- Turmeric powder: 3 gms
- Red chilly powder: 3 gms
- Kastoori methi powder: 2 gms
- Onion: 200 gms
- Cashew nut paste: 100 gms
- Ginger garlic paste: 30 gms
- Coriander powder: 10 gms
- Jeera powder: 2 gms
- Garam masala powder: 5 gms
- Fresh tomato puree: 350 ml



- Garlic chopped: 20 gms
- Salt to taste
- Oil for frying: 300 ml

METHOD

- Take a handi, heat the ghee tempered with whole jeera.

- Add chopped garlic and onion, saute until golden brown.
- Now, add ginger garlic paste.
- Add all powder spices to the handi and cook for a while.
- Add fresh tomato puree and cook until it starts leaving oil from the side.
- Add cashew nut paste for richness and cook it.
- Add peeled potato wedges and let it cook for 20 minutes,
- Now, add fried *Amritsari wadi*.
- Finish with garam masala powder for taste.
- Serve it hot and fresh!

Courtesy: Chef Vivek Rana, executive ched at The Claridges



DEEP FRIED BARBEQUE SPARE RIBS (PORK)

WHAT YOU NEED

- Spare pork ribs (6 pieces): 200gm
- Butter: 5 gm
- Chopped ginger: 5 gm
- Dark soya: 15 ml
- Carrots: 2 gm
- Light soya: 2 ml
- Refined oil: 50 ml
- Ketchup: 30 ml
- Dry chilli: 0.5 gm

METHOD

- Roast the fatless spare ribs until they are reddish-brown.
- Heat two tablespoons of butter on a pan.
- Add some ketchup and sauté with dark soya.
- Toss the ribs in butter and soya sauce.
- Garnish with shredded carrots and dry chillies.

Courtesy: Chef Ram Bahadur Budhathoki, head chef of Chowman Chain of Restaurants

CLASSIC CHOCO-MARTINI



WHAT YOU NEED

- A few ice cubes
- Vanilla ice cream: 2 scoops
- Hershey's chocolate flavoured syrup: 3 tbsp
- Sprite: 30 ml
- Hershey's Kisses Milk Chocolate

METHOD

- Place a Hershey's Kisses Milk Chocolate in the bottom of a chilled cocktail glass.
- Mix all the chocolate martini ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice.
- Shake, strain and then pour the mixture into a cocktail glass and serve.

Courtesy: Chef Ranveer Brar of Hershey India

LISTING



Harajuku Tokyo Cafe opens its second outlet at Ambience Mall, Gurugram

Harajuku Tokyo Cafe, a Japanese street food-inspired QSR, is gearing up to launch their second outlet in the NCR at Ambience Mall, Gurugram. The brand has witnessed significant growth and immense love from its patrons since they first opened in Select City Walk, Saket and are looking forward to expanding even further in the future. With their light-as-air breads, exotic Japanese dishes and desserts, Harajuku is touching souls all over NCR as it has become a hot spot not only for its scrumptious Japanese offerings but also for a one-of-a-kind dining experience for food lovers. Being the most instagrammable cafe in town, Harajuku has its own style, flow and fashion. The cafe offers an array of gastronomic delights from Japan like boba tea, freshly baked *Japanese jiggy cheesecake*, exclusively-crafted Japanese desserts and breads, and made-on-order street food like takoyaki, chicken karaage and the 12-inch-long Japanese fries; fun desserts like taiyaki, and the popular Harajuku crepes; ramen, chahan, sushi amongst other lip smacking dishes. The new outlet, with seating of around 50 guests, will feature an upgraded menu with numerous new additions like *Shrimp dynamite*, *Gyoza ramen*, *Lotus biscotti pancakes*, *Mochi donuts*, new boba tea flavours, and so on. **Where:** Shop number T-320, third floor, (opposite PVR Cinemas), Ambience Mall, Gurugram, 10 am-11 pm **Cost for two:** ₹1,000/- + taxes. **Contact number:** +91 9818536115

Plant-based protein brand, Evolved Foods, launches two new variants

With a pledge to make a sustainable alternative to meat more accessible, versatile to cook with, and ensure it supplements the lack of healthy protein in one's diet, Bangalore-based Evolved Foods has introduced two new variants, Plant Protein and Plant Meat. Delicious, protein rich and offering the same texture as meat and paneer, the 100 per cent plant-based ingredients are great substitutes in everyday cooking. The Plant Protein is firm and non-chewy in texture whereas the Plant Meat is chunkier and chewier, giving the exact feel of the animal protein products. Low carb, low fat, no trans fat, zero cholesterol, the products are designed with an aim to improve both the taste and the overall experience of replacing animal protein with an ingredient lower in fat and with a higher fibre content. So this new year, let your resolution be to make your diet leaner and cleaner with a range of plant proteins. **Price:** Starting from ₹249/- **Where:** www.evolvedfoods.in and other online market places **Contact:** support@evolvedfoods.in



ELGAR ANCHORS SOUTH AFRICA TO 7 WICKET WIN

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

A gutsy Dean Elgar was happy to shun elegance for efficacy as he steered South Africa to a creditable seven-wicket series-levelling victory in the second Test against India here on Thursday.

The defeat was India's first at the Bull Ring in 30 years.

Chasing a target of 240, skipper Elgar, who was prepared to look ugly and forgettable in terms of aesthetics that one generally associates with southpaws, carried his bat through with an unbeaten 96 to set up an exciting final Test at the Newlands in Cape Town starting January 11.

If Aiden Markram and Keegan Petersen gave him good support on the third day, Rassie Van der Dussen (40), with an 82-run stand, ensured victory on a rain-soaked fourth day marking an inauspicious start to India captaincy for KL Rahul, who is supposed to be groomed for future leadership.

Elgar had soaked in all the pressure and hostility in the third evening, which had literally blunted the Indian attack and Mohammed Siraj's injury in a tricky chase became a huge factor.

The Proteas skipper had taken a couple of blows on the head, a few on the chest, another few on the knuckle, one on the shoulder, all of which were like badges of honour for a batter who conforms more with "Shivanarine Chanderpaul School of Batmanship" rather than Brian Lara's.

No amount of lip service could unnerv Elgar as he smirked, smiled and went about his business leaving the visitors even more frustrated.

For posterity, when one remembers this Test match, it will be very difficult to



remember any of his 10 boundaries but one won't be able to forget the game either simply because of an exhibition of how to crush the pain barrier which seemed to be ingrained in Elgar's DNA.

In hindsight, 50 more runs would have helped India immensely and while the bowlers had one rare bad innings in office, the blame should be squarely on the bat-

ters who haven't exactly set the stage on fire for a long time save for a few good individual performances.

In fact, it has been more about good starts over the past season save the second innings of this match. In the final context, the lowly first innings total of 202 became India's undoing.

Cheteshwar Pujara, during the post-

play media interaction on the third day, had spoken about the first hour being helpful for batting but he hadn't factored in the rain which would lead to a lot of moisture but also leave the ball wet making it difficult to grip.

What worked for India in the previous three bowling innings in this series is exactly where they were found want-

ing on the day.

There were too many boundary balls, length all wrong in that first hour in the fourth afternoon which was like playing into South Africa's hands. 16 wides, including boundary byes, didn't help the cause either.

India's strategy at the start was baffling as Ravichandran Ashwin (11-2-20-1) was handed the ball along with Jasprit Bumrah

(17-2-70-0), who was very wayward on the third evening.

Rahul could be cut some slack as it is his first game as an India captain but starting the day with Ashwin under overcast conditions and wet outfield certainly deserves some kind of explanation from the team think-tank.

Especially, when both head coach Rahul Dravid and Virat Kohli were in the dressing room, it is impossible to believe that the young captain wasn't tutored about the combination to use at the onset.

An on drive off Ashwin brought up Elgar's second half century in two games and the off-spinner couldn't be faulted as he tried to bowl a bit flatter in order to keep the batters under check.

The wet ball also did add to India's worries with both Bumrah and Mohammad Shami (17-3-55-1) trying to bowl too short resulting in at least two boundary byes over Rishabh Pant's head.

However, Van der Dussen, who had looked shaky last evening, came into his own with a flick and pull off successive Shami deliveries and the bowler, in sheer frustration, bowled a bouncer that went for four byes.

Shardul Thakur, who enjoyed a 'midas touch' in the first three days, was then back cut and cover driven by the young Van der Dussen as Kohli, sitting in the boundary dug-out, seemed to slump in his chair bearing a grumpy look.

A flurry of boundaries, having brought the target to less than 70, suddenly brought back some urgency. It nearly took an hour before Thakur and Shami found that right length that they have been searching from third evening.

Usman Khawaja century lifts Australia in 4th Ashes Test | Jhulan Goswami biopic 'Chakda Xpress' to release on Netflix

AP ■ SYDNEY

Usman Khawaja's ninth Test century lifted Australia to an imposing 416-8 declared before England's openers survived a nervous five overs to be 13 without loss at the end of the second day of the fourth Ashes Test.

Playing his first Test since 2019 and only in the team because of Travis Head's positive test for COVID-19, Khawaja made the most of the opportunity as he first shared a century partnership with Steve Smith and then anchored Australia's innings with his 137 from 260 balls after England's bowlers fought back with the second new ball on Thursday.

"I've put a lot of hard work in," Khawaja said.

"A lot of time behind the scenes that people don't see. You never take anything for granted. Never sure I was going to represent Australia again, never mind scoring a hundred. I'm very grateful for another opportunity."

Stuart Broad took took 5-101 and went a long way to vindicating his return to the team after being omitted from the third Test at Melbourne that saw Australia humiliate England and retain the Ashes.

At stumps, Haseeb Hameed



and Zak Crawley were both on 2 not out, with the latter surviving being caught off a no-ball from Mitchell Starc as the tourists ended the day 403 runs behind Australia in the first innings.

Earlier, Khawaja completed his century from 201 balls with 11 boundaries in the final over before tea in front of his former home state crowd.

He celebrated by holding both arms aloft, raising and pointing his bat toward his team and family

members in the historic Members Stand at the Sydney Cricket Ground before embracing his skipper mid-pitch.

Khawaja, who also passed 3,000 test runs in this innings, was eventually bowled by Broad after close to seven hours at the crease and left to a standing ovation from the near 25,000 crowd at the venue he made his debut 11 years ago.

"It's my home ground here,, the people still treat me like a local boy," Khawaja said.

"It was probably the most touching, humbling experience getting that hundred here today. It's stuff you dream of."

"I've broken down a lot of barriers to get to where I've got to now and I think people respect that."

He had one reprieve, on 30, when he was dropped by Root off Jack Leach's bowling but it was a rare blemish in what was a masterful second century against England at the SCG.

England will rue that missed opportunity as the tourists pace bowlers performed well, especially with the second new ball and picked up wickets quickly in the afternoon to pull back into the contest.

Earlier, Smith compiled his 33rd half-century off 116 balls and on the way passed Justin Langer's career record of 7,696 runs to become Australia's sixth-highest run scorer in tests. Smith, playing his 81st match, needed 24 tests fewer than Langer, the current Australia team coach, to reach the mark.

Of concern for England, Ben Stokes left the field after the fifth ball of his 14th over just before lunch. The allrounder, who was clutching at his left side as he left the ground, later returned but did not bowl again.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Anushka Sharma-starrer "Chakda Xpress", a film inspired by the life and times of former Indian cricket captain Jhulan Goswami, will stream on Netflix. The movie traces the glorious journey of one of the fastest female pacers in the history of world cricket as she moves up the ladder despite the countless hindrances posed by misogynistic politics to fulfil her only dream: to play cricket.

Produced by Anushka Sharma and her brother Karnesh Ssharma's Clean Slate Filmz, "Chakda Xpress" is directed by Prosit Roy.

"It is a really special film because it is essentially a story of tremendous sacrifice. Chakda Xpress is inspired by the life and times of former Indian captain Jhulan Goswami and it will be an eye-opener into the world of women's cricket," Anushka Sharma said in a statement issued by the streamer on Thursday.

"At a time when Jhulan decided to become a cricketer and make her country proud on the global stage, it was very tough for women to even think of playing the sport. This film is a dramatic retelling of several instances that shaped her life and also women's cricket," the actor said, calling the film



"an underdog story" in the history of Indian cricket. Goswami also spoke about the challenges she faced in her career at a time when the prevailing notion was that "women can't play cricket".

"It doesn't matter if sometimes a man's accomplishments are placed above your own. It doesn't matter if the stadiums are empty. When you pull up on to the pitch to bowl, all you see is the opponent holding the cricket bat and the stumps you need to knock out,"

the cricketer, who hails from Chakdah town in the Nadia district of West Bengal, said."Team India is not just the roaring sound of 1.3 billion voices cheering and praying. Sometimes, it is

one girl from Chakda playing a game of cricket with her team shaking, screaming for, and rising together when the stumps are finally knocked out," she added.

The all-rounder said, "Chakda Xpress is now filming. Meet you on the field." Pratiksha Rao, Director, Films and Licensing, Netflix India, said,

"We are deeply honored and proud to bring this story of an unlikely champion and her contribution to Indian cricket to Netflix; and are thrilled to partner with Clean Slate Filmz and with Anushka Sharma who has won audiences through the many unique roles she's performed with heartfelt emotion and passion."

Jemimah, Shikha dropped from Mithali Raj-led India squad



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star batter Jemimah Rodrigues was on Thursday dropped from the 15-member Indian women's cricket squad announced for the ICC ODI World Cup to be held in New Zealand from March 4 to April 3.

Veteran Mithali Raj will lead the last edition's runner-up side with Harmanpreet Kaur as her deputy. The 39-year-old Mithali has announced that she would chalk out her retirement plans after the mega-event.

The squad expectedly includes veterans Smriti Mandhana, Deepti Sharma, Jhulan Goswami and the young Shafali Verma among others.

However, Rodrigues and all-rounder Shikha Pandey have been ignored from due to lack of form.

A BCCI source confirmed to PTI that the two have been "dropped" on account of their

form in the ODI format.

Rodrigues failed to hit the double figure mark during the last year in all the international assignments she was a part of but was in good touch during The Hundred tournament in England and the subsequent Big Bash League in Australia.

Pandey was similarly off colour during her national duties.

In Richa Ghosh and Taniya Bhatia, India have included two wicket-keepers for the tour, while Sabbhineni Meghana, Ekta Bisht and Simran Dil Bahadur have been named as three stand-by players.

The same 15-member squad will also feature in a five-ODI series against New Zealand from February 11 to 24.

India will open their World Cup campaign against arch-rivals Pakistan on March 6 at the Bay Oval, Tauranga before facing hosts New Zealand on March 10 at Hamilton, followed

by the West Indies (March 12, Hamilton), defending champions England (March 16, Tauranga), Australia (March 19, Auckland), Bangladesh (March 22, Hamilton) and South Africa (March 27, Christchurch).

In the last edition of the tournament in 2017, India narrowly missed out on creating history as they lost by nine runs to hosts England in the title clash.

In a meeting held on Wednesday, the All India Women's Selection Committee also named a 16-member squad to be led by Harmanpreet Kaur for the lone T20 International against New Zealand to be played on February 9 before the ODIs.

The one-off T20 and the first ODI against New Zealand will be hosted by Napier, followed by remaining 50-over games in Nelson on February 14 and 16, and Queenstown on February 22 and 24.

CA set to relocate COVID-affected BBL to Melbourne

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

In its bid to complete the tournament at any cost, a desperate Cricket Australia is set to gradually shift the COVID-hit Big Bash League to Melbourne to avoid any further interruptions. The decision was revealed by CA CEO Nick Hockley, who said that they are planning to relocate all eight teams inside a bio-bubble in Melbourne as it will make it easier for the organisers to reschedule the fixtures in the event of postponement of matches due to any further COVID positive cases.

The BBL has witnessed an unprecedented COVID outbreak with numerous positive cases being reported across eight franchises, forcing postponement and last minute rescheduling of matches.

"What we're dealing with is unprecedented," Hockley told Australia's SEN Radio.

"We'll be gradually centralising (the teams) into Melbourne.

"What that enables us (Cricket Australia) to do is if a team is significant-



ly impacted, it gives us much more flexibility to be able to swap teams in and complete the fixture," he added.

Out of the eight teams, Melbourne Stars and Brisbane Heat have been affected the most by the outbreak as the Stars were forced to play two games in as many days with second rung players.

"Those two particular clubs (Stars and Heat) have been heavily impacted,"

Hockley said.

"We've faced some different timing challenges with test results coming back. It's not ideal. Obviously, we want everyone to have their full-strength team available. "We've got a really clear plan now for the final run-in of the competition. We are very confident that we'll be able to complete the competition," the CA boss added.

Board will come back to you with revised plan: Ganguly

PTI ■ MUMBAI

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly has assured state units that the Board "will do everything to restart the domestic season once the COVID-19 situation is under control" after some marquee tournaments, including the Ranji Trophy, were postponed due to a resurgence of cases across the country.

The BCCI on Tuesday had to put on hold the Ranji Trophy, which was set to begin later this month, and a few other tournaments due to a surge in COVID 19 cases in the country.

"As you are aware, we had to put on hold the currently on-going domestic season due to the worsening COVID-19 situation," Ganguly said in a letter to state



associations. The Ranji Trophy and Col C K Nayudu Trophy were scheduled to begin this month while the Senior Women's T20 League was scheduled to commence in February.

"The COVID cases are rapidly increasing and there were multiple pos-

itive cases in many teams. It posed an imminent threat to the health and safety of players, officials and all others related to the running of the tournaments," Ganguly wrote in the mail to Presidents and Secretaries of all the units.

PTI is in possession of the mail written by Ganguly.

Ganguly stressed that the Board would do everything to restart the domestic season.

"The BCCI would like to reassure that it will do everything to restart the domestic season once the COVID situation is under control.

"We are committed to holding the remaining tournaments for this season. The Board will shortly come back to you with a revised plan," said Ganguly.

"I thank you for your support and understanding. Please look after yourself and stay safe and healthy," the former left-handed batter signed off.

Seven members of the Bengal squad and India all-rounder Shivam Dube along with Mumbai team's video analyst had tested positive for COVID-19 in the run up to the Ranji Trophy, which was scheduled to start across the country on January 13.

The premier domestic tournament did not happen in the 2020-2021 season due to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 situation is grim across all the major cities with Delhi and Mumbai recording thousands of new cases, several them being affected by new Omicron variant.

My11Circle named title sponsor of Lucknow IPL team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fantasy sports platform My11Circle has signed up with RP-Sanjiv Goenka group's Lucknow franchise as the official title sponsor of the team for the upcoming season of Indian Premier League.

The three-year deal will see My11Circle logo featuring on the Lucknow team jersey.

Commenting on the partnership, Raghu Iyer, CEO, RPSG Sports said, "We are delighted to have My11Circle as our Principal Team Sponsor.

We thank them for the faith they have shown in our new franchise and are confident that this will be a winning partnership."

Lucknow franchise is one of the new teams apart from Ahmedabad side in the upcoming season of IPL.

MADRID HOSTS VALENCIA HOPING TO FORGET GETAFE HICCUP

AP ■ BARCELONA

Real Madrid hosts Valencia on Saturday aiming to bounce back from its first loss in three months and protect its now diminished lead of the Spanish league.

Madrid had gone unbeaten in 15 games across all competitions, including 12 in the domestic league, until it stumbled at Getafe last round. The 1-0 loss at its humble crosstown rival allowed Sevilla to pull to within five points with one more game to play than the front-runners.

Madrid will face a Valencia team that had gone nine games overall without losing until it was stunned by Espanyol's two late goals to fall 2-1 at its Mestalla Stadium.

Carlo Ancelotti rested striker Karim Benzema, who leads the league with 15 goals, and Luka Modric for Wednesday's 3-1 win at Alcoyano in the Copa del Rey. The Madrid coach said that his two stars had both finished the Getafe game with unidentified physical issues.

Ancelotti, who had chastised his players' lack of effort against Getafe, said he was pleased with their professional attitude at a third-tier opponent in the cup. "This was not our type of game because it is not possible for your true talent to show," Ancelotti said about the win. "(But) we showed that we are a team that plays well and today could get down and fight. That is the way it had to be. I repeat: if you

Second-place Sevilla will next face the improved Getafe on Sunday. Getafe has turned its season around since the arrival of coach Quique Sánchez Flores in October and is unbeaten in six rounds. Sevilla has four wins and one draw in its last five league games despite missing several players due to injury and coronavirus infections. Third-place Real Betis will try to deal the first home loss to



don't fight, you lose."

Madrid has recovered most of its players from a spate of COVID-19 infections. The club could have Vinicius Junior back against Valencia after missing his speed when it was bogged down by Getafe.

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Third-place Real Betis will try to deal the first home loss to Rayo Vallecano since its return to the first division.

Rayo boasts the best home record of the league with eight wins and one draw, including a 1-0 win over Barcelona.

Barcelona seeks just its third away win of the season in the league when it visits Granada.

Barcelona has shown some improvement under new coach Xavi Hernández and has risen into fifth place, just one point behind Atlético Madrid in fourth.

Defending champion Atlético faces a tough test at a Villarreal team that has greatly improved in recent weeks. Unai Emery's Villarreal has won four straight in the league, scoring five goals in each of its last two victories.



Novak Djokovic denied entry to Australia, has visa cancelled

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUS)

Novak Djokovic's chance to play for a 10th Australian Open title was thrown into limbo Thursday when the country denied him entry and cancelled his visa because he failed to meet the requirements for an exemption to COVID-19 vaccination rules.

The top-ranked Djokovic announced on social media Tuesday that he had "exemption permission" and landed in Australia late Wednesday after receiving a medical exemption from the Victoria state government that would shield him from the strict vaccination regulations in place for this year's first major tennis tournament.

But border authorities did not accept the exemption. The Australian Border Force issued a statement saying Djokovic failed to meet entry requirements.

"The rule is very clear," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told a news conference Thursday. "You need to have a medical exemption."

He didn't have a valid medical exemption. We make the call at the border, and that's where it's enforced."

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the visa cancellation followed a review of Djokovic's medical exemption by border officials who looked "at the integrity and the evidence behind it."

He said Djokovic was free to appeal the decision, "but if a visa is cancelled, somebody will have to leave the country."

The president of Djokovic's native Serbia's blasted the "harassment" of the star, who was detained overnight at Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. The 20-time major winner had to wait more than eight hours at the airport to find out if he would be allowed into the country.

He was later moved to a hotel,

pending arrangements for a flight or legal action.

Morrison confirmed the cancellation in a Twitter post: "Rules are rules, especially when it comes to our borders. No one is above these rules. Our strong border policies have been critical to Australia having one of the lowest death rates in the world from COVID, we are continuing to be vigilant."

Responding later to questions about confusion between the different requirements of federal and state governments, Morrison said it was ultimately up to individual travellers to have correct documentation when they arrive.

The prime minister also rejected the suggestion that Djokovic was being singled out, but he acknowledged that other players may be in Australia on the same type of medical exemption and visa.

"One of the things the Border Force does is they act on intelligence to direct their attention to potential arrivals," he said. "When you get people making public statements about what they say they have, and they're going to do, they draw significant attention to themselves."

Anyone who does that "whether they're a celebrity, a politician, a tennis player...They can expect to be asked questions more than others before you come."

The medical exemptions, vetted by two independent panels of experts and based on information supplied anonymously by players, had been designed to allow Djokovic to play in the Australian Open, regardless of his vaccination status for COVID-19.

He has spoken out against vaccines in the past and has steadfastly refused to acknowledge whether he received any shots against the coronavirus.

Sania-Nadiia pair enter semifinals of Adelaide International



PTI ■ ADELAIDE

India's Sania Mirza and her Ukrainian partner Nadiia Kichenok entered the women's doubles semifinals of the Adelaide International 1 WTA event after beating American Shelby Rogers and Heather Watson of Great Britain in a hard-fought contest here on Thursday.

Sania and Nadiia got the better of their rivals 6-0 1-6 10-5 in a quar-

terfinal tie that lasted 55 minutes.

The Indo-Ukrainian duo will now face Australia combination of Ashleigh Barty and Storm Sanders in the last-four round of the WTA 500 event. Sania and Nadiia had earlier knocked out second seeds Gabriella Dabrowski and Giuliana Olmos 1-6 6-3 10-8 in the first round. The Adelaide event is a tune up tournament for the Australian Open, starting January 17 in Melbourne.

Largest line-up of women match officials to be in action

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup, which will take place from January 20 to February 6 in India, will see the biggest-ever cast of experienced women match officials.

The tournament will be played in three cities of Maharashtra -- Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Pune.

"With the expansion of the showpiece to 12 teams, a total of 32 match officials, comprising 16 referees and assistant referees from 15 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) member associations, will take charge in potentially a maximum of 29 matches including the play-offs," a media statement issued here stated.

From the contingent, as many as nine match officials were previously appointed to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France.

Among those who were appointed in France 2019 are referees Casey Reibelt and Kate Jaciewicz of Australia, China's Qin Liang and Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita and



assistant referees Fang Yan of China, Makoto Bozono and Naomi Teshirogi of Japan and Kim Kyoung-min and Lee Seulgi of Korea Republic.

Kim will be among the most experienced match officials as she is poised for her sixth straight appearance in the AFC Women's Asian Cup followed by her compatriot Lee in what will be her fourth

Golden boy Neeraj turns angel investor, joins funding round for influencer marketing startup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Olympic gold medallist Neeraj Chopra has warmed up to venture investing, following the footsteps of many celebrity sportspersons, by betting an undisclosed sum on influencer marketing platform One Impression.

A statement from the startup said Chopra invested in a "strategic round" which saw the company raise USD 1 million (about Rs 7.4 crore) from a clutch of investors, including Karandeep Anand (formerly with Meta), Varun Alagh of Mamaearth, Anupam Mittal of People Group and stand-up comedians Zakir Khan and Kanan Gill.

Known to pull off audacious feats in the sporting arena, many sportspersons have taken to the high-risk, high-return game of venture investing to grow their earnings. Shooter Abhinav Bindra, India's first individual Olympic gold medallist, had set up a venture capital fund to invest in startups. One Impression said it will deploy the funds to build product solutions for both brands and creators, accelerate hiring and scale operations both in India and key global markets.

The company, which claims to



have an annual revenue rate of USD 7 million and is targeting to touch USD 35 million in 2022, will also be investing in creator growth and monetisation opportunities.

The company's chief executive and co-founder Apaksh Gupta said it plans to grow 10 times after the investment. It is working with brands in India, US, UAE and Nepal at present. "Our growth trajectory is a testament to our hard-

work and has helped us establish the leadership position in the market. I am extremely thankful & excited to welcome all the investors who are now becoming part of our journey.

"Creator economy is booming globally and I have a strong conviction in the team's and platform's capability to become a leading global influencer marketing destination for millions of advertisers," he said.

NIS Patiala reports 4 Covid positive cases

PTI ■ PATIALA

The third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has struck the National Institute of Sports (NIS), Patiala with the elite centre on Thursday reporting four positive cases inside its campus.

The positive cases were confirmed following 170 RT-PCR tests conducted among athletes and coaches residing inside the campus. The cases include three junior athletes and one coach. "RT-PCR tests for 170 athletes and coaches were conducted in NSNIS Patiala on Tuesday as part of SAI COVID SOP. Results have revealed that three junior athletes and one coach are COVID positive," the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said in a statement. "All four are symptomatic and have been isolated as per SOP." "There are no positive cases among national campers and their training is continuing unhindered inside a bio-bubble." A SAI official also said that the elite athletes are in a completely different bio-bubble and have no link with the junior athletes or the outside world. The official revealed that besides athletes, NIS Patiala also reported some positive cases among a few students of its academic courses, but they leave outside the campus and has no connection with its campers.

Chelsea gifted goals by Spurs to gain 2-0 cup semifinal lead

AP ■ LONDON

With Tottenham's defenders giving away easy goals, Chelsea could restore tranquility while easing Romelu Lukaku back into the team.

For Antonio Conte, though, it was a night of frustration on his return to Stamford Bridge four years after being fired by Chelsea as Tottenham lost 2-0 in the first leg of their League Cup semifinal on Wednesday.

Kai Havertz's shot after five minutes was inadvertently diverted into his own net by Davinson Sanchez.

More absurd was the own goal in the 34th minute after Hakim Ziyech's

swung a free kick into the penalty area.

There were no Chelsea players around Tottenham duo Japhet Tanganga and Ben Davies as they combined comically to gift the hosts a second goal. Tanganga's attempt at a headed clearance came off the shoulder of Davies and past their own goalkeeper, Hugo Lloris.

"We try to improve the personality, try to make less mistakes during the game," Conte said.

"Don't lose stupid balls. This is part of a process and I repeat — I want to be very clear — in these games that we played since I was in charge, if you analyze the games, we



struggle."

There's still a second leg to turn it around next Wednesday back on Tottenham's home field. But the trip to west London on Wednesday, two months into Conte's reign, reinforced the need to rebuild a team that is without a title since the 2008 League Cup.

"This type of game can show us the difference, the gap," Conte said.

"We struggled a lot and they showed to be much stronger than us. For sure, we are disappointed."

Collecting trophies — as Conte did in the Premier League and FA Cup — is familiar territory for reigning European champion

Chelsea. So is the occasional off-field distraction.

Lukaku's outburst in an interview aired last week, where he said he was unhappy with how he's being used by Tuchel, led to the club's record signing being dropped for Sunday's Premier League draw against Liverpool.

Restored to the team after apologizing, the Belgium striker had a quiet first half with few touches until having a chance to head in a third before the break. In the second half, he managed a tame shot at Lloris. Most significantly, there was no sense of any dissent against him from Chelsea's own fans.

"He was always involved in dangerous situations," Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel said. "He showed huge commitment in the defensive work which was important."

Arsenal or Liverpool await in the final but the outcome of their semifinal will be delayed with the first leg postponed until next week due to a coronavirus outbreak at the Merseyside club.

Chelsea's ability to host Tottenham was not affected by announcing two coronavirus infections in the squad ahead of kickoff, with defender Thiago Silva and midfielder N'Golo Kante testing positive.