

Delay in completion of Judakalan, Sippighat bridges irk motorists

Residents suffer as NHIDCL, Contractor engage in blame game

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ Delay in completion of the Judakalan and Sippighat junction bridges by National Highways Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) has been causing hardship to motorists and road users, say the residents of this area. In a clear case of inadequate planning, the two bridges on the Sippighat roads have not been completed as yet even though NHIDCL has fixed December as the target date for completion of the two bridges. The reason behind the delay is said to be delay in grant of permission and support from several government departments of the administration. While the NHIDCL has allegedly blamed the contractor VIJ Engineering & Consultant Pvt Ltd for the delay in completion of the bridge work, the contractor on his part blamed the unpredictable weather condition and government departments for delay in granting various permissions. Motorists are facing great difficulties in crossing to the other side in the old narrow road bridge. The Police department has posted two lady constables on both sides of these bridges to ensure flow of traffic. The under-construction bridges have not only been bothering the commuters but the shopkeepers in the surrounding area have also been complaining about dust-related health problems leading to breathing ailments. The



Both bridges have missed the December-2022 deadline due to non-cooperative attitude by departments like APWD, Revenue and Electricity in granting various work permissions

NH-4 road work, the bridge construction has also been marked by delayed construction. Residents have been complaining that the construction of the bridges has been going on at a snail's pace. Speaking about the problems being faced by the residents, a shopkeeper at Jodakalan said that motorists take a lot of time to pass through this stretch. Work at the site has been going on very slowly. "The shopkeepers like us have been getting health problems as dust is present in the area round the clock. Traffic jams in these areas have become a daily affair," he added. As per a top Executive of VIJ Engineering & Consultant Pvt Ltd, the private construction firm tasked to complete these bridges by NHIDCL said that his firm has been given a deadline to complete the bridge work by December 2022. However, they had to face a slew of problems from various fronts. The two main factors are incessant rain and non-supportive attitude of various departments like APWD, District Administration and Electricity Department. These departments are not coming forward to give timely approval. Delay by 4-5 months for every task is common. Be it seeking permission to earth filling, electricity connection on the spot, the permissions are not forthcoming. Besides, unpredictable weather conditions have added to the problems. On being asked to give a revised date of completion, he said by March 2023, the bridge will be ready for public use.

bridge project was started about one year ago as part of NH-4 road construction. It was supposed to be finished by December this year to be opened to the public. However, like the

White Coat ceremony for new MBBS-2022 batch

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ The Andaman Nicobar Institute of Medical Sciences (ANIIMS) hosted the White Coat Ceremony for the new MBBS-2022 Batch at Dr. BR Ambedkar Auditorium on Tuesday. MR. Keshav Chandra, Chief Secretary, A&N Islands graced the event as the chief guest. Mr. Nikhil Kumar, Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Health) was the guest of honour. MR. Arjun Sharma, Secretary (Health), Dr. Anil Agarwal, OSD, ANIIMS, Dr. Munni Singhania, Director, DHS and Dr. Pragya Sharma, Director, ANIIMS were also present on the occasion. The White Coat



Ceremony is a rite of passage for medical students, and was created by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation in 1993. During the ceremony, a white coat is placed on each student's shoulders and Oath is recited, signifying their entrance into the medical profession. The Chief

Secretary initiated the White Coat Ceremony by placing the White Coat on the shoulders of Ms. Techa, the first girl from the Great Andamanese tribe to pursue MBBS course. All other dignitaries also participated in giving White Coats to the students. (Contd. on page-6)

MP for granting special grade designation to Constables, Head Constables of A&N Police

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ The Member of Parliament, Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma has suggested the Lt. Governor to grant special grade designation to Constables and Head Constables of Andaman & Nicobar Police for motivation and also to address the issue of existing stagnation at the rank of Constables and Head Constables of Andaman & Nicobar Police on the same lines as done by Delhi police. Appreciating the crucial role of Andaman & Nicobar Police in maintaining law and order in the entire territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Member of Parliament informed the Lt.

Governor that there is stagnation at the rank of Constable and Head Constable in Andaman and Nicobar Police. As per rule, the qualifying service for promotion to the next rank is five years for both the ranks but as on date it is taking more than 30 years for a Constable to get promoted to the rank of Head Constable. He said that the morale of any force depends upon the motivation and motivation of its manpower and timely promotion, are the two of the key factors for any uniformed force. The Member of Parliament pointed out that in its communication dated 27/06/



2017 addressed to the Director General of Police of all States/UT, the Director-General BPR&D, Ministry of Home Affairs has endorsed the move of Delhi police to grant Special Grade Designation to its Constables and Head Constables, which has resulted in motivation of

staff without any financial implications. He added that as per a circular dated 04/11/2016 issued by Delhi police, a constable who has completed 15 years of service as on the first January of calendar year and has been granted first financial upgradation (MACP) shall be designated as head Constable (Special Grade) similarly Constable or Head Constable who has completed 25 years of service in the cadre as on first January of the calendar year and he has been granted first and second financial upgradation (MACP) shall designated Assistant Sub-Inspector (Special Grade). On similar

grounds the Member of Parliament suggested granting Special Grade Designation to Constables and Head Constables of Andaman and Nicobar Police.

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Modi heaps praise on Gujarat BJP, its chief Paatil as party savours record-breaking state poll win

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The jubilation in the BJP over its record-breaking win in the Gujarat polls echoed in its parliamentary party meeting on Wednesday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was felicitated for the victory.

Modi, in turn, heaped praise on the state unit, especially its president C R Paatil, and said the victory is owed to the BJP's organisational strength and its workers, Union minister Pralhad Joshi told reporters after the meeting. Sources in the party said Modi lauded the BJP's Gujarat unit as an example of how electoral victory is possible if the party organisation is strong. The prime minister's high praise for Paatil, his close confidant, underlines



his rising stock within the party following its win in 156 seats in the polls to the 182-member assembly. Modi also praised the party's national president J P

Nadda. Paatil is known for his micro-management of constituencies down to the booth-level and most households, a factor behind his own win by a record margin of nearly seven lakh votes from the Navsari Lok Sabha seat in 2019. He is credited for replicating the model to a large extent across the state, leading to a rise in the party's vote share, which coupled with a split in the opposition votes, helped it in achieving an unprecedented tally. The BJP was successful in taking its work to the people and ensuring that there was no anti-incumbency at work as it won its seventh assembly polls on the trot, the prime minister said.

In his speech, Modi also spoke of India's G-20 presidency and asked MPs to come out with innovative ideas to involve people in organising various events across the country in the run up to the summit meeting next year. With numerous

foreign delegates expected to attend these meetings to be held in several Indian cities, he said they should be accorded a warm welcome and get glimpses of traditional culture and custom. Union Minister Ashiwin Vaishnav gave a presentation on the Indian economy in the meeting. Citing international publications, he said India is a bright spot among top seven countries. Citing the data of last several decades, the presentation stated that inflation and unemployment were always higher in Congress governments and lower in BJP governments. Bank credit is the highest in many years, while capacity utilisation in industry has increased, he said. (PTI)



BJP President J P Nadda greets Meghalaya MLA Ferlin CA Sangma after she joined the BJP, in New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi will contest 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Amethi, claims UP Cong leader Ajay Rai

AMETHI, DEC 14 /--/ Rahul Gandhi would contest the 2024 Lok Sabha elections again from Amethi with which the Nehru-Gandhi family has old ties, Uttar Pradesh Congress leader Ajay Rai claimed on Wednesday.

Rai, the regional head of the party in UP, also said that it is his appeal to the people of Amethi to send Rahul Gandhi to Delhi by electing him as an MP again with a huge margin. "The Gandhi-Nehru family has old relations with Amethi...no one can weaken it. Rahul Gandhi will contest from Amethi in 2024," Rai told reporters here.

There has been no word from the party so far on the former Congress president fighting the next parliamentary elections again from Amethi. Rahul



Gandhi, who had won the Amethi parliamentary seat for three times in a row, was defeated by BJP leader and Union minister Smriti Irani in 2019 elections. He is currently representing Kerala's Wayanad constituency in Lok Sabha. Rahul Gandhi's parents Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi had won from Amethi in the past.

Speaking about the ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi, Rai who had unsuccessfully contested Lok Sabha elections from Varanasi in 2014 and in 2019 said that the yatra is currently passing through Rajasthan and will enter Uttar Pradesh on January 3 or 4 next year.

But before that, the UP Congress is taking out regional yatras on the lines of Bharat Jodo Yatra at various places, he said, adding that for this, the state has been divided into six regions and a president has been appointed for each region. On December 11, the regional yatra started from Prayagraj under Rai's leadership and reached Amethi on Wednesday via Kaushambi and Pratapgarh.

In Amethi district, the regional yatra that passed through Lodi Baba and Qazi Patti areas on Wednesday will cover a distance of 25 km, Rai said. Besides district Congress president Pradeep Singhal, former MLC Deepak Singh among others were seen in attendance. After Amethi, the regional yatra will reach Sultanpur and proceed to Jaunpur, Mirzapur, Chandauli, Bhadohi, Sonbhadra and finally end in Varanasi on December 22. Rai also said that tension was prevailing everywhere under the BJP government. "Traders are running away leaving their shops. Rahul ji had called GST Gabbar Singh Tax, today he has been proved right. There is fear among the traders about GST. The traders who have been supporting the BJP since long are being harassed. "The chief minister says that action should be taken against 'thieves'... it means that the businessmen have become 'thieves' today," Rai added. (PTI)

Vaccine against cervical cancer to be included in National Immunisation programme by mid-2023: NTAGI chief

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ India would be in a position to roll out the indigenously developed Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV) against cervical cancer for girls in the age group of 9-14 under the National Immunisation Programme by mid-2023, NTAGI chairperson Dr N K Arora said.

The CERVAVAC vaccine is likely to be launched by the Serum Institute of India (SII) in April next year and will be available at a much lower price than the international vaccines available in the market, Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at the SII said on the sidelines of the South Asia meeting on HPV here. The vaccine has received the DCGI's approval and been cleared by the government advisory panel National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) for use in the public health programme, Dr Arora told PTI. At present, the country is fully dependent on foreign manufacturers for the vaccine. Three foreign companies manufacture the HPV vaccine out of which two firms sell their vaccines in India. Each dose of the jab available in the market costs over Rs 4,000. Serum Institute's vaccine is likely to be available at a much lower rate.

In September 2022, SII CEO Adar C Poonawalla had said that HPV vaccine will be available in India at an affordable price of Rs 200-400 per dose. India is home to about 16 per cent of the world's women and accounts for about a quarter of all cervical cancer incidences and nearly a third of global cervical cancer deaths. Indian women face a 1.6 per cent lifetime cumulative risk of developing cervical cancer and 1.0 per cent cumulative death risk from cervical cancer, Dr Arora said. According to some recent estimates, every year almost 80,000 women develop cervical cancer and 35,000 die due to this cancer in India. On what has prevented India from introducing the HPV vaccine till now, Dr Arora said vaccine supply has been a limiting factor globally.

Fortunately, over last five years, the global supply of the HPV vaccine is gradually improving. India has taken a lead in this direction. SII - one of the major Indian vaccine manufacturers - with the support from Department of Biotechnology, Government of India has developed the four valent HPV vaccine. The vaccine has received regulatory approval and been cleared by NTAGI for use in the public health programme. "We are given to understand that three other Indian vaccine manufacturers are also in various stages of developing the HPV vaccine," he said. To a question, Dr Arora said vaccines to prevent HPV infection have been available since 2006. The HPV vaccination can prevent more than 90 per cent of HPV cancers when given at the recommended age. Studies done in India have indicated that efficacy of a single dose of the HPV vaccine is more than 95 per cent. Based on the studies, the WHO has now recommended that even a single dose of the vaccine for 9-14-year-olds is effective. As of 2021, the global HPV immunisation coverage stood at a meagre 13 per cent. Till 2020, less than a third of low and lower-middle income countries had introduced the HPV vaccine in their national immunisation programmes. This when 85 per cent of high income had already incorporated this in their public health programmes, Dr Arora said. For comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and control strategy, screening of women after the age of 35 years and need for infrastructure to diagnose and treat cervical lesions are essential. (PTI)

Raghuram Rajan joining Bharat Jodo Yatra no surprise: BJP

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The BJP on Wednesday took a swipe at former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan after he joined the Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' and said his commentary on India's economy should be discarded with "disdain" as it is "coloured and opportunistic".

BJP's foreign affairs department head Vijay Chauthaiwale tweeted, "One former RBI governor became head of govt and country lost ten precious years. Thanks to Modi, India will not repeat that mistake. RRR (Raghuram Rajan) can walk from Delhi to Chicago." The party's IT department head Amit Malviya said, "Raghuram Rajan, former RBI Governor, a Congress appointee, joining Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra is not a surprise. He fancies himself as the next Manmohan Singh. Just that his commentary on India's economy should be discarded with disdain. It is coloured and opportunistic." Rajan had joined Rahul Gandhi during the Congress-led Bharat Jodo Yatra in Rajasthan.

Appointed as RBI governor during the Congress-led UPA reign, Rajan has been a critic of

some aspects of the BJP government's policies, including its handling of the economy. While the BJP targeted Rajan, Congress leaders expressed happiness at the noted economist joining the yatra. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "A strong and sound economy is a combination of growth and welfare. Our vision is to reclaim that India. We are glad that Former RBI Governor & leading Economist, Shri Raghuram Rajan joined the Bharat Jodo Yatra in our endeavour to build an agenda for the future." (PTI)

October warned the makers of the Bollywood film "Adipurush", based on the epic Ramayana, of legal action if scenes showing Hindu religious figures in the "wrong" way are not removed. In July this year, he directed to file an FIR (First Information Report) over a controversial poster of filmmaker Leena Manimekalai's documentary 'Kaali' after an outrage. (PTI)

KCR colluding with Centre; 'plastic surgery' of renaming TRS won't change its DNA: Congress

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The Congress on Wednesday accused Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao of colluding with the Narendra Modi government and said the mere "plastic surgery" of renaming his party will not change its DNA. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi, formed by Rao in 2001 with the agenda of creating a separate Telangana state with Hyderabad as its capital, was renamed the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) last week, after the Election Commission approved the change. The Congress also alleged that the BRS government in the state was "throttling democracy", after police raided the party's "war room" in Hyderabad. Police on Tuesday raided Congress poll strategist Sunil Kanugolu's office over alleged derogatory social media posts against Rao and his government. Congress media department head Pawan Khara alleged that police acted like "goondas" while raiding the party's "war room", took away 50 computers as well as data from the office and detained Congress leaders who protested against the raid. "They (the BRS government) are throttling democracy in Telangana. What is the difference between KCR (K Chandrasekhar Rao) and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi?" he said at a press conference at the Congress headquarters here. "He (KCR) calls for various documents from the CBI when it comes to his daughter's questioning in the probe into the Delhi liquor policy, but his police raids the office without an FIR or any warrant," Khara said.

Telangana Pradesh Congress chief Revanth Reddy at the presser accused the BRS government of working in collusion with the Modi government at the Centre, saying they are like two sides of the same coin. In response to a question, Reddy attacked Rao, saying mere "plastic surgery" of renaming his party will not change its DNA. The people of Telangana have made up their mind to bid adieu to the state government," he claimed. Elections to the 119-member Telangana assembly is due next year. Reddy said since Rao has "bought" the media in the state, the Congress was using social media as a medium to bring to light the failures of the state government. "Without any procedure, people without uniform entered the Congress war room and stole our data," he alleged. Referring to Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy participating in the inauguration ceremony of the BRS office in Delhi, Reddy said he would like to tell them that the person they want to ally with is "corrupt" and is "not good". He said the Telangana Congress will take the issue of its war room being raided to the people of the state and give a befitting reply to the chief minister. (PTI)

Jailed PFI leader Abubacker doing fine, receiving treatment: NIA tells Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ Responding to E Abubacker's plea against a trial court order refusing to release him on medical grounds, the NIA on Wednesday told the Delhi High Court the jailed former chairman of the outlawed Popular Front of India is "absolutely fine" and receiving treatment.

Last month, Abubacker's counsel had said the 70-year-old was suffering from cancer and Parkinson's disease, and was in "great pain", which needed urgent medical attention. The court had then asked the NIA to file a status report in response to the plea for medical treatment. "We have filed a status report along with the report of AIIMS. He is absolutely fine. He is under treatment. As and when he is required, he is taken there (the hospital)," said special public prosecutor Akshai Malik, who represents the National Investigation Agency, on Wednesday. Counsel for Abubacker, lawyer Adit Pujari, sought time from the court to seek instructions on the status report and for further pursuing the appeal. "The counsel for the appellant prays for and is granted time to obtain instructions qua the further prosecution of the present appeal," said the bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Talwant Singh, and listed the case for further hearing on December 19. Abubacker was arrested by the anti-terror probe agency NIA during a massive crackdown on the banned organisation earlier this year and is in judicial custody.

Last month, the court had said requisite medical treatment will be provided to the accused while rejecting the submission that he should be placed under house arrest. "We are not inclined to do that. AIIMS is a premier hospital in the country. If you are using this as a pretext for house arrest, we are not granting that. We are only concerned with his medical condition," the court had said. It had said it will hear the appeal for medical treatment and that the accused could approach the trial court for regular bail. The NIA had said it was not against medical treatment to the accused and the investigation in the case was going on. A large number of alleged PFI activists were detained or arrested in several states during the massive raids preceding the nation-wide ban imposed on September 28.

In near-simultaneous raids across the country as part of a multi-agency operation spearheaded by the NIA, a large number of PFI activists were rounded up in 11 states for allegedly supporting terror activities in the country. The arrests were made in states and union territories including Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Delhi and Rajasthan. The government banned the PFI and several of its associate organisations on September 28 for five years under the stringent anti-terror law UAPA, accusing them of having "links" with global terror groups like the ISIS. (PTI)

Delhi acid attack: NCW, NCPDR seek immediate arrest of accused

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The country's apex women and child rights bodies have sought urgent action by authorities, including the early arrest of the accused by Delhi Police, in the acid attack incident in the national capital on Wednesday. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has also taken up the matter with the Delhi State Legal Services Authority for compensation to the victim. Two masked men on a bike flung acid on the 17-year-old victim, who was attacked minutes after she left her home for school and is battling serious injuries. NCW Chairperson Rekha Sharma has written to the Commissioner of Police, Delhi to personally intervene in the matter and to ensure the arrest of the accused at the earliest. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) questioned where the accused had procured the acid-like substance, as the same is banned for sale. The NCPCR also sought action against the acid seller in the matter.

A four-member team was deputed by the NCW to visit the victim at the Safdarjung hospital. The team also interacted with the victim's father who informed them that the girl has not been examined by an eye doctor yet. The team raised the concern with the Medical Superintendent at Safdarjung who assured that the eye examination will be undertaken at the earliest. He also informed that the victim has 7 to 8 percent burns and that her condition is stable at present. "We've taken up the matter with Delhi Police and have also written to Delhi Police Commissioner regarding the incident and Delhi State Legal Service Authority for compensation," said Lily Paul, Media Advisor at National Commission for Women. A team from NCPCR will also visit the victim. Delhi Commission For Women (DCW) Chief Swati Maliwal said that the chemical despite ban is as easily available as vegetables.

In a video uploaded on Twitter, Maliwal said that the body may approach the court for stricter enforcement of the ban on over-the-counter sale of acid. "We have issued notice to the city police over the incident. The attackers should be arrested and given stringent punishment," she said. "DCW has issued several notices, given several recommendations, but acid sale continues. Just like vegetables are sold, anybody can buy acid and throw it on a girl." (PTI)

Deepika's costume in 'Pathaan' song objectionable: MP home minister, says some scenes need to be 'corrected'

BHOPAL, DEC 14 /--/ Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Wednesday took objection to actor Deepika Padukone's costume in a song of Bollywood film "Pathaan" and said if certain scenes are not "corrected", the government will consider what to do about its screening.

Mishra, the spokesperson of the state

government, also said Padukone has been a supporter of the "Tukde Tukde gang" as seen in the JNU case. Mishra's statement came after a song, "Beshram Rang", featuring Padukone from the Shah Rukh Khan-starrer film was released recently. He said the costumes seen in the song are prima facie "highly objectionable" and it is clearly visible that this song

was filmed out of a "contaminated mentality". "I would request to correct the scenes and her (Padukone's) costumes (in the song), otherwise whether this film should be allowed in Madhya Pradesh or not will be a question to be considered," Mishra told reporters in Bhopal on Wednesday. In the same breath, he alleged "Padukone has been

a supporter of the Tukde Tukde gang as seen in the JNU case". The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) often uses the "tукde-tукde gang" remark coined in the aftermath of a JNU protest in Delhi in 2016. "Pathaan", a Hindi-language action thriller film, is scheduled for release on January 25, 2023. Notably, Mishra, a senior leader of BJP in Madhya Pradesh, in

October warned the makers of the Bollywood film "Adipurush", based on the epic Ramayana, of legal action if scenes showing Hindu religious figures in the "wrong" way are not removed. In July this year, he directed to file an FIR (First Information Report) over a controversial poster of filmmaker Leena Manimekalai's documentary 'Kaali' after an outrage. (PTI)



Rear Admiral Sandeep S Sandhu, NM on taking over as Chief of Staff Andaman and Nicobar Command and Vice-Chairman, Islands Development Agency at Raj Niwas on Tuesday. Perspective plans and infrastructure development projects of Andaman Nicobar Command were discussed.

Reschedule of MLII-104 and BNS-042 courses Exam of IGNOU

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) TEE December- 2022 examination of the Course MLII-104 and BNS-042 held on December 12, 2022 (morning session) and BNS-042 held on 13th December, 2022 (Afternoon session) conducted at Exam Centres has been cancelled due to

unforeseen circumstances. The exam for these courses has been rescheduled again on 05th January, 2023 in the morning session (BNS-043) and afternoon session (MLII-104). The revised hall ticket for these courses will be uploaded on the IGNOU website: www.ignou.ac.in. The learners who appeared for

the MLII-104 and BNS-042 exam are advised to download the revised hall ticket to re-appear the exam on the scheduled date.

For more details, visit IGNOU Regional Centre, Port Blair or contact over Phone: 03192-242888, 03192-230111 or Email: rcpportblair@ignou.ac.in.

10-days works on 'Development of highly engaging, joyful & innovative additional learning materials'



PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ A 10-days workshop on 'Development of highly engaging, joyful and innovative additional learning materials' for pre-primary & primary sections (3 to 8 years) for PTPSTs and PSTs of South Andaman Zone and WimberlygunjZone wasorganised at GSS Junglighat from 1st December to December 13th 2022, by the State Institute of Education under the aegis of Department of Education which was inaugurated by Mr. R.K.Singh, Principal,SIE. In the inaugural address, he advised the participants to develop joyful and innovative teaching material as per the needs of the child and surroundings.

About 27 participants (PTPSTs and PSTs) enthusiastically engaged and developed highly engaging, joyful and innovative additional learningresources for pre-primary & primary sections (3 to 8

years.) as per NEP Task 34. The valedictory function of the workshop was held on 13th December 2022, in which the participants Ms.BeenaPandey,PST(EVS group) attached to GSSS School Line, Mr. Jothi Mohan, PST (English group), GSSS Rangachang, Ms. Kiran Kumari (Hindi group), PST, GPS Maccapahad, Ms. Laxmi, PST (Maths group), Govt. Model Sr. Sec. School, Port Blair and Ms. J.Permeshwari(Pre-Primary group), PTPST shared their fantastic experience about the Workshop.

Mr. R. K. Singh, Principal, SIE appreciated the efforts made by the participants to develop the engaging, joyful and innovative additional learning materials and also distributed the participation Certificates. Ms. H. Khairun Nisa, Faculty, SIE co-ordinated the entire programme and vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. R.Sethukkarai,Faculty,SIE.

Road closed

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ The road portion from Teal House Junction to Chatham Foreshore Road is closed for all the vehicular movements for 10 days w.e.f. 13.12.2022. Hence, all the vehicles will be diverted through Haddo and Chatham Road.

Heavy rains hit normal life in Nilgiris district, holiday for schools, colleges

UDHAGAMANDALAM, DEC 14 /--/ Heavy rains since Tuesday night through normal life out of gear in the high-range Nilgiris district while rail services were hit as boulders and trees fell on the track. The district administration declared a holiday for schools and colleges on Wednesday as a result of the heavy rainfall. Also, services on the Nilgiris Mountain Railway (NMR) have been cancelled for two days from December 15 in view of boulders and trees falling across the track, a Railway press release said. Heavy rains in the Nilgiris on Tuesday night have caused landslides at many locations. Portions of NMR track between Kallar Coonoor were covered by mud and boulders. Mettupalayam Udhagamandalam (train no 06136) and U d h a g a m a n d a l a m - Mettupalayam (train no 06137) have been cancelled on December 15 and 16. (PTI)

Graft issue hurt AAP in MCD polls, effect to be bigger in 2 to 3 years: Delhi BJP working prez

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The corruption issue raised by the BJP against the Arvind Kejriwal government had an impact in the MCD polls and the effect will magnify in two to three years when the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls are held, the party's Delhi unit working president Virendra Sachdeva claimed Wednesday.

"(Prime Minister) Narendra Modi is the leader of everyone in the BJP and the rest of us are just workers," he said, adding the party's vote share will be boosted by increasing awareness among people about various benefits Delhi has received from the Central government's initiatives. Under Modi's leadership, BJP leaders and workers will work towards ensuring that the party wins all seven parliamentary constituencies in Delhi and better its 52 per cent vote share of the last Lok Sabha polls in the next general elections, Sachdeva told reporters. Sachdeva took over as working president of the Delhi BJP last Sunday after Adesh Gupta stepped down following the party's defeat in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) polls.

The Delhi BJP working president asserted that the AAP will be able to run the civic body if it does not seek the cooperation of his party's councillors. The Aam Aadmi Party won the MCD elections with 134 seats, ending the 15-year rule of the BJP in the civic body. The BJP bagged 104 seats in the 250-member municipal corporation. "We have received a very good mandate.

Even though we could not come back to power in the MCD, the people of Delhi have enabled us to work as an effective check on the AAP," Sachdeva said when asked if the BJP will contest the post of mayor. "In the MCD polls, the AAP lost in wards of its leaders (Manish) Sisodia and (Satyendar) Jain who are facing corruption charges. This means the people have rejected the AAP for corruption. In the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls to be held in two to three years, this public impression will deepen with more of the AAP's corruptions exposed by us," he added.

He said now it was time for the AAP to deliver on its promises, including flattening the three landfill sites in Delhi. "They should tell us how are they going to clean the landfill sites. They were quick to point fingers at BJP in this regard when it was ruling the civic body. We will support them if they work on their promise," Sachdeva said while claiming there were 17 "garbage mountains" in Punjab which is ruled by the AAP. (PTI)

Rain forecast

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ As per Indian Meteorological Department's weather forecast, heavy rain (07-11 cm) is likely to occur at one or two places over Nicobar Islands on Dec. 15. Due to squally weather over South Andaman Sea, wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph is likely to prevail over South Andaman Sea till Dec. 15. Fishermen have been advised not to venture into South Andaman sea Dec. 15, 2022.

For further enquiries / information, one may contact helpline of State Emergency Operation Centre at Helpline No. 1070 & District Emergency Operation Centre at Helpline No. 1077. For any assistance, call Coast Guard, SAR Agency at Toll Free No. 1554.

Firing practice

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ Firing practice will be carried out by Indian Army on Dec. 20 & 21 from 1 pm to 5 pm. All the concerned have been warned to keep themselves and their vessels/ fishing boat away from the firing range during above mentioned date and time, a notification issued by DM (SA) said.

DG, HG felicitates 3-Home Guard Personnel with DGP Disc & Commendation Certificate

PORT BLAIR, DEC 14/--/ Three Home Guard Personnel have been awarded prestigious "DG Disc (Bronze)and Commendation Certificate' for their illustrious and unblemished service on the occasion of 60th Annual Day of Civil Défense& Home Guard on 6th December 2022, by the Director General -Fire Service, Civil Défense& Home Guards. These Home Guard Personnel are HG(R)/53 Sree Kumar of A & N Home Guard Organization, HG(R)/78 G Sunil Kumar of A & N Home Guard Organization and HG(R)/432 K Amina of .A & N Home Guard Organization.

Mr. Neeraj Thakur, DGP, A&N Islands complimented all the awardees for the distinctions conferred on them and bringing honour to A&N Home Guard Organization. He wished them success in their future career.

MESSAGE

The Govt. of India has launched TB Mukht Bharat Campaign on the occasion of World TB Day on 24thMarch, 2021, with the objective of accelerating implementation of various programmatic activities and for achieving better community engagement towards achieving India's target of TB Elimination by 2025.

I am happy to learn that the Central TB Division, MoHFW has initiated a program on "Community Support to TB Patients -NikshayMitra (Donor)" with the objectives to provide additional patient support to improve treatment outcome of TB patients, augment community involvement in meeting India's commitment to end TB by 2025 and leverage the avenues for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The Hon'ble President of India has launched the operationalization of PradhanMantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan on 09thSeptember 2022 to galvanize national support and to create Jan Andolan towards an accelerated movement to eliminate TB. This Abhiyaan aims to provide community support to TB patients through Ni-kshay 2.0 platform and introduction of newer and shorter TB Preventive Treatment.

I appeal to all Individuals, NGOs, Institutions and partners to support and complement the efforts by Government to end TB by providing nutritional support to TB patients and contributing effectuating a better response against TB. I am confident that with the support of NikshayMitras, we will be able to achieve the Hon'blePrimeMinister's vision of a TB Mukht Bharat by 2025.

Jai Hind!

Sd/-
(Admiral D K Joshi)
PVSM, AVSM, YSM, NM, VSM (Retd.)
Lt. Governor, A&N Islands
&
Vice-Chairman, Islands Development Agency

Shyam N Shyam

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Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps, for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be

William Hazlitt

Imminent famine threatens Somalia

Somalia has not yet fallen into famine but several parts of the country are in danger of it in the coming months, according to a new food security report on the Horn of Africa’s worst drought in decades. The report released by United Nations and other experts says more than 8 million people are badly food insecure as Somalia faces “an unprecedented level of need” after five consecutive failed rainy seasons and “exceptionally high” food prices. Thousands of people have died. The report warns that famine is projected between April and June of next year in two parts of Somalia’s southwestern Bay region and among displaced people in the town of Baidoa and the capital, Mogadishu. The “most likely scenario” will see more than 700,000 people in those areas in famine. Several other parts of central and southern Somalia also will see an increased risk of famine if a sixth straight rainy season fails early next year.

Food security experts earlier this year warned of famine in parts of Somalia by the end of this year without an increase in international humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian workers say the war in Ukraine has diverted the funding of some key donors. Neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya also are struggling in the drought, but the new report is a grim look at Somalia’s multiple crises. Insecurity caused by the al-Qaida-affiliated al-Shabab extremist group limits access to hungry people, and its fighters have destroyed water wells and food sources in retaliation for its losses in a new government offensive. Meanwhile, food and fuel prices in Somalia have soared, part of a global problem. And crops have suffered, making food even more scarce for the months to come. Many households have already lost or sold their last breeding animal. Millions of livestock in the country of pastoralists have died, leaving families without their traditional source of wealth and health. Some Somali officials, including the president, have expressed hesitation over declaring famine amid concerns it would take away from them their efforts to show that the country is shedding its past as a failed state.

Famine is the extreme lack of food and a significant death rate from outright starvation or malnutrition combined with diseases like cholera. A formal famine declaration means data shows more than a fifth of households have extreme food gaps, more than 30% of children are acutely malnourished and over two people out of 10,000 are dying every day.

Light at the end of Kerala’s Vizhinjam Tunnel at long last

REFLEX ACTION

P. Sreekumaran

There is light, at long last, at the end of the Vizhinjam tunnel. The peace agreement between the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government and the Latin Church which spearheads the anti-seaport agitation has come as a big relief for the Government.

But the Government cannot rest on its laurels. True, an agreement is in place after the 140-day-old agitation against the Vizhinjam seaport. But, it is an uneasy truce. And the Government has its task cut out. It has to focus, without further loss of time, on the follow-up measures. And, most important, this is no time to crow over the end of the agitation. The reason is there for all to see. It is evident from the reaction of Eugene Pereira, Vicar General of the Latin Church, who announced the ‘temporary’ end of the agitation, has made no bones about his reservations. The agitation is being ended not because “we are satisfied with the steps taken or promises made by the Government. The protest has reached a certain stage...and we are calling it off,” Pereira told reporters.

The Government would – and should – do well to keep the ‘celebrations’ over its ‘political victory’ on a low key. After all, none of the demands of the agitators has been conceded. That said, credit should be given to the Government for taking the initiative to end the stalemate.

The protestors had a meeting with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan after two rounds of talks. First, they met the Chief Secretary, followed by a meeting with the Cabinet Sub-committee. They demanded, among other things, that a local community representative be included in the expert constituted to study the possible coastal erosion because of the port

construction. They also demanded that an additional amount of Rs 2,500 be given from the State exchequer to meet the rent expenses of those who lost their house and property.

The Pinarayi Government, however, rejected both the demands. Its reasoning: the expert panel has already been constituted. However, the CM assured the protestors that the committee will consult them as well. Since a government order has already been issued, the demand for the extra rent amount cannot be conceded, said the Chief Minister. Nor where the agitators in a mood to accept the additional amount of rent they wanted – Rs 2,500 – from the Adani group. Therefore, the agitators decided to settle for the earlier rent amount of Rs 5,500. On its part, the Government promised to set up a Chief Secretary-level monitoring committee of which the Port Secretary will also be a part. The agitators can, according to the Government, consult the committee any time. With the agitation called off, the Adani group would resume the port construction without any further delay so that it can meet the deadline of December 2023.

What prompted the agitators to call off their struggle? Opinion is divided. But, what turned the tables on the agitators is the violence they unleashed on Vizhinjam police station in which many, including policemen, were injured. The violence proved to be the turning point, with the agitators losing sympathy of

the people at large. With the parliamentary polls just a year away, escalation of violence would damage the prospects of the party and its allies.. It is this realization that forced both the Government and the Church to settle for a cessation of hostilities. Another reason why the agitation was losing steam is the communal comments made against a Minister.”

A major bone of contention is the arrest of a large number of people, including a Bishop in connection with the violence which visited the Vizhinjam port. The Government should, in a spirit of accommodation and as a gesture of goodwill, withdraw the cases registered in connection with the struggle. It is gratifying to note that the Government, has assured the agitators that action would be taken only against those involved in serious crimes. That assurance should reassure the agitators. Now that the ‘guns have fallen silent’, the Government has an awesome responsibility. It has to see that the momentum generated by the end of the agitation is not lost. Follow-up steps should be taken immediately.

The peace accord has given the Government an opportunity to assuage the concerns of the fisher community, which played a stellar role when the State was battered by unprecedented floods and rain fury. It must take immediate measures to concede their genuine demands, including compensation and rehabilitation. That the Government has promised to do that is a good sign. The agitators have also done well to assure the government that the protest against the port construction would be ended. The need of the hour is to ensure that both sides do not stop smoking the peace pipe. After all, as the saying goes, hope sustains life! (IPA)



A sweetmeat seller arranges special curated sweets for the ongoing marriage ceremony in Kolkata on Wednesday--Arijit Ganguly

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					

ACROSS						DOWN					
1	Malarial fever	1	Existing in fact			1	Existing in fact				
3	Whirly	2	Complete agreement			2	Complete agreement				
7	Lyric poem	4	Fishing pole			4	Fishing pole				
8	Dance	5	Snakes			5	Snakes				
11	Says further	6	Acceptance			6	Acceptance				
12	Tarnishes	9	Squalid			9	Squalid				
13	Fruit of the oak	10	Metal			10	Metal				
15	Pastry dish	11	Shrewd			11	Shrewd				
18	Go ashore	14	Country			14	Country				
19	Wish evil upon	16	Sports' enclosures			16	Sports' enclosures				
20	Wrathful	17	Extreme fear			17	Extreme fear				
21	Musical group	19	Domestic animal			19	Domestic animal				
23	Singer	21	Wicked			21	Wicked				
24	Bustle	22	Present			22	Present				
25	Daybreak										
26	Consumer										

SUDOKU:3726

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

Yesterday's Solution 3725

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1734

H	A	R	E	M			D	O	E
O		I		E	L	S	E		Y
R	A	V	E	D			P	A	L
D	E		A				A	R	I
E	N	R	O	L		I		M	
	E		M		I	N	T	E	R
E	A	S	E		M		E		O
S	T	A	G		P	E	N	A	L
P	L	A	K	E		E			E
Y	E	T			L	O	T	U	S

DISCLAIMER

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India leads world gold jewellery demand recovery

India is leading a global recovery in gold jewellery. This is despite the fact that gold prices have hit a five-month high. The demand engine is driven by urban consumers, encouraged by a return to pre-covid levels of economic activity. Rural consumers were more cautious as their inflation outpaced that of their urban counterparts.

According to World Gold Council estimates, world jewellery consumption continued to rebound in the third quarter of this year and is now back to pre-pandemic levels, reaching 523 tonnes, which is 10 percent higher compared to the same period in 2021. Much of this growth was spearheaded by India’s urban consumers who drove up demand 17 percent year on year to 146 tonnes. Similarly impressive growth was also seen in much of the Middle East, with Saudi Arabian jewellery consumption up 20 percent since the third quarter of 2021, and United Arab Emirates up 30 percent for the same period. Chinese jewellery demand also saw a modest 5 percent increase, driven by improved consumer confidence and a dip in the local gold price, prompting the release of some pent-up demand.

China, which is the biggest consumer of gold in the world, is

expected to see a further pick-up in jewellery demand, boosting the overall numbers further, although a spike in infection more recently in that country has marred the outlook.

Retail investors bought gold as a store of value amid surging global inflation, while ETF investors reduced their holdings in the face of rising global interest rates. Gold’s safe-haven appeal has also been boosted by a depreciating rupee and falling local equity prices. Just as consumer gold demand firmed, central bank buying picked up significantly with estimated record purchases of nearly 400 tonnes in the third quarter. A council survey of central banks indicated the intention by a quarter of central banks to increase their gold reserves in the next 12 months.

Even as the country led the global gold jewellery recovery, the Reserve Bank of India added 17.46 tonnes of gold reserves in the third quarter. With the latest purchases, India’s total gold reserves have gone up to 785.35 tonnes,

comprising 7.8 percent of the total reserves. Gold imports by the trade recorded a decline after the Centre hiked the tariff on gold from 7.5 percent to 12.5 percent in July this year. But this has led to a significant increase in the smuggling of gold into the country. Smugglers are using innovative methods to dodge customs authorities to bring in their illegal gold, such as conversion of the metal into paste, powder forms, which are more difficult to detect.

The World Gold Council had, in fact, forecast that the increase in tariff could increase gold smuggling by a third to touch 160 tonnes in calendar year 2022 as compared to the pre-covid period when the duty was 5 percent lower.

The trade is now seeking a reduction in the taxes and duties on gold to encourage more imports through official channels. The All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council is urging the government to reverse the tariff increase as well as a reduction in

the GST tax to 1.25 per cent from the current 3 per cent. The trade points out that the higher import duty is creating problems for the domestic industry as it encourages smuggling. According to the industry, a reduction of duty to 4-6 percent would act as a disincentive for illegal trade. This will not only lead to less smuggling, but also add to government’s tax revenue from the legitimate channels, they argue.

According to gold smuggling and seizure data provided by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, as much as 73 per cent of the gold caught had been brought through Myanmar and Bangladesh. The smuggled gold is apparently brought into Myanmar from China through the border towns on the Chinese and Myanmar borders. Smuggling using airline passengers as carriers is also rampant on the Gulf-Kerala sector, where seizures happen as a matter of routine, but much larger quantities escape scrutiny.

A proposal to this effect is reportedly under the consideration of the commerce ministry, which has apparently approached the finance ministry on the possibility. There is widespread expectation that some such decision would be announced in the next budget. (IPA)

FOCUS

K Raveendran



President Droupadi Murmu presenting the National Energy Conservation Awards, National Energy Efficiency Innovation Awards and National Painting Competition Prizes on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day, in New Delhi

Hospital unveils state-of-the-art integrated robotic system for spine surgery

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ A leading private hospital here formally launched a state-of-the-art integrated robotic system for spine surgery on Wednesday and claimed that it was the "most advanced" system in India.

The technology used in the system unveiled at an event here utilises "artificial intelligence to visualise spinal anatomy during complex surgeries". BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, part of the Max Healthcare group, claimed that this was "India's most advanced integrated robotic system for spine surgery". "The integrated spinal robot is programmed to navigate spinal surgeries. Additionally, this is the only robotic system that combines surgical navigation and robotic guidance for spinal surgery, which offers significant advantages to spine surgeons," the hospital said in a statement. "We started this journey in 2019, when we were convinced that we needed to acquire this spinal robotics, because this is the future for having safer, more precise and more accurate spinal surgeries.



The Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Bharati Pravin Pawar at the National Maternal Health Workshop in New Delhi on Wednesday

Winter is here, ice skating begins in Shimla

SHIMLA, DEC 14 /--/ Ice skating, a major winter attraction of Himachal Pradesh's state capital began on Wednesday at Asia's biggest natural rink located here, an official said.

Skating enthusiasts converged at the rink braving the morning chill to enjoy the thrill of sliding on layers of ice. "Skating makes me happy and I am enjoying it," said nine-year-old Aayan, a student of class V in St Thomas School, among 16 kids taking to the rink in the first session. "I was eagerly waiting for ice skating to start and enjoyed the first session," said 21-year-old Joant Tatung, skating for the past 16 years. "It is a tough task to get up early in the morning but when it comes to skating, we are all out before time," she added. Ice remains intact at the rink as long as the temperature doesn't rise above 4 or 5 degrees Celsius. A trial



was successfully done Tuesday and the ice skating season officially begun on Wednesday, said Pankaj Prabhakar, the organising secretary of the Shimla Ice Skating Club.

Last year, the season started on December 16 and 52 sessions, mostly one or two a day, took place. This year the organisers were hoping to start earlier as temperatures

were favourable since December 4. However, it got delayed by almost two weeks as the ground was sinking at one side and levelling it took time. Moreover, barracks put at the Rivoli bus stand stopped the cold breeze, he said. The ice is thin and the skaters only have 80 per cent of the rink which is equal to the size of five tennis courts as construction material for

Children will not have to wait if there are more parents who are ready to adopt: WCD minister

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ A child will not have to wait to get adopted if there are more parents who are ready to do the procedure, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani told the Rajya Sabha, underlining that more girl children have been adopted in India in the last three years against boys.

Replying to the supplementaries during question hour, the minister said the average time taken to adopt a child through court processes was so lengthy that a minimum of two years was needed by adoptive parents in terms of waiting and to reduce the time gap the ministry has proposed the amendment in the law, as in many cases it took up to 3.5 years. "On September 23 this year, we notified the new regulation as there were close to 900 cases pending in states in our high courts. After the

states acted on the new resolution, over 580 children have already been adopted, including children who are in the 'hard to place' category in older age groups who have never been adopted before," she told the house. Irani said there are children who are older and are made available to our NRI diaspora and OCI card holders. Just in a period of seven days, 42 such children found placement with Indian diaspora and resident Indians, she said. "A child now does not have to wait, the adoptive parent may... I am happy to report that children will not have to wait if there are more parents who are ready to adopt. That is a healthy sign for society which is compassionate. Parents may have to wait but children will not have to," the minister told members.

Irani also said that more girls are being adopted in the



country since the last three years and gave figures for the same. "In our country, in the year 2019-20, on one side 1,400 boys were adopted, on the other hand 1,938 girls were adopted. In 2020-21, while there were 1,200 boys who were adopted, as many as 1,856 girls were adopted. In 2021-22, as many as 1,293 boys were adopted while 1,690 girls were adopted and

they have adopted girls as Goddess Laxmi," Irani informed the house. In her written reply, the minister said, "The waiting period of the Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) depends on the availability of children who are legally free for adoption. It also depends on the choice of the Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) to adopt from a particular State and also the age group preferred." While there is a long queue to adopt a normal young child upto six years of age, there is no waiting period for the PAPs who desire to adopt a child having special needs and a child from immediate placement category (mostly older children). Further, the waiting time is relevant for the PAPs only as the child does not wait for the family, she said. "With effect from November 10, 2022, Government has facilitated for the

Resident Indians/Non-Resident Indians/ Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Card holder PAPs to adopt a child from 7-day portal' irrespective of the seniority in their socio-cultural milieu which has been highly appreciated by the waiting parents.

"On the basis of feedback received from the stakeholders and experts, Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has framed the Adoption Regulations, 2022 in-line with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (as amended in 2021) which has been notified on 23.09.2022." "The Adoption Regulations, 2022 were framed keeping in mind the issues and challenges faced by CARA and other stakeholders including the Adoption Agencies & Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs)," the minister said. (PTI)

Graft issue hurt AAP in MCD polls, effect to be bigger in 2 to 3 years: Delhi BJP working prez

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The corruption issue raised by the BJP against the Arvind Kejriwal government had an impact in the MCD polls and the effect will magnify in two to three years when the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls are held, the party's Delhi unit working president Virendra Sachdeva claimed Wednesday.

"(Prime Minister) Narendra Modi is the leader of everyone in the BJP and the rest of us are just workers," he said, adding the party's vote share will be boosted by increasing awareness among people about various benefits Delhi has received from the Central government's initiatives. Under Modi's leadership, BJP leaders and workers will work towards ensuring that the party wins all seven parliamentary constituencies in Delhi and better its 52 per cent vote share of the last Lok Sabha polls in the next general elections, Sachdeva told reporters. Sachdeva took over as working president of the Delhi BJP last Sunday after Adesh Gupta stepped down following the party's defeat in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) polls.

Sachdeva said when asked if the BJP will contest the post of mayor. "In the MCD polls, the AAP lost in wards of its leaders (Manish) Sisodia and (Satyendar) Jain who are facing corruption charges. This means the people have rejected the AAP for corruption. In the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls to be held in two to three years, this public impression will deepen with more of the AAP's corruptions exposed by us," he headed. He said now it was time for the AAP to deliver on its promises, including flattening the three landfill sites in Delhi. "They should tell us how are they going to clean the landfill sites. They were quick to point fingers at BJP in this regard when it was ruling the civic body. We will support them if they work on their promise," Sachdeva said while claiming there were 17 "garbage mountains" in Punjab which is ruled by the AAP.

'Threeshooters arrested in cloth merchant murder case,' says Punjab Police Chief

CHANDIGARH, DEC 14 /--/ Police have arrested three out of five suspected shooters involved in the killing of a cloth merchant in Jalandhar district, the state's top police officer said on Wednesday.

Bhupinder Singh alias Timmy Chawla, 39, who was under police protection, was shot dead by five people on December 7 in Jalandhar's Nakodar. He had been given police protection after he had complained of getting extortion calls. The mastermind of the crime has been identified as Amandeep Singh, a resident of Yuba county in California, Punjab Police Chief Gaurav Yadav said. One .30 bore pistol has also been recovered from the three men arrested, said Yadav. Constable Mandeep Singh, who was deployed as Bhupinder's security guard, was also killed in the shootout.

The incident had drawn sharp reaction from the Opposition parties over the law and order situation in the state. Addressing the media here on Wednesday, Yadav said that the Jalandhar Rural Police has worked out the case with the arrest of three shooters involved in the crime.

He said preliminary investigation has revealed that extortion calls on November 1 and November 8 were made by Amandeep Singh, who is originally from vil-

lage Malrhi, a place close to Jalandhar. Yadav said that Amandeep and a key associate of his, one Gurinder Singh Ginda, also a resident of the Malrhi village, were the two masterminds behind the murder. Five shooters were engaged to kill Bhupinder, with Ginda arranging three .30 bore pistols for the shooters, said Yadav. Shooters who had come on two bikes were identified as Pushkaran Singh alias Fauji, Kamaldeep Singh alias Deep, Manda Singh, Satpal, and Thakur. Pushkaran, Kamaldeep, and Manda have been arrested, said the DGP. Before the murder, two Bathinda-based men, Amrik Singh and Sajan, had done the recce of the area. Both are absconding, said Yadav. One of the two SUVs used in recce has also been recovered, said police. The two bikes used by the shooters were thrown into a canal. A search is on for them and they will be fished out soon, said police.

Delhi LG Saxena seeks report from Police Chief on acid attack

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ Delhi LG V K Saxena on Wednesday sought a detailed report on the west Delhi acid attack incident from the city police commissioner, including information on how the acid was procured despite a ban on its sale.

A 17-year-old girl was attacked with acid by two people on a motorcycle near Uttam Nagar in west Delhi on Wednesday morning. The girl was admitted to the Safdarjung Hospital, where doctors said she suffered seven to eight per cent facial burns and injury to her eyes. "The Lt Governor spoke to the Police Commissioner about the unfortunate incident of acid attack that took place at Dwarka More today and sought a detailed report into the incident, including as to how the acid used was procured despite a ban in the City," the Raj Niwas Delhi said in a series of tweets.

"LG has instructed for swift and thorough investigation so as to ensure exemplary punishment to the guilty. The LG is also in touch with the hospital authorities and has urged them to ensure the best treatment. He has also assured all possible assistance to the victim and her family," it added. One of the suspects behind the attack has been detained, the police said. (PTI)

Heavy rains hit normal life in Nilgiris district, holiday for schools, colleges

UDHAGAMANDALAM, DEC 14 /--/ Heavy rains since Tuesday night through normal life out of gear in the high-range Nilgiris district while rail services were hit as boulders and trees fell on the track.

The district administration declared a holiday for schools and colleges on Wednesday as a result of the heavy rainfall. Also, services on the Nilgiris Mountain Railway (NMR) have been cancelled for two days from December 15 in view of boulders and trees falling across the track, a Railway press release said. Heavy rains in the Nilgiris on Tuesday night have caused landslides at many locations. Portions of NMR track between Kallar Coonoor were covered by mud and boulders. Mettupalayam Udhagamandalam (train no 06136) and Udhagamandalam (train no 06137) have been cancelled on December 15 and 16. However, NMR train services between Coonoor and Udhagamandalam will be operated as scheduled.

Works to repair the damaged railway track are progressing despite the hostile weather and adverse conditions, the release said. Five houses crumbled in a habitat near Coonoor and a few vehicles parked on roadside, including three autorickshaws were washed away in the rain water on TTK Road, sources said.

Vehicular traffic was paralysed due to a big crater being formed on Ooty-Coonoor road and more than 10 trees falling on Ooty-Kotagiri and Ooty-Gudalur highways, the sources added. Workers from the Revenue department and other departments, with the help of public were removing the trees to clear the roads. Residents in this tourist town, Coonoor and Kotagiri remained indoors due to the continuous rains and cold. Official sources said 303 mm rainfall was recorded till 11 AM on Wednesday. Considering the situation, the administration advised those living on the banks of water bodies not to venture out and move to safer places. (PTI)

65 of 67 terror cases probed by NIA get conviction: Govt

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 /--/ The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has so far registered 497 cases of terrorism and judgment has been pronounced in 67 cases of which conviction has been obtained in 65 cases.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said in Rajya Sabha that as on December 2, the NIA has registered 497 cases including the recent Coimbatore blast incident. "Fairness and transparency in investigations by the NIA is evident from the fact that from 2019 to 2022 (up to December 2, 2022), judgment has been pronounced in 67 cases, out of which, conviction has been obtained in 65 cases and two cases have ended in acquittal," he said in a written reply. Rai said the NIA is mandated to investigate and prosecute offences of grave nature affecting the sovereignty, security and integrity of India, security of state, friendly relations with foreign states, matters relating to international treaties, etc., as specified in its schedule cases having gravity including national and international implications are entrusted to NIA without any bias or prejudice. (PTI)

10.54 lakh more people to benefit from Assam's poverty alleviation scheme

GUWAHATI, DEC 14/--/The Assam government on Wednesday rolled out the second edition of 'Orunodoi', its flagship Rs 4,142-crore poverty alleviation scheme, by adding over 10.50 lakh new beneficiaries. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched the programme virtually from New Delhi, while his ministers were present in different districts to start the scheme for the people. "Altogether 10.54 lakh fresh beneficiaries have been newly added under the greater

version of Orunodoi 2.0. With the new inclusion, the total number of beneficiaries in the state will be around 27 lakh," an official release said. The total financial outlay for Orunodoi is Rs 4,142 crore per annum, making it one of the largest direct beneficiary transfer (DBT) schemes in the country, it added. "Orunodoi, the poverty alleviation scheme, launched on December 1, 2020, entails a monthly grant of Rs 1,250 to each beneficiary. It is one of 18 flagship schemes of the Government of Assam currently in

operation," the release said. Later, the chief minister interacted with members of the district-level monitoring committees and asked them to ensure smooth and hassle-free implementation of the scheme. The finalisation of beneficiaries will take place from January 1 to 15, while application forms will be distributed among selected beneficiaries on January 20. The collection and uploading of application forms in the dedicated portal will be completed on February 28, the release said. (PTI)

NEWS BRIEF

3 die in stampede in blanket distribution programme attended by Suvendu

ASANSOL, DEC 14 --/Three persons were killed and five others were injured in a blanket distribution programme at Asansol in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district on Wednesday, police said. The stampede occurred when people rushed towards the dais in an attempt to get blankets. "Three persons were killed and five others were injured in the stampede. The injured people were hospitalised," a senior official of Asansol Durgapur Police Commissionerate said. (PTI)

Oppn evolves joint strategy on India-China conflict issue at meeting in Parliament

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 --/ Leaders of several Opposition parties on Wednesday met in Parliament House complex and decided to take on the government unitedly on the India-China border issue and are likely to issue a joint statement. Several Opposition parties are seeking answers from the government on the Chinese transgressions along the border and moved adjournment notices in both houses of Parliament, demanding an urgent discussion on the issue. Leaders of 17 Opposition parties -- the Congress, RJD, DMK, CPI, CPI-M, AAP, Samajwadi Party, JDU, NCP, Shiv Sena, Kerala Congress, National Conference, AIUDEF, RLD, MDMK, VCK and KCM -- met in the chamber of Mallikarjun Kharge, the leader of the opposition in Rajya Sabha, and decided to corner the government on the border issue. The TMC was, however, not present at the meeting. It was decided to stage a walkout in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in case the government did not agree to their demand for an urgent

discussion. Leaders of the Opposition parties also staged a walkout in both houses. They also decided to issue a joint statement on the Chinese transgressions issue but sounded a word of caution that the Opposition should not sound lowering the moral of the armed forces. Besides this, the leaders discussed important issues to be raised and formulated their joint future strategy in both houses of Parliament. TMC party sources said Sudeep Bandyopadhyay was supposed to go for the Opposition meeting but could not attend due to his indisposition. TMC leaders had conveyed to other opposition leaders that they will be on board on the decision taken at the opposition meeting. The TMC members later walked out along with other opposition members in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. Sources said a decision was taken that a joint statement on behalf of the Opposition parties would be issued on their demands instead of separate remarks made by leaders of various Opposition parties. The Opposition leaders would

be meeting in Parliament again on Thursday and will further plan on their strategy. Defence minister Rajnath Singh had given a statement in both houses of Parliament on Tuesday saying Chinese troops tried to "unilaterally" change the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Yangtze area of Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang sector last week but the Indian Army compelled them to retreat by its "firm and resolute" response. In similar statements in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Singh said there were "no fatalities" or serious injuries to the Indian soldiers and that the clash led to injuries to a few personnel on both sides. The Opposition leaders were, however, not allowed to seek any clarifications from the minister on the issue. Opposition leaders were upset for not allowing them an opportunity to seek clarifications on the issue, even as the chairman said the issue was sensitive and no clarifications can be allowed. The chair also cited several similar instances in the past. (PTI)



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launching Orunodoi 2.0 programme — UB photo

White Coat ceremony for new MBBS-2022 batch

From page-1

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Secretary described the White Coat ceremony as a momentous occasion and also an amazing tradition which has been started by ANIIMS for the students. As years go by, this initiative will assume greater heights and more glory, the Chief Secretary said adding that not only our country but entire humanity will feel proud of the doctors produced by ANIIMS. The Chief Secretary stated that in the field of medicine, doctor is not only a profession, but is regarded as shadow of God and one must strive to imbibe good qualities. Referring to the students of 2022 batch, the Chief Secretary mentioned that on completion of the degree, they will become bold and confident, ready to serve the people. He said, the faculty members will not only teach the nuances of medicine but also teach the students how to become good human beings by imparting the qualities of empathy, pragmatism, honesty and charity.

The Chief Secretary remarked that the aim is not to have an Institute which simply confers degrees, but which produces good doctors as well as good human beings. The priceless moment in a doctor's life is when he is revered and appreciated by people for saving precious lives. The Chief Secretary also inaugurated the 'Healthy Campus campaign' and 'Mentorship Programme Module' on the occasion. This campaign aims to provide a healthy learning and living environment to help students in their academic and co-curricular activities, thereby contributing towards complete personality development.

Speaking as the guest of honor, Shri Nikhil Kumar, IAS, Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Health) described the occasion as auspicious which signifies student's entry into the medical profession. For the first time, this White

Coat ceremony has been organized for the students of ANIIMS which, he said, is a watershed movement in the professional lives and service of every doctor. The White Coat Ceremony is not simply a rite of passage for medical students, but it's a symbolic and constant reminder of the professional duties towards parents, patients, communities, he said. "This ceremony also reminds the doctor to keep the patients interest above their own interest", the Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Health) said. He further stated that Medicine is not merely a profession, but it's a service to fellow citizens, community and entire humanity. By donning this coat, he said, doctors also take on the sacred responsibilities associated with this noble profession. In his address, the Secretary (Health), Shri Arjun Sharma said, today marks the official beginning of the 2022 batch of ANIIMS. This will be 5 year long course, which will have both intensive and extensive medical learning, practical, field visits and wholesome experience for the students. He further stated that ANIIMS as an Institute have seen 7 batches and this one is the 8th one. Two batches have already passed out from ANIIMS. The Secretary said, we have the best faculty in this region and urged the students to learn and imbibe as much as they can during their 5 year long course. In her welcome address, the Director, ANIIMS, Dr Pragma Sharma said, it's a pleasure to see the students commencing their journey not only in the college but also in their professional career. She also congratulated each student for accomplishing an exciting milestone in their life.

Parents of the new batch students and faculty members were also present for the ceremony. The program concluded with physician's pledge and vote of thanks delivered by Dean (Academics).

Assamese 'Gamocha' gets GI tag; state in jubilation

GUWAHATI, DEC 14/--/'Gamocha', a symbol of the culture and identity of Assam, has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the central government, five years after the first application was made. Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal on Twitter shared the GI registration certificate, issued on Tuesday, bringing cheers to people across the northeastern state. A GI is tagged to primarily agricultural, natural or manufactured products, handicrafts and industrial goods originating from a definite geographical territory. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said: "A day of pride for Assam, as our #Gamocha gets a Geographical Indication Tag by the Government of India." Expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is often seen with a 'Gamocha' draped around his neck, Sarma congratulated all the people of Assam for this recognition. Union Shipping, Ports and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated that Assam's pride is "shining bright". "Due recognition of our heritage & cultural identity. 'Gamocha' gets the GI tag, bringing joy to thousands of weavers of this special item that has become a global symbol of Assam," he added. Along with Assam ministers Chandra Mohan Patowary, Ajanta Neog, Atul Bora, Pijush Hazarika and Jayanta

Malla Baruah, many prominent personalities and hundreds of social media users expressed their happiness over the 'gamocha' getting the GI tag. The GI tag has been registered in favour of the Directorate of Handloom & Textiles of the Assam government under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. The certificate has been awarded for 'Gamocha' as of October 16, 2017 as per the application by the directorate. The process was started in 2017 when an application for a GI tag was filed by the Institute of Handicraft Development of Golaghat district. The 'gamocha', a handwoven rectangular cotton piece of cloth with red borders and different designs and motifs, is traditionally offered to elders and guests as a mark of respect and honour by Assamese people. It is an integral part of all socio-religious ceremonies in the state and is considered as an Assamese identity and pride. A 'gamocha' literally means a towel and is commonly used in Assamese households for day-to-day affairs. For specific purposes, it is also made of expensive materials like traditional Assamese 'Pat' silk and in different colours as well. A 'gamocha' meant for exchange during 'Bihu' festival is known as 'Bihuwan'. This unique scarf, which is found only in Assam, is also used as a signifier of reverence while decorating altars or covering religious books. (PTI)

Ahead of cabinet expansion, Himachal CM visits Delhi, to meet senior Cong leaders

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 --/Ahead of his cabinet expansion in the state, Himachal Pradesh's new chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Wednesday arrived here to meet senior Congress leaders, including party chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

Sukhu is also set to meet former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and other senior leaders, sources close to him said. All party MLAs from Himachal are also in the national capital and are reportedly lobbying for the cabinet berths in the hill state. Himachal Congress chief Pratibha Singh is also in Delhi and will be meeting senior leaders. Sukhu, who visited the national capital for the first time after assuming charge as Himachal chief minister was accorded a rousing reception by party leaders and supporters. The chief minister told reporters that he was in the national capital to meet senior party leaders, whom he would be meeting in the next two days. On cabinet expansion, he said consultations are on and it will be formed soon. Sukhu had on Monday said the Cabinet would be expanded in consultation with the Congress high command and it would be a mix of professionals, youths and representatives from all sections. The chief minister later met AICC in-charge for Himachal Rajiv Shukla and said it was a courtesy call. Shukla congratulated Sukhu on taking over as chief minister of Himachal Pradesh and wished him a successful tenure. The chief minister assured him that every effort would be made to fulfil all the promises made to the people of the state. (PTI)

Fans throng streets of Buenos Aires as Argentina reach FIFA World Cup final

DOHA, DEC 14 --/ Joyous Argentina fans packed the streets of Buenos Aires after the Lionel Messi-led side reached the final of the FIFA World Cup. Messi opened the scoring from the penalty spot while Julian Alvarez scored twice as Argentina defeated Croatia 3-0 in the first semi-final on Wednesday. Thousands of Argentina fans celebrated their World Cup semi-final triumph by filling the streets of the capital city. In the videos shared on social media, fans were seen chanting Messi's name while jumping in joy. Alvarez, the Manchester City forward, won the penalty for Messi's opener before going on to score twice himself. However, it was the Argentina captain who stole the show once again with his mesmerising performance. Messi, who scored his fifth goal of the tournament so far, surpassed Gabriel Batistuta (10) as the country's all-time top scorer in World Cups. He has 11 World Cup goals to his name. The 35-year-old also equalled former German player Lothar Matthaeus' record of 25 World Cup appearances. The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner has reportedly confirmed that the 2022 FIFA World Cup final will be his last game for Argentina. "I feel very happy to be able to achieve this, to finish my World Cup journey by playing my last game in a final," Messi reportedly told Argentine media outlet Diario Deportivo Ole. Argentina arrived in Qatar as one of the tournament favourites but doubts crept in after they lost their opening group game 1-2 against outsiders Saudi Arabia. They were unbeaten in 36 matches before arriving in Doha. The two-time champions will now take on either Morocco or holders France in the final, which will be played at the Lusail Stadium on Sunday.

■ **Messi has chance to match Maradona as Argentina reach World Cup final — See page-12**

■ **Lionel Messi to retire, FIFA World Cup final will be his last game for Argentina: Report — See page-12**



Julian Alvarez of Argentina (R), is congratulated by Messi after scoring a goal against Croatia in the first semi final of FIFA World Cup 2022, on Tuesday

Ukraine: Russian strikes thwarted, wreckage hits buildings

KYIV, DEC 14 /--/ Ukrainian authorities said they thwarted a Russian attack on Kyiv and the surrounding region Wednesday as their air defense system intercepted and destroyed 13 explosive-laden drones, although wreckage from some of them damaged five buildings. No casualties were reported. The attempted strikes underlined how vulnerable Ukraine's capital remains to the regular Russian attacks that have devastated infrastructure and population centres in recent weeks, mostly in the country's east and south. But they also highlighted Ukraine's claims of increasing efficiency in intercepting weapons something that Patriot missiles from the U.S. may soon help boost. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a brief video statement, said the "terrorists" fired 13 Iranian-made drones, and all were intercepted. Such drones have been part of the firepower, along with rockets, missiles, shelling mortars and artillery, as Russia targets power stations, water facilities and other public utility sites. The snow-covered capital remained largely calm after the attack, which occurred around daybreak. As the working day began, authorities sounded the all-clear.

The head of the Kyiv city administration, Serhii Popko, wrote on Telegram that the attempted strikes came in two waves. Wreckage from the intercepted drones damaged an administrative building and four residential buildings, he said. A blast left the three-story tax office building in the central Shevchenkyvskiy district with a gaping hole in the roof and blew out windows in parked cars and in a neighbouring building. Clean-up crews were on site quickly to shovel away the rubble and roll out plastic sheeting to cover the blown-out windows in freezing temperatures. One man, unfazed, pushed his son on a swing set on a nearby playground as the crews did their work. Anton Rudikov's family was sleeping when they heard the sounds of an explosion nearby and smashing windows. "The children were frightened; the windows flew out," said Rudikov, who has daughters ages 13 and 18. "What else can I say?"

Local residents told Associated Press reporters they saw fragments from a drone which contained the words "For Ryazan." The Kremlin claims Ukraine was responsible for an attack last week on a military base in the Ryazan region of western Russia. Ukrainian authorities have trumpeted their ability to down Russian weapons. But strikes in some areas continue to cause deaths and havoc, particularly in areas close to the front lines in the east and south. In the southern city of Odesa, drone strikes temporarily shut off the power last week. Kyiv has suffered comparatively little damage. During a previous round of Russian volleys on Dec. 5, more than 60 of 70 strikes were intercepted by air defense systems, including nine out of 10 targeting the capital and the surrounding region, Ukrainian officials have said. (AP)

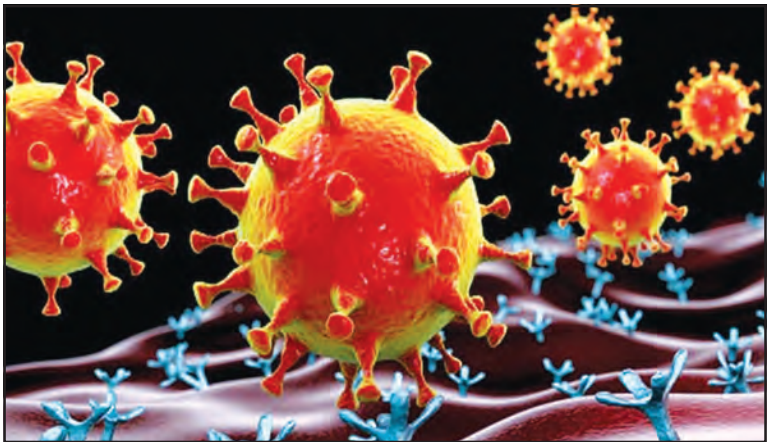
UN recognises Ganges project among 10 initiatives restoring natural world

MONTREAL, DEC 14 /--/ An ambitious project that aims to improve the health of the Ganges, India's holy river, is among 10 "ground-breaking" efforts recognised from around the globe by the United Nations for their role in restoring the natural world. According to a report unveiled during the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) here on Tuesday, climate change, population growth, industrialisation and irrigation have degraded the Ganges along its arcing 2,525-kilometre course from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. Restoring the health of the Ganges is the focus of a major push to cut pollution, rebuild forest cover and bring a wide range of benefits to the 520 million people living around its vast basin. The initiatives were declared World Restoration Flagships and are eligible to receive UN-backed promotion, advice or funding. They were selected under the banner of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, a global movement coordinated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It is designed to prevent and reverse the degradation of natural spaces across the planet, the UN said. Together, the 10 flagships aim to restore more than 68 million hectares an area bigger than Myanmar, France or Somalia and create nearly 15 million jobs, the UN said. "Transforming our relationship with nature is the key to reversing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, pollution and waste," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen. "These 10 inaugural World Restoration Flagships show that with political will, science and collaboration across borders, we can achieve the goals of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and forge a more sustainable future not only for the planet but also for those of us who call it home," Andersen said here. On the Ganges River Rejuvenation project, the UN noted that it was launched in 2014.

The government-led Namami Gange initiative is rejuvenating, protecting and conserving the Ganges and its tributaries, reforesting parts of the Ganges basin and promoting sustainable farming, according to the statement. The project also aims to revive key wildlife species, including river dolphins, softshell turtles, otters, and the hilsa shad fish. The initiative, with an investment of up to USD 4.25 billion so far, has the involvement of 230 organisations, with 1,500 km of river restored to date. Additionally, there have been 30,000 hectares of afforestation so far, with a 2030 goal of 134,000 hectares, according to the UN. (PTI)

China won't report asymptomatic Covid cases in further shift

BEIJING, DEC 14 /--/ China said Wednesday it would stop reporting asymptomatic Covid-19 cases since they've become "impossible" to track with mass testing no longer required, another step in the country's uncertain exit from some of the world's strictest antivirus policies. China last week announced its most significant easing yet of antivirus measures and has begun to see what appears to be a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could become overwhelmed as those in other countries did during early Covid waves. So far, though, many of those newly sick are staying home and there has been little evidence of a surge in patient numbers. But it's difficult to get a clear picture of the virus's spread, and the new reporting rules could make that even harder. Some hospitals have reportedly struggled to remain staffed because of rising infections among



their employees. A notice on the National Health Commission's website on Wednesday said it stopped publishing daily figures on Covid-19 cases where no symptoms are detected since it was "impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected persons," which have generally accounted for the vast majority of new infections.

The only numbers they're reporting are confirmed cases detected in public testing facilities where symptoms are displayed. Many people also test at home and any positive results there would also not be captured. China's government-supplied figures have not been independently verified and questions have been raised about whether the ruling

Imran Khan to announce plans to dissolve provincial assemblies in mega rally on Dec 17; may meet Prez Alvi

ISLAMABAD, DEC 14 /--/ Imran Khan plans to hold a large public gathering on Saturday to announce his plan of dissolving two provincial assemblies ruled by his party, amid reports that Pakistan President Arif Alvi is expected to meet the chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party on Wednesday in the final round of consultations on early general elections.

According to the Dawn newspaper, Khan will conclude his party rallies under the "Election karao, mulk bachao" (hold elections, save country) campaign by Friday, and announce his 'final' plan of dissolving Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies during the rally on Saturday. Talking to the media at Khan's Zaman Park

residence, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Hammad Azhar said the party has planned to hold simultaneous rallies at all divisional headquarters on Saturday where the party chairman's address will be broadcast through a video link. "The main rally will be arranged at Liberty Chowk (Lahore) on Saturday and the rest of the country will participate in the event through the video link," he said. Cash-strapped Pakistan is facing a political crisis with ousted prime minister Imran Khan demanding

that the government announce early general elections and Prime



Minister Shehbaz Sharif rejecting his plea for snap polls. Meanwhile, Geo News reported that President Alvi will

meet Khan on Wednesday as the deadline to announce the date of dissolution of the two assemblies looms near. Quoting sources, the report said that Alvi will meet Khan at the latter's residence in the provincial capital where he is recuperating after sustaining injuries in a recent gun attack. The two leaders have held multiple rounds of deliberations on issues related to elections, the economy and security, but no concrete results have come out of the parleys. Rejecting reports of a divide among allies of the PTI

over the dissolution of assemblies, senior minister Mian Aslam Iqbal asserted that everyone in the party was "on the same page" and that a meeting has been called to finalise the date for the assembly dissolution. "In my opinion, the assemblies should be dissolved before December 20 so that the elections can be held before Ramazan," he suggested.

The minister was also quoted by a section of the media as saying that Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi had already handed over a summary for the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly to Khan. However, party insiders claim that PTI parliamentarians and allies reportedly remain divided over the plan to dissolve the two provincial assemblies. (PTI)

Indian lecturer wins race discrimination case against UK university



LONDON, DEC 14 /--/ An Indian lecturer has won a race discrimination case against the University of Portsmouth after an employment tribunal ruled that she was discriminated against when overlooked for a role as a "visible" member of the university's ethnic minority staff.

Dr Kajal Sharma, who was appointed to a five-year fixed term secondment as Associate Head for Organisational Studies and Human Resources Management at the university starting January 2016, had the option to reapply to the post. However, when she was overlooked for that position, she complained under the university's grievance procedure in November 2020 that she had been discriminated against under the UK's Equality Act 2010. "The claimant [Sharma] was a visible member of the black and minority ethnic [BAME] staff. She speaks with a marked Indian accent," notes the Employment Tribunal judgment dated November 29. "The fact that the claimant was not successful in applying for the job she had been doing for five years, meant that a hundred per cent of the black and minority ethnic staff reapplying for their jobs had not been recruited, whereas 11/12 of white staff applying for their jobs had been recruited," it notes, dubbing the recruitment decision "statistically significant".

The hearing in the case, which took place in Southampton in October, was also told about a series of related issues involving Sharma's treatment during bereavement following the death of her father in India. Her husband gave evidence to confirm that her line manager asked his wife to complete various tasks when

informed about urgent travel plans to India. "Her [Sharma] version of the events and her memories of them as she described them to us were convincing, understandable and appear to be supported by the documentary evidence we have before us as well as by her Husband's evidence," the judgment notes.

The lecturer told the tribunal she and her manager had a "difficult relationship" and that she considered that he had treated her less favourably than the white candidate, both in the application process, but also that he had treated her less favourably than he had treated or would have treated other white employees over the last five years, on grounds of her colour and diverse background.

"We are not able to determine what would have happened if Professor Rees [manager] had not been involved in the recruitment process, and if the process had not been tainted with race discrimination," the tribunal concludes. The University of Portsmouth said it recognised the "strength" of the ruling of the Employment Tribunal in the case and expects every member of its community to uphold the university's values, without exception. "There are no excuses for race discrimination at the University of Portsmouth," said a university spokesperson.

"We will do everything possible to support our colleagues to build an inclusive and diverse community that promotes the dignity and respect of all. The university is examining the ruling carefully and cannot comment further while the legal case continues," the spokesperson said. The compensation related to the tribunal findings remain yet to be finalised. (PTI)

US military creates space unit in S Korea amid N Korea threats

SEOUL, DEC 14 /--/ The US military formally launched a space force unit in South Korea on Wednesday, a move that will likely enable Washington to better monitor its rivals North Korea, China and Russia.

The activation of the U.S. Space Forces Korea at Osan Air Base near Seoul came after North Korea test-fired a barrage of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles designed to strike the U.S. mainland and its allies South Korea and Japan in recent months. "Just 48 miles north of us exists an existential threat; a threat that we must be prepared to deter, defend against, and if required defeat," Lt. Col. Joshua McCullion, chief of the new space unit, said during the activation ceremony at Osan. He apparently referred to North Korea, whose heavily fortified border with South Korea is just an hour's drive from Seoul, the South's capital.

The unit belongs to the U.S. Space Force, which was launched in December 2019 under then-President Donald Trump as the first new U.S. military service in more than 70 years. The Space Force was seen soberly as an affirmation of the need to more effectively organize for the defense of

U.S. interests in space especially satellites used for civilian and military navigation, intelligence and communication. A previous Pentagon report said China and Russia had embarked on major efforts to develop technologies that could allow them to disrupt or destroy American and allied satellites in a crisis or conflict.

The U.S. Space Forces Korea is a subordinate of a bigger U.S. Space Force unit established within the Indo-Pacific command in Hawaii last month. Jung Chang Wook, head of the Korea Defense Study Forum think tank in Seoul, said the U.S. Space Force was created to bring together diverse surveillance assets including space-based satellites in one organization to manage and develop them in an effective, systemic manner. He said its unit in South Korea would work like a field unit while the other one in the Indo-Pacific Command would be its headquarters. "The U.S. Space Forces Korea would maintain, operate and asses related equipment. Simply speaking, I would say the actual U.S. space operations will be done at Osan Air Base," Jung said. He said the main role of the U.S. Space Forces Korea would be

receiving, processing and analyzing tremendous amount of data and information transmitted by U.S. satellites. "The U.S. military is faster, better connected, more informed, precise and lethal because of space," Gen. Paul LaCamera, commander of the 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea, said during the ceremony. "Specifically, the activation here today, of U.S. Space Forces Korea ... enhances our ability to defend the homelands and ensure peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia." Jung said the launch of a space unit in South Korea was primarily aimed at better monitoring North Korea, followed by China and then Russia.

The United States and South Korea have expanded their regular military drills and pushed to further bolster their combined defense capability in the face of North Korea's advancing nuclear program. North Korea has threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively in potential conflicts with the United States and South Korea, and the U.S. military warned the North that the use of nuclear weapons "will result in the end of that regime." (AP)

Lankan Prez holds all-party meeting on 13A for peaceful resolution of Tamil issue

COLOMBO, DEC 14 /--/ An all-party meeting convened by President Ranil Wickremesinghe has discussed the 13th Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution as mooted by India to resolve the long-standing demand for political autonomy for the minority Tamils in the island nation, political leaders said on Wednesday.

The Tamil parties which participated in the meeting on Tuesday urged the government to hold the northern provincial council election. "The 13A is already a part of the Constitution and it is a point that most parties agreed to," Tamil Progressive Alliance (TNA) leader Mano Ganesan told P.T.I. Ganesan, who represents mostly the Western province-based Tamils of Indian origin, said President Wickremesinghe has asked him to forward proposals on the 13A issue on behalf of the hill country Tamil community or the Tamils of Indian origin. India has been pressing Sri Lanka to implement the 13th Amendment which was brought in after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1987. The 13A provides for devolution of power to the Tamil community. Ganesan said President Wickremesinghe, main opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and former president Mahinda Rajapaksa were all in agreement with implementing the 13A. He urged the government to hold provincial council elections in the northern and eastern provinces so as to give people an idea of self-governance with the full implementation of 13A.

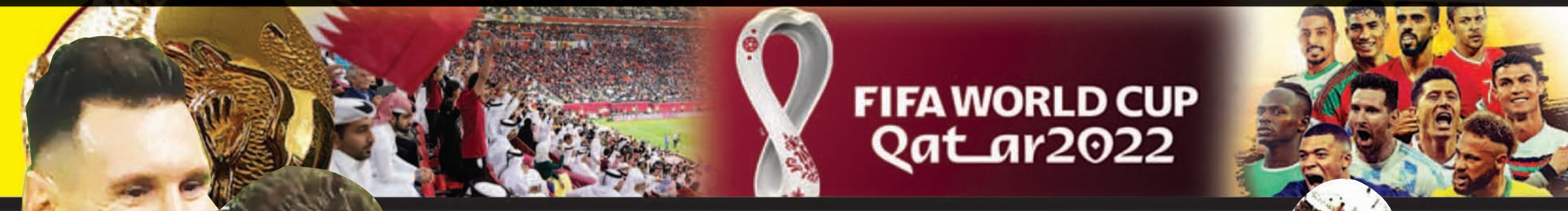
C V Wigneswaran, former chief minister of the Northern province, said ensuring the councils to have already defined powers which have been denied to the provinces was discussed in the all-party meeting. "We raised the issue of land grabbing by the state. They are taking over lands under government departments. This must stop and the land rights must be given



Ranil Wickremesinghe

to the provincial councils," Wigneswaran told PTI. He said other issues concerning the Tamil minority and the release of political prisoners held under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) were also discussed in the meeting.

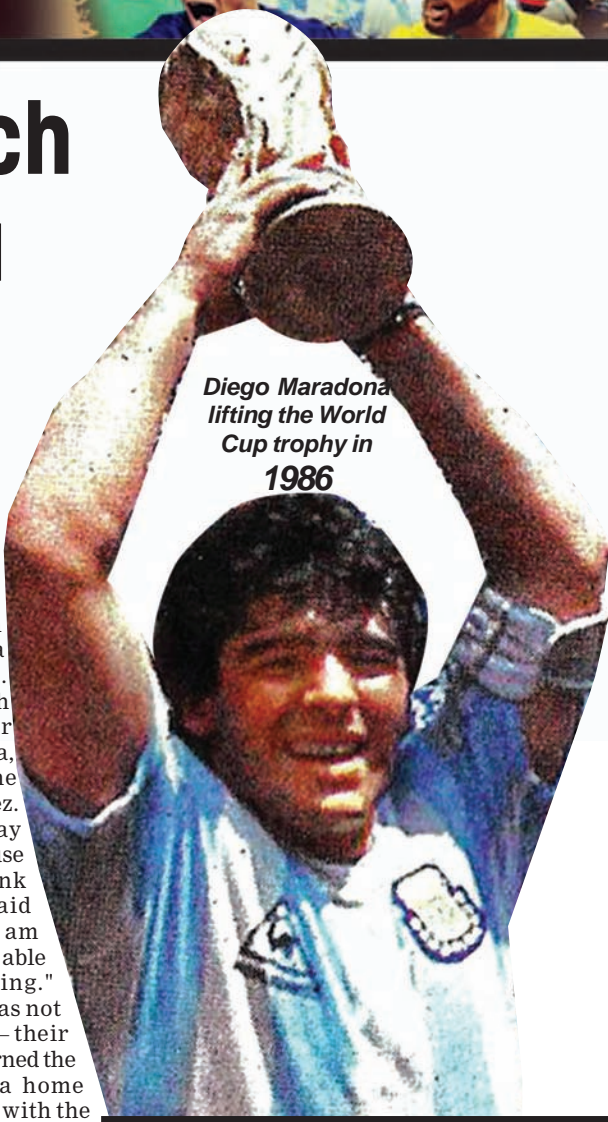
President Wickremesinghe had called Tuesday's All Party Conference in a bid to arrive at a consensus on the Tamil minority's demand for political autonomy. Wickremesinghe had said he was keen to announce a settlement of the issue by February 4 of next year, coinciding with Sri Lanka's 75th anniversary of Independence. "We have very little time so we can't afford to go back and start all over again," Ganesan stressed. Meanwhile, there were no immediate comments from pro-Sinhala majority nationalist parties on Tuesday's talks. All Sinhala parties were present in the meeting, Ganesan said, adding that only Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the third largest majority community party, abstained from the parleys. The Sinhala majority hardliners have been advocating a total abolition of the island's provincial council system established in 1987. There are nine provincial councils in Lanka. Sinhalese, mostly Buddhist, make up nearly 75 per cent of Sri Lanka's 22 million population while Tamils are 15 per cent. (PTI)



Messi has chance to match Maradona as Argentina reach World Cup final

DOHA, DEC 14 /--/ Lionel Messi will get his date with World Cup destiny, and the chance to emulate Diego Maradona, after Argentina's emphatic 3-0 win over Croatia on Tuesday took them through to the final in Qatar. It is 36 years since Maradona dragged Argentina to their second and most recent World Cup triumph in Mexico, the crowning moment of his dazzling but often troubled career. Messi came to this World Cup admitting it would surely be his last at the age of 35 and therefore his final opportunity to lift the trophy that escaped him in 2014, when Argentina was defeated by Germany in Brazil. The sense that Messi was building up to this moment was apparent in his displays for Paris Saint-Germain in the months before the tournament and he has performed at this World Cup like a player with no more time to waste. Sixteen years after making his World Cup debut as a teenager, Qatar has witnessed Messi finally score in the knockout stages of the tournament, and he has done so in three straight games. On Tuesday he scored his 11th World Cup goal, overtaking compatriot Gabriel Batistuta, who previously held the Argentine record. He has now equalled former German player Lothar Matthaeus' record of 25 World Cup appearances. Messi's performance against Croatia at Lusail Stadium was typical of his late career -- a player who saves energy and spends long periods on the fringes of the game. Yet for his country, he is a captain who can still inspire and who always looks capable of creating something when the ball comes to his feet. Goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic, who had been the hero in shoot-outs in the previous two rounds, had no chance of stopping Messi's first-half penalty. Messi then sent Julian Alvarez away to make it 2-0 late in the first half with a first-time ball on a counterattack. But he saved the best moment for midway through the second half with a magnificent assist, twisting and turning to make a fool of Croatia's Josko Gvardiol before teeing up Alvarez to score again. "In the past 15 years he's probably been the best

player in the world and today he was very good again," admitted the Croatia coach, Zlatko Dalic. Messi is now level with Kylian Mbappe as the Qatar World Cup's leading scorer, with five goals, but his assist was further confirmation of how the former Barcelona player has evolved with age. The PSG version spends much of his time creating goals for Mbappe, and now for Argentina, he is doing the same for the exciting young striker Alvarez. "Sometimes it seems like we say Messi is the greatest just because we are Argentine, but I think there is no doubt about it," said coach Lionel Scaloni. "I am privileged to coach him and be able to watch him. It's thrilling." Argentina's run to the final has not been entirely down to Messi -- their vast and passionate support turned the semi-final effectively into a home game, with fans filling Lusail with the sound of their anthem "Muchachos". Scaloni has built a capable team around their one true great, taking Argentina into the final of the first World Cup since the death of Maradona. Argentines may feel that it was meant to be, and Qatar will surely be delighted too. Just over a year after he ended his long association with Barcelona and signed for Qatar-owned PSG, Messi's presence will light up the final in Doha. But, depending on the outcome of Wednesday's second semi-final between France and Morocco, it could be his club teammate Mbappe blocking his path to glory. (AFP)



Diego Maradona lifting the World Cup trophy in 1986

Messi hails Argentina character after reaching final

DOHA, DEC 14 /--/ A delighted Lionel Messi hailed his side's strength of character after he starred in Tuesday's 3-0 World Cup semi-final win over Croatia. Messi scored the opener from the penalty spot and then had a hand in two goals scored by Julian Alvarez at Lusail Stadium as Argentina eased through to Sunday's final where they will face either France or Morocco. The victory continued a remarkable turnaround from Lionel Scaloni's team after they started their campaign in Qatar with a shock 2-1 defeat at the hands of Saudi Arabia. "I think the first match was a very tough blow for us because we had been 36 games unbeaten," said Messi, who spoke to reporters after being named man of the match. "To start in that way when nobody expected us to lose was a real test for this group of players. But we showed how strong we are. "What we have done since then was really difficult because every game has been a final. "We have played five finals, won them all, and let's hope we win the next one." Messi added: "This group has strength of character but is also so intelligent. We have a team that is capable of reading games, that knows how to suffer when they have to suffer. We have a great coaching staff who don't leave anything to chance. That helps because it means we always know what we need to do." Argentina's captain is now the joint-top scorer at the tournament with five goals as he looks to win the World Cup for the first time in his glittering career at the age of 35. His goal that opened the scoring against Croatia was his 11th World Cup goal, allowing him to equal the Argentine record held by Gabriel Batistuta. "I am really enjoying myself. Luckily I feel good and strong going into every game," he said. "In the last game we were taken to extra time and today we were tired but we seem to find strength where we have none." (AFP)

GAME NOTES

South Korea coach Paulo Ben to bids emotional farewell

Seoul, Dec 14 /--/ Paulo Bento has bid an emotional farewell to South Korea, calling his four years as coach of the national football team a "beautiful experience which I will never forget". The Portuguese former international midfielder took the Koreans to the last 16 of the World Cup in Qatar, where they were beaten 4-1 by Brazil last week. The 53-year-old said in the immediate aftermath that he would not be staying on as coach. "I am especially thankful to all the players, due to their professionalism, work ethic and their behaviour," Bento said in a statement late Tuesday, bringing the curtain down on his reign. "They gave me the opportunity to have one of the most beautiful experiences of my life, which I will never forget." (AFP)

Messi World Cup magic: Pakistani neighbourhood goes mad for Argentina

KARACHI, DEC 14 /--/ Thousands of Pakistanis in a Karachi neighbourhood once synonymous with gang violence and poverty will mass together to roar on Argentina in the World Cup final on Sunday. People poured through the labyrinth streets of Lyari in the early hours of Wednesday to watch Lionel Messi and his Argentina side on a giant screen beat Croatia 3-0 in the semifinal. Wearing Argentina shirts, some broke into song and dance after the South Americans sealed their spot in the decider in Qatar against France or Morocco. Fireworks lit up the night sky. "Most of the youth are inspired by them," Tahir Khan, a 40-year-old football coach, told AFP of Argentina's World Cup stars. (AFP)

LIONEL MESSI TO RETIRE

FIFA World Cup final will be his last game for Argentina: Report

DOHA, DEC 14 /--/ Lionel Messi has reportedly confirmed that the 2022 FIFA World Cup final will be his last game for Argentina. Messi was on target from the penalty spot, and also set up the third goal as Argentina defeated Croatia 3-0 in the first semi-final on Wednesday. Messi, who has scored five goals in the tournament so far, also became Argentina's leading goalscorer in World Cups, surpassing Gabriel Batistuta (10) on the list. The 35-year-old has 11 World Cup goals to his name so far. "I feel very happy to be able to achieve this, to finish my World Cup journey by playing my last game in a final," Messi reportedly told Argentine media outlet Diario Deportivo Ole. "It's many years for the next one and I don't think I'll be able to do it. And to finish like this, it's the best," he added.

After the semi-final win over Croatia, Messi urged his teammates to "enjoy" the occasion. "Argentina are, once again, in the World Cup final. Enjoy it!" said Messi. "We've been through tough situations, other very good ones. Today we're experiencing something spectacular." Manchester City forward Julian Alvarez scored twice to take his tally of goals in the tournament to four in as many games. Argentina arrived in Qatar as one of the tournament favourites but doubts crept in after they lost their opening group game 1-2 against outsiders Saudi Arabia. They were unbeaten in 36 matches before arriving in Doha. The two-time champions will now take on either Morocco or holders France in the final, which will be played at the Lusail Stadium on Sunday. (Agency with AFP inputs)



'Still one step to go' for Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni after semi-final win

DOHA, DEC 14 /--/ Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni admitted it was difficult not to get carried away after his side beat Croatia in Tuesday's World Cup semi-final but called on his side to quickly gather their focus for the final.

Captain Lionel Messi scored a penalty and then set up two goals for Manchester City striker Julian Alvarez as Argentina won 3-0 at Lusail Stadium to advance to Sunday's final against either holders France or Morocco. "The truth is that the result maybe didn't reflect the game. I think we deserved to win but maybe not by such a margin," said Scaloni, whose side took the lead from a penalty awarded just after the half-hour mark for a foul on Alvarez. Scaloni said he expected his side to find the going tough against a Croatian midfielder inspired by Luka Modric. "They controlled possession at first, but we knew that could happen because they have three top-class midfielders who have been playing together for years and know each other very well. "We



understood that was how the game would go, but the game opened up with the penalty." Argentina's players celebrated wildly with their fans who made up the majority of the crowd in Doha, and Scaloni added: "We celebrated because it is exciting to be in the final, but there is still one step to go. This is something to enjoy but it's over now, so we need to move on to the next one." The 44-year-old Scaloni is now hoping to win the World Cup just 18 months after leading Argentina to victory in the Copa America in Brazil. It will be Argentina's sixth World Cup final but the former defender rejected comparisons with illustrious coaches of the past, including Cesar Luis Menotti, Carlos Bilardo and Alejandro Sabella, who led them to the 2014 final. "I can't compare myself with other coaches," he said. "It fills me with pride to get to the final and represent the national team. But I can't put myself on the same level as them. I just feel privileged to be in the final." (AFP)

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