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A SMALL LOSS FOR TENNIS,
MAJOR WIN FOR VAXXERS

WORLD 8

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

MONEY 9

BUDGET COULD CONSIDER
LEVYING TDS ON CRYPTO TRADING

DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

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

CAPSULE

'DON'T BUILD ROAD VIA NEPALI TERRITORY'

Kathmandu: Nepal on Sunday once again reminded India not to construct any roads in Nepali territory unilaterally. This reaction comes in a response to a recent statement of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 30 in Uttarakhand. While addressing an election rally, Modi on December 30 announced that his government had built a road to Lipulekh and that there were more plans to extend it further. Responding to the statement of the Indian Prime Minister after it created a huge uproar in Nepal across the political spectrum, Nepal's Minister for Information and Communication Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki said on Sunday that Nepal government has been asking India not to extend and construct road via Nepali territory unilaterally.

OVER 156.76 CR DOSES ADMINISTERED SO FAR

New Delhi: The countrywide vaccination drive against Covid-19 on Sunday completed one year, during which over 156.76 crore vaccine doses were administered. According to health ministry officials, over 92 per cent of the adult population have received at least one dose while over 68 per cent have been fully vaccinated. The Centre will issue a postal stamp on Sunday afternoon to mark the completion of one year of the inoculation drive.

OVER 1.47L KIDS LOST PARENTS DUE TO COVID

New Delhi: The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has informed the Supreme Court that a total of 1,47,492 children since April 1, 2020, have lost either their mother or father or both parents due to COVID-19 and other reasons. Giving the details in a suo motu matter on children in need of care and protection due to loss of parents during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCPCR said its figures are based on data uploaded by states and Union Territories on its 'Baal Swaraj Portal-COVID care' up to January 11. "That it is most humbly reiterated that the data of children uploaded on the 'Baal Swaraj Portal-COVID care' by the States/UTs comprises of both categories of children, wherein the child has lost both or either of the parent to COVID-19 disease or otherwise from April 2020 onwards", the affidavit filed through advocate Swarupama Chaturvedi said.

THIEVES ROB TRAINS FILLED WITH PACKAGES

Los Angeles: Photos and videos have gone viral on the social media showing empty boxes of major shipping companies like UPS, FedEx and Amazon, littered alongside rail tracks in Los Angeles County, as there has been a spike in freight train thefts, according to a media report. A CNN report on Saturday said that Union Pacific, one of the country's largest railroad companies, has announced it may avoid operating in Los Angeles County following the spike in thefts, which it blames on lax prosecution of crimes.

BKU stands behind RLD-SP alliance

Naresh Tikait urges people to vote for coalition candidates in UP elections

PNS ■ NEW DELHI /MUZAFFARNAGAR



polls.

Naresh Tikait not only made an appeal to the people to ensure a victory for the SP-RLD alliance but also handed over the symbol authority letters to two alliance nominees at Kisan Bhawan in Sisauli. In a related development late in the evening, however, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha stated that any farmer organisations which will contest the elections will have to leave the united front.

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

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

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

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

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

Denied ticket, Punjab CM's brother to contest as Independent

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

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

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

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

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

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

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Ex-UP Min Chauhan throws in lot with SP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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India registers 2,71,202 new Covid-19 cases

India's jab drive completes 1 yr, over 156 cr doses administered so far

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Lauding India's Covid-19



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

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

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

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

"It's the largest vaccination drive in the world. We've administered over 156 cr doses in a year and were able to provide vaccines to over 100 countries in line with our philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'," said ICMR Chief Dr Balram Bhargava. He hoped that even as the Covid cases are on increase, the severity will be less because of vaccination.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Severe cold could freeze North India over next 3 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Tata Football Academy turns 35

PNS ■ Jamshedpur

The Tata Football Academy (TFA) conceived in 1983 and inaugurated in 1987, will turn 35 on January 17 this year. A new chapter began in the history of Indian football when Tata Football Academy (TFA) was established on January 17, 1987, by Russi Mody, the then chairman & managing director of Tata Steel, in Jamshedpur. The academy was his brainchild. "Tata Football Academy was set up to provide mainstream national football with a perennial pool of young footballers trained and oriented to international standards," said an official.

All time soccer stars including Olympians like Sailen Manna, Sheoo Mewalal, Runu Guha Thakurta, Pradip Kumar Banerjee, MS Mani and Chuni Goswami (Advisor, Sports and Games, Tata Steel) were present at the occasion. A total of 20 cadets were selected for the first batch with international star, Mohammed Habib, as chief coach. The objective of the academy is to



select, nurture and prepare budding footballers from across the country in the most scientific way. A total of 252 cadets have graduated till date. TFA in its first decade of existence amply proved that systematic training, at the right age in a proper ambience, pays rich dividends. The juniors of TFA achieved a string of impressive victories against reputed

national and international teams in this short period.

A look at the composition of the teams that have done well in the National League since its inception reveals the presence of a number of players from the TFA.

"India has always been a footballing nation and at one time was a powerhouse in Asia but for vari-

ous reasons the game has failed to hold on to that lead and has declined with India now playing catch up with the rest of the world. It is quite baffling that one of the world's most populous countries and fastest growing economies has struggled to make an impact in the beautiful game on a global level. Instead of looking at where we have gone wrong and finding innumerable faults within and outside the system - Tata Football Academy is now concentrating on initiatives the elite football nations have taken to get to where they are. The most evident direction that gets pointed out is: Grassroots," said an official.

As a first step to inspire local players to aspire for greater standards, in the 1980s Tata Steel brought the best of international football to the country with the Super Soccer Series. The resurgence in interest, the passion of the fans countrywide, and the national pride the games drew, were instrumental in the company setting up Tata Football Academy in 1987.

Covid hits health workers, over 200 test positive

PNS ■ Jamshedpur

As the Covid infections gallop in Jamshedpur, an increasing number of doctors and healthcare workers are getting affected by the virus. Even though the rate of hospitalisation has not been much of a worry till now, healthcare workers contracting the infection could put the system under threat.

According to an estimate about 200 doctors have been infected with Covid-19 in the steel city. Doctors, nurses and other paramedical staff of Tata Main Hospital, MGM Medical College Hospital, Tata Motors Hospital, Mercy Hospital, Sadar Hospital and BrahmaNanda Narayana Multispeciality Hospital have been hit by the virus. Addressing the media during a telephonic press meet, Dr Rajan Choudhry, advisor, Covid-19, Tata Main Hospital informed that the doctors and nurses of TMH are also on the path to recovery but still 52 doctors and 130 nurses are not reporting earlier, the figures were much higher. He said that the healthcare workers are following norms but still the speed of infection is so high that even they have been hardly affected by it.



"The doctors and nurses are exposed to the threat. As per our estimate about 45 doctors and as many nurses of our hospital are down with the Covid-19," said Arun Kumar, superintendent, MGM Medical College Hospital. District civil surgeon, AK Lal also expressed concern over the increasing number of doctors being infected with Covid-19 resulting in an adverse impact on the treatment of patients suffering from diseases other than the Covid.

He further noted that despite the fall people should continue to avoid crowding, wear masks and follow social distancing. This will reduce the chances of spread of the virus. If we remain serious about the protocols the

virus will further reduce significantly.

Meanwhile, TMH advisor reiterated that people must take precautionary steps to ensure further safety. Avoid crowds, wear masks and maintain distance. They should continue to avoid crowding, wear masks and follow social distancing. This will reduce the chances of spread of the virus. He said that as part of the precautions for the next wave it is important to get your family and friends vaccinated. The more people get vaccinated the less the chance of pandemic hitting us as hard as it did this time. It is important to wear a proper mask to protect yourself. Follow all COVID-19 protocols.

Police seize illegal liquor from Dhanbad-Dehri Intercity express



Suresh Nikhar ■ Bermo/Gaya

Among the lockdown in the country, while transportation activities are restricted to some extent, but smuggling of liquor are still going on. A case of smuggling of illegal liquor has been revealed on Sunday at Gaya railway station within limits of Eastern Central Railway (ECR). The RPF, Gaya has seized 72 bottles of foreign liquor from the Dhanbad Dehri Intercity Express train on the Gaya- Mughalsarai train section of Eastern Central Railway. According to the information received by Inspector Railway Protection Force on Sunday morning huge quantities of liquor boxes were seized from the D12 coach of the Dhanbad Dehri Inter-

city Express train. In this issue, RPF Sub Inspector Gaya railway station Punam Kumari has said that a special team has been formed to take action against liquor traders, the task of this team is mainly to check the trains traveling from Jharkhand to Bihar. During checking the special team has discovered an alcohol bottle in unclaimed conditions from the Compartment of the train. In this issue, the police have registered an FIR against unknown smugglers and its investigation has been started.

It is also being said that the SHO has said that the seized liquor was manufactured in Haryana, in which the classic 72 bottles of 375 mL, of Imperial blue was found. Sub Inspector Punam Kumari of RPF Gaya said that

in the same sequence while checking the various coaches of the said train, in the order of checking in coach number D12, on top of the luggage rack of the passengers, four different colored baggies were kept, in respect of which the surrounding.

On asking the passengers sitting in the seat, no one accepted their ownership, after that the said bag was checked by dropping it on platform number 01, understanding the witnesses present, then 72 bottles of Imperial Blue foreign liquor, each 375ml and all foreign liquor bottles. But on batch number-IBF0036 dt-02.12.21 and all of them were raided for sale only in the state of Jharkhand, the foreign liquor recovered in all the above said bag was confiscated by making a confiscation list in front of the witnesses present and written for further legal action. GRP went with the complaint letter. In connection with the above, case no-27/22, dated-16/01/22, U/S- 30(a)Bihar prohibition and excise act 2018, has been registered in the Government Railway Police Station Gaya. The estimated value of liquor was found to be Rs 23,760.

Private health hub in Daltonganj starts supply of medical oxygen



PNS ■ Daltonganj

A private maternity hospital registered under clinical establishment act, PC Jain Sewa Sadan has started its medical oxygen supply system. Palamu Deputy Commissioner, Shashi Ranjan on Sunday inaugurated the pressure swing adsorption medical oxygen plant of hospital. The maternity hospital running since 1974 which draws patients from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as well is not on the panel of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. On the occasion the Palamu DC assured the hospital management to get it empanelled under Ayushman Bharat Yojana so that patients low in-

come group are benefited. Also speaking on the occasion, the general secretary of Sewa Sadan, Suresh Jain said Sewa Sadan is ready to have 20 beds for dedicated Covid treatment, but we have urged the district administration to provide doctors and other infrastructure facilities. A Bangaluru based MCKS trust fund has aided in the setting up of the nearly two dozen lakh medical oxygen plant here in Daltonganj. There are 358 registered private medical hubs under the clinical establishment act but none has so far started oxygen supply except Sewa Sadan.

Confusion over the "booster dose" leaves elderly people under stress

Elderly person who has completed both vaccine doses are only eligible for the booster dose of the vaccine.

Ashis Sinha ■ Bokaro

Amidst confusion over the precautionary doses of Covid -19 vaccines among health care workers and elderly people who should receive the vaccine shot is being administered at PHCs in the district. All the elderly people of 60 years and above, including health care and frontline workers, are being administered booster doses, informed a district administrative official. Meanwhile, all those above 60 are being administered the vaccine in some vaccination session sites. In others, only those who have crossed the age

of 60 and are with co-morbidities are being vaccinated, leaving the senior citizens unnecessarily stressed. "A couple of days earlier, I went to take a booster dose at a PHC. After a long wait, when my turn came, the health staff denied administering the vaccine to me, asking for a doctor's prescription. I am a cardiac patient," said S Kumar, a senior citizen residing at Siwandih. A district health department official said, the third and final dose, known as the "booster dose", will be reminded to be taken by the eligible elderly people by SMS. However, the Civil Surgeon of Bokaro, Dr. Jitendra Kumar said, "anyone above the age of 60 who has been vaccinated twice will be eligible for a booster dose of the vaccine." As per the guidelines, the elderly person who has completed both vaccine doses is only eligible for

the booster dose of the vaccine. "The prioritization and sequencing of this precautionary dose would be based on the completion of 9 months (39 weeks) from the date of administration of the second dose," it said in the guidelines. A health official said, "The government has recently abolished the necessity for older adults with comorbidities to get required certificates. At the time of administering a precautionary dose, "all patients aged 60 years and over with comorbidities will not be required to produce/submit any certificate from the doctor." However, it has been suggested that senior citizens with comorbidities must go for the precautionary dose only after the advice of the doctor, he said. The government said earlier that senior citizens with comorbidities should produce a doctor's certificate before receiving the precautionary dose.

1.5 kg gold worth Rs 74 lakh seized from Gaya station, one arrested

PNS ■ Bermo/Gaya

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Gaya within the limits of Eastern Central Railway (ECR) recovered 1.5 kgs of gold worth Rs 74.16 lakhs from a train. On January 16, officers and staff of RPF, Gaya, SIB, Gaya and DRI Patna jointly conducted operation in train no.22912 Howrah-Indore Shipra Express at Gaya railway station headed by RPF Inspector Ajay Prakash on tip off, said Senior Divisional Security Commissioner, MGS Asish Kumar Mishra. According to the officials, a passenger named Manoj Kumar Pathak of Mirzapur arrived at Gaya railway station from Durgapur by Howrah Indore Shipra Express. On scanning his check-in baggage the officials observed dark images. On detailed inspection, a high-pressure foot pump with gold pieces was found inside the pump. The total quantity of gold recovered was 1.5 kgs valued at Rs 74.16 lakhs. According to Senior DSC they apprehended one person namely, Manoj Kumar Pathak son of Ramashankar Pathak, a resident of Mad-



hampur village in Sant Ravi Das Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh and recovered 2 gold biscuits weighing about 1.5 grams from the Howrah Indore Shipra Express at platform no 1 of Gaya railway station. The apprehended person was travelling from Durgapur to Mirzapur, said Senior DSC Asish Kumar Mishra. Later, with recovered items the apprehended person was sent to the custody of DRI Patna for further legal action. The value of the recovered gold is estimated

Rs 74.16 lakhs. Sources said that Manoj Kumar Pathak, who originally hails from Mirzapur in UP, was allegedly smuggling the gold biscuits to Uttar Pradesh. "He was travelling from Durgapur in West Bengal and was on his way to Mirzapur. The seized item and the accused have been handed over to DRI department for further probe," sources added. Of late, gold smuggling has been rampant from across the Myanmar border. Most of these items are smuggled

through West Bengal, to other parts of the country, like UP and Delhi, where they are in high demand in clandestine gold markets. RPF Inspector, Gaya Ajay Prakash said that a team of DRI, Patna comprising strength of 4 officers and staff reached RPF post Gaya and share the intelligence input with RPF Gaya and requested for assistant to verify and work out the case accordingly while train number 22912 up Howrah Indore Shipra express arrived Gaya PF

01, at 1.15 a.m. on Sunday. The joint team of RPF Gaya and DRI Patna raided in coach number S-6 birth no 49 and could be able to arrest one person identified Manoj Kumar Pathak son of Ramashankar Pathak a resident of Madhavpur village in Mirzapur district with 2 numbers foreign gold bar containing 1.5 kg. Earlier in January 4, in two separate operations, illegal gold seized 6 kgs worth Rs 2.89 crore were seized at the Gaya railway station by the RPF sleuths and arrested two smugglers from 22912 up Howrah Indore Shipra express and train no 12311 Howrah Kalka Netaji express soon after it reached Gaya railway junction at platform no 1 on January 4, added Sr DSC Asish Kumar Mishra. The suspects had used various methods in an attempt to smuggle including concealment of gold inside a high-pressure foot pump in the check-in baggage, gold foils in chocolate wrappers, gold powder mixed with mud and paste to hoodwink officials, the Senior Divisional Security Commissioner of Rail, Asish Kumar Mishra said.

Dhanbad gets second women's police station

Pankaj Kumar ■ Dhanbad

Dhanbad gets second women police station which was inaugurated by Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Sanjeev Kumar at Tilland locality of Baghmara block on Sunday. The Tilland police station is second Mahila police station in district as a women police station is already functional at Sadar police station premises. SSP said that attempts were on since 2016 for setting up the police station, but now it's getting shape with help of BCCL that has provided space next to the regional hospital. The new PS would help both the females in person and their family members to complaints without any hesitation about atrocities as the officer-in-change would remain a female police officer. The PS would cater to population that lives in entire Baghmara police sub division, he said. Sonika Verma has been appointed as first in-charge of this police station. Senior police officials including rural SP Rishma Rameshan, ASP Manoj Swargyri, Baghmara DSP Nisha Murmu besides Senior official of BCCL too were present during the inaugural session.

Labour crisis takes toll on eateries in Jamshedpur



PNS ■ Jamshedpur

Makar Sankranti or Tusu has literally taken a toll on eating out plans in the city and on highways till January 20. Almost all the popular eateries in the city and those dotting the NH-33 linking Jamshedpur to Ranchi have been compelled to down their shutters with staff going on leave for celebrating Tusu Parab, arguably the biggest festival of the tribe of this region till January 20. The festival falls on January 14 but with most of the staff hailing from Purulia, West Midnapore (in Bengal), adjoining Chandil (Seraikela-Kharsawan district), Patamda (around 30 km from city) and Haldipokhar (around 35 km from city) in East Singhbhum and going on leave from January 13 itself has forced eateries to shut-down from today itself. Usually, Makar Sankranti (Tusu Parab) is celebrated between January 14-16 but the merrymaking continues for a week in rural areas extending the shut-down till January 20. "We had no option but to

shut down our food joint for a week from today as it is very difficult to prepare and serve dishes of the proper quality without untrained staff. We have been closing our unit for a week for several years despite complaints from our customers. There have been suggestions to make arrangements for alternate staff who do not observe the festivity so as to prevent closure of the unit. But so far we have not been successful in implementing this suggestion and have to suffer financially," said an official of a food joint in Bistupur famed for its South Indian fare. Around 15 popular highway dhabas on NH-33 famous amongst those with penchant for long drives and amongst those commuters who frequent between Jamshedpur and Ranchi also have the same fate. "This is one of the main festivals of the tribe and we cannot employ staff at our joints and rely on villagers as our staff. It is very difficult to find a non-tribal employee with experience of cooking quality foods willing to work in dhabas.

JMM patriarch Shibu Soren tests Corona positive

PNS ■ Ranchi

The JMM patriarch and Rajya Sabha MP Shibu Soren has been kept in isolation under medical supervision as he is reportedly affected by the Covid-19 virus. He is the fourth member of the family who became infected by the virus. Earlier, the Covid-19 hit the family of Chief Minister Hemant Soren as his wife Kalpana Soren and their children Nitil and Vishvaj were tested positive for the virus. However, the test report of the Chief Minister turned negative of Covid-19. But Hemant Soren took precautionary measures. During the second wave of the pandemic, Shibu Soren on 22 August last year was detected Covid positive and he was shifted to Medanta hospital at Gurugram for treatment where he stayed for one month. His wife Rupri Soren was also tested

positive that time. Six other staff of Shibu Soren have been tested positive for the virus. Meanwhile, CMM's private secretary Sunil Srivastava has proceeded to the home isolation as he too has been tested positive. A week back as many as 30 staff of the CM residence were tested positive after which the CM secretariat and CM House were sanitized. In another development, the presence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in Jharkhand has been confirmed. The lab test report of ILS Bhuvneshwar has confirmed that out of 87 samples sent from Jharkhand, 14 samples are of the Omicron variant. One case of the Delta variant was also found. But the good thing is that all patients of the Omicron variant have recovered. The health department is in touch with all such persons who suffered from the Omicron variant



So far across Jharkhand, the total number of active cases is 33,189. But the actual figure of the Omicron variant can't be ascertained in Jharkhand as the state doesn't have a genome sequencing machine. In the last month, the rate of infection increased by 5.56 percent. The third wave of pandemics started on 25 December last year. Across Jharkhand 3520 containment zones have been declared out of which the maximum number of containment zones 2030 is in Ranchi. Across Jharkhand over 200 teams have been deployed for the contact tracing. At the two premier hospitals of Ranchi namely RIMS and Sadar hospital, 82 Covid patients are hospitalized out of which 71 are hospitalized at RIMS. Even children are affected by the Covid as in the last week 10 children were admitted at the pediatric ward.

INBRIEF

J'hkhand Anjali bag two medals in Int'l Karate Championship

In the international karate competition held in Kolkata (West Bengal), the Indian karate team opened its account with two gold medals on the first day. 10-year-old Anjali Kumari of Ranchi (Jharkhand), included in the Indian team, made the country proud by winning two medals in both the events. Apart from Anjali, other women players of Jharkhand also showed a good performance on the first day. Devanti Kumari won the gold medal in Kata while Priyanka Hembram got the silver medal in Kumite. Today a total of eight medals came in the account of the Indian team. All the winning players were honored with medals by the World Karate Association's Judge Hanshi Premjit Sen. All the winning players of Jharkhand have been congratulated by the General Secretary of Jharkhand Karate Association, Rainsi Sunil Kispotta and the President of International Martial Arts Academy Sansai Anil Kispotta.

Cong hits BJP on vaccination

Senior leaders of Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee, (JPCC) Alok Kumar Dubey, Lal Kishore Nath Shahdeo and Rajesh Gupta on Sunday said that BJP leaders are making big claims about vaccination. They should remember that this vaccine was developed by the team of scientists in the same research centres which were established during the previous Congress regime. But it is unfortunate previous vaccination campaigns in the Country were conducted completely free of cost during the Congress rule, but for the first time to benefit their capitalist friends, the government has fixed three different prices of the same vaccine, due to which the Supreme Court also had to intervene and later due to Congress and mass movement, the central government bowed down and started a free vaccination campaign for all.

Minor Girl raped

A minor girl was raped by criminals on Sunday in Chanho police station area of the State capital. This incident is of Mahuvatoli village of Chanho police station area. The minor girl came out of her house with three girls this morning. Meanwhile, three youths who arrived in the car started running towards the three girls. Two girls managed to escape. While a minor girl was forcibly made to sit in the car by the criminals. After that the girl was raped. The criminals sitting in the car came to know that the mobile was lost somewhere. He stopped the car near the crooked bridge. From there the minor girl escaped after getting the opportunity. The minor girl informed her family members about this incident. The family members reached Chanho police station and complained about the matter. After making the complaint, the police are interrogating the victim and the family members. However, the minor girl does not recognize the rapists in advance.

Khunti Police arrested three persons with PLFI link

The police of Rania police station of Khunti district on Sunday has arrested three people associated with the banned organization PLFI. All three were in the process of carrying out the Naxalite incident in Rangroti village of the police station area. Among those arrested are Vishram Konkani alias Mota alias Sukra and Kulen Kongadi. Another minor has also been arrested on charges of collusion with them. Police recovered two live cartridges, PLFI leaflet, donation receipt, mobile and a bike from these people. Police said that Vishram Kongadi is an accused in 7 big cases. At the same time, Kulen Kongadi is the main accused in five big cases. Both were on the run.

Comrade Mahendra Singh remembered, statue unveiled



Devasheesh Badal ■ Giridih

The 17th martyrdom day of the martyr MLA Mahendra Singh, was observed on 16 January in Giridih district. Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, who is also general secretary of CPI-ML, was present on the occasion.

The martyrdom day program started from the party office at Bagodar, taking a pledge to follow the path of late Comrade Mahendra Singh. He was remembered by paying floral tributes at the statue of Martyr Mahendra Singh installed here. On the death of Comrade Mahendra Singh's widow on 16

January 2022, party workers and Other political parties observed a two-minute silence for the peace of her soul.

In the program, hundreds of people, including General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, MLA Vinod Kumar Singh, former MLA of Nirsa Arup Chatterjee, CPI-ML State Secretary Manoj Bhakt, paid floral tributes to the statue.

Thereafter, the statue was unveiled by paying floral tributes at the installed statue of Mahendra Singh at Bagodar Bus Stand.

After this, floral tributes were also paid to his statue located in his native village Khambhara.

During the program, people kept silence for two minutes in memory of the martyrs. During this programme, a large number of police forces were deployed in the bus stand premises regarding the security arrangements.

BJP demands CBI probe over Lalji Yadav death case

PNS ■ Ranchi

A delegation of State BJP headed by Union Minister of State for Education and Koderma MP submitted a memorandum to Governor Ramesh Bais demanding CBI enquiry over the death of former station in-charge of Nawa Bazar under Palamu district Late Lalji Yadav.

The delegation included BJP state general secretary Balakund Sahai, former minister and Koderma MLA Neera Yadav, senior leader and former MLA Manoj Yadav among others. The delegation raised questions on the alleged suicide of Late Lalji Yadav.

Let us tell you that the dead body of suspended SHO Lalji Yadav was found hanging in the police quarters on Tuesday. Police officers are calling it a case of suicide, while the family members have accused him of conspiracy.

In the application given to the DIG of Palamu, the brother of the deceased police officer has held SP Chandan Kumar Sinha, Vishrampur SDPO Surjit Kumar and DTO Anwar Hussain responsible for his

death. However, SP Chandan Kumar Sinha has vehemently denied the allegation of the family members of the suspended SHO. He has said that he was suspended due to indiscipline. This is a common punishment in the police department. His suicide has nothing to do with this case. Everything will become clear in the investigation.

Annapurna Devi said that in Jharkhand there is Jungle Raj, as news related to murder, robbery, rape, illegal mining, increasing Naxalism activities, smuggling of minerals are the daily headlines of newspaper.

The Union Minister targeting JMM/Congress coalition government said that this government has given birth to a coalition in the state - that is the criminal-mafia-administration alliance, which is protected by the ruling party.

Due to such alliance development work is stalled in the state, looting and smuggling continues indiscriminately. And if anyone tries to stop such exploits, then every effort is being made to eliminate him.

The Union Minister also raised the death of police officer Roopa Tirkey, saying that all are the culmination of this immoral nexus. On poor law and order issue, she said in past month several criminal activities has occurred a Sanju Pradhan was burnt alive, a few days later a woman was burnt in the same police station area, the Naxalite attack on the former MLA, the murder of two of his bodyguards, the comfort of the criminals in the jail are telling the story of increasing crime in the state.

In such a situation, the incident of the so-called suicide of police inspector late Lalji Yadav on January 11, posted at Nawa Bazar police station under Palamu district, has again exposed the exploits of immoral alliances.

Late Yadav was an honest cop who tried his best to fight against corruption. He tried to stop the illegal recovery from vehicles by the DTO within his police station area. In such a situation, suspending them under administrative pressure exposes the working style of the state government.



A BJP delegation led by Union Minister of state for HRD Annpurna Devi during a meeting with Governor Ramesh Bais at Raj Bhawan in Ranchi on Sunday.

Houses having water harvesting system will get holding tax waiver

PNS ■ Ranchi

Now people under Ranchi Municipal Commission area will not have to pay holding tax if they installed Water Harvesting System at their residence. Issuing general information, the RMC on Sunday said that those who have made provision for harvesting after constructing house, building, they should inform the corporation within 15 days.

According to the Deputy Municipal Commissioner, whoever does this, their tax on holding tax will be waived separately in the next financial year. Interested citizens should submit the declaration of water harvesting of their house in the corporation office for this.

There are also many citizens living in the civic body's area whose houses have rain water harvesting systems. For some reason, the information about the availability of water harvesting facilities after the construction of the house has not been given to the corporation till now. Due to this, they have to pay holding tax up to one and a half times regularly.

As per information provided by the civic body, under the Jharkhand Municipal Property Tax (Assessment, Collection and Recovery) Rules 2011, such citizens should inform the corporation that they have made arrangements for harvesting in their respective houses, houses, buildings. With this, the tax levied in their holding tax will be removed.

Preparations for Republic Day parade in full swing

Experienced firm to prepare tableau for R Day function

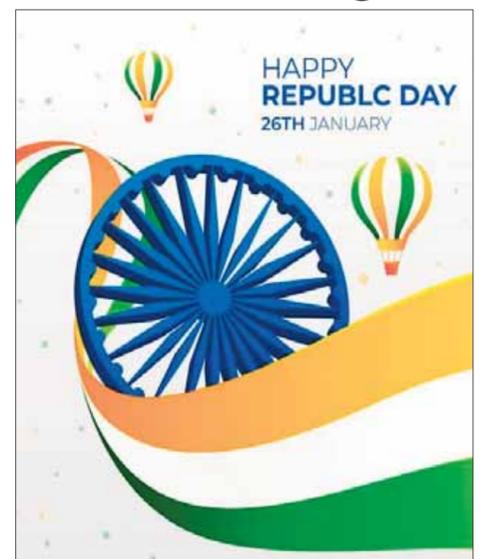
PNS ■ Ranchi

Ranchi district administration is busy making last minute preparations for the tableau to be taken out on January 26 on Republic Day function at Morhabadi Ground in the State Capital. With the help of an experienced institute or firm the tableau is also to be drawn. For this, tender has also been issued from the level of Ranchi District Public Relations Officer. By January 20, people associated with interested agencies, institutions, and firms can submit tenders.

Tenders will be opened on the same day by the Purchase Committee in the presence of the tenderers. Republic Day programs are to be organized as per corona protocol. According to the information released by the District Public Relations Unit, the theme of the tableau will be on the freedom fighter.

According to the terms of the tender, the construction of the tableau will have to be prepared by 3 PM on January 25 at Morhabadi Ground, Ranchi. The amount payable to the tenderer can be deducted if there is a deficiency in the performance of the tableau as per the theme. In front of the tableau, no extra amount will be payable separately to the artist dancing in the tableau on the "Freedom Fighter" and the artist doing a live performance. During the production and presentation of the tableau, the guidelines of COVID-18 will have to be compulsorily followed. For tender related information, the District Public Relations Officer, Ranchi can be contacted on the number 6204800944.

A meeting was held regarding the organization of Republic Day celebrations two days earlier. In the virtual



meeting held under the chairmanship of Ranchi Deputy Commissioner (DC), Chhavi Ranjan to monitor preparation work of the Republic Day programme, the concerned officials were given necessary guidelines regarding preparation. Senior Superintendent of Police, Ranchi, Surendra Kumar Jha, Deputy Development Commissioner, Ranchi, Vishal Sagar and other officials of the district administration were present during the meeting. During the meeting, the DC and the SSP gave directions to the officials regarding the preparations to make the Republic Day a peaceful environment. SSP, Jha said that for the Republic Day to be held in a better environment, elaborate security arrangements would be made, as well as special attention would be given to ensure that there is no traffic problem. Necessary guidelines were also given by the DC to other concerned officials regarding the preparations for the Republic Day celebrations. In the meeting, Ranjan directed to complete the preparations for the Republic Day celebrations in view of the COVID transition. He directed to make preparations following the guidelines regarding parade and display of tableaux. In the meeting, the Executive Engineer, Drinking Water and Sanitation Department was instructed by the DC to make arrangements for drinking water supply, VIP toilets. The Road Construction Division was asked to ensure repair and cleanliness of the roads leading to Morhabadi. Executive Engineer Building Division-1 was directed by Ranjan to ensure the arrangement of tower construction for the visitors, barricading at the venue, stage and sound box for the construction of the gallery. The Superintendent of Police Traffic has been directed to ensure the arrangement of parking of vehicles in Morhabadi ground, appointment of traffic policemen in the connecting roads and making traffic routes and publishing them in newspapers.

Confusion over JPSC mains, as Govt extends mini lockdown

PNS ■ Ranchi

Uncertainty looms large on the main examination of the combined civil services of Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic.

As per the schedules announced, the mains examination will be held from January 28 till January 30. A total of 14 examination centers across Jharkhand has been selected and students were asked to download the admit card from the website of the JPSC from January 15 onwards.

"But the JPSC has not uploaded admit cards so far and we are not sure whether the Commission will conduct the mains examination or not? The JPSC should clarify the matter," an aspirant of the JPSC said.

The JPSC issued a notification to hold a combined civil service examination comprising seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth JPSC against 252 seats. A total of 4293 students from different categories were declared successful namely unreserved (1897), ST (1057), SC (389), OBC (244), EBC (401), and EWS 305. However, students



raised questions over the examination process and the result as they alleged corruption in declaring preliminary results. But the third wave of Covid-19 has further made the matter uncertain as the Hemant Soren government has extended the period of the mini-lockdown till January 31.

Notably, on January 3 when chief minister Hemant Soren had chaired the meeting of disaster management to review the situation the direction was clear that all offline examinations in Jharkhand will remain suspended. But the JPSC has not issued any statement on whether or not the examination

will be postponed. According to the direction of the government, all public places like parks, fitness centers, stadiums, schools, and colleges will remain closed.

Even if the JPSC gets special permission from the government and makes special arrangements for the examination, it hardly minimizes risk factors. It will be difficult to ascertain whether or not an aspirant is affected by the Covid 19. "Suppose a student is indeed affected by the pandemic what arrangement will be made for such students. Students will have the problem of arranging logistics for their stay in the district of their examination centre because they may face the problem of accommodation," said another JPSC aspirant.

Former JPSC aspirant Manoj Kumar who fights for the cause of students said that the JPSC should not risk the lives of students. "Students have challenged the JPSC result at the High Court and the matter is scheduled for a hearing. The JPSC should wait till the hearing takes place. The way the pandemic has spread, the JPSC must immediately postpone the examination."

Fin Min holds pre-Budget meet with BJP functionaries

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The discussions centered round giving incentives to marginalized sections as also giving right fillip to business activities in the country in the aftermath of Covid-19.

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

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



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

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

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

Senior central party leaders conducted the proceed-

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

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

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

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

BJP's politics of hatred harmful for country: RaGa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The poll elicited 3,47,396



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

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

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

On Twitter, Rahul used the format of the game but changed the letters to reflect Congress's allegations against the Prime Minister. The photograph shared by the leader contained words like 'jumla' (scam), 'taxes', 'snoop', 'photo op', in an obvious attack on the ruling party.

Wordle is an online word game and gives a player six chances to guess the day's secret word, which has five letters. The aim is to figure out the secret word with the fewest guesses.

SC raps Punjab & Haryana HC over order upholding life term

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

EC cell to share info on tainted candidates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

As per the guidelines, it will

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

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

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

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

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

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

CBI arrests GAIL's Ranganathan in bribery case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coronavirus will never go away fully, says WHO representative

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A survey conducted by journal Nature also showed

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

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

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

India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage crosses 156 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



second doses have been administered, it said.

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"India has been able to

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

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

He also congratulated all scientists on the occasion.

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

RK Dhamija appointed new director IHBAS



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

specified co-morbid conditions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"With the efficient leadership, determination and constant efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, India has set an example in the world that if the government and citizens unite in the interest of the nation and set a common goal, then the country can overcome the impossible and conquer every challenge," he tweeted in Hindi with a hashtag one year of vaccine drive.

"I congratulate the talented scientists, health workers, all corona warriors and citizens on the successful completion of one year of the world's largest free vaccination campaign in the fight against Covid under the strong and inspiring leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji," Shah said in another tweet.

According to the Health Ministry, over 93 per cent of



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

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

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

SP candidates either in jail or on bail: Thakur

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"On the one hand, I had nine years of service still left in the police, and there was an opportunity to climb to higher posts. On the other hand, there was an ordinary life, and a chance to serve the public," he said. "I think that Prime

Minister (Narendra Modi) has a rare thought process, and the speciality of the BJP is to develop a new leadership," Asim Arun said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Pradesh cabinet minister Dara Singh Chauhan and Apna Dal (Sonelal) MLA RK Verma into the party.

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

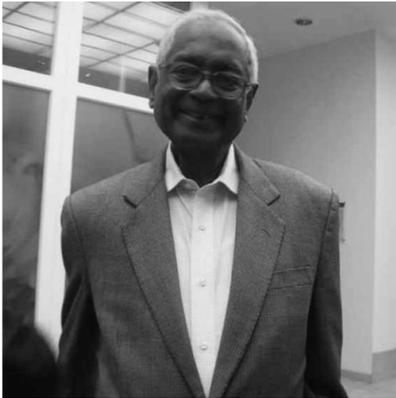
Yadav said photos that are doing rounds on the social media convey that BJP workers from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state had arrived in Uttar Pradesh to spread "rumours, conspiracies, lies and hatred, besides distributing money".

The SP chief addressed journalists at the party office after inducting former Uttar

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

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

Veteran journalist Sam Rajappa dies



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

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

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

Thakur who on Saturday held a closed-door meeting with rebel party MLAs and some senior leaders including deposed State vice president Jay Prakash Majumdar, Ritesh

Tewari and Sayantan Basu said the Sunday's meeting was held to chalk out some plans for future movements concerning the Matua community.

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

Though Thakur would not speak much other leaders of the community said, "talks were held on the betterment of the Matua community and implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act... the Matuas and all other people who migrated to India need to be recognized as proper citizens a promise that was given to us by the BJP... and Home Minister Amit Shah himself said that process of implementation of CAA would start after the pan-

democratic and particularly after the vaccination drive was completed... now the time has come we want the Centre to implement its promise on CAA."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She wet on to write "it is even

more baffling for us that the tableau was rejected without assigning any reasons or justifications."

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

"I may like to inform you that all the people of West Bengal are deeply pained by this attitude of the central government. It is shocking to find that the contribution of its valiant freedom fighters has no place in the nation's ceremony to celebrate the

occasion of the Republic Day on the 75th year of our Independence. I urge you to reconsider the decision and include the tableau of freedom fighters from West Bengal in the Republic Day parade on the 75th year of our Independence," Banerjee added. **PTI**



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



Bihar hooch toll climbs to eleven

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

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

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

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

COVID BULLETIN

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

41K fresh cases, 8 Omicron cases reported in State

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

As 40,327 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 67,60,514. The recovery rate in the state rose from 94.28 per cent to 94.3 per cent. The number of "active cases" in the state increased from 2,64,441 to 2,68,00,900. The fatality rate in the state dropped from 1.97 per cent to 1.96 per cent.

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

(4083) and Aurangabad (3106).

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

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

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

Nashik and Latur—3 each, Gadchiroli, Nandurbar and Solapur—2 each and Jalna and Raigad—one each.

Of the total cases 932 patients have been discharged after a negative RT-PCR test.

In a related development, the authorities said the total number of passengers who arrived at Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur airports since December 1 was 2,86,139 (43,787 from At-risk countries and rest 2,42,352 are from other countries), while passengers whose RT-PCR tests have been done are 89,009 (43,787 are from high-risk countries and 45,222 are from other countries). Similarly, RT-PCR positive and samples sent for genomic sequencing was 1,184 (548 are from at-risk countries and 636 are from other countries). Additionally, field surveillance of all international passengers who have arrived since 1st November is underway.

39 more patients succumb to Covid-19 in West Bengal

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

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

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

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



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

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

Kerala clocks over 18,123 new cases

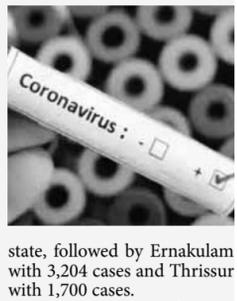
Thiruvananthapuram: The number of daily Covid-19 cases continued to rise unabated in Kerala with the state reporting 18,123 fresh infections on Sunday taking the total positives to 53,69,706.

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

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

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

Among the districts, Thiruvananthapuram recorded 3,917 cases, the highest in the



state, followed by Ernakulam with 3,204 cases and Thrissur with 1,700 cases. The state had tested 59,314 samples in the last 24 hours.

Out of those found infected, 113 reached the state from outside while 17,627 contracted the disease from their contacts. The source of infection of 234 is yet to be traced. Meanwhile, 4,749 persons recuperated from the disease on Sunday taking the total recoveries in the state to 53,23,430. **PTI**

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Guesswork

In the absence of enough data, it's no good pretending that Delhi has conquered Omicron

The figures are not adding up. That is a cause for worry. Delhi's Health Minister Satyendra Jain insists the latest wave of COVID-19, led by the Omicron variant, has peaked in the city. Cases are going to fall from now on, the Minister predicts. On Thursday, 28,867 new cases were reported. They fell to 24,383 on Friday, and further to 20,718 on Saturday. He is, however, unable to present data to counter the Opposition's charge that reduced testing is resulting in a lesser number of new cases being reported. Jain also says that the peak has been "reached" in Delhi. He believes that fewer hospital admissions are evidence that the cases are decreasing in the city. In the same breath, the Delhi Government also admits that the Omicron variant is less virulent, limiting cases of hospitalisation. Media reports indicate thousands of people are buying home antigen test kits in Delhi. It is anybody's guess how many of them test positive but their reports do not appear on the Government's records. The total positivity rate is a high 30.64 per cent and, till January 13, a whopping 17,974 local containment zones were operational. Why then is the Delhi Government in a hurry to prove that the city has already conquered Omicron?

The issue is not about Delhi or its Government. It is about the absence of enough data to make informed decisions about administrative measures, health policy and treatment guidelines.

How much neutralising antibodies ensure full protection? What about monoclonal antibodies? Rich people are buying these highly expensive monoclonal antibodies, unaware that European studies show Omicron is resistant to them. No data is charting the efficacy trend of the first dose, the second dose, both doses plus infection, and so forth. The more testing the States do, the more accurate is the data on the linkage



between dosage and infection. Intensive genomic sequencing can make available data on specific infections each of the variants is capable of. Virologists say that linking clinical information with vaccination status and the COVID-19 variant is critical for handling a wave. The decision to impose night curfews, for instance, would not have been called a knee-jerk reaction had it been based on scientific data. COVID-19 is an evolving virus with no prediction possible about its end. It can be tackled only with equally fast and evolving clinical information that helps patients receive precision medicine. In the last two years, "restrictive emergency use" approval was given to several drugs, ranging from hydroxychloroquine, favipiravir, itolizumab, to Molnupiravir. Some of them never worked, the rest had side effects. On the other hand, we have not been able to institutionalise treatment protocols before one goes to hospital. If thousands of people have survived the virus without hospitalisation in the current wave, it is only because the Omicron infection is mild. Researchers now claim the Omicron variant could be an "evolutionary mistake" and the next one could be virulent. What then?



People protest against the Dutch Government's lockdown measures, in Amsterdam

Dicey

The Assembly poll fight in Uttar Pradesh seems poised to go down to the wire

For the first time in many years, the BJP seems to be on the back foot at the time of a crucial election. Despite all the odds, it put up a brave show in the Bengal elections and never went on the back foot. But the upcoming UP election is proving difficult. Contrary to expectations, Adityanath will contest from Gorakhpur and not from the temple town of Ayodhya, or Mathura. This is the first time he will contest Assembly polls. His Deputy CM, Keshav Prasad Maurya, would contest from Sirathu in Prayagraj. The resignation of influential Swami Prasad Maurya and two other OBC Ministers, Dara Singh Chauhan and Dharam Singh Saini, along with some MLAs has put a spanner in its works. On the one hand, it stands to lose sizeable OBC vote which is crucial for its victory and, on the other, other leaders may follow suit sensing the mood of people. It may be good news for the Akhilesh Yadav camp but, as they say, there's many a slip between the cup and the lip. The UP election is still away and in such a touch-and-go scenario, the last few days are crucial in swaying the voters.



Moreover, the BJP is no pushover and will do everything to control the damage. It has already

stopped commenting about the leaders who left its fold. It has already got into an alliance with the Nishad Party and might give them 15-odd seats but that would send a message to other smaller parties. Moreover, the Samajwadi Party has to bank heavily on alliances, the more the merrier, but Akhilesh Yadav is either not convincing enough or overconfident to ignore other groups. Though an alliance with Om Prakash Rajbhar has materialised, it ominously snapped ties with Chandrashekhar Azad of Azad Samaj Party. This might cost it Dalit votes which are almost one-fourth of the total votes. The Opposition camp is still as hopelessly fragmented as the last time. The alliance with the BSP and the Congress is a far cry. Even the post-electoral alliance might be difficult if it comes to that. Last but not the least, the effect of Ram Temple and the Prime Minister's charisma cannot be ignored which might help BJP achieve the magic figure of 202. Nothing, of course, can be said till voting ends on February 14, the day BJP hates the most.

A small loss for tennis, major win for vaxxers

Novak Djokovic's double visa revocation and deportation from the Australian Open are extraordinary, but so are the times we live in



ASHUTOSH MISRA

Novak Djokovic made world headlines this time for his fight in a different 'court' Down Under. The world No. 1 tennis player had landed in Australia on January 6 to find out that the visa based on the medical exemption granted by the Independent Medical Exemption Review Panel appointed by the Victorian Government, has been revoked by the Australian Border Force.

Australian Open chief Craig Tiley shared that over 26 players and support staff had asked for medical exemption on various grounds, out of which only a few were granted. India's rising tennis player Aman Dahiya was one of the unlucky ones, despite arguing with the Australian authorities that being only 17 years' old, he was not allowed to have vaccination as the Indian Government had approved vaccines for the 15-18 years' old only on January 3, leaving little time for Dahiya to get vaccinated. Naturally, Dahiya was questioning the exemption being granted to Novak Djokovic.

Djokovic's controversy triggered a massive backlash from his fans both back home and in Australia, leading to a police action in Melbourne. From the angry Serbian President to the world no. 1's parents, the brickbats have been unrelenting in Australia.

Djokovic's lawyers filed an appeal in the Federal Circuit Court where Judge Anthony Kelly ruled on January 10 against Djokovic's visa cancellation and ordered his release from Immigration detention, saying: "The Government has conceded that the Border Force's decision to interview Mr Djokovic and subsequently cancel his visa was unreasonable in the circumstances." His lawyers had argued that because he had contracted COVID on December 16, and so he was not eligible for vaccination for six months, and hence, the exemption from Tennis Australia and the Department of Home Affairs was granted. It is a different matter that Djokovic is against vaccination in principle.

Seeing the adverse publicity and backlash, and that too in an election year, in which the feder-



al Government had its own set of fumbling to cover over the vaccine rollout, return of Australian citizens and students stranded overseas and shortage of Rapid Antigen Tests, Prime Minister Scott Morrison intervened for some damage control saying that the matter was being "carefully reviewed" by Home Affairs Minister Alex Hawke.

As the Minister reviewed Djokovic's case, his footage of dancing shirtless in a club along with other infected players, and attending the Adria Tour Charity Fundraiser while being infected with COVID came back to bite him. The Home Affairs contended that the information shared in the visa application by Djokovic was false, in response to which Djokovic said that although he signed it, the declaration boxes were ticked by his team; an argument which does not hold any ground.

Nonetheless, on January

PM MORRISON SAID DJOKOVIC'S VISA HAS BEEN REVOKED 'IN PUBLIC INTEREST' AND SINCE THE AUSTRALIANS HAVE MADE 'MANY SACRIFICES' DURING THE PANDEMIC, THEIR INTERESTS AND SAFETY NEEDED TO BE PROTECTED

14, after much speculation, Home Affairs Minister Alex Hawke revoked his visa for the second time under Section 133C(3) of the Migration Act in "public interest" and to prevent a "civil unrest" by the "talismans of anti-vaccination sentiment". Prime Minister Morrison said that Djokovic's visa has been revoked "in public interest" and since the Australians have made "many sacrifices" during the pandemic, their interests and safety needed to be protected.

The PM's stand has apparently struck the right chord with the larger Australian community. In the past 12 months, thousands of Australian workers and business establishments have suffered unfathomable hardship and pain due to "heartless" border closures and restrictions, strict isolation and quarantine regulations and vaccination requirement. Families have been separated, and many

have been unable to bid goodbye to their near and dear ones due to border restrictions despite being fully vaccinated. Children have been separated from mothers, and Australian citizens have been stranded overseas unable to return for months. This exemption flew in the face of them all.

Djokovic's lawyers challenged the Minister's decision in the full Federal Court where Chief Justice James Allsop announced the court's unanimous decision of dismissing the world no. 1's application, with costs to be paid borne by him. "It sends an appalling message to millions seeking to reduce #COVID19Aus risk to themselves & others. #Vaccination shows respect, Novak," tweeted Stephen Parnis, a former vice-president of the Australian Medical Association. "I don't care how good a tennis player he is. If he's refusing to get vaccinated, he shouldn't be allowed in," Parnis tweeted.

Even the Indian and English cricketers have been subjected to the strictest of quarantine and COVID regulations and, therefore, granting exemption to Novak was definitely making a mockery of all those who made the "sacrifices" and went through a lot of pain to abide by COVID rules and regulations, and did their bit to entertain in a safe manner. Sport nowadays is not just a sport, but is closely linked with the well-being of thousands who congregate to watch it. The pandemic does not discriminate, and so shouldn't we!

That he has been deported is not the key issue but that he was allowed to enter in the first place, is. Novak's double visa revocation and deportation are extraordinary indeed, but so are the times in which we all live.

(The author is the CEO, Institute for Australia India Engagement, Brisbane, and Editor-in-Chief, India News Australia. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CASTE EQUILIBRIUM IN UTTAR PRADESH

Sir — Since the exit of UP Minister Swami Prasad Maurya, the BJP has been in the damage-control mode on and off the camera. Although the saffron party has a big leader in Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya to woo voters and maintain the caste equilibrium, the sudden departure of Swami Prasad may have an impact on BJP's prospects in several eastern UP districts, especially Rae Bareilly, Budayun and Kushinagar. In Uttar Pradesh's ethnic demography, after Yadavs and Kurmis, the third biggest chunk is of the Maurya community which includes Shakya, Saini, Kushwaha, Kori and Kachi. Meanwhile, UP has at least 6 per cent of Maurya-Kushwaha population but in around 15 districts, their population is consolidated to 15 per cent and Swami Prasad has become their undisputed leader.

BSP supremo Mayawati ensured that these OBC communities show their allegiance to her party via Swami Prasad and this vital social engineering made for a winning cocktail for Mayawati in the 2007 Assembly election. The BJP will have to course correct and solve the mystery of caste equation as it did in the past few elections; otherwise the platter of election would subtly shift from CM Yogi Adityanath's plank of "religious identity" towards caste-based voting. But there is a need for every party to realign its strategy and have an ear to the ground in the non-physical and virtual mode.

Nischai Vats | Sultanpur

JAB DRIVE COMPLETES A YEAR

Sir — India completed one year of its vaccination drive against COVID-19 with 157 crore vaccine doses already given. As per the Health Ministry, 92 per cent of the adult population has received at least one dose while over 68 per cent have been fully vaccinated. The 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. The next phase of the COVID-19 vaccination commenced on March 1 for people over

Double standards by Congress



This refers to the news report, 'Channi, Sidhu in Cong's first list of 86 candidates in Punjab', (The Pioneer, Jan 16). The Congress had on Thursday released its first list in Uttar Pradesh with 125 names, including 50 women, many of whom are known voices of 'struggle' and 'fight' against injustice in the State. Priyanka Gandhi called the list a "historic initiative" for fulfilling the party's announcement of giving 40 per cent tickets to women. But a similar push is missing in Punjab where only nine women out of

86 candidates have been nominated. It comes to roughly 10 per cent. But one fails to understand why the Congress chose to undermine Punjab's women as against their UP counterparts.

Priyanka should answer this critical question, otherwise it amounts to gimmickry. In this context, it is hypocrisy on its part to nominate more women in UP where its electoral fortunes are bleak, and fewer in Punjab where it is on a stronger wicket. However, almost all major political parties in the country are guilty of making only tall claims in regard to providing more representation to women in politics. The parties' duplicity has been clearly visible when the overwhelming numerical strength of the MPs, cutting across party lines whose public stance has been to bat for the cause of women, hardly tried to clear the women's reservation Bill in Parliament.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with specific co-morbid conditions.

Then came vaccination for all aged over 45 from April 1. The Government then decided to expand the ambit of the inoculation drive by allowing everyone above 18 to be vaccinated from May 1. The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from January 3 this year for adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years. It was one of the most successful and largest inoculation programmes when compared to many developed nations with a significantly low population base to vaccinate. With this, India has achieved the milestone.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

FOCUS ON JUST BATTING NOW, KOHLI

Sir — Virat Kohli's sudden announcement of stepping down from India's Test captaincy has come as a real shock to the cricketing fraternity of the country. Kohli will go down as India's

most successful Test captain with 40 wins, 17 defeats and 11 draws in 68 matches. It won't be an easy task for Kohli's successor to replicate his success. Only time will tell whether it was a wise move by Kohli to step down from Test captaincy. But whatever the future holds, the batting icon will go down as India's best Test captain by a mile.

Perhaps, by making this decision, Kohli might have missed a big opportunity to shut up his detractors with some terrific wins. Had India won the Test series in South Africa, things might have been different but it seems the 1-2 loss made it a bit complicated. Not having to carry the weight of captaincy any more in any format, the charismatic right-hander can wholly and now intensely focus on his batting and return to being what he is best known for — the run machine.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

SOUNDBITE

The oppression will end and the oppressor will be dethroned on March 10.



Abdullah Azam —Senior SP leader Azam Khan's son

Russia is laying the groundwork to have the option of fabricating a pretext for invading Ukraine.

White House press secretary —Jen Psaki

...Kaam-vaam sab bandh hai ... Bus daadhi badhti jaa rahi hai...



Actor —Amitabh Bachchan

Well done @virat.kohli on the headache you have left behind for your successor.

Indian spinner —Ravichandran Ashwin

My Government is willing to hand over the Alwar rape case to another agency if the affected family wants that.



Rajasthan Chief Minister —Ashok Gehlot

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACE MASK

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



PRITAM SINGH

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

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

Science definitely supports using masks, with recent studies suggesting that they could save lives in different ways. Dr Martin Kirschner, who held the chair for surgery in Heidelberg, first described the neces-



sity of wearing a facemask in 1935 as a 'measure to combat infection'. This paved the way for research on facemasks with varying thickness of cloth. It later proved that "adoption of even relatively ineffective face masks may meaningfully reduce community transmission of Covid-19 and decrease hospitalizations and deaths".

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

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

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

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

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

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

Caste re-engineering decides UP poll result



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IN THE UP ASSEMBLY ELECTION, 80 PER CENT SUPPORTERS WILL BE ON ONE SIDE WHILE 20 PER CENT WILL BE ON THE OTHER.

—UP CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH



YOGI MEANT THE BJP WILL GET 20 PER CENT OF THE SEATS IN UP WHILE THE REST 80 PER CENT WILL GO TO THE SP.

—SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV

COVID-19 fatigue: The end is not in sight

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

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

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

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



GWYNNE DYER

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Quebec is not doing badly

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IAN S ■ NKATHMANDU

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

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

While addressing an election rally, Modi on December 30 announced that his government had built a road to Lipulekh and that there were more plans to extend it further.

Responding to the statement of the Indian Prime Minister after it created a huge uproar in Nepal across the political spectrum, Nepal's Minister for Information and Communication Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki said on Sunday that Nepal government has been asking India not to extend and construct road via Nepali territory unilaterally.

The Indian government is building a road via Lipulekh to Kailash Mansarovar in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China.

After the row in Nepal over Modi's statement, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu on Saturday issued a statement, clarifying that any outstanding boundary issues with Nepal will be settled through established mechanisms and channels.

The Government of India's position on the India-Nepal boundary is well known, consistent and unambiguous,"

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

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

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

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

Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had inaugurated a new map incorporating Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, and Lipulekh within the Nepali territory. The new map was endorsed by Parliament un-

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

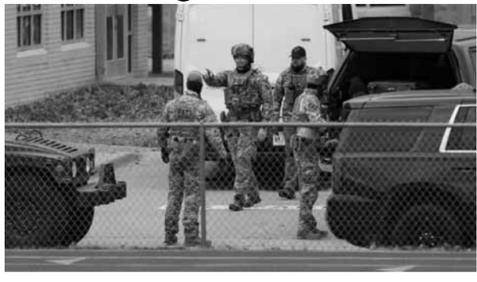
Addressing a press conference on Sunday, Karki who is also the spokesperson of the Nepal government, stated that the Nepal government is clear that Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura are the integral part of Nepal.

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

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

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

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



IAN S ■ HOUSTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pashtun MP in Pakistan remains incarcerated for anti-state speech

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

In early January, Ali Wazir's lawyer, Qadir Khan, had his house ransacked in Karachi.

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

ISI ordered hit on exiled Pak activist for mocking Army

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Libyan Presidency Council stresses commitment to back elections

IAN S ■ TRIPOLI

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

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

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

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

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

Somali Government spokesman injured in suicide car bombing attack in Mogadishu

IAN S ■ MOGADISHU

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

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

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

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

IAN S ■ KABUL

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

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

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

IAN S ■ JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

Pfizer had reported last month that in its ongoing trial

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

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

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

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention found that the

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

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

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

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

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

UN ready to assist Tonga after volcano eruption, tsunami

IAN S ■ UNITED NATIONS

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

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

NZ pledges aid after Tonga volcanic eruption, tsunami

IAN S ■ WELLINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ex-Pak general confesses 'guilt' in espionage case

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Ex-PM Netanyahu negotiating plea deal in corruption trial

AP ■ TEL AVIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lebanon faces internet service interruption amid fuel crisis

AP ■ BEIRUT

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

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

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

Lebanese live with only few hours of state electricity a day and rely on a network of private generators that also depend on diesel fuel. This often leaves neighborhoods in total darkness for hours. Meanwhile, residents have to pay for multiple services, including hefty bills to generator operators, which change regularly as crisis worsens.

Omicron exposes inflexibility of Europe's public hospitals

AP ■ STRASBOURG, FRANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yemen forces recapture strategic district from Houthis

IAN S ■ SANAA

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

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

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

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

IAN S ■ LOS ANGELES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

USD 762 million in the same period of the previous fiscal. India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While the aggregate economy is growing, "the bottom half of India" is in recession, he said and noted that it was sad the country's policy over the last few years has been largely focused on big businesses.

"India's overall macroeconomic situation is in recovery mode... The worry stems from the fact that this growth is concentrated at the top end," Basu told PTI in an interview.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

National Startup Day validates role of ventures in growth of economy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dhruv Sawhney, Business Head and COO of nurture.Farm, said the Indian youth is today equipped to solve problems that previously did not have a voice or a face.

"With a billion-plus population to serve, there are a plethora of services and offerings that, when innovated, can change the standard of living or ease of living for millions of people... Celebrating such innovators and service providers will boost confidence and give more and more youngsters the necessary push to take risks with respect to their ideas and drive changes," he added.

PMC Bank merger with Unity Small Finance Bank awaits Govt approval

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

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

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

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

The scheme as sanctioned by the government would come into force on such date as they may specify, as per the Act.

Under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had prepared a draft scheme of amalgamation and the same was placed in the public domain on November 22 as part of seeking suggestions and objections, if any, from members, depositors and other creditors of PMC Bank and Delhi-based USFB.

The deadline for submitting the comments was till December 10.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATF price hiked by 4.2%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The cost of living is only going up, and taxing them doesn't sound right. We are requesting (the government) if an annuity can also be considered under Section 10 (10D) and can be made tax free. "Section 10 (10D) of the Income Tax Act allows an exemption for life insurance benefits including bonus. These are the two things the industry would be very happy if the government could consider," Raman said.

He urged the government to make a beginning in that direction and to start again from where it had left it before the insurance premium was merged under the overall tax exemption limit of ₹ 1,50,000 under section 80 (D).

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

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

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

from tobacco-related diseases.

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

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

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Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Daljeet Singh Chandok (Borrower), Harpreet Kaur Chandhok (Co-Borrower), NHDEL00000797175	F. Floor Sec 22 Garden Pavilion1 Gurgaon Flat Nogg11A Gurgaon Haryana 122001. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	10-05-2021 Rs. 26,52,011/-	Delhi (Janakpuri)-B
2.	Neetu Singh (Borrower), Dharam Pal Choudhary (Co-Borrower), Sumit Chaudhary (Guarantor), Tikri Service Station (Guarantor), NHDEL00001250362	Block 3 1st Floor Commercial Unit No: Sb/R/11/03/009 Situated in The Project Sector-67 M3m Urbana Gurgaon-122001. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	27-08-2021 Rs. 47,39,906/-	Delhi (Janakpuri)-B
3.	Sumit Kumar Deshwal (Borrower), Gaurav Kumar (Co-Borrower), Vimlesh Kumari (Co-Borrower), NHGHZ00001279037	Gali No 2 Adarsh Colony H No 40,bounded By- North: Gali, South: Ender Kumar House, East: Nathu Singh House, West: Other Plot. Date of Possession- 13-Jan-22	27-08-2021 Rs. 21,73,832/-	Ghaziabad-B
The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.				
Date : January 17, 2022		Authorized Officer		
Place : Gurgaon, Palwal		ICICI Home Finance Company Limited		

WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

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



ASHA workers have been the first line of defense in the battle against Covid-19 in the rural parts of the country," says Shashi Shetty, a social worker from Kalyan in Thane district of Maharashtra. Over the years, she has extensively worked towards the upliftment of individuals and children from marginalised communities in Maharashtra. Since the outbreak of the pandemic Shetty and her team have been supporting ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers in conducting drives to eliminate Covid-19.

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

as full-time employees. And during these times, they have been the first victims of the public's fears about Covid-19. During the distribution drive, Shetty applauded the service of these women, which instantly brought a wide smile to their faces. She said, "You've been given uniforms, you are an army." Discussing the way that the drive operates, Shetty says, "We work closely with the local sarpanch, Seema and Anil Gharat. They help us reach the most vulnerable people and families. We've supported close to 195 ASHA workers in these testing times," informed Shashi. An educationist and a hotelier, Shetty, was felicitated with the

'Samaj Seva Ratna Gaurav Puraskar' by the Governor of Maharashtra, Bhagat Singh Koshyari, on November 8, for her work done during the second wave for food relief. Currently, she is a part of the Indian Development Foundation (IDF), an NGO based in Mumbai committed to the health, education and development of marginalised communities. Reflecting upon the outset of her journey, as a social worker, she said, "It started with IDF and our projects Aashayein and Annadanam which were a part of our SoVo (Social Volunteers) initiative. We work with young children to provide nutritious food and, in addition, organise both fun and educational events. This led me to



the interiors of tribal Maharashtra." She has been frequenting these tribal areas and reaching out to children and individuals from vulnerable communities. For Shetty, the pandemic was a clarion call. "I have always wanted to be a soldier; find my calling and step up when called upon to serve the people. So here I was, one amongst the many — a foot soldier — in the battle against Covid-19," she expressed. Shetty strongly believes that one's vibe attracts one's tribe. That is when she connected with Khaana Chahiye Foundation — a citizen collective based in Mumbai — that had done phenomenal work during the first lockdown and continued to do so during the second wave. "Initially, their operations did not encompass Kalyan, but with one shared goal to help fight hunger, my team — Taurin Nagda, Dinesh Thakkar and the Kutch Yuva Sangh — we set up a community kitchen in the city and also catered to the remote interiors where we worked and had mapped," shared Shashi. Recently, Shetty and her team also arranged meals for special children at Avani Matimand Mulanche Nivasi Vidyalaya, a residential school for special children, in Murbad, Thane. And the list continues to grow. — Charkha Features



A reflection of self
 An honest person must empower himself with the unflinching hope that better times will follow, says **RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI**

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



What most of us seldom recognise is a simple principle that what you see in others is what you create within yourself. As the old saying goes 'what you spot is what you got. So, if you didn't have the tendency that you see in others what you have within your personality, you wouldn't spot it in the other'. That's why it is essential that we find the good — however small within ourselves — tend to it, nurture it and nourish it just the way we would do to the plants. Remember, when we focus on the positive within ourselves, we give it a life, permission to grow and to get restored in our nature. Most of us don't realise that the good has been there all along but it was simply out of our sight and awareness. The idea that 'where your attention goes, energy flows and where your energy flows, things grow' is now somewhat clichéd. But the principle holds at all levels. Hence, to see the positive, the goodness, the virtue in others is to empower what you see in them. It adds a little of your life energy to their life. Mahatma Gandhi had said, 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. So, if you would like others to be good, better and great, then be good, better and great yourself. But, what we see today is sad. The world is more conducive to those who are manipulative and chase rewards than to those toiling hard. In such a scenario many people get disheartened and start asking questions like — what is the point of being good in a bad world? Many of us have come to believe that good gets lost or remains ignored. History is replete with innumerable examples of times when the bad seemed to be all-pervasive when powerful conquerors looted and trapped the masses in an undignified life. And yet, from these very masses emerged a small courageous group of awakened people who led a revolution against injustice and finally turned the tables on the oppressors. But of

course, all acts of goodness don't amount to a revolution, for they do not always create winds of change. Nevertheless, they work like a cool breeze in a hot desert or a drizzle on parched land. All of us have had an experience where we had lost all hope in everything and everyone around us. And then one act of kindness by someone somewhere ignited a ray of hope. So, what we need to understand is that no goodness is wasted. It may go unneeded at times and could be overpowered by negative forces but is never wasted, for sure. We all know the story of the little bird that filled her beak with water from a pond and headed for the woods that were on fire. While she was at it, a spectator asked the tiny creature what was the point of her efforts, for the small droplets would not douse the huge flames. She quipped, "When I die, and my life's record is being read out, my name will appear in the list of those who tried to put out the flames and not those who sparked it or did nothing about it." We must remember that there is a law of cause and effect that guides every action in the universe. And what a person does unto anyone, he does unto himself. So, while a negative action piles debt on a person, a positive act is an investment for a good future. And unless one has unshakable faith in the sanctity of this law, one would be forced to succumb to the prevailing hostile environment. If goodness can survive through troubled times, it can be sure to bloom fully when favourable circumstances arrive. So, an honest person must hold on to his virtue with courage and patience in testing times. He must empower himself with the unflinching hope that as night is followed by day, better times will inevitably follow. So, keep the faith until the new day arrives.

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

A feasible future

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



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

ment manufacturers (OEMs), new-entrant OEMs, captive financing institutions, and dealerships will all face substantial possibilities and problems as EVs expand in popularity in the years leading up to 2030. EVs have two distinct traits that make them ideal for future vehicle technology. They can be charged with electricity from low- or non-CO₂-emitting sources, allowing for further decarbonisation as compared with vehicles that run on biofuels. Second, electric engines are far more efficient than internal combustion engines (ICEs) or other suggested technologies like compressed-air vehicles. Another area where advancements are anticipated is energy storage. Batteries hold the key to weaning ourselves off of fossil fuels and will play a critical role in the future. Due to considerable R&D and production increase in lithium-ion batteries, over the last decade, costs have dropped by 80 to 85 per cent.



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

for 150 GW i.e., 40 per cent of India's total power generation capacity. Beyond the climate imperative and the drive from the Indian government, there is another reason driving green energy's growing appeal. While most policymakers recognised the significance of transitioning to non-fossil-based power generation a decade ago but large-scale solar or wind energy projects were economically unviable without subsidies. Massive global investments in renewables technology, such as improving PV module efficiency in solar; lowering the balance of plant costs; and improving wind turbine technology have resulted in a significant reduction in the cost. While the cost of wind ener-

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

♦ Initiatives by the Government
 In its bid to promote the use of non-conventional sources of energy, MNRE has set a target of achieving 500 GW of installed renewable energy capacity by 2030. The government is making efforts to boost the country's renewable energy industry, including pushing private sector developers to use advanced technologies in renewable energy projects. The majority of renewable energy projects in the country are by private sector developers selected through a bidding procedure. The government has released standard bidding criteria to help distribution licensees get power at competitive prices in a cost-effective way. It also is assisting developers by authorising up to 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Moreover, to meet the 175 GW target, Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charges and losses for inter-state sale of solar and wind power are also waived for renewable projects commissioned by December. Norms for the Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) have been prescribed. Grid integration of utility-scale renewable energy capacity addition shall be aided by the development of Green Energy Corridors. The government has launched PM-KUSUM, solar rooftop phase II, 12,000 MW Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU) scheme Phase II for the better future of renewable energy in India. With a growing economy, the demand for energy from the commercial and industrial sectors is going to increase. Setting up new power plants is inevitably dependent on the import of highly volatile fossil fuels. Thus, it is essential to cater to the energy demand through judicious utilisation of abundant renewable energy resources, such as biomass, solar, hydropower and wind energy. Apart from debating on the energy supply, renewable resources will help India in mitigating climate change. Renewable energy can create many employment opportunities. It is possible to attract foreign investments to herald a Green Energy Revolution in India. (The author is the director & CFO of Oorjan Cleantech, a solar energy company.)

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

WORSENING EFFECT OF HUMID HEAT
 A punishing mix of heat and humidity that makes outdoor labour difficult and dangerous is causing around 677 billion lost working hours a year around the world, according to a new study that warns climate change is making it worse. Researchers in the United States, who estimated the current cost at \$2.1 trillion every year, said that the negative effects of stifling temperatures on people doing heavy work in agriculture and construction had been underestimated. The new figures come amid a growing focus on the severe health impacts of climate change, not just as projections of future harm from heatwaves and other extreme events, but also as consequences already playing out across a warming world. The study, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, looked at data on humid heat which is particularly dangerous because the body is less able to cool down by sweating.

HEART DISEASE TREBLES ALZHEIMER PROTEIN
 A new research, published in *eLife*, has found that heart disease causes a breakdown of a key brain function which links brain activity and blood flow, meaning the brain gets less blood for the same amount of activity. The researchers discovered that the combination of heart disease and a genetic predisposition for Alzheimer's Disease trebles the amount of beta-amyloid, a protein that builds up and triggers Alzheimer's, and increases the levels of an inflammatory gene (IL1) in the brain. Dr Osman Shabir, the lead author of the study from the University of Sheffield's Neuroscience and Healthy Lifespan Institute, said: "We've discovered that heart disease in midlife causes the breakdown of neurovascular coupling, an important mechanism in our brains which controls the amount of blood supplied to our neurons. This breakdown means the brain doesn't get enough oxygen when needed and in time this can lead to dementia."

VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY IS EASIER
 The Edith Cowan University (ECU) study found 30 per cent of people prefer to talk about negative experiences with a virtual reality avatar, rather than a person. Researchers compared social interactions where people engaged in VR conversation versus face-to-face. They used full face and body motion capture technology to create a 'realistic motion avatar' that closely mimicked their real-life counterpart, then analysed how people interacted with avatars compared to people. Psychology and communication researcher Dr Shane Rogers said participants rated their experience on factors such as enjoyment, perceived understanding, comfort, awkwardness and the extent that they felt they disclosed information about themselves. "Overall people rated VR social interaction as similar to face-to-face interaction, except where people tended to feel a little closer with each other when face-to-face," Dr Rogers said

PAST 8 YEARS WERE WARMEST
 Earth's global average surface temperature in 2021 tied with 2018 as the sixth warmest on record, according to an independent analysis done by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Continuing the planet's long-term warming trend, global temperatures in 2021 were 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit (0.85 degrees Celsius) above the average for NASA's baseline period, according to scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) in New York. NASA uses the period from 1951-1980 as a baseline to see how global temperature changes over time. Collectively, the past eight years are the warmest since modern recordkeeping began in 1880. According to NASA's temperature record, Earth in 2021 was about 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit (or about 1.1 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 19th-century average.

GOJI BERRIES TO PREVENT VISION LOSS
 Regularly eating a small serving of dried goji berries may help prevent or delay the development of age-related macular degeneration, or AMD, in healthy middle-aged people, according to a small, randomised trial conducted at the University of California, Davis. AMD is the leading cause of vision loss in older people. "AMD affects your central field of vision and can affect your ability to read or recognise faces," said Glenn Yiu, a co-author of the study and an associate professor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences. The researchers found that 13 healthy participants aged 45 to 65 who consumed 28 grams (about one ounce, or a handful) of goji berries five times a week for 90 days increased the density of protective pigments in their eyes.

SEN WINS MEN'S SINGLES CROWN

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

What followed was a frequent exchange of points as both India and Indonesia earned and squandered their advantageous positions in equal measure. After a fierce battle, it was the Indian pair that emerged winners with the Indonesia squandering five game points.

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

Vidit Gujrathi starts with a win

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE (NETHERLANDS)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Caruana had the upper hand



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

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

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

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

Good start in the first match will boost our confidence

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

India has four teenagers in the squad -- Hemam Shilky

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

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

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

Beijing reports 1st local omicron case ahead of Olympics

AP ■ HONG KONG

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

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

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

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

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

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



ing down residential compounds and even entire cities such as

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

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

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

Mbappe scores for leader PSG

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

four points behind 19th-placed Metz.

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

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

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

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

ISL fixture between Kerala and Mumbai City FC postponed

PTI ■ PANAJI

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

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

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



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

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

Djokovic 'disappointed' over losing deportation appeal

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



remain in detention in Melbourne until he is deported.

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

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

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

"Australia's strong border protection policies have kept us

safe during the pandemic, resulting in one of the lowest death rates, strongest economic recoveries, and highest vaccination rates in the world," Hawke said in a statement.

"Strong border protection policies are also fundamental to safe-guarding Australia's social cohesion which continues to strengthen despite the pandemic," he added.

Djokovic could potentially appeal to the High Court, but not in time for him to compete in the Australian tournament.

"I will now be taking some time to rest and to recuperate, before making any further comments beyond this," he said.

The court process that Djokovic had hoped would keep his aspirations alive for a 21st Grand Slam title was extraordinarily fast by Australian standards.

Within three hours of Hawke's announcement on Friday afternoon that Djokovic's visa was canceled, his lawyers went before a Federal Circuit and Family Court judge to initiate their challenge to the decision.

The case was elevated to the Federal Court on Saturday and submissions were filed by both sides that same day.

The three judges heard the case over five hours on Sunday and announced their verdict two hours later.

VIRAT KOHLI: CAPTAIN WHO WENT FOR WIN AT ALL COSTS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Going for the win at the risk of losing and playing five bowlers were two non-negotiables for Virat Kohli, India's most successful Test captain.

Having taken up Test captaincy from M S Dhoni in the middle of a series in Australia back in 2014, Kohli changed the way India played the five-day game.

Filling in for the injured Dhoni in the Adelaide Test, Kohli for once thought about a draw with India needing 364 runs in 98 overs on day five. His aggressive approach rubbed off on to the entire team as the visitors got agonisingly close to a famous win before losing the game by 48 runs.

"At no point did we not think about chasing the score down. We have come here to play positive cricket. No sort of negativity is welcome in this group. That's the kind of belief we have come here with," Kohli said after the loss that sowed the seeds of many famous wins overseas during his seven-year tenure as captain.

"This has been one of our

strongest performances overseas in the past two-three years, and I am really proud the way the boys played in this game."

'Lions at home, lambs abroad' was the tag associated with past teams but Kohli ensured India became the team for all conditions, he took over the place and pitch out of the equation.

FIVE-BOWLER THEORY THAT REAPED RICH REWARDS

Before Kohli, winning a Test overseas was considered a big deal but when he shocked the cricketing world by stepping down from captaincy on Saturday, his rich legacy included a team mentality which did not settle for anything less than a series victory.

What enabled Kohli to win Test matches overseas regularly was the fast bowling resources he had at his disposal. The likes of Mohammad Shami, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah flourished under his leadership, turning into India's most fearsome bowling attack of all times.

Former chief selector MSK Prasad, whose majority of the tenure



coincided with Kohli's reign as captain in all three formats, explained how the champion batter contributed to India's stellar success across formats.

"First of all I feel he built a winning culture in the side, especially away from home. He introduced the five bowler theory and fitness culture he had helped change before that," Prasad, who thought Kohli had another three four years of captaincy left in him, told PTI.

"He brought aggression into the side. Kohli along with the rest of the stakeholders created a bench strength of fast bowlers which helped us take 20 wickets when we were travelling."

FAST-TRACKING BUMRAH'S TEST DEBUT

Kohli had managed to build a strong pace attack for all conditions but the x-factor was missing, which was eventually provided by Jasprit Bumrah, who since making his Test debut in South Africa four years ago, has become of the one of the best bowlers in the world.

"I still remember in 2017 we had decided to groom Bumrah for an

away series. We gave him rest from limited overs cricket and told him to focus on his red ball cricket. He took a six wicket haul in the Ranji semifinal that year and that convinced Virat and all of us that he could excel in Test cricket," recalled Prasad.

ROHIT SHARMA THE OPENER PROVED TO BE A MASTERSTROKE

Though the decision to push Rohit at the top of the order to resurrect his Test career was suggested by head coach Ravi Shastri, Kohli bought into that idea completely.

It not only revived Rohit's Test career and also gave the team the storkemaker, the team was looking for at the top of the order. Kohli wanted his bowlers to take 20 wickets and his batters to go for runs and not just survive.

The bowlers delivered on that promise more often than not but the batting remains a work in progress with star studded line-up coming a cropper overseas on multiple occasions, most recently in South Africa

His decision is personal, BCCI respects it, says Ganguly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has lauded Virat Kohli for taking the team forward in all forms of cricket during his stint as India skipper but said his decision to quit Test captaincy was a personal one.

Kohli on Saturday ended his seven-year reign as India's most successful Test captain, a day after an unexpected 1-2 series loss against South Africa.

Under Kohli, India won 40 out of 68 Tests with memorable series wins in England and Australia being the highlight. "Under Virat's leadership Indian cricket has made rapid strides in all formats of the game... His decision is a personal one and bcci respects it immensely... He will be an important member to take this team to newer heights in the future. A great player. Well done... @BCCI @imvirkohli," Ganguly tweeted.

While Kohli is India's most successful Test skipper, MS Dhoni is second in



the list with 27 victories in 60 games and Ganguly comes third with 21 wins. Kohli also ranks fourth in the list of most victories as Test captain behind South Africa's Graeme Smith (53) and Australian duo of Ricky Ponting (48) and Steve Waugh (41).

Kohli, who was given the reins of

the Test side back in 2014 when Dhoni stepped down in the middle of the series against Australia, made the announcement in the backdrop of his tense relations with the BCCI which removed him as ODI captain after the star batter himself decided to leave T20 captaincy.

Gavaskar wants Rishabh Pant to succeed

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar wants Rishabh Pant to succeed Virat Kohli as the next India Test captain as he believes a sense of responsibility will make the glovesman a better cricketer in all forms of the game.

Kohli surprised the cricket fraternity by quitting Test captaincy on Saturday evening, a day after losing the Test series in South Africa 1-2 to draw the curtains on a successful seven-year reign.

Gavaskar said he preferred Pant as he is an automatic choice for selectors across all formats of the game.

"It's going to be quite a debate as far as the selection committee is concerned as to who should be taking Indian cricket forward. First of all, it should be someone who is an automatic pick across all formats of the game. Once that happens, it will be a lot easier," Gavaskar



told India Today.

"If you ask me, I am still staying, I would look at Rishabh Pant as next India captain."

"For one reason only, just like Rohit Sharma was given the captaincy of Mumbai Indians when Ricky Ponting stepped down, look at the change in his batting

after that. Suddenly the responsibility of being captain made him convert those beautiful cameos of 30s, 40s and 50s into hundreds, 150s and 200s.

"I think that sense of responsibility given to Rishabh Pant will help him score many more of that wonderful hundred he scored at

Newlands," he added.

Further explaining the rationale behind his pick, Gavaskar cited the example of Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, who achieved great success after taking over the captaincy at a very young age.

"Yes, I am saying that. Tiger Pataudi was captain at the age of 21 under adverse circumstances when Nari Contractor was injured.

Look what he did after that. He took to captaincy like duck to water. "I think what we have seen with Rishabh Pant as the captain of Delhi Capitals in the IPL, I do believe he has the capability of taking Indian cricket forward and making it a very exciting team to watch," he said.

Limited-overs skipper Rohit Sharma has emerged as the front-runner to take over Test captaincy from Kohli although he was not part of the South Africa series due to an injury. Rohit was recently made Test vice-captain, replacing Ajinkya Rahane.

Skipper Yash Dhull's 82 helps India post 232 after poor start

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN

Skipper Yash Dhull helped India recover from a poor start and post 232 against South Africa in their U-19 World Cup opener here on Saturday.

Dhull's solid 82 off 100 balls laid the cornerstone of India's fighting total.

The start of play was delayed by around 40 minutes due to rain and amid the prevailing conditions, South Africa decided to put India in to bat.

Left-arm pacer Aphiwe Mnyanda rocked the Indian top-order by trapping in-form opener Harnoor Singh (1) and his partner Angriks Raghuvanshi (5) in front of the stumps.

Left-handed Harnoor, who was India's leading run getter in the Asia Cup and scored a century in the warm-up game against Australia here, fell to a ball that nipped back in. Raghuvanshi played around Mnyanda's inswinger and was plumb in front, leaving India for 11 for two.

With India in trouble, skipper Dhull and Shaik Rasheed (31) got together to resurrect the innings. They shared a 71-run stand before Rasheed missed a sweep shot off left-arm spinner Liam Alder to be adjudged LBW.

Rasheed, who was dropped on 17 at second slip off Andile Simelane, played some impressive strokes in his 54 ball including an aerial pull and on drive off pacer Matthew Boast to break the shackles.

Delhi batter Dhull then shared a 44-



run stand with Nishant Sindhu (25) to take the innings forward. The skipper ended up with 111 runs and it took a brilliant direct hit from Simelane to dismiss him.

Kaushal Tamble added 35 valuable runs towards the end of the innings to take the team past 200.

Boast was quick to clean up the lower-order removing Tambe and Rajvardhan Hangargekar in successive deliveries.

India would be disappointed not to play the entire quote of overs after being all out in 46.5 overs.

With the pitch playing on the slower side, South Africa will have to bat well to chase this total.

Australia beats England by 146 runs, completes 4-0 Ashes win

AP ■ HOBART

Australia completed a dominant 4-0 Ashes series victory over England on Sunday by winning the fifth day-night Test by 146 runs with two days to spare.

England, set a target of 271 for victory, crashed to 124 all out in the last session on the third day at Hobart, losing 10 wickets for 56 after Zak Crawley (36) and Rory Burns (26) combined in the best opening stand of the series by putting on 68 runs.

Fast bowlers Scott Boland (3-18) and Cameron Green (3-21) made an impact in their first Ashes series by sharing six wickets on a lively greenish wicket as England crumbled against pace for the second time in the match after being dismissed for 188 in the first innings in reply to Australia's score of 303.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins also had an impact in his second spell to finish with 3-42 on an eventful day that saw 17 wickets tumble for the second successive day in the game. Cummins, who grabbed the last two wickets off three balls, led from the front in his first series as Australia captain and grabbed 21 wickets.

"It's pretty crazy, even as a professional cricketer these are the series you have in your diary a couple of years



out," said Cummins.

"Really feels like we are building to something big. To have someone like Cameron Green in his second year to grow as a batter and bowler as well as some of the younger players... can't wait to show our wares overseas, we really judge ourselves in all conditions."

Earlier, Australia was bowled out for 155 just after the dinner break for an overall lead of 270 runs after it resumed from an overnight 37-3.

England paceman Mark Wood snared 6-37, utilizing short-ball tactics against the Australians to perfection. Alex Carey top-scored for Australia with 49 after getting two reprieves.

"We've been outplayed in all areas and credit to Australia," said England captain Joe Root, who remained the tourists' lone fighter with 322 runs, behind only Travis Head (357) and Marnus Labuschagne (335) who led the home side.

India-South Test series involved emotion, Ashes lacked it: Ian Chappell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian great Ian Chappell feels the just-concluded Test series between India and South Africa involved the kind of emotion that the lopsided Ashes lacked completely.

Beaten comprehensively in the three-match series opener, South Africa bounced back in style to claim the rubber 2-1 after convincing victories in the second and third Test against their fancied opponents.

"South Africa surprisingly defeated India in an old-fashioned dogfight that included some enthralling cricket. It also involved ample emotion of the sort that has notably been missing from an Ashes contest that has been surprisingly uncontroversial so far," Chappell wrote in his column for ESPNcricinfo.

The former Australia captain added, "The South Africa series featured bowling domination on pitches that were probably too much in favour of the fielding side, but there was also some exquisite batting."

While both teams fought hard to outdo each other throughout the series, the Ashes series between traditional rivals Australian and England turned out to be completely one-sided with the former dominating their beleaguered visitors.

The hosts sealed the five-match series with three successive wins before England just about managed to halt the Australian juggernaut in the fourth Test with a hard-earned draw. Australia won the fifth Test with two days to spare, to take the series 4-0. "The Australia-versus-England series has often been frustratingly one-sided.

UAE, Ireland and Zimbabwe open campaign with comfortable wins

PTI ■ BASSETERRE

Skipper Mihir Patel scored a combative 96 but his innings went in vain as Canada were handed a 49-run defeat by UAE in their opening Group A clash of the U-19 World Cup here.

Opting to bat, UAE rode on Punya Mehra (71) and Ali Naseer's (73) knocks to reach 284 for seven in their designated 50 overs.

Their bowlers then performed as a cohesive unit to bowl out Canada for 235 in 46.5 over to open their campaign with a win on Saturday.

Naseer's destructive 73 off just 50 balls did the maximum damage for Alishan Sharafu's side after Mehra's well-judged 71 had put the wheels in motion for a strong first innings total.

The Canadians had UAE reeling at 47 for 3 but Mehra, Nilansh Keswani (39) and Sharafu (37) helped them recover to 174 for five.

And then came all-rounder Naseer's late innings pyrotechnics, as his brutal knock - at a strike rate of 146 - catapulted his team to a sizeable total.

Patel's Canada rallied with the captain leading from the front as his fine innings of 96 off 105 balls kept them continually in contention.

Wicketkeeper Anoop Chima (46) and lower-order batter Kairav Sharma (43) also offered resistance but two wickets each for Keswani, Sharafu, Adhitya Shetty and Jash Giyanani helped bowl Canada out for 235 to complete a hard-fought 49-run victory.

Cox catapults Ireland to com-

fortable win over Uganda

Wicketkeeper Joshua Cox scored a well-timed century before spinner Matthew Humphreys spun a web around Uganda as Ireland registered a 39-run win in the second match of the day.

After arriving at the crease with the score at 40 for two, Cox compiled a superb 111 not out off 113 balls to haul his team up to a total of 236 for nine.

Two wickets apiece for Juma Miyaji (2/56), Pascal Murungi (2/44), Joseph Baguma (2/34) and Matthew Musinguzi (2/35) sought to reel the Irish in but ably assisted by Philippus le Roux (32), Cox put his team in a commanding position at the interval.

Ugandan captain Murungi offered the underdogs a consistent glimmer of hope in the run chase



but his knock of 63, bolstered by bowler Miyaji's blockbuster 38 at No.9, proved insufficient in causing a Group B upset.

Left-arm spinner Humphreys -

who opened the bowling for Ireland - starred with the ball for Tim Tector's team as his four wickets for just 25 runs helped halt the Ugandan momentum and cap a 39-run tri-

umph.

Zimbabwe thrash Papua New Guinea by 228 runs

In another match, Zimbabwe's firepower proved too much for Papua New Guinea as the former galloped to a massive 228-run victory in their Group C clash.

Opting to bat first, skipper Emmanuel Bawa (100) scored a superb century while David Bennett played a 58-run knock.

The Zimbabweans racked up a formidable total of 321 for nine from their 50 overs before a polished all-round bowling performance bundled out Papua New Guinea for 93 to complete a comprehensive 228-run victory in Port of Spain.

Papua New Guinea bowler Junior Morea dismissed opener Steven Saul early on but after Bawa entered the fray at 15 for one, he

never looked back as his majestic hundred - off just 95 balls - helped haul his team to a match-winning score.

Bawa and Bennett compiled a century stand for the third wicket while opening batter and wicketkeeper Panashe Taruvinga (36), along with Victor Chirwa and Connor Mitchell - who both scored 35 - also made contributions.

Barnabas Maha's team never got going in response, with no batter mustering more than 15 runs as the wickets were shared equally among the Zimbabwean attack.

Ngenyasha Zvinoera, Brian Bennett and Victor Chirwa - all took two scalps apiece as Bawa's side bowled the underdogs out with 15 overs remaining to crank up for Monday's clash with Pakistan in perfect fashion.