

Regrettable that govt, judiciary not adhering to timelines in filling up HC vacancies: Par panel

NEW DELHI, DEC 11 /--/ Amid a standoff between the government and the Supreme Court Collegium over the appointment of judges, a parliamentary panel has asked the Executive and the Judiciary to come up with "out of box thinking" to deal with the "perennial problem" of vacancies in high courts.

The department-related standing committee on Law and Personnel in its report tabled in Parliament on Thursday said it is not in agreement with the comments of the Department of Justice in the Union Law Ministry that "time for filling up of vacancies of judges in the higher judiciary cannot be indicated".

The timeline has been drawn in the Second Judges

Case and also in the Memorandum of Procedure (MOP) regarding the appointment of judges, it pointed out. "But regrettably, those timelines are not adhere to by both, the Judiciary and the Executive, which is leading to delay in filling up of the vacancies," it lamented. It said as per the data provided by the government, as on December 31, 2021, there were three high courts of Telangana, Patna and Delhi where vacancies were more than 50 per cent and 10 HCs where vacancies are more than 40 per cent of their respective sanctioned strength.

"These all are large states, where judge to population ratio is already skewed an such level of vacancies is a matter of

deep concern," the panel headed by senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi observed.

The government and the Judiciary, the committee noted, "should come up with some out of box thinking to deal with this perennial problem of vacancies in the HCs". The committee also said that it is "surprised" to note that the Supreme Court and the government have failed to reach at a consensus on revision of the Memorandum of Procedure (MOP) for the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts, though the same is under consideration of both for "about seven years now". The committee expects the government and the Judiciary to finalise the revised MOP, which is more

efficient and transparent. There are 25 high courts in the country. As on December 5, 778 judges are working in the high courts against the sanctioned strength of 1,108.

On November 25, the government had asked the Supreme Court Collegium to reconsider 20 files related to appointment of high court judges. The government had expressed "strong reservations" about the recommended names. Out of the 20 cases, 11 were fresh cases and nine were reiterations made by the top court collegium. The government has returned all the names related to fresh appointments in various high courts on which it had "differences" with the Supreme Court Collegium, sources had said. (PTI)



President Droupadi Murmu pays floral tributes to former President Pranab Mukherjee on his birth Anniversary, in New Delhi on Sunday

UP: Over 4,600 PHCs will soon have tele-consultancy facility, says CM Adityanath

VARANASI, DEC 11 /--/ Emphasising the importance of advanced healthcare services in Uttar Pradesh, chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said all the primary health centres will soon be equipped with facilities like tele-consultancy and telemedicine.

Addressing an event on the occasion of 'Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day 2022' in Varanasi, Chief Minister Adityanath said, "Health services must be linked with technology. Over 4,600 primary health centres (PHCs) of the state will be linked with all medical colleges, district hospitals of the state as well as Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) and King George's Medical University (KGMU), Lucknow. For this, health workers of the state will also be specially trained." He also said that soon every health and wellness centre in the state will be connected with the facility of teleconsultation. Adityanath was addressing a conclave commemorating the UHC Day in Varanasi. The event was organised by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. "Also, we are



installing health ATMs at all PHCs for telemedicine. Over 4,600 primary health centres of the state will be connected with health ATMs, which will provide the facility of testing 60 types of diseases at a single centre. For this, proper training will also be provided to the paramedical staff," Adityanath said.

In his address, the chief minister said that Kashi is the city of Lord Shiva and is also the birthplace of Lord Dhanvantari. "This holy city is the workplace of the world's most popular leader Prime Minister Narendra Modi and this workshop concerning health in Kashi will give a new message to the country," he said. Quoting the theme of the conclave 'To build the world, we want a healthy future for all', Adityanath said, "India always worked towards the welfare and upliftment of all without discriminating on the basis of caste, creed or religion following (the mantra of) 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina, Sarve Santu Niramaya'. India propagated yoga and as a result, over 200 countries in the world are leading a healthy lifestyle. Our country is being seen as a big hub of health and wellness centres."

Showering praises on Prime Minister Modi, the chief minister said, "During the world's biggest pandemic, India's health infrastructure was not as strong as it was in many developed countries of the world. But, our prime minister took timely decisions to deal with the crisis... and India's approach towards Covid became a model for the world." "During the second Covid wave, we realised the usefulness and power of community health officers (CHO). We formed 72,000 teams in UP at that time. Each team included 10 to 15 people, including ANMs, ASHA workers, public representatives and officers. As a result, India gave the best model of Covid management to the world, which was widely appreciated," he said. (PTI)

Every family in J&K to get unique ID; BJP welcomes move, other parties raise concerns

JAMMU, DEC 11 /--/ The Jammu and Kashmir administration is planning to create an authentic database of all families in the Union territory with each of them having a unique alpha-numeric code -- the objective being easy selection of eligible beneficiaries of various social welfare schemes.

The proposed move to allot "Family ID" has been welcomed by the BJP but panned by other parties which raised concerns over personal data safety. At the recent national conference on e-governance in Katra in Reasi district, Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister of Haryana Manohar Lal Khattar released the Digital J&K Vision Document, unveiling the government plan to create an authentic, verified and reliable database of all families of the Union territory.

According to the vision document, "Each family will be provided with a unique

alpha-numeric code called JK Family ID. The data available in the family database would be used to determine eligibility through automatic selection of beneficiaries for receiving social benefits." "The database would identify each and every family in J&K and would collect the basic data of the family, provided with the consent of the family, in a digital format."

The document further reads that all the applicable laws and regulations in respect of data protection shall be complied with in the management of data. To thwart risks and protect sensitive and critical data, it said the Jammu and Kashmir government plans to work on an information security policy and also envisages formulation of appropriate cyber security framework. Commissioner Secretary of the IT Department Prerna Puri said the objective of creating the database, which will be at par with Haryana's 'Parivaar Pehchaan Patra', is

that families or individuals will not have to apply to receive benefits under each individual scheme. "Once the data in the JK Family ID database is authenticated and verified, a beneficiary will not be required to submit any more document to avail a service," she told PTI.

The Congress, National Conference and the PDP slammed the proposed move. Congress chief spokesperson and former legislator Ravinder Sharma questioned the government's intention and also its capacity to protect such digital databases from cyber attacks. "Why does the government wish to peek into everything? They already have enough data through Aadhaar and are providing benefits through direct bank transfer (DBT) mode," Sharma said. Referring to cyber attacks by Chinese entities and ransomware attack on the AIIMS servers, he said in such a situation, protection of personal data of the people is a major challenge. (PTI)

Demonetisation, wrongly designed GST reasons behind high unemployment rate: Jairam Ramesh

BUNDI, DEC 11 /--/ Demonetisation, wrongly designed GST and faulty economic policies of the Narendra Modi government are the reasons why the country is facing the highest unemployment rate in 45 years, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh alleged on Sunday. He was addressing a press conference in Bundi district's Laban village, where Bharat Jodo Yatra halted for the morning break after clocking 12.8 km from B a l d e v p u r a . "Demonetisation was the major factor followed by GST (Goods and Services Tax) that destroyed small and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises which generate maximum employment," he said. On the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Ramesh said one of its significant aspects is to raise issues such as economic disparities and inequalities. "We are raising our voice against rising prices, unemployment rate and wrongly designed and implemented GST and closure of small scale industries," Ramesh said as he released a movie on unemployment. The Congress leader said it was appropriate to release the movie in Rajasthan as it was the first state to launch urban employment grantee scheme, which was named after Indira Gandhi, in September. Ramesh also referred to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, saying it gave relief to several lakh people in the two to three Covid-hit years, but the scheme was criticised by some people, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

World returning to Ayurveda after trying various treatments: Modi

PANAJI, DEC 11 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the world tried various treatment styles and is returning to the ancient treatment methods of Ayurveda. The Prime Minister virtually inaugurated the Goa-based All India Institute of Ayurveda, Ghaziabad-based National Institute of Unani Medicine, and Delhi-based National Institute of Homeopathy from Goa. Modi arrived in the coastal state this afternoon to address the valedictory session of the 9th World Ayurveda Congress (WAC) and Arogya Expo. Representatives from more than 50 countries took part in the Ayurveda Congress. "The world has tried many treatment methods and now it is returning to the ancient way of Ayurveda. Ayurveda not only talks about physical health but about overall wellness," he said. Expressing happiness that more than 30 countries have accepted Ayurveda as a traditional medicine system, the prime minister said we should spread it to more countries and give recognition to Ayurveda. The prime minister said the Ayush industry has grown from Rs 20,000 crore eight years (in 2014 when he assumed the office of PM) ago to Rs 1.50 lakh crore. "The global market is growing further and we should try to benefit from undertaking medicinal plantation," he said, adding it will generate more employment.

He also underlined the need for evidence-based generation of the database for Ayurveda which will fulfil the parameters of modern science. "Modern science and treatment rely on the evidence-based database. The Ayurveda sectors need to generate such a database. The Union government's Ayush Portal already has some 40,000 research studies uploaded," he said. The prime minister said during the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 150 specific research studies were submitted to the ministry. He announced the country will have a National AYUSH Research Consortium soon. Modi said Ayurveda and Yoga tourism is possible in a state like Goa and the inauguration of the All India Institute of Ayurveda could be one of the steps in that direction. Speaking on the occasion, Union AYUSH Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the visionary and dynamic leadership of the prime minister has taken the Ayurveda sector to new heights. Sonowal said the PM has brought a huge transformation in the Ayush sector and added the WAC has received huge success due to the positive response from India and abroad. He said the global centre for traditional medicine is being set up in Gujarat. "It would be 'AYUSH ka amrit mahotsav'," he added. Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant said the All India Institute of Ayurveda at Dhargal will have 50 per cent reservation in seats for Goans. He said the AYUSH ministry is commissioning projects worth thousands of crores rupees on a single day. The chief minister announced Goa will have a separate department of AYUSH which will be dedicated towards AYUSH doctors. (PTI)

Ahead of Karnataka polls, Kharge calls meeting of state Congress leaders in Delhi today

BENGALURU, DEC 11 /--/ As assembly elections in Karnataka are due in the next few months, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has called a meeting of the party's senior leaders from the state on Monday in New Delhi, to discuss the preparations and the strategy for the polls. According to a party functionary, 14 leaders from the state, including Karnataka Congress President D K Shivakumar, and state Legislature Party leader Siddaramaiah, among others will be attending the meeting at the AICC office in the national capital. Amid signs of factionalism within the state unit, Kharge is likely to instruct the party leaders to work in a united manner for ensuring victory, the functionary said, adding that discussions are likely to take place regarding preparations, tour plans, preliminary discussions regarding candidate selection, among others. Confirming former chief minister Siddaramaiah's attendance at the meeting, his office in a statement said the Leader of Opposition in the assembly will be travelling to Delhi tomorrow to attend a meeting of state party leaders called by the Congress President at 2 pm. Addressing a mega rally of party workers in Kalaburagi on Saturday, Kharge had urged party leaders from the state to unitedly face the election, and asserted that the high command will decide as to who will become the chief minister and ministers, on winning the polls. He had also asked Congress workers and leaders to travel across the state and attract people towards the party, like the ruling BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi do. The AICC chief's strong call for unity has come, as Congress appears to be faction ridden, especially with its top two leaders -- Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah -- nursing Chief Ministerial ambitions in the event of the party coming to power, and are indulging in a game of political one-upmanship. (PTI)

Vehicles bought under Nirbhaya Fund diverted for Y-plus security to Shinde faction lawmakers, claims Police official

MUMBAI, DEC 11 /--/ Some of the vehicles procured by the Mumbai Police earlier this year under the Nirbhaya Fund to fight crime against women are being used for providing Y-plus security to the MLAs and MPs of the Shiv Sena faction led by Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde, a police official said on Sunday.

In June this year, the city police force procured 220 Boleros, 35 Ertigas, 313 Pulsar motorcycles and 200 Activa two-wheelers using the Rs 30 crore corpus that it had received under the Nirbhaya fund. The development prompted the

opposition Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) to attack the Shinde-led government, as they asked if the security of the ruling legislators was more important than protecting women. The Nirbhaya Fund is being given to the state governments by the Centre since 2013 to implement schemes related to women's safety. "After the vehicles were procured in June, they were distributed to all 97 police stations, cyber, traffic and coastal police units in July," the official said. "Of these vehicles, 47 Boleros were requisitioned from several police stations

by the Motor Transport Department of the Mumbai Police following an order from the VIP Security section of the state police stating that they are required for use as an escort vehicle for MPs and MLAs of the Shinde faction to provide Y-Plus security cover to them," he said. However, 17 of the vehicles which were used for the security of these lawmakers were returned to police stations after the requirement was fulfilled, he added. "But 30 Boleros are yet to be returned, which has impacted the police patrolling in the jurisdiction of respective

police stations," the official said.

NCP spokesperson Clyde Crasto said, "SUVs bought under Nirbhaya Fund diverted to provide Y-plus security to Shinde legislators. Shameful misuse of power by the Sh i n d e - F a d n a v i s government. Eknath Shinde's legislators must hang their heads in shame." President of NCP's Maharashtra unit Jayant Patil said the Nirbhaya Fund was set up by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for the protection of women. "It is shocking that vehicles procured for helping the

police to carry out their duties of protecting women are being misused for the protection of the breakaway MLAs. "On one hand the chief minister claims to have the support of the people and on the other hand, each of the breakaway MLA and MP is being provided Y-plus category security which comprises five police personnel," he said. "If people are with you, what do you fear?" he asked. Patil demanded the vehicles be sent back to the respective police stations and said the security of women was more important than the security of the breakaway legislators. (PTI)

China Churning: Post Ukraine, Should World Beware Xi Jinping’s ‘Win Wars’ Call?

BHOPINDER SINGH

Let’s face it, the ostensible reasons of interoperability and testing synergistic tactics in a Military Exercise entailing two international powers is a cliched and dated rationale. The real reasons are strategic power projection.

Last week when the Chinese H-6K bombers and the Russian Tu-95 ‘Bear’ bombers growled in tandem over the Sea of Japan and East China Seas, they were suggesting a far more sinister and strategic posture than the reaction of scrambling South Korean and Japanese fighter-jets.

While Moscow and Beijing banded these Russian-Sino Military Exercise as ‘routine’, the dark and bloody backdrop of Russia’s war in Ukraine and China’s cold stare at Taiwan added to the signaling.

The reiterative provocation after the joint statement was signed on 4 February between the two powers (just weeks before the Ukraine invasion), which had insisted on a ‘new era’ of strategic understanding with ‘no limits’ on jointmanship, has been tellingly followed up with a series of large-scale Military Exercises and the rare defense of the Russian position on the high tables of international diplomacy.

Irrespective of the global isolation, China chooses to defiantly punt on the Russians to further its own battle of hegemonic stakes— the Military Exercises are simply the most powerful symbols of its resolve, direction and ‘allies’ for the future.

Expectedly, Japan



expressed concerns over what it perceived as plausible threats to its territorial integrity with the assertion of the joint Russian-Sino Military maneuvers in its neighbourhood. Yet, Beijing’s unofficial mouthpiece—The Global Times naively headlined, “Tokyo urged to heed rational voices on China, after it hypes regular China-Russia air patrols.”

Importantly, Beijing which urged ‘rational voices’ to Tokyo did not afford similar and reciprocal rationality when its own wounded border on the other side of the Indo-Sino Line of Actual Control (LAC) was undergoing yet another Military Exercise, albeit one with India and the United States.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian had commented, “The joint military exercise held by India and the US near the LAC violated the spirit of relevant agreements signed by China and India in 1993 and 1996 and does not help build bilateral trust.”

The allusion to the earlier agreements signed by both the countries were even more ironic and disingenuous, considering

the unbridled expansionism displayed by the Chinese in the Summer of 2020.

The limited scale of Military Exercise entailing US troops from the second Brigade of the 11th Airborne Division along with the soldiers of India’s Assam Regiment (100 kilometers from the LAC) by themselves do not create any literal or immediate threat to the Chinese— but it’s the strategic purpose and partnership between India and the US that rankles the Chinese sensibilities and future equations.

Even the name of this 18th edition of the Indo-US Military Exercise ie, Yudh Abhyas or War Practice is clearly explicit in its suggestions.

However, in a move and with a vocabulary that sounds eerily like the sort used by the Chinese to counter the Japanese ‘concerns’, New Delhi reminded Beijing that the ensuing Indo-US Military Exercise had nothing to do with past agreements and also remarked that it would have zero tolerance for China’s attempts to unilaterally change the LAC.

Speaking on India’s foreign policy, the Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had previously stated that “India exercises with whomsoever it chooses to and it does not give a Veto to third countries on this issue” and the newly-appointed US Charge d’Affaires to India Elizabeth Jones did some old-fashioned American talking, and asserted that it is “none of their business!” The open duplicity of the Chinese stand when

confronted with contrasting situations on two different sides of its borders, was bluntly called out.

Beijing’s pontificating tone in The Global Times continued—“Washington hopes that with its assistance in military equipment and intelligence, India will confront China militarily and even engage in an arms race. It is expecting that India will become an important pawn in its Indo-Pacific strategy, and thus, will be able to contain China’s development in the Indo-Pacific region.”

This view is not entirely misplaced as it fits in well with the US worldview of containing China as per the recently released 2022 China Military Power Report. However, it is for New Delhi to partake in the purported US plan to the extent that serves India’s interest and ignore the parts that are beyond its limited concerns. That is unfiltered realpolitik, and China recognises the dynamics at play.

It is the same Chinese who had profoundly invoked a proverb from the Zhou dynasty about the inequities at play whilst defending its nuclear program in the 1960s. That the officials can burn down houses, but the commoners are not even allowed to light their lamps as a piece of timeless wisdom was conveniently forgotten when India was to assert its own nuclear prowess and agenda, later.

The Chinese had come down heavily on New Delhi for joining the ‘Nuclear Club’, uninvited. The Chinese duplicity on anything to do with its expansionist program, is unmatched and institutionalised.

The report also specifically calls out the Indo-Pacific region as “the primary theatre of the revised Cold War realm.”

Issues like the Chinese (and Russian) bombers flying or flotilla sailing dangerously close to other wary country’s territorial limits and reciprocal Military Exercises are only going to be the norm and par for the course, going forward. The intensity of the Chinese threat will also warrant a rival ‘bloc’ approach, and therefore, platforms like the QUAD (Quadrilateral Grouping– Japan, India, Australia and United States) are only natural.

The famously frosty exchanges between Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Chinese President Xi

Jingping at the G-20 meet in Bali, or United Kingdom’s Rishi Sunak’s unprecedented

confirmation of the end of ‘Golden Era’ of relations with China is also augury of the direction of future

winds. (The author is a Former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and

Puducherry. This is an opinion piece and the views expressed above are the author’s own).

Shyam N Shyam

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World Soil Day by KVKs



PORT BLAIR, DEC 11/--/ I C A R - Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Central Island Agricultural Research Institute observed “World Soil Day” befittingly on 5th December 2022, at Chouldari Gram Panchayat, Govindpur and Perka village of Nicobar separately. The campaigns were conducted with the theme “Soils: where food begins” to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems and human well being by addressing the growing challenges in soil management, increasing soil awareness and encouraging societies to improve soil health. Smt. Tapasi Saha, Pradhan,

Chouldari Gram Panchayat, was the chief guest and Samiti Member Smt. Chaitali Haldar was the guest of honour for the awareness program at Chouldari Gram Panchayat. Other PRI members of Chouldari Gram Panchayat also attended the program. Dr. B. K. Nanda, S.M.S. (Agri. Engg.), Shri Thanmai Paul, Technical Officer of KVK, South Andaman and Er. Manoj Kumar, SMS (Agri. Engg.), ICAR-KVK, Nimbudera, were the resource persons for the programs. A detailed discussion was made on the importance of soil conservation, Natural farming, Soil Health Card,

Fasal Bima Yojana, Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme and other schemes related to agriculture and allied sector, of Govt. of India. A practical demonstration was conducted on the preparation of “Jeevamrut” involving the participants of the program.

At Govindpur, the programme was inaugurated by Mr. Sanjay Biswas, Head, Govt. Secondary School, Govindpur in presence of School teachers. In his inaugural speech Shri Sanjay Biswas, expressed the need of soil conservation measures for enhancing crop productivity in this region. Shri Paul David, First Headman Perka Village grace the program.

On this occasion, a total of 173 farmers, farm women and school children were befitted at three places of islands.

These programs were organised under the supervision & guidance of Dr. E. B. Chakurkar, Director, CIARI, Port Blair and Dr. Y. Ramakrishna, Principal Scientist & Head.

Drug peddlers nabbed with 2 kg of ganja

PORT BLAIR, DEC 11/--/ Continuing war against drugs, team PS Aberdeen nabbed two persons for possessing illicit ganja weighing 2.289 kg.

On 2nd December 2022, on receiving credible and specific information, consecutive raids were conducted by a team of PS Aberdeen, consisting of HC Sunil Singh Yadav, HC Preeti, PCs S. N. Phathak, Sandeep Lakra, Sonu Yadav, Ashish Singh, D. Shiv Kumar and Shem Peter led by Inpr. K. Joju, SHO PS Aberdeen. They arrested two persons, residents of Dollygunj and Guptapara and recovered illicit ganja weighing 2289 grams from their possession. Both the

accused persons have been arrested after observing all codal formalities and booked under appropriate sections of law under NDPS Act.

The entire raid took place under the supervision of Sh. Sunny Gupta, IPS, Sub Divisional Police Officer, South Andaman and overall supervision of Sh. Kalaivanan. R, IPS, Superintendent of Police, South Andaman District. The general public is requested to share information pertaining to drugs menace and any crime or other illegal activities to Police at 112, 03192-232100, 03192-233077 & 03192-232400. The identity of the informant will be kept secret.

35th National under 13 Chess Championship begins

PORT BLAIR, DEC 11/--/ The MPL 35th National Under 13 Chess Championships-2022 started on 11th December 2022 at Vanarapet, Pondicherry. Around 500 players across India are participating in the prestigious event in which 5 young chess players, three Boys and

two Girls from Andaman & Nicobar Islands viz V Yashwant of GMSSS Port Blair, Yuvan Singh of Carmel Sr. Sec. School Port Blair, M A Dinakar of Kamaraj EM School, Tanisha Raj & Kavya Raj of VKV Lambaline Port Blair are taking part in the prestigious event. The event will be held

for 8 days over 11 rounds under Swiss System in Classical time control from 11th December 2022 to 18th December 2022. The total Prize money for the championship is rupees Eight Lakhs which will be awarded among top twenty players in Boys & Girls Category.

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Usually, terrible things that are done with the excuse that progress requires them are not really progress at all, but just terrible things

Russell Baker

Higher risk of premature death

A new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has sent alarm bells ringing. It shows evidence of a higher risk of premature death and illness among many persons with disabilities compared to others in the society. The latest global report on health equity for persons with disabilities shows that because of the systemic and persistent health inequities, many persons with disabilities face the risk of dying much earlier—even up to 20 years earlier—than persons without disabilities. They have an increased risk of developing chronic conditions, with up to double the risk of asthma, depression, diabetes, obesity, oral diseases, and stroke. Many of the differences in health outcomes cannot be explained by the underlying health condition or impairment, but by avoidable, unfair and unjust factors.

The report shows the number of people with significant disabilities worldwide has risen to 1.3 billion (or 1 in 6 people). This number reinforces the importance of achieving full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and embedding the principles of inclusion, accessibility and non-discrimination in the health sector. The report stresses the need for urgent action to address the vast inequities in health caused by unjust and unfair factors within health systems. These factors—which account for many of the differences in health outcomes between persons with and without disabilities—could take the form of: negative attitudes of healthcare providers, health information in formats that cannot be understood, or difficulties accessing a health centre due to the physical environment, lack of transport or financial barriers. The report shines a light on the inequities that people with disabilities face in trying to access the care they need. “Health systems should be alleviating the challenges that people with disabilities face, not adding to them,” WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asserted, and said that the WHO is committed to supporting countries with the guidance and tools they need to ensure all people with disabilities have access to quality health services.

With an estimated 80% of persons with disabilities living in low- and middle-income countries where health services are limited, addressing health inequities could be challenging. Yet even with limited resources, much can be achieved. Recognising that everyone has the same right to the highest attainable standard of health, the report provides important economic analysis of adopting a disability-inclusive approach. It shows investing in a disability-inclusive health sector is cost-effective.

WHO calculates that governments could expect a return of about US\$ 10 for every US\$ 1 invested on disability-inclusive noncommunicable disease prevention and care. In addition, family planning and vaccination are cost-effective when implemented in a disability-inclusive manner. The report outlines 40 actions across the health sector for governments to take, drawing on the latest evidence from academic studies as well as consultations with countries and civil society, including organizations representing persons with disabilities. These actions vary by resource level and range from addressing physical infrastructure to training of health and care workers.

Decoding Preeti Banerjee of IPTA on her centenary year

REFLEX ACTION

Sankar Ray

Preeti Banerjee (nee Sarkar) who first sang Sare Jahanse Achchha Hindostan Hamara, the lyric of Mohammad Iqbal (written in 1904), scored anew into a song by Pandit Ravi Shankar in 1945 at the Andheri commune of Indian Peoples Theatre Association in Bombay would have been 100-plus, had she been alive today.

Born on 4 December 1922 into a cultured and educated family of Sarkars in Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh). Preetidi's golden voice remained almost intact even at the age of 88 when I was fortunate among sparingly few to have given audience to the famous song in her voice Sarfaroshikitamannaabhamaaredilmeinhai (The desire for revolution is in our hearts) which became immortal by Sardar Bhagat Singh who used to sing this in condemned cell before his martyrdom in 1931. Spellbinding was Preetidi's melodious singing at the apartment in southeast Kolkata of her elder son, Partha, a professor of physics. We were speechless at the incredible grain in her vocal quality even at that age. Pandit Ravi Shankar used to leave at Malad in Mumbai and was deeply involved with the IPTA as its chief music director.

He played the tune in his Sitar while singing it and Preeti Sarkar set it into her melodious voice. And then other members of IPTA's central squad, living at the Andheri commune of the IPTA, picked it up for making the great song into a chorus. The newly composed song was first sung by Preetidi and she helped other members of the commune learn and sing it. That was sometime in 1945. The legendary Sitarist's music was different from the ghazal tune, scored previously when the poet Iqbal was alive. The maestro will be remembered for turning the song into a household one. In the words of another legend, Prof Hiren Mukherjee, academic and communist parliamentarian, "It's a song for winning the world. It opened a new horizon that brought into IPTA's fold Ravi Shankar, the sarodist Timir Baran and dance-exponent Santi Bardhan along with several other stalwarts of the time".

Preetidi was then a card-holding communist who came in touch with the undivided Communist Party of India in the pre-independence India through the CPI's student

frond, All India Student Federation when she was an AISF activist during his undergraduate years. She told in an interview after the demise of Panditji in December 2012. "In 1945, when Panditji - used to stay at Malad, IPTA requested him to set 'SaareJahan se Achchha' to music. Robuda, which is what we used to call him, readily agreed. I went to his apartment. He played the song on the sitar and asked me to sing along. I learned the song and came back to the commune at Andheri and sang it before all. Everyone was enthralled and felt inspired to learn it from me. Then it became the opening song for any IPTA programme". The request came from Puran Chand Joshi, then general secretary of CPI. He conceived the idea of IPTA as also the Progressive Writers Association.

Preetidi had high praise for Joshi all through her life. "Joshi is incomparable. He wrote the script of 'Spirit of India'. He kept track of everyone and was around the commune to see if anyone was saddened, and inspired all. He knew her mother was a widow, not at all well-to-do. He used to remit Rs 15 month every month by money order. After all, Preetidi left her home when she was just above 20 to be a whole timer. Her cousin brother Benoy Roy (her Tutu-da) was instrumental in her joining the central squad of IPTA in Bombay. Roy's songs like firaiya de de re more Kayyurbondhuder (in memory of Kayuur comrades who were hanged to death) will keep his name indelible in the history of IPTA. The squad needed female voices. Preetidi was then well known as a singer in the AISF in Rajshahi. She wrote to P C Joshi who promptly arranged for taking Preetidi to IPTA in Bombay.

Andheri commune was then truly starred. Came Abani Dasgupta from Uday Sankar's Almora Centre which was then about to be folded up, Salil Chowdhury, Deena Gandhi



People shop for winter garments at Esplanade in Kolkata on Sunday----Arijit Ganguly

Maya Ghosh: A Pioneer in Group Theatre Movement in Bengal

FOCUS

Nitya Chakraborty

Maya Ghosh who mesmerized the theatrelovers of Calcutta in 1960s through her extraordinary acting prowess passed away in Kolkata on Saturday virtually unsung. She was 79 and ailing for quite some time. Those of us who were witness to the surge of the group theatres in Calcutta in the second half of last century, still remember the thrill and excitement over the production of Nandikar's Bengali adaptation of Italian writer Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author" Maya showed her mettle first as an actor in this adapted play by portraying the character of the mother.

The sixth decade of the last century in Calcutta was culturally volatile. After the glorious days of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1940s and 1950s, the centralized IPTA could not keep many of the talented artistes in the areas of drama, films and music. Sambhu Mitra founded his own group "Bohurupee" in 1948. This was followed by Utpal Dutta's Little Theatre Group. Many other groups like Soubhanik, Nandikar came into being within the framework of the ideals of the IPTA.

The new young directors looked for both original and adaptations. Sambhu Mitra adapted Ibsen's "The Doll's House", "The Ghosts" and "The Enemy of the People". Mitra also stunned the theatreloversthrough his production of Sophocles's Oedipus The group theatre

movement was looking for real, socially relevant as also adaptations having relevance to the eco-political situation in India. So the groups looked to the German writer Bertolt Brechtand gave his plays Indian orientation.

It was in this ambience Maya Ghosbbegan her career in Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), Dum Dum Branch, in the play Saoñtali Bidroho (Santhal Revolt, 1961) by Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay. When Ajitesh left IPTA to form Nandikar, she became one of the founders of the group. Her first performance in Nandikar was in the role of the mother in Pirandello's play. It was a new experience to the theatre goers. Maya Ghosh became a big name among the theatrelovers through this oneplay alone. However in 1966, when thirteen members of Nandikar split from the group and formed a new group "Theatre Workshop", Maya joined the new group, eventually becoming its President. Here, she worked on highly successful plays like Chak Bhanga Modhu (written by Manoj Mitra), Rajrakta (written by Mohit Chattopadhyay and directed by Bibhash Chakraborty), Bela Obelar Golpo,

Vietnam, and several other plays. Maya was a classic example of a talented woman theatre actor of a poor family of that politically turbulent period of Calcutta. She had to look after a family of four through her earnings from theatre. The group theatre payment was very meagre, she had to do plays for office clubs to run the expenses of the family. Amidst all these pressures, she continued to work for her group giving stellar performances in every role.

In an interview to Rushati Sen, a leading academic and researcher she said in 2011 "A less busy, lesser-known actress like me will have to deliver her dialogues in the absence of the person to whom my dialogues are delivered. Yet I do it. Didn't I say this before? If I say no to TV completely, what will I eat? It takes some time to get the money, but I get it at least! I don't really have an alternative in front of me now; working here, I get a handful sum together; I spend it slowly. I don't know when will I get to work next. If I get four thousand rupees, I can manage".

Just imagine. This was the plight of one of the greatest female actors of the group

theatres at the age of 68. She was still struggling, looking for smallroles to survive. But this woman played the principal character in Mohit Chattopadhaya's play 'Rajrakta' in early 1970s directed by Bibhash Chakraborty under Theatre Workshop. This play was the mirror of thatperiod of terror organized both by the state authorities as also the fringe elements of the Naxalites. Rajrakta was the expression of the anger of Bengal in that period and Maya's character was the medium. Maya was not a trained actor that way. She took up acting to earn money for taking care of her family. But she had extraordinary instinct. Her acting in Rajraktais still remembered by those who saw that. I personallyfeel that Maya gave her best performance in Rajrakta.

Maya has received several awards, including the Paschimbanga Natya Akademi Puraskar (West Bengal State Theatre Academy Award) for her performance in Bela Obelar Golpo in 1987. But still the worth of her work is largely unknownoutside Bengal. The only available account of her life has been published as Monchoy Jibon (A Life on the Stage), edited by Rushati Sen and published by Thema. Maya did not get her due in her long struggling life. But her life is worth portraying in a play ora biopic... That will bearattribute to a talent who contributed somuch to the growth of group theatre movement in Bengal. (IPA)

(later famous Deena Pathak), her sister Shanta, Hemango Biswas, Prem Dhawan, Kaifi Azmiand her spouse Shaukat Azmi, Benoy Roy, Jyotirindra Moitra who wrote and scored the music of Nabajeebanergan (Songs of new life). She remembered her youth days of Rajshahi.

The freedom movement was raging and its flame touched his psyche. "Communalism was then unheard of in our town and around. I didn't even know what politics was all about. Of course, I went to listen to Mukunda Das's songs. He was a mass singer aflame with patriotic spirit, looked like a flabby gentleman. Many medals hanging around the neck. And singing in a loud voice, appealing to the Bengali girls and ladies, 'Cheredareshmichuribanganaree (Leave the silk bangles, ho Bengali women-in response to the nationalist call for boycotting foreign cloth). I was perhaps an eight year-old girl"

The IPTA central squad was folded up in early 1947;Preetidi came back to Bengal but began staying in Calcutta. Things turned worse for all mass fronts of CPI, including IPTA, during the days of ultra-revolutionary adventurism under the then general secretary of CPI, B T Ranadive, who replaced Joshi. Preetidi plunged into the high-voltage revolutionary experiment and was jailed. Ranadive period heavily damaged the CPI. Preetidi too was among the sufferers. He married a senior party comrade, Ramen Banerjee in 1947. But four members of her family including her husband were CPI whole timers. She had to stay away from IPTA and party work. Although the father-in-law was a lawyer, there was not much expansion. So Preetidi joined the service of the Board of Secondary Education Government of West Bengal. She gave up the party membership but remained a fellow-traveler.

In her last days, she was wholly drawn to Rabindrasangeet – songs of Rabindranath Tagore. During jail days, I used to requisition copies of Swarabitan (notation books of Rabindrasangeet-) which were sent to be with multiple censoring seals I used to learn Rabindrasangeet. I wish I learn and sing them now, but I am now too old to fulfill this wish". She was then 88-plus. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword						
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ACROSS				DOWN			
1	Precipitation	1	Wealthy	2	Part of the eye		
3	Country	4	Serpent	5	Careful efforts		
8	Auction	6	Singer	7	Very poor		
9	Smart and fashionable	10	Wired enclosure				
11	Venomous ill will	11	Wait on				
12	Secure	13	Plants				
14	Indicate agreement	16	Niggardly				
15	Microbes	17	Lawful				
18	Courage	18	Famous				
19	Self	20	Donated				
21	Tide attaining least height	22	Abnormal appetite				
24	Entrances	23	Legume				
26	Agreeable	25	Work unit				
27	Declare						
28	Shelf-like surface						
29	Daybreak						

SUDOKU:3723

1		6			4		7	
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2	8				7			1
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Yesterday's Solution 3722

6	9	7	3	5	2	1	4	8
8	2	5	7	4	1	9	3	6
1	3	4	6	9	8	7	2	5
7	5	8	2	3	4	6	1	9
4	1	2	8	6	9	3	5	7
9	6	3	5	1	7	2	8	4
5	7	9	1	8	3	4	6	2
2	8	1	4	7	6	5	9	3
3	4	6	9	2	5	8	7	1

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1731

M	I	N	U	S		T	A	P	S
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R	O	A	M	S		N	E	A	R
E	N	T	I	C	E				E
	I		D	O	N		P	E	N
A	C	T		R	A	P		R	
M			R	E	C	I	T	A	L
B	A	S	E		T	E	A	S	E
E		P	E	P			M	E	N
R	E	A	L		E	X	E	R	T

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Delhi liquor scam case: CBI team reaches BRS MLC Kavitha's house for questioning

HYDERABAD, DEC 11 /-- / A team of CBI sleuths arrived at the residence of Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's daughter and BRS MLC K Kavitha here on Sunday, to question her in connection with the 'Delhi excise policy scam'.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had last week informed Kavitha that a team from the premier investigating agency would visit her residence in the city on December 11 for examination. Kavitha, who has been served a notice by the CBI for recording her statement in connection with the case, recently said she will be able to meet the officials from December 11-15 (except for 13th). The probe agency issued the notice under Section 160 of



MLCK Kavitha

the Code of Criminal Procedure and asked her to intimate the place of residence as per her convenience for the "examination" at 11 am on that day. Under Section 160 of CrPC, the investigating officer can summon any person as witness in a

particular case. After her name cropped up in a remand report filed by the Enforcement Directorate in a Delhi court on the alleged kickbacks in the 'scam', Kavitha had said she was ready to face any probe.

The CBI on November 25 filed its first charge sheet in the case against seven accused. "As per the investigation carried out so far, Vijay Nair, on behalf of leaders of AAP has received kickbacks to the tune of at least Rs 100 crore from a group, called South Group (controlled by Sarath Reddy, Ms K Kavitha, Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy) by various persons including Amit Arora," the ED had said in the remand report filed on one of the accused - Amit Arora -- in a Delhi Court. (PTI)



PM inaugurates three National Ayush Institutes at the valedictory function of 9th World Ayurveda Congress, in Goa

Goa: More than 200 children rescued from Madgaon rly station this year

PANAJI, DEC 11 /-- More than 200 children have been rescued from Madgaon railway station in South Goa by the authorities so far this year, an official said on Sunday.

Several children who had either run away from home or found begging at the railway station were rescued by the authorities, a senior official of the Railway Protection Force told PTI. Childline, a non-profit organisation, has set up a booth at Madgaon railway station and has been involved in these rescues. "At least 217 children have been rescued from Madgaon railway station till date this year. In some

instances, children have run away from home and ended up at the railway station," said Ana Andria Fernandes, a coordinator for Childline Railways. Fernandes said her team members work round the clock at the railway station and keep an eye out for children who are unaccompanied on the premises and check compartments of trains. Children from neighbouring Karnataka and even from states as far as Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand arrive at the railway station by trains, she said. "In some cases, children leave their homes after witnessing fights between parents or due

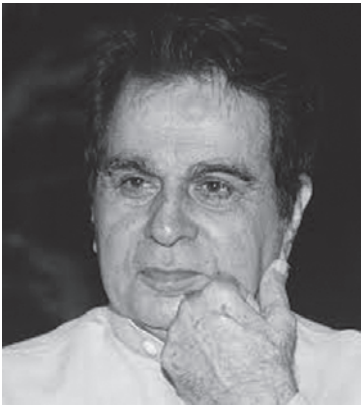
to anxiety about examination. They board any train without thinking about and understanding the consequences," Fernandes said.

Instances of children found begging on railway platforms are also reported in a major way, she said. Once rescued, children are handed over to the RPF or Konkarn Railway Police, which then entrusts them to care of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), which is set up by the Goa government, it was stated. The CWC lodges the children at the state-run home 'Apna Ghar' in Mercers before handing them over to the parents. (PTI)

100years of Dilip Kumar: An archetypal performer who created his own school of acting

NEW DELHI, DEC 11 /-- Phenomenon, instinctually natural performer, polyglot, and one who could harmonise mind, voice and body on screen -- this is how colleagues, film historians and cinema enthusiasts remember Dilip Kumar on his birth centenary Sunday.

Kumar was not only suave and soft, elegant and enchanting, but his performing skills continue to be respectfully emulated by leading actors and thespians of Indian cinema. He never studied the art and craft of acting in any drama or film school, but his presence on screen had a certain rhythm, poise and movement derived from his own method of acting. As the film industry and cinema lovers across generations mark the birth centenary of the silver screen icon, film historian Amrit Gangar believes it is interesting that the celebrations coincide with times when "we are talking not just about Hindi cinema but the pluralistic Indian cinema as a whole". "Dilip Kumar sahab was a polyglot reflecting India's polyphonic character as a nation. He knew or spoke fluently, besides his own mother tongue Hindko, Urdu, Hindi, Pashto, Punjabi, Marathi, English, Bengali, Gujarati, Persian, the Bhojpuri and Awadhi... His birth



centenary marks Indian cinema with an extraordinary poise and economy in today's cacophonic environment," Gangar told PTI. Born in a congested lane of Qissa Khwani Bazaar in Peshawar, Pakistan, Muhammad Yusuf Khan was one of the 12 children of Lala Ghulam Sarwar Khan and his wife Ayesha Begum.

In his 20s, he decided to pursue acting professionally with "Jwar Bhata" being his first film. It was the beginning of the journey of one of the biggest screen icons witnessed by Indian cinema-Dilip Kumar, a name suggested by legendary actor-producer Devika Rani. From "Jwar Bhata" in 1944 to "Qila" in 1998 Kumar had a 56-year-long illustrious career. The decades 1950s and 1960s marked

his golden period so it was Indian cinemas. Mehboob Khan's 1949's "Andaz", alongside Nargis and his childhood neighbour Raj Kapoor, brought him superstardom and he reunited with Nargis the next year for "Jogan". His performances smoothly slid between tragedy and comedy -- "Paigham", "Ram Aur Shyam"-- to swashbuckling titles "Aan", "Azad", "Kohinoor" and "Mughal-e-Azam" . "His aplomb had its own elan," Gangar said. Kumar's screen persona evolved in the directorial hands of Bengali filmmakers such as Nitin Bose ('Deedar' and 'Ganga Jumna'), Tapan Sinha ('Sagina Mahato') and Bimal Roy ('Devdas' and 'Madhumati'). While 1970s was a lean phase for the actor, he rose back in 1980s and 1990s with films such as Subhash Ghai-directed "Karma", "Saudagar", "Vidhata" and Ramesh Sippy's "Shakti", which was the first collaboration between him and megastar Amitabh Bachchan, who has been vocal about his love for the late cinema legend and considers him his idol. "Dilip Kumar is a phenomenon in the world of cinema and society. He was not only a superstar for five decades but also a very profound man," Ghai told PTI. "He once shared with me that he was never a method actor... He never tried to

MP: Country's 1 st infantry museum to be inaugurated in Mhow on Dec 16

MHOW, DEC 11 /-- / The country's first infantry museum will be inaugurated in Mhow cantonment in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh on December 16, an Army official said.

Final preparations are underway in Mhow cantonment for the inauguration of the Infantry Research Centre and Museum, Lieutenant Colonel Vikas Tripathi told reporters on Saturday. The museum will be inaugurated on December 16 and will be thrown open

to the public from December 17, he said. The construction of the museum has been completed and final touches are being given to the building and the surrounding garden, said Lt Col Tripathi who is posted at the facility. The museum will showcase Infantry Corps' history from 1747 to 2020, in which the sacrifice of valour and valiant soldiers have been preserved in statues, murals and photo galleries, he said. The first phase of the museum has been

completed, while the work on the second phase is underway, he said. The museum, housed in a three-storey building spread on two acres of land, is being built in three phases, Lt Col Tripathi said.

The history of battles of Plassey, Saragarhi, Buxar and Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 along with the history of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Subhash Chandra Bose etc have been preserved, he said. The Kargil war room, being built on the second floor, will depict the stories

of heroes through photographs and the Fateh Gallery. The room depicts the history of 27 regiments of the Army across the country, he said. The construction for the research centre and museum was started in 2009 and completed in 2019, the official said. Apart from soldiers' statues, the army men are shown engaged in the various forms of warfare through the artwork made from 3D printers to make them lively, he said. Separate rooms have been

set up to showcase the history of each regiment with an umbrella LED screen, the officials said, adding that when the screen is touched, it will display all the information related to the regiment.

According to officials, visitors will be able to book tickets online and about 100 people will be able to visit the facility in a day. It will take at least two-and-a-half-hours to tour of this museum and visitors will be given a tour of the entire museum in groups of 40, they said. (PTI)

DBRAIT observes BharatiyaBhashaDiwas

PORT BLAIR, DEC 11 /-- / The SubramaniaBharatiJayanti as BharatiyaBhashaDiwas was observed at Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Institute of Technology in a befitting manner on 11th December 2022. A language festival in the name of 'BharatiyaBhashaUtsav' was celebrated with the objectives to provide students with information about Indian languages, to encourage students to learn a few more Indian languages, to celebrate diversity in culture, arts, etc. and to make people experience the unity, harmony and integrity of the nation through languages, to show how language learning can be a fun and an enjoyable experience and to highlight the need to focus on Indian languages for the development of the nation and "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat".

Various linguistic competitions viz Multi language speaking competition, Multi language folk song competition, Multi language essay writing competition and traditional ethnic wear competitions were held at DBRAIT which is in accordance with the National Education Policy-2020, wherein students in the country to be encouraged to participate in a fun project/activity on 'The Languages of India under the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' initiative.

Around 30 plus students participated in the said competitions and prizes were awarded. The message of the President of India which appeared in the official twitter handle of the President of India was also played before the students to enlighten them the perspective and importance of mother tongue.

Ayyappancondoles demise

PORT BLAIR, DEC 11 /- / Mr. Ayyappan, Secretary, CPI (M) A & N State Organizing Committee has condoled the demise of Smt K. OmanaAmma, a retired employee of the Electricity Department and resident of Haddo, Port Blair on 10th December 2022 afternoon at GB Pant Hospital, Port Blair. She was 73 years old. He conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the family members of Smt K. OmanaAmma.

Class 10, 12exam datesheets on social mediafake, says CBSE; to announceschedulessoon

NEW DELHI, DEC 11 /-- / The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Sunday said purported date sheets for class 10 and 12 exams doing the rounds on social media are fake. The board is yet to announce the exam date sheets, and officials said it will be done soon. "The multiple versions of datesheets doing the rounds are fake. The exam schedule will soon be announced and the students and parents should wait for official information," a senior board official said. The board had earlier announced it will conduct theory examinations for class 10 and 12 for the academic year from February 15, 2023. "The practical examinations will begin from January 1 and schools have been directed to complete the syllabus for these till then. The practical examinations for Class 12 will only be conducted by external examiners appointed by the board, while for Class 10, these will be conducted by internal examiners," the official explained. The board has also released the subject-wise CBSE Class 10 and Class 12 sample papers along with the marking schemes for all the subjects. (PTI)

Want to resolve your grievances, submit the same in PM-KISAN portal: Farmers told

PORT BLAIR, DEC 11 /-- / The Department of Agriculture is implementing the PradhanMantriKisanSammanNidhi scheme in A & N Islands. The Department in coordination with the PRIs are working in tandem in all the zones of the Islands continuously from the day of launch of the scheme for its better reach to the farmers.

To make the integrated platform available in the country to assist in benefit transfer, a platform named PM-KISAN Portal was launched for uploading the farmers' details at a single web portal in a uniform structure. Accordingly, a facility is provided in PM-KISAN portal in which any grievances related to PM-KISAN scheme can be submitted. The Department of Agriculture has requested the farmers to submit their grievances in PM-KISAN Portal/Mobile App and they can also contact the respective Agriculture Extension staff/Agriculture office.

It is to mention that there are various factors owing to which, the farmer does not receive the benefit of PM-KISAN. The main reason being mismatch in the spelling of the name in the bank account and the name entered on the Aadhaar Card due to which farmers fail to get the money.

To facilitate farmers, the Govt. of India has decided to undertake e-KYC verification of all the eligible registered farmer-beneficiaries of PM-KISAN Scheme for smooth transfer of benefits.

The e-KYC authentication of the beneficiaries can be done by both e-KYC OTP mode as well as e-KYC biometric mode. The e-KYC authentication of the beneficiaries through OTP mode can be done on PM-KISAN portal, free of cost by the beneficiaries or State functionaries. For e-KYC biometric authentication facility, the beneficiary may visit the nearest CSC. The CSC will charge for

MP Police ask Rajasthan cops to look out for pickpockets targeting people at Cong's Bharat Jodo Yatra'

BHOPAL, DEC 11 /-- / The Madhya Pradesh police have alerted their counterparts in Rajasthan about pickpockets targeting people participating in the Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' led by party leader Rahul Gandhi, an official said on Sunday.

According to the police, pickpockets had struck rich during the last stretch of the yatra in Madhya Pradesh at Agar Malwa district. "We have caught eight to 10 pickpockets, some of them hailing from Kota and Jhalawar in Rajasthan and some from Guna, Rajgarh, Shajapur and Raisen districts of Madhya Pradesh," Agar Malwa superintendent of police Rakesh Kumar Sagar told PTI. The state police have written to the Rajasthan police to be 'watchful' of pickpockets during the

yatra, he said. The yatra entered Rajasthan from Madhya Pradesh on December 5. It has covered Jhalawar and Kota districts before reaching Bundi and will proceed to Sawai Madhopur, Dausa and Alwar districts.

The march will cover about 500 km over 17 days in Rajasthan before entering Haryana on December 21. "We have recovered five to six mobile phones among other things which the accused had stolen during the yatra in Agar Malwa," the official said, adding that the cyber police have also been roped in. At least four to five people who participated in the yatra have complained that they had lost their valuables, he said. The thefts mostly took place when lunch and dinner were served at the camps of the yatra, the official said. A

local Congress leader has complained that he had lost two mobile phones during the march, he said. "We have been requesting people who have lost mobile phones to get their SIMs blocked so that when thieves insert new SIMs in these gadgets, we will be able to track them down," the official said.

A Congress leader, who walked with Gandhi from Burhanpur to Agar Malwa, on the condition of anonymity claimed that he had lost a mobile phone worth Rs 28,000. Mahesh Sharma, a local journalist from Agar Malwa who covered the march, alleged that more than 100 people had lost their belongings while participating in the yatra, but only a handful of them have come forward to lodge complaints with the police. (PTI)

Cyclone Mandous aftermath: 1 dead, over 5000 ha crop damaged in AP

AMARAVATI, DEC 11 /-- / One person died in rain-related incidents in Andhra Pradesh and over 1,000 people have been lodged in relief camps following heavy rainfall under the influence of cyclone 'Mandous', in some southern districts of the state.

SPSR Nellore and Tirupati districts were on alert due to possibility of flash floods in minor rivers-- Kandaluru, Maneru and Swarnamuki. The list of vulnerable mandals and villages have been sent to the district administrations for taking necessary precautionary measures, according to a government status report as on 8.30 am on Sunday. Light to moderate rain is likely to occur at

isolated places in the state on December 11 and 12, it said. K Padmavathi, a resident of Darjipalli village in YSR Kadapa district died on Saturday due to wall collapse. A total of 4,647.4 hectares of agriculture and 532.68 hectares of horticulture crops were damaged due to rains while 170 houses were destroyed.

As many as 140 SDRF and 95 NDRF personnel have been deployed in four districts to be pressed into service in case of any eventuality. Cyclone alert messages have been sent through common alert protocol (CAP) to over one crore subscribers spread across the six districts, which are likely to be affected due to heavy rains during December 8-10. (PTI)

Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu sworn in as Himachal's 15th CM, Mukesh Agnihotri as deputy CM

Modi congratulates new CM, assures all help from the Centre



SHIMLA, DEC 11/--/ Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu, a son of a bus driver and four-time Congress MLA, was on Sunday sworn in as the 15th Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh at a ceremony here attended by senior party leaders including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar administered the oath of office and secrecy to Sukhu (58), as also to Mukesh Agnihotri (60), the leader of

opposition in the outgoing assembly, who will be the state's first deputy chief minister. The elevation of grassroots leader Sukhu, the MLA from Nadaun, marks a generational shift in the state Congress which has been

under the shadow of former chief minister Virbhadra Singh who guided the party in the state for five decades. Party leaders paid floral tributes to a portrait of the six-time chief minister before the oath-taking ceremony. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Sukhu on his swearing-in and assured "all possible cooperation from the Centre to further the development of Himachal Pradesh". This will only be a third Congress government in states across the country currently after Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and both their chief ministers -- Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot -- joined party president Mallikarjun Kharge at the oath-taking ceremony at the historic Ridge ground in Shimla. Former Union minister Anand Sharma, former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Himachal Congress affairs incharge Rajeev Shukla, state Congress Chief Pratibha Singh and senior leader Sachin Pilot were also present. Hooda said the formation of a Congress government has infused new energy in the party. "When winds of change blow from the hills they go down to the plains," he said.

People in traditional attire gathered at the Ridge in large numbers to witness the ceremony, dancing to the tune of folk music and raising "Sukhu bhai zindabad" slogan. Some enthusiastic supporters lifted their probable ministers on shoulders to reach the venue. However, no other leader was administered the oath of office in the state which can have a maximum 12 ministers. Sukhu's family including his mother, wife and daughters were present at the swearing-in ceremony. Sukhu's choice as the chief minister is also being seen as the Congress party shifting its power Centre from the Upper Himachal to Lower Himachal. Sukhu, considered a rival of former chief minister Virbhadra Singh, hails from Nadaun in Hamirpur district and is the first Congress leader from Lower Himachal -- comprising areas merged in Himachal in 1966 such as Nalagarh, Una, Hamirpur, Kangra and lower hills of Kullu -- to occupy the top state post. All former Congress chief ministers including Y S Parmar, Virbhadra Singh and Ram Lal Thakur were from the Upper Himachal. Sukhu will be the second chief minister from Hamirpur district, after the

BJP's Prem Kumar Dhumal. A son of a driver in the Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation, Sukhu started his political career as a class representative at Government College Sanjauli during his student life. He rose through the ranks -- serving as NSUI state chief, Youth Congress president, Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee president -- to become the chief minister of the state.

But his nomination to the top post was not smooth. State Congress president Pratibha Singh's supporters had lodged their protest against his appointment and asserted their leader, who is an MP from Mandi, should be the chief minister. Singh later said they have accepted the decision of the party high command. In an attempt to put up a united face, her family was given due acknowledgment by the top Congress leadership during the swearing-in ceremony. Pratibha Singh, who was the last Congress leader to reach the venue, was accorded a warm welcome and was hugged by Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi. She was seated beside Priyanka Gandhi on the dias. Rahul Gandhi posed for a photograph with Pratibha Singh

and her MLA son Vikramaditya Singh. Earlier, Sukhu personally went to the Holly Lodge, the residence of Pratibha Singh, to invite her to the venue, and said the "first invitation" was given to her as she is the leader of the Congress organisation in the state. Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri, a journalist-turned-politician, is the Brahmin face of the Congress in Himachal Pradesh and with his elevation, the party hopes to sustain the community's support. Agnihotri was one of the frontrunners for the post of chief minister. Agnihotri, who holds a PG Diploma in Public Relations and Advertisement, started his career in journalism as a correspondent in the Hindi daily 'Veer Pratap' and rose to become the bureau head in the 'Jansatta' before joining politics. He won assembly elections from Haroli in 2003, 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022. Considered close to former chief minister Virbhadra Singh, he had served as the state's industry minister. The Congress wrested power from the BJP in the hill state winning 40 of the 68 assembly seats.

The polling was held on November 12 and the results were declared Thursday. (PTI)

Seven lakh candidates appear in TET exam; minister trashes report of question paper leak



Candidates arrive to appear in West Bengal Primary Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) at an examination hall in Kolkata. — Photo : EOI

KOLKATA, DEC 11/--/ Nearly seven lakh candidates on Sunday appeared in the TET examination to fill up around 11,000 vacancies for primary teacher posts in government-sponsored and aided schools in West Bengal. Some of the candidates complained of mismanagement in the Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) conducted by the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) after a gap of five years in 1,460 examination centres across the state amid tight security arrangements. However, WBBPE President Gautam Pal said that no untoward incident was reported during the exam and the board did not get any official complaint from the candidates. State Education Minister Bratya Basu also denied that there has been

only around 2 pm, half an hour before the end of the examination. "Our admit cards showed that the centre was at Bisnupur in South 24 Parganas. After reaching there, we found a notice on the school gate saying the centre is closed and some of us were allotted seats at Kalyannagar in Khardah. Local police helped us in reaching Khardah, but only half an hour was left by then. We were allowed no extra time," Sampa Sikdar, a candidate, said. At Tirithapati Institution centre in Kolkata, candidates alleged that the biometric system to record the time of entering was not working properly and voiced their grievances after the exams got over. West Bengal Primary Trained Teachers Association spokesperson and the BJP teachers cell claimed that the board acted "inhumanly" by not allowing candidates even to carry water bottles inside the centres. "We will take up this with the board president to ensure that candidates do not face such treatment in the next TET exams," he added. Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP told reporters at Chuchura on Saturday that the TET process should be held fairly and transparently. "I have got complaints from many candidates that they have received offers over the phone that they will get the questions before the examination if they are ready to pay a certain amount. I hope the administration will ensure no such malpractices will take place, else there will be little point in holding such exams and it will become a farce," he added. The state Transport department and the Metro Railway have made arrangements for additional services for ensuring smooth travel of the nearly seven lakh candidates taking the examination. (PTI)

State Education Minister Bratya Basu also denied that there has been any question paper leak in the TET examination as reported in a section of the media. He alleged that "some people" wanted to disrupt the process to discredit the Mamata Banerjee government by circulating fake question papers on WhatsApp

examination if they are ready to pay a certain amount. I hope the administration will ensure no such malpractices will take place, else there will be little point in holding such exams and it will become a farce," he added. The state Transport department and the Metro Railway have made arrangements for additional services for ensuring smooth travel of the nearly seven lakh candidates taking the examination. (PTI)

AT A GLANCE

PM Modi inaugurates first phase of Mopa international airport in Goa

PANAJI, DEC 11/--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated the first phase of the greenfield international airport at Mopa in North Goa. He said the airport would be named Manohar International Airport after former Goa chief minister (late) Manohar Parrikar, a BJP stalwart. He targeted the previous governments, saying they had adopted a vote bank approach for decades instead of finding what people needed in terms of public amenities. The Mopa airport in North Goa is the second international airport in the coastal state apart from the existing airport at Dabolim, which is operated as a city enclave from Indian naval air station INS Hansa. (PTI)

Injured Rohit Sharma out of first Test against Bangladesh, Easwaran named his replacement

CHATTOGRAM, DEC 11/--/ India captain Rohit Sharma was on Sunday ruled out of the first Test against Bangladesh, starting here on Wednesday, due to a thumb injury. Rohit had gone back to India after hurting his left thumb while fielding in the second ODI against Bangladesh in Mirpur on December 7. KL Rahul will captain the side in Rohit's absence. Abhimanyu Easwaran has been named as Rohit's replacement. "India captain Rohit Sharma met with a specialist in Mumbai for his left thumb injury, which he sustained during the 2nd ODI against Bangladesh. He has been advised appropriate management for this injury and will not be available for the first Test against Bangladesh," the BCCI said in a statement. (PTI)



France's Olivier Giroud (right) celebrates with teammates Antoine Griezmann, left, and Jules Kounde after scoring the go-ahead goal in the 78th minute of their 2-1 victory over England in their World Cup quarterfinal at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, Qatar

Bhupendra Patel to take oath as Gujarat CM today

AHMEDABAD, DEC 11/--/ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Bhupendra Patel will take oath as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for a second straight term in Gandhinagar on Monday in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other dignitaries, BJP leaders said on Sunday. Patel will be administered the oath as the 18th chief minister by Governor Acharya Devvrat at a function to be held at the Helipad Ground near the new Secretariat in Gandhinagar at 2 PM.

Besides the prime minister, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and chief ministers of other BJP-ruled states are set to attend the swearing-in ceremony, BJP sources said. Along with Patel, some new ministers are also expected to take the oath. In the just-concluded Gujarat Assembly elections, counting for which was held on December 8, the BJP won a seventh straight term by winning record 156 seats in the 182-member House. The Congress won 17 constituencies and AAP 5. Patel, 60, resigned as chief minister along with his entire cabinet on Friday to pave the way for the formation of a new government following the election results. He was elected as the leader of the BJP legislative party on Saturday. He met the governor and staked the claim to form the next government. Patel won the Ghatlodia seat with the highest margin of 1.92 lakh votes in the elections.

A low-profile BJP leader and the first from the Kadva Patidar sub-group to become CM, Patel replaced Vijay Rupani in September 2021. Meanwhile, hectic consultations are going on in BJP for picking ministerial candidates against the backdrop of the historic mandate given the party will have to walk the tightrope of balancing caste and regional representations, sources said. MLAs Kanu Desai, Raghavji Patel, Rushikesh Patel, Harsh Sanghavi, Shankar Chaudhary, Purnesh Modi, Manisha Vakil, Ramanlal Vora and Raman Patkar are among those expected to be inducted in the ministry, they added. (PTI)



Gujarat: 151 of 182 MLAs elected to Assembly in 2022 polls 'crorepatis', says ADR-GEW study

AHMEDABAD, DEC 11/--/ A total of 151, or 83 per cent, of the 182 MLAs elected in the recent Assembly polls in Gujarat are 'crorepatis' (worth over Rs 1 crore), up from 141 in the 2017 polls, as per a study conducted by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Gujarat Election Watch.

The study showed the ruling BJP has 132 crorepati MLAs, followed by 14 of the Congress, all three Independents, and one each of the Aam Aadmi Party and the Samajwadi Party. The BJP won the seventh straight term in Gujarat by winning a record 156 seats in the 182-member House. Of these 151 'crorepati' legislators, 73 have assets of more than Rs 5 crore and 73 have assets in the

Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore range. The average assets per winning candidate in Gujarat now stands at Rs 16.41 crore, almost two times the figure for 2017, which was Rs 8.46 crore.

The richest legislators are BJP's Mansa MLA JS Patel (Rs 661 crore), Siddhpur MLA Balvantsinh Rajput (Rs 372 crore), also of BJP, and BJP's Rajkot South MLA Ramesh Tilala (Rs 175 crore), the study showed.

The study by ADR, which works for electoral reforms and prepares such reports after analysing the self-sworn affidavits of legislators, stated that 74 MLAs were re-elected and their assets had grown by an average of Rs 2.61 crore, which is a rise of 40 per cent when compared to 2017. Assets of

BJP MLA Babubhai Patel grew from Rs 32.52 crore in 2017 to 61.47 crore in 2022, an increase of nearly Rs 28 crore, while that of BJP MLA Harsh Sanghavi grew from Rs 2.12 crore in 2017 to Rs 17 crore in 2022, an increase of Rs 15 crore. The third spot on the list of assets' rise was taken by BJP MLA Jagdish Vishwakarma, who saw a growth of Rs 14 crore in five years from Rs 14.75 crore to Rs 29.06 crore. The study shows six winning candidates are Ph.Ds, 19 are post-graduates, 24 are graduates, six are diploma holders, 86 have studied between Class V to XII, while seven have declared themselves just as "literate". On the age front, two MLAs are 29 years old, while two are 75 years old. (PTI)

Insisted publicly on importance of protection of human rights defenders during visits to India and Vietnam: UN chief

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 11 /--/ UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that he insisted publicly on the importance of guaranteeing civic space and protection of human rights defenders as well as environmental activists during his recent visits to India and Vietnam. "One of the key messages I clearly got and that I also tried to convey very clearly is that human rights must be at the centre of all environmental concerns and namely, the work of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity)," Guterres said last week during a press conference at the COP15 Biodiversity Conference in Montreal. "And one of the aspects that worries me more is in relation to the persecution of human rights defenders in general but including environmental activists," he added. He was responding to a question on governments cracking down on environmental protests. "I had the occasion in the visits that I did preparing for COPS, namely in India and Vietnam, to insist publicly on the importance to guarantee not only the



Antonio Guterres

civic space, the openness of the civic space, and in particular the protection of human rights defenders and within human rights defenders, environmental activists. They play an extremely important role," Guterres said.

The UN chief added that it is "totally unacceptable" that they become victims of human rights violations and "we know that some of them have been in prisons, some of them have been threatened and even some have lost their lives. "And not only because of governments, also because of some economic interests that see an obstacle in direction to their profit objectives that are totally unacceptable because profits based on the destruction of nature are exactly the opposite of what we are discussing here," Guterres said. Ahead of the Climate Change Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in November, Guterres visited India on October 18-20 and met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing students of the IIT Bombay, Guterres had said that India's voice on the global stage can only gain authority and credibility from a strong commitment to inclusivity and respect for human rights at home. India has previously rejected criticism by foreign governments and human rights groups on allegations that civil liberties have eroded in the country.

The Indian government asserts that India has well-established democratic practices and robust institutions to safeguard the rights of all. From India, Guterres travelled to Vietnam where he said that "human rights are at the heart of unleashing the best of our societies" and building solidarity, promoting inclusion, equality, and growth. "They underwrite freedom. They ensure lasting stability," he said. (PTI)

Scottish officials: Lockerbie bomb suspect is in US custody

LONDON, DEC 11 /--/ US and Scottish authorities said Sunday that the Libyan man suspected of making the bomb that destroyed a passenger plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 is in US custody. Scotland's Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service said in a statement that "the families of those killed in the Lockerbie bombing have been told that the suspect Abu Agela Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi is in U.S. custody." The U.S. Justice Department confirmed the information, adding that "he is expected to make his initial appearance in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia." It gave no information on how Mas'ud came to be in U.S. custody. Pan Am flight 103, traveling from London to New York, exploded over Lockerbie on Dec. 21, 1988, killing all 259 people aboard the plane and another 11 on the ground. It remains the deadliest terror attack on British soil. The US Justice Department announced new charges against Mas'ud in December 2020, on the 32nd anniversary of the bombing. "At long last, this man responsible for killing Americans and many others will be subject to justice for his crimes," William Barr, the attorney general at the time, said at a news conference.

In 2001, former Libyan intelligence officer Abdelbaset al-Megrahi was convicted of bombing the flight. He is to date the only person convicted over the attack. He lost one appeal and abandoned another before being freed in 2009 on compassionate grounds because he was terminally ill with cancer. He died in Libya in 2012, still protesting his innocence. A breakthrough in the investigation came when U.S. officials in 2017 received a copy of an interview that Mas'ud, a longtime explosives expert for Libya's intelligence service, had given to Libyan law enforcement in 2012 after being taken into custody following the collapse of the regime of the country's leader, Col. Moammar Gadhafi. In that interview, U.S. officials said, Mas'ud admitted building the bomb in the Pan Am attack and working with two other conspirators to carry it out. (AP)

Indian student leads plogging' missions to clean up UK streets

LONDON, DEC 11 /--/ An Indian student and award-winning environmentalist from the University of Bristol in south-west England has inspired a trend of plogging, or jogging combined with litter picking, across various cities of the UK.

Vivek Gurav, originally from Pune, was inspired by the Swedish concept of "plogging" which combines "jogga" (jogging) with "plocka upp" (a pick-up) to encourage people who use their local streets the most to take pride in keeping them clean. In India, he set up a plogging community known as "Pune Ploggers"

back in 2018, with over 10,000 members who have collected over 1 million kilograms of rubbish and wanted to continue the trend when he took up his scholarship position at Bristol University in September last year. Since then, his university says he has covered over 420 miles on 120 plogging "missions" joined by volunteers from 180 countries and is now taking the drive to 30 UK cities. "I have only been plogging in Bristol but I kept getting asked by people in Manchester, Leeds, Derby, to come plogging there," said Gurav. "So, I decided to do a

India says era of classifying terrorists as 'bad, 'good' on basis of political convenience must end immediately

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 11 /--/ The era of classifying terrorists as "bad" or "good" on the basis of "political convenience" must end immediately, a concept note circulated by India in the UN Security Council here has said, underlining that categorising terror acts by intent as religious or ideologically motivated will dilute the shared global commitment to fighting terrorism.

India, the current president of the 15-nation UN Security Council, will hold two signature events on reformed multilateralism and counter-terrorism to be chaired by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on December 14 and 15. India proposes to organise a briefing of the Security Council on December 15 on Global counter-terrorism approach principles and the way forward" under the Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts'. Ahead of the meeting, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, in a letter to

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, asked that a concept note intended to guide the discussions on the topic be circulated as a document of the Security Council. "The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 were a turning point in the global approach to counter-terrorism. Since then, London, Mumbai, Paris, many parts of West Asia and Africa have also experienced terrorist attacks," the concept note last week said. It added that these attacks highlight that the threat of terrorism is grave and universal and that terrorism in one part of the world seriously impacts peace and security in other parts of the globe. "The threat of terrorism is transnational. Terrorist actors and their supporters, facilitators and financiers collaborate while remaining in different jurisdictions to organise acts anywhere in the world. A transnational threat can be defeated only by the collective efforts of all States Members of the United Nations," it said.

Stressing that the menace of terrorism cannot be associated with any

religion, nationality, civilisation or ethnic group, the note said that all acts of terrorism are criminal. "Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations must be condemned. There cannot be an exception or justification for any act of terrorism, regardless of its motivation and wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed. The era of classifying terrorists as "bad", "not so bad" or "good" on the basis of political convenience must end immediately." It said that existing and emerging threats call for a renewed collective approach to terrorism.

"Looking at the motivations behind terrorist acts and categorising such acts by intent as political or religious and by ideological motivation will dilute our shared commitment to fighting terrorism," it said. The concept note voices concern that in recent times, there has been a resurgence of terrorist activities in both range and diversity, as well as in geographical space. "The threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-

Khorasan, Al-Qaida, Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent and terrorist groups sheltering in Afghanistan has increased following the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in August 2021," the note said.

It added that the collective expectation of the Security Council, expressed in its resolution 2593 (2021) that was adopted under India's August 2021 presidency of the Council, was that Afghan soil would not be used for terrorism, to threaten or attack any country, to shelter or train terrorists or to plan or finance terrorist acts. It however noted that "the threat prospects remain high."

Further, Africa's home-grown terrorist groups have found ideological support from global terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIL. "The terrorist threat was further complicated by pirates and organised criminal networks facilitating trafficking in arms, drugs, humans and finance for these terrorist groups. The threat continues to grow towards the coastal region of Western Africa." (PTI)



Chinese President Xi Jinping along with other top Arab leaders at the China GCC summit, in Riyadh

Japanese company's lander rockets toward moon with UAE rover

CAPE CANAVERAL, DEC 11 /--/ A Tokyo company aimed for the moon with its own private lander Sunday, blasting off atop a SpaceX rocket with the United Arab Emirates' first lunar rover and a toy-like robot from Japan that's designed to roll around up there in the gray dust.

It will take nearly five months for the lander and its experiments to reach the moon. The company ispace designed its craft to use minimal fuel to save money and leave more room for cargo. So it's taking a slow, low-energy path to the moon, flying 1 million miles (1.6 million kilometers) from Earth before looping back and intersecting with the moon by the end of April. By contrast, NASA's Orion crew capsule with test dummies took five days to reach the moon last month. The lunar flyby mission ends Sunday with a Pacific splashdown. The ispace lander will aim for Atlas crater in the northeastern section of the moon's near side, more than 50 miles (81 kilometers) across and just over 1 mile (2

kilometers) deep. With its four legs extended, the lander is more than 7 feet (2.3 meters) tall. With a science satellite already around Mars, the UAE wants to explore the moon, too. Its rover, named Rashid after Dubai's royal family, weighs just 22 pounds (10 kilograms) and will operate on the surface for about 10 days, like everything else on the mission.

In addition, the lander is carrying an orange-sized sphere from the Japanese Space Agency that will transform into a wheeled robot on the moon. Also flying: a solid state battery from a Japanese-based spark plug company; an Ottawa, Ontario, company's flight computer with artificial intelligence for identifying geologic features seen by the UAE rover; and 360-degree cameras from a Toronto-area company.

Hitching a ride on the rocket was a small NASA laser experiment that is now bound for the moon on its own to hunt for ice in the permanently shadowed craters of the lunar south

pole. The ispace mission is called Hakuto, Japanese for white rabbit. In Asian folklore, a white rabbit is said to live on the moon. A second lunar landing by the private company is planned for 2024 and a third in 2025. Founded in 2010, ispace was among the finalists in the Google Lunar XPRIZE competition requiring a successful landing on the moon by 2018. The lunar rover built by ispace never launched.

Another finalist, an Israeli nonprofit called SpaceIL, managed to reach the moon in 2019. But instead of landing gently, the spacecraft Beresheet slammed into the moon and was destroyed. With Sunday's predawn launch from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, ispace is now on its way to becoming one of the first private entities to attempt a moon landing. Although not launching until early next year, lunar landers built by Pittsburgh's Astrobotic Technology and Houston's Intuitive Machines may beat ispace to the moon thanks to shorter cruise times.

Only Russia, the U.S. and China have achieved so-called "soft landings" on the moon, beginning with the former Soviet Union's Luna 9 in 1966.

And only the U.S. has put astronauts on the lunar surface: 12 men over six landings. Sunday marked the 50th anniversary of astronauts' last lunar landing, by Apollo 17's Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt on Dec. 11, 1972.

NASA's Apollo moon shots were all "about the excitement of the technology," said ispace founder and CEO Takeshi Hakamada, who wasn't alive then. Now, "it's the excitement of the business." "This is the dawn of the lunar economy," Hakamada noted in the SpaceX launch webcast. "Let's go to the moon." Liftoff should have occurred two weeks ago, but was delayed by SpaceX for extra rocket checks. Eight minutes after launch, the recycled first-stage booster landed back at Cape Canaveral under a near full moon, the double sonic booms echoing through the night. (AP)

Imran Khan's party threatens to dissolve Punjab and KPK assemblies if govt fails to announce election dates by Dec 20

ISLAMABAD, DEC 11 /--/ Ousted premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on Sunday warned Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government that it will dissolve the assemblies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces if a date for next general election is not announced by December 20. "Leaders of the imported government don't want polls and they have no idea how to run the country," former information minister and PTI's senior vice president Fawad Chaudhry said in a tweet. He criticised the members of the ruling coalition led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), saying the country's affairs are not run by appointing ministers and making foreign visits. "If the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) doesn't bring a formula for holding general elections by December 20, the Punjab and KP assemblies will be dissolved," Chaudhry said. The Pakistan Democratic Movement or PDM is a coalition of political



Imran Khan

parties currently ruling the country. Khan's PTI is in power in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan provinces. Chaudhry said that Pakistan needs political stability which is not possible without a stable government. He said that the process of general elections in the two provinces will be completed by March 20 and PTI has complete trust of its allies on the issue.

Earlier, Chaudhry had said that Punjab chief minister Punjab Chaudhry Parvez Elahi suggested extending the date for dissolution of the provincial assemblies. On December 5, Elahi had said that he did not see elections taking place in the next four months. In an interview with a private news channel, he had said: "Elections cannot be held before four months; the federal and provincial governments need time to work and the elections may be delayed even after October next year." On Friday, the PML-N dared Khan to dissolve the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies without any delay, saying the federal government was ready to hold polls in the two provinces in 90 days. Earlier this month, Khan had warned that he will dissolve the assemblies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces ruled by his party if the federal government led by Prime Minister Sharif does not sit down for talks and announce dates for the general elections. Khan, 70, had last month announced that his lawmakers will resign from the provincial assemblies as he withdrew a threat to march on the capital Islamabad by saying that it would result in destruction. The PML-N-led federal government has threatened to impose Governor's rule in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. However, the federal government led by Prime Minister Sharif is opposed to holding elections now. The term of the current National Assembly will end in August 2023. (PTI)

Russia grinds on in eastern Ukraine; Bakhmut 'destroyed'

KYIV, DEC 11 /--/ Russian forces have turned the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut into ruins, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while Ukraine's military on Saturday reported missile, rocket and air strikes in multiple parts of the country that Moscow is trying to conquer after months of resistance. The latest battles of Russia's 9 1/2 month war in Ukraine have centered on four provinces that Russian President Vladimir Putin triumphantly and illegally claimed to have annexed in late September. The fighting indicates Russia's struggle to establish control of those regions and Ukraine's persistence to reclaim them. Zelenskyy said the situation "remains very difficult" in several frontline cities in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. Together, the provinces make up the Donbas, an expansive industrial region bordering Russia that Putin identified as a focus from the war's outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought since 2014. "Bakhmut, Soledar, Maryinka, Kreminna. For a long time, there is no living place left on the land of these areas that have not been damaged by shells and fire," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, naming cities that have again found themselves in the crosshairs. "The occupiers actually destroyed Bakhmut, another Donbas city that the Russian army turned into burnt ruins."

Some buildings remain standing in Bakhmut, and the remaining residents still mill about the streets. But like Mariupol and other contested cities, it endured a long siege and spent weeks without water and power even before Moscow launched massive strikes to take out public utilities across Ukraine. The Donetsk region's governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko, estimated seven weeks ago that 90 per cent of the city's prewar population of over 70,000 had fled in the months since Moscow focused on seizing the entire Donbas. The Ukrainian military General Staff reported missile attacks, about 20 airstrikes and more than 60 rocket attacks across Ukraine between Friday and Saturday. Spokesperson Oleksandr Shtupun said the most active fighting was in the Bakhmut district, where more than 20 populated places came under fire. He said Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk.

Russia's grinding eastern offensive succeeded in capturing almost all of Luhansk during the summer. Donetsk eluded the same fate, and the Russian military in recent weeks has poured manpower and resources around Bakhmut in an attempt to encircle the city, analysts and Ukrainian officials have said. After Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city of Kherson nearly a month ago, the battle heated up around Bakhmut, demonstrating Putin's desire for visible gains following weeks of clear setbacks in Ukraine. Taking Bakhmut would rupture Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian forces to press on toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk. Russia has battered Bakhmut with rockets for more than half of the year. A ground assault accelerated after its troops forced the Ukrainians to withdraw from Luhansk in July. But some analysts have questioned Russia's strategic logic in the relentless pursuit to take Bakhmut and surrounding areas that also came under intense shelling in the past weeks, and where Ukrainian officials reported that some residents were living in damp basements. "The costs associated with six months of brutal, grinding, and attrition-based combat around #Bakhmut far outweigh any operational advantage that the #Russians can obtain from taking Bakhmut," the Institute for the Study of War, a think tank in Washington, posted on its Twitter feed on Thursday. (AP)

picked up thousands of tonnes of rubbish. It has taken hard work, intelligence and generosity of spirit all traits that Vivek has in spades," she said. The University of Bristol notes that Gurav's life has changed dramatically since he moved to the UK for his Master's in Environmental Policy and Management MSc. Such has been his plogging success that Gurav was recently invited to Egypt to speak at the Conference of Youth (COY) 17, the Official Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). (PTI)

change and this award strengthens this belief of my entire community of ploggers based in India as well as UK to keep going," he said. "I hope this award will really support and amplify our cause. When I told my parents they asked if I was lying. They are really happy and my father said he was very proud of me," he added.

Professor Judith Squires, Acting Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Bristol, said the student's drive to change the world for the better has been nothing short of inspiring. "Together with his volunteers he has

Earlier this year, his efforts won him the Points of Light Award from 10 Downing Street, which honours people making a difference in their communities. Gurav was recognised for his 250 running challenges across Bristol to tackle litter and bringing together over 140 volunteers to clear over 3,750 kilograms of litter. "The award came as a surprise! I believe this award amplifies the cause of climate action that I have been trying to promote through litter picking," said Gurav. "Every individual matters, every action counts in the race to fight climate

plogging challenge across 30 UK cities. Ultimately, I want to set-up a UK-wide plogging community like I did back in India. So, if I can go out plogging across the UK, orientate people, give them a blueprint, then they can start their own groups," he said. The former app developer hopes to be joined by fellow ploggers, environmentalists and keen runners as he visits each city via public transport. His plogging across Derby, Nottingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Leicester, Birmingham and Worcester is being tracked across his social media.



GIROUD takes France into World Cup semis as KANE penalty miss costs England



Pepe and Fernandes blast Argentine referee after Portugal exit

DOHA, DEC 11 /--/ Portugal players Pepe and Bruno Fernandes lashed out at the Argentine referee in charge of their 1-0 World Cup quarter-final defeat by Morocco on Saturday, claiming his nationality impacted the game. Argentina progressed on Friday by beating the Netherlands and should they reach the final, might play against Morocco if they win their semi-final against France. The match referee Facundo Tello, his two assistants, and the video assistant referee were all from Argentina. "It's unacceptable for an Argentine referee to referee our game," Pepe said on Portuguese television. "After what happened yesterday, with (Lionel) Messi talking, all of Argentina

talking, and the referee comes here. "What did we play in the second half? The goalkeeper dropped to the ground. There were only eight



minutes of stoppage time. We worked hard and the referee (only added on) eight minutes." Argentina striker

Messi had complained about the refereeing of his team's clash with the Netherlands, saying too much time had been added on. Portugal's main complaint was that too little had been in their clash with Morocco, critical of supposed time-wasting by the North African side in the second half. Bruno Fernandes complained that far more injury time should have been added, and that referees from teams still involved in the tournament should not be appointed to matches. "We already know how it works... before the game, we already knew what we were in for, and what kind of referee we would find," said Fernandes, who was also furious after not being awarded a first-half penalty. (AFP)

DOHA, DEC 11 /--/ Olivier Giroud scored the winner and Harry Kane missed a late penalty as holders France beat England 2-1 in a tense World Cup quarter-final on Saturday. Aurelien Tchouameni had swept France into a first-half lead only for Kane to equalise from the spot nine minutes into the second half. England were the better side for long stretches of the game at Al Bayt Stadium but, almost from nowhere, France went back in front when Giroud headed home with 11 minutes left. Kane then blazed his second penalty of the game over the bar as England's wait to win a first major international trophy since the 1966 World Cup goes on. France though remain on course to become the first side since Brazil 60 years ago to successfully defend the World Cup. With Brazil having been eliminated on Friday and England dealt with here in the desert north of Doha, France are now surely the favourites to retain their crown as they prepare to face Morocco in the semi-finals.

f these two great rivals in a major tournament knockout game, with Croatia's victory in extra time preventing England from joining France in the final four years ago. England had found their stride after a sluggish start in the last-16 win over Senegal and it was no surprise to see Southgate name an unchanged side, with Bukayo Saka and Phil Foden either side of Kane in attack. That meant he resisted any temptation to revert to a back five in an attempt to counter the threat posed by Kylian Mbappe, the tournament's top scorer with five goals. There is no shortage of goal threats in the French side but few could have predicted that the opener would come from Tchouameni, the midfielder who is just 22 and had scored only once for his country before this game. There was a touch of controversy to the goal, as it came from a France break which started with what looked like a foul by Dayot Upamecano on Saka. Brazilian referee Wilton Sampaio waved play on, and Mbappe cut inside from the left before Ousmane Dembele and Griezmann combined to set up Tchouameni to hit a superb shot from 25 metres that curled away from Jordan Pickford and into the corner. France had looked the more dangerous team before that, but England grew into the contest after falling behind. Kane spun away from Upamecano in the

box but was denied as his Tottenham teammate Hugo Lloris came out to dive at his feet. Another moment of controversy followed as England thought they should have had a penalty when Kane was clearly fouled in a tangle of legs with Upamecano.

However, a VAR check ruled out a spot-kick with the officials judging that any infringement took place outside the box. Not to be discouraged, Kane forced Lloris to tip a shot behind just before the half-hour mark and the France goalkeeper -- winning a national record 143rd cap -- was called into action again just after the restart to tip over a Jude Bellingham volley. The pressure eventually told when Saka was brought down by Tchouameni in the area seven minutes into the second half and this time a spot-kick was given. Kane stepped up to beat Lloris and score his 53rd goal to equal Wayne Rooney's record England tally. The holders may not have been rattled, but England had the upper hand, and Harry Maguire headed agonisingly wide from a free-kick. France had created nothing in the second half, but then Giroud forced an excellent save from Pickford following a Dembele knockdown, and moments later they struck. Griezmann whipped in a tremendous cross from the left for Giroud to head in with the aid of a touch off Maguire. That was not game over, as Theo Hernandez was penalised for a shove on substitute Mason Mount when the referee gave a spot-kick following a VAR review. But this time Kane -- with his country's outright goal record in sight -- blazed over, and England's World Cup dream was over too. (AFP)



Olivier Giroud

Morocco fans go berserk after win over Portugal



Morocco fans celebrate

DOHA, DEC 11 /--/ As their national team made history, crowds gathered in Casablanca on Saturday evening and chanted "Qualified! Qualified!" Morocco beat Portugal 1-0 in Qatar to become the first African or Arab team to reach a World Cup semi-final. "My heart will stop, what a team, what stamina, what an achievement," Iham El Idrissi, a 34-year-old Casablanca woman, told AFP. She was not alone in hailing the team known as the Atlas Lions. "I think I am dreaming awake. Pinch me! What a huge pride. I thank them from the bottom of my heart," said Mouad Khairat, 29, an executive in a call centre. "The Moroccan team has managed to do the impossible. We want the cup now." The collective celebrations that greeted the final whistle are becoming a habit across the kingdom. Morocco topped their group, beating Canada and Belgium, and then eliminated Spain on penalties in the round of 16 before overcoming Portugal. "There is no such thing as impossible in soccer, that's the

magic of this sport", former Moroccan international Abderrazak Khairi told AFP. Khairi scored twice in the surprise 3-1 victory over the same opponents, Portugal, in the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, when Morocco became the first African nation to reach the knockout rounds. No African or Arab country had managed to go beyond the quarter-finals. Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010 came closest to reaching the final four of the most prestigious tournament. "The Moroccan team has managed to do the impossible. We want the cup now," said Ali Gyne, 24. In Casablanca, the temple of Moroccan football, the shirts of the national team, and the red flags with the green star, are everywhere in the windows, the stalls, the markets. Giant frescoes have appeared showing Chelsea attacker Hakim Ziyech and coach Walid Regragui, who has been elevated to the rank of national hero. (AFP)

Cristiano Ronaldo's partner takes aim at Portugal coach for decision to bench him again

DOHA, DEC 11 /-- The FIFA World Cup 2022 ended on a sorry note for Cristiano Ronaldo after Portugal suffered a 0-1 defeat at the hands of Morocco in the quarter-finals. The result all but brought an end to Ronaldo's career in international football but what has hurt his fans the most is the fact that the Portugal captain didn't even start for the team in the last two matches of the World Cup. Ronaldo's partner Georgina Rodriguez has taken a swipe at the team's head coach Fernando Santos over the decision. Taking to Instagram, Georgina wrote: "That friend for whom so many words of admiration and respect you have. The same as when you got into the game, he saw how everything changed, but it was too late. You can't underestimate the best player in the world, his most powerful weapon. Nor can you stand up for someone that he doesn't deserve it. Life gives us lessons. Today we have not lost, we have learned. Cristiano, we admire you." Santos, when asked about his



That friend for whom so many words of admiration and respect you have. The same as when you got into the game, he saw how everything changed, but it was too late. You can't underestimate the best player in the world, his most powerful weapon. Nor can you stand up for someone that he doesn't deserve it. Life gives us lessons. Today we have not lost, we have learned. Cristiano, we admire you —Georgina Rodriguez

With the defeat against Morocco, not just Portugal's FIFA World Cup campaign came to an end, but quite possibly, the 37-year-old Ronaldo's dream to lift the biggest trophy in world football.

GAME NOTES

Gareth Southgate 'will take time' to consider England future

Al Khor, Dec 11 /--/ Gareth Southgate said he would take his time before he makes a decision over his future as England coach after the bitter disappointment of their World Cup quarter-final defeat against France. Defending champions France won 2-1 at the Al Bayt Stadium, with England captain Harry Kane blazing over from the penalty spot when handed a chance to equalise late in the game, having earlier scored from the spot. England reached the semi-finals of the World Cup in 2018 and the final of last year's European Championship but their long wait for a major trophy will now stretch beyond 56 years. Southgate said he would now have to take stock. "Whenever I've finished these tournaments I've needed time to make correct decisions because emotionally you go through so many different feelings and the energy that it takes through these tournaments is enormous so I want to make the right decision, whenever that is, for the team, for England, for the FA," he said in the early hours of Sunday.

Didier Deschamps says 'hearts and guts' got France past England

AL KHOR, QATAR, DEC 11 /--/ France coach Didier Deschamps said his side showed "hearts and guts" to defeat England 2-1 on Saturday to reach the World Cup semi-finals. Aurelien Tchouameni scored first for the World Cup holders at Al Bayt Stadium but Harry Kane's penalty brought England level. After Olivier Giroud's header gave France the lead, Kane wasted a golden chance to equalise when he blasted a penalty over the bar with minutes remaining. "It's fabulous because it was a big match against a very good English team," Deschamps said. "We responded once again, it's wonderful to reach the last four again, you have to savour it, a World Cup semi-final is quite something. "There is quality in this team, but there is also a good mentality and a state of mind. We gave them a little ammunition with two penalties, but it is with hearts and guts that we held onto this result." Deschamps said France's semi-final opponents Morocco "deserve all our respect and recognition". (AFP)

World Cup mania: 9,000 football-crazy Kolkatans visit Qatar, more to travel ahead of final match

KOLKATA, DEC 11 /--/ The euphoria surrounding this year's FIFA World Cup has been "unprecedented" in football-mad Kolkata, with nearly 9,000 fans having already travelled to Qatar to witness the showpiece event and many more slated to arrive in the next few days, officials said. People are still making queries regarding ticket and accommodation availability and travel packages for Qatar, days ahead of the semi-finals and the final next week, they said. "Around 10,000-12,000 football fans have travelled to Qatar from eastern India so far, including close to 9,000 people from Kolkata. (PTI)

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