

## VOICING NEED FOR MORE WHEELS Kalapahad, Kishorinagar residents demand extra bus services



KARTIK

MAYABUNDER, JAN 1/--/Residents of Kalapahad and Kishorinagar in Diglipur have demanded operation of extra bus services from Diglipur to Mayabunder. Kalapahad is located about 30 km from Mayabunder and it takes

about one hour for the bus to reach Mayabunder. According to a resident, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, State Transport Services (STS) used to operate a bus service which started from Diglipur at 2:30 pm for Mayabunder and it returned back at 5:30 pm from Mayabunder for

Diglipur. Presently this service has been stopped due to Covid pandemic in 2020. Non-operation of STS bus services at this time has created a lot of hardship for the office goers and residents to travel without a public transport in this route. Hundreds of office goers, private workers and

commuters avail bus services from Diglipur to Mayabunder. But with the STS halting the bus services, commuters have to undergo a lot of ordeal to reach their work place and return back to their homes after attending office.

Speaking to EOI, a local resident said that presently

one STS bus service is available from Mayabunder to Diglipur which starts at 2:30 pm, operated specially for the Schools and college students. The bus gets overcrowded and office goers hardly get a chance to get into the bus. This one alone bus gets so overcrowded with school and college students that daily commuters are left with no option but to hire private autos and jeeps to travel back to their homes by paying hefty amounts. Due to shortage of buses, the general public, especially office goers, ladies, old age people and medical patients suffer badly. The single bus meant for the school and college students remains overcrowded, which is neither convenient nor safe for the commuters. Local residents have demanded operation of extra bus services in this route in the evening hours for the convenience of the commuters. They have sought operation of STS bus from Mayabunder at about 5.30 pm so that commuters after office hours can return back to their homes at Diglipur comfortably and without hassles.

## Indiscriminate felling of mangrove trees at Mayabunder

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, JAN 1/--/Indiscriminate cutting of mangrove trees in the Mangrove Interpretation Centre at Mayabunder to lay electric poles has drawn the flak of environment experts. The mangrove trees have been felled by the Department of Electricity department, Mayabunder in N&M Andaman for installing electric lines, right under the nose of the Forest department. According to a local, the Mangrove Interpretation Centre, Mayabunder Opp Helipad is a popular tourist spot with scores of tourists visiting this centre to enjoy the greenery and mangroves. But recently, in order to save a few meters of electric lines, the Electricity department laid electric poles to carry electric lines in between mangroves and jungle trees by felling mangroves. A healthy mangrove in the coastline acts as a barrier protecting the shoreline from natural calamities like tsunami & flooding. Mangroves also act as nurseries for a wide range of marine species. Governments throughout the world have been taking extra initiatives to protect mangroves. But unfortunately, for authorities in the islands, protection of mangroves comes as the last priority. Instances of destroying mangroves in the islands have been reported on many occasions in the past, but absence of strict action has encouraged people to destroy mangroves unchecked. The cutting of mangroves for laying of electric lines



is one such example, mangroves are being destroyed by encroachers as well as government departments. EOI Correspondent repeatedly tried to contact officials of Electricity and Forest departments to seek their comments. But they could not be contacted.

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# SC to pronounce verdict on pleas against demonetisation on today

**NEW DELHI, JAN 1 /--/** The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce its judgment on Monday on a batch of pleas challenging the government's 2016 decision to demonetise currency notes of Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 denominations.

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice S A Nazeer, who will retire on January 4, is likely to pronounce its verdict on the matter on January 2, when the top court will reopen after its winter break. According to Monday's cause list of the top court, there will be two s e p a r a t e



judgements in the matter, which will be pronounced by Justices B R Gavai and B V Nagarathna. It is not clear whether the two judgements will be concurring or dissenting. Besides Justices Nazeer, Gavai and Nagarathna, the other members of the five-judge bench are Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian.

The top court had, on December 7, directed the Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to put on record the relevant records relating to the government's 2016 decision and reserved its verdict. It heard the arguments of Attorney General R Venkataramani, the RBI's counsel and the petitioners'

lawyers, including senior advocates P Chidambaram and Shyam Divan. Calling the scrapping of the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes deeply flawed, Chidambaram had argued that the government cannot on its own initiate any proposal relating to legal tender, which can only be done on the recommendation of the RBI's central board.

Resisting the apex court's attempt to revisit the 2016 demonetisation exercise, the government had said the court cannot decide a matter when no tangible relief can be granted by way

of "putting the clock back" and "unscrambling a scrambled egg". The RBI had earlier admitted in its submissions that there were "temporary hardships" and that those too are an integral part of the nation-building process, but there was a mechanism by which the problems that arose were solved. In an affidavit, the Centre told the top court recently that the demonetisation exercise was a "well-considered" decision and part of a larger strategy to combat the menace of fake money, terror financing, black money and tax evasion. The Supreme Court has heard a batch of 58 petitions challenging the demonetisation exercise announced by the Centre on November 8, 2016. (PTI)

## ECIL to deliver EVM-related equipment to Election Commission by October: Jitendra Singh

**NEW DELHI, JAN 1 /--/** The Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) will deliver 21 lakh equipment, including ballot units, control units and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines, to the Election Commission by October 2023, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday.

The equipment supplied by the ECIL, a public sector enterprise under the Department of Atomic Energy, is likely to be used in the 2024 general elections. The ECIL and the Bharat Electronics Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Defence, manufacture electronic voting machines and VVPATs for the Election Commission. In its

annual report for 2020-21, the ECIL had said it was gearing up towards mass production of EVMs required for the general elections in 2024. Addressing the media on Sunday, Singh, the minister of state in the Prime Minister's Office, said the 2023 Science Vision will define India in 2047, the centenary year of Independence. Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had highlighted the need to take science and technology-related research to the local level in order to make India a global center of research and innovation as it marches towards the centenary of its Independence. He said science departments of the government have already outlined their roadmap for

2023 with the Indian Space Research Organisation turning its focus on scientific exploration missions, technology demonstration missions and human spaceflight programme "Gaganyaan".

The Department of Biotechnology would take forward the successes of Covid-19 vaccine mission by investing in the improvement of vaccines for existing and emerging diseases, Singh said.

Significantly, major missions would also be launched on millets and patho-genomics of plant viruses in the International Year of Millets. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research will also focus on Green Hydrogen as it has already made a headway in the field as part of the clean energy mission. (PTI)

## Gujarat: Jain community takes out rally demanding action against desecration of sacred Shetrunjaya Hills

**AHMEDABAD, JAN 1 /--/** Hundreds of members of the Jain community took out a rally in Ahmedabad on Sunday, seeking action against anti-social elements allegedly desecrating the sacred Shetrunjaya Hills in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district.

Led by religious heads of the community, hundreds took part in the rally and walked for 3 km, demanding action against illegal mining activities, liquor dens and encroachment of government land on the hills. Situated on the banks of Shetrunji river around 164 feet above sea level, Shetrunjaya Hills near Palitana city are home to 865 Jain temples and is a holy place for Shwetambara Jains. Members of the community have held more than 85 rallies in different parts of the state ever since the "charan paduka" of a Jain saint was vandalised at a temple on the hills on November 26 last year, the secretary of a Jain trust in Ahmedabad said. The community also handed over a memorandum with a list of demands at the

district collector's office, he said. All the demands are related to illegal activities and the state government should not find it hard to tackle them, said Pranav Shah, secretary of Samagra Jain Swetambar Murtipujak Tapagachh Shree Mahasangh of Ahmedabad city.

The community is demanding action against illegal mining on the hills that is desecrating the sanctity of the region and has flagged the issue of illegal construction, he said. Hand carts and shops along the roads should also be removed and hooch dens that have cropped up in the area need to be shut, Shah said.

"All illegal activities in the hills such as mining and land grabbing should be stopped and the hills should be mapped to remove illegal construction these are our main demands," Shah told PTI. "We have created a road map for the development of Palitana and nearby areas with the help of the administration. Jain communities from across India can work in this direction," he said. (PTI)

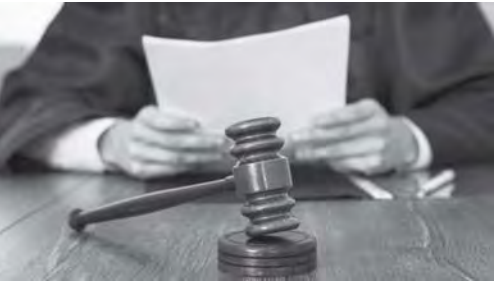
## Only 15 per cent judges appointed to HCs in last 5 yrs from backward communities: Dept of Justice to Par Panel

**NEW DELHI, JAN 1 /--/**A little over 15 per cent of the judges appointed to high courts in the last five years were from backward communities, the Department of Justice has told a parliamentary panel, while pointing out that even after three decades of the judiciary assuming primacy in judges' appointment, it has not become inclusive and socially diverse.

Underlining that the initiation of proposals for the appointment of judges in the Supreme Court and high courts is vested with the collegium, the department said therefore, the primary responsibility to address the issue of social diversity by recommending the names of suitable

candidates from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBC), minorities and women "rests with them". In the present system, the government can only appoint those persons as judges of the Supreme Court and high courts who are recommended by the apex court collegium, the department pointed out. The Department of Justice gave a detailed presentation to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, chaired by senior Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Sushil Modi. "It is almost 30 years that the judiciary has



assumed the primacy role in the appointment of judges to the constitutional courts. However, the aspiration to make the higher judiciary inclusive and representative, addressing the need for social diversity, is not yet achieved," the

department said in the presentation.

It further said the government has been requesting the chief justices of the high courts that while sending proposals for the appointment of judges, "due consideration" be given to suitable c a n d i d a t e s belonging to SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and women "to ensure social diversity" in the appointment of judges in the high courts. According to the details shared by the Department of Justice, from 2018 to December 19, 2022, a total of 537 judges were appointed to the high

courts, of whom 1.3 per cent were STs, 2.8 per cent SCs, 11 per cent were from the OBC category and 2.6 per cent were from minority communities. No information on the social background was available for 20 appointments during this period, the department added. During the presentation, the department also talked about the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), saying it proposed two eminent persons as its members, including one who shall be nominated from the SC, ST, OBC communities or from the minorities or a woman. However, the Supreme Court's constitution bench declared the NJAC "unconstitutional and void". (PTI)

**NASHIK, JAN 1 /--/** One person was killed and 17 others injured, four of them critically, in a massive fire triggered by a blast in a boiler of a chemical factory in Maharashtra's Nashik district on Sunday, officials said.

The blast in the Jindal Poly Films factory, located in Mundhegaon along the Mumbai-Agra highway in Igatpuri taluka, was so strong that it was heard in nearby villages. The fire and smoke could be seen from a distance. Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde tweeted some labourers are still stuck in the huge fire at Jindal factory and a search and rescue operation by the Fire Brigade is on. Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis said so far 19 persons have been rescued and 17 of them admitted to a private hospital for treatment. "Four among them are critical while another one died," he said. Speaking in Aurangabad, CM Shinde said the Air Force Station at Deolali (in Nashik district)

will make a helicopter available for the rescue operation.

A senior official said as it was the first day of the New Year, the number of workers present at the

police, and disaster response force teams rushed to the spot. Firefighting as well as search and rescue operations were underway at the site, officials said. "A blast led to the fire. A

people work in the plant. But, as it was the first day of the New Year, the number was less on Sunday. As huge grass has grown on the premises and inflammable material is lying



factory was less. Officials said some workers were present on the premises of the chemical unit when the incident occurred at around 11.30 am. Mundhegaon is located about 30 km from Nashik and 130 km from Mumbai. Fire brigade,

woman died in the incident. Fourteen people have been injured and admitted to hospitals. The condition of four of the injured people is serious," divisional revenue c o m m i s s i o n e r Radhakrishna Game told reporters. "Normally, 20 to 25

everywhere, our first aim is to control the fire. The exact reason behind the blaze is yet to be ascertained. It will take some time," Game added. CM Shinde said 11 injured people have been admitted to Suyash Hospital in Nashik city. "As it was an

automatic plant, there was not much manpower present at the time of the blast. The government will make whatever efforts are needed for the rescue operations, there will be no lacunae. Our officials, district collector, and superintendent of police are at the spot," he said. "I pray for the early recovery of the injured persons," CM tweeted later. Union minister of State for Health Bharati Pawar told reporters here that the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and the National Disaster Response Force have been informed about the incident.

The SDRF personnel have reached the site, said the minister, who hails from Nashik. "As many as 100 beds have been kept ready in various hospitals Nashik District Civil Hospital, SMBT Hospital and other medical facilities (in case of a need)," she said. Nashik Guardian Minister Dada Bhuse said CM Shinde may visit the spot to take stock of the situation. (PTI)

## VHP passes resolution against religious radicalism Seeks stringent anti-conversion law and UCC

**INDORE, JAN 1 /--/** The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) has passed a resolution against religious radicalism, which it said was responsible for terror attacks across the world, and demanded a stringent law to ban illegal conversions and implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), its functionary said.

This resolution was passed and demands were made during the three-day meeting of the VHP's central board of trustees and the governing council that concluded here on Sunday. "An important resolution on 'Religious Dogmatism Its Ill-effects and Solution' was passed in the meeting," VHP working president advocate Alok Kumar told reporters here. "The resolution made it clear that the declarations by some traditions that 'Only my religion is right, others have to accept and if they don't, then I have the divine command to eliminate them' are unacceptable to humanity. Those who insist on such heavenly commands to destroy have actually destroyed many ancient civilisations of the world," he said. The resolution passed during the meeting said, "Unfortunately, despite the toxic experiences of many centuries, religious radicalism and dogmatism of the desert traditions remain a challenge for the whole world even today.

These radicals are also responsible for the terrorist attacks happening here and there in the world every day..." "The series of inhuman atrocities on non-Muslim women through 'Love Jihad' and also the Jihad activism of the 'Sar tan se juda gang' (beheading gang) are the ghastly faces of this religious radicalism....," a VHP statement said.

Kumar said a comprehensive policy has to be framed at the global level to deal with the toxic effects of religious dogmatism. "This narrow-mindedness and exclusivism has to be neutralised at the intellectual, social and political levels. Violence, looting, rape and murders are used as weapons by a large section of Islam in the

name of Jihad. Now this will not work," he added. "We will not allow any part of Bharat to become Dar-ul-Islam. VHP, Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini along with revered saints and thinkers of the society have been fighting it steadfastly. We will speed up this work," he said. A large section of Christian missionaries is engaged in the agenda of engineering social enmity, fostering terror, and converting people through the tactics of force, fraud and allurements. It was also urged in the resolution that religious radicalism would prove to be a suicidal path for the Christian and the Muslim communities instead of their development, the VHP statement said. They should replace their radical leadership by sensible and rational leadership who stand for development and harmonious co-existence, it added.

VHP's board of trustees appealed to all sections of the society not to patronise such anti-national tendencies, not to destroy the future for the sake of immediate gains. It asked people to play their role in dispiriting religious dogmatist and separatist leadership and cheering open-minded leadership that takes the society towards harmony and development, the statement said. It also appealed to the central and the state governments to control the madrassas and missionary schools that teach exclusivism, extremism and separatism and make arrangements for development and harmony-oriented education, it said. The central government should enact stringent laws to prevent illegal conversions and religious dogmatism. Along with this, a demand was also made to pass and implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the entire country, it added. Hindu society has long been a victim of religious dogmatism of the desert traditions, but it has proved formidable to those challenges, it said, adding, "VHP will organise a mass awareness campaign in this regard to create eternal vigilance and expose the conspiracies of the dogmatic leadership." (PTI)

## Nudge from wife prompts UP Cong leader to carry on in Bharat Jodo Yatra despite suffering muscle tear

**LUCKNOW, JAN 1 /--/** Uttar Pradesh Congress leader Shahnawaz Mangal Azmi had thought about dropping out of the Bharat Jodo Yatra after suffering a muscle tear in the first week itself, but a phone call to his wife changed his course. "I called my wife for her opinion, knowing well that she will be sympathetic to my situation. But her response was blunt, Do not return home until the yatra is over.' Though it came as a shock to me initially, her response strengthened my resolve to carry on despite difficulties," Azmi told PTI. And what was more intriguing, Azmi said, was that his wife had initially opposed the idea of him participating in the Bharat Jodo Yatra, citing the impact his absence will have on his business and education of their children. "She even cried to stop me from joining the yatra. Finally, I

was able to convince her though," he said. The Congress leader from Lucknow is one of the Bharat Yatris' who will walk the entire distance of the Kanyakumari-to-Kashmir yatra. There are 16 other Bharat Yatris' from Uttar Pradesh. The Bharat Jodo Yatra, led by Rahul Gandhi, is currently on winter break and will resume on January 3. The foot march began in Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu on September 7, has so far traversed more than 2,800 km through 10 states and will conclude in Kashmir this month. The yatra will enter Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad on January 3 afternoon and make a night halt in Mavikala village in Baghpat. It will pass through Shamli in Uttar Pradesh on January 4 and enter Haryana through Sanauli in Panipat in the evening of January 5.

Narrating his experience, Azmi said after he suffered a muscle tear, his speed slowed. "I would trail 3-4 km behind the main yatra, but would join other yatris by evening. Many local people would extend me help as I was walking with an injured leg with a temporary bandage," he said. Azmi, a secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee, said he also faced problem with food in the southern states as they primarily use coconut oil. However, it improved once the yatra entered Telangana, he adds. He described his experience as a "new discovery of India". "Earlier, I used to think that I have travelled across India by visiting Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Hyderabad. But, after undertaking the yatra, I realised that our country is literally equivalent to the world," he said. (PTI)



# Tie'em up in the trivial

**BHOPINDER SINGH**

India's noisy politics is caught in the throes of 'manufactured outrage'. This does not add to the vibrancy of the "world's largest democracy" or to the civilisational land of the "argumentative Indian", but towards deflection and stunting of vital debate and questioning.

A shrill battle to assume the moral high ground by diminishing the opposition or contrarian expression with false righteousness or by ascribing malintent is afoot. Besides being beholden to, or wary of repercussions from, the powers-that-be, most media platforms have become willing partners in dialling up the volume on the trivial and the inconsequential to fan manufactured outrage. That doing so bumps up TRP ratings also helps. The noisier and nastier the accusations of being 'anti-Indian' against anyone dissenting, the better.

Instead of discussing issues like Chinese

expansionism, agrarian distress, unemployment, inflation, the return of black money and economic fugitives from abroad, etc., the headlines are swamped with the colour of a dress of an actor, some 'cultural' issue with an advertisement, or on the semantical inelegance of the word 'pitai'. The substantive is readily sacrificed for the peripheral, and the casualty is always that which is essential. In dire socio-economic and deeply polarised times like these, it is pathetic to get caught up in manufactured outrage even if there is occasionally an element of inelegance in an expression used by someone.

With 'IT Cells' and troll factories massaging deliberate narratives with even more falsehood and innuendo on social media, manufactured outrage acquires an emotional wave that can obfuscate critical debate and questioning.

Goebbelsian propaganda has been elevated to a fine art that is

sanctioned and sanctified by the highest offices with a combination of repetition, telling silences, dog-whistling, mealy-mouthed justifications, and above all, by not calling out or punishing the person who is pretending to be outraged.

The formula is simple. Cherry-pick a word or a statement that has either not been heard or found to be objectionable hitherto; creatively attach vile suppositions to give it dark intent; and scratch that manufactured 'objectionable' itch ad nauseum till it acquires widespread resonance and reaction. The favourite corners to box an argument into manufactured outrage are the supposed affronts to nationalism, majoritarian pride, and the imperfect past. The decibel levels, gravity of accusations, and the intensity of faux outrage deployed are sure indicators of the desperation to suppress a far more important line of questioning.

In such a toxic admixture, the conflation of religion, partisan



ideology, 'culturality' toward any ascribed 'outrage' is par for the course. This normalises a frighteningly simplistic binary that diminishes the lofty spirit of the Indian Constitution, which celebrates liberty, secularism, diversity (even of opinions), and the dignity of each Indian citizen, irrespective of their religion, race, ethnicity, or partisan preference.

While the dispensation questions the 'perception-based indices' of three globally renowned and independent watchdog agencies, i.e., Freedom in the World Index, EIU Democracy Index, and

Varieties of Democracy Index—it is known that the rise of 'manufactured outrage' in recent times has had an empirically proven positive correlation to the consistent slide in all indices of the quality of democracy in India. Obviously, no such aspersion is cast if any agency gives a positive indication, e.g., improvement in the parameters of 'ease of doing business.'

Outrage has also to be selectively curated and deployed. Those supporting the agenda of a certain partisan persuasion are afforded immediate legitimacy and credibility, whereas those who dissent or expose a negative situation must be subjected to manufactured outrage over their 'vested interest'!

Electoral campaigns and parliamentary sessions are particularly susceptible to manufactured outrage. Campaigns need a combination of fear-mongering and empathy-building toward an individual or community by simply blowing things

out-of-proportion; parliamentary sessions need distractions to waste the time allotted on vacuous emotions and avoid discussions on the substantial, as also to rush bills through the din.

It is not just the unhinged career politicians who partake in this 'outrage', it even afflicts those from educated and accomplished backgrounds, from whom a more professional, rationale and less theatrical reaction is expected.

Earlier, when an MP from an opposition party queried whether the quality of Indian soil was fit to support bullet trains, the then Railway Minister (a distinguished bureaucrat earlier) reacted with make-believe incredulity and animated gesticulation, thumping on the table repeatedly before slamming, "those who speak of Maa-Maati-Manush (Mother, Motherland and People) are disrespecting the mother (soil) and the motherland", and as is the

wont these days, added that it was tantamount to "questioning the capabilities of Indian scientists".

All this instead of simply answering the legitimate question raised by the MP over the strength of the soil in scientific terms to be able to support the infrastructure for a bullet train! Why bother when manufactured outrage and a melodramatic performance will help the government carry the day through! That even the ostensibly accomplished professionals in the cabinet need to resort to such stazy exaggerations is indicative of the requirements of the day.

Because 'manufactured outrage' requires a structured approach of a 'content factory' to develop the same, the preponderance of 'manufactured outrage' comes usually from one side of the argument, given the compromised nature of the mass media ecosystem.

comes increasingly under one partisan persuasion, more instances of manufactured outrage will tend to occur to deny the last vestiges of opposition or contrarian expressions.

Peter Strzok in his book Compromised notes, "A relentless distortion of reality numbs a country's populace to outrage and weakens its ability to discern truth from fiction". He goes on to add how authoritarianism manifests: "Still, another was by undermining dissent, questioning the validity of opposition, and refusing to honour public will, up to and including threatening or preventing the peaceful transfer of power".

While Peter's doomsday allusion was toward a mature democracy like the US, imagine the threat to a "flawed democracy" like India, a status to which it has slid recently.

*(The writer is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views are his personal)*

## NGO (WITHYOU) celebrates New Year with inmates of old age, divyangs&orphans



PORT BLAIR, JAN 1/NGO (WITH YOU) on Sunday celebrated New Year with inmates of old age, divyangs and orphans at Ferrargunj Home by cutting cakes with the inmates. They donated 35 numbers of track pants to the old aged people at home. They also distributed sweets and fruits to all the inmates and

staff. Then the inmates had lunch with the members of NGO and the same was arranged by WITH YOU. Ms V. K. Mariyambibi, President WITH YOU expressed gratitude to SmtiRashmiGoenka for helping the needy by donating clothes to them. They spent a quality time with the inmates.

## Two isles' boys shine in Chess sports



PORT BLAIR, JAN 1/--/ It is a proud moment for the Islanders as M A Dinakar, a student of Class VIII Kamaraj English Medium School, Port Blair and Yuvan



Singh, a class VII student of Carmel Sr. Sec. School, Port Blair have opened their International rating as per the latest FIDE Rating list published on

31stDecember 2022 by World Chess Federation (FIDE) M A Dinakar and Yuvan Singh, recently participated in the 35th National Under-13 Chess Championship 2022 held at Vanarapet, Pondicherry from 11th December 2022 to 18th Dec.2022 and performed reasonably well which led them to open the International Rating. Altogether 8 young chess players, including R KashthuriBhai have successfully opened their International Rating in the year 2022 which is a blessing sign for the game of chess in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

## Bhopal gas tragedy: 10 women survivors end their fast after getting assurances from govt

BHOPAL, JAN 1 /--/ Ten women survivors of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy called off their hunger strike here on Saturday after getting positive response from both the Madhya Pradesh and Union governments, their leaders said.

They had launched the hunger strike at Neelam Park here on Friday demanding additional compensation for the victims of the 1984 disaster. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy took place on the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984 when poisonous methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, leaving several thousand people

dead and lakhs injured. Five organizations which are fighting for the cause of the Gas Tragedy victims said in a statement that the Madhya Pradesh Minister of Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief & Rehabilitation expressed agreement with the facts and figures presented by them and promised to finalise details in a meeting on January 4. Earlier, the Union government had assured that all the documents presented by them would be included in the papers to be presented before the Supreme Court bench hearing a curative petition for additional compensation, they said. The ten women agitators broke their 29-hour-long fast

with fruit juice offered by officials of the state government and district administration. The agitators were from the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh, Bhopal Gas Peedit Nirashrit Pensionbhogee Sangharsh Morcha, Bhopal Group for Information & Action, Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha and Children Against Dow Carbide. "Despite all odds and the many disappointments of the last 38 years, we hope this New Year has begun with hope for the survivors of the World's worst industrial disaster, the statement added. (PTI)

## UPATS arrests one on suspicion of radicalising youths

LUCKNOW, JAN 1 /--/ The Uttar Pradesh ATS has arrested one person suspected of radicalising youths for terror activities, it said in a statement on Saturday.

The Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) of Uttar Pradesh Police arrested Saharanpur native Azharuddin on December 30. The arrest was based on the disclosure of Lukmaan, who was nabbed earlier for allegedly having links with the al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent and the Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, it said. Azharuddin allegedly showed "jehadi videos and literature" to youths in a bid to radicalise them and was working actively to make them join with the ideology of the terror organisations. On September 26, the ATS arrested Lukmaan and slapped him with a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). It had earlier arrested Md Mudassir and 10 others in the case. During the interrogation of Haridwar-native Mudassir, it emerged that Azharuddin had a suspicious background in the case and he was brought in for questioning. He was subsequently arrested on December 30, the ATS said. "The accused Azharuddin, Bangladeshi accused persons and active criminals of AQIS (al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent) and JMB (Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh), while joining hands with Mudassir, Abu Talha, Ahsan and others, used to propagate jehadi ideology..." the ATS said in the statement. (PTI)

## Awareness camp on fish health disease identification

PORT BLAIR, JAN 1/--/A series of awareness camps and dissemination of information regarding Fish Health Disease Identification, Management and precautionary measures were held in Billiground and VS Pally Nagar, Diglipur under North and Middle Andaman. The programme was jointly organized by the Department of Fisheries, A&N Administration and Central Islands Agricultural Research Institute, Port Blair.

In the programme held at Billiground on Dec.26, more than 50 fish farmers and villagers were imparted information on the subject. Dr. K.



Saravanan, Scientist, Division of Fisheries Science, ICAR-CIARI was the resource person of the programme along with Shri Sarath Menon, Sub-Inspector of Fisheries, Fisheries Sub-Station Billiground,

Similar camp was held at VS Pally Nagar, Diglipur on Dec.28 in which more than 30 fish farmers attended the programme. The main objective of the programme was to educate fish farmers on

various disease identification and their prophylactic measures. The programme was coordinated by Shri Tapan Kumar Biswas, Asst. Director of Fisheries, N&M Andaman.

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*Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right*  
**Isaac Asimov**

## EC plans remote voting for migrant voters

The Election Commission has developed a remote electronic voting machine (EVM) that will aid in letting domestic migrants - people who have moved to different cities within India - vote during their local elections. The 2016-17 Economic Survey tracked annual interstate travel to estimate 6 crore migrant workers between 2001 and 2011. As per Census 2011, 45.36 crore or 37% of population are migrants. Many are unable to vote because they are unable to travel back to their home constituencies on the day of polling. The EC has invited political parties for a demonstration of the machine on January 16 to elicit their views on the legal, administrative and technical challenges in implementing it. But, the EC must convince political parties to support this game-changing initiative as its decision to test the possibility of remote voting for migrant workers will deepen democracy. It comes on the back of EC's acknowledgement of migration-based disenfranchisement. The commission said that it has developed a prototype for a Multi-Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM) that can handle multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth. The RVMs are "stand alone, non-networked systems," effectively providing the voter the same experience as currently used EVMs. They will be set up in remote locations outside the state under similar conditions as current polling booths. According to EC's concept note for RVMs, "voters who are absent from their home locations on the day of polling, even if they wish to vote, are unable to travel to vote due to various reasons." This means that there is a large chunk of the population which is denied its franchise due to exigencies of work or lack of resources to travel. This goes directly against the EC's "No voter left behind" goal. The VVPAT system is expected to work along the same lines with the new technology.

The system is fraught with issues, some of which the EC has itself acknowledged. First, migrants are not a uniform and defined class, with fluid identities, locations and situations. In context of the transience of migration in India, the problem for the EC is to create an inclusive definition of migrants which at the same time does not open the system up to misuse. Are all migrant voters eligible? What is the duration that a migrant has to stay outside home to qualify? The EC's statement says that resolving this issue will "require wider consultations with various legal and political stakeholders." Second, in the context of increasing questions being asked about technology-based voting, how do RVMs enter the conversation? As various countries reject EVMs for paper-based ballots, does this move have the potential to raise further questions on the sanctity of the electoral process itself? While the EC claims that RVMs are as secure as currently used EVMs, more technological components are bound to raise further questions. Third, how does remote voting affect elections and campaigning? In a playing field which is far from level, remote voting can theoretically provide an added edge to bigger parties and richer candidates who can campaign across the constituency and beyond.

# China's new Covid-19 outbreak threatens rest of world

## REFLEX ACTION

Dr. Gyan Pathak

already issued alerts, advisories, and instructions to all States and UTs. Centre's genome sequencing notice to states and UTs has already been served. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has said that such an exercise will enable timely detection of newer variants, if any, circulating in the country and will facilitate undertaking of requisite public health measures.

India by far, with its focus on the five-fold strategy of test-track-treat-vaccination and adherence to Covid appropriate behaviour, have been able to restrict transmission of coronavirus, which is now about 1200 cases weekly. The country has reported 129 fresh cases of infection with one death in the last 24 hours. There have been considerable relaxations in place including wearing of masks have become not mandatory. Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has even held a high level meeting today with top officials and experts to chalk out the strategy to prevent another spike in COVID-19 infection. Everybody in the meeting were seen wearing masks, though it is not mandatory as per the government's protocol. The six points have been identified which also included strategy for blocking incoming cases at the international and domestic airports and other entry points in the country; laying down guidelines for passengers travelling from abroad, and consultation with experts on new variants. The Chairman of the COVID-19 working group Dr N K Arora has said, "It is an important thing that we keep a close vigil on the Chinese situation. But I would say that there is nothing to be panicked about. There is no need for getting too much worried. They system is very vigilant, we need to be very vigilant."

In the meantime, Union Health Minister has written a letter to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi asking him to

ensure COVID rules are followed in his Bharat Jodo Yatra, or he should defer further legs of the Yatra "in the interest of the nation." However, it's unfortunate, that the concern for "national interest" too slow in more important strategies for tackling the threat. For example, only a network of little over 50 laboratories across the country has been sequencing under INSACOG. The latest advisories to states and UTs for increasing sequencing have not come with the increase of laboratories. Secondly, only a select samples are being sent for sequencing. International passengers are being randomly tested and the detection of positive cases among them are about 2 per cent. Samples are gathered from designated sentinel sites, and cluster or outbreak in the community. These laboratories are also testing viral RNA in the sewage system. Obviously, we need to sharply increase the number of laboratories now.

As for the increased surveillance, there has been no change in the protocol for international arrivals as of now. India is still under the older protocol, which has done away with the need for either a negative RT-PCR or complete vaccination certificate last month. Such a slow decision cannot tackle the China like fast spread of the virus, since there is nothing in place to prevent entry of new infection in the country, despite a fortnight of nightmare in neighbouring China. Indians and India should take note of the fact that the present surge in infection is linked to Omicron sub-variant BF.7, which is a nomenclature assigned to BA.5.2.1.7, that has already been detected by INSACOG network, as people in know of the matter has reportedly said, but yet to be officially confirmed. Former AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria has said that nearly three years into the pandemic we are in a situation where there has been high natural infection, and the coverage of vaccines is also high. India might not see a similar situation as China, he said.

Let it be so, however, India cannot afford any laxity in preparedness, and must not put off guard against the disease. COVID appropriate behaviour must be put again in place, before we fall into the new nightmare which could prove catastrophic. (IPA)



Birds enjoy the winter afternoon warmth of the Sun in central Kolkata on Sunday--Arijit Ganguly

## Middle Eastern sports has arrived on the global arena

This decade and beyond could be the era of Middle Eastern sports. It may not have sunk in yet, but the Qatar World Cup was the kick-off rather than the finale. Qatar and Saudi Arabia will be this decade's focal points of Asian sports. By 2030, Egypt and Turkey could become part of the global sports-hosting mix. That doesn't mean that Arab and Berber North Africa will be sidelined. On the contrary, barely two months after emerging as a World Cup superstar, Morocco will host the FIFA Club World Cup in February.

Qatar will host the Asian Cup a bit later in 2023. Saudi Arabia is certain to host the 2027 Cup. Doha is back in the picture as home to the 2030 Asian Games; in 2034, it's Riyadh's turn. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are considered FIFA favourites for the 2030 World Cup should they decide to bid for the tournament together with Greece. A Moroccan pitch for the 2030 World Cup is also within the realm of possibilities. In between, somewhat incongruously, Saudi Arabia, better known as a desert kingdom, will host the 2029 Asian Winter Games in its futuristic yet-to-be-completed \$500 billion city of Neom on the Red Sea. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is also bidding for the rights to the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup. Further afar, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are separately considering bidding for the 2036 Olympics but could join forces. Egypt and Turkey are mulling their separate candidacies.

The flurry of bids and tournaments to be hosted in the Middle East and the by and large celebratory aftermath of the Qatar World Cup proves that the criticism of the Gulf state did little to make Qatar or other regional autocracies rethink the risk of

exposing themselves. At the end of the day, the World Cup achieved what the Qataris wanted. That is likely food for thought for activists for whom the tournaments constitute a golden opportunity to justifiably pursue the campaign for worker and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa, provided they learn from mistakes made with Qatar. That is not to distract from the gains achieved by activists' pressure for migrant workers and the laudable effort of human rights groups and others that did not allow themselves to be sucked into culture wars. That is true, even if they failed to distance themselves for much of the past 12 years from critics who seemed more driven by prejudice and bigotry than genuine concern for the plight of the underdog.

Eager to be the regional hub for sports and everything else from business to entertainment and innovation, Saudi Arabia attempted in 2018 to create a South West Asian Football Federation. The kingdom, as well as AFC members Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, initially signed up for the federation. However, the initiative collapsed within months. Riding on the wave of the Qatar World Cup's success, a potential new move to create an Arab soccer federation would

potentially see 12 Middle Eastern associations depart the 47-member AFC and leave the seven North African associations that fall under the 54-member the Confederation of African Football (CAF) little choice but to join their Arab brethren. A renewed attempt to create a South West Asian body would leave North Africans with the option to remain in CAF but potentially deprive the AFC of an additional seven associations. It didn't help that Qatar secured the rights to the 2023 Asian Cup after China had to back away from hosting the tournament because of its zero-tolerance Covid-19 policy. The Korean Football Association (KFA) responded positively to an AFC inquiry on whether it would want to replace China but suggested that Qatar made a better financial offer.

"Qatar has promised huge financial support, such as the participation of additional sponsors by its own companies in the AFC, which is currently suffering from a loss due to COVID-19, a large-scale broadcasting rights contract with its own broadcasting company, and support for operating expenses of the Asian Cup," the South Korean association said in a statement in October. The KFA said the Qatari manoeuvre was part of an "unconventional offensive and support of Middle Eastern countries trying to take the lead in Asian football."

The Koreans further asserted that the prospect of Saudi financial support for the AFC had secured the kingdom hosting the 2027 Asian Cup. Saudi Arabia is the only candidate after India, which the AFC also shortlisted, withdrew its bid. Arab influence in Asian and African soccer governance has long been undeniable. The AFC is headquartered in Egypt, traditionally one of African football's best performers at the national and club level. Potentially expanding Egypt's influence, Egyptian-born billionaire Mohamed Mansour, the British Conservative Party's incoming treasurer, last week disclosed plans to buy an English soccer club. Mansour already has a majority stake in the top-tier Danish club FC Nordsjaelland and intends to invest in the US football market.

Similarly, except for two years, Arabs have presided over the AFC for the past two decades. First, it was Qatari national Mohammed bin Hamam from 2002 until 2011 when he was ousted as part of the power struggles and corruption scandals that rocked global soccer governance. The AFC's current president, Salman Ebrahim Al-Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's ruling family, has been in office since 2013 and is set to be elected unopposed in February for a fourth term. Al-Khalifa manages the group primarily from Bahrain, even though the AFC is headquartered in Kuala Lumpur.

Finally, Qatar showcased its influence in global soccer when it's two most famous employees, Messi and Kylian Mbappé, who both play for a Qatar-owned Paris Saint Germaine, squared off in Sunday's France Argentina final of the Gulf state's World Cup. (IPA)

| Conventional Crossword |    |    |  |    |    |    |    |
|------------------------|----|----|--|----|----|----|----|
| 1                      | 2  | 3  |  |    | 4  | 5  | 6  |
|                        |    |    |  |    |    |    |    |
| 9                      |    |    |  | 10 |    | 11 |    |
| 12                     |    |    |  |    |    | 13 |    |
|                        |    |    |  |    |    | 14 |    |
|                        |    |    |  |    |    |    |    |
|                        | 15 | 16 |  | 17 |    |    |    |
| 18                     |    |    |  |    |    | 20 |    |
| 21                     | 22 | 23 |  |    |    |    | 24 |
| 25                     |    |    |  |    | 26 |    | 27 |
| 28                     |    |    |  |    |    | 29 |    |
| 30                     |    |    |  |    |    | 31 |    |

| ACROSS |                    |    |                       | DOWN |                         |    |                |
|--------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|------|-------------------------|----|----------------|
| 1      | Naught             | 4  | Military trainee      | 1    | Make humming sound      | 2  | Period of time |
| 9      | Metal-bearing rock | 11 | Part of a church      | 3    | Reposes                 | 5  | Fisher         |
| 12     | Fertile spot       | 13 | Small secluded valley | 6    | Small open river valley | 7  | Level          |
| 14     | Fasting period     | 15 | Garden tool           | 8    | Camping equipment       | 10 | Customary      |
| 19     | Watchful           | 21 | German river          | 16   | Separated               | 17 | Thick          |
| 25     | Deeply engrossed   | 26 | Venomous ill will     | 18   | Harbour towns           | 20 | Hackneyed      |
| 28     | Woody plant        | 29 | Hill                  | 22   | Be bold enough          | 23 | Duelling sword |
| 30     | Out of sorts       | 31 | Encounter             | 24   | Saucy                   | 27 | Digit          |

| SUDOKU:3744 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|             | 1 |   |   | 7 |   | 5 |   |   |
|             |   |   | 5 |   |   |   | 6 | 8 |
| 9           | 5 |   |   |   |   |   | 3 |   |
| 8           |   | 2 |   |   | 4 |   |   | 9 |
|             |   | 1 |   |   |   | 7 |   |   |
| 3           |   |   | 2 |   |   | 4 |   | 5 |
|             | 9 |   |   |   |   |   | 5 | 1 |
| 1           | 3 |   |   |   | 8 |   |   |   |
|             |   | 6 |   | 9 |   |   | 4 |   |

| Yesterday's Solution 3743 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8                         | 7 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| 5                         | 9 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 3 |
| 3                         | 2 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 5 |
| 7                         | 4 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 1 |
| 1                         | 6 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 7 |
| 9                         | 3 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 8 |
| 6                         | 5 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 4 |
| 4                         | 1 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 6 |
| 2                         | 8 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 9 |

| Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1752 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M                                    | O | O | N |   | P | A | R | T |
| A                                    |   | N |   |   |   | P | E | A |
| P                                    | L | U | G |   | H | E | N | C |
| S                                    |   | S | A | G | E |   | A | T |
|                                      |   |   | P | E | A | R | L | K |
| D                                    |   | N | E | R | V | E |   |   |
| A                                    | D | O |   | M | E | E | K | F |
| R                                    | O | V | E | S |   | K | I | T |
| E                                    | V | E | R |   |   | N |   | T |
| D                                    | E | L | A | Y |   | O | G | E |

### DISCLAIMER

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



## Health clinic for sex workers, their families opened in Delhi's G B Road

**NEW DELHI, JAN 1 /--/** A first-ever health clinic for sex workers and their families has been opened in Delhi's red-light area, G B Road, with facilities for routine check-ups and treatment.

The clinic was inaugurated on Sunday. It has been started in a part of a non-functional school by some civil society groups. Shalini (name changed), a sex worker, said she hopes the facility will help her fight the stigma that she faces in visiting clinics in other parts of the city. "Even doctors start behaving differently when they learn we are sex workers and this clinic can help change that as it is meant just for people like us," she told PTI. NGO Sewa Bharti started this clinic in collaboration with Utkarsh Initiative to provide medical facilities to sex workers and their families. This clinic will have seven doctors. "We have started this initiative on the first day of the year to start this year with the right initiative catering to the secluded and exploited strata of the society," said Sushil Gupta, General Secretary of Sewa Bharti Delhi Province.

He said this is the first such clinic in the area and aims to solve the health issues faced by the sex workers while maintaining their dignity and respect. G B Road, or Garstin Bastion Road, is a road running from Ajmeri Gate to Lahori Gate in Delhi. It is a red-light district which has many brothels and there are estimated to be over 1,000 sex workers. (PTI)

## J&K: Mughal road likely to be closed due to heavy snowfall

**JAMMU, JAN 1 /--/** The Mughal road, connecting Poonch and Rajouri districts in the Jammu region with south Kashmir's Shopian district, is likely to be closed in winter owing to recent heavy snowfall, officials said on Sunday.

Traffic movement on the road was suspended on Thursday after over three feet of snow accumulation was reported from Pir Ki Gali and its adjoining areas, the officials said.

"The possibility of resuming traffic on the Mughal road after the recent heavy snowfall looks bleak as more snow is expected in the coming days," Assistant Engineer, Mechanical Engineering Department, Tariq Khan, told PTI. "We are waiting for the official communication to finally announce the closure of

the road for the winter," the official said. The road usually remains closed during peak winter every year in view of heavy snowfall in the upper reaches of the Pir Panjal mountain range. Khan said the department was able to keep the road open despite heavy snowfall on three occasions between November and December last year.

Deputy Superintendent of Police, Traffic Range Rajouri-Poonch, Aftab Shah, said vehicular movement on Mughal road is only possible up to the Poshana army camp on the road's Poonch side.

"There was heavy snowfall in Pir Ki Gali mountainous pass, prompting closure of the road as weather conditions did not allow road clearance operation," he said. (PTI)

## Bhopal gas tragedy: 10 women survivors end their fast after getting assurances from govt

**BHOPAL, JAN 1 /--/** Ten women survivors of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy called off their hunger strike here on Saturday after getting positive response from both the Madhya Pradesh and Union governments, their leaders said.

They had launched the hunger strike at Neelam Park here on Friday demanding additional compensation for the victims of the 1984 disaster. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy took place on the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984 when poisonous methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, leaving several thousand people dead and lakhs injured. Five organizations which are fighting for the cause of the Gas Tragedy victims said in a statement that the Madhya Pradesh Minister of Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief & Rehabilitation expressed agreement with the facts and figures presented by them and promised to finalise details in a meeting on January 4.

Earlier, the Union government had assured that all the documents presented by them would be included in the papers to be presented before the Supreme Court bench hearing a curative petition for additional compensation, they said. The ten women agitators broke their 29-hour-long fast with fruit juice offered by officials of the state government and district administration. The agitators were from the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh, Bhopal Gas Peedit Nirashrit Pensionbhogee Sangharsh Morcha, Bhopal Group for Information & Action, Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha and Children Against Dow Carbide. "Despite all odds and the many disappointments of the last 38 years, we hope this New Year has begun with hope for the survivors of the World's worst industrial disaster, the statement added. (PTI)

## Maha: Politicians, several others visit Koregaon-Bhima for annual event Chandrakant Patil gives it a miss

**PUNE, JAN 1 /--/** Hundreds of people including political leaders visited Jayastambh military monument in Maharashtra's Pune district on Sunday to mark the 205th anniversary of the Koregaon-Bhima battle amid heavy security deployed at the venue in view of violence near it on January 1, 2018. Pune Guardian Minister Chandrakant Patil, however, did not visit the memorial to avoid any untoward incident, citing an ink attack threat to him if he went to there. Last month, ink was thrown at Patil during an event in Pimpri town of Pune district in an apparent protest against his controversial remark about Dr B R Ambedkar and social reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. As per the Dalit narrative, British forces that fought the Peshwas at Koregaon Bhima on January 1, 1818, comprised largely of soldiers from the Dalit Mahar community, who waged a war for freedom from 'casteism' of the Peshwas. Every year on this day, a large number of people, mainly from the Dalit community, visit the Jayastambh (victory pillar) which was erected by the British in memory of the soldiers who fought against the Peshwas in the battle of Koregaon Bhima. Violence had broken out near Koregaon Bhima village during the 200th commemoration of the historical battle on January 1, 2018 in which one person was killed and many others injured. According to police, "provocative" speeches made at the Elgar Parishad conclave held in Pune city a day before had triggered the violence. On Sunday, a large number of people gathered at the victory pillar, decorated with flowers and lights, located in Perne village on Pune-Ahmednagar Road amid heavy police security. (PTI)



President Droupadi Murmu receives New Year greetings from students of various schools at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi

## Migrants unaware of rights falling prey to trafficking; coordinated effort needed for prevention, protection and prosecution: Expert

**AHMEDABAD, JAN 1 /--/** Migrants not aware of their rights have been falling prey to trafficking and exploitation, and coordination among stakeholders is vital to address the issue holistically, an expert on the subject said in light of cases of suspected human trafficking recently reported from Gujarat.

It will be appropriate to have a separate investigation agency for dealing with human trafficking offences, former Indian Police Service Officer P M Nair, who was the project director of a study conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) on human trafficking in vulnerable districts of India, told PTI. Initiatives like setting up anti-human trafficking clubs in colleges and at the panchayat level to prevent such offences at the grassroot level are helpful, said Nair, who is also associated with the National Resource Centre on Human Trafficking at the Rashtriya Raksha University in Gujarat's capital Gandhinagar.

The TISS study, published in 2019, explored the aspect of human trafficking in the country from the perspective of migration, how migration can lead to trafficking, or rather how trafficking of people takes place under the garb of migration, he said.

It also highlighted how the use of technology made trafficking "a faceless and spaceless crime" and revealed every state in the country was impacted by human trafficking. What

separates migration from trafficking is the way restrictions are put on the basic rights of the trafficked person through curtailment of communication and freedom of movement, the study observed. It also noted the increasing use of social networking applications like WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Hike, JustDial, Paytm and Facebook to trap victims for sex trafficking.

The Gujarat Police's Anti-Human Trafficking Cell recently launched an investigation into the reported death of a man hailing from Gandhinagar following his unsuccessful attempt to cross the US-Mexico border wall, also referred to as the 'Trump Wall'. The state police are also probing the suspected role of a man in a case of human trafficking of a family of four from Gandhinagar district's Dingucha village who froze to death in January last year while trying to illegally cross over to the United States from Canada. Nair said while the response system against human trafficking has improved, coordination among the government departments and among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field remains uneven. "Unless we have all the stakeholders coming together, working together and in coordination, this issue of human trafficking cannot be addressed holistically. Prevention, protection and prosecution -- all will have to come together," said Nair, a former chair professor at TISS who also served the National Human Rights

Commission (NHRC) as its nodal officer on anti-human trafficking.

The TISS study showed while there is nothing wrong with migration, "there are many migrants whose rights are being exploited and they are being deprived because they don't know their rights or how to enforce them," he said. The study also revealed that every state in the country was impacted by human trafficking. "It may be a source state, transit state or a destination state. The research also shows that states cannot be classified in watertight compartments because they could be all three, and there are many such states in India," Nair said. While the Census 2011 identified 37 per cent of the population as migrants, the TISS study estimated it to be nearly 13 per cent.

"An emerging form of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation was identified as cyber-sex trafficking where cyberspace and social media are being accessed to treat female bodies as sources of voyeuristic and commercial gains," the study said. Nair said coordination among government departments and among NGOs working in the field required improvement to address the issue holistically. "Some NGOs are good for rescue, some for counselling, some for rehabilitation and some for networking.

If all NGOs come and work together, the strength of each NGO can be put together for a common cause, but even that is not happening because of the

paucity of vision," he said.

Nair also said there was a need for a specialised investigation agency against human trafficking. "Considering the requirements of specialisation, it will be appropriate to have a separate probe agency for dealing with human trafficking crimes. Setting up a specialised vertical in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will also fulfil the requirement," he said. The TISS study called for a comprehensive plan of action by different government ministries -- home, railways, women and child development, labour and employment, etc. -- and a joint task force "to understand the modus operandi and routes used to traffic women migrating for work and to develop a comprehensive strategy for action." "Since trafficking is becoming a faceless and spaceless crime, the masterminds' of these networks often have no contact with lower rung agents in the network hierarchy. Instructions are communicated through phone or the internet. Only the effective use of technology can combat trafficking, which is facilitated by technology," it said. Initiatives like setting up anti-human trafficking clubs in colleges and at the panchayat level to prevent such offences at the grassroot level are helpful, Nair said. There are more than 500 colleges in the country with such clubs, and "are making a tremendous impact," he added. (PTI)

## UP ATS arrests 1 on suspicion of radicalising youths

**LUCKNOW, JAN 1 /--/** The Uttar Pradesh ATS has arrested one person suspected of radicalising youths for terror activities, it said in a statement on Saturday.

The Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) of Uttar Pradesh Police arrested Saharanpur native Azharuddin on December 30. The arrest was based on the disclosure of Lukmaan, who was nabbed earlier for allegedly having links with the al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent and the Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, it said. Azharuddin allegedly showed "Jehadi videos and literature" to youths in a bid to radicalise them and was working actively to make them join with the ideology of the terror organisations. On September 26, the ATS arrested Lukmaan and slapped him with a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). It had earlier arrested Md Mudassir and 10 others in the case. During the interrogation of Haridwar-native Mudassir, it emerged that Azharuddin had a suspicious background in the case and he was brought in for questioning. He was subsequently arrested on December 30, the ATS said. "The accused Azharuddin, Bangladeshi accused persons and active criminals of AQIS (al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent) and JMB (Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh), while joining hands with Mudassir, Abu Talha, Ahsan and others, used to propagate jehadi ideology...", the ATS said in the statement. (PTI)

## Chandigarh's 'Birdman': Messiah for birds in distress

**CHANDIGARH, JAN 1 /--/** Prince Mehra had just entered his forties when, during a visit to Ferozepur in 2011, he found the carcasses of two pigeons that had died of electrocution disposed of in a roadside dustbin.

"I took out both the carcasses and buried them in a nearby pit," Mehra (52) said. Mortified by the incident, the Chandigarh native decided to do something for birds in distress following his return to the city. He modified his bicycle and started an ambulance service and, for the past 11 years, has been looking after injured birds -- earning the 'Birdman' sobriquet. Not only does he look after injured birds, he also disposes of the carcasses found on the roadside. "The incident also made me wonder that if dead birds are disposed of in a reckless manner, it is not good for the environment. It can also endanger both human and animal health," Mehra told PTI. He said his bicycle bird ambulance was equipped with all necessary medical aid. "I move around the city in my bird ambulance and wherever I find an injured bird, I attend to it at the spot or bring it home. If it is seriously injured, I bring the bird to the animal husbandry hospital here where I work. "For the birds that don't survive, I bury the carcasses by digging pits on the roadside where they are found. Birds also deserve a dignified burial," he said. Mehra also gets calls from people informing him about a

dead or an injured bird, he said. If a dead bird is not properly disposed of and left unattended, it can become a cause for spread of diseases, he said. "From 2011, I have buried 1,254 birds and treated 1,150," Mehra added. His widespread acclaim was evident after a nationalised bank gave him an e-bike, which he now uses to provide the ambulance service. His work has also been recognised by the Chandigarh administration, which has given him a state-level award, Mehra said. Mehra has been working for environment protection causes since 1990. "I was associated with a NGO. We used to promote cycling as it was good for the environment," Mehra, who earlier worked as a signboard painter, said. "I also write slogans on my cycle with an appeal to the people to save the environment. Doing all that gives me immense satisfaction," he added.

His family also supports him and his children sometimes accompany him to attend to an injured bird, Chandigarh's Birdman said. "My son is doing a diploma in architecture while my daughter studies in Class 11. Sometimes, they also accompany me on my missions. "I tell them and the common people also that we should treat birds and animals as a part of us. They are an important part of the ecosystem. We should take care of our environment," Mehra added. (PTI)

## Over 300 challan issued for drunk driving on New Year's Eve: Delhi Police

**NEW DELHI, JAN 1 /--/** Delhi Police issued over 300 challans for drunk driving in the national capital on New Year's Eve, an increase of over 12 times compared to the previous year, officials said on Sunday.

According to the official data shared by police, a total of 1,329 challans were issued for committing various traffic violations. Of the total, 318 people were fined for drunk driving, 175 for dangerous driving, 55 for driving on the wrong side, 47 for triple riding, 70 for minor driving, and 664 for driving without a helmet, while 53 vehicles were impounded on the spot, it said.

Traffic police deployed 114 teams, armed with breath analyzers, to check drunk driving on Saturday, they said.

Special pickets were also set up to check stunts on motorcycles,

over speeding and reckless driving in coordination with local police and PCR at major points in Connaught Place, Mehrauli, Saket, Nehru Place, Vasant Nagar, South-Extension, Rajouri Garden, Pitampura, Netaji Subhash Place, Laxmi Nagar, Mayur Vihar and so on, police said. In 2021, 25 people were fined for drunk driving, 19 in 2020 and 299 in 2019, the official data said.

While road accidents claimed two lives on New Year's Eve in 2019, three deaths were reported in 2020 and one in 2021. No deaths due to road accidents were reported on December 31, 2022. This was made possible due to the elaborate traffic arrangements laid out in the city to check the incidence of rash and negligent driving during New Year's Eve, it added. (PTI)

## New Year celebration: 156 people caught for drunk driving in Mumbai

**MUMBAI, JAN 1 /--/** Mumbai Police caught 156 people for drunk driving and 2,465 people for riding motorbikes without wearing helmet during the New Year celebrations in the city, an official said on Sunday.

A large number of police personnel were

deployed across the city for the safety of citizens during the celebration and a campaign was conducted from late Saturday night till the wee hours of Sunday to check people violating traffic norms. Traffic police had put up check points on various roads in the city to keep an

eye on those not following road rules, the official said. The city police caught 156 drunk drivers, while action was also taken against 66 people for rash driving, he said. The official said action was also taken against 2,465 people for riding motorbikes without wearing helmet and

challans were imposed on 274 people for triple riding on two-wheelers. The police also took action against 679 drivers for jumping traffic signals and fines were imposed on 3,087 vehicles after being found parked in no-parking areas, he said. (PTI)

## MP: Muslim man donates blood to save life of ailing Hindu baby in Chhatarpur

**CHHATARPUR, JAN 1 /--/** In a selfless act, a Muslim man donated blood to save the life of a 60-day-old baby boy suffering from anaemia in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district.

When he received a phone call about the baby on Saturday, Rafat Khan, 36, did not hesitate even for a second and raced his motorcycle to the district hospital. Khan was about to leave his house to offer

namaz when he received a call about Vikas Gupta who was in desperate need A positive blood. The baby suffered from anaemia, a condition caused due to deficiency of healthy red blood cells that carry adequate oxygen to body's tissues. "Without a second thought, I picked up my motorcycle and rushed to the district hospital to donate blood to the ailing child," Khan told PTI on Sunday. Khan said the

baby's father Jitendra, who is a resident of Manoria village, had contacted him after he failed to source blood and was cheated by a tout.

The tout allegedly took Rs 750 from Jitendra on the pretext of arranging for blood, he said. Talking to PTI, Jitendra said, "My son's condition has improved now after Khan donated blood.

He came like an angel and donated blood with a

smile when my child needed it desperately." Paediatrician Dr Mukesh Prajapati, who is in-charge of the special newborn care unit at the district hospital, said the baby's condition was stable after he received blood. Khan is not a first-time donor and has donated blood at least 13 times in the span of one year.

The noble act gave him joy and satisfaction, he said. (PTI)





Devotees gather at Dakshineswar temple on the occasion of Kalpataru Utsav —Photo : EOI

## PM Modi to address 108th Indian Science Congress on Tuesday

NEW DELHI, JAN 1/--/Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the 108th Indian Science Congress (ISC) on January 3 via video conferencing, his office said on Sunday. The PMO said the focal theme of this year's ISC is "Science and Technology for Sustainable Development with Women Empowerment." The Congress will see discussions on issues of sustainable development, women empowerment, and the role of science & technology in achieving these objectives. Participants are slated to discuss ways to increase the number of women in higher rungs of teaching, research, and industry, the PMO statement said. They will also deliberate on ways to increase women's number in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields, and their equal status in education, research opportunities, and economic participation. A special programme to showcase the contribution of women in science and technology will also be held with lectures by renowned women scientists. Several other programmes are also scheduled to be held. The event will also see a Children's Science Congress, organised to help stimulate scientific interest and temperament among children.

The Farmers' Science Congress will provide a platform to improve the bio-economy and attract young people to agriculture. The Tribal Science Congress will be a platform for the scientific display of indigenous ancient knowledge systems and practices, and will focus on the empowerment of tribal women, the PMO statement said. (PTT)

## Preparations on for Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' in UP

LUCKNOW/GHAZIABAD / BAGHPAT, JAN 1/--/Preparations are afoot for Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' in Uttar Pradesh, an event Congress leaders hope will galvanize the party's workers and make the masses aware of the "misrule" of the BJP government at the Centre. According to Uttar Pradesh Congress leaders, the march will enter the state on January 3 and cover a distance of 120 kilometres before crossing over to Haryana on January 5. AICC general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh recently said that the yatra, which is currently on a winter break, will resume from the Hanuman Mandir in Delhi's Kashmere Gate on January 3 and enter Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad around noon.

It will make a night halt in Mavikala village in Baghpat. The yatra will pass through Shamli in Uttar Pradesh on January 4 and enter Haryana through Sanauli in Panipat in the evening of January 5, the party leaders said. Congress members are working overtime for the success of the yatra, which they hope would make the masses aware about the "misrule" of the BJP government in Delhi and also infuse fresh energy in the party's workers, they said. The party's Baghpat district unit president Yunus Chowdhary said the yatri will be received at the Dundahera checkpoint and the march will halt for the night at Mavikala village on January 3 where Rahul Gandhi will stay at a farm house. Arrangements for the stay of about 2,000-2,500 people are being made, he added. "The enthusiasm seen in Congress members all through the

yatra was necessary. The effort is to ensure that party workers from all the 75 districts of the state come for the yatra," former MP and member of the administration coordination committee of the yatra P L Punia told PTI. "And these people who have been asked to come are all those from the organisation as the aim is not just to gather crowds. Lists have been sought from block presidents and passes are being made with their photographs. Special arrangements are on for their stay and other needs," he added. Amid



reports of prominent non-Congress leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati and Jayant Chaudhary not showing any inclination to join the yatra, Punia said it is a non-political event with a clear message to end the hatred prevailing in the country and unite it. State Congress spokesperson Ashok Singh recently said that party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra would be present in the Uttar Pradesh leg of the march that set off from Kanyakumari on September 7

last year and would end in Jammu and Kashmir. Anshu Awasthi, who is a spokesperson of the state unit of the party and also in-charge of media management during the yatra, said, "The yatra route has not been decided keeping in mind political gains or losses." Leaders of the party, however, believe that the event has brought the Congress into discussions up to the village level. Former Union minister and yatra coordinator in Uttar Pradesh Salman Khurshid, state Congress president Brijlal Khabri and others toured villages in several districts to mobilise support for the march. Congress Baghpat president Chaudhary said the yatri and party leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, will be welcomed at various points and a number of delegations will also meet them on the way. Gandhi will address "nukkad sabhas" as well. Former state minister Naseemuddin Siddiqui, who arrived in Baghpat to oversee the preparations of the yatra, said leaders of various political parties have been invited to join the march. In the course of the yatra in Baghpat, Rahul Gandhi and fellow participants would take lunch at a Shiva temple in the district. Tents would be pitched for the participants of the yatra to halt for the night, the Baghpat district Congress chief said. A Ghaziabad report said all the wings of Congress party are holding street corner meetings in the Loni area to ensure the success of 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. Sangeeta Garg, a functionary of the All India Mahila Congress, is camping in Loni to monitor preparations for the yatra. (PTT)

## Mamata congratulates TMC workers on party foundation day, vows to strengthen federal structure

KOLKATA, JAN 1/--/West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Sunday congratulated TMC workers on the party's foundation day and vowed to strengthen the country's federal structure.

The TMC was formed on January 1, 1998, after Banerjee walked out of Congress to form her own political party. "Our journey began on January 1, 1998; through all these years, we have been committed to always keeping nation first, people first. Today we remember the many sacrifices and unrelenting efforts of each and every member of our Trinamool family," Banerjee said in a Facebook post. "All those who have supported us from the very beginning and our new members who have joined from different states, we will continue to strengthen the federal structure of our great country; we dedicate ourselves to serve the people and commit ourselves again to ensure their welfare," she said.

As Trinamool Congress celebrated its foundation day on Sunday, senior party leader Kunal Ghosh said the party vows to emerge as a "nucleus" of the opposition parties-led government at the Centre in 2024. "It is indeed a matter of great pride and honour that TMC today stepped into its 25th year, out of which 13 years we are in power in West Bengal. We now have the target to emerge as a nucleus of the opposition parties-led government at the Centre in 2024. We want to provide an alternative to the masses," TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh told PTI. The comments came a day after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said there is a "massive undercurrent" in the country against the BJP, and if the opposition stands effectively against it with an alternative vision, it will be tough for the saffron party to win the 2024



Lok Sabha polls. TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee greeted party workers and supporters on his Facebook page on the party's foundation day. "We support the people of this nation for bestowing their faith on Maa-Mati-Manush. With newer energy, we promise to continue our fight for justice and ensure your welfare, always," Abhishek, also Mamata Banerjee's nephew, wrote.

Born out of the womb of the Congress in 1998, the TMC, after two unsuccessful attempts in 2001 and 2006, came to power by defeating the mighty Left Front regime in 2011, riding the crest of massive public outrage against the communists. (PTI)

## Bengal model will show the way for 2023, beyond: TMC's Abhishek

KOLKATA, JAN 1/--/TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday hinted at the TMC eyeing to play a key role in national politics in 2023 and beyond, saying the ideology of Mamata Banerjee encompassing the "politics of brotherhood and love will reach every nook and corner of the country".

His comment comes in the backdrop of the TMC's push to expand nationally and act as the glue of an opposition alliance against the BJP that came to a halt last year after its flop show in Goa assembly polls in March 2022, preceded by the civic election debacle in Tripura in December 2021. "In Goa, we failed to win the elections. But within a few months, we managed eight per cent votes. Bengal will show the way in the days to come,"

the TMC leader said. Banerjee was speaking to reporters at the sidelines of the stone-laying foundation ceremony of the new TMC office in the city. "We hope this year will end the politics of hatred and separatism. The politics of brotherhood and love would spread its wings. Like in Bengal, you will find love, compassion and brotherhood coexisting under the same roof. In the near future, the Bengal model will show the way in 2023 and beyond. The ideology of Mamata Banerjee will reach every nook and corner of the country," he said. The TMC leader also mocked the BJP leadership over media reports that Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president J P Nadda were likely to tour the state later this month

with an eye on Panchayat polls later this year. Referring to the media reports of the BJP launching a campaign blitzkrieg in the state ahead of the rural polls, the de facto number two in the TMC hierarchy said the BJP leaders only visit the state when there are elections. "The BJP leaders visit the state whenever elections are knocking at the door, and once they taste defeat, they just run away from the ground. We have seen this trend during the 2021 assembly polls. They are welcome to visit the state and campaign as much as they want. But they will again taste defeat," he said. Speaking on the panchayat polls, Banerjee, without naming anyone, said violence of any form during the rural polls wouldn't be tolerated. (PTI)



Trinamool Congress' national General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee at the Bhumi Pujan ceremony for party's new building at Tiljala, Kolkata, Sunday — Photo: Subham Dutta

## Woman dies after being dragged for 4 km by car in Delhi, 5 arrested; DCW issues summons

NEW DELHI, JAN 1/--/In a shocking incident, a 20-year-old woman died after her scooter was hit by a car and her body was dragged for around four kilometres in outer Delhi's Sultanpuri on Sunday, police said.

Five men travelling in the Maruti Baleno have been arrested, they said.

Meanwhile, a purported video of the woman's body without clothes and broken legs made rounds on social media. PTI could not independently verify the veracity of the video. The footage also led to claims that the victim was raped and murdered, but the police called it an accident.

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) has also issued a notice to police in the matter. According to police, an information was received at 3.24 am in Kanjhawala police



Woman killed after car drags her for several kms, all accused held

station (Rohini district) that a body was tied to a car going towards Qutubgarh area.

The body was sent to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial hospital, Mangolpuri for post-mortem, they said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer) Harendra Kumar Singh said the victim's leg got entangled in one of the wheels of the car and she was dragged for around four kilometres. "A case under IPC sections 279 (rash driving) and 304-A (causing death by negligence) has been registered in the matter. Deepak Khanna (26), Amit Khanna (25), Krishan (27), Mithun (26) and Manoj Mittal have been arrested," he said.

"While Deepak is a driver, Amit deals with SBI cards in Uttam Nagar, Krishan works at Connaught Place, Mithun works as a hair dresser in Naraina and Mittal works as a food

dealer in Sultanpuri," he said. Police said blood sample of the car driver has been preserved to examine whether he was under the influence of alcohol or not. The victim used to work in marriages and other functions as part time. When the incident happened, she was returning home from one such function, they added. Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chairperson Swati Maliwal said she has issued summons to Delhi Police in connection with the incident.

"A girl was dragged for several kilometres by a car driven by inebriated men. Her body was found without clothes on the road. This is a very scary incident. I am issuing summons to Delhi Police to appear before the panel. What were the security arrangements on the occasion of New Year?," she tweeted. (PTI)



## Benedict leaves German homeland with complicated legacy

**BERLIN, JAN 1** /--/ Pope Benedict XVI leaves his homeland with a complicated legacy: pride in a German pontiff but a church deeply divided over the need for reforms in the wake of a sexual abuse scandal in which his own actions of decades ago were faulted.

Benedict has long drawn mixed reviews in Germany, a country where Christians are roughly evenly split between Catholics and Protestants and where many struggled with his conservative stance. The day after the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected as the first German pope for centuries in 2005, the best-selling newspaper Bild's front page screamed "We are the Pope!" The left-leaning Tageszeitung countered with the headline "Oh, my God!" Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that "as the German" pope, Benedict XVI was a special church leader for many, not just in this country." He paid tribute to the late pontiff as "a formative figure of the Catholic Church, a combative personality and a wise

theologian." "As the church in Germany, we think with gratitude of Pope Benedict XVI: He was born in our country, his homeland was here, and he helped shape church life here as a theological teacher and bishop," said the head of the German Bishops' Conference, Limburg Bishop Georg Baetzing.

Still, a decade after his resignation, deep divisions are apparent in the German church between traditionalists in Benedict's mould and relative liberals. "The German pope filled many with pride, but above all with hope," said Irme Stetter-Karp, the head of an influential lay organisation, the Central Committee of German Catholics, or ZdK. "For some, this hope was richly fulfilled. For others, there remained an unfulfilled longing to find a way ... for their Christianity to succeed in the 21st century." Since 2019, German Catholic bishops and representatives from the ZdK have been engaged in a potentially trailblazing reform process the "Synodal Path"

that is addressing calls to allow blessings for same-sex couples, married priests and the ordination of women as deacons.

German church leaders insist that the process won't lead to a schism and vow to see it through, even as they face pressure from suspicious Vatican officials. Illustrating both the pressure for reform and the divisions it faces, a Synodal Path assembly in September failed to approve a text calling for a liberalisation of sexual teaching because, while it won 82 per cent backing overall, it failed to get the required support of two-thirds of German bishops. The retired pope himself stayed out of the fray though his longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, has signalled his own strong scepticism about the Synodal Path. The process was launched in response to the abuse scandal that has rocked the church in Germany and elsewhere in recent years, something that has contributed to large numbers of Germans formally leaving the church.

In 2018, a church-commissioned report concluded that at least 3,677 people were abused by clergy in Germany between 1946 and 2014. More than half of the victims were 13 or younger, and nearly a third served as altar boys. Various dioceses tasked law firms or others to put together reports on their own past. That has led to massive and unresolved tensions in the Cologne diocese, where the archbishop, Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki, drew widespread criticism for his handling of a report he commissioned. His offer of resignation has been pending with Pope Francis for months. An independent report in the Munich and Freising archdiocese, where Benedict served as archbishop from 1977 to 1982, turned the spotlight on the retired pope himself last January. Its examination of decades of abuse cases faulted their handling by a string of church officials past and present, including the then-Cardinal Ratzinger in four cases. Benedict asked forgiveness

for any "grievous faults" in his handling of clergy sex abuse cases, but denied any personal or specific wrongdoing. Reform advocates and victim support groups criticised what they saw as a tone-deaf response.

The bishops' conference head, Baetzing, said Saturday that "he asked for forgiveness from those who were affected; still, questions remained open." But he stressed Benedict's role in turning around the church's approach to clergy sexual abuse as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and later as pope. The pro-reform group We are Church said that Benedict's response to the abuse report did serious damage to his reputation and was generally critical of him as an "implacable reactionary." As pontiff, Benedict, who left his homeland for the Vatican in 1982 made three visits to Germany, including a trip to his native Bavaria in 2006 and a 2011 trip in which he became the first pope to address the German parliament. (AP)



People celebrate New Year in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan

## Pak, India exchange list of nuclear installations, facilities

**ISLAMABAD, JAN 1** /--/ Pakistan and India on Sunday exchanged a list of their nuclear installations that cannot be attacked in case of an escalation in hostilities, a Foreign Office statement said here, as part of an annual ritual that has been in practice between the two neighbours for more than three decades.

The lists of nuclear installation and facilities were exchanged as per the provisions of the Article-II of the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, signed on December 31, 1988 and ratified on 27 January 1991. According to this agreement, both countries have to inform each other of the nuclear facilities. This practice of exchanging lists has continued since January 1, 1992. "Pursuant to the agreement, the list of nuclear installations and facilities in Pakistan was officially handed over to a representative of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad at the ministry of foreign Affairs on Sunday," the Foreign Office said in the statement. Simultaneously, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs also handed over their list of nuclear installations and facilities to a representative of the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, according to the Foreign Office. The exchange comes amid strain in ties between the two countries over the Kashmir issue as well as cross-border terrorism. These lists are exchanged under the provisions of the Agreement on Consular Access signed in May 2008. (PTI)

## 'Murder weapon' recovered in Hindu woman's killing probe in Sindh

**KARACHI, JAN 1** /--/ Police have recovered a weapon they believe was used in the murder of a 44-year-old Hindu woman last week in Pakistan's Sindh province. Daya Bheel's mutilated body was found on December 27 in a mustard field in Sinjhiro village in Sanghar district in the province, triggering fear and panic amongst the minority Hindu community.

A police team from Hyderabad city in Sindh recovered a sickle, which they believe was used in the murder, the Dawn newspaper reported. The sickle has been sent to the Sindh health department's laboratory for an examination to ascertain whether it was used in the woman's murder, the report said. A chaddar was also found lying at the scene of the offence, it said. The examination could make investigators know whether the sickle and chaddar had marks of sweating.

Bheel's mutilated body was found after her son Soomar went searching for her in the mustard field. "What is agonising for us (family) is the manner in which she was killed," Soomar told PTI. "When my mother didn't return, we went out to search for her and after hours of search we found her mutilated body in the field," he added. The incident has sparked an uproar amongst the Hindu community, who staged protests in the Sanghar district demanding prompt police action. Police initially formed a joint investigation team to probe the murder. Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan.

According to official estimates, 75 lakh Hindus live in the country. The majority of Pakistan's Hindu population is settled in Sindh province where they share culture, traditions and language with Muslim residents. (PTI)

## NKorea's Kim orders 'exponential' expansion of nuke arsenal

**SEOUL, JAN 1** /--/ North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the "exponential" expansion of his country's nuclear arsenal, the development of a more powerful intercontinental ballistic missile and the launch of its first spy satellite, state media reported on Sunday, after he entered 2023 with another weapons firing following a record number of testing activities last year.

Kim's moves are in line with the broad direction of his nuclear weapons development programme as he has repeatedly vowed to boost both the quality and quantity of his arsenal to cope with what he calls US hostility. Some experts say Kim's push to produce more nukes and new weapons systems reflects his hopes to solidify his future negotiating power as he heads into prolonged tensions with the US and its allies. "They are now keen on isolating and stifling (North Korea), unprecedented in human history," Kim said at a recently ended ruling party

meeting, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. "The prevailing situation calls for making redoubled efforts to overwhelmingly beef up the military muscle," Kim accused South Korea of being "hell-bent on imprudent and dangerous arms build-up" and openly trumpeting its preparations for war with North Korea. That, Kim said, highlights the need to mass-produce battlefield tactical nuclear weapons and push for "an exponential increase of the country's nuclear arsenal," KCNA said.

Kim also set forth a task to develop another ICBM system "whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike," KCNA said. It said Kim accused the United States of frequently deploying nuclear strike means in South Korea and pushing to establish a NATO-like regional military bloc. Kim said North Korea will also launch its first military reconnaissance satellite "at the earliest date possible," saying related preparations

are in their final stages. Tactical nuclear weapons and a military reconnaissance satellite are among Kim's long wish list of new weaponry. Other weapons he wants include a multi-warhead missile, a more agile solid-fuelled ICBM, an underwater-launched nuclear missile and a hypersonic weapon. "Kim's comments from the party meeting reads like an ambitious but perhaps achievable new year's resolution list," said Soo Kim, a security analyst at the California-based RAND Corporation. "It's ambitious in that Kim consciously chose to spell out what he hopes to accomplish as we head into 2023, but it also suggests a dose of confidence on Kim's part."

Last month, North Korea claimed to have performed key tests needed for the development of a new strategic weapon, a likely reference to a solid-fuelled ICBM, and a spy satellite. Kim's identification of South Korea as an enemy and the mentioning of hostile US and

## Pope emeritus Benedict XVI will be remembered as a renowned theologian: Biden

**WASHINGTON, JAN 1** /--/ Joining Catholics around the world in mourning the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, US President Joe Biden on Saturday said that the late leader will be remembered as a renowned theologian. "He will be remembered as a renowned theologian with a lifetime of devotion to the Church guided by his principles and faith," Biden said in a statement. "I had the privilege of spending time with Pope Benedict at the Vatican in 2011 and will always remember his generosity and welcome as well as our meaningful conversation," said the US president. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that the United States mourns the passing of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus, a holy man, witness to faith, and once Shepherd of the Catholic

faithful. "Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was a dedicated leader and was committed to interfaith dialogue. He was an advocate for vulnerable



persons, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants. He supported international legal measures to defend them. He was a renowned theologian within the Catholic Church for decades," he said in a statement. "We offer our deepest condolences to the Catholic faithful around the

world, the Holy See, and all those whose lives were enriched by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's spiritual guidance," he added.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in a statement, described Pope Benedict XVI as a global leader whose devotion, scholarship and hopeful message stirred the hearts of people of all faiths. "Spiritually I am always moved by Pope Benedict's powerful encyclical, God is Love," where he quotes St. Augustine highlighting our moral duty as public servants to fight for justice," she said. "Officially it was my privilege to visit His Holiness in the Vatican and in 2008 to join in welcoming him to our nation's capital. May it be comfort to His Holiness Pope Francis and the Vatican community that so many pray for Pope Benedict during this sad time," Pelosi said. (PTI)

## Taliban: Kabul checkpoint bomb blast kills, wounds several

**KABUL, JAN 1** /--/ A bomb exploded near a checkpoint at Kabul's military airport on Sunday morning killing and wounding "several" people, a Taliban official said, the first deadly blast of 2023 in Afghanistan. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province has increased its attacks since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority. The military airport is around 200 metres (219 yards) from the civilian airport and close to the Interior Ministry, itself the site of a suicide bombing last October that killed at least four people. Interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the blast left several people dead and wounded. He gave no exact figures or further information about the bombing, saying details of an investigation will be shared later. Although Taliban security forces prevented photography and filming directly at the blast site, the checkpoint appeared damaged but intact. It is on Airport Road, which leads to high-security neighbourhoods housing government ministries, foreign embassies and the presidential palace. A spokesman for the Kabul police chief, Khalid Zadran, was not immediately available for comment. (AP)

## Canada to require Covid tests for passengers from China

**OTTAWA, JAN 1** /--/ Canada plans to temporarily require people flying from China, Hong Kong and Macao to test negative for Covid-19 before leaving for Canada. The requirement will apply to all air travellers aged two and older from the three countries and will begin on Jan. 5, the federal government said in a news release Saturday. "These planned health measures will apply to air travellers, regardless of nationality and vaccination status," the release said. "They are temporary measures, in place for 30 days, that will be reassessed as more data and evidence becomes available." The United States announced on Wednesday it would require all travellers from China to show a negative Covid-19 test result before flying to the country as Beijing's rapid easing of Covid-19 restrictions leads to a surge in cases. The Canadian government said its new testing measure is "in



response to the surge of COVID-19 in the People's Republic of China and given the limited epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data available on these cases."

People will need to provide a negative COVID-19 test result to the airline, taken no more than two days before their departure, before boarding a flight to Canada. The test can be either molecular, such as a PCR test, or an antigen test from a telehealth service or an accredited laboratory or testing provider, the release said. Passengers who tested positive more than 10 days before their flight leaves, but not more than 90 days, can provide the airline with proof of their positive test instead. "Since the start, our Government has taken the necessary steps to keep Canadians safe in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic," federal health minister Jean-Yves Duclos said in a statement. "Our actions continue to be guided by prudence and we will not hesitate to adjust measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians." (AP)

## Revellers throng to New Year's parties after Covid hiatus

**MELBOURNE, JAN 1** /--/ Revellers in major city centers across Europe and the Middle East were ushering in 2023 with countdowns and fireworks, as many cities around the globe celebrated New Year's Eve without restrictions for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

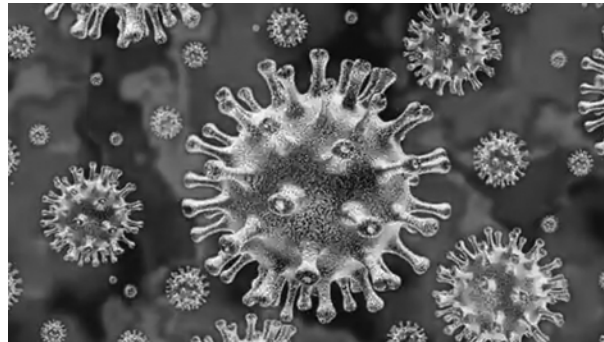
Children crowded a metro station in Kharkiv, Ukraine, to meet with St. Nicholas and enjoy a special performance ahead of the new year. Meanwhile, some soldiers who said they usually celebrate the holiday with family decided to stay in the trenches as they sought to defend their country. Others in Ukraine returned to the

capital, Kyiv, to spend New Year's Eve with their loved ones. As Russian attacks continue to target power supplies, leaving millions without electricity, no big celebrations were planned. A curfew was to be in place as the clock struck midnight. French President Emmanuel Macron delivered "a message of unity and trust" in a televised address Saturday. Referencing the war in Ukraine several times, Macron also sent a message to France's "Ukrainian friends," saying "we respect and admire you." "During the coming year, we will be unfailingly at your side. We will help you until victory and we will be together to

build a just and lasting peace. Count on France and count on Europe," he said.

Turkey's most populous city, Istanbul, was bringing in

thoroughfare Istiklal Avenue, dozens of Christians prayed for the new year and marked former Pope Benedict XVI's passing. The Vatican



2023 with street festivities and fireworks. At St. Antuan Catholic Church in Istanbul's popular pedestrian

announced Benedict died Saturday at age 95. The Pacific nation of Kiribati was the first country to greet the new year,

with the clock ticking into 2023 one hour ahead of neighbors including New Zealand. In Auckland, large crowds gathered below the Sky Tower, where a 10-second countdown to midnight preceded fireworks. The celebrations in New Zealand's largest city were well-received after Covid-19 forced them to be canceled a year ago. There was a scare in the North Island coastal city of Tauranga, about 225 kilometers (140 miles) from Auckland, when a bouncing castle was blown 100 meters (yards). Tauranga City Council reported one person was hospitalised and four people were treated on site.

Over 1 million people

crowded along Sydney's waterfront for a multi-million dollar celebration based around the themes of diversity and inclusion. More than 7,000 fireworks were launched from the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and a further 2,000 from the nearby Opera House. It was the "party Sydney deserves," the city's producer of major events and festivals Stephen Gilby told The Sydney Morning Herald. "We have had a couple of fairly difficult years; we're absolutely delighted this year to be able to welcome people back to the foreshores of Sydney Harbor for Sydney's world-famous New Year's Eve celebrations," he said. (AP)



# Pant all set to miss Australia series, three-way race between Bharat, Upendra and Kishan



**NEW DELHI, JAN 1/--/** The extent of Rishabh Pant's ligament tear, after his horrific car accident, is yet to be ascertained but if BCCI sources are to be believed, he is set to miss the upcoming four-Test series against Australia. Pant's absence from competitive cricket could be a prolonged one and it will be premature to even zero in on a date at this point in time, and hence, one of the biggest challenges for the new selection committee will be to select the two keeper-batters for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The Indian Test wicketkeeper's slot is now suddenly up for grabs and it could be an interesting three-horse race between Pant's current understudy Kona Bharat, India A's second keeper Upendra Yadav and white-ball specialist, Ishan Kishan, when the Test series starts in Nagpur from February 9. The 25-year-old lost control of his Mercedes car while driving from Delhi to Rourkee on Friday morning and hit the divider near Mohammadpur Jat in Manglaur area. He was first rushed to a local medical facility but is now being treated at Max Dehradun for multiple injuries. While X-Ray and CT scan reports have ruled out any fractural, brain or spinal injuries, the multiple ligament tear in his knee and ankle will certainly

keep him out for an extensive period. It could be anything between two to six months depending upon the grade of the ligament tear. "He has extensive swelling so MRI of ankle and knee is yet to be conducted. Once he is fit enough to travel, he will come to Mumbai where he will be under the board's empanelled doctor Dinshaw Pardiwala," a BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. The new selection committee will have effectively three choices. The two India A keepers Bharat and Upendra straightaway make it to the main squad or a dashing left-hander like Kishan could make the cut. In the case of Sanju Samson and Kishan, both didn't keep in Ranji Trophy for Kerala and Jharkhand respectively. Technically, Bharat being the second keeper of the Test side could make his debut in Nagpur but, as a package, Upendra is far better. He is a good keeper and a clean hitter with an average of 45 plus. However, in the case of Pant, there is an X-factor which Bharat or Upendra, despite being good performers, don't possess. Ishan or Sanju are better choices having already handled pressures of international cricket, but both will now regret handing over the big gloves to Kumar Kushagra and Ponnann Rahul, respectively. (PTI)



## GAME NOTES

### Ahead of India tour, Taylor tells Australia to experiment with five bowlers in final Test against SA

**SYDNEY, JAN 1/--/** With the high-profile tour of India fast approaching, former Australia skipper Mark Taylor wants the Pat Cummins-led side to explore the option of playing with five bowlers in the third and final Test against South Africa beginning here on Wednesday. The tour of India, comprising four Tests for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, will take place in February-March. Going into the final Test at Sydney, the hosts are holding an unassailable 2-0 series lead, providing them with an opportunity to explore few other options. "They've got an opportunity in Sydney to try a few things. I know people say you shouldn't try things in Test matches, but with Cameron Green not playing, I'd really like to see Alex Carey bat at six and Australia pick five bowlers. "They can go all out attack with the ball and rely on their top five and Carey to make enough runs to win the Test match," Taylor was quoted as saying by Wide World of Sports. Because of injuries to Mitchell Starc and Cameron Green during their massive win in Melbourne, Australia have called up Matthew Renshaw and Ashton Agar. "I think with the bowling they've got there, with whoever those quicks are going to be, you've got enough guys there to take the 20 wickets. South Africa only just made 200 in the final innings in Melbourne for the first time in four Test matches, their batting is very gettable at the moment. (PTI)



### I'm ready,' says fit-again Jofra Archer as England pacer prepares for comeback

**LONDON, JAN 1/--/** England pacer Jofra Archer, whose career has been plagued by injuries to his elbow and lower back, is looking forward to his comeback in 2023. "2022 thank you. 2023 I'm ready," Archer took to Twitter to announce his return. Having bought him for Rs 8 crore, Mumbai Indians sorely missed the injured Archer last season. The record five-time IPL champions may finally hope to see his dream pairing with India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the upcoming season. MI have also signed him for their Cape Town franchise in the inaugural SA20. Archer, who was England's leading wicket-taker in their 2019 ODI World Cup triumph, last played an international game in March 2021. A fit-again Archer was seen in action in Abu Dhabi in November when he trained there with the Test squad. He also hit Zak Crawley on the head with a sharp bouncer in the first of his nine overs. After playing in the inaugural SA20 in January, Archer will play for England in the ODI series against South Africa beginning on 27 January. He will then be seen in action in a limited-overs tour of Bangladesh followed by the IPL. (PTI)

### Pakistan and New Zealand seek Test turnaround in 2023

**KARACHI, JAN 1/--/** A draw last week having stopped a run of defeats for Pakistan and New Zealand, both sides will be seeking to go one better in the second and final Test in Karachi starting Monday. The tame draw halted Pakistan's four-Test losing streak at home including their first-ever 3-0 whitewash by England. New Zealand also arrived in Pakistan on the back of a 3-0 drubbing by England. Pakistan skipper Babar Azam vowed his team will play "positive and aggressive cricket" after they finished 2022 without a Test win at home. "We need to take things session-by-session and day-by-day," he said. "We're working on it. It's not that we need to play different cricket." New Zealand were in a good position to win the first Test on the final day with Pakistan on 77-2, needing 97 runs to avoid an innings defeat. x But Saud Shakeel, who scored 55 not out, and Mohammad Wasim with 43 averted the danger with a 71-run eighth wicket stand eating up time and overs to salvage a draw. Pakistan declared on 311-8 but a target of 138 in 15 overs under fading light was tough for New Zealand, who finished on 59-1. "We need to credit New Zealand with the way they played and dominated," said Azam, who finished the year as the highest scorer in Tests with 1,184 in nine matches. The National Stadium pitch helped slow bowlers as 23 of the 28 wickets in the first Test went to the spinners. (PTI)

## Premier League: Arsenal end 2022 with seven-point lead at top as Everton hold title holders City to draw

**LONDON, JAN 1/--/** Arsenal head into 2023 with a formidable seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League after a 4-2 win at Brighton, while Manchester City's title defence suffered a major setback as Everton snatched a 1-1 draw against the champions on Saturday. Mikel Arteta's side powered to a fifth successive league victory thanks to goals from Bukayo Saka, Martin Odegaard, Eddie Nketiah and Gabriel Martinelli on New Year's Eve at the Amex Stadium. The Gunners stormed into the lead after just two minutes when Martinelli's deflected effort reached England forward Saka, who took a deft touch before slotting past Brighton keeper Robert Sanchez. Arsenal were in complete control and Danish midfielder Odegaard netted with a thumping 39th minute strike after a corner was cleared to the edge of the Brighton area. Nketiah scored Arsenal's third in the 47th minute, poking home after Sanchez failed to hold Martinelli's effort. Kaoru Mitoma's 65th minute strike for Brighton would have shaken Arsenal's nerves in the past, but the current crop are made of sterner stuff. Six minutes later Martinelli bagged the fourth from Odegaard's sublime long pass, a strike that rendered irrelevant Evan Ferguson's first league goal for Brighton in the 77th minute. "It's a big win against a really good side," Arteta said. "We know the other results, but we know our success will be from what we do. "This is what we want to continue, to improve as a team and play better, to dominate all the areas like today." Arsenal's ninth win in their last 10 league matches was even sweeter coming just hours after second placed City stumbled at the

Etihad Stadium. Pep Guardiola's side blew the lead given to them by Erling Haaland as Demarai Gray scored an eye-catching equaliser for struggling Everton. City have failed to win two of their last three league games and head into 2023 in danger of surrendering the title they have won four times in the last five seasons. Haaland put City ahead in the 24th minute with his 27th goal in 20



competitive appearances since his close-season move from Borussia Dortmund. Riyad Mahrez provided the assist with a dazzling run and pinpoint pass to the Norway striker, who slotted past Jordan Pickford in ruthless fashion. But Everton equalised against the run of play in the 64th minute as Gray robbed City

midfielder Rodri and curled a blistering strike into the top corner, in the process buying under-fire boss Frank Lampard some much-needed breathing space. Guardiola stayed positive, saying: "Dropping points at home is always tough. But we played really good in the last three games and it makes me feel optimistic." Marcus Rashford responded to his benching for missing a team meeting after over-sleeping with the late strike that clinched Manchester United's 1-0 win at Wolves. United manager Erik ten Hag dropped Marcus Rashford because of an "internal disciplinary" issue that broke "our rules". The 25-year-old's exile only lasted until half-time when he was sent on by Ten Hag in a move that proved the catalyst for fourth placed United to seal their fifth successive win in all competitions. Rashford looked determined to prove Ten Hag wrong as he rampaged through the Wolves defence to score his 11th goal in all competitions this season and his third in three appearances since the World Cup. "We draw a line under it and move on. I was a little bit late for a meeting. I overslept but it can happen," Rashford said. Ten Hag added: "It's good after the decision. Coming in he was bright, lively, he scored a goal and that is the right reaction. "Of course (that is the end of the matter). Everyone has to match the rules. This is the right answer." Third placed Newcastle's six-match winning run came to a halt in a 0-0 draw against Leeds at St James' Park. Joao Palhinha's last-gasp goal sealed Fulham's 2-1 win against Southampton, who sit bottom of the table after a fifth successive defeat. Crystal Palace eased to a 2-0 win at Bournemouth as Patrick Vieira's side ended their three-match goal drought thanks to Jordan Ayew and Eberechi Eze. (AFP)

## No threat to Rohit Sharma's captaincy in Tests and ODIs: Report

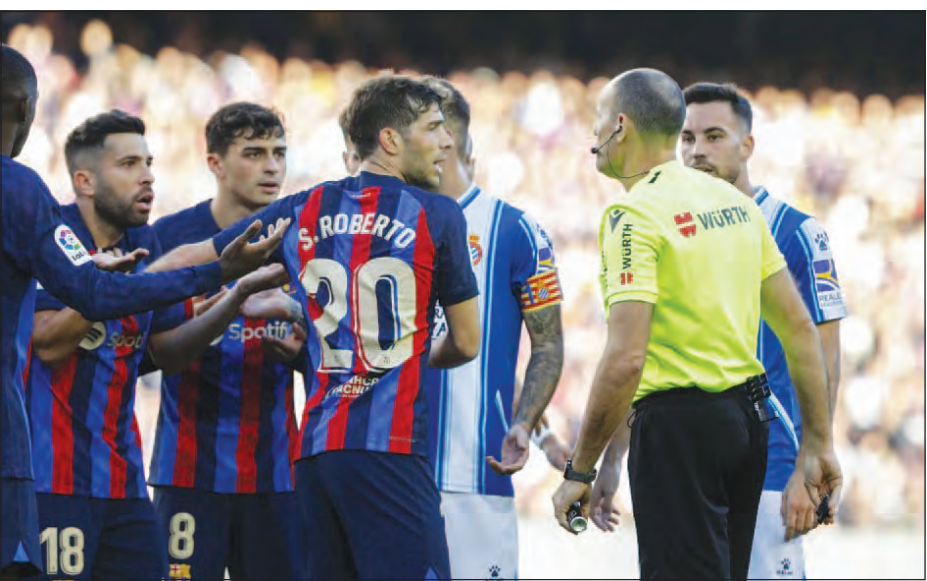
**NEW DELHI, JAN 1/--/** There is no imminent threat to Rohit Sharma's ODI and Test captaincy as the BCCI brass hasn't found anything unsatisfactory about his leadership in the traditional formats, according to a report. Skipper Rohit, along with head coach Rahul Dravid, attended the review meeting in Mumbai. The meeting was conducted by BCCI secretary Jay Shah. Along with last selection committee's chairman Chetan Sharma, NCA head VVS Laxman, president Roger Binny also attended the review meeting. Since the focus is the World Test Championships (WTC), where India have a good chance of making it to the finals, and the 2023 ODI World Cup, new T20 captain Hardik Pandya wasn't a part of the meeting. Hardik is in Mumbai for the T20 international series against Sri Lanka, which starts on Tuesday. "Rohit is leading India in Tests and ODIs and there was no such discussions about his future as leader in these two formats. Look at his captaincy record in Tests and ODIs and it is more than impressive," a BCCI source privy to the development told PTI on the condition of anonymity. It was also decided that a pool of 20 players will be rotated till the 2023 World Cup. In what could be a significant move by the board, Sharma, who attended the review meeting on Sunday, could once again retain his chairmanship of the senior national selection panel. If not chairman, he is likely to be the representative from North Zone. The name of former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad is also doing the rounds from South Zone, but his induction in the panel isn't a certainty. Sharma being included in the planning of roadmap up to the 2023 ODI World Cup in itself is a significant development. "First things first, if Chetan wouldn't have been told, he wouldn't have applied in first place. That itself is an indication. India have a World Cup to play in 10 months. Chetan and Harvinder's presence will add continuity along with three new members," the source added. It is understood that SS Das, a former opener, is a big favourite from East Zone because of his 21 Test experience, unless some other compulsions lead to the BCCI choosing a lightweight candidate from east. From West, Gujarat veteran Mukund Parmar, Salil Ankola, Sameer Digne are engaged in a three-way race. The new committee will be named in the coming week. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL  
GORKHALAND TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION  
PIU, WBSRD, KALIMPONG DIVISION  
NOTICE INVITING TENDER  
On behalf of the Principal Secretary, GTA, tenders are invited by the Executive Engineer, through e-tendering (details can be sought at [www.wbtenders.gov.in](http://www.wbtenders.gov.in)).  
Date of Publishing of Tender on website: 03.01.2023  
Tender Ref No.: 09 of 2022-23

## LaLiga: Barcelona drop point in fiery Catalan derby against Espanyol; Real Sociedad defeat Osasuna 2-0

**BARCELONA, JAN 1/--/** Barcelona stumbled in the Spanish title race with a 1-1 draw against rivals Espanyol in a bad-tempered Catalan derby on Saturday, levelling Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. The duelling Spanish giants have 38 points each from 15 games, nine ahead of third-place Real Sociedad, who beat Osasuna 2-0 later on Saturday. Xavi's Barcelona threw away the two-point advantage they had earned before the World Cup break, with Joselu's penalty pegging Barcelona back after Marcos Alonso's opener. Both teams finished with 10 men as Jordi Alba and Vinicius Souza were sent off, with referee Mateu Lahoz allowing the game to spiral out of control at Camp Nou. "The draw is our fault, we can talk about the referee and other things but they are our mistakes," said Xavi. "I think Mateu is a referee who controls games but today it got away from him in my opinion, he let the game get totally out of control." "(But) I don't blame

him for anything, the fault is ours. We lowered our intensity." The teams were at loggerheads before a ball was kicked because Barcelona started Robert Lewandowski, who had been banned before a late court ruling allowed him to play. The forward, due to miss three league matches, was only allowed to feature thanks to a controversial decision announced on Friday, suspending his punishment. It greatly angered Espanyol, whose president and directors boycotted the match, while Barca coach Xavi admitted his team had prepared all week expecting to be without the division's top goalscorer. The Spanish football federation said in a statement on Saturday they could not override the court's decision. Lewandowski was not at his best but Barcelona took the lead after just seven minutes with Alonso capitalising on shoddy set-piece defending from Espanyol to head home. The former Chelsea defender,



deployed as a centre-back, should have doubled his tally but sent Alba's cross wide from point-blank range. Espanyol's only chance of the first half came when Nico Melamed had a shot deflected wide of Marc Andre ter Stegen's far post, with the hosts looking comfortable. "We wanted to

leave with a win, to leave as leaders," said Sergi Roberto. "We had a very good first half, we lacked the goal to kill the game. In the second half there were a lot of cards, sendings off and the game stopped a lot." Barcelona faded after the break with wingers Ansu Fati and Raphinha struggling to create danger. The visitors,

16th, weren't particularly threatening either but won a penalty after Alonso tangled with Joselu in the area, and the forward dispatched it down the middle. Lahoz, racking up the bookings, sent off Alba for two in quick succession, before dismissing both Souza, for a foul, and Leandro Cabrera for a clash

with Lewandowski seconds later. However he cancelled the latter dismissal after watching the incident again with VAR, and Barcelona could not find a winner in the nine minutes added on. Xavi also received a booking from Lahoz for complaining from the sidelines late on, and the official left the stadium to jeers and whistles from the home fans. "These games are very hard to referee, what's important is the result," said Joselu. "There were a lot of interruptions because there were a lot of fouls, but we had to make sure that we played our game." Real Sociedad earned a solid victory over Osasuna to show they can compete for a Champions League place this season. Veteran playmaker David Silva pulled the strings for La Real and Brais Mendes opened the scoring in the first half. Alexander Sorloth doubled their lead after the break and Mikel Oyarzabal made his return from a knee injury he suffered in March as a substitute. (AFP)