

## Ultrasound test can be a spirit dampener Pregnant women bewail helpless long hours wait

ROOPA LALL



**Many patients in order to avoid the long-wait in government hospitals, including GB Pant Hospital, prefer to visit private clinics**

PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ One of the most stressful parts of visiting a government hospital is the long-wait to be seen by a doctor. In fact, many patients in order to avoid the long-wait in government hospitals, including GB Pant Hospital, prefer to visit private clinics. But for the low income families, who cannot afford costly treatment in a private clinic, GB Pant hospital is the best and only option for them. A good number of pregnant women also visit the GB Pant hospital on a daily basis for conducting the ultrasound tests. These women, who visit the hospital for the ultrasound tests are told to get the test conducted empty stomach. But the most worrisome part for these pregnant women is to stand in a long queue for more than 2-3 hours in front of the ultrasound unit for getting the tests done without food. More frustrating for any pregnant woman is when she is standing in the long queue for over one hour, waiting for your turn and somebody "deemed royal", just because she is a relative of the medical staff, get the test conducted on a preferential basis superseding all the "commoners". Pregnant women have been complaining about the pick and choose system adopted in the GB Pant hospital when medical staff give priority to their relatives and friends to get these tests conducted on priority basis.

## Beach cleaning by students of Yeshuva Training Academy



ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ Students from the Yeshuva Training Academy on an educational tour to Chidiyatappu on Thursday and conducted a cleanliness drive near the Chidiyatappu beach. Unwanted waste dumped on the beach was collected and properly disposed of.

## Dead body of newborn found in Sippighat sealake

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ A newborn girl child was found dead in the Sippighat seawater lake on Thursday evening. According to reports, when a local while fishing in this water pulled up his fishing net, he was shocked to find the dead body of this newborn girl child. Locals suspect the infant could have been dumped by her parents in a bid to get rid of her. Police have registered a case and the further investigation is under progress.

## EOI IMPACT

## Eviction drives carried out to dismantle temporary sheds at Mayabunder

ROOPA LALL

MAYABUNDER, DEC 16/--/ Acting on a news report titled 'Karmatang 9 residents protest contractors greed' published in this newspaper recently, the Revenue department at Mayabunder has carried out eviction drives at Devpur village under Rampur Panchayat and Karmatang village in Mayabunder on Thursday. Encroachment was done by government contractors over revenue land bearing Sy. No. 54/1 which includes fencing and temporary shed. An area of about 0.0700 ha has been restored to the government. In the same manner, an eviction drive was also carried out at Karmatang village on government land bearing Sy. No. 11 which includes fencing and temporary shed and an area of 0.1000 ha (approx) restored to the government.

(Contd. on page-6)



## MP for free of cost heli-evacuation of serious patients, attendant from far-flung Islands

PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ The Member of Parliament, Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma has requested the Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands to make the evacuation of serious patients and one attendant from far-flung Islands via helicopter completely free, as it used to be in the past. The Member of Parliament informed the Lt.

Governor that the only referral Hospital of Andaman and Nicobar is situated at Port Blair city and this is the reason why in case of any medical emergency patients have to be airlifted from different far-flung islands in helicopters and brought to G B Pant Hospital for specialised treatment.

(Contd. on page-6)



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# Regional parties do not have a vision for the country, Cong has: Rahul

**JAIPUR, DEC 16** /--/ Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday said none of the regional parties can represent a vision for the country and that is what makes his party different from others. Rahul, however, also said the Congress must work with other opposition parties for the 2024 general election and party chief Mallikarjun Kharge would evolve a strategy in this regard. He said despite the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) organisational and money power, the Congress fought against it and won the Himachal Pradesh polls, adding that if the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was not put up as a "proxy to target the Congress" in Gujarat, the grand old party could have defeated the saffron party there as well. "We are different

from the large number of opposition parties. We work with them, we appreciate them, we believe they are important, but we are different. The way we are different is that we represent a national ideology. We represent a vision for the country," Rahul told reporters here. "None of the regional parties can represent a vision for the country. They can represent a vision for a community or a vision for a state, but they cannot represent a vision for the country," he said. Rahul said the Congress is competing with a vision that the BJP is proposing for the country. "The space for the Congress party will always be there and the people who believe in the Congress party will always be there. It is a question of getting them excited, getting them motivated and getting them

to believe in what they stand for, which the (Bharat Jodo) yatra has been very good at doing," the former Congress chief stated. Asked about the party's performance in the recent Assembly polls, Gandhi said the Congress won in Himachal Pradesh despite being pitted against the organisational strength and money power of the BJP. "Frankly, in Gujarat, if the AAP would not have been put up as a proxy and had not been used to target the Congress party, we would have probably defeated the BJP," he added. Rahul said though he does not believe in the BJP's principles, "they have complete clarity as regards who they are". "The day the Congress party understands the depth of what it is and what it stands for, it will win every election," he added. (PTI)

# Himachal CM, state Cong chief walk alongside former party chief as Bharat Jodo Yatra completes 100 days

**DAUSA, DEC 16** /--/ Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, his deputy Mukesh Agnihotri and the Congress' chief in the hill state Pratibha Singh walked alongside Rahul Gandhi in the Bharat Jodo Yatra on Friday as it completed 100 days on the road. Besides Sukhu, Agnihotri and the HPC Chief, other newly-elected Himachal MLAs, including Pratibha Singh's son Vikramaditya Singh, and AICC in-charge of the state Rajeev Shukla joined the march after the tea break during its morning session. Large crowds had gathered to greet the yatra participants in Dausa, known as a stronghold of former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot. People had lined up along the entire route of the yatra to cheer the leaders. Slogans were raised in support of Pilot at several places as he walked beside Gandhi. Pilot and his father

Rajesh Pilot have both been elected to Parliament from Dausa in the past. Sukhu, Agnihotri, Pratibha Singh, Shukla and the newly-elected Himachal Pradesh MLAs

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot walked alongside Rahul briefly early in the morning, as the Bharat Jodo Yatra completed 100 days on the road. "Bharat Jodo

walking in the yatra. "The BJP's attempt of demolishing his (Gandhi's) image has also been destroyed by us," he added. The Congress general secretary (organisation) also

which was launched on September 7 in Kanyakumari has traversed eight states Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and now, Rajasthan. With over 2,800 kilometres under his belt, Rahul has managed to catch the attention of his supporters as well as detractors. Controversies have also been part and parcel of the yatra, with the Congress and the BJP trading barbs on several occasions. The yatra will enter Delhi on December 24, and after a break of about eight days, move on to Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and finally, Jammu and Kashmir. It has seen participation from a cross-section of society, including film and TV celebrities such as Pooja Bhatt, Riya Sen, Sushant Singh, Swara Bhasker, Rashami Desai, Akanksha Puri and Amol Palekar. (PTI)



joined after the yatra after it had covered a fair distance early morning. The yatra covered 23 kilometres at a stretch.

Yatra's biggest achievement is that issues of the common people of the country have been highlighted through it," Venugopal told PTI while

stressed that the message of the yatra will be spread through a follow-up campaign to be undertaken by the party from January 26. The yatra,

## Are you in favour of terrorists or patriots, Karnataka CM asks Kharge and Gandhi

**BENGALURU, DEC 16** /--/ Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai on Friday asked Congress chief M Mallikarjun Kharge and former presidents Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, whether they are "in favour of terrorists or patriots". The chief minister was reacting to Karnataka Congress president D K Shivakumar's statement seemingly suggesting that the Mangaluru pressure cooker blast was "orchestrated" by the BJP government to divert attention away from the voter data theft scandal. "Congress' policy is such that earlier too they have trivialised terror incidents and have supported terrorists. They had criticised the hanging of a terrorist. This is part of their appeasement strategy for elections. They feel that they will get minority votes with such statements, and have used the same old technique. But people are aware, such things won't work anymore," Bommai told reporters here. "I want to ask Congress party -- Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi -- they should make it clear whether they are in favour of terrorists who disturb peace and order, or in favour of patriots who serve this country," he said. Such "playful acts" and statements demoralises the country and its police forces, the chief minister further said, adding that "when terrorists are held with evidence, questioning the procedure and investigation will boost the morale of the terrorists."

Addressing a media interaction on Thursday, Shivakumar referring to the November 19 blast in Mangaluru said: "Who asked the director general of police to declare that it was a terrorist act without investigation? Who is the terrorist? Was it an act of terrorism like in Mumbai, Delhi, Kashmir or Pulwama?" His statement has elicited sharp reactions from the ruling BJP. Pointing out that blast accused Mohammed Shariq had everything required to make a bomb inside a pressure cooker, which exploded and it was clear that the man had the intent to cause a blast in Mangaluru, Bommai said, "He (Shariq) had changed his identity multiple times. He was caught two-three times in earlier cases. It was established that he had known terror links, including overseas." For the Karnataka PCC president to say that it was a cover-up, doesn't befit his position, Bommai said.

Reacting to Shivakumar's claim that the Mangaluru blast was used by the BJP to divert attention away from the voter data theft scandal, the Chief Minister said it was the Congress government that gave orders to non-profit organisation Chilume Trust in 2017. "Shivakumar shouldn't forget this. "Congress has the habit of creating illegal votes. We will know clearly this time how many outsiders are there in which constituency. It is because the Election Commission is using new technology to identify double and triple votes," he said, adding that investigations are on in the case and arrests have been made. Last month, the Congress had alleged that Chilume Trust, assigned by the Bengaluru civic agency to spread awareness among voters, collected details of the voters such as name, mother tongue, gender, religion, caste, voter ID number, and the Aadhaar number. The Bengaluru city police, probing the case, have arrested the co-founder of Chilume Trust Krishnappa Ravikumar, the main accused. Later speaking in Mandya, chief minister Bommai questioned Congress as to whether it was its policy to sympathise with terrorists, whenever terror acts took place. Bommai said: "Such things don't happen in any other country... here Congress politicises all issues. On the China border issue, they speak by demoralising our soldiers, they demoralise police here. (PTI)



Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman and the Minister of State for Textiles and Railways, Darshana Vikram Jardosh at the inauguration of 'VIRAASAT, an exclusive weave-based handloom sari festival which is celebrating 75 handwoven saris of India, in New Delhi on Friday

## Names of people who don't link Aadhaar with election card won't be struck off voters' list: Rijiju

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** /--/ The names of people who do not share their Aadhaar number to link with the election identity card will not be struck off the voters list, the Union government said on Friday, noting that the exercise is voluntary. The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, allows electoral registration officers to require the existing or prospective elector to provide the Aadhaar number for the "purpose of establishing identity" on a "voluntary basis", Union law minister Kiren Rijiju said in Lok Sabha. Rijiju was responding to a question on the linkage of Aadhaar with electoral rolls. The Election Commission has launched a

programme to collect the Aadhaar number of existing and prospective electors on



Kiren Rijiju

a voluntary basis from August 1 in all the states and UTs. It is voluntary to link Aadhaar with a Voter ID and consent is obtained from the elector for Aadhaar authentication in Form 6B

which was recently introduced, he said.

However, the minister made it clear that "there is no provision for withdrawing the consent" to share Aadhaar details. Asked whether the name of the voters whose voter IDs are not linked with Aadhaar will be struck off from the voters' list, he replied in the negative. The minister informed Rajya Sabha on Thursday that more than 54 crore of the nearly 95 crore total voters have opted to link their Aadhaar details with the voter list. The law minister said linking of Aadhaar is "process driven" and "no targets have been given" for linking Aadhaar with election photo identity card.

Rijiju said the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), under the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 has made it compulsory for the centralised storage of all Aadhaar numbers in a different repository known as 'Aadhaar Data Vault'. The Election Commission strictly follows the guidelines prescribed by UIDAI and "does not" store the Aadhaar numbers in its database. The Aadhaar number is used only for authentication purposes and EC does not retrieve any personal information from the UIDAI Aadhaar database, he underlined. (PTI)

## BJP stages protest near Pak High Commission over Bilawal Bhutto's remarks against Modi

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** /--/ Scores of BJP leaders and workers staged a protest near Pakistan High Commission here on Friday over Pakistan foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto's remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The protesters also demanded an apology for Bhutto's 'insensible' remarks. The protesters held BJP flags and placards some of which read: 'Pakistan aukaat ma aao and Maafi mango' (Pakistan stay in your limits and apologise) and 'Pakistan hosh mein aayo' (Wake up Pakistan). Lashing out at Bhutto for his personal remark against Modi, a party leader said: "We condemn Bhutto's remarks. How could he use such a language against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He should always remember that his grandfather begged India for forgiveness.

"Pakistan should be thrown out of the United Nations for attacking the Indian leader. They harbour terrorists," said a party leader. Another leader said Bhutto should not have used such words for Indian leaders. "We won't tolerate such insensible statement against our leader. Pakistan should apologise," said Tahir Khan. Bhutto made the comments following India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar's sharp attack on Pakistan over its support to terrorism at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting. (PTI)

## Newly elected Himachal MLAs to take oath on Dec 22

**SHIMLA, DEC 16** /--/ The newly elected Himachal Pradesh MLAs will take oath on December 22 when the three-day winter session of the state Assembly begins, a notification issued here on Friday said. This would be the first session of the 14th Vidhan Sabha. According to the notice, the Speaker will be elected on December 23, which will be followed by the Governor's address, a debate on which would be held on December 24 and it would be passed on the same day. Senior most member of the newly-elected Assembly Chander Kumar, who is a six-time MLA and former Lok Sabha member, was appointed as pro-tem Speaker on Wednesday. He would administer the oath to the newly elected MLAs and function as the chairman of Vidhan Sabha till the new Speaker is elected. Himachal Pradesh Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar had allocated portfolios to the newly-elected chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and his deputy Mukesh Agnihotri. Meanwhile, the cabinet expansion is awaited. (PTI)

## No proposal under consideration to allow proxy voting for NRIs: Govt

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** /--/ No proposal is under consideration of the government to provide proxy voting facility to NRIs, Lok Sabha was informed on Friday. "...no such proposal is under consideration," said Law Minister Kiren Rijiju in a written reply while responding to a question on whether the government is considering to provide the facility of proxy voting to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). In August, 2018, the previous Lok Sabha had passed a Bill to allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians. But the bill could not be brought in Rajya Sabha. In 2020, the Election Commission had proposed to the law ministry to extend the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility, so far available only to service voters, to eligible overseas Indian voters as well. It would require changes in the election rules. But the government has so far not taken a call on the issue. The EC had told the government that it has been receiving several representations from the Indian diaspora residing abroad to facilitate voting through postal ballots since such overseas electors are not in a position to be present in their polling area as travelling to India for this purpose is a costly affair, and they cannot leave the country of their residence owing to specific compulsions of employment, education or other engagements. (PTI)

## LS passes Bill to give tribal status to Hattee community in Himachal

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** /--/ The Lok Sabha on Friday passed a Bill to give scheduled tribe status to the members of the Hattee community in Himachal Pradesh. Piloting that Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Third Amendment) Bill 2022, tribal affairs minister Arjun Munda said that the bill seeks to provide justice to the Hattee community of Trans Giri area of Sirmour district in the hilly state of Himachal Pradesh. Munda said that the Hattee community members living in Uttarakhand were included in the list of scheduled tribes, but the benefit was not accorded to those living in Himachal Pradesh. "The state government of Himachal Pradesh has requested (to the central government) to include Hattee community of Trans Giri area of Sirmour district in Scheduled Tribes list, excluding those communities which are already notified as Scheduled Castes for the State of Himachal Pradesh," said the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill. (PTI)

# HC directs Delhi govt to ensure admission to EWS category kids in private schools

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** /--/ The Delhi High Court directed the city government on Friday to ensure admission to children belonging to weaker sections of the society in private unaided schools, observing that it is high time that the judiciary reaches out to people instead of waiting for them to reach out to it.

It said these kids are being forced to knock on the doors of the court for availing their fundamental right to education. The court said all the private unaided schools concerned shall ensure that no student belonging to the "weaker sections" as defined in the Right To Education (RTE) Act and recommended by the Directorate of

Education (DoE) for being admitted in an academic session shall be denied admission or treated with conduct that is unwelcoming of them on any pretext whatsoever, including that of suspicion of credentials. The counsel representing the children belonging to the economically weaker section (EWS) who were denied admissions by several schools submitted that to add insult to injury, the school gates were literally shut on the faces of the shortlisted students and their parents.

"One can just imagine the humiliation faced by the young children and their parents. This court, as a custodian of the Constitution, cannot remain

a mute spectator to the outright bulldozing of human rights by those in the noble service of imparting education, thus bringing a bad name and repute to the same," Justice Chandra Dhari Singh said in an 85-page judgment.

The court noted that this batch of petitions showed that the provisions of the RTE Act as well as the directives or circulars issued by the DoE are being violated and brutally lynched in broad daylight. This is the status, where circulars in form of letters are exchanged between the State and the schools, while the poor children along with their parents, despite having followed the due procedure, are forced to

move from pillar to post and are being humiliated at every step with the "only hope that on some fortunate day, Lady Luck will shower her blessings and these children will get admission in a school", it said. The court further said: "These children have committed no other crime but that they were born in poverty.

This court's conscience is laden with the woes of the poor children and their parents. The state of affairs is appalling, anguishing and agonising. It is a travesty of justice and an utter failure on the part of the State in its duties of a welfare state."

The judge said it is high time that the judiciary reaches the people and not wait for the people to reach out to it, as the poor kids are

being forced in the instant set of petitions to knock on the doors of the court for availing their fundamental right to education. "In view of the aforesaid analysis as well as to alleviate and ameliorate the miserable state of affairs as prevalent in the NCT of Delhi qua implementation of the RTE Act at elementary education level, it is pertinent to exercise the powers of this court under Article 226 of the Constitution to issue directions to the DoE for ensuring admission to the poor children belonging to weaker sections," it said. The petitions were filed seeking admission of students belonging to the EWS category under section 2(e) of the RTE Act

in various private unaided schools at the elementary level.

These students from the EWS category have been given letters by the Delhi government's DoE, confirming their admission to the respective schools in the national capital under the scheme of the RTE Act. These letters were issued pursuant to a draw of lots conducted by the DoE and the results were communicated to all the schools as well as the fortunate few children belonging to the EWS category who got selected by such a draw of lots. Despite the children possessing confirmed admission letters from the DoE, the schools refused to admit them. (PTI)



## Bharatiya Bhasha Utsav celebration at ALC



**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ The Andaman Law College enthusiastically celebrated the "Bharatiya Bhasha Utsav", as a sequel to the series of events commemorating the 'AzadikaAmritMahotsav' and to uphold the spirit of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' Initiative of the Government of India. Around 150 students, administrative staff and faculty members of the Andaman Law College overwhelmingly participated in the event by highlighting the unity**

**in cultural diversity of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and by reciting various poems, songs, and short stories in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Nicobari, Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Karen, etc. The Principal (i/c), ShriPrashantBhadu of Andaman Law College addressed the gathering by remembering the revered Tamil Poet ChinnaSwami Subramanian Bharati, who in his times was considered to be the bridge between the North and the South India. He also emphasized the need to**

**encourage greater linguistic awareness and inclusivity in the society, by promoting the different languages provided in the Schedule VIII appended to the Constitution of India. The entire event was co-ordinated by Ms. NishaSikdar, Asst. Professor (English) and in her Concluding Remarks, Ms. RaginiKumari, Asst. Professor (Law), Andaman Law College stressed on the fact that language plays a key role in protecting the unity, harmony and integrity of a nation.**

## Training prog on 'First aid firefighting & disaster preparedness' concludes

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ A three-days training programme on "First Aid Fire Fighting & Disaster Preparedness" was**



**conducted at Fire Service Training Centre, Fire Service(HQ) from 13th to 15th December 2022, to sensitize Teacher, Govt Servants, Hoteliers, Coaching Institute and General Public. The participants were made aware of various activities of Andaman & Nicobar Fire Service i.e Fire Control Room, operational techniques of Water Tender, Rescue Tender & Disaster**

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**gained through this training programme. The course certificates were handed over to the participants during the valediction program. Altogether 81 persons participated in the training. The participants appreciated and expressed their gratitude for building the capacity of the individuals to respond to any emergency as first line responders.**

## Accolades pour in for Ms Mousumi Saha of DBRAIT

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/ The Common University Entrance Test is the acronym for Common University Common Entrance Test. The National Testing Agency (NTA) administers the CUET test for admission to UG programs across the country. This move will represent a significant departure from the regular college entrance tests. The President and the members of the DBRAIT student's council congratulate Ms. MousumiSaha of B.Tech, Electronics and Communication Engineering of DBRAIT for qualifying Common University Entrance Test with option in Central University Punjab, Pondicherry & Rajasthan.**



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## Mainstreaming training prog on HIV/AIDS, STD



**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/The A&N AIDS Control Society (ANACS) conducted a mainstreaming training programme on HIV/AIDS for the sanitary workers on Friday at Shadipur Community hall. About 100 participants participated the training programme. Mr. Girish Kumar, AD (SPM), ANACS conducted the training programme.**

**He informed Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is an infection that attacks the body's immune system. HIV infection can be**

**diagnosed using simple and affordable rapid diagnostic tests, as well as self-tests. People can lead a healthy life for a long time with appropriate medical care.**

**Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) effectively suppresses replication, if taken at the right time. Successful viral suppression restores the immune system and halts onset and progression of disease as well as reduces chances of getting opportunistic infections. Medication thus enhances both quality of life and longevity. Further,**

**he also informed about HIV/AIDS (Prevention & Control) ACT, 2017 which came into force on September 10, 2018 with the objective to prevent and control the spread of HIV and AIDS and for reinforcing the legal and human rights of persons infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS. It also seeks to protect the rights of healthcare providers. The participants were inform to come forward for 'Knowing their HIV Status' by voluntarily getting themselves tested which will be kept confidential.**

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**#192, GARACHARMA MAIN ROAD, PORT BLAIR, SOUTH ANDAMAN -744105, L/INE: 03192 252 052 / 522, MOB : 9531807777**



*If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment*  
**Marcus Aurelius Antoninus**

## Acid attack, a heinous crime

Acid attack is a form of violence against women. It is defined as the act of pouring acid intentionally on the body of the victim to mutilate, torment or kill. Most acid attack cases occur due to refusal to marry or a rejection of romance, a marker of how prevalent male egoism and patriarchy are in society. Other reasons for acid attacks include malice and jealousy. The issue has once again gathered momentum with a schoolgirl being attacked in broad daylight in the national capital just the other day. Over-the-counter sales of acid have been banned in India since 2013, but even nearly 10 years after the ban, women continue to be at the receiving end of heinous acid attacks. Acid continues to be sold and bought with ease despite being banned by the Supreme Court of India. Acid attacks are treated as one of the cruelest crimes as it causes long-lasting suffering to the victim. As acid melts flesh and even the bones of a person, it causes unprecedented pain to the survivor and leaves her disfigured, as well as giving permanent disabilities such as blindness and loss of hearing. In 2017, the Delhi High Court provided contractual employment to five acid attack survivors and a transgender person after their struggles were highlighted before the then Acting Chief Justice Gita Mittal. The Delhi State Legal Services Authority had proposed to explore job opportunities for acid attack survivors and the court's decision enabled six women to live with dignity.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, India reported 105 acid attack cases against 109 female victims in 2020. The Acid Survivor Foundation reports a large number of such attacks every year. The victims are mostly women facing abuse through different means of domestic violence, femicide, patriarchy honor killing, human trafficking, child marriage and acid attacks. Every year two million people experience corneal trauma leading them to partial or permanent blindness. One in every five of these cases is caused by chemical burns in the eyes. These incidents can also be termed as blind terror. Such horrific attacks are also perpetrated against men, but the percentage is lower as compared to women. A majority of the acid attack survivors are young girls and women who come from underprivileged backgrounds and are unable to complete their education. The retail sale of this off-the-shelf chemical, which is sometimes also used in suicide attempts, can safely be banned because less corrosive alternatives are available. For effective enforcement, though, it is essential to institute a document trail from production to point of sale. This can be done even online, if suitable applicant identification is available. Since concentrated acid is now used as a weapon, its possession without documents should be made an offence. Evidently, combating these cruel attacks requires a combination of strong penal laws, an effective scheme of treatment, relief and rehabilitation, and curbing of easy access to the chemical. India has a deplorable record on all three fronts. It owes a duty to all women to eliminate the scourge.

# Corporatisation of Ordnance Factories is a failure

## REFLEX ACTION

C. Srikumar

accountability. But none of these are visible. There is no such improvement after corporatization. In fact, the situation is worsening every day. We are ready to have a discussion in this regard with facts and figures. The reality is that instead of concentrating on productive activities, attention is more on non-productive activities like wastage of money in the name of new set up or other activities such as unnecessary man power transfers and harassment of employees.

It is also pertinent to add that at the time of splintering the 41 Ordnance Factories into seven corporations, the factories were achieving a production target up to Rs 17,000 crores. The claim of the ministry of defence at the time of creating the seven corporations was that they will achieve a production value of Rs 35,000 crores in the next five years with value addition every year. It is ironic that instead of giving workload to these corporations to achieve the target, the government has systematically curtailed the workload to them to ruin it. It is even worse in the case of TCL, where the entire workload of four Ordnance Factories have been decided to be given to the private entities by floating tender suitable to certain entities and deliberately barring the TCL Group of Factories even from taking part in it. Under these circumstances the unions once again requested the ministry of defence to immediately withdraw the decision taken to create seven Ordnance Factory Corporations, that are to be neither in the national interest nor in the interest of the workforce and would certainly lead to huge shortage of arms, ammunitions along with equipments for the armed forces, who are facing multiple enemies on the border. Post Corporatization, things have become worse in the Ordnance Factories within one year of Corporatization.

Workload has reduced for almost all the Ordnance Factories and no workload for the four Ordnance Factories under TCL from 2023-2024 onwards. With regard to the factories under the other six corporations (MIL, AVNL, AWEIL, IOL, GIL and YIL) there is an uncertainty about the workload in the coming years and their survival and there is no positive approach from the ministry of defence and armed forces in this regard to keep the infrastructure of these factories fully utilized. In Ordnance Factories like GCF, Jabalpur despite sufficient workload for the time being, most of the jobs are being outsourced which ultimately compromise the quality of the jobs and delay in completing the target. Rework has to be done by the Ordnance Factory workers on many of the components

purchased from the trade thereby wasting manpower and public money. When plant and machineries and manpower is readily available in the Factories, we fail to understand why the corporations are resorting to large scale outsourcing which ultimately increases the cost of production as the installed capacity is underutilized. On paper it is shown that workload is available in AVNL, AWEIL, etc. But physically there is bottle neck in providing materials and components, etc. Acute shortage of manpower due to large scale retirement is not being compensated by fresh recruitments. This affects the production, productivity and target.

Assurances given by the defence minister and the secretary of handholding and all types of support including financial and nonfinancial, to the 41 Ordnance Factories post corporatization is being blatantly violated. The CMDs of the corporations feel that they are the supreme authority of the DPSUs and it is not required for them to have any consultation/discussion with the major stake holder of the Ordnance Factories that is the Federations and the CDRA. The officers who were architects of creating these non-viable corporations and responsible for all the today's mess the Ordnance Factories are facing have been comfortably transferred out and there is no attempt by the MoD/DDP to address the post corporatization problems. No attempt has been made to deal with the uncertainty stalking the employees and the organization. Accidents in the Ordnance Factories have increased within this one year. Regular accidents are taking place especially in the MIL (erstwhile A&E Group of Factories).

To mention specific examples, in the Cordite Factory Aruvankadu and Ordnance Factory Khamaria frequent accidents are taking place. In the major explosion which took place on September 29, 2022 in Khamaria, one worker was killed and five others suffered serious injuries, in the accident. In nut shell there is total chaos and confusions in all aspects in the seven corporations and the purpose for which the government was justifying corporatization is yet to be achieved. It is a failed experiment. No money is invested for training and R&D activities. For skill and knowledge to be updated and new products to be developed, no initiative is taken.

In view of the abovementioned factors, the Federations have demanded that the government of India should reconsider its decision and withdraw the corporatization and restore the Ordnance Factories as government defence production units. They have given conditional assurance that if Rs 35,000 crores worth of production in the next five years is given they are prepared to extend full support and cooperation. But that can be possible only when the status of the Ordnance Factories are restored as a government organization. (IPA)



Christmas trees and other decorative accessories on sale in New Market ahead of the upcoming Christmas Day in Kolkata on Friday--Arijit Ganguly

# AAP's victory in Delhi Civic Polls is significant

AAP's victory in Delhi municipal polls is not a surprise. The exit polls were right for once, and the BJP's undistinguished record in running the municipality made it easy to believe them for once. The margin of victory is lower than what was expected by many, but it is a clear win, nevertheless.

Given that the gap between the two parties is about 30 seats, and that the anti-defection law does not apply in the case of municipal elec. There is some speculation that the BJP might still find a way to stall their own mayor. Given its previous track record with wooing rival politicians, it is entirely possible. But what is important for now is what the results say about the respective parties.

For AAP, the news is good but not something big. It has lost vote share. But against the run of play, it is largely to Congress and only marginally so to BJP. At an aggregate level, this suggests that BJP's many attempts to tar the party with the corruption brush have met with only limited success. On the other hand, the loss of share to Congress suggests that unlike 2017, it is failing to consolidate anti-BJP vote. The loss of Muslim vote is a worrying

aspect, for it thins the margin of victory to a point which makes the party vulnerable in the next election.

This is the real dilemma for AAP—it may need to choose between its national ambition that has dictated its embrace of its own version of Hindutva and it needs to hold on to its power base in Delhi.

Given that its Punjab government has so far not done anything to distinguish itself and that its gains in Gujarat, even in the best case, are not electorally substantial, the prospects of losing office in Delhi in next elections are also there.

For BJP, the news is bad but again with some plus points. It has lost the elections but has held on to its vote share. AAP's diminished vote share would give it confidence that it is today within striking distance of dislodging the incumbent in the next elections. Its pressing need is to find a

credible leader at state level, and to reduce its dependence on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and as of now it has come closer to solving that problem. Even if it can install its own mayor, it will only serve to project the party as a spoiler: something that has not helped its case in the past when it comes to Delhi voter. BJP's larger worry is the possible emergence of AAP as a national alternative. And while municipal elections are in no way a pointer to what might happen nationally, AAP has certainly improved its prospects with this win.

Congress has some good news at last, and while its increased vote share makes little tangle difference on the ground, psychologically it signals a change in the direction of its fortunes.

While the party will no doubt link its improved performance to Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, chances are that this is

more about AAP's inability to hold on to the Muslim vote than it is a vote for the Congress. In any case for reasons known best to Rahul Gandhi, he has planned his Yatra in such way as to ensure that it has nothing to do with trifling matter of elections.

The freebies accusation against AAP might make for aggrieved comments on TV and social media, but to the voter it is the only truly reliable way of receiving benefits from the state. It is more than a little hypocritical for AAP to be criticized for its 'welfare' schemes when every other party distributes its fair share of revdis. This victory also means that AAP can no longer shrug its shoulders and point to the fractured nature of administration in Delhi as an accused for any shortcomings. Given the fact that it is also in office in Punjab, it now has the power it needs to make a difference in fixing the issues that the city faces, including the vexed problem of pollution.

AAP needs to ensure that its national ambition does not come in the way of its focus on Delhi. Otherwise, this victory could end up being a very expensive one. (IPA)

## FOCUS

Harihar Swarup

Conventional Crossword												
1	2	3	4	5	6	7						
		8										
9	10				11							
	12			13								
14				15	16		17	18				
19				20				21				
						22	23					
24		25		26			27				28	
		29										
30							31					

ACROSS						DOWN					
1	Steep rugged rock	1	Long-leaved lettuce			1	Talisman				
4	Fanatical	2	Bands			3	engagements				
8	Very small	3	engagements			4	Spirit				
9	Self-satisfied	4	Coral isle			5	Resting place				
11	Mannequin	5	Pleasing			6	Assembly				
12	Otherwise	6	Corn spike			7	Goal				
14	Golf mound	7	Permit			8	Worn away				
15	Assert without proof	8	Precious metal			9	Come into use				
19	Garb	9	Percolate			10	Kimono sash				
21	Decay	10	Was ahead			11	Bashful				
22	Implement	11									
24	One revelling in things revolting										
27	Probability										
29	Light wind										
30	Attempted										
31	Whirlpool										

SUDOKU: 3728								
			4			7	5	
	4			1	2			
1			6			8	2	
		2				7		
7	6					4	3	
	8				6			
8	3			4			7	
			1	9		6		
	7	9		3				

Yesterday's Solution 3727								
2	9	6	7	1	5	4	8	3
8	1	7	6	4	3	9	2	5
3	5	4	9	8	2	1	7	6
4	2	9	8	3	6	7	5	1
5	3	8	1	2	7	6	9	4
6	7	1	4	5	9	8	3	2
7	4	3	5	6	8	2	1	9
1	8	5	2	9	4	3	6	7
9	6	2	3	7	1	5	4	8

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1736												
C	A	R	E	S	S		C	A	T			
A	C	U	T	E			E	R	G	O		
R	E	N	A	L			A	R	T			
G		G		L	E	D	G	E	S			
O	A	S	T			A	E					
	M	I				M	A	S	S			
T	U	R	E	E	N		T	P				
A	L	E				A	B	O	V	E		
P	E	L	T			V	E	N	A	L		
S	T	Y				R	E	G	E	N	T	

### DISCLAIMER

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# ANC cross country championship-2022-23



**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--/**  
In order to foster camaraderie and sportsman spirit as also to encourage wide participation in sports activities, Headquarters Andaman & Nicobar

Command conducted a Cross Country Championship on Friday. A total of 50 personnel of all ranks from the four components participated with josh and enthusiasm. The 10 Km long cross-

countryrun commenced from MajarDargah near Science Centreand ended at Air Force unit routing through Corbyn crossing, INS Utkrosh Main GateandBathuBasti. Army Components was

declared as 'winners' of the event. RAdm Sandeep S Sandhu, NM, Chief of Staff, Andaman & Nicobar Command awarded Trophies, Medals and Certificates to the 'winners' and 'runners up' teams.

## AAWSA formed under the leadership of M.Vinod



**PORT BLAIR, DEC 16/--** A new association of water sports operators from all islands of A&N Islands has been formed under the leadership of Mr. M. Vinod who is also the President of Andaman Association of Tour Operators. In a meeting held at Hotel King's, Haddo attended by all major stakeholders from Port Blair, SwarajDweep and ShaheedDweep, Mr. M. Vinod was unanimously elected as the President of the association.

As per Mr. Vinod, the objective of the association is to safeguard the interests of the stakeholders and represent the genuine concerns of the industry to A&N Administration and other relevant forums. An executive committee of the association was elected with representation from all activities and different islands. Mr. Anil Meshack was elected as the General Secretary of the association.

## Rajasthan govt likely to enact law to set up education regulator, rein in coaching centres

**JAIPUR, DEC 16 /--/**The Rajasthan government is set to enact a law establishing a regulatory authority to keep tabs on private educational institutes including coaching centres, ensuring that they open counselling cells, end "glorification" of toppers and deal with the kind of stress that possibly led to three students committing suicide recently.

The draft law proposes aptitude tests for students before they join a coaching centre for competitive exams, and a helpline if they find that they cannot face the stress. "The Rajasthan Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Bill - 2022", which has been in the making since 2020, is likely to be introduced in the next session of the state assembly. It covers schools, colleges as well as centres, like in coaching hub Kota, that prepare students for competitive exams. Recently, three students studying at a Kota centre committed suicide, allegedly because they could not cope up with the pressure of studies there.

The draft bill also seeks to regulate tuition fees, annual fee hikes, cost of study material and other charges levied by private institutions, including tuition centres.

The authority, headed by a prominent academician as chairperson, shall also make provisions to fix study hours, days off and the gap between tests to avoid stress on students. The bill proposes hefty penalties - up to Rs 5 crore for repeat offenders. The draft bill mentions setting up a career counselling cell to inform students about job options. The regulatory authority will also take measures to discourage "bogus advertising" and "glorification of toppers" to prevent other students developing a sense of "inferiority", the draft says. It will also deal with false claims by coaching centres about their students succeeding in competitive exams. "In order to ensure mental as well as physical well-being of the students in educational institutions, the Authority shall frame regulations for regular counselling, recreation and

safety of the students. It will mandate establishing of a counselling and mentoring cell in every institute," it says. Specific directions shall be issued for ensuring safety of girl students. There will also be provisions for differently abled students, teachers and non-teaching staff in private educational institutions, it said.

The draft says there will a mandatory aptitude test for students before they join a coaching centre and its findings shall be shared with their parents. The Authority shall mandate setting up a 24x7 helpline for students and parents. Private institutions would pay a maximum penalty of Rs 1 crore if they violate provisions of the proposed law. The fine could increase up to Rs 5 crore for a repeat violation. The bill seeks mandatory registration of all coaching institutes with the government and annual auditing of their accounts. Last month, the state government issued guidelines to provide mental support and security to students studying at coaching institutes. The guidelines suggested telling

students about career options if they fail entrance examinations for IITs and medical institutes. They also had provisions for refund in case a student quits an institute, an official had said then.

The guidelines also suggested an online portal to lodge complaints. Over two lakh students from across the country are taking tuitions in Kota for entering medical and engineering colleges, staying in about 3,500 hostels and as paying guests elsewhere in the city. Three of them allegedly committed suicide about a week back. Ankush Anand (18), a NEET aspirant and resident of Bihar's Supaul district, and Ujjwal Kumar (17), a JEE aspirant from Gaya district, were found hanging from the ceiling fans in their rooms at the same house on Monday morning. The third victim, Pranav Verma (17), a NEET aspirant from Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district, allegedly consumed some poisonous substance at his hostel late Sunday night, police said. Initial inquiries revealed that Anand and Kumar were falling behind in studies at their coaching centre. (PTI)

## SA Police traces out a missing tourist within 13 hours

**PORT BLAIR DEC 16/--**/On 14th December 2022 at 03:45 pm information was received at Police Station SwarajDweep regarding missing of one lady in forest near Kalapatthar beach named AnkitaSuryavanshi (29 yrs), D/o Ajay Kumar Singh, who came here on tour from Allahabad, UP, alongwith her parent. In response to this, a team of PS SwarajDweep immediately swung into action led by I/c PS SI Issac Nixon.

A Police team consisting of SI Sumit Singh, HC P Usman, HC(D) Krishna Bahadur, PC Jaffar, PC NirmalBairagi, PC(D) TitnusTirkey along with villagers of Nayabasti began the search at 05:00 PM in the dense forest around Kalapathar beach area. They relentlessly searched throughout the night and finally spotted the lady in morning 06:00 AM on 15th December 2022, deep in the forest, 13 hours after the search had began. Thereafter, the lady was reunited with her family after a medical examination at HWC SwarajDweep. Firm resolve and tenacity of Andaman Police was duly appreciated by the girl's father, who wrote a detailed testimonial in appreciation.

This reinforces the commitment of Andaman and Nicobar Police to ensure safety and security of tourists.

The general public is requested to share information pertaining to any crime or other illegal activities to Police at 112, 03192-232100 & 03192-233077. The identity of the informant will be kept secret.

# Kerala HC rejects plea for CBI probe into letter purportedly written by TVM Corporation mayor

**KOCHI, DEC 16** --/The Kerala High Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking a CBI probe or a judicial inquiry into the controversial letter allegedly written by Thiruvananthapuram Corporation Mayor Arya Rajendran regarding employing party cadres in the civic body.

Justice K Babu was of the view that there was no substance in the complaint made by the petitioner for ordering a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Advocate K R Rajkumar, who appeared for the petitioner, confirmed the order. The detailed judgement is yet to be made available. The petitioner, G

Sreekumar -- a former Councillor of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation -- had also urged the court to direct the Vigilance Directorate to register the complaint he had made in connection with the letter. The leak of the controversial letter had resulted in protests inside and outside the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation office by the BJP and Congress, including their youth and women wings, seeking Rajendran's resignation. Sreekumar had contended in his plea that Rajendran and LDF Parliamentary Party secretary D R Anil

# Girl dies, several people injured after bus carrying pilgrims to Sabarimala overturns

**KOTTAYAM, DEC 16 /-A** 10-year-old girl died and several others were injured on Friday when their minibus went off the road and turned turtle at Erumely area of Kottayam district in Kerala while enroute to Saharimala from

Chennai for the ongoing annual Mandalam-Makara vilakku pilgrimage. An officer of Erumely police station said the accident occurred between 3-3.30 pm when the vehicle was trying to navigate a treacherous hairpin curve there which is prone to accidents. "A lot of accidents take place here as the road goes steep downhill right after the hairpin curve," she said. The officer said it was believed that mechanical failure of the minibus was the cause for the accident, but it was not confirmed. There were 20 pilgrims, including five children, and the driver in the bus, she said, adding that 12 people were admitted to the nearby medical college for treatment. "No one else suffered any major injuries," she said. Earlier on November 19, as many as 43 people including a boy suffered injuries after a bus carrying Sabarimala pilgrims from Andhra Pradesh met with an accident and overturned near Laha in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district. (PTI)

# CPI (M) seeks convening of Administrator's Advisory Committee



**PORT BLAIR DEC 16/--** The CPI (M) has demanded immediate convening of the Administrator's Advisory Committee in order to discuss all important policy matters which are currently under process in the Administration. In a letter addressed to the Lt. Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Mr. D. Ayyappan, Secretary, CPI (M) A & N State Organising Committee said that a body namely Administrator's Advisory Committee was formed ten years back comprising Heads of Political parties in the islands, a few representatives of Municipal and Panchayat-raj institutions, etc. to ensure some kind of people's participation in the policy matters. It was observed that the functioning of the Committee was not satisfactory and only once in a while the meeting of the Committee was convened. However, for the last 3 - 4 years, no meeting of the Committee has been held.

CPI (M) Secretary stated in the letter that officers are taking important policy decisions concerning the people of these islands at their will and wish without any involvement or consultation with the islanders. He said that most of such decisions go against the interests of the islanders. While the successive central governments have failed to provide any democratically elected body with powers for the governance of this union territory, the authorities in the Administration continue to neglect the hopes and aspirations of the islanders while taking policy decisions. Genuine and reasonable demands and requests made by political parties do not evoke any positive response from the Administration. There is widespread discontentment and anger among the people against the style of functioning of the authorities in the islands over the years. Islanders have no forum to vent their grievances or demands. Hence Shri Ayyappan requested the Lt. Governor to convene the meeting of the Administrator's Advisory Committee.

# Man kills younger brother over drug abuse in Delhi

**NEW DELHI, DEC 16** --/A 23-year-old man was killed allegedly by his elder brother and father over drug abuse and his daily quarrels with the family in outer Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said on Friday. The incident took place on December 13 when no one was at home. After killing his brother, 26-year-old Lalit Kumar came to the police station the next day and confessed to his crime, police said. The deceased, Jaikishan, was a drug addict and often used to quarrel with his family members over money. Seeing this behaviour, his elder brother Kumar hit him with a hammer and with the help of his father (60) and disposed of the body near his house, they said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra K Singh said that on Wednesday, at about 2.15 am, Kumar came to Mangolpuri police station and disclosed that he murdered his brother Jaikishan and can get the body recovered which was thrown by him in the park near his house. On this, SHO Mangolpuri along with the staff rushed to the spot and found a body wrapped in a sheet. He further disclosed that Jaikishan was a drug addict and used to quarrel with family members for money. On December 12, Jaikishan beat his mother following which she left the house, he said. On December 13, when no one was at home, Kumar hit Jaikishan on his head with a hammer and hid the body under the bed. He told about Jaikishan's murder to his family members following which Kumar along with his father, disposed of the body. His mother also returned home the same evening and asked Kumar to go to the police station and confess to his crime, he added.

<p align="center"><b>F. No. 4(4)/2021-P&amp;PW(H)</b>  <b>Government of India</b>  <b>Department of Pension &amp; Pensioners' Welfare</b>  <b>3rd Floor, Lok Nayak Bhawan, Khan Market, New Delhi</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Registration of Pensioners' Associations under the Pensioners' Portal Scheme-Extension in date for submission of application.</b></p> <p>With reference to advertisement dated 17.08.2022 on the subject, it is informed that the last date for submission of application has been extended by 30 days from date of this advertisement. The Criteria for selection and other details are available on this Department's portal website <a href="http://pensionersportal.gov.in">http://pensionersportal.gov.in</a>. The Central Government Pensioners' Associations desirous of being associated with the Pensioners' Portal may send their details and relevant documents as indicated on the website referred to above.</p> <p align="right"><b>(Ashok Kumar Singh)</b>  <b>Under Secretary</b></p>
<p><b>CBC-32301/12/0002/2223</b></p>

		Reg.No.57/2018
<div>Masjid-ul-Ihsaan</div> <div>MASJID-UL-IHSAAN</div>		
Stewart Gunj, Bamboo Flat PO, South Andaman-700107 Andaman & Nicobar Islands		
Ref. No.		Date: 18.11.2022
<div>Conversion Certificate</div>		
Date of issue	18.11.2022	
Old Name	BASANTI KUMARI	
Converted Name	SAHANA	
Father's Name	HANDU CHIK BARAIK	
Sex	FEMALE	
Age	26	
Citizenship	INDIAN	
Previous religion	HINDU	
Adopted religion	ISLAM	
Address STEWART GUNJ, PO-BAMBOO FLAT, SOUTH ANDAMAN		
NOTE: This certificate is issued on the basis of Notary and affidavit published in THE ECHO OF INDIA on 16/11/2022.		
<div>Sd/-</div> <div>Moulana N. Moosa</div> <div>MASJID-UL-IHSAAN</div> <div>Reg. No. 57/2018</div> <div>South Andaman-744 107</div> <div>Andaman &amp; Nicobar Islands</div>		



## Prez for more women at senior positions and leadership roles

NEW DELHI, DEC 16 /--/ President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said more women at senior positions and in leadership roles will strengthen India's resolve for inclusive development.

Murmu was addressing the probationers of the Indian Statistical Service who had called on the president at Rashtrapati Bhavan here. She asked them to do their duty with sincerity and commitment. "Your contribution in steering India towards greater progress and development is going to be huge. The information and data analysis that you provide will be instrumental in making and implementing policies which ensure that no one is left behind in the journey of development," the President said.

Murmu said she was also delighted to know that lady officers comprise over 40 per cent of the officers present at the ceremony. "More women at senior positions and in leadership roles will definitely strengthen India's resolve for inclusive development," the President added.

Murmu said India is at the cusp of a new phase of socio-economic transformation. "Increased penetration of digital technologies has brought transparency and efficiency in the government functioning and has transformed the government landscape. The flow of data through these initiatives provides support to the government in taking effective decisions," she said.

Addressing the officers, the president said policy formulation and execution cannot be effective without the right statistical analysis. "In this era of endless information and data flow, the role and importance of statistics has increased exponentially. When we talk about India's rank in respect of any parameter, it is statistics. When we say, India is a country of young people or has high demographic dividend, it is on the basis of statistics that we say this," Murmu said.

The President said Indian Statistical Service officers have a key role in compiling official statistics at the central level for use of government and non-government entities. "Their job requires high proficiency in statistical methods, which they would use to provide solutions to data and information needs of the country," Murmu said.

She noted that various modules in their training cover wide range of areas, including recently emerged fields of data mining, big data and artificial intelligence. (PTI)



President Droupadi Murmu interacts with probationers of Indian Railways, at Rashtrapati Bhavan

## China preparing for war, Govt asleep: Rahul

JAIPUR, DEC 16 /--/ Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged on Friday that China is preparing for war while the Indian government is asleep and trying to ignore the threat.

Rahul also hit out at external affairs minister S Jaishankar, saying he keeps making remarks but needs to deepen his understanding. He also alleged that China has taken away 2,000 square kilometres of Indian territory, killed 20 Indian soldiers and is "beating up our jawans in Arunachal Pradesh".

The Congress leader slammed the media, saying he is sure that reporters would ask him about everything from Sachin Pilot to Ashok Gehlot, but not a question on China. "I can see the threat of China very clearly. I have been clear on this for the last

two-three years, but the government is trying to hide it and ignore it. This threat can neither be hidden nor ignored. Their (China's) full offensive preparation is going on...the Indian government is asleep," Rahul told a press conference here, referring to conflicts on the borders of Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh. "The government does not want to listen to this but their (China's) preparation is on. The preparation is for war. It is not for incursion, but for war. If you look at their weapon pattern, what they are doing -- they are preparing for war. Our government hides this and is not able to accept it," the former Congress chief said.

He said this is happening because the BJP-led government does event-based work and does not

work strategically. "They think in terms of event management, but where geostrategy is involved, event-based action does not work, power works. I have said three-four times that we should be careful and should understand what is happening," he said. "They keep making statements. I see the external affairs minister keeps making remarks. I should not say it, but he should deepen his understanding," Rahul said.

The Congress has been accusing the government of succumbing to pressure from China and not taking on the neighbouring country after its frequent transgressions at the border. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hit out at the Congress leader, with its IT department head Amit Malviya saying every proud Indian has seen videos of Indian soldiers thrashing their Chinese counterparts, except Gandhi, who continues to doubt their valour just because he signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Chinese, his family enjoyed Chinese hospitality and received funds in RG Foundation. Earlier in the day, the Congress upped the ante on the government over the Sino-India border issue citing the "ballooning" trade deficit and said while trade is "normal" with the neighbouring country, the border is "abnormal".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "exonerating" the Chinese with his 2020 statement on the border standoff and asked whether what happened back then was an "incursion" or an "excursion" by the Chinese.

Hitting out at the Prime Minister over his "silence" on the issue, Ramesh also alleged that Modi "forced" defence minister Rajnath Singh to read a "most wishy-washy" statement in Parliament earlier this week, following a recent face-off between Indian and Chinese forces in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh, and asserted that it was the opposition parties' democratic right to seek a debate on the important issue. "The Prime Minister has met the president of China 18 times. (Former external affairs minister) Sushma Swaraj said trade and terrorism cannot go together. But after China disturbed the LAC arrangement in April 2020, our imports from China have zoomed, our trade deficit has ballooned," he told PTI while participating in the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra here.

"So trade is normal but the border is abnormal. How can we reconcile this with what Sushma Swaraj had said in respect to Pakistan," Ramesh asked. Congress general secretary in-charge organisation KC Venugopal also slammed the government over the Sino-India border issue, saying those who used to talk about nationalism when they were in the Opposition are not even allowing a discussion on the border issue in Parliament. "They (BJP) talked a lot about this type of Chinese aggression but now, they are not even allowing a discussion in Parliament. We are very much concerned about territorial integrity. China day by day is entering our territory, the government is keeping mum," he said. (PTI)

"The Prime Minister's office (PMO) said Modi briefed the Russian President on India's ongoing Presidency of the G-20, highlighting its key priorities. It was the fifth telephonic talk between the two leaders this year. They held phone conversations on February 24, March 2, March 7 and July 1. Modi and Putin held a bilateral meeting in Uzbekistan's Samarkand on September 16 during which the Prime Minister told him that 'today's era is not of war' and nudged the Russian leader to end the conflict. 'Following up on their meeting in Samarkand on the sidelines of the SCO Summit, the two leaders reviewed several aspects of the bilateral relationship, including energy cooperation, trade and investments, defence and security cooperation, and other key areas,' the PMO said in a statement. "In the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Prime Minister reiterated his call for dialogue and diplomacy as the only way forward," it said. The phone conversation came days after it emerged that Modi will not be travelling to Russia for the annual India-Russia summit this year. Putin visited India last year for the summit. "The Prime Minister briefed

## India launches no-holds-barred attack on Pak over Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's 'outburst' against PM Modi

NEW DELHI, DEC 16 /--/ India on Friday launched a no-holds-barred attack on Pakistan foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari for his "uncivilised" outburst against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said the comments were a "new low" even for that country. In a strong condemnation, external affairs ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the Pakistan foreign minister's "frustration" would be better directed towards the masterminds of terrorist enterprises in his own country that has made terrorism a part of its "state policy".

"Pakistan is a country that glorifies Osama bin Laden as a martyr, and shelters terrorists like (Zakiur Rehman) Lakhvi, Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar, Sajid Mir and Dawood Ibrahim. No other country can boast of having 126 UN-designated terrorists and 27 UN-designated terrorist entities," Bagchi said. The MEA spokesperson said Pakistan foreign minister's "uncivilised outburst" seemed to be a result of Pakistan's increasing inability to use terrorists and their proxies," he said. The MEA spokesperson said cities like New York, Mumbai, Pulwama, Pathankot and London are among the many that bear the scars of "Pakistan-sponsored, supported and instigated terrorism".

"This violence has emanated from their Special Terrorist Zones and exported to all parts of the world. 'Make in Pakistan' terrorism has to stop," Bagchi said. "We wish that Pakistan foreign minister would have listened more sincerely yesterday at the UN Security Council to the testimony of Anjali Kulthe, a Mumbai nurse who saved the lives of 20 pregnant women from the bullets of the Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab," Bagchi said. "Clearly, the foreign minister was more interested in whitewashing Pakistan's role," he added. Bagchi further said that Pakistan needs to change its own mindset or remain a "pariah".

Lashing out at Bhutto-Zardari, minister of state for external affairs Meenakshi Lekhi said nothing better can be expected from Pakistan as these are the persons who have butchered people in Balochistan. (PTI)



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## Dialogue and diplomacy only way forward to resolve Ukraine crisis: Modi to Putin

NEW DELHI, DEC 16 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin and reiterated his call for dialogue and diplomacy as "the only way" forward to resolve the Ukraine crisis. The two leaders also reviewed bilateral cooperation in areas of energy, trade and defence during a telephonic conversation. A Russian readout said Putin gave "fundamental assessments of Russia's line on the Ukrainian direction at the request of Modi".

The Prime Minister's office (PMO) said Modi briefed the Russian President on India's ongoing Presidency of the G-20, highlighting its key priorities. It was the fifth telephonic talk between the two leaders this year. They held phone conversations on February 24, March 2, March 7 and July 1. Modi and Putin held a bilateral meeting in Uzbekistan's Samarkand on September 16 during which the Prime Minister told him that "today's era is not of war" and nudged the Russian leader to end the conflict. "Following up on their meeting in Samarkand on the sidelines of the SCO Summit, the two leaders reviewed several aspects of the bilateral relationship, including energy cooperation, trade and investments, defence and security cooperation, and other key areas," the PMO said in a statement. "In the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Prime Minister reiterated his call for dialogue and diplomacy as the only way forward," it said. The phone conversation came days after it emerged that Modi will not be travelling to Russia for the annual India-Russia summit this year. Putin visited India last year for the summit. "The Prime Minister briefed

President Putin on India's ongoing Presidency of the G-20, highlighting its key priorities. He also looked forward to both countries working together during India's Chairship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," it said. The PMO said the two leaders agreed to remain in regular touch with each other. The Russian readout said the two leaders discussed prospects for cooperation in areas such as mutual investment, energy, agriculture, transport and logistics. "Having expressed satisfaction with the high level of bilateral cooperation developing on the principles of the Russian-Indian special and privileged strategic partnership, the leaders discussed in detail the prospects for practical interaction in such areas as mutual investment, energy, agriculture, transport and logistics," it said. It said Modi and Putin underscored the importance of continuing close coordination within the framework of international organisations, including in the context of the Indian presidency in the G20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. "At the request of Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin gave fundamental assessments of Russia's line in the Ukrainian direction," it said. The call between the two leaders came on a day, officials said that Russian forces launched at least 60 missiles across Ukraine, reporting explosions in at least four cities, including Kyiv. India has been ramping up its procurement of crude oil from Russia notwithstanding increasing disquiet in the Western countries. New Delhi has not yet criticised Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine and it has been pressing for resolving the conflict through dialogue. (PTI)

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## MP for free of cost heli-evacuation of serious...

From page-1

He added that from the beginning of Helicopter service the evacuation of serious patients from remote Islands along with attendants used to be completely free, based on the recommendation of the CMO of the concerned Primary Health Centre or Community Health Centre but recently the Civil Aviation Department started to charge fair even for serious patients, who are evacuated from far flung islands. He pointed out that such a move of charging fare from emergency patients not only puts huge financial pressure on the family members of the patient but also causes untold mental agony. The Member of Parliament further added that when a serious patient is referred to Port Blair from PHCs or CHCs for specialised treatment, which is not available at that particular Island then it becomes a state subject and charging helicopter ticket fare from patients is unjustified.

## Eviction drives carried out to dismantle temporary sheds at Mayabunder

From page-1

The eviction drives were carried out on the direction of the Deputy Commissioner, N&M Andaman. Dr Satyendra Singh Dursawat. Mr. Pillai, Tehsildar Mayabunder and his team, including Patwari of the Rampur circle and Revenue department staff on Thursday dismantled the sheds in these villages.

Local villagers have been complaining that government contractors construct temporary sheds near the construction site for storing cements, rods and other construction materials as well as to serve as rest rooms for labourers. The contractors prefer to construct the temporary sheds at a place close to the roadside near the construction site for easy transportation of the materials. It

has become a way of life for such contractors never to ensure dismantling of temporary sheds after the project is over. Most contractors deliberately keep the temporary shed intact so that the area can be encroached upon. There are scores of temporary sheds constructed by the contractors for government projects which have not been demolished and later encroached upon.

Even after completion of the government projects and clearing of all pending bills, the contractors keep the shed intact and after a few days, fencing is erected surrounding the shed. The eviction drives carried out by the Revenue staff is a blow to such contractors who continue to keep the temporary sheds near the construction site with the intention to encroach the government land.

## PM to inaugurate Tripura's 1st Dental College tomorrow

AGARTALA, DEC 16 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Tripura's first Dental College here on Sunday, chief minister Manik Saha said. The Union ministry of health and family welfare has given permission to establish a Dental College in IGM hospital's new building on Thursday based on the recommendations of Dental Council of India (DCI), Saha said at a press conference here on Thursday night. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Tripura on Sunday to address a rally, inaugurate some projects and interact with the beneficiaries of the welfare schemes of the Central and state. During the visit the PM will also inaugurate the Dental College", the chief minister said. Saha said a DCI team visited the proposed building for the Dental College on December 12 and 13 and inspected the facilities. "They were impressed with the infrastructure at

the proposed building and the proposal of setting up a Dental College was approved by the Executive Council of DCI on Thursday (December 15)", he said. The chief minister, who also holds the health and family welfare portfolio, said the Dental College will have 50 seats and will function under the Tripura Central University. "Of the 50 seats, 15 per cent seats will be reserved for the central pool while 7/8 seats will go for northeastern states and the left-out seats will be reserved for the students of Tripura", he said. Terming the setting up a Dental College as a dream project for the state, Saha said four-year BDS admission will be made on the basis of NEET and later it will be upgraded gradually. The academic session will start from September next year. The chief minister also thanked the Prime Minister and Union health and family welfare minister Mansukh Mandaviya for giving permission to establish a Dental College in the state. The North-Eastern state has a government-run Agartala Medical College (AGMC) and society-run Tripura Medical College and Teaching hospital. (PTI)



Will address challenges to food security during India's G20 Presidency: Janet Yellen

WASHINGTON, DEC 16 / --/During India's G20 presidency, ongoing challenges to food security will be addressed, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told African leaders on Thursday.

"G20 leaders recently highlighted the importance of a robust global food



security response," Yellen said in her remarks at the US-Africa Leaders' Summit: Heads of State Session on Food Security.

"Under India's G20 presidency, we will be mapping the existing policy responses to identify any gaps, analyse the spillover effects from food and energy insecurity, and consider how macro-policy tools can be used by G20 economies to address these challenges," she said. The treasury secretary was in India last month for bilateral meetings with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. India currently presides the G20.

Earlier in the day, US President Joe Biden said how his country has, and will continue to, mount a robust and swift response to food insecurity in Africa. "We are doing so through bilateral and multilateral channels, and in partnership with you and other African leaders," Yellen said. The US also stepped-up support for agile mechanisms that prioritise country-ownership like the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme. "The programme will soon announce new funding to help build resilient and sustainable agriculture and food systems, particularly in Africa," she said. (PTI)

10 dead, including 5 children, in France apartment fire

VAULX-EN-VELIN, DEC 16 / --/Ten people, including five children died after a nighttime fire ravaged an eight-story apartment building Friday in one of the city of Lyon's poorest suburbs, French authorities said. The cause of the blaze the country's deadliest in years is under investigation, including to establish whether it had a criminal origin. Fourteen people were injured in the tragedy in the small suburban town of Vaulx-en-Velin, four of them seriously, according to the prefecture for the Rhone region. Some 170 firefighters were mobilized after flames tore through the centre of the modern apartment block shortly after 3 a.m. The fire has since been extinguished. Witness reports carried on French media describe scenes of horror, including residents smashing windows to try to climb out of the building, and one mother throwing her child out of the window to be safely caught by a person on the ground. An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw several fire trucks and a security perimeter set up around the area, and residents and traumatised neighbours with their children assembling in a car park opposite the building.

Counselling centres have been set up in two local schools, authorities said. Lyon academy rector Olivier Dugrip said that pupils from these schools were among the victims of the fire. Vaulx-en-Velin, a small town of 43,000 inhabitants, is among the most impoverished areas in the Rhone region. French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said that he would travel in the coming hours to the town, which is 470 kilometres (290 miles) southeast of Paris. Darmanin had already been due to travel to Lyon on Friday to present the security plan for Sunday's World Cup final between Argentina and France. Darmanin will be accompanied on his visit to the site by Housing Minister Olivier Klein. The fire is the deadliest in France since 2019, when an arson attack in a posh Paris district killed 10 people and injured 32. Tributes and messages of support have come from far and wide, including from soccer team Olympique Lyonnais, which collectively expressed its "thoughts" for the victims of the fire. "We send our deepest condolences to their loved ones," the Lyon club tweeted. (AP)

Pak LeT terrorist Kasab did not have 'iota of remorse' in jail after 26/11 attacks: Nurse Anjali Kulthe

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 16 / --/ Anjali Kulthe, the brave staff nurse who saved many lives during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, has said that the Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab did not have an "iota of remorse" when she saw him in jail after he was captured alive.

Addressing the 'UNSC Briefing: Global Counterterrorism Approach: Challenges and Way Forward' via video link on Thursday, Kulthe recalled the horror that



the victims of the attacks went through on that fateful day when 10 Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists launched coordinated shooting and bombing attacks in Mumbai at five major locations, killing 166 people and injuring over 300 people. Kulthe, who was a staff nurse at the Cama and Albless Hospital for Women and Children when the attack took place, told the Security Council members that Kasab did not show even an "iota of remorse" when she saw him in jail after he was captured alive. She reportedly saw two terrorists, including Kasab, storm into the gates of the hospital and kill the guards. The LeT terrorists targeted five prominent places of the financial capital - Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station, Nariman House business and residential complex, Cama Hospital, Leopold Cafe, the Oberoi-Trident Hotel, and Taj Hotel and Tower.

Earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar thanked Kulthe for vividly sharing her recollection of the human cost of terrorism and described her as a "valiant victim of the 26/11 terror attacks". "Her testimony today is a stark reminder to the Council and the international community that justice is yet to be delivered to the victims of several terrorist incidents, including the 26/11 Mumbai attacks," he said in a statement to the Security Council in his national capacity. Kulthe had also identified and testified against Kasab. She donned her uniform proudly at the court while she testified against him. Kasab was sentenced to death and executed on November 21, 2012 and buried at Yerwada Jail in Pune. (PTI)

India in danger of becoming Hindu nationalist State: US Congressman

WASHINGTON, DEC 16 / --/India is facing the danger of becoming a Hindu nationalist State, an outgoing Democratic Congressman known for his anti-India tirade said on Thursday.

Describing himself as a "lifelong human rights advocate" Congressman Andy Levin (62) in his last speech on the floor of the US House of Representatives said the US has had more success in human rights, although the situation was dire in many parts of the world. "I have been a vocal advocate for human rights in places like India, which is in the danger of becoming a Hindu nationalist State rather than a secular democracy, the world's largest democracy," alleged Levin, who represented the ninth Congressional District from Michigan. In the next Congress, it will be represented by Lisa McClain of the Republican Party. "I am a lover of Hinduism, a lover of Jainism, Buddhism and other religions that were born in India, but we need to protect the rights of

all people there. Whether they're Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Jains," Levin, said.

The Congressman also highlighted some other countries, including Egypt where he said thousands of political prisoners were languishing in jail. "Let me mention just a few highlights. The House passed my bipartisan resolution condemning the coup in Burma (Myanmar) and we have continued oversight of the very troubling human rights situation there as well as the inspiring efforts of the Burmese people to resist repression," he said. "Indeed, my first foreign trip as a congressman was to Bangladesh to visit Rohingya refugees just over the border from Burma there," Levin said. As a lawmaker, Levin was known for making frequent statements against India, including those on Kashmir. During a special Congressional briefing titled "India's Brutal Persecution of Kashmir," organised by multiple human rights groups, including the Indian American Muslim Council

(IAMC), on April 20, Levin had called for international attention on the issue. "While Kashmir may not be in the nightly news, what's happening there deserves the world's attention, and it's still a prime example of how Prime Minister Modi is taking India in the wrong direction in terms of human rights and democracy," Levin alleged. Levin is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and is vice chair of the subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and non-proliferation.

During another Congressional briefing organised by IAMC last year, Levin had expressed concern over religious freedom in India. "The India of (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi today is not the India I fell in love with," he said. "Why would I be so critical and so publicly critical of a country that I love? The answer is it is because I love India that I am committed to ending these attacks on its people. It is because I am so passionate in my support for the vibrant

democracy I came to know as a young man, that I want to see that democracy flourish for generations to come," Levin said. Following his defeat in the Democratic primary, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi described him as a skilled legislator, a valuable leader and a proven fighter for working people. "Our House Democratic Caucus is deeply grateful for Congressman Levin's service, and we will miss his leadership in the House," Pelosi said.

She said public service was in "Levin's DNA" and that he served as a powerful champion of American workers and working families. "On the House Committee on Education and Labour, his passion for economic justice and an unwavering commitment to strengthening America's labour movement shone through in all of his legislative efforts. He brought to the House Foreign Affairs Committee an unwavering commitment to ensuring America stands as a global force for peace and human rights," Pelosi said. (PTI)

COP15: Over 3 mn sign petition for protection of 50 per cent of world's biodiversity

MONTREAL, DEC 16 / --/As countries iron out a deal to protect nature at the COP15 biodiversity conference here, a petition backed by 3.2 million citizens worldwide has called for a more ambitious target of at least 50 per cent conservation and protection of lands and oceans by 2030.

Most of the 196 countries meeting in Montreal, including India, have backed a 30 per cent figure for protecting lands and oceans. However, a final agreement is due to be completed on December 19. "We are already well beyond 30 per cent conservation of the planet, if only our governments recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their territories, lands and waters," Oscar Soria, Campaign Director, Avaaz said in a press briefing here. "They are de facto the ones conserving biodiversity. Now's the time to strive for a higher target, of half the Earth. Any other number will put vital forests in jeopardy, and are clearly not enough to kickstart the necessary revolution to rebuild our relationship with nature," Soria said. However, Basile van Havre, Co-Chair for the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Post-2020 Open Ended Working Group, believes that the Parties should not give themselves goals that are not achievable. "Definitely the science is pretty clear, 30 per cent (target) is a minimum so the way I am looking at it, this will take a massive effort from where we are to reach 30 per cent. Let us not give ourselves goals that we can not achieve in 8 years," van Havre said.

Advocates of the science-based Half target, led by prominent biodiversity NGOs, argue that the 30 by 30 target, conceived in the drafting negotiation process between 2019 and early 2020, is now an outdated figure based on the latest understanding of science and technology. They warn that the national pledges from countries to protect 30 per cent of their own territories by 2030 are now opening a "vulnerability policy loop" in the negotiations which would allow catastrophic destruction in biodiversity-rich nations. The petition has been backed by NGOs including Wild, One Earth, and Grounded. A group of award-winning international artists has also endorsed the petition calling to protect half the planet and make it a safe space for biodiversity. Among the group of signatories are William Shatner, Olivia Colman, Sophie Turner, Jack Black, Joaquin Phoenix, Andie MacDowell, Frances Fisher, and James Cromwell. "Human activities have been driving the proliferation of threats such as climate change, habitat loss, pollution, over-exploitation, and epidemics," Cromwell, American actor and activist, said. "As a result of our own actions, the accelerated biodiversity loss is not only causing species to become extinct faster than at any time," he added. Early reports indicate a cumbersome and contentious process at COP15, bogged down by disagreement, reflected in hundreds of items in square brackets i.e. yet to be agreed. (PTI)

Russia launches another major missile attack on Ukraine

KYIV, DEC 16 / --/Russian forces launched at least 60 missile strikes across Ukraine on Friday, officials said, reporting explosions in at least four cities.

At least two people were killed when a residential building was hit in central Ukraine, while electricity and water services were interrupted in the two largest cities, Kyiv and Kharkiv. Thudding blasts and gunfire from air-defence systems echoed across the country as authorities on social media reported explosions and missile strikes in Kyiv, the capital, southern Kryvyi Rih, southeastern Zaporizhzhia and northeastern Kharkiv. Air raid alarms sounded across the country, warning of a new barrage of the Russian strikes that have occurred intermittently since mid-October.

Ukrainian Air Force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat told Ukrainian TV that more than 60 missiles had been fired, but it wasn't immediately clear how many missiles the Ukrainian army managed to intercept. Some officials reported success in downing some incoming projectiles. Ihnat said Russian forces had fired cruise missiles from positions in the Black Sea, and used bomber aircraft as part of an effort to "massively distract the attention of the anti-aircraft defence, keeping it in tension."

A day earlier, Russia's Foreign Ministry warned that if the United States delivers sophisticated Patriot air defence systems to Ukraine, such systems and any crews that accompany them would also be a legitimate target for the Russian military. Washington rejected that threat. Analysts have said Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure have been part of a new strategy to try to freeze Ukrainians into submission after recent battlefield losses by Russian forces. Officials and experts say that has only strengthened the resolve of Ukrainians to face up to Russia's invasion, while Moscow tries to buy time for a possible offensive in coming months after the current battlefield stalemate. (AP)

Indian-origin nurse, 2 kids found dead in UK

Murder investigation launched

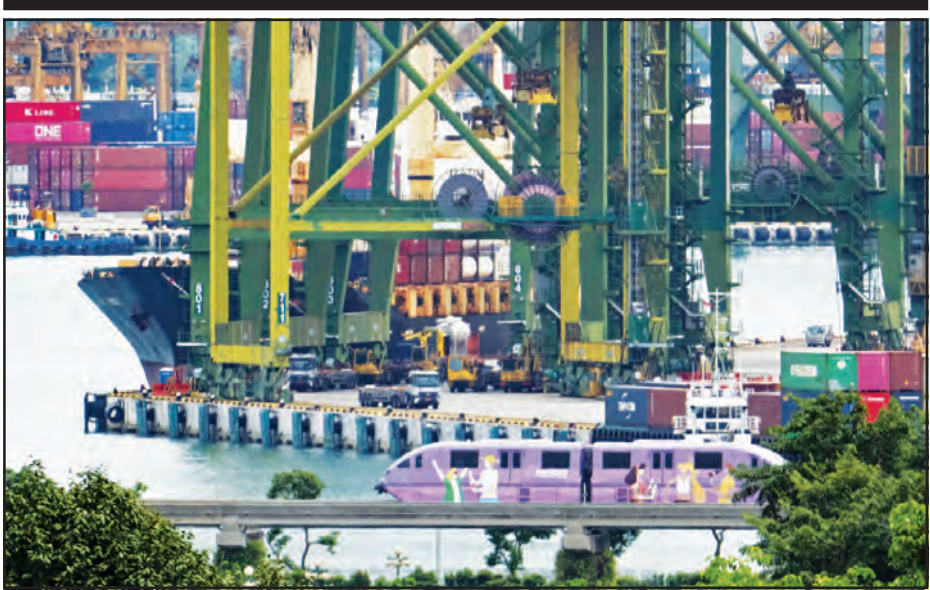
LONDON, DEC 16 / --/An Indian-origin woman and her two young children died after being found with serious injuries at their home in the Northampton region of eastern England, local police said as they launched a murder investigation on Friday.

The woman, locally identified as a 40-year-old Malayali nurse from Kottayam, and her six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter died after being discovered in their home in the town of Kettering. A 52-year-old man, believed to be the woman's husband, has been arrested on suspicion of murder in connection with the incident and remains in police custody. Northamptonshire Police said officers are not seeking anyone else in relation to the "desperately sad" case. "There are no words to describe how upsetting this incident is, but I want to reassure the public that we have a team of detectives working on the case, absolutely determined to get justice for this woman and the two children," said Superintendent Steve Freeman, Local Policing Area Commander for Northamptonshire Police. We understand that the local community, and indeed many people across the country, will be shocked by this event. It is a desperately sad incident and I want to be absolutely clear on our unwavering commitment in establishing what has happened here and in seeking justice for this

woman and these young children," he said.

He said the man they arrested is being questioned by detectives in custody and asked for anyone with any information to contact them. Police officers were called to the residential property on Thursday morning and said that despite their best efforts and that of the paramedics, the woman died at the scene and the two children later died in the hospital. Forensic post-mortem examinations to establish the cause of death will be taking place in the coming days after which the names of the victims will be formally released.

Locally, tributes have started pouring in for the nurse, who worked at Kettering General Hospital, and her children. Her husband reportedly worked at a hotel and the family is believed to have been in the UK for around a year or so. "All of us in Kettering find ourselves shocked by the news of the tragic deaths of three members of our community," said Councillor Kell Watts, Mayor of Kettering. "We all send our love and support to the friends and family of the victims and also to neighbours at Petherton Court. We all stand ready to support those affected," she said. "This is a tragic case and my thoughts are with the loved-ones of the victims at this time," added Councillor Jason Smithers, leader of local North Northants Council. (PTI)



Container ships load and unload goods at the Tanjong Pagar Container Terminal in Singapore

Senate passes defense bill rescinding Covid vaccine mandate

WASHINGTON, DEC 16 / --/A bill to rescind the Covid-19 vaccine mandate for members of the U.S. military and provide nearly 858 billion for national defense passed the Senate on Thursday and now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The bill provides for about 45 billion more for defense programs than Biden requested and roughly 10 per cent more than last year's bill as lawmakers look to account for inflation and boost the nation's military competitiveness with China and Russia. It includes a 4.6 per cent pay raise for servicemembers and the Defense Department's civilian workforce. The Senate passed the defense policy bill by a vote of 83-11. The measure also received broad bipartisan support in the House last week. To win GOP support for the 4,408-page bill, Democrats agreed to Republican demands to scrap the requirement for service members to get a Covid-19 vaccination. The bill directs Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to rescind his August 2021

memorandum imposing the mandate. Before approving the measure, the Senate voted down a couple of efforts to amend it, including a proposal from Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., to speed the permitting process for energy projects.

The effort had drawn fierce opposition from some environmental advocacy groups who worried it would accelerate fossil fuel projects such as gas pipelines and limit the public's input on such projects. Manchin, who chairs the Senate Energy Committee, secured a commitment from Biden and Democratic leaders last summer to support the permitting package in return for his support of a landmark law to curb climate change. Machin's legislation sets deadlines for completion of National Environmental Policy Act reviews for major energy and

natural resource projects. It would require courts to consider litigation involving energy project permits on an expedited



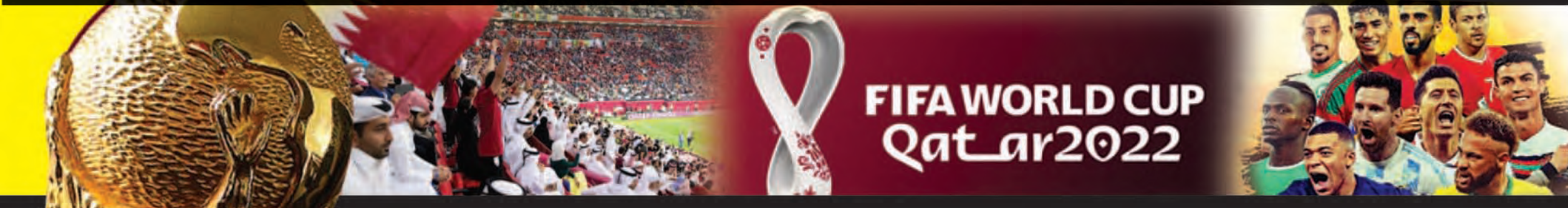
basis. It also directs federal agencies to permit the completion of a natural gas pipeline in his home state and Virginia "without further administrative or judicial delay or impediment." "We're on the verge of doing something unbelievable, but let me tell you, most of it will be for naught. Because without permitting reform, the United States of

America is more litigious than any nation on earth," Manchin told colleagues.

Biden voiced his support for Manchin's legislation a few hours before Thursday's vote. He said far too many projects face delays and described Manchin's amendment "as a way to cut Americans' energy bills, promote U.S. energy security, and boost our ability to get energy projects built and connected to the grid." Not only did some environmental advocacy groups bash

Manchin's proposal, but so did many Republicans. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said it didn't go far enough, calling it "reform in name only." The amendment fell short of the 60 votes needed for passage, 47-47. An amendment from Sens. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., and Ted Cruz, R-Texas, also went down to defeat. It would have allowed for the





# Messi carries the weight of Argentina into FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL



## Dreams shattered, Croatia and Morocco dust themselves off for bronze

DOHA, DEC 16 /--/ As Croatia and Morocco pick up the pieces after their World Cup semi-finals defeats, the two teams will welcome the prospect of potentially leaving Qatar on a high when they square up in the third-place playoff on Saturday. Beating two world class teams in Argentina and France to reach the final proved to be a step too far for Croatia and Morocco, who handsomely defied pre-tournament odds to reach the semis. Morocco rewrote history along the



way when Walid Regragui's fearless squad became the first African team to reach the last four of football's showpiece event. They will be welcomed home as heroes regardless of the result having not only earned the respect and support of the continent and the Arab world, but also having found a place in the hearts of neutral fans who love a true underdog story. Croatia and Morocco will face off in Qatar for a second time after playing out a 0-0 draw in their group opener, just as in 2018 when Belgium and England met each other in the group stage and third-place playoff.

"It will be difficult on a mental level. I will give opportunities to those who did not play and we will try to clinch third place," Regragui said. "The important thing is that we presented a good look to our team and that

football in Morocco is not far from the top level." For 2018 runners-up Croatia, reaching a second consecutive final looked unlikely when they won just one group game. But through sheer graft and tenacity, two penalty shootout wins over Japan and favourites Brazil earned them a semi-final match with Argentina, where an in-form Lionel Messi was the architect of their destruction. "Realistically speaking, before the start of the tournament, we would all have accepted reaching the semi-finals. However, we started to dream about the trophy," Croatia midfielder Lovro Majer said. "Still, we will give everything we've got on Saturday and try to win the bronze medal." For Croatia it represented an opportunity missed to crown their golden generation of players, with coach Zlatko Dalic confirming

most of them will not play in the next World Cup. "I told the players they need to keep their heads up, be proud of giving their maximum and be ready, we must prepare to fight for third place," Dalic said. "There is no blame on our guys, I congratulate them for everything they've done at this World Cup. Now we have to get up, dust ourselves off and try to win the bronze medal." (Agency)

**TODAY'S MATCH**  
**THIRD PLACE MATCH:**  
**CROATIA**  
**VS MOROCCO**  
**- 8.30 PM IST**

## France struck by cold virus ahead of World Cup final

DOHA, QATAR, DEC 16 /--/ A cold virus is running through the France squad ahead of the World Cup final against Argentina on Sunday, affecting at least three players in the squad. Coach Didier Deschamps said two players with symptoms, defender Dayot Upamecano and midfielder Adrien Rabiot, were isolated earlier this week and didn't play in France's 2-0 semifinal win over Morocco. Rabiot wasn't in the lineup in Wednesday's match at Al Bayt stadium. Upamecano was in the lineup as a substitute but didn't play. Deschamps said Upamecano was recovering from "three difficult days" since playing in the quarterfinals against England on Saturday. "However, we have four days until the next game, so he should be available for Sunday," the coach said, adding back-up winger Kingsley Coman had also felt feverish. He insisted he expects all his players to be healthy for the final against Argentina. (AP)

DOHA, DEC 16 /--/ As Lionel Messi approaches his second and likely last World Cup final, the stakes could hardly be higher.

The same goes for Argentina after more than 30 years of disappointment since it last won soccer's ultimate prize. For Messi, victory against France at Lusail Stadium on Sunday is a chance to finally get his hands on the one major trophy that has eluded him in his storied career. In doing so, he would push ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo, who has also never won a World Cup, in the long-running rivalry between the two greatest players of their generation. While 37-year-old Ronaldo exited the tournament at the quarterfinals stage, benched by Portugal and in tears in the likely recognition that his last chance had passed, Messi is summoning some of his finest moments in an Argentina shirt to inspire his country's run to the final. "Each time we see him play, he makes us and the players feel something special," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "There's something about him that people like, not only Argentines. "We feel lucky and privileged to have him wear our shirt." Messi's place alongside Diego Maradona as one of Argentina's two most iconic soccer stars has been secure for some time now. But he is yet to emulate Maradona's greatest achievement by leading his national team to a World Cup title. Maradona did that in Mexico in 1986 and Messi

has lived with the expectation of repeating the feat since he emerged as a prodigy at Barcelona nearly 20 years ago. There have been numerous false hopes during that time. There was the potential "dream team" of Maradona as coach and Messi as the star player in South Africa in 2010. But Argentina went out in the quarterfinals after being beaten 4-0 by Germany. In 2014, with Messi approaching his peak years, Argentina reached the final in Brazil. Again it faced Germany. Again Messi was on the losing side, beaten 1-0 through extra time. At the age of 35, he knew this was probably his last shot at the World Cup and he has risen to the occasion as the tournament's co-leading scorer with France forward Kylian Mbappé with five goals. Perhaps more notable have been his assists, such as the disguised pass for Nahuel Molina's goal against the Netherlands in the quarterfinals. Then there was his mesmerizing run, turning Croatia defender Josko Gvardiol inside out, before setting up Julián Álvarez for Argentina's third in the semis. "It's at least something I can talk (about) with my kids one day that I guarded this great, great player," Guardiola said Thursday.

Those assists have been indicative of the fact that Messi can no longer do it on his own. The emergence of Álvarez, with four goals, has been vital to Argentina's progress. Messi doesn't dominate for

an entire 90 minutes anymore. Instead, he decides to match with key moments. He isn't as dynamic as he was in his younger years, but he has been more influential than at any of his previous four World Cups.

While Messi is aiming to complete his personal collection of trophies, having won four Champions League titles and seven Ballon d'Or awards for the best player in the world, Argentina is looking to end its long wait for a third World Cup. It won the tournament for the first time when hosted in 1978 and then again eight years later thanks to Maradona. Messi was supposed to emulate that feat long before now. If he retires without ever winning the World Cup, then how much longer will Argentina have to wait? No wonder each moment of Messi's magic and every win is greeted with such an outpouring of emotion. A sense of anticipation is growing among Argentina fans, who have lit up the tournament in a sea of blue and white, marching through the streets of Qatar. Messi is feeding the belief that this could be their time again. If this is his farewell tour, he has given his supporters a wild ride along the way. And with or without a World Cup, Scaloni has no doubt about Messi's status as the greatest of all time. "It seems like we say that just because we're Argentinians and we fall into the trap of being selfish because it is very Argentinian to say that," he said. "But I think there are no doubts." (AP)

## Lionel Scaloni on cusp of joining tournament coaching greats

DOHA, DEC 16 /--/ Lionel Scaloni is just one win away from joining the pantheon of all-time Argentina coaching greats alongside former World Cup winners Cesar Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo. Thrust into the hotseat on an interim basis in 2018 after Jorge Sampaoli's tempestuous reign ended, Scaloni, 44, has made the job his own — leading the Albiceleste to the brink of a third World Cup crown. The contrast between the fiery Sampaoli and understated Scaloni, Argentina's assistant at the last World Cup, could not be more pronounced. His appointment following a tumultuous last-16 exit in Russia was met with widespread criticism and disapproval from those who felt he lacked the necessary qualifications. The late Diego Maradona, himself a former Argentina manager, offered a particularly withering assessment at the time, praising Scaloni's character but telling newspaper Clarin: "He's not even capable of directing traffic." Scaloni had no previous experience as a head coach, but he was only supposed to be in charge for two months while the federation searched for Sampaoli's successor. He inherited a squad scarred by a series of near-misses — the 2014 World Cup final defeat was followed by back-to-back Copa America final losses to Chile on penalties in 2015 and 2016. Scaloni's most immediate concern was the future of Lionel Messi, who briefly retired from international duty in 2016 and was disillusioned by Argentina's 2018 World Cup flop. But the superstar forward was impressed by Scaloni's vision for the team — as well as the presence of his idol Pablo Aimar on the coaching staff, along with former international teammates Roberto Ayala and Walter Samuel. (AFP)



## Born winner Didier Deschamps leads France to brink of glory again

DOHA, DEC 16 /--/ Through to their fourth World Cup final in seven editions, France have become accustomed to success on the international stage and central to it all has been Didier Deschamps, a born winner as a player and now an inspirational leader as a coach. As Les Bleus approach Sunday's showdown with Argentina in Doha,

it seems remarkable now that there were serious doubts about this French side coming into the World Cup. They had disappointed at Euro 2020 and Deschamps was already dealing with an injury crisis before Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema withdrew from the squad on the eve of the tournament. Yet the circumstances have brought the best out of the France coach, who ripped up his tactical plans and pulled off a masterstroke in turning forward Antoine Griezmann into a midfielder. Griezmann's own comments during the competition told a story. "I owe him everything in my international career. I give everything for the shirt, for France, but also for him," said the Atletico Madrid star who has arguably been the player of the tournament. "Every game, every action is like me saying thank you to him. I want to do everything to make him proud of his number seven." Deschamps may be derided by some fans who feel his team should play more attractive football. But Griezmann's comments revealed something else about Deschamps — that his man-management skills are even more important than tactical nous. "He likes to talk with his players and know what you are feeling. Every time he gives an order or advice you follow him," Griezmann said. (AFP)

## Gill, Pujara smash hundreds as India reach commanding position in opening Test

CHATTOGRAM, DEC 16 /--/ Shubman Gill scored his maiden Test century while Cheteshwar Pujara finally ended a four-year wait for his 19th hundred as India set Bangladesh a stiff victory target of 513 runs on the third day of the series-opener here Friday. For the second day in succession, Bangladesh were completely outplayed as Kuldeep Yadav's career-best 5 for 40 helped India dismiss the hosts for a paltry 150 in just 55.5 overs. With nearly three days at their disposal and a lead of 254, India captain KL Rahul decided against enforcing the follow-on as Gill (110) and Pujara (102 not out) took full advantage of a toothless Bangladeshi attack that also missed its lead pacer Ebadot Hossain due to a back-injury. The moment Pujara exorcised the ghosts of the last four years with the completion of his fastest Test hundred, skipper Rahul declared the Indian second innings closed at 258 for 2. At stumps, Bangladesh were 42 for no loss on a track where a lot of balls are indeed keeping low but the pitch hasn't shown considerable wear and tear. The hosts still require 471 runs to win the match. However to bat for 180 overs over two days will be an improbable task for the Bangladesh batting line-up against the Indian bowling line-up. Stand-in skipper Rahul, who holed out at the fine leg boundary off a well-laid short ball trap by Khaled Ahmed (1/52 in 13 overs), would rue that he missed a chance to get a big score under his belt. However Gill, blessed with gift of exquisite timing, pounced on a depleted Bangladesh attack, hitting 10 boundaries and three sixes -- one off pacer Khaled and one each of Litton's part-time spin and Mehidy Hasan Miraz after reaching his three-figure mark. Gill's attacking batting also allowed Pujara to take his time at the beginning. He accelerated towards the back-end of the Indian innings as he had 13 boundaries

to show for his efforts. But there could be no debate about which innings would be rated higher in terms of aesthetics. It certainly would be 23-year-old Punjab man, who at times would give a languid vibe in his effortless strokeplay. He used the sweep to good effect against the off-spin of Miraz and the reverse sweep against left-arm spin of Taijul. He repeatedly came down the track to loft the spinners and disturb their length. He converted a lot of good length balls into half-volleys while any width from pacers or deliveries drifting down the leg-side were also met with utter disdain. Gill however would consider himself lucky as he was twice adjudged leg-before by the on-field umpires but DRS ruled it not out. Another time when Bangladesh went for review, the DRS didn't work. Buoyed by his 90 in the first innings, Pujara was a picture of supreme confidence and this Bangladesh attack never had the wherewithal to dismiss him with literally no scoreboard pressure on India. While his first fifty came off 87 balls, he raced to his next 50 in just 43 balls, answering anyone and everyone who keep on questioning his intent. If the first 50 runs had five fours, the second was laced with eight boundaries as he added 113 runs for the second wicket with Gill. The relief was palpable when he hit Taijul Islam for a boundary and got a warm hug from Virat Kohli (19 not out) at the other end. With a lot of deliveries starting to keep low, the spin troika of Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep and Axar Patel will be eager to come out on fourth and fifth day to ensure full 12 World Test Championship points for the team. Najmul Hossain Shanto (25 batting) and Zakir Hasan (17 batting) have given an improved account of themselves in Bangladesh's second essay. At the start of the day, Kuldeep completed his third five-wicket haul when Ebadot (17)'s 37-ball vigil ended. (PTI)



(T-B) Cheteshwar Pujara celebrates his Test century with Virat Kohli. Shubman Gill got to his maiden Test century with a smash over mid-on

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