

DEMAND CRESCENDO ATTAINS HIGH OCTAVE

N&M Andaman residents pitch for shipping services to Kolkata sector

KARTIK

MAYABUNDER, DEC 24/--/ Residents and traders of North & Middle Andaman have pitched for operation of ship services to Kolkata sector via Mayabunder jetty. They say non-berthing of mainland bound vessels at Mayabunder jetty during Port Blair-Kolkata voyage have caused major transportation problems for the Bengali-speaking people living in this region and also led to massive financial losses by the business community.

Local residents as well as PRI members of this region for long have been demanding operations of shipping schedules in this sector. They say that during the Covid-19 pandemic, all ship sailing schedules from Port Blair to the mainland sector have been suspended, as part of safety precaution for the general public. However, post Covid, ship sailing schedule was resumed only at Chennai and Visakhapatnam sectors while the sailing schedule of Kolkata sector continued to remain suspended till date.

Non-operation of ships in the Kolkata sector has been causing hardship for the poor villagers as well as local businessmen of this region. Residents of N & M Andaman have been facing a lot of problems travelling to Kolkata. They have no options, but to travel by air by paying huge airfare. As the airfares in this sector are exorbitant,

Residents & traders of North & Middle Andaman demand operation of ship services to Kolkata sector via Mayabunder jetty

poor residents are unable to bear the expenses as a good population of this region are Bengali settlers and they often undertake journey in the Port Blair to Kolkata sector. Besides, the business community engaged in various trades and commerce in this region are more inclined to get goods and commodities from Kolkata which,



they say, are much cheaper compared to bringing those items from other parts of the country. People living in Diglipur, Mayabunder, Billiground and Rangat in the North & Middle Andaman region complain that though several ships have been operated in the Chennai and Vizag sectors during the past many months,

the Shipping department has not operated even a single vessel to Kolkata sector via Mayabunder. According to some shopkeepers, their business has been impacted badly due to non-operation of passenger ships for the Kolkata sector. They say that it is easier for them to bring goods and materials from Kolkata as these can land directly at their doorsteps at Mayabunder jetty instead of procuring the merchandise routed through Port Blair. This not only hikes up the cost, but also delays the availability of materials in this remote region due to consumption of extra transportation time from Port Blair. Besides, freight charges for importing cargo materials in private cargo vessels is much higher than importing cargo in the DSS operated vessels. Private cargo vessels from Kolkata to Mayabunder charge Rs 5,600 per cubic metre for cargo packages whereas in the DSS operated ship, the charge is only Rs 2,000 per cubic metre.

Meanwhile sources informed that ships are not operated in this sector due to lack of sufficient passengers from this region. Mainland-bound vessels are operated for the people of the islands, but the administration suffered great losses if even 50 per cent of the passengers are not availing the voyage.

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ The dead body of the crocodile attack victim BikasSarkar, School teacher and resident of new Manglutang has been located and recovered near Red Skin Island on Saturday. A team consist of officials of the Police and Forest department reached the spot. Post mortem will be done tomorrow. It may be recalled that at about 5.30 pm on Wednesday, Mr. VikasSarkar went for fishing in a nallah located behind his house, along with his wife when all of a sudden, a crocodile attacked him and dragged him to the creek.

BikasSarkar body recovered after 3 days



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RT-PCR to be mandatory for passengers from China, Japan, S Korea, Singapore, Thailand: Mandaviya

GANDHINAGAR, DEC 24 /--/ Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Saturday said RT-PCR test for the detection of Covid-19 would be made mandatory for passengers from China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand for their travel to India.

He also said that passengers arriving in India from these countries will undergo thermal screening at airports and those found Covid-19 positive or with fever will be quarantined. Talking to reporters in Gandhinagar, Mandaviya said that filling up of the 'Air Suvidha' form to declare the health status will be made mandatory for passengers coming from these countries. "In view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, passengers from China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Bangkok (Thailand) are required to upload their RT-PCR reports in advance (for travel to India). After landing in India, they will

"Sample testing of international passengers, including those from China, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Japan, South Korea, has been initiated at the Delhi International Airport. All necessary steps are being taken in view of the evolving coronavirus situation."
--- Mansukh Mandaviya



undergo thermal screening and we have issued an order for them to be quarantined if found positive or with fever on their arrival in the country," the minister said.

Mandaviya was in the Gujarat capital to deliver a convocation address of the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER). Talking to reporters, he also said that the central government was taking steps against Covid-19 as cases are rising in places like South Korea, Hong

Kong, Europe, America and Brazil. "Yesterday, a COVID-19 advisory was issued. Through newspaper advertisements, people are

"Sample testing of international passengers, including those from China, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Japan, South Korea, has been initiated at the Delhi International Airport. All necessary steps are being taken in view of the evolving coronavirus situation." With China and other countries witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday cautioned against complacency, called for a strict vigil and directed that the ongoing surveillance measures, especially at the international airports, be strengthened.



President Droupadi Murmu visited the Sacred Heart Cathedral church, in New Delhi on Saturday

The Union Health Ministry has already asked the civil aviation ministry to ensure random post-arrival coronavirus testing at airports of two per cent of the passengers arriving in India in each international flight from Saturday to minimise the risk of ingress of any new variant of the coronavirus in the country. (PTI)

Futuristic education system being created in country through NEP, says PM Slams 'slave mentality' of past govts

RAJKOT, DEC 24 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that through the new National Education Policy (NEP), a forward-looking and futuristic education system was being created in India for the first time, and accused the past governments of not doing anything to regain the country's lost glory due to their "slave mentality".

Modi, who was addressing the 75th 'Amrut Mahotsav' of Shree Swaminarayan Gurukul at Rajkot via video link, also said the number of premier educational institutions like IITs, IIMs and medical colleges in the country increased substantially after 2014, the year when his government came to power at the Centre for the first time. Hailing India's ancient 'gurukul' (residential schooling) system of education, the prime minister said knowledge has been the highest purpose of life in the country, and added that saints and spiritual leaders helped revive the country's lost glory in the field of education. "You know very well that for India's bright future, our existing education policy and institutes have a big role to play. Therefore, in this 'amrut kaal' of independence, whether it is about country's educational infrastructure or policy, we are engaged in work at every level at a fast pace," he said.

The number of premier educational institutions like IITs, IITs, IIMs and AIIMS is increasing substantially. After 2014, the number of medical colleges has seen more than 65 per cent rise, Modi said. "Through the new education policy, the country is for the first time preparing an education system which is forward-looking and futuristic," he added. When the country became independent, it was our responsibility to revive India's ancient glory and our great pride in the field of education, he said. "But under the pressure of the slave mentality, the governments did not move in that direction. And in some matters they went in the reverse direction. In these circumstances, once again our saints and acharyas took up the task of fulfilling this duty towards the country. Swaminarayan Gurukul is a living example of this opportunity," he said.

Modi said that India showed the way to the world by carrying out research in the fields ranging from 'atma tattva' to 'paramatma tattva', from spirituality to ayurveda, from social science to solar science, from maths to metallurgy, and from zero to infinity. Women scholars debated with their men counterparts at a time when the term 'gender equality' was not even born, he said. "India showed light to humanity in those dark times, offering rays from which the journey of the modern world and modern science started," he said. The gurukuls of those periods paved the way for the world by allowing women scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi to be involved in debates there, he said.

Knowledge has been the highest purpose of life in India. Therefore, in the period when other countries were identified with kingdoms and royal clans, India was known by its gurukuls, he said. "Our gurukuls have been like a garden of equality, affection and service for centuries. Universities like Nalanda and Takshashila used to be synonymous with the global glory of this gurukul tradition of India. Discovery and research - they were part of India's way of life. Today, the diversity and cultural prosperity we see in the country are results of the same discoveries and innovations," he said. (PTI)

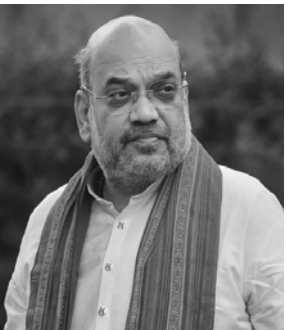
Education in mother tongue will increase students' ability to think, reason, analyse: Shah

MEHSANA, DEC 24 /--/ Education imparted to a student in his mother tongue as provided under the new National Education Policy (NEP) will increase his ability to think, reason, analyse and research, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Saturday.

Addressing a gathering at the 95th anniversary of Sheth G C High School at Vijapur here, Shah said work was underway to translate into regional languages the syllabi of technical, medical and higher education courses, and added that the NEP will make India number one country in the next 25 years. Under the British education

policy for pre-Independent India, rote learning was a sign of intelligence, he said, adding that students did not have the power to think, research, reason, analyse, decide and understand, which created many issues in the society. "The new education policy, which has made fundamental changes, including laying emphasis on the mother tongue, will make India number one in the world in 25 years," the Home and Cooperation Minister said. "If a student reads, speaks and thinks in the mother tongue, then it will increase his ability to think, his reasoning power, the capability of analysis, and research will naturally

emerge within this child," Shah said. "The fundamental change in the NEP is to educate students in their mother tongue at



primary and secondary level as far as possible. I am confident in another two, five, seven years, all the

students in the country will be imparted education in their mother tongue and their mothers will be able to teach them in their language," he said.

Along with this, the syllabi of technical, medical and higher education are being translated into the mother tongue, Shah said. Medical education in Bhopal was being imparted in Hindi after translation of the syllabus of the first semester, he added. "Gujarati, Telugu, Odia, Punjabi and Bengali - higher and medical education courses will begin in all these languages. From there, India will begin

to contribute significantly in research and development," he said. Shah said a person is able to have original thinking only when the subject to ponder over is taught in his mother tongue, and the new education policy will help provide a platform to a child's inherent capacities like art and music etc. "NEP has created a big role for commercial and skill education. More than 50 per cent students will be connected to commercial education before Class 10, and this will help to take them towards self-employment, micro and cottage industry," Shah asserted. (PTI)

Cong gives credit to Rahul's Bharat Jodo Yatra for govt's OROP decision

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 /--/ The Congress on Saturday welcomed the government's decision to revise the pension of ex-servicemen under the 'one rank, one pension' scheme and said it is the result of the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra which raised the issue. Congress general secretary communications Jairam Ramesh said one should "understand the chronology" of the issue as ex-servicemen had only two days ago met Rahul Gandhi during the Yatra and highlighted the issue. "We are happy that pension arrears of ex-servicemen will be given. This is the direct effect of the Bharat Jodo Yatra... Rahul ji's meeting yielded the decision of the union cabinet two days later. We welcome this decision," Ramesh told reporters at a press conference during the morning halt of the Bharat Jodo Yatra. "Understand the chronology of OROP. This is the impact of the Bharat Jodo Yatra," he later said. "All ex-servicemen feel that

the OROP has not been implemented in letter and spirit what the UPA had decided," he claimed.

The government on Friday approved the revision of the pension of armed forces personnel under the 'One Rank One Pension' (OROP) scheme with retrospective effect from July 1, 2019 - a decision that will benefit around 25 lakh pensioners. The announcement was made after a meeting of the Union Cabinet presided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Ramesh recalled that in September the central government had filed an affidavit before the Supreme Court asking the apex court to allow it time to resolve this matter till March 2023. Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Yatra on December 21 in Firozpur Jhirka in Haryana and met 30 ex-servicemen who had raised two issues on arrears of pension and the OROP not being implemented fully, he said.

The second issue, he said, was from JCOs saying

that OROP is beneficial to senior officers and not to junior officers who retire earlier. Ramesh said since March 2022, the Modi government sought an extension in the Supreme Court four times to implement the revision of the pension of ex-servicemen and clear their pension arrears. "Defence Minister announces the clearance of arrears after Cabinet meeting on the evening of December 23rd before Bharat Jodo Yatra enters New Delhi," he said. The Congress leader said the 'One Rank One Pension' as announced by the UPA government on February 26, 2014 is far from implemented, both in letter and spirit. "The Bharat Jodo Yatra will continue to successfully raise the voice of our ex-servicemen. We are committed to the implementation of OROP as per the UPA's government's orders," he said. The government has said Rs 23,638 crore will be paid as arrears to the pensioners from July 2019 to June 2022. (PTI)

Ruling BJP in MP to hold state-wide 'Vikas Yatra' events in Feb 2023, months before Assembly polls

BHOPAL, DEC 24 /--/ The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Madhya Pradesh has decided to organise 'Vikas Yatra' events across the state in February next year, in which elected representatives of the party will inaugurate and lay foundation stone of various development projects, a minister has said.

This was decided on Friday during a meeting of the BJP's state unit and ministers in the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led government. Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh are scheduled by the end of 2023. The BJP has been in power in the state for almost 20 years. In the 230-member MP Assembly, the BJP has 127

members and opposition Congress 96. "Vikas Yatra will be organised between February 1 and 15 next year. Under this programme, elected representatives of the BJP will lay the foundation stone of development projects and inaugurate the completed ones," MP Home Minister Naraottam Mishra told reporters on Friday at the BJP's state headquarters. "There was a meaningful discussion between the government and the (party) organisation. It has been decided that all the ministers will take ground information by meeting and interacting with the district and divisional-level workers of the party," Mishra, a BJP leader who is also the state

government's spokesperson, said.

He said ministers have been told during the meeting that whenever they go to districts under their charge, they should conduct surprise inspections in settlements of poor and hostels meant for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe category students and interact with them. From January 4, the state government will start the Mukhyamantri Bhu-Adhikar Awas Yojana, a scheme to provide land and rights for housing in rural areas, he added. In the meeting, the ministers informed the party leaders about the schemes and works being carried out in the districts from where they hail, Mishra said. (PTI)

Centre should issue mandatory Covid protocols, all must follow: AAP over 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 /--/ The Centre should issue "mandatory" protocols to prevent spread of Covid-19 and everyone, be it a political party or someone taking out amarch, must follow them, the AAP said on Saturday in a veiled reference to Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi.

Addressing a press conference, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) national spokesperson Raghav Chadha said the Centre should issue mandatory protocols to avoid the situation that the country witnessed during the first and second wave of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The country witnessed a major crisis during the last two waves of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the Centre's failure in understanding the "seriousness" of the initial scientific indications about the spread of the virus, he also charged. "So far I know the Centre has not yet issued any mandatory protocols. If such protocols are issues, everyone must show respect to them and follow, be it a political party or someone taking out any yatra," Chadha told reporters when asked for his party's stand on the row over Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya's "follow Covid-19 guidelines" letter to Gandhi.

The AAP's Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab suggested that the central government should monitor all the flights coming to India carrying passengers directly or indirectly from China, and if there is need, ban them to prevent entry of the virus into the country. "Prevention is better than cure," he added. A war of words erupted between the Congress and the BJP after the Union health minister wrote to Gandhi earlier this week asking him to consider suspending his party's Bharat Jodo Yatra if adherence to the Covid protocols cannot be followed. In a letter addressed to Gandhi and Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday, Mandaviya said three MPs from Rajasthan -- P P Chaudhary, Nihal Chand and Devji Patel -- have flagged concerns and requested him that Covid protocols, including use of masks and sanitisers, be strictly followed during the march and only those who are vaccinated be allowed to participate. Hitting back, Gandhi on Friday said the ruling party can hold as many public meetings as it wants in the rest of India but sees Covid only where his Bharat Jodo Yatra is passing through. The former Congress president had earlier accused the government of coming up with "excuses" to stop the Kanyakumari-to-Kashmir yatra. Nothing can prevent the Bharat Jodo Yatra from moving forward, the Congress asserted asking the BJP to "stop playing politics in the garb of the Covid pandemic" and trying to "stall" the march, which entered the national capital Saturday morning. (PTI)

Resigning from Congress in support of Ghulam Nabi Azad was a blunder: Former J&K DyCM Tara Chand

JAMMU, DEC 24 /--/ Resigning from the Congress in support of Ghulam Nabi Azad was a "blunder", former Jammu and Kashmir deputy chief minister Tara Chand said on Saturday - two days after he along with former minister Manohar Lal Sharma and former legislator Balwan Singh were expelled from the Azad-led Democratic Azad Party (DAP). More than 100 office bearers and founding members of the DAP announced their resignation from the party in support of the three leaders, who decided to reach out to the people before taking a decision on their next course of action.

Chand, however, said they will remain secular till their last breath and would have no objection in joining the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra when it enters Jammu and Kashmir. "The decision of the DAP to expel us without any reason or justification came as a big surprise to us. Today, we feel that our decision to resign from the Congress in support of Azad was a blunder," Chand, flanked by the leaders and activists, told reporters here. He said they have a long association with Azad and when he resigned from the Congress, "we felt we should stand with our leader and extend moral support to him". "The Congress gave me a mandate, made me Congress legislative party leader, speaker and deputy chief minister... We repent our decision today as we feel we betrayed our party, while DAP betrayed us," Chand said.

Asked about their sacking from the DAP, he said "We have not seen such a type of dictatorship in our decades long political careers. Azad rebelled against the Congress leadership, set up a G23 group and even shot letters but he was not sacked by the (Congress) party which believes in internal democracy." "We opposed the Pradesh Congress Committee (J&K) president at his behest but the party did not serve us any notice. We were working to strengthen the DAP, the party which is yet to get recognition, and we were accused of anti-party activities and sacked without any intimation," he said.

Welcoming Azad's decision, Chand said it had further strengthened them and they are getting support from all across Jammu and Kashmir. "Many more leaders from Kashmir including former ministers and legislators from DAP and others are joining our group to strengthen the secular vote bank and work for the restoration of the people's rights including the special status under Article 370 of the constitution and statehood. "Restoration of pre-August 5, 2019 status to Jammu and Kashmir is the popular demand of the people from both the regions of Jammu and Kashmir," he said. On Bharat Jodo Yatra, he said when National Conference leaders Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah and leaders of other secular parties have expressed their desire to join the yatra which is meant to unite the country, "we do not have any hesitation to be part of it." However, he said nobody from the Congress approached them so far. (PTI)

Chalk out middle path to address issues of Kashmiri Pandit staffers: Mehbooba Mufti to J&K admin

JAMMU, DEC 24 /--/ PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti Saturday said instead of giving migrant Kashmiri Pandit employees an ultimatum to join their duty, the Jammu and Kashmir administration should chalk out a middle path taking into consideration the recent targeted killings in the Valley. The migrant Kashmiri Pandit and Jammu-based reserved category employees left the Valley in May following the targeted killings of two colleagues. They are seeking relocation outside Kashmir. However, Lt Governor Manoj Sinha last Wednesday asserted that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the safety of minority community employees, including Kashmiri Pandits, in the Valley and sent out a "loud and clear" message to those demanding a transfer no salary for sitting at home.

Interacting with reporters on Saturday, Mufti said, "The administration needs to know their problems and try to resolve those. Giving an ultimatum to join otherwise, your salaries will be stopped is wrong." "Everyone, including the Pandits, has suffered a lot but the government should take into consideration the recent (targeted) killings of the community members." Mufti said the administration should accept their demand for the time being to provide them a breather. "When they are satisfied that the situation in Kashmir has improved, they will return but should not be compelled like this," she said. The government must chalk out a middle way in consultation with the protesting employees who are very perturbed over the past several months and are facing tremendous hardships, the PDP chief said. (PTI)

InevitableAf-Pak dissonance



BHOPINDER SINGH

Pugnacious Amrullah Saleh, former First Vice President of Afghanistan (also Head of the Afghan spy agency, National Directorate of Security from 2004-2010) never tires of calling out Pakistan’s patented duplicitousness. When the US killed one of the world’s most wanted terrorists, Ayman al-Zawahiri, from a safe compound in Kabul a few months back, Amrullah Saleh tweeted, “Osama Bin Laden was killed in Pakistan & Zawahiri killed in GHQ occupied Kabul. If the price tag for use of Shamsi airbase or an overflight is this high, then thumbs up to ‘Directorate S’ for one shot two birds. Another 10m & Head (IS-K) was born before this. Connect the dots.” What the well-versed spymaster was alluding to was Pakistan’s consistent double-crossing even towards its own creation i.e., Afghan Taliban, if the price for the ‘deal’ (in this case, leaking critical information and passively facilitating strikes on both, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri) was attractive enough for the

Pakistanis. Today, it is the turn of the Afghan Taliban to realise Pakistan’s incorrigible ways. In 1988, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, General Mirza Aslam Beg, propounded the concept of ‘Strategic Depth’ to control the Afghan swathes, narrative and as a pawn for securing its own backyard and interests. General Beg had a shadowy past that included accusations of playing an internal role in the airplane crash that killed General Zia, nuclear proliferation, and even manipulating and financing ultra-conservative politicians – his natural instinct for controlling Afghanistan in the post-Soviet era was naturally Machiavellian. Soon Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) along with political support from the likes of Naseerullah Babar, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, etc., started patronising, financing, and shaping the students in madrassas, under the ideological tutelage of Maulana Mohammed Omar. While it was selfish geopolitics for the Pakistanis, it was jihadi puritanism and revisionism for the largely uneducated Talibanis, which necessitated a constant balancing act of asserting their own independence (as they did for eons) and securing support from the Pakistanis. Historically, the common Pashtun did not trust the Pakistani state nor recognised the contentious Durand Line, but circumstances warranted that the Taliban observe a

semblance of allegiance to Pakistan. But as is always the case of supporting any religious strain of extremist insurgents, it never remains a monolithic or disciplined set-up, Pakistan was content to have a client-state and curb murmurs of Pushtoonistan, as a quid pro quo. But this arrangement was given to limitations of interference and guidance that the lawless Talibanis allowed the Pakistanis, and soon by harbouring Osama Bin Laden they invited the wrath of the US. Talibanis were soon banished for 20 years and yet again the Pakistanis were their main sponsors and sustainers, with Islamabad supposedly joining the global ‘War on Terror’ and running with the hare and hunting with the hound. Cut to 2021, Taliban storms Kabul yet again and the then Pakistani ISI Chief, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed is amongst the first to dash to Kabul to congratulate its creation i.e., Taliban – everything looks picture perfect for the Pakistanis, except it is not, as the faultlines persist beyond the rosy optics. The cabinet formation of the Taliban government becomes the first test for Pakistani control and ambition as it leaves many factions angry with Pakistani interference. The Talibanis like to assert themselves as a proud sovereign that is not beholden to any foreign power, not even the Pakistanis – it remains a relationship of

convenience that occasionally flares up. Correlligosity with Islamabad is immaterial beyond a point, as the ethnicity of Pashtuns is a far more emotional matter, hence the ghosts of questioning the validity of the Durand Line resurface, and the Taliban cannot do much. Today, cross-border targeting of security forces between Afghanistan and Pakistan has become a routine matter. More Pakistani security forces are killed on Af-Pak Durand Line than they are killed on the Line-of-Control (LOC). A few days back 6 people were killed and 17 injured when Afghan Border Forces were blamed by the Pakistanis for ‘unprovoked and indiscriminate fire’. Heavy weapons including artillery and mortars are believed to have been used – this at a border post, that had recently been reopened following closure for an ‘indefinite period’, following yet more cross-border firing. Taliban leadership is openly rallying against the Pakistanis. The deadly revival of Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) is hardly coincidental. Pakistanis are additionally frustrated with no progress on the aspired connectivity with the Central Asian States – instead, a sentiment of thanklessness and animosity persists. Clearly, Pakistan tried juggling too many balls in the air, none of which pertained to the Afghan needs – this is a realisation and consequence that is playing out.

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

Seminar to mark National Consumer Day

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24 /--/ As part of National Consumer Rights Day, the Directorate of Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, A&N Administration organized a seminar in the Conference hall of ALHW here today to sensitize the people about their rights as consumer. Smt.i. Ranjana Deswal, Secretary, CS&CA graced the occasion as chief guest. The function was also attended by ShriMadhan Kumar Gupta, Member State Consumer Commission, Port Blair; Shri Rajesh Kumar, Dy. Director, CS&CA and ShriP.J.Sekhar, President Grain Dealers Association, students and others. Speaking on the occasion, the Secretary, CS&CA highlighted on the theme, “Effective disposal of cases in Consumer Commissions” and rights of the consumers. She sensitized the gathering about e-daakhil, an initiative of Department of Consumer Affairs on the direction of Govt. of India.

This facility plays a vital role on easy accessibility to overcome approach barrier by enjoying the comfort of their home. These initiatives removed all the barriers of locations which in turn encourage the consumers of remote areas to come forward and seek redressal of their grievances. Earlier, the Deputy Director, CS&CA welcomed the gathering and briefed about the various redressal modes available in Consumer Fora to file complaints with the jurisdiction of the court based on the compensation claim by the litigant. He also highlighted the importance of National Consumer Right Day. Shri.Madan Kumar Gupta spoke on the Consumer Protection Act. The President Grain Dealers Association ensured their associations commitment towards various services offered to the consumers in a fair and transparent manner. He also stated that all necessary initiatives have been taken

to keep a check on the price of essential commodities in the open market for the larger interest of the consumers. Meanwhile, as part of National Consumer Rights Day, the Department organized an inter school Painting Competition on December 20, 2022 in the auditorium of Govt. Girl’s Sr.Sec.School, Port Blair in which around 160 students from 21 different schools of South Andaman actively participated. In the competition, Ekansha Singh, student of Class XII, of Sagritara School bagged 1st prize, K. Eekshita of Class X of NCS and V.K.AmreenArif of Class XII of VitalaSr.Sec.School jointly bagged 2nd prize and ShifaKhatun of Class VIII of Ummat Public School and Dishita Pal of Class VII of KV-2 bagged 3rd prize. Consolation prizes were also given to the deserving students by the chief guest and others. Shri. Aneesh Chatterjee, Assistant Director proposed the vote of thanks.

Tsunami anniversary on Dec 26, LG to lead Islanders to pay tributes to victims

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24 /--/ The A&N Administration will be observing the Tsunami Anniversary on Dec. 26, 2022 at 8 am at Tsunami Memorial at Andaman Water Sports Complex. Admiral DK Joshi, (Retd.), Lt Governor; A&N Islands and Vice Chairman, Islands Development Agency will offer floral tributes at the Tsunami Memorial to pay homage to the departed souls and will be followed by floral tributes by others present on the occasion.

An all religious prayer (Sarva

Dharma PrarthanaSabha) will be organized at the Memorial on the occasion and a two minutes’ silence will also be observed. In connection with the function of Tsunami Anniversary on Dec. 26, Transport Department will be operating additional bus services to facilitate the movement of commuters. The details of bus schedule which will be operating on Dec. 26 in various routes in South Andaman District are as under:

Andaman District are as under:				
Route No.	Time	From	To	Remarks
16 C	04.30 AM	Tirur	via	
EB 19	05.45 AM	Namunaghar		
EB16	06.00 AM	Tushnabad		
EB29	06.00 AM	Indra Nagar		
EB 1	06.00 AM	Manjery	Bus Terminus	Via Tsunami Memorial at Water sports Complex, Port Blair
EB 18	06.00 AM	Wandoor		
EB 11	06.00 AM	Chidyatapu		
EB 38	06.00 AM	PS Teylarabad		
	05.50 AM	AttamPahad		

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CYMK

So, let us not be blind to our differences - but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved

John F. Kennedy

Free ration to the poor

Is it just till the 2024 Lok Sabha elections that the government will provide free ration to poor people under a food law? A welfare measure indeed, but was the decision taken with an eye on the general elections, little over a year away? Union Food Minister Piyush Goyal said the Centre will bear the entire burden of providing free food grains under NFSA till December 2024. Under NFSA, also called the food law, the government currently provides 5 kg of food grains per person per month at Rs 2.3 per kg. The Union Cabinet at its meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the major decision to provide free ration to 81.35 crore poor people under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) for one year. The families covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) get 35 kg of food grains per month. Rice is given to poor persons under NFSA at Rs 3 per kg and wheat at Rs 2 per kg. The annual cost to the exchequer is estimated at Rs 2 lakh crore. The government decided not to extend the free ration scheme Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), which ends on December 31. Under PMGKAY, five kilogram of food grains per person per month is provided free to 81.35 crore beneficiaries covered under NFSA. This is over and above the monthly distribution of highly subsidised food grains under NFSA.

For the record, government officials described the Cabinet decision as a “new year gift for the country’s poor”, saying that over 80 crore people will now get free food grains under NFSA. The beneficiaries will not have to pay a single rupee to get food grains. The Centre enacted NFSA in July 2013, giving legal entitlement to 67 per cent of the population (75 per cent in rural areas and 50 per cent in urban areas) to receive highly subsidised food grain. The coverage under the Act is based on the population figures of Census 2011. The NFSA is being implemented in all 36 states/UTs and covers about 81.35 crore persons. The PMGKAY was initially launched for three months till June 2020 (phase I) and then extended several times. The government provided free food grain (5 kg per person per month) for 28 months to ensure that no one sleeps on an empty stomach during the pandemic.

With the government deciding not to provide extra food grains over and above NFSA quota, experts said the decision will ease the pressure on food grain stocks under the central pool. The government had to ban wheat exports in May to control inflation after its procurement fell sharply. Domestic production of wheat also fell slightly in 2021-22. About 159 lakh tonnes of wheat and 104 lakh tonnes of rice will be available as on January 1, 2023, as against the respective buffer norms requirement of 138 lakh tonnes of wheat and 76 lakh tonnes of rice.

Kerala CPI-M overtures to IUML worries UDF

REFLEX ACTION

P. Sreekumaran

There is no mistaking it. The CPI(M)’s fulsome praise of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the second most powerful constituent of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), has scared the daylight out of the Congress.

There is a delicious irony here. As the leader of the UDF, the Congress is supposed to take steps to strengthen the front. Instead, the Congress is busy scoring self-goals, consumed as it were by a death wish! It all started with CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan’s overtures to the IUML. Govindan made a statement – regarded by political observers as a masterstroke – that his party does not consider the IUML a communal party.

Govindan reminded IUML that under the leadership of EMS Namboodiripad, it had aligned with the CPI(M) to form a government in 1967. Govindan further said that “League is a democratic party working for the minorities. CPI(M) has criticized it whenever it joined hands with communal parties like the SDPI.” Govindan’s stand was not, however, to the liking of the CPI, the second most important partner in the LDF. CPI state secretary Kanam Rajendran went on record that the overture was totally unnecessary and that there was no move to expand the LDF at present.

The CPI(M) state secretary’s praise sent the UDF into a tizzy, triggering speculation that the exit of the IUML from the UDF is imminent. But, then, if there is panic in the UDF camp, the Congress has no one but itself to blame. It is the statements emanating from top Congress leaders, mainly Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president K. Sudhakaran, which has induced second thoughts in a section of the IUML about its continuance in the UDF camp. What

strengthened the IUML’s suspicions were the remarks of Sudhakaran from time to time. At one point, he said there would be no problem even if the IUML decided to leave the UDF! Though he denied having made the statement, the damage had been done. He followed it up with a statement that at one point of time he had rushed to protect the RSS from political enemies! The IUML, understandably, took strong exception to these statements at a time when the need is to strengthen the battle against the communal forces led by the RSS-BJP combine.

A cornered Sudhakaran tried damage-control by stating that he would never compromise with communalism. Then came another stunner from Sudhakaran. He said even Jawaharlal Nehru had accommodated the RSS by inducting Shyama Prasad Mukherjee into his Cabinet. That ludicrous remark had even the Congress leaders up in arms against the KPCC chief, who blamed the press for distorting his remarks!

The IUML is also unhappy about the Congress handling of the Shashi Tharoor issue. The IUML feels Tharoor is an asset to the UDF and should be given full support in his efforts to strengthen the Congress and the UDF. Bowing to the IUML’s pressure, Leader of the opposition V D Satheesan who had openly criticized Tharoor, beat a grudging retreat. Signs of the growing strains in the ties between the Congress and the IUML came to the fore, again, when IUML’s Rajya Sabha MP

P V Abdul Wahab excoriated the absence of Congress MPs in the house when a controversial bill on the uniform civil code was being presented. Wahab who lamented the absence of his Congress colleagues, had a word of praise for the Left MPs who were present in full strength to vehemently oppose the bill along with members of TMC, MDMK, RJD and SP, among others. CPI(M) MP John Brittas had a dig at Congress saying that this was now the Congress helping its ally in Kerala.

The ball is now in Congress court. The party has to get its act together fast. The party must erase the impression that it is soft on the BJP in its eagerness to regain power in Kerala. Remember, when Satheeswan took over as the Leader of the Opposition, he made said that the main enemy was the BJP. But the resolve weakened with Sudhakaran committing political harakiri with his pro-RSS statement. The wishy-washy stand of the top Congress leaders created doubts in the minds of the IUML, triggering the process of cosy up to the CPI(M). Top IUML leaders like PK Kunhalikutty were perceived as being soft on CPI(M).

Everything depends on the future conduct of Congress. If the party and its leaders fail to up the ante against the BJP-RSS combine, the IUML will be, willy nilly, forced to give serious thought of joining hands with the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic front (LDF), which is in the forefront in the crucial battle against the saffron camp. The Congress has been forewarned. If it refuses to read the writing on the wall, the UDF is in real danger of unravelling. And that would be a sad day in Kerala politics. For, the beneficiary of the UDF’s collapse would be the BJP, which has, so far, failed to capture Kerala, a state steeped in secular ethos. (IPA)



A tableau at St Paul’s Cathedral--Arijit Ganguly

Attacking Nitish Kumar for prohibition and hooch deaths

Exploiting the death of the poor in an accident has been most awful pastime rendezvous of the politicians. This apparently got manifest in the death of nearly 50 people in the Chapra hooch tragedy of Bihar. The BJP which has been prime mover of the idea to impose ban on the manufacturing and sale of the liquor in 2016 has turned lethal post tragedy in his criticism of chief minister Nitish Kumar for his “anti-people” decision and has been blaming him as the murderer of the innocent people.

After this gruesome incident, virtuous thoughts and ideas have descended on the BJP leaders and have started describing the gory happening as the grim reminder of Nitish inability in not recognising the terrible costs of his prohibition policy. Nitish must face the realities and criticism as well, but the BJP leaders owe an explanation to the people that they were so naive not to construe of the fallacies of the policy.

It was their design to single out Nitish as the criminal who is solely responsible for the 50 odd deaths that

had literally forced him to retort “those who drink will die”.

The BJP leaders are painting him as insensitive. Of course some NGOs, civic bodies and opposition parties had at that point had objected to this policy decision, but his then deputy Sushil Modi, had brushed it aside. How could they did not comprehend that this decision result in loss of revenue and even encourage illegal brewing of liquor, or a new class of liquor smugglers and mafia would replace the legal trade. Nevertheless the Chapra hooch tragedy is not the sole incident that took place since prohibition was introduced in Bihar. Already a couple of such tragedies involving death of around 40 persons had taken place even while BJP shared power with Nitish till recently. But they never protested against Nitish and his determination to

have prohibition. In the wake of Chapra tragedy they turned aggressive. They should have mustered courage and conviction as well and confessed to the public that the law was their creation. If they were really concerned of the welfare of the poor people, they should have advised or forced Nitish to retreat. But they did not as they looked at it as a beneficial political decision.

On the contrary a section of Nitish’s party men and his ally RJD were sceptical ever since he implemented it in 2016. Before prohibition, the government earned Rs 4,000 crore annually from liquor. But Nitish more concerned of the wellness of the poor people decided to continue with the ban not bothering for the Rs 30000 crores loss the state had to incur ever since implementation of the policy. Prohibition is also in practice in

Gujarat and hooch tragedies have also been happening there. But the BJP leaders never raised the issue of deaths in that state. They also did not question the loss of revenue. Only in July this year nearly 50 people had died in hooch tragedy in Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad. The intensity of the tragedy could be gauged from the statement of the then minister Harsh Sanghavi that as many as 10 different police teams were set up in Botad and Ahmedabad to arrest the culprits and trace out the chemical used for making hooch.

The comparison is not being made to defend Nitish, but to expose the dichotomy and double speak of the BJP. In the prevail situation where politics has acquired the character of commodity, they are resorting to the politics of marketing the death. The BJP leaders claim that they are performing the task of constructive opposition, but it is not true. Angry at Nitish divorcing them, the leadership is using this incident to malign him and discredit him as a “dushashan” (provider of bad governance) (IPA/To be continued)

FOCUS

Arun Srivastava

Conventional Crossword

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		15				16		17
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			22					
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	27						28	
					29			

ACROSS

1 Delivery
6 Small spot
7 Of the moon
10 Silly
12 Gem
13 Waterway
15 Dash
16 Donkey
18 Distress signal
20 Lofty
22 Insurgent
23 Destiny
25 Blood-sucking worm
27 Slight error
28 Obtained
29 Exploits

DOWN

1 Senseless persons
2 Offspring
3 Gazes fixedly
4 Lift
5 Opening
8 And not
9 Torn clothing
11 No score
14 Made possible
16 Assert without proof
17 Observes
19 Spoken
21 Sheltered side
22 Corded fabric
24 Financial obligation
26 Fish

SUDOKU:3736

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Yesterday’s Solution3735

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

Yesterday’s Cross Word Solution1744

	P	A	L	E		S	C	A	R
D		W	I	L	L		O	V	A
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M				N	A	T	T	E	R
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P	E	S	O			E	P	E	E

DISCLAIMER

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

Biden nominates Rich Verma to be deputy secretary of state for management and resources

WASHINGTON, DEC 24 / --/ Indian-American lawyer diplomat Rich Verma has been nominated by US President Joe Biden to a top diplomatic position in the State Department.

Verma, 54, who served as a former US ambassador to India from January 16, 2015, to January 20, 2017, is currently the Chief Legal Officer and Head of Global Public Policy at Mastercard. If confirmed by the US Senate, he would serve as the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, thus making him the highest-ranking Indian American in the State Department. Biden on Friday announced the nomination of Verma. During the Obama administration, Verma also

served as Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs. Earlier in his career, he was National Security Advisor to the United States Senator Harry Reid while he was a Democratic Whip, Minority Leader and then-Majority Leader of the United States Senate. He has served as Vice Chairman of The Asia Group, Partner and Senior Counsellor at Steptoe & Johnson LLP, and Senior Counsellor at the Albright Stonebridge Group. He is a veteran of the United States Air Force, where he served on active duty as a Judge Advocate. "Ambassador Verma is uniquely well-qualified to become the State Department's number two official. The breadth and depth of his experience and vision will

make him a potent leader in protecting and promoting American interests and values around the world," Ronak D Desai, prominent

Asia Institute at the Harvard University, said on the White House announcement. "President Biden has found the ideal



Rich Verma

attorney and leading India practitioner at Paul Hastings LLP and expert at the Lakshmi Mittal South

individual to serve as the Deputy Secretary of State. Rich's long-standing track record of dedicated public

service, principled leadership on global issues, and fierce belief in the United States renders him the ideal nominee. The President could not have named a better nominee," Desai said. Verma earned a B.S. at Lehigh University, a J.D. cum laude at American University, and LL.M. with distinction at Georgetown University Law Center, and a Ph.D. at Georgetown University. He is the recipient of numerous awards and decorations, including the Distinguished Service Medal from the Department of State, the International Affairs Fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations and the Meritorious Service Medal from the United States Air Force. He was appointed to the President's Intelligence

Advisory Board and is a former member of the Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism Commission. He serves as a trustee of The Ford Foundation, and is on numerous other boards, including the National Endowment for Democracy and Lehigh University. Desai said Verma continues to be a source of profound pride for the Indian American community and global diaspora. "His entire public service career has been one first. By becoming the highest-ranking Indian American in the US government if confirmed, his latest nomination to serve as the chief operating officer of the State Department is no exception. He is an inspiration through example," Desai said. (PTI)

"JAGRITI" AN INITIATIVE OF N&M ANDAMAN DISTRICT POLICE ON "POCSO ACT, DRUG ABUSE

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ "Jagriti" an awareness programme on the POCSO Act, Drug Abuse with Special focus on Carrier Guidance to school students of class IX to XII was organized on 23/12/2022 by North and Middle Andaman District Police in association with Sub-Divisional Legal Service Committee, N&M Andaman at school auditorium of VKZPV Diglipur. Hon'ble Additional District & Sessions Judge, Mayabunder Shri Jimut Bahan Biswas was the Chief Guest and Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal, Superintendent of Police, N&MA District was the guest of honour. A gathering of 450 people constituting school students of VKZPV Diglipur, Govt. Senior Secondary School, Kishori Nagar, Diglipur & Subash Gram, Pradhans&



PRI members, Anganwadi workers & Helpers, Police officials, representative of Medical field, Media persons and general public attended the awareness programme. Shri Lakshya Pandey, DANIPS, SDPO, Diglipur, Shri. R.P Pandey, Deputy Education Officer, Diglipur and Shri Mahadev Gain, UP-Adhykash, N&MA and Zila Parishad Member of Subash Gram and R.K Gram constituency joined to make the programme successful. Hon'ble Additional District & Sessions Judge Shri Jimut Bahan Biswas emphasized on POCSO Act especially the safeguards of victim. Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal, IPS, Superintendent of Police (D), Mayabunder highlighted on Carrier Guidance, drug abuse and POCSO Act. Hon'ble Additional District & Sessions Judge, Mayabunder Shri Jimut Bahan Biswas & Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal, IPS, Superintendent of Police (D), Mayabunder interacted an open interaction session with students, parents, PRIs and local media and addressed their question & issues. The School students of Govt. Senior Secondary School Kishori Nagar & Diglipur presented two "Nukkad Natak" on the theme of Drug Abuse & POCSO Act. Ms. Geetanjali Khandelwal, IPS, Superintendent of Police (D), Mayabunder distributed presents & certificates to the students who performed Nukkad Natak & to the teachers to encourage them to come forward for a societal course. 04 local fishermen who helped police in various activities were also felicitated by SP.

At the concluding session Shri. Manimohan Hira, Principal of VKZPV Diglipur & PRI members expressed their gratitude to District Police for organizing such programme for the motivation and guidance to students. The program concluded with national anthem.

GREETINGS

On this joyous occasion of Christmas, I extend my heartiest greetings to the people of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Let us be part of the efforts to build an exploitation-free new social order dreamt of by Lord Jesus. (D. Ayyappan) Secretary CPI (M) A & N State Organizing Committee Cell: 9434260430



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Shri Vishal Jolly National Executive Member BJP & Former State President BJP-ANI extended his warm wishes and heartfelt greetings to fellow islanders, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters on the occasion of Christmas. In a message Shri Jolly said, "On this joyous occasion, let us resolve to build a society that is based on the values". May Lord Jesus Christ shower his blessings on us and enrich our lives with peace, joy & wisdom," he wished.

Hearing of sub-division cases done in virtual mode by DC, N&M Andaman

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ For the ease of the general public, the hearing of sub-division cases is being done only through virtual mode by the Deputy Commissioner, North & Middle Andaman. As part of this, a total of 15 sub-division cases were disposed of yesterday.

Meanwhile, the general public have been urged to contact through phone number- 03192-262999 or email - nmadc.and@gmail.com to share their grievance, if any, to District Office, North & Middle Andaman.

GREETINGS

On the joyous occasion of 'Christmas', I convey my warmest greetings and best wishes to all the people of A&N Islands.

The festival of Christmas is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth to save humanity. Lord Jesus, an apostle of peace and non-violence, showed humanity the path of salvation through love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. This occasion provides us a renewed inspiration from Christ's universal message to assimilate love, peace and forgiveness in our lives while deepening the religious harmony and brotherhood.

I appeal to all the Islanders to celebrate this occasion while adhering to COVID appropriate behavior.

On this auspicious and holy occasion, I wish that this festival brings happiness, peace, prosperity and religious harmony among the Islanders and our Islands continue to progress ahead with peace and prosperity. (Admiral D K Joshi) PVSM, AVSM, YSM, NM, VSM (Retd.) Lt Governor, A&N Islands & Vice Chairman, Islands Development Agency

MV SwarajDweep to arrive today

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ The vessel M.V. SwarajDweep sailed from Vizag is expected to arrive at Port Blair on 26th December 2022, at 1400 Hrs. She has 743 passengers on board. On arrival the vessel will be berthed at Haddo Wharf and Passengers will be disembarked immediately.

Supreme Court Judge to visit ANI

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ Hon'ble Justice Ajay Rastogi, Judge Supreme Court of India will be arriving on a 6-day visit to these Islands on Dec. 25, 2022. During his stay here, the Hon'ble Justice Ajay Rastogi will be visiting places of tourist as well as historical importance in Isles. On completion of the tour, the Judge Supreme Court of India will leave for the mainland on Dec. 31.

Additional chances accorded to appear for examination

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ The exam registration for 2018-19 series & previous batches and 27 to 14T series students have been accorded additional chances to appear for examination in Dec 2022 / Jan 2023 only of ECE, Civil and CSE branches is being carried out by respective Department and shall be completed by 28/12/2022.

As regards the exam registration for other students such as Regular and Lateral Entry for 2nd to 4th year students, it will be intimated on communication from Pondicherry University.

Pradhan, GP Mithakhari distributes nutritional kit to TB patients

PORT BLAIR, DEC 23/--/ Mr. Mohd Safiq Pradhan, GP Mithakhari joined as Ni-Kshay Mitra under



*Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan and distributed monthly nutritional kit to the three TB patients under Gram Panchayat Mithakhari.

He also took a pledge to help the person with TB under Gram Panchayat Mithakhari.

Allotment of food/ general stalls in ITF

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24/--/ Applications have been invited from interested entrepreneurs/firms/ individuals for allotment of Food/General stalls during Island Tourism Festival-2022-23 which is likely to be held from 14 to 23 January, 2023 for 10 days at ITF ground. The stall will be allotted to the selected applicants on lottery system as per the terms and condition laid down in the application form. The application form along with the terms and conditions for allotment of stalls may be obtained from the Sr. Investigator, Planning Section of the Directorate of IP&T on payment of Rs.100/- . Any query with regard to the same, one may contact Shri Mohammad Saheed, SI, Planning, DIFT, 7063958686, Shri Farooq Ahmed, Receptionist, 9474209236 & Shri Chander Rao, HK Asst. Manager. 9434282324 during office hours.

The details of the schedule are as under:-

Sl.No.	Programme	Tentative dates
1	Distribution of application form Rs.100/-	
2	Last date of submission of filled application form to the Tourism department (Operational Unit) 29/12/2022	
3	Allotment of stall by the committee	02/01/2023
4	Issue of allotment letter	03/01/2023

Love Children Home celebrate Christmas

PORT BLAIR, DEC 23/--/ On the joyous occasion of Christmas, the inmates of Love Children's Home celebrated Christmas through various cultural programmes. Mr. T S G Bhasker, Chairman, Campaign Committee, ANTCC, was the chief guest who emphasized the need to care for the society and show humanitarian love to the needy and socially



downtrodden. Rev. Dr. T. Raja Wilson, Chairman of Love Children Home gave a Christmas message encouraging the inmates that Christmas is a festival of great joy and hope for all. Mr. Gaurav Banerjee, SHO Humfrigunj was the guest of honor. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks from Dr. Sheeba Wilson who is the managing Trustee of LCH.

Pak central bank criticises Shehbaz Sharif govt's policy of prioritising growth over price, financial stability

ISLAMABAD, DEC 24 /--/ Pakistan's central bank has criticised the cash-strapped Shehbaz Sharif government for prioritising growth at the expense of price and financial stability.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in its annual report issued recently said international experience has repeatedly shown the countries that prioritise growth at the expense of price and financial stability are not able to sustain growth and face repeated boom-bust cycles, rapid economic growth followed by a financial crisis, the Dawn News reported. (PTI)

UK PM thanks diplomats, workers with surprise Christmas calls

LONDON, DEC 24 /--/ British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak surprised diplomats, military personnel, charity workers and other public servants working across the world this Christmas by calling them to personally thank them for their sacrifice and dedication in an "extraordinary" year.

Downing Street said the British Indian leader's calls on Friday to diplomats included one to Pakistan to Sherwan Asif, who has worked for the British High Commission in Islamabad for more than 12 years. He was at the forefront of the UK's response to the devastating floods that ravaged the country in June and Sherwan identified areas in critical need and ensured UK's funding reached the most vulnerable, Downing Street said. "Whether you are working in Mogadishu or Milton Keynes this Christmas, I want you to know that I am personally grateful for your sacrifice," said Sunak. "This year has been an extraordinary year for so many reasons, but most of all, it's been a year in which the true spirit and resilience of the United Kingdom has been on the show, from the support given to our Ukrainian friends, to the work being done to ensure essential aid reaches the most vulnerable overseas," he said. "And closer to home, those who have checked on friends and neighbours, volunteers, public servants and essential service staff all working over Christmas I am truly humbled by your dedication and I know your selflessness this festive season will spread cheer across the country," he added. Alongside Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Philip Barton and First Sea Lord Admiral Ben Key, Sunak made the calls to diplomats in Somalia and Ukraine, as well as a Royal Navy ship sailing in Antarctica.

In the UK, Sunak surprised Chris Mitchell who runs Smart Play, an award-winning government-funded Holiday Activities and Food programme in London. Sunak heard first-hand how Mitchell and his team are supporting vulnerable children across the area with fun activities and nutritious meals throughout the school holidays. Speaking to diplomat Nic Guffog, who is based in Mogadishu, Somalia, the UK prime minister heard how the foreign office staffer had been using her breather breaks and flights from the UK back to Somalia to bring in Christmas decorations for the UK's diplomatic compound in Mogadishu. She told Sunak how staff in Mogadishu were living in containers under the threat of terror attacks, and would spend Christmas supporting efforts to counter the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and helping the Somali government deal with the hunger crisis facing the country. (PTI)

CITU Union Wins 1/30th Pay Plus DA Case-Thousands of Workers to get Benefits

PORT BLAIR, DEC 24 /--/ In a great relief to thousands of daily rated mazdoors working in various departments under the Andaman & Nicobar Administration, the Division Bench of the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court sitting Circuit at Port Blair while disposing of the Appeal filed by the Govt. of India & A & N Administration has directed the Administration shall be granted the benefit of the 1/30th of pay plus DA irrespective of the sanctioned posts/ vacant posts.

The Government of India, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions (Department of Personnel & Training) vide their OM No. 49014/2/86-Estt © dated 7th June, 1988, among other things, had directed all the Ministries and departments under it that the casual workers be paid 1/30th of the pay at the minimum of the relevant pay scale plus DA. The Andaman & Nicobar Administration on receipt the said OM from Govt of India had forwarded the same to all the departments under it with the directions to implement it immediately. However, when the workers claimed this benefit, in individual cases, the Administration opposed to grant the benefit and the litigation went upto Hon'ble Supreme Court which rejected the contention of the Administration/ Govt. of India. The



matter was taken up with the A & N Administration and Govt. of India several times by the CITU A& N State Committee and Andaman Sarvajanik Nirman Vibhag Mazdoor Sangh (ASNVMs), affiliated to CITU urging them to implement the 1988 OM of the Govt of India but no favourable decision was taken on the issue.

The ASNVMs had conducted a series of agitation including strike throughout the islands from 2014 onwards with the demand for grant of 1/30th of pay plus DA to all the DRMs working in APWD. But the BJP government at the centre and A & N Administration did not consider the demand of the workers to implement the Govt. of India's order of 1988.

However, in 2017, the A & N Administration came with a scheme for grant of 1/30th of pay plus DA to the DRMs and accordingly an Office Memorandum bearing No. 289 dated 22nd September, 2017 was issued by the Additional Secretary (Labour)-cum-Labour Commissioner. In this OM, the benefit was sought to be granted only from the date of issue of the OM i.e. from 22nd September, 2017. It was also laid down in the said OM of 22nd September, 2017 that the benefit of 1/30th of pay plus DA will be granted to DRMs against the vacant sanctioned posts. Accordingly, a large number of DRMs of APWD were extended with the benefit of 1/30th of pay plus DA while more than half of the workers were denied of the benefit.

In 2018, the Andaman Sarvajanik Nirman Vibhag Mazdoor Sangh (ASNVMs), affiliated to CITU, had filed a Writ Petition before the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court, Circuit Bench at Port Blair, praying for direction to the Govt. of India/ A & N Administration to extend 1/30th of pay plus DA benefit to all the daily rated, mazdoors working under the APWD. The Govt. of India/ A & N Administration vehemently opposed the prayer of the Union. However, on 13th December, 2019, the Circuit Bench of the Hon'ble High Court had directed the Administration and Govt. of India to extend the financial benefit of 1/30th of pay plus DA Scheme to all the DRM workers from the date of their initial appointment as per the Govt. of India's order of 1988 irrespective of the stipulation of sanctioned/ vacant posts, etc.

Challenging the High Court judgement of 13th December, 2019, the Govt. of India & A & N Administration filed an Appeal before the Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court in February, 2020. The Division Bench of the Hon'ble High Court on 18th November, 2021 had imposed a cost of Rs. 51,000/- on the A & N Administration for dilatory tactics adopted by the Administration which was paid to the Union by the Administration promptly. Again, the Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta on 2nd December, 2022 has imposed a cost of Rs. 1.25 lakh on the A & N Administration to be paid to the CITU-affiliated Andaman Sarvajanik Nirman Vibhag Mazdoor Singh (ASNVMs) within one week for the dilatory tactics adopted by the Govt of India and A & N Administration in pursuing the Appeal filed by them. The cost of Rs. 1.25 lakh was paid to the Union within the period as directed by the Hon'ble High Court.

While modifying the order of the single Judge of the Hon'ble High Court dated 13th December, 2019, the Division Bench said that the benefits to the DRMs under the circular dated 22nd September, 2017 will accrue only with effect from the date of circular (OM) and not before that. The Division Bench has also upheld the order of the Single Judge that no distinction should be made between the DRMs working against the sanctioned posts and DRMs casually engaged by the State. The Hon'ble High Court has directed that the benefits be paid to all the DRMs under the Administration within a period of two months from date.

The Hon'ble High Court has also ordered that the Circular and process of framing of Scheme for regularization and every other benefit under the 1988 OM of Govt of India would mandatorily and positively be brought into fore within the next three months.

The BJP-led central government with a view to deny the benefit of 1/30th of pay plus DA to the poor workers has been engaging the Additional Solicitor General of India to defend this case. However, the Union was represented by Ld. Advocate Shri Gopala Binu Kumar of Port Blair.

GREETINGS

On the joyous occasion of Christmas, I extend my heartiest greetings and best wishes to all Islanders and wish everyone a merry Christmas.

Christmas is a festival of brotherhood and sharing happiness which gives a message to follow the ideals of sacrifice, love, harmony, mercy & peace.

I wish Christmas to be celebrated by all in its true form and spirit.

As we celebrate Christmas, we must emulate Jesus Christ's eternal message of love and forgiveness by extending a helping hand to everyone.

Kuldeep Rai Sharma,
Member of Parliament,
A & N Islands

Gandhi family walks together in Bharat Jodo Yatra in Delhi

Rahul accuses BJP of using communal hatred as weapon to divert people's attention



Congress workers and supporters in large number join the Bharat Jodo Yatra to walk alongwith Rahul Gandhi and other members of the Gandhi family, in New Delhi on Saturday

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 --/ The Gandhi family walked together in the Bharat Jodo Yatra on Saturday as former party president Sonia Gandhi, her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren joined Rahul Gandhi in the march in the national capital.

Gandhi and her family members walked with Rahul Gandhi for a short distance till the yatra halted for the morning break at the Ashram Chowk in Delhi. This is the second time Gandhi, also Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson, joined the yatra that began in September from Kanyakumari. She had earlier taken part in the march in October when it was in Mandya in Karnataka. This is the first time the entire family has walked in the Bharat Jodo Yatra together. The former Congress president walked with Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Robert Vadra and her grandchildren and waved to the public waiting along the roads to see the family. "The love that I have received from her, I am sharing the same with the country," Rahul tweeted in Hindi with a picture of a warm hug with his mother. The Congress also shared the same picture. The yatra entered Delhi from Haryana Saturday morning and was accorded a warm welcome at the Badarpur border by party leaders and workers. Traffic snarls were reported from parts of Delhi as the march made its way through the national capital. The yatra will halt near the Red Fort in the evening. Rahul on Saturday

accused the BJP on Saturday of using communal hatred as a weapon and spreading it across the country to divert the attention of people from real issues. Addressing a big rally outside the Red Fort as the Congress's "Bharat Jodo Yatra" entered the national capital, Gandhi said he has not seen violence or hatred anywhere in the country while walking hundreds of kilometres from Kanyakumari to Delhi, but he sees it being spread on television all the time at the behest of the powers controlling the media. The former Congress president also alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spent thousands of crores of rupees to destroy his image, but he has shown the truth to the country in just a month. The Congress leader also thanked people for the love and support showered on him so far during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, which entered its 108th day on Saturday, and said after his request made in Rajasthan, people have opened lakhs of shops to spread love across the country. Hatred in the name of Hindu-Muslim is being spread through television 24x7 to divert the attention of people from the real issues, he alleged, stressing that this is the truth. "After doing Hindu-Muslim 24 hours, they will hand over your money and sell all your ports, airports, roads and other assets to their crony friends.... They try to divert your attention all the time," he said. "This is not a

Narendra Modi government, it is the Ambani-Adani government," Rahul alleged. The Congress leader said he has traversed across the country, "but I have not seen violence, hatred anywhere. But I see it on television all the time." "Thousands of crores are being given to big industrialists but not to common people. These are not policies, but weapons to destroy small businessmen, traders, farmers," he said. Rahul said the Bharat Jodo Yatra aims at uniting India and will spread awareness against price rise, unemployment, communal hatred and violence.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Gandhi were present during his speech outside the Red Fort. Congress General secretary organisation KC Venugopal said we have received an amazing response from the people of Delhi who joined the yatra, braving the early morning chill. The BJP is very much about people's positive response towards this Yatra, he said. "The Gandhi family is the congress family, we are all one family. They are residing in Delhi when the Yatra is here, so they joined the Yatra. It is a very happy moment for all of us," he told PTI. Jharkhand Congress chief Rajesh Thakur said lakhs of people have joined the Bharat Jodo Yatra. The BJP tried to stop it, citing Covid-19, but they failed, he said. "Today, the entire Gandhi family joined the Yatra. It's a proud moment for us that we all are walking together," he added. (PTI)

Parts of Delhi witness huge traffic snarls as Bharat Jodo Yatra enters city

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 --/ Traffic was affected in parts of Delhi on Saturday as the Congress' "Bharat Jodo Yatra", led by party leader Rahul Gandhi, entered the city.

Busy road stretches, such as the National Highway 24 at Ghazipur, the ITO intersection and the Ashram chowk, witnessed massive traffic snarls because of the foot march that started from Kanyakumari and entered its 108th day on Saturday. Vehicular movement was affected in southeast Delhi in the morning hours as the yatri marched into the city, and subsequently, near the India Gate as they resumed their walk after a break in the afternoon. The traffic police had issued an advisory on Friday, cautioning commuters about the routes that were likely to be affected by the yatra. The yatra made its morning halt at the Ashram chowk at 11 am. It resumed at 1 pm and headed towards the Red Fort via Mathura Road, India Gate and ITO. Police put up signboards, requesting the yatri to march on the left side of the road. Vehicles were seen moving at a slow pace due to the congestion during the morning phase of the yatra. Eager to catch a glimpse of Rahul, a large number of people thronged the roads, tried to occupy the pavements and dividers or wherever they found space. "It took us an hour and a half to reach Nizamuddin from Ashram," said Hemant, an autorickshaw driver who was ferrying passengers to the New Delhi railway station. Usually it takes about 25 minutes to cover the distance, he said. Another commuter, Amit, said he might miss his train to Ahmedabad. "You want to take out a yatra, do it, but think of the traffic and the problems people face," he said. Near the Nizamuddin dargah, many passengers were seen carrying their luggage and walking. One of the commuters, Suman, said no autorickshaw was ready to take the route along which the yatra was proceeding. "What they tell us is that there are traffic snarls because of the Bharat Jodo Yatra and they will not take that route," he said.



MOTHER WITH SON: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with his mother and former Congress President Sonia Gandhi, who joined the Bharat Jodo Yatra today, near Red Fort on Saturday

Rajkumar, who had to drop his sister at her office, got stuck in the traffic. "It took us almost two hours to reach Jangpura from Badarpur due to the yatra. There was no proper traffic management," he said. Supriya was out to visit the dargah but decided to go back after seeing the traffic and the crowd. "It is like madness here," she said. Akshay Singh, who was travelling from Civil Lines to Bhogal, said the Pragati Maidan tunnel was closed due to which traffic was affected. "Going towards Bhogal, the first issue was the Pragati Maidan tunnel which was closed. Zakir Hussain Marg, near Nizamuddin, also witnessed a huge traffic snarl due to which I wasted more than half an hour," he said. Mohammad Ashraf, who was going towards the Jama Masjid, said, "There was heavy traffic on Ring Road, near Raighat, on the

carriageway going towards Kashmere Gate. There were massive traffic snarls near the Red Fort. I am trying to find a way to reach home," he said. The traffic advisory had said the yatra will reach the Jai Dev Ashram, near the Ashram chowk, around 10.30 am and will end at the Red Fort around 4.30 pm.

A large number of pedestrians and vehicles were expected to join the march at various points along its route, it had said. The yatra, which started from Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu on September 7, has covered nine states so far and is scheduled to culminate in Jammu and Kashmir by the end of January. It has covered around 3,000 kilometres in 46 districts across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. (PTI)

PM will lead heads of superpower nations during G-20 summit: Union Minister

JALNA, DEC 24 --/ Union minister Rashaheb Danve has said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead leaders of superpower nations during the G-20 summit scheduled to be held in India in 2023. The summit is a great opportunity for India to show leadership before superpower nations, the Union minister for railways coal and mines said while speaking at the concluding function of Maha Expo 2023 on Friday. "We have held 200 meetings in different cities in preparation for the summit. Guests will experience Indian culture and visit historical places," Danve said. The Prime Minister will lead from the front, while hosting leaders from powerful nations, including the US, China, Russia,

France, UK, France and Germany, he said. The next G20 Leaders' Summit at the level of heads of states or governments is scheduled to be held on September 9 and 10 next year in New Delhi. Speaking about the rise in cases of Covid-19 in China, Danve said India has registered a low death toll compared to other countries during the pandemic and vaccination and booster doses will succeed in controlling the outbreak. Danve further said the dry port, logistics park and development of railways in Jalna and Aurangabad will aid industries in the region. Maha Expo 2023, a three-day exhibition of trade and industrial products was organised by Rotary Club of Jalna and Rotary Midtown Jalna. (PTI)



COVID CAUTION: Children wearing face mask attend morning assembly at their school in Moradabad, amid surge in Covid cases in several countries

UIDAI urges Aadhaar holders to update documents submitted 10 years ago

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 --/ The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has urged Aadhaar holders who were issued the unique identity 10 years back and who have never updated their records, to revise their information in its database.

Aadhaar holders can update their unique ID records by uploading supportive documents (proof of identity and proof of address) either online through myAadhaar portal or offline by visiting the nearest Aadhaar centre, UIDAI said in statement. "Residents who had got their Aadhaar issued 10 years back, and have never updated after that in these years, such

Aadhaar number holders are encouraged to get their documents updated," the statement said. During the past decade, Aadhaar number has emerged as a universally accepted proof of identity of residents in India. More than 1,100 government schemes and programs, including 319 run by the central government, use Aadhaar based identification for delivery of services. Besides, many financial institutions like banks and NBFCs use Aadhaar to authenticate and onboard customers seamlessly. "It is in the interest of the residents to keep their Aadhaars updated with current proof of identity and proof of address," it

added. The UIDAI said keeping the documents updated helps in ease of living, better service delivery, and enables accurate authentication. "UIDAI has always encouraged residents to keep their documents updated, and the Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) (Tenth Amendment) Regulations 2022 notified on November 09, 2022 was another step in that direction. "The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) once again urges and encourages residents to update their documents for continued accuracy of information in the Aadhaar database," the statement said. (PTI)

At a glance

Prez greets fellow citizens on X-Mas eve on X-Mas eve

NEW DELHI : President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday greeted fellow citizens on the eve of Christmas and said the festival inspires us to treat each other with love and kindness. In a message, the President said this festival is a symbol of peace and brotherhood for the entire mankind. "On this day, we remember the message of compassion and sacrifice given by Jesus Christ. The festival of Christmas inspires us to treat each other with love and kindness. Let us take a pledge to adopt the divine teachings of Jesus Christ in our lives," Murmu said. The President said, "I extend my heartiest greetings to all the countrymen, especially Christian brothers and sisters on the festival of Christmas". (PTI)

Rajasthan paper leak

JAIAPUR: The general knowledge test for teachers recruitment in Rajasthan was cancelled on Saturday after the question paper was allegedly leaked just hours before the commencement of the exam, and 44 people have been arrested. The paper leak gang had allegedly taken Rs 10 lakh from each candidate for illegally providing them the questionnaire for the teachers' recruitment test conducted by the Rajasthan Public Service Commission (RPSC), police said, adding the arrested included the alleged mastermind of the scam and 37 students. "Today, on December 24, from 9 to 11 am, the general knowledge test for teacher recruitment has been cancelled as a precaution so that no injustice is done to the hardworking youths," chief minister Ashok Gehlot tweeted. (PTI)

10th consecutive term for Hasina

DHAKA: BANGLADESH'S ruling Awami League on Saturday re-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as the party chief for the 10th consecutive term and Obaidul Quader as general secretary amid preparedness for general elections in early 2024. The 73-year-old party, which steered the country's 1971 liberation war against Pakistan, re-elected its top leadership in a closed-door session. Nearly 7,000 councilors from across Bangladesh joined the Awami League's 22nd national council at an auditorium in central Dhaka following an open rally at adjacent Suhrawardy Udyan. (PTI)

Taliban imposes ban on employment of women

KABUL: The Taliban government in Afghanistan on Saturday ordered all foreign and domestic non-governmental groups to suspend employing women. The order came in a letter from economy minister Qari Din Mohammed Hanif, which said that any NGO found not complying with the order will have their operating license revoked in Afghanistan. The contents of the letter were confirmed to The Associated Press on Saturday by ministry spokesman, Abdul Rahman Habib. (AP)

Guv talks to Left students after facing protests at JU convocation

KOLKATA, DEC 24 --/ West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose faced protests by Left students of Jadavpur University, of which he is the Chancellor, on Saturday when he went to attend the convocation but he pacified the agitators by speaking to them. As Bose's car went near the convocation venue, SFI and Faculty of Engineering and Technology Students' Union (FETSU) members of the university waved placards and raised slogans demanding an early students union election, which is overdue for over three years. Bose went inside the marquee set up for the programme and took his chair on the podium as sloganeering continued outside. But he soon sent word to the agitating students that he would like to meet them. A delegation of SFI and FETSU were then closeted with the governor. FETSU president Aritra Majumder later said: "We have nothing against the Governor. We only wanted to convey our long-standing demand to hold students' union polls which the JU authorities are delaying for no reason. We tried to intimate him about our democratic rights not being granted and he seemed to be sympathetic to our issue."



Majumder said Bose invited the students to the Raj Bhavan to discuss their demands in future if they are dissatisfied. The governor also told them that he had taken over recently and is yet to get the full grasp of their problems. "Let me know things first. I will certainly look into it," an SFI leader said quoting Bose. The Governor told reporters: "If there is a problem there can be ways to solve it. We will find the ways." Jadavpur University Teachers Association office bearer Partha Pratim Biswas said

while the teachers' body supported the demand of the students, "we do not endorse choosing a solemn occasion like the convocation for registering protests even if that is done out of desperation." "The Governor subsequently met the students. The agitation could have therefore been avoided. We condemn the form of protest and not the issue," Biswas told PTI. Bose in his welcome

address said he was happy to be in JU which occupies the fourth best spot among Indian universities. "I am proud to be at a place where 42 scientists have got international laurels for their research work. I am happy to be

at the annual convocation of the JU," he said. Addressing the students as new generation leaders of India who will lead the country, Bose said they will be the fulcrum of the Indian knowledge society. "Make changes in society, in fields of research and education," the Governor added. While speaking at the convocation, Jadavpur University Vice-Chancellor Surajam Das said the share of UGC share in the institute's total funds in 2021-22 is only 2.46 per cent while that of the state government is 94.24 per cent. He said the funds provided by the UGC and the West Bengal government have decreased and risen respectively, without divulging details. Of the Rs 31,468 crore fund received by JU for the year 2021-22, the state has a share of Rs 29,656.82 crore while it got Rs 773.56 crore from UGC. "The decline of funding from the UGC and other federal bodies is alarming," he said. Thanking the Mamata Banerjee government, Das said it had also facilitated an additional grant of Rs six crore for the university. (PTI)

Warner fires shot at Cricket Australia over leadership appeal

MELBOURNE, DEC 24 /-- / Veteran David Warner accused Cricket Australia Saturday of a lack of support in his appeal against a lifetime leadership ban and revealed he struggled



mentally during the recent series against the West Indies.

The dynamic opener and former Test vice-captain was banned from any leadership role over his part in the Cape Town ball tampering affair in 2018. He launched a bid to overturn the sanction in February but gave up the fight on the eve of the second Test against the West Indies in Adelaide this month. Warner was furious that the process had dragged on so long and that an independent review panel wanted to make the hearing public, which he said would be traumatic for his young family. The 36-year-old, who will play his 100th Test in the Boxing Day clash against South Africa in Melbourne, said it left him struggling mentally leading into the first Test against the Caribbean team in Perth, where he scored 5 and 48.

"My mental health probably wasn't where I needed to be at, to be 100 percent -- and that was challenging at the time," he told reporters in Melbourne.

"If I had my way, we would have had that (the review) all sorted.

"From the CA point of view, I didn't really have any support," he added.

"My teammates and the staff in our team were absolutely amazing, and my family and friends, so they really got me through that period."

Warner, who was also slapped with a one-year playing suspension over the so-called "Sandpaper-gate" scandal, said he could not understand why the process had taken 11 months.

"We reached out in February, so we have no idea how it went on this far, and only CA can answer that. They'll probably give you the same thing they give everyone else -- they won't really give an answer," he said. Despite struggling mentally, Warner said he never considered pulling out of the West Indies series and insisted he was in a much better space now and determined to snap a recent run drought.

"Yeah my back's up against the wall, but it's in my DNA to keep being competitive, come out here with a smile on my face and take on whatever opposition we're going to face," said the Australian, who not scored a Test century since January 2020. (AFP)

India stare at defeat as Bangladesh spinners get into action

MIRPUR, DEC 24 /--/ Bangladesh spinners, led by their talismanic skipper Shakib Al Hasan and young Mehidy Hasan Miraz, forced Indian batters to press the panic button in a tricky chase of 145 as the visitors ended an engaging third day's play, tottering at 45 for 4 in the second Test here on Saturday.

Having dominated for the better part of two and half days, Bangladesh's lower middle-order, led by Litton Das (73 off 98 balls) and supported by Nurul Hasan Sohan (31 off 29 balls) and Taskin Ahmed (31 off 46 balls), counter-attacked to take their second innings score to 231, giving their bowlers something to defend. If India happen to lose this game, the 118 runs scored by the last four Bangladeshi pairs would haunt them as much as not using a third spinner in Kuldeep Yadav on a track that became increasingly venomous as the match progressed. If they overhaul 145, it will be their third highest successful fourth innings chase at this ground as the top three winning scores are 209, 205 and 103.

KL Rahul (2), who had a horrendous game as a skipper as well as batter, would like to forget this game in a hurry while the stodgy Cheteshwar Pujara (6) suffered his downfall because of his anxiousness to negate any turn on offer. Shubman Gill (7) had his worse day on the tour, increasing India's worry. In case of Rahul, he tentatively poked a Shakib (1/21 in 6 overs) delivery that turned enough to kiss the outside edge of his bat into the



Litton Das kept Bangladesh in the game with a battling half-century

keeper's gloves. Pujara, for the second time, came out to play the delivery from Mehidy Hasan Miraz (3/12 in 8 overs) before it could turn.

The ball hit his bat and pad before a crawling Nurul effected a smart stumping. However, the pitch was showing its true colours and there was turn and bounce with the ball skidding occasionally as well as keeping low, making batting that much more difficult. In fact, India's head coach

Rahul Dravid, with his tactic of sending night watchman Axar Patel (26 batting) with more than 15 overs left, made it clear that there was a certain sense of nervousness as to what happens if Virat Kohli (1 off 22 balls) would get dismissed in the third evening itself.

While Gill was stumped off a doosra, becoming Miraz's second victim, Kohli had no choice but to come out late in the evening as the pitch, at times, was



Mohammed Siraj reacts after dismissing Litton Das

starting to resemble a snake pit with deliveries hissing past the willow. Just like it happens on turners, the close-in fielders started applying more pressure on batters as well as umpires with Kohli needing a DRS to save himself from getting adjudged leg before to Taijul Islam.

But he was just a delivery away from getting dismissed as Miraz bowled a lovely flighted delivery drawing Kohli forward and got a classical bat-pad

dismissal for Mominul Haque standing at forward short-leg. With Kohli not inspiring highest level of confidence, Rishabh Pant, who has shown how to bat on this track, could again play the decisive role and help India manage to log home full points and prevent Bangladesh from winning their first game against India in 22 years of bilateral Test cricket.

At stumps, Axar and night watchman Jaydev Unadkat (3 batting) were at

the crease. But in the first two sessions, it was Axar Patel (3/58) along with Mohammed Siraj (2/41) and Ravichandran Ashwin (2/66) who had Bangladesh on the mat at 113 for 6 before Nurul came out and attacked the spinners in his little cameo.

At the other end, Litton was celebrating his maiden IPL contract with some lusty blows and the 60-odd run stand with Taskin during which India also dropped a few catches which proved

costly. While the Indian team management can claim that the bowlers did their job getting Bangladesh out for 227 and 231 in the two innings but they would be the first to admit that any score in excess of 120 odd on this track would always be a tricky game.

Jaydev Unadkat (1/17), the third seamer India used as they were "confused" looking at the greenish tinge, was used for only nine overs out of the 70.2 that they bowled. (PTI)

Look forward to playing under Hardik Pandya, says Little

DUBLIN, DEC 24 /--/ Pacer Josh Little, who has become the first cricketer from Ireland to land an IPL deal, termed it as an "incredible opportunity" to play in the lucrative league where he will get to work with India all-rounder Hardik Pandya and head coach



Ashish Nehra. Defending champions Gujarat Titans availed the services of the 23-year-old for Rs 4.4 crore at the IPL auction in Kochi on Friday.

The Titans, led by Hardik and coached by former India pacer Nehra, won the league in their debut season.

"I'm delighted to have been signed by the defending champions, the Gujarat Titans, and look forward to playing under Hardik Pandya within such a high quality squad," Little said in Cricket Ireland statement.

"I am also looking forward to working with coach Ashish Nehra and would like to thank the management team at the Titans for believing in me," he added. The left-arm seamer made his international debut in 2016 and has since played 22 ODIs and 53 T20Is.

"I have loved playing international cricket for Ireland - and that will always remain my priority, but to be able to learn and play in the IPL will be an incredible opportunity and thanks to Cricket Ireland for supporting me in this." Little had served as a net bowler for Chennai Super Kings last year. He had claimed a memorable hat-trick against New Zealand in Ireland's T20 World Cup loss in Adelaide earlier this year. He had dismissed skipper Kane Williamson, James Neesham and Mitchell Santner in the 19th over.

"We are delighted for Josh and wish him well in the IPL next year. Josh is a hard-working and dedicated athlete who has come up through the Irish system," Cricket Ireland's High Performance Director Richard Holdsworth said.

"He has been an essential part of the Irish set-up for several years now and we believe his development will only accelerate further through involvement in the IPL." Little has plied his trade in several franchise leagues such as England's The Hundred and Lanka Premier League. He was also picked up in the Pakistan Super League draft recently. (PTI)

Unai Emery will speak to Emiliano Martinez about World Cup celebrations

LONDON, DEC 24 /--/ Aston Villa manager Unai Emery will speak to Emiliano Martinez about the Argentina goalkeeper's controversial



World Cup celebrations when he returns to club duty with the Premier League side. Martinez made a key save to deny Randal Kolo Muani in extra-time and then denied Kingsley Coman in a penalty shootout in Qatar as Argentina beat France in a thrilling final. But he was seen making a crude gesture after winning the golden glove trophy for the best goalkeeper at the tournament. Then, during Argentina's victory parade in Buenos Aires, he was seen holding a baby doll with its face covered by a photograph of France star striker Kylian Mbappe. In the final, Mbappe scored a hat-trick as France twice fought back to take the game to a penalty shootout and then beat Martinez with the opening spot-kick.

"When you have big emotion, sometimes it is difficult to control it," Emery told reporters on Friday.

"I will speak to him next week about some celebrations. We are so



proud of him. He won the World Cup with his national team and it's amazing.

"He's coming back next week. I want him to rest now because after big emotion and hard work, he has to have some days off to rest then he'll come back to work with us."

French sports minister

Amelie Oudea-Castera, speaking earlier Friday, was scathing about Martinez's conduct.

"I find it pitiful," she said. "It's just vulgar, inappropriate, really not up to the occasion. This Emiliano Martinez is not distinguishing himself. It is rather pathetic." (AFP)

Games Notes
'One more night together': Pele's daughter shares photo with father

SAO PAULO, DEC 24 /--/ Pele's daughter posted a photo of the Brazilian football legend from his hospital bed in Sao Paulo on Friday with the caption "one more night together."

In the photo, Kely Cristina Nascimento is seen hugging her 82-year-old father, with only one side of his face visible in the image. Pele is suffering from worsening cancer as well as kidney and heart problems.

"We're still here, in the fight and in the faith. One more night together," Nascimento wrote below the photo shared on Instagram around 11:00 pm local time (Saturday 0200 GMT). On Wednesday, the Albert Einstein Hospital, where the three-time World Cup winner is staying, announced that his colon cancer was showing "progression" and he needed "more extensive care to treat kidney and heart failure."

Minutes earlier, Nascimento and Flavia Arantes, another one of Pele's daughters, had announced on Instagram that their father would spend Christmas at the hospital. Last Sunday, Nascimento had posted a photo of Arantes massaging their father's left foot as he watched the World Cup final on TV. After the match, Pele congratulated Argentine Lionel Messi for his "deserved" victory against France. During this World Cup, Pele saw Neymar equal his international goal-scoring record for the Selecao (77). Pele is considered by many to be the greatest footballer of all time and has received several messages of support since his hospitalization, including from the French star Kylian Mbappe, who called on followers to "pray for the King."

Pele was hospitalized in Sao Paulo on November 29 for what his medical team called a re-evaluation of his chemotherapy treatments, which he has been receiving since having surgery to remove a colon tumor in September 2021. (AFP)

US House passes equal pay bill in latest women's football win

WASHINGTON, DEC 24 /--/ The House has passed a bill that ensures equal compensation for U.S. women competing in international events, a piece of legislation that came out of the U.S. women's football team's long battle to be paid as much as the men. The Equal Pay for Team USA Act, passed late Wednesday, will require all athletes representing the United States in global competition to receive equal pay and benefits in their sport, regardless of gender. It covers America's 50-plus national sports and requires the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee to handle oversight. The bill had earlier passed the Senate with unanimous support. It now heads to President Joe Biden's desk. In a speech Wednesday night on the Senate floor, Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), who co-sponsored the bill with Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), called the bill a fitting way to cap off 2022, which marked the 50th anniversary of Title IX, the landmark law that promoted gender equity in sports.

"I... want to thank heroes like Megan Rapinoe and Alex Morgan, who brought that case against U.S. football," Cantwell said of the American soccer stars, whose World Cup victory in 2019 provided the backdrop for the start of the effort. "U.S. women's soccer led the charge after winning the World Cup and making it clear to everyone that women athletes deserve equal pay."

The bill stems from a federal gender discrimination lawsuit the U.S. women filed against U.S. football in 2019. Earlier this year, the women signed a new collective bargaining agreement that included identical pay structures for men and women and equitable distribution of World Cup prize money. Over the past decade, most Olympic sports in the U.S. have met USOPC standards regarding equal compensation. But there remained inequities between the men's and women's football teams — whose roles in international events, such as the World Cup, resulted in unequal pay structures and different oversight — that led legislators to seek to enshrine those standards into law.

"By sending this legislation to the president, both houses have sent a clear message that this is the standard for all national teams in all sports and it underscores the importance of working with our athletes to achieve equal pay including equalizing international prize money," U.S. football President Cindy Parlow Cone said in a statement announcing the bill's passage. (AP)

Seniors struggle a bit but Greco Roman and junior wrestlers shine in 2022

NEW DELHI, DEC 24 /--/ They were expected to dominate the field at the Commonwealth Games and they did but the tougher World Championships served a reality check for the established Indian stars even as the rise of Greco Roman wrestlers and exceptional show by the juniors made it an eventful 2022 for Indian wrestling.

India won 12 medals at Birmingham CWG, where Sakshi Malik tried to resurrect her career by winning a gold but only Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat returned with medals from the World Championships in Belgrade. The Greco Roman style, a poor cousin of free style wrestling in India, had a lot cheer with historic three-medal performance at the U-23 World Championships through Sajjan Bhanwala, Nitesh and Vikas. The juniors, both boys and girls, emerged serious medal contenders in age group competitions across globe, something which Indian wrestling witnessed for the first time. The rise of Antim Panghal, who became U-20 world champion in Sofia, is very heartening as she could be India's best bet in 53kg when Vinesh Phogat would not be around. Ravi Dahiya became an overnight star after his Olympic

silver in 2021 but he remained a bit subdued this year, though he began by winning a gold and a silver on the circuit and later added a gold to his kitty at the Asian Championships. At the start of the season, he competed in the 61kg as he preferred not to go through the energy-sapping and painful process of weight cut. After an expected gold at CWG, crashing out of the Worlds was a big shock not for Ravi himself but his legion of fans, given his tremendous grip in the 57kg competition.

Despite possessing exceptional strength, stamina, technique which combines well with his big heart for fight, Ravi could not win a medal at the big stage. Interestingly, this year, he trained with Indian coaches at Chhatrasal stadium and also during the national camp in Sonapat after WFI decided not to have foreign coaches for the country's elite wrestlers. While Ravi struggled, Aman Sehrawat made a steady progress in Ravi's 57kg category in 2022. He became U-23 world champion after winning a gold at the Bolat Turlykhanov Cup in Almaty. Ravi will have to be at his best in 2023 in which berth for 2024 Paris Olympics will be at stake. Aman, who also trains at Chhatrasal



stadium, will pose a serious threat to Ravi in 57kg. Interesting battle days are ahead for many established names with many options coming up across weight categories. Sarita Mor, who won a Worlds bronze in 2021 in women's 57kg, has already decided that she will compete in this Olympic weight category as she will try to qualify for the Paris Games. It

means that Anshu Malik, who rose through the junior ranks and also competed at the Tokyo Games, will not have an easy season ahead.

Elbow and knee issues kept her silent in 2022 but the woman from Nidani is a true fighter and should be ready for next season in a better way. Bajrang Punia remains India's best in 65kg

category till now as no wrestler has come close to pose a serious threat to his place in this weight class. He struggled with a mental block this year but overcame it before closing the season with a bronze at the Worlds. His defence has got slightly better but his attacking game still requires a lot of improvement. Since her shock medal-less show in Tokyo, Vinesh Phogat has looked a pale shadow of her usual dominating self. One of the most talented and powerful woman wrestlers India has seen, it was heart-breaking to see her struggle. Her run-in with the establishment in 2021 and the absence of desired results in the follow up has left her with a lot of question marks. It was good that she won a gold at the CWG where competition was weak and she took that confidence to win a bronze at the Worlds. She too is a true fighter and hopefully, with right people around her, she can make a turnaround in 2023 which will be crucial for her, keeping in mind the Paris Games.

She is too good a wrestler to lose for trivial issues. Every possible help should be extended to her so that she regains confidence since if there is one woman wrestler who can bring that elusive Olympic gold, it is Vinesh. (PTI)

Christmas & New Year celebrations at Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata

The holiday spirit is set in the winter season with the fervor of Christmas and New Year. Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata is all set to embrace the commencement of the prosperous year with a plethora of themed parties and other offerings starting 24th December, 2022. Kava, the all-day-dining restaurant will offer a seasonally inspired menu for the perfect festive feast which will showcase, 'French onion soup with parmesan croutons', 'Murghkalami kebab', 'Lamb galouti kebab', to name a few. The city's epicureans can treat their taste buds to an eclectic and delectable feast which will include dishes like 'Roasted pork belly with barbecue sauce', 'Grilled fish with lemon butter sauce', 'Paneernazaqut', 'Aloogobiadraki' along with the 'Chaat station' and 'Live Pasta Station'. On the 25th of December, the Christmas extravaganza brunch will include mouth-watering gourmet cuisines like 'Seafood Bouillabaisse', 'Tomato Caprese with avocado', 'Roasted root vegetable salad', 'Lollo Rosso, Iceberg, rocket, radicchio, romaine', 'Herb crusted baked fish', 'Chicken stroganoff', to name some. The guests can also savor on the Christmas themed desserts like 'Chocolate Yule log', 'Dark Chocolate Torte', 'Christmas Pudding (hot)' and 'Christ Stollen' along with the live counters. The extensive New Year Buffet menu at Kava and Vertex will feature an array of aromatic and wholesome cuisines like 'Ajwainimahitikka', 'Tandoori badamialoo', 'Lamb shepherd's pie', 'Butter roast chicken', 'Kachchegoshiki biryani', 'Bainganmirchkasalan', 'Lasooni dal tadka', and 'Paneergulistani'. For the food connoisseurs there will be live counters of 'Pasta' and 'Teppanyaki' along with the dessert station including 'Black forest', 'Coconut passion', and 'Praline cake'.



Festive cheer at JW Marriott Kolkata

With winter at its peak and New Year around the corner, it's that time of the year again to celebrate and soak into the festive spirit. This year the city's favourite luxury property JW Marriott Kolkata is all geared up to bring in the holiday season of Christmas and New Year with vehemence and glee on 24th, 25th, 31st December 2022 and 1st January 2023 respectively. The in-house culinary team of the property has masterfully curated a wide range of festive delicacies to tantalise the taste buds of the patrons on 24th and 25th December. Indulge in an array of national and international cuisines and menus like 'Chicken popcorn with cheesy pesto dip', 'Arancini Cheese Balls cocktail dip', 'Crisp Thin Crust Italian Pizza', 'Turkish Pide', 'Portuguese Roast Chicken with Spicy Green Sauce', 'Brazilian Seafood Stew with spices and coconut' to name a few. Additionally, guests can relish the quintessential festive spread from the live stations like 'Pasta and Risotto Station', 'Pizza Station', 'Chicken Shawarma Station' and 'Grill Stations' to name some. On New Year's Eve, the hotel brings in the spirit of revelry with piquant and flavorful delicacies, where patrons get to delve into the chef's signature dishes like, 'Drums of Heaven', 'Fish Finger', 'Lobster Bisque' and 'Chicken Shawarma with Roasted eggplant with onions and bell peppers' alongside foot tapping live band performance. For food aficionados, the hotel has crafted a diverse spread of live counters like, 'Craving Station', 'Grill Station', 'Thai Curry Station', 'Pasta and Risotto Station', 'Pizza Station' and 'Kabab Station' available on 31st December 2022 to 1st of January 2023 at JW Kitchen.

Hard Rock Cafe® Kolkata all geared up to celebrate 5 years

Hard Rock Cafe® celebrated its 50th anniversary globally this year. This year the iconic pub will complete five dazzling years in the City of Joy. The brand has scheduled events all month long to commemorate the significant anniversary. The Grooverz, Urban Monkz, Emili and Goshai Gang will put together a scintillating performance on the 15th of December'22. The Different Folks, a popular electronic and

alternative rock band will be paying a tribute to the legendary American rock band The Strokes on 16th December. Get ready to enjoy a soulful evening as Bandeh would be performing live on 17th December with his upbeat vocals and beats. Sway to the musical beats of Adil Amber on 20th December as he will make the anniversary night an evening to remember as he takes over the stage.

Secret Santa gift from Tynimo

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and if you're still contemplating what to get your family and friends, we have some last-minute gifting suggestions to give. Tynimo's selection of products spans over 15 categories, including toys, bags and wallets, home decor, hair accessories, fashion jewellery, travel series, seasonal products like umbrellas and caps, footwear and socks, personal care products, digital accessories, sports and fitness, stationary and Indian handicrafts. The products are sustainably sourced and reasonably priced. Tynimo also offers a range of winter accessories elegantly designed and trendy at the same time. Tynimo's budget friendly gift hampers start at just Rs.799/- With its hampers ranging between Rs.799 - Rs.1999, your loved ones are sure to have a merrier Christmas. What: Christmas gifting guide Price: The current product line is ranged between Rs. 50 to Rs. 3,500. Website: <https://www.tynimo.com/en/>.



Sony TV's 'Kaun Banega Crorepati-14' 'KBC Juniors'

Sony Entertainment Television's knowledge-based game show 'Kaun Banega Crorepati- Season 14' welcomed Prapti Sharma from the City of Joy, Kolkata, West Bengal for 'KBC Juniors'. The wunderkind played an amazing game, moving on to greater prize amounts with her sharp wit, and amazing host Amitabh Bachchan. The host was quite enamoured by the wizkid, especially after talking to her about the game of 'Rock, Paper and Scissors' that the contestant would profess she is a champion of. After a question regarding the game of 'Rock, Paper and Scissors', little Prapti professed that she is a champion of the game. MrBachchan would then asked Prapti about the game as he only knows about one game from his childhood, snake and ladder: Prapti then showed the host how to play the game, creating more confusion for Big B. The only way the chaos would be resolved is if he could see a live example of the game. Prapti and one contestant from FFF played the game in front of the host. Once he learned the game, he indulged in playing the game with Prapti, much to the amusement of the audience. According to a source close to the set, the host talked to the audience and told them about the game he used to play, "MrBachchan told the audience that he and his friends used to hold hands and play the game, "AatiPaatiSaiyankiJaati". The one who was chosen had to go run and get the leaf of that tree while the others would hide. The chosen one would then tear the leaf off the plant and come and search for us. If it was "aatipaatikeleykapaati" then the chosen would have to go search



for a banana leaf. He said he does not understand "Rock, Paper and Scissors".



Christmas & New Year: The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat

Christmas and New Year in the city of joy is always a magnificent affair. Calcuttans flood the streets of the city to experience the astonishing spirit of the season. The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat has masterfully crafted a distinct and unique menu for brunch and dinner on 24th, 25th, 31st December 2022 and 1st January 2023 respectively. 'Seasonal Taste' and 'Nori', will include a spectacular sojourn of cuisines for the grandiose Yuletide Dinner

on 24th December, 2022 and Christmas Brunch on 25th December 2022. Patrons can delve into an assortment of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, like, 'Wonton Soup', 'PayaShorba', 'Teriyaki Chicken Wings', 'Jalapeno and Cheese Poppers', 'Roast Turkey, Vegetable Tart' to name a few. Guests can also choose from a wide range of 'Live' and 'Chaat Counters' including, 'Wasabi Scented Mala Tikka', 'Tarragon Fish', 'KachoriChaat' and many more.



Traffic Gastropub: Seasonal Winter Spread

Located at City Centre 2, Rajarhat Newtown, Traffic Gastropub is all set to launch their Seasonal Winter Spread. Comprising of an exhaustive range of appetizers, main courses, desserts & cocktails the spread is available from the 1st of December 2022, throughout the winter season. The 'Appetizer' section includes several specialties like the Jingleball '22-flavoured panko crumb coated chicken steak dipped in spicy tapenade sauce; the Bold & Blind - Taiwan styled braised pork with green onions, the Beach Bonfire - Tequila infused jumbo prawns with creamy curried sauce; the Hollywood Glamour - Olive stuffed gnocchi in parmesan fondue; the Gangster Wrapper - Bacon wrapped chicken tossed with smoky BBQ sauce; and several other exciting new preparations. The "Main Course" section comprises of a total of 8 mouth-watering culinary creations including the Kingpins - baked Lobster served with house salad & broccoli mashed potatoes; the Aromatic Freaks - Tarragon wine marinated Salmon steak served with herbed rice & french-fries; the Flavour Hunter - paprika and wine braised Scallops served with baked potatoes & jalapeno cheese fondue; and the Backyard

BBQ - red wine poached Lamb steak paired with chickpea cassoulet; among others. Some of the brand-new cocktails include- the Winter Wonder- a blend of white rum, ginger, green chillies, pineapple juice, fresh lime juice and simple syrup, garnished with pineapple chunks, in a champagne saucer with a spicy rim; the Time 2 Celebrate- Bourbon whiskey and La Quintinye Blanc shaken together with clove-apple syrup, apple juice, fresh lime juice & egg whites, garnished with apple slices in a champagne tulip; the Royal Affair- Cognac built up with



honey, ginger cordial, fresh lime juice, ginger slices and warm water, garnished with finger lime, in a brandy balloon; the Mad Sippers - Red wine build up with caster sugar, cinnamon quells, cloves, star anise, orange rind & lemon slice, garnished with oranges and cloves, in a tea-cup; and many other exciting cocktails.

Monkey's Tippy Christmas: From Dec 15-31



Monkey Bar presents, "Monkey's Tippy Christmas" from December 15, 2022 to 31st 2022. On the cards- Stirry Nights: Christmas Edition- a night of carols followed by special performances by local bands; the Ugly Sweater Party which is exactly as it sounds, Ho! Ho! Glow - a one of its kind glow in the dark Neon Party, Merry Little Christmas Drunch - a noon-downer with a fun party vibe and the incredibly boozy Monkey's Tippy Christmas Cocktail Menu with the best cocktails to get you into the holiday spirit! Stirry Nights that will get you into the mood for some dancing, carol sessions that will get your soul singing, DJ sets and a noon-downer for everyone who wants to start the party early. Mrs. Claus comes down fiery red with bourbon, lime juice, red wine, berry puree and syrup; Drunken Rudolph will melt your heart with a concoction of rum, milk and hot chocolate; our Tippy Elf will have you singing along as you sip on bourbon and cinnamon spiked apple juice; while Jingle Juice will be just the pick-me-up you need with gin, Kahlua, pumpkin syrup and a shot of espresso. Of course our regular signature cocktails, wide range of premium alcohol, wines and beer will also be on offer through the season.