

WORLD 5
ISRAEL STRIKES 2 HOMES,
KILLS OVER 90 PALESTINIANS

MONEY 6
AIR INDIA'S 1ST A350-900
AIRCRAFT LANDS IN DELHI

SPORT 8
KAUR LEADS INDIA
WOMEN FIGHTBACK

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Drone attack hits ship off Gujarat coast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India dispatched its warships in the Arabian Sea on Saturday after a merchant vessel reported an explosion and fire incident suspected to be caused by a drone attack. It occurred 217 nautical miles off the Porbandar coast, Gujarat. Preliminary reports stated the fire was extinguished, and no crew members, including the 20 Indians on board, suffered injuries. The vessel MV Chem Pluto is carrying crude oil and was en route from a port in Saudi Arabia to Mangaluru. Reports also mentioned that the fire has affected the functioning of the merchant vessel. In response to the incident, the Indian Coast Guard ship Vikram is moving towards the vessel. The Coast Guard ship Vikram was deployed on the patrol of the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) when it was directed towards the distressed merchant ship. Vikram has also alerted all ships in the area to provide assistance to the merchant vessel. Indian Navy warships in the vicinity are also moving towards the merchant ship, which is reportedly Liberian-flagged and Israeli-affiliated. **Continued on Page 2**

Hindu temple defaced in the US

Jaishankar: India condemns Khalistan terrorists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to an act of vandalism of a Hindu temple with anti-India graffiti in California, allegedly by Khalistani supporters, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said extremists and separatist forces outside India should not get such space. "I have seen the news. As you know, we are concerned about this. Extremists and separatist forces outside India should not get space. Our Consulate has lodged a complaint with the (US) Government and the police there over whatever happened, and I believe the matter is being inquired," Jaishankar said in response to a query about the incident. According to a report by PTI from New York, Swaminarayan Mandir was vandalised with

anti-India graffiti in the US State of California, and the police are investigating the matter as a possible hate crime. The City of Newark Police Department in Newark, California, told PTI in an emailed statement that on Friday at approximately 8:35 am, they received a report of graffiti at the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple. According to images posted on social media, the word 'Khalistan' was spray-painted on a signpost outside the temple along with other objectionable graffiti. The Newark police said any acts or threats of violence, property damage, harassment, intimidation, or other crimes motivated by hate or bias are considered very serious and given very high priority. Officers responded and met



with temple leaders who described the vandalism as meant to intimidate them. "Based on the content of the graffiti, it is believed that the defacement was a targeted act, and the vandalism is being investigated as a possible hate crime," the statement said. The Consulate General of India in San Francisco strongly con-

demned the defacing of the temple. "We strongly condemn the defacing of SMVS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir at Newark, California, with anti-India graffiti," the Consulate posted on X. "This incident has hurt the sentiments of the Indian community. We have pressed for a quick investigation and prompt

action against the vandals by the US authorities in this matter," the Consulate said. "Officers are investigating, collecting evidence, and reviewing surveillance footage from nearby businesses in order to establish the chain of events and bring those responsible to justice," the police said. The department said, "We stand united with our community and are urging community members with any information regarding this incident to come forward and speak with investigators." The police are asking anyone with information regarding this investigation to contact the Newark Police Investigations Unit. This is not the first instance where a temple has been defaced with such graffiti in the recent past by Khalistani separatists. **Continued on Page 2**

BJP aims for big 2024 win with increased vote share

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Setting an eye on the much-awaited grand inauguration of Ram Temple next month, the BJP has set its sights on an "overwhelming" win in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. During the two days workshop of party's office bearers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked key organisational leaders to work towards securing over 50 per cent votes in the 2024 general elections and work in 'mission mode'. Addressing the BJP's national office-bearers and State presidents on the concluding day of the two-day brainstorming meet on Saturday, Home Minister Amit Shah said the BJP's performance should leave the Opposition "stunned", party sources said. The January 22 consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya also came up for discussion as the party is

confident that it will be a major issue in its favour in the polls. Sources said during the meeting, top leaders discussed the party's preparations for the grand Ram Temple opening and how the leaders plan to carry forward a public outreach on the same. The party is all ready to launch massive campaign based on theme Ram Temple as the party rose to power with this as well as abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. Sources said Modi called for raising the BJP's vote share by 10 per cent from its show in the 2019 polls when the ruling party had fetched over 37 per cent of votes while the National Democratic Alliance led by it had bagged around 45 per cent votes. According to sources, Modi said the BJP had won 303 seats in 2019 and will win more seats in 2024 if we work on a mission mode. **Continued on Page 2**

PTI ■ PARIS

The Indian Embassy in France has received consular access to its citizens after a Nicaragua-bound flight carrying 303 people, mostly Indians, was detained by French authorities during "a technical halt" at an airport near Paris over suspected "human trafficking". The plane that took off from

Dubai in the United Arab Emirates carrying 303 Indian passengers was grounded at the Chalons-Vatry airport in Marne on Thursday over suspected "human trafficking", French officials were quoted as saying by the local media on Saturday. "French authorities informed us

of a plane with 303 people, mostly Indian origin, from Dubai to Nicaragua detained on a technical halt at a French airport," the Indian mission said in a post on X. "The Embassy team has reached & obtained consular access. We are investigating

the situation, also ensuring the wellbeing of passengers," it said. According to a 'Le Monde' newspaper report, the civilian protection unit of the Marne department said on Saturday that the plane was carrying 13 unaccompanied minors as well as accompanied minors, with their ages ranging from 21

months to 17 years. An earlier report noted that France's national anti-organised crime unit JUNALCO has taken over the investigation. Special investigators are questioning all those aboard and two people are in custody pending further examination, the Paris prosecutor's office said in

a statement. The prefecture in the north-eastern department of Marne said the A340, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines, "remained grounded on the tarmac at Vatry airport following its landing" on Thursday. The Chalons-Vatry airport, located 150 kilometres

east of Paris, serves mostly budget airlines. The newspaper report says the prefecture said the plane had been due to refuel and was carrying 303 Indian nationals who had probably been working in the UAE. According to the reports, the travel may have been planned by the Indian passengers to reach Central America from where they can attempt to enter the United States or Canada illegally.

India gets Consular access to detained flyers

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India Covid cases highest in 7 months; 4 deaths reported

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid JN.1 concern and WHO flagging surge in new infections by 52 per cent during the past four-odd weeks, India's Covid cases tally too is moving northward as it touched 752, the highest in the past seven months while four deaths have been reported in Kerala, Karnataka and Rajasthan. The WHO which has classified JN.1 as a variant of interest has also warned that the variant could increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries.

Puducherry, Telangana, Punjab, and Delhi. IMA Covid Task Force Dr Rajeev Jayadevan has said that the new strain can be problematic for people of old age and those with multiple comorbidities. States are already on alert in view of rise in the cases. The Bihar government has decided to increase RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) tests while random testing will take place at Patna, Gaya and Darbhanga airports. "We are doing tests in Assam also, but no person without any travel history has tested positive for the coronavirus," said an official from Assam. Similarly, officials in Jharkhand said that the State is prepared to deal with any spurt in Covid-19 cases, although the situation is presently under control. No fresh coronavirus cases have

been reported in the state since December 18, when two infections were detected in a Jamshedpur hospital, the officials said. Amid a surge in cases in the state, the Maharashtra government has decided to set up a Covid-19 task force to study new threats emerging from the new sub-variant of the Covid virus, said health minister Tanaji Sawant as per reports. The country's Covid case tally stood at 4.50 crore (4,50,07,964). The number of people recuperated from the disease has increased to 4,44,71,212, and the national recovery rate stands at 98.81 per cent, according to the health ministry's website. The fatality rate stands at 1.19 per cent. The ministry's website stated that 220.67 crore doses of Covid vaccine have been



administered in the country so far. As per the WHO, worldwide number of new deaths decreased by 8 per cent as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 3,000 new fatalities reported. As of December 17, over 772 million confirmed cases and nearly seven million deaths have been reported globally since the onset of Covid-19, the WHO noted. Further, it said over 118,000 new COVID-19 hospitalisations and over 1600 new intensive care unit (ICU) admissions have been recorded, with an overall increase of 23 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively, globally. As of December 18, 2023, JN.1, a sub-lineage of BA.2.86 Omicron variant has been designated a separate variant of interest (VOI) apart from its parent lineage BA.2.86

due to its rapid increase in prevalence in recent weeks. Globally, EG.5 remains the most reported variant of interest. Due to its rapidly increasing spread, WHO is classifying the variant JN.1 as a separate variant of interest (VOI) from the parent lineage BA.2.86. It was previously classified as VOI as part of BA.2.86 sublineage. Meanwhile, the US health body, CDC has warned that flu and Covid infections are rising and could get worse over the holidays. "Look for flu and Covid-19 infections to ramp up in the coming weeks, U.S. health officials say, with increases fueled by holiday gatherings, too many unvaccinated people and a new version of the coronavirus that may be spreading more easily," it said.

Current vaccines continue to protect against severe disease and death from JN.1 and other circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, it said. The Covid-19 is not the only respiratory disease circulating. Influenza, RSV, and common childhood pneumonia are also on the rise. The WHO has advised people to take measures to prevent infections and severe disease using all available tools. These include wearing a mask when in crowded, enclosed, or poorly ventilated areas, keeping a safe distance from others, practicing respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes), cleaning hands regularly, and getting tested if one has any symptoms or if you might have been exposed to someone with Covid-19 or influenza.

Sai meets Modi, appraises him of steps taken to fulfil poll promises

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Newly elected Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday and appraised him of the steps being taken by his Government to fulfil the party's poll promises, official sources said. Deputy chief ministers Arun Sao and Vijay Sharma accompanied Sai in the meeting with Modi at his residence. During the meeting, the chief minister appraised Modi of the steps being taken by the Chhattisgarh government to fulfil the promises made by him during the state assembly elections. They also discussed the formation of the state cabinet, the sources said. Sharing pictures of the meeting, Sai said in a post on X that he had a detailed discussion with the prime minister regarding various public welfare schemes related to development, progress and public interest of Chhattisgarh and received his guidance. "Under the able guidance of the prime minister, the double-engine government of the BJP will definitely establish new



records of service, good governance, public welfare and development in the state," the chief minister added in his post. Sai was sworn in as the chief minister of Chhattisgarh on December 13, ten days after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) returned to power in the state after a gap of five years by unseating Congress in the assembly elections. Earlier in the day, Sai paid a courtesy call on Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and hailed his "ideas and knowledge" of the constitutional process as "certainly effective". "Today, held a courtesy meet-

ing with Honourable Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar at his residence in New Delhi. His excellent ideas and knowledge of the constitutional process are certainly impressive," he said in a post on X. Dhankhar's office also posted pictures of the meeting on X after the meeting and wrote, "Hon'ble Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Shri Vishnu Deo Sai Ji along with Hon'ble Deputy Chief Ministers, Shri Arun Sao Ji and Shri Vijay Sharma Ji called on Hon'ble Vice-President, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar at Upa-Rashtrapati Nivas today."

Evidence of brain injury present months after acute Covid: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Markers of brain injury developed due to Covid-19 were found in patients even months after the infection and despite blood tests measuring inflammation returning normal results, according to a new research published in journal Nature Communications. Researchers from universities in the UK explained that during the acute phase of the viral infection, when symptoms develop quickly, key inflammatory proteins and brain injury markers are produced. They analysed over 800 hospitalised patients' samples from across England and Wales. Surprisingly, even months after being discharged from the hospital, there is on-going robust biomarker evidence of brain injury developed due to COVID-19, the researchers said in their study published in a journal, Nature Communications. The biomarker evidence was more prominently seen in patients experiencing neurological dysfunction during



the acute illness, and continued in the recovery phase in patients suffering acute neurological complications, the researchers said. "While some neurological 'symptoms' were often mild (headache and muscle aches [myalgia]), it became clear that more significant and potentially life-changing new neurological 'complications' were occurring, including encephalitis (brain inflammation), seizures, and stroke," said Benedict Michael, Principal Investigator and Director of the Infection Neuroscience Laboratory, University of Liverpool. The inflammatory markers, associated with abnormal immune responses in the acute phase of the disease, suggest the possibility of ongoing inflammation and

brain injury that may not be detected by blood tests measuring inflammation, the researchers said. They suggested that these biomarkers could represent therapy targets for COVID-19 and other infections causing acute brain dysfunction. "Our study shows that markers of brain injury are present in the blood months after COVID-19, and particularly in those who have had a COVID-19-induced brain complication (e.g. Inflammation, or stroke), despite resolution of the inflammatory response in the blood. "This suggests the possibility of ongoing inflammation and injury inside the brain itself which may not be detected by blood tests for inflammation," said Michael. Michael's team is now working to understand what the findings means for cognitive function, independence and recovery in those affected. The research team also said that their work helps set the stage for discerning possible underlying mechanisms of these neurological complications.

Polluted air increases asthma attack risks in urban children: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Polluted air may trigger more asthma attacks in urban children and teenagers, according to a study published online in The Lancet Planetary Health journal. Even moderate levels of ozone and fine airborne particulates — two ingredients of smog — appear to increase kids' risk of asthma attacks, the findings said. "The strong association this study demonstrates between specific air pollutants among children in impoverished urban communities and non-viral asthma attacks further augments the evidence that reducing air pollution would improve human health," said Dr. Hugh Auchincloss, acting director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). The study also tied the ozone and fine airborne particulates to distinct changes in children's airways that could trigger an asthma attack, said Dr. Matthew Altman, Associate Professor in the department of medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine, in Seattle.

It's one of the first times elevated levels of distinctive air pollutants in specific urban locations have been tied to the risk of asthma attacks. During an asthma attack, inflammation causes the lining of airways to swell as muscles around the airways contract and mucus floods the passages — all substantially narrowing the space through which air passes in and out of the lungs. Children in low-income urban areas are at particularly high risk for asthma attacks, the researchers said. The study included 208 children aged six to 17 with attack-prone asthma living in low-income neighbourhoods in one of nine different US cities. The researchers later validated their findings in a second group of 189 people aged six to 20 living in low-income areas of four US cities. The team tracked daily air quality and compared it to reports of asthma attacks in the urban children. They also checked to make sure that the children weren't suffering from respiratory viruses that can promote asthma.

Economy growing but wealth not getting distributed, says Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said that India's economy is growing but the wealth is getting concentrated in a few hands and the challenge of unemployment continues. It is not getting distributed, he said. Sharing an interaction on social media with some students of Harvard University, Rahul said, "My advice to all students - True power comes from connecting with people, listening deeply to what they're saying, and being kind to yourself." When asked about India's economic growth in the last 10 years during the interaction, the Congress leader said, "When you talk about economic development you have to ask the question in whose interest is that economic development." "The question to ask is, what is the nature of that growth and who is benefiting from that. Right next to the figure of



growth in India, you have the figure of unemployment in India. So India's growing, but the way it's growing is by massively concentrating wealth towards very few people," he said. "We are operating on a debt sort of model and we are no longer producing. The real challenge in India is how do we set up a production economy that is able to give large numbers of people jobs. We have two or three businesses that are pretty much entire businesses," he said. "We have Adani, everybody knows he is directly connected to the prime minister, he

owns all our ports, airports, our infrastructure! With that kind of concentration, you will get growth but you will not get any distribution," he said. Asked why this has not translated into an electoral outcome or mobilisation of people, Rahul Gandhi there is a massive mobilisation but there is a requirement for an "infrastructure to fight an election". "...You need a fair media, fair legal system, fair election commission, access to finance, institutions that are neutral. Imagine a United States where the IRS, the FBI, their full time job is destroying the lives of the opposition. So that's the para-

digm we're in. I didn't walk 4,000 kilometers because I like walking 4,000 kilometers. I walked 4,000 kilometers because there was no other way to get our message across," he said, referring to his Bharat Jodo Yatra. "Even my social media is fully capped. I've got a shadow ban 24/7...My Twitter's under control, my YouTube is under control and I'm not alone, the entire opposition.... I don't think India is running a free and fair democracy anymore..." he said. He said caste is a real problem in the country and likened it to "apartheid". The Congress leader also accused the BJP-led central government of not treating India as a union of states, but as a nation with "one ideology, one religion, one language". "So they kill the negotiation, they try to capture the institutions. So that's really the political fight in India right now," he said. "We feel if you end the negotiation in India, the conversa-

tion between the union India collapses, India tears itself apart. So you can see that Manipur is burning, you can see Jammu and Kashmir is burning. You can see Tamil Nadu has a problem..." he said. He said a "full scale civil war" is going on in Manipur. In response to a question on India's relations with Russia, he said, "A solid Russian-Chinese alliance is a real problem for the United States. We have traditionally had a relationship with Russia. Being an ally of the United States or a partner of the United States...Doesn't mean we don't talk to anyone else." Asked about his experience from the Bharat Jodo Yatra, he said, "I realised what is called the politician in the West and in India is basically dead. It's a category that has collapsed on itself." "...Huge part of why the politician is dead is that he is not listening anymore. Politician has gone into a zone where he just wants to please at all costs," he added.

Modi, Kharge pay tributes to former PM Charan Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday paid tribute to former Prime Minister Charan Singh on his birth anniversary. Kharge also paid tributes to former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on his death anniversary. Modi said Charan Singh was dedicated to farmers' welfare all his life. A socialist who enjoyed strong support among farmers, Singh was one of the leading politicians of his era. He was India's prime minister between July 1979 and January 1980. He was born in 1902 in Uttar Pradesh and died in 1987. Paying tributes to Rao, the Congress chief in a post on X said, "Our tribute to former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao. Under his government, India embarked on a transformative journey with a series of economic reforms that played a pivotal role in shaping the middle class for generations to



come." "He also made significant contributions to India's nuclear programme and a number of foreign policy achievements marked his tenure, including the 'Look East' policy," Kharge said. "His tremendous role in the prosperity and development of our nation shall always be cherished," he said. In another post, he hailed Singh and said, "Humble tributes to the farmer's struggle partner and former prime minister, respected Chaudhary Charan Singh ji on his 121st birth anniversary". "Farmers are India. Regards to all the annadatas (food providers) of the country.

Hearty greetings to all farmer sisters, brothers and farm labourers on Farmer's Day," he said. Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, and several political leaders on Saturday paid homage to former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao on his 19th death anniversary, PTI reported from Hyderabad. Soundararajan, Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya, Reddy, state ministers and family members of Rao, among others visited 'P V Gyan Bhoomi', the former Prime Minister's samadhi, at the Hussain Sagar lake here, and paid floral tributes.

Liquor in GIFT City: Opposition slams Gujarat Government for lifting ban

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD

While it came as good news for liquor lovers of the 'dry state' of Gujarat, political parties clashed over the BJP led Gujarat Government's decision to allow liquor in GIFT City, which partially overturned the State's strict prohibition policy since 1960. The State Government has lifted the ban on liquor in the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City with the aim of providing a "global ecosystem". While the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party said it was an unfortunate decision that will ruin the youth, the BJP said it

would provide proper environment for the development of business in the region. "This is a very unfortunate decision. The BJP government wants to lift prohibition in the state and they have started it with GIFT city. Tomorrow they will say they want to lift liquor ban at the Statue of Unity (in Kevadia) and Tent City of Dhordo in Kutch to attract tourists as well as the Surat Diamond Bourse," Leader of Opposition Amit Chavda said. Congress MLA Ganiben Thakor said the decision must be withdrawn immediately in order to maintain law and order, dignity of women,

adding that people will go to GIFT City to drink instead of going outside Gujarat. Umesh Makwana, the AAP MLA from Botad, wrote to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel seeking withdrawal of the decision to lift prohibition in GIFT City. Countering these arguments, state minister Rushikesh Patel said the decision was taken for industry players who are coming from outside the state. "This is a decision to provide same lifestyle to business leaders that they are used to in places where there is no liquor ban. Many foreign companies that have come to GIFT City are part of (Fortune) 500



plus companies. Let the Congress say what they want to but they will later understand the importance of this decision," Patel asserted. In a statement, the Gujarat prohibition department had said GIFT City has emerged as a global financial and technological hub which is bustling with economic activities. "An important decision has been taken on Friday to change rules to allow 'wine and dine' facilities in the GIFT City area to provide a global business ecosystem to global investors, technical experts and national and international companies," it said. Under the new system, hotels,

restaurants and clubs (existing and that will come up) in the GIFT City area will be given permits for wine and dine facilities, but they will not be allowed to sell liquor bottles to people, the statement pointed out. The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) welcomed the Gujarat Government move to allow sale and consumption of alcohol in the GIFT City area. "The true significance of this step lies in the underlying acknowledgment that alcohol is an essential part of relaxation and social bonding in the modern world. This

move sends a strong signal to the world that GIFT City is a modern liberal place, ready to do business like other major global centres. It will not only give a major boost to the hospitality sector within the GIFT City but also attract major companies and quality workforce from across the globe. We will see a major boost to business and job opportunities post this move. It will give a fillip to the liquor industry as well as help the government to earn tax revenues. This move will go a long way in further boosting the state's economy," said Vinod Giri, Director General, CIABC.

Coal based power generation rises in April, November

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 The domestic coal-based power generation increased 8.38 per cent to 779.1 Billion Units (BU) in April-November FY24, an official statement said on Saturday. In the year-ago period, the domestic coal-based power generation stood at 718.83 BU. India's power generation increased 7.71 per cent in the period under review, the coal ministry said in a statement. The overall coal-based power generation witnessed a year-on-



year increase of 11.19 per cent during the period on account of unprecedented rise in temperature, delayed monsoon in the northern region of the country coupled with the resumption of full commercial activities post-Covid. Coal import for blending decreased substantially by 44.28 per cent to 15.16 million tonne (MT) up to November in the current fiscal from 27.21 MT in the year-ago period, despite the escalating power demand. "This shows the nation's commitment to self-reliance in coal production and minimising overall coal imports," the ministry said. The government is persistent in its efforts to further enhance coal production, aiming to increase availability and reduce dependence on imported coal, thereby safeguarding foreign reserves.



India largest integrated wood panel plant unveiled in Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ KOLKATA
 Century Plyboards (India) Ltd on Saturday inaugurated India's largest integrated wood panel manufacturing plant at Badvel in Andhra Pradesh. Spread across 100 acres, the plant will have a total investment of Rs 1,000 crore in the second phase and is expected to generate direct and indirect employment for 2,000 people over the next 5 years, the country's largest manufacturer of wood panels said in a statement. The first phase saw an investment of Rs 950 crore. The plant was inaugurated by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in the presence of CenturyPly Chairman Sajjan Bhajanka and other senior officials. "YSR Kadapa district holds an important place on the industrial map of Andhra Pradesh for its valuable repository of resources. "As the government has earmarked this region as a potential agro-industry hub, this initiative of CenturyPly marks the beginning of a series of investments of other industrial entities that will follow, leading eventually to making it a significant hub of furniture for the entire country," Bhajanka said in the statement. The plant comprises two large-size laminate presses, which are already operational. The MDF (Medium Density Fibre) and PVC (Polyvinyl chloride) units are in the advanced stages of commissioning. "We have invested Rs 700 crore in MDF and Rs 250 crore in laminates and PVC in the first phase. The new unit will increase our production capacity in MDF by a 950-meter cube, which will double our footprint in this segment. The second phase will see an investment of Rs 1,000 crore in expansion plans," Bhajanka said. The Andhra Pradesh government has also expressed its commitment to supporting the growth of the wood panel industry in the state. The Kolkata-based company also has 8,55,000 laminate sheets, 3,13,500 CBM in MDF and 15,000 tonne in PVC at the Andhra Pradesh site.

Sundaram Home Finance to disburse ₹10 crore small business loans

PTI ■ CHENNAI
 Sundaram Home Finance has forayed into north Tamil Nadu as part of its vision to expand its presence in the state. The city-based wholly owned subsidiary of non-banking finance company has drawn up plans to disburse Rs 10 crore in the first year of operations in the region. Sundaram Home Finance has set up an exclusive small business loan branch in Kancheepuram which would offer loans of upto Rs 20 lakh to small businesses which seek funds to meet their working capital requirements to boost growth. The branch in Kancheepuram is aimed at serving small businesses in the region as well as neighbouring Cheyyar, Vandavasi, Arakkonam, Walajabad, Oragadam and Sriperumbudur. The company entered the small business loan segment in October 2022 and has opened 25 exclusive branches in south and western parts of Tamil Nadu disbursing



Rs 65 crore in the first year of operations. "Kancheepuram is a trading hub and the SMEs there have been doing well in recent times. The town also attracts lakhs of tourists and devotees around the year. We already have a strong presence in north TN for our home finance business and understand this market well," company MD Lakshminarayana Duraiswamy said in a statement. "We are confident of tapping into the opportunity in the small business loan segment in this region in the coming years," he added. The company has set a target of disbursing Rs 10 crore in the initial phase of the launch.

I-T department notifies ITR forms 1, 4 for AY'25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 The Income Tax Department has notified ITR forms 1 and 4, which are filed by individuals and entities with annual total income of up to Rs 50 lakh, for assessment year (AY) 2024-25. Individuals, besides Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), firms having income up to Rs 50 lakh and those having earnings from business and profession in the current fiscal (April 2023-March 2024) can start filing returns for the income earned this financial year. Usually, ITR forms for a particular financial year are notified by the end of March or early April. But last year, the forms were notified in February. However, this year, ITR forms are notified in December itself, to enable taxpayers file returns early. ITR Form 1 (Sahaj) and ITR Form 4 (Sugam) are simpler forms that cater to a large number of small and medium taxpayers. The I-T Department notified



the forms on Friday. Sahaj can be filed by a resident individual having income of up to Rs 50 lakh and who receives income from salary, one house property, other sources (interest) and agricultural income of up to Rs 5,000. Sugam can be filed by individuals, HUFs and firms (other than Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)) being a resident having total income of up to Rs 50 lakh and income from business and profession.

RBI imposes ₹2 lakh penalty on TDCC Bank for sanctioning loan to its director

PTI ■ THANE
 The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has said it has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh on the Thane District Central Co-operative (TDCC) Bank for alleged violation of banking regulations by sanctioning loan to one of the directors of the bank. The RBI gave this information in a release issued by its Chief General Manager Yogesh Dayal on Friday. In an order



issued on November 28, the RBI imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh on the TDCC Bank for the violation of sections 20 and 56 of the Banking Regulation (BR) Act, 1949, it said. The penalty was imposed under the powers conferred on the RBI under sections of the BR Act. The statutory inspection of the bank conducted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) with reference to its financial position as on March 31, 2022, and examination of the inspection report and all the related correspondence, revealed that the TDCC Bank had sanctioned a loan to one of its directors, the release said. A show-cause notice was then issued to the bank. After considering the bank's reply to the notice and oral submissions made by it during the personal hearing, the RBI came to the conclusion that the charge of contravention of the statutory provisions was substantiated, a release issued by said.

Gujarat's Dholera dream soars with land allocation for industries: Officials

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
 A dream project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Dholera Special Investment Region is an industrial city, planned by the Gujarat government and the Centre, to set up modern large-scale manufacturing units, officials have said. A part of DSIR, the first phase of the Dholera Industrial Smart City, being developed around 100 km from Ahmedabad, is nearly complete, and land allotment for industries has already begun, they said. Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, had shared his grand plans of DSIR in 2013. "This Dholera of ours is going to be six times bigger than the Shanghai that exists today and even six times more," Modi had said then. Strategically planned between Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Baroda, the greenfield industrial smart city covers 22 villages and is spread over 920 square kilometres, said a government release. As part of the state's preparation for the upcoming Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel recently visited DSIR to inspect the progress of the industrial smart city and its infrastructure projects, the release said. The 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, a biennial investor meet that started in 2003, is scheduled to be held from January 10-12 next year. DSIR will be a major beneficiary of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and Dedicated Freight Corridor, with 38 per cent of the DFC traversing Gujarat (565 km), said the release. "The first phase of the project,



covering 22.54 sq km, has achieved an impressive 95 per cent completion, paving the way for increased global investments in Gujarat," the release said. Phase 1 of the DSIR project is known as the activation area, it said. "It (first phase) includes allocated areas for industries, residential spaces, mixed-use, recreation, social infrastructure, and tourism. Land allotment for industries has already begun, covering contiguous land parcels ranging from one acre to 330 acres and more," the release said. During his recent visit, CM Patel underscored the role of sectors such as semiconductor and green hydrogen in India's sustainable and technology-driven development, it said. The phase 1 of the development includes water management, featuring a 50 MLD (million litres per day) water treatment plant, a master balancing reservoir (MBR), elevated service reservoirs, a 10 MLD sewage treatment plant (STP), and a 20 MLD common effluent treatment plant (CETP), it said. Monitored by the City Integrated Operations Center,

Gurugram sees up to 45 per cent price rise for premium homes in last one year: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Prices of premium homes -- under construction and ready -- have increased up to 45 per cent in Gurugram in the last one year, according to Savills India. Real estate consultant Savills on Saturday released a report showing that prices of completed housing units have risen by 28-45 per cent in Gurugram during the last one year. Rates of under construction homes were up 12-45 per cent. In Noida, the prices rose by 27-36 per cent for completed units and 23-47 per cent for under construction residential properties. In Gurugram, the Savills report showed that New Gurugram and Dwarka Expressway were the top performing micromarkets with an annual growth of 45 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively in average capital values of under construction properties. Golf Course Road and Golf Course Extension Road & Souther Peripheral Road registered the highest average capital value appreciation for ready-to-move properties with a year-on-year increase of 45 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively. With 47 per cent year-on-year growth, Noida-Sector 150 micromarket witnessed the highest growth in capital value



for under-construction properties. Arvind Nandan, Managing Director, Research & Consulting, Savills India said, "As we step into 2024, the outlook for the premium to luxury residential segment in key urban hubs like NCR and Mumbai remains exceptionally promising." Pradeep Aggarwal, Founder & Chairman, Signature Global, said, Gurugram, due to its

rapid infrastructure development, has emerged as the preferred destination for end-users and investors. "Notably, areas like New Gurugram, and specific sectors on Dwarka Expressway... Have experienced significant interest from buyers, leading to substantial capital value appreciation in double digits," he said. Mohit Jain, Managing Director, Krisumi Corporation, said, Gurugram has been one of the brightest markets in terms of both sales and capital appreciation perspective. "Rapid infrastructure development like Central Peripheral Road, Dwarka Expressway have played a huge part in it," Jain said.

Bengal gets ₹5,488 crore from Centre as additional instalment of tax devolution

PTI ■ KOLKATA
 West Bengal has received Rs 5,488.88 crore as additional instalment of tax devolution by the Centre. On Friday, the Centre had disbursed Rs 72,961.21 crore to all states as tax devolution due to states on January 10, 2024, the government said. The Centre disburses tax devolution funds in 14 yearly instalments. In the latest allocation, Uttar Pradesh received the largest share at Rs 13,088.51 crore. This was followed by Bihar (Rs 7,338 crore), Madhya Pradesh (Rs 5,727.44 crore), West Bengal (Rs 5,488.88 crore), Maharashtra (Rs 4,608.96 crore), Rajasthan (Rs 4,396.64 crore) and Odisha (Rs 3,303.69 crore).



This was followed by Bihar (Rs 7,338 crore), Madhya Pradesh (Rs 5,727.44 crore), West Bengal (Rs 5,488.88 crore), Maharashtra (Rs 4,608.96 crore), Rajasthan (Rs 4,396.64 crore) and Odisha (Rs 3,303.69 crore).

Arunachal Pradesh gets first five star hotel

PTI ■ TAWANG (ARUNACHAL)
 Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday inaugurated the first five-star hotel in the state, Vivanta Tawang, at an altitude of above 10,000 feet close to the border with China. The hotel has 80 rooms and suites that offer mountain and valley views and the cosy ambience of heated wooden floors and walnut veneer-adorned walls. Khandu said tourism in Arunachal now gets an iconic facility in Vivanta Tawang. He said the Vivanta Hotels are known for their elegance and hospitality and tourists can book rooms from December 26. "Better facilities won't only guarantee the ease of stay for our tourists but will also make their visit to Arunachal Pradesh a memorable one," he said. The chief minister said Tawang, a historic and picturesque town, is renowned for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage. "Not only was His Holiness 6th Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso born here, Tawang also has one of Asia's oldest monasteries founded in 1680. Truly worth a visit!" he said. Arunachal (East) MP Tapir Gao, who was present at the inauguration, said history was created in Tawang with the inauguration of Vivanta Tawang, the first five-star Hotel in Arunachal. Vivanta Hotels wrote on X: "We were honoured to have the pleasure of your presence at the launch of Vivanta Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang, Mr. Khandu. We are excited to become a part of Arunachal Pradesh's tourism landscape and eagerly anticipate the opportunity to offer our guests an unforgettable experience."



Air India's 1st wide-body A350-900 aircraft lands in Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Air India's first wide-body A350-900 aircraft, arriving new brand livery, spiced here from European aviation major Airbus' Toulouse facility in France. The aircraft, registered as VT-JRA, touched down at the national capital's Indira Gandhi International Airport at 13:46



hrs, making the Tata Group-owned airline the first aircraft operator in India to have this type of aircraft in its fleet, a statement said. The delivery flight is operated using a special call sign AI350, it said. The aircraft is the first of Air India's 20 Airbus A350-900 on order, with five more scheduled for delivery through March 2024, the airline said. As part of its now rejigged 250 aircraft order with Airbus, Air India will acquire 40 A350s, comprising 20 each A350-900 and A350-1000 aircraft, along with 140 narrow-body A321neo and 70 A320neo planes. The arrival of the first Airbus A350-900 is, in many ways, "a declaration of Indian aviation's resurgence on the world stage," Air India Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Campbell Wilson said. "As a symbol of the new age of flying, the A350 promises a world-class, long-haul travel experience on our non-stop routes. Its excellent flight economics and technology underscore our dedication to commercially successful operations and to achieving our sustainability goals," Wilson added.

The airline has already announced that initially this aircraft will be operated on short-haul routes and later be deployed for long-haul flights. The new aircraft will enter commercial service in January next year, initially operating domestically for crew familiarisation, followed by longer-haul flying to destinations across continents, the airline said. It also said that the schedule of commercial operations of the A350 will be announced in the coming weeks. The 316-seater A350-900 aircraft comes in a three-class cabin configuration with 28 private business class suites with full-flat beds, 24 premium economy seats with extra legroom and 264 spacious economy class seats, Air India said.

Boora, Rani advance to pre quarters

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA
The experienced duo of Saweety Boora and Pooja Rani cruised into the pre-quarterfinals with contrasting wins on the second day of the women's National Boxing Championships here on Saturday. While Saweety (81kg), the reigning world champion, faced a tough challenge from Alfiya of Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) before securing a 4-1 win, two-time Asian Championships gold medallist Pooja dominated the proceedings against Renu of Nagaland in the 75kg bout as she completed a commanding 5-0 victory. Besides Saweety and Pooja, 2022 World Championships bronze medallist Manisha Moun (60kg) and Saneh (70kg) were the other boxers from Haryana to clinch victories and enter the Round of 16. Meanwhile, Nupur of RSPB went head to head against Himanshi Antil of Delhi in her 81+kg round-of-16 match. Demonstrating swift and aggressive boxing, Nupur wasted no time in securing the victory in the first round with Referee Stopping the Contest (RSC) verdict. Nupur will be up against Monica Sahun of Uttarakhand in the quarterfinals. The day also witnessed domination from Uttar Pradesh boxers as four registered convincing wins in their respective matches. While Aprajita Mani (57kg) and Rinky Sharma (63kg) beat Maharashtra's Aarya Bartakke (5-2) and Tamil Nadu's V Monisha (5-0) respectively, Rekha (66kg) and Deepika (75kg) notched up RSC wins against their respective opponents Pooja Biswas of Telangana and Odisha's Sunita Jena.



BOXING NATIONALS

Shukla appointed India U19 women football team head coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Former India player Shukla Dutta was on Saturday appointed the country's U19 women's football team coach ahead of the SAFF Championships in February next year. Dutta, a former India U17 women's team coach, will be assisted by ex-India international Sradhanjali Samantary, and goalkeeping coach Lourembam Ronibala Chanu in an all-women support staff team. The India team will begin its preparations for the SAFF Championships early next month in Goa. "The Under-19 SAFF for women is an important tournament for us. This tournament is a stepping stone for talented players to move to the next level, which is the seniors," said All India Football Federation acting secretary-general M Satyanarayan in a statement. "It is great to find that we have an all-women technical staff for the U19 women's team," Satyanarayan added. The competition started in 2018



and India has participated four times, bagging the title in 2022, while finishing runners-up to Bangladesh in the 2021 edition. India had finished third this year. The virtual meeting to select the support staff was chaired by former India captain IM Vijayan and attended by Satyanarayan, Manoranjan Bhattacharya (deputy chairman, technical committee), Syed Sabir Pasha (technical director), among others.



AP ■ ROME
Fiorentina moved up to fourth in Serie A after winning at Monza 1-0, while Lazio climbed into the top half of the table with a comfortable 2-0 victory at struggling Empoli on Friday. AC Milan needed a late goal to salvage a point at bottom club Salernitana and Genoa came from behind to beat Sassuolo 2-1. AC Milan, three points ahead of Fiorentina. Lazio jumped two places into ninth. A major shock was averted at Salernitana, where the home side led 2-1 with a minute left and looked like recording only its second win of the season. Fikayo Tomori put Milan 1-0 up with a header after 17 minutes but Salernitana grew into the game and got

Fiorentina, Lazio, Genoa win

the equalizer it deserved shortly before halftime when veteran Argentine defender Federico Fazio headed home from a corner. Antonio Candreva put Salernitana ahead in the second half, but Milan substitute Luka Jovic scored in the last minute to secure a point. Fiorentina's match-winner was Lucas Beltrán but Monza goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio will shoulder much of the blame. With six minutes on the clock, Di Gregorio tried to play the ball out but his pass was too close to Beltrán, whose outstretched leg diverted the ball into the net. In Empoli, Lazio returned to winning ways after two straight losses.



Mattéo Guendouzi got the opener after eight minutes when he rifled home through a crowd of players following a goalmouth scramble. Mattia Zaccagni doubled the lead midway through the second half when he

stabbed home from close range. Empoli has the poorest attack in the league with just 10 goals in 17 games and although it matched Lazio at times, the result left it third from bottom. Genoa came from behind to beat Sassuolo 2-1 and end its four-game winless streak. Sassuolo took the lead through Andrea Pinamonti after 28 minutes and Genoa equalized in the second half when Albert Gudmundsson converted from the penalty spot after Martin Eric was adjudged to have handled the ball. Gudmundsson, whose goal was his second in two games, was also involved three minutes before time in the match-winner. His pass to Caleb Ekuban led to the goal that also lifted them above Sassuolo into 14th place.

Olympic qualifiers chance to show our commitment to hockey, says Salima

PTI ■ RANCHI
Ace Indian midfielder Salima Tete on Saturday said the Olympic Qualifiers here from January 13 are not just about making the cut for the 2024 Paris Games but also an opportunity for the women's hockey team to showcase its commitment to the sport. Eight teams, including India, will vie for three Paris Games berths when the tournament commences here and the hosts will play the United States on the opening day. "This tournament in Ranchi is not just a qualification bid; it's an opportunity to showcase our relentless spirit and commitment to the sport we love. We're ready to give it our all and, hopefully, secure our spot in the Paris Olympics, carrying the spirit of Ranchi with us on that global stage," Salima said in a Hockey India release. India have been clubbed with USA, New Zealand and Italy in Pool B, while Pool A comprises Germany, Japan, Chile and the Czech Republic. India women had failed in their bid to gain automatic qualification for the Olympics during the Hangzhou Asian Games and will make another attempt to secure a Paris spot here. The 21-year-old, who was in the India squad for the Tokyo Olympics, added that the home-crowd support will help the team achieve its goal. "Returning to Ranchi always feels like a heartfelt homecoming. This city holds a special place in my heart -- it's where my love for hockey was nurtured and where I honed my skills," said Salima, who hails from the Simdega district of Jharkhand. "The support and energy from the fans here are tremendous; their enthusiasm fuels our determination on the field. We're eager to step onto the field and leave everything out there, striving to create moments that our fans will cherish and remember," added Salima. The return to Ranchi holds a special significance for the India team, having clinched the women's Asian Champions Trophy earlier this year. India will play New Zealand on January 14, while their last pool game is against Italy on January 16.

AITA loses appeal in ITF tribunal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The ITF tribunal has rejected AITA's contention that its Davis Cup team could face security concerns during the World Group I Play-off tie in Islamabad, paving the way for an Indian tennis team's visit to Pakistan for the first time in 60 years. If the Indian team fails to travel to Pakistan, the tie will be awarded to the host country and the Indian team will be relegated to World Group II. The last time an Indian Davis Cup team travelled to Pakistan was way back in 1964 when it beat the hosts 4-0. All India Tennis Association (AITA) Secretary General Anil Dhupar confirmed to PTI that ITF has rejected their appeal. "I have got a message that AITA's appeal has been rejected by the ITF Tribunal. We will approach Sports Ministry on Monday and seek guidance if we will send a team," Dhupar told PTI. AITA had recently announced a five-member squad for the February 3-4 World Group I play-off tie and said that if ITF rejects its appeal, it will send the Davis Cup team to Pakistan.

INDIAN DAVIS CUP TEAM WILL HAVE TO TRAVEL TO PAKISTAN



AITA's request for a neutral venue was rejected by the 15-member Davis Cup Committee (DCC) and later the national federation approached the ITF Tribunal. "The DCC's decision to hold the tie in Pakistan has solid grounds and it is pertinent on all the nations to visit the venue (country) selected by the DCC for the Davis Cup ties," the Tribunal said, Pakistan media reported. AITA's contention was that India should not be treated like other countries since the bilateral relations are tense between the two nations. AITA had also contended that Pakistan will have its General Election on February 8, so the Indian team should not travel. The DCC had ruled that there is no such situation in Pakistan where an Indian team cannot travel and participate in the Davis Cup tie. "Pakistan has hosted some important Davis Cup ties just recently in a successful manner so there is no solid grounds as to why Pakistan cannot host the tie against India in a befitting manner."

"Maintaining law and order is a sole responsibility of the host nation. Indian team should rest assured that required security measures will be in order for their travel and participation," the committee had opined. India's top players Sumit Nagal and Sasikum Mukund have pulled out of the tie, where the winning team will ensure its stay in World Group I for the rest of the 2024 season. Ramkumar Ramanathan, N Sriram Balaji, Yuki Bhambri, Niki Poonacha and Saketh Myneni were named in the Indian team. Digvijay Pratap Singh, who made his debut against Morocco in India's last Davis Cup assignment in Lucknow in September, was named as a reserve player in the squad. India were drawn to meet Pakistan in Pakistan in 2019 also but the ITF had then moved the tie to Kazakhstan on AITA's request and India emerged winner with an emphatic 4-0 margin. Pakistan's top players had then pulled out of the tie in protest against AITA's decision to not travel to their country. Pakistan fielded rookie players who were no match to India's strong team.

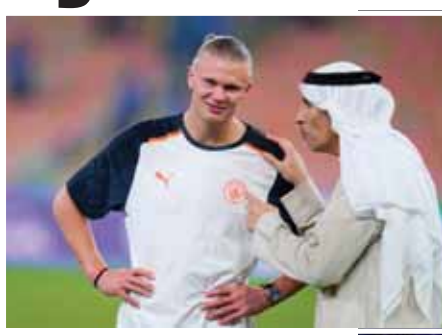
Aston Villa miss chance to go top

AP ■ BIRMINGHAM
Aston Villa missed a chance to go top of the English Premier League when it drew with Sheffield United 1-1 in a game marked by late goals and more VAR disputes on Friday. Although Villa dominated, Cameron Archer put Sheffield ahead with three minutes left, only for Nicolò Zaniolo to equalize in the seventh minute of time added on. A win would have taken Villa above Liverpool and Arsenal and leave it sitting in pole position at this stage of the season for the first time since 1998. Instead, the point left it second on the table, level on points with leader Arsenal and one point more than Liverpool. Liverpool faces Arsenal at Anfield on Saturday. Villa was superior throughout in front of a boisterous home crowd and it would rue the video referee for decisions that went against it. Two penalty claims were rejected early in the first half and a Leon Bailey goal was chalked off after 59 minutes when the review spotted a foul on Sheffield goalkeeper Wes Foderingham. Referee Anthony Taylor looked at another possible penalty for handball with 17 minutes remaining but again ruled against the home side. When the deadlock was broken it came at the other end. Former Villa striker Cameron Archer popped up with a clinical finish after good work from Gustavo Hamer on the left. But just when Villa looked down and out it got the goal its play deserved. Douglas Luiz flighted a cross into the box and Zaniolo beat Foderingham to nod into the empty net. The point was a vital one for Sheffield and lifted it off the bottom of the table and a point above Burnley. For Unai Emery's side, the draw ended a spectacular run of 15 wins in a row at home.



Man City confirmed as world best club in 2023

AP ■ JEDDAH (SAUDI ARABIA)
Pep Guardiola is happy to call Manchester City the best in the world this year, but an all-time great team? That debate must wait for years if not decades. "Right now, I don't know," Guardiola said after City cruised to its first Club World Cup title by easily beating Fluminense 4-0 on Friday, lifting a fifth domestic and international trophy in 2023. Guardiola is the first coach to win the FIFA club title with three different teams and compared City's status to the great Barcelona side he led to be champion of Spain, Europe and the world in 2011. "If people talk about the team 25 or 30 years later it means you're a really good team," he said. "Today is nice. We have been the best team in the world." Judgment on this Man City era also must wait for the outcome of an English Premier League investigation into alleged financial wrongdoing at the club for almost a decade through 2018. A hearing is expected late next year to examine 115 charges leveled against the club for conduct during the first nine full seasons after being bought by the royal family of Abu Dhabi. Verdicts are not expected until 2025, when City will play in the



first revamped Club World Cup with 32 teams. Guardiola's team has been unquestionably the best in Europe this year and was simply too good for over-matched Fluminense, which could ill afford unlucky bounces of the ball that left the first-time champion of South America in a two-goal hole within 27 minutes. "We prepared the whole year for (Copa) Libertadores but not the Club World Cup," Fluminense coach Fernando Diniz said of his team being drained by winning its continental title seven weeks ago. City led after just 40 seconds to make it a match mostly free of tension. Julián Álvarez followed up fastest to meet a rebound off a post from Nathan Ake's shot. An own goal by Fluminense captain Nino decided the game long before



Phil Foden's goal in the 72nd, guiding an Álvarez pass into an open net. Álvarez struck again in the 88th. Victory came at a cost for City, which gave Europe a 16th title in 17 editions of FIFA's competition for continental champions. Key midfielder Rodri limped away from the stadium with his right knee heavily bandaged after a heavy tackle by Fluminense substitute Alexander. Guardiola said the incident forcing Rodri to be substituted was "a scare" though he claimed he was unsure of the severity of the injury. City loses this season typically come when the Spaniard has missed games.

Tempers flared after the game with City captain Kyle Walker confronting Fluminense players including veteran defender Felipe Melo. Rodri later took part in celebrations with the trophy and received an award as the best player at the tournament. With Rodri in imperious form, City cruised to a second easy win in four balmy days in Saudi Arabia even without injured superstars Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne. They also missed City's semifinals win over Urawa Red Diamonds on Tuesday. Their expected absences could help explain about 4,000 empty seats among a crowd of 52,601 at King Abdullah Sports City, the Jeddah stadium which is planned to be used at the 2034 World Cup. Guardiola the first coach to win the Club World Cup with three different teams. He led Barcelona to titles in 2009 and 2011, then with a team that won the Champions League under outgoing coach Jupp Heynckes. Guardiola celebrated calmly his record fourth Club World Cup title as a coach - adding to Barcelona's in 2009 and '11 and with Bayern Munich in 2013 - by walking across to console Diniz with a handshake and arm on his shoulder. Fluminense started with six players

born in the 1980s, and bristled with perceived disrespect when told on Thursday of British media drawing attention to the age of its veteran team. City's oldest player in the starting lineup, 33-year-old Walker, was born in May 1990. The final paired clubs that played in their national third-tier divisions as recently as 1999. City has since become the club with the highest declared annual revenue in world soccer, banking \$890 million in its treble-winning 2023 season with a salary bill of \$530 million. City later added the UEFA Super Cup in August. Fluminense has said it expects to earn \$74 million this year, and the gulf in wealth and purchasing power was clear on the field and likely will grow before both teams play at the relaunched Club World Cup in June-July 2025. "I don't think we just lack money. It's too simplistic," Diniz said in translated comments, before adding "but money is also important." That 32-team tournament in the United States in 2025 will have 12 European teams and six from South America, each potentially earning tens of millions in FIFA prize money. In the third-place game earlier in Jeddah, African champion Al Ahly of Egypt won 4-2 against Urawa, the Asian champion from Japan.

Kaur leads India women fightback

But Australia take slender lead in one-off Test



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's (2/23) golden arm came to India Women's rescue with two late wickets as the hosts endured a challenging outing in the one-off Test here on Saturday, with Australia leading by 46 runs at stumps on the third day. Kaur brought herself on in the third session after India tried almost every trick in their arsenal with the ball but failed to make inroads, as a resolute Australian side overhauled the hosts' 187-run lead in the first

innings with consummate ease. Kaur cleaned up Tahlia McGrath (73 from 177 balls, 10 fours) who hit a second consecutive fifty in the Test and snafled the dangerous Alyssa Healy (32) after a sudden burst of aggression. Before dismissing her counterpart, Kaur fired a sharp return throw at Healy, who took an evasive action and the ball raced to the ropes as it deflected off the Australian skipper's bat. Kaur appealed against Healy for obstructing the field which was rejected by on field

umpires Anil Chaudhary and N Janani. On the next ball, Kaur had Healy out leg-before while attempting to sweep. Annabel Sutherland (12) and Ashleigh Gardner (7) were at the crease at stumps with Australia reaching 233/5 in second innings. It was Australia all the way on third day with their seamers unleashing a short-ball attack on the Indian tail, which folded in a little over half an hour into the day's play with 30 runs added for the loss of last three wickets.

Sutherland (2/41) was Australia's primary weapon as she claimed two wickets in the form of overnight batter Pooja Vastrakar (47) and Renuka Singh (8), while Kim Garth accounted for Deepti Sharma (78) but not before the Indians reset a couple of records. India's first-innings total of 406 is now their highest ever in Test cricket against Australia. A 122-run stand for the eighth wicket between Deepti and Vastrakar is India's highest in the format and second best for any side in the world. Deepti was India's top-scorer

with 78 from 171 balls with nine fours while Vastrakar missed her maiden fifty by a narrow margin of three runs. With 187 in deficit, Australia opens Beth Mooney and Phoebe Litchfield began well but both were guilty of throwing away their starts. Richa Ghosh deserved full credit for running out Mooney for 33 (37 balls, 7 fours) after the batter carelessly ventured out of her crease after defending a delivery from Sneha Rana (2/54). Ghosh, positioned at silly point, hurled the ball back at the wickets while Mooney seemed

to have lacked awareness of getting back into the crease. Litchfield (18) was cleaned up by Rana when the batter attempted a reverse sweep but missed connecting completely. Australia star Ellyse Perry looked set for a big score as she batted in a commanding manner in the second session for her 91-ball 45 with five fours, putting on 84 for the third wicket with Tahlia McGrath. But India wicketkeeper Yastika Bhatia was sharp enough to follow a delivery from Rana which kept drifting down the leg, collecting a faint edge off Perry's bat. McGrath had some luck on the way to a fine fifty as Rana, standing at wide first slip, had an outside edge off Rajeshwari Gayakwad passing under her hands. On 52, McGrath had luck favouring her again when she was adjudged leg-before on Kaur's first delivery which she got overturned. But a few deliveries later, the Indian captain got the breakthrough when an inside edge off McGrath's bat trickled onto the wickets much to the dismay of the batter who had prodded forward totally while presenting the full face of the bat. With the pitch not breaking down to assist spin as much as it was anticipated, it was vital for the Indian bowlers and fielders to work collectively but luck also did not favour them. Rajeshwari Gayakwad toiled for 27 wicket-less overs but she did not press on for a DRS review when Sutherland was pinned in front of the wickets. Gayakwad also had Healy dropped twice by Jemimah Rodrigues on consecutive deliveries at silly point despite the fielder standing slightly deeper.



Combination Confusion

2 slots to give Dravid sleepless nights

PTI ■ CENTURION

The best combination as always a team's best eleven and it will certainly be a struggle for India to find the right blend going into the opening Test against South Africa on 'Boxing Day'. At least two slots will give head coach Rahul Dravid sleepless nights. The teething issues for India will be KL Rahul being asked to keep wickets to bolster the batting and the tricky task of choosing between Mukesh Kumar and Prasidh Krishna to replace the literally irreplaceable Mohammed Shami, who is recuperating from an ankle niggle. On the face of it, some decisions might look straightforward but things won't be as easy as it seems for the Indian team management, which will again have to make unpopular decisions.

But he can also leak runs as he is not known to be consistent with his lines. If one goes by form in ODIs, Mukesh could lose out but going by skills in red ball cricket, he does hold a distinct advantage over Prasidh.

KL 'the batter' or KL 'the Keeper'

Supersport Park was the venue where India won their only Test of the three-match series back in 2021. Rahul looked majestic enroute his hundred while opening the innings. But things have changed in the last two years, Rahul lost his form, Rishabh Pant had a horrific accident, KS Bharat didn't look cut out for top flight cricket and Ishan Kishan, after being benched since the start of World Cup, has now sought a 'mental health break'. Rahul had been named keeper for the series and he has already said that he is ready to don any role that team wants. Last time, he had lost his place as a batter and he understands that glove work will not only give him an extra cushion but help him offset any poor batting form, till Pant makes a comeback, which could still be a distant future. That Bharat was named in India A after his failure to get a single fifty in five Tests proves that the cupboard is bare. Kishan also got his Test cap on the basis of white ball form and the other A team keeper Dhruv Jurel is also more of a T20 keeper-batter in Jitesh Sharma mould. India right now, don't have too many good red-ball keeping options and it is learnt that for the England series, young Kumar Kushagra, who got a whopping Rs 7.20 crore IPL deal from Delhi Capitals, could seriously be considered as the second keeper. In South Africa, Rahul can still manage as he would gather most balls round his waist to the pacers but keeping to Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja on rank turners is easier said than done. But if one plays a specialist keeper in Bharat, then the batting combination goes for a toss. Yashasvi Jaiswal, after his sparkling Test debut in West Indies, might become the proverbial sacrificial lamb with either Rahul or Gill opening the innings. That's the only way that Shreyas Iyer, still an untested commodity on bouncy tracks in SENA countries, can be slotted in the middle order and add depth. Rahul keeping wickets will decide what is Dravid's line of thinking — positive or negative.

Mukesh or Prasidh?

The Centurion track has primarily been a pace bowlers' paradise — hard and bouncy with humidity that aids reverse swing during the latter half of the day. So if one is talking about lateral movement, then Mukesh, who has already made his Test debut in the Caribbean, walks straight into the playing XI. But the Bengal seamer hasn't looked in the best of form during the white ball leg of the series. However, with 151 wickets from 40 first-class games, red ball cricket is where Mukesh feels at home and has an average of 21 plus runs per wicket. His strike rate remains a very decent 48 balls per wicket. More importantly, Mukesh is a like a workhorse, who can bowl long spells and has also been known to use reverse swing during his post tea spells in Ranji Trophy cricket. The other advantage is channel bowling — right on the line — in and around the off-stump corridor and keeping it at fuller length. Mukesh's nearest competitor is one of Dravid's favourite and a fellow Bangalore man Prasidh, whose hit-the-deck stuff is ideal for the Supersport Park. Prasidh, who hasn't even played 15 first-class games since his Ranji Trophy debut in 2015, wouldn't even be in the picture had Shami been fit. However, he hasn't done his cause any harm by picking up a fiver for India 'A' against South Africa 'A' in first 'Unofficial Test' in Potchefstroom. Prasidh, whose speed is a bit more and a natural length on the shorter side, is expected to get more bounce.



South Africa tour

Rituraj to report at NCA after fracturing finger

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Top-order batter Rituraj Gaikwad will head to the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru after fracturing his finger while Harshit Rana has also been ruled out of India A's four-day match against South Africa A. The BCCI confirmed in a statement on Saturday that opener Gaikwad had suffered a fracture to his ring finger and will miss the upcoming two-Test series against the Proteas beginning December 26 in Centurion. "Rituraj Gaikwad suffered an injury to his right ring finger while fielding in the second ODI against South Africa in Gqeberha. He underwent scans, and following an expert consultation, the BCCI Medical Team has ruled him out of the remainder of the tour," said BCCI secretary Jay Shah in a statement. "He will be reporting to the NCA for further management of his injury. The Men's Selection Committee has named Abhimanyu Easwaran as his replacement," the statement added. However, Easwaran will only be available for the second Test as he is currently leading the India A side. Gaikwad featured in the first two ODIs of the three-match series, which India won 2-1. He injured the finger while fielding in the second match. He was also a member of the Indian squad for the Test series.

The statement added that Rana had been ruled out of the four-day India A tour match against South Africa A in Benoni from December 26 due to a hamstring injury. Middle-order batter Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Avesh Khan and Rinku Singh have been added to the India A squad, while chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav has been released. India A updated squad for four-day match against SA A: Abhimanyu Easwaran (c), Sai Sudharsan, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Tilak Varma, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Avesh Khan, Navdeep Saini, Akash Deep, Vidwath Kaverappa, Manav Suthar, Rinku Singh.

3rd ODI: NZ wins series 2-1

Bangladesh beats New Zealand by 9 wickets

AP ■ NAPIER

Bangladesh needed only 15 overs with the bat to complete a nine wicket win over New Zealand in the third one-day international Saturday, ending New Zealand's winning streak in ODIs at home at 17 matches. After rolling New Zealand for 98 in 31.4 overs, captain Najmul Hossain Shanto made an unbeaten 51 from 42 balls and Amanul Haque 37 from 33 to lead Bangladesh to its first ODI win over the Kiwis in New Zealand in 19 attempts. New Zealand won the three-match series 2-1 after winning the first match by 44 runs and the second by seven wickets. But Bangladesh gained a measure of revenge Saturday and primed itself for the upcoming Twenty20 series, bowling New Zealand out for its lowest ever total in ODIs between the teams. Earlier, Tanzim Hasan Sakib took 3-14 and Shoriful Islam 3-22 - both career bests - as Bangladesh rolled New Zealand cheaply to set up a dominant victory. Soumya Sarkar chipped in with 3-18 as New Zealand fell below its previous lowest ODI score against Bangladesh of 162.



"The ball was nipping, the ball was swinging and I knew how we started would set the tone for my team," Sakib said. "I tried to bowl wicket to wicket and hold my line and length. "The wicket really helped me. This wicket is good for pace bowlers and the wicket really helped me." Bangladesh captain Shanto was

delighted to be able to choose to field when he won the toss. The McLean Park pitch usually is one of the best to bat on in New Zealand with an average first innings score in ODIs of 239. But the pitch was unusually well-grassed and Shoriful and Sakib took full advantage, crashing through the New Zealand top

order to leave it reeling at 6-70. Both bowlers tied the New Zealand batters down by bowling into the stumps and swinging the ball both ways. They hit excellent lengths and the ball occasionally spat off a length which made the batters reluctant to play forcefully off the front foot. The largest partnership in the innings was the 36 between Will Young (26) and Tom Latham (21) for the third wicket. Only two other New Zealand batters reached double figures. Shoriful reproduced the form that saw him take two wickets in the opening over of the first ODI, dismissing Young, Latham and Mark Chapman (2). Both Latham and Chapman were bowled by deliveries which jagged back late between bat and pad. Sakib maintained an exacting line, giving the batters no width and completing two maidens among his seven overs. He dismissed Rachin Ravindra (8) in the fourth over to begin the New Zealand collapse, then removed Henry Nicholls (1) and Tom Blundell (4). When the two seamers had left the host's innings in tatters, Sarkar came on and took the wickets of Josh Clarkson (16), Adam Milne (4) and Adithya Ashok (10).

India U19 to play tri-series against South Africa, Afghanistan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian U19 team will take on hosts South Africa and Afghanistan in a tri-series in Johannesburg ahead of the ICC Men's U19 World Cup in the Rainbow Nation next year.



The tri-series will be played at the Old Edwardians Cricket Club in Johannesburg and will witness each team playing each other twice, a BCCI statement read. India U19 will kick-start their campaign against Afghanistan U19 on December 29 before taking on South

Africa U19 on January 2. The final is scheduled to be played on January 10. The U19 World Cup is scheduled to begin on January 19 in Bloemfontein. India is in Group A along with Bangladesh, Ireland and the USA. They are set to open their campaign against Bangladesh on January 20.

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan's white ball specialist spinner, Muhammad Nawaz is being rushed to Australia to reinforce the national team after Noman Ali was ruled out of the remaining two Tests due to an acute appendicitis operation in Melbourne. The 37-year-old Ali, who was not part of the first Test at Perth last week, had complained of acute pain and doctors diagnosed acute appendicitis and carried out a surgery on Saturday. "The doctors have advised him complete rest for a few weeks which means he will not be available for the remaining tests in Melbourne and Sydney," a PCB official said.

Pakistan injury woes continue

Spinner Noman Ali out for remainder of Australia series, Nawaz to join team soon

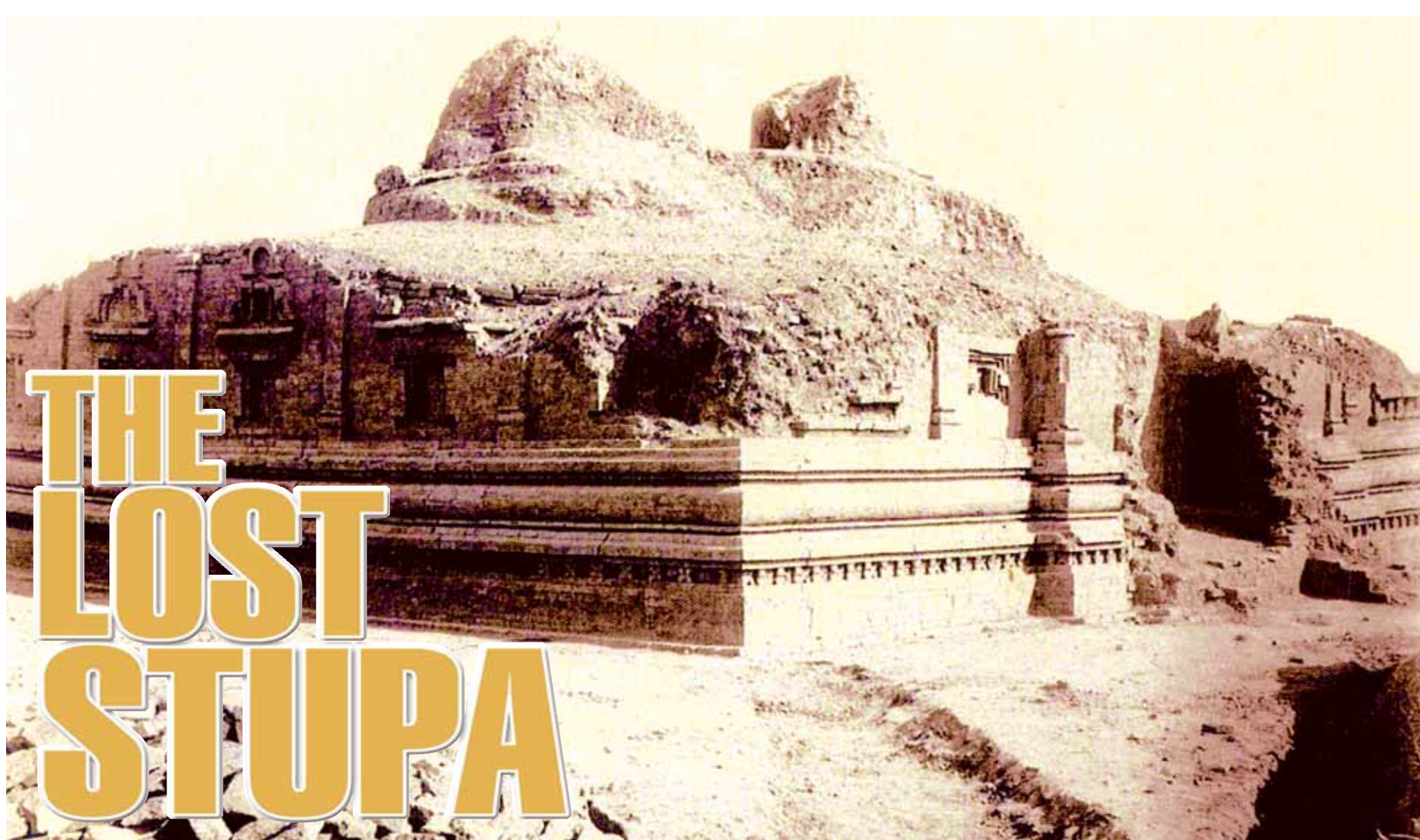
Pakistan is already grappling with a series of fitness issues and chief selector, Wahab Riaz said Nawaz would fly to Australia on the next available flight. "Due to logistical challenges, including visa issues for any new player, and considering the requirement for a left-arm spinner, Nawaz was the best available choice for us as he has



already been named in the squad for the T20 series in New Zealand after the tests in Australia," he added. Pakistan plays the second Boxing Day Test from December 26, while the third Test is set to begin in Sydney on January 3. Ali is the latest player to be ruled out after Pakistan lost their pace bowler, Khuram Shahzad for

the remaining two Tests after he played at Perth and took five wickets. He was ruled out on Thursday due to a rib stress fracture and muscle tear. Pakistan spinner Abrar Ahmed is also in doubt for the second Test due to a fitness issue after having missed the first Test in Perth. Pakistan is left with only one specialist spinner in Sajid Khan, who was rushed to Australia as a back up for Abrar. With pacer Naseem Shah ruled out due to a long-term injury and Haris Rauf opting to play in Australia's Big Bash League, Pakistan had toured Australia with a weak bowling line-up. Pakistan last won a Test in Australia in 1995 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

"Modern sport can be an ugly convergence of commerce and celebrity, but it still has the capacity to move a crowd"
— Katie Kitamura



THE LOST STUPA



Northwest face of Kahu-jo-daro stupa, Mirpurkhas, Sindh, Pakistan

Pilgrim, merchant devotee at Kahu-jo-daro stupa

History neglected archaeology, focusing on kings and politics, relegating artifacts to museums, writes **RAJU MANSUKHANI**

History, especially political and military history, owes archaeology a huge apology. For far too long, historical narratives have centered around kings and courts, politics, diplomatic battles, and military might, while archaeological excavations, findings, and artifacts are conveniently confined to museums, archaeological sites, and scholarly journals.

When the story of Buddhist collections at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), Mumbai, was detailed in *The Lost Stupa of Kahu-jo-daro*, subtitled *An Attempt at Reconstruction and The Buddha Within: Images of Devotion and Piety*, in 2022-23, there was redemption of sorts. Suddenly, archaeologists, surveyors, and museologists were heroes occupying center stage. Nameless and often not recognized for their pioneering efforts, these magnificent men and women are now giving archaeology a rousing start, most appropriately when our nation commemorates its 75th year of Independence and Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.

"At CSMVS, Mumbai, we go back a long way in time with our Buddhist collections: To 1906 precisely when the first Buddhist object was gifted to the museum. It was a plaster bust of the Gandharan Buddha, created by John Lockwood Kipling just a few years after a committee had been formed to determine the feasibility of having a public museum in Bombay," wrote Dr Himanshu Prabha Ray in *The Buddha Within*.

John Kipling, an art teacher and curator, deserves special mention not only because he traveled, sketched, and documented the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent, but also because he was the father of the more famous Rudyard. Rudyard Kipling did his illustrious father proud as he immortalised the British Raj through novels, short stories, poems, and, of course, his news coverage for *The Pioneer* from 1883-89, which was published from Allahabad.

These stories within stories are fascinating when we learn that John Kipling spent years at the Lahore Museum as a curator, besides heading the Mayo School of Industrial Art where students learned to make plaster casts, adding to the collections of new and existing museums. In Lahore, there was a surfeit of artifacts from Gandhara (present-day states of Pakistan and Afghanistan), and the Gandharan Buddha bust showed Graeco-Roman influences, which endeared John Kipling, explained Dr. Ray.

ASI expertise: From 1880-90, the Archaeological Survey of India stepped up operations; their archaeologists, surveyors, and draftsman optimised the opportunity to do exemplary work and make history. They had been trained in



Seated Buddha, terracotta, at Kahu-jo-daro stupa site

photographing, cataloging, and exploring the vast countryside. Henry Cousens now played a critical role as he traversed across the Western Ghats: rock-cut Buddhist caves in Bhaja, Kondane, Pitalkhora, Karle, Nasik, Junnar, Ajanta, and Ellora caves. Cousens and his team then documented the brick-built stupas in Boria (near Gujarat) and Sopara, north of Mumbai, as well as the Mir Rukan and Kahu-jo-daro stupas in Mirpurkhas in Sindh (now Pakistan).

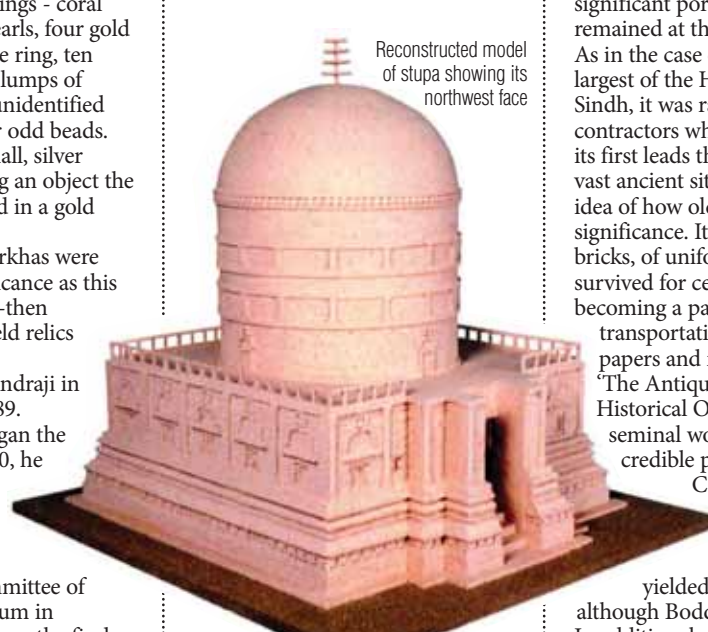
"It was in Mirpurkhas that Cousens recorded the remains of architecture around the stupa, such as monasteries, small votive stupas, and clay tablets. The core of these stupas comprised sun-dried bricks while the exterior casting was of decorated burn bricks (terracotta)," wrote Dr Ray.

History lovers and those drawn towards Buddhism for its spiritual moorings often wonder what was contained in the stupas, given the innumerable structures spread across the length and breadth of our subcontinent. In the case of Kahu-jo-daro, it was revealed that a stone relic casket was found inside the stupa. The casket contained a small crystal bottle covered with white sand and several precious offerings - coral and crystal beads, seed pearls, four gold beads, one small gold-wire ring, ten copper coins, some small lumps of charcoal, a few grains of unidentified materials, and some other odd beads. Inside the bottle was a small, silver cylindrical case containing an object the size of a pinhead, wrapped in a gold leaf.

The excavations at Mirpurkhas were considered of great significance as this was the third stupa in the then Bombay Presidency to yield relics after the stupas at Sopara, excavated by Bhagwanlal Indraji in 1882, and Junagarh in 1889.

When Henry Cousens began the site excavations in 1909-10, he was superintending archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India; and more importantly he was a committee of the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. He decided to place the finds

THE POWER OF CULTURE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD AS IT UNITES PEOPLE, COUNTRIES, RELIGIONS, AND CUSTOMS. IT FUNCTIONS AS A HEALING TOOL IN OUR BROKEN SOCIETIES. AS CLOUDS OF WAR HOVER OVER CONTINENTS, REDUCING ANCIENT LANDS AND CITIES TO RUBBLE AND CLAIMING THOUSANDS OF LIVES, IT IS TIME TO PAY HOMAGE TO KAHU-JO-DARO AND THE SPIRITUAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ARTISTIC LEGACIES OF BUDDHISM, WHICH ARE BUILT AROUND PEACE, ONENESS, AND BROTHERHOOD.



Reconstructed model of stupa showing its northwest face

in the Prince of Wales Museum, including relic caskets found in the stupa. In the 1960s, the relics were transferred to Sarnath and enshrined in the newly-built Mulagandhakuti temple at the site. Once again, a memorable story within the story of archaeology that's worth recounting.

Largest collection: It was in 1919 the terracotta images and bricks excavated from the Buddhist stupa at Mirpurkhas were formally handed over to the then Prince of Wales Museum (now CSMVS) by Cousens. Through the 20th century, legions of venerable historians-art historians and curators like Dr Moti Chandra, Dr Kalpana Desai, Dr Devangana Desai, and Dr Pratapaditya Pal contributed their collective knowledge, published works and monographs highlighting significance of the Buddhist stupa at Mirpurkhas. They were instrumental in giving modern research on Mirpurkhasits new direction, highlighting riverine cultures, urban centres, trading towns, besides significance of religious places where people prayed, contributed their earnings, keeping places of worship alive through centuries.

For Dr Sabyasachi Mukherjee, director general of CSMVS who helmed the research on Kahu-jo-daro from 2008, it was indeed an uphill task for the project commenced without the benefit of either inscriptions or literary evidence.

"Kahu-jo-daro was remote, and beyond our reach and my material resources were only those in the CSMVS collection," he said, adding that CSMVS has the largest and most comprehensive collection of 297 archaeological finds, dating to the 5th and 6th centuries CE, from Mirpurkhas. A large part of the stupa mound was destroyed since the bricks were required for laying railway lines in the area.

Henry Cousens had noted that despite railway workers digging up the bricks, a significant portion of the stupa remained at the north end of the site. As in the case of Mohenjodaro, the largest of the Harappan metropolises in Sindh, it was railway workers-contractors who provided the ASI with its first leads that the bricks were part of vast ancient sites. Railway teams had no idea of how old the bricks were or their significance. It is amazing that these bricks, of uniform size and shape, had survived for centuries and were now becoming a part of modern transportation systems. Besides papers and notes, Cousens' book, 'The Antiquities of Sind with Historical Outline', is regarded as a seminal work and provided a credible platform upon which the CSMVS built its research.

Made of sun-dried bricks, the Mirpurkhas stupa has yielded 11 Buddha relief panels, although Bodhisattva icons are rare. In addition, hundreds of unbaked clay

tablets with the "ye dharma" verse under the image of a Buddha or a stupa have been found, dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries CE. Thus, by the time of the Mirpurkhas stupa, Buddha's biography and narrative depictions of stories from his life had been superseded by single-seated images of the Master place in the niches of the stupa. The stupa now enshrined the words of the 'Enlightened One' - "ye dhamma hetupadhava" - on clay tablets, Prof Prabha Ray explained.

Buddhism in Sindh: Owing to scarcity of archaeological and literary material it is difficult to know when and how Buddhism found its footing in Sindh region. In the north-west, it was the Gandhara region where Buddhism took a deep root, thanks to efforts of Mauryan Emperor Asoka.



Seated Buddha with Acanthus leaf motif in background, terracotta, Kahu-jo-daro stupa site

Explained Dr Sabyasachi Mukherjee in *The Lost Stupa*, "the great river Sindhu, which is the Sanskrit name of river Indus, passed through the valley from the north to the south and acted as an important trade, religious and cultural connection for the Indus Valley, Punjab and the Gandhara region." This riverine connection, water-highways of the ancient world, had a continuing and deep impact on Sindh's social, cultural, and economic history, providing crossroads and bridges for people of the region. Buddhism, as a religion and way of life, found adherents in Sindh.

"It is very important for global citizens, especially the young, to understand that the Indian sub-continent was always part of the globalised world," said Dr Sabyasachi, referring to the present era of globalisation which most netizens feel is a historic unique one. Kahu-jo-daro in Mirpurkhas, he emphasised, is not an isolated instance of artistic activity in the area. He drew links between this site of the ruined Buddhist stupa with Takshashila, the chief city in eastern region of Gandhara.

It was time now for the CSMVS team to take up the digital challenge: The team decided on digital reconstruction of Kahu-jo-daro stupa. "We knew it was one of the few examples of decorative terracotta stupa architecture in the Indus Valley, and that is when we began utilising the collection at CSMVS, and some surviving architectural fragments,

to begin imagining reconstructing the original shape of the stupa, built probably in 500 CE, even though Sir Cousens assigned the stupa to c 400 CE, a century earlier," said Dr Mukherjee.

"One can easily imagine the magnificent scene around the stupa in the valley of Kahu-jo-daro," he said, adding, "the main stupa with its majestic harmika stood nearly 20 metres tall, its towering presence inspiring devotees and pilgrims approaching from over a long distance. Thousands of local devotees, and those from all over India, perhaps even other countries, must have thronged here to pay their respects to the great soul whose corporeal remains were enshrined in the stupa."

The main entrance was embellished with decorative bricks and a torana or gate, as seen in Sanchi too. For pilgrims the circumambulation or going round the stupa is a sacred ritual, followed in Hinduism and Jainism too. At Kahu-jo-daro the visual gallery of seated Buddhas, in niches of the platform walls before entering the stupa, was the source of piety, inspiration and austerity. Shrines inside the stupa would have contained images of the Buddha; it would seem these images were moved to another site, probably to ensure their safety from invasions before the entire stupa itself was covered in sand and left buried, forgotten for centuries.

Kahu-jo-daro, as *The Lost Stupa* details, belonged to a much earlier era, it could have been a reconstruction of a ruined stupa erected under Emperor Asoka's orders in the 3rd century BCE. Fascinating stories of 'when' and 'where' of the Kahu-jo-daro stupa continue to grip our attention, inspiring us with the depth of archaeology in our land, thousands of years ago.

Unfortunately, Dr Mukherjee said, recent images of the site indicate the complete destruction of the main stupa, including its plinth as well as surroundings which had remained intact even decades after the excavations undertaken by Henry Cousens. Like the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Kahu-jo-daro stupa is now visited on pages of books, photographs, and its digital reconstruction.

For Dr Sabyasachi Mukherjee, leading CSMVS Museum for almost two decades, there is no underplaying the power of culture to transform our world. "I strongly believe that the power of culture can change the world as it unites people, countries, religions, and customs. It works as a healing tool in our broken societies." As clouds of war hover over continents, reducing ancient lands and cities to rubble and killing thousands, it is time to pay homage to Kahu-jo-daro and the spiritual, religious, and artistic legacies of Buddhism which are built around peace, oneness, and brotherhood.

(Raju Mansukhani, a former deputy curator of Pradhanmantri Sangharalaya, is writer-researcher on history and heritage issues.)

A recent parliamentary panel report has suggested an array of doable measures to help make the Central flagship health insurance scheme achieve the ultimate goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). ARCHANA JYOTI shares details

PLUG GAPS IN AYUSHMAN

The panel's suggestion to widen the ambit of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) to cover lower middle-income group who fall under the Above Poverty Line (APL) category, just above the poverty line but are in dire need of funds, stems from the fact that the financial burden of diseases leads to cross the poverty line. Many senior citizens residing in places like shelter homes and old age homes do not fall under the BPL and face financial problems while availing treatments. Their inclusion in the scheme would help them access affordable and quality treatment, said the panel in its 151st report which was tabled recently in Rajya Sabha. Under AB-PMJAY the government provides the benefit of cashless hospitalisation for secondary and tertiary care to nearly 10 crore families or 50 crore beneficiaries, identified based on their socio-economic background. The parliamentary standing committee on health and family welfare also suggested the government expand the scope of the scheme to include some sections of children and senior citizens, who may not have health insurance and fall in the Above Poverty Line (APL) category. The panel has cited a document by NITI Aayog, 'Health Insurance for India's Missing Middle', which suggests that even after the implementation of the PMJAY, at least 30 per cent of Indians (more than 40 crore) still lack any form of health cover. Adverse health events can lead to financial hardship and even push

them into poverty, the report said, adding that this group of Indians is characterised by informal employment, unstable incomes, and a lack of social security. As per the Economic Survey 2022-23, almost half of all health spending in India is still paid by patients themselves directly at the point of treatment, although this has dropped as the government's share of spending on health went up significantly after 2013-14. In fact, rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) coupled with increasing health bills in the private sector have resulted in a significant spurt in health spending in the country. While out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) remains the major source of health care financing in India (two-thirds of the total health spending), the financial burden varies enormously across diseases and by the economic well-being of the households. Further, the panel led by Rajya Sabha member Bhubaneswar Kalita has suggested the government to rely on tax incentives and disincentives to improve health insurance coverage among corporate employees. In what could come as a major relief to a large number of workers in the private sector, the panel has recommended measures such as 'employer mandate' — making it a must for an employer to provide health insurance to each employee. The panel has also taken exception that insufficient funds were released and there was poor utilization. "The central government has in the last five years (2018-19 to



SALIENT FEATURES

- 33 States/UTs are currently implementing PMJAY barring Delhi, Odisha, and West Bengal.
- Provides cashless access to health care services for the beneficiary at the point of service, i.e. the hospital.
- Envisions to help mitigate catastrophic expenditure on medical treatment, which pushes nearly six crore Indians into poverty each year.
- Covers up to 3 days of pre-hospitalisation and 15 days of post-hospitalisation expenses, including diagnostics, medicines, and follow-up consultation.
- No restriction on the family size, age, or gender.

2022-23) released Rs 17,000 crore towards PMJAY. Of this, Rs 6,180 crore was released in the previous financial year." It also observed that the average sum of Rs 6,000-Rs 7,000 crore allocated as the central government's share of the scheme each year is not sufficient for 33 states and Union Territories, advising that the same be increased. "For this purpose, other old/peripheral schemes of the government in the healthcare sector may be subsumed or integrated with PMJAY so that the unutilised funds, resources, and manpower involved in those schemes may be utilised for its efficient implementation," said the report. The central flagship which was launched in September 2018 to achieve UHC as recommended in the National Health Policy 2017

and the SDGs has been rolled out in rural and urban areas for over 10.74 crore families, with further expansion of the beneficiary base to 12 crore families based on National Food Security Act (NFSA) data. (See box for more features of the scheme) However, while the scheme is a welcome move, more needs to be done. The panel while preparing reports did extensive research, held a series of discussions with several representatives from the health sector to get the best picture. As per the report, the panel found that the quality of public health-care facilities, including Primary Health Centres, Community Health Centres, district hospitals, and tertiary care hospitals, varies widely. Also, rural areas face significant challenges in terms of shortages of healthcare providers, infrastructure, and medical supplies. Urban areas have relatively better infrastructure and services compared to rural areas, but they are often concentrated in metropolitan cities,

leading to overcrowding and long waiting times, notes the panel. "The private healthcare sector in India offers a wide range of services, from primary healthcare to high-end specialised treatments, but it can be very expensive and inaccessible to a large portion of the population." A significant proportion of the Indian population faces challenges in accessing affordable healthcare, leading to financial strain and even catastrophic OOPE, noted the panel and suggested that "Lack of health insurance coverage is a significant factor contributing to affordability issues. While government-sponsored insurance schemes exist, coverage is often limited, and many people remain uninsured. "There is a need for more healthcare infrastructure, an increase in the healthcare workforce, and reforms to reduce out-of-pocket expenses. India's healthcare access and affordability landscape is complex and marked by disparities."

In developing countries, financial constraints, coupled with the unpredictability of illness episodes, only a minority of the population resort to the ex-ante methods of insuring to meet the health shocks. The poor people who struggle to meet daily subsistence food consumption are incapable of insuring themselves from unexpected illnesses, as per the panel. In 2018, only about 14.1% of the rural and 19.1% of the urban populations had insurance coverage. Therefore people resort to ex-post coping mechanisms like using income savings, selling livestock or assets, and borrowing from family, friends or money lenders to smoothen consumption expenditure. The Committee has strongly called for increasing the Government's health expenditure from the present 2.1 percent of GDP on the lines of the objectives of the National Health Policy 2017. The Committee after intensively studying the experiences of Thailand, China, and Latin American countries found that provisions of the Affordable Care Act of the United States also known as Obama Care for inclusion in Ayushman Bharat. "By including some sections of the persons falling in APL category, the provisions for 'employer mandate' to provide health insurance to the employee and his family, subsuming of specific schemes for children and senior citizens, tax incentives and disincentives to corporate regarding healthcare are some of the measures worth including in the Ayushman Bharat Scheme and PMJAY," it said. Since the outgo of funds is immediate in insurance mode, the Government should push for payment of the premium of insurance in installments, preferably monthly/quarterly installments, the panel has suggested. To sum up, if strengthened and restructured further, the AB-PMJAY can be an important milestone in achieving the UHC. For, the goal of the UHC is to ensure that all the people receive the health services they need without financial hardship.

TEN WAYS TO KEEP THE COVID-19 AT BAY



DR SACHIN KUMAR
Senior Consultant - Pulmonology & Critical Care Medicine, Sakra World Hospital, Bengaluru

The JN.1 variant is linked to the Omicron virus, featuring some novel mutations. Current knowledge suggests a slightly increased transmission rate compared to its predecessors, indicating higher infectivity. Despite this, the variant doesn't exhibit severe symptoms. However, it is noteworthy that it evades the immune system more effectively than Omicron and other variants, contributing to its heightened transmission. In essence, JN.1 is an Omicron lineage, and while there's no need for panic, precautions similar to those for COVID-19, such as practicing cough hygiene, frequent handwashing, and taking breaks from work or school upon symptom onset, remain essential for prevention.

spread more easily but tend to cause less severe illness. This is crucial for the virus's survival and continued transmission.

- The overall fatality or lethality rate seems to be decreasing with virus evolution, indicating a trend where viruses become less deadly over time to ensure their own survival by infecting more people.
- It is emphasized that the current situation does not indicate severe outcomes, but individuals in high-risk groups should remain vigilant and take necessary precautions.
- Promote a robust immune system through a wholesome lifestyle, including a balanced diet, consistent exercise, and sufficient sleep, and seek guidance from healthcare professionals for immune-boosting strategies, particularly for cancer patients in treatment. Maintain optimal blood sugar levels by consistently monitoring and collaborating with healthcare professionals if you have diabetes. Adopt a well-balanced diet, participate in regular physical activity, and effectively manage stress for overall diabetes management.
- Maintain a hygienic home environment by regularly cleaning and sanitizing, while minimizing visitors to lower the potential for exposure.
- Follow thorough preventive measures, such as consistent 20-second handwashing, maintaining safe distances in crowded places, steering clear of close contact with those who are unwell, and wearing masks in public, ensuring proper coverage of both the nose and mouth.
- Vaccination is essential in enabling the immune system to identify and counteract harmful pathogens, averting severe illness, curbing disease transmission, and protecting both individual and community well-being. Regular health check-ups complement vaccination, ensuring ongoing awareness and education about personal health.

Preserving Fertility by Freezing Eggs

Many women are now choosing to delay motherhood to pursue their careers, education, or personal goals. Egg freezing can be the option for these new moms aspiring to have a family later in life



DR VAISHALI SHARMA

As societal norms evolve, so do family planning options. Many women are now choosing to delay motherhood to pursue their careers, education, or personal goals. While this shift is empowering, it can lead to concerns about fertility, especially as age advances. Fortunately, modern science has provided a groundbreaking solution i.e. egg freezing. However, before opting this option, it is important that one must explore the concept of advanced age pregnancy and how egg freezing is offering a promising pathway for women to extend their fertility timeline.

The Challenges of Advanced Age Pregnancy

As women age, the quantity and quality of their eggs decline. This natural process, often referred to as ovarian aging, can lead to several challenges when trying to conceive at an older age:

- Reduced Fertility: A woman's peak fertility typically occurs in her early 20s and starts to decline after the age of 30. By 35, fertility decreases

more rapidly. This decline in fertility is due to a decrease in both the number and quality of eggs.

- Increased Risk of Pregnancy Complications: Advanced maternal age (pregnancy after the age of 35) is associated with a higher risk of pregnancy complications, including gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and genetic abnormalities in the baby.
- Lower Success Rates in Assisted Reproductive Technologies: When women pursue assisted reproductive technologies like in vitro fertilization (IVF) at an older age, they may face lower success rates due to decreased egg quality.

EGG FREEZING: A GAME-CHANGER:

Egg freezing, also known as oocyte cryopreservation, is a revolutionary technique that allows women to preserve their eggs for future use.

How it works:

Egg Retrieval: Women undergo a process similar to the initial stages of

IVF, where multiple eggs are retrieved from the ovaries.

Cryopreservation: These eggs are then carefully frozen and stored at ultra-low temperatures until the woman is ready to use them.

Future Use: When a woman decides to conceive, the frozen eggs can be thawed, fertilized with sperm, and transferred to the uterus, allowing her to become pregnant.

ADVANTAGES OF EGG FREEZING

Extended Fertility: Egg freezing enables women to preserve their younger, healthier eggs, giving them a better chance of conceiving when they are at 39 and are ready.

Improved Pregnancy Outcomes: Using frozen eggs can result in healthier pregnancies and reduced pregnancy-related complications.

Flexible Timelines: Egg freezing provides the freedom to focus on personal or career goals, knowing that fertility options are secured.

Empowerment: It allows women to

take control of their reproductive future and make informed choices.

Who Should Consider Egg Freezing? Egg freezing can be an excellent option for women in the following situations:

- Career-Oriented Women: Those who wish to establish their careers before starting a family.
- Medical Reasons: Women facing medical treatments that may affect their fertility, such as chemotherapy.
- Age-Related Concerns: Women who want to delay motherhood due to age but want to secure their fertility.
- Single Women: Those who have not found a partner but want to have biological children in the future.

Is Egg Freezing a Guarantee?

It is important to note that while egg freezing offers hope, it is not a guaranteed solution. Success rates vary, and the age at which the eggs were frozen

plays a significant role. Generally, the younger the woman when she freezes her eggs, the higher the chances of success. Additionally, factors like sperm quality, uterine health, and overall health can influence outcomes.

Conclusion:

As more women choose to delay motherhood for various reasons, egg freezing emerges as a transformative solution. It provides a pathway to extend fertility, improve pregnancy outcomes, and empower women to make informed choices about when to start a family. While it may not guarantee success, it offers hope and opportunity to many women who wish to balance their life goals and family planning. If you are considering egg freezing, consult with a fertility specialist to explore this option and make an informed decision.

(The writer is MD (AIIMS), COAG (Harvard), RCOG Associate (London) and a national award-winning laparoscopic surgeon and IVF specialist.)

HEALTH NEWS

AIIMS Delhi invites heavy smokers for lung cancer research

If you are above 50, addicted to cigarette or bidi smoking and feel your lungs are healthy, then doctors at AIIMS, Delhi's Department of Pulmonary, Critical care and Sleep medicine are looking for you. The Department is conducting a pilot study to analyse the effect of low dose CT scan on early lung cancer diagnosis. Generally, after the diagnosis of lung cancer, on average, only 8 to 9 months are left for a patient, but AIIMS is now working on a technology to see if there is any way to diagnose lung cancer patients in time.



"In this study heavy smokers above 50years will undergo free low dose CT scans," Dr Ayush Goel said, adding that people who smoke a lot of cigarettes/bidi are vulnerable to lung cancer than others. According to an estimate, there were around 103371 cases of lung cancer in India in 2022.

"Most patients are diagnosed at an advanced stage leading to poor outcomes with the median overall survival being only 8.8 months. Screening using low dose computed tomography (Low Dose CT scan) among smokers may be one of the modalities that could help pick up lung cancer early," explained Dr Goel. By identifying the illness early, patients can undergo surgical intervention rather than resorting to chemotherapy. This study is for a short term defined period—only of a few months, or till the planned numbers are achieved.

The study will be conducted on 200 to 250 participants including men and women. According to Dr Goel, the median range of survival post the detection of a lung cancer is merely 8.8 months. By the time the cancer is detected, the disease spreads throughout the body AIIMS will work to see if there is any way to identify lung cancer patients on time. Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers diagnosed. In India the incidence continues to increase ranking as the 4th leading cause of cancer related death.

New class of antibiotic candidates identified

Using a type of artificial intelligence known as deep learning, MIT researchers have discovered a class of compounds that can kill a drug-resistant bacterium. In a study appearing in Nature, the researchers showed that these compounds could kill methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) grown in a lab dish and in two mouse models of MRSA infection. The compounds also show very low toxicity against human cells, making them particularly good drug candidates.

Transitioning away from fossil fuels

Among the important outcomes, COP 28 text proposes to triple renewable energy capacity and double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030.

It calls for transitioning away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this decade so as to reach net zero by 2050.

The text addresses global goals on adaptation to monitor finance, adaptation needs, and sustainable development with targets on health, water security and ecosystem restoration. On the climate finance front, the text envisages \$250 billion for mitigation, \$100 billion for adaptation and \$150 billion for loss and damage to be provided to developing nations.

The World Bank will oversee the loss and damage fund and a specific percentage of it would be provided to least developed countries and small island countries. Green Credit initiative is also conceptualised that envisages plantations on waste and degraded lands and treatment of river catchments areas.

After the confirmation by World Meteorological Organization ahead of COP 28 that 2023 is the warmest year on record, more than 1.3 degrees Celsius hotter than the pre industrial temperature (between 1850 and 1900), the agreement reached in annual climate conference at Dubai is to transition away from fossil fuels and not to phase out fossil fuels.

While some experts hail the language "transitioning away from fossil fuels" and call it historic, the others find that the language does not guarantee the emission cut.

The agreement has been adopted in the divided world, despite climatic catastrophes hitting the regions with greater frequency and fury. The agreements at earlier climate conferences at Glasgow and Sharm El Sheikh also did not adopt "phase out" of fossil fuels and instead "phase down" was adopted in both.

To me, both the languages "phase down" and

"transitioning away" look similar. As the one did not work, the other will also not work. In one of the reports IMF has said there has been an annual surge in fossil fuel subsidy, which has registered a record of \$7 trillion in 2022. Even when the energy prices were dropped during the pandemic, rich countries did not cut the subsidy.

Western countries dependent on Russian oil and gas changed over to coal after the Ukraine conflict commenced. Five developed countries namely the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom which had the moral responsibility to rapidly phase out oil and gas production are responsible for planned expansion from new oil and gas fields for next decade and half.

How can these countries advise India to cut on coal consumption?

Our greenhouse gas (GHG) emission is nearly 3 Giga tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually. We are distant third behind the two top emitters China with 14 Giga tonnes and US with 8 Giga tonnes. Our contribution to the emission is only 4 per cent of total global emissions, whereas our population is 17 per cent. There is rapid surge in our power demand and owing to such low per capita emission; we cannot sacrifice the growth and aspiration of people of India.

Ahead of Dubai conference, UNEP also brought out its Emission Gap Report saying the warming can be within 1.5 degrees Celsius only when the emissions predicted till 2030 is cut by 42 per cent. The IPCC report also adds that global mean temperature would be exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030 and 2 degrees Celsius by 2050, if current path of carbon emission and the commitment from countries to cut emission are considered.

These reports should not have been brushed aside when a global stock take was taken at the conference for the first time.

Relying on IPCC scientists, UN Secretary General



Antonio Guterres stressed for phasing out fossil fuels by countries on different dates in line with the rise in temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius to prevent low lying and island nations disappearing from the map.

His suggestion was for historical emitters to phase out first and others can follow. Several researches have been undertaken to capture carbon from atmosphere, but all these are uncertain, expensive and time consuming. The technology of sucking carbon and storing in bunker underneath sea has not picked up speed and scale so far. In a similar way employing geo-engineering technique to put a layer of sulphur as aerosol in the atmosphere for reflecting solar radiation in backward direction can only prevent warming of few countries capable of financing this expensive exercise.

Further it may take some time for green hydrogen fuel is rolled out at adequate scale. Studies have also revealed that conserving natural

forests for carbon capture is found to be a better option than fresh afforestation. COP 28 deliberations are also a testimony to all these and only course left for world leaders is to take drastic step to cut emissions.

To compensate the developing countries for the destruction caused by the warming "loss and damage" fund was agreed at COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh. This was in addition to \$100 billion pledged at Copenhagen COP 15 in 2009 to be provided by historical emitters (the developed countries) annually for adaptation, technology transfer and transition to renewable energy.

Developed countries have not fully complied with the pledges. However after a lapse of one year the loss and damage fund was made operational and all developed countries put together pledged \$ 800 million, which hardly meets 1 per cent of the cost of damage inflicted on developing countries by climate change.

In COP 28's "Nature Day" event on December 9, the floor was taken by ecologist Thomas Crowther, the former Chief Adviser of United Nations' trillion trees campaign.

In 2019, his lab at ETH Zurich found that the earth had room for additional 1.2 trillion trees, which could suck two third of the carbon historically emitted into atmosphere causing warming of the globe by 1.2 degrees Celsius. 2500 Giga tonnes of CO2 equivalent has been emitted in the atmosphere by all human activities on the globe since industrialisation began.

The study concluded that the global tree restoration is the most effective climate change solution thus far. This sparked a tree planting craze by leaders of different countries without making any efforts to cut the emission.

Climate scientists criticised Crowther's study saying that it had overestimated the land for forest restoration and the amount of carbon it could soak. Consequently the study

authors corrected the paper and said that the tree planting could be one of the effective solutions, not the only solution and 1.2 trillion trees could suck only one third of carbon in the atmosphere and not two third.

Crowther came up with another study paper last month that shows the naturally occurring forests can have greater climate impact than planted trees. In my opinion, the planting of trees is bound to sequester CO2 provided it is done with utmost care and sincerity. Without any real and effective step to cut the pollution, mere announcement of afforestation would not do the wonders.

To succeed with the afforestation on the ground is quite challenging. For instance planting in refractory areas would have absolutely no carbon sequestration potential, plantations can be damaged by fire and anthropogenic pressures, planted areas can even be occupied by local communities for agriculture

and so on.

In response to Paris climate accord, many countries pledged afforestation. If we sum up all such pledges, total area of planting to be covered is 500 million hectare, which is area equal to half the size of United States. India too announced the planting of 26 million hectare degraded and waste lands by 2030.

The areas are to be identified and verified for the suitability of plantations. Further India's target is yet to be broken in States and districts. Also when forest lands are diverted for non forest uses, the compensatory lands received in lieu are often planted up. These plantations are never quite successful.

Several evaluation reports of compensatory afforestation indicate that these plantations have shown dismal result as regards survival and growth are concerned.

There is no contradiction between Crowther's two studies. Earlier study did not take into account the reasons for low productivity of the plantations. The countries have pledged to grow plantations over millions of hectare and at the same time expanded fossil fuels production and consumption. Another example is the failure of the plantations in countries that accepted money in the carbon trade for cutting emissions. Amount was paid by developed countries where it is costly to cut emissions.

The study of Crowther was not correctly understood by world leaders. Immediately after he concluded his talk on December 9 at COP 28, UAE's Climate Change and Environment Minister Mariam Almeiri praised the lecture and boasted about the planting of 100 million ha mangroves in her country by 2030.

The planting programme was to offset the surge in emissions caused by the biggest expansion planned for state run oil firm. We have missed the path that keeps us within 1.5 degrees Celsius warming.

(The writer is retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka)

The USA, Canada, Australia, Norway and the UK which had the moral responsibility to rapidly phase out oil and gas production are responsible for planned expansion from new oil and gas fields for next decade and half. How can these countries advise India to cut on coal consumption? Our greenhouse gas emission is nearly 3 Giga tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually. We are distant third behind the two top emitters China with 14 Giga tonnes and the US with 8 Giga tonnes



BK SINGH

PERSPECTIVE

Addressing child abandonment

Child rights are a major component to decide whether a country is a safe harbour for its citizens, yet there are instances when the parent or the caretaker of the child is the one who abandons a child who lacks agency and necessary means to fend for itself. While the wordings of the current section are sufficient to address many instances, they fall short to cover under its ambit many instances that arise in the practical applicability of the section, write **CHAKSHU PUROHIT & SONAL GUPTA**

The dichotomy between the belief systems that the human moral compass should aim towards self-gain or the preservation of one another takes a significant hit each time an adult, entrusted with the care and custody of a child, abandons the child at a tender age to fend for itself without considering the effects and consequences of such actions. However, it is lesser known that such acts are punishable under Section 317 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

Dissecting Section 317 IPC Section 317 IPC renders the act of a person who is a parent or has the care of a child under the age of 12 years punishable when, by way of such act, the said parent or the one who has the care of the child "exposes" or "leaves" the child "at any place" "with the intention of wholly abandoning such child. However, the section clearly provides that if such act results in murder or culpable homicide, the present section is not a bar to the trial against the said serious offenses. This implies that if the child suffers injuries, the accused shall be tried under Section 317; however, if such abandonment by the accused has resulted in the death of

the child, the accused shall be liable for murder or culpable homicide as the case may be. The object of the section is to bring about the deterrence of abandonment or desertion by a parent or the one in care of a child of tender years in such a manner that the child, not being able to take care of itself, may run the risk of dying or being injured.

The Defence of 'To Any Place' Vis-à-vis 'To Any Person'

Interestingly, mere abandonment is not sufficient to bring home the offense under Section 317; the child must also be exposed to some danger or injury. Hence, in Queen-Empress vs Mirchia, a case before the High Court of Allahabad, wherein the mother of an illegitimate child abandoned the child to a blind woman, promising to return which she never did, was not held liable under Section 317 IPC, as the act of the mother did not "expose" and "abandon" the child "to any place," as the child was nevertheless left to the care of the blind woman. Justice Blair remarked: "It seems to me manifest that if the drafters of the Act had intended to include in the section a case like the present,

they would have used, after the expression 'in any place,' the words 'or with any person,' or some other words to that effect."

This implies that a parent or one taking care of the child has the utmost liberty to expose and abandon the child to the risk of injury/danger if such abandonment has been constructively planned in such a way that the child is with someone who, even though might not be able to take any care of the child, constitutes sufficient human contact to make the act not fall under the definition of Section 317.

Another situation can be envisioned in this scenario when a parent, with an intention to expose and leave its child below 12 years of age, asks someone else to conduct the final act of exposing and abandoning the child to any place; in this situation, one might take the defence that such another person only held the child for a mere time gap of 2 minutes and was never "having the care of such a child" and was holding the child solely upon the instruction and objective to leave the child at the said place by the parent. It is interesting to ponder this given scenario.

To settle the issue, the High Court of Bombay in the case of Emperor vs Blanche Constant Cripps Anr. rightly held as follows: "We cannot help feeling, however, that in cases of this kind, any person receiving an infant from its mother on the distinct understanding, as in this case, that the mother never desired or wished to have the child back again, must in law be regarded as a person having the care of that child until he or she had transferred it to the care and custody of some other person or institution."

Yet another instance can be thought of when it is difficult to determine whether the exposure caused was sufficient or bore any contributory nexus to the death of the child. This instance was dealt with by the High Court of Madras in the case of King-Emperor vs Antakke. In this regard, the High Court held that the consequence of abandonment/leaving is not a sine qua non to attract the provisions of Section 317. The Court held: "The manner of the exposure or leaving and the consequence likely to ensue from it are not essential ingredients of the offence under Indian law, though they may often be properly taken

into consideration in estimating its gravity and in apportioning the sentence."

What does English Law say? The parallel legislation in English jurisprudence is Section 27 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861, which reads as follows:

Whosoever shall unlawfully abandon or expose any child, being under the age of two years, whereby the life of such child shall be endangered, or the health of such child shall have been or shall be likely to be permanently injured, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and being convicted thereof shall be liable to be kept in penal servitude.

Now, there are mainly three points of distinction that can be drawn between Indian and English legislation regarding the said offence. Firstly, it is obvious, that the Indian law is applicable regarding offences committed against children up to the age of 12 years, whereas the ambit of age is merely 2 years in its English counterpart. However, the second and third points of distinction need to be studied with depth to understand Indian Law with its fullest clarity and to determine whether any changes are required in our legislation. As

per English Law, the consequences of abandonment and exposure are sine qua non to attract the said crime, whereas in its Indian counterpart, and as rightly mentioned in King-Emperor vs Antakke, the consequences of abandonment and exposure are not essential ingredients of the said offence. Another notable point of distinction is that the words "at any place" are missing in English legislation, which automatically widens the ambit of the offence and shall incorporate the term "to any person," as was rightfully mentioned in Queen-Empress vs Mirchia.

In this regard, the High Court of Allahabad in Queen-Empress vs Mirchia, while distinguishing both legislations, fairly noted: It differs materially in language from the section which is in force in England, and which became law about the same time that the Indian Penal Code came into force. Their objects were apparently similar, though not identical. The words of the English Act, Section 27, are... Those words differ materially from the words of the Indian Penal Code section. The provisions of the English Act are limited

to children under two years of age, while in India, they are extended to children under twelve years of age. The English Act does not define the mode of such abandonment or exposure, and no doubt the word 'expose' read with the word 'abandon' would probably be held to be used in a wider and less literal sense than the words of the Indian Penal Code.

What changes must be introduced to Section 317?

Imagine a situation where a fully conscious parent with an intention to expose and abandon the child leaves a severely ailing child in the care and custody of such another person who is three years old or a lunatic, knowing fully that such another person will not be able to provide for such ailing child in any manner whatsoever be covered under the ambit of Section 317? The answer is NO. This implies that the section should clearly address this situation by not only adding the words "to any person" along with "to any place" but also shall add a few more words which shall clarify the desired position, and the most common defense taken by the accused that the child was not

abandoned and exposed at any place but was left with a person can be ruled out. Additionally, the ambit of age can be safely reduced to an age wherein the child lacks any agency of itself. For example, the age can be reduced to 5 years as suggested by the Law Commission of India in its 42nd report.

Way forward

Child rights are a major component to decide whether a country is a safe harbour for its citizens, yet there are instances when the parent or the caretaker of the child is the one who abandons a child who lacks agency and necessary means to fend for itself. While the wordings of the current section are sufficient to address many instances, they fall short to cover under its ambit many instances that arise in the practical applicability of the section. The changes suggested are highly material to the successful practical implication of the section and hope is posed on the legislature to understand the gravity of the situation and make necessary amends.

(The authors are advocates at the Supreme Court)



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week, prioritize clearing any debts or loans. You may be approached for financial help by friends or family for important personal events. Luckily, you're well-placed to offer support, whether financial or emotional. Consider participating in charitable activities too. Your financial stability inspires grand life aspirations. However, be wary of getting lost in unrealistic dreams, especially midweek. Your desires might span from fine dining to luxurious experiences, but a lack of focus could lead to dissatisfaction. Stay grounded and set clear, achievable goals to avoid this pitfall. Achieving a balance of health, wealth, and happiness is within your grasp. Maintain a positive and grateful attitude, and you'll find contentment and success in various life aspects.

Lucky number 12 | **Lucky colour** Turquoise
Lucky day Friday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

Your nature is one of strong leadership and a desire for things to unfold according to your vision. Your meticulous attention to detail often surpasses even your own high standards. You bring a dynamic and active presence to any environment, filled with a sense of purpose and responsiveness. However, be aware that an excess of intensity can lead to disagreements, creating a rift in relationships and potentially leading to unpleasant situations. This might result in colleagues or peers either avoiding interaction or engaging in heated discussions with you. There could be instances of disagreements or differing viewpoints. It's important to channel your abundant energy into constructive activities. You are blessed with robust health, a notable position, and considerable influence. You stand out in competitive scenarios, but remember, fostering a harmonious atmosphere could further enhance your achievements.

Lucky number 15 | **Lucky colour** Beige
Lucky day Wednesday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you may face a health setback, possibly an injury or minor surgery, necessitating a break from your usual activities. Medical care and attention will be important. This period also presents an opportunity to deepen your spiritual connections. Engaging in spiritual practices and exploring the realms of mystical sciences can strengthen your faith and help regain your inner balance. You'll find yourself embracing a path filled with love, humanity, and kindness, guided by a deep trust in the divine. Family bonds will grow stronger, and you'll find yourself sharing more with your spouse. Some may find solace in religious texts or in worship. A healing atmosphere will envelop you throughout the week, and by its end, you'll return to your regular life rhythm.

Lucky number 28 | **Lucky colour** Saffron
Lucky day Wednesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week, you're likely to step into a role of influence, showcasing your ability to lead and inspire. Your organizational and managerial talents are at their peak, positioning you as a key figure in your professional circle. You have a natural knack for understanding and addressing the needs of those around you with empathy. However, be mindful of a faction that may not align with your style. This group could harbor intentions to challenge your efforts or take credit for your successes. As the week unfolds, a sense of weariness might emerge, burdened by the sheer volume of responsibilities. It's crucial to embrace the art of delegation. Sharing tasks not only lightens your load but also fosters a more collaborative and efficient work environment. This approach can lead to greater productivity and team harmony.

Lucky number 22 | **Lucky colour** Coral
Lucky day Monday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This period brings you both financial and emotional rewards. You'll find yourself feeling more secure as prosperity flows from multiple sources, affirming your success in the material realm. This brings a sense of joy, enhanced by pleasures, comforts, and a satisfying family life. As the week progresses, your focus shifts towards achieving emotional fulfillment. This could manifest in positive communications, potentially involving romantic commitments or deepening connections with a loved one. However, a phase of uncertainty may soon emerge, marked by confusion and a noticeable decrease in warmth and affection in various aspects of your life. As the week concludes, you'll find yourself striving to restore balance, adapting your beliefs to the evolving circumstances. Embracing change in your lifestyle and mindset becomes crucial, equipping you to face new challenges with confidence.

Lucky number 11 | **Lucky colour** Magenta
Lucky day Friday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you may find yourself feeling more sentimental and emotional. Various issues, not aligning with your expectations, could lead to emotional upheaval. Despite your eagerness to offer care and affection, circumstances might not be conducive, and health concerns could add to your worries. Women, in particular, might face issues like menstrual irregularities or thyroid imbalances. Financially, it's a time for cautious decision-making and budget management. Mid-week calls for a strategic and organized approach to life's various aspects, including health and finances. Adopting a balanced diet and disciplined lifestyle is beneficial. As the week progresses, expect improvements in your career, leading to financial growth. Income may increase from multiple sources, bringing a sense of satisfaction, joy, and well-being. Additionally, plans for major investments, like purchasing a house, could come to fruition during this period.

Lucky number 17 | **Lucky colour** Green
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

You may encounter challenges at work, including conflicts and disagreements. A colleague, perceiving themselves as superior, might create difficulties for you, leading to a tense atmosphere marked by criticism and competitive tensions. Midweek, you might find yourself influenced by someone with a negative outlook, lacking in moral values. This could pressure you into making choices that clash with societal norms and your own ethical standards. However, your determination and confidence will guide you through these trials. As the week progresses, your steadfastness and commitment to truth will lead to success and recognition. You'll earn respect and admiration, enhancing your professional standing. Despite moments of uncertainty, your integrity will see you through, ending the week on a high note with a sense of accomplishment and heightened esteem.

Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Lavender
Lucky day Saturday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

In the upcoming week, you'll find yourself in an enviable position, where recognition, success, and life's pleasures are readily accessible. Your life seems to be flourishing, much like a garden of roses under a favorable sky, and you revel in this glory. This pinnacle of achievement is a testament to your hard work, determination, and some divine favor. Your fairness, generosity, and strong leadership qualities shine through, reflecting your pure and selfless nature. Your compassionate approach and guidance win over many, making you a respected figure both at home and in your professional sphere. However, as the week draws to a close, be mindful of potential financial setbacks or health issues. It's a time to be cautious and proactive in prevention. Keeping this in mind will help you navigate through any challenges that arise.

Lucky number 13 | **Lucky colour** Olive
Lucky day Tuesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

As the week begins, you'll face challenging decisions requiring a firm and impartial approach. Emotions must be set aside, as your choices could significantly impact your life or that of someone close. In your professional sphere, competition for positions may arise; it's best to avoid confrontations and adopt a more yielding attitude. Midweek, you might encounter criticism or disapproval from a superior, leading to feelings of demotivation. This is a good time to engage in yoga, meditation, or other spiritual practices to regain confidence and mental equilibrium. By the week's end, the atmosphere shifts positively. The negative aspects begin to dissipate, opening up possibilities for romantic or matrimonial proposals. Additionally, anticipate receiving some encouraging news, further enhancing the week's conclusion.

Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** Mustard
Lucky day Monday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week starts with a burst of energy, pushing you to act decisively in your career. An important opportunity demands your immediate focus and skillful action. Progress hinges on your ability to act, so sharpen your approach and communication for success. Midweek, expect significant financial transactions. You'll feel a strong urge to help others, but keep an eye on your emotions as they might sway your decisions. As the week closes, a promising partnership or agreement is likely. This period also enhances personal connections. You'll find joy in deepening relationships or possibly starting new ones. Express your feelings, perhaps through thoughtful gestures. Balancing your practical and emotional sides is key during this time.

Lucky number 7 | **Lucky colour** Teal
Lucky day Thursday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

Your days are becoming increasingly hectic, with work requiring your full dedication. Similarly, students are feeling the pressure of their studies and could use a break. For both groups, rest is essential now. It's a time for healing, rejuvenating, and recharging to tackle future challenges. Overexertion could lead to emotional and mental strain, possibly making you irritable. Mid-week, some may experience health issues, such as menstrual discomfort. Prioritizing your health, including regular check-ups and rest, is crucial. Be aware of potential conflicts or disagreements with superiors at work. Managing your emotions and focusing on rejuvenation is key. This period calls for a clear division between work and relaxation, and from a busy routine to moments of leisure.

Lucky number 21 | **Lucky colour** Indigo
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week, you're brimming with youthful energy and impressive work potential. However, without clear goals or focused thoughts, your efforts may fall short. Set definitive targets and channel your creative energy constructively. Remember, your family also needs your attention and care. Mid-week, some may face separations or financial setbacks, potentially straining relationships. Your inner strength and vitality will be crucial supports during this time. Fortunately, the end of the week brings new opportunities, though your intense focus on personal projects might cause you to miss them. You'll find greater interest in conversations, travel, and activities that cater to your emotional well-being. For those in relationships, this is a time of growing mutual understanding. Additionally, expect wealth to flow in from various sources.

Lucky number 4 | **Lucky colour** Sea Green
Lucky day Thursday

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BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Wilfully adapt to the callings of changing times

Every being is born with a bag full of Karmic carryover from the past in the form of thought seeds parked in mind - both good and bad. That defines how we perceive things, react, and respond to the callings of life. As the planets and astronomical referral points progress with time, in phases both sides of karmic imprint find reflection. In astrology's scheme of things, whenever progression, transit, and dasha sequence become adverse, unworthy thought seeds gain ground when they raise their head. They overtake the thought process so much that the positives don't get enough of mind-space necessary to play their part. The person then becomes due for pains and suffering. Here is the case of a person with dramatic talent who has been going through intermittent bouts of depression for the last 7 years. He has been under psychiatric care, but in vain. In a state of desperation, he came seeking

answer: "Is there any scope to come out of this Karmic bind, which I believe seems to be at the root of my problem?"

Well, there is nothing like a karmic bind you would need to transcend for a smooth run of life. Of course, karmic carryover does point to inherent tendencies we carry by birth. If, however, we identify and acknowledge our fault lines through self-reflection, we could make amends through conscious efforts. The events encountered are not defined in finite terms. There are probable choices in hand. What comes into play is subject to what type of ground we offer. "But how can we change the consequences of our own doing or undoing?" He asked. Well, we are subject to laws of Karma because we enjoy the privilege to guide our actions by choice. But choice option carries equal probability of use and misuse, with related bearing on the quality of life



we become due for. Owning up responsibility and bear with the consequences of the choices made, therefore, becomes imperative. But here again, choice option also enjoins upon you with the capability

to make conscientious choice to make amends through fresh educative inputs.

A look at your horoscope reveals that it doesn't reflect indwelling sense of fear and insecurity necessary to make one susceptible to this malady. But during weak moments, your illusionary beliefs, and perceptions, make you crazy when things don't move on expected lines. That traps your mind into self-created thought web, ordinarily difficult to escape its limit. You end up thoroughly confused when your sense of reason takes a back seat, and your thought process becomes incoherent. Had the seeds of depression been deeply embedded, it would have been long drawn affair. Therefore, life had a smooth run till things moved on expected lines. It was only when progressed Sun closed with natal Saturn around 57th year that ground got laid down for depression. Following which, your confidence level and will power

took a downturn. Also, it became difficult for you to digest unwanted changes coming your way. Caught up with assumed fear about impending change for which you were not prepared, depression set in. You need to appreciate that nature is in a state of constant flux, with related bearing on our life. We need to adapt with the callings of emerging times. Should we resist change, we become a victim of our own making.

In so far as your thought trends are concerned, the lagna lord Venus, is conjunct mind signifying Moon. The two planets read together signify your emotional frame of mind. Both are ill-disposed to the Sun, Mars, and mischievous Neptune. That in the first place makes you emotionally volatile. It makes you too much touchy and sensitive. Consequently, you get over exercised even on trivial issues. You keep internally mulling on them for long. Second, you are inherently

vulnerable to stress. Third, you are irritable and subject to uncontrolled mood swing. What further complicates your thought process is that you are stuck to self-defined idealistic illusionary perceptions and beliefs, distanced from ground realities. If that would not be enough, lagna sub-lord Saturn occupies the 8th house identified with difficulties, which makes you susceptible to become victim of your own making.

"What's the way forward now?" He asked. Developing awareness about living truths of life alone can resolve your problem. Learn it from a Guru. Meditate on the educative inputs offered by him, for it to make it to inner realms of mind. It will then spontaneously reflect in your conduct. That will help regain normal self. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

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