

OPINION 6
 EDUCATE TO AWAKEN
 THE SOUL

WORLD 9
 18 DIE AS MONSTER STORM BRINGS
 RAIN, SNOW, COLD ACROSS US

MONEY 10
 GOVT TO UNVEIL NEXT SET OF
 REFORMS IN TAX ADMIN

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

Late City Vol.32 Issue 357
 *Air Surcharge Extra If Applicable

NEW DELHI, MONDAY DECEMBER 26, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



INDIA WIN 2ND
 B'DESH TEST BY
 THREE WICKETS
 11 SPORT

Risk of data tampering in NRC for Assam: CAG

'Improper software development for data capture & docu updaton'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has expressed concern about the "risk of data tampering" in the updation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam. The auditor has pinned this apprehension of this anomaly on "improper" software development related to data capture and correction during the updation process of the citizenship document.

A highly secure and reliable software was required to be developed for the NRC updation exercise, but during the audit, "lack of proper planning in this regard" came to the fore, the CAG has said in a report which was tabled in the Assam Assembly on Saturday.

The updated final NRC, which validates bonafide Indian citizens of Assam, was released on August 31, 2019, with total of 3,11,21,004 names included out of 3,30,27,661 applicants, though it is yet to be notified. The CAG submitted a report for the year ended in 2020, on the last day of the Winter Session of the Assam Assembly on Saturday.

Quoting from the report, news agency PTI has said the CAG has pointed out that 215 software utilities were added in



a "haphazard manner" to the core software. It was done "without following the due process of either software development or selection of vendor through eligibility assessment following a national tendering, it said.

"Haphazard development of software and utilities for NRC data capture and correction posed the risk of data tampering, without leaving any audit trail. The audit trail could have ensured accountability for the veracity of NRC data,"

the CAG report said. It maintained that the objective of preparing a valid error-free NRC has not been met despite entailing huge expenditure to the State exchequer.

According to the report, there have been irregularities in the utilisation of funds, including excess and inadmissible payments to vendors. The CAG report on the compliance audit of "logistical arrangements for NRC updation project in Assam", recommended fixing responsibility on erring author-

ities for the financial irregularities and penal action against M/s Wipro Limited, the system integrator, for violating the Minimum Wages Act.

The NRC was updated in Assam under the supervision of a Supreme Court bench. The CAG report maintained that the objective of preparing a valid error-free NRC has not been met despite entailing huge expenditure to the State exchequer.

It noted that the initial project cost was estimated at ₹288.18 crore when the NRC updation process commenced in December 2014 and the deadline for completion was set for February 2015. The final draft of the document was, however, published in August 2019 and the project cost escalated to ₹1,602.66 crore (an expenditure of ₹1,579.78 crore was reported), the CAG report said.

It said a test check of records by audit has revealed "various irregularities in the utilisation of funds including excess and inadmissible payment to vendors". The report has recommended fixing of responsibility and action against the State Coordinator of National Registration (SCNR) for the excess, irregular and inadmissible payments.

Continued on Page 2

China 'ready to work with India', says Chinese FM

India, China committed to upholding stability at stand-off areas: Wang Yi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/BEIJING

Days after troops of the two countries clashed on the border in Arunachal Pradesh on December 9, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday said China is ready to work with India for the "steady and sound growth" of bilateral ties.

He also said the two countries are committed to upholding stability at the border areas where tensions have prevailed since 2020. Wang Yi was obviously referring to the stand-offs at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh.

Incidentally, Wang Yi, was the first Chinese Minister to visit India in March this year to hold talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar since the stand-offs started in May 2020.

India has all along maintained ties between the two countries and it will only become normal after the status quo ante is restored there as existing prior to May 2020 when the first face-off started at the Pangong Tso (lake) and soon triggered more flash points at the LAC in Ladakh.

Addressing a symposium



on the international situation and China's foreign relations in 2022, Wang said both countries have maintained communication through diplomatic and military-to-military channels.

"China and India have maintained communication through the diplomatic and military-to-military channels, and both countries are committed to upholding stability in the border areas," said Wang, who has been elevated to the ruling Communist Party of China's (CPC) high-power political bureau during the recent party Congress.

"We stand ready to work with India in the direction toward steady and sound growth of China-India relations," he said at the symposium. Wang, along with

National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, is the Special Representative of the India-China boundary mechanism which has remained dormant in the present set of border stand-offs.

In his lengthy address on China's diplomatic work, Wang focused more on China's troubled ties with the US and burgeoning relations with Russia, despite the Ukraine war.

He briefly touched on India-China relations that have been bogged down since April 2020 when China tried to move a large number of its troops to the disputed areas in Eastern Ladakh, resulting in a prolonged military stand-off.

The two countries have held 17 rounds of talks so far to resolve the stand-off.

The 17th round of the India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting was held on December 20 during which the two sides agreed to stay in close contact and maintain dialogue through military and diplomatic channels and work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest, according to a joint Press release issued after the talks.

Ever since the once-in-a-five-year Congress of the CPC in October which re-elected President Xi Jinping for an unprecedented third five-year term, speculation is rife about Beijing's future course of India policy, especially in 2023 and whether it will normalise relations and restore stability at the 3,488-km long Line of Actual Control (LAC) which has been witnessing tensions between the two militaries.

According to observers, this month's clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers at Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh, barely weeks after Xi began his new term, spelled danger that 2023 too will end up as yet another blank year in the bilateral ties.

It was the first major clash between the Indian and Chinese armies since the fierce face-off in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

Continued on Page 2

Delhi in grip of cold wave, mercury plummets to 5.3 degrees Celsius



Cold wave conditions continued in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and northwest Rajasthan.

The maximum temperature of the national Capital dipped to 16.2 degrees Celsius, five notches below the average.

The city saw unusually warm December till last week, with the day and night temperatures remaining above normal. In the last week, however, the temperature started to dip. The temperature is likely to dip further in north, northwest and central India. The cold wave conditions is likely to persist next five days.

However, the humidity in the weather of the Capital on Sunday at 8:30 am was recorded 97 per cent and 71 per cent at 5:30 pm, at Delhi's base station, Safdurjung observatory, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The visibility at Palam was 50 meter on Sunday morning.

Continued on Page 2

Isolated pockets of Punjab, Hry, Raj at receiving end

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Biting cold gripped Delhi on Sunday morning, as the

minimum temperatures dipped to 5.3 degrees Celsius, three notches less than the normal, and chilly wind swept across the national Capital.

The mercury dropped to 3 degrees Celsius in the Ridge area, 4.9 degrees Celsius below normal, making it the coldest place in the Capital.



People celebrate Christmas at Marine Drive in Mumbai on Sunday

CAPSULE

MODI: BE VIGILANT AGAINST COVID-19

New Delhi: As Covid cases rise in neighbouring China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked people to take precautions against the viral infection and be safe. Addressing this year's last edition of his monthly radio programme, Mann Ki Baat, the Prime Minister asked people to be vigilant while participating in the year-end festivities. P4

55 HELD IN RAJASTHAN RECRUITMENT PAPER LEAK

Udaipur: Rajasthan Police on Friday said it has arrested 55 people, including seven women, so far in connection with the paper leak of 2nd grade teacher recruitment examination. The examination, which was scheduled for Saturday, has been postponed.

MASS ALARM FOR HARYANA X, XII STUDENTS

Chandigarh: In a move aimed at improving pass percentage of schools, the Haryana Government has called for announcements by temples, mosques and gurdwaras to wake up students of Classes 10 and 12 early so that they can prepare for their board exams and secure high percentage.

Co-star arrested in TV actor Tunisha's suicide case

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after film and television actress Tunisha Sharma allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself on the sets of her serial at Vasai's Naigaon area in the neighbouring Palghar district, her co-actor and former boyfriend Sheezan Mohammed Khan was arrested on Sunday on charges of abetting her suicide.

Twenty-year-old Tunisha, who was allegedly found dead in the toilet of lead co-actor Sheezan, was shooting for her ongoing serial "Ali Baba: Dastaan-E-Kabul", at Vasai (East) when the incident took place at around 2.30 pm. Acting on a complaint lodged by Tunisha's mother



Vanita Sharma, the Vasai police arrested Sheezan under section 306 (abetment of suicide) of IPC. After his arrest, Sheezan was produced before a Vasai court which remanded to police custody for four days.

Continued on Page 2

My son died drinking, don't marry off daughters to alcoholics: Minister

PTI ■ SULTANPUR

A rickshaw puller or a labourer will prove to be a better bridegroom than an alcoholic officer, Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaulsh Kishore said as he appealed to people not to get their daughters and sisters married to alcoholics.

"The lifespan of an alcoholic is very less," Kishore reasoned, while addressing a programme on de-addiction in Lambhua assembly constituency here on Saturday. Narrating his personal experience, he said, "When I was an MP and my wife as an MLA could not save the life of our son, then how will the common public do so."

"My son (Akash Kishore)



was into the habit of consuming alcohol with his friends. He was admitted to a de-addiction centre. Assuming that he will quit the bad habit, he was married after six months. However, he started drinking again after his marriage, and that eventually led to his death.

Continued on Page 2

Prachanda is Nepal's new PM

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" was on Sunday appointed Nepal's new Prime Minister, after the former guerrilla leader dramatically broke away from the five-party ruling alliance led by the Nepali Congress, ending the political uncertainty after last month's general elections failed to produce a clear winner.

The surprise development may not bode well for India-Nepal ties as Prachanda and his main backer KP Sharma Oli have some run-ins with New Delhi previously over territorial issues.

Prachanda, the 68-year-old leader of former Communist rebels, was appointed as the Prime



Minister of Nepal, according to a statement issued by the President's Office here.

The President had called any member of the House of Representatives, who can garner a majority with support from two or more parties as stipulated in the Article 76 clause 2 of the Constitution to submit a claim for the Prime Minister's post by 5 pm on Sunday.

Agra man back from China tests Covid +ve, isolated at home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A 40-year-old man, who returned from China two days back to Agra in UP via Delhi, has been detected positive for Covid-19 following which he has been isolated at his home here.

Agra Chief Medical Officer Arun Srivastava said his samples will be sent to Lucknow for genome sequencing. The Central Government has already asked all the States to ramp up genome sequencing of the Covid cases to identify the variants. BE7, which has swept China, is highly transmissible and four cases have already been reported from India so far since July.

Three are from Gujarat



and one is from Odisha. The patients have fully recovered, the officials in the Union Health Ministry said.

"The man has been isolated at his home and teams of the health department have been asked to conduct tests of his family members and those who came in contact with him," Srivastava added.

Continued on Page 2

MPs nominated to AWBI to be exempt for office of profit provisions: Parl panel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After juggling with contradictory opinions and changes in the Administrative Ministry, a Parliamentary panel has said the election of parliamentarians to the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) may not be construed as holding an office of profit.

The AWBI had requested the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Office of Profit in December 2018 to examine whether the election or nomination of lawmakers to the board amounted to holding an office of profit, thus leading to their disqualification as members of Parliament.

The committee, chaired by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Satya Pal Singh, has asked the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying to take steps to include the AWBI, a statutory body that helps in the implementation of animal welfare

laws, in the exempted category of the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act, 1959.

Six members of Parliament -- four from the Lok Sabha and two from the Rajya Sabha -- are elected or nominated to the AWBI. But no representation has been made since 2007, the report of the committee noted.

When the matter was referred to the law ministry for its opinion, the Department of Legal Affairs had opined that the election of members of Parliament to the AWBI "may not be considered as an office of profit and may not incur disqualification in terms of Article 102(1)(a) of the Constitution of India".

The Legislative Department of the law ministry gave a contradictory opinion, saying the election of Lok Sabha members to the AWBI "may attract disqualification from the angle of office of profit," as the board has the powers to dis-

burse funds to animal welfare organisations.

Earlier, the AWBI came under the purview of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, but the administrative ministry was changed to the Ministry of Agriculture in 2019 and later, to the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

The changes in the administrative ministry were conveyed to the committee by the environment ministry when its views were sought on the contradictory opinions of the Department of Legal Affairs and the Legislative Department.

The Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying informed the committee that the parliamentarians elected or nominated to the AWBI did not receive any honorarium or grants, but were entitled to daily allowances for attending meetings of the board in accordance with the Salary,



Allowances and Pensions of Members of Parliament Act, 1954.

"After hearing the views, the Committee concluded that the Office of AWBI should not be construed as an Office of Profit as it is basically for the welfare of animals," it said.

On the issue of the powers of the AWBI to disburse funds, the committee observed that the funds were given for pin-jarpoles, rescue homes, animal shelters and sanctuaries.

"Financial assistance is pro-

vided to the Board to extend assistance to animal welfare organisations functioning in the local area and to encourage the animal welfare organisations in the local area, which shall work under the overall supervision and guidance of the Board," it said.

The committee recommended to the administrative ministry to take steps for the inclusion of the AWBI in the exempted category of the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act.

Make arrangements to deal with Covid cases, G'gram health dept asks hospitals

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In view of the rising Covid-19 cases in China, Brazil, United States and Japan, the district health department issued a fresh advisory to the Government as well as private hospitals to make proper arrangements to deal with Covid cases.

According to the health officials, the situation is not panicked yet but they advised people to get their booster dose and avoid social gatherings and not visit abroad and even not travel domestically unnecessarily.

"We have directed all government-run hospitals in Gurugram to establish a flu corner and if someone developed symptoms of acute respiratory their RT-PCR and Antigen test will be done. Such people will be isolated," Virender Yadav, chief medical officer (CMO) Gurugram said.

"If we found any case we will focus on the five-fold strategy of test-track-treat-



vaccination and follow. Apart from this, the samples of cases positive will be sent to a Delhi-based laboratory for genome sequence," he said. The CMO said We have also directed 50 plus bed hospitals to conduct dry runs of PSA and oxygen plants amid spike in covid cases.

Meanwhile, 02 covid cases were reported in Gurugram

on Sunday. The Covid-19 tally in Gurugram has now risen to 3,01,183 according to the official daily health bulletin. A total of 3,00,136 have been cured and discharged including 01 on Sunday.

Gurugram now has 16 active cases, all are in-home isolation. The district's COVID toll reached 1,031 officials said.

Court dismisses plea for review of previous order seeking intervention on Qutub Minar row

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court dismissed a plea for a review of its September 20 order that dismissed an intervention application on the Qutub Minar row, saying it is without merits and the applicant had failed to show sufficient grounds for a review. It also said "a review application cannot be allowed to be an appeal in disguise".

The court was hearing a plea moved by Kunwar Mahender Dhawaj Pratap Singh, who claimed that he was an heir of the erstwhile ruler of the "United Province of Agra" and the owner of land parcels in several cities in and around

Delhi, including the Qutub Minar. Singh argued that he was a necessary party to an appeal seeking the restoration of Hindu and Jain deities in what was claimed to be a temple inside the Qutub Minar complex.

Singh had filed the review application against the court order that had dismissed the plea on the ground of it being "without merits". "I am of the considered opinion that the applicant has failed to show any sufficient ground for a review of the order dated September 20, 2022. The application is without merits and is, therefore, dismissed and disposed of accordingly," Additional

District Judge Dinesh Kumar said.

The judge also said the fact that Singh did not find the court's observation in his favour cannot be a ground for a review of the order. The court also rejected the arguments that Singh would suffer an irreparable loss and injury due to its earlier order and that his claim pertained to a "constitutional dispute".

"The court has already held that the applicant is neither a necessary nor proper party. Therefore, any grievance of the applicant regarding the said finding cannot be a ground to review the order," it said. The judge also trashed

Singh's arguments that the Centre and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had filed "evasive replies" and did not disclose his status in their replies.

"The order of the court was not based only on the reply of the Union of India or the appellants and the order was passed after considering the submission of the applicant, which was considered to be not sufficient to implead him as a party in the present appeal," the judge said. The other grounds put forward by Singh were also unable to show an error in the earlier order, the judge said, adding that the court cannot review the said order

again just to find out whether another view is possible.

"In the present case, as the record would reveal, the applicant has not shown even one ground in the entire application or during the arguments as to why this court has to review the above-mentioned order," the judge said. He further said the power of review can be used by a court if there is an error apparent on the face of the record and not because of an erroneous decision.

"Thus, it is a settled position of law that when a party is aggrieved by an order or judgment on the ground that it is erroneous, the only remedy available is to question the

said order in the appeal and a review application cannot be allowed to be an appeal in disguise," the judge added.

The appeal in the present case is against a trial court order that dismissed a suit filed by advocate Hari Shankar Jain on behalf of Jain deity Tirthankar Lord Rishabh Dev, claiming that 27 temples were partly demolished by Qutub ud-Din Aibak, a general in the army of Muhammad Ghori, and the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque was raised inside the complex by re-using the material.

The suit had sought the restoration and worshipping rights of the presiding deities of



the 27 temples, along with the performance of regular "puja" within the alleged temple situated in the Qutub Minar complex.

The suit had also sought a

decree of mandatory injunction, seeking directions to the government to create a trust and hand over the management and administration of the temple complex to it.

China 'ready to work with India', says Chinese...

From Page 1

The ties between the two countries froze since then, with India making it clear that peace and tranquillity at the border is the sine qua non for the overall development of bilateral ties.

after the completion of disengagement from many friction points was seen as the reflection of the dilemma prevailing in the Chinese political and military ranks on how to deal with India which is on political ascendency internationally.

about China's opposition to "bloc confrontation". Beijing has been opposing the formation of the Quad alliance comprising the US, India, Australia and Japan, as well as the AUKUS alliance of the US, Australia, and the UK. China claims that such blocs are aimed at containing its rise.

In his address on Sunday, Wang spoke

My son died drinking, don't marry off daughters to alcoholics...

From Page 1

"Two years ago, on October 19, when Akash passed away, his son was barely two years old," the Union Minister said. Kaushal Kishore told the gathering, "I could not save my son, due to which his wife became a widow. You must save your daughters and sisters from this."

The MP from Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh also said around 80 per cent of the cancer deaths are due to addiction to tobacco, cigarettes and 'bidi'. He urged the audience and other organisations to be a part of the de-addiction programme, and save their families. The Minister added that in order to make the district addiction-free, the de-addiction campaign should be taken to all schools, and during the morning prayers itself, advice regarding this should be given to the children.

Co-star arrested for TV actor Tunisha's suicide...

From Page 1

The FIR registered on the complaint filed by the mother of the deceased actress stated that Tunisha and Sheezan — both of whom were starring as co-actors in serial "Ali Baba: Dastaan-E-Kabul" — were in a relationship for some time. They had broken up little over a fortnight ago.

The incident came to light during the tea break. As the actress did not come out of the toilet for a long time, the police — who rushed to the scene after one of television production officials complained — broke open the toilet door to find the actress was found

hanging. She was declared dead soon after she was rushed to a nearby hospital.

The post-mortem conducted on Tunisha at the State-run JJ Hospital on Sunday morning indicated that she died of asphyxiation. There were no injury marks on her body. The police said Tunisha was under extreme stress after her break-up.

Apart from recording the statement of the deceased actress' mother, the police have also recorded statements of 14 people — all of them associated with the television serial that the actress was shooting with Sheezan in con-

nection with the case. The police are looking into Tunisha's death both from the angle of suicide and murder.

Born in 2002 in Chandigarh, Tunisha had started her career at the age of 14 as a child actress the Sony TV show 'Bharat Ka Veer Putra — Maharana Pratap', where she played the role of Chand Kanwar. She went act in several shows and Hindi movies. Among other things, she had worked in shows like 'Ishq Subhan Allah', 'Gabbar Poonchwala', 'Sher-e-Punjab: Maharaja Ranjit Singh', and 'Chakravartin Ashoka Samrat'.

She also acted in

Bollywood movies like 'Fitoor', 'Baar Baar Dekho', 'Kahaani 2: Durga Rani Singh', and 'Dabangg 3'. In her complaint lodged with the police, Tunisha's mother blamed Sheezan for the alleged suicide by her daughter. Twenty-eight-year-old Sheezan, who is being investigated for abetment to suicide, is known for his role as young Akbar in Jodha Akbar and now as Ali Baba in Ali Baba: Dastaan-E-Kabul. Sheezan had begun his acting career in 2013 in Jodha Akbar. As recently as on December 13, Sheezan had taken to his social media to share a photograph with

Tunisha with a caption "Don't Look Back!!" The photograph was from their "Ali Baba..." serial set.

Earlier on December 9, Tunisha had celebrated her friend Falaq Naazz's birthday with Sheezan Khan. On November 19, Tunisha shared her photograph which Sheezan on her Instagram profile in which he was seen lifting her up. Tunisha heaped praise on Sheezan in the caption by saying: "Verified Happy International Men's Day to the Man who lifts me up just like this! The most hardworking, passionate, wildly enthusiastic, and the

most beautiful Man in my life! You don't know what you are and that's the most beautiful part. @sheezan9?? It's time to recognize and honour the contributions and sacrifices that a man makes for his family and society! Happy International Men's Day to all the amazing men out there!!!! (sic)."

Earlier, on Sheezan's birthday on September 9, Tunisha posted a photograph of them were seen laughing their hearts out while lying on the ground, dressed like their characters. Tunisha termed Sheezan 'love' in the caption of the post.

Risk of data tampering in...

From Page 1

The commissioner and secretary, the political department, and the Government of Assam, was designated as the SCNR to carry out the NRC updation exercise. Mentioning non-adherence to the Minimum Wages Act in payment to operators by M/s Wipro Limited as revealed during its audit, the CAG recommended penal action against the system integrator.

"Accountability of the SCNR, as a principal employer, should also be fixed for not ensuring compliance with the MW Act," the report added. Assam, which had faced an influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only State having an NRC which was first prepared in 1951. Risk of data tampering in Assam's NRC updation process: CAG report.

Agra man back from China tests Covid +ve, isolated at...

From Page 1

The man returned to Agra from China via Delhi on December 23 following which he was tested at a private lab. The report came out positive for Covid, he added.

This is the first Covid positive case in the district detected after November 25, officials said. Amid a surge in Covid cases in some countries, including China, the Centre has ramped up its anti-coronavirus measures. The Centre had said the RT-PCR test would be made mandatory for passengers from China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand and asked States to conduct a mock drill on December 27 to ensure the

readiness of health facilities including medical oxygen generation plants.

Meanwhile, the health department in Agra began screening and collecting samples of foreign tourists at Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Akbar's Tomb.

Besides, samples are also being collected at the Agra airport, railway station and Inter Bus Terminal (ISBT), officials said.

"Sample collections at Sarojani Naidu Medical College, District Hospital and Primary and Community Health Centres in rural Agra have been initiated with priority. Those who have symptoms of cold, cough and fever can visit the health centres to

undergo Covid test," CMO added.

Srivastava added, "Residents are being asked to wear masks and maintain social distance at public places. They have been advised to use hand sanitiser and follow Covid guidelines to avoid the infection. Besides, residents are advised to get their precaution dose of Covid-19."

People can contact the health department's helpline numbers 0562-2600412, 9458569043 regarding any queries on the disease, officials said.

As a preventive measure, India has already started random coronavirus testing of international arriving passen-

gers at Delhi airport. Two per cent of passengers arriving in each international flight will be subject to random coronavirus testing at airports from Saturday. Such travellers in each flight shall be identified by the airlines concerned and after submitting the sample, passengers will be allowed to leave the airport.

Union Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya has said, "RT-PCR test is mandatory for international passengers coming from China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand. On arrival, if any passenger from these countries is found symptomatic or tests positive for Covid-19, then he or she will be put under quarantine."

Delhi in grip of cold wave, min...

From Page 1

Dense to very dense fog prevailed over certain parts of the National Capital Region and States of Haryana, Punjab, west Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan. Foggy conditions will persist in these areas over the next few days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast. The Najafgarh and Pitampura observatories registered the highest minimum temperature at 7.9 degrees Celsius. It was a partly cloudy sky on Sunday morning with moderate fog enveloping the city. Some places experienced cold wave conditions, IMD said.

The weathermen said a cold wave is considered when the minimum temperature in the city drops lower than 4.5 degrees Celsius below the normal. According to the data

released by the weather station, the observatories at, Ayanagar, Palam, and Lodhi Road recorded minimum temperatures of 3.5 degrees Celsius, 6 degrees Celsius, and 5 degrees Celsius respectively.

The adjoining States of the national Capital witnessed the season's first cold day as the maximum temperature in Gurugram was settled at 15.3 degrees Celsius, Manesar recorded 15.0 degrees Celsius, Delhi Airport 14.2 degrees Celsius while Safdarjung missed it as the maximum temperature is 16.2 degrees Celsius. Post-sunset, the temperature is nearing single digits which is below 10 degrees Celsius.

In the plains, the IMD declared a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to 4 degrees Celsius. A cold wave is also expected when the

minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches below normal. A "severe" cold wave is when the minimum temperature dips to two degrees Celsius or the departure from normal is more than 6.4 degrees Celsius. When the minimum temperature is less than or equal to 10 degrees Celsius and the maximum temperature is at least 4.5 degrees Celsius below the normal, it is said to be a "cold day".

Skymet, vice president Mahesh Palawat, said the north-westerly wind will continue for a few more days in the national Capital as the maximum temperature is also likely to drop further. As per the IMD official, the city will witness the cold wave on December 26, as the minimum temperature is likely to dip to 4-degrees Celsius and the max-

imum temperature will settle at 19 degrees Celsius.

"From December 27 to 29, the shallow fog will hover over the Capital with the minimum temperature dipping to 5 degree Celsius and the maximum temperature will be recorded 21 degrees Celsius," he said.

"On the last day of the year, December 31, the Capital will witness dense fog with the minimum temperature likely to be recorded at 6 degrees Celsius and the maximum will go up to 20 degrees Celsius," an IMD official added.

The shallow fog reduces the visibility to 999m to 500m, while the moderate fog limits it to 499m to 200m. However, the dense fog reduces the visibility to 199m to 50m and the very dense fog further decrease the visibility to less than 50m.

2022 most significant year for AAP

SAURAV GUPTA ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2022 was the most significant and successful year for Arvind Kejriwal and his party Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as it ended the 15 years rule of the BJP in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The party not only won the important state election in Punjab Assembly polls but also received national party status this year — within 10 years of coming into being.



The AAP has ended the 15-year-long regime of the BJP in the MCD and is about to form a double-engine government in the national capital. The party will have full control over almost all the major sectors of Delhi including Health, Infrastructure, Environment, Education, etc.

There were multiple factors that worked in the favour of AAP, and against the BJP, which won only 104 seats. City residents were dissatisfied with the BJP over its inability to manage civic services effi-

ciently, while AAP built a reputation of maintaining quality social infrastructure. Voter turnout barely crossed 50% overall; it was around 40% in upscale wards and even higher in unauthorised colonies that lacked civic infrastructure.

The mounting problem of solid waste in the capital city's three landfills, in Okhla, Bhalswa and Ghazipur, was a major poll issue raised by AAP, in turn putting the BJP on the defensive. Political experts say AAP's silence on communal

violence in the national capital, and protests on issues such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act led to the desertion of Muslims from the party, and their shifting to the Congress.

The other major achievement for the AAP is getting the status of the national party, as it formed the government in Delhi and Punjab.

The Punjab assembly election victory was Arvind Kejriwal's first outside of Delhi where the AAP formed the government. It won approxi-

mately 92 seats in the 117-member Punjab assembly, followed by the Congress with 18 seats and Shiromani Akali Dal with three.

The Party gained a strong 79% majority in the sixteenth Punjab Legislative Assembly by winning 92 out of 117 seats in March 2022. Punjab, the party managed to win due to infighting in the Congress leadership.

On the other hand, the AAP received 6.77 percent votes in the Goa assembly polls held earlier this year in march and secured nearly 13 percent votes and won five seats in the Gujarat assembly polls.

The results of the Gujarat assembly polls was not on its expected line as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has expected to form the government in the state.

The core issue for AAP right now is the lack of originality, which used to be its strength once upon a time. The absence of a strong and pronounced ideology is no more a blessing but an obstacle. The party fulfilled the important criteria of getting the status of the national party which is receiving more than 6 percent of the valid votes polled in the Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha elections.

Mock drill in hospitals across city tomorrow to see Covid preparedness

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In view of a surge in Covid-19 cases in some countries, officials will physically visit all Government hospitals in Delhi and ascertain their preparedness to deal with any eventuality, authorities said on Sunday.

In pursuance of the Central Government's directions, a mock drill will be conducted across all city Government hospitals on Tuesday.

Delhi Health Secretary Amit Singla chaired a meeting with all district magistrates on Sunday morning and directed them to visit all hospitals and prepare an inventory of beds and equipment available there, a district official said.

another official said. The Delhi government's coronavirus dashboard was last updated on December 12.

"Real-time data will be available on the portal from Tuesday," the official quoted above said. An official from the northeast district said testing is likely to be ramped up soon. At present around 2,500 to 3,000 tests are being conducted in the entire city.

"Meetings are being held with resident welfare organisations and non-government organisations. They are being asked to create awareness about the emerging situation. "We are likely to launch a door-to-door drive to provide booster doses to vulnerable populations," the official said.

A northwest district official said they are asking everyone to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour -- maintaining at least two-feet distance, using masks, avoiding crowded places etc. A southeast Delhi district official said the situation does-

n't seem alarming right now, but "we are completely prepared". "We are also going to collate bed availability data at private hospitals which had played a key role in handling the situation during previous Covid waves," he said.

On Thursday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said the new Omicron sub-variant BE.7 of the coronavirus that is causing a surge in cases in some countries has not been detected in Delhi so far and that his government is fully geared up to tackle any eventuality.

He had also issued instructions to send all positive cases for genome sequencing, increase precaution dose coverage and manpower in hospitals.

He had directed officials to take prior approval for procurement of essential items needed and inspect machines in all hospitals. The CM had asserted that they are self-sufficient in terms of oxygen availability and storage.

110 int'l passengers tested for Covid at airport

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Genestrings Diagnostic Centre, the Covid-19 testing facility at the Indira Gandhi International airport said as many as 110 international passengers were tested randomly on Saturday at the Delhi airport the first day after India restarted random sampling of 2 per cent of foreign arrivals.



Genestrings Diagnostic Centre's lab at the Delhi airport resumed testing which was otherwise stopped after restrictions were taken off at the Delhi international airport, for the inbound passengers. The passengers will have to undergo random Covid testing post arrival at the airport.

Genestrings Diagnostic Centre on Sunday said it has increased the number of lab technicians at the facility to ensure timely reporting of test results.

In a statement on Sunday, Genestrings said that on an average, 25,000 travellers arrive at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) here and out of them, 500 random passengers are being tested.

By the end of the first day on Saturday, Genestrings had conducted approximately 110 tests. "We have increased the manpower of lab technicians at the facility to ensure availability and timely reporting along with being fully prepared for COVID management," said Dr Agarwal.

Delhiites throng churches for Christmas festivities

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds thronged churches across the national Capital for Christmas festivities on Sunday after two years of muted celebrations in the shadow of the Covid pandemic with people seeking to find a balance between rituals and precautions.

Colourful lights, Christmas trees, bunting and balloons decked up street corners, markets and public areas as people from all religions and cultures celebrated the festival with food and music.

Christmas this year comes amid a low number of Covid cases. However, church-goers exercised caution considering the surge in infections in some countries. Most churches urged the people to wear masks and follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. "It (crowd) was double the number we witnessed last year. There are no harsher curbs like the previous two years. So, the number has obviously gone up," a spokesperson of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi said.

"However, we urged people to wear masks and maintain social distance considering



People offer prayers during Christmas celebrations at Sacred Heart Cathedral Catholic Church, in New Delhi, on Sunday

cases are rising in some countries," he said. An administration official at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi said though people turned out in big numbers this time, most of them observed Covid-appropriate behaviour. The pandemic had put a halt to big congregations with most churches hosting socially distanced celebrations for two years. In 2020, churches in Delhi held multiple masses on December 24-25, where a limited number of people were admitted through online registration to ensure social distancing. Though there were no restrictions on the number of visitors last year, fewer people reached churches amid concern over the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.



People light up the candles on birthday of Jesus Christ at Sacred Heart Cathedral Catholic Church, in New Delhi, on Sunday

hoping that their businesses will once again thrive as "it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas again". Some owners said although there has been a bit of a scare after coronavirus cases were reported in some countries, as far as bookings for Christmas and New Year were concerned, they were back to pre-Covid numbers. The Centre has urged all states and Union Territories to gear up the whole genome sequencing of positive samples to keep track of emerging variants amid a spike in Covid cases in Japan, South Korea, Brazil, China and the US.

Jain 'special privileges' withdrawn in Tihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi jailed Minister Satyendar Jain will now live like a common prisoner in Delhi's Tihar Jail after videos of him enjoying body massages in his cell emerged on social media. After getting a massage, special food and VIP treatment in Tihar, Jain will not be allowed any visitors for the next 15 days.



polls, several videos leaked on social media, showing VIP treatment to him in the jail. The videos showed the minister getting a massage, special food, and having visitors in his cell. According to sources, the decision to reduce his privileges was taken in the last few days.

The Inquiry Committee constituted to look into the allegations regarding the VVIP treatment provided to Jain, found that the latter violated norms and rules of the prison

and misused his official position and authority, which enabled him to enjoy special treatment/facilities in the jail.

The report by the committee, comprising principal secretaries of the Delhi government's Home, Law and Vigilance departments, has noted collusion on the part of the senior jail officials, including the then Director General Sandeep Goel and the suspended Jail Superintendent Ajit Kumar in the AAP's minister's matter.

"Jain, a Tihar inmate and Minister in Kejriwal government, violated the norms and rules of the prison and misused his official position and authority, which enabled him to enjoy special treatment/facilities in the jail. At least 5 inmates namely, Rinku (POCSO accused), Afsar Ali, Manish (POCSO accused), Sonu Singh,

and Dilip Kumar were pressurised by the Jail administration (including Jail Superintendent, Jail Warden, and Jail Munshi) to provide "special services" to Minister Satyendar Jain.

This means that a retinue of Jail officials including, Wardens, Munshis, and other staff were involved in the service of Jain," the report said. Against this backdrop, the minister had even approached a Delhi court seeking directions to restrain media from running any video footage from inside his prison cell.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had then affirmed before the court that it had no role in leaking the videos of Jain, including the one where he was seen receiving massage by a fellow prisoner, who is an accused in a rape case, inside his prison cell.

MCD to build toilets at 42 locations ahead of G-20

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the G20 summit next year, a total of 42 locations have been identified by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in five zones to start the construction and revamping work of the Community Toilet Complexes (CTCs) and Public Toilets (PTs). As part of the preparations of the summit, the civic body has also decided to beautify parks, illuminate trees and instal public art at many locations in Delhi.



Zone, Shahdara South Zone, and City SP Zone. "These Zones have been marked as important zones as per the tourist attractions and large footfall," he underlined.

Informing about the zones identified by the Corporation, a senior MCD official said that the new construction and repair work of CTCs/PTs would be carried out in five zones that are Karol Bagh Zone, South Zone, Central

equipped with modern amenities," he said. "Till date, approximately 42 locations have been identified in these five zones where new construction and repair work would be carried out, and furthermore, new locations would be added to the list as per zonal requirements," a senior MCD official stated. "Emphasis would also be given to CTCs/PTs in the other seven zone of MCD.

The work is targeted to complete before G20 foreign ministers meet in March 2023," he said. He told that the Commissioner of MCD, Gyanesh Bharti directed all concerned officials to ensure that all the public toilets/Community toilets in the jurisdiction of MCD should be in spick and span.

Magenta line Metro service halted after drone falls on tracks

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro services on the Magenta line were briefly suspended on Sunday after a drone carrying medical supplies fell on the tracks.

"Magenta Line Update Services are not available between Jasola Vihar Shaheen Bagh to Botanical Garden due to security reason. Normal services on all other lines," Delhi Metro Rail Corporation tweeted around 2.50 pm.

The drone fell on the metro track near Delhi's Jasola Vihar. Due to this, metro service from Jasola Vihar, Shaheen Bagh to Botanical Garden was disrupted. Delhi Police said operations were suspended as a drone carrying medical supplies had fallen on the metro track near Jasola Vihar.

recordings and photo shoots. Head Constable Gurpreet Gaur who has been featured in one such billboard at Panchsheel metro station said ever since her poster has come up, she feels like a celebrity.

"It feels good when your work is rewarded. When my children saw an advertisement in the print media featuring me they were very happy and excited. They even shared this news with their teachers and friends in school," she said.

"They told me how proud they feel. We are known by our work but now even senior officers of my district know me well. I feel motivated and encouraged to do even more," she said. Gaur, who has been posted in the south district of the force, has been rewarded for tracing 92 missing children in the span of six months.

AAP MLAs, Councillors pay tribute to Madan Mohan Malviya

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP MLAs and newly elected councilors after the landslide victory in MCD elections paid their tribute to Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on Sunday.



Somnath Bharti said. After welcoming all guests, Somnath Bharti shared his valuable and intellectual speech with everyone present during the programme.

Bharti said in his statement that Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Ji was a great social worker, politician and educational reformer. "He wanted to make each and every citizen of India educated so that India would be able to reach heights of success and everything that a country and people's

desires. The people of India are not standing on the expectations of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Ji. He wanted a place where there would be safety for the women in the whole country. He wanted self employment to be there for the youngsters," he said. "The citizens of India have always wanted that there should be a government body which would be working for the growth of the citizens of the country.

He said that earlier import of the foreigner trade worldwide was around 25 per cent and now it is more than 80 per cent, and China has been playing the big role of supplying their products in India which has decreased the number of the production and innovation in the country," Bharti said.

Cops strike a pose in campaign posters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 70 personnel have featured in posters of various awareness campaigns run by the Delhi Police as a reward for their good work, investigations and humanitarian acts, officials said.

One can easily spot these posters at metro stations like IIT, Sarojini Nagar, Ashram, INA, GK, ITO and Panchsheel among others in which the featured personnel can be seen alerting the masses on cyber or other types of fraud.

According to officials, it was Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora's idea to make these policemen and women the face of the force's awareness campaign as a reward for their outstanding work. One such poster is aimed at encouraging senior citizens



Delhi Police personnel featured in posters of various awareness campaigns

to register themselves with Delhi Police's portal for the team to visit them and carry out the security audits of the societies they are living in.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (PRO) Suman Nalwa said police personnel are being featured as models for awareness campaigns in the print

media as well. There is a 360-degree campaign going on for this whole drive. "It is one of our unique initiatives through which we are not only taking our message to Delhiites but at the same time boosting the morale of our own men and women in uniform," she said. "Their (featured personnel)

feedback has been amazing in the sense that they feel like a celebrity. Their families feel proud and children show them in their schools. This has given them a recognition at a larger platform since we showcase their work on social media as well," Nalwa said.

"Many among them have also received international acclaim as well. So overall, the impact has been very positive and very motivating," she added. This initiative was kick-started early this month with its focus on cautioning the masses against cyber scams.

The Delhi Police will continue this style of communication in the near future as well, an officer said. According to a senior police officer, Delhi Police's PRO department is fully equipped with its own studio where they carry out

Take precautions against Covid, stay safe: Modi

In Mann ki Baat, PM says: 'Cases rising, Indians must remain vigilant while taking part in year-end festivities'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As Covid cases rise in neighbouring China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked people to take precautions against the viral infection and be safe.

Addressing this year's last edition of his monthly radio programme, Mann ki Baat, the Prime Minister asked people to be vigilant while participating in the year-end festivities.

"You are also seeing that corona is increasing in many countries of the world, so we have to take more care of precautions like masks and hand washing. If we are careful, then we will also be safe and there



will be no hindrance in our enjoyment," said Modi. He extended Christmas greetings to all citizens. The Prime Minister spoke at length about Ayurveda and Yoga and sought that Ayurveda should provide "evidence-based treatment" to

respond to fit in the standards set by the west. He said Yoga has influenced global health and its positive impact has been globally proven and firmly recognized. The Prime Minister noted that the latest research of Mumbai's Tata Memorial Center shows that yoga is effective for patients with breast cancer.

"As per the center, regularly practicing Yoga brought a 15 percent reduction in the recurrence of the disease among patients," he said. The Prime Minister stressed the evidence-based research in Ayurveda and spoke about Ayurveda Congress in Goa which he attended recently.

"Even in the Ayurveda Congress, I reiterated the point for evidence-based research to the Ayurveda experts gathered from all over the world. The way we all are seeing the power of Yoga and Ayurveda in this time of the Corona global pandemic, evidence-based research related to these will prove to be very significant.

"I also urge you that if you have any information about such efforts related to Yoga, Ayurveda, and our traditional treatment methods, then do share them on social media", he said.

The Prime Minister said the outgoing year, 2022, has been inspirational to India in

many ways. "India carved out a special place for itself in the world with its incredible vaccination doses of over 220 crores and the country becoming the fifth largest global economy," he said.

The country also achieved the "magical" export figure of USD 400 billion (one billion=100 crore) and made new strides in space, defence and drone sectors, he added and also highlighted its achievements in sports.

The Prime Minister also said the year 2022 also "scripted another historic moment — the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign in August. This Amrit Mahotsav will continue with

the same spirit next year too and it will strengthen the foundation of Amrit Kaal," he said.

He also paid tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary. "PM Vajpayee took India to newer heights in every sector including education, foreign policy and the field of infrastructure," Modi said.

"Stating that India has managed to successfully eradicate diseases like smallpox, polio and guinea worm, Modi said in the last few years, we have overcome many major challenges in the health sector.

"The entire credit for this goes to our medical experts,

scientists, and the willpower of the countrymen. Now, I would like to bring your attention to another challenge which is on the verge of vanquishing — Kala Azar (visceral leishmaniasis)," he said. The Prime Minister said till recently, the scourge of Kala-azar had spread in more than 50 districts across 4 states.

"But now this disease is confined to only 4 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. I am sure, the strength and awareness of the people of Bihar-Jharkhand will help the government's efforts to eliminate 'Kala Azar' from these four districts as well," said the Prime Minister.

Rahul to visit Vajpayee memorial today, says believe in 'Bharat Jodo'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a departure from the past, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, who is in his Delhi leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, is scheduled to pay tributes at the memorial of former Prime Minister and BJP stalwart Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Monday besides paying obeisance at the samadhis of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri in the Shanti Van area.

"We believe in Bharat Jodo," said Congress chief spokesperson Jairam Ramesh while making the announcement. Rahul's visit to the former PM's memorial is the first by the Gandhi family since Vajpayee passed away in 2018.

Rahul was initially scheduled to visit these memorials on Sunday after the conclusion of Saturday's yatra, the visit was rescheduled because of the birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee on December 25 when top BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi were scheduled to visit



Atal ji's samadhi. The BJP has termed Rahul's visit to Vajpayee samadhi for the sake of photo opportunities. Rahul's visit is now being seen as a political statement by Congress and is supposed to mark a distinction between PM Modi and Vajpayee. Paying tributes to Vajpayee on his birth anniversary,

Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh tweeted that Vajpayee was first-term MP when he co-signed a letter to Nehru requesting for Parliament to be convened earlier than scheduled to debate the Chinese invasion. "Today is the birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He was a first-term MP when he co-signed a letter to Nehru requesting for Parliament to be convened earlier than scheduled to debate the Chinese invasion. Nehru agreed. Now MPs can't even discuss ongoing Chinese incursions," Ramesh said in a tweet.

Rahul: China, Pak preparing together, India vulnerable

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said China and Pakistan are preparing together and if there is a war, then it will be against both countries.

In a YouTube video put out on Rahul Gandhi's channel, the Congress leader, while interacting with veterans of the Armed Forces, said, "China and Pakistan have come together, if there will be any war then it will happen with both, so there will be a major loss for the country.

"India is now extremely vulnerable. I not only have respect for you (Army) but also love and affection for you. You defend this nation. This nation would not exist without you."

"Earlier, we had two enemies China and Pakistan and our policy was to keep them separate. First, it was said that two front wars should not happen then people say there is two and a half-front war going on, that is, Pakistan, China and terrorism. Today there is one front that is China and Pakistan which are

together. If the war happens it will happen with both. They are working together not only militarily but also economically," Rahul said.

Further criticizing the Modi government, Rahul Gandhi reiterated that the economic system has slowed down since 2014 ever since BJP-led government has come.

"In our country, there is a disturbance, fight, confusion, and hatred. Our mindset is still that of two and a half-front war. Our mindset is not of joint operability and of cyber warfare. India is now extremely vulnerable.

China and Pakistan are both preparing a surprise for us, which is why I keep repeating that the government cannot keep quiet. What happened at the border the government should tell people of the country.

What action do we have to take we have to start today. Actually, we had to act five years ago but we did not do it. If we don't act fast, then there will be a big loss. I am extremely concerned with what is happening at the border in Arunachal and Ladakh," he added.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary, at Sadav Atal, in New Delhi on Sunday.

Veteran journo Vishwanathan passes away

PTI ■ KOCHI

Veteran journalist and former Bureau Chief of Press Trust of India (PTI) in Kochi, T N Vishwanathan, died on Sunday afternoon, a family member said. He was 91.

Vishwanathan was undergoing palliative care since he broke his hip in a fall last year, his younger son V Shankar said. "For the last one-and-a-half months, he was not speaking to anyone and was being fed intravenously," Shankar added.

Vishwanathan is survived by his two sons — V Neelakantan (Ramesh) and Shankar. The cremation would be held on Monday at 12 pm in Tripunithura. Those who have worked with Vishwanathan, remember him as a very energetic and dedicated journalist.

The senior reporter started his career in journalism at 19 and joined PTI in the 1950s at Hyderabad.

He moved to Kochi in 1971 as a reporter and covered political and sports events in the port city for two decades before retiring from the agency in 1992.

U'khand villagers allege unlawful conversions, clash with organisers of event; FIRs registered

PTI ■ UTTARAKASHI (UTTARAKHAND)

Villagers clashed with organisers of an event attended by Christian clerics at Devdhung in Uttarkashi district, accusing them of unlawful conversion, officials said.

Cases have been registered at the Purola police station against people associated with a missionary organisation called Asha Aur Jivan Kendra as well as five villagers, Purola Station House Officer (SHO) Komal Singh Rawat said on Sunday.

The officer said FIRs have been registered against the people associated with the organisation under different sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 153(a) (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace).

The villagers have been booked for rioting under section 147 of the IPC apart from 153(a), 323 and 504, Rawat said. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said on Sunday that the government has brought the Freedom of



Religion (Amendment) Act to deal sternly with people who indulge in forcible conversions. Strong action will be taken in this particular case, he told reporters on the sidelines of a function.

The incident was reported on Friday, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Purola, Jitendra Kumar said. "Villagers have complained of collective conversion at a programme in the area. We have information that there was also a minor clash between the villagers and the programme's organisers. The matter is being investigated," he said. On Saturday, right-wing Hindu outfits held a demonstration at the SDM's office, alleging that Christian missionaries are converting people from Nepal coming to Uttarkashi to work by offering them allurements. They also submitted a memorandum addressed to the Governor

Gurmit Singh, demanding action. The organisers of the event could not be immediately contacted.

The governor recently gave his assent to the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill passed by the state assembly on November 30 making unlawful conversion a cognisable and non-bailable offence punishable with a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment besides a fine.

Chief Minister Dhami said the sole purpose of bringing the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Act is to deal sternly with people who indulge in forcible conversions. "We brought in a stronger anti-conversion legislation solely to take stern action against those who force religious conversions by intimidating people or luring them. In this particular case also we will act toughly," he said.

Capsicum-based repellents to help prevent man-animal conflict: Officials

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a cue from global wildlife practices, some states like Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, and Bihar are banking on non-lethal capsicum-based repellents to help keep bears, elephants, ungulates, and dogs at bay from coming in conflict with frontline forest staff during routine patrolling.

A senior official from the Union Ministry of Environment said that the repellent known as ADS is being distributed among the staff on a pilot basis.

It has been reported that capsicum-based repellents alter behaviour of bears, ungulates, dogs and humans.

It is developed by the NGO Endangered Flora and Fauna on Earth Conservation Team (EFFECT) in Dehradun in Uttarakhand.

The resin contains capsaicin found in the fruits of Capsicum spp., which is the agent that gives them the spicy taste by stimulating the nociceptors of the trigeminal system.

"The irritating quality of this stimulation produces a burning sensation that animals find unpleasant and before they are in normal sense, the staff gets enough time to move away from the place, thus saving their lives," said Abhishek K. Singh from EFFECT.

Development of red pepper spray-based repellents for bear defence has been advocated in many settings.



Capsaicin-based sprays are globally accepted for self defence against animal attacks. They have been tried and tested for decades around the world on a variety of animals. In fact, the capsaicin-based aerosol spray has been recommended by

the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and leading wildlife experts.

The success of atomized capsicum oleoresin with bears prompted exploration of its possible use as an elephant and another carnivore repellent.

A capsicum aerosol spray has been found to effectively repel crop-raiding elephants in Zimbabwe while pepper sprays have been used to successfully thwart attacking tigers in Russia.

A comprehensive study, where bear spray was used during close-range encounters in Alaska, USA, from 1985 to 2006, showed that red-pepper sprays prevented undesirable behaviour 92% of the time when used on brown bears, 90% for black bears and 100% for polar bears.

Among all persons carrying sprays, 98% were not injured by bears in close-range encounters, notes a review published in the Current Science journal.

ADS spray is easy to use with practice; it does not make the animals aggressive nor does it kill or injure animals or people, said Singh highlighting that currently it is used by frontline staff for self-protection in two different incidents — one with elephants in Haridwar Forest Division and another with the Asiatic black bear in Joshimath Forest Division.

"Persons working in tiger, bear, elephant, and lion habitats should feel safe if they carry ADS. Thus, the widespread use of this spray will help promote human safety and wildlife conservation," said Singh.

India revamps defence infra with fortification of BSF bunkers at J&K border

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Security agencies have undertaken a major defence infrastructure upgrade including the creation of ramps for Army tanks and the strengthening of BSF bunkers along the International Border with Pakistan.

The first phase of the infrastructure renovation and creation of some new ones has been recently completed on a stretch of 26 km along the frontier in Jammu and works on another 33 km in the same region is underway. The move comes a year after the two countries announced a military



ceasefire in 2021. Jammu shares a 192 km-long front of the total 2,289 km India -Pakistan

International Boundary (IB) running through Gujarat and Rajasthan on the country's western flank. The 772 km long Line of Control (LoC) between the two sides lies mostly in Kashmir.

The latest defence infrastructure upgradation entails creation and revamp of multiple DCBs (ditch-cum-bandhs), maintenance of damaged border fence, creation of ramps for movement of army tanks to the forward areas, upgrade of Border Security Force 'morchas' (troop posts), bunkers and locations for installation of surveillance and other protection mechanism, officials said,

adding the funds have been sanctioned by the Union Home Ministry. They said these works were initiated and the first phase was completed on the 26 km stretch. 'Katcha' or mud tracks that are used by BSF troop carrier vehicles to reach border posts in Jammu region have also been levelled. At many places, the levelling work on these approach routes has also been completed, officials said.

Likewise, similar work has been undertaken by the BSF along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir region where it is converting the bunkers for its troops at 115 forward defence

locations (FDLs) from the present CGI (corrugated galvanised iron) to solar powered compartments made of steel. "Pakistan too is undertaking similar works and both sides keep each other informed in case a major work is undertaken near the fence," a senior BSF officer said.

Except for a few violations, like when Pakistan breached the agreement and opened unprovoked fire in Jammu on September 6, the 2021 ceasefire agreement is holding well, officials said. This ceasefire breach took place when the Indian side was undertaking some "mainte-

nance work" in the Arnia sector of Jammu. A flag meeting was later held between the BSF and Pak Rangers and it was decided to uphold the ceasefire.

Honouring the ceasefire pact is allowing peace to prevail along the IB and border populace, including farmers and they are able to carry on their normal work uninterrupted and without fearing about flying mortar shells and indiscriminate gunfire undertaken by other side regularly (before February 20, 2021), they said. The 772 km -long LoC is guarded by the Army and BSF is deployed to secure about 435 km of this frontier.

55 held so far in Raj teacher recruitment paper leak: Police

PTI ■ UDAIPUR

Rajasthan Police on Friday said it has arrested 55 people, including seven women, so far in connection with the paper leak of 2nd grade teacher recruitment examination.

The examination, which was scheduled for Saturday, has been postponed.

Two separate cases have been registered in Udaipur -- one at Sukher police station and another at Bekariya police station -- and 55 people have been arrested, Superintendent of Police, Udaipur, Vikas Sharma said.

He said the accused were produced before a magistrate who sent seven women to two-day police custody and the remaining accused to four-day police custody.

The main accused of the

paper leak has been identified as Suresh Dhaka, who is absconding, the SP said.

As many as 37 students and seven experts were arrested after the paper leak a few hours before the examination was to begin on Saturday morning in Udaipur district, police said.

Among the arrested included Suresh Vishnoi who had provided the leaked paper to candidates, they said.

During interrogation, it came to light that Vishnoi had got the examination paper from Suresh Dhaka, police said.

The candidates with the help of experts were solving the paper in a bus that was carrying them to exam centres, they said.

Acting on a tip-off that the paper was leaked and a private bus carrying the candidates was



coming to Udaipur, police teams intercepted the bus and stopped it in Bekariya police station circle Saturday morning, police had said on Saturday.

The candidates on the bus had examination paper in their possession, they had said.

When the question paper, which was in possession of the candidates, matched with the original paper, the Rajasthan

Public Service Commission cancelled the exam.

DGP Umesh Mishra said action is being taken against the accused involved in cheating under the stringent National Security Act.

He also said an amendment is being suggested to the state government for making provision to confiscate the property of the criminals involved in the cheating.

Reply submitted to Governor's queries on reservation Bills, says Chhattisgarh CM

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday said the State Government has submitted a reply to queries raised by Governor Anusuiya UIkey on two amendment Bills to hike the overall reservation in the State to 76 per cent.

Talking to reporters here, Baghel said the governor should now give her assent to the bills as she had said she will do it after the state government submits replies to her queries.

The state Assembly on December 2 passed the Chhattisgarh Public Service (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes Reservation) Amendment Bill and the Chhattisgarh Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Amendment Bill, pertaining to quota in government jobs and admission in educational institutions in pro-

portion to the population of different categories in the state.

According to the bills, the Scheduled Tribes will get a quota of 32 per cent, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 27 per cent, Scheduled Castes 13 per cent, and four per cent has been provisioned for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in government jobs and admissions in educational institutions.

The bills were pending for assent with the governor who had sought details on 10 points from the Congress-led state government before giving her approval.

Asked about it, Baghel said, "The reply has been sent to the governor. There is no such arrangement in the Constitution, but the governor had sought details from departments and the answer has been submitted. Now she should give her assent to the bills."

The 10 queries raised by



the governor included details of the quantitative data related to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities if collected, details of the extraordinary situation that compelled the state government to hike reservation beyond 50 per cent ceiling and report of the Quantifiable Data Commission (constituted by the state government for a survey of OBC and EWS population in the state).

Meanwhile, Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Brijmohan

Agrawal said the state government should make public its reply to the governor on the reservation bills.

The issue of reservation flared up after the Chhattisgarh High Court in September this year set aside the Raman Singh-headed state government's 2012 order to raise the quota to 58 per cent in government jobs and admissions in educational institutions, observing that reservation exceeding the 50 per cent ceiling was unconstitutional.

President Murmu to visit Hyderabad on Dec 26 for five-day southern sojourn

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

President Droupadi Murmu will arrive here on December 26 as part of the five-day southern sojourn.

During her five-day stay in Telangana, the President will visit Ramappa and Bhadrachalam temples as well as participate in locally arranged programmes in the city, Telangana Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar had said.

She will also participate in the unveiling of the plaque of Har Dil Dhyani, Har Din Dhyan campaign to mark the sesquicentennial celebrations of Sri Ramachandraj Maharaj of Bhadrachalam by Sri Ramchandra Mission at Kana Shanti Vanam, Ranga Reddy district, officials had earlier said.

Somesh Kumar, who recently held a coordination meeting with the officials of various heads of the department in connection with the



arrangements to be made for the President's Southern Sojourn at Rastrapathi Nilayam here, had directed the officials to work in coordination and make elaborate arrangements for the President's visit.

Elaborate security arrangements with multi-layered security have been made in view of the President's visit, police said.

Police also announced restrictions and traffic diversions on certain routes from December 26 to December 30 in order to facilitate proper regulation of traffic.

Huge cache of arms, ammunition, war-like stores recovered from Uri sector: Army

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

A huge cache of arms and ammunition and "war-like stores", including AK-74 rifles, Pakistani-origin hand grenades and balloons with 'I Love Pakistan' markings, were recovered along the Line of Control (LoC) in Uri Sector of Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district, an Army officer said on Friday.

The recoveries were made at a time when there is huge desperation on the Pakistani side to either infiltrate terrorists or smuggle war-like stores into Kashmir as the number of ultras and arms and ammunition was at an all-time low in the Valley, he said.

Giving details, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Army's 19 Infantry Division Major General Ajay Chandpuria said based on intelligence inputs received from multiple intelligence agencies over a period of two weeks about infiltration attempts and dumping of war-like stores by terrorists in the Hathlanga area



of Rampur Sector in Uri, multiple ambushes and search operations were conducted along the LoC.

On Friday, a search operation was launched in the general area of Hathlanga Nala which lasted for eight hours and concluded with the recovery of arms, ammunition and war-like stores, he said.

The recoveries include eight AK-74 rifles, 24 AK-74 rifle magazines, 560 7.62mm AK-74 live ammunition, 12 .30mm Chinese pistols, 24 Chinese pistol magazines, 244 .30mm pistol live ammunition, nine Chinese hand grenades,

five Pakistani-origin hand grenades, 81 balloons with 'I Love Pakistan' marking on them, and five synthetic gunny nags with Pakistani marking, the Army officer said.

"The situation is near normal in Kashmir valley as the number of terrorists and the availability of war-like stores is at an all-time low. So, there is huge desperation from the other side to either infiltrate terrorists or smuggle war-like stores," he told reporters in Baramulla.

Security forces keep getting such reports on a regular basis and whether it was an attempt

by terrorists or smugglers to get war-like stores cannot be said, Major Gen Chandpuria said, referring to the recovery of the weapons.

"We are still following up the leads and certain details cannot be shared, but a movement close to the launchpads was picked up. Probably, they (terrorists) panicked and left the war-like stores behind and withdrew to that side," he said.

Maj Gen Chandpuria said there have been attempts on the border not only of infiltration but also of smuggling war-like stores and drugs in the past as well.

Shift Pandit staffers to Jammu till situation improves in Kashmir, says Azad



Democratic Azad Party (DAP) chief Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday said Kashmiri Pandit employees should be temporarily shifted to Jammu till the situation improves in Kashmir.

"Unfortunately, some incidents have happened. Life is a priority and so I am of the opinion that Kashmiri Pandit employees be transferred to safer places in Jammu. When the situation improves, they should be brought back," Azad told reporters here.

He said life is far more important than employment

and promised to take such a step if his party comes to power in the UT.

"I do not know what the approach of the government is, but if our party comes to power, we will do this only (temporarily shift such employees to Jammu)," he said.

Asked about the delay in holding the assembly elections in J-K, the former chief minister said, "We have been waiting for the last six years. I raised the issue many times in Parliament as well. They show us Panchayat elections or DDC polls, but the real election is that of assembly which is not taking place."

BJP SLAMS TMC GOVT

Mithun's new film denied screening at State-owned cine auditorium

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Fresh controversy erupted in Bengal after Mithun Chakraborty's new film Prajapati was denied screening permission at the Government owned cine complex Nandan.

Crying vendetta Opposition BJP on Sunday attacked the Mamata Banerjee government for running a one-party dictatorship where people with opposing views are not allowed a space.

Prajapati revolves around a father-son relationship where the role of the father is played by Chakraborty a Bollywood star and BJP leader.

Incidentally Bengali superstar and TMC MP Dev plays the role of the son in the movie.

"The situation in Bengal is such that you have to be a TMC to get a job, your ration card, or a ny government facility... Even your film will not get a government auditorium if you belong to some other party," said BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh.

The ruling party however was prompt to react saying the application for the screening of the film came late.

"It is only in Mamata Banerjee's rule that democracy is perfectly practised... those narrow minded people like Dilip Ghosh raise such flimsy issues to malign the government... it may be the case that application for screening of the film came late... Even our MP Dev is acting in a lead role... So why should we victimise him."

The producers however said that they were the first to submit the application.

Chakraborty had been a TMC Rajya Sabha MP who left the party and joined the BJP a few months before last year's Bengal Assembly polls and campaigned extensively for the saffron party.



claimed that at least 23 TMC leaders including MPs and MLAs were in touch with him.

Meanwhile in a parallel development Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari has warned that he would organise and lead all the illegally appointed school staff to Kalighat --- the official residence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee --- after they are dismissed by the Calcutta High Court.

Modi to flag off Kolkata-NJP Vande Bharat Exp on Dec 30



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The rake of eastern India's first Vande Bharat Express train arrived at Howrah Station on Christmas day.

The superfast semi-high speed train that will run between Howrah and Jalpaiguri

In a spare of orders the High Court has ordered dismissal of more than 250 such people and more than 20,000 cases of illegal appointments are still being investigated by the ED and CBI.

Thousands of crores have allegedly changed hands in the SSC and TET scam" that had seen senior ministers, MLAs and top officials including a serving vice chancellor going jail.

is likely to be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 30 when he visits its Kolkata to join a meeting of National Ganga Council.

The train is expected to be faster than Shatabdi Express that runs between the two cities and is expected to stop at Farakka and Malda enroute.

Janardhana announces new party, to contest 2023 K'taka polls

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former Karnataka Minister and mining baron G Janardhana Reddy on Sunday announced a new party named "Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha", four months ahead of Assembly polls in the State.

With this, the leader, who is an accused in an illegal mining case, has cut his two-decade-old association with the BJP.

Re-entering Karnataka's electoral politics from outside his home district of Ballari, he also announced that he will contest the 2023 Assembly polls from Gangavathi in Koppal district.

There are talks in the political circles that this move may have some impact on the BJP in the Ballari belt, as the party too reacted cautiously on the development, with Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai stating that

he will discuss with the leadership on the development, when he goes to New Delhi on Monday.

"Despite BJP leaders saying that I'm not the member of the party and have no relationship with it, the State and its people believed that I'm from that party, that belief has turned out to be false. Today I'm announcing Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha, with my own thinking, and with the thinking of Basavanna (12th century social reformer) - which is against divisive politics in the name of religion and caste," Reddy said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said in the days to come he will travel across the State to organise the party and share his thoughts with the people.

"I have never failed in any of my new initiatives so far in my life. From the days of playing marbles in my childhood, I'm someone who never accept-

ed defeat. So at the time when I'm going before the people with Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha, I'm confident about getting their blessings and there is no doubt about Karnataka becoming a Kalyana Rajya (welfare state) in the future," he added.

Reddy had been by and large inactive politically for nearly 12 years now, other than for a brief stint ahead of the 2018 Assembly polls when he campaigned for his close friend and now Minister B Sriramulu in Molakalmuru Assembly segment, since the time he was arrested by the CBI for his alleged role in the mining scam.

Ahead of the 2018 Assembly polls, the then BJP national president Amit Shah responding to a reporter's question had distanced the party from him saying that "the BJP has nothing to do with Janardhana Reddy."

Assam CM asks DGP to probe into police directive on church survey

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Distancing himself from an Assam Police directive asking districts to carry out a survey on churches, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has asked the DGP to inquire why such a letter was issued and immediately take "corrective measures".

The Assam government does not have the intention to carry out any survey on religious institutions like churches, Sarma told a TV channel on Saturday.

The chief minister was reacting to a letter from the Special Branch of Assam Police to the district administrations seeking information on the number of churches, religious conversion and people involved in forceful conversions, if any.

"I think we should not ask for such kind of information like how many churches are there in Assam. This might



hurt the sentiment of a particular religious community. We should avoid this kind of thing," the chief minister, who also holds the home portfolio, said.

"I completely disassociate myself from the letter as it was never discussed in any government forum. The letter is wholly unwarranted and as a citizen of Assam, we want to live in peace and harmony with all the communities," Sarma said.

Pointing out that such a let-

ter (if the government wants to issue at all) is circulated by the DGP or the home department, the chief minister said he was unaware in what context, an officer in the rank of a superintendent of police had come out with the "controversial" letter.

"I have already asked the DGP to make an inquiry and take corrective measures because the government does not want to offend religious sentiments of any community.

Covid-19: K'taka Govt likely to decide on guidelines today



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Amid spurt in COVID-19 infections in some parts of the world and cases of Omicron subvariant BE.7 found in the country, the Karnataka Government on Monday is likely to decide on preventive measures and guidelines to be followed in the days ahead, including for the New Year celebrations.

The state may decide on the guidelines at a meeting headed by the Health and Disaster Management

Ministers, along with technical experts.

"Health and Disaster Management Ministers (K Sudhakar and R Ashoka respectively) will hold discussions, several instructions have come from the Centre and the state government need to take certain decisions after analysing the factual situation on the Corona spread," Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, there is no need for unnecessary worry, but awareness is important.



www.dailypioneer.com

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

PAPER WITH PASSION

Agonising

India heads G20, but saffron hotheads besmirch the nation by vandalising Christmas programme

The government and the Bharatiya Janata Party enthusiastically talk about the growing economic clout and strategic importance in international affairs—and rightly so. For India has shed much of the baggage of the Nehruvian Consensus that was a drag. The world is optimistic about good outcomes from India's presidency of G20, especially in the conflict in Ukraine. In a recent telephonic conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised on dialogue and diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine. In October, Putin had called Modi "icebreaker." The reason is simple: India has refused to condemn the Russian attack on Ukraine, despite annoying the Western world. This has given considerable leverage to Modi; he has the opportunity to broker peace between the two warring nations. Modi's counsel to Putin, "today's era is not of war," made on the sidelines of the 22nd meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Uzbekistan's Samarkand, has been appreciated across the globe. On the economic front, there is buzz among global investors about shifting manufacturing facilities from China to, among other countries, India. Then there is the unfolding story of startups, in the success of which government policies have played some role. As PM Modi said a couple of months ago, the number of unicorn startups in India has doubled since 2021. A unicorn is a privately held startup company with a valuation of more than \$1 billion. In general, the economy is picking up, with recovery healing the wounds left by the waves of Covid-19, the ensuing lockdowns, and financial losses.



Against such an agreeable backdrop, it is agonising to notice the unabated deprecations of saffron hotheads. At a time when the country and the world are celebrating Christmas, there is a news report of two and a half dozen young men, armed with sticks, attacked a Christmas programme at Purola village in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district on Friday. Their justification for the assault was standard: forced conversions were taking place there. And what, pray, did the police do? They detained six people, including Pastor Lazarus Cornelius and his wife Sushma Cornelius who were hit by the men claiming to be members of a Hindu organisation! The victim is the villain. Cornelius, who belonged to Union Church, Mussoorie, was reportedly leading prayers. Though they were later released and the issue was resolved peacefully, the very action against the victims of attack speaks volumes about the partisan manner in which the BJP administration in the state is functioning. To be fair to the cops, they also registered a cross FIR against the group of attackers. At the heart of the problem, however, is the vicious propaganda against Christians, especially their clergy, which has been imbibed by a section of the votaries of Hindutva. The BJP's central leadership should rein in Hindutva firebrands.

PICTALK



Men dressed as Santa Claus ride on a horsecart during Christmas celebrations, in Amritsar

Educate to awaken the soul

All wars before they begin, start in the minds of the people. The negativity that sows the seeds of discord can only be eliminated by the right education

Democracies promise equality, equity, and human dignity to all. The promise to move towards a world of peace and tranquility is a compulsory clause in most of the Constitutions and other allied documentations. Human nature, however, invariably tilts towards creating hierarchical order in every human endeavor and activity. After WWII, it was the common global aspiration to banish the horrors of war and violence from the face of the planet earth. It was considered necessary to launch pragmatic initiatives at various levels that would save the planet earth and humanity from further destruction and devastation of human lives and precious life-sustaining resources.

How to move ahead was so thoughtfully subsumed in the Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution: Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Charter - UNDRH - of the UN which stands endorsed by all member countries, asserts in its Article 26: "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." The primacy accorded to education, science, and culture in achieving an attitudinal transformation became evident in the very nomenclature of UNESCO.

The emphasis on all three areas included education, science, and culture - has now assumed contemporary dimensions; the focus in education is on good quality and skill acquisition, and science extends its horizons from coding in the initial stages to information and communication technology and artificial intelligence, ICT, and AI! The cultural context now deserves far more intense attention as achieving cultural cohesion and harmony is now getting more and more complex by the day, consequent upon demographic changes that have taken place at a much higher pace due to various reasons, violence being a prominent fac-



tor responsible for it.

The relevance of UNESCO's doctrine built on the need of constructing the defense of peace by impacting the human mind has, over the last seven decades; achieved universal endorsement. Alert and dynamic systems of learning are now transforming their curricula and pedagogy to prominently focus on nurturing the values of truth, peace, nonviolence, right conduct, love, and brotherhood. The effort is to erase the negativity that clouds his mind, resulting in a lack of in-depth comprehension of the social and emotional consequences of ignoring the necessity of human connection with other human beings and nature. Children have to be made familiar with the basics of social, cultural, moral, ethical, and humanistic values.

Parents need to remain ever conscious that if the near and dear ones are short on compassion and empathy in their general behavior, it would not make a positive impact on the growing up of a child in the household. All three - parents, school, and the child need to develop a sensitive bond that permits the free exchange of ideas, emotions, and aspira-



PARENTS NEED TO REMAIN EVER CONSCIOUS THAT IF THE NEAR AND DEAR ONES ARE SHORT ON COMPASSION AND EMPATHY IN THEIR GENERAL BEHAVIOR, IT WOULD NOT MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE GROWING UP OF A CHILD IN THE HOUSEHOLD

tions. Interests of the child deserve full respect but at the same time, no laxity need be permitted in his growing up as a social and cultural person, as a human being who connects himself with others; extending from near and dear ones to the adage of the universal unity of all human beings.

Even isolated-looking cases of aberrations in teacher conduct just could not be ignored. Recently, a report appeared in the media indicating that Delhi Municipal Corporation teachers do not receive their salary regularly; the delay often being a couple of months! Another shocking incident was reported just the next day; a primary school child was attacked by the lady teacher and thrown out of the first-floor room. To me, the link between the two must be examined very carefully. If the teachers are being put under avoidable stress by the system, they would never be at peace with themselves. And if the teacher is not at peace with himself, it would be futile to expect him to sow the seeds of human values and a keen desire to contribute to efforts intended to create a world of peace!

On a broader horizon, the global literacy rate has crossed the 84% mark, but it would be

perfect to infer that the internalization of basic essential human values has not grown in the right proportion to the growth and coverage of education. It now stands confirmed that education that neglects social and emotional growth considerations would remain largely bereft of its potential to transform humanity into a force capable of creating a world of human cooperation, collaboration, and peace, without which the vision of vanishing wars and violence forever would never be achieved.

The way-out was delineated by the great Indian thinker, historian, and political philosopher Dharampal in the context of a discussion on the third five-year plan: in Parliament: "...Soul has to awaken before we proceed for dams and steel plants to the flowering of the human being, of Indian we deemed to be ignorant, of the people of India whom we describe as 'teeming millions!'" Now we need soul-awakening education. When properly and adequately comprehended and contextualized, it would pave the way for the survival of humanity and the planet earth.

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion, and religious amity. The views expressed are personal)



JS RAJPUT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ADIEU SATHYANARAYA GARUS

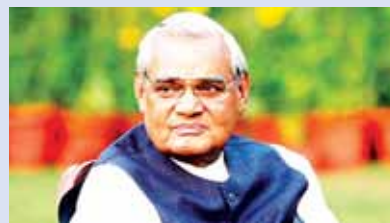
Sir — An Era of Telugu Cinema has come to an end with the passing away of stars and good actors like NTR, ANR, Shoban Babu, Krishna and Krishnam Raju and now Nata Sarvabhouma Kaikala Sathanarayana. His charismatic portrayal of Yama will be ever remembered among cinegoers. Although he excelled as the antagonist in many movies, he also acted as a hero, solo hero, dupe, comedian in more than 800 movies. After SVR and NTR only sathanarayana was best suited for mythological characters, especially no actor was best suited for the role of Yama, the Hindu God of death. He also had a brief stint in politics. He had received several awards including 2011 Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu award and 2017 film fare Lifetime achievement for Telugu award for Telugu cinema. The Telugu film industry has lost another legend. The title "Navarasa Natana Sarvabhouma" suits Sathanarayana garu perfectly. He is the finest actor Indian Cinema has ever seen. Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

BCCI MEANS BIG BUSINESS

Sir — Congratulations to the BCCI team for pulling off another IPL auction with aplomb. I had the good fortune of working on five of them, from 2011 to 2015. The ones in 2011 and 2014 were two-day affairs. I have some great memories of those days. What the Board could probably consider doing in the future is give more opportunities to Indian talent to express itself and thus excel, off the field as well. For instance, we all felt Charu Sharma could have been roped in as auctioneer, after what he did in an emergency situation at the previous auction.

The board deserved kudos and the players pocketed big money needs to be congratulated. Sam Curran is the top pick and Australian all rounder Cameron Green gone for 17.25 crores and the English captain Ben Stokes Rs.16.25 crore, rookeree Harry Brook, who has made waves since his England Twenty20 international and test debuts this year,

Vajpayee's birth anniversary



Departed former Prime Minister of India, Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee was among the select few political leaders of the country who was and is still held in the highest esteem by one and all the leaders as well as the common men across the entire political spectrum, even after over four years since his demise on August 16 of 2018. A leader with a difference, Atalji was an epitome of simple living and high thinking, having no airs and graces and throwing no leadership tantrums around. His first term as the

became the first millionaire of the day after being signed by Sunrisers Hyderabad. In all it was field day for foreign recruits and Indian Maynak Aggarwal fetched Rs.8.5 crore in the mini auction. CK Ramanathan | Ghaziabad

INDIA ABSTAINS FROM VOTING IN UNSC

Sir — In the United Nations Security Council, not only did India abstain from voting on another issue, but it also joined the ranks of perverted dictators from China and Russia. Just a few days ago, India supported the repression cycle being run by Iranian religious leaders against women and people protesting for their rights. Similarly, on December 21, Delhi once again said that human rights and excesses of dictatorship do not matter to him. That is why India did not take part in the voting of the resolution of the United Nations Security Council, in which there was a demand to stop the ongoing violence in Myanmar with immediate effect and to release Aung San Suu Kyi from the military government.

Prime Minister of India lasted as fewer as 13 days notwithstanding, he enjoyed another longer term from 1998 to 1999, followed by a full term from 1999 to 2004.

Poet by nature, journalist and candid but polite orator, Bajpayee was also a leader of stern rectitude, uncompromising the moral values and, hence, enjoying a favourite public persona. It was Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji who asked the then Gujarat Chief Minister (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) to observe the Rashtra Dharma (Constitutional duty) vis-a-vis the state of affairs following the Gujarat riots. Late Atal Bihari Bajpayee's magnetic personality and towering contribution to the making of 'New India' will keep reminding Indians of the straits he was endowed with, greatness cum simplicity. The birth anniversary of this great political leader coincides with the holy Christmas, 25th December, today. R.I.P. Azhar A Khan | Rampur

SOUNDBITE

They spread hatred, we spread love and embrace all Indians. There is Hindustan and 'Mohabbat' (love) in this Bharat Jodo yatra, which does not see any caste, creed, religion, rich or poor and all embrace each other.



Congress leader — Rahul Gandhi



Head of the Catholic church — Pope Francis

It's not a good development when people start ridiculing Bollywood saying, 'They are nothing'. It's just a phase. They have taught us so many things.



Actor — Yash



Cricketer — Rishabh Pant

As an individual, I don't think about the landmark so much. Three figures are just a number for me, I try to play out the situation most of the times. If it happens, it's good.

Rahul Gandhi's mission is more important and that's why I have decided not to participate in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.



Congress leader — Jagdish Tytler

Football fever in India

Unprecedented football craze was seen during the world cup but will India ever play the tournament

The month-long quadrennial football tournament for the FIFA World Cup that culminated at Qatar last Sunday was a measure of the popularity enjoyed by this sporting event across the globe. The football fever seen in India in the run up to the World Cup Championship and the enthusiasm with which the game was watched by millions across the country is further proof of the passion enjoyed by this 90 minutes ball game. Though football in India is nowhere near the quality of game dished out by the living Gods from Latin America, Europe, Africa and other Asian countries, it has not dampened the spirit of the fans. Players like Lionel Messi, Neymar Junior, Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylian Mbappe were household names in India while arguments about the possible winners and stars of the mega sporting event rendered the air months ahead of the tournament. What was more striking was the crowd that gathered in front of big screens installed in village squares in Kerala and Goa to watch the "live" matches and comment about the quality of play churned out by the "super stars". As Argentina boarded the aircraft to fly back with the cup, questions were heard from some corners about the possibilities of India figuring in the World Cup fixture.



The AIFF office-bearers should be "honoured" for keeping the game weak and stagnant in India. Football bosses in India made great fortune out of the game while the game went down the drain. In the 1950s, which is rated as the golden period of football in India, the country had figured in Asian Games as well as in Summer Olympics. We had players like Inder Singh, Magan Singh, Manjit Singh, Ranjit and Shyam Thappa, Subhash Bhowmick who were with continental get ups. There were many all-India as well as local tournaments besides glamorous teams. Who can forget the Big-Three of Calcutta, Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting? Then there were Tata Sports Club, Mafatal Sporting, Orkay Mills (all from the then Bombay) Vasco, Salgaonkar, Sesa, Dempo Sports Club (all from Goa), JCT Mills Phagwara, Punjab Police and BSF and a number of stylish Army teams known for their discipline and class. India is home to Durand Cup Tournament, world's third oldest tournament. The capital city once boasted of Simla Youngs, a team that demolished the Calcutta giants many times. There are no football tournaments or clubs and hence no players. India's hopes of figuring in the World Cup tournament is likely to remain a pipe dream for many more decades.

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

INNOVATION MUST FOR MAKE IN INDIA

Becoming a manufacturing hub is a distinct possibility



MIDHULA DEVABHAKTUNI

Today, India has emerged as the brightest spot on the world economic map. Despite global headwinds, the country has proved its economic resilience. Strong leadership, favourable policies, infrastructure push, investments and initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India are the catalysts that are strengthening its economic foundation.

The positive sentiments are even captured in reports and according to Morgan Stanley, India is accelerating to become the world's third largest economy by 2027. As every single opportunity brings India an inch closer to its ambition of becoming an economic powerhouse, it is imperative to bridge the existing gaps to ensure that the country stays on its path of growth.

The country aims to become a global manufacturing hub. But two missing pieces of the jigsaw — manufacturing units and innovation — need to be addressed. China still remains the go-to market for Indian companies. India is still dependent on foreign manufacturers for products like telecom instruments, components, consumer electronics, project goods, electric machinery and others.

Bottlenecks such as quality, delays in delivery and low agility have to be eliminated to build a strong foundation of manufacturing in India. Improvements in core areas such as designing, employee skilling, automation, tracking need attention. Policies should also be made simple, stable and flexible that can respond swiftly to volatilities and dis-



ruptions. India has an advantage with a large working-age or young population. The workforce, however, needs to be trained. This puts the onus on industry leaders, academia and policymakers to take collective and decisive actions to build a strong and skilled workforce that is competent, resilient and future-ready. Vocational training programs, short-certification courses can equip workers with necessary skills to perform jobs. Technology is transforming the industries at a rapid pace and to withstand this disruption, the workforce has to be prepared for high-technology manufacturing processes.

Many companies manage to achieve success in a quick span of time but lack of innovation prevents them from replicating. Innovation still remains a challenge for Indian startups and according to a survey, even 77 per cent of the venture capitalists hold the view that they lack innovation or unique business models. An IBM Institute for Business Value study found that 91 per cent of startups fail within the first five years due to lack of innovation.

It is encouraging that India has jumped to 40th rank in the global innovation index. There should be more bridges, links or partnerships between academia, industries and policy-makers to facilitate R&D, support talent, cement gaps and come up with new ideas.

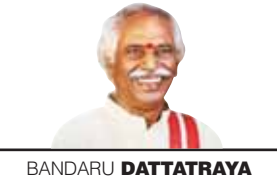
India is steering global efforts to mitigate the perils of climate change and energy crisis. At the recently organised COP 27 summit, the country successfully managed to pivot the focus on climate finance and decarbonisation. The manufacturing sector has to ensure that it adopts energy efficient systems, low or zero carbon emitting practices or processes and increased reliance on renewables to make development sustainable and further helping India to fulfil its global commitments for a cleaner future.

India's manufacturing sector has the potential to become the strongest pillar to support India's economic dominance globally. From revenue generation to job creation, it can definitely accelerate the country's journey towards becoming the third largest economy soon. With great possibilities, the entrepreneurs have to navigate wisely while leveraging existing opportunities so that the country's dream of becoming a global manufacturing hub becomes a reality.

(The author is Co-founder and CMO, Mivi)

Vajpayee: Statesman who dared to dream

The former prime minister advocated dialogue, while he executed an inclusive agenda of development



BANDARU DATTATRAYA

On Christmas Day, Jesus Christ was born. His teachings of love, peace, compassion and brotherhood are the lifeline of humanity. It is a great coincidence that our former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji was born on this solemn day in 1924 in the family of a humble school teacher in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. Throughout his life, Vajpayeeji adhered to the ideals of peace, co-existence, compassion, respect for all, equality, justice and fraternity.

Poet, writer, journalist, statesman, freedom fighter and a visionary par excellence, Vajpayeeji was blessed with a multifaceted personality. He was a true nationalist and always chose to rise above petty politics for the sake of national interest.

Whether in power or in Opposition, he believed in taking along all for the cause of the nation and the people. That is why he was also hailed as 'Ajatshatru' of Indian politics. In a public life of several decades, there was not a single spot on his personality. Integrity, honesty and large heartedness were an integral part of his personality, which always reflected in his writings as a journalist, speeches as a politician and in his approach as an administrator.

A 'Hriday Samrat', indeed! A man of masses, firm in his political convictions, he commanded respect from all political quarters for his vision, views and ideals so integral to our democratic and secular legacy. Vajpayeeji joined the RSS at a very tender age in 1932 and became a Pracharak in 1947. He formally joined politics by becoming a member of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951. He was deeply inspired by the thoughts of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Deen Dayal Upadhyay. He fought the Lok Sabha election for the first time in 1957 and got elected from Balrampur in Uttar Pradesh, and thereafter never looked back. Then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was so much impressed by his lively and enriching debates and discussion in Parliament that he predicted that Vajpayee ji would occupy his seat 'one day'.

In 1980, he became the founder president of the Bharatiya Janata Party. As the external affairs minister in the Janata Party government in 1977, head of various important Parliamentary Standing Committees and Leader of the Opposition, Vajpayeeji's journey of life is all about giving his best to the nation. Impressed by his 'Nation First' belief, then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao asked Vajpayeeji, who was Leader of Opposition, to lead the delegation to represent India at the UN.

His authority on matters of diplomatic and external affairs was fabulous. He left an indelible mark on our foreign policy. In 1996, he became the Prime Minister of the first non-Congress government. I



WHEN PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF HAD COME TO ATTEND THE FUNERAL OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER RAJIV GANDHIJI, HE HAD STAYED AT ASHOKA HOTEL IN NEW DELHI. HE INVITED VAJPAYEE JI AND LK ADVANI JI FOR A PERSONAL MEETING

(The author is Governor of Haryana)



would like to mention here an incident, which amply reflects how he created a positive impression about our country and the huge respect he used to command among the world leaders. The then Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif had come to attend the funeral of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. He had stayed at Ashoka Hotel in New Delhi. He invited Vajpayeeji and LK Advaniji for a personal meeting. Sharif expressed during conversation that he was meeting him for the first time but knew that his tenure as the External Affairs Minister had seen the most cordial relations between India and Pakistan.

In matters of national interest, Vajpayeeji used to have a non-negotiable approach. When he became the Prime Minister for the first time, he had made up his mind to go for the nuclear test but his government did not last long. However, he did not delay Pokhran II when he became the PM again in 1998. In a meeting with Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and Dr R Chidambaram, the decks were cleared for Pokhran II—five nuclear tests of advanced weapons on May 11 and 13, 1998, and joined the comity of nuclear powers.

We celebrate May 11 as the National Technology Day. He was always full of self-confidence in matters of national interest. This was perhaps the only reason that when Pokhran-II was conducted in 1998, he was not rattled despite impending sanctions from the US and other countries. However, he was ever keen to improve relations with Pakistan. He undertook the

Lahore Bus Yatra. He also took a bold step to improve ties with Pakistan by inviting Pervez Musharraf to India for the Agra summit.

Musharraf betrayed India by attacking us in Kargil but our gallant soldiers under the leadership of Vajpayee ji inflicted a crushing defeat on Pakistan. As the PM, Vajpayeeji was very particular about infrastructure upgradation, improved road, rail and air connectivity. He initiated big reforms in tune with the spirit of liberalization unveiled by former Prime Minister Rao. Notwithstanding all odds India under his leadership maintained a stable economic growth of eight per cent. By forming a separate Disinvestment Ministry, he brought in required resilience in the functioning of PSUs. The historic decision to launch Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan to make elementary education free for children aged 6-14 years.

The ambitious project of Inter-Linking of Rivers was the long-cherished dream of Vajpayeeji. Similarly, he gave a big boost to road infra through the Golden Quadrilateral project and the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana, thanks to which our villages are today connected with all-weather roads. Through Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana, roofless people were provided with pucca houses.

As his colleague in the party, Parliament and the Union Ministry for many decades, I know him as an erudite politician, a selfless and dedicated leader, who used to articulate the 'aspirations

of the masses' in true sense. He was blessed with rare qualities to take along people of different political hues and was never ever supportive of any bid to disrupt the proceedings of the House. I was a Member of Parliament when Lal Krishna Advani was arrested in Bihar during his Rath Yatra. Proceedings of Parliament were disturbed for more than a week. Vajpayeeji said in the Parliamentary Party meeting of the BJP that Parliament is a forum for debate and discussion. We should allow discussion. Our political fight should take place outside the Parliament and fight it out by going to the people's court.

As we enter into Amrit Kaal of our Independence, the mantra of good governance of Vajpayee ji — which is based on integrity, embracing diversity of caste, religion, gender, ideology and socio-economic status, being judicious and humane in our approach while dealing with the people in general and the underprivileged in particular — will help us build a happier India. As we celebrate his jayanti as the National Good Governance Day, I strongly feel that people, leaders and bureaucrats should have devotion towards the country and respect to society, and work with the spirit that - 'Our welfare is in the welfare of society as a whole.' It is with this feeling we should discharge our duties.

A strong, healthy and inclusive country will be a true tribute to Vajpayeeji. With clean politics and clean administration, we will be able to make Bharat Vishwa Guru!

POINT COUNTERPOINT

MINISTERS — AND EVEN A HIGH CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY — HAVE BEEN ENLISTED TO MAKE SPEECHES ATTACKING THE JUDICIARY. IT IS AN EFFORT TO REDUCE THE STANDING OF THE JUDICIARY.
— FORMER CONGRESS PRESIDENT SONIA GANDHI



I WOULD HAVE FAILED IN MY CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY HAD I NOT REACTED TO CONGRESS LEADER SONIA GANDHI'S REMARKS IN RAJYA SABHA, WHEN SHE SAID THERE A BID TO "DELEGITIMISE THE JUDICIARY".
— VICE PRESIDENT JAGDEEP DHANKHAR

Newborn screening is key to detect diseases early

If newborns are not examined immediately, they might suffer brain damage, poor body growth, and other problems

Newborn screening aims to identify various health problems, disorders, or inborn errors of metabolism (IEM) and enable doctors and parents for prompt intervention. There is a greater incidence of certain metabolic abnormalities and endocrinopathies in newborns that, if identified later, can be fatal.

In several developed nations, NBS is a mandatory test. In many countries, phenylketonuria and hypothyroidism screenings are ubiquitous. IEM may cause physical difficulties and brain damage in newborns, and if not diagnosed and treated promptly, it can be life-threatening. In contrast, NBS can detect and diagnose these problems from birth,



CHANDRA GANJOO

allowing the kid to enjoy a healthy life.

The newborn screening test is typically administered between 48 and 96 hours after birth. Other tests are also conducted as a part of NBS that do not need blood, such as hearing and pulse oximetry. Once a blood sample has been obtained, it is forwarded to the screening laboratory for analysis.

The findings are available within a week after a newborn's birth. Suppose a test is positive for any of these illnesses (presumptive positive). In that case, physicians send the infant for further testing to establish whether he or she is actually positive or truly negative for that ailment.

Following are the most common diseases or disor-

ders that can be diagnosed with newborn screening tests:

Congenital Thyroid
Newborns can have congenital hypothyroidism or decreased thyroid activity at birth. When it is not diagnosed and treated right after birth, most affected children experience neurologic abnormalities, deafness, growth failure, and mental retardation.

Phenylketonuria (PKU)
PKU babies lack phenylalanine hydroxylase, an enzyme required to break down the amino acid phenylalanine in food. This flaw results in an accumulation of phenylalanine in the blood, which harms the brain. An infant with PKU is first given a specialized formula before transitioning to a diet reduced in phenylalanine. Beginning

dietary therapy in the first few weeks of infancy can stop the disease's effects, including learning impairments and brain damage.

Galactosemia
The absence of an enzyme required to process the sugar galactose is the cause of this illness, which is spelled galactosemia with an emphasis on the lac sound. This incapacity results in growth failure, nausea, cataracts, a liver illness that worsens over time, and mental retardation. The clinical effects of the condition gradually lessen or vanish after removing galactose from the child's diet.

Sickle Cell Disorder
Babies with this severe hereditary illness have red blood cells resembling a sickle after donating oxygen to the

tissues. The sickle-shaped cells may get caught in blood vessels, which can harm organs and cause discomfort. However, since children with this disease are significantly more prone to endure serious infections, excruciating pain, organ damage, and strokes, early diagnosis of the disease is crucial.

Maple Syrup Urine Disease
Leucine, isoleucine, and valine are branched-chain amino acids involved in the metabolism of maple syrup urine disease (MSUD), a genetic disorder that causes mental retardation and occasionally even death. A customized diet can reduce the side effects caused by MSUD.

Homocystinuria
An enzyme that trans-

forms the amino acid homocysteine into cystathionine is lacking in the hereditary illness homocystinuria. Mental retardation, vision issues, bone deformities, and stroke are side effects of the condition. A particular diet and large dosages of vitamin B6 or B12 can avoid or lessen these issues.

Deficiency in Biotinidase
A hereditary disease called biotinidase deficiency causes a lack of the vital B vitamin biotin. This is the outcome of frequent infections, hearing loss, clumsy movements, convulsions, and mental impairment. The baby can avoid these catastrophic outcomes by receiving additional biotin.

Congenital Hyperplasia of the Adrenals- Newborns have the genetic disease congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH). It results from flaws in the adrenal hormones' synthesis. Extreme cases can result in a loss of salt that is fatal. Salt and the missing adrenal hormones are replaced in the treatment.

MCAD - This hereditary condition, pronounced 'EM-cad', results in a lack of an enzyme necessary for converting fat into energy. A seemingly healthy youngster may suddenly experience convulsions, respiratory failure, cardiac arrest, coma, and death. Frequent meal (or glucose) consumption is part of the treatment for MCAD, as does avoiding fasting. If newborns are not examined immediately, they might suffer brain damage, poor body growth, physiological and developmental problems, respiratory difficulties, & even mortality.

(The author is Group Chief Executive Officer, Trivitron Healthcare)

Ukrainians move up Christmas to part ways with Russia

Russia's invasion changed many hearts in Ukraine, they decide not to celebrate Christmas on Jan 7 like Russians

AP ■ BOBRYTSIA (UKRAINE)

Ukrainians usually celebrate Christmas on January 7, as do the Russians. But not this year, or at least not all of them.

Some Orthodox Ukrainians have decided to observe Christmas on December 25, like many Christians around the world. Yes, this has to do with the war, and yes, they have the blessing of their local church.

The idea of commemorating the birth of Jesus in December was considered radical in Ukraine until recently, but Russia's invasion changed many hearts and minds.

In October, the leadership of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which is not aligned with the Russian church and one of two branches of Orthodox Christianity in the country, agreed to allow faithful to celebrate on December 25.

The choice of dates has clear political and religious overtones in a nation with rival Orthodox churches and

where slight revisions to rituals can carry potent meaning in a culture war that runs parallel to the shooting war.

For some people, changing dates represents a separation from Russia, its culture, and religion. People in a village on the outskirts of Kyiv voted recently to move up their Christmas observance.

"What began on February 24, the full-scale invasion, is an awakening and an understanding that we can no longer be part of the Russian world," Olena Paliy, a 33-year-old Bobrytsia resident, said.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which claims sovereignty over Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and some other Eastern Orthodox churches continue to use the ancient Julian calendar.

Christmas falls 13 days later on that calendar, or January 7, than it does on the Gregorian calendar used by most church and secular groups.

The Catholic Church first adopted the modern, more astronomically precise



The Synod of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine decreed in October that local church rectors could choose the date along with their communities, saying the decision followed years of discussion but also resulted from the circumstances of the war.

In Bobrytsia, some members of the faith promoted the change within the local church, which recently transitioned to being part of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, with no ties to Russia.

When a vote was taken last week, 200 out of 204 people said yes to adopting December 25 as

the new day to celebrate Christmas.

"This is a big step because

never in our history have we had the same dates of celebration of Christmas in Ukraine with the whole Christian world. All the time we were separated," said Roman Ivanenko, a local official in Bobrytsia, and one of the promoters of the change.

With the switch, he said, they are "breaking this connection" with the Russians.

As in all the Kyiv region, Sunday morning in Bobrytsia began with the sound of sirens, but that didn't prevent people from gathering in the church to attend a Christmas Mass on December 25 for the first time.

In the end, there were no attacks reported in the capital.

"No enemy can take away the holiday because the holiday is born in the soul," the Rev. Rostyslav Korchak said in his homily, during which he used the words "war," "soldiers," and "evil" more than "Jesus Christ".

Anna Nezenko, 65, attended the church in Bobrytsia on every Christmas since the building was inaugurated in 2000, although always on

January 7th. She said she did not feel strange doing so Sunday.

"The most important is the God to be born in the heart," she said.

In 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, granted complete independence, or autocephaly, to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Ukrainians who favoured recognition for a national church in tandem with Ukraine's political independence from the former Soviet Union had long sought such approval.

The Russian Orthodox Church and its leader, Patriarch Kirill, fiercely protested the move, saying Ukraine was not under the jurisdiction of Bartholomew.

The other major branch of Orthodoxy in the country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, remained loyal to Moscow until the outbreak of war. It declared independence in May, though it remains under government scrutiny.

China's Foreign Min signals deeper ties with Russia

AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi defended his country's position on the war in Ukraine on Sunday and signalled that China would deepen ties with Russia in the coming year.

Wang, speaking by video to a conference in the Chinese capital, also blamed America for the deterioration in relations between the world's two largest economies, saying that China has "firmly rejected the United States' erroneous China policy."

China has pushed back against Western pressure on trade, technology, human rights and its claims to a broad



swath of the western Pacific, accusing the US of bullying.

Its refusal to condemn the invasion of Ukraine and join others in imposing sanctions on Russia has further frayed ties and fuelled an emerging divide with much of Europe.

Wang said that China would "deepen strategic mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation" with Russia. Warships from the two countries held joint naval drills in the East China Sea last week.

"With regard to the Ukraine crisis, we have consistently upheld the fundamental principles of objectivity and impartiality, without favouring one side or the other, or adding fuel to the fire, still less seeking

selfish gains from the situation," Wang said, according to an official text of his remarks.

Even as China has found common ground with Russia as both come under Western pressure, its economic future remains tied to American and European markets and technology. Leader Xi Jinping is pushing Chinese industry to become more self-sufficient, but Wang acknowledged that experience has shown "that China and the United States cannot decouple or sever supply chains."

He said that China would strive to bring relations with the US back on course, saying they had plunged because "the United States has stubbornly

continued to see China as its primary competitor and engage in blatant blockade, suppression and provocation against China." Wang and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked by phone late last week. The State Department said that Blinken discussed the need to manage the US-China relationship responsibly and raised concerns about Russia's war against Ukraine and the threats it poses to global security and economic stability.

Wang accused the US of "unilateral bullying" and said that China would continue to play a constructive role in resolving the Ukraine crisis in its own way, a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said.



Kurds, anti-racism groups gather after deadly Paris shooting

AP ■ PARIS

Members of France's Kurdish community and anti-racism activists joined together in mourning and anger on Saturday in Paris after three people were killed at a Kurdish cultural center in an attack that prosecutors say was racially motivated.

The shooting in a bustling neighborhood of central Paris also wounded three people, and stirred up concerns about hate crimes against minority groups at a time when far-right voices have gained prominence in France and around Europe in recent years.

The suspected attacker was wounded and detained, and transferred Saturday to psychiatric care, the Paris prosecutor's office said. The 69-year-old Parisian had been charged with attacking a migrant camp last year and released from jail earlier this month. For Friday's shooting, he is facing potential charges of murder and attempted murder with a racist motive, the prosecutor's office said.

Thousands gathered Saturday at the Place de la République in eastern Paris, waving a colourful spectrum of flags representing Kurdish rights groups, left-wing political movements and other causes.

The gathering was largely peaceful, though some youths threw projectiles and set a few cars and garbage bins on fire, and police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd. Some protesters shouted slogans against the Turkish government. Berivan Firat of the Kurdish Democratic Council in France told BFM TV that the violence began after some people drove by waving a Turkish flag.

Most demonstrators were ethnic Kurds of varying generations who came together to mourn the three fellow Kurds who were killed, who included a prominent feminist activist and a Kurdish singer who came to France as a refugee.

"We are devastated, really. We are destroyed because we lost a very important member of our community and we are angry. How is this possible?" said demonstrator Yekbun Ogur, a middle school biology teacher in Paris. "Is it normal for a man with a gun to sneak into a cultural place

to come and murder people?"

Demonstrator Yunus Cicek wiped his tears away as he spoke of the victims, and his fears. "We are not protected here. Even though I have political refugee status, I don't feel safe. ... Maybe next time it will be me."

The shooting shook the Kurdish community and put French police on extra alert for the Christmas weekend. The Paris police chief met Saturday with members of the Kurdish community to try to allay their fears.

France's Interior Ministry reported a 13% rise in race-related crimes or other violations in 2021 over 2019, after an 11% rise from 2018 to 2019. The ministry did not include 2020 in its statistics because of successive pandemic lockdowns that year. It said a disproportionate number of such crimes target people of African descent, and also cited hundreds of attacks based on religion.

Friday's attack took place at the cultural center and a nearby Kurdish restaurant and Kurdish hair salon. Surveillance video from the hair salon shared online suggests people in the salon subdued the attacker before police reached the scene. The prosecutor's office would not elaborate on the circumstances of his arrest.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the suspect was clearly targeting foreigners, and had acted alone and was not officially affiliated with any extreme-right or other radical movements. The suspect had past convictions for illegal arms possession and armed violence.

Kurdish activists said they had recently been warned by police of threats to Kurdish targets.

In 2013, three women Kurdish activists, including Sakine Cansiz, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, were found shot dead at a Kurdish center in Paris.

Turkey's army has long been battling against Kurdish militants affiliated with the banned PKK in southeast Turkey as well as in northern Iraq. Turkey's military also recently launched a series of air and artillery strikes against Syrian Kurdish militant targets in northern Syria.

President Bhandari appoints CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Prachanda as Nepal's new PM

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Sunday appointed CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' as the new Prime Minister of Nepal.

Prachanda has been appointed as the Prime Minister of Nepal as per the Article 76 Clause 2 of the Constitution, according to a statement issued by the President's Office here.

The President had called any member of the House of Representatives, who can garner a majority with support from two or more parties as stipulated in the Article 76 clause 2 of the Constitution to submit a claim for the Prime Minister's post.

Prachanda, 68, had submitted the claim before the deadline given by the President expired at 5 pm on Sunday.

The swearing in ceremony of the newly-appointed Prime Minister will take place at 4 pm on Monday, according to the President's Office.

Prachanda along with CPN-UML chairman K P Sharma Oli, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) president Ravi Lamichhane, Rastriya Prajatantra Party chief Rajendra Lingden among other top leaders earlier went to the



President's Office with a proposal to appoint him as the new Prime Minister, sources said.

Prachanda has support of 165 lawmakers in the 275-member House of Representatives which includes CPN-UML with 78, CPN-MC with 32, RSP with 20, RPP with 14, JSP with 12, Janamat with 6 and Nagarik Unmukti Party with 3.

Prachanda is being appointed as the Prime Minister of Nepal for the third time.

Born in Dhikurpokhari of Kaski district near Pokhara on December 11, 1954, Prachanda remained underground for almost 13 years. He joined mainstream politics when the CPN-Maoist adopted peaceful politics, ending decade long

armed insurgency.

He led the decade-long armed struggle from 1996 to 2006 that ultimately ended with signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November 2006.

Earlier, a crucial meeting was held at former prime minister Oli's residence where CPN-Maoist Centre and other smaller parties agreed to form a government under the leadership of 'Prachanda'.

There has been an understanding between Prachanda and Oli to lead the government on rotation basis and Oli agreed to make Prachanda Prime Minister at the first chance as per his demand.

"As the largest party the Nepali Congress failed to form a government under its leadership as per Article 76(2) of the Constitution within the president's deadline. Now, the CPN-UML has taken the initiative to form the new government under the leadership of Prachanda with the support of 165 lawmakers," Shankar Pokharel, CPN-UML general secretary, told reporters after the meeting.

Earlier in the day, Prachanda walked out of the Nepali Congress led five-party alliance after Prime Minister and Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba

rejected his bid to become the Prime Minister in the first round.

Deuba and Prachanda had earlier reached a tacit understanding to lead the new government on a rotational basis.

During talks with Prachanda on Sunday morning at the PM House, Nepali Congress had staked claim for both the key posts of President and Prime Minister, which Prachanda had rejected resulting in failure of the talks, Maoist sources said.

The NC offered the post of Speaker to the Maoist Party, which was rejected by Prachanda. "The alliance has broken as the last-minute talk between Deuba and Prachanda failed to strike a deal," Shah told PTI earlier in the day.

After talks with Prime Minister Deuba failed, Prachanda reached the private residence of CPN-UML chairman Oli to seek his support to become the Prime Minister. He was joined by leaders of other smaller parties.

Nepali Congress is the largest party with 89 seats in the House of Representatives while CPN-UML and CPN-MC have 78 and 32 seats, respectively.

No party in the 275-member House of Representatives has 138 seats required to form a government.



South Africa counts damage, death by tanker truck explosion

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa was coming to grips Sunday with the full extent of the destruction and deaths caused by a Christmas Eve tanker truck explosion near Johannesburg as officials reported the death toll rising to 15.

The truck was carrying gas when it got stuck under a low-lying bridge in the town of Boksburg, on Saturday, sparking flames. As firefighters worked to extinguish the flames the tanker exploded, according to emergency services officials. A "fire bomb" from the explosion substantially damaged Tambo Memorial Hospital, located about 100 meters (110 yards) away, authorities said. Three hospital staff members were among those killed, Minister of Health Joe Phaahla said.

The hospital's emergency unit and X-ray department were badly damaged, he said.

Residents who had gathered to see the burning truck fled from the explosion, some with their clothes burned off, witnesses told the News24 news website. At least 321 injured people were taken to the damaged hospital, though some were later transferred to other Johannesburg-area hospitals.

Several houses and vehicles were also damaged by the explosion, according to officials. "A fireball in the sky," is how resident Rolf Bjornstad described the explosion to News24.

"There was heat coming into the house. I thought of my wife, kids, and helping the affected people," he said.

The tanker truck transporting liquefied petroleum gas — used in homes and industries for heating and cooking — was en route to Botswana from South Africa's Indian Ocean port of Richards Bay, said officials.

China's Covid-19 surge raises odds of new coronavirus mutant

AP ■ BEIJING

Could the COVID-19 surge in China unleash a new coronavirus mutant on the world?

Scientists don't know but worry that might happen. It could be similar to omicron variants circulating there now. It could be a combination of strains. Or something entirely different, they say. "China has a population that is very large and there's limited immunity. And that seems to be the setting in which we may see an explosion of a new variant," said Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University.

Every new infection offers a chance for the coronavirus to mutate, and the virus is spreading rapidly in China. The country of 1.4 billion has largely abandoned its "zero COVID" policy. Though overall reported vaccination rates are high, booster levels are lower, especially among older people. Domestic vaccines have proven less effective against serious infection than Western-made messenger RNA versions. Many were given more than a year ago, meaning immunity has waned.

The result? Fertile ground for the virus to change.

"When we've seen big waves of infection, it's often fol-



lowed by new variants being generated," Ray said.

About three years ago, the original version of the coronavirus spread from China to the rest of the world and was eventually replaced by the delta variant, then omicron and its

descendants, which continue plaguing the world today.

Dr. Shan-Lu Liu, who studies viruses at Ohio State University, said many existing omicron variants have been detected in China, including BE.7, which is extremely adept

at evading immunity and is believed to be driving the current surge. Experts said a partially immune population like China's puts particular pressure on the virus to change. Ray compared the virus to a boxer that "learns to evade the skills that you have and adapt to get around those."

One big unknown is whether a new variant will cause more severe disease. Experts say there's no inherent biological reason the virus has to become milder over time.

"Much of the mildness we've experienced over the past six to 12 months in many parts of the world has been due to accumulated immunity

either through vaccination or infection, not because the virus has changed" in severity, Ray said.

In China, most people have never been exposed to the coronavirus. China's vaccines rely on an older technology producing fewer antibodies than messenger RNA vaccines.

Given those realities, Dr. Gagandeep Kang, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, said it remains to be seen if the virus will follow the same pattern of evolution in China as it has in the rest of the world after vaccines came out. "Or," she asked, "will the pattern of evolution be completely different?"

18 die as monster storm brings rain, snow, cold across US

AP ■ BUFFALO (US)

A frigid winter storm killed at least 18 people as it swept across the country, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses and leaving millions of people on edge about the possibility of Christmas Eve blackouts.

The storm unleashed its full fury on Buffalo, New York, with hurricane-force winds causing whiteout conditions. Emergency response efforts were paralysed, and the city's international airport was shut down.

Across the U.S., officials have attributed deaths to exposure, car crashes, a falling tree limb and other effects of the storm. At least three people died in the Buffalo area, including two who suffered medical emergencies in their homes and couldn't be saved because emergency crews were unable to reach them amid historic blizzard conditions.

Deep snow, single-digit temperatures and day-long power outages sent Buffalo residents scrambling Saturday to get out of their homes to anywhere that had heat. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said the Buffalo Niagara International Airport would be closed through Monday morning and almost every fire truck in the city was stranded in the snow.

"No matter how many emergency vehicles we have, they cannot get through the conditions as we speak," Hochul said.

Blinding blizzards, freezing rain and frigid cold also knocked out power in places from Maine to Seattle, while a major electricity grid operator warned the 65 million people it serves across the eastern U.S. That rolling blackouts might be required.

Pennsylvania-based PJM Interconnection said power plants are having difficulty operating in the frigid weather and has asked residents in 13 states to conserve electricity through at least



Christmas morning. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity to 10 million people in the state and parts of six surrounding ones, directed local power companies to implement planned interruptions but ended the measure by Saturday afternoon. The start of the NFL's Tennessee Titans' game in Nashville was delayed an hour by a planned power outage.

more than 273,000 customers remained without power on Saturday, with Maine the hardest hit and some utilities saying it could be days before electricity is restored.

In North Carolina, 169,000 customers were without power as of the afternoon, down from a peak of more than 485,000, but utility officials said rolling blackouts would continue for "the next few days."

Those without power included James Reynolds of Greensboro, who said his

housemate, a 70-year-old with diabetes and severe arthritis, spent the morning bundled beside a kerosene heater with indoor temperatures "hovering in the 50s."

In the Buffalo suburb of Cheektowaga, two people died in their homes Friday when emergency crews could not reach them in time to treat their medical conditions, according to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. He said another person died in Buffalo and said the bliz-

zard may be "the worst storm in our community's history."

It was taking ambulances over three hours to do one trip to a hospital, Poloncarz said.

Forecasters said 28 inches (71 centimeters) of snow accumulated as of Saturday in Buffalo. Last month, areas just south of the city saw a record 6 feet of snow (about 1.8 meters) from a single storm.

The latest storm knocked out the furnace in the Buffalo home of Brian LaPrade, who woke up Saturday morning to indoor temperatures dipping below 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius).

"I had to go out and dig out the vents," LaPrade said. "As it was, the snow was taller than my snow blower."

Plows were on the roads, but large snow drifts, abandoned cars and downed power lines were slowing progress.

On the Ohio Turnpike, four died in a pileup involving some 50 vehicles. A Kansas City, Missouri, driver was killed Thursday after skidding into a creek, and three others died Wednesday in separate crashes on icy northern Kansas roads.

A utility worker in Ohio was also killed Friday while trying to restore power, according to the Buckeye Rural Electric Cooperative. It said the 22-year-old died in "an electrical contact incident" near Pedro in Lawrence County.

A woman in Vermont died in a hospital Friday after a tree broke in the high winds and fell on her. Police in Colorado Springs said they found the body of a person who appeared to be homeless as sub-zero temperatures and snow descended on the region. Near Janesville, Wisconsin, a 57-year-old woman died Friday after falling through the ice on a river, the Rock County Sheriff's Office announced.

Along Interstate 71 in Kentucky, Terry Henderson and her husband, Rick, were stuck for 34 hours in a massive traffic jam caused by several accidents. The truck dri-

vers weathered the wait in a rig outfitted with a diesel heater, a toilet and a refrigerator but nonetheless regretted trying to drive from Alabama to their home near Akron, Ohio, for Christmas.

"We should have stayed," Terry Henderson said after they got moving again Saturday.

The storm was nearly unprecedented in its scope, stretching from the Great Lakes near Canada to the Rio Grande along the border with Mexico. About 60% of the U.S. Population faced some sort of winter weather advisory or warning, and temperatures plummeted drastically below normal east of the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, the National Weather Service said.

As millions of Americans were traveling ahead of Christmas, more than 2,360 flights within, into or out of the U.S. Were canceled Saturday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

In Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. Border were facing unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on pandemic-era restrictions that prevent many from seeking asylum.

Forecasters said a bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in a strong storm — had developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions, including heavy winds and snow.

Western New York often sees dramatic lake-effect snow, which is caused by cool air picking up moisture from the warm water, then dumping it on the land. But even area residents found conditions Christmas Eve to be dire.

Laticia Stroud and her two daughters, 1 and 12, were stranded without heat or power in their Buffalo house since Friday afternoon, with the snow too deep to leave.

"I have to go over a snowbank to get out," Stroud told the AP.



Lake loses suit over her defeat in Arizona Governor's race

AP ■ PHOENIX (US)

A judge has thrown out a Republican Kari Lake's challenge of her defeat in the Arizona governor's race to Democrat Katie Hobbs, rejecting her claim that problems with ballot printers at some polling places on Election Day were the result of intentional misconduct.

In a decision on Saturday, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Peter Thompson, who was appointed by then-Republican Gov. Jan Brewer, found that the court did not find clear and convincing evidence of the widespread misconduct that Lake had alleged had affected the result of the 2022 general election.

Lake, who lost to Hobbs by just over 17,000 votes, was among the most vocal 2022 Republicans promoting former President Donald Trump's election lies, which she made the centrepiece of her campaign. While most of the other election deniers around the country conceded after losing their races in November, Lake has not. Instead, she asked the judge to either declare her the winner or order a revote in Maricopa County.

Lawyers for Lake focused on problems with ballot printers at some polling places in Maricopa County, home to more than 60 per cent of Arizona's voters.

The defective printers produced ballots that were too light to be read by the on-site tabulators at polling places. Lines backed up in some areas amid the confusion.

County officials say everyone had a chance to vote and all ballots were counted, since ballots affected by the printers were taken to more sophisticated counters at the elections department headquarters. They are in the process of investigating the root cause of the printer problems.

Lake's attorneys also claimed the chain of custody for ballots was broken at an off-site facility, where a contractor scans mail ballots to prepare them for processing. They claim workers at the facility put their own mail ballots into the pile, rather than sending them through normal channels, and also that paperwork documenting the transfer of ballots was missing. The county disputes the claim.

At a two-day trial over Lake's claims, her lawyers alleged small-bore problems that didn't appear to show the widespread, intentional misconduct she would need to prove. Lake faced extremely long odds in her challenge, needing to prove not only that misconduct occurred, but also that it was intended to deny her victory and did in fact result in the wrong woman being declared the winner.

3 NGOs suspend work in Af after Taliban bar women

AP ■ KABUL

Three major international aid groups on Sunday suspended their operations in Afghanistan following a decision by the country's Taliban rulers to ban women from working at non-governmental organisations.

Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE said they cannot effectively reach children, women and men in desperate need in Afghanistan without the women in their workforces.

because women weren't wearing the Islamic headscarf correctly. The three NGOs, child healthcare, education, child protection and nutrition services and support amid plummeting humanitarian conditions.

"We have complied with all cultural norms and we simply can't work without our dedicated female staff, who are essential for us to access women who are in desperate need of assistance," Neil Turner, the Norwegian Refugee Council's chief for Afghanistan, told The Associated Press on Sunday. He said the group has

AP ■ LONDON

A Christmas Eve shooting at a pub in northwest England killed a young woman and wounded three men, police said on Sunday.

The Merseyside Police force said it was investigating the 11:50 pm on Saturday shooting at the Lighthouse pub in the town of Wallasey as a murder case. Police have not detained any suspects.

"This investigation is in the very early stages, and we understand that this is a truly shocking and devastating incident that has happened just before Christmas Day in a busy venue full of young people," Detective Superintendent David McCaughrean said.

The woman died at a hospital "with an injury consistent

Christmas Eve shooting at UK pub leaves 1 dead, 3 wounded

with a gunshot wound," the police force said in a statement. Along with the three men wounded, several people were injured, according to the statement.

Investigators were seeking witnesses as well as cellphone video and closed circuit television footage to figure out what happened, McCaughrean said.

"We believe that the gunman left the pub car park in a dark colored vehicle, possibly a dark colored Mercedes



shortly after the shooting, and we are keen to hear from anyone who saw this to contact us immediately," he said.

The minister of a nearby church told Britain's Press Association news agency that the shooting will come as a shock to local residents because of where the pub is located.

"We've got a lot of young people, families in that area. The Lighthouse is central in that community," Jeffrey Hughes, minister of the

United Reformed Church, said.

Hughes said his church's Christmas morning service would not be "as much a celebration as it was going to be" because of the upsetting news.

"The violence 'shows us that even though we celebrate Christmas, we're still very far from those ideals (of peace) as a society,'" he told PA. Gun violence is comparatively rare in Britain, where most police officers do not carry guns.

US Marines must allow Sikh recruits with beards, turbans: US court orders

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A US court has ruled that a Marine Corps cannot deny entry to Sikhs sporting a beard and wearing a turban, in a major victory for three recruits from the community who can now join the elite unit's basic training without having to forfeit their religious beliefs.

The trio of recruits - Aekash Singh, Jaskirat Singh, and Milaap Singh Chahal - had sought an exemption from a Marines grooming rule requiring them to shave their beards, with the men arguing it was their expression of commitment to their religious faith.

The Marine Corps told three Sikh men that they could serve only if they shaved before going through basic training. They appealed to the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit in September after a lower-court judge denied their request for a preliminary injunction that would have allowed them to enter basic training with their articles of faith.

"They are now suffering

and will continue to suffer grave, immediate, and ongoing injuries to the exercise of their faith," the three-judge bench of the US Court of Appeals here ruled on Friday.

"A federal court has just ruled that Sikhs can maintain their religious beards while serving their country in the U.S. Marine Corps."

Now, three Sikh recruits, who had previously been denied religious accommodations, can enter basic training, lawyer Eric Baxter, who represented the three men, tweeted.

"This is a major ruling for religious freedom—for years, the Marine Corps has barred Sikh recruits with religious beards from entry into basic training. Today's ruling strikes down that rule as a 'violation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA),' he said.

"No one should have to choose between serving God and country," he added in a series of tweets.

The Marines' ban on facial hair applies in basic training

and "combat zones," a designation the plaintiffs said in court covers over three dozen countries where hazard pay is given, the Washington Post newspaper reported.

The Marines claimed that beards will impact "troop uniformity" and appearance among recruits, ultimately threatening national security.

क्र.सं.	विकास खण्ड	कार्य विवरण	धरोहर धनराशि (रु.में)	निविदा का मूल्य (रु.में)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि
1	डोईवाला	खडकमाफ पेयजल योजना के सुदृढीकरण कार्य अन्तर्गत नलकूप अधिष्ठान, उर्ध्व जलाशय निर्माण, राईजिंग मेन एवं वितरण प्रणाली में पाइप लाइन बिछाने, पम्पिंग प्लांट सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य।	324400.00	₹4000 +GST	12 माह
2	डोईवाला	प्रांतीय पेयजल योजना के सुदृढीकरण कार्य के अन्तर्गत नलकूप अधिष्ठान, उर्ध्व जलाशय निर्माण, राईजिंग मेन एवं वितरण प्रणाली में पाइप लाइन बिछाने, पम्पिंग प्लांट सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य।	343400.00	₹4000 +GST	12 माह
3	डोईवाला	हरिपुरकलां पेयजल योजना के सुदृढीकरण कार्य के अन्तर्गत नलकूप अधिष्ठान, उर्ध्व जलाशय निर्माण, राईजिंग मेन एवं वितरण प्रणाली में पाइप लाइन बिछाने, पम्पिंग प्लांट सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य।	729300.00	₹4000 +GST	12 माह
4	डोईवाला	मोतीचूर पेयजल योजना के सुदृढीकरण कार्य के अन्तर्गत उर्ध्व जलाशय संरचना, पाइप लाइन बिछाने, पम्पिंग प्लांट सामग्री की आपूर्ति अधिष्ठान एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य।	306800.00	₹4000 +GST	12 माह

निविदा समय सारणी (मुख्य तिथियाँ) निम्नवत् हैं:

क्र.सं.	विवरण	अनुसूची
1	ऑनलाईन प्रकाशन की तिथि	29.12.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
2	निविदा प्रपत्र डाउनलोड करने की तिथि	29.12.2022 at 11:00 Hrs
3	प्री-बिड मीटिंग की तिथि	03.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
4	बिड ऑनलाईन जमा करने की प्रारम्भ तिथि	07.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
5	बिड ऑनलाईन जमा करने की अन्तिम तिथि	12.01.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
6	ऑफ लाईन रूप से जमा किये जाने वाले प्रपत्र (निविदा प्रपत्र हेतु निर्धारित शुल्क, बिड सिक्वॉरिटी, स्टॉपिंग पेपर एवं अन्य सम्बन्धित दस्तावेज)	12.01.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
7	तकनीकी बिड खोलने की तिथि	13.01.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
8	वित्तीय निविदा खोलने की तिथि	सूचना पृथक से दी जायेगी

ई-निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त जानकारी व शर्तें उत्तराखण्ड राज्य की वेबसाइट www.uktenders.gov.in पर ऑन लाइन देखी/प्राप्त की जा सकती है।

UJVN LTD.
H.O.: "UJWAL", Maharani Bagh, G.M.S. Road Dehradun-248006
Telephone No.: 0135-2763888, Fax: 0135-2763598
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866 Website: www.ujvnl.com

Ro.No.- 947 Dated- 24.12.2022

e-Tender Notice

Office of the Executive Engineer (E&M-II LWR), Juddo Dam, Vyasi HEP(2x60MW) Juddo, Dakpathar, Dehradun invited online bid from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below:

Tender No. 12/EE(E&M)Juddo Dam/2022-23

Name of work : Supply, Installation, testing and commissioning of Automatic Early Warning System (EWS) for Juddo Dam.

Estimated cost : 2,65,81,081.00 (excluding taxes)

Date of availability of bid document on website: 26.12.2022 at 15:00 hrs.

Last date of submission of bid on website: 18.01.2023 at 17:00 hrs.

For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>.

Executive Engineer (E&M-II LWR)

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

STATE INFRASTRUCTURE & INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF UTTARAKHAND LTD.

29, IIE, SAHASTRADHARA ROAD (IT PARK), DEHRADUN - 248001
Ph No. 0135-2708100, 2668092 Fax No. 0135 - 2708109 Web site : www.siidcul.com

NIT No. - 87/SIIDCUL/2022 Date: 26.12.2022

Land available for allotment at Sigaddi, Kotdwar (Uttarakhand) for Development of Theme based Park/Sector Specific Park

State Infrastructure and Industrial Development Corporation of Uttarakhand Limited (SIIDCUL) is a Government of Uttarakhand enterprise engaged in industrial development activity in the State of Uttarakhand. SIIDCUL intends to allot 25 Acres of undeveloped land at Sigaddi, Kotdwar (Uttarakhand) on lease to interested developers/industrial park operators/companies for development and operation of Theme Based/Sector Specific Industrial Park. Online application/bids are invited from prospective applicant/bidders in the prescribed format latest by 17th January, 2023.02.00 pm.

Online bids/application would be available and can be filed with effect from 26.12.2022 at 4.00 pm on www.investuttarakhand.com. For detailed advertisement and details along with instructions for submitting online bids/application please visit our website www.siidcul.com or www.investuttarakhand.com. Interested bidders are advised to visit above websites regularly as any amendment or changes in bid parameters or schedule shall be notified through these websites only.

Managing Director, SIIDCUL

उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, अनुरक्षण खण्ड, उत्तराखण्ड
तेल नं.-1, तरुण विहार, मोपरोवाला रोड, देहरादून-248001
Phone/Fax No.: 0135-2671940, E-mail - eemdujs@rediffmail.com

पत्रांक: 4252/अल्पकालीन निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक: 23.12.2022

अल्पकालीन निविदा सूचना

मुख्य महाप्रबन्धक, उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान, देहरादून की ओर से जलजीवन मिशन कार्यक्रम के अन्तर्गत निम्नलिखित पेयजल योजनाओं में द्वितीय चरण के कार्यों हेतु उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान/उत्तराखण्ड पेयजल निगम पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों/फर्मों से मुहूर्तव निविदाएँ दिनांक 06.01.2023 की राय 03.00 बजे तक आमंत्रित की जाती हैं, जो उसी दिन राय 04.00 बजे उपस्थित निविदादाताओं अथवा उनके प्रतिनिधियों के सम्मुख अधोहस्ताक्षरी अथवा मनोनीत अधिकारी द्वारा कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, अनुरक्षण खण्ड, उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान, देहरादून में खोली जाएगी, निविदा प्रपत्र किसी भी कार्य दिवस में (राजकीय/सार्वजनिक अवकाश को छोड़कर) निर्धारित शुल्क जमा कर दिनांक 05.01.2023 राय 5.00 बजे तक अधोहस्ताक्षरी कार्यालय से प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं।

निविदा क्र.सं.	विकास खण्ड	कार्य विवरण	धरोहर धनराशि (रु.में)	निविदा का मूल्य (रु.में)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि	ठेकेदार की श्रेणी
1	कालसी	लखवाड पेयजल योजना में जल संयंत्र, सतही जलाशय निर्माण, पाइप लाइन बिछाने एवं तत्सम्बन्धी कार्य।	33600.00	₹1500 +GST	04 माह	डी एवं उच्चस्तर

नोट-निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त जानकारी एवं शर्तें विभागीय नोटिस बोर्ड पर चरया है।
राजेश्वर पाल अधिशासी अभियन्ता

"जल संयंत्र-जीवन संयंत्र"

Govt to unveil next set of reforms in tax admin

To prune ITR forms number

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Riding on the back of a 26 per cent surge in tax collections, the Government is set to unveil the next set of reforms in tax administration by pruning the number of forms available for filing Income Tax Return (ITR) to improve taxpayers' experience and reduce the time taken to file returns.

Both direct and indirect tax collections have been buoyant in 2022 is clear indication of revival of the economy after the pandemic and also as a result of government efforts to plug tax leakages.

Going forward, as it seeks to tighten the noose around evaders, the government may also look at stricter tax deduction norms for e-commerce and online service providers, besides online gaming.

Taxation of the digital economy, ensuring developing countries get their fair share of taxes and global coordination for taxation of cryptocurrencies would be one of the priority areas as India is all set to host the leaders of G-20 countries next year.

Rationalisation of long-term capital gains tax structure is also expected to bring pari-



ty in holding period between similar asset classes. Currently, shares held for more than one year attract a 10 per cent tax on long-term capital gains. Gains arising from sale of immovable property and unlisted shares held for more than 2 years and debt instruments and jewellery held for over 3 years attract 20 per cent long term-capital gains tax.

Some tweaking in the new tax regime is also expected next year as the government wants to make the exemption-free tax regime more attractive to individual income taxpayers.

In the longer run, the government wants to do away with the complex old tax regime by establishing a new system, devoid of exemptions and deductions. Moving in

that direction the government in Union Budget 2020-21 gave option to taxpayers to choose between the old regime with various deductions and exemptions and the new tax regime that offered lower tax rates without exemptions and deductions. Even after two years of it coming into effect, the new tax regime has not taken off and the I-T department is now considering some tinkering with it so that more taxpayers shift to it.

The gross collection of direct taxes (before adjusting for refunds) till December 17 of current fiscal year stood at Rs 13.63 lakh crore, a rise of 26 per cent over the same period of 2021-22 on robust growth in advance tax payment and TDS deductions.

LIC may look at composite licence after passage of Insurance Laws (A) Bill

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest insurer LIC may take a call on composite licence clause after the passage of Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill in Parliament, sources said.

As per the proposed Bill, an applicant may apply for registration of one or more classes/sub-classes of insurance business of any category or type of insurer.

However, reinsurers are prohibited from seeking registration of any other class of insurance business. A composite licence will allow insurers to undertake general and health insurance via a single entity.

Sources said LIC would take a call on composite licence and other issues emanating out of passage of the Bill in a comprehensive manner taking into consideration Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956.

The Bill, with proposed amendments to the Insurance Act 1938 and Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, is expected to be tabled in Parliament in the upcoming Budget session starting next month, sources said.

If the proposal for composite insurance registration is passed, there would be change in solvency margin and capital requirement for these companies. The proposed amendments suggest that the mini-



mum paid up capital be specified by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) considering the size and scale of operations, class or sub-class of insurance business and the category or type of insurer. Currently, solvency ratio is pegged at 150 per cent while paid up capital is ₹100 crore as per the existing law.

The finance ministry has recently circulated for wider consultation the amendment in insurance law, including reduction in minimum capital requirement, with a view to enhancing insurance penetration, improve efficiency, and enable product innovation and diversification.

Insurance penetration in India during 2021-22 was 4.2 per cent, remaining same as in 2020-21. Insurance density in India increased from ₹78 in 2020-21 to ₹91 in 2021-22. The level of insurance density has

reported consistent increase from \$11.5 in 2001-02 to \$64.4 in the year 2010-11.

The proposed amendments primarily focus on enhancing the promoting policyholders' interests, improving returns to the policyholders, facilitating entry of more players in insurance market leading to economic growth and employment generation, enhancing efficiencies of the insurance industry - operational as well as financial and enabling ease of doing business.

Presently, there are 24 life insurance companies and 31 non-life or general insurance firms, including specialised players like the Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd and ECGC Ltd.

Last year, the government brought an amendment in the Insurance Act to allow increasing foreign holding in insurers from 49 per cent to 74 per cent.

Mcap of 10 most valued firms erodes by ₹1.68 lakh crore

Reliance biggest drag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of the top 10 valued firms eroded by ₹1,68,552.42 crore last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit in an overall weak broader market.

Last week, the Sensex tumbled 1,492.52 points or 2.43 per cent. Market sentiment remained weak amid surging Covid cases in China and a few other nations, while stronger US growth data cemented expectations of the Federal Reserve continuing with its hawkish stance.

Reliance Industries' valuation tanked ₹42,994.44 crore to ₹16,92,411.37 crore. State Bank of India's market valuation tumbled ₹26,193.74 crore to ₹5,12,228.09 crore.

The valuation of HDFC Bank eroded by ₹22,755.96 crore to ₹8,90,970.33 crore and that of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) plunged ₹18,690.03 crore to ₹4,16,848.97 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank diminished by ₹16,014.14 crore to ₹6,13,366.40 crore and that of



Hindustan Unilever declined by ₹11,877.18 crore to ₹6,15,557.67 crore.

The mcap of Infosys slumped ₹10,436.04 crore to ₹6,30,181.15 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) dipped ₹3,951.78 crore to ₹11,80,885.65 crore.

Bharti Airtel's mcap declined by ₹7,457.25 crore to ₹4,49,868.21 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) dipped ₹3,951.78 crore to ₹11,80,885.65 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 companies, Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, HDFC, Bharti Airtel and LIC.

DPIIT seeks views of Ministries, depts on draft national retail trade policy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has sought the views of 16 departments and Ministries on its draft national retail trade policy, which is aimed at the overall development of all formats of the sector, an official said.

After getting comments from all the departments and ministries, DPIIT would seek approval of the Union Cabinet on the policy, the official added.

The policy would focus on formulating strategies to provide a globally competitive and sustainable environment for the overall development of retail trade through targeted efforts.

The objectives of the policy include ensuring easy and quick access to affordable credit, facilitating modernization and digitisation of retail trade by promoting modern tech-



nology and superior infrastructural support; development of physical infrastructure across the distribution chain; promotion of skill development and improve labour productivity, and providing an effective consultative and grievance redressal mechanism for the sector.

India is the world's fifth-largest global destination in the retail space.

According to a report of CII-Kearney on retail, a cohesive national retail policy can help generate 30 lakh more jobs by 2024.

Mutual funds see muted 2022; expect better days in new year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After a spectacular 2021, the mutual fund industry failed to continue the momentum this year with the growth in asset base, investors count and flows subsiding in 2022 on volatile market conditions, but the New Year is expected to be relatively better.

The industry grew at a slower pace in 2022, mainly due to global headwinds, including the Russia-Ukraine war, supply chain bottlenecks and a decadal high global inflation coupled with rising interest rates. The 2021 growth was mainly braced by a rally in the stock markets.

The assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry rose by 7 per cent or ₹2.65 lakh crore in 2022. This was way lower than a surge of nearly 22 per cent or an increase of close to ₹7 lakh crore in the asset base seen in 2021, data from the Association of Mutual Fund Industry



(Amfi) showed. Swapnil Bhaskar, Head of Strategy, Niyo, said the mutual fund industry growth in 2023 is expected to be in line with the current trend with estimated assets under management of about ₹44 lakh crore at the end of 2023. The growth would be driven by economic growth and retail participation from young investors.

However, industry body Amfi (Association of Mutual Funds in India) CEO N S Venkatesh believes that the industry will grow 16-17 per cent in 2023, aided by India's growth story, and upcoming

budget announcements would support the growth.

The next year's growth would be fuelled by increasing awareness about the benefits of investing in mutual funds across asset classes along with a young generation of investors investing in the space as well as existing investors increasing allocations, said Kaustubh Belapurkar, Director - Research, Morningstar Investment Adviser India.

As per the data, the AUM of the mutual fund industry rose to an all-time high of Rs 40.37 lakh crore in 2022 (till November-end) from ₹37.72 lakh crore at the end of December 2021. It stood at Rs 31 lakh crore in December 2020.

The year 2022 also marked the 10th consecutive yearly rise in the industry AUM after a drop in two preceding years. This year's growth in the industry was supported by inflows in equity schemes.

India to continue to attract foreign investors, amid global uncertainties

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India may attract eyes of overseas investors in 2023 as well on account of measures such as rollout of the production linked incentive (PLI) schemes and projection of healthy economic growth, though global economic uncertainties due to monetary policy tightening in the US and ongoing Russia-Ukraine war may remain cause for concern.

Steps to promote ease of doing business, skilled manpower, presence of natural resources, liberal FDI policies, huge domestic market and prospects of healthy GDP growth are the reasons for optimism on the foreign inflows front for India in 2023 but issues such as delay in enforcement of contracts, cumbersome procedures and high interest rates are still sore points.

According to the latest world investment report 2022 of UNCTAD, the recovery of



greenfield investment in industry remains fragile, especially in developing countries.

It has also stated that the fallout of the war in Ukraine with the triple food, fuel and finance crises, along with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and climate disruption, are adding stress, particularly in developing countries.

India has so far received healthy foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2022. As per the latest figures of the government, India has received foreign investments worth \$42.5 billion during January-September 2022. It stood at \$51.3 billion in 2021.

The country has registered its highest-ever total FDI inflows of \$84.84 billion in 2021-22.

FDI equity inflows into India, however, contracted by 14 per cent to \$26.9 billion during the April-September period of this fiscal. The total FDI inflows (which include equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital) too has declined to \$39 billion during the first half of this fiscal as against \$42.86 billion in the year-ago period.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Anurag Jain said India is the preferred investment destination due to series of measures such as liberalisation in the FDI policy, steps to further promote ease of doing business, reducing compliance burden for industry, rollout of the PLI schemes and the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan for integrated infrastructure development.

NCLAT sets aside CCI order on DLF, remanded back directing to examine

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The NCLAT has set aside an order passed by fair trade regulator Competition Commission of India (CCI) with respect to DLF and directed it to examine the matter.

The case pertains to CCI rejecting a complaint against DLF and its subsidiary for alleged abuse of the dominant position on the basis of a second/supplementary report from DG.

The appellate tribunal said CCI was "not authorised to pass an order for further investigation" if once its probe unit - the DG (Director General) has already "noticed the violation" in its first report and "the same cannot be justified".

Based on the second/supplementary DG report, CCI



passed the order concluding that "the contravention of the provisions" of the Competition Act was not established against DLF and its wholly-owned subsidiary DLF Home Developers.

A two-member NCLAT bench said it was "of the opinion that without going into further detail or delving into the

merit of the case the order impugned is liable to be set aside since the order is primarily passed on the supplementary investigation report submitted by the DG which was conducted on a void order of the CCI."

The matter pertains to Regal Garden in Sector 90, DLF Garden City, Gurugram, where an informant had complained against the realty firm alleging the clauses in the buyer-seller agreement reflected abuse of dominance by DLF Home Developers.

The informant had complained before the CCI alleging clauses to be "highly unfair and discriminatory", however, the fair trade regulator had on August 31, 2018, closed observing that there was no violation.

ONGC board revamp on lines of McKinsey suggestions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Board of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is being revamped by merging two directorships into one and creating a new position of director for corporate affairs in an attempt to breathe fresh life into the state-owned behemoth that is increasingly looking beyond oil and gas, sources said.

ONGC Board presently has six directors for exploration, onshore operations, offshore operations, finance, human resources and technical and field services. It used to be headed by a chairman and managing director.

The government earlier this month appointed Arun Kumar Singh, who had recently retired as head of oil refining and fuel marketing company BPCL, as the chairman of ONGC but not as its managing



director. While this is the first instance of a 60-year-old retired person being appointed as the head of a bluechip state-owned firm, the government also initiated a board revamp.

A post of Director (Production) has been created after merging Director (Onshore), who is in charge of all oil and gas fields located on

land, and Director (Offshore) who looks after all offshore assets such as the prime Mumbai High fields, two sources aware of the matter said.

A new position of Director (Strategy & Corporate Affairs) has also been created. The post of Director (Production) will come into effect from March 1, 2023 after

Director (Onshore) Anurag Sharma superannuates on February 28, 2023. The job is likely to go to Pankaj Kumar, Director (Offshore).

The new Director (Strategy & Corporate Affairs) is likely to look after information technology, communication services, safety, occupational health, environment, business development, joint ventures and marketing after a rejig of workforce between the different functions happens, the sources said.

The jobs that the new position will handle are currently rotated among directors. For instance, marketing is with the Director (Onshore).

Sources said the idea behind the board revamp is to bring greater synergies in operations and allow focussed attention on oil and gas production with a single director responsible for all fields.

FPIs invest ₹11,557 cr in equities in December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have infused a net ₹11,557 crore in Indian equities in December so far despite a market correction and increasing concerns over re-emergence of Covid in China and some other parts of the world.

Going ahead, macro data from the US and Covid news will drive FPI flows and the markets in the near term, said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

According to data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) invested a net sum of ₹11,557 crore in equities during December 1-23.

This comes following a net investment of over ₹36,200 crore in November primarily due to weakening of the US dollar index and positivity about overall macroeconomic trends. Prior to this, foreign investors pulled out ₹8 crore in October and ₹7,624 crore in September.

"Increasing concerns over re-emergence of Covid in some parts of the world and recession worries in the US, FPIs remained net buyers in the Indian equity markets (in December)," said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India.

Maruti Suzuki expects high sale of vehicles with auto gear shift

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With increasing congestion across cities in India, Maruti Suzuki India expects sales of its vehicles with auto gear shift to pick up further next year, according to company Senior Executive, Marketing & Sales Shashank Srivastava.

The company had introduced the auto gear shift (AGS) technology that relieves drivers from manually changing gears using the clutch, for the first time in 2013-14 on its hatchback Celerio. It has cumulatively sold 7.74 lakh units of such vehicles across its portfolio so far.



"After we introduced AGS, slowly we have expanded it in so many of our models. We do believe that with increased congestion, especially in urban areas, AGS is a further addition to the ease of driving. So we believe technology will pick up even further," Srivastava told PTI. The company has nine models — Celerio, Alto K10,

WagonR, Dzire, Ignis, Swift, Brezza, S-Presso and Baleno — which come with the AGS option.

In terms of AGS penetration, he said, "It varies between 12 per cent to 23 per cent across the models" and the volume among individual models also "varies because of different times of introduction".

Celerio has clocked cumulative sales of 2 lakh units of AGS, followed by WagonR at 1.39 lakh units, Swift 1.24 lakh units, Dzire 1.01 lakh units, Alto K10 68,000 units, Ignis 49,000 units, Brezza 39,000 units, S-Presso 37,000 units and Baleno 20,000 units.

'Road transport, highways sector has maximum number of delayed projects'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The road transport and highways sector has the maximum number of delayed projects at 358, followed by railways at 111 and the petroleum sector at 87, showed a Government report.

In the road transport and highways sector, 358 out of 769 projects are delayed. In railways, out of 173 projects, 111

are delayed, while in the petroleum sector, 87 out of 154 projects are running behind schedule, as per the latest flash report on infrastructure projects for November 2022.

The Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division (IPMD) is mandated to monitor central sector infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore and above based on the infor-

mation provided on the Online Computerised Monitoring System (OCMS) by the project implementing agencies.

The IPMD comes under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The report showed that the Muncerabad-Mahaboobnagar rail project is the most-delayed project. It is delayed by 276 months.

INDIA WHITEWASH BANGLADESH

Ashwin, Iyer script dramatic come-from-behind win for India in 2nd Test

PTI ■ MIRPUR

Adogged 71-run stand between Shreyas Iyer and Ravichandran Ashwin came to India's rescue as the visitors fought back from a hopeless situation to pull off a three-wicket win over Bangladesh in the second Test and clinch the series 2-0 here on Sunday.

With India at 74 for seven chasing 145, Bangladesh were on course for their first ever Test win against their formidable neighbours before Iyer (29 not out off 46) and Ashwin (42 not out off 62) denied them with an unbeaten 71-run stand off 105 balls.

Off-spinner Mehidy Hazan Miraz (5/63) gave his all on way to a five-wicket haul but it did not prove to be enough.

The come-from-behind win meant India wrapped up the series 2-0 to strengthen their chances of a second straight final appearance in the World Test Championship.

Bangladesh spinners were all over the Indians after the start of play on Sunday. Resuming the innings at 45 for four, India lost Jaydev Unadkat (13) in the second over of the day.

After slog sweeping Miraz for a six, Unadkat was caught plumb in front of the stumps with a slider from Shakib Al Hasan. Unadkat took the review in desperation but ended up wasting it.

India's crisis man Rishabh Pant walked into the middle and tried to put the pressure back on the opposition with his counter attacking approach. The south-paw had changed the course of the first innings with his 93 but fell for nine on this occasion with Miraz trapping him leg before.



It became 74 for seven when a well set Axar Patel (34) became Miraz's fifth wicket. It was the straighter one again that thud into his pads before clipping the leg stump.

India were staring at their maiden defeat against Bangladesh before Iyer and Ashwin provided a ray of hope with a gritty stand.

The duo was happy to preserve their wicket initially before Iyer changed the momentum with back-to-back boundaries off Shakib in the 41st over.

Miraz offered a loose ball in the following over and Iyer was quick to make room and punch it through cover for another boundary.

Bangladesh resorted to pace

in their bid to break the stand but the plan did not work. Ashwin, who was dropped at short leg on one, collected a couple of boundaries off right arm seamer Khaled Ahmed to bring the target down to just 26 runs.

Miraz was brought into the attack as the last throw of dice but Ashwin pulled him for a six before back-to-back boundaries,

sealing the win for the visitors.

Despite the win, India have a lot of thinking to do going into the home series against Australia. The form of the top-order is a big concern.

India dropping Kuldeep Yadav after his five-wicket haul in the previous game also became a big talking point of the game.

There were nerves but we had full trust in our batters: Rahul

PTI ■ MIRPUR

India captain KL Rahul on Sunday said he trusted his batting unit to do the job for the side despite losing seven wickets while chasing a modest 145 on day four of the second Test against Bangladesh here.

Resuming the day at 45 for four, India lost three quick wickets before Ravichandran Ashwin (42 not out) and Shreyas Iyer (29 not out) shared an unbeaten 71-run for the eighth wicket to guide India home by three wickets and clinch the two-match series 2-0.

"You just trust the guys in the middle. There's always belief but there were nerves, we are human. But we trusted the batters out," Rahul said in the post-match presentation ceremony.

"Today, Ashwin and Shreyas did it with ease and style. Well done to them to earn India the win. We never thought it'd be a cakewalk, thought we needed to grind and work hard for runs..."

"It was tougher with the new ball. We lost more wickets than we'd have liked. We've made mistakes but will look to learn and hopefully put a better performance if a similar situation arises in the future. Happy with our bowling depth in the last 6-7 years," he added.

Rahul, who led India in the series in the absence of injured Rohit Sharma, was effusive in his praise for the team's bowling unit.

"The series wins say a lot about how well we've groomed our pace attack. Ashwin and Axar (Patel) have also done really well. Umesh (Yadav) put his hands up, Jaydev (Unadkat) came in after a long time but bowled phenom-

enally well and probably deserved more wickets than he got. But the pressure helped Ashwin and Axar capitalise," he said.

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan felt one more wicket could have changed the result of the match. He, however, gave full credit to Iyer and Ashwin for their gritty effort with the bat.

"Everyone contributed, we've played well in this venue. Shreyas and Ashwin batted well under pressure. We needed one more wicket. We can think of lots of ifs and buts but happy with the way we fought," he said.

"It was unfortunate I couldn't bowl well in the first Test, but happy to have done well here. The mindset of the team makes me happy. Hopefully, we get better results next year."

Man-of-the-match Ashwin, who picked up six wickets and scored 42 not out in India's second innings, said he trusted his defence while coming out to bat on Sunday.

"I thought Bangladesh played really well. The game had to be won the hard way. In these situations, sometimes you feel you need to hit your way. They bowled well. But we needed to trust our defence. I wanted to get in and support Shreyas. Pitches were good though they were a touch slow."

Cheteshwar Pujara was declared player-of-the-series for scoring 222 runs in two games.

"It's been a hard series. The series was very competitive. I feel I've found my rhythm. A lot of hard work has been put in. I've played many first-class games and have worked on my game," Pujara said.

Rahul's approach, sane selection calls are need of the hour



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's batting approach in the two Tests against Bangladesh was a far cry from the aggression promised by KL Rahul and the buck stops at the stand-in captain's doorstep after a close shave in the Mirpur game which could have gone the home team's way.

The Indian bowlers did get the 40 wickets on expected lines but their propensity to let the opposition tail wag nearly cost them the second Test which was won by four wickets.

The day four surface was challenging but knocking off 145 should still have been a

straightforward job for India. Instead, they chose to employ ultra-defensive technique on a track where that should have been the last option.

In a small run-chase, letting that sort of mindset allowed the Bangladesh spinners to boss the proceedings.

A special stand between Shreyas Iyer and Ravichandran Ashwin saved the blushes for India but the below par performance of the top-order and a few tactical blunders raise plenty of questions for the tougher test that awaits them in the upcoming home series against Australia.

India don't need to copy England's uber aggressive style

of play popularly known as 'Bazball' but Rahul and Co should have taken a leaf out of their book at least while chasing 145.

Chasing 167 on a tricky Karachi pitch, England shut the game by racing to 112 for two in 17 overs at stumps on day three. They eventually 'gunned' down the target in just 28.1 overs the following morning.

The Indian top-order did not need to go hammer and tongs like the English but it could have done a lot more than just defending against the rampaging Bangladesh spinners.

Skipper Rahul's never looked assured in the middle

and was dismissed on the front foot in the two innings. His place in the first Test against Australia in February looks far from certain.

Shubman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara tried to step out of the crease against offie Mehidy Hasan Miraz but failed miserably. The current generation's struggles against spin are not new and their underwhelming showing against Miraz and Co will only leave the much more accomplished Nathan Lyon licking his lips ahead of the series opener in Nagpur.

Virat Kohli's greatness can't be argued but his 1 off 22 balls on day three is an innings he himself would like to forget. He doesn't play the sweep shot often but is brilliant at using the crease.

However, he just chose to defend everything on the front foot and it was only a matter of time before he got the ball that had his number.

Among the tactical errors, not playing Kuldeep Yadav after his eight-wicket haul in his comeback Test stood out.

A third spinner on a turning track would have possibly helped India finish the game on day three itself.

The series opener was won by a handsome margin but that could have been wrapped earlier had Rahul chosen to enforce the follow on.

Don't regret Kuldeep decision: Rahul

PTI ■ MIRPUR

Son Sunday admitted that India missed the services of left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav in the second innings but said he has "no regret" about leaving him out of the final Test against Bangladesh.

Fresh from his match-winning show in India's 188-run win in the Chattogram Test, Kuldeep was benched for an extra seamer in Jaydev Unadkat, a decision which was slammed by the likes of Sunil Gavaskar.

"I don't regret the decision. It was a right decision. If you look at the wickets, our fast bowlers too have taken many wickets and they had a lot of assistance. There was a lot of inconsistent bounce," Rahul said defending his decision at the post-match media interaction.

Struggling at 74 for 7 while chasing a tricky 145 on a difficult fourth day track, India survived a scare as Ravichandran Ashwin and Shreyas Iyer pulled off an incredible three-wicket chase with an unbroken eighth wicket partnership of 71 runs.

"We took the decision keeping in mind our experience of playing here in the ODIs. We saw there's assistance for both spin and bounce. It was to have a balanced side and I think it was a right call," he added.

Kuldeep had made a spectacular comeback after 22



months, returning with a match-haul of eight wickets and also scored a valiant 40 in a crucial lower-order partnership with Ashwin. He was also adjudged the man-of-the-

match in their opening Test at Chattogram.

"It was really a tough call, knowing that he won us the last Test. But seeing the pitch a day before the game, we felt that

there would be assistance for both fast bowlers and seamers and keeping that in mind we wanted to play the best and balanced team that we can," Rahul said.

The team felt Kuldeep's absence especially in Bangladesh's second essay when India with a crucial first innings lead of 87 runs struggled to bowl out the home side.

Bangladesh were 70 for 4 but went on to make 231.

On hindsight, Rahul said he would have loved to have Kuldeep bowl in the second innings if he had the option of the 'Impact Player' rule that would make its debut in next year's IPL.

"Ideally, if the Impact Player rule was there -- like in the IPL -- I would have definitely loved to bring Kuldeep in the second innings," Rahul said.

The Impact Player of 'Super Sub' rule, which made its debut in the Big Bash 2020 and was also seen in the Syed Mushtaq Ali domestic T20s this season, means each team can make one substitution in the course of a match.

Each team will submit four substitutes at the toss and any one of them can come in as 'Impact Player'.

The two-Test series proved to be disastrous for Rahul (57 runs, average: 14.25) and Virat Kohli (45 runs; 15.00) but the stand-in skipper blamed it on the quick transition from white ball to red ball cricket.

PTI ■ LONDON

Cricket bat and pad exports from the UK to India could be in line for a big boost if a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries gets finalised, the UK government has said.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) issued the update on Saturday following the sixth round of FTA negotiations wrapped up in New Delhi last week.

It said the agreement seeks to cut tape and tariffs for businesses, which could include reducing the current 20 per cent tariff on cricket bats and pads made in the UK.

"English cricket is rightly proud of its world champion players -- but also of our brilliant exports like the willow that goes to make the bats hitting boundaries across the world," said Andrew Bowie, UK Minister for Exports.

"We look forward to concluding a modern ambitious trade deal with India that

UK cricket exports eye boost with India free trade deal



helps UK exporters of all types hit their sales targets and builds on the increasing amount of British goods and services sold to India, worth 12 billion pounds in the 12 months to the end of June," he said.

The DIT said any reduction could benefit iconic British brands like Gunn & Moore, whose bats are used by England captain Ben Stokes and have been trading with

India for more than a century.

The Nottingham-based firm, which uses English willow in its bats and exports both wooden bat "clefts" and fully made bats to India, welcomed the negotiations, saying cuts to tariffs would help its business.

"Gunn & Moore Cricket are fully supportive of a UK-India trade deal and look forward to that having a very positive outcome for both countries," said Richard Lowy, Gunn & Moore Sales Director.

According to DIT, an FTA could see taxes cut or even removed entirely, along with a range of duties on other exports that would help UK firms expand into an economy due to become the world's third largest by 2050.

It pointed out that the latest round of negotiations completed a week ahead of Friday's Indian Premier League (IPL) auction, which saw its teams bid for players like Stokes and some of his England ICC T20 Men's World Cup-winning teammates to represent them in the season ahead.

"England and India have long shared a passion for cricket that extends beyond the boundaries of play. We are fortunate to have a game that can not only inspire millions of people across both countries but which creates opportunities to compete and learn from one another in major tournaments such as the IPL and bring us all closer together," said Clare Connor, England and Wales Cricket Board Interim CEO.

India consolidate position at No 2, remain in hunt for WTC final

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's 2-0 series sweep over Bangladesh in Mirpur on Sunday consolidated their position at the number two spot behind leaders Australia in the ICC World Test Championship standings.

The series win brightened India's hope for a back-to-back WTC final appearance.

This helped India consolidate their position behind Australia with 58.92 per cent of possible points with a crucial home series against Australia (four Tests) due in February-March next year.

India need to produce some good results during their series against pacesetters Australia if they are to make it to back-to-back appearances in the WTC final. Australia are in the box seat to qualify for their first WTC final, with the Pat Cummins'



side currently holding a healthy lead at the top of the standings with 76.92 per cent of possible points. Fresh from their six-wicket win over South Africa, Australia have two more matches at home against the Proteas in Melbourne and Sydney.

Four Tests in India for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in February and March next year

will be Australia's final assignment in this period, but they also have the chance to seal their place in the ongoing home series. India took the second place after Dean Elgar side's loss but the Proteas can still have an opportunity to reclaim their place inside the top two by bouncing back in the ongoing series in Australia.



Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Shivraj Singh Chouhan
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

Science & Technology Led Growth

**LAUNCH OF
MADHYA PRADESH SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY
& INNOVATION POLICY 2022**

by

Shivraj Singh Chouhan
Chief Minister
Madhya Pradesh

Vibrant STI Ecosystem	Creation of State Innovation Fund	Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Startup Culture	Investment in DigiTech, Drone-Tech, Bio-Tech, and Green-Tech
Good Governance++: Contactless, Faceless, digital delivery of citizen services		Creation of knowledge and skill-based economy	Digitisation of Traditional Knowledge

In presence of

Dr. Vijay Kumar Saraswat
Member, NITI Aayog, GoI

Om Prakash Sakhlecha
Minister, MSME and S&T, GoMP

Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi
Vice Chairman, MPSPPC & AIGGPA

Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood
Principal Scientific Adviser to GoI

Prof. Rajat Moona
Director, IIT, Gandhinagar

Dr. Akhilesh Gupta
Senior Adviser, DST, GoI

Dr. Sudheer Kumar N
Director (CBPO), ISRO, Bengaluru

Praveen Ramdas
Secretary, Vigyan Bharati

26 December, 2022 | 7:30 P.M.

Golden Jubilee Auditorium, RCVN Noronha Academy of Administration and Management, Bhopal

LIVE STREAMING

@Cmmadhyapradesh @jansampark.madhyapradesh

@Cmmadhyapradesh @jansamparkMP

JansamparkMP

Department of Science & Technology, Government of Madhya Pradesh