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 NETAJI, NOT CONGRESS,
 FINALLY WON FREEDOM

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**SINDHU WINS
 SYED MODI
 INTERNATIONAL
 12 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,

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 karoonga" (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



sary --- also being celebrated as 'Prakram divas' --- a digital statue is being unveiled - to be replaced by a 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 heritage 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.

ED may arrest Health Min before Punjab polls: Kejriwal

We're not afraid, they conducted raids earlier too, says Delhi CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo and Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, on Sunday said he had been informed by sources that the Enforcement Department (ED) might arrest his Cabinet Minister Satyendar Jain just before the Assembly elections in Punjab.

"From our sources, we have got to know that right before the Punjab polls in the coming few days the ED is going to arrest the Health and Home Minister of Delhi, Satyendar Jain. They are most welcome. Previously too, the Centre had conducted raids at Satyendar Jain but got nothing," Kejriwal said in a virtual press conference.

"We are not afraid of that as well. Once you tread on the path of Satya, you are ready to overcome all these obstacles as well," the AAP's national convenor said.



Hitting out at Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Kejriwal said that neither AAP leaders fear the jails, nor the BJP Government's raids. "Come what may, we are here to serve Delhi; I appeal to the BJP to send the CBI, Income Tax and Delhi Police behind us. We know that we have not done anything wrong. We have forced this earlier too, we are just waiting for them to come now," Kejriwal added.

"We won't spiral into a hue and cry spectacle like Charanjit Singh Channi Ji; he was on the wrong side and his mountains of cash have been

exposed. If BJP wants, they can raid my house or deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and the party's Punjab CM candidate Bhagwant Mann as well. We will all welcome them with wide smiles," he added.

Kejriwal said as a party and as a family, the Central Government has conducted malicious raids against Jain two times prior to this as well. "They couldn't find even a pennyworth's mistake back then. We'll be happy to have them around this time as well. We have nothing to fear," he said.

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.

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Capt releases first list of 22 candidates out of total 37

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Settled on contesting on Saround 32 per cent of the total 117 Assembly seats in Punjab in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa-led SAD (Sanyukt), Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday announced 22 candidates of his new outfit, Punjab Lok Congress, by following social engineering formula and making effort to give representation to all, but lacks “big names”. Seeking re-election from his family bastion, Patiala Urban, once again, Capt Amarinder also announced the candidature of three former legislators — former Akali MLA and wife of late DGP Izhar Alam Khan Farzana Alam from Malerkotla; former MLA and Forests Corporation’s former chairman Harjinder Singh Thekedar from Amritsar (South); and a former SAD

MLA from Mansa and Ludhiana’s former senior Deputy Mayor Prem Mittal from Atamnagar. Besides, former Indian hockey team captain Ajitpal Singh will be contesting as PLC candidate from Nakodar. The Sanaur seat will be contested by business and youth social activist Bikramjit Inder Singh Chahal — son of Capt Amarinder Singh’s close aide and advisor Bharat Inder Singh Chahal, while he has fielded a young leader from a political family, Damanjeet Singh Mohi, against his once close aide Capt Sandeep Sandhu from Dakh. Mohi is an active Youth Congress functionary who has formerly been Sarpanch, Zila Parishad member, and also Mullanpur Market Committee’s chairman. With the former Congress leader wielding influence in the Malwa belt, 26 of PLC’s total seats are from the region, while seven seats came to its share

are in the Majha region, and four from Doaba region. “The PLC has currently got 37 of the 117 seats in the state as part of its alliance with the BJP and SAD (Sanyukt), with discussions still in progress on possibly another five seats for the party,” said Capt Amarinder, while addressing the media. Implying the social engineering formula, four of the 22 candidates belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC) community, three to the Other Backward Class (OBC) community, while five are Hindu faces (three Pandits and two Aggarwals). Capt Amarinder, releasing the first list of nominees, said that all these candidates have strong political credentials and are well-known faces in their respective constituencies. “There is one woman on this first list,” he said, adding that there are eight other Jat Sikhs in the well balanced first list.

In addition to Capt Amarinder and Farzana Alam, another key candidate from the Malwa region is the Patiala Municipal Corporation’s sitting mayor Sanjeev Sharma, who was president of District Youth Congress for a number of years. Sharma will contest the Patiala (Rural) seat against Cabinet Minister Brahm Mohindra’s son and youth Congress leader Mohit Mohindra. Kamaldeep Saini, former Punjab Congress secretary, has been finalised as the candidate from Kharar; while Jagmohan Sharma, who was Ludhiana District Congress Committee president and is currently the PLC district president, has been selected for Ludhiana (East). The party ticket from Ludhiana (South) has been allotted to Satinderpal Singh Tajpuri, who is the son of a former Cooperation Minister in the previous Shiromani Akali

Dal (SAD) government. A popular Dalit face and a retired PPS officer, Mukhtiar Singh, has been nominated for the party ticket from the reserved constituency of Nihalsingh Wala; while Dharamkot seat ticket has gone to an advocate, agriculturist, and businessman Ravinder Singh Garewal. A medical practitioner Amarjeet Sharma, who has been working at the grassroots for over a decade, has been pitched from Rampura Phul. An established businessman, transporter, and agriculturist, Raj Nambardar is a prominent Hindu face from Bathinda and will contest the polls from Bathinda (Urban), from where state’s Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal is sitting MLA. Incidentally, his father Dev Raj Nambardar also contested from Bathinda in 1985. Bathinda (Rural), a reserved constituency, will be contested by Sawera Singh —

son of late MLA Makhan Singh and currently Punjab Water Resources Management Corporation’s vice chairman. From another reserved seat, Budhalada, a former Army man Subedar Bhola Singh Hasanpur will contest as alliance’s candidate. Hasanpur has served the Indian Army for 28 years and was unanimously elected Sarpanch of his village. Three-time Municipal Councillor and former member Improvement Trust, Barnala, as well as ex-President SC Wing of SAD, Dharam Singh Fauji has been selected as the PLC candidate from Bhadaur (SC); while Surinder Singh Kherki, former Member of Panchayat Samiti, will be party candidate from Samana. In Majha region, Tejinder Singh Randhawa is the candidate for Fatehgarh Churrian, currently represented by cabinet minister and Congress stalwart Tript Rajinder Singh

Bajwa. The first list of candidates from Doaba region includes Amandeep Singh, former Punjab Congress spokesperson, for Bholath. SONIA KEPT QUITE WHEN TOLD ABOUT THOSE INVOLVED IN ILLEGAL MINING Stepped down after bitter tussle with Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu and citing “repeated humiliation”, Capt Amarinder on Sunday asserted that he had informed the Congress president Sonia Gandhi about those involved in illegal mining, but “she went quite when I asked her whether we should take action”. “NEVER SAID WOULD CONTEST AGAINST SIDHU” Clarifying that he had never said that he would contest against his bête noire Sidhu,

Capt Amarinder said that he would contest from Patiala only and “won’t leave my family’s home of 300 years”. “I had never said that I would contest against Sidhu. But said that I would not let him win,” said Capt Amarinder. WILL SEEK VOTES ON MY OWN GOVT AND MODI GOVT’S ACHIEVEMENTS: Capt Amarinder said that he would seek votes on his own government’s achievements and Prime Minister Narendra Modi government’s accomplishments at the Centre. Capt Amarinder had to step down as the Chief Minister after four and half year tenure. JAT SIKH - 9, SC-4, OBC- 3, HINDU (PANDIT)- 3, HINDU (AGGARWAL)- 2, MUSLIM/LADY- 1 Total:22.

Adventure-sports training to be given to 1,000 youth every year in Hry: Khattar

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday announced that 1,000 youth of the state would be imparted training in adventure sports every year by the State Government so as to enable them to get employment. “Besides this, adventure-sports will be started in the hills of Kalesar, Dhosi, Aravalli and Mewat, where three to five ‘adventure-sports camps’ will be organised every year other than such camps being organised in Morni, Panchkula. An amount of Rs 2 crore will be spent every year on training in the above camps,” said the Chief Minister while addressing the youth at the closing ceremony of the training programme named ‘Youthpreneur’ under the

‘Milkha Singh Adventure Sports Club’ organised by the Sports and Youth Affairs Department of Haryana. During this training programme, youth falling between the age group of 16 to 29 years of Morni area were trained about entrepreneurship related to ‘Adventure-Sports and Home-Stay’. While congratulating and wishing the youth on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the Chief Minister talked about Netaji’s indelible contribution to the freedom movement and called upon the youth to follow the path of patriotism shown by him. Citing example of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh and other great personalities, Khattar said that youth is energetic, thus, if this energy is channelised in

the right direction, then the nation will surely be on the path of progress. While exhorting the youth to be job-givers instead of job-seekers, he said that the Haryana Government is striving for the upliftment of the poorest of the poor with the spirit of Antyodaya. He said that this will be done by organizing Antyodaya Rozgar Melas and the state is making the poor aware about the facility of loans and various ways to become self-employed, including starting poultry farms, fish farming, animal husbandry etc so that their income can be enhanced. Khattar also apprised the youth about the work being done by the State Government in the field of religious tourism and cultural tourism, besides adventure sports.

State Information Commission building to be named after Subhas Chandra Bose: Haryana CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday laid the foundation stone of the State Information Commission building to be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 36.49 crore in Sector 3, Panchkula and announced to name this building after Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He extended greetings to the people of the state on the 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose. It was informed that the construction of the six-story State Information Commission building is estimated to be completed in two years and administrative approval of Rs 36.49 crore has been given. The total area of the plot is 3274.35 square meters and it will have two basements. The total covered area of the said building will be 8500.98 square meters and the basement will have an area of 3692.20 square meters. The Chief Minister while interacting with the media-persons said that the indomitable courage, spirit of patriotism and inspiration of Bose that was inculcated in youth for achieving the country’s independence can never be forgotten. “It is really unfortunate that the Congress party could never think beyond the dynasty of the Nehru family and due to this the contributions made by Netaji and

other revolutionaries in the struggle for country’s independence never got the required attention. However, today youth should take inspiration from the biography of revolutionaries like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and come forward to make a pivotal contribution in the progress of the country and society,” he said. Replying to a question, the Chief Minister said that the Congress should regret hiding the contribution made by leaders like Netaji in the country’s independence and should express gratitude to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for unveiling the hologram statue of Netaji at India Gate on the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary so that future generations can take lessons from his life. Today on the 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose as part of the Amrit Mahotsav to mark the celebrations of the 75th year of India’s independence going across the country, ‘Parakram Diwas’ have been organized at 75 places in Haryana. The statue of Netaji has also been unveiled in the park near Haryana MLA Hostel in Chandigarh, Khattar said. Responding to another question regarding the assembly elections to be held in five states, the Chief Minister said that the election process has just started and gradually the situation will become clear and he hopes that the BJP will perform better than its previ-

ous performance. CM unveils statue of Subhas Chandra Bose at a park in Chandigarh The Chief Minister unveiled a statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose installed at a park named after him in Chandigarh to mark the countrywide celebrations of ‘Parakram Diwas’ on his 125th birth anniversary. The Chief Minister said that today’s occasion gives us a golden opportunity to remember the freedom era of our country and the pivotal contributions made by Bose and many others who had made supreme sacrifices for the country’s freedom. “I call upon the youth of the nation to dedicate their lives for serving the country while taking inspiration from the ideals and sacrifice made by Netaji,” he said. The Chief Minister said that as the entire country is celebrating the Amrit Mahotsav to mark the celebrations of the 75th year of India’s independence, around 495 programmes with a slogan of ‘Haryana bolega Jai Hind Bose’ along with public participation are being organized across the state. Haryana’s contribution in serving the country has always remained a matter of great pride for the state as even in Netaji’s brave army of 50,000 Azad Hind Fauj, a large number of youth from the state had made their significant contributions, he added.

Badal asks Kejriwal ‘not to allow communal bias, electoral opportunism to hinder Prof Bhullar’s release’

Advises Delhi CM not to walk polarising path of Congress rulers; cites Bhullar’s serious health condition

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Amidst growing resentment among the Sikh community over the delay in release of 1993 Delhi blast convict Prof Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, Punjab’s five-time former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Sunday called for his immediate release “in the larger interest of consolidating peace and communal harmony in Punjab”. Badal urged the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal not to allow a communal bias or political or electoral opportunism to dictate his decision and refusal to grant immediate clearance for Bhullar’s release. “Bhullar must be released without even a moment’s delay as he had already served his full term in jail...Punjab had suffered enough because of these petty communal and polarizing political conspiracies by the Congress rulers in the past. Kejriwal must resist the temp-

tation to walk the same path for the same petty reasons,” said senior Badal, who is currently recovering from COVID-19. Also drawing Kejriwal’s attention to the serious health complications Bhullar is facing, Badal said that even the basic humanitarian concern, apart from just legal considerations, should compel you to act expeditiously and positively in this case. “I really don’t know why the Delhi Chief Minister is not allowing justice to be delivered to Bhullar even after the latter has already suffered long years of laceration and served more time in jail than the full tenure of sentence. There is no legal, judicial or moral ground for keeping the long lacerated Sardar Bhullar behind the bars now. Why Kejriwal has not granted the necessary clearance for this, only his conscience or his political know,” said the Akali stalwart while urging and requesting “Kejriwal sahib” to immediately accord the requisite permission. “And I see no reason why he wouldn’t heed my request and advice in this regard,” said the elder statesman.

Now, Rana urges Sonia to expel Khaira

PNS ■ JALANDHAR

Already at daggers drawn with his party’s candidate from Sultanpur Lodhi. Navtej Singh Cheema, senior Congress leader and Punjab’s Technical Education Minister Rana Gurjeet Singh on Sunday urged the party president Sonia Gandhi to expel Sukhpal Singh Khaira, former MLA and party nominee from Bholath, from the Congress party for his alleged involvement in ‘drug money’ laundering. Rana Gurjit, in a letter to Sonia Gandhi, said: “He (Khaira) is currently in jail in connection with the money laundering case. It is not the routine money laundering case of unaccounted wealth or money. It relates to drug money. The money in question has been made through drugs, which is unacceptable and indefensible.” “The Congress party has always been against drugs. In fact, it was our worthy former president Rahul Gandhi who had flagged the issue in 2015, while referring to the serious problem of drugs in Punjab,” he said in the letter while raising a question, “how can our party give ticket to someone who is tainted by drug charges or to any of his family members?” “It will be difficult for the Congress leaders and contestants to defend the indefensible that on the one hand, we have sworn that we will eliminate drugs; and on the other hand, we are giving a party ticket to a tainted person who is in jail accused of money laundering which he accumulated from drugs,” he said. Rana Gurjit said: “This was high time that the Congress party should take a stand on the issue of drugs and someone who is tainted and is in jail for

PUNJAB POLL BUZZ

RS 74.90 CR VALUABLES SEIZED AFTER ENFORCEMENT OF CODE

Chandigarh: After the Model Code of Conduct came into force in the state for Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections, various enforcement teams have seized valuables worth Rs 74.90 crores in violation of code till January 22 (Saturday). The state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Dr S Karuna Raju on Sunday said that surveillance teams have seized 11.38 lakh litres of liquor worth Rs 3.62 crore. Similarly, the enforcement wings have also recovered psychotropic substances amounting to Rs 56.17 crores besides confiscating unaccounted cash of Rs 14.05 crore, he added. As per the Election Commission’s directions, Dr Raju said that of total 3,90,275 licensed weapons in the state, 3,69,086 have been deposited till date, while 41 without licenses weapons were seized.

SSM ANNOUNCES 8 MORE CANDIDATES

Chandigarh: Sanyukt Samaj Morcha, Punjab’s farmers’ political outfit, on Sunday announced eight more candidates for the ensuing state Assembly elections. The announcement came a day after the Morcha, in a surprising move, announced gangster-turned-social activist Lakha Sidhana as its candidate from Maur. With the fresh list, the SSM has now announced 76 candidates for February 20 polls. The party has named retired bureaucrat Khushi Ram from Phagwara, Chamkaur Singh from Bathinda Rural, Raj Kumar Mahal Khurd from Banga, Rashpal Singh Raju from Chhabawal, Dr Jang Bahadur Singh Rai from Garhshankar, Jawsant Singh Randhawa from Mukerian, Gora Singh from Bhadaur, and Kuldeep Singh Dalla from Jagron. Besides the SSM has also withdrawn the candidature of two candidates fielded earlier — Harwinder Singh Harpalpur from Rajpura and Balraj Singh Thakur from Kadian. The decision has been taken in view of suggestions by the public, said the SSM spokesperson.

SAD FIELDS FORMER MLA JALAL USMAN FROM BABA BAKALA

Chandigarh: Shiromani Akali Dal on Sunday announced the candidature of former MLA Baljit Singh Jalal Usma as party candidate from Baba Bakala segment in Amritsar district for next month’s Punjab Assembly polls. With this, the party has, so far, declared 95 candidates of the total 97 seats it will contest in alliance with BSP. SAD is yet to announce candidates for key constituencies of Lambi and Amritsar East. Lambi is currently represented by former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, while Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu is seeking his re-elections from the Amritsar East segment.

3 AKALI FAMILIES JOIN CONGRESS

Mohali: In a push to Congress election campaign in Mohali, three Akali families have joined the Congress party at Sekhan Majra village on Sunday. In the presence of Balbir Singh Sidhu, the former cabinet minister and Congress candidate from Mohali, the families declared support to Balbir Sidhu while expressing full faith in his leadership. The families said that they were impressed with Sidhu’s relentless work in rural areas in past years. To help him in continuing his good work and to ensure his re-election from Mohali with a big margin, we joined his campaign and Congress. Meanwhile, Sidhu maintained that he was committed to improve Mohali’s basic infrastructure. “We have tried hard to improve the town on every index of development. In past years, it has remained our endeavor to bring a planned development in every sphere of Mohali,” he said.

HEAVY RAIN FAILS TO DAMPEN CANDIDATES’ SPIRITS

Mohali: Heavy rains throughout the day, coupled with chilly weather, failed to dampen the spirit of young and energetic Ravneet Brar, candidate from farmers’ political outfit ‘Samyukta Samaj Morcha’ from Mohali. Brar continued his election campaign on Sunday in Mohali’s various villages and received an overwhelming response. Accompanied by limited supporters as per Election Commission’s guidelines in the wake of COVID-19 protocol, Brar lashed out at his opponents while assuring the overall development of the constituency—covering both urban and rural areas.

Opposition takes on Cong over Mustafa’s ‘hate speech’

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Aam Aadmi Party’s (AAP) Punjab affairs co-in-charge Raghav Chadha on Sunday said that party candidate and party workers from Malerkotla lodged an FIR against Mohammad Mustafa, principal strategic advisor to Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu, for his “provocative” and “peace threatening” statement. “He tried to disturb the atmosphere of Punjab and conspired to divide people on religion. To ensure peace and brotherhood in Punjab, AAP leaders have filed an FIR against Mustafa,” said Chadha. Chadha said that Mohammad Mustafa is not only close to Sidhu, he is also very close to Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. “Mustafa, however powerful, cannot be above the law. Any person who tries to disturb the atmosphere of Punjab should be dealt with the strictest action against him and AAP has just ensured that,” he added.

AAP leader said that party workers and leaders held protests against Mustafa everywhere in the State and also complained to the Election Commission about his provocative remarks. Chadha appealed to the Election Commission to take notice of Mustafa’s provocative statement and demanded strict action against him for trying to vitiate the atmosphere in a poll-bound state.

ARREST MUSTAFA IMMEDIATELY FOR TRYING TO INCITE COMMUNAL CLASHES: SUKHBIR

Sangrur: SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal demanded immediate arrest of former DGP Mohammad Mustafa for trying to incite communal clashes in Malerkotla with his incendiary statements. SAD chief also urged the Election Commission to take note of the development and order the immediate arrest of Mustafa. “This is much needed to restore the confidence of the people in the democratic set up which has been vitiated by the officer who is the husband of Malerkotla MLA and Congress Minister Razia Sultana,” said Sukhbir while talking to mediapersons.

Sidhu’s adviser Mustafa in trouble as Pb police lodges FIR over hate speech

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab police have booked former top cop and Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu’s principal strategic adviser Mohammad Mustafa for allegedly making a provocative speech in Baghwala Mohalla in Malerkotla on January 20. Termining the FIR baseless and rejecting all allegations, Mustafa asserted that it has been registered without proper verification of facts. The former DGP Mustafa has been booked under Section 153-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that deals with the offence of promoting enmity following the police’s decision to stop their programme. On Friday, complaints had been lodged against both the political parties for reportedly violating COVID-19 protocols. Later, the SSP confirmed that an FIR has been registered against Mustafa, and “we are inquiring the details of the incident minutely. No one will be allowed to spoil the atmosphere of the city.” It has been learnt that the returning officer concerned had already issued notice, pertaining to the alleged violation of the model code of conduct, to both the Congress and the AAP. AAP leaders had already lodged a complaint with the Election Commission and a notice was issued to Mustafa. But after video created storm on social media, the police finally registered an FIR on Saturday night. FIR BASELESS: MUSTAFA Defending himself, Mustafa claimed that he did not target any religion in his speech. Husband of sitting Congress MLA from Malerkotla and Cabinet Minister Razia Sultana, Mustafa has termed the FIR as baseless saying that his political opponents were “trying to make an issue out of nothing”. Though Mustafa has been booked under a non-bailable offence, he hasn’t been arrest-

ed yet. The former DGP also maintained that he never spoken against any community nor did he ever ask his supporters to issue any statement. “I had warned AAP workers, who chased me and tried to harm me. The FIR is totally baseless as it has been registered without the proper verification of facts,” he said. At the same time, Mustafa maintained that he would fully cooperate during investigations. Taking on BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra on Twitter, Mustafa said: “Don’t look for your staple diet ‘Hindu-Muslim’ into everything. Unless your eardrums lie dysfunctional, stretch your ears to listen ‘fitnon’, not hinduon. “Fitne aur fitno” meaning mischievous elements, are the most commonly used expressions in my samaj (sic).” Mustafa lashed out at Patra, who had shared Mustafa’s video to attack the Congress party and the Gandhi siblings. “There was absolutely no Hindu-Muslim context to what happened in Malerkotla to which the quoted video clip relates. It was a verbal outburst unilaterally mischievously provoked by jhaduwalas, all muslims (sic),” he said in a related tweet. In another tweet, Mustafa told BJP leader, “Your intended branding will not work on Mustafa as my nationalistic credentials are far superior to yours with a history of life long fight against enemies of India and destroyers of communal harmony in the State.”

Impart youths demand driven skills: Baghel

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday said that youths should be trained in various trades to equip them for employees in line with the demand of industries and market.

He was addressing the maiden meeting to discuss the nature and functioning of the Chhattisgarh Employment Mission here, an official communication said. He inaugurated its office too.

The Working President of the Mission and senior officials were present.

Baghel said the produc-



tion should be done as per the market demand in Rural Industrial Parks.

To enhance the quality and certification of the prod-

ucts, cooperation of state-based higher technical institutions should be taken.

He sought suggestions from the directors of state-

based IIT, IIM, IIIT and NIT on employment generation. The higher educational institutions should come forward for certification and stan-

dardization of products from rural areas, he said.

They can also hand-hold to bring new startups and reputed companies to the state.

He said Collectors can play a key role in holding surveys of educational qualifications of youths where new industries are coming up.

Based on the needs of the industries, youth can be imparted training on trades through Industrial Training Institute (ITI), and Livelihood College locally.

He asked for re-activation of the website whereby plumbers, electricians, carpenters and other service providers can get work in urban areas.

C'garh's ACI gets 5th place in cardiac treatment



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The Advance Cardiac Institute (ACI) at the Pandit Jawaharlal Memorial Medical College, Raipur, has been ranked 5th in India in electrophysiology treatment.

The top three hospitals in the list are from Jammu and Kashmir while Chandigarh is at the fourth place. ACI in

Chhattisgarh and the Pariyaram Medical College in Kerala share the fifth spot.

The study of electrophysiology was started in ACI in 2016. About 70 patients have been treated since then.

The ACI is equipped with 'state of the art' facilities for this complex treatment.

Physicians said when arteries have a problem, then the heart beats too fast or too

slow. To treat this, the problem is first detected and mapped (mapping or electrophysiology study), then it is diagnosed by reaching the heart through the thigh vein.

Significantly, for these treatments, 3D EPS (Electrophysiology Mapping Machine) is used in the ACI. This machine used for mapping in electrophysiology is rarely available.

CRPF, C'garh Police discuss Naxal menace

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Director General of Police Ashok Juneja and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Director General Kuldeep Singh on Sunday discussed the anti-Naxalite operations in the state.

Juneja and Singh along with senior officials of CRPF and Chhattisgarh Police met at the Special Intelligence Branch Building here. They discussed the Naxalite scenario in Chhattisgarh and the status of security opera-



tions. Singh expressed satisfaction over the actions being

undertaken by the security forces, an official communication said. He discussed the

future course of engagement and strategy to tackle Naxalism in the state.

Showers likely in Bastar, Surguja

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday predicted light showers in isolated parts of Bastar and Surguja regions in Chhattisgarh.

Weather Scientist H.P. Chandra said that damp air coming from the Bay of Bengal is pushing down the lowest temperature in the state.

"There will be a trend of decrease in lowest temperature throughout the state," he said.

The scientist said medium to dense fog will envelop some pockets in the state.

Elephant kills elderly woman

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIGARH

A 67-year-old woman was trampled to death by a wild elephant in a forest near her village in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district, an official said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday night near Champkachhar village under the Dharamjaigarh Forest Division when Devkumari Yadav was returning home, Dharamjaigarh Divisional Forest Officer Manivasagan S said.

Human-elephant conflicts in the northern part of the state have been a major cause of concern for the last decade.

Her body was found by her family members who had launched a search after she didn't return home, he said.

An aid of Rs 25,000 has been provided to the son of

the deceased, the official said, adding that the remaining compensation will be given later.

Human-elephant conflicts in the northern part of the state have been a major cause of concern for the last decade. The elephant menace spread to some districts of the central region in recent years.

According to the Forest Department, as many as 195 people were killed in elephant attacks in Chhattisgarh between January 2019 and November 2021. Forty-three elephants also died.

Naxalite accused in killings, arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■
NARAYANPUR

A Naxalite involved in the killings of at least seven security personnel including two Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) officials was arrested in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district, the police said on Sunday.

Pandru Padami, 20, was nabbed on Saturday from Toyameta village, Narayanpur Superintendent of Police Girija Shankar

Pandru Padami, 20, was nabbed on Saturday from Toyameta village, Narayanpur Superintendent of Police Girija Shankar Jaiswal said.

Jaiswal said. Padami is a close associate of Naxalites' Amdai

Ghati area committee Secretary Suresh Salam, he said.

"Padami was part of a team that executed an incident at Kademeta village in Narayanpur in August last year in which an Assistant Commandant of ITBP Sudhakar Shinde and Assistant Sub Inspector Gurumukh Singh attained martyrdom.

"In this incident, the Naxalite team also looted an AK-47 rifle, a magazine and

a bulletproof jacket among other things. He was also behind a blast which killed five security personnel in the district last year," Jaiswal said.

Following a tip that Padami was spotted in Toyameta village, where he came to damage an under-construction road, police and the District Reserve Guard went there and arrested him, the officer added.

A court sent the Naxalite to judicial custody.



Chhattisgarh's tableau depicting the state's "Godhan Nyay Yojana" on Sunday took part in the full-dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade at Rajpath in New Delhi.

Pioneer Photo

Three nabbed for beating soldier



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police have arrested three persons including a minor for beating an Indian soldier here, police said on Sunday.

Abdul Shahil (23), Asif Ali (22) and the minor boy, all from Mowa area in the city, have been taken into custody, Raipur Additional Superintendent of Police (Urban) Tarkeshwar Patel said.

The incident took place when soldier Kishore Kumar Tiwari was heading to a private hospital for the treatment of his parents.

He objected after the accused who were in an auto rickshaw overtake from the wrong side.

The three first abused Tiwari and then reached the hospital and beat Tiwari black and blue, the police said.

The police caught them after identifying them through CCTV footage.

Online programme on voter's day tomorrow

STAFF REPORTER ■
DANTEWADA

Followed instructions from the State Election Commission (SEC), the Dantewada district administration in Chhattisgarh is going to hold an online programme on National Voters' Day on January 25.

A communiqué from the district administration said the online programme would include felicitation and award programme for persons and government officials for their exemplary electoral work.

Vimal Kumar Nag, a resident of Barsoor, will be felicitated for creating awareness



among youths and enrolling them in voters' list.

Similarly, the BLO of Chikpal, Swaroop Mondal,

Dantewada district administration in Chhattisgarh is going to hold an online programme on National Voters' Day on January 25

and Nodal Officer Professor Vivek Sharma will be felicitated with cash prize of Rs 5,000 and Rs 7,000 respectively for exemplary electoral work, the statement said.

Baghel govt won't tolerate corruption: Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The Congress on Sunday said the Bhupesh Baghel government in Chhattisgarh had zero tolerance for corruption.

Rejecting the charges by Leader of Opposition Dharamlal Kaushik, Sushil Anand Shukla of the Congress Communication wing said an entire government cannot be accused if a Municipal Counselor rank leader is found guilty.

The government has announced of enquiry into the corruption charge levelled against the Councillor of the Jagdalpur Corporation, Shukla said.

If he was found guilty, the law will take its own



course, Shukla said.

With hurling the corruption charge, the BJP proved that it doesn't have any big issue to be raised, the Congress leader said.

Three years have passed and the BJP has not flung a single corruption charge at the Congress government, he 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 Amorcres 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 Aachankulam 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 large scale of communal violence and suddenly their public sprit 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.’

Protest in Shillong against State’s ‘forced’ inoculation drive

Shillong: Amid the surge of Covid-19 cases in Meghalaya, anti-vaccination protesters organised a rally in the capital city Shillong against the alleged mandatory inoculation drive by the State Government.

Organised by the NGO Awaken India Movement (AIM), the anti-vaccination protesters took out a protest march from Motphran to Khyndailad, strongly opposing the compulsory vaccination by

the health department.

AIM Chairman Banshai Marbaniang, who led the protest march, said that people are protesting the mandatory vaccination by the state government against their fundamental rights of taking the vaccine jab of their choice.

The protesters are also against the compulsory wearing of face mask and testing of their samples.

"The authorities are forcing

and harassing the non-vaccinated people to test their samples every 10 days. The AIM would hold protest marches on the matter in other parts of the state," Marbaniang told the media. According to reports of the National Health Mission, Meghalaya, the state on Saturday recorded the highest ever single-day spike of 406 new Covid positive cases pushing the number of active cases to 2,002, with one death due to

the infection raising the total number of casualties to 1,496.

Aman War, Meghalaya Director of Health Services, said that East Khasi Hills in which the state capital Shillong falls, the most coronavirus-hit district registered 304 fresh cases on Saturday, with the district currently having 1,377 active cases with 1,018 people succumbed to the contagious disease.

Deputy Chief Minister

Prestone Tynsong while talking to the media said that the state government is not considering imposing lockdown in the state following the sudden rise of new Covid-19 cases.

The state government would review the situation arising out of sudden spurts of Covid cases and in view of the positive cases of Omicron variant found in the hill state and in the neighbouring states, Tynsong added.

IANS

14L people vaccinated in TN’s 19th mega vax drive

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu public health department has inoculated 14,29,736 people as part of the 19th mega vaccine drive conducted across the state.

The drive was conducted on Saturday. The health department officials said that a majority of those who were inoculated had come for their second doses. The health and family welfare department in a statement on Saturday said that 10,27,810 people took the second dose of vaccine, 3,68,797 took their first dose and 33,129 took the booster dose.

The state health minister, Ma Subramanian while speaking to IANS said, "The state health department has vaccinated more than 14 lakh people and I appeal to the people

of the state, who are yet to be vaccinated, to do it immediately."

The state minister said that 89.6 per cent of the eligible population have taken their first dose of the vaccine while 66.8 per cent have taken their second dose of the vaccine. Ma Subramanian said that out of the 5.56 lakh people eligible for the booster dose of vaccine, only 1.84 lakh have taken them till Friday.

He also said that while the Covid-19 cases were increasing in large numbers in the state, it was less compared to the figures in Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. The minister also said that the case fatality rate was less in Tamil Nadu and added that those who were dying due to Covid-19 were those who were not vaccinated. He urged the people of the state to take vaccination with immediate effect.

IANS

Red wine could help stave off Covid: New research

New Delhi: Red wine could help stave off Covid-19, according to new research.

People who drink more than five glasses a week had a 17 per cent lower risk of catching the virus, the Daily Mail reported citing the study as saying.

Experts believe this is due to the polyphenol content, which can inhibit the effect of viruses such as flu and respiratory tract-related infections.

White wine drinkers who con-

sume between one to four glasses a week had an eight per cent lower risk of catching the virus compared with non-drinkers.

Beer and cider drinkers had a nearly 28 per cent higher chance of getting Covid, regardless of how much they consumed. Figures from British database UK Biobank were analysed at China's Shenzhen Kangning Hospital, the report said.

IANS



Accused gets life term for raping minor in UP

Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh): A special POCOS (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) court in Moradabad has awarded life imprisonment to a 24-year-old man for raping a Class 10 girl and recording a video of the crime.

The court also slapped a fine of Rs 50,000 on the accused, after pronouncing him guilty. Half of the fine amount will be provided to the survivor as compensation, the court ordered.

The survivor was 15 years old when the crime took place in 2018 and had to leave the town with her family after the

incident.

Additional District Government Counsel (ADGC) M.P. Singh told reporters, "According to the FIR, Faheem was arrested and sent to jail earlier too for harassing the girl. After securing bail, he barged into her house in the absence of her parents and raped her. He was caught red-handed by neighbours and handed over to the police. An FIR was registered against him under relevant sections of IPC and under the POCOS Act."

He further said that the police had filed a charge sheet against Faheem, and the court

pronounced him guilty, sentencing him to life imprisonment for his offence. At present, the accused is behind bars. A copy of the order has been sent to the jail authorities," Singh added.

A senior police officer in Moradabad said, "We are closely monitoring all cases of crime against women and providing all possible support to ensure speedy trial. The survivor and her family were provided adequate counselling and financial support through beneficiary schemes by the district administration."

IANS

UP woman given triple talaq for not dancing in orchestra shows

Varanasi: A 35-year-old woman in Uttar Pradesh was given triple talaq by her husband after she refused to dance in orchestra shows.

The woman has now lodged an FIR against her husband with Lanka police.

ACP Bhelupur, Pravin Kumar Singh said, "After initial investigation in the complaint of the woman, an FIR against her husband Naseem Ahmed of Mungra Badshahpur area of Jaunpur district, his mother and two sisters has been lodged by Lanka police under sections of Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and Dowry Prohibition Act.

"The police have started further investigation in this case."

According to the police, the woman in her complaint mentioned that she was married to Naseem in 2007 and they have two sons and a daughter.

In 2015, Naseem and his family forced the woman's father, who is a retired government employee, to give Rs 2 lakhs to get his job of driver in municipal body confirmed.

After this, Naseem started forcing her to dance in orchestra shows and indulge in flesh trade. The woman said that her mother started paying Rs 5,000 to Naseem's family per month to ensure that she was not forced to indulge in immoral

activities.

She further alleged that in August 2021 she was ousted from home with her children by Naseem, his mother and sisters as she refused to indulge in flesh trade and dance in orchestra to earn money for him.

She said that she kept requesting her husband and in-laws over the phone to take her back.

She alleged that when she was talking to Naseem on phone, he gave her 'triple talaq'.

IANS

BJP Govt discarding Netaji’s ideals, says West Bengal CM

MAMATA ASKS CENTRE TO REVEAL BOSE’S DEATH MYSTERY

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued to fire salvos at the Centre over the issue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's tableau even as she accused the BJP Government for discarding the iconic freedom-fighter's ideals.

Slamming the Centre for doing away with the Planning Commission --- which has been replaced with Ayog --- she said, "We will have a planning commission in West Bengal... The tableau from West Bengal has not got space in Republic Day Parade in Delhi but will definitely participate in the celebrations at Red Road in Kolkata."

Insisting that the Centre had taken the decision to install Netaji's statue at India Gate under pressure --- in the wake of the tableau controversy --- Banerjee said "we still not have been given the reasons why the Bengal's tableau on Netaji was rejected by the Centre."

She said, "had Bengal not been there, country's Independence would not have been achieved" and asked, "why such neglect for Bengal. None can wipe the history of Bengal ... Nobody can change the real history of the country. If someone does that they will be playing with fire."

Attacking the Centre for failing to bring out the truth on



Netaji's final days Banerjee said "it is not enough to install the freedom fighter's statue ... In so many years there is no clarity about Netaji's death ... They (the BJP) had said that after coming to power, they will work on it but nothing happened. In fact, we (state) have released and declassified all files on Netaji Bose ... On Netaji's statue, his birth day can be written, will we able to write the date of his death?"

She also attacked the Centre for merging Amar Jawan Jyoti with National War Memorial. Saying that there was a constant effort to divide the people of the country Banerjee asked the powers that be to read the history of Swami Vivekanand, Gandhi and Netaji saying "I request them to read about Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. None of these personalities ever talked about dividing the country"

The Chief Minister on Sunday announced a number of schemes including the setting up of Jai Hind Force in every school that would be shaped after the NCC.

K'taka hijab row triggers debate on religious practices in educational institutions

Bengaluru: The issue of wearing a hijab (head covering worn in public by Muslim women) to the colleges along with the uniform has sparked a debate in Karnataka over religious practices impacting the education system in the state. The matter has also snowballed into a controversy on whether the hijab could be considered as part of the uniform.

The ruling BJP is deliberating on whether to take a call on allowing hijab as part of the uniform of college students. State Education Minister B.C. Nagesh, while opposing the wearing of hijab to classrooms, has said that a decision would be taken on the issue soon by the government.

The experts as well as students are divided over the issue. Those who are in favour state that the dress code in classrooms should not indicate faith or religion as it creates barriers between students as well as teachers. Those who support the wearing of hijab say that hijab should be treated as a scarf. Hijab is black in colour and it can't be a religious symbol as Islam is identified with the green colour. The hijab should be treated as a symbol of chastity, they maintain.

The denial of permission to six girls in the Government Girls' Pre University College in the communally sensitive district of Udupi in the state has created a controversy. Nagesh dubbed it as a political move and questioned whether centres of learning should become religious centres.

Meanwhile, the girl students have decided to continue their protest until they are

allowed to attend classes wearing hijab.

"I have been facing the issue of hijab. We have not been allowed into the classroom just because we are wearing hijab. Though it's our fundamental and constitutional right they are not allowing us. It's a government college though. There is a lot of discrimination in the college, we can't speak to each other in Urdu, we can't say salaam to each other in the college. This matter has become communal and we are so sad about it. We did not want this to become communal," Aliya Assadi, a protesting student explained.

"Many political parties are taking advantage of this. We are just asking for basic fundamental rights. I don't know why it is so tough to take us inside with a headscarf. We are not asking permission with burqas. Last Friday, the college principal and four professors made protesting students give an apology letter by black-mailing them that their statements on hijab are false. For basic rights do we have to do so much?" she asked.

"They tease that we will never win in this protest. They called our parents many times and tried to manipulate them. I request government officials to respond on the issue and allow us to wear hijab. We don't want options. We want to study, come up in life as well as wear hijab," explained Almas.

Eight students of the college are still protesting in the college campus for being denied entry into the classrooms for wearing hijab along with the uniform.

IANS



A woman walks through a trail during heavy snowfall in Dharmasala on Sunday

AP

BJP MP rescued after TMC, BJP men clash

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Security forces reportedly fired several rounds after clashes broke out on Sunday between cadres of BJP and ruling Trinamool Congress over celebrations of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary at Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas adjacent to Kolkata.

Though there was no official statement from any side locals said forces manning BJP MP Arjun Singh's security fired

several rounds in the air after brickbats were hurled from both sides when Singh the local MP rushed to a spot where the members of two parties were exchanging blows.

The BJP MP was rescued and sent to his residence safely, said Joint Commissioner of Police Dhruva Jyoti Dey.

"This is how the TMC is trying to capture Bengal ... this is the kind of democracy they have established in the State," Singh said after the incident. "Our men had gone to garland

a statue of Netaji when the TMC goons stopped them from doing so ... when our men protested they attacked them and even fired shots," Singh said.

Local TMC MLA Partho Bhowmick however rejected the charges saying it were "the BJP goons who attacked the TMC men ... after which Arjun Singh came with his security men and lathi-charged our workers and his forces fired in the air ... I will request the police to investigate as to who resorted to the firing."

Massive dust storm heading towards Guj, south Rajasthan

New Delhi: After affecting normal life in Karachi, Pakistan, a massive dust storm headed towards Gujarat and south Rajasthan and may continue to have an effect till the next 12 hours, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

No impact likely over Delhi in coming days, it added.

Karachi was caught off guard on Saturday morning when a dust storm that travelled from west Pakistan disturbed the normal life there with visibility reduced to less than or about 500 metres.

"The Saurashtra coast has been getting dust rising winds from Saturday afternoon. Dwarka station reported 400 metre visibility, at Porbandar the wind speed was more than 10 km per hour with visibility of less than one kilometre," the IMD said.

Winds carrying dust blew from south Pakistan areas and adjoining Arabian Sea towards Kutch and Saurashtra towards evening.

"Dust storm or dust raising winds in association with surface winds at a wind speed of 30-40 kmph gusting to 50 kmph, is likely over many places of Saurashtra and Kutch, and at isolated places over adjoining Gujarat region and south Rajasthan," said IMD's



senior scientist R.K. Jenamani, adding, "This is valid till Sunday morning for next 12 hours."

Fortunately, the dust storm will have no impact on Delhi in view of the western disturbance being very active for the next 36 hours in northwest India.

"Its (dust area) forward part interacts with high moisture and intense cloud zone currently located over southwest Rajasthan. The dust layer is over Saurashtra, very far, southwest of Delhi," Jenamani said.

The 'Sand and Dust Storms Risk Assessment in Asia and the Pacific' report for 2021 published by the Asian and Pacific Centre for the

Development of Disaster Information Management, which is a regional institution of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, had said more than 500 million people in India and more than 80 per cent of the population of Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran are exposed to medium and high levels of poor air quality due to sand and dust storms.

Lahore, Karachi and Delhi are the three most affected cities, the report had said.

Dust storms, if severe, and over a longer time, also adversely affect agriculture, especially cotton.

Stalin’s elephant to seek Lord Narasimhamoorthi’s blessings

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A Dravidian nationalist devotee from Tamil Nadu is seeking the blessings and favors of Lord Narasimhamoorthi, an Aryan God, may sound strange. Come January 31, a caparisoned elephant representing Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin would go round the centuries old Anayadi Narasimhamoorthi Temple at Sooranadu in Kollam district of Kerala. According to Venugopala Kurup, president

of the Narasimhamoorthi Temple, representatives of the rationalist and atheist Stalin has paid Rs 9,000, the customary fee for parading the elephant to take a round of the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. The elephant has been numbered six, to match with the lucky number of the chief minister, said Kurup.

Though Stalin is unlikely to make it to Sooranadu, his close confidante M Subramanian, the health minister and hundreds of DMK activists from

Tamil Nadu are certain to take part in the divine function, according to Kurup.

"This pooja is performed for seeking the Lord's favors and to get cured of serious ailments. The persons who booked the pooja in Stalin's name told us that they want the chief minister to lead the DMK to victories in all elections," said Kurup.

Though the temple management got phone calls reportedly from the DMK office in Chennai, enquiring about the

details of the offering, the temple staff did not take it seriously and briefed the callers about the age-old custom and tradition. It was only when a duo from Chennai called on the department of Devaswam, they understood the seriousness.

"The Gajamela in the temple is a famous rituals and we have paraded hundred elephants in the past. But because of Covid-19 related restrictions, the number of elephants have been kept to a minimum. Though 500 devotees had

booked for the offering, we convinced the sixth person in the list to give way to Stalin which he obliged without any hotch," said Kurup.

Though Stalin is a rationalist, his wife Santa Durga is a devotee and visits all churches, temples and mosques praying for the health and success of the former.

The shots of Durga sobbing uncontrollably during the swearing in of Stalin as chief minister in May 2021 had gone viral in the social media.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

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.



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

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.

Netaji, not Congress, finally won freedom

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, *minimal*."

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



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

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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 Rash 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.)

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 Service 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, *padyatras*, 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

SOUNDBITE

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



Shiv Sena chief —Uddhav Thackeray

The idea that Russia wants to invade Ukraine is nonsense... Putin deserves respect.



German Navy chief —Kay-Achim Schoenbach

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



Actor —Nagarajuna

Quite obvious where we've gone wrong. No shying away from it. At times, our shot selection has been poor.



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

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.)

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

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 Minister Jagan 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 Bhoo Raksha* (permanent land rights) 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 project Jagan 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 Maharashtra 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 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.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

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

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'

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-



SURAVI SHARMA KUMAR

(The writer is an author and a Pathologist doctor. The views expressed are personal.)

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 sky over 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 washere 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 couldn't 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 childhood never go away. I believe the fear response in us has 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 of psychological 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.

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 plans 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 refurbishing 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 Waziri, 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.

Peru declares 90-day environmental emergency following oil spill

Lima: The Peruvian government has declared a 90-day environmental emergency in the coastal area of Lima which has been affected by a recent oil spill, the Ministry of the Environment said. The government has called it one of the "most important ecological disasters" on the coast in recent years, reports Xinhua news agency. The resolution was approved by Minister of the Environment Ruben Ramirez, who heads the Environmental Crisis Committee that is trying to mitigate the effects of the oil spill. The oil spill occurred on January 15 when an oil tanker was unloading at one of the terminals of La Pampilla Refinery, operated by Repsol, in the province of Callao, neighbouring Lima. Repsol reported on January 21 that the cleanup of the areas affected by the oil spill should be completed by the end of February, and that 1,580 cubic metres of contaminated sand had been removed. **IAN S**

Aus to establish eDNA research centre to boost biosecurity

IAN S ■ CANBERRA

The Australian government has announced a new environmental DNA (eDNA) research centre to boost biosecurity. The National eDNA Reference Centre will be set up at the University of Canberra in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, reports Xinhua news agency. Researchers at the centre will be tasked with developing cutting-edge technology to detect pests at the Australian border. The eDNA technology works by detecting skin, hair, urine, tissue and faecal matter shed by organisms in an environment such as a shipping container. It can also be used to detect ribonucleic acid (RNA) from a species. Dianne Gleeson, a wildlife geneticist from the University of Canberra's Centre for Conservation and Ecology Genetics, said eDNA testing has transformed pest surveillance. "The work that we've

been doing recently with the khapra beetle has been using dust samples from shipping containers where we suck up the dust, extract the DNA and we look for a sign of the species," she was quoted by Nine Entertainment newspapers on Sunday. "Currently Australia is free of that species and it puts it in a very good market position internationally... Because otherwise, it's a massive pest and a massive problem for the grain industry so it could be really destructive if it arrives." The government has committed A\$7 million in funding for the new centre. Andrew Metcalfe, head of Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, said eDNA detection was critical to safeguarding Australia's biodiversity. "While the program will have the capacity for broad risk management application, our immediate focus is to address risks associated with khapra beetle and high-priority hitchhiker pests generally," he said.

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.

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.

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

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.

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,

one read: "Farmers speak. Who's listening?" Spain's Ecological Transition Ministry said the country's budget for 2022 includes 4.2 billion euros (\$4.7 billion) to fight the depopulation of rural areas. Spain's rural world "doesn't need populist slogans but political involvement and resource to solve historical problems," it said in a statement. A spat over industrial livestock farming has dominated headlines for the past month since Consumer Minister Alberto Garçon, a member of the far-left junior partner of the Socialist-led administration, criticized big cattle operations for damaging the environment and producing poor quality food for export. His remarks caused a political storm, created divisions within the ruling coalition and led to calls by right-wing opposition parties for Garçon to resign.

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.

Amazon makes offer to Future Retail for acquisition by an entity 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.

TCS aims to grow in high double digits in Canada as demand for digitisation rises

PTI ■ MUMBAI

TCS is aiming for a high double-digit growth in revenues from Canada in the next few years as the North American country's economy grows across sectors and digitisation becomes an essential aspect for businesses, a senior official has said.

TCS Canada, a wholly-owned subsidiary of India's largest IT exporter dedicated to serve the market, had a turnover of Rs 6,268 crore in FY21 and has been growing at triple the rate of overall IT servicers in Canada over the past few years, its country head Soumen Roy said. Roy said if the Canadian IT spends have grown at 4-5 per cent yearly, the company has been able to grow at triple the pace and the company also surpassed the billion-dollar mark three fiscals ago. The revenue growth from Canada, where it employs over 7,000 people at present, was hampered because of the pandemic-related disruptions in FY21 but is likely to be much better in FY22.

PUBLIC NOTICE
CP(1B) No. 167/Chd/Hry/2018 pursuant to Hon'ble NCLT Chandigarh Bench vide order dated 03.01.2022
Darshan Anil Lodha V/s Kopargaoon Ahmednagar Tollways (Phase I) Pvt. Ltd.
IA No. 439/2021
Next date: 17.03.2022
Publication issued to M/S KOTKAPURA MUKTSAR TOLLWAYS PVT. LTD. (Respondent No. 05) address registered with Ministry of Corporate Affairs: 510, 5TH FLOOR, ABW TOWER, IFFCO CHOCK MG ROAD, GURGAON, HARYANA-122002.
In the above titled case, the notice dated 12.11.2021 issued by Hon'ble NCLT Chandigarh Bench along with application could not be served upon to the Respondent No. 5, as the speed post was returned stating "addressee is absent". The Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Chandigarh Bench ("Hon. NCLT") vide its another order dated 03.01.2022 passed in IA No. 439/2021 in CP(1B) No. 167/Chd/Hry/2018, has directed the Resolution Professional to serve the Respondent No. 5 i.e. M/s Kotkapura Muktsar Tollways Pvt. Ltd. through newspaper publication.
Therefore, by virtue of the said order dated 03.01.2022, the public notice is being hereby served upon to M/S KOTKAPURA MUKTSAR TOLLWAYS PVT. LTD., Respondent No. 5. Please note that the next date of hearing in the above-mentioned matter before the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Chandigarh Bench is 17.03.2022.
Please refer to the link given below for order details:
https://nclt.gov.in/gen_pdf.php?filepath=/Efile_Document/ncltloc/casedoc/04041160019/02018/04/Order-Challenge/04_order-Challenge_004_1641448907846501396611d685cb2b3d4.pdf
Sd/-
Udayraj Patwardhan
Resolution Professional for
Kopargaoon Ahmednagar Tollways (Phase I) Private Limited
Reg. No. IBBI/PA-001/PP-P00024/2016-17/10057
Reg. Address with IBBI:
Naman Midtown, B Wing, 1106, 11th Floor,
Behind Kangar Kala Kendra, Senapati Bapat Marg,
Elphinstone West, Mumbai City, Maharashtra, 400013.
Reg. Email ID with IBBI: ca.udayraj@viajire.in
Process specific email ID for correspondence: katp1@sumedhamanagement.com
Date: 22.01.2022
Place: Nashik

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR
DIRECTORATE OF FLORICULTURE SRINAGAR KASHMIR
Tel-0194-2474234 Fax - 2482032 – email :- kashflori@rediffmail.com
Gist of e- Tender Notice No. 40 of 2022 Dated:- -20/01/2022
For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of J&K UT, e-tender is invited from interested parties/persons for **Outsourcing of entry ticketing system of Mughal Garden Nishat** of Floriculture Department Kashmir as per details given below:-
The participants have to quote their bid amount in the concerned BOQ:-

S. No.	Period of contract	Reserve Bid (Rs. in Lakhs)	Value of security deposit	Cost of Tender Document
1.	01 year from the date of award of contract	1,41,31,121/-	14,13,112/-	3000/- in the shape of e-challan

The bidding document (s) consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions and other details can be seen/downloaded through the Departmental website www.dirflorkmr.in / www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of date given below:-

1. Period of downloading of bidding document	21.01.2022 from 1.00 PM to 11.02.2022 up to 02:00 PM
2. Bid submission Start Date	22.01.2022 from 10:00 AM
3. Bid submission End Date	11.02.2022 up to 02:00 PM
4. Date and time of Opening of Tenders (Online)	14.02.2022 at 02:00 PM

The security deposit money exceeding 2% shall be adjustable towards approved bid amount in favour of the successful bidders. The CDR's of the bidders who offer below the reserve bid shall be forfeited.
In case of any eventuality, the date of opening will be considered on any other convenient working day.
Sd/- Accounts Officer
(Member secretary)
No. DIPK-17031/21 Dated:- 22-01-2022

APPENDIX IV
[See rule 8 (1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(for immovable property)
Whereas,
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of **INDIABULLS COMMERCIAL CREDIT LIMITED (CIN:U65923DL2006PLC150632)** under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued Demand Notice dated **22.07.2021** calling upon the Borrower(s) **KAMLESH GOYAL PROPRIETOR SURYA PUBLISHING AND RAVEESH GOYAL** to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice being **Rs.79,18,430.85 (Rupees Seventy Nine Lakh Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred Thirty and Paise Eighty Five Only)** against Loan Account No. **HLLADPR00484009** as on **20.07.2021** and interest thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.
The Borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, Notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken **symbolic possession** of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on **20.01.2022**.
The Borrower(s) in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of **INDIABULLS COMMERCIAL CREDIT LIMITED** for an amount of **Rs.79,18,430.85 (Rupees Seventy Nine Lakh Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred Thirty and Paise Eighty Five Only)** as on **20.07.2021** and interest thereon.
The Borrowers' attention is invited to provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of the Act in respect of time available, to redeem the Secured Assets.
DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
PROPERTY BEARING VILLA NUMBER 22 HAVING A BUILT- UP/ CONSTRUCTED AREA OF 1549 SQUARE FEET (APPROX) CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT AREA ADMEASURING 216 SQUARE METERS (258.34 SQUARE YARDS (APPROX)) IN THE RESIDENTIAL COLONY KNOWN AS "OMAXE CITY-BAHADURGARH (DELHI ROAD)" SITUATED IN VILLAGE KASSAR AND SANKHOL, TEHSIL BAHADURGARH, SECTOR 15, DISTRICT JHAJJAR, BAHADURGARH-124510, HARYANA, WHICH IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:
EAST : AS PER TITLE DEED WEST : AS PER TITLE DEED
NORTH : AS PER TITLE DEED SOUTH : AS PER TITLE DEED

Date : 20.01.2022 Sd/-
Place: JHAJJAR Authorised Officer
INDIABULLS COMMERCIAL CREDIT LIMITED

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDERS
The Executive Engineer, Civil Division No. VIII, Irrigation & Flood Control Deptt., Govt. of NCT of Delhi, 'Sector- 15, Rohini, Delhi invites online E-tenders (Open Tender) DBO basis on behalf of the President of India from those bidder (proprietorship firms, partnership firms, companies, corporations, non indian (Overseas) firm/s/com pa nies consortia or joint ventures) who meet requisite eligibility criteria as prescribed in the NIT.
1. NIT No.- EE/CD-VIII/NIT/W.B.2021-22/01 (2nd Call) N.O.W.- Rejuvenation of Mungeshpur water body in Kh. No. 22/34 in Distt. North West by installation of 150 KLD STP, Pooth Khurd Water body Kh. No. 157 in Distt. North West by installation of 400 KLD STP, Nizampur Rasidpur water body Kh. No. 505 in Distt. North West by installation of 150 KLD STP, Sultanpur Dabas water body Kh. No.96/1/1 in Distt. North West by installation of 400 KLD STP, Khera Khurd B water body Kh. No. 268 & 63/4/50/25/2 in Distt. North by installation of 150 KLD STP, Bakkarwala water body Kh. No. 91/2 in Distt. North West by installation of 150 KLD STP using ecologically sensitive and sustainable technology with O& M for 5 years on DBO basis. H.O.A:-Rejuvenation of water bodies Estimated Cost:- Rs 9,43,58,535 Earnest Money:- Rs 18,87,171 Period of completion:- 365 Days; Last date and time of submission of tender: upto 3:00 P.M. on 10.02.2022 (ID. No. 2022_IFC_214445_1)
1. All the documents as stipulated in the NIT/bid documents should be submitted in the Office of Executive Engineer, Civil Division-VIII, I&FC Deptt., Govt. of NCT of Delhi, Sector-15, Rohini, Delhi-110085 before the last date and time of submission of technical bids.
2. The details of above mentioned work(s) can be seen and downloaded from the website <http://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>
3. Tenders submitted through e-procurement portal shall only be considered and no manual tender shall be accepted.
Sd/-
DIP/Shabdarth/0602/21-22
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER:CD-VIII



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 NIKUNJJ/

It's been a couple of weeks since I've 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 sannnyasin, 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 and the anger is released 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.

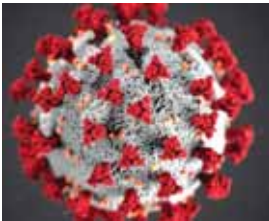


NEW COVID DRUG WITHOUT SIDE-EFFECTS

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 Ruturaj 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 Indians' 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 cramped. 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 hosts 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-armers 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 small-

er 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 five 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 forearm 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 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



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

IAN S ■ LUCKNOW

Ace Indian shuttler PV Sindhu clinched the 2022 Syed Modi International title after beating young Malvika Bansod in the women's singles final at the Babu Banarasi Das Indoor Stadium, here on Sunday.

The 26-year old Sindhu beat Malvika 21-13, 21-16 in just 35 minutes to win her second title at the Super 300 event. She had won the tournament in 2017 as well.

It was also Sindhu's first BWF title since winning the BWF World Championships in 2019, after losing twice in the finals last year -- at the Swiss Open and the BWF World Tour Finals.

The two-time Olympic medallist 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

It was also Sindhu's first BWF title since winning the BWF World Championships in 2019, after losing twice in the finals last year -- at the Swiss Open and the BWF World Tour Finals. The two-time Olympic medallist 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.



meeting between the 20-year-old Malvika Bansod 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.

Meanwhile, the mixed doubles title went to seventh seeds Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto, who defeated compatriots Nagendra Babu and Srivedya Gurazada 21-16, 21-12 in the 29 minutes final to claim their first Super 300 crown.

The pair of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Pullela won the women's doubles title after beating Anna Cheong Ching Yik and Teoh Mei Xing. Earlier, the men's singles final between Frenchman Arnaud Merkle and Lucas Claerbout was declared a 'no match'. One of the finalists tested positive for Covid-19 while the other was deemed a close contact and was also withdrawn.

The Syed Modi International 2022 was the second tournament in this year's BWF calendar after the India Open. The Odisha Open Super 100, will be the next tournament, scheduled to be held in Cuttack from January 25 to 30.



India-Chinese Taipei Asian Cup match is off

IAN S ■ 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

IAN S ■ 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 Matwe Middelkoop 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 Barbora Krejčíková.

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

IAN S ■ 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 Kvitová, the 2020 semifinals to Sofia Kenin and the 2021 quarter-finals to Karolína Muchová.



During Sunday's outing, Barty's progress was not all smooth sailing. At times, she was outthit 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

IAN S ■ 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 Zohreh Koudaei 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 Iranpoost's Iran side was never easily broken down, but China produced a move that would have picked apart the very best defences just before half-time, 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 Negin Zandi was introduced at half-time as they looked for a way

back into the match, but their cause suffered a significant blow when Melika Motevali 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



IAN S ■ ANAHEIM (USA)

Francis Ngannou's win in UFC 270 over interim champ Israel Adesanya 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 Deiveson Figueiredo.

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

IAN S ■ 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 aptour.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."

