

OPINION 6 THE EVER-ALARMING GROWTH OF CHINA

WORLD 8 SCRIBE JAILED FOR WUHAN REPORTS 'CLOSE TO DEATH'

SPORT 12 INDO- SA TEST MOVED TO CAPE TOWN

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AFTAB IS ALL ABOUT FAMILY AND WORK NOW 10 VIVACITY

Pakistan role in Af pernicious: India

‘Their NSA’s decision not to attend meet unfortunate’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As India prepared to hold an important international meet on Afghanistan next week, it has termed Pakistan's decision not to attend it as “unfortunate” and said its role in Afghanistan is “pernicious.” This reaction on Friday came ahead of the National Security Advisers (NSA)-level meet on November 10 here to review the situation in Afghanistan.



attempt to deflect attention from its pernicious role in Afghanistan. Sources also said Pakistan's decision is unfortunate, but not surprising. “It reflects its mindset of viewing Afghanistan as its protectorate. Pakistan has not attended previous meetings of this format,” officials said. India has extended invitation to several central Asian countries, including Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, besides Russia, Iran and China.

next week's meeting hosted by India reflects the widespread concern of regional countries about situation in Afghanistan and their desire to consult and coordinate with each other. India has an important role to play in this process. “Invitations have been extended to China and Pakistan too, and formal responses are awaited. However, Pakistan has indicated through the media that it will not attend,” they said.

Two earlier meetings in this format were held in Iran in September 2018 and December 2019. The third meeting in India could not be held earlier due to the ongoing corona pandemic, they said.

Justifying its role in Afghanistan, the Pakistani NSA also said in the Press conference on Tuesday, “It may be a luxury for the Western world sitting 10,000 miles away (to not bother about Afghanistan) but we do not have any option to disengage from Afghanistan.” Explaining Pakistan's support for the Taliban dispensation in Kabul, the NSA said the world needs to engage with them in order to prevent a humanitarian crisis. “This is not a matter of the Taliban or some other Government but of the ordinary Afghan (citizens) and We are the biggest victim of this (instability in Afghanistan) so when we talk about stability in Afghanistan then one (reason) is that it is the right of our Afghan brothers and sisters. But secondly, it is also necessary for our national security that there is stability in Afghanistan and continuous peace is established,” Yusuf said.

Wankhede out, NCB SIT to probe drug case

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Under severe flak from various quarters for its lopsided investigations in the mid-sea drug bust case involving Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan leading to the grant of bail to the accused, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Friday replaced its Mumbai Zonal team, headed by controversial IRS officer Sameer Wankhede, with a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising officers from Operations Branch of NCB headquarters to investigate the sensational case.

Stopping short of saying that it has removed Wankhede — who is facing several serious charges ranging from bribery, forging his caste certificate to join IRS to enjoying “lavish lifestyle” — from the team investigating the mid-sea drug bust case, an apparently embarrassed NCB merely said that its Director General had “constituted” an SIT comprising officers from New Delhi to “take over” as many as six cases with national and international ramifications” from its Mumbai Zonal unit. In a brief couched statement issued in the evening, Deputy Director-General (Ops) Sanjay Kumar Singh said, “A Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising officers from Operations branch of Narcotics Control Bureau



Zonal Director of NCB Mumbai Sameer Wankhede poses for a photo with media persons as he arrives at NCB office, in Mumbai on Friday

(NCB) has been constituted by the Director General, NCB, to take over a total of 6 cases from the NCB Mumbai Zonal Unit, which have national and international ramifications.” “In order to conduct deeper investigations to find out forward and backward linkages, no officer has been removed from their present roles and they will continue to assist the Operation Branch investigation as required until any orders issued to the contrary. It is reiterated that the NCB functions across the country as a single integrated unit,” Singh said. The appointment of an SIT team comes in the wake of the NCB ordering vigilance probe into the “vigilance matters” relating to the ongoing investigations in the mid-sea

drug bust case and summoning of Wankhede to its headquarters in the capital last week for a meeting with the top bosses. The two events were a fallout of the allegations made through an affidavit by “panch witness” Prabhakar R Sail, including the charge of ₹8 crore extortion attempt, in the mid-sea drug bust case. What has embarrassed most is the manner in which is the fact that Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh's son Aryan and two other accused — Arbaaz Merchant and Munmun Dhamecha — were granted bail by the Bombay High Court on October 28, while a special NDPS court granted bail to two accused ahead of the high court granting bail to Aryan and two and two others and it granted bail to nine others on October 30.

Low pressure to form around Nov 9: Temp to dip after couple of days

Dry weather would prevail over the districts of the State till November 9

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A low-pressure area is likely to form over southeast Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood around November 9, said the Regional Office of the IMD here on Friday. As per the IMD, light to moderate rainfall is likely to occur in south coastal Odisha next week due to the low-pressure system. Earlier, the weather office said that dry weather would prevail over the districts of the State till November 9 while shallow to moderate fog would occur at one or two places over Nayagarh and Kalahandi districts. The IMD also forecasted that there would be no large scale changes in the night temperature during the next two days across the State. However, the mercury would gradually dip by 2 to 3 degree Celsius thereafter. Kenojhar was the coldest place in the State on Thursday with the mercury plummeting to 17.4 degree C while Sambalpur recorded the highest maximum temperature of 32.3 degree C. The IMD had earlier forecast light to moderate rain or thundershower at one or two places in Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada and Nabarangpur on November 7 morning.

Allow airspace for Srinagar flights for people, India asks Islamabad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has asked Pakistan through diplomatic channels to grant overflight clearance to GoFirst's Srinagar to Sharjah flights in the larger interest of the common people. Pakistan on Tuesday did not allow the Srinagar-Sharjah flight to use its airspace, forcing it to take a longer route and fly over Gujarat to reach its destination in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The duration of the Srinagar-Sharjah flight has gone up by 45 minutes, increasing from three hours and 30 minutes to four hours and 15 minutes. The airline began direct flights between Srinagar and Sharjah city in the UAE from October 23. Top sources said that the matter has been promptly raised through the diplomatic channels in this regard.

Modi: Take kids to sites linked to freedom struggle, ancient shrines

PM unveils Adi Shankaracharya's statue in Kedarnath, inaugurates works

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi exhorted citizens to take their children to visit historical sites linked to India's freedom struggle and also ancient shrines to give them a sense of the nation's heritage. Modi said this after unveiling the statue of Adi Shankaracharya at the reconstructed Shankaracharya Samadhi in Kedarnath apart from unveiling the foundation stones for various works and inaugurating other works totaling ₹400 crore on Friday. Addressing a gathering after offering special prayers and unveiling various works, Modi spoke in detail about



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kedarnath Temple in Uttarakhand on Friday

Adi Shankaracharya, his life, works and teachings. Stating that Kedarnath offers a unique glimpse of

India, he exhorted the people to visit historical sites related to India's freedom struggle and ancient shrines along with their children so that they are also aware of the nation's spiritual and cultural heritage.

BJP slams Opp States for not slashing VAT on fuel

BJP-ruled States further cut petrol price by ₹8.7/L, diesel by ₹9.52

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Politics over oil prices flared-up on Friday as the BJP accused Opposition-ruled States of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Delhi of not reducing VAT on petrol and diesel after the Central Government announced a cut in excise duty with slashing of local sales tax (VAT) rates of fuel. Petrol price has been further reduced by as much as ₹8.7 per litre and diesel by ₹9.52 in the BJP-ruled States and UTs — from Ladakh to Puducherry. Buckling under pressure, the Union Government had on Wednesday cut excise duty on



petrol by ₹5 per litre and that on diesel by ₹10 a litre to give reprieve to consumers battered by record-high retail fuel prices. Taking on the “Jeb Katron se savdhan” jibe of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who accused the Modi Government of tax extortion, the BJP asked who is today proving to be “bigger jeb katra” and condemned what it called “vulture politics” of the Congress. Addressing a Press conference here, national spokesman

of the BJP Gaurav Bhatia asked why the Congress and Opposition-ruled States are not reducing VAT on petrol and diesel to give more relief to the common men as has been done by BJP-run States. He said in Uttar Pradesh VAT is ₹21.86 and in Uttarakhand it is ₹20.46 while in Maharashtra where, he said, under “maha vasooli aagadi Government” VAT on petrol is ₹31.19 and petrol is selling at ₹110. Attacking Congress-run Ashok Gehlot Government of Rajasthan and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the BJP leader said petrol in Rajasthan's Ganganagar is selling at ₹121 and diesel at ₹112 per liter. Bhatia demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative of reducing oil excise duty should be carried forward by all States by lowering VAT and criticised Gehlot for “not welcoming” excise cut by the centre and seeking further cut on it.

Sidhu takes back his resignation

But sets condition to head Punjab Cong again: ‘Will resume charge only when new AG is appointed’

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH



Over a month after triggering political storm in Punjab by quitting as the State Congress president over the key appointments in the Charanjit Singh Channi led Government, Navjot Singh Sidhu on Friday finally withdrew his resignation, while at the same time declaring that he would rejoin the office only after the appointment of the State's new Advocate-General (AG). Days after putting up a “united” show with Channi by visiting Kedarnath and later addressing the party meeting, Sidhu questioned his own

Daily Covid cases decline to 170 in State, 24 children among infected

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State on Friday witnessed a significant decline in Covid-19 positive cases as 170 persons were found infected in 20 districts and the State pool. With this, the total tally increased to 10,42,943. Among the newly-infected were 24 children in the age group of 0 to 18 years. In the last 24 hours, 55,743 samples were tested and the test positivity rate (TPR) was 0.30 per cent. The active cases were 3,651. Notably, the State had recorded 351 cases on Thursday. Of the 170 new cases, 98 were from quarantine and 72 local contacts. Khordha district recorded the day's highest 61 cases followed by Cuttack with 19 and Kendrapada and Baleswar 11 each. The districts which recorded below-10 cases were Sambalpur nine, Jajpur eight,

70 articles sent for tests in Mamita murder case: Bizman says he sold tyres to Govinda

PNS ■ BALANGIR ■ BHAWANIPATNA

The Balangir police, expediting the probe into the murder of Kalahandi school-teacher Mamita Meher, on Friday sent 70 seized articles in connection with the case have been sent to a forensic laboratory for tests. The articles included five strands of hair, a pair of earrings, a towel, a jar and a knife which were recovered from the car of prime accused Govinda Sahu. Besides, Govinda's nail, hair and blood samples were sent to the laboratory for examination. Police have sent ashes, bones and skin samples to the laboratory to establish the identity of the body remains that were recovered from a pit at the under-construction Mahaling stadium in Kalahandi on October 19. Other items, including an airbag, ironware, wires, a gold chain, a silver anklet, burnt



clothes and salt stuffed in plastic sheets which were dug out from the pit have also been sent for examination. The DNA samples of Mamita's father Suchandra Meher and mother Tulasi were also sent to the laboratory for DNA profiling which will be used to match with the samples taken from the body remains to establish Mamita's identity. In another development in the case, Mahaling-based businessman Vivek Agarwal has allegedly told police that Sahu bought two tyres from him which were used to burn Mamita's body on October 8 night. His statement has been recorded by police under Section 161 of CrPc. Agarwal said Govinda had told him over telephone for the two tyres and his driver Radeshshyam Chandi came to his shop and took the tyres.

Delhi HC fines CRPF DG ₹20K for non-compliance of June 9 order

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has slapped a fine of ₹20,000 on CRPF Director General Kuldeep Singh in response to a contempt petition. The court order came following non-compliance of its order passed on June 9 this year on a writ petition filed by a group serving CRPF officers aggrieved by the discriminatory provisions of promotion for medical officers and combatant officers. Through its order in June, the court had directed the CRPF chief to address the grievances of the combatant officers within 12 weeks. The petitioners were aggrieved with the anomalies in the promotional entitlement of the medical cadre officers of the paramilitary who were getting a faster promotion than the combatant officers.

State reduces VAT on petrol, diesel by ₹3

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Hence, the total loss to the State exchequer on account of reduction in VAT is approximately Rs 2,000 crore. However, it would provide a major relief to the people of Odisha.

With the decision, petrol and diesel prices in the State are likely to be one of the lowest in the country.

A day after the Central Government reduced Excise Duty on petrol and diesel, price of the fuels dipped in the State. Petrol was being sold at Rs 104.73 per litre in Bhubaneswar; similarly, the rate was Rs 105.51 in Cuttack.

Petrol prices had crossed Rs 110-mark in all districts of the State, a couple of days ago.

The Centre on Wednesday announced slashing of Excise Duty cut on both petrol and diesel, thus bringing down retail price.

Mohapatra sworn in as HC Judge



PNS ■ CUTTACK

High Court.

With the fresh appointment, the number of judges in the Orissa High Court rose to 18. Last month, three new judges had been appointed to the High Court. The newly-appointed judges Mruganka Sekhar Sahoo, Justice Radha Krishna Pattanaik and Justice Sashikanta Mishra had taken oath on October 19.

Atal Tinkering Lab unveiled at BJEM II

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Buxi Jagabandhu English Medium School (BJEM II), Satyabhamapur, inaugurated its Atal Tinkering Lab with great fanfare on Monday.

Minister of Science and Technology, Public Enterprises, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disability Government Ashok Chandra Panda joined the event as chief guest.

Jayadev MLA Arabintha Dhal joined as guest of honour along with the other guests, including chairman of BJ Education Society Raghunath Mishra, vice-chairman Aswin Tiwari, manager Pratap Kumar Jena and principal Khyanika Das. The valedictory ceremony was inaugurated by the chief guest, Brahmananda Double Guinness world record holder and Principal Scientist, Institute of Water Management, Bhubaneswar Dr Pothula Srinivasa. Dr Aneeya Kumar Samantara, Post Doctorate fellow School of Chemical Sciences, National Institute of Science Education and Research Programme joined as guest of honour.

The inaugural day proceeded with community training and learning which was carried out by trainers from TECHB. Students from 10 different schools participated in the learning programme which led to project development and competitive learning. Raseswari Nayak was felicitated as ATL Brand Ambassador of BJEM-II.



Hit by truck, Banaharpali couple dies: Irate locals block road

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

When people across the country were immersed in Diwali celebrations, tragic struck a couple from Banaharpali area in Jharsuguda district.

Rama Krusha Saa and wife Sarita Saa from Sapali village under Banaharpali police limits met with an accident. The couple was returning from Katarbaga School where their daughter has been studying.

On the occasion of Diwali, the couple had gone to the school to meet their daughter and give her sweets. While returning home riding a motorcycle, the couple was hit by a truck near Sahasabaga Chhak on NH-49 at around 3 pm. The couple died on the spot.

The road mishap flared up resentment among the locals who detained the truck driver and called the vehicle owner to the spot. Subsequently, the locals blocked the NH while keeping the bodies on the road. They demanded compensation for the family of the deceased.

Vehicular traffic on the NH-49 was disrupted due to the road blockade and senior police officials held talks to pacify them.

City's Sudhanya tops nat'l test for kids organised by Train Me Academy

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Sudhanya Panigrahi (6), a student of UKG of Loyola School, Bhubaneswar, was announced as winner of Extempore competition, organised by the Train Me Academy (TMA), Ghaziabad, UP, a leading training and image consulting organisation promoted by a group of seasoned HR professionals.

The event was graced by a panel of judges including Gunjan Ashish Goel (Educator) and Suchana Pattnaik (media professional and entrepreneur). Anjali Dutta, HR expert, international corporate trainer, celebrity coach and motivational Speaker, who is the founder and director of the Train Me Academy, presided.

The other performers including Dhyansaran, seven years old from Cochin (1st Runner Up) and Amogh Saxena (an extraordinary participant and brand ambassador child category of Train Me Academy) five years old from UP (2nd Runner Up) performed very well.

The other kids who were from various countries including Singapore, Japan and USA were judged at different time zones. Sudhanya is daughter of Bibhudatta Panigrahi and Dipanwita Mishra.

Excitement in air as bears visit temple to savour Bhog



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Navartari. Moreover, the two animals are eating coconut and banana offered to the Goddess.

With a lot of excitement, devotees have been giving coconuts and bananas to the two bears on the premises of the temple.

A devotee said, "It seems the two bears have been coming to the Chhuuari Mata Temple to offer obeisance to the Goddess every day. After taking the bhog offered to the Goddess, the two bears feel blessed and return to forest."

BJD demands LPG price slash: Gives Centre 10-day ultimatum

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

This is a welcome step though it would result in a total loss of ₹2,000 crore to the State exchequer.

A day after the Centre Government reduced excise duty on fuel, price of both petrol and diesel dipped in Odisha on Thursday. While petrol was sold at Rs 104.73 per litre in the capital city of Bhubaneswar, the rate was Rs 105.51 in Cuttack. Petrol price had crossed Rs 110-mark in all districts of the State, a couple of days ago.

and diesel with effect from November 5. This is a welcoming step though it would result in a total loss of Rs 2,000 crore to the State exchequer. With the reduction, petrol and diesel prices in the State are likely to be one of the lowest in the country."

A day after the Central Government reduced excise duty on fuel, price of both petrol and diesel dipped in Odisha on Thursday. While petrol was sold at Rs 104.73 per litre in the capital city of Bhubaneswar, the rate was Rs 105.51 in Cuttack. Petrol price had crossed Rs 110-mark in all districts of the State, a couple of days ago.

₹27L brown sugar seized in city: 2 held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate Police (CP) on Thursday seized brown sugar worth around Rs 27 lakh from Hi-tech Square under the Mancheswar police station here and arrested two persons in this connection.

A joint team of the Quick Action team and Mancheswar police conducted a raid and during search found 273 of the contraband in the possession of the two drug peddlers. The duo was arrested and forwarded to court under the relevant sections of the NDPS Act.

So far, the Commissionerate police have seized 2,038 kg brown sugar and arrested 38 persons ever since its special anti-drug enforcement drive 'White Spider' was launched in August 2021.

While launching the drive, the CP had issued a dedicated WhatsApp number -7077798111 to receive information on illegal drug trading and peddlers from the citizens.

Brown sugar seized from PWD staff: 4 arrested

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

Around 23 grams of brown sugar worth over Rs one lakh was seized from one Kamal Lochan Nayak (23) working as a peon in the PWD office here from his Government quarter on Thursday.

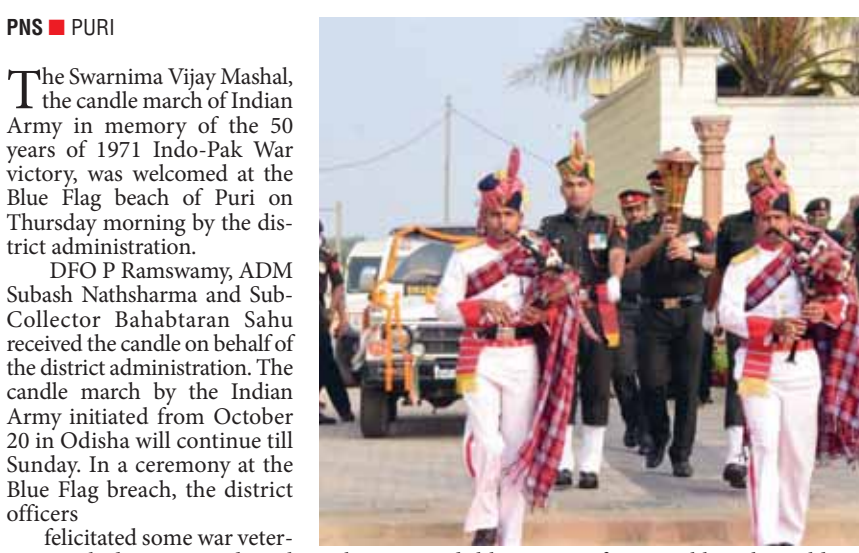
Police arrested Nayak and three others while the latter were striking a deal with him as drugs customers.

Sources said Nayak was appointed in the PWD office after death of his father under the rehabilitation scheme. But while appointing him, the concerned authority was well-aware of his criminal antecedents.

Incidentally, the quarter allotted to him is just 20 feet from that of the PWD Executive Engineer. Most of the PWD Colony inhabitants knew about Nayak's involvement in drugs peddling but were not revealing it out of fear due to his previously-known criminal behaviour.

Nayak's family members are permanent resident of Baleswar district.

Swarnima Vijay Mashal welcomed at Puri



PNS ■ PURI

The Swarnima Vijay Mashal, the candle march of Indian Army in memory of the 50 years of 1971 Indo-Pak War victory, was welcomed at the Blue Flag beach of Puri on Thursday morning by the district administration.

DFO P Ramswamy, ADM Subash Nathsharma and Sub-Collector Bahabtaran Sahu received the candle on behalf of the district administration. The candle march by the Indian Army initiated from October 20 in Odisha will continue till Sunday. In a ceremony at the Blue Flag beach, the district officers felicitated some war veterans including retired Col Manas Ranjan Mohanty, Col PS Sekhayat, Col Debadutta Swain, Col EP Iliyans and Lt Col Rishi Wahli for their bravery and dedication to the nation.

In memory of the Indo-Pak War and liberation of Bangladesh, art and oratory competitions among school students were held and top performers given awards.

Cultural programmes including Odishi and Gotipua dances, a sand sculpture resembling the Golden Jubilee year of war victory by Sudarshan Pattnaik were held on the beach. Later, the candle march proceeded to the SCS Autonomous College, where it was accorded a warm welcome by the students and teachers.

Croc attack in Kharasrota: Fisher's half-eaten body found

PNS ■ JAJPUR

A half-eaten body of a 25-year-old fisherman was found in the Kharasrota river near Kaharaganda village under the Bari police station of Jajpur district on Friday. The deceased was identified as Somyaranjan Mallick whose mangled body was replete with crocodile bites.

Somyaranjan was dragged by a crocodile while he was fishing in the river on Wednesday afternoon near his village. He is the latest victim in a growing number of crocodile attacks in the riverside villages. The forest guards and fire brigade personnel, besides locals, launched a search on Wednesday evening after he was dragged away by a crocodile in the presence of his younger brother Soubhagya Ranjan Mallick. Some locals found his mangled remains near the river bank on Friday.

The crocodile had consumed major portions of the body.

"Bhitarkanika, a vast tract of forest and saltwater swamp, is the home of around 1,768 salt water crocodiles as per this year's reptile census. In the recent months, many crocodiles strayed from the park areas and entered in the rivers, creeks and other water bodies far away from the park," said Range officer of Jajpur Road Jyoti Ranjan Mohapatra.

However, he informed that the Forest Department would provide a compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the family members of the crocodile victim after due inquiry. "We do not think crocodiles are a risk to public safety if people keep out of the waters, but if people do enter the waters their safety cannot be guaranteed," he cautioned.

Violence on Hindus in B'desh a conspiracy: RSS to recruit cadres ahead of centenary year 2025



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Sangha expressed concern over the deep silence of the so-called Human rights watchdog organisations and UN organisations and called on the international community to come forward to condemn the violence and protect and defend Hindus, Buddhists and other minority communities of Bangladesh and also raise the voice for their safety.

Mohanty said after the relaxation of restrictions imposed in view of the Covid-19, the Sangh resumed its direct work upto 54,382 daily Sakhas running across the country including 1,302 Sakhas in Odisha. Sangha is also running several activities related to the development of villages (Grama Vikash), organic farming (Jaivik Krishi), bringing awareness about the essence of the family system (Parivar Prabodhan), preservation of Cows (Go-Surakshya), environment protection (Paryavaran Suraksha), and Social harmony (Samajik Samarasata).

The year 2025 is going to be the centenary year of Sangh. Hence there is a plan to engage full-time workers during this period for at least 2 years to take sangh work to all mandals, he informed.

Police ASI held taking bribe

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Friday caught Kailash Chandra Khuntia, ASI of Police of the Naikanidih police station in Bhadrak district, red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 2,000.

Khuntia had demanded the bribe from the complainant to show him favour in a case registered with the police station.

Following the trap, simultaneous searches were conducted on the rented residential house and office room of Khuntia. Later, he was arrested and forwarded to court.

Swarnim Vijay Varsh: War veteran's kin felicitated

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The victory flame of the Swarnim Vijay Varsh was received at the 120 Infantry Battalion here on Friday by Battalion Honorary Lieutenant Mihr Kumar Mal.

The family of Lt Col Mohammed Serfuddin Ahmed, who participated in the 1971 liberation of Bangladesh, was felicitated. Those felicitated were his daughter Flight Lieutenant Razia Ahmed, son-in-law Nasir Ahmed, son Major Shiraz Ahmed and daughter-in-law Urusa Mushkbar Ahmed.

Mahila Cong announces State office-bearers: Also 33 dist presidents

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Pradesh Mahila Congress on Friday announced a list of its new State office-bearers and district presidents following the approval of All India Mahila Congress president Neeta D'Souza and OPCC president Niranjan Pattnaik.

State president Bandita Parida said 70 frontline women leaders have been accommodated as State office-bearers besides 22 members to the executive body and 15 senior leaders as special invitees.

While Nirmala Mallick was appointed as treasurer, Moti Kaibarta, Rupadipta Mohapatra, Ayasa Banu, Kusum Pradhan, Swarupa Tripathy, Kankalata Mallick, Choudhury Snehalata Ray, Charulata Sahu, Nirupama Das and Sabati Dhir were selected as vice-presidents.

Sriya Sambhedana, Sabita Apat, Reena Swain, MA Paraween, Muni Thappa, Sarojini Bamnka, Chaitali Pattnaik, Biswakalyani Kar, Arnapurna Sahu, L Manika Prava and Deepitirani Pradhan were appointed as general secretaries.

Hooch death toll reaches 33 in Bihar

Nitish calls for fresh campaign against liquor

Patna/Bettiah/Gopalganj: The death toll in the latest hooch tragedy in Bihar climbed to 33 on Friday, while arrests were made and errand officials punished in connection with sale of illicit liquor, even as Chief Minister Nitish Kumar called for a fresh campaign to dissuade people from drinking alcohol in the dry State.

However, officials in West Champaran and Gopalganj districts claimed only 25 of the deaths could be confirmed as having been caused by consumption of spurious liquor.

In West Champaran, alleged hooch trader Ram Prakash Ram (50), besides Dhani Lal Ram (40), Jhakkad Paswan (64) and Vikas Ram (25) died at a hospital.

All of them were residents of Dakshin Telhua village under the Nautan Police Station limits where local people had consumed liquor on the night preceding Diwali, the festival of lights.

According to Champaran

Range DIG Pranav Kumar Pravin, the four casualties have raised the death toll in West Champaran to 14, and seven people were undergoing treatment at the Government Medical College and Hospital in Bettiah town.

The hospital's superintendent Pramod Tiwari said, "Among those who have died, three were brought dead. Bodies are being handed over to bereaved family members after post mortem examinations."

Those undergoing treatment included a 70-year-old person who lost his eyesight on Friday morning - a common side-effect of consumption of illicit liquor.

The DIG said, "Two officials - Manish Sharma, the in-charge of Nautan Police Station, and a village chowkidar - have been placed under suspension for their laxity. One of the alleged sellers has died, while another - Munna Ram - is absconding and a search has



been launched to nab him."

However, according to sources in the local administration, two others, who had died after consuming liquor, were cremated by their family members before word spread about the hooch tragedy.

In Gopalganj, District Magistrate Nawal Kishore Chaudhary confirmed 17 deaths in the Mohammedpur Police Station area but asserted that only 11 of these could be blamed on consumption of spurious

liquor.

"Three persons - residents of a village under the Mohammedpur Police Station limits - had been cremated by family members before post mortem."

"Family members of another three deceased refused post-mortem claiming that deaths were on account of natural causes", he said.

Superintendent of Police Anand Kumar said Ranjan Kumar, the in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, and a chowkidar have been suspended, and three alleged sellers - Chhote Lal Sah, Jitendra Sah and Ram Pravesh Sah - have been arrested.

He also claimed that raids conducted at various places in the area has led to recovery of 100 litres of spurious liquor. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, in Patna, vowed stern action against those found responsible for the tragic deaths but expressed dismay over people continuing to consume a "galat cheez" (wrong thing) during festivals. Replying to questions from reporters outside the assembly, where he went to attend swearing-in of two newly elected MLAs of his JD(U), the chief minister said, "I will conduct an in-depth review of the enforcement of prohibition in the state. But, it appears that we need another extensive campaign to spread awareness about the ill-effects of drinking."

30 more people test +ve for Zika virus in Kanpur

Tally rises to 66

Kanpur: Thirty more people have tested positive for Zika virus here, taking the total number of those infected in the district to 66, including 9 IAF personnel, a senior official said on Friday.

Of those infected, 45 are men and 21 women, according to officials. The first case in Kanpur was reported on October 23 when an Indian Air Force (IAF) warrant officer tested positive for Zika virus.

"Thirty more people have tested positive for Zika virus in Kanpur," District Magistrate Vishak G Ayyar said.

Among the 66 tested positive for Zika virus, 9 are from IAF, the DM said.

Samples were collected from various pockets in the neighbouring areas of IAF station hangars and sent to the lab at King George's Medical University (KGMU), Lucknow for testing.

Thirty of them came back



positive for Zika virus, he said. Zika is a mosquito-borne virus and hence, getting rid of mosquitoes is the safe way out, he said.

"We advise the local people not to panic regarding the sudden spurt in Zika virus cases," Ayyar said.

A high alert has been sounded in the periphery of hangars of the IAF station, another official said.

To check the spread of the disease, health teams are undertaking sanitisation programmes including anti-larvae spraying and identifying fever patients, screening seriously ill people and pregnant women.

Health officials have been asked to step up surveillance and ensure door-to-door sampling and testing for Zika virus.

TMC's Subroto Mukherjee cremated with full State honour

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The body of Subroto Mukherjee, the veteran Trinamool Congress leader and Minister and one of the mentors of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was cremated with full State honour on Friday afternoon with Banerjee repeatedly telling that in her life "the festival of lights had never been filled with so much darkness."

Mukherjee, 75 was admitted to the state-run SSKM Hospital following a major heart attack in late October. A stent was applied on him and was scheduled to be released on Friday morning, family sources said adding he suffered two successive attacks on Thursday evening and succumbed to his ailments past 9 pm.

While senior leaders cutting across party lines and a sea of humanity came to bid the final adieu to the departed leader, the Chief Minister was conspicuous by her absence in the crowd of mourners.

She earlier said "I will not go to see Subroto da in that state ... I do not have that strength to see him lying dead ... let him remain in the eyes of my mind the jovial person he was... I have seen so many

tragedies but not the one like this ... this has affected me personally."

The last of Congress Young Turks from Bengal groomed by SS Ray the then Chief Minister, Mukherjee is often called one of the best Chief Ministers Bengal never had. "A close friend of PR Dasmunshi he was a favourite of former Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and President Pranab Mukherjee.

A nine-time MLA Mukherjee and PR Dasmunshi had divided their political zones with the former preferring State politics leaving the central politics to the latter. Later Mukherjee joined the Trinamool Congress in 1999 while Dasmunshi remained in Congress. A former Kolkata Mayor he was an AIICC member for years.

The leader whose career spanned more than 50 years still remained the youngest minister to have served in Bengal. He became the Information and Culture Minister and later Minister of State for Home in SS Ray's Cabinet --- during the Emergency.

A leader who was loved by all the opposition Mukherjee was a favourite of former Chief

Minister Jyoti Basu too.

In fact Mukherjee was one of the Congress leaders who in 1984 impressed upon the top Congress leadership to field Mamata Banerjee against a iconic Somnath Chatterjee from Jadavpur parliamentary constituency.

The Jadavpur elections catapulted Banerjee to the political centre stage of Bengal and India after she defeated Chatterjee.

"Despite we had a different ideological path and belief Subroto da was like a good friend ... he was like a grandfather of Bengal politics today ... and his death will leave a big void in the State politics," said BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh.

His party colleague and State BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said "he was one of the best Chief Ministers Bengal never had ... the circle of his political career could have been completed had he been made the Chief Minister."

CPI(M) central committee member Sujjan Chakrabarty said "Subroto da was not only a politician ... he was a social person who mixed with the members of all the parties ... a trait which is fast vanishing in today's politics."



A pandal based on the theme of Buddhism on the occasion of Kali Puja, at Bolpur in Birbhum district on Friday

TN police file 2,000 cases for violation of SC directive on firecrackers

Chennai: About 2,000 cases have been registered by police across Tamil Nadu against those who violated the Supreme Court directives in respect of firecrackers, police sources said here on Friday.

The total number of cases registered across the State is approximately 2,000 and it includes violations in respect of the two-hour time slab fixed by the apex court to burst firecrackers on Deepavali.

The cases also include those against firecracker shops or units that sold or stored products by breaching 'specific court directives' and also for violation of other norms, police sources here told PTI. On

Tirupur entrepreneurs face uncertainty as cotton prices soar

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ TIRUPUR

Industrialists and entrepreneurs in Tirupur, the knitwear capital of India which is home to nearly 1,500 garments manufacturing companies, are suspecting that China is playing havoc with the cotton and cotton yarn, the main raw materials in the enterprises.

"We do have evidence which points to the role of a foreign hand that is manipulating cotton prices in our market. The hike in cotton prices during the last two months is shocking and this is the handiwork of certain forces out to destabilise Indian economy," said Raja S Shanmugham. President, Tirupur Exporters association.

He cautioned that if the price hike continues like this, the entrepreneurs would be left with no alternative other than downing the shutters. More than three lakh workers are employed by the TEA-run entrepreneurs.

"The profit generated out of TEA units is too low as this is a labour intensive industry. We are struggling to stay afloat and competent in a volatile market. The price hike has no justification at this juncture," he said.

Representatives of South India Mills Association, another powerful industry body said that cotton prices have shot by more than 50 percent since the beginning of 2021. "Tamil Nadu accounts for 50 per cent of the cotton consumption. The steep hike in cotton prices (Minimum Support Price ₹5,726/- per quintal) is the highest rate in the recent past. The prices became volatile after we said that Tirupur would soon become a hub of cotton garments and fashion industry," said S Sakthivel executive secretary, TEA.

Shanmugham said there was no justification

for the current price hike. "The onslaught on Indian economy began immediately after Tirupur equipped itself with infrastructure to emerge as the sub-continent's fashion hub. The competitiveness enjoyed by informal clothes manufactured in the hub became an eyesore for our competitors," said the TEA president.

Though the TEA and SIMA wanted the public sector Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) to intervene in the market so that prices could be stabilised, cotton farmers, traders and CCI officials were against the move. "CCI is meant for helping the cotton farmers to procure cotton when the price falls below the Minimum Support Price fixed by the Government. If the prices are rising above the MSP, it is a sign that the farmers are getting a small profit," said P Chengal Reddy, advisor, Consortium of Indian Farmers Association (CIFA).

As on Thursday, cotton was being traded at Rs 7600 per quintal which is hardly Rs 500 or Rs Rs 600 more than the cost of production. "The cotton farmers are in dire straits as they are not getting quality seeds. The Government of India is not allowing us to switch over to GM Cotton which would have helped us to bring down the cost of production," said Reddy, a farming veteran.

An industry observer also agreed with Reddy and said that it was not advisable to keep on spoon-feeding the industrial units. "They should find a way out for themselves. The farmers are not making any huge kill out of the price hike. It is not practical to keep the traders away from the cotton market," he said.

Tirupur wore a pall of gloom during this Diwali as entrepreneurs kept their fingers crossed and stayed away from cotton trading.

Students with grace marks can enrol in diploma courses

Ahmedabad: The Gujarat Government on Friday announced that Class 10 students who have passed with grace marks can seek admission for diploma courses at polytechnic institutes.

Notably, a rule framed by the State Education Department in 2016 had barred students passed with grace marks from seeking admission to polytechnic diploma courses in the state.

Speaking to reporters in Gandhinagar, state Education Minister Jitubhai Vaghani said the State Government has decided to do away with the rule from this year onwards to help such students pursue diploma courses. "Around 30,000 seats in various polytechnics are currently vacant, and an equal number of SSC students have passed with grace marks this year. To ensure that these students also get an opportunity to build their career, we have decided to allow them seek admission to diploma courses," Vaghani said. The Class 10 board exams in Gujarat were cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and students were given mass promotion. "We have also extended the date for accepting admission forms."

Students with grace marks were considered ineligible for diploma courses since 2016. Now, they will be considered eligible. I urge such students to take advantage of this announcement and fill the admission forms in time," the minister said. When asked about the reopening of primary schools for students from Classes 1 to 5, Vaghani said the final decision will be taken "very soon" after consulting experts.

K'taka CM Bommai orders measures to prevent flooding

Bengaluru: As the heavy downpour inundated parts of Bengaluru, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Friday said four State Disaster Response Teams would be set up and funds granted for long- and short-term plans to avoid flooding in the city.

The members of the 64 rescue teams would also be increased by recruiting more people from the home guard and civil defence, the Chief Minister said adding that desilting of stormwater drains during summer would be taken up.

"There is one Disaster Response Team in Bengaluru, which should be increased to four. The four teams will be raised with the help of State Disaster Response Fund and the Finance Department," Bommai said. Soon after returning from Hubballi, the Chief Minister convened an emergency meeting of the officials following flooding in many parts of the city.

Many areas were inundated due to torrential rain in the IT capital of the country on Thursday. Vehicles were stuck in the water in Chamaraipet, and neighbouring areas.

Water gushed into many low-lying areas and trees came down crashing. Noting that the rainy season has extended this year, the Chief Minister said the Meteorology



Department has predicted rainy weather in the next four or five days. Bommai said there are 64 rescue teams with 15 members each. The members would be increased to at least 30. Home guards and civil defence volunteers have to be added in these teams, he added. While reviewing the reasons behind flooding in Bengaluru, the Chief Minister said he came across the fact that there many clogged stormwater drains due to which water got stagnated. "The old retaining walls of the stormwater drains are giving way. The total length of the SWD in Bengaluru is 842 km and a 389-km-long retaining wall has been built. We have taken up the construction of the rest of the work under the Nagarothana scheme," Bommai said.

He directed the officials to also report to him on a monthly basis about the reason behind flooding and progress made to achieve the long- and short-term measures to end water-logging. PT

Previous Govts deliberately discouraged start-ups in J&K: Singh

Srinagar: Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Friday accused the previous governments of deliberately discouraging start-ups in Jammu & Kashmir so that the youth remains perpetually dependent on salaried Government jobs and continues to hang around the political masters of the day.

As a result, the region's immense potential for entrepreneurship and self-livelihood remained unexplored, Singh said while addressing an interactive meet of agricultural start-ups and farmers organised jointly by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) here.

This is for the first time in the last

few years that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, concerted and technology-based effort has been made to promote the agriculture sector for young start-ups in the region, the Minister of State for PMO, science and technology, earth sciences, personnel, public grievances, pensions, and atomic energy and space said.

"Whereas in the past, farmers and agriculturists would largely depend upon the mood of climate and vagaries of nature for cultivation, in the last few years, new areas like lavender cultivation have been explored at a large scale both in the Kashmir valley and the areas around Gulmarg as well as the Jammu region in Doda and Reasi districts," he said.

Singh said no Government in any country of the world can ensure 100 per cent salaried government jobs to every youth, but a responsible government always plans to promote means of livelihood and this is precisely what the Modi Government is trying to seek.

He said a sustained awareness campaign needs to be launched among the youth and their parents to educate them that there are much more lucrative emoluments available through these self-livelihood and new start-up options and, therefore, they should not be led to waste their time and energy in protesting for Government salaried jobs.

Singh said the farmer today is actually an agricultural technocrat or an

agricultural start-up who has the option of making handsome profits using new technology and provisions introduced in the agricultural sector by the prime minister.

He said the Union Government through CSIR is providing all relevant financial and technical support for new modes of cultivation, multiple integrated farming and also hybrid farming which have the capacity to double farmers' income by 2022, as envisaged by the prime minister.

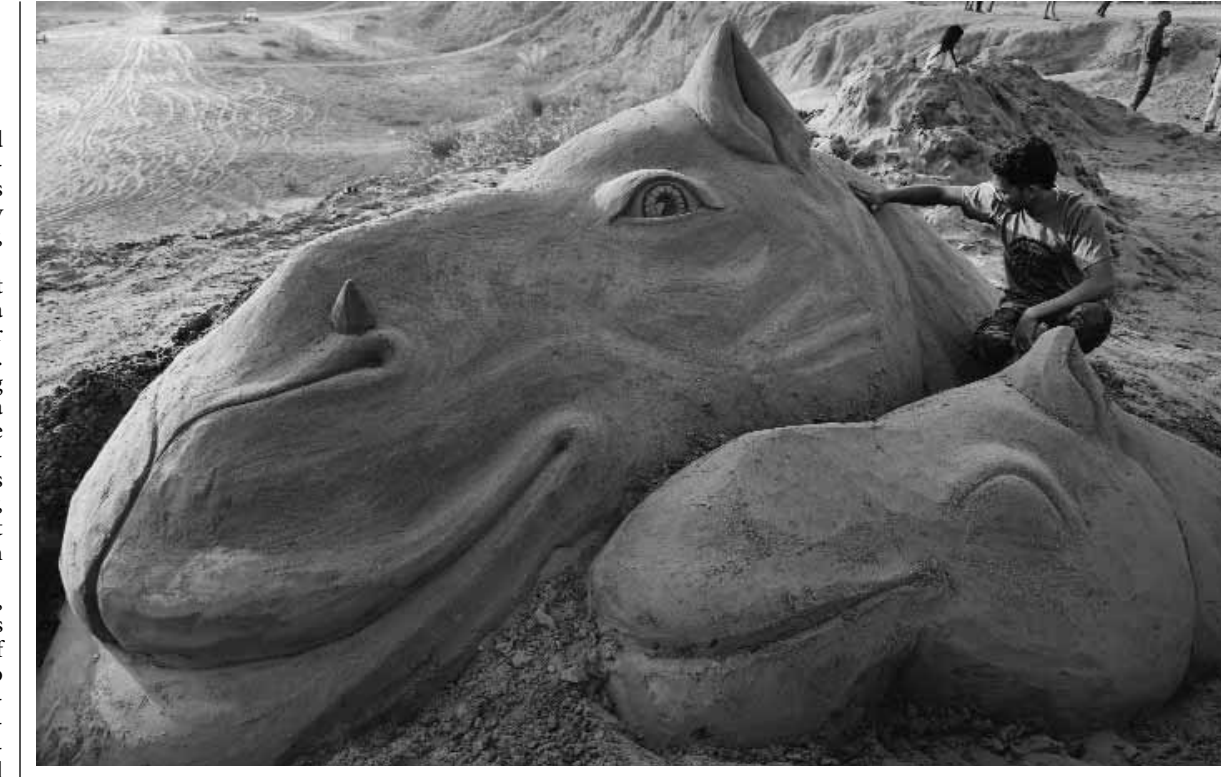
On the occasion, Singh also distributed farming kits to agriculturists drawn from all the 10 districts of Kashmir valley while the CSIR and SKUAST signed a Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration. PTI

5 killed in car-bus collision in Mathura

Mathura: Five persons died and one person got injured in a head-on collision between a private bus and a car on Yamuna Expressway here in the district on Friday, police said.

The incident took place about 60 kilometres away from Mathura at a place that comes under Naujheel Police Station, they said. The occupants of the car were going to Kanpur from Noida to invite a minister for a programme, police said. The deceased have been identified as Shiv Sagar Yadav, his mother Prem Lata, Gaurav Yadav, and Aryan, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Netra Pal Singh said.

The driver of the private bus, who also died in the incident, was identified as Balwant Singh of Pathankot, he said. According to Singh, the incident occurred during the early hours of Friday morning, when driver of the Delhi-bound private bus lost its control and ran across the divider. PTI



Sand artist Ajay Rawat creates sand art of camel face ahead of international Pushkar Camel Fair in Pushkar on Rajasthan

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Absent Xi

Xi could be using COVID as an excuse not to travel as China faces criticism on several fronts

World leaders are coming out of their pandemic bubbles, doing away with virtual conferences. One leader missing from the list is Chinese President Xi Jinping. He is not to be seen at any of the world's fora since January 2020, when the Coronavirus outbreak rattled the world and China shut itself up. Xi was missing from the G20 meeting in Italy and COP26 in Scotland. He missed the opportunity of a personal meeting with US President Joe Biden in Rome. The leaders are supposed to have a summit meeting sometime this year. It took a six-hour meeting in Zurich in early October between US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Chinese Politburo member Yang Jiechi to finalise the summit details. It is expected to be a virtual meeting as of now. He has not taken up an invitation to meet with any European leader either. Xi has not stepped out of China in over 650 days. His last foreign assignment was a trip to Myanmar on January 17, 2020. It is not that Xi has abandoned international diplomacy. China's negotiations with the Taliban and its request to the world to recognise its Government have Xi's approval. He took conference calls with many leaders in this period, including Angela Merkel, the outgoing Chancellor of Germany, Emmanuel Macron, President of France and Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the UK. Xi sent foreign minister Wang Yi to Rome for the G20 meeting.



His globe-trotting image may have sagged because of him being bubble-bound but within China he is quite busy implementing his "common prosperity" goal, ensuring that economic sectors with the largest private participation, like real estate, technology, private tuitions, fall in line with new State regulations. It is possible that Xi holds himself back at home because of the strict COVID-19 restrictions or uses them as an excuse not to travel when China is facing criticism on several fronts. It is equally possible that his absence from the world stage may signal China looking more inward. Certainly, other than the Taliban, most of the other issues China has tackled in the last year are internal. Is it an indication of a major shift in China's foreign and domestic policies? Or that Xi is unwilling to no longer cooperate at global fora on terms other than his own? Or is Xi preoccupied with internal politics and machinations of his critics as he prepares for the 20th Party Congress in 2022 for another five years as supreme leader? The absence of President Xi is felt nowhere more than in the context of China's race to challenge the global leadership of the US. It is ironic that Xi was travelling all over the world at a time when the US under Donald Trump was in an "America First" self-siege. As the world returns to interaction with vigour after a pandemic lull, it is Xi's turn to go into a shell.

PICTALK



Rashtrapati Bhavan engulfed in smog a day after Diwali

RANJAN DIMRI / THE PIONEER

Stand clean

A couple of cases in Kerala tell the nation that vindictive politics is not the way to go

It's a classic case of the use of politics over ethics and morals. An IAS officer, known for his administrative acumen and with nearly a decade of service to complete before superannuation, is facing an uncertain future following three months of incarceration in a Thiruvananthapuram jail. A corporate liaison executive-turned-homemaker and seven young men imprisoned under the draconian UAPA and COFEPOSA laws on the charges of gold smuggling spent more than 14 months in jail. Though the special courts denied them bail, the Kerala High Court recently granted them conditional bail. The charges of anti-national activities slapped against them by the National Investigation Agency and Customs Department crumbled like a pack of cards as the court asked the probing agency for details that linked the "accused" to gold smuggling and unpatriotic acts. There was not an iota of evidence against the "suspects" and this led to the latter walking out of the jail. Moreover, the elite agencies failed to arrest those who are safely ensconced in their West Asian havens.



The gold smuggling case is seen as a ploy against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the CPI(M) in the 2021 Assembly election. All allegations of corruption and gold smuggling fizzled out and those who accused the Chief Minister of culpability in the LIFE MISSION project, a flagship programme of the Left Democratic Front Government, bit the dust. While accusing Vijayan and his family for their role in the alleged smuggling, the BJP leaders forgot the fact that it was the Chief Minister himself who requested the Union Government to order a probe. The charges of gold smuggling got vapourised in thin air as the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) spy case of the 1990s. Cherian Philip, the person who wrote the script of the Isro spy case to help his godfather become the Chief Minister himself went on record to tell the world that the case was manipulated. The country's elite space mission programmes suffered a setback as two top scientists were entrapped in the cheap political game. Philip, who had quarrelled with his godfathers in the Congress and joined the CPI(M), returned home the other day after spending 20 years as a privileged guest at AKG Centre, the party's State headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram. The Kerala experience is a lesson to those presiding over the Dilli Sultanate that Central agencies should not be unleashed upon enemies to settle political scores.

The ever-alarming growth of China

With its borders still not demarcated with India and its continued belligerent posture, India must be wary of China and face the challenge squarely



JL KOULI JALALI

Much talked about the rise of China as an economic super power has been inviting attention for years now but it has been intimidating, too. The world opinion has veered around the fact that the attitude of the Communist regime in China, particularly towards most of its neighbours, has been pivoted around aggression and intimidation from the very beginning. In 1962, the first victim of its brazen policy of aggression was its immediate neighbour India. During subsequent years and decades, Vietnam and many other countries in or bordering South China Sea and East China Sea fell prey to its aggressive attitude. Now after its rise as an economic superpower, it has been throwing around its weight without any regard for international law and rules. It has usurped the rights of its neighbors in the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean and has been illegally hindering free navigation rights of other nations too. This has only endangered the security of the world. The West has its own concerns about the intimidating rise of China.

It is not communist ideology, which is based on revolution, but its own attitude and policies which prompt China to adopt coercive and aggressive means against other countries to maintain and uphold its interests, in a case or two mostly based on mere perceptions. It has had no qualms even in befriending and turning Pakistan, the epicentre of terrorism, into an all weather friend just to achieve its nefarious aims against India. To harm Indian interests, it went to the extent of even supporting terrorism emanating from Pakistan. It continuously vetoed UN resolutions to declare terrorists from Pakistan as international terrorists. Though at a much later stage it had to bow before international pressure.

Although an atheist regime and avowedly against obscurantism, China is not averse even to come nearer to staunch fundamentalist and radical Taliban regime in Afghanistan just for some pecuniary gains.



Fundamentalism and radicalism have been bedeviling the whole world and have caused much distress and wreaked havoc all over the world particularly in Afghanistan itself.

China needs to realise that with the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1993, Communism as a perceived panacea for all human sufferings has proved to be inadequate. Even the hybrid Communism practised in China for decades now has its own limitations. Freedom of spirit is an inalienable non-physical aspect of human beings. But China has failed even to uphold it. With the return of Hong Kong to China, it was hoped that China would uphold this aspect of human personality not only in Hong Kong but allow it to prevail elsewhere also in the country. But forcible civil liberty curbs and other excesses in Hong Kong have even belied this hope. More serious and destabilising is the matter about Taiwan. Taiwan has clearly demonstrated that it cannot be part of the authoritarian and atheist regime of China. Despite armed threats and intimidation Taiwan has avowed to defend its democ-

ocratic values and freedom of human spirit.

With its borders still not demarcated with India and its continued belligerent posture, India has to be wary about China and face the challenge posed by it squarely. Along with recalibrated economic development after the Coronavirus, India has to boost its self-reliance in every sphere. It has to encourage and enlarge the pool of developed skilled manpower. Apart from nourishing its democratic values, it has to strengthen its self-confidence to meet the challenge. It should also widen its sphere of influence all over the world and broaden its trade interests. Moreover, apart from the geopolitical context of the challenge, it has to be prepared as usual to come up to the diplomatic challenges that may be thrust on it.

China has had a glorious past and is one of the most ancient civilisations still surviving and on the rise. Like all other countries, China has every right to rise to the top but not through aggression and by breaking international law and rules. This is bound to create security risks even for the powerful West. The announcement of the

Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS) alliance is an ominous manifestation of this threat. With abundant sophisticated nuclear weapons and other armaments all around the world, this could even jeopardise survival of mankind.

The world we live in has changed beyond imagination and come so close that evolution of human civilisation has become a possibility. Despite so many contradictions, widespread uneven economic development and daunting cultural diversities, evolution of human civilisation can no longer be considered a utopia. But this could be possible only after the formation of a democratically constituted world parliament. By changing its attitude, China could aid the formation of such an institution which could ensure survival of mankind and evolution of human civilisation. No doubt evolution of such an institution could be brought nearer when all other countries subject their actions to an ethical and moral compass.

(The writer is a former IIS officer, freelance journalist and producer. The views expressed are personal.)



CHINA HAS EVERY RIGHT TO RISE TO THE TOP BUT NOT THROUGH AGGRESSION AND BY BREAKING INTERNATIONAL LAW AND ORDER. THIS IS BOUND TO CREATE SECURITY RISKS EVEN FOR THE POWERFUL WEST

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DIWALI ALONE CAN'T BE BLAMED

Sir — Delhi's air quality has severely deteriorated after the Diwali festival, allegedly owing to the bursting of crackers in the Capital. However, there are more than 15 factors that contribute to air pollution. It has been proven in an IIT report on Delhi's air pollution that Diwali crackers contribute only about five per cent to air pollution. There are several other factors, both known and unknown, which contribute to pollution in the NCR. Delhi's air pollution is caused mainly by stubble burning. Add to it the innumerable vehicles that ply on the roads of Delhi. Vehicular pollution is also a major contributor. The dust and dirt caused by construction activities and even air conditioners contribute a major share in polluting the air.

Therefore, blaming Hindus for the alarming pollution levels during Diwali is untenable, since the festival is celebrated only once a year. A ban on stubble burning, checking emission from factories, curtailing vehicular and industrial emissions — activities which cause pollution throughout the year — will go a long way in solving the air pollution problem of the Capital as well as the country.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

A FANCY KEDARNATH YATRA

Sir — Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kedarnath was more about himself than the reconstructed Shiv Temple or Adi Shankaracharya, whose statue was unveiled in honour of his exertions to revive Hinduism when Buddhism was embraced by more and more people and his commentaries on Hindu scriptures. We couldn't help noticing that the sole focus was on the VVIP pilgrim. We couldn't help thinking that no ordinary devotee could ever dream of the kind of treatment Prime Minister Narendra Modi, hailed as 'Rashtra Rishi' by his supporters, got in the temple precincts and sanctum sanctorum. Perhaps the fact that he is spearheading the revival of Hinduism automatically qualifies him for such a special treatment.

Not just a girl from India



Vinisha Umashankar, a class 10 student from Tiruvannamalai in northern Tamil Nadu, deserves accolades for her stirring speech on clean energy at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) held recently at Glasgow, which was attended by some eminent world leaders, including our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Intrepidly enough, she took them by surprise, saying, "young people

have every reason to be angry and frustrated at leaders who have made empty promises and failed to deliver." Incidentally, last year, Vinisha won the Children's Climate Prize conferred by the Children's Climate Foundation, Sweden, for designing an innovative and eco-friendly solar-powered mobile ironing cart, which will be an efficient and profitable alternative to the conventional heavy iron box, fuelled by charcoal.

She came up with the idea to use solar energy to heat up the irons. Over the span of six months in 2019, when she was just 12 years old, she designed a cart that had solar panels to power a steam iron. The young girl's achievement shows that India has enormous potential to lead the world in the area of scientific research. "It made me think about the amount of charcoal burnt every day and the damage it does to the environment," says Umashankar. We must learn to be thoughtful of our environment from this young girl.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

The visit was choreographed to the last detail for his cast as a larger-than-life character. Even otherwise, on election-eve, PM Modi has been wanting to get into a temple, preferably a cave temple for televised solitary meditation to connect with the multitudes for whom religion is a centre of devotion, and woo them for favour in elections. Clearly, he cannot do without being bathed in religious symbolism.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

TSUNAMI: A SERIOUS KILLER

Sir — Tsunamis are usually rare but one of the most dangerous natural calamities. Over the last 100 years, 58 tsunamis have taken more than 2.6 lakh lives, or an average of 4,600 lives per disaster. Humanity suffered the deadliest tsunami in the Indian ocean in December 2004. It caused over 2.27 lakh deaths across 14 nations. It is worth mentioning that 80 per cent tsunamis take place in the Pacific ocean only. To educate and

inform people about tsunamis, November 5, 2021, is observed as the "World Tsunami Awareness Day".

The day is observed to promote the target of the 'Sendai Seven Campaign', which aims to sustainably enhance international cooperation with developing countries through adequate support to complement their national actions for implementation of the present framework by 2030. Decisions and resolutions adopted in June 2021 by the UN Ocean Decade (2021-2030) will provide the "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to improve tsunami detection and early warning systems. It is even more important that every person knows the tsunami's natural warning signs and immediately self-evacuates since the waves are infamous to attack spontaneously and dangerously.

Shruti Raikwar | Ujjain

SOUNDBITE

I want to tell women that I will fight for them, the Congress party will fight for them.



Congress leader

—Priyanka Gandhi

May the light of Diwali remind us that from darkness, there is knowledge, wisdom, and truth. From division, unity. From despair, hope.



US President

—Joe Biden

Wholehearted appreciation to the team for holding Sooryavanshi for more than a year to revive the theatre business.



Filmmaker

—SS Rajamouli

It wasn't the World Cup we expected. It was a tough competition, we should keep our heads high.



West Indies all-rounder

—Wayne Bravo

A large number of people did not burst firecrackers. But some people did it on purpose. The BJP made them do it.



AAP leader

—Gopal Rai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN
ASEAN NATIONS AND THE CHINA FACTOR

India wants equitable inclusive development in the region without facing coercion from China

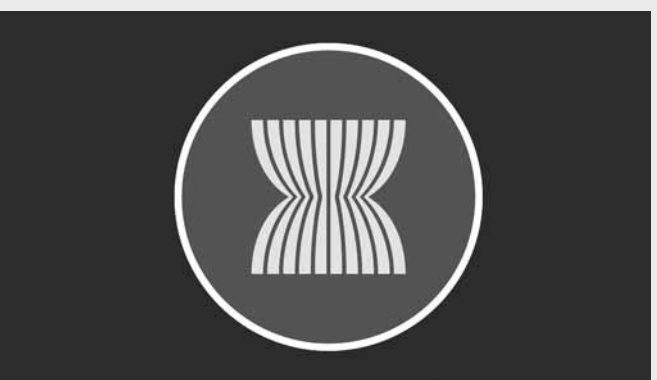


KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi wound up two high-ticket global events this week. The G20 summit in Rome followed by the COP26 climate change talks in Glasgow. In the last week of October, he was able to interact with his Southeast Asian counterparts, the region gaining increasing significance in India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

India has had lukewarm to cold ties with the ASEAN as a collective bloc of influence in the past. The reasons are varied, as India, in the pre-2014 period, was still trying to take a firm call on its Indo-Pacific strategy. This 'free, open, accessible, follower of international laws and conventions' Indo-Pacific region has been the central focus of many regional bloc and finds prominence in India's foreign policy now.

The QUAD alliance is all about keeping the Indo-Pacific region rule-bound. The equations between members of ASEAN and their outreach and alliances with other countries are now increasingly being dictated by the China factor. China is a close neighbor to many ASEAN nations that have maritime interests in the shared waters. China's economic and military might has silenced many voices within the bloc from coming out in full support of the emerging global consensus on Indo-Pacific strategy. Some have even bought the China rant on alliances like QUAD being 'Anti-China'.



These narratives are detrimental to Indian interests specially, if it has to take a regional influencer's role. The Prime Minister was right when in his address to ASEAN he commented, "This special role of ASEAN, India's Act East Policy which is contained in our Security and Growth for All in the Region — 'SAGAR' — policy. India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo-Pacific are the frameworks for our shared vision and mutual cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region." He clearly brought out the centrality of India's shared vision of equitable inclusive development in the region without facing coercion from China.

China has been a notorious actor in the region (read South China sea). This year, ASEAN statement mentioned pending issues in the South China sea region which many analysts have hailed as an important step. Perhaps, for the first time, the ASEAN leaders agreed to vocalise the need for rules-based order in the South China sea, something akin to UNCLOS. Interestingly, India went through a laborious round of negotiations and consultations to get UNCLOS recognized by the elite security council of the UN, which was under its presidency during the period. In fact, Prime Minister Modi chaired a debate on maritime security in the UNSC in August this year where the statement was adopted. Therefore, the reiteration coming from the ASEAN leadership for ensuring free maritime trade, settling disputes on high seas peacefully and preventing terrorism and drug trafficking via sea routes can be seen as the step in the right direction. This could be seen as early signs of ASEAN leadership's collective frustration with China.

India's strategic partner, the US, has also a key role in building up a consensus among the ASEAN leadership. The US can possibly request the other QUAD to use their past alliances with ASEAN to chart out a new course. It may be worth mentioning that besides India, Australia and Japan both have strategic alliance with ASEAN and have shared interests in the region.

One of the low hanging fruits could be sending away a bulk of the Covid vaccines planned under QUAD agreement to these ASEAN nations which currently may be heavily dependent on Chinese vaccines and the citizens would be greatly benefitted with a new dose of vaccines. Also, developing strategic bilateral ties with countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam could be the game changer for India.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Impact of greenhouse gases and deforestation



BKP SINHA

While natural gas plants are running, they need to purchase fuel and the price of fossil fuels does not reflect the cost of climate change in terms of greenhouse gas emissions

People around the world are experiencing climate change and scientific evidence clearly indicates that the climate is changing and is likely to accelerate in the future. The effects of climate change such as heavier precipitation and longer dry spells are obvious; though advanced models are also inadequate in predicting regional impacts, which are important for the formulation of local adaptation programmes. Climate change will undoubtedly affect water, forests, and coastal areas along with the Himalayan ecosystem, which is most likely threatened by rising sea levels and migrations of species.

Greenhouse gas such as, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) are majorly responsible for climate change. Regardless of where these greenhouse gases are emitted, they contribute to global warming.

India is the world's third largest producer of renewable energy and the third largest consumer of electricity in the world and presently 85 million people in India use electricity. As the country advances along with its population, per capita consumption of electricity is likely to rise sharply.

Would it be possible to generate all the electricity we need without emitting additional greenhouse gases?

India emits 83 per cent of greenhouse gases, a number that is likely to increase given the country's energy needs for development. India's population growth will intensify the demand for food, necessitating more urea and irrigation, and using the Haber-Bosch process to produce urea will exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions. Through amplifying the greenhouse effect of the planet, we are increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Therefore, it is necessary to switch to less CO₂ intensive energy. Developed nations like the United States and Western Europe have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through appropriate measures and specific innovations because their research and development budgets are relatively large for this purpose. Obtaining carbon-free electricity will be a huge challenge for India because to achieve zero emissions, all of our electricity must come from non-emitting sources. Solar, wind, hydroelectric, biomass, and geothermal power can provide energy without causing global warming. India depends on 74 per cent of fossil fuels to generate electricity.

While natural gas plants are running, they need to purchase fuel and the price of fossil fuels does not reflect the cost of climate change in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. Solar and wind energy are intermittent energy sources. The maximum conversion capacity of solar energy is only 33 per cent. They cannot generate electricity 24



SOLAR POWER AND WIND ENERGY GENERATION IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON NATURAL CIRCUMSTANCES. EVEN IN BRIGHT SUNSHINE AND STRONG WINDS, PRODUCTION WILL ALWAYS BE LESS THAN THE INSTALLED CAPACITY DUE TO INTERMITTENT SHUTDOWNS CAUSED BY MAINTENANCE

(The writer is a former Indian Forest Service officer. The views expressed are personal.)



hours a day, so their storage and generation cost should also be considered. Batteries used in off-grid solar systems can be charged during the day and used during the night. It is a reasonable solution for using solar power throughout the day, but it is also quite expensive due to the costs associated with the battery and its life, which will determine how much it adds to the electricity bill and the public exchequer. Installing enough solar panels might be an option, but their effectiveness depends on the time of year. Solar power generation is significantly less in winter than in summer. Solar power and wind energy generation is totally dependent on natural circumstances. Even in bright sunshine and strong winds, production will always be less than the installed capacity due to intermittent shutdowns caused by maintenance. To collect as much sunlight as possible, we need a large number of solar panels that take up a lot of space, and some roofs are not big enough to accommodate them, so space is also an issue. Location is also increasingly important in solar energy. Our installation needs to be increased many times compared to the current one.

Even though nuclear power could be a solution, but it is risky and capital intensive.

The main reason why zero-carbon electricity is so expensive is intermittency. Because of this, the state is aiming to generate more renewable electricity by combining solar and wind power

with other options like gas-powered plants, which is a necessity for cities and towns. It can be argued that the grid — a single connected network — is the solution, but in practice, this is not feasible, at least in the near future.

To use renewable energy more efficiently and generate carbon-free energy, we must invest more in research and development. Furthermore, issues such as widespread poverty alleviation, education, health, clean drinking water, water for sanitation and job creation require more money to be diverted to address these issues, which in turn can adversely affect investment in research and development. Even if we take into account the government's efforts towards clean energy, new innovations will be required to remove its impediments. Diffusion of innovations requires R&D expertise and also a long period of persuasion, decision-making, and implementation that will take a considerable amount of time. Conservation, afforestation and sustainable forestry practices are also the most efficient and cost-effective ways to combat carbon emissions.

Trees can absorb four tons of CO₂ over the course of 40 years. A forest is considered a carbon sink if it absorbs more carbon from the atmosphere than it emits. Photosynthesis absorbs carbon from the atmosphere. It is then deposited in forest biomass (such as trunks, branches, roots and leaves), in dead organic matter (litter), and in soil and

microorganisms. This process of carbon absorption and deposition is known as carbon sequestration. It is estimated that in India, forest carbon sequestration was around +68 (MT CO₂ eq/yr) in 2005-2007 and about +203 (MT CO₂ eq/yr) in 2008-2011, although no reliable data are available. Type of forest also determine the quantity of carbon it can sequester, such as a closed canopy forests produce less carbon sequestration, because they lack under story vegetation and grasslands. A typical forest would emit close to 22,000 pounds of oxygen but when forests are cut down, plants absorb less CO₂ thus increasing the concentration of atmospheric CO₂.

In all global climate negotiations, developed countries have put pressure on developing countries (such as India and China) to reduce deforestation, but forests are either fragmented or degraded due to various development activities such as infrastructure, construction, mining, and urbanization. Therefore, to combat carbon emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation, steps must be taken to sequester and store carbon. COVID-19 is the most recent illustration of our unbalanced relationship with nature and if the current trend of development, deforestation, and sources of greenhouse gas emissions is allowed to increase, there will be a terrible result in the near future. Hence, deforestation must be controlled in order to avoid the adversity that accompanies it.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE CENTRE'S DECISION WILL BRING DOWN PETROL AND DIESEL PRICES PER LITRE BY ₹5 AND ₹10, RESPECTIVELY.
—UNION MINISTER BHAGWAT KARAD



IF THE PRICE HAS TO BE BROUGHT DOWN BY ₹50, THEN THE BJP MUST BE DEFEATED COMPLETELY.
—SHIV SENNA LEADER SANJAY RAUT

Africa: Stumbling towards disintegration

It would be a catastrophe if Nigeria and Ethiopia, containing a quarter of Africa's total population, were to be Balkanised, but that may be coming

Something is going wrong in Africa. Nigeria and Ethiopia, the two most populous countries on the continent, are both stumbling towards disintegration. There are now 54 sovereign African countries, which really ought to be enough, but in a few years there could be 60.

Ethiopia is closer to the brink, so close that it could actually go over this month. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's attempt to force the northern state of Tigray into obedience began well in late 2019, when federal government troops occupied it against only minor resistance, but the Tigrayans were just biding their time.

Tigrayans did most of the fighting in the 16-year war to overthrow the brutal Communist tyranny known



GWYNNE DYER

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

as the Derg. They dominated the less cruel and more competent regime that followed in 1991-2018. And they withdrew from the government when Abiy tried to corral everyone into a non-ethnic, more or less democratic 'Prosperity Party' in 2019.

The military occupation of Tigray didn't last. The Tigray Defence Force (TDF) came down from the hills last June and cleared federal troops out of the state practically overnight. Then it pushed south into the neighbouring state of Amhara along Highway One, which links Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, with the only port accessible to the landlocked country, Djibouti.

In July, the TDF stopped at Weldia, still in Amhara state



and about 400 km. from Addis Ababa, to await the great Ethiopian counter attack — which didn't start until about 10 October. It takes time to organise tens of thousands of half-trained volunteers, which was about all Abiy had left after the June-July debacle.

The battle raged for two weeks, with the attacks of Amhara militia and volunteers from elsewhere failing against the trained, experienced Tigrayan troops. About

a week ago the Ethiopian troops broke and started fleeing south, although you probably didn't hear about that because Abiy began bombing the Tigrayan capital, Mekelle, to distract your attention.

The TDF has already captured Dessie and is advancing on Kombolcha, which is halfway from Mekelle to Addis Ababa. Will the Tigrayans actually go for Addis itself? It's not impossible. They're arrogant enough, and they may be strong enough.

Nigeria is not that close to the edge, but the signs are bad. The huge gap in income, education and simple literacy between the very poor Muslim north and the mostly Christian south is a major irritant. The desperate lack of

jobs for the young is destabilising even the south, as last year's failed youth rebellion clearly demonstrated.

In the north-east, the jihadist Boko Haram has become the local authority in some places, collecting taxes and digging wells. In the north-west, banditry is out of control, with dozens or even hundreds of school children being kidnapped for ransom almost every week. The region is awash with arms, and one gang recently shot down a military jet.

In the 'middle belt' of states, farmers and herders are often at war, and in the southeast Igbo secessionists are raising the call for an independent Biafra again. Along the coast piracy is flourishing, and the oil multi-

national Shell is offloading its onshore Nigerian oil assets in the face of insecurity, theft and sabotage.

"This is an exposure that doesn't fit with our risk appetite anymore," said Shell CEO Ben van Beurden, and most major investors, whether foreign or Nigerian, feel the same way. Nigeria, like Ethiopia, is full of clever, ambitious young people with the education and skills to transform the country if only it was politically stable, but that is asking for the moon.

It would be a catastrophe if these two countries, containing a quarter of Africa's total population, were to be Balkanised, but that may be coming. If the Serbs and the Croats can't live together happily, why should we expect the

Igbo and the Hausa, or the Tigrayans and the Amharas, to do so?

The old Organisation of African Unity rule said the former colonial borders must never be changed, no matter how arbitrary they were, because otherwise there would be a generation of war and chaos. That's why for a long time there were fifty African states and no more, but recently the rule has begun to fray. Somaliland, Eritrea, South Sudan...who's next?

Will the dam burst if Ethiopia breaks up into three or four different countries? Nobody knows, but it would be preferable if we don't have to find out. Better the borders you know than the borders you don't.

GLOBE TROTTERING

JAPAN AND GERMANY EXPAND MILITARY TIES

Tokyo: Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi on Friday said Japan will step up military cooperation with Germany in the Indo-Pacific region as he welcomed a port call by the first German warship to visit Japan in about 20 years.

5 WORKERS KILLED IN FACTORY FIRE IN DHAKA

Dhaka: At least five workers died after a fire swept through a show factory in Old Dhaka on Friday. The workers at the factory in Old Dhaka's Showari Ghat died from suffocation, firefighters said.

NAVY FIRES 2 OFFICERS OF SUBMARINE DAMAGED

Washington: The Navy said Thursday it fired the two senior officers of a nuclear-powered attack submarine that was damaged in an underwater collision last month in the South China Sea.

CROATIA PLANS CURBS AS VIRUS SURGES

Zagreb: Croatian authorities will limit gatherings and widen the use of Covid-19 passes to curb soaring infections after the numbers of infected people hit new records again on Friday.

VATICAN CONFIRMS PAPAL TRIP TO GREECE

Vatican City: Pope Francis will travel to Greece and the eastern Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus on a five-day trip next month, the Vatican confirmed Friday.

Scribe jailed for Wuhan reports 'close to death'

AFP ■ BEIJING

A citizen journalist jailed for her coverage of China's initial response to Covid in Wuhan is close to death after going on hunger strike, her family said.



urged his sister in letters to "take care of herself".

"In her heart, it seems there is only God and her beliefs, with no care for anything else."

Zhang Ju's posts sparked fresh calls for his sister's release, with Amnesty International urging the Chinese government Thursday to "release her immediately so that she can end her hunger strike and receive the appropriate medical treatment she desperately needs".

Amnesty campaigner Gwen Lee said in a statement that Zhang's detention was a "shameful attack on human

rights". Someone close to the citizen journalist, who declined to be named, told AFP the family had asked to meet Zhang more than three weeks ago at the Shanghai women's prison, where she is being held but had not received a response.

AFP was unable to reach Zhang Ju while Zhang's mother declined to comment.

The Shanghai prison also offered no response when approached by AFP.

China's Foreign Ministry on Friday did not comment on Zhang's condition, but dismissed calls from rights groups for her release as "anti-China political manipulation."

UN rights body opens urgent session in wake of Sudan's coup

AP ■ GENEVA

The UN's top human rights body is holding an urgent session about Sudan on Friday after a military coup there nearly two weeks ago, with Britain, the United States, Germany and Norway leading a push to commission an expert to monitor the situation.

The Human Rights Council debate is taking place while the United Nations still recognises the ambassador from the deposed Sudanese government as the country's official representative in Geneva, raising questions about how - or if - the military leadership in Khartoum will be represented during the session.

The push for a human rights expert comes amid mounting international pressure on Sudan's top general, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the forces loyal to him who dissolved Sudan's transitional government and detained other government officials and political leaders in the Oct. 25 coup.

"The actions of the Sudanese military are a betrayal of the Sudanese revolution, of the democratic transition, and of the hopes and aspirations of the Sudanese people," Simon Manley, Britain's ambassador in Geneva, said in



On Thursday, Sudan's state-run news agency reported that Burhan had ordered the release of four Government Ministers who also were detained

a statement sent to The Associated Press.

"Fundamentally, this is about respect for democracy and human rights."

"I hope that fellow council members will stand in solidarity with the brave people of Sudan today," Manley said.

The four Western countries presented a draft resolution on Wednesday, and the final language still was being worked out.

Human Rights Council spokesperson Rolando Gomez

said a provision remained intact to create a "special rapporteur" to monitor the situation in Sudan for one year.

The draft also called for the immediate return to a civilian-led transitional government under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was among those detained in the coup.

He is now under house arrest but has been allowed to meet with UN

And international diplomats as part of mediation efforts. On Thursday, Sudan's state-run news agency reported that Burhan had ordered the release of four Government Ministers who also were detained.

A defence lawyer for the ministers said they had not yet been freed.

Russia gets partial win in \$50B case over bankrupt oil giant

AP ■ THE HAGUE

The Dutch Supreme Court on Friday handed Russia at least a temporary victory in an appeal of what's believed to be the world's largest award in an arbitration case after former shareholders of bankrupt Russian oil giant Yukos accused the Kremlin of taking down the company to silence its CEO, a fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin.

The decision further extends what already has been a yearlong legal battle between Russia and former Yukos shareholders. It quashed a lower court ruling, effectively setting aside a \$50 billion award made to the former shareholders in 2014 and sending the case to another court in Amsterdam to consider Russian claims that the shareholders committed fraud in the original arbitration hearings.

However, the highest Dutch court rejected the rest of Russia's arguments, a move welcomed by the former shareholders, who said in a statement that they "won on all substantive grounds of Russia's appeal."

The Russian prosecutor-general's office welcomed the ruling but said "it is regrettable" the high court didn't dismiss the award outright.

Suspected Islamic extremists kill 69 people in Niger

AP ■ NIAMEY, NIGER

Suspected Islamic extremists ambushed a self-defense brigade in western Niger, killing 69 people in the latest attack in the volatile border region near Mali, the Interior Ministry said.

The violence took place earlier this week near Banibangou, some 155 miles (250 kilometers) north of the capital, Niamey, the ministry said in a statement Thursday.

The town's mayor was among those killed in the Tuesday attack and 15 other members of the village defense group were wounded in the ambush, the statement said.

The local self-defense

groups have been helping Niger's military to fight extremists who have stepped up attacks on civilians this year blamed on Islamic State-linked militants.

The resurgence of extremist violence began with a January attack on two villages that killed at least 100 people. The following month 237 more were killed in a series of attacks at the hands of armed gunmen riding motorcycles.

The mounting violence poses a strong threat to Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum, who was sworn into office in April only days after security forces thwarted an attempted military coup at the presidential palace.

Pfizer says Covid-19 pill cut hospital, death risk by 90%

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Pfizer Inc. said Friday that its experimental antiviral pill for Covid-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drugmaker joins the race to bring the first easy-to-use medication against the coronavirus to the US market.

Currently all Covid-19 treatments used in the US require an IV or injection. Competitor Merck's Covid-19 pill is already under review at the Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.

Pfizer said it will ask the FDA and international regulators to authorize its pill as soon as possible, after independent

experts recommended halting the company's study based on the strength of its results. Once Pfizer applies, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months.

Researchers worldwide have been racing to find a pill against Covid-19 that can be taken at home to ease symptoms, speed recovery and reduce the crushing burden on hospitals and doctors.

Pfizer released preliminary results Friday of its study of 775 adults. Patients taking the company's drug along with another antiviral had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalization or death after a month, compared to patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalized and no one died. In the com-

parison group, 7% were hospitalized and there were seven deaths.

"We were hoping that we had something extraordinary, but it's rare that you see great drugs come through with almost 90% efficacy and 100% protection for death," said Dr. Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's chief scientific officer, in an interview.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate Covid-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalization due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease. Treatment began within three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days.

Pfizer reported few details on side effects but said rates of problems were similar between the groups at about 20%.

Thousands of intelligence officers refusing vaccine risk dismissal

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Thousands of intelligence officers could soon face dismissal for failing to comply with the US Government's vaccine mandate, leading some Republican lawmakers to raise concerns about removing employees from agencies critical to national security.

Several intelligence agencies had at least 20% of their workforce unvaccinated as of late October, said US Rep. Chris Stewart, a Utah Republican who is a member of the House Intelligence Committee.

CIA Director William Burns disclosed publicly last week that 97% of the agency's officers have been vaccinated. The National Reconnaissance

Office, which operates U.S. Spy satellites, has more than 90% of its workforce vaccinated.

But Stewart said some agencies in the 18-member intelligence community had as much as 40% of their workforce unvaccinated. He cited information the administration has provided to the committee but not released publicly. He declined to identify the agencies because full information on vaccination rates was classified.

While many people will likely still get vaccinated before the administration's Nov. 22 deadline for civilian workers, resistance to the mandate could leave major agencies responsible for national security without some personnel.

विहार सरकार कार्यपालक अभियन्ता - सह-स्थानिक अभियन्ता का कार्यालय विहार भवन, नई दिल्ली। अल्पकालिन निविदा पत्र सं0-679/स्था0अमि0, दिनांक-05/11/2021

Appeal for Identification General Public is hereby informed that a male dead body Name: Unknown, S/O Unknown, R/O: Unknown, Age: 40 years, Height: 5'6", Complexion: Wheatish, Face : Oval, Wearing: Sky Blue Shirt & Army Printed Pant, Hairs: Black. He was laying at HRH footpath and brought to HRH where doctor declared brought dead vide MLC no.3974/21. In this regard, DD No. 11-A dated 31.10.2021 has been lodged at PS Subzi Mandi, Delhi.

Iran says has enriched over 210 kg of uranium to 20% Iran's atomic agency said Friday that its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium has reached over 210 kilograms (463 pounds), the latest provocative move ahead of upcoming nuclear talks with the West.

Table with 4 columns: क्रमांक, कार्य का नाम, प्राकल्पित राशि, अद्यतन राशि, बीडओ/बूड, कार्य अवधि

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency First Floor, Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Opp-IT Park, Sahasradhara Road, Dehradun Ref. No. 2112 / 11-02(xix)JTCCO/URRDA/21 Dated: 03-11-2021 PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAQ YOJANA (PMGSY) e-Procurement Notice- 13/2021-22

China vows no mercy for Taiwan 'Independence diehards' China vowed on Friday to punish "diehard" Taiwan politicians, saying it would ban several from visiting the mainland, as tensions between Beijing and Taipei spiked to their highest level in years.

VOICES OF CHANGE

The panel discussion, at the launch of NRAI Covid Impact Assessment report, elaborated on ways to revive the food and delivery industries post lockdown. By KHUSHBU KIRTI

While I was aware this was one of the biggest events in the F&B industry, it was a panel discussion I didn't think I would be so thoroughly invested into. I was afraid it might get boring, but to face the reality of the worst pandemic affecting even the roots of our beloved industry was something one should really know.

After two years of interlude, NRAI (National Restaurant Association of India) announced the launch of the NRAI COVID Impact Assessment report at their first flagship event post lockdown. The Restaurant Roundtable held at Essex Farms on October 25, saw a strong panel of industry leaders including the moderator, food writer and television personality Kunal Vijayakar, corporate chef Manish Mehrotra, founder and CEO of FreshMenu, Rashmi Daga, CEO and MD of Impresario Entertainment & Hospitality Pvt Ltd, Riyaz Amlani, and Zorawar Kalra, the MD & founder of Massive Restaurants Pvt Ltd. The panel of the eminent speakers discussed together the road to be chosen by food and delivery industries post-pandemic.

At the beginning of the elegant conference, Kabir Suri, the current president of NRAI and co-founder and director of Azure Hospitality, stated the reality and the alarming statistics. Amongst the worst hit industries by Covid-19 is the food services industry globally.

He noted, "In the financial year of 2021, Indian Food Services industry contracted severely leading to permanent closure of over 25 per cent of food business operators which resulted in job losses of nearly 24 lakh people. The Food Services industry employs approximately 73 lakh people and is one of the largest employment generators for the economy. The industry in India declined by 53 per cent and was estimated to be worth ₹ 2,00,762 crores, compared to ₹ 4,23,624 crores in the financial year of 2020. However, the industry is expected to recover and reach a size of ₹ 4,72,285 crores in the financial year of 2022."

"The people who are here are the ones who have survived," Amlani ruminated.

During the presentation on the said report of Nitin Saluja, the founder of Chaayos, he expressed, "Looking at the report, you will realise that while we, as an industry, have thoroughly suffered and are now only struggling to come out. The government has also been equally impacted. The direct taxes or the GST funds that the government would get have also suffered a blow. The partner ecosystem has had a negative impact."

Overall, the biggest beneficiary is going to be a chained organised player. An organised retail business is one which



Panelists of restaurant roundtable: (L-R) Zorawar Kalra, Riyaz Amlani, Chef Manish Mehrotra, Rashmi Daga and Kunal Vijayakar



Nitin Saluja, founder, Chaayos



Kabir Suri, president, NRAI

is registered with GST, whereas a chained restaurant is defined as a restaurant with three or more stores. He explained, "20 per cent com-

poned annual growth rate of chained organised players as compared to a 13 per cent of organised standalone store players, versus a five per cent growth rate of unorganised players."

Elaborating on the intense restructuring that the industry is going through, to adapt to the challenges hurled by Covid,

he highlighted the emerging trends in the report, saying, "There are certain trends that have emerged due to Covid. First and foremost is the overall shift of consumers

towards organised retail. Two, consumers making hygiene a priority. Which is a good thing, honestly. People care about cleanliness and hygiene."

"People are becoming more aware and conscious of what they are doing behind the kitchen, not just in front, which is a good thing," Mehrotra joined in.

"The Covid protocols are being followed by the employees vigilantly and that has helped bring customers back, too," Amlani added.

Further, Saluja spoke of the delivery industry shooting from a 10 per cent rate to a 33 per cent hike, "Ordering in has become the norm now. It is now a thing for everyone. People prefer virtual brands. For some, it might be 100 per cent, depending on whether it is a cloud kitchen or not. However, overall revenue has increased to 33 per cent."

The report stated certain recommendations for the government to aid the industry, of which the biggest is to allow tax credit. Second most vital request is to allow businesses to operate 24x7. It helps them grow faster.

"We, as a fraternity, need from the government — business support, demand stimulus and regulatory interventions. All the major economies ended up supporting the food services industry by giving some business support or overall stimulus. We ask for the same," Saluja concluded.

The panel also examined the difficulties faced by the industry as a whole. A question that was on my mind, also asked by the moderator Vijayakar, was that there were two sides of the story - "I've seen restaurants short of staff and chefs without jobs, because of the pandemic. Where is the truth in this?"

"Most of the workforce in the metropolitan cities come from outside and with the onset of the pandemic, everyone went back. Now, getting them back is a bigger task. Most of the companies have started re-hiring but have, at the same time, suffered losses that they haven't exactly been able to make up for. In some cases, the chefs don't want to return because of the fear after so much hardship that they faced," Mehrotra answered.

Suri believed that 80 per cent of the losses will be revived in the next two months and considered the report to be pivotal. He said, "the report is crucial for the industry to garner the necessary support and recognition from the Government and its agencies for providing a fillip for consistent and sustained growth."

He later thanked all the NRAI members for their contribution to the research study leading to the formation of the report.

Be it your high school sweetheart, your work buddy, or your connection you met on a dating app, figuring out how to pop the big question is not always easy.

A couple, Aradhana and Vinay, that met on the dating app, Bumble, found each other on the women-first dating app when they both were looking for marriage. After dating for a year and half, Vinay carefully planned to pop the question and Aradhana got her dream proposal. While they were dating, every time Aradhana watched a proposal video, it would bring a smile to her face. Also, since both Aradhana and Vinay are extremely close to their families, "he thought of combining the two, and when our families were supposed to meet each other for the first time over dinner, he planned a surprise proposal for me! Everyone knew about it except me," exclaimed Aradhana.

Another pair, Madhura and Yatharth, had the most adventurous proposal before they got married in June 2020. They were both scared of marriage and giant wheels. So, Madhura somehow found a giant wheel at a fair and persuaded Yatharth to get onto it with her. Just as it started spinning faster, Madhura took out the ring and proposed to him by telling him that, "I hate giant wheels, you hate giant wheels. I hate marriage, you hate marriage. But if I have to be on a giant wheel or in a marriage, I'll only do it with you."

You, too, can plan your grand proposal with the help of these tips, given by Aradhana:

◆ **Make it personal**
 Observe what your partner likes and incorporate those elements into the proposal. It's fun when you tailor the proposal to what your partner likes and wants. Vinay had noticed me tearing up while watching a proposal video that I saw sometime back and when it was our time, he took inspiration from that video, it absolutely touched my heart.

The perfect proposal

A quick guide, ahead of the wedding season, on confessing your innermost feelings to your beloved. By TEAM VIVA



◆ **The proposal is all about the couple and not just one partner**

Make the proposal about the two of you and not just one person. Do add things to the proposal that both of you enjoy. Since both of us are big Game of Thrones fans, while proposing to me, Vinay added a reference to GOT which made it extra special.

◆ **If you are close to your families, involve them as well**

Having your family present during this special moment of your life can mean a lot. My proposal was a surprise for me but Vinay involved both our families as we are a tight-knit bunch and they also got to



experience it. They were, thus, a part of our important moment which made them very happy.

◆ **Make sure someone is capturing the special moment on camera**

This goes without saying. This is the only way to cherish the proposal forever and pass it on to your kids one day.

◆ **You can make a trip out of it**

If you both love to travel and want the memory to be a private one, you can venture out on a weekend getaway to a beautiful location and do it there. What's great is that if you tell the hotel management in advance about your proposal plans, they will help you in making your vision a reality.

Last but not the least, don't get too caught up in executing everything perfectly. While having the perfect proposal can be daunting, don't lose sight of the big picture. You've found your everlasting love and that's what you need to celebrate, so enjoy it.

Enriching experiences

The AYUSHMANN-RAKUL starrer, *Doctor G*, set to release in cinemas in June next year, is a campus comedy. By TEAM VIVA

After announcing the release date of *Badhaai Do* last week, Junglee Pictures studio has now revealed the theatrical release date of their much anticipated film, *Doctor G*, starring Ayushmann Khurrana, Rakul Preet Singh and Shefali Shah on June 17, 2022.

It will be interesting to see Ayushmann portraying the role of a gynaecologist for the first time in the campus comedy drama, alongside Rakul and veteran actor Shefali Shah.

After two successful collaborations *Bareilly Ki Barfi* (2017) and *Badhaai Ho* (2018), both Ayushmann and Junglee Pictures have collaborated yet again to score a hat-trick at the box office.

Amrita Pandey of Junglee Pictures says, "The writers of the film — Sumit, Saurabh and Vishal



along with Anubhuti have created a fabulous script of *Doctor G* which Anubhuti has taken to the next level. We can't wait to bring it to the theatres next year."

Anubhuti Kashyap, who is making her feature directorial debut with the movie, adds, "With the shoot of the film wrapped up, we are now gearing up to get the movie ready for theatres. I am really happy to have got the opportunity to work with Ayushmann, Rakul, Shefali, Junglee and the entire team of *Doctor G* who stood by me and that reflects on screen. It has been an enriching experience. I am really excited to bring the movie to audiences."

Directed by Kashyap, *Doctor G* is a campus comedy drama, co-written by her, Sumit Saxena, Vishal Wagh and Saurabh Bharat.

Saif Ali Khan plays the role of the original Bunty in the completely rebooted big-ticket family entertainer *Bunty Aur Babli 2* and he is heaping praise on the young Bollywood actor, Siddhant Chaturvedi, who is playing the new Bunty — a super slick, a big city conman.

Saif expresses, "Siddhant is a star, no question about that. For someone so young to have the screen presence that he has and the acting maturity that he exhibits, he is definitely one of the most exciting talents that the industry has chanced upon."

"We have to give credit to Zoya Akhtar for discovering him for *Gully Boy* and *Adi* for believing that he can be a quintessential hero in the comedy genre which is one of the toughest for any actor to crack," he adds. Saif reveals that

Passing the baton

SIDDHANT is one of the most exciting talents that the industry has chanced upon, says SAIF ALI KHAN.

By TEAM VIVA



Siddhant is natural in front of the camera and that he was born to be an actor.

"He is fantastic in *Bunty Aur Babli 2* and he lights up the screen with his

performance and persona every time he comes on screen. This film will showcase him as a masala Hindi film hero and from what I have seen of him, he thoroughly relishes being one."

Yash Raj Films' *Bunty Aur Babli 2*, which is set to release worldwide on November 19, is a rib-tickling comedy that will pit two sets of con artists, from different generations, against each other as they show their mastery over disguises to outwit each other. It will also star Rani Mukerji as the OG Babli and debutant Sharvari as the new Babli — a hot, sassy, drop-dead gorgeous con-artist from a big city. *Bunty Aur Babli 2* has been directed by Varun V Sharma, who has previously worked as an assistant director in YRF's biggest blockbusters like *Sultan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai*.



ICC T20 WORLD CUP



WHEN PEOPLE TAKE PACE OFF THE BALL, YOU'VE GOT TO WAIT FOR THE BALL. WHEN THERE'S PACE ON IT, THEN YOU CAN SIT ON IT

— DAVID WARNER

SHAMI, JADEJA ROLL OVER SCOTLAND FOR 85

India's seasoned bowlers made short work of the Unheralded Scotland by bundling them out for just 85 in 17.4 overs in a Super 12 game of the ICC T20 World Cup here on Friday. With one eye on the net run-rate, skipper Virat Kohli finally won a toss on his 33rd birthday and pacer Jasprit Bumrah (2/10), made the life of Scottish batters miserable during his first spell. Bumrah surpassed Yuzvendra Chahal (65 scalps) to now become India's highest wicket-taker in shortest version. Plucky left-handed opener George Munsey (24 off 19 balls) clipped Bumrah over square leg for a six and reverse swept Varun Chakravarthy for a boundary to signal positive intent but the gulf in class was always obvious. Skipper Kyle Coetzer (1) was pegged on the backfoot by a Bumrah yorker first up and then he bowled a slower one which beat the Scotsman all ends up. A lethal Mohammed Shami (3/15) then sent back the dangerous looking Munsey,



SCOTLAND'S PREVIOUS POOR SHOW AGAINST EVEN WEAKER TEAMS LIKE NAMIBIA AND AFGHANISTAN WAS AN INDICATOR THAT THEY WOULDN'T DO ANY BETTER AGAINST INDIA

who failed to clear mid-on. That was the end of Scotland batting's brief bright spot. The disciplined Ravindra Jadeja (3/15), with his 'dart-like' accuracy, removed Matthew Cross (2), Richie Berrington (0) and Michael Leask (21 off 12 balls) in quick succession to blow away the middle-order. Jadeja varied the pace of his deliveries but occasionally bowled the ones that skid through the surface hurrying the batters. Once Scotland were 44 for

4 after 10 overs, there was no looking back for the Indian bowlers. It was a game where even percentage bowling was enough to rattle the Scotland batters, who didn't find too many options to keep the scoreboard ticking. Scotland's previous poor show with willow against weaker teams like Namibia and Afghanistan was an indicator that they wouldn't do any better against India. Once half the side was out with less than 60 on the board, the lower order was caught between survival and attack. Calum MacLeod (16 off 28 balls) laboured along before being cleaned up by Shami as Indians hardly had to bowl too many effort balls to dismantle the opposition. Save one where No. 10 Alasdair Evans was yorked by a 90 mph thunderbolt by Shami. It was one such happy evening in the office where skipper Kohli wasn't bothered whether there was a sixth bowler available or not. Ravichandran Ashwin (1/29) and Varun Chakravarthy (0/15) were also accurate for the better part of their spells.

Scoreboard: NEW ZEALAND (BATTING), NAMIBIA (BOWLING)

Scoreboard: NAMIBIA (BATTING), NEW ZEALAND (BOWLING)

Scoreboard: SCOTLAND (BATTING), INDIA (BOWLING)

Scoreboard: INDIA (BATTING), SCOTLAND (BOWLING)

points table: Group A

points table: Group B

Match 38 ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2021: Australia vs West Indies

Match 39 ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2021: England vs South Africa

New Zealand's big win over Namibia

Glenn Philips and Jimmy Neesham's game changing partnership on a tricky surface helped New Zealand beat Namibia by 52 runs in a Super 12 game here on Friday and stay on course for a semifinal berth in the T20 World Cup. Courtesy some late-hitting by Phillips (39 not out off 21 balls) and Neesham (35 not out off 23 balls), New Zealand posted 163 for four and then restricted the opposition to 111/7 to complete a convincing win. Tim Southee (2/15), Trent Boult (2/20), Mitchell Santner (1/20), Ish Sodhi (1/22) and Jimmy Neesham (1/6) shared the wickets. The win also meant that Kiwis jumped to the second spot in the standings and now have six points with a net run rate of +1.277. They play Afghanistan on Sunday in what could be a virtual quarterfinal. Chasing 164, Namibia openers Stephen Baard (21) and Michael van Lingen (25) conjured 47-runs for the opening wicket. But New Zealand sent back both the



openers, first Neesham cleaned up Lingen in the eight over and then 29-year-old slow left-arm orthodox bowler Santner castled Baard with Namibia slipping to 51/2. Leggie Sodhi removed rival skipper Gerhard Erasmus (3) cheaply to put tights on Namibia. Zane Green (23) and David

Wiese (16) only delayed the inevitable and experienced pacer Southee trapped the latter in front in the 15th over to dash the remaining opposition hopes. Earlier, Phillips and Neesham took the Namibian attack to the cleaners and propelled New Zealand past 150 which looked unlikely at one stage. New Zealand were struggling at 87/4, but brutal hitting by Phillips and Neesham ensured that the Kiwis were back in the game.

Indo-SA test moved to Cape Town

The third and final Test between India and South Africa in the upcoming Test series between the two teams has been moved to Cape Town from Johannesburg, the CSA announced on Friday. Johannesburg was scheduled to host both the series-opener (starting December 17) and the third Test (January 3-7) while Centurion is set to host the Boxing Day Test from December 26. However, Cricket South Africa (CSA) announced the change in venue for the third Test but did not specify the reason for the move. "CSA has announced a key schedule change as the 3rd Betway Test of the Freedom Series has been moved from the Imperial Wanderers in Johannesburg to Cape Town's Six Gun Grill Newlands," CSA tweeted. India will be backing themselves for their maiden Test series win in South Africa, having beaten Australia in their backyard twice in the last three years. On the tour of South Africa, India will also play three ODIs and four Twenty20 matches, beginning January 11. The tour will conclude with the fourth T20 on January 26.



Nitish Rana smashes 25-ball-50

Nitish Rana smashed half a dozen sixes in his unbeaten 25-ball-50 to lead Delhi to a comfortable seven-wicket win over Chandigarh in a Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 group E encounter, here on Friday. Chasing a target of 145, Delhi knocked off the runs in just 17.2 overs as Rana with six sixes and a boundary. All-rounder Lalit Yadav's (23 not out off 13 balls) five fours made it difficult for unheralded Chandigarh bowling attack. Rana, who plays for Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL, and Yadav added 65 runs in just 5.1 overs to also bolster their net run-rate. They are now on top of the group E table with eight points. The other contributor with the bat for Delhi was left-handed keeper-batter Anuj Rawat, who hit three sixes and three fours in his 35-ball-44.

Anushka Sharma pens heartfelt note on Virat Kohli's birthday

It's Indian skipper Virat Kohli's 33rd birthday and Anushka Sharma marked the occasion with an emotional note, praising her "amazing man" for his courage, honesty and guts of steel. Sharma said the sports star has the unmatched ability to bring himself out from "dark place". "No filter needed, for this photo and the way you lead your life. Your core is made of honesty and guts of steel. I know no one who can pick themselves up from a dark place like you can. You grow better in every way because you hold on to nothing in you as permanent and are fearless," Sharma wrote on Instagram alongside a photograph with Kohli. The celebrity couple have always been particular about



their privacy, but Sharma said she decided to share her feelings on Kohli's birthday because she wanted to tell the world how amazing her husband is. "I know we are not ones to talk to each other through social media like this but sometimes I just want to scream and tell the world what an amazing man you are. You are those who really truly know you. Thank you for making everything brighter and more beautiful. Oh, and Happy Birthday cuteness!" she added.

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