

## OPINION 8

NETAJI, NOT CONGRESS,  
FINALLY WON FREEDOM

## MONEY 10

STARTUPS SEEK FRIENDLY  
POLICIES, TAX INCENTIVES

## WORLD 11

S KOREA CULLS CHICKENS  
OVER BIRD FLU OUTBREAKS

LUCKNOW, MONDAY JANUARY 24, 2022; PAGES 14 ₹3



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SINDHU WINS  
SYED MODI  
INTERNATIONAL  
14 SPORT

## 'Omicron in community transmission stage now'

Virus is no longer  
being spread  
through foreign  
tourists, INSACOG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Omicron infection is no longer being spread through foreign travellers. The Government has finally acknowledged that Covid-19, which is now in the form of a new highly transmissible variant, is in the community transmission stage.

A recently released bulletin of Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), the consortium of national laboratories that is tracking the different variants of the Coronavirus, has said that Omicron is now spreading through community transmission. So far there are more than 10,000 reported Omicron cases in the country, spread across 28 States. The actual numbers could be far more (70 to 90 times as per some estimates) because in very few cases genome sequencing is being done to identify Omicron infections.

"Omicron is now in community transmission in India and has become dominant in



A health worker collects nasal swab sample of prisoners being produced at the Civil Court, in Patna on Saturday PTI

multiple metros, where new cases have been rising exponentially," noted INSACOG in its latest bulletin on Sunday.

INSACOG, jointly initiated by the Union Health Ministry and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) among others, is a consortium of 38 laboratories to monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2

The two-page bulletin of January 10, released on Sunday, added that while most Omicron cases so far had been asymptomatic or mild, hospitalisations and ICU cases had been increasing in the current wave. The threat level remained unchanged.

The recently reported new SARS-CoV-2 variant —

B.1.640.2 — lineage was also being monitored, it added. "While it had features of immune escape, it was currently not a variant of concern. So far, no case has been detected in India," said the bulletin.

It further said that BA.2 lineage was a substantial fraction in India and S-gene dropout-based screening was thus likely to give high false negatives. Tests suitable for PCR-based screening applicable to all Omicron lineages had been approved for use. S-gene dropout was a genetic variation like that of Omicron.

"Further spread of Omicron in India is now expected to be through internal transmission,

Continued on Page 4

### VP Naidu tests positive for Covid

**New Delhi:** Vice President Venkaiah Naidu tested positive for Covid-19 in Hyderabad on Sunday. He will remain isolated for one week, his secretariat informed via Twitter.

"He has advised all those who came in contact with him to isolate themselves and get tested," the tweet said.

President Venkaiah Naidu paid tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his 125th birth anniversary at a portrait of the freedom fighter in Hyderabad. Photographs of the same were posted on his official Twitter account. "

## PM Modi unveils Netaji's hologram

### Soon to be replaced by granite statue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday unveiled a hologram of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the India Gate. The hologram would "soon" be replaced by a granite statue.

The PM paid tribute to the "Can do and Will do" spirit of the Indian National Army (INA) leader saying the country would revive many such memories which were sidelined in the history of freedom struggle.

In a ceremony at the India Gate in the evening attended among others by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Urban and Housing Minister Hardeep Puri, the PM paid glowing tribute to the "brave son of India" who, he said, declared before the British that "main swatantrata bheek main nahin loonga, main ise hasil karunga" (I will not beg for freedom but take it from you by my resolve).

Modi said it is a historic day on Netaji's 125th anniversary --- also being celebrated



as 'Prakram divas'--- a digital statue is being unveiled- to be replaced by a grand granite one - that would, he said "inspire present and many future generations and remind them of their national duty".

The canopy where Netaji's granite statue is to stand had once housed the statue of British monarch King George V which was vacated in 1968.

In 1969, a move was contemplated to install a statue of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru or that of Bose but a decision was deferred for one or the other reasons.

Reminding that "India is presenting with pride the her-



itage of Netaji", Modi pointed out naming of Andaman Island and a Museum there in Netaji's name; march of ex-INA veterans in the Republic Day parade in 2019; unfurling of national flag by him from the Red fort wearing INA cap; and starting of Republic day celebrations from January 23, the birthday of Bose.

Continued on Page 4

### Missing youth from Arunachal found by Chinese army

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A teenager from Arunachal Pradesh who went missing last week has been found by the Chinese army and may be sent back to India in the next few days after establishing his identity and due verification.

One version claimed that the 17-year-old boy was abducted by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), the other narration said he lost his way in the thick jungles while collecting herbs and hunting.

Giving the update about the youth, sources said the PLA confirmed to the Indian Army that they have found a missing person. Authorities were now trying to confirm whether he was the same youth, Miram Taron, who had recently gone missing from Arunachal Pradesh. BJP MP from the State, Tapir Gao, had alleged that PLA troops had abducted the youth from Indian territory on January 18.

Sources said the PLA will confirm the youth's identity using photos and then start the process of sending him back, which could take about a week.

The Indian Army had earlier reached out to the PLA regarding the disappearance of Taron. Defence sources had then said the Army was in touch with the PLA on the matter. Continued on Page 4

## Yogi: Haj House was built earlier, we constructed Mansarovar Bhawan



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a BJP election campaign for upcoming state assembly polls, in Ghaziabad on Sunday. PTI

PTI ■ GHAZIABAD

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday took part in a door-to-door campaign in Ghaziabad and launched a scathing attack on the Samajwadi Party, saying while a Haj House was built here earlier, his government constructed the Kailash Mansarovar Bhawan.

During the day, Adityanath addressed party workers in

Krishna Dental College of Sahibabad and in Saraswati Shishu Mandir in Nehru Nagar, besides the door-to-door campaign in Rajiv Colony of Sahibabad.

"Earlier Haj House was made in Ghaziabad. Our government constructed Kailash Mansarovar Bhawan. Earlier the mafia used to harass traders, but now no mafia can dare to grab property of any trader, doctor or a poor person..." he said.

"In the past, ration meant

for the poor did not reach them and it would go to Bangladesh through the food grains mafia. But today food grains are reaching the poor and 15 crore people have got it. The double engine government is making available a double dose of foodgrains," he said.

The Haj House in Ghaziabad was inaugurated in September 2016, while the Kailash Mansarovar Bhawan was inaugurated in December 2020. Also see Page 2

## CAPSULE

### GOOGLE TO WARN OF SUSPICIOUS FILES

**San Francisco:** Tech giant Google has introduced a new security feature to Drive to help users stay on top of potentially malicious files. Google Drive will now start displaying a warning banner when you are about to download and open a potentially dubious document, image, or any type of file, reports Android Central. The new feature is rolling out across all Google Workspace, G Suite Basic and G Suite Business tiers.

### CHILD DEATH: WOMAN SUES META, SNAP

**New York:** A Connecticut woman is suing Instagram's parent company Meta and Snap Inc, alleging that an addiction to their social media platforms led her young daughter to commit suicide, media reports say. The lawsuit alleges that her death was caused by the potentially dangerous features of the platforms, the report said. The case comes amid growing fears over the impact of social media on children, it added.

### BACHENDRI PAL TO LEAD ALL WOMEN TEAM

**Jamshedpur:** The first Indian woman to conquer Mount Everest, Bachendri Pal will lead a 10-member, all women's team, all of whom are more than 50-years-old on a five-month long expedition from Arunachal to Ladakh along the Himalayan range.

## Soldiers on R-Day parade to wear uniforms from bygone eras to present

Contingents to also  
carry vintage rifles

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

The Republic Day parade this year at Rajpath will see soldiers marching past the saluting base in different uniforms worn by the Army since 1950 till date.

The contingents will also carry rifles of that era. Tanks of various vintage will roll down the parade route showcasing the ongoing process of modernization.

Overall, the parade will see six marching contingents



Army columns on display during the full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day Parade 2022, at the Rajpath in New Delhi, Sunday PTI

wearing different uniforms and carrying different weapons of that era.

The elite commandos of the Parachute Regiment will be seen in the new combat uniform. The Pioneer in the edition dated December 3, last year had reported about these two new additions to the Republic Day parade. Unlike the previous years when the contingents wore the dress of their regiments, the Republic Day this year will see the troops marching past in uniform of the past era --- the 1950s and '60s-and the olive greens of the present.

Continued on Page 4

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# SP making unrealistic promises: CM Yogi

‘Aware of its impending defeat, SP making unrealistic promises’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said that the Samajwadi Party leadership was aware of its impending defeat in the forthcoming assembly elections in the state and, therefore, it was making big and unrealistic promises to the people.

Yogi Adityanath took part in a door-to-door campaign in Mohan Nagar area of Ghaziabad and addressed intellectuals in Sahibabad to seek people's support in the forthcoming elections. General (Retired) VK Singh and some other leaders accompanied him during the campaign.

Taking a dig at Akhilesh Yadav while addressing intellectuals at an event at Sahibabad, Yogi Adityanath said: "Those who failed to provide electricity to the people when they were in power are promising 300 units for free because they know well that they are not coming back and need not bother to keep their promises to the people. Actually, they are used to living in darkness because thieves do not like a moonlit night."

Yogi Adityanath said that all the opposition parties, including Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress, had disappeared from the scene during the COVID-19 pandemic and were busy misguiding people on the two vaccines developed in India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"India has set an example for the developed world in Covid management under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. It is because of effective management (of Covid) that despite having a population four times more than that of the US, the deaths due to the pandemic in India have been half the deaths in the US," he remarked.

Urging intellectuals to visit

## ...remembers Subhash Chandra Bose

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, paid floral tributes to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 125th birth anniversary in Lucknow.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said, "Netaji could have taken care of his family by staying in India or Britain and have earned money but he never accepted that life, he never accepted the British rule and he left his civil service job because for him nothing was more important than the independence of India," the chief minister said. He further said the slogan given by Netaji became the mantra of the country's independence.

"For the independence of India, he gave up his job, he became a part of the ongoing struggle for independence, for the independence of India he also left the Congress office and after that, by staying outside India and forming the Azad Hind Fauj, he gave a new



slogan to the youth of the country and it was *"Tum mujhe khoon do main tumhe azadi dunga"* and it became the mantra of the country's independence," he added.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister remembered the late freedom fighter as 'the great hero of the Indian freedom

struggle' who gave the "immortal freedom mantra" 'You give me blood, I will give you freedom'.

"The great hero of the Indian freedom struggle, the leader of Azad Hind Fauj, the inventor of the immortal freedom mantra 'You give me blood, I will give you freedom'.

Tribute to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary 'Parakram Diwas,' he tweeted in Hindi.

Born on January 23, 1897, Netaji played a crucial role in India's freedom movement. Subhash Chandra Bose had also established the Azad Hind Fauj.

as we need power to serve every individual of the state."

He added, "UP needs the BJP government again to ensure safety of women, poor and common people. The BJP government is needed so that bulldozers continue to run over illegal properties of mafias and gangsters; corruption is kept in check and expressways give momentum to the lives of people."

Yogi also said that Gautam Buddha Nagar would have a world-class film city while the international airport at Jewar would be the biggest in Asia. He also promised to resolve the drinking water problem at Mohan Nagar and Koda localities, pointing out that the state government had provided tap water to seven districts of the

# SP demands ban on opinion polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an intriguing political development, the Samajwadi Party, on Sunday, urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to impose a ban on opinion polls being aired by news channels.

The Samajwadi Party urged the ECI to immediately impose a ban on opinion polls being aired by news channels. This demand has come after several opinion polls reportedly projected a majority for the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance in the UP elections. SP state president Naresh Uttam shot off a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, arguing that the airing of opinion polls at a juncture when the nomination for the first phase had already finished was a violation of the model code of conduct.

Maintaining that the voters were getting influenced by the findings of these surveys, he contended that the prohibition of opinion polls was a prerequisite for free and fair elections.

As per Section 126A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, exit polls cannot be aired from the hour fixed for commencement of poll in the first phase and half an hour after the end of polling in the last phase.

The ECI's formal response to the SP letter is awaited.

A survey conducted by one TV channel projected that the BJP-led alliance shall win 252-272 seats whereas the alliance led by the Akhilesh Yadav-led party might end up with 111-131 seats. On the other hand, Bahujan Samaj Party, Congress and other parties are likely to get 8-16, 3-9 and 0-4 seats respectively. As per the opinion poll, the BJP-led alliance is expected to garner a vote share of 41.3 per cent as against 33.1 per cent of the SP.

Besides, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was the first choice for the top post for 41.2 per cent of the respondents,

## SP announces list its star campaigners

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party, on Sunday, released the list of its 30 star campaigners for the first phase of the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections.

SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, his son and party president Akhilesh Yadav, daughter-in-law Dimple Yadav, Rajya Sabha member Jaya Bachchan, party secretary-general Ramgopal Yadav and MLA Swami Prasad Maurya are among the star campaigners.

Earlier, the SP had announced that Akhilesh Yadav would contest the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections from Mainpuri's Karhal constituency. He is currently a Lok Sabha MP from Azamgarh.

Elections to the 403 assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh will be held in seven phases starting February 10.

11The polling will be held on February 10, 14, 20, and 23, 27, and March 3 and 7 in seven phases. The counting of votes will be taken up on March 10.

while 29.4 per cent of the respondents were in favour of SP chief Akhilesh Yadav. As far as election issues are concerned, unemployment and farmers' protest topped the list followed by increase in prices of fuel and essential commodities, lack of widespread availability of water, bad roads and the issue of stray cattle.

Rating the UP government's performance, 18 per cent of the respondents termed it 'excellent', 38 per cent 'good', 25 per cent 'average' and 19 per cent 'poor'.

## Joined hands with BJP to follow nationalism: Aparna

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Aparna Yadav, the daughter-in-law of Mulayam Singh Yadav, who recently joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, said on Sunday that she joined hands with the party to follow nationalism and she wished to contribute towards the formation of the 'New India'.

Ahead of the UP elections, BJP's women's brigade has now entered a new phase as besides Aparna Yadav, MLA Aditi Singh joined the BJP from Congress along with Priyanka Maurya, the poster girl of Congress 'Ladki hoon..' campaign, and they all held a press conference together in Lucknow on Sunday.

Speaking at the press conference, Aparna Yadav thanked the party members for the warm welcome given to them.

Speaking at her maiden press conference as a BJP leader, Aparna Yadav said, "I thank PM Narendra Modi and CM Yogi Adityanath for the opportunity they have given me. I have chosen BJP because of nationalism."

She further addressed the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and said that the ideologies live and men follow them.

"Thought moves ahead and the man follows it. I believe that man is mortal but thought never dies. Once Shankaracharyaji was asked that when there is a lot of conflict in the mind when such a time comes when the mind is not stable, then what direction can one give to society and he said that thought is medicine," Aparna Yadav said.

She praised the BJP for its work and said that she was looking forward to working with PM Modi. "BJP is the party which has saved the country. I want to move with



Aparna Yadav, Aditi Singh, Sanyukta Bhatia and Priyanka Maurya during an election campaign on Sunday

PM Modi to build a New India. I have got an opportunity to fill colour with CM Yogi in this New India," she said.

Meanwhile, BJP candidate from Rae Bareilly Sadar seat of UP, Aditi Singh, said that the safety of women had been ensured in the Yogi government.

Samajwadi Party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav had earlier given his blessings to his daughter-in-law Aparna Yadav who joined BJP. The meeting on January 21 was

the first meeting between them after she arrived in Lucknow.

Having unsuccessfully contested the 2017 Uttar Pradesh assembly polls from Lucknow Cantonment constituency as SP candidate, she supported various initiatives of the BJP government such as abrogation of Article 370 and the 'Swachh Bharat' campaign besides donating Rs 11 lakh for the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

## Congress a ‘vote katva’ party, says Maya

## Attacks Yogi over his claims of simplicity

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati, on Sunday, hit out at both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress and also made a direct attack on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

"It seems that people in western Uttar Pradesh did not know that the muth in which Yogi mostly lives during his stay in Gorakhpur is not less than a huge bungalow. It would be better if Yogi also tells this fact to the people while campaigning in western UP," the BSP chief tweeted while questioning the praise of his simplicity made by Yogi Adityanath during his campaign in western UP.

Further attacking Yogi over his tall claims of doing several welfare work for the poor and weaker section of society, Mayawati tweeted, "While praising work done by his government for the poor, it would be good if CM should also disclose outstanding work done during her government regarding giving houses and lands to the poor and landless people."

Through another tweet, Mayawati said that in two phases of Manyawar Kanshiram Saheri Garib Aswas



Yojana, over 1.5 lakh houses were given to the poor and weaker sections. Besides, she said, in Sarvan Hitai Garib Awas Yojana also, several lakh landless families were benefited.

The BSP supremo said that her party had always launched a maximum number of welfare programmes for the down-trodden section of society irrespective of caste or religion.

Further attacking the Congress, Mayawati termed it as a "vote katva" party while taking a jibe at Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's statement on Congress chief minister face in UP and later withdrawing it within a few hours.

In a couple of tweets in Hindi on Sunday morning,

Mayawati wrote, "The condition of the Congress party in the elections of the UP assembly has remained so bad that their so-called CM candidate has changed the stand within a few hours."

"In such a situation, it would be better that people do not spoil their vote by voting for Congress, but vote for BSP unilaterally," she appealed to the people

She further said, "In UP, parties like Congress are only vote-cutting parties in the eyes of the people. In such a situation, Bharatiya Janata Party should be out of the power in UP in the interest of the society and a government headed by BSP, which is the number one party in the elections,

should replace them."

It may be mentioned that earlier Congress also dumped BSP, claiming it to be a B-team of the BJP and even questioned Mayawati that if her party was so concerned about the poor and weaker section than where she was when people were suffering from hunger and several lakh people died in pandemic or when the goons under patronage of present government were attacking the modesty of Dalit girls and even killing them.

### BSP RELEASES LIST OF STAR CAMPAIGNERS

Bahujan Samaj Party has released the list of its 18 star campaigners for the UP assembly elections.

In the list, Mayawati's brother Anand Kumar figures as a star campaigner.

The list of star campaigners for the first phase polls includes Mayawati, Anand Kumar, Satish Chandra Mishra, Munkad Ali, Samsuddin Raine, Satpal Peepala, Gore Lal Jatav, Rajkumar Gautam, Suraj Singh Jatav, Ashirwad Arya, Nakul Dubey, Pradeep Jatav, Pratap Singh Baghel, Dinesh Kumar Kazipur, Dr. Kamal Singh, Raj Kartar Singh Nagar, Chand Singh Kashyap, and Satya Prakash.



### NOTICE

Due to mistake my son's name written in school records as Zaid Raini & father's name as Idrees Ahmad, whereas my son's correct name is Mohammad Zaid Raini father's name is Mohammad Idrees Please correct accordingly. Mohammad Idrees 602/1865 Avadh Enclave Colony, Gate No. 1 Dubagga, Kakori Lucknow.

## Minor raped, murdered in Farrukhabad

**Lucknow (PNS):** In a sensational case of rape and murder of a minor in Farrukhabad, the naked body of an 11-year-old girl was found lying in a mustard field on Sunday morning.

As soon as the information was received, the superintendent of police reached the spot with a heavy police force. Forensic team was also called to the spot immediately. The body was sent for post-mortem and further investigations are on.

Reports said that a villager saw the nude body of an 11-year-old girl lying in the mustard field of Shringirampur village under Kamalganj police station in Farrukhabad on Sunday early morn-

ing. He raised an alarm after which a huge crowd gathered at the spot.

The local police also reached the spot and covered the body with a cloth. In the meantime, a villager from Gursahaiganj Kotwali area of Kannauj district also reached and identified the body as that of the 11-year-old daughter of a local villager.

They said that on January 20, the victim's parents had gone to their in-laws' house and when they returned they found their daughter missing. A report in this connection was lodged at Gursahaiganj Kotwali the next morning.

Superintendent of Police Ashok

Kumar Meena said that on January 20, the information about the disappearance of the girl was given by the family members in Gursahaiganj, Kotwali of Kannauj district. The relatives identified the body as that of their 11-year-old daughter. A SOG team has been deployed to work out the case and the accused would be arrested, he said.

Meanwhile, in Moradabad, a 6-year-old girl was raped in Majhola police station area of the district. The police have arrested the accused and registered a case under IPC and POCSO Act, while medical examination of the victim has also been done.

According to the DSP of Civil Line

Circle, a 6-year-old girl was playing outside the house in Majhola police station area. It is alleged that a youth, Ajay Saini, who lives in the neighborhood, took her with him to a dilapidated house on the pretext of giving her money, where he raped the girl.

Meanwhile, a woman working on a building made a noise on seeing the accused, on which people ran to the spot and caught him.

On the basis of the complaint, a case was registered against Ajay Saini on rape charges and POCSO Act at Majhola police station. The court on Saturday sent the accused to jail in judicial custody.

## 100 prisoners likely to be released on R-Day

**Lucknow (PNS):** The Uttar Pradesh government is likely to release 100 prisoners of good conduct, old age and suffering from serious diseases on the occasion of Republic Day on Wednesday.

Those who have completed 16 years of jail term and have crossed the age of 60 years and those with serious illness will be eligible for the release. Besides, the prisoners will also be released on the basis of their good behaviour. The government has examined the files of the eligible prisoners sent by the jail headquarters. The government will now send the list of selected eligible prisoners to Governor Anandiben Patel who will take a final decision on release of the prisoners.

However, in view of the election code of conduct in force, the government is also considering taking permission from the Election Commission of India. In addition to the Adarsh Jail of Lucknow, Nari Bandi Niketan, the prisoners of Varanasi, Bareilly Agra, Fatehgarh and Naini Central Jail will be eligible for release.



# Active cases continue to decline as recoveries surpass fresh cases

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

Maintaining the positive recovery trend -- high recoveries and a low number of fresh COVID-19 cases -- has reduced the active caseload in Uttar Pradesh to 93,757.

In a sharp contrast to Uttar Pradesh, sparsely populated states like Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu account for a heavier active caseload of 2,47,227, 2,79,930 and 1,87,358 respectively.

According to an official communiqué released here on Sunday evening, out of 2,32,051 samples tested in the last 24 hours in Uttar Pradesh, only 13,830 were positive for novel coronavirus infection. In the same period, another 16,521 COVID-19 patients recovered from the infection. The rate of growth has started slowing down, indicating a reduced transmission rate.

Where other major states have been witnessing a greater surge of fresh COVID-19 infections (daily cases ranging up to 30,000), Uttar Pradesh, with emphasis on effective screening, aggressive vaccination and containment measures, has been able to control the spread of novel coronavirus infection comparatively well.

Leading India's vaccination drive with over 24.85 crore total doses of Covid vac-

cine administered, Uttar Pradesh is followed by Maharashtra with 14.60 crore doses administered so far. In terms of percentage, about 65 per cent of the adult population is fully vaccinated and over 98 per cent have received one dose of the vaccine.

Strengthening its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, Uttar Pradesh has also administered over 7.80 lakh 'precautionary doses' of the Covid vaccine to healthcare and frontline workers and those above 60 years.

Committed to providing protection cover to children in the age group of 15-18, the state has so far administered vaccine doses to over 56 per cent teenagers.

Since the beginning of the inoculation drive for this age bracket, more than 7,800,084 teens have received their first dose of the vaccine.

The government has also set a target to provide complete first dose coverage to all the eligible teens by January 25.

Just a few days after crossing the 24 crore dose milestone, UP has inched closer to crossing the 25 crore Covid vaccine shots.

This will be another major landmark as the state continues to conduct one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the country.

## 2,326 test +ve for Covid in city, 2,542 recover

**Lucknow (PNS):** As many as 2,326 people tested positive for coronavirus infection in the city in the last 24 hours while 2,542 recovered from the infection. There were 17,362 active cases in the city on Sunday evening.

Giving this information, Yogesh Raghuvanshi from the CMO office said that amongst those who had tested positive included 1,544 males and 1,057 females.

He said 377 people tested positive for COVID-19 in Chinhat, 388 in Aliganj, 307 in Alambagh, 277 in Indiranagar, 169 in Sarojininagar, 235 in NK Road, 196 in Silver Jubilee, 125 at Red Cross and 77 at Turiyaganj.

Amongst those who tested positive included 147 travellers, 776 contacts, 432 having influenza-like illness, 79 who were pre-surgicals, 127 healthcare workers and 61 who were admitted at the Command Hospital.

Meanwhile, hospitalisation of the positive cases continues to remain low in the Omicron wave in Lucknow district which

is a big relief.

RK Singh, Covid nodal officer from SGPGIMS, said that 60 patients were currently admitted at the SGPGIMS hospital. He said that there had been three COVID-19 deaths at SGPGIMS which were incidental Covid cases.

Lok Bandhu Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Ajay Tripathi said that there nine COVID-19 patients were admitted at the hospital.

He said that 10-15 had been admitted earlier who recovered and went back in home isolation since they had no symptoms.

"These are those patients who are concerned after having tested positive for coronavirus and have got themselves admitted through self-recommendation. This is an age group between 30-40 years. There was a mother with a five-year-old child who had tested positive and got herself admitted at the hospital. They left after we gave them an assurance that if they face any problem they can get themselves admitted to the hospital. Again

there was a 50-year-old who was admitted at Lok Bandhu Hospital whose kretnin levels started falling and so we tried to send him to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital but he refused to stay there and returned home after which he got a readmission at our hospital," Dr Tripathi added.

He said that there was only one patient who was serious and was on oxygen. Dr Tripathi said that several elderly patients who are symptomatic and did not have isolation facilities at home were also given admission if they asked.

Regarding pregnant positive women, he said that they were not admitting pregnant positive women and as per the direction of the CMO, they were being sent to Queen Mary's Hospital.

"The staff is also working for non-Covid patients here and hence we are not admitting positive pregnant women," he said. Nisha Singh from the Queen Mary's Hospital said that approximately 20 pregnant women admitted in the hospital were Covid positive.

## Police searching for clues in Para murder case

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

The kin of the murdered property dealer, Sandeep Pal, refused to perform his last rites on Sunday to press their demand for the arrest the killers.

The cops who reached the spot assured the family that the killers would be arrested soon after which the kin agreed to perform the last rites. On the other hand, the Para police are yet to get any clue about the killers, a day after the murder of 32-year-old property dealer Sandeep Pal.

After the incident came to light on Saturday morning, the police detained and quizzed several youths who were in contact with the deceased and also those who attended the birthday party on Friday night in which Pal had also participated. Sandeep Pal of Narauna village in Kakori was shot in the stomach and later his body was dumped at a vacant plot behind a plywood factory in Para. His motorcycle was found parked near a school in the area.

Sources said the police scanned the CCTV footage but did not get any clue about the killers.

"Police are yet to find out the persons with whom Sandeep was after he left the party venue," sources in the police said.

They said the investigating team suspected the role of some insider.

"It seems that Sandeep was lured to attend the birthday party and later he was killed. There seems to be some conspiracy," they said.

**FOUND DEAD:** The body of an elderly man was recovered from his house in Saadatganj police station area on Sunday.

Police suspect that the man died due to the biting cold. The body was sent for autopsy.

The deceased was identified as Satnam Singh of Chaupatiya. He had two children who are said to be mentally unsound and both were not at the house when the police reached there on getting information from a neighbour.

**ALLEGED:** A girl accused four persons of sending obscene photos on her mobile phone and making obscene comments and threatening to kill her when she objected, in Talkatora police station area. The girl lodged a report naming Ashutosh, Sohan, Vijay and a woman. A team is investigating the case.

## Woman accuses neighbour of molestation in Krishna Nagar

**Lucknow (PNS):** A woman accused her neighbour of molesting her and thrashing her over a land related issue in Krishna Nagar. The woman also named the mother of the accused, alleging that she provoked him to teach her (victim) an unforgettable lesson. Those named in the case were identified as Ashutosh Tyagi and his mother Arti, both residents of Indralok Colony in Krishna Nagar.

As per the complainant, the

woman's father owned a plot close to the house of Ashutosh in the colony. On January 19, she had gone to the colony as she had to remove the garbage dumped at the plot.

It was alleged that when she was getting the work done, Ashutosh and his mother reached the spot and picked up a fight with her.

"They started abusing me and when I objected, they attacked me with sticks. Arti kept inciting Ashutosh to beat

me and teach me a lesson that I will never forget. On being provoked, Ashutosh started dragging me inside his house. I was scared and cried for help. The residents assembled at the scene and saved me. Someone from the mob filmed the incident in which both Ashutosh and Arti are seen attacking me and abusing me and the molestation by Ashutosh," the victim claimed. The police registered a case in this connection.

## CDRI scientists develop RT-PCR kit for detection of Omicron variant

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

The Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) scientists have developed an indigenous RT-PCR kit 'OM' for detection of the Omicron variant of novel coronavirus.

According to the CDRI spokesperson, as the coronavirus continues to mutate, it becomes challenging to diagnose and treat different variants of concern.

"The Omicron variant, though milder in symptoms and fatality, is a super spreader and is propagating like wild fire across the world. Currently, detection of this variant depends upon tests like the S-gene drop out or by NGS (Nextgen sequencing) of the whole viral genome. The S-gene drop out method is not specific to pinpoint the type of variant and the NGS (Nextgen sequencing) method has its

limitations in terms of expense, turnaround and the number of centres which can provide such service. Hence we have developed this OM kit for its detection," the CDRI spokesperson said.

CDRI Director, Prof Tapas K Kundu, said that the current upsurge in Covid infections indicated variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus circulating in the Indian population.

"So far most of the RT-PCR based diagnostic kits do not confirm whether Covid infection is caused by the highly mutated Omicron variant. The scientific team comprising Dr Atul Goel, Dr Ashish Arora and Dr Niti Kumar at CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow along with our industry partner Biotech Desk Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad have successfully developed the indigenous RT-PCR kit INDI-CoV-OmTM for specific detection of the Omicron variant. In the



entire world our kit is one of the very few specific kits for detecting Omicron," he said.

Dr Atul Goel, team leader, said that with the joint efforts of Dr Ashish Arora and Dr Niti Kumar they had developed an indigenous diagnostic kit for direct detection of Omicron variant in patient samples.

"This CDRI's primer probe kit has been tested and validated by Prof Amita Jain in a number of novel coronavirus

positive patient samples at King George's Medical University in Lucknow. This provides an advantage of a quick and a cost-effective detection of Omicron variant over genome sequencing for a large population. Further, this indigenous technology can be aligned for detection of other emerging variants of COVID-19 infection and other respiratory infections," he added.

Dr Goel further mentioned

that the indigenous fluorescent dyes and quencher technology would help in becoming self-reliant in the development of RT-PCR based detection kits for emerging infections in future.

Dr Shraddha Goenka, managing director of Biotech Desk Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad, said that since this wave was happening now and there was not much time, it was quite an uphill task to be able to deliver to the market a detection kit which shall make this specific detection within the reach of the common man.

"However, since we have been in the supply business for long, it has been possible for us to source all components of the kit in record time so that we can roll out our kit, the INDI-CoV-OmTM by mid-February. We are now working on regulatory approvals and the assembly of the kit, and keep

our fingers crossed for an early release," she said.

CSIR-CDRI Director Prof Kundu further informed that at present CDRI was gaining sufficient expertise in the antiviral research for therapeutics and diagnostics to combat any kind of viral infections.

The team lead by Dr Atul Goel is fully prepared for the detection of broad spectrum and specific pathogenic viral infection. This kit for SARS-CoV-2 Omicron diagnosis has been submitted to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for independent validation and should be available for the people of India.

"We are delighted to serve the nation. CDRI team of researchers Dr Atul Goel, Dr Niti Kumar, Dr Ashish Arora, Surbhi Mundra, Varsha Kumari, Kundan Singh Rawat, Ms. Priyanka Pandey," he added.

## 2,150 litres of diesel recovered from house in Banthra

**Lucknow (PNS):** A joint team of the surveillance cell and police recovered 11 drums filled with 2,150 litres of diesel from a house in Banthra on Sunday.

The police arrested the accused who had stocked the diesel stolen from tankers in his house and were interrogating him to know about his aides involved in the crime.

The accused was identified as Jai Prakash Yadav of Narera village in Banthra. He confessed his crime and disclosed that he used to get diesel stolen from the tankers transporting diesel to different destinations. After collecting the stolen diesel, he used to stock it and later sold it to customers at a lower price.

While the police did not disclose more details about the gang and its modus operandi, sources said Jai Prakash and his men used to steal diesel in connivance with the tanker drivers and cleaners.

"The tankers, after being filled at a depot, are sealed before they leave the depot. The miscreants mix some chemicals which creates foams in the diesel to maintain the level of diesel in the tanker," the sources said.

They said some filling stations had complained of getting lesser volume of diesel in the supply and the authorities concerned had conducted an internal checking, the finding of which was shared with the police.

"The practice of stealing diesel was in the know of the local police and the miscreant had patronage of lower rung cops. A surveillance team worked in the case in a secret way and the fraud was exposed," they said.

## SP leader lodges report against a viral audio clip

**Lucknow (PNS):** Unidentified miscreants made viral an audio clip purportedly of former state minister in Samajwadi Party government and state secretary of the party, Ram Singh Rana.

The SP office-bearer lodged a report in this connection but he did not name anyone. Police registered a case under Section 500 of the Indian Penal Code (for defamation) and under Section 67 of the Information Technology Act.

In his complaint, Rana, a resident of Gomti Nagar, said the miscreants made an audio clip viral on social media using a part of his name.

"I have nothing to do with the audio clip and the voice in it is not mine. Some persons with vested interests have made the audio clip viral," he said.

He said he suspected some of his political adversaries in the opposition political parties who aimed to tarnish his image in the Samajwadi Party, made the audio viral. "The audio clip has harmed my reputation and it has also lowered the reputation of my political party. I request the police to initiate proper action against the miscreants," he said.

## LU carrying out research on spotted munia

**Lucknow (PNS):** Birds largely rely upon the natural day length as daily and annual timer to time their behavioral and physiological processes for their reproductive activity, depending on the availability of light in the environment. Several experiments on birds, both in wild and in laboratory conditions, have revealed a lot about the behaviour and physiology of photo periodic birds.

But spotted munia shows an atypical photosensitivity and thus is considered as a non-photoperiodic bird. It has been found to respond even under dark-domi-

## Birth anniversary Subhash Chandra Bose celebrated in city

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

The 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was celebrated with enthusiasm in the city.

Cadets of 20 UP Girls' Battalion NCC and 67 UP Battalion NCC and students of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University together celebrated the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose as Parakram Diwas.

As the chief guest of the programme, BBAU Vice-Chancellor Acharya Sanjay Singh, inaugurated the programme by offering flowers to the portrait of Netaji and said that Netaji devoted his life for the nation.

"He presented an ideal in the society by working in the



interest of the country. Similarly every human being should work keeping in mind the interest of the country," he said.

The programme was conducted by Associate NCC Officer, Capt (Dr) Raj Shree.

BBAU Registrar Prof S Victor Babu, chairperson of Unnat Bharat Abhiyan, Prof Naveen Kumar Arora, chair-

person of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav Committee and Gender Champion Committee, Prof Shilpi Verma, Lt. (Dr) Manoj Kumar Dadwal, Dr Ravi Shankar Verma, SK Dixit along with NCC cadets, teachers and students were present in the programme.

At Lucknow University, the vice-chancellor garlanded the statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at the Subhash Hostel of the university. Also present on the occasion were Dean of Student Welfare Poonam Tandon and Subhash Hostel provost NK Singh.

Samaj Sewa Sansthan distributed tea and breakfast amongst the patients of KGMU on the occasion of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's birth anniversary.

## Man found hanging in Jankipuram

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**

A 35-year-old man was found hanging in a house where he was living alone in the Jankipuram police station area on Sunday.

The deceased was identified as Ram Lakhan Sharma of Madien. He was living in a rented house in Sita Vihar Colony in Jankipuram.

On Sunday, Ram Lakhan did not wake up as usual. In the meantime, the landlord, Mohammed Rafiq, reached the house to meet

the tenants. He also called Ram Lakhan and reached his room when the latter did not respond.

"I found Ram Lakhan hanging from the ceiling with a cable wire tied around his neck," Rafiq told police.

Police said Ram Lakhan was staying all alone for the last three months after his wife along with her two children left for her parents' house following a domestic dispute.

Police sent the body for autopsy.

climate change and habitat loss, and help in the conservation of these birds," she said.

"This investigation will monitor the involvement of molecules, other than the ones found in the photoperiodic birds, in the regulation of the reproductive cycle in this 'non photoperiodic' seasonally breeding bird. It is expected that the investigation will establish a relationship of the behavioural, daily activities and neural correlates during the reproductive cycle in a species during a period of approximately 12 months," she added.





# Teenager dies of alleged police excesses in Kheri

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

**A**lleged excesses of the cops in Lakhimpur Kheri district led to the death of a minor boy.

The teenager was reportedly caught by the police on charges of mobile phone theft and brought to the police station where third degree was used to compel him to accept the crime after which he was released. Four days later on Sunday morning, the boy succumbed allegedly to the assault by the cops.

The family members accused the police of brutally beating up the juvenile in custody. Angry family members staged a demonstration by placing the body of the teenager on the road after which local officers reached the spot and

assured of action against the guilty after probing the matter.

The incident took place in Indira Nagar village under Sampurna Nagar police station in Kheri.

On Thursday, Rahul, 14-year-old son of Lakshi Ram of Indira Nagar village, was taken into custody by the Sampurna Nagar police on charges of mobile theft on the basis of a complaint made by his uncle. The family alleged that despite there being no confirmation of the allegation of mobile theft against Rahul, the police beat him up in the police station. They said when Rahul's condition became very critical after the alleged beating, the cops released him from the police station. The family members took him to a doctor and later admitted him at the communi-

ty health centre in Palia.

The family claimed that the doctors told them of some haemorrhage and advised surgery.

However, before Rahul could be treated, he succumbed to his injuries on Sunday.

The news of the teenager's death agitated his relatives and local residents who blocked the road after keeping the body on Khajuria road in the village. They demanded that a case be registered and the guilty policemen be arrested.

Kheri Superintendent of Police, Sanjeev Suman, who reached the spot along with other officers, said that the victim's uncle made a complaint of mobile phone theft and both sides were called to the police station and the boy was interrogated for 2-3 hours and

later he was handed over to the family safely. On January 20, the victim's mother complained to the police that her son was beaten up by his uncle. He was later admitted to the hospital and died on Sunday morning. He said the family was now blaming the police. Suman said the matter would be investigated and action taken against the guilty.

Meanwhile at Aligarh's Dehli Gate police station, a riot control repeater gun accidentally went off, injuring three persons. The incident took place late on Saturday night. All three were rushed to hospital.

The senior superintendent of police also reached the spot and handed over the investigation to the circle officer while the guilty cop was removed and attached to the reserve police

lines.

The relatives of the injured, besides MLA Sanjeev Raja and former mayor Shakuntala Bharti, reached the spot. The family created a ruckus but they were pacified by the officers.

Reports said the duty of constable Ankit was in the night shift on Saturday. Around 10 o'clock he received the riot control repeater gun from the day shift constable. After coming on the road outside the police station, he was checking the gun when it accidentally went off injuring three persons, two of whom were identified as Sumit and Dev, residents of Delhi Gate. The injured were taken to the district hospital. CO Raghavendra Singh said that no one was seriously injured and after first aid they were sent home.

# MARD determined to show its prowess in election

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

**O**ne can simply give thumbs up for their confidence levels and their determination to see that their voices are heard. MARD (Mera Adhikar Rashtriya Dal), a party which has been working for the rights of men, will be fielding six candidates, including two from Lucknow, in the Vidhan Sabha elections despite the fact that the party had secured a mere 1,000 votes for its two candidates who stood for the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 when the party first came to the forefront.

In the MARD manifesto, it has been clearly stated that if the party comes to power it would start a 'Men's Power Line', a 'Men Welfare Ministry', focus on 'Beta Padhyae', stress on jail until guilt is proved, bring in shared parenting law for marriage disputes, reservation of seats for men in government transport, make it mandatory for the police to wear 'body worn' with audio being kept live in public domain, ensure 50 per cent of the amount received after the death of a policeman or army man would be reserved for the children, 30 per cent of the aged parents and 20 per cent for the wife.

On being asked whether they saw themselves standing a chance, considering the whole focus was on the bigger political parties in the election, Mohan said, "Just because there are bigger political parties does not mean that we stop fighting elections. It is a matter of half of the population, if women form half the population, then men also form the other half. We just want to be heard," he added.

He said that they had field-

rape case the onus to prove it wrong is on the man but there is no law which punishes a woman who makes a false charge and something needs to be done about it because in case of marital rape there could be several false accusations," he said.

President of the party, Kapil Mohan, says that they have no option but to fight for the rights of the men when the laws are getting more and more women centric.

"We formed a party because we want to have the power to stop the process of formation of such laws and thereby save those who are affected by the laws which are increasingly pro-women. This does not mean that we are against women but we want to fight for our own protection," he said.

Mohan said it was easy to make an allegation of rape these days.

He said that with the focus being on marital rape these days, it was a great cause of concern for men regarding its misuse. "Currently if there is a

ed two candidates in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, one from Lucknow and the other from Varanasi. "When we stood for the elections for the first time we got 474 votes for our candidate in Lucknow which was a big thing for us because in our election meetings barely 150 would gather and in Varanasi we had secured 498 votes on EVMs and one postal ballot which was interesting itself because the numbers were equal to Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code against which we were fighting," he said.

He said that one of their candidates had also contested for the by-election in 2020.

"For this election we are fielding six candidates -- one each from Bareilly, Rampur, Gorakhpur, Allahabad and two from Lucknow," he said.

He admitted that their party was the first of its kind in the world.

Incidentally, he said that there was a woman candidate who would be also fighting the election from their party. "In the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, all the proposers for our candidate were women and the administration was quite surprised to see that.

"These women are working and professional women," he added.

A businessman by profession, Kapil Mohan, who formed the party, will not be contesting from any seat.

# Apna Dal (S) fields Muslim candidate from Rampur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

**A**pna Dal (Sonelal), an ally of Bharatiya Janata Party, has announced to field a Muslim candidate, Haider Ali Khan, from Suar Tanda assembly constituency in Rampur district.

Khan will contest against Abdullah Azam of the Samajwadi Party.

Despite there being no official announcement so far on the seat-sharing arrangement for the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls, Apna Dal (S) on Sunday announced

Haider Ali Khan as its candidate from Suar Tanda in Rampur.

Khan is the first candidate announced by Apna Dal (S), as well as the first Muslim candidate to be fielded by the alliance.

He will be pitted against SP candidate Abdullah Azam, who is the son of jailed SP MP Mohammad Azam Khan.

Previously, Abdullah Azam had been elected from Suar Tanda, but the Allahabad High Court had quashed his election on the grounds that he was less



than 25 years at the time of filing his nomination.

His case is pending in the Supreme Court.

Haider Ali Khan's grandfather, Nawab Zulfikar Ali Khan, was a five-term Congress MP from Rampur and his father, Nawab Kazim Ali Khan, is a four-term MLA and presently the Congress candidate from Rampur.

Khan himself was previously named as the Congress candidate from Suar Tanda before he defected and became the candidate of Apna Dal (S).

# Race for tickets strain family ties this UP election

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

**I**n poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, family ties are going through a test as closely related candidates pull out all stops in their hunt for tickets.

Driven with ambition, close relatives are trying to elbow out each other for a nomination in various assembly segments.

One glaring case of family tussle is in Sarojini nagar assembly seat in Lucknow, where minister Swati Singh and her BJP state vice president husband Dayashankar Singh are locked in a ticket race.

Another keen tug-of-war is witnessed in Amethi, where the first and second wife of former Congress stalwart Sanjay Singh are vying for the BJP nomination. Garima Singh, Singh's first wife, is sitting MLA of BJP from Amethi.

But when Sanjay Singh defected to BJP, his present wife Amita Singh emerged as her challenger. Sanjay Singh had given up his Rajiya Sabha seat before joining BJP in July 2019.

Sources close to him said he is lobbying to secure nom-

ination for Amita Singh, the former Badminton player he married after divorcing Garima Singh in 1995.

In the 2017 state election, Amita Singh, then contesting on a Congress ticket, had stood fourth in the seat.

BJP's Lok Sabha coordinator Rajesh Masala told PTI-Bhasha that party's word will be final in the choice of candidates.

"Selection of a candidate is no issue here. Whoever the party gives the ticket, their victory will be ensured," he said.

Contest for ticket has created fissure in a prominent political family in Ghazipur district too.

Kin of deceased muscleman-politician Krishnanand Rai are competing with each other for the BJP ticket.

Rai, a former BJP MLA from Mohammadabad, was gunned down in 2005.

Political strongman Mukhtar Ansari and Munna Bajrang are booked in this connection.

In the subsequent bypoll, his wife Alka Rai had won the seat, and won it again in 2017

on a BJP ticket defeating Mukhtar Ansari's brother Simatullah Ansari, a Samajwadi Party leader.

Sources in the family said that Alka Rai is now trying for nomination of his son, Piyush Rai, from the seat.

But Krishnanand's elder brother's son Anand Rai too has staked a claim on the seat, putting up banners in the area.

"Everybody knows that after the death of my uncle, I sacrificed my youth for the family as well as for the people of the area. "In addition to fighting the court cases I faced challenges from rivals and Alka Rai merely remained a 'chhetra' (face), Anand Rai told PTI-Bhasha. "I ensured her victory in elections and now she is trying a BJP ticket for her son, how can I tolerate this?"

On the controversies, BJP state leader Naveen Srivastava said people are free to seek tickets, but they will have to accept the decision of the party when it makes them.

Ghorawal BJP MLA Anil Maurya and his elder brother Udaylal Maurya, who left BJP and joined SP, too might be pit-

ted against each other.

In Gorakhpur district's Chillupar assembly segment, ex-minister Markanday Chand's son CP Chand and his cousin's wife, BJP State Women Cell vice president Ashmita Chand are trying for the party nomination.

CP Chand who was elected MLC from SP had recently switched over to the BJP.

"There is no clash within the family, Ranvijay Chand, a member of the family," said.

While C P Chand will contest the poll for legislative council, Ashmita Chand is preparing for the assembly election. This is the view of the family. We are waiting for the party decision, he said.

In Bidhuna assembly seat in Auraiya district, a father and his daughter have found themselves in the opposite camps.

Sitting BJP MLA Vinay Shakya left the party to join SP along with Swami Prasad Maurya and others.

His daughter Riya Shakya opposed the decision and blamed his grandmother and uncle for the defection. Sources said she is preparing to contest

against her father on a BJP ticket.

Former union home minister Ramlal Rahi's son Suresh Rahi has been named as its candidate by the BJP from Hargaoan seat in Sitapur district, while his ex-MLA elder brother Ramesh Rahi is seeking SP ticket.

Recently Congress prominent face in western UP Imran Masood switched over to the SP, while his elder brother Noman Masood embraced BSP.

Cracks have surfaced in SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav's clan too.

His younger daughter-in-law Aparna Yadav, and other close relatives, Hariom Yadav and Pramod Gupta, have joined BJP leaving the Akhilesh Yadav-led SP.

Likewise in Apna Dal, union state minister Anupriya Patel and her mother Krishna Patel are two leading factions of party.

Former minister Swami Prasad Maurya may have walked out of BJP to join SP, but his Badaun MP daughter Sanghmitra Maurya continues to remain in the saffron party.

# Desertion of OBC ministers, MLAs will have no impact on BJP: Maurya

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

**D**eputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Sunday said desertion of OBC ministers and MLAs from the BJP will have no impact on the party's poll prospects in Uttar Pradesh as all sections of society trust Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

They have left to fulfil their 'self-interest' and not for 'any ideology', the BJP leader said.

Recently, Swami Prasad Maurya, Dara Singh Chauhan and Dharam Singh Saini quit the state cabinet and the BJP to join the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party (SP) along with some legislators.

Dismissing any challenge from rivals in the high-decibel seven-phase Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, which begins next month, Deputy Chief Minister Maurya said it was claimed that the BJP would be impacted in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, but the party won, and used the Hindi proverb 'khoda pahar, nikle chuhiya' to describe the claim makers.

He claimed that like in 2019, after the assembly polls' results are declared on March 10 neither Yadav, Congress' Priyanka Gandhi Vadra nor other "so-called challengers" to the BJP will be seen.

Taking a swipe at the leaders who deserted the BJP, he told PTI in an interview that no voter has gone with them.

The desertion was seen in political circles as a major blow to the BJP's support among Other Backward Castes (OBCs), which form over 50 per cent of the state's population.

The BJP's "double-engine" government has done a lot of

work for the people and "I say that in (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi ji there is a confluence of the upper castes, backward castes and the scheduled castes..." Maurya said ahead of the polls to the 403-member Uttar Pradesh assembly.

Hitting out at the defectors, he said in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had won 73 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, and then these people were not with the BJP.

The BJP won again in the 2017 assembly polls after the historic win of 2014, Maurya, a prominent OBC face of the saffron party in the state, said.

Swami Prasad Maurya, Chauhan and Saini had left the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and joined the BJP before the 2017 state polls.

"Somebody joining the party or leaving it hardly makes a difference as the BJP is very strong at the booth level. I don't feel that any voter has gone with them (defectors). They have gone out of their vested self-interest and not for any ideology," Deputy Chief Minister Maurya said.

The BJP is running a number of campaigns and in the state, under its government there has been an improvement in law and order, and a number of developmental works have been done, he said.

Even if all rival parties come together, the BJP will be stronger, Maurya, who is in the fray from Sirathu, said.

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections is an example. The SP, BSP and RLD came together, but the BJP (and its allies) won 64 seats in the state, and got 51 per cent of votes, Maurya said.

On who is the face of the BJP in the state polls —

Narendra Modi or Yogi Adityanath, he said, "Chief ministers are generally the face (of the party) in a state. The BJP is not a party of one state that it will remain confined there like the SP, BSP or the Congress."

"We are a pan-India party, and there are prominent faces, whose one programme will lead the party to victory in 100 seats," he said, adding "we will win on the development work done.

On Yadav claiming that his rainbow coalition is becoming stronger with every passing day, Maurya mockingly said, "Similar claims were made in 2019 Lok Sabha elections." "But, when the results came, it was 'khoda pahar, nikle chuhiya'. There is no strength in his claims, Maurya said.

Continuing with his attack on Yadav, he said, "If he (Yadav) says that dynastic politics is socialism, then this is equivalent to ridiculing socialism."

On the matter of Lord Krishna appearing in Yadav's dreams, Maurya said, "If Lord Krishna had come in his dreams, then I believe he must have told him to stop making efforts in 2022, and prepare for 2027. About Aparna Yadav, the younger daughter-in-law of SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, joining the BJP, he said even before joining the BJP, Aparna's point of view was quite similar to the BJP's view point on various issues.

Maurya who recently raised issues related to Mathura, said, "The BJP never linked temples with elections. For the BJP, prominent religious places are a centre of faith, and not election issues. It is the opposition, which makes them an election issue.

# India's 'tallest man' joins SP, hopes to dwarf opponents

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

**A**t 8 feet and 1 inch, Dharmendra Pratap Singh from Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh has always stood out, dwarfing most others around him and leaving them awestruck.

Now, the former event manager, who claims to be the tallest man in India, is making his political debut with the Samajwadi Party and hopes to help it come out on the top in the upcoming state assembly polls.

Singh told PTI on Sunday, "I will work to take the party to greater heights and dwarf the stature of my opponents. The stature of the rival political parties has already been reduced as a number of their leaders have joined the SP."

"Whatever duties are assigned to me by the party, I will discharge them to the best of my ability. If the party asks me to campaign for SP chief Akhilesh 'bhaiya', then I will go to Karhal and seek votes for him," he said.

Singh said he decided to

join the SP as the party does not discriminate against anyone and takes everyone along.

Responding to a question about the SP having a pro-criminal image, Singh said, "If there are criminals and mafia elements in the SP, then you must specifically point them out. There are people who only spread rumours, and rumours should not be believed. Has there been any party under whose tenure there were no riots?"

Asked if he will be contesting the assembly polls, Singh

said it is for the SP president to decide.

"As of now, I have just joined the party. As far as contesting the assembly elections is concerned, the decision in this regard will be taken by party chief Akhilesh ji. If he gives me a ticket, then I will definitely contest the elections," he said.

He added that if the party gives him a ticket, he will prefer to contest from the Pratapgarh assembly constituency.

Singh on Saturday joined

the SP in Lucknow in the presence of party president Akhilesh Yadav.

The SP tweeted a photo in which Singh, dressed in a crisp white kurta-pyjama with a grey Nehru jacket on top, is seen standing with Yadav and other party leaders.

Singh said he requires double the amount of fabric as compared to a normal person to get a kurta-pyjama stitched.

"For a kurta, I need 4.5 to 5 metres of fabric. For a pyjama, I require around 4 metres of fabric," he said.

## FROM PAGE 1

### 'OMICRON IN COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION STAGE NOW'

not foreign travellers, and a revised sampling and sequencing strategy of INSACOG is being worked out to address genomic surveillance objectives in the wake of dynamic changing scenario of virus infection," an earlier bulletin, dated January 3 but also released now, said.

It had warned that Omicron is now in community transmission in India and has become dominant in Delhi and Mumbai, where new cases have been rising exponentially.

"Most Omicron cases so far have been asymptomatic or mild. Since initial detection has primarily been in vaccinated travellers, this should not be taken to mean that Omicron infection will also be mild in high-risk unvaccinated subjects. The threat level remains high and requires constant vigil as the situation rapidly evolves with community spread," it had said adding that Covid-19 appropriate behaviour and vaccination were main shields against all form

mutations of SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### PM MODI UNVEILS NETAJI'S HOLOGRAM

"Azadi Ke Amrit Mahotsav resolves that India will revive its identity and inspirations," said Modi.

"It is unfortunate that after Independence, along with the culture and rites of the country, work was done to erase the contribution of many great personalities," he said.

This is being now "corrected" very openly, said the PM.

"Ise danke ki chot par desh sudhar raha hain...", he said saying " efforts were made in the past "to limit roles of lakhs of freedom fighters in the country" and referred to installation of Statue of Unity of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and due recognition accorded to the chairman of the constituent assembly B R Ambedkar and freedom fighter and tribal leader Birs Munda.

Modi also gave away freshly announced "Aapada awards" for disaster management for 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 on the occasion and recalled how the

government has changed the face of disaster management in the country.

Before the PM took the stage, Shah recalled the 35,000 km journey of Bose took from Kolkata, Berlin to Japan and his "grand efforts" to free India.

He said "attempts were made that the name of the Netaji is forgotten" and complimented Modi for taking several major steps to enshrine the memory of the great freedom fighter.

### MISSING YOUTH FROM ARUNACHAL FOUND BY CHINESE ARMY

They said after the Army received information about the missing person and it "immediately contacted the PLA through established mechanism of hotline", informing them that an individual "who was collecting herbs and hunting, has lost his way and cannot be found."

The Army then sought assistance from the PLA to locate Taron on their side and return him as per protocol. The PLA responded on January 21 saying that they had found a boy.

Gao, who is the MP from Arunachal

East, had termed it an instance of abduction from Indian territory. He said two people had been abducted, but one of them managed to escape and report it to the authorities.

The MP had tweeted on January 19 saying, "Chinese #PLA has abducted Sh Miram Taron, 17 years of Zido vill. yesterday 18th Jan 2022 from inside Indian territory, Lungta for area (China build 3-4 kms road inside India in 2018) under Siyungla area (Bishing village) of Upper Siang dist, Arunachal Pradesh."

The teenager, a native of Zido village in the Upper Siang district, went missing on Tuesday. The district authorities said the youth along with others were hunting in the border area.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had targeted the Centre over the missing boy. "Just a few days before Republic Day, the future of India is kidnapped by China. We stand with the family of Taron and we will not give up hope, will not give up, won't accept defeat. PM's stupid silence is his statement - he doesn't care!" Gandhi tweeted.

Incidentally, the PLA had detained five youths in September 2020 from the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal

Pradesh and released them after a week.

### SOLDIERS ON R-DAY TO DON UNIFORMS FROM BYGONE ERAS TO PRESENT

These troops will also carry vintage .303 rifles, the main infantry weapon in the early 1950s, and 7.62mm rifles.

Giving details here on Sunday about the marching contingents, Major General Alok Kakkar, Chief of Staff, Delhi area said troops of the Rajput regiment will be seen wearing the uniform from 1950 and carrying .303 rifles. This will be followed by the Assam regiment donning the uniform from 1960 and carrying .303 rifles.

Soldiers of Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry (JAKLI) will be in the uniform from 1970 and carry 7.62 mm rifles, while troops from Sikh Light Infantry (SIKHLI) and Army Ordnance will don the present-day olive green and carry INSAS rifles.

The commandos of the elite Parachute Regiment will don the new combat uniform unveiled at the Army Day parade on January 15. The commandoes will carry

the latest Tavor rifles.

Given the restrictions due to the corona pandemic, the number of troops in marching contingents has been reduced from 144 to 96, he said. The number of visitors is reduced to 5,000 to 7,000 for the parade from 25,000 last year. The parade will commence from Vijay Chowk and end at the National Stadium. Earlier, it used to conclude at the Red Fort.

There will be a total of 16 marching contingents. Six from the Army, one each from Navy and Air Force, four Central Armed Police Forces, one from Delhi Police two from National Cadet Corps and one NSS, Kakkar said.

The guns systems to be rolled out on Rajpath will include vintage platforms like PT 76 and Centurion used in 1965 and 1971, Arjun tank wars to the modern ones like the Dhanush gun system.

Vintage platforms like HT 16 for electronic warfare to the modern ones like Tarang Shakti and the potent Akash Missile system, the first indigenously designed air defence system that has the capability of carrying out surveillance of airspace up to 150 km and can engage hostile aerial platforms to a range of 25 km will also be part of the parade.



# Vaccination means protection from Covid: BHU study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As the world continues to reel under a fresh wave of COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-Cov-2 virus, vaccinating the most vulnerable and population as a whole are the uphill tasks governments across the globe face today. The virus changed the world and lives of people as never before. 'The only way to put life back on track seems to be a widespread vaccination programme which would in turn generate a general resistance against a severe and complicated form of disease, even if the infection occurs. Many vaccines have been introduced in the market and are being delivered through government sponsored vaccination programmes in India and across the world. India is conducting one of the most successful and the largest vaccination programmes in the world. It is generally observed that those vaccinated as per protocol fare well even if they get infected subsequently. This common perception has been further concretised and documented through a study by physicians in the



Prof Ashish Verma and Dr Ishan Kumar

Department of Radiodiagnosis at the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS BHU).

The team of doctors under the leadership of Prof Ashish Verma and Dr Ram Chandra Shukla, Dr Pramod Kumar Singh and Dr Ritu Ojha, provided one of the earliest documentary evidence to confirm the above notion. The study is first of its kind in the country so far. The group compiled their observation in an original research paper which has been published in the journal 'European Radiology' which

has a high impact factor of 5.3. The investigators analyzed high resolution Computed Tomography scans of persons infected with SARS-CoV-2 and showing symptoms and subdivided them in three groups, viz those who were unvaccinated, those who had received partial vaccination and those who had received vaccination as per protocol. The variable under evaluation was the CT severity score, whereby differential analysis of the variability on this parameter between the three groups was the outcome.

Patients who received com-

plete two doses of vaccination had significantly low CT scores compared to the partially vaccinated patients. The CT scores were significantly lower in completely vaccinated patients of lower ages (below 60 years) while patients above 60 years did not show significantly different CT scores between the vaccinated and non-vaccinated groups.

Though this is an initial observational compilation with a small sample size, based only on patients reporting to a tertiary Covid-care centre, it provides an initial insight into the efficacy of the vaccine and the immunization programme in India.

Notably this work includes data collected from actual patients during their routine treatment, and no external intervention or sampling was performed on/from these persons.

The group also took utmost care that there was no breach of patient related ethics and patient privacy, while this study was also approved by the ethics committee of this institute.

# RSS leader praises Modi for giving respect to Netaji

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) executive member Indresh Kumar praised the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving respect to the country by putting a statue of Netaji Subhash Bose at India Gate. 'For the first time, the country has given full respect to its superhero because since 1945, the Congress must be ashamed for sidelining Netaji, who is now being worshiped as the national deity,' he said while addressing a function at Subhash Mandir, Lamahi here on occasion of Netaji's birth anniversary on Sunday. 'Every Indian is indebted to Subhash for his contribution during the freedom struggle,' said that senior RSS activist. The function was attended by several religious leaders and 11 Vedic Brahmins, along with senior religious leaders of Kashi and Ayodhya Mahants offered prayers amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. The programme was organised under the auspices of Vishal Bharat Sansthan (VBS). Mahant Balak Das of Patalpuri Math, Subhash Mandir priest Khushi Raman Bharatvanshi, founder Dr Rajeev Srivastava, Shambhu Devacharya of Ayodhya, Mahant Avadh Bihari Das, Mahant Mahavir Das, Mahant Sarveshwar Sharan Das, Mahant Shravan Das, Mahant



RSS leader Indresh Kumar paying tributes to Netaji at Lamahi in Varanasi on Sunday.

Pioneer

Umesh Das and many others were present. On the occasion, several persons were also honoured.

Meanwhile, the birth anniversary of Netaji was also celebrated by the Department of Posts at the Regional Office. Postmaster General (PMG) Krishna Kumar Yadav paid floral tributes to the portrait of Netaji and remembered his contribution in the freedom movement of the country. Superintendent (Post Office)

Sanjay Verma, assistant director Ram Milan, postmaster (Varanasi Cantt) RS Verma, postal inspector VN Dwivedi, Shrikant Pal, Rajendra Yadav and many other officers and employees were also present.

Similarly, a function was also held near Netaji's statue at Azad Hind Park (Sagra) under the auspices of Amar Shahid Seva Samiti in which former Vice Chancellor of Kind George Medical University (KGMU) Lucknow Padma Shri

Prof Saroj Chooramani was the chief guest while Dean of Faculty of Ayurveda, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Prof Kamal Nayan Dwevedi was guest of honour. Samiti chief Santosh Kumar Agrawal presided over the function. The programme was also attended by Dr KK Jain, Abhay Kumar Dixit, Alok Kumar Agrawal and others. The students under the guidance of Manjula Basak presented patriotic songs.

# UPTET held amidst tight security

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test (UPTET) was conducted at 89 centres in the district amidst tight security arrangements here on Sunday as the state government was not willing to give any other opportunity to the political rivals, especially when the state is going to assembly polls, to make an attack on the ruling party. Due to a paper leak, the same examination was cancelled when thousands of candidates had reached their centres in November last year. In the examination, 83,579 candidates were enrolled to appear in the examination in two shifts.

At all the centres, elaborate security arrangements were made as apart from the police, Special Task Force (STF) and Local Intelligence Unit (LIU) personnel were also keeping a close vigil on all activities. For each of the centres, an observer and static magistrate were deployed.

In the first shift held from 10 am-12.30 pm, the examination for primary teachers was held at 89 centres in which 48,978 candidates were enrolled while in the second shift (from 2.30 pm-5 pm), the test for junior high school teachers was held at 64 centres in which 34,601 candidates



Candidates coming out after appearing in UPTET at Queen's College in Varanasi on Sunday.

Pioneer

were enrolled.

A large number of candidates who appeared in the second shift were also the candidates of the first shift.

Heavy rush of candidates were seen at Roadways depots as a large number of candidates had used free travelling facilities for the UPTET provided by the state government.

The rush of candidates arriving here from adjoining districts was also seen at railway stations.

Traffic restrictions were imposed in some areas where there were several centres, especially during the examination periods.

**SPL COVID SURVEY DRIVE FROM TODAY:** A

special door-to-door survey campaign will be conducted in the district from January 24 to 29 on the lines of polio in which ASHA and Anganwadi workers will identify persons with symptoms of COVID-19, children below two years of age who have missed routine vaccination and those (above-60) who have not received the first dose of Covid vaccine. For the success of the drive, District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Shastri has directed health and other departments to train ASHA and Anganwadi so that every home should be covered during the survey.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that along with the survey, the work of

Covid-19 vaccination would go on as usual. 'During the survey, stickers will be pasted on each house along with markings on the lines of the polio campaign. There will be a supervisor and a zonal officer for each of the five teams.

Daily review will be done at block and district level. ANMs and CHOs will be kept free from the survey.

Training and collaborative supervision for all activities will be done by WHO and UNICEF' he said.

There will be no survey due to the holiday on January 26 but from January 27, it will be done regularly till January 29. In this campaign, cooperation will be taken from Panchayati Raj Department, Rural Development, ICDS, Municipality, Forest Department, Agriculture Department, NGOs, WHO and UNICEF etc. The CMO said that the information will be collected on several points in the survey.

According to him, by Saturday a total of 51,79,794 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been applied in the district which included 29,97,246 (100.9%) first dose, 19,75,312 (66.5%) second and 15,468 third (booster) doses. So far, 1,91,768 (74.4%) adolescents have been vaccinated in the district.

# UPTET: Aspirants denied late entry amid high security measures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Officials were tough enough during UPTET on Sunday and at some places they are being criticized for following rules strictly and not allowing the late comers to enter into the examination center.

However, the strictness brought positive results and no report of paper leakage or involvement of the solver gangs was received. It is also true that the gates of examination centres were closed on time, and some aspirants could not take the examination for getting late even by one minute.

A video of a girl aspirant went viral in which she can be seen crying and pleading that she was coming from far distance and got late by five minutes, so she should be allowed entry. An officer is heard say-



ing in this video "Der se aate hain, paper leak karate hain". Officers should have been strict and tough, but not rough in handling such situations.

Strict measures had been introduced to check any mal-

practice in UPTET this time. This test had earlier been cancelled owing to a paper leak.

Even the invigilators and officials on duty were not allowed to possess a mobile phone fitted with a camera.

Only keypad mobiles were kept by the officials to avoid the chance of leaking papers.

Massive videography was done and the CCTV vigil had also been tightened. All the persons entering the examination centre had been 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 had been enforced around the examination centre.

Examinations were held in two meetings. As many as 84017 aspirants had to take the examination in the first meeting at 183 centres, while in the second meeting 59895 persons at 132 centres. Officials had been asked to be extra vigilant for ensuring fair examination.

# 3 UPTET solvers arrested in Pratapgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Three solvers were arrested in different districts including one solver in Prayagraj Pratapgarh and Jaunpur districts. They were nabbed giving the exam instead of the bonafide candidates in UP TET 2021 (Teacher Eligibility Test) exam which was conducted here on Sunday.

The STF team caught solver Vijay Bahadur Saroj who was found appearing in the exam in lieu of the bonafide candidate in the morning shift at Shiv Balak Singh Inter College Examination Center located at Badamar in the industrial area of Prayagraj.

Ram Bahadur of Mithipar village of Sikrara in Jaunpur said that he was taking the exami-

nation at the place of Deepak Kumar resident of Bithalpur, Sarai Mamrej, Prayagraj.

He confessed that settled the deal with Deepak giving his examination for Rs 35000. Advance Rs 5000 was given by Deepak. Ram Bahadur told the police that he comes from Jaunpur and prepares for competitive examinations by staying in a rented room in Salori, Prayagraj. He was preparing for the TET after BTC. Deepak had prepared a fake Aadhar card and admit card and sent it by giving Rs 5000 in advance by luring money to take the exam.

On the other hand, in the first shift in Pratapgarh's Saket College, in place of the candidate, another person i.e. solver was caught taking the examina-

tion with an electronic device. The center in-charge handed him over to the police. Now the police are interrogating him as well as the original candidate is also being ascertained so that it can be known how this deal was done between these two. There is no gang behind this. Police said that Amarjeet Verma of Kalyanpur village was taking the examination in place of Vivek Kumar, a resident of Dandwa Kalyanpur in Antu area.

Investigation will be done against both of them by writing an FIR under the Examination Act.

Along with this, several candidates missed the exam due to late arrival. Due to the delay, the candidates created a ruckus at two centers when

they were not allowed to sit in the examination. Somehow they were handled.

Amarjeet Verma, resident of Kalyanpur in Antu police station area, was taking the examination in place of Vivek Kumar, resident of Dandwa Kalyanpur Antu. On getting information about this, the center administrator handed him over to the police.

On the other hand, in Malti Inter College and MDPG College, more than two dozen candidates arrived late to take the examination. When they were not allowed in the examination, they started creating a ruckus.

Later, the ASP and BSA who reached the spot took the memorandum from them and returned them.

# Water level of Ganga stabilises

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

After witnessing a rising trend for the past three days, the water level of river Ganga stabilised on Sunday, providing relief to a sizable number of seers, kalpwasis and devotees camping in the Magh Mela.

The rise in the water level has caused bank erosion, with the water entering the camps of Sectors 2 and 3. While people were shifted to safer places, authorities have put up sandbags to check further erosion of the banks by the strong currents of Ganga.

The volume of water, which in previous years was quite shallow and in fact the Allahabad High Court had to intervene, asking the authorities to release extra water in Ganga, is flowing 107cm more

than last year (as on Friday), due to which the water has entered a large area of its bank. Although the level of water has come down a bit, it could again set the alarm bells ringing, following the release of water from Ganga barrage in Kanpur.

The mela administration is constantly monitoring the situation and providing all help to the affected devotees.

Divisional commissioner Sanjay Goyal, along with officiating mela adhikari Arvind Kumar Chouhan and other officials, took stock of the situation and instructed the authorities to provide a solution to the problems arising out of the rise in the water level of river Ganga. The irrigation department has been told to check the water entering the mela area at Gangdweep, Sector

3, Sector 2 and other affected places.

The divisional commissioner has also asked to increase the number of manpower, tractors and pumps to remove the water from the mela area.

During the inspection, Goyal also expressed his displeasure over the slow action being taken by the officials of the Jal Nigam. The divisional commissioner has directed all the officers concerned to pour more sand in the affected areas and to drain out the water continuously by installing more pumps.

"Due to the rise in water level, the process of shifting all the affected 44 institutions and Prayagwals of Gangadweep to Sector 5 and to provide all the basic facilities has already started. But as many devotees do

not want to shift to Sector 5, we are taking a written consent from those who do not want to move even after providing all the basic facilities," said the Mela adhikari.

Commenting on the water level in the river, head of the department of Geography, Prof AR Siddiqui said, "It is because of the heavy rainfall in the Himalayan region and since farmer do not use much water in their fields owing to rains and low usage of water for irrigation during Rabi crop, the volume of water in Ganga is fairly more."

Likewise, executive engineer at flood control department, Brijesh Kumar Verma said, "We are keeping a constant watch on the level of water in both the rivers and fortunately, the water level is stable."

# Floral tributes paid to Netaji

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Members of Bengali Social and Cultural Association paid floral tributes to the National Hero Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 125th Birth Anniversary at Subhash Crossing on Sunday under his statue.

Patriotic songs were played and sung by members— 'Kadam kadam badhaye

ja' 'Jodi tor dak sune keu na ashe to enter Ekla cholo re' and so on.

The Association was not able to organise the function in a big way due to Covid restrictions but announced to celebrate Netaji's Jayanti in the days to come by organising Debates, Painting, Music Competitions in a big way.

The garlanding was done

by President Manoj Banerjee, Vice Presidents Dilip Dutta, SM Mittra, Dr Mukti Vyas, Secretary Shanker Chatterjee, Joint Secretary Rana Chanda, Treasurer Devraj Chatterjee, Babul Bhattacharya, Joybroto Dutta, Gopal Bose, Dhrubo Dasgupta, Jyotirmoy Chatterjee, Srikrishna, Sudeep, Ashim Roy, Jayanta Dey, AK Banerjee, Arindam Ghosh, Bimal Choudhury, and

Proshanto Deb.

**NCR GM SECRETARY SAURABH JAIN RESIGNS:** Saurabh Jain relinquished the charge of Secretary to GM North Central Railway. He will be joining as Joint Director/ Civil (Transformation) Railway Board on Monday.

DGM/G will be looking after the duties of Secretary till the new incumbent joins.

# BJP enhances number of booth committees

**ALLAHABAD (PNS) :** Following the directives of the Election Commission to make one booth for every 1,200 voters in each district instead of 1,500 as was the norm earlier to maintain adequate social distancing needed due to Covid-19 threat, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has modified its organisational preparations for the upcoming UP Assembly elections going to be held amidst Corona resurgence.

Taking note of the decision of the Election Commission, the saffron party has also increased the number of its booth committees. For example, earlier, BJP had 1,252 booth committees in the Sangam City area, whose numbers have now been increased to 1,293 by the party, informed BJP city unit president Ganesh

Kesarwani. With this, a committee of 21 people has also been constituted at each booth to motivate BJP voters to cast their votes and also ensure that they face no problems in exercising their right to franchise, he added.

Apart from the president, general secretary, other office bearers of all party frontal organizations have been included in these committees. Women have also been given proper representation so that door-to-door campaigning can reach even the women of every household. In this, workers of every caste and class have been given representation, Kesarwani added.

BJP leader and former convener of BJP legal cell of Kashi Kshetra that covers 16 districts including Allahabad's city,

trans-Ganga and trans-Yamuna areas Devendra Nath Mishra said that BJP keeps on changing the structure of its organization from time to time as per need.

"Just before the 2017 assembly elections, the number of presidents in the district was increased from two to three. Earlier there were city unit presidents and district presidents. In 2017, the system of city unit, trans-Ganga and trans-Yamuna district presidents was implemented. Not only this, earlier there were 10 "mandals" in the city itself but their numbers were then increased to 15 two years ago," he said.

Mishra said that this time every "Panna Pramukh" has been entrusted with the task to focus their attention on 60

voters each taking into account that a voter list's page has 30 names on one side and another 30 on its reverse side.

"The booth level committee members including the Panna Pramukhs have already started visiting the homes of voters concerned apprising them of the party's achievements and motivating them to come out and vote on the polling day," he added.

**YOUTH RAPES MINOR GIRL:** A youth allegedly lured a minor girl of his neighbour to a secluded place and raped her. The girl somehow managed to escape and narrated her ordeal to the family members at a village under Pipri police station in Kaushambi. On the complaint of her father, the police registered an FIR and launched a hunt for the accused.



# Congmen pay homage to Netaji

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Hundreds of Congressmen gathered at Meston Road on Sunday to pay homage to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 126 birth anniversary. The city president, Naushad Alam Mansoori, first paid floral tributes to the great revolutionist by garlanding the statue and said it was high time that the youth emulated the great patriot. He said India cannot forget his contribution and the slogan ‘ Tum mujha khoon do main tumhe azadi doonga’. He appealed to the youth to tread the path shown by him.

Throwing light on his past he said Netaji had given up ICS job and returned from England and became the inspiration of thousands of youngsters and motivated them to proudly join the battle for freedom. He said Netaji had formed the Azad Hind Fauj to counter the British government and achieve Independence.

He said Netaji formed the INA which motived the armed forces to revolt against the British Raj and said that it was Netaji’s and INA’s struggle against the British which was an important factor for their quitting India.



Congressmen pay floral tributes to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary at Meston Road.

Pioneer

He said Netaji was elected president of the Indian National Congress in 1938 and formed a national planning committee, which formulated a policy of broad industrialisation.

Mansoori said Netaji’s call ‘Remember that the greatest crime is to compromise with injustice and wrong. Remember the eternal law: you would like to give if you want to urge.’

He also promoted hard work and said one individual may die for an idea, but that idea will, after the death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives.

Prominent others who

took part in the homage function were SD Mishra, Sohail Ahmed, MM Shukla, Pramod Jaishwal, Zeeshan Ansari. Meena Mishra, Lallan Awasthi, Mahesh Meghani and many more.

## Cognitive functions weaken in obese students: Yoga expert

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Noted Yoga expert, Dr Shalini Vaidya and head of Sadhak Anshit Yoga Institute, while addressing a webinar on ‘Childhood Obesity’ on Sunday said childhood obesity contributed to the risk of numerous health problems. She said study carried out by the Institute showed that in obese students the cognitive functions were significantly weakened. She said significant impairments in their cognitive functions, especially attention, retention, intelligence, and cognitive flexibility, were observed. She said thus it was highly necessary that the school adolescents were involved in physical activities to reduce body weight in order to have cognitive functions within normal range.

She said obesity in childhood and adolescents was a serious community concern and the magnitude of the problem was progressively affecting low, middle and high-income sections mainly the urban population. She said the obese children were likely to stay obese into their adolescence and later part of their life. She said school age was a period of strenuous growth because of a greater amount of activity and

the development of physical and cognitive functions, required a balanced nutrition.

She added that from the approach of neuropsychology, ample nourishment with physical activity was compelling for healthy brain growth, optimal learning, and scholastic performance. She said the major change in lifestyle of families with eating habits and increasing hours of inactivity because of video games, social media, and computer had played a noteworthy role in enhancing obesity in school-going children who are overweight. She said as a result childhood obesity led health-associated risks at adulthood.

She said thus yoga asanas need to be taught to school children which will help burn calories, tone muscles, boost metabolism and also prevent the child from emotional eating. She said yoga brought about mindfulness that will help child maintain a disciplined lifestyle and make healthy lifestyle choices. She said yoga will not only boost metabolism but it will also help the child steer clear of emotional eating and overeating and thus they need to practice these asanas. Dr Vaidya said Vinyasa Flow was a series of yoga poses that one

needed to move through quickly and the sequence increased the heart rate, tones the body and brought along mindfulness. She said similarly Surya Namaskar or sun salutation had many benefits from boosting metabolism to toning body and 18 minutes of sun salutation done at a fast pace can be enough to give a good cardio workout and reap all its other benefits. She said next was Virabhadrasana or the warrior pose series that can help tone muscles and enhance muscle growth and development. She said next was Kumbhakasana or plank pose which was excellent to burn fat from the entire body. She said in this pose, one needed to use upper body and core muscles simultaneously, making it especially great to strengthen the core muscles.

She said next was Halasana or plough pose which toned the muscles of butts and strengthened the shoulders. She said it stretched out the hamstrings and the muscles of the abdomen. She said apart from concentrating on the core, this asana also toned the muscles of the thighs and arms.

She advised parents to ensure they put their children under the tutelage of yoga trainers to ensure they grow in a healthy manner.

## Neha Sharma new DM of Kanpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In a sudden turn of events the existing District Magistrate, City, Vishak G Iyer, was replaced by new DM, Neha Sharma. The incumbent was to take the charge late on Sunday. Sudden shifting by EC of an IAS who was farsighted, honest and a wonderful taskmaster has raised many eyebrows. He had stepped in on September 23, 2021 and in a very short span had given momentum to the ongoing development works of the city. He stayed in Kanpur for mere four months. There were rumours that his probity and transparency in his working was behind the sudden removal. Sharma who steps in now had been SDM in Kanpur as well and was well aware of the working of in and around Kanpur.

It may be mentioned here that Kanpur was for the first time having the best IAS Troika, all south Indians, to look after the working on a day to day basis for perfect management and development of the city. The first to enter was Divisional Commissioner, Dr Raj Shekhar followed by the Kanpur Municipal Commissioner, Sharanappa and finally entered Vishak G Iyer as the DM. This troika was being considered to be the best and people of Kanpur were quite hopeful that they together will ensure the proper uplift of the city. The various projects which were being carried out were directly being monitored by the three and every inspection and review of the progress of the works was being done collectively by the three.

It may be mentioned here that quite a few years ago the UP Government had roped in the services of another south India IAS who proved to be the



The New District Magistrate, City, Neha Sharma.

nail in the coffin of land and sand mafia of the division and city. However, the syndicate in Kanpur and the surrounding districts had joined hands for the removal of the IAS which had opened floodgates of corrupt practices in both the controversial areas. It was rumoured that the outgoing DM had put the foot down strongly to prevent the syndicate from corruption in digging work in Kanpur but was not very successful.

The crackdown on the land mafia and the recovery of land of the KDA under his and DC leadership has brought fruits and land worth crores had been freed from the clutches of the land sharks who thrived with the political background. Iyer was also the key person for the widening of land between Kannauj GT Road and IIT-Kanpur and had ruffled feathers of umpteen politically influential people of the city. He was said to be strictly monitoring the compensation which was being awarded and this was reported to be the reasons the political lobby had locked horns with him. However his removal at the threshold of elections was being viewed as a threat to holding of free and fair elections in Kanpur.

## Spl team carrying out house to house search of Covid patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Chief Medical Officer, Dr Nepal Singh on Sunday addressing presspersons said a special team had been set up which was carrying out house to house search of COVID-19 patients especially those who were under home isolation. He appealed to the people not to hide cases and if they had any symptoms they should report to the district administration. He expressed concern over the effort of a section of people who were in Home Isolation and were not giving their daily detailed progress report. He said the asst Nodal Officer of the ICCCH had informed that there were reports of around 150 cases of COVID-19 which had been traced by the RRT team. He said their test were carried out and they were found to be positive. He the team had been directed to keep a vigil on cases which were negative on being tested. He said the objective was to prevent the spread of COVID-19. He said special directives were being sent to medical officers and messages were being sent on phones to ensure they keep a strict vigil on such patients who were hiding their ailment. Dr Singh said patient under home isolation will stand discharged and end isolation after at least 7 days had passed from testing positive and no fever for three successive days and they shall continue wearing masks. He also said that there was no need for re-testing after the home isolation period was over. He said as per the home isolation protocol one need to stay home and away from other people for at least five days and wear masks mandatorily. He said if one developed symptoms, one need to get tested immediately and isolate until one received test results and if one tested positive, follow isolation recommendations.

## NCL director visits community centre

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

Director (Finance/Personnel) of Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL), Government of India’s Miniratna Company, Ram Narayan Dubey, under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav on Saturday visited the community centre built under NCL CSR at Birkuniya. Under project Kisanganga NCL with the objective of strengthening local rural economy and increasing the income of farmers here with the technical support of NCL-IIT BHU Incubation Centre has set up satellite centre and agri clinic. From here local farmers can get information on agriculture related topics from reputed agricultural experts of the country through video conferencing. Dubey also distributed 315 blankets to local needy people present there and had a conversation with local public representa-



tives and farmers. Addressing the farmers, Dubey said the NCL management is committed for overall development of local farmers and all possible help will be provided to them.

During the programme General Manager (CSR) AK Singh and other CSR officers, local public representatives and a large number of villagers were present. Dubey also visited the poultry farm running under NCL CSR in Birkuniya

Baiga Basti and had a conversation with the women operating it. It is worth mentioning that NCL under Corporate Social Responsibility has so far provided direct employment through poultry farming to 584 tribal women of Adivasi Baiga Basti. Along with it by connecting more than 160 other tribal families with this scheme the process of making them financially independent is going on.

## Flag marches staged

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Under the leadership of Lalganj Circle Officer (CO) Uma Shankar flag march/area domination exercise was conducted in areas under Halia police station. During the march CO was

station. The march was accompanied by SO Jamalpur, police outpost incharges of Dabak and Sherwaan, heavy police force and paramilitary forces. It passed through markets Jivnathpur, Dhara, Mathna, Dohari, Gorkhi, Jamalpur, Bahadurpur, Dabak, Sherwaan,



accompanied by heavy police force and paramilitary forces. The march passed through Garbada Dham, Garbara Gokul, Rateh Chauraha, Deori, Baidha, Gajaria and Dramondganj market during which CO interacted with people. He said the purpose behind the march was to make common people feel fearless. Besides Chunar CO Rama Kant Rai led the flag march in areas under Jamalpur police

Bhaaipur and other adjacent villages. During the march the CO appealed to people to follow Covid protocol and be safe. He said forces in the area were keeping a close watch over all the activities.

**TRAINING:** For holding election in a free and fair manner different teams, including flying squad team, media certification and monitoring team etc, were trained by Deputy Sistrict election officer Shiv

Pratap Shukla and CTO Raj Kumar Gupta at Collectorate on Saturday. The team members were made aware about their works. The teams were told that expenditure limit for all candidates was ₹40 lakh. About vehicles for canvassing it was stated that permission of returning officer was a must and copy of the permit was to be fixed in front of the vehicle. For publicity declaration of the printer/publisher was a must before the district election officer. About transportation of cash, it was stated that for more than ₹50,000 proper papers were a must. For conducting the work effectively flying squad teams had been equipped with cameras and other necessary papers. The flying squads were told in case of any violation collected evidences should be kept in CD form. Among those present on the occasion were Additional District Magistrate (Namami Gange) Amarendra Kumar Verma, deputy collectors Ashwini Kumar Singh and Dr Abhineet Kumar, AMA, Zila Panchayat, Neetu Singh Sodhia and other officials concerned.

## Girl Child Day to be observed today

PNS ■ VARANASI

National Girl Child Day is to be celebrated at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) on January 24 while ensuring the compliance of Covid-19 guidelines. Through a virtual meeting General Manager, BLW, Anjali Goyal, has directed the senior officials concerned to celebrate National Girl Child Day very attractively. The GM by addressing all girl participants through virtual medium will boost their enthusiasm. On the occasion various types of

programmes will be organised for the encouragement of BLW officers and employees’ daughters whose age is 20 years or less. In which a selfie point will be set up at Surya Sarovar located in BLW campus on Monday through which daughters of BLW officers and employees will take selfie with their parents and forward them on WhatsApp (mobile numbers 7752801166 and 7752800782), out of which the selected best selfie will be uploaded on Indian Railways and BLW website. In addition an online

competition of patriotic poetry/song for the students of BLW Inter College has been organised at 12:00 noon. In this, the best contestants will also be rewarded. Apart from it on the occasion of Republic Day on January 26 as many as 75 daughters of BLW officers and employees will be honoured for their outstanding achievements in various fields besides special activities like academic, sports, cultural, debate competition, Public Relations Officer(PRO) Rajesh Kumar said.

## Complete work on time: NER GM

PNS ■ VARANASI

General Manager, North Eastern Railway (NER), Anupam Sharma, was on one-day visit here on Saturday. During the meeting for reviewing the progress of various development works in Varanasi division in Premchand auditorium room of divisional office GM discussed in detail the budget allocated for various development schemes in the current financial year, including doubling, work plans, deadlines and physical and practical difficulties faced during the work. He directed to complete various construction works related to development works with full quality within the stipulated time-frame with minimum impact on normal rail traffic. He also reviewed the annual budget and income/expenditure of the division, pending cases in courts, punctuality etc. Suggesting that there should be economy in expenditure and increase in the income of the division, he said it should always remain alert in this direction. In the field of passenger amenities, concrete steps should be taken to reduce complaints and accountability should be ensured on the employees responsible for complaints regarding lack of facilities. For the next financial year for the pending plans of the division he directed that estimated budget and work plans should be kept ready in advance. The meeting was attended by Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)/ Construction Rajiv Kumar, Principal Chief



Engineer (PCE) SK Pandey, Chief Engineer/ Construction Panna Lal, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Ramashray Pandey, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM/ General Administration) Rahul Srivastava, ADRM (Infra) Gyanesh Tripathi, ADRM/ Operation SPS Yadav and all branch officers of the division and officials of construction organisation. Meanwhile GM Anupam Sharma by leaving by inspection special train from Banaras station conducted window trailing inspection of Banaras-Chhapra rail section on Saturday. He was accompanied by CAO/ Construction Rajiv Kumar, PCE SK Pandey, DRM Ramashray Pandey and others. GM with the objective of reviewing the progress of various development works in the division and ensuring safety in rail operations while conducting window trailing reached Chhapra Junction railway station. GM by his inspection vehicle by checking rear window trailing and caution order reached Chhapra. From the point of view of safe-

ty from Banaras to Chhapra Junction during window trailing inspection, he reviewed railway track, overhead traction, colour light signal, information/warning board, passenger amenities and doubling work going on between Chhapra-Ghazipur. In continuation of inspection GM gave necessary instructions regarding general passenger hall, station premises, computerised passenger reservation, availability of public toilets and drinking water and cleanliness and maintenance of various stations falling on Varanasi-Chhapra rail section.

**GIRL CHILD DAY:** National Girl Child Day will be celebrated on Monday from 11:00 am in Varanasi division. Besides, on January 26 on the occasion of Republic Day, daughters of officers and employees of Varanasi division their outstanding achievements in various fields in addition to special activities like academic, sports, cultural, debate competition other than will be honoured by DRM Ramashray Pandey, PRO Ashok Kumar said.



**BUDGET SESSION**

# Congress asks Opp to form united front to corner Govt

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress is making efforts to reach out to several Opposition and other like-minded parties to put a united front in the forthcoming Budget Session to corner the BJP-led Centre over “multiple failures” including highest-ever unemployment and price rise affecting the larger section of society across the country.

AICC sources told *The Pioneer*, as far strategy is concerned, all Opposition parties even though they are contesting against each other in all the poll bound States, they should work together for at least the first half of the Budget session till February 11 as the five States including Uttar Pradesh will begin their first phase of voting on February 10.

All the major opposition parties, Congress, Samajwadi party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Aam Aadmi Party are putting up a brave front against each other in all polling states UP, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur.

“Except for the Trinamool Congress, all were on same board until last winter session to take on the Modi government on almost all the issues which were to be opposed in the national and common people interest. The TMC, however, cropped differences with Congress and kept away to put a united Opposition.

Even AAP and SP, BSP were on board and shared platform with Rahul Gandhi. Now when TMC is fighting a high pitched poll battle in Goa against Congress and AAP in Punjab besides SP in crucial Uttar Pradesh, we are working out a common strategy so that the Opposition parties don’t fight each other on floor of the Parliament when serious and concerning issues like inflation, unemployment, Chine border issues are concerned. We are in



touch with TMC, AAP and others to devise a common strategy in the Parliament and don’t give enough advantage to BJP by exhibiting our political differences,” said a very senior Congress leader and a Rajya Sabha member.

When contacted, leaders of TMC, AAP and SP said that Parliament strategy will not affect the parties’ assembly election fortunes. “Yes they are in touch and a meeting in this regard is being worked out for coming weekend before the Budget session begins,” said a Rajya Sabha MP.

In a statement on Sunday former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi alleged that over four crore people have been pushed into poverty in the country and that there has been development of only “Hamare Do”.

“‘Vikas overflow’ only for ‘Humare Do’. While our 4,00,00,000 brothers and sisters are pushed into poverty,” he said on Twitter.

“Each of these 4,00,00,000 is a real person, not just a number. Each of these 4,00,00,000 deserved better. Each of these 4,00,00,000 is India!” Rahul Gandhi said, using the hashtag “BJPfailsIndia” on Twitter.

# 70 companies of RPF to be deployed for upcoming polls

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 70 companies of the Railway Protection Force (RPF) besides the 1,700 companies of the regular paramilitary forces are being deployed for the upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Punjab.

In a communication to the Chief Secretaries of these States, RPF Director General Sanjay Chander has sought provision of accommodation and conveyance to an Inspector rank officer at par with deputy commandants of the paramilitary forces saying an Inspector is in-charge of a company as against Assistant Commandants in the regular paramilitary forces, leading to resentment in the Group A services.

“...your attention is invited towards the structure of RPF which is different from the structure of CAPFs (Central Armed Police Forces). In RPF, Inspector is incharge of a Post/Company unlike CAPFs where Assistant Commandants are incharge of a Coy (company).

At the same time, Asstt. Security Commissioners/Asstt. Commandants in RPF are Group-A officers who are assigned supervision of Post/Coys like Deputy Commandants in CAPFs,” reads the communication sent to the Chief Secretaries of the poll-bound States.

It further said, “Therefore, Inspectors of RPF should not be compared with Inspectors of CAPFs and should be provided facilities of accommodation, transportation etc at par with Asstt. Commandants of CAPFs as incharge of Coys.”

Similarly, the RPF DG also requested the Chief Secretaries that Asstt. Security Commissioner of RPF



should be treated at par with Supervising Officer of CAPFs and accorded facilities of accommodation and transportation at par with Deputy Commandants.

A company in a uniformed service typically comprises 100 personnel. Paramilitary forces like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the like are also referred to as CAPFs.

A section of officials in the CAPFs are miffed at the equation of the Inspectors, a subordinate post with the Assistant Commandants who are Group A Gazetted service officers recruited through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) These officers are referred to as cadre officers.

“The RPF should have sought provision of facilities without equating its ranks with those of the CAPFs as it is demoralising for the officers. While the mandate of the RPF and CAPFs are different, the sanctity of the ranks must be maintained,” a cadre officer said, requesting anonymity.

# DGCA imposes ₹20 lakh fine on Kolkata airport



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a penalty of ₹20 lakh on Kolkata’s Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport (NSCBIA) for violating safety norms by neglecting runway maintenance. The fine imposed on NSCBIA is the highest so far.

According to officials, the audit report suggested that the NSCBIA has been negligent in the maintenance of the runway as per the mandated safety requirement. “That’s why the DGCA has decided to impose a penalty of ₹20 lakh. This is the highest penalty imposed on any airport

so far,” officials added. The safety audit of NSCBIA was carried out last year.

According to the audit report, the maintenance of the runway at Kolkata airport was not done as per the guidelines, the lights on the runway were not fixed properly and Foreign Object Debris (FOB) was reported on the runway, which could have been a part of an aircraft’s safety during landing and takeoff was a concern. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has constituted an internal committee to look into the said incident.

The provisions of levying fines were added by a special section introduced in the Aircraft Act in September 2020.

Subsequently, last May an enabling provision was introduced to provide for levying financial penalty against service providers for violation of regulations/requirement.

Interestingly, January 23 marks the 125th anniversary of iconic freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, after whom the international airport was named. From this year on, Netaji’s birth anniversary will mark the beginning of the Republic Day celebrations in India.

January 23 is also observed as ‘Parakram Diwas’ (Day of Valour) in India and as ‘Desh Nayak Dibas’ in West Bengal as a tribute to the freedom fighter.

# SC sets aside NGT order for compensation in TN firecracker factory blast

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court has set aside a National Green Tribunal (NGT) order directing compensation of Rs 20 lakh to the heirs of the victims of a firecracker factory blast in Tamil Nadu’s Virudhunagar district last year in which 19 workers were killed.

A bench of justices A M Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari noted that the NGT proceeded ex-parte and directed the tribunal to reconsider the case afresh.

“Accordingly, in the interest of justice, we deem it appropriate to set aside the impugned judgment and order and relegate the parties before the National Green Tribunal for reconsideration of the entire matter afresh after giving an opportunity to the parties concerned, including the appellants, and to pass appropriate orders in accordance with the law,” the bench in a recent order said.

The parties appearing through counsel before the apex court were asked to appear before the tribunal on February 14, 2022, and the NGT was directed to proceed with the matter on that day or assign a suitable date for hearing, as may be convenient to it.

The apex court was hearing an appeal filed by Tamil Nadu Fireworks And Amores Manufacturers Association challenging the NGT’s order dated June 11, 2021.

The tribunal had directed Tamil Nadu through District Magistrate,

Virudhunagar to pay compensation of Rs 20 lakh to the heirs of deceased victims.

It had directed the State Legal Services Authority to provide legal aid to ensure that payment is made to genuine heirs of the deceased and to the injured without undue hassle. The NGT had formed a committee headed by a former high court judge and directed it to submit a report on the firecracker factory blast in Tamil Nadu’s Virudhunagar district.

The explosion occurred on February 12, 2021 when some chemicals were being mixed to produce fireworks at the unit in Achankulam village.

The green panel had said that to secure credible facts, it is constituting an eight-member committee including former high court judge Justice K Kannan and representatives of the Union Environment Ministry.



# ‘Public spirited’ citizens have come with ‘unclean hands’: Tripura to SC on probe plea into violence

**New Delhi:** The Tripura Government has told the Supreme Court that “public spirited” citizens seeking an independent probe into the recent “communal riots” in the state have come with “unclean hands” and that under the garb of public interest, the forum of this court is being used for “oblique” purpose.

Pointing to the petitioner’s “silence” on a series of pre-poll and post-poll violence which took place in West Bengal, the Tripura government said the so-called public spirit of the petitioners did not move a few months back on a larger scale of communal violence and suddenly their public spirit aroused due to some instances in a small state like Tripura.

“It is pointed out that such a selective outrage of the petitioner is not presented before this court as a defence but to satisfy this court that under the garb of public interest, the August forum of this court is used for apparently oblique purposes” an affidavit filed by the state government said.

“It is not a question of one petition or the other but the majesty and sanctity of the proceedings before the highest court of the country. No individual or group of individuals professionally functioning as public spirited persons/groups can selectively invoke the extraordinary jurisdiction of the court to achieve some apparent but undisclosed motive. The selective rousing of public interest itself justifies dismissal of the petition with exemplary cost,” the affidavit stated.

The affidavit was filed in response to a PIL filed by advocate Ethesham Hashmi seeking an independent probe into the recent “communal riots” in Tripura and the alleged complicity and inaction of the state police in it.

The Tripura Government further said that the petition is based on basis of a “private/sponsored” ‘report’ titled “Humanity under Attack in Tripura #Muslim Lives Matter” and is not maintainable. “A genuine and bonafide public spirited citizen would not be selective in his public interest and would not be choosy about rushing before the court with regard to one state and keeping quiet with regard to the other,” Tripura said.

The present case is clearly a case of selective outrage under the pretence of public interest and to achieve some undisclosed agenda, it alleged.

The north-eastern state recently witnessed incidents of arson, looting and violence after reports emerged from Bangladesh that Hindu minorities there had been attacked during Durga Puja on allegations of blasphemy.

# Study: Multi-mutated Omicron immune against antibodies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The presence of a large number of mutations, and more than 30 on its spike protein makes antibodies ineffective against the Omicron variant of Covid-19, according to a research peer-reviewed and published in the Journal of Autoimmunity. The purpose of antibodies is to recognise the virus and stop the binding, which prevents infection.

Omicron, the new variant of COVID-19, has become the dominant strain around the world. The new variant of COVID-19, which was first discovered in South Africa, is the virus’s most mutated version, with over 50 changes, 30 of which are in its spike protein, allowing it to bypass vaccine-induced immunity.

An extraordinary number of mutations, particularly in the Spike (S) protein of the Omicron strain, have been linked to its high transmissibility and infectivity.

These modifications also enable it to resist pre-existing antibodies in the human body, which contributes to an increasing number of re-infections and breakthrough cases. The University of Missouri researchers wanted to learn more about the alterations detected in

the Omicron variant’s S-protein.

The study detected 46 hallmark changes within the Omicron variant using full sequences, 23 of which were wholly new and had not been identified in any of the previous variants of the virus. Two of the mutations were discovered in the Delta or Delta Plus variant first. Thirty of the 46 changes were found in the S-protein, while the rest were found elsewhere in the viral cell. Furthermore, the researchers employed a pre-existing S-protein structure to see if the Omicron mutations would damage the Covid-19 S-protein in the same way, rendering antibodies ineffective.

According to the paper, certain mutations cause interference on the virus’s surface, preventing antibodies from adhering to it, while others result in a complete loss of interaction between the antibodies and the virus, rendering the antibodies useless against the highly modified variety. According to the researchers, this shows that pre-existing immunity (whether from vaccination or past infection) may no longer be able to give adequate protection against the Omicron form of the virus, allowing it to evade antibodies and penetrate the immune system.

# Covid-19 booster dose drive yet to gather steam, just 39% seniors opt for shots

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government’s drive for ‘precaution dose’ for Covid-19, also called ‘booster dose’ in global parlance, is yet to gather steam. Launched on January 10 across the country, the precaution dose programme has so far covered just 39 per cent of people above 60 years of age with co-morbidities.

Healthcare workers and frontline workers who are also eligible for the dose are also taking their own time to get themselves inoculated. This, despite the fact that there are sufficient Covid vaccines available with the States.

According to the Union Health Ministry, about 63 per cent eligible healthcare workers, 58 per cent frontline workers have opted for the ‘special dose’. There are around 35 lakh and 33 lakh healthcare workers and frontline workers respectively in the country. In contrast, “Over 4 crore youngsters between the 15-18 age group were vaccinated against COVID19 in just 19 days. Young India is contributing significantly towards further strengthening the nation’s fight against the pandemic,” said Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in a tweet on Friday. According to the Co-WIN portal, a total 4,13,91,852 have registered themselves for the first dose of vaccines on the portal.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said about 22.66 lakh healthcare

workers have received their precaution dose, accounting for 63 per cent of such people. Similarly, “there are 33 lakh frontline workers who were due for precaution dose and 191400 have got precaution dose which is 58 per cent.

“Those above 60 years and with comorbidities, the eligible number is 47,81,000 out of them 18,66,000 have taken precaution dose which comes to 39 per cent,” Bhushan said.

However, while admitting that the pace is not as per expectation, the senior official hoped that it will soon in near future. “So given the fact it has been only 10 days since we rolled out precaution dose the coverage yet is not bad though we are constantly engaging with the states to ensure that the uptake increases. It is essential that all of must motivate people to get doses for which they are eligible,” he said.

The fact that about 1 crore people in the over 60 age group are yet to get their first dose is also bothering the government. NITI Aayog member Dr VK Paul said there are still 6.5 crore people whose second dose is overdue.

“At least 25 per cent (of age above 60 years) are yet to get a second dose. This is unfinished work. 52 per cent children have been covered in the 15-17 years age group, more healthcare and frontline workers should also come forward. Availability is not at all an issue here,” he said.

Why should it be overdue, everyone

should take their second dose. All those who are not fully protected will not be a danger to itself but others too. We have to accept masks and protect our seniors and the prevention tool here is vaccination and we need to take it in this paradigm,” he said.

As per government data, 12 states and union territories including Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have administered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to 100 per cent of the eligible adult population.

The countrywide Covid-19 vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16, 2021 with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. The vaccination of frontline workers started on February 2 while the next phase of vaccination commenced from March 1 for people aged above 60 and those aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions.

The country launched vaccination for all people aged above 45 from April 1 while everyone above the age of 18 started getting the vaccine from May 1. The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination for adolescents in the 15 to 18 age group commenced from January 3, 2022. The ‘Precaution’ dose of Covid-19 vaccine Drive for healthcare workers, frontline workers, including personnel deployed for election duty, and those aged 60 and above with comorbidities from January 10.

# Omicron wave to reach its peak by Feb 6: IIT-M

**New Delhi:** The existing, Omicron-driven wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country is likely to reach its peak in the next 14 days, by February 6, a study conducted by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras has concluded. However, it is silent on the number of actual cases the country will report.

In the last 24 hours, India recorded 333,533 fresh Covid-19 infections, 259,168 recoveries and 525 related deaths. The cumulative case tally stands at 39,237,264 including 36,560,650 recoveries, 21,87,205 active cases and 489,409 deaths.

The IIT researchers’ result is based on the institute’s analysis of the national ‘R-value,’ which, it said, declined further in the week of January 14-21.

‘R-value’ is the number of people who can contract a virus from a person who is already infected with it. According to the study conducted by IIT Madras, the said value was recorded at 1.57 in the latest round, as against 2.2 from January 7-13, while from January 1-6 it stood at 4 and was at 2.9 from December 25-31 last year.

For individual cities, the R-value stood at 0.56 for Kolkata, 0.67 for Mumbai, 0.98 in Delhi and 1.2 in Chennai, the data showed. If this number goes below 1, the pandemic is considered to have ‘ended.’

Explaining the figures, Dr Jayant Jha, Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, IIT-M, said the wave has already peaked in Kolkata and Mumbai, which means that in the two cities, the pandemic is becoming ‘endemic.’

“Therefore, as per the analysis, the peak of the current coronavirus wave is likely to come in the next 14 days, till February 6. Our previous prediction was that the peak would likely come between February 1 and 15,” Jha further said.

IIT Madras’ Department of Mathematics and its Centre of Excellence for Computational Mathematics and Data Science jointly conducted the research, putting into use the ‘computational model.’



## By God!

Congress candidates in Goa were told to swear in front of three Gods that they won't jump ship

It should be the height of political desperation. The Congress candidates for the Assembly election in Goa were asked to take a pledge of loyalty in front of not one or two but three Gods that if they win the election, they would not leave Congress for five years. It is the leadership's 'strategy' to assure the voters of Goa who appear convinced that voting for the Congress candidates is as good as voting for BJP. The popular perception changed after massive defections from the Congress after the 2017 election. The party, which had won 17 seats in 2017, was eventually reduced to two. The 'grand old party' certainly has a compelling reason to appeal to the Maker to keep its flock together. Legislators have switched sides from the party not only in Goa but also numerous other States in the country since 2014. A majority of the defections benefited the BJP. The worst case of defections was in Arunachal Pradesh where 44 legislators, including Chief Minister Pema Khandu, quit the party and joined a regional outfit backed by the BJP. Last November, the Congress saw 12 of its 17 MLAs in Meghalaya defect to the Trinamool Congress. As a result, it lost its status as the principal Opposition party. In 2016, former Uttarakhand Chief



Minister Vijay Bahuguna, along with eight other rebel Congress MLAs, joined the BJP after being disqualified from the membership of the House.

However, it is not just the Congress that is at the receiving end of floor-crossing legislators. In Sikkim, 10 MLAs of Sikkim Democratic Front joined the BJP. In Assam, many BJP legislators and even Ministers have Congress roots. Tripura's is a similar case. Manipur is no different. Even the JD(U), BJP's ruling ally in Bihar, was shocked when six of its seven MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh went over to BJP. In the run-up to the current Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh, as many as 36 MLAs have switched sides benefiting the Samajwadi Party mostly, but also BJP and RLD. There is nothing to write home about when it comes to morality and ethics helping legislators resist the lure of power or other considerations to switch loyalties. State legislatures in the 1960s and 1970s witnessed several instances of brazen defections. The most glaring is the example of Gaya Lal, an independent MLA from Haryana, who changed parties twice within a few hours and for the third time a few days later. The phrase that describes turncoats, "Aaya Raam, Gaya Ram" immortalised him. The growing spate of defections led to the Anti-Defection Act but legislators took advantage of the myriad loopholes. Legislators switching sides in Karnataka in 2019 found an entirely new way to defect without punishment: They simply resigned before any activity of theirs could lead to their disqualification. Defections subvert democracy. They ridicule people's mandate. If resignation or re-election is enough to circumvent the anti-defection law, then the law needs replacing. A stronger law can revive a voter's belief in democracy better than a pledge to Him.

### PICTALK



Sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik pays tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, at the Puri beach

# Netaji, not Congress, finally won freedom



PRAFULL GORADIA

As reportedly admitted by former British PM Attlee, the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the decision to quit India was 'minimal'

A conversation took place between former British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and the then acting Governor of West Bengal Justice PB Chakraborty. In 1956, Clement Attlee had come to India and stayed as a guest of the then Governor. Remember, Attlee was the man who, as the British PM, had signed on the decision to grant Independence to India.

Chakraborty then wrote a letter to the publisher of RC Majumdar's book, *A History of Bengal*. In this letter, the Chief Justice wrote, "When I was acting Governor, Lord Attlee, who had given us Independence by withdrawing British rule from India, spent two days in the Governor's palace during his tour of India. At that time, I had a prolonged discussion with him regarding the real factors that had led the British to quit India." Chakraborty adds, "My direct question to Attlee was that since Gandhi's Quit India movement had tapered off quite some time ago and in 1947 no such new compelling situation had arisen that would necessitate a hasty British departure, why did they had to leave?... Attlee cited several reasons, the principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British crown among the Indian Army and Navy personnel as a result of Netaji's military activities."

That's not all. Chakraborty adds, "Toward the end of our discussion, I asked Attlee what was the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the British decision to quit India. Hearing this question, Attlee's lips became twisted in a sarcastic smile as he slowly chewed out the word, *mini-m-a-l*."

This startling conversation was first published by the Institute of Historical Review by author Ranjan Borra in 1982, in his piece on Netaji, the Indian National Army and the war of India's liberation. To understand the significance of Attlee's assertion, we have to go back in time to 1945. The Second World War had ended.



The allied powers, led by Britain and the US, had won. The axis powers led by Hitler's Germany had been vanquished. The victors wanted to impose justice on the defeated armies. In India, officers of Netaji Bose's INA were put on trial for treason, torture and murder. This series of court martials came to be known as the Red Fort trials.

Indians serving in the British armed forces were inflamed by the Red Fort trials. In February 1946, almost 20,000 sailors of the Royal Indian Navy serving on 78 ships mutinied against the Empire. They went around Mumbai and Karachi with portraits of Netaji and forced the British to shout 'Jai Hind' and other INA slogans. The rebels brought down the Union Jack on their ships and refused to obey their British masters. This mutiny was followed by similar rebellions in the Royal Indian Air Force and also in the British Indian Army units in Jabalpur. The British were terrified. After the Second World War, 2.5 million Indian soldiers were being de-commissioned from the British Army.

Military intelligence reports in 1946 indicated that the Indian soldiers were

inflamed and could not be relied upon to obey their British officers. There were only 40,000 British troops in India at the time. Most were eager to go home and in no mood to fight the 2.5 million battle-hardened Indian soldiers who were being demobilised. It is under these circumstances that the British decided to grant Independence to India.

The idea is not to in any way undermine the significant contribution of Mahatma Gandhi or Pt Nehru in awakening the masses to the value of freedom but to spark a debate about the real contribution of Netaji Subhas and the role played by him and the INA. School textbooks are dominated by the role played by the non-violent movement while the INA's role is dismissed in a few cursory paragraphs. The time has come to revisit modern Indian history and acknowledge the immense contribution of Netaji in helping India win its freedom.

Bose was so popular as Congress president in 1938 that the members made him contest again in 1939. Gandhiji did not approve of the re-election and, in due course, squeezed the young

leader out of the Party. In 1940, Netaji was put under home arrest in Calcutta, from where he decided to abscond to join Germany which was fighting World War II against Britain. The land route was difficult with several visas required on the way. After a hard struggle, Netaji reached Berlin in April 1941, three months since leaving Calcutta.

After the Japanese declared war on America and UK, Hitler suggested that Netaji could be more useful against the British. He therefore agreed to proceed across half the globe by submarine. He reached Singapore en route Tokyo by the middle of 1943, soon to take over an incipient INA founded by the patriot Rsha Behari Ghosh. From a motley crowd of less than 10,000, Netaji within weeks built the army into a disciplined force of 50,000 soldiers by persuading British Indian POWs, that fought until the end of the war. Tragically, it took Bose's life in an accidental air crash. India's brightest lamp of patriotism was blown out.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)



INDIANS SERVING IN THE BRITISH ARMED FORCES WERE INFLAMED BY THE RED FORT TRIALS. IN FEBRUARY 1946, ALMOST 20,000 SAILORS OF THE ROYAL INDIAN NAVY SERVING ON 78 SHIPS MUTINIED AGAINST THE EMPIRE

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SHUN THE PATH OF CONFRONTATION

Sir — The Union Government had informed the States in December that the number of IAS officers deputed to the Centre was not sufficient. The Department of Personnel and Training proposed four amendments to Rule 6(1), of which two have drawn serious criticism from some State Governments. The deputation of IAS officers is made through an understanding between the Centre, State Governments and the officers concerned. One of the proposed amendments makes it mandatory for the States to provide a certain number of IAS officers to the Centre on deputation every year, which is against the rights of the officers to make a choice.

The Centre has clarified that it would set the number of officers to be deputed. This proposal will also badly affect the Centre-State relations and damage the structure of the IAS services. In fact, the shortage of IAS officers in Central services is a cause for concern and it needs to be resolved immediately. This move by the Centre has other negative consequences, too. The State Governments may seek the services of more State Civil Aervice officers and it may lead to the marginalisation of the IAS. The Centre must take a wider view of the situation and address the grievances of the States.

Venu GS | Kollam

### A TIMELY, PERTINENT MEASURE

Sir — The Election Commission has extended the ban on political rallies, road shows, *padayatras*, cycle rallies and processions till January 31. It is a prudent step in the right direction as the number of Omicron cases is increasing by leaps and bounds and the situation is alarming. The curbs on other political event will be revoked only when the situation improves drastically, the EC has said. So it will take some more time for political parties in the poll fray to go all out and bring out the best in vote bank politics. The decision, impairing the campaign by political parties in the five poll-bound States, was taken after online

## Let's vote for development



Elections are going to be held in five States in the next few weeks, but it is surprising to see that the contest is in the name of caste and religion instead of development. The irony is that more than 70 years of Independence have passed but even today, we cannot rise above caste system and discrimination. There is a lot of talk on development but at the time of elections, the issue is sidelined and finally the elec-

tion is held based on castes. The voters need to think how long we will be entangled in such conservative thinking. We must rise above all this and vote for the candidate who works for the betterment of the country and society.

In the absence of such awareness, the contesting parties try to polarise society by fielding people of a particular community or caste rather than promoting the development work done in a particular State. Gradually, the current caste issue would start moving towards religious issues, then the public would start feeling cheated because then they do not see any significant difference between them and those who talk about caste and religion all the time. Once the trust of people is won, it has to be maintained. Therefore, with the help of our votes, all of us should break this vicious circle of caste-religious politics.

Devanand Roy | New Delhi

consultations.

Though the Punjab election was postponed to February 20, the other States would go to the polls around Valentine's Day and the spread of virus is still continuing in other States. Better sense should prevail on the authorities to postpone the elections to sometime in March to protect those actively involved in politics from the virus; thereby preventing the spread of the virus to other parts of the country.

MR Jayanthi | Kerala

### SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Sir — Immediately after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to instal Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's statue at India Gate on his 125th birth anniversary, Union Home Minister Amit Shah as usual slammed the Congress for forgetting the freedom fighter's immortal contribution to the country. He tweeted: "...Congress has left no stone unturned to forget the immortal contri-

butions of India's brave son." Sadly, it is beyond Shah's knowledge that India's first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his first Independence Day Speech (August 16, 1947) at the Red Fort invoked the names of only two men: Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Bose.

Shah should be asked whether installing Netaji's statue at India Gate is the true reminder of his immortal contribution to the nation? But when Netaji was trying to secure foreign support for the nation's liberation, was it not Savarkar who offered full military cooperation to the British masters and directly called out to Hindus for joining the British armed forces? Whatsoever be Netaji's contribution to the country, will Amit Shah condemn Savarkar's backstabbing of Subhas Bose and apologise for it to the nation?

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

## SOUND BITE

Once upon a time, they were friends. Our 25 years in alliance with the BJP were wasted.



Shiv Sena chief —Uddhav Thackeray



German Navy chief —Kay-Achim Schoenbach

The only thing that bothers me is if the media writes anything about my family.



Actor —Nagarjuna



India captain —KL Rahul

I am deeply touched by the Assam Government's decision to bestow on me the Assam Baibhav award for 2021.



Industrialist & philanthropist —Ratan Tata

## Brrr...

La Nina is mainly responsible for the freezing dip in temperature across northern India

If you are reading this in the national Capital or, for that matter, anywhere in north India, you don't need to be told how chilly it is. This January has been unusually chilly and the winter rain is making it worse. The dense fog and frequent rains made people stay indoors; the weekend curfew, of course, added to people's woes. Delhi and other parts of northern India, including Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have been severely hit by the fresh cold wave which is likely to stay for nearly another week. A respite is not expected anytime soon as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted rainfall, fog and low temperatures in the coming days. The experts are of the view that it is because of La Nina — a weather phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean that leads to a dip in temperatures. As a result, north India is reeling under an intense cold wave with temperatures in some regions dipping below the freezing point. In Rajasthan, the minimum temperature in Fatehpur and Churu dropped below zero. The IMD has issued yellow alerts to warn people.

The fall in temperatures right now is due to a big cloud cover hanging over the Gangetic plain. It has led to fog and blocked sunlight in the entire region. The IMD says that it will take several days to clear.

Just to give the idea of the size of the cloud cover, it is 1,700-km-long and extends from Pakistan to Bihar. Besides, the western disturbance will lead to rainfall in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, UP and northern parts of Rajasthan. The cold wave usually arrives from the west, through the western disturbance wind system. This system is also responsible for causing rains in north India. It is laden with moisture, which is going to result in mild to heavy showers scattered all over. Yet another factor is the unprecedented snowfall that the Himalayan terrain is witnessing right now. The snowfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and adjoining areas would make north India chilly. While the winter is harsh for the people living on the street, the Netizens are responding to the cold in their own way. It's raining memes online as the virtual commentators found novel ways to brace the cold wave. They are sharing winter fashion and seasonal delights, with some of them even celebrating it.





FIRST COLUMN

FISCAL CONSOLIDATION:  
THE 2022 CHALLENGE

Not meeting disinvestment targets  
will nullify tax revenue gains



VINAY K SRIVASTAVA

The next budget would be against the backdrop of gradual recovery taking place in the economy hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of the Omicron variant. The fiscal deficit that reached 4.6 per cent in FY19-20 against the budget estimate of 3.3 per cent and revised estimate of 3.8 per cent, had increased to 9.5 per cent against the target of 3.5 per cent in FY20-21. A steep rise in fiscal deficit in the last fiscal was the impact of pandemic on the economy resulting in a weak revenue inflow. This was combined with an increase in total expenditure by ₹7.64 lakh crore in FY20-21 and ₹4.08 lakh crore in FY21-22 to provide essential relief to weaker sections of the society. As expected, the capital expenditure was also increased to ₹1.03 lakh crore in FY20-21 and ₹1.15 lakh crore in FY21-22 preferably on infrastructure and capital assets to pursue growth. There is much talk of fiscal consolidation and stratagems all




around. The Government intend to continue with the path of fiscal consolidation and has set a guide path to reduce the fiscal deficit from 6.8 per cent of the GDP in financial year 2022 to 4.5 per cent of GDP by FY25-26 by increasing the buoyancy of tax revenue through improved compliance and by increased revenue from monetisation of assets and disinvestment of CPSUs. On the tax revenue front, the Government has undertaken crucial tax reforms to address the issue of the fiscal deficit and boost investments since 2020-21. Tax buoyancy is the result of these reforms. The broad trend in tax collection is expected to continue despite a third wave of pandemic and associated disruption in economic activity. Hence, the actual size of the fiscal deficit for the current financial year will be dependent on the realization of proceeds from disinvestment of CPSUs and monetisation of assets. Hitherto, the amount realized from disinvestment is only ₹9,364 crore against the target of ₹1.75 lakh crore. It is only five per cent of the target. The Government is also looking to collect ₹0.88 lakh crore through monetisation in the current fiscal.

However, the fiscal data released by the CAG for April-November on December 30 give us a good signal. The fiscal deficit for April-November dipped at ₹6.96 lakh crore. It is just 46 per cent of the budget estimate for FY22 due to a higher-than-expected revenue collection. It is much better than last fiscal when it had reached 135 per cent and 102.4 per cent in FY20. But we should note that the favourable size of the fiscal deficit is due to improvement in investment (gross fixed capital formation - (GFCF), buoyant revenue and better control over revenue expenditure. Meanwhile, the government got assent of the president to spend an additional amount of ₹3.73 lakh crore through supplementary demand for grants. This is a concern on the front of the fiscal deficit. The tax revenue gains will be nullified by the expected failure to achieve the target of the disinvestment, failure of monetisation of assets and supplementary demand. The size of the fiscal deficit will be widened, as per ICRA, by ₹1.53 lakh crore. The rating agency ICRA expects the fiscal deficit to print at ₹16.6 lakh crore — 7.1 per cent of the GDP, against the budget estimate of ₹15.07 lakh crore. Though, we still have two and half months to gear-up the disinvestment process and increase disinvestment proceeds. It will not only help to keep the fiscal deficit at expected level, it will also provide a fiscal consolidation path for financial year 22-23.

(The writer is the co-author of 'Indirect Tax Reform in India' and teaches at Institute of Technology & Science, Ghaziabad. The views expressed are personal.)

# When fears are bottled up in a sea of worry

## Systematic desensitisation is what we all have gone through in the last two years; the pandemic seems to have dulled our 'fear response'



SURAVI SHARMA KUMAR

Once linear, life now seems circular. Schools opened. They closed again. In-person meetings had just been reinstated when, weeks back we were again told they would cease, with a return to Zoom gatherings.

Maybe Omicron will mutate; maybe not. Some other variants have come and gone without driving the pandemic to terrifying new heights. Maybe Omicron will follow suit. But for now, for us, every plan is a provisional plan.

It's a sea of worry. If you take illness as a metaphor, we all hold dual citizenship of the land of the well and that of the unwell. Maybe worry is the bridge between the towns. And living in this bridge as we all are doing now is not easy though it may look 'near nor-

mal' from a distance.

As a child, I lived in an upper Assam town where, on hot humid summer nights, incessant rains hammered our house roof. There was thunder — explosions of fury. The rains and thunderbolts made me feel like a caterpillar who was about to have his head stuck by a cannon. And I clung to my mother or my nanny and slept until the rains stopped.

The arrival of the rainsat times sent the nanny - a girl in her teens called Niru — into her past and at times she spoke up about her painful memories sending terror down my spine. The air would slow down and grow heavy as if coiling in on itself. Niru would say, remembering her life a year back. Far away, near the river bank where she lived with her parents and



siblings, the vast expansion of skyover the waterbody flickered. That day, for a minute or two, the lights paused, she said with terror in her eyes, like maybe the rains went away to skirt around the hills;and then got back only to detonate over the roof of her hut. And there she was facing a stream of ravaging flood waters. Her siblings and she cried together, and then all she remembered washer struggle to keep her head above the water level. Niru survived, so did her parents but

her siblings who were younger than her, went missing.

Her story gave me goosebumps and the fear that I got from her still lives with me.I have been reminded of this time a lot lately. I am not making light of this pandemic, one that killed many and may kill many more before it is brought under control, or the economic panic that is now scorching through markets. I wonder how would this time turn into memories in the minds of the children today in the years to come.

If you are reading this and feeling fear, this is just to say that panic and fear are the great contagions of a contagion. After Niru's stories, in a thunderous rainy night when I along with my sibling couldnot take the dread, we would run to our bedroom and get under a thick quilt. And there we will tell stories or try to fall asleep in order to do what seemed the most logical thing: leaving. As I grew up,I would open a book and go someplace where nothing had quite so much power over me. This is a form of quitting the unpleasant, unwanted. My worst fear was that a lightning bolt would come scissoring down and evaporate my mother or a loved one while I was under the quilt.

I imagine many of us are doing something similar these days (or during the last couple of pandemic waves) in the quiet of our bedrooms.

Fear in general can deteriorate mental health but fears of childhoodnever go away. I believe the fear response in ushas gone through a sea change in this pandemic. It seems to have dulled our 'fear-

response' by now; at least in many of us. We all have possibly received the best fear extinguishing therapies that psychologists often use therapeutically in patients. Systematic desensitization is what we all have gone through in the last two years.

Pandemic-related adverse psychological conditions have led to another pandemic ofpsychological distress around the globe. For those under 18, one is four was affected.

We all exist in vulnerability. Shared vulnerability is essential to family life-and to citizenship, and in the larger context humanity. What each of us does affects us all. It is about accepting that you cannot opt out of an ecosystem and need to manage our interconnectedness.

# Breaking new ground to curb land litigation

Andhra Pradesh Govt has made a long-pending beginning among States by deciding to re-survey land records to ensure that all title deeds are clean



AMAR DEVULAPALLI

Land litigation is a nightmare across the country. Land records are not readily available or updated. Registration of land is a cumbersome affair. Proving land ownership is tough. The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to rectify the situation by ordering a re-survey of land records in a phased manner so that legal title deeds are handed over to the property owners by the end of 2023.

In the first phase, land was re-surveyed in a set of village and new land records have been made available. The process is to be carried out in a phased manner across the state and completed by June 2023.

The process, initiated by Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, will cost ₹1000 crore involving thousands of survey teams and the latest geo-tagging and satellite mapping technologies. Once the land is marked afresh, an identity card is issued specific to the coordinates of the land determined digitally. The card will have a QR code along with a map of the land.

The prime reason for land litigation is attributed to the land records dating back to the colonial era which have never been touched for any re-survey to check the authenticity of the ownership. Interestingly, civil litigants had to spend an average of ₹497 per day on court hearings, according to a survey done some time back.

A World Bank study suggests that these land disputes in courts include those related to the validity of land titles and records, and rightful ownership, and for years together the cases are pending before disposal. A NITI Ayog paper points out that land disputes on an average take about 20 years to be resolved.

Another interesting aspect is benami transactions are taking place in the absence of proper land document. The White Paper on Black Money released in 2012 had noted that black money generated in the country gets invested in benami properties.

While this is the scenario all over the country, the situation is no different in Andhra Pradesh which prompted Chief MinisterJagan Mohan Reddy to straighten the land records system once and for all.

It may be mentioned here that the system of land records was inherited from the zamindari system and post-Independence, the responsibility for land administration was transferred to states.

Most of the 6.4 lakh villages in the country were surveyed and their cadastral maps prepared during the late 19th and early 20th century. In Andhra Pradesh too survey of lands had taken place during British Rule in 1927-28.

The scheme initiated by Jagan Mohan Reddy is the first of its kind in the coun-



KEEPING THE LABORIOUS PROCESS IN VIEW, THE ENTIRE PROGRAMME IS SCHEDULED TO COMPLETE IN THREE PHASES. AROUND 5,000 VILLAGES ARE PROGRAMMED TO BE COVERED IN THE FIRST PHASE, 6,500 VILLAGES IN THE SECOND PHASE AND 5,500 VILLAGES IN THE THIRD PHASE. THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO SET UP MOBILE TRIBUNALS TO SOLVE LAND DISPUTES ON THE SPOT

(The writer is Advisor, National Media and Inter-State Affairs, Government of Andhra Pradesh. The views expressed are personal.)



try to accord permanent land rights to the legal owners with an aim to providing land protection legally. This initiative is aimed at making land-related transactions convenient and dispute-free, giving owners permanent land rights with the state Government's assurance. Under the Jagananna Sashwata BhooHakku (permanent land rights) Bhoo Raksha (land protection) scheme, the land resurvey records are now being digitised and maintained in a transparent manner.

It was during his historic 'Praja Sankalpa Yatra' covering 3,468 km walking through 2,516 villages in 134 Assembly segments of the state in a span of 341 days between November 6, 2017 and January 9, 2019 that the YSRCP Chief understood the fate of legal land owners who were facing litigation for years together. He had seen how people rued when their plot, house, farm, and other lands fell into litigation after they had purchased them with their hard-earned money. After taking over as Chief Minister one of his priorities is to attend to the issue and launched the historic scheme.

A beginning was made in Takkellapadu village near Jaggaiahpet in Krishna district on December 21, 2020 when the CM formally commenced survey process. Ten days before formally launching the scheme, the Andhra Pradesh Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Survey of India to kick-start one of the largest land and house ownership surveys.

The land resurvey was started with a budget of around ₹1,000

crores. Around 14,000 surveyors have been appointed by the government and given training by Survey of India for the survey. In exact figures, the survey covers 1.26 crore acres of agricultural land in 17,000 villages, 85 lakh acres of non-agriculture lands of Government and private owners within the limits of 13,371 villages, 40 lakh government and private properties and 10 lakh plots in 110 urban areas. Once the process is done, every land parcel that is surveyed is being given a unique identification number.

Keeping the laborious process in view, the entire programme is scheduled to complete in three phases. Around 5,000 villages are programmed to be covered in the first phase, 6,500 villages in the second phase, and 5,500 villages in the third phase.

The state Government has also set up mobile tribunals to solve land disputes on the spot.

While launching the initiative the CM had made it clear to the teams that "With every new survey, accurate revenue records are to be prepared for every immovable property with exact latitude and longitude, using advanced instruments like drones, Continuous Operating Reference Stations (CORS) and Rovers". Survey stones are to be installed once the marking of the land is completed. A digitised cadastral should be prepared after the completion of the survey and all details of the lands in the village are to be reflected in the maps, the CM instructed.

Thus, yet another dream projectJagan Mohan Reddy came into reality on January 18 last

when he launched the registration process in 37 villages of Guntur district as part of first phase. He was happy that in the first phase resurvey was completed in 51 villages covering 29,563 acres. On the occasion, the CM asserted that the resurvey would ensure no scope for any future litigation and the land deals can be carried out at village level with the implementation of the scheme.

Mandal Mobile Magistrate teams which are specially drafted have scrutinised 3,304 objections that were registered in 51 villages and resolved them making way for the officials to issue Permanent Land Right Certificates. As per the programme, once resurvey is completed, registrations are done at village secretariat level.

Even before the first phase process is in progress, the Maharastra government has evinced keen interest in the scheme and has sent a team of 11 senior officials led by Maharashtra survey settlement commissioner Niranjana Kumar Sudanshu to study the land and the survey project being implemented. He appreciated the efforts of the AP Government and felt that the resurvey of lands can be a viable solution to the decades-old survey problems.

Terming the YSR Jagananna Saswata BhooHakku and Bhoo Raksha scheme as a great reform and revolutionary step, the Chief Minister has said that the resurvey of lands has been taken up after 100 years and the Government is committed to providing clear title deeds to the rightful owners after proper and scientific resurvey.

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT

PUNJAB CM CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI WILL BE DEFEATED FROM HIS CHAMKAUR SAHIB SEAT IN NEXT MONTH'S ASSEMBLY POLLS.  
—DELHI CHIEF MINISTER  
ARVIND KEJRIWAL



KEJRIWAL WANTED TO BECOME A LEADER HERE BUT AFTER SEEING RESPONSE FROM THE PUBLIC, HE PUT FORTH BHAGWANT MANN FOR SACRIFICE.  
—PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER  
CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI



# Jewellery exports up 29% against pre-pandemic 2019

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

India's gem and jewellery exports during December 2021 grew 29.49 per cent to \$3,040.92 million (Rs 22,914.6 crore) as compared to \$2,348.44 million (Rs 16,712.46 crore) in December 2019 — the pre-pandemic year, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council said.

Besides, exports during April-December rose 5.8 per cent to \$29,084 million from \$27,500 during the same period of 2019.

"The holiday bounce has managed to offset part of the post-Diwali export slump when factories normally take a short break. Holiday and festive demand was robust in important trading centres such as the US, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Israel," Council Chairman Colin Shah said. "And we have every reason to believe that this momentum will carry through the end of FY 2022, bringing us closer to the set target of \$41.67 billion in exports."

**Exports of cut and polished diamonds in December 2021 grew by 41% to \$1,770.61 million as compared to \$1,253.79 million for the same period of 2019**

Further, exports of cut and polished diamonds in December 2021 grew by 41 per cent to \$1,770.61 million as compared to \$1,253.79 million for the same period of 2019. During April-December 2021, cut and polished diamond exports rose by 23 per cent to \$18,007.24 million as compared to \$14,666.23 million for the same period in 2019. Gold exports during December 2021 remained largely steady at \$778 million, the Council said.

# Rupee to slip on expensive crude oil, FII funds' outflow

IAN S ■ MUMBAI

Rising global crude oil prices along with FIIs fund outflow from the equity market will further weaken the Indian rupee during the upcoming week. Accordingly, the rupee is expected to trade with a weak bias upto 75 to a USD in the coming week.

"Rising crude and trade deficit has been keeping the currency under pressure and even FPI outflows have been a constant pressure on the rupee..." said Sajal Gupta, Head, Forex and Rates at Edelweiss Securities. "It may lose further ground owing to oncoming US Fed meeting and current equity outflows."

Notably, a rate hike by the US Federal Reserve can potentially drive away more FII money from India and other emerging markets. "Omicron normalisation would also lead to demand revival and thus more imports and more pressure on the rupee... Crude oil prices around \$90 to a barrel is



a warning bell for commodity price rise in the time to come," Gupta said. Last week, the rupee closed at 74.41 to a USD after weakening to 74.75.

"In the coming days, the price action of USDINR will be determined by Crude oil prices, FOMC Meeting outcome, risk sentiments, and dollar inflows," said Devarsh Vakil, Deputy Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. "Spot USDINR is expected to oscillate between 74.10 to 74.8 for the next

week." Gaurang Somaiya, Forex & Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said: "This week, market participants will be primarily keeping an eye on the Fed policy meeting as the central bank is likely to provide clarity and details on the end of quantitative easing, possibly in March. "Apart from the policy statement, preliminary manufacturing and services PMI, advance GDP and core PCE index number to gauge a view for the dollar."

# Demand for office space up 50% in 2021 led by startups, tech cos: Colliers

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Demand for office space in Delhi NCR region has grown 50 per cent year-on-year in 2021, majorly due to strong absorptions by startups and technology firms, said global real estate consultancy firm Colliers. In 2021, total absorption in the office space segment was 6.3 million square feet, it said. Of the total, startups absorbed 1 million square feet.

"Gurugram led the leasing activity accounting for 64 per cent share in overall transactions. Flight to quality is driving occupiers' real estate strategy and Noida Expressway, Golf Course Extension Road and DLF Cybercity drove the bulk of leasing activity as they looked for better-quality buildings," it added. With more than 25 years presence, Colliers, a Nasdaq-listed company, is a professional consultancy firm which provides advice to real estate occupiers, owners and investors with operations in 67 countries.

"For north India, only the NCR can boast in terms of sig-

nificant office absorption as the other major cities have not chosen office markets. Hub'n'spoke models have not been successful due to the mindset of the workforce still choosing to move to major metros.

"Co-working transactions have been the preference for most occupiers and will continue to be the preference for Occupiers throughout 2022 until there is an end to the uncertain environment created due to the pandemic," said Bhupindra Singh, Managing Director, Regional Tenant Representation and Office Services, North India, Colliers. "...The overall absorption numbers indicate a strong desire for corporates to commit to the office segment and thereby showcasing that the WFH is an interim option only."

Besides, demand for flex spaces grew threefold during the calendar year. Going forward, rentals in key micro markets like Cyber City, Sector 16 A and 16B Noida, Golf Course Road and Sector 62 are expected to see a gradual rise due to the limited availability of quality stock, Colliers said.

# Crypto.com users not able to access accounts after \$34 mn hack

IAN S ■ SAN FRANCISCO

After several users complained about issues with logging back to their accounts on Crypto.com after the platform was hit by a \$34 million hack, its CEO Kris Marszalek has been forced to respond on social media how best they can get back their accounts.

Thousands of people took to social media to complain that they could not get back into their accounts, begging for help. In a tweet thread, Marszalek finally responded, saying if you can't get back into our app following access reset this week, "in 95/100 cases you are simply using the wrong email to login". "We don't allow duplicate accounts with the same phone number, so you will get stuck if you are using the wrong email," Marszalek posted late on Saturday.

"We are helping users with these cases one by one, but it takes time given the scale of our platform," he added. Leading cryptocurrency platform Crypto.com last week admitted that 483 users on its platform lost almost \$34 million in various digital coins owing to a compromise in two-factor (2FA) authentication. Overall, the unauthorised withdrawals had over \$15 million worth of ethereum, \$19 million worth of Bitcoin and \$66,200 in "other currencies".

Marszalek said in a latest tweet: "Rest assured your funds are safe and waiting for you to log back in... with the right email." Crypto.com, which is endorsed by famous Hollywood actor Matt Damon, had said it revoked all customer 2FA tokens, and added additional security hardening measures, which required all customers to re-login and set up their 2FA token to ensure only authorised activity would occur.

# Union Budget: Startups seek friendly policies, tax incentives

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

To further aid small businesses and empower entrepreneurs, the Union Budget 2022-23 should introduce additional startup-friendly policies and tax relaxations to enable spending on innovation, ease-of-doing business and reducing compliance costs, a slew of homegrown startups said. New reforms, policy assistance and support mechanisms for establishing a focused approach in solving unmet financial needs through technology will significantly benefit the economy, they stressed.

"We've seen a substantial spike in the adoption of digital payments in the last one year. I'm hoping that in the upcoming Budget, the government will think of alternatives to the Zero MDR (merchant discount rate) policy, as that will help promote e-payments and drive significant digital adoption among businesses," said Harshil Mathur, CEO and Co-founder, Razorpay. In last year's Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced Rs

1,500 crore to further accelerate digital payments' growth in the country. Mathur said that it would also be desirable for the government to increase contribution to the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS).

"Hassle-free loan disbursements, automation of tax and compliance, paper-less approvals, and incentives to adopt digital banking practices will also be welcome changes that can support the growth of MSMEs," he added. To incentivise startups, the government had last year extended the eligibility for claiming tax holidays for startups by a year to March 31, 2022. It also extended the capital gains exemption for investment in startups by a year to March 31, 2022, to boost funding. The country has also seen numerous startups incentivising their employees in the past year with buying back ESOPs.

"Deferring tax payments when exercising the option, plus waiving tax for some ESOP receipts, will also be a laudable change in the new budget," said Mathur. According to Ravish Naresh,

CEO and Co-founder, Khatabook, they are hoping for a progressive Budget, especially aimed at promoting homegrown startups focused on problem-solving for India. "New reforms, policy assistance, and support mechanisms for establishing a focused approach in solving unmet financial needs through technology will significantly benefit the economy," Naresh told IANS. "In addition, the government's continued focus on enhancing digital infrastructure in the country will ensure progress towards equality in digital access in FY22-23," he added.

In the last year's Budget, the government had said it will facilitate setting up of a world-class fintech hub in Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) city. The government also proposed a portal to collect relevant information on gig



workers to help formulate social security schemes for them.

Vidit Aatrey, Founder and CEO of homegrown social commerce platform Meesho, said that a singular focus on augmenting offline MSMEs with online distribution could be a game-changing economic transformation opportunity. "We would like to see the government focus on policies that will create a level playing field for offline and online sellers with less than Rs 40 lakh turnover," Aatrey told IANS. "Simplifying GST compliance requirements for online sellers will also enable millions of small businesses to leverage the

potential of e-commerce and contribute to India's growing digital economy," he added. In addition to this, the startups hope that the government incentivises capital formation in the area of logistics and cold chains through policies and infrastructure development. Akash Gupta, Co-founder and CEO, Zypp Electric, said that they are optimistic that the government will announce new initiatives to encourage local EV manufacturing, facilitate easy finance and create an innovative EV ecosystem. "We urge the government to reduce GST on EV purchases and rentals from 5 per cent to 2 per cent. A reduced GST would allow consumers to smoothly shift to EV," Gupta told IANS. Indian startups raised a record \$24.1 billion in 2021, a two-fold increase over pre-Covid levels, while \$6 billion were raised via public markets with 11 startup IPOs, a Nasscom-Zinnov report said last week. The Indian tech startup base continues to witness steady growth, adding over 2,250 startups in 2021, which is 600 more than 2020.

# Google's new feature warns about suspicious files on drive

**Users will recognise the security alert if they have been using Google Docs, Sheets, Slides and Drawings**

IAN S ■ SAN FRANCISCO

Tech giant Google has introduced a new security feature to Drive to help users stay on top of potentially malicious files. Google Drive will now start displaying a warning banner when you are about to download and open a potentially dubious document, image, or any type of file, reports Android Central.

The new feature is rolling out across all Google Workspace, G Suite Basic and G Suite Business tiers. The yellow banner shows up at the top of an attachment page after

you click on a link. It should appear before a file is downloaded to your laptop, warning you that it looks suspicious and "might be used to steal your personal information".

Users will recognise the security alert if they have been using Google Docs, Sheets, Slides and Drawings. At Google's Cloud Next 2021, the search giant announced new measures to help safeguard users from malicious files. These alerts were rolled out to those file syncing services late last year.

# PFS could not hold board meeting in absence of independent directors

**New Delhi:** Power solution provider PTC India arm PTC India Financial Services (PFS) board could not hold its scheduled board meeting on Saturday in the absence of all independent directors, a source said.

On Wednesday, the three independent directors -- Kamlesh Shivji Vikamsey, Santosh B Nayar and Thomas Mathew -- resigned en masse from the board of PFS citing corporate governance issues. The source told PTI that the PFS cannot hold board meeting in the absence of all three independent directors as per the norms of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). The source also stated that now the company will have to seek SEBI permission or exemption for holding its board meeting. The queries sent to PFS remained unanswered. Earlier on Friday, PTC India CMD Rajib Kumar Mishra had told in a virtual press conference that PFS board will be meeting on Saturday.

However, he had not divulged the details about agenda of the meeting saying it was confidential. At present, there are three members on board of the PFC, Rajib Kumar Mishra (CMD of PTC India), Pankaj Goel (CFO PTC India) and PFS MD and CE Pawan Singh. Earlier this week, independent director of the PTC India, Rakesh Kacker, in his resignation letter, had said that despite best efforts, the "independent directors could not convince the management of PTC and PFS to take proper action to run the company in accordance with what we considered the correct course of action".

"As a result, the company is now facing serious governance issues with several defaults of the Companies Act, 2013 and the Securities & Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations & Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. Due to this, the operations of the company also must have been affected," he had said in the letter.

PFS, a systemically-important Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC), is promoted by PTC India. **PTI**

# Jio completes 5G coverage plans for top 1,000 cities in country



**New Delhi:** Jio has completed 5G network coverage planning for top 1,000 cities in the country and is augmenting its fibre capacity as well as running pilot across sites, a senior company official said during a presentation.

The company has created teams to focus on dedicated solutions for 5G deployment in India, Reliance Jio Infocomm President Kiran Thomas said on Friday evening.

"5G coverage planning has been completed for 1,000 top cities across the country. Jio has been doing trials on advanced use cases across healthcare and industrial automation on its 5G network," Jio said in a statement.

Thomas during the presentation said that the company is running a 5G pilot in multiple cities and network planning for the roll out of 5G using 3D maps and ray tracing technology is going on. "We are using the most modern approaches towards network planning, especially 3D maps and ray tracing technology because 5G is pretty unique technology, which requires

very advanced network planning techniques, and we are undertaking that for all of India, so that as and when the approvals are received for us to roll out this network, we will be well geared-up to prioritise our rollout, where we can make the maximum contribution," Thomas said.

Auction for 5G spectrum is expected to be held in the first quarter of the next financial year.

Reliance Jio reported to close the third quarter which ended December 31 with net addition of 1.02 crore customers year-on-year (YoY) at 42.1 crore. The subscriber base, however, declined on a quarter-on-quarter basis. "We closed the quarter at 421 million subscribers. That was a reduction of 8.4 million, but the gross addition continued to be very strong 34.6 million. And the reduction was really on account of SIM consolidation and some of the less active customers, now with tariff increases, etc, looking at consolidating uses in a single SIM," Reliance Jio head of strategy Anshuman Thakur said.

On a reported number basis, Jio's ARPU remained almost flat but the company's average revenue per user (ARPU) increased by 8.4 per cent to ₹ 151.6 on a year-on-year basis after making adjustments interconnection usage charges (IUC) which it had to pay to other operators. The IUC charges have become nil from January 1, 2021.

Jio Platforms posted an 8.8 per cent increase in net profit at ₹3,795 crore for the third quarter ended December 2021. It had posted a net profit of ₹3,486 crore in the same period a year ago. Gross revenue from operations increased by 5.76 per cent to ₹24,176 crore from ₹ 22,858 crore in the October-December 2020 period.

Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd (RJIL), the telecom services arm of Jio Platforms, posted a 9.8 per cent rise in net profit at ₹3,615 crore for the quarter, compared to ₹3,291 crore in the year-ago period. RJIL's revenue from operations increased 4.62 per cent to ₹19,347 crore from ₹ 18,492 crore earlier. **PTI**

# Amazon makes offer to Future Retail for acquisition led by Samara Capital

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Amazon has said it is pleased that for the first time since December 2, 2020, the independent directors of Future Retail are willing to consider Amazon's assistance in addressing the financial concerns of FRL.

"We note that significant time has been lost on account of the unwillingness of FRL and the independent directors to consider potential solutions facilitated by Amazon in the past. Nevertheless, we reaffirm our offer to assist FRL within the framework of our rights under the Agreements", Amazon said in a letter to the independent directors of Future Retail. Amazon said Samara Capital has once again reiterated to us that they

remain interested and committed to lead and take forward the term sheet dated June 30, 2020, signed amongst Samara, FRL and the Promoters of FRL, which contemplates a purchase consideration of Rs 7,000 crore with the assistance and cooperation of the independent directors.

Pertinently, the Samara Term Sheet provides for an acquisition of all retail assets of FRL, including the "small store formats" comprising the "Easy Day", "Adhaar" and "Heritage" brands, through an Indian owned and controlled entity structure led by Samara and supported by Amazon. The transaction envisaged in the Samara Term Sheet would ensure availability of funds in FRL at the earliest, through an asset sale and an equity infusion,

which would be a direct antidote to FRL's indebtedness, Amazon said.

As regards compliance of any structure with Indian law, Amazon said that this structure is also similar to the proposed acquisition of the retail and wholesale undertaking of the Future group (which includes FRL's retail assets) by Reliance Retail and Fashion Lifestyle Limited.

We understand that this entity has negligible business operations and whose parent entity Reliance Retail Ventures Limited has received at least Rs 47,265 crore from various foreign investors. We also understand that this amount is proposed to be utilised to fund the acquisition of FRL's retail, wholesale and logistics assets", Amazon said.

# E-mobility start-up, VAAN Electric Moto, launches e-bikes in India

**Kochi:** Indian lifestyle e-mobility startup VAAN Electric Moto Pvt Ltd has launched its electric bicycle-Urbansport in the country.

Union Minister of State for Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Electronics and IT, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, launched the Van Electric Moto brand in India in a virtually held event in Kochi on Friday. The e-bike is available in two variants- Urbansport and Urbansport Pro, priced at ₹59,999 and ₹69,999 respectively and will initially go on sale in Kochi, before being launched in other high-potential markets like Goa, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Delhi in the future.

According to VAAN, the vehicles offer a maximum assistance (top speed) of 25 km/h,

and a pedal assisted range of 60 kilometres. VAAN claims that a full charge would require just half a unit of electricity, costing around ₹4-5.

The removable battery pack, with a net weight of 2.5 kg, would offer added convenience and would require 4 hours for a full charge.

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan and the Chairman and Managing Director of OilMax Energy Pvt. Ltd, Kapil Garg jointly launched the VAAN e-bikes in the Indian market. Ernakulam MP Hibi Eden unveiled the VAAN brand logo in the event in which former MP Chandran Pillai was also present. Both the electric bikes get, compact 6061 aluminium unisex frames, saddle, rims and handlebar designed by Benelli

Biciclette, the e-bike vertical of the Italian brand.

"VAAN has tied with them for engineering and supply chain and has worked closely with the Benelli team for the development of the Urbansport duo," the group said in a release. VAAN claims that its removable battery is a first in this segment, adding that the bicycles come with Shimano Tourney 7 speed derailleur gear system, front and rear disc brakes and Spinner USA front shocks. "The electric pedal assist system consists of a 250W hub mounted electric motor, a 48 Volt, 7.5 Ah removable Lithium-ion battery, and a total of 5 electric 'gear levels,'" it said.

VAAN Urbansport e-bikes get a Smart LCD display serving all necessary information, that can also be used to control front and rear lights. "The Urbansport is the most practical of the two and gets 20 inch spoke wheels, a carrier that can carry up to 15 kilograms and an exposed electric motor. Urbansport Pro is a more stylish and premium e-bike that offers alloy wheels and an electric motor that is neatly integrated into the rear hub," the release said.

The company's plant at Ernakulam has a capacity to assemble 2,000 cycles a month, and are initially targeting sales of 8,000 to 10,000 cycles a year. "We targeted a young crowd earlier but are now looking at even those in the age group of 40-55 years who need not be cycling enthusiasts, considering the advantages of our product that comes with three modes,"

Jithu Sukumaran Nair, Chief Executive Officer and founder of VAAN Electric Mobility said.

He said the e-cycle has a power-assisted mode with five electric gears and a full-throttle mode ratcheting up a speed of up to 25 km per hour. VAAN says the lithium-based removable battery weighing around 2.50 kg with a two-year warranty can be fully charged in around four hours and lasts for 50 km to 60 km depending on the mode in which the cycle is used. KTM-owned KISKA GMBH, Austria handles branding for VAAN an Indian lifestyle e-mobility start-up. It was globally launched at theEICMA motorcycle show in Italy. Vaan has technology partnership with the well-known motorcycle producer brand Benelli. **PTI**



# High security on Iraq, Syria border post IS ultras' jailbreak

**IAN S ■ BAGHDAD**

Iraq has tightened security measures on the border with neighbouring Syria after a jailbreak by Islamic State (IS) terrorists in a Kurdish-controlled prison located in the latter country's Hasakah province.

On January 20, a group of IS militants escaped from the Sina'a prison in the Gweiran neighbourhood of Hasakah, followed by violent clashes between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and the terror group, reports Xinhua news agency. "There are directives issued by the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi forces to double the security measures on the Iraqi-Syrian border," Yahia Rasoul, spokesman of the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi forces, told the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) on

Saturday. The Iraqi security forces are ready to confront any attempt by IS militants to infiltrate Iraqi territory, Rasoul was quoted as saying by INA.

According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the IS militants blew off the gate of the Sina'a prison with a booby-trapped car and an explosive-laden fuel tanker.

It said a number of inmates fled the prison while many Kurdish security members were wounded. Captured IS militants have repeatedly tried to break free from the prison in Hasakah. A number of IS militants have been imprisoned by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) following the defeat of the terror group in Hasakah and parts of Deir al-Zour province.

# Iran vows stronger ties, cooperation with Turkey

**IAN S ■ TEHRAN**

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has vowed to strengthen ties and cooperation with Turkey for regional stability.

"Iran has a long-term and comprehensive vision of relations and cooperation with Turkey, and we welcome planning for strategic cooperation with Turkey," Raisi said during a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Raisi also stressed the need of respecting countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity as the only way to long-term security and stability in the region, reports Xinhua news agency. Erdogan, for his part, said Turkey has prepared a list of diverse economic collaborations to strengthen relations with Iran, and expressed his hope to visit Tehran soon.

# S.Korea culls chickens over bird flu outbreaks

**Seoul:** South Korean quarantine officials began culling about 427,000 chickens on Sunday as a precautionary measure after the outbreaks of H5N1 avian influenza virus or bird flu, at two farms, the Agricultural Ministry said. The cases of highly pathogenic bird flu were reported at two chicken farms in Hwaseong, about 40 km south of Seoul, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs said. The Ministry did not give a specific time frame on when quarantine officials will complete culling, Yonhap News Agency reported. It marked the 23rd and 24th case of a highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 found at poultry farms in South Korea this winter since November 8, 2021. Highly pathogenic avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can cause severe illness and even death, especially among poultry.

# German navy chief resigns over remarks on Ukraine, Russia during India visit

**IAN S ■ NEW DELHI**

German naval chief, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schonbach has resigned over comments on Ukraine and Russia he made during his visit to India. His resignation on late Saturday night was accepted by Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht. Lambrecht has appointed his deputy as interim naval chief.

During his interaction on January 21 at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, a military think tank in Delhi, Schonbach had said the idea that Moscow wanted to invade Kiev was "nonsense", adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin deserved respect. "Does Russia really want a small and tiny strip of Ukraine soil to integrate into their country? No, this is nonsense. Putin is

probably putting pressure because can do it and he splits EU opinion. What he really wants is respect." Speaking about Putin, the German naval chief had also said: "He wants high-level respect and my God giving some respect is low cost, even no cost. If I was asked, it is easy to give him the respect he really demands and probably also deserves.

Russia is an old country, Russia is an important country. Even we India, Germany, need Russia. We need Russia against China." Talking about Ukraine's possible admission into NATO, Schonbach had said: "Ukraine of course cannot meet requirements because it's occupied in Donbas region by the Russian Army or by what they call as militias." He also said that the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, was gone and would not come back to Ukraine.

# S.Korea to restore gateway of ancient Egyptian temple

**IAN S ■ SEOUL**

South Korea said on Sunday that it has signed a deal with Egypt to dismantle and restore the gateway of an ancient temple in the city of Luxor.

South Korea plans to begin restoring the pylon and refurbish the access road of the Ramesseum, a mortuary temple of Pharaoh Ramses II, starting next year, according to the Cultural Heritage Administration.

The move came as Mostafa Waziry, Secretary-General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, requested Cultural Heritage Administration to restore Ramesseum during senior-level talks on January 20, reports Yonhap News Agency. On January 21, the two sides inked a memorandum of understanding during President Moon Jae-in's visit to Cairo.

# Russia rejects UK's claim of trying to replace Ukraine leader

**AP ■ MOSCOW**

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Sunday rejected a British claim that Russia was seeking to replace Ukraine's government with a pro-Moscow administration, and that former Ukrainian lawmaker Yevheniy Murayev was being considered as a potential candidate.

Britain's Foreign Office on Saturday also named several other Ukrainian politicians it said had links with Russian intelligence services, along with Murayev who is the leader of a small party that has no seats in parliament. Those politicians include Mykola Azarov, a former prime minister under Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian president ousted in a 2014 uprising, and Yanukovich's former chief of staff, Andriy Kluyev.

"Some of these have contact with Russian intelligence officers currently involved in the planning for an attack on Ukraine," the Foreign Office said.

Murayev's Nashi party — whose name echoes the former extensive Russian youth movement that supported President Vladimir Putin — is regarded as sympathetic to Russia, but Murayev on Sunday pushed back, characterizing it as pro-Russia.

"The time of pro-Western and pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine is gone forever," he said in a Facebook post. Shortly before the British statement was made public, he posted his face superimposed on a James Bond movie poster and the comment: "Details tomorrow."

The U.K. government made the claim based on an intelligence assessment, without providing evidence to back it up. It comes amid high tensions between Moscow and the West over Russia's designs on Ukraine and each side's increasing accusations that the other is planning provocations.

"The disinformation spread by the British Foreign Office is more evidence that it is the NATO countries, led by the Anglo-Saxons, who are escalating tensions around



Members of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces, volunteer military units of the Armed Forces, train in a city park in Kyiv, Ukraine, Saturday. Dozens of civilians have been joining Ukraine's army reserves in recent weeks amid fears about Russian invasion

AP

Ukraine," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on the Telegram messaging app Sunday. "We call on the British Foreign Office to stop provocative activities, stop spreading nonsense," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the information "shines a light on the extent of Russian activity designed to subvert Ukraine, and is an insight into Kremlin thinking."

Truss urged Russia to "deescalate, end its campaigns of aggression and disinformation, and pursue a path of diplomacy," and reiterated Britain's view that "any Russian military incursion into Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake with severe costs."

Britain has sent anti-tank weapons to Ukraine as part of efforts to bolster its defenses against a potential Russian attack.

Mark Galeotti, who has written extensively on Russian security services, told The Associated Press "I can't help but be skeptical" about the British claim.

"This is one of those situations where it is hard to know whether what we're facing is a genuine threat, a misunderstanding of the inevitable overtures that were being made to various Ukrainian figures by Russians or 'strategic communication' — which is what we call propaganda these days when we're doing it," said Galeotti, who is honorary pro-

fessor of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College, London.

Amid diplomatic efforts to defuse the crisis, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace is expected to meet Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for talks in Moscow. No timing has been given for the meeting, which would be the first U.K.-Russia bilateral defense talks since 2013.

The U.S. has mounted an aggressive campaign in recent months to unify its European allies against a new Russian invasion of Ukraine. The White House called the U.K. government assessment "deeply concerning" and said it stands with the duly elected Ukrainian government.

"The Ukrainian people have the sovereign right to determine their own future, and we stand with our democratically-elected partners in Ukraine," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said.

The assessment came as President Joe Biden spent Saturday at the presidential retreat Camp David outside of Washington huddling with his senior national security team about the Ukraine situation.

A White House official said the discussions included efforts to de-escalate the situation with diplomacy and deterrence measures being coordinated closely with allies and partners, including security assistance to Ukraine.

# UK lawmaker claims she was fired over her Muslim faith

**LONDON:** A former minister in Britain's Conservative government says she was told her Muslim faith was a reason she was fired, a claim that has deepened the rifts roiling Prime Minister Boris Johnson's governing party. Former transport minister Nusrat Ghani told Sunday Times that when she was demoted in 2020, a government whip said her "Muslimness" was "making colleagues uncomfortable."

She said she was told "there were concerns 'that I wasn't loyal to the party as I didn't do enough to defend party against Islamophobia allegations.'" "It was very clear to me that the whips and No. 10 (Downing St.) were holding me to a higher threshold of loyalty than others because of my background and faith," Ghani said. Chief Whip Mark Spencer said he was per-

son Ghani was talking about, but strongly denied her allegation. "These accusations are completely false and I consider them to be defamatory," he wrote on Twitter. "I have never used those words attributed to me." The Conservative Party whips' office said Ghani's claims "are categorically untrue."

"The Conservative Party does not tolerate any form of racism or discrimination," it said in a statement. The prime minister's office said Johnson met with Ghani to discuss her concerns in 2020, and invited her to file a formal complaint, but that she didn't do so. Several Conservative lawmakers, however, spoke up to support Ghani. Caroline Nokes, who heads Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee, said Ghani's treatment had been "appalling" and she was brave

to speak out. Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi tweeted that Ghani's allegations must be "investigated properly & racism routed out." His tweet ended with hashtag "standwithNus."

When Ghani was made a minister in 2015, her boss, then Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, said it was proof Conservatives "were a party of opportunity." But some have accused party of failing to stamp out anti-Muslim prejudice under Johnson, who in 2018 compared women who wear face-covering veils to "letter boxes." Ghani's allegation comes after another Conservative legislator, William Wragg, accused party whips of intimidating and blackmailing members of Parliament to ensure they supported government.

AP

# Omicron spreads in New Zealand, spoiling PM's wedding plans

**AP ■ WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND**

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is postponing her wedding after announcing new COVID-19 restrictions Sunday following the discovery of nine cases of the omicron variant in a single family that flew to Auckland to attend a wedding.

The so-called "red setting" of the country's pandemic response includes heightened measures such as required mask wearing and limits on gatherings. The restrictions will go into effect on Monday. Ardern stressed that "red is not lockdown," noting that businesses can remain open and people can still visit family and friends and move freely around country. "Our plan for managing omicron cases in the early stage

remains same as delta, where we will rapidly test, contact trace and isolate cases and contacts in order to slow the spread," Ardern told reporters. But her own wedding plans are on hold. The 41-year-old prime minister was planning to tie the knot next weekend. "I just join many other New Zealanders who have had an experience like that as a result of the pandemic and to anyone who's caught up in that scenario, I am so sorry," she said.

New Zealand had been among few remaining countries to have avoided any outbreaks of omicron variant, but Ardern acknowledged last week that an outbreak was inevitable given high transmissibility of variant. The country has managed to contain spread of delta variant, with an average of about 20 new cases each day. It has seen an

increasing number of people arriving into country and going into mandatory quarantine who are infected with omicron. That has put strain on the quarantine system and prompted government to limit access for returning citizens while it decides what to do about reopening its borders, angering many people who want to return to New Zealand.

About 93% of New Zealanders aged 12 and over are fully vaccinated, and 52% have had a booster shot. The country has just begun vaccinating children aged between 5 and 11. The family from Nelson-Marlborough region attended a wedding and other events while in Auckland earlier this month, with estimates suggesting they came into contact with "well over 100 people at these events," Ardern said.

# Authorities: 16 dead in nightclub fire in Cameroon's capital

**AP ■ YAOUNDE, CAMEROON**

A fire erupted at a popular nightclub in Yaounde, Cameroon's capital, setting off explosions and killing at least 16 people, government officials said Sunday. The tragedy comes as country hosts thousands of soccer players, fans and match officials from across continent for month-long African Football Cup of Nations tournament. "We are still at the level of investigations to find out names and nationalities of dead and wounded," said government spokesman Rene Emmanuel Sadi. Authorities say fire started at a nightclub in Bastos neighborhood of Cameroonian capital and soon spread to a place where cooking gas was being stored. "There were loud explosions from six gas bottles, causing panic in neighborhood," the government statement said, adding that eight others were injured and taken to Yaounde's Central Hospital.

# Seven Afghan civilians killed in minibus blast

**IAN S ■ KABUL**

At least seven civilians, including four women, were killed and nine others injured when a bomb blast hit a minibus in Herat city, capital of Afghanistan's western Herat province, an official said. Seven dead and nine wounded were admitted to Herat Regional Hospital following a bomb blast in Herat city on Saturday evening," the official told Xinhua news agency. According to local residents, the incident occurred when an improvised bomb planted in a minibus was detonated in Police District 12, a Shia-dominated neighbourhood in the city, 640 km west of Kabul. Some of wounded were in critical condition. The vehicle was destroyed by the blast. No group has claimed responsibility for attack so far. Local affiliates of Islamic State terror group, opposing the Taliban-led administration.

# Beijing district orders mass virus testing ahead of Olympics

**AP ■ BEIJING**

People in a Beijing district with some 2 million residents were ordered Sunday to undergo mass coronavirus testing following a series of infections as China tightened anti-disease controls ahead of the Winter Olympics.

The government told people in areas of the Chinese capital deemed at high risk for infection not to leave the city after 25 cases were found in the Fengtai district and 14 elsewhere.

The ruling Communist Party is stepping up enforcement of its "zero tolerance" strategy aimed at isolating every infected person as Beijing prepares to open the Winter Games on Feb. 4 under intensive anti-virus controls.

On Sunday, Fengtai residents lined up on snow-covered sidewalks in freezing weather for testing.

The Chinese capital must "take the most resolute, decisive and strict measures to block the transmission chain of the epidemic," a city government spokesman, Xu Hejian, told a news conference. "In principle, personnel in risk areas shall not leave Beijing," Xu said.

Nationwide, 56 new confirmed infections were reported in the 24 hours through midnight Saturday. The National Health Commission said 37 were believed to have been acquired abroad. China has reported 4,636 deaths out of 105,603 confirmed cases and seven suspected cases since the pandemic began.

The Olympics are being held under strict controls that are meant to isolate athletes, reporters and officials from the outside world. Athletes are required to be vaccinated or undergo a quarantine after arriving in China.

Other outbreaks prompted the government to impose travel bans on the major cities of Xi'an and Tianjin.

# 'America has no specified schedule to recognise Taliban Govt'

**IAN S ■ WASHINGTON/KABUL**

The US has no specified schedule to recognise the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan, said Thomas West, Washington's special representative for Kabul.

He also emphasized that normalisation of relations between the Islamic Emirate and the world depends on the Taliban's behaviour.

West made the remarks while speaking to BBC Pashto. The top diplomat said that normalisation of ties between the US and the Taliban does not seem easy and that Washington has outlined preconditions in this regard, Khaama Press reported. Respect for human and women's rights, freedom of speech, education of women, and formalisation of the rights of minorities in Afghanistan are preconditions of the US to the Taliban. The special representative said that the US will pay the salaries of Afghan teachers in collaboration with the International Society in case the Taliban reopen schools. Regarding the frozen assets of Afghanistan, West said that a part of the money will be released for humanitarian purposes in Afghanistan but reiterated that it will not be given to the Taliban.

Afghanistan's over \$9.5 billion funds has been frozen by the US since the country fell to the Taliban in August last year.

Taliban officials meanwhile, have said they want good relations with the world while claiming to have fulfilled the promises made to the world for recognition. "The Islamic Emirate has hopes from the international community which have several aspects, particularly that the US, European Union and other organisations take a position that is understandable and engage in a new phase of engagement in Afghanistan," said Taliban spokesman Inamullah Samangani.

# Farmers' protest in Spain highlights rural concerns

**AP ■ MADRID**

Farmers, cattle-breeders, hunters and opposition supporters descended Sunday on the Spanish capital of Madrid to protest environmental and economic policies by Spain's left-of-center government that they say are hurting rural communities.

Sunday's protest was organized by Alma Rural 2021, a platform representing over 500 rural organizations from all corners of Spain. Members of opposition parties, ranging from centrists to far-right supporters, also attended.

The demonstration came as Spanish politicians are campaigning before an early election in Castilla-Leon, a vast region northeast of Madrid where proposals against depopulation and agricultural policies are taking center stage. Carlos Bueno, head of Alma Rural 2021, said the protest aimed to



People on horseback follow a tractor during a march in defence of Spanish rural areas during a protest in Madrid, Spain, Sunday, Jan. 23, 2022. Members of rural community are demanding solutions by the government for problems and crisis in the Rural sector

(AP Photo/Paul White)

highlight rural concerns amid what he called "ideological" attacks from the government. Concerns ranged from regulating prices for agricultural products to protections for those who breed cattle for bullfights and more subsidies for rural industries. Tractors

and bull carts headed the march along a Madrid thoroughfare, with protesters walking from the gates of the Ecology Transition Ministry — the previous Environment Ministry — to the Agriculture Ministry. Among the many banners held by protesters,





Priyanka listens to issues put up by women from her village

Last year, the panchayat elections in Bihar witnessed an increase in the number of women contesting the elections. The voting for the panchayat election took place in 11 phases. While the first phase began on September 24, the last one was held on December 12. As per a report, five to 10 per cent more women than men participated in the panchayat elections in each phase and won. Against a total of 4,17,772 male candidates, 4,74,917 women contested in all the phases.

The Government of Bihar has reserved 50 per cent of the seats in the panchayat election for women to motivate them to enter politics. These provisions have helped in increasing women's participation in decision-making and strengthening women's empowerment. In the recent panchayat election in Bihar, women from different rural areas have ensured their participation through their candidature. Interestingly, women who have studied at prestigious colleges in the country and worked in multinational companies have also contested the elections.

Take the case of 31-year-old Dolly, who completed her MBA from Symbiosis International University in Pune and worked in several multinational companies before deciding to enter the fray in the recent panchayat elections. Not

## POLITICS OF GENDER

SAUMYA JYOTSNA delves into the effects of more women participating in the electoral process in Muzaffarpur, Bihar

only did she participate, but also won by receiving 2,600 votes in her favour and is currently the sarpanch in the Shadi Pur panchayat of Manpur block situated in the Gaya district of Bihar. "I started working after I passed my XII standard in 2008. I wanted to get back to my village and work for its development. With this vision in my mind, I finally left my job in 2018," said Dolly.

In 2014, she got married and has a four-year-old daughter. Her mother-in-law was the sarpanch of Shadi Pur panchayat for eight years but, unfortunately, died during her tenure in November 2018. "The death of my mother-in-law was a huge loss. An educated and responsible person was required to take her place and carry out the duties. This is when I decided to contest in 2018. With everyone's support, I won the election," she expressed. Ever since she has been working towards the development of the village and won the



Sarpanch Dolly with women from her village

panchayat election for the second time.

While talking about her initiatives, she said, "I want to establish a cottage industry in the village so that more women can get work and become financially strong. As women in this village take an active part in agricultural work, they will benefit from this initiative." On the other hand, talking about the challenges, Dolly informed that the biggest one in the village is domestic violence, which needs to be curbed. Although women in the village complain about it, they are afraid to take action. Over

the years, Dolly has been able to bring several positive changes to the village. She has also received the Aparajita Award for Women Empowerment in Excellence of Gram Kachhari by Dainik Jagran for establishing the first digitised village office in Bihar.

Similarly, Priyanka, from Bishanpur Gonahi panchayat in Sonbarsa block of Sitamarhi district in Bihar, is driven towards breaking stereotypes through taking part in politics. However, her journey was not easy. Coming from an average family, her parents did not want to spend on her education and preferred to save money for her dowry. Despite several hurdles, she managed to take tuition and get an education. Even though she had started getting proposals when Priyanka was young, she did not want to get married.

"I told my brother about the situation, who was studying in Delhi. He did not just stop the wedding but

also helped me complete my X standard. I became the first girl from my family to get a first division in the exams," Priyanka informs gladly.

In 2013, she came to Delhi with her brother, completed her XII and got admitted to Miranda House. Coming from a village with a low literacy rate and getting admission to a prestigious college in the country's capital is indicative of Priyanka's grit and spirit. She completed her education in Philosophy. During her course, she came to know about India's first MBA degree holder sarpanch, Chhavi Rajawat, which motivated Priyanka to become one herself.

"In 2017, I got an opportunity to participate in the Gramya Manthan programme — a 10-day rural immersion initiative — by the Youth Alliance of India. And in 2018, I was entrusted by the organisation with the responsibility of Nibada, Kharagpur, Badi Palia and Chhoti Palia villages in Uttar Pradesh's Kanpur district, where I started a campaign named Sham Ki Pathshala for the children in the villages and did other developmental works," she informed.

Inspired by these works, she returned to her village in April 2020 and started working on awareness. Currently, there are four members in her team, who are running the Chetna Choupal programme under the Gram-Chetna-Andolan initiative. Under the programme, they visit different villages and inform people about social issues. She aims to become the sarpanch of her village and, therefore, participated in the recent panchayat elections. Despite her loss in the election, she did not lose her zeal to work towards developing her village.

Women in decision-making positions not only leads to increasing women's representation but also bridges the gender gap in political decision making. Given the right support and access to resources, these women can undertake outstanding work. And most importantly, society has to do away with conservative notions and discourage those who work relentlessly towards the greater good. As Priyanka puts it, "A woman has to struggle more than a man to get into politics because society wants to only see a woman making bread and this situation is more prevalent in rural areas."

—Charkha Features  
(The author has been a grassroots journalist for five years and is the winner of the UNFPA Laadli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity 2020 and 2021.)



## Change perspective

If we see the 21st century with a new outlook, we will be rewarded with a break from the past, says

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

It's been a couple of weeks since we entered a new year with fresh plans and renewed hopes. We have been reading and watching the intelligentsia sharing their views and visions of what the society in this year would be like. Generally, these talks revolve around the new inventions of science or about social and economic issues.

However important these inventions and issues may be, there is hardly any forum or platform where anyone ever offers ideas, ideology or visions which have such social, political, economic, administrative, cultural and health-related dimensions that represent almost a complete departure from what we know of what has been in the past 20 centuries. They only stretch their human imagination, linked as it is to what we see today and their visions or predictions are, more or less, a knitting-together of the latest researches and findings, projected by their fertile imagination into the future. What they say is not altogether novel nor do they give any scenes of a wonderland that will become a reality.

Similarly, newspapers, magazines and electronic media also give almost the same stuff with only little additions or changes in perceptions, observations or conclusions and they call some of these changes a 'breakthrough'. Perhaps, these are a breakthrough but what will be their overall effect, reflected in the emerging society is hardly discussed with any clarity, certainty and coherence. They just give bits and pieces of information which are disjointed and no one tells how these will fit in the jigsaw puzzle of the new society. They give only grains of information; no one gives an integrated and holistic view of what society in the coming years will be like. No effort has ever been made to synthesise the findings of all branches of knowledge to give mankind the multi-disciplinary sum-up or resume of the whole thing. Perhaps, no human being could do this because no one is well-versed in all the branches nor has anyone the requisite time and acumen.

Moreover, the total information provided by all kinds of research, done in all fields of knowledge, is so scant and sketchy that one cannot make out anything concrete about the 21st century, with any certainty. Also, there are many gaps and missing links in the information, so much so that the knowledge of these in future may overturn and invalidate the current beliefs. If we read the history of Philosophy, Physics, Astronomy, Geology, Biology or Psychology, to give a few examples, we will find that many theories in all the disciplines have been changing and some of them have been changing very frequently and



overnight. So, we cannot say that what we have learnt is accurate and final and will stay unchanged at least in our lifetime. What then can, we, human beings say about the 21st century when we do not know whether a nuclear world war will start or an environmental catastrophe will result in grave devastation of our flora, fauna and humankind or the population explosion and the expanding cities will cause havoc during our lifetime? Again, the so-called new information or discoveries have not yet even been delinked from the old and the obsolete and contradictory theories co-exist as there is no clinching proof of either or the paucity of time and effort to sift the grain from the chaff. For example, there is no universal agreement as to whether the mind or soul is an entity separate from the body or the mind is an epiphenomenon of the brain. The information we have is so inadequate that nothing can be said with certainty that is acceptable to all.

Further, the major and minor events that occurred from the 20th century till today are recorded in history but no human being knows their effects and after-effects thoroughly nor has anyone ever combined and coherently collated these to give a cogent view of what will happen as a cumulative result of these. No one can calculate these. We do not even know for sure whether we are sitting on an active volcano or that, soon, the gates of paradise would be flung open unto us to enter. More importantly, we do not know whether all these events have been part of a well-knit plan that has a meaning and a goal for all of us without a single exception. And, what is most important is that most of us haven't ever thought that there is a plan of retrieval that is being implemented and there is an incognito intervention of Supreme Almighty to impart new holistic knowledge, give a new paradigm and teach new ways of making spiritual efforts to usher a new era that is almost totally different from what we see today. So, let us look at the 21st century from that perspective. No one can neglect or postpone seeing the birth of this golden era in this light. Can we?

Protesters were walking back to their village post-rally when they turned violent. Within a flash of a second, one person began pelting stones and bricks in the demonstration sloganeering against the administration. Others joined him instantly and charged at the police. Crowds turn unruly and dangerous. What transforms peaceful protesters into violent agitators?

Rarely does a single demonstrator, even if provoked, becomes violent. However, crowds easily adopt violence. Why? According to social psychologists, mob mentality turns individuals into conformists. To fit in with the rest of the group, individuals, including law-abiding individuals, become irrational. Driven by the mob's mind they blindly follow others actions.

A single person tends to behave or act independently but that person, in a crowd, loses his inhibitions, defers blame, responsibility, accountability and/or judgment in a crowd. He assumes group identity ignoring his guiding inner voice. In the crowd, he does what he would otherwise term as unlawful.

Moreover, as humans have instinctive responses, their responses intensify by group influences. Such situations can become dangerous. The 'larger the group the greater the amplification of that crowd behaviour'. History and even present times have several examples of a mob killing

## Mob mentality impacts our culture

Osho sannyasin, MA SHASHIN, says an individual might be incapable of violence but a crowd has a different psyche

those who committed blasphemy or were accused of being witches.

Let's understand mob behaviour based on three major psychological theories. The Contagion theory, for example, is where one learns to smoke from a friend. It's nearly a magnetic influence as a non-smoker feels it's okay to smoke. According to the Convergence theory, people with common interests, motivation, and goals align, for example, college students or civil activists protesting against the administration. The Emergent-norm theory explains that mob behaviour results in collective action. People under strain assume a new norm and are stimulated to act both anti-socially and against their rationale. There are many examples of communal riots in our history.

Floyd Henry Allport, the father of experimental social psychology, holds this view: "The origin of crowd response is not by crowd members and the stimulus situation but it is the prepotent trend of the individual himself. The trend escalates with crowd stimulus.

While there can be many

factors leading to unlawful mob behaviour, Jung and Martin explain the cause for crowd behaviour. They say that 'every individual possesses the innate ability for mob behaviour'. The ability is adjusted with socialisation by social conditioning and social training. However, in a crowd situation, humans are possessed by the primitive, unconscious impulses that abort social conditioning and training. So, do humans become more powerful in crowds and give expression to their suppressions? Or are we humans responsible for our conduct regardless of the predisposition to adopt mob mentality for conforming to groups?

Consider this scenario to understand mob mentality. All the villagers draw water from a well. Until one day, the king and his Minister see that all those who drank water from the well have become insane. In a few days, all of them turn mad and they say that the king and the minister are mad. Later, these two confer and later decide that it's best for them to also drink water from the well if they



want to survive in the village.

Further, Jung and Martin say that our suppressions and repressions lead to such behaviour. What is the solution?

Osho says: "When you are angry with someone and you throw your anger at him, you are creating a chain reaction. Now he too will be angry. This may continue for the rest of your lives and you will go on being enemies.

How can you end it? There is only one possibility. You can end it only in meditation, nowhere else, because in meditation you are not angry with someone: you are simply angry."

This difference is basic. You are not angry with someone. You are simply angry into the cosmos. You are not hateful towards anyone. If hate comes, you are simply hateful and the

hate is thrown out. In meditation, emotions are not addressed. They are unaddressed. They move into the cosmos, and the cosmos purifies everything.

It is just like a dirty river falling into the ocean: the ocean will purify it... In meditation, you are throwing yourself into the cosmos to be purified. All the energy that you throw is purified in the cosmos. The cosmos is so vast and so great an ocean, you cannot make it dirty. In meditation, we are not related to persons. In meditation, we are related directly to the cosmos."

"To grow one's own insight, one needs to be deeply meditative, very alert and aware. The crowd lives a kind of sleepy, unconscious life; it makes no effort at awareness; it lives in a mechanical, robot-like."

Osho says: Why do people feel so happy in a crowd? Why does happiness in a crowd become so infectious? Because in a group they fall, they become unconscious. They lose their individuality. Then they are happy, then there is no worry, then there is no responsibility... Beware of mobocracy and be alert.

It would be appropriate to end this in Osho's words: "A group can have a mind — not a soul."

“ The wound is the place where the light enters you. — Rumi ”

### BACTERIAL BIOFUELS COST REDUCED

Researchers from the University of Kent's School of Biosciences have designed and built equipment that can be used to investigate bacterial biofuel production at a fraction of the cost of commercial systems. This technology was then used to demonstrate that bacterial genetic engineering could be used to enhance biofuel production.



Commercial equipment used to study biofuel-producing bacteria can be prohibitively expensive, which prompted the team to build their own bioreactors that are accessible to most research laboratories. The researchers then used this equipment to verify that one of their genetically engineered variants of Clostridium bacteria could produce the biofuel butanol more rapidly.

These research findings, published in the journals *Access Microbiology* and *Microbial Biotechnology*, reveal that a change to a single gene can result in remarkable changes to how sugars are converted to biofuel products.

### SCIENCE RESEARCH PAPERS SIMPLIFIED

Science research papers are notoriously difficult for an average person to comprehend without drifting away, but an artificial intelligence project aims to change that by summarising the gist in merely a few sentences that are easy enough for a second grader to understand.

A new technology has lowered the bar to the comprehension level of students in second grade. Say hello to t|d|r papers, a research paper summarising AI that describes its motto as "science abstracts a second grader can understand."

At first, the project sounds too ambitious because one can't expect even a season expert, let alone an AI, to explain what a niche quantum tunneling breakthrough is all about to a school-going kid. But it appears that the scientific research community is quite enamoured by the idea.



### DON'T MISS IMPORTANT MESSAGES

A new patent application from Apple reveals that future AirPods could let users switch off Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) with just a code word. AirPods Pro and AirPods Max come with Active Noise Cancellation to help users filter out ambient noise for a disruption-free audio experience. However, ANC blocks out pretty much all sounds indiscriminately, which means users sometimes miss out on important messages from their friends and family, something the company is trying to address with its new patent.

Apple's new patent describes the option to use designated code words to switch off noise cancellation on AirPods. Called 'Interrupt for noise-cancelling audio devices,' the new feature would ensure that users get to enjoy the benefits of noise cancellation without worrying that they will miss out on an important message from their family or friends. As part of the plan, the patent proposes that the noise-cancelling headphones or earbuds will scan externally-generated sounds to detect whether somebody is speaking the code-word.



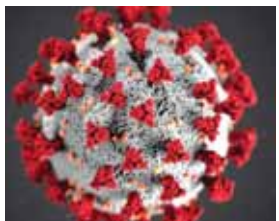
### OCEAN SEA-SALT TO PREVENT WARMING

In an opinion article published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a team of scientists led by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and The Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) researchers outline a framework for assessing the viability of a method for reflecting sunlight called marine cloud brightening, or MCB. The proposed method would use ocean sea-salt particles to increase the reflectivity of low-lying clouds over certain ocean regions. This is one of a number of proposed methods under consideration as a temporary measure to limit warming. Climate scientists agree that the most important steps that can be taken to avoid the worst impacts of climate change are to decarbonise the economy, and preserve and restore natural ecosystems that absorb carbon.



### NEW COVID DRUG WITHOUT SIDE-EFFECTS

Scientists in the Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) in Lucknow are trying to develop another drug for Covid treatment without any side-effects. A team led by chief scientist Ravi Shankar, is working on two combinations to provide the safest medication to coronavirus patients. "Experts say that a combination of antivirals with different mechanisms can be more effective to counter the viral pandemic. We are working on two combinations — Umifenovir with Molnupiravir (an antiviral) and Umifenovir with Niclosamide (anti-parasitic)," he said. Molnupiravir showed reduced hospitalisation during clinical trials, its biggest drawback are the side-effects, he added. "Now, we are trying to keep a low dosage of Molnupiravir in its combination with Umifenovir which may weed out the side-effects," said the chief





# South Africa beat India by 4 runs, complete 3-0 whitewash

**IAN S ■** CAPE TOWN

Deepak Chahar's fighting fifty (54 off 34 balls) went in vain as South Africa beat India by four runs in the third and final ODI to complete a 3-0 whitewash in the three-match series, here on Sunday.

A fantastic century by Quinton de Kock (124 off 130) helped South Africa post a challenging 287 in 49.5 overs. Apart from de Kock, Rassie van der Dussen (52 off 59) and David Miller (39 off 38) also played vital knocks for the Proteas.

Prasidh Krishna (3/59), Jasprit Bumrah (2/52), Deepak Chahar (2/53), and Yuzvendra Chahal (1/47) were the wicket-takers for India.

In reply, Shikhar Dhawan (61 off 73) and Virat Kohli (65 off 84) played important knocks but India were in deep trouble at one point after losing quick wickets during middle overs. However, Deepak Chahar's knock under pressure ignited hopes and kept India in the game till the time he was at the crease.

Once Deepak got out in the first ball of the 48th over, it was curtains for India as South Africa cleaned up the last two wickets too quickly to seal a 3-0 whitewash. In the end, the hosts were bowled out for 283 in 49.2 overs.

Phehlukwayo 3/40 was the most successful bowler for South Africa.

India rallied to bowl out South Africa for 287 after opener Quinton de Kock struck an attacking century



and Rassie van der Dussen continued his sublime form with a 52-run knock in the third and final ODI here on Sunday.

De Kock struck 124 off 130 balls and added 144 runs for the fourth wicket with van der Dussen before India put the brakes on the home team's scoring by sending back both the batters in quick succession.

The home team has already taken a winning 2-0 lead in the series.

After that, David Miller contributed a 38-ball 39 before the

innings ended with a ball to spare.

With his sixth ODI century, de Kock equalled AB de Villiers' record of scoring the most hundreds against India by a South African.

KL Rahul's decision to bowl first worked straightaway as Deepak Chahar (2/53) had opener Janneman Malan (1) caught behind with just eight runs on the board at the start of the third over.

It was a big wicket for the Indians as Malan came into the inconsequential final ODI on the back of a neat 91-

run knock in the Proteas' series-clinching second ODI win at Paarl.

And credit for that must go to Chahar who got his fullish delivery to move away after angling it in, leaving Malan clueless.

A direct hit from India skipper KL Rahul from mid-off, ended his in-form counterpart Temba Bavuma's brief stay in the middle as the batter failed to reach the non-striker's end in time.

Bavuma making his way back to the dressing room for eight runs was

another big break for India as the South Africa captain had scored a century in the opening fixture and also looked solid in the second outing.

After bagging two wickets in the powerplay, India seemed to be headed in the right direction when Aiden Markram's attempted pull shot failed to clear substitute fielder Rituraj Gaikwad in the deep square leg region, leaving the hosts at 70 for three in the 13th over.

However, the duo of De Kock and Van der Dussen got together and forged an excellent partnership, mixing caution with aggression to deflate the Indian bowling attack.

De Kock moved into the 90s with two boundaries and then produced a flat-batted six straight over Prasidh Krishna's (3/59) head.

But he got stuck on 99 for a while before finally getting to the three-figure mark by driving Shreyas Iyer to the left of sweeper cover for two runs.

Van der Dussen hit Yuzvendra Chahal through mid-wicket for four, as the two upped the ante with their vast range of strokes on all sides of the wicket.

But just when it looked like the two batters were taking the game away from India, the visitors got rid of both of them.

De Kock got out to a Jasprit Bumrah (2/52) short ball, giving Shikhar Dhawan a simple catch at deep square leg, and then, Chahal had van der Dussen brilliant caught by Iyer in the deep.

## If Rohit is fit, why can't he be the captain in Tests too: Ravi Shastri



**IAN S ■** NEW DELHI

Former head coach Ravi Shastri has said that Rohit Sharma should be made a full-time Test captain of India, provided the senior batter can maintain his fitness.

Rohit was appointed as India's Test vice-captain in December last year.

However, the Mumbai Indi'ns skipper was not able to travel with the Indian team to South Africa due to a hamstring injury he picked up last year.

KL Rahul was then appointed Kohli's deputy ahead of the tour of South Africa. But after Virat stepped down from Test captaincy, the search for next leader has begun.

To this, Shastri came forward and shared his view.

"If Rohit is fit, why can't he be the captain in Tests too. He was appointed vice-captain for the South Africa series but he couldn't go there because of injuries. So why not, if he was made the vice-captain, why can't he be promoted to captaincy," Shastri told India Today.

Rohit, who is likely to lead India across all formats, is currently 34 and India is certainly going to look towards grooming a youngster for the leadership role in the future and Shastri bats for Rishabh Pant.

He said the 24-year-old wicketkeeper-batter should be kept in mind when the selectors and the team management are discussing the future captain.

"Rishabh is a tremendous young player. As a coach, I was very fond of him, his attitude and the good thing about him was that he would always listen to you.

"A lot of people say, he always does what he wants but that's not true. He reads the game well and would always put my team effort first than self. So, he should always be kept in mind for leadership," Shastri added.

# Janneman, Fatima named ICC's Emerging Players of the Year for 2021

**IAN S ■** DUBAI

South Africa opener Janneman Malan and Pakistan pacer Fatima Sana were on Sunday adjudged as the ICC emerging players of the year for 2021 in men's and women's respectively.

Malan, named in ICC's ODI eleven of the year, had a stunning run in 2021 with the bat, making 715 runs in 17 international matches at 47.66 Average and 101.85 strike-rate, including two centuries and three fifties. He played a total of eight ODIs and nine T20Is in the year, but it was the 50-over format where he showed his real potential.

"It is a privilege to be named the ICC Men's Emerging Cricketer of the Year. I would like to thank my family, my support system, and



my team for the opportunity. My favourite innings of the year came in Sri Lanka where I had to bat the

full fifty overs, whilst I was cramping. It was personally a big innings for me to keep batting and fight

through the pain and be in a position to help my team win the game," said Malan.

His voyage started with the T20I series in Pakistan, followed by another ODI and T20I series against the same side at home. At the end of those two series, he had already shown the world his ability with two excellent knocks of 70 and 55 in Centurion.

But his moment of fame arrived when he smashed an unbeaten 177, the fourth highest score by a South African in ODIs, against Ireland in Dublin. He followed that up with another excellent knock of 121 against Sri Lanka in Colombo and thus ended the year on a good note.

Malan's most impactful knock was an unbeaten 177 against Ireland.

## Beaumont named Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year



**IAN S ■** DUBAI

England opener Tammy Beaumont on Sunday was voted as the ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year for 2021. Tammy beat competition from fellow team-mate Nat Sciver, India's Smriti Mandhana and Ireland's Gaby Lewis to win the award.

Tammy was England's highest run-getter in the year 2021 in T20Is, and third-highest overall

in the world with 303 runs in nine matches at an average of 33.66, including three half-centuries.

"It's a huge privilege to win the ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year Award. I've worked incredibly hard on my T20 game in the last few years. My T20I career has had its ups and downs and I don't think I've always been known for my T20 abilities, so this award gives me a huge amount of confidence," said Tammy.

In a low-scoring series against New Zealand away from home, Tammy was the top run-scorer and was awarded the 'Player of the Series' for amassing 102 runs in three matches. Her 53-ball 63 in the second match put England in a winning position after they lost two wickets in the Powerplay. She scored a brilliant fifty against India, though it went in vain after a lower-order collapse.



## England suffer crushing 9-wicket loss to West Indies

**IAN S ■** BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

England's T20 International series against West Indies got off to a disappointing start with the Eoin Morgan-led side suffering a nine-wicket defeat in a D/N match at the Kensington Oval on Sunday (IST).

West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder came up with career-best T20 bowling figures of four wickets for seven runs in 3.4 overs as the hosts restricted England to just 103 in 19.4 overs. Then, an unbeaten half-century from Brandon King saw West Indies score an easy win in the opening game of the five-match series.

The hosts started the rot with the wicket of Jason Roy in the first over of play, and didn't look back in a dominating performance from their bowlers.

Kieron Pollard's men were unrelenting with the ball and in the field, restricting the tourists to 26/4 in the Powerplay. Holder claimed Tom Banton and Moeen Ali in successive deliveries, as Sheldon Cottrell (2/30 off four overs) made his mark at the other end.

Cottrell removed Roy, and the left-armer picked up James Vince (14 from 12 balls), who threatened to launch English resurgence.

The fourth wicket brought Sam Billings to the middle, just a week after his Test debut in Hobart against Australia. The wicketkeeper-batter was unable to hang around with captain Morgan, missing an AkealHosein delivery on the charge and stumped for just two.

On top of the West Indies' execution of plans, England's batting capitulation was as much down to mistakes at crucial moments, with a poor call running between wickets the reason for Liam Dawson's downfall.

Misjudging a quick single, Dawson fell to his knees in an attempt to skip back into his ground, with Pollard finishing a simple throw to Nicholas Pooran for the run out.

# Too much importance is being given to strike rate: Mithali Raj

**IAN S ■** MUMBAI

India skipper Mithali Raj believes too much importance is being given to strike rate and wants her batters to focus on playing knocks and stitching partnership to lead the team to victory.

With the 2022 Cricket World Cup coming in New Zealand, Mithali gave an example of Australia's Beth Mooney's unbeaten knock of 125, where she started slow and then accelerated to win the match for her team, as a template for the Indian batters to follow.

"I think isn't too much importance given to strike-rate by all? It is always spoken when it comes to batting or putting up big totals. I just wanted to know if you all follow the strike rate of Indian players or players from all around the world? If you might give an opportunity to me to enlighten, in the Australia series itself, the decider game which Australia won, Beth Mooney scored her 50 in 80-odd balls," said Mithali in the pre-departure virtual press conference.

"But she went on to play a match-winning innings for her team. As for me, I believe that cricket is a game played on the situations on the ground and yes, it is important we keep it in mind that we need to have a healthy strike rate. But at the end of the day, it is about how the batting unit revolves and the depth



of the batting unit in our team," added Mithali.

She further explained, "When we have to score 250-270, we need to have a healthy strike rate, but having said we will not entirely focus on strike rate, it is important to play an innings to win and build partnerships. That happens not because of strike rate but because you apply and play according to the situation on the ground."

"Sometimes, you have to play fast but sometimes you have to play to get your team out of a hole too. There will always be areas to address, any team. no team is perfect and we will be looking to post a total of around 250-270 consistently and that requires a top-order to score runs and be consistent."

India will depart for New Zealand on January 24 to play a T20I and five ODIs against the hosts' before attempting to win their first World Cup trophy after being runners-up in 2005 and 2017. Mithali pointed towards contributions from the lower-middle order being a positive for the team.

"Something which we were quite happy about is the contribution of our lower-order, like Jhulan and Pooja Vastrakar, not only perform with the ball but with the bat as well. Then there's Sneha Rana, who's performed with both ball and bat. So, it is very good to see the lower-middle order actually contributing. So, that helps to have a depth in the team and smaller

tail, I would say."

Talking about young pacers Meghna Singh and Renuka Singh Thakur, Mithali felt the duo will perform well with support staff and veteran pacer Jhulan Goswami around. "They might lack the experience but Meghna has done well in the Australia series. I guess Jhulan is an experienced bowler in the set-up. She worked very well with the youngsters in the series and as far as Renuka is concerned when I saw her in the Australia series, she came across as somebody who is very competitive,"

"She had a very good domestic season with wickets. It's important to give players an opportunity when they are in rhythm and performing. I am sure they will do well with the support staff we have and having Jhulan, I am sure she will be sharing her experiences of bowling in these conditions with the youngsters who will respond very positively."

Life has come full circle for Mithali, who first featured in the World Cup in 2000 in New Zealand and will now lead India in her sixth appearance in the mega event. "I think it has been a wonderful journey, not an easy one. There have been struggles too but there have been good times as well. I think it has come a full circle, my first World Cup was in 2000 in New Zealand and here I am flying to New Zealand for my sixth World Cup."

# India hammer Uganda to top group, face Bangladesh in quarters

**IAN S ■** TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Raj Bawa and Angkrish Raghuvanshi smashed fine centuries as India recorded their second-highest score in an Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup match to crush Uganda by a massive 326 runs, as the four-time champions went through as group winners to the Super League of the ICC U-19 World Cup at the Brian Lara Stadium here on Sunday (IST).

Thanks to opener Raghuvanshi's 120-ball 144 and Bawa's unbeaten 162 off just 108 deliveries, which came at a strike rate of 150, India notched up 405 for 5 in the allotted 50 overs and then bundled out their opponents for just 79 runs, winning their last Group B match by 326 runs. India will now take on defending champions Bangladesh in the quarterfinal at the Coolidge Cricket Ground on January 29. India's 405/5 is only behind their 425/3 against Scotland in 2004. In the game, Shikhar Dhawan had slammed an unbeaten 155, the previous highest individual score for India at an ICC

Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup.

Earlier, Bawa and Raghuvanshi powered India past several batting records as they set Uganda an insurmountable total of 405. After captain Nishant Sindhu fell for 15 in the 16th over, Raghuvanshi and Bawa worked together to add 206 runs in 22.4 overs. Opener Raghuvanshi was eventually dismissed for 144 runs. Bawa then continued to pile on the runs as Kaushal Tambe and Dinesh Bana made useful cameos.

By the time the left-hander Bawa reached 150, 66 per cent of his runs had come from boundaries and at the close of the innings, he held the highest score of the tournament, surpassing the 154 not out from England's Tom Prest, to end with 162 from 108 balls including 14 fours and eight sixes. Uganda's challenge got even tougher as opener Isaac Ategeka was forced to retire having been struck on the forehead by a RajvardhanHangargekar delivery. The right-arm seamer then dismissed his replacement Cyrus Kakuru for a

first-ball duck off the final ball of an eventful first over.

Captain Pascal Murungi, who earlier took Uganda's best figures of 3/72, batted bravely for 34 but could not stop the inevitable victory as Uganda ended on 79 for nine from 19.4 overs with Ategeka unable to retake the field. The 326-run victory is India's largest at an ICC Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup.



## Pakistan thrash PNG, set up Super League clash with Australia

**IAN S ■** PORT OF SPAIN (TRINIDAD)

Pakistan eased to one of the most facile wins in the current edition of the Under-19 ICC Cricket World, thrashing Papua New Guinea by nine wickets in a low-scoring Group C game at the Queen's Park Oval here on Sunday (IST). They will clash with Australia

in the Super League quarterfinal at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground on January 28.

Papua New Guinea were bundled out for just 50 in 22.4 overs, with five batters being dismissed for ducks. Seventeen-year-old Pakistan opener and right-arm pace bowler Muhammad Shehzad grabbed five wickets for seven runs in his 6.4

overs as the opponents could manage just one double-digit score -- from opener Christopher Kilapat (11 off 30 balls). Papua New Guinea started positively as Kilapat and Boio Ray put on 24 for the first wicket. However, once the wicket of Kilapat fell Papua New Guinea lost the next nine wickets for 26 runs.

## Afghanistan, Bangladesh score big wins

**IAN S ■** DIEGO MARTIN TRINIDAD

Afghanistan and Bangladesh scored big wins against their rivals, Zimbabwe and UAE, respectively as they advanced to the Super League quarterfinals on the final day of group-stage matches in the Under-19 ICC Cricket World Cup on Sunday (IST).

In Group C, Afghanistan came out on top, securing a 109-run win over Zimbabwe to progress, while Bangladesh triumphed in another winner-takes-all game, beating the UAE by nine wickets (D/L method) in a Group A match.

In the quarterfinal on January 27, Afghanistan will take on Sri Lanka, while on January 29, defending champions Bangladesh will meet India for a place in the last-four.

At the Diego Martin Sporting Complex in Trinidad, Suliman

Safi's century helped Afghanistan to victory, with the skipper putting on 111 from 118 balls, including 14 fours and three sixes. Safi's efforts helped Afghanistan move to 261/6 as he was dismissed on the final ball of the innings.

Four other batters posted scores of over 20, with opener NageyaliaKharote contributing a half-century from 45 balls.

Alex Falao was the pick of the bowlers for Zimbabwe as he took 3/54 from his 10 overs to move on to eight wickets for the tournament so far. In reply, Zimbabwe opener Matthew Welch led the charge with Steven Saul contributing nine to the score before being given out leg before wicket to leave his side on one for 49.

Welch's next two partners could add only one run to the total before it was Welch's turn to fall having made 53 from 61 balls.



# Sindhu clinches Syed Modi International title

SHALABH SAXENA ■ LUCKNOW

Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu defeated Malvika Bansod 21-13, 21-16 to win her second title at the Syed Modi India International Badminton Tournament at UP Badminton Academy on Sunday.

Bansod, who defeated Saina Nehwal in the recently-concluded India Open, failed to present any challenge to Sindhu as the top seed wind-up the final match in just 35 minutes.

Sindhu never let the young Bansod settle down with her smashes and crosscourt drops at any point of the match. Sindhu raced to a 7-0 lead inside the first three minutes and kept the charge on to pocket the game quite comfortably in 14 minutes.

The second game saw a similar pattern with the world No 7 leading 11-4 at the mid-game interval. Bansod, the world No. 84, mounted a comeback and reduced the lead at 17-12 but the experienced Sindhu went on to seal the match in straight games.

Notably, this was the first meeting between the 20-year-old MalvikaBansod and PV Sindhu at the international circuit. Bansod, who clinched the All-India Senior Ranking Championships in

December, had beaten the London 2012 Olympic bronze medallist Saina Nehwal at the India Open, earlier this month.

This is Sindhu's second title at the tournament after her first win in 2017. The men's final was marred by the COVID-19 and was declared a 'No match' after Arnaud Merkle of France tested positive for coronavirus infection.

His opponent Lucas Claerbout, who was also Merkle's roommate, was also forced to leave the tournament due to close contact.

Earlier, in the mixed doubles, the seventh seeded pair of Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto defeated T Hema Nagendra Babu and Srivedya Gurazada 21-16, 21-12 to annex the title.

Seventh-seeded Indian pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand lost to eighth-seeded Malaysian pair of Anna Ching Yik Cheong and Teoh Mei Xing 12-21, 13-21 in the women's doubles final.

It was a silver for Indian men's doubles pair also as Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnuvardhan Goud Panjala were beaten by Malaysian pair of Man Wei Chong and Tee Kai Wun 15-21, 18-21.



(Left) PV Sindhu and Malvika Bansod (Right) Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto



## India-Chinese Taipei Asian Cup match is off

SIANS ■ MUMBAI

India had to withdraw from the ongoing AFC Women's Asian Cup football competition on Sunday as the hosts failed to name their team for the match against Chinese Taipei because of injuries and Covid positive tests.

The rules specify that a team should be able to put up a bare minimum of 13 players to compete in a match. The Indians had only 11 players fit and available to play Sunday's match against Chinese Taipei at the DY Patil Stadium here. Of the 23 players in the squad, two players had to isolate themselves as they tested positive on the eve of India's opening match in the competition on January 20.

Sources said on Saturday, the hosts had 13 players that were not down with Covid-19 but two of them were injured. The two injured players could not recover in time and thus a team could not be named for the match against the Chinese Taipei.

"The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has confirmed that the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 match between Chinese Taipei and India at the D.Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai could not be played today," the AFC said in a statement on Sunday.

"Following several positive cases of Covid-19, India failed to name the required minimum of 13 players for the Group A match against Chinese Taipei," said the statement.

"In accordance with Article 4.1 of the 'Special Rules Applicable to AFC Competitions during the COVID-19 pandemic' (Special Rules), India was therefore unable to participate in the match and the full provisions of Article 4.1 will apply," the statement said.

Article 4.1 of the 'Special Rules Applicable to AFC Competitions during Covid-19 pandemic' states, "If a Participating Team/Participating Club has less than thirteen (13) Participating Players (including one (1) goalkeeper) available for a Match for any reason (whether or not relating to Covid-19), the relevant Participating Team/Participating Club shall not be able to participate in the Match. Such Participating Team/Participating Club shall be held responsible for the Match not taking place and shall be considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition. The relevant Participating Team/Participating Club and its affiliated Member Association shall be subject to the provisions of the relevant Competition regulations regarding the consequences of withdrawal, as applicable."

## Sania Mirza-Rajeev Ram advance to mixed doubles quarters

SIANS ■ MELBOURNE

India's Sania Mirza and her American partner Rajeev Ram advanced to the quarter-finals of the 2022 Australian Open mixed doubles event after beating Australia's Ellen Perez and MatweMiddelkoop of the Netherlands, here on Sunday.

Mirza-Ram won their second-round match 7(8)-6(6), 6-4 in one hour and 27 minutes.

The Indo-American pair got off to a bad start and trailed



2-0 in the opening stages of the first set. However, they struck back to level up the score at 6-6 and stretched the set into a tiebreaker.

Sania and Ram had a better start in the second set, racing to a 2-0 lead. The experienced duo, with no unforced errors, then won the set comfortably.

In the quarters, Sania Mirza and Rajeev Ram will now face the winner of the match between Australian wild card pairs Samantha Stosur-Matthew

Ebden and Jaimee Fourlis-Jason Kubler. Notably, both Mirza and Ram have won the Australian Open mixed doubles title before with different partners. While Sania Mirza won the Grand Slam in 2009 with Mahesh Bhupathi, Ram won the 2019 and 2021 mixed doubles events with BarboraKrejickova.

The 35-year-old Sania is the only Indian left in the competition after Rohan Bopanna made a first-round exit in mixed doubles event on Saturday.

## Ash Barty beats Anisimova, to face Pegula in quarters

SIANS ■ MELBOURNE

Top-ranked Ashleigh Barty booked her place in the 2022 Australian Open quarter-finals with a win over Amanda Anisimova, here on Sunday.

Top seed Barty beat 20-year-old Anisimova 6-4, 6-3 in a 74-minute clash. She will meet No 21 seed Jessica Pegula, who reached the last eight in Melbourne for the second straight season after defeating No 5 seed Maria Sakkari of Greece 7-6(0), 6-3. With this win, Barty's quest to become the first home women's champion at the Australian Open since Chris O'Neil in 1978 remains alive. In her previous second-week showings, she lost in the 2019 quarter-finals to Petra Kvitova, the 2020 semifinals to Sofia Kenin and the 2021 quarter-finals to Karolina Muchova.



During Sunday's outing, Barty's progress was not all smooth sailing. At times, she was outbitten by bold drive volleys and down-the-line winners from Anisimova. She gave her younger opponent openings with a smattering of dou-

ble faults (three, two of which came consecutively) and unforced errors (17, outweighed by 23 winners).

However, the World No 1 found solid one-two punches to wriggle out of her tightest service games in the first set, and a couple of moments of magic with delightfully angled backhand slice winners to break Anisimova for the first time. Her crafty variation on the slice paid dividends throughout, repeatedly tangling Anisimova up tactically and technically.

The 25-year-old Barty also raised her level to accelerate toward the finishing line of both sets. The first three of her seven total aces came in her final two service games of the first. And in the second, Anisimova held two game points to hold for a 4-3 lead, only for Barty to reel off 12 of the next 14 points to take the win.

# China thrash Iran 7-0 for another stylish win

SIANS ■ MUMBAI

Eight-time champions China virtually sealed a place in the quarter-finals and underlined their AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 title credentials by cruising to a 7-0 win over Iran at Mumbai Football Arena here on Sunday. Wang Shuang scored a birthday brace, Wang Shanshan too scored a double, Xiao Yuyi and Tang Jiali contributed a goal each while Iran's Fatemeh Adeli scored an own goal as Shui Qingxia's side continued their blistering start to the tournament and set their sights towards the latter stages of the competition. The result leaves Iran's quarter-final ambitions hanging on Wednesday's clash against Chinese Taipei, which



is likely to be pivotal to both sides' knockout stage hopes.

As expected, China dominated the match, enjoying 80.4 percent possession, and attempted 23 shots and 12 of them on target, resulting in six goals. Iran could get only one shot on target. The Steel Roses returned to the scene of Thursday's 4-0 win over Chinese Taipei eager to build on their fast start, and they quickly assumed control against a deep-lying Iranian defence.

Wang Shanshan forced a strong save from ZohrehKoudaei in the 10th minute, and the star goalkeeper got down low to deny the Chinese captain once again five minutes later, continuing the form which saw her voted Player of the Match in Thursday's 0-0 draw

against India. It seemed that it would take something special to beat Iran's number one, and that's exactly what Wang Shuang provided in the 28th minute, picking out the bottom corner with a perfectly directed left-footed effort from the edge of the box to celebrate her 27th birthday in style. Coach Maryam Irandoost's Iran side was never easily broken down, but China produced a move that would have picked apart the very best defences just before halftime, with Zhang Xin's slide-rule pass setting up Xiao Yuyi, who duly caressed the ball into the net to make it 2-0 two minutes before half-time. Iran's dynamic teenage striker NeginZandi was introduced at half-time as they looked for a way

back into the match, but their cause suffered a significant blow when MelikaMotevalli clumsily fouled Chinese substitute Li Mengwen, with Wang Shuang easily beating Koudaei from the penalty spot to make the points all but safe in the 49th minute. The earlier intensity of the game now noticeably absent, Wang Shanshan extended the lead when she poked home Xiao Yuyi's cross in the 55th minute, and the same duo teamed up four minutes later to increase the tally to 5-0.

China's superior fitness and technique was evident throughout the second half, and they duly added a sixth through Tang Jiali 77th minute, with the Tottenham forward finding the net with the swerving effort 15 minutes.

## Ngannou regains heavyweight crown over Gane



SIANS ■ ANAHEIM (USA)

Francis Ngannou's win in UFC 270 over interim champ CirylGane has put the organisers in a spot.

The heavyweight champion, who took on Gane in a five-round clash at the Honda Centre in Anaheim, California, has made it clear that he will not fight again unless he is given a considerable fee hike.

So far, UFC President Dana White has been reluctant to consider it. The fight was a literal

and figurative clash of titans with both men standing at 6 feet 4 inches and weighing in well over 230 pounds.

Both fighters also share a considerable history having been long-time sparring partners and this was evident throughout the fight with Gane winning the first two rounds on the feet, nullifying the Cameroonian's scary knockout power, no doubt due to being used to it in the sparring sessions they have together. But Ngannou showed that he too had learnt lessons from those sessions as he proceeded to turn around the fight in the next three rounds by repeatedly taking down the French kickboxer, leaving him helpless as he couldn't wrestle away from the Champion's considerable frame.

The fight between the former training partners wasn't the only title clash on the card, however, with the co-main event being contested for the flyweight championship between incumbent champ Brandon Moreno and DeivesonFigueiredo.

This was the third battle for the title between the pair with the first two matches ending in a draw and a win for Moreno which saw him snatch away Figueiredo's crown.

## Shapovalov gets past No. 3 Zverev

SIANS ■ MELBOURNE

Canadian star Denis Shapovalov remained calm and composed as he booked his Australian Open quarterfinal berth with a 6-3, 7-6(5), 6-3 victory over world No. 3 and Tokyo Olympic Games gold medallist Alexander Zverev of Germany at the Melbourne Park on Sunday.

Shapovalov has now set up a quarterfinal showdown with Spanish stalwart Rafael Nadal, who is aiming for his second Australian Open crown after the title triumph in 2009.

The searing Melbourne heat could not stop Shapovalov from extinguishing the hopes Zverev in the duo's first meeting at a major.

The 14th-seeded Canadian had to take an ice bath after his gruelling five-setter against world No. 54 Soonwoo Kwon of South Korea in the second-round, but he kept a cool head

throughout the tough encounter to brush past an inconsistent Zverev in the fourth round. "It's probably the one I least expected to finish in three (sets)," Shapovalov was quoted as saying by atptour.com on Sunday. "I'm very happy with my performance, definitely happy with where my game is at."

With his returns sharp as ever, Shapovalov broke Zverev early for a 3-1 lead, the German dropping just his third service game of the tournament on the way to also losing his first set in Melbourne this year.

Zverev looked frustrated as Shapovalov broke the German again immediately in the second. But seven double faults in the set from the Canadian helped Zverev claw back. Serving for the set at 5-3, Zverev's inconsistency again came to the fore at crucial moments and Shapovalov forced a tie-break. The Canadian

looked more comfortable of the two, winning 7/5.

"I think off the ground I was playing really well, really feeling my shots off both wings," said Shapovalov. "I played pretty smart today, it felt like things were going my way early on. I lost a little bit of momentum mid-way in the second set but fought well to come back and just kind of rolled with it after."

Shapovalov's opponent in the quarterfinals will be Nadal, after the sixth-seed defeated Adrian Mannarino of France 7-6(14), 6-2, 6-2. Nadal holds a 3-1 lead in the ATP head-to-head against Shapovalov.

always an honour to go up against a guy like Rafa," said Shapovalov. "It's always going to be a battle against him. It's going to be a tough one and I'm definitely going to enjoy it."

