



Sri Lanka favoured destination for Indian tourists in 2021

page 8



India records 1.4 lakh new COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra tops tally

page 9



Kazakhstan detains ex-intelligence chief Massimov for treason

page 10



Khawaja hits century in both innings, puts Australia in control

page 15

IN BRIEF



Delhiites keep indoors as police step up patrol

NEW DELHI
 Delhi roads wore a deserted look on Saturday following the weekend curfew imposed by the city government in a bid to curb the rising number of COVID-19 cases. The Delhi police stepped up patrolling and warned citizens of legal action if they left their homes without any reason.

STATES ▶ PAGE 3

Niraj trying to delay app case probe: police

NEW DELHI
 Police officials said on Saturday that Niraj Bhosnai, the main accused in the 'Bulli Bai' app case, is trying to delay the investigation and refusing to co-operate during interrogation. He has tried to harm himself twice while in custody, the officials said.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

BJP's Sarabjit Kaur new Mayor of Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH
 Sarabjit Kaur Dhillon of the BJP was on Saturday elected the new Mayor of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after she defeated Anju Katyal of the AAP by one vote.

STATES ▶ PAGE 5

MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4

Polls in five States from February 10 to March 7

ECI bans physical rallies, gatherings till January 15 due to rise in COVID-19 cases

DAMINI NATH
 NEW DELHI

Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur will be held between February 10 and March 7, the Election Commission of India announced on Saturday.

The counting of votes for all 690 constituencies across the five States, where a total of 18.34 crore citizens are eligible to vote, will be held on March 10.

The Commission banned all physical campaigning till January 15 due to the rise in COVID-19 cases across the country.

Announcing the poll schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said the decision was taken after much deliberation.

The polling for Uttar Pradesh's 403 Assembly seats will be held over seven phases on February 10, February 14, February 20, February 23, February 27, March 3 and March 7.

Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand will all vote on a single day, February 14, while polling in Manipur will be held over two phases on February 27 and March 3.

Mr. Chandra said no roadshows, *padyatras*, cycle or bike rallies, vehicle rallies and processions as well as physical rallies would be al-

Polling to be held in seven phases in Uttar Pradesh and two in Manipur

Off to the hustings

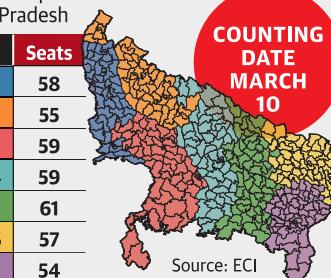
The Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh will be held in seven phases from February 10 to March 7, 2022, while polls in Manipur will be conducted in two phases. Election in Punjab, Uttarakhand and Goa will be held in a single phase



STATE-WISE PHASES | The table shows the State-wise and phase-wise polling dates

State	No. of phases	Poll dates
Uttar Pradesh (403 seats)	7	Feb. 10, Feb. 14, Feb. 20, Feb. 23, Feb. 27, March 3, March 7
Punjab (117)	1	February 14
Uttarakhand (70)	1	February 14
Manipur (60)	2	Feb. 27, March 3
Goa (40)	1	February 14

U.P. PHASES | The map shows the phase-wise split of constituencies in Uttar Pradesh



Source: ECI

go ahead with scheduled elections was taken after much deliberation, discussions and careful analysis of the ever-dynamic situation. The situation is very dynamic, it is not static. Nobody can predict," Mr. Chandra said.

Citing Article 172(i) of the Constitution that sets a five-year term for each Assembly, Mr. Chandra said, "Any postponement of Assembly elections may result in a situation that denies people of that State the right to elect an accountable government of their choice."

Mr. Chandra said the Commission had consulted the Union Health Secretary and other health experts ahead of the announcement of the schedule. As of Friday, 95.8%

of those eligible to vote in Goa had received both doses of vaccine, while it was 82.39% in Uttarakhand, 45.6% in Punjab, 44.8% in Manipur and 52% in Uttar Pradesh.

In total, more than 15 crore people in the five states had received at least one dose and nine crore had got both doses, he said.

Mr. Chandra said the Commission also reviewed the weekly positivity rate, which was 0.24% in Uttar Pradesh, 1.01% in Uttarakhand, 2.1% in Punjab, 1.1% in Manipur and 13% in Goa "because of the New Year parties by outsiders".

He later told *The Hindu* that the Commission would review not just the positivity

rate, but other factors as well before deciding whether to allow rallies post-January 15.

He said the Commission had ensured safety measures at all polling booths, third dose of vaccine for polling officials, who would be treated as frontline workers, and COVID-safe measures for voters.

COVID-19 guidelines

The Commission also brought out a revised set of guidelines for the elections. If and when it decides to allow physical rallies, the curbs on the number of people allowed to attend, rules on safety measures and other guidelines issued by the State Disaster Management Authority would apply, Mr.

Chandra said. The Chief Election Commissioner said the District Magistrate, the State Chief Secretary and the Election Commission officers would monitor the implementation of the COVID-19 guidelines.

Candidates would also have to submit an affidavit that they would adhere to the guidelines. Victory processions have also been banned, he said.

The announcement of the elections came on a day the country's daily positivity rate stood at 9.28% and active cases at 4.72 lakh, according to a statement from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 7

Respect laws passed by T.N. Assembly, CM tells Governor

B. KOLAPPAN
 CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Saturday that it was the basic principle of a democracy that when the Assembly of a State invoked its right and enacted a law, the Governor should respect it and give its approval.

Addressing a meeting of MLAs of all parties to chalk out the next move to get the State exempted from the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), Mr. Stalin said the Governor had failed to send the Bill against NEET, adopted in the Assembly, to the President even after he requested him to do so.

'Prove we're united'
 He said, "This meeting has been convened since the rights of the States and the rights of the Assemblies to enact laws are under question.

It is our goal to put an end to NEET and protect the interests of Tamil Nadu students. The meeting has been convened to prove that all are unanimous in their opposition to NEET."

Mr. Stalin said there was a need to form an opinion that political parties in T.N. were united since the problem concerned the State.

SEE ALSO ▶ PAGE 5

India to export mango to U.S. after hiatus

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
 NEW DELHI

Welfare of India.

After over two years, India is set to export mangoes to the U.S. under a new framework agreement signed between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture and Farmer

agreement also covers pomegranate and pomegranate aril to the U.S. India did not export mangoes to the U.S. for two and a half years as the U.S. phytosanitary inspectors did not visit during 2020 and 2021. The new

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 7

NEXT IAS

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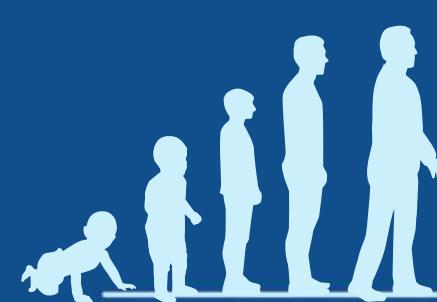
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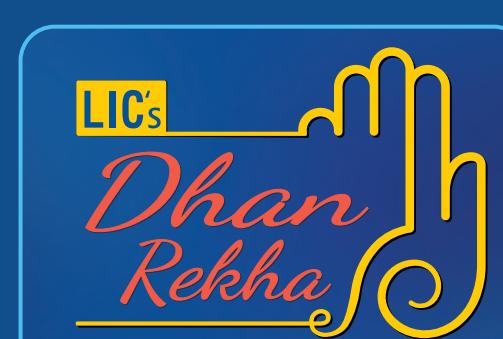
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LIC/PRA/2021-22/40/Eng

Pushed by poverty to give away their newborns

Delhi police bust fraud adoptions but face moral dilemma

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Nazma's son was just a day old when she told her estranged mother, a midwife, that she would not be able to raise her baby. The 28-year-old mother of five knew that the monthly income as an e-rickshaw driver of her husband, who was an alcoholic and often beat her up, was not enough to take care of another member in the family.

In less than a week, she chose to hand over her infant to a family in west Delhi. She only wished for a good family to raise her son. She received ₹2,00,000 in return.

Rekha, whom Nazma's mother knew, helped her in this arrangement. "When I reached the appointed place in Uttam Nagar, Rekha was there with a couple who took my child and kissed him in front of me and then Rekha took money from the couple and surprisingly gave it to me," she said.

The Hindu met more families like Nazma's who – driven by poverty – chose to give away their newborns. The Delhi police recently busted the gang of women who were running a racket of selling newborn babies in the city. Their modus operandi involved preying on pregnant women from economically weaker sections



Hands tied: Many parents admitted to giving away their babies because of financial crunch. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

who were willing to give away their babies for ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh, as their circumstances did not allow them to raise another child.

Dire need

In Nazma's case, her husband's "refusal to take contraceptive measures and her inability to undergo tubectomy owing to her religious faith" made her situation difficult. While she wasn't looking for any monetary gain in this, Chandni*, residing in north Delhi, was in dire need.

Chandni's husband, a drum player at weddings and a daily wager, was against his wife's decision as he wanted to keep their son. But Chandni insisted on giving the child away in exchange for money as that could be used for treating their other son. "I asked Kajal if I would be able to see my child later but she refused. She did not share any details about the family either, only told us he will go to a good family," she said.

Ten days after her son's birth in April, Chandni, along with Rashmi, went to meet Kajal. "She met us in a park in east Delhi, took my baby and returned with ₹2,00,000. After that day, she stopped taking my calls when I tried to reach her to enquire about my baby," she said.

Jyotsna's fifth pregnancy was unwanted. Her neighbour Anjali – whose role is being investigated – advised her against abortion and told her to give the baby to a family in need. She also told Jyotsna that her brother and sis-

Taekwondo-champ-turned gangster held

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 41-year-old gangster, who is also an international taekwondo black belt holder, has been arrested for planning to harm a senior Tihar jail officer to avenge the death of Ankut Gujjar inside prison, police said on Saturday.

DCP (Special Cell) Jasmeet Singh said the accused has been identified as Ajay Gurjar alias Bhaiji, a resident of Haryana's Palwal, who is in-

volved in more than 24 criminal cases, including murder, attempt to murder, extortion and assault.

Police said in a call recording that went viral in August 2021, a man named Satender alias Satte was heard asking his associate Gurjar to arrange an AK-47 rifle to kill a rival gang member.

Satender was arrested on August 17. Gurjar, who has connections with four underworld gangsters, was earlier arrested in 2018 and came out of jail around 10 months ago.

Dozen graft cases against Delhi officials last year: ACB

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) on Saturday said it registered a dozen graft cases against Delhi government officials last year.

Special Commissioner of Police, ACB, S.K. Gautam said the branch took several stringent steps to check corruption in government departments. The measures

led to six convictions in two separate cases.

"In 2021, we conducted 5 raids on civil servants under the Delhi government and all were successful. It is the highest figure compared with the raids conducted during the last five years," Mr. Gautam said, adding that nine individuals were arrested red-handed for accepting bribes.

(Names changed)

Office of the Executive Engineer Road Construction Department, Road Division,Garhwa. e-Procurement Notice For National Competitive Bidding (VERY SHORT TENDER)

e-Tender Reference No.: RCD/GARHWA/994/2021-22 Date: 30.12.2021

1.	Name of the work	I.R.Q.P./Strengthening Work of Ranka-Ramkanda Road (Length- 20.875 km) for the year of 2021-22 under R.C.D., Road Division, Garhwa
2a.	Approximate Value of Work	Rs. 7,94,29,203.00 (Rupees Seven crore Ninety Four Lac Twenty Nine thousand Two hundred Three) only.
b.	Bid Security*	Rs. 7,95,000.00 (Rupees Seven Lac Ninety Five Thousand) only.
3.	Time of Completion	05 (Five) Months.
4.	Last date/Time for receipt of bids	19-01-2022, 12.00 Noon
5.	Date of Publication of Tender on website	10-01-2022, 10.30 A.M
6.	Name & address of office Inviting tender	Executive Engineer, RCD, Road Division, Garhwa Pin Code - 822114
7.	Contact no. of Procurement officer	06561-295161
8.	Helpline number of e-Procurement cell	0651-2401010

Note :- The Bid Amount & Bid security will be decrease or increase. Further details can be seen on website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> UCAN registration is mandatory for the bidders who are already registered in appropriate class with road construction department Govt. of Jharkhand.

Executive Engineer, Road Construction Department, Road Division, Garhwa.

PR 261316 (Road) 21-22 (D)

Govt. asks DMs to set up community care centres

One 50-bed facility to come up in each Assembly constituency

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday asked all District Magistrates to set up one 'Community COVID Care Centre' in each of the 70 Assembly constituencies. It also issued special operating procedures for setting up these centres at schools, each having 50 beds.

According to investigators, after these women procured the babies, they dressed them in "appealing clothes", took videos and photos and circulated them in their circles and to prospective buyers. The selling price of a child was usually between ₹5 lakh-₹6 lakh, of which ₹1 lakh-₹2 lakh was given to the biological mother. The rest of the money was kept as a commission by the procurers. The women contacted each other only through mobile phones and met at the IVF centres to avoid suspicion.

According to the police, the women believed they were doing no wrong but helping childless couples. The police have so far recovered three children and located 10 more. An officer said some of the children have been placed in affluent families while their biological parents struggle to make ends meet. "The unearthing of this racket also presents a moral dilemma," said Special Commissioner of Police Devesh Chandra Srivastava. "But we have to work under the ambit of law."

Mr. Deo said the economically weaker sections also needed to be made aware of the racket of selling their children illegally.

(*Names changed)

people occupying hospital beds increased to 1,390, 89.5% of the total 12,580 hospital beds for COVID patients were vacant as of Saturday, said the bulletin.

The Delhi government has added 1,300 COVID-19 beds in 14 hospitals, according to an official order.

Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Saturday said though the cases in Delhi are rising, the number of deaths are very less compared to the second wave. Also, no death of any patient infected with the Omicron variant has been reported so far, he said.

FOOD SPOT

From spicy appetisers to entrees with a tweak, Asian Nomad presents an interesting menu of Pan-Asian delicacies



Tickling the taste buds: The delivery from Asian Nomad.



RAHUL VERMA

There is something about pepper. When the temperature dips, the use of pepper in our kitchen rises as if on cue. It helps us deal with the cold through an array of heat-inducing dishes – from soups and sautéed veggies to fried egg and Chettinad chicken.

Not surprisingly, the words peppered lamb jumped out and touched my heart when I went through the menu of a new delivery outfit called Asian Nomad. This is a platform for pan-Asian food. Many of the dishes have been given an interesting tweak, while some have been suitably enriched with spices and herbs. The peppered lamb (₹626), wok tossed and served in pita-like pockets with lettuce leaves on the side, for instance, was delightfully hot and tasty. The lamb had been spiced just right, and the soft pita bread complemented its spiciness, while the lettuce gave it a splendid crunch.

But before I write more about the food, let me tell you about Asian Nomad. Co-founded by two food enthusiasts – Shruti Jain and Sanchit Gupta – this serves

Asian-fusion food, and delivers in Gurugram and south Delhi. You can order from www.asiannomad.in.

Hot and sweet

Some of its dishes are hot, which is how most of us like our Chinese, and some have a hot-and-sweet taste, which is a flavour that I thoroughly enjoy. Asian Nomad's chicken satay was delicious, with its chili hot and chili sweet flavours melding harmoniously.

The pork nomad dumplings (₹435) had been flavoured with chili bean paste, home-made chili paste and pepper and cooked with spring onions and a spice mix. Golden-yellow in colour with red specks, it was superb – and good to look at too. The jewel dumplings (₹365) had the crunchy texture of asparagus and chives.

Tofu has its legion of fans; sadly I am not among them. However, I must say that the golden tofu (₹465) was quite invigorating. It had a light coating, and the sauce had been flavoured with lemongrass and paprika.

I enjoyed the nasi goreng (₹625). The Indonesian rice dish, an old favourite of mine, had a burst of flavours – from the mildly sweet to the hot and tart.

The fried rice was full of plump and juicy shrimps and topped with a fried egg. The grilled chicken sri-racha (₹625) consisted of a chicken breast that had been grilled and sliced and came with the sweet-and-hot sri-racha sauce. It had a garlicky flavour that was most appealing. The chicken, I was told, had been marinated with garlic juice, chopped garlic, olive oil, chili oil, chili paste and annatto oil.

I had the dishes with some fragrant jasmine rice, and thought I could now deal with a dip in the temperature. As long as there was pepper – and some chili paste.

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1	CCP-II/40/2021-2022	Engagement of manpower for meter reading, bill preparation, bill distribution receiving payment of bills at site and Supervision of the work through mobile based billing for two years in following packages: (i) Garhwal Zone (ii) Kumaon Zone (iii) Hardwar Zone (iv) Rudrapur Zone	2.96 Crores (for one Year)	62.95 CRORE	94.43 CRORE	1.26 CRORE	29,500	27.01.2022 at 11:30 hrs. at V.C.V. Garbar Singh Urja		

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RISE 11:58	SET 00:00
MONDAY, JAN. 10	
RISE 07:16	SET 17:43
RISE 12:28	SET 00:32
TUESDAY, JAN. 11	
RISE 07:16	SET 17:44
RISE 12:58	SET 01:27

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	16	15
Safdarjung	16	15
Palam	17	15

Delhi Palam Today
18°C The weather will be cool during the day. Spell of rain and thundershower with gusty winds is possible at some area. Fall in night temperature.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
18°C The dry and cool weather to continue with cool breeze. Moderate to dense fog will occur during cold morning. Night also will be cold & foggy.

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Duo arrested for killing cab drivers

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two men have been arrested for robbing and killing two cab drivers within a span of six hours, the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Shweta Chauhan said the accused have been identified as Aakash alias Akku and Junaid, both aged 19 and residents of Anand Parbat. One cab driver was found dead near Ramjas ground while another in Bharat Nagar.

Weekend curfew: Delhiites keep indoors as police step up patrol

Barricades erected, force deployment stepped up; meet tomorrow to assess situation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi roads wore a deserted look on Saturday following the weekend curfew imposed by the city government in a bid to curb the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

The curfew came into effect across the Capital from 10 p.m. on Friday and will remain in force till 5 a.m. on Monday. To ensure strict compliance with the restrictions, the Delhi police stepped up patrolling, erected barricades and cautioned citizens of legal action if they stepped out of their homes without any reason.

On Sunday, however, devotees will be allowed to visit gurdwaras to be able to observe Prakash Purab of Guru Gobind Singh, according to the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA).

Deployment of personnel has been increased in several police districts for the entire 55-hour curfew period. "No major violations were reported by any of our 40-45 odd enforcement teams that kept a watch during the day. Rain and cold also contributed



A deserted Delhi-Meerut Expressway on Saturday after the weekend curfew was imposed in the Capital. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

to keeping people indoors," said a south Delhi district officer.

Roads in many parts of the city remained empty and marketplaces fell silent following the curfew. Many DTC buses were seen plying empty and bus stands too wore a deserted look.

Home isolation

"A weekend curfew has been imposed to minimise the spread of the coronavirus in Delhi. Visit the hospital only if you have severe symptoms. Treatment is possible under home-isolation. Wear a mask and fol-

low all the COVID-related protocols," Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain tweeted on Saturday morning.

During the curfew, only those involved in essential services and those facing emergency situations are allowed to step out of their homes while others venturing out have to produce e-passes issued by the government or valid identity cards if they fall under the list of exempted categories.

There were some complaints regarding the issuance of e-passes during the curfew and the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) tweet, "We demand that the government immediately issue e-passes for all essential workers in any manner whatsoever for any claims and/or damages for advertisements in this newspaper."

India said it might be compelled to halt home deliveries due to the problem. Following the NRAI tweet, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal promised to look into the matter.

E-passes on website

Officials involved in essential and emergency services are included in the exempted category and can move out by showing their identity cards. Individuals can apply for an e-pass for the weekend curfew and the night curfew on weekdays on <http://www.delhi.gov.in>.

The DDMA is scheduled to meet at noon on Monday to assess the COVID situation amid surging daily cases and more restrictions are likely to be announced, according to government sources.

"Anyone having any kind of emergency like going to a hospital etc. will be allowed to move. We request the citizens not to come out of their homes without any reason during the curfew and to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour," Delhi Police public relations officer Chinmoy Biswas had said on Friday.

(With inputs from PTI)

Fake video of Cabinet meet circulated from Pak.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
The Delhi police on Saturday said primary technical investigation into a fake viral video of a Cabinet meeting from December 2021 has revealed that the accounts were being operated from Pakistan.

"It was noticed that there were various accounts which had tweeted the same video with the same content and same hashtag. All the accounts were created between October 2021 to December 2021," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell Cyber Cell)

K.P.S. Malhotra said. "A technical analysis has revealed that these accounts were being operated from a single browser and were being used from Pakistan. The 46 accounts are being blocked," he said.

The video showed a meeting of the Cabinet Commit-

tee held on December 9, 2021, after CDS General Bipin Rawat's demise. The video was morphed and a new voice-over was superimposed in which the alleged persons tried to show that the meeting was against the Sikh community, the police said.

GET COVID-19 VACCINE'S PRECAUTIONARY DOSE FROM 10th JANUARY 2022

Healthcare workers, frontline workers and 60 years & above with comorbidities are now eligible for Precaution Dose of COVID-19 vaccine

(On completion of 9 months/39 weeks from the date of 2nd dose)



Precaution dose will be the same vaccine as administered in first two doses.



60 years and above with comorbidities should take precaution dose on advise of their physician.



Registration of Precaution dose of COVID-19 vaccination is available both online and on-site.



Vaccination against COVID-19 may prevent seriousness of the illness.

Vaccine, Mask, Hand Hygiene & Maintaining 6 feet distance are weapons to fight against COVID-19

Highest single-day rain for Jan. in 22 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded its highest rainfall in a day for January in 22 years on Saturday, yielding the city's best air quality

in over two months even as the minimum temperature settled at 15 degrees Celsius, eight notches above normal.

According to the IMD, the Safdarjung Observatory re-

corded 41 mm rainfall in a 24-hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Saturday.

The highest single-day rain for January recorded in the city was 46 mm in 1999.

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Brides & Grooms

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Chhattisgarhi

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Hindi

Kannada

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GOVT / QUASI GOVT

PSU EXECUTIVE. 31/158, Good looking, B.Tech, PGDM, Vanniyar/CNB, Chennai, seeks groom of similar background, 9488549285, 7598317771

MALAYALAM

RE-MARRIAGE, Alappuzha Nair girl (widow - issueless), 38/ 158, Uthram, B.Tech, MNC Bangalore. 9633851831 / 9880273614.

HINDU PULAYA girl, 29/5ft 4inch, settled in Delhi & pursuing Ph.D. in Kerala, seeks suitable grooms. Parents Gazzeted Officers in Central Govt., working & retired. Caste no bar. Contact: 9013285402 & bisnysuresh@gmail.com

MALAYALAM

NAIR GIRL 26 doing MD, General Medicine/PG doctors, Civil Service Officers interested. 9847334042

MALAYALEE VISWAKARMA(G.S) girl 38/ 162, Avitom, Deputy Manager in MNC,Chennai. Seeks educated & Employed Groom(CNB). 944561626 / 9790739037

MALAYALI VISHWAKARMA

Girl Age : 34 years, Height : 5'4", Fair, MBA well settled in Chennai. Divorcee, Seeks : Well Qualified professional with good Family Back ground, Tamil or Malayalam. Settled preferably in Chennai or Bangalore. Caste : No Bar. Cell No: 9941619416 Email : gopi_ppp@yahoo.com

KANNUR NAMBIAR Girl, 43/165, Chithra, MDS Doctor working Abroad. Looking for Suitable alliance. 9495545852

TAMIL

CSI CHRISTIAN Nadar God fearing Girl, 15/52cm, B.E., M.S (USA), Wheatish, Engg.Engineer, INTEL, Oregon State, I-140. Approved, Own House, seeks Christian Teetotaller Bachelor Groom working in USA. Ct: 9941303491, 944407318, 9445357046

CSI NADAR AGE 26/ 165cm / 40,000/- PM Working in IT Company Seeks Suitable Groom Contact: 9380791999

RC Christian 34, 173cms, MBA lives in Chennai. Parents are Business professionals. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for a like-minded and clean match lives in Chennai or surroundings. Contact: 89392 12233. Email: rackeshd@gmail.com

CATHOLIC VELLALAR Girl, 24/52 Fair, good looking M.A. Sociology, seeks suitable well educated groom in good job. Contact: 98429 66019.

CHRISTIAN Nadar 32 years Eng Graduate Employed in MNC at Chennai wanted Eng graduate employed Groom from a decent literate family Cast No Bar cont: 9445931257

GROOM WANTED preferably Software Engg. Financially Well Settled Job, God fearing, Below 30 Years from Tamil Catholic "Adidivara" grooms, for our only daughter 24/ 154 cm , dark complexion, CSE Engg from Upper Middle Class family living in Delhi. Contact: 9999143474

CHRISTIAN NADAR 33 MBA M.Phil, (PhD), Asst. Professor Seeks Suitable Groom Ct: 99410 62047 22915

TAMIL MUSLIM Piou, Girl 25/163 BPT seeks Pls Prof Qualified Groom Ct: 7708438031.

TAMIL CHRISTIAN girl, 22/165, fair, only daughter, M.Tech, working in IT, Blr, caste no bar, looking for a suitable boy. Ct: 6361140390

INTERCASTE FAMILY fair good looking well educated employed in Canada 31 / 164 cms Data Science, Caste / religion no bar, Looking for a like-minded match. Ph: 81227 5699.

CSI CHRISTIAN Nadar Girl Fair, Good Looking, 03-04-1986 born /152cm M.Sc M.Phil working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College, Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private), Suitable Alliance, Employed / Settled in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 9841825214

SEEKING MUNNIYAR girl, 24/52, 157, Chithira, Thulam, Sovai dosham, BTech, MS Data Science,USA, Working in USA seeks Groom working in India or USA, Ct:9204657704, rpkumar328@gmail.com

HINDU AD/PR 38/160 Widow, no child, ME, Lecturer at Trichy Govt. edu grom, CNB Age upto 44 Ct:406401199

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BJP's Sarabjit Kaur elected Chandigarh civic body Mayor

AAP loses by 1 vote, alleges collusion between Congress and BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Bharatiya Janata Party's Sarabjit Kaur Dhillon was on Saturday elected the new Mayor of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after she defeated Aam Aadmi Party's Anju Katyal by one vote.

Ms. Kaur secured 14 votes while Ms. Katyal got 13 votes. One vote was declared invalid.

28 members voted

In the 35-member House of the MC, a total of 28 members voted. The Congress's seven members and one member of the Shiromani Akali Dal abstained from voting. In the Chandigarh MC, there are 35 councillors



BJP municipal councillor Sarabjit Kaur (sitting) flashes the victory sign in Chandigarh on Saturday. ■ PTI

while the Member of Parliament from Chandigarh, who is an ex officio member in the municipal corporation, also has a voting right.

Soon after the results, AAP councillors created a ruckus in the House, follow-

ing which the police had to intervene.

The Chandigarh MC election results declared on December 27 threw up a hung House as no single party secured a clear majority of 19 seats. AAP had emerged as

the single largest party by winning 14 wards. The ruling BJP won 12 seats. The Congress won eight seats while the SAD secured one. Later Harpreet Kaur Babla, from the Congress, joined the BJP, taking the party's seats to 13.

AAP's Punjab and Chandigarh affairs in-charge Jarnail Singh accused the BJP of murdering democracy. He said that in the Chandigarh civic body elections, the city residents had voted the maximum number of 14 seats for AAP. He said the election for the Mayor of Chandigarh clearly showed that there was a clandestine understanding between the BJP and the Congress to defeat AAP.

Demand revives for accountability law

Rajasthan's Congress govt. reminded of promise made in 2018 manifesto

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

The demand has revived in Rajasthan for enactment of a transparency and social accountability law. Civil rights groups have reminded the Congress government that it had promised to bring such a legislation in its manifesto before the 2018 Assembly election. A committee had submitted a report on this, along with the draft of the proposed statute, in 2020.

A 'Jawabdehi Yatra' (accountability march) organised by civil rights groups, which covered 13 districts in the State during the last fortnight, has once again brought the issue to the forefront. The march was suspended after it reached Kota on Friday in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.



Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. ■ FILE PHOTO

had expressed his resolve to enact the legislation in his Budget speech in 2019 and later assured that the accountability law would incorporate the provisions of the Guaranteed Delivery of Public Services Act and the Right to Hearing Act. Both of these statutes were enacted during the Congress regime of 2008-2013.

The committee appointed

by the State government had laid emphasis on evolving a legal framework to guarantee accountability to the citizens and highlighted the limitations in the existing administrative system which prevented timely delivery of services. Representatives of Suchna Evam Rozgar Adhikar Abhiyan were also the members of the committee, which was headed by former civil servant Ram Lubhaya.

Transparency provisions

The draft Bill has incorporated the suggested provisions for transparency in governance, citizens' participation, public hearing, social audit, information and facilitation centres, decentralisation of the process and establishment of an independent grievance redressal structure.

The mechanism for re-

dressing grievances will start from village panchayats and involve public hearings at the block level.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan leader and right to information activist Nikhil Dey said the Transparency and Social Accountability Bill should be tabled in the upcoming budget session of the Assembly. He said there was a "strong clamour" among the public for the law, while several instances of people struggling to get benefits of government schemes had come to light.

The social activists who participated in the march felt that countless citizens were suffering from an inability to access their rights and have their complaints redressed in a time-bound manner because of the absence of the law.

Jabs, negative RT-PCR made must to enter Maharashtra

A 'village of books' in all Maharashtra districts

It seeks to popularise Marathi books

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

In the second phase, every district will have one such village. Funding of ₹19.70 crore will be spent on the project.

Conditions to be met

Selection criteria require villages to be connected to tourism, protected monuments and pilgrimages, or sites of literary importance, historical significance, or as centres of agro-tourism. Villages known for their cultural contribution, peaceful coexistence and cleanliness will be prioritised, if residents are ready to cooperate and participate.

The village Gram Panchayat can make available the necessary space (a minimum of ten rooms of 250 sq. ft. each is required), water, electricity, sanitation, etc.

Tamil Nadu to mobilise opinion against NEET in other States

It will consult legal experts to dispense with the test

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

A meeting of all party MLAs, convened by the Tamil Nadu government on Saturday, decided to consult legal experts to find ways of dispensing with medical admissions based on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test and to take steps to mobilise a unanimous opinion against the test in other States.

Against federalism

A resolution adopted at the meeting said NEET went against federalism and had dashed the hope of rural and poor students to enter higher educational institutions. Tamil Nadu was a model State for the other States in

medical education and the health sector. NEET and the National Medical Commission Act had severely affected Tamil Nadu students, it said. "NEET is against the autonomy of the States since it has taken away their rights to admit students to medical colleges launched with their own funds," the resolution said.

Arguing that NEET favoured only students who could afford coaching classes, the resolution moved by Health Minister Ma. Subramanian said it had rendered school education irrelevant and destroyed the country's federal character espoused by the Constitution.

It said the Governor's failure to send to the President the Bill adopted by the Tamil Nadu Assembly against NEET would not augur well for the sovereignty of the House.

Recalling Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's meeting with the Governor and the efforts made by a delegation of Tamil Nadu MPs to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the resolution said a team of all party MLAs would meet Mr. Shah, if he agreed.

Though the BJP participated in the meeting, its MLA Vanathi Srinivasan staged a walkout. "A lot of students of government schools have cleared NEET. Even tribal students have secured admission to medical colleges after clearing the test."

BJP MLA from Mumbai says family being threatened on phone

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

A day after reports of "terrorists" conducting recce of the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Nagpur

emerged, a BJP MLA from Mumbai wrote to Maharashtra's Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil informing him that he and his family members are being threatened over the phone.

In the letter to Mr. Walse-Patil, Bandra (West) MLA Ashish Shelar said he has been receiving threats from two different mobile numbers and has given details of those numbers to the police. "The manner in which me and my family are being given death threats is extremely serious. The lan-

guage used by the person and the extreme anger are not ordinary," he said.

Later in the day, a 48-year-old man, Osama Shamshad Khan, was arrested for allegedly threatening and abusing Mr. Shelar, the Mumbai police said. Khan, a resident of Mahim, was tracked down and held on the basis of technical inputs gathered during a probe by the Crime Branch.

The Nagpur police on Friday stepped up the security outside the RSS headquarters. Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Devendra Fadnavis said such reports are worrying and the government as well as the police should take necessary precautions.

(With inputs from PTI)

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Saturday made full vaccination and a negative RT-PCR report mandatory for domestic travellers arriving in the State by air, train and road. However, the Government of India guidelines for international travellers will remain in place.

In light of surging COVID-19 cases, tighter restrictions were announced on Saturday. While night curfew has been imposed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., no one will be allowed to move in groups of five or more from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. Public transport will be open, but only for fully vaccinated passengers.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION



General public is hereby informed that a unidentified dead body of a male namely Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unkonwn was fond dead on 06.01.2022 lying Near Chhilla Village Ganda Nala, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi. In this regard DD No. 43 A, dated 06.01.2022 has been lodged at Police Station, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi. The dead body is preserved in the Mortuary of LBS Hospital, Khicharpur, Delhi. Identification of unidentified dead body of male is as under:

Name: Unknown, Age: Around 35-40 Years, Height: 5'5", Face: Round, Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Medium, Wearing: Black Colour Pajama & Black Colour Jacket and Black Colour Shoes in Feet.

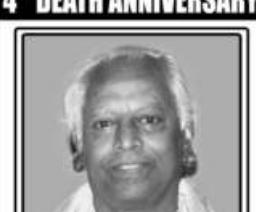
If anyone have any information or clue about this male deceased may kindly be inform undersigned.

SHO
Police Station New Ashok Nagar, Delhi
DP/879/ED/2022
Ph.: 011-22610839, 8750870673

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SN	Name of Post	Essential Qualification & Experience	Pay Matrix	UR	OBC	SC	Upper Age Limit
1	Principal, College of Nursing	(a) Master Degree in Nursing with Advanced specialization on Nursing. (b) Must be registered Nurse and midwife (c) 10 years experience in the nursing field after registration as Nurse out of which 7 years must have been spent in Nursing Education OR Administration after obtaining the prescribed Post Graduate qualification.	Rs. 37400-67000 GP-Rs. 8700/-	01	-	-	50 Yrs
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Syndicate had turned down proposal

STAFF REPORTER
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Lending credence to the allegations by the Opposition United Democratic Front, a letter written by Kerala University Vice-Chancellor V.P. Mahadevan Pillai turning down a proposal by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan for awarding President Ram Nath Kovind an honorary doctorate emerged in the public domain on Saturday.

The document validated the charge that statutory provisions were ignored while considering the proposal.

The latest in a series of 'leaks' in the ongoing controversy triggered by allega-



posal to confer the D.Litt. degree on the President.

"The members of the Syndicate turn it down," the letter added.

Despite the Governor having not divulged specific details of the discussions he had with Prof. Pillai, the contents of the letter corroborate the former's claim of matters of national importance having sparked his rift with the government.

Mr. Khan had shot off a strongly-worded letter to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan a day after he was informed of Kerala University's disinclination to honour his request. The Opposition had accused the Vice-Chancellor of failing in his duties by rejecting the proposal without placing it before the Syndicate and Senate for discussions.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Ramesh Chemithala, who termed the Vice-Chancellor's act disgraceful, questioned the government's role in the controversy.

Mr. Chemithala demanded that the university divulge the minutes and agenda of the meeting the Vice-Chancellor had with Syndicate members as claimed in the letter.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan said in Kochi that the Vice-Chancellor should have placed the Governor's proposal before the Syndicate instead of discussing it in secret with some Syndicate members. Mr. Satheesan took a dig at the Governor for what he regarded as "leaks" from Raj Bhavan while openly declining to speak about the matter.

Kerala-bound helicopter makes emergency landing

STAFF REPORTER
ERODE

A private helicopter with four persons on board made an emergency landing on a farmland at Athiyur village in Kadambur hills in Erode district on Saturday.

Kadambur police said a couple, Bharat, 65, and his wife Sheela, 60, from Karnataka had hired the helicopter for undergoing treatment at a hospital in Kochi in Kerala and were on their way. The pilot Jaspal and an engineer Angith Singh were on board. While flying over the forest area in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR), bad weather prevailed and the pilot decided to make an emergency landing at 10.30 a.m. at the farm-



The helicopter that landed at a private farm land in Erode on Saturday.

land owned by Perumal Amman.

The chopper landed safely and all the four passengers are safe.

The police said that after the weather turned favourable, the helicopter lifted off at 12.55 p.m. and resumed its journey.

Congress firm on padayatra plan, Karnataka set for showdown today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The stage is set for a political showdown as the Karnataka Congress is poised to go ahead with its 10-day padayatra from Mekedatu to Bengaluru from Sunday demanding early execution of the drinking water project despite warning by the State government that it will not allow such political rallies in the wake of restrictions enforced due to COVID-19.

Prominent party leaders, including Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly Siddaramaiah are already camping in Kanakapura, which also

TRS MLA's son remanded in 14-day judicial custody

He confessed to the crime, say police

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM

Vanama Raghava, son of Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) legislator from Kothagudem Vanama Venkateshwara Rao, who was arrested by the police in connection with a businessman family's suicide case, has been remanded in judicial custody for two weeks.

"Raghava confessed to the crime of abetment to suicide," ASP Rohith Raj said.

Raghava, 58, had been on the run ever since the Paloncha police registered a case against him under Sections 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder) and 306 (abetment to suicide) of the IPC on a complaint filed by a relative of the deceased. The grisly incident of suicide by a debt-ridden 40-year-old Ramakrishna, who set on

fire his wife and two daughters injuring them fatally before immolating himself at his house in Old Paloncha in the wee hours of Monday, sent shock waves across Telangana. The victim in his suicide note as well as selfie video accused Raghava of mentally harassing him to send his wife to a hotel room on the pretext of settling a property dispute between him and his sister.

A police team apprehended Raghava while he was heading towards Hyderabad at Mandalapalli crossroads on Friday night. On Saturday morning, he was produced before a local court, which remanded him in 14-day judicial custody.

A near total bandh was observed in Kothagudem constituency demanding harshest punishment to the accused.

Netai row: Dhankhar seeks details from CS, DGP

Suvendu Adhikari complained he was stopped from attending an event in Jhargram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

A day after Leader of the Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari, in a letter, complained that he was stopped from attending a programme in Jhargram, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday asked the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police to provide him all details of the incident by January 10.

Written report sought

Mr. Dhankhar also sought a written report from them in the matter.

"In view of highly disturbing scenario, reminis-

cent of emergency, in Jan 07 communication @SuvenduWB WB Govt has directed CS @MamataOfficial & DGP @WBPolice to brief him, fully updated, with written report, on Jan 10 at 11 am (sic)," he tweeted.

In an earlier tweet, he said Mr. Adhikari was "ill-treated by the administration".

Mr. Adhikari, in his letter to Mr. Dhankhar, said he was prevented from visiting Netai, where he sought to pay respects to those killed on January 7, 2011.

Court order

The Nandigram MLA alleged that he was stopped by the police despite a Calcutta High Court order stating that "there is no restriction on my movement".

In 2011, nine people were killed in Netai in indiscriminate firing by alleged CPI(M) activists.

Punjab CM uses Sardar Patel's quote to target PM

'Ready to perform *mahamrityunjay path'*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Minister's life and said he was tired of saying that and was ready to perform even "*mahamrityunjay path*" for the long life of the PM.

"Where was the threat? There was no protester within one km from Pradhan Mantri. Where the PM goes, his 6,000 security personnel come. IB is there, SPG is there, ours is the largest democratic country and you are the PM. What danger could he face?" the CM asked.

The Chief Minister alleged the PM apparently did not mind being stopped in Gujarat or Varanasi, but resented his convoy being held up in Ferozepur.

Probe graft in pandemic purchases, says Satheesan

'500-odd files missing in Health dept'

STAFF REPORTER
KOCHE

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan has warned of strong protests by the United Democratic Front (UDF) unless a probe is ordered into what he alleges as corruption of ₹1,600 crore in the irregular purchases made during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Talking to reporters here on Saturday, Mr. Satheesan said substandard PPE kits of ₹550 each were bought for a three-fold inflated price of ₹1,600. He also alleged corruption in the purchase of one crore gloves.

"More than 3,000 computer files and 500-odd other files were destroyed to keep the corrupt deals under wraps. Besides, 500-odd files had gone missing from the Health department. The corruption had taken place with the know-



ledge of the political leadership," he said.

By suspending just one person, the government was trying to pin the blame on him alone. The purchases of ₹1,600 crore had been made from a single laptop.

The companies that usually supplied medicines were bypassed and a file noting was made to give 100% advance to the newly chosen ones.

Abduction case: probe rules out security lapse

Woman security officer suspended

STAFF REPORTER
KOTTAYAM

Even as the authorities have placed a woman security officer under suspension for alleged callousness while on duty, a preliminary investigation into the abduction of an infant girl from the Government Medical College Hospital in Kottayam on Saturday has ruled out any security lapse.

Hospital officials said here on Saturday that the woman officer was suspended from duty pending further inquiry, based on a verification of the CCTV visuals gathered from the hospital.

The official concerned had been posted on duty at the entrance of the hospital's maternity ward when the abduction took place.

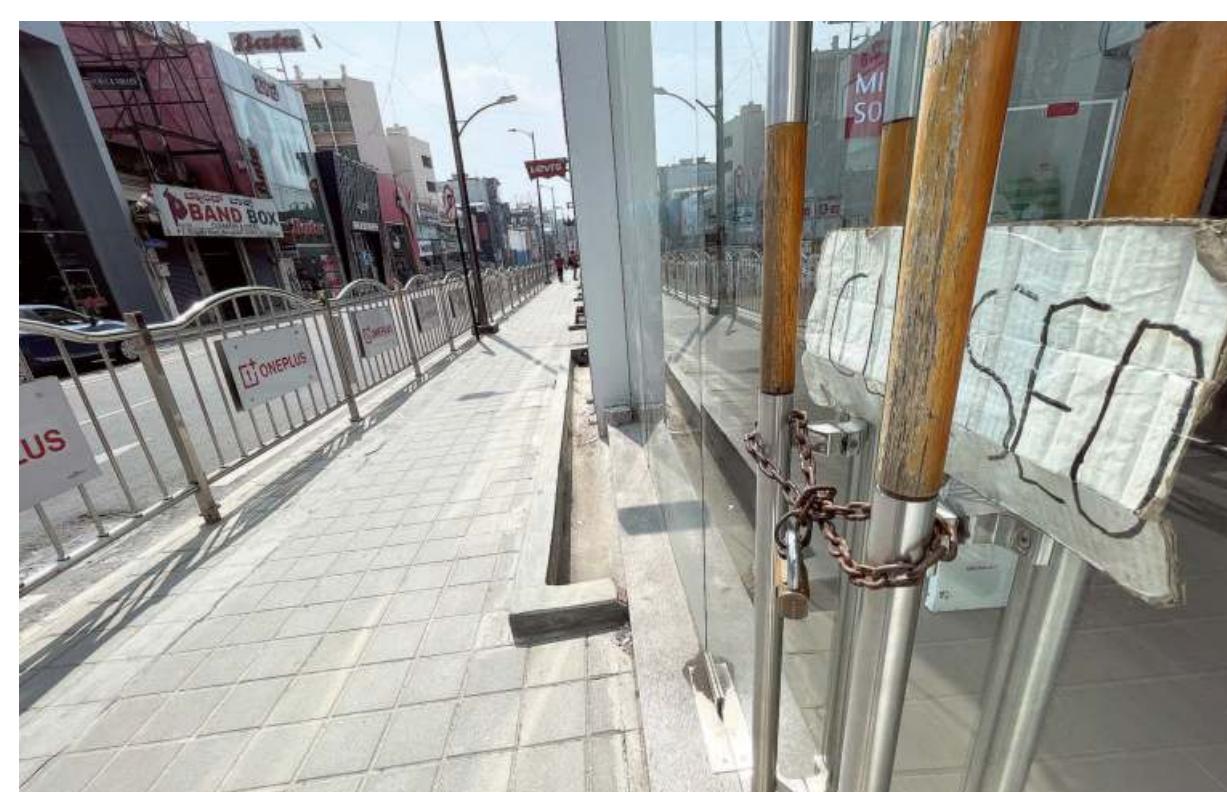
As part of the investigation, joint director of medical education Thomas Mathew visited the hospital and

assessed the security network. Talking to presspersons later, the official sought to dismiss reports of a security lapse and said the abductor did not seem to have received any help from the hospital. "The kidnap was well planned as the woman had no doubts whatsoever with regard to entering the hospital and it was all over in just three to four minutes," the official said.

Mr. Mathew will submit a report to Kerala Health Minister Veena George in a week. Besides the State government, the medical college authorities have launched an in-house inquiry.

Officials said the accused would be taken to the hotel where she had stayed and the medical store from where she had purchased a coat, as part of evidence collection.

No takers



No visitors: Brigade Road in Bengaluru closed during the weekend lockdown announced by the Karnataka government, due to sharp rise in COVID-19 cases in the State. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

Left leaders meet KCR, call to root out BJP from politics

They stress on need for unity among like-minded parties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

The top leaders of CPI and CPI (M) on Saturday called on Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao here separately and made a strong case for unity of like-minded and progressive parties to pull out BJP along with its roots from national politics.

There was an emergency need for these parties to come on a single platform to fight against the atrocious government at the Centre led by the BJP, the leadership of the twin Left parties informed Mr. Rao.

It was therefore decided to hold another meeting



Deep discussion: Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan with Telangana CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao in Hyderabad on Saturday.

shortly to discuss their future course of action, sources said.

The CPI (M) leaders who met Mr. Rao included party general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, former Tripura Chief Minister Ma-

nik Sarkar, Polit bureau members Ramachandran Pillai, Balakrishnan and M.A. Baby. The CPI was represented by its general secretary D. Raja, Parliamentary party leader Binoy Viswanath and Revenue Minister of Kerala K. Rajan.

Fruits of his relentless labour dot campuses

Biology teacher Raphi Ramanath on a mission to increase tree cover across Kerala

SAM PAUL A.
ALAPPUZHA

At Vignana Vilasini Higher Secondary School (VVHSS) at Thamarakulam in Kerala there are two intrinsically green gardens teeming with life. A herbal park spread over 25 cents is home to more than 150 medicinal plants and the second, which uses the Miyawaki method, houses 460 trees of 115 species in five cents.

While the abundant tree cover on the campus is the fruit of relentless planting and nurturing by students and staff, one man who deserves accolades is Raphi Ramanath, biology teacher at the school.

For Mr. Ramanath, 41, the two gardens are small endeavours, given a long list

of initiatives undertaken by him to increase tree cover since 2009.

The teacher has so far planted or helped plant more than one lakh saplings in Alappuzha and other parts of Kerala. Mr. Ramanath, who won the best conservation award of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board in 2015, recently bagged the Vanamittra award of the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department for his efforts to conserve the environment.

His vision

He says his vision is to increase green cover and inculcate environmental values in young minds. "I was not part of any conservation initiatives until



Green initiative: Raphi Ramanath (sitting right) and others engaged in a planting drive in a school in Alappuzha.

I became coordinator of the school nature club in 2009. As a beginning, we planted saplings of 50 medicinal plants with the help of the

students an able partner in my initiatives in increasing green cover," says Mr. Ramanath, hailing from Thekkelkara in Mavelikara.

His initiatives got a boost when he was elected State coordinator of an environmental NGO in 2013. He helped create herbal/fruit gardens, butterfly gardens and *nakshatra vanam* (planting trees named after stars in the Malayalam calendar) in a number of schools, government offices, places of worship and so on over the years.

Although no longer associated with the NGO, he continues to plant saplings and distribute saplings free of cost to those who are ready to plant them.

Parties welcome poll schedule, exude confidence

Amid pandemic curbs, SP, BSP want EC to ensure level playing field on digital platforms, monitor violations by BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Political parties across the spectrum on Saturday welcomed the announcement of the poll schedule for the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

While the BJP president J.P. Nadda expressed confidence that his party will win with big margins, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the elections are "an opportunity" to defeat the BJP and put an end to unemployment, price rise and atrocities against women and Dalits.

'Vote for progress'

Home Minister Amit Shah took to Twitter to express his confidence that the people will give the BJP an opportunity to serve them again and appealed to "the people of these States to elect a government that contributes to the progress of the State and the progress of the country".

Welcoming the ECI guidelines of holding polls under COVID guidelines, Mr. Shah



In compliance: Municipal workers removing a political hoarding in Lucknow on Saturday, following the Model Code of Conduct coming into effect in U.P. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

said, "The BJP under the leadership of @narendramodi ji is committed to have a healthy and safe elections".

Of the five poll-bound States, the BJP is in power in four – U.P., Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur – while in

Punjab, it has allied with former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's outfit and a faction of the Akali Dal.

While every Assembly election will be an important test for the parties, the results of U.P., that has 80 Lok

Sabha seats, will be the most crucial and could well set the agenda for the 2024 general elections.

In a series of tweets, Samajwadi Party (SP) chief and former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav claimed that the

counting day of March 10 will see a "revolution and change".

"People of the State have been waiting for March 10 to say goodbye to the BJP," Mr. Yadav said.

The SP chief also appealed to the ECI that it should ensure a level-playing field for the regional parties on digital platforms where the BJP dominates not only because of its financial heft but also because it is in power at the Centre as well in the State.

Novel manipulations

Taking to Twitter, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati said, "The tendency of the ruling party [the BJP] to violate the model code of conduct by adopting new tactics in every election is becoming fatally common. It needs to be given due attention and prompt action is taken in this election. It is a special appeal to the Election Commission".

While Sukhbir Badal of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), that has tied up with the BSP for the Punjab polls, expressed confidence of being voted to power, Aam Admi

Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal, who has emerged as the biggest challenger to the established players in the State, asserted that AAP is ready for the battle.

Addressing an online press conference, Congress' Surjewala said the adverse election results are the only thing that the BJP is scared of.

"This is a chance to defeat the BJP as well as price rise and inflation. Farmers also have a chance to punish those who retained a union minister despite his and his son's involvement in the mowing down of farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri. Defeat the BJP and unemployment with vote ki chot [cause hurt with a vote]. Our women also have a chance to defeat the BJP over the atrocities and rising crime against women as well as Dalits in these five States," he said.

Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress, that is contesting in Goa as a serious player, said, "With elections in full swing, the Budget session will be out of focus. This is Modi's gameplan: Make Parliament irrelevant so he is accountable to no one".

'Anyone keen to defeat BJP can ally with Cong.'

Chidambaram says it can conquer BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

The Congress is ready to accept the support of any party that is keen to defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the upcoming Goa Assembly election, senior leader P. Chidambaram said on Saturday.

His statement came shortly after Mahua Moitra, the Goa desk in-charge of the Trinamool Congress, suggested that the Mamata Banerjee-led party was open to a pre-poll alliance with the Goa Forward Party (GFP) and the Congress.

The Congress is capable of defeating the BJP on its own, but "if any party wants to support the Congress to defeat the BJP, why should I say no?" Mr. Chidambaram questioned.

After winning the maximum 17 seats in the 40-member Goa Assembly in 2017, the Congress's strength dwindled over the past five years.

The party has lost a bulk of its MLAs to the BJP and at least two to the Trinamool, the new entrant in Goa pol-



itics, leaving the Congress with only two MLAs in the House.

The Congress has already announced its pre-poll alliance with the GFP, while the Trinamool has a tie-up with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) for the State polls slated to be held next month.

The Congress had emerged as the single-largest party in Goa in the 2017 poll by winning 17 seats in the 40-member House, but could not come to power as the BJP, which bagged 13, allied with some independents and regional parties to form the government under Manohar Parrikar.

SP to file FIR against BJP for 'deception'

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday said the legal wing of his party would lodge a police complaint against the BJP's IT cell in-charge for spreading misinformation about him on social media, linking him to Kannauj perfume trader Piyush Jain whose premises were raided by tax officials recently.

Mr. Yadav said he would get an FIR lodged against Amit Malviya, the BJP's national information and technology department in-charge, for tweeting a photo of him when he was visiting France in 2015 as Chief Minister for the purpose of setting up a perfume park in Kannauj.

While along with Mr. Yadav, his colleague Abhishek Mishra, wife Dimple Yadav and MLC Pushpraj Jain alias Pampi are also present, in his tweet Mr. Malviya insinuated that Piyush Jain was also present with Mr. Yadav.

Mr. Malviya said the photograph featured Mr. Yadav's business friend from whose house stacks of currency notes were recovered from under the floor and from inside the walls. Mr. Yadav however termed the BJP's allegations as deception, saying the BJP IT cell in-charge was "lying with the support of the State and Central government".

Viresh Bhawra appointed DGP of Punjab

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Viresh Kumar Bhawra, a 1987-batch IPS officer, assumed charge as the DGP of Punjab on Saturday.

The State government order said: "On consideration of the panel received from the Union Public Service Commission, the Governor of Punjab is pleased to appoint Shri Viresh Kumar Bhawra, IPS, as DGP, Punjab (Head of Police Force). His term shall be for a minimum period of two years from the date of assumption of office in pursuance of the orders of the Supreme Court dated July 3, 2018."

After assuming charge, Mr. Bhawra said the Punjab police will ensure smooth conduct of elections.

Senior IPS officer opts for VRS, to join BJP in U.P.

He may contest in Assembly polls

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A 1994-batch IPS officer, who previously served as the chief of the Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorist Squad, Asim Arun (51) on Saturday announced that he had applied for voluntary retirement (VRS) and plunged into politics with the BJP.

The Commissioner of Kanpur police (rank ADG) said he was "proud" that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath considered him fit for the membership of the BJP.

He was earlier the ADG of the U.P. 112 emergency services. Hailing from Kannauj in central U.P., Mr. Arun is the son of Arun Ram, who had served as the DGP of the State twice. There is speculation that Mr. Arun could

also contest in the 2022 Assembly polls from his home district.

Mr. Arun, in a statement posted on Facebook, said he wanted to serve the country and the nation in a new form. He said he would try and utilise his skills and experience in the police force to serve the BJP.

He also paid a tribute to B.R Ambedkar. "The IPS job and now this honour was

only possible due to the system crafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar for 'equality of opportunity'. I will follow his high ideals and work for the honour, security and uplift of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as well as brothers and sisters of all sections," Mr. Arun said.

New challenges emerge for parties

They will have to bolster virtual strategy as roadshows and rallies are not allowed

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

As elections for five Assemblies start off with a ban on physical campaigning till January 15 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, Election Commission officials said on Saturday the rules regarding the conduct and expenditure of conventional campaign would be applicable to virtual campaign events.

Announcing the poll schedule for Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra on Saturday also encouraged candidates to adopt the virtual mode of campaigning as much as possible. The EC banned physical rallies and roadshows till January 15, when it planned to review the situation before taking a

call on the rest of the campaign period. The revised guidelines for elections released by the EC put a complete ban on *nukkad* [street corner] *sabhas* or meetings on public roads, roundabouts, public streets and corners. A top EC official said as

candidates have to open an account and submit their expenditure details for physical events, they should do the same for online rallies or events. Similarly, the Model Code of Conduct, which bans certain kinds of speech and misuse of government machinery for electoral pur-

poses, would be applicable.

The candidates would have to apply for clearance from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees, which usually give pre-certification for advertisements, the official said. In fact, earlier this week, the EC announced that the expenditure limit for candidates had been increased from ₹28 lakh to ₹40 lakh. At the press conference, Mr. Chandra said one of the reasons for this was the increased expenditure on digital campaigning during the pandemic.

While the BJP had started digital rallies in the Bihar Assembly elections in 2020 during the pandemic, it remains to be seen how all political parties proceed under the new rules.



Thing of the past: Large rallies where different parties crossed paths are unlikely in the near future. ■ FILE PHOTO

FROM PAGE ONE

India to export mango to U.S. after hiatus

Mango and pomegranate exports will start from January–February 2022 and pomegranate arils exports from April 2022," the government said in a press statement.

The development comes months after the 12th India-USA TPF (Trade Policy Forum) meeting held on November 23, 2021, which

paved the way for the latest framework agreement. A joint statement issued at the end of the meeting had announced that both sides would fast track the phytosanitary work necessary for export of mangoes and pomegranate arils to the U.S. and for cherries and alfalfa animal feed from the U.S. to India.

In her first online interaction on Facebook with women and girls from U.P. on Saturday, Ms. Vadra said she

will not allow women to be ignored and asserted that "women are the centre of the political discourse in the State".

As with Ms. Vadra's online interactive session, the Congress is working on a plan to reach the voters by adhering to all COVID protocols.

Door-to-door campaigns

Addressing an online press conference, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra kicked off her first virtual campaign for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls.

phasis on door-to-door campaigns (a group of 5 people as per latest EC guidelines) as well as *nukkad sabhas* (neighbourhood meetings) apart from hosting virtual rallies across different digital platforms. The party is said to be preparing 'virtual studios and green rooms' at the party headquarters as well as State headquarters for leaders to address the virtual and hybrid rallies.

However, the party is likely to rely on door-to-door campaign and small corner meetings to circumvent network and connectivity issues in remote areas and hilly terrain in States like Uttarakhand.

"We are hopeful that the

The election outcomes will set the tone for 2024 across parties and issues

VARGHESE K GEORGE

NEW DELHI

Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Punjab and Goa will litigate some key political questions that will have resonance across the country. There are at least six defining issues of these Assembly elections that will influence the course of the country's politics ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

First, two national parties are defending one of their key turf each this time – the BJP in Uttar Pradesh and the Congress in Punjab.

To understand the importance of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in the scheme of things of the BJP and the Congress, respectively, note the contribution that these States make to their national strength. Eleven of the Congress's 52 Lok Sabha seats – 20% – comes from Punjab.

Of the BJP's 301 Lok Sabha seats, 62, again 20%, comes from Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP and the Congress are not facing each other, however, as they do in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The Opposition space is in a flux in both States. The Samajwadi Party (SP) is drawing crowds in Uttar Pradesh, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is a talking point in Punjab, but incumbents appear to have an upper hand at the start.

Minority problem

Secondly, both national parties have a 'minority problem' that is in the spotlight. The BJP is practically non-existent in Punjab; and the Congress is practically non-existent in Uttar Pradesh – which shows a fundamental struggle that these national parties face. The BJP is impulsively mistrusted by reli-

gious minorities, and its efforts to woo Sikhs, remain half-hearted. It swings between accommodation and hostility. The party's confrontation with Sikhs, a largely farming community, on the question of three controversial farm laws, has shrunk its appeal further this time.

The Congress on the other hand is seen largely as the party inherently trusted by the religious minorities. The party's strongholds in Pakistan ea-

sier; it perhaps wanted to signal friendship to Catholics in Goa, who constitute a third of the population, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with the Pontiff last year.

The BJP wants to get a foothold in Punjab; the Congress wants to get a foothold in Uttar Pradesh, through internal debates on her role.

Regional issues

Fourth, two models of regional politics are at test in these elections. The SP in Uttar Pradesh represents backward politics led by a dominant caste; the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab helms a minority religious politics.

NEWS ANALYSIS

These are two distinct models in the spectrum of regional political formations in India. Both are facing a crisis, as their traditional mobilisation strategies are now weak, and their corruption-ridden dynastic politics is increasingly unacceptable to the electorate.

Fifth, Dalit politics in the

heartland is at a crossroads. Dominated by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) until some years ago, Dalits politics is adrift now, and is in search of a platform. The BSP, which has been in power in Uttar Pradesh several times in the past, appears to be in terminal decline. It had a strong presence in Punjab too, though it never won power.

The BJP has made significant inroads among the Dalits, at the cost of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh. In Punjab, the Dalits have largely voted for the Congress in the past, and the party is trying to consolidate them following the appointment of Charanjit Singh Channi, a Dalit, as Chief Minister.

Dalit politics

The outcomes of these Assembly elections may give some indication of how Dalit politics will evolve from here on. The BJP and the Congress are both trying to expand their acceptance among the Dalits.

Sixth, the ambitions of two Chief Ministers who want to form a non-Congress alternative to the BJP are on test in these elections. Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, and West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee are testing their politics outside their respective current arenas.

Both want to emerge as the principal challenger to Mr. Modi ahead of 2024. Mr. Kejriwal's focus is Punjab where his party had emerged as the second largest in 2017; Ms. Banerjee is focussing on Goa. The AAP is also in Goa, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh; TMC is trying to be a player in Manipur.

The national ambitions of these two leaders are based on two different models and two different sets of calculations.

Their performance this time can influence the course of national politics ahead of 2024.



Sweet success: Parties are thinking of ways to gain a foothold in various constituencies in the run-up to the polls. ■ FILE PHOTO

days are regions and constituencies that have a significant population of minorities, leaving it unviable in places and situations of communal polarisation.

India tops Sri Lanka's tourism list

Destination weddings, 'Ramayana trail' have become favourites of Indian visitors

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO
India topped Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals in December and the entire year, according to data published by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA).

For most part of 2020 beginning April, Sri Lanka shut its borders fearing import of COVID-19 cases into the island nation, which was then making global headlines for managing the pandemic well.

It was only in December 2020 that the country had gradually opened up to recover from the severe economic impact of the pandemic that had hit its tourism sector – third largest foreign exchange earner. However, 2021 saw a gradual increase in tourists, picking up in the latter part of the year.

For December, Sri Lanka recorded 89,506 tourist arrivals, of whom 23,566 or 26.3 % were from India, data



Getaway destination: Sri Lanka's southern beaches are popular among Indian tourists. ■ MEERA SRINIVASAN

showed, signalling that India had regained its spot as the largest source market in its tourism sector. From January 2021 to December 2021, 56,268 tourists – about 42 % of the visitors – arrived in Colombo from India, again the highest number from a country recorded last year, following Russia, the U.K. and Germany.

Sri Lanka is making its second big attempt to revive tourism after the Easter terror bombings of April 2019.

It recorded about 1.9 million arrivals in 2019, a drop from the record 2.3 million the previous year. And then the pandemic struck. In 2020, 5,07,704 tourists visited Sri Lanka, mostly during the first three months before Sri Lanka reported its first local case of COVID-19 in March 2020.

The sector's recovery in 2021 was slow, with 1,94,495 tourists through the year. Pre-pandemic, the tourism sector generated \$4 billion.

It dropped to \$682 million in 2021 and to \$82 million until October in 2021, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka data showed.

Enthusiased by the increase in tourist arrivals in November and December 2021, the SLTDA has stepped up international promotions hoping to further boost the sector. "Sri Lanka is back, and we are open for tourists. Our country has everything a post-COVID traveller is looking for. We have created a relaxed, bubble-free travelling for fully vaccinated travellers. Sri Lanka is ready to welcome you with the warmth of our hospitality," SLTDA chairperson Kimali Fernando said recently.

Indian tourists, in addition to holding destination weddings along the southern beaches, often travel to the hills in the Central Province, to cities such as Nuwara Eliya, while some follow the 'Ramayana trail' curated by tour operators.

'App case accused trying to delay probe, not cooperating'

Main accused in 'Bulli Bai' case tried to harm himself: police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Main accused in the 'Bulli Bai' app case Niraj Bishnoi has tried to harm himself twice while in police custody but he is being taken care of, police officials said on Saturday.

Police said Bishnoi is trying to delay the investigation and not co-operating in interrogation.

"He had also tried to harm himself twice and is also threatening to end his life. He is being taken care of him while he is in custody. His medical examination has been conducted and he is stable and unharmed. This may be due to his mental condition or perhaps, he wants to delay the investigation," a senior police officer said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell Cyber Cell) K.P.S. Malhotra said af-



Niraj Bishnoi

ter two days of interrogation, it has been revealed that he is a habitual hacker and has hacked websites of Indian and Pakistani schools and colleges.

"Bishnoi is habitual of hacking, defacing the websites and is learning the same since he was 15-years-old. His claims of hacking the websites related to schools is being verified from the concerned quarters," he said.

Police sources said Bishnoi further disclosed that he was in touch with the persons arrested by Mumbai Police online and used to communicate through Twitter group chats.

However, he had never met them nor did he have their contact numbers.

According to the police, Bishnoi also said that he was using the Twitter account of another accused Shweta Singh, who has been arrested by the Mumbai Police.

Sources said Bishnoi disclosed that he had chosen the Gurumukhi script "as he found the same to be more impactful than the Devanagari script".

According to the police, Bishnoi was also in touch with the creator of Twitter handle @sullideals, who had created the 'Sulli Deals' app on GitHub, and he had also propagated the app.

Govt. blocks multiple social media handles

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government has blocked several social media handles that were circulating "fake and inciting" content on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, Minister of State for IT Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Saturday.

Owners of these accounts are being identified for action under the law, Rajeev Chandrasekhar added.

Amid the massive crackdown on hateful posts, sources said that the offensive content actioned pertained to a fake video of a Cabinet briefing, an animated fake video showing violence against the Prime Minister and derogatory posts targeting Hindu women uploaded on various social media handles.

The Minister said that social media platforms will be reviewed on their due diligence.

PM urged to steer India away from divisive forces

IIM students flag silence on hate speech

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A group of students and faculty members from Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to steer the country away from "forces that seek to divide us" and said his silence "emboldens" voices of hate.

The letter with over 180 signatories, has flagged hate speech and attacks on minorities.

"Your silence on the rising intolerance in our country, Honourable Prime Minister, is disheartening to all of us who value the multicultural fabric of our country," the letter said.

"Your silence, Honourable Prime Minister, emboldens the hate-filled voices and threatens the unity and integrity of our country,"

the letter further said.

"We ask your leadership to turn our minds and hearts, as a nation, away from inciting hatred against our people. We believe that a society can focus on creativity, innovation, and growth, or society can create divisions within itself," it added.

'Lead by right choices'

They urged him to steer the country away from "forces that seek to divide us".

The letter said the signatories wanted to build an India that stood as an exemplar of inclusiveness and diversity in the world and expressed hope that Mr. Modi will lead the country in making the right choices.

It noted that the Constitution gave people the right to practice their religion with dignity, without fear and without shame.

'LCA MK-1A to take flight in June'

A larger aircraft will be rolled out by year end or early 2023, says HAL MD

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) expects to deliver all Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas in the Final Operational Clearance (FOC) variant to the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2022 while the LCA MK-1A, with specific enhancements, will take flight by middle of this year, said R. Madhavan, Chief Managing Director, HAL.

"We will be attempting at least 6-8 aircraft (LCA) this year. All 10 aircraft are already ready, there are some systems to be delivered from Israel. If that happens in time, we can deliver all 10," Mr. Madhavan told *The Hindu* talking of the hectic calendar HAL has for this year. "By June this year we should start flying the LCA MK-1A configuration. Once flying starts, we have about 20 to 24 months of testing. Once that is done, we will be ready



Spreading wings: HAL will try to deliver all 10 Light Combat Aircraft to the Indian Air Force by this year. ■ FILE PHOTO

for deliveries as expected."

Last February the Defence Ministry had signed a ₹48,000 crore deal with HAL to supply 83 LCA MK-1A to the IAF. HAL will be delivering the first three aircraft in 2024 and 16 aircraft per year for subsequent five years, the Defence Ministry had stated earlier.

We will start manufacturing activities parallel with the testing, Mr. Madhavan

said on LCA MK-1A schedule. With COVID cases surging again, there could be some delay if the work schedule is disrupted.

To ramp up production, HAL has already set up two additional assembly lines. Stating that all three LCA assembly lines are operational now, Mr. Madhavan said the back end of the lines is what they are finishing now including supply of sub-assemblies by vendors.

The design for LCA MK-2, a much bigger aircraft, has been frozen and some of the manufacturing activities have started. Hopefully by this year end or early 2023 we should have the first roll out of the aircraft, and one year after that it will be taking to the skies, Mr. Madhavan said. "We are targeting early 2023 but we should be able to do it slightly early."

The LCA MK-2 features enhanced range and endurance including Onboard Oxygen Generation System (OBOGS), which is being integrated for the first time. Heavy stand off weapons will also be integrated on the MK-2. The MK-2 will be a heavier and much more capable aircraft than the current LCA variants with the aircraft 135mm longer, featuring canards and can carry a payload of 6,500 kg compared to 3,500 kg by the LCA.

Plea in Supreme Court against ILPS in Manipur

Govt. takes steps to prevent disorder

IBOYAIMA LAITHANGBAM
IMPHAL

A little known West Bengal-based organisation, Amara Bangali, has filed a petition in the Supreme Court opposing the implementation of the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS) in Manipur.

Fearing that there may be communal tension, the Manipur government has taken up all necessary steps to maintain law and order.

The Supreme Court has directed the Manipur government to file an affidavit.

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren, who is also in charge of Home, said, "The government has made all preparations to meet the challenge of this organisation in the Supreme Court. These people are the ones who had done nothing good for us".

Mr. Biren has been saying that the Modi government's move of imposing the ILPS

was a 'gift' to the people which had been long denied by the previous Congress government. It would go a long way in protecting the interests of the indigenous people who "fear being swamped", he said. The ILPS has been in force in Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Outsiders planning to enter these States must obtain a permit specifying the number of days they can stay and they must leave after it expires.

On January 7, leaders of four students' organisations, AMSU, MSF, KSA and SUK, staged a protest in Imphal condemning the Amara Bangali, reportedly formed to protect the interests of Bengalis in the Northeast. They also torched the effigy of its general secretary Bakul Chandra Roy and the police picked up some leaders.

BJD rolls out incentives for anganwadi workers

With an eye on women voters, Odisha government raises retirement benefits, offers smartphones

SATYASUNDAR BARIK

BHUBANESWAR

Looking for votes from women in the forthcoming local body polls, the Naveen Patnaik government on Saturday announced an increase in the retirement benefits of anganwadi workers, and smartphones for community resource persons-community mobilisers (CRP-CM) involved in women self-help groups (SHG).

The retirement benefits of anganwadi workers has been raised from ₹20,000 to ₹40,000. Similarly, incentives for mini-anganwadi workers and anganwadi as-



Rewards galore: About 1.30 lakh anganwadi workers are set to benefit from the announcement. ■ FILE PHOTO

sists have been doubled from ₹15,000 to ₹30,000 and ₹10,000 to ₹20,000, respectively.

About 1.30 lakh anganwadi workers will benefit from the announcement, which comes into force retrospec-

tively from January 1, 2019. Similarly, CRP-CMs – members of women SHGs who handhold and guide groups of SHGs after training – will now receive ₹1,000 towards a "cloth allowance"; ₹5,000 for smartphones of their choice; ₹3,000 as monthly remuneration; ₹350 as monthly travel allowance; and ₹250 as phone allowance.

In the past two decades, Mr. Patnaik's government has reaped electoral successes largely due to women voters, who have extended their unflinching support for the regional party. The 'Mis-

sion Shakti' programme, which seeks grassroots social and economic empowerment of women, is one of the major reasons behind the winning streak.

Key members' The smartphones and phone allowances will benefit about 50,000 CRP-CMs.

A political observer who did not wish to be named said, "Both anganwadi workers and CRP-CMs are key members in villages and can influence voters' decision during elections. The government is trying to keep them in good humour."

KARNATAKA STATE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION

Central Offices, Stores and Purchase Dept., K.H. Road, Shanthinagar, Bengaluru-560027

NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO 07 Dated:10/01/2022

Tenders (Pre-qualification and/or commercial offers) through e-procurement portal (<http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>) are invited for supply the following goods / services:

Tender No.	Nomenclature	Tender Value in Crores Rs. (Approx)	Last date for submission of tender @ 17.00Hrs
G-47 /21-22	Procurement of Automotive Grease	6.50	09/02/2022
G-48/21-22	Procurement of Jumbo thermal paper reel	3.50	09/02/2022
G-49/21-22	Procurement of Plywood Sheets	1.00	09/02/2022
A-24/21-22	Procurement of Wiper Motors, Arms & Blades	9.00	09/02/2022
A-25/21-22	Procurement of Ball and Roller Bearing	4.53	09/02/2022
A-26/21-22	Procurement of Thin Walled Bearing	0.75	09/02/2022

Further any addendum / corrigendum in respect of change in calendar of events, specification, scope, other tender terms and conditions etc, will be uploaded / published through e-portal only.

NOTE:- Interested suppliers need to register in the e-procurement portal. For further information log into <http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>. In case of further assistance, contact e-procurement cell (Phone No. 080-22230960, 080-22234115). Interested suppliers may also contact e-procurement cell for training on bid submission. Mail to eprocurermenthelpdesk@gmail.com for further information if required.

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'Omicron is driving third wave now'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic across all States is being driven by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, official sources said on Saturday, citing the latest data.

Till a few days ago, it was only in the western region that the surge in COVID-19 cases was due to Omicron while the Delta variant was predominant in the north-east, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. A source said, however, the latest data suggest that all eastern States have also reported high numbers of Omicron cases.

"So going by that it can be said the third wave is being driven by the fast-spreading and highly transmissible Omicron variant," the source said.

India saw a single-day rise of 1,41,986 new coronavirus infections taking the case tally to 3,53,68,372, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Saturday.

The government has reiterated and urged people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour and avoid mass gatherings, as well as States and UTs to review infrastructure preparedness.

Country sees highest spike in new COVID cases in 222 days

Daily positivity rate stands at 9.28%; Centre urges people to follow guidelines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

India reported a single-day spike of 1,41,986 new COVID-19 cases, the highest in around 222 days. Active COVID-19 cases have increased to 4,72,169, the highest in around 187 days, according to data updated by the Union Health Ministry on Saturday morning.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 9.28%.

The country also saw its Omicron case tally rise to 3,071, as reported from 27 States and Union Territories.

Of the 3,071 cases of the Omicron variant, 1,203 have recovered or migrated, the Ministry said.

Maharashtra recorded the maximum number of 876 Omicron variant cases, followed by Delhi at 513, Karnataka at 333, Rajasthan at 291, Kerala at 328 and Gujarat at 204.

The active cases account for 1.34% of the total infections reported. An increase of 1,00,806 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours. The national COVID-19 recovery rate decreased to 97.30%, the Health Ministry said.

The Centre has urged people to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour and avoid mass gatherings to keep disease transmission under check.

It has also asked States to review infrastructure preparedness, including re-establishment of field/makeshift hospital facilities to avoid



Serious concerns: A health worker collects swab sample of passengers at Hazrat Nizamuddin railway station in Delhi on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

any shortage in the eventuality of a potential surge in hospital admissions due to COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has called for the strict implementation of public health and social measures as COVID-19 cases surged in most countries of the South-east Asia region.

It also said that though the Omicron variant of coronavirus may appear to be less severe, it should not be dismissed as "mild", as health systems in many parts of the globe are being overwhelmed by the sheer number of hospitalisations. Also, not every case of COVID-19 is due to Omicron and other variants may cause severe disease.

Odisha registered 3,679 fresh COVID-19 cases, a 36% rise over the previous day and the biggest single day spike in more than six months, the State Health Department said on Saturday. Two deaths were also recorded. The active case pool of the State has 4,548 patients now.

Kerala's COVID-19 graph is on the rise once again, with the State reporting 5,944 new cases on Saturday.

The State's active case pool now has 31,098 patients, of whom 2,473 persons are being treated in hospitals. It also detected 23 more Omicron cases, taking the total number of Omicron cases in the State to 328.

Andhra Pradesh reported 839 new cases of COVID-19 and two more deaths as on Saturday morning. The number of active cases jumped to 3,659. It is for the second consecutive day that the State is logging over 800 cases.

In Assam, 1,254 new cases

were tested over the past 24 hours.

Karnataka on Saturday reported 8,906 new cases of COVID-19, when 1,64,261 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours. Of the new cases, Bengaluru Urban alone reported 7,113 cases. Four new Covid-related deaths were also reported in the State on the day. The State now has 38,507 active cases.

Stating that authorities must implement situation specific measures to arrest further spread of the virus, she said people must adhere to these measures.

"Masks, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, ventilation, and physical distancing is an absolute must," she said.

Use only Covaxin for 15-18 age group, says vaccine maker

WHO urges strict implementation of COVID-19 protocols

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

COVID-19 vaccine maker Bharat Biotech has appealed to healthcare workers to be "highly vigilant and ensure that only Covaxin is administered to individuals in the 15-18 years age group".

The appeal was issued late on Friday night and comes following reports of other COVID-19 vaccines being administered to this cohort.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation on Saturday called for stringent implementation of public health and social measures as COVID-19 cases increased in most countries of south-east Asia, with some witnessing an exponential rise.

Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director, WHO South-East Asia Region said all preventive and protective measures must be implemented with full earnestness by one and all.

Stating that authorities must implement situation specific measures to arrest further spread of the virus, she said people must adhere to these measures.

"Masks, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, ventilation, and physical distancing is an absolute must," she said.

Other variants present
A release issued by the South-East Asia Region office said though Omicron variant may appear to be less severe, it should not be dismissed as "mild". Emerging as the most predominant variant, this highly infectious variant is already overwhelming health systems around the world.

Globally we are seeing hospitalisation and deaths from Omicron," said Dr. Singh, adding that "we must also not forget that not every COVID-19 case is an Omicron infection. Other variants, including Delta, are also circulating, which, as we know, cause severe infections and deaths".

"Each positive case of COVID-19 should hence be a cause of concern," she noted.



Note of caution: A student being vaccinated at a govt. school in West Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

variant is already overwhelming health systems around the world.

"Globally we are seeing hospitalisation and deaths from Omicron," said Dr. Singh, adding that "we must also not forget that not every COVID-19 case is an Omicron infection. Other variants, including Delta, are also circulating, which, as we know, cause severe infections and deaths".

"Often, people who are infectious do not always have symptoms or know that they are carrying the virus, so it is important to ensure good ventilation by opening windows and doors, if possible, when sharing an indoor space with other people... It is extremely important for people to wear well-fitting masks and avoid crowds and big gatherings, along with taking other measures," she said.

Cautioning that even after being fully vaccinated, people must continue to take all preventive and protective measures Dr. Singh said scaling up COVID-19 vaccination coverage is another key preventive measure for COVID-19, and all efforts must continue to ensure that the high-risk population is protected at the earliest.

Stating that we are aware that COVID-19 virus spreads mainly between people who are in close contact with each other, she added that the virus can also spread in poorly ventilated indoor settings or crowded settings.

"Often, people who are infectious do not always have symptoms or know that they are carrying the virus, so it is important to ensure good ventilation by opening windows and doors, if possible, when sharing an indoor space with other people... It is extremely important for people to wear well-fitting masks and avoid crowds and big gatherings, along with taking other measures," she said.

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Sonowal bats for AYUSH immunity kit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Ministry of AYUSH has developed an Ayurvedic kit for increasing immunity to combat the variants of COVID-19, AYUSH Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Saturday.

"Our Ministry has developed an Ayurvedic kit named Ayuraksha Kit comprising Chyavanprash, Sanshmani Vati, Anu Taila and Ayush Kwath to increase immunity in the fight against the coronavirus. Together with yoga, it can help in maintaining fitness during the pandemic," he told journalists in Guwahati.

Mr. Sonowal said the Ministry of AYUSH is working in close coordination with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to maximise the efficacy of the medications by supplementing each other.

PUBG on rail track, selfie near river prove fatal for 3 persons

+ Duo run over by a train; woman falls into Narmada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR/JABALPUR

Two brothers who were engrossed in playing popular online game PUBG on their mobile phones while sitting on a railway track were run over by a train in Rajasthan's Alwar district on Saturday, police said.

The deceased have been identified as Lokesh Meena (22) and his younger brother Rahul (19). They were preparing for competitive exams, the police said.

"Lokesh Meena and Rahul were sitting on the railway track near Roopbaas town and were playing PUBG when they were run over by a train. They were so engrossed in the game that they did not see the train coming," said Manohar Lal, Assistant Sub-Inspector of Sadar police station.



The bodies were handed over to the family of the deceased after a post-mortem examination, the police said.

Selfie mishap
A 50-year-old woman from Mumbai and her son's fiancée fell into the Narmada river while taking selfies in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district, an official said on Saturday.

The body of the 50-year-old woman was fished out later while the 22-year-old woman remains missing, he said. The incident occurred at the New Bhedaghat area, a famous tourist spot, some 25 km away from the Jabalpur district headquarter, on Friday, Tilwara police station sub-inspector Lekh Ram said.

He said the women are identified as Hansa Soni (50) and Riddhi Pichdia (22).

The family of four from Mumbai took a ropeway ride from Dhuadhar waterfall on the Narmada river and went to another side called New Bhedaghat on Friday.

Riddhi and Hansa were standing on white marble rocks and taking selfies with mobile phones when they lost their balance and fell into the river, he said.

Duty calls



Rough terrain: A milkman carrying his bicycle on a snow covered path following fresh snowfall in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Gharials to return to Orang National Park

It is to be expanded to more than thrice its existing size; to include dolphins, turtles

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The gharial, wiped out from the Brahmaputra River system in the 1950s, could be the prime beneficiary of a process to expand an Assam tiger reserve that shed its "Congress connection" five months ago.

The Assam government had on January 3 issued a preliminary notification for adding 200.32 sq. km to the 78.82 sq. km Orang National Park, the State's oldest game reserve about 110 km northeast of Guwahati.

Much of the area to be added comprises the Brahmaputra river and the sandbars or islands in it, some cultivated by locals or used as sheds for livestock. Forest officials said the administrative heads of the Darrang and Sonitpur districts have been asked to determine the "existence, nature and the right of any

person in or over the proposed schedule of land".

Orang, on the northern bank of the river, is strategic to the Kaziranga Orang Riverine Landscape. Tigers and rhinos are known to use the islands in this riverine landscape, about 180 km long, to hop between Orang and Kaziranga.

But what has enthused wildlife experts is the prospect of reintroducing the gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) in the area to be

beneficiary of the final notification of the addition to Orang, expected to take at least three months after the rights and claims are settled.

16 species of turtles

"There are a few points within the riverine landscape where the endangered dolphin thrives. The landscape has 16 species of turtles that need more conservation too," Mr. Baruah said.

One of the four major rhino habitats in Assam, Orang was recognised as a tiger reserve in 2016. The Himanta Biswa Sarma government had in September 21 dropped the 'Rajiv Gandhi' prefix to Orang given by the Congress government in 1992.

Other national parks in Assam are Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Dibrugarh, Raimona and Dehing Patkai.

Gharials were locally extinct for over six decades. The govt. is planning to rehabilitate them with better protection.

added to Orang. "The government is pursuing a policy for the reintroduction of the gharial that became locally extinct more than six decades ago. With better protection, the stretch of Kaziranga-Orang landscape is ideal for sustaining the gharial," Pradip Baruah, divisional forest officer of the Mangaldoi Wildlife Division, told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

The Gangetic dolphin is also expected to be

Five primate carcasses found in Assam forest

Poachers kill them for skin and tails

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The carcasses of five primates, believed to be capped langurs, were found without the skin and tails in an Assam reserve forest. A team of researchers working in the Biswanath district's Behali Reserve Forest located the carcasses, presumably killed by poachers for their skin, bones and tails.

The 140 sq. km. reserve forest connects the Kaziranga National Park and the Nameri National Park bordering Arunachal Pradesh. "We recovered five skulls and a few bones inside the reserve forest. They are suspected to be of capped langurs, although samples will be sent to the Wildlife Institute of India to confirm the species," Arun Vignesh, the Sonitpur East Divisional Forest Officer told *The Hindu* on Saturday. The Forest Department registered a case

and started an investigation after recovering the carcasses. Raids have been conducted in adjoining areas as officials fear more wild animals may have been killed.

Investigation started

"This is the first such incident here and we are sending the samples for forensic testing to ascertain the cause of death. But it looks like the primates were killed after being lured and trapped," Mr. Vignesh said.

"We are concerned about the habitat that has been targeted by poachers for long. Behali is an important bird area and an elephant reserve that needs conservation," researcher Jaydev Mandal said.

Apart from the rare capped langur, the Behali Reserve Forest houses the endangered slow lorises, the near-threatened Assamese macaque and the rhesus macaque.

SUDOKU

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Kazakhstan's former security chief held

President Tokayev tells his Russian counterpart Putin that the 'situation in the country is stabilising'

REUTERS
ALMATY

Kazakhstan's former intelligence chief has been arrested on suspicion of treason, the state security agency said on Saturday, as the former Soviet republic is roiled by its worst unrest in 30 years.

The detention of Karim Massimov was announced by the National Security Committee, which he headed until he was fired this week by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as violent protests swept across the Central Asian nation.

Mr. Tokayev told Russian President Vladimir Putin in a "lengthy" phone call that the situation in the country was stabilising, the Kremlin said.

It said Mr. Putin backed a proposal from Mr. Tokayev on the call to convene a video conference of leaders from the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), under whose umbrella Russia and four other former Soviet republics have sent



Major crackdown: A police officer detaining two protesters after clashes in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Saturday. • AP

troops into Kazakhstan to help restore order.

Dozens of people have died, thousands have been detained and public buildings across Kazakhstan have been torched over the past week in the worst violence experienced in the major oil and uranium producer since it became independent in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union collapsed.

Mr. Tokayev has ordered his troops to "shoot to kill"

to put an end to what he has called attacks by bandits and terrorists.

He said on Friday the state had "slept through" instigators' preparations to launch attacks on the biggest city, Almaty, and across the country.

The arrest of Mr. Massimov indicated that moves against those deemed responsible are under way.

Apart from heading the intelligence agency that replaced the Soviet-era KGB,

Mr. Massimov is a two-time ex-Prime Minister who worked closely with former President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country's ruler for three decades until he turned over the presidency to Mr. Tokayev in 2019.

The demonstrations across the country began as a response to a fuel price hike but swelled into a broad movement against Mr. Tokayev's government and 81-year-old Nazarbayev, whose family is widely believed to have retained influence in Nur-Sultan, the capital that bears his name.

After several days of violence, security forces appeared to have reclaimed control of the streets of main city Almaty on Friday.

Some businesses and petrol stations began to reopen on Saturday in the city of around 2 million people as security forces patrolled the streets. Occasional gunshots could still be heard around the city's main square.

Russia responded angrily

on Saturday to a comment by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who on Friday challenged Russia's justification for sending forces into Kazakhstan.

Blinken's jibe

"One lesson of recent history is that once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave," Mr. Blinken said.

Russia's Foreign Ministry called Mr. Blinken's remark "typically offensive" and accused him of joking about tragic events in Kazakhstan. It said Washington should analyse its own track record of interventions in countries such as Vietnam and Iraq.

The Deputy Mayor of the city was quoted by Russia's RIA news agency as saying

operations to purge the city of "terrorists and bandit groups" were still under way

and citizens were advised to stay at home. The Interior Ministry said that over 4,400

people had been detained since the start of the unrest.

Ethiopia grants amnesty to prominent Opposition leaders

Govt. says the move is aimed at 'promoting a national dialogue'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NAIROBI

Several high-profile Ethiopian Opposition figures were tasting freedom on Saturday after the government granted a surprise amnesty for prominent political detainees, including Tigrayan party leaders.

The government said the move was designed to promote "national dialogue" and follows a dramatic shift in fortunes in the brutal 14-month war between forces loyal to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

TPLF fighters withdrew to their stronghold in the northernmost region of Tigray at the end of December in the face of a military offensive by government forces that saw them retake a string of strategic towns.

There has been something of a pause in fighting since the TPLF retreat, although the rebels accuse the

'56 killed in Tigray airstrike'

REUTERS
ADDIS ABABA

An air strike in Ethiopia's Tigray region killed 56 people and injured 30, including children, in a camp for displaced people, two aid workers said on Saturday, citing officials and eyewitness accounts.

well as Opposition leaders from the Oromo ethnic group, the largest in Ethiopia, and the Amhara.

"The key to lasting unity is dialogue. Ethiopia will make any sacrifices to this end," the government communications service said in a statement late Friday announcing the amnesty.

They included Eskinder Nega, a veteran Amhara journalist. Others released were Jawar Mohammed, an Oromo media mogul.

The strike in the town of Dedeib, in the northwest of the region near the border with Eritrea, occurred late on Friday night, said the aid workers.

Before the latest strike, at least 146 people have been killed in air strikes in Tigray since October 18.

government of still carrying out deadly drone strikes on Tigray.

Among those freed were several politicians rounded up after deadly protests erupted in mid-2020 over the killing of Hachalu Hundessa, a popular Oromo singer and activist.

They included Eskinder Nega, a veteran Amhara journalist. Others released were Jawar Mohammed, an Oromo media mogul.

U.S. trade chief expresses support for Lithuania

Vilnius is under pressure from Beijing

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai on Friday expressed strong U.S. support for Lithuania and the European Union in the face of "economic coercion" from China during a call with EU Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis, USTR said in a statement.

The expression of support for Lithuania is the second this week from Ms. Tai, who had a call with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrieius Landsbergis on Wednesday.

Lithuania is under pressure from China, which claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory, to reverse a decision last year to allow the island to open a de facto Embassy in Vilnius under its own name.

China has recalled its Ambassador to Lithuania and downgraded diplomatic ties, and is pressuring com-

Maldives inks key deals with China

Beijing agrees on visa exemption for Maldivians, signs aid pact on infrastructure

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Maldives and China on Saturday signed key bilateral agreements during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit, on developing and maintaining infrastructure in the Indian Ocean archipelago, besides agreeing on a visa-free travel arrangement for Maldivians intending to travel to China.

Mr. Wang arrived in Male on Friday, as part of his five-nation trip to Eritrea, Kenya, the island nation of Comoros, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid and his Chinese counterpart unveiled a special official logo to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between the countries.

and tourism. I have no doubt that Maldives-China relations will rise to new heights under the able leadership of both President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, and President Xi Jinping," Mr. Shahid said, at a press conference.

A statement issued by the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said the visa-waiver agreement would allow Maldivians to travel to China on 30-day visa free basis once the pandemic restrictions are lifted. The two governments signed an agreement of 'Economic and Technical Cooperation' on grant aid,



Foreign Minister Wang Yi with President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. • TWITTER

focusing on social, livelihood, and infrastructure projects. Further, the Government of Maldives signed a 'Letter of Exchange' on a 'Feasibility Study of Management and Maintenance of China-Maldives Friendship Bridge', for Chinese assistance in maintaining the 1.4-km bridge connecting capital Male with the island of Hulhumale.

It was built with \$200 million Chinese assistance during the term of former President Abdulla Yameen, whose government was close to Beijing. The bridge is considered China's flagship project in the Maldives. Male owes Beijing about \$1.4 billion from past loans, which President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's government has sought to "restructure".

China also agreed to back a sea-water desalination project and cooperate in the health sector, the Foreign Ministry said. Minister Wang's visit would be one of

"great significance to the future development of our bilateral relations", Chinese Ambassador in Male Wang Lixin said in a tweet.

Mr. Wang's visit will be watched closely by New Delhi, which has maintained frequent contact with the Solih government that openly pursues an 'India First' foreign policy. Following regime change in Male in 2018, New Delhi committed \$1.4 billion to development in the island nation that is home to about 5.5 lakh people.

Mr. Wang's visit also coincides with a growing 'India Out' campaign among sections within the Maldives that oppose "Indian military presence" in the country. The government has denied the allegation. The 'India Out' campaign has more recently intensified, with the backing of President Yameen, whose conviction in a money laundering case was recently overturned by the Supreme Court.

charge been levelled against her."

Princess Basmah was arrested shortly before a planned trip to Switzerland for medical treatment, according to a source close to the family.

The nature of her illness has never been disclosed.

Prince Mohammed has overseen a reform drive since he was appointed by his father King Salman in June 2017 at the expense of the previous designated heir to the throne, Mohammed bin Nayef.

Reforms have included lifting a decades-long ban on women driving and the easing of so-called "guardianship" rules that give men arbitrary authority over female relatives.

"Basma bint Saud Al Saud and her daughter Suhoud... have been released," the ALQST for Human Rights said on Twitter.

"She was denied the medical care she needed for a potentially life threatening condition," the rights group added.

"At no point during her detention has any

ELSEWHERE



Egypt frees jailed Palestinian activist

Cairo Egyptian-Palestinian activist Ramy Shaath arrived in France on Saturday after almost two and a half years in detention in Egypt, after his family said he had to renounce his Egyptian nationality. The 48-year-old was allegedly involved in the 2011 uprising in Egypt. AFP

Sri Lanka settles Chinese firm's bill in fertiliser row

COLOMBO Sri Lanka paid a Chinese firm \$6.8 million despite rejecting its shipment of organic fertiliser as substandard, officials said on Saturday. After tests in October showed the shipment was contaminated, the officials banned it from landing anywhere on the island. AFP

Heavy snow kills 22 stuck in cars in Pak.

Most of the victims, including 10 children, died of hypothermia in a resort town

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

At least 22 people, including 10 children, died in a popular mountain resort town in Pakistan after being stuck in their vehicles overnight during a heavy snowstorm as temperatures plummeted, officials said on Saturday.

Most of the victims died of hypothermia, officials said. Among them was an Islamabad police officer and seven other members of his family, fellow police officer Atiq Ahmed said.

More than 4 feet of snow fell in the area of the Murree Hills resort overnight Friday and early Saturday, trapping thousands of cars on roadways, said Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed. The snow was so severe that heavy equipment brought in to clear it initially got stuck during the night, said Umar



Soldiers clearing the snow-covered road in Murree, around 46 km north of Islamabad, on Saturday. • AFP

Maqbool, assistant commissioner for the town of Murree. Temperatures fell to minus 8 degrees Celsius.

Officials called in paramilitary troops and a special military mountain unit to help. By late Saturday, thousands of vehicles had been pulled from the snow but more than a thousand were still stuck, Ahmed said.

Emergency officials distri-

buted food and blankets to people while they were trapped in their snowed-in vehicles, but many died of hypothermia. Others may have died from carbon monoxide poisoning after running their car heaters for long periods of time, said rescue services physician Abdur Rehman. As of late Saturday, the death toll included 10 men, 10 children and two women, Mr. Rehman said.

In one instance, a husband and wife and their two children all died in their car. In another, four young friends died together, he said.

Located 46 km north of Islamabad, Murree is a popular resort town that attracts well over a million tourists annually. Streets leading into the town are often blocked by snow in winter.

Sudan talks aim at salvaging political transition: UN

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAIRO

The United Nations said on Saturday it would hold talks in Sudan aimed at salvaging a fragile democratic transition amid a grinding stalemate following an October coup and the prime minister's resignation last week.

Volker Perthes, the UN envoy for Sudan, said in a statement the UN-facilitated political process would seek a "sustainable path forward towards democracy and peace" in the country. It

wasn't immediately clear when discussions might begin.

"It is time to end the violence and enter into a constructive process. This process will be inclusive," he said.

Mr. Perthes said key players in Sudan, including the military, rebel groups, political parties and protest movements will be invited to take part in the process as well as civil society and women's groups.

There was no immediate

comment from the pro-democracy movement or the military on the UN statement.

The October 25 coup scuttled hopes of a peaceful transition to democracy in Sudan more than two years after a popular uprising forced the military overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok resigned from office on January 2 citing a failure to reach a compromise bet-

ween the generals and the country's pro-democracy movement. He had been ousted in the coup only to be reinstated a month later following a deal with the military meant to calm tensions and anti-coup protests.

But Mr. Hamdok resigned, plunging the country further into turmoil amid political deadlock and relentless street protests that have claimed the lives of at least 60 people since the coup.

Mr. Perthes said repeated

violence since the coup has deepened the mistrust of the military among political parties. He warned that the deadlock could push the country into further instability and "squander the important political, social and economic gains" since the uprising against al-Bashir.

The protest movement insists that a civilian government lead the transition, a demand rejected by the generals who say power will be handed over only to an elected government. Elections are planned in July 2023.

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SNAPSHOTS



Death of a giant

Astronomers have imaged the explosive death of a red super giant star, watching it sizzle for 130 days after which it formed a supernova. The star is located in NGC 5731, a galaxy about 120 million light years away from Earth. This discovery was published in *The Astrophysical Journal*.



Beauty in biofilms

Bacterial biofilms have been found to form complex patterns. Scientists writing in *Cell* discovered this feature, observed earlier only in higher plants and animals. This suggests cell patterning during development is more ancient than known. Biofilms pervade a range of areas - medicine to food industry.



Flex it for the brain

When elderly people exercise, their brains produce more of a class of proteins that enhance their synapses. A study, published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, discovered this effect and found that it went beyond the hippocampus, the brain's seat of memory, to encompass other parts of the brain involved in cognition.



Heat and fish

A team of climate scientists has reconstructed the conditions of the warm period, the Eemian interglacial (125,000 years ago), from sediment samples taken from the Humboldt Current System off Peru. They showed that warming could favour the existence of small, goby-like fishes and cause larger fishes like the anchovy that are useful as food to vanish.

Conflicting signals from drug regulator, COVID-19 task force

On a few occasions, the national COVID-19 task force has refused to include drugs and vaccines that have been granted an EUA by the regulator

R. PRASAD

done for three months for male and female if this drug is given because the child born could [have problems] due to teratogenic influence... We have concerns about the drug and its use during lactation, in children, soft-tissue injuries, reproductive age group," he said.

Public health problem

"After the EUA, Indian generics are now aggressively launching the drug, and it is likely to be prescribed widely to patients diagnosed with COVID-19 with mild/moderate disease in the private sector.

This may be problematic from a public health point of view, because of concerns regarding the inherent capacity of molnupiravir to cause viral mutations and its risk to induce more viral mutants," says Ms. Leena Menghaney, South Asia Head of Médecins Sans Frontières's Access Campaign.

"The drug is already available and pharmaceutical companies are aggressively marketing it. In all likelihood, the drug is abused already," says Dr. Lancelot Pinto, Consultant Respirologist at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital and Medical Research Centre, Mumbai.

"Drug companies are aggressively marketing the drug with blatant lies and

tall, unsubstantiated claims [such as] reduction of post-COVID-19 anxiety, depression and fatigue but without a word on potential risks," says Dr. Shriprakash Kalantri, Professor of Medicine at Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram, Maharashtra. "Why do the two highest scientific bodies – the drug regulator and ICMR – take such conflicting positions. This sends a confusing signal to the public and physicians."

Not the first time
This is not the first time that the national COVID-19 task force has refused to include drugs/vaccines granted an EUA by the regulator.

On August 20, 2021 Zydus Cadila's COVID-19 vaccine Zy-

CoV-D was granted an emergency use approval by the Indian regulator. The vaccine was approved for use in adults and children 12 years and above. However, in a letter dated December 28 last year, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said Covaxin will be the only option for vaccination of children 15-18 years that was set to begin on January 3. He also said Covaxin is the "only vaccine with EUL [emergency use listing] for the age group 15-18". The same message was conveyed by the guidelines released by the health ministry.

But speaking to CNN News18 on December 27, Dr. R.S. Sharma, CEO of the National Health Authority and Chairperson of the Empo-

wered Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (Co-WIN) said both Zydus's vaccine (ZyCoV-D) and Covaxin will be available for vaccination and children will have an option to choose between the two vaccines depending on availability.

For reasons not known, the health ministry has not only declined to use Zydus vaccine in adolescents but has not even recognised the emergency use approval granted to ZyCoV-D by saying Covaxin is the only vaccine that has an EUL. Incidentally, emergency use listing or EUL is a term used by the WHO and not by Indian authorities or the drug regulator.

In the second case, itolizumab, a monoclonal antibody originally developed by Bio-

con and sold under the brand name Alzumab to treat psoriasis, was granted an EUA on July 11, 2020 to treat patients with moderate-to-severe COVID-19 disease. The subject expert committee greenlighted the drug the previous day despite the very small size of the study and inconclusive data. But three days after approval, Dr. Bhargava said trials have not yet demonstrated that the drug can reduce mortality. On July 27, 2020, it became clear that the drug will not be included in the national treatment protocol.

Absence of data

Strangely, ivermectin, hydroxychloroquine and convalescent plasma therapy were included by ICMR in the recommended treatment guidelines even in the absence of data. Hydroxychloroquine was approved in end-March 2020 primarily for ICMR to carry out studies.

Convalescent plasma was dropped from the guidelines only in mid-May last year. Ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine were dropped from the revised clinical guidance for management of adult COVID-19 patients only on September 24 last year. WHO had on March 31, 2021 said there is inconclusive evi-

dence of benefit in the case of ivermectin.

"Even after a year of COVID-19, the ICMR guidelines in May 2021 advised ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine which were well known to have been useless for COVID-19 treatment," Mr. Murali Neelakantan, Principal Lawyer at Amicus, Mumbai says in an email. "On the other hand, the drug regulator had approved favipiravir and itolizumab to treat COVID-19 but they don't find place in the ICMR protocol, even though hundreds of crores of rupees worth of these two drugs were being consumed in India. It says something about the Indian drug regulator that favipiravir and itolizumab are not being prescribed for COVID-19 anywhere else in the world."

Remdesivir and favipiravir were approved by the Indian regulator and included in the treatment guidelines even when supporting data were not available or were inconclusive.

In fact, on November 20, 2020, WHO recommended against the use of remdesivir in hospitalised patients, regardless of disease severity. Yet, the revised clinical guidelines of September last year have retained remdesivir for use in specific circumstances.

NCBS: Zebrafish study reveals how the brain makes its connections

How nerve-end connections known as synapses form is highlighted in this study of Purkinje neurons in the cerebellum of knockout zebrafish

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Neurons, or nerve cells, in the brain connect by means of junctions known as synapses through which they transmit signals. Recent work by researchers at the National Centre of Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, has thrown light on what stimulates these synapses to form.

There are two types of synapses – chemical and electrical. In chemical synapses, there is a space of about 20 nanometres between two neurons, and the way they communicate is this: One neuron converts electrical signal into chemical signals and this chemical is released into the synaptic space and the receiving neuron converts the chemical signal back into an electrical signal.

Neuron handshake

It was shown that electrical synapses are formed before chemical synapses, they are like a blueprint in which neurons make a handshake. This results in the making of chemical synapses. Research on organisms such as leeches showed that if you remove electrical synapses, the chemical synapses do not form. However, the mechanism of how it happens

in higher organisms such as vertebrates was not known.

Researchers from TIFR-National Centre of Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, have chosen Zebrafish as a model organism to study this process. Zebrafish are transparent and neuron development in larval zebrafish can be observed from day to day by injecting a dye or by engineering the fish to express fluorescent proteins.

Purkinje neurons

The group observed that knocking out a particular protein known as the gap junction delta 2b (*gjd2b*) in the cerebellum of zebrafish affected levels of an enzyme CaMKII. Levels of CaMKII were seen to increase in the Purkinje neurons in the cerebellum. These neurons and the cerebellum itself



Transparent fish: Neuron development in zebrafish can be observed by injecting a dye or engineering the fish to express fluorescent proteins. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

control co-ordination of movements in the organism. In humans for example, excess abuse of alcohol leads to damage of these cells, which results in lack of co-ordination in movement.

mon ancestor about 500 million years ago, the cerebellum has been evolutionarily conserved. While zebrafish have about 300-400 Purkinje neurons, humans have thousands of these.

Dendrite arbours

"Normally, levels of CaMKII are low in developing (immature) neurons and high in mature neurons, and the increased level actually freezes the development of dendrite arbours," says Vatsala Thirumalai of NCBS, who led the work published in *eLife*. Dendrite arbours are branched ends of neurons, given this name because of their tree-like structure. "In the absence of gap junction protein, camk2 levels prematurely increase, preventing arbours from forming.

Thus, chemical synapses do not form."

The work uses advanced techniques such as time-lapse microscopy and confocal microscopy which allowed the group to observe how the neuronal cells grow in the fish brain day after day. Electron microscopy was used to view slices of the brain to count the number of synapses present.

To make the mutant fish with *gjd2b* protein knocked out, the group used the genome editing tool TALEN (Transcription Activator-Like Effector Nuclease). "It is possible to do such exciting research using the latest and most advanced tools and techniques in India today. I hope this trend will encourage more students to take up a career in research," says Prof. Thirumalai.

Omicron epidemic: third wave or new pandemic?

Both Delta and Omicron might co-exist, needing more vaccines in 2022

T. JACOB JOHN
M.S. SESHADRI &
DHANYA DHARMAPALAN

India is facing an epidemic wave of Omicron disease presenting mostly with sore throat, nasal discharge – without cough or high fever. Pneumonia is uncommon. Blood oxygen level remains normal.

Some senior citizens and those with diseases or therapies that weaken the immune system do get severe disease requiring hospitalisation. Altogether, Omicron disease is a milder version of COVID-19 with Wuhan-D614G or Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants.

Mutational changes

All previous variants had few mutational changes of the spike protein, Omicron has many more, particularly in the 'receptor-binding domain' (RBD), the ligand that binds to host cell receptor, ACE-2. While earlier variants have 8-9 mutations on the S1 portion, Omicron has 32-37 in different studies. On RBD, Omicron has 15 mutations, while others have only 1 to 3. This many mutations have resulted in several alterations in the virus-host cell interactions. For example, the viral load in saliva is high, allowing high sensitivity in RT-PCR of saliva samples. Much virus is broadcast into air even without cough. Ob-



Vastly different: Most monoclonal antibodies that were effective to treat COVID-19 are no longer effective to treat Omicron disease. ■ GETTY IMAGES

ion, syncytium formation does not occur. This change presumably leads to less virus production in the body, less invasion of organs and tissues, lower severity and duration of symptoms, decreased need for hospitalisation and low case-fatality ratio – altogether a watered down 2021 version of COVID-2019. Omicron resembles influenza virus infection that remains mostly confined to upper respiratory tract.

Immunity evasion

Omicron has a propensity for immunity evasion. Virus neutralising antibodies induced by infection by all earlier variants or any of the available vaccines are far less effective against Omicron disease. Most monoclonal antibodies that were effective to treat COVID-19 are no longer effective to treat Omicron disease. However, the world over, high degree of protection against severe disease requiring hospitalisa-

tion proceeded unhindered, instead of getting postponed.

These many changes – genetic, fundamental cell-virus interactions, pathology, virulence, disease characteristics, immunity evasion – set Omicron apart from all other variants. To emphasise its greater deviation than other variants, imagine the term 'deviant'.

The term deviant indicates the high degree and abruptness (non-continuum) of change – in virology, the terms used to represent substantial genetic differences are: lineage, sub-type or serotype – depending on the degree of deviation. We expect the International Committee of Taxonomy of Viruses will address this question without delay, as we have already alerted the WHO and the International Society of Infectious Diseases.

Even when antibody fitness to the virus (affinity) is low, the sheer magnitude of antibody level enables antibody-binding to more viruses, thus enhancing functional effectiveness as shown in the U.K. Had India gone on a massive public education on the importance of two doses of vaccine to mitigate the impact of Omicron wave, and also on the value of booster doses to increase protection, we could have had a relatively normal life in India during January–February of 2022 – many scientific meetings and other events scheduled for these months could have

1918 pandemic was still circulating as endemic/seasonal. H2N2 with antigenic shift not only spread globally, but it also displaced H1N1 from circulation – why? Immunity induced by H2N2 was sufficient to prevent H1N1 circulation. In 1968, the next pandemic started with H3N2 subtype; it displaced H2N2, presumably due to cross-immunity. The 2009 pandemic was with a new variant of H1N1, with borrowed genes from swine influenza, and named H1N1pdm09 to distinguish it from the earlier H1N1. Antigenic cross-reactivity with H3N2 was not strong – hence both H3N2 and H1N1pdm09 are in co-circulation globally as endemic/seasonal.

While Delta variant overshadowed all earlier variants that are nowadays infrequently found anywhere, we anticipate that Omicron with antigenic shift and compromised cross-reactivity may not displace Delta. Omicron being more transmissible than Delta, we speculate: (1) In 2022, both Delta and Omicron might co-circulate, and (2) we may need vaccines against all variants of SARS-CoV-2 as well as against Omicron and its future variants, if any.

Influenza pandemic

Analogy with Influenza Type A virus epidemiology is interesting. The 1957 pandemic due to a subtype H2N2 emerged when the H1N1 of

they need oxygen. So it has been a long-standing puzzle why they are also very abundant in waters where there is no oxygen. The researchers found that these micro-organisms make their own oxygen, according to a University of Southern Denmark press release.

Keeps it going

The researchers conducted tests in the lab and found that *N. maritimus* was using the oxygen present in water but the oxygen levels started increasing again in water. They micro-organisms were able to make oxygen even in a dark environment. Not sufficiently high to influence oxygen levels on Earth, but enough to keep itself going.

Nitrogen cycle

A few microbes are known to make oxygen without sunlight, but so far they have only been discovered in very limited quantities and in very specific habitats.

N. maritimus couples the oxygen production to the production of gaseous nitrogen. By doing so they remove bioavailable nitrogen from the environment.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Q
Question Corner

Amazing and rare microbes

Can microbes produce oxygen in the dark?

Scientists say there would be no oxygen on Earth were it not for sunlight: the key component in photosynthesis. Now researchers from University of Southern Denmark have discovered that oxygen is also produced without sunlight, possibly deep below the ocean surface. Researchers have discovered that some of the invisible microorganisms living in water columns produce oxygen in an unexpected way.

Nitrogen cycle

A few microbes are known to make oxygen without sunlight, but so far they have only been discovered in very limited quantities and in very specific habitats.

N. maritimus couples the oxygen production to the production of gaseous nitrogen. By doing so they remove bioavailable nitrogen from the environment.

Oxygen source: Ammonia oxidising archaea play a key role in the nitrogen cycle ■ GETTY IMAGES

they need oxygen. So it has been a long-standing puzzle why they are also very abundant in waters where there is no oxygen. The researchers found that these micro-organisms make their own oxygen, according to a University of Southern Denmark press release.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



No smooth landing: Devas moves to seize assets worth \$30 million from Air India and AAI. • PTI

The Devas arbitration

Why have shareholders of the company moved to seize Air India assets overseas? What lies ahead?

JAGRITI CHANDRA

The story so far: On Monday (January 3), Devas shareholders said they had won an order allowing seizure of \$30 million worth of properties of Air India and the Airports Authority of India after a Canadian court's order in connection with the arbitration award it had won against the Indian government. Both Indian entities have sought quashing of this order and the court has reserved its decision.

What happened in Canada?

■ A court in Canada had ordered seizure of amounts collected by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) on behalf of Air India and AAI. Separate orders were passed on November 24 and December 21 on pleas by Devas's shareholders. This is the latest attempt by Devas shareholders to enforce the arbitration awards it won at international tribunals after India cancelled the Devas-Antrix deal in 2011.

So far, Devas has moved to seize U.S. \$17.3 million of ticketing fees collected on behalf of Air India and U.S. \$12.76 million of air navigation and aerodrome charges international airlines owe to AAI. Air India and AAI have sought quashing of the seizure order and the Quebec Superior Court held hearings on January 4 and January 5. The court has reserved its decision.

What was the Antrix-Devas deal and why was it cancelled?

■ Telecommunications firm Devas Multimedia signed a contract with Antrix (ISRO's commercial arm) in 2005 under which the latter would build and launch two ISRO satellites and lease the corresponding S-band satellite spectrum to Devas, which in turn would use it to provide its Internet services.

+ The move to seize Air India assets comes weeks before Tata Sons takes over the airline. But events in Canada are unlikely to hamper the transfer as Tata Sons has been granted indemnity from past legal claims

evidence of quid pro quo or bribery. Questions have also been raised about the calculation of losses by the CAG in the Antrix-Devas deal as it compared satellite spectrum with telecom spectrum.

Why has Devas sought to attach AAI and Air India assets overseas?

■ After the Devas-Antrix deal was cancelled in 2011, Devas Multimedia Private Limited and its shareholders won three arbitration awards at international tribunals. Despite the compensation awarded to Devas shareholders, India has not paid any money yet and challenged the awards multiple times. Devas says that in 2020 the BJP government agreed to a negotiated global financial settlement, but walked away from it and until India returns to the negotiating table, it has no alternative but to move against India's assets globally.

The first award on September 14, 2015 by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Tribunal, seated in New Delhi, unanimously rejected Antrix's defence of "force majeure" for cancelling the deal and held that it had wrongfully repudiated the agreement and awarded Devas U.S. \$562.5 million in damages plus 18% interest per annum. ISRO's commercial arm, Antrix, has filed a petition to set aside the ICC award which is currently under adjudication before the Delhi High Court. In 2012, shareholders of a Devas arm incorporated in Mauritius moved the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) against India, alleging violation of the obligation to protect their interest as guaranteed under the India-Mauritius Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). The PCA Tribunal, seated at The Hague, on July 25, 2016 found India liable for breaching its obligations. On October 13, 2020 the PCA Tribunal awarded Devas shareholders over U.S. \$111 million plus interest as compensation. A third arbitration by one of the other shareholders of Devas – Deutsche Telekom (DT) – under the India-Germany Bilateral Investment Treaty at the PCA, won DT more than \$132 million plus interest (in December 2017 and May 2020).

Meanwhile, in January 2021, after a plea from Antrix, the National Company Law Tribunal ordered winding up of Devas on grounds of being fraudulent, which was upheld by NCLAT in September, 2021. NCLAT has also held the Antrix-Devas agreement to be illegal. Devas has moved the Supreme Court and its appeals are pending.

What about Air India's sale to the Tatas?

■ Devas's move to seize Air India assets comes just weeks before Tata Sons is set to take over the airline. However, the events in Canada are unlikely to hamper the transfer of the airline as Tata Sons has been granted indemnity from past legal claims in the shareholder's agreement. "Expect a smooth transition by January-end," Kapil Kaul, CEO, CAPA India, said.

What's the roadmap for vaccinating teenagers?

Which vaccine are 15-17 year olds getting? Will lower age groups also be inoculated?

RAMYA KANNAN

The story so far: India started vaccinating adolescents (15-17 years of age) from January 3, this year. The Union Government decided to extend vaccination coverage to the adolescent group in view of the increasing cases of Omicron globally, and on the strength of the recommendations of the 'COVID-19 Working Group of National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI)' as well as its Standing Technical Scientific Committee. Registration is to be done on the CoWIN app, and walk-ins would also be allowed. Covaxin is the only vaccine that is now available for children, in the same configuration as used for adults, though two vaccines, including ZyCoV-D, have been cleared for use. All those whose birth year is 2007 or before, are now eligible for COVID vaccination.

As per figures on the CoWIN portal, 30.8% of those in the 15-17 age group have received their first dose, as on January 8.

Do children need to get a vaccine?

■ This was a question on the minds of many parents, confused by conflicting information coming on social networks. While experts, including at the World Health Organization (WHO), indicated that children are relatively safe from COVID-19 and that the disease did not affect them as severely as it affected adults, basing the decision to open schools on such immunological evidence, vaccination for children had commenced in the U.S. and the U.K. Children as young as 5 years were eligible to get a shot in the U.S.

While the jury is still out on that, divergent views continue to prevail on whether children need vaccination or not, outside the anti-vaxxer's bubble too. T. Jacob John, retired Professor of Clinical Virology, CMC Vellore, who has also served on NTAGI earlier, says ultimately it is the decision of the parent, but as far as safety goes, "Covaxin as such is absolutely safe, since it uses an inactivated virus. Efficacy also rests in the number of doses one gets—the more means better protection." He recommends that a virus neutralisation antibody test is done in a small sample size, and if the results are problematic, additional doses may be advisable.

He also stressed the importance of planning ahead for booster shots.

What about a vaccine's shelf life?

■ Some parents who took their children in for



Teen shots: Covaxin is the only available vaccine for children between 15 and 17 years of age. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

vaccination on day 1 to private hospitals were asked for consent to administer the vaccine since the shelf life of the vaccine to be used had been 'extended'. After media reports claiming that expired vaccines were being recycled for use emerged, the Union Government sought to clarify this on January 3.

While they did not provide data in support of the decision to extend the shelf life of the vaccines, the Government claimed that the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation had responded to a request from Bharat Biotech to extend the shelf life of Covaxin from 9 months to 12 months.

The national regulator then decided to approve the request, "based on comprehensive analysis and examination of stability study data" provided by the manufacturer. It pointed out that the manufacturer of Covishield had also petitioned for, and secured, an extension of shelf life to 9 months from the earlier six months.

There was no dilution in the efficacy of the vaccines, a source in the health department added.

Does the vaccine have side effects?

■ As with adults, post vaccination side effects in adolescents reported so far included fever, headache, body ache and heaviness or pain in the injected arm. Major adverse effects following immunisation have not been recorded so far. Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech issued a statement dissuading children from taking paracetamol to counter the side effects of the vaccine.

"We have received feedback that certain immunisation

centres are recommending taking three paracetamol 500 mg tablets along with Covaxin for children. No paracetamol or pain killers are recommended after being vaccinated with Covaxin." The release added: "Through our clinical trials spanning 30,000 individuals, approximately 10-20 per cent of individuals report side effects.

Most of these are mild, resolve within 1-2 days, and do not require medication. Medication is only recommended in consultation with a physician," it said.

What's the future?

■ Immunisation experts have urged the Government to monitor all AEFI (adverse event following immunisation) carefully, and report it on a database.

"This disease is going to stay with us for a long while. Vaccination is definitely on the cards, even for children. We have to proceed to lower age groups, if it is safe and reasonably efficacious in 15-year-olds, it should be extended to 12 years plus, and then, to five-year-olds too," Dr. Jacob John adds. There is no word yet on extension for lower age groups from the Government.

Does data support booster dose of same vaccine?

Why is the Indian government not allowing mix and match of COVID-19 vaccines for the third shot?

R. PRASAD

The story so far: On January 5, five days before the rollout of the 'precaution dose', scientifically called a third or booster dose, for people older than 60 years with comorbidities, health-care and frontline workers, the Government announced that all eligible individuals will receive a homologous – the same vaccine as used in the primary vaccination— vaccine as the third dose. This means those who have received Covishield as their first and second dose will receive Covishield as their third dose. Similarly, those who have received Covaxin in their first two doses will receive Covaxin in the third dose. The Government made it clear that no mix and match of vaccines (i.e.) using a vaccine different from the one used for primary vaccination, which is scientifically called heterologous boosting, will be allowed.

What is the evidence for a third or booster dose?

■ While one study each has been undertaken in India for Covishield and Covaxin, there is evidence of declining vaccine effectiveness against infection of symptomatic and severe disease from studies carried out outside India.

The prime objective of COVID-19 vaccines is to prevent severe disease and death after full vaccination. Citing a preprint (which is yet to be peer-reviewed) that is based on systematic review of published data, the World Health Organization (WHO) said after full vaccination, vaccine effectiveness of four vaccines – AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson – "decreased by about 8% against severe COVID-19 over a period of six months in all age



Safety boost: The 'precaution dose' will be administered from January 10. • FILE PHOTO

months after the second dose. At four weeks after the booster dose, the antibody level was seven-fold higher in the intervention arm than the control arm, as per plaque reduction neutralisation test. There was no statistically significant difference between the two arms in the case of binding antibodies at the end of four weeks after the booster shot. While the Government has said the third dose should be administered nine months or 39 weeks after the second dose, the booster dose trial carried out by Bharat Biotech was given six months after the second dose. "We know that the longer the gap, the better the boosting effect," Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, physician-epidemiologist and public policy and health systems specialist, recently told *The Hindu*.

There is currently no data on the Covishield booster dose from India. On December 10, the Subject Expert Committee had asked the Serum Institute of India to submit a proposal to generate clinical trial data for a booster (third) dose. According to the minutes of the meeting, based on Serum Institute's request for permission to administer the Covishield booster dose six months after the second dose, the SEC noted that the company has "not presented any data from the Indian population for the requirement of booster dose based on demographical profile and waning immunogenicity". The SEC wanted the company to submit this data. Though clinical trial data are not currently available for either Covishield or Covaxin (publicly), Dr. Lahariya says homologous boosting is generally safe and there is immunological evidence from other vaccines that a booster shot increases the immune responses. According to him, heterologous boosting should be allowed only after conducting clinical trials.

Can online bullying of women be punished?

What are the laws under which people who spread misogyny and hate may be stopped?

DEVESHE PANDEY

The story so far: Taking cognisance of multiple complaints that photographs of Muslim women had been posted on one "Bulli Bai" mobile app for fake auctions, the police in Delhi and Mumbai have registered separate cases. While the Mumbai police have so far arrested three persons, the Delhi police have arrested a B.Tech. student for allegedly creating the application on the GitHub platform, which has now blocked the app. This is the second such case reported since July 2021, when a similar application named "Suli Deals" – in which images of Muslim women were uploaded in the same manner – was detected. Following complaints lodged by some victims, the Delhi police had then lodged a case.

What are the legal provisions invoked?

■ The police have invoked Sections 153A, 153B, 295A, 354D, 500 and 509 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act.

Section 153A pertains to the offence of promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony; while Section 153B relates to imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration. Section 295A provides punishment for deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings.

Section 354D provides that any man who monitors the use by a woman of the internet, email or any other form

of electronic communication with malintent, commits the offence of stalking. Under this provision, the punishment may extend to five years of imprisonment with fine, in the case of second or subsequent conviction.

While Section 500 defines the punishment for defamation, Section 509 of the IPC addresses the offence of word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman.

Section 67 of the IT Act lays down the punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form. The first conviction attracts imprisonment up to three years and fine up to ₹5 lakh and the second or subsequent conviction may lead to imprisonment up to five years and fine that may extend to ₹10 lakh.

What are the other provisions related to cybercrimes?

■ Section 66E of the IT Act prescribes punishment for violation of privacy. Also, sections 354A (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment) and 354C (voyeurism) of the IPC, which were introduced along with sections 354B and 354D in 2013, may also be applied in conjunction with the relevant IT Act provisions, based on the nature of the offence.

What are the responsibilities of intermediaries like social media platforms?

■ Although the intermediaries are not liable for any third-party data or communication link hosted or stored

by them, they are required to retain the requisite data for a duration as prescribed by the Government and supply the same to the authorities concerned, as and when sought.

Any contravention attracts punishment as prescribed under the IT Act.

Have some additional steps been taken?

■ On February 25, 2021, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Its provision – "Due diligence by intermediaries and grievance redressal mechanism" – requires them to inform their users not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any illegal information.

They include contents that are defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another's privacy, insulting or harassing on the basis of gender, libellous, racially or ethnically objectionable, etc.

The intermediaries, on the direction of the court or appropriate government agency, are prohibited from hosting, storing or publishing any information declared unlawful.

Within 24 hours from the receipt of a complaint from, or on behalf of, an individual about any offensive content, they are required to take all reasonable and practicable measures to remove or disable access to it.

NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV

The 'old man' and the unrest

Kazakhstan's once 'beloved' leader has turned out to be the target of violent protesters who demand an end to his de facto rule

STANLY JOHNY

As a young man, Nursultan Nazarbayev was a steel mill worker in Temirtau in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. He was a member of the Komsomol, the Leninist Young Communist League. He then rose to become the boss of the communist party in Kazakhstan.

At age 50, he became the first President of the republic, a position he would hold for nearly three decades. In 2019, he relinquished the presidency, but would continue to remain the real power behind the throne as the Elbas (Leader of the Nation) who is immune to prosecution and the head of the powerful Security Committee.

This uninterrupted rise to and hold on power of the 81-year-old 'strongman' met with a strong resistance in the new year when thousands staged violent protests in Kazakhstan's oil-rich western region and in Almaty, its biggest city, directly targeting the 'old man'.

In Almaty, which looked like a war zone after mobs stormed government buildings, torched vehicles and pulled down Mr. Nazarbayev's statues, slogans such as 'the old man out' became a rallying cry for mass mobilisation. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Mr. Nazarbayev's cherry-picked successor, moved swiftly to quell the unrest. He reversed an increase in fuel prices that was the trigger of the protests, sacked his Cabinet and replaced Mr. Nazarbayev as the chair of the Security Committee with himself. He also requested the Russia-led

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for help in restoring order following which Russian President Vladimir Putin despatched thousands of troops to Kazakhstan.

Mr. Nazarbayev is nowhere to be seen in public. The Elbas, who the public was taught to admire, has suddenly become a lonely, hated autocrat. There are speculations in the media that he would leave the country for "treatment".

Rise to power

Born in 1940 in Stalin's Soviet Union, Mr. Nazarbayev's life had been closely linked with the ruling communist party. After graduating from a technical school in Dneprodzerzhinsk (in today's Ukraine), he started working in steel mills. In 1962, when Stalinism was fading under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, Mr. Nazarbayev joined the party. His rise was relatively quick. In 1984, at the age 43, he became the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Kazakhstan (equivalent of Premier), and in five years, he was appointed the First Secretary of the Communist Party in the republic.

The next year, he was named the first President of Kazakhstan by the Supreme Soviet. In that position, Mr. Nazarbayev, along with Boris Yeltsin of Russia, opposed the 1991 coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of a crumbling Soviet Union, by Soviet hardliners. When the Union disintegrated and Kazakhstan became independent in December 1991, Mr. Nazarbayev was firmly in control of the newly

born country. He never had to turn back.

As President of independent Kazakhstan, Mr. Nazarbayev took a balanced approach towards Russia and the West. A strong proponent of economic and security cooperation of Russia and other former Soviet republics in Central Asia, Mr. Na-

Only 162 people account for 55% of the energy and mineral-rich Kazakhstan's total wealth today, while the minimum wage of workers is less than \$100 a month

zarbayev also invited western oil companies to invest in his vast, oil-rich country. (Chevron Corp., the American multinational, owns a 50% stake in the joint venture that runs the Tengiz oil field, a \$37 billion project in wetlands along the northeast shores of the Caspian Sea.) He voluntarily gave up nuclear weapons, a legacy of the Soviet era, which earned

him praises from world over.

In an interview in 1994, Mr. Nazarbayev said, "The Soviet Union carried out more than 400 nuclear explosions on testing grounds in Kazakhstan, nearly 200 of them above ground or in the atmosphere, and more than 500,000 people are still suffering from the radioactive fallout." He said his country suffered so much from Soviet nuclear policy that it should never seek nuclear weapons.

He also promised that Kazakhstan, under his leadership, would become "a proving ground for democracy and a market economy." The democracy bit never happened. As Mr. Nazarbayev grew more and more powerful, the Constitution was amended to reward him with limitless terms. Political opposition was not tolerated. Dissent was crushed. The regime built a cult personality around the leader, while there were allegations of corruption and favouritism which helped the President's family continue to become richer. Western companies made huge investments in Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon fields and Western governments ignored the lack of de-

mocracy and repression in the country. Business continued to flourish.

In 2019, 29 years after he became President, Mr. Nazarbayev finally decided to step down. But the country's ruling elite had already given him the title Elbas. He also remained the head of the ruling party Nur Otan (from which he stepped down late last year) and retained a tight grip on the country's security apparatus. Besides, Kazakhstan's powerful oligarchs, many of them from Mr. Nazarbayev's family, were closely associated with the former President. The regime continued to adulate him. Astana, the capital city, was renamed as Nur-Sultan, after Mr. Nazarbayev. Statues were erected across the country and parks and other public places were dedicated to the former President. But the regime, busy building a cult personality around the leader, failed to see the resentment that was growing in the country's oil-rich underbelly.

Economic woes
Kazakhstan, a member of the OPEC Plus grouping, is one of the leading producers of

oil and gas. It pumped out about 1.7 million barrels of oil a day in November, almost 2% of what the world consumed each day last year. It is also rich with coal and uranium — about 40% of the world's uranium supply comes from Kazakhstan. It was long seen as a successful, stable political and economic model in Central Asia. But Kazakhstan has also been a widely unequal country.

When it went through a privatisation spree after the collapse of the Soviet Union, business people with close ties to the ruling elite made a fortune, creating a new class of oligarchs, who continued to become richer under Mr. Nazarbayev's reign, while the basic pay for the workers remained stagnated. According to a report by KPMG, only 162 people account for 55% of the country's total wealth today. But the minimum wage in the country is less than \$100 a month.

The pandemic worsened the economic situation. And high inflation stretched the family budgets further, adding to the miseries of the public. These underlying conditions led to the outbreak of mass protests on Ja-

nuary 2 when the government removed a price cap on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which many Kazakhs, especially those in the country's western region, use in cars as petrol and diesel are more expensive. The removal of the cap saw prices of the LPG nearly double, which triggered an instant protest. Within hours, the unrest spread to Almaty and other parts of the country. The protesters demanded not just a rollback of the price hike but also political reforms and an end to Mr. Nazarbayev's de facto rule.

The protesters' direct attack on Mr. Nazarbayev and President Tokayev's quick move to seize the moment and fire his predecessor as the head of the Security Committee suggest that the "old man's" era is finally coming to an end. But it's too early to say whether President Tokayev would be able to mobilise enough public support and restore stability. To use the old cliché, the crisis is as much a challenge as an opportunity for Mr. Tokayev to come out of the shadows of Elbas Nazarbayev and start afresh. But would he?



In Focus

■ Nazarbayev, who stepped down as President in 2019 after nearly 30 years of rule, continued to remain the real power behind the throne

■ While in power, he offered stable governance and balanced ties between Russia and the West, but his rule also saw the rise of a new class of oligarchs and widening inequality

■ In the new year protests, the mobs targeted Nazarbayev shouting slogans such as 'old man, out' and pulling down his statues

AYESHA MALIK

Gender justice

The first woman judge in Pak. Supreme Court comes with a stellar reputation

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

The nomination of Justice Ayesha Malik as the first woman judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has been welcomed across the world for being a progressive move in the male-dominated topmost appellate court of the country. However, the development has exposed, once again, the rift between the military establishment and its rivals, especially in the judiciary.

Justice Malik has a stellar reputation to back her candidature to the top court. She has been associated with prestigious chambers in Pakistan and was educated at the Harvard Law School. That apart, she has consistently battled for women's rights as well as the rights of women judges in lower courts. The nomination comes a year after Justice Malik gave a landmark judgement in the Lahore High Court against the 'two-finger test', terming it scientifically unsound. Her legal pedigree is undoubtedly among the finest in Pakistan.

However, a section of Pakistan's liberals are cautiously welcoming her nomination, citing that Justice Malik got support from the pro-government members in the JCP (Judicial Commission of Pakistan), who elected her with majority votes in the January 6 meeting. The bar councils of Pakistan that called for protest following the announcement



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

pointed out that her elevation took place superseding four senior judges.

They point out that the support from the pro-government sections in the JCP indicates that the government may be eager to appoint a woman judge to project its progressive face, but in deed, it is not an honest broker. The appointment saw a divided JCP with the Chief Justice, Gulzar Ahmed, senior Puisne Judge Umar Ata Bandial, former Judge Sarmad Jalal Osmany and Attorney-General Khalid Jawed supporting the elevation, while others, including Justice Qazi Faez Isa, opposing it.

Government support

The support from the Attorney-General is a clear indication that the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan favoured the elevation of Justice Malik, superseding other judges.

Over the years, Pakistan's Supreme Court has clashed

with the military establishment repeatedly. In a judgement in 2019, Justice Isa had directed the military not to be partial to any political party.

While Justice Malik had taken on the patriarchal elements of society, Justice Isa had taken on the all-powerful military and therefore the doubts have risen if the good deed of elevating Justice Malik to the Supreme Court was indeed an outcome of the pursuit of gender justice or is it aimed at weakening the anti-military sentiment at the highest appellate body.

The larger politics of the appointment has risen to the surface also because of the recent controversies over the appointment of the new chief of the Inter-Servic Intelligence, the spy agency. The appointment of Lt. Gen. Nadeem Ahmed Anjum, which came in the backdrop of tension between Prime Minister Imran Khan and the military, was a reminder of the unstable dy-

namics inside the Pakistani state. Following the appointment of the new ISI chief, Pakistan witnessed violent protests by the extremist Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP), which forced the government to release hundreds of its activists and its jailed leader, Saad Hussain. It has been reported that the establishment has been behind the TLP's move to harass the government. The role of the Supreme Court, in this backdrop, becomes important.

The Supreme Court had famously clashed with the former dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, which led to the return of democracy in Pakistan. In 2007, Gen. Musharraf had asked Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry to resign from the post but the Justice defied the order, triggering a mass movement against Gen. Musharraf's rule. The resultant election of 2008 saw the overthrow of the Musharraf regime. The democratic movement was spearheaded by the lawyers of the Supreme Court.

With growing economic turmoil in Pakistan, which has recently prompted some diplomats to express displeasure against their government through "hijacked social media handles", shows there is great deal of systemic tension building up inside the state organs. While Justice Malik is expected to deliver fairness in gender-related issues, her verdicts in cases involving the establishment will be her real test.

MEMORIAL

Keeper of Russia's memories

A Russian court shuts down the rights group for violation of 'foreign agent' law

G. SAMPATH

In a setback for civil rights in Russia, its Supreme Court has ordered the closure of the International Memorial Society, one of the country's oldest and most reputed human rights groups. In a ruling on December 28, the court said the NGO, known as Memorial, was in violation of the 'foreign agent' law and must, therefore, cease operations. A day later, a Moscow city court also granted a request to shut down Memorial Human Rights Center, a sister organisation.

Started in 1987 in the Soviet years of glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev, one of Memorial's early organisers was Andrei Sakharov, the dissident physicist who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize. Starting off as a movement to uncover information about victims of repression in Stalinist Russia, Memorial grew into a web of civil society groups that ran a museum, a library, an archive, and support centres that together sought to preserve the collective memory of Soviet-era repression and help the victims and their family members.

Memorial's databases, for instance, contain the names and details of more than 3 million victims and thousands of perpetrators who worked for the Soviet state. The NGO operates on the principle that the most effective bulwark against the return of mass repression is preserving the memory of

people's suffering in the nation's totalitarian past. Unlike other former totalitarian states such as East Germany, for instance, where it is the state that has taken on the responsibility of archiving the past, in post-Soviet Russia, the task fell on independent organisations, the foremost among them being Memorial. Apart from the documentation of the past, Memorial has also been, through its human rights wing, tracking abuses in the present.

Some months ago, it published a list of 419 political prisoners kept in jail by the regime of Vladimir Putin. It has also been helping hundreds of Russians file cases against government agencies at the European Court of Human Rights.

For Mr. Putin, who in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, pushed through constitutional amendments paving the way for him to potentially serve as President till 2036, NGOs such as Memorial are both an irritant (insofar as they generate material that the West could use to embarrass him) and a threat (by puncturing holes in the narrative of democratic legitimacy that undergirds his hold on power). Also, Mr. Putin has publicly maintained that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. A core element of his nationalist propaganda is that the Russian state is, and has always been, a force for good. His regime, therefore, has always sought to play down the abuses of the Soviet state while playing up its glorious geopolitical successes.

Authoritarian cast

Russian democracy under Mr. Putin, a former KGB agent from the Communist era who made a successful switch to politics under Boris Yeltsin, has taken on an authoritarian cast. Opposition leaders have been



jailed, investigative journalists have been assassinated, and civil society groups harassed relentlessly. Reminiscent of the ongoing crackdown on NGOs in India through amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, Russia's 'foreign agent' law requires NGOs who get funding from abroad to register themselves as a 'foreign agent'.

In Russia, the term 'foreign agent' – a carryover from the Soviet era – tends to denote a 'spy' or 'traitor'. Apart from the suspicion and stigma that automatically attaches to such labelling, the law, through a byzantine array of reporting requirements, raises the compliance barrier to impossible levels. It thus makes it relatively easy for the authorities to initiate prosecutions and/or liquidation of entities deemed to have violated the 'foreign agent' law.

The case against Memorial exemplifies this tactic. By getting the state prosecutor to go after Memorial using the 'foreign agent' law, Mr. Putin, some believe, hopes to both erase records of past abuses and escape scrutiny for current ones.

Human rights groups around the world have condemned the Russian court's decision, with the U.S. Ambassador to Russia describing it as "a blatant and tragic attempt to suppress freedom of expression and erase history." As for Memorial, its spokespersons have vowed to seek legal remedies to continue their work.

Court orders GM unit to pay 50% wages

Pune Industrial Court sees 'prima facie case of unfair labour practice' in interim ruling on union's plea

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

In a partial relief for 1,086 employees of General Motors India who had been laid off in July 2021, the Industrial Court in Pune has directed the Indian unit of the American auto major to pay 50% of the monthly salary to each employee till final disposal of the case.

"I hold that the complainant [General Motors Employees Union] has made out prima facie case of unfair labour practice," the court's presiding officer said in an interim ruling. "In these circumstances, if interim relief of partial wages is not granted, then employees will suffer irreparable loss and there will be hardship to them," the court observed.

"As such, balance of convenience tilts in favour of the



Uncertain future: GM India retrenched 1,086 employees in July citing 'natural calamity' and no business future. ■ REUTERS

complainant," the court said.

In the order, a copy of which has been seen by *The Hindu*, the court said, "[The] application is partly allowed. The respondent is directed to pay 50% of the salary to each employee who has been retrenched as per or-

der dated 12.7.2021 on 7th day of each month till final disposal of the complaint. The first salary be paid on 7.4.2022.

"The prayer of the complainant to restrain the respondent from alienating its property is hereby rejected,"

the court, however, added in its order dated January 5.

Declines to intervene

Since the case relating to transfer of plant and machinery to Great Wall Motors (GWM) of China along with 300 acres of land at the Talegaon plant, is being heard by the High Court, the Industrial Court refrained from intervening in the matter.

"GM India [had] terminated services of 1,086 employees under the garb of retrenchment without complying with the provisions of Section 25-N of the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 i.e., without obtaining prior permission of State government and [thus] committed unfair labour practices," said Nitin A. Kulkarni, advocate for the employees' union.

GM India on its part sub-

mitted in the court that the lay-off was declared under the ground of natural calamity [COVID-19 pandemic] hence it was not necessary to obtain the permission of the appropriate government for the lay-off.

It had submitted that it had paid compensation to the employees ranging from ₹4 lakh to ₹7 lakh.

The automaker had submitted that it had suffered losses of ₹8,400 crore from its operations in India. Since December 2020, it had no production or work in hand.

Asserting that there was no business potential for the future, GM India submitted that it would not be possible to reinstate the employees.

GM India's comment on the court order was still awaited at the time of going to the press.

GST evasion: notices issued, but 'no record of outcome'

DGGI reply to RTI query cites action on evasion of ₹9,359 cr.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NAGPUR

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) issued 158 show-cause notices for tax evasion, amounting to ₹9,359 crore in the six years to FY21, but does not maintain a record of the outcome of those cases, a reply to an RTI query has revealed.

City-based RTI activist Abhay Kolkarkar had sought consolidated information pertaining to the Directorate General of GST from DGGI, which disclosed that between FY15 and FY21, a total of 158 show-cause notices had been issued, involving an amount of over ₹9,358 crore. However, questions on SCNs (show-cause notices)



Keeping a tab: The tax evasion amounted to ₹9,359 crore in the six years to FY21, says DGGI. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and keep a record on it. But the reply clearly says 'no such data is maintained,' Mr. Kolkarkar said.

Before the introduction of GST in July 2017, the DGGI operated as Directorate General of Central Excise Intelligence (DGCEI), he added.

D-Mart Q3 net profit rises 23.6% to ₹552.53 crore

'Inflation impacting some categories'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Avenue Supermarts, which owns and operates retail chain D-Mart, on Saturday reported a 23.6% rise in consolidated net profit to ₹552.53 crore for the third quarter ended December 31.

The company had posted a net profit of ₹447 crore in the same quarter a year earlier, Avenue Supermarts said in a BSE filing.

Revenue from operations increased 22.2% to ₹9,217.8 crore during the quarter under review against ₹7,542 crore in the corresponding quarter last fiscal.

The total expenses also increased 21.7% to ₹8,493.6 crore in Q3 FY 2021-22, compared with ₹6,978 crore in

Considering the current COVID wave, sales and footfalls will be dependent on local regulations

the year-earlier quarter.

Avenue Supermarts CEO and MD Neville Noronha said: "Revenue grew by 22% in this quarter over the corresponding quarter of last year. Inflation and lesser opportunities to go out are negatively impacting certain categories more than others," he said.

On the outlook, Mr. Noronha said that considering the current COVID wave, D-Mart's sales and footfalls would be dependent on local regulations.

INTERVIEW | RAMESH NAIR

Return of large deals will push up realty space absorption by 15-20%: Colliers CEO

Omicron may turn developers, occupiers cautious in Q1 2022, he says

MINI TEJASWI

Global investors, looking for stable yields and steady returns, are expected to have strong exposure to India's new-age realty assets such as data centres, cold storage, co-living and other emerging portfolios in 2022, said Ramesh Nair, CEO, India and MD, Market Development, Asia, Colliers, in an interview. Excerpts:

What are the factors that would bring back recovery for the Indian realty sector in 2022?

The year 2022 is expected to see growth in real estate, after facing pandemic-led shocks in 2020. Economic activity is in full gear, with GDP growth pegged at 9.5% for 2021-22. The fast pace of vaccinations is encouraging occupiers to bring back employees to offices. Buoyed by the growth in e-commerce and the need for same-day delivery, the warehousing sector is likely to see increased traction over the next few quarters.

Technology will continue to be the predominant theme across the realty sector. On the residential front, sales momentum is expected to continue in 2022. Low home loan rates, stamp duty concessions and realistic prices will give confidence to homebuyers and fence-sitters. Large deals are back in the sector and this trend will push up the absorption by 15-20% in 2022 over last year.

What is the cumulative business loss of the Indian realty industry on account of COVID-19?

The construction and real estate sectors came to a grinding halt on the back of the nationwide lockdown and a series of restrictions announced in the past two years to contain the spread of the virus. Reverse migration added to deve-



Low home loan rates, stamp duty concessions and realistic prices will give confidence to homebuyers

and e-commerce during the pandemic, warehousing and data centres have been drawing strong investor interest in recent times. Moreover, the success of the listed REITs has provided a new route for investments. Hence, the institutional investments have shown resilience despite the pandemic and this momentum is likely to continue in 2022 as well.

How are realtors coping with post-COVID changes in customer behaviour?

It is true that the pandemic triggered a massive reverse migration in the country. This only exacerbated the distress of developers who were already grappling with business challenges. However, the market started looking up with the unlocking of the economy and resultant improvement in the business environment. Developers now have recalibrated their products and pricing strategies to align with the evolving homebuyer preferences. They adopted a more flexible and amenable approach for serious home-

buyers. They were timely in doling out lucrative offers, discounts and freebies during festive periods, thus clocking higher sales.

Are buyers wanting increased comfort levels at homes as they are staying and working from home?

The pandemic has reinforced home ownership and the desire to own a house is perhaps stronger than ever before. The combined impact of historically lower interest rates (6-7% from the highs of 11-12% a decade ago), realistic pricing and attractive offers of developers has created an affordable symphony in the market. With hybrid work and education model, there is a greater demand for larger apartments, gated communities replete with amenities and wellness features. Homebuyers are now placing emphasis on layouts to ensure the presence of balconies and an additional room for work and kids' classes.

Could you give us a realistic view on office space uptake?

After facing a slowdown due to the second wave, office leasing rose by 89% QoQ in Q3 2021, with 10.3 million sq. ft. of gross absorption, the highest volume recorded since Q1 2020.

We expect the optimism to further strengthen over the upcoming quarters in 2022. Large deals are back in the market, and occupier confidence is returning. However, there is some uncertainty looming around due to the new Omicron variant. Developers and occupiers are likely to remain cautious in taking decisions during the first quarter of 2022.

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Time for India to revisit its approach

Pant and the other batters need to be careful about their shot-selection in Cape Town Test

INDIA IN SA

S. DINAKAR
CAPE TOWN

We are in the beautiful wind-swept city of sea and mountains. The rhythmic beating of the drums on the beach reflects the mood here.

And the picturesque Newlands, which has the formidable Table Mountain as its backdrop, is among the great venues in cricket.

India and South Africa will clash here in the decider of this fascinating Test series from January 11.

The Indian bowling will have to pick itself up and coach Rahul Dravid is sure to crack the whip. He will have strong words for the batters too about building on starts and shot selection.

As Dravid pointed out, the timing of a stroke, at what stage to play it, is vital.

It will be hard for someone like Rishabh Pant to rein in his natural instincts. But the southpaw, with loads of natural talent, needs to apply himself for the team.

Two senior batters, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane, had departed after a long partnership and Pant needed to lock one end up and bide his time at the Wanderers.

Instead, he succumbed to the mind games in the cauldron. Was he 'softened' up by Kagiso Rabada's vicious lifter that struck him on the helmet grill?



Stepping up to the plate: Vihari was the biggest gain for India at the Wanderers ■ GETTY IMAGES

Dussen's edge off the ground, something that left the South Africans angry.

Perhaps the words from van der Dussen infuriated Pant into playing a wild heave.

Or did the wicketkeeper-batter not back himself to bat through the hostile spell from Rabada with the threat of physical damage.

At least Pant did not, like

the former India and Delhi all-rounder Madan Lal, back away to the leg side when the super quick Jeff Thomson bowled at him in Australia. To be fair to Madan, it was the pre-helmet era.

Dravid is sure to have a conversation with Pant. You need to balance aggression with responsible batting and a workable defence has to be a part of your game.

Washington Sundar was shaping well for India in Tests - he is a strong back-foot player who made runs in Australia with all the grace and flow of a left-hander.

It's a pity the southpaw had to be left out of the Test team owing to fitness concerns.

Washington averages a whopping 66.25 with three half-centuries in four Tests, the highest being 96 not out, apart from being a handy off-spinner.

Young cricketers like him, with such an outstanding record, should not be forgotten and lost to Test cricket.

Pant is the lone left-hander in the line-up and India needs more of this breed to disrupt opposition's bowling line.

The South Africans countered K.L. Rahul's ploy of leaving deliveries outside off by bowling a lot closer to the off-stump and making him play.

More right-left combinations in the mix can change the dynamics of a contest, upset game-plans.

Hanuma Vihari, someone who respects and learns from the game, bats for his team with a solid back-foot game and has the heart to bat in crisis, was a gain for India from the Wanderers.

Jansen grabs the opportunity

Left-arm could lend Proteas attack variety and thrust

S. DINAKAR
CAPE TOWN

Despite problems on several fronts, the Proteas continue to churn out exceptional pacemen. The assembly line never dries out.

In recent times, the fast and furious Anrich Nortje and, now, beanpole left-arm Marco Jansen have emerged.

Paradoxically, had Nortje been fit for the series, we might have not seen Jansen at all. In fact, had Duanne Olivier not suffered from Covid after-effects, Jansen would not have made his Test debut at Centurion.

Destiny's child
So, in several respects, Jansen's destiny's child.

The talent in the left-arm was recognised early. He was among those who bowled at the Indians in the nets during the 2018 tour.

His bowling left Virat Kohli impressed. He bowled at the Royal Challengers Bangalore nets but was eventually bought by the Mumbai Indians.

Jansen makes great use of his height with a high-arm action. He has a lovely side-on release, bowls from close to the stumps and brings with him the left-arm's angle.

He generates good pace, achieves natural bounce,



Jansen. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Jansen finished with four for 55. Skipper Dean Elgar called him the "Player-of-the-match for us".

He caught the eye at the Wanderers too. K.L. Rahul had just reached 50 when Jansen scalped him on the pull. Hooking, pulling or slashing Jansen is hazardous since the ball comes at varying heights.

And he took out Mayank Agarwal on the drive, angling the ball across the right-hander and pitching it up.

The free-stroking R. Ashwin fell to a slash off a short ball – once again it was a case of varying bounce – and Jansen dismissed Rishabh Pant with a delivery that came in with the angle and held its line on the left-hander's off-stump.

And he bowled close to Rahul's off-stump to have the key batsman held in the cordon in the second innings.

Jansen is versatile, can bowl from round the wicket too but needs to work on control.

South Africa does not have a great history of left-arm quicks. Brett Shultz was fast but fitness concerns terminated his career.

Jansen, who needs to put a lid on his temper, could lend the Proteas attack variety and thrust.

Mayank shortlisted for ICC award



Mayank Agarwal. ■ AFP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

India opener Mayank Agarwal was on Saturday nominated for the ICC Player of the Month award for December following his stellar performance in the Test series against New Zealand and South Africa.

Besides Mayank, New Zealand spinner Ajaz Patel and Australian pacer Mitchell Starc were also short-listed for the award. With regular openers Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill and K.L. Rahul all missing games at some point last month, Mayank grabbed the opportunity with both hands against New Zealand and South Africa.

Khawaja smashes his second century of Test

England, needing 388 for a victory, ends day four at 30 without loss

THE ASHES

REUTERS
SYDNEY

Usman Khawaja scored his second century of the match to help Australia to 265 for six declared on the fourth day of the fourth Ashes Test on Saturday, handing England an unlikely victory target of 388.

England, whose hopes of avoiding going 4-0 down in the series would seem to rest on obdurate batting and the weather, will resume on the final day on 30 without loss after Haseeb Hameed and Zak Crawley survived 11 overs before stumps.

The day again belonged to Khawaja, who returned to Test cricket after 2-1/2 years as a makeshift replacement for Travis Head when the middle-order batsman tested positive for COVID-19.

Oozing class
The 35-year-old once again oozed class as he re-energised the Australian innings in a 179-run partnership with all-rounder Cameron Green after England had stalled the home team's march towards a second declaration of the match.



Businesslike: Khawaja's breezy hundred helped Australia score at a good clip and declare. ■ AP

SCOREBOARD

Australia — 1st innings: 416/8
decl. in 134 overs.

England — 1st innings: Haseeb

Hameed b Starc 6, Zak Crawley

b Boland 18, David Malan c

Khawaja b Green 3, Joe Root c

Smith b Boland 0, Ben Stokes

lbw b Lyon 66, Jonny Bairstow

c Carey b Boland 113, Jos Buttler c Khawaja b Cummins 0,

Mark Wood c Lyon b Cummins

39, Jack Leach c Cummins b

Lyon 10, Stuart Broad c Carey b

Boland 15, James Anderson

(not out) 4; Extras (b-9, lb-6,

nb-2, w-3): 20; Total (in 79.1

overs): 294.

Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-36, 3-

36, 4-36, 5-164, 6-173, 7-245,

8-266, 9-289.

Australia bowling: Cummins

20-6-68-2, Starc 16-2-56-1,

Boland 14.1-6-36-4, Green 9-4-

24-1, Lyon 17-0-88-2,

Labuschagne 3-0-7-0.

Australia — 2nd innings: Marcus

Harris c Pope (sub) b Leach

27, David Warner c Pope (sub) b

Wood 3, Marnus Labuschagne c

Pope (sub) b Wood 29, Steve

Smith b Leach 23, Usman

Khawaja (not out) 101, Cameron

Green c Root b Leach 74, Alex

Carey c Pope (sub) b Leach 0;

Extras (lb-3, w-5): 8; Total (for

six wkts. decl. in 68.5 overs):

265.

Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-52, 3-

4-86, 5-265, 6-265.

England bowling: Anderson 12-

1-34-0, Broad 11-3-31-0, Wood

15-0-65-2, Leach 21.5-1-84-8,

Root 7-0-35-0, Malan

2-0-13-0.

England — 2nd innings: Zak

Crawley (batting) 22, Haseeb

Hameed (batting) 8; Total (for

no loss in 11 overs): 30.

Australia bowling: Starc 4-0-

10-0, Cummins 4-0-15-0, Boland

3-1-5-0.

Depleted Bayern humbled at home

EURO LEAGUES

REUTERS
MUNICH

A makeshift Bayern Munich team conceded two goals in four minutes to suffer a shock 2-1 loss to visitors Borussia Moenchengladbach on Friday as the Bundesliga resumed following a three-week winter break.

Robert Lewandowski cracked in his 20th league goal this season to give Bayern an early lead, but Gladbach hit back with two goals in four first-half minutes by Florian Neuhaus and Stefan Lainer.

LaLiga: Levante 2 (Soldado 47,

Morales 90+7) bt Real Mallorca 0; Real Sociedad 1 (Oyarzabal 13) bt Celta Vigo 0.

IN BRIEF



Sarwan named Windies selector

ST JOHN'S
Former skipper Ramnaresh Sarwan has been appointed as a selector to the West Indies men's senior and youth selection panels till 2024. Sarwan will serve as a member on both panels till June 2024. Sarwan joins batting great Desmond Haynes, the newly-appointed West Indies men's lead selector, and head coach Phil Simmons on the senior panel and former leg-spinner Robert Haynes on the youth panel. PTI

Dabang edges Yoddha, Mumba thrashes Titans

BENGALURU
Dabang Delhi eked out a 37-33 win over UP Yoddha while U Mumba thrashed Telugu Titans 48-38 in the ProKabaddi League here on Saturday. Naveen Kumar scored 18 points for Dabang, which regained the top spot. Abhishek Singh (13 points) starred for U Mumba. Patna Pirates pipped Gujarat Giants 27-26 in the final match of the day. PTI

Canada dethrones Russia to make the final

ATP CUP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Felix Auger-Aliassime and Denis Shapovalov stunned defending champion Russia on Saturday in a decisive doubles rubber to send Canada storming into an ATP Cup final against Spain.

Their Sydney showdown went to the wire after Shapovalov neutralised Roman Safiullin 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 and Auger-Aliassime lost to Medvedev 4-6, 0-6; Auger-Aliassime & Shapovalov beat Safiullin & Medvedev 4-6, 7-5, [10-7].



We did it! Shapovalov and

TV PICKS

Pro Kabaddi: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m. onwards
ISL: Star Sports 3, 7.30 p.m.
Bundesliga: Sony Ten 1, 10 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Bulls best Wizards for ninth straight win

CHICAGO
Zach LaVine's game-high 27 points led six Chicago Bulls stars in double figures on Friday night as it stretched the winning streak to nine games with a 130-122 defeat of the visiting Washington Wizards.

The results: Philadelphia 119 bt San Antonio 100; Milwaukee 121 bt Brooklyn 109; Toronto 122 bt Utah 108; Chicago 130 bt Washington 122; Dallas 130 bt Houston 106; Minnesota 135 bt Oklahoma City 105; Denver 121 bt Sacramento 111; LA Lakers 134 bt Atlanta 118; Cleveland 114 bt Portland 101.



Danushka Gunathilaka quits Test cricket

COLOMBO
Sri Lanka's opening batter Danushka Gunathilaka has decided to retire from Test cricket at the age of 30 to focus on the white ball formats, Sri Lanka Cricket said on Saturday. In eight Tests, Gunathilaka gathered 299 runs, including two half-centuries with a career-best score of 61. PTI

In the boys' category, Karnataka beat Delhi 77-68 to enter semifinals, while Uttar

Bopanna & Ramkumar in final

Will challenge top seeds Dodig and Melo for the title

INDIANS ABROAD

SPORTS BUREAU
ADELAIDE

Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan cruised past fourth seeds Tomislav Brkic and Santiago Gonzalez 6-2, 6-4 in the doubles semifinals of the \$521,000 ATP tennis tournament here on Saturday.

The Indian pair, which has dropped one set in four matches, will challenge the top seeds Ivan Dodig and Marcelo Melo in the final.

In the Challenger in Italy, Arjun Kadhe and Marco Bortolotti of Italy won the doubles title, beating Michael Geerts and Alexander Ritschard 7-6(5), 6-2 in the summit clash. It was the second Challenger doubles title for

the 28-year-old Arjun.

In the Challenger doubles semifinals in Traralgon, Divij Sharan, in partnership with Christopher Rungkat of Indonesia, was beaten 6-4, 6-4 by the Swiss pair of Marc-Andrea Huesler and Dominic Stricker.

The results: \$521,000 ATP, Adelaide, Australia: Doubles (semifinals): Rohan Bopanna & Ramkumar Ramanathan bt Tomislav Brkic (BIH) & Santiago Gonzalez (Mex) 6-2, 6-4.

\$58,320 Challenger, Traralgon, Australia: Doubles (semifinals): Marc-Andrea Huesler & Dominic Stricker (Sui) bt Christopher Rungkat (Ind) & Divij Sharan 6-4, 6-4.

\$32,160 Challenger, Forlì, Italy: Doubles (final): Marco Bortolotti (Ita) & Arjun Kadhe bt Michael Geerts (Bel) & Alexander Ritschard (US) 7-6(5), 6-2.



Easy outing: Ramkumar and Bopanna got the better of Brkic and Gonzalez in straight sets. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kerala girls edge out Tamil Nadu

Karnataka boys down Delhi

BASKETBALL

SPORTS BUREAU
INDORE

Defending champion Kerala girls edged out Tamil Nadu 76-75 to enter the semifinals of the National Junior Basketball championships here on Saturday.

Kerala came back from behind to stun the in-form Tamil Nadu side. Kerala girls, who trailed by seven points at half-time, won the third and fourth quarters by decisive margins to score a one-point win.

Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan completed the semifinal line-up in the girls' section.

In the boys' category, Karnataka beat Delhi 77-68 to enter semifinals, while Uttar

Pradesh edged out Kerala 68-65.

The results (quarterfinals):

Quarterfinals: Boys: Karnataka 77 (B.M. Manoj 31, Achintya Krishnan 16, Pratam Shetty 10) bt Delhi 68 (Sushanth Dhanda 29); Uttar Pradesh 68 (Kushal Singh 18, Aman Kaushik 11, Robin Banerjee 11) bt Kerala 65 (Pranav Prince 22, C.K. Abhinav 19).

Girls: Punjab 90 (Kavya Singla 17, Manmeet Kaur 17, Kanishka Dhir 12) bt Maharashtra 69 (Aanya Bhavas 20, Sameeksha 15); Chhattisgarh 69 (Riya 22, D.Kirti 14, Amisha Gaikwad 12) bt Madhya Pradesh 61 (Manvi Srivastava 23, Prathana Salve 12); Kerala 76 (P.S. Jesely 21, R. Abhirami 14, Irin Elsa John 11) bt Tamil Nadu 75 (K. Sathy 24, Yuvasree 16, Angel Jeevanath 14); Rajasthan 42 (Rashi 14) bt Karnataka 41 (Sanjana 19, Pavana 12).

Kyrgios has feuded with Djokovic in the past over his response to the coronavirus pandemic, but has softened his stance, saying on Saturday he was "feeling for him".

'Determined' Djokovic will be unstoppable if he is cleared to play in the Australian Open: Kyrgios

The Aussie, who has feuded with the Serb in the past over his COVID response, has softened his stance



Empathetic: Kyrgios called Australia's treatment of Djokovic 'really bad' and 'not really humane'. ■ REUTERS

21st Grand Slam title – a milestone that Spanish great Rafael Nadal is also chasing at Melbourne Park.

Fellow 20-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer is injured and not in Australia.

"If he's allowed to play the Australian Open, I don't want any bar of him. I reckon he's going to be pissed off," Kyrgios said in Sydney ahead of a warm-up tournament before the Australian Open on January 17.

a competitor he is," he added.

"You don't become a great champion like that without being able to overcome some adversity like this. I'm sure he's overcome a lot more challenging times than, you know, spending a couple more extra days in hotel rooms."

Kyrgios on Friday called Australia's treatment of the Serbian "really bad" and doubled down Saturday, saying it was "not really humane, is it, what's going on".

"I think like it's just, if this was a normal person they wouldn't have to deal with all this. His life's probably hard enough as it is, and I know what that's like. I just hope it all gets sorted soon."

Surekha's 2022 target: Asian Games gold

ARCHERY

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Jyothi Surekha, who is taking part in the NTPC National-ranking archery championship at the Gachibowli Stadium here, said it was important to perform well in 2022.

She felt that there was no better way to start the season than by competing in the compound category here on Sunday.

"This is my first competition after almost two months. I was keen to get a feel of competition again," Surekha told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

"With the specific objective of winning an Asian



Hectic schedule: Surekha has a busy year ahead of her. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Games gold this year, I feel it is imperative to take part in as many events as possible though the pandemic threat looms large," said the archer,

who has won a silver and bronze in the women's teams events in the Asiad.

"For us, the next major event is the World Cup Stage

I in Turkey this April. It will be followed by events in Korea, Paris and Columbia.

"We also have the World Games in the USA in July and then the Asian Games," said Surekha about the hectic schedule ahead.

"I am pretty impressed with a lot of young talent in this championship and I am sure many of them will go places with exposure and training," Surekha said.

Though she has won seven World Cup medals (three silver and four bronze) and six World Championship medals (four silver and two bronze), Surekha revealed that she wanted said to keep going and win more.

Yuvan, Tejasvi clinch maiden titles

Manas-Aryan and Vaishnavi-Rutuja pairs lose in finals

ITF GRADE-3

SPORTS BUREAU
CHANDIGARH

Yuvan Nandal defeated Daksh Agarwal 6-0, 6-4 to clinch the boys' title in the ITF grade-3 junior tennis tournament at the CLTA Complex on Saturday.

It was the maiden singles title from five finals in the

ITF junior circuit for the 16-year-old Yuvan.

It was the first crown for Tejasvi Dabas too in the girls' section, as she beat Vaishnavi and Lantana Tararudee.

The results:

Boys (final): Yuvan Nandal bt Daksh Agarwal 6-0, 6-4.

Semifinals: Daksh bt Ayush Bhat (US) 4-1, 4-2; Yuvan bt Sahib Sodhi 5-4(1), 4-1.

Doubles (final): Fadi Bidan and Thanaphat Boosara-wongse, the Indian pair losing 10-12 in the match

wongse (Tha) bt Manas Dhamne & Aryan Shah 7-5, 6-7 (3), [12-10].

Girls (final): Tejasvi Dabas bt Vaishnavi Adkar 6-4, 6-4.

Semifinals: Tejasvi bt Anya Murthy (US) 5-3, 4-2; Vaishnavi bt Lantana Tararudee (Tha) 4-2, 4-1.

Doubles (final): Anya Murthy (US) & Lantana Tararudee (Tha) bt Vaishnavi & Rutuja Chaphalkar (US) 7-5, 7-5.

Yuvan and Rutuja Chaphalkar lost in the girls' doubles final to Anya Murthy and Lantana Tararudee.

In doubles, Manas Dhamne and Aryan Shah finished runner-up to Fadi Bidan and Thanaphat Boosara-wongse, the Indian pair losing 10-12 in the match

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Yuvan and Rutuja Chaphalkar lost in the girls' doubles final to Anya Murthy and Lantana Tararudee.

In doubles, Manas Dhamne and Aryan Shah finished

A tumultuous journey

Documenting the rough ride that people across the nation took in 2021

If 2020 was a tough year, 2021 took it up more than a few notches. COVID-19, which had been around for months, kept people on the edge with new highs and lows. While the battle of ballots kept many regions and their leaders busy, the weather didn't make it any easy, with unprecedented rains pounding many parts of the country.

The new farm laws kept the power corridors of Delhi busy, while farmers opposed to it dropped anchor on the outskirts of the capital in January 2021 with a plan to move to the heart of the city

on Republic Day. They came in waves the Capital had not seen in a long while. While public empathy usually erodes for such prolonged campaigns, which finally forced the government to take a U-turn, there was no visible anger from the commoners of Delhi.

The virus that spread like wildfire, taking down people and their livelihoods did not spare any part of the country.

The dreaded Delta variant put hospitals under stress to provide medical oxygen. After weeks of chaos, trains were used to move medical oxygen from manufacturing plants to the many needy

cities. In some places, autorickshaws fitted with oxygen cylinders became improvised ambulances. Visuals of mass cremations stunned the world.

Towards the end of the year, tragedy struck the defence fraternity when Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Bipin Rawat, wife and accompanying defence personnel died in a chopper crash in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.

A look into the tumultuous year through the eyes of *The Hindu* lensmen.

In tandem:
Tractors lined up ahead of the tractor rally scheduled for Republic Day, on January 24, 2021, in New Delhi. ■
R.V. MOORTHY



Showering love: Audience greeting DMK President M.K. Stalin during an election campaign in Villupuram district on February 12, 2021. ■
S.S. KUMAR

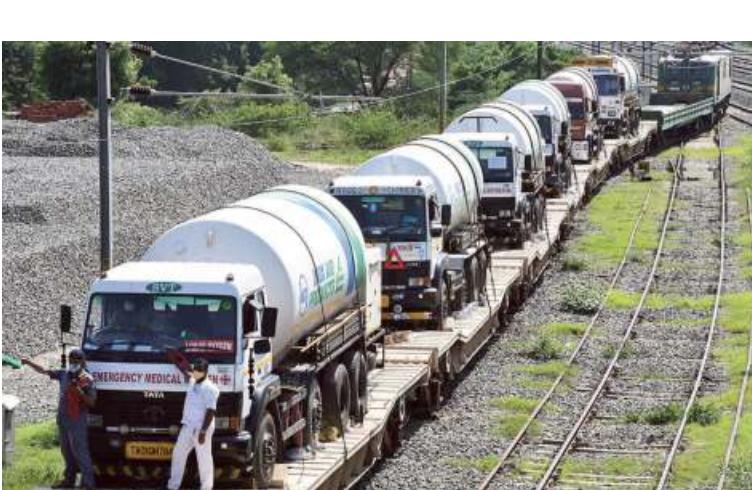


Gasping for air: People queuing up to refill oxygen cylinders in New Delhi on April 27, 2021. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Show of strength:
Farmers attending the 'Khap Mahapanchayat' against Centre's farm laws at the Bahadurgarh bypass in NCR, on February 12, 2021. ■
V.V. KRISHNAN



Getting jabbed: A 78-year-old woman being carried by her son-in-law after her vaccination in Kerala, on February 22, 2021. ■ THULASIK KAKKAT



Oxygen on rails: Oxygen Express carrying liquid medical oxygen arriving at a railway station near Coimbatore on May 27, 2021. ■ S. SIVA SARAVANAN



Grim days: Cremation of COVID victims underway at Ghazipur in New Delhi on April 28, 2021. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Man of masses: Fans of actor Puneet Rajkumar gathered at Bengaluru to pay respects to his body on October 29, 2021. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN



Survival mode: People lining up to collect food during COVID lockdown, in Bengaluru, on May 29, 2021. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR



Auspicious flame: Earthen lamps lit by devotees on the ghats of Ganga River during Dev Deepawali celebrations on November 19, 2021. ■ K.R. DEEPAK



Shower of blessings: A couple wading through water after getting married in the midst of rainy days in Chennai on November 11, 2021. ■ M. VEDHAN



Winged human: A man wearing mask walks past a mural in Mumbai on April 9, 2021. ■ VIVEK BENDRE



Kindred spirits: Officials and volunteers distributing food to rain-affected people in Chennai on November 12, 2021. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Final farewell: Narendra Modi paying tribute to late CDS General Bipin Rawat in New Delhi on December 9, 2021. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



Flood fury: Areas around Hyderabad that were flooded after five days of heavy rain on September 6, 2021. ■ NAGARA GOPAL



In memoriam: Late CDS General Bipin Rawat's daughters at his funeral on December 11, 2021. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



Jumbo tragedy: A woman paying tributes to an elephant which was hit by a train in Assam on December 1, 2021. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR