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NEW DELHI, SUNDAY DECEMBER 24, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹4



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Drone attack hits ship off **Gujarat coast**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India dispatched its war-ships 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 Liberianflagged 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

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 prior-

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

RNI No. 53466/91, REGD. No. DL (C)-05/1219/2021-23 Posted at DRMS Delhi 6

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

 $S^{\text{etting an eye on the much}}_{\text{awaited grand inaugura-}}$ tion 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 'mis-

sion 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 meet-

ing, 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

will win more seats in 2024 if we work on a mission mode. Continued on Page 2

had won 303 seats in 2019 and

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 traf-

Mandir was vandalised with

The plane that took off from

India gets Consular access to detained flyers

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 northeastern 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.



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J&K Govt announces aid, jobs to kin of 3 civilians found dead

MOHIT KANDHARI JAMMU

Simmering tensions between the angry residents and the civil administration were diffused in the Buffliaz area of Surankote tehsil in Poonch district late Saturday afternoon after the Union Territory administration announced adequate compensation and jobs to the kin of the three civilians who were found dead under mysterious circumstances in Poonch district late Friday evening. The deceased civilians were

identified as Safeer Hussain (43), Mohd Showket (27) and Shabir Ahmad (32) of Topa Peer village of Buffliaz. The bodies of the civilians were laid to rest at their ancestral graveyard in Buffliaz Saturday afternoon. Meanwhile, massive combing and search operations continued for the second consecutive day in the Dera Ki

the perpetrators behind the ambush on two army vehicles in which four soldiers were killed in action and three others were injured.

The spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir government in a brief statement posted on X (earlier Twitter) announced, 'The death of three civilians was reported yesterday in Baffliaz of Poonch District.

The medico-legal formalities were conducted and the appro-priate authority has initiated legal action in this matter. The government has announced compensation for each of the deceased. Further, the Government has also announced compassionate appointments to the next of kin of each deceased".

The Indian army also maintained that the matter is under investigation and the army conduct of investigations.

Search operations by the Security Forces are continuing in the area of operations after the incident of 21 Dec 23. Reports have been received regarding three civilian deaths in the area. The matter is under investigation. Indian Army stands committed to extending full support and cooperation in the conduct of investigations", the Indian Army said in a message on X (earlier Twitter).

During the day the mobile Internet services also remained suspended in the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri to contain the spread of rumors and prevent further flare-ups amid the volatile atmosphere in the region. Senior civil and police authorities from Jammu also rushed to Surankote to handle the crisis. Divisional



General of Police Anand Jain were both camping in the region and interacted with the residents to diffuse the ten-

Additional police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed in sensitive pockets of the districts to maintain peace. Soon after the recovery of three dead bodies of civilians in Surankote late Friday evening a large number of people started protest demonstrations alleging foul play behind the mysterious circumstances under which they were found

The residents and relatives of the deceased alleged they were among those people who were picked up by the Army for questioning in connection with Thursday's ambush. They also alleged that four others were admitted to a government hospital with "torture injuries".

killed as security forces guarding the International Border (IB) thwarted an infiltration attempt early Saturday morning. White Knight Corps posted a message on X (earlier Twitter), "}

Infiltration bid foiled in IB sector of Khour, Akhnoor. The suspected move of four terrorists was seen through our own surveillance devices on the night of 22/23 Dec 23. Effective fire brought down. Terrorists were seen dragging one body back across the IB".

In a separate incident two more civilian workers were charred to death in a fire inside an Army camp in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district on Saturday, police said.

Parshotam (55) of Samba and Som Raj (45) of Kathua were running a tailor shop in the Arnoda Gatt Army camp and were caught in the fire caused

due to some snag in a kerosene heater, a police official said. The fire was reported at around 2.30 am, the official said, adding that the charred bodies of both the workers were recovered from the scene and are being handed over to their next of kin for last rites.

Expressing concern over the situation unfolding in border districts of Rajouri and Poonch, Former Chief Minister and President of Peoples Democratic Party Mehbooba Mufti Saturday said that reports of civilian killings which followed the ambush of an operational team of security forces were appalling and need to be

thoroughly probed. Mufti demanded an immediate and impartial probe into the alleged deaths of three civilians, highlighting their mutilated bodies and reports of widespread torture allegedly inflicted on the detained villagers.

Forces scornful towards India culture should be retaliated against: Dhankhar

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday said a small section of people in the country had no respect for its 5,000-year-old cultural legacy and asked those who take pride in it to retaliate against such forces.

"It is a matter of concern that a section of people in the country who are not many, have no respect for India's 5,000-year-old culture or its glorious past. They have a scornful attitude towards it and keep tarnishing the country's image. They are either misled or misguided. They deserve to be retaliated against by people who take pride in our own culture and roots," Dhankhar said at a programme held at the Gurukul Kangri University in Haridwar.

He said some misguided people in this "great country" cannot swallow the progress it has made in recent years.

"They are against the inclusive education policy in mother tongue. The day is not far away when all education in

India will be given in mother tongue," he said.

Describing the Gurukul Kangri (deemed to be) University as the epicentre of Indian nationalism and a symbol of the essence of its cultural ethos, he said some western universities are engaged in tarnishing India's development journey and asked the university to counter this.

"You have the scholarship and erudition that can counter this smear campaign," he said. Dhankhar said India will have

wants to regain its position as the Vishwaguru. The new National Education Policy is based on taking pride in the country's cultural roots,

to return to the Vedas if it

He said the 5000-year-old culture of the country which is at the core of its identity was beautifully showcased during the G20 summit held in Delhi and the entire world glimpsed it with curiosity and admira-

He said the wheel of the

New Delhi against the "auto-

cratic, dictatorial" BJP regime

at the Center. The CPI-M

comrades are hand in glove

with the Congress in its bid to

defeat Narendra Modi

Government in the upcoming

Many Congress MPs includ-

ing K Sudhakaran and some

of the party MLAs suffered

minor injuries when the cops

and CPI-M activists lunched

physical assaults on the

Sudhakaran, who complained

of body pain was removed to

a hospital for first aid,

described Vijayan as the most

hated chief minister Kerala

has seen in its history.

"Vijayan is worse than Adolf

Hitler and has to be subject-

ed to prosecution for the

cruel manhunt ordered by

water canon. Jeby Mather MP

following the police assaults

Vijayan, in his interaction

with the media said that there

were many conspirators and criminals masquerading as

journalists. "We have solid

proof of the illegal relations

between the Congress crimi-

nals and these fake journal-

ists. Hence the police has

filed criminal cases against

them," said Karana Bhoothan,

as the chief minister prefers to

be addressed.

on her.

him," said Sudhakaran.

Lok Sabha elecgion.

demonstrators.

Konark Sun Temple and the statue of Natraj which symbolise India's ancient culture was appreciated by the world leaders who gathered in Delhi for the summit.

for the summit.

India is gradually coming out of the "shackles of its colonial mindset", he said, adding that the three new legislations passed by Parliament to replace the IPC, CrPC and the Evidence Act are a reflection of this changing mindset.

The system of penal law introduced by the British has been turned into a legal system of justice," he said.

The statue of Subhas Chandra Bose at the India Gate, the conversion of Raj Path to Kartavya Path show India's growing faith in itself and its own icons.

He extended an invitation to the students of Gurukul Kangri University to visit the new Parliament building in Delhi, saying they would be his guests. "A look at the new Parliament building will show you what a positive change has come about in the country under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," the vice president said.

Fresh ED summons to Tejashwi in land for jobs case

The Enforcement Directorate has issued a fresh summons to Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav in the railway land-for-jobs scam case, asking him to appear on January 5, official sources said Saturday.

He was earlier called to appear on December 22 but the 34-year-old skipped the summons. He had called the ED notice a routine affair.

In the same case, his father and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad Yadav has been asked to depose on December 27 at the ED headquarters in Delhi.

The alleged scam pertains to the period when Prasad was the railway minister in the UPA-1 government. "There is nothing new in the

summons. All these agencies -- ED, CBI and I-T department -- have summoned me so many times in the past and I have duly appeared every

But now it seems to have become routine," the RJD leader told reporters on December 21 in Patna.

He was one questioned by the ED in this case on April 11. It is understood that the summons come following the



close associate" of the Lalu Prasad family, Amit Katyal. He was arrested by the ED in It is alleged that from 2004 to

2009, several people were appointed to Group "D" positions in various zones of the Indian Railways in return for land they transferred to the family members of Prasad, the then railway minister, and a linked company named A K Infosystems Private Limited.

Katyal was the director of this company when it acquired land from candidates "on behalf" of Lalu Prasad, the statement.

ED had earlier claimed in a The registered address of to Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family members," the agency had alleged. "Several other lands were also

acquired by Amit Katyal in the said company in return for giving undue favours by Lalu Prasad Yadav when he was minister of railways," the agency said. After acquiring the land, it

said, shares of the said company were "transferred" to the family members of Lalu Prasad in 2014.

The ED case, filed under the criminal sections of the PMLA, stems from a complaint lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Prasad, his wife Rabri Devi and Tejashwi Yadav were

Expectant

the ramp

mothers walk

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■

fashion show was held at

A fashion show was
Motherhood Hospitals,

Sector 57 here in which

expectant mothers walked on

the ramp to showcase the beauty of the journey of motherhood they are on. Exclusive dress designs were from Sneha Rateria of Ahens Fashion at the show which was choreographed by leading choreographer Kashika, leading to a celebration of beauty, style, and happiness. Equally enchanting was Baby Show—a celebration of innocence, giggles, and sheer cuteness! Our little stars lightened up the day with their charm and irresistible smiles,

that new life brings. The fashion show was not merely a display of clothing;

reminding us of the magic

it was a heartfelt tribute to the granted bail by a trial court in strength, resilience, and grace the company is D-1088, New Friends Colony, New Delhi, that define the journey of October after the CBI filed a chargesheet against them in pregnancy, said the organiswhich is the house belonging this case.

Nava Kerala Sadass ends

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Nava Kerala Sadass CPI-M sponsored by the Government of Kerala) led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and was accompanied by his council of ministers including the latter's son-inlaw Muhammed Riyaz and health minister Veena George culminated at the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram late Saturday evening.

To be known to all that Mr. Mahender Parkash Aggarwal S/o Sh. Sham Sunder Aggarwal R/o - J/107, First Floor, Vikas Puri, New Delhi-110018 is the Lessee/owner of Plot No.A-32 situated at Naraina Industrial Area Phase-II, New Delhi vide File No. FSA (42) well-by 167/IND. We lost/misplaced.Our Original Perpetual Lease Deed of the above said property An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, vide LR No. 1259496 dated 21/12/2023. Any person claiming any right, interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9899326640 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to Dy. Director (Indl), or Asstt, Director (Indl) ABlock, First Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi se-II.New Delhi vide File No.F6A (42 PUBLIC NOTICE

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The last day of the Sadass saw the CPI-M and police beating up Congress leaders all over Thiruvananthapuram who were demonstrating against

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Date for submission of tender and 28.12.2023 Opening of tender Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender Above tender available on GEM site can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form Bid No.GEM/2023/B/4361517 Dated: 18.12.2023

Pilot appointed Congress general assembly constituencies in secretary incharge the State which send 20 representatives to the Lok Sabha. in Chhattisgarh disaster which struck the people of Kerala the day it was PIONEER NEWS SERVICE launched from Manjeswaram in Kasaragod," said K Muraleedharan, MP and one **NEW DELHI**

The Congress on Saturday of the aspirants for the Chief Minister's post in the eventu-1 appointed Sachin Pilot the general secretary in-charge of ality of a Congress win in the Chhattisgarh and Avinash 2026 Assembly Election. Interestingly, the Congress Pande the general secretary inand CPI-M members of parcharge of Uttar Pradesh, liament were seen rubbing replacing Kumari Selja and shoulders and hugging each Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, other in Friday's protest respectively. march at Jantar Mantar in

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will now be a general secretary "without any assigned portfolio", according to a statement issued by the Congress.

The appointments come two days after a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), party's highest decision-making body, which was chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and attended by senior leaders, including Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

Pilot, a former deputy chief minister of Rajasthan, replaces Kumari Selja, who has now been given the charge as general secretary in-charge of Uttarakhand, the statement

Congress leader GA Mir is the general secretary in-charge of Jharkhand with the additional charge of West Bengal, it said.

The police and CPI-M Deepa Dasmunshi has been activists were seen targeting appointed the general secretary of Kerala and Lakshadweep the Congress workers with with additional charge of and chief of Mahila Congress Telangana. Kerala unit was seen weeping Senior leaders Jairam Ramesh,

K C Venugopal, Mukul Wasnik and Randeep Singh Surjewala remain the general secretary in-charges of communication, organisation, Gujarat and Karnataka, respectively.

Jitendra Singh, who is the general secretary in-charge of Assam, was given the additional charge of Madhya Pradesh, while Deepak Babaria holds the charge of Delhi and the additional charge of Haryana, the statement said.

Hindu temple defaced in...

India has been asking its partner countries such as Canada, the UK, and the US not to give space to "extremist Khalistani ide-

Khalistan supporters have increased their anti-India activities after the death of Canada-based Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India's consulate in San Francisco in July came under an attack from Khalistan supporters who tried to set the diplomatic facility on fire.

The vandalism of the temple in Newark came close on the heels of allegations of an Indian official's involvement in a conspiracy to assassinate a separatist Sikh leader in the US.

The Indian official has been linked by American prosecutors to an individual accused of conspiring to assassinate Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States.

India has expressed concern over the matter and stated that appropriate action will be taken following the conclusions of an

investigative panel examining the allega-

Meanwhile, talking about the arrest of Nikhil Gupta in the Czech Republic over an accusation that he was planning to assassinate Pannun in collaboration with an Indian official, Jaishankar said the Indian Embassy was provided consular access to him (by that country's Government). "Whenever an Indian citizen is arrested, we seek consular access for their care, which we have received thrice,"

BJP aims for big 2024...

From Page 1

We have to reach every home with our ideology and historic works of BJP Governments and make Modi Prime Minister again in 2024 with an unprecedented majority," Shah later posted on X about his address at the meet. Since coming to power at the

Centre in 2014, the BJP has

positive answers to Opposition's negative propa-

ganda with facts"

continuously striven to raise its vote share to 50 per cent in State Assembly polls and sucthe Centre. ceeded in this feat in many elections. Shah, like Modi a day before, underlined the primacy of organisation in elections and said it should score such an "overwhelming" win that the Opposition thinks many times before challenging it, sources said. The Prime Minister emphasised the need to reach out to women, youth, farmers and the poor — whom he has often described as the four biggest "castes". He also advised the party's top brass to "express views aggressively on social media" and "give

connect a maximum number of these people with the ongoing 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, which aims at saturation of his Government's flagship welfare schemes. The sources said the party's top brass did not set any specific seat target but emphasised on ensuring a win which should be bigger than its 2019 performance when the BJP had bagged 303 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats. They accused the Opposition of resorting to lies and spreading fake narratives but expressed confidence that people would reward Modi with a third straight term at Top party leaders, in their

speeches, asked BJP functionaries to strengthen its booth committees everywhere to ensure that its local cadres reach more and more people. The BJP's big win in the recent Assembly polls also came up for praise in the meeting, with the party unit presidents of the three Hindi heartland states of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh speaking on the vic-

Modi's leadership, the appeal of his Government's welfare schemes and the strength of its organisational machinery were cited as big reasons for the win. Different 'morchas' of

He asked party leaders to the party spoke about their upcoming programmes in the run-up to the polls. On Friday, Modi addressed a

closed-door meeting of the BJP's national office-bearers as the party took stock of its organisational preparedness and chalked out upcoming programmes for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. There was no official word on what Modi or Nadda said during the closeddoor meeting but, sources said, the general message to the party leaders was to intensify their outreach around the government's good works in the over three months left before the elections are announced.

The positive feedback about the ongoing Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, a flagship Central Government programme aimed at ensuring saturation coverage of its numerous welfare schemes, was also talked about at the Friday meeting. The BJP has asked its members to ensure that people in maximum numbers benefit from it.

The poll results, especially the BJP's sweep of the three Hindi-speaking states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, have boosted the party's morale as it looks to retain power at the Centre for a third straight

Drone attack hits ship off Gujarat...

From Page 1

The Indian Navy's P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft managed to establish communication with the distressed vessel after taking off from INS Hansa naval air base in Goa. The Indian Navy warship is

moving towards the vessel and is expected to reach the merchant ship in the next few hours, as per the latest information.

The suspected drone attack comes in the backdrop of missile and drone attacks in the Red Sea by Houthis, reportedly backed by Iran. The Houthis claim they are in support of Palestinians in the ongoing Israel-Hamas con-

evacuation of an injured sailor from a hijacked Malta-flagged cargo vessel. Six pirates had reportedly

Incidentally, on Monday, the

Indian Navy assisted in the

boarded the ship, the MV Ruen, in the Arabian Sea.

Gupta appeals to LG for swift action on SC desealing order

BJP MLA and former Delhi state unit president Vijendra Gupta met Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to discuss the urgent implementation of a recent Supreme Court Judicial Committee's order. The judgment mandates the de-sealing of properties in various areas of Delhi, including Defence Colony, South Extension-1, GK-1, Hauz Khas, and others, which were sealed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for violating building bylaws.

During his meeting, Gupta emphasized the prolonged distress and hardship faced by hundreds of property owners due to the sealing of the first



and second floors of several local shopping complexes. "The recent decision by the judicial committee offers significant situation, Gupta has urged the

ing a vital turn in their extensive struggle for justice," he said. Highlighting the urgency of the Supreme Court's directives. He called for the MCD to fully comply with the order, ensuring immediate and effective action in de-sealing the affected properties.

"The meeting with the LG is a crucial step towards restoring the faith of Delhi's citizens in our justice and administrative systems," stated MLA Gupta in his letter to the LG. He added, "It is essential that we act quickly to uphold the rule of law and alleviate the difficulties faced by our citizens."

Gupta further emphasised that the implementation of this directive is not only a legal obligation but also a moral imperative to support the citi-

Days after marriage, motivational speaker faces domestic violence charges

This is not the first time entrepreneur and motivational speaker Vivek Bindra is in the news for the wrong reasons. Already involved in an online feud with another motivational speaker, Bindra is accused of domestic violence against his wife and left her partially deaf, just a few days after his marriage. A case has been registered against him by his brother-in-law in Noida's Sector

According to the police, the complaint was filed by Vaibhav Kwatra, the brother of Bindra's wife, Yanika, who claimed that the incident took place in the Supernova West Residency in Noida's Sector 94, where the couple resides. The police said they are investigating the alle-



upon probe.

In the early hours of December 7, a heated altercation erupted between Bindra and his mother, Prabha. What began as a family dispute took a distressing turn when Yanika stepped in to mediate, only to get physically assaulted by Bindra, police said. The assault has allegedly left deep wounds on Yanika's body, as captured in a video that has since gone viral on social media. A video of Yanika showing her injuries from a hospital bed has also gone viral one social media. In the purported video, she is seen showing her injuries to cameras and claiming the influencer slapped him some 30-40 times. She also claimed she is unable to hear from her left ear. Another video, shot in the early

hours outside the society gate, shows Bindra trying to persuade his wife to come inside.

Bindra could not be contacted immediately for his response. The FIR was lodged at the Sector 126 police station on December 14 after a complaint by Vaibhav Kwatra, brother of Bindra's wife Yanika. Bindra and Yanika got married on December 6 and were living in a posh society in Sector 94 here, he said.

"On the morning of December 7, my brother-in-law Vivek ter Yanika intervened in this matter, my brother-in-law locked the room with my sister, abused her and beat her a lot, due to which she has wounds all over her body, she is unable to hear, and her hair were also torn out," Kwatra claimed.

"Due to the head wound, she was feeling quite dizzy. She was being treated at Kailash Deepak Hospital in Delhi," he claimed. Kwatra also alleged that during the fight Bindra broke his sister's mobile phone. He urged the police to take strict action in the case. A senior police officer said on the basis of the complaint, an FIR has been lodged in the case under Indian Penal Code sections 323 (causing hurt), 504 (insult to provoke breach of peace), 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt), and 427 (mis-

AAP vs BJP after LG recommends CBI probe into nonstandard drugs in hospitals

Political slugfest has erupted between the AAP and the BJP, after Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended a CBI inquiry into the alleged procurement and supply of "non-standard" drugs in Delhi government hospitals.

In a note to Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar, the Lt Governor mentioned that it is concerning that these medicines are being given to lakhs of patients. Drugs such as Amlodipine, Levetiracetam

Pantoprazole failed in both government as well as private labs. Further, Cephalexin, Dexamethasone failed in pri-

According to Vigilance Department report, at least 10 percent sample lifted by the department failed in laboratory test and found to be spurious /not of standard quality. These drugs, procured by the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) under the Delhi Health Services (DHS), were supplied

and may also have been supplied to the 'Mohalla Clinics', the Lt Governor said in his note. "It is with a sense of deep concern that I have perused the file. I am, to say the least, anguished at the fact that lakhs of hapless people and patients are being supplied fake drugs that have failed quality standard tests," read the note to

The move comes after, the Drug Controller under Health Department, GNCTD, on the basis of complaints regarding sub-standard medicines being supplied in Delhi Government hospitals, randomly collected the drug samples from these hospitals and sent them to the approved government and private labs for testing. There were complaints of sub-standard medicines being supplied in Delhi government hospitals. Subsequently, samples were collected from the government hospitals. The complainants said that these "frequentlyused" medicines given in these hospitals were ineffective on

The reports of the labs were sent by the Drug Controller and the Department of Health for further necessary action to the Directorate of Vigilance (DoV). The DoV, based on test reports, found that more than 10% of the drug/medicine samples failed and were found to be "Not of standard quality". According to the Vigilance Department, out of 43 samples that were sent to government labs, 3 samples failed the test as 12 reports are still pending. Further, out of another 43 samples sent to private labs, 5 samples failed. These drugs, procured by the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) under the Delhi Health Services (DHS), were supplied to Delhi government hospitals and may also have been supplied to the 'Mohalla Clinics', the Lt Governor said in his

Tested by government as well as private analysts/laboratories as per rules and statutory provisions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, these



have failed and are categorised as 'Not of Standard Quality," he

Reacting to the development, Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said that after assuming office, he had directed an audit of the medicines procured, but no action was taken by the Health Secretary. He also demanded the suspension of the bureaucrat and other officials concerned. Delhi BJP, however, demanded the sacking of the Delhi health minister over the matter. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, MP Manoj Tiwari and Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri demanded resignation of health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj in the matter. Reacting to the development, Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely demanded the setting up of a medical board to look into the issue.

Saxena, in his note, also said that "these drugs procured by spending huge budgetary resources are a grave threat to public health and safety" and have the "potential of endangering lives of people".

Prima facie, apart from CPA-DHS, GNCTD, there are suppliers, manufacturers situated

trollers in those states associated in this whole exercise," he said. The Lt Governor said accordingly, as proposed at Para 35, since the matter of 'Mohalla Clinics' is already entrusted to the CBI, this case, which may, inter alia, also involve supply of these failed 'Not of Standard Quality' drugs to such clinics, may also be entrusted to the central agency, especially in light of the fact that the investigation therein involves multi inter-state stakeholders including CPA- DHS, GNCTD, suppliers/dealers, manufacturers in other states and other state agencies".

Addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva attacked Bharadwaj. "We have the lab and vigilance report. The samples of the medicines being provided in the Delhi government hospitals have failed. We demand that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal immediately sack his health minister," Sachdeva said.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh

investigation order regarding the supply of substandard medicines in government hospitals of Delhi. He said LG's order is a step towards bringing the culprits in front of the people. The investigation of this case should be completed swiftly so that the impact of these substandard medicines can be revealed. Bidhuri emphasized that the issue of substandard medicines is not only a matter of

corruption but akin to jeopardizing someone's life. "Those responsible for this should face strict action. Until the investigation is concluded, the Health Minister should resign," he In a series of posts on X, Bharadwaj demanded the suspension of errant officials. "I joined on 9.3.2023, gave direc-

tions dated 21.3.2023 for audit of Medicines procured through CPA or otherwise. No action by Health Secretary. "Again action taken report sought from Health Secretary

dated 24.7.2023. However, no

response came from Health

LG saab to suspend Health Secretary SB Deepak Kumar and DGHS. Why no action against them? At least suspend them now," he said. Earlier, when asked about the matter on the sidelines of a press conference here, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai, who is also the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Delhi state convener, said that the government will come out with a detailed response. Rai said he had not seen the details of the The Delhi Congress said it is a "serious matter" and action

medicines comes under DGHS

and dept head is Health Secretary. 2 months back, on 23.10.2023, I recommended

should be taken against the culprits after an investigation."It is a serious problem and a probe must be conducted... A medical board should be constituted by the government so that other medicines can also be tested and action should be taken against those found

Ruckus during Special Session of MCD House, BJP members protest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ruckus prevailed during a Special Session of the municipal House here on Saturday as BJP councillors protested during the proceedings over issues related to sealsion, called to discuss issues pertaining to de-sealing of properties under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), was marred by sloganeering and protests by opposition members, officials said.

Leader of Opposition Raja Iqbal Singh and several other BJP councillors held placards and raised slogans against the AAP and the party-led civic body. Many even trooped into the well of the House during the protest, they said.

The BJP members alleged that while the MCD has called a session to discuss the de-sealing issue, the civic body sealed three shops in south Delhi's



Amar Colony on Friday. A senior civic official said the

de-sealing matter to be discussed was about the decision taken by a court-appointed committee to de-seal the first and second floors of shops located in local shopping com-

The sealing of the three shops on Friday was on account of "not having licence", and the two issues should not be mixed, the official said. The special ses-

sion of the House began in the afternoon but was disrupted as BJP members protested, the senior official said.

After that, Mayor Shelly Oberoi adjourned the House. The session resumed after some time but the protest by BJP councillors continued, officials said, adding that the House was later adjourned for the day. We called a special session to

discuss the desealing issue. We wanted to pass the resolution that officials should immediately de-seal the shops that were sealed six years ago in local shopping complexes. We spoke about the benefit of businessmen in Delhi but BJP has not let the House run even for a single time," said Oberai. tion was passed by the House stating that the shops in local shopping complexes that were sealed about six years ago should be de-sealed.

The session lasted for less than an hour, the official said. The BJP's Iqbal Singh later addressed the media on the issue at the Civic Centre.

There was "no intention to deseal" the shops, otherwise, as per the "judicial committee's report, the shops should have been immediately de-sealed", he claimed.

He questioned the mayor, saying if the MCD was "waiting for the opposition's protest before initiating the de-sealing of shops". Singh accused the

AAP of engaging in "false propaganda and deceit". He warned that if de-sealing

processes don't start within 24 hours, the BJP would protest from the streets to the assemmayor's office. Mayor Oberoi court-appointed panel has taken a decision to de-seal the first and second floors of shops located in local shopping com-

The sealing had started with such complexes in the Defence Colony area in 2017-18 on the directions of the monitoring committee for alleged violation of building bye-laws, she had told reporters. Then a judicial committee was constituted by the Supreme Court to look into the legal aspects of the matter, the mayor had said.

Now, in a major relief for traders, it has been decided that such shops in these complexes will be de-sealed, she had

Councillors resorting to such behaviour will face tough action in future: Mayor

bly and will even gherao the STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Thwas adjourned due to ruckus during its proceedings, Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi on Saturday said in the future, Councillors who "resort to such behaviour" may face tough action. The House was adjourned after just less than an hour of business due to protest by opposition BJP members on issues related to sealing of shops.

On Saturday, a special session of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House was called to discuss issues pertaining to de-sealing of properties falling under the jurisdiction of the civic body. But it was marred by sloganeering and protests by opposition



members

Oberoi told a press conference at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) headquarters here that ever since her party has come to power in the MCD, BJP councillors have "not allowed smooth functioning of the House".

The special session was called today to discuss issues pertaining to de-sealing of certain properties falling under the jurisdiction of the MCD, which Oberoi said. "However, the ings) to happen in the House,

A senior civic official said that the de-sealing matter to be discussed was about the decision taken by a court-appointed committee to de-seal the first and second floors of shops located in local shopping complexes here.

The mayor appealed to BJP members to let House proceedings be conducted in a peaceful manner. She also urged all councillors to maintain the "sanctity of the House" and not violate its sanctity, and warned that in the future, councillors who "resort to such behaviour" during proceedings may face tough action.

Carry out repair work at war footing: Atishi to PWD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Republic Day Celebrations, Delhi PWD Minister Atishi instructed the Principal Secretary (PWD) to carry out repair and maintenance work on a war footing. Minister Atishi has sought weekly progress reports on her table to monitor the progress of maintenance works, including painting of all road markings and repair of all minor breakages of footpaths. In a written communication, The PWD minister emphasized sprucing up the national capital on this day of national pride, so that Delhiites could feel proud of their city.

The PWD Minister, "The PWD is in charge of the maintenance of the fundamental infrastructure of major roads in Delhi. Therefore, it is crucial for PWD to initiate the work of repair and maintenance of these roads at a war footing level ahead of January 26. Atishi instructed the officials to ensure the repair and mainte-



tral verge. Painting of road markings should be done again along with footpaths, central verges, kerbstone and grills. Officials have also been asked to focus on enhancing the aesthetics with horticulture on central verges and sidewalks to increase the beauty of the roads across the city.

Earlier, expressing anguish over what she termed as its "deplorable" condition on , Atishi who is also holding the portfolio of Law and Justice department, has directed officials concerned to prepare a detailed maintenance contract draft for the Rohini Court Complex by December 30. In

response to the concerns raised by judges and lawyers about the poor management of facilities at the Rohini Court Complex, Atishi on Friday visited the site to assess the situation and expressed dissatisfaction with the deteriorating state of the court building. Following her visit, she directed the Principal Secretary of PWD to produce a comprehensive annual maintenance contract by December 30, in consultation with the Principal Secretary (Law). Last week, Atishi had pulled up her own department for laxity

and apathy towards the dismal condition of roads. Atishi said all roads wider than 60 feet are maintained by the PWD and these roads are in abysmal conditions in most parts of the city. In a communication addressed to the PWD Principal Secretary, the minister has directed with an ultimatum to repair all the potholes in the national capital by the end of this year; soliciting daily reports on the progress to

Dense fog envelopes city, reduces visibility

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

vast swathes of North As vast swattles of fronting Alindia continued to reel under the effects of the falling mercury, a dense fog blanketed the national Capital on Saturday, leading to low visibility affecting international and domestic

The poor visibility amid dip in temperature and foggy conditions resulted in disturbances to flight schedules at the Delhi' Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), where the Flight Information Display System reported delays for 11 international and five domestic flights on Saturday. However, there was no official confirmation from the ministry of railways in connection to the delay of trains due to the fog in the national Capital.

The Centre on Saturday decided to hold off on implementing stricter measures to curb air pollution in Delhi-NCR, preferring to assess the effectiveness of the current actions. A Sub-Committee of the Commission



(CAQM), a statutory body responsible for planning air pollution mitigation measures in Delhi-NCR, reviewed the situation on Saturday, the Environment Ministry said.

Observing that GRAP Stage III curbs were implemented only a day ago, the committee decided to wait and observe the impact of the measures implemented under Stage III before considering more severe actions under Stage IV, it said.

central government on Friday ordered a ban on non-essential construction work and plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers in Delhi-NCR amid worsening air quality in the region.

As the air quality index (AQI) in the national capital was

recorded at 450 at 4 pm, which comes under the 'severe' category as per the central pollution control board (CPCB) data, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Saturday asked all departments concerned to reactivate their teams for effective implementation of curbs under Stage-3 of the Centre's air pollution control plan. Data also showed December has witnessed a total six days severe category air pollution so far.

Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 9.6 degrees Celsius, two notches above the season's average, during the day. The maximum temperature settled at 24.4 degrees Celsius, four notches above normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The relative humidity oscillated between 97 and 69 per

Addressing a press conference here, Rai said that air quality in Delhi deteriorated from very oor to the severe category on Friday due to low temperatures and calm winds.

Two days all India winter rose show inaugurated

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW

New Delhi Municipal (NDMC) Chairman Amit Yadav on Saturday inaugurated a twoday All India Winter Rose Show organised by NDMC in association with The Rose Society of India at India -Africa Friendship Rose Garden in Chankyapuri. The Show displayed 70 varieties of roses through 85 exhibits in 25 categories. More than 200 participants are participating across the country. More than 50 children also participated in the on the Spot Painting Competition on the theme of Roses. NDMC Chairman gave away the prizes - certificates and trophies to the winners of best judged paintings. He also launched a souvenir of the Rose Society of India on the

Yadav appreciated the efforts of The Rose Society of India to organise the Winter Rose Show in which large number of institutes and individuals both local and outside exhibiting their best blooms with the different and unique colour as well as blooming potted plants of Roses. He said Rose Cultivation is a

passion of people who devote their decades to cultivating different types of roses. They are very close to nature to cultivate different types of roses for the general public. This exhibition is a result of their long time efforts and is a part of the Rose Movement of the world. The Chairman urged people to come this weekend and enjoy the different colour of roses in the lush green atmosphere and feel energized and stress relieved to know more about the rose garden and enjoy the sight of majestic bloom in the rose

India Covid cases highest in 7 months; 4 deaths reported

 $A^{\text{mid JN.1 concern and}}_{\text{WHO flagging surge in}} \text{ new infections by 52 per cent}$ 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

As per the Union Health Ministry data, in India 17 States have reported an uptick in active cases of Covid-19 with Kerala (266), Karnataka (70), Maharashtra (15), Tamil Nadu Puducherry, Telangana, Punjab,

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

tions were detected in a Jamshedpur hospital, the offi-

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



administered in the country so

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

prevalence in recent weeks. Globally, EG.5 remains the most reported variant of inter-

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 sublin-

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.

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 mack when include wearing a mask when in crowded, enclosed, or poorly ventilated areas, keep ing 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

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

Newly elected Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday and apprised 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 apprised 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 doubleengine 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

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

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

Evidence of brain injury present months after acute Covid: Study

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 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

The biomarker evidence was more prominently seen in patients experiencing neurological dysfunction during

Communications.



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 bio-

markers could represent therapy targets for COVID-19 and other infections causing acute brain dysfunction. "Our study shows that mark-

ers 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 Inflammation, or stroke), despite resolution of the inflammatory response in the

"This suggests the possibility of ongoing inflammation and which may not be detected by blood tests for inflammation," said Michael. Michael's team is now work-

ing 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 complica-

asthma attack risks in urban children: Study PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Polluted air increases

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 nonviral 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.

vated 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

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

Economy growing but wealth not getting distributed, says Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

 $F^{\text{ormer Congress president}}_{\text{Rahul Gandhi on Saturday}}$ 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 your-

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 devel-

'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

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,"

"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

"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 conversation 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

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

"...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

collapsed on itself."

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



"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.

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

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 BIP 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

Amit Chavda said. Congress MLA Ganiben Thakor said the decision must be withdrawn immediately in order to maintain law and order, dignity of women,

Bourse," Leader of Opposition

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 tech-nological 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,

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

restaurants and clubs (existing

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

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,

move sends a strong signal to the world that GIFT City is a

modern liberal place, ready to

Israel strikes 2 homes, kills over 90 Palestinians

 $M^{
m ore\ than\ 90\ Palestinians},$ including dozens from an extended family, were killed in Israeli airstrikes on two homes, rescuers and hospital officials said on Saturday, a day after the UN chief warned again that nowhere is safe in Gaza and that Israel's ongoing offensive is creating "massive obstacles" to the distribution of humanitarian aid.

Also Saturday, the Israeli military said troops arrested hundreds of alleged militants in Gaza over the past week and transferred more than 200 of them to Israel for further interrogation, providing rare details on a controversial policy of mass roundups of Palestinian men. The army said more than 700 people with alleged ties to the militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad have so far been sent to Israeli lockups.

Israel declared war after Hamas gunmen stormed across the border on October 7, killing some 1,200 people and taking some 240 hostages.

More than Palestinians have been killed in Israel's war to destroy Hamas and more than 53,000 have been wounded, according to health officials in Gaza, a besieged territory ruled by the Islamic militant group for the past 16 years.

Despite mounting inter-



Palestinians look at the residential building of the Khalifa family destroyed in an Israeli strike in Nusseirat refugee camp, central Gaza Strip on Saturday

national calls for a cease-fire, Israel has vowed to keep up the fight until Hamas is destroyed and removed from power in Gaza and all the hostages are

ınday pioneer

The Biden administration has shielded Israel in the diplomatic arena. On Friday, the UN Security Council adopted a watered-down resolution that calls for immediately speeding up aid deliveries to desperate civilians in Gaza, but not for a cease-fire. On Friday, airstrikes flattened two homes, one in Gaza City and the other in the urban refugee camp of Nuseirat in the center of the territory.

The Gaza City strike killed

one of the deadliest of the war, said Mahmoud Bassal, a spokesman for Gaza's Civil Defence department.

He provided the names of 16 heads of households within the family, and said the dead included women and children. Among those killed were

Issam al-Mughrabi, a veteran

employee of UN Development Programme, his wife, and their "The loss of Issam and his family has deeply affected us all. The UN and civilians in

Gaza are not a target," said Achim Steiner, the head of the agency. "This war must end." Later on Friday, a strike

TV journalist, killing him and at least 14 others, according to officials at the nearby Al Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital where the bodies were taken. Mourners held funeral prayers on Saturday in the hospital's courtyard while rescue teams continued to search for survivors. The legs of at least two bodies were seen under what appeared

to be a collapsed roof. Israel blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, citing the militants' use of crowded residential areas and tunnels. Israel has launched thousands of airstrikes since October 7, and has largely refrained from commenting on specific attacks, including discussing

military campaigns in recent history, displacing nearly 85 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people and levelling wide swaths of the tiny coastal enclave. More than half a million people in Gaza — a quarter of the population — are starving, according to a report this week from the United Nations and other agencies.

The military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said late on Friday that forces are widening the ground offensive "to additional areas of the strip, with a focus on the south".

He said operations were also continuing in the northern half of Gaza, the initial focus of Israel's ground offensive. The army said that it carried out airstrikes against Hamas fighters in several locations of Gaza City. The army statement on detentions followed earlier Palestinian reports of largescale roundups of teenage boys and men from homes, shelters and hospitals in northern Gaza where ground troops have established firmer control. Some of the released detainees have said they were stripped to their underwear, beaten and held for days with minimal

The military has denied abuse allegations and said those without links to militants were quickly released.

BOMB FOUND IN TRAIN AT KARACHI'S CANTT STATION Karachi: The Sindh Counter Terrorism department has foiled a terror attack at the main railway station of Pakistan's biggest

city Karachi when a time bomb was found in a train. Asad Raza, DÍG Operations CTD, said that on Friday they found an IED device in a bag which was placed under a seat of the Peshawar Express from Peshawar which had just reached the Karachi Cantt Station. Raza said that the bag was found on Friday at 9:15 pm. The bag contained a "time bomb attached to a battery, wire and switches". "A vigilant security guard while observing the embarking of passengers noticed a bag lying under a seat. He immediately informed the CTD and Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS)," Raza said. The senior official said the BDS found an IED device bomb with a watch timer attached to it and the bomb was then taken and diffused through two controlled blasts. "There was at least two kilograms of explosive material in the IED device which weighed five kilograms," he added. Dozens of passenger and cargo trains come and go at the busy Cantt station daily from the five functional platforms. The DIG said it appeared that someone left the bag there and disappeared.

CHINA SHUTS DOWN 34,000 ONLINE ACCOUNTS

Beijing: In a bid to ensure sustained social stability, security officials across China have shut down 34,000 online accounts for spreading rumours and punished more than 6,300 people since the start of a crackdown campaign in April. Over 4,800 cases have been handled, with more than 6,300 people punished, Li Tong, an official with the Ministry of Public Security said. Officials across the country have shut down 34,000 online accounts for spreading rumours, Li said. To ensure social stability, the ministry has decided to carry out a yearlong crackdown on online rumours spanning 2024, Li told the media here on Friday. The campaign will employ multiple measures to make sure it is effective and delivers solid outcomes, he said. In 2023, Chinese police have also taken strong measures against criminal acts of cyber violence such as online smearing, insulting and privacy infringe-ment, handling 110 cases so far, the state-run Xinhua news agency

WANTED TTP COMMANDER KILLED IN PAKISTAN

Lahore: Pakistani security forces on Saturday killed a key commander of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who was involved in several terror plots, including a deadly attack on an ISI building in Punjab province. The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in a statement said that it received a tip-off that come to receive the that some terrorists were hiding in the Chiniot area, some 200 km from Lahore, the provincial capital. The CTD along with police raided their hideout in the early hours of Saturday. "When the police surrounded the hideout the terrorists opened fire on them. The fire was returned and during the shootout, two terrorists were killed," the CTD said. One of the terrorists has been identified as Ghazanfar Nadim alias Khalid Habib who was carrying a bounty of Rupees five million. It said Nadim was the mastermind of a bomb attack on the ISI building in Faisalabad city, some 130 km from Lahore. In 2011, a car-borne improvised explosive device exploded outside the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) building in Faisalabad, killing 25 people and injuring over 100.

VIDEO SHOWING DOC PUNCHING PATIENT SPARKS OUTRAGE

Beijing: Chinese authorities are investigating a 2019 incident where a surgeon allegedly punched an 82-year-old woman thrice in the head during surgery, a video of which caused a furore in local social media. Though the incident occurred in December 2019, it only came to the public's attention this week after a prominent Chinese doctor, Ai Fen, shared CCTV footage of the surgery. The video appears to show the surgeon punching the patient in the head at least three times while operating on her eyes. The video clip of the surgeon punching the 82-year-old woman during surgery went viral on Chinese social media following which the hospital parent group, Aier China, sacked the surgeon and the CEO of the hospital, the BBC reported.

logistical capacity especially trucks, and the resumption of 76 people from the al-Mughrabi family, making it pulverised the Nuseirat home of Mohammed Khalifa, a local the intended target. Israel says it has killed commercial activity. France completes military

 $F^{\text{rance on Friday completed the}} \\ \text{ withdrawal of its troops after they}$ were asked to leave Niger by the country's new junta, ending years of onthe-ground military support and raising concerns from analysts about a gap in the fight against jihadi violence across the Sahel region of Africa.

The last French military aircraft and troops departed Niger by the Dec. 22 deadline set by the junta which severed ties with Paris after the coup in July, the French Army General Staff told The Associated Press by email. France already announced this week that it would close its diplomatic mission in Niger for "an indefinite peri-

However, the country would con-

tinue to be involved in the Sahel — the vast expanse south of the Sahara Desert which has been a hot spot for violent extremism — although differently, President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday during a visit to a base

"I decided on some important reconfigurations," Macron said. "We will continue to protect our interests over there but our armies won't be as present permanently, will be less stationary and also less exposed," he said.

Niger's junta described the end of the military cooperation with France as the start of "a new era" for

"Niger stands tall, and the security of our homeland will no longer depend on a foreign presence," it said via X, formerly known as Twitter. "We are determined to meet the challenges before us, by consolidating our national military and strategic capabilities." But analysts say a vacuum will be

created by the troops' departure. It will "leave Niger and the entire Sahel worse off" in terms of overall counterterrorism efforts as Niger was seen as the last remaining Western partner in the decade-long fight against jihadi groups in the region, said Ryan Cummings, director of Africa-focused security consulting company Signal Risk.

Some 1,500 French troops were training and supporting the local military in Niger, which had been envisioned as the base for counterterrorism operations in the region after anti-French sentiment grew in Mali and Burkina Faso, both run by juntas that have also forced French troops out. But after deposing Niger's demo-cratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum, the nation's junta led by Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani severed military relations with France and other European countries. Instead, he sought defense cooperation with Russia, whose private mercenary Wagner Group is already active in parts of Africa but faces an uncertain future there following the death of its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

The withdrawal of foreign military missions is already affecting security in Niger, where the number of attacks has surged, according to Oluwole Ojewale with the Dakar-based Institute for Security Studies.

'The country has not demonstrated sufficient military capabilities to fill the vacuum created by the with-

drawal. Strategic attacks are being launched by the various armed groups who now roam freely in the ungoverned spaces in the country and incidents have remained on the rise," said Ojewale. The junta in Niger has formed a security alliance with the military governments in Mali and Burkina Faso to coordinate counterterrorism operations across the Sahel.

including about 2,000 in the

past three weeks, but has not

presented evidence. It says 139 of its soldiers have been killed

resolution, it was not immedi-

ately clear how and when aid

deliveries would accelerate.

Currently, trucks enter through

two crossings — Rafah on the

border with Egypt and Kerem Shalom on the border with

Israel. Both crossings were closed on Saturday by mutual

agreement between Israel, Egypt and the United Nations,

Israeli officials said. Ahead of

the Security Council vote, the

US negotiated the removal of

language that would have given

the UN authority to inspect aid

going into Gaza, something

Israel says it must continue to

do to ensure material does not

reach Hamas. UN Secretary-

General Antonio Guterres said

on Friday that it's a mistake to

measure the effectiveness of the

humanitarian operation by the

the way Israel is conducting this

offensive is creating massive

obstacles to the distribution of

humanitarian aid inside Gaza,"

he said. He said the prerequi-

sites for an effective aid oper-

ation don't exist - security,

staff that can work in safety,

The real problem is that

number of trucks.

In the aftermath of the UN

in the ground offensive.

However, much of the immediate impact of the departure of French troops would be felt in western Niger's Tillabéri region which has been the hot spot for extremism in the country, said Ryan with Signal Risk con-

"Violent extremist organisations may utilise the vacuum created to exploit and expand their operations'

Pro-peace Russian presidential hopeful blocked by EC

AP MOSCOW

Russian politician calling Afor peace in Ukraine hit a roadblock in her campaign on Saturday, when Russia's Central Election Commission refused to accept her initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the documents submitted. Former legislator Yekaterina Duntsova is calling for peace in Ukraine and hopes to challenge President Vladimir Putin, promoting her vision of a "humane" Russia "that's peaceful, friendly and ready to cooperate with everyone on the prin-

ciple of respect". "On December 23, the Central Election Commission refused to register my initiative group," Duntsova wrote on the Telegram messaging app. According to a Telegram channel close to Duntsova's campaign, the commission found 100 errors in her nomination papers, including mistakes in the spelling of

"You are a young woman, you still have everything ahead of you. Any minus can always be turned into a plus," the head of Russia's Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, said at the commission meeting, addressing Duntsova.

Duntsova said that she would appeal the decision in Russia's Supreme Court, and appealed to the leaders of the Yabloko (Apple) political party to nominate her as a candidate, as she said she would be unable to convene a second meeting of sup-

Also on Saturday, Russian state media said that Yabloko party founder and leader Grigory Yavlinsky would not run for the presidency, citing the party's press service.

Speaking in a live interview on YouTube, once Duntsova's appeal to Yabloko became known, Yavlinsky said that he "didn't know" whether the party would consider her application. Duntsova took her first steps toward candidate status on Sunday, when her run was endorsed by 500 supporters as required by Russian election law, and presented documents Wednesday to Russia's Central Election Commission to register her nomination

China's death | **SC declines to fast-track** toll rises to 148

PTI ■ BEIJING

 $T^{\text{he death toll from the 6.2-}}_{\text{magnitude earthquake that}}$ jolted northwest China earlier while local authorities stepped up focus on reconstruction and rehabilitation after five days of gruelling relief and rescue operations amid biting cold conditions.

nine years in the region, struck midnight on December 18 at a depth of 10 kilometres.

The Death toll in the worst-hit Gansu province has risen to 117 while in the neighbouring Qinghai province, 31 people were killed in the earthquake.

As of Friday, the earth-quake had injured 781 people in Gansu, according to the provincial earthquake relief headquarters, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Saturday

relocation sites have been set up for the affected residents in Gansu, and 112,346 people relocated so far. So far, 499 individuals have

been discharged from hospital after receiving treatment, while 282 people remain hospitalised. Among them, 17 are in critical condition and 69 are

severely injured.

Donald Trump can be prosecuted for his actions to overturn the 2020 election results. The ruling is a scheduling win for Trump and his lawyers, The quake, the worst in

who have sought repeatedly to delay the criminal cases against him as he campaigns to reclaim the White House in 2024. It averts a swift ruling from the nation's highest court that could have definitively turned aside his claims of immunity, and it further throws into doubt the possibility of the landmark

on March 4.

The Supreme Court said on Friday it will not immedi-

ately take up a plea by special

whether former President

The issue will now be decided by the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which has signaled it will act quickly to A total of 311 temporary decide the case. Special coun-sel Jack Smith had cautioned that even a rapid appellate decision might not get to the Supreme Court in time for review and final word before the court's traditional summer

trial proceeding as scheduled

Smith had pressed the Supreme Court to intervene, citing significant public interest in a prompt resolution to

Trump immunity case the case. The request to leapfrog the appeals court, which Smith himself acknowledged was 'extraordinary,' also underscored prosecutors' con-

> presidential election. The justices turned down Smith's request in a singlesentence order on Friday. As is customary, the court gave no explanation for the decision.

issue could delay the start of

Trump's trial beyond next year's

With the justices remaining out of the dispute for now, additional appeals are likely that could delay the case. If the appeals court, which is set to hear arguments on Jan. 9, turns down Trump's immunity claims, he could then ask for the Supreme Court to get involved — giving the justices another opportunity to decide

if they want to weigh in.
US District Judge Tanya Chutkan has already put the case on hold while Trump pursues his claim that he is immune from prosecution. Chutkan has raised the possibility of keeping the March trial date if the case promptly returns to her court.

She earlier rejected the Trump team's arguments that an ex-president could not be prosecuted over acts that fall within the official duties of the

'COVID-19 possibly peaked in Singapore'

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The latest wave of COVID-19 cases in Singapore has possibly peaked, and there is no need for additional measures, like wearing a face mask said Minister for Health (MOH) Ong Ye Kung.

"We might have a slight surge, but I think more or less, we are seeing the peak of this wave," Channel News Asia quoted Ong as saying on Friday at the soft opening of a health campus at Woodlands in northern Singapore.

However, having about 600 to 700 hospital beds taken up by COVID-19 patients is quite a strain on the system, the minister noted.

We are a 10,000 bedstrong system. To take up 600 or 700 beds, it's six-seven per cent, which is not small. It's a significant workload on our healthcare workers and our system.

"Nevertheless, I think our assessment remains ... that we can withstand this without additional SMMs (safe management measures)," said Ong.

Noting that the estimated infection numbers have come down over the past few days, he said, "The indications are that we have plateaued."

Experts say hospitalisation and the need for intensive care always lag infections,

which have been rising for four weeks running - from 10,726 infections in the week of Nov 12-18, to 58,300 in the week of December 10-16.

"We have to remember that severe cases will typicalpeak, so even if the peak cases have already come, we may need to wait a while before the impact on the healthcare system starts to get better," warned Associate Professor Alex Cook of the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public

"Just because the cases dipped does not yet mean the wave has peaked, and the wave isn't over until cases have come down again," The Straits Times quoted Cook as

Acknowledging that the upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays will bring chances for the virus to spread, Minister Ong encouraged Singaporeans to exercise personal responsibility by wearing a mask when sick and staying at home and continuing to be up to date with vaccinations.

It is especially important for seniors or those with underlying illnesses to receive their vaccination once a year as they are particularly vulnerable, he added.

Ong said that MOH will

work to improve the availability of vaccines by increasing the number of general practitioners (GPs) that administer COVID-19 vaccines and having it be part of

the Healthier SG programme. average estimated daily number of COVID-19 cases in Singapore has been dropping in recent days, decreasing from 7,730 on December 17 to 6,820 the following day and then 6,530 cases on December

He said many people have asked him to reinstate the mandate to wear masks, especially on public transport.

If it is necessary to do so, Singapore will mandate it, he said, but for this wave, "we can withstand this without additional safe-distancing mea-

Nevertheless, the minister appealed to everyone, "When you are sick, do wear a mask, do stay at home".

"If you have to come into contact with someone, then wear a mask.

Ong reiterated the importance of being up to date with Covid-19 vaccination, "at least once a year, especially if you are senior, and have underly-

ng conditions".

He said this is necessary because the effect of the vaccine wears off in about one to 1.5 years (18 months).

Czech Republic holds national day of mourning for the victims of its worst mass killing

National flags on public buildings were at half-staff and people across the Czech Republic are set to observe a minute of silence as the country holds a day of national mourning on Saturday to honor the victims of the worst mass killing in Czech history.

The shooting inside a university building at the heart of the Czech capital on Thursday left 14 dead and dozens injured

Police and prosecutors said they have evidence the 24year-old shooter also killed his father earlier in the day and a man and a baby in Prague last

Bells will toll at churches at

noon and a Mass at St Vitus cathedral in Prague, the biggest in the country, will be celebrated for the victims. President Petr Pavel is scheduled to attend the service that is open to everyone.

Similar religious services will be held in other cities and towns, while Christmas markets in a number of places were closed or reduced their programs amid boosted security Authorities said that 13

people died at the scene in the Faculty of Arts of Charles University and one died later in a hospital. A total of 25 people were wounded, including three foreign nationals.



Milos Vystrcil, speaker of A view of floral tributes and candles left outside the headquarters of Charles University in downtown Prague, Czech Republic

Parliament's upper house, the Senate, was among many who have been coming together to light candles at an impromptu memorial for the victims created in front of the university headquarters.

"Ît's been a horrible experience for us all but it still can't be compared with what the victims had to experience at the time of the attack and what their dear ones have to experience now," Vystrcil said. "I think that to help them

at this point we express our support and that's what we're all doing now."

The 14 who died have been identified and their names ave been gradually released.

The university confirmed

Institute of Music Sciences, Lenka Hlávková. First-year student Lucie Spindlerova was another, said the Lidove noviny daily, where she also worked.

The shooter, who killed himself as police closed in, was Czech and a student at the

Faculty of Arts.

two staff members were among them, including the head of the

Investigators do not suspect a link to any extremist ideology or groups. Officials said they believed he acted alone. His motive is not yet clear.

Previously, the nation's worst mass shooting was in 2015, when a gunman opened fire in the southeastern town of Uhersky Brod, killing eight before fatally shooting himself.

Coal based power generation rises in April, November

¬he 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-

per cent during the perion 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 peri-



power demand.

This shows the nation's commitment to selfreliance 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



India largest integrated wood panel plant unveiled in Andhra Pradesh

PTI KOLKATA

entury Plyboards C(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 state-

ment. 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

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

wood panel industry in the

to disburse ₹10 crore small business loans

Sundaram Home Finance has forayed into north Tamil Nadu as part of its vision to expand its presence in the

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.

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

The branch in Kancheepuram



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 company MD

Lakshminarayanan 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

Gujarat's Dholera dream soars with

land allocation for industries: Officials

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

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)

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 fil-

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 sim-

number of small and medium taxpayers. The I-T Department notified

pler forms that cater to a large



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

RBI imposes ₹2 lakh penalty on **TDCC** Bank for sanctioning loan to its director issued on November 28, the tion of the inspection report RBI imposed a penalty of Rs

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

The RBI gave this information in a release issued by its Chief General Manager Yogesh Dayal on Friday. In an order



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 examinaand 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

Gurugram sees up to 45 per cent price rise for premium homes in last one year: Report rapid infrastructure development, has emerged as the pre-

PTI AHMEDABAD

dream project of Prime Adream project of 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 manufac-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 prepara-

tion 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,



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 technologydriven 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), elevat-

ed 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, the area caters to residential commercial, and industrial water needs, contributing to the city's self-sufficiency, the release added. In terms of its energy needs,

Dholera's 4400 MW solar park, being developed by Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd (GUVNL) under the PPP model, is a game-changer, aligning with the national goal of 250 GW of green energy by 2030, it said.

About 25 lakh tonnes of garbage was used in the con-struction of the Dholera-Ahmedabad highway, impressing Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, the release said.

"I am thankful to the Gujarat government for building the Ahmedabad-Dholera highway and the Mumbai-Delhi highway, in which we used around 20-25 lakh tonnes of waste from Ahmedabad," Gadkari had said.

Gujarat cabinet minister Rushikesh Patel said, "The dream that Narendra Modi saw back then, it was a very big dream, especially for Dholera SIR. He wanted it to become an independent green field indus $P^{\text{rices of premium homes } \text{--}}_{\text{under construction and}}$

last one year, according to Savills India. 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 prop-

ready -- have increased up to

45 per cent in Gurugram in the

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.

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, ties. respectively.

With 47 per cent year-on-year growth, Noida-Sector 150 micromarket witnessed the highest growth in capital value



for under-construction proper-

Arvind Nandan, Managing Director, Research & Consulting, Savills India said, "As we step into 2024, the outlook for the premium to luxu-

PTI TAWANG (ARUNACHAL)

ry residential segment in key urban hubs like NCR and Mumbai remains exceptionally promising."

Pradeep Aggarwal, Founder & Chairman, Signature Global, said, Gurugram, due to its

Arunachal Pradesh gets first five star hotel

Krisumi Corporation, said, Gurugram has been one of the brightest markets in terms of both sales and capital appreciation perspective. "Rapid infrastructure devel-

ferred destination for end-

'Notably, areas like New

Gurugram, and specific sectors

on Dwarka Expressway... Have

experienced significant interest

from buyers, leading to sub-

tion in double digits," he said.

Mohit Jain, Managing Director,

users and investors.

opment like Central Peripheral Road, Dwarka Expressway have played a huge part in it,"

"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

Arunachal (East) MP Tapir

a visit!" he 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 dis-

bursed Rs 72,961.21 crore to all states as tax devolution for funding various social welfare measures and infrastructure development schemes. This comes in addition to the

tax devolution instalment 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

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 Pradesh received the largest share at Rs 13,088.51 crore. 3,303.69 crore).



suites that offer mountain and valley views and the cosy ambience of heated wooden floors and walnut veneer-adorned Khandu said tourism in Arunachal now gets an iconic facility in Vivanta Tawang.

border with China.

He said the Vivanta Hotels are known for their elegance and hospitality and tourists can book rooms from December

"Better facilities won't only



our tourists but will also make their visit to Arunachal Pradesh a memorable one," he

The chief minister said Tawang, a historic and picturesque town, is renowned for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage.

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ir India's first wide-body AA350-900 aircraft, sporting new brand livery, arrived 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 1346

hrs, making the Tata Groupowned 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.

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.

The airline has already

commercial operations of the A350 will be announced in the coming weeks. The 316-seater A350-900 air-

It also said that the schedule of

craft 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-

Besides Saweety and Pooja, 2022 World Championships bronze medallist Manisha Moun (60kg) and Saneh (70kg) were the other boxers from Harvana 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)

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.



Shukla appointed India U19 women football team head coach

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 Samantaray, and goalkeeping coach Lourembam Ronibala Chanu in an allwomen 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

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



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

PTI RANCHI

ce Indian midfielder Salima A 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 her and the hosts 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

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 from the 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

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

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 a goalmouth scramble. eight minutes when he rifled home Mattia Zaccagni doubled the lead midthrough a crowd of players following way 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 bot-

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

AITA loses appeal in ITF tribunal Aston Villa miss

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

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 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 15member 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 Sasikumar 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 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 Kazakshtan on AITA's request and India emerged winner with an emphatic 4-0 mar-

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.

chance to go top

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 Nicolo Zaniolo to equalize in the seventh minute of time added on.

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 Foderin-

gham. Referee Anthony Taylor looked at another possible penalty for handball with 17 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)

 $P^{\text{ep Guardiola is happy to call}}_{\text{Manchester City the best in the}}$ 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

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 overmatched 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 Akés shot.

An own goal by Fluminense captain Nino decided the game long before



Phil Foden's goal in the 72nd, guiding an Alvarez pass into an open net. Alvarez struck again in the 88th. Victory came at a cost for City, which gave Europe a 16th title in 17 edi-

tions of FIFA's competition for con-

tinental champions Key midfielder Rodri limped away from the stadium with his right knee heavily bandaged after a heavy tackle by Fluminense substitute

Alexsander.

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 losses this season typically come when the Spaniard has missed games.

Tempers flared after the game with City captain Kyle Walker confronting Fluminense players including veter-an defender Felipe Melo.

Rodri later took part in celebrations with the trophy and received an award as the best player at the tour-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 2022-23 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 snaffled 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

Kaur appealed against Healy for obstructing the field which was rejected by on field

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 metabases.

After rolling New Zealand for 98

in 31.4 overs, captain Najmul

en 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

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 low-

est ODI score against Bangladesh

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 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

3rd ODI: NZ wins series 2-1

Bangladesh beats New Zealand by 9 wickets

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

openers Beth Mooney and

Phoebe Litchfield began well

but both were guilty of throw-

ing 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 Sneh 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

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

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

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 dou-

Shoriful reproduced the form that

saw him take two wickets in the opening over of the first ODI, dis-

missing Young, Latham and Mark Chapman (2). Both Latham and

Chapman were bowled by deliver-

ies which jagged back late between

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)

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

Africa U19 on January 2. The final is

(4) and Adithya Ashok (10).

and Tom Blundell (4).

ble figures.

bat and pad.



Combination Confusion

2 slots to give Dravid sleepless nights

PTI ■ CENTURION

The best combination as per conditions isn't 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 ster the batting and the tricky task of choosing between Mukesh Kumar and Prasidh Krishna to replace the literally irre-placeable 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.

Mukesh or Prasidh?

The Centurion track has

However, with 151 wickets from 40 first-class games, red ball cricket is where has an average of 21 plus runs per wicket. His strikerate remains a very decent

More importantly, Mukesh is a like a workhorse, who can bowl long spells and has

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

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 fifer for India 'A' against South Africa 'A' in first 'Unofficial Test' in

Prasidh, whose speed is a bit

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

Supersport Park was the venue where India won their only Test of the threematch 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 glovework 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

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 sac-rificial lamb with either

than done.

ed commodity on bouncy tracks in SENA countries,

decide what is Dravid's line of thinking — positive or negative.

primarily been a pace bowlers' paradise — hard and bouncy with humidity that aids reverse swing dur-ing 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

48 balls per wicket.

also been known to use reverse swing during his post tea spells in Ranji Trophy cricket. The other advantage is

Supersport Park.

Potchefstroom.

more and a natural length on the shorter side, is expected to get more bounce.

Rahul or Gill opening the innings.
That's the only way that Shreyas Iyer, still an untest-

can be slotted in the middle order and add depth. Rahul keeping wickets will

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

teams.

¬he Indian U19 team will take on The Indian U19 team win the 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 ball was nipping, the ball was swinging and I knew how we start-

ed would set the tone for my team," Sakib said. "I tried to bowl

wicket to wicket and hold my line

'The wicket really helped me. This

wicket is good for pace bowlers and

Bangladesh captain Shanto was

the wicket really helped me."

and length.

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

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

statement read. India U19 will kick-start their campaign against Afghanistan U19 on December 29 before taking on South

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

 $P_{\text{spinner, Muhammad Nawaz}}^{\text{akistan's white ball specialist}}$ 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.



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



Pakistan injury woes continue

Spinner Noman Ali out for remainder of

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, Khurrum 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

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.

also in doubt for the second Test

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.

South Africa tour

Ruturaj to report at NCA after fracturing finger

Top-order batter Ruturaj 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.

"Ruturaj Gaikwad suffered an injury to his right ring finger while fielding in the sec-ond 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

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

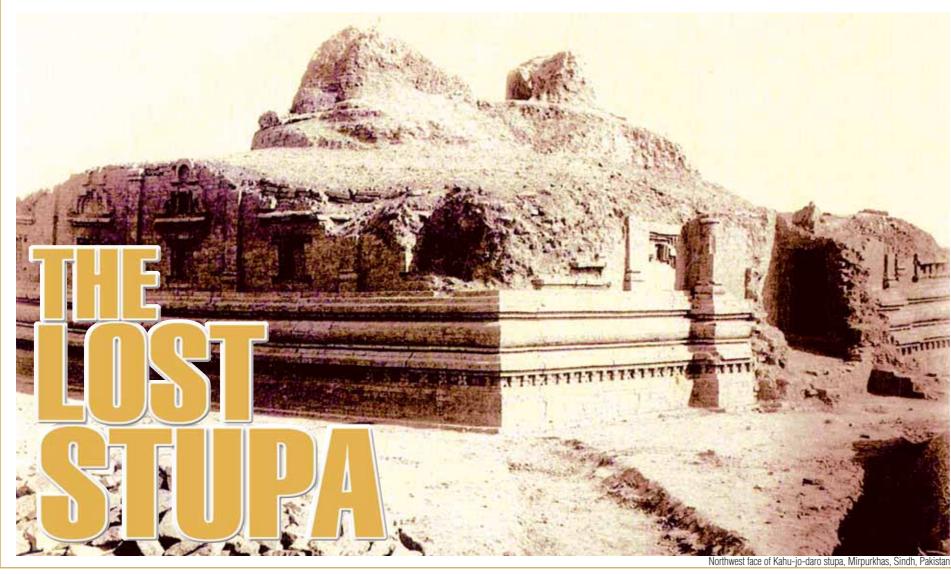
squad, while chinaman bowler Kuldeep

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, Vidhwath Kaverappa, Manav Suthar, Rinku Singh.

the pioneer

'Modern sport can be an ugly convergence of commerce and celebrity but it still has the capacity







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

istory, 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 Kahujo-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 recogniSed 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

"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

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 draftsmen optimised the opportunity to do exemplary work and make history. They had been trained in surveying, documenting,



Seated Buddha, terracotta, at Kahu-jo-daro

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 sundried 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.

size of a pinhead, wrapped in a gold 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 BhagwanlalIndraji 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

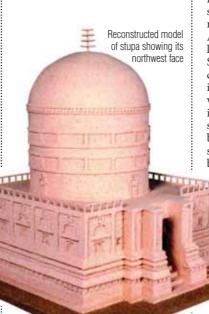
Bombay. He decided to place the finds

the Prince of Wales Museum in

Inside the bottle was a small, silver

cylindrical case containing an object the

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.



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 historiansart 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.

 $F^{\text{or Dr Sabyasachi Mukherjee,}}_{\text{director general of CSVMS who}}$ 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.

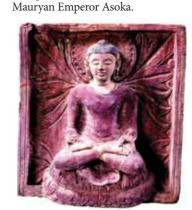
"Kahu-jo-daro was remote, and beyond our reach and my material resources were only those in the CSMVS collection," he said, adding that CSMVS has the largest and most comprehensive collection of 297 archaeological finds, dating to the 5th and 6th centuries CE, from Mirpurkhas. A large part of the stupa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



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-jodaro 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 throned 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-jodaro 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 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 $surroun\bar{d}ing\bar{s} \ which \ had \ remained$ intact even decades after the excavations undertaken by Henry

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

Cousens. Like the Bamiyan Buddhas,

the Kahu-jo-daro stupa is now visited

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 AYUSHMA

Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) to cover lower middleincome 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 sug-gests 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

The panel's suggestion to widen the ambit of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan 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-pock-et 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 house-

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



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 prehospitalisation 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

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 healthcare 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 achieve UHC as recommended in the National Health Policy 2017 rural areas, but they are often con-centrated 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 outof-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 expendi-

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.



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 ilar 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 pre-

- Individuals with underlying health conditions (e.g., those aged 65 and older, children, diabetes, bronchitis or asthma, heart patients, cancer patients) should exercise extra caution when venturing outside.
- If someone in these vulnerable groups experiences flu-like symptoms, prompt medical attention is advised due to their lower immunity.
- Currently, there's no evidence suggesting the severity of the JN.1 variant is higher than other Omicron variants. It appears to be milder, with the only concerning factor being its increased infectivity.
- The heightened infectivity is seen as a normal evolutionary process for viruses, where they

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 20second 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

s societal norms evolve, so do **A**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, preclampsia, and genetic abnormalities in the baby.

Lower Success Rates in Assisted Reproductive Technologies: When women pursue assisted reproductive technologies like in vitro fer-tilization (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.

Egg freezing can be an excellent option for women in the following sit-

Who Should Consider Egg Freezing?

- 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 chemother-
- Age-Related Concerns: Women who want to delay motherhood due to age but want to secure their
- Single Women: Those who have not found a partner but want to have biological children in the

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

HEALTH NEWS

AIIMS Delhi invites heavy smokers for lung cancer research

f you are above 50, addict Led 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 50 years will undergo free low dose CT scans," Dr Ayush Goel said, adding that people who smoke a lot of cig-

arettes/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 tomogra-phy (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 through-out 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

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 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

To me, both the languages

"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 How can these countries

advise India to cut on coal consumption? 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

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 commitment from countries cut emission

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



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 sulpher 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. Relying on IPCC scientists, Studies have also revealed Secretary General 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.

compensate 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

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 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 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 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 begun.

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 communities for agriculture

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 historically emitted into 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 afforestation would not do the wonders.

To succeed with the afforestation on the ground is quite challenging. For instance planting 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

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 Environment Mariam Almheiri praised the lecture and boasted about the planting of 100 million ha mangroves in her country by

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; 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 effect." abandonment or desertion by a parent or the one in care of a one taking care of the child child of tender years in such a manner that the child, not being able to take care of to the risk of injury/danger if itself, may run the risk of dying or being injured.

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

Interestingly, 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 envisioned in this scenario Queen-Empress vs Mirchia, a case before the High Court of intention to expose and leave Allahabad, wherein the its child below 12 years of age, mother of an illegitimate asks someone else to conduct child abandoned the child to a the final act of exposing and blind woman, promising to abandoning the child to any 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 never "having the care of such nevertheless left to the care of a child" and was holding the

the blind woman. Justice Blair remarked: "It seems to me manifest that if leave the child at the said the drafters of the Act had intended to include in the section a case like the present, given scenario.

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

This implies that a parent or has the utmost liberty to expose and abandon the child 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 when a parent, with an 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 child solely upon the instruction and objective to place by the parent. It is interesting to ponder this

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

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

consideration estimating its gravity and in apportioning the sentence."

The parallel legislation in Indian counterpart, and as English jurisprudence is rightly mentioned in King-Section 27 of the Offences Emperor vs Antakke, the against the Person Act 1861, consequences which reads as follows:

Whosoever shall unlawfully 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 automatically widens the be permanently injured, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and being convicted thereof person," as was rightfully shall be liable to be kept in mentioned in Queenshall be liable to be kept in penal servitude. Now, there are mainly three

points of distinction that can of Allahabad in Queenbe drawn between Indian and English legislation regarding the said offense. Firstly, the obvious, that the Indian law is applicable regarding offences committed against children up to the age of 12 years, became law about the same whereas the ambit of age is merely 2 years in its English counterpart. However, the objects were apparently 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 of the English Act are limited

in per English Law, the consequences abandonment and exposure are sine qua non to attract the What does English Law say? said crime, whereas in its

abandonment and exposure are not essential ingredients abandon or expose any child, of the said offence. Another notable point of distinction is that the words "at any place" are missing in English legislation, which

ambit of the offence and shall incorporate the term "to any Empress vs Mirchia. In this regard, the High Court

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 time that the Indian Penal Code came into force. Their 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

to children under two years of abandoned and exposed at 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 ʻabandon' would word 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 when 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

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)







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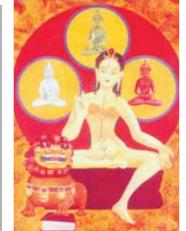




ARIES March 21-April 19

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

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Turquoise



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

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 wellbeing. 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



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. Midweel 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. emember, 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

ucky number 4 | Lucky colour Sea Green

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very 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

Wilfully adapt to the callings of changing times



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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