

PARKING WOES

Mayabunder bazaar suffers from violation of 'Right of Way'



KATICK

MAYABUNDER, DEC 27/--/ Mayabunder bazar is a small but very important place in terms of trade & commerce as well as fulfilling of daily needs of citizens of the locality. It is an area where residents regularly come to purchase vegetables, ration items and other necessary goods for sustainable living standards. As this is a main bazaar, daily footfall is of substantial numbers. Recently the area is suffering a new malady. People are made to go through enormous difficulty in parking their vehicles while they do their shopping and complete other essential work. Due to lack of proper parking place most of them park their vehicles on the road side that gives rise to traffic jams.

Disgruntled citizens have raised questions as to why such a busy place is so neglected in terms of development and no provision of suitable place for parking vehicles is not provided, though it is most needed.

Cultural organizations invited to participate in ITF-2023

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ The Island Tourism Festival is scheduled to be held in January 2023. The Department of Art & Culture, A&N Administration in collaboration with Department of IP&T will be organizing cultural programmes in the main venue and other venues in South Andaman District and North & Middle and Nicobar District during the festival. In this context, the Department of Art & Culture has invited applications from the local registered Cultural Organizations. Interested Cultural Organizations may apply in the prescribed application format enclosing details of programmes. The Cultural Organizations should prepare a minimum of three or more number of programmes so that the Programme Selection Committee can have different options for selection. The prescribed format can be collected from the Directorate of Art & Culture at Cellular Jail Complex, Port Blair. Application format can also be downloaded from www.andaman.gov.in. The last date for submission of application in the prescribed form is 5th January, 2023.

Spiritual discourse by Chinmaya Mission at Mayabunder

MAYABUNDER, DEC 27/--/ As part of visit of Swami Sudhanand Saraswati, Prankuh of Chinmaya Mission, Andaman & Nicobar Islands to North & Middle Andaman district, a spiritual discourse was organized for the devotees of Mayabunder on 26th December 2022, at Shri Sita Rama Temple, Mayabunder. In his address Revered Swamiji focused and emphasized the importance of chanting the glory of divine personalities through Bhajans, doing of good



deeds mentally and physically and self-study of religious scriptures. In the concluding of the Discourse (Pravachan) a question & answer session was also made

and this programme became interactive. In this Discourse (Pravachan) people from Mayabunder, Members of various Hindu Temples and Organizations

participated and spiritually benefitted. They urged Chinmaya Mission, ANI to take more religious and spiritual activities further in Mayabunder also.

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Prezfor including value education in school curriculum

HYDERABAD, DEC 27 /-- / President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday stressed the importance of teaching value education to children to make them good citizens.

Murmu, who addressed the students and faculty members of the Keshav



Memorial Educational Society at a function organised as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav here, said parents also, in view of competition, focus on children studying the syllabus taught in their books. "I say everywhere that value education should be added in our curriculum, our system, our syllabus," she said. If value education is imparted from the beginning, it will help in ushering in a good society, she said.

The President was responding to a query from a student that the absence of study of ethical values is leading to unwanted incidents in the society. In her speech, Murmu expressed confidence that the implementation of National Education Policy 2020 will create a learner-centric education system to foster critical thinking and creativity. This shift in focus will not only benefit the students as individuals, but will also contribute to the overall progress and development of the nation, she said. Emphasising on the importance of reading, the President said the habit of reading is one of the most effective means for self-development. It is a skill that would serve students well throughout their life, she said.

"In an age of internet and social media when attention span is getting shorter and communication is limited in characters, I will urge you to read more in order to improve your understanding and widen your perspective," she said. Union tourism and culture minister G Kishan Reddy, Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and others were present on the occasion. (PTI)

HomeMin gives NOC for name change of 2 places in UP

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ The Union home ministry has given its consent to change the names of two places in Uttar Pradesh following recommendations from the state government, officials said on Tuesday.

The 'no-objection' certificates were issued by the ministry for changing the name of municipal council 'Mundera Baazar' in Gorakhpur district to 'Chauri-Chaura' and that of 'Telia Afghan' village in Deoria district to 'Telia Shukla', an official said. The home ministry considers proposals for name change according to the existing guidelines, in consultations with agencies concerned. It gives a 'no-objection' certificate to change the name of any place after taking consent from the ministry of railways, Department of Posts and the Survey of India, another official said.

For changing the name of a village, town or a city, an executive order is needed. Renaming of a state requires an amendment of the Constitution with a simple majority in Parliament, the official added. (PTI)

Maharashtra Council passes resolution to "legally pursue" inclusion of 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Karnataka

NAGPUR, DEC 27 /--/ The Maharashtra legislature on Tuesday unanimously passed a resolution to "legally pursue" inclusion of 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Karnataka into the western state, amid the raging boundary dispute between the two states.

The resolution moved by chief minister Eknath Shinde in both Houses of the Maharashtra legislature said the Karnataka legislature had passed a resolution on the issue to purposely fuel the border row and condemned the southern state's stand. "The state government stands resolutely with the Marathi-

speaking people in 865 villages and cities of Belgaum (also called Belagavi), Karwar, Nipani, Bidar and Bhalki that are being contested in the Supreme Court," said the resolution passed in the Maharashtra legislature. "The state government will legally pursue in the Supreme Court the case to include (in Maharashtra) inch and inch of land of Belgaum, Karwar Bidar, Nipani, Bhalki cities and the 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Karnataka," it added.

The Maharashtra resolution said when the chief ministers of the two

states had met Union home minister Amit Shah, it was decided that till the Supreme Court gives its judgement in the matter, it should be ensured that the issue does not flare up any further.

However, the Karnataka government took a contrary stand by passing a resolution in its state Assembly.

The border issue dates back to 1957 after the reorganisation of states on linguistic lines. The Karnataka Legislative Assembly last Thursday unanimously passed a resolution on border row with Maharashtra, resolving

to protect the southern state's interests and not to cede an inch of land to its neighbour. The resolution had also condemned the border dispute "created" by Maharashtra.

The Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) on Tuesday demanded in the Maharashtra Assembly that the 865 villages be declared as a Union Territory till the Supreme Court gives its verdict on the issue. However, it did not figure in the resolution. Deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis said in the Assembly that the case is pending before the Supreme Court and it also

has to be ensured that there is no contempt of court while putting forth the demand, as the matter is sub-judice.

Maharashtra laid claim to Belagavi, which was part of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency, as it has a sizable Marathi-speaking population. It also laid claim to more than 800 Marathi-speaking villages which are currently part of Karnataka.

Karnataka maintains the demarcation done on linguistic lines as per the States Reorganisation Act and the 1967 Mahajan Commission Report as final. (PTI)

Khurshid likens Rahul to Lord Ram, BJP says Cong puts devotion to family above devotion to God, nation

MORADABAD / NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid has likened Rahul Gandhi to Lord Ram and described him as "superhuman" and a "yogi doing tapasya" as he lauded the former party chief for his Bharat Jodo Yatra, evoking sharp criticism from the BJP.

Slamming the Opposition party leaders for their show of "sycophancy", the BJP said comparing a person out on bail in a corruption case, a reference to the National Herald probe, to a God worshipped by so many people not only hurts the feelings of Hindus but also the entire society. The Congress leader, however, remained unfazed and defended his remarks. "No one can replace God but everyone can try to walk the path shown by him. Why should anyone object if I say someone is following that path," he said on Tuesday. While BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia targeted the Congress at a press conference for Khurshid's comparison, another party spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla, in a swipe at Congress leaders, said they put "parivaar ki bhakti" (devotion to family) above "bhagwaan and rashtra ki bhakti" (devotion to God and nation).

The Congress must apologise for hurting Hindu sentiments, Poonawalla said. Khurshid, a former Cabinet minister, also likened Congress workers to Lord Ram's brother Bharat. Talking to newsmen in Moradabad on Monday, Khurshid, who is the state coordinator of the yatra, said, "Rahul Gandhi is superhuman. While we are freezing in the cold and wearing jackets, he is going out in T-shirt (for the Bharat Jodo Yatra). He is like a yogi, he has called himself so,

doing his 'tapasya' (penance) with focus."

Drawing a parallel with Lord Ram and his brother Bharat, Khurshid said: "Lord Ram's 'khadau' (wooden slipper) goes very far. Sometimes when Ram ji is not able to reach, Bharat takes his 'khadau' and goes to places.

Like that, we have carried the 'khadau' in Uttar Pradesh. "Now that 'khadau' has reached Uttar Pradesh. Ram ji will also come, this is our belief," Khurshid said. He was responding to a question about the Gandhi-led yatra not passing through Uttar



Salman Khurshid

Pradesh till now. Asked about BJP's reaction to his remarks, Khurshid told reporters on Tuesday: "If I believe somebody is following the path shown by God, then what will I say if I have to praise him? How do you praise a person if he has attained such a height? Isn't this said that he is like God? No one can replace God but everyone can try to walk the path shown by him.

"Why should anyone object if I say someone is following that path and that people can again see the story they associate with God. If the BJP has never seen a good man, then it's their problem." BJP spokespersons, however, alleged that the Congress, when in power, had

questioned the existence of Lord Ram and accused its leaders of repeatedly riding roughshod over Hindu sentiments. "Salman Khurshid in his attempt to clarify remains defiant about his outrageous analogy between Prabhu Ram & Rahul! Heights of Parivar Bhakti that you even put Bhagwan Bhakti & Desh Bhakti aside. "Will Salman ji ever make similar analogies for other faith? Can he," Poonawalla tweeted.

The yatra will enter Uttar Pradesh on January 3 through Loni in Ghaziabad. It will then pass through Baghpat and Shamli to enter Haryana. Khurshid said the yatra will follow the scientific guidelines on the coronavirus pandemic. His statement came in the backdrop of Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya asking Gandhi to consider suspending the yatra if Covid-19 protocols could not be followed.

To a question related to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Khurshid said: "We respect him, that's why our leader Rahul Gandhi went to his samadhi. The actions of other BJP leaders are not worthy of respect."

The Congress leader said the Bharat Jodo Yatra is working to unite those who love the country while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) works to break the country by spreading hatred.

Reacting to Khurshid's statement, BJP spokesman Harishchandra Srivastava said they reflect nothing but sycophancy. "Khurshid saheb needs to think thousands of times before comparing Rahul Gandhi with the 'mahapurush' who is followed by the entire world. He is a barrister but his statement is a symbol of sycophancy," Srivastava said. (PTI)

BSF jawan murdered after protest against circulation of daughter's objectionable video; 7 arrested

KHEDA, DEC 27 /--/ A 42-year-old Border Security Force (BSF) jawan was murdered allegedly by seven members of a family in Gujarat's Kheda district after he went to their house to protest while holding one of them responsible for circulating an objectionable video of his minor daughter on social media, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place at around 10 pm on Saturday and the seven accused were arrested on Sunday, they said. BSF jawan Melaji Vaghela, his wife and son went to the house of Dinesh Jadav at Chaklasi village in Nadiad taluka of the district to protest against the objectionable video of Vaghela's daughter, which they claimed was circulated on social media by Jadav's son. "After a heated argument over the issue, Jadav and his six other family members attacked Vaghela and his family members with sticks and sharp weapons," Nadiad's deputy superintendent of police V R Bajpai told newsmen. Vaghela received injuries on his head and other body parts and died on the spot, he said.

The jawan's son Navdeep too suffered severe head injuries and his wife was also injured, the official said. An FIR was registered on Sunday night at Chaklasi police station under various Indian Penal Code Sections including 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult) and 143 (unlawful assembly), he said. All the seven accused were arrested. They were sent to judicial custody on Monday, the official said. An investigation was on into the incident. A forensic team was in the process of collecting evidence, he said. The incident took place when Vaghela was visiting his family on a holiday before his transfer to Barmer in Rajasthan from Ambasan in Mehsana, superintendent of police Rajesh Gadhiya said. (PTI)

SC to hear on Jan 2 pleas challenging state laws regulating conversions due to inter-faith marriage

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on January 2 a batch of pleas challenging controversial state laws regulating religious conversions due to interfaith marriage. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice PS Narasimha is scheduled to hear the PILs filed by advocate Vishal Thakre and an NGO 'Citizens for Justice and Peace'. The Supreme Court will also hear a plea by Muslim body 'Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind' which it had allowed last year to become a party to the petitions as it claimed a large number of Muslims are being harassed under these laws across the country. As per the office report uploaded on the apex court website, so far no reply has been filed by the Centre or any of the states which have been made parties to the litigation.

On February 17, 2021, the apex court had permitted the NGO to make Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh the parties to its pending petition by which it had challenged some controversial state laws regulating conversions due to interfaith marriages. The Supreme Court had on January 6, 2021 agreed to examine certain controversial new laws of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand regulating religious conversions due to such marriages. It had, however, refused to stay the controversial provisions of the laws and issued notices to both the state governments (Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) on the petitions.

The pleas, filed by Thakre and the NGO, have challenged the Constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 which regulate religious conversion of people in interfaith marriages. The NGO had submitted during the last hearing that both Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh should be made parties to its plea as they have also framed laws on the lines of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The controversial UP ordinance relates to not only interfaith marriages but all religious conversions and lays down elaborate procedures for any person who wishes to convert to another religion.

The Uttarakhand law entails a two-year jail term to any person or persons found guilty of religious conversion through "force or allurement". The allurement can be in cash, employment, or material benefit. Thakre and others have said in their plea they are aggrieved by the ordinance which curtails the fundamental rights of the citizens of India provided under the Constitution. The plea said the laws passed by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand against 'Love Jihad' and punishments thereof may be declared ultra vires and null and void because they disturb the basic structure of the Constitution as laid down by the law. It claimed they are against public policy and society at large. The plea filed by the NGO alleged the legislations violate Articles 21 and 25, as they empower the state to suppress an individual's personal liberty and the freedom to practice religion of one's choice. (PTI)

WCD ministry focussed on 3 verticals in 2022 to tackle various issues of women, children

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ The women and child development ministry worked through three verticals of Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, Mission Shakti and Mission Vatsalya with an aim to ensure better monitoring and efficient implementation of its various schemes this year.

Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 looked into nutrition support for children, adolescent girls and pregnant women and lactating mothers; and for early childhood care and education while Mission Shakti aimed at safety, security and empowerment of women and Mission Vatsalya focused on protection and welfare of children. Last year, the ministry classified all its major programmes under these three umbrella schemes for better implementation. Under Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, the ministry issued the

scheme guidelines on August 1 whereby two lakh anganwadi centres were to be strengthened, upgraded and rejuvenated for improved nutrition and educational delivery. So far, anganwadi workers have been provided with 11.22 lakh smart phones.

Besides, to promote regular growth monitoring of children, 12.65 lakh growth monitoring devices, such as infantometer, stadiometer, weighing scale for mother and infant, weighing scale for child, have been procured by states and Union Territories. To promote the nutritional status of women and children in real-time, Poshan tracker application was put on smartphones of anganwadi workers. As on October 31, approximately 9.84 crore beneficiaries have been onboarded. Also, beneficiaries on Poshan tracker were Aadhaar seeded to ensure last mile tracking and delivery of

services. This led to opposition from civil rights groups who expressed concern over possibility of lack of nutrition facilities for children who did not have Aadhaar card. Following which, the women and child development ministry clarified that a child's Aadhaar card is not mandatory for availing the benefits of nutrition scheme, and that these can be accessed using the mother's biometric card to register on the Poshan tracker app. The government is exploring adding Ayush component in take-home ration of children, pregnant women and lactating women that they get from anganwadi centres to improve their nutrition level, a senior official said.

The project is being tried out on a pilot basis in Gujarat and Karnataka and both states have given good results, the official said. This year, the government also decided to integrate various

helplines -112, 181 and 1098 - in an effort to provide a better emergency response, another official said. Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) is a pan-India single number (112) for citizens in emergencies while 1098 is a toll free, phone outreach service for children. Under Mission Shakti, focus was on



two sub-schemes Sambal and Samarthya for safety and security of women and empowerment of women

respectively. As on September 30, assistance under the one-stop centres for women affected by violence and in need of assistance has been provided to over 88 lakh women.

The ministry also launched Stree Manoraksha Project in collaboration with NIMHANS Bengaluru for psycho social training for staff and counsellors of One Stop Centres. The Nirbhaya fund set up after the gang-rape of a paramedical student in 2012 was utilised by 70 per cent by November. From its inception till 2021-22, the total allocation under the fund has been over Rs 6,000 crore, of which Rs 4,200 crore has been utilised. Under Mission Vatsalya, the Juvenile Justice Model Amendment Rules, 2022 and Adoption Regulations, 2022 were notified in September under which the district magistrates were made the nodal authority at district levels for all matters relating

to child safety, empowerment and safety including issuance of adoption orders. Concerns remained over high pendency of adoption cases in district courts due to new regulations but ministry said that pendency of adoption orders have come down since the rules have come into force.

High number of prospective adoptive parents and low availability of children legally free for adoption was another concern that remained this year among various quarters but under the new adoption regulation waiting period was removed for those parents who desire to adopt a child having special needs and also from the immediate placement category. The immediate placement category includes children who have been referred several times to prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) through Child Adoption Resource Information and

Guidance System, but have not found a family. To support children who have lost both parents, single surviving parent, legal guardian or adoptive parents to Covid pandemic, the scheme for PM Cares for Children was launched last year under which a total of 4,345 children were found eligible under the scheme till this year. The ministry's two commissions - National Commission for Women and National Commission for Protection of Children - continued to play a crucial role this year.

The focus of NCW worked on projects of entrepreneurship, digital literacy, legal awareness while the NCPCCR focussed on rehabilitation of street children. Led by Smriti Irani, the ministry also held various zonal meetings in different parts of the country to discuss and deliberate on various issues of women and children. (PTI)

BRAVERY AND MARTYRDOM OF CHAR SAHIBZAADE

“Sura So Pehchaniye, Jo Ladeh Din Ke Het, Purja Purja Kat Marai, Kabahu Na Shadai Khet”

DR. SARABJEET
KAUR JAGPAL

The martyrdom of the four “Sahibzaade” (Sons) is an integral part of the Sikh history. The occasion is commemorated both with great vigour and very acute sadness by the Sikh community annually in December, also known to be the month of “Poh”. Dasmesh Pita Guru Gobind Singhji had four sons. The mughals and kings of hilly regions asked Guruji to leave the Anandpur Fort. In return, they would not be attacked. Guru Sahib, the four Sahibzaade, Mata Gujari Kaur, Mata Jeeto Ji, his wife, the five Panj Piaras and a few hundred Sikhs left Anandpur Sahib on the chilly night of 20 December 1704 towards Ropar. But

the promise was broken and Guruji was betrayed. On the intervening night of 20 –21 December, the Mughals breached the vows and attacked Guru’s entourage at a site on the Sarsa rivulet, some 25 kms from Anandpur Sahib. The Guru’s family was separated and broken away. This spot is now known as “Pariwar Vichhora” and the Gurudwara Sahib is also built up there in their honour as “Gurudwara Pariwar Vichhora Sahib”. Guru’s Mahil left with Bhai Mani Singh towards Delhi. Guru Gobind Singh Ji with two elder Sahibzaade, 5 Panj Piaras, and 40 Sikhs proceeded towards Chamkaur and reached there on the afternoon of 21 December. In 17th century, the youngest heroes and bravest comrades of Sikhism, sacrificed their lives for humanity.

The four beloved sons of Guru Gobind Singhji, showed utmost valour and stood up against the tyranny of Mughal Empire. The two elder sons’ of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Sahibzaada Ajit Singh (aged 17 years) and Sahibzaada Jujhar Singh (aged 14 years), attained martyrdom at the Battle Of Chamkaur. In this battle, 40 brave Sikh Warriors fought with an army of over ten lakhs. Sahibzaada Ajit Singh, led the charge of five brave Sikhs in the Battle of Chamkaur. History defines Sahibzaada Ajit Singh as undefeated, “Ajit Haan! Jitaya Nahi Javanga, Jitaya Gaya Agar, Wapas Nahi Aavanga”.

Everyday a group of five Sikhs used to leave the besieged fortress and face the enemy on the battlefield. On attaining martyrdom, the sound of Sikh war cry, “Bole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal”, by Guru Gobind Singh Ji echoed the battlefield. Seeing his elder brother fighting, Sahibzaada Jujhar Singh entered the battlefield. He also fought like a fierce warrior. He attained martyrdom on Dec 7, 1705 AD. During the battle, Guru Ji’s two youngest sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh and their grandmother Mata Gujri Ji got separated from the rest of the Sikhs. A former servant, Gangoo, a Kashmiri pandit, from his house, saw them and suggested that they come with him to his village. They were grateful for his help and went with him. However, the servant breached their trust and in greed of money, disclosed their location to the Mughal. The Mughals came to the house and captured them. All three

were imprisoned in the Open Tower (Thanda Burj), in chilling winters with no mats to sleep on, just strands of straw as their bedding. The sons were brought to Wazir Khan, the governor of that state. Wazir Khan believed in Emperor Aurangzeb’s vision. Wazir Khan told the Sahibzaade that he would spare their lives if they converted to Islam. But they replied bravely - “Pahila Maran Kabul, Jivan Ki Shad Aas, Hoh Sabhna Ki Renuka, Tau Aau Hamare Paas” Thus, the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Sahibzaada Zorawar Singh (Age 9) and Sahibzaada Fateh Singh (Age 5) attained martyrdom at Sirhind, Punjab. They were bricked alive. Mata Gujri Ji also left for heavenly abode. Their prudence, wisdom and spiritual knowledge was way beyond their age for an argument

with tyrannical monarch, Wazir Khan. Till date, the Sikhs in Anandpur Sahib and Sirhind, commemorate these days by sleeping on the floor, without any blanket. When Mata Sahib Kaur and Mata Jitiji, unaware of this adversity and tragedy, inquired about the well being of the four sons. Guru Gobind Singh Ji replied- “In Putran Ke Sees Par, Vaar Diye Sut Chaar, Chaar Muye Toh Kya Hua, Jeevat Kahin Hazaar” As I remember the Sahibzaade and Mata Gujar Kaur Ji’s sacrifices, I hope to be imbued with the same level of sacrifice, courage, and love. By searching for truth and justice for each of us, remembering that we are all children of that same Divine Light, we can move towards a more courageous and humble practice of love and light in the time of darkness.

Voice Christ to the World celebrates Christmas



PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ On the occasion of Christmas, Voice of Christ to the World has celebrated Christmas on its campus at Garacharma on 24th December 2022. Smti. U.

Kavitha, Chairperson PBM was the chief guest who emphasized Christmas as a festival of great love that we should love one another. Rev. Dr. Raja Wilson the Chairman of VOC gave a

Christmas message stating Christmas is a festival of Great joy and hope for all. Smti. Mariam, S I, P S Pahargan was the guest of honor. A cultural presentation was made by

the congregation to make the festive fever more colorful. Finally the celebration ended with a vote of thanks from its Managing trustee Dr. T Helen Sheeba Rani.

Firing practice

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ The Vice Principal, Police Training School, Prothrapur, Port Blair has allotted their firing range to CISF w.e.f. 29.12.2022 to 30.12.2022 from 0700hrs to 1700hrs for carried out the Annual Range Classification of CISF personnel deployed at this Unit Port of Port Blair.

Chess rating championship

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ The 1st War of Kings Open International FIDE Rating Chess Tournament 2022 begins yesterday the 26th December 2022 at Sonarpur, Kolkata, West Bengal. Around 240 players across India & abroad are participating in the event in which 2 young budding chess players, (one Boy & one Girl) from Andaman & Nicobar Islands viz Shrihaan Karmarkar, a student of class III, KV-2 Port Blair, and Anuva Majumdar, a student of Carmel Sr. Sec. School Port Blair are taking part in the event. The tournament will be held for 6 days over 9 rounds under Swiss System in Classical time control from 26th December 2022 to 31st December 2022.

Firing practice

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ Chinthe Long Range, Brichgunj will be used for Firing practice on Dec.28, 2022 from 9.30 am to 5 pm. All concerned have been warned to keep themselves and their vehicle/livestock away from the firing range during the above mentioned date and time.

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GPA, A&N Islands demands extend reimbursement of medical claims to pensioners

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ The Government Pensioners Association, Andaman & Nicobar Islands has demanded to extend the facility of reimbursement of medical claim to the pensioners of this UT and their dependant family members on taking treatment as an in-patient in a hospital at mainland including the airfare irrespective of the fact that he/she has been referred to mainland for treatment by the medical authorities of this UT or not. In a letter sent to the Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. Of India, Shri S. Surender, General Secretary of the Government Pensioners' Association has also demanded that benefit of CGHS facility may be extended to all the pensioners who retired after serving in Andaman & Nicobar Islands and presently settled in different State/UTs without any discrimination. It has been brought to the notice of the Association by some of the pensioners who after getting retired from various departments of the A & N Administration and settled at a place in mainland where CGHS facilities are available that their request for enrollment in CHGS have been rejected by the authorities citing the Government of India, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare OM No. Z-15025/58/2017/DIR/CGHS/Pt dated the 21st July, 2017. In the said OM it was stated that serving employees/pensioners of Union Territories are not entitled to CGHS facilities. The reasons for coming to such a conclusion have not been described at all.

The Association pointed out that as per the Central Government Health Scheme, a large category of entities are eligible to join

Year 2022 saw political slugfests in Maharashtra courtrooms, cases against alleged Maoists

MUMBAI, DEC 27/--/ Political turmoil in Maharashtra spilled over to the courts in 2022 with the arrests of leaders like Sanjay Raut, Nawab Malik and independent MP from Amravati Navneet Rana in different cases and subsequent legal battles over their bail applications. The courts also dealt with litigation related to the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case of 2017 with some of the accused getting relief. In February, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and former minister in the then Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government Nawab Malik moved the Bombay High Court, seeking to quash an alleged money laundering case registered against him by the Enforcement Directorate. The ED case is related to a land deal in Mumbai in which associates of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim were involved. Malik's plea is still pending. In March, the ED arrested Malik in the case and subsequently a special court for the Prevention of Money Laundering Act

the scheme which includes all Central Government employees paid from the Central Civil Estimates (except Railways and Delhi Administration) including their dependant family members and Pensioners of Central Government (except pensioners belonging to Railways and the Armed Forces) and their family.

The Pensioners' Association reminded the Government of India that the Ministry of Home Affairs vide letter No.43/26/6-ANL dated 01.02.1960 had unambiguously clarified that all orders of the Govt. of India, unless otherwise stated, are applicable to the employees of the A&N Administration as they are also Central Government servants. The Association has further pointed out that pension and other retirement dues of the employees were settled as per the CCS (Pension) Rules, 1972. The Association has pointed out that it is stipulated in the Govt. of India's decisions No. 1 below Rule 2 of the CCS (Pension) Rules, 1972 that all the conditions of service as applicable to the Central Government employees are applicable to the employees of the Union Territory Administration.

The Association further said that in view of the CGHS Scheme, MHA's clarification, provision of the CCS (Pension) Rules and various judicial pronouncements and more important to the dismissal of the SLP and Review Petition which were filed by the Union of India, the contention of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, as contained in the OM dated 21.07.2017, cannot be logically and legally sustainable as the judicial pronouncements are always superior over the executive/administrative orders as per our judicial system.

(PMLA) cases rejected his bail applications. Malik has now moved the High Court for bail. April saw another high-profile case when Mumbai Police arrested Navneet Rana and her husband, MLA Ravi Rana after they announced that they would recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside then Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's private residence 'Matoshree' in Mumbai. About ten days later, the couple was granted bail by a court. But arguably, the case that dominated headlines the most was that of Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut. Trials in the 2008 Malegaon blast case and 2012 Sheena Bora murder continued. Some prosecution witnesses turned hostile in the Malegaon case where BJP MP Pragya Thakur is a prime accused. In February 2022, Justice Pushpa Ganediwala, who had faced flak over the interpretation in a few of her judgements of the term sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSOA), resigned. (PTI)

Swaraj Dweep to sail for Chennai today

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27/--/ The vessel MV Swaraj Dweep will sail for Port Blair to Chennai on Dec. 28, 2022 at 1000 hrs. Excess baggage will be loaded from 1400 Hrs to 1600 hrs on Dec.27, 2022 i.e. one day prior to

sailing of the vessel. Embarkation of passengers will commence from 0800 hrs to 0900 hrs on Dec.28. The embarkation of passengers will be closed one hour before the schedule time. Passengers reporting late will

not be allowed to board the vessel. The vessel will sail soon after the embarkation of passengers and completion of other formalities from Haddo Wharf. Excess baggage will be subject to double the rate of freight.

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Good manners will open doors that the best education cannot

Clarence Thomas

Hasina, the longest serving Awami League boss

Sheikh Hasina has become the longest serving President of Awami League since 1981 when she first assumed this post. Recently, the ruling party re-elected her for the 10th time in a row. It assumes significance at a time when both politics and the economy of the country are facing challenges in 2023. Moreover, Bangladesh is scheduled to go to polls in early 2024. Sheikh Hasina has cautioned the AL leaders and activists about the conspiracies and asked them to focus on the marginalised people to transform Bangladesh into a developed, prosperous and smart country by 2041. Referring to the measures taken by the government for electoral reforms, she spoke about the new law to appoint Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners. She has asserted that the next general election will be conducted in a free and fair manner. Accusing Khaleda Zia of preparing a fake voter list of 1.23 crore people during her regime, she said Awami League is the only party which ensured voting rights of the people.

Given her friendly ties with India, bilateral cooperation is expected to gain momentum in 2023 despite some pending issues, especially the sharing of river waters, that Sheikh Hasina has said Dhaka believes could be resolved through negotiations. Bangladesh-India relations are multifaceted in nature and rooted in a shared history, geographical proximity and commonality in their cultures. The emotional bonds stemming from the contribution of India towards the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 remain a dominant factor in the country's political, social and cultural web. Being India's next-door neighbour, Bangladesh's relations with New Delhi are crucial for its political and economic stability. The two neighbours have remained engaged bilaterally and, unlike some western nations, India usually refrains from commenting on Bangladesh's domestic politics in public. Owing to geographic reality and historic backdrop, "good relations" are likely to be there in place in the interest of both countries. But there is a general perception in Bangladesh that "we give more and get less" -- this concern must go and being the bigger neighbour, India is expected to take the lead role. The two countries have several pending issues with the most crucial being the sharing of waters in common rivers, including the Teesta River, which flows through India. Prime Minister Hasina has repeatedly said that Dhaka believes the outstanding issues with New Delhi could be resolved through discussions. The governance system appears as the crucial factor to sustain political stability and economic durability in the current context as tensions rose with the return of former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to the political scene after years of wilderness and are eying the upcoming elections. Prime Minister Hasina's Awami League-led government has decided to tighten further its spending as trade imbalance and inflation eroded Bangladesh's GDP while a sense of panic gripped people due to fallout from money market volatility. Financial analysts said Bangladesh's growth was remarkable but its economy was now at risk. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in a recent report feared that the GDP, which it predicted to be 6.6 per cent, now was likely to be lower in 2023-24, though the lending agency did not quantify any figure afresh.

Bangladesh-U.S. diplomatic relations worsen over Ambassador's visit

REFLEX ACTION

Ashis Biswas

They condemned the AL's allegedly poor record in handling issues related to human rights as well as democratic rights of opposition parties. Hundreds of people had been reported missing or killed in one-sided dubious encounters, especially by personnel of the rapid Action Battalion (RAB), in recent years. The situation continued to deteriorate despite repeated warnings and concerns expressed by the US and EU countries, not to mention major international HR groups, to the Bangladesh Government.

Eventually, last December the Biden-led US administration slapped sanctions on seven senior RAB officials, along with a warning to Dhaka to deal with the opposition in a more transparent and accountable manner. AL leaders in response alleged that the US had been fed much disinformation about the law and order situation by the motivated opposition. There were major allegations of the BNP aligning with the fundamentalist Jamat-e-Islami during its tenure. It carried out systematic repression and attacks against minority Hindus and AL activists. But the US and EU countries in general overlooked such practices of the BNP and its declared bonhomie with Pakistan and Islamic fundamentalist organisations.

Bangladesh government has since appealed several times to the US to withdraw/reconsider its sanctions, but to no avail so far. However, there is a general feeling that over time, the number of clashes between the AL and opposition parties, as well as the dreaded 'encounters', has significantly reduced. Ironically, there has been a marked increase in the level of violence directed against the Government, on part of the fundamentalist Hifazat-e-Islam group, resulting in major loss of official property and innocent lives. Often sporadic anti-government violence/

arson has continued for 48/72 hours, as was noticed during the last visit of Indian Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi to Bangladesh, to mark the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh freedom day in 2021. This has led to an angry, sullen reaction against the ruling AL from the large body of secular political leaders and people in Bangladesh, not to mention mounting concern in neighbouring India, resulting in an extremely delicate situation for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

AL leaders and Ministers responded to the Embassy stand through a statement, questioning why the Ambassador did not feel it necessary to visit the Martyrs' memorial in built Dhaka, as a mark of respect to the numerous victims of Islamic fundamentalism during the BNP's rule. His controversial visit incidentally had occurred on the anniversary day for the memorial! The Dhaka-based mainstream as well as social media were sharply divided over the incident and its diplomatic fallout. Some analysts maintained that the US had strongly sent yet another strong public signal about their uneasiness with the ruling AL regime and obvious preference for the BNP. Some years ago, Western analysts and activists had even indicated that they felt 'more at home' with the BNP than with the AL,during an interaction, as reported in Bangladesh media at the time. Kolkata-based analysts point out that perhaps the explanation of the apparent US bias against the ruling AL was rooted in history. Bangladesh was established through a hostile break-up of pro-West US ally Pakistan in South Asia. The US, though it was forced to recognise Bangladesh and acknowledge existing realities, had never forgiven the AL, the party that led the struggle for East Pakistan's freedom, as well as Russia and India, for their open-ended support for the liberation struggle.

It had resulted in a major embarrassing defeat for US/ Western policy/diplomacy and much loss of face. Whether the Democrats or Republicans were in power in the US was not important -- the basic pro-Pak thrust in its diplomacy in South Asia had remained the same. (IPA)



A shop presents new year desserts to attract customers in Ginza, Tokyo, Japan

BJP worried about Rahul Yatra impact in Haryana, Kashmir

FOCUS

Arun Srivastava

Having failed in its design to malign and create hurdles in the path of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, Narendra Modi has finally resorted to the strategy of hitting below the belt. As an obedient colleague, the Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya conveyed the directives of Modi to Gandhi to suspend his Yatra "in the national interest" if he could not be follow the "protocol".

Mandaviya through his letter to Gandhi tried to create an impression that Modi and his minister were really worried of the alleged resurgence of the dreaded covid 19, but this letter and his subsequent jibe at the Gandhi family that the enormous mass support to the Yatra has frightened Modi to the extent that he even preferred to stake his prestige. His letter has ominous intent is evident from his saying; "I cannot neglect my duty of stopping potential Covid spread just because one family perhaps believes it's above the rules... No one is entitled to special treatment."

The lingering shadow of losing the 2024 Lok Sabha election has been so frightening that this minister came out with an oblique threat. It is certainly not tough to comprehend that he wrote the letter to Rahul out of frustration at the success of the rally and deep incubation of his vengeance. Lest there was no need to mention the word one family".

This is the other form of Narendra Modi's jibe of dynastic politics. On December 20, the day Yatra was in Rajasthan, Mandaviya in his letter expressed apprehension that people of Rajasthan would get infected with Covid. But on December 21, when the Yatra entered into Haryana, not a single case of Covid was mentioned by the minister in his

letter. He wrote "several people" have caught the virus after participating in the yatra and cited Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu as an example. If the Covid had infected large number of people, why then only Sukhu's name was cited. In all fairness, Mandaviya should have mentioned the total number of the infected number of people. It would not be astonishing if after the veracity of his assertion being challenged his department now may come out with detail number.

Besides the Yatra hurting the electoral prospect of Modi at 2024 Lok Sabha, yet another issue that cajoled the government to take to this step is the unconceivable response of the people of the valley who have been living under the shadow of the state power. The government is not sure how the Kashmiris would react to the situation. If the people of the BJP ruled states, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and even Haryana come out on the streets in lakhs, this number may multiply many fold. People coming out on streets would expose the claims of having restored peace and order in the valley and its justifying scrapping of 370, which is being heard in the Supreme Court.

In his letter Mandaviya wrote: "I request [Rahul Gandhi] that Covid protocol, including use of masks and sanitisers, be strictly followed during the march and only those who are vaccinated be allowed to participate."

What is most surprising is he has asked the vaccinated yatris, the participants, to carry the certificate, which was even not necessary when the Covid was at its peak. This is indeed a tactics to substantially reduce the number of participants. Obviously a reduced number of participants would not have the desired impact and the BJP and Modi government could get the opportunity to claim that the Yatra was not welcome by the Kashmiri people.

The game of the Modi government is out in the public domain, even before it could make a significant dent. Even the Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar ridiculed Modi government for raising an alarm over a fresh COVID-19 spike at a time when Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra was gaining momentum. He said; "It should be known why they (the ruling BJP at the Centre) had become laidback over Covid in the first place, and why they have certainly become vigilant now when the Congress people are taking out a yatra".

Kumar also sought to know; "Why do these people have an objection to that yatra? Why do they themselves keep taking out processions?"

Mandaviya acted on the letter written by three BJP members of Parliament from Rajasthan, P PChaudhary,Nihal Chand and Devji Patel claiming that Covid-19 is spreading in the state due to the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Though they alleged that

coronavirus was spreading, they could not site a single example. They alleged that Bharat Jodo Yatra has not been following Covid protocols. These members probably were not aware that curbs have been lifted. The eminent Supreme Court advocate Prashant Bhushan underlines the ignorance of these members. They in their letter to Mandaviya argued that the Vaccinated will not get and spread Covid and will not get sick. Bhushan pointed out "Now all studies are showing that the Vaccinated are more likely to get Covid and get sick." He seeks to know; "Will these people be held accountable for fooling & harming us?"

Nevertheless their allegation is akin to the complaints lodged by the saffron vigilantes across the country against the secular, socialist forces and especially against the Muslims. At the complaints of the vigilantes police arrests the alleged offenders and are jailed. These members did not raise the issue of violation of covid protocol even in Parliament. Members of the house are not wearing the masks. The MPs had requested that Covid protocols, including the use of masks and sanitisers, be strictly followed during the march and only those who are vaccinated be allowed to participate. The MPs also requested the Union minister to ensure that participants are isolated before and after taking part in the march.

One development that sprang out of Wednesday's meeting of experts and senior officials, chaired by the minister was observation of the review meeting that there was no overall increase in caseload as of now. Of the three cases of the Omicron subvariant BF.7 two were detected in Gujarat where Modi held rallies and road shows and one from Odisha. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword												
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24							23					
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ACROSS						DOWN					
1	Encountered					1	Intended				
3	Scourge					2	Conclude				
6	Augury					4	Colours				
7	Say further					5	Spirit				
9	Large brown seaweed					6	Relating to sheep				
10	Tavern					8	Impel				
11	Regrets					9	Part of a yacht				
13	Strong thread					12	Oneness				
16	Wickednesses					14	Unwanted plant				
18	Measures of length					15	Airman				
19	Lubricant					17	Echo sounder				
20	Dry					18	Discharge				
21	Japanese currency unit					20	Limb				
23	Diplomacy					22	Greek letter				
24	Bearing										
25	Spoil										

SUDOKU : 3739								
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Yesterday's Solution 3738								
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8	7	2	9	5	4	3	6	1
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4	3	5	6	1	2	8	9	7
1	6	3	4	2	7	9	8	5
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Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 1747												
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BJP alleges Gandhi family 'most corrupt family' in Indian politics

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 --/ The BJP on Tuesday dubbed the Gandhi family as "kattar paapi parivaar" and the "most corrupt family in Indian politics" as it cited the Rajasthan High Court's rejection of Robert Vadra's plea to quash a money laundering probe against him.

BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi should break their "silence" on corruption and money-laundering allegations against Vadra, who is married to Rahul's sister and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi, when their party was in power in Haryana and Rajasthan and at the Centre as well. The Congress has often claimed that the corruption charges against Vadra are politically motivated. The Rajasthan High Court had last week rejected a petition seeking the quashing of an Enforcement Directorate (ED) investigation into the purchase of land in Bikaner by a company (Skylight Hospitality), linked to Vadra and his mother, through alleged shady means. "This is a 'kattar paapi parivaar' (extremely immoral family) of India. Its only work has been to do corruption and grabbing land to hand over to Vadra," Bhatia alleged. The BJP spokesperson also rejected the Congress's claim of witch hunt against Vadra, claiming that it amounted to casting aspersions on the judiciary which has refused to quash charges against him. "They are the most corrupt family in Indian

politics. Three members of the family are out on bail in corruption cases. It is a serious matter of concern for a government with zero tolerance for corruption," he said, in reference to the corruption probe against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul, both former Congress presidents, in the National Herald case. Bhatia cited the details of the case against Vadra in Rajasthan and said the Congress government there during 2008-13 acquired land and allotted it to non-existing people. Huge parcel of land ended up in the ownership of the company in which Vadra and his mother were partners through a maze of transactions involving fictitious entities, he alleged. "The then government headed by Ashok Gehlot bypassed laws and rules to appease Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law," he claimed, alleging that Vadra became the lead of a land mafia. Gehlot is the current chief minister as well. "The Gandhi members thought they were above law. Now they are trembling before law under a government headed by an honest Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with probe agencies determined to do their work. This is good," he said. Bhatia also dubbed Congress leader Salman Khurshid's reported remarks likening Rahul Gandhi, who has travelled hundreds of kilometres on foot while leading the Bharat Jodo Yatra, to Lord Ram as "sycophancy". Comparing a person out on bail with a God not hurts the feelings of Hindus but also the entire society, he said. (PTI)

Court acquits man of charge of possessing 2 bottles of non-duty paid liquor

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 --/ A court here has acquitted a man charged under the Delhi Excise Act for possessing two bottles of non-duty paid liquor labelled for sale in Haryana only', noting the FIR number was mentioned on documents which were prepared prior to the registration of the offence.

The court was hearing a case against Dinesh Kumar, who was accused of possessing two 750 ml bottles of "illicit liquor" one whisky and one vodka bottle at a hotel in Kapashera on January 25, 2021. He was accused of possessing the liquor without any permit or licence, knowing the same to have been unlawfully imported, transported or manufactured or knowing the prescribed duty was not paid.

"This court hereby accords the benefit of doubt to the accused and holds the accused not guilty of commission of the said offence. Accused Dinesh Kumar is thus, acquitted of the offence under sections 33 and 38 of the Delhi Excise Act," Metropolitan Magistrate Apoorva Rana said in an order passed last week. Section 33 of the Delhi Excise Act prescribes the

penalty for unlawful import, export, transport, manufacture, possession, sale, etc. of intoxicant or liquor and Section 38 of the act prescribes the penalty for possession of liquor which is unlawfully imported, non-duty paid, etc.

The court said the prosecution's case had "multiple inconsistencies", rendering its version "incredible," because of which presumption of commission of offence could not be raised against Kumar. "This court is of the opinion that the prosecution has failed to bring on record any cogent evidence in order to prove the commission of and guilt of the accused," the judge said.

The court noted there was no written order or instruction from the Deputy Commissioner (Excise) about the raid at the hotel and no documentary or oral proof was submitted to prove that Kumar was responsible for organising the event during which the illicit liquor was allegedly seized. "All these incongruities in the version of the prosecution have remained unexplained, thereby blemishing the story of prosecution on material aspects,"

the court said. It said sub-inspector Anuj Rana, the complainant in the case, failed to recount the basic details of the events as they occurred on the day of the incident and this cast doubt about his presence on the spot.

The court also noted that the FIR number was mentioned on documents which were prepared prior to the registration of the FIR. "Either the FIR was registered prior to the alleged recovery of the illicit liquor, or the said documents were prepared later in point of time. In either of the scenarios, a dent is created in the version of the prosecution, the benefit of which must accrue to the accused," the court said.

Also, no sincere attempts were made by the police to join public witnesses in the present case, the court said. The court noted while Rana spoke about handing over duly sealed and completely filled liquor bottles, when the case property was produced in court, one bottle was unsealed and the other contained "very little liquid." This raised serious suspicion about tampering with the case property, the court said. (PTI)

CDSCO and state body conducting joint inspection of drug manufacturing units

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 --/ The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has started conducting inspection of identified drug manufacturing units jointly with state authorities. The joint inspections are being conducted all over the country according to the standard operating procedures on the directions of Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, a health ministry statement said. An action plan for the

nationwide inspection of manufacturing units which are identified to be at the risk of manufacturing not of standard quality, adulterated or spurious drugs was made prior to the inspections, according to the statement. A committee of two joint drugs controllers has been constituted at the CDSCO headquarters to monitor the process of inspection, reporting and subsequent action so as to ensure compliance with the

Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, the statement said. This will ensure high standards of quality compliance with respect to drugs manufactured in the country. The objective of drug regulation is to ensure safety, efficacy and quality of the drugs available in the country. The drug control administration is required to ensure that manufacturing units comply with the Drugs & Cosmetics Act and Rules. (PTI)

Year 2022 saw political slugfests in Maharashtra courtrooms, cases against alleged Maoists

MUMBAI, DEC 27 --/ Political turmoil in Maharashtra spilled over to the courts in 2022 with the arrests of leaders like Sanjay Raut, Nawab Malik and independent MP from Amravati Navneet Rana in different cases and subsequent legal battles over their bail applications.

The courts also dealt with litigation related to the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case of 2017 with some of the accused getting relief. In February, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and former minister in the then Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government Nawab Malik moved the Bombay High Court, seeking to quash an alleged money laundering case registered against him by the Enforcement Directorate. The ED case is related to a land deal in Mumbai in which associates of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim were involved. Malik's plea is still pending.

In March, the ED arrested Malik in the case and subsequently a special court

for the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) cases rejected his bail applications. Malik has now moved the High Court for bail. April saw another high-profile case when Mumbai Police arrested Navneet Rana and her husband, MLA Ravi Rana after they announced that they would recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside then Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's private residence 'Matoshree' in Mumbai. About ten days later, the couple was granted bail by a court. But arguably, the case that dominated headlines the most was that of Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut.

Trials in the 2008 Malegaon blast case and 2012 Sheena Bora murder continued. Some prosecution witnesses turned hostile in the Malegaon case where BJP MP Pragna Thakur is a prime accused. In February 2022, Justice Pushpa Ganediwala, who had faced flak over the interpretation in a few of her judgements of the term sexual assault' un-

der the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSOA), resigned. Following her problematic judgments delivered in January and February 2021, the Supreme Court collegium had withdrawn its recommendation to appoint her as a permanent HC judge. In April 2022, the High Court was hearing a plea filed by activist Gautam Navlakha, arrested in the Elgar Parishad 'Maoist links' case, seeking that he be put under house arrest instead of being kept in prison owing to his health issues. The HC was bemused when it learnt that the prison authorities had refused to hand over to him a book by English humour author P G Wodehouse, sent by Navlakha's family.

The High Court, though, rejected Navlakha's plea for house arrest. The plea was later allowed by the Supreme Court.

In April, Bollywood actor Salman Khan moved the Bombay High Court challenging the summons issued

to him by a magistrate's court on a complaint filed by a journalist over a 2019 dispute. The HC stayed the summons. On September 19, the High Court rejected a bail plea filed by former Delhi University professor Hany Babu, an accused in the Elgar Parishad case, noting that on the face of it there was substance in the allegations against him.

In September, the HC directed the Mumbai civic body to demolish unauthorised construction at Union minister and BJP leader Narayan Rane's bungalow in Juhu area, noting that it had violated Floor Space Index (FSI) and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules. Anil Ambani got relief from the High Court in the same month when the court directed the Income Tax department not to take any coercive action against the industrialist on a show-cause notice seeking to prosecute him under the Black Money Act. On October 14, the Nagpur bench of the HC acquitted ex-Delhi Univer-

sity professor G N Saibaba, overturning his conviction in an alleged Maoist links case. The order has been stayed by the Supreme Court on an appeal filed by government agencies.

On November 18, the High Court granted bail to scholar-activist Anand Teltumbde, yet another accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, noting that prima facie there was no evidence to show that he was an active member of the banned terror outfit CPI (Maoist) or had indulged in any terrorist act. Between July to September, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested 11 people for allegedly killing Amravati-based pharmacist Umesh Kolhe for sharing social media posts backing BJP leader Nupur Sharma's controversial remarks about Prophet Mohammad.

In December, the NIA filed a charge-sheet against the accused, stating that radicalized Islamists of the Tablighi Jamaat were involved in the murder. (PTI)

Mandala puja held at Sabarimala, hundreds of devotees offer prayers

PATHANAMTHITTA, DEC 27 --/ Large number of devotees thronged the famed Sabarimala temple here on Tuesday seeking the blessings of Lord Ayyappa as auspicious Mandala puja was held at the hillock shrine in the afternoon, marking the culmination of the 41-day-long first leg of the annual pilgrimage season.

The puja was performed under the aegis of 'tantri' (head priest) Kandararu Rajeevaru after adorning the idol of the principal deity with 'thanka anki', the sacred golden attire brought at the Sannidhanam (temple complex) on Monday evening. Special rituals including 'kalabhabhishekam' and 'kalasabhishekam' were held as devotees waited in long queues chanting 'swamiye saranam Ayyappa' to have a glimpse of Lord Ayyappa on the auspicious occasion. Prominent officials of Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) were also present before the sanctum sanctorum when the ceremonies were held. The temple was closed soon after the Mandala puja and would be opened in the evening for devotees to offer prayers before closing in the night. The shrine would be closed for three days and reopen on December 30 at 5 PM for the Makaravilakku ceremonies, the second leg of the pilgrimage season. The Makaravilakku ritual would be held on January 14, 2023. Thereafter, the shrine would be closed on January 20 marking the end of the annual pilgrimage season.

Earlier in the day, Devaswom Minister K

Radhakrishnan said despite the huge turn-out of devotees, the Mandala puja period went off well without much complaint. Over 30 lakh devotees have reached the hillock shrine during the 41-day-long season but things went well through the co-ordinated efforts of various government departments, he told reporters after attending a review meeting at the guest house here. The TDB, the apex temple body which manages the shrine, said Rs 222.98 crore revenue was generated by the shrine in the last 39 days of the two-month long annual pilgrimage season. (PTI)

Law student arrested over killing of delivery executive by car with 'judge' sticker in Noida

NOIDA, DEC 27 --/ A 20-year-old law student has been arrested over the death of a food delivery executive here after his motorcycle was hit by a speeding car bearing the sticker of "judge" on its bonnet, the Noida Police said Tuesday.

There were two more law students in the car at the time of the accident but they are at large. All three are friends of the son of a family court judge and had taken the car to go to Ghaziabad when the accident took place, an official said.

The 27-year-old Zomato delivery executive was near Parthala Chowk when the Toyota Corolla car with registration in Prayagraj hit it around 1.30 am on Monday. The delivery executive, identified as Parvinder

Kumar, was taken to a private hospital in Birsakh area but was pronounced dead on arrival, the police said. The occupants of the car had also fled the spot after the crash, leaving the damaged vehicle behind, according to the police.

On Tuesday, a Noida Police spokesperson said, "Suyash Mishra, the driver of the car has been arrested. The delivery executive had got hit by the negligently-driven car, causing him severe injuries that led to his

death on the spot." Mishra, a native of Gwalior district in Madhya Pradesh, was arrested from his current place of residence in Shakti Khand area of adjoining Ghaziabad district, the official said.

An FIR in the case was lodged at the Noida Sector 113 police station over a complaint from the deceased's brother. The FIR was lodged under Indian Penal Code sections 304A (death by negligence) and 279 (rash driving). (PTI)

PUBLIC NOTICE

**ICICI Bank**
ICICI Bank Limited

Registered office: Landmark, Race Course Circle, Vadodara 390 007.
Corporate office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai 400 051.
GOLD E-AUCTION CUM INVITATION NOTICE

The below mentioned borrowers have been issued notice to pay off their outstanding amount towards the facility against gold ornaments. ("Facility" availed by them from ICICI Bank Limited ("ICICI Bank"). We are constrained to conduct an E-Auction of pledged gold ornaments on **Jan 07, 2023** as they have failed to repay the dues. ICICI Bank has the authority to remove account/change the E-Auction date without any prior notice. Auction will be held online - <https://jewel-auction.procuretiger.com> between 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm. For detailed Terms and conditions, please log into given website. In case of deceased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs.

Loan A/C No.	Customer Name	Loan A/C No.	Customer Name
Branch Name: Mayabunder		Branch Name: Port Blair	
277605000319	S Rajesh Dass	2140405000704	S Kailash Parera

Date : 28.12.2022
Place : North and Middle Andaman, South Adaman

S/d Authorised Officer
For ICICI Bank Limited

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS

No. PN/DB/CD-I/RGT/2022-23/4340 dated 20th December'2022

The Executive Engineer, Construction Division-I, A.P.W.D., Rangat on behalf of President of India invites online Item rate bid from authorized dealer or manufacturer that they have experience on executing the relevant magnitude of work as per CPWD works manual and with other GOI organization in these Island and do not have adverse remarks:-

NIT No. 15/DB/E&M/CD-I/RGT/2022-23 e-Tender ID No. 2022_APWD_8623_1 Name of work. Supplying, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of 01 No. 3 Phase, 415 volt, 25 KVA/20KW KOEL Green Make Diesel Generator Set or equivalent for Primary Health Centre at Baratang. **Estimated Cost: Rs. 8,45,706/- Earnest Money Rs. 16,914/- & Time of completion:** 04 Months, **Last Date of Submission of bid** 25.01.2023 at 3.00 PM.

The bid forms and other details can be obtained from the website eprocure.andaman.gov.in

9483/22 Executive Engineer
CD-I, APWD, Rangat

FINAL PRESS NOTICE

Whereas Shri M.Marimuthu S/o Muthu working as a Sanitary Mazdoor in ward no 15, Municipal Council is absenting from his duty w.e.f 11/12/2020 without any prior intimation/ permission of the competent authority and proceeded to mainland.

Whereas a memo was already issued by the Administrative Officer vide 1-268/SS/Estt/MC/1165 dated 02/08/2021.

Whereas with reference to the memo mentioned above, no response is received from the employee till date.

Whereas, a Press Notice vide no 1-268/SS/Estt/MC/984 dated 14/06/2022 was also released directing him to report duty within 07 days of publication of the notice and till date the employee failed to report duty.

Shri M.Marimuthu S/o Muthu, Sanitary Mazdoor, is once again directed to report for duty within 07 (Seven) days from the date of publication of this notice, with valid reason along with documentary proof, if any, for his unauthorized absence from duty failing which action under Sub-rule(1) of Rule 5 of the CCS (Temporary service) Rules, 1965 will be taken against him.

**Administrative Officer
Municipal Council**

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS

The **Executive Engineer, Panchayati Raj Institution, South Andaman Division-I** on behalf of *Pradhan, Gram Panchayat, Beodnabad* invites online item rate tender (in CPWD form-8) from bonafide and experienced contractors of appropriate class of APWD, MES, ALHW & P&T for the below mentioned work.

1. NIT NO. EE/PRI/SAD-I/GEN/2022-23/97 **Name of Work:** - Construction of Shed for storage of Segregated waste after Bailing in SWM Cluster Beodnabad under Gram Panchayat Beodnabad. **Estimated Cost Rs:** - 13, 54,314/- **Earnest Money Deposit:** - 27,086/- **Time of Completion:** - Four (04) Months, Tender Fee: - ₹.500/- & last date & time of submission of bid: - 06/01/2023 (1500 hrs)

The tender forms and other details can be obtained from the website <https://eprocure.andaman.gov.in>.
Tender ID: - 2022_RDPRI_8649_1

Executive Engineer,
Panchayati Raj Institution,
South Andaman Division-I
Junglighat, Port Blair
South Andaman

9493/22



Commuters click images in their cellphones as Vande Bharat Express train arrives at Howrah station. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the train on December 30. The train will run between between Howrah and New Jalpaiguri

PM's brother, family injured in accident near Mysuru

MYSURU, DEC 27 /--/ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brother Prahlad Modi and family members sustained injuries when the car in which they were travelling met with an accident near here, police said on Tuesday. According to sources, other than the driver, Prahlad Modi, his son, daughter-in-law and a grandchild were in the car. They are said to have suffered some injuries and have been shifted to JSS Hospital for treatment. As per the police, the injuries are said to be "minor" in nature. The incident happened near Kadakola around 1.30 PM when their car, on the way to Bandipur, is said to have hit the road divider. Mysuru superintendent of police Seema Latkar has visited the spot and the hospital, sources said. A doctor at the hospital said: "all were stable with minor injuries when they came, they were immediately attended and are out of danger without any major bleeding. X-rays and CT scans have been done...only the child has suffered a small fracture on left leg tibia, but it is not major and is being treated." Member of Parliament from Mysuru-Kodagu



(L) Prahlad Joshi, (R) the car that met with accident

constituency Pratap Simha, who visited the hospital too, said the family that was on a private visit had sustained "minor" injuries, and the child has suffered a minor fracture, and is undergoing treatment. Speaking to newsmen he said, "Prahlad Modi has suffered a minor scratch on his face nothing other than that, there is nothing to worry, he is fine and talking. His son too has suffered minor injuries and is doing fine. His daughter-in-law has suffered a minor cut on her eyebrow on one side, she is being treated. All are fine and conscious. The grandchild's bone below the left knee is fractured, but is stable." Prahlad Modi's other daughter was in another car and she is fine, Simha said, "for observation, they will be in the hospital today. With the grace of goddess Chamundeshwari all are doing fine." According to Simha, the incident might have occurred as the driver is said to have felt a bit drowsy for a while. A case has been registered in Mysuru South police station. (PTI)

India-backed projects in Afghanistan, Myanmar impacted due to prevailing situations: MEA to parliamentary panel

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ India-backed projects have suffered setbacks in Afghanistan and faced numerous challenges in Myanmar due to the current political and security situations in these countries, the ministry of external affairs has informed a parliamentary panel.

The parliamentary standing committee on external affairs chaired by BJP MP P P Chaudhary noted that there has been a reduction in allocation in aid to Afghanistan. In an action taken report tabled in Parliament last week, the ministry of external affairs said it has noted the parliamentary panel's observations and will work towards addressing them. India's development partnership with Afghanistan includes more than 500 projects spread across each of its 34 provinces and in various sectors. "Several proposals in this regard are already under process. Due to the political and security situation in Afghanistan, projects

implementation has suffered setbacks," the ministry said in the report. Responding to the parliamentary committee's observations on allocations to Myanmar, the ministry said despite the ongoing political situation in the country, India has completed and handed over a capacity building institution each on information technology and agriculture research in March this year. Talking about the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, the ministry said its waterways component has been completed. While the construction work on its road component has been slow, "mainly due to the security situation on the Myanmar side and the delay caused due to Covid-19 pandemic." "Given the current security and political situation in Myanmar, implementation and execution of the above projects have been met with numerous challenges," the ministry said. (PTI)

Ramesh to move SC against BJP MP Pragya Thakur over 'hate speech'

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday said BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur's remarks at a function in Karnataka's Shivamogga are a clear example of hate speech and he would move the Supreme Court against her.

Ramesh said he would file a case against Thakur in the apex court as the police in Karnataka would not act against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP. Karnataka is currently being ruled by the BJP and the Assembly polls are due in the state early next year. "BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur's remarks made in Karnataka are a clear example of hate speech and I would be moving the Supreme Court against her for making such remarks," the former Union minister told news agency PTI. The former Union minister said Thakur's remarks clearly seek to divide the society, while claiming that the local police would not act against her since the BJP is in power in the southern state. Thakur said Hindus have the

right to respond to those who attack them and their dignity as she spoke about the killing of Hindu activists. She also called on Hindus to at least keep the knives in their homes sharp, as everyone has the right to protect themselves. Speaking at the Hindu Jagarana Vedike's southern region annual convention at Shivamogga on Sunday, the BJP MP from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh told the gathering to give a befitting reply to anyone who "infiltrates our house". "Keep weapons in your homes. If nothing else, at least keep the knives used to cut vegetables sharp.... Don't know what situation will arise when.... Everyone has the right to self-protection. If someone infiltrates our house and attacks us, giving a befitting reply is our right," she said. "Love jihad. They have a tradition of jihad. If nothing, they do love jihad. Even if they love, they do jihad in that. We (Hindus) too love, love the god, a sanyasi loves his god," Thakur said. (PTI)

Mock drills held in hospitals across country to check Covid readiness

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Many hospitals across the country held mock drills on Tuesday to check preparedness of health facilities to deal with any spurt in Covid-19 cases, with Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya saying it was important to gauge operational readiness of equipment and human resources.

Mandaviya oversaw the drill at the Centre-run Safdarjung Hospital here, while health ministers reviewed the drill in their respective states. The Centre has asked states and Union Territories to conduct the drill as part of precautionary measures following an increase in infection in China and other countries. Officials said the mock drill focused on parameters such as the availability of health facilities in all districts, the capacity of isolation beds, oxygen-supported beds, ICU beds and ventilator-supported beds, and optimal availability of doctors, nurses, paramedics, AYUSH doctors, and other frontline workers, including ASHA and Anganwadi workers.

Mandaviya said the drill was necessary to know how prepared our hospitals are. "Covid cases are rising all over the world and India might witness a spike in cases too. Hence it is important that the entire Covid infrastructure in terms of equipment, processes and human resources are in a state of operational readiness," the health minister stated. Clinical readiness at hospitals is crucial, Mandaviya said while noting that government as well as private hospitals are undertaking mock drills. Cautioning against complacency, he urged everyone to follow Covid Appropriate Behaviour. He also asked people to refrain from sharing unverified information and ensure high level of preparedness. India recorded a single-day rise of 157 new Covid-19 cases, while the count of active cases of the disease has marginally decreased to 3,421, according to Union health ministry data updated on Tuesday. In the national capital, the drill took place at the LNJP Hospital and other government-run facilities.

Some of the private hospitals are expected to take up the exercise later in the day. Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, who also holds the health portfolio, visited the Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital around noon to assess the drill. "The Delhi government is prepared for any kind of emergency. At LNJP, there are 2,000 beds and 450 of them are marked for Covid-19. If a need arises,

we can dedicate all 2,000 beds for Covid-19... we can also increase this number by using nearby banquet halls and add an additional 500 beds for Covid-19, so there would be no shortage," Sisodia told reporters at the hospital. The deputy chief minister asked people not to panic, saying



Health workers take part in a mock drill conducted as part of preparations against COVID-19, at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), in Rishikesh on Tuesday

primary data suggests that the new BF.7 sub-strain of the coronavirus, which is causing a surge in infections in other countries, is similar to previous variants.

"Compared to previous times, oxygen availability has increased 10 times, five PSA plants have been set up here. And ventilators are also present. Today, a mock drill was conducted, how patients can be attended to and shifted to desired location within five minutes was observed," he added. An official said Covid-19 testing in the city is also likely to be ramped up soon. At present, around 2,500 to 3,000 tests are being conducted daily in the city. Delhi has recorded over 2,007,000 Covid cases and 26,521 deaths since the pandemic started in early 2020. The number of daily cases has remained below 20 and the positivity rate below one per cent since mid-November, according to official data.

Four international travellers from Myanmar, who tested positive for Covid at the Delhi airport, are admitted at the Safdarjung Hospital and their samples have been sent for genome sequencing "They were asymptomatic. They will be discharged once they test negative," Dr Sherwal informed. In Uttar Pradesh, deputy chief minister Brajesh Pathak visited a hospital in Lucknow to ascertain its preparedness to deal with any eventuality. Uttar Pradesh recorded two COVID-19 cases in Unnao and Agra districts among persons who had

recently returned from abroad. "A mock drill is being conducted across all Covid hospitals in the state to check their preparedness. I personally checked the Covid management (facilities), oxygen flow and ventilators at Lucknow's Balrampur Hospital. Everything is working fine. A mock drill is being conducted for medical, paramedical and nursing staff on how to function in case of an emergency," Pathak, who is also the state's health minister, told reporters. In Mumbai, medical facilities including the civic-run Seven Hills Hospital (having 1,700 beds) and Kasturba Hospital (35 beds), government-run Cama Hospital (100 beds), St George Hospital (70 beds), Tata Hospital (16 beds), and Jagjivan Ram Hospital (12 beds) conducted the mock drill. The state-run J J Hospital said it will be conducting the mock drill.

To diagnose and track Covid-19 cases, the city has a daily testing capacity of 1,35,035 at 34 hospitals and 49 laboratories, according to the release. Madhya Pradesh saw

such drills being conducted in all government medical institutions in the state. State medical education minister Vishvas Sarang said the Covid-19 situation in Madhya Pradesh was under control and not a single positive case was reported from the state in the recent past. Officials in West Bengal said the mock drill was conducted at Kolkata-based hospitals including MR Bangur Hospital, Infectious Diseases and Belegata General Hospital, Medical College Hospital Kolkata, RG Kar Medical College and Shambhunath Pandit Hospital besides Dr BC Roy Post Graduate Institute of Paediatric Sciences. All private hospitals in the city and one hospital each in the districts are also taking part in the drill, the official added. "We are ready to face any situation in case there is any surge in Covid-19 cases. It's an exercise to keep a check on our preparedness. At the moment, the Covid-19 contagion is totally under control and there is no reason to panic. The state has enough testing facilities and we are ready to face any situation," Director of Health Services (DHS) Siddhartha Niyogi told news agency PTI.

Karnataka health minister K Sudhakar said Covid response mock drills are in place in all districts and talukas across the state. He said the BF.7 variant of Covid-19 is transmissible with low virulence, but emphasised that senior citizens, children and pregnant women must remain cautious. (PTI)

Anubrata gets bail in attempt to murder case

DUBRAJPUR, DEC 27 /--/ A court in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Tuesday granted bail to TMC leader Anubrata Mondal in an attempt to murder case. Mondal, arrested by the CBI in August in the cattle smuggling case, was booked by the police under IPC sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 325 (causing grievous hurt) and 307 (attempt to murder) on the complaint of a TMC worker who alleged that he was assaulted. The sub-divisional court in Dubrajpur granted bail to Mondal when he was produced, after the expiry of his seven-day police custody. Public prosecutor Rajendra Prasad Dey said: "The investigating officer prayed for police custody but the court after examining the case diary and other records granted him bail. On behalf of the state, I opposed the bail petition."



TMC leader Anubrata Mondal being produced before Dubrajpur court, in Birbhum

The police complaint was filed by one Shibthakur Mondal, who alleged that the TMC Birbhum district president had attempted to kill him by throttling him about six months back. The police registered a case and moved the court on December 19, securing a production warrant for Mondal, who was in judicial custody in Asansol. The timing of the assault case raised questions as the Enforcement Directorate was preparing to take him to Delhi for questioning in the cattle smuggling case on the order of a court in the national capital. After he was given bail in the assault case, Mondal was taken back to the Asansol correctional home where he will continue to stay in the cattle smuggling case. "Whatever happened, I am okay with that," the TMC leader told newsmen after the bail order. (PTI)

Dense fog cloaks Delhi, cold wave in parts of city



NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Parts of the national capital reeled under a cold wave as dense fog blotted out the sun on Tuesday morning, lowering visibility to just 50 metres and affecting road traffic and train movement.

Fifteen trains to and from Delhi were reported running late while two were rescheduled, a Railways spokesperson said. At 5.6 degrees Celsius, Delhi's minimum temperature was less than that of Dharamsala (6.2 degrees Celsius), Dehradun (7 degrees Celsius), and Nainital (7.2 degrees Celsius). With a high windchill factor -- a measure of the rate of heat loss from skin that is exposed to the air -- in play, cold day conditions prevailed in some parts of the city such as Palam and Jafarpur. A cold day is when the minimum temperature is less than or equal to

10 degrees Celsius below normal and the maximum temperature is at least 4.5 degrees below normal. A severe cold day is when the maximum is 6.5 degrees or more below normal. The windchill factor is based on wind speed -- the higher the wind speed during cold weather, the colder it feels on the skin if a person is outside. Delhi clocked a top wind speed of 16 kilometres per hour on Tuesday. The national capital shivered under a 'severe' cold day on Monday, with the maximum temperature dropping 10 notches below normal at some places. The Safdarjung observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, recorded a maximum temperature of 15.6 degrees Celsius on Monday, six notches below normal and the lowest day temperature in December since December 17, 2020. On Tuesday, Safdarjung logged a minimum

temperature of 5.6 degrees Celsius -- a notch below normal. The maximum temperature settled at 17.2 degrees Celsius, three notches below normal.

Meteorologists attributed below-normal day temperatures to frigid north westerly winds barreling through the plains and reduced sunshine due to foggy weather. Mahesh Palawat, vice president (meteorology and climate change), Skymet Weather, said a western disturbance led to a fresh spell of snowfall in the mountains on December 25-26 and cold northwesterly winds are now sweeping through the plains after its retreat. He said the wind chill factor was also high. Palawat said cold wave conditions in northwest India would abate from Wednesday under the influence of a fresh western disturbance. However, the relief is likely to be

short lived. Dense to very dense fog prevailed in some parts of the National Capital Region (NCR), Haryana, Punjab, west Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan on Tuesday.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), 'very dense' fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres, 51 and 200 metres is 'dense', 201 and 500 'moderate', and 501 and 1,000 'shallow'. In the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to four degrees Celsius or when the minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches below normal. A 'severe' cold wave is when the minimum temperature dips to two degrees Celsius or the departure from normal is more than 6.4 degrees Celsius. (PTI)

PM Sharif pledges to eliminate terrorism from Pak

ISLAMABAD, DEC 27 /--/As Pakistan reels from multiple incidents of terrorism, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed his vow to eradicate the menace amid criticism from ousted premier Imran Khan on the government's "failure" to curb militancy during its eight-month stint. Addressing a gathering in the Dera Ismail Khan district



of the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday, Sharif said that the menace of terrorism was on the rise and the state would crush it very soon, the Dawn newspaper quoted him as saying. He said that with the help of provincial governments and security forces, the government would eliminate terrorism in all its forms. Sharif said that a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC) would be summoned in a few days to take stock of the security situation. Commenting on the attack on a security compound claimed by the outlawed Pakistani Taliban (TTP) terror group in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district last week, Sharif said it was heart-breaking and added that the law enforcement agencies conducted a successful operation, killing all terrorists who had taken over the compound.

Meanwhile, former prime minister Khan, who wants snap polls in the country at all costs and is likely to dissolve Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies, lambasted the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government for its "failure" to rein in terrorism after coming to power in April this year. During a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf meeting at his residence in Lahore, Khan, the chairman of the party, claimed that his government had "controlled terrorism and was proudly leading the country towards making it one of the world's top tourism destinations". He expressed his concern over the situation at the Pakistan-Afghan border as well. He claimed there was a 52 per cent increase in terror incidents since April and chided the government for the resurgence of terrorism. "At least 52 per cent increase has been recorded in terrorism cases across the country that claimed some 270 precious lives and left over 550 people injured," the former premier said.

Separately, PTI party leader Fawad Chaudhry told reporters that terrorism was returning to Pakistan. He said that during its tenure, the PTI government was proudly projecting Pakistan as the world's top tourist destination, and now the nation was being pushed into the "fire of terrorism, and the embassies were issuing advisories to their employees to avoid five-star hotels" in Islamabad. The United States embassy on Sunday warned about a possible terror threat against American citizens at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad and prohibited American staff from visiting the five-star facility. The Saudi Arabian embassy in Islamabad also issued a security advisory on Monday, instructing its citizens in Pakistan to restrict their movement. (PTI)

China to reopen borders, scrap quarantine for international travellers from Jan 8

BEIJING, DEC 27 /--/Days after it faced nationwide anti-government protests against its stringent zero-Covid policy, China in a major shift of its coronavirus response policies has announced that it will scrap quarantine for international travellers from January 8 as it reopens its borders and comes out of international isolation after nearly three years.

The National Health Commission (NHC) on Monday announced that Covid-19 management will be downgraded from Class A to B from next month, in the same category as less-severe diseases, such as Dengue fever. China will cancel inbound quarantine for international arrivals starting from January 8, 2023, it said. Previously passengers coming from abroad had to mandatorily stay in over two weeks of quarantine in government accommodations, which was gradually reduced to five days with three days' of observation. These announcements come at a time when the country is grappling with a sudden spurt in coronavirus infections fuelled by the Omicron variant after the Xi Jinping regime relaxed its stringent zero-Covid policy earlier this month following a wave of anti-government protests.

Officials argue that the Omicron variant was not as lethal as the Delta strain, which caused massive casualties all over the world. Covid-19 has been managed as a top category 'A' infectious disease since 2020, putting it at par with bubonic plague and cholera, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Under Chinese laws, authorities must impose the toughest restrictions such as quarantine and isolation of the infected and their close contacts, and lockdowns to contain those diseases. At the border, the infected must be isolated and those who might be infected quarantined, depending on the incubation period.

The NHC also stopped announcing daily Covid cases from Sunday. The novel coronavirus first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019 before it turned into a pandemic. (PTI)

Indian American community observes Veer Bal Diwas

WASHINGTON, DEC 27 /--/The Indian American community here has observed the maiden 'Veer Bal Diwas' during which they paid tributes to the unparalleled sacrifices made by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh's four sons who laid down their lives while defending their faith.

The martyrdom day of Guru Gobind Singh's sons -- Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh -- is observed as 'Veer Bal

Diwas'. On the occasion of Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary on January 9 this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that December 26 will be observed as 'Veer Bal Diwas'. Organised by the Indian Embassy at its premises here on Monday, a digital exhibition on the lives of the four Sahibzades was also mounted on the occasion. In her remarks, Charge d'Affaires Sripriya Ranganathan highlighted the various

initiatives taken by the Indian government to commemorate Sikh festivals. She highlighted the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor -- connecting the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib near Lahore in Pakistan to Gurudwara Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab's Gurdaspur district. Ranganathan also highlighted the initiatives taken by the Indian government to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev across the world; celebration of

the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur with a special commemorative coin and a postage stamp being released by Prime Minister Modi to mark the occasion; and bringing back three Holy Swarups' of the Guru Granth Sahib from Afghanistan with full honour in August last year. Guru Gobind Singh's two sons -- Baba Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh -- were killed on the battlefield, while Baba Zorawar and Fateh Singh were bricked up alive. (PTI)

Amid Ukraine conflict, Covid-inflicted crises, India emerges as voice of Global South

UNITED NATIONS, DEC 27 /--/ India emerged as a voice of the Global South during its two-year term in the powerful UN Security Council, which acrimoniously deliberated on Russia's invasion of Ukraine that led to unprecedented levels of global food and fuel insecurity as the world continued to grapple with inequalities amplified by the pandemic. Before relinquishing its non-permanent seat in the 15-member Council on December 31, 2022, India presided over the powerful UN body in December with the country's first woman Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj sitting in the President's seat at the horse-shoe table. Just about two months into India's second year of its 2021-2022 term on the Council as elected non-permanent member, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a

'special military operation' in eastern Ukraine on February 24. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made a direct and strong appeal to Putin to "stop your troops from attacking Ukraine" and give peace a chance as the UN chief called the invasion the "saddest moment in my tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations." As the Russian invasion unfolded, India's then UN envoy Ambassador T S Tirumurti in February underscored New Delhi's call for urgent de-escalation of tensions and cautioned that the situation was in danger of spiralling into a major crisis.

In statements in the Council and the General Assembly throughout the year, India consistently called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and an end to violence. New Delhi emphasised that dialogue and

diplomacy are the only way forward and actions that exacerbate the conflict should be avoided. "Our world faced many trials and tests in 2022 some familiar, others we might not have imagined just one year ago," Guterres said, adding that even in the brutal war in Ukraine, the power of determined, discreet diplomacy has helped people and tackle unprecedented levels of global food insecurity. India abstained on most resolutions related to the Russia-Ukraine war in the Security Council, General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, including on a Security Council procedural resolution to convene a rare emergency special session of the General Assembly.

The 193-member General Assembly, the most representative body of the United Nations, convened the rare emergency session on February

28 on Russia's aggression against Ukraine, only the 11th such emergency session of the UNGA since 1950. Kamboj, who took charge of India's Permanent Mission in New York in August, has asserted that in the course of the Ukraine conflict, India has "spoken in one voice that we are for peace. Peace is also a side and we favour diplomacy and dialogue We are among the few countries, dare I say, which are speaking to both sides." As the Ukraine conflict continued unabated through the months of 2022, India highlighted that its impact has not been limited just to Europe. The Global South especially is facing serious economic consequences, with growing concerns about energy and food security exacerbating the hardships unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic. While India supplied 240 million doses of

COVID-19 vaccines to over 100 countries, it also provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and economic support to some of its neighbours in the Global South under economic distress due to the ripple effect of the conflict. "We were there in response to humanitarian crises. All of this and more points to the fact that India is ready to take its place at the global top table as a country that is willing to bring solutions to the table and to contribute positively to the global agenda," Kamboj said. "Over the last two years of our membership of the Council, I can say with confidence that we have been shouldering responsibilities well, and making every effort to bridge the different voices within the Council so as to ensure that the Council itself speaks in one voice as far as possible on a variety of issues," she said. (PTI)

South Korea's leader calls for stealth drones to monitor North

SEOUL, DEC 27 /--/ South Korea's president on Tuesday called for stronger air defences and high-tech stealth drones while the military apologised for failing to shoot down North Korean drones that crossed the border for the first time in five years.

South Korea's military scrambled warplanes and attack helicopters on Monday, but they failed to bring down any of the North Korean drones that flew back home or disappeared from South Korean radars. It raised serious questions about South Korea's air defense network at a time when tensions remain high over North Korea's torrid run of missile tests this year. "We have a plan to create a military drone unit tasked with monitoring key military facilities in North Korea. But we'll advance the establishment of the drone unit as soon as possible because of yesterday's incident," President Yoon Suk Yeol said during a regular Cabinet Council meeting. "We'll also introduce state-of-the-art stealth drones and bolster our surveillance capability." He said South Korea's military needs more intensive readiness and exercises to cope with threats posed by North Korean drones. Lt Gen Kang Shin Chul, chief director of operation at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a televised statement the military feels sorry because of its failure to shoot down the North Korean drones and for causing big public concerns.

Kang acknowledged South Korea lacks capacities to detect and strike small surveillance drones with a wingspan of less than 3 metres (9.8 feet) though it has assets to spot and bring down bigger combat drones. Kang said South Korea will establish drone units with various capacities and aggressively deploy military assets to shoot down enemy drones.

A front-line county office in South Korea on Tuesday sent emergency text messages notifying residents of a new batch of North Korean drones. But the military later said it was a flock of birds. On Monday, South Korea sent its own surveillance assets, apparently unmanned drones, across the border as corresponding steps against the North Korean drone flights. South Korea's public confirmation of reconnaissance activities inside North Korea is highly unusual and likely reflects a resolve by Yoon's government to get tough

on North Korean provocations. It was the first time North Korean drones entered South Korean airspace since 2017. The drone flights came three days after South Korea said North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles, extending its record testing activities this year. North Korea has touted its drone program, and South Korean officials have previously said the North had about 300 drones. Advanced drones are among modern weapons systems that North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to procure, along with multi-warheads, underwater-launched nuclear missiles and a spy satellite.

Earlier Tuesday, North Korea's state media said Kim called for stronger effort to overcome hardships and challenges facing his country at the start of a key ruling Workers' Party meeting the previous day. Some experts say Kim will likely use the

meeting to reaffirm his resolve to expand his nuclear arsenal and introduce high-tech weapons targeting the US and South Korea while laying out projects to revive pandemic-battered public livelihoods. In Seoul, the South Korean president used the drone incident to hit at his liberal predecessor's engagement policy with North Korea.

Yoon, a conservative who took office in May, said South Korea's military had conducted little anti-drone training since 2017, when Moon Jae-in was inaugurated. "I think our people must have seen well how dangerous a policy relying on the North's good faiths and (peace) agreements would be," he said. Moon's liberal opposition Democratic Party accused Yoon of shifting his government's "security disaster" to someone else. Party spokesperson Park Sung-joon called on Yoon to thoroughly disclose what he did when the North Korean drones were flying in South Korean territory.

Moon was credited with arranging now-dormant diplomacy on North Korea's nuclear programme, but also faced criticism that his appeasement policy allowed North Korea to buy time and boost its nuclear arsenal despite international sanctions. The North Korean Workers' Party meeting is expected to last several days, and Kim will likely address issues such as his arms buildup, relations with the United States and the economy in later sessions. (AP)



Yoon Suk Yeol

Pak makes 'special' security plan for Islamabad amid terror alert by foreign mission

ISLAMABAD, DEC 27 /--/ Pakistan Police on Tuesday announced special security measures, including setting up 25 new check-posts, to tighten security in the federal capital here after several countries, including the US, UK, Saudi Arabia and Australia asked their citizens to restrict their movement, warning of a possible terror threat.

According to the security plan, shared on Islamabad police's official Twitter account, entry points of the Red Zone will be recorded via Safe City cameras while video surveillance of metro bus passengers would also be conducted. Pakistani citizens as well as foreign nationals have been asked to carry their identification documents with them. "Special security plan issued in view of the current security situation

in Islamabad. Temporary security check posts have been established at 25 different locations in Islamabad," it said. Police also advised the local people to register tenants and employees at the nearest police station and warned that those employing unregistered local or foreign workers will be investigated. All motorists have been instructed to ensure their vehicles had number plates issued by the excise office. People have been asked to inform authorities of any unusual activity on the helpline. The security plan comes in the wake of the US, UK, Saudi Arabian and Australian governments issuing advisories to their respective citizens in Pakistan to restrict their movements due to possible terror threats. The advisories came in

the wake of a suicide bombing on Friday in Islamabad that killed a policeman. It was the first major incident of terrorism in Islamabad following the onset of the recent wave of militancy that was initially limited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Two days after the blast, the US embassy in Islamabad warned about a possible terror threat against American citizens at the Marriott Hotel in the country's capital and prohibited American staff from visiting the five-star facility. The Saudi Arabian embassy in Islamabad also issued a security advisory on Monday, instructing its citizens in Pakistan to restrict their movement. The United Kingdom and Australia issued separate security alerts on Monday, asking their citizens to limit their movement in Pakistan. (PTI)



Rescue team members help evacuate people from a flooded area after heavy rain in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia



David Warner
RETIRED HURT
Runs : 200
Balls : 254
4's : 16
6's : 2

MELBOURNE, Dec 27 /--/ Opener David Warner battled through searing heat to hit an epic unbeaten 200 in his 100th Test on Tuesday before retiring in pain as Australia consolidated their advantage against South Africa at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. On a scorching day, the hosts were 386-3 at stumps on day two of the second Test, leading by 197 after the Proteas were dismissed in their first innings for 189. Travis Head was not out 48 with Alex Carey on nine. Steve Smith (85) and Marnus Labuschagne (14) were the only wickets to fall. But worryingly for Australia, Cameron Green, who took 5-27 in South Africa's first innings, also retired hurt after a nasty rap on the finger from Anrich Nortje. Smith and Warner's 239-run partnership took the game further

away from South Africa, whose bowlers toiled in temperatures touching 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit). Warner, 36, snapped a near-three-year century drought in typically aggressive and gritty fashion, reaching three figures for a 25th time after coming into the game under pressure after a lean run. It was his first Test hundred since January 2020 and as the opposition bowlers tired, he battled the elements and converted it to 200 for only the third time. But it was an exhausting effort, as he passed 8,000 Test runs en route. Chairs had to be brought out for Warner and Smith to rest on in the drinks breaks, with towels draped over their heads and ice-packs around their shoulders. Warner needed treatment for cramp several times and retired in pain after reaching 200 and dropping to his

knees, eventually helped from the field by support staff. Australia resumed on 45-1, having lost Usman Khawaja late Monday after taking charge of the opening day, with Green's heroics helping dismiss the visitors for under 200 again. They were all out for 152 and 99 in the first Test in Brisbane, which they lost by six wickets inside two days. Warner began on 32 and showed his aggressive intent with an early boundary off Kagiso Rabada. Nortje was routinely sending down 150 kph (93 mph) rockets, smacking Warner on the head when he was on 47. The batter was given the all-clear after a mandatory concussion test on the field, with a lengthy delay as a new helmet was found. But disaster struck two balls after play resumed. Warner pushed Nortje for a single and came back for a second, but Labuschagne hesitated

and was run out despite a lunging dive. Unfazed, Warner put his head down to motor to 100, punching the air when he got there with a boundary after a near-flawless knock characterised by his trademark strong running between the wicket. Smith was not as comfortable, escaping on nine when he was dropped by wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne and then on 39 when he was given out caught behind only for it to be called a no-ball after Rabada overstepped the mark. But he persevered to reach a 37th Test fifty with a four off Marco Jansen. Warner upped the ante after his century and raced to 200 off 254 balls before calling it quits. Smith departed shortly before his partner reached the milestone, with Nortje getting his reward for a hard day's work, with Theunis de Bruyn taking a catch at gully. (AFP)

Didn't feel pressure of replacing Kuldeep, domestic grind helped me perform: Unadkat

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Jaydev Unadkat did get his much-awaited chance with the red ball and he kept his "promise" with a spirited effort in his first Test for India after 12 years. His love for the longer version of the game became apparent more than ever in January when he typed a tweet that went viral. "Dear red ball, please give me one more chance.. I'll make you proud, promise!" the left-arm pacer had posted. "Everyone thought that I was referring to a national comeback. I was just missing red ball cricket in general as Ranji Trophy was postponed for a second time (due to COVID)," Unadkat told PTI in an interview after his arrival from Bangladesh. The 31-year-old, who had played his first and only Test way back in 2010 with the great Sachin Tendulkar and current head coach Rahul Dravid being his celebrated teammates, featured in his second outing last week in remarkable circumstances. Having not been on selectors' radar despite a record-breaking performance in the 2020 Ranji Trophy, a national recall came for Unadkat when he expected it the least. He was not even part of the India A side that toured Bangladesh before the Test series, so one could not fault him for keeping his hopes to bare minimum. Eventually, his patience and perseverance prevailed as he was flown to Bangladesh as a backup pace option, with Mohammad Shami not regaining full fitness for the series. The visa delays meant he could only reach Chattogram after the start of the first Test but against all expectations, stand-in skipper K L Rahul gave Unadkat the big break he was waiting for while toiling on the domestic circuit for years. The opportunity came at the expense of spinner Kuldeep Yadav, whose exclusion after an eight-wicket haul in the series opener triggered a selection controversy. The scoreboard would show that Unadkat took three wickets in his comeback Test but his impact was bigger in the game. With years of first-class experience under his belt since his Test debut in South Africa, Unadkat relished the pressure. Getting the most out of flat tracks in Rajkot is something Unadkat had done for years and the Porbandar-born cricketer found himself in similar territory in Mirpur. It did not take long for him to make his presence felt as he removed previous game's centurion Zakir Hasan with a ball that jumped from good length. That was his maiden wicket in Tests and Unadkat says that moment will remain the most special of his career. (PTI)



Saina named for selection trials of Asian Mixed Team C'ship

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Two-time Commonwealth Games champion Saina Nehwal has been named for next month's selection trials of Asian Mixed Team Championships, to be held in Dubai from February 14 to 19. The senior selection committee had a virtual meeting on December 25 to finalise the trials for picking the team for the Asian event. Based on their superior world rankings, the committee decided to give direct entry to singles players Lakshya Sen, HS Prannoy, PV Sindhu and men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Ranikreddy and Chirag Shetty. The rest of the 14-member team will be picked in the selection trials, scheduled to be held in Delhi on January 2 and 3. "The members unanimously agreed that since it is a big competition with limited number of entries, only BWF rankings from 16-50 should be considered for inviting players for the trials for the rest of the available spots," the BAI said in a

letter. In women's singles, apart from Saina, Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap have been invited for the trials, while in men's doubles -- Arjun/Dhruv Kapila, Krishna Prasad Garga/Vishnuvardhan Goud P and Ishaan Bhatnagar/Sai Patheek K were named. For the two spots in women's doubles, Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treasa Jolly and Gayatri P Gopichand, Sikki Reddy and Ashwini Ponnappa, Ashwini Bhatt and Shikha Gautam and Haritha Manazhiyil and Ashna Roy were invited. Ishaan Bhatnagar and Tanisha Crasto, Venkat Gaurav Prasad and Juhi Dewangan and Rohan Kapoor and Sikki Reddy were invited for the trials which will pick the one mixed doubles pair for the event. Saina, a former world number one, had skipped the selection trials for the 2022 Commonwealth Games in April to manage workload after returning from three weeks of European events. (PTI)

Another year, another set of medals; Mirabai continues to rule Indian weightlifting

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ The legend of Mirabai Chanu continued to grow as she added a second World Championships medal to her much-decorated trophy cabinet while other Indian lifters too revelled in the glory of a power-packed performance at the Commonwealth Games in 2022. They say winning is a habit and Mirabai has certainly made one. The lifter from Manipuri expectedly bossed the 49kg field at the Commonwealth Games to give India the first gold medal of the Birmingham edition.

It was not a question of if, but the margin of gold medal win as Mirabai was assured of title the moment she entered the not-so-competitive field. Such was her domination that the second-place Mauritian Roilya Ranaivosoa finished 29 kgs behind her. It was Mirabai's third CWG medal and second consecutive gold. The diminutive lifter ended the year with a bang, fetching a silver at the world championships, once again, giving everyone a master class in grit and determination. If she battled painful menstrual cramps to win the Tokyo Olympics silver last year, Mirabai overcame a wrist issue to claim her second world championships medal, adding to her 2017 gold. She lifted a total of 200 kg with 87kg in snatch and 113kg in clean & jerk. The clean and jerk effort also fetched her a silver medal in the section. But as another year passed, the much-anticipated 90kg snatch lift continued to elude her. And that is perhaps the biggest downer for the tenacious Mirabai, who has been trying to pull off that one lift since 2020 as more and more opponents achieve the feat in the run-up to the Paris Olympics. Earlier in July-August, the senior weightlifters set the ball rolling at Birmingham with Mirabai going on a record-smashing spree. Records continued to tumble with Jeremy Lalrinnunga claiming his maiden CWG gold medal, obliterating the Games record in snatch and total weight with an aggregate of 300kg (140kg+160kg). Achinta Sheuli too shattered the Games record in snatch and total lift on his way to gold with an effort of 313kg(143kg+170kg).



Indian weightlifters bagged a total of 10 medals, including three golds as many silvers, and four bronze. While Mirabai (48kg), Jeremy (73kg) and Achinta (77kg) took home gold medals, Sanket Sagar (55kg), Vikas Thakur (96kg), S Bindyrani (55kg) fetched silver medals, and P Gururaja (61kg), Lovepreet Singh (109kg), Gurdeep Singh (+109kg) and Harjinder Kaur (71kg) added a shade of bronze. India topped the medals tally in the sport in the tournament. But the lifters, barring Mirabai, were not able to take forward the CWG momentum. Most of them skipped the Asian and World Championships and for those who didn't, the gulf between them and the other lifters around the world was visible. Apart from Mirabai, the four other Indian lifters were placed in groups C and D, failing to finish even in the top 20 in the worlds earlier this month. .(PTI)

GAME NOTES

Argentina confident Scaloni will stay with World Cup winners

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 27 /--/ Argentina's football federation chief insisted Monday that coach Lionel Scaloni will remain with the World Cup winners. "Scaloni is the coach of the Argentina national team. We are both men of our word, we said yes to each other. I have no doubt that he will continue," Argentine Football Federation (AFA) president Claudio Tapia said. Scaloni, 44, has been in charge of the team since 2018, leading them to the Copa America in 2021 - Argentina's first international trophy since 1993. He then guided Lionel Messi and the squad to a third World Cup with victory over France in the final in Qatar earlier this month. (AFP)

Prannoy regains career-best world no. 8 rankings

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 /--/ Star Indian shuttler HS Prannoy regained his career-best number eight position in the latest BWF world rankings issued on Tuesday. The 30-year-old from Kerala, who has been in good form this year, had achieved the number eight ranking in 2018 for the first time before slipping to 34 in 2019. However, some memorable performances in the season, including the Thomas Cup win, seven quarterfinals, two semifinals and a runner-up finish at the Swiss Open, saw him rise like a phoenix in 2022.

Ashleigh Gardner new No. 1 in women's T20I all-rounders' ranking

DUBAI, DEC 27 /--/ Australian all-rounder Ashleigh Gardner has overtaken West Indies skipper Hayley Matthews, India's Deepti Sharma and New Zealand captain Sophie Devine to attain a career-best No.1 spot in the latest ICC Women's T20I player rankings for all-rounders released on Tuesday. Following a closely-fought five-match T20I series, which Australia won 4-1, Gardner, who was named Player of the Match in the last game for her 32-ball unbeaten 66 and bowling figures of 2/20, has topped the all-rounders' list for the first time after moving up three spots. Gardner (417 points) holds a big advantage over Devine (389) and Deepti (387) in second and third spots respectively, with Matthews dropping two places (381) to fourth.

More than skin deep: Fans line up for Messi tattoos



BUENOS AIRES, DEC 27 /--/ Fans of the Argentine team that claimed football's ultimate prize in Qatar this month are lining up in Buenos Aires for tattoos of victorious captain Lionel Messi and the World Cup trophy. "For the next two weeks, I have (appointments) exclusively related to the World Cup," tattoo artist Esteban Vucinovich told AFP in the capital. "Some had already made an appointment for tattoos of snakes or skulls, but they are changing it to Messi or the Cup. I have two or three appointments a day," he said. The most requested skin art is of the trophy, said Vucinovich, followed by Messi and then goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez who was crucial in the victory of the Albiceleste in the final against France. Many fans are inspired by the body art of Argentine players such as Angel Di Maria, who has since recently sported a World Cup tattoo on his right leg. "I got a tattoo of

Messi as a gesture of thanks," civil servant Nicolas Rechanik told AFP. "This represents not only what Messi is but also the team that brought us a third World Cup and all the years of effort to reach this goal." Before getting the image of Messi in the team's blue-and-white striped jersey and kissing the trophy indelibly attached to his left leg, Rechanik already sported the likeness of another Argentine football icon: Diego Maradona. "It's a perfect representation of what Argentine football is and what it means to be Argentine," he said. Football fanatic Alma Ocampo, 20, decided to get a tattoo when, to everyone's surprise, Argentina lost its first match of the World Cup to Saudi Arabia. "When everyone lost confidence, I decided that... if Argentina wins, I will get a tattoo of the Cup. And so I did, with the date December 18, 2022" of the final, she said, adding "it hurt quite a bit." (PTI)

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