

**OPINION 6**  
TURNING INDIA INTO A  
REPUBLIC OF VILLAGES

**WORLD 8**  
UNDETERRED NSO SAYS  
CRITICISMS HYPOCRITICAL

**MONEY 9**  
GOVT MANDATES STORAGE OF ISD,  
CON CALL DETAILS FOR 2 YRS

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## Pegasus shadow looms over Budget Session

Opp to raise issue in wake of fresh expose in snooping issue

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The Budget Session of Parliament beginning Monday with the Presidential Address is likely to be a stormy one in the wake of the fresh expose in the Pegasus snooping issue.

The last two Parliament sessions - Monsoon and Winter- witnessed disruptions and curtailment of the proceedings of the House over 'snooping'.

Leader of the Congress Party in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chaudhury, will move a Privilege Motion against the Union Minister of Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw for allegedly misleading the Parliament by his statement in the Monsoon Session that the Government has nothing to do with the Pegasus row. The Congress and other Opposition parties like the TMC, the Shiv Sena, the RJD and Left parties are likely to raise the Pegasus



issues in both the House from day one, seeking immediate clarification from the Government.

While an all-party meeting is scheduled to be chaired by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla before the House meets, the Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, too, has convened a virtual meeting of party leaders in the evening.

Birla and Naidu met on Sunday and reviewed the preparations with top officials of the Parliament. Naidu has been in isolation after testing positive for Covid last week, whereas several Parliament officials, too, were quarantined after testing positive.

Both the presiding officers expressed optimism that all political parties would engage in constructive debates and

contribute to a productive Budget Session. Birla has convened a Business Advisory Committee meeting on Monday afternoon.

Both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will sit one hour less per session of the total 27 sessions due to staggered sitting arrangements in the wake of a fresh spate of the Corona pandemic.

The discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address and the General Budget are the major items of business for the first part of the session.

On the first day on Monday, President Ram Nath Kovind will address members of both Houses and on the second day, the Union Budget for 2022-23 will be presented in the Lok Sabha by Finance Minister

Nirmala Sitharaman. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will meet at separate times of the day for five hours each to ensure Covid distancing norms. The Lok Sabha will meet at 11 am on February 1 for the presentation of the Union Budget, and it will meet from 4 pm to 9 pm from February 2 to February 11, when the first part of the session concludes. The Rajya Sabha will meet from 9 am to 3 pm.

During sittings of the Lower House of Parliament, the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha chambers and their galleries will be used for sitting of members in view of the pandemic, a Lok Sabha bulletin said.

The first part of the Budget Session will have 10 sittings between January 31 and February 11, while 19 sittings are scheduled for the second part between March 14 and April 8.

The Rajya Sabha will have Zero Hour reduced by half to 30 minutes per day with a total time of 13 hours 30 minutes for raising issues of public importance besides laying of papers and reports during 27 sittings.

This Budget Session is the sixth to be held since the outbreak of the pandemic in January 2020.

Continued on page 2

## Farmers to observe nationwide 'Vishwasghat Diwas' today

Centre is not keeping word on fulfilling our demands, says Tikait

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Farmers across the country would observe January 31 as 'Vishwasghat Diwas' (Betrayal Day) in protest against the failure of the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government to fulfil their pending demands, which were accepted by the Centre in writing when the growers' agitation against the three farm Acts was withdrawn.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella of over 40 farm unions, which formally ended the physical agitation on December 9 last year after written assurances from the Centre, said it would go ahead with 'Mission Uttar Pradesh' (UP) and ask people not to vote for the BJP after the Union Government failed to act on the promises made by it in December. The joint platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Sectoral Federations will observe January 31 as 'Vishwasghat Diwas' in support of the farm-



ment was suspended on the basis of a letter given by the Government on December 9, but those promises have not been fulfilled as yet," Tikait, whose BKU is a part of the SKM, said in a tweet in Hindi.

The national spokesperson of the influential north Indian farmers' union claimed that the over-a-year-long protest at Delhi's borders was withdrawn on the basis of a letter of assurance on the fulfillment of the promises made by the Government on December 9 but those remain unfulfilled. The SKM, on the other hand, said that farmers would go to UP and urge the people not to vote for the BJP in the

forthcoming Assembly polls as they have failed to keep the promises made to the growers last year. It maintained that it would observe 'Vishwasghat Diwas' across the country on January 31, and major demonstrations would be organised at the district and block levels. The constituents expect that this programme will be organised in at least 500 districts. Prime Minister Modi had in November 2021 announced that the contentious farm laws would be rolled back, leading to the protestors eventually vacating Delhi borders on December 9, after one year and 14 days of the commencement of the stir. However, the farmer unions have been protesting against the Union Government for not meeting their demands since it scrapped the controversial farm laws. The protest on Delhi's borders had started under the banner of the SKM, a farmers' collective, in November 2020 over the main demands of withdrawal of the three contentious farm laws that were introduced by the BJP-led Government at the Centre. The farmers, who occupied key border points of Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur for over a year, also demanded a legal guarantee for the MSP of crops.

## 75% adults in India now fully vaccinated against Covid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India achieved another milestone in its fight against Covid-19 by administering more than 75 per cent of its adult population with both doses of the vaccines.

"Seventy-five per cent of all adults are fully vaccinated. Congratulations to our fellow citizens for this momentous feat. Proud of all those who are making our vaccination drive a success," tweeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on this feat on Sunday. A moment later Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandavaya joined Modi in praising the achievement.

"With the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Prayas', India has administered 75 per cent of its adult population with both doses of the Covid vaccine. We are getting stronger in the fight against the pandemic. We have to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour and receive the vaccine as soon as possible," Mandavaya tweeted.

As per the Ministry report, with the administration of more than 62 lakh vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage has exceeded 165.7 crores in India. This has been achieved through 1,81,35,047 sessions.

Continued on page 2

## As poll fever rises EC to review ban on physical rallies today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) will meet on Monday to review its ban on physical political rallies, roadshows and bike and cycle rallies in the five poll-bound States of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Uttarakhand, Goa, Manipur and Punjab.

The commission may also decide whether fresh relaxations can be extended to political parties and candidates in holding physical campaigning events. Earlier this month, the EC had banned poll rallies in order to control the spread of Covid-19 in India.

Sources said banning of political rallies, roadshows, cycle and bike rallies will depend on the prevailing Covid situation in these States.

"The commission will discuss with all stakeholders including the Union Health Secretary, Health Secretaries of the States, Chief Secretaries and the Chief Electoral Officers of the five States before taking the decision," sources said.

The ECI had on Saturday extended the ban on physical political rallies, roadshows,



padyatras, cycle and bike rallies, and processions till January 31 in the five poll-bound States but relaxed the norms for public meetings.

This is the second time the commission has extended the ban after the first one was announced on January 15 and the second was declared on January 22.

The poll panel also increased the five-person limit for door-to-door campaigning to ten and allowed video vans for publicity at designated open spaces with coronavirus restrictions.

According to the Health Ministry, with 2,34,281 people testing positive for the coronavirus infection in a day, India's total tally of cases increased to over 4.10 crore on Sunday.

Continued on page 2

## CAPSULE

### 5 TERRORISTS KILLED IN ENCOUNTER IN J&K

**Srinagar:** Five heavily-armed terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad outfits, including a self-styled commander, were killed in two separate overnight encounters with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, police said on Sunday. P5

### PRAYAGRAJ: 1 CRORE DEVOTEES EXPECTED

**Prayagraj:** Amid the coronavirus pandemic, authorities in UP expect one crore devotees to take a holy dip in the Ganga and the Sangam here on Mauni Amavasya on Monday.

### TRIBUTE PAID TO NATHURAM GODSE

**Bhopal/Gwalior:** On the day the nation observed Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary, the Hindu Mahasabha on Sunday paid tribute to his assassin Nathuram Godse and a co-accused in the Gandhi murder trial, Narayan Apte, in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior by observing "Godse-Apte Smriti Diwas".

### DALIT MAN FORCED TO CONSUME URINE

**Jaipur:** A 25-year-old Dalit was allegedly abducted, beaten and forced to drink urine by eight men over old animosity in Churu district of Rajasthan, police said on Sunday. Two accused have been arrested, they said. The police complaint was filed by the victim Rakesh Meghwal, a resident of Rukhasar village, on January 27 regarding the horrific incident

### N-KOREA TESTS LONG RANGE MISSILE

**Seoul:** North Korea on Sunday fired what appeared to be the most powerful missile it has tested since President Joe Biden took office, as it revives its old playbook in brinkmanship to wrest concessions from Washington and neighbours amid a prolonged stalemate in diplomacy. P8

### 'NO TIE-UP WITH NCP-SHIV SENA FOR GOA POLLS'

**New Delhi:** Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday said an alliance could not be forged between his party and the NCP-Shiv Sena for the Goa Assembly elections despite best efforts by the party but asserted that they "would remain friends."

## 'Bengal gas chamber for democracy under TMC'

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The war of words continued between Raj Bhavan and Nabanna (State Secretariat) with Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar once again attacking Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's regime saying during her rule Bengal has become a "gas chamber for democracy."

After paying floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, the Governor said the "hallowed" State of Bengal was witnessing massive violations of human rights.

"I cannot see this hallowed land getting blood-drenched... now the people say that this



State is turning into a gas chamber for democracy... it has become a laboratory for the trampling of human rights," the Governor said, adding "it is not the rule of law but the law of the ruler that runs Bengal."

Saying that he would continue to raise his voice against "the wrongs that were being

committed", the Governor said he had been regularly humiliated for doing his duty.

"I tried to alert the Nabanna several times, but every time they sent out the impression that 'all is well'," Dhankhar said. "Your Governor has been humiliated... he had to sip blood... how many times he has been abused... but still no one can deter me from raising my voice... no one can stop me from doing my duty," he added.

When asked to comment on the Governor's "gas chamber" comments senior Minister Firdad Hakim said if he was feeling so then he should leave the State. Continued on page 2

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# 3 women, girl killed as teen's car hits them

**Hyderabad:** Three women and a girl died when a car allegedly driven by a 16-year old hit a group of labourers sitting on a pavement in Karimnagar town on Sunday morning, police said.

The incident happened at around 6.50 AM when the teenager lost control over the steering while rubbing his eyes due to thick smog in the area and rammed into a divider and hit those sitting on the pavement, they said.

A police official said three women (aged between 27 and 32) and a 14-year old girl died in the incident (three died on the spot while another died on way to being shifted to a hospital) and two others who were injured were admitted to a hospital.

The Child in conflict with the law (CCL), pressed the accelerator instead of brake and hit the car on the four and



others, Karimnagar Commissioner of Police V Sathyannarayana said.

The CCL, a ninth standard student, along with his two minor friends, who were in the car when the accident occurred fled the scene leaving behind the car, police said the trio was subsequently apprehended and the owner of car was also taken into custody for allowing his minor son to drive.

The labourers earlier used to stay in temporary huts erected on the pavement that were removed by police and civic officials recently, police added. **PTI**

# Huge disappointment awaits Opp on March 10: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a fierce attack on Opposition parties, including the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress, on Sunday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that their leaders, who were hiding from people for past five years had suddenly appeared ahead of election to seek votes, but they would be disappointed on March 10, because there was no place for mafia and gangsters in the double engine government where everyone was protected and respected, but appeasement was for none.

"In the double engine government, the voices of the poor will be heard, women will be protected, youth will get employment and farmers will be uplifted," he said.

Addressing people at the party's Interaction with Influential Voters programme at Maharaja Agrasen Public School and Shikarpur in Bulandshahr district to seek votes for the Bharatiya Janata Party candidates, Yogi said that during COVID-19 pandemic

when he along with ministers and officials was reaching out to people to save the life of every individual and help people in every possible manner, the leader of the opposition had confined himself to his house.

"A friend is one that stands by you in your bad times; the rest are opportunists," he remarked.

Taking a dig at SP leader Akhilesh Yadav, Yogi said that those who could not provide electricity as they were used to living in darkness were promising free electricity to fool people. Yogi said that electricity could be free only when it was not there at all.

He added, "The SP chief says that he has a new economics, but his economics has actually proved disastrous for Uttar Pradesh. As for us, we are providing electricity to people without any discrimination."

Yogi said that in the double engine government, security was guaranteed to every one and a new UP had been created free of riots and fear. He, however, added that there were things on which the government was currently working such as resolving

issues of Dhangarh, Baghel and Meena people, which included inclusion of Aheria community in the Scheduled Castes category. "We have written a letter to the Registrar General of India in this regard, seeking justice for them," he said.

He added further that while the BJP government stood for 25 crore people of the state, for SP, BSP and Congress, family was the state.

Hitting out at the SP, Congress and BSP, Yogi said that they were all together in denying rights to the poor and were sympathisers of criminals and the mafia, and their pain reflected when bulldozer ran over illegally properties of the mafia.

"Their sentiments are not for the poor, the downtrodden and the deprived. Women's safety and peaceful celebration of festivals are not their concerns," he remarked. Yogi alleged that the previous governments used to make guns as crime was their profession and criminals were their friends, adding that people's hard-earned money was kept hidden by their friends in the perfume business.

# Akhilesh to file nomination from Karhal today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Sand former Chief Minister of UP, Akhilesh Yadav, who is contesting from the Karhal Assembly constituency in Mainpuri district, will file his nomination papers at Mainpuri district collectorate on Monday.

Other SP candidates will also file their nominations along with Akhilesh Yadav on Monday.

The Yadav dominated Karhal assembly constituency is the pocket borough of the Samajwadi party and is a few kilometres away from Saifai, the native town of the first family of the SP in Etawah district.

Akhilesh Yadav will contest the assembly election for the first time from the Karhal assembly seat. He is presently MP from Azamgarh.

"Akhilesh Yadav will reach the collectorate on January 31 and file his nomination papers. Preparations are almost complete to file the nominations of three other SP candidates with him," SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said.

He said that the people of Karhal wanted Akhilesh Yadav to contest the election from this constituency. He claimed that it would be a one sided contest in Karhal and Akhilesh Yadav would win the election by a huge margin.

Akhilesh Yadav will move from Saifai by road and reach the district headquarters via Karhal for filing his nomination. On the way, there is also a possibility of a huge public gathering for his first-time nomination in the assembly election.

Rajendra Chaudhary said, "The nomination process will be a low key affair as per the Covid protocol and the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India."

Polling in Uttar Pradesh will be held in seven phases on February 10, 14, 20, 23, 27 and March 3 and 7. Voting in Mainpuri will be held in the third phase of the polls and the nomination process has started. Samajwadi Party has a stronghold in Karhal since 1993 till today. Only once, in 2002, the SP had to face defeat in this constituency.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has not yet announced its candidature from the Karhal assembly seat. There are speculations that the BJP may field someone from the Yadav family -- Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Aparna Yadav, who recently joined the BJP -- from Karhal.

# Centre's plan to provide SC benefits to Muslim and Christian Dalits a pol gimmick : AIPMM

**Patna:** President of the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz (AIPMM), Ali Anwar on Sunday termed the Centre's reported move to explore the possibility of providing scheduled caste benefits to Muslim and Christian dalits as a "political gimmick" to woo voters ahead of the assembly poll in five states.

There were recommendations by the Ranganath Misra Commission for providing SC benefits to dalits of the two communities. But the Centre had rejected the Commission's study on the ground that there was no field study or data on the subject, Anwar said in a statement.

He said, "The intention of the central government is quite clear. In fact, the NDA government at the Centre does not want to provide SC benefits to Muslim and Christian dalits at all. While Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist dalits enjoy SC status as per the presidential order issued under Article 341 of the

Constitution in 1950 and amendments thereafter, those from Christian or Muslim communities do not".

Anwar said the Ranganath Misra Commission had in 2007 recommended that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, should be deleted to delink SC status with religion and grant religion-neutral status to all dalits, like the scheduled tribes.

"Why did the NDA government at the Centre not accept the Ranganath Misra Commission report? Why is it exploring the formation of a national panel to examine whether dalits converted to Christianity or Muslim religions should be given SC status? It's a mere political gimmick of the NDA government, it is not interested in providing SC benefits to Muslim and Christian dalits. Whatever the NDA government is doing is just to woo voters ahead of the upcoming assembly elections," he said. **PTI**



A worker carves stone as part of construction of Ram Temple, in Ayodhya on Sunday

# 'BJP Govt's priority is spying on citizens'

**New Delhi:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday attacked the Centre over the issue of employment, saying its priority is "spying" on citizens when it ought to be jobs for the youth.

Her attack on the government came over a media report which claimed that there are 3.03 crore unemployed youth in the country.

"The priority of the government should be jobs for the youth, but the priority of the BJP government is spying on citizens," the Congress general secretary alleged in an apparent reference to the Pegasus



snooping allegations against the government. The country needs an agenda for the youth, it needs a roadmap for employment for the youth, Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi. **PTI**

# Cong attacks Yogi over PF scam in UPPCL

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress hit out at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe pointed at huge irregularities in syphoning off employees provident fund (PF) money in the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) and the sought prosecution against three senior IAS officers in the Bharatiya Janata Party government.

"A scam of about Rs 2,600 crore took place right under the nose of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. First, the sleuths of Economic Offences Wing (EOW) and now the probe by the CBI has pointed at involvement of the government in the PF scam and has sought prosecution against three senior-most IAS officers of the corporation," Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee president Ajay Kumar Lallu said while accusing the BJP government of being directly involved in the this scam.

"While 17 officials were sent to jail, Yogi Adityanath has taken no action so far against

Sanjay Agarwal and Alok Kumar, two former chairmen of Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited, besides MD Aparna U," Lallu said, while alleging that even now the chief minister was trying to save these officials by not immediately sanctioning order to prosecute the corrupt officials who cheated government employees of their hard earned savings.

"This government neither talks about the interests of the employees nor ensured safety of their PF money," Lallu charged.

Lallu alleged that despite such a big scam happening under the present government, Yogi Adityanath was still making tall claims of his government's honesty and not committing any sins.

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In compliance of and consequent to Department of Medical Education Govt. of MP order nn. f1-3/2018/55-2 Dated 26/05/2018, order no. F1-3/2018/55-2 Date 12/26.03.2019 and order no. 2-57/2018/55-1 dated 06/08/2018 Madhya Pradesh Super Speciality Chikitsa Shikshak Adarsh Seva Niyam 2018 & Commissioner medical Education Circular no.5528/Est./Gaz./2018 Dated 11/09/2018 regarding schedule of posts and Govt. of MP gazette (Extra-Ordinary) dated 14/08/2019 regarding state level reservation roster, & order no. 2-57/2018/55-1 dated 07/04/2018 Madhya Pradesh Swasthi Mahavidyalaya chikitskiya Adarsh Seva Niyam 2018, the posts of Professor /Associate Professor Assistant Professor under teaching cadre in various super specialty subjects and medical officer under non teaching cadre are to be filled. Only those applicants will be eligible to apply who fulfill Govt. of MP/MCI/NMC norms. Applications for the vacant posts are invited in the office of Director School of Excellence in Pulmonary Medicine, NSCD Medical College campus Jabalpur latest by 05:30 PM on 21/02/2022. Those who have already applied in response, to previous advertisement no S.N./Est./Gaz./SEPM/2021/11 Jabalpur Dated 26/11/2021 (last date 27/12/2021) need not apply again. Their application will be considered.

**Vacancy position of the various posts is as under :-**

| TABLE NO. 01 |  |                       |     |    |    |     |       |
|--------------|--|-----------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-------|
| S.N          | Name of Post (Super Speciality)        | Category wise vacancy |     |    |    |     | Total |
|              |  | UR                    | EWS | ST | SC | OBC |       |
| 1            | Professor Pulmonary Medicine           | 01                    | 00  | 00 | 00 | 00  | 01    |
| 2            | Associate Professor Pulmonary Medicine | 00                    | 00  | 00 | 00 | 01  | 01    |
| 3            | Assistant Professor Pulmonary Medicine | 00                    | 00  | 01 | 00 | 01  | 02    |

| TABLE NO. 02 |   |                       |     |    |    |     |       |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-------|
| S.N          | Name of Post (Broad speciality)           | Category wise vacancy |     |    |    |     | Total |
|              |   | UR                    | EWS | ST | SC | OBC |       |
| 1            | Professor-Respiratory Medicine            | 01                    | 00  | 00 | 00 | 00  | 01    |
| 2            | Assistant Professor- Respiratory Medicine | 00                    | 00  | 01 | 00 | 00  | 01    |
| 3            | Assistant Professor- Radio diagnosis      | 01                    | 00  | 00 | 00 | 00  | 01    |

**Note- 01:** As per above table, posts are reserved for- EWS= Economically Weaker Section, ST- Scheduled Tribe, SC-Scheduled Caste and OBC= Other Backward Classes. OBC and EWS category candidates must submit certificate regarding Non creamy layer. (where ever applicable)

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**TABLE NO.02**

| No. | Post            | Pay scale                                      | Category wise vacancy |     |    |    |     | Total |
|-----|-----------------|--|-----------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-------|
|     |                 |  | UR                    | EWS | ST | SC | OBC |       |
| 01  | Medical officer | 15600-39100+5400 & NPA as per prevailing rules | 00                    | 00  | 00 | 00 | 01  | 01    |

Details of the advertisement & application format are also being provided on the Website of NSCB Medical College Jabalpur [www.nscbcmc.ac.in](http://www.nscbcmc.ac.in) and Director medical education, M.P. website [www.medicineducation.mp.gov.in](http://www.medicineducation.mp.gov.in)

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# Pegasus shadow looms...

**From Page 1**  
Naidu has called a virtual meeting of leaders of parties and groups at 5 pm on Monday to discuss the agenda for this Budget Session.

A total of 135 hours of sitting time is available for Rajya Sabha for transacting various items of business during the 27 sittings scheduled during February 2- April 8, 2022, at the rate of 5 hours per day.

Of this, the first part of the session with 40 hours accounts for about 30 per cent of the total scheduled sitting time while the second part with 95 hours accounts for about per cent.

The time share of Question Hour will be 27 hours. A total of 15 hours time is scheduled for Private Members' Business on six days during the session.

During the first week of second part of the session, Private Members' Bills will be taken up on Thursday as Friday being a holiday.

This leaves only 79 hours 30 minutes for considering and passing Bills to be proposed by the Government besides discussing issues of immediate public concern under Calling Attention Notices and as Short Duration Discussions.

# 'Bengal gas chamber for democracy under...

**From Page 1**  
"If he is really feeling that Bengal is gas chamber then why does he not leave the State or go to Delhi," Hakim said. Hakim has often attacked the Governor alleging he was acting like a BJP leader and had turned the Raj Bhavan into a BJP party office said.

The Governor has been at loggerheads with the State Government ever since he took charge in the year 2019. Both the Chief Minister and the Governor had traded fire through open letters.

The Chief Minister is known to have advised the TMC MPs to move a motion against Dhanraj in Rajya Sabha and demand his withdrawal from the State in the upcoming Budget Session.

In fact, the State ruling party is likely to pass a resolution against the Governor in the Assembly, sources have said.

Meanwhile, the TMC-BJP battle reached new heights when a BJP leader and close aide of party MP Arjun Singh was on Sunday arrested on charges of the murder of a TMC leader in Barrackpore north of Kolkata.

# 75% adults in India now fully vaccinated against ...

**From Page 1**  
Meanwhile, India reported a marginal decline in Covid-19 cases at 2,34,281 with 893 deaths in the last 24 hours.

However, the daily positivity rate in the country has risen to 14.5 per cent. The active caseload has also reported a marginal decline at 18,84,937 which constitutes 4.59 per cent of the country's total Covid-positive cases. As many as 893 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the

death count to 4,94,091. The top five States which have registered maximum cases are Kerala with 50,812 cases, followed by Karnataka with 33,337 cases, Maharashtra with 27,971 cases, Tamil Nadu with 24,418 cases, and Gujarat with 11,794 cases. As many as 63.31 per cent of the new cases have been reported from these five States, with Kerala alone accounting for 21.69 per cent of the new cases.

# As poll fever...

**From Page 1**  
The death toll climbed to 4,94,091 with 893 fatalities reported during the 24-hour period.

In Manipur, Governor La Ganesan on Saturday met several spiritual leaders seeking their help to ramp up vaccination. In a meeting with 18 Church leaders and 17 Imams, the Governor requested them to encourage people to take both doses of the Covid-19 vaccination as the State is also gearing up for the elections.

# I apologise if my role as Godse in film hurts people's sentiments: NCP MP Amol Kolhe

**Pune:** Facing flak for playing Nathuram Godse in a film, NCP MP and actor Dr Amol Kolhe has said he would never support the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, and apologised if his role presented only one side and hurt the sentiments of Gandhiji's followers.

Kolhe, who has played the role of Godse in the Hindi movie "Why I killed Gandhi", visited the memorial of the Father of the Nation in Alandi near Pune on Saturday to pay homage to him on the eve of his death anniversary.

Talking to reporters after paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi, Kolhe said, "The film was shot in 2017. If the role has

conveyed only on side- that of Godse- and has hurt the sentiments of many who follow Gandhiji, then I really want to say sorry to those who have been hurt. I have never supported the ideology of Godse and wouldn't support it in future also."

Kolhe said if the movie has presented only one side, then he would put forth the other side also in another form soon to avoid sending across a wrong message to the public.

"I again want to say that I don't support the character of Nathuram Godse. I played the role of Nathuram in the film, but I will never support his ideology. Mahatma Gandhi's

thoughts will never be erased by such a small thing," he said.

"There is an attempt to create a vicious atmosphere, so I am visiting the place where Gandhiji's ashes were immersed in the Indrayani river near Alandi and want to say in his words 'Sabko Sanmati De Bhagwan'," the NCP leader said.

Later, in a Twitter post, Kolhe said he was very happy to see the faith and devotion among today's youth towards Mahatma Gandhi. "This proves the immortality of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts. His message of truth, non-violence and forgiveness to the world is invaluable to the mankind." **PTI**



# City logs 3,674 new cases, 30 deaths

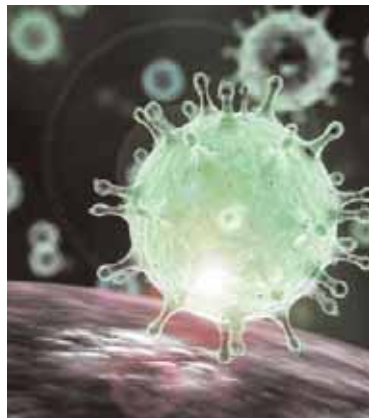
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Sunday reported 3,674 daily cases of Covid-19 while the tests positivity rate recorded 6.37 per cent, 4.5 per cent less than Saturday's positivity rate.

According to the Delhi state health bulletin, 30 people also succumbed to the infection in the preceding 24 hours while 6,954 patients also recovered, and a total 57,686 tests conducted.

Whereas on Sunday, cases were registered below 4,000 while on Saturday, Delhi logged 4,483 cases, a jump of 10.85 per cent. On Friday, the national capital saw 4,044 cases of coronavirus, as per the state health bulletin.

Pivotaly, the daily number of Covid-19 cases in Delhi has reduced significantly in the last one week from 28,867 registered on January 13, while now it is fluctuating near to 3,000 to 4,000. It is important to mention here



that containment zones are significantly higher - 38,853, as per Sunday's bulletin. On Saturday, the number of containment zones were - 39,869.

According to authorities, a containment zone has been created to limit the spread of infections.

# Centre may tell HC if it wants to alter stand on pleas to criminalise marital rape

**New Delhi:** The Centre is likely to inform the Delhi High Court on Monday whether it wishes to withdraw its earlier affidavit in which it had submitted that marital rape cannot be made a criminal offence as it could become a phenomenon which may destabilise the institution of marriage and an easy tool for harassing husbands.

A bench of Justices Rajiv Shukdhher and C Hari Shankar, on January 28, had asked the Centre's counsel to take instructions on whether it wants to withdraw its 2017 affidavit.

The bench, which has been conducting marathon hearings on a batch of petitions seeking criminalisation of marital rape, will also hear rejoinder submissions on behalf of petitioners on Monday. Advocate Karuna Nundy, representing petitioner NGOs RIT Foundation and All India Democratic Women's Association, has sought a clarification as to whether she shall

address the written submissions and affidavits filed by the central government so far or they are withdrawing it.

This assumes significance as the Centre, in its affidavit filed in August 2017, had said the Supreme Court and various high courts have already observed the rising misuse of Section 498A (harassment caused to a married woman by her husband and in-laws) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

It had further said that marital rape has not been defined in any statute or law and while the offence of rape is defined under section 375 IPC, defining marital rape would call for a broad based consensus of the society.

Regarding the petitioners' submission that other countries, mostly western, have criminalised marital rape, the Centre had said it does not necessarily mean India should also follow them blindly.

"This country has its own unique problems due to various factors like literacy, lack of finan-



cial empowerment of the majority of females, mindset of the society, vast diversity, poverty, etc. And these should be considered carefully before criminalising marital rape," it had said. However, in January, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the high court that it was considering a "constructive approach" to the issue and has sought suggestions from several stakeholders and authorities on

comprehensive amendments to the criminal law.

He had said criminalisation of marital rape involves "family issues" as well as the dignity of a woman and cannot be looked at from a "microscopic angle" and sought some time to respond with the government's stand.

The bench, on January 24, granted 10 days to the Centre to come back with its stand on the issue. The court, which has been hearing the pleas on a daily basis since January 10, has concluded hearing the submissions of petitioners, the Delhi government and some NGOs which have been opposing the pleas.

It was hearing PILs filed by NGOs RIT Foundation, All India Democratic Women's Association, a man and a woman seeking striking down of the exception granted to husbands under the Indian rape law. Under the exception given in Section 375 of the IPC, sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife

not being under 15 years of age, is not rape. The petitioners had said that marital rape was the biggest form of sexual violence against women and the Delhi government had said that this act was already covered as a "crime of cruelty" under IPC.

The petitioner NGOs have challenged the Constitutionality of section 375 IPC on grounds that it discriminated against married women being sexually assaulted by their husbands.

NGO, Men Welfare Trust (MWT), which is opposing the batch of petitions seeking criminalisation of marital rape, had argued that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife cannot be treated on a par with that in non-marital relationships as the issue of consent cannot be divorced from the context of a marriage.

It had submitted that the Domestic Violence Act was specifically promulgated for recognising spouse sexual violence. **PTI**

# Photos of only Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh in Govt offices if AAP comes to power in Punjab: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) National Convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said if his party wins Punjab elections, photographs of Baba Saheb B R Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh will be put in all Government offices in the State.

The AAP supremo further added that there will be no photograph of any politician in these offices.

Amid the political battle in the state of five rivers - Punjab, Kejriwal hit out at Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia for indulging in a verbal spat and ignoring the issues plaguing people in the Amritsar East Assembly segment, calling them political elephants.

Kejriwal alleged that Sidhu is not fighting against corruption. "His



fight is only for becoming the next chief minister of state," he added.

The AAP minister had also announced in Delhi too that there will be photographs of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh in government offices of the national capital. "Today, we announce that after the formation of the (AAP) government in Punjab, there will be no photo of the chief minister or any other political leader

in any government office. Photos of Babasaheb Ambedkar and Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh will be put up in all government offices, so that by looking at these photos, we and the next generation can draw inspiration from them," he added.

He said remembering the struggles of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh, both wanted good education and health for everyone.

# Police introduces phonetic keyboard with Hindi voice typing facility

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To facilitate professional investigation along with data and records management Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana has now introduced a phonetic keyboard system with Hindi voice typing facility in the CCTNS on which all works of investigation beginning with lodging of FIR, writing case diaries and submitting chargesheets are done across the country.

This has been developed and executed under Special Commissioner of Police (Technology and Implementation) Muktesh Chander, it is the first of its kind system innovation to have taken place in north Indian Hindi speaking states, police said.

As a pilot project, the system has been launched in all the police stations of New Delhi and North districts of the force and shall be rolled out in all the districts shortly, said Chinmoy Biswal, the



spokesperson of Delhi Police.

"With this technological solution now investigating officers (IOs) will be able to speak and record their work electronically using phonetic keyboard, dispensing the dependency on Hindi typists or the compulsion to record hindi versions in English alphabets,

bringing in efficiency, accuracy and transparency in investigation works," said Biswal.

Till now, police personnel, especially IOs were experiencing difficulty in operating CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems) in Hindi for official works like writing FIRs, case

diaries, final report as very few personnel are adept in Hindi typing; and often sought help of professional Hindi data entry operators, said the spokesperson.

Moreover, the system did not accept the Hindi scripts and even Hindi words and sentences had to be written in English script, he said.

"However, the newly developed procedure is quick, easy and Artificial Intelligence (AI) based. A dictionary of traditional Hindi/Urdu words, often used in police working, has been added for convenience of users.

The system catches new Hindi and Urdu words also and stores the same for database, thus expanding its vocabulary to include all words and syntax used in police works," Biswal said.

The system has improved speed, accuracy and efficiency of police functioning in terms of maintaining proper records digitally, he said.

# DAMEPL seeks HC order to DMRC to deposit ₹6,208 cr available in escrow

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Following the Supreme Court Order, the Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd (DAMEPL) has filed a fresh application in the Delhi High Court seeking direction to Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to deposit Rs 6208 crores available in its various bank accounts into project escrow account without any delay. DAMEPL has also rejected any out of court negotiations / settlement or assignment of debt to the Delhi Metro.

Requesting the Delhi High Court to pass an order listing the instant Execution Petition for final hearing and disposal in the first week of February 2022, DAMEPL in its application said that the present application is made bonafide and in the interest of justice. "It is reiterated that the delay in payment by DMRC is causing immense prejudice to DAMEPL and its Promoter, Reliance Infrastructure Limited. In case the reliefs are sought for are not granted, the Decree Holder shall suffer irreparable loss and injury", DAMEPL said in the application.

"Consequently, the Decree Holder prays that the Judgement Debtor may be directed to satisfy the remaining amount of the decree, amounting to Rs. 6305.40 crores as on 31 January 2022, by depositing the entire amounts available in the Judgement Debtor's accounts (as disclosed on 10 January 2022), namely Rs. 6208.03 crores, into the Project Escrow Account and, for the remaining amount of Rs. 97.37 crores [6305.40 crores - 6208.03 crores = 97.37 crores] as on 31 January 2022 plus further interest till the date of actual payment, the

Judgement Debtor may be directed to arrange funds and make payment to the Decree Holder," reads the application.

The Supreme Court has earlier asked the Delhi Metro and the Reliance Infrastructure's subsidiary, DAMEPL to appear before the Delhi High Court on January 31 and request it to hear the dispute relating to execution of the over Rs 4,600 crore arbitral award to DAMEPL at the earliest. A bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao and B R Gavai said the hearing on the execution application does not brook any further delay as it is detrimental to the interest of both the parties. The apex court on September 9, 2021 had upheld the 2017 arbitration award of around Rs 4,600 crore in favour of DAMEPL, enforceable against the Delhi Metro.

DAMEPL, its plea, has stated that non payment of Termination Fee since 2013 by Delhi Metro has caused immense damage to DAMEPL and its promoter company, Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. Reliance Infrastructure had infused Rs 2513 crores to DAMEPL by taking loans from public sector banks, and the banks have initiated proceedings for liquidation against the company. Any further delay in satisfying the Arbitral Award will result in irreversible consequences for DAMEPL and Reliance Infrastructure Ltd.

"The delay in satisfying the arbitral award is adding an incremental daily interest of Rs.1.76 crores per day on Delhi Metro and this amount cumulatively comes to 260 crores, for the period from 10 September 2021 to till 31 January 2021," the application said.



People, not adhering to social distancing norms, visit a crowded Sadar Bazar market in Gurugram on Sunday

# City records maximum temperature of 22 deg C, clear skies likely today

**New Delhi:** Delhi on Sunday recorded a maximum temperature of 22.2 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature settled at 7.5 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's normal, the India Meteorological Department said.

The relative humidity was 52 per cent at 5.30 pm.

According to the weather department, the national capital is likely to witness mainly clear skies on Monday with mist in the morning and strong surface winds (speed 25-35 kmph) during the day.

The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to settle around 8 degrees Celsius and 23 degrees Celsius respectively.

Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'poor' category on Sunday. The air quality index (AQI) read 282 at 5.05 pm, according to Central Pollution Control Board data.

The air quality in neighbouring cities of Faridabad (282), Ghaziabad (264), Greater Noida (220), Gurgaon (234) and Noida (237) was also poor. An AQI between



zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

On Saturday, the minimum temperature in the national capital stood at 5.4 degrees Celsius, three notches below the season's average, while the maximum temperature was 22.4 degrees Celsius. Delhi saw its coldest January day in nine years on Tuesday with the maximum temperature plunging 10 notches below normal and settling at 12.1 degrees Celsius.

Be fore this, the city had recorded a maximum temperature of 9.8 degrees Celsius on January 3, 2013, according to IMD data. The capital also recorded 82.2 mm of rainfall this January, the highest in the month in 122 years. **PTI**

# Court denies bail to Bulli Bai App's creator Niraj Bishnoi

**New Delhi:** A Delhi court has dismissed the bail application of Niraj Bishnoi, the alleged creator of the Bulli Bai app, saying his offence was not only against the essence of womanhood but was also designed to disturb communal harmony. Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana denied the relief to the accused on January 29, noting that the allegations against him were serious in nature and the investigation was at a nascent stage.

Several complaints were received by police stations in the country regarding the listing of Muslim women for "auction" on the 'Bulli Bai' mobile application with photographs sourced without permission and doctored. It has happened for the second time in less than a year.

The app appeared to be a clone of 'Sulli Deals' which triggered a similar row last year. The judge passed the order after hearing arguments of the accused as well as the prosecution. "The sardonic conduct of the applicant accused in targeting women journalists of a particular community, using offensive monikers with derogatory communal overtones, on a social platform is not only an offence against the essence of womanhood but also an act designed to enrage passion and cause ill will amongst commu-

nities and disturb communal harmony," the judge said in the order. The accused had sought bail on the ground that the investigation against him was already complete and no fruitful purpose would be served by keeping him behind bars. He had submitted that he is an engineering student and has no criminal antecedents.

The prosecution had opposed the bail application arguing that in the present case, doctored photographs of the complainant, a journalist, were shared on Twitter handle @bullibai through a web app.

It submitted that the accused created a web app Bullibai on Github website/portal platform by using Proton VPN to hide his identity. It further submitted that after the arrest of the accused, his laptop and mobile phone were analysed and various incriminating material have been recovered including many lewd comments and derogatory remarks on the doctored photographs of victims in Bullibai web app using Twitter handles @wannabesigmaf and @bullibai. The Delhi police had further submitted that the investigation was at a nascent stage and if the accused was released on bail, he may attempt to influence the fair course of the investigation. **PTI**

# Former Religare CMD Sunil Godhwani denied bail in ₹2,300 cr cheating case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has denied bail to Sunil Godhwani, former chairman and managing director of Religare Enterprises Limited (REL), in a case related to alleged misappropriation of funds, noting the seriousness of allegations, loan amount involved and his role in the transactions.

The court said that economic offences are considered to be grave, especially when public money is involved and courts have to be careful in granting bail in such cases.

According to prosecution, Godhwani and others had put Religare Finvest Limited (RFL), a group firm of REL, in poor financial condition by disbursing loans to entities having no financial standing. Those entities then allegedly willfully defaulted in repayments and caused wrongful loss to RFL to the tune of ₹2,397 crores.

In 2019, police registered an FIR against Godhwani, Malvinder Mohan Singh, Shivinder Mohan Singh, and others on a complaint from RFL's authorised representative (AR) for allegedly diverting the company's money and investing in other companies. REL was earlier promoted by the Singh brothers.

Keeping in mind the conduct of accused, seriousness of allegations, loan amounts involved, the alleged role of accused in the loan transactions and other circumstances of this case, bail application of accused Sunil Godhwani stands dismissed. Additional Sessions Judge Prashant Sharma ordered.

ASJ Sharma noted that the allegations against the accused are that he is involved in the illegal transfer of huge loan amounts to the tune of ₹2,000 crores. "The cash amount involved in this case is public money/investor money," the judge said.

Coupled with the same, the accused was arrested from the airport, as per record, after registration of FIR in question. Accused was occupying a significant top position in REL company. In such circumstances, the possibility of the accused fleeing from justice

and influencing witnesses or tampering with evidence, cannot be ruled out," he added.

The investigating officer, in the reply to the bail plea, alleged that the loans were illegally extended to companies known to the promoter group on Godhwani's instructions without any due diligence and proper documentation. The IO added that the accused misused his position. Godhwani was arrested in 2019. The accused sought bail on the grounds that he is a senior citizen, suffering from various ailments, and can have health issues in jail considering the third wave of the pandemic.

The allegations in the case were that Godhwani, along with co-accused, in connivance with each other swindled the public money. According to the police, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) pointed out the discrepancies in its analysis to the effect that top borrowers of RFL under the Corporate Loan Book (CLB) portfolio were related entities.

India's central bank stated that those entities had inter-linked between the borrowers, as funds were rooted from one borrower to another. It was also noted that the loan amount ultimately came back to the group of companies of RFL. Godhwani and the other accused were major shareholders till June 2017 and remained in control of companies till February 2018. After new management took over, it was found that RFL was put to a loss of Rs 2,397 crores approximately, the police said.

The accused, through his lawyer, however, stated that he was never involved in sanctioning and disbursement process and it was the responsibility of committees to ensure that all procedures and processes were adhered to in the sanctioning and disbursement of loans.

The accused are facing charges of 420 (cheating), 409 (criminal breach of trust), and 120B (criminal conspiracy) under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The case is being probed by Delhi Police's economic offence wing. **PTI**

# Freelance scribe held for impersonating Adityanath

**New Delhi:** A freelance journalist was arrested for allegedly impersonating Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and sending forged letters to several public sector units in a bid to obtain advertisements for his newspaper in 2016, police said on Sunday.

Adityanath was then a Lok Sabha MP from Gorakhpur. Accused Manoj Kumar

Seth (41) was arrested from his native Bhubaneswar in Odisha by the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of Delhi Police's Special Cell, they said. Rajbhushan Singh Rawat, personal secretary to Adityanath, had filed a police complaint alleging that some unknown persons had created a fake email ID using the BJP leader's credentials. **PTI**



# PM: 60% of 15 to 18 yrs old got vaccinated within 3 to 4 weeks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said about 60% of the youth in the age group of 15 to 18 years got vaccinated against COVID-19 within three to four weeks which would help them continue with their studies, and that within 20 days "one crore people have taken the precaution dose as well."

Till now, close to 4.50 crore children had been inoculated, Modi said.

The first edition of Modi's radio talk of the year was deferred for 30 minutes and commenced at 11.30 am as Modi paid obeisance to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary (Martyrs' Day).

"Now the cases of Corona infection have also started decreasing, this is a very positive sign. People should be safe, the pace of economic activities of the country should be maintained," said Modi.

Modi said in the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the country is re-establishing its national symbols through new efforts.

"We saw that the 'Amar Jawan Jyoti' near India Gate and the Jyoti lit at the 'National War Memorial' in the vicinity, were

merged. There were tears in the eyes of many countrymen and martyr families on this emotional occasion he said.

"At the 'National War Memorial', the names of all the bravehearts of the country who have been martyred since Independence have been inscribed. Some former soldiers of the army have written to me saying that - "The 'Amar Jawan Jyoti' lit at the memorial is a symbol of the immortality of the martyrs", he said.

The Prime Minister asked people to "certainly visit" the 'National War Memorial and take their family and children too. "Here you will feel a different energy and inspiration", he said. He said in the midst of these events of Amrit Mahotsav, many important national awards were also given away in the country. One of them is the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Baal Puraskar.

"We all must highlight about these children in our homes. Our children will also get inspiration from this and the enthusiasm to bring glory to the country will be awakened in them", he said.

The Prime Minister said recent Padma awards have also just been announced include

many, thus far, unknown faces. "These are the unsung heroes of our country, who have done extraordinary deeds in ordinary circumstances. For example, Basanti Devi of Uttarakhand, who has been honored with Padma Shri, lived her whole life in the midst of struggles", said Modi.

The PM said staying in an Ashram there, Basanti Devi "fought to save the river and made an extraordinary contribution to the environment. She has also done a lot of work for the empowerment of women.

Similarly, 77-year-old Lorembam Beino Devi of Manipur has been conserving the Liba textile art of Manipur for decades.

Arjun Singh of Madhya Pradesh has received Padma award for imparting recognition to the art of Baiga tribal dance.

used to call this tigress collared tigress. The Forest Department named it T-15. The death of this tigress made people so emotional as if someone of their own had left the world. People performed her last rites, bid her farewell with full respect and affection", he said.

He also appreciated the "resolve of the people of Assam to save the rhinoceros."

Talking about the diverse shades of Indian culture, Modi told listeners about the Indian culture "making its mark in Argentina."

"In 2018, during my visit to Argentina, I participated in a yoga program - "Yoga for Peace". There is an organization in Argentina - Hastinapur Foundation. You will be surprised to hear... whither Argentina... and Hastinapur Foundation there too! This foundation is involved in the propagation of Indian Vedic traditions in Argentina", said Prime Minister.

Saying Hastinapur Foundation was founded 40 years ago by a lady, Professor Aida Albrecht, now 90 was since age of 18 introduced to "the power of Indian culture" and studied Bhagwat Gita and Indian and Indian religion.

# ISI floats political party to further Khalistan agenda

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistani covert agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has floated a political outfit styled as Pakistani Nazriyati Party (PNP) to fuel Khalistan agenda and ramp up support domestically besides boosting the activities of Khalistani separatist groups like banned Sikhs for Justice.

Shaheer Haider Malik Sialvi is the president of the PNP who is closely connected to Pakistani terror groups Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and is also the chairman of the youth parliament of that country. Sialvi also has the backing of ISI, sources said.

The US-based Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) is also an ISI project to enlist global support for secessionist Khalistani agenda.

The SFJ has been banned by the Union Home Ministry under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and is embroiled in a number of terrorist cases being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

The PNP has clearly articulated its stand to back secessionist agenda of the Pakistani

Sikhs and those linked to the SFJ. It has also sought to capitalize on the social faultlines of the farmers' unrest over the now scrapped farm laws. The PNP will also liaise with Sikh terrorist groups like SFJ and Khalistan Zindabad Force among others, the sources tracking the development further said.

The Pakistani politico-military combine's renewed bid to revive the Khalistani movement comes in the backdrop of setbacks to the terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir being fuelled from across the border. The security forces operating on the ground in Jammu and Kashmir have neutralized a number of terror commanders as well as a number of cadres, adversely affecting the recruitment drive of the terrorist groups.

During the last two years, the ISI has been using drones to drop arms, ammunition and narcotics along the frontiers in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir to create disturbances and generate revenues through narcotics supplies to fund terrorist activities in these two bordering State/Union Territory.

# Maha Covid cases drop by 5.5 k, touch a tally of 22,444



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Covid-19 situation eased a bit in Maharashtra on Sunday, as the daily infections dropped by 5,527 to touch a case tally of 22,444 and the daily cases in Mumbai went down to 1,160.

On a day when five fresh omicron cases were reported in the state, the daily infections dropped from 27,971 cases on Saturday to 22,444 cases on Sunday. With the fresh infections, the total number of Covid-19 cases in the state rose from 76,83,525 cases to 77,05,969 cases.

With 50 fresh deaths, the total number of deaths registered in the state since the outbreak of Covid-19 in the state in March 2020 went up from 1,42,522 to 1,42,572.

Mumbai, where the daily infections have been dropping steadily for more than eight days, witnessed an increase in the number of cases from 1,411 to 1,160. With the latest cases, the total number of cases in Mumbai mounted from 10,44,470 cases to 10,45,630 cases.

As 39,015 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March 2020 increased from 72,92,791 cases to 73,31,806 cases.

The recovery rate in the state rose from 94.91 per cent to 95.14 per cent.

The number of "active cases" in the state dropped from 2,44,344 to 2,27,711. The fatality rate in the state stood static at 1.85 per cent.

The active cases in Pune dropped from 75991 cases on Saturday to 69,511 cases on Sunday.

The active cases in Mumbai dropped from 12187 cases to 10797, while the active cases in the neighbouring Thane came down from 18855 on Saturday to 16,974 cases.

Nagpur accounted for 26145 cases, followed by Nashik (17000), Ahmednagar (9675),

Aurangabad (7052), Satara (6581) and Raigad (6004).

Of the 7,45,02,688 samples sent to various laboratories across the state so far, 77,05,969 have tested positive (10.34 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday.

Currently, 12,61,198 people are in home quarantine while 3,332 people are in institutional quarantine.

Meanwhile, as many as 5 fresh Omicron cases were recorded in Maharashtra, taking the total number of the new Covid-19 variant cases to 3,130. All the cases were reported by Pune municipal Corporation (PMC).

# Violent clashes in Manipur BJP offices after candidates' list released

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement of the list of candidates for Manipur by the BJP on Sunday triggered resignations and violent confrontations between those finding their names in the list and those failing to get in and losing the race to the fresh defectors to the BJP.

Violent clashes have been reported in the BJP offices in the State.

BJP supporters burnt effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh and shouted slogans as protests erupted after the party named candidates for next month's elections, leaving many disappointed.

Protesters waved placards and raised slogans. Party offices were ransacked in various parts of the state and protesters gathered in several areas with placards. Security has been stepped up around the BJP headquarters in Imphal.

A few party functionaries who were hoping to get tickets have resigned.

According to sources, most of the disgruntled leaders were those who were not selected to accommodate defectors from the Congress.

At least 10 former Congress leaders who joined the BJP were given tickets as the BJP announced it would contest all 60 seats in the Manipur assembly elections, releasing a list of its candidates.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh will contest from his traditional seat in Heingang. Another key minister in Manipur, Biswajit Singh, will

contest from Thongju seat. Former national footballer Somatai Saiza will contest from Ukhrul.

In the 2017 election, the BJP won 21 seats but formed the government with the help of smaller parties and independent MLAs. Of these, 19 MLAs have been given party tickets and three have been dropped.

The Manipur BJP has fielded only three women and one Muslim candidate. Former Manipur Congress chief who joined the BJP, Govindas Konthoujam, has also got a party ticket to contest the election.

Most loyalists of the Chief Minister have got party tickets, sources said.

Earlier this week, despite BJP's efforts to prevent its ticket seekers from switching over

to other parties, one of its aspiring candidates, Lourembam Sanjoy Singh had joined the NPP.

The unrest is also fuelled on account of leaders of other parties in the state joining the saffron party ahead of the elections, making the competition for ticket aspirants tougher.

On January 24, the BJP Kakching Mandal Yuva Morcha and Mahila Morcha had warned the party leadership not to give tickets to former Congress MLA of Kakching constituency, Y Surchandra, three days after he switched over to the BJP.

On Saturday Lourembam Sanjoy resignation and joining NPP is the first casualty inflicted on BJP over the issue of ticket distribution, ahead of the Manipur assembly polls, sched-

uled on February 27 and March 3. While welcoming Sanjoy, NPP national vice-president and deputy chief minister

Y Joykumar Singh said more aspiring candidates from BJP, are on the verge of joining NPP.

NPP is currently in the BJP coalition government but the BJP is not sure that it would extend the helping hand again in the post-poll scenario.

After lot of delay the BJP list for Manipur which was to be announced on January 24, the party released its list for the state on Sunday.

The BJP will contest all 60 seats in the Manipur assembly elections, said the party General Secretary Bupendra Yadav and state-in-charge Sambit Patra here

on Sunday while releasing a full list of its candidates.

"The BJP has run the government in Manipur with peace and development. In Manipur, the party will fight vigorously on all 60 seats. We have fixed the names of the candidates on all the seats. CM N Biren Singh will contest from Heingang constituency. Most of the tickets have been given to those people who have worked for the BJP for a long time. People related to sports, administrative and academics have also been given tickets," Yadav said here at a joint press conference.

The party will retain the state and will win two third majority in the state, claimed Yadav and Patra.

Patra said Prime Minister Modi wearing Manipur stol during the Republic day parade reflects how close Manipur is to his heart.

# NTPC expresses dismay over use of abbreviation NTPC in Railways exam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Country's largest power generation company National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has expressed its 'dismay' over the use of its abbreviation -NTPC- in its recruitments by the largest employer of the nation Indian Railways that has led to a lot of confusion and in a way has brought bad name to a reputed organization like NTPC.

In a letter dated January 28, 2022 the NTPC has requested the railways to change the name of its NTPC exam which has caused great confusion among the aspiring candidates so far.

The NTPC in the name of the power generation company stands for National Thermal Power Corporation while that in the name of the NTPC exam of railways stands for Non-Technical Popular Categories.

NTPC Ltd has said that it has created a wrong impression about the company. Railways examinations are in the middle of controversies owing to the aspiring students' violent outrage including burning of a train at several places in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during the last week.

Pointing specifically to the similarity in names of the exam and the company, the NTPC in its letter said "This is with reference to the recent protest in some parts of the country with respect to Railway Recruitment Board Non-Technical Popular Categories (NTPC RRB) exam of Indian Railways."

Expressing concern over the way this issue is being reported with the abbreviated names of the exams, NTPC Ltd has further said "While we are confident that the Railways is taking all necessary steps to address the situation, we just wish to bring to your notice

that the NTPC Ltd has inadvertently been caught in the crossfire. The media has been using the abbreviated form NTPC, which gives the impression that the exams are linked to India's largest power producer."

"This, you would agree, is also hurting our reputation. You are requested to clarify and use the full form of the Railways Recruitment Scheme in your press releases or statements so that this misconception is not carried on creating the wrong impression amongst the users of social media and also the public at large. We would therefore urge you to kindly rename these exams so that no confusion is created in the future," said the letter by Executive Director (HR) of NTPC Ltd.

The letter further stated "This, you would agree, is also hurting our reputation. You are requested to clarify and use the full form of the Railways Recruitment Scheme in your press releases or statements so that this misconception is not carried on creating the wrong impression amongst the users of social media and also the public at large. We would therefore urge you to kindly rename these exams so that no confusion is created in the future."

While there was no official response from railways over the NTPC letter, sources said that the issue raised by the power generation company is being examined as what can be done.

"We will look into it as we also don't want unnecessary embarrassment for the NTPC. While we cannot change the acronym for the immediate recruitment that has led to multiple controversies, the name of recruitment examination could be rechristened from next announcement. There is a due process and it cannot be done overnight," remarked the official.

# IMD predicts snowfall, rain between Feb 2 and 5

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said there is a possibility of snowfall and rainfall between February 2 and February 5 in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Sikkim, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Assam and Nagaland.

Meanwhile, the 40-day harshest spell of winter known as "Chilla-i-Kalan" in Kashmir will end on January 31 but the cold wave will continue even after that with a 20-day-long 'Chilla-i-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day-long 'Chilla-i-Bachha' (baby cold). This is a period when a cold wave grips

the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies including the famous Dal Lake here as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley.

According to the IMD, the minimum temperature is likely to rise by 3 to 5 degree Celsius over most parts of Northwest, Central, East and Northeast India till February 3 and fall by 3 to 4 degree Celsius thereafter.

IMD said that fairly widespread to widespread light to moderate rainfall or snowfall over Western Himalayan Region during 2 to 4 February. A feeble Western Disturbance is very likely to cause isolated rainfall/snowfall over Jammu-

Kashmir-Ladakh till 01st February, 2022.

"Another active Western Disturbance is very likely to affect Northwest India from February 2. An induced cyclonic circulation is likely to form over southwest Rajasthan and neighbourhood on February 3, 2022. In addition, moisture feeding from Arabian Sea to northwest India at lower and middle tropospheric levels is also very likely on February 2 and 3. Another Western Disturbance likely to affect Western Himalayan Region from 06th February 6. An isolated hailstorm is likely over the region on February 3rd under the influence of a fresh active Western Disturbance and its induced

cyclonic circulation," the IMD said.

"Scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh during 2 and 4 February. Isolated hailstorm likely over Punjab, Haryana and northwest Uttar Pradesh on February 3," IMD said in a tweet.

"Scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall with thunderstorm/lightning likely over Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal & Sikkim on 3rd & 4th and over Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura on February 4 and 5, 2022," it added.

Parts of Rajasthan shivered

on Sunday under cold wave conditions while Karauli was recorded as the coldest place with a minimum temperature of 2.8 degrees Celsius, the IMD said. Chittoargarh was the second coldest as the minimum temperature there settled at 3.1 degrees Celsius, followed by Sangariya in Hanumangarh (3.5 degrees Celsius). Sikar, Bhilwara, Alwar, Dabok and Pilani recorded a low of 4, 5, 5.6, 6 and 6.4 degrees Celsius, it said.

The minimum temperature at most places in Kashmir went down and settled below the freezing point, even as IMD said there is a possibility of rain or snow at scattered places on Monday. A day after

some improvement, the temperature decreased at most places in the Kashmir valley on Saturday night. Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 2.3 degrees Celsius down from minus 1 degrees Celsius the previous night, IMD said.

The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg in north Kashmir recorded a low of minus 7.4 degrees Celsius marginally up from minus 7.5 degrees Celsius the previous night. Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir, which also serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 7 degrees Celsius down from minus 2.8 degrees Celsius the previous night, they said.

# Air pollution ruining babies' health in India: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The air pollution is damaging the health of babies and infants in India, a team of researchers have found after studying more than 250,000 children aged under five in 640 districts across the States.

The international research team included researchers from the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies and the University of Colorado in the USA and the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi.

They found that fine particulate matter in air has contributed to infant mortality in India. They identified that unborn children were exposed to increased levels of particulate matter during the later stage of pregnancy. They used satellite data to estimate the concentrations of fine particles during the month of each child's birth.

India is ranked third only to Bangladesh and Pakistan for worst air quality, PM 2.5 concentration in India is 5.2

times above the WHO annual air quality guideline.

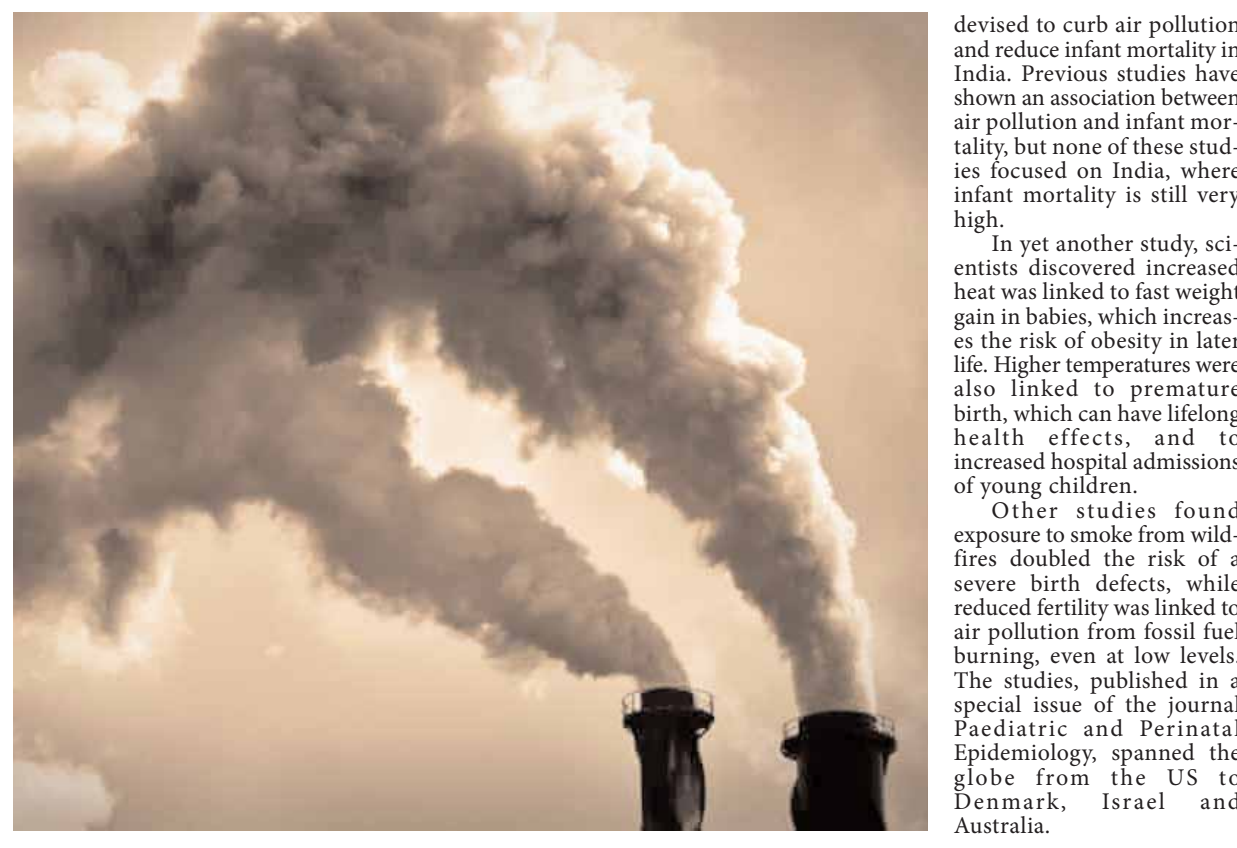
The researchers said that fine inhalable particles permeate the lungs of pregnant women, causing oxidative stress and disrupted hormone levels which affect fetal growth. This results in babies with a low birthweight.

They found that babies with a low birthweight were more likely to die in the first year of life, and the mothers' inhalation of fine particles increased mortality for infant girls more than boys.

Analyses showed that the children who died in their first year of life were less privileged than those who survived. They also experienced higher exposure to particulate matter than children who survived.

The researchers found that both groups of children were exposed to concentrations of fine particles that exceeded the permissible limit set by the World Health Organization.

The researchers say urgent plans need to be



devised to curb air pollution and reduce infant mortality in India. Previous studies have shown an association between air pollution and infant mortality, but none of these studies focused on India, where infant mortality is still very high.

In yet another study, scientists discovered increased heat was linked to fast weight gain in babies, which increases the risk of obesity in later life. Higher temperatures were also linked to premature birth, which can have lifelong health effects, and to increased hospital admissions of young children.

Other studies found exposure to smoke from wildfires doubled the risk of a severe birth defects, while reduced fertility was linked to air pollution from fossil fuel burning, even at low levels. The studies, published in a special issue of the journal Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology, spanned the globe from the US to Denmark, Israel and Australia.



# 5 terrorists gunned down in J&K

JeM commander, Pakistan terrorist among five killed in 24 hours

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A Pakistani terrorist, along with a top Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) commander, was among five terrorists gunned down by the joint team of security forces in two back to back anti terrorist operations in Pulwama and Budgam districts of Kashmir valley in the last 24 hours.

The killed terrorists included a top JeM commander Zahid Wani and a foreign Pakistani terrorist Kafeel Bhai @Chotu.

As per police records, the killed terrorists were linked with proscribed terror outfit JeM and were part of group

involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on Police/SFs and civilian atrocities. Zahid Wani was also one of the masterminds behind various IED attacks.

Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range Vijay Kumar while addressing a joint press conference at Army Headquarters Balpora, termed the elimination of most wanted terrorists as a big success and congratulated the joint forces for conducting successful anti-terrorist operations without any collateral damage. He also said that, during the current year, so far 21 terrorists including 8 foreign terrorists have been neutralized in 11 anti-terrorist operations and 13 terrorists among them were linked with proscribed terror outfit JeM.

The first anti-terrorist operation was launched late Saturday evening after receiving inputs about the presence

of terrorists in village Naira in Pulwama. While the security forces were tightening the cordons in the area the hiding terrorists fired indiscriminately on the joint search parties. However, due to darkness and to ensure safety of the civilians trapped inside the cordon area, the joint parties exercised maximum restraint.

After evacuation of the civilians to the safer places, the fire was retaliated leading to an encounter. In the ensuing encounter, 04 terrorists were killed and their bodies were retrieved from the site of encounter. They have been identified as Zahid Ahmad Wani @Uzair (a top commander) resident of Karimabad Pulwama, foreign terrorist Kafeel Bhai @Chotu resident of Pakistan, Waheed Ahmad Reshi resident of Khadermoh Kapapora and Inayat Ahmad Mir resident of Naira Pulwama. According to a police

spokesman, the killed terrorist Zahid Wani was a categorized terrorist active since May-2017 and involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities. He was involved in an attack on patrolling party of 44RR at Below Rajpora, attack on patrolling party of 55RR at Tiken Pulwama, attack on patrolling party of 50RR at Parigam, grenade attack on PS Pulwama and firing upon CRPF camp at Rajpora. He was also involved in the killing of one civilian Azad Ahmad Dar of Kangan Pulwama. Moreover, terrorist Zahid Wani was also instrumental in motivating the gullible youth to join terror folds and other criminal activities. Meanwhile, the killed foreign terrorist Kafeel Bhai was operating in the Pulwama and Shopian belts and was involved in a series of terror crime cases. The killed terrorist Waheed Ahmad was active

since 2021 while as Inayat Ahmad had joined terror folds recently. Security forces also recovered arms and ammunition including 01 M4 rifle, 02 AK series rifles and 02 Pistols from the site of encounter.

Police spokesman said, the second anti-terrorist operation was launched in village Chahre-Sharif area of Budgam late Saturday night.

In the ensuing encounter, the hiding terrorist identified as Bilal Ahmad Khan resident of Chill Brass Khanshab was killed and his body was retrieved from the site of encounter. As per police records, he was a categorized terrorist and linked with proscribed terror outfit LeT (TRF) and part of groups involved in several terror crime cases.

"01 AK-56 rifle, 02 AK Magazines and 05 AK rounds have been recovered from the site of the encounter", police spokesman said.

# Fresh plea filed in SC to take cognizance on Pegasus row

## Cong seeks privilege motion against Govt, writes to LS Speaker

New Delhi: A fresh plea has been filed in the Supreme Court on the alleged use of Israeli spyware Pegasus, seeking that the court take cognizance of a New York Times report on it and order a probe into the 2017 defence deal with Israel.

The media report claiming India bought Pegasus spyware as part of a USD 2 billion defence deal with Israel in 2017 has triggered a major controversy with the Opposition alleging that the government indulged in illegal snooping that amounted to "treason".

The plea filed by advocate ML Sharma, who is one of the original petitioners in the case before the top court, said the deal was not approved by Parliament and, therefore, needs to be cancelled and money be recovered.

He urged the top court to issue suitable directions for registering a criminal case and to investigate the impugned Pegasus spyware purchase deal and alleged misuse of public funds in the interest of justice.

The media report has said Pegasus and a missile system were the "centrepieces" of a roughly USD 2 billion deal of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear between India and Israel in 2017.

The NYT, in its report titled "The Battle for the World's Most Powerful Cyberweapon", said the Israeli firm NSO Group had for nearly a decade been "selling its surveillance software on a subscription basis to law-enforcement and intelligence agencies around the world, promising that it could do what no one else -- not a private company, not even a state intelligence service -- could do: consistently and reliably crack the encrypted communications of any iPhone or Android smartphone".

On October 27, last year, the top court had appointed a 3-member panel of cyber experts to probe the alleged use of Pegasus for surveillance of certain people in India, saying the state cannot get a "free pass" every time the spectre of

Minister of Information Technology for deliberately misleading the House on the Pegasus issue," the Congress leader said in his letter to the speaker. He also alleged that the government "lied to the Supreme Court when it was directly questioned about the purchase and deployment of Pegasus".

The Congress leader pointed out that in a sworn affidavit, the government unequivocally denied "any and all" of the allegations against it on the Pegasus issue.

The Pegasus issue rocked the monsoon session of Parliament last year when the Opposition demanded a discussion on the issue.

Chowdhury alleged that the government was targeting political leaders, journalists, judges and civil society activists, using the Israeli spyware. The Pegasus issue is likely to cast its shadow on the budget session of Parliament starting Monday, with the opposition parties set to raise the pitch in both houses. **PTI**

In view of the latest revelations by New York Times, it appears that the Modi government has misled Parliament and the Supreme Court and lied to the people of India.

"In view of the above, I demand that a privilege motion may be initiated against the

national security is raised and it cannot be the "bugbear" that the judiciary shies away from.

In one of the significant verdicts in recent times over the issue of citizens' right to privacy, a bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana had said that mere invocation of national security by the state cannot render the judiciary a "mute spectator" and asserted that indiscriminate spying on individuals in a democratic country cannot be allowed. The apex court said Justice Raveendran will oversee functioning of the three-member panel of cyber security, digital forensics, networks and hardware.

It had said that former IPS officer Alok Joshi and Sundeep Oberoi -- Chairman, Sub

Committee in (International Organisation of Standardisation/ International Electro-Technical Commission/Joint Technical Committee) -- will assist Justice Raveendran to oversee the task to the committee.

The apex court had said it is appointing the committee in view of the six compelling circumstances: Right to privacy and freedom of speech are alleged to be impacted, which needs to be examined; entire citizenry is affected by such allegations due to the potential chilling effect, no clear stand taken by the Centre regarding actions taken by it and seriousness accorded to the allegations by foreign countries and involvement of foreign parties. **PTI**

# Jat with BJP, alliance won't make any difference: Dev

PNS ■ ALIGARH/ HATHRAS

BJP State president Swatantra Dev Singh came to Aligarh and in his brief programme, paid homage by garlanding the statue of the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi at Swachhta Chowk on Aligarh Road. During this, two minutes silence was observed and tribute was paid. He said that the country was not built by political parties, but by great men like Rishi-Muni and Gandhiji.

In a conversation with media on India's Swachh Bharat Mission and on the alliance of SP-RLD, he said that the Jat community is with the BJP in the past and is still with the BJP. The alliance won't make any difference. On the launch of the development works during the tenure of the Samajwadi Party Government, it was said that earlier people did not get electricity, people used to complete their sleep by sitting in trains and buses.

There was no current in the electric wires coming to the houses, but the electricity bill definitely used to come. This bill used to create current among the people.

He said that Akhilesh Yadav remembers Jinnah on the birth anniversary of Sardar Patel. What could be a greater misfortune than this? He said that Akhilesh Yadav wants to replace Patel's idol and get Jinnah's statue installed. He wants to establish Atiq and Mukhtar again in the state, but BJP will never allow his plan to be fulfilled.

He further said that the BJP has ended the SP rule by taking action against the goondaraj mafia. The central and state governments have done good to the poor through public welfare schemes. They have given relief by giving ration, housing, gas connection. BJP is winning more than 300 seats in the state. The remaining works will be completed after the formation

of the government in 2022. On this occasion, BJP's district in-charge Devendra Singh, candidate from Hathras reserved seat Anjula Mahour, district president Gaurav Arya, chairman Ashish Sharma, city president Shrad Maheshwari and other workers were present.

On the other hand BJP national president JP Nadda came to Hathras and contacted door to door for campaigning in the assembly elections. Apart from this, he interacted with party workers and enlightened people of the city. There was no big event like road show and rally in public due to covid guidelines. After landing here, he started traveling in the city and started door to door contact. He met people by visiting shopkeepers and houses in

Pathar Bazar, Chavad Gate, Qila Gate, Nayaganj and other areas. During this, the BJP President attacked SP President Akhilesh Yadav and counted the achievements of BJP rule.

# Communalism that led to Gandhi's death biggest threat to nation today: Kerala CM

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday said the communal ideology that led to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi has become the biggest threat to the country and it still "slaughters" people in the name of religion.

Vijayan, in his message on Martyrs' Day, said memories of Gandhiji were more relevant now than ever before and urged the people to take a pledge to fight communalism and promote fraternity.

Gandhi was shot dead on this day in 1948 by Nathuram Godse. The Father of the Nation's death anniversary is observed as Martyrs' Day.

"Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by the very forces that still slaughter people in the name of religion. They are the biggest threat to our country today. Gandhiji's memory is more relevant now than ever before. This #Martyrs' Day, let's

pledge to fight communalism, promote fraternity," Vijayan tweeted on the 74th death anniversary of Gandhi. Vijayan said all forms of sectarianism were gaining ground, shaking the very foundations of democracy and innocent people were the victims.

"The same communal ideology that assassinated Mahatma Gandhi has become the biggest threat to the country... We even have to watch the racists share joy on the day of death of the world-respected Mahatma Gandhi. This is the biggest challenge we Indians are facing as a community. We must take up that challenge with the strongest political conviction," Vijayan said in a Facebook post. He said the martyrdom of Gandhi, who united the people through the national movement and led them to achieve independence, should become an inspiration and strength. **PTI**

# Two religious groups clash over social media post in Gujarat

Nadiad: Members of two communities clashed with each other in Kathlal town in Gujarat's Kheda district over social media posts which both sides claimed hurt their religious sentiments, following which two FIRs were registered on Sunday, police said.

A Kathlal police station official said the FIRs were lodged under IPC sections pertaining to rioting armed with deadly weapons, unlawful assembly, voluntarily causing hurt, intentional insult as well as other offences.

"One FIR was based on the complaint of Jyotindra Bhavsar who said he was out for a walk with friends in his neighbourhood last night when some 20 people attacked them with swords and sticks after accusing them of uploading posts that hurt religious sentiments, leaving two people injured," the official said.

The second FIR was lodged after one Asif Vora complained he and others were attacked last night by some 20 people, leaving the former injured and hospitalised, the official added. **PTI**

# Hope POK Kashmir will become part of India by 2024, says Union Minister

Thane: Union minister Kapil Patil has said that Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) will probably come back to India by 2024 and hailed the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for taking many "bold" decisions for the country.

Speaking at an event in Kalyan city in Maharashtra's Thane district on Saturday night, the Minister of State for Panchayati Raj also said that Modi has not become the prime minister for bringing down the prices of onions and potatoes and suggested that people complain about the rise in the prices of the kitchen staple like onions but buy pizza and mutton. Patil, the BJP MP from the Bhiwandi constituency in the Thane district, quickly added that nobody will support inflation and a rise in prices of essential commodities.

"Only prime minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah can achieve certain things for the country. PM Modi should continue to lead this country as he has taken bold decisions like (bringing) CAA, abrogating sections 370 and 35 A etc. I feel, possibly, Pak Occupied Kashmir (PoK) will come back to India by 2024," he said while delivering a memorial lecture. Patil said that people can afford to buy mutton for Rs 700, pizza for Rs 500-600, "but buying onions for Rs 10 and tomatoes for Rs 40 is costly for us".

"Nobody will support rice in prices. But Narendra Modi has not become the prime minister to bring down the prices of onions and potatoes. If you understand the reason behind the rise in prices of these commodities you will not blame him (Modi)," he said. **PTI**



An artist dressed as Mahatma Gandhi performs outside his Samadhi Sthal on his 74th death anniversary, in Patna on Sunday **PTI**

# 'BJP Govt trying to remove Mahatma Gandhi's ideology'

Jammu: The BJP Government at the Centre is trying to "remove" Mahatma Gandhi's ideology, Jammu and Kashmir Congress president G A Mir alleged on Sunday and asserted that his party will continue to carry forward the philosophy of the father of the nation.

Speaking to reporters after paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at his statue at the Satwari Chowk here on his 74th death anniversary, he said the forces who martyred Mahatma Gandhi on this day in 1948 are the same who are involved in "sabotage" in the country.

"It is unfortunate that Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse is getting weightage over the ideology of Gandhi which is acknowledged by the entire world," Mir, who was joined by other senior Congress leaders and Sewa Dal chief

Vijay Sharma in paying tributes, said. He said Gandhi is the biggest martyr who sacrificed his life for the country.

"It is unfortunate that the central government in its official order on Martyrs' Day omitted his name while dedicating the day to all the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the independence of the nation. We are not against it but January 30 was devoted to Mahatma Gandhi. The BJP basically follows the philosophy of Godse and is trying to remove his ideology," the Congress leader said.

Asked about former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's tweet that "Hindutwadis" feel the father of the nation is no more. But he is alive, where there is truth," Mir said the reality cannot be kept hidden by putting a veil over it. **PTI**

# 8 booked for forcing Dalit man to consume urine in Rajasthan

Jaipur: A 25-year-old Dalit was allegedly abducted, beaten and forced to drink urine by eight men over old animosity in Churu district of Rajasthan, police said on Sunday.

Two accused have been arrested, they said. According to the police complaint filed by victim Rakesh Meghwal, a resident of Rukhasar village, on January 27, the accused abducted him from his house at around 11 pm the previous night and took him to a field in an SUV.

They forced him to drink liquor after which they urinated in the same bottle and forced it down his throat, Meghwal alleged in his complaint at the Ratangarh police station.

He also alleged that the accused used casteist slurs and other derogatory terms saying the Dalits would be taught a lesson for confronting them as

**"It is confirmed that he was beaten up and two accused have been arrested in connection with the matter. The allegation that he was forced to drink urine is yet to be established"**

all of them belonged to an 'influential' community.

The police said injury marks on Meghwal's back confirmed that he had been attacked. "It is confirmed that he was beaten up and two accused have been arrested in connection with the matter. The allegation that he was forced to drink urine is yet to be established," investigating officer and Ratangarh circle

officer Himanshu Sharma said. While two of the accused Umesh and Birbal have been arrested, the others Akshay, Rajesh, Rakesh, Tarachand, Bidadichand and Dinesh are absconding, he said.

They have been booked under Sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 365 (abduction) and 382 (theft after preparation made for causing death, hurt, or restraint) of the Indian Penal Code and under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the officer said, adding that the vehicle used in the crime has been recovered.

According to Meghwal, he was playing a local musical instrument called Chang on Holi during which the accused had passed nasty comments, leading to a confrontation between them for the first time. **PTI**

# Authorities: 1 cr to take holy dip on Mauni Amavasya in UP amid Covid

Prayagraj: Amid the coronavirus pandemic, authorities in Uttar Pradesh expect one crore devotees to take a holy dip in the Ganga and the Sangam here on Mauni Amavasya Monday.

Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra, who reviewed the preparation for the event, said Mauni Amavasya is a very important festival of Magh Mela and people from across the country come here to take a holy dip in the river.

"Tomorrow one crore people are expected to take bath," Mishra said, adding he was satisfied with the arrangements made there for devotees.

The chief secretary said he himself took a bath on Sunday in the Ganga and found that the river flow and the water is

"good". As far as the coronavirus pandemic is concerned, the cases are coming down in the state, he said.

"The rate of infection in the state has come down from 20 percent to 4 percent. As of today, the first dose of vaccine has been given to 99.5 percent of the people in the state while 69 percent of the people have been given the second dose too," he said.

He also said that 65 percent of the children in the age group of 15 to 17 years have also been vaccinated with the first dose. "During my visit here, whoever I asked about the coronavirus vaccine, they told me that have taken both the doses," he said. **PTI**

# Min leaves podium at Bapu's death anniv function in protest against presence of BJP MP

Kolkata: West Bengal Forest Minister Jyotipriyo Mallick on Sunday abruptly left the podium during a function to mark the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in Barrackpore area, refusing to share the stage with BJP MP Arjun Singh.

Mallick, who was seated beside Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, suddenly got down from the stage when the Barrackpore MP arrived.

Asked why chose to step aside, the minister was heard telling the governor, "A professional killer is sitting beside you. In protest, I am leaving the platform. I am sitting with the audience."

# Mallick suddenly got down from the stage when the Barrackpore MP arrived

by unidentified assailants late on Saturday.

While the ruling party alleged the killing was masterminded by Singh, the BJP MP attributed the incident to infighting within the TMC.

BJP leader Bijoy Mukhopadhyay was arrested on Sunday morning in connection with the murder of Majumder, who was shot at and stabbed multiple times while returning home, a police officer said.

"We believe in democracy and non-violence preached by

Mahatma Gandhi. It is the TMC that is unleashing violence on us, and killing its own party members in factional feud," Singh said.

He, however, refused to comment on Mallick's action.

The minister later told reporters, "I was representing the state government as per protocol. But, I could not be seated on the podium with a mastermind of murders against whom we have filed charges and investigation is pending."

"I did not leave the function midway, I remained seated with the audience," he added. BJP leader Debajit Sarkar shot back, asserting that the TMC is making wild allegations, and it has no right to indulge in "character assassination" of a representative of people at a state function. **PTI**





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Bottled storm

Bihar is taking unconventional steps to make prohibition work but who is it helping, really?

The Bihar Government is intent on making its prohibition law work, the growing criticism of its impracticality notwithstanding. To that end, it has decided to rope in additional forces to catch illegal liquor consumers. It has now directed principals, teachers of Government schools and "all persons associated" with them to identify liquor consumers and suppliers in their areas. In return for their services, their identity will be protected. The Government realises that the criminal elements and black-marketeers will not tolerate attempts to disrupt their operations. The call to the teachers comes when the Government is defending itself against judicial criticism of its prohibition policy. The courts are clogged with nearly 3.5 lakh cases and four lakh people arrested till last October. Over 20,000 bail pleas are pending disposal and jails are overcrowded. The Government plans to de-clog the courts by introducing bailable offences and fines for spot disposal of minor cases. It is also under pressure over the frequent deaths of people after consuming poisonous hooch or adulterated liquor. What started as a noble experiment by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to relieve family stress of women by making irresponsible drinking illegal has turned into a controversial exercise with the Opposition charging him with imposing an impractical law. The Government would do well to analyse why the first attempt at prohibition in Bihar in 1979 failed.

Is prohibition aimed at cutting off people's access to liquor to end addiction? High taxes can also serve the purpose. Or can it make people consume liquor responsibly, without destroying families? The former is a law and order approach. The latter has a social outlook. The present situation is that lakhs of people are caught in legal tangles. Most can ill-afford the legal fees. Many would have lost their jobs.

Smuggling of liquor has not been stemmed out. People manufacture spurious liquor and sell it in stealth. Or they go across the Bihar border to satiate their thirst. The police force and the excise machinery are stressed out. Now lakhs of teachers are being drawn into it. If trained police are unable to detect smuggling, how can teachers be expected to succeed? Some time back, they were asked to spy on open defecators. This approach is inexorably leading to a point of no return. And at the end of it all — the policy came into force in 2016 — has the situation improved? Why are reports of corruption and smuggling on the rise? In reality, the State's people have stopped consuming liquor because it is not available and many do not wish to take risks to procure it. It would be interesting to know how many became teetotalers because of a change of heart brought about by the law. Drinking is not a crime; alcoholism is. Should responsible drinkers be punished while trying to reform compulsive drinkers? Also, if the prohibition is for all, why are Army liquor canteens exempt in Bihar? The issues are piling up.

### PICTALK



Competitors line up as they start the Marcialonga cross-country ski race, in Cavalese, Italy

PTI

## Battleground

Ahead of the UP polls, the BJP and SP are busy mudslinging and calling each other names

The election dates approach, the campaign heat is turning up and the war of words in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh is intensifying and, actually, recording new depths. The main players are the ruling BJP and the Samajwadi Party. In its claim to portray a clean house and rake muck at the BJP, SP president Akhilesh Yadav alleges that the BJP has so far fielded 99 candidates with criminal history. "It's just short of hitting a century," he observes. On the other hand, incumbent Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath says the BJP Government is working to protect the masses and instil a sense of safety among them while ensuring that "criminals feel scared" and surrender before the police "with folded hands". When the BJP returns to power, Yogi promises that his "bulldozer policies" against criminals would continue. The war of words between the SP and the BJP has been swiftly escalating on the issue of siding with criminals. While the BJP has been accusing Yadav and his party of patronising people with criminal backgrounds, the latter has sought to know the number of cases filed against Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya.

Accusing the other side of arm-twisting, Yadav claimed last Friday that he was stranded in Delhi as his helicopter was not being allowed to take off for Muzaffarnagar "without any reason given for it". He called it a "desperate conspiracy" of the BJP as "it can sense it's losing" Uttar Pradesh. The BJP, on the other hand, mocked the SP saying the party men's red caps are painted in the blood of victims of Muzaffarnagar riots and 'kar sweaks' shot dead in Ayodhya. Taking his attack a notch further, he said the SP's views are family-centric and Pakistan-centric. Recently, Yadav had said that India's "real enemy" wasn't Pakistan, leading to a battery of assault from the BJP camp, who called him "a friend of Pakistan" and that the SP chief would have given a party ticket to Yakub Menon and made Ajmal Kasab his star campaigner. Both the Chief Minister and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have been repeatedly targeting the party colour's cap. In December last year, addressing a rally in Gorakhpur, the PM had said those in red caps were "red alert" and a "sign of danger" for the State. Earlier, in February, Adityanath had claimed that every child saw those wearing red caps as "goons".

# Turning India into a republic of villages

Most of the gram sabhas and ward committees in our country don't utilise their powers to the full, but things are looking up for the future



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, famously said: "The soul of India lies in its villages." If there are people with no greed, avarice and mentality to cheat others, they can be found only in villages. Villagers do not have any complaint or ill-will towards anybody. Simple rural life, unspoiled by the trappings of modernity, is a real beauty.

The morning cuppa, which comes from the shop in the village square to the accompaniment of gossip, is the ideal way to begin the day. Village panchayat meetings are an extension of the daily *chai pe charcha*. There are no 'points of order' or clauses from Shakti & Kaul to disrupt the proceedings. Panchayat members conduct the sessions in an impeccable style. No tearing up of Bills or running into the well of the House!

The only wordy duel at a panchayat meeting this writer is witness to took place in Angamali, Kerala, back in the 1970s. Ouseph, an elder member, told his interrupting counterpart: "Nee onnum parayanada (You need not speak)." The opposition was on its feet complaining that Ouseph shouldn't have used the word 'Nee' (You). He retorted: "Ridiculous. My evening prayer is *Oh Daivame, Njan Ninne Snehikkunnu* (Oh God, I love you)." The opposition fell quiet.

Despite this old-world charm, the villagers and villages continued to be ignored by masters in State capitals and the national Capital. The villagers remain ignorant of the powers they wield. It was former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who launched the mission to empower villages. The three-tier local self-government system which we see today is the result of his dreams though he did not live to see its realisation.

Though there has been decentralisation of power to local bodies, the villagers are yet to understand the impact of laws. Barring Kerala, there are complaints from other States, like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka,



how the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and women panchayat presidents and members are harassed by upper caste people. The electoral system has reserved 50 per cent seats in local bodies to people belonging to these categories but that has not resolved the issue. Villagers are still ignorant about *gram sabhas* which are capable of overturning Government decisions that harm their wards.

Kerala Finance Commission chairperson SM Vijayanand is of the view that panchayat raj laws need urgent reforms to make the local governance system more effective. He says the system of 50 per cent reservation of local seats for women and SCs/STs should be reformed at the earliest.

Interactions with those elected to such bodies under these categories reveals they were not at all interested in taking up major works in their wards. This is because the 'reserved' ward would become 'general' in the subsequent election and the chances of them getting re-elected become bleak. "A member should get a minimum two-term tenure to undertake major initiatives," Vijayanand told a congre-



DESPIRE THIS OLD-WORLD CHARM, THE VILLAGERS AND VILLAGES CONTINUED TO BE IGNORED BY MASTERS IN STATE CAPITALS AND THE NATIONAL CAPITAL. THE VILLAGERS REMAIN IGNORANT OF THE POWERS THEY WIELD

tion of senior lawyers, judges and panchayat raj members in a seminar held by CG3 (Connecting Governed, Governing and Governance), an initiative to empower local body members. The veteran IAS officer, who is rated as one of the masterminds in the country in the system of power decentralisation, says that those in power dare to bring in anti-people policies because of the failure of *gram sabhas* and ward committees, the "basic units of the Republic".

"What Rajiv Gandhi dreamt of was transferring power to people. He had visualised *gram sabhas* and ward committees as institutions as important as legislatures and Parliament. If these *gram sabhas* and committees do not succeed, the concept of decentralisation also fails," said Vijayanand.

Kerala would not have experienced the deluge and landslides it suffered since 2018 had the local self-governments made use of their power and freedom effectively, he feels. The natural disasters were the fallout of the failure to implement the recommendations of the Madhav Gadgil Committee that was constituted to sug-

gest ways to preserve the sanctity of the Western Ghats, the water tower of South India. Massive deforestation and quarrying had almost robbed the Ghats of rain forests. "Had the local bodies put their foot down, the administration would not have been able to overrule them," he said.

Kylasanadha Pillay, a senior advocate in the Supreme Court who conceived the concept of CG3, disclosed that LAMP (Legal Awareness and Motivation Programme), a mission to take legal awareness to schools and students, has found takers from Kayamkulam in Kerala to Nepal. "Though the workshop for panchayat members has concluded, we are launching the next step of CG3. The members of urban local bodies would be trained in taking up people's causes," said Dr Pillay. He says CG3 was born out of the COVID-induced lockdown. "But we have succeeded in launching a silent revolution to make India a republic of villages," he said. An ideal tribute to the Father of the Nation!

(The writer is a senior journalist with The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### STAY SAFE FROM COVID

Sir — This refers to the report, 'WHO: COVID risk still high, no country out of woods' (January 30). The WHO's cautious advice is appropriate and timely. A weary world wonders whether the COVID-19 pandemic will end this year. The misconceived optimism that the virus will be vanquished by vaccines in 2021 vanished amid the assault of variants. Will the armour of immunity that millions of natural infections and billions of vaccine doses have built over the past 14 months protect against severe disease and death? The virus has surprised us with its adaptability to evade vaccines. Besides, the levels of immunity and susceptibility vary across the world.

As far as India is concerned, we have some reasons to be cautiously optimistic and some others for concern. The optimism springs from the fact that many who weathered the Delta storm and the large number who have been fully vaccinated are likely to experience relatively mild, non-life threatening illness, if infected. In contrast, there are potential threats that we must be wary of. A new variant may arise within the country among unvaccinated persons. It may arise in other parts of the world and enter India, surreptitiously sneaking through our entry point checks.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

### CONFUSION ON HEALTH CONCERNS PERSISTS

Sir — India has completed two years of COVID-19 since the first Coronavirus case was reported in the country and, during this time, it has not just battled the virus but also its mutated variants even as uncertainty continues to surround the expected course of the pandemic. It was on January 30, 2020, when a third-year medical student from Wuhan University tested positive for Coronavirus, becoming the country's first COVID-19 patient, days after she had returned home for semester holidays. Since then, India has suffered three waves of COVID-19, some of which turned out to be lethal.

According to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortia, seven variants of concern have been identified in the last

## Govt owes an explanation



While there was no doubt that the Pegasus spyware was purchased by the BJP Government and used to spy on our constitutional bodies, Opposition leaders, journalists, activists and even the general public, it bungled in the Supreme Court which made the court to constitute an expert committee to inquire into the entire episode. It is shocking to learn from the latest NYT report that India voted in Israel's

favour at the UN after the deal to buy the spyware. If it is proved right, it will expose the real intention and despicable motive of the BJP Government in purchasing the software.

Though Syed Akbaruddin, the then Indian permanent representative to the UN, has rushed to assert that he unilaterally took the important and sensitive decision to vote in favour of Israel, it is indigestible and makes the issue murky. It appears that the Government purchased the spyware well before the 2019 general elections. When the entire nation was terribly upset with the anti-people policies of the BJP Government, the results in favour of the party with such brute majority not only surprised the voters but left them with many unanswered questions. Many suspected the EVMs were the main culprit. One is now convinced that if the NYT report is true, the Pegasus spyware must have also played a crucial role in the elections to help the ruling dispensation.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

two years in India — Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, B.1.617.1 and B.1.617.3, AY series and Omicron. Of these, Delta and Omicron have been found to be the most dangerous, with the former driving the second wave of COVID-19 while the latter is behind the ongoing third wave. Vaccination remains the best possible solution to tackling the Coronavirus variants. But there is no clarity about when the pandemic will finally become endemic in India. India is still in danger and in a serious situation.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### PETTY POLITICS & ITS PIVOTAL ROLE

Sir — Indian selectors don't seem to have a plan when it comes to selecting a team. They knew they had to make some changes, given the South African drubbing. But to bring in Kuldeep just doesn't make sense. Even UP, his home State, didn't select him. Is he even match fit? There are plenty of left-arm spinners who

excelled recently, including Sai Kishore. You don't need a 'Chinaman' bowler to win matches. Instead of just banking on home umpires, pitch and the toss, we should have rational thinking and work hard to remove the 'home tigers' tag.

When you have a small total to defend and the so-called fast bowlers are not good enough, start with spin to make the opposition batter play at all balls. The batting order is not stable all the time. As per the situation, the batters need to be rotated. We just back placid pitches to bring out our batting potential, though we lose wickets regularly while chasing. Our shortcomings are well and cleverly covered up whereas, when we tour overseas, we find the going tough. Petty politics by our captain and ex-coach made a mess of the situation.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUND BITE

The training I got in NCC and the things I learnt there have provided me immense strength in delivering upon my responsibilities.

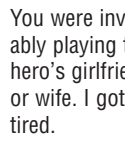


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



There won't be a war as far as it depends on the Russian Federation.

Russian Foreign Minister — Sergey Lavrov



You were invariably playing the hero's girlfriend or wife. I got tired.

Actor — Lara Dutta Bhupathi



The BCCI has decided to conduct the Ranji Trophy this season in two phases.

BCCI secretary — Jay Shah



I'm confident that under the Tata Group, Air India will regain its lost place...in international skies as well.

Union Minister — Jyotiraditya Scindia





## FIRST COLUMN

### BANK RETIREES' PENSION WOES

The Finance Minister must walk the talk on this critical issue



S KALYANASUNDARAM

When the Special Leave to Appeal (C) No(s). 5561/2016 was taken up by the Supreme Court on January 20, bank retirees were hopeful of getting some favourable orders for their pension updation, which is lingering for three decades. But to their disappointment, the case was directed to be listed after three months as the counsel appearing for the respondent(s) including Indian Banks' Association, submitted that the Committee considering the representation/claim of the petitioners and similarly placed persons is yet to be reconstituted.

Until 1993, the bank employees were having contributory provident fund scheme without any pension scheme. On October 29, 1993, an industry-level settlement was arrived at between Indian Banks Association and Bank Employees unions and this paved the way for introduction of pension scheme in lieu of Contributory Provident Fund as in RBI. A similar joint note was signed with federation representing officers



also. Para 12 of the said settlement provided for formation of a small committee consisting of representatives of IBA and unions to work out details on similar lines as RBI pension regulation and Central Civil Services Pension Rules applicable to Central Government employees.

The said Small committee said in 1994: "Formula for updating pension should be on the lines of the same given in the Reserve Bank pension scheme. Any change therein should be introduced only after mutual agreement."

However, though Reserve Bank of India has permitted updation of pension for their employees, the bank pensioners are drawing their pension without any revision for the past three decades.

When the matter was represented to the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, she has expressed her concern in an interview in October 2020 and again in a talk the following month: "I want bank employees to be given their due. A lot of pensioners are waiting for very long time. Yesterday, I had meeting with Rajkiran Rai of IBA. I spoke to him, too. We need bank employees to be attended to, particularly their families and the pension of retired employees"

Though it was informed a committee has been formed by Indian Banks Association, nothing has happened on the ground. When Government employees' pension is paid out of every year's tax receipt - it is a tax on people. Bank retirees' pension is paid out of profit generated by banks. Adequate provision has already been made to pay upto the last pensioner as per existing pension rules. If pension updation is conceded, only additional amount has to be appropriated out of profits. It is not necessary that provision has to be made at one go as the RBI may permit to amortize the expenditure over a period of five or more years.

Without any updation of pension, the bank pensioners in their 70s, 80s and 90s are having a miserable life. The retirees are paying three months of their pension just to have medical insurance as the banks are simply arranging group insurance but leaving the premium payment to individuals.

The past retirees are drawing a pittance as pension. Persons retired as general managers in the past are drawing lesser pension than a clerk who is retiring now on account of non-revision of pension.

Above all, the Indian Banks Association has not recognized any of the Retirees' Association and there is no body to represent the retirees with the banks. Employees' unions represent only working staff and they have their own issues to discuss and settle.

Even after one and half years, the Finance Minister's concern has not been addressed by the banks. Senior retired bankers expect her to walk the talk.

(The writer is a retired banker. The views expressed are personal.)

# Cut I-T, create more jobs to drive economy



SHIVAJI SARKAR

### FM has to prioritise nation's growth and the promised \$5 trillion economy and involve and inspire the Indian private sector to create quality jobs

People have a major expectation. Two years back on September 20, 2019, less than 40 hours before prime minister Narendra Modi's Houston event, the government announced a massive corporate tax rate cut, lowering the base rate to 22 per cent from 30 per cent, and to 15 per cent from 25 per cent for new manufacturing companies. Till such time individual and tax rates were in sync.

Now people want that synchronisation is re-established. The individual income tax rates remain very high at 42 per cent and 30 plus 3 per cent. It robs an income tax payee of a lot of his or her income. The aspiration is that it be lowered to 20 to 22 per cent, possibly to around 17 per cent to help generate demand. The aspiration is because of the difficult three years of Covid-19 uncertainty, job losses, income contraction and severe inflation at 14.6 per cent.

The Finance Minister has her problems of constricted finances, not the desired growth or rather uneven growth instead of a high trajectory that could have generated jobs, increased demand, boosted production and paved the way for demand.

The FM should also think of incentivising savings by asking RBI to raise interest rates. If she does, it would bring back the sustained growth pattern and strengthen Indian families come out of the crisis.

If this happens, the government would not have to resort to free food, edible oil and other doles to 80 crore people or 61.54 per cent of the population. It is a benevolent approach but could have been avoided if the families had the financial strength to face the crisis.

The FM now should through various policy formulations try to empower the families. It may help the country reduce these expenses in the next four to five years helping the country to invest in many projects and create demand.

The budget would invest in many metro, infra projects, healthcare, railways and ports. It also may take up the issue of regulating crypto currencies. Last year, the new National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), with a capital base of ? 20,000 crore and a lending target of ? 5 lakh crore over a three-year horizon was set up. In five years, it targets Rs 111 lakh crore investment.

NaBFID chairman KV Kamath says that it would require Rs 80 lakh crore in 2022-23 to kickstart big ticket projects like high-speed railways, airports, ports, highways, river interlinking for the national infra pipeline. Infra is critical and risky both. Highway investments may go up by 35 per cent. The ASEAN had gone bust with high infra investment. It aims to make it up by further asset sales of the PSUs.



THE FM MAY OPEN A NEW LEAF. INDIA HAS THRIVED WITH A MIXED ECONOMY. THE PSUs HAVE THE CAPACITY TO START A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR ABHORS. NO NATIONAL ECONOMY CAN THRIVE WITHOUT COMPETITION WITHIN. MONOPOLISED PRIVATE OR PUBLIC SECTOR WOULD CAUSE INBREEDING LEADING TO POOR PERFORMANCE

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)



It has to lay special emphasis on agriculture. Procurements are on the rise but still unable to satisfy farmers. The budget proposes to increase loan limit to Rs 18 lakh. Various infra funding, healthcare, agriculture, small businesses would depend heavily on banks, which are certainly not so comfortable. As per RBI, banks have Rs 8.35 lakh crore NPA. Even there are plans to allow youth to have loans from banks for entrepreneurship. Looks good. But MUDRA loans' record is not that bright. Bad debts for Mudra loans have spiked for PSBs, and, at the end of 2018-19 (FY19), stand at 9.3 per cent of advances. There has been 71 per cent jump in the number of MUDRA loan accounts that have turned non-performing assets (NPA) in Gujarat in 2021.

The Budget has also to refocus on jobs and changing lifestyles to defuse a social time bomb. Two recent incidents indicate the magnitude of the impending crisis. One is the death by freezing of a Gujarati family of four while trying to illegally enter the United States in order to escape their adverse economic realities in India. The other is the recent round of protests over railway jobs in Bihar and UP where millions applied for roughly 40,000 vacancies. It is a grim reminder that the sheer size of unemployment.

The unemployment rate rose a four-month high to 7.9 per cent in December 2021. It stood at 7 per cent in November last year and 9.1 per cent in December 2020. But jobs were shrinking

even before that in 2019 and earlier. World Bank says that India has the highest total unemployment rate at 21.01 per cent for the 15-24-year-old population.

The jobs have to be the priority in a country where the number multiplies every day. The covid-19 lockdown is the immediate cause. Blaming any government for this criticality is not wise. As a nation somewhere the political parties are found to be clueless. The NITI Aayog supposedly tasked to suggest like its predecessor Planning Commission is not apt in hitting the nail on the head.

The Gujarati family was apparently well off with a teacher's job and sundry other chores. It could pay \$2.5 lakh for their dream travel through agents for illegal entry to the US. What sparked them like many Gujaratis and Punjabis rushing to El Dorado may be aspirational "lifestyle". In 2007, Babubhai Katara, MP, was caught trying to smuggle a Punjabi woman and her son for Rs 30 lakh to the US. His party suspended him.

What triggered Bihar and UP problem is lack of jobs. Once private sector jobs were considered well-paid. The seventh pay commission changed that. Now for years the corporate, including the IT, are not creating the required number of jobs. And jobs fetch lower wages and remain insecure.

Bihar has about 13 per cent unemployment. UP had 5.41 per cent unemployment in May-August 2021 against 3.75 per

cent in March 2017. The job strategy has to change. An interesting aspect is that because of the Narendra Modi government's less interference in PSU operations, even in the difficult Covid times, 171 PSUs continued to have good profits despite better salary structure. This indicates that proper salaries can be paid even during crisis periods and profits can be achieved. But that also calls for reviewing the PSU disinvestment policy. The world has seen the failure of the global private sector for unethical practices since the 2007-08 Lehman meltdowns.

The FM may open a new leaf. India has thrived with a mixed economy. The PSUs have the capacity to start a competitive economy that the private sector abhors. No national economy can thrive without competition within. Monopolised private or public sector would cause inbreeding leading to poor performance. She has to be innovative enough to help create rural farm and non-farm jobs that make the rural economy viable and lifestyle attractive to stem rural migration.

The private sector also has a tendency to employ less and pay less. If jobs are to be a priority this policy has to be given up. The PSUs can deliver if encouraged. The FM has to think in terms of the nation's growth and a promised \$5 trillion economy. In the new scenario, she has to involve and inspire the Indian private sector to create quality jobs and make them capable of competing with their international rivals.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

WHY WAS BHATTACHARJEE SUDDENLY CHOSEN BY THE BJP? THE MOVE WAS AIMED AT SECURING LEFT VOTES IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. —TMC SPOKESPERSON KUNAL GHOSH



BHATTACHARJEE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO SOCIETY AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS. THE DECISION WAS OBVIOUSLY TAKEN WITHOUT ANY POLITICAL MOTIVE. —BENGAL BJP PRESIDENT SUKANTA MAJUMDAR

# Budget: Building a case for the infrastructure sector

### For post-pandemic recovery to gain momentum, the upcoming Budget must frontload infrastructure investments

With inflation trending upwards, unemployment on the rise, demand lagging in some sectors, and the threat of the Omicron variant on the rise across the world, we analyze the various trends that would impact the direction, the government would have to take with the upcoming budget.

Infrastructure sector is a key driver for the Indian economy. The sector is highly responsible for propelling India's overall development and enjoys intense focus from Government for initiating policies that would ensure time-bound creation of world class infrastructure in the country. Infrastructure sector includes power, bridges, dams, roads, and urban infrastructure development. Over the past seven years,



VAIBHAV DANGE

(The writer is an independent expert & commentator on infrastructure and economy. The views expressed are personal.)

infrastructure in India has expanded at rapid pace significantly bringing change in the lives of citizens and boosting the local economy. While the infrastructure construction record of MODI government has been undisputed, the government shall have to ensure this year too budget gives impetus to this pace of infrastructure development in the country.

While there have been some signs of economy coming back on growth trajectory, it should be emphasized that as the threat of a third Covid wave looms large, the economic recovery remains fragile. Therefore, in ascertaining that any recovery gains momentum, the upcoming Budget must frontload infrastructure investments.

This is particularly needed because the states contribute



almost 40% of the total infrastructure investments in India. But due to pandemic-related disruptions, the states have high fiscal deficits and are hit with liquidity issues. Therefore, the Centre needs to shoulder more of the burden of raising funds to drive infrastructure investments and projects. But the infrastructure sector should be sanctioned on priority in the Budget because any delay will impact the possibility of a faster economic revival.

Industry associations have already recommended that public investments in agri-infrastructure be increased while healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP should be raised to 20 per cent for building hospitals, training institutions and suchlike across India.

Given the Centre's focus on its Atmanirbhar Bharat mission, infrastructure development can be vital in moving steadily towards achieving these goals. The Centre will be better placed in raising funding investments for the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP). Projects worth Rs 44 lakh crore are already being implemented as part of the Rs 111 lakh crore NIP, with the latter amount slated to be spent by 2024-25.

Meanwhile, projects worth Rs 22 lakh crore (or 20 per cent

of NIP) are under development stages. But proper and timely implementation is indispensable if ambitious objectives are to be met. The NIP framework currently comprises 39% investment by the Centre, 40 per cent by states and 21 per cent from the private sector. Considering the present market conditions, any shortfall from either of the other partners may require that the Centre fill the deficit for NIP goals to remain on track.

Significantly, under NIP, among others, Rs 25 lakh crore has been allocated for the energy industry, Rs 20 lakh crore for highways, Rs 16 lakh crore for irrigation, rural agriculture and food processing, Rs 16 lakh crore each for Railways and mobility, respectively, and Rs 14 lakh crore on digital infrastructure.

Given the Government's

thrust on infrastructure spending to revive the economy, the FY2023 budgetary outlay remains crucial to complete the Government's ambitious Bharatmala and allied programmes in a timely manner. Budget is expected proposed increase capital outlay by 25-30 per cent. With an increase in the budgetary allocation the pace of asset monetisation is expected to get momentum. Markets are also expecting a clear funding roadmap for the ambitious NIP and asset monetisation pipeline for NMP is spelled out in budget. The availability of long-term infrastructure financing continues a challenge, given the problems faced by commercial banks of asset-liability mismatch and high share of stressed assets.

It is estimated that weak

infrastructure imposes a huge cost on business to the tune of 3-4 per cent annually. That means, an infrastructure thrust directly boosts GDP growth by around 3-4 per cent. That is because infrastructure investment has a huge multiplier effect downstream. Finally, The infrastructure sector expects Budget 2022-23 continues government's focus on Infrastructure and as suggested by Rakesh Mohan committee addresses Sustaining spending on physical infrastructure, Monetize income-earning infrastructure assets, Develops robust and dynamic debt market for infrastructure funding and Special incentives for use of modern technology. This shall almost guarantee growth that finance ministers expects this year.



# N Korea tests longest-range missile since 2017

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Sunday fired what appeared to be the most powerful missile it has tested since President Joe Biden took office, as it revives its old playbook in brinkmanship to wrest concessions from Washington and neighbors amid a prolonged stalemate in diplomacy.

The Japanese and South Korean militaries said the missile was launched on a lofted trajectory, apparently to avoid the territorial spaces of neighbors, and reached a maximum altitude of 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles) and traveled 800 kilometers (497 miles) before landing in the sea.

The flight details suggest the North tested its longest-range ballistic missile since 2017, when it twice flew intermediate-range ballistic missiles over Japan and, separately, three intercontinental ballistic missiles that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland. Sunday's test was North Korea's seventh round of launches this month.

The unusually fast pace of tests indicates its intent to pressure the Biden administration over long-stalled nuclear negotiations as pandemic-related difficulties put further stress on an economy broken by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.

South Korean President

Moon Jae-in called an emergency National Security Council meeting where he described the test as a possible "mid-range ballistic missile launch" that brought North Korea to the brink of breaking its 2018 self-imposed moratorium on the testing of nuclear devices and longer-range missiles.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi also told reporters that the missile was the longest-range the North has tested since its Hwasong-15 ICBM in November 2017.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un chaired a ruling party meeting on Jan. 20, where senior party members made a veiled threat to lift the moratorium, citing what they perceived as U.S. hostility and threats.

The latest launch suggests Kim's moratorium is already broken, said Lee Choon Geun, a missile expert and honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

In his strongest comments toward the North in years, Moon said the situation around the Korean Peninsula is beginning to resemble 2017, when North Korea's provocative run in nuclear and long-range missile testing resulted in an exchange of war threats between Kim and Trump.

Moon said the North's latest moves violated U.N. Security Council resolutions and were a "challenge toward the international community's

efforts to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula, stabilise peace and find a diplomatic solution" to the nuclear stand-off. The North "should stop its actions that create tensions and pressure and respond to the dialogue offers by the international community including South Korea and the United States," Moon said, according to his office.

Moon had ambitiously pushed for inter-Korean engagement and held three summits with Kim in 2018 while also lobbying to set up Kim's first summit with Trump in 2018, where they issued vague aspirations for a nuclear-free peninsula.

But the diplomacy derailed after the collapse of the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said Sunday's missile flew for around 30 minutes and landed in waters outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. There were no immediate reports of damage to boats or aircraft.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the United States condemned North Korea's testing activity and called on Pyongyang to refrain from further destabilizing acts. It said the latest launch did not "pose an immediate threat to U.S. Personnel, territory, or that of our allies." Takehiro

Funakoshi, director-general for Asian and Oceanian Affairs at Japan's Foreign Ministry, discussed the launch in separate phone calls with Sung Kim, Biden's special envoy for North Korea, and Noh Kyu-duk, South Korea's nuclear envoy. The officials shared an understanding that Sunday's missile was of enhanced destructive power and reaffirmed trilateral cooperation in the face of the North Korean threat, Japan's Foreign Ministry said.

Experts say the North could halt its testing spree after the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics next week out of respect for China, its major ally and economic lifeline. But there's also expectation that it could significantly up the ante in weapons demonstrations once the Olympics end in February to grab the attention of the Biden administration, which has been focusing more on confronting China and Russia over its conflict with Ukraine.

"North Korea is launching a frenzy of missiles before the start of the Beijing Olympics, mostly as military modernization efforts. Pyongyang also wants to boost national pride as it gears up to celebrate political anniversaries in the context of economic struggles," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"It wants to remind Washington and Seoul that trying to topple it would be too costly. By threatening stability

in Asia while global resources are stretched thin elsewhere, Pyongyang is demanding the world compensate it to act like a responsible nuclear power," Easley added.

North Korea has justified its testing activity as an exercise of its rights to self-defense and threatened stronger action after the Biden administration imposed fresh sanctions following two tests of a purported hypersonic missile earlier this month. While desperate for outside relief, Kim has showed no willingness to surrender the nuclear weapons and missiles he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Analysts say Kim's pressure campaign is aimed at forcing Washington to accept the North as a nuclear power and convert their nuclear disarmament-for-aid diplomacy into negotiations for mutual arms-reduction.

Kim last year announced a new five-year plan for developing weapons and issued an ambitious wish list that included hypersonic weapons, spy satellites, solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched nuclear missiles.

State media said Friday that Kim visited an unspecified munitions factory producing a "major weapons system," and that the workers pledged loyalty to their leader who "smashes with his bold pluck the challenges of U.S. Imperialists and their vassal forces."

## Iraqi air strikes kill nine IS militants, including 4 Lebanese

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Airstrikes north of Baghdad in retaliation for an attack by the Islamic State group on an Iraqi army barracks earlier this month killed nine suspected IS fighters, including four Lebanese, officials said Sunday.

IS gunmen in Iraq broke into a barracks in the mountainous al-Azim district outside the town of Baqouba on Jan. 21, killed a guard and shot dead 11 soldiers as they slept.

It was one of the boldest attacks by the militants in recent weeks and came amid an uptick in violence that stoked fears the group has been re-energized.

Yehia Rasool, the spokesman for Iraq's commander in chief, said the joint military operations room and the air force identified the cell behind the attack as its members hid in al-Azim. Three airstrikes were launched that killed the nine militants, he said.

A security official told The Associated Press that four among the killed were Lebanese, natives of the northern town of Tripoli. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

Tripoli is Lebanon's second largest city and the country's most impoverished. It has been prone to violence and militants who, inspired by the Islamic State group, launched attacks against Lebanon's army in 2014 in the most serious bout of violence in the city.

As Lebanon faces an unprecedented convergence of crises, including a swift descent into poverty, many fear militants may seek to exploit discontent among the city's majority Sunni residents.

IS was largely defeated in Iraq in 2017. The group was dealt a final blow in 2019 when it lost its last territory in southeast Syria during the U.S.-led military campaign in cooperation with Syrian Kurdish-led forces.

But thousands of militants melted into the desert and have continued to wage attacks, frequently hitting security forces and military with roadside bombs and firing on military convoys or checkpoints in both countries.

## Undeterred NSO says criticisms 'hypocritical', blacklisting by the US will be rescinded

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's embattled cyber tech company NSO Group has denied wrongdoing as it called criticism of its sale of Pegasus spyware programme to non-democratic countries "hypocritical," comparing the surveillance technology to military weapons systems.

Being sold by others, amid mounting allegations that software was misused globally, including in Israel. An undeterred Chief Executive Officer of NSO Group, Shalev Hulio, in an interview to Israeli Channel 12 on Saturday, strongly defended the company's operations, though he also conceded that some "mistakes" may have happened over the years.

"I absolutely sleep soundly at night," Hulio told the Channel's interviewer when asked if he can do so amid so much worldwide criticism.

Hulio's interview came a day after a New York Times report on Friday claimed that India bought Pegasus spyware as part of a USD 2 billion defence deal with Israel in 2017, triggering a major controversy with the Opposition alleging that the government indulged in illegalsnooping that amounted to "treason".

"There is not one country we've sold to, not one... that the US doesn't sell to, or that Israel doesn't sell to. So it's a bit hypocritical to say it's okay to sell F-35s and tanks and drones, but it's not okay to sell a tool that collects intelligence," Hulio said, defending the company's position.

He also pointed out that out of almost 90 clients that turned to them for the technology, they sold only to around 40 as per laid down norms.

In reaction to the blacklisting of the company by the US Department of Commerce in November, the company's senior most executive called it an "outrage" that he hopes will be lifted soon. "Our technology has over the years helped the interests and national security of the United States quite a bit," he claimed. "I think the fact that a company like NSO is on [a US blacklist] is an outrage... I'm sure we'll be taken off that list. I have

no doubt." The NSO Group and its controversial Pegasus technology, which has grabbed attention of governments and people worldwide with allegations of misuse in India as well, was blacklisted by the US Department of Commerce for acting "contrary to the foreign policy and national security interests of the US" last year in November.

Israel distanced itself from the controversy triggered by the blacklisting of the NSO Group after allegations of illegal use of its Pegasus spyware to target government officials, activists and journalists globally, saying it is a private company and it has nothing to do with the policies of the Israeli government.

In India, a row had erupted last year over Pegasus allegedly being used for targeted surveillance in India. An international investigative consortium had claimed that many Indian ministers, politicians, activists, businessmen and journalists were potentially targeted by the software.

The Indian government, however, had dismissed allegations of any kind of surveillance on its part on specific people. Last October, the Indian Supreme Court set up a three-member independent expert panel to probe the alleged use of Pegasus for targeted surveillance in India, observing the state cannot get a "free pass" every time the spectre of national security is raised and that its mere invocation cannot render the judiciary a "mute spectator" and be the bugbear it shies away from.

In his interview, Hulio also denied that Pegasus was used to hack the phone of French President Emmanuel Macron. He also denied any link between the company's products and the killing of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Gulf Kingdom's consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

"It's become something of a national pastime to blame anything that happens on NSO. A large part of reports are simply untrue, are prejudiced, and it certainly sometimes angers [me] and sometimes frustrates. But in the end... we know truth," the CEO asserted.

## Sudanese take to streets in latest anti-coup protests

AP ■ CAIRO

Thousands of protesters took to streets of Sudan's capital and other cities across the country Sunday for the latest in a months-long string of demonstrations denouncing an October military coup that plunged country into turmoil.

Protesters, mostly young men and women, marched in the streets of Khartoum and other cities, demanding an end to military's takeover. They called for a fully civilian government to lead country's now-stalled transition to democracy. The coup has upended Sudan's transition to democratic rule after three decades of repression and international isolation under autocratic President Omar al-Bashir.

The African nation has been on a fragile path to democracy since a popular uprising forced military to remove al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019. The protests are called by the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Resistance Committees, which were backbone of uprising against al-Bashir and relentless anti-coup protests in past three months. Footage circulated online showed people beating drums and chanting anti-coup slogans in streets of Khartoum and its twin city Omdurman.

Protesters were also seen carrying Sudanese flags and other flags with photos of protesters reportedly slain by security forces printed on them.

There were protests elsewhere in the country including the eastern city of Port Sudan, western Darfur region and Madani, the capital city of Jazira province, about 135 kilometers (85 miles) southeast of Khartoum.

Medani saw a massive anti-coup protest last week. Ahead of protests, authorities stepped up security in Khartoum and Omdurman. They deployed thousands of troops and police and sealed off central Khartoum, urging protesters to assemble only in public squares in capital's neighborhoods.

The United Nations mission in Sudan on Saturday warned that such restrictions could increase tensions, urging authorities to let protests "pass without violence." Protest groups said they were planning to head to presidential palace, an area in capital that has seen deadly clashes between protesters and security forces in previous rounds of demonstrations. Since coup, at least 78 people have been killed and hundreds of others wounded in a widely condemned crackdown on protests, the Sudan Doctors Committee, which tracks casualties among protesters, said.

## Kuwait suspends Iraq flights after Baghdad airport attack

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Kuwait suspended flights to Iraq for a week starting Sunday citing security fears after a rocket attack targeted Baghdad international airport. Iraqi authorities, meanwhile, announced an attacker had been apprehended.

Kuwait Airways, the country's main carrier, said in a statement Saturday that flights to Iraq were temporarily suspended based on instructions from the Kuwaiti Civil Aviation Authority due to "current conditions."

Six rockets struck the Baghdad airport last week damaging two commercial planes belonging to Iraqi Airways, the main national airline.

The incident marked an escalation in rocket and drone attacks often targeting the U.S. and its allies, as well as Iraqi government institutions. The attacks have been blamed on Iran-backed militia groups.

Iraqi authorities said in a statement late Saturday they had apprehended a person allegedly behind the airport attack.

The individual was arrested at a checkpoint near northern province of Kirkuk en route to Irbil in the Kurdish-run semi-autonomous region. The statement provided no further details.

## Argentina rejects UK's deployment of new weapons to Falklands

IAN S ■ BUENOS AIRES

Argentina has expressed strong opposition to the UK's recent installation of new anti-aircraft weaponry on the disputed Falklands Islands.

The Argentine Foreign Ministry noted that the Sky Sabre ground-based air defense system newly deployed on the South Atlantic archipelago triples the range of the former Rapier system, reports Xinhua news agency.

Argentina "rejects in the strongest terms the new deployment of British military weapons in the Malvinas Islands", over whose sovereignty the two countries have been locked in a dispute and fought a war in 1982, the Ministry added.

Argentina calls the disputed islands as Malvinas. The recent deployment is "a new and unjustified show of force and a deliberate departure" from the calls of the UN and other international organisations for a peaceful and definitive solution to the sovereignty dispute, added the Ministry.

The South American country also stressed that "the alleged defensive status of the British military base in the South Atlantic is not only totally unjustified, but also represents a threat to the

entire area". Located off Argentina's southern Atlantic coast, the islands have been controlled by the UK since 1833, but Argentina insists on having sovereignty over the islands, which it deems as a vestige of colonial rule.

The larger march would arrive in Islamabad in the last week of February, he said. Farmers across Pakistan have faced a severe shortage of fertilisers, especially urea.

President of the opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif has said the people who feed the whole country are protesting helplessly and the government is nowhere to be found.

The entire nation would suffer if the government does not come to the farmers' aid immediately, he said. The opposition leader said that after sugar and gas, urea has also become a luxury in the country under the incumbent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, the report said.

The government should ensure the availability of urea to the growers at reasonable prices, he added. Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also plans to lead a march on Islamabad at the end of February, while the Pakistan Democratic Movement has announced one for March 23.

## Farmers in Pak announce plans to march in Islamabad

IAN S ■ JAN

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, a leading farmers body, has announced plans to march in Islamabad to protest against the shortage of agricultural inputs, including urea, and the economic hardships faced by farmers, Samaa TV reported. The march would begin from Multan on February 14, the body announced on Saturday.

Kissan Ittehad Chairman Khalid Mehmood Khokhar said that several marches would be staged across the country in February, and they would eventually converge in Multan to proceed towards Lahore and Islamabad. The larger march would arrive in Islamabad in the last week of February, he said. Farmers across Pakistan have faced a severe shortage of fertilisers, especially urea. President of opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif has said people who feed whole country are protesting helplessly and government is nowhere to be found.

## Portugal picks new Government with \$50B of EU funds on table

AP ■ LISBON

Portuguese voters went to the polls Sunday in an early election that looked set to produce another vulnerable minority government, just as the country is poised to start spending a huge windfall of European Union funds.

That outcome would leave Portugal back where it started two months ago, when lawmakers rejected the minority Socialist government's spending bill and the country's president dissolved parliament.

The center-left Socialists and their main rivals, the center-right Social Democratic Party, were in a tight race, opinion polls suggested.

Those two parties traditionally collect around 70% of the vote and have for decades alternated in power in Western Europe's poorest country. The landslide victory needed to form a majority government, which can pass most legislation despite opposition in parliament, is rare. Portugal has had just three majority govern-

ments in the past half-century. That means one of the two main parties likely will have to form parliamentary alliances by cutting deals with smaller parties. The stakes are high: Portugal, a country of around 10.3 million people, is poised to begin deploying some 45 billion euros (\$50 billion) of aid as a member of the EU to help spur the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic. Two-thirds of that sum is intended for public projects, such as major infrastructure, giving the next government a financial bonanza. The other third is to be awarded to private companies.

The ballot took place amid a surge in COVID-19 cases blamed on the omicron variant, with about 1.2 million people confined at home but allowed to go to polling stations to cast their vote. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, in an election-eve address to the nation, urged people to vote, saying it is "a way of saying that... Nothing, and nobody, can silence our voice." He said the coming years would be marked by

"leaving behind a painful pandemic (and) an urgent rebuilding of the economy," Miguel Morgado, a 49-year-old company manager voting in Lisbon, the capital, said he wasn't worried by the high coronavirus infection rate and hoped the country would soon be back to normal.

"Above all it is our civic duty to vote, the country needs it," he said. "No matter what we believe in, we must vote." By midday, 23.3% of registered voters had cast their ballot, up from 18.3% at the same time of day at the last election in 2019, official figures showed.

Since it came to power in 2015, the Socialist Party had relied on the support of their smaller allies in parliament — the Left Bloc and the Portuguese Communist Party — to ensure the annual state budget had enough votes to pass. But last November their differences, especially over public health spending and workers' rights, were insurmountable, leaving Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa short of

votes to pass his party's plan. Costa could seek to resurrect the left-of-center alliance, despite some acrimonious exchanges during the election campaign.

The Social Democrats, meanwhile, may have to deal with a surge in support for the Chega! (Enough!) populist party, whose policies Social Democratic Party leader Rui Rio finds distasteful. The Social Democrats have also in the past joined forces with the smaller Popular Party.

The Socialist Party promises to increase the minimum monthly wage, earned by more than 800,000 people, to 900 euros (\$1,020) by 2026. It is currently 705 euros (\$800). Low wages are a common grievance among voters.

The Socialists also want to "start a national conversation" about working four days a week instead of five. The Social Democratic Party is promising income tax cuts and more help for private companies, cutting corporate tax from the current 21% to 17% by 2024.)

## British 'hitman' found guilty of trying to kill Pakistani dissident

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

A British "hitman" has been found guilty of conspiring to kill a Pakistani dissident in the Netherlands, the BBC reported. A court in London heard that Muhammad Gohir Khan was offered about \$134,000 to carry out the murder in Rotterdam last year.

However, he failed to track his target down, and was arrested on his return to the UK, the BBC report said.

Now a jury has given a unanimous guilty verdict of conspiracy to murder and he is set to be sentenced in March.

The intended victim, Waqas Goraya told the BBC that he is sure the Pakistani intelligence services were ultimately behind the plot and that it forms part of a wider crackdown on dissenting voices both inside and outside

## Australian Defence Force deployed to airdrop supplies to flood-hit region

IAN S ■ CANBERRA

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has been deployed to deliver essential supplies to flood-stricken parts of South Australia (SA). Steven Marshall, the Premier of SA, on Sunday announced that the ADF will fly 20 tonnes of food and supplies into the town Coober Pedy in the state's north on Monday ahead of a forecast extreme weather, reports Xinhua news agency.

"We are very grateful to our friends in the Australian Defence Force who have been helping South Australia, first with the bushfires of course, then with our response to coronavirus and now with these extreme weather events," Marshall said. The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) has warned parts of SA's north to brace for up to 200 mm of rain in the next three days with a forecast peak on Tuesday, potentially cutting remote towns off from rest of state.



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea. AP Photo



# Govt mandates storage of ISD, satphone, conference calls, messages details for 2 years

**New Delhi:** The Government has mandated storage of international calls, satellite phone calls, conference calls and messages made over normal networks as well as on the internet for a period of at least two years, according to circulars issued by the telecom department.

The move follows an amendment made in the unified licence (UL) in December by the Department of Telecom (DoT) which extended storage of call data records as well as internet logs to two years from earlier provision of one year.

UL holders are telecom companies like Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio, Vodafone Idea, BSNL for providing all kinds of telecom services, except satellite phone services.

"The licensee shall maintain all commercial records, call data record, exchange detail record, IP detail record with regard to the communications exchanged on the network. Such records shall be

archived for at least two years for scrutiny by the licensor for security reasons and may be destroyed thereafter unless directed otherwise directed by the licensor," the circular dated January 27 for voice mail, audio-text and unified messaging service license said.

The amendment applies to companies like Tata Communications, Cisco's Webex, AT&T Global Network, etc who have subscribed to these licences. The DoT made amendments in ILD licence on January 25 which besides extending an additional one year for maintaining call detail records includes provision for storing details of international communications made using internet protocol.

A similar amendment has been issued for licence issued to BSNL for providing satellite phone calls and data services as well as for VSAT licence holders who provide satellite based services on January 24 mandating them to maintain call data and internet communications records for at least two years. **PTI**

# Eyes on GDP forecast by Economic Survey despite recent misses

**New Delhi:** The pre-budget Economic Survey, which is tabled in Parliament ahead of the Union Budget to present the state of the economy and suggest policy prescriptions, quite often misses on the GDP forecast, sometimes by a significant margin.

This time, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the Economic Survey for 2021-22 in the Lok Sabha on Monday soon after the President's Address to both Houses of Parliament. She will present the Union Budget for the next financial year beginning April 1, 2022, on Tuesday.

One of the most-watched numbers in the pre-Budget Economic Survey, authored by a team led by Chief Economic Advisor (CEA), is the projection of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the next fiscal. The previous economic survey was presented in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ray of optimism as

the country recovers from the impact of the pandemic is likely to figure prominently in the current year's economic survey. However, various high-frequency indicators like GST collections and corporate profitability are pointing towards significant upward movement.

Just days before the presentation of the Economic Survey, the government appointed economist V Anantha Nageswaran as the new CEA. Nageswaran, an academic and former executive with Credit Suisse Group AG and Julius Baer Group, succeeds K V Subramanian, who demitted the office of CEA in December 2021 after the completion of his three-year term.

The Economic Survey for 2021-22 is expected to give a growth projection of around 9 per cent for the next financial year as Asia's third-largest economy is showing signs of recovery from the pandemic.

The last survey, presented in

January 2021 amid the Covid pandemic, had projected the economic growth for 2021-22 at 11 per cent. However, India's statistics ministry has estimated the economic growth at only 9.2 per cent for the current fiscal. The economy had contracted by 7.3 per cent during 2020-21 as against the projection of 6-6.5 per cent in the Economic Survey presented in Parliament months before the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in 2020.

Economic activities were severely impacted as India imposed a strict lockdown in the latter part of March 2020 to check the spread of the virus. The government and the Reserve Bank of India rolled out several measures to support the economy. The Economic Survey 2018-19 had estimated the GDP growth for fiscal 2019-20 at 7 per cent. However, the economy expanded by only 4 per cent, missing the target by a wide margin. **PTI**

# Bank of America cuts expected US GDP growth rate

**Washington:** Bank of America slashed its projection for the first quarter US economic growth from 4 to 1 per cent on Friday because of disruptions caused by the Omicron coronavirus variant. Economists at Bank of America told clients in a report that they expect US gross domestic product (GDP) to rise at an annual rate of 1 per cent during the first quarter, as "risks of a negative growth quarter are significant", Xinhua news agency quoted a GNN Business report as saying. "That would break a streak of six consecutive quarters of growth that began in the summer of 2020," said the report. Meanwhile, the Atlanta Federal Reserve's GDPNow forecasting model, released on Friday, projected a 0.1 per cent growth in the first quarter, a rapid slowdown from the 6.9 per cent annual rate of growth during the final quarter of 2021. **PTI**

# Govt extends term of IPO-bound LIC's chairman for one year

**New Delhi:** The government has extended the tenure of chairman of IPO-bound Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) by one more year with a view to facilitate smooth listing of the insurance behemoth, sources said.

Besides, the government has also extended the tenure of one of the managing directors, Raj Kumar, for one year.

With the extension, M R Kumar will continue as chairman of LIC till March 2023, the sources said.

This is the second extension for the LIC chairman. Last year in June, he was given a nine-month extension in a view of LIC's proposed initial public offering towards the end of the current financial year.

The government had extended the term of M R Kumar from June 30, 2021, till March 13, 2022, the date when he

completes three years, the sources said.

The government is looking to list LIC during the current financial year in line with the Budget announcement.

In her Budget Speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said the initial public offering (IPO) of LIC will be floated in 2021-22 as part of the ambitious Rs 1.75-lakh crore disinvestment target.

The government owns a 100 per cent stake in LIC. Once listed, it is likely to become the country's biggest company by market capitalisation with an estimated valuation of Rs 8-10 lakh crore.

Meanwhile, the government has significantly increased the authorised capital of LIC to Rs 25,000 crore from Rs 100 crore to facilitate the listing. **PTI**

# India's Q3 manufacturing outlook improves, cost of doing biz remains cause for concern: FICCI

**New Delhi:** The outlook for India's manufacturing sector seems to have improved in the October-December 2021 quarter even as the cost of doing business remains a cause for concern and hiring prospects remain subdued, according to a FICCI survey.

The findings of the latest quarterly survey on manufacturing unveiled on Sunday also reflect sustained economic activity in the sector, with existing average capacity utilisation in the range of 65 to 70 per cent.

It also highlighted that manufacturers are looking forward to the upcoming Union Budget to enhance growth and investments in the sector. The Budget will be presented on February 1.

The percentage of respondents reporting higher production in the third quarter of 2021-22 (October-

December 2021-22) was around 63 per cent, almost double than the year-round period (around 33 per cent), noted FICCI.

This assessment is also reflective in order books as 61 per cent of the respondents in October-December 2021-22 had a higher number of orders as against July-September 2021-22, the survey found.

High raw material prices, high cost of finance, the uncertainty of demand, shortage of working capital, high logistics cost, low domestic and global demand due to supply chain disruptions are some of the major constraints that are affecting the expansion plans of the respondents, it said.

The survey assessed the performance and sentiments of manufacturers for Q3 (October-December 2021-22) for 12 major sectors name-

ly automotive, capital goods, cement, chemicals, fertilisers and pharmaceuticals, electronics & electricals, medical devices, metal & metal products, paper products, textiles, textiles machinery and miscellaneous. Responses have been drawn from over 300 manufacturing units from both large and SME (small and medium enterprise) segments with a combined annual turnover of over Rs 2.7 lakh crore.

Around half of the participants expect a rise in their exports for Q3 2021-22 as against the same quarter of the previous year. "Hiring outlook for the manufacturing sector remains subdued as around 75 per cent of the respondents mentioned that they are not likely to hire additional workforce in the next three months," FICCI stated on the survey. **PTI**

# MRPL Q3 profit rises to ₹969 crore

**Mangaluru:** The Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) posted a net profit of ₹969 crore during the third quarter of 2021-22 against a loss of ₹76 crore in the corresponding period in 2020-21.

The gross revenue from operations stood at ₹25,238 crore during Q3 of 2021-22 against ₹14,136 crore in the third quarter of 2020-21. Multiple initiatives have been taken to improve revenue from marketing margins in domestic, exports and business-to-business (B2B) arrangements, a company release here said.

The gross refining margin (GRM) of the company stood at ₹9.29 a barrel during Q3 of 2021-22 as against ₹3.26 a barrel in the corresponding period of the previous year. GRM is the difference between the price of crude oil and the end products.

The throughput of the refinery was 4.37 million tonnes (MT) during the reporting quarter as against 3.08 MT in the corresponding period in 2020-21. The company achieved crude throughput of 116.44 per cent in capacity utilisation.

Highest production of polypropylene and petrol was achieved in October and December of Q3 of 2021-22. Highest dispatch of LPG was also achieved during the quarter.

The management has assessed the potential impact of COVID-19 based on the current circumstances and expects no significant impact on the continuity of operations of the business on long-term basis, on useful life of assets and on long-term financial position, the press release said. **PTI**

The company informed the stock exchange that demand for petroleum products was lower during the first half of 2021-22 due to Covid-19 related lockdowns, resulting in lower crude throughput

MRPL commissioned a desalination plant in December 2021 that will mitigate one of the major risks faced by the company with respect to water availability. Besides this, new HSD (high-speed diesel) tanks, along with the new HSD coastal line to jetty, were commissioned during the quarter.

The company informed the stock exchange that demand for petroleum products was lower during the first half of 2021-22 due to Covid-19 related lockdowns, resulting in lower crude throughput.

However, the demand for petroleum products has improved during the third quarter of 2021-22 as compared to previous quarter of the current fiscal, resulting in higher throughput.

The management has assessed the potential impact of COVID-19 based on the current circumstances and expects no significant impact on the continuity of operations of the business on long-term basis, on useful life of assets and on long-term financial position, the press release said. **PTI**

# AGS Transact to list today

**Mumbai:** Leading payment solutions provider AGS Transact Technologies, which has completed a ₹680-crore share sale over eight times subscription last week, is listing on Monday with debut trade taking place on the BSE. The IPO, which was carried out through an offer for sale, received bids for 22.35 crore shares against an offer of 2.87 crore, translating into a subscription of 8.22 times, the company had said after the issue was closed on January 21.

The retail demand stood at 3.25 times, qualified institutional buyers 2.82 times, and the non-institutional category received 27 times subscription. It had earlier raised ₹204 crore from anchor investors. The ₹680-crore issue saw promoters and other selling shareholders divesting stakes at a price band of ₹166-175.

AGS Transact is an integrated omnichannel payment solutions provider providing customised products and services comprising ATM and cash-recycling machines outsourcing, cash management and digital payment solutions including merchant solutions, transaction processing services and mobile wallets.

Through the offer-for-sale (OFS), promoter Ravi B Goyal had sold shares worth ₹650 crore, but the company informed exchanges that he pumped the entire money back into the company by subscribing to CCPS or compulsorily convertible preference shares on January 29. As a result, the debt-to-equity ratio and the debt-to-operating profit ratio have now become strong, which will lead to substantial savings of financial costs, thereby improving profitability, it said.

AGS leads the domestic ATM industry. It has over 80 banking partners and services 72,000 ATMs/ cash-recycling machines, and has over 2.2 lakh points of sale machines. **PTI**

# Child suffering from mental disorder entitled to family pension: Union Min

**New Delhi:** Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Sunday said a deceased Government employee's child, who is suffering from a mental disorder, is entitled to a family pension. He said this public reiteration was needed because the Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare has noticed that in some cases banks are not allowing family pension to such children and are insisting on a guardianship certificate from courts.

Singh, the Union Minister of State for Personnel, emphasised that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi the Government follows the mantra of good governance to provide "ease of living" for the common man. In that spirit, the provision of nomination for family pension is intended to avoid any hassle for a child, suffering from a mental disability, in obtaining guardianship certificate from the court or in claiming family pension after the death of his/her parents, Singh said.

Therefore, insisting on a guardianship certificate by a bank in such cases defeats the very purpose of such nomination and also amounts to violation of the statutory provisions of Central Civil Service (Pension) Rules, 2021, the minister said. Chairman and managing directors of all pension disbursing banks have been advised to issue suitable instructions to their centralised pension processing centres/pension paying branches for payment of family pension to a mentally retarded child through the person nominated by the government servant/pensioner/ family pensioner under the statutory provisions of the rules and not to insist for a guardianship certificate, Singh said.

The Department of Pensions has introduced many path-breaking reforms including relaxation in the provision of family pension for divorced daughters, the introduction of face recognition tech through a mobile app for ease in submitting life certificates by elderly pensioners among others, Singh added. **PTI**

# Saregama India plans to invest up to ₹750 cr in music biz

**Kolkata:** Saregama India, a part of RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group, is planning to invest up to Rs 750 crore in its music business to achieve a 25-30 per cent revenue growth in the next few years through organic and inorganic routes, an official said.

It is also foraying into a new business segment of artist partner programme to launch their music videos and audios on its platforms with an arrangement of sharing revenue, he told analysts.

"The fund (of up to Rs 750 crore) is only for the music business. This is not going to be used for our films or our Carvaan business. Other businesses are well capitalised and they will be able to manage to run on their own.... Our projection of 25-30 per cent revenue growth that we are giving is a combination of both organic, new content purchases, and some inorganic purchases," the official said. **PTI**

# India steel output grows 18% to 118 MT in 2021

**New Delhi:** India's crude steel production rose by nearly 18 per cent to 118 million tonne (MT) in 2021, while world leader China recorded a 3 per cent decline to 1 032.8 MT, according to worldsteel.

India, which is the second largest steel producing nation, had manufactured 100.3 MT steel in 2020 and China had produced 1 064.7 MT of steel in the same year, World Steel Association (worldsteel) said in its report. "Total world crude steel production was 1,950.5 MT in 2021, a 3.7 per cent increase compared to 1 880.4 MT in 2020," the global industry body said.

According to the report, in 2021, Japan produced 96.3 MT steel as against 83.2 MT in 2020. The United States' output was at 86 MT compared to 72.7 MT a year ago. **PTI**

# Employee engagement in tech sector hit the most by Covid, says report

**New Delhi:** Employee engagement and retention has emerged as the worst-hit aspect of organisations in the technology sector amid the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a report.

The other four aspects impacted the most by the pandemic were revenue, client engagement, new clients & projects, and employee productivity, the report by PeopleAsset, an executive search & talent advisory firm, said.

The report said that in a survey of senior leaders across functions and industries, 88.9 per cent of leaders agreed that Covid-19 has had a profound impact on their organizations, with the same number observing that employee engagement and retention were the hardest hit.

When it comes to employee engagement, the organisations are facing the challenges of lack of sense of association with the organization, reduced interconnectedness, communication, team collaboration, and work-life balance, the report said.

A record number of people around the world, especially in the tech industry, have begun to quit their jobs, causing the unprecedented problem of employee turnover, it noted. This ongoing crisis has created a large supply-demand imbalance as companies fail to meet their talent needs. However, the dynamics of the employment market are changing. Companies are finding that location barriers are disappearing for knowledge-based work in the post-Covid world, it noted.

The report noted that 'pandemic stress' has increased dramatically as employees work from home and are often isolated. For organizations, the COVID crisis has highlighted the need to focus on the mental health and well-being of employees.

Around 69 per cent of the employees surveyed said they value working for organizations that have specific plans focused on improving the physical and mental well-being of employees, the report based on responses of senior leaders across functions and industries said. **PTI**

# Western Coalfields supply 19 MT coal to Mahagenco, says Govt

**New Delhi:** The Government on Sunday said Coal India arm WCL has supplied 18.96 million tonnes of coal to Mahagenco against the prorated contracted quantity of 18.68 million tonnes up to Saturday this fiscal.

The annual contracted quantity of coal to Mahagenco which is agreed by Western Coalfields Ltd (WCL) under the Fuel Supply Agreement (FSA) is 23.14 million tonnes (MT).

"Against the prorated contracted quantity of 18.68 million tonnes up to 29th January, 2022, WCL had supplied 18.96 million tonnes of coal, the materialisation of which is at 101.5 per cent of the contractual commitment," the coal ministry said in a statement. As per the flexi-utilisation plan, Mahagenco has the option to distribute the quantity despatched from the coal companies to any of its power sta-

tions. WCL also endeavour to make power station-wise distribution of allocation of coal as per the priorities indicated by Mahagenco.

"The despatch to Chandrapur Super Thermal Power Station (CSTPS) during the current month (up to 29th) is 8.96 Lakh tonnes against the prorated Monthly Contracted Quantity of 9.13 Lakh tonnes, at 98 per cent materialisation level," it said.

Thus, currently, WCL is supplying the contracted quantity of coal to CSTPS under the FSA. In addition to the FSA, Mahagenco has also entered into a MOU with WCL for supply of 83.20 lakh tonnes of coal against bridge linkage. Supplies under bridge linkage is on best effort basis by the coal companies of Coal India Ltd (CIL) and the supplies in bridge linkage are till such time the power generator is

able to meet its fuel requirement from the captive mine allocated to it.

As per the MOU, this quantity is to be lifted by Mahagenco by road mode. Mahagenco has lifted 43.50 lakh tonnes by road against the bridge linkage. However, against the total allocation against bridge linkage, Mahagenco had made distribution of only 2.61 lakh tonnes of coal to CSTPS.

Mahagenco could have increased the allocation of coal lifted against the bridge linkage to CSTPS to build up the stock. Nevertheless, WCL is making all efforts on SOS basis to boost the supplies and to build up the stock at CSTPS. CIL is also taking steps to ensure movement of 3 rakes per day from MCL to Mahagenco, besides facilitating movement of rakes against the coal lifted by Mahagenco from SECL through washery circuit. **PTI**

**GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR**  
**DIRECTORATE OF FLORICULTURE SRINAGAR KASHMIR**  
 Tel-0194-2474234 Fax - 2482032 - email :- kashflori@rediffmail.com

**Gist of e-Tender Notice No. 46 of 2022 Dated: -28/01/2022**  
 For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of J&K UT, e-tender is invited from interested parties/persons for Outsourcing of entry ticketing system of Shaheed Park, Pulwama of Floriculture Department Kashmir as per details given below:-  
 The participants have to quote their bid amount in the concerned BOQ:-

| S. No. | Period of contract                         | Reserve Bid (Rs. in Lakhs) | Value of security deposit | Cost of Tender Document          |
|--------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.     | 01 year from the date of award of contract | 11,82,000/-                | 1,18,200/-                | 1000/- in the shape of e-challan |

The bidding document (s) consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions and other details can be seen/downloaded through the Departmental website [www.dirflorikmr.in](http://www.dirflorikmr.in) / [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in) as per schedule of date given below:-

|    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Period of downloading of bidding document    | 29.01.2022 from 01.00 PM to 18.02.2022 up to 02:00 PM |
| 2. | Bid submission Start Date                    | 29.01.2022 from 03:00 PM                              |
| 3. | Bid submission End Date                      | 18.02.2022 up to 02:00 PM                             |
| 4. | Date and time of Opening of Tenders (Online) | 21.02.2022 at 02:00 PM                                |

The security deposit money exceeding 2% shall be adjustable towards approved bid amount in favour of the successful bidders. The CDR's of the bidders who offer below the reserve bid shall be forfeited.  
 In case of any eventuality, the date of opening will be considered on any other convenient working day.  
**Sd/- Accounts Officer (Member secretary)**  
 No. DIPP-17308/21 Dated:- 29-01-2022

**Government of Jammu & Kashmir**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR**  
 Telefax No. :- 0194-2496089, Email Id:- xennmhchdk@yahoo.in

(Short Term)  
**GIST OF E -NIT NO: MHCHD/TS /2021-22/303/e-tendering Dated:-28-01-2022**

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, J&K UT e-tenders are invited from registered/reputed/experienced firms with J&K Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the below mentioned work:-  
**Name of Work:- Repairs/replacement works to G+3 Techno Make Lift at Mini Secretariat Ganderbal.**  
**Est. Cost (in Rs.) :- 73000/-, Cost of T/Doc. (In rupees) :- 200, Time of completion (in days) :- 05, AA Accorded Vide No :- DDCG/NFB/2020-21/8446-49 Dt:02-03-2021, TS.NO :- 193 of 01/22 (AEE-3rd), Earnest Money (in Rupees) :- 1500**

- The Tender document Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in) from 28-01-2022 (18.00 hrs).
- The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site from 29-01-2022(10.00 hrs) to 03-02-2022(14:00 hrs) in two (02) cover.
- The bids uploaded on the website up to due date and time will be opened on 03-01-2022(16.00 hrs) or any date convenient to the department in the office of Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar.

No. DIPP-17257/21 Dated:- 28.01.2022

**Sd/- Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar**





peers, online learning can also cause a lack of communication skill development in students.

**UNICEF report: Out of 250 million students 8.5 per cent have internet access**

All enrolled children who were not able to attend online classes faced multiple challenges. A survey by ASER (an autonomous assessment, survey, evaluation and research unit within the Pratham network) confirms anecdotal accounts of students facing hurdles in access to mobile phones, connectivity and even electricity. Bigger challenges have been faced by students whose families fall under the below poverty line (BWL) as they find it difficult to arrange online classes.

**Can India make a complete switch to online education?**

Before the pandemic hit the globe, countries were progressing towards ensuring that, by 2030, children would at least complete primary school education. Keeping in mind the GDP statistics of India and poverty as a serious issue, it would be easy to argue that online education is easily not accessible to most people.

As per the NCERT survey, at least 27 per cent of students do not have access to smartphones or laptops to attend online classes, while 28 per cent of students and parents believe that lack of electricity is one of the major concerns. In such a situation, it becomes difficult for students to cope with everyday assignments and live sessions.

According to the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey, titled *Locked Out: Emergency Report on School Education*, involving 1,362 school children from underprivileged homes in 15 states and UTs, 37 per cent in rural areas are not studying at all and 48 per cent can't read more than a few words.

**Summary**

Online learning across the globe saw a great spike due to covid norms, with multiple ed-tech startups offering new-age courses, online learning paved its way to the system and holds a strong position today. The most affected by this change of learning pattern are underprivileged students, as they do not have basic backup resources.

India, despite being one of the major players in the world of online learning, there is still a large gap in technology literacy and affordability in the population. Until such gaps in society exist, online education will not be able to reach all students. Therefore, it's important that we look at online learning as an addition, rather than as a replacement for the traditional mode of education.

(The author is founder president and CEO, AROH Foundation.)



**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Mind pollution has led to moral degradation in society, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

A little reflection on the recent political affairs in India and its neighbouring countries would enable anyone to identify and understand the factors that are causing high pollution in the national atmosphere of these countries. According to experts, the conflict and confrontation between these countries were due to expansionist thinking and the tendency to grab more land from the other side. Had there been no prejudice and misunderstanding between the top leadership of these countries, then they might have had some kind of reconciliation through mediation by other country heads or through diplomatic talks. But their prejudices made even minor issues as prestige issues and they fought bitterly among themselves even when the national economy had suffered badly.

In India too, there has been a great scramble for power in many states, which is visible on national television nowadays. On one hand, we see that the opposition party of a state wants to grab power at the earliest and on the other hand the ruling party is trying its best to retain power.

Most of these political groups who earlier proclaimed that they believed in value-based politics, became ready to throw all values to the winds and to ask legislators and MPs of other political parties to defect to join their groups or to form another party to have some kind of alliance. This has now become a very common practice in politics, whereby every party wants to repeat its performance in states where it scored high in the last elections. And for that, they go to any extent without bothering about values or ethics. However, in this whole merry-go-round, each party has their prejudices against each other and some parties even consider the opposition as politically untouchable and hence they are deeply prejudiced against them.

In the ultimate analysis, it can be said that all of these are deeply involved in party politics and have forgotten matters of national interests and national security. They also do not care much for the interests of the poor, the down-trodden and the backward classes for which they had been crying hoarse. These groups never worry that fresh elections would cost the national exchequer very heavily and would consume the time and energy of thousands of policemen, supervisors, etc. However, they always worry about the costs they or their party will have to incur in case of new elections. In short, the party interest and the lust for power and prestige are so deeply rooted in them that they hate each other and yet they are willing to work together cordially for the sake of power.

Why is the state of the nation as bad as it is now? Why is the national atmosphere so polluted? What are all these factors such as lust for power, party politics, prejudices due to? Why have intelligent people fallen so low? Why is everyone selfish or narrow-minded? Well, a deep and practical study would reveal that this situation prevails not only in politics but also in other fields like religion, where prestige and position become an issue and truth is sacrificed for it. Similarly, in business, people consider money as power and they, therefore, run amuck towards that power. In the academic field, people consider degrees, diplomas and prizes as tokens of power, position, prestige and honour and, therefore, they work towards that end. It is thus a matter of pity that, deprived of spiritual and moral power, they run desperately in this rat race and, ultimately, go empty-handed, leaving degrees and rupees behind. Deep thinking on this issue would lead us to the conclusion that it is ignorance about the self that has resulted in the loss of self-respect and contentment. And it is this loss that has led man to run after short-lived attainment of worldly power, position and prestige.

It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that man should attain knowledge of the self and have a feeling of self-respect. There is no other solution to this turmoil.



**AN ONLINE SHIFT**

Accessibility of classes will remain an issue till the time the basics are made available to the underprivileged, says DR NEELAM GUPTA



and colleges. These changes in the pattern are making students ready for the job sector and allowing each student to explore their passion and creativity from a network of global educators and also connecting students across India to the international job market.

E-learning gives students a comfortable space and ability to learn from any

place and allows more flexible schedules, especially when they wish to take up classes apart from school. The immediate transition from offline learning was smoothly adapted to by the teachers and many students. However, some underprivileged students found it tough to cope with this new change because of the limited resources available to them.

**The dark side of online learning**

Online learning glues young children to screens for more than 12 hours a day which could be alarming for parents. It can cause social isolation which might lead to other serious issues including mental health disorders, stress and anxiety. Due to the lack of face-to-face communication between

The education industry that was once majorly focused on theoretical learning has now taken a practical turn and is strongly leaning towards soft skills. To add to this, the need for upskilling and reskilling too has grown as an important trend in the education sector.

Online education was already making its presence felt in the Indian education system but with the pandemic hitting the globe, it transformed from an option to a necessity for students. As per the survey conducted, the online education market in India is set to garner a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of almost 20 per cent by the end of 2025. There has been a revolutionary change in a majority of the schools and colleges with the introduction to online or hybrid learning.

**Is online learning an advantage for GenZ students?**

Generation Zees are more curious, creative and spontaneous. They are climbing a long and innovative academic ladder through major transformations in learning patterns. Online education for young kids comes with many additional benefits attached to it apart from following Covid restrictions. Students can expose themselves to tons of information and courses available online by many upscaling ed-tech startups and online educators.

Unconventional courses such as clinical research, blockchain, data management, UX/UI are still exclusive for on-campus students and provide multiple professional assistance, which is a step forward from the regular schools

Sunita Bhosle, who is at the forefront of the fight to protect the Pardi community's self-esteem, has been recently awarded the Karyakarta Puraskar (Activist Award) by the Maharashtra Foundation — a charitable organisation established under the laws of the United States and committed to the basic humanitarian principles of freedom, equality, secularism and human rights enshrined in the American Constitution. Her autobiography, *Vinchavacha Tel* (scorpion oil), is the tale of her struggle. In this article, I, as a co-writer of the book, evoke some memories from the creative process of the book.

All of us like to tell stories about ourselves. However, Bhosle's life struggle is no less dramatic than a film or a play and is certainly worth recounting. She speaks breathlessly, without a pause, like a bursting spring. She doesn't allow a breather so much so that even though she spoke in Marathi, I had difficulty understanding. For me, the issues of caste, exploitation, injustice and atrocities weren't new. My father, professor G V Rupavate, while studying in college, lived in a hostel for Dalit students. It was established by Dadasaheb Rupavate, an Indian politician, Ambedkarite, social activist and newspaper editor from Maharashtra. His was the second

**Voice of the marginalised**

Activist SUNITA BHOSLE has lived an extraordinary life, says PRASHANT RUPAWATE, co-author of her autobiography *Vinchavacha Tel*

batch of students. In the first batch were luminaries like writer Daya Pawar (his memoir *Baluta* is considered a milestone in Dalit literature), scholar Raosaheb Kasbe and Madhukar Pichad, who was a minister in the Maharashtra assembly.

My father was involved in social movements and activist writers like Lakshman Mane, Parth Polke held meetings in our house. So, even though I was exposed to several movements and thoughts, when I heard Bhosle's, I was shaken from within. I decided that her account needed to be made public. There was a need to expose the dark and heinous side of the so-called great, tolerant and vibrant culture which denies any civility to the groups living on the edges and from it *Vinchavacha Tel* took shape.

I went to Shirur to meet her. We caught up at the cluttered and oily canteen in the State Transport Corporation's Shirur Depot. She started speaking like a torrential flow and began narrating the *bundi* incident (*bundi* is a sugared and fried ball of chickpea flour). "It was May and really hot



even at eight in the morning. By 10 o'clock, the temperature would rise to 35°F. It was also the wedding season and I got to know of one which was to take place at Kalvantwadi, around 2 km from our place. I went there with my younger brother, Avinash. We were waiting for hours in front of the wedding hall near the garbage bin. The wedding feast was in full swing from the morning till 4:00 pm. We would run to the garbage bin once the plates were thrown there, shoo away the stray dogs and collect the *bundi* in a plastic bag. All this while we worried about being shooed away by the police. Hence, we kept the packets of *bundi* hidden under a tree. When we went there after some time, the packets were gone. The stray dogs had taken them away. The hard work we had put in was wasted. We couldn't stop crying and hearing those, people from the wedding hall came out. After listening to us, they understood the real situation and they generously gave us fresh *bundi*," narrated Bhosle.

I was engrossed in Bhosle's riveting account when the TV set in the canteen started telecasting the news about the successful launch of the Mangalyaan Mission. The Prime Minister, while congratulating the scientists at the Srihari Kota spaceport, was proud of the great and

glorious culture of ancient India. That was the moment when I found it imperative to bring the ancient and 'glorious legacy' of India in which Bhosle lived before the world.

We titled the book *Vinchavacha Tel* because it reflects the exploitation Bhosle's community is subjected to. Scorpion oil is used as a weapon against any accused, from a 'low caste'. They apply this oil to the genitals of the accused man which causes them to swell and burning of the genitals. The accused is not able to endure the pain and pleads guilty. This is similar to an attack on creativity. Society has used this oil as a weapon against the Dalit, the dispossessed and nomads. It's used in various metaphorical forms to evoke caste divides or at times to further the agenda of divide and rule.

Sunita belonged to the caste living on the edges. She was born into a tribe branded as 'criminal'. She had to face violence and discrimination since childhood. But she's brave and started speaking out against the criminalisation and exploitation of Phase Pardi since she turned 11. *Vinchavacha Tel* is the life story of this fiery and self-made activist.

(Translated by Alka Gadgil.) — Charkha Features

**It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. —Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

**SCIENTISTS FIND MOVEMENTS ON MARS**

Scientists at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad have spotted thousands of tracks on the surface created by tumbling boulders. These boulder tracks can be used to pinpoint recent seismic activity on the planet as humans become more and more interested in the Red Planet with plans to develop colonies in the near future. "Mars is currently active," says Dr S Vijayan, Assistant Professor with the Planetary Science Division at the Physical Research Laboratory, who led the research.



The study published last month in *Geophysical Research Letters* states that it takes about two to four Martian years (four to eight Earth years) for these boulder tracks to disappear, whereas on Earth they are rarely preserved. These ejections and tracks can be used to recognise very recent surface processes on planetary surfaces.

**COMMUNICATION AMONG FISHES**

Fishes are far more likely to communicate using sound than generally believed and some of them have been doing this for at least 155 million years, recent research has found. The research has been published in the *Ichthyology and Herpetology Journal*. "We've known for a long time that some fish make sounds," said lead author Aaron Rice, a researcher at the K. Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "But fish sounds were always perceived as rare oddities. We wanted to know if these were one-offs or if there was a broader pattern for acoustic communication in fishes," he added.



The authors looked at a branch of fish called the ray-finned fish. These are vertebrates (having a backbone) that comprise 99 per cent of the world's known species of fish. They found 175 families that contain two-thirds of fish species that do, or are likely to, communicate with sound.

**SOLVE PUZZLES TO ADVANCE CANCER RESEARCH**

Scientists have just launched GENIGMA, a videogame that scientists players to solve puzzles while generating real-world scientific data that can detect alterations in genomic sequences and ultimately advance breast cancer research. The game was created to boost worldwide research efforts that depend on cancer cell lines, a critical resource used by scientists to study cancer and test new drugs to treat the disease. One of the limitations of cancer cell lines is a lack of high-resolution genome reference maps, which are necessary to help researchers interpret their scientific results.



The game, on iOS and Android and available in English, Spanish, Catalan and Italian, is the result of a two-and-a-half-year long citizen science project developed by a team of researchers at the Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG), the Centro Nacional de Analisis Genómico (CNAG-CRG) and game professionals. The game was created to boost worldwide research efforts that depend on cancer cell lines, a critical resource used by scientists to study cancer and test new drugs to treat the disease.

**DNA HAS A MAJOR ROLE IN BLOOD STEM CELLS**

A new study has found a protein that masterminds the way DNA is wrapped within chromosomes has a major role in the healthy functioning of blood stem cells, which produce all blood cells in the body. The study has been published in the *Nature Cell Biology Journal*. The protein, histone H3.3, organises the spool-like structures around which DNA is wrapped in plants, animals and most other organisms. Histones enable DNA to be tightly compacted and serve as platforms for small chemical modifications — known as epigenetic modifications — that can loosen or tighten the wrapped DNA to control local gene activity. The study examined H3.3's role in blood stem cells, also known as hematopoietic stem cells (HSCs), that are a major focus of efforts to develop stem-cell-based medicine.



**COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH**

On Vancouver Island, the Nanwakolas Council, a group of five member First Nations, is working to restore an ecosystem hit by climate change. As the rivers have warmed, the salmon that spawn in Knight Inlet have declined which means fewer bears and an unhealthy forest. As we see in *Ice and Fire: Tracking Canada's Climate Crisis*, a documentary from The Nature of Things, by building new channels of cool fresh water, the council hoped to increase the number of salmon spawning in the area.



The council enlisted University of Victoria behavioural ecologist Melanie Clapham and her BearID Project to find out if the animals are returning. BearID — a citizen, or community, science — allows anyone to take a photo of a bear and send it to Clapham. Using facial recognition software, the researchers can determine if the bear is new to the area and track its movements over time.



# RAVI WREAKS HAVOC AS INDIA OUST BANGLADESH

PTI ■ COOLIDGE (ANTIGUA)

Left-arm seamer Ravi Kumar bowled a sensational opening spell as India's 'class of 2022' exacted a sweet revenge, ousting defending champions Bangladesh by five wickets to enter the semi-final of ICC U-19 World Cup here on Saturday.

India will meet Australia in the semi-final on February 2, having won an unprecedented seven out of nine U-19 World Cup quarter-finals.

Son of a CRPF personnel, the Uttar Pradesh-born Ravi, who has followed footsteps of his illustrious state senior Mohammed Shami to ply his trade for Bengal, ended with excellent figures of 7-1-14-3 on a tacky track as Bangladesh were all out for 111 in 37.1 overs.

Bangladesh were 56 for 7 at one stage before SM Mehrob (30) and Ashiqur Zaman (16) added 50 for the eighth wicket to take the team past 100-run mark. In reply, India chased down the target in 30.5 overs with opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi's 44 being the top-score.

Skipper Yash Dhull scored a chiselled 20 not out and his deputy Shaik Rasheed making 26 as the victory was even more satisfying considering the youngsters came back without any training post recovery

from COVID-19.

It was a fitting reply from the 'Boys in Blue' to the 'Tiger Cubs' after their senior batch lost an ill-tempered final of 2020 edition which was followed by boorish behaviour from both sides, especially Bangladeshis, whose reactions has always been over the top when it came to beating India.

For the current batch, the win was also necessary after they were beaten twice by this same side last year during a four-nation meet in Kolkata.

India won a good toss and Ravi made full use of the moisture underneath with initial movement in the air helping team's cause.

Ravi, who has the natural ability to bring the ball back into right-handers, had right-handed Mahfijul Islam (2) beaten all-ends up to an inswinger in the second over.

His opening partner left-handed Iftakher Hossain (1) was done in by the slowness of the track as he tried to square cut and was held at point by vice-captain Shaikh Rasheed.

One drop batter Prantik Nawrose (7) was not at all comfortable during his stay and was late into the drive to a delivery that swung away only to offer a catch to Kaushal Tamble in the slips.

Down at 14 for 3 in the eighth



over, there was no coming back for Bangladesh boys as they started losing wickets at regular intervals.

Left-arm spinner Vicky Ostwal (9-1-25-2) was consistent as ever

with his flight and dip which was not very easy for the opposition batters.

However if anyone deserves the credit for restricting Bangladesh to

a manageable total, it is Ravi, who till few months back, was another outstation cricketer, plying his trade in Kolkata club cricket.

The 18-year-old had his share

of twists and turns before he became the pace spearhead for India colts in the tournament.

In fact, talking to officials in Cricket Association of Bengal

(CAB), it was learnt that left-arm pacer who played for Ballygunge United had come for U-16 Bengal trials in 2019 but was rejected after he failed to clear the TW3 (Bone test for age verification) test.

However a good CAB T20 league tournament for Kanchenjunga Warriors got him into Bengal U-19 reckoning as former India opener and national selector Devang Gandhi and assistant coach (bowling) Jayanta Ghosh Dastidar worked with him.

In fact, when Vinoo Mankad (U-19) National One Dayers was being held, the grapevine is that the feelers sent from local state association was to watch out Ravi's pace bowling partner Debopratim Halder, who was considered a better prospect.

But national selectors' attention was caught by Ravi, who was then inducted into the India U19 Challengers Squad.

"He is a very hardworking boy and if you ask me, Devang worked a lot on his mental aspect. Also his biggest asset is the ability to get the ball to swing in to the right handers."

"That is his stock delivery and he works that ball a lot in the nets," Ghosh Dastidar, who was a student of Dennis Lillee at the MRF Pace Foundation's first batch, alongside Javagal Srinath and Ashish Winston Zaidi, told PTI.

## Ali leads England to 34-run win over West Indies in 4th T20

AP ■ BRIDGETOWN

Stand-in captain Moeen Ali smashed seven sixes and took two wickets as England beat West Indies by 34 runs in their fourth Twenty20 game to level the series at 2-2 with one match left.

Ali, who was again leading England with Eoin Morgan out of the series with a quad injury, hit 63 off 28 balls on Saturday as the tourists added 59 in the last three overs to post 193-6. Opener Jason Roy contributed 52 off 42 deliveries at the Kensington Oval.

Spinner Ali went on to take 2-28 from four overs as West Indies was held to 159-5. Opener Kyle Mayers top-scored with 40 off 23 and Jason Holder smashed 36 off 24 with two fours and three sixes.

The fifth and final game is on Sunday in Bridgetown.



It was an explosive finish to England's innings, with Holder (3-44) clubbed for four successive sixes by Ali in the 18th over.

The hosts required 61 from the final 24 balls but Chris Jordan

(0-30), brought back alongside Sam Billings after missing Wednesday's loss, and Reece Topley (1-21) held their nerve at the death to ensure the five-match series goes to the wire.

Roy, dropped on three by Holder in the second over, shared an 85-run stand for the second wicket with James Vince (34) after England lost the toss and was asked to bat first.

England's innings appeared to have lost momentum, adding just 54 from 48 deliveries to sit at 134-3 from 17 overs, before Ali decided to get after Holder and the play worked spectacularly. In reply, the West Indies raced to 56-0 from six overs. Adil Rashid (1-28) was a calming influence. With neither Mayers nor co-opener Brandon King (26) willing to take risks against Rashid they were caught in the deep attempting to go big against Ali before Rashid produced a googly that ripped through the gate of Rovman Powell (5), who made a ton last time out.

## Earthquake felt during U-19 World Cup match

PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN

Live visuals of the ICC U-19 World Cup match between Ireland and Zimbabwe shook vigorously for few seconds as an earthquake off the coast of Port of Spain sent mild tremors through the Queen's Park Oval here.

While the players were unaware and continued the action on the field, the commentators could feel the tremors as the commentary box began shaking.

The earthquake was measured at 5.2 magnitude on the richter scale.

Commentator Andrew Leonard described the tremors as the commentary box began to wobble.

"We are... I believe we are having an earthquake right now.



In the box. We are indeed having an earthquake. It felt like not just a train going by behind us, but the whole Queen's Park Oval media centre rocked," he said. The tremors were said to have lasted for 15-20 seconds. Ireland spinner Matthew Humphreys was bowling the fifth ball of the sixth over to Zimbabwe's Brian Bennett when the front-on camera showing the action began to shake. Play was not stopped as Bennett played a defensive shot to mid-off, and then hit the next ball to the boundary.



## CSK becomes country's first Unicorn sports enterprise

IAN S ■ CHENNAI

Ahead of the 15th edition of the Indian T20 franchisees, Chennai Super Kings (CSK), has become the country's first sports Unicorn with its market cap having touched a high of Rs 7,600 crores and its share in the grey market trading in the Rs 210-225 price band.

The Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led CSK, which won its fourth IPL title in Dubai last year, now has a market cap more than its parent entity, India Cements. On Friday, India Cements' market cap stood at Rs 6,869 crores.

Two key reasons which have led CSK's market cap to go past its parent entity are the team winning its fourth IPL title in Dubai, and two new franchisees being added to the upcoming season at record prices. The Sanjiv Goenka-led RPSG Group bought the Lucknow franchise (Lucknow Super Giants) for Rs 7,090 crore, while CVC Capital acquired the rights for the Ahmedabad franchise for 5,625 crore. N. Srinivasan, the managing director of India Cements and former president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was quoted as saying on Friday that, "Brand CSK will outgrow Brand India Cements. If you look at the history of franchise-based leagues in the US, it will outgrow everything. Passion for cricket is so much in India. The road between countries will see franchise-based leagues getting precedence as we go along." The shares of Chennai Super Kings Cricket Limited (CSKCL), which controls CSK, had hit an all-time high in the unlisted market on October 26 last year, surging from Rs 110-120 per share to crossing the Rs 220-mark in trade within a week. It brought CSKCL's market cap to around Rs 7,000 crore, which was just Rs 500 crore short of making it to the Unicorn club and came just 11 days after they defeated Kolkata Knight Riders by 27 runs in the IPL final.

## England, Australia settle for thrilling draw

PTI ■ CANBERRA

In a fantastic advertisement for women's Test cricket, England hung on for a dramatic draw as their Ashes contest against Australia came to a thrilling finish on the last session of the fourth and final day here.

The visiting England finished at 245 for nine after a sporting declaration from Australia captain Meg Lanning set the tourists a target of 257 runs from 48 overs at the Manuka Oval.

England looked on course to pull off the biggest fourth-innings chase in the history of women's Test cricket before escaping with a tense draw after an inexplicable batting collapse.

Captained by the inspirational Heather Knight, England needed 43 runs in the last 48 balls

with seven wickets in hands, but ended up drawing the match with just a wicket left.

The Australian bowlers made a terrific comeback to put their team on the verge of victory after struggling against the English top-order. However, England slipped from 218 for three to 244 for nine to end all hopes of scripting a memorable come-from-behind win after playing catch-up for three days. Hosts Australia entered the final day at 12 for two after a major part of the third day was washed out due to rain. Beth Mooney and Ellyse Perry propped up Australia with a 91-run partnership and guided the team past the 100-run mark. Sophie Ecclestone produced the breakthrough to end the stand while Charlotte Dean had Mooney trapped in front of the wicket.



After that Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner scored quickly during a 49-run stand for the sixth wicket as Australia managed to stretch their lead over 200. After the dismissal of McGrath and Gardner, Jess Jonassen smashed 14 off 6 as Lanning declared with the scorecard reading 216 for seven.

England started the chase on a positive note and looked on course for a magnificent victory until the Australian bowlers found their bearings.

First-innings centurion Heather Knight followed up her monumental 168 with a 54-ball 48, while Nat Sciver made a 62-ball 58.

Sophia Dunkley smashed 45 off just 32 balls but after her dismissal, none of the English players could get going with the bat.

## Didn't want to spend 22 more weeks in a bubble: Starc

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

Australia pacer Mitchell Starc said that he needed to stay away from bio-bubble for a while to get his body refreshed for Australia's next international assignment. He added that he did not want to spend 22 more weeks in a bio-bubble, hence opted out of the mega auction of the Indian Premier League (IPL). "I was a click of the button away from entering the auctions but personally didn't want to spend 22 more weeks in a bubble, needed some time to refresh the body, and for me, that's prioritising Aussie games," Star was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. Starc, despite hinting towards a return to the IPL for the first time since 2015, added that while he would love to return to the tournament, he needs to spend more time with his family. "There'll be a time where I'd love to go back to the IPL but in terms of wanting to play as much as I can for



Australia, a multi-format player as well, that's a decision I've taken and that gives me an opportunity to spend time with Alyssa and family in those eight weeks outside of a cricket bubble," he said.

"The last two years, as life is at the moment, there's a lot of ups and downs. You find ways to adapt, but it's a reflection of the support base I have had throughout those two years as well. "There's certainly been times when I haven't played my best cricket or certainly times over those two years where I didn't want to play any cricket. I'm very thankful for my support networks and in particular Alyssa, to play cricket at the highest level [and] be there to support me as well, I can't thank her enough for that," he added. Starc was recently part of the Ashes series and will next play in the three-match ODI series and one-off T20I against New Zealand at home, followed by a five-match T20I series against Sri Lanka.

## JOE ROOT IS A POOR CAPTAIN: IAN CHAPPELL

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian great Ian Chappell has found Virat Kohli to be an exceptional captain who has carried the Indian team to a higher level and considered England's Joe Root a "fine batter but poor captain".

Kohli, who recently relinquished captaincy after India lost a Test series to the weakest-ever South African team, was sacked as ODI skipper prior to that.

He pointed out the contrasts in Kohli and Root's styles of captaincy and its corresponding efficacy, but few observations made by Chappell could be debated, including the one where he singularly attributed the "development of Rishabh Pant" to the former India captain.

"This is a tale of two cricket captains; one very good at his job and the other a failure," Chappell wrote in his column



for ESPN Cricinfo.

"There's no doubt Kohli was an exception as captain; he didn't curb his enthusiasm but he was still able to lead the Indian team to a higher level. With the capable assistance of vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane, he lifted India to overseas success like no other captain had done," Chappell opined.

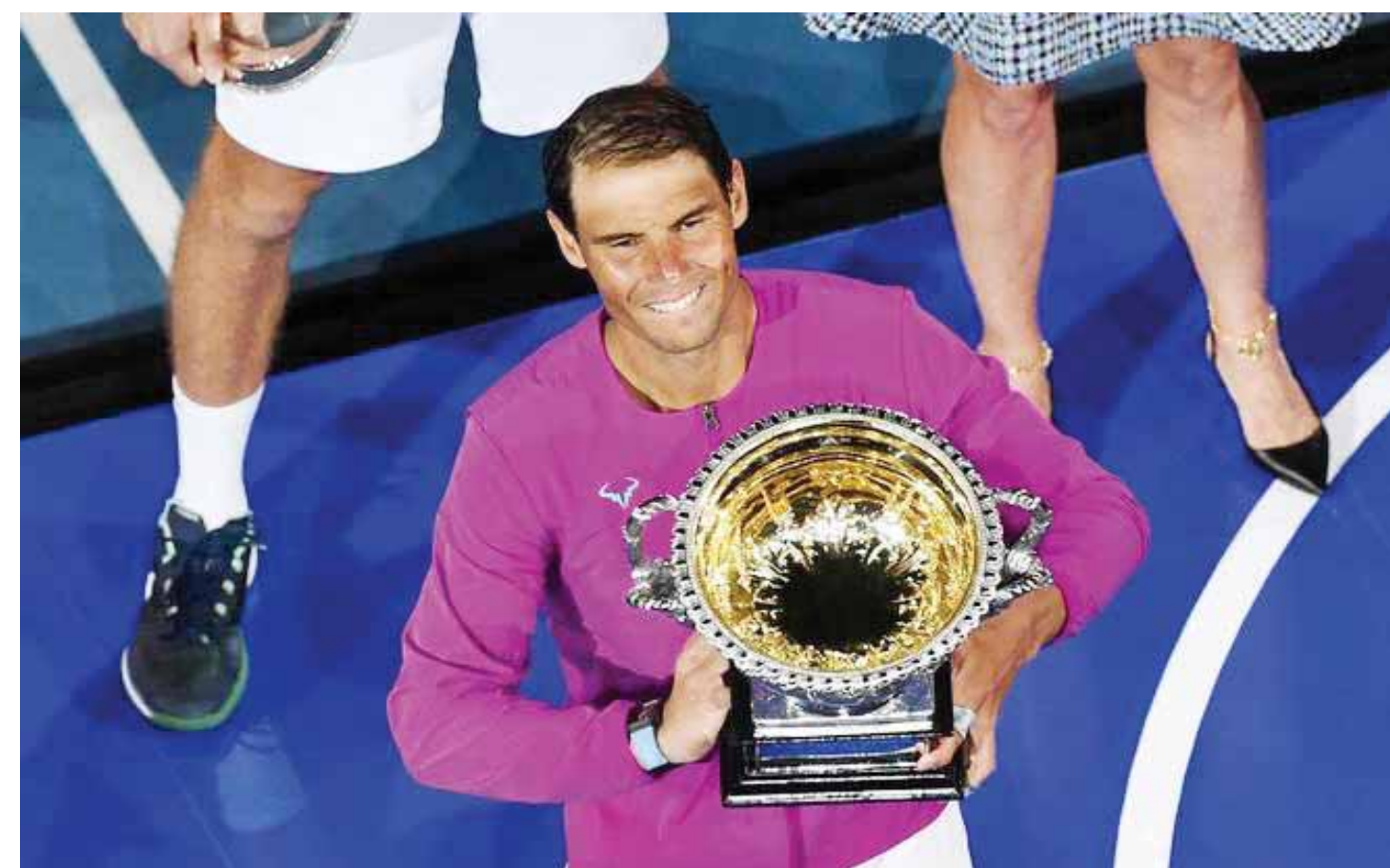
In the case of Root, he was

as blunt as any Aussie would ever be when it came to judging an English cricketer.

"The captaincy failure, despite having led his country more times than any other captain, is Joe Root. It doesn't matter what Root or any other English devotee tells you, Root is a fine batter but a poor captain," his assessment of Root was scathing.



# NADAL WINS AUSTRALIAN OPEN FOR RECORD 21ST MAJOR TITLE



AP ■ MELBOURNE

Rafael Nadal got to 21 first, breaking the men's record for most Grand Slam singles titles and doing it the hard way by coming back from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev in an almost 5 1/2-hour Australian Open final that didn't finish until the early hours of Monday morning.

He was broken when serving for the championship at 5-4 in the fifth set but made no mistake the next time.

At 5 hours and 24 minutes, it was the second longest Australian Open final after Novak Djokovic beat Nadal in five sets in 5 hours and 53 minutes in 2012.

The 35-year-old Spaniard now has one more than Roger Federer and Djokovic, his long-time rivals in the so-called Big Three.

With the 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 win that started Sunday night and was delayed for a while in the second set when a protester jumped onto the court, Nadal also became just the fourth man in history to win all four of the sport's major titles at least twice.

Nadal won his first

**Medvedev, who was aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title at the very next major, made Nadal go the distance and win from two-sets down. Medvedev now joins Andy Murray among those who've lost the final at the next major tournament after their career breakthrough at the highest level**

Australian Open title in 2009 and lost four other finals at Melbourne Park before his dramatic win over U.S.

Open champion Medvedev. His conversation rate in major finals is now 21 out of 29. Federer and Djokovic each have 20 majors from 31 finals appearances.

His victory was even more remarkable considering Nadal flew to Australia with just two matches under his belt in the second half of 2021 because he was sidelined with a chronic foot injury that can be treated but not cured. He also had a bout of COVID-19.

Medvedev, who was aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title at the very next major, made Nadal go the distance and win from two-sets down. Medvedev now joins Andy Murray among those who've lost the final at the next major tournament after their career breakthrough at the highest level. It was just the fourth time Nadal has rallied from two sets down to win a best-of-five-set match, and the first since a fourth-round victory in 2007 at Wimbledon over Mikhail Youzhny.

## India will look to build on their recent showings in FIH Pro League



PTI ■ MUSCAT

The Indian women's hockey team will look to build on its bronze medal-winning showing in the Asia Cup when the side makes its debut in the FIH Pro League, chief coach Janneke Schopman and captain Savita said on Sunday.

India won the bronze medal in the continental tournament after beating China 2-0 in the third-place match and will open their FIH campaign against the same team.

India are scheduled to play two matches against China on Monday and Tuesday in Muscat, Oman.

"We are excited to start our Pro League campaign and look to build on our performance in the Asia Cup by hopefully creating and converting our opportunities as well as having a clinical defense," Schopman said.

"China has shown to be a good team here in the Asia Cup. While they did not finish in the top three, their game stats show that they were even to all top 3 teams," she added.

Savita, who will continue to lead the team in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021/22 matches against China, too said that they would look to build on their recent performances.

"We not only managed to qualify for the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup in Spain and Netherlands but also earned a podium finish. We are happy with how the team is shaping up and are looking forward to building upon the same in the upcoming matches," Savita said.

"It was a good tournament for us to not only get an understanding of our opponents, but also learn how the team reacts in certain situations on the field, and how we can replicate what we are learning in the training."

"We are eager to play in the FIH Hockey Pro League for the first time and continue to improve and gain confidence," she added.

## Hyderabad look to consolidate lead at top

PTI ■ MARGAO

Hyderabad FC will look to extend the new-found form and consolidate their lead at the top of the points table when they take on struggling NorthEast United FC in an Indian Super League match here on Monday.

Hyderabad got their mojo back after a string of underwhelming performances to remain unbeaten in their last three matches. They pummelled SC East Bengal to show character before beating Odisha FC to now sit atop the table with 23 points from 13 games.

NorthEast United are 10th in the standings with 10 points from 14 games, and Khalid Jamil's side would be desperate to snap a seven-game winless run.

But in Hyderabad, they have a difficult task at hand as the league leaders boast of not only good attackers with Bartholomew Ogbeye at the heart of it, but full-backs like Asish Rai and Akash Mishra who play a key role in the team's balance.

Besides their defensive duties, the pair possess a potent attacking threat as displayed by Mishra the other day with not only his goal but three assists so far this season. Rai



has provided five assists and together the duo are one of the main reasons for the team's success.

Hyderabad have also shown they have it to win games after falling behind, a trait champions display. They have gained 10 points from losing positions in a match,

the most by any team so far. NorthEast United have struggled miserably at the back, with Jamil not being able to settle to a steady defensive lineup.

The Highlanders have conceded the most goals in the ISL this season (28). If they concede three

more goals, this could be the worst defensive performance for NorthEast United in the league stages of an ISL season in terms of goals conceded.

They have started with nine different back-four combinations in their 14 matches this season.

## Japan thrash Thailand to book Asian Cup semifinal spot

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Japan on Sunday qualified for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in style as they reached the semifinals of the ongoing AFC Asian Cup with a 7-0 thrashing of Thailand here.

Striker Yuika Sugawara scored four goals for the two-time defending champions who will face the winners of the other quarterfinal match between China and Vietnam in the semifinals on Thursday.

Thailand, the 1983 champions, are still in the running for a place in the FIFA World Cup in Australia and New Zealand through the playoffs to be played on February 2 and 4.



With Thailand missing several players due to a COVID-19 outbreak in their squad, Japan started as favourites and Futoshi Ikeda's side took an immediate grip on the match.

Mana Iwabuchi, after two attempts in the early stages, had a chance to put

Japan ahead in the 14th minute after Wilaiporn Boothduang fouled Rin Sumida in the penalty box. Goalkeeper Waraporn Boonsing, however, judged correctly to deny Iwabuchi.

Boonsing would prove to be a stumbling block for Japan as the match progressed but there was little the goalkeeper could do to deny the defending champions their opener in the 27th minute, with Yuika Sugawara's right-footed shot from the centre of the box proving too powerful for the custodian to stop.

Thailand continued to bravely deny their opponents but were hit again in the first half stoppage time, with Hinata Miyazawa scoring from close range following a goalmouth melee.

Any hopes Thailand had of a possible comeback were dashed three minutes into the second half, with Sumida scoring Japan's third with a right-footed shot from the centre of the box into the bottom right corner.

## Krejcikova, Siniakova win women's doubles

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Top-ranked Barbora Krejcikova and Katerina Siniakova took another major step in a partnership which began in junior ranks when they won the Australian Open women's doubles 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-4 Sunday from unseeded Anna Danilina and Beatriz Haddad Maia.

The Czech pair claimed their first Australian Open title to go with one Wimbledon and two French Open titles to move a step closer to a career Grand Slam in doubles. They also are Olympic champions.

They were finalists in Melbourne last year but went down 6-2, 6-3 to Elise Mertens and Aryna Sabalenka. Krejcikova also had been in top form in the singles in Melbourne this year before unexpectedly falling to Madison Keys in the quarterfinals.

The top seeds were fully stretched by Danilina of

Kazakhstan and Haddad Maia of Brazil who put together their partnership less than a month ago and were unbeaten in nine matches before Sunday. They won the Sydney Classic doubles title before tackling their first Grand Slam tournament together.

Danilina and Haddad Maia became the first pair to take a set from Krejcikova and Siniakova in Melbourne and kept the final alive for 2 hours and 42 minutes before finally succumbing.

Krejcikova and Siniakova's well-honed partnership was scratchy at times Sunday before experience pulled them through. Siniakova was more active in the first two sets while Krejcikova seemed unusually stuck on the baseline and less mobile than usual at the net.

Krejcikova stepped up in the final set and produced many of the key points, hitting strongly through



the middle of the court while Siniakova crossed over at the net for clutch volleys.

Siniakova had served for the match at 5-2 in the third set but Danilina and Haddad Maia, not to be denied, broke her serve.

Haddad Maia held serve in

front of cheering fans waving Brazil flags before Krejcikova clinched the win on serve.

"You guys have played two great tournaments and I hope you're going to continue together and I hope we're going to have more fights like this because it's a real

pleasure to share a court with you," Krejcikova said court-side. "You're really amazing."

"I want also want to thank my partner for playing with me for a very, very long time. I'm so happy we are still working so well together and our co-operation is only going up so I'm really happy with that and I'm looking forward to the next adventure."

Siniakova thanked Krejcikova for her support through recent difficult times.

"Thank you for pushing me hard and for helping me and just being on my side on the court," she said.

The top seeds fell behind in the first set when Siniakova's serve was broken in the third game. They leveled, breaking Danilina in the eighth game and Siniakova and Danilina both lost their serves again before the set went to a tiebreak.

## Barcelona brings Traoré back on loan

AP ■ BARCELONA

Adama Traoré is returning to Barcelona on loan from Wolverhampton until the end of the season, the Spanish club said.

Barcelona said it will pay for the winger's salary and there will be an option to make the deal permanent.

The conditions for any permanent deal were not immediately disclosed, though Wolverhampton technical director Scott Sellars said the Premier League club had secured "a very healthy option in the deal should Barcelona wish to make the move permanent this summer."

The 26-year-old Spain international came through Barcelona's youth squads and debuted with the first team in 2013 at age 17. Traoré moved to Aston Villa in 2015 and also played with Middlesbrough before joining Wolverhampton in 2018.

"Adama has always acted with the utmost professionalism, however it is no secret that we have not been able to agree a new contract with him, despite protracted negotiations, and his desire at the moment is to play football elsewhere," Sellars said.

"Everyone knows Barcelona is a city, and club, very close to Adama's heart, so it is a dream move for him."

Traoré's contract with Wolverhampton runs until the summer of 2023.

Barcelona said the player's presentation will be made on Wednesday behind closed doors.



## Teenager Unnati claims women's singles title

PTI ■ CUTTACK

Teenager Unnati Hooda became the youngest Indian to win a Super 100 tournament as she beat compatriot Smit Toshniwal in straight games to claim the women's singles title while unseeded Kiran George emerged triumphant in men's singles final of Odisha Open badminton tournament here on Sunday.

Producing an excellent performance to emerge triumphant in her event, the 14-year-old Unnati won 21-18 21-11 to be crowned champion in the inaugural edition of the USD 75,000 Odisha Open.

Hosts India dominated the last day's proceedings winning three out of the five finals.

The 21-year-old George prevailed over fellow Indian Priyanshu Rajawat 21-15 14-21 21-18 to clinch the men's singles title after battling hard for 58 minutes.

In another all-Indian final, Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, daughter of former All England Open champion and Indian badminton legend Pullela Gopichand, defeated Sanyogita Ghorpade and

Shruti Mishra 21-12 21-10 to claim the women's doubles title after a 28-minute contest.

But in the mixed doubles final, India's MR Arjun and Jolly suffered a 16-21 20-22 defeat at the hands of the Sri Lankan duo of Sachin Dias and Thilini Hendadahaewa in a match that lasted 36 minutes.

There was also no Indian victory in the men's doubles summit clash as the Malaysian duo of Nur Mohd Azriyan Ayub and Lim Khim got the better of the host nation's Wah Ravikrishna PS and Sankar Prasad Udayakumar 18-21 21-14 21-16. The keenly-contested men's doubles match lasted 51 minutes.

Unnati, who entered the final after she surprised Indian Open finalist Malvika Bansod 24-22 24-22 in the last-four clash on Saturday, took 35 minutes to get the better of Toshniwal in the summit showdown of the women's singles at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Indoor Stadium.

Toshniwal too pulled off an upset, knocking out Ashmita Chaliha, seeded five, 21-19, 10-21, 21-17, to set up the title clash with Unnati.