

## Anganwadi centres by NACD of APWD at Mayabunder

### Non-clearance of pending bills put Civil Contractors in a fix

KURMA RAO

**MAYABUNDER, DEC 21/--**/Many contractors in the Mayabunder region, who have completed projects assigned by the Andaman Public Works Department and handed over the assets to the client department are running pillar to post to get their bills cleared. Long delays seem to have become the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) these contractors inevitably are forced to face.

Several of the government projects have been completed and handed over to the client departments about a year back, but when it comes to clearing of pending bills, these contractors are made to suffer, citing fund crunch.

In one such glaring example, payment bills for about 7-8 Anganwadi centres constructed and handed over to North Andaman Construction Division of APWD at Mayabunder are still pending for over a year now as a result of which contractors are unable to pay wages to labourers engaged by them. It is estimated that construction cost of each Anganwadicentre is about Rs 20 lakhs. About three Anganwadi centres were constructed at Webi and Tugapur No-8 while another five Anganwadi centres were constructed at Betapur region.

In the same manner, payment bills for work undertaken at Mayabunder Gandhi Govt College have also not been cleared by the NACD of APWD. As per reports, several contractors in the

**Running from pillar to post to get pending bills cleared is the current SOP**



Manaybunder region, who have completed the Anganwadi centres and handed over these centres to the Social Welfare department, are struggling to get their payments from the North Andaman Construction Division of APWD. N&M Andaman as a result of which contractors are unable to pay wages to

labourers engaged by them. "Several contractors in the North and Middle Andaman region are struggling to get the payments for completed projects of the APWD. It is now over a year that these Anganwadi centres have been completed by contractors and handed over to the client department. However, the NACD of APWD at Mayabunder is still not releasing the payments to these contractors. We are under huge debts as payments to labourers, cost of materials

purchased for the projects are pending for months. The administration should take concrete steps to address the situation. How will we run our families? We're unable to pay wages to our labourers," said a contractor of Mayabunder. "Despite sky-rocketing prices of construction materials, contractors here have ensured timely completion of the Anganwadi centres. We purchased materials and made payments to workers by obtaining loans from Banks with the hope that APWD will promptly release our payments after completion of the works. But despite submitting bills on time after completion of work, our bills have not been settled and we are unable to pay the bank interests on time. Small time contractors are the worst-hit as they are reeling under huge debts. The administration should take note of the plight of the contractors and work out a mechanism to settle the payment of contractors in a time bound manner," said some of the others.

## ANI on International trade map soon

### NCCI, YCCI help fulfill PM's vision of act east policy

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--**/Based on Prime Minister Modi's vision of act east policy, Nicobar Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NCCI) and Youth Chamber of Commerce & Industry (YCCI) acted upon quick to initiate talks with trade body, Joint Business Council Aceh-India (JBC), and visited Aceh province of Indonesia on August which is the closest point to the Nicobar Island. The business delegation from NCCI led by Mr. Rashid Yusoof(President) and YCCI led by Mr.Tanveer Singh (President) was to understand the ground reality, infrastructure and resources available with both counterparts to establish trade between the two countries. Further, It comes as a good news to our islanders that following various interactions and events between the two governments and the stand of the present A & N Administration is very much on the same line as has been spelt out by our Prime Minister, Mr.NarendraModi on his recent visit to Indonesia and efforts from NCCI and YCCI now that the 2nd Joint Task Force meeting was held at Port Blair from 18th Dec 2022 to 20th Dec.2022, where delegations from both side headed by JatmikoHeruPrasetyo, Director for South & Central Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Indonesia and Mr. VishvasSapkal, Joint Secretary(South), Ministry of External Affairs by India had a two-day meeting discussing various points to enhance connectivity between A&N islands and Aceh Province. Subsequently there have been continuous dialogue and discussion between both government and trade bodies namely JBC from Aceh province of Indonesia and NCCI and YCCI from ANI, the dream of big opportunities seems to be changing to reality. This delegation visit in August by NCCI AND YCCI was as a result of an invitation from JBC headed by Mr. AlmerHavis Sandy and the local government. On the trip, the delegation was made to explore various trade opportunities in different sectors and surveyed on ground technicalities and infra

available to kick start trade. There were also MOU signed between JBC and NCCI supported by YCCI to initiate first trade between Nicobar Islands and Banda Aceh/Sabang as a mark of friendship while starting trade relations. Extensive meetings were held with government bodies and Bank of Indonesia to see how the local businessmen from islands and mainland India would be facilitated to start trade and likely invest in Aceh province. Keen support and enthusiasm was shown by both sides to participate and suggest on India Indonesia policy to



make it more cohesive which is now happening in the form of 2nd Joint Task Force Meeting, where both NCCI and YCCI have jointly welcomed the efforts of JBC in Aceh-Indonesia to taking this discussion further and making the suggestions and helping government on both sides help formulate a policy. NCCI and YCCI appreciated all the efforts made by A & N Administration and thanked the Andaman Nicobar Administration under the dynamic leadership of Chief Secretary, Mr. Keshav Chandra that a very positive message has been sent to our counterpart JBC in Indonesia. NCCI and YCCI alongside JBC are in continuous efforts to facilitate businessmen from both parts of the world to make use of this opportunity, particularly in sectors of trade & investment, tourism & culture exchange, and education for strengthening long-term partnership between Aceh and ANI.

## MP seeks Central University in ANI

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--**/Mr.KuldeepRai Sharma, Member of Parliament has demanded a Central University in Andaman & Nicobar Islands for which he has moved a private member's bill in the Parliament on 9th December 2022 Mr. Sharma said that the Islands have a literacy rate of 86.27% which is higher than the National average of 74.04%. With such a high rate of literacy it is imperative that the islands must have a central university to provide quality secondary education

to its bright young population. This will also create greater job specialization and aid in the carrying out of quality research. Shri Sharma highlighted that presently, the Institutions of higher education in the Islands are affiliated to the Puducherry Central University. Increase in the number of higher educational institutions from the lone Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) to three degree colleges, one medical college, one

engineering college, two polytechnic, two ITIs, one law college, one B.Ed. college, one DIET, one vocational training institute, one department of ocean studies and marine biology, one department of coastal disaster management, one nursing, one ANM in which more than 3059 students pass every year, which has necessitated the need to have a separate Central University for Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Mr. Sharma emphasized that the absence of a full-fledged University



in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is depriving the local students belonging to poor or marginalized sections of the society since they have very limited higher educational opportunities in the Islands and have to travel to mainland for higher education purpose which is a costly affair and difficult to bear. In order to realize the true potential of students of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, there is an eminent requirement to establish a Central University in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. According to Mr. Sharma, a Central University is necessary to revolutionize Higher Education and to provide a level playing field to the students of the Islands in comparison with other Union Territories like Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Delhi, Puducherry, Chandigarh who have their own Universities. The Central University will enable the introduction of several new courses in the field of Marine Biology, Forest, Fisheries, Tribal Culture, Environment and many others. This will also facilitate socioeconomic development of the A&N Islands and will also generate more employment opportunities for the Islanders. He further pointed out that Central University will provide employment to the local youths including tribals but this Central University will create an educational hub in the islands which will also generate revenue as the Islands will soon be open to South Eastern Asian countries. Students from South East Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma) will come to Andaman and Nicobar Islands for higher education.

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# Rahul attacks BJP, its ideology as Bharat Jodo Yatra enters Haryana

NUH, DEC 21 /--/ Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday targeted the BJP, saying while one ideology gives benefits to a select few, another is the voice of the people, farmers and labourers. As the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by him crossed over into Haryana from Rajasthan this morning, Rahul also said that inflation and unemployment are the biggest issues affecting the country. Addressing a gathering in the district, where a large number of people had turned up braving the morning chill, Gandhi said the fight between two ideologies was not a new one and has been going on for thousands of years. On BJP leaders questioning the need for him to undertake the Kanyakumari to Kashmir yatra, Rahul said he was "opening a shop of love in the

market of hate" through the yatra. "When these people go out to spread hatred in this country, people of our ideology go out to spread love and affection," he said. "This is not a new fight, don't think that this fight is of today, of 21st century, this fight is thousands of years old and two ideologies have been fighting. One ideology which gives and gave benefits to select few and second ideology is the voice of people, peoples' pain, farmers' voice, labourers' voice," he said. "This fight has been going on, will go on, but in this fight the Congress has a role and we all have a role. This is why we started this yatra," the former Congress president said. The Yatra resumed from Patan Udaipuri in Haryana's Nuh after entering from neighbouring Rajasthan.

While Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot and senior leaders from the state Sachin Pilot and Govind Singh Dotasara accompanied the yatra, it was welcomed in Haryana by former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, senior leader Randeep Singh Surjewala, Kumari Selja, Deepender Singh Hooda, state party chief Udai Bhan, newly appointed Haryana Congress in-charge Shaktisinh Gohil, among others. Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav also joined the Yatra. Along the way, many people from Mewat joined the Yatra. One person could also be seen giving a rose to Rahul. The Congress leader said he has learnt a lot through this yatra, which probably one does not learn sitting in cars, aeroplanes and helicopters. Rahul said these days leaders

have a habit and stressed that he was talking about leaders of all parties including the Congress, BJP and Samajwadi Party. "Nowadays there is a gulf between leaders and the public. Leaders think there is no need to listen to people and they give lengthy speeches for hours, this yatra has attempted to change that." "We walk daily for six-seven hours and all leaders listen to the voice of everyone, including farmers, labourers, youth, mothers, daughters, small shopkeepers, small and medium business persons and after this we give a 15-minute speech," he said. Rahul said that he was happy to note that Gehlot, his cabinet ministers and other party leaders from the state will walk at least 15 km once a month in their State for a better understanding of people's problems and redress their grievances. (PTI)



Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Rajnikant Patel (R) calling on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in New Delhi on Wednesday

## Covid caution: Karnataka govt to start screening international passengers at Bengaluru airport

BELAGAVI, DEC 21 /--/ The Karnataka government will start screening international passengers at Bengaluru airport in view of a sudden spurt in Covid-19 cases in some parts of the world, health minister K Sudhakar said on Wednesday. Sudhakar, however, did not specify from which date the screening process will begin at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) here. "We will have to take certain precautionary measures in the wake of global situation. KIA has a high inflow of international passengers. We will start screening passengers

there," Sudhakar said. The minister emphasised the need for people to take precaution dose of Covid-19 vaccine amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in some parts of the world, especially in China. He said new Covid-19 guidelines would be issued. The state government has taken measures to send positive samples for genome sequencing to keep track of emerging variants, as per Union health ministry's guidelines. "Some countries including China and Japan are witnessing a sudden spurt in cases. China is witnessing more hospitalisation. Therefore, we need to focus on booster (precaution) dose coverage,"

Sudhakar told reporters here. "A high level meeting will be chaired by chief minister Basavaraj Bommai to discuss next course of action," he added. The state has achieved 100 per cent double dose Covid-19 vaccination, but a lot of people are yet to take precaution jab. "All those who are yet to get their booster (precaution) shots should voluntarily come forward and get it," Sudhakar said in an appeal to people. "We are prepared to face any kind of situation. We will take all necessary precautions and new guidelines will be released in this regard," the health minister added. (PTI)

## UP govt directs officials to ensure Covid protocols followed at night shelters

LUCKNOW, DEC 21 /--/ The Uttar Pradesh government Wednesday directed officials to ensure Covid protocols are followed at night shelters for the homeless, a day after the Centre asked states to ramp up genome sequencing of positive samples to keep track of newer variants. The Centre's directive came in view of a fresh spurt in cases in some countries such as Japan, South Korea, Brazil, China and the US. According to a statement, the state government's guidelines stated that Covid protocol, such as maintaining social distancing, must be adhered to at the night shelters. Chief minister Yogi Adityanath had recently instructed officials to make proper arrangements at night shelters in view of the biting cold in the state. Director of Uttar Pradesh Local Bodies Directorate Neha Sharma said directives have been issued to municipal commissioners and executive officers on a priority basis. They have been directed to regularly update details of night shelters on the Google link of the directorate so that monitoring of arrangements at all the night shelters can be done, she said. The facilities at the night shelters should be of good quality and arrangements for cleanliness, pure drinking water and lighting should be made. Directives have also been issued for the distribution of blankets among the poor, Sharma said. (PTI)

## House not meant for reckless politics: Shah slams Cong member in LS over Pegasus snooping charge

NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/ Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday took exception to Congress member Gaurav Gogoi's allegation that government snoops on politicians with Israeli spyware Pegasus and asked him to give proof of the claim, saying the house was not meant for "reckless politics." Gogoi, while participating in a discussion in Lok Sabha on drug menace, sought to know from the government about the kind of surveillance mechanism it has in place on the country's land and sea borders, as well as international airports, to check the entry of contraband into the country. The Congress member also sought to know from the home minister as to what kind of surveillance and intelligence mechanisms are in place to check the arms smuggling, human trafficking, and smuggling of animal parts at the India-Myanmar border. "You snoop on us again and again, install Pegasus on our phones and that of the journalists," Gogoi charged. "You tell us how many drug mafias you have caught through Pegasus so far," the Congress MP asked Shah. Objecting to Gogoi's remarks, Shah asked him to submit in the House the proof of his accusation. "He has levelled a very serious allegation that Pegasus has been installed in his mobile. He must submit here the basis (of his accusation) in the House. Either his words are removed or he must submit the basis," Shah said. "The House is for serious discussion, not for reckless politics," he added. Gogoi urged Speaker Om Birla to issue an order if he made any mistake in asking the government to tell the House if it uses Pegasus for surveillance or not. "He has said (Pegasus was) used on him. He must submit facts. He can't just talk like this. Rest the Supreme Court has decided," the home minister said referring to the apex court's decision on the Pegasus spyware matter. "What can we do if you also do not read like your leader," Shah also said, hitting out at Gogoi over his remarks. Intervening, the Speaker told the members that it will enhance the dignity of the House if they make their points with facts and proof. "This is my request," he added. (PTI)

## Home minister says battle against drugs delicately poised, asks states to join hands

NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/ Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the battle against drugs was delicately poised and urged states to fight the menace together with the central government, keeping aside politics. Responding to a short-duration discussion in the Lok Sabha on the drug-abuse problem in the country and steps taken by the government to control it, Shah said the Modi government has zero tolerance policy towards drugs and vowed to put behind bars drug traders, however verbiage, in the next two years. "We have mapped the drug network across the states. No matter how big the criminal is, in the next two

years there will be a situation that they will be behind bars," Shah said. The home minister said the issue of drug menace is a serious one as profits from this trade are also used to finance the acts of terror. According to Shah, the presence of dirty money also destroys economy and the government will leave no stone unturned in achieving the target of drugs free India. Shah said Rs 97,000 crore worth drugs were destroyed between 2014 and 2022 while Rs 23,000 crore drugs were seized between 2006 and 2013 and the government will carry forward its campaign against drugs with gusto. On the seizure of 3,000 kg drugs in Gujarat, he said it was a reflection of the state

government's pro-active action against the menace. He said all those involved in the smuggling of the drugs were arrested. The source of drugs was traced to some Gulf countries and action has been taken to ensure that the factories have been shut down, the home minister said, adding the consignment was seized due to the scientific surveillance mounted by the Customs department and allied agencies. Referring to the row over the powers given to the border guarding forces to register cases along the international borders, the home minister said those who were making political issues out of it were supporters of drug trade. (PTI)

## Morbi bridge tragedy: Gujarat HC issues notice to maintenance firm

AHMEDABAD, DEC 21 /--/ The Gujarat High Court on Wednesday issued a notice to the company involved in the maintenance and operation of the Morbi suspension bridge, which collapsed in October killing 135 people, on a plea seeking the company be made a respondent in the suo motu proceedings initiated by the High Court. A division bench of Chief Justice Aravind Kumar and Justice Ashutosh Shastri issued notice to Ajanta Manufacturing Limited on the plea which

stated the "acts of malfeasance on its (the company's) part makes it liable for the payment of exemplary damages." The High Court said it had initiated suo motu proceedings after taking cognizance of news items on the death of 135 persons in the October 30 bridge collapse tragedy. The division bench also dismissed an application filed by 46 councillors of the Morbi municipality seeking they be impleaded in the proceedings as they fear the civic body might be

superseded going by the observations made by the High Court in its previous order. The next hearing on the suo motu proceedings will be held on January 19. Applicants Sanjiv Ezhava and Dilip Chavda said while there may be some doubt regarding the contract between the company and the local civic body, it was clear from the affidavits filed in the court that the company "controlled the entire administration, repair, maintenance and operation of the ill-fated structure." (PTI)

## ISRO's satellite images show how drug trafficker's bungalow came up in Gujarat village

AHMEDABAD, DEC 21 /--/ Thanks to satellite images provided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has been able to establish how an alleged drug trafficker built a palatial bungalow in a Gujarat village by using his ill-gotten wealth. Isa Rao, who is absconding, is one of the

main accused in the seizure of heroin worth Rs 600 crore by the Gujarat Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS) in Morbi district of the state in November 2021. The probe was later handed over to the NCB. Satellite images provided by ISRO's Advanced Data Processing Research Institute (ADPRIN) showed how he developed his property at Jodia village

in Devbhumi-Dwarka district over three years and constructed a bungalow worth more than Rs 50 lakh, said a senior NCB official on Wednesday. The images showed the stages of construction from 2019, he said. "Investigation revealed that the property was developed using the money Rao made from the drug trade. As his family was not

cooperating with the investigation, we used satellite images to establish that this property was developed over three years. The house has been now seized for being 'proceeds of crime'," said the official. Rao is currently believed to be in Karachi, Pakistan. In November 2021, the Gujarat ATS seized 120 kg of heroin, valued at Rs 600 crore in

global markets, from an under-construction house at Zinzuda village in Morbi district and arrested three persons including Isa Rao's brother Mukhtar Hussein. The drugs had been sent by Rao's Pakistani associates by sea route and initially hidden in the coastal area near Salaya in Devbhumi Dwarka district before being moved to Zinzuda, the ATS said. (PTI)

## States asked to release prisoners who have completed their sentence: MoS Home

NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/ The Centre has asked state governments to release prisoners who have completed their terms but are behind bars due to non-payment of fine, minister of state for home affairs Ajay Kumar said in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

The minister was responding to a question by Congress member Imran Pratapgari, who raised the issue of release of convicts in the Bilkis Bano case. "We have created a special scheme for August 15, 2022, January 26, 2023 and August 15, 2023, under which states have been asked to release such prisoners who are behind bars due to non-payment of fine," Kumar said in response to a supplementary asked by Pratapgari. The Congress member said the minister tabled an "irresponsible answer" to his question. Kumar said around 80 per cent of prisoners in India are under trial and asked what steps are being taken by the government to reduce this. The minister said the Congress member should collect information about the matter first.

As per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the responsibility of administration and management of prison lies with the state and the Centre only supports it. "Judiciary is independent in our country, and only courts have the right to decide the matter of under trials," the minister said. While asking for a second supplementary, Pratapgari said the minister's reply is "full of arrogance". In his second supplementary to the question, the Congress leader referred to President Droupadi Murmu's Constitution Day speech, in which she suggested decongesting jails by helping poor people languishing there for years for petty crimes.

"Are we moving towards development? What is the need to set up more jails? We need to reduce their numbers," Murmu had said in her valedictory address at the Constitution Day celebrations organised by the Supreme Court. Thereafter, Pratapgari asked the minister whether the release of the convicts in the Bilkis Bano case is a state matter or the Home Ministry too is looking into it. In his reply, Kumar only mentioned advisories issued to states for the release of prisoners who have completed their punishment period and asked for putting up separate notices on matters related to pardon or punishment. AAP's Raghav Chadha asked about the status of the promise made by the prime minister on the eve of Gurupurab for release of Sikh prisoners.

In his response, Kumar said state governments have been asked to send their proposals and a decision would be taken after that. (PTI)

## Inclusion of tribal communities in ST list: MPs raise issues of basic amenities, fake caste certificates

NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/ Opposition members on Wednesday asked the Union government to take a holistic approach on reservation for tribals and urged it to bring a comprehensive bill that covers all communities to be included in the Scheduled Tribes category instead of bringing state-wise legislation.

Some Opposition members also questioned if the government was bringing state-wise Bills for political considerations. Speaking on the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2022, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 9, members across party lines raised issues affecting the Adivasis in their regions including that of providing them basic amenities, giving them representation according to their population and protecting them from fake caste certification for reservation. Nationalist Congress Party MP Supriya Sule said while she welcomes the government's move to include names of communities left out from the ST list, why had the government not brought a "comprehensive bill" that covers all such communities.

Echoing similar views, National Conference's Hasnain Masoodi asked why the government is not bringing one bill to include names of communities in the ST list that have been left out if there is no procedural issue. "Are there political considerations for not bringing one bill and going for state-wise bills to appeal to certain sections," he asked, taking a wibe at the Centre. TMC's Aparupa Poddar said that it was not enough to just include the tribes in the central list. She said that with their inclusion, they need to be provided basic amenities, like safe sanitation, drinking water and other services. "There is a need for socio-economic caste census which is essential for proper planning of welfare schemes," she said.

The Bill seeks to include the Dhanuwar, Dhanuwar, Kisan, Saunra, Saonra, and Binjha communities in the ST list in Chhattisgarh and seeks to formalise Bhuinya, Bhuiyan, and Bhuyan as synonyms of the Bharia Bhumia community. It also includes three Devanagari versions of the name of the Pando community. DMK's DNV Senthilkumar, while welcoming the Bill, said that more communities need to be added to the list. YSRCP's Sanjeev Kumar Singari said that the number of Scheduled Tribe communities should be increased on the basis of their population in districts. Shiv Sena leader Rajendra Gavit raised concerns over the use of fake caste certificates in Maharashtra to con members of the tribal communities and urged the government to take strict action against such culprits.

"With fake certificates many get reservations. Land belonging to these communities cannot be handed over to non-Adivasis. They do it by taking fake certificates. I demand strict action against them," he said. BJD's Pinaki Misra urged the government to include STs in Odisha that have been left out of the list. BSP's Girish Chandra demanded that SC/STs should be provided scholarships at all levels. He also highlighted atrocities against the SC/STs, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. TRS' Nama Nageswara Rao raised the issue of a bill passed by the state in 2017 for the welfare of STs that is pending with the Centre and urged the government to clear it. BJP's Sunil Kumar Soni accused the Congress of working against the tribals in Chhattisgarh.

"What is the difference between the Congress and the BJP, the Congress creates problems and BJP solves problems," he claimed. Earlier, the House cleared certain amendments made by Rajya Sabha to a Bill passed in the recent past. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022 was passed by Lok Sabha in April this year. The Bill seeks to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Uttar Pradesh) Order, 1967 (ST Order) and the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 (SC Order) with respect to its application to Uttar Pradesh. (PTI)



# ICAR-KVK, Port Blair conducts awareness prog on Natural farming



PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/ICAR-KVK, CIARI, Port Blair organized awareness programme of natural farming at Community Hall, Maglutan village on 20.12.2022 under out scaling of Natural farming through Krishi Vigyan Kendras. Dr Y Ramakrishna, Principal Scientist & Head was inaugurated the programme. He highlighted various ill-effects of indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals and inorganic fertilizers in soil health and soil microbial diversity. He enlightens the importance of natural farming by which drastically reduced crop

production cost through replacing the inorganic fertilizers and plant protection chemical by use of own farm production like Beejamrut, Jeevamrut, live mulch through intercropping & crop residue mulch and moist root zone. Dr N. Bommayasamy, SMS (Agro./Agril.Ext.) dealt about difference of organic and natural farming practices, management of crops pests by using Neemastra, Bhramastra and Agnistra and application of sour curd. Application of ghanajeevamrut and jeevamrut helps in improving the soil health and soil biological activity by

providing nutrients. Experts demonstrated the method of preparation of ghanajeevamrut, jeevamrut during the programme. ICAR-KVK, Port Blair distributed jeevamrut preparation kits to participants.

Fifty three farmers and farm women were participated and benefited in this programme. The programme was concluded with Mrs. Snehalata, farm women. The programme was organized under supervision and guidance of DrEaknath B. Chakurkar, Director, ICAR-CIARI, Port Blair.



Group of Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS) Probationers of 2021 batch, as part of their Tri-Services Command attachment to Andaman & Nicobar Command called on Admiral D K Joshi, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, NM, VSM (Retd.), Hon'ble Lt Governor, A&N Islands and Vice-Chairman, Islands Development Agency, today at Raj Niwas.

## PDME admission in DBRAIT

PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/ The application form for the new admission in 2 Yrs Pre-Sea Training for Diploma Holders (Post Diploma in marine Engineering course) at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Institute of Technology (DBRAIT) is available with the Maritime Section of DBRAIT; the last date for submission of filled application form is 30th DEC 2022. This course is duly approved by DG Shipping, Mumbai and is a residential course. This course is of 24 months duration and the entry qualification is Diploma in Mechanical/Electrical/EEE/Diploma Ship Building Engineering with 50% marks in final year of the Diploma and 50% marks in English, either in Class X or XII. For further details about the course, fees structure, etc., the candidates may kindly contact to the Maritime Section of DBRAIT during working hours (Mob-9679553501 / 9933224884).

## President, NYA hails CS direction

PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/ The President of Nicobar Youth Association Mr.Rayhaan Pasha on behalf of tribal community of Nicobar District appreciated the Chief Secretary for issuing circular dated 20th December 2022 to make A & N Administration easily accessible for the general public as well as tribal. Now it is

only because of the Chief Secretary Shri.Keshav Chandra IAS that tribal living at the far-flung area/remote islands that often come to Port Blair will be able to present their problem/ Grievances for redressal to the Administration. The tribal will remain grateful to the Chief Secretary & A & N Administration.

## Lord Sri Veer Hanuman Jayanti celebration

PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/ Sri Veer Hanuman Temple Trust, Aberdeen Bazar, Port Blair will celebrate Lord Sri Veer Hanuman Jayanti on 23rd December 2022, which will start with Sudersan Homam at 8.00 am, Abhisekh from 10.00 am to 11.30 am followed by Aarti and Annadaanam / Bhog from 12.00 am. to 3.00 pm.. And at 5.00 pm, Lord Sri Veer Hanuman Utsava Moorthy city procession will start from the Temple and be routed via Golghar, Delanipur, Phoenix bay and Aberdeen Bazaar to the temple. On 24th December 2022, Pushpanjali Puja will be performed in the temple at 5.00 pm followed by a cultural programme at 6.00 pm. Devotees can participate in the puja celebrations and city procession of Lord Sri Veer Hanuman.

## PS Diglipur resolves theft case within 6 hours

PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/ The team of PS Diglipur once again cracked a blind theft case within 06 hours of registration of the case and arrested 02 accused namely Bijoy Kumar Biswas, S/o Shri. Bidhuth Biswas and Kshitish Mondal, S/o Late Nikhil Mondal both residents of Krishnapuri village near Nikhil Medical, Diglipur. On 20/11/22 a theft case was reported at PS Diglipur where 03 Nos. batteries were stolen from 03 trucks parked at different locations of Diglipur. A case was registered and a team was constituted by Inspr. Vikash Singh, SHO PS Diglipur, consisting of Inspr. Kabita Kirtonia, PC Devsai, PC Abubacker Siddique, PC Santosh Lal and PC Sameresh Mistry. The team immediately activated the informers and checked all available local CCTV footage and cross checked with the local garbage collectors related to suspicious movements at night. Also various scrap

dealers examined & based on the quick human intelligence gathering, 02 accused were apprehended and after sustained interrogation stolen batteries were recovered which was stolen on the intervening night of 19/12/22 and 20/12/22. The accused sold the stolen batteries in a nearby scrap yard and the owner who purchased the stolen property was apprehended. The whole exercise took place under the command of Shri Lakshya Pandey, DANIPS, SDPO Diglipur and overall supervision of Smti Geetanjali Khandelwal, IPS, Superintendent of Police, N & M Andaman District. The general public is requested to pass and share any credible information pertaining to any crime or illegal activities to their nearest police station or over phone No.100, 112 & 30192 273344. The identity of the informers will be kept secret and will also be suitably rewarded.

## Art, Craft & Science exhibition by Invent Public School

PORT BLAIR, DEC 21/--/The Invent Public School Prothrapur organized Art, Craft and Science exhibition (IMAGINE-INVENT-INSPIRE & EXPLORE2022) was held on Wednesday. On this occasion Smti. Kavitha Udaya Kumar Chairperson, Port Blair Municipal Council and Mr. N. K. Udhaya Kumar, Ex-Chairperson, PBMC were the chief guest. The chief guests were welcomed by the students by performing a mesmerizing welcome dance and a welcome song. The Civic Chief praised the children for the active participation in exhibition despite a long covid-crisis, and realized the significance of C-Curricular activities along with conventional academic performance, further the students performed various activities with much creativity with the same zeal and vigor. At the outset Shri.Susai Alexander the founder chairman of Invent Public School and the President of Andaman and Nicobar Private School Association delivered the welcome speech to honor the Chief gueststuffs's students and the entire Invent fraternity.

## 09th Death Anniversary

ON  
22-12-2022

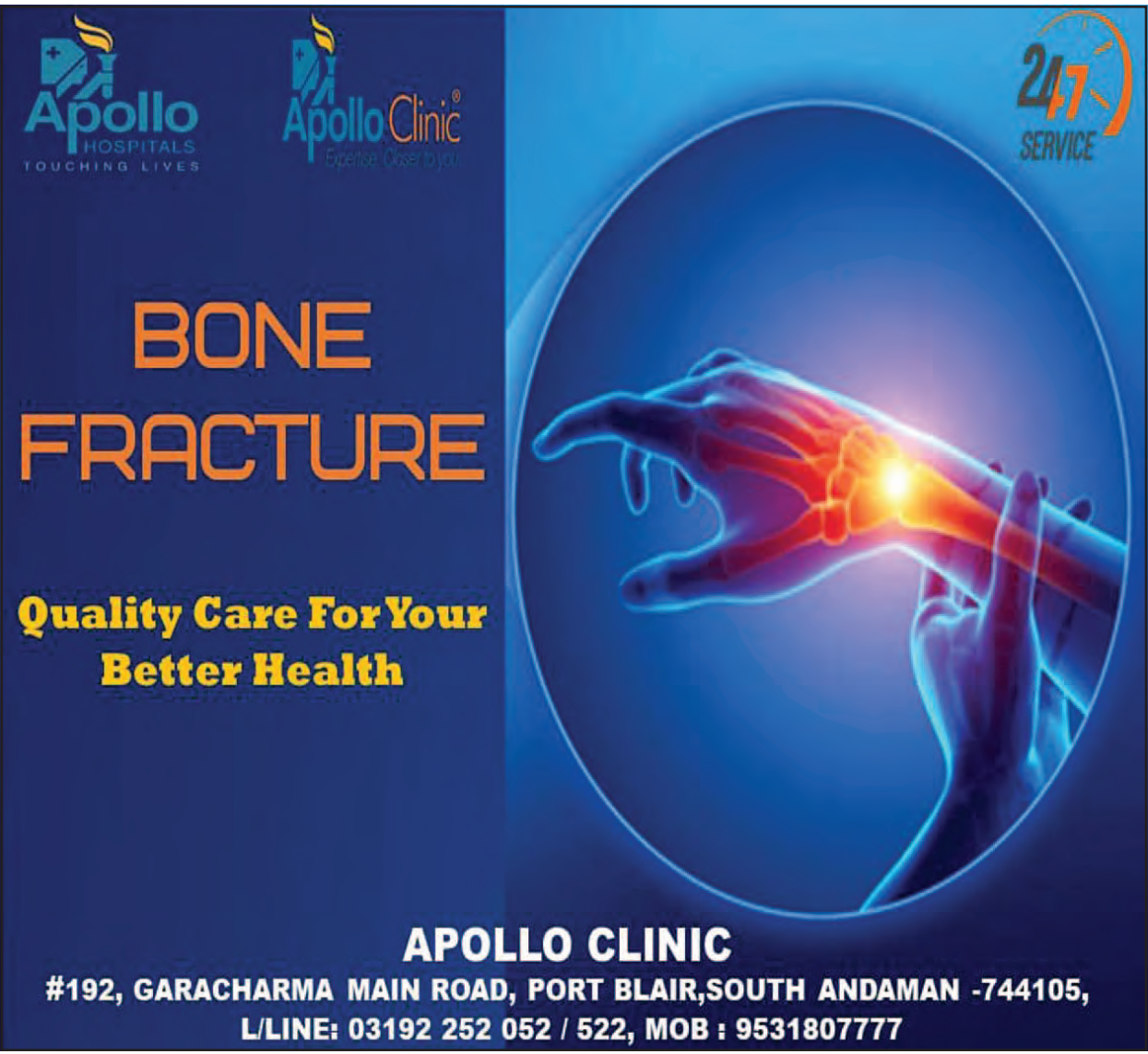
Late. Thyagarajan

"May the winds of heaven  
blow softly and whisper in  
your ear, How much we  
love and miss you  
and wish that you  
were here"



Inserted by:

T. Indira (Wife), T. Krithika & T. Priya (Daughters), S.Sakunthala (Mother-in-Law), P.K SounderRajan (Son-in-law), S.Shivaansh (Grandson) & All Family Members





*For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them*  
*Aristotle*

## Uniform tax on cars not good for auto industry

Having a uniform tax structure across all segments of vehicles may not be good for the growth of auto industry. The regulatory burden is the highest on small cars, a key segment of the Indian automobile industry. If manufacturing sector grows fast, India's economic growth rate could be higher which 'unfortunately' has remained a laggard despite the best efforts of the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre due to implementation gaps at the ground level. The burden of regulatory changes on the small cars is far higher than the regulatory burden on big cars and that is changing the whole market behaviour.

People who are buying small cars are not buying small cars in near the same numbers. Maruti Suzuki India Chairman RC Bhargava believes "it's not a good thing, either for the car industry or the country". For the healthy growth of the automobile industry, there must be a steady increase in the number of new customers in the car parc. The base of ownership of cars must be increasing every year. Only then when the whole pyramid becomes a larger one, which is able to balance itself. But, Bhargava doesn't see that as becoming an inverted pyramid and the car industry becomes an industry where in India there is hardly any growth in the small segment and all the growth takes place in the higher segments. So, that factor has to be kept in mind, the regulatory effect on the car, and that's one argument for not having a uniform rate of tax on all small and big cars. At present, automobiles are taxed at 28 per cent GST with additional cess ranging from 1 per cent to 22 per cent depending on the type of vehicle. Cars imported as completely built units (CBU) attract customs duty ranging between 60 per cent and 100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value being less or above USD 40,000.

For electric cars, GST has been kept at 5 per cent whether it's a small electric car or big electric car. There's no differential tax rate there. So, there is already that uniform taxation happening. Since the auto sector continues to be heavily taxed, it is going to affect the growth of the industry. Compared to developed markets like Europe and Japan, where per capita income is far higher, taxes on cars in India are much higher. It is to be pondered whether cars should be charged more than the average rate of taxation...? If it is yes, then we are, in some way, accepting the thing that cars or luxury products should be taxed more than non-luxury products, which is the old socialist way of thinking and taxation.

India is doing well with a growth rate of nearly 7 per cent although next year it looks difficult to achieve that rate because there are too many international events, which are in the sense of negative headwinds for us or in the rest of the world. The growth rate could be higher if manufacturing in India could grow fast. Unfortunately, manufacturing in India has still remained a laggard. One of the main reasons for not achieving the desired growth in the manufacturing sector is due to the gaps in implementation at the ground levels despite the Centre pushing with policy reforms.

# Congress has to reinvent itself to be the anti-saffron pole

## REFLEX ACTION

Mriganka M Bhowmick

The recently concluded state elections of Gujarat, Himachal along with MCD election in Delhi and By-elections give a mix-bagged signal towards 2024 general election. One can hardly draw a conclusion about the final shape of political outcome as well as political divides across the party lines. Nonetheless it was important as the opposition parties set out for a journey to create an alternative space of BJP.

To counter hard Hindutva and growing pain of inflations as well as unemployment, the opposition resorts to a Healing Touch politics by connecting people through Soft Hindutva and promulgating immediate reliefs by waiving off electricity, water bills or announcing recruitments, pensions and allowances to women and jobless youth. The combinations of all these are focussed to build a new narrative of inclusive politics of Good-living with Faith. Undoubtedly there are many takers of this politics of soothing benefits to electorates. BJP can ignore it at its own peril. It's been now more than three years that Indian economy is running into a topsy-turvy path where inflationary pressure on the economy remains main concern. Price rise of essential commodities has created a hole to the pocket of common man. The worry has been added up further with the woes of unemployment and weak capital supply for small and medium enterprises. The pain is visible and it moves from Covid disruption to geopolitical tension to global recessionary phase, all happened within a short span of time. Increase in the household budget with stagnant wage level in semi and unskilled jobs have reduced the household savings to the bottom. At this juncture, the great growth data of economy sounds hollow to a common man. Surely the future of politics will revolve around it and a healing touch to this wound can bring acceptance to the alternative politics. Harder the economy, more drift from hard Hindutva politics. The opposition parties have sensed it already.

The direct transfer of Good-Living benefits in the form of waiving of electricity and water bills, free medical services, education, etc as blanket welfare schemes were promulgated and exercised first by Aam Aadmi Party way back in 2015. Over the time it has gained momentum due to tightening of economic condition of middle and lower middle class. Arvind Kejriwal has marked it as AAP signature with soft tinge of Hindutva with free Religious Tourism for Senior citizen and other occasional pro-Hindutva discourses. However, it has been termed as politics of freebies by BJP. Kejriwal has established it as public welfare model for AAP. The same type of promises were promulgated in Punjab and even in Gujarat by AAP. Been economically hard-pressed for more than two years, these type of welfare promises sound sweet to any person, even if he earns fifty thousand rupees per month.

Other regional parties and Congress were quick to adopt the politics of Good-Living Benefits. One may remember that previous welfare benefits were ad-hoc in nature and segment specific, like farm loan waiver. It was never recurring in nature till the party remain in power. The hard-working party cadres of BJP still create a traction towards BJP model of nation building. But with prolonged economic woes, the traction will be weaker.

Turning pages to other political parties, it seems that congress has also joined the bandwagon with promise of Free electricity, Women allowances, Old Pension Schemes, etc in its manifestos for Himachal and Gujarat elections. Mamata Banerjee of TMC got generous support from women for her direct cash transfer scheme to women for household and so was the support for Naveen Patnaik of BJD in Orissa for his Mission Shakti Scheme for women. Just after acquiring power with support of RJD, Nitish Kumar also made a tall promise of 10 lakhs jobs to address the woes of unemployment of youth. KCR of Telangana

has moved ahead further to promise free power countrywide to farmers, while making his intention clear to enter into national politics. But their promises are not figment of imaginations, rather those are the manifestation of the needs of their respective electoral base facing tightening economic conditions.

Expecting a dilution of appeal of BJP in coming months, Congress has pulled its socks to reorganize itself with its socialist politics which resulted in Bharat Jodo Yatra. Setting aside the social media and news channels debates, congress hit the ground to mobilise mass around it. In fact, it's the rediscovery yatra of Rahul Gandhi and he is leading it from the front. One may notice that the discourses by Rahul Gandhi are less on the peril of Hindutva Politics, rather it is mainly focused on inflation, price rise and crony capitalism with a tinge of inclusive socialism. A long march with sermons of healing touch for common man's pain seems gaining traction and people able to see Congress in the street. How much it will generate dividend in coming elections that only time will tell. But the Yatra has able to mobilise its workers from hibernations. Indeed, that's a good feat to achieve.

An opposition pole position seems unfolding. The politics of Good-Living by transferring immediate reliefs coupled with soft Hindutva and Socialist ethos is becoming a corner stone of opposition politics and so are narratives of the parties. Though its very early to say but one can expect a change of goal post of the electorates in 2024, from Proud Hindu to Prosperous Hindu. If Congress is able to reinvent itself to old socialist model with Mahatma Gandhi's all-inclusive Hindutva model, the regional parties can flock towards it with their own platters of Good-Living Politics. Year 2023 seems challenging in economic front and much will be explored in the politics of public welfare. Amidst of growing pain, instead of tough disciplined teacher, one may need a compassionate companion. The Healing touch Politics is the beginning to create a unified opposition space where main non-BJP parties can gravitate for 2024. (IPA)



Cine lovers gather at Nandan to view films at the ongoing 28th KIFF in Kolkata on Wednesday--Arijit Ganguly

# Larger responsibility in preventing sewerage deaths

Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale told the Parliament in a written reply early this week that the country has not seen any deaths due to manual scavenging but 233 persons died while undertaking hazardous cleaning of sewers in the past three years. In Haryana, after 20 workers died in about 10 months in similar hazardous cleaning, the state's chief secretary has released a new standard operating process for sewer cleaning that makes the presence of an ambulance necessary while such cleaning activities are being undertaken.

Last week, two workers died during cleaning a clogged sewer in the cash-rich Cidco and NMMC jurisdictions of Navi Mumbai. One was pulled out of the sewer safely and is currently undergoing treatment. All these three workers were reportedly from Jharkhand. Given the high rate of fatality in sewer cleaning due to toxic gases, these incidents are making rights activists and policymakers worried.

Bezwada Wilson, founder of Safai Karmachari Andolan, points to a larger issue. He says most of these workers who are engaged in sewer cleaning and other types of manual scavenging dye in their 40s and 50s due to illnesses. Even if they don't die while cleaning, they die of different diseases they get inflicted with while doing the job. A look at workers cleaning the clogged sewer joints makes for a

nauseating and inhumane view. Workers go neck deep into the filthy waste of the city that includes excreta without any waterproof gear or gas masks.

Usually, power cleaning techniques are used to clean clogged drains and sewers worldwide. But Indian sewers seem to have additional problems and those modern techniques don't seem to work. When they don't work, it has to be done manually and that's when workers enter the sewer joints, sometimes 10 feet below the surface. In Haryana, the majority of the deaths took place while cleaning septic tanks. To replace workers in the hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks, task-specific equipment and tools can be used. A report by ResearchAndMarkets.com says the global sewer cleaning equipment industry is expected to grow at a combined annual growth rate of 7.9% to \$2.8 billion by 2027, from \$1.88 billion in 2021. Governments and municipal bodies are the target market.

Drainage is an essential component of any city that aims to be efficient as it provides integrated and seamless waste disposal and management system. As investments in real estate development grow across emerging economies in Asia and Africa, the market for sewer-

cleaning equipment is likely to grow. But does that excite our entrepreneurs in India or the burgeoning startup scene?

While the dividends of having a younger population that's driving the economy, including the market of residential and commercial infrastructures, is analyzed with keen interest, how it's adding to the pressure of drainage and sewer management is not a topic commonly discussed. At least, there are no proportionate investments in either developing the right equipment and tools or providing training, logistics, and social security to the cleaning workers. India, with roughly 1.4 billion people has more problems in sewer and waste management than it can effectively deal with.

Wilson who comes from a family of manual scavengers has been leading a resolute fight to eradicate the inhuman practice of manual scavenging for last over 30 years. He points out the social stigma and discrimination it brings to the people who practice it and those who come from such families. According to him, cleaning dry latrines, sewers, and railway tracks are instances of manual scavenging but they are not covered by the same law.

In August, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment said it was planning to conduct a national survey and make a list of all the people who are engaged in the hazardous cleaning of septic tanks and sewers. This exercise is to be undertaken under the Union government's National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) and will cover 500 Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) cities. The NAMASTE scheme aims to eradicate hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning practices. It's a joint initiative of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. NAMASTE has received Rs. 360 crores to be spent over the next four years.

While the government ministries will plan broader plans and initiatives, it's at the municipal and local levels that the problem needs to be addressed. India should be proud that it has people with the capability and willingness to go into the sewer and clean it with their bare hands. But these brave hearts should be recognized with proportionate economic benefits. They should not be allowed to die inside those sewers and septic tanks. The local administration must share a larger responsibility and ensure that all standard safety measures are in place before a worker steps into a sewer, if at all. To this end, the initiatives suggested by the Haryana chief secretary are worth emulating. (IPA)

### Conventional Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		8		9		
10				11		
		12		13		
			14		15	16
17		18		19	20	
			21		22	
23	24		25		26	
27				28		
29					30	

**ACROSS**  
1 Coagulated blood  
4 Matures  
8 By way of  
9 Bait  
10 Cicatrice  
11 Be merciful to  
12 Fasting period  
14 Female rabbit  
15 Obscure  
17 Flow back  
19 Golfing aid  
21 Dash  
23 Large antelope  
26 Sudden wind blast  
27 Shift  
28 Everyone  
29 Meat dish  
30 Otherwise

**DOWN**  
1 Fortress  
2 Egg-shaped  
3 Weary  
4 High mountain  
5 Protect  
6 Do wrong  
7 Observe  
11 Metal  
13 Famous  
16 Loose sleeveless  
18 Heroic  
20 Bird of prey  
22 Of no effect  
23 Printers' measures  
24 Fate  
25 Fresh

### SUDOKU: 3733

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

**Yesterday's Solution 3732**

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

**Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1741**

R	E	D	S	P	A	D	E	S
E		O	B	O	E		O	W
A		W		L	A	T	T	E
L	I	N	G	E	R		E	S
	M		U		L	O	D	G
S	P	E	N	T		D	I	
W	X		E	M	E	R	G	E
A	T	T	I	R	E		E	Y
N	O	R		S	A	G	E	
S	T	A	G	E	D		K	I

**DISCLAIMER**

The views in the articles published here are absolutely the views of the author and The Echo of India does not stand liable for them.



## Drugs carrying drone shot by BSF along Punjab border falls on Pak side

AMRITSAR, DEC 21 /--/A Pakistan drone that reportedly dropped drugs into India along the International Border in Punjab was intercepted by BSF troops following which it fell on the other side, a senior officer said Wednesday.

The drone was "downed" by Border Security Force (BSF) troops around 7:20 pm on Tuesday and it has been taken away by the Pakistan Rangers, he said. The incident took place near the Daoke border post in Amritsar. The drone was seen lying 20 metres inside the Pakistan territory opposite Indian border post Bharopal when the area was searched on Wednesday morning. The troops later recovered a packet containing 4.3 kgs of suspected heroin behind the border fence in Bharopal village, a BSF spokesperson said. Officials said it is suspected that the drug packet was

dropped by the drone. "It (drone) hovered in the sky for a few minutes when counter-drone measures (firing) were taken and later it fell on the other side while returning," he said. In an another narcotic recovery case from along the same border but not related to drone dropping, the BSF recovered 25 kgs of suspected heroin from a farming field in Fazilka district on Wednesday around 2 am.

The troops got alerted after some activity was noticed on both sides of the India-Pakistan border fence near Gatti Ajaib Singh village of the district. "BSF troops fired towards Pakistani smugglers ahead of the border fence.

However, smugglers managed to run away taking advantage of the dense fog.

"A total of 25 packets suspected to be heroin weighing approximately 25 kg, a PVC pipe and a shawl were recovered," the spokesperson said. (PTI)

## Book exploring Bengaluru to release next year

NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/ Touted to be a first-ever deep dive work on Bengaluru, a new book offers a richly researched narrative into one of India's most global cities. "The City of New Beginnings: Unboxing Bengaluru", co-written by authors Malini Goyal and Prashanth Prakash, is scheduled to release next year, announced Penguin Random House India (PRHI) in a statement. The PRHI recently acquired the book from literary agent Priya Doraswamy of Lotus Lane Literary. "This book has been a great culmination of my 28 years in mainstream media. Coming from Delhi and working on it has been both a challenge and lots of fun. While it allowed me to explore the city dispassionately, it also forced me to work a lot harder to be able to understand the city more intuitively and intimately," said Goyal. In the book, the authors, among other things, explore the parallel economies that have cropped up; how the influx of young workers has changed the city; and the fault lines of unplanned and poorly managed growth over the decades. (PTI)

## Delhi HC directs constitution of medical board to examine accused in money laundering case


NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the constitution of a medical board to examine money laundering case accused Gurupada Maji on his plea for interim bail on medical grounds in a matter linked to an alleged coal mining scam in West Bengal.

Justice Amit Sharma directed the Safdarjung Hospital to constitute the board within one week after examining the report given by Tihar jail authorities. Maji's counsel said he is suffering from diabetes and bleeding from rectum. "With consent of parties, it is directed that a medical board be constituted to examine the medical condition of the applicant in order to ascertain the exact ailment and necessary treatment to be provided," said the court. "In the circumstances, the medical superintendent of Safdarjung Hospital is directed to constitute an appropriate medical board after going through the medical report (given by Tihar Jail authorities). It is directed that the medical board be constituted within one week from today and the report may


be sent to court," the court ordered.

The court directed that the matter be listed for hearing on January 13 when the accused's plea for bail in the case is already listed for consideration. Maji was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in May. The ED has claimed that Maji is a partner of prime accused in the case Anup Majee and he "received more than Rs 66 crore from the proceeds of crime generated through illegal coal mining business from Anup Majee alias Lala and his associates". In September, a trial court had refused to grant bail to him in the money laundering case, saying it did not find a reasonable ground for believing that the accused was not guilty of the alleged offences. The ED case of money laundering stems from a November 2020 FIR registered by the CBI that alleged a multi-crore-rupee coal pilferage scam related to Eastern Coalfields Limited mines in West Bengal's Kumustoria and Kajora areas in and around Asansol.

A charge sheet was filed by the ED in the case in May last year. The agency has said that the total proceeds of crime in the case stand at Rs 1,352 crore and it has attached assets of Rs 180 crore. (PTI)



**BUREAU OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY**  
(A Statutory body under Ministry of Power, Government of India)  
4th Floor, Sewa Bhawan, R. K. Puram, New Delhi – 110066  
Website: [www.beeindia.gov.in](http://www.beeindia.gov.in), Ph: 011-26766700



**23<sup>rd</sup> NATIONAL CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION FOR ENERGY MANAGERS AND ENERGY AUDITORS- 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2023**

**Bureau of Energy Efficiency will conduct the 23<sup>rd</sup> National Certification Examination for Energy Managers and Energy Auditors on 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 (Saturday and Sunday).**  
**Prospectus can be downloaded from [www.aipnpc.org](http://www.aipnpc.org) as per the instructions given in the website.**  
**Link to the above website are also available at [www.beeindia.gov.in](http://www.beeindia.gov.in)**  
**Commencement of Online Registration: 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 at 10:00 hrs**  
**Closure of Online Registration: 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 at 23:59 hrs.**  
**cbc 34106/12/0029/2223**  
**(Secretary) BEE**

## 21-yr-old medical student wins sarpanch election in Maharashtra on return from Georgia

PUNE, DEC 21 /--/Yashodhara Shinde, 21, aspired to become a doctor and was pursuing the medical course in Georgia, but fate had something else in store for her as she returned to her village in Maharashtra, contested the sarpanch election and won it too.

She now plans to work for the betterment of her village Vaddi in Miraj tehsil of Sangli district and also complete her education online. Talking to PTI, Shinde said she wants to make women self-reliant,

introduce e-learning and other education tools for students, help children adopt good health habits, contribute towards the betterment of youth's aspirations and welfare of the farmers' community in the village. "I have been pursuing the MBBS course at the New Vision University in Georgia. Currently, I am in the 4th year and one-and-a-half years of the course is still left to be completed," she said. "When elections were announced in my village, locals wanted someone from our family to

contest for the sarpanch's (village head) post. A decision was taken to field me for the position. I got a call from my family and I returned, contested the election and won," said Shinde.

Voting for 7,682 gram panchayats in parts of Maharashtra was held on December 18. The results were declared on Tuesday. Asked about her plans as sarpanch for the development of the village, Shinde said her main focus will be to address the issues of women and make them

stand on their feet. "I am of the opinion that women must get an equal chance to show what they are capable of and I would like to make them educated and independent and not rely on their male counterparts," she said. Her priority list also includes the welfare of children and their education. "I would like to expose them to e-learning and the latest pedagogies," Shinde said. "I would also like to work towards the construction of toilets in the village and facilitate easy availability of sanitary napkins for girls and women. Also, children need to adopt good health habits," she said. Shinde also said she will work with the youth on the development agenda of the village. "In the village, 70 to 80 per cent of the population is into agriculture and I would like to work for their sustainable development," she said. Asked about her medical course and how she wishes to pursue it, Shinde said she will complete her education online and her friends will also help her in the studies. (PTI)

## Chhattisgarh: woman Naxalite with Rs 1 lakh bounty surrenders

DANTEWADA, DEC 21 /--/A 27-year-old woman Naxalite carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh on her head surrendered before security forces in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh on Wednesday, police said. The Naxalite, identified as Kumari Hemla, was working with the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS) under the Bhairamgarh Area Committee of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), said Dantewada

Superintendent of Police Siddharth Tiwari. She was carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh on her head, the SP said. Hemla was involved in the 2017 police-Naxalite skirmish and the 2018 gun-battle between security forces and Naxalites in which eight jawans were killed, he said. Hemla cited her disillusionment with the "hollow" and "inhuman" Naxalite ideology as the reason for surrender, he said. (PTI)

## No special remission for those convicted in heinous crimes, offences against women, kids: Govt

New Delhi, Dec 21 /--/Any person convicted with life imprisonment and those for heinous crimes, including offences against women and children, are not eligible for special remission announced as part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations, Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra said as part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the government had approved a scheme to grant special remission to specific categories of prisoners and release them in three phases on August 15, January 26, 2023 and on August 15, 2023. "In terms of the guidelines provided on the subject, persons convicted with sentence of life imprisonment and those convicted of heinous offences, including offences against women and children, are not eligible for special remission under this scheme," he said in a written reply to a question. (PTI)

## Security agencies probe motive behind Kerala family's travel to Yemen

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC 21 /--/Security agencies are seeking to ascertain the motives of a family which left their home in Kerala six months ago and is suspected to have gone to Yemen, perceived to be a hotbed of extremely religious groups.

A police officer, who is investigating the matter locally, said the family comprising husband, wife and their four children had been staying in Dubai for the past 12 years for job purpose. They had visited their homes in Kasaragod district six months ago following a death in their family. Thereafter, they are suspected to have travelled to Yemen, he said. "Any illegal movement of Indian citizens to the countries like Yemen is a matter to be reported (officially). The intention of the family which is suspected to have travelled to Yemen is not known", the police officer told PTI. Both the man and his wife are MBA graduates from Bengaluru and their children are aged one, two, eight and 12 years, he said. Responding to a query, the police officer said it cannot be categorically stated they have gone to the West Asian nation after being attracted to the ideology of Islamic State (IS) terror group. (PTI)



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(An Institute of National Importance established by an act of Parliament)  
Adv. No.: IIITL/Advertisement/December/2022

**ADMISSIONS DECEMBER-2022**  
IIIT Lucknow Invites Applications for Admission in the following courses:-  
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**AFFIDAVIT**  
I, NO 10535438P Rank Hav Name PRAKASH CHANDRA MOHAPATRA Age About 42 years faith Hindu presently residing AT-Austinabad Port Blair South Andaman Tehsil Port Blair, do I hereby Solemnly affirms and Declare as under:-  
1. That my Mother actual name is MANORAMA MOHAPATRA and date of birth is 01/01/1958 as per Aadhar card no 768249647408.  
2. That now due to numerological mistake in my service book so that I intend to change my Mother Name from RAMA MOHAPATRA to MANORAMA MOHAPATRA.  
3. THAT RAMA MOHAPATRA AND MANORAMA MOHAPATRA is the same and one identical person and having no differences.  
The statements made in para No 1 to 3 is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
Place: Port Blair **DEPONENT**


**AFFIDAVIT**  
I, NO 10535438P Rank Hav Name PRAKASH CHANDRA MOHAPATRA Age About 42 years faith Hindu presently residing AT- Austinabad Port Blair South Andaman Tehsil Port Blair, do I hereby Solemnly affirms and Declare as under:-  
1. That my father actual name is SASHI BHUSAN MOHAPATRA and date of birth is 20/05/1950 as per Aadhar card no 350108315610.  
2. That now due to numerological mistake in my service book so that I intend to change my father Name from SHASHI BHUSAN MOHAPATRA to SASHI BUSAN MOHAPATRA.  
3. THAT SHASHI BHUSAN MOHAPATRA AND SASHI BUSAN MOHAPATRA is the same and one identical person and having no differences.  
The statements made in para No 1 to 3 is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
Place: Port Blair **DEPONENT**

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**  
**MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS**  
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**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL ASSAM RIFLES**  
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**ADVERTISEMENT FOR RECRUITMENT THROUGH COMPASSIONATE GROUND APPOINTMENT SCHEME IN ASSAM RIFLES 2023**  
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- Offline/ through email applications are invited from eligible candidates from across the country for enrolment into the Assam Rifles under the Compassionate Ground Appointment Scheme. The recruitment rally will tentatively be held from 11 Feb 2023 onwards at Headquarters Directorate General Assam Rifles, Laitkor, Shillong (Meghalaya) NRS - Guwahati (Assam). Firm Date of reporting to attend the recruitment rally will be intimated to the eligible candidates by registered post followed by uploading of necessary details on our official website [www.assamrifles.gov.in](http://www.assamrifles.gov.in) from time to time. The candidate is responsible to check the official website for firm date to appear in recruitment rally.**
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Ser No	Name of Post	No of vacancies
(a)	Rifleman GD <b>(for Male and Female both)</b>	81
(b)	Havildar Clerk <b>(for Male and Female both)</b>	01
(c)	Warrant Officer RM <b>(Male candidates only)</b>	01
(d)	Warrant Officer Draftmans <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
(e)	Rifleman Armourer <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
(f)	Rifleman NA <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
(g)	Rifleman BB <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	02
(h)	Rifleman Carp <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
(j)	Rifleman Cook <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	04
(k)	Rifleman Safai <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
(l)	Rifleman WM <b>(for Male candidates only)</b>	01
	<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

- Vacancies are tentative and may increase or decrease. The vacancies so notified are subject to variation and the Assam Rifles reserves the right to make any changes in the advertisement or cancel it without assigning any reasons.**
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- Cut Off Date for Reckoning of Age Limit:** Cut off date for calculation of upper age limit will be **01 Jan 2023** for fresh applicants.
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- In case of any query, the following help line numbers may be contacted from 0900 hours to 1730 hours on any working day:-**  
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Sd/- x-x-x  
(Ganga Singh)  
Deputy Commandant  
Staff Officer-2 (Recruitment)  
for Director General Assam Rifles



## Govt reviews Covid situation; asks people to mask up, take vaccine precaution dose

### BF.7 strain of Omicron variant behind surge, 3 cases detected in India

**NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/** In view of a sudden spurt in Covid cases in China and some other countries, Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday reviewed the situation in the country and asked people to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour, including wearing masks in crowded places, and get vaccinated. Official sources said random sample testing will be done at airports for international passengers arriving from China and other countries. Mandaviya said: "COVID is not over yet. I have directed all concerned to be alert and strengthen surveillance. We are prepared to manage any situation." During the meeting, attended by experts and senior officials, the health minister was briefed on the global Covid-19 situation and the domestic scenario, including the preparedness of all stakeholders. Noting that only 27-28 per cent of India's eligible population have taken the precaution dose of Covid-19, NITI Aayog member (health) Dr V K Paul, after the meeting, said people should take the jab and also wear masks in crowded places. Paul urged people not to panic and said there was no change in the guidelines for international air travel so far. "People should wear masks in crowded areas. Those with comorbidities and old should especially adhere to this," Paul said. The government will again hold a meeting next week to monitor the situation.

Underlining the challenge posed by the increasing number of Covid-19 cases in some countries across the world such as China, Japan, South Korea, France and the United States, Mandaviya noted the importance of being prepared and remaining alert against new and emerging strains of COVID-19, especially in view of the upcoming festive season. The health minister directed for strengthening of the surveillance system for whole genome sequencing of positive case samples to track the variants through the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network to ensure the timely detection of newer variants, if any, circulating in the country. This would facilitate the undertaking of appropriate public health measures. States/UTs have been requested to send samples of all COVID-19 positive cases to INSACOG Genome Sequencing Laboratories (IGSLs) on a daily basis, for sequencing, to track new variants, if any, a health ministry statement said. In a presentation, the minister was briefed that India has been witnessing a steady



**Two women wearing face mask at Khan Market in New Delhi. The Union government has already advised people to wear mask at crowded places, amid fresh surge in Covid cases in different countries, including China**

decline in cases with average daily cases falling to 158 in the week ending December 19, 2022. However, a consistent rise in global daily average cases has been reported for the last six weeks, with 5.9 lakh daily average cases reported in the week ending December 19, 2022. A new and highly transmissible BF.7 strain of the Omicron variant is behind a wider surge of Covid infections in China, the statement said. The Union health ministry has already issued "Operational Guidelines for

Revised Surveillance Strategy in context of COVID-19" in June 2022 which calls for early detection, isolation, testing and timely management of suspected and confirmed cases to detect and contain outbreaks of new SARS-CoV-2 variants. Mandaviya directed officials to ensure effective implementation of the same. It deserves mention here that three cases of Omicron subvariant BF.7, have been detected in India so far, official sources said Wednesday. The first case of BF.7 in India was

detected in October by Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre. So far, two cases have been reported from Gujarat while one case has been reported from Odisha, they said.

"The BF.7's high transmissibility in China might be attributed to a low level of immunity in the Chinese population from the previous infection and possibly vaccination too," an official source said. BF.7 is a sub-lineage of the Omicron variant BA.5 and has the strongest infection ability since it is highly transmissible, has a shorter incubation period, and has a higher capacity to cause reinfection or infect even those vaccinated. It has already been detected in several other countries, including the US, the UK and European nations such as Belgium, Germany, France and Denmark. During the meeting, it was highlighted that Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are the top five states contributing in terms of new Covid cases even though there is a consistent decline in the overall Covid caseload in the country. These five states accounted for 84 per cent of the daily new cases reported on December 20, 2022. (PTI)

## Mandaviya urges Rahul to consider suspending 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' if Covid protocols cannot be followed; why just its event, questions Cong



**Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', in Haryana**

**NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/** Citing concerns raised by three BJP MPs over spread of coronavirus, Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday urged Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to consider suspending the Bharat Jodo Yatra if adherence to Covid protocols cannot be followed. The health minister's move prompted the Congress to accuse the government of selectively picking on the Bharat Jodo Yatra. The Opposition party said the BJP was taking out yatras in Karnataka and Rajasthan and asked if Mandaviya had sent letters to their organisers too. In a letter addressed to Rahul and Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday, Mandaviya said three MPs from Rajasthan - P P Chaudhary, Nihal Chand and Devji Patel -- have flagged concerns and requested him that Covid protocols, including use of masks and sanitisers, be strictly followed during the march and only those who are vaccinated be allowed to participate. The yatra has entered Haryana on Wednesday from Rajasthan. The MPs have also requested the Union minister to ensure that participants are isolated before and after taking part in the march. The health minister urged

Rahul and Gehlot to take prompt action keeping in view the requests made by the three MPs in Rajasthan. Referring to the letter signed by the three MPs, Mandaviya said they have sought suspension of the yatra in national interest if adherence to Covid protocols cannot be ensured keeping in view concerns around public health. The three MPs, in their letter on December 20, mentioned how the risk of Covid spread has "increased" as people from other states are coming to Rajasthan to take part in the march and claimed that symptoms have shown up in many of them after the participation. The MPs also highlighted how Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu tested positive for coronavirus infection after going back following participation in the event. The Union health minister also attached the letter signed by the MPs to the Congress leaders and asked him to address their concerns. Reacting to the letter, Congress leader Pawan Khara asked the government to announce Covid protocols and said the party would follow them. (PTI)

## Parliament passes Bill to deal with maritime piracy

**NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/** Parliament on Wednesday passed the Maritime Anti-Piracy Bill, which provides for stringent punishment to those convicted of such crimes. The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed by voice vote the Maritime Anti-Piracy Bill-2022 which was moved for consideration and passage by external affairs minister S Jaishankar. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on Monday. In the Bill, the government has added provisions for death penalty and life imprisonment for those convicted of maritime piracy. Replying to a debate on the bill, Jaishankar said it will help the country in having international cooperation to deal with piracy. He also told the House: "We will have jurisdiction on foreign ships (which would indulge in piracy)." About the members' suggestions about having standard operating procedures (SOP) for have better enforcement, the Union minister stated that the suggestion is well taken as it would help in its enforcement. (PTI)

## Sonia slams Govt for 'stubbornly' refusing discussion on India-China border issue

**NEW DELHI, DEC 21 /--/** Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday slammed the government for "stubbornly" refusing a discussion on the India-China border issue in Parliament, saying silence on matters of serious concern has become its defining feature. She also accused the Centre of making a calculated attempt to "delegitimise" the judiciary, terming it as a "troubling new development". Launching a scathing attack on the Modi government during her address to party MPs in the Central hall of Parliament, Gandhi said refusing a parliamentary debate on such a serious issue as Chinese "incursions" shows "disrespect for our democracy and reflects poorly on the government's intentions". She said a frank discussion strengthens the nation's response and it is the duty of the government of the day to inform the public and explain its policies and actions with respect to the security and border situation. Noting that the "continuing incursions by China on our border is a matter of serious concern", the former Congress president who was chairing the parliamentary party meetings said the nation stands with vigilant soldiers who repelled these attacks under difficult conditions. Gandhi said

when facing a significant national challenge, it has been the tradition in the country to take Parliament into confidence. "The government, however, stubbornly refuses to allow a discussion on the issue in Parliament. As a result, Parliament, political parties and the people remain ignorant of the true situation on the ground," Gandhi said. "Unfortunately, silence



**Congress MPs Sonia Gandhi, P Chidambaram, KC Venugopal and other members stage a protest near the Gandhi Statue demanding discussion on national security and Indo-China border dispute issue during the Winter Session of Parliament**

on matters of serious concern has become the defining feature of this government's tenure. "While blocking debate, the government is also actively engaged in targeting the opposition and any questioning voices, manipulating the media and undermining the institutions which stand in their way. This is happening not only in the Centre but also in every state where the

ruling party governs," she charged. Indian and Chinese troops clashed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh on December 9 and the face-off resulted in "minor injuries to a few personnel from both sides", according to the Indian Army. The Congress-led Opposition has been demanding a discussion on the India-China clash and border situation in Parliament and has led to several disruptions. The government has maintained that it was a sensitive issue concerning national security and there should be no politics over it. "This refusal to allow a parliamentary debate on such a matter of grave national concern shows disrespect for our democracy, and reflects poorly on the Government's intentions. It demonstrates its inability to bring the nation together," Gandhi also asserted. The former Congress chief alleged that "by following divisive policies, by spreading hatred and targeting some sections of our society, the government makes it harder for the country to stand up as one against foreign threats." "Such divisions weaken us and make us more vulnerable. At times like this it must be the government's endeavour and responsibility to unite our people, not divide them as it has been doing these past several years," Gandhi said at the meeting. (PTI)



**Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with children at the inauguration of Kolkata Christmas Festival at Allen Park, on Wednesday —Shyamal Maitra**

## We don't divide people but unite them: Mamata

### CM inaugurates Christmas festival, reviews Gangasagar Mela preparations

**KOLKATA, DEC 21 /--/** Urging people of all communities to take part in Christmas celebrations, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said West Bengal is a state where people are not divided on the basis of their religious identity.

Inaugurating the Kolkata Christmas Festival at Park Street here, she also said Bengal should be a place where people follow different religions, but come together to celebrate during various festivals. "In Bengal, we don't divide people, but unite them. Like every year, Christmas will be celebrated throughout the state; from Jhargram to Bandel... in each and every district," Mamata said. "Let's make Bengal a place where people follow different religions, but celebrate their festivals together," she added.

Anticipating a huge footfall at Gangasagar Mela this year, the chief minister on Wednesday took stock of the state's preparedness for the annual congregation, and said the administration was adopting necessary steps to ensure its success. Asserting that the "Gangasagar Mela is organised on the same scale as the Kumbh Mela", Mamata urged Central government offices, the railways, the Army, the Navy and the NDRF to extend necessary assistance to the state for the event, scheduled to be held from January 8-17.

The chief minister also cautioned against people who might try to sabotage the mela or create unrest. "This year, the number of pilgrims at Ganga Sagar Mela is expected to be more (than what it was in the past few years). We are well prepared for it. We also urge the central government offices, the Army, Navy, the Coast guard and disaster management departments to help us in ensuring that the sagar mela gets smoothly conducted," Mamata said at a meeting held at the state secretariat. The annual mela on Sagar island, one of the biggest religious events of the country, attracts lakhs of people who take a dip at the confluence of river Ganges and Bay of Bengal on Makar Sankranti and offer prayers at the Kapil Muni temple. The chief minister said that the state is taking requisite measures for the safety of all pilgrims. She asked several senior ministers and top police officers to visit the island and review the arrangements from time to time during the nine-day long fair. "There'll be people who might try to play spoilsport... See to it that nobody enters the mela with arms people may have plans to sabotage the event, spark riots. We must spoil their plans." A mega control room will be set up for monitoring all movements during the Ganga Sagar mela. As many as 1,150 CCTVs will be used for surveillance, besides drones," Mamata added. (PTI)

## 7 students killed as school bus overturns in Manipur's Noney



**Injured students being taken to hospital, in Manipur**

**IMPHAL, DEC 21 /--/** Seven students were killed and over 25 others suffered grievous injuries after a school bus overturned in Manipur's Noney district on Wednesday, police said. The incident took place on Old Cachar Road near Longsai area of the hill district, around 55 km from the state capital, they said. The injured students are being treated at a few hospitals in Imphal, after being evacuated from the accident site, a police officer said. The students of Thambalnu Higher Secondary School were on an annual study tour to Khoupum when they met with the accident, he said, adding, the bus in which the girl students were travelling overturned after the driver lost control of it. Chief Minister N Biren Singh has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased, and Rs 1 lakh each for those with serious injuries. Meanwhile, the state government on Wednesday directed authorities of all schools not to organise or conduct school excursions till January 10, 2023 in the wake of the accident. In an official order, the government said head of the educational institutions will comply with the directive failing which they will be held responsible for any untoward incident. (PTI)

## Suspected thief injured in police firing in Assam

**DIPHU, DEC 21 /--/** A person was shot at by the police in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Wednesday when he allegedly tried to flee custody after being arrested for "snatching Rs 22 lakh from a bank customer", a senior officer said. The accused was arrested while trying to escape with the amount snatched from the customer of the State Bank of India here, Karbi Anglong Superintendent of Police Sanjib Kumar Saikia told reporters. "The thief attacked police personnel after his arrest and tried to escape for the spot, and in retaliation, the police team opened fire aiming at his leg," the officer said. The injured person was admitted to the Diphu Medical College Hospital, he said. During preliminary interrogation, the accused admitted that he was part of a gang that is involved in snatching, Saikia said. The police launched an operation to nab the mastermind of the gang, he said. The arrested person claimed he came from Jalpaiguri district in neighbouring West Bengal but the police have not found any identity card from him, Saikia said. The Karbi Anglong district has witnessed several cases of snatching of cash and jewellery by criminals who came from other districts of Assam and neighbouring West Bengal, he added. (PTI)



## Days when Afghan was used by others as 'strategic depth' are over: India to UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 21 /--/The days when Afghanistan was used by others as so-called "strategic depth" are over, India said, asserting that such skewed approaches have only brought misery to the people of Afghanistan and mayhem in the region.

Secretary (West) in the ministry of external affairs, Sanjay Verma addressed a UN Security Council briefing on Afghanistan on Tuesday and said peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical imperatives that the international community needs to collectively strive for. He also said that India will continue to play its role in pursuit of this objective and that the interests of the Afghan people will continue to be at the core of New Delhi's efforts. "The days when Afghanistan was used by others as so-called strategic depth' are over. Such skewed approaches have only brought misery to the people of Afghanistan and mayhem in the region," he said. Verma said India is closely monitoring the security situation in Afghanistan and is actively engaged with the international community on issues related to that country. "Terrorist attacks have targeted public spaces like places of worship and educational institutes, especially of minorities, as well as diplomatic premises. This is a concerning trend," he said. He noted that the collective approach of the international community has been articulated in the Security Council

Resolution 2593, which unequivocally demands that the territory of Afghanistan should not be used for sheltering, training, planning, or financing terrorist acts, specifically terrorist individuals and entities proscribed by the UN Security Council, including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. The senior official also noted that closely linked to the issue of terrorism is the menace of drug trafficking. "It is important for us to strengthen international cooperation to disrupt and dismantle the trafficking networks," he said.

On the political front, Verma said India continues to call for an inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan which represents all sections of the Afghan society. A broad-based, inclusive, and representative formation is necessary for long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, and in turn, for economic recovery and development, he added. Verma said India has direct stakes in ensuring the return of peace and stability to Afghanistan, "given our position as a contiguous neighbour and long-standing partner of Afghanistan, as well as our strong historical and civilizational linkages to the Afghan people. Our approach to Afghanistan, as always, will be guided by our historical friendship and our special relationship with the people of Afghanistan." (PTI)

## Zelenskyy to meet Biden, address Congress as war rages on



Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Joe Biden

WASHINGTON, DEC 21 /--/ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was making his way to Washington on Wednesday for a summit with President Joe Biden and to address Congress in his first known trip outside the country since Russia's invasion began in February.

Zelenskyy said on his Twitter account that the visit was "to strengthen resilience and defence capabilities" of Ukraine and discuss cooperation between his country and the US with Biden. The highly sensitive trip is taking place after 10 months of a brutal war that has seen tens of thousands killed and wounded on both sides of the conflict, along with devastation for Ukrainian civilians. It also comes as US lawmakers are set to vote on a year-end spending package that includes about USD 45 billion in emergency assistance to Ukraine and as the Pentagon prepares to send Patriot surface-to-air missiles to the country to defend itself.

Zelenskyy headed abroad after making a daring and dangerous trip on Tuesday to what he called the hottest spot on the 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) front line of the conflict, the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's contested Donetsk province. He praised Ukrainian troops for their "courage, resilience and strength" as artillery boomed in the background.

In a statement on Tuesday night, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden looks forward to the visit and that the address to Congress will demonstrate "the strong, bipartisan support for Ukraine."

"The visit will underscore the United States' steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, including through the provision of economic, humanitarian, and military assistance," she said. Zelenskyy was scheduled to meet with Biden at the White House in the afternoon and then join Biden for a news conference in the East Room. He was expected to address Congress in the evening.

In her invitation to Zelenskyy to address a joint meeting of Congress at the US Capitol, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said "the fight for Ukraine is the fight for democracy itself" and that lawmakers "look forward to hearing your inspiring message of unity, resilience and determination." US and Ukrainian officials have made clear they don't envision an imminent resolution to the war and are preparing for fighting to continue for some time. Biden has repeated that while the US will arm and train Ukraine, American forces will not be directly engaged in the conflict. Biden and Zelenskyy first

discussed the idea of a visit to Washington during their most recent phone call, on December 11, and a formal invitation followed three days later, said a senior US administration official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the visit. Zelenskyy accepted the invitation on Friday and it was confirmed on Sunday, when the White House began coordinating with Pelosi to arrange the congressional address.

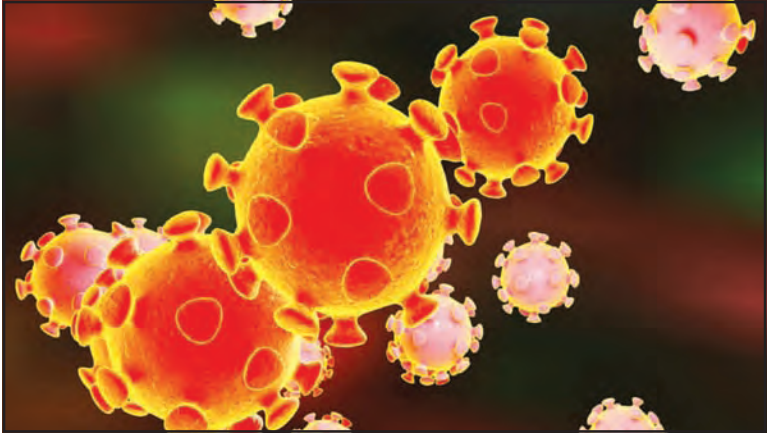
The White House consulted with Zelenskyy on security for his departure from Ukraine and travel to Washington, including the risk of Russian action while Zelenskyy was briefly out of the country, the official added, declining to detail the measures taken to safeguard the Ukrainian leader. The official said the US expected Russia to continue its attacks on Ukrainian forces and civilian infrastructure targets despite the trip. The tranche of US funding pending before Congress would be the biggest American infusion of assistance yet to Ukraine even more than Biden's USD 37 billion emergency request and is meant to ensure that support flows to the war effort for months to come.

On Wednesday, the US was also set to announce that it will send a major package of USD 1.8 billion in military aid to Ukraine that will for the first time include a Patriot missile battery and precision guided bombs for its fighter jets, US officials said. The aid signals an expansion by the US in the kinds of advanced weaponry it will send to Ukraine to bolster its air defences against what has been an increasing barrage of Russian missiles in recent weeks. (AP)

# Modelling warns of massive Covid-19 death toll in China

LONDON, DEC 21 /--/As India's health ministry held urgent talks on the Covid-19 situation on Wednesday, different sets of data modelling indicate that China could be facing a massive death toll from a surge in cases after it lifted its stringent zero-Covid policy.

According to a recent report in The Economist, around 1.5 million Chinese could die based on its model that calculates the trajectory of the country's outbreak under different scenarios based on estimates of the rates at which people become infected, get sick, recover or die referred to as the SEIR model. Those figures tally with other recent modelling, including a report in The Lancet' journal from last week quoting analysis by Airfinity, a UK-based science information and analytics company, which projected that somewhere between 1.3 and 2.1 million people could die from Covid-19 after China re-opens. "Predicting the number of deaths is tricky. Much will depend on the coverage and timing of the COVID-19 vaccines among the elderly and vulnerable, as well as the availability of antivirals," The Lancet noted. "Serological studies from the UK have shown that almost everyone in the nation has



antibodies against SARS-CoV-2; equivalent data for China are not publicly available, but levels of natural immunity will certainly be low. The country has registered fewer than 2 million cases of COVID-19 throughout the course of the pandemic," it said.

According to the journal, Feng Zijian, former deputy director of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, has suggested that 60 per cent of the country's population could become infected with SARS-CoV-2 the virus which causes Covid-19 in the first wave of disease following opening up, which equates to 840 million people. Airfinity, meanwhile,

extrapolated from the experience of Hong Kong with Omicron earlier this year to make projections that ending the zero-Covid strategy would result in 167-279 million cases of the disease.

"China's zero-COVID strategy also means the population has almost no naturally acquired immunity through previous infection. As a result of these factors, our analysis shows if mainland China sees a similar wave to Hong Kong's in February, its healthcare system could be pushed to capacity as there could be between 167 and 279 million cases nationwide, which could lead to between 1.3 and 2.1 million

deaths," warns the Airfinity analysis. The country's zero-Covid policy deployed mass testing and strict quarantine measures, which were revised earlier this month in the wake of anti-government protests. Several Chinese cities endured lengthy lockdowns, often prompted by a handful of infections and there were indications that people were starting to run out of patience. The days prior to the announcement by the National Health Commission saw protests in several cities, including one in Shanghai in which the crowd chanted "we don't want Covid-19 tests, we want freedom".

Meanwhile, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday reviewed the Covid-19 situation in the India in view of a sudden spurt in cases in some parts of the world, and directed officials to be alert and strengthen surveillance.

"In view of the rising cases of Covid19 in some countries, reviewed the situation with experts and officials today. Covid is not over yet. I have directed all concerned to be alert and strengthen surveillance. We are prepared to manage any situation," Mandaviya said in a tweet. (PTI)

## Covid-19 cases in the US surpass 100 mn: Johns Hopkins University

WASHINGTON, DEC 21 /--/The number of Covid-19 cases registered in the US since the start of the pandemic in early 2020 exceeded a staggering 100 million, Johns Hopkins University has said, amid a sharp spike in caseloads globally and the WHO making a strong pitch for vaccination. Japan, the US, the Republic of Korea, Brazil and China have witnessed a sudden spike in coronavirus cases over the last week. US-based Johns Hopkins University in its latest update said that 100,003,837 coronavirus cases were reported in the country so far. The virus has also claimed the lives of 1,088,236 people in the US, it added.



Meanwhile, close to 8,000 and 10,000 people die of Covid-19 every week, said Maria Van Kerkhove, an infectious disease epidemiologist who serves as the technical lead for the Covid-19 response team at the World Health Organisation (WHO). She told 'Science in 5' that the WHO target of vaccinating 70 per cent of the population in every country has not been achieved so far. Vaccination against Covid-19 was "fundamental," she said. According to health officials in China, Chinese cities are currently hit by the highly transmissible Omicron strains, mainly BA.5.2 and BF.7. The novel coronavirus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. (PTI)

## US condemns Taliban restrictions on women's education

WASHINGTON, DEC 21 /--/The United States has condemned the recent decision of the Taliban with regard to imposing restrictions on education of women in Afghanistan. "The United States condemns the Taliban's indefensible decision to prevent Afghan women from receiving a university-level education," White House NSC spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Tuesday. "This deplorable decision is the latest effort by Taliban leadership to impose additional restrictions on women and girls in Afghanistan and prevent them from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms," she said. As a result of this unacceptable stance to hold back half of the population of Afghanistan, the Taliban will be further alienated from the international community and denied the legitimacy they desire, Watson said. "The United States is in touch with our partners and allies on this issue. We will continue to take steps to advance our shared efforts to support Afghan women and girls and provide robust humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan," she added in a statement. (PTI)

## Pak PM vows to 'crush the nefarious designs' of terrorists

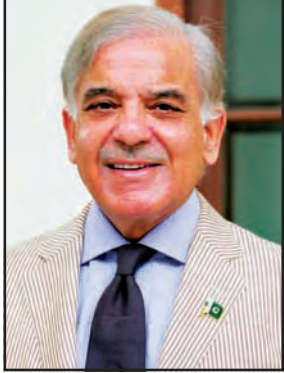
ISLAMABAD, DEC 21 /--/ Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday vowed to "crush the nefarious designs" of terrorists who intended to spread chaos in Pakistan and asserted that the State would not bow down to any militant group, amid a resurgence in terror incidents across the country.

"Resurgence in terrorism poses a renewed threat to our national security. Our valiant security forces are fully capable of dealing with this threat," Prime Minister Sharif said. Voicing his concern a day after the Pakistan Army's elite forces killed nearly three dozen terrorists who had seized a police centre and taken hostages in Bannu area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, Sharif said terrorism is a sensitive issue of national security, and a collective thinking and action plan are needed to counter it. At least two commandos were killed in the military operation to end the hostage crisis. But the incident exposed the country's vulnerability to militant-led violence. The Prime Minister strongly condemned the recent terrorist incidents and vowed to "crush the nefarious designs of terrorists" who intended to spread chaos in the country, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. He categorically said that the "State will not bow down to any terrorist group, and terrorists will be dealt with according to the law and the Constitution".

Sharif said the government would also address the external facilitation and hideouts of terrorists. Appreciating the ample response of the armed forces, he said the entire nation will ultimately curb terrorism by supporting its brave forces. He

said the primary responsibility for law and order rests with the provinces, but the federal government cannot turn a blind eye to these serious issues. "We will work together with provinces to fight terrorism," he said. Sharif said the National Action Plan, a consensus plan to eradicate militancy, would be fully implemented to eliminate terrorism in the country. He said that increasing the capacity and efficiency of the provincial government is important in the eradication of terrorism and the government will assist in improving the professional capacity of counter-terrorism departments in all provinces.

The prime minister said that his government will work with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to revamp its Counter Terrorism Department. "We will meet all the requirements of the armed forces, including provision of modern and sophisticated weapons and imparting professional training," he said. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) took responsibility for the recent spate of attacks, spotlighting the threat faced by the country even after several operations to uproot militancy. The TTP, set up as an umbrella group of several militant outfits in 2007, last month called off a ceasefire agreed upon with the federal government in June and ordered its militants to stage terrorist attacks across the country. The group, which is believed to be close to al-Qaeda, has been blamed for several deadly attacks across Pakistan, including an attack on army headquarters in 2009, assaults on military bases, and the 2008 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad. (PTI)



Shehbaz Sharif

## On the holidays, efforts to distract Ukrainian kids from war

KYIV, DEC 21 /--/In a carpeted meeting room of what used to be a posh hotel, Ukrainian children are screaming with happiness at a performance put on for them and the joy of opening presents.

In a country where children have seen the horrors of a 10-month war, there are people trying to bring some peace and happiness to them, at least for a moment during this holiday season in Ukraine. The upscale Venice hotel on the outskirts of Kyiv is now a rehabilitation centre housing children who have experienced the horrors of the Russian invasion. "When it's a holiday, it's easier," said Ksenia, a 12-year-old girl from Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine that has been the epicentre of a fierce battle between the Russian and Ukrainian armies. "We forget about the war. It's easier to distract," she added after a performance by actors, some dressed as Disney characters. Ksenia was among the 62 children, between 6 and 12,

celebrating Saint Nicholas' day on Monday. It's a traditional date when Ukrainian kids get presents and that marks the beginning of the winter holiday season. "Why do our soldiers fight? For the sake of the future because without it, there will be nothing. And children are our future," said Artem Tatarinov, the director of the rehabilitation centre. Here, he said, they have received children who instead of playing had to hide in a shelter to escape bombs and who have discovered grief when their relatives were killed.

UNICEF estimates that of the around 7 million Ukrainian children, at least 1.2 million are currently displaced within the country because of the war. This centre houses children for two weeks, and during that period they get therapeutic lessons and have sessions with psychologists to try to process the trauma of the war. "It is like a temporary rehabilitation from the war," said Alevtyna, a tutor, who

refused to give her last name for security reasons. She works with the children around the clock, sacrificing her own life, but also finding a safe place for herself. Like other mentors in the centre, Alevtyna comes from eastern Ukraine, which is now under constant fire. Her native Kostyantynivka is just 23 kilometres from Bakhmut. For children, Alevtyna said, the centre can be a sort of an island of happiness, but it's not easy for them. "They often talk about the war, cry," she said. "Children are afraid to fall asleep, are afraid to turn off the light."

Over the past six months, the centre has received more than 1,300 children from across the country. "It is difficult to work like this when you see children who do not smile, when their childhood was taken away," Tatarinov, the centre's director said. He mentioned that once he met a 12-year-old boy who discovered the headless body of his brother, 10 metres away from their house, after a mortar strike. (AP)

## Waiting time for Indian visas eased considerably to facilitate travel during Christmas: VFS

LONDON, DEC 21 /--/The post-pandemic travel demand spike resulting in long delays for travellers seeking Indian visas has considerably eased in time for the busy Christmas travel period, visa facilitation service VFS Global said here this week.

The restoration of the electronic visa (e-visa) facility for UK travellers earlier this month is expected to further ease the pressure, which has been reduced by as much as 80 per cent since the peak of the massive visa rush a few months ago. The opening up of new visa application centres (VACs), extra visa appointment slots and

the launch of a bespoke Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD) facility have been described as delivering results. "Just in time for the festive season, it feels great to be able to report that travel to India from the UK is facing no add-on visa pressures," said Yummi Talwar, COO Europe & Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for VFS Global.

"The resumption of the e-visa facility this month will undoubtedly continue to have a positive impact. Overall, VFS is glad to be able to facilitate smooth processes at a particularly busy period for the Indian diaspora and

others within the UK-India travel corridor," she said.

The latest update comes as the British High Commissioner in New Delhi took to Twitter recently to announce that UK visit visas for Indians are now back within the turnaround time of 15 working days. On the reverse end, travellers from the UK who had faced weeks of delay as they struggled with Indian visa appointments have also been assured of a streamlined process. The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, took to social media to promise a doubling of visa capacity from 20,000 to 40,000 a

month within days of taking charge in September. "The e-visa system is now live and will enable friends from the UK to travel far more easily to India," he said recently, adding that travellers can also use their valid e-visas from before the UK's removal from the list of e-visa eligible countries over the pandemic period.

VFS Global, the outsourcing and technology services provider for governments and diplomatic missions, coped with a massive rush of around 200 visa applicants a day at its brand-new VAC at Marylebone in central London when it opened last month. (PTI)





# Messi and team ditch bus for chopper ride over Buenos Aires due to massive crowds

**BUENOS AIRES, DEC 21** --/ Argentina's World Cup winners were forced to abandon their open-top bus parade around Buenos Aires due to the massive crowds and have instead embarked on a helicopter tour of the capital, the presidency said Tuesday. "The World Champions are flying over the parade route in helicopters because it was impossible to continue on the ground due to the explosion of popular joy," presidential spokeswoman Gabriela Cerruti said on Twitter. The bus had been crawling along the planned 30-kilometer route towards the centre of the capital due to the huge numbers of Argentines who had lined the streets to celebrate their victory over France in the World Cup final. Millions of people had been gathering around various parade points in the capital since dawn in a bid to see their heroes in the flesh. The largest congregation was at the iconic Obelisk monument in the centre of Buenos Aires that has for decades been the epicentre of sporting celebrations. Claudio Tapia, president of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), blamed police for the decision to abandon the planned bustour. "They are not allowing us to go and greet all the people at the Obelisk," said Tapia on Twitter. "The same security agencies that escorted us are not allowing us to continue." "Thousands of apologies in the name of all the champion players. It's a shame." The news emerged almost five hours after the team set off from the AFA training complex where they had briefly rested following their late night arrival from Qatar. Hundreds of people starting running towards the presidential palace on another city centre square amidst rumours the players were heading there by helicopter. But it turned out that they merely flew over the planned route before returning to the AFA complex. An estimated five to six million people had lined the parade route, a government source said. (AFP)



## Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez mocks Kylian Mbappe during FIFA World Cup victory parade

**BUENOS AIRES, DEC 21** --/ Celebrations in Argentina have not stopped ever since the South American nation edged past France in the summit clash of the FIFA World Cup on Sunday to the lift after 36 years. The final encounter turned out to be a roller-coaster ride for the fans as the nail-biting thriller reached to its conclusion on the penalties. After Argentina took 2-0 lead, Kylian Mbappe restored parity for France. Then Lionel Messi. and Kylian Mbappe scored a goal each in the extra-time as the match went into the penalty shootout. Argentina defeated France 4-2 in the penalty shootouts. A victory bus parade was conducted in the capital city of Buenos Aires, where millions of fans turned out to congratulate and celebrate their nation's win in one of the biggest sporting events. However, the parade had to be abruptly called-



off due to a massive crowd and a helicopter tour was arranged in haste. But before the parade got abandoned, a very quirky moment got captured in which Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was seen holding a baby toy with Kylian Mbappe's face on it. The picture soon went viral on social media as many fans came forward and criticized Martinez for his act. "Classless act. Yea, you're a world champion, but act like one too. This gesture was totally unnecessary. Also, that lad scored 4 past you in the final, so you have no bragging rights too," tweeted a fan. "On the field, France was a superior team and Mbappe a superior player. Argentina won only the penalty shootout. No reason to ridicule Mbappe. He scored 3 goals in the final. France had 3 frontline players injured. France is a superior team. Argentina got lucky," wrote another fan. (AFP with agency inputs)

# India to go for kill in second Test as WTC battle heats up

**MIRPUR, DEC 21** --/ Stand-in skipper KL Rahul would be eager to overcome his lean patch as India are expected go for the kill in the second Test against Bangladesh, beginning here on Thursday, to strengthen their position in the World Test Championship. The race for the top-two spots in the WTC standings has become more interesting with India (55.77 PCT) moving up to the second position following South Africa's (54.55 PCT) heavy loss to Australia (76.92 PCT) in two-day Gabba Test. The upcoming home series against Australia will be decisive in India's bid for a second straight WTC final but they also can't afford any slip-ups against Bangladesh, who showed plenty of fight in the first Test after a poor first innings with the bat. With regular skipper Rohit Sharma yet to recover from his thumb injury, no changes are expected in the Indian playing eleven. The first Test presented a golden opportunity for the likes Shubman Gill and Kuldeep Yadav and they made it count. Had Rohit been fit for the game, it would have been extremely difficult to drop Gill following his maiden Test hundred in Chattogram. However, that situation did not arise and Gill will be keen to cash in on another opportunity. Rahul too would look to lead from the front after the disappointment of his two innings in the first Test. Like Chattogram, the pitch is expected to be slow and decent for batting, providing Rahul an ideal platform to get runs under his belt before the Australia series. It would be fair to say that Cheteshwar Pujara, who made a comeback with the one-off Test in England, has consolidated his number three position with a 90 and an unusually attacking 102 not out in the series-opener. It was refreshing to see Pujara going for his shots as India

needed to accelerate in the second innings. The stage will also be set for Virat Kohli to score his first Test hundred since November 2019. India batted at more than four runs per over in the second innings and it remains to be seen if that positive approach was only the need of the hour or a sign of things to come. Considering the conditions, the bowlers will once again be looking to target the stumps, be it the pacers or slower bowlers. Kuldeep, playing his first Test since February last year, flaunted his artistry with a match haul of eight wickets. Compared to lead spinner R Ashwin and Axar Patel, he was slightly under-bowled in the second innings but the left-arm wrist spinner still managed to take three wickets. Former captain Mominul Haque too could get a game. "He'd be the first to admit that in last year he hasn't got the runs. But he is too good a player to not have around. You cannot lose a player of Mominul's quality. He will definitely be considered for the second Test," said head coach Russell Domingo. (PTI)

**Squads: Bangladesh:** Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul Haque, Yasir Ali, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan (c), Litton Das, Nurul Hasan, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Khaled Ahmed, Zakir Hasan, Rejaur Rahman Raja.

**India:** KL Rahul (C), Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara (VC), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Shardul Thakur, Mohd. Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Saurabh Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat.

**MATCH STARTS 9 AM IST.**



India's Virat Kohli, right, walks with head coach Rahul Dravid after batting in the nets during a training session ahead of their second test cricket match against Bangladesh, in Dhaka, Bangladesh

## GAME NOTES

### Test Rankings: Axar Patel surges to career-best ranking, Kuldeep Yadav jumps 19 spots

**DUBAI, DEC 21** --/ India all-rounder Axar Patel jumped 20 spots to reach a career-best 18th position while spinner Kuldeep Yadav catapulted 19 places to 49th in the latest ICC Test rankings released on Wednesday. Kuldeep, who was adjudged the Player of the Match for his eight for 113 in the first Test of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) against Bangladesh, has 455 rating points. Axar, who claimed five five scalps in the match, has 650 points as he broke into the top 20. Meanwhile, the injured Jasprit Bumrah (4th) and Ravichandran Ashwin (5th) continued their stay in top five. Among batters, veteran Cheteshwar Pujara and young Shubman Gill jumped 10 positions each to be 16th and 54th. Pujara knocks off 90 and 102 in the first Test against Bangladesh last week helped him break into the top 20 with 664 rating points. The other Indian centurion of the match, Gill is 54th with 517 rating points. Shreyas Iyer's first innings 86 has lifted him 11 places to 26th as wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant continues to remain the top-ranked Indian batter at number six. (PTI)

### 'It would be great if Rehan is picked in IPL auction': McCullum

**KARACHI, DEC 21** --/ England red-ball coach Brendon McCullum says it would be "awesome" if leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed bags an IPL deal following his stellar Test debut and he would want the teenager to play as much franchise cricket as possible. The 18-year-old Ahmed became the youngest to take a five-wicket haul on his Test debut as he claimed impressive figures of (5/48) against Pakistan on day three in the third Test here. Ahmed, who already has a deal to play in the inaugural ILT20 in the UAE in January and February, has entered the IPL auction, to be held in Kochi on Friday, with a base price of Rs 40 lakh. "It would be great if he got picked up at the IPL. It would be awesome if he did," McCullum told BBC's Test Match Special on Tuesday. "Why not give him that opportunity to rub shoulders with other players and pick up those experiences? What other 18-year-old is going to get those chances?" "He's a fully-fledged international cricketer." (PTI)

### ICC CEO pitches for more Test-playing nations to tour Pakistan

**KARACHI, DEC 21** --/ International Cricket Council (ICC) CEO Geoff Allardice is keen to see more Test cricket being played in Pakistan following the successful completion of the three-match series against the Ben Stokes-led England. The three matches, played in Rawalpindi, Multan and Karachi, saw spectators give a huge thumbs up to Test cricket, even though the hosts lost the series 0-3. Australia also toured Pakistan earlier this year, with packed stadiums for the three-Test series indicating the fans' craze for the longest format of the game in the country. "The fans in Pakistan are passionate about the game and passionate about their team, but most importantly they are welcoming of visitors," Allardice told Pakistan Cricket. (PTI)



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Executive Director (CS)  
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