

## OPINION 6

A THIRD TERM FOR  
PAK ARMY CHIEF?

## WORLD 8

SINGAPORE SAYS 30% COVID-19  
DEATHS IN 2021 WERE FULLY VACCINATED

## MONEY 9

AIRLINES OFFER DOMESTIC FLIERS  
FREE DATE CHANGE AMID CURBS

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY JANUARY 11, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

## the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

HARDIK SET  
TO LEAD  
AHMEDABAD  
FRANCHISE  
12 SPORTDELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADALate City Vol.32 Issue 10  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

## Lull before Covid storm: Experts

Country sees 1.79  
lakh fresh Covid  
cases, 146 deaths;  
likely to witness  
massive spike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time since the third Covid-19 wave hit the country, the number of daily cases has shown a decline in several States such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, West Bengal and Gujarat among others. However, experts feel that cases will again spike on Tuesday as Monday's report was the outcome of lowest testing on weekend.

The country recorded 1,79,723 new coronavirus cases on Monday, raising the tally to 3.57 crore. This included 4,033 cases of Omicron variant reported across 27 States and Union Territories.

The country reported 146 deaths linked to the virus. The steep rise in the past week was primarily due to the case surge in urban centres such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Chennai.

On Monday, Delhi saw a dip reporting 19,166 cases during the last 24 hours. The national Capital reported 22,751 cases in the last 24 hours. The positivity rate in Delhi stood at 25 per cent, the

highest since May 5. The city also reported 17 deaths.

There are currently 65,806 active Covid patients in the Capital, the highest since May 15. As many as 44,028 patients are in home-isolation and the recovery rate stands at 94.20 per cent. Around 14,076 patients were discharged in the past 24 hours.

Mumbai saw a dip in coronavirus cases for the third day running recording 13,648 cases on Monday. This is around 30 per cent lower than Sunday's count. But the positivity rate stood at a very high at 23 per cent. Mumbai on Monday reported 13,648 new Covid-19 cases, around 30 per cent or 5,826 less cases than the previous day count. The city's tally of infections now stands at 9,28,220 and the death toll at 16,411.

Maharashtra on Monday reported 33,470 new Covid-19 cases, which is nearly 11,000 lower than the previous day count.

West Bengal recorded around 19,286 cases on Monday, lower than Sunday's number of 24,000 plus cases. The State saw 8,187 recoveries and 16 deaths.

Karnataka case count also came down slightly from 12,000 plus cases on Sunday to 11,698 new cases and 4 deaths in the last 24 hours. Karnataka Chief Minister M Basavaraj Bommai also tested positive for Covid-19 "with mild symptoms". But daily cases increased

slightly in Tamil Nadu from 12,000 plus on Sunday to 13,990 new cases, 2,547 recoveries, and 11 deaths, in the last 24 hours. Active cases stood at 62,767.

Gujarat reports 6,097 new Covid cases and 2 deaths in 24 hours.

Concerned at the rising cases, Union Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya in a meeting with health ministers of five States and one UT asked them not to drop their guard. "Let there be no lapses in our preparedness as we battle this surge of the pandemic. Holistic synergy between Centre and States is most vital for seamless and effective pandemic management," he said.

Continued on Page 2



Health workers applaud as a Covid-19 positive woman, who delivered a baby while undergoing treatment at a Covid-19 hospital is shifted out for home quarantine in Ahmedabad on Monday

AP

## Covid 'precaution shots' start for priority groups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Battling a spike in Covid cases pushed by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, India on Monday kicked off the drive to give late booster doses called "precaution shots" of the Covid-19 vaccine to priority groups. Health and frontline workers and citizens above 60 years old with comorbidities are currently eligible to take the jab.

There is no need for a new registration on CoWIN platform for those eligible for the precautionary or the third dose



An elderly Kashmiri woman receives her third dose of vaccination for Covid-19 inside a health centre in Srinagar on Monday

AP

of the Covid-19 vaccine. The portal has sent over one crore reminder messages to the beneficiaries to get the precaution dose, said a senior official from the Union Health Ministry.

Notably, the precaution dose can only be taken after 39 weeks (from the date of administration of 2nd dose).

The Ministry has recommended that the precaution dose for healthcare workers, frontline workers, and senior citizens with co-morbidities will be the same as given previously.

Continued on Page 2

Rajnath, Nadda  
Covid positive, in  
home isolation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP president JP Nadda have tested positive for Covid-19 and are now undergoing in-home quarantine. Rajnath urged those who came in his contact recently to isolate themselves and get tested.

"I have tested positive for Corona today with mild symptoms. I am under home quarantine. I request everyone who has recently come in my contact to isolate themselves and get tested," tweeted Rajnath.

"I am feeling fine and have isolated myself on the advice of doctors," said Nadda.

Other politicians testing positive include Union Minister Minister Rajeev Chandrashekhar and former Union Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore. In a tweet on Sunday, Chandrashekhar said "And after succeeding in avoiding #COVID19 for last 21 months, it finally catches up with me today as I tested +ve today."

Union Ministers Mahendra Nath Pandey, Raosaheb Patil Danve, Bharti Pawar, Nityanand Rai, and SP Singh Baghel too have tested positive.

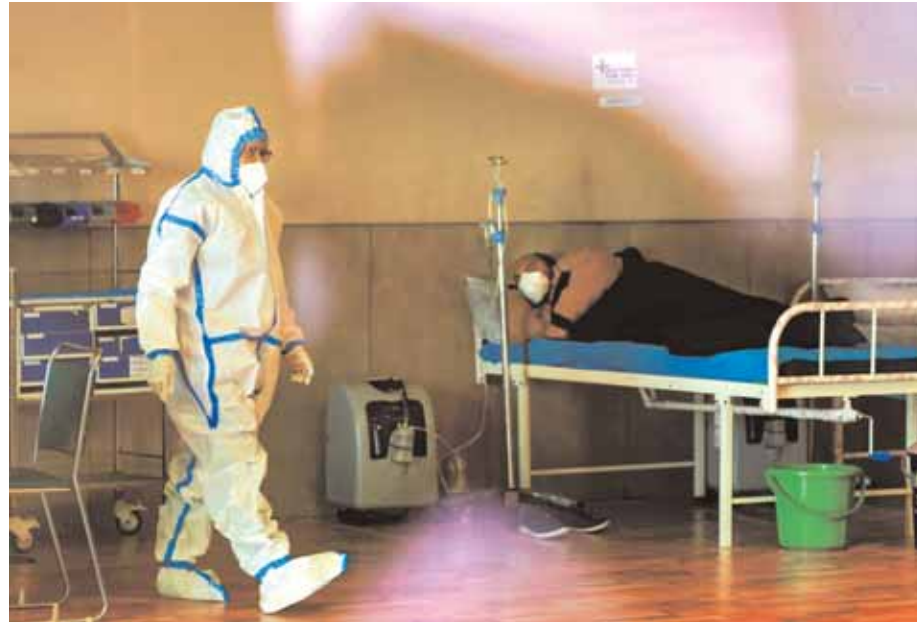
SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Monday announced that restaurants and bars would remain closed for dine-in services but "take away" services would continue in the national Capital.

In a high-level meeting, chaired by Lieutenant-Governor Anil Bajjal, it was decided that a lockdown would not be imposed in the city.

According to the minutes of the meeting, ways to strictly enforce existing restrictions to check rising cases of Covid-19 and the latest variant Omicron in the Capital were discussed.

In a series of tweets, Bajjal informed, "Chaired the 31st meeting of the DDMA to review the Covid-19 situation in Delhi along with Hon'ble CM @ArvindKejriwal, Hon'ble DyCM @msisodha, Hon'ble Ministers @SatyendarJain & @kgahlot, Dr VK Paul, NITI Aayog, Chief Secretary, Prof Balram Bhargava-ICMR, Dr Randeep Guleria-AIIMS. Today's DDMA meeting decided to close restaurants and bars and to allow 'takeaway' facilities only. It was also decided



A health worker walks inside the Shehnai Banquet Hall, a Covid-19 care facility, during the third wave in New Delhi, on Monday

PTI

ed to allow operation of only one weekly market per day per zone."

Bajjal also announced that only one weekly market would be allowed to operate per day in each zone.

"The Delhi Health Department was advised to

make adequate arrangements for additional manpower in hospitals and to scale up the vaccination efforts, including for those in the age group of 15-18 years," Bajjal said.

It is vital to mention here that Delhi is functioning under "yellow alert" as per the GRAP

system that has been in place since December 28. Surprisingly, the city registered 19,166 fresh Covid-19 cases on Monday and 17 deaths, according to the Covid-19 health bulletin of the Delhi Government. The positivity rate was recorded at 25 per cent.

Sonu Sood's sister  
Malvika joins Cong

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Ahead of the Assembly polls in Punjab, actor-philanthropist Sonu Sood's sister Malvika Sood on Monday joined the Congress, with Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi batting for her candidature from Moga for the February 14 Assembly polls, saying the party's sitting legislator Harjot Kamal will be suitably adjusted.

Malvika Sood's joining the party will be a "game-changer", said Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu, who along with Channi, travelled to the Sood's residence in Moga district for the event. "It is very rare that a party (state) chief and the Chief Minister both have gone to someone's home to grant the honour, and she deserves it," said Sidhu.

Continued on Page 2



Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and PPCC president Navjot Singh Sidhu with actor Sonu Sood and his sister Malvika Sood Sachar, after Malvika joined the Congress ahead of Punjab Assembly polls

PTI

Sonu and Malvika met Sidhu and Channi at Moga, but the actor was not present at the press conference when his sister joined the Congress.

SC to hear plea seeking action  
against Haridwar hate speeches

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a PIL seeking action against those who made hate speeches during the recent "Dharam Sansad" held at Haridwar in Uttarakhand. A bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal that no action has been taken against those who made the hate speeches despite the registration of an FIR.

"I have moved this PIL in respect of what happened in Dharam Sansad in Haridwar on December 17 and 19. We are living in difficult times where slogan in the country has changed from Satyamev Jayate to Shashtramev Jayate," Sibal said. "All right, we'll take up the matter," the CJ said.

Sibal also told the bench that though the Uttarakhand Police has registered an FIR, no arrests were made against the speakers who made vitriolic speeches.

After the CJ asked whether any enquiry was already on in the case, Sibal said, "The FIRs have been filed, no arrests have been made. This is



in the State of Uttarakhand. No action will be taken without the intervention of your lordships"

The hate speeches were allegedly delivered between December 17 and 19, 2021, in Haridwar by Yati Narsinghanand and in Delhi by "Hindu Yuva Vahini".

The petition has sought an independent, credible and impartial probe by a special investigation team into the hate speeches against the Muslim community.

NIA chargesheets four  
Bangladeshis, 1 Indian  
JMB operative in case  
linked to ultra's arrest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted four Bangladeshis and one Indian operative of Bangladesh-based Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in connection with a case related to the arrest of a JMB terrorist in Kolkata.

The five chargesheeted accused Bangladeshi nationals are Najir Rahman Pavel, alias Joseph, Mikail Khan alias Sekh Sabir, Rabiul Islam, alias Rabiul Islah, Md Abdul Mannan Bachu, alias Mannan, and Indian national Lulu Sen alias Rahul Sen.

The case was originally registered as FIR No. 11/2021 dated July 10, 2021 at STF Police Station, Kolkata, in connection with hatching of criminal conspiracy by three Bangladeshi nationals who had illegally entered India along with their associates of JMB/AQIS, to recruit, motivate young Muslim youth in order to establish "Caliphate" and for the furtherance of terrorist activities in India and Bangladesh.

Continued on Page 2

Suu Kyi sentenced  
to 4 more yrs in jail

AP ■ BANGKOK

A court in Myanmar sentenced ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi to four more years in prison on Monday after finding her guilty of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies and violating coronavirus restrictions, a legal official said.

Suu Kyi was convicted last month on two other charges and given a four-year prison sentence, which was then halved by the head of the military-installed government.

The cases are among about a dozen brought against the 76-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate since the army seized power last February, ousting her elected government and arresting top members of her party.

If found guilty of all the charges, she could be sentenced to more than 100 years in prison. Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say the charges against her are contrived to legitimize the military's seizure of power.

Monday's verdict in the court in the capital, Naypyitaw, was conveyed by a legal official who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities, who have restricted the release of information about Suu Kyi's trials.

Continued on Page 2

## CAPSULE

SERIAL RAPIST,  
MURDERER HELD

**Faridabad:** The arrest of a man here in connection with a rape and murder case opened a can of worms as the accused confessed to raping and killing three other girls in two years. The accused Singhraj Nagar (54), security guard at a private hospital in Sector 16 here and a native of Jasana village, was previously convicted of killing his uncle and cousin, some 36 years ago.

9 CHILDREN AMONG 19  
DEAD IN NYC FIRE

**New York:** Nineteen people, including 9 children, have been killed in an apartment fire in New York City, in what the city's fire commissioner called one of the worst blazes in recent memory.

'MARRIAGE: RIGHT TO  
EXPECT INTIMACY'

**New Delhi:** The Delhi High Court on Monday said that while there can be no compromise with women's right to sexual autonomy and any act of rape has to be punished, there is a "qualitative difference" between a marital and a non-marital relationship as the former entailed a legal right to expect reasonable sexual relation from the spouse and it played a part in the marital rape exemption in criminal law.



# Amid spike, Bombay HC principal bench to work for 3 hrs/day

## Will only hear urgent matter till January 28

**Mumbai:** Amid the surge in COVID-19 infections in the city, the principal bench of the Bombay High Court will operate only three hours on all working days beginning Tuesday and hear urgent matters till January 28, it was informed on Monday.

The new timing will be effective from January 11, a communication issued to lawyers by the Bombay Bar Council stated on Monday evening.

The HC will hear only urgent matters during this period, the HC Registrar said in a notice. "A meeting was convened with the administrative committee of the Bombay High Court today," the communication said.

"In view of the exponential rise in COVID-19 positive cases, it was decided that effective from tomorrow, viz 11.1.22 till 28.1.22, the principal bench of the Bombay High Court will operate for 3 hours from 12 noon to 3.00 pm (without lunch break) and take up urgent mat-

## BMC must ensure citizens are safe from Omicron: HC

**Mumbai:** The Bombay High Court on Monday said the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) must not leave any stone unturned in ensuring people of the metropolis remained safe from the rapidly rising number of cases caused by the new Omicron variant of COVID-19. A bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice MS Karnik directed the BMC to implement precautionary measures as well as guidelines issued by the Maharashtra government to manage Covid-related healthcare resources.

Earlier this month, all benches of the high court stopped physical hearings and reverted to online hearings.

# Lull before Covid...

The States were Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

Meanwhile, the ICMR has said that contacts of confirmed Covid cases do not need to get tested unless identified as "high risk" based on age or comorbidities. The ICMR Advisory on Purposive Testing Strategy for Covid-19 said individuals undertaking inter-State domestic travels also do not need to get tested. It said testing can be undertaken either through RT-PCR, TrueNat, CBNAAT, CRISPR, RT-LAMP, Rapid Molecular Testing Systems or through Rapid Antigen Test (RAT). A positive point-of-care test [home or self-test/RAT] and molecular test is to be considered confirmatory, without any repeat testing, the advisory by the ICMR said. The ICMR advisory comes in view of sharp transmission of the virus in the community across the States which are reporting spurt in cases. Notably, the test positivity rate crossed the 10 per cent mark in the country. That is, every 100 tests now yield 10 positive cases.

Between January 4 and 8, Mumbai recorded more than 86,000 cases, a 150 per cent increase in infections compared to the week before. Delhi recorded about 68,000 new cases, a 350 percent rise. Bengaluru registered close to 24,000 cases, a 400 per cent increase. In the same period, Chennai saw 17,247 infections, a 350 per cent increase compared to the past week. With nearly 45,000 new infections, Maharashtra's active cases breach 2 lakh-mark.

Andhra Pradesh reported 1,257 COVID-19 infections and two deaths in the 24 hours ending Sunday morning. The single-day tally crossed 1,000 for the first time in 101 days since October 1, 2021. At 3.27 per cent, the positivity rate was also the highest in the past 180 days. The number of active cases tripled in just five days from 1,848 on January 5 to 4,774 on Sunday.

The number of active cases in Bihar until January 8 was 12,311, with over 7,000 in Patna district. More than 350 doctors and medical staff in the state have tested positive, most of whom were from Nalanda Medical College and Hospital. In addition, some staff of a private airline working at the Patna airport was also tested positive.

In Gujarat, the case count increased by 6,275, while 1,263 patients recovered. As a result, active cases neared the 28,000-mark, of which 26 patients were on ventilator support.

# HC asks East Pak immigrant to apply for citizenship under CAA

**Guwahati:** Gauhati High Court has set aside the order of a Foreigner's Tribunal in Assam which had declared a person who had migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a foreigner and asked him to apply for citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The order was passed in the judgement to a writ petition filed by Bablu Paul alias Sujit Paul of Karimganj district of Assam by a High Court Bench comprising Justices N Kotiswar Singh and Malasri Nandi.

The Foreigners' Tribunal-II of the district had in May 2017 declared Paul a foreigner who came to India illegally from Bangladesh on or after March 25, 1971.

The High Court in its order said that Paul was about two years old when he entered India with his father Boloram Paul and grandfather Chintaharan Paul on September 30, 1964 from the then East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh on March 26, 1971.

"...They were given refugee status by the Government of

India as (is) clearly evident from the certificate issued by the Government of West Bengal to the members of the minority community in East Pakistan desiring to stay in India," the order said.

According to the petitioner, his grandfather had entered through West Bengal but thereafter settled in Assam and his name appeared in the voters' list of the state in 1966. He died later.

The Tribunal also noted that the petitioner had studied upto class five in Gandhi Colony Madhyamik Vidyalaya in Kolkata and after attaining his majority was engaged in jewellery business at Jadavpur area of that city.

"... It is on record that the petitioner came to Patharkandi, Karimganj, Assam, only in the year 1984 and settled there and started his jewellery business," said the High Court judgement on December 14, 2021.

The judges said that considering the evidence on record, there is no doubt that the petitioner had entered India in 1964 and thereafter stayed in Calcutta (now Kolkata) till

1984, then shifted to Assam and settled in the state.

"The question which naturally will arise is, what will be the status of the petitioner, who had entered India in the year 1964 from East Pakistan and continued to stay in India? Is he to be declared a foreigner?" they wondered.

The two-judge bench expressed its inability to declare Paul as an Indian citizen as claimed by him as he was not born in this country but in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and entered India in 1964.

As to whether a person who enters India in 1964 from East Pakistan can be considered to be an Indian or not, there is no provision under the Citizenship Act, 1955 except for Sections 6A(2), the judges said.

"Under Section 6A(2) of the Citizenship Act, 1955, a person entering India before 01.01.1966 can be deemed to be a citizen provided he enters Assam from the specified territory (East Pakistan) and he has been ordinarily residing in Assam after the date of entry," the bench said. According to the Assam

prosecutors do not comment. Her lawyers, who had been a source of information on the proceedings, were served with gag orders in October.

The military-installed government has not allowed any outside party to meet with Suu Kyi since it seized power, despite international pressure for talks including her that could ease the country's violent political crisis.

It would not allow a special envoy from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a member, to meet her. The refusal received a rare rebuke from fellow members, who barred Min Aung Hlaing from attending its annual summit meeting.

Even Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who took over as the regional group's chair for this year and advocates engagement with the ruling generals, failed to meet her last week when he became the first head of government to visit Myanmar since the army's takeover.

The military's seizure of power was quickly met by nonviolent nationwide demonstrations, which security forces quashed with deadly force, killing over 1,400 civilians, according to a detailed list compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Peaceful protests have continued, but amid the severe crackdown, an armed resistance has also grown, to the point that U.N. experts have warned the country could be sliding into civil war.

"The Myanmar junta's

accord, foreigners entering Assam on or before March 25, 1971 can get the benefit of citizenship if they register themselves before the competent authority. Those who entered the state after the date will be declared as foreigners.

The High Court said that as the petitioner did not enter Assam but West Bengal and also as he has not been a resident of Assam after his date of entry in 1964, he cannot get the benefit of deemed citizenship under Section 6A(2) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

"Under such circumstances, the question which arises is, whether the petitioner will be declared a foreigner, in which event, he will be liable to be deported also," it said.

The bench then pointed to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), which said any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014 shall not be treated as an illegal migrant.

## Covid...

From Page 1

Also, the senior citizens with co-morbidities will not be required to produce a doctor's certificate or prescription at the time of administration of the precaution dose.

The details of the administration of the precaution dose will be suitably reflected in the vaccination certificates. An estimated 1.05 crore healthcare and 1.9 crore frontline workers, and 2.75 crore comorbid people in the 60 plus age group are going to be administered the precaution dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

"The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) has recommended the administration of the homologous vaccine for HCWS, FLWs and elders (more than 60 years of age) with co-morbidities, i.e. the same vaccine that has been administered for the previous two doses would be given as the precaution dose to the eligible beneficiaries," said Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan in a letter.

Earlier, Vikas Sheel, Additional Secretary and Mission Director, National Health Mission, said that the reminder SMSs have been pushed to more than 1 crore beneficiaries for the precaution dose. On Friday, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in a tweet said that the third dose of Covaxin holds promise.

"Third dose of Covaxin holds promise," ICMR had tweeted. The medical research body in its tweet further highlighted the benefits of getting Covaxin's precautionary dose. India started administering the "precautionary doses" on the same day when the country recorded 1,79,723 new Covid-19 cases, 146 deaths in the last 24 hours, pushing the total death toll to 4,83,936, as per data released by the Ministry.

## NIA chargesheets four Bangladeshis, 1 Indian...

From Page 1

The NIA had re-registered the case on August 6 and took up the investigation.

They have been chargesheeted under various IPC sections including criminal conspiracy and relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Foreigners Act and Passport Act before the NIA Special Court, Kolkata.

"Investigation revealed that the four Bangladeshis and one Indian national were actively involved in establishing module of JMB/AQIS and had conspired to recruit vulnerable Muslim youths in furtherance of terrorist activities in India to propagate the ideology of JMB/AQIS and were planning terrorist activities in India," the NIA said in a statement.

They had received funds from Bangladesh through the hawala channel and also fraudulently obtained Indian identity documents including Aadhaar cards, Electoral Photo Identity Cards, PAN cards and Passports to evade detection and to conceal their illegal activities from the law enforcement agencies, it added.

## Suu Kyi sentenced to 4 more yrs...

From Page 1

He said she was sentenced to two years in prison under the Export-Import Law for importing the walkie-talkies and one year under the Telecommunications Law for possessing them. The sentences are to be served concurrently. She also received a two-year sentence under the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly violating coronavirus rules while campaigning.

Suu Kyi was convicted last month on two other charges — incitement and breaching COVID-19 restrictions — and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Hours after that sentence was issued, the head of the military-installed government, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, reduced it by half.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in a 2020 general election, but the military claimed there was widespread electoral fraud, an assertion that independent poll watchers doubt.

Since her first guilty verdict, Suu Kyi has been attending court hearings in prison clothes — a white top and a brown longyi skirt provided by the authorities. She is being held by the military at an unknown location, where state television reported last month she would serve her sentence.

The hearings are closed to the media and spectators and

courtroom circus of secret proceedings on bogus charges is all about steadily piling up more convictions against Aung San Suu Kyi so that she will remain in prison indefinitely. Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and the junta leaders obviously still view her as a paramount political threat who needs to be permanently neutralized," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch.

"Once again, Aung San Suu Kyi has become a symbol of what is happening to her country and returned to the role of political hostage of military hell-bent on controlling power by using intimidation and violence," Robertson said in a statement. "Fortunately for her and the future of Myanmar, the Myanmar people's movement has grown well beyond just the leadership of one woman, and one political party."

Suu Kyi was charged right after the military's takeover with having improperly imported the walkie-talkies, which served as the initial justification for her continued detention. A second charge of illegally possessing the radios was filed the following month.

The radios were seized from the entrance gate of her residence and the barracks of her bodyguards during a search on Feb. 1, the day she was arrested.

Suu Kyi's lawyers argued that the radios were not in her personal possession and were legitimately used to help provide for her security, but the court declined to dismiss the charges.

# SC to form panel to probe...

**From Page 1**  
SC to form panel to probe Modi's security breach

"Please hang me and my officers if we are guilty but please do not condemn us unheard," the State's law officer said, urging that an independent committee be set up as he apprehended that the State officials would not get a fair hearing before the Centre's panel. "The committee's inquiries were put on hold. Where have these show cause notices come from," said Patwalia expressing displeasure over the Union Home Ministry sending notices to State officials after the Supreme Court's intervention.

The SC took note of the concern of the Punjab Government that its officials were being condemned by the Central Government panel without any proceedings and said, "All inquiries should stop." The Bench referred to the State Government officials being issued show cause notices

despite the panels being asked to stay their hands till January 10, and asked what purpose would remain for the court to intervene. "Your show cause notice is totally self-contradictory. By constituting a committee, you seek to enquire if there was a breach and then you hold the State Chief Secretary and the DGP guilty. Who held them guilty? The State and the petitioner want a fair hearing and you cannot be against a fair hearing. So why this administrative and fact-finding enquiry by you at all," the Bench asked.

The show cause notices were issued before the order of the court, the Solicitor-General replied, adding that the Central Government's panel may be allowed to inquire into the lapses, and a report would be submitted to the Bench. "Asking them to reply within 24 hours, after our order... It is not expected of you," the Bench said. "To say 'it is not expected of you,' is a bit harsh under

the circumstances," Mehta said, adding that the Prime Minister's security is of paramount importance.

"We are not undermining the importance of the security of the Prime Minister... We are taking up the matter with all seriousness. Please do not be under the impression that we are not giving the importance," the Bench said. "There is a breach and the State too has admitted it, but the other issues are questions of facts and they have to be seen by independent persons," the Bench said. "If you want to take disciplinary action against the State officers then what remains for this court to do," the Bench asked.

If the court felt that the show cause notices pre-empted the final outcome, then inquiry proceedings may be put on hold till the Central committee inquires and give the report to the Bench, Mehta said.

He referred in detail to the provisions of the "Blue Book" for the PM's security and said that several breaches of the scheme of the rules are established such as the PM's convoy had proceeded on the road after taking clearance from the DGP and moreover, the warning vehicle did not warn about the blockade.

## Congress leader Imran to join...

From Page 1

He has also won the election of Saharanpur Municipality Chairman. In 2012, he contested the Assembly elections from Nakur but lost. In 2014, he contested from Saharanpur on a Congress ticket. In that, he stood second by getting about 4.10 lakh votes. After this, he contested from Nakur Assembly in the 2017 Assembly elections but lost to BJP candidate Dharam Singh Saini by about 1,300 votes. Along with the Assembly, Imran Masood has also tried his luck in the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and lost.

Earlier, the former MLA and Congress leader from the western part of the State, Masood had praised SP giving fuel to speculations of him switching over to the party, a few days after he had also met the SP chief Akhilesh at a marriage function. The exodus in the Congress continues as many senior leaders, including Jitin Prasada switched, over to the BJP recently. Also, Congress Raebareli (Sadar) MLA Aditi Singh recently switched over to the BJP.

Earlier in November last year another close aide of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Harendra Malik along with his son and State vice-president and former MLA Pankaj Malik had resigned from Congress. The one thing that was common in most of the defections was the allegations of being sidelined and ignored in the party. Also, many senior Congress leaders have expressed their concern regarding the behaviour of people close to Priyanka.

From Page 1

Kamal, who is learnt to be not happy with the party backing her candidature, was also conspicuous by his absence.

The actor had last year in November said that his sister would join politics.

Asked if Malvika Sood will fight the elections from the Moga assembly constituency, Channi said, "Is there anything left to say now", clearly signaling that she is the party's choice. On questions from reporters about Kamal's candidature, Channi said, "Harjot Kamal is our MLA, he is very talented. He is my brother. We have worked together in the party and the government. We will take him together and if there is need for an adjustment, we will do that." "He is an asset to our party and he will be taken along," the chief minister said.

Channi said in the party, everyone is taken along and sometimes, if anyone feels disappointed, things are sorted out. He said before coming to Moga he had spoken to Kamal and added that he would be meeting him in the evening. Asked that the MLA Kamal has reportedly said that he always remained available to his constituents round-the-clock which Malvika Sood may be unable to do, Channi said Malvika Sood is a strong and brave young woman, and she will be there to serve the people at any hour of the day.

"It is a matter of great happiness for us that a young woman who has earned a name for herself by running an NGO and dedicated herself to the people's service is joining our party," Sidhu said while welcoming her into the Congress.

Sonu Sood, who hails from Moga, had earlier also said that his sister has done a lot of "amazing" work in the past. The actor is known for his humanitarian works not just in India but around the world, both Sidhu and Channi said while talking to reporters.

Sonu Sood had grabbed the national spotlight for helping migrants reach their home states during the nationwide lockdown clamped in 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



# 1K Delhi policemen test Covid positive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the spike of Covid-19 cases in the national Capital, around 1,000 police personnel have tested positive for Covid-19 since January 1st, 2022. Police said that those tested positive for the virus are home quarantined and recovering well.

The strength of the Delhi Police force is over 80,000. Recently, following the rise in Covid-19 cases across the city, the Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana had issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) for preventing spread of coronavirus amongst police personnel. Since police personnel are frontline workers performing their duties amidst the public, it is imperative they take adequate precautions to protect themselves from exposure to Covid, it said.

According to the SOPs mentioned in the order dated January 5, all police personnel should wear face-masks, maintain social distancing and practice proper hand hygiene while performing their duties. All police personnel and eligible family members who have



not been vaccinated, may be motivated to complete the vaccination process.

"Those who have not been vaccinated due to medical reasons may be encouraged to seek medical opinion again for vaccination" the order said. All police personnel may be motivated to take precaution dose of Covid vaccine and install and use of Aarogya Setu App mandatorily.

Self monitoring practice to be adopted by police personnel and any kind of illness may be reported without fail, to daily health monitoring officer.

The force was asked to go contact less and do their enquires through Video Conferencing and if a visitor came without a face mask, a face mask should be provided to him or her, the order had stated.

## 46 inmates infected in 3 city jails

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Around 46 inmates and staffs in national Capital's three jail complexes, Rohini, Tihar and Mandoli Prisons have tested positive for Covid-19.

According to data shared by jail authorities till Sunday, 46 inmates were tested positive.

"Out of them, a maximum of 29 inmates were from Tihar and the remaining 17 were from Mandoli jail. Staffs in Prison Complexes of Tihar, Rohinu and Mandoli have also been tested positive for Covid-19," said a senior prison official.

Overall till Sunday, 43 prison staffs were tested positive for Covid-19. Out of them 25 are from Tihar, 12 from Rohinu and six from Mandoli jail complex.

"All infected inmates as well as staffs have been under isolation and are recovering," said the senior prison official.

As part of steps taken against the spread of the viral disease in Tihar, Mandoli and Rohini jail complexes, dispensaries in Delhi jails turned Covid care centres, oxygen plant in Tihar to start working soon, officials said.

"Many medical isolation cells have been set up for inmates showing slight symptoms of Covid-19. Those who test positive but are asymptomatic will be kept in separate isolation cells within the same jail," he said.

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.

The jail administration said they have formed four committees for the inmate and staff who test Covid positive.

"Each of these panels has been divided into four jurisdictions with each comprising four members, including jail staff and officers, tasked with looking after them if they need further help and guidance. All the new inmates will have to undergo quarantine for 10 days and mandatorily undergo the rapid-antigen test," said the official.

Social distancing among staff and inmates is followed to the extent possible. Inmates are mostly restricted to within their wards and an educational and awareness programme about following Covid norms are carried out regularly, officials said. The total number of prisoners in all the three jails of Delhi Prisons as of January 7 was 18,528. Tihar has a maximum of 12,669 inmates, Mandoli 4,018 and Rohini 1,841.

The inoculation status of inmates of Delhi Prisons as of December 31 was, 22,620 have been administered the vaccine of which 15,452 got the first dose and 7,168 got the second shot.

## Health Min urged to allow 200 guests as wedding business takes a hit

**New Delhi:** Stakeholders in the wedding industry on Monday urged Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain to allow 200 guests at such events, which is currently capped at just 20, citing losses incurred by linked businesses due to Covid curbs.

A memorandum submitted to the minister stated the industry is in dire straits as the recent restrictions imposed due to a surge in Covid cases have forced postponement or cancellations of weddings. "Weddings are an essential social requirement of the society. Wedding planners, hotels, caterers, banquets, dance troupes, artists, are seeing 99 per cent weddings getting cancelled, migrated or postponed due to capping of guests ie 20 people," it stated.

Urging the government to permit weddings with at least 200 guests in attendance or with 50 per cent capacity of the venue, the stakeholders said they will follow Covid-appropriate guidelines, including sanitising the venue twice and ensuring only double vaccinated people attend it.

"Please allow us to have weddings with a capacity of 200 Pax as our wedding venues are very large and can accommodate very large gatherings in a controlled and monitorable environment.

Or allow us gatherings following the 4 sq ft/per person formula of social distancing," read the memorandum.

Appreciating the way the Delhi government has "controlled (the situation) and at the same time given a breather to other sectors", it claimed that no such provision has been made for the wedding industry. **PTI**

## Booster dose campaign starts in G'gram

**Gurugram:** Amid the surge in covid cases in Gurugram the district health department has started applying booster doses to health care workers, front line workers and senior citizens with comorbidities above 60 years of age on Monday.

The first booster dose was administered to Deputy Commissioner Gurugram, Dr Yash Garg, Dr Sushila Kataria of Medanta Hospital and Dr Virender Yadav, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) at the CMO office.

On this occasion, Garg told reporters several people from all over the world come to Gurugram district, so there is an increase in the cases of the Covid-19.

"It is a matter of relief that the number of patients admitted to hospitals in this is relatively less. Multiple steps are being adopted by the district administration to provide better health facilities to the people. Apart from increasing the number of beds in the hospi-



tals, a vaccination campaign is also being run vigorously in Gurugram," Garg said.

Also, Pressure swing absorption (PSA) oxygen generating plants have been installed in the district to ensure the availability of oxygen. Apart from this, oxygen cylinders and concentrators are also available in sufficient numbers in Gurugram, he said.

Garg informed that to curb

infections, challans are also being made regularly for people who are not wearing masks.

In the last week, more than 5 thousand people have been challenged for not wearing face masks. Apart from this, teams have also been constituted in private and government institutions to ensure compliance with the corona protocol, he informed.

On this occasion, the CMO

said a dedicated covid care centre is also operational in Gurugram.

"Several covid beds have been reserved in hospital and if required hospitals can be directed to reserve 35% beds for covid patients. Apart from this, In Pataudi and Sohna block 10-10 each bed have been reserved for the covid patients which will be increased by 30 beds as per the requirements," CMO told said.

"At our booster dose centre, a total of 187 recipients (Healthcare workers-65, above 60 years of age with Co-morbidities- 80) received this booster dose and none of them experienced any type of reaction. Covid protocols are being followed at the centre and every working doctor and nursing staff is taking required precautions," said Dr Swadesh Kumar, Consultant and Head of Emergency Department and Medical Services Narayana Superspeciality Hospital Gurugram.

## SDMC launches Covid helplines for consultation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the number of patients infected with Covid-19 increasing day by day, South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has launched helpline numbers and decided to provide tele consultation or video consultation.

The helpline numbers 9999019340, 9999019375, 9999019426 and 9999019745 will be operational 24 x 7.

Mayor of the SDMC Mukesh Suryan said that the civic body has decided to provide tele-consultations to contain the spread of Coronavirus. He said that due to the surge in Covid-19, the number of Covid positive patients at home has been increasing.

"Those have mild symptoms and are getting treatment at home through proper consultation. In view of the situation, the SDMC has started Covid helpline to provide

proper consultation and guidance. Experienced doctors from the SDMC will provide consultancy services to Covid positive patients who are at home in isolation," he said.

Suryan further said that the SDMC has made adequate arrangements at its hospitals to tackle the third phase of Covid-19. "Arrangements of 100 Oxygen beds have been done at Mata Gujri Hospital in Tilak Nagar and 2 PSA Oxygen plants have also been installed to deal with Covid cases," he added.

Besides this, 60 Oxygen beds have been made available at Poornima Sethi Hospital at Kalka Ji and 1 PSA Oxygen Plant has been installed. 40 beds with the facility to supply Oxygen have been made available at Chest Clinic and TB Hospital Nehru Nagar and 1 PSA Plant has also been installed, he added.

## Congress slams opening of liquor vend near school

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar staged a protest against the opening of a new liquor vend near a school at Vinod Nagar situated in the Assembly constituency of Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia. Kumar said that Delhi Congress will not allow opening of liquor vends near religious places and educational institutions in violation of rules and regulations, as the Arvind Government was trying to make Delhi "Nashe Ki Rajdhani".

The Congress president said that the Chief Minister during his political tourism in Punjab, had made loud announcements there that he will make the State "Nasha Mukti", but he has

not only done the opposite in Delhi, but also lowered the drinking age from 25 to 21 years, to attract more and more impressionable youth to intoxication of liquor.

"The Arvind Government's liberalized excise policy and the move to open nearly 1000 liquor vends in the Capital at the rate of three vends per ward will not only ruin the unemployed youth of the city but also worsen the already disturbed law and order and crime situation in Delhi," he said.

Kumar further said that the Residents' Welfare Associations, social and religious organizations were not consulted before opening liquor vends in residential areas, near schools and places of worship.

## DMRC files affidavit in Delhi HC giving details of bank accounts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) filed a fresh affidavit in Delhi High Court giving details of all the bank accounts and funds worth Rs 6208 crores lying in those accounts.

The move of DMRC's came after Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt. Ltd. (DAMEPL) had filed an application in Delhi High Court on 7 January stating that the DMRC was in contempt of the last order of the court by not disclosing the details of all the bank accounts and funds lying in those accounts. DAMEPL in its application had said that "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".

It had also 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.



## DSEU-trained Team Delhi bags 2 silver medals, 1 bronze medal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University (DSEU) team won two silver medals and one bronze and four medallions of excellence in first-ever IndiaSkills competition. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said three skill stars from Delhi will represent India at WorldSkills. "DSEU will be happy to train and support the entire India contingent that will be going for WorldSkills Shanghai 2022," he added.

"First-ever Delhi team of 22 skill champions in 18 different skills competed at IndiaSkills National competition 2022. DSEU had trained these skill stars with 17 world-class training partners and in collaboration with Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) across Delhi and India for 2200+ hours. The Delhi contingent competed in skills such as Electrical Installations, Fashion Technology, 3D Digital Game Art among oth-

ers," he added, "I am very proud of the performance of the Delhi contingent in its debut appearance at IndiaSkills."

Vice-Chancellor DSEU Professor (Dr.) Neharika Vohra expressed her joy and said "Delhi participated at IndiaSkills for the first time and I am delighted to see that our skilled stars have performed so well."

She further added, "WorldSkills is a magnificent platform for youngsters to showcase their skills and their aptitude, and I congratulate the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), respective Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), Industry and Training Partners, Experts, Jury Members and all stakeholders on the success of this event. We will ensure that our skilled champions receive the best training and make India proud at WorldSkills Shanghai 2022. I wish all the candidates representing India the best of luck for WorldSkills Shanghai 2022."

## Delhi Govt has no power to formulate doorstep food delivery scheme: Ration dealers tell HC

**New Delhi:** The Delhi government's scheme for doorstep delivery of ration cannot be sustained in law in the absence of approval from the Lieutenant Governor and the Centre, the Delhi High Court was told on Monday.

The Delhi Sarkari Ration Dealers Sangh (DSRDS), which has challenged the AAP government's Mukhyantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojna, said before a bench headed by Justice Vipin Sanghi that the scheme fell foul of the law, including the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

"The state government does not have the power to make any such scheme without the concurrence of the L-G (Delhi lieutenant governor) and the central government," the DSRDS argued.

It also said that any notification pertaining to the food security law has to be mandatorily published under the signature of the L-G. On being asked if fair price shops (FPS) were ready to supply door-to-door, lawyer V Shrivastav, appearing for the petitioner, replied, "We are ready but the central government has to say yes because it is their food grain."

The DSRDS is an association that represents FPS owners.

The court, which has reserved its verdict on the challenge to the scheme, also asked the Delhi government as

to how its doorstep delivery scheme was an improvement on the existing FPS model and how did it allege the present system has corruption.

"You are brandishing the whole community of FPS owners by the same brush. You are saying that they're all corrupt. What the L-G has told you is you're only basically replacing one set of persons by another. Are you suggesting that those accepting your tender are coming from an outer planet?" it said.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the Delhi government, said that in the new system, a contractor would lose the tender in case of misconduct, and contended that the court was not examining whether the new regime would ensure 100 per cent sanitisation.

He informed that the implementation of the scheme would be monitored by state-owned corporations, and the city government was entitled to change the system to make it "significantly better" and minimise malpractices.

FPS owners were found to be in a system which has leakages, the advocate said.

Singhvi said that the scheme was approved by the council of ministers and the law does not empower the L-G to keep referring back to the council any difference of opinion for re-consideration. **PTI**

## 5 arrested for killing man in Delhi

**New Delhi:** A bedsheet and polythene bags used to dispose the body of a 20-year-old man killed in Delhi recently led the police to the five suspected killers who run a bakery, officials said on Monday.

The man was strangulated to death. His body was recovered on January 7 at Tikona Park Inderlok.

The accused — Afjal Ansari (45), Savjal Ansari (38), Rasid Ansari (30), Md. Israfil (20) and Mohd. Abrar Ansari (27) — are natives of Jamui district of Bihar and run the bakery in Padam Nagar area. They were arrested on Sunday.

The police said the accused admitted to killing Abhishek, a resident of Delhi's Partap Nagar.

They told the investigators that they had bought two stolen laptops from Abhishek for a sum of ₹ 5,000 around one-and-a-half-years ago.

Investigation revealed that since then, Abhishek started blackmailing and extorting money from them on several occasions by threatening them with report-

ing to police about their purchase of stolen laptops, a senior police officer said. The victim managed to extort ₹1 lakh from them.

Abhishek was also involved in around 20 cases of theft, robbery and burglary, he said.

Abhishek had visited the bakery on January 6 and demanded ₹ 20,000 from them. They then planned to kill him to put an end to his blackmailing and extortion, he added. According to their plan, they took him to an adjoining room and strangulated him to death, the officer said.

After killing him, they wrapped his body in a bedsheet, put it in a polythene bag and dumped it in Tikona Park Inderlok, police said.

A case was registered under sections 302 (murder) and 201 (Causing disappearance of evidence of offence, or giving false information to screen offender) of the Indian Penal Code at Sarai Rohilla police station. **PTI**



Security personnel stand guard during a cold and foggy morning at Raisina Hill in New Delhi on Monday

PTI


**SOUTH DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**


**OFFICE OF THE DY. COMMISSIONER,**  
**REMUNERATIVE PROJECT CELL DEPARTMENT**  
 Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Civic Centre (25<sup>th</sup> Floor),  
 Jawaharlal Nehru Marg, New Delhi-110002

**E-TENDER FOR USE OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS/PREMISES OF SOUTH DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION ON LICENSE FEES BASIS AND MAINTENANCE THEREOF**

**PRESS NOTICE E-TENDER**

E-Bids are invited on behalf of Commissioner, SDMC from eligible bidders for allotment of Heritage Buildings/Premises of SDMC on license fees basis and maintenance thereof in two bid system (Technical and Financial) **for a period of twenty years with an enhancement @ 15% in the last paid license fee after every 5 years.** 1. Tender NIT No. 638 dt. 06.01.2022. 2. Bid Download Start Date: 07.01.2022 09.00 am onwards, 3. Pre-bid Meeting 14.01.2022 at 3 PM Conference Hall at 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Civic Centre, 4. Bid submission start date:- 21.01.2022 from 09.00 am onwards, 5. Last date of Submission of E-Tender: 27.01.2022 upto 3.00 PM, 6. Opening date of Technical Bids: 28.01.2022 at 3.30 PM onwards, at R.P. Cell/SDMC Dept. 25<sup>th</sup> Floor, Civic Centre. (For details visit SDMCs website: [www.mcdonline.nic.in](http://www.mcdonline.nic.in) and [www.etenders.gov.in](http://www.etenders.gov.in) . Contact number- 011-23227514.

**Ro. No. 69/DPI/SP/2021-22 Assistant Commissioner, R.P. Cell/SDMC**



# Covid cloud hovers on Budget Session

## Naidu, Birla ask officials to review Covid protocol for safe conduct

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With Parliamentary work being affected due to almost half of Parliament staff down with Covid and in isolation ahead of the crucial Budget session beginning this month end, Rajya Sabha chairman M Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday directed the secretaries general of both Houses of Parliament to examine in detail the prevailing scenario of the spread of coronavirus and suggest effective measures for the safe conduct of the upcoming session.

Sources said Naidu had called up Birla and the two took stock of the situation and directed both secretaries general accordingly. The Monsoon Session of 2020 was the first full session held under Covid pro-



ocol with the Rajya Sabha meeting in the first half of the day and Lok Sabha during the second half. The same protocol was followed for the first part of the Budget Session during 2021. Though the dates of the Budget session have not yet been announced but it usually begins at the end of January.

Amid the surge in Covid cases across the country currently and around 500 Parliament staff members testing positive for the infection,



presiding officers expressed their concerns and asked officials to chalk out measures to hold a safe Budget Session. They desired review of the adequacy of covid protocol followed during the last winter session in the context of the present scenario of spread of infections, said a Parliament secretariat official.

According to sources, 65 employees of the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 200 of the Lok Sabha Secretariat and 133 of



allied services tested positive for COVID-19 between January 4 and 8 during regular tests and another 100 is estimated to caught between the last two days, sources added.

For the second part of the Budget session, Monsoon and Winter sessions conducted in the year 2021, Parliament

reverted to normal timings with members sitting in the chambers and galleries of respective Houses. However the restrictions continued for the visitors' gallery and entry of media too was restrained with very limited number of media persons allowed to enter the Parliament premises.

# ED attaches ₹36-cr assets in Morris coin crypto currency case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth over Rs 36.72 crore of Nishad K, Managing Director and his associates in the case of Morris Coin Crypto Currency Case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act linked to a cheating case involving alleged fraud of Rs 1,200 crore.

The attached assets include balances in multiple bank accounts of Nishad K and his companies, immovable property including land of one of his associates and rupee equivalent of crypto currencies purchased out of the proceeds of crime.

The ED initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of multiple FIRs registered by Kerala Police in various districts including Malappuram, Kannur and others. As per the FIRs, more than 900 investors were cheated to the tune of Rs 1,200 crore.

The money laundering investigation carried out so far revealed that Nishad K, through his various companies like Long Rich Global, Long Rich Technologies and Morris Trading Solutions collected deposit money from the investors in the guise of Initial Coin Offer for the launch of Morris Coin Crypto Currency, the ED said in a statement.

"Investors were impressed by conducting promotional events in the presence of celebrities, introducing the investors to flashy websites by provision of e-wallets to each investor via web-based applications. The amounts so collected by duping, the investors were siphoned through various companies operated by him and his associates," it said.

The deposits taken from the general public were illegal and without any statutory permission from any regulatory agencies. This was a ponzy schemes and investors were lured with the promise of very high return.

The money obtained was used for the purchase of immovable properties, various other Crypto currencies, luxury cars and for spending in luxury hotels and resorts.

In this regard, the crypto currencies such as Ethereum (5.92387265), BTC (0.08267646), BNB

(5.51232875), YFI (0.023062), VET (4284.4), ADA (226.479601), USDT (35.88576551) totally valued at INR 25,82,794 were found and all the above crypto currencies, purchased out of the proceeds of crime, were converted into rupees and attached by the ED, it said.

In addition, a search action was conducted at 11 premises situated across various States like Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and New Delhi resulting in identification of assets worth several crores of rupees in the form of immovable property and other details.

The searched premises include the residential and office premises of the entities that are related to Nishad K and his companies.

# Jairam Ramesh pushes for online Parliamentary committee meetings

New Delhi: In the wake of the rise in Covid cases in the national Capital, the meetings of several Parliamentary committees have been cancelled after over 400 Parliament staff tested positive for Covid-19 during random testing.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has now called for conducting online meetings of the standing committees.

"I requested the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha on the last day of the Winter Session to allow online meetings of standing committees. And yet again it was disallowed. Now, important committee meetings are being cancelled. I simply cannot understand why online meetings cannot be held," Ramesh said.

Sources said that apprehension of leakage is the main reason why permission for

online meetings has not been granted yet.

The Parliamentary standing committees on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, Urban Development, and Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology decided to cancel their meetings on Monday, the sources said.

The decision to call off the meeting of the standing committee on External Affairs, scheduled later this week, is likely to be taken today.

Earlier also during the first and second waves of Covid, meetings of the standing committees had been called off.

Over 400 Parliament staff have tested positive for Covid-19 during random testing. Among those who tested positive, 65 are from the Rajya Sabha, 200 from the Lok Sabha and 133 belong to allied ser-

vices.

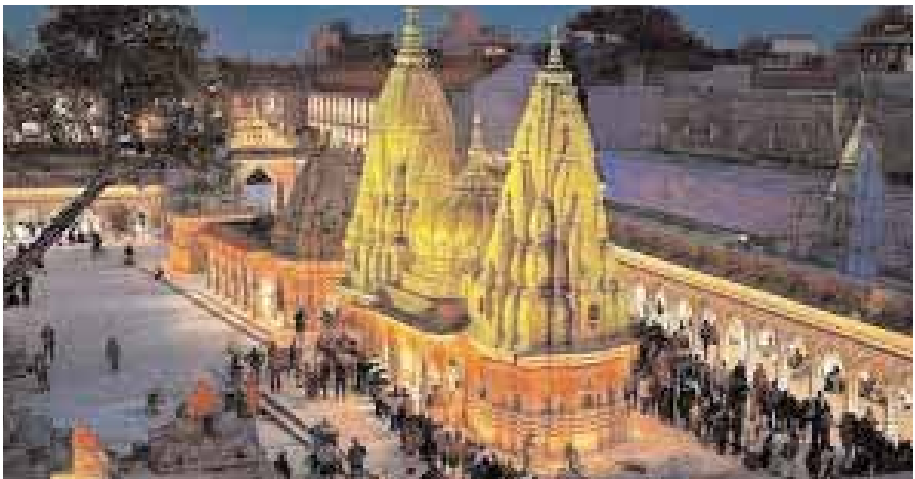
Random testing was conducted after a sudden spike in cases in the national capital, and most of the staff who tested positive did not show any symptoms.

"More random testing will be conducted for those coming to the Parliament to control the spread of the infection," sources said.

The Rajya Sabha Secretariat now restricts staff attendance. As per the new guidelines, 50 per cent of staff or officials below the rank of under-secretary or executive officer are required to work from home.

Earlier, both Rajya Sabha chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had requested all the staff to get double vaccinated. IANS

# KVIC to sell paper slippers for devotees at Kashi Vishwanath temple



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The devotees visiting the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and hundreds of temple workers will no longer need to enter the temple premises barefoot. Beginning from January 14, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is beginning the sale of Khadi handmade paper "Use & Throw" slippers for the use of the devotees and the workers. The Khadi handmade paper slippers will be sold from the

Khadi sales outlet located at the parking lot of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor. Khadi's handmade paper "use & throw" slippers have been developed for the first time in India. These handmade paper slippers are 100% eco-friendly and cost-effective.

According to the KVIC, the handmade paper slippers can be purchased at a nominal price of Rs 50 per pair. The slippers will be sold by Kashi Hastkala Pratisthan, a registered Khadi Institution in

Varanasi. The handmade paper slipper manufacturing unit will be inaugurated by the Mahant of Kashi Vishwanath Temple on Makar Sankranti.

"The devotees visiting the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and hundreds of temple workers will no longer need to enter the temple premises barefoot. Starting January 14, KVIC is beginning the sale of Khadi handmade paper 'use and throw' slippers," the KVIC noted.

The development comes in

wake of the jute slippers sent by the Prime Minister for the workers of Kashi Vishwanath Temple after he learnt that most of the people working at the temple performed their duty barefoot. It is forbidden to wear footwear made of leather or rubber on the temple premises. The entire workforce of the temple including the priests, security guards, sanitation workers and people performing seva have to abide by this rule.

Chairman KVIC, Vinai Kumar Saxena said the "use & throw" slippers made of handmade paper will maintain the sanctity of the temple and at the same time will also save devotees from heat and cold during harsh weather conditions. Also, these slippers will prevent any kind of pollution as they are made of natural fibres. "These handmade paper slippers will uphold the sanctity of the temple. These slippers are made of 100% eco-friendly material. The use of these slippers in temple premises will also create sustainable employment for Khadi artisans. KVIC will be selling these slippers from 14th January," Saxena said.

# SC lawyers get threat calls over PM security lapse case

New Delhi: Several Supreme Court lawyers alleged on Monday that they received calls threatening judges over the case involving the security breach that left Prime Minister Narendra Modi stuck on a fly-over in Punjab for 20 minutes last week.

A police complaint has been filed by lawyer Deepak Prakash over what he says were "terrifying calls" that could lead to riots. The caller threatened "extremely adverse reactions affecting national security and integrity", he alleged.

The calls were made allegedly by a pro-Khalistan organisation Sikhs for Justice (SFJ). Many lawyers say they received an automated call at 10.40 am on Monday. The caller allegedly claimed that the SFJ group was responsible for the blockade by protesting farmers on PM Modi's route when he was travelling by road from Bathinda to Ferozepur on Wednesday. After waiting for 20 minutes for the road to clear up, the Prime Minister turned back and cancelled all his programmes..

The caller allegedly warned that the judges who heard the case "must not help PM Modi" a punish Sikh farmers. They also referred to the 1984 anti-Sikh riot and accused the Supreme



Court of silence on the death of Sikh farmers over the past year, during protests against three now-cancelled farm laws.

"All advocates have been receiving such threatening calls since morning, which indicate that they want to bring hatred, contempt and hostility to disrupt the government and public peace and tranquillity if the Supreme Court hears the PM security breach case," Deepak Prakash's complaint to the police said.

Nikhil Jain, the treasurer of a Supreme Court lawyers' body, said he had received a call from the number +44718365564.

Vishnu Shankar Jain, a lawyer for the Uttar Pradesh government, said he had received the calls twice. "Today,

many Supreme Court lawyers including me have received calls from a number from UK. The call specifically asked Supreme Court Judges to refrain from hearing the petition on the blockade of PM Modi's cavalcade," Mr Jain said. "This matter requires consideration. It is a very serious issue and I think the highest authority must take it up as well," he said.

Nishant Katneshwarkar, a Supreme Court lawyer who once represented the Maharashtra government, also confirmed receiving the call. He said, "In the morning I received two calls from a number in the UK. Most of the Supreme Court lawyers have received such calls."

# Modi to open 11 medical colleges in TN on Jan 12

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Eleven new Government Medical Colleges across Tamil Nadu and the new campus of Central Institute of Classical Tamil in Chennai, will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 12 by way of video conferencing.

The new medical colleges are being established at an estimated cost of about Rs 4000 crore, out of which around Rs 2145 crore has been provided by the Union government and rest by the Tamil Nadu government, according to the Prime Minister's office.

The districts in which the new Medical Colleges are being established are Virudhunagar, Namakkal, The Nilgiris, Tiruppur, Thiruvallur, Nagapattinam, Dindigul, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur, Ramanathapuram and Krishnagiri.

The new medical colleges, with cumulative capacity of 1450 seats, are being established under the Centrally Sponsored scheme of 'Establishing of New Medical Colleges attached with existing district or referral hospital'.

Under the scheme, medical colleges are established in districts, which do not have either a government or private medical college.

# PM to inaugurate 25th national youth fest in Puducherry tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry on January 12, which is the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and also observed as National Youth Day.

During the event, the Prime Minister will unveil by way of video conferencing selected essays on "Mere Sapno ka Bharat" and "Unsung Heroes of Indian Freedom Movement". These essays have been selected from submissions by over 1 lakh youth on the two themes.

Prime Minister will also inaugurate a Technology Centre of the MSME Ministry, established at Puducherry with an investment of about Rs. 122 crore. With focus on the Electronic System Design & Manufacturing (ESDM) Sector, this Technology Centre will be equipped with the latest technology.

It will contribute towards skilling youth and will be able to train around 6400 trainees per year, according to Prime Minister's office.

Prime Minister will also inaugurate the Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Manimandapam – an auditorium with open air theatre, constructed by Government of Puducherry at



a cost of about Rs 23 crores. It would primarily be used for educational purposes, and can accommodate more than 1000 people.

The Festival aims to shape the minds of India's youth and transform them into a united force for nation building.

This year, in view of the emerging Covid situation, the Festival has been scheduled to be held virtually from January 12 to January 13. The inauguration will be followed by the National Youth Summit wherein there will be panel discussions on four identified themes.

In line with the youth-led development and motivating youngsters to solve the emerging issues and challenges, the themes will include environment, climate and SDG led growth; tech, entrepreneurship and innovation; indigenous and ancient wisdom; and national character, nation building and home grown.

# TMC MP O'Brien seeks Parl panel meeting on 'Tek Fog' app

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

TMC's Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien has written to the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs seeking a meeting of the panel to discuss the issue of "hijacking and manipulating" social media trends using 'Tek Fog' app which he said is a "threat" to national security and privacy of citizens.

A recent media report alleged that people associated with the ruling BJP's IT cell were purportedly using the app to take control of inactive WhatsApp accounts, send messages to frequently contacted numbers, and "hijack" trending topics on social media platforms. This is the second letter the TMC MP has written to Congress leader and panel head Anand Sharma for a meeting.

In his letter on Monday, O'Brien said that the exposé shows that the Tek Fog app gives cyber troops the ability to hijack WhatsApp accounts of private citizens by sending them spyware disguised as a media file. It then remotely



accesses inactive accounts in their contact list and uses the inactive number to send targeted messages to all their contacts.

"All of the hijacked number's contacts are synced to a database on cloud, ripe for picking as future targets of disinformation and harassment... It is also pointed out that this hacking technique was formerly used by the Pegasus spyware, before the NSO Group developed an even more sophisticated zero-click hijacking method," he said.

He said that the application can automate the sending of WhatsApp messages across networks of groups, flooding the social media space with

misinformation and fake news, misleading individual citizens, and manipulating political narratives.

"Use of such manipulative technology is a danger to national security and democratic rights of free speech and unfettered media, and a threat to individual citizens' privacy and safety. I, therefore, request you to call a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs at the earliest, to discuss these developments," said O'Brien who is also the leader of the TMC's Parliamentary Party in Rajya Sabha and a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs.

# Scientists develop durable Braille maps using digital embossing technology

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists from National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation (NATMO) under the Department of Science & Technology have developed user-friendly long lasting durable Braille maps using advanced technology for visually challenged students in the country.

The digital embossing technology is a technology which eliminates the need for printing plates, moulds, chemicals, and solvents, emitting no pollutants or waste and reduces overall energy usage, said a statement from the DST here.

The maps produced using this technology are not only useful for high-speed produc-



tion of the maps but can also produce Braille Maps that can be used by more people for years together. It has been experienced that the maps produced with earlier technology have lost its readability and feeling experience within a very short span of time, it added.

Initially, NATMO had published Braille Atlas for Visually Impaired (India), edition 2017 in English Braille Script which received huge response from the visually impaired community. It was developed with an indigenous manual embossing method. It was conferred

with the National Award on "Science & Technology Intervention for Physically Challenged" for this publication which was officially released on February 10, 2017.

In continuation, NATMO received unexpected and overwhelming demands for Braille Atlases from different corners, encouraging it to prepare Braille Atlases in Hindi and other regional languages.

With encouragement and support from the Department of Science & Technology, NATMO has developed a Braille Unit with state-of-art cutting edge solutions such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and spot UV coating methods for Digital Embossing Solution. The complete process under-

goes different stages with end-to-end solutions in digital platforms.

Braille Atlas of India were distributed in 323 schools of India as a proof of concept (PoC). Along with this publication, NATMO also organized Braille Workshops & Quiz Contests to develop awareness among the visually impaired students, teachers and trainers. From 2017 to 2019, a total 1409 students from 97 schools of 22 States & UT participated in the Braille Workshops & Quiz Contests.

The unique Braille Solution Unit will be launched soon with the expectation to fulfil the demands of the larger community at PAN India level, said the statement.



# 2 Al-Badr ultras gunned down in J&K's Anantnag

PNS ■ JAMMU

Braving inclement weather conditions a joint team of security forces on Monday gunned down two terrorists belonging to the Al-Badr terrorist outfit in village Hasanpora of Anantnag. The operation was launched in the area late on Sunday evening after confirming the presence of local terrorists in the area. So far 13 terrorists, including 6 foreign mercenaries, have been eliminated by the security forces in over half a dozen encounters. Meanwhile, strict vigil is being maintained along the line of control in the North Kashmir district of Kupwara to prevent fresh infiltration bids. As per police records, both the killed terrorists were catego-

rized terrorists. They have been identified as Imad Muzaffar Wani resident of Arigam Pulwama and Abdul Rashid Thoker resident of Hassanpora. According to a police spokesman, both the slain ultras were part of groups involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities. Terrorist Imad Wani was involved in an attack on police personnel Mushtaq Ahmad Wagay of Pulwama on 19-12-2021, in which the said police personnel got seriously injured. While as, killed terrorist Abdul Rashid Thoker, before joining terrorist ranks was working as terrorist associate and was also involved in attack on a civilian at Chitragram in which said civilian got injured.

# Civic polls to go ahead: SEC to HC

BJP, CPM oppose stand, seek postponement of polls till Corona graph declines in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as Bengal continued to witness a steep hike in corona cases, the State Election Commission on Monday told the Calcutta High Court that it would go ahead with the January 22 elections to the four municipal corporations of Asansol, Siliguri, Bidhannagar and Chandannagar elections as per schedule. Asked earlier by the Court to file an affidavit noting its stance on the holding of elections the SEC said that it had put all the pandemic protocols in place banning large gatherings and rallies restricted and asking the candidates to organize online campaigns.

Hearing a petition, seeking postponement of the polls, in view of rising corona cases, the Court had earlier directed the SEC to give its views. The matter was likely to be heard on Tuesday. Amid rising corona graph

that on Sunday saw 24,287 new cases ---highest single day spike so far --- Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar too tested positive and had to be hospitalized, party sources said. Lambasting the Trinamool Congress and its "electoral ally" SEC, BJP on Monday said that the State ruling party had no sympathy either for the people or for its administrative staff including the police "otherwisethey would not have thrust an election on the people." State spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said that "the way the Government and the SEC are behaving is proof enough that they do not value people's lives," adding "whatever is going on in the name of elections is nothing but a Tamasha (drama) as no party is allowed to go to for campaigning." He said "both the voters and candidates are taking part

in the polls in captivity because the parties will not be able to campaign and the voters will not be able to go to the booths to cast their votes ... We have been asking people about what they would do on the polling day and they are saying that they may not go to vote at the risk of getting infected ... this is not a vote but a tamasha where the foregone conclusion is written on the wall." BJP apart, the Left and the Congress too have asked for postponement of elections to a future date when the corona graph falls. CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty too wondered, why "when they could postpone polls and appoint administrators in all the municipalities from March 2020 onwards when there was no corona in Bengal why are they conducting polls now when the virus has invaded Bengal as never before."

## HC seeks Govt's clarification on preventing Opp leader from visiting State's people

**Kolkata:** Taking note of how Bengal Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari was being repeatedly blockaded by the State administration during his district tours the Calcutta High Court on Monday directed the State Government to explain its acts by January 18 the next date of hearing. Adhikari who was earlier blocked by the State Police from visiting some villages in Bankura and Netai in West Midnapore district had filed a petition before the High Court wondering whether he as an Opposition Leader enjoying Z+ security had any right to visit the people of the State and undertake his own political programmes.

State Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar too had sought explanation from Chief Secretary and Director General of Police as to why the Leader of Opposition was repeatedly being stopped from visiting places. "In view of highly disturbing scenario reminiscent of emergency, ... Governor has directed Chief Secretary and DGP to brief him ... with written report," a Raj Bhavan tweet said. The Governor said that in spite of January 5 High Court order (allowing Adhikari free movement) the "Leader of Opposition was so ill-treated by the administration and police compromising his fundamental rights. PNS

## CEC meet held to discuss names for 1st phase poll

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

To discuss the names of probable candidates for the first phase of polls in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress Party's Central Election Committee (CEC) held a meeting on Monday. In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Congress CEC for Uttar Pradesh held a virtual meeting in the evening. According to sources, the first list of candidates for the Uttar Pradesh assembly election would be announced soon. The party is facing a tough time in finding potential female candidates, especially as Congress general secretary and incharge UP, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, has made it clear that she will field at least 40 per cent women candidates in the present assembly polls in UP. Though a big number of women have applied for the tickets but as majority of them are new to the party, it is very difficult for the CEC to find suitable candidates.

# Veg vendor collects ₹1L for EDCC's 'edu drive'

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Vavachan, a poor vegetable vendor from Angamali, is the new star of the Indian National Congress in Kerala. Ernakulam District Congress Committee's move to educate and make party workers read books and periodicals got a shot in the arm thanks to the efforts of Vavachan. An ordinary party worker, Vavachan has emerged as a role model for the cadre and leaders alike. Mohammed Shiyaz, the president of the DCC, while addressing a block committee meeting recently had asked party cadres to mobilize funds or books for the library to be set up by the party. "Vavachan told me after the meeting that he would collect books/funds for the proposed library. Despite being taunted by other Congress workers who were cynical of the move to set up a library, Vavachan took it up as a challenge," Shiyaz told *The Pioneer*. Vavachan pleaded with his



customers for books or donations. An old lady who has been buying vegetables from him for decades gave him her gold earrings asking him to sell the same and use the money for buying books. "I got ₹18,000/- by selling that ear rings. Many people came forward with books and donations. By the end of December, I had mobilized ₹1,00,000/- for the library," said Vavachan. He said



that though many party workers had made fun of him when he launched the drive to collect funds, people by and large were happy and donated him with books and cash. Shiyaz, the young DCC chief, was moved by the efforts of Vavachan and chose to honour him in a different manner. He sought the presence of V D Satheeshan, Leader of the

Opposition, himself to come to Angamali (home town of Vavachan) to accept the books as well as the cash. "Vavachan is an exception to other political activists as he reads half a dozen newspapers and periodicals every day. He is well aware of the topical issues, both national and Kerala specific. It is people like Vavachan

# SFI student activist stabbed to death amid college union polls

## KHC had banned campus politics

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Dheeraj, a computer science student and SFI leader in Government Engineering College, Idukki, was stabbed to death on Monday by a gang belonging to the rival KSU. The murder occurred amidst college union election in which the CPI(M) controlled SFI and the rival KSU, the students wing of the Indian National Congress were engaged in tough fight. Though campus politics has been banned by the Kerala High Court, the government or the political parties have not taken any action to implement the verdict. Nikhil Pylee, a Congress leader has been arrested by the Idukki Police in connection with the murder. SFI have declared a statewide agitation

on Tuesday including boycotting of classes. College Principals and political observers are unanimous in their view that elections in campuses should not be held based on political leaning. "One has to doubt the intention of the Kerala Government not to shut down schools and colleges despite the upsurge in Covid-19 cases. On Monday, the State diagnosed 5,797 new cases and the Test Positivity Rate stood 12.6 per cent. The CPI(M) -led Kerala Government wants to establish its total control over educational institutions and universities. There is no justification for the government's decision to keep the colleges and universities opened despite the hike in Covid-19 cases," said Hari Kartha, former chief editor, Janmabhumi. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan condemned the murder of Dheeraj. "The murder of Dheeraj is reprehensible. The

government has asked the police to put their foot firmly and suppress all kinds of violence. We will not allow the campuses to become killing fields," said Vijayan in his social media post. Kodyeri Balakrishnan, CPI(M) secretary, blamed KPCC president K Sudhakaran for the murder. "It is after he was appointed as the KPCC chief that political murders shot up in the State," Balakrishnan told reporters at the State capital. Meanwhile, activists of the DYFI (youth wing of the CPI-M) have waylaid Sudhakaran at Malappuram where he had gone to address a camp of party workers. A KSU leader pointed out that the SFI activists themselves complained that the police refused to shift Dheeraj to the hospital despite their pleas. "There were internal issues in the SFI itself and last Friday saw they clashing among themselves," said a KSU functionary.

## Michael Lobo resigns as Goa Minister, quits BJP

**Panaji:** Goa minister and BJP MLA Michael Lobo on Monday resigned from the Pramod Sawant-led Cabinet and also as member of the Legislative Assembly, ahead of the state polls scheduled next month. The Goa BJP unit later said Lobo's move will not have any impact on the party's prospects in the state Assembly elections, to be held on February 14. Lobo, who represented the Calangute Assembly constituency and held charge of the state port and waste management departments, submitted his resignation to the chief minister's office and the Goa Assembly's Speaker. He is likely to join the Congress, according to sources. Asked whether he will join the Congress, Lobo said he is in talks with other political parties. He claimed that people were unhappy with the ruling BJP in the coastal state. The voters told me that the BJP is no more a party of the common people," he said, while claiming that the grass-root level workers were feeling ignored by the party. However, Goa BJP president Sadanand Shet Tanavade said Lobo's decision to leave the party will have no impact on its prospects in the upcoming state polls. Lobo had left the party long back and he was "only physically present with us," Tanavade said. He may have left, but other workers in the Calangute Assembly constituency are with the party, he said. The BJP will field a fresh candidate to retain the Calangute Assembly seat in the elections, Tanavade said. The Election Commission of India on Saturday announced that elections to all 40 Assembly constituencies in Goa would be held on February 14. The BJP, Congress, Goa Forward Party (GFP), Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Trinamool Congress Party (TMC), and NCP are the main political parties in the fray. PTI

# Untoward incident averted at CSMIA

Firefighters douze blaze in pushback truck towing aircraft

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A major disaster was averted at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in Mumbai on Monday, as the airport fire brigade officials doused the blaze after a pushback truck towing an Air India aircraft suddenly caught fire. The mishap took place at around 12.30 pm when a towing truck caught fire when it was preparing to push back Air India's Mumbai-Jamnagar aircraft with 85 passengers on board. Within minutes of the fire breaking out, the Fire brigade teams at the airport rushed to the scene and brought the blaze under control within 10 minutes. No one was injured in the

## 1 killed, 2 injured in factory gas leak in N-E Mumbai

PNS ■ MUMBAI

One person was killed while two others were injured when a gas leak took place at a factory located at an industrial area at Ghalapor in north-east Mumbai on Monday morning. The incident occurred at 8 am when Methanol and Cyanuric Chloride leaked on the premises of a factory in Kurla Industrial Estate. The fire brigade personnel, who rushed to the scene, identified the person killed as one Ramnivas Sarod (360, who

died after inhaling the toxic gasses. Two others identified as Rubin Solkar (36) Sarvansh Sonavane (25) have been admitted to the nearby Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation-run Rajawadi Hospital where the condition of both the persons was described as stable. The cause of the gas leak has not been established as yet. The BMC fire brigade are looking into the circumstances leading to the mishap. damage to the aircraft.

However, owing to a swift action by the Airport officials, what could have been a major tragedy was averted. A CSMIA spokesperson said that the incident took place when the pushback trolley was at service of Air India's Mumbai-Jamnagar flight which had 85 passengers onboard. "Today, at the Mumbai airport, a fire was reported on Air India Pushback Tractor on stand V26R. This tractor was to push back Air India flight AIC-647 (Mumbai-Jamnagar) being operated by A320 aircraft VT-EXM. There were eighty five persons on board. Fire was immediately extinguished. There is no damage to the aircraft. Aircraft departed at 1204 pm," a Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCL) spokesperson said.



Children walk on a snow-covered road after recent snowfall at a village at Tangmarg, in Baramulla district, on Monday

PTI

## COVID BULLETIN

# Maha reeling under Covid 3rd wave: State Health Min

## '33K Covid cases including 31 Omicron infections reported in State'

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said here on Monday that the State had begun to reel under the third Covid-19 wave, even as 33,470 Covid-19 daily infections, Tanavade said. The Election Commission of India on Saturday announced that elections to all 40 Assembly constituencies in Goa would be held on February 14. The BJP, Congress, Goa Forward Party (GFP), Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Trinamool Congress Party (TMC), and NCP are the main political parties in the fray. PTI

started. We do not know when the third wave will peak. The number of cases has gone up 44,388. The number of cases is increasing now. During the second wave, we used to record 65,000 cases every day. It is difficult to predict what would be the number of daily cases when the third wave peaks in the state. Experts are predicting that the third wave may peak by the end of this month," Tope said. Meanwhile, the daily Covid-19 cases dropped from 44,388 on Sunday to 33,470 on Monday, taking the total number of cases recorded 69,20,044 to 69,53,514 cases. As many as 8 Covid-19 deaths were reported from various parts of the state. Talking to media persons here, Tope said that the state had begun to come under the grip of the Covid-19 wave and it was difficult to predict as to how long it would continue. But it was certain that the state would reel under the third wave for the whole of January. "The third Covid-19 wave



Commuters walk on a crowded railway platform amid a nationwide surge in coronavirus virus cases, during the third wave of Covid-19 in Kolkata, on Monday

PTI

the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 65,72,432 to 66,02,103. The recovery rate in the state dropped from 94.98 per cent to 94.95 per cent. The

number of "active cases" in the state increased from 2,02,259 cases to 2,06,046. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 2.04 per cent to 2.03 per cent. Of the total recorded cases, Mumbai accounts for a maximum of 1,03,862 active cases, while there are 45,801 active

cases in Thane. There are 22,290 active cases in Pune, followed by Raigad (8,038), Palghar (7,268), Nashik (4,465), Nagpur (3,345), Satara (1,402), Ahmednagar (1,306) and Aurangabad (856). Of the 7,07,188,888,911 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 69,53,514 have tested positive (9.83 per cent) for COVID-19 until Monday. Currently, 12,46,729 people are in home quarantine while 2505 people are in institutional quarantine. Meanwhile, the following is the break-up of a total 1247 Omicron cases recorded in the state so far, Mumbai: 606, PMC-251, Pimpri-Chinchwad-69, Sangli-59, Nagpur-51, Thane-48, Pune rural-34, Kolhapur-18, Panvel-17, Osmanabad-11, Navi Mumbai and Satara-10 Covid each, Amravati-7, Kalyan Dombivli-7, Buldhana and Vasai-Virar-6 each, Bhiwandi-Nizampur and Akola-5 each,

Nanded, Ulhasnagar, Aurangabad, Mira-Bhayandar and Gondia-3 each, Ahmednagar, Gadchiroli, Latur and Nandurbar-2 each, Jalna and Raigad-one each. Of the total cases 467 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 2,59,527.

## Bihar CM Nitish Kumar tests +ve

**Patna:** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has tested positive for COVID 19 and is in home isolation, his office said on Monday. The chief minister's office shared the information on its Twitter handle, adding that the septuagenarian has urged people of the state to follow all measures which are part of the Covid protocol. Notably, on Monday last, several attendees of his 'Janta Ke Durbar Mein Mukhyamantri' programme had tested positive for the contagion. A day later, many ministers, including both Deputy CMs had tested positive just ahead of a cabinet meeting. This had prompted Kumar to suspend many of his programmes including the state-wide 'Samaj Sudhar Abhiyan' against alcohol consumption, and social evils like dowry and child marriage. In the past one week, several staff members deployed at the Chief Minister's 1, Anne Marg, residence have been found infected with the coronavirus. PTI








FIRST COLUMN

INDUSTRIALISATION OF SPACE



GWYNNE DYER

Space transport becoming an industrial-scale operation like road transport was back then

It will be a bumper year for big space launches to the Moon, Mars, and asteroids, including many manned flights, but the real shocker is the number of satellites and spaceships being launched by private companies. Never mind Elon Musk's twelve-thousand-small-satellite Starlink programme, which is already becoming a traffic hazard after only 1,892 satellites have been launched, sixty at a time. (The Chinese have lodged a complaint.) There are 39 other companies in eleven different countries whose vehicles are scheduled to make their maiden flights this year. There's 'Blue Whale 1' from Perigee Aerospace in South Korea, 'Agnibaan' from AgniKul Cosmos in India, and 'RFA One' from Rocket Factory Augsburg in Germany. Not to mention 'Hyperbola-2' from i-Space in China, 'Eris' from Gilmour Space Technologies in Australia, and 'Terran 1' from Relativity Space in the United States. It's like 1910, when there were hundreds of start-up car manufacturers in the world. Space transport is becoming an industrial-scale operation now like road transport was then, and everybody with an alternative approach that might fly is piling in. For example, 'Blue Whale 1' is a two-stage, two-tonne rocket that can put a 50-kg. satellite into a 500-km-high Sun-synchronous orbit. Perigee plans to launch up to forty Blue Whale 1 rockets a year from an Australian site at \$2 million each. Agnibaan's special feature is that its rocket engine is 3D-printed at the company's site in Chennai. It can deliver a 100-kg. payload to a 700 km. orbit, and the launches will be made from Alaska since India still has limited space at its own commercial launch sites. And on, and on... But the four really heavy lifters are all American, and all are attempting first flights this year. Blue Origin' is designed to deliver 45 tonnes to LEO, but only the first stage is reusable. 'Vulcan-Centaur', mostly for military use, lifts 27 tonnes into LEO and 12 tonnes to a lunar transfer orbit. Space Launch System (SLS), descended from the rocket that carried the Space Shuttle into orbit, is NASA's own new heavy lifter. It will ultimately be able to deliver 95 tonnes to LEO and 27 tonnes to a lunar transfer orbit. The star of the show, without a doubt, is Elon Musk's Starship, whose first flight is still tentatively scheduled for this month. It may well crash and burn - most of his maiden flights do - but that's the way he works, and he has planned at least a dozen more launches this year. If there are bugs in the newly celebrated marriage of the super-heavy launch vehicle and the passenger- and cargo-carrying Starship proper, he'll weed them out in the end. This is a real spaceship: room for a hundred people or a thousand cubic metres of cargo space. Both parts are reusable, and the Starship can refuel in orbit. It will land on the Moon, and eventually on Mars. It will be, as Musk said, "a generalized transport mechanism for the greater solar system." All of these advances will be overshadowed by the various space spectaculars coming up this year: the unfolding of the James Webb telescope, NASA's 'Artemis' mission orbiting the Moon, the joint Russian- European ExoMars mission, Indian, Russian, Japanese and South Korean soft landings on the Moon. But the real news is that after marking time for fifty years, we are actually getting off the planet at last. Cargo to orbit is now affordable (if you're rich or corporate), and both Earth orbit and the surface of the Moon will begin to accumulate a human population. A thousand people in fifteen years? Mars will take a little longer, probably, but we're on our way.

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

# FDI in retail: The conundrum persists



UTTAM GUPTA

The way forward is to legitimise Foreign Direct Investment in Indian online retail along with 100 per cent FDI in offline retail without any riders

In 2020, the Department of Consumer Affairs, in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution issued the Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules, under Section 101 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The rules require all e-commerce entities that are not established in India, but intending to operate here to register with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade in the Commerce Ministry, bar affiliated entities from selling on e-commerce platforms and restricting 'flash sales', and disallow seller from using the name or brand associated with that of marketplace e-commerce entity for promotion of goods.

Within a year, the government proposed amendments through the Consumer Protection (e-commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2021. These amendments include restricting business-to-business or B2B sales (business conducted between one business entity and another, such as transaction between a marketplace firm and the seller) in e-commerce, a provision to prevent 'abuse of dominant position' by e-commerce firms, and a fallback liability clause (it makes e-commerce firms liable in case a seller on their platform fails to deliver goods or services that causes loss to the customer).

The amendments are a response to the complaint lodged by the Confederation of All India Traders and other associations regarding violation of the Foreign Direct Investment policy by global e-commerce players, Amazon and Walmart-owned-Flipkart, etc. For close to five years, these bodies have been registering protest with the concerned authorities, viz., Reserve Bank of India, Enforcement Directorate, Ministry of Commerce and Industries besides the judiciary regarding the 'unfair' and 'discriminatory' treatment meted out to traders by foreign majors on their marketplace. These petitions have failed to make an impact. Here are some facts:

In a PIL filed by the Retailers Association of India in early 2018 alleging violation of FDI norms in e-commerce, ED had informed the Delhi High Court on October 31, 2018, that it was investigating violation of the Foreign Exchange Management Act against Amazon, et al but the proceedings are stuck due to the lackadaisical attitude of agencies and the court.

The All-India Online Vendors Association had petitioned the Competition Commission of India alleging abuse of market dominance against Flipkart India Private Limited (it is into wholesale trading/distribution) and e-commerce marketplace Flipkart Internet Private Limited. But, CCI saw nothing wrong in this practice; it wondered 'how come any one player in the market command any dominant position'.

Even as the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) quashed the CCI ruling and ordered a probe, nothing

“

IF THE MODI GOVERNMENT GOES AHEAD WITH THE NEW RULES, IT WILL TANTAMOUNT TO OVERTURNING THE 2016 AND 2018 GUIDELINES. IT WILL BE VIEWED AS RETROSPECTIVE CHANGE OF POLICY AND SEND A WRONG SIGNAL TO FOREIGN INVESTORS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE EXISTING POLICY DISPENSATION CONTINUES, THIS WILL TANTAMOUNT TO THE GOVERNMENT BACKTRACKING ON ITS COMMITMENT TO SMALL TRADERS

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



is heard on the subject thereafter.

In another complaint filed on January 13, 2020, another traders' body Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh alleging anti-competitive behavior by Amazon Seller Services (it operates an e-commerce marketplace) and Flipkart Internet, the CCI had ordered a probe. But the investigation was stayed by the High Court of Karnataka.

As for submissions before the Union Government, all that we see is either Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal reprimanding Amazon chief Jeff Bezos (February, 2020) or the DPIIT (the department under his ministry dealing with FDI) issuing directions to the RBI and ED to take action against the errant e-commerce firms (December, 2020). Now, we have Rules issued by the DoCA aimed at reining in e-commerce firms (paradoxically, these have been opposed by none other than DPIIT).

Will these Rules help achieve the objective? Was there anything wrong with the extant Rules?

As per the guidelines issued in early 2016, 100 per cent FDI is allowed under the marketplace model. The marketplace is a platform where vendors sell their products to consumers even as its owner merely acts as a facilitator by providing services such as booking orders, raising invoices, arranging delivery, accepting payments, etc. No inventory can be held or direct selling undertaken.

Two conditions are prescribed: The entity cannot permit more than 25 per cent of total sales on the marketplace from one vendor or its group companies. Two, it cannot directly or indirectly influence the sale price. Sans any mention as to

who the vendor is, a firm linked to marketplace either its subsidiary or a Joint Venture with an Indian company is eligible. As for the second condition, it is not easy to establish that marketplace owner has manipulated the sale price.

Thus, these norms permitted e-commerce majors as direct sellers albeit through their subsidiary/JV. A clarification issued on December 26, 2018, said: "The owner of the marketplace or its subsidiary or its JV with an Indian company can't have ownership of the seller." Moreover, "a seller on the platform can't source more than 25% of its inventory from a firm connected with the latter".

The owner could get around both; first, by having less than 50 per cent shareholding in the seller firm and argue, he or she has no control (albeit majority) over the latter and second, by its wholesale arm restricting supplies to the seller within 25 per cent threshold. It is therefore not surprising that the e-commerce majors continue to hold sway over the marketplace run by them. For instance, only three dozen firms out of 400,000 sellers on Amazon platform account for 67 per cent of sales on it.

Now, look at the proposed rules (2020) and amendments (2021). The thrust of both sets is to establish a 'disconnect' between the seller and the marketplace. Whether, it is barring affiliated entities from selling on e-commerce platform or restricting transaction between a marketplace firm and the seller or preventing 'abuse of dominant position' by e-commerce firms or disallowing seller from using the name or brand associated with that of marketplace entity for promoting sale of their

goods, all point towards this overarching goal.

Juxtapose these rules with what is already there in the 2016 guidelines and the clarification issued on December 26, 2018. Both are at cross-purposes. While the former wants a total disconnect (the owner of the marketplace or its subsidiary can't have even 1% shareholding of the seller on the platform; besides, the seller can't source any supplies from a firm linked to the marketplace), the latter allows an e-commerce major to be a direct seller - albeit indirectly. This throws up a serious dilemma.

If the Modi Government goes ahead with the new rules, it will tantamount to overturning the 2016 and 2018 guidelines. It will be viewed as retrospective change of policy and send a wrong signal to foreign investors. On the other hand, if the existing policy dispensation continues, this will tantamount to the Government backtracking on its commitment to small traders.

Caught between the Devil and the deep sea, so far the team of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has merely tried to buy time in the name of wider consultations. But a decision can't be deferred indefinitely.

The way forward is to legitimize FDI in Indian online retail. Modi should also allow 100 per cent FDI in offline retail without any riders (at present, 51 per cent FDI is allowed subject to a host of conditions bordering on prohibition). This will enable all retailers, online or offline, big or small, to compete with one another on equal terms. It will be a win-win for all stakeholders including the Government which will be spared the rigmarole of having to regulate the sector.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

BRIEFED PRIYANKA GANDHI ON WHATEVER HAPPENED DURING PRIME MINISTER MODI'S VISIT TO THE STATE ON WEDNESDAY. —PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI



WHAT CONSTITUTIONAL POST DOES PRIYANKA GANDHI HOLD AND WHO IS SHE TO BE KEPT IN LOOP REGARDING PM'S SECURITY? —BJP SPOKESPERSON SAMBIT PATRA

# Government needs effective communications strategy

The Government's performance depends upon proper communication of its policies and schemes but little or no effort is made in this direction



ALOK RANJAN

*(The writer is former Chief Secretary, Government of Uttar Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)*

was the chief guest in a seminar of the medium and small industries sector (MSME) at Lucknow recently and surprised to find that the biggest problem appeared to be a huge communication gap between the government and the entrepreneurs. Most MSME members are not aware of the government schemes available for them and are unable to take advantage of them. That is why the objectives of the schemes are not fully realized.

MSME is a key sector. Nearly 60 million MSME units in the country employ about 110 million people and contribute 30 percent of GDP and 48 percent of exports. At the seminar, I found that most industrialists spoke about the problem of getting credit for

the sector, marketing their products, and technological innovation. Later, when the various schemes were outlined and explained to them, they were surprised to find that they could run their industry much better by using the incentives offered by the government.

It was then decided that awareness meetings need to be held in various industrial areas, districts and academic institutions and that the government should take the initiative so that intended beneficiaries are sensitized properly. Strangely though, the entire performance of the government depends upon proper communication of its policies and schemes but little or no effort is made in this direction. It is true for other



sectors as well — agriculture, environment, health, and education. There is thus a need for a communication strategy at the level of the Union and State Governments.

I was closely associated during my tenure as an IAS officer with the information department of UP. The department issued advertisements to the media to highlight government's achievements. The vital schemes are mentioned but details are not given. Merely issuing an advertisement does not make people

aware of the benefits of the schemes. During my tenure as District Magistrate, we had an information officer whose job was to make people aware of the government schemes and projects. He was expected to use local folk artists and theatre to popularize government schemes and make them reach the citizens in a simple and entertaining manner. This used to be quite effective but over time these innovative tools of communication are not being resorted to.

The quickest way to reach the millions is through the use of social media. Increasingly the government and its officers are using Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Whatsapp messaging to communicate their ideas and schemes. Normally large budgets are allotted to the information department but somehow it is spent on expensive advertisements. We need to evaluate whether this budget is being utilized effectively and are the people being made aware of government schemes and policies.

One-way communication does not always give the right results. For communication to be effective, there is need for feedback. Fortunately, technology has made this a simple matter. I recall as Chief Secretary, I wanted to know whether the beneficiaries of various schemes are genuine and have got the desired benefit. In the past, the only way of knowing was to physically verify things. Technology now makes it possible to do 100 per cent verification and in no time. We set up a call center to

contact the listed beneficiaries on their cell phones to find out whether they had received assistance under various government schemes. We also gave them details of schemes over the phone and took their feedback and suggestions. This worked really well and I would like to use this template for future use of technology-based communication.

In rural areas radio is an excellent mode of communication. Television also plays a useful role. However, there is no substitute for old-fashioned face-to-face interaction. I remember as a District officer I used to visit villages and hold meetings explaining to the villagers about government schemes and how they could avail the benefits. The audience was given time to clear their

doubts and put forward their grievances. Over the years paper work increased so much that that touring in the interior areas has become rare.

The government needs a professional approach for dissemination of information and communication with the citizens. Apart from print media, television, field visits and use of folk art, the strategy is to go digital. Social media has tremendous reach and therefore becomes an important medium. Technology can make information accessible to all. If the Government genuinely wants to get full benefit of the budget being spent on the development schemes it would be well advised to make communication strategy and consequent action plan one of its top priorities.



# Singapore says 30% Covid-19 deaths in 2021 were fully vaccinated

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Fully vaccinated individuals accounted for 30 per cent of Singapore's total COVID-19 related deaths last year, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in Parliament on Monday.

The minister said that Singapore last year registered 802 deaths due to the coronavirus, out of which 247 were fully vaccinated people. Most of the vaccinated individuals, who died from COVID-19 related complications, had received non-mRNA vaccines, according to crude incidence rates of deaths provided by Ong.

Ong provided the crude incidence rates based on type of vaccination: 11 deaths per 100,000 for those vaccinated with Sinovac, 7.8 per 100,000 for Sinopharm, 6.2 per 100,000 for Pfizer-BioNTech and 1 per 100,000 for Moderna.

"Be mindful, we are calculating this based on quite a small sample of 247 deaths... These rates are only indicative since they do not account for other factors which can affect mortality such as the age and timing of vaccination," Channel News Asia quoted Ong as saying in the House.

The remaining 555 people who died from COVID-19 last year were not fully vaccinated. Although the unvaccinated represents a "small propor-

tion" of Singapore's population, those deaths accounted for 70 per cent of the total COVID-19 deaths last year, Ong said.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has managed to vaccinate "well over 90 per cent" of every eligible age group over the past months, he said. "We are especially happy to see that amongst seniors aged 60 to 69, and 70 and above, 96 per cent and 95 per cent have been fully vaccinated respectively," the minister said.

As for those aged 12 to 19 years old, 95 per cent are fully vaccinated, said the minister, while response has been "good" and operations have been "smooth" for vaccinations among younger children aged five to 11.

"At this time, only the Pfizer-BioNTech/Comirnaty vaccine is authorised for use in ages below 18 years. We will continue to monitor closely the availability of other vaccines, including non-mRNA vaccines that are approved for use in children," Ong assured the House.

Singapore's booster programme is "gathering pace", with about 46 per cent of the population having received their boosters (third injection), said Ong. "We have recently brought some 900,000 individuals aged 18 to 29 into the booster programme, of whom

700,000 are already eligible to receive their boosters today," he said.

The MOH has also set a validity period for full vaccination status of 270 days, to send "a strong signal to our population".

However, it is "still too early to tell" whether there is a need for further booster shots, he said. Israel is the only country that has authorised a fourth dose for

non-immunocompromised individuals. Meanwhile, the current COVID-19 safe measures will only be tightened as a "last resort" when Singapore's healthcare system is under heavy strain, Ong said.

"It is the (multi-ministry task force's) hope that we can ride through the Omicron wave with the current safe management measures. "If we have to tighten the restrictions, it will be as a last resort when our healthcare system is under severe pressure," he said, in response to questions on whether stricter rules will be put in place.

Citing Singapore's experience with the Delta wave last year, Ong said that even after it subsided, authorities had refrained from "being too jubilant" and over-relaxing restrictions. "That would have been a mistake," he said.

## Philippines reports 3rd day of record virus cases

AP ■ BEIJING

**Manila:** The Philippines on Monday reported a record high number of new COVID-19 cases for third day, logging 33,169 infections. The positivity rate, or percentage of tested people whose results came out positive, also soared to 46 per cent, another record high since pandemic started two years ago. Monday's tally brings Philippines' total infection count nearer to 3 million mark at 2,998,530. The death toll stood at 52,293 with 145 new deaths recorded. Officials said they are assuming that local transmission of highly contagious omicron variant is driving the current spike in cases. Some experts have called for increased restrictions as cases surge and hospital operations are being hobbled by number of infected health workers. But officials said on Monday that there is still no need to raise alert to fourth level of five-step alert system. The capital region Metro Manila and several provinces and cities are under under Alert Level 3 until January 15.

AP

## Chinese port city reports 41 virus cases, amid mass testing

AP ■ BEIJING

Authorities in the Chinese city of Tianjin on Monday reported 41 COVID-19 infections out of 3.4 million residents tested since the discovery of two local omicron cases. Officials say they plan to test all of the 14 million inhabitants of the large port city that lies near the capital of Beijing.

City officials said that 41 people had tested positive as of 6 p.m. Local time, according to state broadcaster CCTV. Of those 31 had COVID-19 symptoms and 10 did not.

The outbreak, while small, has raised concerns because it is the first one in China linked to omicron and comes as nearby Beijing is set to host the Winter Olympics in less than a month. The port city is also an industrial hub with Volkswagen and Airbus factories. Tianjin has locked down affected parts of the city, but so far not ordered a total lockdown. It has closed some subway stops, the zoo, museums and libraries. The citywide

testing was being carried out in two phases on Sunday and Monday. The measures, in response to a relatively small number of cases compared to other countries, shows how far China is going to shut down outbreaks as it pursues a zero COVID-19 strategy.

The restrictions have only tightened ahead of the Olympics, which China and the International Olympic Committee seem determined to pull off despite the spread of the omicron variant globally.

China has locked down two other cities battling delta outbreaks, the historic ancient capital of Xi'an in Shaanxi province and the smaller city of Yuzhou in neighboring Henan province. The number of new cases in Xi'an, home to famed Terracotta Warriors statues in a former emperor's tomb, fell to just 15 on Sunday, but the city of 13 million people remained locked down. Officials said that sections of the city could be opened up when they meet certain conditions including no new cases in past 14 days.

## Singapore expects Omicron wave to be several times larger' than Delta: Minister

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore can expect an infection wave due to Omicron "several times larger" than the one caused by Delta, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in Parliament on Monday as he cited the latest variant's higher transmissibility.

Responding to a query from a Member of Parliament, the minister said that cases are likely to double every two to three days. Singapore can expect an infection wave "several times larger" than the one caused by Delta, said Ong, citing the Omicron variant's higher transmissibility.

"If Delta infections reached a sustained incidence of about 3,000 cases a day, Omicron could perhaps reach 10,000 to 15,000 cases a day, or more. "So once cases start to rise steeply, within a couple of weeks, we may see 3,000 Omicron cases a day," the minister said. Ong also pointed to global studies that have shown that the Omicron vari-

ant causes less severe illness than Delta, with fewer cases being admitted to hospital or requiring emergency care. "This has also been borne out by our own experience. In Singapore, we have recorded 4,322 Omicron infections so far, including 308 seniors aged 60 and above.

"Eight needed oxygen supplementation and all of them have been taken off oxygen after a short few days. None required ICU care as yet," he said.

If these infections had instead been caused by Delta, authorities would expect 50 to 60 patients needing oxygen supplementation, ICU care or to die, he said. But Ong cautioned that Singapore must be careful in interpreting these observations, as "it is early days and the circumstances of each country are different". Meanwhile, the current COVID-19 safe measures will only be tightened as a "last resort" when Singapore's healthcare system is under heavy strain, Ong said.

## Beijing accuses US of inciting Lithuania over Taiwan

AP ■ BEIJING

Beijing on Monday accused Washington of inciting Lithuania to "contain China" in a feud over status of self-ruled Taiwan after US officials expressed support for European Union-member country in face of Chinese economic pressure. Lithuania is latest flashpoint in China's campaign to pressure companies and foreign governments to adopt its positions on Taiwan, Tibet and other sensitive issues.

"The United States has instigated Lithuanian authorities to undermine one-China principle," said a foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin. "It has supported, aided and abetted them in going further down wrong path to achieve its political calculations to contain China." American and Lithuanian officials say China

has blocked imports from northern European country since Taiwanese government was allowed to open a trade office there under name Taiwan. In a phone call last week, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai expressed "strong support" to a European official for Lithuania "in face of economic coercion", Tai's office said in on its website.

Taiwan and China have been ruled separately since splitting amid civil war in 1949. The mainland's ruling Communist Party never has controlled the island but claims it as part of Chinese territory and threatens to invade. The US and most other governments, including Lithuania, have diplomatic relations only with Beijing but maintain commercial and informal political ties with Taiwan's democratically elected government.

## US, Russia meet for talks amid tensions over Ukraine

AP ■ GENEVA

Senior US and Russian officials formally launched special talks on strategic stability on Monday as part of a flurry of diplomatic activity in Europe this week aimed at defusing tensions over a Russian military buildup on the border with Ukraine, though no major breakthrough was immediately in sight.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and his delegation arrived under Swiss police escort at the US diplomatic mission for face-to-face talks with Wendy Sherman, the US deputy secretary of state, and her team.

The meeting is part of "Strategic Security Dialogue" talks launched by Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin during a June summit in the Swiss city. After an informal working dinner on Sunday, Ryabkov predicted "difficult" talks in Geneva that are to be followed by a NATO-Russia meeting in Brussels on

Wednesday and a meeting of the multilateral Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Thursday. Moscow has sought to wrest a string of concessions from the US and its Western allies, including guarantees that NATO will no longer expand eastward into former Soviet states like Ukraine, along whose border Russia has amassed an estimated 100,000 troops in steps that have raised concerns about a possible deeper military intervention there.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said that during Sunday's dinner Sherman "stressed the United States' commitment to the international principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the freedom of sovereign nations to choose their own alliances", a reference to Ukraine and its aspirations of joining NATO. Many analysts say any such accession would be years away at best. Sherman "affirmed that the United States would welcome genuine

progress through diplomacy", Price said in a statement. The US has played down hopes of significant progress this week and said some demands - like a possible halt to NATO expansion - go against countries' sovereign rights to set up their own security arrangements, and are thus non-negotiable.

But US officials have expressed openness to other ideas, like 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.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said bluntly Sunday that he doesn't expect any breakthroughs in coming week. Instead, he said a more likely positive outcome would be an agreement to de-escalate tensions in short term and return to talks at an appropriate time in future. But US will have to see a de-escalation for there to be actual progress. "It's very hard to see that happen-

ing when there's an ongoing escalation, when Russia has a gun to head of Ukraine with 100,000 troops near its borders, possibility of doubling that on very short order," Blinken said on ABC's "This Week". The United States, which has emphasised that Ukraine's government and those of other European countries need to be included in discussions, plans to discuss some bilateral issues in Geneva "but will not discuss European security without our European allies and partners", Price said Sunday.

Amid Russian military buildup, concerns have risen about a broader Russian military incursion in Ukraine - and United States and its Western allies have vowed "severe costs" for Russia if it happens. Putin's government has laid out a list of demands, such as seeking guarantees that the NATO military alliance won't seek to expand any further eastward to countries like Ukraine or Georgia, which are former Soviet republics.

## 9 children among 19 killed in one of worst fires in New York

PTI ■ NEW YORK

In one of the worst fire accidents in the recent history of New York City, 19 people, including nine children, were killed in an apartment building where a massive blaze broke out due to a malfunctioning electric space heater.

The New York City Fire Department said that approximately 200 of its members were operating on the scene at the 19-storey building in the Bronx where the fire started around 11 AM on Sunday.

The incident comes days after an apartment fire in Philadelphia killed 12, with eight children among the dead. New York City Mayor Eric Adams termed it a "tragedy beyond measure".

"We've lost 19 of our neighbours today... Join me in praying for those we lost, especially the 9 innocent young lives that were cut short," Adams said in a tweet on Sunday. Over 30 people were seriously injured in the incident. Adams said that the building housed a largely Muslim population, with many immigrants from Africa's Gambia.

"This is a horrific, horrific, painful moment for the City of New York. The impact of this fire is going to really bring a level of pain and despair to our city... This is going to be one of the worst fires we have witnessed during modern times," Adams said at a news conference.

Governor of New York state Kathy Hochul said the city is "in shock". "It's impossible to go into that room where scores of families who are in such grief, who are in pain, to see it in a mother's eyes as I held her, who lost her entire family.

It's hard to fathom what they're going through," Hochul said as she joined Adams to provide an update on the apartment fire in the Bronx. The Governor said that she will establish a victims' compensation fund for the individuals affected by the fire and to help them find new housing and for

burial costs. Mayor Adams said that over 32 people sustained life-threatening injuries, nine serious injuries and 22 injuries that are non-life-threatening. New York City Fire Department Commissioner Daniel Nigro described the incident as "tragic" and said that units arrived within three minutes for a call of a fire in the duplex apartment.

"They were met in the hallway with this fire, very heavy smoke, very heavy fire. Units pushed in. The smoke extended the entire height of the building, which is very unusual. Members found victims on every floor and in stairwells and were taking them out in cardiac and respiratory arrest," he said.

The 32 people were transported to hospitals in life-threatening condition. "That is unprecedented in our city," Nigro said. A "malfunctioning electric space heater" was the source of the fire, he said, adding that the heater was in the bedroom of an apartment and the fire consumed the room and then the entire apartment.

Victims were found in stairways on every floor of the building, many in cardiac arrest. The injuries were predominantly from smoke inhalation, he said. Firefighters kept attempting to save people from the building despite

running out of air tanks, Nigro said. Some of the residents who were trying to leave the building could not "escape because of the volume of smoke," he said. Nigro said that the door to the fire apartment was left open which allowed the fire and smoke to spread. "This fire took its toll on our city."

"The Fire Department issued several messages on social media urging citizens to always close the door when escaping a fire. "Closing the door saves lives," the message said. Authorities said the fire appeared to have been caused by a space heater in one of the apartments.

## Norway tells conscripts to return underwear after service

**Copenhagen:** Conscripts in Norway have been ordered to return their underwear, bras and socks after the end of their military service so that the next group of recruits can use them. The Norwegian military said Monday that it is struggling with dwindling supplies, in part due to the pandemic.

The Norwegian Defence Logistics Organisation said because of "a challenging stockpile situation, this move is necessary as it provides the Armed Forces with greater garment volumes available for new soldiers starting their initial service". Its press spokesman Hans Meisingset

said with "proper checks and cleaning, the reuse of garments is considered an adequate and sound practice". Until recently, the roughly 8,000 young men and women who every year do their military service returned their outer clothing but were allowed to leave barracks with the underwear and socks they were issued.

Military service is mandatory for both men and women in Norway and lasts between 12 and 19 months. Meisingset said the pandemic was not the only reason why the stock of garments is low for some items. It also depends on finance, contracts and other issues.

### कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता, लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड कबीरधाम (छ.ग.)

:: निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना ::

ऑनलाईन निविदाएं "प्रपत्र-ए" में प्रतिशत दर पर नीचे उल्लेखित कार्य के लिये **DWSM, KABIRDHAM** की ओर से कार्यपालन अभियंता एवं सदस्य **DWSM** द्वारा एकिकृत पंजीयन व्यवस्था ई-रजिस्ट्रेशन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है।


कार्य का विवरण :- कबीरधाम जिले के बोंडला विकासखण्ड में स्वीकृत एकल ग्राम नल जल प्रदाय योजनांतर्गत पेयजल प्रदाय एवं इत्यादि कार्य।

निविदा सूचना क्रमांक/ दिनांक	निविदा सिस्टम क्रमांक	योजना का नाम एवं विकासखण्ड	अनुमानित लागत (रुपए लाख में)
189/Dt. 24.12.2021	89530	विकासखंड बोंडला के ग्राम बरेंडा में एकल ग्राम नल जल प्रदाय पेयजल प्रदाय एवं इत्यादि कार्य।	125.30

उपरोक्त निर्माण कार्य की निविदा की सामान्य शर्तें, धरोहर रशि, विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञप्ति निविदा दस्तावेज व अन्य जानकारी ई-प्राक्वोरमेंट वेब पोर्टल <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> 24.12.2021 से देखी जा सकती है।

निविदा डाउनलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि 14.01.20222

हस्ता/— कार्यपालन अभियंता, लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड कबीरधाम (छ.ग.)

**SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE**  
**Whereas**  
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.  
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Rajeev Kumar Chaudhri/ Kiran Chaudhary/ LBAGR00003453832/ LBAGR00003455522	Flat No. 503, 5th Floor, Grand Fort, Shastripuram, Agra, Uttar Pradesh/ January 06, 2022	September 27, 2021 Rs. 27,87,341/-	Agra/ Delhi/ Ghaziabad

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 11, 2022**  
**Place: Delhi/ NCR**  
**Authorized Officer**  
**ICICI Bank Limited**

## In Pak over 70 Hindu couples tie knot at mass wedding

PTI ■ KARACHI

Dressed in colourful clothes and wearing traditional handmade garlands, over 70 Hindu couples have tied knot at a mass wedding ceremony here in Pakistan's largest city, according to media reports on Monday. The mass wedding was organised by the Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) and it was held at Railway Ground located on II Chundrigar Road on Sunday.

Every year, for last 14 years, MNA Ramesh Kumar Vankvani, who is also PHC patron-in-chief, has been organising mass weddings for poor Hindu families who cannot afford to marry off their children. The first mass wedding, held in 2008, had seen 35 Hindu couples get married at same time. That figure has grown over years. "This year, because of safety measures

related to coronavirus pandemic, we invited only half of them to ceremony," Vankvani said, adding that it was a cultural activity for Hindu community. "The event also conveys message to world that our minority communities are completely free to hold their social events in accordance with their religion," he was quoted as saying in The News International newspaper.

As many as 72 Hindu couples joined in matrimony during mass wedding ceremony. Most of couples had travelled from Sindh and were accompanied by their parents, relatives and friends, the Dawn newspaper reported.

"I work as a packer boy in a mobile phone company in Korangi. If left to me, I would have had to wait for several more years to save up and get married," said Laxman, who got married to Mehek.

Vickey and Nandni belonged to Ibrahim Hyderi. Vicky said that he worked as a sweeper with Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. "We have been engaged for three years. I have been trying to save up ever since our engagement but it was not enough. Finally, we decided to get married in a mass wedding," Vicky told Dawn.

Nandni's mother had her youngest child, five-month-old Krishan in her lap. Her eyes grew moist as someone said that bride was going to miss her baby brother, the report said. "But this is life. Daughters have to leave their parents' home. I will also miss my daughter, we all will," she said. After wedding each couple was presented with pure silver jewellery, crockery, cooking pots and utensils, along with a cheque to help them begin their new life.

## WEST ASIA FOREIGN MINISTERS HEAD TO CHINA FOR MEETINGS

AP ■ BEIJING

Foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states are visiting China this week for meetings with officials from world's second largest economy, a leading consumer of oil and source of foreign investment.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Monday gave no details of agendas for visits, but said they were expected to "deepen relations between two sides." The meetings running through Friday will include foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, along with secretary general of Gulf Cooperation Council. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian will also be in China at end of this week, ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh said in Tehran. It wasn't immediately clear if he would join meetings with others. Khatibzadeh said

the foreign minister left for Oman today. The ministry spokesperson said that his country is not satisfied with speed of negotiations to revive Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which have dragged on for weeks in Vienna. China is a party to talks and a critic of related U.S. Sanctions on Iran.

"Time is important to us, but it is not possible other side moves like a turtle and we move at speed of light," Khatibzadeh said. Iran's diplomats under recently elected hardline President Ebrahim Raisi have presented maximalist demands, exasperating European nations. Western delegates have warned that time is running out to revive deal. China and U.S. Are increasingly jockeying for influence in Middle East, where Chinese companies have found markets for goods and services ranging from highways to military drones.

## Former Israeli PMs face off in court in defamation lawsuit

**Jerusalem:** Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Monday repeated his assertion that his successor and former rival, Benjamin Netanyahu, exhibited "crazy behaviour" as a high-profile defamation lawsuit between the two political heavyweights got underway. The two fallen prime ministers faced off in a largely empty Tel Aviv courtroom in the opening of Netanyahu's defamation suit against Olmert. Netanyahu was joined by his wife, Sara, and oldest son, Yair. Olmert, the only Israeli prime minister ever to go to prison, sat alone

on a bench, his legs crossed, across the room. Netanyahu is suing Olmert for remarks he made last year, during the aftermath of a series of inconclusive parliamentary elections. At the time, Netanyahu refused calls to step down while on trial for corruption charges. In an interview with an Israeli news site last April, Olmert leveled criticism at Netanyahu and said that "what is irreparable is the mental illness of the prime minister, his wife and his son." The Netanyahus have sued Olmert, seeking nearly USD 270,000 in damages, according to Hebrew press reports.



# Airlines offer domestic fliers free date change amid curbs

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

In a relief for domestic passengers who are having to abort travel plans due to the Omicron surge and decline in demand for domestic air travel due to restrictions imposed by State Governments, several airlines - Air India, IndiGo, Go First and Vistara announced a free change of date option on domestic tickets with confirmed travel plans until March 31 this year. The number of air passengers has slipped considerably as Covid cases have spiked. The Ministry of Civil Aviation data showed 2, 40, 795 air passengers travelled on 2,409 flights on January 9, down from 3.85 lakh recorded on December 26. Occupancy of airlines have also reduced to the range of 60 per cent.

In a tweet, Air India said, "In view of recent uncertainties due to the surge in Covid-19 cases, Air India is offering ONE FREE CHANGE of date or flight number or sector for all domestic tickets (098) with confirmed travel on/before 31.03.22."

The Tata-Singapore Airlines-backed Vistara is also providing one complimentary 'date change' for all domestic flights. The complimentary date change is permitted on all domestic flight routings issued for travel up to March 31, 2022. "We are observing a decline

in demand for air travel due to the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases and travel restrictions imposed by various states. At Vistara, we are monitoring the situation closely and adjusting capacity to demand. We are also trying to minimise the inconvenience to our customers by offering them various options such as rescheduling or refunds," Vistara said in a statement.

On the other hand, IndiGo airlines anticipated that around 20 per cent of its current scheduled operations to be withdrawn from service. "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," statement from IndiGo stated. IndiGo, which has a fleet of over 275 aircraft, operated about 1,500 daily flights in December.

Another carrier, Go First airways also offered similar scheme keeping in view uncertain travel plans. "With GO FIRST, you can simply reschedule your flights at no extra cost. Offer valid on bookings till 31st January and travel up to 31st March," said the airline on Monday.

On its part, online travel bookings company EaseMyTrip said it is offering a full refund to customers (including money deducted by airlines), in case of medical emergencies.

According to the Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA), domestic air passenger traffic remained 44 per cent lower in the April-December 2021 against the corresponding period of FY20, but saw a jump of 52 per cent year-on-year to 111 lakh in December 2021. The total domestic passenger traffic had stood at 73 lakh in December 2020. Besides, the average daily departures stood at around 2,800, notably higher compared with around 2,065 in December 2020 and around 2,700 in November 2021, it said.

On its part, online travel bookings company EaseMyTrip said it is offering a full refund to customers (including money deducted by airlines), in case of medical emergencies. SpiceJet is also discussing the issue internally and is likely to make an announcement soon.

According to the Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA), domestic air passenger traffic remained 44 per cent lower in the April-December 2021 against the corresponding period of FY20, but saw a jump of 52 per cent year-on-year to 111 lakh in December 2021. The total domestic passenger traffic had stood at 73 lakh in December 2020. Besides, the average daily departures stood at around 2,800, notably higher compared with around 2,065 in December 2020 and around 2,700 in November 2021, it said.

## Report: Domestic air passenger traffic at 111 lakh in Dec

**Mumbai:** Domestic air passenger traffic remained 44 per cent lower in the April-December 2021 against the corresponding period of FY20, but saw a jump of 52 per cent year-on-year to 111 lakh in December 2021, according to rating agency ICRA.

The total domestic passenger traffic had stood at 73 lakh in December 2020, according to a report by the rating agency.

It also said that the emergence of new coronavirus variant and reactionary restrictions impacting air travel remain near term-challenges for the airline industry. On a sequential basis, the growth in December was recorded at 5-6 per cent over November 2021 during which Indian carriers had flown 105 lakh passengers, ICRA said in a statement on Monday. Besides, the average daily departures stood at around 2,800, notably higher compared with around 2,065 in December 2020 and around 2,700 in November 2021, it said.

At the same time, the average number of passengers per flight during December 2021 was largely flat at 129 as compared to 130 in November, ICRA said. Though sequential recovery continued in December 2021, demand continues to remain subdued from the corporate traveller segment as reflected by the passenger traffic for 9M FY2022 remaining around 44 per cent lower than 9M FY2020, ICRA Vice-President and Sector Head Suprio Banerjee said. **PTI**

## Sebi puts in place framework for operationalising gold exchange

**New Delhi:** Capital markets regulator Sebi on Monday came out with a framework for operationalising the gold exchange, wherein the yellow metal will be traded in the form of electronic gold receipts (EGRs).

The stock exchange desirous of trading in EGRs may apply to Sebi for approval of trading in the new segment, the regulator said in a circular.

The bourses can launch contracts with different denomination for trading or conversion of EGR into gold. Under the new framework, the entire transaction has been divided into three tranches-- creation of EGR; trading of EGR on stock exchange and conversion of EGR into physical gold.

A common interface will be developed by depositories, which will be made accessible to all the entities -- vault managers, depositories, stock exchanges and clearing corporations.

The new framework will come into force with immediate effect, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said. This comes after the government, through a notification on December 24, declared "electronic gold receipts" as 'securities' under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act 1956.

Separately, the regulator through a notification on December 31, notified rules for vault managers paving the way for operationalising gold exchange.

As per the Sebi circular, supply of the physical gold, to be converted into EGR, will be the fresh deposit of gold, coming into the vaults, either through imports or through stock exchange accredited domestic refiners.

The existing deposit of gold lying in the vaults, which meets the criteria and has never been out of the vaulting infrastructure, can be considered for conversion into EGR.

Vault managers will have to ensure that 'gold' to be converted into EGR meets the criteria.

The gold which complies either with LBMA Good Delivery Standard or with the India Good Delivery Standard, or any other standard specified by Sebi, will be eligible under this framework.

To lower the costs associated with withdrawal of gold from the vaults, EGRs have been made "fungible" and "interoperability between vault managers" have been allowed.

To increase the reach of gold exchange, all existing branches of vault managers may be allowed as 'collection and/or withdrawal center', which meets the safety standards, as specified by Sebi. **PTI**

## NSE to launch derivatives on mid-cap stocks index from January 24

**New Delhi:** Leading stock exchange NSE on Monday said it will launch derivatives on the Nifty Midcap Select Index from January 24.

The exchange announced that it has secured approval from market regulator Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to launch derivatives on the index. Nifty Midcap Select Index aims to track the performance of a focused portfolio of 25 stocks within the Nifty Midcap 150 index, NSE said in a statement.

All the index constituent stocks are individually available in derivatives and the weight of the stocks is based on free-float market capitalisation methodology.

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) will offer futures and options with trading cycle of seven weekly expiration contracts (excluding the monthly expiration contract) and three serial monthly expiration contracts.

"The current availability of index derivatives on the exchange is largely focused on either the large cap stocks or sector specific stocks. The midcap stocks account for around 17 per cent of market capitalization," Vikram Limaye, MD and CEO, NSE said.

The launch of derivatives on Nifty Midcap Select Index will provide participants an additional hedging tool to manage their portfolio risk effectively, he added. The midcap segment has come into focus during the recent market rally with improved participation levels from across investor classes and consequent liquidity.

Nifty Midcap Select Index has delivered returns of 39 per cent in the last 1 year and 19 per cent annualised returns in the last 5 years ending December 2021. **PTI**

## Third wave to push revenue recovery for multiplexes by five months: Report

**Mumbai:** The third wave will push the recovery in multiplexes by up to five months as Governments resort to the temporary closure of movie halls to contain the spread of the COVID wave, a domestic rating agency said on Monday. The full revenue recovery of the multiplexes will be pushed back to the second half of the next fiscal as against the first quarter earlier, Crisil Ratings said.

However, once the restrictions are lifted, the pace of recovery is expected to be sharp -- as was witnessed after the second wave -- and should limit further downside in the credit profiles of multiplex operators along with healthy balance sheets, it said. "The temporary closure of operations in New Delhi/National Capital Region, Bihar, Haryana and restrictions in other key states, such as Maharashtra, will push back new film releases," its director Nitesh Jain said.

Stating that a few big-ticket films such as 'RRR' and 'Jersey' have already been postponed indefinitely, Jain said in his base case, he assumes the third wave to peak in February and bottom out by the end of March, which will mean the release of big-ticket content to resume in the first quarter of fiscal 2023.

Occupancy doubled to 20 per cent in December 2021 from 10 per cent in September, indicating healthy demand, and could have improved to over 25 per cent this quarter compared to 30 per cent pre-pandemic as several big-ticket films were scheduled for release, it said.

Multiplex operators could

increase occupancy despite having increased average ticket prices last quarter by 10-15 per cent from their pre-COVID levels, it said, adding that movies such as 'Sooryavanshi' and 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' collected ₹ 200 crore each at the box office, which is comparable to the collections made by big-ticket films in a normal year. "The swift recovery shows the relevance of multiplexes despite the plethora of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, and reinforces our view that OTT platforms are not a threat to multiplexes -- the two can co-exist -- and that the current disruption is temporary," the rating agency said.

Crisil, which rates half of the multiplex industry by revenue, said such operators are expected to have clocked a profit of ₹ 40-60 crore in the third quarter of the fiscal, following losses of ₹ 625 crore in FY21 and ₹360 crore in the April-September 2021 period. There will be operating losses because of the third wave but healthy liquidity of ₹ 880 crore as of September 2021 would comfortably cover operating expenses and debt obligations for the next 4-6 months, it said.

"Theatre releases will also bolster revenue from the food and beverages (F&B) segment, which accounts for 25-30 per cent of the topline of multiplex operators," its associate director Rakshit Kachhal said.

Downside risks for the industry, which need to be watched include sustainability of cost-control measures and the prolonged impact of the pandemic. **PTI**

## Non-life insurance cos register over 7% rise in gross premium at ₹18,953 cr in Dec 2021

**New Delhi:** The gross direct premium underwritten by non-life insurance companies grew by 7.3 per cent to ₹18,953.09 crore in December 2021, data from Irdai showed on Monday.

The non-life insurance companies had underwritten gross premium valuing at ₹17,662.32 crore in December 2020.

In a break-up, the 24 general insurance companies had registered a gross premium of ₹16,109.62 crore in December 2021, up by 4.2 per cent from ₹15,463.51 crore in the year-ago period, as per data of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai).

The five standalone health insurance companies registered a 31.3 per cent rise in their gross underwritten premium at ₹1,740.15 crore during the month, against ₹1,325.03 crore a year ago. The two specialised PSU insurers -- Agricultural Insurance Company of India Ltd and ECGC Ltd -- witnessed a 26.3 per cent increase in their gross premium at ₹1,103.33 crore compared to ₹873.78 crore, as per the data.

On a cumulative basis, the gross premium underwritten by all the 31 non-life insurance companies registered an 11.18 per cent increase at ₹1,61,081.60 crore during the April-December period of 2021-22.

It stood at ₹1,44,879.54 crore during the same period of 2020-21. **PTI**

## Sensex zooms 651 pts; Nifty recaptures 18,000-level ahead of Q3 results season

**Mumbai:** The BSE Sensex shot up over 650 points to surge past the 60,000-level while the NSE Nifty settled above 18,000 on Monday as participants showed keen interest in IT and financial shares ahead of the Q3 earnings season.

Rising for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark hit the day's high of 60,427.36, before ending at 60,395.63, higher by 650.98 points or 1.09 per cent. Likewise, the broader NSE Nifty climbed 190.60 points or 1.07 per cent to settle at 18,003.30.

On the Sensex chart, Titan, Maruti, SBI, L&T, SBI, HDFC and Kotak Bank emerged as prominent gainers, advancing as much as 3.29 per cent. In contrast, Wipro, Nestle India, Asian Paints and PowerGrid were among the major laggards, shedding up to 2.47 per cent.

Market breadth was positive, with 20 of the 30 Sensex counters posting gains. Analysts said the Q3 corporate results announcements starting this week from the IT majors and HDFC Bank are likely to set the trend for the crucial tech and banking segments.

"Amid weak global markets and rising COVID cases, the domestic market displayed strong momentum on expectations of a healthy start to the earnings season. PSU Banks led the sectorial rally as reports suggested an increase in FPI limits while the realty sector

followed the trend on robust sales numbers and expectations of support measures in the upcoming budget.

"Globally, bourses were muted as reports of record-high Eurozone inflation at 5 per cent kept investors on edge while awaiting the release of the US inflation data later this week which is expected to remain

elevated," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

S Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities, said banks led the rally on expectations of better loan growth with provisional numbers pointing towards an improved third quarter performance. **PTI**

## Rupee spurts 29 paise to 74.05 against US dollar

**Mumbai:** Rising for the second straight session, the rupee surged by 29 paise to close at 74.05 against the US dollar on Monday amid robust buying in domestic equities. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened strong at 74.15 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.03 and a low of 74.21. It finally settled at 74.05, a rise of 29 paise over its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee had settled at 74.34 against the US dollar.

On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 650.98 points or 1.09 per cent higher at 60,395.63, while the broader NSE Nifty jumped 190.60 points or 1.07 per cent to 18,003.30. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.19 per cent to 95.90.

## Paytm records over 4-fold jump in loan disbursals in October-December 2021

**New Delhi:** Digital payments firm Paytm on Monday posted over four-fold jump in loan disbursals from its platform both in terms of numbers and value in the quarter ended December 31, 2021.

Paytm disbursed 44 lakh loans worth ₹2,180 crore during the quarter as compared to 8.81 lakh loans worth ₹470 crore disbursed from its platform in the year-ago period.

The gross merchandise value (GMV) of the company more than doubled to ₹2.5 lakh crore during October-December 2021 compared to ₹1.12 lakh crore it registered in the corresponding quarter a year ago. "Our monthly transacting users (MTU) showed consistent growth in FY2021 and in the first two quarters of FY2022. The trajectory has continued in the third quarter of FY 2022 with 64.4 million average MTUs, growth of 37 per cent Y-o-Y over the 47.1 million average MTUs in the third quarter of FY2021," Paytm said in the filing.

The stock of the company

**Paytm disbursed 44 lakh loans worth ₹2,180 crore during the quarter as compared to 8.81 lakh loans worth ₹470 crore disbursed from its platform in the year-ago period**

closed at ₹1,157.9, down 6.01 per cent from the previous close, at the BSE on Monday. **PTI**

**कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता,  
लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड बिलासपुर (छ.ग.)**

**:: ऑन लाईन निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना ::**

जिला जल एवं स्वच्छता मिशन बिलासपुर की ओर कार्यपालन अभियंता एवं सदस्य सचिव, जिला जल एवं स्वच्छता मिशन द्वारा एकीकृत पंजीयन व्यवस्था के अंतर्गत उपयुक्त श्रेणी में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से निम्नांकित कार्य हेतु प्रपत्र “अ” (प्रतिशत दर) ऑन लाईन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है।

सिस्टम क्रमांक	निविदा क्र दिनांक	कार्य का नाम	अनुमानित लागत (रु. लाख में)	घरोहर राशि
90340	231 / 07.01.2022	बिलासपुर जिले के विकासखण्ड कोटा के ग्राम सेगरिया, कुनारीमुडा (द्वितीय आमंत्रण)	121.01	90800.00
90341	232 / 07.01.2022	बिलासपुर जिले के विकासखण्ड मसूरी के ग्राम परसादावेद (द्वितीय आमंत्रण)	150.76	113500.00

अन्य विवरण एवं विस्तृत निविदा छ.ग. शासन के ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट वेबसाइट <https://neproc.cgstate.gov.in> पर दिनांक 14.01.2022 सुबह 10.30 बजे से उपलब्ध है तथा दिनांक 27.01.2022 समय 17.30 तक बीड डाले जा सकते है एवं अन्य विवरण कार्यालयीन समय पर लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड बिलासपुर (छ.ग.) में देखे जा सकते है।

हस्ता / —

कार्यपालन अभियंता,  
लोक स्वास्थ्य यांत्रिकी खंड  
बिलासपुर (छ.ग.)

**Ro. No:- 66683/5**  
**Ro. Date:-10/01/2022**

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

Whereas

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

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Raju Saxena/ Rajeev Saxena/ LBNOD00000679557	Flat No-UG-1, 1st Floor, Plot No-332, Sector-4, Vaishali, Ghaziabad/ January 06, 2022	September 27, 2021 Rs. 3,89,478/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Deepak Rana/ Manohar Singh Rana/ LBNOD00001803639	Flat No- 122, First Floor, Block- D, Gaur Green Vista- 2, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad/ January 06, 2022	October 05, 2021 Rs. 16,95,524/-	Delhi/ NCR
3.	Sadree Alam/ Nighat Arif/ LBDEL00001363530	Plot No C-12 / 506, First Floor Yamuna Vihar Delhi/ January 06, 2022	July 06, 2021 Rs.5,66,947/-	Delhi/ NCR
4.	Tarun Kumar/ Surabhi Priyambada/ LBDEL00001967559	Flat No- H- G03 Ground Floor Grand Savanna Raj Nagar Ext Nh- 58, Ghaziabad Ghaziabad/ January 06, 2022	October 05, 2021 Rs. 24,39,098/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Lata/ Deepak Choudhary/ LBGUR00004931127	Plot No 1/6426 Plot No 18, 1st & 2nd Floor , Rohtas Nagar Sahadara Delhi/ January 06, 2022	September 27, 2021 Rs. 73,82,188/-	Delhi/ NCR

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

Date : January 11, 2022

Place: Delhi/ NCR

Authorized Officer

ICICI Bank Limited

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
CORRIGENDUM II	
No. NR/FuelCell/DEMU/P/1/2021	Dated 10.01.2022
Corrigendum II of Tender Notice No. - NR/FUELLCELL/DEMU/P/1/2021 Dt 15.12.2021 has been uploaded on IREPS website on 10.01.2022	
Please visit website <a href="https://www.ireps.gov.in/Tender/Notice/NR/FUELLCELL/DEMU/P/1/2021">https://www.ireps.gov.in/Tender/Notice/NR/FUELLCELL/DEMU/P/1/2021</a> Dt 15.12.2021 for Corrigendum II, having reply to queries of M/S Cummins and M/S BHEL and amendments made in Tender document, which shall be available on IREPS website.	
<b>Contact Person :-</b> <b>Chief Mechanical Engineer/IT</b> <b>Mechanical Branch, Northern Railway Head Quarter,</b> <b>1st Floor, Annexe-I, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001</b> <b>Contact no :- 9717639460/9717637480</b> <b>Email: cmeitnrly@gmail.com</b>	
52/2022	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is publicly notified that the Flat/Flat No. 120, Block-C, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) has been allotted in the name of Sh./Smt./Kumari Sunita Arora So/D/o/ W/o Sh. Ashok Arora R/o C-120, Sector-61, Noida based on the Registered Mukhtarnama (General Power of Attorney), the said flat was sold to the following person as follows: 1. Mr./Smt./Ms. Moh. Rijwan Siddiqui Son/ S/o/Ms. Moh. Saeed Ahmed Siddiqui Resident C-1, Sector-1, Noida District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) in favour of sale contract (Agreement to Sale) was not executed. 2. The said building/Plot no. C-120, Sector-61, Noida, District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) Sh./Smt. M/s Motherson Auto Ltd. Transfer application is being submitted in favour of Son/Wife Shri Ankur Awana Resident Plot C-1, Sector-1, Noida District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) if any person has any objection in this regard, please file your objection, with all the evidence, within 15 days from the date of publication of this information with the Residential Building Department of the Noida Authority. — Rijwan Siddiqui

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is publicly notified that the Flat/Flat No. 43, Block-A, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) has been allotted in the name of Sh./Smt./Kumari Kashtri Devi So/D/o/ W/o Sh. Raghunath Prasth R/o A-43, Sector-61, Noida based on the Registered Mukhtarnama (General Power of Attorney), the said flat was sold to the following person as follows: 1. Mr./Smt./Ms. K.K. Sehgal Son/ S/o/Ms. Shri Kuldeep Sehgal Resident C-1, Sector-1, Noida District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) Sh./Smt. M/s Motherson Auto Ltd. Transfer application is being submitted in favour of Son/Wife Shri Ankur Awana Resident Plot C-1, Sector-1, Noida District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) if any person has any objection in this regard, please file your objection, with all the evidence, within 15 days from the date of publication of this information with the Residential Building Department of the Noida Authority. — K.K. Sehgal



DOCYARD

DR PANKAJ CHATURVEDI

Dermatologist

MEDLINKS, NEW DELHI



## Maintain a healthy skin barrier



Any good dermatologist will tell you that beauty is not skin deep; in fact, it's the layers of skin that protect our beauty. More precisely, the outermost layer of skin called the stratum corneum is the first bastion of protection. This deceptively thin barrier containing keratin, ceramides, fatty acids, etc. stands between every individual and the world.

A healthy skin barrier's function is twofold—primarily, it prevents aggravated loss of moisture from the deeper layers; and, secondly, it keeps foreign agents and toxins from entering the sub-dermal gateway and doing any damage. If the barrier fails at its job, it's a sign that your skin needs help.

**Signs that spell breaching of the skin barrier**

- ❖ Dry, scaly skin that constantly itches
- ❖ Adult acne, discolouration or inflamed patches
- ❖ Regular skin infections

Other than age, most of the less-than-ideal conditions of our environment can play havoc with our skin barrier.

- ❖ Unbalanced environmental conditions such as too little humidity or too much
- ❖ Heightened sun exposure
- ❖ Exposure to harsh chemicals such as alkaline detergents, steroids, allergens, pollutants
- ❖ Stress and worry
- ❖ Genetic conditions that makes one prone to skin conditions like psoriasis and dermatitis

**Bolster the skin care routine in your 50s**

A good skin care routine is always built around simple factors such as one's age, immediate environment and the specific nature of the skin. And while products can be switched up to suit personal requirements, the procedure generally stays the same, cleanse and tone

According to the well-loved cleanse-tone-moisturise (CTM) method, the foundation of good skin is proper cleansing. Mature skin benefits from mild cleansers that don't strip natural oils from the skin. Hence, oil and cream cleansers are gaining popularity with 50-year-olds. Oil cleansers work great with removing every shred of stubborn make-up without playing nasty with your skin's pH balance, while cream cleansers are good for regular, light make-up days or for an additional cleansing step, where necessary.

Toners soothe and hydrate skin, and can also act as the first anti-aging layer in the routine if it comprises hyaluronic acids (HA), glycerin, and similar ingredients. These help with fine lines and dryness by countering the plunging levels of natural HA.

**Exfoliate with care or opt for masks**

Since skin is really thin and delicate at 50, exfoliate with caution. Opt for gentle scrubs containing glycolic and salicylic acids that work best for mature skin, and indulge only once a week. Avoid rigorous scrubbing—a light touch is enough.

**Massage skin with soothing oils**

Regular massage with plant oils like Jojoba or Argan containing fatty acids and antioxidants improve the moisture levels and have proven to be most beneficial to the skin.

**Add specialised serums and moisturisers in that order**

Serums are products with higher concentrations of HA, Vitamin C or similar ingredients than are found in creams and they build the skin barrier's resilience. Choose one suiting your skin and remember to add a heavy moisturiser to seal it in.

Add the necessary specialised treatments

Skin in the 50s may need a little extra care such as an eye or lip cream. Such treatments should keep dryness and wrinkles in specific areas at bay. Don't be afraid to consult a dermatologist to opt for prescription treatments and peels when necessary.

Your skin barrier is a soldier that needs help to fight off external threats; arm it by using sunscreen daily and humidifiers in dry winters, and by eating healthy and hydrating regularly.

We can also opt for injectable skin remodeling treatment like Profhilo, which has a range of treatments that can help to keep our skin hydrated and nourished over the winter season. These include fractional mesotherapy, skin boosters and lip fillers. Contact your expert to discuss the best-suited treatment.

WARMFOOD

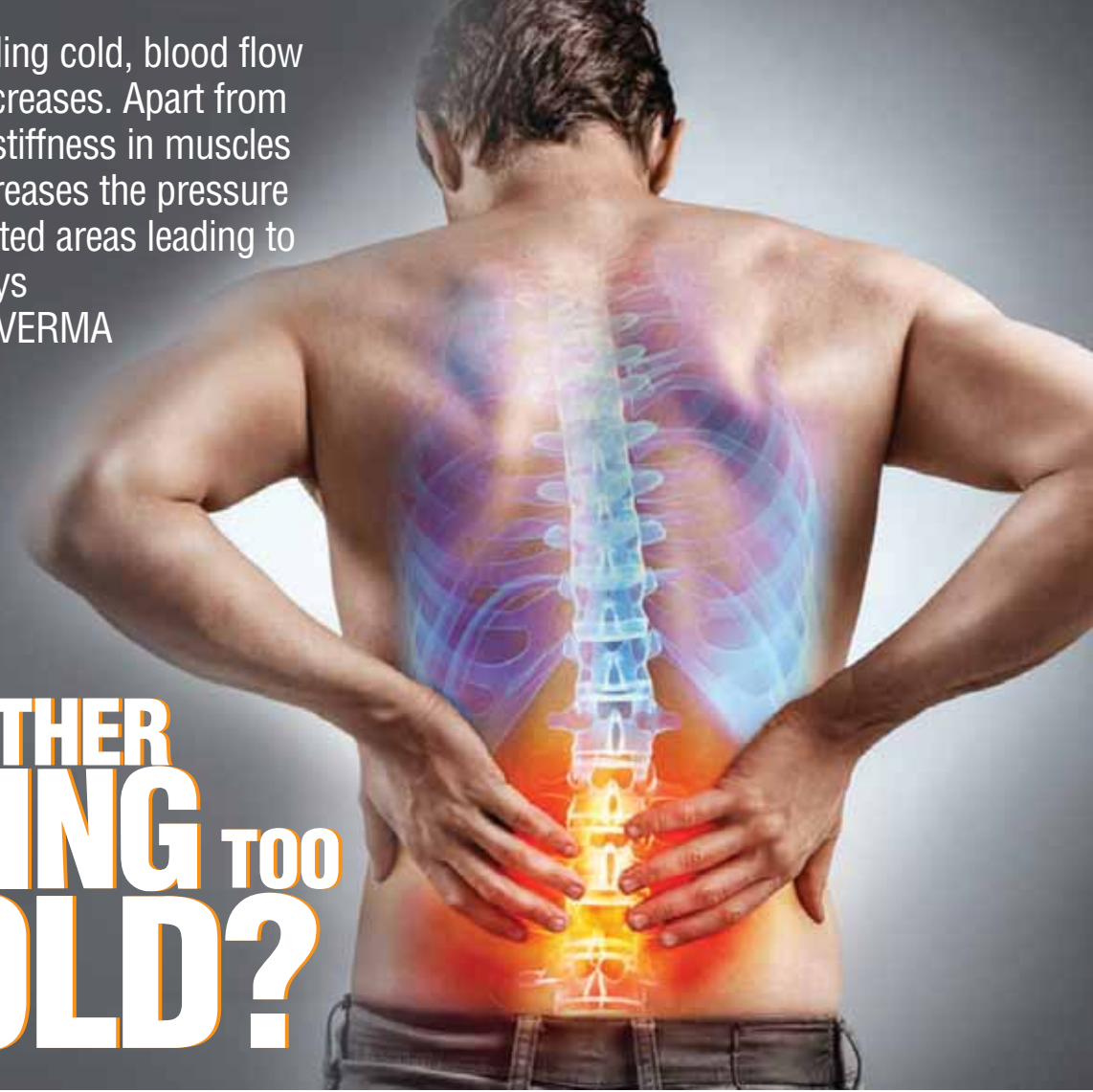
MUSHROOM: Mushrooms are well-known for their delicious flavour and numerous health advantages. They are a great addition to your diet because they are high in key vitamins and minerals and provide taste to a variety of meals. Mushrooms are a low-calorie food that is high in nutrients. They've long been acknowledged as a crucial part of any diet



since they're packed with health-promoting vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Mushrooms are high in potassium, a nutrient that helps to reduce the detrimental effects of salt on the body. Mushrooms' anti-inflammatory properties have been found to boost the immune system's effectiveness. Consuming mushroom soup is very healthy for kids.

With spine-chilling cold, blood flow in our body decreases. Apart from increasing the stiffness in muscles and joint, it increases the pressure in sciatica affected areas leading to severe pain, says

DR SAURABH VERMA



WEATHER ACTING TOO COLD?

Winters in Delhi can be a dreadful experience. Known for extreme climate, the winters in the national capital have always brought along its own set of problems – Rising pollution, heart problems, orthopedic issues, amongst other things. Muscle issues in winters can turn worse than usual owing to the lack of sunlight exposure to our skin which devoid us of Vitamin D, essential for bones and muscles to recuperate and stay strong.

One such condition that tends to escalate during the cold months is sciatica. Sciatic nerve connects our lower back to our hips and buttocks down each leg. Sciatica is the pain along the path of the sciatic nerve. Usually, a person only feels the effects of sciatica on one side of the body. Since sciatica is caused when the sciatic nerve gets damaged or pinched, it can occur due to a tumor in that region. Herniated disc is one of the most common risk factors for sciatica.

The pain from sciatica starts from the lower back and goes to the back of your leg. The pain may vary and has a range that extends from mild pain to excruciating and unbearable type of pain. Physical movements are a must as restricting movements may cause the condition to get worse.

**Risk factors**

- ❖ Age: As we grow older, the structure of our spine changes and may cause conditions like herniated disc.
- ❖ Obesity: Weight increases the load that your back has to take and might aggravate any previous conditions.
- ❖ Occupation: The studies aren't verified on this but a job that

puts strain on your back may be detrimental to your cause

- ❖ Prolonged sitting: Active people have a less chance of developing sciatica than people with lesser work volumes.
- ❖ Diabetes: Diabetes causes lasting nerve damage and may affect the sciatic nerve.

With the onset of winters, the blood flow in our body decreases because of the colder temperature this results in muscles tightening up. Apart from increasing the stiffness in muscles and joint, it increases the pressure in sciatica affected areas thereby increasing the pain.

There are other factors that may affect our bones and muscles and make them susceptible to sciatica related pain:

- ❖ Since there is limited sunlight, limited Vitamin D is absorbed. Vitamin D is essential for the bones and muscles to develop and rejuvenate.
- ❖ Colder weather and shorter days make it difficult to exercise and keep our bodies functional. Lack of exercise and physical movement propound back and leg issues.
- ❖ During winters, some organs receive blood that is redirected from the limbs to keep them functioning efficiently. This increases the pressure on joints and ultimately leads to worsening of the condition.

Besides these physiological changes and natural limitations, if you notice the risk factors mentioned above, you will see that winter season is in some way or the other, heightens them, leaving us more susceptible to conditions like sciatica.

In almost all cases, sciatica is a reversible disorder, either through



Dr Saurabh Verma  
HOD Spine Surgery,  
HCMCT Manipal Hospital,  
Dwarka, New Delhi

**Pain from sciatica starts from the lower back and goes to the back of your leg. The pain may vary and has a range that extends from mild pain to excruciating and unbearable type of pain. Physical movements are a must as restricting movements may cause the condition to get worse**

physical therapy or in worst case scenarios, surgery to relieve pressure on the sciatic nerve. However, there are a lot of ways in which people can ease the pain caused by the condition during the winters. Patients who suffer from sciatica must keep in mind that physical activity is essential to keep the condition from growing. Other than physical activities, patients may:

- ❖ Wear warm clothes and keep themselves warm to regulate the blood flow to limbs and make sure there is no increased pressure in the sciatic nerve.
- ❖ Keeping yourself hydrated is essential during the winters. People tend to drink less water during winters however, water helps avoid muscle cramps and helps you keep a positive attitude.
- ❖ Use warm water baths or swimming pools to recuperate and relax your muscles.
- ❖ Winter gloom may lead to lack of physical exercise. It is always advisable to keep yourself active during the winters in order to beat the heightened risk of muscle pain and heart problems.

Like mentioned above, winter might bring relief from the horrid summer heat, but they come with their own problems.

Sciatica symptoms get compounded in winter months and may lead to excruciating pain. It is advisable to follow healthy practices like the ones mentioned above and stay over the line in your attitude. Seek medical attention before the symptoms start getting out of control. A quick and subtle response may help you avoid further damage. It is essential to take care of our health to enjoy the winter cheer and festivities with our family and friends.

## Take the much needed vitamin

The primary source of Vitamin D is exposure to sunlight, particularly ultraviolet B (UVB) rays, says DR SHELLY SINGH

The deficiency of Vitamin D is quite common across the country. In 2013, it was estimated that approximately 40 per cent of the Indian population suffered from Vitamin D deficiency. Currently, it has risen to as much as 77 per cent, in both rural and urban areas. This deficiency is particularly prevalent in adults of the 18-30 years age group. Women belonging to the lower social demographic are also more prone to Vitamin D deficiency.

The primary source of Vitamin D is exposure to the sun. However, there are many factors that prevent the majority of the population to get sufficient sun exposure. Modernisation has meant that most people spend the bulk of their time indoors. Moreover, some of the cultural practices like wearing a burqa limit exposure to the sun. The application of sunscreens and increased skin pigmentation limits the production of Vitamin D by the skin. A high

level of air pollution is also a contributing factor as it prevents UVB ray transmission. Dietary habits are also responsible for the vast vitamin D deficiency. Poor dietary habits contribute to a lower intake of Vitamin D as well as calcium. Furthermore, most food rich in Vitamin D is derived from animal sources.

Considering the fact that a majority of people in India follow a vegetarian diet, people usually don't get sufficient Vitamin D from dietary sources. Even the food products that are widely consumed across the country such as dairy products do not have sufficient proportions of Vitamin D. Fibre-rich food products contain phosphates and phytates, which play a role in depleting Vitamin D stores.

Medical factors like underlying conditions or certain medications can also cause Vitamin D deficiency. Certain health conditions like celiac disease, cystic fibrosis, inflammatory bowel disease,

chronic liver disease and gastric bypass can cause malabsorption of Vitamin D. Medications like Carbamazepine, Clotrimazole, Nifedipine etc., can cause activate Vitamin D degeneration. Vitamin D deficiency is also commonly seen in women with multiple pregnancies and successive pregnancies in a short time span.

**Some adverse health effects:**

- ❖ Unexplained pain and weakness in muscles and bones
- ❖ Depression and cognitive impairment
- ❖ Rickets in children due to reduced bone mineralisation
- ❖ Reduced absorption of calcium from diet and increased bone loss in adults
- ❖ Higher risk of infections like influenza, tuberculosis
- ❖ Higher risk of deranged lipid profile, hypertension, stroke and heart failure
- ❖ Increased risk of breast,

lung, prostate, colon, pancreas and ovarian cancer

- ❖ Increased insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes mellitus
- ❖ With existing medical conditions, it can increase morbidity in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus and worsen Rheumatoid arthritis.
- ❖ Loss of pregnancy

**Common sources:**

The primary source ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. Around 50-90 per cent of Vitamin D is absorbed by the skin through sunlight and the rest comes from dietary sources. Around 20 minutes of daily exposure to the sun with around 40 per cent of skin being exposed to sunlight can help prevent Vitamin D deficiency. The ideal time to get sunlight is 11 am to 3 pm. Skin's synthesis of Vitamin D is also affected by factors like pollution, ageing skin, ozone layer, melanin pigmentation and latitude.

The writer is Obstetrician and Gynecologist, Rosewalk Hospital, ND

## INBRIEF

### Now&Me to your rescue

Gen Z, who is more aware of mental health than the previous generations, still seems to be struggling with it and not much is being done about it. *Now&Me*, founded by Drishti Gupta and Bani Singh is a start-up that aims to build a safe space online where a community of empaths can interact and share their stories and insecurities.

For a start, they installed a small set-up of two chairs and a chalkboard at the busy street of Galleria Market, Gurgaon. The goal here was to make people realise how much weight can be lifted off them by simply sharing their insecurities. Sharing your emotions can give you immense relief and make you feel empowered.

People's insecurities ranged from depression, anxiety, friends and family issues, job expectations, future worries and outer appearance issues. More than 100 people voluntarily participated and agreed on feeling lighter, better and empowered later on.

The activity was a micro-



demonstration of how communities work online. The founders said that it was to see and observe how many people are comfortable in opening up to a stranger and that they were happily surprised with the kind of participation they received.

The credit of the idea and organising of the activity goes to Word Dogs, which is a creative agency that works with start-ups. Their founder, Nipun Sood said, "It is rather gutsy of the client to take on such a risky and innovative form of marketing themselves. The integration was very subtle yet the pull towards the brand was highly successful."



# LIVING WITH THE PAST

MADHULIKA LIDDLE tells KHUSHBU KIRTI that Delhi, in her new novel, *The Garden of Heaven*, is a beautiful and diverse garden with its share of thorns, snakes in the grass, and the occasional poisonous plant

The first Indian to win the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's Short Story Competition in 2003, Madhulika Liddle is known for her deeply researched and engaging works. Afterall, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mughal detective Muzaffar Jang is, indeed, her brainchild.

Being born in Delhi, Liddle has embarked on a new journey to unravel the secrets from the pages of history of the city of love.

Her freshly published work by the Speaking Tiger Books, *The Garden of Heaven*, is the first one in the saga of *The Delhi Quartet*. Beginning shortly before the invasion of Mohammad Ghuri, and extending till just after Partition; the saga will span 800 years of Delhi's history. And you guessed it, the first 200 years of that stretch are being covered in *The Garden of Heaven*.

In a rather interesting conversation, Liddle talks about her works, and shares her thoughts on history, the city and the city's history. Read on for excerpts from an exclusive interview:

◆**Congratulations on your recent release, *The Garden of Heaven*. Please give us an overview of the same.**

◆**What inspired you to begin this saga?**

Thank you! *The Garden of Heaven* is a historical novel, the first in a four-book series called *The Delhi Quartet*. The entire saga will span 800 years of Delhi's history, as seen through the lives of a group of interconnected families. The first novel covers the period from 1188 CE, just before Mohammad Ghuri defeated Prithviraj Chauhan and established the Delhi Sultanate; to 1398 CE, when Taimur sacked Delhi. A somewhat similar, but much more ambitious book, Edward Rutherfurd's *Sarum*, inspired me to write this series. Sarum is about ordinary people living their lives against the backdrop of several thousand years of history (from the Ice Age to 1984) in and around England's Salisbury, which was earlier known as Sarum.

◆**What is the significance of the title — '*The Garden of Heaven*'?**

The Garden of Heaven is the name the stone carver, Madhav, gives to the exquisite stone frieze he carves in his later years, a frieze depicting a garden. I also meant the 'garden of heaven' to be a metaphor for Delhi itself, a beautiful and diverse garden, but (like any real garden), with its share of thorns, of snakes in the grass, and the occasional poisonous plant...



◆**A lot of people's lives are intertwined, their stories running in parallel lines in the book. Thus, making it deeply layered.**

◆**What is the objective behind the same?**

I wanted to write a historical novel which focussed not on the important people, the larger-than-life historical figures of that era, but the everyday people: I wanted to explore how they might have felt, even as history was being made during their own lifetimes. I also wanted to show how people come together, how one family divides and separates, or how two disparate families come together: these are themes that interest me, and placing them in a historical setting helped me give it a new dimension: to explore how people cope with hardship, with circumstances outside their control.

◆**Important people like Razia Sultan, Amir Khusró, Ibrahim Lodhi, Mohammad Ghori, Prithviraj Chauhan, and so on, exist and their personal endeavours are conveyed beautifully. How close to reality is the story?**

◆**Can this qualify for a historical fiction?**

Mostly, the episodes and incidents regarding the real personalities in this book are based on fact (or, as in the case of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, on folklore). Razia's tussles to gain and then retain her throne; Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq's attempts to suppress Nizamuddin; Taimur's invasion, and so on: these are all factual. It is mostly only in their interactions with the fictitious characters (Madhav, Jayshree, Girdhar, et al) that a fictitious episode in the lives of these historical characters is introduced.

So yes, I would call *The Garden of Heaven* historical fiction.

◆**It is said that Dilli was destroyed and built seven times. Do you wish to encompass this journey in your books?**

There is some debate on whether Delhi was destroyed and built seven

times, or more — some historians believe there could be up to ten cities of Delhi, perhaps even up to fifteen. Enumerating all of these (or even just seven) in the course of four novels might lead to a too bulky set of books, so I am restricting myself to just telling the story in its broad outlines. At times, the destruction of the city (or rather, the falling away of one area and the coming to power of another) does become highlighted; at other times, the shift in power is rather less dramatic, and one city fades gently away, too gently for anything other than an oblique reference.

◆**This is the first of the four of *Delhi Quartet*. What is your vision for the forthcoming books?**

As in *The Garden of Heaven*, the other three books will also follow a similar pattern: ordinary people living in Delhi, their lives at times touched by the history being made in Delhi. Some important real-life historical personalities will appear now and then, but otherwise, the focus will be largely on the fictitious characters. Each book will cover, as did *The Garden of Heaven*, approximately 150-200 years of history.

◆**Have you studied history since your novels are so well-researched. Would you be a historian, if not a writer?**

I've always been interested in history, especially since my sister, Swapna Liddle, is a historian — her studying history inspired me too, to regard history with a lot more affection than most Indians seem to have for the subject.

If I hadn't been a writer, I would probably have been one of the many professions I've followed in my career: hospitality manager, advertising executive, editor, instructional designer... for me, the interest in history came a little late in life, after I'd decided (as I thought) what career I was going to adopt. By then, it was too late to start studying history in earnest. So my interest in history remains (and will remain) a love, not a profession.

◆**Historicity and meaning. What, in your opinion, is the antinomy between history and truth?**

I think history and truth are not quite synonymous, simply because — like science — history too is a discipline which draws conclusions from available evidence, coming up with logical theories to interpret that evidence. For example, old chronicles, artefacts, archaeological evidence, and so on, can help historians build up a picture of what might have happened in the past. While artefacts and archaeological evidence may be more irrefutable proof, chronicles can be biased, thus, distorting the truth. And, as in the case of science, until further evi-

dences come to light, one history, one accepted truth, may prevail. Newly-discovered evidence may however change that truth.

History, therefore, to me is perceived truth; believed truth. Some aspects of it might be factual, some may be reliably so, and others may be so till further evidence proves either way.

◆**What do you think of the Education Ministry's move of wiping out the Mughal dynasty from the history syllabus of prominent universities?**

I think that's a very short-sighted, bigoted move. Wiping out mentions of the Mughal dynasty (or any other, for that matter) or trying, in other ways, to distort historical fact to suit one's own agenda serves nothing other than to propagate a falsehood.

What will this lead to? A generation (many generations?) of Indians who are learning something nobody else in the world knows as history? A falsehood, too, which is completely unsupported by evidence of any sort? My take is that history cannot be changed; we have what we have. The past is done, and nothing we do now can change it. So what is wrong with living with that past? Good or bad, all of India's history is our history. To try and sanitise it is juvenile.

◆**I truly believe we need more female authors to write stories of women, since they were either wiped out from the pages of history or their truths misconstrued by male voices.**

◆**Care to weigh in?**

I agree. Women have, for too long, been largely erased from the 'commonly known histories' — that's how I would describe it, since there are historians I know who have done research into women in history, and have come up with fascinating instances of women going far beyond what anybody can imagine in a patriarchal society like ours. The great queens of Odisha, for instance, or the padishah begums during the time of the Mughals: women with far greater agency than is now remembered by the common populace.

◆**How do you like to portray your female characters? For Shagufta seems to be one bold woman in the face of atrocity.**

I like to portray my female characters as a blend: not all strong-willed, not all flawless; human. Some are more feisty than others, some are far more conforming and meek than most, but I like to have at least one female character who stands up for herself, and is emotionally mature and intelligent.



## Striking a balance

The virtual world has become a blessing in disguise for the art fraternity as millennials are the new customers. By TEAM VIVA

While several businesses were hit due to the pandemic, the art market was among a few which was not affected much due to the economic dishevel. Like others, the business of art also went online, with online art exhibitions, auctions and art previews. It resulted in reduced cost and carbon footprint by eliminating costs of printing catalogues, invites, international air travel for art fairs and packaging and shipping cost for fairs, et al. Also, going online proved to be a blessing in disguise for the art world with millennials becoming the new customers for art.

Choyals from Rajasthan, the three generation of artists who believe in striking a balance between the offline and online medium and have been actively tapping the online medium for their art, also did seemingly well this year.

"To understand the various nuances of the artwork and appreciate it, a physical display and exhibition of art is very important and you can't just do away with it. However, having a sizeable number of foreign art lovers, we do have our website running for more than a decade and have been showing online as well," says Akash Choyal, the youngest Choyal, known for his 3D illusion art and fibre glass sculptures.

"During the pandemic, being online certainly helped and added a new dimension to the art. Even the gallerists and art curators are tapping the medium but certainly not doing away with the offline shows. In fact, since mid 2021, physical shows are back and the artists, art lovers and art collectors are indulging in it. The family of five artists sold quite a few artworks this year. Among their new art collectors were millennials, who are getting enthusiastic about the art as a viable investment option," Akash adds.

Swati Pasari, an spiritual-based artist from Kolkata saw a 15 per cent growth in sales of her artwork in 2020 and 2021. "The pandemic proved to be a blessing in disguise, as I ventured into the online space and could increase my sales. I participated in more than five exhibitions this year, both online and offline and am planning to continue my foray into the online exhibitions and art shows," shares Pasari.

She continues, "As people spent more time in their homes due to lockdown, they invested in decorating their space by buying colourful artworks, this was one of the major reasons for the growth in the art market. Also, along with decorating their space, people wanted to bring in more positivity in their homes,"

A Delhi based art curator and the founder of Art School & Gallery, The Art Hub, Bhavna Minocha, expresses, "During 2021, a year of challenges, despite the contraction of sales overall from the impact of Covid-19, it was interesting to see the new trends of shopping of art. In-person events went down, of course, but online sales went up. Interest in culture increased in the lockdowns. Young collectors were the highest spenders with online platforms enhancing accessibility. Affordable art created at our studio by upcoming artists sold very easily, but art collectors are waiting to buy the master's art when studio is going to be a safer place for all of to meet personally,"

Renowned Carnatic vocalist and Padma Shri Award winner Aruna Sairam is excited at the prospect of encouraging and helping aspiring students learn Indian classical music. She has joined the Artium Academic Board and dons the role of Faculty Head for Carnatic Music where she will use her vast knowledge and experience to shape and nurture talent, through the unique music courses offered by the academy.

Known for her tremendous contribution to the world of music spanning almost six decades, Sairam believes that the music space is evolving drastically and with time and technological advancements, method of teaching also needs to evolve to be in line with the emerging trends.

Sairam's latest campaign for Artium Academy canvasses the inter-play of music with technology to make learning a lot easier and more accessible to people of all ages. Through the campaign video, she explains her love for Carnatic music and highlights her journey on how she learnt it herself. The video ends with Sairam inviting music enthusiasts from across the world for an exciting course in Carnatic music designed and curated personally by her.

The course is a curated blend of innovation and perfection, taught one on one by trained and certified teachers based on a performance driven Carnatic music curriculum designed

## Inspiring music enthusiasts

Padma Shri awardee ARUNA SAIRAM joins the Artium Academic Board and dons the role of faculty head for Carnatic music. By TEAM VIVA



under the guidance of Sairam herself. The course aims at a performance driven learning approach that is simple and easy to grasp.

Talking about her aspirations to nurture future musicians, Sairam said,



"Learning music has become a lot easier due to technology. India as a nation is not just passionate about listening music but we love to learn music as well. Technology is helping to foster and develop future musicians in a big way

and I am delighted to be a part of Artium Academy to develop and nurture future musicians."

Talking about her association as head of faculty, she added, "My association with Artium Academy is very timely as I was looking to share my learning and experiences in the genre of Carnatic music, an art form I have worshipped over the years. I am extremely excited to become a part of the board and contribute towards building the gold standard in music learning."

With the advent of new technology, Sairam dreams to take Carnatic music to the millions of aspirants worldwide and providing them with an opportunity to train them under her wing. Her zeal to promote fresh and young talent lead to her collaboration with the academy for the launch of their latest campaign to inspire music enthusiasts across the world.

Campaign link: [Artium Academy & Aruna Sairam — Carnatic Music Course](#) (on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.)

## In the limelight

HFFA names winners of the 2022 Golden Globes via Twitter. While *The Power of the Dog* was named the best film, RACHEL ZEGLER, and WILL SMITH lifted the best actors' trophies



drama, while Will Smith (*King Richard*) won best actor.

Andrew Garfield (*Tick, Tick ... Boom!*) won best actor in a musical or comedy.

For TV, *Succession* won best drama series and *Hacks* won best musical or comedy series, both from HBO.

The awards' body has been embroiled in scandals since the 2021 show, when it was revealed that the HFFA had no black members and participated in questionable business practises.

The American television network NBC pulled out of the telecast for this year's ceremony. Since then, HFFA has diversified its membership and revamped its bylaws in attempts to save face in Hollywood. HFFA highlighted its philanthropic activities and highlighted organisations like St Elmo Village which allows people to express their creativity and Get Lit which encourages teen literacy through poetry.

—IANS

### GOBARDHAN ASH LIVE AUCTION

Prinsep's is hosting the first NFT auction in India, offering five rare works on paper from the family estate. This live auction will present a total of 70 lots including 35 Gouache's by Gobardhan Ash from the 1950s, and 35 contemporary NFTs based on his work.

Non-fungible tokens have bought in a revolution in the art world, a unique digital asset or a token that can be minted, recorded and traded on blockchain technology platforms.

The *Gobardhan Ash Auction* re-creates the second exhibition of Progressive Artists and Calcutta Group, 1950, in which Ash presented a series of vibrant and eccentric gouache works that perfectly captured the milieu of the time presenting modernist interpretations of everyday people and animals, which will be offered at the auction.

**When:** Live bidding will open on January 17, 7 pm  
**Registration link:** [https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_LLEg0UHF52eYNYka1p9QWA](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_LLEg0UHF52eYNYka1p9QWA)



### HINDUSTANI VOICE RECITAL

*Hindustani Vocal Recital* (51 minutes) Online programme by Ghulam Hasan Khan from Delhi, disciple of Ustad Ghulam Sadiq Khan, accompanied by Mahavir Chandrawat (tabla); and Satendar Verma (harmonium)

The artist will present Raga Nand. Video recording of a concert for IIC online programmes  
**When:** Till January 16  
**Where:** Video recording of a concert for IIC online programmes



### THE SECRET WORLD OF LEWIS CARROLL

*The Secret World of Lewis Carroll* (UK) (60 min; 2015; English) Director: Clare Beaven

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a timeless classic and one of the most quoted books in English only preceded by the Bible and Shakespeare. To mark the book's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this film explores its extraordinary appeal and the life of the man who wrote it, the Reverend Charles Dodgson or better known as Lewis Carroll.

Martha Kearney, a radio broadcaster and journalist, examines biographies of the author himself and of the girl who inspired his most famous creation, Alice Liddell.  
**When:** Till January 16  
**Where:** <https://documentaryheaven.com/secret—world-of-lewis-carroll/>



### TRANSPIRING THE LANGUAGE OF BEING

Every being must heave and hide to reconstruct new visual revelations and replace the existing visual mores, which is sometimes felt as crossing a junkyard of robbed, manipulated, disintegrated, and recycled visual images. The desire to record the shape and contours of our private times is lost amidst the posturing of public lives. EH Pushkin records that desire lurking within us and paints the same.

The pieces originate from profound inner space for humanity and love. Use of primary colours and a constant brooding nature of the magnified objects cape with elongated shadows, oblong acrylic figurations, backdrop doubling up as a post-gurative floating surface and self referential iconic titles of the works on the futility and inevitability of market driven isolation of identities make this exhibition a compelling view.

**When:** Till January 29, 2022, 11 am-7 pm  
**Where:** Gallery 1000A -210 D, Old M B Road, Lado Sarai, New Delhi 110030





# Australian judge says Djokovic can stay but saga not over

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic won a court battle Monday to stay in Australia to contest the Australian Open after his exemption from strict coronavirus vaccination rules was questioned, but the drama might not be finished, with the government threatening to cancel his visa a second time and deport him.

Hours later, the tennis star hit the court and was training, his brother told reporters. Djokovic himself tweeted that he was still planning to compete.

Federal Circuit Court Judge Anthony Kelly reinstated the Djokovic's visa, which was revoked after his arrival last week because officials said he didn't meet the criteria for an exemption to a rule that all non-citizens be fully vaccinated.

Djokovic's lawyers say that since he recently recovered from COVID-19, he didn't need to be inoculated under Australia's rules.

The judge ruled the No. 1 player had not been given enough time to speak to his lawyers before the decision was made and ordered the government to release him within 30 minutes from a Melbourne quarantine hotel where he has spent the last four nights.

But government lawyer Christopher Tran told the judge that the immigration minister "will con-



sider whether to exercise a personal power of cancellation."

That would mean that the nine-time Australian Open winner and defending champion could again face deportation and could miss the tournament, which starts on January 17. It could also bar him from the country for three years.

The back and forth has gripped the world and caused a furor in Australia, where many initially decried the news that Djokovic, who

has been a vocal skeptic of vaccines, had received an exemption to strict rules to compete in Melbourne.

Many felt the star, who court documents say is not inoculated against COVID-19, was being given special treatment since Australians who aren't vaccinated face tough travel and quarantine restrictions.

But when border police then blocked him on arrival, others cried foul, saying he was being scapegoated by an Australian government fac-

ing criticism for its recent handling of the pandemic.

Speaking with television network Prva in Belgrade, Serbia, the tennis star's brother, Djordje Djokovic, described the judge's ruling as a "great defeat for Australian authorities."

"This is definitely politics, all this was politics," he added.

He said at one point Monday that the family was hearing that his brother might still be detained, though he gave no details. Later, he confirmed that the tennis player was not in detention.

"Novak is free. He was at the tennis court moments ago. He is training," he said.

The star himself tweeted out a photo of him standing on a court at the arena where the tournament is hosted.

"I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation.

Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen," he said in the post.

The 34-year-old Djokovic boarded a plane for Australia last week, after receiving an exemption from vaccination rules from Victoria state authorities and Australian Open organizers. But upon arrival, federal border officials refused to let him in, saying the exemption was not valid.

# Hardik Pandya set to lead Ahmedabad franchise

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CVC-owned Ahmedabad franchise will be appointing senior India all-rounder Hardik Pandya as captain for its maiden season in the Indian Premier League, for which it has got the all-clear from the BCCI.

One of the world's leading venture capitalists, who bought the Ahmedabad IPL team for INR 5625 crore, the owners had to wait longer for the BCCI to give them the Letter of Intent as legal vetting was required.

The delay in getting the green light was due to CVC's investments in betting firms in Europe and although they have no such operations in India where betting is illegal, the country's cricket board wanted to be sure about the legal ramifications before giving them the go-ahead.

"Yes, Ahmedabad franchise has received their Letter of Intent.

However, they have been doing their back-room work for some time as it's a huge process. As far as we know, Hardik has been zeroed in on as the captain of the franchise," a senior IPL source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

The two new franchises

(Lucknow being the other) have the right to choose three players (two Indian and one foreigner) from the pool of available players as part of the draft pick before the mega auction.

"Hardik with his local connect and being a proven IPL performer for Mumbai Indians for so long was an obvious choice as captain and premier player.

"The franchise has almost finalised its deal with Afghan spin sensation Rashid Khan and dashing keeper-batter Ishan Kishan as their second and third picks from the draft. As of now, that's what is finalised unless there are changes at the last moment," the source said.

The Ahmedabad franchise has already appointed Ashish Nehra as its head coach along with Vikram Solanki as director of cricket and Gary Kirsten as team mentor.

This year's tournament will be sort of a comeback trail for Hardik, who has been out of favour since the completion of the ICC T20 World Cup, where India were knocked out in the league phase.

The main contention has been his bowling as he hasn't been the same potent, skiddy fourth seamer in the line-up that he used to be before his back surgery and, of late, he hasn't bowled much even in white ball cricket.

It is now an accepted fact that Pandya in order to prolong his white ball career might not play the longer version for India again but for the white ball team, he remains a vital cog going into this year's World T20 in Australia, and hence, a good show for Ahmedabad as leader cum captain might change the scenario for him.



# I am absolutely fit but can't risk Siraj as he isn't ready to play 3rd Test: Virat Kohli

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India captain Virat Kohli on Monday said he will return to the team for the series-deciding third Test against South Africa here as he is "absolutely fit" but ruled out the participation of pacer Mohammed Siraj.

The skipper feels that he has been playing for so long across all three formats that people almost took this for granted that he can never miss a match and will play "every game that India plays" which is practically impossible.

Kohli, who missed the second Test because of an upper back spasm, had nets with the rest of the team at Newlands on Sunday.

"I am absolutely fit," Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

However, he added that Siraj will not feature in the game after he suffered a hamstring injury in Johannesburg, where India lost by seven wickets. "Siraj is obviously recovering from the (hamstring) niggle he had in the last game and at present, I don't think he is match-ready to take the field in the third Test.

"You cannot obviously risk a guy who is not at 110 per cent as a fast bowler and we know how important that is as the little niggle he had can extend into an injury," the skipper said.

"Siraj is not up to the



mark," he added. However, the skipper did not say whether Ishant Sharma will get the nod ahead of Umesh Yadav.

"As I said, we are yet to sit down, myself, the head coach and vice-captain to decide what we want to do about replacement," he said. "And I say that because of our bench strength and it's difficult for us to figure out as everyone is bowling well, batting well, these things become a point of contention and we need to have a healthy discussion on a decision on that and just that everyone feels balanced (okay) about it," he explained.

The Indian skipper said that there would have been a point when there would be injuries especially for a person like him who plays every match with highest intensity across three formats.

"Our focal point was to be as fit as possible and to be the fittest version of myself but reality of the situation is that we do play a lot of cricket and there is no denying that.

"My case is an example. As much as I take lot of pride in being absolutely fit at all times, you do take a lot of things for granted about the fact that we are playing three formats and the IPL regularly, is almost a thing taken for granted that I will play every game for India."

He also gave examples of Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who in the past few years have suffered a great deal due to injuries and Ravindra Jadeja, who is also having a knee issue.

# Pankaj Advani tests positive for COVID-19

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Multiple time world snooker and billiards champion Pankaj Advani has tested positive for COVID-19. The ace cueist confirmed it to PTI on Monday. "I was following all the COVID restrictions but still got infected. We all have to be extra careful in this third wave of COVID. I have taken medicines and I think it'll take a week for me to recover and get back to my normal routine," Advani said.

A source close to the player added, "He woke up with fever and uncontrollable shivering in the morning. To confirm if he has been affected with the virus, Pankaj tested himself with the home test kit and the results indicated that he was COVID positive. "The champion player gave a brilliant performance in the 64th National Billiards Championship which was recently held in Bhopal and won National Billiards title

# Latham, Boult star as NZ dominates 2nd test



AP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

Tom Latham scored 252, Devon Conway banked another century and Ross Taylor likely played his last test innings as New Zealand declared at 521-6 on Monday before bowling out Bangladesh for 126 on the second day of the second cricket test.

Trent Boult took 5-43, including his 300th test wicket to join Richard Hadlee, Daniel Vettori and his new ball partner Tim Southee among New Zealanders who have taken 300 wickets in tests. The milestone came in

Boult's 75th test at an average of 27.35, along with his ninth five-wicket hauls in tests. "It definitely means a lot," Boult said. "I suppose as a team we're not about the milestones but it definitely means a lot to join an exclusive club, tough to get a membership."

Latham declared New Zealand's first innings halfway through the middle session on day two at Christchurch, and Boult and Southee raced through the Bangladesh top order to leave the tourists' 11-4 in the seventh over — challenging their test low score of 43.

Yasir Ali showed fortitude to post a maiden test half century and was out for 55 just before stumps.

Latham took two catches at second slip among those four early wickets to keep up his outsized influence on the match which represented a massive shift in fortunes of the series after Bangladesh shocked World Test Champion New Zealand by winning the series-opener by eight wickets.

Latham's second double century in tests was a mammoth innings which began when he lost the toss Sunday for the sixth time as New Zealand's stand-in captain.

It ended 552 minutes, or 5 1/2 sessions, later after Latham had shared partnerships of 148 for the first wicket with Will Young and 215 for the second wicket with Conway.

Latham ticked off milestones with metronomic regularity — a 50 from 65 balls, his century from 133 deliveries and 150 in 199 balls — before he ended the first day 186 not out.

His shot-making was fluent and varied. When the ball was new and hard and Bangladesh pitched short he peppered the fence behind the point boundary.

When the bowling was fuller he drove on the off side or worked the ball through mid-wicket.

# Arsenal out of FA Cup, Liverpool and Tottenham avoid upsets

AP ■ LONDON

Third-round exits in the FA Cup don't come along very often for Arsenal. Unless, that is, Nottingham Forest is the opponent.

Failing to transfer its improved Premier League form to the world's oldest knockout competition, Arsenal was beaten 1-0 by second-tier Forest on Sunday in the second big shock of the third round — the stage where top-flight clubs enter the draw. It's only the second time in 26 seasons that Arsenal has fallen at the first hurdle. Forest was responsible for the other occasion, too, in 2018.

"We were not good enough," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said, "and we have to apologize for it." Tottenham and Liverpool avoided the same fate as



Arsenal, launching comebacks after falling behind at home to third-tier opponents. Tottenham beat Morecambe

3-1 and Liverpool won 4-1 against Shrewsbury.

By conceding an 83rd-minute goal

to substitute Lewis Grabban at the City Ground, Arsenal became the highest-ranked casualty of this season's FA Cup.

So inept was Arsenal's display that Arteta's team failed to have a shot on target against Forest, a former European champion which has fallen on hard times since the turn of the century and is ninth in the Championship.

"It's brilliant to get through and I hope the players now really believe in what we're doing," said Forest manager Steve Cooper, who is looking to lead the team back to the Premier League to play top-flight football for the first time since 1999.

It was in stark contrast to Arsenal's recent performances in the Premier League which have helped to lift the team into the Champions League positions.

# BCCI postpones Cooch Behar Trophy knockout games after massive COVID-19 outbreak

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The BCCI on Monday postponed the knockout games of U-19 Cooch Behar Trophy following a massive COVID-19 outbreak among the participating teams.

Around 50 positive cases across eight teams were detected ahead of the knockout stage beginning in Pune on Tuesday, PTI has learnt.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday announced the postponement of the knockout stage matches of the Cooch Behar Trophy following some



positive COVID-19 cases within the team environment.

"Keeping everyone's health and safety in mind, the knockout matches to be held in Pune have been put on hold until further notice. The BCCI had conducted 93 matches across 20 venues in the league stage. "The Board will continue

to monitor the situation and identify a new window once the situation improves," said the BCCI in a statement.

Last week, the BCCI was forced to postpone all domestic events including the premier Ranji Trophy due to a surge in COVID-19 cases across the country.

# PV Sindhu, Kidambi Srikanth eye glory at India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star Indian shuttlers P V Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth will look to carry the momentum from last season and make winning starts to the new year when they begin their campaign at the India Open, which returns after being cancelled twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A lot of ranking points will be up for grabs at the USD 400,000 Super 500 tournament which is being held in the looming shadows of a raging third wave of the pandemic in the country with cases rising at a rapid speed, fuelled by the new Omicron variant.

Top shuttler B Sai Praneeth and doubles player Dhruv Rawat have already pulled out after testing positive in the pre-departure testing.

Another men's doubles player Manu Attri, who formed the fifth seeded pair with his partner B Sumeeth Reddy, also pulled out of the tournament on Monday after his RT-PCR test came positive again.

"I had a cough and tested positive yesterday. I have withdrawn from the event today. I have to see how it affects my health and if I can play Syed Modi next week," Attri told PTI.

Top doubles player Chirag Shetty, however, was cleared to play after his RT-PCR test came negative after he failed the test the first time on Sunday.

He along with his partner Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, are seeded second and will now compete in the tournament with an opening round match against compatriots Ravi and Chirag Arora.

Despite the spectre of



COVID, many top Indian and foreign players have descended on the national capital for the year's first event.

Besides Sindhu and Srikanth, many top players such as newly-crowned world champion Loh Kean Yew, three-

time world champion Indonesian duo of Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan, top Malaysians Ong Yew Sin

and Teo Ee Yi will also be seen in action at the event which will take place behind closed doors at the Indira Gandhi stadium here.

Among Indians, all eyes will be on two-time Olympic medalist Sindhu and world championships silver and bronze medalists Srikanth and Lakshya Sen respectively, to deliver the goods at the country's flagship event.

Sindhu embarked on a consistent run last season as she claimed a second Olympic medal and also secured a silver at World Tour Final besides making the final at the Swiss Open and few semifinals finishes but a title eluded her.

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad, whose last title was the 2019 World Championships, will be itching to regain the India Open

title which she had first captured five years back in 2017.

Sindhu will begin her campaign against compatriot Sri Krishna Priya Kudaravalli, while Russian fifth seed Evgeniya Kosetskaya could be her opponent in the last-eight stage.

Two-time champion Saina Nehwal, Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan and Singapore's up and coming Jia Min Yeo are the other top shuttlers in women's singles.

The London Olympics bronze medalist and fourth seed Nehwal, who endured a tough last year plagued with multiple injuries, is likely to square off against seventh seed Iris Wang of USA in the quarterfinals and second seed Ongbamrunphan in the semifinals.

In men's singles, Srikanth

will begin his campaign against compatriot Siril Verma and might clash with Singapore's Loh Kean Yew in the semifinals in a rematch of their World Championships final after being drawn in the same half.

The in-form Sen will start his campaign against Adham Elgamal of Egypt and could face compatriot and World Championships quarter-finalist HS Prannoy in the quarterfinals. Prannoy, who is making a comeback after battling post COVID after-effects, is set to kickstart his challenge against Spaniard Pablo Abian. Sixth seed Sameer Verma, who had suffered a calf muscle injury in Denmark, will also look to go deep into the draw after starting his campaign against his elder brother Sourabh.