

Life less ordinary or extraordinary

BHOPINDER SINGH

As an Infantryman, almost half of one's professional life was divided into tenant postings that were either in 'field areas' or 'peace stations'. Put simply, this alternative oscillation at the 'field area' entailed deployment in the direct line of defense against the 'enemy', hence usually in the border outposts at the geographical-topographical extremities of the sovereign, with extremely difficult conditions and frequent threats to life. Herein, serving in isolated 'pickets' at heights that can be 17,000 feet (minus 20-degree temperature) or above, as indeed in foreboding terrains like leech-infested tropical forests of the Northeastern jungles or frozen glaciers of Siachen, are par for the course. After a grueling posting that could range from 2 to 3 years in 'field areas', comes the relative relief of 'peace stations' that ostensibly allow for retraining and recouping, as also enjoying precious family time, albeit in stations like Dhana in Madhya Pradesh, Danapur in Bihar or Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh! The so-called relief of 'peace stations' is invariably punctuated by sudden deployment in insurgency-hit areas, training 'exercises' in forward areas, or even individual postings (beyond Unit attachments), back to 'field' areas! Truly exemplifying the Indian Army's recruitment pitch, 'Join the Army and Live a Life Less Ordinary. Serving in the 'field areas' is not only imperative for career progression but very often, deliberately sought and volunteered by soldiers who consider the same a badge of honour, duty, and pride.

With this understanding of 'normalcy' in-service conditions of the 'Uniform' for forty years, one proceeded to the pristine and salubrious Andaman and Nicobar Islands, post hanging the dockmartens boots in 2006. The land of India's freedom struggle had then just been struck with nature's fury via the Tsunami and in dire need of relief and rehabilitation. As soldiers, one was familiar with the necessities of relief operations after having partaken in rescue operations in avalanches, floods, earthquakes, etc. However, no longer in 'Uniform' and now as a civilian Administrator with a team of civilian bureaucrats in the task, was a cultural change - sometimes for the better and

sometimes, not. Many exemplified the best of minds, commitment, and integrity that makes the Civil Services amongst the toughest examinations to



crack, as indeed, aspirational.

However, some within the AGMUT cadre that is responsible for the Islands (along with all other UTs like Delhi, Chandigarh, Goa, etc.) took to postings in the Emerald Islands like a 'punishment posting' to the proverbial Kaala Paani (a blot of nomenclature for the holy land) - for these odd derelicts, it bred disinterest, dismay and 'time serving' attitude that led to an apathetic performance. Conversely, it also led to occasional cases of extreme hubris and highhandedness, as the 'State' has a disproportionately larger say in livelihood than it does in other places, as is the case in all border areas or distant lands. Having served in far-flung areas of Ladakh or Northeastern states, one was conversant with the subliminal sensitivities and the need to 'reach out' as much as possible and allowed. Often these odd bureaucrats didn't exactly enjoy the spirit besetting, 'a life less ordinary. Dereliction of duty could be an unfortunate outcome, if not corrected.

Recent accusations surrounding the extreme abuse of power by the former senior-most bureaucrat (Chief Secretary) of the Islands, is a doomsday scenario of what could go wrong. This militates in the face of the 'steel frame' imagined by Sardar Patel who had beseeched the IAS probationers even before independence, "No Service worth the name can claim to exist if it does not have in view the achievement of the highest standard of integrity" and had cautioned sagely about the possible misuse of power, "render your service without fear or favour and any expectation of extraneous rewards". When the highest bureaucrat of the land is accused in a sex-for-job scandal, not only is

something amiss with the 'system' but also with the adherence to the civilizational truths of the land. Andamans and Nicobar Islands was the first territory to unfurl the Tricolour (by Netaji in 1945) and instill the lofty 'Idea of India' - this incident besmirches that sacredness of thought and land.

Ironically, Port Blair with its basic facilities (Government Hospital, International Airport, Educational facilities, etc.) befitting a capital city is still considered a 'hard posting' in the official recording of the bureaucracy - whereas there is an Infantry Brigade in Port Blair that has Infantry Units who are in a 'peace station' after having done a truly hard posting in the

Cont. on page -6

Transportation glitches render job aspirants stranded

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ The District Health Society (Nicobar) has invited online application from eligible job aspirants to fill-up forms for various posts such as AANM, Staff Nurse (SNCU/NBSU), Staff Nurse, PHN, Lab Technician, District Programme Coordinator (NTEP), Lab Assistant and Support Staff/Office Attendant. The date of Walk-in-Interview for these posts was fixed on 29th November 2022, which was later rescheduled to 30th November 2022.

The advertisement for recruitment to various posts

in the District Health Society was uploaded in the official website of andaman.gov.in on 7th November 2022. Accordingly thousands of eligible candidates have filled online applications for the jobs. However, these candidates are now feeling helpless as they cannot appear for the interview to be held on November 30, 2022, at the Office of Deputy Commissioner/Chairman, DHS, Car Nicobar due to unavailability of requisite ship services to Car Nicobar.

According to sources, the last ship sailed for Car Nicobar was on 22nd November 2022, and thereafter, there has been no

Candidates are unable to appear in walk-in-interview of various posts in District Health Society (N) at Carnic due to lack of ship services

sailing of ships to Car Nicobar. In such a scenario, candidates rue the fact that they cannot appear for the interview. Since only limited persons can travel in helicopters, it is almost impossible to avail heli-services for Car Nicobar. In such a scenario, operation of exclusive ship services for to & from Car Nicobar is the only way out so that more and more candidates can appear for the

interview. Candidates who are unable to visit Car Nicobar to appear for the interviews due to non-operation of boat services are now seeking postponement of the interview and providing necessary ship services so that they can appear in the interview.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner (Car Nicobar) assured EOI that he will look into the issue.

MV Bharat Seema to sail for Carnic

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ MV Bharat Seema will sail Car Nicobar via Little Andaman on 2ND December

2022 (Fri) at 0700 Hrs from Haddo Wharf and will sail for Port Blair on 3rd Dec 2022 (Sat) at 1600 Hrs from

Car Nicobar via Little Andaman. Passenger tickets will be issued to the general public from 30th November 2022 (Wed) onwards at STARS Ticketing Counters.

Badminton Club Tournament (RCS Group) evokes overwhelming response



PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ The final match of the 1st Badminton Club Tournament (RCS Group) was held on 28th November 2022. The tournament was held from 26th to 28th of November 2022 for U-11 Girls & U-12 Boys & Senior Men and Senior Women categories. In the final match of the tournament, Mr. Uday Kumar, Youth State President BJP

was the chief guest and distributed prizes to the participants, Mr. Sahul Hamid, Municipal Councillor, Ward No-1 and Mr. C. Arvind, Secretary Organising Committee were also present on the occasion. Smt C. Kalaiarasi and Dr. Robert James were special guests. The final match was held on 28th November 2022.

Greetings to Mr. Sawa Lall (Retd., Junior Engineer)

State President, A & N Vidyut Shramik Sangh (ANVSS) and National Executive Member, Akhil Bhartiya Vidyut Mazdoor Mahasangh (ABVMM) greet Mr. Sawa Lall, (Retd., Junior Engineer), Rural Division of Electricity department on his superannuation from service on 30/11/2022. ANVSS & ABVMM congratulate Mr. Sawa Lall (Retd., Junior Engineer) on a successful career and wishes him well on the exciting adventures ahead.

Retirement is one of those major life milestones that mark the ending of one chapter and the start of another: N. Peddi Raju, State President, ANVSS and National Executive Member, ABVMM.

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Kharge hurls 'Ravan' barb at PM; Gujarat CM claims it shows Cong's hatred for Gujaratis

AHMEDABAD, NOV 29 --/ Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has stirred a controversy by throwing "Ravan" barb at Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of the Gujarat Assembly elections, with chief minister Bhupendra Patel claiming the remark reflects the Opposition party's hatred for Gujaratis.

Elections for the 182-member Assembly in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled Gujarat are scheduled to be held in two phases on December 1 and 5. The Prime Minister has been extensively campaigning for the BJP candidates ahead of the polls.

Kharge on Monday night addressed a rally in Behrampura area of Ahmedabad city where he said the Prime Minister asks people to vote "looking at

his face" in all elections. "Are you 100-headed like Ravan," he said. Taking a strong exception to the remarks, CM Patel in a tweet said: "Bereft of any development agenda and support from the people, the Congress is out to abuse Gujarat and Gujaratis."

The statement made by Kharge ji against PM Narendra Modiji is a testimony to their hate for Gujaratis. The people of Gujarat will reject them this time too for such behaviour," Patel added.

Addressing people in Behrampura area under the Congress-held Danilimda seat, Kharge said in every election, votes are sought in the name of Modi instead of local candidates or the performance of government. "Modi asks people to ignore everything and vote (for BJP) by

keeping his face in front of the eyes. I wonder on how many occasions we have to see your face? People have



Mallikarjun Kharge

How many faces do you have? Are you 100-headed like Ravan? I don't understand this," the



Bhupendra Patel

Congress president said. He further said the BJP asks people to vote for Modi. "If our candidate for this seat is Shailesh Parmar, then campaign for your candidate against him and

seek votes in his name. Instead, they say vote for Modi. Will he come here to fix issues related to the municipality," Kharge said. The senior Congress leader further said instead of doing his work as India's PM, Modi canvasses for various elections, be it local bodies or Assembly polls. He asked the BJP to seek votes on the performance of its government and previous Congress governments, both in Gujarat 27 years back and at the Centre.

"The BJP believes in telling lies only. I recently said Modi is 'badshah' of telling lies, because he keeps on telling lies. What happened to two crore jobs every year? He used to say he will give Rs 15 lakh to each citizen after bringing black money from abroad," Kharge said. The Congress

president further claimed Modi was fond of inaugurating projects which were originally started by the Congress. "Recently, the Centre filled 75,000 vacancies. I saw that event on TV. And who was distributing certificates at the event? The PM of this country. Why was he doing the work of a clerk or a deputy secretary? Are you needed for distributing appointment orders?" he said.

"You first tell the nation why they are not filling 30 lakh vacancies? They are not doing it because out of those 30 lakh, nearly 16 lakh jobs will go to the poor people. They don't want Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Economically Weaker Section candidates to get jobs," Kharge claimed. (PTI)

J-KLG launches key initiatives under NEP, says policy will equip students with wide range of skills

JAMMU, NOV 29 --/ Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha launched on Tuesday several key initiatives under the National Education Policy (NEP) which, he said, will equip students with a wide range of skills required for a knowledge society.

Under the policy, several agreements were signed between the government and universities to achieve the desired target. The NEP will equip students with a wide range of skills required for a knowledge society, Sinha said, adding inter-disciplinary curriculum and multi-disciplinary education are at the heart of the policy to train future innovators and leaders.

Maintaining that Jammu and Kashmir has taken the lead in the implementation of the NEP, Sinha said future higher education and learning will be more dynamic, adaptable and personalised like a liquid learning model platform to seamlessly blend the ideas from different disciplines to prepare students for varied and comprehensive knowledge in a rapidly shifting world.

"Environmental, scientific, technological transformation and globalisation have increased the pace of socio-economic changes. Problem-based learning will make the students familiar with real-world situations and develop thinking and creativity skills," the LG said.

Sinha said the recommendations implemented in undergraduate programmes in all colleges from the 2022-23 session will bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, provide resources and choice for research and flexibility in completing degree programmes. He said schools and the education system must strive to prepare students for the real world and they would require at least six skills -- curiosity, critical thinking, adaptability, effective communication, teamwork and collaboration -- to become more productive and successful in their chosen career. The LG said NEP has put special emphasis on engagement and involvement in both classrooms as well as field study.

The Lieutenant Governor launched four portals for digital outreach in higher education, including e-samarth, three-tier feedback and transfers. (PTI)

Yoga guru Ramdev apologises for her remark on women

MUMBAI, NOV 29 --/ Yoga guru Ramdev has apologised for his remark on women for which the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (MSCW) had issued him a notice, the panel's chairperson Rupali Chakankar said.

At a public event in Maharashtra's Thane district last week, Ramdev said women can look good in anything, saree, salwar kameez or "even when they wear nothing". He had shared stage at the event with state deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis's wife Amruta Fadnavis. Taking cognisance of the comment, the MSCW had issued a notice to Ramdev to which he responded with an apology.

Chakankar in a tweet on Monday said, "Baba Ramdev aka Ram Kisan Yadav used lowly language against women at a public event in Thane. The state commission for women took cognisance of it and sent him a notice seeking his response in two days. The commission has received his response and he has sought an apology for his comments."

Ramdev in his response claimed his remarks were misconstrued and apologised for the comments. Delhi Commission for Women chairperson Swati Maliwal had also tweeted the video of Ramdev's comments and sought an apology from him. (PTI)



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh felicitating prominent CSR contributors to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund during CSR Conclave, organised by Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare in New Delhi

I&B minister cautions media on reporting on terror attacks

NEW DELHI, NOV 29 --/ Union information and broadcasting minister Anurag Thakur on Tuesday advised caution while live reporting terror attacks, saying it should not provide clues to attackers and their ill motives. "Media needs to report with responsibility in the case of earthquakes, fire and more importantly terrorist attacks. Media must ensure that any live reporting in case of terrorist attack should not provide clues to the attackers and their ill motives," Thakur said while addressing the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) General Assembly here. While the speed with which information is transmitted is important, accuracy is even more important and should be primary in the minds of communicators, Thakur said. The Union minister said maintaining public trust should be the highest guiding principle for responsible media

organisations. Thakur also credited the media for coming to the aid of those stuck at home during the Covid-19



Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Anurag Singh Thakur addressing at the 59th Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) General Assembly & Associated Meetings 2022, in New Delhi

pandemic, saying it connected people with the outside world. He said the Indian media ensured that Covid-19 awareness messages, important government guidelines and free online consultations with doctors reached everyone in every nook and corner of the country. Prasara

Bharati -- India's public service broadcaster -- lost over a hundred members to COVID-19, yet it did not

deter the organisation from carrying on with its public service mandate, the minister said. Thakur said ABU, as an association of broadcasting organisations, must continue to train and equip media practitioners with the best professional skills on the role of media in times of crisis. (PTI)

TN BJP claims "security lapse" during PM's visit, goes to Guv

CHENNAI, NOV 29 --/ Alleging a grave security lapse by police during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tamil Nadu in July, BJP State unit chief K Annamalai on Tuesday called on Governor RN Ravi and urged him to direct the government to order an enquiry.

Annamalai, on his Twitter handle, said he called on Ravi along with senior party leaders and presented a memorandum on a "grave security lapse committed by the @arivalayam govt," (DMK regime) during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Chennai on July 28 and 29. "It has come to light that most of the handheld metal detectors, door frame metal detectors and bomb detectors that were used in the security arrangement were not in order and were overdue for maintenance and replacement," a party release said quoting the memorandum submitted to Ravi. (PTI)

Prez inaugurates International Gita Festival in Kurukshetra

KURUKSHETRA, NOV 29 --/ President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday stressed imbibing the teachings of 'Bhagavad Gita', saying it is a book whose messages spread hope in despair and also give solutions to all doubts of practical life.

The President, who is on a two-day visit to Haryana to attend various programmes, on Tuesday inaugurated the International Gita Festival-2022 organised on the banks of Brahma Sarovar here. She offered prayers amidst chanting of mantras at Brahma Sarovar and also offered flowers on the holy religious scripture Gita as she performed the 'yagna' near Lord Shri Krishna's huge chariot idol located at Purushottampur Bagh. She was accompanied by Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar. The President launched a Nirogi Haryana scheme, an e-ticketing system in Haryana Transport and virtually laid the foundation stone of a medical college in Sirsa district to be built at an estimated cost of Rs 950 crore.

Murmu also participated in the International Gita Seminar. Addressing the gathering, President Murmu said that she was happy to be here and lauded the state government for organising the International Gita Festival and for the launch of the Nirogi Haryana scheme, e-ticketing system and upcoming medical college at Sirsa. She was also informed that the Gita festival was being organised at the international level since 2016. The President said she considers it a blessing of Lord Krishna that she got an opportunity to begin her first visit to Haryana as the President from this 'Dharma-kshetra'. The President said 'Bhagavad Gita' is an international book in a real sense and it has been translated into many languages.

"Like Yoga is India's gift to the entire world, in the same way, Yoga-Shastra Gita is also the spiritual gift of Mother India to the entire humanity. The Gita is a life code for the whole of humanity, a spiritual beacon," she said. Murmu said Gita which comprises 700 'Shaloks' has the essence of all 'Vedas'. "Gita is the important 'granth' of 'Vedanta'. Gita is such a book in which solutions to all the doubts of practical life and spirituality are easily found," said the President. Maintaining balance in all situations is the most useful message of Gita, she added. The President said: "Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is a 'granth' of encouragement in adverse circumstances and spreads hope in despair. This is a 'granth' for life-building." She stressed that it is most important to imbibe the messages of the Gita. Leaders like Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, who gave direction to our freedom struggle, took guidance from Bhagavad Gita in every sphere of life, she said.

The President further said Mahatma Gandhi used to call 'Shrimad Bhagavad Gita' as 'Gita Mata'. Gandhi had said, "The mother who gave birth to me is gone, but I have learned to go to 'Gita Mata' in times of crisis," Murmu added. The President said that Swami Vivekananda used to say that Gita gives a message of shedding cowardice and adopting bravery. Brave jawans, hardworking farmers and daughters of Haryana made the state and the whole country proud in their respective fields by imbibing the teachings of the Gita, Murmu said. Earlier, the President visited the state-level progressive Haryana exhibition at the International Gita Festival.

In the progressive Haryana state-level exhibition, the President saw the artwork of evidence of Gita teachings and got a glimpse of the stories of valour and contribution of Haryana's heroes in the freedom struggle displayed through photographs. (PTI)

Karnataka's stand on boundary dispute justified, confident of good outcome": CM ahead of SC hearing

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI, NOV 29 --/ Set for a legal battle with Maharashtra over the border dispute, Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai on Tuesday expressed confidence about a "good outcome", as he asserted that as per the Constitution and the States Reorganisation Act, the state's stand is justified. The chief minister is in New Delhi and held discussions with senior advocate in the state's legal panel Mukul Rohatgi, in the wake of the case coming up before the Supreme Court for hearing on November 30. "I have met Rohatgi on the border dispute, the advocate general has briefed things, I too shared inputs regarding the background on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border issue and we discussed the legal status. He told me that all the preparations have been made for tomorrow," Bommai said. Speaking to newsmen after meeting Rohatgi in the national capital, he said, the important thing is the maintainability of Maharashtra's case.

"In 2017, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Deepak Mishra had framed preliminary issues regarding the maintainability of the case, which was challenged by Maharashtra. What should be our objections or arguments to it has been decided, and we are confident that as per the Constitution and the States Reorganisation Act Karnataka's stand is justified. We are confident of a good outcome," he added. The border dispute dates back to the 1960s after the reorganisation of states on linguistic lines. Maharashtra laid claim to Belagavi which was part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency as it has a sizable Marathi-speaking population. It also laid claim to 80 Marathi-speaking villages which are currently part of Karnataka.

Responding to a question on damages caused to Karnataka's vehicles in Maharashtra during the last couple of days, the CM said, such things have happened earlier too, "due to internal politics" in that state, as part of an attempt by political parties there, to "showcase their seriousness" on the border issue. "I had asked our home secretary and chief secretary to speak to their counterparts in Maharashtra to control such things and now it has been controlled to an extent," he said. To another query on people of more than 40 villages in Maharashtra, bordering Karnataka, wanting to meet him, with a demand to merge their areas with the state, Bommai said any further decision on this will be taken only after consulting all political parties in the state and legal experts.

"This stand by them (people in border villages) is not new, I too have spoken about it.... but the issue is before the Supreme Court, so it has to be decided after consulting all political parties and legal experts," he said. Responding to a reported statement by leader of opposition Siddaramaiah, questioning as to why not include those villages of Maharashtra, as desired by the people there, Bommai called it a political statement. "When he (Siddaramaiah) was the chief minister a similar resolution was made, why did he not join them then? The question is not that, for joining parts of the other state, things have to be considered legally. I'm a responsible chief minister and everything has to be done within the Constitutional and legal framework," he added. (PTI)

Jailed Delhi minister Satyendar moves Delhi HC challenging trial court order denying bail

NEW DELHI, NOV 29 --/ Jailed AAP minister Satyendar Jain has approached the Delhi High Court challenging a trial court order denying him bail in a money laundering case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Jain said he is not in a position to influence witnesses or tamper with evidence and is not a flight risk if granted the relief in the case of ED's ECIR (the equivalent of FIR) registered on September 30, 2017 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The plea is likely to come up for hearing later

this week. Jain has challenged the trial court's November 17 order which dismissed his bail plea on the ground that he was prima facie involved in concealing the proceeds of crime. In his plea, the AAP leader claimed that since he was not in possession of any proceeds, the offence under the PMLA was not made out. It claimed that the special judge and ED have gravely misread and misapplied the PMLA by identifying proceeds of crime solely on the basis of accommodations entries which cannot itself lead to a punishable offence under

the Act. Proceeds of crime under the PMLA have to be derived as a result of scheduled criminal activity, it said. Jain, who was arrested by the ED on May 30, is currently in judicial custody.

He was granted regular bail by a trial court on September 6, 2019 in the case lodged by the CBI. Besides him, the trial court had also denied bail to two co-accused -- Vaibhav Jain and Ankush Jain -- saying that they "knowingly" assisted Jain in concealing the proceeds of crime and were "prima facie guilty" of money laundering. The trial

court had said "prima facie" Jain was "actually involved in concealing the proceeds of crime by giving cash to the Kolkata-based entry operators and thereafter, bringing the cash into three companies...against the sale of shares to show that income of these three companies was untainted one." "By this process, the proceeds of crime to the tune of 1/3rd of Rs 4.61 crore has been laundered.

Apart from that, Jain has also used the same modus operandi to convert his proceeds of crime of Rs 15 lakh by receiving accommodation entries

from Kolkata-based entry operators in his company by the name of J J Ideal Estate Pvt Ltd," it had noted. It had said that Jain had knowingly done such activity to obliterate the tracing of the source of ill-gotten money and accordingly the proceeds of crime were layered through Kolkata-based entry operators in a way that its source was difficult to decipher. "Hence, a p l i c a n t / a c c u s e d Satyendar Kumar Jain has prima facie indulged in the offence of money laundering of more than Rs 1 crore," the trial court had

said, adding that money laundering was a "serious economic offence". The ED had arrested the accused in the money laundering case based on a CBI FIR lodged against Jain in 2017 under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Jain is accused of having laundered money through four companies allegedly linked to him. Recently, the court also took cognisance of the prosecution complaint (charge sheet) filed by the ED against Jain, his wife and eight others, including the four firms, in connection with the money laundering case. (PTI)

CS to flag off rally to mark 'World AIDS Day'

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ As part of observance of 'World AIDS Day' on 1st December 2022, the A&N AIDS Society has chalked out befitting programmes. To mark the day, a rally of school and college students will be held on 1 December 2022 (Thursday) at 7:30 am from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Stadium. More than 500 students are expected to participate. Mr. Keshav Chandra, Chief Secretary will be the chief guest and flag off the rally at 07:30 am from Netaji Stadium. Other dignitaries and officials from Health and various departments will also grace the occasion. The rally will start from Netaji Stadium and pass from Clock Tower, Model School, Benigni Club, Co-operative Bank to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Auditorium, PBMC At Dr. BR Ambedkar auditorium, folk performance will be held with a message on HIV & AIDS by Balakrishna Nritya Academy and Dance Nritya Academy followed by prize distribution to participants of various competitions. Mr. Nikhil Kumar, Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Health) will be the chief guest and Mr. Arjun Sharma, Secretary (Health) will be the guest of honour.

State President of INTUC & team meets Forest Labour Union



PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ Mr. TSG Bhasker, State President of INTUC, A & N Islands, along with the senior leaders of INTUC visited Chatham Saw Mill on 28th November 2022 and interacted with the Forest Labour Union. The Forest Labour Union put forth certain issues which he assured the workers that all their genuine demands will be taken up at the appropriate level and solutions will be obtained for all their problems. Later, the President of INTUC met the DCF of Chatham Saw Mill in his Chamber, interacted with him, and put forth all the grievances of the forest labour union in front of the DCF, Chatham Saw Mill, and Port Blair. The DCF assured swift decisions and assured to meet the labour union and workforce members in regular intervals.

Congress promises to regularise all temp workers in MCD if voted to power

NEW DELHI, NOV 29/--/ Delhi Congress will regularise all temporary employees in the MCD including daily wagers, if voted to power in the civic body, party president Anil Chaudhary said on Tuesday. Releasing another 'vision document' of the party for MCD polls, Chaudhary asserted that the party will regularise all the temporary staff within six months, if they get to govern the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Chaudhary also alleged that the BJP did not spend the funds meant for the welfare of Dalits, nearly Rs 2,500 crore of which remains unused. "A Congress government in the MCD would ensure social, financial, religious and cultural justice to Dalits," he said. He blamed Arvind Kejriwal for the garbage menace across Delhi, which he did by, he alleged, not releasing funds to pay the wages of sanitation workers. "We will ensure no Dalit families are unemployed. We will also ensure maintenance-free RO water purifiers to them, creating the Dalit wards as 'model wards' in all the 42 reserved wards. Their colonies will also be garbage-free," Chaudhary claimed. He further said that the Delhi Congress would provide rent-free flats to Dalits under the Rajiv Ratan Awas Yojna, maximum rebate in house tax, and also licences to the street vendors. (PTI)

State Congress stage mass rally, dharna in support of 100% job reservation for local youth



PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ Under the leadership of ANTCC President, Mr. Rangalal Halder and ANTCC Chairman-Campaign Committee, Mr. TSG Bhasker, the Congress Party has conducted a mass protest rally, dharna and public meeting on Tuesday.

The mass rally started from the Gandhi Bhavan at 11.30 am and reached Gandhi Statue, Clock tower and ended at the Tiranga Park, Port Blair. There a public meeting was held in which the issues being faced by the Island's youths, because of online job application and mainland youths applying for Jobs in our Islands were highlighted.

The main purpose for the rally and dharna is to sup-

port the Youths/ Islanders of Andaman & Nicobar Islands in granting 100% Job Reservations for the posts recruited by Andaman & Nicobar Administration.

The Congress party has well organized and coordinated the mass rally, dharna and the public meeting to fight for the right in support of 100% Job Reservations for the Youths of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Mr. Rangalal Halder addressed the public meeting and said that the system of advertising jobs online of Andaman and Nicobar Administration is causing a huge problem for the Islanders and in such cases, a large number of Mainlanders are being appointed in government jobs in Andaman,

which should have been only reserved 100% for our Islands Youths.

Mr. TSG Bhasker, the Chairman, ANTCC said that the administration has to give the first preference to only the youths of A&N islands in jobs by not considering the mainlanders.

He further said that if the A&N Administration fails to fulfill the demands then the Congress party will hold a massive strike in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands to fight for the rights of the Islanders.

Many other Congress Party Senior leaders and Members also addressed the Public gathering at Tiranga Park and highlighted issues being faced by the youths of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Awareness prog on career guidance, drug addiction & cyber crime' by NMA Police

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ An awareness programme on career guidance and drug abuse with special focus on Cyber Crime was organized by N&MA District Police on Tuesday at Mahatma Gandhi Govt. College Mayabunder with 500 college students and faculty members. SI Ashok Kumar Bagel highlighted different types of Cyber-crimes and precautionary measures as well as challenges with the investigation agencies to crack down cyber-crime in the present scenario and highlighted the safety tips to a common man.

Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal, Superintendent of Police (D), Mayabunder highlighted the importance of choosing the correct career

option and efforts required to achieve it because due to lack of guidance students fail to choose the right way for career prospects. She also explained the components & methods to choose the right career and importance of career guidance. MG College provides good facilities for the students with good career opportunities and scope in different fields. Speaking on the ill effect of Drug abuse especially in the youngsters and teenagers in the Islands she elaborately discussed the risk factors and effects of drugs in society and their lives. Youngsters are easily targeted being lured to drugs by excitement, curiosity or by drug related risk behaviour. The harmful use of alcohol can have serious

social and economic consequences for individuals, family and society at a whole.

The college students presented Nukkad Natak on the theme of Cyber Crime and Drug Abuse. Dr. S.K. Biswas, Principal (I/c) expressed his gratitude to District Police for organizing a career guidance & awareness programme in the college and highlighted the benefits of this awareness program organized by the senior officers of the district.

At the concluding session of the programme, Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal Superintendent of Police (D), Mayabunder interacted with college students, heard the challenges being faced by them for choosing a career and guided them.

NGO WITH YOU felicitates sanitation workers of Baratang



PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ NGO WITH YOU felicitated the sanitation workers of Baratang on Monday working under Gram Panchayat Nilambur and Sundergarh. Miss V. K. Mariyam Bibi, President WITH YOU applauded the efforts of sanitation workers in keeping the village neat and clean. Mr. Sarvanan SHO

Baratang was the chief guest and speaking on the occasion, he appreciated the work of WITH YOU for felicitating the workers as this motivation will boost their spirit towards work. Mr. Alagaraswamy ZPM, Baratang, Smti Sumari Roy, Pradhan GP Nilambur, Smti Sarla Krishna, Pradhan GP Sundergarh, Mr. Roy, ex-

pradhan GP Nilambur, Smti Rasheeda, member WITH YOU, Mr. Hari Krishnan, VLW, PRI members were also present on the occasion.

Joint Table Top Exercise: Great Nicobar preparing to face any eventuality

SUBRATA

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ A joint table top exercise was held on Tuesday in association with NDRF in Great Nicobar Island. The exercise was held in the scenario of 03 types of disasters "Earthquake/Tsunami, Cyclone and Fire". The first exercise was conducted on Earthquake/Tsunami in the morning 07:00 am at Kamal Basthi, Campbell Bay, the second exercise on "Cyclone" conducted on 10:00 am at Vijay Nagar, Campbell Bay and the third exercise on "Fire" conducted on evening at 3:00 pm at RPRS Colony, Campbell Bay. An announcement was made about the Mock Drill for awareness of the general public through the PA system and direction was conveyed to all religious heads for announcement at their respective religious places



about the conduct of the Mock Drill. The directions & responsibilities have been given to all heads of offices for conducting the joint exercise & mock exercise. The exercise was successfully completed and the lacunas will be corrected in the mock drill to be held tomorrow. The Swastyaadoot Volunteer ac-

tively participated in the Disaster management exercises.

Dr. Nitin Shakya, Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay informed that such exercises will be held on a regular basis to overcome the lacunas and to be prepared during real time of disaster.

Burglar arrested within 12 hours by PS Diglipur

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ A team of PS Diglipur nabbed a house burglar Suraj Mazumder @ Gullu who is also a history sheeteer & has been involved in many house breaking & burglary as well as NDPS Act cases in Diglipur. On reporting of house burglary in medical colony area Diglipur, a case was registered. Within a short span of 12 hours only Diglipur Police acted swiftly and arrested the above accused with re-



coveries related to the case.

The general public is requested to pass and share any credible information pertaining to any crime or illegal activities to their nearest Po-

lice Station or over phone No. 100, 112 & 03192-273344. The identity of the informers will be kept secret and will also be suitably rewarded.

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At the end of the day, whether or not those people are comfortable with how you're living your life doesn't matter. What matters is whether you're comfortable with it

Phillip C. McGraw

Is Imran’s threat to quit assemblies real?

Pakistan's former premier Imran Khan's threat to quit the assemblies could just be an attempt to "stay politically relevant". It could also mean an invitation for renewed engagement with the new military leadership. The Pakistan government has appointed Gen Asim Munir, a former ISI chief, as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) to succeed General Qamar Javed Bajwa, 61, who retired after six years in what is normally a three-year post. While addressing a mega rally of his supporters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, Khan said that his party has decided to resign from the provincial assemblies instead of marching on Islamabad to force the Shehbaz Sharif-led government to announce snap polls. But, Khan may not actually follow through on the threat. It is being widely speculated that the PTI leader made the announcement because he had no other option left, after telling his followers that he would spring a surprise at the gathering in Rawalpindi -- the headquarters of the powerful military giving it the sobriquet of garrison city. Khan had no other option but to make such an announcement after creating a massive hype around the month-long 'Haqueqi Azadi March' which fizzled out. If Imran really wanted to give a surprise, he should have sounded definitive as he had so much time for consultations with party leaders.

If PTI members simply opted to resign from the provincial assemblies of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab, they would not be able to force elections. This would, in fact, be a repeat of what happened in the Centre, where a federal government and a parliament were still functioning despite en-masse resignations by PTI members. This means that the PTI only wants to give this threat to see how seriously those with a say in power corridors choose to engage with him. Since there had been a change in the military leadership, it seems Khan now wants to seriously engage with them. The message he is trying to send is something to the effect of: Do not take me lightly. I am a very important person. This is the real message. A ruling party parliamentarian said Khan was basically trying to put pressure on the new military high command so that they can, in turn, put pressure on the government . The decision is not definitive and final. It is just a signal to the new military leadership. The move could be taken as a surprise, but there was no clear decision from the PTI yet, as Khan had stated that he would first hold consultations. But by doing so, he has actually kept the pot boiling as this long march was to culminate in a sit-in to force elections, which did not happen. According to constitutional experts, if Khan is serious about this move, he will have to make a decision within the next couple of months. He, technically, has until March to make up his mind, because under the Constitution, if the PTI takes such a decision in April, it will not be able to force elections. The term of the present legislature is set to expire in August next year.

Sign of easing of global recessionary trend good for India

REFLEX ACTION

Anjan Roy

A Christmas celebration has started at least on the global stock markets. The financial markets are showing a surprising buoyancy and climbing new heights.

Indian stock markets jumped up. The representative BSE index rose by close to 1000 points and touched its historic record high of 62,412. The NSE index is also rising in step, indicating a more broad based recovery of the markets. The immediate trigger for the global financial markets to shake off lethargy and respond with verve is the positive feedback from Federal Reserve of United States about the prospects for global economy and the course for inflation. However, underlying these is a major battle among economists about their perceptions about the course of general price level and its nature. The world had got used to low levels of inflation and efforts to perk the prices. Japan had faced decades of negative inflation (or deflation) and falling prices which had devastated its economy. However, all of a sudden the prices had started rising and rather alarmingly in the last two years. So much so, that inflation had hit a forty-year high in the United States earlier this year which kicked the alarm bells. Everyone started shouting about the need for measures to fight inflation. Not to be spared, the Russian invasion into Ukraine and the consequent clamp down on the world energy markets had started strangling the global economy. Russia is a major supplier of several essential goods, namely, energy (oil and gas) and food (wheat) and fertilisers (phosphatic). So also is Ukraine which is a major wheat exporter.

The invasion and war worked out through higher prices for food and energy throughout the world. The cramp down on supplies of energy items from Russia pulled up overall energy prices. Europeans had faced severe strains on their disposable incomes which higher energy prices. The third world countries faced problems of shortages of food, energy being another secondary blow. The compounding impact of these

developments was that the global economy was feared to shirk. In fact, coming close on heels of the pandemic, major economies were shrinking rather than expanding. Hence, these were the ideal recipe for a global slowdown and recession.

The all had turned on whether the current spate of inflation had become endemic or transitory. Some eminent economists had argued that the inflation was getting structural and would call for heavy handed interventions to control. This in effect meant large doses of interest rate hike — that is the copy-book economist medicine. Others, argued that inflation was temporary and needed to be treated with caution. The Fed had approached inflation control with the former point of view, that is, large hikes in inflation and control of prices. This would automatically have brought a recession in its train. The latest revelations of the Fed monetary policy committee proceedings indicate a change in thinking in inflation fight. That also indicates a possible change in perception about a recession in global economy in the immediate future.

There are indications now that the talk of an impending recession in the world economy is receding. After all, a global recession might be avoided, though not an immediate return of leaping growth rates. As the Federal Reserve of United States released its latest monetary policy consultations proceedings it is interpreted as indicating that future interest rate hikes would be paired. Maybe, the Fed will not raise interest rates in the short term. This is a win for those economists who maintained that the recent sharp rises in overall prices were a temporary phenomenon and the price rise should abate shortly. That is inflation was a transitory one and not one

which had got embedded. Former secretary of US Treasury, Lawrence Summers of Harvard University, had led the charge of the embedded inflation viewpoint and thus had rooted for anti-inflationary measures including sharp hikes in interest rates. The Fed had increased its interest rate by a historic 75 basis point at one go earlier this year.

A deceleration of the interest rate hike is good news for the stock markets as well as for demand and investment. In anticipation of rates hikes, the investors were moving their funds away from the equity investments and into bonds or debts. As a result, the debt yields were rising and stocks were losing ground. With a reversal of the viewpoints, a reversal of the trends of investment is expected. The global financial markets are dominated by the American financial institutions in effect. They move humongous amounts of money across markets. Instead of taking their funds from emerging third world markets, these institutional investors take their investable funds keeping an eye on the US interest rates. With lower interest prospects in the US, the institutions are moving away from US markets and back into the emerging markets. Thus, we are seeing a fall in dollar exchange rates and rise in other currencies. Indian rupee had improved in the last few days just as the Indian financial markets. The billion-dollar question now is: is this reversal of perceptions for real and persist. Will the rate cycle now turn and interest rates would remain stable at least for now. Will the prices stabilise. That will hold clue to an onset of a recession.

Financial markets are now gaining buoyancy. But the real economy would come to play. It looks as though the key would still be how the Russian invasion in Ukraine would go. Will the energy markets revert back to sustainable levels? The oil market reports now indicate a move towards stability. Prices are no longer jumping. Hopefully, the New Year would show some positive trends. (IPA)



Supreme Court questions hasty Election Commissioner appointment

FOCUS

Arun Srivastava

With the Supreme Court questioning the Centre about resorting to unnecessary “haste” and “tearing hurry” in appointing Arun Goel as Election Commissioner, the saffron Think Tank and academician supporters of the Narendra Modi Government have turned belligerent and have indiscreetly alleged that it was trying to grab the power of the executive.

These people have also been feeling aggrieved at the Supreme Court seeking to know from the government why the criteria for appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner was strictly not being adhered to. The CEC must complete a six year term in the office. But in recent times, precisely during Modi Raj no CEC was in the office for the whole period. In fact the supporters of Modi were so enraged that they questioned why judges with short period were being appointed. Justice U ULalit was in the office for 74 days and the present incumbent Justice Chandrachud would be for only two years.

Nonetheless the intellectuals conveniently tend to forget that a judge even if he becomes the Chief Justice of India has to retire once he completes his tenure. But it is not the case with the CEC. He has to be in the office for six years. Under the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991, an EC can have a tenure of six years or up to the age of 65, whichever is earlier. During the eight years of the NDA government, there have been eight CECs. It obviously implied that he was made to resign by the authorities only for being appointed as the CEC. Selection

through creating panel was merely a hoax. In this perspective remark of the Attorney General R Venkataramani ought to be taken seriously that there is a mechanism and criteria for selection and there cannot be a scenario where the government has to look back at every officers' track record and ensure that he completes the six-year tenure. He also said for appointment it is the profile that is important and not the voluntary retirement which is being made an issue. Obviously for the convenience of the government there is no need to follow the 1991 Act that says EC’s tenure is of six years and the government has to ensure that the person who holds the post completes the stipulated period.

This hurry of Modi government in appointing Goel smells of some design. Goel is being brought into office just a fortnight ahead of Gujarat assembly election. For Modi the Gujarat election has major implication. An insight into campaign would make it crystal clear that it is not the BJP but Modi who is in the fray. He has so far addressed not less than 30 meetings and taken out a number of roadshows. A defeat will completely erase his image and charisma.

The manner in which the law ministry chose Goel, made the five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice K M Joseph which had perused the Centre's original file pertaining to Goel's appointment as EC, to observe; "What kind of evaluation is this? Although, we are not questioning the

merits of Arun Goel's credentials but the process."

The 1985-batch IAS officer got voluntary retirement from service in a single day, his file was cleared by the Law Ministry in a single day, a panel of four names were put up before the prime minister and Goel's name got the nod from the President within 24 hours. On his part, Venkataramani resisted judicial scrutiny of the appointment and said there was no “trigger point”, inviting the top court's intervention in the current system to select an election commissioner. The AG was simply performing his duty to defend the actions of the government. It is not that Goel was that only suitable candidate. There were many from later civil service batches who could have been appointed. This would have also meant compliance with the law that warrants an election commissioner to have a tenure of six years in office, he argued. But more than that they would not have served the interest of the government in best manner. The list which featured the name of Goel incidentally had the names of other 44 officers. But they believed to be unfit for the task in the eyes of the law ministry.

Justice Roy wondered whether it was normal for civil servants to take voluntary retirement. “Does it happen like this normally?” he asked. Justice Joseph also said that while the law contemplated a direct appointment to the position of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), the government

had made it a “promotion-based” one. He added that direct appointments were being made until 1989. The frustration of the bench at the happenings clearly manifest in the observation; there is need to appoint a Chief Election Commissioner with 'character' like the late T.N. Seshan,

On November 17, 2022, while hearing a petition for the setting up of an Independent Body to choose Election Commissioners, Justice K.M. Joseph of the Supreme Court made a significant observation: “The Election Commission of India (ECI) is perhaps the envy of the world. Perhaps one institution which has come in for a lot of compliments, largely due to the reforms of T.N. Seshan. He had succeeded in putting in place a lot of rules to reduce human discretion to the minimum. By doing this, he eliminated fear. That is, the Election Commissioners just had to follow the rules and did not have to bother about coming under pressure from any political party.”

Just after Modi came to power his primary aim has been to win the elections. With this elections and the electoral system have become farce. It is generally said that the 2019 General Elections has been one of the least free and fair elections that the country has had in the past three decades or so. In the past, despite the efforts of criminal elements, musclemen, and unscrupulous politicians, the persons who graced the ECI did their best to ensure that elections were conducted as freely and fairly as possible.

Forced by the manner which elections were conducted some former Elections Commissioners and CECs were forced to question the decisions of their successors in office.” (IPA)

Conventional Crossword

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						28	

ACROSS

1 Self-satisfied
6 Present
7 Low sand hill
9 Profit
10 Ship's small room
11 Singer
12 Day before
14 Postpone
17 Prescribed amounts
20 Period of time
21 Very bright
23 Allude to
25 Defeat utterly
26 Dash
27 Hill
28 Back of the neck

DOWN

1 Drooped
2 Combines
3 Departed
4 Young bear
5 Marsh
7 Venture
8 African river
10 Fish
13 Speech sound
15 Trilby hat
16 Disconcert
18 Level
19 Title of respect
22 Golf club
23 Colour
24 Devoted follower

SUDOKU:3711

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Yesterday's Solution3710

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution1719

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DISCLAIMER

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Lapid made grave mistake, hope he apologies: Israeli director Dan Wolman on IFFI 'Kashmir Files' row

JERUSALEM, NOV 29/--/ Veteran Israeli filmmaker Dan Wolman says it was "improper" for his colleague and friend Nadav Lapid to express his personal opinion about "The Kashmir Files" at the closing ceremony of the 53rd International Film Festival of India.

Lapid, who served as the chairperson of IFFI's international jury, termed "The Kashmir Files" a "vulgar and propaganda" movie in his speech at the award ceremony during the closing night of the nine-day film festival on Monday.

Wolman, known for directing acclaimed Israeli titles "Hide and Seek", "Tied Hands" and "An Israeli Love Story", said Lapid should

apologise for his remarks.

"I think he made a grave mistake when, as part of the announcement of the prize winners, he expressed his personal opinion about one of the films that did not win a prize, claiming that the organisers made a mistake in including it in the competition.

"To my mind his announcement was improper. It made me uncomfortable and I don't share his views about 'The Kashmir Files'. I hope he will apologise," the veteran filmmaker, who was honoured with IFFI's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018, told PTI.

"The Kashmir Files", penned and directed by Vivek Agnihotri, portrays

the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir following the killings of people from the community by Pakistan-backed terrorists.

The film, which opened to polarised reactions on March 11, is one of the most commercially successful Hindi films of the year. Wolman said as the jury head Lapid was chosen to discuss the quality of the films participating in the competition - but not on the stage of the closing ceremony.

"The judges were chosen to discuss the quality of the films and consider who will be awarded - and there at the internal deliberations of the jury was the place to discuss the qualities of the films that didn't win prizes - certainly

not on stage at the closing ceremony." After all, people that were chosen by the festival spent many hours watching hundreds of films and selecting which ones will be screened as part of the competition," Wolman added.

"The Kashmir Files" featured Anupam Kher, Darshan Kumar, Mithun Chakraborty and Pallavi Joshi among others. Both Kher and Agnihotri have targeted Lapid for his remarks.

Agnihotri said he will quit filmmaking if Lapid is able to prove that events depicted in his film are false, while the veteran actor called the Israeli writer-director a "person who himself is vulgar and an opportunist". (PTI)

Five boys held for sexually assaulting girl

HYDERABAD, NOV 29/--/ Five Children in Conflict with Law (CCLs) were apprehended by police here for allegedly sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl, police said on Tuesday.

The five CCL boys, all 10th and 9th standard students, sexually assaulted one of their classmate (victim girl) and also recorded the act, they said.

The boys and the victim are all friends. The boys used to roam on the outskirts of their locality after school timings and used to watch porn videos in their mobile phones, on that they craved for sexual desires, a release from Rachakonda Police Commissionerate said.

To overcome their lust, they had an eye on one of their classmate, police said adding as the girl also moved and talked with them freely, they took it as an advantage.

In August this year they fulfilled their sexual desire with the girl by putting her under threat at her home in the absence of her family members, police said. One of them captured the sexual act by recording video in cellphone. After 10 days, two boys again went and sexually abused her and recorded it on a mobile phone. When this act was shared with friends through an instant messaging platform, the victim narrated the entire ordeal to her parents, who approached the Hayathnagar Police Station and lodged a complaint against the boys.

Based on the complaint a case under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and IT Act was registered and during the course of investigation the five CCLs were arrested, police said. The boys were produced before the Juvenile Justice Board for further action, police added. (PTI)

DG NCC commendation card awarded to first officer Kalluri Ravi

PORT BLAIR, NOV 29/--/ On the occasion of NCC day, First Officer Kalluri Ravi, Associate NCC Officer of 1(AN) Naval Unit NCC has been awarded with Director General NCC Commendation card and badge for his utmost sincerity, dedication and exemplary performance. First Officer Kalluri Ravi is presently posted as GTT at GSSS, Haddo (Telugu), Port Blair and has been associated with Naval NCC for the past 13 years. He has actively organized and participated in various camps and social service activities that are being conducted by NCC all across the islands like Blood Donation, Puneet Sagar Abhiyaan, Fit India Movement amongst many others.

Lt Cdr Ankit Pant and the staff of 1(AN) Naval NCC



congratulated First Officer K Ravi on this achievement. The Commanding Officer highlighted that this award would be a great morale

booster for all involved in NCC activities in the islands and will motivate others as well to come forward and volunteer for the organization.

Gujarat polls: BJP's attack on Patkar attempt to paint Congress against state's interests

AHMEDABAD, NOV 29/--/ The BJP has targeted the Congress after Medha Patkar participated in the Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', in an attempt to paint the opposition party inimical to the interests of Gujarat as the activist was seen as the face of protests against the Sardar Sarovar project.

While Patkar and the protests she championed for decades arguing against the displacement of people due to the project are no longer a burning issue for voters, political experts believe that the BJP's campaign gels with its larger attempt to present the Congress as anti-Gujarat, a recurring theme in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll speeches over the last two decades.

Interactions with voters in different parts of the state suggest that many of them do see Patkar as someone whose protests delayed the completion of the project, which has brought water to Saurashtra-Kutch region even though

they do not see it as a key poll issue. Though she also draws praise from some for raising her voice against displacement of people.

Residents of Vantadu village in Banaskantha note that Patkar was opposed to the Sardar Sarovar project that has brought water to several villages in their vicinity. They cannot like someone who created obstacles in constructing water canals, they said.

Rajesh Tadvai, a tribal from the district, though adds that his relatives in Narmada district, where the project is located, talk highly about her as she raised her voice against their displacement.

Locals argue that the benefits of the project, which brought water for drinking and irrigation in a vast region of Gujarat, are huge.

Amid all this, water continues to be an issue in parts of Kutch region, and is one of its major poll issues, just like in previous elections. All parties are full of promises

on solving the long standing crisis by bringing water from Narmada river.

The Kutch Branch Canal (KBC) of the Sardar Sarovar project on the river, which was to provide water to the Mandvi region, had recently developed a breach, disrupting water supply and locals say they continue to face problems. In other areas, such as Abdasa and Bhuj, the work for the pipeline connecting with Narmada main canal is yet to start, locals say.

Several BJP leaders agreed that "water crisis" is an issue but blamed Narmada Bachao Andolan, once spearheaded by Patkar, for constant delay in the Sardar Sarovar project.

"The entire project has been delayed due to Narmada Bachao Andolan. Had the project taken off early, situation would have been different. We are committed to bringing water to the region. We are confident once the elections are over, work will start on a war foot-

ing to set up the infrastructure to bring in regular water supply in the region," BJP MLA from Abdasa, Pradhyuman Singh Jadeja, recently told PTI.

BJP's Bhuj assembly constituency president Ghyanshyam Thakkar blamed Patkar and her movement for the delay by trying to create hurdles.

It is here that the ruling party hopes to score by attacking Patkar and linking the Congress with her.

Congress leaders say the continuing water crisis in the region despite nearly 25 years of the BJP's uninterrupted rule is the biggest example of the ruling party's administrative and political failure.

"Even after so many years, if you have to blame others for failing to provide water to the region, then the BJP leaders should quit politics and sit back at home," Kutch district Congress president Yajuvendra Jadeja said. (PTI)

Two held with fake Indian, Nepalese currencies, press IDs in UP

BAHRAICH, NOV 29/--/ A joint team of the Uttar Pradesh Police's Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) posted at the India-Nepal border and officers from the local police station seized fake Indian currency worth Rs 3.5 lakh and arrested two youths, an official said.

Another Rs 60,000 in Indian tender and Rs 4.4 lakh in fake Nepalese rupee, a country-made pistol, ammunition and identity cards of media outlets from the duo were also seized from them, he said.

One of the youths arrested is a known criminal, who had used three different identities, the official said.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Ashok Kumar on Tuesday said the police received a tip-off about smuggling of fake Indian and Nepalese currencies. It was also learnt that the criminal activities were carried out in the garb of journalism.

Acting on the tip-off, a joint team of the ATS and the police searched two persons in Murtiha police station limits and seized Rs 3.5 lakh in fake Indian currency, Rs 4.4 lakh in fake Nepalese rupee, Rs 60,000 in Indian tender, a country-made pistol, ammunition, three identity cards of media outlets, four mobile phones and a motorcycle. The two men were also arrested.

One of the arrested accused has been identified as Pritam Singh alias Sonu alias Doctor Singh, son of Arun Singh alias Roda Singh alias Gurbux Singh, of Lakhimpur Kheri district. The other accused is Gonda district native Awadhesh Tiwari. Kumar said the ATS and the police are looking into the contacts of the arrested accused. (PTI)

Shringla bats for new technology order during India's G20 presidency

NEW DELHI, NOV 29/--/ Ahead of assuming the G20 presidency, senior diplomat Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Tuesday made a strong pitch for a new technology order that combines cross border flows of technology and investment with development and growth apparatus.

Addressing the Global Technology Summit, Shringla, India's Chief Coordinator for G20, said the principle of data for development will be an integral part for the overall theme of India's presidency of the group of the world's developed and emerging economies. "Our presidency will take forward efforts to create a holistic global health architecture that can respond better to future health crises like the Covid pandemic," he said. India is all set to formally take over the G20 presidency from the Indonesia on December 1. The G20 comprises Argentina, Aus-

tralia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US and the European Union.

Shringla said it was important to focus on the benefits that technological progress and evidence-based policy can provide when it comes to expanding access to healthcare and nutrition. "At the G20, this model can be internationalised. Digital India must go global. A new technology order must combine cross border flows of technology and investment with development and growth aspirations," he said. Shringla said India will make efforts with its G20 partners to create mechanisms that would strengthen the capacity of developing countries to tackle the health crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic and any future

pandemics. "We also need new approaches to intellectual property, innovation and co-development of health technology to ensure a more inclusive response to health crises." Shringla said India has also proposed a new engagement group called 'Startup 20' which will seek to provide an opportunity for startups from all countries to collaborate with each other.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had unveiled the logo for the G20 presidency that bears a lotus and the message of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - One Earth, One Family, One Future".

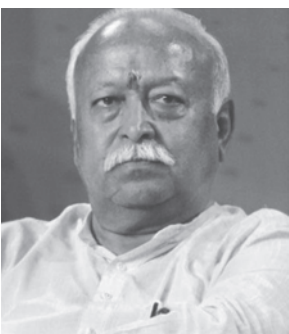
In his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' radio address on Sunday, Modi said India should focus on global good during its term and asserted that it has solutions to the challenges related to peace, unity, environment and sustainable development. (PTI)

Religion not possible without spirituality: RSS chief

PRAYAGRAJ, NOV 29/ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Tuesday said all the great men who awakened the society made spirituality the basis and religion is not possible without it.

Bhagwat, the chief guest at the inauguration of 'Aradhana Mahotsav' organized at the ashram of Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati in Alopibagh, said, "You look at saints, mahatmas, sanyasis or great men like Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhiji or Ambedkar working in social life. He (Ambedkar) also used to say that nothing will happen without religion".

"Dharma means taking everyone along, driving everyone together, uplifting everyone. Where there is no religion, people believe that the one who is strong will go ahead and the one who is



weak will surely die. Religion says that the one who is strong should protect the weak. Religion comes out of spirituality," he said.

He said, "It is spirituality that purifies our individual life, our family life and our national social life."

The Sangh chief said, "If people do not get guidance, they go astray. It is the good fortune of our nation that the tradition of great men who guide the people by their conduct has continued un-

broken. Brahmalin Swami Shantanand Saraswati was from the same tradition."

Bhagwat said, "To make life a human life, one has to be spiritual. Looking at material and spiritual life separately is not our attitude because we look at all things from a holistic point of view."

The event organised on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Brahmalin Brahmanand Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, will continue till December 8, 2022, in which the story of Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana will be narrated by Shrinath Peethadhiswar Swami Acharya Jitendra Nath Ji Maharaj. Former Governor of West Bengal Keshari Nath Tripathi, Swami Acharya Jitendra Nath Ji Maharaj and many saints participated in the inauguration programme. (PTI)

CHANGE OF NAME
I. Naushin Shoaib, W/o Md Shuiab Shamsi. R/o, - 30/1, Phears Lane, PO.- Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata - 700073. Will henceforth be known as Naushin Shamsi. Vide an Affidavit before the Notary Public Kolkata at CHMM'S Court on dated 29-11-2022. Both Naushin Shoaib and Naushin Shamsi are the same and one identical person.

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Executive Officer.

NEW DELHI, NOV 29/--/ Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in the national capital will be granted "financial and political" powers besides the status of "mini councillors" if the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) comes to power in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Tuesday. Naming it "Janta Chalayegi MCD" (Public will run MCD) campaign, Kejriwal appealed to the public to vote for them and get their tasks done "swiftly" through RWAs. Addressing a press conference just few days ahead of the civic polls, he said the idea behind this vision is to "make people the owners of Delhi ('janta ko Dilli ka malik banana hai')." "If AAP comes to power in MCD, we will will launch 'Janata Chalayegi MCD' campaign where the RWAs will be given the status of a 'mini parshad' (mini councillor). We are going to really empower RWAs. We will give them political and financial powers," said Kejriwal, who is also AAP's national convener. "RWAs will be given funds to run

their offices. RWAs will be empowered. The real purpose behind this is to make the people of Delhi take their own decisions. I appeal to all RWAs to support AAP. "We will frame a transparent framework. We will rely on online platform also, so that MLAs, councillors and RWAs all know where the problem is and there is accountability. The tasks of public will be completed swiftly," Kejriwal further said. The civic polls, spanning 250 wards, are due on December 4 and are largely being seen as a contest among the AAP, BJP and the Congress. Both AAP and BJP have exuded confidence that they will emerge victorious in the polls. Votes will be counted on December 7. Kejriwal also dismissed a series of sting videos on AAP leaders allegedly released by the BJP in the run-up to the December 4 municipal polls as "awful and boring films which no one wants to watch". Responding to a question, the AAP supreme asserted that "masses are mature" and parties which have considered them as fools have "got finished". (PTI)

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Vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar visit at Kalighat Temple in Kolkata on Tuesday

KPshit out at Israeli filmmaker Lapid, want him to be deported immediately

JAMMU, NOV 29 ---/ Kashmiri Pandits, whose parents were killed by terrorists in the Valley, lashed out at Israeli film director Nadav Lapid on Tuesday for terming Bollywood movie 'The Kashmir Files' a "propaganda movie" and "vulgar".

They demanded that Lapid be immediately deported from the country. Calling Vivek Agnihotri's movie as the 'Schindler's List' of India, they sought to know from Lapid whether he, as a Jew, thought the same about the American movie based on the genocide of Jews. Lapid, viewed as an anti-establishment filmmaker, had described 'The Kashmir Files' as a "propaganda movie" and "vulgar" at the closing ceremony of the 53rd International Film Festival of India (IFFI) on Monday. He was the jury chairperson. "The Kashmir Files unmasked the 30-year-old propaganda designed to hide the truth on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits," Vikas Raina, son of principal Ashok Kumar Raina, who was killed by Hizbul Mujahideen, said.

"Does he know my pain? I lost my father when I was a child. My father, along with two of his lecturers, were brought down from a bus and sprayed with a volley of bullets," he said. "The Kashmir Files is India's Schindler's List. It is our truth," he said. Sandeep Kaul, whose grandfather Radha Krishen and father Shibban were dragged out of their house and killed by terrorists in South Kashmir's Kulgam district, demanded an apology from Lapid for "mocking the tragedy" depicted in 'The Kashmir Files'. "His remarks have reopened my old wounds. It has brought pain to me and my mother," Kaul said. Ravinder, whose father was killed by terrorists and his body chopped into pieces, said it is shameful on Lapid's part to make such a comment.

"I want strict action against him for terming the film vulgar and propaganda. He should apologise", Ravinder said. (PTI)

Rahul, Kharge slam BJP for 27 years of 'misrule' in Gujarat, say time to rebuild Mahatma's land

NEW DELHI, NOV 29 ---/ Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi Tuesday slammed the BJP for its 27 years of "misrule" in Gujarat and said it is time to rebuild Mahatma Gandhi's land.

Calling upon the people to reject the BJP in the upcoming Assembly polls, Kharge attacked the ruling party over inflation and unemployment while alleging that it has "betrayed" farmers. Rahul, on the other hand, hit out at the state government over reported deaths due to spurious liquor in Junagarh. "In 'dry state' Gujarat, people died again yesterday due to spurious liquor! On one hand, there is a show-off liquor ban, on the other people are dying due to poisonous liquor and drugs. Instead of employment, the government is giving poison. This is the BJP's 'Gujarat model'! The land of Gandhi-Sardar has been inebriated," the former Congress president said in a tweet in Hindi. With the

tweet, he used the hashtag '#RejectBJP' to urge people not to vote for the party.

There were media reports about two deaths in Gujarat's Junagarh due to spurious liquor. In July, 42 people lost their lives in Gujarat's Botad district after consuming hooch. Hitting out at the BJP in Gujarat, Kharge asked, "Why is every section of Gujarat -- youth, farmers, women, small businessmen, Dalits, tribals, and the backward classes -- are suffering." Gujarat demands answers and accountability for the last 27 years of BJP rule, the Congress national president said.

He alleged that the income of the people of Gujarat is less than the national average and also claimed that due to the BJP, seven crore Gujaratis have a debt of Rs 4.5 lakh crore. "The CAG has warned that Gujarat is getting trapped in a debt cycle. The BJP has given nothing but economic burden and social hatred to the people of Gujarat," Kharge said.

"Now is the time for a

SC seeks report from jails across country after Prez flags plight of non-release of poor despite bail

NEW DELHI, NOV 29 ---/ Days after the emotional speech of President Droupadi Murmu flagging the plight of poor tribals languishing in jails in petty offences despite bail, the Supreme Court Tuesday directed prison authorities across the country to provide details of such prisoners within 15 days to NALSA for formulating a national scheme for their release.

The President had, in her maiden Constitution Day address on November 26 at the Supreme Court, highlighted the plight of poor tribals of her home state Odisha besides Jharkhand, saying they remain incarcerated despite getting bail for lack of money to furnish the bail amount or arrange sureties.

Departing from her written speech in English, Murmu had spoken in Hindi to urge the judiciary to do something for the poor tribals, noting those accused of serious offences walk out free but these poor inmates, who may have gone to jail for slapping someone, have to spend years on end before they are released. Justice S K Kaul was among those seated on the dais with Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, when the president narrated her experience of meeting several undertrial prisoners as an MLA in her native Odisha and later as the governor of Jharkhand.

A bench of Justices Kaul and Abhay S Oka on Tuesday directed the jail authorities to submit the details of such prisoners to

the respective state governments which will forward the documents to the National Legal Service

they have spent in jail after the bail order. "At the inception, we flagged the issue of detainees/



Authority within 15 days. The bench said the jail authorities will have to submit such details as the names of undertrial prisoners, charges against them, date of the bail order, what bail conditions were not met and how much time

Undertrial prisoners, who continue to be in custody despite being granted bail but could not fulfill the bail conditions. Each jail authority of the country has to convey to their state government the details which will be forwarded to

ISIS-inspired terror still a threat; Ulemas have vital role in deradicalisation: NSA

NEW DELHI, NOV 29 ---/ Emphasising that cross-border and ISIS-inspired terrorism continues to pose a threat, National Security Advisory (NSA) Ajit Doval said on Tuesday that Ulemas have a "vital role" to play in countering radicalisation and extremism by propagating progressive ideas and thought.

In his opening remarks at a dialogue between the Indonesian and Indian delegation of Ulema and leaders of other faiths, Doval said the cooperation of the civil society is essential in countering the threat from ISIS-inspired individual terror cells and returnees from theatres like Syria and Afghanistan. "...both our countries have been victims of terrorism and separatism. While we have overcome the challenges to a considerable extent, the phenomenon of cross-border and ISIS-inspired terrorism continues to pose a threat." "Cooperation of the civil society is essential in countering the threat from ISIS-inspired individual terror cells and returnees from theatres like Syria and Afghanistan," Doval said.

Emphasising the important role of Ulema in Islamic society, the NSA said the aim of the discussion is to bring together Indian and Indonesian Ulema and scholars to promote tolerance, harmony and peaceful co-existence which will bolster the fight against violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation. Urging the need to develop a common narrative on deradicalisation, Doval said in a

democracy there is no place for hate speech, prejudice, propaganda, demonisation, violence, conflict and misuse of religion for narrow ends. Drawing attention towards youths who are becoming the "primary target" of radicalisation, Doval said if their energies are nurtured in the right direction, they can become "harbingers



Ajit Doval

of change" and building blocks of progress in any society. He said we also need to counter disinformation and propaganda that can "impede peaceful co-existence" among the followers of different faiths.

Doval said state institutions also need to come together to detect and identify potential negative influencers and share information to counter their activities. "In this, Ulema, due to their deep connect with civil society, can play a vital role," he said. The NSA said the essence lies in disseminating positive discourse far and wide, and not merely reacting to the agenda set by inimical forces. "While technology is a

blessing for humanity, it is also being misused by anti-social elements to spread hatred and for disruptive purposes. The Ulema must also be adept in the use of technology and utilise various technological solutions to thwart the evil designs of propaganda and hate," he said. Doval said Islam had emerged as a rallying point for the disadvantaged and tolerant outlook.

Fissures emerged among the caliphs after the death of the Prophet on the question of legitimate heir with each faction attempting to outdo each other by espousing a more radical interpretation of Hadiths, he said. "It is here that the Ulema have a pivotal role to play. They have a leading role in educating the people on the original tolerant and moderate principles of Islam and countering radicalisation and extremism with progressive ideas and thought," he said. Doval said: "None of the ends" for which extremism, radicalisation and the misuse of religion are employed is justifiable on any ground.

"This is a distortion of religion against which all of us need to raise our voices.

Extremism and terrorism are against the very meaning of Islam because Islam means peace and well-being (Salamati/ Asalaam). Opposition to such forces should not be painted as a confrontation with any religion. That is a ruse," he said. (PTI)

Mamata stalls event, raps official over inadequate arrangements

HINGALGANJ, NOV 29 ---/ Chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday stalled a programme in North 24 Parganas and pulled up the district magistrate over his



failure to bring to the venue the blankets and winter garments she has bought for distribution among locals. Mamata, in the presence of locals, asked district magistrate Sharad Dwivedi to make arrangements to bring the garments to the venue at the earliest. Thousands of

people had gathered at Hingalganj for the programme, organised for doling out government scheme benefits and caste certificates. "I've brought 15,000 winter garments, blankets for locals. Where have you kept them? Bring them to me immediately. I'll not continue with the programme till you get those I'll wait here," the chief minister told Dwivedi. The CM, who is in the district on a two-day visit, also warned the DM, and other officials of stern action for such lapses. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to take action in case the DM and block development officers don't carry out their responsibilities properly," Mamata added. Around 15 minutes later, bunches of shawls were brought to the venue. The chief minister then announced that she would be distributing 1,000 shawls among local women.

Earlier in the day, the CM, who reached here on Tuesday afternoon in a helicopter, offered prayers to local deity 'Bonobibi' at a temple here and planted a tree. (PTI)

Show of unity by Gehlot and Pilot ahead of Rahul's yatra in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, NOV 29 ---/ In a show of unity days after Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot had called his former deputy Sachin Pilot a "traitor", the two Congress leaders appeared together here on Tuesday.

"This is the Rajasthan Congress," All India Congress Committee general secretary said, as he held the hands of both leaders locked in a tussle of power in the party's state unit. The leaders were addressing a press conference after participating in a meeting on preparations for the party's Bharat Jodo Yatra, scheduled to enter Rajasthan on December 4. Venugopal recalled former party president Rahul Gandhi's remarks in Indore Monday, when he said both leaders are assets to the party.

Rahul had been asked to comment on Gehlot's "traitor" remarks that had seemed to queer the pitch for the Rajasthan phase of the yatra led by him. "Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot have assured that the Yatra will be the one of the most successful in the country. I am also sure that Rajasthan will also be the number 1 state," Venugopal told reporters. Earlier, while going to the meeting, Gehlot too had recalled Rahul's remarks. "When Rahul Gandhi has said that our leaders are assets then we are assets... where is the dispute then," the chief minister said.

"This is the beauty of our party that after our top leader says anything, there is no scope (for further argument)," he said. Gehlot on Thursday told NDTV that Pilot is a 'ghaddar' (traitor) who cannot replace him as he had revolted against the Congress in 2020, and tried to topple the state government. In response, Pilot said such "mud-slinging" would not help. (PTI)

Life less ordinary or extraordinary

From Page 1

unforgiving heights of the border areas! So much for the supposed parity of conditions and considerations between the two arms of governance? Loose talk of 'free rations', 'mess life', 'CSD rates', and copious amounts of free-flowing alcohol is a cruel joke for those who lead a 'life less ordinary'. This is not to suggest that there aren't instances of dereliction in the 'Uniform' or that every civilian bureaucrat is only a 'pen pusher' - but to state the uneven service conditions, considerations, and imagination between services. Unfulfilled and forgotten OROP is a manifestation of that lack of parity and no number of condescending visits to 'forward areas' by politicians, can compensate for the reality. The Port Blair incident shames our conscience, as it should to those who lead a life 'extraordinary'.

(The author, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are his personal)



Priest applying tilak on forehead of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at Mahakaleshwar temple in Ujjain

change! To root out the BJP's 27-year misrule in Gujarat! The time has come to rebuild the Gujarat of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Morarji Desai, Balwantrai Mehta and Chimanbhai Patel! The Congress will come, will bring happiness to the people of Gujarat," he said in a series of tweets. Kharge also alleged that Gujarat suffered badly during the Covid period.

There is a huge shortage of health workers with 90 per cent of posts in community health centres vacant. Privatization initiated by the BJP is making healthcare unbearable for lakhs of people of Gujarat, he claimed. Claiming that Dalits and Tribals in Gujarat are exploited Kharge accused the BJP of "protecting criminals".

The Una incident, in which Dalits were publicly beaten up under the protection of the administration, shook the conscience of every Indian. Tribals were not given rights and Panchayats

Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) was not implemented, he alleged. "Demonetisation, wrong GST and lack of help during the Corona period have broken the back of every section of Gujarat. People's life has become difficult due to the constant tremors of inflation. GST has been imposed on flour, pulses, milk, pencils, medicines and from treatment. "Betrayed farmers of Gujarat, MSP hike was low. Modi Ji had promised the farmers of the country that he will give cost plus 50 per cent MSP. This turned out to be the biggest betrayal of the farmers.

"The farmers of Gujarat are also fed up with the rising prices of fertilizers, diesel, GST, electricity and inputs," the Congress leader said in a series of tweets in Hindi. Gujarat elections will be held in two phases on December 1 and 5 and the results will be out on December 8. The Congress is vying to oust the BJP which has been in power in Gujarat for 27 years. (PTI)

NATO commits to future Ukraine membership, drums up aid

BUCHAREST, NOV 29/--/ NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg reaffirmed the military alliance's commitment to Ukraine on Tuesday, saying that the war-torn nation will one day become a member of the world's largest security organization.

Stoltenberg's remarks came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his NATO counterparts gathered in Romania to drum up urgently needed support for Ukraine aimed at ensuring that Moscow fails to defeat the country as it bombards energy infrastructure.

"NATO's door is open," Stoltenberg said. "Russia does not have a veto" on countries joining, he said in reference to the recent entry of North Macedonia and Montenegro into the security alliance. He said that Russian President Vladimir Putin "will get Finland and Sweden as

NATO members" soon. The Nordic neighbors applied for membership in April, concerned that Russia might target them next.

"We stand by that, too, on membership for Ukraine," the former Norwegian prime minister said.

In essence, Stoltenberg repeated a vow made by NATO leaders in Bucharest in 2008 in the same sprawling Palace of the Parliament where the foreign ministers are meeting this week that Ukraine, and also Georgia, would join the alliance one day.

Some officials and analysts believe this move pressed on the NATO allies by former U.S. President George W. Bush was partly responsible for the war that Russia launched on Ukraine in February. Stoltenberg disagreed.

"President Putin cannot deny sovereign nations to

make their own sovereign decisions that are not a threat to Russia," he said. "I think what he's afraid of is democracy and freedom, and that's the main

allies believe the focus now must solely be on defeating Russia, and Stoltenberg stressed that any attempt to move ahead on membership could divide them.

announce substantial U.S. aid for Ukraine's energy grid, U.S. officials said. Ukraine's network has been battered countrywide since early October by targeted Russian strikes, in what U.S. officials call a Russian campaign to weaponize the coming winter cold.

"We are all paying a price for Russia's war against Ukraine. But the price we pay is in money," Stoltenberg said Tuesday, "while the price Ukrainians pay is a price paid in blood."

The meeting in Romania which shares NATO's longest land border with Ukraine is likely to see NATO make fresh pledges of nonlethal support to Ukraine: fuel, generators, medical supplies, winter equipment and drone-jamming devices.

Individual allies are also likely to announce fresh supplies of military equipment for Ukraine chiefly the air defense

"We are in the midst of a war and therefore we should do nothing that can undermine the unity of allies to provide military, humanitarian, financial support to Ukraine, because we must prevent President Putin from winning," he said.

During the two-day meeting, Blinken will



challenge for him."

Even so, Ukraine will not join NATO anytime soon. With the Crimean Peninsula annexed, and Russian troops and pro-Moscow separatists holding parts of the south and east, it's not clear what Ukraine's borders would even look like.

Many of NATO's 30

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak declares UK's golden era' with China is over

LONDON, NOV 29/--/ Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made a clear break with the past on UK-China relations as he declared that the "so-called golden era" of bilateral ties is over in the face of the "systemic challenge" posed by the Chinese regime to British values and interests. In his first major foreign policy speech at the Lord Mayor of London's Banquet on Monday night, the British Indian leader said he wants to "evolve" the UK's approach towards one of Asia's largest economies as he criticised the country's human rights record.



However, he did acknowledge that the UK "cannot simply ignore China's significance in world affairs" and therefore his approach would be one of "robust pragmatism" taking a "longer-term view". "Let's be clear, the so-called golden era' is over, along with the na ve idea that trade would lead to social and political reform," said Sunak, with reference to the phrase coined during the David Cameron-led Conservative Party government around seven years ago.

"But nor should we rely on simplistic Cold War rhetoric. We recognise China poses a systemic challenge to our values and interests, a challenge that grows more acute as it moves towards even greater authoritarianism," he said. Sunak was critical of China's handling of the ongoing anti-lockdown protests in the country and the arrest and beating of a BBC journalist over the weekend, saying instead of listening to people's concerns, the government "has chosen to crack down further".

"The media and our parliamentarians must be able to highlight these issues without sanction, including calling out abuses in Xinjiang and the curtailment of freedom in Hong Kong," he said. "Of course, we cannot simply ignore China's significance in world affairs to global economic stability or issues like climate change. The US, Canada, Australia, Japan and many others understand this too. So together we'll manage this sharpening competition, including with diplomacy and engagement," he added.

The 42-year-old former chancellor, who took charge at 10 Downing Street last month, had faced some criticism over the course of the Conservative Party leadership election back in August for being too soft on his approach towards China. It would seem his first major foreign policy speech was intended to quash any such perception. It comes soon after a proposed meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia earlier this month, had to be cancelled in favour of an emergency meeting of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members over developments in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"China is conspicuously competing for global influence using all the levers of state power. In the face of these challenges, short-termism or wishful thinking will not suffice," said Sunak. "We can't depend on Cold War arguments or approaches, or mere sentimentality about our past. So we will make an evolutionary leap in our approach," he declared. China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Beijing has also made substantial progress in militarising its man-made islands in the past few years.

Beijing claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea. But Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims. In the East China Sea, China has territorial disputes with Japan. Sunak's speech confirmed an updated Integrated Review' that would take this approach into account and also strengthen partnerships with like-minded allies around the world, including India and the Commonwealth.

"By 2050, the Indo-Pacific will deliver over half of global growth compared with just a quarter from Europe and North America combined. That's why we're joining the Trans-Pacific trade deal, the CPTPP, delivering a new FTA [free trade agreement] with India and pursuing one with Indonesia," he said. (PTI)

Religious extremists desecrate Ahmadi graves in Pakistan

LAHORE, NOV 29/--/Several graves belonging to the minority Ahmadi community have been desecrated allegedly by religious extremists in Pakistan's Punjab province, an official said on Tuesday, the second such incident against them in over three months. Jamaat Ahmadiya Pakistan official Amir Mahmood told PTI that the tombstones of the graves were desecrated at Prem Kot graveyard in Hafizabad district, some 100 kilometres from Lahore. He said that those who damaged the graves also wrote "Ahmadi dog" on them, which is very distressing for the families.

"The Ahmadis living in Pakistan are not at peace even after their demise. The Ahmadis are not safe in their graves," he said. Mahmood demanded the arrest of those involved in the desecration of graves of the minority community.

In the past also, such incidents have taken place in other Ahmadi graveyards in Punjab but not a single culprit was arrested or put on trial. On August 24, 16 graves of the Ahmadi community in Pakistan's Punjab province were allegedly desecrated by religious extremists for using Islamic symbols on gravestones at a cemetery in Chak 203 RB Manawala, Faisalabad district, some 150 kilometres from Lahore.

Minorities, especially Ahmadis, are very vulnerable in Pakistan and they are often targeted by religious extremists. Former military dictator Gen Zia-ul Haq made it a punishable offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims or to refer to their faith as Islam. Pakistan's Parliament in 1974 declared the Ahmadi community as non-Muslims. A decade later, they were banned from calling themselves Muslims. They are banned from preaching and from travelling to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage.

In Pakistan, around 10 million out of the 220 million population are non-Muslims. According to the 2017 census, Hindus constitute the largest religious minority (5 million) in Pakistan. Christians make up the second largest religious minority, with almost the same number (4.5 million) and their concentration is mostly in urban Sindh, Punjab and parts of Balochistan. The Ahmadis, Sikhs and Parsis are also among the notable religious minorities in Pakistan. (PTI)

Indian-origin businessman's store attacked in New Zealand

MELBOURNE, NOV 29/--/ A store owned by an Indian-origin businessman was attacked by a group of young armed robbers in New Zealand and they held a knife to a worker's neck during the horrifying incident, a media report said, days after a shopkeeper of Indian descent was killed during an alleged robbery. The owner of the vape store, Sidhu Naresh, said that his store in Hamilton, North Island was targeted on Friday by four young offenders, the New Zealand Herald newspaper reported on Monday.

"My staff was made to kneel and a knife was put to his neck," it quoted Naresh as saying. "They came and smashed everything, every single one of the cabinets, and they walked away with the till," he said. Naresh was told by his staff that the robbers "couldn't have been more than 16 years old", according to the report. He said a courier who tried to stop the offenders was injured during the raid, and at least 4,000 New Zealand dollars in cash was stolen. The police informed Naresh that the offenders were believed to be the same people involved in attacking his business just a few weeks ago.

The New Zealand government announced new measures to combat retail crime on Monday - including a fog cannon subsidy scheme open to all small shops and dairies. The announcement came after the murder of an Indian-origin shopkeeper Janak Patel last Wednesday, the report said. Patel was fatally stabbed at the Rose Cottage Superette, where he worked, following an apparent robbery, the New Zealand Herald reported on Sunday. According to the report, Naresh said that although the new measures may help keep his staff safe, they will do little to prevent crime. (PTI)



UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland (Front) speaks at a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at the UN headquarters in New York

Uneasy calm grips Ukraine as West prepares winter aid

KYIV, NOV 29/--/ An uneasy calm hung over Kyiv on Tuesday as residents of the Ukrainian capital did what they could to prepare for anticipated Russian missile attacks aiming to take out more energy infrastructure as winter sets in.

To ease that pain, NATO allies were making plans to boost provisions of anything from blankets to generators to ensure the 43 million Ukrainians can maintain their resolve in the 10th month of fighting against Russia's invasion.

Ukraine's first lady implored the West to show the same kind of steadfastness that Ukrainians had shown against Russian President Vladimir Putin's military campaign.

"Ukrainians are very

tired of this war, but we have no choice in the matter," said Olena Zelenska, the wife of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a BBC interview during a visit to Britain. "We do hope that the approaching season of Christmas doesn't make you forget about our tragedy and get used to our suffering," she said.

A two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Bucharest, Romania, was likely to see the 30-nation alliance make fresh pledges of nonlethal support to Ukraine: fuel, generators, medical supplies and winter equipment, on top of new military support.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was to announce substantial US aid for Ukraine's energy grid, US officials said.

Ukraine's grid has been

battered countrywide since early October by targeted Russian strikes, in what Western officials call a Russian campaign to weaponise the coming winter cold.

Ukrainians are putting up defences both for troops and for civilians. The government has rolled out hundreds of help stations, christened Points of Invincibility, where residents facing outages of power, heating and water can warm up, charge their phones, enjoy snacks and hot drinks, and even be entertained.

"I had no electricity for two days. Now there's only some electricity, and no gas," said Vanda Bronyslavavina, who took a breather inside one such help center in Kyiv's Obolon neighbourhood.

The 71-year-old lamented the uncertainty about whether Russia will simply resume its strikes after infrastructure gets fixed, in a frustrating cycle of destruction and repair.

It underscored how the war continues to cast a pall over every aspect of life, even if civilian casualties are relatively low at the moment.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the presidential office's deputy head, said Russian forces overnight fired on seven regions in Ukraine's south and east, employing missiles, drones and heavy artillery. At least one civilian was killed and two wounded.

Tymoshenko said that as of Tuesday, power had been restored to 24% of residents in the hard-hit southern city of Kherson. (AP)

UK delivering on new FTA with India, says Rishi Sunak

LONDON, NOV 29/--/ British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has reiterated the UK's commitment to a free trade agreement (FTA) with India as part of the country's wider focus on enhancing ties with the strategic Indo-Pacific region and standing up to competitors with "robust pragmatism".

Delivering his first major foreign policy speech since taking charge at 10 Downing Street last month at the Lord Mayor of London's Banquet on Monday night, the British Indian leader reflected upon his heritage and committed to promoting British values of "freedom and openness" around the world.

He also pledged to "do things differently" far removed from the so-called "golden era" with China, which he said poses a "systemic challenge" to British values and interests.

"Before I came into politics, I invested in businesses around the world. And the opportunity in the Indo-Pacific is compelling," Sunak said.

"By 2050, the Indo-Pacific will deliver over half of global growth compared with just a quarter from Europe and North America combined. That's why we're joining the Trans-Pacific trade deal, the CPTPP, delivering a new FTA with India and pursuing one with Indonesia," he said.

India and Britain launched negotiations for the free-trade agreement (FTA) in January with an aim to conclude talks by Diwali but the deadline was missed due to a lack of consensus on issues.

The focus of the FTA negotiations is on reducing the barriers to trade, cutting tariffs, and supporting easier imports and exports into each other's markets.

"Like many others, my grandparents came to the UK, via East Africa and the Indian subcontinent and made their lives here. In recent years, we've welcomed thousands of people from Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. We're a country that stands up for our values, that defends democracy by actions not just words," Sunak noted.

On China, the prime minister said he wants to "evolve" the UK's approach as he distanced his government from a slogan used by the previous Conservative Party led government to describe UK-China bilateral relations just over seven years ago.

"Let's be clear, the so-called golden era' is over, along with the na ve idea that trade would lead to social and political reform. But nor should we rely on simplistic Cold War rhetoric. We recognise China poses a systemic challenge to our values and interests, a challenge that grows more acute as it moves towards even greater authoritarianism," Sunak cautioned.

China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Beijing has also made substantial progress in militarising its man-made islands in the past few years.

Beijing claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea. But Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims.

In the East China Sea, China has territorial disputes with Japan.

Sunak was also critical of China's approach towards ongoing anti-lockdown protests in the country, saying instead of listening to people's concerns, the government "has chosen to crack down further" as he referenced the arrest and beating of a BBC journalist over the weekend.

"The media and our parliamentarians must be able to highlight these issues without sanction, including calling out abuses in Xinjiang and the curtailment of freedom in Hong Kong," he said.

The 42-year-old former chancellor admitted that the UK cannot simply ignore China's "significance" in world affairs, something he pointed out that other leading economies such as the US, Canada, Australia and Japan also acknowledge.

"So together we'll manage this sharpening competition, including with diplomacy and engagement. Much of this is about dramatically improving our resilience, particularly our economic security," Sunak said.

Reiterating his pro-Brexit vision, Sunak ruled out any alignment with European Union (EU) law in favour of cooperation on shared issues such as illegal migration. He also committed the UK to standing by Ukraine in its conflict with Russia as part of Europe's "collective resolve" to protect democratic values.

"After years of pushing at the boundaries, Russia is challenging the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. China is consciously competing for global influence using all the levers of state power. In the face of these challenges, short-termism or wishful thinking will not suffice.

"We can't depend on Cold War arguments or approaches, or mere sentimentality about the past. So, we will make an evolutionary leap in our approach," Sunak declared.

"This means being stronger in defending our values and the openness on which our prosperity depends. It means delivering a stronger economy at home, as the foundation of our strength abroad. And it means standing up to our competitors, not with grand rhetoric but with robust pragmatism," he added.

Sunak confirmed that further detail on the UK's foreign policy outlook will be laid out in an updated Integrated Review' in the new year, which will also cover closer collaboration with the Commonwealth.

"Under my leadership we won't choose the status quo. We will do things differently. We will evolve, anchored always by our enduring belief in freedom, openness and the rule of law and confident that in this moment of challenge and competition our interests will be protected...and our values will prevail," he concluded.

The Lord Mayor's Banquet at Guildhall in the financial heart of London is an annual event where the UK Prime Minister addresses business leaders, international dignitaries and foreign policy experts on the subject of foreign policy. (PTI)



Messi, Argentina play Poland for survival at FIFA World Cup

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ Lionel Messi has already come to Argentina's rescue at the World Cup. He might just have to do it all over again.

Another emotionally charged evening awaits Messi and the soccer-mad south American nation that worships him when Argentina meets Poland on Wednesday for a match with so much on the line. For Messi, who is playing in likely his last World Cup. For Poland striker Robert Lewandowski, who might also be too old when soccer's biggest tournament rolls up next in 2026. And for the World Cup as a whole. Because who, really, doesn't want to see Messi — one of the game's greatest ever players — in the late stages of a tournament that is heating up so nicely.

There are multiple permutations at play for the Group C finale: A win for the Argentines and they are sure to advance, likely as the group winners. A draw, and they can either finish in second place behind Poland or be squeezed out by either Saudi Arabia or Mexico, who are playing

in a match taking place concurrently. A loss? Well, that just doesn't bear thinking about for anyone associated with Argentina. The team wouldn't just be eliminated but humiliated. Messi might never be seen in the Albiceleste's sky blue-and-white jersey again.

That scenario is too much for Argentina fans to take. It's why tears were shed on the field, among the technical staff and among the fanbase after Messi scored the crucial second-half goal to set Argentina on its way to a 2-0 win over Mexico on Saturday. That victory meant Argentina bounced back from its shocking 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia in its opening match and now has a fighting chance to avoid a first group-stage exit since 2002.

"Now another World Cup has begun," said Messi, who will hope to score for



the third straight match at this World Cup and has netted 13 goals for Argentina in 2022 — already a career-high haul in a single calendar year.

Concerns about Messi's health have dogged the seven-time world player of the year at the World Cup, starting from when he trained alone for two days

before Argentina's opening game. He played the full 90 minutes against Saudi Arabia and also in the Mexico game, which he finished in some discomfort after turning his ankle late on.

Messi later confirmed it was nothing serious. But it only adds to the worries about the physical well-being of a 35-year-old player who is clearly pacing himself during matches, picking and choosing his moments to explode into life. Elsewhere, Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni must decide whether to persist with Lautaro Martinez, who has been well covered in the first two games or go with another striker in Julian Alvarez. Likewise, has highly-rated young midfielder Enzo Fernandez done enough to force his way into the team after a scoring cameo as a substitute against Mexico? And who

will Scaloni pick at full-back, having played a different right back and left back in each of Argentina's games?

As for Poland, some of the weight is off the 34-year-old Lewandowski's back after he finally scored a goal at a World Cup in the 2-0 win over Saudi Arabia on Saturday. Now he's looking to advance beyond the group stage for the first time at a World Cup. Poland hasn't done so since 1986. Argentina fans will be wary of the threat of Lewandowski, who rivals France's Karim Benzema as the best striker in the world. They'll know, though, that they have an even bigger icon in Messi, who continues — even in the twilight of his magnificent career — to bend soccer games to his will.

Can he do it one more time? (AP)

Bruno Fernandes double sends Portugal into knockouts

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ Bruno Fernandes scored twice to give Portugal a 2-0 victory over Uruguay on Monday and send them into the knockout stages of the World Cup alongside France and Brazil.

The Manchester United midfielder scored a cross-cum-shot nine minutes into the second half and then added an injury-time penalty following a handball by Jose Maria Gimenez. The match at Doha's spectacular 89,000-capacity Lusail Stadium also featured the first pitch invader of the Qatar tournament — the man carried messages of support for Ukraine and Iranian women and had a rainbow flag.

"It was a well-deserved victory," Portugal coach Fernando Santos said.

"The first part is over, we are in a hurry. Now I will continue to work to improve what needs to improve. The team deserved it, they were solid and very strong both in the quality of the game and the bond between them."

With Portugal already through, Uruguay must now beat Ghana in their final Group H match to stand any chance of also progressing. Both sides made three changes from their opening matches, with Portugal bringing in veteran Pepe for the injured Danilo Pereira, who suffered cracked ribs in training. Pepe became the third-oldest outfield player in World Cup history and it was his first full 90 minutes in more than a month and a half.

"I worked a lot with my club



Bruno Fernandes (right) celebrates after scoring against Uruguay (Porto), which gave me the possibility of being 100 percent for the national team," said Pepe of his surprise start. Portugal dominated the first half, hogging the ball and creating several chances, but without ever testing Uruguay goalkeeper Sergio Rochet. Uruguay's forwards, Edinson Cavani and Darwin Nunez, were starved of the ball but the South

Americans still had the best opportunity of the first period. Rodrigo Bentancur picked the ball up in his own half and surged forwards, slipping between two defenders to find himself one-on-one with goalkeeper Diogo Costa, who spread himself well to save the midfielder's shot.

Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo was largely anonymous in

the first 45 minutes but did delight fans with a shoulder pass to pick out William Carvalho, who volleyed over. The main drama came after the break. Moments after a pitch invader ran onto the pitch carrying an LGBTQ rainbow flag and with a message supporting Ukraine and Iranian women on his T-shirt, only to be spectacularly tackled by security, Portugal went in front. Fernandes created space for himself on the left and curled an inswinging cross into the mixer, with Ronaldo breaking the offside trap to attempt a glancing header. As the ball nestled in the goal, Ronaldo wheeled away in celebration but FIFA decided he had not touched the ball, thus denying him a ninth World Cup goal, which would have put him level with Portuguese great Eusebio. Uruguay coach Diego Alonso threw on forwards Maxi Gomez and Luis Suarez as the South Americans belatedly began to exert some pressure, and both came close to an equaliser. Gomez's rasping drive from 20 yards came back off the post with Costa beaten, while Suarez hit the side netting from close range.

With the 90 minutes almost up, Fernandes nutmegged Gimenez, whose trailing hand diverted the ball away from the midfielder and prevented him from finding himself one-on-one with Rochet. Iranian referee Alireza Faghani awarded the spot-kick after a VAR check and Fernandes sent Rochet the wrong way after his signature hop, skip, run-up. He then almost completed a hat-trick but hit the post from 20 yards. (AFP)

Brazil admit toiling at World Cup without injured Neymar

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimaraes admitted the World Cup favourites lacked some of their usual verve after they needed a late Casemiro strike to beat Switzerland and secure a place in the last 16.

The five-time World Cup winners knew a second straight win in Group G on Monday would clinch their place in the knockout phase with a game to spare. But it looked like they would have to settle for a draw until Manchester United's Casemiro, not known for his goalscoring, popped up with a deflected strike seven minutes from time to seal a 1-0 win.

"It was a really difficult game and a 0-0 suited them, but the most important thing is that we are through," said Newcastle's Guimaraes, who came on as a second-half substitute at Doha's Stadium 974. He replaced Fred, who was in the starting line-up in the absence of Neymar, sidelined with an ankle injury suffered in Brazil's opening 2-0 win over Serbia.

"Neymar is such a player, a real star. What team wouldn't miss him?" he asked. Despite the absence



of Neymar, matchwinner Casemiro believes Brazil are a more complete team now than four years ago, when they crashed out of the World Cup in Russia in the quarter-finals.

"Four years have gone by and there are new players," said the former Real Madrid star, who was one of the few survivors from a draw with Switzerland in the 2018

group stage. Tite's side are yet to concede a goal in Qatar, having let in just five goals in 17 games in South American qualifying.

"Our defenders are more experienced and that is another match with a clean sheet, but it's not just about Alisson or the back four, it starts from Richarlison up front," Casemiro said.

"I think we have a wider range of options." (AFP)

‘injustice’ fires up ‘sorry’ Son and South Korea

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ A "united" South Korea will be fired up by a burning sense of injustice when it faces Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal later this week as it fights to keep its World Cup alive.

Coach Paulo Bento and his players were left fuming at the conclusion of Monday's 3-2 defeat to Ghana after English referee Anthony Taylor blew the final whistle before they could take a corner. The defeat, having stormed back from 2-0 down before Mohammed Kudus's 68th-minute winner for Ghana, left Son Heung-min's side on the brink of elimination ahead of their final Group H game against Portugal on Friday. Taylor sent off an irate Bento after the final whistle when the Portuguese coach and his players including skipper Son angrily confronted the referee. Bento will now be suspended for the showdown against his native Portugal, who

have already qualified for the last 16.

"It will be a loss but it will make us better, united... we will show all our qualities," his assistant Sergio Costa told reporters afterwards of Bento's absence from the bench for the Portugal game.

"We have a feeling of a lack of justice but I think we also have to be very proud of what we did. We gave our souls on the pitch."

Spurs striker Son has been playing in Qatar in a mask after having surgery for a fracture around his left eye earlier this month. The 30-year-old was distraught after the game and told reporters: "I am really sorry to all of our fans who cheered for us."

Midfielder Hwang In-beom is refusing to give up hope.

"Our World Cup doesn't end here and our football careers don't end here either," he said. (AP)

Man with rainbow flag invades pitch during Portugal vs Uruguay

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ A man carrying a rainbow flag and wearing a T-shirt with the words "Respect for Iranian Woman" on the back invaded the pitch during a match at the Qatar World Cup on Monday. The man was on the field for about 30 seconds during the second half of the game between Portugal and Uruguay before being tackled and escorted off by security. He also had the words "Save Ukraine" on the front of his T-shirt, in reference to the war-torn nation.

"We know what has happened around this World Cup... It's a normal thing to happen," said Portugal player Ruben Neves.

"Of course, we are all with them as well. With Iran as well, with the Iranian women. So I hope it doesn't happen, anything to the boy, because we understand his message, and I think all the world understands it as well."

The protestor was identified as Italian Mario Ferri by Italian press agency AGI. He has staged similar protests before, including at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, where he raised the issue of children living in poverty. Gay rights and the use of the rainbow flag have been a simmering issue at the World Cup in Qatar, where homosexuality



A protester in a Superman shirt with "Save Ukraine" on the front and a rainbow flag storms the pitch during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 match on Monday

is illegal. Captains of seven European teams had planned to wear rainbow-themed anti-discrimination armbands during the tournament as part of a campaign for diversity. But they backed down over the threat of disciplinary action from football's governing body FIFA, including yellow cards.

Britain's sports minister Stuart Andrew will wear the armband when he attends England's clash with Wales on Tuesday. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser wore the "OneLove" armband last week while sitting next to FIFA president Gianni Infantino for Germany's shock 2-1 defeat by Japan. Fans complained earlier in the tournament that they

had been told to remove items of clothing with the rainbow on them. Monday's on-pitch protest was addressed by White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, speaking on the eve of a politically charged match between the USA and Iran in Qatar.

"We are concerned over the potential treatment of LGBTQ+ spectators and athletes," she said.

"We urge the state of Qatar and all Qataris to fully realise the emir's message and that is to truly recognise, to welcome everyone to the Cup, the World Cup."

FIFA said it had no comment to make at this stage. Iran's team has separately been in the spotlight because of anti-

France coach Deschamps refuses to discuss holidaying Benzema

DOHA, NOV 29 /--/ France coach Didier Deschamps refused to discuss Karim Benzema after the injured Ballon d'Or winner was spotted arriving on holiday on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion following his withdrawal from the World Cup.

The Real Madrid striker pulled out of the France squad with an injured left thigh on the eve of the tournament and departed their team hotel in Qatar soon afterwards. He arrived on Reunion, a French overseas department, early on Tuesday morning following rumours in Spain that he might return to training with his club.

Sources close to Benzema said the player would stay on the island for a week. Asked about Benzema, who is still officially part of the France squad at the World Cup having not been replaced, Deschamps dismissed the question.

"You are fishing for things there, but these things are not on my mind. I don't know who is saying what, where or how," the France coach said at a press conference in Doha ahead of Wednesday's final group game against Tunisia.

"I spoke to Karim after his departure, and you know what his situation is and how long he will be out for."

"I am focusing on the 24 players who are here. I'll let you talk about that and debate it if you want, but I am not going to talk about things that don't affect what we are doing here from day to day."

The French Football Federation said Benzema would be sidelined for three weeks after he picked up the injury, technically meaning he could be fit to return for the end of the World Cup should France go that far. France have won both Group D games so far at the tournament against Australia and Denmark and a draw against Tunisia on Wednesday will guarantee that they progress to the last 16 as winners of their section. Even a defeat will suffice so long as Australia do not beat Denmark and manage to overturn France's advantage on goal difference, which is currently superior by six. Tunisia have to win the game at Education City Stadium to have a chance of advancing. (AFP)