

OPINION 8

AFGHAN WOMEN'S
RIGHTS ARE STILL FAR

WORLD 11

CHINA RAPS US MISSILE
SANCTIONS AS HYPOCRISY

SPORT 14

SOUTH AFRICA HAND 'OUT OF
SYNC' INDIA'S SERIES DEFEAT

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY JANUARY 22, 2022; PAGES 14 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

HAVE NO
LIMITS:
RANVEER
12 VIVACITYAditi Singh in BJP's 3rd
list of 85 for UP polls

Asim Arun gets ticket from Kannauj, Nitin Aggarwal from Hardoi

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI /
LUCKNOW

The BJP on Friday fielded Aditi Singh and Rakesh Singh, who left the Congress to join it, and Asim Arun, who recently quit the IPS, in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls as it released a list of 85 more candidates.

Both Aditi Singh and Rakesh Singh are sitting MLAs from constituencies falling under Congress president Sonia Gandhi's Rae Bareilly parliamentary seat. They have been fielded from their current seats of Rae Bareilly and Harchandpur, respectively.

The list also includes incumbent MLA Hariom Yadav, a relative of Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav. Hariom Yadav quit the opposition party recently and joined the BJP.

Yadav has been fielded from his current seat Sirsaganj, while Arun, a Dalit, will contest from Kannauj, a reserved seat.

In the last assembly election in 2017, out of the five assembly seats in Rae Bareilly, the Congress and the BJP had won from two constituencies each while one had gone to the

Samajwadi Party.

The five assembly seats of Rae Bareilly — Bachawan (SC), Harchandpur, Sareni, Unchahar and Rae Bareilly — will vote in the fourth phase, while Salon (SC) will vote in the fifth phase on February 27.

The BJP also announced its candidates for assembly constituencies in Lakhimpur Kheri district.

In Lakhimpur Kheri district, the BJP has repeated Shashank Verma (from Nighasan), Arvind Giri (from

Gola Gokranath), Manju Tyagi (from Srinagar), Yogesh Verma (from Lakhimpur Kheri), Saurabh Singh Sonu (from Kasta-SC), Lokendra Pratap Singh (from Mohammadi) and Harvinder Romi Sahni (from Palia).

Lakhimpur Kheri has been in the news recently after four protesting farmers were run over by vehicles. Four others, including a journalist and two BJP workers, were also killed in the violence in October last year.

Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra's son Ashish Mishra has been named as an accused in the violence.

The BJP has fielded Vinod Shankar Awasthi from Dhaurahra in place of Bala Prasad Awasthi, who has joined the SP.

The party has fielded Salona Kushwah from Tilhar in Shahjahanpur. Earlier, the seat was represented in the assembly by Roshan Lal Verma, who had recently joined the SP.

Uttar Pradesh Assembly Deputy Speaker Nitin Aggarwal, who had also left the SP to join the BJP, will fight from Hardoi.

Other key candidates include former BSP leader Ramveer Upadhyay from Sadabad, Archana Pandey from Chhibramau, and Satish Mahana from Mahrajpur.

Riya Shaky, daughter of Bidhuna MLA Vinay Shaky who joined the SP, has also got a ticket to contest from her father's seat.

With the fresh list of candidates, which includes 15 women, the total number of names announced by the party for the seven-phase election to

Continued on Page 11

Amar Jawan Jyoti merger stirs row;
India Gate to get Bose's statueRahul raps Govt
for moving flame
to War Memorial

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amar Jawan Jyoti on Friday was merged with the eternal flame at the newly constructed National War Memorial (NWM) here. Some veterans and political leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, however, criticised the move and said it was an insult to the fallen soldiers.

In a short military ceremony, the flame at the Amar Jawan Jyoti at the India Gate was taken and merged with the War Memorial about 400 metres away in the afternoon. Chief of Integrated Defence Staff Marshal BR Krishna presided over the ceremony that included a parade and salute.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, meanwhile, announced that a statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose will be installed at India Gate as a symbol of India's indebtedness to him. This announcement came ahead of Bose's 125th birth anniversary.

Until the installation is completed, a hologram of Netaji will be projected at the site of the statue, the Prime Minister said. "I will unveil the



Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's statue (that is yet to be installed) at India Gate area in New Delhi, to mark his 125th birth anniversary



hologram statue on 23rd January, Netaji's birth anniversary," he tweeted.

"At a time when the entire nation is marking the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, I am glad to share that his grand statue, made of granite, will be installed at India Gate," Modi tweeted on Friday. "This would be a symbol of India's indebtedness to him."

The statue will be installed under the grand canopy near which the Amar Jawan Jyoti flickers. The canopy, which was built along with the rest of the grand monument in the 1930s by Sir Edwin Lutyens, once housed a statue of the former king of England George V. The statue was later moved to Coronation Park in Central Delhi in the mid-1960s.

The National War Memorial, built in 2019, will now be the single point for military ceremonies and tributes to fallen soldiers.

Continued on Page 11

Priyanka pitches
herself as CM
candidate in UP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Friday pitched herself as the party's Chief Ministerial face in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls as she released a "youth manifesto" for the State, along with her brother Rahul Gandhi.

Priyanka, who has been leading from the front in the crucial poll-bound State, however, evaded queries on whether she would contest the Assembly polls. At the same time, she said the Congress would be open to a post-poll alliance if the need arose. Rahul on his part chose to attack the BJP alleging that those preaching Hindutva are spreading hatred in the cyber world.

"Do you see any other face from the Congress party?" Priyanka said when asked who would be the party's Chief Ministerial candidate in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. "You are seeing my face everywhere," the Priyanka added while addressing the joint Press conference with Rahul to release the "Bharti Vidhan"



Congress party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra speaks during the release of the Congress party's manifesto for the upcoming State election in Uttar Pradesh, in New Delhi, on Friday

(recruitment document) manifesto that promises a new vision for youth in the State and the creation of 20 lakh jobs, including eight lakh for women.

To a question on whether she would herself contest the Assembly polls, Priyanka said, "We have not yet decided." She said it would be known once that is decided.

Continued on Page 11

Parrikar's son quits BJP
to fight as independent
from coveted Panjim

PTI ■ PANJI

Denied ticket from Panaji, his late father's constituency, former Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar's son Utpal Parrikar on Friday quit the BJP.

He would contest the February 14 Assembly elections in the State from Panaji as independent, he announced here.

The day before, the ruling BJP nominated from Panaji — which Manohar Parrikar had represented for over two decades — its sitting MLA Atanasio Monserrate, one of ten legislators who had joined the saffron party in July 2019 after quitting Congress.

"I was left with no other choice. I have resigned from the party and I would be contesting as an independent from Panaji," Utpal Parrikar told reporters.

He also said that resignation was a formality but the BJP will "always remain in my heart."

"It is a difficult choice for me, I am doing it for the people of Goa. No one should be worried about my political future, people of Goa will do it," he said.

The BJP had offered him "other options" (constituencies other than Panaji), Parrikar said.

"I am fighting for the values which I believe in. Let people of Panaji decide. I cannot negotiate with my party," he added.

Asked whether he would seek support of other political parties, he said the only platform for him was the BJP.

"If not BJP, then I would go for (contesting as) independent. I will not go for any other political party," Parrikar said.

On Thursday, the BJP's Goa in-charge Devendra Fadnavis had said while releasing its first list of candidates that the party offered some other seats to Utpal, but he was not willing to contest from any of them.

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said his party, which had formed a tie-up with the NCP for Goa elections, would support Parrikar if he promised not to back the BJP post elections.

On Thursday, Aam Aadmi Party leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had slammed the BJP for adopting "use and throw" policy regarding the Parrikar family, and invited Utpal to join his party.

703 die, 3.5L infected in a
day as corona marches onKerala positivity
rate soars to 43%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday recorded 13,47,254 new cases of Covid-19, including 9,692 cases of the new Omicron variant, while 703 fatalities were reported in the last 24 hours. The active cases have increased to 20,18,825, the highest in 235 days, the Union Health Ministry data showed. The active cases comprise 5.23 per cent of the total infections.

The Test Positivity Rate surged to 43.76 per cent in Kerala, painting a gloomy picture about the Covid-19 situation in the State which recorded 41,668 fresh cases during the last 24 hours on Friday. The samples tested on Friday stood at 95,218.

By far this is the highest positivity rate recorded by any State in India ever since Covid-19 spread in the country. Positivity rate is the percentage of people who test positive of those overall who have been



A student stands for verification as a health worker administers a Covid-19 vaccine to another at a private school in Kolkata on India, Friday

The Government on Friday increased the limit of registering the number of people on Co-WIN using one mobile number from four to six to cover maximum number of beneficiaries

tested. The Kerala Government

suffered a setback on Friday as a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court asked the Kasaragod district administration not to allow any public meetings attended by more than 50 persons. Though the District Disaster Management Authority had issued an order limiting the number of persons

that could assemble for any meeting to 50, the district collector reportedly under political pressure issued a new order stating that the number of persons that could be allowed to attend public meetings should be decided based on the Test Positivity Rate as well as the number of beds available in the district.

Neighbouring Karnataka too is battling massive surge in Covid-19 cases. The State reported 48,049 new Covid-19 cases along with 22 deaths and 18,115 recoveries on Friday. Bengaluru registered 29,068 infections and six deaths.

The Karnataka Government on Friday decided to lift the weekend curfew that was in place with an aim to control the spread of Covid-19 infections. However, the night curfew hours between 10 pm and 5 am everyday will continue. This comes as Karnataka registered a steep spike in Covid-19 cases on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Delhi reported 10,756 new Covid-19 cases, 17,494 recoveries and 38 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Continued on Page 11

Domestic fliers can't carry
more than one hand baggage

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic air passengers will no longer be allowed to carry more than one hand baggage. In a bid to reduce congestion at airports, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has asked the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) to strictly implement the rule which mandates that only one handbag is allowed per passenger.

The CISF has said flyers with more than one cabin handbag are choking the security check-in counters at airports as well as causing delays, congestion and inconvenience to passengers. CISF guards all



key airports in India.

Interestingly, BCAS's own rules allow passengers to carry one hand baggage, the existing rules permit a passenger to carry one laptop bag, one ladies' handbag, and one blanket, gift item purchased from duty-free shop, umbrella, and a reasonable amount of reading material on board an aircraft.

In a letter to Director General, BCAS, the CISF's IG/Airport Sector Vijay Prakash pointed out that it has been seen that passenger on

average carries two to three handbags to the screening point. This has led to increased clearance time as well as delays, congestion in PESC points, and inconvenience to passengers. "As per BCAS AVSEC Circular Nos. 06/2000 & Lt12000, no passenger should be permitted to carry more than one handbag other than those items already listed in the circular including lady's bag," the CISF said, adding, "All airlines and airport operators may be instructed to take steps to implement 'One Hand Bag rule' meticulously on the ground to ease the congestion and other security concerns."

Continued on Page 11

Harak Rawat
joins Congress

PNS ■ DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI

Expelled BJP leader and former Uttarakhand Minister Harak Singh Rawat on Friday joined the Congress in Delhi along with his daughter-in-law Anukriti Gusain in the presence of party campaign head for Uttarakhand Harish Rawat, PCC president Ganesh Godiyal, Leader of Opposition in Uttarakhand Assembly Pritam Singh.

Harak, who represented the Kotdwar seat in the Uttarakhand Assembly, was among the 10 MLAs who had rebelled against the then Chief Minister Harish Rawat-led State Government in 2016 and joined the BJP.

Harak was expelled from the BJP five days back.

35 YouTube, 2 Twitter accounts
blocked for anti-India canards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Acting on intelligence inputs, the Government has blocked 35 YouTube channels, two Twitter accounts, two Instagram accounts, two websites, and a Facebook account for spreading anti-India propaganda and spreading fake news in a "coordinated manner" on the Internet from Pakistan.

Talking to the media, Apurva Chandra, secretary Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry, said these YouTube accounts had a total subscriber base of over 1.20 crore, and their videos had over 130 crore views. The Government last month had



blocked 20 YouTube channels and two websites for spreading anti-India fake and divisive news and other content.

According to Chandra, the 35 YouTube accounts blocked by the Ministry were all operating from Pakistan and were identified to be part of four coordinated disinformation networks. These include Faisal Tarar Speaks, Apni Duniya TV, Haqeeqat ki Dunia, Shahzad Abbas, Mera Pakistan with

Shahab, Khabar with Ahmed, HR tv, Sabee Kazmi, Such tv network, Saqib Speaks, and Salman Haider Officials.

The Apni Duniya Network operates 14 YouTube channels, and Talha Films Network operates 13 YouTube channels. A set of four channels and a set of two other channels were also found to be acting in synchronisation with each other.

The channels were used to post divisive content in a coordinated manner on topics like Kashmir, Indian Army, minority communities in India, Ram Mandir, General Bipin Rawat, etc. One of the groups identified on YouTube was "Naya Pakistan".

Continued on Page 11

CAPSULE

CLUBHOUSE APP CHAT
CASE: 3 ARRESTED

Mumbai: The Mumbai Police has arrested three persons from Haryana in connection with the chat on Clubhouse app, in which obscene comments were allegedly made against Muslim women, an official said on Friday. In a tweet posted early on Friday morning, Shiv Sena's Rajiya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi praised the city police for the arrests in the case.

R-DAY REHEARSAL: TRAVEL
ADVISORY ISSUED

New Delhi: The Delhi Traffic Police on Friday issued an advisory on the arrangements and traffic restrictions in place for the smooth conduct of full dress rehearsal in national Capital on January 23 for the Republic Day parade.

Imandaar soch, damdaar kaam to bring BJP back to power: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Launching Bharatiya Janata Party's poll campaign and new slogan, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said the BJP would return to power because of its "imandaar soch" and "damdaar kaam" as the people had made up their mind to bring the BJP back to power.

The campaign slogan which reads 'Soch imandaar, kaam dumdaar, UP phir mange bhaija sarkar' was launched on Friday

After the launch of campaign material, including the slogan, Yogi Adityanath said that the government had fulfilled the promise it had made to the people. "The BJP government does not believe in appeasement of anyone as the priority of our government was to restore the rule of the law in the state," he said.

Yogi Adityanath said that rioters were once a threat to the peace and harmony of the state and were given patronage by the previous government, but today posters of the same rioters were put up on the main crossings.

"Our government did the work of strengthening law and order so that everyone lives happily in the state," he added.

The chief minister said that history-sheets should not run police stations, mafia should not run the government, rioters should not riot, transparency should be maintained in government recruitment, no one should play with the dignity of sisters and daughters, hence BJP was the need of the state today.

He said, "We did what we said and this is possible when the thinking is honest and the work is strong. Earlier in the state, due to the mafia, our sisters and daughters could not get out of their houses but now the land of the mafia has been confiscated by our government. Our government has built houses for the poor by running bulldozers on the illegal properties of such mafia."

Yogi Adityanath said that the sugar mills used to be closed under the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party governments. "For many years, the sugarcane payment was not cleared and when BJP came to power, record payment was made to the farmers," he said.

He said that earlier in the government the chief minister used to build his own house, but the BJP government had



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressing a press conference at BJP State office in Lucknow on Friday

‘UP govt has guaranteed security to people, investors’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Highlighting how the law and order situation has improved in Uttar Pradesh over the last five years, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said, it is same state where criminals ruled the roost and used to torture people but the present government reversed the trend.

"Now the criminals are running for their lives and the tranquillity is back in society," the UP chief minister said, asserting that his government guaranteed security to the people as well as investors and now big industrialists wanted to invest in the state.

"Those accused of Muzaffarnagar riots used to be rewarded by the previous governments but now they are begging for their lives," Yogi Adityanath said, adding that under his regime, those who had forced people to migrate from Kairana had themselves migrated out of the state and the rule of law had been established in Uttar Pradesh in five years.

Yogi was interacting with the entrepreneurs of western UP through a virtual medium on 'Aatmanirbhar Uttar Pradesh'. He called upon the businessmen and entrepreneurs to make their contributions in building a self-reliant

Uttar Pradesh without any fear.

"Employment and investment prospects have gained momentum in UP. They will gain more currency after the BJP government is formed again with a thumping majority on March 10," he said.

Expecting positive cooperation from the entrepreneurial class for the BJP in the assembly elections, Yogi said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream was to make UP a one trillion US dollar economy.

"This dream can be fulfilled only with the cooperation of entrepreneurs," he said.

He hit out at the previous Samajwadi Party government headed by Akhilesh Yadav for the Saharanpur-Muzaffarnagar riots and said, "Between 2017, several families in Kairana had migrated due to threats of extortion and the merchant-entrepreneur society in Ghaziabad was also plagued by extortion and kidnapping. But the BJP government adopted the policy of zero-tolerance towards crime and criminals. As a result, the law and order situation has strengthened today."

Stating that the thinking of people had changed towards UP, the chief minister maintained, "Industrial investment of lakhs of crores came to UP.

Investments of Rs 66,000 crore alone came in the COVID-19 period. This created huge employment opportunities in the state and over 1.61 crore youth got employment in our MSME units in the last five years."

The chief minister said that today the state had good connectivity in the form of Purvanchal Expressway, Delhi-Meerut Expressway, Bundelkhand Expressway, Ballia Link Expressway, Gorakhpur Link Expressway, Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway, and Ganga Expressway.

"Before 2017, one and a half airports were active in the state, today nine airports are functional, 12 new ones are being built and flights are available for 75 cities. Till 2017, UP had only 12 medical colleges, today 35 are being built. Be it the uninterrupted supply of electricity or the availability of land for industries, the government has paid attention to every need, as a result, UP has emerged as the best destination for investment in the country," he said.

The chief minister said that the government was making special industrial areas like Film City, Medical Device Park, Pharma Park, Plastic Park, and Toy Park in western UP.

Narrating an interesting

incident from his Kairana visit, the chief minister said, "After the formation of the government in 2017, he met a family of Kairana who wanted to return but were afraid. I asked them not to be afraid as the government was with them. The family returned and I went to meet them three months ago in Kairana where I also met a girl studying in class 6 who told me that there was no problem but we had come to know that a goon was out on bail and was roaming on the crossroads."

I asked the officials to look into the matter, and immediately the next day it was in the newspapers that the goon got his bail cancelled and went to jail again, he added. The chief minister said that UP needed such law and order and only the BJP government was capable of providing it.

The entrepreneurs, too, while speaking to the chief minister, appreciated the industrial promotion policies of the government and also put forward their expectations about future needs. Deepak Gupta from Bulandshahr Industrial Area told the chief minister that the biggest change in five years was that children who wanted to work outside UP earlier, had started talking about living in

UP today. claimed. He said that hooliganism and corruption were widespread in the state during the previous regime but Yogi Adityanath's government had completely eliminated the mafia raj from the state.

SIT files more chargesheets against 7 in Kheri violence

Lucknow (PNS): The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Lakhimpur Kheri case, on Friday, filed four more chargesheets against seven accused over the death of a driver and two Bharatiya Janata Party workers during the violence in Tikunia.

The SIT investigator filed the 500-page chargesheet on Friday in the court of chief judicial magistrate in connection with an FIR lodged by BJP worker Sumit Jaiswal.

All the seven are accused of lynching three people in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence case after four farmers and a journalist were allegedly mowed down by a speeding vehicle. They are currently lodged in a jail.

The Lakhimpur Kheri case pertains to the violence that erupted in Lakhimpur Kheri district on October 3 last year. Eight people, including four farmers, two BJP workers, a driver and a local journalist, were killed in the incident. Union minister Ajay Misra Teni's son Ashish Misra is the prime accused in the case and has been lodged in jail since his arrest on October 9.

Two FIRs were lodged in connection with the incident.

The first FIR, number 219/2021, was lodged by farmer Jagjeet Singh in connection with the deaths of farmers and a journalist in which he implicated Ashish Mishra alias Monu, the son of the Union minister, and 15 to 20 others. The second FIR, number 220/2021, was lodged by BJP worker Sumit Jaiswal in connection with the death of two party workers and a driver, in which he implicated unidentified assailants. Sumit Jaiswal is also a close aide of Ashish Misra.

On October 3, 2021, eight people were killed in Lakhimpur Kheri during violence that erupted when farmers were protesting against Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's visit to the area. A vehicle allegedly linked to Ajay and Ashish Misra ran over some farmers, killing five. An angry mob burnt several vehicles and killed three people, taking the toll to eight.

The farmers' bodies claimed that besides a journalist, four farmers, identified as Nakshatra Singh (55), Daljeet Singh (35), Lavepreet Singh (20) and Gurvendra Singh (18), died as vehicles mowed the protesters down on the Tikunia-Banbirpur road. Three other deaths were reported from the BJP's camp.

Shah, Nadda to campaign in Uttar Pradesh today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

figures of Meerut at 5:15 pm at Hotel Godwin.

Bharatiya Janata Party president JP Nadda and Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah will be in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday for poll campaigning in western region.

According to party sources here, Nadda and Shah will hold many organisational meetings and guide the workers and party functionaries for the elections. Along with this, they will also launch a door to door campaign.

Nadda will reach Bijnor on Saturday at 1:00 pm and will hold an important meeting with the Vidhan Sabha officials of Bijnor, Nagina Muzaffarnagar at JBS Resort Bypass Road, Bijnor at 1:30 pm.

Thereafter, the BJP national president will reach Gajraula at 3:00 pm and will hold an important meeting with the office-bearers of Amroha, Moradabad and Meerut assemblies at Gajraula residence of MP Kanwar Singh Tanwar.

On the other hand Shah will reach Kairana on Saturday at 2:30 pm and will launch a door-to-door campaign following the guidelines of the Election Commission at 2:45 pm.

Thereafter at 3:15 pm, he will hold a meeting with party officials and workers at Hotel Orchid in Shamli.

Shah will hold discussions with prominent social

J.K. Cement Limited
(CIN: L17229UP1994PLC017199)
Regd. Office : Kamla Tower, Kanpur-208001
Email : shambhu.singh@jkcement.com
Web : www.jkcement.com

NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that share Certificate No 72420 for 203 Equity Shares bearing Distinctive No(s) 43629249 to 43629451 issued by the Company in the name of Mr. Bhadrash H. Shah are reported to be lost. Any objection for issuance of duplicate share certificate(s) must be filed with the Company within 15 days from the date of publication of this Notice, failing which duplicate share certificate(s) will be issued without incurring any liability by the Company for the said issue.
Place: Kanpur For J.K.Cement Ltd.
Date : 21.01.2022 (Shambhu Singh)
V.P. (Legal) & Company Secretary
M.No: FCS 5836

J.K. Cement Limited
(CIN: L17229UP1994PLC017199)
Regd. Office : Kamla Tower, Kanpur-208001
Email : shambhu.singh@jkcement.com
Web : www.jkcement.com

NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that share Certificate No 40056 for 10 Equity Shares bearing Distinctive No(s) 42933364 to 42933373 issued by the Company in the name of Alokandanda Neogi jointly with Ranabir Neogi are reported to be lost. Any objection for issuance of duplicate share certificate(s) must be filed with the Company within 15 days from the date of publication of this Notice, failing which duplicate share certificate(s) will be issued without incurring any liability by the Company for the said issue.
Place: Kanpur For J.K.Cement Ltd.
Date : 21.01.2022 (Shambhu Singh)
V.P. (Legal) & Company Secretary
M.No: FCS 5836

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, PRAYAGRAJ
No.: 74-W/Tender/Sr. DEN-II/PRYJ/D&AR Dated: 18.01.2022
PUBLIC NOTICE REGARDING ABSENCE FROM DUTY
Shri Ankit Kumar S/o Shri Premnath, Designation-SSE/P.WAY/Sec/SRO, Permanent Address:- Village Kachhwa Bazar, Post-Magarwari, Distt.-Mirzapur, U.P. Pin Code 231501 working under S.S.E/P.WAY/KGA has absented from duty w.e.f. 22.11.2017 without any prior information and your where about are not known due to this act, a copy of SF-5 (Major penalty charge sheet) was served to you by special courier at your permanent home address. But you have neither turned up for duty nor submitted your reply about absent to Railway administration. After that you have been informed about date fixed for inquiry at several time by enquiry officer to be present before him for enquiry by registered DAK at your home addressed. A copy of the notice was also pasted at your home door. Inspite of above you have not reported to enquiry officer for enquiry.
Now a last chance is given to you through this public notice to report alongwith clarification to ADEN/Line/NCR/PRYJ enquiry officer within a week time.
Please note, if you do not turn up within the stipulated period, it will be prescribed that you are no more interested to work in Railway department & Ex-party action will be taken against you under D&AR rules on your sole responsibility.
(Enquiry Officer)
ADEN/Line/NCR/PRYJ
74/2022 V
f North Central Railways @CPNCR

SP changes strategy for selecting candidates

Lucknow (PNS): The Samajwadi Party has changed its strategy for selecting candidates following criticism from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party of fielding candidates with tainted records and those involved in Muzaffarnagar communal riots and migration of Hindu community from Kairana in 2013.

The SP candidates with tainted records are now seeking tickets for their family members. The first casualty is former MLA Nahid Hasan, SP candidate from Kairana in Shamli district. SP has now announced to field his sister Ikra Hasan from Kairana. She returned from Britain where he was pursuing a degree course. Nahid Hasan has been arrested under Gangster Act and sent to jail.

Ashok Dikshit, SP leader with a tainted record, was front runner for the party ticket from Fatehabad assembly constituency. He has now managed to get the party ticket for his daughter Rupali Dikshit.

Among the Ansari brothers of Ghazipur, Sibgatullah, the elder brother of don-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, has already joined the SP. Abbas Ansari, son of Mukhtar Ansari, has also joined the SP and may get a ticket from one of the constituencies in Ghazipur district.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had recently lashed out at the Samajwadi Party, saying its choice of "candidates with criminal backgrounds" in Kairana, Bulandshahr, Muzaffarnagar and Loni had revealed its "true colours".

He said by giving tickets to people responsible for the 2013 communal riots in Muzaffarnagar and migration of Hindu families from Kairana (after the riots), SP had exposed its flawed social justice mentality. Yogi Adityanath had also pointed out that "the first list of candidates released by Samajwadi Party was a reflection of what they think about the poor, Dalits, backward classes, businessmen and other citizens whose properties were robbed by such criminals."

He added, "It's a habit that doesn't change easily. Hence, in a hurry to hide their faces, the SP has avoided making the list of candidates public and is silently allotting party symbols by accepting money under the table."

Acting on the Election Commission's new directive, the

Samajwadi Party earlier this week declared the list of criminal cases against its candidates. Samajwadi Party has listed the criminal cases pending against 20 of its candidates, the Bharatiya Janata Party, on the other hand, listed criminal cases of its 37 candidates, including Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya with four criminal cases pending against him.

The Samajwadi Party uploaded a document on its official Twitter handle listing 20 candidates with details of their criminal cases and justification for selecting them. In several cases, the party said that the selected candidates work for public welfare and uplift of weaker sections, thereby gaining "immense popularity" in their area.

Aparna takes Mulayam's blessings

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Aparna Yadav, the daughter in law of Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, returned to Lucknow and took blessings of her father-in-law.

She shared a picture touching the feet of Mulayam Singh Yadav on her Twitter account.

"After taking the membership of Bharatiya Janata Party, on coming to Lucknow, took blessings from father/Netaji," she said in a tweet.

In another tweet, she wrote "On reaching Lucknow Amausi Airport from Delhi after taking membership of BJP was given a grand welcome by supporters and workers, I thank all of you that by coming in such large numbers, you all have encouraged me."

Aparna, the younger daughter-in-

“On reaching Lucknow Amausi Airport from Delhi after taking membership of BJP was given a grand welcome by supporters and workers, I thank all of you that by coming in such large numbers, you all have encouraged me”

law of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, joined the BJP on Wednesday at the party headquarters in New Delhi.

Expressing good wishes to Aparna Yadav on joining the Bharatiya Janata

Party, Samajwadi Party chief and former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav had told reporters that Netaji had tried a lot to convince her.

In a sharp riposte to Aparna Yadav switching allegiance to BJP on Wednesday, Akhilesh Yadav had quipped that he was happy at the "expansion" of the Samajwadi ideology.

Moreover, he claimed that his father had tried to convince her against taking such a step. Refuting the notion that she was miffed over denial of a party ticket, he also took a dig at her for justifying her BJP entry on the 'nationalism' plank.

Samajwadi Party ally Om Prakash Rajbhar underplayed Aparna Yadav's joining the BJP saying "her entry into BJP will make no difference as she has no votes".

the pioneer
CLASSIFIEDS
NOTICE
NOTICE
A sale deed and lease deed both dated 09.11.2004 which is executed by the Varanasi Development Authority, Varanasi through authorised signatory Under Secretary in favor of Mr. Divakar Dwivedi, son of Late Sheshdhar Dwivedi, resident of Flat No. LB-3, Badli Gali, VDA Colony, Varanasi, which is Flat No. LB-3, Second Floor, Badli Gali Awasthi, Varanasi, Badi Gali, Varanasi, proportionate plinth area 42.48 sqm and common land area 2.28 sqm duly registered in Sub-Registrar Office IV Varanasi in Indenture (sale deed) book no. 1, volume 2117 pages 109 to 130 doc. no. 4130 and Lease deed book no. 1, volume 2117 pages 69 to 88 doc. no. 4128 dated 09.11.2004, have been lost away. If any person/institution have any objection or information regarding these sale deed and lease deed please inform with in 15 days Anand Prakash Singh Advocate S.21/116E-3, Subhash Nagar, Maldahiya, Varanasi. Mob.No.9450013575

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Lucknow only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

22 Covid deaths reported in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

For the first time in the last six months, 22 people died of COVID-19 in one day as Uttar Pradesh reported 16,142 fresh cases on Friday while during the same period 17,600 people recovered from coronavirus infection, said Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad here.

He said there were 95,866 active cases in the state of which over 85,000 persons were in home isolation.

On Thursday, 2,41,457 samples were tested out of which 16,142 were found positive. The overall positivity rate in the state is 1.97 per cent while the recovery rate is 93.8 per cent. The government is making all efforts to ensure that the maximum number of eligible persons in the state are fully immunised against the novel coronavirus before the assembly polls and on the directives of the chief minister, screening and testing has been intensified in the state.

The establishment of Covid Help Desks in all the offices and industrial units has been made mandatory. The chief minister has also issued

2,290 test positive, 17,495 active cases in the city

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As many as 2290 people tested positive for novel coronavirus infection while 2,615 COVID-19 patients recovered in the city on Friday.

At present there are 17,495 active cases in Lucknow. Yogesh Raghuvanshi from the CMO office said that these positive cases included 1,586 males and 1,018 females. He said that two COVID-19 deaths were reported in the city from SGPGI which included a 59-year-old diabetic patient who also had hypertension along with chronic

instructions to maintain constant communication with the people under treatment in home isolation and to deliver medical kits to them as required. UP has so far administered 24,29,28,849 doses of Covid vaccine and has carried out 9,74,62,647 tests of samples. "On Thursday, 26,12,031 peo-

ple took the vaccine," the official said and added that Uttar Pradesh had so far administered vaccine doses to over 50 per cent of the teenagers.

Since the beginning of the inoculation drive for this age bracket, more than 70,92,929 teens have received their first dose of vaccine within a span

of less than three weeks. While reviewing the COVID-19 situation with senior officials on Friday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed them to further ramp up vaccination. He instructed the officials concerned to ensure 25-30 lakh vaccinations per day.

second corona wave. He said that 6-7 per cent were kids below 18 years of age.

Meanwhile even as the Omicron wave sweeps through and various predictions regarding the peak come in, Covid experts admit that the real projection of figures would come if the testing is increased.

"With directions being currently of reduced testing the projected figures are not the real numbers and the peak can be accurately predicted if the proper figures come up," said a senior doctor.

He said that Friday was also the last date for filing nomination papers for the first phase of polls to 58 assembly constituencies in 11 districts of western UP.

Election process set rolling for 2nd phase

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Election Commission of India (ECI) set the election process rolling for the second phase of Uttar Pradesh assembly polls on Friday with issuance of notification for 55 assembly constituencies in nine districts of Rohilkhand and west UP region.

Friday was also the last date for filing nominations for the first phase of polls to 58 assembly constituencies in 11 districts of western UP.

Ten nominations were filed for the second phase of polling on the first day on Friday.

UP Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ajay Kumar Shukla said here on Friday that notification for the second phase polls was issued at 11am on Friday. He said nominations in these 55 assembly constituencies had commenced, strictly following the Covid norms and guidelines issued by the ECI.

Shukla said this time, the candidates could also submit their nomination papers online. Only two persons along with the candidate would be allowed during filing of nomination physically, he added.

He said that Friday was also the last date for filing nomination papers for the first phase polls.

As many as 815 candidates have filed their nominations in the first phase.

The state will witness a keen tussle of ballots in the seven-phase elections covering 403 assembly constituencies with polling to be held between February 10 and March 7 and announcement of result on

March 10.

In the second phase polling to be held on February 14, filing of nominations commenced from January 21, the last date for filing nominations is January 28, scrutiny on January 29 and last date for withdrawal is January 31.

Altogether 55 assembly constituencies will go to polls in the second phase covering nine districts of Saharanpur, Bijnor, Amroha, Sambhal, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Budaun and Shahjahanpur.

In the second phase, 2,01,42,441 voters will cast their votes in around 17,000 polling booths.

In the 2017 elections, Bharatiya Janata Party had won 40 seats of these 55 assembly seats while Samajwadi Party won 13 and Bahujan Samaj Party won 2 seats.

The assembly constituencies going to polls in the second phase are Behat, Nakhur, Saharanpur City, Saharanpur, Deoband, Rampur Maniharan (R), Gangoh, Najibabad, Nagina (R), Bijnor Chandpur, Noorpur, Kanth, Thakur Dwar, Moradabad Rural, Moradabad City, Kundarki, Bilari, Chandauli (R), Asmoli, Sambhal, Swar, Chamraua, Bilaspur, Rampur, Milak (R), Navgoa Sadat, Amroha Hasanpur, Bisauli (R), Sahavasan, Bilsa (R), Budaun, Sheikhpur, Dataganj, Baheri, Mirganj, Bhojipura, Nawabganj, Fatehpur (R), Bithari, Chainpur, Bareilly, Bareilly Cantonment, Aonla, Katra, Jalalabad, Tilhar, Puwaya (R), Shahjahanpur and Dadraul.

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

815 nominations filed for first phase of assembly polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A total of 815 nominations have been filed for the first phase of assembly polls to 58 constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh.

On Friday, the last day for filing nominations for the first phase poll, 426 candidates filed their papers.

Sources in the Election Commission of India said on Friday that 426 nominations were submitted on Friday where as 389 nominations were filed earlier.

On the last day, the highest number of 27 nomination papers were filed in the Mathura assembly constituency followed by 23 in Noida and 20 each in Bah and Meerapur and 12 in Kairana.

The scrutiny of the papers would be done on Monday. The first phase polling is scheduled on February 10.

announced a seven-phase poll this time also like in 2017 polls though the duration has been reduced by five days. In 2017, the poll dates were announced on January 4 and results were declared on March 11.

The poll process commenced from January 14 with the issuance of notification for the first phase starting from western UP on January 14 where polling will be held on February 10.

Health dept aims to complete 75% double dose vaccination till polling

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

The Health department is targeting to complete 75 per cent double dose vaccination against COVID-19 till the polling kicks off in the state on February 10.

Giving this information, a senior official from the Health department said that all efforts were being made in this direction.

It may be noted that Uttar Pradesh has administered 24.4 crore doses till now, which include 14.9 crore first doses, 9.37 crore second doses and 6.9 lakh precautionary doses. Till January 20, the state has achieved 63.06 per cent coverage of the second dose.

"We are aiming to complete 75 per cent coverage of the second dose but it all depends on the first dose administered. If the first dose is administered late we cannot administer the second dose in case of Covishield. Hence if the first dose is administered in the month of January 2022 or December 2021, the person will not be eligible for the second dose if the person has had a shot of Covishield," he said.

When asked if this gap could be reduced now since the availability of the vaccine was sufficient, he said that it was for the Central government to decide whether the gap of 84 days should be reduced for the entire country.

The official further pointed out that they were monitoring daily to see that the numbers of the Covid vaccinations increase.

"Everyday, we are reviewing the process to see that the vaccination is expedited and this is taking place at every level whether it be the district or block and workers are going from door to door to see that all the people are vaccinated," he said.

The senior official said that the Central government had sent a letter for reduction of the gap in the booster dose which was currently at nine months. "The booster dose will be reduced from nine months for Covishield for the healthcare workers and all frontline workers who are going for election duty," he said.

He admitted that the number of vaccinations done had increased. "In January we have already completed four crore vaccinations in a period of 20 days in the entire state which includes the first, the sec-



ond and the precautionary doses and these are the highest number of doses which we have administered till now since the vaccinations started on January 16 last year. In December we administered 3.86 crore of vaccines. This way the pace of the vaccination is going well," he said.

As per the figures provided by the Health department till January 20, in Gautam Buddha Nagar 92.33 per cent have received the second dose, in Shahjahanpur 89.4 per cent, in Baghpat 76.8 per cent, in Lucknow 75.86 per cent and in Ghaziabad 71.42 per cent.

Districts which have not fared well in the second dose administration include Moradabad (52.08 per cent), Shamli (52.59 per cent), Agra (55.81 per cent), Aligarh (56.81 per cent) and Farrukhabad (56.11 per cent).

Meanwhile District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash said that in the battle against COVID-19, the Lucknow district had completed 68 lakh vaccinations through various phases at 148 centres which included 12 district level hospitals such as Balrampur Hospital, Civil Hospital, Lok Bandhu Hospital, Rani Laxmi Bai Hospital, RML, KGMU, BRD Mahanagar, Ram Sagar Mishra, 100-bed hospital at Thakurganj and Sadamau, 19 urban health care centres, 18 primary health centres, 104

workplace venues and seven other centres.

He said that 37.8 lakh people had already received the first dose and 28.44 lakh had received the second dose and 44,749 had received the precautionary dose.

"We will be working at war footing and complete the vaccinations by 100 per cent in the coming days.

The DM said that a 100 per cent first dose had been completed in the district and that the officials worked day in and out to complete the target and would soon complete the second dose target too. He appealed to the people who had not got themselves vaccinated to get themselves vaccinated.

Meanwhile, Organized Medicine Academic Guild secretary general Ishwar Gilada said that the current vaccination programme should be speeded up in the country, especially for those above 60 years age who had not taken the first dose.

"Reduce gap between two doses of Covishield, from 12-16 weeks to 4-6 weeks. Speed up vaccination of 15-17 age group and start vaccination in 12-14 age group as early as possible. Provide a precautionary dose for those who had taken the second dose at least 6 months back rather than current guidelines of nine months," he suggested.

300 Braille voter guides to be given to newly voters

Lucknow (PNS): Three hundred Braille voter guides have been provided for the newly registered voters in the Lucknow district. Giving this information, a senior official from the district election office said that these were provided by the UP Chief Electoral Officer and would be distributed through the returning officer.

It may be noted that to ensure ease of participation and active engagement of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in the electoral process, the Election Commission of India has given directions to issue accessible voter information slips with Braille features to persons with visual impairment, along with normal voter information slips.

Officials said that the Election Commission of India had given directions that a voter guide shall be provided to every elector's household ahead of elections, giving them information about the date and time of polls, contact details of the BLOs,

important websites, helpline numbers, documents required for identification at the polling station besides other important information including the Do's and Don'ts for voters at the polling station. The voter guide also contains important information like Covid guidelines. An official said that as per the directions of the Election Commission of India for identification at polling station, voters shall present the EPIC or any of the identification documents approved by the ECI along with the voter information slips such as the Aadhaar card, MNREGA job card, passbooks with photograph issued by bank, post office, health insurance smart card issued under the scheme of the Labour Ministry, driving licence, PAN card, smart card issued by RGI under NPR, Indian passport, pension document with photograph, service identity cards with photograph issued to employees by Central, state governments, PSUs, pub-

It may be noted that to ensure ease of participation and active engagement of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in the electoral process, the Election Commission of India has given directions to issue accessible voter information slips with Braille features to persons with visual impairment, along with normal voter information slips

lic limited companies, and official identity cards issued to MPs, MLAs and MLCs.

DM: Effectively implement model code of conduct

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A meeting was held at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan here on Friday for the effective implementation of the model code of conduct. It was presided over by District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash and Commissioner of Police DK Thakur.

Both the officials also reviewed the work done in this regard by the video surveillance teams, flying squads and static surveillance teams.

The DM said that as per the instructions given by the Election Commission of India, the duties of these teams had been fixed shift wise and a videographer had also been posted in the static surveillance teams and video surveillance teams.

The DM said that the flying squads would look into any instance of exchange of illegal



money and distribution of liquor to lure voters. Each flying squad is headed by an

The static surveillance team would look into the exchange of illegal money, any suspected product, liquor and weapons. Every static surveillance team would be headed by an incharge, a senior magistrate, police officers and videographers

incharge, a senior magistrate, police official, videographer and three to four police person-

nel. The static surveillance team would look into the exchange of illegal money, any suspected product, liquor and weapons. Every static surveillance team would be headed by an incharge, a senior magistrate, police officers and videographers.

The district election officer said that all the teams would put stickers on their vehicles.

उत्तर प्रदेश विधानसभा सामान्य निर्वाचन-2022

KYC-ECI ऐप

अपने प्रत्याशी का पूरा ब्यौरा जानने के लिए KYC-ECI ऐप का इस्तेमाल करें

पहले जानें, फिर चुनें

KYC-ECI ऐप से मतदाताओं को मिलने वाली जानकारियां

- नामांकन भरने वाले सभी उम्मीदवारों को देखें
- उम्मीदवार का विवरण देखें
- आपराधिक पृष्ठभूमि सहित उम्मीदवार का शपथ पत्र देखें
- नाम से उम्मीदवार खोजें
- अपने उम्मीदवार को जानें

Google Play Store या Apple Store से फ्री में डाउनलोड करें, इसके लिए लिंक अथवा QR कोड का इस्तेमाल करें

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.eci.ksa>
<https://apps.apple.com/in/app/kyc-eci/id1604172836>

Toll Free No. - 1950

voiceofvotersup @ceoup ceo_up संकल्प हमारा ना टूटे, कोई मतदाता ना छूटे मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी, उत्तर प्रदेश द्वारा जनहित में जारी

Varanasi achieves 100 per cent target in administering first dose of vaccine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a remarkable achievement, the Varanasi district has achieved the 100 per cent target to administer the first dose of Covid vaccine while approximately 65 per cent got a second shot of vaccine. More than 50 lakh beneficiaries have been vaccinated in a year.

A total of 13,136 persons were given the first shot of vaccine on Thursday and in total, 29,79,345 beneficiaries got the first dose of vaccine by a day earlier. With this, the district achieved the target of a cent per cent of first dose (100.3 %) administered to the beneficiaries. The District Magistrate

Kaushal Raj Sharma appreciated the Health and other departments and exhorted the concerned officers to achieve the target of 100 per cent administration of second dose too at the earliest.

A total of 28,348 beneficiaries got a second shot of the vaccine on Thursday and with this, 64.6 per cent beneficiaries were administered the second dose by a day earlier; the Chief Medical Officer Dr Sandeep Chaudhary informed adding, the district has also achieved the feat to administer the vaccines to 50 lakh beneficiaries in a year as a total of 50,96,707 people including 26,71,064 men and 24,12,542 women

had been vaccinated a few days earlier.

The DM has emphasised that the 100 per cent vaccination target of adolescents aged from 15 to 17 years is also to be achieved at the earliest and to achieve this, everyone should make their best level effort.

According to the District Immunisation Officer Dr VS Rai, a total of 596 sessions were held at various vaccination centres of the district on Thursday and a total of 43,176 beneficiaries were vaccinated including 1,692 precautionary doses.

Besides, a total of 4,254 beneficiaries aged from 15 to 17 years, 27,236 beneficiaries from

18 to 44 years, 6,459 beneficiaries from 45 to 59 years and 3,481 beneficiaries above 60 years were also vaccinated a day earlier.

With this, a total of 5,62,820 beneficiaries above 60 years of age got Covid in a year and similarly, a total of 31,66,270 years from 18 to 44 years and 10,19,093 from 45 to 59 years have got the doses in a year. Since January 3 last, 1,83,810 (71.3%) adolescents in the age group from 15 to 17 years have received the first dose. At the same time, since January 10 last, 13,053 precautionary doses have been administered, Dr Rai informed.

‘Temples, mutts should be freed from government control’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

President of the Akhil Bharatiya Dandi Swami Parishad, Swami Brahmashram Maharaja besides seers and saints from different Hindu outfits have demanded that temples and Hindu mutts be freed from government control.

“Prominent saints and seers held a meeting on Mela campus and demanded that all Hindu temples and mutts across the country should be freed from government control. When the government has no control over churches and mosques, why should only Hindu temples and mutts be

controlled by it,” questioned Maharaja after holding an important meeting at the camp of Akhil Bharatiya Dandi Sanyasi Parishad, Sector-5 on the Mela campus here.

He said, “According to Sanatana Dharma tradition, ashrams and Sanskrit schools should be run by temples and mutts. Therefore, the government should adopt a similar policy and free temples from its control at the earliest.”

“Prominent seers, saints of the country would launch a mass movement to free Hindu temples and math across the country from the control of the government,” said Maharaj.

He also claimed, “It’s an irony that Sanatana Dharma and its followers have always been on the target of the government since the country’s independence. Till now, not a single mosque or church in the country has been controlled by the government.”

“None of the government has dared to look into the activities taking place inside religious places of other religions, except temples,” said the Peethadhiswar Swami.

The seers claimed that “not only the affairs of many prominent temples of the country are under government control, but some temples and mutts are

even being looked after by persons of other religions who are not even aware of our religious practices and rituals.”

The Dandi sanyasi also claimed that the day-to-day affairs or for that matter the religious rituals and practices of temples and mutts.

On being asked whom the saint and seers’ community is going to support in the state assembly election, they said, “We will support the party which will work in the interest of the country. It should also have a clear development agenda and is able to provide a riot-free environment in the state.”

One death from Covid reported

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Indicating an alarming situation, the Varanasi district recorded one death from COVID-19 on Friday. It is the first day when one death was reported from the deadly coronavirus in the third wave of the pandemic. The district also recorded an increase in Covid cases with 624 persons tested positive. A total of 611 also recovered and thus, the active cases were reported as 3,881. It is learnt that a total of 518 positive cases were reported.

As per the data made available by Friday evening, one death was reported from the deadly coronavirus indicating an alarming situation. As per the information provided by the Health department, the patient

who died of COVID-19 was about 28 years old and a resident of Badagaon Block. He was admitted at trauma centre in BHU on January 16 last and was shifted to Covid Ward on January 19 last after being tested positive.

A total of 624 persons were tested positive (8.54% positivity rate) increasing the cumulative figure to 8120, as per data provided by the Health department which added, 611 (52.19% recovery rate) patients also recovered from home isolation as well as Covid hospitals taking the cumulative figure of recovered patients to 4238. So, the active cases were reported as 3881.

ADMN FLAYED FOR NOT GIVING SECURITY TO RAI: Congress expressed its concern over not providing

security to the party’s former MLA Ajay Rai, who is also a party’s candidate from Pindra assembly constituency this year, by the district administration despite the order of the court. The city Congress chief Raghavendra Choubey termed the act of the administration as petty politics. Meanwhile, Ajay Rai reached MP/ MLA Court to testify against Mokhtar Ansari without security arrangements here on Friday as he is the witness in the murder case of his brother Awadhesh Rai against Mokhtar Ansari, an MLA of Mau. Choubey expressed displeasure over not being given security even after the court’s order and alleged that the district administration was doing the same at the behest of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

According to him, this is not the first time when the administration failed to give any security to Ajay Rai, who is a five-time MLA, former minister and a strong leader of the Congress along with a candidate from Pindra assembly constituency as his candidature had already been announced by the party. Leveling allegations on the government for supporting the criminals, Choubey played the local administration for showing such laxity with a former minister. He further said that if any untoward incident takes place against Ajay Rai, its full responsibility will be on the government and administration. He further said that the court is being disregarded again and again due to the growing popularity of Ajay Rai.

Strict anti-malpractice measures to be taken in upcoming UPTET

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Strict measures have been introduced to check any malpractice in UPTET to be organised on Sunday. This test had earlier been canceled owing to a paper leak.

Even the invigilators and officials on duty will not be allowed to possess a mobile phone fitted with a camera. Only keypad mobiles will be kept by the officials to avoid the chance of leaking papers.

Massive videography plans have been chalked out this time and the CCTV vigil has

also been tightened. All the persons entering the examination center, will have to be captured in camera first at the entrance gate and then by CCTV camera on the campus and in the examination hall.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPC will remain enforced around examination centers.

Examinations are to be held in two meetings. As many as 84017 aspirants will take the examination in the first meeting at 183 centers, while in the second meeting 59895 persons will appear at the exami-

nation at 132 centers. Officials have been asked to be extra vigilant for ensuring fair examination.

District magistrate Sanjay Khatri warned the officials in no uncertain words that strict action would be initiated against them in case of any foul play or ignorance on their part.

Keeping in view the increasing number of Covid cases, Covid Help Desk will be created at every examination center equipped with masks, sanitiser, thermal scanner, and oximeters. Seating arrange-

ment will also be done as per Covid guidelines.

Instructions have been issued to complete all examination related arrangements one day in advance. No face should be spared from videography, and the process of unsealing of papers and packing of answer sheets after the test will be done in front of the camera. CCTV cameras will record all the activities without any break. Unused rooms at examination centers will remain sealed. Officials will visit centers after centers to maintain the sanctity of the examination.

UPPSC 2022 exam calendar released; PCS prelims on June 12

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) has released the schedule of 19 recruitment examinations to be conducted between March and December 2022. The commission has formally released the annual calendar of proposed examinations for the year on its website <http://uppsc.up.nic.in/>. However, officials clarified that in some circumstances, the dates of listed exams could be rescheduled.

According to secretary, UPPSC, Jagdish, the examinations to be conducted for selection of candidates for various state-level administrative posts include deputy collector and deputy SP — Combined State/Upper Subordinate Services (Preliminary) Examination-2022, commonly known as PCS (Pre)-2022 — as

well as the Assistant Conservator of Forest/Range Forest Recruitment Exam (Preliminary)-2022 will be conducted on June 12.

The calendar also lists PCS (Main)-2021 that was set to be held from January 28 to January 31 but following postponement in light of the resurgence of Covid-19 cases in the state would now be held between March 23 and March 27. The calendar is eagerly awaited by aspirants who pace their preparations for the various exams accordingly.

As per the calendar, the commission would conduct the Computer Operator Grade-B and Programmer Grade-B Recruitment Exam under Programmer Grade-2/Computer Operator Grade-B/Manager (system) Recruitment-2021 on March 5

followed by Lecturer (Male/Female) Government Intermediate College Recruitment (Main) Exam-2020 on March 13.

Likewise, the Assistant Professor in Government Degree College (Screening) Exam-2020 will be held on March 15 while Technical Education (Teaching) Services Examination-2021 (Remaining Subjects) is scheduled for March 22.

The Combined State /Upper Subordinate Services (PCS)-2021 Main Exam will be conducted by the commission from March 23 while the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF)/Regional Forest Officer (RFO) Service (Main Exam)-2021 will be held from April 3 while the commission would hold Staff Nurse (Male) Preliminary recruitment Examination-2017 (Re-adver-

tised in 2022) on April 10.

Similarly, Combined State Engineering Services (General/Special Selection)-2021 Exam is scheduled to be held on April 17, the Review Officer (RO)/Assistant Review Officer (ARO) (General/Special Selection) Main Examination-2021 is to be conducted on April 24 while the Lecturer (Government Ashram system schools) Main Examination-2021 will be held on May 1.

This would be followed by the Veterinary Officer (Screening) Exam-2020 set to take place on May 15 and Examination (System) Examination-2021 under Programmer Grade-2/Computer Operator Grade-B /Manager (System) Examination-2021 on May 25. Staff Nurse (Male) Main Exam-2017 will be held on July 24.

Reserved zonal, sector magistrates appointed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate/ District Election Officer (DM/DEO) Kaushal Raj Sharma has appointed zonal/sector magistrates (reserved) to conduct the Assembly General Election-2022 peacefully and efficiently.

According to him, registrars of Banaras Hindu

University (BHU), Tibetan University (Sarnath), Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU) and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth (MGKV) Neeraj Tripathi, Himanshu Pandey, Om Prakash and Sunita Pandey respectively will be the reserved zonal magistrates.

Besides, Sanjay (joint registrar, BHU), Amit Kumar

Srivastava (finance officer), Keshalal (deputy registrar), Sunil Kumar (assistant registrar), Chandranath Mishra (assistant registrar, SSU), Harish Chandra (assistant registrar, MGKV) have been appointed as reserved sector magistrates.

The DEO has ordered these officers posted on election duty that they would maintain their presence at the

district headquarters and they would not go out of the district headquarters apart from not keeping their mobile phones switched off. If it is necessary to go out of the headquarters due to any unavoidable reasons, then through the ADM (City), presenting the application before the DEO, will go out of the headquarters only after obtaining permission, they were directed.

Rush of devotees seen at Ganesh temples

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Despite surge in COVID-19 positive cases, heavy rush of devotees thronged different temples of Lord Ganesh in this city of Lord Shiva, specially Bada Ganesh temple at Lohatia, here on Friday, on the auspicious occasion of Sankashti Ganesh Chaturthi, falling the fourth day of the Krishna Paksha (the waning phase of the moon) in the month of Maagh. Though the Ganesh Chaturthi is falling every month as per the Hindi Calendar, two of them falling on months of Bhaadho and Maagh are very popular in this region and on this occasion, a large number of women in this region of Purvanchal (eastern UP) and adjoining districts of Bihar observed fast.

As this year during the day hours there were no much restrictions, like Makar Sankranti recently heavy rush of devotees was also seen at Ganesh temples. The maximum rush was seen at the pop-



Rush of devotees at Bada Ganesh temple on the occasion of Sankashti Chaturthi in Varanasi on Friday.

Pioneer

ular Bada Ganesh temple at Lohatia, where long queues of devotees were seen right from Maidagin and Kabirchaura. Due to long lines and heavy rush, it took hours for the devo-

tees to reach the temple through the narrow lanes. Seeing the rush of devotees, several traffic restrictions were imposed between Kabirchaura and Maidagin and the vehicles

were diverted. Rush was seen at other Ganesh temples including Chintamani Ganesh at Sonarpura, Siddh Vinayak (Durgakund) and Vighna Vinayak Ganesh.

FDP on innovation management starts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Five-day AICTE Training and Learning (ATAL) Academy sponsored online Faculty Development Programme (FDP) on ‘Innovation Management’ was inaugurated at the Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University (IM-BHU) here on Friday. It is the fourth such online FDP, being organised at IM-BHU in recent times. Director of Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Tiruchirappalli, Prof Pawan Kumar Singh was the chief guest in the inaugural session.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof Singh said that innovation management is very much important for the development of any country, illustrating the

technological innovations that played a prominent role in the COVID-19 times. He highlighted on the latest innovations taking place in the field of management especially in the area of artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data analytics are going at a faster pace which help organisations to have competitive advantage.

Emphasising on the importance of innovation in teaching and learning to make it more effective, he said how one can be innovative in different facets of life. He appreciated the initiative taken by the IM-BHU for providing a learning opportunity to the participants from academia and industry through online FDPs, which in turn would help them to upgrade

their skills in their future endeavors.

Director of IM-BHU Prof SK Dubey, welcoming the participants, emphasised the importance of innovation management and how it can make India stand ahead of other countries. He mentioned how essential innovation management is, especially in the current pandemic scenario. It is pervasive and is equally important for every sector in the society.

Coordinator of FDP Dr Rajkiran Prabhakar said innovation is one of those words that suddenly seems to be all around us. He further said firms care about their ability to innovate, on which their future allegedly depends, and many management consultants are

busy persuading companies about how they can help them improve their innovation performance. He emphasised that there is extensive scope for examining the way innovation is managed within organisations.

Dean of IM-BHU Prof HP Mathur proposed the vote of thanks. The inaugural session was conducted by co-coordinator Dr Ram Shankar Uraon. More than 200 participants from across the country have enrolled for the FDP. The experts of innovation management are from academia and industry including IITs, IIMs, BHU, and several reputed industry leaders, consultants, freelancers and practitioners will deliver lectures in total 14 technical sessions.

Ankur Chandra takes charge as NCR Dy GM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Ankur Chandra, who was serving as Deputy Chief Vigilance Officer has taken charge of Deputy General Manager/General, North Central Railway.

Mr Chandra took charge from Mannu Prakash Dubey who has been transferred to Railway Board as Director Traffic (Transformation).

Ankur Chandra is an officer of Indian Railway Stores Service of 2004 batch. He had served earlier as Deputy Chief Materials Manager in NCR and in different capacities in

Workshop Projects Organization/Patna and Patratu Diesel Shed/East Central Railway in the past.

He joined NCR in 2013 as Senior Materials Manager.

He is an alumnus of IIT Kanpur from where he completed his B.Tech in Civil engineering in 2001. He has earlier received the GM award during his tenure at Patna.

Mr Chandra had undergone training in High Speed Railway in Japan.

At a small farewell function of Mr Dubey, organised on Thursday amidst all COVID protocol, Mr Chandra was

given a warm welcome by GM NCR.

PDA VICE-CHAIRMAN TAKES STOCK OF MAGH MELA AREA: Officiating district magistrate (Magh Mela) and Vice-chairman of Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA), Arvind Kumar Chauhan, inspected all five sectors of the mela area and reviewed the sanitary arrangements.

He also directed all sector in-charges to provide all sorts of basic amenities to devotees and visitors. While carrying out inspection at Sector no.-5, the officiating mela DM noticed

sanitation conditions prevailing near toilets, and cleanliness was not carried out as per the norms. He further ordered the suspension of circle inspector and adverse entry into the character role of sector medical officer. Officiating DM also inspected Ganga water entering affected camps on campus and asked to shift the affected kalp-wasis to Sector-5 at the earliest. Chauhan also directed officials of the irrigation department (flood control division) and coordinated with concerned officers to keep a strict watch on the rising water level of Ganga.

Youth killed in road mishap

ALLAHABAD (PNS): A youth was killed in a road accident in Gangapur area of Yograj district. The youth, who was crossing the road in front of Rudrapur village at Chiraura intersection of Tharwai police station area, was hit hard by a speeding car coming from Prayagraj side.

The youth got stuck in the car but the driver did not stop the vehicle. Due to this he was dragged for some distance. Along with the car, the driver fled from there but left the car ahead and fled. The young man lost his life in the accident. After the accident, the people around and the relatives of the youth who reached there informed the Tharwai police. The police reached the spot and sent the dead body to the mortuary for post mortem examination. The accident happened late on Thursday night.

40-year-old Rajesh Kumar son of Ramdhan, resident of Devaneri village of Tharvai police station area, was crossing the road on foot to go home at Chiraura intersection late on Thursday night. At the same time, the car coming from Prayagraj side at high speed hit hard. After the collision, the driver started running away with the car. Due to this, Rajesh dragged for about 100 meters.

The people around woke up after shouting and they reached the spot. By then Rajesh Kumar had stopped breathing and the driver had fled with the car. Villagers informed about the incident to Tharwai police and Rajesh’s

family members. After interrogation, the police reached the spot and took the dead body to the police station and sent it for the post mortem examination.

On the other hand, the driver ran for about a kilometer ahead after hitting the youth with the damaged car. He then fled, leaving the damaged car. The police have seized the car. The police are trying to trace its driver and owner.

Rajesh Kumar used to work as a laborer to support his family. Due to his death in the accident, the condition of his wife Krishna Devi, son Manish Kumar, Sumit, Aditya and others in the family are aggrieved.

THREE YOUTHS HELD FOR DISTURBING PEACE: Panic gripped sangam and adjoining areas, under the lim-

its of Daraganj police station, after a group of youths arrived to shave their heads to mark their protest against unemployment. The police have arrested the three youths on the charges of disturbing peace in the area. Cops also exchanged heated arguments with agitating youths, who arrived to shave their heads with demand to provide employment. The youths were keen to perform pindaan activities of the government. Daraganj police said that these youths have not taken any permission to hold protests at the Sangam area.

On the other hand, the three boys alleged that the state government has not gone through recruitment processes and all the recruitments are pending in the judiciary.

Modern convention centre to be completed in 15 months: DC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar while reviewing the more ambitious 13700 sq mtr project of Modern Convention Centre on Friday said it will be completed in the next 15 months with the active technical support of HBTU, IIT-Kanpur and IIM-Indore. He said this Convention Centre was a prestigious project of Kanpur and this Smart City Initiative will be 'Central Activity Hub' to boost art, culture, trade & industry not only in Kanpur but for the entire region.

He said the total cost of this project was Rs 80 crore, out of which the work of Rs 67.41 crore was for construction of a multi-storey building which included 500 seating capacity state-of-the-art auditorium, another 16000 sq Ft Exhibition Hall, 12000 sq Ft Exhibition Hall, a 300 seating capacity conference room, three meeting rooms of 100 seating capacity each, six guest rooms and also a 8000 sq ft of Food Court.

The DC further informed that a covered parking slot of 68 vehicles and eight commercial shops along with a business centre and finally modern restaurant will be part of this prestigious project. Discussing the features of the structure like to come up he said the building had been designed as a



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar, reviews the progress of Modern Convention Centre on Friday.

Pioneer

'Green Building' following the National Building Code (NBC). He added that the Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) had been included in the building itself and 90 per cent treated water will be recycled again for floor cleaning and also for watering the plants to maintain the green belt on the premises.

Shekhar said the entire building will be energy efficient with Solar Panels installed on roof by which basic aesthetic illumination of this building will be carried out. He said the entire facility will be air-conditioned, with eight elevators and four escalators for conve-

nient transit across the two and half stories structure.

He said the entire building was differently abled- friendly with lifts, ramps, toilets and seating areas. He said the developer had started the work at site on a full swing after proper soil testing of the land was carried out.

He said instructions had been issued that the architectural design will be approved only after the careful and critical examination of the Harcourt Butler Technological University. He said in addition to this quality and progress will be monitored strictly on a

monthly basis by a special committee under the Chairmanship of Professor of IIT-Kanpur.

He said and special help in the form of the module for operation and maintenance from IIM-Indore. He said although the work had to be accomplished in 18 months but it had been directed that it should be completed in the next 15 months.

During the review he was accompanied by Kanpur Municipal Commissioner, Nodal Officer, Kanpur Smart City Ltd and a few other officials.

SIT starts probe into Kanpur anti-Sikh riots

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the 1984 anti-Sikh riots of Kanpur has started investigation into two more cases. These include one related to the murder of a man and his two sons in Naubasta after seeking details of documents, witnesses and accused involved in it. These two cases were reported from the Naubasta and Nazirabad police station areas of the city.

It may be recalled that the SIT, set up to re-investigate the riots in the city in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, has so far identified 89 accused in the 13 cases. Of these 89 accused, 70 are alive and remaining 19 have died.

In the 11 cases, the SIT has already handed over the list of the accused to the government while the investigations in two more cases (Nos 12 and 13) are still underway.

"The rioters had killed a man and his two sons in case No. 12 reported from Naubasta police station area. The SIT has gathered all the evidence in this regard. More than a dozen accused have been identified. The verification process is in progress," sources in the SIT said and added, "Similarly, in case No. 13, two persons of the Sikh community were killed by the mob."

SIT DIG Balendu Bhushan Singh said, "So far, the investigation of 11 cases has been completed. The investigation of case Nos. 12 and 13 is already underway." All the documents relating to these cases like names of witnesses, plaintiffs and accused had been recovered. In case No.12 registered as 498/84 in the general diary of Naubasta police station by Vijender Kaur, her husband Gurmendra Singh, father-in-law Nagina Singh and brother-in-law were murdered, while in case No. 13 registered as 315/84 in the GD of Nazirabad police station, one Gurcharan Singh and Amlak Singh were killed by the rioters, DIG Singh said.

It may be recalled that nearly 127 people were murdered in the city in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984.

AKSS asks political parties to include lawyers' pension scheme in poll manifesto

KANPUR (PNS): Adhivakta Kalyan Sangharsh Samiti (AKSS) has urged prominent political parties to include the issue of lawyers' pension scheme in their election manifestoes. Addressing media persons, AKSS convener Pt Ravindra Sharma said they had sent a letter to this effect to all the prominent political parties. He said that a lawyer, after 35 years of practice and attaining the age of 65 years, should be paid a pension of a minimum Rs 10,000 per month as part of his/her social security. He also demanded enforcement of young lawyers' incentive scheme, envisaging payment of Rs 10,000 per month incentive for the first five years of his/her practice after registration up to 30 years of age. Under the Lawyers' Health Insurance Scheme, he demanded free health insurance cover of at least Rs 5 lakh to each lawyer and under the Adhivakta Awas Scheme, plots/houses to lawyers at cheaper price on 'no profit, no loss' basis. President of the Commissionery Bar Association, Dinesh Sharma, SK Sachan, Gurmeet Singh, Sarvesh Tripathi, Vijay Sagar, Sanjiv Kapoor, BL Gupta, Anand Sethi, Raj Kumar Tripathi, Mohd Quadir, Shishir Mohan, Arvind Sharma, Danish Qureshi, Ved Uttam and KK Yadav were present.

HEALTH INSTITUTE LAB: The Director of the University Institute of Health Sciences, CSJM University, Kanpur, Dr Pravin Katiyar on Thursday informed the laboratory of the Health Institute had received all the new pathology machines to run the pathology full fledged. He said this laboratory will conduct 129 tests.

He said the pathology tests done at the lab will be half the price charged at pathology centres in the city.

Bipin Kumar Singh takes charge as NER PCPO

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

Bipin Kumar Singh took over as the charge as Principal Chief Personnel Officer (PCPO), North Eastern Railway (NER) recently. Earlier he was working as Chief Personnel Officer (CPO)/ Administration in East Central Railway (ECR), Hajipur.

Bipin Kumar Singh obtained his master's degree in Sociology from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. He entered the railway



service through Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) batch of 1990. His first appointment

was on the post of Assistant Personnel Officer (APO)/Dhanbad. Apart from it he had worked on the post of Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM) in Sonpur and Danapur divisions. He has successfully worked as the Principal Chief Personnel Officer in Chittaranjan Locomotive Works.

Singh has experience in railway administration and management and is popular among officers and employees alike.

Stress on fair conduct of UPTET

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

With the purpose of holding the Uttar Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test (UPTET) on January 23 in a fair, proper and peaceful man-

ner a meeting of the zonal/sector/static magistrates and examination centre superintendents was organised at Zila Panchayat on Thursday. Addressing it DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar said static magistrates had been deployed at all examination centres. The examination was to be held in two shifts — from 10 am to 12.30 pm and from 2.30 pm to 5.00 pm. He also said that it will be mandatory for the candidates getting BED training to bring the original copy of the training certificate or the photocopy attested by the principal. He directed all officials concerned to read the directions properly. The DM said that students by showing admit cards could travel by Roadways buses free of cost. The candidates were requested to sit only on the seat having their roll number. Giving details of arrangements ADM(F&R) Shiv Pratap Shukla said that all the centres were equipped with the facilities like CCTV cameras, furnitures, lighting, toilets,



said that flying squads had been formed to hold the examinations in a transparent manner. Regarding Covid-19 the ADM informed that all centres will be equipped with Covid help desk, scanner, hand sanitiser, some masks etc and during the examination Covid protocol had to be followed strictly. ASP (City) Sanjay Verma said that proper police arrangements had been done not only at the examination centres but at the roadways and railway stations too along with other main places. The meeting was attended by the ADMs, city magistrate, SDMs, deputy collectors, DIOS and other officials concerned.

SP's DIRECTIVE: Superintendent of Police (SP) Ajay Kumar Singh held a meeting of gazetted officers of the administration at Police Lines on Thursday to ensure availability of amenities at the places where forces had to stay during assembly election. The SP directed circle officers to visit all the places with SDMs where

the forces, including paramilitary/state forces, had to stay. He said the management/principals of the schools should be contacted and ensure the availability of essential amenities so that forces could stay in a proper atmosphere and directed the Electricity department to ensure the availability of electricity at all the fixed places. The DSO was directed to ensure availability of ration to the forces without any problem. The DPRO was asked to direct the village pradhans to keep coordination with the officials involved in the polling. The BSA was asked to direct all the school headmasters to cooperate and ensure the repair of buildings, if required. The meeting was mainly attended by the ADM(F&R) Shiv Pratap Shukla and the ASP (City) Sanjay Kumar and ASP (Operation) Mahesh Singh Attri.

FINE: A sum of ₹1,86,000 was deposited as fine by liquor shop owners on Thursday. As per the reports, on the direction of the district magistrate, a surprise checking drive of the liquor shops had been conducted by Additional District Magistrate (Finance & Revenue), city magistrate and all SDMs on January 11 and 12. Under the drive as many as 29 shops had been checked in which irregularities were detected in eight of them. Under the provisions, the fine was imposed on those shops and as per the compliance ₹1,86,000 was deposited in the exchequer. ADM (F&R) Shiv Pratap Shukla said that the drive will continue.

Flag march taken out

CORRESPONDENT ■ CHANDAULI

In view of the assembly elections on the instructions of Superintendent of Police (SP) Ankur Aggarwal, paramilitary forces and police personnel took out a flag march on Thursday and gave a message of security. The flag march taken out by security force personnel was taken out from Naugarh tehsil and passed through development Block, Community Health Centre and the entire town. During it police officers also inspected the polling booth. CO (Naugarh) Sheshmani Pathak said the police force is fully prepared to conduct elections. Naugarh police station incharge Rajesh Saroj said if voters have any kind of prob-



lem then they should immediately inform on the government contact numbers or to the police. In the flag march Chakarghatta police station incharge Alakh Narayan Singh and others along with personnel of police, PAC and paramilitary force were included.

FLAGGED OFF: Under

the voters' awareness campaign the Matdata Jagrookta Express vehicle was flagged off by the Deputy District Election Officer/Additional District Magistrate and Chief Development Officer. On the occasion Chief Medical Officer, District Panchayat Raj Officer and others were present.

Creche to facilitate working women

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

In Dudhichua area of Government of India's Miniratna company Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) on Wednesday giving a new place to employee welfare newly constructed Vatsalya creche was

workers were present. It may be pointed out here that Dudhichua project is one of the mega projects of NCL.

CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN: Under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan NCL is running a massive cleanliness



started in the Sector A residential premises of the project. It was inaugurated by General Manager, Dudhichua Area, Anurag Kumar. With the starting of this creche proper care can be taken of children of women working in the project. Heads of departments of Dudhichua Area, representatives of trade unions and other

campaign in the vicinity of the company. In this sequence, taking the campaign forward, the company, together with Nagar Nigam, Singrauli, is starting a new campaign on public awareness related to waste management, recycling, beautification and cleanliness.

Under the Clean and Beautiful Singrauli campaign,

district administration and various units of NCL, Block B, Jayant, Amlohri, Jhingurda, Nigahi, CWS-Jayant and Dudhichua projects will collect wet and dry waste from each house separately and deposit it at a fixed place. Nagar Nigam, Singrauli, will pick up the collected waste from all the projects and recycle it into compost and other useful items. For the execution of this work, the five projects of NCL located in Madhya Pradesh will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Nagar Nigam. Proper management of waste already collected from households is being done at NCL headquarters.

It may be pointed out here that in NCL every year the month of October is celebrated as Swachhta Month under which various efforts are made like cleanliness on a large scale in all projects and units, at workplaces, residential residences, hospitals and schools etc, ban on single-use plastic, cleanliness rally, organising various competitions, tree plantation and cleanliness audit.

CSAUAT sends scientists to tackle late blight disease

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Under the directives of the UP Government the Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology on Friday sent its trouble-shooting team of scientists to tackle the late blight disease which had affected over 25 per cent of potato crop. The team also found that the farmers were using excess of pesticide which was leading to more damage to the crops. Kanpur and Kannauj which were the major potato producers spread out over 1.30 lakh acre of land including Farukhabad, Etawah and Auraiya. This was a major setback to the farmers of these areas and thus the government had decided to provide all possible help to save the crop.

This was informed by Soil Scientist of CSA, Dr SK Biswas while conducting a survey in the surrounding areas. He said the fog coupled with rains has led to late blight which was affecting the potato crop and this will lead to not only losses of farmers but it will also lead

to price rise of the crop in the coming times. He said the team was advocating that the farmers use a right amalgam of Matco, Equation Pro and Radomil fungicide by mixing one ml mixture in one litre of water and spar on the crops immediately. He said the farmers should use the fungicide only after consultation with the scientists of the CSA. He warned the farmers to refrain from storing the blight affected potato crop in cold storage as it will rot leading to financial losses.

He said late blight was caused by the fungus called phytophthora infestans which was the most important deadliest disease of potato that can result into crop failures in a short period if appropriate control measures were not adopted. He said losses in potato yield can go as high as 80 per cent in this epidemic year. He added that when plants become infected, lesions (round or irregularly shaped areas that range in colour from dark green to purplish black and resemble frost injury)

appear on the leaves, petioles, and stems. He said a whitish growth of spore-producing structures may appear at the margin of the lesions on the underleaf surfaces. He said potato tubers developed rot up to 15 mm (0.6 inch) deep. He said secondary fungi and bacteria often invaded potato tubers and produced rotting that resulted in great losses during storage, transit, and marketing.

Prof Biswas said the cause of concern was that phytophthora survived in stored tubers, dump piles, field plants, both sexual oospores and asexual sporangia were dispersed by the wind to nearby plants, in which infection may occur within a few hours. He said at temperatures below 15 degree C sporangia germinated by producing zoospores (asexual spores with flagella) that encyst and later form a germ tube under certain temperature and humidity conditions. He said above that temperature most sporangia produce a germ tube directly.

He said the disease can be

managed with a timely application of fungicide, though epidemics can occur rapidly once crops were infected. He added that the oospores had thickened walls and were able to persist in the soil for several seasons, the disease can be difficult to eradicate. He suggested measures for controlling and preventing blights which typically involved the destruction of the infected plant parts, use of disease-free seed or stock and resistant varieties, crop rotation, pruning and spacing of plants for better air circulation. He said apart from this by controlling pests that carry the fungus from plant to plant and to avoid overhead watering and working among wet plants and, where needed, the application of fungicide or antibiotics.

He mooted proper sanitation was key to stop the spread of the infestation. He said for bacterial blights fixed copper or streptomycin was an effective antibiotic if applied weekly during damp weather when leaves and shoots were expanding, deliver results.

Vaccination camp for students who had been left out today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Nepal Singh addressing a meeting on Friday said the response to the schoolchildren vaccination had received a good response and as part of the ongoing drive another similar camp will be held on Saturday where the students who had been left out on any ground can avail themselves of the facility. He said the schools have been directed to ensure that they submit their vaccination details positively on Friday. He said each child has to sent in his or her details to the school including class Aadhar Card number and mobile number as well. He the left out schools can submit their left out students details after the vaccination drive on Saturday.

He said till Friday a total of 564 affected cases were identified and out of the total 513 have over come COVID-19 home isolation. He said in the first and second wave the most effective pattern of recovery was witnessed in Home Isolation and the recovery was

massive. He underlined the government directive to facilitate home isolation to the COVID-19 patients and said special emphasis had been made for monitoring the home isolation cases and also the distribution of medicine kits. He said the home isolation this time had been reduced to one week.

Later addressing the supporting staff of the LLR Hospital he said there were umpteen doubts relating to hospital and home care both for an adults or children, especially confirmed or suspected COVID-19. He said the last wave had clearly proved that the biggest number of COVID-19 affected people who got cured were in home isolation under the medical supervision and the administration ensured the supply of medicine kits to them timely.

He said in the event of the Third Wave the home isolation of people who were infected with can make an important contribution to breaking the chains of transmission of the virus.

He said taking the decision

as to whether to isolate and care for an infected person at home depended on the following three factors important factors first clinical evaluation of the COVID-19 patient, second evaluation of the home setting and the third the ability to monitor the clinical evolution of a person with COVID-19 at home. He said a trained health worker should assess whether the home in question was suitable for the isolation and the provision of cared of a COVID-19 patient, including whether the patient, caregiver or other household members had all they needed to adhere to the recommendations for home care isolation.

He said for home isolation one needed hand and respiratory hygiene supplies, environmental cleaning materials, the ability to impose and adhere to restrictions on people's movement around or from the house. He said even the ability to address safety concerns such as

accidental ingestion of and fire hazards associated with alcohol-based hand rubs and

cleaning products should also be made and symptomatic patient meeting the case definition for COVID-19 without evidence of viral pneumonia or hypoxia.

Dr Singh said moderate illness may include in an adult or adolescent, clinical signs of pneumonia (fever, cough, dyspnoea, fast breathing) but no signs of severe pneumonia. He said in cases there was limited or no access to water and sanitation, as well as to resources for cleaning and disinfection and hygiene posed risks for caregivers and community members for transmission of COVID-19. He said as per Health Ministry guidelines children should remain with their caregivers wherever possible and this should be decided in consultation with the caregiver and the child. He said to prepare families with children for potential illness within a family, community protection focal points and case-workers should help families plan and agree in advance on how they will care for children in case the primary caregivers became ill.

Masks not for children below 5 years: Revised guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In what should come as a huge relief for both parents and children, wearing of masks is not recommended for children aged 5 years or below according to the revised Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry. Those aged 6-11 years may wear it depending on the ability of the child to use a mask safely and appropriately under direct supervision of parents.

Ensuring that the kid masks up properly has been of much concern to parents while masking up didn't go too well with children who felt suffo-

cated.

As per the 'Revised Comprehensive Guidelines for Management of COVID-19 in Children and Adolescents (below 18 years)', those aged 12 and above should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, the guidelines said.

It also said that use of antivirals or monoclonal antibodies is not recommended for those less than 18 years of age, irrespective of severity of Covid infection, and if steroids are used, they should be tapered over 10 to 14 days, subject to clinical improvement.

The guidelines were reviewed by a group of experts in view of the current surge that

is mainly attributed to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which is also a variant of concern.

The available data from other countries suggests that the disease caused by the Omicron variant is less severe. However, there is a need for a careful watch, as the current wave evolves, the ministry said.

It categorized cases as asymptomatic, mild, moderate and severe.

According to the guidelines, COVID-19 is a viral infection and antimicrobials have no role in the management of uncomplicated COVID-19 infection.

In asymptomatic and mild

cases, antimicrobials are not recommended for therapy or prophylaxis while in moderate and severe cases, antimicrobials should not be prescribed unless there is clinical suspicion of a superadded infection.

In case of septic shock, empirical antimicrobials, according to body weight, are frequently added to cover all likely pathogens based on clinical judgement, patient host factors, local epidemiology and antimicrobial policy of the hospital, it said.

The guidelines stated that steroids are not indicated and are harmful in asymptomatic and mild cases of COVID-19.

They are indicated only in hospitalised severe and critically ill COVID-19 cases under strict supervision, the guidelines said.

Steroids should be used at the right time, in the right dose and for the right duration, they stated.

Steroids should be avoided in the first three to five days since onset of symptoms as it prolongs viral shedding, the guidelines stated.

Anticoagulants are not indicated routinely and all hospitalised children should be evaluated for risk of developing thrombosis and monitored for development of thrombosis, the ministry said.

As far post-COVID-19 care is concerned, the guidelines stated that children with asymptomatic infection or mild disease should receive routine childcare, appropriate vaccination (if eligible), nutrition counselling, and psychological support on follow up.

In addition to the above, parents or caregivers of children, who suffered moderate to severe Covid, during discharge from hospital should be counselled regarding monitoring for persistence or worsening respiratory difficulty and explained the indications for bringing the child back to the facility, the guidelines stated.



MHA to allow arms manufacturers to enhance weapon production

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Friday amended the rules to enable arms manufacturing companies to enhance their production of firearms and ammunition. Under the Arms (Amendment) Rules, 2022, the arms manufacturers, however, will have to submit online every month details of the firearms manufactured, sold or transferred or consumed for the month.

"The manufacturer who has been issued licence in Form VII under these rules shall be permitted to have enhanced annual production of firearms or ammunition or caliber wise revision of his licensed capacity by giving intimation to the licensing authority and also to the State Government concerned within ninety days from the end of the financial year and for which no further endorsement on the licence as to capacity shall be required," the MHA notification said.



The manufacturer who has been issued licence in Form VII under these rules shall be permitted to have enhanced annual production of firearms or ammunition or caliber wise revision of his licensed capacity by giving intimation to the licensing authority and also to the State Government concerned within ninety days from the end of the financial year and for which no further endorsement on the licence as to capacity shall be required

tion, sold, transfer and consumed shall be submitted by the manufacturer by close of business hours of the last day of the month, the notification said.

Prior approval of the licensing authority will be mandatory for any change in control, either directly or indirectly, of the company or in case of any change in shareholding or beneficial interest in the shareholding, resulting into

dilution of promoters shareholding below 10 per cent.

However, prior approval will not be required if there is increase in shareholding of a shareholder, who held less than 10 per cent in the share capital of the company, to 10 per cent or more provided that for transfer of share holding between the two promoters which is already approved by the licensing authority.

AG OK's contempt proceedings against Yati

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Attorney General KK Venugopal on Friday granted consent to activist Shachi Nelli for initiation of criminal contempt of court proceedings against controversial Yati Narsinghanand over his recent derogatory remarks against the Supreme Court.

The AG found that Narsinghanand's statement "those who believe in this system, these politicians, in the Supreme Court, and in the Army will all die the death of a dog", was a direct attempt to lower the authority of the Supreme Court in the minds of the general public.

As per Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act, the consent of Attorney General is required before the Supreme Court can hear a criminal contempt of court petition filed by a private individual. The complainant Nelli wrote to the AG seeking his consent for the same.

In her letter seeking consent, Nelli had stated that in an interview given by Narsinghanand which went viral on social media was total-



ly contempt for the Supreme Court and the Constitution of India clear by saying, "We have no trust in the Supreme Court of India and the Constitution. The Constitution will consume the 100 crore Hindus of this country. Those who believe in this Constitution will be killed. Those who believe in this system, in these politicians, in the Supreme Court, and in the Army will all die the death of a dog."

Narsinghanand's statements were made in response to questions posed about the court proceedings in the Haridwar hate speech cases. He was arrested for the vitriolic speeches at Haridwar Dharam Sansad.

SC refuses to entertain plea to censor Kangana posts

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking censorship of actress Kangana Ranaut's all future statements on social media, clubbing multiple FIRs lodged against her for remarks against the Sikh community and investigation by Mumbai police.

It asked the petitioner either to ignore the utterances made by her or avail remedy under law.

The top court also said that the petitioner, a member of the Sikh Community, as a public cannot seek clubbing of multiple FIRs, and only the accused or informant can seek such remedy.

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Bela Trivedi told petitioner Sardar Charanjeet Singh Chandernal, an advocate, appearing in person that remedy which he was seeking cannot be granted under Article 32 petition and he has to pursue relief under the criminal law. "There are two possible solutions. Either you ignore the utterances made by her or avail remedy under law. We respect the communi-



ty. We respect your faith...By speaking these utterances you are doing more disservice to the cause. Don't try to prejudice the mind of the court. Don't politicise it. We have read these utterances in your file. You don't need to speak up", the bench told Chandernal, when he tried to read the remarks which Ranaut had made on social media. Chandernal said that he has filed an intervention application in the FIR quashing petition of Ranaut and is pursuing it.

The bench then ordered, "As regards to first relief is concerned, the petitioner-in-person states that he has already adopted proceedings for the

purpose of availing of his remedies in accordance with law by instituting a private complaint. In view of the invocation of the remedy by the petitioner in person, we, therefore, request this court to treat the petition in so far prayer A (censoring social media posts) is concerned as being disposed of without being expressed any opinion by this court at the present stage". Chandernal said that the actress is going on and on with her "outrageous" and "defamatory" statements that "Sikh Farmers were Khalistani Terrorists" and tried to portray the community as "anti-national".

PTI

'Goof up by bank led to wrongful deposit': SC sets aside National Consumer Commission order

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday set aside a National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission order, in a matter connected with wrong deposit and withdrawal, from an account at State Bank of India.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Bela M. Trivedi said that calling for the report by the National Commission on its own from the officer of the bank was absolutely unwarranted. "Be that as it may, the impugned order passed by the National Commission solely relying upon the suo moto report called for from the respondent-bank during the pendency of the revision application, being highly erroneous, deserves to be set aside and is accordingly set aside. The order passed by the State Commission is restored," it said.

The matter is connected with the withdrawal of Rs 3 Lakh from petitioner Sunil Kumar Maity's account at State Bank of India. Maity found that the money, which was deposited through cheque, was withdrawn from the account. Later, it was found the bank had given him the account number of another person by name of Sunil Maity, which led to this goof-up. The bank refused to address Maity's grievance. He moved the district consumer forum, which allowed his complaint. The West Bengal State Commission noted the bank should have accepted its mistake, by crediting the cheque amount to the account of Sunil Maity, who had the account at the same branch.

The top court noted: "There was no way that the appellant would have known that the second respondent namely Sunil Maity had an account in the same branch. No sane person would deposit cash or cheque meant to be



deposited in his account in an account number belonging to another person with similar name."

It pointed out that the National Commission exceeded its revisional jurisdiction by calling for the report from the bank and made it the basis to conclude that the two fora below had erred in not undertaking the requisite in-depth appraisal of the case.

The top court said the report that tries to absolve the bank of its liability is based on surmises and conjectures, as it holds that bank has every reason to believe that wrong account number was intentionally inserted by the petitioner himself for reasons best known to him or on account of negligence by him by not keeping the passbook in proper custody. "The suppositions are contradictory as well as incredulous and fanciful," said the bench.

The National Commission, allowing a revision petition by the bank, said the complainant can move the competent civil court under the law.

The petitioner submitted before the top court that he did not know Sunil Maity, the second respondent, and would not have known his account number unless it was given by a bank officer.

IANS

194 schools registered for affiliation with Sainik School Society

New Delhi: A total 194 schools have been registered till now for affiliation with the Sainik School Society and application process is underway, the Ministry of Defence said on Friday.

The Ministry said that marching ahead in tune with National Education Policy (NEP), the government has decided to provide an increasing focus on value-based education enabling children to develop pride in the rich culture and heritage of this nation, effective leadership with character, discipline, sense of national duty and patriotism.

In a paradigm shift to the existing pattern of Sainik Schools, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its meeting has approved the proposal for launching of affiliated Sainik Schools under Sainik Schools Society, Ministry of Defence.

These schools will function as an exclusive vertical which will be distinct and different from existing Sainik Schools of MoD.

In the first phase, 100 affiliate partners are proposed to be drawn from states, NGOs and private partners.

Scheme is aimed at providing Sainik School pattern of education to a larger cross section of aspiring students all over the nation.

Sainik Schools Society has forwarded application forms to all such applicant Schools which have registered themselves upto January 15, 2022.

The application forms are required to be filled up and submitted back to Sainik Schools Society through online mode by January 12, 2022.

IANS

New Delhi: A furious backlash in India has forced Nestle to discontinue a range of KitKat bars covered by wrappers with images of Hindu gods on them, the Daily Mail reported.

The range has sparked worries that the chocolate bars adorned with the images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Mata Subhadra would inevitably be thrown away in bins and on the streets, the report said.

It is only recently that the KitKat wrapper with a picture of Lord Jagannath came into the spotlight, sparking reactions on social media.

"Kindly remove the pictures...they might even get stepped on unintentionally," one Twitter user posted.

Another Twitter user commented that it is an honour to have "Odisha culture and Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra on KitKat, but throwing the wrappers in dustbin or stepping on them accidentally would be an insult to the deities."

The bars were introduced to "celebrate the culture",



according to Nestle. The company has since issued an apology, and withdrawn the bar range.

A Nestle spokesperson said: "We do understand the sensitivity of the matter and regret if we have inadvertently hurt anyone's sentiment. We had already withdrawn these packs from the market last year. We thank you for your understanding and support."

"We wanted to encourage people to know about the art and its artisans. We do understand the sensitivity of the matter and regret if we have inadvertently hurt people's sentiments."

IANS

ED files chargesheet against IREO Group's MD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed Prosecution Complaint (chargesheet) before Special Court at Panchkula, Haryana against Lalit Goyal, Vice-chairman cum Managing Director of IREO Group of companies named in the Panama Papers leak, and others under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA) in a case related to multi-crore real estate scam.

The ED investigation, inter-alia revealed that over 1,050 homebuyers/investors of IREO Projects were duped of Rs 1,225 crore.

The Special Court, Panchkula on Friday took cognizance of the present prosecution complaint.

The ED had initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of FIRs under



various Sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) registered at various police stations across Gurugram, Panchkula, Ludhiana and Delhi. As many as 30 FIRs have been identified

in the case so far, the ED said in a statement.

"The ED investigation inter-alia revealed that over 1050 homebuyers/investors of IREO Projects, namely IREO

Fiveriver, The Corridors, IREO City, Gurgaon Hills in Haryana and IREO Waterfront Township in Punjab, among others, had made advance payments but are yet to receive their booked flats/plots despite a lapse of more than 4-5 years," it said.

Investigation further revealed that IREO Group of companies could not complete the projects due to diversion and siphoning of funds. Customer receipts to the tune of Rs. 1,225 Crore have been diverted outside India in the form of redemption / purchase/transfer and buy-back of shares violating the FDI policy and other laws, it said.

"The modus operandi adopted by the group includes routing of funds to India from various entities based in tax havens like British Virgin Islands, Mauritius, recording of fictitious expenses in the books

of account, writing off project in progress, interest free loans and advances to sister concerns and round tripping of funds through shell companies and creation of assets within and outside India," it said.

Investigation further revealed that Lalit Goyal is "settler and named beneficiary" of an overseas Trust which owns and controls entities holding assets outside India. Recent Pandora Papers Leak has also named four entities (which are beneficially owned by Lalit Goyal) which are holding assets of more than USD 77.73 million (Rs. 575 crore approximately) overseas, it said.

Goyal, was arrested on November 16 last year after a Look Out Circular (LOC) was issued against him and has since been in judicial custody. In the matter, searches were also conducted on November 22, it added.

The medium

To teach in English or in mother tongue?
A multilingual approach is the answer

The Telangana Government has decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction in Government schools from the next academic year. The State language, Telugu, will be parallelly available as the other medium of instruction. On the face of it, there is a readymade explanation for the change. More and more parents of children in Government schools of Telangana feel the kids, when they reach the college level, fail to catch up with the standards of English-medium students. Secondly, private schools, hitherto limited to the urban centres with their English-medium education, have of late mushroomed across rural Telangana offering education in the English medium. That has led to a near-exodus from Telugu-medium Government schools, many of which have either closed down or merged with bigger schools, or relocated for want of students. The Government in any case runs a few residential schools with English medium and thinks offering English medium across the State would not be much of an issue. The problem the Government faces is finding teachers who can teach in English. They are scarce. The majority of the teachers is proficient in Telugu. The Government has to re-train these teachers — a tough task



— and encourage prospective teachers to take up B Ed courses in English. But by and large, not many eyebrows are being raised as the English medium creeps into the Government school system in Telangana where ‘going to America’ is a popular cry and Telugu-medium students shell out big money to enrol in private English-language courses.

The issue, however, points to a disturbing fact. Even after 75 years of Independence, we are stuck with basic stuff, like what should be the medium of education in our schools. We are still debating whether children should be taught in English or their mother tongue. We

are also not sure whether mother tongue constitutes languages or dialects, too. For instance, millions speak Bhojpuri but it is considered a dialect of Hindi. Only last year, a Minister in Bihar mooted the idea of making the “mother tongue of the region” the medium of teaching. It just shows India never had an exhaustive debate on the subject. Linguists backing cognitive education insist that children learn skills in their mother tongue, a language they grow up with. The aspirational, social-empowering, rights-based argument favours English because it is the language that works in the world. Thus, the medium of instruction carries the baggage of ideology and elitism in the world’s largest multi-lingual federation that is India. In contrast to parents’ eagerness for their children to be taught in English, the Centre’s National Education Policy (NEP) largely prefers the mother tongue. The answer is a bilingual or, preferably, a multilingual approach. Technology makes it possible. In a country where most children live their lives in two or three languages, multi-lingual teaching methods provide a level playing field for diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds while reconciling the desires of both parents and the NEP.

PICTALK



A troupe of folk singers during a rehearsal on the Red Road for upcoming R-Day function, in Kolkata

PTI

Ill at ease

As Kerala grapples with rising COVID cases, its ‘immaculate health care’ balloon has burst

As the number of daily COVID-19 cases soared to 46,487 on Thursday, Kerala’s boast of being a role model for health care came crashing down like a pack of cards. The death toll in the State till Thursday stood at 51,501. Kerala has not been free from the pandemic’s onslaught since India’s first COVID-19 case was diagnosed in the State in early 2020. However, the State administration-sponsored media blitzkrieg portrayed an “all is well” image. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is currently recuperating in a US hospital, had addressed the media daily to tell the world that Kerala was the only State taking on the pandemic by the horns. The daily briefings, which were telecast by all satellite news channels, were used by Vijayan to campaign for the 2021 Assembly election. He claimed that Kerala was receiving global acclaim for its health care system and other countries were emulating its example. But after the LDF retained power following the 2021 Assembly election, he discontinued the practice of addressing the media daily; the opportunist in Vijayan the politician chose to ignore people as the next major election is due only in 2024.

When the cases of COVID-19 surged, the Government turned to blaming people for the transmission of the virus. The truth, however, is that no worthwhile efforts were made to study the pattern in the spread of the disease. The State Government continued to tom-tom and live by its past laurels, when some agencies had praised the Kerala model of health care. The health department was complacent throughout this period, and manipulated figures failed to cover up the administration’s malpractices. A 600-bed COVID hospital at Kasaragod, built by the Tatas and handed over to the Government in early 2021, is yet to become fully operational. The Government doctors were on a path of agitation for the last one year, demanding restoration of allowances which were cancelled citing financial crunch. The much-touted Kerala model was virtually a red herring spawned by friendly media. EMS Namboodiripad and C Achutha Menon, the Communist Chief Ministers of the State, used to fly to Romania and East Germany for medical treatment while Vijayan and his conscience-keeper Kodyiyeri Balakrishnan prefer the “imperialist” US as their medical caretaker. It’s time for the Comrades to see the writing on the wall, isn’t it already?

Afghan women’s rights are still far

The Taliban’s recent announcements fail to inspire confidence and don’t go far enough to impress the international community



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Two news items, published in newspapers on January 20, 2022, merit attention. The first by AFP, carried in the Delhi edition of a leading daily, is about Acting Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund’s appeal on January 19 to Muslim countries “to take the lead and recognise us officially”. He was speaking at a conference to address Afghanistan’s massive economic problems. The second, by PTI, featured in the Delhi edition of *The Pioneer*. It cited Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Xiao Lijian as saying at a media briefing on January 18 that he hoped that the Afghan side would respond further to the international community’s expectations that it would “establish an open and inclusive political architecture, adopt moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies, firmly combat all sorts of terrorist forces” and be “on friendly terms with other countries, especially its neighbours and integrate into [the] international family at an early date”.

The statement, made following a mention of the Taliban seeking China’s help to get global diplomatic recognition, clearly indicated that the world did not think that they had established an “inclusive” Government or that their policies towards women would not be a repeat of the horribly repressive ones that marked their earlier stint in power from 1996 to 2001. And this, when they had promised that women would enjoy all the rights to education and work available under Sharia law.

In fact, the UN and its bodies have, on several occasions, asked the Taliban to implement their promises and made critical observations about their actions. Its secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, told reporters on October 7 last year, “I am particularly alarmed to see promises made to Afghan women and girls by the Taliban being broken.” He added, “I strongly appeal to the Taliban to keep their promises to women and girls and fulfil their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.” Speaking at the Human Rights Council, an inter-govern-



mental body within the UN system responsible for promoting and safeguarding human rights, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said on September 13, 2021, “My office has received credible allegations of reprisal killings of a number of former ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces) personnel, and reports of officials, who worked for previous administrations, and their family members being arbitrarily detained.... In some cases, the officials were released and, in others, they were found dead.” Bachelet also highlighted “deeply troubling information” about Taliban raids on offices of some advocacy groups.

The UN bodies have acted. On September 17, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution asking the Taliban to establish an inclusive Government that has “the full, equal and meaningful participation of women” and upholds human rights. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on October 7 to have, from March 2022, a special rapporteur, supported by UN experts, on the ground to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

There are some indications

“THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT DOESN’T MENTION THE PRECISE DATE WHEN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES WILL REOPEN, NOR DOES IT MENTION WOMEN’S RIGHT TO WORK. CLEARLY, NEITHER ANNOUNCEMENT MEANS MUCH

that the Taliban are reacting. Abdul Baqi Haqqani, Minister for Higher Education, announced at a press conference in Kabul on January 12 that the Government would soon reopen public universities for male and female students. He also announced that these students would be segregated and cited Afghanistan’s economic crisis and the lack of separated classes for male and female students, as reasons for the delay.

Earlier, in a decree on December 3 in the name of the Acting PM, the Taliban had stated that a “woman is not a property, but a noble and free human being; no one can give her to anyone in exchange for peace...or to end animosity”. Both women and men, it had added, “should be equal” and that “no one can force women to marry by coercion or pressure”. The decree also enabled a widow to re-marry 17 weeks after her husband’s death — against the longstanding Afghan tribal custom of her marrying one of her husband’s brothers or relatives after his death. Further, the Taliban leadership has reportedly ordered Afghan courts to treat women fairly, especially in cases of widows seeking inheritance as next of kin. The announcement also cites the

Taliban as saying they had asked their Ministers to spread awareness about women’s rights across the population.

Significantly, the first announcement does not mention the precise date when public universities will reopen. Nor does it mention women’s right to work. The third *sura* of the *Koran* (ayats 193 and 194) forbids the wasting of anyone’s — whether a man or woman’s — labour. The fourth *sura* (ayats 36 and 37) says, “To the men a share of what they have earned,/ and to the women a share of what they have earned...” (translation from *The Koran Interpreted* by Arthur J Arberry). The second announcement says nothing about women’s right to education and work, which are crucial issues with the international community. Also, the rights the decree announces regarding marriage have all been enshrined in Islamic jurisprudence since the time of Prophet Mohammad. Clearly, neither announcement means much and is unlikely to impress the international community sufficiently for the purse strings to be loosened generously or recognition to be forthcoming soon.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAJOR MIDAIR COLLISION AVERTED

Sir — A major midair collision was averted earlier this month in Bengaluru’s skies as two aircraft of the same airline, which had taken off almost simultaneously from the city’s Kempegowda International Airport, almost brushed against each other. While one of the planes was headed for Kolkata, the other aircraft was flying passengers to Bhubaneswar. It was a really shocking incident as to how the two aircraft were allowed to take off at the same time. It is a matter of grave concern as to how the planes were in this dangerous situation; besides, the air traffic control (ATC) didn’t even report this incident nor made a record of it in the log book.

Luckily, an alert radar controller spotted the potentially grave error and immediately alerted both the pilots, thus saving hundreds of lives. In recognition of his presence of mind, both the radar controller and his swift action should be applauded and he should be suitably rewarded, too. The Government should order a thorough probe into this matter and ask the DGCA to conduct an in-depth investigation, which should be followed by taking necessary action in what could easily have been one of the biggest air safety lapses at the Bengaluru airport and in the country in recent history.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

ANOTHER BLOW TO SPIRIT OF FEDERALISM

Sir — It appears that the BJP Government at the Centre is determined to curtail the powers of the States by introducing controversial Acts and amendments to the Constitution and other existing regulations, despite protests from the States concerned. Before the din on the undemocratic denial of the participation of the tableaux from non-BJP ruled States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal in the upcoming Republic Day parade on flimsy grounds could die down, the Centre has now proposed changes to the IAS cadre rules which, when implemented, would remove power from the States and their rights as far as transfer/deputation of the

Respect history, and monuments



I’m not at all surprised to hear that after burning for five decades, the Amar Jawan Jyoti will be put out at India Gate, and merged with the National War Memorial 400 metres away. The Jyoti has a cenotaph and a monument to honour our fallen soldiers, on a marble pedestal, with a rifle and a soldier’s helmet on it. The flame, lit to pay tributes to the soldiers martyred in the 1971 war, was inaugurated by then Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi on the Republic Day of 1972. Actually, one can learn from PM Narendra Modi how to kill two birds with one stone. Just as the nation commemorated 50 years of the 1971 war, the Defence Ministry announced that the Jyoti will be put out.

Similarly, in August 2021, Modi suddenly renamed the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna as Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna. All this is nothing but an attempt at “freeing” India of the Gandhi-Nehru name and legacy while, at the same time, rewriting history in favour of Modi by decisions such as building the Central Vista. Sadly, the Modi Government seems to have forgotten that respecting history involves conservation of the old while building new institutions. Hence, instead of extinguishing one memorial after the other, the Government will do better to make sincere and concrete attempts to spark the fire of patriotism among all countrymen.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

IAS cadres to the Centre are concerned.

This amendment would entail the Union Government to transfer IAS officers without the consent of the States, which is clearly against the spirit of cooperative federalism. Though many Chief Ministers have raised their voice against this amendment and termed it draconian, it is alleged that the BJP Government, as usual, is going to implement the amendment unmindful of the objections. This amendment, if implemented, will be another blow to the democratic norms and cooperative federalism the country has been cherishing all these years.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

OBC QUOTA IN NEET UPHELD

Sir — The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of reservation for OBC candidates and it is a right step in the right direction. While upholding the constitutional validity of reservation for OBCs in AIQ seats, the court elaborated on the concept of merit and

observed that it is not of one’s own making. It noted that “reservation is not at odds with merit” in open competitive exams. While open examinations present equal opportunity to candidates, reservation ensures distribution of such opportunities, the court said.

It added that privileges of forward classes include not just having access to quality schooling and good coaching centres but also social networks and cultural communication, including good speaking skills, accent and academic accomplishments. All these ensure that children from forward classes take up jobs commensurate with the family’s standing whereas first-generation learners from Other Backward Classes, who lack these, are placed at a disadvantage. Marks alone are not an indicator of merit, but also the resilience required to uplift oneself from the conditions of deprivation.

MR Jayanthi | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

An agreement on extending a \$190 mn Line of Credit from India to Mauritius will be exchanged.

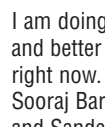


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



I think Vladimir Putin will move in on Ukraine but (he) does not want a full-blown war.

US President — Joe Biden



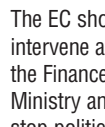
I am doing bigger and better projects right now. I have a Sooraj Barjatya film and Sandeep Vanga’s next with Ranbir Kapoor.

Actor — Parineeti Chopra



Only the captain has the answer as to why Venkatesh wasn’t bowled even once.

Former India captain — Sunil Gavaskar



The EC should intervene and direct the Finance Ministry and ED to stop politically motivated raids (on Punjab CM’s relatives).

Congress leader — Randeep Surjewala

FIRST COLUMN

QUICK COMMERCE: A NEW RETAIL MANTRA

Essentially large warehouses, dark stores enable fast delivery of goods in localities



MICHAEL CHANDA



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

A wise person can create 'The Advantage of Adversity'. And you can very much learn this from retail marketers at this crucial juncture. Coping with the crucial situations of COVID-19, retail marketing is scaling newer heights. Business climate for retail marketing is getting conducive as there is a win-win situation for both the marketers and the clients. Today, retail industries are resorting to varied strategies to meet up consumers' demands. Moreover, the modus operandi of delivering the goods and services is becoming digitalized and even fast-paced. Consequently, understanding and innovating the retail has become a new business mantra. So much so Amazon, Flipkart, Ola, Uber, Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy, Dunzo, Bigbasket and other business units are surprisingly found to be engaged with quick commerce companies. Owing to fasten the business, dark stores have been founded in the local area for treading



purposes. Essentially, dark stores are large warehouses that are the central points of retail distribution. They cater exclusively to local needs through online shopping. Quick commerce is indeed the next generation of e-commerce. It is an international business process that caters to the wishes of the consumers to bring instant delivery of goods. It provides instant support to the modern communities which are in dire need. Groceries, stationaries hygiene products etc., are coming under the ambit of quick commerce activities. Quick commerce websites are used to provide an online platform for various trading in the country. However, this business method helps the online shoppers to make safe purchases for their stores. Such a business model wants to be the biggest kirana store in the urban colony. It should be expressed that a dark store hits a frequency of more than 200 orders per day. The unit economics depends on the fact that there is a mixture of perishable and non-perishable in transaction. Tellingly, quick commerce remains a new and evolving business management with the effective inclusion of information technology. Many e-commerce companies are turning to social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram to showcase their vast array of products. Customization is the key of this trade. It will facilitate speed and efficiency. Quick commerce addresses are meaningful. The customers can use their mobile devices for shopping. However, quick commerce can invite online fraudulent activities. Credit card frauds are persistent in online businesses. It is apparent that quick commerce or electronic commerce is above all a commercial transaction over the Internet. It is a space mainly to watch out for logistics and e-commerce players. The expectations are likely to settle in at a sweet spot of thirty minutes' delivery or so. According to industry players, ten minutes' delivery model will see rationalization over time. Subscription-based e-commerce is another new venue that is being explored. It customers to subscribe to a product on a recurring basis depending on their need. However, the local kirana stores in the local area lose business due to the rise of dark stores that modernises the trading process. The local businessmen cannot afford to make big capital for having dark stores. These stores are losing customers due to the higher discount offerings of the companies. The companies have appointed a number of bikers and cyclists to deliver the commodities to the customers from dark stores. The corporate giants should pay minimum heed to the interest and survival of owners of kirana stores.

(Chanda is an author-activist and works as an advocate at High Court, Calcutta. Chakraborty teaches at Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal.)

Cinema ticket pricing vs bloated film costs



RAMACHANDRA MURTHY KONDUBHATLA

The Andhra Govt has issued an order fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, *nagar panchayats* and village *panchayats*

Two controversial Government Orders issued by the Andhra Pradesh Government related to entertainment and culture have created a lot of heat. The first Go issued in April 2021 was aimed at regulating film industry. The second one was recently issued banning a popular and message-oriented stage play 'Chintamani'. Both the issues could have been dealt with skilfully had the Government consulted the stakeholders before taking the decisions.

The Government of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy which has been dabbling in controversies of all kinds has added two more, involving the film industry and stage plays.

About 170 of the 950-odd theatres in Andhra Pradesh have been closed since the GO was issued. The exhibitors say they lost hugely due to Covid during 2021 when the theatres were completely shut. They were reopened with 50 per cent occupancy on July 31, 2021. Even before that, the State Government issued GO 35 fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, nagar panchayats and village panchayats under economy, deluxe and premium classes for multiplex, AC theatres and non-AC theatres.

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma met AP Information, public relations and cinematography minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) and told him that the Government has no business to intervene in this issue. It is for the exhibitors and audience to decide the price of tickets. Pawan Kalyan, film hero-cum-politician (president of Jan Sena which has alliance with the BJP) was rather aggressive in his criticism. He said since the Government has no money, it is indulging in online ticketing and fixing ticket prices. Minister Nani asked the actor why would the government which has no money would reduce the ticket price instead of increasing. Senior actor, Pawan Kalyan's elder brother and former union minister Chiranjeevi tried to break the ice when he travelled to Amaravati to meet Jagan Mohan Reddy over lunch on last Thursday. Some news channels and newspaper said Chiranjeevi was offered a Rajya Sabha seat by the YSRCP chief which was promptly and curtly denied by the mega star. He said the problem would be resolved soon.

What is the problem? Is it peculiar to Tollywood? So, it appears. The problems in the industry started with stardom. At least six stars today charge a fee of ₹45 crore each for a movie. Heroines also are paid in crores, though their remuneration is nowhere near the actors'. Directors don't take all the remuneration by cheque or cash but ask for share in the revenue area wise. Together they eat away three-fourth of the budget.

Persons working in 24 crafts in films get a pittance. The presence of Chiranjeevi, Prabhas, Mahesh, Pawan Kalyan, NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja makes the budget



THE PRESENCE OF CHIRANJEEVI, PRABHAS, MAHESH, PAWAN KALYAN, NTR (JR) AND RAM CHARAN TEJA MAKES THE BUDGET OF ANY FILM CROSS ₹100 CRORE. IN ORDER TO EARN THAT KIND OF MONEY, THE EXHIBITORS ORGANISE BENEFIT SHOWS AND EXTRA SHOWS TO COLLECT MORE. FOR BENEFIT SHOWS, THE PRICE OF THE TICKET WOULD BE ABOVE ₹1,000 FOR BIG-TICKET MOVIES

(The writer is Editor, Primepost, the news website based out of Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal.)



of any film cross ₹100 crore. Each actor acts in one movie in one or two years.

In order to earn that kind of huge money the exhibitors organize benefit shows and extra shows to collect more. For benefit shows, the price of the ticket would be above ₹1000 for big-ticket movies in which one of these stars acts.

If you have two stars like NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja and a star director such as Rajamouli of Bahubali fame, as in RRR (Raudram, Ranam and Rudhiram), the budget would be around ₹300 crore. The film RRR was supposed to be released on January 7 after three postponements. Some other films slated to be released on Sankranti postponed their dates thinking that RRR would be released by then. The release of Sarkaruvaripaat (featuring Mahesh Babu) was put off till April 1 and Bhimla Nayak (Pawan Kalyan, Rana) till February 25. It happened because when a big budget film, such as RRR, is released, it is exhibited in most of the theatres for one week with special shows and higher ticket prices to earn back the huge investment. The poor and the middleclass among the audience are made to pay through their noses to pay to the stars. During that week no theatres would be available for other films.

Small cinema which used to flourish earlier has been thoroughly discouraged. Small producers have to depend on OTT platforms or sale of the cyber rights. The remuneration for artists is far less in Kannada, Malayalam and

Marathi movies.

Once late Raj Kumar, the Kannada Kanteerava, invited all Kannada producers, directors and exhibitors to his residence, gave them sumptuous dinner and politely asked them permission to raise his remuneration by ₹25,000 since he has a number of children. The guests were stunned and told him he could enhance his fee by lakhs.

The late NTR acted for twenty years for less than a lakh of rupees for a film. The days of NTR, ANR, Sobhan Babu and Krishna were golden for Tollywood. Beside the heroes, actors, directors, technicians and other craftsmen used to live happily. If the prices of tickets are low, small movies can get theatres and reasonable revenue. Some exhibitors went to AP High Court which asked the government to appoint a committee to study the issue. In the absence of compliance, the HC has stayed the operation of the GO. Then the government organized raids on theatres which were running without proper license and selling refreshments at higher prices. The result is bad blood between the government and the industry.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Government has agreed to the demand of the film industry and allowed fixing of ticket prices by the producers and exhibitors. Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu did not want any trouble on this count. The ideal solution would be for both the chief ministers of Telugu States to sit with the important persons from Tollywood to sort out the matter once for all. The remuneration of the stars, the stranglehold of four families on hundreds of theatres in both the States (Families headed by Dil Raj, Allu Aravind, Daggubati Suresh and Sunil Narang) and the unethical exploitation of the film lovers, scope for small budget film producers to survive and the welfare of technicians and others (estimated to be more than 50 thousand) have to be discussed threadbare to arrive at a comprehensive and amicable solution. Sooner it is done the better for both government and film industry.

The ban on Chintamani, the popular stage play, imposed by Rajat Bhargava, the Principal Secretary through a GO, was not warranted although the complaint of a community is genuine. The original play written by social reformer, writer and poet Kallakuri Narayana Rao, exactly one hundred years ago, was sophisticated and enlightening. It was a critique of the Devadasi system. Subbi Shetty, a character in the play, is a vaisya (bania), who loses his wealth to Chintamani and his character is used to engage the audience through his teasing chat with Chintamani's mother Srihari, hurting the sentiments of a community.

The Andhra government should have allowed the play to run with a condition that vulgar characters and dialogues are removed. Even today, the play has great relevance. The AP Government's decision needs to be revised.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE DOUBLE-ENGINE GOVT PEOPLE ARE DISMANTLING EACH OTHER'S WHEELS. THE DELHI CAMP HAS SHUNTED THE CM TO GORAKHPUR. —SAMA JWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV



THOSE NOT GETTING TICKETS TO RIDE THE DOUBLE ENGINE ARE BUYING TICKETS IN BLACK TO RIDE THE BICYCLE. —UP BJP CHIEF SWATANTRA DEV SINGH

Will Russia play the 'Cuban card'?

But Russia stopped being Communist 30 years ago

After a week of intense discussions about 'security' between Russia and the NATO countries, this is the week when the Western allies will send their written replies to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Various pundits, some of whom have actually been to Russia, warn us that there will be 'War in Europe' if Putin's demands are not met.

(You there, at the back. Stop giggling! This is no laughing matter! Peace is hanging by a thread!)

Historians keen for a moment in the limelight are being wheeled out to draw parallels with past diplomatic disasters like the Munich conference of 1938 (appeasement of Hitler) and Yalta in 1945 (carving up Europe and giving Stalin the eastern half in 1945).



GWYNNE DYER

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

And this just in! Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, just back in Moscow from the talks, told Russian television that if the talks failed, he could "neither confirm nor exclude" that Russia would send "military assets" to Cuba and Venezuela.

Wow! A dagger - no, two daggers - pointed at the heart of America (although they'll have to work on the length of the Venezuelan dagger, since it's 2,000 km. from Caracas to Miami). If that does not force the Americans to give in, what will?

I'm sorry. That's enough sarcasm. It's just that all this prancing around and mugging for the camera gets tiresome. This is a minor diplomatic spat that has been deliberately inflated far beyond its merit, and it is being taken much too seriously. Let's start with Russia play-



ing the 'Cuban card'. Cuba is still a Communist country, and Maduro's regime in Venezuela also has aspirations in that direction - but Russia, in case you've forgotten, stopped being Communist thirty years ago.

Putin's regime in Moscow is nationalist-populist, and Cuba has absolutely no motive to host Russian troops and risk triggering a confrontation with the United States. In any case

Russian troops in Cuba would pose no military threat to the United States. What are they going to do? Invade Florida?

Ryabkov's intention was obviously to do a "How would you like it if...?" on American diplomats. How would like it if there were Russian troops '90 miles from Florida' (as people used to say during the Cuban crisis of 1962), and not NATO troops 450 km. from Moscow

(which is where they are now).

The grown-up American answer to that would be "Who cares?" In real life, there are a number of troglodytes in the US Congress who would work themselves up into a lather about Russian troops in Cuba - but since the Cubans would not agree to it in the first place, it's really quite irrelevant.

Well, then, what about the alleged historical precedents: Munich and Yalta? They were both about granting a 'sphere of influence' in Europe to a great power (Germany in 1938, the Soviet Union in 1945) that could easily enforce its wishes on the ground.

Russia is effectively demanding a comparable sphere of influence in its old 'satellite' countries, which would not be allowed to have friendly foreign troops on

their soil even though they are NATO members, but it's a complete non-starter. Russia lacks the military capacity to enforce its will on the ground.

So will there be 'War in Europe', as the feverish headlines suggest? Not in the sense they imply: massive armoured forces rolling across whole countries, with the threat of nuclear war looming in the background. But there might be some shooting on or just inside Ukraine's border with Russia.

Of course, there's already a little bit of shooting along that border, in the Russian-backed breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. As Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Friday, Putin may now be planning to cause a little more.

Kirby warned that Russia "has pre-positioned a group of

operatives to conduct what we call a false-flag operation, an operation designed to look like an attack on them or on Russian-speaking people in Ukraine, as an excuse to go in." He may be right - and he may be wrong. The satellites can see their location, but not their intentions.

Something has got into Putin, and he's seeking concessions that he should know he cannot extract, with threats that he cannot enforce.

It is possible that he could blunder into a local clash that would bring harsh sanctions down on Russia.

It is extremely unlikely that he would try to conquer all or even half of Ukraine.

It is almost inconceivable that this will end up with Second World War-style battles between large armoured forces.

GOOD GOVERNANCE INDEX

J&K first UT to have GGI

Union HM Amit Shah to release index for 20 districts today

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is set to witness cut throat competition among different district headquarters as the Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah is set to release the District Good Governance Index for 20 Districts on Saturday.

The exercise on formulation of District Good Governance Index was set in motion in July, 2021 which has now been completed and Jammu & Kashmir will become the first Union Territory in the country to have Good Governance Index.

The index of Good governance has been prepared after assessing the different aspects of development and district administration in sectors such as agriculture, commerce and industry, human resource development, public health, public infrastructure and util-

ities, economic governance, welfare and development, public safety, judiciary, and citizen-centric governance.

The maiden event is being organized jointly by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), GOI and Jammu & Kashmir Institute of Management, Public Administration & Rural Development in association with the Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad.

Manoj Sinha, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir and Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions are also expected to address the event.

The District Good Governance Index of Jammu and Kashmir was prepared by DARPG in collaboration with Government of Jammu and Kashmir in pursuance of the announcements made in the "Behtar e-Hukumat - Kashmir

Aelamia" resolution adopted on July 2, 2021 in the Regional Conference on Replication of Good Governance Practices held at Srinagar.

The District Good Governance Index of Government of Jammu and Kashmir represents a major administrative reform in benchmarking good governance at District level and a significant step for timely collation and publication of statistics at State/ District level. The District Good Governance Index is a milestone and it is expected that it will provide a robust framework for evidence based assessment of the performance of all the districts in Jammu & Kashmir.

The Chief Secretary Government of Jammu & Kashmir Arun Kumar Mehta and V. Srinivas, Secretary DARPG, Government of India will also be addressing the event. The event will be attended by Senior Officials of

Government of Jammu and Kashmir, District Collectors and Chief Planning Officers of Districts. Secretaries of Planning and Secretaries of Administrative Reforms of all State/ UT governments and District Collectors of non-election bound States have also been invited to participate in the event by video conferencing.

During the occasion, a presentation on formulation of District Good Governance Index will be made by Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad. This will be followed by district presentations by selected 12 District Development Commissioners, who will be showcasing achievements of various sectors. Thereafter a panel discussion will be held on DGGI-A Way Forward for futuristic 2.0 version of DGGI for measuring and benchmarking performance and improvement of Districts in future as well.

‘Netaji statue a damage control exercise’
TMC not happy with Centre’s move to erect statue at India Gate

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress continued to attack the Narendra Modi Government for ‘ignoring Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’ even after the Centre’s decision to install a granite statue of the legendary freedom fighter at the iconic India Gate in the national Capital.

When asked to comment on the latest development senior TMC leader and MP Saugato Roy said, “today they are installing Netaji’s statue ... if they have so much of respect for him then why they did not allow the Bengal Government to prepare a tableau on him to commemorate his 125th birth anniversary,” adding the belated decision (to install his statue) had been taken as a damage control exercise.

Similarly Forward Bloc leader Naren De said ‘simple installation of Netaji’s statues will not suffice ... you have to follow his principles and ideas ... otherwise there are thousands of statues of this great

It’s a nice gesture, better late than never: Bose’s daughter

Kolkata: The daughter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Anita Bose-Pfaff, on Friday hailed as "a nice gesture" Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s announcement about installing a statue of the iconic freedom fighter at India Gate, and hoped it will put to rest the controversy over rejection of West Bengal’s tableau for the Republic Day parade.

Welcoming the decision as "better late than never", Bose-Pfaff said the announcement took her by surprise.

"I am very happy about the decision. It is very good location. I am certainly glad that his

statue would be put up at such a prominent place. What surprises me is it came all of a sudden now. One might have prepared a bit earlier, but better late than never, I must say. I hope that the controversy about the tableau can also be put to rest in a satisfactory manner," Bose-Pfaff told PTI over the telephone from Germany, where she lives.

When asked if she thinks that the decision was taken to end the tableau controversy, she said she is not in a position to comment on it.

"I don’t know. Let’s put it that way", she said. **PTI**

leader throughout India ... If you really have to respect Netaji then you should follow his ideals ... he was a leader who respected all the communities ... he never mixed religion with politics." Bose had joined and built Forward Bloc after leav-

ing the Congress.

Congress leader of Lok Sabha Adhir Chowdhury too attacked the Centre for politicizing the Netaji issue. “Why have they announced the decision to install the statue of Netaji now a day before his

birth anniversary ... why was it not installed earlier ... they are doing it as a face saving exercise,” he said.

Chowdhury would not spare the Trinamool Congress either. He attacked the Bengal ruling out fit on different issue --- for destroying the anti-BJP forum led by the Congress in India.

“Everyone knows that only Congress can take on the BJP with the kindout outreach it has through the length and breadth of the country ... TMC cannot do a fraction of what the Congress can do to dislodge the BJP ... yet they are trying to harm the Congress by entering the States like Goa, Meghalaya where the Congress has a good support base ... The TMC is doing this to weaken the Congress and strengthen the BJP?”

On the TMC keenness to ally with the Congress in Goa Chowdhury who is also the Bengal Pradesh Congress president said “today they are talking of alliance when they know that they will be rejected by the people of Goa”.

BULLI BAI APP CASE

3 accused denied bail; court says their acts defamed womanhood

Mumbai: A court in Mumbai denied bail to three students arrested in the Bulli Bai app case by stating that the trio had committed serious acts of “defaming womanhood” and, therefore, in the larger interest of society the personal liberty of the accused can be curtailed.

The Bulli Bai app had made public the details of several Muslim women in a bid to malign them, allowing users to participate in their ‘auction’.

Vishal Kumar Jha, Shweta Singh and Mayak Rawat were denied bail by Bandra Metropolitan Court Magistrate Komalsingh Raj on January 20, but a detailed cop of the order was made available on Friday.

While Singh and Rawat were arrested by the Mumbai police’s cyber cell from Uttarakhand on January 5, Jha was nabbed from Bengaluru on

January 4.

"No doubt accused persons are students of tender age and they have fundamental right to life and liberty, but those rights are subject to reasonable restrictions. They were arrested for collection of evidence relating to non-bailable offence and, hence, their arrest is not in violation of any law," the magistrate said in the order.

"They were found to have committed serious acts defaming womanhood. The larger interest of society is at stake. Therefore, their personal liberty can be said to be curtailed following due process of law," the magistrate said.

The court also noted there was "some ill-intention" on part of the creator and followers of the app as well as persons propagating and disseminating information about women of a

particular religion.

Stating that, prima facie, the involvement in of the accused is noticed, the court said, "The disputed fact is only in respect of exact role played by them. It is contended on behalf of the applicants that they are just followers and disseminated the information containing its link. Even if it is presumed they are just followers/subscribers of the application, at this stage it cannot be said they are innocent."

The court further said records showed their "active involvement" in propagating and disseminating the information/data relating to the women.

Meanwhile, accused Vishal Kumar Jha has moved sessions court for bail, and his plea is likely to be heard on Monday.

In the bail application, moved through his lawyer

Clubhouse App chat case: Mumbai Police arrests three from Haryana

Mumbai: Mumbai police have arrested three persons from Haryana in connection with the chat on Clubhouse app, in which obscene comments were allegedly made against Muslim women, an official said on Friday. Personnel of the cyber police station of the Mumbai crime branch made the arrests late on Thursday night, he said. Two of the accused will be produced in a local court later in the day, the official said. In a tweet posted early this morning, Shiv Sena’s Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi praised the city police for the arrests in the case. "Kudos @MumbaiPolice, they have got cracking on the Clubhouse chats too and some arrests have been made. Say no to hate. #Clubhouse," she said in the tweet. On Wednesday, the Delhi police had written to the Clubhouse app and search engine Google, seeking details about the organiser of the alleged audio group chat in which "obscene comments were made against Muslim women". **PTI**

Shivam Deshmukh, the accused claimed he had been "falsely implicated in this case".

"The accused hails from a respectable family hav-

ing deep roots in the eyes of society and any such act as alleged by the present complainant is beyond imagination," Jha’s plea said. **PTI**

Four hurt in parcel bomb blast in Bengal

Kolkata: Four persons were injured, three critical when a parcel bomb exploded at a shop in Hentabard town of North Dinajpur district bordering Bangladesh in North Bengal, police said.

All the injured had been admitted to the Raiganj super-specialty hospital.

"The incident took place when a parcel (packet) sent in the name of one Bablu Chowdhury a medicine retailer was opened by him," said local adding three onlookers too were injured in the blast.

"The packet was delivered to me by an unknown toto driver," said one of the injured persons adding "out of curiosity the injured person opened it and the thing exploded in his face." **PNS**

CBI probe into actor SSR’s death was a hoax, says Maha Cong leader

Mumbai: Maharashtra Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant on Friday said the CBI probe into actor Sushant Singh Rathod has been a hoax and a disgrace to the renowned institution.

Taking to Twitter, Sawant said that at least 534 days after the CBI took charge and 474 days since the AIIMS ruled out murder in the case of Rajput’s death, the investigation has been a hoax and disgrace to the renowned institution.

The Congress leader took to social media to pay tribute to the actor on his birth anniversary. "Tribute to a talented actor #SushantSinghRajput on his birth anniversary. His unfortunate death was horribly misused by Modi govt & BJP for cheap electoral gains in Bihar. Cheap

stunt to defame & destabilise MVA govt," Sawant said. "534 days of CBI took charge & 474 days since the AIIMS ruled out murder."

CBI, which shows extraordinary efficiency in investigating matters related to opposition leaders, continues to drag its feet on the SSR case.

This investigation has been a hoax & disgrace to this renowned institution," he tweeted.

The 34-year-old actor was found dead in his apartment in Bandra on June 14, 2020. Starting with the Mumbai Police, Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) were brought in to investigate various angles in the actor’s death. **PTI**



An artist prepares a sculpture of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ahead of his 125th birth anniversary, in Kolkata on Friday **PTI**

Security situation in J&K reviewed ahead of R-Day

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the Republic day celebrations a Core Group consisting of top officials of Civil Administration, Intelligence Agencies and security forces Friday reviewed the security situation in Kashmir at Badami Bagh Cantonment. The meeting was co-chaired by the General Officer Commanding, Chinara Corps, Lt Gen DP Pandey and Director General of Police, Dilbag Singh.

The core group discussed fresh strategies of the terrorist organizations and their handlers including use of Hybrid terrorist and targeting of soft targets. 15 terrorists killed in 2021 were fresh names not on the security forces radar.

The officials stated that the ceasefire has improved the security situation along the border, however, intelligence inputs of terrorist launch pads

and terrorist training activities in Pakistan indicate the need to be alert along the Line of Control. On the Line of Control, late snow has kept the infiltration routes open for a longer time, however effective domination has ensured decrease in overall infiltration including those from South of Pir Panjal. The vigil on the Line of Control against infiltration of men, drugs and weapons is continuing.

According to a Defence spokesman the officials shared the challenge of propaganda of the nexus through internet and social media. Sadly, these efforts include propaganda to legitimize killing of Kashmiri civilians by the terrorists. "Deliberations were also focused on the use of social media to spread disinformation. The officials present in the meeting observed joint efforts were needed to counter it by exposing fake news, booking of



radicals trying to foment unrest and proactive sharing of information by state agencies.

The spokesman said, "The setting up of the State Investigative Agency and the increased booking by NIA is showing the impact of focused intelligence and investigation efforts. These efforts have been effective in targeting drug, hawala and the OGWs networks. Legal action on those willfully harbouring terrorists is being increased as the harbourers have direct involve-

ment in terror activities.

The DGP and the Corps Commander commended the officials present on improved security indicators. They appreciated that post the abrogation of Article 370, certain benchmarks were set which have been achieved successfully for the restoration of peace and prosperity in the region. The DGP stated that reduction in local terrorist recruitment is one parameter that all must approach with continued focus. A special mention was made

on the measures taken to minimize the collateral damage in operations despite risk to own soldiers. He recommended continued efforts to give chance of surrenders to local terrorists to give them a second chance at living a fruitful life. The Corps Commander called upon all to treat 2022 as a transformative year where common man used to zero civilian casualties in 2021 should see 2022 as the year when things turned for good for the long term. He cautioned the trend of the terrorists to use urban areas with thick built up area for operations as they provide more avenues to hide or escape and puts higher onus in security forces to exercise restraint to avoid collateral damage. He called for continued efforts along with the civil society to counter the separatist propaganda and break the cycle of violence for long term peace in Kashmir.

Covid-19 cases continue to rise in Kerala, over 41K logged in 24 hrs

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Though Kerala’s Department of Health brought down the number of samples tested on Friday to 95,218, the Covid-19 cases continued to remain unabated in the State. A total of 41, 668 persons were diagnosed with the pandemic during the last 24 hours and the Test Positivity Rate surged to 43.76 per cent. A total of 51, 607 persons succumbed to the pandemic in the State till Friday evening, according to a release issued by Veena George, minister of health.

The Government of Kerala suffered a setback on Friday as a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court asked the Kasaragod district administration not to allow any public meetings attended by more than 50 persons. Though the

District Disaster Management Authority had issued an order limiting the number of persons that could assemble for any meeting to 50, the district collector reportedly under political pressure issued a new order stating that the number of persons that could be allowed to attend public meetings should be decided based on the Test Positivity Rate as well as the number of beds available in the district.

A Public Interest Litigation filed in the High Court on Thursday had pointed out the restrictions were compromised possibly to facilitate CPI(M) district meetings. It has been argued by the petitioner that the Chairperson of the Disaster Management Authority can only amend his orders on certain new circumstances for the purpose of prevention of dis-

asters or their mitigation.

The Kasaragod district meeting of the CPI(M) was underway at Kasaragod in violation of all safety protocols when the High Court delivered its interim order. "What is so special about the political party meetings? The number of persons who could attend the Republic Day itself has been restricted to 50," said the Division Bench.

Taken aback by the High Court order, the State leadership of the CPI(M) decided to hold the Thrissur district committee meeting which began on Friday. Though Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was scheduled to be present in Thrissur for the three day event, his hospitalization in USA has led to the cancellation of the public meetings which were to be held on Friday and Sunday.

Meghalaya CM tests +ve day after meeting Amit Shah

Shillong: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Friday tested positive for COVID-19, a day after meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Delhi. Sangma urged everyone who has come in contact with him to isolate themselves and get tested if necessary. "I have tested positive for COVID-19. I am isolating myself for the required time. I have mild symptoms. All those who came into contact with me last few days are requested to observe their symptoms and test if necessary," he tweeted.

Sangma and Sarma had met Shah on Thursday to submit reports on the amicable resolution of dispute in a few areas along the Meghalaya-Assam inter-state boundary. **PTI**

Daily Covid positivity rate shoots up to 30% in AP as over 13,000 test +ve in 24 hours

Amaravati: The daily infection positivity rate shot up to 30 per cent as 44,516 tests turned out 13,212 Covid-19 positive cases in Andhra Pradesh in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday.

Consequently, the number of active cases climbed to 64,136.

The state reported five fresh Covid-19 fatalities and 2,942 recoveries in 24 hours, the latest bulletin said.

The cumulative case count is now 21,53,268, recoveries 20,74,600 and deaths 14,532, the bulletin added.

Visakhapatnam district reported the highest of 2,244 fresh coronavirus cases and three deaths in 24 hours.

Chittoor district registered 1,585 more cases and one death. Anantapuram added 1,235, Srikakulam 1,230, Guntur 1,054 and SPS Nellore 1,051 new cases. SPS Nellore also reported one death in a day. Kurnool logged 961, East Godavari 816, Prakasam 772, Vizianagaram 681, Kadapa 649, West Godavari 596 and Krishna 338 fresh positives. **PTI**

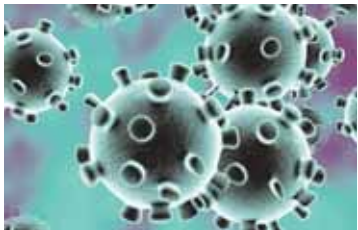
Curbs imposed amid case surge in Valley

Srinagar: Authorities on Friday afternoon imposed restrictions on the non-essential movement of people across Kashmir as a 64-hour lockdown began in the union territory in view of an exponential rise in the number of coronavirus cases since the beginning of the new year, officials said.

Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday recorded 5992 fresh cases of coronavirus -- the highest single day spike since the pandemic began. There are 31,044 active cases in the UT.

Police vehicles fitted with public address systems announced the restrictions at several places across the valley in the afternoon after the government ordered complete restriction on non-essential movement during from 2 pm on Friday till 6 am on Monday in the entire Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said.

Shops and other business establishments in the city and elsewhere in the valley -- which had opened this morning -- were forced by police to shut in view of the restrictions, they



said.

The police closed the markets and asked people to return to their homes. After the movement of people early in the morning, the police erected barricades at several places in the city here and other areas of the valley and the movement of public was restricted, the officials said.

They said only employees and emergency cases were allowed to move and all other non-essential movement was restricted.

The district authorities appealed to the people to cooperate with the administration and curtail their movement in view of the rising cases. **PTI**

China raps US missile sanctions as hypocrisy

AP ■ BEIJING

China on Friday criticised Washington for imposing sanctions on Chinese companies the US says exported missile technology, and accused the United States of hypocrisy for selling nuclear-capable cruise missiles.

The United States announced penalties on three companies it said were engaged in unspecified "missile technology proliferation activities."

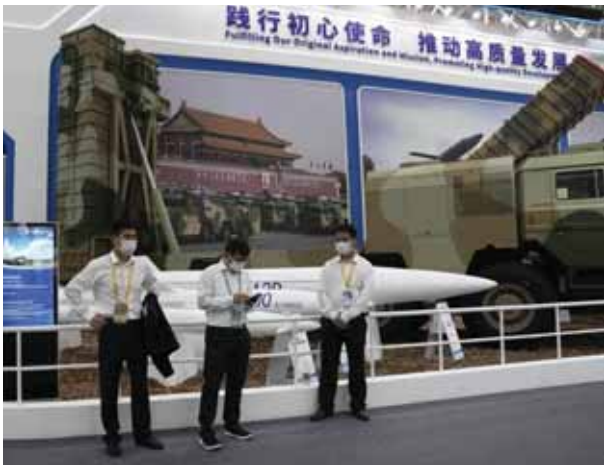
It said they were barred from U.S. Markets and from obtaining technology that can be used to make weapons.

"This is a typical hegemonic action. China strongly deplores and firmly opposes it," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian. "China urges the United States to immediately correct its mistakes, revoke the relevant sanctions and stop suppressing Chinese enterprises and smearing China."

"China accounted for about 5 per cent of global weapons exports in 2016-20, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

The United States was the top global exporter, accounting for 37 per cent of the total in 2016-20.

Cruise missiles and long-range ballistic missiles are regarded as among China's



Workers wearing masks stand near missiles produced by China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp. displayed during the 13th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, also known as Airshow China 2021 on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021 in Zhuhai in southern China's Guangdong province. China on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022 criticized Washington for imposing sanctions on Chinese companies the U.S. says exported missile technology and accused the United States of hypocrisy for selling nuclear-capable cruise missiles (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

strengths in weapons technology. Zhao defended Beijing's controls on weapons exports.

He said China opposes proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and strictly controls exports of missiles.

"Normal cooperation between China and relevant countries doesn't violate any international law and doesn't involve proliferation" of weapons of mass destruction, Zhao said.

Zhao pointed to U.S.

Plans to sell Australia's government Tomahawk cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"The United States has overtly pursued double standards," Zhao said. The latest U.S. Penalties apply to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

First Academy, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp. Fourth Academy and Poly Technologies Inc. And their subsidiaries.

America sanctions Ukrainian officials alleged to help Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US Treasury Department levied new sanctions on Thursday against four Ukrainian officials, including two current members of parliament who administration officials say are part of a Russian influence effort to set the pretext for further invasion of Ukraine.

The sanctions name parliamentarians Taras Kozak and Oleh Voloshyn and two former government officials. According to Treasury, all four have been intimately involved in disinformation efforts by Russia's federal security service, known as the FSB.

The new sanctions were announced less than 24 hours after President Joe Biden said he thinks Moscow will newly invade Ukraine. He warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that his country would pay a "dear price" in lives lost and a possible restrictions in access to the global banking system if it does.

Biden faced criticism from Republicans and Ukrainian officials that he invited a limited Russian invasion by suggesting in comments to reporters on Wednesday that US Would react with a measured response if there was only a "minor incursion" of Ukrainian territory. Administration officials sought to clarify his remarks late

Wednesday and Thursday. The White House last week warned that Russia has stationed operatives in and around Ukraine possibly to create pretext for an invasion. US And Ukrainian officials have also been concerned about Russian weaponising of disinformation.

"The United States is taking action to expose and counter Russia's dangerous and threatening campaign of influence and disinformation in Ukraine," said Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement. "We are committed to taking steps to hold Russia accountable for their destabilizing actions."

Kozak, who controls several news channels in Ukraine, is accused of amplifying false narratives about Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's inner circle and the 2020 elections.

Voloshyn has worked with Russia's FSB to undermine Ukrainian government officials, Treasury says. Treasury officials say Voloshyn also worked with Konstantin Kilimnik, a Russian national who was previously sanctioned for allegedly attempting to influence 2016 presidential election and passing on information to Russian intelligence. Treasury also sanctioned Ukraine's former deputy secretary for national security and defense councils, Vladimir Sivkovich.

Vaccines to Africa must have good shelf lives, says expert

AP ■ ABUJA

At least 2.8 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines donated to African countries have expired, the Africa Centers for Disease Control said Thursday, citing short shelf lives as the major reason.

Donors of vaccines to the continent should send them with a realistic shelf life of about "three months to six months" before their expiration, Africa CDC director John Nkengasong told an online briefing. More African nations are now refusing to accept donations of vaccines that have only one or two months before their expiration, he said.

Although the number of expired doses is only about 0.5% of the total number donated to Africa, Nkengasong said he is unhappy to see any become invalid. Any dose of vaccine that expired pains me because that is a life that can potentially be saved," Nkengasong said.

Just over 10 per cent of Africa's population of 1.3 billion people are fully vaccinated, he said. The continent's 54 countries have confirmed 10.4 million COVID-19 cases and 235,000 deaths. The continent's omicron wave appears to be receding, with new confirmed cases down by 20 per cent from the previous week and deaths dropping by 8 per cent, the World Health Organization's Africa office announced Thursday. More



A man receives an AstraZeneca vaccination against Covid-19, at a district health center giving first, second, and booster doses to eligible people, in the low-income Kibera neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya on Thursday. At least 2.8 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines donated to African countries have expired, the Africa Centers for Disease Control said on Thursday, citing short shelf lives as the major reason (AP Photo/Brian Inganga)

than 60 per cent of the 572 million vaccine doses African countries have received have already been administered, Nkengasong said. The "big fight" for African countries will be "logistics and getting doses to the population even as more supplies arrive," he said.

"We've seen remarkable uptake of vaccines in settings where we engage the community ... and religious leaders," Nkengasong said, urging countries to use innovative ways to "bring vaccines to the population and not only require that the populations should go to where the vaccines are." In Nigeria, for instance, an increasing number of vaccination centers are being set at public facilities such as markets and motor parks and health authorities are collaborating

with opinion leaders to fight hesitancy. Vaccines are Africa's "best defense" against severe illness, death and overwhelmed health systems, Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO Africa director said at another online briefing Thursday. "Africa must not only broaden vaccinations but also gain increased and equitable access to critical COVID-19 therapeutics to save lives and effectively combat this pandemic," Moeti said.

"The deep inequity that left Africa at the back of the queue for vaccines must not be repeated with life-saving treatments." In 2022, more testing is needed to fight the pandemic, said Harley Feldbaum of the Global Fund. "We need to bring testing and treatment together in a much more rapid fashion," said Feldbaum.

Family of four, believed to be Indians, frozen to death along US-Canada border; man charged with human smuggling

PTI ■ TORONTO/NEW YORK

In a heartbreaking tragedy, a family of four, including a baby, all believed to be Indians, has died from exposure to cold weather on the Canadian side of the border with the US in an apparent human smuggling operation, according to media reports.

Manitoba Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on Thursday said that the bodies of four people - two adults, a teen and an infant - were found on the Canadian side of the U.S./Canada border near Emerson on Wednesday.

US officials say the dead are believed to be a family from India. They are thought to have been attempting to cross into the US, according to media reports.

RCMP Assistant

Commissioner Jane MacLatchy shared the discovery with reporters in a news conference on Thursday. "What I am about to share is going to be difficult for many people to hear," she said, calling it "an absolute and heartbreaking tragedy".

"At this very early stage of the investigation, it appears that they all died due to exposure to the cold weather," MacLatchy said, adding RCMP believe the four people are connected to the group that was apprehended on the U.S. Side of the border. She said all four were located within 9-12 metres of the border. MacLatchy said that the group was "on their own in the middle of a blizzard" and "faced not only the cold weather but endless fields, large snowdrifts and complete darkness". Police are referring to them as victims, as there are

concerns the group's attempted border crossing was facilitated in some way, and that they were left out in the extreme cold, Global News reported.

MacLatchy said work is underway to ID the victims, but at this stage, it appears they all died from exposure to the cold, the report said. Manitoba RCMP was notified by US Customs and Border Protection on Wednesday morning that a group of people had crossed into the U.S. Near Emerson, and that one of the adults was carrying items intended for a baby, but there was no infant with the group.

An immediate search began on both sides of the border, and by that afternoon, the bodies of an adult man, an adult woman, and an infant were found. The body of a boy

believed to be in his mid-teens was found shortly afterwards.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota issued a release late Thursday afternoon and said 47-year-old Steve Shand of Florida had been arrested and charged with human smuggling in connection with the incident. Shand was driving with two passengers determined to be undocumented foreign nationals from India, according to the release.

Inside the vehicle, officers found cases of plastic cups, bottled water, bottled juice and snacks in the van.

As they were taking the trio back to the border patrol station in North Dakota, officers came across another group of five Indian nationals walking.

Step back from Ukraine or be ready for massive consequences, UK Govt warns Russia

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government on Friday warned Russia of "massive consequences" if it did not step back from Ukraine, noting that it is working with partners like India to counter such growing threats to democracy and build a global network of liberty.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss used a speech at the Lowry Institute think tank here to urge Russian President Vladimir Putin to desist from an invasion on its border with Ukraine, where tensions have been building up in the past few weeks.

She went on to call out Russia and China working together against forces of democracy as they get "emboldened" in a way never seen since the Cold War era.

"Russia and China are working together more and more, as they strive to set the standards in technologies like artificial intelligence, assert their dominance over the Western Pacific through joint military exercises and in space through closer ties," Truss said.

"China and Russia have spotted an ideological vacuum and they're rushing to fill it. They are emboldened in a way we haven't seen since the Cold War. As freedom-loving democracies we must rise up to face down these threats. As well as NATO we are working with partners like Australia, India, Japan, Indonesia and Israel to build a global network of liberty," she said. In her direct appeal to Putin, she noted: "The Kremlin hasn't learned the lessons of history. They dream of recreating the Soviet Union,

or a kind of 'Greater Russia' carving up territory based on ethnicity, and language.

"We know what lies down that path, and the terrible toll in lives lost and human suffering it brings. That's why we urge President Putin to desist and step back from Ukraine before he makes a massive strategic mistake."

Truss warned of sanctions if such an invasion were to take place in Ukraine, where the UK has announced a new package of training, support and defensive weapons to boost defensive capabilities.

"Last week, at the NATO-Russia Council we sent a clear message to Moscow that any further incursion into Ukraine would bring massive consequences, including through coordinated sanctions hitting the financial sector, and indi-

viduals," Truss said.

"We're also pushing for alternatives in energy supply, so that nations are less reliant on Russia for their gas. We need everyone to step up."

Together with our allies, we will continue to stand with Ukraine and urge Russia to de-escalate. What happens in Eastern Europe matters for the world," she added. Russia denies it is planning an invasion but has moved around 100,000 troops near its border with Ukraine. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members, which includes the UK, US and several former Soviet Union states, agree on working together against such a conflict. Putin, on the other hand, has made a series of demands to the West, including not allowing Ukraine to join NATO.

FROM PAGE 1

ADITI SINGH IN BJP'S 3RD LIST OF 85 FOR UP POLLS

the 403-member assembly has reached 195. Last week, the BJP had released its first list of candidates for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. It was announced that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will contest the polls from the Gorakhpur seat and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya from Sirathu

Uttar Pradesh elections for the 403 Assembly constituencies are slated to be held in seven phases starting from February 10. The counting of votes will take place on March 10.

PRIYANKA PITCHES HERSELF AS CM CANDIDATE IN UP

The Congress general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh said the party would certainly look at supporting other parties for Government formation and was open to backing them if the situation were to arise after the elections.

She, however, said the Congress would keep implementing its vision for youth, especially women, as a priority while extending any such support for Government formation in UP. "We would be open to considering that. If such a situation arises, then we would certainly want our agenda for the youth and women to be fulfilled if we were going to be part of any such dispensation," she said to a question on whether the Congress would support other parties in Government formation.

The party has resolved to fill the "massive backlog" of jobs in the public sector and promised 20 lakh jobs, including eight lakh for women, in their manifesto for the youth. The campaign in Uttar Pradesh is very negative and is centred around caste and religion, Priyanka said, adding that the Congress is moving away from this to present a development oriented roadmap.

Addressing the media, Rahul stressed that the country needs a new vision and their document is "not hollow words" but drafted after consulting youth whose views are reflected in it. "There are polls

in UP and the youth there need a new vision and only the Congress party can give that vision to the state," the former Congress chief said.

"We don't spread hatred, we work to unite people and we want to build a new Uttar Pradesh driven by the strength and confidence of youth in the state," he said.

In Uttar Pradesh, Rahul said, 880 youth lose their jobs everyday and over 16 lakh youth have been rendered unemployment in the last five years of BJP rule. The Prime Minister promised to provide two crore jobs every year to youth and the entire country is seeing the truth, he said.

"Our understanding and our belief is that India requires a new vision. The vision that was proposed by the BJP in 2014 has completely failed. It is a disaster and it is turning our demographic dividend into a demographic disaster. India requires a new vision going forward," he told reporters when asked about the need for such a manifesto focussed on youth.

Even people in the BJP, he alleged, admit that something has gone "very wrong" and the vision that was committed to has failed. Uttar Pradesh would lead the country in jobs and was the centre of the resistance to the British. It was from where the far-reaching ideas came from, he noted, adding that the manifesto is a step towards providing a vision for the country and the Congress believes this has to begin in Uttar Pradesh.

Countering the "untoward remarks" on social media, Rahul said those preaching Hindutva are spreading hatred in the cyber world. Calling them cowards, he said they do not have the courage to come out in the open and asked supporters to fight the 'hatred'. "Hindutvavadis' have been spreading hatred in the cyber world because cowards only attack while hiding. Had they mustered enough courage, they would have come forward. We need to be strong and keep tackling this hatred - the country needs to be saved! #NoFear," Rahul tweeted in Hindi.

AMAR JAWAN JYOTI MERGER STIRS ROW

In the past three years, most military events have been moved to the new

memorial from India Gate.

Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurated the Amar Jawan Jyoti on January 26, 1972 as a memorial for the Indian soldiers killed in action in the India-Pakistan war in 1971. Modi had on February 25, 2019, inaugurated the National War Memorial. Names of 25,942 soldiers have been inscribed in golden letters on granite tablets at the memorial. The memorial is spread over 40 acre and was built at a cost of Rs 176 crore.

Facing criticism from some ex-servicemen and political leaders, sources in the Government said "there is a lot of misinformation circulating regarding the flame of the Amar Jawan Jyoti.

The flame of the Amar Jawan Jyoti is not being extinguished. It is being merged with the flame at the National War Memorial. It was an odd thing to see that the flame at Amar Jawan Jyoti paid homage to the martyrs of the 1971 and other wars but none of their names are present there, they said.

The names inscribed on the India Gate are of only some martyrs who fought for the British in the World War I and the Anglo-Afghan War and thus is a symbol of our colonial past, they said.

The names of all Indian martyrs from all the wars, including 1971 and wars before and after it are housed at the National War Memorial. Hence it is a true shraddhanjali to have the flame paying tribute to martyrs there, officials said.

It is ironic that people who did not make a National War Memorial for seven decades are now making a hue and cry when a permanent and fitting tribute is being made to our martyrs," they said.

The Government's response was to a tweet by Congress leader Rahul. Written in Hindi, it said, "It is a matter of great sadness that the immortal flame for our brave soldiers will be extinguished today. Some people cannot understand patriotism and sacrifice - never mind... We will once again light the 'Amar Jawan Jyoti' for our soldiers."

"Whatever is being done is a national tragedy and an attempt to rewrite history. Merging the Amar Jawan Jyoti with the War Memorial Torch means erasing history. BJP has built the National War Memorial, that does not mean they can

extinguish the Amar Jawan Jyoti," said Congress leader Manish Tewari.

Air Vice Marshal (retired) Manmohan Bahadur tagged Modi on Twitter and requested him to rescind the decision.

"Sir, the eternal flame at India Gate is part of India's psyche. You, I and our generation grew up saluting our brave jawans there," he stated. While National War Memorial is great, the memories of Amar Jawan Jyoti are indelible, Bahadur noted.

Colonel (retired) Rajendra Bhaduri said the Amar Jawan Jyoti is sacred and need not be extinguished. "India Gate has names of Indian soldiers who died in wars. It is immaterial who constructed it," Bhaduri said on Twitter.

Former Lieutenant Colonel Anil Duhoon said on Twitter that "If one can't make it then break it, is the BJP's mantra for new India.

He said the Amar Jawan Jyoti is too sacred to be touched or relocated. "Why can't they have two of them? Can't understand their functioning," Duhoon added. However, Lieutenant General (retired) Satish Dua expressed "great satisfaction" on merging the Amar Jawan Jyoti with the National War Memorial's eternal flame.

"As someone who has steered the design selection and construction of the NWM, I had been of this view all along that India Gate is a memorial to the fallen heroes of First World War," Dua stated. The Amar Jawan Jyoti was added in 1972 as we did not have another memorial, he mentioned. The NWM pays homage to the soldiers who were killed in action after the country's independence and all homage ceremonies have been shifted to the new memorial already, he noted.

Former Army Chief General Ved Malik also supported the Centre's decision to merge the flames. He said on Twitter that it is "a natural thing" to merge flames now as the NWM has been established and all ceremonies related to remembrance and honouring soldiers killed in action are being held there.

DOMESTIC FLIERS CAN'T CARRY MORE THAN ONE HAND BAGGAGE

The airline may be made responsible and depute staff to guide pax, check and verify their handbag status, etc, before allowing the passenger for Pre-embarkation security checks. All airlines may be directed suitably to inform pax and to display "one handbag rule" on their tickets/boarding passes very conspicuously," reads the communiqué.

"Airport Operators may be instructed to place hoarding / banner/ board / standees displaying the contents of the 'One hand bag Rule' near the check-in counters, vantage locations before SHA at the airports so that passengers get sensitized and if required, have an option to switch their extra handbags to registered baggage," it said. CISF has requested its heads at numerous airports to convey the identical to all stakeholders.

35 YOUTUBE, 2 TWITTER ACCOUNTS BLOCKED FOR ANTI-INDIA CANARDS

The channels had a combined subscriber base of over 35 lakh, and their videos had over 55 crore views. Some of the YouTube channels of the Naya Pakistan Group (NPG) were being operated by anchors of Pakistani news channels.

"The contest is absolutely fake and toxic like the government is responsible for Bipin Rawat's death, Bipin Rawat's daughter is accepting Islam, North Korean army is going to Kashmir, etc. What sort of nonsense is this! And these YouTube accounts had a total subscriber base of over 1.20 crore. These videos had 130 crore views, which is almost the population of India. Our intelligence agencies are now alive to the situation and more such news channels on YouTube will get blocked," Chandra said.

"Indian intelligence agencies were closely monitoring these social media accounts and websites and flagged them to the ministry for immediate action," he added.

"Vide five separate orders issued under rule 16 of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, the Ministry has ordered to block these Pakistan-based social media accounts and

websites," the ministry said in a statement later.

703 DIE, 3.5L INFECTED IN A DAY AS CORONA MARCHES ON

Active cases stood at 61,954. At the same time, Mumbai recorded 5008 new Covid-19 cases, 12,913 recoveries and 12 deaths in the last 24 hours.

In the meantime, the Union Health Ministry said "isolation facility would not be mandatory for international travellers arriving from at-risk countries from January 22. In a statement here, it added that they would still be required to undergo seven-day home quarantine. "If tested positive, their samples should be further sent for genomic testing at INSACOG laboratory network. They shall be treated/isolated as per laid down standard protocol," tweeted the Ministry.

In India, the active Covid-19 cases comprise 5.23 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate is at 93.50 per cent, the Ministry said. An increase of 94,774 cases has been recorded in the active Covid-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours. The country had reported 3,11,170 cases in a single day on May 15 last year. The daily positivity rate was recorded at 17.94 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 16.56 per cent, according to the Ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,60,58,806, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.27 per cent. The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide Covid-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 160.43 crore, said the Ministry in the statement.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.



SHORTCIRCUITS



RANVEER SINGH

My constant endeavour is such that you cannot put me in a box. I don't wish to be defined because I feel defining my fundamental nature would be limiting me. As a creative person I would like to believe that I have no limits. That the possibilities within my craft are limitless, that they be infinite.



PRATEIK BABBAR

Dhobi Ghat was a game-changer for me. Not only because it minted the fame that it did, but it also taught me a lot as an actor. There was a lot I could explore with my character, and it allowed me to learn more nuances of acting. I still can't believe it has been 11 years since the film. It feels surreal!



AMOL PARASHAR

Sardar Udham has received immense love and phenomenal response so far I am proud to be a part of this film and I am hoping that the love will continue to pour in from audiences. I thank Shoojit sir for his vision and guidance in humanising the legendary characters.'



ADELE

I'm so sorry, but my show ain't ready. We've tried absolutely everything we can to put it together in time and for it to be good enough for you, but we've been absolutely destroyed by delivery delays and COVID.

CHRISTINA AGUILERA

Miami is such a hotbed of incredible talent from all over the world and again, the Latin music is undeniable, there's nothing like it. So going there, when I start hearing it from all angles and everybody is speaking it, you catch up very quickly and many things are remembered from being a kid.



WILD WORLD

SNAKES SOS: GOA'S WILDEST

In their new show, wildlife activists **BENHAIL ANTAO** and **LOUISE REMEDIOS** embark on a quest to conserve the species and simultaneously bust myths around them by educating the audience that these reptiles are not the danger lurking in the dark. By **KHUSHBU KIRTI**

Wildlife activists Benhail Antao and Louise Remedios, in their new show, *Snakes SOS: Goa's Wildest*, were seen rescuing wild snake species and other undomesticated animals in Goa.

The 10-part adventure series is bringing in a spirit of adventure, thrill and adoration for wild animals. The power couple will face and rescue some of the wildest snake species in the most unusual of situations. It showcases the duo in action and giving an up-close and personal experience of their techniques in rescuing the varied snake species and other undomesticated animals through the city of Goa. It is understanding snake psychology 101, if you may.

Read on for excerpts from a candid interview with the adrenaline junkies and wildlife rescuers about insiders from their new series:

Q National Geographic has introduced an Indian avatar of the show, *Snakes in the City*. How is it going to be different or how are you Indianising it?

BA: *Snakes in the City*, or for that matter, *Crocodile Hunter*, are extremely different shows. I think *Goa's Wildest* is an independent show and has everything unique about it. Right from the snakes — they are Indian species and behave differently — to the places where they're rescued from. It's more about the snakes in this programme and more about the people who are encountering the snakes.

I mean, snakes are a problem everywhere. And the way people respond, the culture shown promotes repulsion or aversion. The message that we give through this programme is subtle — I want people to watch this and find between the lines. It's pretty clear where we stand when it comes to snakes and, the term, conservation. You know, snakes are not that danger lurking in the dark anymore. Snakes never were the danger lurking in the dark. The ideology of the show is pretty different.

Q What is the aim of the show?

LR: So, first, we want to educate you about the kinds of snakes that

are in Goa because this show has been shot there specifically. And a lot of these snakes are also present in different parts of India. People assume we're either dealing with an anaconda or a rattlesnake or Black Mamba. No, you don't get those. It's cool that people are watching these programmes, but they are not aware of the many varieties of venomous, non-venomous and different kinds of snakes that exist here. We want to create awareness.

Besides that, we want people to understand that snakes are like any other animal. You don't look at them like you look at a dog or a cat, right? There's a lot of myth and mystery. In India, mythology, which is associated with a snake, makes people more intrigued and more scared of them. People are unable to distinguish between mythology and fact. So, we're trying to bust these myths. There are so many more questions associated with our mythology when it comes to snakes, which we will be answering in the show. You'll find that message in every episode.

We also want to set people on the right trend, which will be there maybe even 10 years from now, which is a conservation technique of very ethical snake-rescue, to try and impart empathy into people. Because when you can put yourself into another animal's shoe, and understand where they come from, you will then feel empathy towards them, you will then understand them, and you will start to admire them.

We want you to understand the difference between fear and danger. We're trying to conserve the ecosystem, too. If you want to conserve any kind of habitat, you need to protect the animals in them.

Q You've mentioned that there are so many myths around the species. I wanted to know, what are some myths and misconceptions around it?

BA: Yeah, that's super interesting. What most people know happens to be myths, like, for example, a very, very common myth is that a snake takes revenge. I've had people calling me up, like, you know, at three in the morning and saying, 'I



need help'. When I enquire why they say they can't sleep because they rode over a snake in the daytime and are scared it's going to come and take revenge. So, it's no longer any rescue call, it's more of a counselling call (everyone laughs).

LR: So, what happens is that there are possibilities that these snakes, during mating season, release certain kinds of pheromones and perhaps you know, another snake tracks that and comes looking for the dead snake. These are territorial animals, if they see an open territory, they might come. Also, if it's a female's hormones that are put onto your tire or tube, there's a very small chance that a male will sense that and follow. However, the snake is definitely not interested in you (chuckles). It can also be a coincidence.

BA: Funny how when people are given a choice, they will defer to the most supernatural explanation for it and the most expensive one. I heard of people who go around catching snakes and charging a huge sum of money. They feed people with all these myths, that snakes fly and coil around your neck, or that snakes dance to music.

Q Wait, snakes don't dance to music? I mean that's what the snake charmer (*sapera*) does, right?

LR: Haha, see! Okay, so, first of all, the snake needs to enjoy the music, right? So, when we enjoy it, we are not scared of it. The fact is that when a cobra spreads its hood, it signifies that it's scared. The hood is a form of defence. So, it is definitely not enjoying and second, most snakes do not have external ears and cannot hear audible music! They can hear very low-frequency



sound vibrations.

Now, why does it shake or give the impression that it's dancing? It's because it is scared of that flute. It is following the movement of the

hand of the snake charmer. Most of the time, the snake charmer will have a long needle with them to poke the snake so they're scared of them and their hands. It looks to us

like they're dancing, they're not.

BA: And they claim that there is a diamond in the head. I mean, that's not possible. There is no stone or precious stone. If that would've been the case, we would have been multimillionaire (giggles).

A lot of times they pluck out the teeth of these snakes. What happens is that there can be a lot of bacterial infections and the snake can die from that. So the charmers pluck out the teeth just in case they come too close to the snake. They stitch the mouth sometimes. It is extremely sad.

Q I always thought that snakes knew how to protect themselves. If somebody does something like this, don't they bite?

BA: Oh, yeah, they do bite. Even snake charmers get bitten all the time. I mean, there are snake charmers that die of snake bites and sometimes they pull out the snakes' fang but don't notice there is another fang and they've died of it.

LR: But usually a snake gets very exhausted. If you provoke the snake, initially it will try to stay away from you, you provoke it a little more, it is going to give you a warning, provoke it still further it is going to bite you with a fake bite. It doesn't want to waste its venom on you. And then you really provoke, it's going to severely bite you. When you do it repeatedly, the snake gets scared, almost traumatised and tired. They have no energy to even strike most of the time.

BA: Also, it's not that every time they strike you, there's going to be venom, they can control how much venom goes in or doesn't go. Because that venom is a very important resource. And to produce venom, it takes a lot of energy for that snake and it takes time for it to develop venom back.

Look, the snake doesn't want to bite you because it knows even if it does bite you with a full dose of venom, you can still kill it before you die. Right? It will still give you maybe like a fake strike, like a warning to leave it alone.

Q Makes sense. Tell us why did you choose Goa as the location, specifically?

BA&LR: We live in Goa. We love Goa (both laugh).

Q You are a power couple who are luxurious wedding planners in the day and deadly wildlife rescuers at night. How did this dynamic transpire?

BA: I can talk for myself. But we have been passionate about rescuing wildlife and spreading awareness. I've been doing this for the last 19 years now, spreading the message of conservation.

Over a period of time, I did engineering, I worked in a company, we joined event management,

then we got married and started our own event management company. So, all these happened along the way. But snake rescue has been the backbone. I mean, it's always been there. We never monetised it. But it's always been a passion.

LR: So, when my mom asked me about Ben, when we were dating, and what he does, I told them. My father was like, really? My mom surprised me. She said, 'you know, baby, I always thought you'll marry someone like this. You've always been one wild child. Now we're hashtag *Goa's wildest* (chortles).

Q That's one sweet story! How does it feel to have your entire passion turned into a show that the entire world is watching?

LR: I will say it's better than a dream because nobody dreams of such things as being associated with National Geographic. I remember my neighbour picked up about 50 magazines and I read them every single day because it is such a huge platform. So, when something like this happens, it is an incredible feeling — nobody plans for these things. And if you work hard, and you have a little bit of luck associated with it, as well, and you're passionate about something. I mean, this is a dream come true.

BA: This awareness programme that I've been doing for the last 15 years in schools, colleges, gatherings, and the most, I've taught like 1,000 people, but the most effective is when I'm rescuing the snake at somebody's house. If we can spread the knowledge to the entire world this way, I'm grateful and content.

Q Benhail, you said that you were in this for 19 years now. What intrigued you to get into the profession?

BA: Uhm... it never was a profession, always has been my passion. What intrigued me is I've always liked wildlife. I come from a background where in my grandfathers, my uncles were hunters. I was brought up in a way that the fear of any wildlife was not instilled into me.

When I was eight years old, I remember being called by a neighbour to go and kill a snake that had entered his bathroom. That's when I realised that killing was not the only option. I could handle the situation differently. There was no internet or books that could teach me the procedure. I've had my fair share of bites and stuff like that. Snakes don't appreciate that they are being rescued because they don't know they're being rescued. So, experimenting and not resorting to violence was how I learnt and I want to make others aware of the same.

(*Watch Snakes SOS: Goa's Wildest on National Geographic at 8 pm, on Mondays and Tuesdays.*)

After a challenging two years, the film industry is once again dealing with the prospect of a possible third wave in 2022. However, given its intrinsic resilience, the industry is ticking along with many of its content creators all set to surprise the audiences with fresh themes. Here are some of the female producers and directors whose packed slates promise to bring something new to the cinema-scape this year.

Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti: These two powerhouse creators have already established their production house Tiger Baby as a clutter-breaker and in 2022, they are all set to bring *The Archies* on an OTT platform in a unique live-action musical



adaptation. Set in 1960s India, this project is directed by Zoya and recalls the nostalgia and innocence of *Archie* comics. This is also Tiger Baby's first solo project

Powerhouse women

Here is a pick of female producers and directors, expected to bring something new to the cinema-scape this year. By **TEAM VIVA**

though the duo will continue to collaborate with Excel Entertainment on future projects like *Made in Heaven 2*, *Jee Le Zara* (starring Katrina Kaif, Priyanka Chopra and Alia Bhatt), *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan* and *Dahaad* amongst others.

Deepshikha Deshmukh: Among the youngest female producers in the industry, Deepshikha started her career with the critically acclaimed film *Sarbjit* and even helmed big productions like *Bellbottom* which was shot and released during the pandemic. The year promises to be big for her as well, with two biggies lined



up for release. The much-awaited dystopian thriller, *Ganapath* will be released on December 23 and the yet-to-be-named *Production 41* will also release this year. This dystopian action bonanza is headlined by Tiger Shroff and Kriti Sanon while their untitled *Production 41* stars Akshay Kumar. Deepshikha has a strong foothold in the industry and her love for the environment has helped create greener film productions in India. She has also produced movies like *Jawaani Janeman*, *Coolie No. 1* among others.

Taapsee Pannu: The actor, who starred in some of the most acclaimed films in recent times, is now producing *Blur*, a horror-thriller directed by Ajay Bahl. This official Hindi remake of the Spanish film *Julia's Eyes* is jointly produced by Pannu's Outsider Films along with Zee Studios and Echelon Productions. She also stars along with Gulshan Devaiah in this venture that promises to decisively



announce her foray into the production of unapologetically women-led themes.

Meghna Gulzar: Often described as a maverick filmmaker, Meghna Gulzar is all set to return with another unforgettable story in 2022. This time, with the biopic



Sam Bahadur which is based on the life of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, one of India's greatest war heroes, who served as the chief of the Indian Army in 1971 during the Bangladesh Liberation War. She wields the directorial baton for this story which will see Vicky Kaushal as Sam Bahadur along with Fatima Sana Shaikh and Sanya Malhotra. After *Raazi*, *Chhapaak* and *Talvar*, this is an entirely new genre for the director but she is expected to do full justice to it.



Charmme Kaur: In the post-pandemic world of borderless entertainment, the cross-pollination of talent continues across industries. The latest example is *Liger*, a sports action film, written and directed by Puri Jagannadh and produced by Karan Johar, Charmme Kaur, Apoorva Mehta, Hiroo Yash Johar and Jagannadh under the banners of Dharma Productions and Puri Connects. Charmme is already well-established as an actor across Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada cinema. To be shot simultaneously in Telugu and Hindi, the film stars Vijay Deverakonda and Ananya Panday in lead roles and is all set to release on August 25.



SHALABH SAXENA ■ LUCKNOW

Sindhu enters semifinals
HS Prannoy crashes out

Ace Indian shuttler and two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu kept aside the challenge of Supanida Katething of Thailand 11-21, 21-12, 21-17 to enter the semifinals of the Syd Modi International Super 300 tournament at UP Badminton Academy on Friday.

The top-seeded Indian came from behind to edge past Supanida, who had toppled her in the Indian Open semifinal, in a one-hour and five minutes match. Sindhu will now take on fifth-seeded Russian Evgeniya Kosetskaya in the semifinals. Kosetskaya defeated Tereza Svabikova 21-8, 21-14.

In the men's singles, title favourite HS Prannoy crashed out of the tournament with a straight-game defeat to Arnaud Merkle of France in the quarterfinals. The Frenchman never let his Indian opponent move ahead at any point in the match and staged a 19-21, 16-21

upset.

Meanwhile, another Indian, Mithun Manjunath, advanced to the semifinals after upstaging Russian Sergey Sirant 11-21, 21-12, 21-18 in a hard-fought tie. Manjunath will face Merkle in the semifinals. It was a déjà vu feeling for Merkle as he lost in the same manner, in which he registered a win over Chirag Sen a day earlier.

In the mixed doubles, the Indian pair of MR Arjun and Treasa Jolly beat eight-seeded French duos of William Villeger and Anne Tran 24-22, 21-17 in the quarterfinal match that lasted 42 minutes. Arjun and Jolly will face compatriots and seventh-seeded pair of Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto in the semifinals.

In the women's doubles quarterfinals, India's Ramya Venkatesh Chickmenahalli and Apeksha Nayak conceded a walkover to eighth-seeded Malaysian pair of Anna Ching Yik Cheong and Teoh Mei Xing.

Milan, Juventus return to San Siro after recent losses

AP ■ MILAN

Both AC Milan and Juventus have recent bad memories of San Siro ahead of their eagerly-anticipated Serie A match at the iconic stadium on Sunday.

Juventus lost the Italian Super Cup to Inter Milan last week, when Alexis Sánchez scored the winner with the last kick of the match at the end of extra time.

Milan's last match at its home stadium was on Monday when a refereeing error cost it dearly in a dispiriting 2-1 loss to relegation-threatened Spezia.

"It's hard to lose like that. It's a missed chance that no one wanted, we've missed an opportunity," Milan coach Stefano Pioli said.

"Unfortunately we didn't manage to bring home the win, but now we'll think of the next matches.

"The season is still long, everyone can have an off day. It's good for us that now we have two difficult matches because that will give us great motivation and we'll find the strength to bounce back."

Milan could have moved above league leader Inter Milan with a win but Spezia scored in stoppage-time shortly after a potential winner from Junior Messias was disallowed for Milan because the referee whistled a foul on Rossoneri forward Ante Rebic in the buildup, just as Rebic was passing the ball to Messias. Referee Marco Serra apologized.

“Unfortunately we didn’t manage to bring home the win, but now we’ll think of the next matches.”

M i l a n now finds itself two points behind Inter, which it plays the following weekend. Defeat to Juventus could see Milan head into the derby five points behind its bitter rival and having played a match more. Inter hosts relegation-threatened Venezia this Saturday.

Napoli is also only two points behind Milan and plays last-placed Salernitana. Pioli will be hoping Milan recovers its attacking prowess after uncharacteristically stuttering against Spezia. The Rossoneri missed several opportunities to put the game to bed long before the controversial finale.



Milan has the second best attack in Serie A, having netted 47 times this campaign. Juventus has scored only 34 goals – fewer than any of the top 10 teams in the Italian league, apart from Torino – but there are signs the Bianconeri are beginning to get into their stride after struggling at the beginning of the season under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri. In the top five European leagues, only Real Madrid has scored as many goals as Juventus in 2022 (12) and Allegri's last loss in the league was back in November, against Atalanta.

That left Juventus seventh in the league, seven points behind fourth-placed Atalanta and the final Champions League spot. It has now moved to within one point of Atalanta.

"We are doing well and we have achieved many good results," Juventus forward Paulo Dybala said.

Simeone losing magic touch in his 10th year at Atlético

AP ■ BARCELONA

This season was supposed to be Diego Simeone's chance to firmly establish Atlético Madrid as Spain's top team and cap his incredibly successful decade as its coach.

While Barcelona lost Lionel Messi and Real Madrid had to replace coach Zinedine Zidane, Atlético strengthened its championship squad with the return of Antoine Griezmann and the signing of attacking players Rodrigo de Paul and Mathews Cunha.

It looked like the perfect scenario to repeat as Spanish league champions for the first time since 1950 and maybe even win the Champions League title which Simeone has twice come oh-so-close to grasping. It has-



n't gone Atlético's way. Atlético hosts Valencia on Saturday in fourth place in the league, trailing Madrid by 16 points with one more game to play. It is also out of the Copa del Rey and barely advanced from the Champions League group phase. Atlético has lost six of its last 10

games across all competitions.

It was dumped from the Copa del Rey's round-of-16 in a 2-0 loss at Real Sociedad on Wednesday, following a 2-1 loss to Athletic Bilbao last week in the Spanish Super Cup played in Saudi Arabia.

In December, it lost four in a row in the Spanish league, falling to Mallorca, Madrid, Sevilla and Granada. Previously, Atlético had never lost more than two consecutive league matches since Simeone became its coach in December 2011.

"Last season was magnificent and this one is proving to be very difficult," said Simeone, who has led Atlético to two Spanish league titles, one Copa del Rey, two Europa League titles, and two Champions League final appearances.

"We still have opportunities in the league and the Champions League.

I am not going to just sit still. I can promise you that."

Most surprisingly, Atlético has lost its formidable defense. Loyal to Simeone's vision of building a team on a strong defense, it is accustomed to leading the league in fewest goals allowed. This season, eight league teams have allowed fewer goals than the 24 conceded by Atlético. Atlético has also faltered up front. Except for a goal against a third-tier opponent in the Copa del Rey, Luis Suárez hasn't scored since a 3-3 draw at Valencia on Nov. 7. Griezmann was playing well enough until a muscle injury sidelined him for all of but one match since mid-December.

NCAA adopts new policy for transgender athletes



AP ■ INDIANAPOLIS

The NCAA has adopted a sport-by-sport approach for transgender athletes, bringing the organization in line with the U.S. And International Olympic Committees.

Under the new guidelines, approved by the NCAA Board of Governors on Wednesday, transgender participation for each sport will be determined by the policy for the sport's national governing body, subject to review and recommendation by an NCAA committee to the Board of Governors.

When there is no national governing body, that sport's international federation policy would be in place. If there is no international federation policy, previously established IOC policy criteria would take over.

"Approximately 80% of U.S. Olympians are either current or former college athletes," NCAA President Mark Emmert said in a release. "This policy alignment provides consistency and further strengthens the relationship between college sports and the U.S. Olympics." The NCAA policy is effective immediately, beginning with the 2022 winter championships.

NCAA rules on transgender athletes returned to the forefront when Penn swimmer Lia Thomas started smashing records this year. She was on the men's team her first three years, but she is competing for the women this season after transitioning. The Board of Governors is suggesting NCAA divisions allow for additional eligibility if a transgender student-athlete loses eligibility based on the policy change.



Terrific attack has Strasbourg in rare air in French league

AP ■ PARIS

As Paris Saint-Germain waits for the trio of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappé to reach its full potential, another combination is taking the spotlight in the French league.

Ludovic Ajorque, Habib Diallo and Kevin Gameiro aren't global names but together with midfielder Adrien Thomasson — whose clinical efficiency has bagged seven goals and four assists — they have made Strasbourg one of the most potent teams in Europe this season.

The Alsatian quartet has 31 goals out of the team's total of 41 in 21 matches. Only PSG has done better, with a total of 42 goals.

This attacking verve has brought dividends, with Strasbourg sitting in fourth place after winning at Clermont 2-0 in a rescheduled match midweek. It's the club's best league position at this stage since 1997.

Ahead of a trip on Sunday to struggling Bordeaux, Julien Stephan's team are just two points behind Marseille, with qualification for a European tournament in sight. Marseille plays at Lens this weekend, with second-placed Nice traveling to Metz, and runaway leader PSG hosting Reims. Stephan became the coach when he replaced Thierry Laurey following a season of struggle.

"Being fourth doesn't change much, but it does validate the players' hard work," Stephan said. "Above all, it's our third victory in 2022, all of them won in different contexts, and that is extremely promising. We remain very humble."

Strasbourg has 15 goals in its last six matches while conceding just five, with Stephan widely credited for the team's metamorphosis.

In his previous stint, Stephan secured Rennes' first trophy in 48 years and led the Brittany club to the Champions League. He preaches a fluid passing game.



Medvedev withstands Kyrgios, crowd to advance in Australia

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Daniil Medvedev faced a hostile crowd and a full array of Nick Kyrgios' outbursts and tricks, and still remained calm for long enough to reach the third round at the Australian Open.

The 115th-ranked Kyrgios worked up the crowd, hit 'tweeners and drop shots, mixed up the pace of his groundstrokes and tossed in an under-arm serve in a bid to ruffle the second-ranked Russian.

Medvedev kept his composure, taking a quick trip to the locker room after losing the third set and recovering to win 7-6 (1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 Thursday on a rowdy Rod Laver Arena.

In an on-court TV interview with former champion Jim Courier, Medvedev was asked how he managed to stay so composed.

"That's the only choice when you get booed between first and second serve," he said, triggering some boos from the crowd. "It's not easy."

The (service) games I lost, on the break points, it was the case.

It's tough to play."

Kyrgios usually likes to play on John Cain Arena,

known locally as the People's Court because fans with ground passes can get in and the singing and chanting is always less restrained than the two main show courts.

He managed to turn the all-ticketed stadium court into something more akin to a soccer stadium.

In the seventh game of the third set, Kyrgios got two break-point chances when he bunted away a backhand from Medvedev directed at his body and then took off on a circular run behind the baseline to celebrate like he had scored a goal.

When he converted the break, he danced in the change-over and worked up the crowd. Medvedev managed to lower the volume with two service breaks in the fourth set.

It was Medvedev's first win over Kyrgios following two losses in 2019.

And there were cheers later when Courier suggested a new crowd favorite for the rest of the tournament.

Medvedev was the runner-up last year but avenged that loss by beating Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open final.

He's the quasi No. 1 now, anyway, because Djokovic was deported on the eve of the tournament for failing to meet

Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination regulations.

Another contender in his half of the draw had a more routine run to the third round, with fourth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas beating Sebastian Baez 7-6 (1), 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 in a match featuring two former top-ranked junior players.

Five-time runner-up Andy Murray only lasted two rounds. Two days after winning his first match at the Australian Open in five years, the former No. 1 lost to 120th-ranked Taro Daniel 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

Other winners among the men included No. 5 Andrey Rublev, No. 15 Roberto Bautista Agut, No. 20 Taylor Fritz, 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic and No. 32 Alex de Minaur. No. 24 Dan Evans moved on when the player he was supposed to face in the second round, Arthur Rinderknech, pulled out with an injured wrist.

Australian wild-card entry Chris O'Connell upset 13th-seeded Diego Schwartzman 7-6 (6), 6-4, 6-4.

There were surprises in the women's draw on Day 4, with No. 3 Garbiñe Muguruza becoming the highest-seeded player to exit only minutes after No. 6 Anett Kontaveit lost.

Friday's ISL game between Mumbai and Jamshedpur postponed

PTI ■ BAMBOLIM

The Indian Super League match between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC, scheduled for Friday, has been postponed as many players representing the teams are down with the COVID-19 virus.

"Hero Indian Super League (ISL) Match No. 67 between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC scheduled for Friday, January 21, 2022, at Athletic Stadium, Bambolim, stands postponed," the league organisers said in a statement.

"The decision was taken considering advice from the League's medical team on Jamshedpur FC's inability to safely field a team and prepare for the match," the ISL added in its statement.

On Monday, the ISL match between Hyderabad FC and Jamshedpur FC was also postponed



due to COVID-19, and so was Thursday's game between Kerala Blasters FC and ATK Mohun Bagan due to unavailability of enough players in the former's ranks after being hit by COVID-19 inside the bio-bubble. Three days back, Jamshedpur FC's match against Hyderabad FC was postponed hours before kick-off after the Jharkhand-based club failed to field a team due to COVID-19 cases in its ranks.

Dominant India waste chances galore to play out goal-less draw

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

The Indian women's team wasted innumerable chances in a completely dominating performance as Iran held them to a goal-less draw in their Asian Cup opening match here on Thursday.

Head coach Thomas Dennerby will be disappointed with the outcome of the match as a win against lower-ranked Iran would have put his side in a comfortable position in its bid to qualify for the quarterfinals.

But he must be happy in part as his wards dished out some fine display of possession and passing football, especially in the second half, at the DY Patil Stadium.

He will hope that his team continues in the same vein and score goals in the second match on Sunday against Chinese Taipei, who were thrashed 0-4 by China in the day's earlier match, to keep their quarterfinals prospects alive.

The Indians would have expected Iran to be defensive in their approach but it turned out to be the opposite in the initial period.

Iran, ranked 70th as against India's



55th, were the better side in the opening minutes during which they got two scoring chances, including a hit on the crossbar, but the home team took control of the Group A match midway into the first half and dominated till the end.

Iran had two chances in the period they dominated with captain Behnaz Taherkhani's header off a Samaneh Chahkandi free-kick ricocheting off the crossbar after beating goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan in the 12th minute.

Though captain Ashalata Devi was rock solid at deep defence, Iran almost took the lead in 19th minute when an Indian defender's header went backward and fell before Negin Zandi, who, however, sent the ball wide under pressure.

After absorbing the initial pressure, India settled down and came on their own. Indumathi, however, could not keep her volley down in the 24th minute while Manisha Kalyan's free

header six minutes later also sailed over the bar.

But the best chance for India came in the 32nd minute. Pyari Xaxa's scuffed shot fell kindly for Indumathi, but her toe-poke took the ball over the bar.

India dished out a fine display of passing football in the second half and they were all over a rattled Iranian side who had nothing to do but defend desperately.

Dennerby's side were unlucky not to have scored any goal and win the match easily. Iranian goalkeeper Zohreh Koudaei made saves after saves to deny the Indians full three points.

As India pressed for a goal, Iran defended doggedly while facing a deluge of attacks. The Indians were all over — crosses, shots, toe-pokes, headers — all inside Iran box but a goal still eluded the home side.

In the 51st minute, Manisha Kalyan sent a fine low cross from the left but Pyari Xaxas toe-poke went just wide. A minute later, Xaxa again could not reach the ball off a lovely pass from Sandhya Ranganathan, as an Iranian made a last-ditch defending.

SOUTH AFRICA HAND 'OUT OF SYNC' INDIA SERIES DEFEAT



PTI ■ PAARL

A young South Africa punished a jaded Indian team for its outdated approach, handing it one of the most comprehensive series defeats in recent times with an easy seven-wicket victory in the second ODI here on Friday.

A target of 288 was below-par on a flat track and the seasoned Quinton de Kock (78 off 66 balls) in the company of rising sensation Janneman Malan (91 off 108 balls) added 132 for a match-deciding opening stand.

The home team eventually reached the target in 48.1 overs to take an unsailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

KL Rahul's captaincy ambitions and head coach Rahul Dravid's wish to see him being anointed in the long run, however, suffered a rude jolt following back-to-back defeats in 50-over games on a track, which was more Indian than South African in nature.

India's archaic approach, a very '90s safety first mind-set, hurt the team as has been the case for a while now in the white-ball format.

INDIA'S ARCHAIC APPROACH, A VERY '90S SAFETY FIRST MIND-SET, HURT THE TEAM AS HAS BEEN THE CASE FOR A WHILE NOW IN THE WHITE-BALL FORMAT.

A tour that started with a great Test win at the Centurion is now in tatters and the Indian contingent would be looking to board the charter flight back home on Monday after the inconsequential third ODI at the Newlands, which would be a spicier track compared to the one at Boland Park.

The batting, save Rishabh Pant's cavalier style, was too defensive starting with skipper Rahul, whose 55 off 79 balls was an innings of bygone era, which cannot align with the fearless cricket that teams want to associate with now.

The match slipped away from India's grip during their innings once Pant was gone as the others simply failed to get going when the ball didn't come on to the bat and it was not a track that offered firm and even bounce.

It's not a new malaise to plague Indian cricket but what should be worrying is that nothing has been done to address the issues.

A veteran like Bhuvneshwar Kumar (8-0-67-0) was swept as well as pulled for sixes by De Kock while Malan would come down the track to hit him through the covers signalling that his early 130 kmph speed, with lack of variations, was simply not working.

For Shardul Thakur (40 not out and 5.1-0-36-0), the quality batting show won't save him if he doesn't curtail the number of bad balls that he is bowling per spell.

And Ravichandran Ashwin (10-1-68-0)'s second coming in white ball cricket might end in a whimper even before it gathers enough wind to sail through.

Yuzvendra Chahal (10-

0-47-1) tried his best but his confidence, after being uncereemoniously dumped from the T20 World up final squad, has been in tatters.

Venkatesh Iyer (22 off 33 balls and 5-0-28-0) is still a work in progress and his fast-tracking in the limited overs set-up is less of pragmatism and more desperation to find a fresh version of injury-plagued Hardik Pandya.

Iyer might develop into a good cricketer but he is a far from finished product and may be some time away from being a success at the international level in all conditions.

As of now, he is not a natural No.6, who can be a finisher like Pandya was in his best days before injury.

Had Pant not played the role of an enforcer to perfection, even a target of 288 wouldn't have been possible. And this was after it seemed India would score close to 315 when he was having a steady stand of 115 with his skipper.

But there dismissals in quick succession saw Proteas make a comeback on a Boland Park strip where stroke-making wasn't an easy proposition for a new batter.



Devoid of options, Covid-hit India to take on Uganda

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Rattled by a COVID-19 outbreak but through to the last-eight stage, India will have just 12 players to choose from in their final Under-19 World Cup group B clash against Uganda on Saturday as five of their six isolated squad members returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR tests, here.

Only Vasu Vats came out negative but it is likely that the team management will field the same playing XI that thumped Ireland by 174 runs on Wednesday and secured a place in the quarterfinals. Skipper Yash Dhull, his deputy Shaik Rasheed, and Aaradhya Yadav, all of who tested positive in the Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT), have been confirmed positive in the latest RT-PCR reports along with Manav Parakh, who had tested negative in RAT.

Sidharth Yadav had already tested positive in the RT-PCR test before the Ireland game. Fortunately, India already have two victories in pocket and an easy opponent to tackle in the final Group game on Saturday.

Considering that Uganda is not a strong team, India, despite limited options, is expected to steamroll the minnows from the African region and finish on top of Group B. If the team does that, all the infected players, including the worst-affected Dhull, are expected to be back in the reckoning for selection for the January 29 quarterfinal.

National Cricket Academy Head VVS Laxman had lauded the players for the way they responded to the situation ahead of the Ireland game.

"Tremendous show of character and maturity from the U-19 team. With just 11 players available, to go out and express themselves the way they did was phenomenal. Can't say how proud I am of them! The Ireland match is one they will cherish for life," Laxman had tweeted.

The game against Uganda is inconsequential mathematically for India but it would have been ideal if the affected players got some time in the middle to be ready for the knockout stage.

The team would have obviously preferred to have all its best players on the park as it eyes a fifth trophy.

So far, openers Harnoor Singh and Angriksh Raghuvanshi have shown terrific form and are likely to continue in the same vein but the following middle-order batters need to score at better pace.

Not surprised at Kohli's decision to quit captaincy: Pietersen

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former England skipper Kevin Pietersen has suggested that the "harsh" bio-bubble life could be one of the reasons for Virat Kohli's stunning decision to quit Test captaincy and backed Rohit Sharma to lead India in all formats of the game going forward.

Kohli stunned the cricketing world by stepping down from the Test captaincy following India's 1-2 series loss to South Africa. He had relinquished T20 captaincy after the World Cup last year, and was subsequently removed from ODI leadership, leading to a war of words with the BCCI on the sequence of events leading to these developments.

"People who are critical of the modern day sportsmen I think are foolish because these bio-bubbles are very hard to play in," the former England star batsman told PTI in a group interaction on the sidelines of the Legends League Cricket here.

"It will be very unfair to be too harsh, to be critical. Because you have not looked at Virat Kohli.



Kohli needs crowds, he gets going (from it), he is an entertainer.

"I think it's very difficult for his personality to perform to the best of his (Kohli's) abilities (in the bubble)," he reasoned as he reflected on sportspersons' life in a COVID-scarred world.

The 33-year-old Kohli held the record for most Test wins by an Indian captain (40) with only Graeme Smith, Ricky Ponting, and

Steve Waugh having won more matches than him.

Pietersen said he was not surprised when Kohli quit captaincy from all formats.

"A lot of players have suffered. It is the greatest job in the world. But when you put them in a bubble, it's certainly not the greatest job because there is no fun," the 41-year-old said.

"I'm actually not surprised that

Virat wants just a little bit of a break from that extra pressure because it's damn difficult playing in these bubbles," he said.

"It's very difficult to judge all International sportsmen, be it premier league footballers or any sportsman around the world, playing in a pandemic," Pietersen said from his perspective, he would not have performed well for two years without any crowd in the stadiums.

"As a batter, I feed on the energy of fans, and there are a lot of these players, be it in football, rugby or tennis."

Vice-captain KL Rahul is leading India in the ongoing ODI series in South Africa with Rohit Sharma injured. Pietersen backed Rohit to captain India across all formats once he regains fitness. The big-hitting batter is expected to be back for the home limited-overs series against the West Indies next month.

"I've always loved 'Hitman' Rohit Sharma. He's a fabulous player, every time he's batting I've got to watch. His captaincy is great for the Mumbai Indians too. So he's probably next in line," Pietersen said.

West Indies U-19 get two COVID-19 replacements



PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN

The ICC's Event Technical Committee of the U-19 World Cup has approved Kevin Wickham and Nathan Edward as replacements for Onaje Amory and Jaden Carmichael in the West Indies squad.

Wickham and Edward are temporary replacements for Amory and Carmichael who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are undergoing isolation.

"A COVID replacement can be temporary, in that once the player has recovered he would be eligible to return to the squad in position of the player that replaced him," said the ICC in a statement.

The replacement of a player requires the approval of the Event Technical Committee.

Stupid to blame IPL for England's Ashes debacle

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former captain and batting star Kevin Pietersen has said that it's "stupid" to blame the Indian Premier League for England's embarrassing 0-4 loss to Australia in the recently-concluded Ashes series.

England great David Gower was "annoyed" after their Ashes defeat and said current skipper Joe Root had players who were "unavailable" because of the IPL.

Pietersen, an Ashes winner in 2005, 2009, 2010-11 and 2013, laughed at the remark.

"It is stupid. You can't blame the IPL for the demise of Test cricket in England. It's crazy. I've commented on it quite a lot. It's the system, it's the county cricket system, which is poor. So there's no blame," Pietersen, who is representing World Giants in the Legends League Cricket here, said during an interaction here on Thursday.

"It's crazy to blame the Indian Premier League because if you have a look at the Test team, there's only maybe (Ben) Stokes (Jonny) Bairstow and (Jos) Buttler who play the IPL..."

"Hardly any of the Test team players play the IPL... So how can you blame the IPL? You can't blame the IPL. It's crazy," a former captain of the IPL's Delhi franchise added. Off-



the-field, the English cricketers were also mired in a controversy after a report claimed that there was a "drinking culture" in the team with the players and coaches drinking late into the night before police broke up the session. Pietersen said there was no harm in it as the players are affected by the strict bio-bubble restrictions.

"It's stressful. It's incredibly stressful. I've never played in a bubble. I can't imagine but I think it must be very lonely.

"You're not allowed to go to coffee shops. You're not allowed to go down to the restaurants, you're not allowed to do anything. And what else do you do?"

India to open T20 WC campaign against Pakistan

PTI ■ DUBAI

In a blockbuster T20 World Cup opener for India, the team was on Friday drawn to clash with arch-rivals Pakistan on October 23 at the iconic MCG as the International Cricket Council (ICC) released the fixtures.

India had lost to Pakistan for the first time in an ICC tournament when the teams clashed in last year's T20 World Cup in Dubai.

India's second Super 12 match in Group 2 will be on October 27 in Sydney against a qualifier (runner up of Group A) and will be followed by matches against South Africa (October 30 in Perth) and Bangladesh



(Adelaide Oval on November 2). The Men in Blue's last Super 12 match is scheduled for November 6 against the winners of Group B at the MCG. The Super 12s -- round two of the tournament, with two group outs as well as a number of near misses. Noor Ahmad blasted three sixes to leave his side in with a chance of a shock victory, needing 28 off the last two overs with two wickets in hand.

Reigning champions Bangladesh bounce back against Canada

October 22 in a re-match of last year's men's T20 World Cup final.

The Black Caps will also face England at The Gabba on November 1 in a re-match of their epic semi-final encounter at the 2021 event. In Super 12s, Australia are in Group 1 with world number one England, New Zealand, Afghanistan plus the

winner of Group A and the runner-up in Group B from the first round.

The semi-finals will be played at the SCG and Adelaide Oval on November 9 and 10, respectively. It will be the first time the Adelaide Oval will host a World Cup semi-final.

The MCG will host the final, which will be contested under lights on November 13.

In the first round, 2014 champions Sri Lanka and Namibia will play the opening match at Kardinia Park, Geelong on October 16. They'll be joined by two qualifiers in Group A.

Two-time champions West Indies will also start in the first round, joined in Group B.

U19 World Cup Updates

England, Pakistan cruise to quarterfinals, Bangladesh bounce back with win

PTI ■ BASSETTERRE (ST KITTS)

Skipper Tom Prest smashed an unbeaten 154 as former champions England cruised to the Super League quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup with a thumping 189-run win over the UAE here.

Continuing his incredible run of form, Prest powered England to a mammoth 362 for six after electing to bat.

The English bowlers, led by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed (4/30), then

put up a disciplined effort to bowl out UAE for 173 in 38.2 overs.

Prest blasted 13 fours and four sixes in his scintillating 119-ball innings, while Jacob Bethell (62), William Luxton (47) and George Thomas (41) also chipped in as the 1998 edition winners England put up an imposing total.

Bethell and Thomas gave England a blistering start, adding 69 runs in 11.5 overs.

The Young Lions' total always looked like it would be a big ask to overhaul and the UAE were reeling



when they were reduced to 61 for five in the 15th over.

Ali Naseer's counter-attacking 54 off 44 balls helped reverse some of the momentum as he put on 59 with Nilansh Keswani for the sixth wicket. But when Nilansh departed, the last four wickets fell for 53 runs as leg-spinner Rehan excelled in his first outing in the West Indies with four for 30 from his allotted ten overs. Pakistan qualify for quarterfinals with win against Afghanistan. Pakistan too booked their place in the Super League quarterfinals with a 24-run victory over Afghanistan.

Afghanistan did well to restrict Pakistan to a modest 239 for nine in the group C match at Brian Lara stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad.

However, the Afghans got the pace of their innings all wrong in

reply, managing 215 in the designated 50 overs.

The top three soaked up far too many balls in pursuit of the target.

It took them 170 balls to bring up 100 runs with Bilal Sayedi (42 off 81), Nangeyalia Kharote (12 off 32), and Allah Noor (28 off 49) managing strike rates under 58.

Despite the slow start, Afghanistan took the contest deep although their innings was characterised by some wild running between the wickets, with three run outs as well as a number of near misses. Noor Ahmad blasted three sixes to leave his side in with a chance of a shock victory, needing 28 off the last two overs with two wickets in hand.

Reigning champions Bangladesh bounce back against Canada

Bangladesh bounced back from defeat with a dominant eight-wicket triumph over Canada.

Off-spinner SM Meherob and pacer Ripon Mondol snapped four wickets each as Bangladesh bowled out Canada for a lowly 136 in a group A match at Conaree Sports Club in Basseterre.

Bangladesh then galloped to the target in 30.1 overs to register their first win of the tournament.

Iftakher Hossain anchored the chase for the defending champions with a well-made 61 off 89 balls while Prantik Nawrose Nabil (33) and Aich Mollah (20 not out) also chipped in.

Earlier, opener Anoop Chima stood amid the ruins with a 117-ball 63 as Canada's decision to bat backfired with only four of their batters reaching double digit figures.