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DHARM SANSAD: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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THIS WILL BE SOUTH SUDAN'S HUNGRIEST YEAR EVER: EXPERTS

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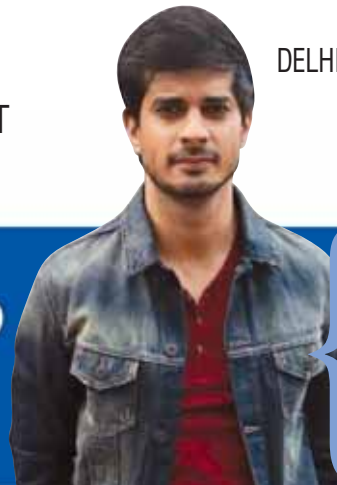
ENG CLINGS ON FOR A DRAW IN 4TH ASHES TEST

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JANUARY 10, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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A BOND FOR LIFE: TAHIR RAJ BHASIN 10 VIVACITY

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DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR

RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH

DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 32 Issue 8

*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

CAPSULE

ICG: PAK BOAT WITH 10 CREW MEMBERS HELD

Ahmedabad: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) apprehended a Pakistani fishing boat with ten crew members in Indian waters in the Arabian Sea off the Gujarat coast, it said on Sunday. The boat, named 'Yaseen', was caught by an ICG ship during an operation on Saturday night, the official said. "The Indian Coast Guard ship Ankit apprehended Pakistani boat 'Yaseen' with 10 crew members in Indian waters in the Arabian Sea during night ops on 08 Jan. Boat being brought to Porbandar for further interrogation," the official said in a tweet. **P5**

NEW NYC LAW ALLOWS NONCITIZENS TO VOTE

New York: More than 800,000 noncitizens and "Dreamers" in New York City will have access to the ballot box — and could vote in municipal elections as early as next year — after Mayor Eric Adams allowed legislation to automatically become law Sunday. **P8**

NO LOCKDOWN IN DELHI YET: KEJRIWAL

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said there is no plan to impose a lockdown as of now in the city, and that there will be no need for it if people wear masks. He said that on Sunday the city is likely to report 22,000 Covid-19 cases in 24 hours. He appealed to the public to wear masks and not panic. "Rising COVID-19 cases is a matter of concern but there is no need to panic," Kejriwal said in a virtual press conference. **P3**

CREATOR OF 'SULLI DEALS' APP ARRESTED

New Delhi/Indore: The Delhi Police has arrested a man believed to be the creator of "Sulli Deals" app from Indore in Madhya Pradesh, officials said on Sunday. This is the first arrest made in the "Sulli Deals" app case, police said. Hundreds of Muslim women were listed for "auction" on the mobile application with photographs sourced without permission and doctored. Accused Aumkareshwar Thakur (26) did his BCA from IPS Academy in Indore and is a resident of New York City Township, they said. **P3**

FAKE INDIAN CURRENCY SUPPLIER HELD

New Delhi: The Special Cell of Delhi Police has busted an international syndicate involved in circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) and arrested its key supplier in the national Capital, an official said here on Sunday. The accused has been identified as Raisul Aazam, a resident of Motihari in Bihar. Furnishing details about the operation, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Jasmeet Singh said in the last week of October 2021, information was received regarding indulging in circulation of FICN in India from Indo-Nepal border through Raxaul in District Motihari (Bihar). **P3**

1.6 L new cases as Omicron surges

PM holds meeting to review situation; UP, Karnataka see major rise in cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 continues to fuel a surge in the infection count across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting through video conferencing to review the situation.

There is no let-up in virus infection in India which saw a single-day rise of 1,59,632 new Coronavirus cases, raising the tally to 3,55,28,004 crore, which included 3,623 cases of the Omicron variant.

Uttar Pradesh has reported a massive surge in Covid cases ahead of State elections that are less than a month away. The 7,695 fresh cases reported over the last 24 hours are 13 times what was recorded last week. Last Sunday, the State had recorded 552 fresh cases.

On Sunday, the situation seemed to stabilise in Maharashtra, but cases spiked in West Bengal and Karnataka in a big way. Delhi saw as many as 17 deaths on Sunday, highest in a day in seven months.

The Prime Minister's (PM) high-level meeting was held a day after the Election Commission of India (ECI)



A health worker interacts with Covid-19 infected children inside the Covid Care Centre of the Commonwealth Games Village, in New Delhi, on Sunday

announced poll dates for five States, i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Goa and Punjab. Sources said that the meeting discussed rising cases in the States and the country's preparedness to tackle the pandemic.

On Monday, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will interact with State Health Ministers over the Covid-19 situation.

There is some respite for Maharashtra after it saw a huge surge in the last two weeks. On Sunday, the State reported 44,388 new cases and 12 deaths. Mumbai reported 19,474 fresh Covid cases and seven related deaths. The city had recorded 20,318 new Covid-19 cases and five deaths

on Saturday.

The Maharashtra Government on Sunday revised the Covid-19-related restrictions for gyms and beauty salons, allowing them to operate at 50 per cent capacity from January 10 midnight. On Saturday, the Government had said gyms and beauty salons would remain closed, while hair cutting salons would function at 50 per cent capacity.

Delhi reported 22,751 cases, 12 per cent higher than Saturday's number of 20,181. The positivity rate stood at 23.53 per cent. The city also reported 17 deaths, the most Covid deaths in a day since June 16 last year.

On Friday, Delhi reported 17,335 fresh Covid cases while

on Thursday the city registered 15,097 infections.

Altogether 1,800 patients are admitted in the Covid-dedicated hospitals in the city, said a Government health bulletin. Out of these, 182 are Covid suspects while 1,618 are confirmed positive patients, it said.

Of the patients admitted, 1,442 are from Delhi while 176 are from the neighbouring States. Of them, 440 among them are on oxygen support, while 44 are on ventilator support, while another 310 are in the ICU. But the situation is turning for the worse in West Bengal. The State reported 24,287 new Covid cases, 8,213 recoveries and 18 deaths on Sunday. **Continued on page 2**

Punjab CEO gets Covid ahead of Assembly polls



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Ahead of the crucial Assembly polls in Punjab, the State's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) S Karuna Raju tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday.

The news came just a day after the Election Commission (EC) announced the schedule for the Assembly election in Punjab and four other States. Punjab CEO S Karuna Raju had also held a press conference here on Saturday to give details of the schedule of the Assembly polls and arrangements made for elections.

"CEO Punjab Dr S Karuna Raju, IAS, Asymptomatic, tested Covid positive. Under isolation at home taking all precautions as per Covid protocol. Those who came in contact with him in the last few days, kindly get tested and take care (sic)," said a tweet posted on the Twitter handle of the CEO, Punjab on Sunday. **Continued on page 2**

400 Parliament staffers test positive as Budget Session draws near

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 400 Parliamentary staff members have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last couple of days. This is a cause of serious concern for the Government because the Budget Session of the Parliament is set to begin by the month-end.

With all the 400 personnel forced to quarantine themselves, the authorities are worried about how to manage the preparation of the Budget Session if the situation does not improve on the Covid-19 front.

The crucial Budget Session of Parliament begins in the last week of January each year. This entails a huge exercise for the Parliament as the entire systems has to work round-the-clock.

"The customary joint address to the Parliament by the President of India before the Union Budget requires a month-long preparation as the minutest details have to be worked upon. But the Secretariat will leave no stone unturned for a smooth Presidential Address and presentation of the Union Budget"



a Parliament Secretariat official said.

Out of the Covid-related isolated staff, 65 are from the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 200 are from the Lok Sabha Secretariat and 133 belong to allied services.

As a precautionary measure, the Rajya Sabha Secretariat has introduced a host of measures, including restricting the physical attendance of its staff after an emergency review meeting was conducted by Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday. Similar directives have been issued by Speaker Om Birla, sources said.

As per the latest directions, 50 per cent of officials and staff below the rank of Under Secretary are required to work from home till the end of the month. They constitute about 65 per cent of the total employees. **Continued on page 2**

Def Min is the biggest landowner in country

Has 18 L acres under its command

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A recent digital survey has placed the Defence Ministry as one of the biggest landowners in the country with nearly 18 lakh acres under its command across the country. Giving details of the mammoth land-mapping exercise which took three years, officials said here on Sunday the Defence Ministry owns about 17.99 lakh acres

Approximately 1.61 lakh acres is situated within the 62 notified Cantonments. About 16.38 lakh acres is spread across many pockets outside the Cantonments. Out of 16.38 lakh acres, about 18,000 acres is either State-hired land or is proposed for deletion from records on account of transfer to other Government departments. Clear demarcation and



boundary survey of Defence lands and fixing of the boundaries is necessary for the protection of the Defence land, safeguarding of the title of the Ministry, updation of land records, maps, and prevention of encroachments.

The Directorate General Defence Estates, Ministry of Defence commenced the survey of its land from October 2018.

The entire exercise of a survey of about 1.61 lakh acres of Defence land inside cantonments and 16.17 lakh acres outside cantonments (total 17.78 lakh acres) has been completed.

It is a remarkable achievement since for the first time after Independence, the entire Defence land has been surveyed by using latest technology and in a large number of pockets in association with the Revenue authorities of various State Governments.

The magnitude of land holding, location of land in approximately 4,900 pockets across the country, inaccessible terrain in many places and the association of various stakeholders makes this survey one of the largest land surveys in the country. **Continued on page 2**



WALKING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND: Tourists and locals enjoy a walk on the Ridge during a snowfall in Shimla, on Sunday

PTI

NEET-PG counselling from Jan 12, says Min Mandaviya

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following the Supreme Court's direction, counselling for NEET post-graduate admission is all set to begin from January 12, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Sunday.

"NEET-PG counselling is being started by MCC from January 12, 2022, following the order of the Supreme Court, as assured by the Ministry of Health to the resident doctors. This will give more strength to the country in the fight against Covid-19. My best wishes to all the candidates," Mandaviya said in a tweet.

In a major relief for resident doctors and medical stu-



dents, the Supreme Court had on Friday paved the way for starting the stalled NEET-PG 2021 counselling process based on the existing 27 per cent OBC and 10 per cent EWS reservations in the All India Quota seats.

Stating that there was an "urgent need" to begin the

NEET-PG 2021 and NEET-UG (Under Graduate) 2021 examinations.

However, the top court specified that the validity of the criteria determined by the committee for identification of EWS would prospectively for the future be subject to the final result of the petitions challenging the previous Government order.

Previously, the Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA) had said every year approximately 45,000 candidates are selected as post graduate (PG) doctors through the NEET-PG and delay in counselling has led to a situation where no junior doctors have been inducted 2021. **Continued on page 2**

Party workers question Rahul's absence after declaration of Assembly polls dates

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

There is a huge resentment in the Congress' workers and leaders over the absence of former party chief Rahul Gandhi. The leader is on a fortnight-long foreign vacation when he is needed in the country to oversee the preparation for the forthcoming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Goa. The Election Commission has already announced the poll schedules.

Rahul left for abroad on December 30 for a five-day "private vacation". Sources say he will return only after January 15.

The Punjab unit of the party had to reschedule Rahul's Moga Rally scheduled for January 3 and the new dates were January 15. Now, this cannot happen due to the restriction imposed by the election watchdog on holding poll rallies due to rising Covid cases. Rahul was to sound the poll bugle from Moga before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit of January



5. The PM's visit was canceled due to a security lapse.

Party workers and leaders are clueless as to why Rahul extended his vacation when poll schedules have been announced and other political parties have plunged headlong into campaigns and finalisation of candidates.

The Congress has high stakes in Punjab, Goa, and Uttarakhand polls where the party is expecting to do well. The Congress is in with a chance to retain

Punjab and make a bid to stage a comeback in Uttarakhand and Goa.

Rahul had also gone abroad before the party and the Opposition was busy planning a joint strategy for the Winter Session of Parliament which saw a major standoff between the ruling and the Opposition benches.

In December 2020, Rahul left for Italy on the 136th foundation day of the Congress. In October 2019, just 15 days before the Assembly elections in Haryana and Maharashtra, the Gandhi scion had reportedly gone abroad.

In November 2019, the Congress had planned as many as 35 press conferences across the country against Modi Government's policies, but Rahul, who allegedly gave directions for the press conferences, skipped them himself.

In May 2019, before the counting of votes of the Parliamentary elections, Rahul flew to London and skipped an important meeting held by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi to decide on a PM candidate.

‘Curb rising misuse of religion during polls’

Mayawati’s remark comes after UP CM says coming election be ‘80% versus 20%’ affair

Lucknow: Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday expressed concern over the ‘increasing’ use of religion in politics during elections and said the Election Commission must curb this ‘worrying’ trend.

Her remarks came a day after Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the assembly elections in the State will be an “80 per cent versus 20 per cent” one, alluding to the roughly 20 per cent Muslim population.

“In the past few years, during the elections, there have been attempts to derive electoral advantage using religion. This impacts the election and the entire country is worried about this,” Mayawati told reporters on Sunday.

“The Election Commission should take serious steps to curb the narrow

politics of selfishness as was evident in the past few years,” she added.

Accusing the Adityanath government of foisting a “jungle raj” through its biased policies, Mayawati also claimed that the BJP will lose the 2022 elections “if there is no misuse of government machinery and there are no discrepancies in EVMs”.

“The BJP will be thrown out of power this time, provided there is no misuse of government machinery and there are no discrepancies in voting machines,” she said while urging the poll panel to “keep an eye on it”.

Elaborating the reasons for her claim that the BJP will be thrown out of power, Mayawati said, “Owing to the biased approach of the (BJP) government, a ‘jungle raj’ of criminals

is prevailing.”

“Due to this, people of every caste and section are feeling very sad. A section of the upper caste, which had in the previous elections voted enthusiastically for the BJP, is feeling very sad,” she added, insinuating that even upper caste voters will not support the BJP.

Without naming the Samajwadi Party, Mayawati said, “In the state, there is a party, which is dreaming of bagging 400 out of 403 seats (of the UP legislative assembly) by banking on people who have been expelled from other parties and allying with other parties.”

“Their dreams, however, will be shattered on March 10. The BJP and other parties too will face the same situation. Only the BSP can give a popular government,” she added.

Urging people to be wary

of “alluring poll manifestoes of rival parties”, she said they must not be carried away by promises of freebies.

She said she has called a meeting of senior party leaders to select party candidates while claiming that her party will perform well in Uttarakhand and Punjab. In Punjab, the BSP has allied with the Shiromani Akali Dal.

The BSP chief also asked people not to be misled by survey agencies which show the BSP “out of the race” till voting.

“In the 2007 UP assembly elections, the BSP was kept out of the poll race and it was shown that the SP and BJP were in the contest. However, when the results came, these parties were much behind us,” she said, adding that the 2007 situation will be replicated this time.

Covid vax certificates in 5 poll-bound States won’t have PM’s photo

New Delhi: Covid vaccination certificates issued in the five poll-bound states will not have Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s photo since the model code of conduct has come into force there, official sources said on Sunday.

The Union Health Ministry has applied necessary filters on the Co-WIN platform to exclude Modi’s photo from the vaccine certificate, a source said. According to sources, the filters were applied on Saturday night soon after the poll schedule was announced.

Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur and Goa will be held between February 10 and March 7 in seven phases with the counting of votes on March 10, the Election Commission announced on Saturday. With the announcement of the schedule, the Model Code of



Chinar Corps of the Indian Army carry a pregnant women on a stretcher for urgent medical assistance, during heavy snowfall near Rannagiri in Shopian

Party hoardings, posters being removed as code of conduct comes into effect

Lucknow: Authorities have begun removing hoardings and posters put up by political parties across Uttar Pradesh as the model code of conduct has come into effect with the Election Commission announcing polls dates for the state.

The commission on Saturday announced seven-phase voting in the state starting February 10. Counting of votes will take place in March, along with four other poll-bound states.

Voting will be held on February 10, February 14, February 20, February 23, February 27, March 3 and March 7. It will move from the western part of the state towards the east.

“The model code of conduct has been implemented in the state, and it will be followed. All district magistrates (district election officers) have been given the responsibility to

Punjab CEO gets Covid ahead of Assembly...

From Page 1

117 Legislative Assembly seats in Punjab will go to polls on February 14 in a single phase election. The results will be declared on March 10.

The poll-bound Punjab is witnessing a rapid surge in Covid cases with 3,922 fresh infections and nine deaths reported on Sunday. The State reported a daily positivity rate of 13.77 per cent.

According to the State’s health bulletin, three deaths due to Covid were reported in Patiala district and one death each was reported in Amritsar, SAS Nagar, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Pathankot and Sangrur.

A maximum of 768 infections were reported in Patiala followed by 750 cases in SAS Nagar and 509 in Ludhiana.

The bulletin stated that there are 16,343 active cases in the State.

BJP set to pull out all stops in UP; SP main contender

Lucknow: The BJP has its task cut out in Uttar Pradesh -- to break a jinx under which no party has won two consecutive assembly elections in the state after 1985.

Spread over seven phases, moving sequentially from the west to the east of the vast state, the 403-seat polls will have a major bearing on the 2024 parliamentary elections, when the party hopes to return to power in Delhi under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Union Minister Amit Shah, who has been spearheading the ruling party’s campaigns in UP in the past elections, indicated that much a few weeks back at a rally that scotched speculation that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is now out of favour with the BJP’s central leadership.

“The foundation of the 2024 Lok Sabha election, which has to be won under the leadership of Modi ji, will be laid in the 2022 assembly elections here,” he said.

The state will vote on February 10, 14, 20, 23, 27,

Canada court allows Devas Multimedia to continue to seize Air India’s 50% funds

New Delhi: A Canadian court has allowed Devas Multimedia shareholders to continue to seize 50 per cent of Air India’s funds that have been held by global airlines body IATA.

The court also granted relief to the Airports Authority of India (AAI), freeing its funds that were seized by the Devas Multimedia shareholders. Earlier this month, the court had ordered seizure of funds of Air India and the Airports Authority of India (AAI), which have been held by the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), in a case filed by Devas Multimedia shareholders to enforce the arbitration award regarding Antrix deal’s cancellation.

On October 27, 2020, a US court had asked Antrix Corporation, the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), to pay a compensation of USD 1.2 billion to Devas Multimedia, a Bengaluru-based start-up, for cancelling a satellite deal in 2011.

1.6 L...

From Page 1

The State’s case positivity rate of 19 per cent is among the highest in the country. The number of Covid-19 cases in Kolkata has risen almost 37 times over two weeks — from 178 on December 23 to 6,569 on January 6. The situation in the southern States is also deteriorating. Karnataka on Sunday reported 12,000 fresh Covid cases, 9,020 alone in Bengaluru. The State’s positivity rate stands at 6.33 per cent. Similarly, Tamil Nadu reported 12,895 new cases and 12 deaths in the last 24 hours. Kerala on Sunday reported 6,238 new Corona cases and 2,390 recoveries.

Among the poll-bound States, Punjab reported 3,922 new cases and nine death in 24 hours, whereas Uttarakhand logged 1,413 Covid cases, 482

recoveries, one death in the last 24 hours. Active cases stand at 4,118 in the State.

Uttar Pradesh is also seeing a gradual rise in Coronavirus cases. The State reported 7,695 new cases and four deaths on Sunday taking its active case tally to 25,974. Only three per cent are under hospitalisation. Gautam Budh Nagar and Lucknow accounted for 1,149 and 1,115 cases respectively in the past 24 hours. As many 12 districts in the State have more than 500 cases. Of these Gautam Budh Nagar leads with 4,612 cases, followed by Lucknow (3,653), Ghaziabad (3,297), Meerut (2,519) and Varanasi (1,313).

There is no let-up in virus infection in India which saw a single-day rise of 1,59,632 new coronavirus cases, raising the tally to 3,55,28,004 crore, which included 3,623 cases of the Omicron variant. At present, 27 States and Union Territories have been affected by the fast-spreading variant. As many as 1,409 people have recovered from the strain too, the Union Health Ministry said.

The overall daily positivity rate was recorded at 10.21 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 6.77 per cent. The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide vaccination drive has exceeded 151.58 crore, the Union Health Ministry said.

The country’s R naught value that indicates the spread of the infection was recorded at four this week, higher than the 1.69 recorded during the peak of the pandemic’s second wave. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), country’s top medical body, has said that “the Omicron variant is the predominant circulating strain.”



Children play in Arabian sea at Dadar Chowpatty amid restrictions imposed due to rising Covid-19 cases in Mumbai, on Sunday

NEET... Def Min...

From Page 1

Second and third-year PG doctors are handling patients and are facing increased workload due to the Covid pandemic, FORDA had said.

The association had staged a country-wide protest over the delay in starting of NEET-PG counselling, which was called off on December 31 after the Government assured that their demands would be looked into.

400...

From Page 1

The decision was taken at the meeting Naidu held with Secretary-General PC Modi and Adviser PPK Ramacharyulu. Those with disabilities and pregnant women have been exempted from attending office. Starting and closing timings of the Secretariat are staggered to avoid crowding.

defence land.

3D modelling techniques for better visualisation of defence land in hilly areas have also been introduced by utilising Digital Elevation Model (DEM) in association with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).

During the last six months, as a result of the active intervention of the Defence Secretary and use of latest survey technologies, the survey progressed at a much faster pace, which is evident from the fact that out of 17.78 lakh acres, 8.90 lakh acres was surveyed during the last three months.

As a part of the Survey, a project for real-time change detection system based on the Time series Satellite imagery for detection of encroachments on defence land has also been initiated. A pilot test has been carried out on satellite images of defence land pockets procured from National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad.

Geo-referenced and digitised shape files are made available to enable quick decision-making. Association of Revenue officials in the survey will eventually help in reducing boundary disputes amongst stakeholders and would also help in resolving legal disputes at various levels.

Completion of such a humongous survey has been made possible due to Capacity Building of technical personnel and officers of Defence Estates Organisation in latest technologies for land survey over the years in association with premier institutes like National Remote Sensing Centre and National Institute for Geo-Informatics Science and Technology.

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Land Survey and GIS mapping has also been established in NIDEM (National Institute of Defence Estates Management) for capacity building of Defence Estates officials in the field of the latest survey technologies.

The CoE aims to be an apex survey institution capable to impart training of various levels to the officers of Central and State Government departments.

17 Covid deaths, 22,751 new cases in Capital

No plan to impose lockdown in Delhi yet: CM

New Delhi: Delhi reported 17 fatalities due to Covid-19 on Sunday, the highest in a day since June 13 last year, and added 22,751 cases to its tally of infections as the positivity rate soared to 23.53 per cent, the city's health department data showed.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the pace of the contagion in the city has been a matter of "deep concern" but there is no plan to impose a lockdown for now and urged people to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour as well as get themselves vaccinated.

In isolation since January 4 after testing Covid positive, the chief minister said that he has recovered from the disease. Delhi has logged 53 fatalities due to coronavirus this month so far. A total of 54 fatalities were recorded in the last five months -- nine in December last year, seven in November, four in October, five in September and 29 in August.

The 22,751 fresh cases reported on Sunday are the highest since May 1 last year when 25,219 people were diagnosed with the disease. On June 13 last year, 23 deaths were reported in Delhi due to the disease. The positivity rate of 23.53 per cent was the highest after May 7 last year when it was 24.9 per cent.

Delhi currently has 60,733 active cases, of which 35,714 are in home isolation. As many as 1,618 Covid patients are in hospitals. Of them, 44 are on ventilator support, government data showed. Of the 14,222 Covid-dedicated beds in hospitals, 1,800 (12.66 per cent) are occupied.

A total of 96,678 tests, including 79,954 RT-PCR ones, were conducted the previous day. The Delhi government has been stressing that most cases



this time are mild or asymptomatic and do not require hospitalisation. In a bid to stymie the coronavirus spread driven by its Omicron variant, the city government has already announced a host of restrictions, including night and weekend curfews. According to officials, the low hospital bed occupancy rate is the reason the authorities have not implemented the restrictions prescribed under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

Health Minister Satyendra Jain had earlier said authorities devised different levels of restrictions and alerts under the GRAP keeping in view the severity of the infection caused by the Delta variant of the virus. However, the severity and the

hospitalisation rate this time is quite low, he had said. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority, which devises Covid management strategy for the capital, will hold a crucial meeting on Monday.

Earlier in the day, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said there is no plan to impose a lockdown as of now in the city, and that there will be no need for it if people wear masks. "Rising Covid cases are a matter of concern but there is no need to panic. Very few people are getting hospitalised. Wearing a mask is very important. There will be no lockdown if you continue to wear a mask. There is no plan to impose a lockdown as of now," he said.

PTI

DAMEPL files fresh application against DMRC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Infrastructure subsidiary, Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt. Ltd. (DAMEPL) has filed an application in the Delhi High Court stating that the DMRC has failed to comply with the order passed on 22 December, directing DMRC to make full disclosure of all their bank accounts and the funds lying in those accounts, within one week.

The application filed by DAMEPL on 7 January was in response to DMRC's belatedly filed affidavit on 5 January in which it has made a partial/limited disclosure of its bank accounts only with respect to Rs. 1642.69 crores out of the total funds of Rs. 5800.93 crores that it had disclosed in the court through its last affidavit filed on 21 December 2021.

DAMEPL in its application said that the DMRC has intentionally not provided details of its remaining funds and bank

accounts, which is blatant disregard and contempt of the Delhi High Court order.

"The delay in the payment of Arbitral Award by DMRC is costing the taxpayer an additional interest burden of almost Rs.1.75 crores per day," it said.

It may be noted that DMRC, in its last affidavit filed on 21 December in the Delhi High Court, had informed that it had total funds worth Rs 5800.93 crores, as on 17 December 2021.

Out of this, Rs. 1642.69 crores were classified as DMRC funds, Rs. 2412.12 crores as Project funds, and balance Rs. 1746.12 crores as other than DMRC funds.

DAMEPL, in its application, has requested Delhi HC to direct DMRC to comply with the Court's previous order in letter and spirit and furnish complete details of all its bank accounts and the funds lying in those accounts along with the respective bank statements, on or before the next date of hearing i.e. 11 January.

PICTALK



Karol Bagh market wears a deserted look during the weekend curfew imposed by the Delhi Government to curb the spread of Covid-19, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

Cong slams AAP for Covid situation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid surge in Covid cases in the national Capital, Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar attacked the AAP Government, saying that the Kejriwal Government should focus on providing medical facilities to the patients' who are under home isolation.

Kumar said that the government, instead of containing the cases, was busy in election tourism. "The Chief Minister should remain in Delhi to tackle the Covid surge," he said. "Despite the Covid cases going up in Delhi, the Arvind Government seems to have taken no prompt steps to stem

the Covid tide as the CM continues to give false hopes and assurances to the people about the severity of the situation," he said.

Meanwhile, Delhi Congress vice-president Jai Kishan targeted the BJP, accusing party leaders of defaming Punjab over the issue of "security breach" of the Prime Minister during his visit to the poll-bound state.

Jaikishan further targeted BJP's MLA Ramveer Singh Bidhuri over his remark on Rahul Gandhi, saying that the BJP leader kept hailing Gandhi family being the member of the party earlier but now he indulged in petty politics.

Dispensaries in Delhi jails turn Covid care centres; oxygen plant in Tihar to start working soon

New Delhi: A newly installed oxygen plant at a hospital in Tihar prison will be made operational in four days while all dispensaries in the three jail complexes of Delhi have been designated as Covid care centres amid a surge in infections, officials said on Sunday.

As part of steps taken against the spread of the viral disease in Tihar, Mandoli and Rohini jail complexes, many medical isolation cells have been set up for inmates showing slight symptoms of COVID-19, they said.

Those who test positive but are asymptomatic will be kept in separate isolation cells within the same jail complex.

The Tihar Prison comprises central jails number one to nine, the Rohini complex houses central jail number 10 while the Mandoli prison complex houses central jails number 11 to 16.

The 120-bed hospital in Tihar and the 48-bed facility in Mandoli have been converted into Covid Health Centres with the round-the-clock presence of doctors, 50 oxygen concentrators and over 100 cylinders and essential medicines to treat patients.

"However, if the condition of any Covid-positive inmate turns serious, then he or she would be immediately shifted to Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital or Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital," a senior jail official said.

PTI

Kejriwal pitches for positive and honest electoral campaigns

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Pitching for positive and honest electoral campaigning in the poll-bound States, AAP National Convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the motive of the party is not to overthrow one party to bring another but to eliminate the entire corrupt regime from its roots to implement a system of honesty and integrity.

Addressing the party volunteers on Sunday, Kejriwal said that the AAP election is not a means of grabbing power but to bring a change in the society and the whole country.

"The AAP has proven that elections can be fought and won with honesty; Delhi Government a living testimony of how honest governments cannot just survive but create examples for the future. AAP has proven in Delhi that government schools can be revolutionised to world-class levels and children

of the poor can get the same pedestal as children of the rich," he said.

"The idea being in government translates to ministers and MLAs enjoying free services while the public runs from pillar to post; AAP will change this definition. Under AAP's watch ministers and MLAs will serve the society while the public enjoys all the facilities," he said.

Kejriwal further said that the AAP Government of Delhi proved that change is possible. "Till today, these political parties told us that running a government is not that easy; it requires some element of corruption and bigotry. The AAP Government proved that governments can be run with honesty as well.

These parties told us that winning an election requires truckloads of cash and even more deceit. AAP proved that elections can be fought with honesty and can also be won with honesty," he said.

Kalindi College constitutes transgender cell to sensitise students

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has busted an international syndicate involved in circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) and arrested its key supplier in the national capital, an official said here on Sunday. The accused has been identified as Raisul Aazam, a resident of Motihari in Bihar.

Furnishing details about the operation, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Jasmeet Singh said in the last week of October 2021, information was received regarding indulging in circulation of FICN in India from Indo-Nepal border through Raxaul in District Motihari (Bihar). The said information was further developed and the police team got a tip-off after two months about a key supplier of this FICN syndicate, which was actively involved in supply of FICNs in Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and other parts of India. The accused Aazam was apprehended near Indraprastha Park near Sarai Kale Khan Bus Terminal, Ring Road while he was there to deliver a consignment of fake Indian currency notes.

PTI

Creator of 'Sulli Deals' app where Muslim women auctioned held from Indore

New Delhi/Indore: The Delhi Police has arrested a man believed to be the creator of "Sulli Deals" app from Indore in Madhya Pradesh, officials said on Sunday.

This is the first arrest made in the "Sulli Deals" app case, police said.

Hundreds of Muslim women were listed for "auction" on the mobile application with photographs sourced without permission and doctored.

Accused Aumkareshwar Thakur (26) did his BCA from IPS Academy in Indore and is a resident of Newyork City Township, they said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (IFSO) KPS Malhotra said during preliminary interrogation, the accused admitted that he was a member of a group on Twitter and the idea to defame and troll Muslim women was shared there. "He had developed the code on GitHub. The access of GitHub was with all the members of the group. He had shared the app on his Twitter account. The photos of the Muslim women were uploaded by the group members," the officer said.

Investigation has revealed that the accused had joined the group on Twitter by the name of "Tradmahasabha" in January 2020 using the handle @gangescion.

During various group discussions, the members had talked about trolling Muslim women, the police said. "He admitted that he had

developed the code/app on GitHub. After the uproar regarding the Sulli Deals app, he had deleted all his social media footprints," the DCP said.

The Delhi Police said that further analysis of technical gadgets is underway to find out the codes/images related to the app.

Earlier in July, a case was registered by the Cyber Cell of the Delhi Police after it received a complaint about an unidentified group uploading photos of Muslim women on an app.

Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal had earlier said, "Acting on a complaint received on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal regarding "Sulli Deals" mobile application, a case under section 354-A of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and investigation taken up."

The Indore police on Sunday said their Delhi counterparts have not shared any information with them about the arrest. However, Indore's Police Commissioner Harinarayanchari Mishra told PTI, "We have come to know only from the media about the arrest of Thakur from Indore by Delhi Police. The Delhi Police have not shared any official information with us in this regard so far."

Mishra also said that the Indore police will consider starting an investigation into the matter after the Delhi Police share with them details of the case.

PTI

Missing girl reunited with parents

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Displaying an exemplary courage, the women constables of Delhi Police Northwest district have reunited a missing girl with her parents, pinned down a snatcher after a chase, nabbed four persons including two women seizing huge amount of illicit liquor and arrested a thief involved in vehicle theft within last one week in the National Capital.

The Northwest district police, under Tejaswani-Women Centric Safety & Empowerment initiative, had deployed women constables in all women earmarked beats to extend all possible help to citizens of the area.

On January 6, a 24 year-old man was arrested by the Tejaswani team of Mukherjee Nagar police station, who is a habitual criminal and was found involved in several cases of theft and burglary registered across the city. Police said that two scooters and stolen item have been recovered from the possession of the accused.

"Head Constable, Pooja along with Constable Sonu and Constable Sumit were on vehicle checking duty in Mukherjee Nagar area when a man on scooter tried to flee away from there. However, HC Pooja chased and nabbed him. The scooter he was riding



was found to be a stolen," said a senior police official.

"During interrogation, he confessed of having stolen more vehicles and on his instance one more scooter was also recovered. He also disclosed that he was involved in a burglary in Mukherjee Nagar area in which high valued tapestries were stolen and eventually recovered from his house," said the senior police official.

The women constables of the West district have also nabbed four person including

two women, in separate incidents and recovered more than 400 bottles of illicit liquor from their possession.

"In order to nab the accused indulged in sale of illicit liquor, the women constables, Bharti, Shakuntala and Suman of Keshav Puram police station hid their identity and mixed up with the locals in the area. They developed intelligence from the local women which led to the arrest of Reshmi, Krishna and Sushila. A large quantity of illicit liquor was recovered,"

said the senior police official adding that 156 bottles of illicit liquor were recovered in this operation.

"Similarly, a women constable Nandini posted at Model Town police station while patrolling on GTK Road near Tripolia Gate nabbed a habitual offender with 48 half bottles of illicit liquor. The accused is also a Bad Character of the area, having previous involvement in eight cases of excise and gambling act," said the official adding that 228 bottles were seized by constable Kavita in another operation at Bharat Nagar police station area.

In one more incident one women constable Monika of Ashok Vihar police station recovered a minor girl within 48 hours of registration of First Information Report (FIR). "She single handedly worked out the case after taking painstaking efforts by analyzing numerous CCTV footages and enquiring many citizens of the area," the official added.

Displaying courage, the woman constable, Kiran posted at Bharat Nagar police station single handedly chased and pinned down a snatcher while she was patrolling in the area. "No wonder that Kiran is fondly called and nicknamed as "Asha Ki Kiran" for the area women," said the senior police official.

4 SC judges, 150 staff members test Covid +ve

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four Supreme Court judges and almost five per cent of its staff have tested positive for Covid-19, official sources said on Sunday, as the national Capital witnesses a sharp spike in coronavirus cases.

An apex court official told PTI that out of the 32 judges in the apex court, at least four judges, and 150 out of the nearly 3,000 staff members are currently infected with the virus.

Delhi on Saturday, recorded seven fatalities due to Covid and 20,181 cases as the positivity rate rose to 19.60 per cent, while the country, according to Union health ministry data updated on Sunday, reported a single day rise of 1,59,632 cases and 327 fatalities.

A COVID-19 testing facility has been set up on the top court's premises and it is open from Monday to Saturday. "In view to contain the spread of



the highly contagious coronavirus infection and sudden upsurge in the cases of Omicron variant of the coronavirus, it is reiterated that the entrants to the Supreme Court premises, i.e. the registry staff, staff of the coordinate agencies, advocates and their staff etc., particularly those who may be showing any symptom(s) similar to those notified for COVID-19 infection(s), may kindly get themselves tested at

such facility..." a circular read.

The top court on January 2 had decided to conduct all hearings in virtual mode for two weeks starting from January 3, in view of the rising number of cases.

A circular issued in this regard stated that an earlier circular prescribing standard operating procedure for physical hearing (hybrid hearing) will remain suspended for the time being.

Alliance University's ex-chancellor held in money laundering case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Madhukar G Angur, former Chancellor of Bengaluru-based Alliance University in a money laundering case for misappropriating university funds to the tune of Rs 107 crore by duping 4,500 students.

The ED had initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of four FIRs registered against Angur and others.

"Angur, Priyanka BS and Ravi Kumar, the three accused had physically lodged themselves inside the campus premises of the Alliance University, Bengaluru, between 2016 and 2017," the ED said in a statement.

During this time, Angur and others informed the parents of the students through emails and physical notices not to deposit the fee in the

official accounts of the Alliance University and instead asked the parents to deposit the fees of their children into the illegally opened bank accounts by him and others in the name of Srivari Educational Services, it said.

The parents of about 4,500 students were persuaded to deposit the fees in the said illegally opened bank accounts and amounts to the tune of Rs 107 crore approximately. were siphoned off by Angur and others by collecting the tuition fees, hostel fees and other fees illegally from the student community.

The accused was produced before the City Civil and Sessions Judge and Special Judge for PMLA Cases at Bengaluru on Saturday and remanded to judicial custody for seven days, it said, adding, further investigation is in progress.

Breach in PM's security: SC to take up matter today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea on the recent breach in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security in Punjab.

On January, the Prime Minister's convoy was stranded on a flyover due to a blockade by protesters in Ferozepur after which he returned from poll-bound Punjab without attending the planned events, including a rally.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice N V Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli is likely to take up the plea filed by an organisation, Lawyers Voice.

The apex court on Friday had directed the Registrar General of the Punjab and Haryana High Court to "secure and preserve" the records pertaining to arrangements made for the prime minister's visit to Punjab when there was a "massive security breach".

It had also said the inquiry committees set up separately by the state and central govern-



ments will hold their horses and not proceed with their respective inquiries till January 10 when the matter will be taken up again by the court.

The bench, however, did not dictate it as part of the order, and had asked the counsels to convey its feelings to the authorities.

The Registrar General of the High Court will be assisted by the Director General of Police, the Union Territory of Chandigarh, and an officer of the National Investigation Agency not below the rank of Inspector General

in securing the requisite records from the state government, its police and central agencies, the bench had said.

The plea has sought a thorough investigation into the breach in Prime Minister Modi's security in Punjab to ensure there is no such event in the future.

It has also sought preservation of evidence on security arrangements, court-monitored probe and action against erring officials of the Punjab government responsible for the alleged lapse.

Three doses of jab reduce risk of hospitalisation due to Omicron: UK study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As India begins the rollout of a third dose for health workers and elderly from Tuesday, a study has said that three doses of Covid vaccine can give high levels of protection against hospitalisation with the Omicron variant.

The study, led by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), estimates the effectiveness of three doses of either of Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccines against mild and severe disease in adults aged 65 years or older.

The study included individuals who reported symptoms and tested in community testing between November 27 and December 31, 2021. Vaccination rates in PCR positive cases were compared to vaccination rates in those who test negative.

The estimates suggest that effectiveness against symptomatic disease with the Omicron variant is significantly lower than compared to the Delta variant and wanes rapidly in those aged 65 years or older.

But 2 to 9 weeks post the

third dose of a Covid vaccine was associated with an 89 per cent reduced risk of hospitalisation among symptomatic cases with the Omicron variant among those aged 65 years or older.

"The current data shows the booster dose is continuing to provide high levels of protection against severe disease, even for the most vulnerable older age groups," said Professor Wei Shen Lim, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) chair of Covid-19 immunisation, in a statement.

"The data is highly encouraging and emphasises the value of a booster jab," Lim added.

However, the UKHSA ruled out against the rollout of a second booster dose. In the wake of the highly infectious Omicron variant that is causing rising numbers of infections around the globe, Israel has started the fourth Covid shots, while some countries including Germany, France and the UK have been planning for it. Priority should continue to be given to rolling out first booster doses to all age groups, the JCVI advised.

Expert urges Govt to raise tax on 'sin product'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Budget Session, health economist, Rijo M John, has urged the Government to increase the tax on 'sin product' tobacco in the Union Budget 2022-23 and invest the generated revenue in improving the country's health infrastructure, reeling under the Covid-19 pandemic.

John pointed out that there is a need to enhance tax on tobacco given that smoking is a known risk factor for many respiratory infections particularly with Covid-19, compared to non-smokers. "It is time that prices on tobacco products like cigarettes are raised with an aim to reduce their consumption which is taking a toll on the health and economic condition of the users."

But, unfortunately, the public health analyst from Kerala lamented, there has been no major increase in taxation of tobacco products since the introduction of the

Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017. The excise duty on tobacco in India continues to remain extremely low, he said.

"Many state governments used to increase VAT to discourage the use of tobacco consumption before the GST came into the picture."

As a result, tobacco is currently an affordable item for many, said John recently at a Twitter Space organized by a group of citizens under the platform "TobaccoFreeIndia."

"If taxes are not increased urgently and significantly, some of the hard-won gains achieved in tobacco consumption reduction in the past few years in India might reverse at the cost of the economy and public health," John said. He added that "In contrast, several countries have high excise taxes along with GST or sales tax and they are continuously being revised to bring down tobacco consumption."

In fact, several studies show that a price increase of

10% results in a 2.5% - 5% smoking reduction in the short run and possibly up to 10% in the long run, if prices are increased to keep pace with inflation. Young people may reduce their smoking at two to three times the rate of older people, thus helping cut down millions of deaths.

The economic burden due to tobacco product consumption on the country is staggering. It's as high as Rs 1,77,000 crore keeping in account health expenditure and premature deaths due to tobacco consumption. India is the second largest consumer of tobacco in the world.

Around 13 lakh deaths are attributable to tobacco consumption annually in India i.e. 3,600 deaths daily.

He stated that the lack of tax increase means that the tax burden on tobacco products (tax as a percentage of the retail price) decreases.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) has been recommending a uniform tax burden of at least 75% for each tobacco product,

in India, the tax burden on bids, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco, on average, stands at 22%, 53%, and 64% in 2021.

Sources said that the Government is serious about the health impact of tobacco on the people in Covid-19 times.

The proposed amendments to the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) bill which has several landmark provisions like ban on tobacco consumption in public places might see light of the day in the Budget Session.

John pointed out that besides raising GST on tobacco, the Government could use other channels such as national calamity contingent duty (NCCD) or Compensation Cess to increase prices of cigarettes and bids.

In India, around 28 per cent of adults above 15 years and 8.5 per cent of school students aged 13-15 years consume tobacco in some form or the other.

IndiGo to waive change fees as Covid-19 cases increase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IndiGo on Sunday announced that it is waiving change fees in view of the increasing number of Omicron cases in the country. The airline is also offering free changes for all new and existing bookings made up to January 31 for flights up to March 31, 2022. IndiGo said that around 20 per cent of its current scheduled operations will be withdrawn from service.

In a statement, the airline said that owing to the increasing number of infections, a large number of IndiGo customers are changing their travel plans.

"In response to customer needs, IndiGo is waiving change fees and is offering free changes for all new and

existing bookings made up to January 31, for flights up to March 31, 2022," it mentioned. The budget carrier said with reduced demand it will also selectively withdraw some flights from service.

"We anticipate that around 20 per cent of our current scheduled operations will be withdrawn from service."

"Where possible, cancellation of flights will be done at least 72 hours in advance and customers will be moved to the next available flight and will also be able to change their travel through the use of Plan B (section) on our website," it noted.

The airline encouraged the customers to digital channels since the call centres have been handling a large volume of calls.

Rain lashes parts of Punjab, Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Rainfall continued to lash several parts of Punjab and Haryana on Sunday but minimum temperatures hovered above normal limits at many places in the two states.

The maximum temperature however remained below normal limits across the two states.

Chandigarh, the joint capital of two states, recorded 19.1 mm rainfall till Sunday evening and recorded a minimum temperature of 11.1 degree Celsius and a maximum of 13.2 degrees.

According to the Meteorological Department,

Ambala, Yamunanagar, Sonapat, Panchkula, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Kaithal, Fatehabad in Haryana recorded rainfall till the evening. Similarly in Punjab, rainfall was reported in Ropar, Mohali, Patiala, Jalandhar, Fatehpur Sahib.

In Punjab, Amritsar and Ludhiana recorded a low of 10.2 degrees Celsius each while Patiala's minimum temperature settled at 10.8 degrees Celsius. Bathinda was the coldest place recording a low of 5.6 degree Celsius.

In Haryana, Ambala recorded a low of 11.8 degrees, Rohtak's minimum temperature was recorded at 12.8

degrees Celsius, Gurugram recorded 12 degrees Celsius, Bhiwani settled at 11.3 degrees Celsius and Fatehabad recorded 7.1 degree Celsius.

The Met Department has forecast dense fog in Punjab and Haryana during next 24 hours.

SNOWFALL IN SEVERAL AREAS OF HIMACHAL

Himachal Pradesh continued to experience snowfall on Sunday leading to temporarily closing of many roads across the state.

The higher reaches of Kullu, Chamba, Sirmour, Shimla, Mandi, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts experi-

enced heavy snowfall in the past 24 hours. Upper areas in Manali have been closed for traffic owing to heavy snow, said an official.

Manali recorded 12 mm snowfall, Kufri recorded 2 mm and Kalpa 5 mm from Sunday morning till evening.

According to the Met Department, Shimla, the state capital, recorded a low of minus 0.2 degrees Celsius. Kufri recorded a minimum temperature of minus 2.8 degree Celsius, Kalpa recorded minus 2.4 and Dalhousie settled at a low of minus 2 degree Celsius.

The Met Department has forecast snowfall and rainfall in the state till Monday.

Vikrant begins another set of sea trials



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Gearing up for the induction of the warship into the Navy later this year, the indigenously designed and built aircraft carrier Vikrant began another set of rigorous sea trials on Sunday.

The Rs 23,000-crore ship built by the Cochin Shipyards Limited is likely to be dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15. Vikrant has already undergone two rounds of extensive trials in the last few months to validate the complex machinery.

The 40,000-tonne aircraft carrier, the largest and most complex warship to be built in India, successfully completed a five-day maiden sea voyage in August and underwent 10-day sea trials in October.

The ship now sails to undertake complex manoeuvres to establish specific readings of how the ship performs

in various conditions.

Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said here adding various sensor suites of the ship would also be tested. The successful construction of the warship has propelled India into a select group of countries having capabilities to build state-of-the-art aircraft carriers. President Ram Nath Kovind and Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu visited the ship recently in Kochi.

"After two successive high profile visits - the President and Vice President of India - within a span of less than two weeks, Vikrant is heading out for the next set of sea trials," Madhwal said.

"Both dignitaries, having reviewed the progress, had conveyed their satisfaction and expressed their best wishes to all the stakeholders involved in the project," he added.

While the maiden sea trials were to establish propulsion, navigational suite and basic operations, the second sea trial

witnessed the ship being put through its paces in terms of various machinery trials and flight trials.

"The ship in fact was out for 10 days proving its sustenance in the very second sortie. Various seamanship evolutions were also successfully cleared during the second sortie," he said. Scientists from the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory based at Visakhapatnam, are witnessing the third phase of sea trials of Vikrant.

The warship will operate MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31 and MH-60R multi-role helicopters. It has over 2,300 compartments, designed for a crew of around 1,700 people, including specialised cabins to accommodate women officers.

Vikrant has a top speed of around 28 knots and a cruising speed of 18 knots with an endurance of about 7,500 nautical miles. The ship is 262 metres long, 62 metres wide and it has a height of 59 metres.

Its construction began in 2009. At present, India has one aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya built by Russia.

"That the ship has been able to carry out basic flying operations from its very first sortie itself is a landmark in Indian warship construction history," Madhwal said regarding the performance of Vikrant.

He also said despite surging COVID cases in the country and the resultant challenges, the combined teams from multiple organisations associated with the project are upbeat and committed to meet the timelines.

Vikrant has been a success story on numerous counts. Be it the case of Atmanirbharta wherein 76% of the equipment is indigenously sourced or the close engagement between the design teams of the Indian Navy and Cochin Shipyard Limited - a high-point in the largest and most complex warship ever to be built in the country, he said.

PM: Dec 26 to be celebrated as 'Veer Baal Divas' every year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major announcement ahead of Punjab Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced that December 26 every year would be marked as "Veer Baal Divas" as a tribute to the courage and sacrifice of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh.

"Today, on the auspicious occasion of the Parkash Purab of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, I am honoured to share that starting this year, 26th December shall be marked as "Veer Baal Divas". This is a fitting tribute to the courage of the Sahibzades and their quest for justice", the Prime Minister said in his message.

Sikh guru Gobind Singh's two sons were executed by the Mughals and two others were killed in a battle.



Guru Gobind Singh, born as Gobind Rai, was the tenth Sikh Guru, a spiritual leader, warrior, poet and philosopher. He formally became the leader and protector of the Sikhs at the age of nine after his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, was killed by Aurangzeb for refusing to convert to Islam.

Modi greeted the nation on the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru of Sikhs. "Greetings on the Parkash Purab of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. His life and message give strength to millions of people. I will always cherish the fact that our Government got the opportunity to mark his 350th Parkash Utsav. Sharing some glimpses from my visit to Patna at that time", said the Prime Minister.

He said, "Veer Baal Divas will be on the same day Sahibzada Zorawar Singh Ji and Sahibzada Fateh Singh Ji attained martyrdom after being sealed alive in a wall. These two greats preferred death instead of deviating from the noble principles of Dharma".

"The bravery and ideals of Mata Gujri, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the 4 Sahibzades

give strength to millions of people. They never bowed to injustice. They envisioned a world that is inclusive and harmonious. It is the need of the hour for more people to know about them," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah also hailed the decision by the Prime Minister.

Punjab's former CM Amarinder Singh also welcomed the decision. Amarinder, who left Congress to form his own party last year November, is now a BJP ally, contesting the upcoming Punjab assembly polls.

After a political showdown on the farmers issue and repealing of central farm laws, the Modi government has been taking a number of measures to reach out to the Sikhs across the country, particularly in Punjab.

Pak boat apprehended off Guj coast: ICG

Fish boat 'Yaseen' with 10 crew members on-board intercepted by ICG vessel 'Ankit'

Ahmedabad: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) apprehended a Pakistani fishing boat with ten crew members in Indian waters in the Arabian sea off the Gujarat coast, it said on Sunday.

The boat, named 'Yaseen', was intercepted by the ICG vessel 'Ankit' during the operational patrol on Saturday night.

When the crew members of the boat failed to justify their presence in Indian waters after being questioned, the ICG ship apprehended it, the ICG said in a release.

The boat tried to flee towards the Pakistani waters, but due to the quick response by the ICG ship, it was made to stop and apprehended, said the ICG.

Around 2,000 kg fish and 600 litres of diesel were seized from the boat, the ICG said, adding that the boat is registered at Keti Bandar in Pakistan.

The apprehended boat, with the ten crew members, is presently being towed to Porbandar for detailed investigation and joint interrogation, it said.

"Indian Coast Guard ship



Indian Coast Guard (ICG) personnel with 10 crew members of the Pakistani boat 'Yaseen', who were apprehended by them from Indian waters at Arabian Sea on Saturday night

'Ankit' during an operational patrol at the Arabian Sea apprehended a Pakistani fish-

ing boat 'Yaseen' along with 10 Pakistani crew, operating in Indian waters during the intervening night of January 8, 2022," the ICG said in a release.

During the initial boarding, PFB Yaseen registered at Ketibandar was found in possession of approximately 2000 kgs of the fish catch along with 600 litres of diesel, the ICG added.

Sometimes, Pakistani fishing boats cross the notional international maritime boundary and enter Indian waters during fishing expeditions. There has also been a rise in cases of such boats being used to smuggle contraband drugs through the Gujarat coast.

The Indian Coast Guard had on September 15 last year apprehended a Pakistani boat with 12 crew members in the Indian waters off the Gujarat coast. On December 20, a Pakistani fishing boat with six crew members on board and carrying 77 kg of heroin worth around Rs 400 crore was apprehended in the Indian waters off the Gujarat coast by the ICG in a joint operation with the state Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS)

PTI

Another Bengal BJP leader quits party WhatsApp group

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The WhatsApp rebellion tended to continue in the Bengal BJP with yet another senior State leader quitting the party WhatsApp group. Shankudeb Panda a senior State Yuva Morcha functionary on Sunday quitting the WhatsApp group days after party MP and Union Minister Shantanu Thakur doing the same along with five other BJP MLAs apparently to express his displeasure at being ignored in the party organisational reshuffle.

When asked Panda a former Mukul Roy confidant who quit the Trinamool Congress to join the BJP however said that he had left the group as he had crossed the age of 35. "The party will soon bring in new leadership to for the Yuva Morcha and definitely accommodate me somewhere else," Panda said refusing to dwell further on the matter.

At least 11 MLAs and an MP have left various WhatsApp organizational-

groups in the past one month --- particularly after the State committee was reshuffled post party's debacle in the recently held Assembly by-elections and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation polls.

Reacting to the latest 'rebellion' State BJP vice president Jayaprakash Majumdar said that though Panda was a well-known face in the party he had not been taking active role in the party affairs in the recent months ... hence party will not be able to comment on steps that are being taken by him."

Poo-h-pooing the state of affairs in the BJP, senior Trinamool Congress MP Saugato Roy said that "leaders like Panda had gone to the BJP either out of greed or fear ... but now they are quitting that party or disassociating themselves ... soon they will be left with no leader."

When contacted another rebel MLA and actor Hiran Mukherjee said "it is more important to be seen working for the people and the youth of Kharagpur from where I have

been elected instead of being seen in the groups." He too had left the WhatsApp group a few days ago.

BJP MLA held for flouting Covid protocol, party cries foul

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The BJP on Sunday cried "inequity" when Biman Ghosh its MLA from Pursura in Hooghly district was arrested for breaking corona protocols and taking out a huge rally with where most of the party workers were not in masks.

The BJP leadership promptly took up the matter attacking the Government for sparing the TMC leaders for doing what the BJP MLA did.

Though Ghosh was subsequently released an officer of Chandannagarpolice commissionerate, said that he was leading a rally of 100 people in ward number 26, in support of his party candidate Sandhya Das, flouting the SEC guidelines.

State party spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said "There may be lapses here and there but what an enslaved police is doing is ... they are arresting our men and leaders but sparing the TMC men ... today when Biman Ghosh was arrested at the same time a former BJP councilor from Rajarhat-Bidhanagar municipality was campaigning with a large number of men without masks ... but she was spared ... it is a clear show of double standard and the BJP condemns this."

Ghosh was campaigning for the upcoming civic elections in Chandannagarmunicipal corporation. Ignoring the objections from opposition BJP, Left and Congress the State Election Commission have announced polls to municipal corporations of Chandannagar, Bidhannagar, Siliguri and Asansol.

Elections will be held on January 22. Meanwhile, in view of the rising corona cases TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday postponed his Goa visit where the party is scheduled to contest the upcoming Assembly elections.

"I think we should stop all kind of religious, political and other gatherings for the coming two months ... this is my personal view and TMC will not organize large rallies in my constituency Diamond Harbor ... I ask the CPI(M) and BJP to do the same," Banerjee, the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee earlier said.

Adhikari stopped from visiting Netai, WB Guv seeks briefing from CS, DGP

Kolkata: A day after Leader of the Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari, in a letter, complained that he was stopped from attending a programme in Jhargram, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday asked the Chief Secretary and director general of police to provide him on January 10 all details of the incident. Dhankhar also sought a written report from them in the matter.

"In view of highly disturbing scenario, reminiscent of emergency, in Jan 7 communi-

cation @SuwenduWB WB Guv has directed CS @MamataOfficial & DGP @WBPolice to brief him, fully updated, with written report, on Jan 10 at 11 am," he tweeted.

In an earlier tweet, he said that Adhikari was "ill treated by the administration".

"In spite of Jan 5 HC order the LOP was so ill treated by the administration from the @MamataOfficial and police @WBPolice compromising his fundamental rights. Such blatant disregard of High Court

directive calls for exemplary consequences if democracy is to survive (sic)," he wrote on the microblogging platform.

Adhikari, in his letter to Dhankhar, said he was prevented from visiting Netai, where he sought to pay respect to those killed on January 7, 2011.

The Nandigram MLA alleged he was stopped by the police, despite a Calcutta High Court order stating that "there is no restriction on my movement".

PTI

After RJD, Cong backs Nitish on caste census

Patna: The Congress in Bihar on Sunday asserted that it was "fully" with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on the issue of caste census and urged him to move forward and hold a State-specific exercise without waiting for a nod from his ally BJP which is keeping cards close to the chest.

Congress Legislature Party leader Ajeet Sharma's statement to the effect came close on the heels of Lalu Prasad's RJD, the principal opposition party in the State, adopting a similar stance.

"The Chief Minister wants to convene an all-party meeting.... Apparently the BJP does not want to be seen on the same page.... Let Nitish Kumar go ahead, the Congress is fully with him on the issue", Sharma told reporters here.

The state BJP has in the past backed a caste census with its MLAs voting in favour of resolutions passed twice, unanimously, by the legislature.

The party finds itself in a bind after the Narendra Modi government turned down demands for conducting headcount of social groups other than SCs and STs.

A meeting between the Prime Minister and an all-party

delegation from Bihar headed by the Chief Minister failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Politics in the state has for decades been dominated by the numerically powerful OBCs, who are hopeful of gains in the event of an exercise that might confirm that their percentage in population is far greater than 27 percent which has been earmarked as their quota following the Mandal Commission's implementation.

In the wake of the Centre's lukewarm response, Kumar who like Lalu Prasad is an OBC has decided to undertake a state-spe-

cific survey. Recently, he disclosed that he proposed an all-party meeting on the issue which was hanging fire for want of the BJP's assent. Kumar controls the JD(U) but, on account of the party's diminished numerical strength, has become heavily dependent on the BJP which is second only to the RJD in terms of the number of MLAs.

The 19-MLA-strong Congress is hardly a force to reckon with though it has been trying hard to make itself count ever since it was dumped by the RJD in assembly by-polls last year.

PTI

Periyar statue vandalised in Coimbatore

Coimbatore: A life-size statue of social reformer 'Periyar' E V Ramasamy was on Sunday allegedly desecrated by miscreants at Vellalore on the city outskirts leading to tension in the town for some time.

A garland of slippers was found placed around the statue, police said.

The forehead of the statue, erected in 2005 in front of the Thanthai Periyar Library, was smeared with saffron powder, which was noticed by the res-

idents in the early hours, police said.

On hearing about this, a group of residents and members of some outfits gathered at the place and raised slogans condemning the act and demanded that police bring the culprits to book for the disrespect shown to Periyar.

Police who arrived at the scene assured action against those involved in the incident and said further investigations were on.

PTI



Troops of the Indian Army perform 'Khukuri Dance' in the snow-clad ranges of the Tangdhar sector in the Kupwara district of North Kashmir

COVID BULLETIN

Covid cases cross 44-K mark in Maha

207 Omicron cases logged in 24 hours

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The daily Covid-19 cases shot up top 44,388 in Maharashtra while the State recorded 207 fresh Omicron cases on Sunday, even as the total number of people in home quarantine in various parts of the state crossed 10.76 lakh mark.

A day after the daily Covid-19 infections touched a staggering tally of 41,434 cases, the daily cases went up to 44,388, taking the total number of cases from 68,75,656 to 69,20,044 cases. As many as 12 Covid-19 deaths were reported from various parts of the state.

Of the 44,388 fresh cases recorded in the state, Mumbai accounted for 19,474 Covid-19 cases on Sunday. With the daily cases having dropped from 20,318 cases to 19,474 on Sunday, the total number of cases in the metropolis rose from 8,95,098 to 9,14,572.

As 15,351 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March last year increased from

65,57,081 to 65,72,432. The recovery rate in the state dropped from 95.37 per cent to 94.98 per cent.

The number of "active cases" in the state increased from 1,73,238 cases to 2,02,259 cases. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 2.05 per cent to 2.04 per cent.

Of the total recorded cases, Mumbai accounts for a maximum of 1,17,437 active cases, while there are 38,105 active cases in Thane. There are 18,867 active cases in Pune, followed by Raigad (6486), Palghar (5381), Nashik (3550), Nagpur (2609), Ahmednagar (1093) and Satara (1047).

Of the 7,05,45,105 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 69,20,044 have tested positive (9.88888 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday.

Currently, 10,76,996 people are in home quarantine while 2614 people are in institutional quarantine.

Meanwhile, the State recorded 207 cases of Omicron, taking the total number of new Covid-19 variant cases to 1216 cases. Of the cases, 155 cases have been reported by B J Medical College while 52 cases have been reported by the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune.

The following is the breakup of a total 1216 Omicron cases recorded in the state so far, Mumbai: 606, PMC-223, Pimpri-Chinchwad—68, Sangli

—59, Nagpur —51, Thane —48, Pune rural —32, Kolhapur —18, Panvel —17, Osmanabad —11, Navi Mumbai and Satara —10 each, Amravati —9, Kalyan Dombivli —7, Buldhana and Vasai-Virar—6 each, Bhiwandi-Nizampur and Akola-5 each, Nanded, Ulhasnagar, Aurangabad and Gondia —3 each, Ahmednagar, Gadchiroli, Latur and Nandurbar—2 each, Jalna and Raigad—one each.

Of the total cases 454 patients have been discharged after a negative RT-PCR test.

In a related development, the authorities said the total number of passengers who arrived at Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur airports since December 1 was 2,55,324 (37,552 from At-risk countries and rest 21772 are from other countries), while passengers whose RT-PC tests have been done are 71834 (37,552 are from high-risk countries and 34,282 are from other countries). Similarly, RT-PCR positive and samples sent for genomic sequencing was 901 (436 are from at-risk countries and 465 are from other countries).

Additionally, field surveillance of all international passengers who have arrived since 1st November is underway. "Through airport and field surveillance, 3,868 samples have been sent for genomic sequencing. The results of 97 are awaited so far," the daily health bulletin said.

Varun: Tested +ve with fairly strong symptoms

Pilibhit: The BJP's Lok Sabha MP from Pilibhit Varun Gandhi on Sunday said he has tested positive for Covid-19 with 'fairly strong symptoms'.

In a tweet, he also said the Election Commission, which on Saturday announced the poll schedule for five states, should make sure candidates and political workers too get a precautionary dose of Covid vaccine. "After being in Pilibhit for three days, I have tested positive for Covid with fairly strong symptoms," Varun Gandhi said.

PTI

Covid curbs revised for beauty salons & gyms in Maha

Mumbai: The Maharashtra Government on Sunday revised the Covid-19-related restrictions for gyms and beauty salons, allowing them to operate at 50 per cent capacity from January 10 midnight.

On Saturday, when the state reported over 41,000 new COVID-19 cases, the government had said gyms and beauty salons will remain closed, while hair cutting salons will function at 50 per cent capacity. The order was revised on Sunday and the beauty salons were grouped with the hair cutting salons. Only those activities that do not require removal of mask shall be allowed.

PTI

18K fresh Covid cases in WB

Kolkata: With 18,802 fresh cases of Covid-19 reported in West Bengal on Saturday, the State sank deeper into a coronavirus crisis, as capital Kolkata clocked a cumulative weekly positivity rate of over 55 per cent ending Friday. Government officials said. The overall tally, since the pandemic erupted, has gone up to 17,30,759.

The State's positivity rate also rose from Friday's 26.34 per cent to 29.60 per cent, por-

tending a grim battle against the disease ahead, with the Gangasagar fair, a huge congregation of common people and seers having begun today.

The Calcutta High Court had on Friday given the go-ahead for the fair, an annual event, which is once in a lifetime pilgrimage for many Hindus, but ordered enforcement of strict guidelines to check the spread of the disease.

PTI

4 dead, 14 injured as ST bus collides with truck in Beed

Beed: Four persons were killed and 14 injured after a Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation bus and a truck collided on Ambajogai-Latur Road in Beed district on Sunday, police said.

The accident took place near Nandgaon village when the ST bus, which was going from Latur to Aurangabad, and the truck carrying machinery to Hyderabad in neigh-



bouring Telangana collided when the former tried to overtake another vehicle, an official said.

Four people, including the driver of the bus and one unidentified person, died on the spot. One of the deceased is a 72-year-old woman. The 14

people who have been injured have been admitted in Swami Ramanand Tirth government hospital in Ambajogai. The condition of five is critical," said Bardapur police station Inspector Ashok Kharat.

The statements of the bus passengers as well as others who may have been in the vicinity are being recorded as part of the probe to find out who was at fault, he added.

PTI



A devotee takes a dip in the holy sarovar (pond) on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar on Sunday

PTI

Vaccine paradox

The question remains if we have developed infection-led herd immunity after two major waves

A Lancet study published on January 1 says: “Randomised controlled trials and real-world effectiveness studies (in Scotland, Brazil) have shown the considerable short-term protection offered by COVID-19 vaccines”. It says the protection against symptomatic infection began decreasing within three months of the second dose. In Scotland, the effectiveness initially remained relatively stable between 2-3 weeks and 6-7 weeks after the second dose, then decreased up to 18-19 weeks after the second dose. Other studies reveal that fully vaccinated people lose half their antibodies every 108 days. Does it mean the efficacy is strikingly less a year later? Such studies are the basis for recommending a third, booster dose because people receiving boosters have lesser chances of getting a severe infection. This raises certain questions about the vaccination cycles and current and future directions of vaccine research that the Indian Council of Medicine Research and National Technical Advisory on Immunization need to address. The first question relates to a vaccine paradox: You notice that every 7-9 months, a section of the population that is fully vaccinated ends up with reduced vaccine efficacy. It is only



a notch better than the unvaccinated population when it comes to facing a highly transmissible variant. There comes a time in the vaccination process when both the unvaccinated and a section of the vaccinated await a dose, first dose for the former, third or booster dose for the latter. Thus, these two segments together face a threat from the prevalent coronavirus variant. Our scientists need to tell us how to come out of this disturbing cycle. Current government guidelines indicate there are two solutions in play for the time being: Reduce the rate of infection through vaccination, irrespective of the levels of efficacy dictated by the passage of time. Reduce transmission through social distancing measures like work from home and weekend curfews. Our virologists must tell us if it is possible for neutralising antibodies that can attack viruses before they infiltrate cells to have a constant staying power over time. For, if not, the third, booster dose is the real option for the fully vaccinated population; not just for those above 60 but for all age groups. The other alternative is to hope for a scientific breakthrough to improve the cellular immunity that can fully protect from disease.

The second question relates to herd immunity. The COWIN website says 88 crore people have received the first dose so far and 63 crore, both doses. There is still time for us to reach vaccination-led herd immunity. Do we at least have infection-led herd immunity, considering we have already faced two major waves? A related question is, with the original virus regularly mutating, do we need to achieve herd immunity for each variant? Or achieving it once is enough? If antibodies made when infected with one virus variant can protect against other variants, we can have broad protection at the national level. Is that the best to hope for?



Deserted city streets during curfew imposed by the State Government, in Chennai

Self-defence

To beat the virus, people must live healthy and boost their immunity

The exponential rise in Omicron cases is being dubbed as the ‘third wave’ of the pandemic. Indeed, the health of people should be the foremost priority of the Government. It should act and take all preventive measures against the spread. Having said that, the situation needs to be analysed from the right perspective. Though the cases have been rising and the national tally is showing an upward trend, the number of fatalities is low. This logically means that it is not as fatal as the earlier waves. The reason cited for it by scientists is that it is a highly mutated variant of COVID-19. It would spread fast, but it would not be as fatal as the earlier variants. Dr M Vidyasagar, professor at the IIT, Hyderabad, is on record saying that counting daily cases means nothing because they don’t mean anything. According to him, the sheer number of those who test positive, in the context of Omicron, is not an appropriate measure to highlight the intensity of the situation. Dr Vidyasagar is the head of the National COVID-19 Supermodel Committee. He says the heavily mutated Coronavirus escapes vaccine-induced immunity and infection-related immunity. He is of the view that ending the virus spread is impossible as it dodges immunity. So the closure of schools, offices or lockdowns will not work. The cases will go up as



people have no defence against it but won’t result in severe disease.

The supermodel committee, headed by Professor Vidyasagar, also comprises Professor Manindra Agrawal of IIT-Kanpur and Lt Gen Madhuri Kanitkar, the deputy chief of the Army Medical Service. It was formed by the Modi Government to make projections of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recovery rate depends directly on the immunity of a person. This indeed must be very relieving for the authorities and help them resort to more appropriate response mechanisms for fighting the ‘third wave’. In this scenario, lockdowns and closure of schools and offices is not a solution; rather it disrupts normal life. People have suffered for almost two years now. It has tested their patience and financial resources are at an all-time low. Making policies that would hamper their economic activity at this stage would indeed be catastrophic. This is not to suggest that we should let down our guard. COVID-related precautions must continue but, at the same time, people should be made aware of the need for boosting their immunity and following a healthy lifestyle which would automatically retard the growth of COVID-19.

Dharm Sansad: Where do we go from here?

To damage Hinduism, you don’t need Muslims. Rabid, narrow-minded Hindus are capable enough of tarnishing their own religion

Hinduism is going through a metamorphosis. “Dharm Sansads” are throwing up new Hindus. The new lot is different from the older folk who were assimilating, generous and believed in coexistence. The new ones do not mind digging their teeth into the other’s skin and spewing venom. The media seems to be amplifying their message while the Government and the leaders look the other way. The new Hindus who are perpetrators of Hindutva 2.0 mince no words, are unapologetic, dangerous, direct and, yes, fearless of the consequences. Are we ready for it, don’t know, justified certainly not; is it for real? Definitely. And, like it or not, it is here to stay.

Recently a Dharma Sansad (religious parliament) was organised by Yati Narasinghanand, the priest of the Dasna Devi temple in Ghaziabad. It was held over three days during 17-19 December, 2021. Almost all the speakers were saffron-robed Hindu ascetics. Many of them hailed from akharas.

The theme of the conference was quite interesting, “Islamic Bharat Mein Sanatan dharm ka Bhavishya” -- The Future of the Sanatan Dharma in Islamic India. There is so much in the theme to decipher that itself speaks volumes about the mindset of the organisers and attendees alike.

To begin with, they believe that India is an Islamic nation; something even the RSS and the BJP would have a problem conceding. Surely it is detrimental to the credentials of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is often dubbed to be a right-wing Hindu sympathiser. Now though rightwing hardcore is itself denying that. India is an Islamic nation headed by Prime Minister Modi! Forget about a Hindu Rashtra; according to them, it is not even secular.

Lo and behold, all these years the pseudo seculars, urban Naxals, “tukde tukde” folk had been implicating Prime Minister as a Hindu hardliner. In a sense, the Dharma Sansad was more



against the BJP and Prime Minister Modi than Muslims. They believe that Hindus do not have a future in India and so they must take up arms and kill anyone non-Hindu, Muslims in particular, so that a pure Hindu Rashtra, a Hindu-only Rashtra can spring up. Those who do not believe in democracy termed their event “dharma Sansad” – religious parliament where there is no scope for plurality.

The so-called defenders of Sanatan dharma forget that Sanatan dharma survived Khiljees, Tughlaqs, Aurangzeb, generally known for their anti-Hindu policies. So what are the odds that it would not survive in a country being ruled by RSS supported right-wing Hindu party? Zero, nought, zilch!

Coming to the Sanatan Dharm, well let’s get our facts clear. If anybody who has worked relentlessly to destroy and circumvent it, it is sandharms themselves. Had the great seers at the dharma Sansad spared some thought to tell people what Sanatan dharma means, things would have been clearer. Sanatan Dharm or the eternal religion is the universal law of nature. It stresses the need for self-purging, abstaining from falsehood, violence, sexual



THE RULING PARTY AND ITS LEADERS ARE KEEN TO SEEK VALIDATION FROM THE WESTERN PRESS. IN THE TIMES OF THE INTERNET, NOTHING REMAINS UNDER THE WRAPS AND IT THROWS THEM INTO A SERIOUS IMAGE CRISIS

misconduct and stresses purity of mind and soul.

Of course, reading Vedas and Upanishads is highly recommended to understand the divine order. Now how many Hindus have read, let alone understood, the Vedas and Upanishad? About purging, the lesser said the better. Harboursing ill will hatred animosity anger anxiety greed is the anathema of Sanatan dharma. We are all partners in crime in bleeding Sanatan Dharma.

Haridwar is not the only place where defenders of faith made themselves heard. Suresh Chavhanke, a TV channel chief, gave a call to “fight, die and kill if required” to make India a “Hindu nation” on December 19. In Raipur, a certain Kalicharan abused Mahatma Gandhi.

Call it an obsession with Muslims or their anxiety to prove their militant credentials, they are just walking the path of Islamic jihads and doing what they did to their religion. Jihadists the world over have publicised Islam as a religion of hate and vengeance. So moderate Muslims, which are in majority, are left explaining that Islam is a religion of peace and is all about forgiving and being compassionate.



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Think of it, a few more so-called dharma Sansads, we all would be explaining the same about Hinduism. Tough times are ahead for moderate Hindus.

To make it to the political main stage, they may give a call for genocide and the Governments may look the other way for a while but it will not go very far. The ruling party and its leaders are keen to seek validation from the western press. In the times of the internet, nothing remains under the wraps and it throws them into a serious image crisis.

As for the guy who administered an oath to kill the Muslims, do not overreact. Prison is no solution. Suresh Chavhanke is a cute guy. He is perhaps overtaxed. Running a TV channel and fighting imaginary enemies took a toll on his mental health. He would better take a sabbatical and go on a vacation, maybe to Agra where he can visit Taj Mahal (okay, Tejo Mahalya) to relax and also find time to visit its world-renowned facility for his mental check-up and correction.

(The writer is a columnist and documentary filmmaker. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAKE PUBLIC INTEREST A PRIORITY

Sir — The Karnataka Congress has undertaken a 168-km ‘padayatra’ for the sake of the Mekedatu project in the State. For sure, Bengaluru, the ever expanding city, needs Mekedatu to meet its drinking water needs. Meanwhile, the Karnataka Government helmed by the BJP is leaving no stone unturned to obtain clearances for the project. But, the Tamil Nadu Government has filed petitions against the project in Supreme Court, thereby, the project is stuck in legal tangles. In this backdrop, the Congress party’s padayatra can be seen as politically motivated in the light of the State Assembly elections due next year.

But the moot question is, why couldn’t the Congress, an ally of DMK, try to hold talks with the Tamil Nadu Government, keeping the interest of both the States in mind, to not obstruct the project — which in no means harms its interests? Moreover, it is unbefitting for the party to launch the padayatra which draws huge crowds of the people at the time when the State imposed curbs are in place for containing the spread of Coronavirus. Apart from showing complete disregard to public health, the party also failed to comprehend the gravity of the situation when the State stares at a possible third wave of the pandemic.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

WHY DIFFERENT COACHES IN ONE TRAIN?

Sir — The Indian Railways has shown tremendous development in the last two decades. It introduced a lot of luxury trains to Indian travellers for a comfortable journey. The trains like Vande Bharat Express, Gatimaan Express, Duronto Express, Rajdhani Express, Humsafar Express and Tejas Express are providing luxurious amenities as well as pantry car facilities to the travellers. The travellers are enjoying their journey while travelling from these trains. The time has come when Indian Railways will run the ‘bullet train’ from all big cities in the coming days.

The time of the journey will be very less with the introduction of ‘bullet trains’. Even railways are running special trains

It just doesn’t seem to end



Numbers are reliable indicators to understand the scale of a pandemic at a given point of time; they give us a sense of the gravity of the situation. India has recorded 1,59,632 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours. The cases have exceeded one lakh for four consecutive days. The massive spike in daily cases point to the onset of the third wave. The daily positivity

rate is put at 10.21 per cent. The active cases stand at 5, 90,611. Even in the time of a pandemic, a person is not to be treated as a statistic; 327 persons have lost their lives to COVID-19 in the last 24 hours. By the time the third wave peaks, India will have lost over half a million to the pandemic. We are exhausted physically and mentally; there appears to be no respite from the pandemic; we are becoming increasingly less sanguine about a return to normality; we seem to be destined to live through a prolonged pandemic.

The third wave is said to peak in mid-February. The virtual campaign will be a new experience for the Indian voters, candidates and parties; digital divide exists for successful universal online campaigning. Parties with meager resources are likely to go without the benefit of a level playing field. The Assembly elections assume added political significance as they will set the tone for the 2024 general election.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

for the religious tour from all over India. But the identity of the train is now problematic because the coaches of Duronto Express attach to Humsafar Express and vice versa. A few days ago, Tejas Express coaches were attached to the Rajdhani Express and it was very difficult to identify the train. There is a need to run the train with the same coaches otherwise it loses the identity of the train. I hope the Indian Railways will look into this and keep the identity of trains intact by running the train with the same coaches.

Syed Nisar Mehdi | Hyderabad

ONE MUST NOT UNDERMINE INDIRA’S ROLE

Sir — There is little doubt that the historic victory in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was not only a crowning glory for the Indian military, but equally a victory for the country on the diplomatic front. The ruling BJP, during the recent Vijay Diwas celebrations of the war, should have the generosity to remember former Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi and give due credit to her for the victory, since she played a stellar role that led to the unconditional surrender by the Pakistan military.

In fact, India gave shelter to millions of refugees from Bangladesh who sought refuge to escape from the onslaught of the Pakistan forces. Unquestionably, this was independent India’s most decisive military victory leading to the formation of Bangladesh, which was perhaps Indira Gandhi’s finest hour as PM because she handled the political, diplomatic and military perspectives dexterously and executed her plans with a clock-like precision. No doubt the BJP’s failure to mention Indira Gandhi’s name during the celebrations was deliberate and a crass act of ignoring her decisive role in the creation of Bangladesh.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

After having fever for two days due to COVID and completing home isolation, I am back at your service.



Delhi Chief Minister —Arvind Kejriwal

We have so many more tools developed, and continue to develop, that can contain COVID and other strains of COVID.



US President —Joe Biden

I think those days are gone when people would body shame and talk about your thunder thighs and Amazonian growth.



Actor —Raveena Tandon

The legend and captain cool MS Dhoni has honored me with a beautiful gift, his shirt.



Pakistan pacer —Haris Rauf

The Congress party will fight for the rights of youth, farmers, women, workers, traders and common people.



Congress leader —Priyanka Gandhi

FIRST COLUMN

HIGH INFRA COST, SLIDING INDUSTRY

High inflation accentuates the fiscal situation riddled by high debt, causing imbalances



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The Government has an uphill task to present an extra-ordinary budget that is low cost, high on growth, and having debt sustainability even as it contends with the third pandemic wave. It is a challenge to achieve Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s avowed GDP target of a \$5-trillion economy by 2025, and adjust, if not check, high inflation of 14.2 percent. Now the estimates are for about a \$2.6 trillion budget by 2025. The pandemic has certainly reduced the achievements by about \$200-300 million. The high inflation accentuates the government’s fiscal situation riddled by high debt and causing imbalances, affecting growth. The IMF observes that central government deficit has risen to 8.6 percent and those of the states to 12.8 percent in 2020-21 mostly due to Covid-19. Bank credit is also subdued. The government has to make a provision for Rs 4.38 trillion on account of delays in 470 projects. With offline mode and other restrictions hav-



ing a bearing on the economy, that itself is a challenge. It also has to account for growing pressure on the health sector and keep public debt vulnerabilities in check. Mending ways is not easy. It must move out of the many hackneyed high-cost infrastructure investment. The not-so-well-planned highway system has levied additional cost on the rural system as the neighbourhood gets distanced and people are made to pay higher fees and tolls. Certain small and mid-sized cities and townships are being dumped with flyovers and metros affecting their functionality, aesthetics and capability to sustain high-cost infrastructure. Aping the west does not pay. It calls for cut in imports of products that could be made domestically like the rail track cement sleepers to save forex. The Economic Survey 2021-22 does not see high debt as a problem in Indian situation but it certainly raises debt service problems. The ES is of the view that since interest rates are low, the country would be able to sustain it. A sustained rate rise could threaten the RBI’s case for keeping borrowing costs lower for longer to support the economy, given it has a mandate to keep consumer price inflation within its target band of 2 to 6 percent.

The biggest concern is that private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) has still not reached the pre-pandemic levels in the September quarter. The PFCE is the largest component of India’s GDP and its weakness suggests that the recovery is still not broad-based and is being driven by the rich. In the pandemic, the large unorganised labour sector is bearing the brunt of the costs. The Centre for Monitoring Indian economy estimated that over 130 million daily wagers in the urban centres were rendered jobless and homeless. India’s economy has been in distress for most of the last decade - 2011-21. Exports are stuck at around \$300 billion for nearly a decade. The 68-day world lockdown has prevented India from bouncing back either on manufacturing or exports. The country is losing market share to smaller rivals such as Bangladesh, whose remarkable growth has hinged on exports. The revenue projections remain moderate. India’s economic advisory council to the prime minister expects the country to grow at an actual of 7.7 to 7.5 percent. The revenue collections may be moderately higher. But the country needing higher doses of cash infusion may not find it easy to manage the finances. The major problem is the industry that contributed 26.5 percent in 2019 is sliding and agriculture with 15.6 percent is sustaining growth. The future trend may remain inflationary and the course towards 2022-23 would remain bumpy but expected to stabilize if the pandemic abates.

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

Lowering standard of election promises



S KALYANASUNDARAM

In view of the forthcoming Assembly elections in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur, it is time for the poll panel to act decisively

Whenever any state election is announced, political parties make tall promises to the electorate. In a democracy it is all right to make promises as the voters will be able to select and elect suitable parties and persons to represent them based on their plan of action. But of late we notice that the political parties are including assurances in their election manifestos that are not economically viable and feasible.

During the Tamil Nadu elections, DMK and AIADMK made many unviable promises like waiver of farm loans and even jewel loans. They had promised waiver of NEET exam for medical seats when even in the Supreme Court NEET was recognized as the proper way to conduct admission for medical colleges.

Now a senior Bharatiya Janata Party functionary in Andhra Pradesh has made a promise that if the BJP comes to power, they will offer liquor for just Rs.50. He said that there are one crore people in Andhra who consume liquor and if all of them vote for BJP in 2024, they will get liquor initially for Rs.75; if the government gets good revenue, they will get liquor for Rs.50 even. He further assured that the citizens will get quality liquor.

The above promise shows to what level the party is willing to stoop to gain votes. The promise is unethical and immoral. It will also be against the spirit of our constitution and the election commission and judiciary must suo motu act in time.

It is ironical that the present offer of quality liquor at affordable price is coming from the Bharatiya Janata Party, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi, proud of his identity as a Hindu nationalist and rich heritage of Bharat, made a reference to Uthiramerur’s model of democracy on the day he performed the Bhumii Pujan of the new Parliament complex in New Delhi.

Democracy is not something given to us by westerners. In fact, we should be grateful to the foundations of democracy laid down by ancient India with a practiced and elaborate system of self-governance 1200 years ago in Uthiramerur, Tamil Nadu.

Western intelligentsia propagates Magna Carta, “The Charter Of Freedoms” of 1215 the world over as the oldest and greatest written constitutional document of all times perhaps due to ignorance about a better treatise on formulation of freedom of the individual and self-governance a good 450 odd years before Magna Carta and nearly 1000 years before the Constitution of United States Of America came into being in 1788.

Several temples of Tamil Nadu have inscriptions on temple walls on the existence of village assemblies and the Uthiramerur temple contains earliest inscriptions with complete information about how the elected village assembly functioned. In these inscriptions there are



THE SUPREME COURT HAS DIRECTED THE ELECTION COMMISSION TO FRAME GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION OF ELECTION MANIFESTO IN THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE GUIDANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES. THE ELECTION COMMISSION SHOULD BE EMPOWERED TO ACT NOT ONLY ON THE BASIS OF ELECTION MANIFESTOS BUT ALSO UTTERANCES OF FUNCTIONARIES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

(The writer is a retired banker. The views expressed are personal.)



details about the constitution of wards, the qualification of candidates to be nominated for the elections, the disqualification norms, the mode of election, the constitution of committees with elected members, the functions of these committees, etc.

When T N Seshan, former Chief Election Commissioner, wanted to introduce election reforms, he was inspired by the inscriptions of Uthiramerur temple.

Our Constitution contains Directive Principles of State Policy and under Article 47, it contains the following: “Duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health. The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and, in particular, the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.”

Hence making a promise to offer liquor at a reduced price, if elected to power, should be considered as against the directive principles of state policy. It will be worthwhile to refer to the judgement delivered by the Supreme Court on July 5, 2013 in the case S.Subramaniam Balaji vs Government of Tamil Nadu and others.

The case relates to distribution of free gifts (freebies) to the people. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam while releasing the election manifesto for the Assembly Elections 2006, announced a Scheme of free distribution of colour television sets

to each and every household which did not possess the same, if the said party/its alliance were elected to power. The Party justified the decision of distribution of free CTVs for the purpose of providing recreation and general knowledge to the household women, more particularly, those living in the rural areas. In pursuance of the same, follow up actions by way of enlisting the households which did not have a CTV set and door-to-door identification and distribution of application forms were initiated. This Scheme was challenged by way of filing writ petition before the High Court on the ground that the expenditure to be incurred by the State Government for its implementation out of the State Exchequer is unauthorized, impermissible and ultra vires the Constitutional mandates. This writ petition was dismissed by the Madurai branch of the Madras High court.

When the case went to the Supreme Court, it decided that the promises in the election manifesto cannot be declared as a corrupt practice. Further the Supreme Court said that the schemes challenged in this writ petition fall within the realm of fulfilling the Directive Principles of State policy thereby falling within the scope of public purpose. From here we can conclude that any promise by the political parties cannot be in contravention of directive principles. When the directive principles states that prohibition should be enforced, any promise contrary to that will be unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court further expressed as follows: “Although, the law is obvious that the promises in the election manifesto cannot be

construed as ‘corrupt practice’ under Section 123 of RP Act, the reality cannot be ruled out that distribution of freebies of any kind, undoubtedly, influences all people. It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree.”

Further the Supreme Court has directed the Election Commission to frame guidelines for inclusion of election manifesto in the Model Code of Conduct for the Guidance of Political Parties & Candidates. The Election Commission should be empowered to act not only on the basis of election manifestos but also utterances of functionaries of the political parties.

On another directive of Supreme Court, the Election Commission had called for a meeting of political parties in August 2013 itself to decide about the modalities of election manifestos. But we observe from the recently held assembly elections in various states, the political parties make tall promises without any accountability. Many promises which have financial implications for the state are made without explaining how the funds necessary for them will be managed.

People are hooked not only to the manifestos but also to various promises made during election meetings organized at different places and people may be carried by such assurances. Hence there should be a watch by the election commission on the conduct of meetings of political parties and punitive action should be initiated for violation.

In view of the forthcoming elections in Punjab, UP, Goa and Manipur, it is time for the election commission to act decisively.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE HAD ALREADY INAUGURATED THE NEW WING OF THE CHITTARANJAN NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE BY MAKING IT A COVID CENTRE LAST YEAR. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE



DIDI MUST REALISE THAT INAUGURATING A COVID FACILITY IS NOT THE SAME AS INAUGURATING A CANCER FACILITY IN A HOSPITAL. —BJP IT CELL HEAD AMIT MALVIYA

Accelerating agri-tech to transform food systems

With over 1000 agri-tech startups exploring transformative solutions in agriculture, the country has a booming agri-tech ecosystem

The agri-tech industry can play a vital role in leading the transformation in food systems and improving efficiency, quality and profitability of small farms. Leveraging emerging digital technologies like AI, Blockchain, Internet of things, and drones, the agri-tech industry has been employing solutions to address pertinent sectoral challenges, a trend which accelerated during the pandemic due to disruptions in industries and supply chains.

With over 1000 agri-tech start-ups exploring transformative solutions in agriculture, India has a booming agri-tech ecosystem, space is expected to grow to a \$30-35 billion market by 2025, which is very promising for the entire sector. Agri-tech has huge transforma-



(Kolluri is Head of Experimentation, Raghavan is Head of Exploration, and Singh is Head of Solutions Mapping, at Accelerator Lab UNDP India. The views expressed are personal.)

tional potential with capabilities of automating agricultural functions, improving traceability of agriculture supply-chain, fighting risks and uncertainties through predictive power, directly connecting farmers with consumers, agribusinesses, credit institutions and with government policies and many more.

But India still experiences low penetration of agri-tech solutions due to skepticism towards digitalization. However, many enterprises are integrating Indian food systems with impact-driven and evidence-driven large-scale agri-tech innovations.

UNDP Accelerator Lab India is leading a network of partners for reimagining Indian food systems while addressing various challenges



through its many agri-tech initiatives. For instance, the Lab, supported by Cabinet Office of Japan, has partnered with the Spices Board of India to strengthen the livelihoods of spice farmers and small-scale spice processors by building a blockchain-powered traceability and trading platform for Indian spices. This blockchain-powered platform is expected to enhance transparency and quality assurance in spices value chain while connecting small and marginal spice farmers to direct buyers through smart contracts. A pilot was

launched involving over 1000 chili and turmeric farmers in Andhra Pradesh which successfully demonstrated the potential of blockchain in terms of enhancing overall transparency through data immutability and retrievability. Efforts are underway for assessing real-world traceability of spices. Depending on the results, UNDP Accelerator Lab is planning to scale up this blockchain platform jointly with Spices Board India to cover major spice varieties and spice growing regions in India. To mainstream climate resilience and farmer-led solutions into agriculture policies, the Lab has initiated “Data for Policy” in partnership with the Telangana Government, the Rockefeller Foundation, and several other stakeholders to

strengthen climate resilience in agriculture programs and policies. The initiative leverages open-source technologies and digital public good platform, to engage citizen scientists to generate data insights on climate resilience.

To ensure sustainable irrigation practise, IoT technology is being leveraged to design smart irrigation system for black gram crop in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. To assess factors including soil richness, local weather, water requirement of crops, etc and share the information back to the farmers, the IoT-driven platform is generating actionable insights to achieve optimal water utilization and ensure best irrigation practices, empowering farmers to make informed decisions.

In food processing, the lab has partnered with start-up SAS (Science For Society) to test an innovative women-led business model using solar drying of agriculture commodities. This initiative is providing integrated market-based food solutions across the value chain to preserve agri-produce and build a cost-efficient supply chain. It involves decentralised processing of commodities, addressing food wastage and perishability issues, and ensuring product quality. Women micro-entrepreneurs are earning an additional income of ₹35,000 to ₹100,000 per year. Over 6,000 women micro-entrepreneurs are being supported through this model.

Crop residue burning and air pollution is a serious concern across India. The Lab has

partnered with start-up A2P in Punjab to implement innovative business model that converts crop residue into biofuel as a partially replacement fuel for coal-dependent industries, while providing additional income to farmers to process their crop residue.

India is showing significant penchant for agri-tech systems. With increasing awareness, more common people are joining the initiatives. This is helping the country to reimagine our food system and make it an effective means to boost socioeconomic development. As the complete value chain engages the majority of Indian population, most of which is underserved, the agri-tech driven food system will act as an instrument of change, upliftment and social development.

164 killed in week of protests: Kazakhstan

AP ■ MOSCOW

Kazakhstan's Health Ministry said on Sunday that 164 people have been killed in protests that have rocked the country over the past week.

The figures reported on the state news channel Khabar-24 are a significant rise from previous tallies. It is not clear if the deaths refer only to civilians or if law-enforcement deaths are included. Kazakh authorities said earlier Sunday that 16 police or national guard had been killed. Authorities previously gave the civilian death toll as 26.

Most of the deaths — 103 — were in Almaty, the country's largest city, where demonstrators seized Government buildings and set some afire, according to the Ministry. The country's ombudswoman for children's rights said that three of those killed were minors, including a 4-year-old girl.

The Ministry earlier reported more than 2,200 people sought treatment for injuries from the protests, and the Interior Ministry said about 1,300 security officers were injured.

The office of Kazakhstan's president said that about 5,800 people were detained by police during the protests that developed into violence last week and prompted a Russia-led military alliance to send troops



to the country.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's office said Sunday that order has stabilized in the country and that authorities have regained control of administrative buildings that were occupied by protesters, some of which were set on fire.

The Russian TV station Mir-24 said sporadic gunfire was heard in Almaty on Sunday but it was unclear whether they were warning shots by law enforcement. Tokayev on Friday said he had authorized police and the military to shoot to kill to restore order.

Almaty's airport, which had been taken by protesters last week, remained closed but was expected to resume operating on Monday.

Protests over a sharp rise in prices of LPG fuel began in the country's west on Jan. 2 and spread throughout the country, apparently reflecting discontent extending beyond the fuel prices.

The same party has ruled Kazakhstan since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Any figures aspiring to oppose the government have either been repressed, sidelined, or co-opted and financial hardship is widespread despite Kazakhstan's enormous reserves of oil, natural gas, uranium and minerals.

Tokayev contends the demonstrations were ignited by "terrorists" with foreign backing,

although the protests have shown no obvious leaders or organization. The statement from his office on Sunday said the detentions included "a sizable number of foreign nationals," but gave no details.

It was unclear how many of those detained remained in custody on Sunday.

The former head of Kazakhstan's counterintelligence and anti-terror agency has been arrested on charges of attempted government overthrow. The arrest of Karim Masimov, which was announced Saturday, came just days after he was removed as head of the National Security Committee by Tokayev.

No details were given about

UK records 'terrible toll' of 1.5L Covid-19 pandemic deaths

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK crossed another grim Covid-19 milestone after recording 150,000 deaths since the pandemic hit the country in 2020, even as the Omicron variant surge continues with a further 1,46,390 daily infections and 313 deaths on Saturday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the coronavirus pandemic has "taken a terrible toll on our country" as he renewed his appeal for people to get vaccinated and thanked the National Health Service (NHS) for its life-saving efforts.

"Each and every one of those is a profound loss to the families, friends, and communities and my thoughts and condolences are with them," said Johnson.

"Our way out of this pandemic is for everyone to get their booster or their first or second dose if they haven't yet. I want to thank everyone in the NHS and all the volunteers who have come forward to help with our country's vaccine programme," he said.

Opposition Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer described the figure as a "dark milestone" for the UK.

"Our thoughts are with all those who have lost someone



and we thank everyone for supporting the vaccination effort," he said. He also reiterated calls for a public inquiry to take place to "provide answers" and ensure "lessons are learned".

It comes as the UK's Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, became the first Cabinet minister to suggest further cutting down the seven-day self-isolation period for mild Covid cases to five days as the country was on the road from "pandemic to endemic".

The US recently shortened the self-isolation period to five days, but Zahawi pointed out that it was important to remember that in the UK isolation begins when you get symptoms while in the US it

starts from when you test positive.

He told the BBC that the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) had said that there might be a higher spike if the period was cut from seven to five days but the government would keep the "measure under review" as staff absences due to self-isolation continue to pile significant pressure on frontline services.

However, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said such a move would be an "utterly wrongheaded" approach to dealing with coronavirus.

"Hard to imagine much that would be less helpful to trying to 'live with' COVID," she tweeted.

This will be South Sudan's hungriest year ever: Experts

AP ■ OLD FANGAK (SOUTH SUDAN)

Nyayiar Kuol cradled her severely malnourished 1-year-old daughter as they traveled for 16 hours on a crowded barge to the nearest hospital to their home in rural South Sudan.

For months she had been feeding her four children just once a day, unable to cultivate because of disastrous flooding and without enough food assistance from the government or aid groups. She worries her daughter might die.

"I don't want to think about what could happen," she said.

Seated on her hospital bed in Old Fangak town in hard-hit Jonglei state, the 36-year-old Kuol tried to calm her daughter while blaming the government for not doing more. Nearly two years have passed since South Sudan formed a coalition government as part of a fragile peace deal to end a five-year civil war that plunged pockets of the country into famine, and yet Kuol said nothing has changed.

"If this country was really at peace, there wouldn't be hunger like there is now," she said.

More people will face hunger this year in South



Sudan than ever, said aid groups. That's because of the worst floods in 60 years, as well as conflict and the sluggish implementation of the peace agreement that has denied much of the country basic services.

"2021 was the worst year since independence in the 10 years of the life of this country and 2022 will be worse. Food insecurity is at horrific levels," said Matthew Hollingworth, country representative for the World Food Program in South Sudan.

While the latest food security report by aid groups and the government has yet to be released, several aid officials familiar with the situation said preliminary data show that nearly 8.5 million people — out of the country's 12 million — will face severe hunger, an 8%

Snowstorm death toll in Pak's Murree goes up to 23

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The death toll due to unprecedented snowfall and influx of tourists in Pakistan's popular hill station of Murree reached 23 on Sunday, even as rescuers ramped up efforts to evacuate thousands of trapped picnickers from the scenic snow-bound mountain resort in Punjab province.

Thousands of people visited Murree after the picturesque town, about 60 kilometres from here and located at the foothills of the Himalayas in Rawalpindi, received a record-breaking snowfall, leaving the local administration helpless and freezing to death at least 22 people, including 10 children, in their stranded vehicles on Saturday.

Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, after taking an aerial view of the area to have firsthand knowledge of the situation, announced on Sunday that the rescue work would continue until the last person was rescued.

"Every Pakistani is saddened by the tragic incident that took place in Murree. All sympathies of the Punjab government are with the families of the deceased," Buzdar said.

He ordered an official



probe to fix the responsibility for the tragedy and also announced Rs 800,000 as compensation for the people who died in the calamity.

The death of a four-year-old girl has pushed the toll to 23. The minor girl died in Jhika Gali. She was suffering from severe cold and pneumonia, according to rescue sources, adding that she lost her life as she could not be rushed to the hospital in time.

Rescue officials told Geo News at least 23 people have died thus far as vehicles continue to remain trapped in several feet of snow. The toll was later confirmed by Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed in a statement on

Saturday night.

The minister said that the situation can only be described as a "natural calamity" and that the area had witnessed "extreme snowfall".

The cars were prevented from moving on to Murree, people began proceeding there on foot, and they too were stopped, he said. The minister said that the deaths were caused due to "suffocation".

According to officials, over 142,000 vehicles had entered Murree by Saturday but all travellers could not reach the main city and their hotels.

An unprecedented snowstorm clogged the two roads leading to Murree from Islamabad, they said.

Indian-origin Sikh taxi driver assaulted at JFK airport, turban knocked off

New York: In a yet another case of suspected hate crime, an Indian-origin Sikh taxi driver in the US has been assaulted by an unidentified man, who knocked off his turban and also used expletives against him outside the JFK International Airport here, according to a video on social media.

The undated 26-second video was uploaded by Navjot Pal Kaur on micro-blogging site Twitter on January 4, showing a man assaulting the Sikh taxi driver outside the airport.

She said the video was shot by a bystander at the airport.

The person can be heard allegedly using expletives against the victim. He repeatedly hits and punches him and knocks off his turban.

"This video was taken by a bystander at John F. Kennedy International Airport. I do not own the rights to this video. But I just wanted to highlight the fact that hatred continues to remain in our society and unfortunately I've seen Sikh cab drivers get assaulted again and again," Kaur tweeted.

Further details about the driver or the cause of the incident were not available.

Terming the incident as

Prospects dim as US, Russia prepare to meet over Ukraine

Washington: With the fate of Ukraine and potentially broader post-Cold War European stability at stake, the United States and Russia are holding critical strategic talks that could shape the future of not only their relationship but the relationship between the U.S. and its NATO allies. Prospects are bleak.

Though the immediacy of the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine will top the agenda in a series of high-level meetings that get underway on Monday, there is a litany of festering but largely unrelated disputes, ranging from arms control to cybercrime and diplomatic issues, for Washington and Moscow to overcome if tensions are to ease. And the recent deployment of Russian troops to Kazakhstan may cast a shadow over the entire exercise.

With much at risk and both warning of dire consequences of failure, the two sides have been positioning themselves for what will be a nearly unprecedented flurry of activity in Europe this week. Yet the wide divergence in their opening positions bodes ill for any type of speedy resolution, and levels of distrust appear higher than at any point



since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

U.S. Officials on Saturday unveiled some details of the administration's stance, which seem to fall well short of Russian demands. The officials said the U.S. is open to discussions on curtailing possible future deployments of offensive missiles in Ukraine and putting limits on American and NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe if Russia is willing to back off on Ukraine.

But they also said Russia will be hit hard with economic sanctions should it intervene in Ukraine. In addition to direct sanctions on Russian entities, those penalties could include significant restrictions on products exported from the U.S. To Russia and potentially foreign-made products subject to U.S. Jurisdiction.

Russia wants the talks ini-

US: Intel reports repeatedly failed to forecast Capitol riot

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Intelligence reports compiled by the US Capitol Police in the days before last year's insurrection envisioned only an improbable or remote risk of violence, even as other assessments warned that crowds of potentially thousands of pro-Trump demonstrators could converge in Washington to create a dangerous situation.

The documents underscore the uneven and muddled intelligence that circulated to Capitol Police officers ahead of the January 6 riot, when thousands of Donald Trump loyalists swarmed the Capitol complex and clashed violently with law enforcement officers in their effort to disrupt the certification of the results of the 2020 presidential election.

The intelligence reports in particular show how the police agency for days grievously underestimated the prospect of chaotic violence and disruptions.

The contradictory intelligence produced by law enforcement leading up to the riot has been at the forefront of congressional scrutiny about the January 6 preparations and response, with officials struggling to explain how they failed to anticipate and plan for the deadly riot at the Capitol that day.

The shortcomings led to upheaval at the top ranks of the department, including the ouster of the then-chief — though the assistant chief in charge of protective and intelligence operations at the time remains in her position.

There was, according to a harshly critical Senate report issued last June, "a lack of consensus about the gravity of the threat posed on January 6, 2021."

"Months following the attack on the US Capitol, there is still no consensus among USCP officials about the intelligence reports' threat analysis ahead of January 6, 2021," the report stated.

The conclusions of the daily intelligence reports have been described in congressional testimony and in the Senate report. But the AP on Friday evening obtained full versions of the documents for January 4, 5 and 6, marked as "For Official Use Only," of last year.

On each of the three days, the documents showed, the Capitol Police ranked as "high-

ly improbable" the probability of acts of civil disobedience and arrests arising from the "Stop the Steal" protest planned for the Capitol.

The documents ranked that event and gatherings planned by about 20 different other organisers on a scale of "remote" to "nearly certain" in terms of the likelihood of major disruptions.

All were rated as either "remote," "highly improbable," or "improbable," the documents show.

"No further information has been found to the exact actions planned by this group," the January 6 report says about the "Stop the Steal" rally.

The Million MAGA March planned by Trump supporters is rated in the document as "improbable," with officials saying it was "possible" that organizers could demonstrate at the Capitol complex, and that though there had been talk of counter-demonstrators, there are "no clear plans by those groups at this time."

Those optimistic forecasts are tough to square with separate intelligence assessments compiled by the Capitol Police in late December and early January.

Will try to approach Cabinet on revised FDI policy to facilitate LIC disinvestment: DPIIT Secy

New Delhi: The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) will soon try to approach the Union Cabinet to seek its approval on changes in the FDI policy to facilitate disinvestment of the country's largest insurer LIC, a top Government official said on Sunday.

DPIIT Secretary Anurag Jain said the issue has been discussed with the Department of Financial Services and Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) and all have reached unanimity.

"Now it is a matter of drafting it out. We will try that soon we will make the Cabinet note, after holding inter ministerial consultation, (to) take the approval...It will be very soon," Jain told reporters here.

The Finance Minister has directed that the disinvestment has to be completed during the current financial year, "so we also have to work at that pace," he added.

According to the current foreign direct investment (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 foreign portfolio investment (FPI) and FDI are permitted under public offer. However, sources said 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.

When asked about the issue of direct overseas listing of Indian startups, the secretary said the department is still examining the matter to understand exactly what the startups want.



"To my mind there is nothing which stops them from doing (that). Why do they want to go outside and list, what are the factors which are not there? We are engaged in the discussion with the industry leaders. "I know there was a proposal which was under consideration. There are views which need to be synchronised and come to a final conclusion. But I want to understand what exactly is really required. Why can't it be listed...So we are still examining that," he said.

Further, Jain informed that DPIIT is organizing the first-ever Startup India Innovation Week from January 10.

DPIIT has recognised more than 61,000 startups as on date and created over 6 lakh jobs since 2016.

"This startup and innovation festival's primary goal is to bring together the country's key startups, entrepreneurs, investors, incubators, funding entities, banks, policymakers, and other national/international stakeholders to celebrate entrepreneurship and promote innovation," he said.

The platform will also promote knowledge exchange, develop entrepreneurial ecosystem capacities; mobilise global and domestic capital for startup investments; and provide market access opportunities.

The week-long event includes interaction of select startups with Prime Minister Nareandra Modi on January 15; roundtable with global investors and domestic funds; launch of Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) digital strategy. ONDC is an initiative of DPIIT which aims to democratise digital commerce, moving it from a platform-centric model to an open network.

As UPI is to the digital payment domain, ONDC is to e-commerce in India. It will enable buyers and sellers to be digitally visible and transact through an open network, no matter what platform/application they use. It will empower merchants and consumers by breaking silos to form a single network to drive innovation.

Interest calculator soon in GSTR-3B for delayed monthly tax payment

New Delhi: GST Network, which provides technology backbone for the indirect tax regime, will shortly release interest calculator functionality in monthly tax payment form GSTR-3B to help taxpayers in calculating interest for delayed tax payment.

This new functionality will compute the minimum interest applicable on the basis of the values declared by the taxpayers in GSTR-3B for a particular tax period, GSTN said in an advisory.

"To facilitate taxpayers in doing self-assessment, the new functionality of interest calculator is being released in GSTR-3B. This functionality will assist taxpayers in calculating the interest applicable for delayed filing of returns. Taxpayers will have to verify and discharge the correct interest liability as per law, as payment of interest is a statutory compliance," it said.

As per Goods and Services Tax law, 18 per cent interest is charged for failure to pay tax liability on time, while 24 per cent interest is levied for undue or excess claim of input tax credit (ITC) or reduction of output tax liability.

This functionality will be made available on the GST Portal shortly, the advisory said, adding it will improve ease in filing return.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said,"this change will enhance the user experience by affording them the necessary tools to compute precise interest liability and enable authorities in a timely collection."



Taxmen to give 'reasonable time' to biz to explain reasons for mismatch in GSTR-1, 3B before recovery action

New Delhi: Tax officers will give reasonable time to erring business to explain reasons for mismatch in turnover reported in sales return GSTR-1 and tax payment form 3B before initiating recovery action for short payment or non-payment of taxes.

Apex indirect tax body CBIC has issued guidelines on recovery proceedings and said that taxmen would give a "reasonable time" to businesses to explain the reasons for such mismatch.

As per the changes in the GST law effective January 1, GST officers were allowed to directly initiate recovery action against those errant businesses which showed higher sales in monthly return GSTR-1 but under-report it while tax payment in GSTR-3B. The move was aimed at curbing the menace of fake billing whereby sellers would show higher sales in GSTR-1 to enable a purchaser to claim an input tax credit (ITC) but report suppressed sales in GSTR-3B to lower GST liability.

So far, under the goods and services tax law, show-cause notices were first issued and then a recovery process was initiated in such cases of mismatch in GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B.

Following doubts raised by the trade and the field formations regarding modalities for initiation of the recovery proceedings, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on January 7 issued guidelines, saying that an opportunity needs to be provided to the concerned businesses for short payment or non-payment of the amount of self-assessed tax liability.

It noted that in some cases there may be a genuine reason for the difference between the details of outward supplies declared in GSTR-1 and those declared in GSTR-3B. Giving example, the CBIC said the GST law permits rectification of typographical errors or omissions in the GSTR-1 or GSTR-3B of a particular month, in the returns or tax payment forms of subsequent months. There may also be



cases, where a supply could not be declared by the registered person in GSTR-1 of an earlier tax period, though the tax on the same was paid by correctly reporting the said supply in GSTR-3B. The details of such supply may now be reported by the registered person in the GSTR-1 of the current tax period.

"In such cases, there could be a mismatch between GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B (liability reported in GSTR-1> tax paid in GSTR-3B) in the current tax period. "Therefore, in all such cases, an opportunity needs to be provided to the concerned registered person to explain the differences between GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B, if any, and for short payment or non-payment of the amount of self-assessed tax liability and interest thereon, before any action under Section 79 of the Act is taken for recovery of the said amount," the CBIC said.

Wherever any such amount of tax, self-assessed by the registered person in his outward supply statement GSTR-1 is found to be short paid or not paid through his GSTR-3B return, the tax officer would send a communication to pay the amount short paid or not paid or to explain the reasons for such short payment or non-payment of self-assessed tax, within a "reasonable time", as prescribed in the communication.

"If the concerned person is able to justify the differences between GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B, or is able to explain the reasons of such short-payment or non-payment of tax, to the satisfaction of the proper officer, or pays the amount such short paid or not paid, then there may not be any requirement to initiate proceedings for recovery under section 79," the CBIC said.**PTI**

Ex-RBI Governor Urjit Patel appointed VP of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Beijing: Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel has been appointed as a vice-president of the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a multilateral funding institution, according to sources in the bank on Sunday.

India is a founding member of AIIB with the second-highest voting share after China. It is headed by the former Chinese vice-minister for finance, Jin Lique.

Patel, 58, will be one of the five vice-presidents of the AIIB with a three-year tenure. He is expected to take over his posting next month.

He will succeed outgoing vice-president D.J. Pandian, who is in charge of sovereign and non-sovereign lending of the AIIB in South Asia, the Pacific Islands and South-East Asia, AIIB sources told PTI.

Pandian, who has previously served as the chief secretary of Gujarat, is set to return to India later this month.

Patel had taken over as the 24th governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) succeeding Raghuram Rajan on September

5, 2016.

Patel resigned in December 2018 on account of personal reasons, saying "I have decided to step down from my current position effective immediately".

Prior to taking over on September 6, 2016, he was a deputy governor overseeing the monetary policy department at the RBI under Rajan and was known as his inflation-warrior.

Patel has previously worked with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Boston Consulting Group and Reliance Industries among other organisations.

Patel's posting to AIIB is regarded as significant as India has emerged as its biggest beneficiary by obtaining USD 6.7 billion funding for 28 projects, Pandian said in his farewell luncheon interaction on Saturday.

Also, the AIIB along with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is processing a USD two-billion loan for India to purchase Covid-19 vaccines.

Of the USD two-billion loan, the Manila-based ADB is

expected to finance USD 1.5 billion and AIIB is considering providing USD 500 million.

The AIIB had recently granted a USD 356.67 million loan for the expansion of the Chennai metro rail system. It is also considering funding several other infrastructure projects for the development of Chennai city and its suburbs.

The bank has also funded the Bengaluru metro rail project. In his farewell interaction, Pandian sought to dispel the impression, especially in India, that the AIIB is a Chinese bank.

He said that the bank now has emerged as a multilateral bank becoming the lead financier of infrastructure projects in Asia.

Except for the United States and Japan, most of the developed and developing countries have joined the bank, he said.

A readout on AIIB official website said the bank is a multilateral development bank whose mission is financing the 'Infrastructure for Tomorrow' with sustainability at its core.

Agencies

CREDAI seeks tax sops to boost housing demand; hike in deduction limit on home loan interest

New Delhi: Realtors apex body CREDAI has sought various tax sops to boost housing demand, including increase in the deduction limit for interest on home loans to ₹5 lakh from the current ₹2 lakh.

In its Budget recommendations to the Finance Ministry, CREDAI which has around 13,000 developer members, has also sought infrastructure status for the sector and change in definition of affordable housing.

CREDAI's National President Harshvardhan Patodia expects the upcoming budget to give much-needed impetus to infrastructure development and housing by introducing various amendments, relaxations and extensions. "We urge the Finance Ministry to increase the interest deduction for homebuyers for tax rebate under section 24(B) to boost the overall home buying sentiment especially in these difficult times with the onset of the third wave," Patodia said.

CREDAI also demanded amendment to Section 80C under the Income Tax Act to increase limit for repayment of housing loan principal, reduction in income tax burden on rental housing and long-term capital gains on capital assets. On interest deduction on home loans, CREDAI said that "in case of individuals, the interest in respect of first self-occupied property should be allowed without any limit." Alternatively, the limit for deduction of interest should be increased to ₹5 lakh in respect of the self-occupied property, it added. CREDAI said the limit of ₹45 lakh on the value of property to qualify as affordable housing renders housing in metros ineligible for the benefits under Section 80 IBA, which promotes the development of such low cost homes.

The limit on value of the unit be raised to ₹75 lakh (for non-metro cities) and ₹1.50 crore (for metro cities), it said.

PTI

Jeep India positive about auto sector outlook; to launch new products in 2022

Mumbai: Jeep India, which posted a robust 130 per cent volume growth last year despite a bumpy ride due to the pandemic, is positive about the outlook for the domestic automobile industry and is set to launch new products this year.

Besides, it anticipates the market to grow further notwithstanding concerns over the impact of the Omicron variant, Jeep India Head Nipun Mahajan.

Driven by the facelift version of SUV Compass in February 2021 and the locally-assembled Wrangler; Jeep India sold 12,136 units in 2021 as compared to 5,282 units in 2020. This reflects a 130 per cent growth in its vehicle sales.

Jeep is a part of the portfolio of brands offered by leading and mobility provider Stellantis. Currently, Jeep brand has two products in its India portfolio - Compass and Wrangler. While it has been producing Compass at the Ranjangaon facility near Pune since June 2017, the company started locally-assembling of Wrangler from mid-March last year from the same facility.

"We are pretty positive on the outlook because of the market resilience. In the last 4-6 years, the market has gone through many ups and downs, adjusting to various factors but the bounce back is pretty good," Mahajan told PTI.

Consumer durables' prices to go up 5-10% as makers feel heat of rising input costs

New Delhi: Prices of air conditioners and refrigerators have shot up in the new year as consumer durables makers pass on the impact of rising raw material costs and higher freight charges to customers, while home appliances like washing machines may witness 5-10 per cent price hike later this month or by March.

Companies including Panasonic, LG, Haier have already reviewed prices upwards, while other makers such as Sony, Hitachi, Godrej Appliances may take a call by the end of this quarter.

According to the Consumer Electronics and Appliances Manufacturers Association (CEAMA), the industry make hike prices from January to March in the range of 5-7 per cent. "With an unprecedented surge in the cost of commodities, global freight and raw materials, we have taken steps to increase prices of our products by 3 to 5 per cent in the refrigerator, washing machines, and air conditioner categories," Haier Appliances India President Satish N S told PTI.

Panasonic, which has already increased prices up to 8 per cent for ACs, is considering hikes further. It is also mulling a similar move for home appliances.

"Air Conditioners have already seen a price hike of



around 8 per cent and this may further go up depending on rising costs of commodities and supply chain. We can also see a reflection of price hike for home appliances too in near future," said Panasonic India Divisional Director, Consumer Electronics Fumiyasu Fujimori. South Korean consumer electronics major LG, which has also increased prices in the home appliances category, said a constant hike in input raw material costs and logistics cost has been a concern.

"We have tried best to absorb the same through cost innovations but prices need to increase for business sustainability," said LG Electronics India Vice President, Home Appliances and Air Conditioner Business Deepak

Bansal.

Terming the price increase "inevitable", Johnson Controls-Hitachi Air Conditioning India Chairman and Managing Director Gurmeet Singh said brands will hike prices up to 10 per cent in phases by April on account of an increase in input costs including that of raw materials, taxes, and transportation.

"In a phased manner, up to April, prices will go up by at least 8-10 per cent. Prices have gone up from around the same time last year December to this year by nearly 6-7 per cent," he said adding "the onslaught of Cost Up is continuing and now with anti dumping duties being imposed on aluminium and refrigerants, we see another increase by 2-3 per cent".

Amazon moves NCLAT against CCI order suspending 2019 Future Coupons deal approval

New Delhi: Amazon has filed an appeal in the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal against the CCI order that suspended the over two-year-old approval for its deal with Future Coupons Pvt Ltd, according to sources.

In December, fair trade regulator Competition Commission of India (CCI) had suspended the 2019 approval for Amazon's deal to acquire a 49-per cent stake in Future Coupons Pvt Ltd (FCPL), Future Retail Ltd's promoter, while slapping a penalty of ₹202 crore on the e-commerce major.

Amazon and Future have been locked in a bitter legal tussle after the US e-commerce giant dragged Future Group to arbitration at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) in October 2020, arguing that FRL had violated their contract by entering into a deal for the sale of its assets to billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Retail on a

slump sale basis for ₹ 24,713 crore.

The NCLAT is an appellate authority for the orders passed by the CCI.

According to sources, Amazon has moved the NCLAT and filed an appeal against the CCI order that was passed last month.

Emails sent to Amazon and Future did not elicit any response. Last month, the CCI had suspended the Amazon-FCPL deal saying that the US e-commerce major had suppressed information while seeking clearances for the transaction back then.

In a 57-page order, the CCI had said the approval for the Amazon-Future Coupons deal "shall remain in abeyance".

Recently, Future Retail had also approached SIAC (Singapore International Arbitration Centre) to stay the arbitration proceedings based on the order passed by the CCI.

PTI

:: कार्यालय पुलिस अधीक्षक, जिला बालोद (छ.ग.) ::			
निविदा विज्ञप्ति क्रमांक-पुअ/बालोद/एसी-1/म-1/एम-52/2022			
बालोद दिनांक 05/01/2022			
:: अत्यकालीन निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना क्रमांक-02/2021-22 ::			
इकाई अंतर्गत निम्नलिखित निर्माण कार्य के लिए मुहरबंद निविदायें प्रपत्र-अ में सक्षम श्रेणी में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से दो लिफाफा पद्धति, जिसमें एक अमानत राशि व दूसरा निविदा प्रपत्र का लिफाफा होगा, निविदा पंजीकृत डाक/स्पीड पोस्ट द्वारा आमंत्रित की जाती है। कार्यालय पुलिस अधीक्षक, बालोद में निविदा हेतु उपस्थित निविदाकार या उनके अधिकृत प्रतिनिधि के समक्ष खोले जाने की प्रक्रिया प्रारंभ की जावेगी। उक्त तिथि को उपस्थित परिस्थिति में निविदा संबंधी कार्यवाही अगले कार्य दिवस को की जावेगी।			
(1) निविदा प्रपत्र विक्रय की अंतिम तिथि	:	25.01.2022 के अपराह्न 5.00 बजे तक	
(2) निविदा प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि	:	27.01.2022 के अपराह्न 5.00 बजे तक	
(3) निविदा खोले जाने की तिथि	:	28.01.2022 के 12.00 बजे से	
(4) निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य	:	750/- (बालान-0055 पुलिस, 800 अन्य प्राप्तिथी)	
(5) कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि	:	02 माह	
(6) ठेकेदार की श्रेणी/निविदा - आमंत्रण क्रमांक	:	"डी" एवं उच्च श्रेणी लोनिवि के श्रेणी के पात्रानुसार (प्रथम बार)	
(7) प्रभावी दर अनुसूची	:	लोटनिविदा द्वारा दिनांक 01 जनवरी 2015 को जारी भवन एसओआरआर में प्रवर्तित	
सं0	कार्य का नाम	अनुमानित लागत राशि (रु0 में)	घरोहर राशि
1	चौकी चिनकापार में 01 नग डबल स्टोरी बैरक निर्माण कार्य	19.4238,840.00	
नोट :- 1. निविदा संबंधी अन्य जानकारी/शर्त के लिए पुलिस अधीक्षक कार्यालय बालोद से सम्पर्क कर सकते हैं।			
हस्ता/			पुलिस अधीक्षक
Ro No. 66612/4			जिला बालोद (छ.ग.)
Ro Date. 07/01/2022			

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Home Finance

Registered office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051

Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059

Branch Office: Plot No.1, 1st floor, Sahyog Bhawan, Aerodrome Circle, Kota - 324007

Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company 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 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 Home Finance Company Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Choudhary Nawab Singh (Borrower), Mithlesh Kumari (Co- Borrower), LHKOT00001302968	16th Park Viewtower F 4th Floor Gaur Yamuna City Pocket 3 Mirzapur Site Secot 9 Yeida Yamuna Expressway Greater Noida No 3300 Noida Uttar Pradesh 201307. Bounded By- North: Details Not Mentioned, South: Details Not Mentioned, East: Details Not Mentioned , West: Details Not Mentioned. Date of Possession- 07-Jan-22	10-05-2021 Rs. 14,39,596/-	Kota- B

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 10, 2022

Place: Noida

Authorized Officer

ICICI Home Finance Company Limited



Bollywood
'I lost my best friend, the nicest and kindest man. Couldn't have asked for a better father.'
—Vishal Dadlani

ONCE IN A LIFETIME

TAHIR RAJ BHASIN opens up, about recreating history in 83 and the line of forthcoming projects he's looking forward to, in a candid conversation with KHUSHBU KIRTI

It is, indeed, a great start of the year for Bollywood star Tahir Raj Bhasin. The actor not only showed his acting prowess with the recently released 83, but also showcases a promising line-up of films and shows. Bhasin garnered a lot of appreciation for his role as the Little Master. From playing an antagonist in *Mardaani* and *Force 2*, he has embarked now on a romantic journey with his forthcoming lead roles. Read on for excerpts from an interview about his experience in 83 and more:

◆83 has been highly appreciated by audience. More so, because it evokes nostalgia of a great event in Indian cricket history.

Do you feel drawn to the history?
Yes, 100 per cent. I mean, the decision to do 83 was an emotional one. It wasn't an actor's decision. Only because of the nostalgic value. And when I read the script, I had goosebumps. And the thought that I had was that this is the feeling that it's going to leave the audience with. Do I want to be a part of the team that brought the audience that feeling? Of course.

When they said you're going to be Sunil Gavaskar, it was a no brainer. I definitely relate to the nostalgia, the wholesome feeling that the film leaves you with. And the fact that, you know, I wasn't born in 83, but I felt like I have grown up with it as a part of my history. So to be able to represent it for a whole new generation was just a once in a lifetime opportunity.

◆How was it acting in a period piece?

The first thing that you have to get used to when you're dealing with a period piece is the language. There are certain words that you don't use, there are certain mannerisms which are very modern. Now, technology has had a huge influence in how we connect, so you try and avoid those. And the challenge really, very deeply, was not only is it a period film, but you're recreating history.

So, you know that there are two things that this country is crazy about — one is film and the other one is cricket. And when you try and com-

bine both of them, there is going to be, you know, judgement there. There are going to be comparisons. The challenge is to overcome those.

◆This is the second time you play a cricketer after Kai Po Che. Do you have an affinity for the game and do you play?

No, you know, that's just an ironic coincidence. I'm not from a crick-eting background. In *Kai Po Che*, it was just one shot. So that was just like a one day shoot.

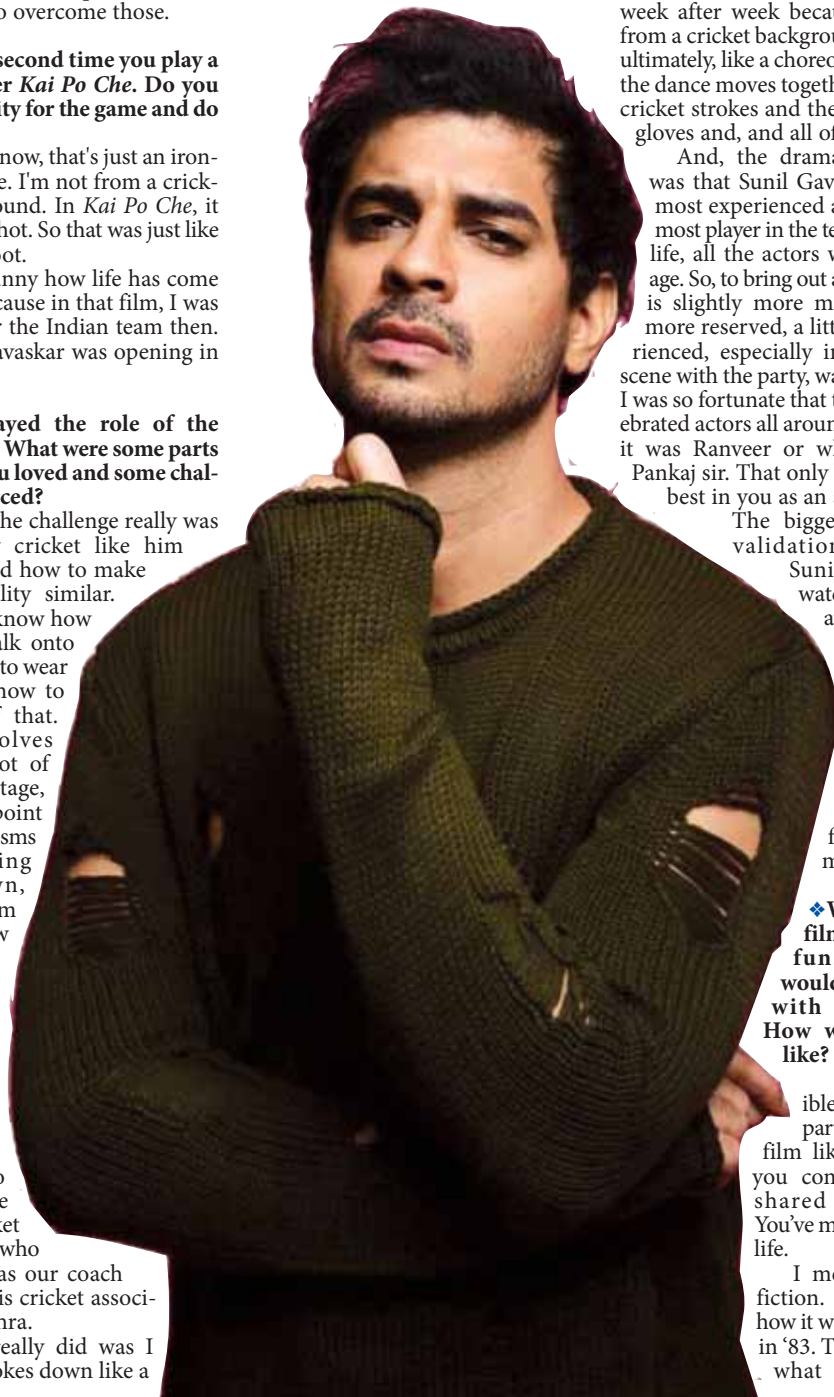
But it's funny how life has come full circle, because in that film, I was an opener for the Indian team then. And Sunil Gavaskar was opening in 83 (laughs).

◆You portrayed the role of the Little Master. What were some parts of the role you loved and some challenges you faced?

I'm sure the challenge really was how to play cricket like him (chuckles) and how to make your physicality similar. You need to know how to exactly walk onto the field, how to wear the gloves, how to smile, all of that. That involves watching a lot of archived footage, trying to pinpoint what mannerisms are breaking them down, watching them in slow motion.

And as far as the cricketing was concerned, we had Balwinder Singh Sandhu, who was part of the original cricket team in 1983, who was with us as our coach and he had his cricket associate, Rajiv Mehra.

What I really did was I broke the strokes down like a



sports choreography. One cricket stroke was broken down into four or five moves and I would practise that week after week because I was not from a cricket background. And then ultimately, like a choreography, put all the dance moves together and get the cricket strokes and the walk and the gloves and, and all of that, right.

And, the dramatic challenge was that Sunil Gavaskar was the most experienced and the senior most player in the team, but in real life, all the actors were the same age. So, to bring out a persona, who is slightly more mature, slightly more reserved, a little more experienced, especially in the conflict scene with the party, was challenging. I was so fortunate that there were celebrated actors all around me whether it was Ranveer or whether it was Pankaj sir. That only brings out the best in you as an actor.

The biggest reward or validation was when Sunil sir himself watched the film at the premiere. When I hugged him, he told me he saw himself in the part I played. And after that, no other feedback really mattered.

◆Watching the film was a lot of fun. The team would joke around with each other. How was shooting like?

It was incredible fun! The best part about doing a film like this is that you come back with shared memories. You've made a bond for life.

I mean, this isn't fiction. This is really how it was for the team in '83. That, no matter what the dynamic

was, whether they were winning or losing, when they were on field, they were all part of one team, and they were playing for India.

◆How real was all of this?

I'd say, all of it! The only dramatised aspect of the film was, you know, when you have music coming in, and when you put dramatised slow motion shots. But all of it, even the scene with the soldiers, the fact that there were riots going on in parts of the country, all of it is real. And I think, that's the great thing about having a director like Kabir Khan because he's so well researched with a subject and also to have such a large star cast and everyone is an established star in their own respective fields, to give each player and each moment its due time in the ensemble is really an act of genius.

◆Tell us about your new shows, Ranjish Hi Sahi on Voot Select and Ye Kaali Kaali Aankhein on Netflix, both releasing in January.

This is also a period drama, based in the 70s. It was created by Mahesh Bhatt and every time there's a Bhatt love story, he blurs the lines between what is and what is not socially acceptable. It's a love triangle between who the director, Shankar, is married to at the time and a diva.

I've also been blown away by the reaction that the audience had had towards *Ye Kaali Kaali Aankhein's* teaser. The series starts off as a romantic drama but progresses into a psychological thriller. Vikrant is the name of my character.

Entering into the love space is very exciting. It's a hat trick for romance with the above two and *Loop Lapeta* a little later in the year.

◆What is one difference you've felt working for OTT shows/films and theatre?

The great thing about OTT that it gives you the length to explore a character in a story more than a feature film.

To be able to jump genres like that in *Ye Kaali Kaali Aankhein* — that is incredible for the craft.

WEBBED



ETERNALS

Set in the aftermath of *Avengers: Endgame*, the Marvel movie follows a new superhero group — the Eternals, funnily enough — as they step up in the Avengers' absence and seek to avert another potentially world-ending disaster. The film starts premiering on January 12 on Disney+Hotstar.



PEACEMAKER

A spin-off series that takes place after James Gunn's soft reboot of *The Suicide Squad*, *Peacemaker* will explore the origins of John Cena's anti-heroic titular character, and follow the subsequent missions he undertakes for the secret US Government organisation known as Task Force X. The super-hero comedy drama will premiere on January 13 on HBO Max.



HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA: TRANSFORMANIA

Van Helsing's mysterious new invention transforms Drac and his pals into humans, and Johnny into a monster. With their new mismatched bodies, Drac and the pack must find a way to switch themselves back before their transformations become permanent. It will premiere on January 14 on Amazon Prime Video.

King of reality shows

PRINCE NARULA's latest web series, *Extreme Survivors*, directed by SHARAD CHAUDHARY, is making all the buzz

The season for new reality shows, events and web series seems to have become a rage, especially amidst these times, where people love to binge-watch shows and web series at their convenience from the confines of their homes.

This is definitely the new trend, which picked up pace after almost everything moved digital. Newer times need newer solutions to everything, including media and entertainment, which is why producers and directors are leaving no stone unturned to make sure they create content, which can compel people to watch it and be highly engaged with it.

One such web series has been released online named *Extreme Survivors*, which features the TV personality Prince Narula as the host, wrestler Anuj Chaudhary and *Roadies* fame Kashish Thakur. The web series has been directed and produced by Sharad Chaudhary, also a casting director and entertainment entrepreneur.

Extreme Survivors is making all the buzz for all the right reasons, for the kind of entertainment it promises to audiences who love adventure and high-octane stunts and tasks. Chaudhary thinks it was high time to offer audiences something refreshing and new, and that's how they came up with the idea of the reality show. VIPs Entertainment and Production has presented the same. Narula was roped in to manage the hats of the host and mentor, along with Hritu Zee as the co-host.

(*Extreme Survivors Season 1* is available online with the TV and movie app named VIS Entertainment.)



In the last year we have witnessed a significant shift within our community. Being an extramarital dating app, Gleeden is mostly used by individuals who are married or in a long-term relationship seeking for adding some spice into their love lives, being this either a real-life affair or just a virtual flirt. And even though the majority of users continue to belong to this profile type, not necessarily they are doing it without the consent of their partners. According to one of our latest studies, 55 per cent of users believe that monogamy is a social construct and over 47 per cent among them have opened up with the consent of their partners. This means that the couple have decided to grant each other (together or separately) the possibility of straying away. These adventures are meant to be short-term and not to undermine the existing relationship.

Privacy as a luxury good

Another trend that we have been witnessing within the users is the increase of singles using extramarital dating apps.

Last year, the application witnessed an increase in the number of single users. People who were once married or in a long-term relationship that have now changed their marital status to 'divorced', 'separated' or 'single' and wish to go back to dating without everybody in their circles knowing it.

After being locked down for months with the family, privacy has become a luxury good that people are now valuing more than ever. Not necessarily because they are doing something forbidden or frowned-upon by the society, but simply because in an era where everybody noses into each other's businesses through social

FUTURE DATING TRENDS

TEAM VIVA discusses the end of monogamy as we know it and the rise of open relationships



media, the privacy of doing something and keeping it private has become more and more important, especially when it comes to something as sensitive and personal as dating.

The lockdown-induced several restrictions and other public health measures taken amid the global health crisis have, certainly, accelerated the shift towards online dating. Earlier, it was restricted to physical means only, however, recent times have made way for dating virtually. Getting the opportunity to meet new people on the romantic front from the solace of one's house is, positively, a welcome choice for the generation who inclines more towards instant gratification.

Here are a few notable findings from a recent survey of dating trends for this year by QuackQuack:

Online dating a stress buster for singles

People lost the probability of meeting, rather running into their potential partners during the first wave of the pandemic. Consequently, the loss and loneliness in the lives of the individuals fueled a longing to find ways to connect more, relieve stress and come together even if it is behind screens, thus, there could be witnessed a surge in the numbers of users of online dating apps. According to the survey, a growing number of people, especially singles, are utilising the opportunity of getting to know someone closely before taking things forward physically, owing to the help of dating apps. This helps save time, energy, resources as well as proves to be a real stress-

buster for them in times of stress.

As per the report, nearly 73 per cent of single respondents will always see virtual dating as a low-pressure way to sow seeds of love for someone when compared to dating traditionally. While 75 per cent say that it can be a real stressbuster, approximately 61 per cent feel that it is much easier to make connections online, thereby, boosting relationships. Usage of dating apps is much higher, around 20 per cent per cent, among people who suffer from social anxiety or who are simply introverts. Online dating basically solves a problem of loneliness that happens to be compounded, especially now more than ever, due to the lethal variants of the Covid-19 virus. It wouldn't be wrong to state that dating platforms are significant tools for building relationships in times of crisis.

Virtual is where we live

Many a times, not surprisingly, one may not feel like heading out for a date and blowing cash on a fancy cocktail, even if it means finding 'the one'. The period of lockdown, certainly, brought inundation of online dates, and a solid number of daters are wanting to bring them into post-pandemic life as well, primarily due to the convenience associated with it. Over 51 per cent of users feel that they will probably continue virtual dating even after they'd be able to meet up safely, which, perhaps, perfectly makes sense. Online dating offers individuals a golden opportunity to vibe-check a match without having to leave their comfort zones. They

can do a simple screening without even investing much efforts as well as money that a traditional first date often requires. When it comes to building a new relationship, online dating puts the users firmly in the driving seat. They decide who they'd like to meet to build further connections with. One of its benefits is that individuals get to understand the other person better even before interacting with them in reality. Therefore, a whopping number, around 73 per cent of people believe that the future of online dating looks promising. It is, indeed, here to stay as virtual is the new reality today.

Long distance matches are in

With most people now working from their hometowns and people spreading out, we're seeing users expand their match criteria and search for matches pan-India. Three out of five women are expanding their match criteria to other cities as well. In a survey conducted, 60 per cent users are okay with matches from other cities as well.

Friendship is the new dating

The pandemic has surprisingly given a new vibe to dating apps. While there are people looking for serious and casual dates, more people are now using dating apps to find and make new friends. Friendships are somewhere in between casual and serious dating and this gives immense opportunity for singles to chat, interact and build healthy relationships while not actually dating. 43 per cent women and 35 per cent men who were surveyed said they joined the app because they wanted to make new friends. This new-found love for make new friends on dating apps is bound to grow as we go into 2022.

TRENDBLAZER



PICKING PROJECTS FROM THE HEART

Actress **VAANI KAPOOR**, who will be next seen in *Shamshera*, says she never chooses films thinking that she would win awards for them, but picks them from her heart.

Kapoor shared, "I have always chosen projects from my heart and that's why I'm fortunate that I have films like *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* in my filmography."

"It is rare to find a project that can consume you, dissolve you on screen to become someone like Maanvi. She is an idea and an ideal for the world and I'm blessed that I got to play this character with all my heart and soul," she added.

fairtalk

RAM CHARAN



'The aspect of star value is only to bring the masses to the theatres. Post that the story takes over, that has the responsibility to talk and make the audience sit in the theatre. Every film has its own role to play the business part of the entire industry but these (big releases) are the films that bring glory back to the theatres. Not differentiating between the OTT films or theatre films but on the whole all these (spectacle) films have their own part to play.'

dailytalk

HASAN ZAIDI



'I am not dissatisfied about how my career is going but yes, I want to be part of good projects and stories. I want to work more but never want to be over-worked. I want to have my time off to be able to disconnect from one project and move to the next good one. Over the years, I feel grateful to have become somebody who, somewhere, is regarded as somebody who can deliver.'

STEWART READY FOR HER D-DAY

Actress **KRISTEN STEWART** who got engaged to her girlfriend Dylan Meyer in November after being together for two years together, said she was unsure how many 'traditions' they will follow on their big day, she's already chosen her clothes but wants to keep the details a surprise.

She expressed, "Traditionally speaking, I don't even know detail-wise, I don't know how many traditions we're going to follow." Stewart will be appearing as Princess Diana in *Spencer* which she says was 'such a trip' and a very unique role.



SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

RUBY SARKAR recounts BHURI BAI's transformation from a construction worker to an artist in Madhya Pradesh



Back in the 80s, Bhuri Bai, along with her husband and other members from her village, worked as labourers in the construction of Bharat Bhavan — a multi-art complex — founded in 1982 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Often, during breaks, she and several members of the group painted on the spare bricks and stones as their favourite pass time. At the construction site, Jagdish Swaminathan — an artist, painter, poet and writer — who played an important role in the establishment of the Bharat Bhawan, came across their beautiful paintings. Propelled by their art, he asked them to illustrate the customs of their community through painting.

As the Bhil community decorated their clay walled houses with beauti-



ful paintings, Bhuri and others from the community took this chance and created some outstanding pieces. Initially, they received ₹10 in cash for the work. Impressed by Bhuri's paintings, Swaminathan encouraged her to make more and set her on a path to begin her life as a professional artist. Once, she received ₹1,500 for each of the 10 paintings. The amount was larger than what she had earned while working as a daily wage labourer for years. From this point, there was no turning back for Bhuri.

"I could not believe that someone would pay me so much money just to sit comfortably and paint," she expressed. This first woman artist from the Bhil community was born in Pitol village in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. Recently, in 2021, she received the Padma Shri award, the fourth highest civilian award in India. This brilliant artist, who depicts the culture of the Bhil tribe on walls and canvas, has been honoured with several state and national awards.

Bhuri's paintings are highly influenced by her surroundings and her life journey. "While painting, I feel a deep sense of gratitude towards so many types of grains and plants that grow on earth. Painting these gives me a feeling of worshipping the new grains as my parents did when I was young," she said and added, "Since childhood, on the occasion of a festival or a marriage, I made stamps on the wall of the house by dipping my fist in white clay, which is called *sarkala*."

Bhuri had a tough childhood. Her parents had very little land for agriculture and it was difficult to survive. Soon, Bhuri, along with her elder sister, started going to their land-

lord's field for weeding. "The landlord would give us a rupee for weeding the whole day. But work at the landlord's field was also not always available," she informed.

Most of the time, both the sisters accumulated peepul leaves and dried twigs from the forest and took that bundle to Dahod in Gujarat and sold it at ₹ two a kilo. They would reach Dahod by catching the Sabarmati Express at 11 in the morning from the Anas railway station, approximately four to five kilometres from the village, and would return to Anas after catching the same train from Dahod in the evening.

"We worked very hard to meet the expenses of our household. We were struggling to arrange even two meals a day," said Bhuri. To run the household, her father would arrange the necessities on credit from a businessman's shop in Pitol. The loan that could never be settled. As a way of paying back, Bhuri's father agreed to go to Dahod to work on the construction of the house to be built for the businessman's younger brother. He took both, Bhuri and her elder sister, along with him to work. "After shifting to Dahod, we got involved in construction work and, in the meantime, I got married at 16. Soon after marriage, I moved to Bhopal with my husband, Johar Singh, who was also a daily wage labourer," she said.

This shift proved to be momentous as she was engaged in the construction of Bharat Bhavan along with her husband. Bhuri is a source of motivation for lakhs of tribal artists. Once a wage labourer, today she gets invitations to showcase her paintings across the world.

—Charkha Features



SPREAD THE LIGHT OF LOVE

Wishing for a world bonded by unity and harmony is not utopian, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

It is rightly said that 'Love makes the world go round'. Isn't it true that without love, our lives seem dry and empty? Without it, we can neither see the beauty in creation nor can we find our inner beauty. After all, love is what we are all about. That is why Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said that 'Where there is love, there is life'. The deep-seated human desire to love and to be loved lies at the core of all emotions and dictates the world around us. It is the wish to experience this pure exchange that drives people to raise families, be part of social circles and connect with others. The same intention has also given birth to modern means of communication, a bombardment in online interaction through email and social networking sites. And yet in this age of communication, we see a parallel reverse trend dominating our social scene. This is manifested in disintegration leading to the formation of nuclear families that are the norm today as it is increasingly becoming difficult for people to manage the bonds of relationships that our elders have been managing for generations. Off late, even these small units are breaking apart as parents and children and life partners are struggling to adjust with each other. The reason? Everyone needs their own space. That's why today we see an increasing number of ugly divorces resulting in more and more families being run by single parents.

Everyday conflicts and differences of opinion lead people to a deadlock of emotions, compelling them to escape to a space of their own, despite their intrinsic desire to come together. But the bitter taste of unpleasant memories makes it hard for them to patch up, brewing anger and hatred in interpersonal relations and drifting away further. A ruling sense of fear thus keeps people far away from associating with others or trusting in relationships in their onward journey. As a result, the earth is becoming a cluster of islands, all longing to be together, yet unwilling or powerless to do so. In such a scenario isn't it a utopian wish to want a world bonded by unity and harmony? Is it ever possible to restore the human family like it was before? Yes, all we need to do is to restore the basic link that binds us, that which has gone amiss. That bond is love.

Remember, to build bridges inside we need to unblock the flow of love between us. We must earnestly strive to let go of the past, which often resists this flow. For this, we need to sit in silence at the end of each day and cleanse our consciousness of any bitter feelings that may have settled during the day and go to our beds only when we are done with cleansing and are light.

Is it as easy as it sounds? Yes. But one should understand that the cleansing can only take place in soul consciousness i.e. when we look at ourselves as souls and others as our brothers-sisters, children of the same Supreme. This consciousness and thought approach will make it easy for us to forgive, forget and be merciful with others. We must realise that benevolent wishes smoothen our relationships and set a positive environment, even before we embark on any form of communication in word or action. Hence, we must train our minds to give to the world good wishes of peace, love and happiness.

In these trying times, where each one of us is facing some or the other tragedy, it would be practical if we all fix a few minutes each day to mentally send out these positive vibrations and touch every member of the human family with them. The perennial gush of pure feelings is capable of washing away any negative feelings in its way, however dominant they may be. Wherever this spring of love blooms, flowers of acceptance, understanding, sacrifice, detachment and freedom bloom along and weeds of jealousy, hatred and revenge gradually wither away. And as the infectious spring spreads from one to the other; the dark jungle that is earth will slowly be transformed into the garden of flowers (Paradise) where everyone will live as one big warm family. So, let us all spread the light of love and heal the world from the wounds of hatred and negativity.



The pandemic has given rise to a wave of toxic positivity, an excessive overgeneralisation of happiness in any given situation that has made reassuring platitudes almost inescapable. In the last few months, data suggests that anxiety and depression along with other mental health problems have surged to historic levels. Adding toxic positivity to the mix may only exacerbate the rising tide of negative emotion around us. The sudden enormous sweep of face-tuned picture-perfect posts, positive messages, reels, videos and live broadcasts on social media are making everyone feel the need to be happy all the time irrespective of experiencing the highest or lowest of lows in life.

THE DARK SIDE OF POSITIVE VIBES

The idea of positivity is so deeply rooted in our culture that real human experiences are silenced through an unreasonable desire to be always positive. Injecting minds — that are already dealing with anxiety, fear and more — with an overdose of positivity through social media can make us believe that any feeling other than happiness isn't valid at all. It cannot be denied that a positive outlook towards life is good for the overall mental well-being. But the

The toxic positivity trap

The excessive need to see the bright side of life even while experiencing lows can prove to be injurious to your mental health, says KANCHAN RAI



idea of the need to maintain a level of happiness, and not feel any flipside emotions, is highly toxic.

Further, denying truth leads to an illusionary world that is a sham. It results in losing connection with ourselves as well as



making it difficult for others to connect and relate to us. Hiding true feelings, dismissing an emotion, feeling guilty for your emotions, shaming others for expressing anything other than positivity and more, could be signs of toxic positivity. It places unexplainable stress on the importance of optimism and denies any trace of human emotions that aren't happy or positive.

ESCAPING THE TOXIC TRAP

To avoid the toxic trap, it is always important to know that while you are consuming someone's social media feed, you are just witnessing one side of the coin. What we see on social media is not always the whole picture as people want to put their best foot forward there. If someone's posts are taking a toll on your mental and physical well-being, unfollow. It's hard to identify the moment positivity turns toxic. Be aware of how much time you're spending on social media platforms. If you've seen too many filtered images of joy in a day, pause.

Write about how you feel. Seeing things on paper help us reach a more logical, rational perspective and get an insight. It is believed that when ideas are translated into a language, it can help to diminish self-defeating voices.

Healthy positivity is about leaving adequate space for negative emotions and being com-

fortable with them. The attempt to escape or mute the negative and chase happiness can backfire in more than one way. Seek wellness therapies. Remember, it takes courage to recognise your true feelings. It may take time, but it will build your muscle to resilience and authenticity and give you true identity.

TOWARDS A ROBUST EMOTIONAL LIFE

Many psychological studies suggest that suppressed emotions can later result in anxiety, depression and even physical illness. It's important to acknowledge the reality of our emotions openly and honestly to embrace all of ourselves, be it good, bad or ugly.

Reach out to a qualified mental health professional who can help you open the floodgates, think through, and discover solutions by examining your challenges. Emotions are to be dealt with and not buried down in oneself. Last, remember, by insisting on the monochromatic idea of being happy all the time, we are not only hurting ourselves but also the people around us, whom we care for.

(The author is the founder of Let Us Talk and a mental and emotional well-being coach.)

EXERCISE CAN PROTECT AGING SYNAPSES

When elderly people stay active, their brains have more of a class of proteins that enhances the connections between neurons to maintain healthy cognition, a UC San Francisco study has found.

This protective impact was found even in people whose brains at autopsy were riddled with toxic proteins associated with Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases.

"Our work is the first that uses human data to show that synaptic protein regulation is related to physical activity and may drive the beneficial cognitive outcomes we see," said Kaitlin Casaletto, PhD and lead author on the study, which appears in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*.

The beneficial effects of physical activity on cognition have been shown in mice but have been much harder to demonstrate in people.



BEST TIME FOR VAX DURING PREGNANCY IS NOW

COVID-19 vaccination of expectant mothers elicits levels of antibodies to the SARS-CoV-2 outer 'spike' protein at the time of delivery that don't vary dramatically with the timing of vaccination during pregnancy, thus, don't justify the delay in vaccination, according to a study from researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine and NewYork-Presbyterian.

The researchers, whose study was published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, analysed how anti-spike antibody levels in the mother's blood and baby's umbilical cord blood at delivery varied with the timing of prior vaccination in nearly 1,400 women and their babies.

They found that the levels of these antibodies at delivery tended to be higher when the initial vaccination course occurred in the third trimester. However, they also found that antibody levels at delivery are still comparably high, and probably still protective, when vaccination occurs in early pregnancy or even a few weeks before pregnancy — and a booster shot late in pregnancy can make those antibody levels much higher.



TEENS EAT MORE CARBS DUE TO POOR SLEEP

Sleep is vital for all but is particularly important for teenagers as their bodies undergo significant development during their formative years. Unfortunately, most teens aren't getting enough sleep. Data from the American Academy of Pediatrics found that 73 per cent of high school students are getting less than the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep each night.

Prior research has linked lack of sleep to increased risk for poor mental health, poor academic performance, and behavioural problems. But new research says insufficient sleep also increases the risk of weight gain and other cardiometabolic diseases among teenagers because teens have worse dietary habits when they sleep less.

"Shortened sleep increases the risk for teens to eat more carbs and added sugars and drink more sugar-sweetened beverages than when they are getting a healthy amount of sleep," stated Dr Kara Duraccio, BYU clinical and developmental psychology professor and lead author of the study.



MARIJUANA USERS AT RISK DURING STROKE

Among people with an aneurysmal subarachnoid hemorrhage (aSAH) stroke, a type of bleeding stroke, recent marijuana users were more than twice as likely to develop a dangerous complication that can result in death or greater disability, according to new research published in *Stroke*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Stroke Association, American Heart Association.

The study examines the impact of THC or Tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive component (change of a person's mental state) of marijuana on complications after an aneurysmal subarachnoid hemorrhage (a rare but severe form of stroke).

"We're all vulnerable to a bleeding stroke or a ruptured aneurysm, however, if you're a routine marijuana user, you may be predisposed to a worse outcome from a stroke after the rupture of that aneurysm," said Michael T Lawton.



CELL-REPROGRAMMING FOR HEART FAILURE

Not too long ago the idea of taking, for instance, a skin cell and transforming it into a muscle cell was unthinkable. About 10 years ago, however, revolutionary research showed that it is indeed possible to reprogram differentiated adult cells into other types fully capable of conducting new functions.

Cell reprogramming is a main interest of the lab of Dr Todd Rosengart whose research focuses on finding innovative therapeutic approaches for heart failure.

Researchers have succeeded at reprogramming fibroblasts from small animals to become heart muscle, with dramatic improvements in heart function. The challenge has been to apply this technology to human cells — human fibroblasts are more resistant to reprogramming. In this study, Rosengart and his colleagues explored a novel strategy to enhance the reprogramming efficiency of human fibroblasts.



ENG CLINGS ON FOR A DRAW IN 4TH ASHES TEST

AP ■ SYDNEY

England's tailenders resisted Australia's bowlers in fading light Sunday to clinch a draw on a dramatic final day of the fourth Test in fading light at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Jack Leach, Stuart Broad and then Jimmy Anderson batted out the final 10 overs under immense pressure, after Pat Cummins and Scott Boland took three quick wickets in the final session before Steve Smith removed Leach with two overs remaining to set up a nervous finale to a gripping test match.

At stumps, England finished 270-9 with Broad unbeaten on eight and Anderson not out on zero to give England its best result of the five-match series which Australia leads 3-0.

With the final hour approaching, Cummins removed Jos Buttler and Mark Wood in the space of three balls to turn the test on its head after it was looking increasingly likely that England would earn a draw after its most determined batting effort of the series.

Scott Boland then continued his incredible start to test cricket by having first-innings centurion Jonny Bairstow caught at bat pad by Marnus Labuschagne for 41. It was Boland's 14th wicket in just his second test after making his test debut at Melbourne's 3rd test where he was named man of the match.

But Broad and Leach saw out the remaining 10 overs despite Australia have all its fielders around the bat in catching positions as the fading light meant Australia had to bowl spinners



Nathan Lyon and Steve Smith in the final three overs.

Earlier in the session, Stokes, no stranger in proving to be an immovable object for Australia after his heroics in the 2019 Ashes series in England, did not appear to let the pain of his left side injury curtail his attacking shots as he crushed ten boundaries and a six as part

of his 60 runs, to go with his 66 in the first innings.

But Lyon eventually made the vital breakthrough as he caught Stokes in two minds as to whether play at the ball or leave it. In the end he did neither and guided a simple chance to Steve Smith at slip.

It was the ninth time that Lyon has

taken Stokes' wicket, including twice in this match.

As the final hour loomed, Cummins (2-80) made a big breakthrough trapping Jos Buttler lbw for 11. On-field umpire Paul Reiffel initially rejected the appeal before Cummins referred to the TV umpire, who reversed the decision.

Two balls later Cummins dismissed Wood with a vicious in-swinging delivery that hit the tail-ender on the foot for a much easier lbw decision for Reiffel to confirm.

Boland then had Bairstow caught at bat pad to expose England's tail, but Leach and Broad and then Anderson found a way to survive despite up to nine fielders in close catching positions.

Before tea, Joe Root and Stokes combined for a 60-run partnership from 26 overs before Scott Boland had the English skipper edging through to wicketkeeper Alex Carey for 24 to give Australia renewed optimism it may be able to bowl England out.

Needing to bat out the day to draw the Test after being set an improbable 388 to win, the tourists lost a very defensive-minded Hameed (9) and Malan (4) in the morning session, but Zak Crawley decided that attack was the best form of defense as he unleashed eight boundaries on his way to a 69-ball half-century.

Hameed was dropped by Carey off Pat Cummins, but only survived a few overs more as he again edged through to Carey, who made the catch, to give Scott Boland yet another wicket in his bright start in test cricket.

Lyon (2-28) was introduced into the attack and in his third over found a way through Malan's defenses to have England at 74-2 after the first hour of play.

Crawley's enterprising innings was halted at 77 after 13 boundaries when Cameron Green (1-38) captured the 23-year-old opener leg before wicket.



All eyes on Yuki, Ramkumar at Australian Open qualifiers

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India will keenly watch Yuki Bhambri's progress after his return to competitive tennis at the Australian Open Qualifiers while compatriot Ramkumar Ramanathan will enter the competition after a confidence-boosting maiden title triumph on the ATP Tour.

Bhambri, 29, lost invaluable three years due to a troubling knee but in a few tournaments that he has played going into the fresh season, the talented Delhi player seems ready for the grind yet again.

The close fight he had had against Aljaz Bedene in March was a testimony that he is ready for top flight tennis but his return came to halt again due to the same knee issue.

He began again in November, competing on the Challenger and ITF circuit and won a doubles titles with Saketh Myneni in Gurugram.

In the tune-up event for the first Grand Slam, Yuki tied up with old partner Michael Venus but lost first round in Melbourne at the ATP event.

He has got a decent draw as he has been pitted against Portugal's Joao Domingues, ranked 248 and clearing first round should not be an issue for Yuki. A good show at Melbourne Park will set the tone for him in the 2022 season.

In 22 attempts so far, Ramkumar has not yet succeeded in cracking the singles main draw of a Grand Slam and it's time that he breaks the losing trend. He will be up against Italian Gian Moroni, ranked 197.

Ramkumar has enjoyed fantastic results going into Australian Open.

Kohli hits nets, could return for decisive third Test against SA

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India Test captain Virat Kohli hit the nets on Sunday and if his cover drives and off drives were any indication, he could return for the decisive third match against South Africa after missing the second game due to a back spasm.

The Indian team began training for the third and final Test hoping to recover from the defeat in Johannesburg and claim its maiden series win in the Rainbow Nation.

"We are here at the picturesque Cape Town. #TeamIndia begin preparations for the 3rd Test," the BCCI tweeted along with a picture of the Indian camp after the visiting players hit the ground running at the magnificent Newlands Stadium.



The third Test is scheduled to be played here from January 11-15.

If Kohli is declared match fit, Hanuma Vihari will make way for the Indian talisman.

"It's GO time here in Cape Town. #TeamIndia all set and prepping for the series decider," the BCCI wrote in another tweet alongside a host of pictures including Kohli batting at the nets.

Seeking to win their first-ever series on South African soil, India began the rubber on a rousing note, winning the opener at Centurion by 113 runs before succumbing to a seven-wicket defeat in the second Test at Johannesburg.

The Indian team arrived at Cape Town on Saturday. The visitors were without the services of Kohli at the Wanderers but after the game, head coach Rahul Dravid had said he was hopeful of the captain returning for the series-deciding match.

Kohli had missed the previous Test due to an upper back spasm, leading to the elevation of vice-captain KL Rahul to the top job. "Virat Kohli should be fine from all accounts, he should be fine.

He has had the opportunity to run around a little bit, he has had the opportunity to test it a little bit," Dravid had said during a virtual press conference. "Hopefully with a couple of net sessions in Cape Town, he should be good to go. Everything I am hearing and just having a chat with him, he should be good to go in four days time."

BCCI MAY CONSIDER REDUCING VENUES

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rapidly rising COVID-19 cases across the country may force the BCCI to reduce the number of venues for the upcoming white-ball series against the West Indies but the cricket body has not yet formally discussed options.

The third wave of coronavirus is fast gripping the country and several states have introduced curbs, including weekend lockdowns, to prevent the spread of infection.

India will host West Indies for six white-ball games -- three ODIs and as many T20Is -- at six venues, starting with the first 50-over match at Ahmedabad on February 6.

"Nothing has been decided as of now. This is a fluid situation and we are keeping an eye on the situation, and we will take a call at appropriate time," a senior BCCI official told PTI.

Apart from Ahmedabad, the other venues which are scheduled to host the matches are Jaipur (February 9), Kolkata (February 12), Cuttack (February 15) Visakhapatnam (February 18) and Thiruvananthapuram (February 20). Given the current COVID situation in the country, the Board might look to host the six games at three centres to avoid too much travelling as it might make the players vulnerable to infections.

The West Indies team is scheduled to undergo a three-day isolation after landing in Ahmedabad on February 1. There will be practice sessions on February 4 and 5 before the action begins with the first ODI at Motera on February 6. The BCCI was recently forced to postpone major domestic tournaments including Ranji Trophy and the Col CK Naidu Trophy due to a surge in COVID-19 cases across the country.

Captain's knock: Latham's 186 leads NZealand vs Bangladesh

AP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand promised to bounce back quickly from its first-test loss to Bangladesh and captain Tom Latham redeemed the pledge with a commanding unbeaten century Sunday on the first day of the second Test.

Latham lost the toss for the sixth time while standing in as captain for Kane Williamson and had to bat on a disconcertingly green pitch at Hagley Oval. By stumps he was 186 not out and with the help of a half century to Will Young and Devon Conway, who faced a nervous night on 99 not out, New Zealand was 349-1. "I'm a bit nervous naturally but I'll try to take a



sleeping tablet to help me go to bed and reassess tomorrow," Conway said. "It was special today, considering the fact after we lost the toss.

I think both teams wanted to bowl first. The way Tom Latham and Will Young went

about their work was really special and Tom was outstanding to bat throughout the day and I was just grateful to bat beside him." Bangladesh's shock win in the first test thrilled the cricket world.

Djokovic detention draws focus to Australia's asylum-seekers

AP ■ SYDNEY

Novak Djokovic spent a fourth day on Sunday among the unwilling occupants of Melbourne's Park Hotel.

The tennis superstar is awaiting court proceedings on Monday that will determine whether he can defend his Australian Open title or whether he will be deported — and the world has shown keen interest in his temporary accommodation.

His fellow residents in the immigration detention hotel include refugees and asylum-seekers who are challenging their own proceedings that have all lasted much longer than Djokovic's. So long in some cases they feel forgotten.

Djokovic's mere presence at the hotel, a squat and unattractive building on the leafy fringe of the city's downtown, has drawn the world's eyes to those other residents and their ongoing struggles with the Australian immigration system.



Refugee activists have been quick to capitalize on the media attention as one of the world's most feted athletes shares the hotel and its sparse amenities with some of the world's most vulnerable and dispossessed people.

Djokovic was denied entry at the Melbourne airport late

Wednesday after border officials canceled his visa for failing to meet its entry requirement that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

His lawyers filed court papers Saturday challenging the deportation that show Djokovic tested positive for COVID-19 last month

and recovered, grounds he used in applying for a medical exemption to the country's strict vaccination rules. A decision on his appeal is expected Monday.

Renata Voracova, a 38-year-old Czech doubles player, was detained in the same hotel over a vaccine dispute before leaving Australia on Saturday.

The Park Hotel was once a thriving tourist hotel, popular for its central location near Melbourne's network of trams and across the road from the home ground of the Carlton Australian Rules Football Club.

But for the past two years it has often been referred to as the "notorious" or "infamous" Park Hotel. At the outbreak of the pandemic it was a quarantine hotel for Australians returning from overseas and reportedly a source of a delta-variant outbreak that swept Melbourne and forced the city into months of lockdown while claiming hundreds of lives.

England shuttlers pull out of India Open badminton

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The entire England badminton contingent has withdrawn from the upcoming India Open after the country's doubles specialist Sean Vandy and coach Nathan Robertson tested positive for the COVID-19.

England's decision to pull out was made public by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Sunday. The organisers, however, said that COVID tests of all players conducted this morning at the team hotel came out negative.

Entire @BadmintonEngland team had withdrawn



two days back and they are not here in India. #YonexSunriseIndiaOpen2022 is on track and all players who were tested at the hotel this morning as per protocol have come negative," the BAI tweeted. Vandy's men's doubles partner, Ben Lane, too confirmed the development with a Twitter post. "No India Open this year for myself and @SeanVandy after he returned a positive covid test along with our coach @Nath_Robertson," Lane tweeted.

Benzema, Vinícius net braces in Madrid rout; Barcelona draws

AP ■ BARCELONA

Karim Benzema and Vinícius Júnior each scored a brace of goals as Real Madrid beat Valencia 4-1 and extended its lead of the Spanish league.

Madrid increased its lead over second-placed Sevilla to eight points before it plays Getafe on Sunday.

Benzema converted a penalty earned by Casemiro just before half-time on Saturday to reach 300 career goals for Madrid. He helped set up Vinícius to double the lead in the 52nd minute after the Brazilian winger slalomed past several defenders. Shortly after, Vinícius finished off a rebound for the third.

After Goncalo Guedes pulled one back for Valencia, Benzema took his league-leading tally to 17.

Carlo Ancelotti's side missed Vinícius' verve last weekend in a shock loss to Getafe. Vinícius was sitting out the first of two games

after testing positive for COVID-19.

Against Valencia, the forward again showed why he is a big reason Madrid is on course to reclaim the league title from Atlético Madrid.

Vinícius has developed the finishing touch and decision making — to go with the quickness and dribbling skill he showed when he arrived at Madrid as a teenager — to become the competition's break-out player.

All his talents were there in his first goal.

With four defenders in his path, Vinícius took them on. He blew past two, exchanged quick passes with Benzema, and slipped the ball past the last two men before beating the hapless Jasper Cillessen.

His next goal was his 11th, leaving him behind only Benzema on the league's scoring list.

Benzema added a second goal with two minutes to play when he received the ball, spun and drilled



a low strike into the corner.

"I have always felt good with Vinícius. I know his potential and that he can do even more," Benzema said after his 301st goal for Madrid.

"It is a source of pride to reach such numbers with this club, which I think is the best in the world."

BARCELONA HELD

Ten-man Barcelona conceded a late goal to draw at Granada 1-1 after Dani Alves set up the opener in his first league match since returning to the club.

The 38-year-old Alves curled in a long ball for Luuk de Jong to steer home with a header in the 57th.

But Granada poured forward after teenager Gavi Páez got his second booking with 10 minutes left. Antonio Puertas scored the 89th-minute equalizer with Barcelona hemmed in in its box.

Alves, who helped Barcelona win 23 titles from 2008-16, started his second stint on Wednesday as third-tier side Linares was beaten 2-

1 in the Copa del Rey.

Barcelona was left in sixth place after missing the chance to climb into third and the Champions League spots.

FINALLY, A WIN

It took Levante 20 matches, but it finally got its first win of the season.

Roberto Soldado and José Morales scored in its 2-0 win over Mallorca after having gone the entire first half of the season — a full 19 rounds — without a single victory.

The only previous win in any competition for the Valencia-based side came against a lower-division opponent in the Copa del Rey, before it was eliminated in the next round by a third-tier opponent.

Levante remained in last place, five points from safety.

Mikel Oyarzabal scored his 12th goal in all competitions to help Real Sociedad beat Celta Vigo 1-0, ending its six-round winless streak.