

## Garbage dumped in Manarghat School premises create health hazard for students

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/-/ Achieving success in the flagship 'Swachh Bharat' programme is on the top of the current government's agenda, but for the first responder-the Sanitary workers, it seems this mantra has little relevance as after collecting the garbage from the locality, the sanitary workers engaged by the Manarghat Panchayat has been dumping the garbage in the premises of Govt. Sr. Sec School Manarghat. Hundreds of students study in the Govt. SS School, Manarghat. Garbage dumping in the School premises has become a cause of concern for the students and their parents.

Zubida, a local resident who just lives next to the school, said a lot of children come to the School. The dumping of garbage in the school premises has been leading to releasing pungent & nauseating smells in the surrounding area. "Post Covid-19, we have to be extremely careful about the public health, particularly about the health condition of the children", she added. Some residents have put the role of the Pradhan, Manarghat under scanner as despite the



**Little relevance: Sanitary workers engaged by Manarghat Panchayat have been dumping the garbage in the premises of Govt. Sr. Sec School**

Manarghat Panchayat receiving the Lt Governor's Commendation Certificate, no steps being taken to keep this region neat and clean, schools vicinity in particular. This

Correspondent who visited the Mangarghat School found that heaps of garbage in the forms of empty plastic bottles, plastic bags and other forms of garbage are dumped on the school complex. The local Panchayat body, however, appears to care two hoots in keeping the area spick and span. "While the government is focusing on cleanliness drive, the GP Mannarghat is least bothered on sanitation. The Department of Rural Development & Panchayat should take a strong note of the situation and take appropriate steps to dispose of garbage at regular intervals from the School premises. Adequate dustbins should be placed in various places for dumping of garbage instead of dumping the waste in school premises.



**Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar, Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare, Gol, currently on visit to A&N Islands from 27th - 30th December 2022, to review medical infrastructure & preparedness for Covid-19 by A&N Administration met Admiral D K Joshi (Retd.), Lt Governor of A&N Islands at Raj Niwas on Thursday. The Lt. Governor briefed the steps being taken by Directorate of Health Services for overall readiness of Andaman & Nicobar Islands in Fight against Covid and upgrading of healthcare framework.**



### MP seeks repair of velodrome of Netaji Sports Complex, construction of a velodrome at Carnic

and rectified. He mentioned that the velodrome needs a total makeoverso that not only local level but also international level training can be imparted in the velodrome. This will certainly produce more and more international level cyclists from these Islands, which will bring more medals for India in future.

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/-/ The Member of Parliament, Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma has requested the Lt. Governor to repair the velodrome of Netaji sports Complex as per the international standard under Khelo India initiative and also to construct a velodrome of internationally approved specifications at Car Nicobar for creating more cycling opportunities for the childrens of Nicobar District at their place of residence

In his letter, Mr. Sharma said that this is a matter of extreme pride that we have many international level cyclists in Andaman and Nicobar Islands like Deborah Herold, Master Esow Alben and David Beckham, who have brought laurels for our Islands in national as well as international level. He said that all these cyclists and many others budding cyclists have got initial training in the lone velodrome of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and later they got specialised training in mainland India. He added that the lone velodrome is in very bad shape and training on this velodrome can lead to serious accidents to the cyclists, which ultimately can spoil the career of any future budding cyclists. The Member of Parliament pointed out that the existing Rajiv Gandhi Velodrome at Netaji Stadium Sports Complex, Port Blair has inherent technical defects since it's construction way back in the year 1995, which needs to be identified

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# Benefits of tech should reach remote areas, poor: Prez

**HYDERABAD, DEC 29** -- / The benefits of technology should reach the remote areas and poorest of the poor. It should be used as an instrument of social justice, President Droupadi Murmu said on Thursday.

Addressing the students and faculty members of G Narayanamma Institute of Technology and Science for Women and also students of B M Malani Nursing College and Suman Junior College of Mahila Dakshata Samithi here, she said engineering has played a big role in technological advancements, including computers, medical equipment, internet, smart devices and digital payment systems. The role of engineering as a profession becomes very critical in today's world where unthinkable and unprecedented problems need quick and sustainable solutions, the President said.

Observing that engineers have the power to make the world a better place, the President said the solutions that they find and

technologies that they would create in future should be people-oriented and environment-friendly, an official release said. Recently at COP27, India reiterated its vision of a safe planet in one-word Mantra LiFE which stands for Lifestyle for Environment.

"We have been achieving our climate targets and upgrading them. We are taking new initiatives in renewable energy, e-mobility, ethanol-blended fuels, and green hydrogen. These initiatives can start producing better results on ground through technological innovations," she said. The President said technology in today's world has social, economic, political, educational, environmental and geo-political dimensions. It is continuously evolving and impacting every arena.

Murmu expressed hope that engineers would come out with innovative technologies for the benefit of public at large and improve the quality of life of the people. They should also

think about engineering solutions for the disadvantaged sections, senior citizens, 'divyang'



Droupadi Murmu

persons (People with disabilities) and other people who need special support, she added. Speaking about women's contribution in engineering and technology, the President said there are examples of many inspiring women who are heading big companies, have launched start-ups and are contributing in a major way in all fields such as telecom, IT, aviation, machine design, construction

works, Artificial intelligence and other areas.

More women need to come forward to take up science streams, the President emphasised. Murmu said STEM-- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics -- is vital to the Indian economy. Nurturing young women as technocrats and innovators can lead the country towards a stronger economy.

Women bring different perspective and skill-sets in tech fields. Cognitive abilities of women can change the way knowledge and technologies are perceived at various levels, she said. Women should overcome challenges that come their way and rise in their careers, she added. The President advised students to be empowered and empower others too. She said they should not be satisfied just with their own success and happiness. They have a duty towards the nation and humanity as a whole. They should use their talent and technological capabilities for the larger good. (PTI)



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy calling on Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in New Delhi on Thursday

## EC plan on remote voting excellent initiative: Former CEC Quraishi

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** -- / Former Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi on Thursday described as an "excellent initiative" the decision of the Election Commission to invite political parties for a demonstration of a prototype of remote electronic voting machine for domestic migrant voters. Quraishi also welcomed the move of the poll panel to carry out a pilot, saying it will help smoothen difficulties faced by the system. In a major move to increase voter participation, the Election Commission on Thursday said it has developed a prototype of a remote electronic voting machine (RVM) for domestic migrant



S Y Quraishi

voters and has invited political parties for a demonstration on January 16. If implemented after stakeholder consultations, migrant voters do not need to travel to their home district to exercise their franchise. "I have seen the EC press release. I think it is an excellent initiative because migrant voters' issue has been hanging fire for a long time and we have not been able to find a solution," Quraishi told PTI. "If EC has found an electronic solution, that is very good and it is very important that they are doing it democratically. They have called all political parties for a demo which is a good thing," he said. According to the former CEC, it is a good step to invite comments from all recognised national and state parties. "And they have assured that it will be done in consultation with all stakeholders. They will do a pilot. It is also an excellent idea. He said pilot will show all the problems which the system will come across. All good reforms in EC have come through pilot testing only. I think on the whole, it is a very good step and hopefully there will be a consensus," he said. (PTI)

## Major NIA crackdown on PFI members in Kerala; nearly 5 dozen locations searched

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** -- / The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday conducted searches at 56 locations in Kerala in a case related to "unlawful and violent activities" being carried out by the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) and its affiliates, an official said.

The raids were carried out in 12 districts at the residences of seven each state executive committee members and zonal heads of PFI, 15 physical training instructors-trainers and seven

cadres trained in use of knives, daggers, swords and other types of weapons to carry out murderous violent acts, an NIA spokesperson said.

The official said the crackdown also covered 20 other suspects. A maximum of 13 places were searched in Eranakulam, nine in Kannur, seven in Malappuram, six in Wayanad, four in Kozhikode, three each in Trivandrum, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha, two each in Thrissur and Kottayam and one in Palakkad, the

spokesperson said. The NIA said the searches have led to the recovery and seizure of sharp-edged weapons, incriminating material and digital devices. "The PFI has been found justifying the use of criminal force and encouraging vulnerable youth to join terrorist organisations," the NIA said. The case was registered suo moto on September 19 and three days later, the NIA had conducted searches at 24 locations in Kerala, including Offices of PFI and residences of 13 accused. (PTI)

## Cong demands white paper on farmers' income since 2014

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** -- / The Congress on Thursday accused the government of not fulfilling the promise of doubling farmers' income and demanded a white paper on their earnings since 2004. The All India Kisan Congress, a department of the Opposition party, said the Bharatiya Janata Party's claim of doubling of farmers' income by 2022 is just a myth. In reality, their income has come down during the NDA regime. "In February 2016, PM Modi had promised doubling of farmers' income by 2022. What to speak of doubling their

income, if the inflation is accounted for, the farmers' income has actually reduced during these years," Kisan Congress chairman Sukhpal Singh Khaira told a press conference here. Khaira cited the National Sample Survey of 2018 and said it was actually the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government between 2004 and 2014 which had "more than doubled the farmers' income". The Kisan Congress leader said the minimum support price (MSP) for crops is one of the basic parameters of determining the income of

farmers. He said the UPA government doubled the MSP of wheat and paddy -- two main crops -- within eight years of coming to power. During the Congress regime, the MSP for wheat was Rs 640 per quintal in 2004 and it went up to Rs 1,400 per quintal for the 2013-14 season. Similarly, the MSP for paddy in 2004 was Rs 560 per quintal and it which went up to Rs 1,310 per quintal in 2013-14. In strong contrast, Khaira said, the MSP for both paddy and wheat did not increase by more than 50 per cent during the BJP regime. (PTI)

# Handling terror groups, scrutiny of NGOs, citizenship to persecuted Hindus, Sikhs keep MHA busy in 2022

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** -- / Tackling violence perpetrated by terror groups, close monitoring of activities of some NGOs and efforts to ameliorate the woes of persecuted minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were some of the key issues which dominated the agenda of the ministry of home affairs (MHA) in 2022.

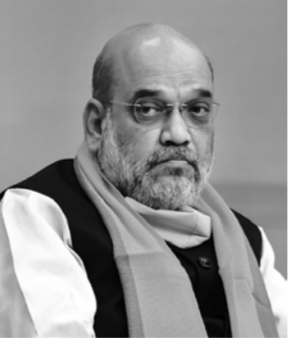
The ministry also initiated the process of complete overhaul of criminal laws, especially the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act 1872, and adapt them in accordance with the contemporary needs and aspirations of the people. Action against Chinese-controlled predatory lending apps, which allegedly harass, blackmail and adopt harsh recovery practices and strict vigil along the international borders, some of them have seen "demographic changes", also kept the MHA busy in the year. One of the major steps that the MHA took in 2002 was declaring the Popular Front of India (PFI) and several of its associates banned for five years under the stringent anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, accusing them of having

involved in terror acts and maintaining "links" with global terror groups like the ISIS. There were reports that the PFI had also allegedly conspired to attack high court judges, senior police officers and foreign tourists, especially Jews visiting Vattakkanal, a tiny hill station in Tamil Nadu.

In an obvious reference to Pakistan, Union home minister Amit Shah said some countries repeatedly support terrorists and have made terrorism their state policy and "strict economic crackdown" should be launched against them. Shah said this at an international meeting -- "No Money for Terror Ministerial Conference" -- held in New Delhi. Separately, the home minister said 42,000 people lost their lives to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir over the years but the security situation has improved now to such an extent that no one dares to call a hartal or indulge in stone-pelting in the Union territory. "A zero-tolerance policy has been adopted towards terrorism, ensuring complete control of the security forces over the situation," he said. Shah also alleged that some NGOs have indulged in religious conversion, anti-national activities and misuse of funds

to stall the country's economic progress, and strong action has been taken against such entities.

As part of the crackdown on some NGOs, the MHA cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licences given to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) and the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust (RGCT) -



two NGOs headed by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. Since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014, rules related to the FCRA have been tightened and it also cancelled FCRA registration of nearly 2,000 NGOs for violating various provisions of law. There were 22,762 FCRA registered organisations till December-end 2021. Giving relief to those who have faced religious persecution in

Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, the MHA empowered district magistrates of 31 districts and home secretaries of nine states to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, coming from these three countries, under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

The move to grant Indian citizenship to these communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan under the Citizenship Act, 1955 and not under the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) bears significance. The CAA also provides for granting Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, the rules under the CAA have not been framed by the government yet and hence no one so far could be granted Indian citizenship. To allay the apprehension of some people, the MHA said in its annual report that the CAA is a "limited and narrowly tailored legislation" which seeks to provide a relaxation to specific communities from the specified countries with a clear cut-off date. "It is a compassionate and ameliorative legislation," the

report for 2020-21, published early this year, said.

Further, the present legal process of acquiring Indian citizenship by any foreigner of any category as provided in the Citizenship Act, 1955 is very much operational and the CAA does not amend or alter this legal position in any manner whatsoever. At a meeting in Kishanganj in Bihar in September, the home minister had said that the demographic changes taking place along the border areas are "very worrisome" and the security forces should stay alert. "But the demographic changes taking place along border areas are very worrisome and the security forces should stay alert," an official quoted Shah as saying at a meeting on security situation along the international border. The MHA has also sought urgent strict action by law enforcement agencies against predatory lending apps as harassment, blackmail and harsh recovery practices by such Chinese-controlled entities have led to multiple incidents of suicides.

In a communication to all states and Union Territories, the home ministry had said the issue has caused a serious impact on national security, economy and citizen safety.

## PM's mother recovering, says hospital

**AHMEDABAD, DEC 29** -- / Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mother Hiraben is "recovering", a hospital in Ahmedabad where she is admitted said on Thursday. Hiraben (99), also called Hiraba, was admitted to the UN Mehta Institute of Cardiology and Research Centre on Wednesday morning due to some health issues. The prime minister reached Ahmedabad from Delhi on Wednesday afternoon and visited the super-speciality hospital to meet his mother. He remained at the hospital for more than an hour. He had also spoken to doctors at the hospital, a government-funded autonomous medical facility situated on the campus of the civil hospital. On Thursday, the hospital in a statement said: "Smt Hiraba Modi's health condition is recovering." Earlier in the day, PM Modi's elder brother Somabhai Modi said their mother's condition was gradually improving and she had liquid food in the morning. "Her condition is gradually improving. She is much better today, she moved her arms and legs," Somabhai Modi told PTI. "She even asked us, through a sign, to put her in the sitting position and also took liquid food given by the hospital. The decision about her discharge will be taken by doctors after conducting her CT Scan and MRI today," he said. (PTI)

## Akhilesh seeks special session of Assembly to discuss OBC quota in urban local body polls

**LUCKNOW, DEC 29** -- / Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to convene a special session of the Assembly to discuss the issue of reservation for OBCs in urban local body polls. Dubbing the ruling BJP "anti-OBC" and "anti-Dalit", Akhilesh said: "If the government's conscience is clear, it should convene a special session of the Assembly so that they can put forth their points and give us a chance to put our views on OBC reservation in urban local body polls." The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday appointed a five-member commission on reservation to the Other Backward Classes in urban local body elections, a day after the Allahabad High Court quashed its draft poll notification and ordered it to hold the polls without reservation for OBCs. The former chief minister said the SP will stand solidly



with the backward classes as "we have no faith in the government" and added the OBC wing of his party was making preparations to fight the battle in the Supreme Court, if required.

"It is not just discrimination on the issue of reservation, but the government is also trying to run away from election as they know that if they go before the people they will be defeated," he said, citing the recent by-poll results. "The results of the elections held recently have shown that backwards, Dalit, minority people together voted against the wrong policies of the BJP," he said. The government has pushed things to the brink forcing the backwards and Dalits to prepare together for a revolution for reservation, the SP chief said. Alleging that the BJP government is against the backwards, he said the State Backward Classes Commission was constituted in 1994 but it was disbanded later. "It (commission) could have extended some support to the backwards but the government has brought it to an end," the former UP chief minister stated. Accusing the BJP government of meting out step-motherly treatment to backwards and Dalits, he alleged that there is a conspiracy to snatch away their rights.

Warning that "today the reservation of backwards has been snatched, tomorrow the quota of the Dalits will also be snatched", Akhilesh said the backwards have not only been betrayed but there is also a conspiracy to snatch away their rights, provisions for which were made by the architect of the Constitution, B R Ambedkar. "This is a conspiracy to make the coming generations of OBCs servants. It is also aimed at evicting these castes from power and BJP has been making preparations for it all through," the SP leader said. "The BJP wants votes of the backwards but does not want to make them partner in power. Through publicity and allurements, they want to take their votes but when it is time to make them partners in power they do not do so. The governments both in the state and at the Centre have been formed because of votes of the backwards, but there is no place for them in governments," he stressed.

Taking a jibe at the BJP's backward class leaders without taking any name, the SP chief said it seems that after joining BJP and coming to power, the souls of these leaders die. At the press conference, traders from Ayodhya whose land have been acquired for development purposes narrated their woes. The SP chief demanded that the traders be given adequate compensation and government land for their livelihood. He said that he would visit Ayodhya on January 27 next year. (PTI)

## PS Aberdeen staff cracks burglary case within 24 hours

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/Police Station Aberdeen staff have cracked a blind burglary case, which occurred at the residence of a senior citizen. The accused has been arrested and stolen articles recovered within 24 hours.

A burglary case was reported at PS Aberdeen that on 27/12/2022 a sum of Rs. 30,000/- has been stolen from the house of the complainant by breaking the door by some unknown persons. Upon the complaint, an FIR Vide No 234/2022 dated 27/12/2022 U/s 454/380 IPC was registered and immediately a team comprising of SI R. DhiraJkishen (IO), HC Sunil Singh Yadav, PCs SandeepLakra, Asish Singh and Shiv Kumar was constituted under the supervision of Insp. Girish Kumar, SHO PS

Aberdeen for the search of accused person and stolen money. The team working professionally swung into action and nabbed the accused person namely V. Eshwar S/o Shri P.S. Venkatesan (32) yrs, Pvt. Electrician R/o behind Youth Hostel and recovered the stolen cash & articles which he had purchased from the stolen money.

The entire investigation took place under the overall supervision of Sh. Arshdeep Singh Panwar, DANIPS, Sub Divisional Police Officer, South Andaman.

The general public is requested to share information pertaining to any crime or other illegal activities to Police at 112, 03192-232100, 03192-233077 & 03192-232400. The identity of the informant will be kept secret.

## 15th annual athletic meet of VKZPV Pahalgoan



KURMA RAO

MAYABUNDER, DEC 29/--/ The 15th Athletic Meet at Vivakananda Kendra Zilla Parishad Vidyalaya, Pahalgoan was celebrated on Thursday. Mr. Shibananda Bairagi, Pradhan, Gram Panchayat Pahalgawn was the chief guest while and Mr. Ajit Kumar Biswas was the guest of

honour. The President, PTA Committee, Mr. DilipKarmakar was the chief guest of the closing function. The annual sports meet began with a Yoga session and march past followed by a beautiful dance, presented by the girl students of class IX and X. The sports concluded with the vote of thanks proposed by the Principal, Mr. Kamal Chandra Das.

## 17th Annual Sports of MES School, Ograbraj



PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/ The 17th Annual Sports of M.E.S. School, Ograbraj was conducted on 28thDecember 2022, in the school grounds. The sports meet was declared open by the chief guest, Mr. Mohammed Shafiq, Pradhan, Gram Panchayat, Mitakhari. In his inaugural address, he laid stress on the importance of sports in shaping a child.

He also appreciated the exemplary work of Muslim Education Society, Andamans in the field of education in these rural areas of South Andaman during the last 45 years since

its inception in the year 1977. During the inaugural session of sports meet, march past by students of four houses were performed. Mass PT, Dumble Drill, Yoga, Colorful Dance by students and Saree Drill were also performed during the meet.

Mr. T Abdul Wahab, Principal, MES School, Ograbraj welcomed the gathering and informed about various achievements of the school in the academic year 2022-23. He also expressed gratitude to the A & N Administration and PRI of the area for their help and cooperation. A

large gathering of PRI members, parents and students were also there on the occasion.

Mr. Simson, Up-Pramukh, Panchayat Samiti Ferrargunj graced the occasion as chief guest in the closing ceremony of sports meet and Mr. AnandAmrit Raj was the guest of honour. They jointly declared the sports meet closed and distributed prizes to the winners. Overall winner in the sports meet was Sunil Chethri House and was presented a trophy. Smti. Punam Dung Dung presented the vote of thanks on this occasion.

# Vishal hoists BJP Flag at modern fish market of Junglighat

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/ Mr. Vishal Jolly, National Executive Member of BJP hoisted the BJP flag at Modern Fish Market Junglighaton Thursday in presence of senior leaders. During the flag hoisting function, a large number of fishermen community members joined BJP being impressed by the leadership of Mr. Narendra Modi and National President Mr. J.P. Nadda and showing their trust on BJP State leadership.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Vishal Jolly briefed about the welfare activities undertaken by the Union Government and assured that all possible help would be provided from the State BJP Unit.

Fishermen community expressed their gratitude towards Sate BJP Unit for their all-possible help towards welfare of the fishermen community of the island.



## CPI(M) seeks halting of commercial activities at Tiranga Park

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/ CPI (M) has demanded that the Tiranga Park at Aberdeen Bazar, Port Blair should be used only for holding public meetings, mass dharna, etc by political parties and organizations and not to allow any kind of commercial activities in the Tiranga Park in future. In a letter sent to the Secretary, Port Blair Municipal Council, Shri D. Ayyappan,

State Secretary, CPI (M) drew the attention of the Secretary, PBMC to the exhibition-cum-sale organized by some traders at Tiranga Park, Aberdeen Bazar, Port Blair recently. The Tiranga Park was created by the CPI (M)-led Left & Democratic Front which was in power in the erstwhile Port Blair Municipal Board from 1990 to 1994, for holding public meetings and protests like

Mass Dharna, etc by political parties and organizations. There is no other place available at the Port Blair town to conduct public meetings and mass dharna, etc.

ShriAyyappan stated in the letter that earlier also, CPI(M) had protested against utilizing the Tiranga Park for commercial activities, but the successive rulers in the PBMC continued the

practice. When the Tiranga Park is booked for such commercial purpose in advance, the political parties and organizations who want to hold public meetings and Mass Dharna, etc. are forced to give up their plan for organising the

programme. He further stated that holding public meetings, mass demonstration, etc are the constitutional rights guaranteed to the citizens and no authority can abridge it on whatsoever ground.

## One seat vacant at TGCE

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/ One seat under Category V in Chemistry for admission to Two Years B.Ed. Degree Programme has fallen vacant in Tagore Government College of Education, Port Blair.

The counseling for admission to this seat shall be held on 3rd January 2023 at 9:30 a.m. in the College. Eligible candidates who have already applied for

the course and are desirous of availing the above seat are directed to attend the counseling on the above-mentioned date and time positively.

Those who fail to attend the counseling session in time, will not be considered for admission to the course and the next eligible candidate available will be considered for admission.

## Awareness prog on 'Cooperative at Panchayat level by NCUI

PORT BLAIR, DEC 29/--/ The National Cooperative Union of India, Cooperative Education Field Project (Ministry of Cooperation) Andaman & Nicobar Island Unit has organized an "Awareness Programme on Cooperative at Panchayat Level at Community Hall Ograbraj on Tuesday. Mr. Mohammed Saffique, Pradhan, Gram PanchayatMitakhari was the chief guest on the occasion. In his address, he said that the platform of cooperative is important and can play a vital role for socio-economic upliftment of people. Welcoming the gathering, MrSurenraNath

Singh, Project Officer, National Cooperative Union of India, Cooperative Education Field Project (Ministry of Cooperation) Andaman & Nicobar Island Unit in his address has said that cooperatives have the power of unity, where members are working together to achieve their similar goal. He emphasized the needs of youths to enroll themselves in cooperative for their socio-economic development. Dr. Nagesh Ram Senior Scientist (Rtd.) Head KishiVigyan Kendra in his address said that Primary Agriculture Cooperative society is actively working

for the welfare of their members through lending business inform of providing Kisan Credit Card. He urged the villagers to enroll themselves in cooperative to avail various benefits. Mr. BiplobBiswas representative from A & N State Cooperative Bank was briefed in detailed about various banking programs specially for cooperatives and self-help group members. Around 100 participants including PRT's of the areas attended the program. The vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Naresh Ram, Cooperative Education Instructor, NCUI Field Project, Port Blair.

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*The power of illustrative anecdotes often lies not in how well they present reality, but in how well they reflect the core beliefs of their audience*

**David P. Mikkelsen**

### Economy biggest challenge for Netanyahu

As he takes over as Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to honour his campaign pledge. More than that, the new government together with the Bank of Israel should draft a new economic plan to harness inflation, reduce the cost of living and housing, invest in infrastructure and encourage the expansion of trade with existing and new partners. Boosting the economy is, perhaps, the biggest challenge facing the new government. Now that members of the new government have taken care of themselves in terms of portfolios and legislation, they should waste no time in taking care of the citizens of Israel, particularly when it comes to their pockets and the economy. While Netanyahu won the election fairly, the far-reaching power he is offering his far-right and ultra-Orthodox partners creates a real threat to democratic values. The coalition agreements included language endorsing discrimination against LGBTQ people on religious grounds, contentious judicial reforms, as well as generous stipends for ultra-Orthodox men who prefer to study instead of work. The package has laid the groundwork for what is expected to be a stormy beginning for Netanyahu's government and could put it at odds with large parts of the Israeli public and Israel's closest allies abroad. Its lengthy list of guidelines was led by a commitment to advance and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria, the biblical names for the West Bank.

Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. The Palestinians seek the West Bank as the heartland of a future independent state. In the decades since, Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements there that are now home to around 500,000 Israelis living alongside around 2.5 million Palestinians. Most of the international community considers Israel's West Bank settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. The United States already has warned the incoming government against taking steps that could undermine the dwindling hopes for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Netanyahu's hard-line Israeli government put West Bank settlement expansion at the top of its priority list, vowing to legalise dozens of illegally built outposts and annex the occupied territory as part of its coalition deal with ultranationalist allies. The Palestinian leadership emphasises that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved only through the establishment of a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. Without a negotiated two-state solution, there will be no peace, security or stability in the region," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. There was no immediate US comment. The Biden administration has said it strongly opposes settlement expansion and has rebuked the Israeli government for it in the past.

Netanyahu's new government -- the most religious and hard-line in Israel's history -- is made up of ultra-Orthodox parties, a far-right ultranationalist religious faction affiliated with the West Bank settler movement and his Likud party. Netanyahu, who served 12 years as prime minister, is returning to power after he was ousted from office last year. In the coalition agreement between Likud and its ally, the Religious Zionism party, Netanyahu pledged to legalise wildcat settlement outposts considered illegal even by the Israeli government.

# Workforce world over to face great hardship in 2023

## REFLEX ACTION

Dr. Gyan Pathak

Workforce world over would face greater hardship in 2023. IMF has already sounded alarm over the grim global situation in their latest World Economic Outlook. More than a third of the global economy is expected to slip into recession in 2023, while the three large economies – the United States, the European Union, and China – would continue to stall, IMF Economic Counsellor Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas has said. According to the IMF assessment made before the emergence of the new COVID-19 in China, the globaleconomic growth was likely to fall to 2.7 per cent with a 25 per cent probability that it might fall below 2 per cent. The China nightmare that has threatened every part of the world would additionally caste its shadow. It would distort the labour market.

With no end to the Russia-Ukraine war in sight, commodity prices and food supply chain are expected to be volatile. “We expect global inflation ... remain elevated for a longer than previously expected,” IMF October outlook had said projecting global inflation projections at 8.8 per cent in 2022. China's new COVID-19 outbreak is an evolving situation, in which one million people are expected to die within 90 days, with over 60 per cent infection in China and over 10 per cent globally. It may disrupt the entire supply chain of the world, and several sectors of the economy are threatened a significant reduction in their activity. Millions of people had already been laid off, especially in IT sector, in 2022 due to global economic downturn, in which migrant workers have suffered the worst, that has been threatened further by China's disastrous new COVID-19 spread.

The ILO flagship Global Wage Report 2020-23 released on November 30, just a week before the outbreak of new COVID-19 after the relaxation given on zero-COVID policy of China on December 7, has included evidence on how the inflation was biting into the real wage growth in most regions of the world. The report shows that for the first time in the 21st century real wages growth has fallen to negative values while, at the same time, the gap between real

productivity growth and real wage growth continues to widen. During the earlier COVID-19 crisis from 2020-2022, the various components of the wage bills – such as employment, nominal wages, and inflation – have changed, and more recently the situation has aggravated during the cost-of-living crisis. Wage inequality and gender pay gap has been on the increase which has worsened the income inequality in different regions of the world. The UN and the ILO has al along been urging the world to adopt appropriate policies for a human-centred economic recovery, but only a little has been done to date, while crises have been multiplying. ILO report shows that wages and the purchasing power of households have been dented considerably during the past three years, fist by the COVID-19 pandemic and then, as the world economy started to recover from that crisis, by the global rise in inflation. In 2022, rising inflation caused the real wage to dip into negative in many countries, reducing the purchasing power of the middle class and hitting low-income groups particularly hard. In the near future, in absence of adequate policy responses, the workforce could see a sharp erosion of the real incomes, increase in inequality, further threatening the economic recovery and possibly fuelling further social unrest, the ILO report had warned just a week before the emergence of the new COVID-19 outbreak in China.

In the global economic downturn and labour market context, the ILO report has pointed out that the improvement in employment level witnessed by the second quarter of 2022 was limited to only high income countries, while it remained at about 2 per cent below the pre-pandemic level in middle- and low-income countries. Employment in the informal

economy was found to be rising faster than in the formal economy. During the last two quarters of 2022, inflation remained quite stubborn with rapid price rise, despite a global response tightening of monetary policy since mid-2022. The projection of inflation for 2023 made before the world threatening China new COVID-19 outbreak stood elevated at 6.5 per cent.

In the inflationary context, erosion in real wages comes on top of some significant wage losses incurred by workers and their families during the three years of pandemic during 2020-2022. Governments world over showing their data to tell the people that average wages increased globally by 1.5 per cent in 2020, and by 1.8 per cent in 2021, but is should be interpreted in the context of job losses and change in the composition of employment in large countries such as in the US. The mathematical fallacy should be noted and people should know how this data has improved despite increase in joblessness, and low-paid jobs. The ILO report has said, “In these countries, a majority of those who lost their jobs and hence their earning during the pandemic were low-paid wage employees, while their higher-paid counterparts remained employed, thereby increasing the estimated average wage.” As a result of this “composition effect” in some countries, average real wages in the advanced G20 economies jumped by 1.7 per cent in 2020, the highest wage growth recorded in many years, but then increased by a much lower rate of 0.4 per cent in 2021, ILO said.

With slowdown of the global economy and rising inflation real wages of workers have been on the decline, while unemployment, job losses, and lack of job opportunity remained a dominant feature of the job market. With prospect of further deterioration in global economic growth, job market condition would certainly deteriorate in 2023, with additional uncertainly of evolving new COVID-19 threat from China. The world needs human-centric policy response with complete social security coverage for the workforce. (IPA)



# Concerns over undermining Biodiversity Act through amendment persist

Earlier, exemptions were granted to local people and communities of the area, and vaidas and hakims who have been practising indigenous medicine. The Bill proposes additional exemptions to AYUSH practitioners, cultivated medicinal plants and for holders of “codified traditional knowledge”.

There are concerns that exempting the AYUSH practitioners would, in effect, give the AYUSH industry a free hand to use biological resources without having to compensate the communities. The Committee, however, did not scrutinise the exemption granted to AYUSH practitioners under this provision. Objections were raised by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj against certain provisions of the Bill. In its submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee, it stated, “[B]y excluding the codified traditional knowledge, the entire traditional knowledge goes outside the purview of the act which in a way contradicts the [UN Convention on Biological Diversity].”

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj further contended that the documentation of traditional local knowledge in the People's Biodiversity Register may in itself count as codification, thereby depriving those communities of benefits they would have received had they not done the documentation. “It gives a free hand to the users of the traditional knowledge at the cost of the communities”, the Ministry submitted. To get around this

discrepancy, the JPC has recommended that “codified traditional knowledge” should be specified to mean the books listed in the First Schedule of the Drugs And Cosmetics Act, 1940, which hosts a list of 99 books of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani medicine systems.

While granting approval to a foreigner or a foreign corporation to obtain biological resources or its associated knowledge, or for an intellectual property protection, the NBA has to ensure that the terms and conditions subject to which the approval is granted secures fair and equitable sharing of benefits. Under the Act, this is to be carried out according to mutually agreed terms between the person applying for such approval, local bodies concerned, and the benefit claimers. The Bill removes the need for benefit claimers' consent from this provision, in addition to nullifying the authority of local bodies. The proposed amendment states that the terms shall be agreed between the person applying for such approval and the NBA (representing the BMC).

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework contains four goals and 23 targets that need to be achieved by 2030, and has been signed by 188 of the 196 countries which attended the UN Biodiversity Conference in

Montreal, which concluded earlier this week. It emphasises a “whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach” to implementing the agreement. At the core of the agreed framework is the aim of ensuring respect for and protection to sustainable use of biological resources by indigenous peoples and local communities. It places the responsibility on individual governments to ensure that these communities receive a fair and equitable share of benefits that arise from the utilisation of genetic resources.

Some of the clauses of the agreed framework might already be a part of the BDA and the 2004 Rules made under the Act. For instance, on the criteria for equitable benefit sharing, the Rules stipulate that the quantum of benefits are to be agreed upon considering the extent of use, the sustainability aspect, the impact and expected outcome levels, including measures ensuring conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The Rules also give power to the NBA to impose such terms and conditions as may be necessary for ensuring equitable sharing of the benefits.

The Kunming-Montreal Framework is a successor of the 2010 Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing,

which lays down the international regime for access and benefit sharing, and mandates that access to biological resources cannot be granted without obtaining “prior informed consent”, and the involvement of indigenous and local communities. However, the latest framework takes a step further, requiring governments to take legal, administrative or policy measures to ensure that large and transnational companies and financial institutions regularly monitor, assess and transparently disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity.

It also requires governments to ensure “the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge.”

In its present form, the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 might be in contradiction with the UN Convention on Biodiversity, the 2010 Nagoya Protocol and the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Framework. The latest framework will not be legally binding until its ratification by the Parliament, which is at liberty to alter the framework in any manner it deems fit. However, it remains to be seen whether the amendment would uphold the spirit of the agreed framework. (IPA/Concluded)

## FOCUS

Tushar Kohli

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					32		

ACROSS		DOWN	
1	Church service	1	Bill of fare
5	Discourage	2	Tool
9	Terminate	3	Glittering particles
10	Grow older	4	Location
11	Orderly	5	Adulterates
12	Conductor's wand	6	Make lace
14	Of the kidneys	7	Self
16	Serpents	8	Replenish
19	Satisfy fully	13	High mountain
21	Corroded	15	Not artificial
24	Live coal	17	Proverb
27	Edges	18	Attire
29	Observe	20	Land measure
30	Handsome	22	Woody plant
31	throughfare	23	Employs
32	Metal	25	Encountered
	Incites	26	Insect
		28	Drinking vessel

SUDOKU: 3741								
	7		4					
	4	6		3			8	
		2			6			
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	1	7				8	6	
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Yesterday's Solution 3740								
5	1	7	6	3	2	4	8	9
2	8	9	1	4	7	5	6	3
3	4	6	5	9	8	2	7	1
1	6	4	9	7	5	3	2	8
7	5	2	3	8	1	9	4	6
9	3	8	2	6	4	1	5	7
8	7	5	4	1	3	6	9	2
6	2	1	7	5	9	8	3	4
4	9	3	8	2	6	7	1	5

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1749								
S	I	L	E	N	T		S	A
C		M		R	O	U	G	E
E	N	T	I	C	E		N	E
N	E	A	T		E	L	K	S
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T	I	D	E		N	E	R	O
B	A	R		G	A	I	N	E
A	P	I	N	G		N		E
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### DISCLAIMER

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

# Rahul to hold public meeting in Panipat on Jan 6: Ex-Haryana CM Bhupinder Hooda

**CHANDIGARH, DEC 29 / --/** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will hold a public meeting in Haryana's Panipat on January 6, a day after the Bharat Jodo Yatra will re-enter the state, former state chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said on Thursday.

Hooda said the yatra will enter Haryana from Sanauli Khurd village in Panipat district on January 5 evening. It will cross into Haryana from neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. "On January 6 a public meeting will be held in Panipat," he said, adding that the yatra will pass through Karnal on January 7 and a day later it will be in Kurukshetra. The Yatra will take a day's break on January 10, he said. It will reach Ambala on January 11 and the enter neighbouring Punjab, Hooda, who is Leader of the Opposition

in Haryana, told a news conference here. Hooda, who was flanked by state Congress chief Udai Bhan, said the yatra is against unemployment, inflation and other issues.

"This yatra is also a public awareness campaign against the politics of division as some forces make people fight in the name of caste and religion. This is the reason why the yatra is getting tremendous support from the people," he said. When asked if his party will ask Haryana government for foolproof security arrangements after Congress wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah alleging security breaches during the yatra in Delhi, Hooda said that when the yatra entered Haryana in the first phase he had even then spoken to the DGP and the government had assured about

necessary arrangements. Notably, Rahul-led Bharat Jodo Yatra will resume from Kashmere Gate in Delhi on January 3 and enter Uttar Pradesh the same afternoon through Loni in Ghaziabad. The yatra, which is currently on winter break, will resume from the Hanuman Mandir in Kashmere Gate at 10 am on January 3 and enter Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad at noon.

The yatra covered over 130 km in the first phase in Haryana between December 21-23 when it passed through Nuh, Gurugram and Faridabad districts. The yatra, a mass contact initiative of the Congress, started from Kanyakumari on September 7 and covered Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi

in the first phase. Meanwhile, Hooda demanded a white paper from the BJP-JJP government in Haryana over "rising debt" of the state. "The government has loans of Rs 3,25,000 crore and liabilities of Rs 1,22,000 crore. The situation has reached a point where the government is taking loans even to pay salaries to the employees. Due to this, there is a delay in getting salary to the employees many times," he said.

Hooda said the government claims the debt is not this high and gives some other figures. "We demand a white paper over the issue," the former chief minister stated. Speaking on the 3-day Assembly session which concluded on Wednesday, Hooda said the government was running away from discussion on key issues. "Many calling

attention and adjournment motions of the Opposition were rejected. This government is shying away from discussion on burning issues," he said. The former chief minister said that the Congress demanded an increase in the price of sugarcane, but this too was rejected by the government. "This season the government did not increase the price of sugarcane even by a paisa and kept it unchanged at Rs 362 per quintal," he said. Hooda claimed that during the Congress tenure between 2005-2014, the sugarcane rate registered an increase of nearly 165 per cent, rising from Rs 117 in 2005 to Rs 310 per quintal in 2014. "On the other hand, the BJP led government increased the rate of sugarcane by only 17 per cent in 8 years," he said. (PTI)

## Army inaugurates first 3D-printed dwelling unit for soldiers in Ahmedabad

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29 / --/** The Army has inaugurated its first 3D-printed dwelling unit for soldiers at Ahmedabad Cantonment, the defence ministry said on Thursday. 3D printing technology uses complex software and a robotic unit that helps in creating a structure through multiple stages from a digital model.

"The Indian Army inaugurated its first 3D-printed house dwelling unit (with ground-plus one configuration) for soldiers at Ahmedabad Cantonment on December 28," the ministry said in a statement. "The dwelling unit has been constructed by the Military Engineering Services (MES) in collaboration with MiCoBPvt Ltd incorporating the latest 3D rapid construction technology," it said.

Construction work of the dwelling unit measuring 71 sqm with garage space was completed in just 12 weeks by utilising the 3D-printed foundation, walls and slabs, officials said. "The disaster-resilient structures comply with zone-3 earthquake specifications and green building norms.

The 3-D printed houses are symbolic of the modern-day rapid construction efforts to cater for growing accommodation requirements of the armed forces personnel," the ministry said. "This structure also stands testament to the commitment of the Indian Army in fostering the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan'," it said.

The technique utilises a concrete 3D printer that accepts a computerised three-dimensional design and fabricates a 3D structure in a layer-by-layer manner by extruding a specialised type of concrete specifically designed for the purpose.

Ahmedabad-based Golden Katar Division of the Army has been instrumental in pursuing the project with manifold applications even in operations, the statement said. (PTI)

On Wednesday night, Sawant along with Atul Joshi, vice president of Dilip Buildcon Limited which is constructing the new structure, drove for nearly four kilometres - from a connecting flyover to the new bridge.

"I thought of having a feel of the bridge from a driver's perspective. I drove along with the contractor to acknowledge the hard work his company has put in to construct this structure," Sawant told PTI at the site after the drive.

The chief minister said he was eager to drive on the new bridge. "It was a different experience for me. The entire feel was different," he said, adding he has been completely away from driving a vehicle since the time he became the chief minister. The state had earlier planned the bridge inauguration on December 26, but it

was postponed to December 29. Asked about the delay in the inauguration of the new structure in view of the traffic congestion on the old bridge, Sawant said: "Traffic jam on the old bridge is not a new thing.

I regret that. But at the same time, we wanted to have a grand function to inaugurate such a mega-project." Sawant said the state government was waiting for Union minister Nitin Gadkari's availability for the inauguration function as he has been the force behind the bridge and such projects across the country.

The new bridge is part of a Rs 2,530 crore project covering a distance of 13.2 kilometres between Bambolim (North Goa) and Verna (South Goa) villages. Dilip Buildcon Limited has said the entire eight-lane project will be completed by April 2023. (PTI)

## Goa CM drives car on new Zuari bridge before its inauguration for first-hand experience

**PANAJI, DEC 29 / --/** Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant drove his car on a new bridge constructed on the Zuari river to have a first-hand experience before the inauguration of the structure.

Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari will inaugurate the first phase of the bridge on Thursday evening. The cable-stayed structure, termed by the government to be the country's widest bridge once fully completed, is located on the Zuari river at Cortalim village on Margao-Panaji National Highway, about 15 km from the state capital. The bridge is considered as an important link between North and South Goa. An old bridge on the river, which was constructed in 1980s, has not been able to withstand the increasing traffic load on the national highway.

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## Tunisha death: Police questions her co-star Sheezan Khan to know what happened on TV set show

**MUMBAI, DEC 29 / --/** Police on Thursday said actor Sheezan Khan was being questioned to ascertain what exactly happened on the set of a television show in Maharashtra's Palghar district where his co-star Tunisha Sharma allegedly committed suicide last week.

Though Khan had ended his relationship with Sharma, they were on good terms with each other and used to speak regularly, an official from Valiv police station in Palghar said. Sharma, 21, who acted in the show 'Ali Baba: Dastaan-e-Kabul', was found hanging in the washroom on the set of the serial on Saturday near Vasai in Palghar. Khan (27) was arrested on Sunday on the charge of abetting her suicide. He is currently in police custody. Sharma's mother has alleged that Khan cheated and "used" her daughter. On the day of the incident, Khan and Sharma met during the lunch break of shooting. After speaking to Sharma for 15 minutes, Khan left for his shoot, the official said.

After sometime, Sharma was found hanging in the washroom, said. "Khan is being questioned about what exactly happened during the chat with Tunisha Sharma on the set," the official said. So far, Khan has not revealed what transpired between them, he said. The police

have so far recorded statements of a number of people, including Sharma's mother, uncle, other relatives, crew on the set and co-actors, the official said. Police also called Khan's sister for an enquiry on Thursday, but she was yet to appear before the investigation officer, he said. The police were also questioning another woman who was in contact with Khan, the official said. They were also examining the WhatsApp chats which took place between Khan and Sharma, he added.

Sharma had also featured in the TV show 'Bharat Ka Veer Putra Maharana Pratap' and films like 'Fitoor' and 'Baar Baar Dekho'. (PTI)

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## Cough syrup linked deaths in Uzbekistan: Drugs Standard Control Organisation initiates probe

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29 / --/** The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has initiated a probe in connection with the death of 18 children in Uzbekistan allegedly linked to a cough syrup manufactured by an Indian firm, official sources said on Thursday. The health ministry of Uzbekistan has claimed that the 18 children had consumed cough syrup, 'Doc-1 Max', manufactured by Noida-based Marion Biotech.

Hasan Harris, legal representative of Marion Biotech, said the governments of both countries are looking into the matter and inquiring.

"There is no problem from our end and no issue in testing. We have been there for the past ten years. Once the government report will come, we will look into it. For now the manufacturing has stopped," Harris said. According to the ministry, chemical ethylene glycol was found in a batch of syrup during laboratory tests. Sources said the Drugs Controller General of India has sought more information regarding the incident from the Uzbek regulator.

An inspection jointly conducted by the central drugs regulatory team of north zone and state drugs regulatory team was also taken during which samples were lifted. Earlier this year, death of 70 children in Gambia was linked to cough syrups manufactured by Haryana-based

Maiden Pharmaceuticals following which the Haryana-based unit was shut for violation of manufacturing standards. However, later the samples tested in a government laboratory in India were found to be complying with specifications.

India's drug regulator had told the World Health Organisation (WHO) earlier this month that the global health body drew a premature link between the deaths of children in Gambia and the four India-made cough syrups which adversely impacted the image of the country's pharmaceutical products across the globe. In a letter to Dr Rogerio Gaspar, Director (Regulation and Prequalification) at WHO, Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) Dr V G Somani had said that a statement issued by the global health body in October in the wake of the deaths "was unfortunately amplified by the global media which led to a narrative being built internationally targeting the quality of Indian pharmaceutical products".

In the letter, Somani said the samples of four made-in-India cough syrups linked to the deaths of 66 children in Gambia, which were tested in a government laboratory in the country, were found to be complying with specifications.

The DCGI had said that India has been committed to rigorous monitoring and oversight to ensure that the highest standards of manufacture are maintained in quality control of drugs and cosmetics. (PTI)

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## 2 Maoists wanted in murder cases held in Dantewada

**DANTEWADA, DEC 29 / --/** Two Maoists a man and a woman - wanted in murder cases and carrying a bounty of Rs 10,000 each have been arrested in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, police said on Thursday.

A joint team of the District Reserve Guard and Chhattisgarh Armed Force

was out on a search operation in Aranpur police station area on Wednesday when it spotted the two Maoists in a forest near Gonderas village while they were trying to escape, Dantewada additional superintendent of police RK Barman said. The duo was apprehended after a short chase, he said. They

were identified as Dula Sodhi (29) and Deve Kowasi (32), who were active as lower rung cadres, the police said. The two were wanted in incidents of murder and attempt to murder in the area. They were carrying a reward of Rs 10,000 each on their head, Barman said. (PTI)



Minister of State for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences Dr. Jitendra Singh holding a meeting with the Secretary, DSIR, Dr N. Kalaiselvi and CMD, National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) and senior officials on Technology Commercialization for benefit of Start-Ups, in New Delhi

## Delhi LG lays foundation stone of park that will consolidate 7 fragmented green pockets

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29 / --/** Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena on Thursday laid the foundation stone of a park being built as part of a project that consolidates seven fragmented green pockets into one horticultural space, officials said.

Once completed, the project located in Ashok Vihar Phase II will turn the area into one large park, named 'Vaishnavi', spanning nearly 33 acres. The landscape scheme "captures the space symbolism from Samkhya Philosophy," the DDA said in a statement. To further promote greenery and eco-friendly open public spaces in the national capital, Lt Governor V K Saxena, today laid the foundation stone of 'Vaishnavi', a DDA Park and nursery in North Delhi. It is one of the first sites of DDA greens that the LG had visited after taking oath

in May 2022, and had instructed that the hitherto fallow land strewn with garbage and construction and demolition waste, to be developed into an aesthetic public park and nursery, the urban body said.

The project consolidates seven fragmented green pockets, it said. It has been christened 'Vaishnavi' -- a name given to the plant 'tulsi', a sacred plant, and also another name of Goddess Parvati, the DDA said. Lok Sabha member Harsh Vardhan and various senior officials of the DDA were present on the occasion. The project proposes to develop "an environmental asset in form of a public park", it added. "The park will act like an integrated centre where city dwellers and tourists will be provided with hands-on opportunity to interact with nature through

connected activities of plant nursery, vermi-composting, apiculture and pottery, being exhibited at the park with a special emphasis on know-how of hydroponic farming," the statement said. The central area is designed as a public park with subtle introduction to mythological tree species in the main spaces and attraction of interactive sculptures and multipurpose ground.

There will be a freestanding restaurant within this space that will be able to operate, after park timings, it said. An independent approach link will connect the restaurant area to the park. The interactive zones in the area adjacent to the park will offer an exposure to variety of plant material, the statement said. "These are to be connected through a central water channel, which acts like a common spine with

sculptures. Pottery activity is also offered here. A location has been dedicated for an organised commercial exchange of plant and plant-oriented merchandise in natural setting. "The inner locations are reserved for more activities meant for imparting education on plants, including the know-how of hydroponics and apiculture, to interested people," it said.

The park proposes to generate its own manure through vermi-composting. The requirement of water for irrigation will be met through an on-site STP on local drain. Certain neighbourhood level parks been kept dedicated for the use of local residents. Since it is a time-bound project, the activities have been phased out for ease of construction, and the boundary and STP will be taken up on priority, the statement said. (PTI)

## AP stampede tragedy: Toll rises to 8, PM Modi, CM Jagan announce ex-gratia

**AMARAVATI, DEC 29 / --/** One more person who was injured in a stampede during a programme organised by the Telugu Desam Party in Kandukur town in Nellore district succumbed while undergoing treatment on Wednesday night, taking the toll to eight, police said on Thursday.

The victims, including two women died and eight others were injured on Wednesday after they fell in a drainage canal when the Leader of Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu was addressing a roadshow there. People gathered in large numbers at the venue and there was some jostling among the public during the meeting, leading to a stampede-like situation at the canal, they had said based on initial information. Some of the injured are undergoing treatment in hospital.

Naidu, who immediately cancelled the meeting, announced Rs 10 lakh to the kin of the deceased. He also visited the hospital where the injured were being

treated. He also asked the TDP leaders to ensure better medical care to the injured.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reacting to the incident, said he was pained by the mishap and announced Rs two lakh ex-gratia to the kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 to those injured. "Pained by the mishap at a public meeting in Nellore, AP. Condolences to the bereaved families. May the injured recover soon. An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased and the injured would be given Rs 50,000," PMO India said in a tweet. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, in a statement, expressing shock over the incident announced Rs ex-gratia of Rs two lakh each to the kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 each to the injured.

He instructed the officials to extend necessary support to the families of the victims, the statement said. (PTI)

## Ex-ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar, husband Deepak Kochhar and Videocon founder Dhoot sent to judicial custody till Jan 10

**MUMBAI, DEC 29 / --/** A special CBI court here on Thursday sent former ICICI Bank CEO and MD Chanda Kochhar, her husband Deepak Kochhar and Videocon group founder Venugopal Dhoot to 14-day judicial custody in connection with a loan fraud case.

The Kochhars were arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) last Friday. Dhoot was arrested on Monday.

The three were produced before special judge S H Gwalani at the end of their earlier remand on Thursday.

The CBI, represented by special public prosecutor A Limosin, did not seek their custody further.

The court then sent all the three accused to judicial custody till January 10, 2023.

The CBI had named the Kochhars and Dhoot, along with companies Nupower Renewables (NRL) managed by Deepak Kochhar, Su-

preme Energy Private Limited (SEPL), Videocon International Electronics Ltd (VIEL) and Videocon Industries Limited, as accused in its FIR registered in 2019 under Indian Penal Code sections related to criminal conspiracy and the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The CBI has alleged that ICICI Bank had sanctioned credit facilities to the tune of Rs 3,250 crore to companies of the Videocon Group promoted by Dhoot in violation of the Banking Regulation Act, RBI guidelines, and credit policy of the bank. According to the CBI, a sanctioning committee headed by Chanda Kochhar in 2009 approved a term loan of Rs 300 crore to VIEL in contravention of the rules and policies of the bank by abusing her official position as a public servant.

The day after the loan was disbursed, Dhoot transferred Rs 64 crore to NRL from VIEL through SEPL. (PTI)

## UGC-NET to be conducted from Feb 21 to March 10

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29 / --/** The National Eligibility Test (NET) to determine the suitability of students to be recruited as assistant professors will be conducted from February 21 to March 10, 2023, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced on Thursday. The exam will be a Computer Based Test (CBT) in 83 subjects. According to University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar, the NTA has been entrusted by the UGC to conduct the UGC-NET. The test determines the eligibility of Indian nationals to become "Assistant Professor" and "Junior Research Fellowship" (JRF) in Indian universities and colleges. "The NTA will conduct UGC-NET's December edition for JRF and eligibility for Assistant Professor in 83 subjects in CBT mode.

The online applications will be accepted from December 29 to January 17. The exam will be conducted from February 21 to March 10," he said. The exam is conducted twice a year. (PTI)

## At least 19 killed in massive fire at Cambodia hotel

PHNOM PENH, DEC 29 /-/- A massive fire at a Cambodian hotel casino that lasted more than 12 hours killed at least 19 people and injured more than 60, while other victims were apparently not yet accounted for Thursday. Neighbouring Thailand sent firetrucks and emergency workers to help cope with the crisis in the bustling border town of Poipet. Some victims were believed to still be under debris or in locked rooms that rescue teams could not immediately access, so the death toll was expected to rise, said Sek Sokhom, head of Banteay Meanchey province's information department. He said more than 60 people were injured. The dead and injured comprised people of several nationalities, including Thai, Chinese, Malaysian, Vietnamese and Cambodian, he said. A local Buddhist temple was being used to receive their bodies. (AP)

## State minister Subrata Saha dies of cardiac arrest

KOLKATA, DEC 29 /-/- West Bengal minister Subrata Saha on Thursday died of cardiac arrest in Murshidabad district, his family said. Saha was 69, and is survived by his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The minister of state for food processing complained of chest pain and was admitted to Berhampore Medical College and Hospital, where he died half-an-hour later, they said. The three-time Sagardighi MLA had recently undergone gall bladder surgery. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee condoled Saha's death. "I had long personal ties with Subrata babu. His social and political contributions will be remembered forever. His death has left a big void in the political spectrum," Mamata said in a statement. The chief minister recalled that Saha had earlier performed with aplomb when appointed as the PWD minister of state. Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari also condoled the minister's demise. (PTI)

# Negative Covid report mandatory for flyers to India from China, 5 other countries from Jan 1

NEW DELHI, DEC 29 /-/- A negative Covid report will be a must for passengers arriving in India from China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand from January 1, Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday. The Covid test must be conducted within 72 hours of undertaking the journey to India and the negative report from the RT-PCR test has to be uploaded on the Air Suvidha portal before their departure, the minister said. This requirement is in addition to the random testing of international passengers on their arrival in India irrespective of their port of departure. Last week, the government made random coronavirus testing mandatory for two per cent of passengers arriving

on each international flight. Already many countries, including the US, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have announced testing requirements for passengers from China. The government ramped up its surveillance against Covid-19 amid a spike in coronavirus cases in some countries, including China, and tightened Covid guidelines and asked states and Union territories to prepare for any eventuality. The health minister on Thursday asked pharma companies to ensure adequate stocks and availability of all drugs, including those for Covid management, in the supply chain up to the retail level amid rise in coronavirus cases in some countries. He reviewed the status, adequacy of Covid-19 management drugs and production capacities with

representatives of pharma companies through a virtual conference here so that India is equipped to effectively handle any situation. This review meeting was taken in view of the spike in Covid-19 cases in some countries including China, an official statement said. Through a presentation, the minister was briefed regarding the evolving global scenario. Mandaviya appreciated the pharma companies for their invaluable contribution during the pandemic in the country, the statement said. According to the Union health ministry data on Thursday, India recorded 268 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases increased to 3,552. The daily positivity rate was recorded at 0.11 per cent while the weekly positivity was pegged at 0.17 per cent, the ministry said. (PTI)



An elderly patient with breathing problems waits for admission to the Lala Lajpat Rai Hospital amid COVID scare, in Kanpur

## PM to flag off Vande Bharat Express from Howrah today

**Modi to launch projects worth over Rs 7,800 cr in Bengal**

NEW DELHI, DEC 29 /-/- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in West Bengal on Friday to launch development projects worth over Rs 7,800 crore in the state and flag off the Vande Bharat Express connecting Howrah and New Jalpaiguri. The Prime Minister's Office said Modi will also chair the second meeting of the National Ganga Council (NGC) in Kolkata. Among the new projects, he will lay the foundation stone and also inaugurate multiple sewerage infrastructure projects worth over Rs 2,550 crore, it said. He will inaugurate Joka-Taratata stretch of Purple Line of Kolkata Metro, launch multiple railway projects and lay the foundation stone of redevelopment of the New Jalpaiguri railway station. A National Institute of Water and Sanitation named after BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee will be inaugurated as well, it added. In yet another step to boost cooperative federalism, the PMO said, Modi will chair the NGC meeting in Kolkata and several Union ministers besides the chief ministers of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal are expected to attend the meeting. The NGC spearheads the exercise for preventing pollution in Ganga and its tributaries and their rejuvenation. (PTI)

## Husband arrested in Jharkhand actor's murder in Howrah

HOWRAH, DEC 29 /-/- The husband of Jharkhand actor Riya Kumari was on Thursday arrested for allegedly murdering her, police said. Riya Kumari, who goes by the screen name of Isha Aliya, was shot dead on National Highway 16 in West Bengal's Howrah district in the early hours of Wednesday when she was heading to Kolkata along with her husband Prakash Kumar and two-year-old daughter, they said. Prakash had told the police that she was killed by a group of robbers who attacked



Prakash Kumar

them when he stopped the car to relieve himself near Mahishrekha in Bagnan police station area. Police said they arrested him after interrogation and on the basis of a complaint lodged by Riya Kumar's family on Wednesday night. Prakash has been booked under sections 302 (murder), 201 (giving false information), 498A (Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) and various sections of the Arms Act, police said. A hunt is on for others involved in the case, they said. Riya Kumari, a native of Hazaribag in Jharkhand, was a popular face in Nagpuri music videos on YouTube, besides acting in a few Nagpuri films. Known to be very soft-spoken in the film industry, she lived in Ranchi's Morabadi area. These locals helped Kumar take his wife to the SCC Medical College and Hospital in Uluberia where doctors declared her brought dead, police said. (PTI)



An image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi being spruced up at Howrah station ahead of flagging off of the Vande Bharat Express on Friday —Photo : Subham Dutta

## India gets fresh consular access to 8 Indians detained in Qatar

NEW DELHI, DEC 29 /-/- India on Thursday got its second consular access to the eight former navy personnel detained in Qatar, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said here. MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the Indian embassy in the country was actively pursuing the case. Responding to a question, he said New Delhi was trying to facilitate visas for the family members of the eight men. "I understand family members who are in Doha have been able to go there. And we are trying to facilitate visas for those who are here so that they can go," he said. Bagchi said New Delhi got its second consular access to the eight people on Thursday. "Our embassy personnel were able to meet the detainees and ascertain their well-being, and of course, we will continue to extend all possible consular assistance in this case," the MEA spokesperson added. The men have been in detention in Qatar for nearly four months now. (PTI)

## Security of borders can be ensured by bravery, alertness of soldiers, not by fencing: Shah

NEW DELHI, DEC 29 /-/- Pillars and fences along the borders are no match to alertness and bravery of soldiers guarding them which is further augmented by patriotic villagers living in close vicinity to the forward locations, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Thursday. While launching a mobile application 'Prahar' prepared in-house by the BSF and the manual of the border guarding force, Shah also suggested that under the Vibrant Village Programme, the personnel should make efforts for increasing tourism to villages but did not further elaborate on it. Security of the country's borders cannot be ensured by pillars or fencing, but only by the bravery, patriotism and alertness of the soldiers standing on the border, he said. The home minister said the BSF guards the most

difficult border of the country. After former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee conceptualised 'One Border One Force', the responsibility of guarding borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh had come to the BSF. Shah said the brave soldiers of the BSF are manning these borders with great vigilance, strength and promptness as well as consistent efforts. He said the security of the borders can be ensured only when the border villages are populated. Along with the deployment of soldiers on the borders, only the patriotic citizens living in the village can provide permanent security and all the border guarding forces should strengthen them. The home minister said in the last three years, 26,000 kg of narcotics and 2,500 arms and ammunition were seized by the BSF. Although the anti-drone technology on the

border is still at the experimental stage, it has been successful to a great extent, he said. The home minister said in the last six months, the BSF has shot down 22 drones on the western border, which is a huge achievement. Success is also being achieved against the drones carrying weapons to spread narcotics and terrorism with nefarious intentions, he said. Shah said a 'BSF Drone/UAV and Cyber Forensic Lab' has been set up in Noida, through which captured drones have been thoroughly mapped for their linkages and locations across the border. He said fencing could not be completed at some places along the international border due to difficult topography but the BSF has developed in-house technology for electronic surveillance there, cost of which is very low but its efficiency is very high. (PTI)

# EC develops remote voting machine prototype for domestic migrant voters

**Invites political parties for demo on Jan 16**

NEW DELHI, DEC 29 /-/- In a major move to increase voter participation, the Election Commission on Thursday said it has developed a prototype of a remote electronic voting machine (RVM) for domestic migrant voters and has invited political parties for a demonstration on January 16.

If implemented after stakeholder consultations, migrant voters do not need to travel to their home district to exercise their franchise. Terming counting of votes cast at remote booths and their transmission to the returning officer in other states as a "technological challenge", Election Commission (EC) officials said RVMs will be developed as "a robust, failproof and efficient stand-alone system" based on existing electronic voting machines and will not be connected to the internet. Based on feedback from various stakeholders and the demonstration of the prototype, the EC will appropriately carry forward the process of implementing remote voting, according to a statement. The poll panel has also floated a concept note on remote voting and sought the views of political parties on the legal, administrative and technological challenges in implementing it.

The multi-constituency remote EVM, developed by a public sector undertaking, can handle up to 72 constituencies from a single remote polling booth, the statement issued by the poll watchdog said. "After focus on youth and urban apathy, remote voting will be a transformational initiative for strengthening participation in electoral democracy," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar said. With the objective of finding a technological solution that is credible, accessible and acceptable to all stakeholders, the commission headed by CEC Kumar along with election commissioners Anup Chandra Pandey and Arun Goel "has now explored the option of using a modified version of the time-tested model of M3

(Mark 3) EVMs to enable voting at remote polling stations -- polling stations outside home constituency, for domestic migrants," the statement said.

The initiative, if implemented, can lead to a "social transformation" for migrants, it said. "Many a times migrants are reluctant to get themselves enrolled at their place of work for various reasons such as frequently changing residences, not enough social and emotional connect with the issues of area of migration, unwillingness to get their name deleted in an electoral roll of their home or native constituencies as they have permanent residence or property," the poll panel said. Elaborating on the concept note, the EC said it has invited all eight recognised national and 57 state political parties on January 16 to demonstrate the functioning of the multi-constituency prototype RVM. Members of the commission's Technical Expert Committee will also be present. The commission has also solicited written views of recognised political parties by January 31 on various related issues, including changes required in legislation, changes in administrative procedures and voting method for domestic

migrants. The concept note also highlights the challenges of defining domestic migrants, enumerating remote voters and implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) at remote polling booths in other states.

Ensuring secrecy of voting, facility of polling agents for identification of voters and process and method of remote voting and counting of votes, are among the other issues identified by the note. The Representation of the People Act, 1950 and 1951, The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, and The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, will need to be amended to introduce remote voting, the statement said. While the laws can only be changed by Parliament, the related rules in this case can be tweaked at the level of the Law Ministry. The number of booths to be set up and their locations also needs to be changed by Parliament, the related rules in this case can be tweaked at the level of the Law Ministry. The number of booths to be set up and their locations also needs to be settled. The method of remote voting, familiarity of voters with the methods and the RVM technology, counting of votes cast at remote booths and their transmission to the returning officer located in other state or states also requires deliberations. "Migration-based disenfranchisement", the EC said, is not an option in the age of technological advancement. The voter turnout in the 2019 Lok



Sabha elections was 67.4 per cent and the EC was concerned over the issue of over 30 crore electors not exercising their franchise and also differential voter turnout in various states and Union Territories, it said. "It is understood that there are multifarious reasons for a voter not opting to register in a new place of residence, thus missing out on exercising the right to vote. Inability to vote due to internal migration (domestic migrants) is one of the prominent reasons to be addressed to improve voter turnout and ensure participative elections," the EC said. Though there is no central database available for migration within the country, the analysis of available data in the public domain points to work, marriage and education-related migration as important components of domestic migration.

"Out-migration" is predominant among the rural population in overall domestic migration and around 85 per cent of the internal migration is within states, the commission noted. Soon after assuming office as CEC, Kumar's learning of domestic migration issues first hand from his trek to Dumak village in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district focused his attention on enabling the migrant voters to exercise their franchise from their current place of residence, the statement said. Realising such empowerment would entail a host of legal, statutory, administrative and technological interventions, the EC has deliberated at length to find inclusive solutions to facilitate electoral participation of migrants across all socio-economic strata and explored alternative voting methods like two-way physical transit postal ballots, proxy voting, early voting at special 'Early Voting Centres', one-way or two-way electronic transmission of postal ballots (ETPBS) and Internet-based voting system, the commission observed. (PTI)

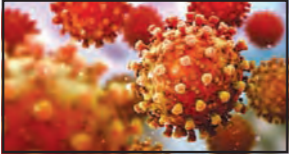
## Kosovo reopens Serbia border crossing, roadblocks yet to go

**KOSOVO, DEC 29** /--/ Kosovo reopened the country's main border crossing with Serbia on Thursday after a nearby barricade that led to its closure was removed, while Serbia's president said more than a dozen other Serb roadblocks in northern Kosovo also would be dismantled. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said Serbs would start removing their barricades on Thursday. The move could defuse weeks of tensions between Kosovo and Serbia that triggered fears of new clashes in the Balkans. Kosovo had demanded that NATO-led peacekeepers remove the barricades, or said its forces would do it. Serbia then raised the combat readiness of its troops on the border with Kosovo, demanding an end to "attacks" against Kosovo Serbs. The removal agreement was reached at a late-night crisis meeting with the leaders of Kosovo's Serbs, Vucic said. It followed the release from jail of a former Kosovo Serb police officer, whose detention on a terrorism charge triggered protests and clashes in northern Kosovo. A court ordered him placed under house arrest Wednesday. The roadblocks, which consist mostly of loaded heavy trucks, other vehicles and tents, were still in place as of mid-morning Thursday. Unknown assailants set fire to two trucks on a roadblock in the northern town of Mitrovica, Kosovo police said.

The former police officer, Dejan Pantic, was detained December 10 for "terrorism" after allegedly assaulting a Kosovo police officer during an earlier protest. Kosovo's president and prime minister have criticized a Kosovo court's decision to release Pantic from jail. "How is it possible for someone who is accused of terrorism to go from detention to house arrest," President Vjosa Osmani said late Wednesday. The main Merdare border crossing with Serbia closed down earlier this week because of a roadblock a few kilometres away, on the Serbian side of the border. Kosovo police told expatriates heading to Kosovo from European countries for the holidays that they could again use that route instead of going through North Macedonia or other entry points. The unrest over Pantic's detention sparked tense standoffs and gunshots but no major clashes. However, international concerns grew of a new conflict in the Balkans while the war in Ukraine is raging as well. A separatist rebellion by Kosovo's majority Albanians led to a 1998-99 war that featured a brutal Serbian crackdown in the territory that was its province at the time. NATO intervened in 1999 to stop the onslaught and push Serbia out of Kosovo. But Belgrade does not recognise Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence and has relied on Russia and China for backing. Both Serbia and Kosovo have been told they must normalise relations in order to become members of the EU. Washington and Brussels recently have stepped up efforts to push forward EU-mediated dialogue between the former war foes. (AP)

## EU assesses impact China's rollback of COVID measures

**BRUSSELS, DEC 29** /--/ The European Union is assessing the increase in COVID-19 cases in China following Beijing's rollback of its strict anti-infection controls in an attempt to streamline the testing of travellers from China in the 27 EU nations. The European Commission said on Thursday that the BF7 omicron variant prevalent in China was already active in Europe and that its threat has not significantly grown. "However, we remain vigilant and will be ready to use the emergency brake if necessary," the EU's executive arm said in a statement. Even though virus experts in the EU have played down the immediate danger, Italy on Wednesday made coronavirus tests mandatory for all airline passengers arriving from China. More than 50 per cent of people screened upon arrival at Milan's Malpensa airport in recent days tested positive for the virus. Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni on Thursday increased pressure on the EU to join Italy's approach. She said requiring COVID tests of all passengers from China "is only effective if it is taken at the European level", noting that many arrive in Italy on connecting flights through other European countries. In Germany, however, the government had a different position. "There is "no indication that a more dangerous variant has developed in this outbreak in China ... which would bring corresponding travel restrictions," Health Ministry spokesman Sebastian Guelde said. A coordinated EU approach is necessary since almost all EU member nations are part of Europe's visa-free Schengen Area. The unrestricted travel means that testing in one nation would not be very effective since travellers from China could enter from another EU nation and spread the virus. After strict travel restrictions at the height of the pandemic, the EU returned to a pre-pandemic system of free travel this fall, but member nations agreed that an "emergency brake" could be activated at short notice to meet an unexpected challenge. The United States announced new COVID-19 testing requirements on Wednesday for all travellers from China, joining some Asian nations that had imposed restrictions because of a surge of infections. (AP)



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# Israel's 37th government to be sworn in under Netanyahu, Palestinians call its agenda "dangerous escalation"

**JERUSALEM, DEC 29** /--/ Benjamin Netanyahu is all set to be sworn in as Israel's new prime minister on Thursday, leading the Jewish state's most hardline government to date.

Netanyahu, 73, Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, is returning as prime minister with the formation of his sixth government, which is composed of a number of far-right allies, a prospect that many fear would put the new government at odds with large parts of its own population and its closest allies abroad.

Out of 120 members of the Knesset (Israeli parliament), Netanyahu has the support of 64 members -- all right-wing, including his Likud party supported by the ultra-orthodox Shas, United Torah Judaism, the far-right Otzma Yehudit, Religious Zionist Party, and Noam.

Speaking at the Knesset ahead of the swearing-in of the new government, Netanyahu said that the three "national goals" of his government would be to prevent Iran from going nuclear, launch a bullet train that runs across the length of the country and bring more Arab countries into the Abraham accords fold.

Amid repeated heckling by opposing members who called Netanyahu "weak" and "racist", the incoming Prime Minister told them to "respect the will of the voters," and that "this is not the end of democracy or the end of the country." "In a democracy, you

don't climb over the walls of the Capitol nor those of the Knesset," he said.

He promised to improve the personal safety of the citizens and lower the high cost of living.

Several lawmakers were expelled from the hearing after hitting tables with their hands and repeatedly calling him "weak."

After Netanyahu announced his government that would be later required to be voted in and then sworn in following the election of the new Knesset speaker, outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid in his address to the Knesset listed the achievements of his short-lived government, including those of his predecessor and coalition partner Naftali Bennett.

"We are handing you a government in excellent condition ... try not to destroy it, we will be back soon," Lapid said.

Earlier in a Facebook post, Lapid vowed to continue to fight to topple the incoming government and make a comeback.

"Citizens of Israel, thanks for the last year and a half," he wrote. "This isn't the end, this is the beginning of the struggle for our beloved country. We are fighting for the future of our kids and we won't stop until we topple the government of destruction, and return".

Despite a clear mandate for the right wing to form the next government under Netanyahu in

November 1 elections, the negotiations between the coalition partners came down to the wire with the emerging bloc having to pass a flurry of legislation to satisfy the demands of the coalition partners even before the government could be sworn in.

The Knesset passed laws sponsored by incoming coalition parties enabling Shas party leader Aryeh Deri to become a minister despite a recent conviction and suspended sentence.

Other legislation changes include quasi-constitutional basic law which enables the Religious Zionist Party's leader Bezalel Smotrich to be appointed as an independent minister in the Defence Ministry in charge of West Bank settlements, which forms his key voting constituency.

A third bill granted greater control over police to the newly formed National Security Ministry, set to be helmed by far-right Otzma Yehudit leader Itamar Ben Gvir, who has been convicted multiple times for incitement, racism, and terror-related offences.

The parties included in the government had run in the

elections with a clear understanding that the Likud party Chairman Netanyahu would lead the next government if they were to get a majority, but they drove a hard bargain in reaching coalition agreements,

securing far-reaching policy and appointment concessions that will drive judicial reform, may change security service command structures, retroactively legalise and expand settlements, introduce far-right influence in secular education, and expand religious influence over state and social institutions.

Critics have raised concerns that the expected changes could impact the fundamental character of Israel's polity leading to changes that could harm Israel's internal cohesion, risk putting its delicate ties with the world Jewry in jeopardy, and also put the country at the receiving end of international condemnation due to its hardline position on the long-standing acceptance of a two-state solution to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The new government where the right-wing Likud party comprises the left-most flank of the coalition is a major shift from

the previous one which for the first time in Israel's history had not only parties drawn from the Left, Right, and Centre, but also enjoyed the support of an Arab party.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority (PA) slammed the agenda of the incoming Israeli government, which calls to expand settlements in the West Bank, as a "dangerous escalation".

"These guidelines constitute a dangerous escalation and will have repercussions for the region," said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

Abu Rudeineh emphasised that Israel must realise that without complying with the UN resolutions "nothing will be achieved and that there will not be any settlement left on the lands of the independent state of Palestine". He also called upon the US administration "to turn its words into deeds since it is committed to the two-state solution, without which there will be no stability in the region".

Meanwhile, hundreds of Israelis protested outside the Knesset in Jerusalem against the incoming government as Netanyahu addressed the parliament in a charged atmosphere, being repeatedly heckled by opposition members. Hebrew media outlets estimated that some 300 people were participating in the rally organised by centre-left organisations. (PTI)

## Russia launches massive missile barrage across Ukraine

**KYIV, DEC 29** /--/ Multiple regions of Ukraine, including its capital, faced a massive Russian missile attack on Thursday, the biggest wave of strikes in weeks targeting power stations and other critical infrastructure during freezing weather. Air raid sirens rang out across the country. Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Russia launched over 120 missiles. There were no immediate reports of any deaths. Russia dispatched explosive drones to selected regions overnight before broadening the barrage with "air and sea-based cruise missiles launched from strategic aircraft and ships" in the morning, the Ukrainian air force reported.

The widespread attack was the latest in a series of Russian strikes on power and water supplies that have increased the Ukrainian population's suffering. Moscow has launched such attacks on a weekly basis since October, while its ground forces struggle to advance. On Thursday, air defence systems were activated in the capital Kyiv to fend off strikes, according to the regional administration. Sounds of explosions were heard in the city. At least three people were wounded and hospitalised, including a 14-year-old girl, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. He warned of power outages in the capital, asking people to stockpile water and to charge their electronic devices. After more than 10 months of fighting, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a grinding battle of attrition. The Ukrainian military has reclaimed swaths of Russian-occupied territory in the country's northeast and south, and continues to resist persistent Russian attempts to seize all of the industrial Donbas region.

At the same time, Moscow has methodically targeted Ukrainian power facilities and other key infrastructure in a bid to weaken the country's resolve and force it to negotiate on Russian terms. While the Ukrainian military reported success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones after earlier attacks, some still reached their targets. Most cities have gone without heat, internet service and electricity for hours or days at a time. Anastasia, a medic who took shelter on Thursday at a central Kyiv subway station and gave only her first name, said she was tired of the war. "We don't know how long the war will last. It's hard to be afraid every day and put your life on hold," she said.

Numerous explosions also took place in Kharkiv, which is located in eastern Ukraine and the country's second-largest city, and in the city of Lviv near the border with Poland, according to their mayors. About 90 per cent of Lviv was without electricity, Mayor Andriy Sadovyi wrote on Telegram. Trams and trolley buses were not working, and residents might experience water interruptions, he said.

Ukrainian authorities in several regions said some incoming Russian missiles were intercepted. The governor of southern Ukraine's Mykolaiv province, Vitaliy Kim,

said five missiles were shot down over the Black Sea. The Ukrainian military's command North said two were downed over the Sumy region, located on the border with Russia in the country's northeast. Fragments from downed Russian missiles damaged two private buildings in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv, the city administration said. An industrial facility and a playground in neighbourhoods located across the Dnieper River also were damaged, city officials said. No casualties were immediately reported.

As the latest wave of Russian strikes began on Thursday, authorities in the Dnipro, Odesa and Kryvyi Rih regions said they switched off electricity to minimize the damage to critical infrastructure facilities if they were hit. Earlier this month, the United States agreed to give a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine to boost the country's defense. The US and other allies also pledged to provide energy-related equipment to help Ukraine withstand the attacks on its infrastructure.



Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, said that Russia was aiming to "destroy critical infrastructure and kill civilians en masse". "We're waiting for further proposals from 'peacekeepers' about peaceful settlement," security guarantees for RF and undesirability of provocations," Podolyak wrote on Twitter, a sarcastic reference to statements from some in the West who urged Ukraine to seek a political settlement of the conflict. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Monday that his nation wants a "peace" summit within two months at the United Nations with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as mediator. Kuleba said Russia must face a war-crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow. He said, however, that other nations should feel free to engage with the Russians.

Commenting on the summit proposal on Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed it as "delirious" and "hollow," describing the proposal as a "publicity stunt by Washington that tries to cast the Kyiv regime as a peacemaker". "It's an attempt to give a semblance of legitimacy to a meaningless discussion that will not be followed by any concrete steps," Zakharova said during a briefing. Russian officials have said that any peace plan can only proceed from Kyiv's recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the regions it illegally annexed from Ukraine in September. (AP)

## Smartwatch data shows Covid booster vaccine is safe: Lancet study

**JERUSALEM, DEC 29** /--/ The booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine is safe, according to a study published in The Lancet Respiratory Medicine that monitored heart measures through smartwatches. Researchers at Tel Aviv University equipped close to 5,000 Israelis with smartwatches and monitored their physiological parameters over two years. Of those monitored, 2,038 received the booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, allowing the researchers to objectively compare measures before and after the participants took the vaccine, and confirm the safety of the vaccine.

The team also examined the safety of the booster by analysing the medical files of 250,000 members of Maccabi Health Services anonymously. They were able to evaluate the safety of the vaccines from three perspectives: subjectively -- what the participant reports, objectively -- what the watch detects, and clinically -- what the doctor diagnoses. "The smartwatches were used to monitor a number of parameters such as heart rate, variation in heart activity, quality of sleep,

number of daily steps taken, and more," said Professor Dan Yamin from Tel Aviv University. "We saw clear and significant changes after administration of the vaccine, such as an increase in heart rate compared to the pulse rate measured before vaccination, and then we saw a return to the participant's baseline, i.e., the



pulse levels after vaccination returned to their previous levels after six days. Hence, our study confirms the safety of the vaccine," Yamin said.

The researchers said the most surprising finding was that the watches were more sensitive than the people they were monitoring.

Many participants reported fatigue, headache, etc. after receiving the vaccine, and after two or three days reported that they felt normal and well, they said.

"In contrast, from examining their watches, we saw distinct changes in heart rate that continued for several more days," Yamin said.

"There were also vaccinated participants who did not report any side effects at all and yet definitely experienced physiological changes, based on data from their smartwatches. In other words, we learned that the smartwatches were more sensitive to changes in general feeling than the participants themselves," he added.

In the medical literature, 25 unusual side effects attributed to the COVID vaccine were reported, and the researchers paid special attention to look for rare cases of inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) and pericarditis. The researchers checked the frequency of these unusual side effects among a quarter of a million Maccabi members and found no increase in serious incidents of any kind associated with vaccination. (PTI)

# Want a game against SL to impress Hardik, says Shivam Mavi after maiden India call-up

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** /--/ Having overcome his fair share of injuries and done the hard yards in domestic cricket, starting January 3 in Mumbai. The 24-year-old is supremely confident that he won't let Hardik down. "Hardik Pandya supports



all Shivam Mavi wants from India skipper Hardik Pandya is an opportunity to shine in the upcoming home series against Sri Lanka. A week after he was snapped by Gujarat Titans for a whopping Rs 6 crore in the IPL mini-auction, Mavi celebrated another big moment of his career when he was selected in India's T20 squad for the upcoming three T20s against Sri Lanka,

every player. He is a great leader. It is very difficult to be the IPL champions in the first outing but he managed to do it. He led Gujarat Titans from the front and became champions. He is a calm leader but took some bold decisions," the 24-year-old told PTI in an exclusive interview. "As a captain Hardik bhai is very shrewd and a master tactician. He knows exactly whom to bowl

when and whom to promote in the batting order. I know it is not going to be easy for me but I am just hoping to get a game, perform there and be a regular for India." But the journey to the national team was not easy for Mavi after a difficult 2022 IPL season with Kolkata Knight Riders, where he took only five wickets in six games at an economy rate of 10.31 after fetching Rs 7.25 crore. He went back to the nets and worked hours on to bring variations in his bowling, especially death bowling skills and included the bouncer and yorker in his repertoire. The efforts seemed to have bore fruit as Mavi was influential for Uttar Pradesh across domestic white-ball competitions this year, picking up 10 wickets in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament and 14 scalps in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. "I didn't do anything different. I just worked hard in the nets. I know I can generate speed, so just concentrated on bringing variations into my bowling. It paid off as I became more consistent this year," Mavi said. "A lot of senior players in the Uttar Pradesh team helped me like Anureet Singh, Parwinder Awana, who is also from Noida. They taught me how to bowl, how to plan out things." Mavi, who was a key member of the victorious India's U-19 World Cup-winning squad in 2018 along side Shubman Gill and Prithvi Shaw, said a patient approach

ultimately paid dividends for him. He also had to deal injuries at the start of his career. "It's a great feeling and a proud moment to represent your country. Shubman and Prithvi made their India debuts before me but I knew it's all about the right time. Every individual has his or her luck and time," he said. Despite a below-par performance in last IPL, Mavi was confident of a good price in this year's IPL mini-auction and also got the team of his choice. "Yes, I was expecting something around Rs 5 and 6 crore. It is a result of my consistent performances. I always wanted to be in GT because I have heard that their management is very good. GT has Hardik bhai and (Ashish) Nehra bhai, the two best thinkers of the game," he said. In his formative years, Mavi started as a top-order batter but transformed into a genuine fast bowler under his childhood coach Phoolchand Sharma. "I started as a batter but I also used to bowl at nets but later I noticed I didn't have batting skills to become a proper batter. I started to realise after sometime that bowling suits me more than batting. "Becoming a bowling all-rounder would be a better option for me," said Mavi, who idolises South Africa pace great Dale Steyn. Phoolchand Sharma was understandably ecstatic after Mavi's India call-up. "Shivam came to me when he was 10 years old. He started as a batter but he used to bowl occasionally at the nets and was a very aggressive bowler. He is a fighter and big match player. He plays very well under pressure," Sharma said. (PTI)

## GAME NOTES

### Suryakumar, Mandhana among nominees for ICC T20 Cricketer of the Year honour

**DUBAI, DEC 29** /--/ Swashbuckling Indian batters Suryakumar Yadav and Smriti Mandhana were on Thursday nominated for the men's and women's T20 Cricketer of the Year awards, respectively, for their exploits in 2022. Suryakumar has been nominated alongside T20 World Cup-winning England all-rounder Sam Curran, Pakistan wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan and Zimbabwe's batting all-rounder Sikandar Raza for the top honours in the men's category. Pakistan bowling all-rounder Nida Dar, New Zealand's Sophie Devine and Australian Tahlia McGrath will give Mandhana competition in the women's category. Suryakumar had a sensational 2022 in the shortest format of the game, becoming just the second batter to score more than 1000 runs in a year in the format. He ended the year as the highest run-getter, scoring 1164 runs at a ridiculous strike-rate of 187.43. His tally of 68 sixes in the calendar year in T20s is the highest anyone has recorded in the format in a year by a fair distance. (PTI)



### At Pele museum, fans proud of ailing Brazilian football icon's legacy

**SANTOS, BRAZIL, DEC 29** /--/ On a visit to the Pele Museum in Brazil's seaside city of Santos, Sergio Murillo Junior says he's sad to see the football legend's health deteriorate, but adds "I am proud of the legacy he left us." For the 53-year-old lawyer, Pele is above all "an example of perseverance and resilience, for all generations." The



museum in Santos is full of memorabilia from the man dubbed "The King": jerseys and cleats he wore, balls from key matches, and numerous trophies — including the honorary FIFA

Golden Ball he received in 2014. Pele, 82, is battling worsening cancer as well as kidney and heart problems at a Sao Paulo hospital 80 kilometers (50 miles) inland. Flores Araujo Hermes, an 82-year-old Peruvian tourist, told AFP he remembered seeing the football legend play in Lima like it was yesterday. "Chest, shot and goal! Magnificent!" he recalled, sports commentator-style. "It was the best. People keep comparing him to others, but no one has surpassed him yet," Hermes added. (AFP)

### Ligue 1: Mbappe grabs winner for PSG after Neymar red card; Lyon thrash Brest

**PARIS, DEC 29** /--/ Kylian Mbappe scored an injury-time penalty to seal a 2-1 win for Paris Saint-Germain over Strasbourg in Ligue 1 on Wednesday before admitting he will never get over France's World Cup final defeat to Argentina. Mbappe was back in action 10 days after scoring a hat-trick in the final but then seeing the South Americans win in a penalty shootout. PSG had Neymar sent off for two yellow cards as the Brazilian made an unhappy return to action following his country's elimination in the World Cup quarter-finals. Captain Marquinhos had put the hosts ahead with an early header but the Brazilian defender scored an own goal after 51 minutes as some of PSG's stars appeared to be suffering a post-Qatar hangover. Neymar picked up a yellow for a petulant flick in the face of a Strasbourg player and then earned another for a blatant dive in the penalty area just after the hour. Mbappe had been a constant menace for PSG but was unable to find the target with two clear-cut chances. But deep into second-half injury time he was brought down in the penalty area and converted the winner from the spot in the 96th minute. (AFP)



## MCC expresses interest to host Indo-Pak Test after T20 WC clash success

**MELBOURNE, DEC 29** /--/ The Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) has expressed interest in hosting a Test match between arch-rivals India and Pakistan after successfully organising the marquee T20 World Cup clash between the two sides earlier this year. MCC, which manages the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and the Victoria government have recently inquired with Cricket Australia (CA) about the possibility of hosting the high-profile Test. MCC chief executive Stuart Fox has revealed his intentions to host the Test following the tremendous success of the T20 World Cup clash in October, which was attended by over 90,000 spectators. "Absolutely. Three (Tests) in a row would be lovely at the MCG. You'd fill it every time. We have asked," Fox was quoted as saying by SEN radio. "We've taken that up with Cricket Australia. I know the (Victoria) government has as well. Again, it's enormously complicated from what I can understand, amongst a really busy schedule. So I think that's probably the greater challenge". "Wouldn't it be great that it wasn't just Australia-centric and Victoria-centric, that we're catering for all the countries and filling the stadium all the time. So we have asked". Fox said it is now up to CA to pursue the matter with the ICC. "Hopefully, Cricket Australia keep taking it up with the



ICC and keep pushing for it. When you do see some of the stadiums around the world unoccupied, I think it would be much better to have a full house and that atmosphere and celebrating the game with full houses," he said. "The atmosphere, I've never felt it like that. The noise after every ball was just phenomenal and the families and children and everyone enjoying it. I think if we can be more inclusive and make sure that we cater for all cultures, we've got to tap into that Pakistan community next year. We want them here and that would be fantastic to have a full house day one," he added. (PTI)

## Australia beats South Africa in 2nd test to clinch series

**MELBOURNE, Dec 29** /--/ Spinner Nathan Lyon took 3-58 as Australia bowled out South Africa for 204 Thursday to claim victory by an innings and 182 runs on the fourth day of the second test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Australia clinched the series and will be chasing a 3-0 sweep in Sydney where the third and final test starts on Jan.4. Tamba Bavuma top-scored for South Africa with 65, although he also played key roles in two run outs. Resuming Thursday on 15-1, South Africa lost three wickets in the morning session. Mitchell Starc, nursing a tendon injury to the blood-stained middle finger on his bowling hand, produced a fast yorker to remove Sarel Erwee lbw for 21 at 47-2. Ten runs later, Scott Boland had Theunis de Bruyn (28) caught at second slip as cracks continued to appear in the Proteas' brittle batting lineup. Those cracks widened when Khaya Zondo was run out in demoralizing fashion for one at 65-4 after Bavuma pushed to mid-off and called Zondo through for a risky single. Bavuma and Kyle Verreynne (33) fought hard to add 63 for the fourth wicket before Boland (2-49) removed Verreynne lbw at 128-5 in the fourth over after lunch. Marco Jansen (five) fell in the same fashion to spinner Nathan Lyon 16 runs later, following a video review. Bavuma was involved in a



Australia celebrates the wicket of Sarel Erwee

second run out, theatrically turning his back on Keshav Maharaj (13) who was forced to give up on an attempted third run through cover and failed to regain his ground at the striker's end at 174-7. A wild slog from Bavuma was caught at mid-on in the following over as Lyon claimed his second victim of the innings and Kagiso Rabada (three) also skied an attempted slog, leading to his departure in Lyon's next over at 177-9. Anrich Nortje and Lungi Ngidi entertained the crowd with some big hits as they added 27 for the last wicket, which fell before the tea break on day four. Medium-pacer Cameron Green claimed a career-best 5-27 in South Africa's first innings of 189. All-rounder Green also scored an unbeaten 51 in Australia's reply of 575-8, retiring hurt for six with a broken right-index finger before returning to share a century partnership with wicketkeeper Alex Carey (111) for the eighth wicket. Green has been ruled out of the third test. Opener and man-of-the-match David Warner, who scored 200 in his 100th test, along with half-centuries from Steve Smith (85) and Travis Head (51), gave Australia a solid foundation before the late-order heroics of Green and Carey allowed captain Pat Cummins to declare with a 386-run advantage on the first innings. (PTI)

## Indian Cricket in 2022: A saga of forgettable year

**NEW DELHI, DEC 29** /--/ Virat Kohli's artistic sixes against Pakistan united fans from Kashmir to Kanyakumari in an otherwise underwhelming year for Indian cricket, which started with a promise of transformation but ended with the commencement of another difficult transition period.

Indian cricket in 2022 was chaotic, to say the least and messy at most of the time both on and off the field. The only saving grace was a Rs 48,000 crore IPL media rights deal, an indication of what market forces aspire the cricketing ecosystem to be. But on the field, it was a saga of disappointing results at least for the men. It started with a Test series defeat in South Africa which led to a dejected Virat Kohli stepping down from captaincy in the longest format. His relationship with the BCCI bigwigs was a fractured one after being sacked from ODI captaincy and he wanted to leave on his own terms. It happened in January and as the year comes to an end, Kohli's illustrious heir Rohit Sharma too finds himself shunted from the national T20 captaincy. In an expected change of guard, Hardik Pandya emerged as a new leader of the national T20 team as Rohit paid the price for another semi-final exit in the T20 World Cup following defeat against England. In fact, it is the England team, which across formats is changing the grammar of cricket with an amazingly aggressive approach known as 'Bazball', a name, which is set to attain a cult status in years to come along with the golden generation of English players led by Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler. They played cricket in such an entertaining style that

the Indian team's "ideas cupboard" seemed bare in comparison. The Indian team looked good during bilaterals but came a cropper at the global events. No one knows when the trend will be bucked. Some of the bilateral series lacked context and hence Virat Kohli's 71st and 72nd international hundreds in dead rubbers versus Afghanistan (T20) and Bangladesh (ODI) didn't have a lot of currency. While Kohli's straight six off Haris Rauf and his 82-run knock will forever remain a poetic nostalgia, the archaic approach



of India's senior batters, including that of skipper Rohit and KL Rahul, stuck out like a sore thumb during the T20 World Cup. It also didn't go unnoticed that head coach Rahul Dravid's decision-making has left a lot to be desired. From rushing a half-fit Jasprit Bumrah for a T20 series against Australia that aggravated his lower-back stress fracture, to not thinking of using wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal at the global event and dropping a performer like left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav from a Test after a match-

winning show, Dravid could never actually convince anyone that he is a shrewd tactician. In the case of Rohit, his dip in batting form also became an issue although he was the only one among the top three who had tried changing his game as per the needs of modern-day white-ball cricket. KL Rahul was the most disappointing of the lot and by the end of the year, it became clear that the Chetan Sharma-led panel's wish of seeing a potential national leader in him had crash landed as he lost his T20 vice captaincy to Suryakumar Yadav and ODI deputy's role to Hardik Pandya. Shreyas Iyer's consistent run in Tests and ODIs, Rishabh Pant emerging as the current team's most prolific Test match game changer and Jammu's tearaway quick Umran Malik entering collective conscience were some of the positive signs. Shubman Gill realising his potential at the highest level and Ishan Kishan giving a glimpse of his phenomenal talent was also a good sign, looking forward. The year also marked the end of international careers of Ishant Sharma and Wriddhiman Saha, two workmanlike players, who had served the national team with distinction before being told that their time is up and Indian cricket is moving past them. Ditto for Shikhar Dhawan, a prolific ODI player, who has now been shown the exit door. At 37, another comeback doesn't seem imminent. Chetan Sharma's selection committee, that showed lack of foresight, was sacked by the BCCI after the team's poor show in the T20 World Cup. (PTI)

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