

**OPINION 6**  
THE NEED FOR CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF

**MONEY 9**  
DEPOSITORS MUST BE WARY OF CHASING HIGH RETURNS: RBI

**SPORT 12**  
VERSTAPPEN WINS F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 16 Issue 341  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

CHANDIGARH, MONDAY DECEMBER 13, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹2



# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



I LIKED  
ATRANGI RE'S  
STORY: AKSHAY  
10 VIVACITY

## Rahul tears into BJP at Jaipur

India belongs to Hindus, not Hindutvavadis, says Cong scion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Touted as the relaunch of Rahul Gandhi, the Congress on Sunday held a mega 'Mehengai Hatao' rally in Jaipur addressed by Rahul, general secretary Priyanka Gandhi and other leaders in the presence of party chief Sonia Gandhi. However, Sonia did not address the rally due to ill-health.

Around one lakh people gathered at the venue in Jaipur and the Pink City was peppered with huge cut-outs and placards of the Gandhi family. However, Rahul got the maximum visibility on the posters, giving enough indications about the party's effort to present him as its leader of the future.

The Congress is working to bring back Rahul as party president, a post he quit on moral grounds following the 2019 Lok Sabha election debacle. AICC sources said that the party cadre was hinting that the rally must focus only on Rahul and should be "crafted" as part of the strategy for his "installation" as the head of the party in a few months. Sonia is currently working as interim chief.

Rahul at once launched an ideological attack on the BJP,



Congress president Sonia Gandhi and senior leader Rahul Gandhi during the party's 'Mehengai Hatao Rally' against the Central Government, in Jaipur on Sunday

saying that Hindu and 'Hindutvavadi' were two different terms and that the country was of Hindus and not Hindutvavadis.

"There is a collision of two words in the politics of the country today. One word

Hindu and the other word Hindutva. I am a Hindu and not a Hindutvavadi.

The difference between Hindu and Hindutvavadi is that Hindu searches for the truth, it is called satyagraha but Hindutvavadi searches for

power and it is called as Sattagraha," Rahul said addressing the gathering.

"Mahatma Gandhi searched for the truth, Nathuram Godse pumped three bullets into him. He (Godse) was a Hindutvavadi. A

Hindu is interested in Satyagrah. Hindutvavadi are only after power, they don't care about the truth. A Hindutvavadi is only after Sattagrah (search for power)."

Last month, Rahul sought to differentiate between Hinduism and Hindutva at an internal meet of the party.

"Is Hinduism about beating a Sikh, or a Muslim. Hindutva, of course, is. In which book is it written? I have not seen it. I have read the Upanishads. I have not read it," he said.

"We say there is a difference between Hindutva and Hindu religion. It is a simple logic -- if you are a Hindu then why do you need Hindutva? Why do you need this new name?" Rahul added.

Targeting the Narendra Modi Government, Rahul said, "Today one per cent of the population of India has 33 per cent wealth in their hands while 10 per cent of the population has 65 per cent of the money in their hands. And the poorest 50 per cent of the population has only six per cent of the money in their hands."

## After Delhi, farmers launch stir in Punjab

Kisans to meet CM on Dec 17; seek full loan waiver

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

After returning from Delhi's borders, the farmers and farm labourers in Punjab opened a front against the Congress-led State Government on Sunday. Supported by the farmers, various unions of the farm labourers in Punjab held a 'rail roko' agitation, disrupting rail traffic at several places for four hours, seeking loan waiver, among other things.

Punjab's 32 farm organisations have decided to raise the issue of complete loan waiver, as promised by the Congress Party before the 2017 elections, among other issues.

"During the meeting between Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and 32 kisan organisations on December 17, the issue of complete loan waiver would be raised. The Punjab Congress should immediately fulfil the promises made in the election manifesto before the 2017 Assembly elections, as the forthcoming elections are very close but the farmers are burdened with debt," said Bharatiya Kisan Union-Ekta (Dakonda) president Buta Singh Burjigill.



Farmers being welcomed as they arrive at their hometown after their year-long agitation against contentious farm reform laws, in Jalandhar on Sunday. Farmers have called off their agitation after receiving a formal letter from the Centre on Thursday agreeing to their pending demands

The 'rail roko' agitation that was held on a call given by the Sanjha Morcha — a group of farm labourers in Punjab — was held for four hours, seeking waiver of loans taken from microfinance companies, restoration of snapped power connections over non-payment of bills, allocation of five-marla plots to "needy" labourer families in villages, among others.

Notably, the Sanjha Morcha had a meeting with Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on November 23.

"At the time, the Chief Minister did not give any assurance over our demands

that we raised. We decided to wait for a few days...but when nothing has been done, we decided to launch the agitation to make the Government not only listen to us, but do something for us," said a representative of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union (PKMU), who did not wish to be named.

PKMU representative said that most of the people who participated in the protest on Sunday, have returned from the Delhi borders on Saturday only.

The agitation was supported by BKU Ugrahan — the largest farmers' union in Punjab.

## PM's Twitter handle hacked briefly, restored

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Twitter handle was briefly hacked on Sunday, and a tweet claiming that India has "officially adopted bitcoin as legal tender" was put out from it.

Although the handle was restored later, a link promising a bitcoin giveaway had already been shared from the account and was later deleted. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) is on the job and is trying to identify the source of the hacking incident. Latest technology is being used for the same.

This hacked push for cryptocurrencies comes amid the Centre's plan to table the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 in the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament.

## 4 more Omicron cases detected in India, tally now 38

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With four more people testing positive for Omicron infection on Sunday, India's tally of new variant of Covid-19 has climbed to 38. For the first time, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Chandigarh reported Omicron cases.

Till now the new SARS-CoV-2 "variant of concern" in the country has been detected in Maharashtra (18), Rajasthan (9), Karnataka (3), Karnataka (3), Andhra Pradesh (1), Delhi (2), Chandigarh (1), and Kerala (1).

However, bringing major relief, 15 people infected with the Omicron variant were tested negative and were discharged from Government hospitals in Rajasthan and Maharashtra on Friday, health officials in the two States said.



The Maharashtra State Government banned large gatherings and imposed other restrictions within Mumbai as its yet another district, Nagpur, reported its first Omicron case on Sunday with a 40-year-old man testing positive for this variant of coronavirus after returning from a West African country.

Of the 18 cases of Omicron variant in Maharashtra, five have been reported from Mumbai, 10 from Pimpri Chinchwad, and one each from Kalyan Dombivli, Pune and Nagpur.

## CAPSULE

### VARUN SUBMITS PVT MEMBERS' BILL

New Delhi: Continuing to back the demands of farmers, BJP MP Varun Gandhi has piloted a private member's bill seeking legal guarantee of MSP with financial outlay of ₹1 lakh crore.

### COVID: STUDENTS RISK LOSS OF \$17 TRILLION

New Delhi: The present generation of students risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14 per cent of today's global GDP, as a result of Covid-19-related school closures, according to the World Bank in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF.

### 'ACT AGAINST RIGHT WING GROUPS IN UP'

Mathura: The Akhil Bhartiya Teerth Purohit Mahasabha on Sunday said the Uttar Pradesh Government should take strict action against Right-wing groups that shouted slogans on December 6 demanding installation of a Krishna deity inside the Shahi Idgah mosque here.

## After stir in Delhi, farmers launch 4-hr rail roko in Punjab

Farmers to meet Punjab CM on Dec 17, raise issue of complete loan waiver

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

After returning from Delhi's borders, the farmers and farm labourers in Punjab opened front against the Congress-led State Government on Sunday. Supported by the farmers, various unions of the farm labourers in Punjab held rail roko agitation, disrupting rail traffic at several places, for four hours seeking loan waiver, among other demands.

At the same time, Punjab's all 32 farm organisations have decided to raise the issue of complete loan waiver, as promised by the Congress party before 2017 elections, among other issues.

"During the meeting between Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and 32 kisan organisations on December 17, the issue of complete loan waiver would be raised vociferously. Punjab Congress should immediately

fulfil the promises made in the election manifesto before 2017 Assembly elections, as the forthcoming elections are very close but the farmers are burdened with debt," said Bhartiya Kisan Union-Ekta (Dakonda) president Buta Singh Burjigill.

Unfulfilled promises are what irked the farm labourers too. So much so, that a day after returning from Tikri, Singhu borders, they chose not to rest, but seek what they were promised.

The rail roko agitation, on the call given by Sanjha Morcha — a group of farm labourers in Punjab, was held for four hours, seeking waiver of loans taken from microfinance companies, restoration of snapped power connections over non-payment of bills, allocation of five-marla plots to "needy" labourer families in villages, among others.

Notably, the Sanjha Morcha had a meeting with Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on November 23. "At the time, the Chief Minister did not give any assurance over our demands that we raised. We decided to wait for a few days...but when nothing has

been done, we decided to launch the agitation to make the government not only listen to us, but do something for us," said a representative of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union (PKMU), who did not wish to be named.

PKMU representative said that most of the persons, who participated in the protest on Sunday, have returned from the Delhi borders on Saturday only. The agitation was supported by BKU Ugrahan — the largest farmers' union in the state of Punjab.

The representatives of Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, Krantikari Gramin Mazdoor Union, Dehati Sabha, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha Punjab, Krantikari Gramin Mazdoor Union Punjab and Khet Mazdoor Sabha, while addressing the gatherings at different places, lashed out at the Punjab Government for breaking the promise with the workers.

"The promises to give five marlas of land to the homeless and needy, reservation in cooperative societies, debt waiver, restoration of electricity meter, providing basic daily need


items at cheaper rates, among others have not been fulfilled," said a labour leader.

They maintained that the Chief Minister's such attitude shows that the Dalit, poor, hardworking labourers were being wooed just to seek votes. They demanded that land should be given to the needy labourers for houses, Rs 50,000 for building a house, all eligible workers should be given work for the entire year under MGNREGA at Rs 600 wages, curb corruption in MGNREGA, Rs 5000 old age and widow pension, among others.

During the agitation, seven trains were halted midway in Bathinda, Barnala, and Sangrur areas under the Ambala Division of railways, while 10 trains were delayed under the Ferozepur Division.

The agitation was organised primarily at nine different locations including Amritsar, Mansa, Jethuke and Pathrala in Bathinda, Golewala in Faridkot, Tapa in Barnala, Ajitwal in Moga, Chowkimaan in Ludhiana's Jagraon constituency and Phillaur in Jalandhar.

Achieve Life Goals with Security



Plan No.:863 UIN:512N343V01

- ✔ **Guaranteed Addition**
- +
- ₹ **Money Back**
- +
- ₹ **Full Payout on Maturity**

(A Non-Linked, Non-Participating, Individual, Life Assurance Savings Plan)

Also Available Online

**Salient Features :**

- Age eligibility: 90 days - Max 60 years
- Single Premium or Regular Premium Payment Mode (Limited Premium Paying Term)
- Optional Riders available
- Special Premium Rates for Female Life


\* Maximum Guaranteed Additions @ ₹60/- per thousand Basic Sum Assured

Call Centre Services (022) 6827 6827

For details, contact your Agent/Nearest LIC Branch/visit [www.licindia.in](http://www.licindia.in) or SMS YOUR CITY NAME TO 56767474

Follow us: [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [g](#) LIC India Forever | IRDAI Regn No.: 512

BEWARE OF SPURIOUS PHONE CALLS AND FICTITIOUS / FRAUDULENT OFFERS. IRDAI is not involved in activities like selling insurance policies, announcing bonus or investment of premiums. Public receiving such phone calls are requested to lodge a police complaint. For more details on risk factors, terms and conditions, please read sales brochure carefully before concluding a sale.



भारतीय जीवन बीमा निगम  
LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA

Har Pal Aapke Saath





# Apne senao par hei hame garv, says CDS Rawat in his last public message

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
As Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday inaugurated an exhibition to mark 50 years of 1971 war, a message by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat was played out at the event. The short video clip lauding the role of armed forces was recorded on December 7 a day before he died in the helicopter crash.

"Apne Senao par hei hame garv, aao milkar manaye Vijay Parv (We are proud of our armies, let's celebrate victory together)" was the last public message by General Rawat. The Indian Army on Sunday released a 1.09-minute video clip in which he greeted the armed forces personnel on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1971 war and paid tributes to the fallen heroes.

Rajnath said General Rawat was excited about the celebrations and used to discuss with him various aspects of the function. The minister said he missed the General.

General Rawat, his wife Madhulika and his Defence Adviser Brigadier LS Lidder



were among the 13 people killed in the crash. In the video clip, Gen Rawat paid glowing tributes to the Indian armed forces personnel killed in the 1971 war with Pakistan and appealed to the citizens to join the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the victory.

"I am extending heartfelt greetings to all the brave soldiers of Indian armed forces on the occasion of Swarnim Vijay Parv. We are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the victory in the 1971 war as the Vijay Parv," General Rawat said.

"I am paying my tributes to our brave soldiers on this occasion, remembering their sacrifices. Several events are being organised at the India Gate between December 12 and 14. It is a matter of great pride that

Vijay Parv is being organised at the Amar Jawan Jyoti complex which was established in memory of our brave soldiers," he said.

"We invite all countrymen to participate in the Vijay Parv," he said adding "Apne Senao par hei hame garv, aao milkar manaye Vijay Parv."

Rajnath said the government had planned to conduct this Swarnim Vijay Parv in more glorious manner. "However, due to untimely death of the country's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, his wife and 11 other armed forces personnel, it was decided to conduct this event with simplicity," he said.

Paying tributes to the CDS, Rajnath said India has lost a courageous soldier, a capable advisor and a lively human being.

"He was extremely excited regarding this Swarnim Vijay Parv's celebration. He discussed various issues related to the organisation of this event with me personally. Therefore, I miss him a lot today," he said.

# ₹1,300 cr returned to depositors that was stuck for years: PM

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Affirming that the "concern of poor and middle-class" has been addressed by increasing the insurance of deposit to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday informed that in the last few days, more than one lakh depositors have got their money back that was stuck for years and "this amount is more than ₹1,300 crore."

Addressing a function on "Depositors First: Guaranteed Time-bound Deposit Insurance Payment up to Rs. 5 Lakh" here, Modi said "today is a very important day for the banking sector and crores of bank account holders of the country as this day is witnessing how a big problem which was going on for decades has been solved."

He stressed that the spirit of 'Depositors First' is very meaningful and "in the last few days, more than one lakh depositors have got their money back that was stuck for years. This amount is more than Rs 1300 crore," Modi said.

Union Finance Minister,



Minister of State for Finance and RBI Governor were among those present on the occasion.

The Prime Minister also handed over cheques to some of the depositors.

The Prime Minister said any country can save the problems from getting worse only by timely resolution of them. However, he said, for years there was a tendency to avoid problems. "Today's new India strives for solving problems, today India does not avoid problems", he said.

Modi informed that in India, the system of insurance for bank depositors came into being in the 60s. Earlier, out of the amount deposited in the bank, only the amount up to 50 thousand rupees was guaranteed. Then it was raised to one lakh rupees.

"Understanding the concern of the poor, understanding the concern of the middle class, we increased this amount to Rs 5 lakh", the Prime Minister said.

Another problem, he said was tackled by amending the law. "Earlier where there was no time limit for refund, now our government has made it mandatory within 90 days i.e. 3 months. That is, even in the event of a bank sinking, the depositors will get their money back within 90 days", he said.

# 'Partition of India on basis of religion was a historic mistake'

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
With the country now celebrating victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war leading to creation of Bangladesh, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said partition of India in 1947 on the basis of religion was a "historic mistake."

Making this observation here while inaugurating the "Swarnim Vijay Parv (golden jubilee celebration)" he said Bangladesh is a subject of inspiration for the entire world.

"This (1971) war also shows that India's division on the basis of religion was a historic mistake. Pakistan's birth took place in the name of one religion but it couldn't remain as one," the minister said.

Following the defeat wherein more than 90,000 Pakistani military personnel surrendered, he said Pakistan has ever since continued to engage in a proxy-war against India.

Pakistan, he said, "wants to break India by promoting terrorism and other anti-India activities. Indian forces foiled its plans in 1971 and now work is going on to eliminate roots of terrorism by our brave forces. We have won in the direct war, and will achieve victory in the proxy war as well."

"The feeling of antagonism towards India is so deep-rooted in Pakistan that it can be seen in the name that it has given to its missiles," the minister said.

Pakistan's missiles have been named after Ghauri, Ghaznavi and Abdali who invaded India, the minister added. "Someone should ask the Pakistan Government that these invaders also attacked the people living in the geographical area of Pakistan," he said. On the other hand, India's missiles have been named such as Aakash (Sky), Prithvi (Earth) and Agni (Fire), he said.

Rajnath hailed India's victory in the 1971 war "that changed both the history and geography of South Asia," and said India has always stood on the side of truth and justice. In fact, it was a war not against the Pakistan military only but also against injustice and torture, Rajnath stressed.

"This war is a classic example of our morals, our democratic traditions and just treatment. It will be rarely seen in history that after defeating another country in a war, India did not express its dominance over it, but handed over power to the political powers there," the minister said.

He said the government had planned to conduct this Swarnim Vijay Parv in more glorious manner. "However, due to untimely death of the country's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, his wife and 11 other armed forces personnel were killed when a military helicopter carrying them crashed near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu on December 8. Lone survivor, Group Captain Varun Singh is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Bengaluru.

Rajnath said he was constantly in touch with the IAF officer's family and "We all pray that he is relieved from hospital soon after becoming healthy and he does his duty as before."

The minister inaugurated the "Wall of Fame-1971 Indo-Pak war" at India Gate. He also visited the display of military equipment at the event.

He also said "India has never attacked another country and never occupied a single inch of another country. India helped in establishment of democratic traditions in Bangladesh and we are really helpful that in the last 50 years, it is moving really fast on the road of development," the minister said.

# Plans afoot to have 4 cut-off dates for new voters to enroll

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Government is planning to have cut off dates to allow more eligible people to register as voters by amending section 14(b) of the Representation of the People Act to insert four qualifying dates (or cut-off dates) -- January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1 -- of every year.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) had been pushing for multiple cut-off dates to allow more eligible people to register as voters.

The move will eventually help have a common electoral roll for the Lok Sabha, Assembly and local body polls as also ensure that more eligible youngsters become part of the electorate.



As of now, for an election to be held in a particular year, only an individual who has attained the age of 18 years as on January 1 of that year or before is eligible to be enrolled in the voters' list. Due to only one qualifying or cut-off date, a person attaining the age of 18 years on January 2 cannot be registered. Therefore, a person who turns 18 after January 1 will have to wait for next year to get registered. The EC had been pushing for multiple cut-off dates to allow more eligible people to register as voters.

The EC had told the government that the January 1 cut-off date set for the purpose deprives several youngsters from participating in the elec-

toral exercise held in a particular year. The law ministry has told a parliamentary panel that "it is proposed to amend section 14(b) of the Representation of the People Act to insert four qualifying dates (or cut-off dates) -- January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1 -- of every year."

It said a comprehensive draft cabinet note "containing this proposal (of four qualifying dates) as well as a few other important electoral reform proposals taken up by the Election Commission is under preparation". The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Personnel on Friday tabled its 109th report on "Action Taken on 107th report of the Committee on Demands for Grants (2021-22) pertaining to the Ministry of Law and Justice" in the Lok Sabha.

The committee referred to its earlier observation where it had reiterated its recommendation for the implementation of a common electoral roll in the country and desired that "all-out efforts" should be made in this regard.

Responding to the recommendation, the ministry said according to section 13D of the Representation of the People Act, the electoral roll for every parliamentary constituency should consist of the electoral rolls for all the Assembly constituencies within the Lok Sabha segment and it should not be necessary to separately prepare or revise the electoral roll for any such parliamentary constituency.

# Bodies of all personnel killed in Coonoor chopper crash identified

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The authorities have managed to identify all the 13 who died in the helicopter crash last week and handed over their mortal remains to their relatives.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt and the three Services chiefs on Sunday paid their last respects to Lt Colonel Harjinder Singh, who was among those killed along with Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat and his wife Madhulika.

While the bodies of General Rawat, his wife and his advisor Brigadier L S Lidder were identified the next day after the crash on December 8, the authorities took time in identifying the other casualties. The bodies had suffered severe burn injuries thereby making the process of identification difficult.

Rajnath laid a wreath on the mortal remains of Lt Colonel Singh at the Brar Square in Delhi Cantonment before his cremation. Army chief



General M M Naravane, Air chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari, Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, and other military officers paid tributes to Lt Colonel Singh, who is survived by his wife Major Agnes P Manazes (retired) and daughter Preet Kaur.

Lt Colonel Singh, who served as Staff Officer to the CDS, belonged to 11 Gorkha Rifles, the same regiment as Rawat. He had served in various operations with his battalion including deployment on the Siachen Glacier and a tenure in the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission. General Rawat, his wife and Brigadier Lidder were cremated on Friday.

Others who were killed in the crash were Wing Commander P S Chauhan, Squadron Leader K Singh, Naik Gursewak Singh, Naik Jitender Kumar, Lance Naik Vivek, Lance Naik B S Teja, Havaldar Satpal, Junior Warrant Officer (JWO) Das and JWO Pradeep.

# ED gets five-day custody of human trafficker from Ranchi in PMLA case

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
A designated court in Ranchi has granted five-day police custody to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to question Panna Lal Mahto who is accused of trafficking 5,000 people across multiple States in the garb of a placement agency.

The accused Panna Lal Mahto alias Ganju, a resident of Khunti district of Jharkhand and is accused in multiple cases registered against him in Khunti, Ranchi and Delhi under various Sections of Indian Penal Code for the offences of kidnapping and trafficking among others, the ED said in a statement.

Mahto was arrested twice by Khunti Police in 2006 and



2015, but walked out of jail on bail. He had networks in Delhi, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, it said.

In Delhi, he used to operate an agency in the name of Panna Lal Placement Agency. It is estimated that Mahto trafficked not less than 5,000 people. Recently, he was lodged in Birsu Munda Central Jail, Ranchi and presently continuing judicial custody in an NIA's

Mahto has amassed huge property in Jharkhand, Delhi and other States from the activities related to illegal human trafficking, the agency said.

During the investigation conducted under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), various immovable properties in the form of land in Ranchi and Khunti districts have been identified to have been acquired by Mahto out of the proceeds of crime.

Mahto and his accomplices are also operating various bank accounts having number of high value transactions, which appear to have been acquired and transacted out of proceeds of crime, it said, adding further investigation is under progress.

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Jai Narayan Sharma and Nizamuddin in Navjeevan Credit Cooperative Society Scam Case and seized incriminating documents and digital devices during searches on money laundering charges. Cash of Rs 62.60 lakh and silver weighing 20 Kg were also seized during the search operation.

A day before the arrest, the Enforcement Directorate conducted searches at six premises of Sterling Urban Co-operative Bank Ltd., Ashapura Agro Industries, Western Energetics Private Limited; residential premises of Jai Narayan Sharma, Chairman, Sterling Urban Co-operative Bank Ltd., Rawat Singh and Preeti Swami. Five premises searched are located in Rajasthan and one in Gujarat.

The ED had initiated a money laundering investigation on the basis of an FIR and chargesheet filed by Special Operations Group (SOG), Jaipur, Rajasthan Police. In the FIR, it was alleged that Navjeevan Credit Cooperative Society, through the Chairman, his aides and relatives opened more than 200 branches in Rajasthan and Gujarat and duped the investors by promising them unrealistic returns on their investment.

The accused Chairman, his aides and relatives availed loans from the Society funds fraudulently in the name of entities owned and controlled by them and their close associates.

On the basis of the role played in money laundering and in order to unearth the true facts about generation, acquisition, layering and integration of proceeds of crime and for corroboration of other evidences in the case, ED arrested the two accused Jai Narayan Sharma and Nizamuddin after recording of their statements. The Special Judge CBI, Jaipur has remanded them to the ED custody till December 24.

# Now, residential complexes will have to adopt energy-efficient techniques

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
After commercial buildings, now the Government is in the process of bringing large residential complexes under the ambit of the proposed Energy Conservation Act 2001 amendments to integrate energy efficiency measures into such buildings and reduce energy consumption to address climate change threats.

In 2017, the Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) was revised for new commercial buildings which sets minimum energy standards for commercial buildings having a connected load of 100kW or contract demand of 120 KVA and above.

"Large-sized residential complexes are now given an obligation to adopt energy efficiency techniques, constructions and interiors. Why residential buildings?"

"Buildings consume around 31% of the electricity in the country and being the main source of energy consumption we have to see that all the new buildings especially the large residential buildings complexes are energy efficient,"

Alok Kumar, Union Secretary Power Ministry said here.

He was addressing a 'National Workshop on Energy Efficiency in the Indian Residential Sector' organized in hybrid mode by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the Union Ministry of Power recently, in collaboration with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of the Swiss Confederation.

Kumar also deliberated about India's performance on the front of its commitment to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) made at the COP26 and highlighted that India has achieved some of them even before time.

"It is very essential that energy efficiency techniques and materials are used at the design and construction stage of buildings. This is all the more important as India is poised to urbanize very rapidly in one or two decades. More urbanization, more new buildings and we will see huge residential complexes coming up in all the old and new cities.

Since 75 percent of energy demand comes from residential buildings, it is very impor-



tant that they are eco-friendly," he reasoned.

The official also lauded BEE for ensuring sufficient technical material and knowledge products are available to the public.

During the occasion, four knowledge products with support from Indo-Swiss Building Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP), a bilateral co-operation project between the Ministry of Power and the Swiss Government. It is being implemented by the BEE.

Aimed to facilitate energy efficiency measures in building sector, these knowledge products are a booklet on

Cooperation and Counsellor, Jonathan Demenge.

He pointed out that by adopting ambitious energy efficiency measures, Switzerland was able to reduce energy consumption in new buildings by 75 per cent. "SDC with Swiss and Indian partners are working to bring in this experience, co-develop knowledge and expertise and translate these into energy efficient building design, technologies and policies in India through the BEEP project," said Demenge.

At the event, Architect Ashok B Lal, who has worked on several green buildings, suggested an "adaptive comfort" range of 19-32 degrees Celsius in the house, which allows little to no dependence on air conditioning or heaters. While it is easier for newer buildings to save on energy from the start, older buildings can also adapt quickly.

For instance, he said, "Windows facing the sun are a major source of heat being trapped inside a house. Any shade or the use of blinds can prevent that from happening. Similarly, if the temperature outside is high, warm air can be prevented from entering inside through airtight windows. Cracks or crevices allow the cooler air inside to escape, which puts additional load on ACs."

He stressed on creating awareness among stakeholders about the need for green buildings for better health which has become all the more important in the Covid times. Dr Sameer Maithel, director at Greentech Knowledge Solutions, debunked the myth that building energy efficient building designs is a costly affair.

Adjustments in older buildings, which can be as basic as painting the roof with a reflective paint, can save thousands of rupees each month in electricity bills. "The use of external shades and roofs outside a window to prevent direct sunlight from entering the room is important. While insulating the roof is preferred, cheaper options include applying reflective paint, which reduces absorption of heat considerably. Hollow clay tiles can be paved on the roofs along with a layer of concrete to prevent sunlight from being absorbed," said Maithel.





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Partying hard-ly

The Govt has a tough choice: To instantly curb festivities or wait to know more about Omicron?

The year-end festivities generally begin on December 15 and last till January 5 in the new year. Globally, the travel, tourism, hospitality and entertainment industries rake in their maximum revenues in this period. The high streets in world capitals turn night into day as millions of tourists shop and window-dress. Is Omicron about to put a dampener on the celebrations this year? Looks likely. Governments across the world are planning to put a brake on the year-end events citing three factors. One, though not much is known about the new Coronavirus mutant's infective abilities, it is clear that it is more easily transmissible, with a greater risk of re-infection than Delta. Two, nearly all the Omicron cases in the world are linked to travel. Three, since Omicron affects people irrespective of their vaccination status, gatherings in large numbers are a clear invitation to the infection. The Governments' cautious approach is justified after the bitter Delta experience. Incoming tourists are a trickle in Israel and Japan. Christmas shopping in Berlin and Munich in Germany may not happen on a large scale this year. Brazil has already stopped mass gathering in this season. The famous December 31 celebration on Copacabana beaches stands cancelled. The American authorities have called off

one of the spectacular fireworks shows in Baltimore. And, in New York, only the fully vaccinated can come to Times Square to watch the ball drop on New Year's eve.

In India, Odisha became the first State to ban people from gathering in hotels and clubs and other public places on December 31 and January 1. The question before the world Governments is whether to stop international travel to contain the spread of Omicron. They can test and trace Omicron positive cases coming in, but the risk of more such cases travelling by air cannot be ruled out. Scientists should advise on a travel option that minimises the risk. Flights from high-risk countries pose the biggest problem. There will come a point when two things will happen simultaneously: More and more cases will be detected at airports while they contribute to increased re-infections among the general population. This is the classic introduction to a wave that must be avoided at all costs. The UK, without any restrictions as of date, is facing the risk of a major wave this January, according to scientists. Vaccinations and booster shots will only help reduce the risk of death, but once hospitalisations stress the health care infrastructure, things can go awry. The Indian Government has a tough call to make. Should it wait till more is known about Omicron or announce festive season restrictions right away? Already, there is mounting fear of advance tourist bookings being cancelled, people seeking refunds of foreign package trips and doubts about people reserving their tables at restaurants. The tourism and hospitality industries that took a severe hit last year are only now beginning to revive. Omicron has the potential to crush their hopes this year.

### PICTALK



Daniil Serokhvostov of Russia competes in the Biathlon World Cup in Hochfilzen, Austria

# The need for Chief of Defence Staff

After perfunctory noises for decades, the incumbent Govt finally showed the will to install the first CDS and Gen Rawat was the perfect choice



PRAFULL GORADIA

Several months after the conclusion of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, rumours had begun to fly that, due to its success, the Army might take over power from the then Congress Government. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was anxious for her own reasons. That inflation was increasing if not raging which, she believed, was a frequent cause for losing elections. She, therefore, asked General Sam Manekshaw to meet her. While chatting, she happened to mention rumours of an Army takeover, and asked the General if he had any such plans. Manekshaw, with his wry sense of humour, reacted by asking: "So?"

This made Indira Gandhi nervous, but eventually she got an assurance that Manekshaw had no such plans. This episode put a lid on the concept of the integration of the three services of the armed forces under a single chief of staff. Divide and rule through bureaucrats remained the system, whose seed had been sown by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was doubly convinced that he was right when Ayub Khan seized power in Pakistan in 1958. Nehru had apprehensions since the morrow of Independence. At the time, the British interim commander-in-chief of the Indian Army, General William Lockhart, asked Nehru as to the scale and style of the Army he would like the C-in-C to plan for. To this, the Prime Minister's reply was that India was a peaceful country and therefore had "no need for an army". The police would suffice to protect the country. The style and scale therefore, ought to be to whittle down the Army.

VK Krishna Menon, India's then Foreign Minister, Nehru's friend and guru on foreign affairs and international relations, also believed that the armed forces generally were a threat to the civilian Government of a Third World country. He also believed that no Communist country would even attack India because it was looked upon as a "fraternal power". The Chinese Communist Party by then was



winning that country's civil war and was expected to defeat the Nationalist Kuo Min Tang of Chiang Kai Shek, which it eventually did in October 1949.

As time went on, the Indian Government's policy was to appoint gentle and obedient generals as commanders-in-chief, soon to be watered down to Chief of Staff. Only when there were strong candidates who could not be superseded were less gentle generals appointed to the top post. Generals Thimayya and Choudhary were examples.

This issue of a joint commander was not only swept under the carpet, but was dug deep into its grave. It was publicly raised for the first time when the BJP first came to power with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the Prime Minister. After that, the idea was tossed about with the respect a shuttlecock deserves.

It was not until the incumbent Prime Minister took over in 2014 that the idea of a Joint Chief of Defence Staff starting jelling seriously in political circles. The late General Bipin Rawat was first elevated to the position of Chief of Staff. It is only when he retired that the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) was created and

General Rawat was appointed there. His was perfectly a professional appointment. It is just possible that if the CDS had been in place in 1962, the Indian Air Force (IAF) might have been deployed in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, or both. As it happened, Prime Minister Nehru was flabbergasted so much as to weep on the radio with the words, "Assam is in danger." The then Chief of Army Staff General Thapar had resigned, while General Brijmohan Kaul had no combat experience. In the meantime, the Indian soldiers, sent up at the last minute, had hardly any woollen clothes while trying to fight at up to 16,000-foot altitude. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 was possibly the most amateurishly fought by one side in the history of warfare, whereas the invading forces were well-trained and better equipped. Such a one-sided affair might have been avoided had there been more experience of generalship with the help of a joint command of the three wings of the armed forces.

Much water has flowed in the Ladakh rivers since. Warfare in the modern age is a multidimensional affair with an awesome variety of weaponry. It calls for a great deal of knowledge and experience, which a joint command would help to provide

with Generals, including naval and air, sharing thoughts and inputs together. The air force in a war has today become indispensable. The navy has become a combination of war in the air as well as water. Even the Army needs its own aircraft in today's theatres of war. The outcomes that flow from these permutations and combinations are truly mind-boggling.

Military commanders have to be thorough professionals in their domains and not the personal choices of the Prime Minister or political leadership. This is particularly important for our country because its culture has traditionally been inspirational as distinct from empirical. From mathematics to medicine, ancient India's contribution has flowed through inspired *rishis* as opposed to research, experimentation and debate. For example, the great physician Charak revealed ayurveda without seeing the inside of a human body. Therefore, we emphasise that our appointments should be strictly professional; neither personal nor inspirational.

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



IT'S JUST POSSIBLE THAT HAD THE CDS BEEN IN PLACE IN 1962, THE IAF MIGHT HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED IN ARUNACHAL, LADAKH, OR BOTH. AS IT HAPPENED, PM NEHRU WAS FLABBERGASTED SO MUCH AS TO WEEP ON THE RADIO WITH THE WORDS, 'ASSAM IS IN DANGER'

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### WE MUST NOT LET OUR GUARD DOWN

Sir — It has been 20 days since Omicron, a SARS-CoV-2 variant, was first reported from Botswana. This new variant emerged close to two years after the detection of the first case of SARS-CoV-2 in China's Wuhan. It was the fifth variant of concern (VoC) to keep the pandemic ongoing — the others being Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants. Worldwide, the Delta remains the dominant variant and it is too soon to say if it will be overtaken by Omicron or not. The world is keeping its fingers crossed if Omicron will drive another wave of infections globally.

Omicron is being studied to gain an understanding of its transmissibility, severity and immune escape. As things stand, there is little chance of a quick end to the pandemic and a quick return to pre-pandemic normality. SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19, is still very much in circulation. We cannot and must not let our guard down. We need to test, track and vaccinate the maximum number of people in the minimum possible time and adhere to COVID-19 appropriate behaviour such as mask wearing, hand hygiene, physical distancing, avoidance of enclosed spaces and outdoor preference as our response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

G David Milton | Marathancode

#### CHRISTMAS CAME EARLY FOR AFGHANS

Sir — For the first time since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, the Indian Government has sent humanitarian aid for the people in Afghanistan. The consignment carries two tonnes of medicines for the WHO for further distribution. Most importantly, the labels on the consignment of medicines read "gift from the people of India to the people of Afghanistan". The Taliban regime thanked India in no time. The Afghan economy is going down, the business is slow.

The new Taliban regime has not got international recognition yet and this has led to the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan. People there are deprived of food and healthcare amenities. India as

#### Order! Order!



After releasing his autobiography *Justice For The Judge*, the controversy-ridden tenure of former Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi, which was almost fading away from the public memory, is once again in focus. Interestingly, after delivering a unanimous verdict in the Babri Masjid case on November 9, 2019, CJI Gogoi took his colleagues, who were part of the bench, for a dinner at Hotel Taj Mansingh and ate Chinese food and shared a bottle of the best wine. With due respect to the judiciary, though this dinner was the

personal choice of the CJI Gogoi and the other judges, does not this 'celebratory' dinner leave a poor taste on the expectation that judges decide cases dispassionately? In an interview with *MDTV*, CJI Gogoi denied that it was a "celebration" and claimed that the judges were merely taking a break.

In his book, Gogoi also writes about the important meetings, intense interactions and private confrontations that preceded the landmark verdicts authored by him such as Rafale and the contempt proceedings initiated against Rahul Gandhi, Sabarimala, NRC, Electoral bonds. At times, it feels that Gogoi is attempting to redeem his reputation at the cost of the institution which he served. Some columnist rightly pointed that Gogoi's memoir is essentially an attempt to salvage his legacy and reputation from public scandals and a lament about what he perceives as the unfair attacks on him by a "group", which he does not name or specify.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

a powerful country in the region has shown a big heart by initiating the help. The step will be followed by other humanitarian aid in the upcoming days from India. A friend in need is a friend indeed, India is one of the first countries to send help to Afghanistan during their tough times which will help build good diplomatic and strategic ties with Afghanistan in the future.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Cuttack

#### SECULARISM IS THE LYNCHPIN OF DEMOCRACY

Sir — Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar's assertive denial to grant permission for *namaz* (prayers) at public places is rational and cogent for vital reasons. In a secular democracy, an elected Government is bound to protect common interests rather than safeguarding the faith related interests of any particular religion. Secularism is the linchpin of our democracy and hence distorting constitutional proviso to woo certain religious groups will

surely jeopardise the pivotal interests of the country. It would be more appropriate to confine all religious activities within the perimeters of respective worship places.

In secular democracy, religion is a private affair of the citizen and ergo spiritual doctrines can never eclipse constitutional clauses. Specifically, religion(s) cannot exist without a country and therefore the necessity for a nation for sustenance of a religion need not be emphasised. After all, religion is made by humans and these faith related doctrines cannot veto universal human rights. More specifically, our basic rights guaranteed under religious freedom are indeed a constitutional compromise or privilege only. In a secular democracy, religious concerns cannot claim all such faith linked rights as an unassailable licence, for overt reasons.

Thomas KM | Muvattupuzha

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

### SOUNDBITE

Those in power are fake Hindus...India is experiencing a *Hindutva-vadi* raj, not a Hindu raj.



Congress leader —Rahul Gandhi

I made it absolutely clear to President Putin that if he moves on Ukraine, the consequences for his economy will be devastating.



US President —Joe Biden

You (Ayushmann Khurrana) are one of the finest actors of Indian cinema, my friend. It's been a long time since I got inspired like this.



Actor —Hrithik Roshan

I think it's good for Indian cricket that now we have got two captains, one in red-ball cricket and one in white-ball cricket.



Former Indian batsman —Gautam Gambhir

Sugarcane is ours and Jinnah is theirs. We will win by contesting on sugarcane and exposing their Jinnah mentality.

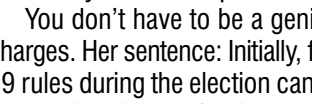


BJP national president —JP Nadda

## Fighting the odds

Myanmarese Generals are becoming more and more alienated, both at home and abroad

Myanmar is going through a period of transition. No matter how hard the army Generals want to cling on to power, they would have to eventually leave. This is not a prediction, nor wishful thinking. It is an analysis based on filtered news that comes out of Myanmar. The people are on the streets to reclaim their country, braving all odds, paying with their blood, life and livelihood; but they won't be cowed down. The Tatmadaw has been trying all tricks in the book to crush people's movement. Amid the rising anger and anguish came the jail sentence for Aung San Suu Kyi which, of course, helped intensify the movement. The military leaders seem to have failed to grasp people's mood and that the movement is now much bigger than Suu Kyi and that she hardly has any hold on the sporadic yet orchestrated people's anger. All that the Myanmar army could get by arresting and sending her to jail was international condemnation, isolating it further. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, called the verdict a "theatre of the absurd" and described the country's junta as "a criminal gang". Human Rights Watch said the military was "using this sham court proceeding to wipe out all opposition



to military dictatorship". You don't have to be a genius to figure out that she has been jailed on frivolous charges. Her sentence: Initially, four years in prison for incitement and breaking COVID-19 rules during the election campaign. But she still faces 10 more charges that could see her imprisoned for the rest of her life. Suu Kyi was Myanmar's State Counsellor and *de facto* leader before she was ousted and detained when the military seized power on February 1, 2021. Known as "Mother Suu" to supporters, her party won the 2015 elections with a thumping majority and she became the State Counsellor. However, she fell from grace when she overlooked the Rohingya massacre and went on to defend the army for its pogrom against them. Ethnic cleansing has been systematically going on in Myanmar for decades now and hundreds and thousands of people have been killed by the army. The same army Generals that she defended have now arrested her and, if they have their way, they would keep her incarcerated forever. Poetic justice, some would say!

**FIRST COLUMN**  
**INDIA'S CLIMBING RATE OF CLIMATE REFUGEES**

Affected people will keep getting displaced unless effective measures curb climate change impact



KOTA SRIRAJ

Human displacement and consequent sufferings have always been associated with strife and conflict for political or economic reasons. However, of late, deteriorating environment on account of climate change is giving rise to climate disasters and extreme weather events that in turn are displacing more human population than conflicts and disturbances. The recent decade has been a testament to this new and concerning pattern wherein climate caused disasters have displaced millions of people globally making them climate refugees. The World Migration Report 2022 of the United Nations maps the worsening displacement of people due to climate-change-related events. 2020 witnessed displacement of 30.7 million people across 145 countries. There is also the matter of internal displacement countries on account of climate related disasters. The Philippines experienced the highest absolute numbers of 5.1 million displacements caused by natural disasters in



2020, whereas China reported five million new disaster-related displacements by the end of 2020. Storms accounted for 14.6 million displacements and floods, 14.1 million. Extreme temperatures displaced 46,000 people while droughts caused new displacement of 32,000 people in 2020. During 2008-2020, about 2.4 million new displacements were caused by droughts and over 1.1 million by extreme temperatures. A World Bank estimate predicts that 143 million people would migrate within their countries by 2050 due to climate change related events in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) also estimates that droughts could lead to the migration of 22 million more people in Africa, 12 million in South America and 10 million in Asia by 2059. These reports make the writing on the wall very much clear that displacement caused by climate disasters is an emerging problem and the rate of climate refugees is rising alarmingly every year. India especially is increasingly finding the rate of the climate refugees spiralling out of control. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) says that approximately 1.4 crore people in India have been displaced due to climate and environmental disasters.

As per the report, the "costs of climate inaction" will force over 4.5 crore people to migrate from their homes by 2050. The Centre data shows that over 38 lakh new displacements took place in India due to environmental disasters in 2020, which is 989 times more than the 3,900 displacements caused by conflicts. Given the scale of climate refugee numbers in India, the government must expedite work on a two-pronged strategy of preventing deterioration of the environment and rehabilitating the climate refugees through effective regulations and laws. Currently, climate refugees in India are not acknowledged and recognised explicitly under any specific law as a result scores of climate disaster displaced people have no identity nor recourse to relief and rehabilitation. Even at the international level, there is a conspicuous absence of clear-cut laws that deal with the subject of climate refugees. Given this scenario, it would bode well for India to make a bold first move in this sphere by launching social initiatives and legislative laws that not only recognise the plight of the refugees but also provide them the chance to reclaim their life, dignity and livelihoods. This path-breaking initiative will bring recognition to India on the international forum and help showcase India's concern and action regarding a critical subject on which no country globally has taken any concrete steps. Climate disasters and climate refugees are two sides of the same coin. Unless effective measures start reining in climate change, people impacted by the same will keep getting displaced. When climate change wanes, climate disasters too will come down and so will the numbers of climate refugees.

*(The writer is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.)*

**The Chinese march towards west Balkans**

The Balkans might perhaps land themselves in a situation of total political backsliding, harming the long-term interests of the EU and North America



NISHTHA KAUSHIKI

Armed with its foreign aid diplomacy, China has elbowed its way into the European geopolitical chessboard via Eastern Europe. In 2012 it launched its 16 + 1 cooperation framework, including all the Western Balkan states (excluding Kosovo) and nine other Central and Eastern European (CEE). Later next year, Greece joined in to make the initiative "17 + 1", thereby promoting what many strategic experts call "multilateral bilateralism". Within the framework of BRI, Chinese economic cooperation with these 17 countries fulfils their mutual investment needs and strategic interests.

In the context of the Western Balkan states, Beijing from 2005 to 2019 has invested approximately \$14.6 billion (sans Albania), particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia in different projects, and more than 80 percent of these investments constitute loans with conditions as 'pre-agreements' on firms, workers, tax cuts. This has led to a situation of asymmetric interdependence that Beijing can essentially use as an essential bargaining tool vis-à-vis EU and the US.

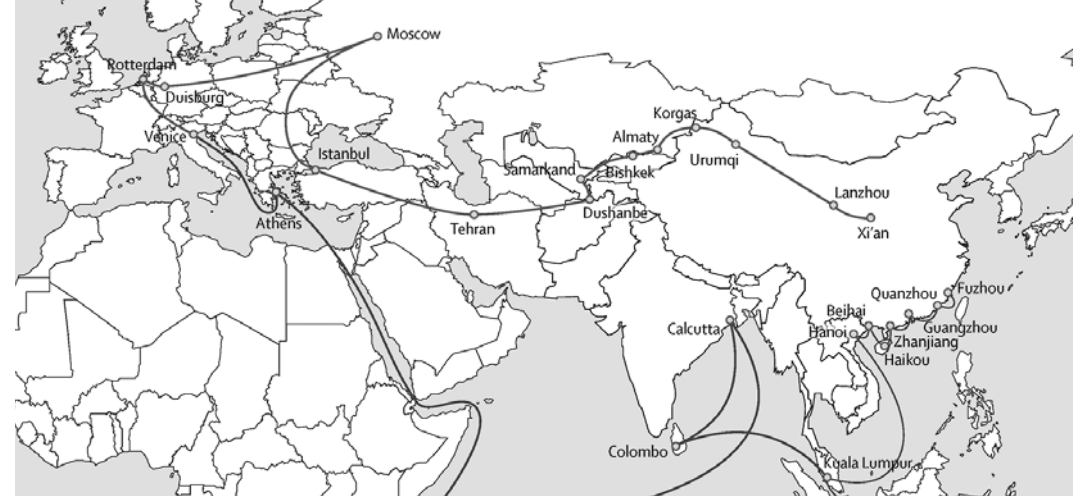
Even during the Covid-19 lockdown, China successfully created a "health silk road" in the Balkans when in March 2020 European Commission decided to block essential pandemic goods. Both Russia and China used the opportune moment when they supplied them with the medical and surveillance equipment for COVID 19. Although later the EU coughed up \$9 million, given the trajectories of the pandemic, the help was a little late, and China's proactive health diplomacy was appreciated amongst the Balkan countries.

Closely associated with Chinese strategic inroads in the Western Balkans is EU membership. Of the six countries in the Western Balkans, official candidates for accession are Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania, and potential member countries are Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Although the official note from various EU platforms is a positive one, i.e., considering them for membership owing to their geographical and cultural affinity with the community, yet, there is hesitation on the part of EU, especially France, to finance the projects that do not sound 'lucrative' and are 'unaffordable' apart from the fractious political nature of their societies. Beijing has taken initiatives that are probably 'non-profitable', such as the BRI-funded railway between Belgrade and Budapest. Chinese loans thus seem to be an attractive option for them to strategically communicate to EU to focus less on the political and the economic reforms for their membership apart from inviting more rigorous investment plans. Dordje Radulovic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, apparently called the "heart of Europe", recently stated on the insufficient funding of EU and the US that it has "left an empty geo-



AS THE TENSION BETWEEN THE US AND RUSSIA ON UKRAINE REACH THE BRIM, THE LOCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE BALKANS SHOULD NOT BE MISSED BY STRATEGIC EXPERTS. NEVERTHELESS, THE LARGER AIM OF CHINA IS TO CONSTRUCT A 'LAND-SEA' ROUTE TO CONNECT THE PORT OF PIRAEUS (GREECE) TO ACT AS A HUB FOR EU-CHINA TRADE

*(The writer is an Assistant Professor at Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. The views expressed are personal.)*



political space here in the Western Balkans, China jumped in".

Beijing's economic presence in the region is governed by debt trap conditions similar to South Asian and African countries. Projects are implemented by state-owned companies with Chinese workers employed, thereby increasing the geopolitical influence of Beijing. Imagining induced cultural changes through increased interactions to set the narratives of geopolitical changes perhaps would not be wrong if one looks at the previous case studies of small countries like Nepal and Myanmar falling into the trap of China. The vicious circle of being denied membership because of less political and financial credibility resulting in Beijing's lucrativeness should be avoided to weaken its strategic outreach and the risks associated with it. If not so, the Balkans might perhaps land themselves in a situation of total political backsliding harming the long-term interests of the EU and North America.

Second, the strategic interests of China in the Western Balkans and other states can be understood in terms of the NATO membership of Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia and Serbia's refusal to join the organisation for the reason of military neutrality. Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, are eager to join NATO owing to the Russian influence on the Serb community and consequently fear the collapse of the existing power-sharing agreement. China, too, has made efforts to deepen its ties with the country, making it a fourth political actor after EU, NATO and Russia seeking influence. For example, Beijing has recently decided to finance coal plants in the country despite President Xi Jinping's pledge to reduce the projects sanctioned for

the usage of coal. The smart cities project and 5G communication networks have further increased China's influence. Such and other 'no strings attached' measures that seem affordable to the economically disadvantaged countries only enhance China's stakes in the regions across the world.

Further, just as the tensions between the US and Russia on Ukraine reach the brim, the locational importance of the Balkans should not be missed by the strategic experts. Nevertheless, the larger aim of China is to construct a 'Land-Sea' route to connect the port of Piraeus (Greece) to act as a hub for EU-China trade. As envisioned by Xi, it is the Mediterranean's largest container transit port and serves as the southern gate of Central and Eastern Europe.

The third aspect that China capitalises on is an ideological one. Beijing has carefully increased its presence through the ideological similarities that it shares with some of the Balkan and Central European countries. These similarities in the near future will play an essential determining role in making crucial decisions such as voting in favour of China or possibly even military bases at an appropriate time. For instance, there is China-CEEC Political Parties' Dialogue and the China-CEEC Young Political Leaders' Forum; active participation in the World Political Parties' Dialogue to strengthen its linkages with the world communist countries, and finally, party to party cooperation with Montenegrin Democratic Party of Socialists and Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) apart from Yugoslavia. Further, although not recognised by Beijing, Kosovo maintains informal relationships and adheres to its 'One China' policy concerning Taiwan. The result

is the creation of sharp divisions within the European community.

The democratic summit hosted by the US has further divided Europe. With countries like Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia invited and Belarus, Hungary, and Bosnia and Herzegovina not invited, it has sharpened the divisions within Europe. China might fill the 'political vacuum' and extract advantages that perhaps could be detrimental to the interests of Europe and the US.

Europe has lately awakened to the Chinese threat, and in September 2021, EU adopted a new China policy that emphasised the Xinjiang human rights violations and the disinformation apart from "fostering strategic autonomy and defending European interests and values". The European Commission has recently aimed to evolve its role to that of a "geopolitical commission" that aims to strengthen the trade rules making it fully comply with the existing international law for trade. Launching the "Global Gateway" strategy worth Euro 300 billion focussing on digital, transport and energy projects apart from strengthening democratic partnerships has increasingly been seen as a response to China's debt trap practices.

Finally, from a different perspective, the role of the Western Balkans should be pondered over. The Balkans strategically would expect favours such as EU waiving off its debt owing to the Chinese strategic inroads and might expect a reciprocal move as a counter-response from China. Alternatively, the countries might expect EU to pay off the Chinese debt in place of military favours. In either case, the transfer of the European wealth to the Chinese banks thus seems to be inevitable.

**POINT COUNTERPOINT**

**THE BJP TOOK FIVE YEARS TO COMPLETE THE SARVU PROJECT THAT WAS ALREADY 75 PER CENT COMPLETE UNDER THE SP GOVERNMENT.**  
—FORMER UP CHIEF MINISTER  
**AKHILESH YADAV**



**I WAS WAITING SINCE MORNING TO SEE WHEN SOMEBODY WOULD CLAIM THAT THEY LAID THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR THIS PROJECT.**  
—PRIME MINISTER  
**NARENDRA MODI**

**Safe motherhood is key to self-reliant India**

Health workers and the community at large should support pregnant women in becoming advocates for their health and make informed decisions

A society of healthy women lays the foundation of a healthy, dynamic and progressive nation. Constant development of the country can thus be achieved only if we take holistic care of our women and children. The rapid decline in maternal and infant mortality rates can be attributed to the efforts of our government since 2014, political commitment, well-designed policies and significant investment in the National Health Mission under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. Ensuring quality maternal health is one of the top priorities of our government. I echo the Prime Minister's words at the Partners' Forum in 2018: "Health of mothers will determine the health of our children. Health of children



BHARATI PRAWN PAWAR

*(The writer is Union Minister of State, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. The views expressed are personal.)*

will determine the health of our tomorrow."

Notable achievements have been endorsed by the recently released findings from the first phase of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). Institutional deliveries have increased in the country while antenatal and postnatal care has improved in majority of States and UTs. It is indeed a matter of great pride that targeted and unwavering focus on maternal health has yielded these dividends.

From instilling a behavioural change for helping more women deliver in hospitals through Janani Suraksha Yojana, for absolutely free services under the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakam (JSSK), we have come a long way now in providing quality and



respectful maternity care throughout pregnancy and childbirth. Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN) 2019, aims to build a proper maternal ecosystem to assure respectful delivery of quality healthcare services at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services to any woman and her new born visiting a public health facility in order to end all preventable maternal and new born deaths and morbidities. This is weaved with many other initiatives including the Labour room Quality improve-

ment initiative (LaQshya) 2017, to provide quality maternal healthcare at public health facilities.

Under the current government, the country has also witnessed innovative ideas being translated into action in the field including those related to health and wellbeing of pregnant women. The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA), launched in 2016, guarantees a minimum package of antenatal care services to women in their second and third trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health facilities by a physician or specialist. Moreover, under the guidance of Minister of Health Family Welfare Mansukh Mandaviya, Maternal Perinatal Child Death and Surveillance

Response (MPCDSR) software has been recently launched to streamline actionable data in order to eliminate preventable maternal mortality.

Lately, it became crucial for the country to establish "birth models" that promote cultural awareness in birth practices, respect woman's autonomy, preferences and choices during child birth, overall contributing to a positive birthing experience. Scaling new frontiers, in 2018, the GoI took a policy decision to roll out Midwifery Services with the help of Nurse Practitioner in Midwifery (NPM) in the country to provide a positive birthing experience. This will require making a palpable shift to the way services are delivered.

Moreover, particular attention to family planning and

access to comprehensive abortion care and anaemia screening testing under the Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) strategy is warranted.

The government undertook monumental steps towards providing accessible and affordable healthcare by setting up Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), to deliver a comprehensive range of services including care in pregnancy and childbirth, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) to reduce out of pocket expenditures in healthcare. As the country is deeply engaged in mitigating the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, it has also been able to reimagine health service delivery through teleconsultation to ensure uninterrupted access to

essential healthcare to all, including women and their families. For a good measure, Union Health Ministry's National Telemedicine Service — eSanjeevani initiative 2020, has rapidly shaped into the country's most popular and the largest telemedicine service.

In these challenging times, it is important to be resilient, regain and continue to accelerate the progress we have made. I would like to appeal to the health workers and community at large to support all pregnant women in becoming advocates for their health care and make informed and reasoned decisions. We are committed to aim higher and envisage a new India which is fully responsive and accountable to the needs of its women and children.

# At G7 meet, UK warns Russia of 'severe' cost of Ukraine incursion

**AP ■ LIVERPOOL**

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said Sunday that "the world's largest economies are united" in warning Russia that an invasion of Ukraine would have "massive" — though largely undisclosed — consequences.

Russia's military build-up near the Ukrainian border has dominated talks among foreign ministers from the Group of Seven wealthy democracies in the English city of Liverpool.

The US and its NATO and G-7 allies worry that the movement of Russian troops and weapons to the border region could be precursor to an invasion, and have vowed to inflict heavy sanctions on Russia's economy if that happens.

Moscow denies having any plans to attack Ukraine and accuses Kyiv of its own allegedly aggressive designs.

Truss, who discussed the crisis with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other G-7 diplomats, said the group was sending a "powerful signal to our adversaries and our allies."

"We've been clear that any incursion by Russia into

Ukraine would have massive consequences for which there would be a severe cost," she said at a news conference on the final day of the weekend meeting.

Top diplomats from the G-7 nations — the UK, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — are likely to deliver a stern warning to Moscow as part of their conclusions to the conference later Sunday. It's less clear how much detail they will give about the measures they might take. When it comes to economic sanctions, Truss said the G-7 was "considering all options."

A senior US official who participated in the G-7 discussions said the ministers were united in their "extreme concern" about developments on the Russia-Ukraine border and agreed on the need for strong measures that could be implemented "very, very fast" if Russia did not heed warnings to back down.

The US and its allies have played down talk of a military response to defend Ukraine, with efforts focusing on tough sanctions that would hit the Russian economy, rather than just individuals.

In the US, reporters asked President Joe Biden on Saturday about the possibility of sending combat troops to Ukraine, and he said that idea was never considered. "Are you ready to send American troops into war and go into Ukraine to fight Russians on the battlefield?" he said.

Biden said he has made it clear to Putin that in the event of an invasion, "the economic consequences for his economy are going to be devastating. Devastating."

China's muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region and the ailing Iran nuclear deal were also on the agenda for the weekend meeting at the dockside Museum of Liverpool.

Getting a unified response from the G-7, a group of countries with disparate interests, has often proved tough.

Germany plans on getting gas from Russia soon through the contentious Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which bypasses Ukraine. Britain, which is not dependent on Russian gas, generally takes a tougher line on the pipeline — but faces tough questions about London's financial district and property market, both hubs for

# Tornado tears middle of US, leaves dozens dead in 5 States

**AP ■ MAYFIELD (KENTUCKY)**

A monstrous tornado, carving a track that could rival the longest on record, ripped across the middle of the U.S. In a stormfront that killed dozens and tore apart a candle factory, crushed a nursing home, derailed a train and smashed an Amazon warehouse.

"I pray that there will be another rescue. I pray that there be another one or two," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said, as crews sifted through the wreckage of the candle factory in Mayfield, where 110 people were working overnight Friday when the storm hit. Forty of them were rescued.

"We had to, at times, crawl over casualties to get to live victims," said Jeremy Creason, the city's fire chief and EMS director.

In Kentucky alone, 22 were confirmed dead by Saturday afternoon, including 11 in and around Bowling Green. But Beshear said upwards of 70 may have been killed when a twister touched down for more than 200 miles (320 kilometres) in his state and that the number of deaths could eventually exceed 100 across 10 or more counties.

The death toll of 36 across five states includes six people in Illinois, where an Amazon facility was hit; four in Tennessee; two in Arkansas, where a nursing home was destroyed; and two in Missouri.

If early reports are confirmed, the twister "will likely go down perhaps as one of the longest track violent tornadoes in United States history," said Victor Genzini, a researcher on extreme weather at Northern Illinois University.

The longest tornado on record, in March 1925, tracked for about 220 miles (355 kilometres) through Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. But Genzini said this twister may have had touched down for nearly 250 miles (400 kilometres). The storm was all the more remarkable because it came in December when normally colder weather limits tornadoes, he said.

Debris from destroyed buildings and shredded trees covered the ground in Mayfield, a city of about 10,000 in western Kentucky. Twisted metal sheeting, downed power lines and wrecked vehicles

lined the streets. Windows and roofs were blown off the buildings that were still standing.

The missing at the candle factory included Janine Denise Johnson Williams, a 50-year-old mother of four whose family members kept vigil at the site Saturday.

"It's Christmastime and she works at a place that's making candles for gifts," her brother, Darryl Williams, said. "To give up the gift of life to make a gift. We haven't heard anything, and I'm not presuming anything. But I'm expecting for the worst."

He said Johnson Williams called her husband overnight to report the weather was getting bad, the last time anyone heard from her.

Kyanna Parsons-Perez, an employee at the factory, was trapped under 5 feet (about 1.5 meters) of debris for at least two hours until rescuers managed to free her.

In an interview with NBC's "Today," she said it was "absolutely the most terrifying" event she had ever experienced. "I did not think I was going to make it at all."

Just before the tornado struck, the building's lights

flickered. She felt a gust of wind, her ears started popping and then, "Boom. Everything came down on us." People started screaming, and she heard other workers praying.

Kentucky State Trooper Sarah Burgess said rescue crews were using heavy equipment to move rubble at the candle factory. Coroners were called to the scene and bodies were recovered, but she didn't know how many. She said it could take a day and potentially longer to remove all of the rubble.

Rescue efforts were complicated because Mayfield's main fire station and emergency services hub were also hit by the tornado, Creason said.

After a wall at a nursing home in Mayfield collapsed, Vernon Evans said he rushed to help firefighters pull people out, only to find one resident lying dead in a few inches of water.

"All I could do is sit there and hold their head up," he said. "I never experienced anything like this."

President Joe Biden approved an emergency disaster declaration for Kentucky on Saturday and pledged to support the affected states.

# New Caledonia votes to stay in France

**AP ■ NOUMEA (FRANCE)**

Voters in the French island territory of New Caledonia chose overwhelmingly Sunday to stay part of France, in a referendum boycotted by pro-independence forces and closely watched around the South Pacific.

French President Emmanuel Macron hailed the result as a resounding confirmation of France's role in the Indo-Pacific, and announced negotiations on the territory's future status. Separatist activists expressed disappointment or resignation.

They had urged a delay in the vote because of the pandemic, and were angry over what they said were French government efforts to sway the campaign. So, they called on their supporters to stay away

from voting stations.

And they did. Official results showed 96 per cent of those who took part chose to stay in France. Overall turnout was just 42 per cent — less than half the numbers who showed up in a previous independence referendum last year, where support for breaking away was 46.7 per cent.

"Tonight, we are French, and we will stay that way. It's no longer negotiable," said Sonia Backes, president of the Southern Province region and a fervent loyalist.

The vote was monitored by the UN and regional powers, amid global efforts toward decolonisation and amid growing Chinese influence in the region. New Caledonia, colonised by Napoleon's nephew in the 19th century, is

a vast archipelago of about 270,000 people east of Australia that is 10 time zones ahead of Paris — and hosts a French military base.

"Tonight, France is more beautiful because New Caledonia decided to stay," Macron said in a national televised address.

He did not address the boycott. Noting that the electorate "remains deeply divided," Macron pledged "respect for all Caledonians," including those who voted to break away.

Sunday's vote was the third and last in a decades-long decolonisation process that stemmed from violence in 1988, which led to the French government handing New Caledonia broad autonomy under the Noumea Agreement. The process was aimed at settling tensions between native

Kanaks seeking independence and those who want the territory to remain part of France. The process does not end with the last referendum. The state, separatists and non-separatists now have 18 months to negotiate a new status for the territory and its institutions within France.

"We are reaching a new stage," Macron said, calling for negotiations on new structures to handle health crises, boost the economy, improve women's rights and protect the environment from climate change — a m a j o r concern in this island territory. A tropical storm warning also dampened enthusiasm for the vote. Lines snaked out of some polling stations, as winds whipped palm trees lining the streets of the regional capital Noumea. But turnout at others

was barely a trickle.

The question put to people in the archipelago's 307 voting stations was: "Do you want New Caledonia to gain full sovereignty and become independent?" Masks and social distancing measures were required.

The campaign and voting day were unusually calm because of the boycott call.

In the first such referendum in 2018, 43.6 per cent of voters supported independence, and 46.7 per cent favoured it in a second vote held in 2020.

While support for a "yes" vote seemed to be growing, the region's first coronavirus outbreak in September threw the political debate into disarray. Until then, New Caledonia had been one of the few virus-free places left on the planet.

# Kentucky Governor: Storm may have killed at least 70 people

**AP ■ MAYFIELD**

A monstrous tornado killed dozens of people in Kentucky and the toll was climbing Saturday after severe weather ripped through at least five states, leaving widespread devastation.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said upwards of 70 may have died when a twister touched down for more than 200 miles (320 kilometres) in his state but the number of deaths could exceed 100 across 10 or more counties.

"This has been the most devastating tornado event in our state's history," Beshear said at a news conference.

The storms hit a candle factory in Kentucky, an Amazon facility in Illinois and a nursing home in Arkansas. Officials had confirmed 29 deaths, including 22 in three Kentucky counties.

Beshear said about 110 people were in the Mayfield factory when the tornado roared through.

Debris from destroyed buildings and shredded trees covered the ground in Mayfield, a city of about 10,000 in western Kentucky. Twisted metal sheeting, downed power lines and wrecked vehicles lined the streets of what was barely recognizable as a town.

The missing at the candle factory included Denise Johnson Williams, a 50-year-old mother of four whose family members kept vigil at the site Saturday.

"It's Christmastime and she works at a place that's making candles for gifts," her brother, Darryl Williams, said.



Kentucky State Trooper Sarah Burgess said rescue crews were using heavy equipment to move rubble at the candle factory. Coroners were called to the scene and bodies were recovered, but she didn't know how many. She said it could take a day and potentially longer to remove all of the rubble.

Rescue efforts were complicated because Mayfield's main fire station and emergency services hub were also hit by the tornado, said Jeremy Creason, the city's fire chief and EMS director.

"We have been working tirelessly through the night," he said. "We had to at times crawl over casualties to get to live victims to get them out."

President Joe Biden tweeted Saturday that he was briefed on the situation and pledged the affected states would "have what they need as the search for survivors and damage assessments continue."

At least one person died at an Amazon facility in Edwardsville, Illinois, Police Chief Mike Fillback told reporters Saturday morning. The roof of the building was ripped off and a wall about the length of a football field collapsed.

# 3 dead, 6 missing in explosion in Sicily caused by gas leak

**AP ■ MILAN**

Firefighters in Sicily were digging through the rubble of a collapsed apartment building Sunday in the search for six missing people after an explosion apparently caused by a gas leak killed at least three, authorities said.

The building was occupied by nine members of an extended family, and two visiting relatives — a heavily pregnant woman and her husband — were also on the premises when the explosion occurred late Saturday in the town of Ravenusa, firefighters said.

Two women were rescued overnight. One of them, 80-year-old Rosa Carmina, told La Repubblica daily that the lights

# Israel's Bennett to make first official visit to UAE

**AP ■ JERUSALEM**

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said he would travel to the United Arab Emirates on Sunday, the first visit by an Israeli premier, as part of a blitz of regional diplomacy amid the backdrop of struggling nuclear talks with Iran.

Israel has watched with concern as Iran has pushed a hard line against negotiators meeting in Vienna, at once demanding sanctions relief while accelerating its nuclear programme. In recent weeks, Israel has fanned out its top diplomat and its defence and spy chiefs to meet allies in Europe, the US and the Mideast to push for a firmer

approach to Iran.

Bennett's one-day trip to Abu Dhabi, where he will meet with Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, is a milestone for both Israel and its new leader. Israel and the UAE last year signed a normalisation deal brokered by the Trump administration under the so-called Abraham Accords, which saw similar agreements penned with Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. Israel and the UAE have long shared common anxiety over Iran's nuclear programme. The deal to establish ties between the countries only increased tensions with the Islamic Republic.

Bennett's office said he will be discussing "economic and regional issues that will contribute to prosperity, welfare and strengthening stability between the countries" during his meeting with bin Zayed.

Bennett's trip comes on the heels of a visit by the UAE's national security adviser Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Tehran, where he met with Iran's new hard-line president, Ebrahim Raisi in a bid to ease tensions. It was a major visit for the Gulf Arab federation that has long viewed Iran as its main regional threat. Several other regional political visits, by Syria's foreign minister and the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have also taken place recently, all with an eye on the negotiations.

# UK opens up Covid boosters to all over 30 in Omicron fight

**PTI ■ LONDON**

Britain's health authorities said on Sunday that bookings for the COVID booster vaccines for everyone aged 30 and over in England will be open from Monday, as one of the key actions aimed at tackling the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the country.

There are around 7.5 million people aged 30 to 39, and 3.5 million of those are eligible for boosters from Monday, NHS England said. It comes as early analysis shows booster jabs being effective against the Omicron variant, the first cases of which have started being hospitalised now.

There is no reported death from the variant in the UK yet, but experts warn that it is set to take over from Delta as the dominant coronavirus variant by the end of this year.

"The COVID-19 booster programme is accelerating rapidly and more than 22 million people in the UK have already received their top-up,

securing vital protection ahead of Christmas," said UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid.

"This is our national mission — the most recent data shows boosters are the essential defence against Omicron and we are doing everything in our power to get jabs into arms as quickly as possible. We are now expanding the offer to over-30s — so please come forward as quickly as possible to get boosted and help our country get ahead in this race with the variant," he said.

The expansion of the booster programme follows updated advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), allowing millions more people to book their third top-up dose. The booking can be made two months on from their second dose, which is a month in advance of becoming eligible to receive the jab — a gap set at three months from the second dose by the JCVI.

"Booster vaccines are the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from this virus and new variants," said UK Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup.

"With the emergence of the new variant and the rising case numbers, there has never been a more important time to get boosted. So when it's your turn, come forward and book in," added Dr Emily Lawson, head of the NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, who also called on people to volunteer for the National Health Service (NHS) vaccination programme to help out as a "vaccinator".

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) warned that the sheer weight of numbers of people being infected with Omicron means it will find the unvaccinated or people who have had a poor immune response to the vaccine.

"It is now a race between the booster and that protection, and the Omicron variant," said UK Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi.

# Capitol rioters' social media posts influencing sentencing

**AP ■ WASHINGTON**

For many rioters who stormed the US Capitol on Jan. 6, self-incriminating messages, photos and videos that they broadcast on social media before, during and after the insurrection are influencing even their criminal sentences.

Earlier this month, US District Judge Amy Jackson read aloud some of Russell Peterson's posts about the riot before she sentenced the Pennsylvania man to 30 days imprisonment. "Overall I had fun lol," Peterson posted on Facebook.

The judge told Peterson that his posts made it "extraordinarily difficult" for her to show him leniency.

"The lol particularly stuck in my craw because, as I hope you've come to understand, nothing about January 6th was funny," Jackson added.

"No one locked in a room, cowering under a table for hours, was laughing."

Among the biggest take-

aways so far from the Justice Department's prosecution of the insurrection is how large a role social media has played, with much of the most damning evidence coming from rioters' own words and videos.

FBI agents have identified scores of rioters from public posts and records subpoenaed from social media platforms.

Prosecutors use the posts to build cases. Judge now are citing defendants' words and images as factors weighing in favour of tougher sentences.

As of Friday, more than 50 people have been sentenced for federal crimes related to the insurrection.

In at least 28 of those cases, prosecutors factored a defendant's social media posts into their requests for stricter sentences, according to an Associated Press review of court records.

Many rioters used social media to celebrate the violence or spew hateful rhetoric. Others used it to spread misinformation, promote baseless conspiracy theories or play down their actions.

Prosecutors also have accused a few defendants of trying to destroy evidence by deleting posts.

Approximately 700 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. About 150 of them have pleaded guilty. More than 20 defendants have been sentenced to jail or prison terms or to time already served behind bars.

Over a dozen others received home confinement sentences.

Rioters' statements, in person or on social media, aren't the only consideration for prosecutors or judges.

Justice Department sentencing memos say defendants also should be judged by whether they engaged in any violence or damaged property, whether they destroyed evidence, how long they spent inside the Capitol, where they went inside the building and whether they have shown sincere remorse.

# Covid-19: Bangladesh confirms presence of Omicron variant in two women cricketers

**PTI ■ DHAKA**

Bangladesh has confirmed the presence of Omicron variant of the coronavirus in two players of the women's national cricket team, which recently returned from Zimbabwe.

"Both the cricketers are in quarantine at a hotel. They are in good health," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told reporters here late Saturday evening.

Doctors are expecting their recovery by the next two weeks, he said.

Without revealing the identity of the cricketers, Maleque said, the two — one 21-year-old and the other 30 — are the first confirmed cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in the country.

Everyone who came into contact with them have been tested, but none of them have tested positive for Covid-19, he said.

Besides, "the whole (cricket) team is also in quarantine. So there is no cause for worry", Maleque said.

According to health officials, the two cricketers appeared to have contracted the viral infection during their stay in Zimbabwe. They had tested positive for Covid-19 while under institutional quarantine upon their return from Zimbabwe on December 1.

All the cricketers underwent Covid-19 tests on December 6, and samples from the two Covid-19 positive players were sent to laboratories for genome sequencing to determine if they contained the Omicron variant.

The Bangladesh women's national cricket team had gone to Zimbabwe in October to take part in the ICC Women's World Cup qualifying round and returned home as qualifier.

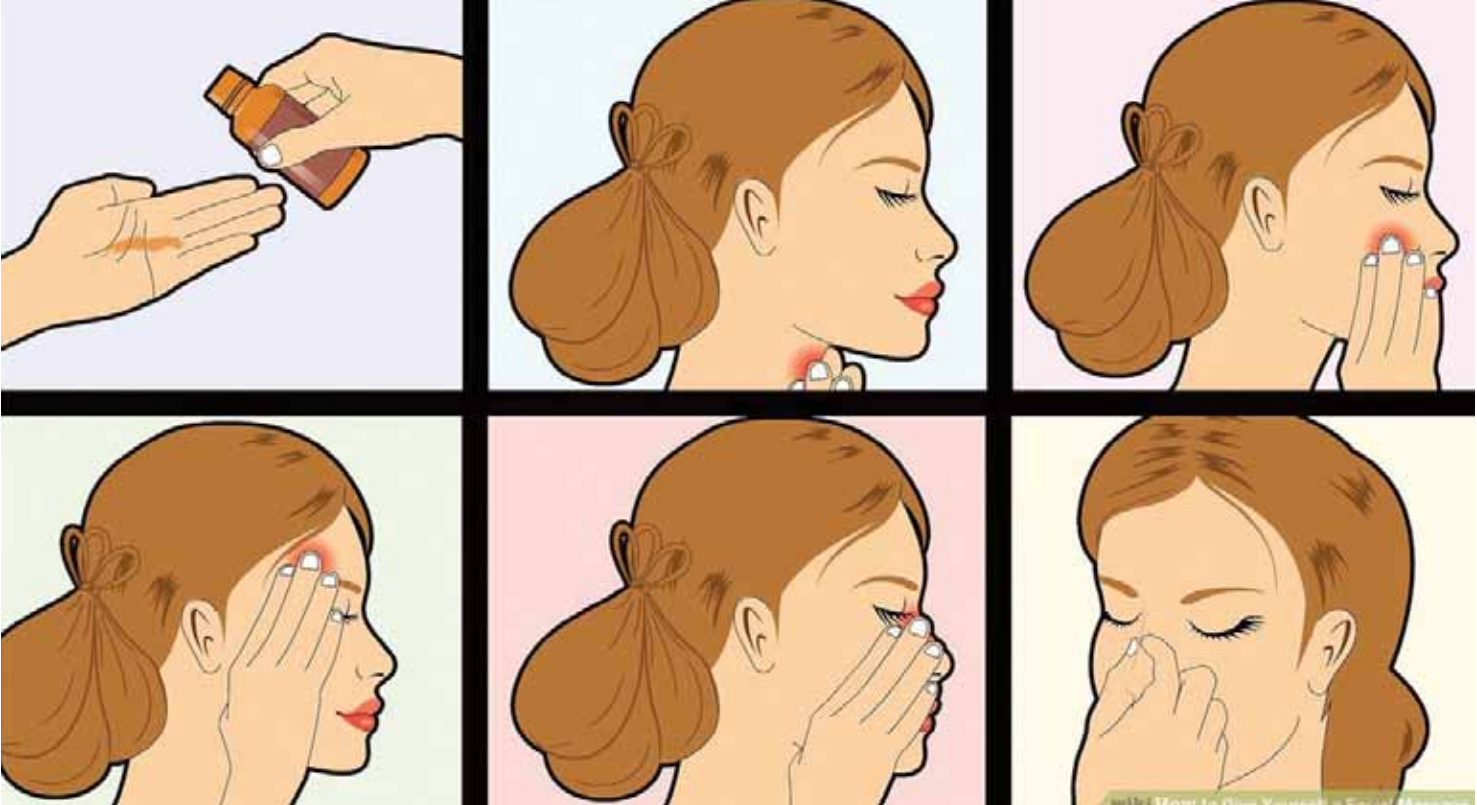
Bangladesh has so far recorded 15,78,996 coronavirus cases, while the death toll stands at 28,022.







**Bollywood**  
 'My parents always have and will be with me as my guiding light. I'm blessed to have them.'  
 —Ayushmann Khurrana



There is nothing better than a healthy skin glow. What people don't tell you is that make-up also looks better on healthy rejuvenated skin. A lot of focus is given to cleansing and moisturising, but face massage is equally important. Massaging the face using hands increases blood circulation and relaxes the skin, taking stress and tiredness right out. Face massages can also help in collagen synthesis to ensure skin brightening and smoothening the fine lines. One should massage the skin two to three times a week to get the desired results. It is unrealistic to expect one face massage or facial to result in miraculous results, consistent effort is required for real results. Facial skin is more delicate than the skin on the rest of the body and demands a lot of attention and care. Hectic lifestyles make the facial skin lose the sheen and natural glow. The solution for common problems like patchy skin tone, dullness, acne, scars or spots, premature aging, etc. is to include face massages with natural gels in one's routine. Gels are recommended especially as they suit varied skin types and do not harm the skin. They lightly moisturise and bring back the

## REJUVENATING YOUR SKIN

Facial massage gels help in healing and mending, among many other benefits, explains RACHIT GUPTA



shine of the face. Chemical products might result in irritation, inflammation, or even breakouts. But natural gel mostly does not have such reactions or side effects.

Often people believe that regular scrubbing can solve all problems. Scrubbing is an essential part of facial skincare but is incomplete in isolation. Scrubbing alone cannot elim-

inate acne, age spots, or lessen fine lines. Scrubbing helps in removing dead skin, unclog pores, removes oil and dirt. But, scrubbing too frequently or without the follow-up of the right nourishment routine, scrubbing can disrupt the natural protective barrier of the facial skin. In some cases, excess scrubbing causes rashes, micro-tears, and increased sensitivity. A natural gel face massage revitalises the facial skin. Just five minutes of care can give wonderful results not just in terms of healthier skin but as a great stress buster.

**What can a five-minute massage do?**  
 ♦ Improve blood circulation gives a natural glow to the face.  
 ♦ Removes toxins by moving the

lymphatic fluid.  
 ♦ Regular massages help in reducing fine lines and can keep wrinkles at bay.  
 ♦ Increases collagen production that helps in improving elasticity and preventing the skin from sagging, thus, keeping it young.  
 ♦ Gel face massage has de-puffing potential.  
 ♦ Results in even and radiant skin tone, also help in reducing acne and scars.  
 ♦ Reduces stress not only in the muscles but also helps in relaxing mentally, leaving one's mood elevated.  
**How to do it right?**  
 ♦ Wash your hands thoroughly.  
 ♦ Wash your face with water or a gentle face wash and pat dry.  
 ♦ Apply a natural face massage gel on the face.  
 ♦ Steam your face to help open up your pores.  
 ♦ Use your fingers to massage the skin with gentle pressure only. Massage in a circular motion. One can also use a roller.  
 ♦ Things to keep in mind while massaging your face: Do not use a lot of pressure while massaging. Be careful and gentle around the eyes as the skin is very sensitive, use soft movement. Use slow and outward motion to massage your face. Move thoroughly and cover all areas from forehead to the neck.  
 ♦ The skin looks amazing after a gel facial massage, but how does one retain the glow?  
 ♦ To retain the benefits and reduce further damage to facial skin, Remove make-up properly at the end of the day. Cleanse your skin regularly. Use a delicate face wash and not soap for daily cleansing. Use good sunscreen to avoid damage by the sun.  
 Choose natural gels for massage which contain aloe vera and/or herbs or mint or rose. Gels provide light moisturising and are not oily. They provide much-needed nourishment to the facial skin. They are versatile and suit dry skin types as well as oily skin. Most people have combination skin and are always concerned about which product to choose. In this case, one cannot go wrong with natural gels. Gels also help in healing and mending the skin due to their beneficial ingredients.  
 (The author is the director of OxyGlow Cosmetics Pvt Ltd.)

## WEBBED



**FOODTASTIC**  
 The reality TV game-show involves highly skilled artists create extravagant scene work and larger-than-life sculptures made entirely out of food. From vegetables and butter to fruit and cheese, these everyday items are transformed into works of art. The show starts premiering on December 15 on Disney+Hotstar.



**420 IPC**  
 The film revolves around CA Keswani, who is arrested for cheque theft and forgery. He hires Birbal, a lawyer, to fight his case, but the latter realises that there's more to things than meets the eye. 420 IPC will premiere on December 17 on ZEE5.



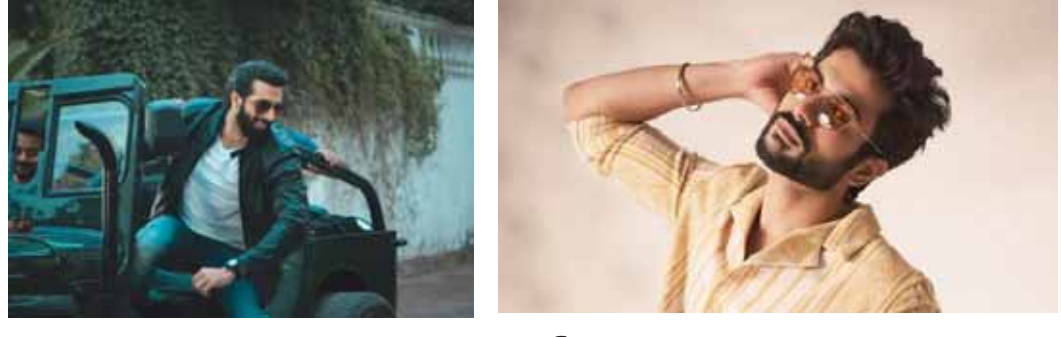
**WITH LOVE**  
 The story follows the Diaz siblings, Lily and Jorge, who are on a mission to find love and purpose. The Diaz siblings cross paths with seemingly unrelated residents during some of the most heightened days of the year — the holidays. The show starts premiering on December 17 on Amazon Prime Video.

## BE YOURSELF

'I really wanted to become a doctor', says veteran actress ASHA PAREKH on India's Best Dancer 2

Week on week, the contestants of India's Best Dancer 2 have been enthralled the audience with their dancing talent. Under the tutelage of their choreographers, these contestants have been honing their skills and the result is for all to see. This weekend, the contestants will pay a befitting tribute to the evergreen jodi of Indian Film Industry — Dharmendra Deol and Asha Parekh — as they perform on the iconic retro songs of the veteran actors. As known to all, contestant Saumya Kamble's father wants her to become a doctor like him. However, in a surprising turn of events, Kamble's strict father will finally only be accepting his daughter's choice but also decides to wholeheartedly support her dream and passion. When legendary actress Asha Parekh heard about this, she made a confession herself that really surprised everyone. The actress shared, "Even I wanted to become a doctor. For school, I used to travel everyday from Santa Cruz to Flora Fountain and one day on my way to school, I saw an accident site and all the blood really made me dizzy. Which is when I knew that I can't be a doctor. But that's okay, because with the earnings I got from working in films, I opened a hospital and am helping those

in need in my own way. Even you can do that, Saumya. You can also help the poor and under-privileged by being a dancer. Being a doctor isn't important, become who you really want to be."  
 (Watch India's Best Dancer 2 this Saturday & Sunday at 8 pm only on Sony Entertainment Television.)



## Beginning of a new era

As we inch closer to 2022, TEAM VIVA zeroes in on four male performances of 2021 that are worth a revisit

2021 is on its final chapter. The year saw some of the best work put forth by the Indian film industry. While the makers played with never-before-seen subjects, the powerhouse actors embarked on the new era of acting with their performances. By turning the narrative, these male performers created history in the calendar of filmmaking. As we inch closer to 2022, here's rounding four performances from the last year that mark the beginning of a new era.

**Armaan Ralhan in Ajeeb Daastaans**  
 Ralhan proves his acting mettle with his role as Ajeeb Daastaans' Majnu. The star masterfully aces the curve of his character from a handsome young man to a man with a game plan. The unconventional actor earned massive acclaim from all corners for his performance.

**Adarsh Gourav in The White Tiger**  
 Another name that stirred the industry was Adarsh Gourav. The



new-age star created an everlasting impact on the audience and critics with his character in The White Tiger. Apart from making big in India, the actor bagged a BAFTA nomination for the same.

**Sunny Kaushal in Shiddat**  
 Kaushal rose to instant stardom with his blockbuster success of Shiddat. Starring with Radhika Madan, the actor gave a new definition of love to the audience and



impressed the critics with his intense character arc.

**Mohit Raina in Mumbai Diaries 26/11**  
 With Mumbai Diaries 26/11, Raina breathed life into one of the most horrific tragedies on celluloid. Taking on to a daunting task, the actor left critics mighty impressed with his deeply felt performance. The show also starred Konkona Sensharma in the lead.



Bollywood actors Akshay Kumar and Sara Ali Khan with director Anand L Rai and writer Himanshu during the promotions of forthcoming film, Atrangi Re, at Imperial Hotel, New Delhi. —Photo by Pankaj Kumar

## TRENDBLAZER

**KUMAR ON HIS ROLE IN ATRANGI RE**  
 Superstar AKSHAY KUMAR is all set to enchant the audience with his latest role in the forthcoming film Atrangi Re. "I am just a part of the film but this is actually Dhanush and Sara's film. They are the main leads and I am just a character in it. When this film came to me I liked the story," Kumar shared. "The character was small but I liked it so much that I told Anand L Rai that I will do it and he was also shocked to hear how I said 'yes' to this," he added.

**fairtalk**  
 SS RAJAMOULI  
 "As far as I understand the pulse of the audience, it is obvious that a lot of people will expect a similar film from me after Baahubali, because it is a benchmark in my career. But there is a deeper meaning in what they expect. They are looking for that cinematic experience from RRR. Not a similar story, but a similar visual experience, imbued with emotions and fiery action sequences."

**dailytalk**  
 ABHAY DEOL  
 When Karan (Deol) was a child, Sunny bhaiyya used to bring him toys every time he returned home. I remember, once he said, 'No, I'm not going to get him anything this time'. You know, so that we don't spoil the child. Karan cried so much because he didn't get his toy. I still remember how he was bawling as he didn't anything."

**HOLLAND ON PICTURING FUTURE**  
 Hollywood star TOM HOLLAND wants to think about his future for the next five years. Asked if he'd reached the stage where he can take on 'weird' experimental movie roles, Holland said, "I wouldn't necessarily call it weird but I'd love to explore and try out new things with different characters." "But then again, I've been an actor since I was 11. I haven't done anything else. Maybe, I don't want to be an actor? Maybe, I just wanna set up a carpentry shop and be a dad? I want to think about my future now," he added.

# STAY STRESS-FREE

DR CHANDNI TUGNAIT explains ways of breaking the normalcy developed around anxiety amongst employees

Research has proven that our brains are 'wired' specifically to detect patterns, identify dangers and react accordingly. However, through intense pressure that we subject ourselves to, in our day-to-day lives, the mind is often unable to distinguish between stress that is real and the stress that is imagined; if we think something has the potential to put us in harm's way, it will trigger the same response as actual danger.

Stress can be self-created or self-perpetuated simply by thinking about it. In other words, when an employee feels they have a looming deadline, their brain automatically reacts as if their deadline were right around the corner, even if they have free time on their hands. It is important that we promote the leader mindset at work and do not normalise stress and anxiety. The important thing is to get into the action mode instead of focussing on stress and allowing it to increase exponentially through self-perpetuation.

Employees cannot be expected to avoid every piece of stress that comes into their lives; however, they can be trained on how to handle stress more effectively when it does come along by breaking the normal stress patterns and behaviors.

Stress is known to lead to insomnia, headache, irritable bowel syndrome, breathing issues, ulcers, high blood pressure, obesity, suppression of the immune system, diabetes, heart ailments, depression, panic attacks and pain in the body. An excess of stress, also known as the distress syndrome, can prove to be very harmful for one's mental, emotional and physical health. In the current fast-paced world, many times, we start perceiving the excessive workload, driving in traffic, family concerns, daily deadlines of emails, and so on as stress. The unconscious algorithms are running for all of us. The key is to be aware and then to be able to change the state. We should pause and breathe; be aware of the present moment instead of constantly chasing 'the next' in order to reduce stress in our lives. Especially, post the pandemic, the number of stressors is off the chart — work pressure, financial and economic uncertainty, relationship issues, peer pressure, spike in



health issues, sleep disorders, fears, irritability, need for validation on social media, social withdrawal, et al. The increasing stress amongst the employees is not only bad for morale but also for the overall productivity and profitability of the business.

Here are some quick ways to help break the patterns around stress for your employees:

## IDENTIFY THE TRIGGERS

Ask your team to acknowledge the situation that induces stress and set a time to plan for it or process it before responding impulsively.

## TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS

Don't let the team drown in hours and piles of work. Encourage them to take frequent breaks to stretch a little, walk a bit, take a few deep



breaths, listen to their favourite song or read a comic strip; anything that helps them relax.

## MEDITATION AND BREATHING

Daily meditation of five-15 minutes is known to have a profound impact on

calming the mind and releasing stress, worry and anxiety. You can introduce the same to your employees. Deep breathing and other breathing exercises are stellar for mindfulness.

## COMPANY OFFSITE

This is a fun way to promote bonding in the team away from the work pressure.

## GRATITUDE

Make gratitude and appreciation a part of life. Say it out loud. Appreciate your employees — for every big and small thing that adds value.

## HEALTHY EATING

Promote healthy eating instead of 'stress eating'. When we are stressed, the brain releases cortisol that makes us crave salt, sugar and fats for temporary pleasure. It is important to encourage healthy eating habits at work to handle pressure in better ways.

## SET AN EXAMPLE

As a leader, take out time for self-care. If employees see you stretching yourself beyond your capacity, working round the clock, not prioritising your health, they are more likely to get impacted by it all and continue to stay overwhelmed. Walk the talk — set the culture right.

## OFFER PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

It is important to confide in someone who offers a non-judgmental space to share all that one desires. Hold the space for your employees to connect with you and have authentic communication. Offer them support in the ways you can. In case of chronic stress, connect your employees to an expert who can help them cope better.

It's about time people acknowledge the colossal impact of stress at work, break the normalcy around it and make some lifestyle changes to address the stressors before stress takes over every aspect of their lives and business. Stay stress-free!

*(The author is a psychotherapist and the founder of Gateway of Healing.)*



## Ethical concerns while developing economy

RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI says that economics, estranged from ethics, leads to man's moral downfall

We are very much aware of the fact that the governments, especially in capitalist countries, resort to deficit financing, and increasing tax-rates in order to mop up large resources so that the plan outlays can be hiked. Hence, when the plan outlays keep increasing, the deficit on the revenue account also keeps increasing. Similarly, some governments, in the capitalist developing countries, indulge into public borrowings, which again goes on increasing year after year. Thus, one can say that, large-scale borrowings, deficit financing and increase in tax-rates have always resulted in the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

So, not only has poverty not been eliminated or alleviated but the rich, by borrowing money from the savings or fixed accounts of the middle class and the poor people, become richer. The result of all this has been that the rich have become more and more greedy and money-minded and, due to inflation, the poor have become poorer. Again, the black money generated due to tax-evasion, and so on, has also become responsible for increase in prices, and many other wrong habits which are opposed to the attainment of the goal of liberation. Because, those who amass large amounts of black money, indulge into various kinds of unsocial, illegal or unholy acts which speed up the moral degeneration of the society. Thus, this vicious circle continues.

The government increases tax-rates, which results in the increase of prices of consumer goods. The government servants demand higher pay scales or more dearness allowance and the workers demand more wages. The government and the factory managements or the wage-boards give a pay-hike and, in order to meet this extra burden, the government again raises its tax rates! In this whole process, the poor-man who already has little earnings, is crushed. The tension of the housewife or the middle-class man increases and, due to high tension, he has to pay higher bills to the chemist and the doctor and, in order to meet the increasing demands, he indulges into bribery. All this, then, results in dehumanisation and in moral turpitude. Thus, economics, estranged from ethics leads to man's moral downfall and to untold sufferings.

Even those who have modern gadgets and goods for comfort, lack mental concentration and peace. This is the present state of our society. This state shows that there is utter degeneration of the moral fiber of mankind. This decay in morals goes on increasing and a stage is reached when its vicious circle cannot be cut by man himself. Because, the nature of evil forces is such that one evil strengthens and supports the other. Not only does black money run a parallel economy and result in many economic crimes but it also affects the total morality of man, who goes on to conceal his actual income, evades taxes, bribes bureaucrats, becomes dishonest and then spends money on harmful habits, such as drinking, gambling, et al. In spite of knowing about these facts subconsciously, little does any government and the people realise that if man does not control his mind, there would either be high-rate of corruption, population growth, or broken homes, cases of divorce, and so on. The best thing, therefore, is to observe moral norms and to base our economy on ethics, for without that there cannot be peace and happiness in the world.



Loran, a non-descript village located in Mandi tehsil in the border district of Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir, is one of the most mesmerising places in the country. Tucked away in the foothills of the mighty Pir Panjal range, this place is approximately 32 kilometres from Poonch city. Many places in Loran, such as Molsar Saran and Nandishool Falls, offer a breathtaking view. Although these areas have all the features to attract travellers from across the globe, many would not prefer to visit due to a lack of even basic facilities.

Approximately ninety five percent of Loran is mountainous and glacial, with forests covering the remaining fifty to sixty percent of the land. Currently, only six to seven percent of Loran's population is engaged in formal occupation, while the rest is engaged in cultivation and daily labour. Considering the place is endowed with beautiful valleys and waterfalls, it has high potential to excel in the tourism sector, meanwhile producing employment for the locals.

Anjum Chaudhry, 25, a local from the village while reflecting on the role of the administration in promoting Loran, said, "Exploring the tourism potential of Loran will promote the development of this area and its inhabitants. It will not only generate jobs but will strengthen the economic condition of the people."

The valley is quite captivating, surrounded by lush green



## Self-reliant borders

Exploring the tourism potential of Loran will promote the development of the area and its inhabitants. It will not only generate jobs but will strengthen the economic condition of the people, finds SALMA RAZI

forest. Kamran Bashir, 70, the Sarpanch of Loran, stressed that although there are some facilities to accommodate tourists in the region, they aren't enough. "The tourism department has built a guest house, where tourists mostly stay, but the building is right next to the Loran headquarters. No such arrangements are in place for tourists at places

like Chinara Bella Sethi, Charkhari Ziyarat, Saran, Sib and Dinah. These are the places with great potential for tourism," he informed.

Nandishool Waterfall - pride of Poonch, is another unique tourist attraction in Loran that lacks basic facilities. Talking about it, Tanveer Ahmed Tantrre, 26, another local from the

region, said, "The mesmerising Nandishool Waterfall is not on the tourist map yet. No huts or roads have been built there, and no other facilities have been provided." As there is no place for shelter, people do not bother to visit the place again, he added.

In recent times, the administration has been mulling over



promoting border tourism. As per a report, in September this year, Ajay Bhatt, Minister of State (MoS) for Defence and Tourism, while visiting the border district of Kupwara in north Kashmir, said that in future, border tourism would be opened soon. This brings hope to the people in these regions as it will significantly reduce the unemployment.

Chaudhry Riyaz Naz, the District Development Council (DDC) member of Poonch is hopeful of tourism in Poonch. "Several projects have been handed over to the administration. The work on these projects will commence soon after the approval of the administration and all possible facilities will be available to tourists," he said.

Giving an insight on the projects in pipeline, Tanveer Ahmed, the Chief Tourism Officer (CTO) of Poonch, said, "In these two years, I have

worked in various places in Mandi and Surankot tehsils of Poonch district. Especially in Mandi Tehsil, a lot of work has been done by the tourism department. A project for Jabi Tooti has been prepared and a big field has been constructed at Arai Top in Mandi," informed the CTO.

There is no doubt that in the last few years, tourism has been promoted in various places in Poonch District's Mandi Tehsil and the administration is engaged in its continuous efforts. However, the pace of work needs to be accelerated. It is also essential that the development authorities promote sustainable, ethical and ecotourism. While border tourism can boost the country's economy, it will also help in creating jobs for the locals and make them self-reliant without having to migrate from their regions.

—Charkha Features

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.”  
 —Henry Ford

### MALARIA DRUG MAY PROTECT AGAINST COVID

Researchers discovered that Covid-19 can be prevented by a medication currently being used for malaria. As part of the medication Malarone, it has been used for the treatment and prevention of Malaria since 1999.

The medicine, Atovaquone, had a protective effect both before and after infection with the Coronavirus in human cells in the laboratory, which means that it can, in all probability, also be used for the prevention and treatment of Covid-19, said researchers from Aarhus University in Denmark. Atovaquone has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

"Being able to use already approved medicines against Covid-19 would be ideal, because it would save both time and resources during the developmental phase," David Olgagner from Department of Biomedicine added. Researchers also plan to examine whether the drug has any effect on the Omicron-related variant.

### SAVANNAS CAN BE PROTECTED

Researchers explore the potential for fire management-based carbon-financing programmes to fill the funding gap and benefit degrading savanna ecosystems in Africa.

The Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) announced in the journal *One Earth* that Savanna fire management can generate enough carbon revenue to help restore Africa's rangelands. Researchers explored the potential for fire management-based carbon-financing programs to fill this funding gap and benefit degrading savanna ecosystems.

"This study provides the first credible estimates built on sound data and proven methodologies that clearly show the significant potential for substantial long-term economic and ecological benefits. Given the positive social and biodiversity impacts that come along for the ride, we can only hope that with greater understanding, more public and private investment will follow," says Tim Tear, director of BRI's Climate Change Programme and lead author on the paper.

### A POSSIBLE CURE FOR PARKINSON'S DISEASE?

A molecule that shows promise in preventing Parkinson's disease has been refined by scientists at the University of Bath in the UK.

Professor Jody Mason, who led the research, explains, "Work still needs to happen, but this molecule has the potential to be a pre-cursor to a drug. We hope to develop a drug that can return people to good health before symptoms develop."

A peptide known to prevent the protein error that gives rise to Parkinson's disease has been optimised by scientists. The new peptide is a strong candidate for future development into a cure.

Parkinson's disease is characterised by a protein in human cells 'misfolding', where it becomes aggregated and malfunctions. The protein, alpha-synuclein (a5), is abundant in all human brains. After misfolding, it accumulates in large masses, known as Lewy bodies, which comprise a5 aggregates that are toxic to dopamine-producing brain cells, causing them to die. This triggers the symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

### AIR POLLUTION INCREASES RISK OF COVID-19

Hospitalised Covid-19 patients who had been chronically exposed in their neighbourhoods to higher particulate matter — such as smoke, soot, and dirt — had increased risks for admission to the ICU and death compared to those without such exposure.

Mount Sinai-led researchers reported in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

The finding adds to our understanding about environmental factors that increase the risks of COVID-19. Researchers noted that chronic air pollution exposure can alter the pulmonary immune system, may increase systemic inflammation, and can be associated with increased risk for cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome.

A team of researchers conducted a retrospective analysis of more than 6,500 COVID-19 patients admitted to seven New York City hospitals.

### GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT MAY BOOST HEALTH

When it comes to your health, being willing to give social support to your spouse, friends and family may be just as important as receiving assistance, a new study suggests.

While researchers have long thought that receiving social support from others is a key to health, studies have shown mixed results. So researchers from The Ohio State University decided to see if giving support may also play an important role in health.

They found that on one important measure of health — chronic inflammation — indicators of positive social relationships were associated with lower inflammation only among people who said they were available to provide social support to family and friends.

Results show that the healing power of good relationships comes from the fact that support is mutual.

BEST IN THE WORLD

Red Bull's Verstappen pips Hamilton in the season's final race in Abu Dhabi to win 2021 F1 championship

AP ■ ABU DHABI The most dramatic Formula One season in years ended, of course, in one of the most dramatic finishes possible when Max Verstappen snatched the world championship away from Lewis Hamilton with a pass on the final lap of the Abu Dhabi GP. Hamilton was five laps away from passing Michael Schumacher in the record books with an eighth championship on Sunday until a crash gave Verstappen and Red Bull one final chance. Whatever Hamilton said over his radio when

Nicholas Latifi crashed to bring out the safety car was only played as one long beep to cover the expletives. F1 race director Michael Masi took his time figuring out how to conclude the race before controversially settling on one final lap of racing to decide the title. Verstappen started the

It's just insane. My goal when I was little was to be a Formula One driver. You dream of podiums and victories. But when they tell you that you are world champion, it's incredible

- MAX VERSTAPPEN AFTER WINNING F1 TITLE

Congratulations to Max and to his team, I think he did an amazing job this year

- LEWIS HAMILTON

Table with 3 columns: Driver, World titles, Years won. Rows include Michael Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton, Juan Manuel Fangio, Alain Prost, and Sebastian Vettel.

final lap just behind Hamilton, chasing him through the first four turns. Verstappen made his pass in the fifth turn and Hamilton had one last shot. He pulled his Mercedes even with the Red Bull but couldn't clear Verstappen, who surged ahead to become the first Dutch world champion. Verstappen and Red Bull celebrated in a champagne soak, received hugs from his fellow competitors — including Hamilton and Hamilton's father — and made his way to the DJ stand at Yas Marina Circuit and jumped wildly up and down to the music. "It's just insane, I mean, my goal when I was little was to become a Formula One driver and to go for wins, to be on the podium," said Verstappen. "When they play the national anthem, you want it to be yours and when you stand here and they tell you that you are the world champion, it's something incredible and special. It was a fitting end to a season that saw the two contenders go wheel-to-wheel over 22 races spanning four continents and arrive in Abu Dhabi tied in the championship standings. It marked the first time the contenders were equal at the season finale since 1974." "Congratulations to Max and to his team, I think he did an amazing job this year," Hamilton said.

This bitter rivalry between Mercedes and Red Bull got the ending it deserved — one that left the victor speechless. "Oh my God!" Verstappen screamed over his radio as he crossed the finish line. "You are the world champion! The world champion!" screamed back Red Bull boss Christian Horner. "Let's do this for another 10 or 15 years!" Verstappen replied. Red Bull won its first F1 title since 2013; Mercedes had won every championship since. The mood was far different in the Mercedes camp, where Hamilton sat motionless in his car for several moments as other drivers made their way to congratulate Verstappen. The defeat ended his reign of four consecutive titles and denied Hamilton a chance to pass Schumacher as best all-time in F1. Mercedes boss Toto Wolff was incredulous on the radio, demanding "the last lap be reinstated." "Toto, it's called a motor race," Masi tersely replied. "We want car racing." Hamilton received a long hug from his father, who then went to the Red Bull garage and hugged both Verstappen and Verstappen's father. Jos Verstappen was himself a former F1 driver and raised his 24-year-old son to become a world champion. Mission accomplished and Red Bull celebrated by playing "We are the Champions" in its garage.



2021 DRIVER STANDINGS table with columns: POS, DRIVER, NATIONALITY, CAR, PTS. Lists drivers like Max Verstappen, Lewis Hamilton, Valtteri Bottas, Sergio Perez, Carlos Sainz, Lando Norris, Charles Leclerc, Daniel Ricciardo, Pierre Gasly, Fernando Alonso, Esteban Ocon, Sebastian Vettel, Lance Stroll, Yuki Tsunoda, George Russell, Kimi Raikkonen, Nicholas Latifi, Antonio Giovinazzi, Mick Schumacher, Robert Kubica, and Nikita Mazepin.

Tough competition for Dhawan from Ruturaj Gaikwad, Venkatesh Iyer all set for SA ODIs



Shikhar Dhawan's poor run of form in the Vijay Hazare Trophy would keep the selectors worried but young turks Ruturaj Gaikwad and Venkatesh Iyer seem to have all but booked their tickets for the upcoming away three-match ODI series against South Africa in January. While BCCI has announced Rohit Sharma as the next captain of the ODI side, the squad for the series is yet to be finalised. It remains to be seen how many rookies do selectors take for the 50-over competition keeping bubble-life and workload management in mind. The two names who are in the midst of a stellar Vijay Hazare Trophy season are Gaikwad and Iyer, who have now hit three and two hundreds respectively in the competition so far. Iyer, on his part, has also taken some important wickets, making it amply clear that he is ready to push back Hardik Pandya for the time being as team's premier all-rounder. It is understood that once it was clear that Iyer, who is a specialist opener will find it difficult to fit in at the top of the order in presence of KL Rahul and Rohit, he will have to improvise and perhaps bat at number five or six as a designated finisher. Iyer has taken the role like a fish to water as he batted at number four against Kerala to score 112 off 84 balls and then pushed the envelope further scoring 71 off 49 balls batting at number five. Maharashtra captain Gaikwad has carried his IPL Orange Cap form into the Hazare Trophy with three back-to-back hundreds which will certainly put the selection committee under intense pressure to take him as the back-up opener. Gaikwad had played two T20 Internationals in Sri Lanka but didn't get chance in the ODIs. Even in the three match T20 Internationals against New Zealand, he couldn't find a place with Rohit batting at the top and KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan being the two opening partners. But now he has a string of big scores 136 versus MP, 154 not out vs Chattisgarh and 124 vs Kerala and will be difficult to ignore.

Sevilla wins at Bilbao 1-0 to pressure Madrid before derby

AP ■ BARCELONA A long-range strike by Thomas Delaney and Athletic Bilbao's chronic troubles finishing its scoring chances helped Sevilla earn a 1-0 win at San Mamés Stadium to close the gap with Spanish league leader Real Madrid. Sevilla pulled to within five points of the pace-setter a day before Madrid faces Atlético Madrid in a derby that the visitor needs to win to keep alive its title defense. Delaney on Saturday struck in the 38th minute for his first goal since the Denmark midfielder joined Sevilla from Borussia Dortmund in the offseason. His curling strike from outside the area that beat Spain goalkeeper Unai Simón came against the

flow of play. Bilbao threatened to overrun a Sevilla side missing several of Julien Lopetegui's first-choice players. Striker Yousef En-Nesyri, forwards Lucas Ocampos and Erik Lamela, midfielder Suso Fernández, and right back Jesús Navas were out injured, while midfielder Ivan Rakitic was suspended. Brothers Iñaki and Nico Williams and Iker Muniain generated a steady stream of scoring chances, only for the same scoring difficulties that have plagued the Basque club all season to again ruin its hopes. Dani García and Unai Vencedor hit the post. Muniain missed twice from close range, and when Iñaki Williams did get a shot goal-bound, goalie Yassine Bounou got a leg on his strike to push it wide. Delaney's goal was cued by Papu Gómez, who dribbled into the area to draw in Bilbao's defense before passing back to the top of

the box for teammates arriving in a second wave. Gonzalo Montiel knocked the ball on for Delaney to size up the net and bend his left-footed strike into the corner. Sevilla's win came after it was eliminated from the Champions League group phase after falling to Salzburg 1-0. FAN PROTEST Marching behind a large banner that read "For the Dignity of Valencia CF LIM GO HOME," thousands of Valencia fans protested against the ownership of Singaporean businessman Peter Lim before their team's home match against Elche. This was the second large protest by disgruntled supporters who accuse Lim of running the club solely as a business as opposed to investing to win since acquiring it in 2014 when it was heavily in debt. The first major protest was in May. Many fans also held up signs against Lim during the match that ended with a 2-1 victory for the hosts. Valencia was without coach José Bordalás and player Omar Alderete after both tested positive for COVID-19. ALAVÉS RECORD Joselu Mato became Alavés' all-time leading scorer in the first division after his 30th goal for the club earned a 1-1 home draw with Getafe. ESPANYOL PREVAILS Espanyol forward Javi Puado scored twice in the second half to tilt a 4-3 shootout in its favor and keep Levante winless in all 17 rounds played.



Delaney's goal was cued by Papu Gómez, who dribbled into the area to draw in Bilbao's defense before passing back to the top of the box for teammates arriving in a second wave. Gonzalo Montiel knocked the ball on for Delaney to size up the net and bend his left-footed strike into the corner.

Bengaluru head coach Pezzaoui not unduly worried about Chhetri's goal glut

AP ■ BAMBOLIM India captain Sunil Chhetri is yet to score a goal in six matches in the ongoing Indian Super League but his Bengaluru FC head coach Marco Pezzaoui is not unduly

worried about the talisman's form, saying "he is also a human being". Pezzaoui conceded that "it's hard times" for Chhetri but said he has the support of the team. "He (Chhetri) is a human being. Sometimes you don't have luck going for you. With the national team, he had a lot of luck as the ball fell to him many times and he scored five goals," Pezzaoui said after Bengaluru lost 1-2 to FC Goa on Saturday night. "In this hard time, he has the support of the team and also how he worked for the team was good. He needs more luck inside the box.



India captain Sunil Chhetri is yet to score a goal in six matches in the ongoing Indian Super League but his Bengaluru FC head coach Marco Pezzaoui is not unduly

ISL: Hyderabad FC face NEUFC challenge

AP ■ BAMBOLIM NorthEast are a strong team. They played a good game and did not deserve to lose against Odisha. Like every other game, this one will be very difficult as well for us," said HFC head coach Marquez, who believes NorthEast will be a tough team to beat. "In the ISL, any team can beat the other this season and for sure, this will be yet another tough game for both teams involved," he added. Khalid Jamil-coached NEUFC have the likes of Khassa Camara, Mathias Coureur, Deshorn Brown and Hernan Santana, who are in fine form this season, along with Patrick Flottmann, Suhair, who have also been consistent. Irrespective of their form, I think

High on confidence after an impressive half-round show against Bengaluru FC, Hyderabad FC will be up against a fresh challenge from NorthEast United FC in an Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Monday. Currently fifth in the league table, Manolo Marquez's men managed to register their first clean sheet in their previous game, and will next take on the Highlanders, who are having a mixed run of form. NorthEast suffered a narrow loss to Odisha FC in their last match on Friday and have picked up just four points from their five games so far this season. Irrespective of their form, I think

Hustle for Vijay Hazare Trophy Tripura, Nagaland keep winning in Plate Group

PTI ■ JAIPUR Tripura crushed Nagaland by 10 wickets in a Vijay Hazare Plate group match for their fourth straight win in the national one-day tournament here on Sunday, while Meghalaya held off Mizoram's spirited challenge to record their fourth victory in as many matches. The experienced M Muresingh was the star performer for Tripura as his five-wicket haul helped them bundle out Nagaland for 48 in 14 overs. Tripura knocked off the required runs in 10.1 overs to improve their net run-rate to 2.739 which is ahead of Meghalaya's 1.475. Meghalaya skipper and wicket-keeper Punit Bisht cracked a brilliant 142 (129 balls, 20 fours and 1 six) to help his side make 237 in 49 overs against Mizoram. Meghalaya and Tripura will face off on Tuesday to decide the team that will advance to the next stage. Gujarat ride on Saurav-Het's twin hundreds to beat Vidarbha

Opener Saurav Chauhan hit eight sixes in his 141 off 121 balls while keeper Het Patel struck an unbeaten 109 as Gujarat beat Vidarbha by 46 runs in a high-scoring Group A league match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Sunday. Batting first, Gujarat scored a mammoth 363 for 6 in 50 overs with former Delhi Capitals player Rupal Patel hitting two sixes in his 15-ball 25 towards the end. Chauhan and Patel added 118 runs for the third wicket as the opener also hit nine fours. Patel, on his part, hit 12 fours and two sixes. Pacer Darshan Nalkande went for 92 runs in his 10 overs. In reply, Vidarbha could manage only 317 in 48.3 overs with veteran Ganesh Sathish smashing 110 off 78



Pacer Punit Bisht cracked a brilliant 142 (129 balls, 20 fours and 1 six) to help his side make 237 in 49 overs against Mizoram. Meghalaya and Tripura will face off on Tuesday to decide the team that will advance to the next stage.

Karnataka beat Baroda for their third victory. Chasing a revised target of 206 in 44 overs under VJD method, Tamil Nadu ended at 204 for 9 despite enterprising half-centuries by skipper N Jagadeesan (64) and Dinesh Karthik (65) and fell agonizingly short by 1 run. Defending champions Mumbai lost to Bengal by 67 runs via the VJD method used for domestic matches and face an early elimination from the tournament. The team led by Shams Mulani has only one win after four matches and is virtually out of contention for the next phase. In the Bengal vs Mumbai match, the former had piled up 318 for 7 in 50 overs, thanks to enterprising tons by Anustup Majumdar (110, 122 balls, 14x4) and Shahbaz Ahmed

lose again Unfancied Pondicherry pulled off an upset one-run win over Tamil Nadu in a Vijay Hazare Trophy Elite Group B match on Sunday, while

the last seven wickets for 21 runs. Earlier, Sidhu and Lalit Yadav came together after Delhi were tottering at 47 for 4 in 17 overs having lost Shikhar Dhawan (18 off 42 balls), Vaibhav Kandpal (0), Himmat Singh (1) and Kshitiz Sharma (17 off 39 balls). All-rounder Venkatesh stars in MP win; Kerala on top after big win over C'garh Promising all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer continued his sensational form with both bat and ball as Madhya Pradesh pipped Chandigarh by five runs in a high-scoring group D thriller of the Vijay Hazare Trophy National One-dayers here on Sunday. Venkatesh, who is seen as a India prospect to fill in the Hardik Pandya slot across white-ball formats, blazed his way to a 113-ball 151 (8x4, 10x6) to power Madhya Pradesh to a challenging 331/9. Chandigarh responded in style with centuries from skipper Manan Vohra (105) and Ankit Kaushik (111) and needed 32 runs from the last 12 balls.