

HOAX OR REAL: ISSUE CRAVES FOR INVESTIGATION

PDS consumers allege distribution of 'plastic rice' from fair price shops

ROOPA LALL

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ Alleged rumours of plastic rice being sold in PDS shops in the city are making the rounds, and people can't stop wondering if it's true. In order to find out the truth, EOI Correspondent contacted a family who blamed that the rice they procured from a fair price shop at Babu Line contained plastic rice mixed up with normal rice. Unheard of such a strange incident in the islands, the consumer alleged that his family came to know about plastic rice when their son prepared a ball out of the cooked rice. Their son kept the rice ball for a few hours and the ball became hard as a cricket ball. The children of the locality then started playing with the rice ball.

"After witnessing my children playing with the rice ball, I started to check the rice thoroughly and found that some rice in the bag is hard to break. I then with the help of my family members separated some rice which I feel is plastic rice. It seems that the rice supplied to PDS consumers is mixed up with plastic rice", said this fearful consumer. The family has demanded a probe into the issue. Some elderly family members said that whosoever consumes the "plastic rice" will fall ill and authorities in

the Department of Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs must look into the issue as to why people are being distributed with rice mixed up with plastic rice. As the news of plastic rice being supplied to consumers from fair price shops spread in the locality, panic gripped the consumers who are now afraid to consume rice supplied by fair price shops.

Meanwhile, a senior officer of Department of Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs on hearing that consumers are being given plastic rice from the fair price shops expressed his shock. He told EOI that the fair price shops are getting the rice stocks for distribution to

PDS card holders from the Civil Supplies department which in turn procures the rice stocks from the FCI godown located at Dollygunj. He assured immediate raids on such fair price shops selling plastic rice mixed up with normal rice. The term 'plastic rice' first surfaced in China when the famous Wuchang rice scandal took place. In 2010, manufacturers from China added flavouring to ordinary rice and started selling it off as a brand, Wuchang rice, which began to be called 'plastic rice.' The term later popped up again in Korea where distributors were seen selling fake rice made from a mixture of potatoes, sweet potatoes, and plastic. This



plastic rice was also allegedly made from synthetic resin, which was moulded into the shape of real rice. Though the possibility of plastic rice being supplied to the PDS card holders is minimal, some consumers want the matter to be investigated as the majority of the population in the islands consume rice as the staple food.

MP donates dead-body freezer box to

Teressa Island from MPLADS fund



PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The Member of Parliament, Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma has handed-over a dead body freezer box to the Tribal Council of Teressa Island, from MPLADS fund. Mr. had learnt that in case of any death in Teressa Island the residents of the Island had to face a lot

of difficulties in preserving the body till arrival of the family members of the deceased from other Islands. Considering this problem, the Member of Parliament handed-over the Dead Body Freezer Box to the people of Teressa Island, in the presence of Tribal captains.

Jumbo raids farm

at Kalsi village



ASHIM

RANGAT, DEC 8/--/ A Forest department elephant has created havoc in Kalsi village under Urmilapur Panchayat. The jumbo ravaged the agriculture plantation of the local farmer Viren Bairagi on December 3rd 2022. The farmer who had planted bananas, vegetables and other fruits bearing trees suffered huge financial loss as all his crops were destroyed.

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BJP's strategy to change CMs pays off in Gujarat, experiment missed in Himachal

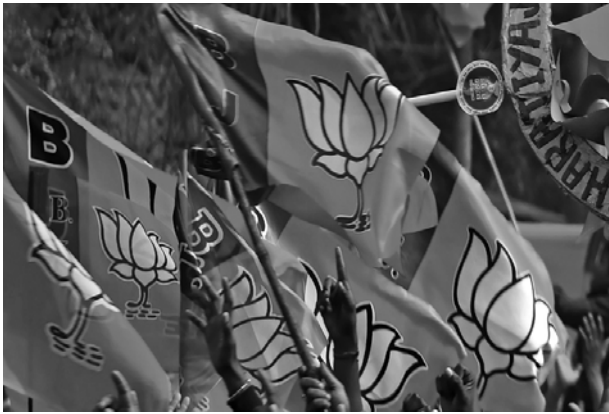
NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ The BJP's victory in Gujarat and earlier in Uttarakhand appears to have vindicated its strategy of changing chief ministers and resetting the cabinet ahead of assembly polls to thwart anti-incumbency, an exercise not done in Himachal Pradesh where the party suffered defeat.

With the strategy working in its favour, the BJP could be encouraged to undertake similar steps in

states, including Karnataka, where elections are due next year, to counter factors that might work against it. In September last year, the BJP appointed Bhupendra Patel, a first-time MLA as Gujarat chief minister to replace Vijay Rupani barely over a year before the state elections. The party also changed the entire cabinet to reset the overall government. A senior national-level leader of the BJP said the results

clearly indicated that the change of chief minister in both Uttarakhand and Gujarat played a role in neutralising anti-incumbency. In Gujarat, the caste of the chief minister (Patidar) also came in handy.

While the Opposition targeted the BJP for removing its chief ministers, political watchers believe the changes highlighted the leadership's readiness to



address feedback from the ground.

Similarly, in Uttarakhand, the BJP had changed chief ministers twice before the assembly polls, held earlier this year. However, the party won in the hill state despite its new chief ministerial face, Pushkar Singh Dhami, suffering defeat.

The senior leader also questioned why the same exercise was not done in Himachal Pradesh, where

the party stuck with incumbent Jairam Thakur despite losing last year's by-polls.

Another senior BJP leader said three factors -- delivery on the ground, keeping the organisation in good humour and the leader's popularity -- were behind these changes of chief ministers in the last two-three years. The recent spate of changes undertaken at the Centre or in states ruled by it has

marked a return to more conventional politics with the standard political faultlines of caste identity pushing to the background the urge to experiment.

The BJP has even preferred those leaders who started their careers from other political outfits. In 2023, Assembly elections are due in BJP-ruled Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura, where the party recently changed its chief minister. (PTI)

Cong leaders credit Priyanka's campaign, strategising for victory in Himachal

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ With the Congress headed for a win in Himachal Pradesh, its leaders on Thursday credited party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's campaign in the hill state for the good showing of the party in the Assembly polls. Priyanka led the party's charge in Himachal Pradesh with several rallies and was also closely involved in strategising for the polls. Many leaders hailed her



leadership in securing a win for the party and defeating the BJP's mammoth election machinery. All India Congress Committee (AICC) in charge of Himachal Pradesh Rajeev Shukla hailed Priyanka's campaign and leadership, lauding the "hard work" put in by her. Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma also complimented Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for her "spirited" campaign in the state. This is Priyanka's first electoral success while heading the campaign charge. The party had lost Uttar Pradesh assembly polls while she spearheaded the canvassing in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls earlier this year.

Party sources said the team of Priyanka and Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, who was the senior observer for the polls, played an important role in formulating the election campaign. Based on the feedback, a systematic election campaign was prepared under the leadership of Priyanka Gandhi that involved pledges for women, youth, employees, the sources said. During her rallies in Sirmour, Kangra, Solan and Una, Priyanka Gandhi raised the issues of Agnipath, inflation, unemployment and the old pension scheme, and that won over the people's confidence, the Congress leaders claimed. (PTI)

Siddaramaiah blames BJP for reaping political benefit out of border row

BENGALURU, DEC 8 --/ With the border row between Karnataka and Maharashtra over Belagavi still persisting, former Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday accused the BJP of reaping political benefits instead of resolving the issue. In a series of tweets, the Leader of Opposition said people were facing hardship owing to the controversy. "It is in the DNA of @BJP4Karnataka to reap political benefits out of controversies. Belagavi border issue, which could have been resolved through negotiations, is now allowed to grow so that BJP can take benefits," the Congress leader said. Siddaramaiah said the people were facing problems as the transport departments of both the States have stopped the Belagavi-Maharashtra inter-State bus service. "People of both the States are anxious about the developments, & @BJP4Karnataka govt have to intervene & establish peace," the former chief minister said.

Siddaramaiah further said the coalition government in Maharashtra has been trying to target Kannadigas residing in the neighbouring states and Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai should immediately intervene, reach out to his counterparts in Maharashtra and protect Kannadigas. "It is not just enough to claim it is a double-engine govt. @BJP4India should step up whenever it is needed to solve the crisis. This time it has failed to resolve the issue....," the Congress leader said. The border row was several decades old with Maharashtra claiming the merger of Belagavi with it on the ground that the district has substantial Marathi-speaking population. Karnataka has refuted the claim by saying the issue has been settled long ago. (PTI)

NEW DELHI/ GANDHINAGAR, DEC 8 --/ The BJP on Thursday attributed the party's "historic" victory in Gujarat Assembly polls to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's credibility and people's trust in his leadership.

The party achieved a landslide victory in Gujarat to retain power for a seventh straight term by winning more seats than in any Assembly election in the state. Hailing Prime Minister Modi's leadership, BJP president JP Nadda said the party's historic victory in the Gujarat elections is a victory of Modi's commitment towards development, good governance and public welfare. "Gujarat has set new records of development in the last two decades under the leadership of Modi ji and today the people of Gujarat have blessed the BJP and created a new record of victory. "Every section has wholeheartedly blessed the BJP. This is the victory of people's unwavering faith in BJP's policies," Nadda

tweeted.

Union home minister Amit Shah termed it as a rejection of those who do politics of hollow promises, freebies and appeasement. In a series of tweets, Shah said he salutes the people of



Gujarat on this historic victory and it shows the "unwavering faith of the public in Narendra Modi's development model". "In the last two decades, under the leadership of Modi ji, the BJP broke all records of development in Gujarat and today the people of Gujarat have blessed the BJP and broken all records of victory,"

Shah said. Gujarat chief minister Bhupendra Patel said the people of the state have rejected the anti-national elements in the Assembly election and once again reposed faith in Prime Minister Modi and the BJP

of Madhavsinh Solanki. Addressing a press conference in Gandhinagar, chief minister Patel said: "The people of Gujarat have once again reposed faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP leadership. If the masses of Gujarat have elected the BJP, then we have to live up to their expectations." "The people of Gujarat have rejected the anti-national elements in this election and have voted for the BJP's track record of development in the state," he said. Gujarat BJP president C R Paatil, who was also present at the press conference, hit out at new poll entrant Aam Aadmi Party, alleging it tried to demean the people of Gujarat with "dole" politics.

"AAP never thought about Gujarati Asmita (pride) and was never able to connect with the psyche of the Gujarati people. "All anti-Gujarati forces have been defeated...The Congress must introspect as to why they are losing public support," he said. (PTI)

The Congress holds the record of winning 149 seats in 1985 under the leadership



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaking in Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session of Parliament

Govt plans to ease congestion at airports; results will soon be visible: Scindia

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ The Union government has chalked out a plan along with all stakeholders to ease congestion at country's airports, which have been witnessing heavy traffic in recent days, and the results will soon be visible, civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Thursday.

Scindia also said in the Lok Sabha that the increase in traffic is due to the "resurgence of traffic" and also partly because of the "democratisation of civil aviation" and expansion of the

network across the country. "I have had a detailed meeting yesterday not only with airport operators but with the immigration, the CISF and others. I told them that we must have a planning for peak hour departures and arrivals. Not on the basis of an airport's capabilities of takeoff and landing. On the basis of our peak hour traffic, we can manage our departures and arrivals," he said during the Question Hour. Scindia said there is a great degree of volatility in India's airports graph which have to be

smoothen up -- very similar to the winter schedules being prepared by the airports to handle fog.

"I have requested the airport operators to do the peak hour planning. Today, that process is on. I am quite sure that we will be able to manage our airports traffic soon," Scindia said. Referring to the US and Europe, where resurgence of traffic was witnessed too, the minister said there was "mayhem" at the airports of the US and Europe where baggages were lost. "Our airports have done

yeoman job. That process is on. With the new planning we will be able to smoothen up the process and I am very confident about that," he said. Scindia said civil aviation was one of the most affected sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic when all the planes were grounded. Pre-Covid, the minister said, the highest number of passengers in India's history was 4.07 lakh on a single day in 2019 and the number was breached three days ago when 4.13 lakh passengers travelled by air on a single day. (PTI)

MCD authorities to seek date from LG to convene civic house as polls are over

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ Authorities in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) are likely to soon approach the Lieutenant Governor to seek a date on which the civic House can be convened so that councillors can take oath and a mayor be elected.

This will be the first municipal House consisting of 250 councillors who have been just elected after the high-stakes civic polls held on December 4. The House will be convened at the Civic Centre, the headquarters of the MCD at Barakhamba here. Votes were counted on Wednesday

and the AAP has emerged as a clear winner, bagging 134 wards and ending the 15-year rule of the BJP in the civic body. A senior MCD official said: "The elections are over and now MCD will approach the LG, seeking a date on which the municipal House can be convened so that the councillors can take oath, and then a mayor be elected."

According to the DMC Act 1957, "The Corporation shall at its first meeting in each year elect one of its members to be the chairperson to be known as the mayor and another

member to be the Deputy Mayor of the Corporation." Section 3 of the Act talks about the "establishment of the Corporation", and in the 2022 amendment brought in by the government, this section has remained unchanged, the official said. A constitutional expert and a former state election commissioner conjectured that if a mayoral poll is held late December or so, the cycle of mayoral election could be changed, which till 2012 was being held around April time.

Some experts also said that a clearer picture will emerge once the official

process progresses further. Poll authorities had earlier said the entire process of the election will be completed on December 15. Experts and election watchers have said the mayoral poll will have to be held soon after the poll process ends.

In a closer-than-expected contest, the BJP, which bucked the trend predicted by exit polls, put up a spirited fight, winning 104 municipal wards, while the Congress managed to win just nine seats, down from 30 in the previous civic poll. Three independents also won.

The post of mayor is considered prestigious and a Delhi mayor wielded a lot of power until the erstwhile unified MCD, set up in 1958, was trifurcated into North Delhi, South Delhi and East Delhi municipal corporations in 2012 with a mayor each for three civic bodies.

The civic bodies were reunified in May 2022. The post of mayor sees five single-year terms on a rotation basis, with the first year being reserved for women, the second for open category, third for reserved category, and the remaining two also being in the open

category.

Former mayor of North Delhi Jai Prakash, who served in the post from 2020-2021, said, according to the old DMC Act, which governs the MCD, besides elected councillors, some nominated members also are eligible to vote in a mayoral poll.

The AAP on Wednesday wrested power from the BJP in the high-stakes civic polls in the national capital and all eyes are now on who will be the next mayor of Delhi, even as some leaders of the saffron party claimed that its member could be elected to the top post. (PTI)

Need to protect Himachal Cong MLAs from 'poaching' bid: Chhattisgarh CM

RAIPUR, DEC 8 --/ As the Assembly poll trends showed the Congress was likely to get a majority in Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Thursday said the party needed to protect its MLAs in the hill state from any possibility of horse-trading.

The BJP can "go to any level", Baghel claimed. The Congress surged ahead of the BJP on 39 of the 68 seats with one seat already under its belt, while the ruling party has won four seats and was ahead in 21 constituencies, as per trends from Himachal Pradesh where the counting of votes was underway. Baghel, who was appointed as senior observer by the Congress for the Himachal Pradesh Assembly polls, denied speculation that the newly elected party MLAs from Himachal Pradesh will be shifted to Chhattisgarh. "The counting is still underway



Bhupesh Baghel

and we should wait for the final results. However, we were confident that we will form government in Himachal Pradesh and the early trends show we are heading towards victory there," he told reporters.

The Chhattisgarh CM said he will go to the northern state later in the day. Asked whether Congress MLAs from Himachal will be shifted to Raipur amid the possibility of horse-trading, Baghel said, "They will not be brought here. However, we have to protect our friends (MLAs) as the BJP can do anything. It can go to any level." He claimed the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was the 'B team' of the BJP. Speaking about the Bhanupratappur by-poll in the state's Kanker district, in which Congress candidate Savitri Mandavi was leading, Baghel said, "It shows the people have faith in the (state) government and they have put their stamp of approval on works done by party MLA Manoj Singh Mandvi." (PTI)

MP seeks release of pension for old age, widow, specially-abled & destitute in 1st week of every month

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The Member of Parliament, Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma has requested the Lt. Governor to release pension for old age, widow, specially-abled and destitute in the first week of every month.

Mr. Sharma informed the Lt. Governor that old age, widow, specially-abled and destitute people are not getting their pension on time, which has caused huge hardship to them. He mentioned that most of the



people under this category are completely dependent on the pension amount re-

leased by Administration for their monthly expenditures like food, medical expenses and room rents and delay in the release of the pension amount, brings huge problems for them.

He pointed out that if pension amounts are credited to their account, in the first week of every month, they will be in a better position to plan their expenditure and survive in society with full confidence and dignity.

State BJP leaders meet Union Agri Minister, discusses host of issues



PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ Mr. Ajoy Bairagi, State BJP President and Mr. Vishal Jolly, National Executive Member of BJP met Union Agriculture Minister & Farmers Welfare, Mr. Narendra Singh Tomar and the Minister of State, Mr. Kailash Choudhary at New Delhi on Thursday. The State BJP leaders discussed a host of issues pertaining to the farmers and Agriculture sector in the Islands. Notable is-

sues raised were providing Minimum Support Price for Copra by taking up the matter with National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd and also by involving all recognized procurement agencies. Arecanut as a crop for insurance PM Fasal Bima Yojna. Allotment of land to all those settlers and other allottees of whose respective lands were washed away by passage of time, due to river/stream bank erosion.

All these issues were patiently heard by the Ministers and after lengthy discussion, the Minister held discussion

with the concerned authority of NAFED and instructed them to immediately form a team to convene meetings with the recognized procurement agencies and chalk out plans for providing MSP for COPRA, throughout A & N Islands.

The Ministers also assured that the Arecanut would soon be included as a crop within the purview of PM- Fasal Bima Yojna at the earliest. In so far as the issue of loss of land due to soil erosion is concerned, the Ministers assured that soon a committee would be formed to conduct a detailed survey for proper assessment of the loss of land.

Second counselling for admission in ALC

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The second counselling for the vacant seats in the respective available categories in the first year of the B.A., LL.B. Degree Course in Andaman Law College will be conducted on 15th December 2022 (Thursday) at 9:00 am in Andaman Law College, Port Blair. The interested candidates of all the categories, including general category have been asked to attend the above mentioned Counselling Session. The unfilled seats in the said respective categories will be allotted in the order of general merit only. Any representation from the candidates who fail to attend counselling on the said date will not be entertained thereafter.

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3-day workshop on 'Coastal & Marine Biodiversity of Islands Ecosystems' by ZSI begins

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The Zoological Survey of India is organizing a three-day workshop on 'Coastal and Marine Biodiversity of island ecosystems' under the "Training of Personnel of Other Stakeholders" sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. Dr. Dhriti Banerjee, Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata was the chief guest, while the Mr. Hari Kallikatt, Secretary (IP&T), Andaman and Nicobar Administration, Dr. M. Vinod Kumar, Fishery Survey of India, and Dr. Lalji Singh, Head-of-Office were the guests of honour.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Dhriti Banerjee in her address, appreciated ZSI, A&N Regional Centre, Port Blair for organizing this important workshop. ZSI/ANRC, Port Blair is playing an important role in the knowledge-based capacity building programme on the Island Biodiversity through Seminar/Symposium/Workshop. Moreover, she stated that this workshop will focus on understanding the role of the coastal ecosystems and its vital importance in areas such as biodiversity, food security, climate change and others. The speaker also mentioned the overall objectives of the program viz., understanding and creating awareness of the marine and coastal resources, prioritizing identification of marine fauna such as corals (Both epibiotic and endobiotic organisms) and assessment of

factors in climate change adaptation in coastal and marine ecosystems. All the participants those are enrolled to participate this workshop were greeted by her and encouraged to carry on the knowledge and information into future for an easy pavement to build conservation strategies.

Mr. Hari Kallikatt in his address praised the current workshop for helping participants develop their skills and for bringing together a diverse group of students. He asserted that the tourism industry is interwoven in every aspect with the island's biodiversity. He used his personal experiences to encourage students by pointing out the low employability of the majority of academic programmes. Therefore, these drives, which were initiated by the Indian government, aim to up-skill the human resources so that they can support individuals in finding employment more effectively. He also emphasised the significance of endemicity in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands' extensive biodiversity as in birds, corals and mangroves, which can be assessed in a more comprehensive way if the youth are properly educated. In this he specifically mentioned his gratitude towards Director Zoological Survey of India and Dr. C. Sivaperuman, Officer-in-Charge, ZSI, Port Blair who have initiated various scopes through these kinds of workshops. He extended his wishes to everyone who participated and successfully

completed the workshop.

Dr. Vinod Kumar Zonal Director, Fishery Survey of India in his felicitation address began with the serene biodiversity and huge marine and coastal ecosystems the island ecosystem holds. The speaker mentioned the collaboration among the two institutes, viz, FSI and ZSI which has explored in sharing knowledge and research activities. He also mentioned the active contribution of ZSI/ANRC in the collection of pioneer information for the identification of various faunal groups from Andaman and Nicobar Islands. He praised Officer-in-charge ZSI/ANRC for its tremendous active contribution to the field of science. He emphasised the importance of this kind of programme which regularly is being conducted to create greater awareness for the stakeholders, students and researchers. He stated that this kind of workshop updates our knowledge and inspires students for choosing their respective fields of interest in future.

Dr. Lalji Singh, Head-of-Office, Botanical Survey of India, Port Blair greeted the audience with his ephemeral yet heartening speech. He has justified how the rich biodiversity of this archipelago is in a crucial need of thoughtful mitigation measures. He mentioned this workshop will educate the participants to understand the management practices and sustainable tourism policies which can help in the future discussions. He en-



couraged the students to engage themselves with nature and learn about marine biodiversity and decipher strategies to save the fragile ecosystem. The speaker congratulated all the participants and teachers for being a part of this eventful workshop.

Dr. C. Sivaperuman, Officer-in-Charge, ZSI in his welcome address has greeted the notables, invited guests and students. He briefed about the previous workshops conducted by ANRC/ZSI. The workshops and seminars included participants from Indira Gandhi Forest National Academy as well as esteemed institutions here at the island. He signified the role of Zoological Survey of India, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Port Blair in training of newly recruited forest officials. He significantly said how the workshop has helped the students to attain a better understanding of facilities present in the islands. He thanked Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India for providing the opportunity to host this

kind of training programme for a third consecutive year. Total of 105 participants participated this workshop from NABARD, Zilla Parishad, St. Mary School, Kamaraj English Medium School, Nirmala Senior Secondary School, Sagaritara Secondary School, Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya, Kendriya Vidyalaya-II, Mahatma Gandhi International School, Tagore Government College of Education, Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya, Andaman Law College, and Pondicherry University. He also highlighted about the nine lectures which will be presented during the course work. Many topics such as both island and mainland marine fauna of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and India waters, will be dealt with by delegates from online and offline. The speaker mentioned about the addition of field trips in the current forum which the participants will cover in South Andaman. The inaugural function concluded with the vote of thanks.

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Lynn Hall

Arvind Kejriwal, the unstoppable

The MCD election in Delhi has brought curtains down on the BJP's 15-year rule over the civic body. For 15 long years, when the Congress ruled the Delhi Assembly under the leadership of late chief minister Sheila Dikshit, the BJP had struggled to dislodge her. Ultimately, it was the Aam Aadmi Party which replaced the Congress and formed the government in Delhi following its rise in the 2013 elections. This time, the AAP dislodged the BJP from the civic body, and in the process sent out a strong political message. The message from the elections is clear. The political dynamics in Delhi still remains bi-polar; only AAP has come to replace the Congress as the principal opponent of the BJP – in all formats of polls now. The AAP won 134 out of the 250 seats, while the BJP bagged 104. The Congress won nine and others won three seats. With MCD victory, the AAP has replaced the Congress as principal opposition to the BJP. While AAP had won the Delhi assembly polls in 2015 and in 2020 with thumping margins, it had also displaced Congress and come second in all the seven Lok Sabha seats in 2019, when BJP had scored another clean sweep. The MCD poll outcome has strengthened the AAP's grip over the national capital and added fuel to the party's claim of emerging as a new pole in the national opposition politics and crafting an alternative electoral platform capable of halting the BJP's juggernaut. Even after the AAP won the 2013 and then then 2015 Assembly elections in Delhi – the second with over 54.5% votes and 67 of the 70 seats – the BJP still managed to win the 2017 polls for all the three corporations in Delhi. This year, the polls were originally scheduled to be held in April-May but the BJP-led Union government delayed it on the ground of unifying the three civic bodies.

Some people love to call municipal elections the 'quarter finals' of political battles, assembly polls the 'semifinal' and Lok Sabha elections the 'finale'. But it is a fact that Delhi's politics has – over the decades – shown that this has never been the case with this electorate. People vote differently in various elections in Delhi with the firm understanding that the governments at all the three levels provide different services. Upstaging the BJP under the very nose of Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo in MCD, which has a budget higher than many of the mid-sized and smaller states, will certainly give Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal a significant political advantage. Having lost two consecutive Assembly polls to the AAP, the BJP's latest defeat in the MCD elections might force the saffron party to redraw its strategy and project a local face to take on Kejriwal's party. There is no doubt that Delhi remains a challenge for the BJP. According to political pundits, the defeat in the MCD polls is expected to impact the BJP's efforts to weaken the AAP's political dominance in Delhi and its chances in the 2025 assembly polls.

Building a welfare state requires a huge increase in fiscal efforts

REFLEX ACTION

Prabhat Patnaik

The post-second world war period had seen a spate of welfare state measures in the advanced capitalist countries, especially in Europe, in emulation of what the Soviet Union was effecting. Capitalism had to accept these measures, notwithstanding its hostility to them, because it was in the midst of an existential crisis, weakened by the war, shaken by the upsurge in working-class anger, and terrified by the spread of socialism in Eastern Europe.

With the subsequent consolidation of its position, however, its hostility to welfare state measures manifested itself openly. It tried to roll them back, though, thanks to the resistance of the workers, it did not have the success it would have wished; even a person like Margaret Thatcher could not succeed in dismantling the National Health Service in Britain. At the same time ironically, capitalism derived a degree of legitimacy from the welfare state, with its claim that, far from being predatory, it was indeed a system guaranteeing people's welfare.

The maintenance of the welfare state however has meant a substantially higher tax-GDP ratio compared to the earlier period in European countries and also compared to the current figures for countries that have skimmed on welfare provision. In the list of countries arranged in descending order of tax-GDP ratio for the year 2020, 29 of the top 30 countries are from Europe, both West, and East, that is, countries which have had a legacy of either Communist or Social Democratic rule; the only non-European country is Cuba which again is not only under Communist rule but whose welfare state measures are admired all over the world.

Communist governments adopting welfare state measures and raising the resources required for this purpose through high levels of taxation, and this arrangement persisting even after the collapse of communism, should not come as a surprise; what is striking however is that West European Social Democracy too has maintained a high tax-GDP ratio to finance its welfare state provisions. France tops the list with a tax-GDP ratio of 46.2 per cent, followed by Denmark (46.0), Belgium (44.6), Sweden (44.0), Finland (43.3), Italy (42.4), and Austria (41.8). The inescapable conclusion that emerges is that the

maintenance of a welfare state requires heavy taxation, that is, heavy interference by the State in the pattern of income distribution that is spontaneously generated by the market.

None of these European countries has been characterised by GDP growth rates as impressive as those of the high-growth economies of today even in the heyday of the so-called Golden Age of capitalism in the immediate post-war years; their rates of GDP growth have fallen to even lower levels in the period after the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008. India, by contrast, while its officials keep patting themselves on the back for its being a supposedly high-growth economy, has abysmal welfare state measures, and, not surprisingly, a tax-GDP ratio (18.08 per cent) that is towards the lower end of the scale.

Three propositions follow from these findings. First, the so-called "trickle-down" effect of GDP growth is a completely vacuous concept. The outcome of the functioning of unfettered capitalism can never succeed spontaneously in raising the level of welfare of the mass of the working people. This is because capitalism can never function without a reserve army of labour; one of whose main functions is to keep down wages even as labour productivity keeps increasing, so that the share of surplus in social output increases, leading to larger consumption by the capitalists and their "hangers on". The workers do not automatically get the benefits of economic growth under capitalism. True, if they organise themselves, they can fight for and even obtain better living conditions; but in such a case they would also force the State to increase the tax-GDP ratio with which to provide them with a higher social wage. The crucial determinant in other words is their capacity to fight effectively, not the rate of economic growth whose benefits are supposed to "trickle down".

The second proposition is the following. Not only does GDP growth not lead to a welfare state per se, but in fact,

fetishising GDP growth becomes a means of preventing any transition towards a welfare state, of creating a false narrative that the working people would become actually better off by allowing transfers of resources to capitalists so that they can undertake larger investment and thereby usher in larger GDP growth, than by insisting on transfers towards themselves for the creation of a welfare state. The latter position is even pejoratively called "populism" and debunked as being wasteful and short-sighted because it entails the distribution of so-called "freebies".

This fetishisation of GDP growth is used as the argument for keeping the tax-GDP ratio low, for any increase in it, which would typically require taxing the capitalists, is supposed allegedly to destroy their "enterprise", and hence their inducement to invest, thereby damaging GDP growth. The third proposition relates to the dialectics of exclusion. As resource transfers are made from the government budget towards the capitalists to stimulate GDP growth, and as the relative magnitude of transfers increases with the onset of recession and stagnation that typically constitutes the denouement for neoliberal capitalism, fewer resources are left even for the paltry welfare expenditure that was being made earlier from the budget. This results in privatisation of education, health, and other essential services, which leads to the further exclusion of working people from all these services. Since the transfers made to the capitalists do not cause any increase in investment or even produce much immediate increase in their consumption, the reduction in welfare expenditure that matches such transfers, has the effect of reducing over all aggregate demand.

There are, to clarify and recapitulate, two distinct problems with GDP-growth fetishism that is propagated in the current era of neoliberal capitalism: one, the analytical error underlying the claim that giving larger transfers to capitalists leads to higher investment and hence growth; and two, the claim that higher GDP growth itself leads to greater welfare for the people even if the tax-GDP ratio is small. The experience all over the world shows that building a welfare state requires a huge increase in fiscal effort. (IPA)



New Year diaries and calendars on sale at Esplanade on Thursday--Arijit Ganguly

Digitalisation in agriculture is going to adversely affect small farmers

The Narendra Modi government has recently signed an MoU and released recently to introduce a policy called digitalisation in the agriculture sector. What are the benefits of it? What are the losses? Discussions are going on. Recently a discussion forum was held in Delhi under the auspices of some voluntary organizations on November 21-22, 2022. More than 60 people from various farmers' associations participated in it and expressed their views.

More than 60 percent of people in India depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Scientists say that there are more than 15 crore agricultural families. While introducing major technologies like digitalisation in agrarian sector, farmers connected with the field were not even considered nor contacted for dialogue. They did not even inform this form of grass roots change to those who were depending on the sector for survival. The farmers' representative associations were also kept at bay.

Agriculture is under the purview of the state government. At least those concerned states could have been taken into confidence. The government is intensifying its efforts to hand over the agriculture sector to private corporate

forces by digitalising it. In the past, the Modi government had introduced three black laws in the agrarian sector, and as a result of large-scale agitation by farmers and farmers' associations for more than a year, the Modi government withdrew those laws in unfortunate circumstances. Now initiatives are taken again to bring those black laws in another form by introducing this digitalisation system to hand over agriculture to corporate forces.

Corporate houses have changed the entire agricultural process from the time of planting of the seeds to transporting it to the market. This digitalisation process is an attempt to present it to the private companies.

More than 10 reputed conglomerates in India are involved as partners with these companies. For example, Amazon, owned by Walmart, accounts for over 90 percent of the seed sector's cottonseeds transactions. There are more such agrarian products handled and represented by Mann Cent, as

well as Bayer companies. Majority of the marketing of agricultural products are in the fields of tobacco and few others.

There are also ITC like companies that are continuing as partner. Also there is Patanjali run by Baba Ramdev, who plays a major role in marketing and sales of the other products as well, involved with this deal.

It is said that Microsoft Company is also involved. Companies like Uber and Ola that have already entered the transport sector are operating in all sectors beginning from buses to autos. Also, there is the beginning of practice that is spreading fast from currency notes to the form of digital money, from plane, train and bus tickets to retail businesses like coffee and tea shops. Internet services continue from near the car used by humans to the freeze.

In 8 years of Modi government, everything has been privatized. In the name of monetization pipeline, government assets and industries were sold cheaply. All-

out efforts have started to collect 1.6 crore rupees in the financial year 2022-23. The process of sale of all assets related to power department, sports department, exchange department and coal mines has been accelerated.

The process of digitilisation of land records, survey records, has already started in the agriculture sector. The work of spreading fertilisers, seeds and pesticides through the drone system has started. This approach is intensified at the same rate as human labour is devalued and intellectualisation is increasingly emphasized. 70 to 80 percent of people in the agricultural sector are illiterate. Also, small and marginal farmers and tenant farmers are important. It is not possible for them.

This means that the main intention of this policy is to forcefully remove these small farmers from agriculture and transfer all the land to the corporate powers and then turn the farmers into labourers. All farmers should oppose this. If it has to be introduced, it should be done not in the private sector but in the public sector with the participation of farmers and with the cooperation of various states. Farmers and farmer associations have to deliberate on the issue as a prime theme. (IPA)

FOCUS

Ravula Venkaiah

Conventional Crossword

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

ACROSS
1 Large cave
4 Immerse
7 Ooze out
8 Leave
11 Depressed
12 Wicked
13 Vend
15 Fraction
16 Imitate derisively
20 Resting places
23 Visage
24 Lacking discipline
25 Combined
26 Willow
27 Obtain
28 Happenings

DOWN
1 Military trainee
2 Lofly
3 Fish traps
4 Not bright
5 Worshipped image
6 Church seat
9 First woman
10 Fastener
14 Large building
17 Floor covering
18 Frozen formation
19 Gives up
20 Foundation
21 Way out
22 Certain
24 Ship's record

SUDOKU: 3720

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

Yesterday's Solution 3719

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1728

			T	O	P			S	H	O	W
S	H	A	H					A			R
A			I	M	P			A	R	M	Y
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P	L	U	S			T	U	B		R	
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P	L	E	A			T	O	R			

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Two-day multilingual writers’ meet at Andaman Club

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ With the aim to encourage multilingual literary endeavours of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, SahityaAkademi’s Regional Office at Kolkata in association with the Directorate of Art & Culture, A&N Administration will be organizing a two-day multi-lingual writers’ meet on 10th & 11th December 2022 in the premises of Andaman Club, Port Blair. The meeting will be inaugurated by Mr. SubodhSarkar, an eminent Bengali Poet and Convenor, Bengali Advisory Board, SahityaAkademi while Mr. HariKalikkat, Secretary, Art & Culture, A&N Administration will chair the meet. Writers of eight languages will participate in the meet.

Dr. K. Srinivasarao, Secretary, SahityaAkademi, MrAnadiranjanBiswas, Member, General Council, SahityaAkademi and Dr. Devendra Kumar Devesh, Regional Secretary, SahityaAkademi Kolkata will be the other dignitaries in the inaugural session which will commence from 3.00 pm on 10th December 2022. Smt. RoshanaraDilbar (Isles’ eminent Urdu Writer) will chair the first session of multilingual poetry-reading. Smt. JharnaHalder (Bengali), Mr. Jagdhish Narayan Rai (Hindi); ShriChandranKokkadan (Malayalam), Mr. A. Karttikainathan (Tamil) and Dr. RashidaIqbal (Urdu) will read out their poems in

the session. The second session will commence from 10 am on the next day which will be chaired by Mr. BinayakBandyopadhyay, a well-known Bengali poet and fiction writer, where Smt. Moumita (Bengali), Neeta Samaddar (Hindi) and Ms. Jochiobed Vincent (Nicobari) will read their short stories. The programme will conclude with the third session chaired by ShriPrateek Raj Yadav, Director, Art & Culture, A&N Administration and poetry-readings by Mr. Pranab Kumar Chattopadhyay (Bengali), Mr. VyasmaniTripathi (Hindi), Mr. R. Gopalan (Tamil), Ms. D. Adi Lakshmi (Telugu) and Mr. Iliyas Ahmed Khan (Urdu).

Corporates destroying jungles but saving themselves from legal action using money power: Cong MP

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ Congress Rajya Sabha member Kumar Ketkar on Thursday alleged that real estate sharks and corporates were devastating jungles and using their money and muscle power to avoid legal action. In order to protect wildlife, not only should the laws be strict but their implementation should also be equally stringent, Ketkar said during a discussion on the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill in the Upper House. The Bill was tabled by Union environment minister Bupender Yadav on Wednesday. "At present, when we are talking about this Act, Nicobar is being completely ruined, Nicobar jungles are being removed for the benefit of some corporates. So essentially, the wildlife is actually attacked not by any humans as such, but by the corporates and sometimes by celebrity Bollywood types," he said. Stressing on the effective implementation of laws, Ketkar said: "The implementation is not strict

because the corporates are actually using their money or muscle power or their contacts in bureaucracy and in the government to destroy the jungle. When jungles are gone, the wildlife is gone." Stating that climate change was directly related to wildlife protection, he stressed on the need for creating an environment conducive for the survival and growth of wild animals and birds. "When Project Tiger was announced, there was a considerable discussion, and thankfully there was a lot of support. But today, this issue has come because real estate sharks and corporates are devastating jungles and creating problems for wildlife," he said. Congress member Jairam Ramesh opposed the Bill in "its present form" and expressed apprehension over the provision related to transfer or transport of captive live elephant "for any other purpose", saying it could be misused. He asked the minister to specify the purpose in the Act. "What is this 'any other purpose'? To provide an elephant for cap-

tive zoo in Gujarat? to provide for some private amusement parks in some other state?" Ramesh said, while suggesting that it should have been stated for "cultural and religious" purpose, considering the significance of elephants in such events in many parts of India. Sushmita Dev of the All India Trinamool Congress, too, expressed similar sentiments in her speech and asked the minister to tell the Parliament why the government did not vote against the motion to restart international ivory trade. On the other hand, Praful Patel of the Nationalist Congress Party supported the bill but drew attention towards the need to strike a fine balance between protection of wildlife and growth as man-animal conflict had been growing. Rakesh Sinha and Indu Bala Goswami of the BJP said the bill was much needed as many indigenous wildlife were becoming extinct in India due to invasion of aggressive foreign species. (PTI)

Killing of Kashmiri Pandits: SC tosses out curative petition over "mass murder"

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ The Supreme Court has dismissed a curative petition seeking reconsideration of its 2017 order dismissing a plea which had sought investigation into the alleged mass murder of Kashmiri Pandits in the valley in 1989-1990. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud rejected the plea and said no case is made out. "We have gone through the Curative Petition and the connected documents. In our opinion, no case is made out within the parameters indicated in the decision of this Court in Rupa Ashok Hurra vs Ashok Hurra. The Curative Petition is dismissed," the bench also comprising Justices SK Kaul and S A Nazeer said. The curative petition, filed by an organisation of Kashmiri Pandits, 'Roots in Kashmir', had said the apex court was not justified in dismissing the writ petition at the admission stage in 2017 merely on presumption that the instances referred to in it pertained to 1989-1990 and no fruitful purpose would emerge as evidence is unlikely to be available at this late juncture. "This really amounts to failure of justice or gross miscarriage of justice caused to the petitioner in view of the fact that the petitioner has stated in the writ petition as well as in review petition that this court has not only entertained the writ petition and also passed necessary direction for trial etc. in cases where the incident pertains to even more than 30-32 years," the petition had said. A curative petition is the last legal recourse in the apex court and is generally heard in-chamber unless a prima facie case

is made out for reconsideration of the verdict. The organisation had initially filed a writ petition in the top court seeking investigation and prosecution of several persons in connection with killing of Kashmiri Pandits during 1989-90, 1997 and 1998. Besides seeking other directions, it had also sought transfer of investigation of all the FIRs and cases of murder and other allied crimes against Kashmiri Pandits in the years 1989-90, 1997 and 1998 to some independent investigating agency like the CBI or the NIA or any other agency appointed by the top court. The organisation had said in its plea that the Jammu and Kashmir Police had failed to make any progress in hundreds of FIRs pending with them. The apex court had dismissed the plea in April 2017. Later, it had also dismissed the review petition filed in the matter. In the curative petition, the organisation sought reconsideration of the orders passed by the apex court. It also urged the apex court to hear and decide the writ petition afresh on merit by giving opportunity to both the parties to argue. The petition said communal harmony is the hallmark of a democracy and no religion teaches hatred and that if in the name of religion, people are

killed, that is essentially a slur and blot on the society governed by rule of law. "The Constitution of India, in its preamble, refers to secularism. Religious fanatics really do not belong to any religion. They are no better than terrorists who kill innocent people for no rhyme or reason in a society," the petition said. It said the apex court had appointed a special investigation team (SIT) in the post Godhra riots cases on the petitions filed before it. The plea said, in the review petition, the organisation had mentioned that in similarly placed cases of 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the court had taken cognizance even after a lapse over 33 years. If the state's machinery fails to protect a citizen's life, liberty and property and the investigation is conducted in a slipshod manner to help the accused, it is but appropriate that this court should step in to prevent undue miscarriage of justice which is perpetrated upon the victims and their family members, it said. The plea claimed the top court had failed to appreciate that more than 700 Kashmiri Pandits were murdered from 1989 to 1998 and FIRs were lodged in more than 200 cases, but not even a single FIR reached the stage of filing of charge sheet or conviction. (PTI)

ParikshaPeCharcha-2023

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ To celebrate the Utsav of Examination, the sixth edition of 'ParikshaPeCharcha 2023', the unique interactive programme of e Prime Minister, Mr. NarendraModi with students, teachers and parents will be held at Talkatora Stadium in January 2023. This event is being organized successfully for the sixth consecutive year by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education. Children studying in classes from IX to XII, teachers and parents can participate in the 'ParikshaPeCharcha' programme. An online creative writing competition is being conducted at <https://innovateindia.mygov.in/ppc-2023/> on various topics from Nov 25 and will continue upto Dec.30th 2022, for selection of 18 participants from A & N Islands. Suggested topics can be obtained from the Office of Zonal Officers, Secondary & Senior Secondary Schools across Islands. Selected participants will receive a certificate signed by the Director (NCERT) and a copy of the 'Exam Warrior' book, written by the Prime Minister. The competition is the mode through which students, parents and teachers are invited to frame their questions to be addressed to the Prime Minister. Selected questions, shortlisted by NCERT, may feature in the programme. The participants who asked questions in the previous editions of 'ParikshaPeCharcha' are invited by media channels to appear in their programmes. In the same lines, this year's chosen few may get an opportunity to interact with the media. In this regard, all the students from classes IX to XII, teachers and parents of A & N Islands have been informed to go through the above link and participate accordingly.

Distant Cautionary Signal No I hoisted at Port Blair port

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ Distant Cautionary Signal No.I has been hoisted at Port Blair Port. For further enquiries/ information, one may contact the helpline of State Emergency Operation Centre at Helpline No.1070 & District Emergency Operation Centre at Helpline No. 1077. For any emergency/assistance at sea, call the Coast Guard SAR Agency at Toll Free number 1554.

Stalin inaugurates new projects in TN

TENKASI, DEC 8 --/ Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin on Thursday inaugurated new projects, laid foundation stones for fresh schemes and gave away welfare assistance to beneficiaries, all totally valued at about Rs 238.90 crore. A total of 57 infrastructure projects completed at an estimated cost of Rs 22.20 crore were inaugurated by the chief minister here and it includes green houses, a g r i - w a r e h o u s e , anganwadis, buildings to house offices for village panchayats and milk producers cooperative, community sanitary complex, overhead water tank and sub-agriculture extension centre. Stalin arrived here on Thursday from Chennai by train to launch projects and he was accorded a warm welcome by ministers, elected representatives, representatives of local bodies and the people. People lined up on both

sides of the roads here to greet the chief minister and he also received petitions, for grievance redressal, from them. Cost-free housing 'pattas' e-pattas, old age pension to 6,246 beneficiaries and solatium were given away to beneficiaries by Stalin, marking the launch of distribution of welfare aid to a total of 1,03,508 beneficiaries worth Rs 182.56 crore. The chief minister laid foundation stones for new projects worth about Rs 34.14 crore, which includes buildings for several facilities like a maternity centre on the premises of Tenkasi government district hospital (Rs 30.02 crore), a building to house village panchayat office and fair price shops. Ministers K N Nehru (Municipal Administration), I Periyasami (Cooperation), K KSSR Ramachandran (Revenue), elected representatives and senior officials took part. (PTI)

Sonia reaches Rajasthan; to celebrate birthday with Rahul, Priyanka today

JAIPUR, DEC 8 --/ Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who is on a four-day visit to Rajasthan, reached Sawai Madhopur district on Thursday. According to a party spokesperson, Gandhi will celebrate her 76th birthday with her children Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi on Friday. "Gandhi reached Jaipur in the morning in a routine flight from New Delhi. Thereafter, she took a chopper from Jaipur airport and reached Sawai Madhopur. A few hours later Rahul and Priyanka joined her at a luxury resort near Ranthambore Tiger Reserve," the spokesperson said. The former Congress president is likely to participate in the Bharat Jodo Yatra on December 10, a day reserved for women participants, the official said. "It is her personal visit and no leader is called or permitted to meet. There are chances that CM Ashok Gehlot and state party chief Govind Singh Dotasra may meet on her birthday," the

spokesperson said. The Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra, which is passing through the Kota district, will be paused after the first half of Thursday. It will resume on December 10. The march entered its 93rd day on Thursday in which the Gandhi scion walked a 24 km stretch in one go. Later, he too flew to Ranthambore from Bundi in a chopper. The yatra will cover about 500 km in Rajasthan by passing through Jhalawar, Kota, Bundi, Sawai Madhopur, Dausa and Alwar districts over 17 days before entering Haryana on December 21. The march that started from Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu on September 7 has so far covered Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana before traversing through Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. It will conclude in Jammu and Kashmir in early February 2023, covering 3,570 km in 150 days. (PTI)

CPI (M) seeks special drive to fill-up vacant ST posts

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The CPI (M) has demanded a special drive to fill up backlog vacancies of ST reserved posts in various departments under the Andaman & Nicobar Administration. In a letter sent to the Lt. Governor, A & N Islands, Mr. D. Ayyappan, Secretary, CPI (M) A & N State Organising Committee said that nearly one thousand posts of various categories in different departments under the A & N Administration are lying vacant for quite a long time. He stated in his letter that no effort has been made by the Administration to fill up these backlog vacancies

reserved for ST candidates while hundreds of unemployed Nicobarese youths are waiting for a job. He further stated that since the tribal reserved posts do not attract the ban on filling up of vacant posts, the Administration should have taken proper steps to fill up these vacancies. Mr. Ayyappan further said that unlike other parts of the territory, there is no chance for any self-employment or private job in the Nicobar group of islands and the educated tribal youths completely depend on government job. He informed the Lt. Governor that CPI (M) is of

the view that only as a Special Recruitment Drive in a centralized manner through the Recruitment & Employment Cell of the Secretariat these backlog vacancies reserved for tribals can be filled up as the normal recruitment process will delay filling up these reserved posts. Mr. Ayyappan requested the Lt. Governor to take immediate steps to fill up the backlog vacancies reserved for ST candidates through Special Recruitment Drive considering the growing number of unemployment among the tribal candidates in these islands.

Mausam App, Damni Lighting App to provide information on weather forecast

PORT BLAIR, DEC 8/--/ The Andaman & Nicobar Islands are prone to Geological and Hydro-meteorological disasters. These Islands also fall in the cyclogenesis zone and a significant number of cyclones gets generated every year in the Andaman sea. Heavy rainfall due to monsoon leads to localized flooding frequently in low lying areas. To provide localised information about such Natural Phenomena various mobile applications have been developed. MAUSAM, a Mobile App of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is providing seamless and user-friendly access to weather products available on [https://](https://mausam.imd.gov.in/)

mausam.imd.gov.in/. Users can access observed weather forecasts, radar images and be proactively warned of impending weather events. Damini Lightning Apps has also been developed by IITM-Pune and ESSO where monitoring of all lightning activity happening specifically in India and alert is generated, if lightning happens nearby through GPS notification under 20KM and 40 KM. All residents of A&N Islands have been requested to download the MAUSAM App and Damini Lightning App from the Google Play Store or IOS and install the same in mobiles to get timely information.

Cyclone 'Mandous': Andhra CM asks collectors to be vigilant

AMARAVATI, DEC 8 --/ Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday directed the collectors of various districts to be vigilant in view of the cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) heavy rainfall is predicted over several parts of the state as cyclone 'Mandous' over the Bay of Bengal is expected to cross the coast between Puducherry and Sriharikota in AP on the midnight of December 9. The chief minister

held a review meeting with the officials concerned here over the cyclone, an official release said. He said adequate precautions should be taken by the authorities reviewing the impact of the storm from time to time. The officials informed the chief minister that rain is predicted in Nellore, Tirupati, Chittoor and other districts. Jagan asked the agriculture department officials to create awareness about the precautionary measures to be taken by the farmers and be helpful to them. Heavy

rainfall is likely to occur at isolated places over Prakasam and SPSR Nellore districts today, the IMD said. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely to occur at isolated places over SPSR Nellore and Chittoor districts and heavy rainfall over Prakasam, YSR district and Anantapuramu districts on Friday, it said. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely occur at isolated places over Chittoor and Anantapuramu districts and heavy rainfall over YSR district and Prakasam district on December 10, it further said. (PTI)

Cong's Himachal win to have ripple effect on states going to polls next year: Anand Sharma

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 --/ Senior Congress leader and former Union minister Anand Sharma on Thursday said the Congress' victory in Himachal Pradesh will have resonance and a ripple effect on states where elections are scheduled for next year.



Sharma said he was happy that the people of Himachal Pradesh demonstrated "wisdom and maturity" to give the Congress a decisive victory and a stable majority in the state. "Delighted over the victory of Congress in my home state Himachal Pradesh. I thank our people, the voters and people of the state who have demonstrated wisdom and maturity to give Congress a decisive victory and stable majority," he said. "The victory will have resonance and a ripple effect in states that will go to elections next year," Sharma said. The former Union minister, who is also a member of the G23 group of Congress dissenters, had campaigned for the party in Himachal assembly polls and many candidates, for whom he canvassed, won the election. He, however, later had lamented that the party did not utilise his services well. "Equally also congratulating all the Congress workers for their spirited campaign and not overwhelmed by BJP's carpet bombing and unprecedented use of resources. Devbhomi has sent a message, loud and clear -- withdraw the Agniveer scheme and restore the old pension scheme. 'Himachal contributes large number its youth serve in the armed forces and those regions have rejected the BJP and its poli-

cies. A united congress will provide a government that will take forward our developmental agenda and fulfil the promises made to the people," Sharma said in a series of tweets. The Congress leader said the workers remained united and campaigned hard for the party. Sharma also complimented Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for her "spirited" campaign in the state. The Congress is headed for a simple majority in Himachal Pradesh, where people of the state voted in line with the tradition by voting out the incumbent BJP government. (PTI)

truecaller

Government Services launched on Truecaller: Verified government contacts to help connect citizens and government

The digital government directory will strengthen trust in digital communication and empower citizens to connect with public representatives and authorities through verified contacts across states.

Andaman, 8th December 2022: Truecaller launches in app digital government directory to support seamless interaction between citizens of India and the Government by giving easy access to thousands of verified contacts of government officials. This is an important step to build trust in citizen services by protecting users from any scams, fraud and spam.

The digital government directory gives access to helplines, law enforcement agencies, embassies, educational institutes, hospitals, and other key departments of about 23 states including union territories to Truecaller app users. This information has been sourced directly from the government, and official government sources. This initiative is aimed at helping and streamlining public access to government representatives and assisting over 240 million Indian Truecaller users in connecting with the government in a hassle-free manner.

Based on interactions with netizens and relevant stakeholders, Truecaller has learnt that one of the most pervasive scams on the phone involves impersonation of government officials. The creation of a verified government contact directory is a continuation of Truecaller's efforts to build trust in communication and protect our users from frauds and scams. Users will see a green background and a blue tick, indicating that the number is verified. Truecaller is working with different government departments to expand the directory and is looking at adding contacts at the district and municipal levels in the next phase, based on user feedback. Truecaller has also created a simple process for any government agency to share information and get verified on the directory.

Commenting on the launch of the feature, **Pragya Misra, Director of Public Affairs, Truecaller said that "Truecaller** has evolved to become more than just a Caller Identification app and is today bridging the digital divide between the urban and growing semi-urban/rural markets in India by enabling trust in digital communication. Our attempt is to protect people from widespread impersonation of government officials leading to scams and frauds. We believe that with this feature, citizens can easily reach out to the right authorities when in need. This is a first of its kind digital directory of government numbers and we will keep improving on it based on user feedback. We will continue to align our efforts to make communication safe by building trust."

To access the feature and learn more about it, please visit – <https://www.truecaller.com/blog/features/introducing-the-government-services-digital-directory>

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Vidya Rai, W/o Dal Bahadur Rai R/o Tharo Line, Badamtam Tea Garden, P.O. Leborg, Dist- Darjeeling, Pin- 734101, W.B. declare that I have change my name Vidhya Rai to Vidya Rai. As per affidavit before the Notary Public at Kolkata on 08 Dec 2022.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Puspita Sarkar Mondal, W/o Pabitra Mondal R/o 311, School Road Dharmaitala, P.O. Dakshin Jagaddal, P.S. Sonarpur, Dist- Baruipur, Pin- 700151, W.B. declare that I have change my name Puspita Mondal to Puspita Sarkar Mondal. As per affidavit before the Notary Public at Kolkata on 07 Dec 2022.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Sanjay Keshari, S/o Ram Prasad Keshari R/o MA/1, Mahua Sarani, Rabindra Pally, A-Block, Durgapur-1, P.S. Coke Oven, Dist- Paschim Bardhaman –713201 W.B. declare that I have change my name Sanjoy Keshari to Sanjay Keshari. As per affidavit before the Notary Public at Kolkata on 07 Dec 2022.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Khadija Resma Begum, W/o Sk. Nagimul Hassan R/o Vill. and P.O. Sahapur, P.S. Panchla, Dist- Howrah -711310 W.B. declare that I have change my name Minu Begum to Khadija Resma Begum. As per affidavit before the Notary Public at Kolkata on 07 Dec 2022.

Lotus blooms brighter in Gujarat, withers in Himachal

Successive 7th term for BJP in Gujarat, Cong bags HP; Kejriwal declares AAP national party



(Left to right) Gujarat chief minister Bhupendra Patel greeting people after winning the Assembly election at Ghatlodia area, in Ahmedabad on Thursday. Congress supporters celebrating victory in Kullu on Thursday



AHMEDABAD/SHIMLA, DEC 8 /-- Riding high on the charisma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP on Thursday retained power in Gujarat for a record seventh straight term pulverising the opposition to secure the biggest majority ever in the state.

While the BJP set new records in the home state of Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah with its "historic" victory, it lost Himachal Pradesh to the Congress after a close fight and the hill state continued with the tradition of nearly four decades of voting out the incumbent party. Congress leaders credited its general secretary Priyanka Gandhi for the win which came as a boost for the grand old party in the home state of BJP President JP Nadda. As Modi continued to hold sway over voters and addressed 31 election rallies in Gujarat, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) crossed the three-fourths majority and in the process checkmated the new entrant Aam Aadmi Party(AAP) in triangular contests and also pushed the Congress down to its all time low.

The Gujarat state BJP president C R Paatil said Bhupendra Patel, the party's 60-year-old soft-spoken face in Gujarat, would continue as the chief minister and his swearing-in ceremony would be held on December 12. Patel won the Ghatlodia seat in Ahmedabad by a

huge margin of 1.92 lakh votes. Getting support from all sections, the BJP got 147 seats and was leading in 9 in a House of 182 garnering a vote share of nearly 53 per cent which was the highest for any party in the western state. The BJP, which bagged 99 seats in 2017 Assembly polls with a 49.1 per cent vote share, surpassed its previous best showing of 127 seats in 2002 when Modi was the chief minister. Congress holds the all-time record of 149 seats that it had won in 1985 under the leadership of Madhavsinh Solanki.

With a nearly 13 per cent vote share, the Arvind Kejriwal-headed AAP won five seats. In a video message, the Delhi chief minister said though the AAP has not won many seats the votes it got helped it attain the national party status. Defence minister Rajnath Singh and Gujarat chief minister Patel credited Prime Minister Modi for the party's "historic victory". "The biggest credit for this victory goes to public's trust in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his popularity and credibility. Congratulations to him and thanks to the public," Singh said. The BJP, which focused on a development agenda and overcame anti-incumbency yet again after being in power for 27 years without losing an election since 1995, also equalled Left Front's feat of seven consecutive terms in West Bengal.

After giving a tough fight to the BJP in 2017 Assembly polls in Gujarat by winning 77 seats, the Congress has hit a nadir in the western state where the party's campaign, mostly shouldered by local leaders, has leaned on door-to-door canvassing for votes as its leader Rahul Gandhi chose to stay away to focus on the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. Rahul had aggressively campaigned in 2017. The AAP also appeared to have played spoilsport for the Congress which mustered a vote share of about 27 per cent. With a vote share of nearly 28 per cent, the Congress won 16 seats and was leading in one. Firebrand Dalit leader and sitting Congress MLA Jignesh Mevani retained his Vadgam seat by a slim margin after trailing in the initial rounds of vote counting.

BJP also managed to improve its tally as the issues it faced in the 2017 state polls like the state-wide outburst of anger among the Patidar community and restlessness among the traders over the GST regime appear to have faded. Hundreds of BJP workers thronged the party office in Gandhinagar as they danced and distributed sweets outside the Gujarat state party headquarters. Though the Opposition in Gujarat took on the Modi government over rising inflation, slowing growth and joblessness, the economic troubles apparently did not dent BJP's

GUJARAT RESULT TALLY

182 / 182 SEATS (92 SEATS TO WIN)

Party	BJP	INC	AAP	OTH
WINS/Leads	156	17	5	4
2017 :	+57	-60	+5	-2

HIMACHAL PRADESH RESULT TALLY

68 / 68 SEATS (35 SEATS TO WIN)

Party	BJP	INC	AAP	OTH
WINS/Leads	25	40	3	4
2017 :	-19	+19	0	0

Support to BJP reflects anger against dynasty rule: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 /-- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said Gujarat has broken all records and created history by showering love on the BJP despite the party being in power in the state for 25 years. Addressing party workers here, Modi said the support to BJP shows that people's anger against dynasty rule and corruption was rising. He said people had voted for the BJP as it was taking all facilities to the poor and middle class at the earliest. "I am thankful to the voters of Himachal also, where our vote share was just less than one per cent below that of the winning party," the Prime Minister said. "I bow to people. Their blessings are overwhelming," the prime minister said. The BJP was on course to win 156 seats in the 182-member state Assembly, its best ever performance in Gujarat. (PTI)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing BJP workers after party's victory in the Gujarat Assembly elections, at party's headquarters in New Delhi

AT A GLANCE

MPs should not write about Speaker on Twitter: Birla

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 /-- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday cautioned MPs for writing against him on Twitter and asked them not to do so. Birla did not take the name of any MP but his remarks in Lok Sabha came immediately after Trinamool Congress member Mahua Moitra raised an issue related to the Civil Aviation Ministry. "Some members sometimes write on Twitter that the speaker does not give opportunity to the members to speak. Please keep in mind that the members should not write on Twitter about the speaker. That would be good," he said during Question Hour.

Cong thanks people on Himachal victory; Rahul says every promise made to public will be fulfilled

NEW DELHI, DEC 8 /-- With the Congress winning the Himachal Pradesh elections on Thursday, party leaders thanked the people of state for reposing faith in it and giving a clear mandate. "This victory is of all of you. Thank you Himachal Pradesh," the party said in a tweet in Hindi from its official handle. The Congress now will be in power in three states on its own and in as many others - Jharkhand, Bihar, Tamil Nadu -- in alliance. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge congratulated the people of Himachal and credited them and party leaders for the victory of his party. Kharge said Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra has also helped in this win and thanked former Congress president Sonia Gandhi for her support in these elections. He said it is a long journey ahead and "we will all sit together and discuss the way forward". Former Congress president Rahul said: "Heartfelt thanks to the people of Himachal Pradesh for this decisive victory. Hearty congratulations to all Congress workers and leaders. Your hard work and dedication are truly behind this victory," he said in a tweet in Hindi. "I assure you again, every promise made to the public will be fulfilled at the earliest," Rahul

added. Congress leader and Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel said his party would protect its MLAs from the fear of poaching by the BJP. Baghel was the party's senior observer for Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh Congress chief Pratibha Singh congratulated the people of the state for the party's victory in the state. "Hearty congratulations and best wishes to all the people of Himachal and party workers for the huge victory of the Congress in Himachal assembly elections. This is the victory of all of you," Singh said in a tweet in Hindi. Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath said: "The beauty of democracy lies not in the power of any party but in the power of the people." AICC in-charge for party affairs in Himachal Pradesh Rajeev Shukla said the party workers did well and thanked all the leaders for campaigning in the elections. Senior Congress leader and former union minister Anand Sharma hoped the Congress victory in Himachal Pradesh will have ripple effect in states going to poll next year. Sharma said he was happy that the people of Himachal Pradesh demonstrated wisdom and maturity to give the Congress a decisive victory and a stable majority. "Delighted over the victory of Congress in my home state

Himachal Pradesh. I thank our people, the voters and people of Himachal who have demonstrated wisdom and maturity to give Congress a decisive victory and stable majority," he said. "The victory will have resonance and a ripple effective in states that will go to elections next year," he also said. Sharma, a member of the G23 grouping, had campaigned for the party in Himachal Assembly polls, but later had lamented that the party did not utilise his services well. "Equally also congratulating all the Congress workers for their spirited campaign and not overwhelmed by BJP's carpet bombing and unprecedented use of resources. Devbhomi has sent a message, loud and clear -- withdraw the Agniveer scheme and restore the old pension scheme," he said on Twitter. The former Union minister said a united congress will provide a government that will take forward the developmental agenda and fulfil the promises made to the people. Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala congratulated people party workers. "Truth and progress have won while lies and deceit have failed," he said in a tweet in Hindi. The Congress has achieved a simple majority in Himachal Pradesh, winning 39 seats and leading in another. (PTI)

Gujarat poll result will not impact 2024 LS polls in Bengal: TMC

KOLKATA, DEC 8 /-- Ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal on Thursday asserted that the BJP's landslide victory in Gujarat assembly elections will not have any impact on the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in the eastern state. The Mamata Banerjee-led party, however, said it will analyse the results of the Assembly polls that went in favour of the saffron party. The party, on the other hand, claimed that Congress victory in Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections showed people's desire for change in government every five years. Opposition BJP in West Bengal, however, said that Gujarat poll result showed anti-incumbency did not work in the western state as people reaffirmed their faith in the "Gujarat model of development", while saying that the setback in Himachal Pradesh will be introspected. Tapas Roy, TMC deputy chief

whip in West Bengal Assembly, told PTI: "The people of Gujarat have again voted in favour of the BJP. We will have to analyse the factors and reasons behind the verdict. However, this result will not have any impact on the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in our state." Roy said that the results in the hill state are, however, on expected lines. BJP national secretary Anupam Hazra said that anti-incumbency factor does not work in Gujarat. "Gujarat and BJP are synonymous. The trust of the people of the western state on the saffron party remains undented because of economic growth and high HDI. West Bengal should be turned into Gujarat for its own benefit," Hazra said. The BJP leader also said Gujarat did not witness any major incident during the polls, unlike West Bengal where not a single phase during the 2021 Assembly elections was free from incidents of violence. (PTI)



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visiting a person who was admitted to SSKM trauma care centre after he was injured in a road accident at Chingrighata —EOI Photo

Maharashtra-Karnataka border row: Centre cannot remain mute spectator, says Pawar

MUMBAI, DEC 8 /-- Amid the simmering border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka, Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar on Thursday said the central government cannot remain a mute spectator.

If power is misused to destroy the idea of a language medium and movement, there is bound to be a reaction. But, the Centre has turned a blind eye to it, Pawar said addressing a meeting of the NCP here. The Maharashtra-Karnataka boundary dispute is not between the two states, but for the rights and justice of the Marathi-speaking people in the border areas of the neighbouring state, the former Union minister said. On Wednesday, the issue of the border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka was raised in the Lok Sabha with NCP leader and Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule seeking the intervention of the Union home ministry in the matter. Referring to it, Pawar said: "Yesterday, the Lok Sabha Speaker told Supriya Sule that the issue is between two states and not an issue to be raised in Parliament. If Parliament will not look into the dispute, who will? The central government cannot be a mute spectator."

The former Union minister said the Karnataka government has always taken a different stand on how the percentage of Kannada population can be increase in Belagavi in the southern state, which is located adjoining the Maharashtra border. They (Karnataka government) brought government offices to Belagavi. The winter session of the Karnataka legislature is also held in Belagavi to show Maharashtra has no right over the city, Pawar said. Kannada is compulsory in schools there and children are not allowed to study Marathi, he said, adding that there are schools of all mediums in Maharashtra, he said. "If power is misused to destroy the idea of language medium and movement, there is bound to be a reaction. Unfortunately, the Centre has turned a blind eye," said the NCP chief. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Sule said people of Maharashtra are getting "beaten up" every day despite the BJP being the ruling party in both the states. (PTI)

Will continue to be 'steadfast friend' of Sri Lanka: India

COLOMBO, DEC 8/--/ India on Thursday said it will continue to be a "steadfast friend" of Sri Lanka and is committed to strengthening the bilateral economic partnership for mutual benefit, as it thanked President Ranil Wickremesinghe for holding "successful" talks on debt restructuring.

Wickremesinghe during the inaugural session of the Sri Lanka Economic Summit 2022 on Monday said that it held "successful" talks with India on debt restructuring and will also begin discussions with China, as the island nation scrambles to get assurances from major bilateral creditors to close a crucial deal with the IMF.

Sri Lanka, which is trying to secure a USD 2.9 billion bridge loan from the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), is also looking at financial assurances from its major creditors -- China, Japan and India -- which is the requisite for Colombo to get the bailout package.

Replying to Wickremesinghe's tweet on holding the "successful" talks on debt restructuring, the Indian High Commission here tweeted, "Thank you H.E President @RW_UNP. #India will continue to be a steadfast friend of #SriLanka and stand by our brethren. We are committed to strengthening the bilateral economic partnership for mutual benefit."

Sri Lanka has large debt rollover volumes (Gross Financing Need) running up to 37 per cent of GDP in 2022, which the IMF wants

to bring down.

The exact GFN target is not known, but other

restructuring of several recipient countries of Chinese finances, which are



countries under restructuring have levels around 15 per cent, and some less, the EconomyNext reported.

China, however, continues to be ambivalent about its stand on loans to Sri Lanka as it is set for talks with the IMF for debt

defaulting on their external debt. Sri Lanka, which went bankrupt earlier this year, had announced a default on over USD 51 billion in foreign loans, including that of China.

China has also announced assistance of 500 million RMB (about

USD 74 million) for the supply of essential goods, but it remained silent about former Lanka president Gotabaya Rajapaksa's request to defer the loan repayment.

India has rushed about USD 4 billion in assistance in the form of line credit and other modes to help Sri Lanka this year, which has virtually declared insolvency and defaulted on all foreign loans.

In November, Sri Lanka said it held a "productive" second round of crucial talks with its bilateral creditors. Sri Lanka is going through its worst economic crisis since its independence in 1948, triggered by a severe paucity of foreign exchange reserves.

In mid-April, Sri Lanka declared its international

debt default due to the forex crisis.

The Sri Lankan government in May appointed international legal and debt advisors for debt restructuring after the country declared its international debt default for the first time in history.

Sri Lanka is nearly bankrupt and has suspended repaying its USD 51 billion foreign debt, of which it must repay USD 28 billion by 2027.

Sri Lanka, a country of 22 million people, plunged into financial and political turmoil earlier this year as it faced a shortage of foreign currencies.

Due to this, the country has been unable to afford key imports, including fuel, fertilisers and medicine, leading to serpentine queues. (PTI)

Nobel laureate: No lasting peace in Ukraine without justice

COPENHAGEN, DEC 8/--/There will be no lasting peace in Ukraine until there is justice and human rights, the head of the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Liberties said Thursday as she arrived in Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize with fellow human rights campaigners from Belarus and Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin "thinks he can do exactly what he wants," Oleksandra Matviichuk told reporters upon arrival at the Oslo airport. "There will be no lasting peace in our region until we achieve justice."

"Human rights and peace are inextricably linked," Matviichuk said. "A state that systematically violates human rights does so not only against its own citizens, but against an entire region, an entire world. Russia is a great example of this," she said according to the Norwegian news agency NTB.

This year's Nobel Peace Prize was shared by jailed Belarus rights activist Ales Bialiatski, the Russian group Memorial and the Centre for Civil Liberties. The Norwegian Nobel Committee said the laureates "have made an outstanding effort to document war crimes, human right abuses and the abuse of power. Together they demonstrate the significance of civil society for peace and democracy."

The prize was seen as a strong rebuke to the authoritarian rule of Putin. "We have received this award during a war that started in 2014, and which has escalated into a bloody and cruel conflict," Matviichuk said, adding that getting the Nobel Peace Prize "entails a great responsibility."

Jan Rachinsky, chairman of the International Memorial Board, who also arrived in Oslo Thursday to receive the prize, said the situation in Ukraine reminded him of the conditions in Russia during World War II, and what his own relatives then experienced: Lack of electricity, heat, food.

"The most important message from us is that the world must react more strongly to violations of human rights," he told reporters at the airport, according to NTB.

Natalia Pinchuk, the wife of Ales Bialiatski, will receive the prize of her husband's behalf, the Norwegian Nobel Committee has said. Bialiatski, who founded the non-governmental organisation Human Rights Centre Viasna, was detained following protests in 2020 against the re-election of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. He remains in jail without trial and faces up to 12 years in prison if convicted.

While the peace prize is handed out Saturday in the Norwegian capital, the other Nobel awards are given during a ceremony in Stockholm at the same time, in line with award founder Alfred Nobel's wishes. The awards are always handed out on December 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death in 1896. Each prize includes a diploma, a gold medal and a monetary award of 10 million kronor (about USD 967,000) to be shared among the recipients. (AP)

Indian-American Krishna Vavilala receives US Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award

HOUSTON, DEC 8/--/US President Joe Biden has recognised Indian-American and a longtime Houstonian, Krishna Vavilala, with the Presidential Lifetime Achievement (PLA) Award, the nation's highest honour for his contributions to his community and the country at large. The Presidential Lifetime Achievement (PLA) Awards, led by AmeriCorps, is an annual event held to honour citizens, who exhibit outstanding character, worth ethic, and dedication to their communities.

AmeriCorps, an agency of the United States government, engages more than five million Americans in service through a variety of volunteer work programmes in many sectors.

At a glittering ceremony last week, 86-year-old Vavilala, a Houstonian for the past four decades, was lauded for his lifetime service and achievements by calling him a "Change Maker and Global Humanitarian".

AmeriCorps certifier Dr Sonia R. White presented the official Presidential Award to Vavilala which contained a framed proclamation from the White House, signed by President Biden, and the medalion. Vavilala attended the red-carpet event along with his wife, Prabhat Lakshmi, two daughters, Monica and Amanda, and four grandchildren.

In the Citation of the Congressional Certificate of Recognition, 18th District Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, who was the keynote speaker, said "Your dedication to serving your nation deserves the respect, admiration, and Commendation of the United States Congress."

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner stated in his congratulatory message that the award identifies selfless individuals who work behind the scenes without seeking the limelight for their efforts.

"For this, your kindness and generosity are deserving of this award. The City of Houston is pleased to honour you and thank you for your dedication to the betterment of this world," it said.

Originally from Andhra Pradesh, Vavilala is a retired Electrical Engineer, and currently, the founder and Chairman of the Foundation for India Studies (FIS), a 16-year-old non-profit organisation, whose signature project "The Indo-American Oral History Project" won the 2019 Mary Fay Barnes Award for Excellence.

"I am deeply touched by this unexpected honour, which is truly a recognition of the contributions of the Indians in Houston," Vavilala told PTI.

In 2006, Vavilala established the India Studies programme at the University of Houston. He was also responsible for initiating the India Studies programme at Texas Southern University, early this year.

Vavilala, a strong believer in promoting peace and racial harmony, has participated in several Martin Luther King Jr. parades, dressed as Mahatma Gandhi, a trend he started in 2006, to bring Indian and Black communities together and to spread the message of peace and nonviolence, which both leaders, MLK and Gandhi followed.

FIS remains committed to commemorating Gandhi and Dr King's legacies of non-violence and peaceful co-existence. As a nine-year-old boy, Vavilala experienced the aura of Gandhi in person in his native town, Rajahmundry and later on as an immigrant here proposed and served as the Project Chair of the Gandhi statue project in Herman Park (2003).

In addition, Vavilala has also served as a President of the American Society of Indian Engineers, Telugu Cultural Association, Houston and Telugu Literary and Cultural Association. He has received several awards and accolades from various organisations including the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston, the Indo-American Press Club and the Lifetime Achievement Award, from the India Culture Centre.

Sponsored by Comerica, PLA awards honourees also included the Muhamad Ali family, State Rep. Shawn Thierry, Grammy-winning gospel artist Brian Courtney Wilson, Global Humanitarian Ricky Anderson, Radio One VP Pamela McKay, Global Humanitarian Clarence KD McNair, CEO of MLK Grande Parade Houston Charles Stamps, CEO of Nation Waste, Inc. Maria Rios. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the S.M.I.L.E. Foundation Inc.

The PLA Awards have rapidly become recognised as an immense honour and highly anticipated annual event in America. "The Selection Committee of Sonia R. White Enterprises, L.L.C. chose each of the honourees based on citizens displaying exemplary character and unparalleled leadership in the community," Dr White said. "Each honouree has committed to over 4000 community service hours and exhibits outstanding character, worth ethic, and dedication to their communities," she added. (PTI)



U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace meet at the Pentagon in Washington

---REUTERS

New York Times journalists, other workers on 24-hour strike

NEW YORK, DEC 8/--/ Hundreds of journalists and other employees at The New York Times began a 24-hour walkout Thursday, the first strike of its kind at the newspaper in more than 40 years. Newsroom employees and other members of The NewsGuild of New York say they are fed up with bargaining that has dragged on since their last contract expired in March 2021. The union announced last week that more than 1,100 employees would stage a 24-hour work stoppage starting at 12:01 a.m. Thursday unless the two sides reach a contract deal.

The NewsGuild tweeted Thursday morning that workers, "are now officially on work stoppage, the first of this scale at the company in 4 decades. It's never an easy decision to refuse to do work you love, but our members are willing to do what it takes to win a better newsroom for all."

Negotiations took place Tuesday and some on Wednesday, but the sides remained far apart on issues including wage increases and remote-work policies.

On Wednesday evening the union said via Twitter that a deal had not been reached and the walkout was happening. "We were ready to work for as long as it took to reach a fair deal," it said, "but management walked away from the table with five hours to go."

"We know what we're

worth," the union added.

But New York Times spokesperson Danielle Rhoades Ha said in a statement that they were still in negotiations when they were told that the strike was happening. "It is disappointing that they are taking such an extreme action when we are not at an impasse," she said.

It was unclear how Thursday's coverage would be affected, but the strike's supporters include members of the fast-paced live-news desk, which covers breaking news for the digital paper. Employees were planning a rally for that afternoon outside the newspaper's offices near Times Square.

Rhoades Ha told The Associated Press the company has "solid plans in place" to continue producing content, including relying on international reporters and other journalists who are not union members.

In a note sent to guild-represented staff Tuesday night, Deputy Managing Editor Cliff Levy called the planned strike "puzzling" and "an unsettling moment in negotiations over a new contract."

He said it would be the first strike by the bargaining unit since 1981 and "comes despite intensifying efforts by the company to make progress." But a letter signed by more than 1,000 employees, the NewsGuild said management has been "dragging its feet" bargaining

for nearly two years and "time is running out to reach a fair contract" by the end of the year.

The NewsGuild also said the company told employees planning to strike they would not get paid for the duration of the walkout. Members were also asked to work extra hours get work done ahead of the strike, according to the union.

The New York Times has seen other, shorter walkouts in recent years, including a half-day protest in August by a new union representing technology workers who claimed unfair labour practices.

In one breakthrough that both sides called significant, the company backed off its proposal to replace the existing adjustable pension plan with an enhanced 401 (k) retirement plan. The Times offered instead to let the union choose between the two. The company also agreed to expand fertility treatment benefits.

Levy said the company has also offered to raise wages by 5.5 per cent upon ratification of the contract, followed by 3 per cent hikes in 2023 and 2024. That would be an increase from the 2.2 per cent annual increases in the expired contract.

Stacy Cowley, a finance reporter and union representative, said the union is seeking 10 per cent pay raises at ratification, which she said would make up for raises not received over the past two years. (AP)

Lahore opens its first transgender school providing free education

LAHORE, DEC 8/--/ Pakistan's Punjab government has opened the first transgender public school here in the provincial capital in its bid to empower more trans persons in society.

Earlier, Pakistan's Punjab government had set up three transgender schools in the province -- Multan, Bahawalpur, and D.G Khan - to educate and teach skills to trans persons.

These institutes provide free education from primary to higher secondary classes while imparting skill training that includes stitching, cooking, and beauty make-up.

The Lahore school, which was opened on Wednesday, will work in two shifts where the first half will be dedicated to imparting mainstream education while the second half will focus on teaching technical skills.

"The Lahore school for transgender will work in two shifts. In the first, the students will be imparted education while in the second shift they will receive training in technical skills. The government will provide free books, uniforms, school bags, and pick and drop service," said a statement by the Punjab School Education Department.

A total of 36 transgender persons have been enrolled so far in the school.

The statement further said the teachers at the school also belong to the transgender community while two consultants have been engaged to help the community understand their problems.

Punjab province has 64.4 per cent of the country's transgender population with 6,709 people registered in the category.

However, Lahore and its adjoining areas alone, reportedly have a population of 30,000 transgender persons.

Access to education is the right of every Pakistanis but transgender persons face discrimination in the country and many of them struggle to find employment.

The country's upper house -- Senate -- had unanimously approved a bill in 2018 for the protection of the rights of transgender people, empowering them to determine their own gender identity. (PTI)

China's Xi at Saudi palace to meet royals on Mideast trip

DUBAI, DEC 8/--/Chinese leader Xi Jinping met on Thursday with Saudi Arabia's king and the crown prince while on a visit to the kingdom, solidifying ties with a region crucial to his country's energy supplies as sanctions intensify on Russia over its war on Ukraine. Xi arrived at Al Yamama Palace in Riyadh and was greeted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the king's assertive son who stands ready to rule the oil-rich kingdom in the decades to come. Xi shook hands with the prince as an honour guard on horseback carried Saudi and Chinese flags.

It wasn't immediately clear what the two focused on in their discussions, though Xi in a newspaper column published by Al Riyadh newspaper said "exchanges between China and Arab states date back more than 2,000 years." The column also quoted a saying by Islam's Prophet Muhammad: "Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China." "The Arab people value independence, oppose external interference, stand up to power politics and high-handedness, and always seek to make progress," Xi's column read. He also noted that the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, serve as "an energy tank for world economy."

China, the world's largest crude oil importer, relies heavily on Saudi oil, paying tens of billions of dollars annually to the kingdom. Gulf Arab states are trying to recalibrate their foreign policy as the United States turns its attention elsewhere in the world. Russia's war on Ukraine and the West's hardening stance on Moscow has also left the Arab countries wanting to cement ties with China. For Prince Mohammed, hosting Xi boosts his own international profile after being linked to the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

Beyond China's oil purchases, its construction expertise could be tapped as well for Prince Mohammed's planned USD 500 billion futuristic city of Neom on the Red Sea. Chinese construction firms have worked elsewhere in Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, particularly in Dubai in the UAE. Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, also has provided political cover to China over its harsh policies toward Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

More than a million have been sent to detention centres, forced to denounce Islam and swear fealty to Xi and the party. The trip to Saudi Arabia marks a further move by Xi to restore his global profile after spending most of the pandemic inside China.

The visit is his third overseas trip since early 2020. It also comes as Xi, who was granted a third five-year term as leader in October, has faced street protests over his zero-COVID-19 policies that represent the most-significant challenge to his rule. During the visit, Xi is expected to attend the inaugural China-Arab States Summit and a meeting of the GCC. (AP)

First King Charles 50 pence coins enter circulation in UK

LONDON, DEC 8/--/The first coinage featuring King Charles III will start to appear in circulation at Post Offices around the UK from Thursday, with millions of the new 50-pence coins bearing the new monarch's portrait given out as change to customers.

The coin with the 74-year-old monarch's image reflects a transition from the Elizabethan age of the late Queen Elizabeth II to the Carolean era of Charles, with the coin also commemorating the life and legacy of the Queen on its reverse.

"Today marks a new era for UK coinage, with the effigy of King Charles III appearing on 50ps in

circulation. It's a fantastic opportunity for coin collectors to add to their collections, or start one for the first time," said Rebecca Morgan, Director of Collector Services at the Royal Mint.

"We anticipate a new generation of coin collectors emerging, with people keeping a close eye on their change to try and spot a new 50p that bears the portrait of our new King. The Royal Mint has been trusted to make coins bearing the Monarch's effigy for over 1,100 years and we are proud to continue this tradition into the reign of King Charles III," she said.

A total of 9.6 million 50

pences will enter circulation, with the rest entering in line with demand. According to the Royal Mint, a commemorative version of the coin released in October saw record visitors to its website in the 24 hours following.

"It is a tremendous honour for the Post Office and for Postmasters that the first coinage featuring King Charles III is being released into circulation via our extensive branch network," said Nick Read, Chief Executive of the Post Office.

"December is our busiest time of the year so the coin will be entering our network in a phased

manner. If you don't receive the new 50p in your change on your first visit to a Post Office you may well get it in your change in a subsequent visit, so keep a lookout for it," he said.

Starting this week, Post Office branches throughout the country will receive the first batch of 4.9 million 50 pence coins bearing the King's portrait, including the Aldwych branch which is close to Clarence House in London the official residence of King Charles III.

The portrait has been created by renowned British sculptor Martin Jennings and has been personally approved by Charles. In keeping with

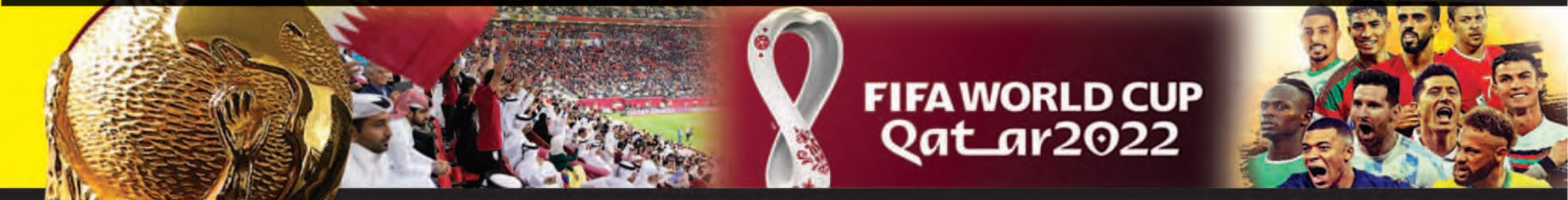
tradition, the King's portrait faces to the left, the opposite direction to his late mother Queen Elizabeth II.

The reverse, or tails side, of the 50 pence features a design that originally appeared on the 1953 Coronation Crown, struck to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's coronation at Westminster Abbey and includes the four quarters of the Royal Arms depicted within a shield.

In between each shield is an emblem of the four nations that make up the United Kingdom a rose for England, a thistle for Scotland, a shamrock for Northern Ireland, and a leek for Wales.

All UK coins bearing the portrait, or effigy, of Queen Elizabeth II will remain legal tender and in active circulation, as historically it has been commonplace for coins featuring the effigies of different monarchs to co-circulate. This ensures a smooth transition, with minimal environmental impact and cost, the Royal Mint said.

There are approximately 27 billion coins currently circulating in the UK bearing the effigy of Queen Elizabeth II, to be replaced over time as they become damaged or worn out. Other denominations of coins will be manufactured carrying the King's effigy in line with demand. (PTI)



Against the dancing Brazilians, resilient Croatians hope to make a mark



Today's Match
Quarter-final 1
Croatia
vs Brazil
- 8.30 PM IST
Quarter-final 2
Netherlands
vs Argentina
- 12.30 AM IST



Brazil (top) and Croatia during their respective training sessions in preparation for the quarterfinal

Netherlands, Argentines meet again with FIFA World Cup history in the air



DOHA, DEC 8 /--/ Merely a glance at their iconic orange or blue and white striped shirts is enough to evoke memories of World Cups past and more history will surely be written on Friday when the Netherlands face Argentina in their quarter-final.

Argentina have the pride that comes from being two-times world champions while the Netherlands carry the baggage of being three-times beaten finalists. The game is far from being a nostalgia-fest, however, pitting one of the greatest forwards of all time against one of the finest defenders of the modern era, with Lionel Messi trying to unpick a defence marshalled by Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk. The game also pits the youngest manager in the tournament against the oldest. Argentina's 44-year-old coach Lionel Scaloni, in his first major tournament, will have to out-think the wily 71-year-old Louis van Gaal, whose resume includes league titles with Barcelona and Bayern Munich as well as a Champions League victory with Ajax. The South Americans came into the tournament, as always, with high hopes in their homeland of a victory to match those celebrated in 1978 and 1986, while the Dutch had more tempered expectations given their failure to qualify four years ago. It has been smooth progress in Qatar for the Dutch though, who topped their group and then beat the United States in the last 16 with some comfort and style, looking solid at the back and – despite critics labelling them dull – increasingly effective in their attacking play. With Memphis Depay's fitness gradually improving and Cody Gakpo having enjoyed a good tournament, the Dutch have a punch to their attack that many feared would be missing. Argentina began the tournament with a shock loss to Saudi Arabia, one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history, but recovered to finish first in the group. Messi then turned on the style as they overcame

Australia to book their place in the last eight. Van Gaal unsurprisingly sees Messi's creativity as a serious threat but he raised some eyebrows when he also hinted at the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner's lack of defensive work-rate. "Messi is the most dangerous creative player, he is able to create a lot and to score goals himself. But when they lose the ball he doesn't participate much, this gives us chances", he said. Surprisingly, given their pedigree, Argentina have never beaten the Netherlands inside 90 minutes in their nine meetings in World Cup and friendly encounters. But it is their victory on penalties in Sao Paulo in the semi-final in 2014 that lingers in the mind for Van Gaal, who was in charge of the Netherlands at the time. Van Gaal noted that while Messi was neutralized by the Netherlands in that game it counted for little given that the Argentines advanced after a shootout to end the Dutch dream of finally celebrating a World Cup title. A fonder memory for Dutch fans is of the 1998 World Cup where Dennis Bergkamp secured a place in the last eight with a wonderful last-minute finish in a 2-1 victory. Bergkamp is one of many superb talents that the Netherlands has produced since they made the world take notice of them in the 1970s with a team inspired by the brilliant Johan Cruyff. Widely considered to be one of the best teams never to win the World Cup, the Dutch finished runners-up in 1974 and 1978 – in the latter final losing 3-1 to hosts Argentina. Top technical skills and clever tactics have been part of the Dutch game ever since but World Cup success has evaded them, with only the 1988 European Championship title offering some consolation. There is no player of the level of Bergkamp, Cruyff or Marco van Basten in this current version of the team in orange. with perhaps only the towering centre-half Van Dijk meriting comparison in terms of class. (AFP)

DOHA, DEC 8 /--/ Brazil head into Friday's World Cup quarterfinal against Croatia brimming with confidence after Neymar's return inspired a performance laced with swagger and arrogance in the last 16. Their eye-catching 4-1 victory against South Korea, which featured goals by Vinicius Junior, Richarlison and Lucas Paqueta as well as a Neymar penalty, sent out an ominous message to their rivals in Qatar. The football, for 45 minutes at least, was free-flowing and full of joy, the players celebrating their goals by showing off their dance moves and even getting Tite, their 61-year-old coach, to join in. So thrilling were the Selecao at Doha's Stadium 974 that their performance drew comparisons in some quarters with the very best and most entertaining Brazil sides, from the 1970 team of Pele to the 1982 vintage led by Socrates.

Yet it was just one game, and it came after the five-time champions scored just three goals in three group matches and also lost to Cameroon, their first defeat in the opening round at a World Cup since 1998. Brazil will surely settle for a simple victory without the exhibition football when they take on 2018 runners-up Croatia at Education City Stadium, mindful of results at recent World Cups. Since they won their



fifth title in 2002, Brazil have gone out each time to European opponents, including a 7-1 humiliation at the hands of Germany on home soil in 2014 and a defeat by Belgium four years ago in Russia. "We are dreaming of winning the title, that's obvious, but we have to go step by step," Neymar said after the victory over South Korea. "This was the fourth game. There are three to go but we are prepared. Our minds are focused on winning the title." Neymar returned to the starting line-up for the last 16 after suffering an ankle injury in the opening 2-0 victory over Serbia, while the return of Danilo at left-back was almost significant. Tite has lost another full-back, Alex Telles, for the rest of the tournament but another, Alex Sandro, is training again and hopes to be back. If that is the case then Danilo will switch over to right-back and Eder Militao should drop out of the side. Croatia made it to the final four years ago after being taken to extra time in three consecutive matches and they required an extra half hour as well as penalties to get the better of Japan in the last 16 on Monday. The fear now is that this game might be a step too far for Zlatko Dalic's resilient side, who have much the same spine as four years ago and are still led by the 37-year-old Luka Modric. "I think everyone in the world knows the value of Luka Modric. He's our leader, our best player, and we're proud to have him on the field," said Mateo Kovacic. "We are accustomed to very tough physical games in the Premier League and that's something that we want to show against Brazil," the Chelsea player added. "We want to show our technical quality too but we want to show our physical quality in every duel and in possession." Whatever happens, reaching this stage on the back of their 2018 exploits is an achievement worth celebrating for the nation of just four million people. But Croatia, who have lost just once since last year's European Championship, believe they can compete and may use their Nations League win over France in Paris in June as an example to follow. "We had a really good game there, with important ball possession too, and we need to keep the ball against Brazil," said Kovacic. "This is Brazil, we can follow that blueprint but it will be a different game." (AFP)

GAME NOTES

Portugal deny Ronaldo reported World Cup walkout threat

DOHA, LISBON, DEC 8 /--/ The Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) on Thursday denied Cristiano Ronaldo threatened to abandon the World Cup squad after being benched against Switzerland. The 37-year-old striker was surprisingly dropped for the last 16 clash on Tuesday, with his replacement Goncalo Ramos netting a hat-trick in the 6-1 victory. Ronaldo appeared from the bench, but a report from Portuguese publication Record said the striker had previously threatened to leave in a tense conversation with coach Fernando Santos. "The FPF clarifies that at no time did the captain of the Selecao, Cristiano Ronaldo, threaten to leave the national team during the stay in Qatar," said the federation. "Every day Ronaldo is building up a unique track record at the service of the national team and the country, which must be respected." (AFP)

Croatia fined over fans' xenophobic chants aimed at Canada's Milan Borjan

DOHA, DEC 8 /--/ FIFA on Wednesday sanctioned World Cup quarter-finalists Croatia following abuse by their fans targeting Canada's goalkeeper Milan Borjan. A disciplinary inquiry fined the Croatian federation 50,000 Swiss francs (50,674 euros, \$53,000) "in relation to the behaviour of Croatian supporters during the Croatia v. Canada FIFA World Cup match on 27 November", a statement announced. During the match in Doha, Croatia fans verbally insulted Borjan, an ethnic Serb, who was born in Croatia but fled the country as a child. They also brandished banners, including one which referred to a 1995 military operation that ended Croatia's independence war. During and after the operation more than 200,000 ethnic Serbs fled the country, including Borjan's family. Croatia's punishment comes 48 hours before they take on Brazil in the last-eight on Friday. The Serbian federation was also in the FIFA dock, receiving a 20,000 Swiss franc fine over a controversial flag depicting Kosovo hung up in the team's dressing room during their group game against Brazil. (AFP)

Kyle Walker confident of stopping Mbappe in quarter-finals

DOHA, DEC 8 /--/ As the two sides prepare for their quarter-final match, England defender Kyle Walker said that France superstar Kylian Mbappe will not "stand in my way of winning a World Cup." Mbappe, who has five goals in four games and is on track to win the Golden Boot in the ongoing FIFA World Cup 2022, returned to training with the France team on Wednesday after a recovery session separate from the squad on Tuesday. Walker has been dubbed England's antidote to Mbappe's attacking danger, and the 32-year-old refuses to "lay out the red carpet" for forward. "I think the game's not England vs Mbappe, it's England vs France," Walker told a press conference on Wednesday. "We respect that he is a good player in good form, but I am not going to roll out a red carpet for him and tell him to go and score. I'm representing my country at the quarter-final in a World Cup, it's do or die really. If we lose, we go home. He's not going to stand in my way of winning a World Cup for my country," Walker said. Walker has faced Mbappe four times in his career, each time when Manchester City faced Paris Saint-Germain in the

Champions League. "When we've played the four times against PSG for Man City in the Champions League, you're not just thinking about Mbappe," Walker added. "I think it is exactly the same on Saturday. He's a tool in their armoury that is very good, but there are other good players and we can't underestimate them. [They have] players that have won big titles, won World Cups. So OK, he



[Mbappe] is a great player, we know that – that is why all of the questions are about him," said the England player. "But let's not forget about Olivier Giroud, who has scored countless goals for France and in the Premier League. Ousmane Dembele, who for me is just as good on the other wing and a very tricky player. And then you have Antoine Griezmann – these players can cause you a problem," he added. (AFP)

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