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WHAT'S HAPPENING IN
KAZAKHSTAN, & WHY?

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BIDEN REDOUBLING FOCUS ON TESTING
AMID SHORTAGES, CONFUSION

MONEY 9

MCAP OF BSE-LISTED FIRMS AT
ALL-TIME HIGH OF ₹ 278 LAKH CR

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY JANUARY 14, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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SCORES
CENTURY
12 SPORT

Omicron global deaths at .25%

Mortality rate was in double-digit in some nations when Covid-19 hit world 2 yrs ago first time

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The fatality rate of Omicron-driven Covid-19 has stabilised around 0.25 per cent across the world. This is far below the double-digit mortality rate some countries saw when the first wave of Covid-19 hit the world two years ago.

On Wednesday, the world recorded 3,238,025 new cases and 8,425 deaths. The USA reported 8,29, 2928 cases and 2,283 deaths which translates to nearly 0.25 per cent both in global terms and for the USA.

Among the European nations, France has been the worst hit by Omicron. The country reported, 3.61 lakh cases on Wednesday but only 246 deaths. In fact, France is managing coronavirus in better ways than most other countries, including India. On Wednesday, India clocked 2.47



Amid rise in Covid-19 cases, a large number of devotees take part in the golden chariot procession of the Lord Venkateswara temple on the occasion of auspicious Vaikuntha Ekadasi, at Tirumala in Tirupati, on Thursday

PTI

cases and 30 deaths.

The number of weekly reported deaths has remained stable since October 2021, at an average of 48,000.

Meanwhile, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid is

driving a huge spike in Covid infections across countries but the death rate is stable.

He also noted that though vaccines do not fully protect from infections, the overwhelming majority of people admitted to hospitals around the world are unvaccinated.

The sheer number of cases also means more pressure on already overburdened and exhausted health workers.

Last week, more than 15 million new cases of Covid-19 were reported to WHO from around the world, by far the most cases reported in a single week. While these are official estimates, the actual numbers

could be really high.

"This huge spike in infections is being driven by the Omicron variant, which is rapidly replacing Delta in almost all countries," said Ghebreyesus at his Press address on Wednesday.

"However, the number of weekly reported deaths has remained stable since October last year, at an average of 48 thousand deaths a week," he added.

This could be due to the reduced severity of Omicron, and widespread immunity from vaccination or previous infection, he noted.

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Of 8 crore 15+ population, 3 cr get vaccinated

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Of the total 8 crore teens population in the country, over three crore have already received their first dose of the vaccine as on Wednesday, in just ten days since the drive for children aged between 15 and 18 years beginning January 3.

As of now only Bharat Biotech indigenously-made Covaxin is available for vaccinating this age group.

According to the CoWIN portal, as of now, total of 3,06,60,329 teens have been vaccinated and the numbers are increasing every minute. However, a total of 3,21,63,781 youngsters of this age group have registered themselves for the vaccines till now.

"Great sense of responsibility and enthusiasm among Young India. Over 3 crore youngsters in the 15-18 age group have received 1st dose of the Covid-19 vaccine," said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in a tweet on Thursday.

He also appealed to all eli-



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to a teenager in Mumbai on Thursday

PTI

gible young beneficiaries to get vaccinated at the earliest.

As per an estimation, around 7.50 crore teens of this age bracket are to be administered the vaccine. Out of the total, over three crore have received their first dose of the vaccine so far. As of now only Bharat Biotech indigenously-made Covaxin is available for vaccinating this age group.

According to the Union Health Ministry, additional doses of Covaxin have been sent to all the States and Union Territories for administering the vaccine to this population category.

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OBC leaders' exodus hits Yogi Cabinet

Another Minister Dharam Saini, 4 MLAs quit BJP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The exodus of OBC leaders from the BJP continued on Thursday as another Minister Dharam Singh Saini, the third in three days, and four legislators resigned from the party showing allegiance to Swami Prasad Maurya. Maurya's resignation from the Cabinet on Tuesday has triggered the exodus.

Interestingly, Saini, who held the Ayush portfolio and was considered close to Swami Prasad Maurya, had refuted reports of leaving the saffron party barely a day ago.

The day Maurya resigned he said, "I am with BJP and if Maurya has given his name as defector this is wrong."

The four legislators who resigned from the primary membership of the BJP on Thursday are Dr Mukesh Verma, Bala Prasad Awasthi, Vinay Shukla and Avtar Singh Bhadana. They have accused the party leadership of ignoring the interests of the Dalits, backward classes, and farmers. Bhadana has joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal.



Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav welcomes former UP Minister Dharam Singh Saini into the party in Lucknow on Thursday

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"During the tenure of five years by the BJP Government, no attention was given to the leaders and public representatives of the Dalit, backward and minority communities, and these communities were neglected," Verma, a backward caste leader, wrote in his resignation letter. "Hence, I resign from the primary membership of the BJP."

As many as three BJP Ministers and 13 MLAs, most of them hailing from the OBC community, have quit in one week triggering panic within the party and altering its electoral scene in the Key State.

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Situation worsening in Delhi, positivity soars to 29%, 31 die

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Covid-19 situation is turning from bad to worse in Delhi. The national Capital recorded the biggest-ever spike in Covid infections on Thursday with 28,867 new Covid-19 cases. On Wednesday, the city had registered 27,561 Covid cases and 40 deaths.

The positivity rate leaped to 29 per cent, and 31 persons lost their lives to the virus during the last 24 hours.

Delhi's positivity rate on Thursday was higher than what it witnessed on May 3 last year at the peak of the second wave of Covid-19. So far, Delhi has logged over 16.46 lakh cases and more than 25,000 Covid deaths.

The situation was equally bad in Bengaluru which recorded 18,374 on Thursday. Test positivity rate in Bengaluru hits 20 per cent as cases rise to 18,374 today. Karnataka's capital saw an increase of 18 per cent over Wednesday tally of 15,617. Overall, Karnataka reported 25,005 new Covid-19 cases, 8 deaths. Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai attended a virtual meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Covid situation in all States.

Bruhat Bengaluru

Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) in an advisory issued has stated that entire apartment complex will be declared "containment zone" for a minimum of seven days in case of more than three Covid-19 cases. The civic body also stated that all residents will be tested and detailed contact tracing will be conducted.

The situation remained static in Maharashtra, while Mumbai saw a slight dip in number of cases compared to Wednesday. Maharashtra on Thursday recorded 46,406 new cases and 36 deaths in the last 24 hours. On Wednesday, the State had reported 46,723 cases. Out of the new cases, as many as 13,702 new cases and 6 deaths were reported from Mumbai as against 16,420 reported on Wednesday.

Pongal, the annual harvest festival and Tamil New Year festivities suffered a setback as Tamil Nadu registered 20,911 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday. Tamil New Year and Pongal falls on Friday and the pandemic have robbed the gaiety and enthusiasm associated with the festivities.

The traditional Jallikattu (bull taming) will be celebrated with restrictions amidst the Covid-19 and Omicron pandemics.

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Bikaner-Guwahati Express derails: 3 killed, 10 trapped

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

At least three persons were killed and more than 40 injured when the Guwahati bound 15366UP Bikaner-Guwahati on Thursday jumped off track near Moynaguri town in Jalpaiguri district of north Bengal, sources in the North-East Frontier Railways and Jalpaiguri district administration said, adding the number of casualties could go up as more people remain trapped inside the mangled coaches.

The accident occurred about 5 pm when seven coaches of the train got derailed. While some of the coaches turned turtle, two coaches "most probably S-6 and S-5 collided against each other with one telescoping on the other," causing most number of injuries, sources said.

"Till now three persons have been reported dead on the spot while we have admitted 25 others in Jalpaiguri Super Specialty Hospital," Jalpaiguri District Magistrate Madhumita Godhara said, adding ambulances and team of doctors had



Mangled remains of Guwahati-Bikaner Express train after it got derailed at Mainaguri in Jalpaiguri district on Thursday

PTI

rushed to the spot.

"The accident occurred at around 5 pm and my Siliguri SRP had rushed to the spot," said Adhir Sharma, DGP Railways, adding everything possible was being done to facilitate the rescue work.

The local block health officer of Moynaguri said out of 16 injured persons admitted in the Block hospital 15 were critically injured and were being rushed to Jalpaiguri.

The accident occurred near an overbridge between

Moynaguri and Domohuni, sources said, adding the train was bound for Guwahati via Alipurduar. "As the accident occurred at a 'block area' (an area which is far stations) it is becoming more difficult for the rescue teams to reach the spot," said a senior railway official.

As the area is far away from urban centres hundreds of local villagers joined the initial rescue work extracting the trapped passengers and sending them to hospitals, sources said.

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Covid fight must not hamper eco activities, PM tells CMs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the country witnessed an alarming rise in Omicron cases in the last 24 hours, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on Thursday held a review meeting with Chief Ministers (CMs) of all States.

Modi said that "vaccination" and the "local containment" that did not impede "economic activities" should form part of their strategy to counter the new variant of the Covid-19 virus.

Cautioning all to be "alert", the PM said Omicron is "rapidly spreading" and called for adhering to the Covid-19 protocol that includes masking and social distancing.

"Compared to previous variants, Omicron is rapidly spreading...it's more transmissible...Our health experts are assessing the situation. It's clear that we have to stay alert, but also ensure to avoid panic," said Modi during the meeting with the CMs.

Almost all CMs attended the meet with Modi calling for continuous cooperation



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with Chief Ministers over the prevailing Covid-19 situation in the country via video conferencing, in New Delhi

PTI

between the Centre and the States and expressed happiness that all were confident of overcoming the current spell of the infection.

"The ₹23,000 core package allocated by the Centre to the States has been utilised well with many States are strengthening their health infrastructure. The Centre and States need to follow this pre-emptive, collective, and proactive approach this time too," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya attended the meeting that was held virtually.

Modi said given the past two years experience of fighting coronavirus, all States need to see that the speed of economic activities continues

while managing the current wave of the pandemic.

"Any strategy needs to keep this thing in mind", he said and suggested "local containment from where large cases are emerging."

Modi asked CMs of States where a surge of cases is palpable, to encourage "home isolation so that there is less pressure on the hospitals."

Better home treatment and tracking would prevent crowding of hospitals, the PM said, adding he was happy "many States were doing innovative experiments in Covid management."

The Centre and States need to further accelerate the 'Har Ghar Dastak' programme to reach 100 per cent vaccination coverage, he said.

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India, China fail to defuse LAC stand-off in 14th round of talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and China failed to achieve a breakthrough to ease tension on the border in Ladakh during the 14th round of military-level talks on Wednesday. The two sides agreed to meet again to find a solution to the face-off persisting at several points.

The Corps Commander-level talks were held on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Chushul sector of Eastern Ladakh. The Indian side was led by 14 Corps chief Lt General Anindiya Sengupta.

The talks lasted for more than 12 hours and ended at 10.30 pm.

The joint statement released on Thursday said the representatives from the defense and foreign affairs



establishments of the two sides were present at the meeting. The two sides had a frank and in-depth exchange of views for the resolution of the relevant issues along the LAC in the Western Sector, it said.

Both sides agreed to follow the guidance provided by the State leaders and work for the resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest. It was noted that this would help in the restoration of peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the Western Sector and enable progress in bilateral relations.

Haridwar hate speech: Wasim Rizvi, alias Jitendra Tyagi, arrested

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

In the first arrest in the Dharm Sansad hate speech case, Waseem Rizvi, aka Jitendra Narayan Tyagi, was arrested from Roorkee in Haridwar district on Thursday.

Rizvi who changed his name to Jitendra Narayan Tyagi after converting to Hinduism is among more than 10 people named in the FIRs lodged in connection with the case.

He was formerly the head of Uttar Pradesh Shia Waqf Board.

Waseem Rizvi was arrested from Narsan border, Roorkee, Haridwar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Yogendra Rawat told PTI.

Pick your AAP's CM face for Punjab by call, text: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday sought suggestions from the public to decide the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) chief ministerial candidate for the Punjab Assembly polls.

Addressing the media, Kejriwal said people can call, SMS, or WhatsApp their choice of the chief ministerial candidate on the number 7074870748 till January 17 evening. "It is almost certain that the Aam Aadmi Party Government will be formed in Punjab and the chief ministerial face of the AAP will be the next Chief Minister. After 1947, so many elections have been held, but till date no party has had the guts to ask the public who their chief ministerial



Delhi CM and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal with party leaders Bhagwant Mann and Raghav Chadha at a press conference in Chandigarh on Thursday

PTI

candidate should be. In a historic first, the AAP is asking the public who should be their chief ministerial face. Whoever the public votes for will be made the Chief Minister," Kejriwal added.

He said that all the surveys are stating that the AAP will get

57 to 60 seats.

"I appeal to all the residents and volunteers of Punjab to give a strong push so that the AAP gets at least 80 seats, and not just 60. I wanted to make Bhagwant Mann the CM face, but he said no."

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CAPSULE

WOMAN BRANDED WITCH, SET ON FIRE

Simdega: Close on heels of a lynching incident in Jharkhand's Simdega district, a 60-year-old woman was set on fire by locals at a village here on the suspicion that she practised witchcraft, a police officer said on Thursday. Five persons have been arrested in this connection, the officer said. The victim with severe burn injuries was undergoing treatment at Sadar Hospital. Jhanya Devi had gone to a relative's place for a funeral ceremony.

HC ADMITS AKBAR'S PLEA AGAINST RAMANI

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Thursday agreed to examine former Union Minister M J Akbar's appeal against the trial court order acquitting journalist Priya Ramani in his criminal defamation case over her allegations of sexual harassment.

Cop martyred in anti-terrorist op in J&K's Kulgam

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A selection grade constable of the Jammu & Kashmir Police on Wednesday attained martyrdom during an anti-terrorist operation in which one Pakistani terrorist Babar Bhai of Jaish-e- Muhammad terror outfit was gunned down by the security forces in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam. Three army jawans and two civilians also received injuries during the operation.

The police constable identified as Rohit Chib was serving in the special operations group for a long time and had earned out of turn promotions due to his gallantry in the past.

The braveheart has left behind his pregnant wife, younger brother, sister and mother. He was staying in the Jagti Migrant camp near Nagrota. His family had migrated from Kashmir valley.

As per police records, the killed terrorist was a categorized terrorist active since year 2018 in the areas of Shopian-Kulgam and its adjoining areas. He was



wanted by law in several terror crime cases. So far 14 terrorists have been neutralized during the current year out of which 7 are foreign terrorists including 1 killed at LOC in Kupwara.

According to police, one police personnel, three Army soldiers and two civilians got injured during the operation. All the injured were immediately shifted to the hospital for treatment however police personnel SgCt Rohit Chib succumbed to his injuries and attained martyrdom. The con-

dition of other injured including two civilians who had sustained minor injuries is stated to be stable.

The mortal remains of Rohit Chib were brought to Jammu early Thursday morning. Later he was cremated with full honors in the presence of top cops including Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh. Several local politicians, cutting across party lines along with a large number of local residents attended the last journey of the braveheart in

7 Pakistani terrorists among 14 killed in 8 operations in J&K this year: DGP

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh on Thursday said that 14 terrorists, including seven Pakistani nationals, have been killed in eight encounters in the union territory so far this year and asserted that anti-terrorist operations will be intensified to clear the region of terrorism.

The police chief paid tribute to police constable Rohit Chib who was killed during an encounter with terrorists in Kulgam district of

south Kashmir on Wednesday. In the operation, Pakistan-origin Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) terrorist Babar was killed and five, including two civilians and three soldiers, were injured.

"This year, we have undertaken eight successful operations. As many as 14 terrorists have been killed in these operations. Among these 14 terrorists, seven are Pakistani terrorists," Singh told reporters.

The police chief further said the terror modules and

their networks helping terrorists are also being eliminated.

"The elimination of these terrorists are going on at a fast pace. In these operations, seven terrorists who had come from Pakistan to engineer terror have been eliminated," he said.

He said people heaved a sigh of relief in 2021 as there have been largescale elimination of terrorists. "We will clear this land of terrorism so that people live in an environment of peace," he added. **PTI**

Last night he along with army jawans was conducting house to house search in the general area of Kulgam when a hiding terrorist opened fire and also lobbed a grenade. Rohit had received critical injuries while safely evacuating civilians being used by the terrorists as human shield.

Vijay Kumar, IGP Kashmir while interacting with media at Kulgam Thursday said that the owner and his family members where the killed terrorist was hiding deliberately misled the search team by saying that no terrorist was hiding in their house which led to collateral damage.

Bikaner-Guwahati express derails: 3 killed, 10...

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"We arranged local vehicle to carry some of the passengers to Moynaguri from where they are being sent to Jalpaiguri," a local villager said adding he had seen rescue personnel cutting the leg of a trapped passenger to extract him and send him to the hospital.

"Our men involved in the rescue work have informed that quite a few passengers were trapped inside the bogies and had to be extracted after cutting the metals with gas cutters," a senior officer at New Jalpaiguri said adding "prima facie it does not seem to be a problem of points as the train was not near-

any station and neither was any track point nor any signal." Sources contradicted each other even as some said the train was speeding away while some others said it was running at a gentle speed of about 40 kmph.

Though there was no information about the number of passengers travelling in the train at the time of the accident sources said the train had started with 700 passengers from Bikaner. "I felt a jerk and then

suddenly things came to a halt and my bogie tilted to a side...I immediately leapt out of the train and found that bogies ahead of mine had telescoped on each other," said Dipak Bharani, a businessman from Guwahati who was travelling in the train.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was in the midst of a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi briefed the former about the accident and issued directions from Kolkata. At least 50 ambulances were rushed to the spot from both Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar, sources in the state administration said.

While Dilip Kaur the NF Railway CPRO said "a high level investigation has been ordered and things would be ascertained soon," an engineer from the same Division said "ICF bogies were being used in the Bikaner Express which is why some of the coaches telescoped."

Meanwhile, the NF Railways had given three helpline numbers for the anxious relatives of the passengers. These are 9002041951-55, 8134054999, 03612-731622, 23.

OBC...

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The leaders who quit the BJP are: Swami Prasad Maurya, Bhagwati Sagar, Roshan Lal Verma, Vinay Shakya, Avtar Singh Bhadana, Dara Singh Chauhan, Brijesh Prajapati, Mukesh Verma, Rakesh Rathore, Jai Chaubey, Madhuri Verma, R K Sharma, and Bala Prasad Awasthi.

Maurya who resigned from the state Cabinet on Tuesday is likely to join Samajwadi Party

on Friday. "Just wait and see as how many people will join with me," he told reporters.

Earlier in the day he had, in another tweet said: "I will start a new political inning on January 14". Later in the day Maurya along with some legislators who had resigned from BJP visited Lohia Trust and met Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav. The meeting continued for over half an hour. Coming out of that meeting Maurya tweeted to call RSS as Naag and BJP as Saap and himself as Nevla (mongoose) that will destroy them.



Army jawans display their war skills during the full dress rehearsal for the Army Day Parade, at Army Parade Ground in New Delhi, on Thursday

PTI

Covid fight must not hamper eco activities, PM tells...

From Page 1
Modi said the Centre has developed tele-medicine techniques which "greatly helped Corona patients".

The PM told the CMs that there is need that "we remain ahead of all Corona variants now and mutual cooperation would give us strength in this fight..."

"We, the 130 crore people of India, will surely emerge victorious from the Coronavirus pandemic with our collective efforts", he said. "Initial scepticism about Omicron is slowly getting cleared. This variant is infecting the general population several times faster than previous ones", he cautioned.

"Hard work is our only path and victory is our only option...", said Modi who assured that the Centre was extending all help to the States in coping with the latest surge.

The CMs thanked the PM for his support and guidance and for funds provided by the Central Government which has been of immense help in boosting health infrastructure.

The CMs talked about preparedness to tackle increasing cases, through steps like increase in beds, oxygen availability etc.

The Karnataka CM talked about the spread of cases in Bengaluru and measures taken to contain spread in apartments.

The West Bengal CM discussed the possible increase in cases in the State on account of upcoming festivities and the administration's preparation to tackle it.

The Tamil Nadu CM said the State stands together with the Centre in the fight against this wave, while the Jharkhand CM talked about misconcep-

tions in some rural and tribal areas which have caused some difficulties in the vaccination programme.

The Uttar Pradesh CM spoke about steps being taken to ensure that no one is left out of the vaccination drive. Punjab CM thanked the PM for funds and infrastructure support, especially in meeting oxygen requirements and Assam CM said that steps like precaution dose have proved to be an immense confidence booster. Manipur CM said that the State is taking efforts to increase the vaccination coverage.

Meanwhile, the Health Minister complimented the youth for showing 'great sense of responsibility & enthusiasm' as over 3 crore youngsters between the 15-18 age group have received the 1st dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, he said.

China: Naravane's remarks on face-off 'unconstructive'

Beijing: China said on Thursday that it hopes 'relevant people' in India will refrain from making 'unconstructive comments', a day after Chief of Army Staff Gen M M Naravane stated that threat in eastern Ladakh has 'by no means reduced' and the Indian Army will continue to deal with the Chinese military in a 'firm' and 'resolute' manner.

In his press conference on Wednesday ahead of the Army Day on January 15, Gen Naravane also said that war or conflict is always an 'instrument of last resort' but if it is thrust upon India, then the country will come out victorious.

His comments came on a day India and China held the 14th round of Corps Commander level talks to resolve the military standoff in eastern Ladakh. Asked for his reaction to Gen Naravane's comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here on Thursday that "now China and India have been in communication and dialogue through diplomatic and military channels to ease the border tension".

"We hope relevant people on the Indian side will refrain from making unconstructive remarks," he said in response to a question from the Western media.

About the Corps Commander-level talks, Wang said "regarding the 14th

Commander level meeting, we will release information if there is any".

However, sources in the security establishment in New Delhi said on Wednesday that India pressed for an early disengagement of troops in the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh at the 14th round of military talks with China which took place at the Chushul-Moldo border point on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual. The Indian side also insisted on disengagement as soon as possible in all the remaining friction points including resolution of issues in Depsang Bulge and Demchok.

The 13th round of talks had taken place on October 10 and they ended in a stalemate.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas. Both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process last year in the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area. Each side currently has around 50,000 to 60,000 troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the sensitive sector. **PTI**

Pick your AAP's CM face for Punjab by call...

From Page 1
At the same time, AAP MP and Punjab Convenor Bhagwant Mann said, "CM sahib told me that your name can be declared as the CM's face (for Punjab). But I told him that usually parties force a CM face on the people and do not ask their choice. For the next five years the CM has to look after the people, so why not ask the public which one of the leaders of the AAP do they

want to be the CM. So if people choose, they will have faith that the CM is their choice. Therefore, the trust of the public should be secured for the CM's face."

He said, "I am a true soldier of the AAP. Even if my duty is pasting posters, I will do that too. If my duty is to sweep the streets, then I will do that too. Punjab is important to me. That's why I don't have any desire to become the CM."



Health workers admit a suspected Covid-19 positive patient to a hospital amid concern over spread Omicron variant, in Kolkata, on Thursday

PTI

Situation worsening in Delhi, positivity soars to 29%,...

From Page 1
Though Tamil Nadu and Kerala were showing reduced number of Covid-19 cases throughout December, matters took a turn for the worst in new year as the number of new patients started rising from January 1. Kerala Minister for Health Veena George said on Thursday that the Health Department diagnosed 13,468 new patients with Covid-19 during the last 24 hours. The death toll till date in Kerala mounted to 50,369.

West Bengal is also seeing no respite from Covid. The State reported 23,467 fresh Covid-19 cases and 26 more fatalities.

On the basis of Wednesday's case count, India

added 2,47,417 new coronavirus infections taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 3,63,17,927 according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

It is the highest single-day increase in the ongoing wave. The infections increased by more than 165 per cent compared with the case count a week ago. Of the total 5,488 cases of Omicron variant reported from 28 States, 2,162 people have recovered or migrated so far.

Assam recorded 3,274 new cases on January 12 after 49,915 samples were tested. The test positivity rate stood at 6.56 per cent. Four new deaths were also reported on the day. The active case count stood at 11,792.

It was no different in Andhra Pradesh, where 3,205 fresh cases were reported in the 24 hours ending January 12 morning.

On Omicron front, Maharashtra recorded the maximum number of 1,367 cases followed by Rajasthan at 792, Delhi 549, Karnataka 479 and Kerala 486. The active cases have increased to 11, 17,531, the highest in 216 days, while the death toll has climbed to 4,85,035 with 380 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am stated.

The active cases comprise 3.08 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate decreased to 95.59 per cent, the Ministry said. An increase of 1,62,212

cases has been recorded in the active Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 13.11 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 10.80 per cent, according to the Ministry. A total of 2,11,298 coronavirus infections were reported in a single day on May 26.

An increase of 1,33,873 cases has been recorded in the active Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

Of 8 crore 15+ population, 3 cr get...

From Page 1
According to the Ministry data, over 26,73,385 precaution doses have been administered to healthcare workers, frontline workers and those aged 60 and above with comorbidities. With the administration of over 76 lakh (76,32,024) vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage has exceeded 154.61 crore. This has been achieved through 1,65,65,942 sessions, said a statement.

While testing capacity has been enhanced across the country, the weekly positivity rate in the country currently stands at 10.80 per cent and the daily positivity rate also reported to be 13.11 per cent.

Hospitalisation rate is low: Health Min

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said that according to the audit of the death committee, the highest number of deaths caused due to Corona is of those patients who were admitted in hospitals due to any comorbidity or any other diseases.

"The rate of admission of patients is currently very low. There is no increase in the number of hospitalizations of patients," he said.

Giving detailed information on the Coronavirus cases in Delhi on Thursday, he said "The number of patients admitted in the hospital has stabilized. The number of hospitalizations as compared to new cases coming daily is currently under control. We are hopeful that this is the peak. The existing health system in Delhi is in a good shape and we are fully prepared to deal with the most serious of situations."

He added, "Despite the surge of new cases daily for the last few days, the number of patients admitted to the hospital remains the same. This could be a sign that the peak of the corona has now arrived. I hope that this peak of corona ends as soon as possible so that the cases of corona in Delhi and the country can come down thereafter and people can get relief from this outbreak."

About the patients being admitted to the ICU, Jain said, "There are very few such cases among the patients admitted to the ICU beds in the hospitals, who are admitted only because of the Corona. Most of the patients are those who are being treated for some other disease."

Apart from this, while talking about the number of patients admitted to the hospital and the preparedness of the Government, the Health Minister said that at present very few patients are admitted to the hospital. For example, 30 corona patients are admitted to GTB hospital, there are a total of 750 beds available. Similarly, at present, a total of 750 beds are available in LNJP Hospital but only 136 patients are admitted. If needed, we can increase 1000 beds in both these hospitals.

Similarly, preparations have been made in other hospitals of Delhi like Deendayal Hospital, Lok Nayak Hospital, and Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital.

"A total of 37 thousand beds have been arranged for by the Delhi Government in these hospitals. At present, 15,000 beds have been made operational. We can double the number of beds overnight if needed, but as the number of hospitalized patients is so less at present, the need to increase the number of beds is not taken into consideration."

BJP forced EC change party registration norms: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/PUNJAB

AAP national spokesperson Arghav Chadha alleged that the Election Commission is making major changes in the process of registration of the political parties under the pressure of the BJP to prevent the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab. "The Election Commission is reducing the 30 day objection period to 7 days to make special changes for the registration of a special political party. Despite the imposition of the code of conduct, the EC is going to register this political party just 25 days before the election. What was the need to change the laws overnight to register a particular political party," he asked? Chadha further said "It is for the first time in India's history that the Election Commission of India, the body responsible for upholding our democracy by conducting free and fair elections, is providing special treatment by bringing about two major changes in the registration process of a

political party."

"This is the same election commission whose sole responsibility is to establish a fair and democratically elected government in our country, a body which we consider to be a crucial pillar of Indian democracy. I will first elaborate on the two changes that the EC is introducing and later go into the politics and power play of the matter," he added.

He said "The two changes that Election Commission of India is bringing about includes: one, there is a month-long objection period prior to the registration of any political party in India, during which people can raise their grievances and objections against the establishment of said political party to the Election Commission. This period lasts 30 days. However, giving special treatment this time, the Election Commission has shortened this objection period to a mere 7 days, reducing it by more than one-third of the original time-frame, to accelerate the registration of a special party."

Green cover of Delhi is up by 18 sqkm: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Green cover of Delhi has increased from 21.88 per cent to 23.06 per cent in the last two-year, Delhi Government said on Thursday. Environment Minister Gopal Rai said, "Green Cover of Delhi has increased by almost 18 sq km. The Union Environment Minister released the State of Forest Report (SFR)-2021 today. The report has been prepared by Forest Survey of India, Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change. As per this report, Green Cover of Delhi has increased by almost 18 sq km in comparison to SFR 2019."

He added, The tree cover of Delhi as per SFR 2019 was 129 sq km which has now increased to 147 sq km that means there is an increase of 18 sq km within 2 years. The overall green cover (Forest cover + Tree cover) is now 342 sq km (as per SFR 2021) which was earlier 324.44 sq km. Thus, there is a net increment of 17.5 sq km in green cover.

BSF Commandant, 3 others held in ₹125 cr tender cheating case

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a breakthrough, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Gurugram police have arrested a Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant his wife, sister and one other man for allegedly cheating of Rs 125 crore in the name of getting a construction tender at the National Security Guard (NSG) campus Manesar in Gurugram.

The police said on Thursday, a total of 13.81 crores and 6 high-end vehicles (Tata Harrier, Rangerover, Jeep Compass, BMW, Safari and Volvo) were recovered from his possession.

The culprits have been identified as BSF Deputy Commandant Praveen Yadav, his wife Mamta Yadav, sister Rituraj Yadav who was a manager at a private bank, and Dinesh. According to the police, the complainant Monesh Israni and three others filed separate written complaints to the Deputy

Commissioner of Police (DCP), Manesar, Gurugram on January 8. Israni told the police that Praveen Yadav, posing as the Deputy Commandant, Dinesh Mohan Sorkhi and Kamal Singh in connivance with their other associates had cheated them of Rs 125 crore in the name of getting the construction tender of Perifill Road, STP and housing flats in the NSG campus Manesar.

Acting promptly, Commissioner of Gurugram police constitutes an SIT led by ACP (crime), Preet Pal Sangwan including Inspector Sandeep Kumar, Incharge Manesar crime branch who with the held of lead inputs arrested the alleged criminal on Thursday.

During police interrogation, they disclosed that Yadav was the mastermind of this fraud. Yadav works as a Deputy Commandant in the BSF and was on deputation and was stationed till the last year-2021 in the NSG campus Manesar.

8 Delhi Police personnel awarded Home Minister's Medal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police's eight personnel have been awarded the "Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Police Training" for the year 2020-21.

According to a statement released by the Public Relation Office of Delhi Police, the eight police personnel have been selected in recognition of their excellent work towards imparting training in Delhi Police Academy's different campuses to produce good officers and personnel in different fields.

"They have been selected for their commendable training techniques in Outdoor (Drill and Physical Activities), Indoor (Law, Police Science, Scientific & Forensic Investigation and Cyber Proficiency) and other such



training modules. They have been steadfast in developing and updating training techniques to suit the evolving aspects of policing," the state-

ment read. According to the police, the awardees are Kamlesh Bisht, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Surender Singh Rathee, ACP (Outdoor

Training), Inspector Ravinder Kumar Verma, Dilip Kumar Shukla & Sita Ram Arya (Indoor Training), Sub Inspector (SI) Pushpender Kumar (Outdoor Training), SI Satya Narain Sain and Head Constable (HC) Satender Singh (Outdoor Training).

The Ministry of Home Affairs has instituted the "Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Police Training" for motivating and awarding the trainers and support staff of police training institutions of State and Central Police Forces to promote the quality of training in the country, the police said.

BJP ruled MCDs not carrying out development work, says AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) accused the BJP ruled MCDs of not carrying out any development work despite taking money from MLA-Local Area Development funds.

AAP senior leader and MLA Somnath Bharti said that the Delhi government has widened and repaired many roads that come under Public Works Department but cannot improve roads that come under Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

Infant dies during treatment in hospital, family cries negligence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The parents of a two month old infant on Thursday alleged that their boy died due to negligence on part of doctors at Paramjeet Chikitsa Kendar in Outer Delhi during the course of treatment. According to a senior police official, on Wednesday at 10.43 PM, a police control room (PCR) call was received regarding the death of a male child during treatment at Paramjeet Chikitsa Kendar, Bakhtawrpur.

"On reaching the hospital, complainant Ankit gave a written complaint to them alleging that on October 28, 2021, his

wife delivered a male baby at Paramjeet Chikitsa Kendar. On January 12, 2022, the baby was admitted to the same hospital for treatment of cold and vomiting but during the course of treatment, the infant died," said the senior police official.

"The father and relative then took the infant to a private hospital and they advised for higher centre and subsequently the child was taken to SRHC hospital in Narela," said police.

The father and relatives of the deceased are claiming negligence act on the part of doctors of Paramjeet Chikitsa Kendar and are willing to take further legal action, said police.

Petrol pump looting plan thwarted, 5 held

Gurugram: A team of the New Colony Police Station of the Gurugram police have arrested 5 people who were planning a petrol pump robbery and also planned to execute a decoy of Rs 1 crore at a house of the Faridabad based businessman on Thursday. The police also recovered 1 pistol and 1 cartridge, 1 Breeze car, 1 Knife and an Iron rod from the arrested people. The five arrested people were identified as Anuj Kadyan, Ajay, Vinesh and Ravinder are all residents of different districts of Haryana while Wazid a resident of Uttar Pradesh.

As per the information received, Police received a tip-off from an informer that some suspicious people were planning a petrol pump robbery.

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FLAG-OFF CEREMONY

By **Arvind Kejriwal**
Chief Minister, Delhi

in the august presence of **Kailash Gahlot**
Transport Minister, Delhi

Friday, 14th January 2022
at **12 noon**
Venue: **Rajghat Cluster Bus Depot**



दिल्ली सरकार
आप ही बदलें

Transport Department, Government of NCT of Delhi

DIP/Shabdarth/D/0184/21-22

Cong fields Unnao rape survivor’s mom, anti-CAA activists in UP

40% women candidates while another 40% are youth, says Priyanka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Going ahead with its ‘Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon’ campaign, the Congress on Thursday named the mother of the Unnao rape victim, an anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) activist, an Asha worker and female journalists as its candidates in the party’s first list of 125 candidates

including 50 women for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, spearheaded by general secretary Priyanka Gandhi. Releasing the list at a Press conference on Thursday, Priyanka said the inclusion of a number of women who suffered injustice as contestants sends a “new message” that those “who face injustice have the power to fight back for their

rights”. Priyanka said the Congress is making a new beginning by fielding 40 percent women candidates while another 40 percent are youth. “Congress in UP will give you this power, support and help you in every possible way so that you can fight your battle. Come into politics, fight for your rights by being part of the power structure,” Priyanka said at the AICC press conference. Asha Singh, mother of the rape victim, has been fielded from the Unnao Assembly seat



and anti-CAA activist and party spokesperson in Uttar Pradesh, Sadaf Jafar, from the Lucknow central seat. The 2017 Unnao gang rape incident had made headlines as

former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar was not only convicted for sexually assaulting a 17-year-old victim, but also was found to be involved in the death of her father. Soon after the list was released, former party president Rahul Gandhi tweeted, “In Unnao, the one with whose daughter the BJP did injustice, now she will become the face of justice — will fight and win!#Election2022.” Asha worker and activist Poonam Pandey, who fought for the rights of Asha workers, has been fielded from

Shahjahanpur and Ram Raj Gond, a tribal leader who fought for the rights of the Adivasis in Sonbhadra, from the Ponga constituency. “I don’t see this as creating new vote bank of young women. I see this as empowering women to ask for their rights and stand up for themselves. They are 50 percent of the population, and frankly, it is absolutely their right to participate in politics,” Priyanka said when asked if the Congress was creating a new constituency of women voters in these elections.

Exuberating confidence, Priyanka who is leading from front in the State as in-charge, said Congress would like to strengthen its organisation and work towards dislodging the Yogi Adityanath government. “Today, the government in Uttar Pradesh is a dictatorial government,” Priyanka said, adding the party would be open to supporting a non-BJP alliance post poll if the need arises. Apart from fielding Pradesh Congress Committee chief Ajay Kumar Lallu (Tamkuhi Raj), legislature party

leader Aradhna Misra Mona (Rampur Khas) and Louise Khurshid (Farrukhabad), the party has given tickets to journalists, actors and social workers who have struggled on the streets for their rights. Journalist Pankhuri Pathak has been given ticket to contest from Noida while former Union Minister Salman Khurshid’s wife Louise Khurshid will contest from Farrukhabad. A ticket from Umbha has been given to the leader who raised her voice for the Sonbhadra massacre victims.

CISF men manning Delhi Metro to get booster shots by Jan 20

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the surge of Covid-19 cases in the paramilitary ranks, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has begun administration of booster vaccine shots to its personnel.

Out of the 12,000 CISF personnel engaged in securing the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation corridors in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, 2,500 personnel have been administered the booster doses. The CISF is also securing the airport in the national capital and elsewhere.

The CISF is securing mass transit corridors in Delhi-NCR and facilitating safe mass rapid transit of 35 lakh passengers on a daily basis and are at the frontline in terms of vulnerability and exposure to Covid-19 due to contact with passengers.

“To combat raging wave of Covid Pandemic and to ensure safety and good health of its personnel performing duties at Delhi Metro, a special drive camp for administering Covid vaccine booster has been organised at Shastrri Park campus of CISF unit DMRC,” the CISF said in a statement.

The camp was inaugurated on Sunday and a team of doc-



tors from East Delhi District along with civil defence volunteers are running two centers for administration of booster dose to CISF personnel. The CISF aims to cover all eligible personnel of DMRC under the protection of the booster vaccine by January 20. At the Shastrri Park camp here, an additional counter for vaccination of eligible wards (children between age 15-18) of personnel has also been opened which is also witnessing good turnout, it said. “The CISF, being a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) or

paramilitary force, with a pan India presence and the largest public interface, has already vaccinated over 9,000 of its personnel with the booster dose across the country to enhance protection against Covid-19 infection,” it further said. The booster dose vaccination drive is running across all the 353 CISF Units, including 64 airports. The booster dose vaccination drive seeks to ensure that 100 percent eligible personnel are inoculated against the deadly viral disease at the earliest, it added.

WHO cautions against concurrent outbreaks of Covid, other diseases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organization (WHO) has cautioned and urged for preparedness against concurrent outbreaks of Covid-19 and other respiratory diseases during the coming spring.

Maria van Kerkhove from the WHO’s Health Emergencies program, on Wednesday said at a press briefing that this could happen as population mixing increases, and as other respiratory pathogens such as influenza circulate in spring.

More than 15 million new Covid-19 cases were reported to WHO from around the world last week, by far the most cases reported in a single week. This has been driven by “the Omicron variant rapidly replacing Delta in almost all countries,” according to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Meanwhile, the number of weekly reported deaths has remained stable since October



2021, at an average of 48,000.

While the number of patients being hospitalised is increasing in most countries, it is not at the level seen in previous waves. That is possibly due to the reduced severity of Omicron and widespread immunity from vaccination or previous infection, he said.

“Let’s be clear: while Omicron causes less severe disease than Delta, it remains a dangerous virus, particularly for those who are unvaccinated,” said the WHO Chief.

The organisation has constantly warned that the sheer volume of cases is putting a heavy burden on healthcare systems.

“We will have to see what happens as this virus evolves,” said Van Kerkhove, warning of future outbreaks among those who are unvaccinated and not well protected.

Severe disease and death can be reduced by vaccination, as well as by improving clinical care, she added. However, this does depend on the nature of the interventions.

Forest cover in Himalayan States, including NE, declined: Forest report ‘21

New Delhi: Forest cover in the 140 hill districts of the country has shown a decrease of 902 sq km (0.32 per cent) with all eight states of the northeast region also showing a decline, as per the India State of Forest Report 2021 (ISFR 2021) released on Thursday

As per the current assessment, the total forest cover in the hill districts is 2,83,104 sq km, which is 40.17 per cent of the total geographical area of these districts. Hill districts are those which have 2/3rd area as hills.

Arunachal Pradesh, that has 16 hill districts, has shown a loss of 257 sq km forest cover compared to 2019 assessment, Assam’s three hill district (- 107 sq km), Manipur’s nine hill districts (- 249 sq kms), Mizoram’s eight hill districts (- 186 sq km), Meghalaya’s seven hill districts (- 73 km), Nagaland’s 11 districts (- 235 sq km), Sikkim’s four districts (- 1 sq km), and Tripura’s four districts (- 4 sq kms).

In the case of the other districts in the Himalayan states and UTs, not all have shown decline. West Bengal’s sole district has shown a slight decline (- 18 sq km), Jammu &

Kashmir’s 22 districts (29 sq km), Ladakh’s two districts (18 sq km), Uttarakhand’s 13 hill districts (2 sq km) and Himachal Pradesh’s 12 districts (9 sq km).

Total forest cover in the northeastern region is 1,69,521 sq km, which is 64.66 per cent of its area. The current assessment shows a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 1,020 sq km (0.60 per cent) in the region.

Incidentally, Assam, as a whole, has shown smaller negative change (- 15 sq km) compared to just three of its hill districts (- 107 sq km).

The ISFR2021 divides forests into distinct categories according to density of canopy: very dense forest (VDF), moderately dense forest (MDF) and open forest (Open). India is blessed with a multitude of forests that vary with altitude and the ISFR2021 has also brought out the forest cover data according to altitude with respect to the total geographical area of the country at that altitude.

At 0-500 m altitude, of the 23,29,321 sq km, as much as 39,456 sq km is VDF, 1,51,917 sq km is MDF and 1,90,571 sq

km is open, totalling to 3,81,944 sq km of forest cover.

Similarly, at 500-1,000 m altitude, of the total 541,747 sq km, as much as 25,956 sq km is VDF, 94,259 sq km is MDF and 77,747 sq km is open, making it 1,97,962 sq km of total forest cover.

Of the 1,17,835 sq km between 1,000-2,000 m altitude, the forest cover is 15,743 sq km is VDF, 34,599 sq km is MDF and 75,261 sq km open to make the total 75,261 sq km.

So is with the 2,000-3,000m altitude, of the 56,891 sq km, the forest cover is divided as 15,241 sq km is VDF, 18,500 sq km MDF and 7,162 sq km open to make 40,903 sq km total forest cover.

And for, 3,000-4,000 m altitude, of the total 59,298 sq km, the forest cover is 3,356 sq km is VDF, 7,458 sq km MDF and 6,304 sq km open to total 17,138 sq km forest cover.

Last, for altitude above 4,000 m, of the total 1,82,377 sq km, an area of 27 sq km is VDF, 157 is MDF and 417 is open, to total 601 sq kms of forest cover, the ISFR 2021 data showed.

IANS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A feeling of a conspiracy against their faith and for “hurting religious sentiments” was among the major triggers for complaints against advertisements, as per a study conducted by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

Taking note of what upsets Indians most about ads, the ASCI has conducted a study and come out with a report titled ‘What India takes offence to’ detailing six trends that offend the sensibilities of Indian consumers. For the report, ASCI mapped 1,759 complaints against 488 advertisements received in the last three years.

Last year, the ASCI found itself flooded with scathing complaints against an advertisement of Mohey Manyavar showing Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt portraying ‘Kanyadaan’ as an oppressive practice and suggesting ‘Kanyamaan’ as an alternative.

The complainant said that Mohey Manyavar is falsely projecting Hindu religion as regressive and hurting Hindu

religious sentiments by mocking Indian culture and traditions like Kanyadaan.

Specifying instances of ads found offensive for hurting religious sentiments, the ASCI said the ad’s attempt at portraying the wedding ritual of ‘kanyadaan’ as an oppressive practise was deemed to be mocking religion, while the use of the phrase ‘upar wala’ in an ad by ICICI Bank was seen as promotion of Islam by a complainant who felt there is no ‘upar wala’ in Sanatan dharma.

The ASCI report comes at a time when concerns are being raised over majoritarianism, and how it is making advertisers, including multi-billion corporations, buckle under pressure if there is a controversy over some campaign. Hurting religious sentiments continues to be a criminal offence in the liberal democracy and calls have been made to repeal it.

Campaigns deemed to be “crossing cultural boundaries” by mocking what is considered sacred and those showing the youth and women in an individualistic way were also among the major triggers that



led people to complain, the study found.

A complainant is driven by a feeling that religious identity is constantly under attack, and is under the threat of becoming diffused or diluted, the report said, pointing out that they believe such ads are part of a conspiracy against their religion.

The underlying issue, which triggers complaints of the cultural kind, was specified as fear of new, emerging social structures and the complainant is generally self-righteous and

antagonistic in her tonality, as per the report.

“Complainants here consider themselves the gatekeepers of tradition. As long as the change depicted celebrates or makes tradition grander, they are fine by it, but the moment there is a discontinuity in how things are supposed to be, they are angered,” the report said.

Sharing of ice cream by a woman with a stranger, and not with the companion she is with, was found to be offensive because they feel this is not how a woman should behave in a

traditional relationship, the report said, citing an instance under this category.

In another advertisement showing two women talking about Cars24’s promise that you can test drive the car and return it with full refund in seven days if it doesn’t work for you has upset a section of men. In the ad, the women say there should be such a policy for husbands, too. “Will same return policy be taken so laughingly as this one if we reverse the #gender? (sic)” asks a complainant.

Twitter announces initiatives for voters ahead of upcoming elections

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Assembly elections 2022, micro-blogging site Twitter on Thursday announced a series of initiatives to empower citizens with the right knowledge before they cast their vote. Twitter said these initiatives, powered by an open internet, are directed towards not just ensuring a high voter turnout, but also aiding in ensuring voters are involved, engaged and informed throughout the election cycle, and that everyone with the right to vote is a ‘jagruk voter.’

“Twitter is what’s happening, and events of political and civic significance always find a place among the conversations on the service,” Payal Kamat, Public



Policy and Government, Twitter India, said in a statement.

“In line with that, we have been working in partnership with official authorities, including the Election Commission of India to empower every #JagrukVoter on Twitter, and

we will continue to harness the power of the Open Internet to strengthen civic dialogue and encourage quality participation this election season,” Kamat added.

In the first line up of initiatives, Twitter said it will be

launching a customized emoji, which will further be supported with a notification and reminder mechanism which will allow people to voluntarily sign-up for reminders on the day voting starts.

A voter education quiz will be aimed at engaging people in Q&As with necessary facts about the polls. Twitter will also be expanding its dedicated search prompt, powered by the Election Commission of India (@ECISVEEP) to provide people with real time updates and developments on the elections from ‘credible’ and ‘authoritative’ sources.

In addition to English, the Search Prompt will be available in Hindi, Punjabi, and Konkani, and will be supported by several hashtags.

AITUC condemns deal between Govt and Vodafone Idea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India’s trade union AITUC on Thursday urged the Central Government to withdraw from taking shares in private telecom companies having large tax dues.

Citing the Vodafone Idea (Vi) move to issue the Government 35.8% shares to swap its around two lakh crore rupees dues, the AITUC national secretariat termed it as a criminal and anti-people step when the Government’s telecom companies like BSNL and MTNL are facing lack of resources and millions of people are starving in the country.

“Why this largesse to these TSPs (telecom service

providers), when the Government’s own BSNL and MTNL are starved to death? Why buy shares of a bankrupt company when the Government swears by the philosophy “the government has no business to be in business”? Why give up what is due to the Government by way of taxes and then float the insidious scheme like the National Monetization Pipeline (NMP) allegedly to raise funds for new infrastructure? What if the corporates lapping up Government assets coming out of the NMP turn around saying we cannot pay the agreed lease rent? Will the government then shamelessly announce the mother of all reforms?

“AITUC condemns this



deal as a criminal act on the part of the Government. The Government has no right to go about waiving off taxes like this when multitude of our people are reeling under pathetic living conditions. We demand that the Government simply withdraw this anti-people step,” said AITUC in a statement.

Soon after Vodafone’s deci-

sion to allot 35.5 percent shares to Government in lieu of dues in spectrum usage fee and sharing of revenue per call, Tata Teleservices also offered 9.5 percent shares to Government to liquidate their dues of more than Rs.12,500 crore. Only Airtel agreed on Government offer for four year moratorium on dues payment with interest.

Degree denial to Prez draws flak in Kerala

Guv's offer to honour Prez with D.Litt was denounced by KU syndicate members

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The refusal by the Kerala University syndicate to honor President Ram Nath Kovind with an honorary D Litt during the latter's visit to the State last month has shocked educationists, cultural icons and literary figures.

It is said that when the Maharaja of Travancore decided to set up an independent Travancore University in 1937, C P Ramaswami Aiyar, the then Diwan of the princely State wrote to Albert Einstein asking him to join the new University as a professor on a monthly pay of ₹6,000/-. But the Nobel laureate preferred to join Princeton for reasons known to him only. That was the era of visionaries like Aiyar who always dreamt and thought big.

If the recent letter by V P Mahadevan Pillai, the present Vice Chancellor of Kerala

University, to Chancellor Arif Mohammed Khan (the Governor) reaches Aiyar, the latter would have turned in his grave, said R Sanjayan, director, Bharathiya Vichara Kendra, Kerala's leading think tank on socio-political-cultural issues.

Governor Arif Mohammed Khan while interacting with the media the other day said that the Vice Chancellor's handwritten note shocked him because of the kind of language and the spelling mistakes.

Sources close to the Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, said that he was aghast to learn that the University has not held its annual convocations for decades. As a sign of atonement, the Governor decided to hold the convocation in a grand style and got in touch with President of India and requested him to be the chief guest of the function. The President obliged the Governor



who summoned the vice chancellor to Raj Bhavan and asked him to make arrangements for the convocation and get the syndicate pass a mandatory resolution to honor the President with the D Litt. But the syndicate members, all of them nominees of the CPI(M)-led Government decided not to honor the President.

The vice-chancellor, a CPI(M) appointee, too toed the party line and the plans of the Governor came a cropper. "The issue is not honoring the President of India. But the University of Kerala lost a chance to honor itself by the

refusal," said Sanjayan.

The universities in the State, Kerala, MG, CUSAT, Kannur, Sree Sankara Sanskrit University, Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences (KUFOS), Calicut and Kannur have been politicized and communalized beyond imagination, according to Prof C I Issac, member, Indian Council of Historical Research. "It is an unconscionable mistake taken by hardcore politicians blinded by political power. I can say that they were challenging the Constitution of India by refusing to honor the First Citizen of the Country," said Prof Issac.

Prof Issac, a widely respected educationist did not mince words when he came down heavily on politicians of all hue and cry. "The appointments of vice chancellors in the universities in Kerala are based on caste, communal and political lines. The Kerala University

vice-chancellor is appointed from Hindus while Mahatma Gandhi University post is meant for Christians. Calicut and Kannur Universities are for Muslims representing SDPI and PFI. This is a sad state of affairs," said Issac.

Both Sanjayan and Issac pointed out that it was the State Committee of the CPI(M) that decides who becomes the heads of university and cultural organisations. "I was reading a series of articles in local media about the election process of KUFOS that said the person approved by the State Committee would be appointed as the Vice Chancellor. Have you heard of such a thing anywhere in the country?" asked Sanjayan.

Pillai, the vice chancellor, opted the easier way out by issuing a statement in which he said that he preferred to be 'careful with the spelling and grammar of his life'.

1st-phase nomination for UP Assembly polls today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With political parties grappling in the selection of candidates for the 403 Assembly seats in the State, the Election Commission of India (ECI) will set the ball rolling for the 7- phase crucial Assembly polls as a nomination for the first phase begins tomorrow.

Termed as a semi-final before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, UP is witnessing a wide-scale defection in all the major political parties, with three Cabinet Ministers of the Yogi Adityanath Government resigning and like to join the Samajwadi Party. Several MLAs from BJP, SP, and Congress too were joining other political parties.

On the other hand, ECI will issue notification for the first phase of polls in 58 Assembly segments covering 11 districts in western UP on Friday at 1100 hours to kick start the poll process.

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ajay Kumar Shukla here on Thursday said that all preparation for the issuance of notification for the first phase has been completed. "Nominations in these 58 assembly seats will commence with strictly following Covid norms and guidelines," he said.

Already over 120 companies of Central forces have reached UP to maintain law and order during the polls.

ECI has announced a 7-

BSP to field Noman Masood from Gangoh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati on Thursday announced two candidates, including former Congressman Imran Masood's brother, for western Uttar Pradesh in the upcoming polls.

In a tweet, the BSP chief announced Salman Sayeed as the party's candidate from Charthawal and Noman Masood from Gangoh Assembly constituencies. "Salman Sayeed, son of former Uttar Pradesh home minister Saiduzzaman, met the BSP president late on Wednesday evening and joined the BSP after quitting the Congress.

Sayeed has been fielded by the BSP as its candidate from Charthawal," Mayawati tweeted in Hindi.

In a related tweet, she wrote, "Noman Masood, nephew of former union minister Rashid Masood and brother of Imran Masood also joined the BSP yesterday (Wednesday) leaving the Lok Dal. The BSP chief has made him the candidate of her party from the Gangoh Assembly seat." Imran Masood had recently quit the Congress and joined the Samajwadi Party.

Meanwhile the BSP has already decided at least 300 of its total 403 candidates for Uttar Pradesh.

NIA weakening Malegaon blast case, safeguarding all accused, says Cong

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With as many as 16 'important witnesses' having already turned 'hostile' in the 2008 Malegaon blasts cases, the Maharashtra Congress on Thursday accused the NIA of 'weakening' the case and 'not prosecuting all the accused with honesty and sincerity'.

In a letter shot off to the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) chief Vineet Agrawal, State Congress Working president Mohd. Arif Naseem Khan recalled that the ATS, under its martyred chief Hemant Karkare, had 'cracked' the Malegaon blasts case, arrested prime accused Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur and Lt Col Prasad Shrikant Purohit and filed a charge-sheet in the trial court.

"Subsequently, the NIA took over the case and filed a supplementary charge-sheet and exonerated Sadhvi Pragma at the behest of the Central government and dropped MCOCA charges against the case and has in the process weakened the case," Naseem Khan said.

In a serious accusation made against the central investigating agency, Khan said: "The NIA is not prosecuting all the accused with honesty and sincerity. (Out of 223 witnesses, 16 important accused have till today accused. Hundred more witnesses are left to be accused. These witnesses are crucial. They need to be protected," the Congress leader said.

"The NIA has not challenged any order passed in favour of the accused in higher court which shows its intentions clearly. Strict supervision by the ATS is a must for a

fair trial and effective prosecution, since the ATS had recorded the statements of maximum and conducted most part of the investigations," Khan wrote in his letter to the State ATS chief.

"So that the guilty can be punished and justice can be delivered to the public at large and through your action, a tribute will be paid to the martyred ATS chief Hemant Karkare," Khan wrote.

It may be recalled that an improvised explosive kept under the seat of a LML Freedom motor-bicycle had exploded between Bhikku Chowk and Anjuman Chowk, near Noorani Masjid, at Malegaon in north Maharashtra, on the night of September 29, 2008, leaving six persons dead and injuring 101 others.

Based on a strong case against the accused by the ATS which investigated the case initially before the NIA took over the case a Mumbai-based special court had on October 30, 2018 framed charges against Lt Col Prasad Shrikant Purohit, Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur and five other accused under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and various other sections of the IPC for their alleged involvement in the 2008 blasts.

In his letter to the State ATS chief, Khan stated: "It seems witnesses are under the influence of the accused and are deliberately taking the names of the BJP-RSS people to get mileage in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections and defame the Maharashtra government and the ATS, as Prosecution Witness no 220 went beyond what was recorded in his earlier statements by mentioning the name of (UP

chief minister) Yogi (Adityanath) etc and the irony is that Special Public Prosecutor did not take objection on it".

Khan went on to say that after the prosecution witness no 220, a leading national television channel went to town confirming that the witness had taken the name of UP chief Yogi Adityanath's name.

Khan said that "the ATS as an investigation agency is being maligned as to be anti-Hindu" and that under the circumstances to maintain the trust of public in ATS and on the Maharashtra government, it was necessary that ATS deployed its officers who were part of the investigations in the case to attend the court which is hearing the case on a day-to-day basis.

Seven key accused, including Lt Col Purohit and Sadhvi Pragma, are being tried under sections 16 (committing a terror act) and 18 (criminal conspiracy) of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), and sections 120(b) (punishment of criminal conspiracy), 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder) and 326 (intentionally causing harm to others) of the IPC. They were framed charges under the Explosives Substances Act.

On December 27, 2017, a Special NIA court had dropped charges under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur, Lt Col Prasad Purohit and five other key accused in the much-discussed case. However, the NIA court observed that it could not exonerate Sadhvi Pragma from the case as her motorbike has used in the blast.



A pilgrim taking a holy dip at Gangasagar on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti', in South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal, on Thursday

PTI

TMC ready to tie up in Goa to defeat BJP: Didi to Cong

Panaji: Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra on Thursday hit out at the Congress, saying it should realise that its leaders are not "emperors of India" and added that had the grand old party discharged its duty well in Goa, there was no need for the TMC to enter the coastal State's poll fray to defeat the ruling BJP.

She said the TMC is ready for an alliance in Goa as defeating the BJP is the "need of the hour", but added that the Congress should get off its "high horse" and wake up to its depleted strength.

Moitra was reacting to senior Congress leader P Chidambaram's assertion made earlier in the day that the Congress and the BJP are the two main contestants in Goa and if the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the TMC fielded candidates and secured some votes in the upcoming assembly polls, in effect they will be splitting the non-BJP vote.

In an interview to PTI, Chidambaram also said that the TMC and the AAP do not have cadre base in constituencies in Goa and they attempt to build their parties through defections.

Referring to the Congress

leader's statements, Moitra said the fight in Goa is between the BJP and anti-BJP forces.

"The anti-BJP forces in Goa today are Congress, AAP and TMC. Now, this is a fight between them. Neither of them can stake a claim that we are the only ones in the fray," she said.

Moitra, who is TMC's desk-in-charge for Goa, said that all the three parties are in the fray in Goa, and this is the reality that the Congress should wake up to.

"I think that it is important for people to realise that if Congress had done its job, there was no need for us (TMC) to be here. We are here because Congress could not do their job. Congress is a platform which is not adequate enough to defeat the BJP," she added.

The TMC is ready for an alliance, Moitra said, adding, "We are saying come to the table and talk to us to see how we can defeat the BJP. This is the need of the hour."

She said the people of Goan will respect the fact that the TMC is not sitting on a high horse and that the party has no ego. "TMC is saying if anybody come together we can defeat the BJP," she said.

PTI

Shiv Sena: Cong can't win Goa polls on its own


New Delhi: The Shiv Sena is upset at being given a cold shoulder by the Congress over its proposal to repeat the Maharashtra coalition experiment in the Goa Assembly elections.

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said the political situation in Goa is such that the Congress cannot go beyond single digit if it contests the assembly polls in the coastal state on its own.

"The Congress has only three MLAs in Goa. The party's MLAs have deserted it enmasse. Key political parties, we (Shiv Sena and NCP) had offered to support the Congress in its difficult times. But I don't know what the Congress is thinking. It cannot cross the single digit mark if it contests alone," Raut told reporters here.

Raut, who had held a round of discussions with AICC in-charge of Goa Dinesh Gundurao, CLP leader Digambar Kamat and Goa Congress chief Girish Chodankar, said he had placed a proposal that the Congress contest on 30 of the 40 assembly seats and leave the rest for its allies. He said the 10 assembly seats, where Congress has not won elections in the past 50 years, could be allocated to Shiv Sena, NCP and Goa Forward Party.

PTI



DELHI POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, (GOVT. OF NCT OF DELHI)
5th FLOOR, ISBT BUILDING, KASHMERE GATE, DELHI 110006

Visit us at <https://www.dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in>

PUBLIC NOTICE

Citizens of Delhi are advised to initiate the following steps in different categories of air quality. The air quality and category in which it falls i.e. Good, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor, Severe and Severe + is available at www.cpcb.nic.in.

(1) MODERATE TO POOR CATEGORY

Ambient PM2.5 values between 61-120 ug/m3 or ambient PM10 values between 101- 350 ug/m3

- a) Keep engines of your cars/bikes/scooters properly tuned.
- b) Maintain proper air pressure in tires of cars/bikes/scooters.
- c) Keep your PUC certificate up to date.
- d) When you are out for a drive, do not idle your vehicle , turn off the engine.
- e) Do not dispose of waste / garbage in the open spaces.
- f) Report air pollution activities through SAMEER App/Green Delhi App.

(2) VERY POOR CATEGORY

Ambient PM2.5 values between 121-250 ug/m3 or ambient Pm10 values between 351-430ug/m3

- a) People to minimize the use of personal vehicles and use public transport.
- b) Be sure to replace air filters at recommended intervals in your automobiles regularly.
- c) Avoid dust-generating construction activities during the months of October to January, if possible.

(3) SEVERE CATEGORY

Ambient PM2.5 values > 250 ug/m3 or ambient PM10 values >430 ug/m3

- a. Choose a cleaner commute - share a ride to work or use public transportation or walk or cycle.
- b. People whose positions allow them to work from home should work from home.
- c. Do not use coal and wood for heating purposes.
- d. Individual house owners may provide electric heaters (during winters) to security staff to avoid open burning.
- e. Combine errands and reduce trips. Walk to errand when possible.
- f. Do not burn garbage, plastics and other discarded items.

(4) SEVERE + CATEGORY

When ambient PM2.5 values > 300 ug/m3 or ambient PM10 values >500 ug/m3

- a) Children, the elderly and those with respiratory, cardiovascular, cerebrovascular or other chronic diseases stay indoors as much as possible, and to avoid outdoor activities.

Sd/-
Member Secretary (DPCC)

FIRST COLUMN

UP POLLS: INTRA-BJP POLITICKING TO WATCH FOR

Swami Prasad Maurya's exit may cause some in the party to question Yogi's credentials



Not with standing the assumption that victory in UP assembly polls is going to be a cakewalk for BJP and Yogi Adityanath, politicking at several levels may play a more complicated role than expected. Prospects of Congress returning to power are remote. Chances of other rival parties performing better in 2022 than they did in 2017 elections cannot be ruled out. A bigger damage may be caused by the future aims of Yogi. Yes, the 49-year politician is not likely to be satisfied with being just UP chief minister for too long. Prior to taking charge of UP, he was elected member of Lok Sabha for five consecutive terms from Gorakhpur. At 26, he was the youngest member of 12th Lok Sabha. He apparently had eyes set on the national stage from the day he joined politics. Besides, attempts made to enhance his political base cannot be ignored. These include his campaigning in assembly elections of other states, including Gujarat,



Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal. He was even labelled as party's "star-campaigner". Of course, there is a difference in his being considered a "favoured" politician by some but not by all within BJP. The same may be said about the appeal of his right-winged religious card within UP and other parts of India. Yogi is not as close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as Amit Shah is assumed to be. Shah is not at all keen on such factor disturbing his ties with Modi. They have shared a good political understanding from their common home state, Gujarat. Besides, he has also been an active campaigner during several states' assembly polls. Prior to taking charge as Union Home Minister, Shah served as BJP president from 2014 - 19. From 2014, he has been chairperson of National Democratic Alliance. Shah's quick rise on national front within less a decade places him ahead of Yogi in a possible race for prime ministerial berth. Yogi can claim credit for being a parliamentarian for around twice the time than Shah. Yogi may not have been appointed as UP chief minister in 2017 if Modi was not heading the national government. BJP's return in power in 2017 in UP after around 15 years rested primarily on Modi's political cards and weak strategies of BJP's rival parties. Though BJP won 312 seats, it secured only 39.67 per cent votes. Its key rivals SP and BSP won 47 and 19 seats, respectively. While 21.82 per cent votes favoured SP, BSP got 22.23 per cent. In a number of seats, votes polled by BSP and SP exceeded votes BJP secured by over 20,000. This reality apparently prompted SP and BSP to align for the 2019 parliamentary elections.

While BJP retained its lead in 2019 and won 62 seats, nine less than it had secured in 2014, BSP won 10 seats, SP five and Congress just one. BJP's performance in the coming polls cannot be de-linked from strategies exercised by its rivals. Covid-panic and economic grievances have pushed Yogi's religious shows to the background in general. What is to be watched for is possible intra-party politicking within BJP which may create political problems for Yogi in UP and hamper his future plans. Resignation of UP Minister Swami Prasad Maurya from BJP to join SP is perhaps just a warning signal Yogi. It certainly provides ample reason for some party members to question his credentials and perhaps even provoke a few anti-Yogi sentiments. Irrespective of strategies exercised by rival parties, the political storm within the BJP camp is likely to be quite the testing ground for Yogi in UP polls.

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

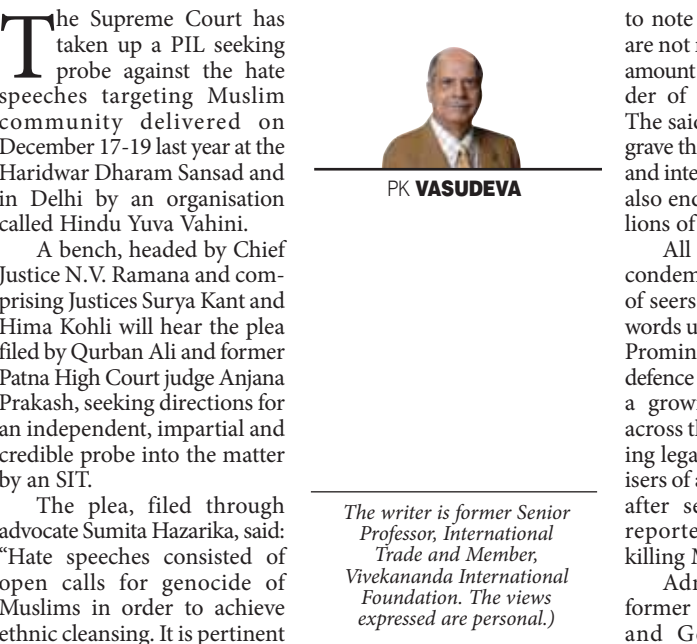
Dharam Sansad: Dangerous echo

The speeches pose a grave threat to the unity and integrity of our country and also endanger the lives of Muslim citizens

The Supreme Court has taken up a PIL seeking probe against the hate speeches targeting Muslim community delivered on December 17-19 last year at the Haridwar Dharam Sansad and in Delhi by an organisation called Hindu Yuva Vahini.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli will hear the plea filed by Qurban Ali and former Patna High Court judge Anjana Prakash, seeking directions for an independent, impartial and credible probe into the matter by an SIT.

The plea, filed through advocate Sumita Hazarika, said: "Hate speeches consisted of open calls for genocide of Muslims in order to achieve ethnic cleansing. It is pertinent



PK VASUDEVA

The writer is former Senior Professor, International Trade and Member, Vivekananda International Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)

Is KCR trying his hand at national politics?

He led a statehood movement for more than 13 years and headed the Govt in the new State for seven. He is entitled to have national ambitions

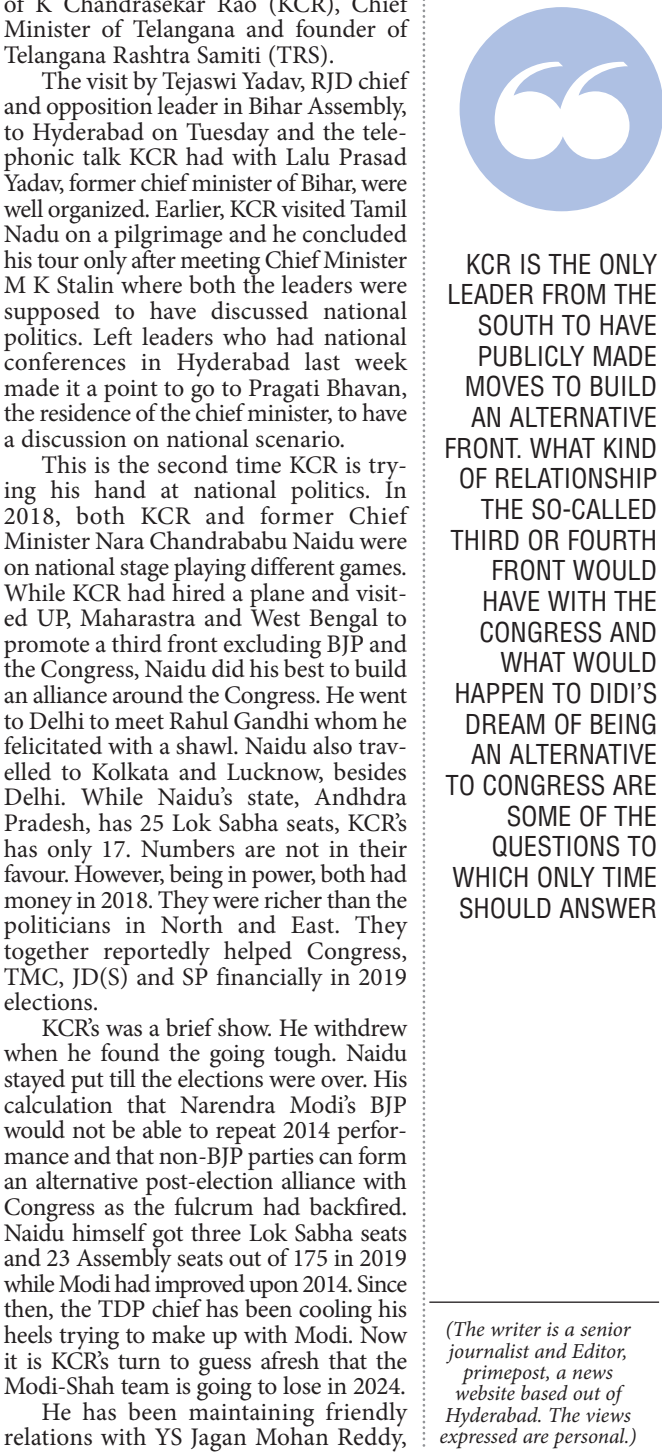
After Mamata Banerjee proved that Modi-Shah combination is beatable, leaders from different parts of the country have been trying their luck to play a role in national politics. Chief Minister of West Bengal and chief of Trinamool Congress visited Delhi and Mumbai, had talks with Sharad Pawar, the eternal campaigner and never-say-die politician. She admitted into TMC some Congress leaders in Goa which is going to polls along with UP, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Manipur. She is said to be planning to campaign for Samajwadi Party in UP. It is now the turn of K Chandrasekar Rao (KCR), Chief Minister of Telangana and founder of Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS).

The visit by Tejaswi Yadav, RJD chief and opposition leader in Bihar Assembly, to Hyderabad on Tuesday and the telephonic talk KCR had with Lalu Prasad Yadav, former chief minister of Bihar, were well organized. Earlier, KCR visited Tamil Nadu on a pilgrimage and he concluded his tour only after meeting Chief Minister M K Stalin where both the leaders were supposed to have discussed national politics. Left leaders who had national conferences in Hyderabad last week made it a point to go to Pragati Bhavan, the residence of the chief minister, to have a discussion on national scenario.

This is the second time KCR is trying his hand at national politics. In 2018, both KCR and former Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu were on national stage playing different games. While KCR had hired a plane and visited UP, Maharashtra and West Bengal to promote a third front excluding BJP and the Congress, Naidu did his best to build an alliance around the Congress. He went to Delhi to meet Rahul Gandhi whom he felicitated with a shawl. Naidu also travelled to Kolkata and Lucknow, besides Delhi. While Naidu's state, Andhra Pradesh, has 25 Lok Sabha seats, KCR's has only 17. Numbers are not in their favour. However, being in power, both had money in 2018. They were richer than the politicians in North and East. They together reportedly helped Congress, TMC, JD(S) and SP financially in 2019 elections.

KCR's was a brief show. He withdrew when he found the going tough. Naidu stayed put till the elections were over. His calculation that Narendra Modi's BJP would not be able to repeat 2014 performance and that non-BJP parties can form an alternative post-election alliance with Congress as the fulcrum had backfired. Naidu himself got three Lok Sabha seats and 23 Assembly seats out of 175 in 2019 while Modi had improved upon 2014. Since then, the TDP chief has been cooling his heels trying to make up with Modi. Now it is KCR's turn to guess afresh that the Modi-Shah team is going to lose in 2024.

He has been maintaining friendly relations with YS Jagan Mohan Reddy,



(The writer is a senior journalist and Editor, primepost, a news website based out of Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal.)



Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. KCR can count on Jagan's support after elections. However, can a politician with just 17 Lok Sabha seats in his state hope to become a prime minister or a king-maker? Is it overconfidence or outright gamble? KCR, no doubt, is a crafty politician. He played his cards shrewdly so far. He promised Sonia Gandhi that he would make his party, TRS, a partner in alliance with Congress after the latter conceded his demand for a separate state of Telangana. The only other demand he put forward was that he should be made chief minister after 2014 elections. Congress had half-a-dozen hopefuls then. While Congress was the party that delivered Telangana, TRS was the one that achieved statehood. KCR's demand was not met and he fought the elections alone and was lucky enough to win. The rest is history.

A leader who led a statehood movement successfully for more than thirteen years and headed the government in the new State for more than seven years, is entitled to have national ambitions. More so with no leader of stature to match Modi's available either in the Congress or outside. His son, K Taraka Rama Rao (KTR), is ready to take over the reins to run the state administration. KCR is the only leader from the south to have publicly made moves to build an alternative front. What kind of relationship the so-called third or fourth front would have with the

Congress and what would happen to Didi's dream of being an alternative to Congress are some of the questions to which only time should answer.

Unlike Lalu Prasad and Akhilesh, KCR has not been strident in his anti-BJP discourse. He was playing safe until recently. His party supported almost all the Bills introduced by the NDA government till the other day. He started criticizing farm laws just before they were withdrawn. KCR has been vacillating in his stand towards the BJP.

KCR knows his limitations. He is aware that he does not command numbers. He also can see that the days when lightweight politicians like VP Singh, Chandrasekhar, Deve Gowda and IK Gujral could become prime ministers are over. The opposition is waiting for a leader who can match Modi in stature and articulation. KCR can speak reasonably good English and Hindi/Hyderabadi and get on in North India like PV Narasimha Rao, a polyglot, did. He can mobilize funds to an extent. But he lacks the stature of Sharad Pawar or the prowess of Mamata Banerjee as a fighter. Sharad Pawar is lying low because of his own limitations chief of which is his age. Mamata is not acceptable to leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and she may not be able to mobilize funds. That is, perhaps, the reason why Lalu Prasad asked KCR to take up a leadership role.

By nature, KCR is not a democrat in the sense that he does not

believe in consultations before or after taking decisions. It was the case even during the statehood movement. He does not believe in collective leadership, the quality which is essential for a leader at national level to build an alternative alliance from parties headed by egotistic and ambitious leaders. It required a lot of patience which KCR does not have.

An important factor that must have prompted KCR to start his second innings in national politics is the fact that his adversaries in Telangana are not of his stature. Bandi Sanjay, BJP chief, was a corporator before getting elected to Lok Sabha from Karimnagar in 2019. The TPCC president Revanth Reddy is also relatively junior who is facing problems from seniors in Congress. Instead of a street fight with noisy juniors, KCR must have thought it is better to take on Modi, win or lose, and have the satisfaction of trying his best to make a mark in national politics. In the meanwhile, he can satisfy his family members who are keen on KTR becoming chief minister. KTR is already an important minister and working president of TRS. His cousin, Harish Rao, Minister of Finance and Health, who is a senior and capable politician, is reportedly prepared to accept the younger politician's leadership. Can KCR take the risk of giving up the position of a chief minister for some uncertain position at national level at a future date? Will the date ever arrive?

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IT IS THE PEOPLE WHO WOULD CHOOSE THE NEXT CHIEF MINISTER OF THE STATE AND NOT THE HIGH COMMAND.
—PUNJAB CONGRESS CHIEF
NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU



PUNJAB NEEDS SERIOUS PEOPLE WHOSE POLITICS IS NOT SOCIAL ENGINEERING, ENTERTAINMENT, FREEBIES... WHO HAVE SOLUTIONS TO PUNJAB'S CHALLENGES.
—CONGRESS MP
MANISH TEWARI



Malik, former Chief of Army Staff, took to Twitter to slam and condemn the event. They criticised it for creating fissures in the country and weakening "national security" at a time when the South Asian country is involved in tense situations on both its eastern frontier with China as well as its western border with Pakistan.

Such hate speeches are dangerous for the country when India and China have been involved in a military standoff at the eastern Ladakh border for

nearly one-and-a-half years. The standoff remains unresolved in spite of 13 rounds of military commander-level talks and several rounds of various level discussions foreign ministers. The 14th round of military commander-level talk is being held any time soon to resolve the withdrawal of troops to its original positions of the Line of actual control (LAC).

The concerns from prominent individuals have surfaced as several videos of radical Hindu priest Yati Narsingh-anand Giri, who was one of the lead speakers and organisers of the event, appeared online in the wake of the Haridwar gathering. "Swords are not enough to kill the Muslims... They have stockpiled very advanced weapons... Our (Hindu) religion is not going to be saved

just by picking up arms", Giri said during a speech at the event.

Giri reiterated that only by having "the most advanced weapons in every Hindu household" and "by outnumbering Muslims in birth could the Hindu community be saved".

In an interview given to Sudarshan TV, Giri, the head priest of the Dasna Devi temple in Uttar Pradesh, did not even spare Muslim politicians in Bharatiya Janata Party. He remarked that leaders like Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and former minister Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain "are more dangerous than even jihadis". India is moving towards becoming an Islamic state. This must be reversed and the nation should move towards becoming a Vedic-Sanathan (Hindu)

nation", Giri said in the interview. A five-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Uttarakhand police will now probe the alleged hate speeches made by Hindu seers against Muslims at the 'Dharma Sansad' held in Haridwar last month.

The move comes a day after the Muslim Seva Sangathan - an organisation working towards the betterment of the minority community in Dehradun - protested outside the Uttarakhand police headquarters, demanding the arrest of Hindu seers who had allegedly made controversial statements during the three-day event. Five seers have been booked so far in connection with the 'Dharma Sansad'. "Investigation is going on and the probe team is examining

whether charges made in the FIRs are arrestable or not. But these people are certainly accused and they will be charge-sheeted in court," Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Kumar said. However, no arrests have been made so far.

Meanwhile, Sadhvi Annapurna, one of the accused in the case, said "nothing wrong" was spoken at the Haridwar 'Dharma Sansad'. Even the charges made against us are not as per law, added she, a former IIM professor.

It is surprising that the central government has not uttered a single word against the hate speeches, which may be due to huge vote bank of seers. Now that the case is taken up in the apex court the outcome will be awaited.

Biden redoubling focus on testing amid shortages, confusion

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is redoubling its efforts to expand supply and accessibility of COVID-19 testing as it faces mounting criticism over long lines and supply shortages for testing nationwide and confusion about when to get tested amid the omicron surge.

The White House announced Wednesday that a dedicated stream of 5 million rapid tests and 5 million lab-based PCR tests will be made available to schools starting this month to ease supply shortages and promote the safe reopening of schools.

It said Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, will join the COVID-19 team to oversee the enhanced testing push. The moves come just days before private insurers will be required to reimburse Americans for tests and the launch of a new federal website for Americans to order free tests to be shipped to their doors. The test supply push, though, will likely be too late for many Americans trying to safely navigate the omicron-fuelled case surge, which is already showing signs of crest-

ing. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on Wednesday offered guidance for when Americans should use tests - which were in short supply as Americans travelled and saw family during the busy holiday season.

"Americans should take a test when they have symptoms that appear to be COVID-19," she said, including fever, cough, sore throat, respiratory symptoms and muscle aches.

She also said they should test after known exposure to the virus, generally five days after being exposed, or earlier as part of test-to-stay protocols in schools and workplaces.

"Certainly if you're going to gather with family, if you're going to a gathering where people are immunocompromised or where they're elderly or where you have people who might be unvaccinated or poorly protected from a vaccine that might be an opportunity you want to test," she added.

The school testing initiative announced Wednesday comes after nation's third-largest public school system, in Chicago, closed for days after an impasse between teachers and officials over reopening policies. The closure was a black eye for

President Joe Biden, who made reopening schools - and keeping them open - a priority. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said students need to be in their classrooms and the announcement shows the administration's commitment to helping schools stay open.

"We're doing everything we can to make sure that our children have an opportunity to stay in school," Cardona said Wednesday on "CBS Mornings." "That's where they need to be, and we know we can do it safely." States are applying to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for tests, Cardona said, adding that he expected distribution to begin as early as next week.

"We recognise that schools are the hubs of the community" and they should be open for instruction, the secretary added, saying it is "vital for our students."

"We have been very clear, publicly and privately, that we want to see schools open," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday. She cited massive amount of funding for schools as evidence of the administration ensuring "we were prepared and had resources needed to address whatever may come up in pandemic."

US Prez highlighting federal 'surge' to help weather Omicron

Washington: President Joe Biden is highlighting the federal government's efforts to "surge" military medical personnel to help overwhelmed medical facilities weather the spike in coronavirus cases and staff shortages due to the highly transmissible omicron variant.

Starting next week, 1,000 military medical personnel will begin arriving to help mitigate staffing crunches at hospitals across the country. Many facilities are struggling because their workers are in at-home quarantines due to the virus at the same time as a nationwide spike in COVID-19 cases.

The new deployments will be on top of other federal medical personnel who have already been sent to states to help with acute shortages. Biden planned to deliver remarks Thursday morning on the "surge response" to COVID-19, the White House said. The administration's focus is shifting to easing disruptions from the nationwide spike in cases that is also contributing to grocery shortages and flight cancellations.

On Tuesday, Janet Woodcock, the acting head of the Food and Drug Administration, told Congress that the highly transmissible strain will infect "most people" and that the focus should turn to ensuring critical services can continue uninterrupted.

"I think it's hard to process what's actually happening right now, which is: Most people are going to get COVID, all right?" she said. "What we need to do is make sure the hospitals can still function-transportation, other essential services are not disrupted while this happens."

The White House said Biden would be joined by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who recently recovered from his own case of COVID-19, and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. *AP*

AstraZeneca vax as third dose effective against Omicron: Study

London: The AstraZeneca Vaxzevria vaccine showed an increased antibody response to the Omicron variant of COVID-19 after a third booster dose, preliminary data released by the Anglo-Swedish biopharma major said on Thursday. In an ongoing safety and immunogenicity trial of the vaccine, a formulation developed by Oxford University and administered in India as Covishield, it was found that given as a third dose increased the body's immune response to Beta, Delta, Alpha and Gamma SARS-CoV-2 variants.

A separate analysis of samples from the trial showed increased antibody response to the Omicron variant. The results were observed among individuals previously vaccinated with either Vaxzevria or an mRNA vaccine. The company said it is submitting this additional data to health authorities around the world given the urgent need for third dose boosters. *PTI*

US discourages India from acquiring Russian S-400 missile defence systems: President Biden's nominee

Washington: The US has made clear to India that it is "discouraging" it from proceeding with its acquisition of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia but Washington will have to weigh "important geostrategic considerations" while taking a decision on growing calls for a presidential CAATSA waiver to New Delhi, President Joe Biden's nominee for Coordinator for Sanctions Policy has told lawmakers.

In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions.

The Biden administration has not yet clarified whether it will impose sanctions on India under the provisions of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for procuring the S-400 missile systems. CAATSA is a tough US law that was brought in 2017 and authorises the US administration to impose sanctions on countries that purchase major defence hardware from Russia.

James O'Brien, President Biden's nominee for the US State Department's coordinator for sanctions policy was asked at his confirmation hearing on Wednesday if the US experience with Turkey provided any warning or lessons on how to proceed with India.

The US has already imposed sanctions on Turkey under the CAATSA for the purchase of a batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia.

Following the US sanctions on Turkey over the procurement of S-400 missile systems, there were apprehensions that Washington may impose similar punitive measures on India. Russia has been one of India's key major suppliers of arms and ammunition. *PTI*

Pakistan Taliban confirms ex-spokesman's killing in Afghanistan

Peshawar: The Pakistani Taliban on Thursday confirmed the weekend killing of a former spokesman in neighbouring Afghanistan and vowed to avenge the murder. The outlawed Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, which is known as TTP, announced on Twitter death of man known as Mohammad Khurasani, which is an alias. His real name was Khalid Balti. The confirmation comes days after Pakistani security officials said the former spokesman of TTP was shot dead in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. The TTP did not confirm the claim until Thursday. The current TTP spokesman, who also goes by name Mohammad Khurasani,

said on Twitter that Balti was killed on Jan. 9 while travelling. He said Balti's death was a great loss and his death would soon be avenged. Balti was commander of TTP and he served as group's spokesman from 2011 to 2015. That's when he was arrested in Afghanistan and was freed after Taliban seized power. Since then, the TTP has been emboldened. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan is an umbrella group and is a separate organization from Afghanistan's Taliban. In November, Pakistan announced a month-long cease-fire with TTP. The group has been behind numerous attacks on security forces and civilians over last 14 years.

WFP director for Afghanistan warns of 'tsunami of hunger'

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Afghanistan is facing a "tsunami of hunger" because of a shortage of funds that's needed to keep the supply of food intact as country teeters on the edge of economic ruin with more than half of the population struggling to eat this winter, a senior official with the United Nations World Food Programme said on Thursday.

In an interview with The Associated Press, WFP leader in Afghanistan Mary-Ellen McGroarty urged the international community to put humanitarian necessity above political discussions and avoid disaster by making sure that billions in aid keep reaching the Taliban-run country.

According to the UN humanitarian organisation, 22.8 million people face acute food shortages, including 8.7 million close to starvation. "We don't have enough money going into 2022," said McGroarty during a stop in Brussels.

"What we call all the humanitarian sector in Afghanistan needs 4.4 four billion dollars for the next 12 months to mount a comprehensive response. And for WFP, we need 2.6 billion to do the minimum we need to be doing in 2022." Afghanistan's aid-dependent economy was

already stumbling when the Taliban seized power in mid-August amid a disorderly departure of US and NATO troops. The international community froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted funding, unwilling to work with a Taliban government given its reputation for brutality during its previous rule 20 years ago.

Combined with the COVID-19 crisis and a drought, the shortage of money has had catastrophic consequences amid a dramatic surge of inflation, with the price of food going up by over 50 percent in the last couple of months.

McGroarty said she recently met with old farmers during a trip to the northeastern province of Badakhshan, who told her they have never been confronted to such an ordeal despite the experience of living through 19 governments.

"They have never before, despite the decades of conflict, had to stand in a line with their hands out for humanitarian support," she said. "This is the first time ever for them, and they told me the hunger is worse than the conflict that they have lived through over five decades." McGroarty urged the international community to keep sending money to Afghanistan, insisting that funding can get into the country independently from the

Taliban. The new Kabul rulers initially promised tolerance and inclusiveness regarding women and ethnic minorities. But so far, their actions including renewed restrictions for women and the appointment of an all-male government have left the international community and many donors unimpressed.

"We've been working for years in Afghanistan, in contested areas, and the money comes directly to the agencies," McGroarty said. "We work with our partners, we work directly with the communities."

McGroarty said the WFP managed to distribute food in key locations across the northeast and central highlands of the country in prevision of the winter months.

But she said the winter snows have already started to block some of country's major roads, making the need for aid even more urgent. "Can you imagine not being able to feed your young children? And you can also imagine not being able to keep those young children also warm?" McGroarty said.

"It's unimaginable suffering and the support is required today to avert some of that unimaginable suffering," McGroarty said. Afghans now face the choice of either starving or leaving their country. "It's one step away from a catastrophe," she said.

Israel probes death of detained 80-year-old Palestinian

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel was investigating after an 80-year-old Palestinian with U.S. Citizenship died of a heart attack after being detained by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank.

The State Department said it was in touch with the Israeli government to seek "clarification" about the incident, which occurred early Wednesday, and that it supports a "thorough investigation."

Omar Asaad was detained by Israeli forces while returning from a relative's home in his hometown of Jaljulia, near the West Bank city of Ramallah. He was brought to a hospital hours later, dead from a heart attack, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

Jaljulia Mayor Fouad Qattum, citing witnesses, said the soldiers stopped Asaad's vehicle and removed him by force shortly before dawn. He said they took Asaad, bound and blindfolded, to an abandoned building nearby.

Later, they detained a number of young men from the surrounding area in the same building. Qattum said the other detainees did not know Asaad was there because it was dark and he didn't make a sound.

Strike paralyses Lebanon as economic conditions worsen

Beirut: Schools, universities and many shops were closed in Lebanon on Thursday as a general strike by public transportation and labour unions paralysed the crisis-hit Mideast nation.

Protesters closed the country's major highways as well as roads inside cities and towns, starting at 5 a.m., to protest fuel prices that have increased at an alarming rate after the government lifted subsidies.

Taxi and truck drivers used their vehicles to block roads. In the capital of Beirut, many roads were blocked by giant trash bins and vehicles.

The nationwide protests, dubbed a "day of rage," were scheduled to last 12 hours but appear to have petered out by early afternoon. The number of protesters were small.

The protest action comes as the Lebanese pound has continued to tumble against the dollar. About 80% of people in Lebanon live in poverty after the Lebanese pound lost more than 90% of its value in the past two years. Filling up a gasoline tank now costs more than the monthly minimum wage.

The ruling class, which has run Lebanon into the ground, has proved unwilling to reform and has done almost nothing to try to pull the country out of its meltdown, rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement. "The clear



A truck driver holds a Lebanese flag as others drivers block a main highway with their vehicles during a general strike by public transport and workers unions paralyzed Lebanon in protest to the country's deteriorating economic and financial conditions, in Beirut, Lebanon, Thursday, Jan. 13, 2022 (AP Photo/Bilal Hussein)

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE (Through e-tendering)	
Name of work with its location	Provision of Telecom Facility in Delhi Area along with Railway Officer's Colony.
App. Cost of the work (₹)	₹ 43,83,677.50/- only
Earnest Money Deposit (₹)	₹ 87,700/- only
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annexe-1, DRM office, New Delhi-110055.
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of tender	Tender uploading / closing date & time- 09.02.2022 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.ireps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055.
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-Tele-OT-943 Dated: 13.01.2022	85/2022
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	



SEARCH FOR MISSING

General Public is hereby informed that a person (depicted in the photo), **Namely:** Anil Kumar **S/o** Virender Singh **R/o** Vikram Pur, Bah, Agra, U.P. has been missing since 02.01.2022 from P-Block, Raghubir Nagar, Delhi. In this regard a DD No 59A dated 03.01.2022 has been lodged at Police Station Khyala, Delhi. His physical description is as under:-

Anil Kumar

Age: 30 Years, **Height:** 5', **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Red Colour Jacket & Blue Colour Pant and Chappal in feet.

Any person having any information/ Clue about this missing person, may inform SHO, Khyala, Delhi at E-mail ic@cbi.gov.in or website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

Phone: **SHO**
011-24368638, 24368641 **P.S. Khyala, Delhi**
Fax No. 011-24368639 **West Distt., Delhi**
DP/690/WD/2022 **Ph. No. 011- 8750871132, 9911820101**



Appeal for Identification

General Public is hereby informed that a male dead body **Name:** Unknown, **S/o** Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** About 30 years, **Height:** 5'6", **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face :** Oval **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Black half T-Shirt having with white straps, Locket in neck shape of heart (Silver Colour), Red Colour Cloth Bracelet and Rudraksh type Bracelet in Right Arm and Hand, Blue Colour Jeans pant, without Sleeper and Shoes. was found at Paper Market at CNG Pump, Gazipur, Delhi. In this regard **DD No. 42-A, Dt. 11.01.2022** has been lodged in PS Gazipur, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this person but no clue has come to light so far. Any, person having any information or clue about this person may kindly inform to the following.

SHO
P.S., Gazipur, Delhi
Ph. : 011-22610068
8750870625

DP/881/ED/2022

GOVT. OF BIHAR OFFICE OF THE RESIDENT ENGINEER, BIHAR B BHAWAN, NEW DELHI

NO.....24..... **Dated.....13/01/2022/**

Short Notice inviting Quotation

The reputed firms are requested to submit sealed quotation for following work in Bihar Bhawan and Bihar Niwas Chankyapuri, Bihar sadan dwarka New Delhi for the year 2021-2022 Quotation will be submitted up to 21-01-2022 till 3:00 pm and opened on 21-01-2022 at 3:30 pm at the office of the Resident Engineer, Bihar Niwas Chankyapuri, New Delhi undersigned office has right to cancel quotation without any further information. Registration, GST, PAN No. and authorization of firm paper here enclosed. Details of items list can be obtained form the office of the Resident Engineer, Bihar Bhawan , New Delhi. The Earnest Money (NSC/ Term Deposit) should be deposited 5% of total contract value before issue of work order.

S. No	Particulars
1.	Addition alteration work of Female toilet in basement at Bihar Sadan new Delhi for the year 2021-22
2.	Addition alteration work of show case , book Shelve and display rack in prefuction on area at Bihar Sadan New Delhi for the year 2021-22
3.	Supply fitting and fixing extended kitchen at Bihar sadan Dwarka new Delhi for the year 2021-22

**Sd./-
Executive Engineer-Cum-
Resident Engineer
Bihar Bhawan, New Delhi**

Polish Church says it's wrong to ask if abuse victim is gay

AP ■ WARSAW, POLAND

Poland's Catholic bishops have strongly criticized a local diocese for asking a court to determine whether a man who was sexually abused as a child by a priest is gay, and whether the sexual contact may have consequently been pleasurable for him.

The victim, Janusz Szymik, who is now 48, was an altar boy when the abuse began in the 1980s. Szymik sued the diocese of Bielsko-Zywiec, in southern Poland, in a civil court last year.

The priest, who has been identified only as Rev. Jan W., admitted to the abuse. Szymik is now seeking 3 million zlotys (\$760,000) in compensation from the diocese.

The Onet news portal earlier this week disclosed the contents of documents it obtained that a lawyer for the church had submitted to the court.

The documents show the church wanting an expert "to check the plaintiff's sexual orientation" and to determine whether he "showed satisfaction with maintaining an intimate relationship with Rev. Jan W" or derived any "material benefits" from the sexual relationship with the cleric. Rev. Piotr Studnicki, the director of

a special office for the protection of children within the Polish Bishops' Conference, said in a statement issued on Wednesday that "reliable knowledge and human sensitivity" are necessary to any legal procedure.

"The issue of sexual orientation or the way a child reacts emotionally to an offense of sexual abuse cannot constitute an argument against the injured person and diminish the responsibility of the perpetrator," Studnicki said.

"It must be clear to everyone that a child never bears responsibility for violence experienced."

Szymik expressed surprise about how the case has turned, noting that Bishop Roman Pindel of Bielsko-Zywiec had previously shown compassion toward him for the abuse he suffered as a child.

"Previously, he expressed pain and regret and asked for forgiveness, and now he wants to prove ... that I am a homosexual person, that pedophilia gave me pleasure, that everything that happened was voluntary, that I benefited from it," Szymik said in an interview on the all-news station TVN24. Tomasz Terlikowski, a Catholic journalist, comment-

ed that the the diocese's letter to the court was "scandalous" and should be withdrawn, and that Bishop Pindel should apologize to Szymik.

He said such statements are harmful to victims and are "sad proof" that the bishop does not even know the teaching of his own church.

The development comes as Pope Francis has been trying to clean up a culture of abuse and cover-ups in the Polish church.

The Catholic Church was long the highest moral authority in Poland, having played an inspirational role during occupation and foreign rule and supporting the anti-communist Solidarity movement in the 1980s.

But the recent reckoning of abuse has damaged its credibility. Even Poland's most famous Catholic, St. John Paul II, now has his legacy tarnished by his own failure to tackle abuse when he was pope.

One of the country's top church leaders, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the primate of Poland, said recently that the church is seeing a "devastating" decline in religious practice among young Poles, arguing that the church hierarchy's failure to deal with clerical abuse is one reason for that.



PEOPLE OF TOMORROW

The vegan all-day dining cafe, a passion project, is a space for environmentally-conscious brands to display their products, says SAMEER BAWA

In June 2021, when celebrity Chef Daniel Humm started serving a strictly plant based menu in his award winning, three michelin star restaurant, Eleven Madison Park, in New York, it raised a few eyebrows. The menu got mixed reviews but the chef was convinced that it was the way forward and the menu was more luxurious than ever before.

While veganism as a practise might be quite evolved in the West, I have started noticing that a lot of restaurants back home in Delhi have also started incorporating vegan preparations in their menus which optically seems a bit surprising, considering that the major population of India has always been vegetarian. A couple of days ago, I got the opportunity to try out, People Of Tomorrow, a vegan all-day dining cafe located in the Dhan Mill compound.

“Upon being educated about the negative impacts of the meat and dairy industry on the environment, I realised the importance of veganism and the lack of food options for those wanting to adopt this lifestyle. I knew I had to delve into this project, making veganism accessible,” says founder Ritv Kapoor, a vegan convert for the last four years.

The rustic, casual and vibrant cafe serves reconstructed soul food with a wide array of small plates, salads, platters, a live taco counter and much more.

We started with the *Signature mezze platter* comprising two bean falafel, baba ghanoush, beetroot hummus, *muhammara*, tabbouleh and pita. As they say, well begun is half done! Really liked all the dips but a special shout out



for the *muhammara* which was almost a perfect blend of red peppers, walnuts and pomegranate molasses. I requested for an iced tea on the side but they do have nice options for coffee lovers as well.

We also requested for a *Go-Green beans* salad which complimented the *mezze* platter beautifully. Seasonal green beans decorated with a kaffir lime sambhar and garnished with almond slivers and chilli soy. The beans had the perfect crunch and *sambhar* provided the requisite contrast that the dish warranted. Just brilliant!

Next up was the *Puff-lo broccoli*, a dish which intrigued me the most. A broccoli preparation glazed with cream cheese, buffalo sauce and white onion soubise. A very comforting dish, it had a lovely and creamy aftertaste with a hint of heat.

We sampled the *Smoke - don't choke arti* pizza, a charcoal fettucini and a pumpkin ravioli next. The pizza topped with smoked artichoke and almond with a drizzle of balsamic was light and fluffy. I was told that they rest the pizza dough for 24 hours.

All the pastas at People of Tomorrow are from the artisanal pasta brand, Casarecce.in. The fettucini was served *al dente* with some seasonal mushrooms and drizzled with some portobello powder. It was very nice.

Their take on the pumpkin ravioli, though, was a slight dampener for me. It could have been served at a warmer temperature. Nice touch of sprinkling it with hazelnuts and capers but if you are expecting a North Italian classic, then you might be a bit disappointed.

They gave the finishing touches to the meal with the *Textures of chocolate*. As the name suggests, different preparations and textures of chocolate were served on a platter with contrasting flavour profiles. Can't go wrong with chocolate, can you?

In a nutshell, it was a very nice dining experience. I wholeheartedly support the endeavour and the 'sustainability' message behind the brand, along with the food expression of the chef. While People of tomorrow is passion project which, in its own way, wants to help preserve future generations, it is also a space for environmentally-conscious brands to display their products. Vegan food might be propagated at the heart of the brand, but I personally feel that it also shares a perspective which encourages a super healthy and sustainable lifestyle. I would not be surprised if over the next few years, the F&B industry in India embraces vegan food and we have more such concepts mushrooming across the country. *(The author is a food critic and food connoisseur.)*

Chomping under cabanas

From the decks of Aerocity, One8Commune has spread its roots of delicacy to Mall Road as KHUSHBU KIRTI defines her experience



Launched by Virat Kohli in Aerocity Delhi long back, the Indian skipper decided to open a new branch of One8Commune at Mall Road, North Delhi, and it speaks of ultimate panache.

It was drizzling slightly, on a winter evening and I was cold and parched. So, entering the grounds rendered to me a different form of relief, besides the evident warmth and style the place reflected.

The new branch showcased a large open space, with a combination of grey and beige furniture, which was, and hear me out, a repose for the eyes that were used to the turquoise/teal and pink pastel everywhere!

It featured a luxurious terrace seating and I was ready for the Al-fresco dining experience. In the background, pop music made me groove as one of the servers, Swain, helped me with deciding, for I'm not good at picking from a plethora of good meals, especially drinks.

I started with their famous *Gin cocktail twist 2*. It had a smoky-ish taste, was rose flavoured, specifically like a *khatta roafsa*, but immediately calmed the mind. I could taste grapefruit and rosemary.

The *Chicken nachos* encompassed sauteed chicken chunks served cold. The chicken was brilliantly cooked with mustard sauce only augmenting the taste.

Next up, the *Paneer tikka* with mint hari chatni was served. The gravy was warm and just right but the paneer felt slightly rubbery.

One of the glories of the one8 brand that I had heard of was the fine line of culinary dishes that Chef Pawan creates. The *Black and fiery chicken* along with the *Mushroom goo-gly dimsums* were too popular to be ignored. However, since spicy food and I don't go along well, I chose just the dimsums. The name was unique. But Kohli being the owner, it sorta made sense with the cricket metaphors.

The truffle oil dimsums had assorted mushrooms which I paired with gin. The combination turned out to be better than I had imagined.

I was excited for One8's *Classic mac n cheese* which quickly became one of the best I had had. The mozzarella cheese, and Parmesan cheddar cheese made it soft and creamy — very American. Yet, the crust was crispy, and indulged in goodness of oregano, became lip smacking.

Towards the end, I tried the *Sriracha chicken taco* which gave a tangy taste, I'm guessing, because of the siracha sauce. The shredded chicken was juicy, slightly spicy and



the covering was soft. It was one of the best and I highly recommend taco with *Passion session*, vodka with green apple.

They had added a huge screen across the terrace, which suited the ambience well.

Finally came the *One8 Commune signature chicken*, which was basically Korean fried chicken on an extravagant spread of cheese and heavenly in every bite.

Chef Sanjit Kumar had praised the *Khau galli soya boti kebab*, *Garlic butter prawn*, *Grilled fish* and *Bamboo cashew nut tofu* but since I was content and full, it went straight to my future food drive agendas.

Abhinav, the corporate CDC for the brand, who handled the European part of the menu, explained the secret behind their delicious *Butter garlic prawns*, “Our rendition of the *Butter garlic prawns* has a bit of olives, cherry-tomato, star anise, and a lot of herbs.”

The Civil Lines branch also has a rooftop set up with cabanas, a separate chic bar and a well-lit live kitchen, serving dimsums, sushi, and pizzas. It made for the perfect place to relax and have good food with splendid views of the lanes of Central Delhi.

R E C I P E S



PONGAL TIKKIS

WHAT YOU NEED

- Oats *pongal* (cooked as per packet instructions): 1 cup
- Boiled potato: 1
- Bread crumbs: 1 cup
- Chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Cumin powder: 1 tsp
- Coriander powder: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder: 1 tsp
- Chilli flakes: 1 tsp
- Garam masala: 1 tsp
- Salt
- Chopped onion: 1
- Grated ginger: 1 tsp
- Chopped green chilli: 1
- Oil for frying

METHOD

- In a bowl, add all the ingredients and mix them well.
- Make small tikkis out of the dough.
- Heat a pan and add oil.
- Shallow fry the tikkis on both sides.
- Serve hot with ketchup.

Courtesy: Pavitra K, lead, new product development, True Elements

QUINOA CRUSTED COTTAGE CHEESE WITH CHILLY PINEAPPLE MARMALADE

WHAT YOU NEED

- Cottage cheese: 300 gm
- Quinoa roasted: 50 gm
- Sumac spice: 10 gm
- Garlic powder: 15 gm
- Green chilly: 5 gm
- Salt: 5 gm
- Pepper powder: 2 gm
- Rosewater: 2 drops
- Rose syrup: 5 ml
- Sunflower oil: 10-20 ml

For chilly pineapple marmalade:

- Pineapple puree: 300 gm
- Ginger: 25 gm
- Sugar: 100 gm
- Pineapple juice: 100 ml
- *Deghi* mirch powder: 10 gm
- Lemon slices: 4
- Lemon juice: 5 ml

GUR AUR ATTE KE LADDO

WHAT YOU NEED

- Jaggery: 1000 gm
- Wheat flour: 500 gm
- Desi ghee: 500 gm
- Sesame seeds: 200 gm
- Almonds: 100 gm
- Cashew nuts: 100 ml

METHOD

- Take a pan and roast wheat flour in ghee for 20 to 25 minutes on low flame till it attains light brown colour.
- Shift it to a small bowl and let it cool down.



METHOD

For pineapple chilly marmalade:

- In a clean vessel, add pineapple puree, sugar, pineapple juice, grated ginger and lemon juice. Cook till half reduced on slow flame.
- Upon attaining gel like consistency, add chilli powder and let it cool in sterilised glass jar.
- For cottage cheese:● Cut cottage cheese into cubes.
- Marinate them using sumac spice, garlic pwd, finely chopped green chilly,

rosewater, rose syrup, salt, pepper and oil.

- Separately, on a nonstick pan roast quinoa grains on slow flame until it gets nutty and crunchy.
- Marinated cottage cheese could be either grilled or pan seared.
- Now drench the individual pieces of cottage cheese in quinoa and arrange them nicely on a platter.
- Serve it them hot with chilly pineapple marmalade.

Courtesy: Godrej Vikhorli Cucina



- In the same pan, add jaggery and water and melt it on high flame. When the jaggery melts, slow down the

flame and boil it on low flame till it becomes thick. Switch off the flame and let it cool down.

- Slightly roast sesame seeds and add them in melted jaggery along with crushed almonds and cashew nuts.
- Mix them well in roasted flour till it becomes a soft dough.
- Take a small portion of mixture and roll between your palms to give it round ball shape.
- Make sure the mixture should not turn completely cool otherwise you will not be able to bind mixture into laddoos.

Courtesy: Mukesh Kumar, executive sous chef, DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square

L I S T I N G

RETURN OF SUPER SWEETY AT THE CLARIDGES

Lohri is one of the most celebrated festivals in India and bears a message that is universal in every sense. It has a lot to offer — great food, a taste of tradition, dance and dhol. It's a way to spread joy marking the end of the chilly winter season and welcoming the first Rabi harvest.

The Claridges, New Delhi brings you authentic, popular Lohri recipes by top chefs to celebrate the popular folk festival at Dhaba, restaurant serving Northern Frontier and delicacies from Punjab. Head Chef Mahavir Singh and renowned guest Chef Sweetie Singh have curated a special menu for the occasion.

Chef Sweetie Singh has dug deep into authentic Punjabi flavours to come up



with a special a la carte menu, showcasing a range of regional preparations consisting of signature dishes. His ability to experiment while keeping within the boundaries of traditional Indian food will earn him accolades amongst the Delhites during Lohri!

When: Till January 17

Where: Dhaba, The Claridges, New Delhi



GET YOUR FAVOURITE WINTER TEA-TIME COMBO FROM SAMOSA PARTY

Samosa Party is known for its cleverly conceptualised scrumptious samosas with interesting fillings right from *Corn Cheese*, *Mozzarella pizza*, *Peri Peri*, *Mutton keema*, *Pickley paneer*, *BBQ chicken* to *Egg samosas*.

Choose from their exciting range of freshly fried cocktail samosas, party packs and chai samosa combos to enjoy with family and friends. Don't forget to order the freshly brewed flask of your favourite chai; be it adrak, lemon, masala, or *elaichi* chai.

With Samosa Party, you can now throw the perfect party every day AM and PM.

Order on Swiggy or Zomato

Where: Gurgaon and Manesar

When: 9 am-10 pm

RAISE A CHOCOLATE TOAST AT SMOOR, GURGAON, BAANI SQUARE

Celebrate everyday by giving it a perfect ending with exotic desserts. SMOOR, Gurgaon, Baani Square offers you a perfect setting to celebrate with your loved ones with Couverture chocolate. Complete your each meal with specially crafted chocolates according to your preference by SMOOR like pecan and coffee, cashew and cury, true bar, hot chocolate mocha, macarons, cookies and many more. Take your loved ones on the unforgettable chocolate journey and explore the new flavours created by SMOOR to make your day.

Where: SMOOR, Gurgaon, Baani Square

Order at: www.smoor.in

Price: ₹150/- onwards



MADRID BEATS BARCELONA FOR 100TH TIME, REACHES CUP FINAL

AP ■ RIYADH

Barcelona put on a good fight as an underdog, but in the end it was Real Madrid celebrating again after a thrilling "clásico" between the Spanish powerhouses in Saudi Arabia.

Federico Valverde scored in extra time to give Real Madrid a 3-2 win over Barcelona on Wednesday for its 100th victory over its storied rival and a spot in the final of the Spanish Super Cup.

Barcelona twice equalized in regular time but couldn't recover after Valverde scored from close range on a breakaway eight minutes into extra time to give Madrid its fifth straight win over the Catalan club in all competitions.

Defending Super Cup champion Athletic Bilbao will face Spanish league champion Atlético Madrid in the other semifinal Thursday.

"We competed well," Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué said.

"It's not the result we wanted but we are a step closer to winning.

I'm very proud of our team. We have to leave with our heads up after the way we played against a Real Madrid team that is having a very

good season."

The Spanish Super Cup is being played in Saudi Arabia again after the coronavirus pandemic transferred last year's edition back to Spain. The competition was moved to Saudi Arabia — and expanded from two to four teams in a "Final Four" format — as part of a deal reportedly worth 30 million euros (\$34 million) a year until 2029.

The changes drew criticism from human rights activists and complaints from fans who preferred the competition stayed in Spain. Among those complaining was Athletic midfielder Raúl García, who said this week it made "no sense" to play the games away from Spain.

It was Madrid's 100th win over Barcelona in 248 competitive matches against the rival. Barcelona has 96 wins, though none since 2019.

"I have to admit that Barcelona played well," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said.

"It was an even match. We were efficient on the counterattacks."

It was a mostly even match but Madrid looked the more dangerous



team throughout thanks to its counterattacks led Vinícius Júnior and Benzema. The duo gave Madrid

the lead in the 25th minute after Benzema stole the ball from Barcelona midfielder Sergio

Busquets near the midfield line and fed Vinícius, who made a run into the area and beat goalkeeper Marc-

Andre ter Stegen with a shot into the top of the net.

Barcelona equalized with a fluke goal near the end of the half. Madrid defender Éder Militão tried to clear a ball from inside the area but his shot bounced off Barcelona striker Luuk de Jong and then off the post before going over the line.

Benzema hit the post in the 69th, then a couple of minutes later put Madrid ahead again from close range off the rebound of a deflection by Ter Stegen following a cross by Dani Carvajal. Ter Stegen had stopped another Benzema shot just moments earlier.

Ansu Fati, who replaced De Jong in the 66th, leveled the match again in the 83rd with a header off a well-placed cross by Jordi Alba.

Valverde, who replaced Luka Modrić in the 83rd, scored the winner in extra time after a fast counterattack by Madrid, converting a cross by Rodrygo from the right flank with Barcelona's defense heavily outmanned.

Madrid arrived as one of the hottest teams in Spain and was the favorite over a Barcelona side still rebuilding after the loss of Lionel Messi to Paris Saint-Germain. The

Catalan club trails its rival by 17 points in the Spanish league with a game in hand.

It was the first clásico for Xavi Hernández as Barcelona coach. Ronald Koeman was still at the helm when the Catalan club lost 2-1 to Madrid at the Camp Nou in the first clásico of the season in the league last October.

Ferran Torres made his Barcelona debut after being signed from Manchester City. Torres and young midfielder Pedri González arrived in Saudi Arabia later than their teammates because they tested positive for the coronavirus. Torres, who was substituted at half-time, hadn't played since getting injured with Spain's national team in October. Madrid was without defender David Alaba because of an injury.

Madrid made it to the "Final Four" after finishing second to Atlético in the league last season. Barcelona qualified as the Copa del Rey champion, which it won over Athletic.

Only about 30,000 fans were allowed at the 62,000-capacity King Fahd International Stadium because of the coronavirus pandemic.



Sindhu advances, Malvika knocks idol Saina out of India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu and HS Prannoy advanced to the quarterfinals but the promising Malvika Bansod ended her idol Saina Nehwal's campaign at the Yonex-Sunrise India Open here on Thursday.

Former champion and 2012 Olympic bronze medallist Saina suffered a 17-21 9-21 straight game loss to her 20-year-old compatriot Malvika.

Malvika, ranked 111th, took 34 minutes to see off the former world number 1.

"It was my first meeting with Saina Nehwal. She has been my idol since I started playing badminton. So playing against her was a dream come true and that too, in the Indian Open, on such a big stage.

... A Super 500 tournament, it was a big achievement for me, one of the biggest wins of my career so far," Malvika said after her win. Coming back from knee and groin injuries, Saina, who had won her first round match on Tuesday, was happy with the her movement on the court but said she had a lot of catching up to do on the fitness front. "Today I was moving on

the court but my fitness is still not where it should be. So I came here to see where I stand. My body is good but fitness level I need to work on," Saina said, adding, that she Malvika is "very good" in rallies and has a bright future.

Earlier, the top seed Sindhu had no problem dispatching fellow India Ira Sharma 21-10 21-10. She will meet compatriot Ashmita Chaliha, who got the better of french shuttler Yaelle Hoyaux 21-17 21-14, in the quarterfinal. Malvika will next take on fellow Indian Aakarshi Kashyap in the quarterfinals.

Aakarshi had defeated compatriot Keyura Mopatin 21-10 21-10 in another women's singles second round match. Prannoy received a walkover as his opponent Mithun Manjunath withdrew from the tournament after testing positive for COVID-19.

The men's top seed Kidambi Srikanth, doubles player Ashwini Ponnappa, Ritika Rahul Thkar, Treasa Jolly, Simran Aman Singh and Khushi Gupta are the other players who had to withdraw from the tournament due to the positive COVID-19 results, which led to several walkovers.

Srikanth, six other players withdrawn after testing positive for COVID-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The India Open tournament was on Thursday rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic with as many as seven Indian shuttlers, including reigning world championship silver medallist Kidambi Srikanth, withdrawing from the event after testing positive for the virus.

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) announced this in the wee hours, before the Badminton Association of India (BAI) confirmed the names. Besides Srikanth, the other players affected by the virus are Ashwini Ponnappa, Ritika Rahul Thkar, Treasa Jolly, Mithun Manjunath, Simran Aman Singh and Khushi Gupta.

"The players returned a positive result to a mandatory RT-PCR test conducted on

Tuesday. Doubles partners deemed close contact of the seven players have also been withdrawn from the tournament," the world governing body said in a statement.

"The players will not be replaced in the main draw and their opponents will be given a walkover to the next round."

Initially, the BWF didn't reveal the names of the seven players. Earlier, B Sai Praneeth, the 2019 world championship bronze medallist, double specialists Manu Attri and Dhruv Rawat had tested positive for the virus ahead of their departure for the national capital and had pulled out before the start of the tournament. The entire England badminton contingent had also withdrawn ahead of the Super 500 event after the country's doubles specialist Sean Vandy and coach Nathan



Robertson tested positive for the virus.

Organised by the BAI, the 2022 edition of India Open is being held behind closed doors at the Indira Gandhi Stadium's

KD Jadhav Indoor Hall.

As per the COVID-19 protocols, all the participating players are being tested every day at the hotel and outside the stadium. Two-time Olympic

medallist P V Sindhu, World Championships silver and bronze medallists Kidambi Srikanth and Lakshya Sen, London Games bronze winner Saina Nehwal are among the Indian players who have reached the second round of the tournament. Among top international stars, world champion Loh Kean Yew, three-time men's doubles world champion Mohammad Ahsan, and Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan are competing in the tournament, which is being hosted for the first time in three years following the cancellation of the last two editions due to the pandemic.

Delhi reported 27,561 COVID-19 cases, the second-highest single-day rise since the pandemic began, and 40 deaths on Wednesday.

8 MORE BOXERS TEST POSITIVE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eight more boxers tested positive for COVID-19 in the ongoing men's national camp at NIS, Patiala on Thursday, taking the total number of cases to 26 but all those infected are complaining of "relatively mild symptoms".

After 18 campers, 12 boxers and six support staff members returned positive for the virus on Wednesday, eight more were added to the tally after a fresh round of testing. The total number of infected boxers now stands at 20. "Two main boxers Sumit and Rohit also have tested positive.

Two Indian coaches lock horns as Goa look to pile more misery on NEUFC



PTI ■ BAMBOLIM

Two Indian head coaches will lock horns in the ISL for the first time when FC Goa take on lowly NorthEast United FC here on Friday.

Under Derek Pereira, Goa won their last game against Chennaiyin FC after coming out with a point against Kerala Blasters before that. The Gaurs are ninth in the table

with 12 points from 10 games and Pereira would hope to start the second leg on the front foot.

"I am happy that Indian coaches are getting an opportunity to lead.

If you give them a bit more opportunity and exposure they will flourish more and can prove themselves in the highest levels," Pereira said.

For Goa, Jorge Ortiz has been

a key figure and since returning from a two-match suspension, the Spaniard has been all guns blazing.

"The table does not reflect the quality we have. The league is unpredictable but our focus right now is on the next match rather than focusing long term. However, with the process we have in place, I am sure we can finish in the top positions," Pereira added.

For Khalid Jamil-coached NorthEast, who are sitting a rung below Goa at 10th place, a loss to Jamshedpur FC saw them without a win in the last three games.

Jamil can take heart from the fact that Deshorn Brown has found his scoring boots.

Brown scored a brace in NorthEast United's 3-2 defeat against Jamshedpur.

He has now scored five goals in his last two matches for the club. NorthEast beat Goa 2-1 the first time the two sides met this season.

Jamil was not short of praise for his compatriot Pereira. "Credit to Derrick, once he has come in, the team has looked good. They have played some good matches and have adapted well to the new formation.

It will be a good challenge for our team," Jamil said



HC refuses to stay CIC order asking Hockey India to disclose list of members

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Thursday refused to stay, for now, an order of the Central Information Commission (CIC) directing Hockey India to disclose certain information, including list of its members and employee salaries under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Justice Rekha Palli observed that Hockey India, which is a National Sports Federation (NSF) and a public authority, cannot shy away from disclosing such information even when the salaries of judges are also known to everyone. "Prima facie I really don't see what is wrong with the CIC order.

You are a public authority, you can't shy away from disclosing salaries of employees, no matter how high or low it is. When our salaries are known to everybody then what is the problem in salaries of your employees. You are a public authority which is getting so much of aid, benefits and funds," the judge said, adding that she was not inclined to stay the CIC order at this stage. The central government also supported the December 13, 2021 order of the CIC saying it was in consonance with the National Sports Code and the guidelines of the Centre.

After delay, Indian team arrives for AFC Asian Cup



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian football team arrived here for the AFC Women's Asian Cup on Thursday, hours after its scheduled flight from its training base Kochi got delayed.

Amid the concerns caused by the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese Taipei became the first team to arrive here for the continental tournament.

The delay in their flight from Kochi, the Indian team's base since its return from the tournament-cum-exposure tour of Brazil, also led to the postponement of the host nation's scheduled media session on Thursday evening.

Looking forward to the tournament, India head coach Thomas Dennerby said, "This is the moment we've been preparing for over the past six months. We've had over 200 sessions, a number of matches against quality opponents across four countries, and now it's time to implement all the things that we have been working on."

The 62-year-old Swede, who had also previously coached the Swedish and the Nigerian national teams, revealed that a pep talk with the players before departure to Mumbai, has helped put everyone in the correct mindset.

"We had a small meet with the players and we explained to them how important the coming few weeks are in their lives. I think this has really struck a few chords, and you can now see the determination in their eyes," he said.

The Indian team has been drawn against Iran (January 20), Chinese Taipei (January 23) and China (January 26) in Group A of the competition that consists of 12 teams.

It has also been learnt that all the teams playing in Pune will arrive in Mumbai and then commute to Pune by road.

"We are expecting the first team to be in Pune by 15th, which is Korea Republic. The teams (playing in Pune) will stay in two plush hotels in the city," a source in the know of developments said.

Djokovic in Australian Open draw despite visa uncertainty

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic now knows he'll face fellow Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round of his Australian Open title defense, if he's allowed to play.

Djokovic's visa status dominated attention until the moment the draw was conducted Thursday, after a postponement of 75 minutes, to determine the brackets for the men's and women's singles draws at the first major tennis tournament of 2022.

He was still in limbo after it. The Australian immigration minister was still considering whether to deport the nine-time and defending Australian Open champion, who is not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Top-ranked Djokovic had his visa canceled on arrival in Melbourne last week when his vaccination exemption was rejected, but he won a legal battle on procedural grounds that allowed him to stay in the country. Immigration Minister Alex Hawke has been considering the question since a judge reinstated Djokovic's visa last Monday.

The tournament starts next Monday. If he's allowed to stay, Djokovic's bid for a men's record 21st major title could mean a quarter-final against No. 7-ranked Matteo Berrettini and possibly a

semifinal against Rafael Nadal or third-seeded Alexander Zverev. He is tied with Nadal and Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slam titles,



missing a chance for the all-time record when he lost the U.S. Open final to Daniil Medvedev last year. Medvedev, who also ended Djokovic's run at a calendar-year Grand Slam with that win in New York, is on the opposite end of the draw as the No. 2 seed in Australia. A finalist here last year, he could meet local favorite Nick Kyrgios in the second round, and also No. 5 Andrey Rublev, No. 9 Felix Auger-Aliassime, John Isner in his quarter of the draw. He's seeded to meet No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas in the semis. On the women's side, top-ranked Ash Barty and defending champion Naomi Osaka ended up in the same section of the draw, meaning two of the best players in the tournament could meet in a fourth-round match that could

have the feeling of a final.

After that, No. 5 Maria Sakkari or No. 9 Ons Jabeur could be waiting in the quarterfinals. Osaka, who has been ranked as high as No. 1, slid down the list because of her lack of matches in 2021 and is seeded 13th. French Open champion Barbora Krejickova and No. 8 Paula Badosa are in the same half of the draw, along with 2020 champion Sofia Kenin, who has a tough opener against fellow American Madison Keys and could meet No. 18 Coco Gauff in the third round.

In the other half of the draw, No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka has a first-round meeting against wild-card entry Storm Sanders and is seeded to WTA Finals winner Garbine Muguruza in the semifinals.

PANT SCORES CENTURY

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Rishabh Pant scored one of his finest hundreds in most adverse of circumstance but another shoddy batting show left India with only 211 runs to defend on the third day of the third and final cricket Test against South Africa, here Thursday.

Pant's (100 not out off 139 balls) fourth Test hundred constituted for more than 50 percent of India's second innings total of 198 with Virat Kohli's 29 off 143 balls being the second highest individual score.

The umpires called for tea break at the fall of final Indian wicket in the extended second session.

This was the first Test match in 145-year-history where all 20 batters of one team were caught.

The day belonged to Pant as he scored a hundred which is as good as one would ever see and what stood out was his shot selection, which was immaculate.

He didn't do anything that was 'un-Pant' like as there was a rasping square cut off a rising one from Kagiso Rabada (3/53). There was the audacious down the track cover drive off Duanne Olivier and that six over long-on off Keshav Maharaj



came just an over before lunch.

These are all shots that one associates with the dashing keeper-batter but what was exemplary was his use of discretion as to what kind of deliveries he would attack.

In between defending the good balls, he drove Maharaj out of the attack with a one-handed slog sweep and a six over long-off. When Olivier dug one short at his pace, it was pulled for six as

he hit six fours and four sixes in all.

Skipper Virat Kohli's presence during a 94-run stand definitely helped that he had that guiding light in the middle as he went about his job.

Once Pant had unsettled the line and length of the Proteas pace unit, Dean Elgar opened the field allowing them to rotate the strike but once Kohli perished outside the off-stump, it was only Pant who had to take the burden.

The other highlight was his batting with the tail, taking a single off either the fourth or fifth delivery shielding the Number 9, 10 and 11 as much as possible.

If Pant's learning from his mistake was one good aspect, same can't be said about Cheteshwar Pujara (9) and Ajinkya Rahane (1) as they have now put their careers in jeopardy.

Pujara was again cramped for room

on the leg side and the tickle off the gloves was brilliantly taken by Keegan Petersen at leg slip, diving to his right and snapping it up inches ahead of the ground.

In case of Rahane, Rabada bowled a terrific one which kicked from length and took his gloves and Dean Elgar at first slip caught it after keeper Kyle Verreynne had managed to tip it up with his gloves.

Eight Indian batters failed to get into double figures.

Joe Root considering entering IPL auction



PTI ■ HOBART

England's Test captain Joe Root has revealed that he is considering entering the upcoming IPL auction, four years after going unsold in the auction for the lucrative T20 league.

Considered one of the modern greats of the game, Root is yet to play in the IPL after going unsold in the 2018 auction.

The 31-year-old batter, however, said he would look to play in the tournament only if it does not distract him from his Test career.

"Time is ticking but I have a lot to weigh up," Root said, according to ESPNcricinfo.Com.

"Will it have a negative impact on me playing Test cricket? If I don't think so then I will put myself in the auction. But I will never do anything that will detract from playing Test cricket for England. It's so important to make sure that is the priority for me and other players as well."

Root had expressed his desire to play in the IPL earlier too even though he had decided against entering the auction.

The mega-auction ahead of the upcoming season is scheduled to be held on February 12 and 13 in Bengaluru.

On Wednesday, Australian pacer Mitchell Starc said he was also contemplating making a comeback to the IPL after a lengthy hiatus despite a hectic schedule that includes touring the subcontinent and the T20 World Cup title defence at home later this year.

Starc, who last played in the IPL in 2015, said he hasn't made the decision yet but entering his name for the league's mega auction, the nominations for which close on Friday, is "certainly on the table."

Starc clinched a contract worth Rs 9.4 crore with Kolkata Knight Riders in 2018 but had to be released because of an injury.

Despite being one of the most valuable T20 bowlers, the left-arm pacer has featured in just two seasons of the IPL due to injury and workload management.

In the 27 matches that he played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in 2014 and 2015, Starc snared 34 wickets at an economy rate of 7.16 and an impressive strike rate of 17.

Group C fixtures in ICC U-19 World Cup reworked

PTI ■ DUBAI

Afghanistan's late arrival into the Caribbean has forced the ICC to "rework" the fixtures in Group C for the 2022 U-19 World Cup, to be held in the West Indies from Friday.

"After successfully obtaining the necessary visas for travel, Afghanistan will arrive in the West Indies and undergo their required quarantine period," the ICC said in a statement.

The changes in the schedule were approved by the Event Technical Committee which



comprises Chris Tetley, ICC Head of Events (Chair); Ben Leaver, ICC Senior Event

Manager; Fawwaz Baksh, Tournament Director; Roland Holder, WICB Representative;

Alan Wilkins and Russel Arnold.

"We are delighted that the

Afghanistan squad have received the necessary visas and will be able to travel to participate in the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2022," Tetley said.

"We have reworked the fixtures for group C to ensure that all matches can take place within the allocated time frame and would like to thank the participating Members for their flexibility in finding a solution," he added.

To ensure all fixtures could be completed, four out of the six Group C matches in Trinidad and Tobago have been rescheduled as follows:

January 15 - Zimbabwe v PNG -- Queens Park Oval. Rescheduled from January 20.

January 17 - Pakistan v Zimbabwe -- Diego Martin Sporting Complex.

Rescheduled from January 22.

January 18 - Afghanistan v PNG -- Diego Martin Sporting Complex. Unchanged.

January 20 - Pakistan v Afghanistan -- Brian Lara Cricket Ground. Unchanged.

January 22 - Pakistan v PNG -- Queens Park Oval. Rescheduled from January 15



இனிய பொங்கல் நல் வாழ்த்துக்கள்

HAPPY Pongal

I wish everyone a Happy and Joyful Pongal. May God Bless us with a fabulous year ahead.

-Arvind Kejriwal
Chief Minister, Delhi



दिल्ली सरकार
आप की सरकार

Department of Art Culture and Language, Government of NCT of Delhi

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