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A SMALL LOSS FOR TENNIS,
MAJOR WIN FOR VAXXERS

WORLD 8

ISRAEL TO ROLL OUT COVID VAX FOR
CHILDREN BELOW 5 YEARS IN APRIL

MONEY 9

BUDGET COULD CONSIDER
LEVYING TDS ON CRYPTO TRADING

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JANUARY 17, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3

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KOHLI: CAPTAIN
WHO WENT FOR
WIN AT ALL COSTS
12 SPORT

CAPSULE

BREAKING COVID RULE:
BAGHEL BOOKED IN UP

Raipur: The Chhattisgarh Congress slammed the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government in Uttar Pradesh for registering an FIR against Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel for allegedly violating Covid-19 norms and claimed it showed the "frustration" of the ruling party in that State.

CENTRE REJECTS BOSE
TABLEAU FOR R-DAY

Kolkata: Expressing shock over the Centre's decision to exclude West Bengal's tableau commemorating Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his INA on the leader's 125th birth anniversary year, from the upcoming Republic Day Parade in Delhi, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to reconsider the decision. Banerjee also said that no reason was cited for the tableau's rejection, a decision, which she said had "pained" people.

'DON'T BUILD ROAD VIA
NEPALI TERRITORY'

Kathmandu: Nepal on Sunday once again reminded India not to construct any roads in Nepali territory unilaterally. This reaction comes in a response to a recent statement of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 30 in Uttarakhand. While addressing an election rally, Modi on December 30 announced that his government had built a road to Lipulekh and that there were more plans to extend it further. **P8**

VETERAN JOURNALIST
SAM RAJAPPA DIES

Kochi: Veteran journalist and political commentator Sam Rajappa is no more. He breathed his last early Sunday morning (IST) at Canada where he had gone to be with his elder son and family for Christmas and New Year vacation. Sam, who started his career with Free Press Journal and moved over to The Statesman as chief of New Delhi bureau was instrumental in launching India Today in 1975. **P5**

OVER 1.47L KIDS LOST
PARENTS DUE TO COVID

New Delhi: The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has informed the Supreme Court that a total of 1,47,492 children since April 1, 2020, have lost either their mother or father or both parents due to COVID-19 and other reasons. Giving the details in a suo motu matter on children in need of care and protection due to loss of parents during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCPCR said its figures are based on data uploaded by states and Union Territories on its 'Baal Swaraj Portal-COVID care' up to January 11. **P4**

THIEVES ROB TRAINS
FILLED WITH PACKAGES

Los Angeles: Photos and videos have gone viral on the social media showing empty boxes of major shipping companies like UPS, FedEx and Amazon, littered alongside rail tracks in Los Angeles County, as there has been a spike in freight train thefts, according to a media report.

BKU stands behind RLD-SP alliance

Naresh Tikait
urges people to
vote for coalition
candidates in
UP electionsPNS ■ NEW DELHI
/MUZAFFARNAGAR

In a new twist in the politics of Assembly poll-bound Uttar Pradesh (UP), the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) on Sunday openly came out in support of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

The news will come as another source of worry to UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who is facing rebellion from powerful Ministers and MLAs of the BJP belonging to the Other Backward Class (OBC) community.

"I hope people of the State will support the candidates of this (SP-RLD) coalition," BKU president Naresh Tikait said while addressing a gathering of farmers at Sisauli in Muzaffarnagar area of western UP which goes to polls in the first phase of the Assembly elections on February 10.

The endorsement could drastically alter the electoral scene in the Jat-dominated region where the ruling BJP did very well in the 2017 Assembly



polls.

Naresh Tikait not only made an appeal to the people to ensure a victory for the SP-RLD alliance but also handed over the symbol authority letters to two alliance nominees at Kisan Bhawan in Sisauli.

In a related development late in the evening, however, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha stated that any farmer organisations which will contest the elections will have to leave the united front.

The alliance of the RLD and SP on Saturday had announced its second list of seven candidates for the Assembly elections in which all candidates are members of the Jayant Chaudhary-led RLD. Accusing the BJP of indulging in polarisation in the run-up to the UP polls, Chaudhary on Sunday said the BJP is driving a "one-gear car" that is headed backwards, and asserted that the anti-Muslim rhetoric will not work as people are fed up of such politics.

The alliance has fielded

Rajpal Baliyan from Budhana and Chandan Chauhan from Meerapur, both in Muzaffarnagar district, and Ashraf Ali from Thana Bhawan

in Shamli who reportedly participated actively in the farmers' protest against the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

Last month top BKU leader Rakesh Tikait sent a strong message of the farmers' support when he joined Jayant Chaudhary during the remembrance ceremony of Jat stalwart leader and former Prime Minister late Chaudhary Charan Singh.

Western UP is dominated by Jat voters and almost a hundred Assembly seats are decided by this voter base, which is predominately agrarian.

Denied ticket, brother of Punjab
CM to contest as Independent

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi has a political rival in his own house. His younger brother Dr Manohar Singh, who gave up his Government job to test political waters, on Sunday declared that he would contest as an Independent from the Bassi Pathana constituency against the Congress nominee.

Growing up together, the two brothers are now divided by politics. Staking claims on the Bassi Pathana segment, Manohar was denied a party ticket owing to Congress' "one family, one ticket" rule.

It is because of this rule, the Congress' veterans like Sunil Jakhar and Brahm Mohindra have given up their claims on the party tickets to pave way for their next-generation leaders.

While Jakhar has vacated Abohar constituency for his nephew Sandeep Jakhar, Mohindra has given up his traditional Patiala Rural seat for his son and youth Congress leader Mohit Mohindra.

However, the Congress High Command's decision to field sitting legislator Gurpreet Singh GP from Bassi Pathana did not go down well with the Chief Minister's own brother.

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Ex-UP Min Chauhan
throws in lot with SP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Former Uttar Pradesh (UP) Minister Dara Singh Chauhan joined the Samajwadi Party (SP) on Sunday and accused the BJP of ditching the backward communities and conspiring to end the caste-based reservation system.

In the presence of SP president Akhilesh Yadav, Chauhan, levelled several charges against the BJP and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and claimed that Akhilesh Yadav would be the next Chief Minister of the State.

RK Verma, an MLA of the BJP's ally Apna Dal (Sonelal), also joined the SP on Sunday.

Quoting from the Mahabharata, he said that just as big masters were employed to stop Abhimanyu, similarly efforts have been made to stop Akhilesh Yadav, but he has overtaken everyone. Chauhan targeted the BJP Government and alleged that the BJP is killing the rights of the backward classes and conspiring to end reservation in educational institution for their children.

"All the Dalit and backward society people have now been mobilised. Nothing can stop



Former UP minister Dara Singh Chauhan (L) joins the Samajwadi Party in presence of party president Akhilesh Yadav, at party office in Lucknow, Sunday PTI

this tsunami now. This time in the Assembly elections, the SP Government will be formed and Akhilesh Yadav will again become the Chief Minister," he said.

"I have joined the SP with the honour of the Chauhan Samaj. The BJP had talked about development for all, but development happened for a few people. A conspiracy is being hatched to enslave people but the backward society

has woken up. No conspiracy will succeed," he said.

He said that Dalits and Backward people are not getting employment under the BJP's rule. The youth and the farmers of the State had once supported the BJP, but the saffron party cheated them. The youth are being lathi-charged. The BJP will pay the price for this. Now, people of every society are with the SP.

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India registers 2,71,202
new Covid-19 casesNation's jab drive
completes 1 yr,
over 157 cr doses
administered so far

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India registered 2,71,202 new Covid infections in a day — its highest daily count in eight months — in the last 24 hours. The overall Covid caseload surged to 3.71 crore on Sunday, which included 7,743 Omicron variant cases, according to the latest data by the Union Health Ministry on coronavirus.

With 1,702 cases of new variant of coronavirus in the past day, India saw a rise of 28.17 per cent in its Omicron tally. In the meantime, India on Sunday marked the first anniversary of the nationwide vaccination drive against Covid-19, with over 156.76 cr doses administered till date.

Lauding India's Covid-19



Paramilitary soldiers patrol a closed market during a weekend lockdown in Srinagar. Authorities announced complete restriction on non-essential movement during weekends to curb the spread of the coronavirus AP

vaccination drive as it completes a year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said it has added great strength to the fight against the pandemic and has resulted in saving lives and protecting livelihoods.

When the pandemic first struck, not much was known about the virus. However, our

scientists and innovators immersed themselves in developing vaccines, he noted. India feels proud that our nation has been able to contribute to fighting the pandemic through vaccines, Modi tweeted.

"It's the largest vaccination drive in the world. We've administered over 157 cr doses in a year and were able to provide vaccines to over 100 countries in line with our philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'," said ICMR Chief Dr Balram Bhargava. He hoped that even as the Covid cases are on increase, the severity will be less because of vaccination.

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India's Lakshya Sen produced a magnificent effort to beat world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 24-22 21-17 in the final of men's singles at the Indian Open. This is Sen's first BWF World Tour Super 500 title and third overall PTI

Keeping schools closed
in view of Covid spread
not justified: World Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The World Bank Global Education Director Jaime Saavedra has said there is no justification now for keeping schools closed in view of the pandemic and even if there are new waves, closing schools should be the last resort.

Saavedra, whose team has been tracking the impact of Covid-19 on the education sector, said there is no evidence that reopening schools has caused a surge in coronavirus cases and that the schools are not a "safe place".

He also asserted that it does not make sense from public-policy perspective to wait till children are vaccinated as there is "no science" behind it.

"There is no relation between opening schools and spread of coronavirus. There is no evidence linking the two

and there is no justification now to keep the schools closed. Even if there are new waves of Covid-19, closing schools should be the last resort," Saavedra told PTI in an interview from Washington.

"It does not make sense to keep restaurants, bars and shopping malls open and keep schools closed. There is no excuse," he added.

According to various simulations by the World Bank, health risks for children if schools are opened are low and the cost of the closure is extremely high.

"During 2020, we were navigating in a sea of ignorance. We just didn't know what is the best way of combating the pandemic and the immediate reaction of most countries in the world was let's close schools.

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Severe cold could freeze North India over next 3 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Many parts of North India could see severe cold conditions and dense fog over the next few days. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said cold day to severe cold day conditions are very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan during the next two days and over east Uttar Pradesh during the next three days. It also predicted dense to very dense fog over parts of northwest India till 19 January.

Meanwhile, various regions of North India on Sunday witnessed foggy conditions that



The homeless rest inside a night shelter on a cold winter morning, in New Delhi, Sunday

reduced visibility in parts of the city in the early hours of the day.

"A fresh western disturbance likely to affect Western Himalayan region from January 18. Another western disturbance is likely to affect northwest India from January 21," the IMD said.

In a post from its official handle on Twitter, the IMD warned of isolated to scattered rains and snowfall in several areas and also a very dense fog cover over others, most of these regions being in north-west India.

The IMD has warned of very dense fog over Rajasthan and east Uttar Pradesh during next two days and dense fog in

Jammu division and Himachal Pradesh today and tomorrow (Sunday and Monday), and over west Uttar Pradesh and north Madhya Pradesh during next two days.

In southern India, the IMD has predicted light to moderate rainfall over Telangana on January 16; over coastal Andhra Pradesh on January 16 and 17 and over Tamil Nadu, Kerala during next three days. Rainfall is also predicted over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura during on January 19 ad 20. In northern part, rain is likely in Himachal and Uttarakhand till January 20.

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Maha to consider reopening schools in next 15 days: Min

Jalna: The demand for reopening of schools in Maharashtra will be considered after the next 10-15 days as there is a low incidence of coronavirus infection in children and students are suffering education loss, State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said here on Sunday.

He said the final decision will be taken by Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Schools have been shut in Maharashtra till February 15 due to the rise in COVID-19 cases across the state.

"Demands are rising from certain quarters for reopening of schools as children are suffering the education loss. We will consider it after 10-15

days as there is a low (rate of) infection among children. The chief minister will take the final call in this regard," Tope told reporters.

Expressing concern over the rise in infections, Tope said that the people seem to be not afraid of the coronavirus. "The COVID protocols must be followed strictly. Common people, as well as politicians, should avoid crowding," he added.

Speaking on the current scenario of the pandemic, the health minister said that though the cases are surging in Maharashtra, the number of hospitalisations and the need for medical oxygen remain low.

On the first anniversary of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, the state health minister said that 10-15 per cent of the eligible people in Maharashtra remain to be vaccinated as taking the jab is voluntary.

"This is a challenge for the health department to ensure a cent per cent vaccination and we will make it possible," he added.

Maharashtra on Saturday recorded 42,462 new coronavirus infections, 749 less than Friday, besides 23 deaths, the state health department had said.

The overall caseload stands at 71,70,483, and the death toll at 1,41,779 as of Saturday. **PTI**

Bengal Minister invites Elon Musk to set up business in State, BJP mocks proposal

Kolkata: West Bengal on Sunday made a pitch for a piece of the electric vehicle revolution as one of its ministers sent an invite to Tesla founder and CEO Elon Musk to "drop here" and set up his business in the state, days after the industrialist tweeted that he was trying to work through some challenges with the Centre.

The US-based company, which is looking to launch its products in India, had last year sought a reduction in import duties so that his company's high-performance electric cars can begin to sell in India.

The heavy industries ministry had asked the electric car major to first start manufacturing its iconic vehicles in

India before any tax concessions are considered.

Responding to a tweet on the company's plans to launch its products in India, Musk had written on January 13, "Still working through a lot of challenges with the government."

Md Ghulam Rabbani, the Bengal minister for minority development and madrasa education, on Sunday invited the business magnate to the state, drawing sharp reaction from the BJP, which reminded the TMC minister that it was his party that had driven out Tata's car project some 14 years ago.

"Drop here, we in West Bengal have best infra & our leader @MamataOfficial has got the vision. Bengal means Business," Rabbani posted on

the microblogging platform as reply to Musk's January 13 tweet.

Tatas, which had set its sights in Singur for a small car factory, was forced to pull out of Bengal in 2008 following a massive agitation led by the TMC over forcible land acquisition for the project.

Mocking Rabbani, BJP's IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya sought to remind him of the state's past records.

"You might think it is a joke. But it isn't! West Bengal's minister in charge for Minority Affairs and Madrasa Education has made an offer to Elon Musk to come invest in WB. His pitch will start with Mamata Banerjee's record on post poll violence and end

with Singur agitation?" Malviya tweeted.

Other states such as Maharashtra and Telangana have made similar pitches to invite the electric car maker to their respective states.

K T Rama Rao, the industry and commerce minister of Telangana, said that it would happy to partner with Tesla in working through the challenges, while Maharashtra Water Resources Minister Jayant Patil has assured all possible help to the car maker.

Last year, Tesla India Motors And Energy Private Ltd, a subsidiary of Tesla Inc, registered itself as a company in Bengaluru for its India operations. **PTI**

MP's famous 'Collarwali' tigress dies in Pench Reserve

Seoni: "Collarwali", the famous tigress of Madhya Pradesh's Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR), who had earned the tag of "supermom" for giving birth to 29 cubs, has died, officials said.

The 17-year-old tigress, also known as T15, died on Saturday evening, they said.

She had given birth to 29 cubs in eight litters during the span of 11 years - between 2008 and 2018 - the officials said.

Talking to PTI, an official from the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) confirmed about the death of the tigress without disclosing any other information.

The tigress, who looked very weak due to old age, was last seen on January 14 by the PTR visitors.

According to experts, the average age of a tiger is about 12 years.

This female cub was radio-collared in March 2008. After that radio collar stopped functioning, she was again radio-collared in January 2010. The tigress later became famous as "Collarwali" or T15 tigress, the officials said.

Collarwali had first given birth to three cubs in May 2008, but they could not survive. For the last time, the tigress delivered four cubs in December 2018, which took the number of her cubs to 29. Officials feel that this number could be a record, they said.

Of the total number of 29 cubs, 25 survived, the officials added.

In a rare occurrence, Collarwali, born as one of the four cubs to famous tigress T-7 in September, 2005, had given birth to a litter of five cubs (four females and one male) on October 23, 2010, the officials said.

Madhya Pradesh, with 526 big cats, had emerged as the "tiger state" of the country in 2018. **PTI**

Respite from intense cold in Kashmir as Min temp improves at many places

Srinagar: There was some respite from the intense cold wave conditions in Kashmir as the minimum temperature improved by several degrees, officials said here on Sunday.

The night temperature at most places in the valley on Saturday night was above normal for this part of the season, the officials said.

The minimum temperature in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, settled at a low of minus 1.2 degrees Celsius - over three degrees up from the previous night's minus 4.5 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

Gulmarg, the famous skiing resort in Baramulla district of north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 7 degrees Celsius, up 2.5 degrees from the previous night.

Pahalgam in south Kashmir Anantnag district, which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra,

recorded a low of minus 5.4 degrees Celsius, six degrees up from the previous night, they said.

The officials said Qazigund, the gateway town to the valley, recorded a minimum of minus 3.4 degrees Celsius, while the nearby south Kashmir town of Kokernag recorded a low of minus 4.5 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature in Kupwara in north Kashmir settled at a low of minus 2.1 degrees Celsius.

The MET Office said under the influence of a feeble Western Disturbance, the weather is most likely to remain generally cloudy with possibility of very light to light rain/snow in plains of J-K during Sunday to Wednesday and light to moderate snowfall over the higher reaches.

There is no forecast of any major rain/snow till the end of this month, it said. **PTI**

Major fire at Secunderabad club in Hyderabad; no casualties reported

Hyderabad: A massive fire broke out at the Secunderabad Club's main building here in the early hours of Sunday, officials said.

However, there were no casualties, police said.

The fire occurred in the ground-plus two-storeyed building of the club at 3 AM and a call was received by the Fire Control Room at 03.15 AM, said a press release from Telangana State Disaster Response and Fire Services Department.

Visuals on social media showed the heritage building engulfed in flames.

Immediately, fire-tenders, including one from the Army, went to the spot.

The building was built mostly with wood and the blaze spread rapidly, so a multi-purpose tender was rushed to the scene, they said.

The internal wooden staircase of the building was completely destroyed, hence the fire-fighting operations were done from the external staircase, said Regional Fire Officer (Central Region- Hyderabad) V Papaiah.

He said the external staircase didn't have access to the first and second floors of the building, so it was with great difficulty the flames were doused from the windows of the first and the second floors.

However, the fire was contained after a three-hour battle and the flames were extinguished by 8:40 AM.

The cause of the blaze is under investigation and the loss of property under assessment, the senior official added. It was a major fire. The cause is suspected to be a short circuit, a police official said. **PTI**

National Start-up Day: Lack of pair of bullocks spurs Maha man to make small tractor

Aurangabad: A man in Maharashtra's Beed district has become a good example of the ingenuity that is powering start-ups in the country by building an 18 horsepower tractor to tide over the need for a pair of bullocks to help with farming.

Speaking to PTI on National Start-up Day, Namdev Anerav (36) of Pimpalner, some 160 kilometres from here, said the idea of a tractor with a width of just 1.5 feet and length of 5 feet came to him in 2008 after the need for a pair of bullocks was stalling farming on his ancestral plot.

"Big tractors cannot perform optimally on small plots. To overcome this limitation, I created this small tractor, which runs on petrol and diesel. After a long process of trial and error, I used my welding skills to build the first prototype in 2011-12.

The final product can plough, remove grass, break clods of soil," he said.

"I need to deliver 40 such tractors in the next four months, for which I have employed seven people. I plan to start a full scale facility in Pimpalner to provide employment. I started with Rs 1.10 lakh of my own and 28 investors put in Rs 8 lakh. The investment is worth Rs 1.10 crore now," he said. The manufacturing unit had to be shifted from Pimpalner to Shendra in Aurangabad due to electricity supply issues, he said, adding that his product got patented in July last year. Namdev's mentor and Marathwada Accelerator for Growth and Incubation Council (MAGIC) director Ashish Garde said MAGIC is India's first regional industrial association led incubator.

Lata Mangeskar's condition improving: Maha Health Minister

Jalna: The health condition of legendary singer Lata Mangeskar, who remains admitted in the ICU of a hospital in Mumbai, is improving, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said here on Sunday. The 92-year-old singer tested positive for coronavirus with mild symptoms and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) last week. **PTI**

Ex-UP Min...

From Page 1

On this occasion, Akhilesh Yadav said that people of Dalit and Backward society have understood that the BJP is working on the policy of privatisation so that reservation can be abolished and the Constitution of the country can be weakened.



A volunteer teaches underprivileged children in an open classroom in Moradabad, on Sunday

Severe cold could freeze North India over next 3 days..

From Page 1

Cold weather conditions prevailed in many parts of Punjab and Haryana on Sunday with Chandigarh, the common Capital of the two States, recording a low of 8.2 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperatures in the two States have also registered a sharp fall and have been hovering in the range of 11 degrees Celsius to 14 degrees Celsius. In Punjab, Gurdaspur recorded a minimum temperature of 5.6 degrees Celsius while Bathinda saw the mercury settle at 6.2 degrees Celsius, according to the meteorological department.

Patiala experienced a cold night at 7.5 degrees Celsius. Jalandhar recorded a low of 8.6 degrees while Moga registered a low of 6.3 degrees Celsius. Ludhiana's minimum settled at

8.7 degrees Celsius while Amritsar recorded a low of 8.4 degrees. Hisar in Haryana reeled under intense cold, recording a minimum temperature of 6.8 degrees while Ambala recorded a low of 7.7 degrees Celsius. Sirsa also experienced a cold night recording a low of 6.1 degrees Celsius while Gurgaon's minimum settled at 7.2 degrees. Meanwhile, there was some respite from the intense cold wave conditions in Kashmir as the minimum temperature improved by several degrees. The night temperature at most places in the valley on Saturday night was above normal for this part of the season.

The minimum temperature in Srinagar, the summer Capital of Jammu and Kashmir, settled at a low of minus 1.2 degrees Celsius - over three degrees up from the previous

night's minus 4.5 degrees Celsius. Gulmarg, the famous skiing resort in the Baramulla district of north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 7 degrees Celsius, up 2.5 degrees from the previous night.

Pahalgam in south Kashmir Anantnag district, which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 5.4 degrees Celsius, six degrees up from the previous night. Kashmir valley is currently under the grip of the 40-day harshest winter period known as "Chilla-i-Kalan" which began on December 21 last year. The "Chilla-i-Kalan" will end on January 31, but the cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir with a 20-day-long "Chillai-Khur" (small cold) and a 10-day-long "Chillai-Bachha" (baby cold).

India registers 2,71,202...

From Page 1

The active Covid cases now comprise 4.18 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has decreased to 94.51 per cent. An increase of 1,32,557 cases has been recorded in the active Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry data updated this morning.

The daily positivity rate saw a marginal improvement from 16.66 per cent to 16.28 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 13.69 per cent. The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide vaccination drive has exceeded 156.76 crore, the

Ministry said.

The 314 new fatalities include 106 from Kerala and 39 from West Bengal. Of the total deaths reported so far in the country, 1,41,779 are from Maharashtra, 50,674 from Kerala, 38,418 from Karnataka, 36,967 from Tamil Nadu, 25,335 from Delhi, 22,953 from Uttar Pradesh and 20,052 from West Bengal. Covid cases have been on the rise since late last year due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant, first identified in Botswana and South Africa. The total number of Covid-19 registered worldwide since the start of the pandemic topped 300 million, according to an AFP count based on official figures.

Denied ticket, Punjab CM's brother to...

From Page 1

Notably, Bassi Pathana constituency falls in the Puaadh cultural region and is considered to be the home turf of Chief Minister Channi and his community.

Day after the Congress announced its first list of 86 candidates for the February 14 elections, the party was hit by rebellion at several seats, with many prominent leaders switching sides, and some others expected to announce their decision in coming days. However, the revolt by the Chief Minister's younger brother, days ahead of Punjab polls, is expected to hit the party hard.

Manohar had, in August 2021, resigned as a Senior Medical Officer from the Kharar civil hospital, to take an electoral plunge. He even went on to organise a huge rally to stake claim for the Bassi

Punjab's other political families divided by politics

Badal Family: Punjab's most prominent political family, the Badals, was hit by political ambitions when Manpreet Singh Badal was expelled from SAD. Manpreet, currently Punjab's Finance Minister, is the nephew of the five-time chief minister and Akali patriarch Parkash Singh Badal. Now, he is top Congress leader, while his cousin Sukhbir Singh Badal is heading SAD.

Bajwa family: Congress' Rajya Sabha MP and Gurdaspur's former MP Partap Singh Bajwa, who has returned to the state politics, is expected to face his younger brother Fatehjung Bajwa as BJP nominee in their home turf, Qadian. Partap Bajwa's wife, Charanjit Kaur, represented the Qadian seat after he was elected as Gurdaspur MP, who later vacated the seat for Fatehjung. But with Partap Bajwa now making a comeback in the

state politics and staking a claim on Qadian, his younger brother went on to join the BJP. Congress has now fielded Pratap Bajwa as its candidate.

Randeep Singh Nabha and Jasdeep Singh Nikku: Agriculture Minister and senior Congress leader Randeep Singh Nabha also has a political rival in the family. His brother Jasdeep Singh Nikku has joined the Aam Aadmi Party.

Patiala royal family: Maharaja of Patiala and former Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has joined hands with the BJP after floating his own party and leaving Congress following a bitter tussle with Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu. However, his wife and Patiala MP Preneet Kaur is still representing Congress in Lok Sabha. But, Preneet has openly declared to support her husband, for which she had been issued a show-cause notice also.

Pathana Assembly seat, besides holding small public meetings.

An MBBS and MD, Manohar also holds a post-graduate degree in journalism and has also studied law.

Dubbing the decision of the Congress giving ticket to Gurpreet Singh GP as "injustice" with the people of the constituency Manohar alleged that the sitting MLA was "incapable and ineffective". Several prominent people of Bassi Pathana area have asked me to fight as an independent and I will go by what they have said. There is no chance of going back and I will surely fight the polls," he said.

"I will contest as an Independent and ensure the defeat of the sitting Congress MLA who has been fielded again," Manohar was seen telling a gathering of supporters in a video. He maintained that he decided to contest as an Independent after meeting several councillors, village sarpanch, and panch who asked him to fight the polls. "People told me that it was wrong to give the ticket to him (Gurpreet).

Keeping schools closed in view of Covid spread not justified, says...

From Page 1

Time has passed since then and with evidence coming in from late 2020 and 2021, we have had several waves and there are several countries which have opened schools," he said.

"We have been able to see if schools opening have had an impact in the transmission of virus and new data shows it doesn't. Many countries have also had waves when schools were closed so obviously there has been no role of schools in some of the spikes.

"Even if the kids can get infected and with the Omicron it is happening even more but fatalities and serious illness among children is extremely rare. The risks for children are low and costs are extremely high," he added.

Asked about the

concerns of children not being vaccinated yet, he said, "There is no country which has put the condition of reopening schools only after children are vaccinated. Because there is no science behind it and it does not make sense from public policy perspective."

Talking about the impact of school closures due to the pandemic in India, Saavedra said the "impact is more severe than previously thought" and the learning poverty is likely to increase much more than anticipated. Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10.

"The learning poverty in India is expected to increase from 55 per cent to 70 per cent due to learning loss and more out-of-school children. Learning adjusted years of

schooling is estimated to fall almost one full year of schooling while the average annual earnings might shrink in a pessimistic scenario by nine per cent per student in future."

"In countries like India where the inequalities in education were already prevalent before the pandemic and the learning poverty levels were already gigantic, there is a lot at stake. Nearly two years later, schools remain closed for millions of children, and others may never return to school," he said.

"The loss of learning that many children are experiencing is morally unacceptable. And the potential increase of learning poverty might have a devastating impact on future productivity, earnings, and well-being for this generation of children and youth, their families, and the world's economies," he further said.

Rationalising the curriculum, reorganising the academic calendar, preparing the teachers for the huge task ahead are among the suggestions that the World Bank has to reduce long-term learning

losses caused by closure of schools during the pandemic.

"There is a critical need to have more data on learning losses from the states and the country as a whole. Ideally this data will be in the form of personalised student level learning data since the situation is very heterogeneous at the children level.

"This focus on having personalised learning data is aligned with best practices, and is in line with our advice we are currently providing to countries. Again, the numbers we present are World Bank simulations showing what happens if reopening school systems is not made a priority. These numbers can be reversed if governments can act now," he said.

A 2020 report by the World Bank Education, titled "Beaten or Broken? Informality and Covid-19 in South Asia", had predicted that the prolonged closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic in India may cause a loss of over USD 400 billion in the country's future earnings.

Curbs helped contain spread of Covid: Jain

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Sunday that corona cases in Delhi have decreased over the last three days and the weekend curfew is proving to be beneficial, as fewer and fewer people are venturing outside, limiting the spread of corona.

Briefing reporters on Covid-19 situation in the national Capital, Jain said, “Cases are decreasing though the State Government is still trying to implement all the best practices.” “Those who are unvaccinated are at risk of contracting Corona more than the rest. Delhi is in good shape at large, and the Government is prepared to deal with even the most serious of situations,” he added.

Adding furthermore, he said it is a good sign that cases are declining hoping that this trend continues. “Optimum number of beds are available in Delhi; hospitalisation rates have plateaued hopefully positivity rates will also come down, 100 percent of eligible individuals have been jabbed with first dose of vaccination, request everyone to get their second dose as soon as possible, Jain said congratulating health workers and frontline workers on the completion of one year of vaccination drive.

Providing details on the Covid situation, Jain said that the cases in Delhi have been declining for the past three days. On January 14, Delhi



recorded approximately 24,383 positive cases, while on the 15th of January, Delhi recorded 20,178 new cases, and today, Delhi is expected to record 17,000 positive cases. Weekend curfews have played a significant role in this decline. This trend indicates that the number of cases in Delhi is decreasing, but the Government is still keeping a close eye on the covid cases, and it will take some time to understand the trend.

The Delhi Government is prepared to arrange a total of 37 thousand beds in. At the moment, 15,000 beds are operational. We can double the number of beds overnight if necessary, but because the number of hospitalised patients is currently so low, the need to increase the number of beds doesn't seem to arise soon. The government, on the other hand, is fully prepared to deal with the most dire of situations. In Delhi, the hospitalisation rate is currently very low.

In Delhi's hospitals, 13,000 beds remain currently vacant. Patients who are hospitalised due to coronavirus are either unvaccinated or have comorbidities.

PICTALK



Closed shops at a market during the weekend curfew imposed by the Delhi Government to curb the spread of Covid-19, in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Covid tests in city 3 times the number recommended by ICMR, says Minister

New Delhi: Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Sunday sought to allay concerns over "fewer" Covid tests being conducted in the national capital, saying the city is conducting three times more diagnostic tests than the number recommended by the ICMR.

All those who need to undergo testing are being tested, he said. According to the Centre's new guidelines, asymptomatic patients do not need to undergo a test. Also, contacts of laboratory confirmed Covid-19 patients need not get tested unless they have comorbidities or are aged above 60.

Jain said these new guidelines on testing have come after thoughtful consideration.

"Delhi has been conducting 60,000 to 1 lakh tests every day," he said. The city is conducting three times more Covid tests than the number recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research, he added.

Delhi conducted 67,624 tests on Friday and 79,578 on Thursday. On Thursday, the national capital reported 28,867 Covid-19 cases, the sharpest single-day spike since the beginning of the pandemic, after 98,832 tests were conducted the day before. *PTI*

Delhi logs 18,286 fresh cases

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday recorded another fall in its daily Covid cases with 18,286 fresh cases and 27.87 percent test positivity rate, according to state health Covid -19 bulletin.

While the national capital reported 21,846 recoveries and 28 deaths in the same period. With this, the active cases have dropped to 89,819.

Notably, the city had reported 20,718 cases and 30 deaths on Saturday.

In the last two days, the daily infections have come down by about 10,000. Delhi had recorded 28,867 cases, the highest single-day spike since the beginning of the pandemic, with a positivity rate of 29.21%.

According to the Delhi government database, the previous biggest daily jump of 28,395 cases was recorded on April 20, 2021.

PM proved Delhi Govt most honest: Kejriwal tells Goa

New Delhi/Goa: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who was in Goa on Sunday to campaign for the Aam Aadmi Party ahead of next month's election - offered novel 'proof' of his party's honesty and track record that raids ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had failed to find evidence of wrong-doing.

The AAP supremo began his press briefing accusing the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) of taking bribes to fill Government posts saying, "If Goa people voted for AAP, the party will ensure 'equality of opportunity.'" "This claim of a corruption-free government - had been questioned by Goa's youth and that their concerns were valid because 'before elections everyone will say 'our party is the best' ". "In Delhi we did this., a certificate was provided by PM Modi, who conducted raids on Deputy CM Manish Sisodia were done by the CBI, by police. They set up a commission to examine 400 of our files, but they couldn't find one mistake," he said. The Chief Minister of Delhi, Kejriwal announced AAP's 13-point vision plan for Goa and said every family there will get direct benefit of Rs 10 lacs in five years if AAP comes to power.

"Every family will receive free electricity, water, health, and education services, as well as a three-thousand-rupee unemployment allowance and a one-thousand-rupee allowance for women, saving each family two lakh rupees per year, AAP has emerged as the only hope for Goans and public knows they now have a chance to bring change," he added.

Authorities step up efforts to vaccinate staff, shopkeepers at markets across Delhi

New Delhi: Amid a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases, authorities in Delhi have stepped up efforts to ensure 100 per cent vaccination of the staff and the shopkeepers at markets across the national capital.

In several districts, the market associations have been asked to ensure that the shopkeepers and the other staff have received both doses of a Covid vaccine and to submit the certificates of the same at the respective district administration offices.

Two city markets -- Sarojini Nagar and the Janpath market -- have already been declared as fully-vaccinated markets by the district administration.

"Vaccination is the only thing that can save people from Covid. So it is crucial that everyone in a market, which has the potential of becoming a super spreader, is fully vaccinated. Instructions have been issued to the market associations to ensure the same and submit supportive documents to us at the earliest," an official in Southeast district told PTI.

Major markets where the associations have been asked to provide the details of the vaccination status and ensure 100 per cent vaccination of the employees include the Lajpat Nagar market, the Bengali market, the Kamla Nagar market, the Krishna Nagar market and the Rajouri Garden market.

The shopkeepers and vendors at the Lajpat Nagar market have been asked by the administration to submit the vaccination certificates of all the shop owners and the staff. *PTI*

EDMC introduces web-enabled work flow system

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to ensure online approval of administrative and technical sanctions of buildings, East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) introduced a web-enabled work flow system 'PRICE' software (Project Information and Cost Estimation).

Shyam Sunder Aggarwal, Mayor of East Delhi, while introducing the system along with Beer Singh Panwar, Chairman of Standing Committee and Vikas Anand, Commissioner of EDMC said that 'PRICE' will lead to preparation of estimates of development works in an efficient and transparent manner.

Mayor said that preparation of estimates regarding civil and electrical works of buildings, the EDMC has followed CPWD Rate Analysis (DAR) and approved rates with cost index. With this Application, estimates preparation can be done for plan/non plan works.

Commissioner Vikas Anand said that 'PRICE' will also help in speedy approval of estimates which reduces delay in issue of administrative and technical sanctions, transparency and accountability will also be ensured.

"The higher authority can view the estimate and return for correction (online) while file History will be maintained for all estimates and Quick retrieval of data. It will also help in auto generation of Administrative and technical sanction while issuing sanction," he added.

While elaborating the 'PRICE', Dr Venkatesh BG, Incharge, Information Technology Department said that the system is a complete e-platform solution for the management of all public works.

Delhi court dismisses bail plea of Sulli Deals app creator

New Delhi: A Delhi court has dismissed the bail plea of Sulli Deals app creator Aumkareshwar Thakur, saying that granting him relief at this juncture will prejudice a fair investigation.

In July, 2021, the app was made on Github platform to auction Muslim women and the matter came to light when the Delhi Police took suo moto cognisance of this matter.

Metropolitan Magistrate Vasundhra Chhaunkar passed the order on Saturday after hearing arguments from the accused as well the prosecution. During the arguments, the police claimed that it has come to light that the accused is a member of 'Trade Mahasabha' and he created the app on GitHub, and he and other people posted pictures of Muslim women for online auction. "Prima facie, at this stage, the arguments of the counsel for the accused do not hold water as certainly the women of Muslim community only have been targeted by posting their pictures for auction," the court held.

The court at this stage cannot ignore the peculiar facts of the case which reflect upon the severity and gravity of the alleged acts of the accused, it said. *PTI*

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Consider permanent reallocation of power from NTPC stations, DERC urges Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) has written to the Delhi Government, urging it to consider permanent reallocation of power from NTPC stations.

According to the letter, the matter of surrender of power from Dadri-I is sub-judice and NTPC has filed an Appeal before the Supreme Court of India against Interim Order passed by the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (APTEL).

Average power purchase cost of Delhi is higher as compared to many other States due to higher allocation from the costly power plants, it said.

"NTPC Gas based stations like Anta, Auraiya and Dadri-Gas have higher generation cost and their 25 years period from date of CoD have already expired in case of Anta and Auraiya and will end shortly on March 31, 2022 in the case of Dadri-Gas," it reads.

In view of higher generation cost and expiry of PPA, they may be considered for permanent reallocation to other needy States, it said.

Fin Min holds pre-Budget meet with BJP functionaries

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a pre-Budget exercise, Union finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday held a stakeholders' consultation with BJP's party representatives from 25 States.

BJP National Spokesperson and economic cell in-charge Gopal Krishna Agarwal said BJP representations were from "industries, professionals, business communities, academicians, economists including people from Tribal and backward classes and women community."

The discussions centered round giving incentives to marginalized sections as also giving right fillip to business activities in the country in the aftermath of Covid19.

"About 20 written submissions have been received, which will be compiled and submitted to the finance-Minister", said the BJP leader.

Representatives from 25 States participated in this discussion, including from North-eastern states like Mizoram,



Tripura and from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Ladakh and southern states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Telangana.

States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa were amongst many more states from central and North India "making effective pitch for the development of their regions", said Agarwal.

Some prominent think tanks and Morchas president also presented their views and suggestions.

Senior central party leaders conducted the proceed-

ings from party head-quarter here at Deen Dayal Marg.

State party President from respective state party offices, were also present in the hybrid mode.

Finance Minister Sitharaman, in her concluding remarks thanked all the BJP participants for their important inputs.

Sitharaman is to present the Union Budget 2022-23 on February 1. The budget session of Parliament will commence on January 31 with the address of President Ram Nath Kovind to both the Houses.

BJP's politics of hatred harmful for country: RaGa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said the BJP's politics of "hatred" is very harmful for the country and is also responsible for unemployment.

The attack came a day after Rahul Gandhi attacked the BJP government by posting an online Twitter poll asking his followers which are the present regimes biggest shortcomings.

"Domestic and foreign industries cannot run without social peace. Will defeat this growing hatred around you everyday with brotherhood. Are you with me? #NoHate," Rahul Gandhi asked on a Twitter post.

In an online quiz a day earlier, Rahul had asked people about the "biggest shortcoming" of the BJP government and gave them three options to choose from including "unemployment", "tax extortion", "price rise" and an "atmosphere of hatred".

The poll elicited 3,47,396



votes, with most of them (35 per cent) voting for the fourth option, indicating the prevalence of hateful atmosphere was the central government's biggest failure.

According to the post, the second biggest failure of the government was unemployment, with 28 per cent of those interacting with the poll voting for it.

Two days ago, Rahul chose the newest craze on social media, Wordle, to take a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government.

SC raps Punjab & Haryana HC over order upholding life term

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to the manner in which the Punjab and Haryana High Court had passed an order upholding the conviction and life sentence awarded to a man, the Supreme Court has said any first appeal in a murder case cannot be dealt in this way.

The apex court noted that in the high court's March 2020 order, the conclusion was recorded in a paragraph in "four lines in general terms" to dismiss the appeal filed by the appellant, who is stated to be over 80-year-old A bench of justices S K Kaul and M M Sundresh, which allowed the appeal filed by the man who had challenged the high court order, remitted the matter back for consideration before the high court.

"The appeal before the high court was against the conviction under section 302 (murder) of the IPC (Indian Penal Code) and by the impugned order dated March 2, 2020 after noticing the tes-

timony of the witnesses, the conclusion is recorded in para 15 in four lines in general terms to dismiss the appeal," the bench said in its January 6 order.

"We do believe that a first appeal in a murder case cannot be dealt with in this fashion," the top court said while setting aside the high court order.

The apex court made it clear that since it had earlier exempted the appellant from surrendering and he is "stated to be more than 80 years of age and has been on bail in the proceedings before the high court", he would continue to be on bail, subject to the terms set out in the April 22, 2020 order.

It said the terms set out earlier would be modified to the extent that the appellant would report to the local police station in the forenoon on the first Monday of every month.

The man had earlier approached the high court challenging the October 2005 order of a sessions court in Bhiwani which had convicted and sentenced him to undergo a life term in the case.

SC asks Patna court to complete Bihar trader murder trial in 3 mths

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed a Patna local court to complete the trial within three months in the case of gunning down of the head of a traders' association in Bihar's Bihta in 2017.

A bench of justices L Nageswara Rao and Hrishikesh Roy, which had earlier cancelled the bail granted by the Patna High Court to an accused in the murder case, was perturbed over the slow pace of the trial.

The top court took note of the submission of lawyer Smarhar Singh, appearing for Ajay Kumar, brother of the deceased trader, that the testi-

monies of all witnesses have been recorded and moreover, the accused have no witness to produce now in the case.

"We are informed by learned counsel for the petitioner that the evidence of the prosecution witnesses was recorded prior to 2019. Though time was sought for production of defence witnesses, ultimately, the accused informed the court that they have no witnesses."

"As the evidence of all witnesses has already been recorded, we direct the trial court to complete the trial within a period of three months from today," the apex court noted this in its order of January 5.

EC cell to share info on tainted candidates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) has created a dedicated cell to deal with candidates having criminal antecedents following the Supreme Court ruling last year. A dedicated mobile application naming 'Know Your Candidate' containing information regarding criminal antecedents of the candidates as declared by them.

Moreover, a dedicated fund has been created for voter's awareness campaign and to make available the information regarding criminal antecedents of all contesting candidates for the general public. Any fine imposed by the Supreme Court on political parties regarding non-compliance of its above orders is to be submitted in the above fund. The poll panel has stressed that candidates as well as the concerned political party shall issue a declaration in media about the antecedents of the candidate.

As per the guidelines, it will

be mandatory for political parties to upload on their website detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases (including the nature of the offence, and relevant particulars such as whether charges have been framed, the concerned Court, the case number etc.) who have been selected as candidates, along with the reasons for such selection, and also as to why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates.

The reasons as to selection shall be with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned, and not mere 'winnability' at the polls. This information also needs to be published in one local vernacular newspaper and one national newspaper; on the official social media platforms of the political party, including Facebook and Twitter.

For ensuring periodic awareness of electors during the campaign, the EC has now

prescribed a certain timeline for publicity of criminal antecedents: within first 4 days of withdrawal of nominations, between next 5th - 8th days, and from 9th day till the last day of campaign (the second day prior to date of poll).

Last year, the apex court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to create a dedicated mobile application containing information published by the candidates regarding their criminal antecedents so that voter gets information on his or her mobile phone at one stroke.

"Political parties are to publish information regarding criminal antecedents of candidates on the homepage of their websites, thus making it easier for the voter to get to the information that has to be supplied. It will also become necessary now to have on the homepage a caption which states 'candidates with criminal antecedents'," the bench said in its 71-page verdict.

CBI arrests GAIL's Ranganathan in bribery case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has arrested Director (Marketing), Gas Authority of India, New Delhi, ES Ranganathan and five others during the investigation of a bribery case. The agency recovered cash of Rs 1.29 crore and gold jewellery and other valuables from the premises of the accused GAIL official besides Rs 84 lakh from the possession of the accused private persons representing private firms also accused in the case.

Besides the GAIL Director, the agency arrested Pawan Gaur, Delhi (a private person); N Ramakrishnan Nair, Gurgaon (another private person); Rajesh Kumar, New Delhi, Director of Rishabh Polychem Pvt. Ltd, Saurabh Gupta, Panchkula, of United Polymer Industries, Chandigarh; Aditya Bansal, Karnal of Bansal Agencies, Karnal, Haryana.

Before the arrests, the agency conducted searches at the premises of the accused at Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Panchkula and Karnal till late on Saturday which led to recovery of Rs 84 lakh, including recovery of Rs 75 lakh from Gurgaon-based private person N Ramakrishnan Nair.

Searches at the premises of GAIL Director led to his arrest and recovery of the cash and other valuables, including jewellery.

Earlier, the CBI has registered a case against eight accused including Director (Marketing) GAIL, private persons, private companies and unknown public servants/private persons, the CBI said in a statement.

"The allegations are that the Director (Marketing), GAIL (a Central Public Sector Undertaking), was allegedly indulging into corrupt and illegal activities in conspiracy with other accused who

were acting as his middle-man, by obtaining bribe from the private companies buying petro chemical products marketed by the GAIL," it said.

It was further alleged that at the direction of the representative of an accused private company, a private person had requested the GAIL Director for allowing some discount to the buyers on petro chemical products being marketed by the PSU in lieu of illegal gratification.

It was also alleged that Nair has also collected Rs 40 lakh from the other accused earlier in this matter.

The CBI laid a trap and apprehended a private person and a Director of a private company based at Delhi when the alleged bribe of Rs. 10 lakh was received by the private person representing the accused private firm on behalf of, Director (Marketing) GAIL, it added.

Coronavirus will never go away fully, says WHO representative

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The way the novel coronavirus pandemic is developing suggests that the virus will never go away completely, WHO Representative to Russia Melita Vujnovic said on Sunday.

The virus will circulate as an endemic disease, a news agency quoted Vujnovic as saying on a channel.

"Coronavirus is on its way to becoming an endemic disease. This means it won't go away. But we have to learn how to treat it and how to protect ourselves from it."

"Most importantly, we need to contain the outbreak of the infection now and reduce the number of those vulnerable to it. Otherwise, new variants will emerge in an unpredictable fashion," she said.

Further, Vujnovic noted that evidence indicates that the Omicron variant is less severe than other strains. However, its dangers should not be underestimated, and it is too early for humanity to relax, she said.

"There is evidence now that Omicron seems to be less serious than (previous variants), but this does not mean that it should not be taken seriously. The coronavirus infection may lead to very serious consequences," she said.

"Apart from vaccination, it is of utmost importance now to follow other safeguards as well: to wear a face mask and change it at recommended intervals, to ventilate rooms and avoid large groups of people in confined spaces. This is very important," Vujnovic said.

A survey conducted by journal Nature also showed

that many scientists expect the virus that causes Covid-19 to become endemic, but it could pose less danger over time.

More than one-third of the respondents to Nature's survey thought that it would be possible to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 from some regions while it continued to circulate in others. In zero-COVID regions there would be a continual risk of disease outbreaks, but they could be quenched quickly by herd immunity if most people had been vaccinated.

"I guess Covid will be eliminated from some countries, but with a continuing (and maybe seasonal) risk of reintroduction from places where vaccine coverage and public health measures have not been good enough," said Christopher Dye, an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford, UK.

India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage crosses 156 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage has crossed 156 crore with more than 57 lakh vaccine doses administered on Saturday, the Union Health Ministry said.

The daily vaccination tally is expected to increase with the compilation of the final reports for the day by late night. Cumulatively, 52,40,53,061 first doses have been administered to individuals in the 18-44 age group across states and union territories and 36,73,83,765 second doses have been given since the start of phase-3 of the vaccination drive, according to health ministry data.

In the 15-18 age group, 3,36,09,191 vaccine doses have been administered, the ministry said.

Cumulatively, 90,68,44,414 first doses and 65,51,95,703



second doses have been administered, it said.

India's COVID-19 vaccination coverage crossed 156 crore (1,56,63,10,110) on Saturday. More than 57 lakh (57,29,760) vaccine doses were administered till 7 pm, it added.

More than 42,69,993 'precaution' doses for the identified

categories of beneficiaries for COVID-19 vaccination have been administered so far.

The vaccination exercise as a tool to protect the most vulnerable population groups in the country from COVID-19 continues to be regularly reviewed and monitored at the highest level, the ministry underlined.

70% adults fully vaccinated, says Mandaviya at stamp launch to mark one year of Covid vaccination drive

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seventy per cent of India's adults have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 while 93 per cent received the first jab, said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya while launching a postage stamp on indigenously developed vaccine Covaxin to mark one year of the inoculation drive. The drive was rolled out on January 16 last year with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase.

Addressing the commemorative postage stamp release event through a video link, Mandaviya said it is a proud moment for Indians and the entire world is amazed by the country's Covid inoculation drive.

"India has been able to

achieve the milestone of administering over 156 crore doses despite such a huge population and diversity," he said.

"On the occasion of completion of one year of the Covid vaccination drive, a postage stamp has been released on the vaccine indigenously developed jointly by the ICMR and Bharat Biotech, realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji's dream of self-reliant India," the minister said.

He also congratulated all scientists on the occasion.

"Our prime minister encouraged scientists to carry out research and develop an indigenous Covid vaccine and held discussions with vaccine manufacturing companies and offered them support.

RK Dhamija appointed new director IHBAS



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prof R K Dhamija, Head of the Department of Neurology of the Lady Hardinge College, Delhi has been appointed as the new director of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), Delhi. Dr Dhamija took over the charge of the IHBAS last Friday.

Dr Dhamija as Director of the IHBAS has tremendous responsibility to deliver at a time when Omicron is raising its ugly head and need for deliberation around mental health taking centre stage. An autonomous body under the Delhi Government, IHBAS is the first neuro-psychiatric institute in India to get the NABH accreditation.

India's Covid vaccination drive completes one year, over 92% adults administered one dose

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The countrywide vaccination drive against COVID-19 on Sunday completed one year, during which over 156.76 crore of vaccine doses were administered.

According to Health Ministry officials, over 92 per cent of the adult population have received at least one dose while over 68 per cent have been fully vaccinated.

The Centre will issue a postal stamp on Sunday afternoon to mark the completion of one year of the inoculation drive. The drive was rolled out on January 16 last year with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. Vaccination of frontline workers started from February 2.

The next phase of the COVID-19 vaccination commenced from March 1 for people over 60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with

specified co-morbid conditions.

Vaccination of all people aged over 45 from April 1. The government then decided to expand the ambit of the inoculation drive by allowing everyone above 18 to be vaccinated from May 1.

The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from January 3 this year for adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years.

India started administering the precaution dose of Covid vaccine to healthcare and frontline workers, which include polling personnel deployed in the five poll-bound states, and comorbid people aged 60 and above from January 10 in a bid to stymie the coronavirus spread driven by its Omicron variant. The health ministry has claimed that India's vaccination programme has been one of the most successful and largest inoculation pro-

grammes when compared to many developed western nations with a significantly low population base to vaccinate. In the vaccination drive, the country has achieved several milestones, which have no precedent in the world, including administering over 100 crore doses in less than nine months, administering 2.51 crore doses in a single day and several times administering one crore doses in a day, it said.

Covid vaccine doses administered in the country surpassed the 100-crore mark on October 21 last year. The cumulative vaccine doses administered in the country surpassed the 150-crore mark on January 7.

With the administration of more than 66 lakh vaccine doses in a day, India's COVID-19 vaccination coverage has exceeded 156.76 crore, according to provisional reports till 7 am on Sunday.

Amit Shah compliments Modi, citizens for one yr of jab drive

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday complimented Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the successful completion of one year of India's Covid vaccination drive and said the country has set an example for the world how the government and the people together can conquer impossible challenges.

The countrywide vaccination drive against COVID-19 on Sunday completed one year, during which over 156.76 crore vaccine doses were administered.

Shah also congratulated the scientists, health workers, Covid warriors and the people of the country for this endeavour.

"With the efficient leadership, determination and constant efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, India has set

an example in the world that if the government and citizens unite in the interest of the nation and set a common goal, then the country can overcome the impossible and conquer every challenge," he tweeted in Hindi with a hashtag one year of vaccine drive.



the adult population have received at least one dose while over 69.8 per cent have been fully vaccinated.

The drive was rolled out on January 16 last year with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. Vaccination of frontline workers started from February 2.

The government decided to expand the ambit of the inoculation drive by allowing everyone above 18 to be vaccinated from May 1.

SP candidates either in jail or on bail: Thakur

Launching fresh attacks on Samajwadi party, Union Min says those who are rioters join SP

Lucknow: Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday targeted the Samajwadi Party, saying people indulging in riots go to Akhilesh Yadav's party, while those who catch the rioters join the BJP. He was speaking at the BJP's Uttar Pradesh headquarters on the occasion of former IPS officer Asim Arun joining the party.

Later, two Samajwadi Party (SP) MLCs — Shailendra Pratap Singh and Ghanshyam Lodhi — and former IAS officer Ram Bahadur also joined the BJP, the party's State co-media in-charge Abhay Singh said. Asserting that those with a clean image are coming to the BJP, Thakur said, "Those who indulge in riots go to the Samajwadi Party, and those who catch the rioters, join the BJP". The BJP leader's remarks come ahead of the elections to the 403-member Uttar Pradesh assembly, which will be held in seven phases beginning February 10. Counting of votes is on March 10.

"The real 'khel' (game) of the Samajwadi Party is that the candidate is either in jail or on bail," the Union information and broadcasting minister said,

referring to the SP's list of candidates for the polls.

"If you see MLA Nahid Hasan (the SP candidate from Kairana), he is SP's candidate number one. He is in jail. The second MLA is Abdullah Azam, who is on bail. If you see the list of SP candidates, it starts from the one in jail, and ends with the one on bail. The game of jail-bail is the real 'khel' of the SP," Thakur said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also attacked the SP, saying while the BJP's list of candidates for the assembly polls has given representation to different sections of society, the SP's list consists of names of criminals.

"If you have seen the list of the SP-alliance, then tickets have been given to people responsible for the exodus of Hindu traders from Kairana and riots in Muzaffarnagar, and a history sheeteer from Loni," Adityanath said.

On Asim Arun's joining the BJP, the Union minister said, "This is clear before society that officials with a clean image are coming to join the BJP, while those indulging in riots are in the SP."

BJP list of candidates represents all sections of society, says Yogi

Lucknow: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said while the BJP's list of candidates for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls has given representation to different sections of society, the Samajwadi Party's list consists of names of criminals.

Elections for the 403-member state assembly will be held in seven phases, beginning February 10, while counting of votes will be held on March 10.

Speaking to reporters after reviewing the King George Medical University's preparedness to deal with Covid cases, Adityanath said, "The BJP yesterday released its list of candidates. You have seen that it symbolises social justice, and has given representation to different sections of society."

Every person, who has seen the BJP list, feels that the essence of 'sabka saath, sabka vikaas' has been incorporated in it, the chief minister, who will be contesting the polls from Gorakhpur, said.

"But, if you have seen the list of the Samajwadi Party (SP)-alliance, then tickets have been given to people responsible for the exodus of Hindu traders from Kairana and riots in Muzaffarnagar, and to a history sheeteer from Loni," Adityanath said.

This shows the character of the SP and its alliance partners, he said.

"They want to make a government a medium to exploit (people) through criminals and mafia. This is their social justice, and this was clearly visible in their ticket distribution," Adityanath said. **PTI**

He also accused SP candidate Hasan of forcing the "exodus" of people, referring to the alleged incident in Kairana from years back.

Sitting SP MLA from Kairana, Hasan, on Friday became the first candidate to file his nomination papers for the assembly polls.

The two-time legislator from the constituency was on Saturday sent to 14-day judicial custody by a special court after being arrested by police, officials said.

Earlier, police had invoked the stringent Gangsters Act against Hasan.

Abdullah Azam, who is the son of senior SP leader Azam Khan, was released from the Sitapur jail on Saturday evening. At the BJP headquarters, state party chief Swatantra Dev Singh, and Union Minister Thakur, who is also the BJP's election co-incharge, gave the party's membership to Asim Arun. Singh lauded Asim Arun and his father Sriram Arun, a former DGP of Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking to reporters, Asim Arun said, "The BJP has given me a chance to serve the people. The decision to opt for VRS was not an easy one."

"On the one hand, I had nine years of service still left in the police, and there was an opportunity to climb to higher posts. On the other hand, there was an ordinary life, and a chance to serve the public," he said. "I think that Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) has a rare thought process, and the speciality of the BJP is to develop a new leadership," Asim Arun said.

He also said that the past five years were good from the law and order point of view, and police personnel and officers got an excellent opportunity to work.

On January 10, the Uttar Pradesh government approved the voluntary retirement request of Kanpur Police Commissioner Asim Arun.

The senior IPS officer of the 1994-batch had applied for premature retirement amid speculation of his entry into active politics and contesting the assembly polls.

Fifty-one-year-old Asim Arun was an additional director general of police (ADGP)-rank officer, who has previously helmed the state's Anti-Terrorist Squad, the 112 service besides leading the police force in districts like Aligarh, Gorakhpur and Agra.

During central deputation, Asim Arun, served in the Special Protection Group (SPG) when Manmohan Singh was prime minister. **PTI**

‘BJP imported workers from Guj to spread rumours, hatred in UP’

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP of importing workers from Gujarat to train its cadres in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh in spreading "hatred and rumours". He asked the Election Commission to take cognisance of the issue and send them back, failing which, he said elections may not remain impartial.

"None of our workers are from other states. I will ask my journalist friend to give me the list of people that have come from Gujarat. I will write to the Election Commission to send back also those who have arrived here from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh," he said.

Yadav said photos that are doing rounds on the social media convey that BJP workers from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state had arrived in Uttar Pradesh to spread "rumours, conspiracies, lies and hatred, besides distributing money".

The SP chief addressed journalists at the party office after inducting former Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister Dara Singh Chauhan and Apna Dal (Sonelal) MLA RK Verma into the party.

Responding to Anurag Thakur's jibe that SP leaders were either "in jail or out on bail", Yadav asked journalists to look into the Union minister's records in various ministries. Welcoming former Kanpur Police Commissioner Asim Arun into the BJP fold, Thakur had on Sunday said those indulging in riots join the SP and those who crack the whip on rioters join the BJP.

Commenting on the former IPS officer, Yadav said he will move the Election Commission demanding that those officials, who had been discharging duties with Asim Arun, be kept away from poll duties or else they too would "double up as BJP workers". **PTI**



Veteran journalist Sam Rajappa dies



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Veteran journalist and political commentator Sam Rajappa is no more. He breathed his last early Sunday morning (IST) at Canada where he had gone to be with his elder son and family for Christmas and New Year vacation.

Sam, who started his career with Free Press Journal and moved over to The Statesman as chief of New Delhi bureau was instrumental in launching India Today in 1975.

It was Sam who broke the report on the police highhandedness of the CPI-led UDF Government in Kerala during the emergency (1975-1977). He flashed the scoop about the killing of P Rajan, an engineering college student at Kozhikode despite the vehement denial of the report by the Home Minister K Karunakaran and the Kerala Police.

Sam got himself arrested by the Kozhikode Police and with the help of a senior police official managed to get remanded to the sub jail where some of the suspected Naxalites have been incarcerated. He met a colleague of Rajan, who was arrested along with the latter and he confided to Sam that Rajan died in police custody due to the third degree measures deployed by the cops of the Crime Branch.

Though the Kerala Government had denied the report, it was made to swallow its own words and owned up the fact that Rajan died in police custody. This led to the resignation of the then Chief Minister K Karunakaran within a month of his swearing in.

His edit page articles remain a standing monument for his knowledge, articulation and erudition. According to close family sources, efforts were on to fly his mortal remains to India to be interred at Marthandam in Kanyakumari, Sam's native village.

Disgruntled Bengal BJP leader steps up heat on party leadership Organises Central committee of Matua Mahasangh

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Disgruntled Bengal BJP leader and junior Union Minister for Shipping Shantanu Thakur stepped on heat on the party leadership, on Sunday holding a meeting of the Central committee of the Matua Mahasangh the umbrella body of one million strong Matua community.

Matuas are a closely knit members of the SC community — that migrated to India from Bangladesh after Partition and 1971 war — distributed across four-five districts of Bengal impacting about 25-30 Assembly seats and 5-6 MP constituencies.

Thakur who on Saturday held a closed-door meeting with rebel party MLAs and some senior leaders including deposed State vice president Jay Prakash Majumdar, Ritesh Tewari and Sayantan Basu said the Sunday's meeting was held to chalk out some plans for future movements concerning the Matua community.

Thakur is the grandson of Matua matriarch and late religious leader of the Matua Mahasangh a Hindu reformist movement which has considerable presence on both sides of the border.

Though Thakur would not speak much other leaders of the community said, "talks were held on the betterment of the Matua community and implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act ... the Matuas and all other people who migrated to India need to be recognized as proper citizens a promise that was given to us by the BJP ... and Home Minister Amit Shah himself said that process of implementation of CAA would start after the pandemic and particularly after the vaccination drive was completed ... now the time has come we want the Centre to implement its promise on CAA."

Sunday's meeting is seen as Thakur's ploy to step up pressure on the State leadership to accommodate his followers in the newly formed decision making committees.

Earlier he said on Saturday that "a section of the State leaders are trying to sell out the party to some other outfit." Regarding the formation of a new State committee he said "those who took BJP from 2 per cent to 40 per cent have been axed whereas those who did nothing are enjoying plum posts."

A rebel MLA said how "Matuas have been completely ignored by the leadership in distribution of posts ... though

they have a large presence in Bengal." Though he would not take any names the Union Minister's statements are reportedly aimed at BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh even as he said "there are some leaders who do not want the BJP to prosper in Bengal ... they are misleading the national leadership into taking wrong steps."

On whether he was planning to join some other party Thakur said "there is ample scope for removing the ills from within the party ... and there is no need to leave the party."

In a show of dissent about 10-15 BJP MLAs and other leaders have recently left various designated WhatsApp group of the party. So much so that the Birbhum district committee of the BJP had to literally announce that there was no formal WhatsApp group of the party existin in the district.

Shocked over Centre's move to reject Bose tableau for R-day parade, Didi urges Modi to reconsider decision

Kolkata: Expressing shock over the Centre's decision to exclude West Bengal's tableau commemorating Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his INA on the leader's 125th birth anniversary year, from the upcoming Republic Day Parade in Delhi, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to reconsider the decision.

Banerjee also said that no reason was cited for the tableau's rejection, a decision, which she said had "pained" people.

"I have been profoundly shocked and hurt by the decision of the Government of India to abruptly exclude the proposed tableau of the Government of West Bengal from the ensuing Republic Day Parade," Banerjee said in a two-page letter to Modi.

She wet on to write "it is even more baffling for us that the tableau was rejected without assigning any reasons or justifications."

The proposed tableau was to commemorate the contributions of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his INA on his 125th birth anniversary year, the Chief Minister said.

"I may like to inform you that all the people of West Bengal are deeply pained by this attitude of the central government. It is shocking to find that the contribution of its valiant freedom fighters finds no place in the nation's ceremony to celebrate the occasion of the Republic Day on the 75th year of our Independence. I urge you to reconsider the decision and include the tableau of freedom fighters from West Bengal in the Republic Day parade on the 75th year of our Independence," Banerjee added. **PTI**



Deserted roads during full lockdown imposed by Tamil Nadu Government to curb the spread of Covid-19, at T Nagar in Chennai, on Sunday (L), needy collect free food distributed by volunteers during full lockdown in front of Central Railway Station in Chennai, on Sunday (R)



PTI

Bihar hooch toll climbs to eleven

Bihar Sharif: Seven more people have died here after consuming spurious liquor, raising the toll to 11 in the head-quarters of Nalanda district -- to which dry Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar belongs.

According to Superintendent of Police, Nalanda, Ashok Mishra, the station house officer (SHO) of the police station concerned has been suspended and bodies of eight of the deceased have been handed over to family members after post mortem.

"Four people died in the early hours of Saturday while four others breathed their last in the evening. Three more died this morning," he said.

"All deaths have taken place in Chhoti Pahari and Pahari Talli localities of the town. The SHO of Soharsai has been suspended for being lax in keeping an eye on the activities in an area under his jurisdiction," added the SP. **PTI**

COVID BULLETIN

Maha sees dip of 1K Covid-19 cases in 24 hrs

41K fresh cases, 8 Omicron cases reported in State

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The daily Covid-19 infections dropped further in Maharashtra by 1,135 cases to touch a tally of 41,327 cases on Sunday, even as eight Omicron cases were recorded, taking the total number of Covid-19 variant cases recorded in the state to 1738.

A day after it registered 42,452 cases, the daily infections dropped to 41,327, taking the total number of cases recorded from 71,70,483 to 72,11,810 As many as 29 Covid-19 deaths were reported from various parts of the state.

In Mumbai, the daily Coviod-19 infections dropped significantly by 2,766 cases –

from 10,661 cases on Saturday to 7,895 cases on Sunday. With the latest tally of fresh cases, the total Covid-19 cases in Mumbai rose from 9,91,967 cases to 9,99,862 cases

As 40,327 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 67,60,514. The recovery rate in the state rose from 94.28 per cent to 94.3 per cent The number of "active cases" in the state increased from 2,64,441 to68,00,900. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.97 per cent to 1.96 per cent.

Of the total recorded cases, Mumbai accounts for 60,371 active cases, while there are 64,259 active cases in Thane. There are 55,997 active cases in Pune, followed by Raigad (15,122), Palghar (10,904), Nagpur (9814) Nashik (8767), Satara (4573), Ahmednagar

(4083) and Aurangabad (3106).

Of the 7,19,74,335 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 72,11,810 have tested positive (10.02 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday. Currently, 21,98,414 people are in home quarantine, while 2921 people are in institutional quarantine.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra recorded eight Omicron cases taking the total number of cases in the state to 1,738.

The following is the break-up of a total 1367 Omicron case-s recorded in the state so far, Mumbai: 653, PMC-542, Pimpri-Chinchwad—113, Nagpur—90, Sangli—59, Thane—49, Pune rural --46, Kolhapur—19, Panvel and Amarvati—18 each, Satara—14, Navi Mumbai-13, Osmanabad and Akola —11 each, Kalyan Dombivli —7, Buldhana and Vasai-Virar-6 each, Bhiwandi-Nizampur and Aurangabad -5 each, Ahmednagar—4, Nanded, Ulhasnagar, Jalna, Gondia,

39 more patients succumb to Covid-19 in West Bengal

Kolkata: West Bengal's Covid-19 tally rose to 18,82,761 on Saturday as 19,064 more people tested positive for the infection, 3,581 less than the previous day, a health bulletin said.

The State's coronavirus death toll rose to 20,052 as 39 more patients succumbed to the infection, the highest single-day toll since the recent surge in Covid-19 cases, it said.

West Bengal's positivity rate slightly improved to 29.52 per cent from 31.14 per cent on the previous day, the bulletin said.

Kolkata recorded 4,831 new cases, 2,036 less than the previous day, followed by 3,496 infections in neighbouring North 24 Parganas district, it said. The metropolis registered the highest number of fresh



A relative of a Covid patient waits outside a State Government-run Covid hospital, amid concern over spread of Covid-19, in Kolkata, on Sunday

PTI

fatalities at 12, followed by 10 in North 24 Parganas, it said. **PTI**

Kerala clocks over 18,123 new cases

Thiruvananthapuram: The number of daily COVID-19 cases continued to rise unabated in Kerala with the state reporting 18,123 fresh infections on Sunday taking the total positives to 53,69,706.

The toll in the state touched 50,832 with 158 related deaths, the health department said.

Among today's deaths, eight were recorded over the last few days and 150 designated as COVID-19 deaths after receiving appeals based on the new guidelines of the Centre and the directions of the Supreme Court.

"Currently there are 1,03,864 active COVID-19 cases in the state out of which only 4 per cent require hospitalisation," the state government is a release.

Among the districts, Thiruvananthapuram recorded 3,917 cases, the highest in the state, followed by Ernakulam with 3,204 cases and Thrissur with 1,700 cases.

The state had tested 59,314 samples in the last 24 hours.


Out of those found infected, 113 reached the state from outside while 17,627 contracted the disease from their contacts. The source of infection of 234 is yet to be traced.

Meanwhile, 4,749 persons recuperated from the disease on Sunday taking the total recoveries in the state to 53,23,430. **PTI**

FIRST COLUMN

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACE MASK

It is an effective and humble tool to win the battle against infectious diseases



PRITAM SINGH

The practice of wearing the most affordable protection against viruses or pollution, the face mask, is not a new one. Most Indians may have seen it during the Covid-19 pandemic but it has its roots in the history of medicine and science, dating back to the spread of the 'Manchuria' epidemic in China. Later, face masks were used during the 'Spanish-Flu' that cost over 40-million lives all over the world, and the 'Bombay Fever' during 1919-20.

Wu Lient-teh - a Cambridge educated doctor -first described the face-mask as a "prophylactic apparatus" that could be worn by all to protect themselves. For over a century now, it has remained an effective and humble tool to win the battle against infectious diseases.

Science definitely supports using masks, with recent studies suggesting that they could save lives in different ways. Dr Martin Kirschner, who held the chair for surgery in Heidelberg, first described the necessity of wearing a facemask in 1935 as a 'measure to combat infection'. This paved the way for research on facemasks with varying thickness of cloth. It later proved that "adoption of even relatively ineffective face masks may meaningfully reduce community transmission of Covid-19 and decrease hospitalizations and deaths".

There are masks for different purposes -- antiviral, antimicrobial, anti-odour. Above all, they should be well-fitting and comfortable on the face. The size of the most common causative agents of infectious diseases -- the virus and bacterium known as pathogens - is in the range of 0.4 microns (about one millionth of a meter) and 0.02 to 0.25 microns. This allows their easy and stealthy transfer from person to person in close proximity. The most effective facemasks have multiple layers of tightly woven fabric-like cotton to act as a 'barrier' against the virus.


The face mask that covers both nose and mouth leaving no gaps limits the transmission of the virus in public places or on public transport like bus, train or plane. A research report says that multi-layer cloth masks are more effective than single-layer masks, blocking as much as 50-70 per cent of exhaled small droplets and particles. The research of NIOSH - National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health -- recommends the most widely available N95 face mask as it filters up to 95 per cent of particles as small as 0.3 microns. It is not-washable, little expensive and needs to be discarded when dirty, damaged, or difficult to breathe through.

Research studies say that having double mask (wearing a cloth mask over the procedure mask) could improve the user's exposure to an aerosol or simulated droplets particles is reduced to the extent of 95 per cent.

While babies are at a much higher risk of severe illness, it warrants that every child of age two and above wear a mask in public places like schools. Children below age two having any breathing problems, or a child who has a condition that would prevent it from being able to remove the mask without help, needs precautionary measures and meticulous care by parents/guardians.

The use of safety protocols like facemasks, vaccination, maintaining physical distancing, etc., can play a significant role in mitigating the spread and transmission of Covid-19 and its variants. Measures such as imposition of night-curfews have no evidence of effectiveness. WHO's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan is of the view that "if 90 per cent of the population uses face masks all the time", there would be a drastic reduction in the transmission of Covid-19. Closure of offices or educational institutions would then be the last resort.

(The writer was formerly with the Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun. The views expressed are personal.)



Caste re-engineering decides UP poll result



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The BJP is prudently not taking Akhilesh Yadav lightly, considering that it is UP that will set the course for the 2024 general elections

The churning in UP is being keenly observed following the exit of some caste leaders from BJP. Is it caste reengineering or a repeat of the Bengal elections where a similar exodus was seen from the ruling TMC to BJP?

Caste is more powerful in states like UP than "vikas". It is a complex situation. As a footnote also, it would be interesting to observe whether development would be a vote generator or not.

It is interesting to recall that host of leaders, MLAs and other leaders joined the BJP in Bengal and most had got tickets too. Only a few got elected in the 2020 Bengal assembly polls election among the 73 MLAs. The story did not end there. After Mamata Banerjee romped home with a thumping majority, a reverse exodus started and continues till the day. That includes the Matua community leaders, who had helped the rise of BJP in the 2019 elections.

The comparison is slightly incongruous. The politics of Bengal and UP are different. The common refrain is whether a Bengal-like situation is developing in UP.

Does it mean that Samajwadi party has become powerful and can dislodge BJP? Not easy to say but SP is doing caste reengineering almost the way BJP did it some years back. SP leader Akhilesh Yadav is roping in different smaller caste groups. Since December 11, 2021, 17 leaders quit BJP and most of them have joined SP.

Most of the leaders leaving BJP since December 2021 are from different OBC groups having influence in different areas. This includes Omprakash Rajbhar of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, a caste-based party of Rajbhar. They are among the extreme backward OBCs having influence in many parts of eastern UP.

Swami Prasad Maurya is the leader of another caste group spread in about 30 constituencies. Following him so far, four others Roshan Lal Verma, Bhagwati Sagar, Roshan Lal Prjapati, ministers Dara Singh Chauhan and Dharampal Saini have quit the party and more are said to be in the queue. UP deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya hints that these people left the party for their selfish ends. The overall perception gaining ground is that the SP has won back its lost ground with Jats of Jayant Chaudhury's RLD and minority groups. Yadavs largely are with the SP. Akhilesh Yadav trying to win over smaller parties is again an attempt to unite splinter caste votes, a strategy that helped UP BJP in 2017.

BJP spokesman Sangeet Ragi says that like in the previous election, BJP is replacing about 50 to 60 per cent MLAs and those who left, did so fearing rejection of tickets. Of late, another caste leader of Apna Dal is also clamouring



IN THIS ENTIRE DISCOURSE, DEVELOPMENT IS NOT REALLY A MAJOR POLL ISSUE DESPITE CLAIMS BY THE BJP AND BARBS BY THE OPPOSITION AGAINST IT. SO FAR, THE POLL PLANKS REVOLVE AROUND MODI, YOGI, AKHILESH, TEMPLES AND CASTES. JOBLESSNESS, FARMERS' ISSUES AND INFLATION HURT PEOPLE BUT YET ARE NOT CENTRE STAGE DESPITE THE OPPOSITION HARPING ON IT

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



to fight on 36 seats in the state elections. So far BJP has offered five. It is not easy for BJP to concede its strongholds to caste parties. It also cannot strengthen smaller parties at its cost.

The BJP has its concern. It cannot leave the field to caste parties and empower their leaders. The concern is legitimate. Most caste leaders have been given important party or ministerial portfolios. They are not losing the opportunity to further increase their clout in their regions. This does not serve well for the BJP or its cadres for its national goals. The cadre is unhappy in different pockets and the BJP has to take care of them during these critical times.

The party and allied organisations' cadre manage BJP campaigning right down to the booth level. It is they who make voters move to the EVM booths. The social engineering that had helped the BJP win 325 of 403 seats also brought a baggage of smaller parties. These parties cause many problems for the big brother. The smaller groups are viewed as a burden but nobody can say so. In a way those leaving BJP are helping it, the party leaders believe. A concern also remains how to keep those caste groups along.

Those leaving BJP include Brahmins, and extreme backward classes and Nishads, who in 2017 had given the party an edge. They are from places like Prayagraj, Ballia, Bahraich, Sant Kabir Nagar, Sitapur, Azamgarh - all in eastern UP. There are some defections from Agra and

Bulandshahr too. Challenge is being noticed in key western UP areas in Mathura, Aligarh, Hathras, Baghpat and adjacent areas, wherever the RLD has its influence.

As the SP is seemingly gaining enough to pose a challenge, the BJP also has successfully tried some defections from other parties. It however apparently is not at even keel. Belligerent Akhilesh Yadav is challenging the statement of chief minister Yogi Adityanath - 80 per cent with BJP and 20 against - by reversing it in his favour. He is criticizing Yogi for giving it a communal tinge. The BJP feels heightened Hindutva would help it meet the opposition challenge.

The party won about 100 seats with margins of 100 to 2000. These seats are a matter of concern. It is more so as SP is supposed to have increased its vote share from 21.5 per cent in 2017 to 31 per cent. The BJP vote share remains around 40 per cent as per poll surveys. It had 39.67 per cent votes in 2017. This means while the SP has added to its kitty, BJP share remains stagnant or it has not been able to add more support despite its focus on Hindutva, Ram temple, Vishwanath corridor and Sri Krishna temple.

A BJP election organizer in eastern UP says that this is a small concern. The party is confident about the edge it has against SP. It has also to see how Congress acts in this election. Though nobody says it has much of strength but its recent road shows, and the approach of

Priyanka Gandhi, may cause some surprises in pockets. So far, no Congress-SP understanding is on the cards. If that happens there may be some difference in results. BSP for now remain an enigma.

The BJP organisers feel that BJP gains in western UP would be limited. It has to gain the maximum from the east. In central Avadh region too, it may have mixed bag.

The rise of SP is being noted by BJP who says the former has its baggage to deal with. After the recent panchayat elections, an aggressive Yadav posturing is said to have annoyed people in the rural areas. It reportedly reminds them of its 2012-17 lawless regime.

The minorities aligning with SP may also hurt it - that is yet another perception. The en bloc voting of the minorities causes reactive voting and that helps BJP. The Hindutva and minority factors may help BJP get back to power.

In this entire discourse, development is not really a major poll issue despite some claims by BJP and barbs by the opposition against it. So far, the poll planks revolve around Modi, Yogi, Akhilesh, temples and castes.

Joblessness, farmers issues and inflation hurt people but yet not centre stage despite the opposition harping on it.

The BJP is prudently not taking Akhilesh lightly considering that it is UP that will set the course for the 2024 national elections. Nobody would have a cakewalk. The scenario remains complex and interesting.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IN THE UP ASSEMBLY ELECTION, 80 PER CENT SUPPORTERS WILL BE ON ONE SIDE WHILE 20 PER CENT WILL BE ON THE OTHER.
—UP CHIEF MINISTER
YOGI ADITYANATH



YOGI MEANT THE BJP WILL GET 20 PER CENT OF THE SEATS IN UP WHILE THE REST 80 PER CENT WILL GO TO THE SP.
—SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF
AKHILESH YADAV

COVID-19 fatigue: The end is not in sight

How to transition from pandemic to epidemic, and then deal with this however long it remains with us, whether that's five, six...10 years?

Once they called it 'combat fatigue', and treated the soldiers who showed the symptoms with a mixture of pity and contempt. Then they renamed it 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD) and broadened the definition to cover similar responses to other stressful situations. And now we have Covid fatigue.

We're coming up on two years since the first round of lockdowns and overflowing hospitals, and heading for yet another peak in the pandemic. At least five million people have died of Covid-19, and more than half a billion have had it. People are worn down, and it's starting to show.

The anti-vaxxers are the first to feel the weight of public resentment. Once they were



GWYNNE DYER

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

just seen as gullible simpletons taken in by online conspiracy theories. Now, in countries where the great majority of people are vaccinated, they have been promoted to the status of a public health risk.

They were always a reservoir of the virus, but now that most people are vaccinated, the harm they do is more visible. In countries like Canada and France, where 80 per cent or more of the population is fully vaccinated, up to 90 per cent of the people filling intensive care beds that could be serving other critically ill people are unvaccinated Covid cases.

That's why French President Emmanuel Macron, facing an election in April, found it politically advantageous to say: "We have to tell



(the unvaccinated)... you will no longer be able to go to a restaurant. You will no longer be able to go for a coffee, you will no longer be able to go to the theatre. You will no longer be able to go to the cinema."

Macron later told a newspaper: "as for the non-vaccinated, I really want to piss them off." So that they would go and get vaccinated, presumably, but he knew he was also catching

the popular mood. He later told reporters in Paris: "People can get upset about a way of speaking that seems colloquial, but I fully stand by it. I'm upset about the situation we're in."

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took the same line, although in more genteel language. But he didn't go as far as Quebec, the hardest hit of the Canadian provinces.

Quebec is not doing badly

by international standards; the same population as Austria or Switzerland, and about the same number of deaths. But last week it required people to show proof of vaccination at provincial cannabis and alcohol shops - and it has now declared that the unvaccinated will have to pay a monthly 'contribution' to the cost of health care.

Even the Pope has chipped in, saying that getting vaccinated is a "moral obligation," and you don't have to share his faith to agree with that statement. Vaccines protect not only the people who get the jab, but all those who may come into contact with them. That was always true, but now the patience has run out because people are tired.

The most dangerous consequence of Covid fatigue, however, is the magical thinking

that it induces even in some health professionals. It's been so long; surely it will be over soon' is a wish, not a scientific statement.

Early this week Dr David Nabarro, World Health Organisation's special envoy of Covid-19, suggested that most countries have already passed the halfway mark in the pandemic 'marathon'. "We can see the end in sight, but we're not there (yet), and there's going to be some bumps before we get there."

Nadhim Zahawi, responsible for Britain's vaccine deployment last year, said "I hope we will be one of the first major economies to demonstrate to the world how you transition from pandemic to epidemic, and then deal with this however long it remains with us,

whether that's five, six, seven, ten years."

And Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that the European Union should stop detailed tracking of the pandemic and "start evaluating the evolution of this disease with different parameters." In plain Spanish, that means: treat it like a flu epidemic.

This is wishful thinking and nothing more. There is no reason to believe that the end is in sight, or that the next Covid variant won't be worse than Omicron, or even that infectious diseases always evolve towards lower lethality. Some do; some don't.

And it won't be over until the vaccination rates in Africa and Asia are the same as in Europe, East Asia and the Americas, plus 6-12 months.

Don't build road via our territory: Nepal tells India

IAN S ■ NKATHMANDU

Nepal on Sunday once again reminded India not to construct any roads in Nepali territory unilaterally.

This reaction comes in a response to a recent statement of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 30 in Uttarakhand.

While addressing an election rally, Modi on December 30 announced that his government had built a road to Lipulekh and that there were more plans to extend it further. Responding the statement of the Indian Prime Minister after it created a huge uproar in Nepal across the political spectrum, Nepal's Minister for Information and Communication Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki said on Sunday that Nepal government has been asking India not to extend and construct road via Nepali territory unilaterally. The Indian government is building a road via Lipulekh to Kailash Mansarovar in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China.

After the row in Nepal over Modi's statement, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu on Saturday issued a statement, clarifying that any outstanding boundary issues with Nepal will be settled through established mechanisms and channels. "The Government of India's position on the India-Nepal boundary is well known, consistent and unambiguous,"

it said in the statement. "It has been communicated to the Government of Nepal." Almost all political parties in Nepal, including Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's own Nepali Congress, have been demanding that the government speak up on Modi's statement and make its position clear on Lipulekh.

When India and China agreed to develop a trade and transit route via Lipulekh during Modi's visit to China in 2015, the Nepal government had objected to the decision and protested with both Indian and Chinese governments through the separate diplomatic notes.

While calling Lipulekh an integral part of its territory, Nepal asked both New Delhi and Beijing to scrap the agreement or take prior consent from Nepal if they want to construct anything into the disputed territory. Lipulekh is a trijunction between Nepal, India and China.

Earlier in 2020, Nepal again protested India's decision to extend the road via Lipulekh.

Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had inaugurated the road in the first week of May 2020, creating quite an uproar in Nepal.

The Nepal government then on May 20, 2020 unveiled a new map incorporating Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, and Lipulekh within the Nepali territory. The new map was endorsed by Parliament unan-

imously through a constitutional amendment. India had taken umbrage at Nepal's move, calling the publication of the new map "cartographic assertions". Nepal-India relations then hit a rock-bottom and came back on track only at the end of last year. But Modi's remarks on Lipulekh once again created a commotion in Nepal.

Addressing a press conference on Sunday, Karki who is also the spokesperson of the Nepal government, stated that the Nepal government is clear that Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura are the integral part of Nepal.

Besides Lipulekh, Nepal and India also have disputes in Kalapani and Limpiyadhura area. Limpiyadhura is the last border point between Nepal and India which Nepal claims as its own territory. Similarly, near Limpiyadhura, there is another chunk of land called Kalapani where India has been keeping its troops after the 1962 Indo-China war.

Nepa has been saying that Kalapani falls inside Nepali territory and India had unilaterally stationed its troops there without prior approval from Nepal.

Given the close and historic relations between Nepal and India and its letter and spirit, Nepal wants to resolve the dispute through the historic treaty and agreement, facts, maps and evidence through the diplomatic channel, said Karki.

Hours-long standoff in Texas synagogue ends, all hostages safe



IAN S ■ HOUSTON

Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced on Sunday that "all hostages are out alive and safe" after an hours-long standoff at a synagogue ended.

The four hostages, including a rabbi, were taken hostage on Saturday at the Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, just outside Fort Worth, reports Xinhua news agency.

No injuries were reported among the hostages, one of whom was released earlier in the evening.

Addressing the media, Colleyville Police Chief Michael Miller said although all the hostages are now safe, the synagogue was still an active crime scene.

According to Miller, the police received a call at 10.41 a.m. Services at the synagogue were being broadcast online

through apps including Facebook and Zoom when the suspect entered and took four people hostage, CNN quoted the police chief as saying.

Authorities negotiated with the suspect "all day", Miller said, adding there was "constant communication with him".

He also confirmed that the suspect was dead, without giving further details.

In a statement released by the White House, President Joe Biden said: "There is more we will learn in the days ahead about the motivations of the hostage taker.

But let me be clear to anyone who intends to spread hate, we will stand against anti-Semitism and against the rise of extremism in this country. That is who we are, and tonight, the men and women of law enforcement made us all proud."

Pashtun MP in Pakistan remains incarcerated for anti-state speech

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

A hearing of incarcerated Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM)-linked MNA Ali Wazir's case has been postponed once again in Pakistan, with rights activists raising concerns about absence of due process, Friday Times reported.

While Wazir was recently granted bail in a case pertaining to 'anti-state' speech, he remains behind bars as another case registered against him is still pending.

On Friday, the PTM held a protest in Islamabad calling for the release of Ali Wazir, as well as Hanif Pashteen and Uwais Abdal, among other PTM members. Rights activist Tahira Abdullah and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Farhatullah Babar were among the participants, the report said.

In early January, Ali Wazir's lawyer, Qadir Khan, had his house ransacked in Karachi. Several close to the attorney claimed the raid was the work of the Sindhi Rangers, whom they also alleged harassed the lawyer's family, including his daughter, the report said. Ali Wazir, a lawmaker from South Waziristan elected in 2018, was arrested in Peshawar in December 2020 on charges of sedition, along with 10 other PTM members. Wazir was granted bail by the Supreme Court in November last year, but remains incarcerated in another case.

ISI ordered hit on exiled Pak activist for mocking Army

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

A man has gone on trial in London, accused of plotting to kill a Pakistani blogger living in the Netherlands, the BBC reported.

A court heard that 31-year-old Muhammad Goher Khan was hired as a "hitman" by figures said to be based in Pakistan. He was arrested last June and pleaded not guilty to conspiracy to murder.

Lawyers said the intended victim, Ahmad Waqass Goraya, had set up a blog on Facebook making fun of the Pakistani military and detailing alleged human rights violations, the report said.

Kingston Crown Court heard that Goraya, who was living in Rotterdam at the time, "was known for speaking out against the activities of the Pakistani government and appears to have been targeted for that reason", the report added. The jury was told that Khan, a supermarket worker from East London, was heavily in debt - with the prosecution alleging he reacted "enthusiastically" to a proposal by a man named only as "MudZ" to kill the Pakistani political activist in exchange for 100,000 pounds.

Leading the prosecution, Alison Morgan QC, said in December 2018, Goraya had received information from the FBI that he was on a "kill list" and that he had received threats online and in person, some of which he believed "were being orchestrated by ISI", Pakistan's intelligence agency.

Libyan Presidency Council stresses commitment to back elections

IAN S ■ TRIPOLI

A top official of the Presidency Council of Libya has stressed the need to support holding the presidential elections in the country.

The council's Deputy President Abdullah Allafi made the remarks during a meeting with the Speaker of the Libyan House of Representatives Aguila Saleh, reports Xinhua news agency quoted an official statement as saying.

"The Deputy President of the Presidency Council of Libya, Abdullah Allafi, confirmed that his meeting with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, was fruitful and that they discussed ways to support the political process and the elections in Libya," the statement said.

"Allafi stressed the council's commitment to supporting the elections through a clear roadmap and based on strong legal and constitutional foundations," it added. He also stressed the Council's support for the efforts of the House of Representatives to issue laws that help bring the Libyans together and achieve stability in the country.

Libya's presidential elections, originally scheduled for December 24, 2021, were postponed indefinitely due to technical and legal issues, according to the country's elections commission.

Somali Government spokesman injured in suicide car bombing attack in Mogadishu

IAN S ■ MOGADISHU

A Somali government spokesman Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimu was injured in a suicide car bombing in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, on Sunday, said a police source.

Police spokesman Abdifitah Aden said that a suicide bomber blew himself up at Moalimu's vehicle at a busy Daabka intersection in Mogadishu, Xinhua news agency reported.

"The government spokesman is currently hospitalized in Mogadishu," Aden told journalists and promised to provide more details once ongoing investigations are completed. Witnesses said the former journalist escaped with slight injuries and is out of danger. No group has claimed responsibility for latest attack in the restive city but militant group, al-Shabab, frequently stages such attacks in capital and elsewhere in Somalia.

Child killed, four wounded in roadside bomb blast east of Kabul

IAN S ■ KABUL

At least a child was killed and four security personnel were wounded after a roadside bomb blast hit a security forces pick-up truck in Bagrami district, east of the capital Kabul on Sunday, the capital police said. The incident occurred when an improvised bomb planted at a road divider was detonated when the vehicle was passing by an area in Bagrami district at around mid-day, police spokesman Mubin Khan told reporters via a text messaging, Xinhua News Agency reported.

An investigation is underway and affected people have been shifted to a nearby hospital, he said. The blast also damaged several vehicles and nearby buildings. No group has claimed responsibility for attack yet. Militants affiliated to the extremist Islamic State (IS) group have claimed responsibility for a number of bomb attacks in Afghanistan in recent months.

Israel to roll out Covid vax for children below 5 years in April

IAN S ■ JERUSALEM

Israel is expected to start vaccines for babies and toddlers, between six months and 5 years, by April, according to a senior health official.

Currently vaccines are available in the country for adults, and children aged five and above.

"In Israel vaccines are available now for everybody aged five and over. I believe by April this year it will be expanded for any age above six months," Dr Asher Shalmon, the Health Ministry's director for international relations, said in a briefing to foreign policymakers and journalists this week.

US drugmaker Pfizer is in the process of conducting clinical trials to lower the approved age for its vaccine from five years to six months, Times of Israel reported.

Pfizer had reported last month that in its ongoing trial

of children aged six months to five years, "no safety concerns were identified" and the vaccine "demonstrated a favourable safety profile."

The company is currently checking responses to a regimen of three mini doses for under-5s, after finding that a two-dose approach provoked a strong response among children aged 6-24 months, but was not very strong in children aged two to five years, the report said.

According to government Covid adviser Prof Nadav Davidovitch, a top epidemiologist, children are often much less sick than adults, but they can have "PIMS [pediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome, an after effect of Covid-19] and long Covid, which is why vaccines are important, and there will be vaccines for children under five."

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention found that the

Pfizer vaccine is highly protective against PIMS. It concluded that the vaccine is 91 per cent effective in preventing PIMS among 12-18 years of age, a statistic based on comparison of its occurrence among unvaccinated teenagers, the report said.

Davidovitch said parents should not let their guard down against Omicron based on observations that it tends to cause milder illness than previous variants.

"It's clear now that unlike with the original SARS-COV-2 that was not so relevant to children and they were not so infectious, now things are very different," he said.

"It's probably related to biological characteristics, infection is now much more in your throat and in the upper respiratory areas.

With children, whose anatomy is different from adults", this seems to make them more prone to infection now."

UN ready to assist Tonga after volcano eruption, tsunami

IAN S ■ UNITED NATIONS

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed deep concerns after reports of a tsunami and ash affecting Tonga following the eruption of an undersea volcano near Pacific nation. 'Tsunami warnings have been issued in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and US, reports Xinhua news agency. "The UN offices in Pacific are closely monitoring situation and are on standby to provide support if requested. The Secretary-General is grateful to countries that have already offered their support," Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for Guterres, said in a statement.

According to Tonga Geological Services, a massive underwater volcano erupted on Friday with plumes reaching more than 19 km above sea level. A cloud of ash and steam reached about 241 km across, an event captured by satellite images that are shared by various meteorological agencies.

NZ pledges aid after Tonga volcanic eruption, tsunami

IAN S ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand on Sunday pledged to provide support for Tonga following a volcanic eruption that sent tsunami waves crashing onto Pacific Island. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told reporters here that her government has made an initial sum of NZ\$500,000 (\$340,000) available to provide assistance to Tonga, reports Xinhua news agency.

The tsunami had a significant impact on part of foreshore of Tonga, with boats and large boulders washed ashore and shops along coast damaged, said Ardern.

There has been no official report of injuries or deaths yet. However, communications were interrupted and limited. The main undersea communications cable has been impacted, said Ardern. "Damage assessments are under way and New Zealand has formally offered to provide assistance to Tonga. A New Zealand Defence Force P3 Orion is on stand-by to provide

vide aerial surveillance subject to conditions including ash fall," she said. Along with the aircraft flight, New Zealand was considering deployment of a naval ship should it being needed, the Prime Minister further said. The New Zealand government was waiting to hear from Tongan authorities about what was needed, said Ardern. Tsunami waves hit Tonga on Saturday evening.

The tsunami followed a series of violent eruptions from submarine volcano Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai, 65 km north of country's main island Tongatapu.

Tsunami warnings were issued in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and US. According to Tonga Geological Services, a massive underwater volcano erupted on Friday with plumes reaching more than 19 km above sea level. A cloud of ash and steam reached about 241 km across, an event captured by satellite images that have been shared by various meteorological agencies.

Ex-Pak general confesses 'guilt' in espionage case

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan defence authorities told Lahore High Court's Rawalpindi bench that Lieutenant General (ret'd) Javed Iqbal, who was found involved in espionage activities, had confessed to his "guilt" in his judicial confessional statement before an Islamabad first class magistrate. The Express Tribune reported.

On conclusion of trial, court adjudged him "guilty" of all charges and awarded him sentence of rigorous imprisonment for 14 years on May 29, 2019. Moreover, the petitioner confessed his "guilt" in his judicial confessional statement before an Islamabad first class magistrate. He also appeared before Field General Court Martial (FGCM) and recorded his statement and was subjected to cross-examination by private defence counsel of petitioner, the report said.

Moreover, it was submitted that interim relief in form of suspension of sentence would jeopardise security and interest of State. "The petitioner remained on highly sensitive posts while serving in Pakistan Army and his suspension of sentence would endanger State's security. Further, case before this court is an extraordinary sensitive in nature and petitioner's own life would be at risk as anti-state elements might harm him for their nefarious designs," the report added.

Ex-PM Netanyahu negotiating plea deal in corruption trial

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is negotiating a plea deal in his corruption case, a person involved in talks said Sunday. The deal, which could be signed as early as this week, could usher Netanyahu off the Israeli political stage for years, paving way for a leadership race in his Likud party and shaking up Israeli politics. Any deal could spare Netanyahu an embarrassing and protracted trial over an issue that has gripped the nation and risks tarnishing his legacy. Reports of a deal angered critics who said it would undermine rule of law.

"The man who worked to destroy public's trust in foundations of democracy for personal reasons is not eligible for deals," Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz tweeted. He was referring to Netanyahu's attempts after he was indicted to cast doubt on Israel's justice system, saying it was biased and pursuing a witch hunt against him.

Demonstrators gathered against developing deal outside attorney general's house Saturday evening. Any deal will likely be challenged in court. A spokesman for Netanyahu declined to comment. Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and

accepting bribes in three separate cases. The former premier, now opposition leader, denies wrongdoing. The person involved in negotiations said plea deal would drop bribery and fraud charges and scrap one case entirely. The person asked for anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the details of talks. He said a plea deal would likely be announced in the coming days.

The person said a number of elements remained unresolved, including inclusion of charge of "moral turpitude," which under Israeli law would ban Netanyahu from politics for 7 years. They were also deliberating whether Netanyahu would be forced to do community service under deal.

Including "moral turpitude" would challenge Netanyahu's vows to return to lead the country after his 12-year reign was ended last year by a coalition of ideologically disparate parties with little in common other than its opposition to his leadership. But Netanyahu, dubbed a political wizard for his ability to survive repeated attempts at ending his rule, could make a comeback when he can expires. He would be nearly 80. His departure from political scene would set off a leadership race in Likud party, with several lawmakers already promising to run.

Lebanon faces internet service interruption amid fuel crisis

AP ■ BEIRUT

Internet services were disrupted in Lebanon on Sunday because of diesel shortages, according to state provider, adding another essential service to the list of casualties of the country's snowballing economic crisis.

Imad Kreidieh, the head of state internet provider Ogero, tweeted that starting early Sunday a major station in west Beirut, al-Mazraa, would run out of diesel and go offline. The outage affected over 26,000 subscribers, including the country's Internal Security operation rooms, he told Al-Jadeed TV.

By midday Sunday, a resident donated diesel, allowing station to get back online, he said. Meanwhile, another neighborhood in east Beirut, Achrafieh, was out of diesel and briefly operated on batteries. "The situation is unbearable," Kreidieh told TV station.

Lebanese live with only few hours of state electricity a day and rely on a network of private generators that also depend on diesel fuel.

This often leaves neighborhoods in total darkness for hours. Meanwhile, residents have to pay for multiple services, including hefty bills to generator operators, which change regularly as crisis worsens.

Omicron exposes inflexibility of Europe's public hospitals

AP ■ STRASBOURG, FRANCE

A World Health Organization official warned last week of a "closing window of opportunity" for European countries to prevent their health care systems from being overwhelmed as the omicron variant produces near-vertical growth in coronavirus infections. In France, Britain and Spain, nations with comparatively strong national health programs, that window may already be closed.

The director of an intensive care unit at a hospital in Strasbourg is turning patients away. A surgeon at a London hospital describes a critical delay in a man's cancer diagnosis. Spain is seeing its determination to prevent a system collapse tested as omicron keeps medical personnel off work.

"There are a lot of patients we can't admit, and it's the non-COVID patients who are the collateral victims of all this," said Dr. Julie Helms, who runs the ICU at Strasbourg University Hospital in far eastern France. Two years into the pandemic, with the exceptionally contagious omicron impacting public services of various kinds, the variant's effect on medical facilities has many reevaluating the resilience of public health systems that are considered essen-

tial to providing equal care. The problem, experts say, is that few health systems built up enough flexibility to handle a crisis like the coronavirus before it emerged, while repeated infection spikes have kept the rest too preoccupied to implement changes during the long emergency.

Hospital admissions per capita right now are as high in France, Italy and Spain as they were last spring, when the three countries had lockdowns or other restrictive measures in place. England's hospitalization rate of people with COVID-19 for the week ending Jan. 9 was slightly higher than it was in early February 2021, before most residents were vaccinated.

This time, there are no lockdowns. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, a population health research organization based at the University of Washington, predicts that more than half of the people in WHO Europe's 53-country region will be infected with omicron within two months. That includes doctors, nurses and technicians at public hospitals. About 15% of the Strasbourg hospital system's staff of 13,000 was out this week. In some hospitals, the employee absentee rate is 20%. Schedules are made and reset to plug gaps; patients whose needs aren't critical must wait.

Yemen forces recapture strategic district from Houthis

IAN S ■ SANAA

The Yemen government army has recaptured Harib district in the oil-rich province of Marib from the Houthi militia after a deadly battle, a military source confirmed. The army entered the district's central town on Saturday and now is combing the areas surrounding it, the source told Xinhua news agency.

Meanwhile, the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV reported that the coalition carried out 33 airstrikes on Marib in the past 24 hours, destroying 21 vehicles of the Houthi militia and killing 190 militants. The Houthi is yet to officially comment on the developments.

The Houthis seized Harib and several other districts in the government-controlled province last year. Last week, Yemeni army recaptured three districts in adjacent province of Shabwa from the Houthi militia after a 10-day battle, taking the whole province of Shabwa from the militia. Yemen has been mired in a civil war since late 2014 when the Houthi militia seized control of several northern provinces and forced the internationally recognized government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi out of the capital Sanaa.

LA thieves rob freight trains filled with UPS, FedEx, Amazon packages

IAN S ■ LOS ANGELES

Photos and videos have gone viral on the social media showing empty boxes of major shipping companies like UPS, FedEx and Amazon, littered alongside rail tracks in Los Angeles County, as there has been a spike in freight train thefts, according to a media report.

A CNN report on Saturday said that Union Pacific, one of the country's largest railroad companies, has announced it may avoid operating in Los Angeles County following the spike in thefts, which it blames on lax prosecution of crimes.

The containers and trains are locked, but can be broken into, the report added. In a letter to the Los Angeles District Attorney sent last month, the Union claimed that it saw a 160 per cent year-over-year increase in theft in the county, the largest in the US.

Meanwhile, the Association of American Railroads has expressed concern about crime increase. "In coordination with local law and where necessary federal law enforcement partners, industry is committed to pursuing all avenues necessary to address this criminal behaviour," an Association spokesman said in a statement.

Budget could consider levying TDS/TCS on crypto trading, make it reportable in SFT

New Delhi: The Government could consider in the upcoming Budget levying TDS/TCS on sale and purchase of cryptocurrencies above a certain threshold and such transactions should be brought within the ambit of specified transaction for the purpose of reporting to income tax authorities, Nangia Andersen LLP Tax Leader Aravind Srivatsan said.

Also, a higher tax rate of 30 per cent should be levied on the income arising from the sale of cryptocurrency, similar to winnings from lottery, game shows, puzzle, etc, he said.

Speaking to PTI on what the Budget 2022-23, to be unveiled by the government on February 1, could have in store for the crypto industry in India, Srivatsan said currently, India has the highest number of crypto owners globally, at 10.07 crore and as per a report it is expected that the investment by Indians in cryptocurrency could touch USD 241 million by 2030.

"A bill was expected to be presented during Winter Session of Parliament to regulate cryptocurrencies. However, it was not introduced, and it is now expected that the government may take up this bill in the Budget Session. If the government does not prohibit Indians from dealing in cryptocurrencies, we expect that the government could introduce a regressive tax regime for cryptocurrencies," he noted.

He said considering the size of the market, the amount involved, and the risk coupled with cryptocurrencies, certain changes may be brought in the taxation of cryptocurrencies like bringing them under the provisions of tax deducted at source (TDS) and tax collected at source (TCS) above a threshold

limit which will help the Government get the "foot-prints of the investors".

Both sale and purchase of cryptocurrencies should be brought under the ambit of reporting in the Statement of Financial Transactions (SFT).

The trading companies already do similar reporting of sale and purchase of shares and units of mutual funds, he said. To keep a watch on high value transactions undertaken by the taxpayer, the Income-tax law has the concept of SFT or reportable account.

This helps tax authorities to collect information on certain prescribed high value transactions undertaken by any person during the year. Financial institutions, companies and stock market intermediaries fall within the purview of SFT reporting. Srivatsan said similar to winnings from lottery, game shows, puzzle, etc., a higher tax rate of 30 per cent should be levied on the income arising from the sale of cryptocurrency. Ahead of the winter session of Parliament which ended of December 23, the government had listed for introduction a bill on regulating cryptocurrencies. The bill comes amid concerns over such currencies being allegedly used for luring investors with misleading claims.

Currently, there is no regulation or any ban on use of cryptocurrencies in the country.

The 'Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill' is now expected to be introduced in the Budget session of Parliament beginning January 31. Separately, the government is mulling changes in income tax laws to bring cryptocurrencies under the tax net, and some changes that could form part of the 2022-23 Budget. **PTI**

ICRA suggests long-term finance at low rates for power, renewables in Budget

New Delhi: Availability of adequate long-term financing at competitive rates is key in achieving India's renewable as well as sustainable goals, rating agency ICRA said as part of its pre-Budget expectations report.

The Union Budget for FY23 will be tabled in the Parliament on February 1.

The rating agency said that incentives and relevant policy measures are needed to promote investments in the energy storage segment, considering the increasing share of renewables in the electricity generation mix.

"This apart, policy measures are required to revive the stranded gas-based projects, which would enable availability of balancing power sources," it said.

To augment domestic manufacturing of solar modules, the Centre must increase the production-linked incentives outlay for the manufacturers, it added.

For power distribution companies, the budgetary allocation must be increased to improve transmission infrastructure (both at intra-state and inter-state levels) for evacuation power from the regions having high renewable energy potential.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the COP26 meet in Glasgow, said India aims to increase its non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, besides the country wishes to fulfil 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030.

Also, India intends to reduce its total projected carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes by 2030 and ultimately, become a net zero carbon emitter by 2070. **IAN S**

Gold imports jumped over 2-fold to \$38 bn in Apr-Dec 2021



New Delhi: India's gold imports, which has a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), more than doubled to USD 38 billion during April-December this fiscal on account of higher demand, according to data of the commerce ministry.

The imports stood at USD 16.78 billion in April-December 2020.

In December 2021, imports of the precious metal rose to USD 4.8 billion from USD 4.5 billion in the year-ago period.

The surge in gold imports during the nine months contributed to the widening of the trade deficit to USD 142.44 billion against USD 61.38 billion in April-December 2020.

Similarly, silver imports also increased to USD 2 billion during April-December 2021 from

USD 762 million in the same period of the previous fiscal.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry.

The gems and jewellery exports during the nine-month of the current fiscal grew by 71 per cent to about USD 29 million.

India's current account slipped into a deficit of USD 9.6 billion or 1.3 per cent of GDP in the September quarter, according to the Reserve Bank.

The current account, which records the value of exports and imports of goods and services, along with international transfers of capital, was in a surplus mode both in the quarter-ago and year-ago periods. **PTI**

India's overall macroeconomic situation on recovery mode but facing stagflation: Basu

New Delhi: India's overall macroeconomic situation is in a recovery mode but the growth is concentrated at the top end, which is a worrying trend, according to former World Bank Chief Economist Kaushik Basu.

Amid the rising inflationary trends, including the sharp increase in retail inflation last month, Basu, who has also served as Chief Economic Advisor to the Indian government during the UPA rule, said the country is facing stagflation and "very carefully curated policy interventions" are required to address the situation.

Currently, Basu is a professor of Economics at the Cornell University in the United States.

While the aggregate economy is growing, "the bottom half of India" is in recession, he said and noted that it was sad the country's policy over the last few years has been largely focused on big businesses. "India's overall macroeconomic situation is in recovery mode... The worry stems from the fact that this growth is concentrated at the top end," Basu told PTI in an interview.

He also said the youth unemployment rate in the country touched 23 per cent, among the highest globally, even before the Covid-19 pandemic started. Workers, farmers and small businesses are seeing negative growth, he added. **PTI**

Increase in tax on components to make mobile PLI uncompetitive for exports: ICEA

New Delhi: Demanding reduction in import duty on parts used for making mobile phones, industry body ICEA has said that increase in taxes on components will make the products manufactured in India under the PLI scheme globally uncompetitive.

The India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) in its budget wishlist has demanded roll-back of goods and services tax to 12 per cent from 18 per cent at present as it is a deterrent for growth of domestic market and manufacturers as well as checks in adoption of mobile phones by disadvantaged sections in rural India.

ICEA chairman Pankaj Mohindroo in a letter to the Ministry of Electronics and IT said that the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme offers an incentive for meeting partial cost disability for manufacturing in India compared with other countries such as China and Vietnam that existed before January, 2020.

"Post the change in the duty structure in the Union Budgets for financial year (FY) 2020-21 and FY 2021-22 the cost disability gap has increased further. Increasing tariffs on inputs will lead to serious impact on the

cost structures of PLI approved companies, rendering their product uncompetitively priced for global markets," Mohindroo said. Samsung and Apple's contract manufacturers are the biggest investors under the PLI scheme and both these brands dominate mobile phone exports from India.

The government expects mobile phones worth Rs 10.5 lakh crore to be manufactured under the PLI scheme. Mohindroo said that the Government has introduced 15 per cent duty on camera lens and 2.5 per cent on rest of the parts which make the camera modules production in India competitive and called for rationalisation of taxes as complete camera modules used in mobile phones can be imported by paying 11 per cent import duty.

The industry body has called for rationalisation of duties on the mother boards (printed circuit board assembly), mechanics components, etc used in mobile phones as well on components used for making mobile phone accessories like Lithium ion cell for power banks, raw materials for wireless and audio devices etc.

ICEA said that the hike in GST by 50 per cent in March 2020 to 18 per cent from 12 per

cent should be rolled back as it slows down the digital India campaign and deters growth of manufacturers.

"The GST increase of 50 per cent in March 2020 was a cruel blow to the mobile industry. The rationale presented to the GST Council was flawed. The sovereign assurance of no increase in cumulative tax was also given a go-by with this increase. In the pre-GST era, the excise duty plus VAT was 6 per cent (in most states), and the weighted average was 7.2 per cent. All components, parts and accessories were at zero duty for manufacturing," ICEA said in the budget wishlist separately.

According to industry body ICEA, whose members include Apple, Foxconn, Wistron, Lava and Vivo, mobile phone production in the country peaked at ₹2.2 lakh crore in 2020-21 and is expected to cross ₹ 2.75 lakh crore by March 2022 which will significantly meet demand of the domestic market.

To achieve the goal of smartphones in the hands of every Indian, and to broaden a domestic mobile phone market of USD 55 billion (about ₹4 lakh crore), it is imperative to restore the status quo ante with respect to the GST on mobile phones from 18 to 12 per cent. **PTI**

FPIs invested ₹3,117 crore in markets in Jan so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) reversed the three-month selling streak in January by investing net ₹3,117 crore in Indian markets, so far this month.

Depositories data showed that they pumped ₹ 1,857 crore into equities and Rs 1,743 crore into hybrid instruments during January 1-14. At the same time, they pulled out ₹482 crore from the debt segment, taking the total net inflow to ₹ 3,117 crore. Prior to this, overseas investors were net sellers in the Indian markets for three consecutive months since October 2021.

"IT stocks have boomed in Jan after the good results of IT majors. This is likely to be repeated in the case of financials too," noted VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

As per Himanshu Srivastava, associate director - manager research, Morningstar India, FPIs have currently adopted cautious stance towards Indian equities. With Union Budget around the corner, FPIs would like to get

more clarity and direction from the government about its roadmap towards economic growth before investing substantially in the country's capital markets.

For the debt segment, Srivastava said FPIs haven't been investing significantly in Indian debt markets for a long time now and that trend continues.

About other emerging markets, Shrikant Chouhan, head- equity research (retail), Kotak Securities said FPI flows were positive across the emerging markets except for the Philippines which witnessed an outflow of USD 4 million.

Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia saw inflow of USD 1,793 million, USD 1,528 million, USD 445 million and USD 322 million, respectively.

"Amidst sharp increase in Omicron cases, elevated inflation and expectations of rate hike by the U.S, FPI flows in the emerging markets are expected to remain volatile," said Chouhan.

As far as Indian market is concerned, upcoming Union Budget and earnings season would be the key things to monitor, he added. **PTI**

National Startup Day validates role of ventures in growth of economy

New Delhi: National Startup Day is a validation of the role of startups in the growth of the country's GDP and strengthening India's position at a global stage, and will encourage young talent to see entrepreneurship as a primary career option, according to industry experts.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the country will celebrate January 16 as National Startup Day, as he termed startups the "backbone" of new India and the engine that will power the nation's economic growth in the run up to the 100th year of Independence.

"National Startup day is a validation of the role of startups in the growth of country's GDP and strengthening India's position at a global stage. This initiative will not only make startups mainstream but also encourage young talent from seeing entrepreneurship as a primary career option," Varun Saxena, founder and CEO of short video platform Bolo Live, said.

The acknowledgment is a big morale booster for entrepreneurs - the new job creators of the country, he added. ValPro Director Neha Khanna highlighted that the startup

ecosystem has seen maturity over the last decade, and new age-ventures are contributing significantly to the economy in multiple ways. The contribution of startups include by way of large infusion of FDI in an asset class outside of public markets, export of products and services by the country, larger base of retail investors borne out of employees with respectable salaries and wealth creation tools such as ESOPs and being a key consumption market in the global economy.

The Prime Minister, during his address, had noted that 42 unicorns - companies valued at over USD 1 billion - had come up in India last year and that startups are "changing the rules of the game. He had added that the golden era of India's startups is starting now, and that the country is rapidly moving towards hitting a century of unicorns - a hallmark of self-reliant and self-confident India.

Mayank Kumar, co-founder and MD of edutech firm upGrad, said while India is already a talent powerhouse, this move will further encourage millions to innovate and find solutions to business and societal challenges, thus making the country a global leader.

Pranav Dangi, founder and CEO of The Hosteller, said National Startup Day will help startups stay motivated on their path and push them to perfect services with the knowledge that the government acknowledges their hard work and creative visions.

"We hope to see more focus on small and middle tier startups that will benefit greatly from the exposure and consideration. The startup market in India is not only booming but exactly at that precipice where this positive and supportive environment will propel growth in exponential numbers," he added.

Dhruv Sawhney, Business Head and COO of nurture.Farm, said the Indian youth is today equipped to solve problems that previously did not have a voice or a face. "With a billion-plus population to serve, there are a plethora of services and offerings that, when innovated, can change the standard of living or ease of living for millions of people...Celebrating such innovators and service providers will boost confidence and give more and more youngsters the necessary push to take risks with respect to their ideas and drive changes," he added.

PMC Bank merger with Unity Small Finance Bank awaits Govt approval

New Delhi: The proposed merger of debt-ridden Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank with Unity Small Finance Bank (USFB) is being examined and the process of amalgamation will start after the government approval, sources said.

Various aspects of the scheme of amalgamation have been examined and the government would soon send its suggestions, if any, to the RBI, sources said.

The RBI in December extended the restrictions on Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank for another three months till the end of March, 2022 as all necessary process on the draft scheme for the takeover was not complete.

As per the Banking Regulation Act, the draft scheme of amalgamation is required to be placed before the government for its sanction and the Centre may sanction the scheme without any modifications or with such modifications as it may consider necessary.

The scheme as sanctioned by the government would come into force on such date as the they may specify, as per the Act. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had prepared a draft scheme of amalgamation and the same was placed in the public domain on November 22 as part of seeking suggestions and objections, if any, from members, depositors and other creditors of PMC Bank and Delhi-based USFB.

The deadline for submitting the comments was till December 10.

In September 2019, the RBI had superseded the board of PMC

Bank and placed it under regulatory restrictions, including putting a cap on withdrawals by its customers, after detection of certain financial irregularities, hiding and misreporting of loans given to real estate developer HDIL.

The restrictions have been extended several times since then. The directions were last extended in June this year and are in place till December 31.

The draft scheme of amalgamation envisages a takeover of the assets and liabilities of PMC Bank, including deposits, by USFB, thus giving a greater degree of protection for the depositors, the RBI had said in November last year.

It may be seen that USFB has been set up with capital of about ₹ 1,100 crore as against regulatory requirement of ₹ 200 crore for setting up of a small finance bank.

Further, the scheme notes that equity warrants of ₹ 1,900 crore, to be exercised anytime within a total period of eight years, have been issued by USFB on November 1, 2021 to the promoters to bring further capital.

Under the scheme of arrangement, the depositors will get their full amount back over a period of 10 years. In the initial phase, the bank will pay amount insured under Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) of up to ₹ 5 lakh to depositors.

It is to be noted that USFB, a joint venture between Centrum Group and Bharatpe, has commenced operations as a small finance bank with effect from November 1, 2021. **PTI**

ATF price hiked by 4.2%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jet fuel or ATF price on Sunday was hiked by 4.2 per cent - the second increase in rates this month warranted by firming international oil prices, but petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged for the 72nd day in a row.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was hiked by ₹ 3,232.87 per kilolitre, or 4.25 per cent, to ₹79,294.91 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

This is the second increase in rates this month. Rates were hiked by ₹ 2,039.63 per kl, or 2.75 per cent, to ₹76,062.04 per kl on January 1.

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

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

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

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

Unlike ATF, petrol and diesel rates are revised daily after taking the average price in the preceding fortnight. But prices have remained unchanged since November 4, 2021, when the central government had cut excise duty on petrol by ₹5 per litre and that on diesel by ₹10 a litre. **PTI**

Life insurers seek separate bucket for life insurance premium, tax-free annuity in Budget

New Delhi: The life insurance industry has recommended the Government to create a separate bucket for tax rebate under section 80 (C) and make annuity tax-free for the benefit of subscribers as part of its demand for the next Union Budget to be unveiled in February.

The ₹ 1,50,000 limit for tax rebates is a pretty cluttered bucket and it does not give much space for the life insurance premiums (to get the full benefit of tax exemption), Karthik Raman, CMO and Head - Products, Ageas Federal Life Insurance, told PTI.

"We want to create a separate bucket from the tax benefit in terms of rebate because section 80 (C) has a limit of ₹ 1,50,000 and everything comes under that like PPF is part of it, and if one has a home loan then for all practical purposes, it is gone.

"So, we would like to have a separate amount of money earmarked for investment in life insurance for tax rebates," he said on behalf of the industry.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the general budget for the next fiscal on February 1.

Also, the industry would like the annuity products to come under tax rebates. Today, the annuity at the hands of the receiver or annuitant is taxable. An annuity is viewed as salary and hence it is taxable. However, typically annuity is received by people who are moved out of the regular source of income and they look at an annuity as an alternate source of income.

"The cost of living is only going up, and taxing them doesn't sound right. We are requesting (the government) if an annuity can also be considered under Section 10 (10D) and can be made tax free. "Section 10 (10D) of the Income Tax Act allows an exemption for life insurance benefits including bonus. These are the two things the industry would be very happy if the government could consider," Raman said. He urged the government to make a beginning in that direction and to start again from where it had left it before the insurance premium was merged under the overall tax exemption limit of ₹ 1,50,000 under section 80 (D).

"So, a separate bucket can be created for the life insurance (premium). And the next year and going ahead if the Government feels that it is an important investment, and considering the kind of impact the pandemic had, it would encourage people to look at life insurance as a correct investment," the official said further. **PTI**

NCPCR chief calls for more taxes on tobacco products, OTT, films displaying their use

New Delhi: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) chairperson Priyanka Kanoongo has advocated increasing taxes on tobacco products as well as on films, OTT platforms and other media that display use of such items in any form.

He said affordability and easy availability of lethal tobacco products is harmful, especially for the youth, and an increase in taxes will not only make these products out of bounds, but the additional revenues earned can be used for the treatment and rehabilitation of those suffering

from tobacco-related diseases.

Experts have called for making India free from tobacco during the National Youth Week, being celebrated from January 12-18 to mark Swami Vivekananda Jayanti.

Delivering the keynote address during the webinar 'Freedom From Tobacco: What India Wants' on the occasion of the National Youth Day, Kanoongo, who is the chairman of India's apex child rights body NCPCR, advocated increase in taxes on a wide range of tobacco products **PTI**

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Home Finance

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

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

Branch Office: Ground Floor, B-1/4, Community Centre, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058

Koushombi: 1st Floor, Vishwakarma Complex, Plot No 17/18, Behind Yashoda Hospital, Koushombi, Ghaziabad- 201010

Whereas

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

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Daljeet Singh Chandok (Borrower), Harpreet Kaur Chandhok (Co-Borrower), NHDEL00000797175	F. Floor Sec 22 Garden Pavilion1 Gurgaon Flat Nogg11A Gurgaon Haryana 122001. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	10-05-2021 Rs. 26,52,011/-	Delhi (Janakpuri)-B
2.	Neetu Singh (Borrower), Dharam Pal Choudhary (Co-Borrower), Sumit Chaudhary (Guarantor), Tikri Service Station (Guarantor), NHDEL00001250362	Block 3 1st Floor Commercial Unit No: Sb/R/11/03/009 Situated in The Project Sector-67 M3m Urbana Gurgaon-122001. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	27-08-2021 Rs. 47,39,906/-	Delhi (Janakpuri)-B
3.	Sumit Kumar Deshwal (Borrower), Gaurav Kumar (Co-Borrower), Vimlesh Kumari (Co-Borrower), NMHGH200001279037	Gali No 2 Adarsh Colony H No 40,bounded By- North: Gali, South: Ender Kumar House, East: Nathu Singh House, West: Other Plot. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	27-08-2021 Rs. 21,73,832/-	Ghaziabad-B

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

Date : January 17, 2022

Place: Gurgaon, Palwal

Authorized Officer

ICICI Home Finance Company Limited

WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

SHASHI SHETTY stepped in to help the most vulnerable sections of the society during the pandemic, says MITHILA NAIK-SATAM

ASHA workers have been the first line of defense in the battle against Covid-19 in the rural parts of the country,” says Shashi Shetty, a social worker from Kalyan in Thane district of Maharashtra. Over the years, she has extensively worked towards the upliftment of individuals and children from marginalised communities in Maharashtra. Since the outbreak of the pandemic Shetty and her team have been supporting ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers in conducting drives to eliminate Covid-19. Shetty starts her day early by taking stock of the tasks and coordinating over phone calls. Recently, she and her team organised a drive for the ASHA workers at Saralgaon in Murbad-Malshej Ghat in Maharashtra. “As a token of our support, we had organised a sari and grocery kit distribution drive to honour ASHA workers’ services during these tough times,” she said. While smiling warmly, she adds,



“They have been risking their lives every day.”

Around 195 ASHA workers were present at the distribution drive, wearing brown saris and armed with notebooks in their hands. These women have been on the field each day, going from door to door in their assigned villages to spread the word and to check for symptoms, oxygen levels and temperature regularly. In addition, they have been performing their regular duties, which include pre and post-natal care for pregnant women and immunisation drives for children. Despite having been at the forefront of various disease surveillance programmes, including tuberculosis, HIV-AIDS and now Covid-19, they are still struggling to be recognised

as full-time employees. And during these times, they have been the first victims of the public’s fears about Covid-19.

During the distribution drive, Shetty applauded the service of these women, which instantly brought a wide smile to their faces. She said, “You’ve been given uniforms, you are an army.”

Discussing the way that the drive operates, Shetty says, “We work closely with the local sarpanch, Seema and Anil Gharat. They help us reach the most vulnerable people and families. We’ve supported close to 195 ASHA workers in these testing times,” informed Shashi.

An educationist and a hotelier, Shetty, was felicitated with the

‘Samaj Seva Ratna Gaurav Puraskar’ by the Governor of Maharashtra, Bhagat Singh Koshyari, on November 8, for her work done during the second wave for food relief. Currently, she is a part of the Indian Development Foundation (IDF), an NGO based in Mumbai committed to the health, education and development of marginalised communities.

Reflecting upon the outset of her journey, as a social worker, she said, “It started with IDF and our projects Aashayein and Annadanam which were a part of our SoVo (Social Volunteers) initiative. We work with young children to provide nutritious food and, in addition, organise both fun and educational events. This led me to



the interiors of tribal Maharashtra.” She has been frequenting these tribal areas and reaching out to children and individuals from vulnerable communities.

For Shetty, the pandemic was a clarion call. “I have always wanted to be a soldier; find my calling and step up when called upon to serve the people. So here I was, one amongst the many — a foot soldier — in the battle against Covid-19,” she expressed.

Shetty strongly believes that one’s vibe attracts one’s tribe. That is when she connected with Khaana Chahiye Foundation — a citizen collective based in Mumbai — that had done phenomenal work during the first lockdown and continued to do so during the second wave. “Initially, their operations did not encompass Kalyan, but with one shared goal to help fight hunger, my team — Taurin Nagda, Dinesh Thakkar and the Kutch Yuva Sangh — we set up a community kitchen in the city and also catered to the remote interiors where we worked and had mapped,” shared Shashi.

Recently, Shetty and her team also arranged meals for special children at Avani Matimand Mulanche Nivasi Vidyalaya, a residential school for special children, in Murbad, Thane. And the list continues to grow.

— Charkha Features



A reflection of self

An honest person must empower himself with the unflinching hope that better times will follow, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ J/

The fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind. But the goodness of a person spreads everywhere, said Acharya Chanakya. If we ponder over this quote we may realise that he was right because our acts of kindness, generosity, strength and integrity never fail. In today’s world, many of us find it tough to see the good in ourselves and in others. We prefer to talk about our weaknesses and not our strengths while highlighting our vices. Perhaps this has to do with our childhood when we were told by our parents or relatives to not blow our own trumpet. Or maybe, we learned to easily identify our failures by watching and listening to others and thereby picked up the habit of seeing only the weaknesses of others. Or maybe we grew up with someone whose approach towards life was negative. A question that comes to mind is — which sensible person would choose to ignore the positive and accentuate the negative? Would any of us consciously choose to be a negative person? Not really.

What most of us seldom recognise is a simple principle that what you see in others is what you create within yourself. As the old saying goes ‘what you spot is what you go for’. So, if you didn’t have the tendency that you see in others what you have within your personality, you wouldn’t spot it in the other. That’s why it is essential that we find the good — however small within ourselves — tend to it, nurture it and nourish it just the way we would do to the plants. Remember, when we focus on the positive within ourselves, we give it a life, permission to grow and to get restored in our nature. Most of us don’t realise that the good has been there all along but it was simply out of our sight and awareness. The idea that ‘where your attention goes, energy flows and where your energy flows, things grow’ is now somewhat clichéd. But the principle holds at all levels. Hence, to see the positive, the goodness, the virtue in others is to empower what you see in them. It adds a little of your life energy to their life.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, ‘Be the change you want to see in the world’. So, if you would like others to be good, better and great, then be good, better and great yourself. But, what we see today is sad. The world is more conducive to those who are manipulative and chase rewards than to those toiling hard. In such a scenario many people get disheartened and start asking questions like — what is the point of being good in a bad world? Many of us have come to believe that good gets lost or remains ignored.

History is replete with innumerable examples of times when the bad seemed to be all-pervasive when powerful conquerors looted and trapped the masses in an undignified life. And yet, from these very masses emerged a small courageous group of awakened people who led a revolution against injustice and finally turned the tables on the oppressors. But of



course, all acts of goodness don’t amount to a revolution, for they do not always create winds of change. Nevertheless, they work like a cool breeze in a hot desert or a drizzle on parched land. All of us have had an experience where we had lost all hope in everything and everyone around us. And then one act of kindness by someone somewhere ignited a ray of hope. So, what we need to understand is that no goodness is wasted. It may go unheeded at times and could be overpowered by negative forces but is never wasted, for sure.

We all know the story of the little bird that filled her beak with water from a pond and headed for the woods that were on fire. While she was at it, a spectator asked the tiny creature what was the point of her efforts, for the small droplets would not douse the huge flames. She quipped, “When I die, and my life’s record is being read out, my name will appear in the list of those who tried to put out the flames and not those who sparked it or did nothing about it.” We must remember that there is a law of cause and effect that guides every action in the universe. And what a person does unto anyone, he does unto himself. So, while a negative action piles debt on a person, a positive act is an investment for a good future. And unless one has unshakable faith in the sanctity of this law, one would be forced to succumb to the prevailing hostile environment.

If goodness can survive through troubled times, it can be sure to bloom fully when favourable circumstances arrive. So, an honest person must hold on to his virtue with courage and patience in testing times. He must empower himself with the unflinching hope that as night is followed by day, better times will inevitably follow. So, keep the faith until the new day arrives.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its newest report, brings out the current advances in climate change. The influence of human activities on the planet has further warmed the land, ocean and atmosphere. It further says that CO₂ levels in the atmosphere are at their highest in two million years, sea-level rise is at its fastest in 3,000 years, and Arctic Sea ice is at its lowest in at least 1,000 years. The initiatives undertaken to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) emissions are quite ambitious and will help in limiting global warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C above the pre-industrial levels. The recently concluded (Conference of the Parties) COP 26 aims to reduce the GHG emission by 50 per cent by 2030 and reach ‘net-zero’ by 2070. India also started to increase the renewable energy capacity to 500 gigawatts (GW), which will account for half of the total energy consumption, by 2030.

♦Contribution of renewables

The core objective of renewable energy is to promote economic growth, enhance energy security, increase energy access and reduce climate change. Sustainable development is possible by the use of clean energy and by ensuring access to affordable and reliable energy. India has emerged as the world’s most attractive renewable energy markets due to strong government backing and an improving economic position. To achieve sustainable growth and avert catastrophic climate change, the government is making a rapid shift to renewable energy technology. Customers are shifting to solar, wind, biomass, waste and hydropower energies. It is increasingly evident that clean energy is also affordable. India had set a target of installing 175 GW of renewable energy by 2020. The target is distributed into 100 GW from solar, 60 GW from wind, 10 GW from bio-power and 5 GW from small hydropower. Investors have planned to create a total capacity of more than 270 GW viz., 191 GW by private corporations GW, 58 GW by foreign companies, 18 GW by private sectors contributed 18 GW, and Indian Railways contributed 5 GW. As per the recent predictions, solar and wind potential will be more than 750 GW and 410 GW by 2047.

♦Growth in the electric vehicle market

For the first time in 2019, cumulative yearly sales of battery electric cars and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles surpassed the two million mark globally. The electric vehicle sector has progressed significantly, with automakers investing billions in everything from R&D to plant redesign to offer new electrified vehicles. Traditional original equip-

A feasible future

Manjesh Nayak makes a case for a push towards switching to green energy to ensure sustainability



ment manufacturers (OEMs), new-entrant OEMs, captive financing institutions, and dealerships will all face substantial possibilities and problems as EVs expand in popularity in the years leading up to 2030. EVs have two distinct traits that make them ideal for future vehicle technology. They can be charged with electricity from low- or non-CO₂-emitting sources, allowing for further decarbonisation as compared with vehicles that run on biofuels. Second, electric engines are far more efficient than internal combustion engines (ICEs) or other suggested technologies like compressed-air vehicles.

Another area where advancements are anticipated is energy storage. Batteries hold the key to weaning ourselves off of fossil fuels and will play a critical role in the future. Due to considerable R&D and production increase in lithium-ion batteries, over the last decade, costs have dropped by 80 to 85 per cent.

♦Transitioning to renewable energy

According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, India’s total installed renewable energy capacity, excluding major hydropower, has surpassed 100 GW, accounting for around 26 per cent of total capacity. Renewable energy sources currently account



for 150 GW i.e., 40 per cent of India’s total power generation capacity.

Beyond the climate imperative and the drive from the Indian government, there is another reason driving green energy’s growing appeal. While most policymakers recognised the significance of transitioning to non-fossil-based power generation a decade ago but large-scale solar or wind energy projects were economically unviable without subsidies.

Massive global investments in renewables technology, such as improving PV module efficiency in solar; lowering the balance of plant costs; and improving wind turbine technology have resulted in a significant reduction in the cost. While the cost of wind ener-

gy has decreased by 30-40 per cent, the cost of Concentrating Solar Power (CSP) has decreased by 47 per cent. The greatest significant reduction has been in the cost of solar photovoltaic (SPV) electricity by 82 per cent. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), new renewable power production projects are currently less expensive than maintaining many existing coal facilities.

♦Initiatives by the Government

In its bid to promote the use of non-conventional sources of energy, MNRE has set a target of achieving 500 GW of installed renewable energy capacity by 2030. The government is making efforts to boost the country’s renewable energy industry, including pushing private sector developers to use advanced technologies in renewable energy projects. The majority of renewable energy projects in the country are by private sector developers selected through a bidding procedure. The government has released standard bidding criteria to help distribution licensees get power at competitive prices in a cost-effective way. It also is assisting developers by authorising up to 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Moreover, to meet the 175 GW target, Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charges and losses for inter-state sale of solar and wind power are also waived for renewable projects commissioned by December. Norms for the Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) have been prescribed. Grid integration of utility-scale renewable energy capacity addition shall be aided by the development of Green Energy Corridors. The government has launched PM-KUSUM, solar rooftop phase II, 12,000 MW Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU) scheme Phase II for the better future of renewable energy in India.

With a growing economy, the demand for energy from the commercial and industrial sectors is going to increase. Setting up new power plants is inevitably dependent on the import of highly volatile fossil fuels. Thus, it is essential to cater to the energy demand through judicious utilisation of abundant renewable energy resources, such as biomass, solar, hydropower and wind energy. Apart from debating on the energy supply, renewable resources will help India in mitigating climate change. Renewable energy can create many employment opportunities. It is possible to attract foreign investments to herald a Green Energy Revolution in India.

(The author is the director & CFO of Oorjan Cleantech, a solar energy company.)

Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. —William James

WORSENING EFFECT OF HUMID HEAT

A punishing mix of heat and humidity that makes outdoor labour difficult and dangerous is causing around 677 billion lost working hours a year around the world, according to a new study that warns climate change is making it worse.

Researchers in the United States, who estimated the current cost at \$2.1 trillion every year, said that the negative effects of stifling temperatures on people doing heavy work in agriculture and construction had been underestimated.

The new figures come amid a growing focus on the severe health impacts of climate change, not just as projections of future harm from heatwaves and other extreme events, but also as consequences already playing out across a warming world. The study, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, looked at data on humid heat which is particularly dangerous because the body is less able to cool down by sweating.



HEART DISEASE TREBLES ALZHEIMER PROTEIN

A new research, published in *eLife*, has found that heart disease causes a breakdown of a key brain function which links brain activity and blood flow, meaning the brain gets less blood for the same amount of activity.

The researchers discovered that the combination of heart disease and a genetic predisposition for Alzheimer’s Disease trebles the amount of beta-amyloid, a protein that builds up and triggers Alzheimer’s, and increases the levels of an inflammatory gene (IL1) in the brain.

Dr Osman Shabir, the lead author of the study from the University of Sheffield’s Neuroscience and Healthy Lifespan Institute, said: “We’ve discovered that heart disease in midlife causes the breakdown of neurovascular coupling, an important mechanism in our brains which controls the amount of blood supplied to our neurons. This breakdown means the brain doesn’t get enough oxygen when needed and in time this can lead to dementia.”



VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY IS EASIER

The Edith Cowan University (ECU) study found 30 per cent of people prefer to talk about negative experiences with a virtual reality avatar, rather than a person.

Researchers compared social interactions where people engaged in VR conversation versus face-to-face. They used full face and body motion capture technology to create a ‘realistic motion avatar’ that closely mimicked their real-life counterpart, then analysed how people interacted with avatars compared to people.

Psychology and communication researcher Dr Shane Rogers said participants rated their experience on factors such as enjoyment, perceived understanding, comfort, awkwardness and the extent that they felt they disclosed information about themselves.

“Overall people rated VR social interaction as similar to face-to-face interaction, except where people tended to feel a little closer with each other when face-to-face,” Dr Rogers said



PAST 8 YEARS WERE WARMEST

Earth’s global average surface temperature in 2021 tied with 2018 as the sixth warmest on record, according to an independent analysis done by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Continuing the planet’s long-term warming trend, global temperatures in 2021 were 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit (0.85 degrees Celsius) above the average for NASA’s baseline period, according to scientists at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) in New York. NASA uses the period from 1951-1980 as a baseline to see how global temperature changes over time.

Collectively, the past eight years are the warmest since modern recordkeeping began in 1880. According to NASA’s temperature record, Earth in 2021 was about 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit (or about 1.1 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 19th-century average.



GOJI BERRIES TO PREVENT VISION LOSS

Regularly eating a small serving of dried goji berries may help prevent or delay the development of age-related macular degeneration, or AMD, in healthy middle-aged people, according to a small, randomised trial conducted at the University of California, Davis.

AMD is the leading cause of vision loss in older people. “AMD affects your central field of vision and can affect your ability to read or recognise faces,” said Glenn Yiu, a co-author of the study and an associate professor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences.

The researchers found that 13 healthy participants aged 45 to 65 who consumed 28 grams (about one ounce, or a handful) of goji berries five times a week for 90 days increased the density of protective pigments in their eyes.



SEN WINS MEN'S SINGLES CROWN

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty became the first team from the country to win India's flagship tournament after toppling three-time world champions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Lakshya Sen secured his maiden Super 500 title by winning the Yonex-Sunrise India Open with a stunning straight-game victory over reigning world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore in the men's singles final here on Sunday.

It was after Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty became the first team from the country to win India's flagship tournament after toppling three-time world champions Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan.

The 20-year-old Sen, who had claimed his maiden world championships medal with a bronze in Spain last month, produced a fine performance to outshine the fifth seeded shuttler 24-22 21-17 in the summit clash that lasted 54 minutes.

Satwik and Chirag showed nerves of steel as the duo saved five game points to overcome the world No. 2 Indonesian pair 21-16 26-24 in 43 minutes.

Going into this match, the two had a 2-2 head-to-head record with Sen losing two of the last three meetings, but the Indian was the better man on show on Sunday as he showed great athleticism,

used his attacking shots to good effect and came up with his punched winners from the back at the right moments.

It is Sen's biggest title of his career. He had won two Super 100 titles -- Dutch Open and SaarLorLux Open -- besides three international challenge at Belgium, Scotland and Bangladesh in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic came in the way of his progress.

Last year, the youngster made it to the semifinals at Hylo, reached the knockout stage at World Tour Finals on debut before sizzling at the World Championships with a bronze.

Satwik and Chirag came into the match with a 1-3 head-to-head record against their opponents but they dished out a brave effort to stage off a fightback from the Indonesians and reign supreme in the final.

From almost missing the tournament following false COVID positive results to winning the title, it turned out to be an incredible start to 2022 for the Indian pair, which accumulated valuable ranking points ahead of a busy season, which comprises big-ticket events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games.



The Indian pair started on a positive note and even though the Indonesian combination fought back, Satwik and Chirag ensured they were two points ahead at the first interval.

The Indians tried to engage their rivals in rallies and led 18-13 but the Indonesians reduced the deficit to 16-18 before Satwik and Chirag prevailed in the opening game.

Fast-paced but short rallies were the norm in the second game as well, as Ahsan and Satiawan grabbed a three-point lead at 9-6 early in the second game.

But the Indian pair again ensured they have the advantage at the break, grabbing a slender 11-10 lead. Sawtik and Chirag maintained the intensity in the rallies after the break to lead 15-13.

The world number two again drew parity at 17-17 but Satwik and Chirag moved to 19-17 when Ahsan erred at net. Chirag went long next and it was 19-19. The Indonesians managed to move to a game point with a tap by Ahsan.

What followed was a frequent exchange of points as both India and Indonesia earned and squandered their advantageous positions in equal measure.

After a fierce battle, it was the Indian pair that emerged winners with the Indonesia squandering five game points.

Satwik and Chirag had won the Thailand Open Super 500 title in 2019, besides reaching the final at French Open Super 750 the same year.

Vidit Gujrathi starts with a win

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE (NETHERLANDS)

Indian Grandmaster Vidit Santosh Gujrathi began his campaign at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament with a win over American Sam Shankland, here.

After the rating favourites Magnus Carlsen, Fabiano Caruana (USA) and Anish Giri (the Netherlands) drew their games, Jan-Krzysztof Duda, Gujrathi and Jorden van Foreest grabbed the lead with victories in round one, late on Saturday.

Gujrathi, the India No.2 behind Viswanathan Anand, took advantage of a mistake by Shankland, playing black, on the 33rd move to grind out a win in 73 moves.

The other Indian player in the fray in the Masters section of the Tata Steel chess tournament - Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa opened with a draw against Anish Giri (the Netherlands) in 44 moves.

The 16-year old Indian faced Giri in a rare line of the English Opening with Black. The Dutchman made a pawn sacrifice to grab the initiative, but the Indian youngster neutralised white's threats and safely played out a draw.

World No.1 Carlsen of Norway was held to a draw by Russia's Andrey Esipenko in 21 moves as chose to play it safe against the highly-rated opponent.

Caruana had the upper hand



against Sergey Karjakin (Russia) but missed a couple of good attacking opportunities and allowed his opponent to escape with a draw.

In the second round later on Sunday night, Gujrathi faces Caruana while Praggnanandhaa takes on Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Poland).

A total of 14 players are taking part in the round-robin tournament featuring 13 rounds with Carlsen headlining a strong field.

Meanwhile in the Challengers event, being held simultaneously, experienced Indian GM Surya Sekhar Ganguly began with a victory over Marc Andria Maurizzi of France. Arjun Erigaisi, the top-seed, was held to a draw by Lucas van Foreest (the Netherlands).

Good start in the first match will boost our confidence

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Midfielder Indumathi Kathiresan feels a good start in their AFC Women's Asian Cup campaign-opener against Iran will give hosts India a massive boost going forward.

India, drawn in Group A, will open its campaign against Iran here on Thursday.

Besides Iran, India will take on Chinese Taipei (January 23) and China (January 26) in the 12-team competition, which will be held in three cities of Maharashtra.

"It's important for us to get a good start in the first match itself.

That would really give us the confidence to push ahead," Kathiresan was quoted as saying by the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

"We had played Iran a couple of years back in the Hero Gold Cup, and they are a good side. They are a side that has qualified for the Asian Cup, and they deserve the respect. Having said that, we are confident in our abilities, but not overconfident," the midfielder added.



Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the teams are operating from within a bio bubble and no spectators are allowed for the continental event.

"It's sad that we won't have the fans in the stands to support us in the Asian Cup, especially since we are the ones hosting it," forward Dangmei Grace said.

"But seeing such excitement everywhere is certainly motivating for us all. When you play for the country, you always dream of such support," Grace added.

India have four teenagers in the squad -- Hemam Shilky

Devi, Naorem Priyanka Devi, Sumati Kumari, and Mariyammal Balamurugan.

Of these, 18-year-old Mariyammal and 16-year-old Shilky have already made their senior international debuts against Brazil in November last year. "It was definitely a surreal experience to play in Brazil. But we can never stop at that. For me, this is just the start of my football career, and I want to keep pushing as far as I can.

"Playing Brazil was a unique experience, but playing the Asian Cup will be even bigger. We can't wait," said Mariyammal.

Beijing reports 1st local omicron case ahead of Olympics

AP ■ HONG KONG

Beijing has reported its first local Omicron infection, according to state media, weeks before the Winter Olympic Games are due to start.

The infected person lives and works in the city's northwestern district of Haidian and had no travel history outside of Beijing for the past two weeks. The individual experienced symptoms on Thursday and was tested on Friday for COVID-19, officials said in a news conference Saturday.

The news of the infection comes less than three weeks before the Winter Olympic Games' opening ceremony on Feb 4., and around two weeks before the start of Lunar New Year celebrations in China.

So far, multiple cities in China have reported omicron infections, including Zhuohai and Zhongshan in southern Guangdong province as well as the city of Tianjin, which is 30 minutes from Beijing by high-speed rail.

Officials across the country have urged residents to stay in their cities for the new year, instead of traveling back to their hometowns.

China has adopted a strict "zero-Covid" policy, with authorities lock-



ing down residential compounds and even entire cities such as

Xi'an when a local outbreak has been discovered in an effort to stamp out community transmission.

The Beijing patient's residential compound and workplace have been sealed off and authorities are mass-testing people linked to either location for the coronavirus. Some 2,430 people had been tested as of Saturday night, according to The Global Times, a state-owned newspaper.

China reported 119 new coronavirus infections on Saturday, of which 65 were domestic cases. The country has reported 104,864 infections since the beginning of the pandemic.

Mbappe scores for leader PSG

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe's 10th goal in the French league helped leader Paris Saint-Germain overcome a sloppy start to beat Brest 2-0 and stay 11 points ahead of second-placed Nice.

PSG was missing Lionel Messi as he continues to recover from the coronavirus, and struggled early.

Brest forward Irvin Cardona was lively and forced goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma into two smart saves.

Mbappe's excellent form has glossed over PSG's shortcomings this season, and he curled a shot into the bottom corner from the left of the penalty area in the 32nd minute.



PSG midfielder Marco Verratti hit the post just after the break, and left back Nuno Mendes set up fellow defender Thilo Kehrer for a close-range volley in the

53rd. Brest was in 13th place but finished as the stronger side.

Earlier, Saint-Etienne's campaign took a turn for the

worse when it conceded deep in injury time and lost at home to Lens 2-1.

Rock-bottom Saint-Etienne has won only two games and lost 12, leaving it

four points behind 19th-placed Metz.

Captain Seko Fofana curled the ball in brilliantly five minutes into stoppage time to give fourth-placed Lens another late win after an 88th-minute strike against Rennes last weekend.

Firing coach Claude Puel has made little difference for Saint-Etienne, once one of Europe's most entertaining sides during the Michel Platini era.

Puel's replacement, Pascal Dupraz, saved Toulouse from relegation against the odds in 2017, and Saint-Etienne is looking just as bad this time.

The pick of Sunday's games sees third-placed Marseille hosting defending champion Lille.

ISL fixture between Kerala and Mumbai City FC postponed

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Indian Super League (ISL) match between Kerala Blasters FC and Mumbai City FC in Vasco was postponed on Sunday, hours before their kickoff as the southern outfit did not have the requisite number of players to field.

The match was scheduled to be played at the Tilak Maidan in Vasco.

The organisers did not specify the reason for the postponement. Prior to this, two more matches had been postponed this season after the coronavirus breached the ISL's bio-bubble. "Hero Indian Super League (ISL) has decided to postpone Match No. 62 between Kerala Blasters FC and Mumbai City FC scheduled to be played today, Sunday, January 16,



2022, at Tilak Maidan Stadium, Vasco. The League will look to reschedule the fixture to a later date," the ISL said in a statement. "The decision has been taken

in consultation with the League's medical team after it was assessed Kerala Blasters FC do not have the requisite number of players available for the match.

Djokovic 'disappointed' over losing deportation appeal

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic said he was disappointed that a court on Sunday dismissed his challenge to a deportation order and accepted his hopes of playing at the Australian Open were dashed.

The top-ranked tennis star released a statement shortly after three Federal Court judges unanimously upheld a decision made on Friday by Immigration Minister Alex Hawke to cancel the 34-year-old Serb's visa on public interest grounds because he is not vaccinated for COVID-19.

"I am extremely disappointed with the Court ruling to dismiss my application for

judicial review of the Minister's decision to cancel my visa, which means I cannot stay in Australia and participate in the Australian Open," Djokovic said.

"I respect the Court's ruling and I will cooperate with the relevant authorities in relation to my departure from the country," he added.

Djokovic said he was "uncomfortable" that the focus had been on him since his visa was first canceled on arrival at Melbourne's airport on Jan. 6.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love," he said.

The decision likely means that Djokovic, who is not vaccinated for COVID-19, will



remain in detention in Melbourne until he is deported.

Deportation usually occurs as soon as possible after an order unless prevented by court action. The government has not said when Djokovic will leave.

A deportation order also usually includes a three-year ban on returning to Australia. Chief Justice James Allsop said the ruling came down to whether the minister's decision was "irrational or legally unreasonable."

Hawke welcome the decision. His office did not immediately provide detail of how or when Djokovic would leave.

"Australia's strong border protection policies have kept us

safe during the pandemic, resulting in one of the lowest death rates, strongest economic recoveries, and highest vaccination rates in the world," Hawke said in a statement.

"Strong border protection policies are also fundamental to safe-guarding Australia's social cohesion which continues to strengthen despite the pandemic," he added.

Djokovic could potentially appeal to the High Court, but not in time for him to compete in the Australian tournament.

"I will now be taking some time to rest and to recuperate, before making any further comments beyond this," he said.

The court process that Djokovic had hoped would keep his aspirations alive for a 21st Grand Slam title was extraordinarily fast by Australian standards.

Within three hours of Hawke's announcement on Friday afternoon that Djokovic's visa was canceled, his lawyers went before a Federal Circuit and Family Court judge to initiate their challenge to the decision.

The case was elevated to the Federal Court on Saturday and submissions were filed by both sides that same day.

The three judges heard the case over five hours on Sunday and announced their verdict two hours later.

VIRAT KOHLI: CAPTAIN WHO WENT FOR WIN AT ALL COSTS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Going for the win at the risk of losing and playing five bowlers were two non-negotiables for Virat Kohli, India's most successful Test captain.

Having taken up Test captaincy from M S Dhoni in the middle of a series in Australia back in 2014, Kohi changed the way India played the five-day game.

Filling in for the injured Dhoni in the Adelaide Test, Kohli not for once thought about a draw with India needing 364 runs in 98 overs on day five. His aggressive approach rubbed off on to the entire team as the visitors got agonisingly close to a famous win before losing the game by 48 runs.

"At no point did we not think about chasing the score down. We have come here to play positive cricket. No sort of negativity is welcome in this group. That's the kind of belief we have come here with," Kohli said after the loss that sowed the seeds of many famous wins overseas during his seven-year tenure as captain.

"This has been one of our

strongest performances overseas in the past two-three years, and I am really proud the way the boys played in this game."

'Lions at home, lambs abroad' was the tag associated with past teams but Kohli ensured India became the team for all conditions, he took out the place and pitch out of the equation.

FIVE-BOWLER THEORY THAT REAPED RICH REWARDS

Before Kohli, winning a Test overseas was considered a big deal but when he shocked the cricketing world by stepping down from captaincy on Saturday, his rich legacy included a team mentality which did not settle for anything less than a series victory.

What enabled Kohli to win Test matches overseas regularly was the fast bowling resources he had at his disposal. The likes of Mohammad Shami, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah flourished under his leadership, turning into India's most fearsome bowling attack of all times.

Former chief selector MSK Prasad, whose majority of the tenure



coincided with Kohli's reign as captain in all three formats, explained how the champion batter contributed to India's stellar success across formats.

"First of all I feel he built a winning culture in the side, especially away from home. He introduced the five bowler theory and fitness culture he had helped change before that," Prasad, who thought Kohli had another three four years of captaincy left in him, told PTI.

"He brought aggression into the side. Kohli along with the rest of the stakeholders created a bench strength of fast bowlers which helped us take 20 wickets when we were travelling."

FAST-TRACKING BUMRAH'S TEST DEBUT

Kohli had managed to build a strong pace attack for all conditions but the x-factor was missing, which was eventually provided by Jasprit Bumrah, who since making his Test debut in South Africa four years ago, has become of the one of the best bowlers in the world.

"I still remember in 2017 we had decided to groom Bumrah for an

away series. We gave him rest from limited overs cricket and told him to focus on his red ball cricket. He took a six wicket haul in the Ranji semifinal that year and that convinced Virat and all of us that he could excel in Test cricket," recalled Prasad.

ROHIT SHARMA THE OPENER PROVED TO BE A MASTERSTROKE

Though the decision to push Rohit at the top of the order to resurrect his Test career was suggested by head coach Ravi Shastri, Kohli bought into that idea completely.

It not only revived Rohit's Test career and also gave the team the strokemaker, the team was looking for at the top of the order. Kohli wanted his bowlers to take 20 wickets and his batters to go for runs and not just survive.

The bowlers delivered on that promise more often than not but the batting remains a work in progress with star studded line-up coming a cropper overseas on multiple occasions, most recently in South Africa

His decision is personal, BCCI respects it, says Ganguly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has lauded Virat Kohli for taking the team forward in all forms of cricket during his stint as India skipper but said his decision to quit Test captaincy was a personal one.

Kohli on Saturday ended his seven-year reign as India's most successful Test captain, a day after an unexpected 1-2 series loss against South Africa.

Under Kohli, India won 40 out of 68 Tests with memorable series wins in England and Australia being the highlight. "Under Virat's leadership Indian cricket has made rapid strides in all formats of the game ..His decision is a personal one and bcci respects it immensely. .He will be an important member to take this team to newer heights in the future. A great player. Well done ..@BCCI @imVkohli," Ganguly tweeted.

While Kohli is India's most successful Test skipper, MS Dhoni is second in



the list with 27 victories in 60 games and Ganguly comes third with 21 wins. Kohli also ranks fourth in the list of most victories as Test captain behind South Africa's Graeme Smith (53) and Australian duo of Ricky Ponting (48) and Steve Waugh (41).

Kohli, who was given the reins of

the Test side back in 2014 when Dhoni stepped down in the middle of the series against Australia, made the announcement in the backdrop of his tense relations with the BCCI which removed him as ODI captain after the star batter himself decided to leave T20 captaincy.

Gavaskar wants Rishabh Pant to succeed

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar wants Rishabh Pant to succeed Virat Kohli as the next India Test captain as he believes a sense of responsibility will make the glovesman a better cricketer in all forms of the game.

Kohli surprised the cricket fraternity by quitting Test captaincy on Saturday evening, a day after losing the Test series in South Africa 1-2 to draw the curtains on a successful seven-year reign.

Gavaskar said he preferred Pant as he is an automatic choice for selectors across all formats of the game.

"It's going to be quite a debate as far as the selection committee is concerned as to who should be taking Indian cricket forward. First of all, it should be someone who is an automatic pick across all formats of the game. Once that happens, it will be a lot easier," Gavaskar



told India Today.

"If you ask me, I am still staying, I would look at Rishabh Pant as next India captain.

"For one reason only, just like Rohit Sharma was given the captaincy of Mumbai Indians when Ricky Ponting stepped down, look at the change in his batting

after that. Suddenly the responsibility of being captain made him convert those beautiful cameos of 30s, 40s and 50s into hundreds, 150s and 200s.

"I think that sense of responsibility given to Rishabh Pant will help him score many more of that wonderful hundred he scored at

Newlands," he added.

Further explaining the rationale behind his pick, Gavaskar cited the example of Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, who achieved great success after taking over the captaincy at a very young age.

"Yes, I am saying that. Tiger Pataudi was captain at the age of 21 under adverse circumstances when Nari Contractor was injured.

Look what he did after that. He took to captaincy like duck to water. "I think what we have seen with Rishabh Pant as the captain of Delhi Capitals in the IPL, I do believe he has the capability of taking Indian cricket forward and making it a very exciting team to watch," he said.

Limited-overs skipper Rohit Sharma has emerged as the front-runner to take over Test captaincy from Kohli although he was not part of the South Africa series due to an injury. Rohit was recently made Test vice-captain, replacing Ajinkya Rahane.

Skipper Yash Dhull's 82 helps India post 232 after poor start

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN

Skipper Yash Dhull helped India recover from a poor start and post 232 against South Africa in their U-19 World Cup opener here on Saturday.

Dhull's solid 82 off 100 balls laid the cornerstone of India's fighting total.

The start of play was delayed by around 40 minutes due to rain and amid the prevailing conditions, South Africa decided to put India in to bat.

Left-arm pacer Aphiwe Mnyanda rocked the Indian top-order by trapping in-form opener Harnoor Singh (1) and his partner Angrikskh Raghuvanshi (5) infront of the stumps.

Left-handed Harnoor, who was India's leading run getter in the Asia Cup and scored a century in the warm-up game against Australia here, fell to a ball that nipped back in. Raghuvanshi played around Mnyanda's inswinger and was plumb in front, leaving India for 11 for two.

With India in trouble, skipper Dhull and Shaik Rasheed (31)) got together to resurrect the innings. They shared a 71-run stand before Rasheed missed a sweep shot off left-arm spinner Liam Alder to be adjudged LBW.

Rasheed, who was dropped on 17 at second slip off Andile Simelane, played some impressive strokes in his 54 ball including an aerial pull and on drive off pacer Matthew Boast to break the shackles.

Delhi batter Dhull then shared a 44-



run stand with Nishant Sindhu (25) to take the innings forward. The skipper ended up with 11 fours and it took a brilliant direct hit from Simelane to dismiss him.

Kaushal Tamble added 35 valuable runs towards the end of the innings to take the team past 200.

Boast was quick to clean up the lower-order removing Tambe and Rajvardhan Hangargekar in successive deliveries. India would be disappointed not to play the entire quote of overs after being all out in 46.5 overs.

With the pitch playing on the slower side, South Africa will have to bat well to chase this total.

Australia beats England by 146 runs, completes 4-0 Ashes win

AP ■ HOBART

Australia completed a dominant 4-0 Ashes series victory over England on Sunday by winning the fifth day-night Test by 146 runs with two days to spare.

England, set a target of 271 for victory, crashed to 124 all out in the last session on the third day at Hobart, losing 10 wickets for 56 after Zak Crawley (36) and Rory Burns (26) combined in the best opening stand of the series by putting on 68 runs.

Fast bowlers Scott Boland (3-18) and Cameron Green (3-21) made an impact in their first Ashes series by sharing six wickets on a lively greenish wicket as England crumbled against pace for the second time in the match after being dismissed for 188 in the first innings in reply to Australia's score of 303.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins also had an impact in his second spell to finish with 3-42 on an eventful day that saw 17 wickets tumble for the second successive day in the game. Cummins, who grabbed the last two wickets off three balls, led from the front in his first series as Australia captain and grabbed 21 wickets.

"It's pretty crazy, even as a professional cricketer these are the series you have in your diary a couple of years



out," said Cummins.

"Really feels like we are building to something big. To have someone like Cameron Green in his second year to grow as a batter and bowler as well as some of the younger players ... can't wait to show our wares overseas, we really judge ourselves in all conditions."

Earlier, Australia was bowled out for 155 just after the dinner break for an overall lead of 270 runs after it resumed from an overnight 37-3.

England paceman Mark Wood snared 6-37, utilizing short-ball tactics against the Australians to perfection. Alex Carey top-scored for Australia with 49 after getting two reprieves.

"We've been outplayed in all areas and credit to Australia," said England captain Joe Root, who remained the tourists' lone fighter with 322 runs, behind only Travis Head (357) and Marnus Labuschagne (335) who led the home side.

UAE, Ireland and Zimbabwe open campaign with comfortable wins

PTI ■ BASSETTERRE

Skipper Mihir Patel scored a combative 96 but his innings went in vain as Canada were handed a 49-run defeat by UAE in their opening Group A clash of the U-19 World Cup here.

Opting to bat, UAE rode on Punya Mehra (71) and Ali Naseer's (73) knocks to reach 284 for seven in their designated 50 overs.

Their bowlers then performed as a cohesive unit to bowl out Canada for 235 in 46.5 over to open their campaign with a win on Saturday.

Naseer's destructive 73 off just 50 balls did the maximum damage for Alishan Sharafu's side after Mehra's well-judged 71 had put the wheels in motion for a strong first innings total.

The Canadians had UAE reeling at 47 for 3 but Mehra, Nilansh Keswani (39) and Sharafu (37) helped them recover to 174 for five.

And then came all-rounder Naseer's late innings pyrotechnics, as his brutal knock – at a strike rate of 146 – catapulted his team to a sizeable total.

Patel's Canada rallied with the captain leading from the front as his fine innings of 96 off 105 balls kept them continually in contention.

Wicketkeeper Anoop Chima (46) and lower-order batter Kairav Sharma (43) also offered resistance but two wickets each for Keswani, Sharafu, Adhitya Shetty and Jash Giyanani helped bowl Canada out for 235 to complete a hard-fought 49-run victory.

Cox catapults Ireland to com-

fortable win over Uganda

Wicketkeeper Joshua Cox scored a well-timed century before spinner Matthew Humphreys spun a web around Uganda as Ireland registered a 39-run win in the second match of the day.

After arriving at the crease with the score at 40 for two, Cox compiled a superb 111 not out off 113 balls to haul his team up to a total of 236 for nine.

Two wickets apiece for Juma Miyaji (2/56), Pascal Murungi (2/44), Joseph Baguma (2/34) and Matthew Musinguzi (2/35) sought to reel the Irish in but ably assisted by Philippus le Roux (32), Cox put his team in a commanding position at the interval.

Ugandan captain Murungi offered the underdogs a consistent glimmer of hope in the run chase



but his knock of 63, bolstered by bowler Miyaji's blockbuster 38 at No.9, proved insufficient in causing a Group B upset.

Left-arm spinner Humphreys –

who opened the bowling for Ireland – starred with the ball for Tim Tector's team as his four wickets for just 25 runs helped halt the Ugandan momentum and cap a 39-run tri-

umph.

Zimbabwe thrash Papua New Guinea by 228 runs

In another match, Zimbabwe's firepower proved too much for Papua New Guinea as the former galloped to a massive 228-run victory in their Group C clash.

Opting to bat first, skipper Emmanuel Bawa (100) scored a superb century while David Bennett played a 58-run knock.

The Zimbabweans racked up a formidable total of 321 for nine from their 50 overs before a polished all-round bowling performance bundled out Papua New Guinea for 93 to complete a comprehensive 228-run victory in Port of Spain.

Papua New Guinea bowler Junior Morea dismissed opener Steven Saul early on but after Bawa entered the fray at 15 for one, he

never looked back as his majestic hundred – off just 95 balls – helped haul his team to a match-winning score.

Bawa and Bennett compiled a century stand for the third wicket while opening batter and wicket-keeper Panashe Taruvinga (36), along with Victor Chirwa and Connor Mitchell – who both scored 35 – also made contributions.

Barnabas Maha's team never got going in response, with no batter mustering more than 15 runs as the wickets were shared equally among the Zimbabwean attack.

Ngenyasha Zvinoera, Brian Bennett and Victor Chirwa -- all took two scalps apiece as Bawa's side bowled the underdogs out with 15 overs remaining to crank up for Monday's clash with Pakistan in perfect fashion.