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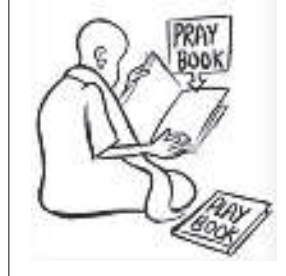
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DECISION 2022

EVERY PARTY IS
AFTER WOMEN'S
VOTE IN U.P. [PAGE 12](#)

BJP SAYS THE 'OPPORTUNISTIC' WILL BE REJECTED

Third minister quits Yogi govt, 8 of 9 BJP rebels likely to join SP today

Dharam Singh Saini, 2 MLAs quit, say govt neglected the marginalised

ASAD REHMAN & LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 13

AMID THE flurry of resignations from the Uttar Pradesh BJP, a minister and two MLAs resigned from the party Thursday, saying the government had not worked for the marginalised communities in the last five years.

Dharam Singh Saini, Minister for Ayush and MLA from Nakur constituency in Saharanpur,

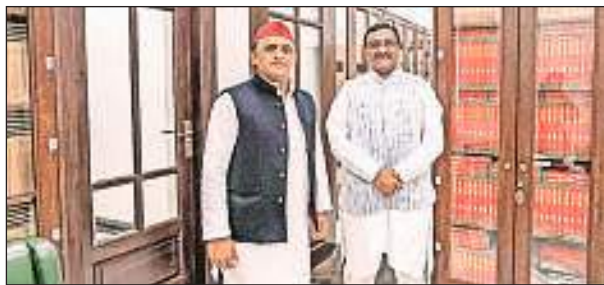


Photo tweeted on Thursday by SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, with former UP Minister Dharam Singh Saini.



Mukesh Verma, MLA from Shikohabad in Firozabad, and Awasthi Bala Prasad, MLA from Dhaurahra in Luckhimpur, were the three BJP MLAs who resigned Thursday.

BJP ally Apna Dal (S) MLA from Shohratgarh, Amar Singh Chaudhary, also left his party for the SP. Chaudhary, a backward caste leader, met SP chief Akhilesh Yadav Thursday. Saini's resignation was the **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Unnao victim's mother, CAA protester among 50 women in Cong's 1st list

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

HAVING CENTRED the party's campaign in Uttar Pradesh around women empowerment, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Thursday announced names of 50 women in the party's first list of 125 candidates. Among the women were the mother of the Unnao rape survivor, an ASHA worker who was roughed up by police, a former SP leader who was at-

tacked during the panchayat elections and a social activist and Congress leader who was jailed during the anti-CAA protests.

Vadra, the AICC general secretary in charge of UP, had already announced that 40 per cent of the Congress candidates would be women. The move is seen as a novel as well as desperate attempt to carve out a support base for the Congress in UP politics where caste equations traditionally, and now Hindutva politics, hold much sway.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Local Covid curbs, but ensure minimal loss of livelihood: PM advice to CMs

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

WHILE UNDERLINING the need to focus on local containment measures to check the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asked state governments to ensure "minimal loss to the common man's livelihood and related economic activity".

Addressing a review meeting with chief ministers on the Covid-19 situation, Modi asked state governments to adopt a "pre-emptive, proactive and collective approach".

India reported 2.47 lakh new infections on Thursday, with the active case count touching 11.17 lakh. The daily case count in Delhi and Chennai crossed their

respective second wave peaks on Thursday. Delhi reported 28,867 new cases; the previous peak was 28,395 on April 20 last year. Chennai reported 8,218 cases; the previous peak was 7,772 cases on May 12 last year.

Kolkata and Mumbai have also crossed their second wave peaks. Kolkata is currently reporting over 6,700 cases daily; it did not cross the 4,000-mark during the second wave. The case count in Mumbai climbed up to almost 21,000 this time, but has come down in the last few days. On Thursday, it reported 13,702 cases. During the second wave, Mumbai's daily case count peaked at 11,206 on April 4 last year. Among the major states, West Bengal is the only one to have crossed the second wave peak for now.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CONTRACTORS UNDER CLOUD

Missing workers, dodgy rolls, wage diversion: NREG audit in Jharkhand

Workers on rolls for building this shed never turned up, says its owner's son in East Singhbhum district. *Express*ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, JANUARY 13

■ In Dumka district, an audit of 869 work sites found 774 people at work although 7,712 were listed on the rolls.

■ In East Singhbhum, records listed 2,798 workers at 688 sites but only 1,253 were found to be at work.

■ In Dhanbad, 7,859 people were on the rolls for 1,348 schemes that were audited but only 421 workers — a mere 5% — were

found at the spot. OVER 1.59 LAKH workers listed on records but around 75 per cent missing from work sites; machines used for work meant to generate jobs for people; beneficiaries striking deals with contractors to use their names on muster rolls in return for a cut from direct money transfers; contractors using contract labour instead of local work-seekers.

These are the key discrepancies found by the Social Audit Unit (SAU) of the Rural Development **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Livid over DRS reprieve for Elgar, Kohli vents on stump mic

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, JANUARY 13

WITH THE Test and the series slipping out of their hands towards the end of Day 3 at Newlands and the Decision Review System overturning spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's confident LBW appeal against South African skipper Dean Elgar, Indian players used the stump microphone to air their displeasure against the host broadcasters.

By the time stumps were drawn for the day with South

Africa on 101/2, needing 111 more runs to win the hotly contested series 2-1, clips showing Team India's collective on-field outburst had gone viral on social media.

When Elgar survived the scare, he was on 22 and South Africa on 60/1. With the ball tracking showing the ball to be travelling over Elgar's leg-stump, an agitated Indian skipper, Virat Kohli, kicked the turf. Ashwin walked close to the stump to say, "You have got to find better ways to win SuperSport (official broadcaster in South Africa)." To which, field umpire Marius

7 killed, over 40 injured as train to Guwahati derails in north Bengal

SWEETY KUMARI, ATRI MITRA & TORA AGARWALA
KOLKATA, GUWAHATI, JANUARY 13

AT LEAST seven persons were killed and over 40 others injured, including 13 critically, after 12 coaches of the Bikaner-Guwahati Express derailed Thursday evening near the New Domohani station in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, officials said.

A high-level probe has been ordered to find the cause of the accident that took place at 4.53 pm about 42 km from the New Jalpaiguri station, on a section between the New Domohani and New Maynaguri stations, officials said.

The injured have been admitted to hospitals in Jalpaiguri and Maynaguri, which is about 12-13 km from the site, and the death toll may rise, they said. Three persons were brought dead to the

Maynaguri hospital and four others died at the Jalpaiguri Super Speciality Hospital.

Guwahati-based Northeast Frontier Railway said in a statement that there were 1,053 passengers onboard the train headed to the city from Rajasthan's Bikaner via Patna in Bihar.

According to officials at the spot, some coaches toppled from the track and one coach was found on top of another. Several **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

High tests, doctors on call: In Bengal Covid curve, a VIP exception

ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, JANUARY 13

IT IS BEING called the 'Diamond Harbour Model'. In West Bengal, currently grappling with a Covid rise (1.16 lakh active cases), low testing (65,000-odd per day since start of the year), high positivity (nearly 31% as of January 12) and a Kumbh-scale Gangesagar Mela for which pilgrims started arriving Wednesday, this suburb of Kolkata certainly stands apart: for

a "country-wide record" in daily testing for a constituency on January 12 (53,203), for low positivity (2.5%), and for banning any gathering.

Also, as the Opposition points out, for being a constituency represented by Abhishek Banerjee, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and the ruling Trinamool Congress's No.2.

The contrast between the rest of West Bengal and the VIP seat stands stark at a time when **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Since 2019, loss in dense forests higher than gain in net cover

PAGE 1
ANCHORJAY MAZOOMDAAR & ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

RELEASING THE biennial India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 that recorded an overall gain of 1,540 sq km of forests since 2019 on Wednesday, Environment

Minister Bhupendra Yadav emphasised on "maintaining the quality of forest" as the government's top priority. The report, however, testifies to the continuing loss of natural old-growth forests across the country.

While Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Karnataka and Jharkhand contributed the most to the national gain in forest cover, and the Northeast reported the biggest losses, the

numbers in ISFR 2021 add up to a total destruction of 1,643 sq km of dense forests, which have become non-forests since 2019.

Over one-third of this loss has been compensated by conversion of 549 sq km of non-forest (canopy density below 10%) **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**EXPLAINED
[PAGE 9](#)

COVER STORY

DENSE FOREST LOST

	2019-21	2003-13	2013-21
VDF to NF	150	288	982
MDF to NF	1,493	6,714	11,724
Total	1,643	7,002	12,706

GAINED IN PLANTATIONS

	2019-21	2003-13	2013-21
NF to VDF	37	43	427
NF to MDF	512	3,591	6,715
Total	549	3,634	7,142

All figures in sq km

EXPLAINED
E.

VDF: Very dense forest (over 70% canopy)

MDF: Medium dense forest (40-70% canopy)

OF: Open forest (10-40% canopy)

NF: Non forest

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WEB EXCLUSIVE



HOW E-COMMERCE IS BOLSTERING THE CRAFT SECTOR, ONE CLICK AT A TIME

During the pandemic, while the fashion industry adopted hyper digitisation of sales and marketing with aplomb, the crafts sector and the artisans, who make for the backbone of India's coveted textiles and fashion repository, were left behind.

SCIENCE



ANCIENT DECORATED CHESS PIECE FOUND

Researchers note the piece appears to be a horse or a knight

TECHNOLOGY



GALAXY S21 FE REVIEW: ALMOST PREMIUM

Samsung model ranks high on all parameters needed for a great phone

EXPRESS AUDIO

BJP's OBC push in jeopardy, showdown in Chattisgarh, Kerala actor sexual assault

Today on the 3 Things podcast, we talk about OBC leader Swami Prasad Maurya's exit from BJP, the Cong vs Governor tug of war in Chattisgarh, and the sexual assault

FROM PAGE ONE

Cong's 1st list

Also in the Congress first list are an actress-turned politician, the managing director of a real estate firm, a former member of the National Commission for Women and a 27-year-old graduate.

State Congress president Ajay Kumar Lallu and CLP leader Aradhana Misra-Mona have been renominated from their Tumkuhi Raj and Rampur Khas seats respectively. Sources said the average age of women candidates is 42 years, while it is 46 for the male candidates. As many as 21 women candidates are between 25 and 40 years of age, 25 are between 41 and 60 and four are above 61.

In the candidate list is Sonbhadra district Congress president Ramraj Gond who spearheaded the Gond tribals' legal battle over land in Umbha village which had taken a tragic turn in 2019 when 11 tribals were gunned down. He is said to be an eyewitness to the killings. These some of the party candidates:

Asha Singh (Unnao): She is the mother of the Unnao rape survivor. The case dates back to 2017 when the girl was allegedly raped by former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar. A four-time BJP MLA from Bangermau, Sengar has been sentenced to life imprisonment by a Delhi court in the case. In 2018, the rape victim's father was allegedly framed in an illegal arms case and arrested. He died in judicial custody. In 2019, the car in which the victim and her two aunts were travelling was hit by a speeding truck. Her aunts were killed while the victim and her lawyer were critically injured.

Poonam Pandey (Shahjahanpur): She and other ASHA workers were allegedly roughed up by police when they tried to meet CM Yogi Adityanath in Shahjahanpur last year.

Sadaf Jafar (Lucknow Central): A social activist and Congress spokesperson, she was arrested in December 2020 following the violence in Lucknow during the anti-CAA protests.

Ritu Singh (Mohammdi): A former SP leader, she was stopped, allegedly by BJP workers, when she was on her way to file her nomination for the post of the block pramukh in the panchayat polls last year. She joined the Congress last year.

Alpana Nishad (Allahabad South): From the Nishad community, she raised her voice against the sand mining mafia and its alleged nexus with the police when boats of people from the community were burnt.

The party has fielded a 27-year-old graduate, Shivani Singh Baghel, from Etmadpur seat. Also on the list are former journalist Nida Ahmad (Sambhal), actress-turned politician Archana Gautam (Hastinapur), former SP leader Pankhuri Pathak (Noida), former NCW member and Mahila Congress national general secretary Shameena Shafiq (Sitapur).

Some of the women candidates are from political families and a large number are either UPCC or Mahila Congress office-bearers. For instance, senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid's wife Louise Khurshid will try her luck once again from the Farrukhabad seat. Henreita Rajeev Singh, the candidate in Bijonr's Nagina seat, is the daughter-in-law of former SP MP Omwati Devi. Devi's husband RK Singh is a retired IPS officer. Both had joined the Congress from the BJP in 2019. A four-time MLA, Devi was a minister in the Mayawati government.

Similarly, the Congress candidate from Orai seat, Urmila Sonkar Khabri, is the wife of former Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha MP Brijlal Khabri. Urmila is a re-

tired PCS officer. Abha Chaudhary (Garhmukteshwar) is managing director of real estate firm Aaradhayam Infra builders.

Among the office-bearers in the list are state Mahila Congress president Mamta Choudhary from Mohanlalganj, NSUI leader Pratima Pal from Sirsaganj, UP Mahila Congress East Zone president Shahla Ahrari from Rampur Karkhana, UPCC secretaries Sarita Singh Dohre from Auraiya and Usha Rani Kori from Bilhaur.

Covid curbs

"Omicron variant is infecting more people compared to the previous variant. This is also spreading at a faster pace. In just one day, the US reported 14 lakh cases.... It is very clear that we have to be vigilant. We have to be careful. However, we also have to ensure that there is no panic situation," Modi said. "There cannot be any drop in the level of alertness, both by the administration and the people, during the festivity. The key to success, during this period, is to again adopt the pre-emptive, proactive and collective approach. The more we are able to contain the spread of infection, the less trouble we will be in," Modi said.

"We also have to keep in mind that we have two years of experience in fighting this pandemic. The country is also well-prepared. There should be minimal loss to the common man's livelihood and related economic activity. The pace of economic progress should be maintained. We have to keep this in mind, whenever we are making a strategy (for Covid-19 containment)," he said.

Modi asked states to ramp up testing to break the chain of transmission. "This is very important. That is why it is better to focus on local containment. Whichever pockets are showing more cases, testing has to be ramped up. We have to ensure this," he said. He highlighted that vaccination continues to be the most important tool in fighting the infection.

Kejriwal

"Often, it is seen that relatives of politicians are made the CM face in some parties. Bhagwant Mann is very dear to us, he is my younger brother.... We had decided that he should be our CM face. But Bhagwant said the CM face should not be chosen behind closed doors, and the people of Punjab should choose who should be the CM face," said Kejriwal.

Asked about the possibility of another leader besides Mann emerging as the people's choice, Kejriwal said, "I would like the public to choose their own candidate. If anybody else is chosen, Bhagwant will go to that person's house and bring him forward."

Mann said Kejriwal had suggested that he (Mann) should be declared the CM candidate. "I, however, suggested that the people of the state should be asked. Kejriwal agreed to my suggestion. If the people's choice is picked, then people will be assured of their choice," said Mann. "I am the party's loyal soldier. I will perform any duty entrusted to me. If someone asks me to paste posters or wave the party symbol at a chowk, I will happily do so. For me, Punjab is important, and the CM (Arvind Kejriwal) has reposed a lot of trust in me," he said.

NREG audit

Department of Jharkhand in its latest concurrent audit of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) — a key initiative that has ensured at least a trickle of income to rural households amid the looming distress caused by the pandemic. *The Indian Express* accessed the

Third minister quits Yogi govt

third by a BJP minister in three days — Swami Prasad Maurya quit Tuesday and was followed by Dharam Singh Chauhan the next day. In identical letters of resignation, all ministers and MLAs alleged neglect of Dalits and backwards.

Awasthi Bala Prasad became the ninth MLA to leave the party. SP spokesperson and MLC Udaaveer Singh said Prasad met Akhilesh Yadav Thursday.

Sources said eight of the nine MLAs are expected to join the SP Friday in the presence of Akhilesh Yadav. After announcing his resignation, Saini too met the SP chief.

On the resignations of the MLAs and ministers, state BJP spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi said: "Those who are leaving the party after the announcement of the Model Code of Conduct are opportunistic people and

like many others in the past who have left the BJP for selfish reasons, they will be rejected by the people."

In his resignation letter, Mukesh Verma, who is from the Nishad community, said no attention was paid to leaders from Dalit, backward and minority communities by the government in the last five years. Verma said he would support Swami Prasad Maurya who had earlier resigned from the state cabinet, saying "Maurya is the leader of marginalised and exploited communities".

Saini, who represents Nakur, is a four-time MLA. He was elected MLA twice on a BSP ticket from Sarsawa in Saharanpur district.

In his resignation letter to the Governor, Saini wrote that he is resigning from the post of minister because leaders and peo-

ple who are Dalit, backward, farmers, educated unemployed and small and mid-level traders have been neglected by the BJP government.

Soon after his resignation, Saini met Akhilesh, who tweeted a photograph with the OBC leader, and wrote, "With the coming of another champion of social justice Dr Dharam Singh Saini, we have got more power and excitement for our politics of positive and progressive politics". He is welcome to the SP with respect and greetings to him. In 2022, the victory of inclusivity and harmony is certain," Saini had defeated Congress's Imran Masood from Nakur in 2017 — Masood who met Akhilesh Wednesday is also set to join the SP.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* Thursday evening, Awasthi Bala Prasad said: "I have submitted my resignation to the top BJP leadership. I have been a weak and helpless MLA for the last five years and have not been able to work for the poor people I represent. This government has failed on all fronts. I met Akhilesh Yadav ji and have joined him."

Apna Dal (S) MLA Amar Singh Chaudhary who resigned and headed to the SP told *The Indian Express*: "This government has derailed from the promises it had made in its manifesto. There is price rise, corruption and farmers are facing problems. This government has betrayed OBCs on the issue of reservation too."

"I have met Akhilesh Yadav today and he has given me his blessings. I will join SP tomorrow. If he gives me a ticket, I will contest the election from Shohratgarh," he said

Deputy Development Commissioner

(East Singhbhum) Parmeshwar Bhagat said: "Multiple issues come out during the social audit after which they are disposed of at the panchayat, block, district or the state level."

A recurring pattern

In Garhwa, out of 2,886 work sites audited with 20,995 people on the rolls, officials found only 4,120 at work. It is in this district that sources in the audit team said they came across a video of a woman purportedly admitting that she had received NREGA wages, "without working for a day", and handed the money over to the village mukhiya. The Indian Express could not reach the woman to corroborate the contents of the video. Deputy Development Commissioner (Garhwa) Satendra Narayan Upadhyay said: "I can't comment without reading the report."

Bengal

the graph of Abhishek, the MP from Diamond Harbour, is on a steep, undisputed rise since the TMC returned to power. It has been four days now that buzz started around Diamond Harbour and Abhishek's "Covid management". Even as the state earned the High Court's wrath for refusing to scale down Gangasagar Mela numbers, and went ahead with civic polls in two municipalities, Abhishek held a well-publicised meeting with officials of South 24 Parganas district on January 8, where he was said to have given "suggestions" regarding his constituency.

Says Sub-Divisional Officer, Diamond Harbour, Sukanta Saha, "He inspired us. We worked accordingly for the next two-three days and have already got positive results in terms of curbing Covid cases in Diamond Harbour."

Among Abhishek's "suggestions" were banning all political, social and religious meetings up to February 28; a dedicated control room and WhatsApp number for every panchayat and municipality for the public; doctors on call; a doctor-on-wheels facility; strict compliance of Covid protocols; and setting up of isolation facilities.

The one suggestion of Abhishek that really got officials going was that on January 12, Swami Vivekanand's birth anniversary, the administration hold a massive testing drive, aiming to reach a target of at least 30,000.

Says Saha: "In 20 hours that day, we collected 53,203 random samples, of which 1,151 were positive. So, the positivity rate is only 2.16%." The random tests were held for free, at government

campus. As for the rest of the state, the government is dragging its feet on testing, even as West Bengal has been identified by the Centre as one of the states of concern. A senior Health Department official said they could not afford mass testing as "it is a costly exercise". "We are giving priority to self-testing and doing tests in places where numbers are very high."

The testing numbers in West Bengal, which were 62,413 on January 6, stood at 71,792 on Wednesday, the highest for the month so far. The positivity rate meanwhile has risen from 24.70% to 30.85%, and case numbers to 22,155. Amid the second wave last year — for instance, May 12, when new cases stood at 20,377 and the positivity rate was 9-10 per cent — the average sample size for testing would hover around 70,000 daily.

The Health Department official said there was no cause for worry as of now. "Hospitalisation numbers are low in this wave and fatality also low so far. But, we are preparing for a further rise and making sufficient arrangements for liquid oxygen, as that was the main challenge in the second wave."

Testing isn't the only thing on which Abhishek is charting a separate path over Covid. Asked about the Gangasagar Mela, he recently said, "I believe all religious events and political campaigns should be halted for the next two months... (It is my) personal opinion." He has also called for postponement of the coming Assembly elections in five states. About the Bengal municipal polls, he said: "The matter is sub-judice and it is for the High Court to decide."

7 killed

of the dead and injured were found lying on both sides of the track, while others were found stuck inside a mangled coach, they said. "Initially, the rescue operation was hampered as night fell but floodlights and cranes were soon sent to the spot," an official said.

This is the first major rail accident involving fatalities since the derailment of Seemanchal Express in February 2019 in Bihar where six people lost their lives.

The trend persists among the top five losers. While Arunachal Pradesh (418 sq km) and Manipur (158 sq km) lost more dense forests than open forest patches, neighbouring Nagaland, Mizoram (86 sq km each) and Meghalaya (36 sq km) also recorded significant losses of dense forests.

Other big losers of dense forests include Madhya Pradesh (143 sq km), Jammu and Kashmir (97 sq km), Assam (66 sq km), Uttar Pradesh (41 sq km) and Tripura (31 sq km). Besides

tampering the ball, the incident that gets referred to as the Sandpapergate scandal.

At the post-day press conference, Indian team bowling coach Paras Mhambrey was asked about the incident. "We saw it, you saw it. I think I leave that to the match referee to have a look at it. Nothing else that I can comment on (this) here. We all just want to move on with the game," he replied.

About the comments picked up by the stump mic, he said: "Every individual out here is trying his best and sometimes in a moment like this, people do say certain things. But I think it's only fair that we move on."

And this was not the first time that technology was called into question in this series. Mayank Agarwal's leg-before dismissal in the first innings of the first Test was debated upon as well. When the opener was asked about that, he had said: "Well, to be honest, I'm not allowed to express my opinion on it. And I would leave it at that unless I want to be in the bad books and get my money (match fee) docked." It remains to be seen if the Indian team's adverse comments against the DRS decision would catch the attention of the match referee or ICC's attention.

In the post-game analysis for Supersports, former South African player and commentator for the game Shaun Pollock spoke in support of the technology used.

"Hawkeye is something you rely on for decision-making. It's an independent body. They do their level best with everything they have got. They have got their own cameras. I can understand the disappointment because they wanted the wicket but I think they went over the top a little bit. It's scientific. They get each little point that they plot. And that's how they work out where it goes. That's a lot more scientific than any of us. We rely on them to make the decision and that's what they have done."

Forest cover

areas to dense forests (canopy density over 40%) since 2019. These are plantations of fast-growing species since natural forests rarely grow so fast.

Since 2003, when "change matrix" data were first made available, 19,708 sq km — more than half of Kerala's landmass — of dense forests have become non-forests in the country. The decadal rate of this destruction of quality natural forests has more than doubled from 7,002 sq km during 2003-2013 to 12,706 sq km since 2013 (see chart).

On paper, much of this loss has been offset by fast-growing plantations as 10,776 sq km of non-forest areas became dense forests in successive two-year windows since 2003, nearly two-third of that (7,142 sq km) since 2013.

Among the five states that recorded maximum overall gain in forest cover since 2019, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka show a net loss in dense forests (see chart). While Jharkhand maintained status quo, Telangana claimed a significant increase (348 sq km) in dense forest cover.

The trend persists among the top five losers. While Arunachal Pradesh (418 sq km) and Manipur (158 sq km) lost more dense forests than open forest patches, neighbouring Nagaland, Mizoram (86 sq km each) and Meghalaya (36 sq km) also recorded significant losses of dense forests.

Other big losers of dense forests include Madhya Pradesh (143 sq km), Jammu and Kashmir (97 sq km), Assam (66 sq km), Uttar Pradesh (41 sq km) and Tripura (31 sq km). Besides

Livid Kohli

Telangana, Chhattisgarh (81 sq km), West Bengal (66 sq km) and Maharashtra (30 sq km) recorded significant net gain in dense forests.

Overall, the forest cover has increased to 7,13,789 sq km, or 21.71% of India's geographical area. Including the tree cover outside recorded forest areas on plots of less than one hectare, the total green cover now stands at 8,09,537 sq km (24.62%). India remains one of the top 10 countries in terms of forest cover, with Brazil leading the pack at 59.4%, followed by Peru at 56.5%.

Releasing the report, minister Yadav said as many as 17 states now had 33% forest cover. "There has been an increase in mangroves as well, which is encouraging as they are extremely important for the protection of coastal areas from natural calamities like cyclones... The forest produce inventory is also being prepared and will be introduced soon."

Since 2019, the area under mangroves has increased by 17 sq km to 4,992 sq km, and the tree cover by 721 sq km. Of 52 tiger reserves, 20 have recorded an increase in forest cover since 2011. Overall, the forest cover in tiger reserves and corridors declined by 22.6 sq km (0.04%). Buxa, Anamalai and Indravati reserves have shown an increase while the maximum loss has been in Kawal, Bhadra and the Sunderbans.

The report puts the total carbon stock in the country's forests at 7,204 million tonnes — an increase of 79.4 million tonnes compared to 2019. It also identifies 35.46% of the forest cover as prone to forest fires.

ISFR 2021 attributed the gain in forest cover or improvement in forest canopy density to "better conservation measures, protection, afforestation activities, tree plantation drives and agro-forestry" while it held shifting cultivation, felling of trees, natural calamities, anthropogenic pressure and developmental activities responsible for the loss, particularly in the Northeast.

The report, however, "does not make any distinction between the origin of tree crops (whether natural or manmade)", and "all the tree species along with bamboos, fruit bearing trees, coconut, palm trees etc" on plots of 1 hectare and above and with "canopy density of more than 10 per cent" are included as forest cover.

Maharashtra The minister further said that the state, through a written submission, urged the Centre to come up with mandatory measures to tackle the issue of vaccine hesitancy among people. It also sought clarity on the treatment protocol, said Tope, adding that while every state is imposing certain restrictions, the Centre should issue a standard operating procedure.

Tope said that the issue of people using home kits and rapid antigen tests (RAT) to get tested for Covid-19 was raised with the Centre.

"Many people are using home kits and RATs to get tested... but the positive cases are not being reported... The state has instructed pharma companies and shops to keep records of those purchasing such kits so that they can be tracked."

The minister added that the government also brought to the notice of the Centre that Delta variant of Covid-19 was still dominant in the state. "Of the 4,000 samples that went for genome sequencing in our state, we found 1,300 samples are infected with Omicron and 2,700 with Delta. This means that Delta is still dominant in Maharashtra," he added.

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Both hold responsible posts, settle issues amicably: HC to Mayor, Shelar

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE BOMBAY High Court Thursday orally suggested that BJP MLA Ashish Shelar and BMC Mayor Kishori Pednekar should resolve issues between them "amicably" as both parties hold "responsible posts". It went on to issue notices in a plea filed by the MLA seeking to quash an FIR lodged against him for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Pednekar.

The Mumbai Police, through Additional Public Prosecutor J P Yagnik, assured the division

Won't file chargesheet against BJP MLA for two weeks, Mumbai Police tells HC

bench of Justice Prasanna B Varale and Justice Anil S Kilor that it would not undertake any exercise pursuant to the lodging of FIR, including the filing of chargesheet, against Shelar till the next date of hearing two weeks later, which the court accepted.

Shelar had last month approached the HC after he was booked for making statements that allegedly outraged Pednekar's modesty during a press conference on December 4, last year. Shelar had slammed the mayor for her alleged delayed response in

reaching out to the victims of a cylinder blast in Worli on November 30. He had asked if Pednekar had been sleeping for 72 hours. On December 8, Pednekar had approached the Marine Drive police station, following which a case was registered under sections 354 (A) (4) (sexual harassment) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the IPC.

Shelar, in his plea filed through advocate Rizwan Merchant, has claimed that the FIR is "blatantly false, vexatious, frivolous, con-

cocted and a product of abuse of process of law".

On Thursday, Merchant sought an interim relief stating that his client, who is active in public life and the sitting MLA representing Bandra (West) for two consecutive terms, had merely held a press conference on an unfortunate incident at Worli to express his anguish. "If any action pursuant to the report is initiated against my client, he will be subjected to serious prejudice," Merchant argued.

The bench orally remarked, "Considering factual scenario, the

petitioner is MLA (and) the respondent is also holding responsible position in these trying Covid-19 times. She is also representing the entire city of Mumbai... Why do you not solve it amicably, it will not send a good picture (in public). As a representative... you have liberty to take (up) issues of public importance and being a respectable and sensible person, better choice of words is also expected. Such incidents do occur in public life. Responsible persons are also expected to have a choice of words."

Khar police arrests one for vishing fraud

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

KHAR POLICE have arrested a youth from Jogeshwari for vishing, or phone scam. The man was allegedly part of a gang where one of them impersonated a manager from a finance company and offered an international credit card to the complainant, tricking him into revealing his bank details which were then used to transfer Rs 4.20 lakh from his account. The Indian Express had reported the cyber crime online, when the FIR was registered.

The accused, twenty-five-year-old Sagar Ghayal, was arrested on January 11. Ghayal works as an executive with a cab service provider. After the money was transferred from the complainant's account, the fraudsters used it to buy gift vouchers which were further used for buying products online. The fraudsters bought gold worth Rs 3.80 lakh and bought electronic items with the remaining Rs 40,000.

"The arrested accused was deputed by the gang to collect the gold which he sold for cash," said Mahadev Nimbalkar, inspector at Khar police station. "The fraudsters use this modus operandi of buying gift vouchers and online shopping as it becomes time-consuming for police to trace them and they think police will not come after them," said Netra Mule, sub inspector and cyber officer.

The 49-year-old complainant from Khar runs an ice cream and dairy business. As per the FIR registered on January 7, he received a text message on January 5, purportedly by a relationship manager of Citibank diners club, offering him an international credit card.

The message had a phishing link on which the complainant was asked to fill in his personal details. The money was debited from his account as soon as the complainant clicked on the link and filled in his personal and banking details.

After the money was transferred from the complainant's account, the fraudsters used it to buy gift vouchers which were further used for buying products online

Dawood's nephew in Pakistan since September 2018, says Mumbai Police

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE MUMBAI Police on Thursday said that fugitive underworld gangster Dawood Ibrahim's nephew Sohail Kaskar, who was arrested by the US agencies in 2015, had moved to Pakistan in September 2018.

The clarification came after some TV channels reported on Thursday that Kaskar had managed to give India the slip and moved to Pakistan without specifying when it has happened. Recently, a call intercepted by a central agency had confirmed that Kaskar was in Pakistan.

A senior officer from Mumbai Police told The Indian

Express, "It is true that Sohail is currently in Pakistan. After his term in a US prison came to an end, India had tried to get him to the country. However, eventually he managed to get to

Pakistan via Dubai in September 2018, where he has been ever since."

Kaskar is the son of Noora Ibrahim, who died in 2010 due to kidney failure. Kaskar, along

with his aide Danish Ali, had come under the radar of US agencies in 2014 when he was trying to smuggle heroin from Pakistan to the US. Eventually, they were arrested by the agen-

cies from Spain and handed over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the US.

Later, the Mumbai Police had sought the custody of Kaskar and Ali. A team from the

Crime Branch had managed to get the custody of Ali, who was brought back to India. Kaskar, who has cases lodged against him in Mumbai, had contested India's claims of deportation.

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NOTICE OF EXTRA ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING (EGM) AND E-VOTING INFORMATION

Shareholders are hereby informed that an **Extra Ordinary General Meeting (EGM)** of the members of **Nirmitee Robotics India Limited** will be held on **Saturday, the 12th February, 2022 at 03.00 P.M.** at the Registered office of the Company at **D 3/2, Hingna, MIDC, Nagpur, Maharashtra- 440028** India to transact the businesses as set forth in the notice of the EGM which will be sent to the shareholders for convening EGM of the Company.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 108 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with Rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 (as amended) and Regulation 44 of SEBI (Listing Obligations & Disclosure Requirements) Regulations 2015 (as amended) the Company is offering e-voting facility to all the respected members to enable them to cast their valuable vote on the item of business to be transacted at the meeting.

Notice of the meeting will also be available on the Company's website at <https://www.nirmiteerobotics.com/investors/> and on the website of stock exchange at <https://www.startupsbse.com/index.html>.

Manner of registering/updating email address:
Those shareholders who are holding shares in a dematerialized mode and have not registered/updated their email addresses with their depository participant(s) are requested to register/update their email addresses with the relevant depository participant(s).

Manner of casting vote through e-voting:
The Company will be providing remote e-voting facility to all its shareholders to cast their votes on the businesses as set forth in the notice of EGM and the facility of voting through ballot paper would also be available during the EGM. The login credentials for casting votes through remote e-voting shall also be made available to the shareholders through e-mail. The Company has availed the services of National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) to facilitate e-voting. The detailed procedure for casting votes through remote e-voting shall be provided in the notice of EGM and the same will be available on the website of Company at <https://www.nirmiteerobotics.com/investors/> and on the website of NSDL at www.evoting.nsdl.com.

The remote e-voting period commences on **09th February 2022 at 9.00 a.m. IST** and ends on **11th February 2022 at 5.00 p.m. IST**. During this period, Members may cast their vote electronically. The remote e-voting module shall be disabled by NSDL thereafter.

Once the vote on a resolution is cast by the member, the member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently.

In case of any queries, you may refer the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Shareholders and e-voting user manual for Shareholders available at the download section of www.evoting.nsdl.com or call on toll free no.: **1800 1020 990** and **1800 22 44 30** or send a request to **Ms. Soni Singh at evoting@nsdl.co.in**

A person who has acquired shares and become a member of the Company after the dispatch of notice of EGM and holding shares as of cut-off date, may obtain the login ID and password by sending a request at evoting@nsdl.co.in. However, if the person is already registered with NSDL for remote e-voting then the existing user ID and password can be used for casting vote.

The facility for voting through ballot paper shall also be made available at the EGM and members who have not already cast their vote by remote e-voting shall be able to exercise their right at the EGM. The Members who have cast their vote by remote e-voting prior to the EGM may also attend the EGM but shall not be entitled to cast their vote again.

Persons entitled to attend and vote at the meeting, may vote in person or by proxy/ through authorized representative, provided that all proxies in the prescribed form/authorization duly signed by the person entitled to attend and vote at the meeting are deposited at the Registered Office of the Company, not later than 48 hours before the meeting.

The Register of Members and Share Transfer Books of the Company shall remain closed from **09th February 2022 to 12th February 2022** (both days inclusive) for taking record of the Members of Company for the purpose of EGM.

Further, **07th February 2022** has been fixed as a cut-off date for the purpose of e-voting entitlement and for determining the names of eligible members.

Place: Nagpur
For Nirmitee Robotics India Limited
Sd/-
Jay Prakash Motghare
DIN: 07559929
Whole Time Director

Date: 14/01/2022

4 MAHARASHTRA

20 ministers' residences opposite Mantralaya named after state forts

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE 20 official residences of ministers opposite Mantralaya, the state secretariat, were named after the forts of Maharashtra on Thursday. The public works department has issued an order in this regard in last month.

Official said that several memorandums were received by the government on naming ministerial bungalows after the forts. "Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had asked the administration in October 2020 to take appropriate action. After seeking a report, it has been decided that names of forts would be used for these bungalows," said an official.

Some of these 20 bungalows were called A-3, A-4, B-1, B-2, C-7 and C-8 till now. Now, these are to be called Shivgad, Rajgad, Sinhgad, Ratnasindhu, Jaigad and Vishalgad, respectively.

"From today, the official residences of ministers in front of the Mantralaya will be known by the names of forts. My demand has been accepted. My official residence B-2 has now become Ratnasindhu," said Uday Samant, Higher and Technical Education Minister.

Not a single day passes when a BJP leader does not leave party: Sharad Pawar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

NCP PRESIDENT Sharad Pawar on Thursday took a swipe at the BJP over the defections that the party had seen in Uttar Pradesh over the past few days.

"BJP leaders were saying 15 days ago, there is no reason to look at anyone in Uttar Pradesh and that the party will come back to power. However, not a single day passes when a BJP leader does not leave the party," Pawar told mediapersons.

Eight BJP MLAs, including three ministers, have resigned over the past three days.

The NCP supremo, who has extended support to the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party in UP, said that he is in Goa or wherever the polls are to be held, one can see the same picture.

"The process has begun," he said, alluding to a possible setback the BJP might face in the upcoming Assembly polls.

ATTEMPT TO MURDER CASE
HC reserves order in Nitesh Rane's pre-arrest bail application

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE BOMBAY High Court on Thursday concluded hearing and reserved its order in a plea filed by BJP MLA Nitesh Rane, son of Union Minister Narayan Rane, seeking anticipatory bail in connection with an attempt to murder case lodged against him in Sindhudurg district last month. The court will pronounce its verdict on Monday.

The Maharashtra Police on Thursday continued its oral assurance that it would not take any coercive action against Nitesh till Monday.

The case against Nitesh relates to complainant Santosh Parab (44), who has alleged that on December 18, last year, while he was travelling from Naravde naka in Kankavli, an Innova car without a number plate had hit his bike. Parab claimed that he was assaulted and heard the assailant tell another person in the car that they "should inform Gotya Sawant and Nitesh Rane".

Nitesh moved HC after a Sindhudurg special judge on December 30, 2021 rejected his pre-arrest bail plea, in which he claimed he had been booked "out of political rivalry and mischievously".

While Mumbai Covid numbers drop, state reports over 46k cases again

Test positivity rate down in city

RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

WITH 13,702 cases, Mumbai recorded a drop of 16.55% in daily Covid-19 cases on Thursday from the previous day.

A day ago, Mumbai registered 16,420 new infections, which was 41% more than that of Tuesday. The test positivity rate — the ratio of tests returning positive — fell to 21.73% from 24.38%.

However, this drop didn't reflect in the state's tally as Maharashtra again reported over 46,406 cases for the second consecutive day. "Considering the recent trend, we are expecting that the cases will start dropping in Mumbai soon. But other districts such as Nashik, Thane and Raigad are recording more cases which reflects that the virus is spreading in the state," said Dr Pradip Awate, state surveillance officer.

At present, the state has 2,51,828 active cases, of which 49.3% are from six districts — Thane (61,794), Raigad (12,113), Pune (38,001), Nashik (6,713), Nagpur (5,688).

"The containment strategy would be the same as Mumbai — Test, Track and Vaccinate. Under the epidemic act, we have given power to the local authorities to impose curbs as per their requirements," said Dr Awate.

As per Dr Shashank Joshi, member of the Covid-19 task force, Mumbai is likely to witness the peak this week. Maharashtra would witness the peak in the first week of February. "Global data shows that due to the high transmission rate, cases will be sporadic but the fall will also be faster with a low fatality rate. But we need to keep an eye on the elderly and vulnerable patients with comorbidities," he said.

On Thursday, the state also recorded 32 deaths. Most of the recent deaths in the past week have been among those above 60 years of age with severe comorbidities.



Preparations underway to open a Covid centre for children at Navi Mumbai Municipal Hospital. *Narendra Vaskar*

40-member team of doctors to analyse low Covid figures in Malegaon city

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE MAHARASHTRA University of Health Sciences (MUHS) has set up a 40-member team of doctors to analyse the low Covid-19 figures in Malegaon city — located 280 km north of Mumbai.

During the first wave of the pandemic, Malegaon had seen a massive increase in cases and a large number of deaths. In April 2020, it had registered 580 deaths, almost twice the number for the same month the previous year (277).

However, cases have been declining ever since in spite of low vaccination rates. The city as of Thursday had only 35 active Covid-19 cases.

70.81 lakh

TOTAL POSITIVE CASES IN MAHARASHTRA

New Cases 46,406

Total Deaths 1,41,737

New Deaths 36

9.67 lakh

TOTAL POSITIVE CASES IN MUMBAI

New Cases 13,702

Total Deaths 16,426

New Deaths 6

"There were around 400 active cases last April at the peak of the second wave... now the num-

ber is only 35," said Bhalchandra Gosavi, commissioner of the Malegaon Municipal Corporation.

To understand the sharp change in the infection pattern, last December, the Nashik district administration had written to Additional Chief Secretary Dr Pradeep Vyas requesting that tests be carried out to find out the reason behind the very low number of active cases.

"We don't know how the cases dropped drastically. This needs to be studied scientifically and analysed, which can help in dealing with the ongoing third wave," said Dr Swapnil Torane, MUHS Registrar.

In a meeting between MUHS Vice-Chancellor Lieutenant General Dr Madhuri Kanitkar

and the Nashik district administration, it was decided to undertake a study to find out reasons for the low number of cases.

The team of 40 members started collecting blood samples from Thursday. As per protocol, the team will collect blood samples of 2,000 to 2,500 people, which will be sent to the virology laboratory in Dhule, where antibody and Elisa tests will be conducted. "The samples will be collected randomly from different areas of the district. Then we will check if herd immunity helped contain the cases," said Gosavi.

"In fact, the rate of compliance of Covid-19 safety protocol is low in the city. Despite this, the infection rate is minimal in a city that has over 6 lakh people," he added.

Amid surge in cases, various holiday spots closed for tourists

YOGESH NAIK
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

IN VIEW of a surge in Covid-19 cases across the state, strict curbs have been imposed on tourists visiting holiday destinations.

Matheran Municipal Council on Thursday closed down several areas for tourists. An order issued by Matheran chief officer Surekha Bhangre shut down areas like Charlotte Lake, Alexander Point, Rambag Point, Big Chowk Point, One Tree Hill Point, Eco Point, Louisa Point, Coronation Point, Sunset Point and Monkey Point for tourists.

This was after several hoteliers and allied organisations wrote to the municipal council not to take such drastic steps. While Surekha Bhangre confirmed that she had received the representations, she also said that the order regarding the closure was final.

Asha Kadam, president of Ashvapal Sangathana, which represents horse owners of Matheran, said, "We will write to the chief officer to open all tourist spots. Our incomes have reduced in the last two years and it is difficult to feed horses."

Garish Dapkekar, chief officer of Panchgani Municipal Council, said that all four tourist points in his area have been closed. Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar are twin hill stations located in Satara district.

Pallavi Patil, chief officer of Mahabaleshwar Municipal Council, said, "We have closed

down Venna lake point and boating services. The forest department has also shut down several of the areas under it that are visited by tourists."

"All hotels are working at 100 per cent occupancy. Tourists have to show a double vaccine certificate before coming to our hill station. We used to get 2,000 tourists every day, and now we barely get 200," she added.

Satara Collector Shekhar Singh said he has issued an order regulating tourist spots due to a state order banning entry of people in forts, museums and other places.

When contacted, Pune Collector Rajesh Deshmukh said, "We have closed down some areas in Lonavala-Khandala and other places in Pune district that are frequented by tourists... the order was issued by our district disaster management authority."

Further, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Kamala sanctuary as well as all tiger reserves, national parks and sanctuaries have been closed for tourists. A woman who ran a canteen service in Kamala said, "We have shut our canteen from Monday."

According to a senior Indian Forest Service officer, all protected areas have been shut as per government order.

Elephanta Caves off Mumbai have also been closed for tourists. Rajendra Padte, a former sarpanch of Gharapuri village where the caves are located, said, "Now, we get just one or two boats of tourists daily. Local businesses have suffered a lot."



A police officer takes the booster dose in Navi Mumbai on Thursday. *Narendra Vaskar*

MAHARASHTRA SADAN CASE

Activist moves HC challenging order discharging Bhujbal, son and nephew

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

ACTIVIST ANJALI Damania on Wednesday approached the Bombay High Court with a criminal revision application, seeking to quash a September 9, 2021 order of the special court discharging Maharashtra cabinet minister and NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal and seven others in the Maharashtra Sadan scam case, which is being probed by the state Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).

Along with Bhujbal, his son Pankaj, nephew Sameer and five others were cleared of all charges by special judge H S Satbhai.

Last month, Damania also

filed an intervention application in the special court seeking to be heard while opposing the discharge application filed by the NCP leader in connection with alleged misconduct involving the construction of a central library in Kalina, when Bhujbal was the PWD minister. In 2016, the ED had arrested Bhujbal for alleged money-laundering. He remained behind bars until 2018, when the Bombay High Court granted him bail.

Damania said that along with others, she has been following up the case diligently from the beginning, filed the PIL in the Bombay High Court and has helped the investigating agency in the matter as she has knowledge about the case.

The plea by Damania read,

"There has been gross miscarriage of justice in discharging the respondent accused by special court, which passed the judgment without taking into account the prosecution's reference that this act of accused Chhagan Bhujbal was clear misuse of his position as he was a cabinet minister having charge only of Home and Tourism Department and had no authority to either interfere or any give instructions in respect of the matters related to the Transport Department."

The plea, while seeking to quash and set aside the special court order, also sought direction to conclude the trial in an expeditious manner. The High Court will hear the plea in due course.

FOREST SURVEY OF INDIA REPORT

Mangrove cover in Maharashtra improves marginally from 2019

SANJANA BHALERAO
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THERE HAS been a marginal increase in the mangrove cover in the state since 2019, as per the Forest Survey of India (FSI). According to India State of Forest Report (ISFR), FSI's biennial report released on Thursday, the mangrove cover in the state is spread across 324 square km, a 4 square kilometres rise since 2019.

The report, which assesses the forest and tree resources of the country, says while the overall mangrove cover has increased in the state, Mumbai suburbs recorded the highest loss of mangroves among the six

coastal districts at 1.08 square km.

Mangroves are an important refuge of coastal bio-diversity and also act as bio-shields against extreme climate events such as flash floods. Mangrove cover is also divided as very dense, moderate and open mangrove cover and the state has moderately dense and open mangrove covers.

According to the report, Mumbai city has a mangrove cover of 2 square kilometres. In the Mumbai suburbs, it is spread across 63.22 sq kms -- down from 64.30 sq kms in 2019.

Across the state, Raigad has the highest concentration of mangrove spread across 126.99 sq kms, an increase of 6 sq km

from 2019. In 2019 too, Raigad recorded the highest increase in mangrove cover by 14.97 sq km from 2017.

According to the Maharashtra mangrove cell, the involvement of locals in mangrove conservation, eco-tourism in these districts has helped in preserving mangrove cover. The report attributed the increase to natural regeneration.

The second-largest mangrove cover in the state is found in Thane which has recorded a decrease of 0.98 sq km. In Sindhudurg, the mangrove cover has dropped by 0.12 sq km, while Ratnagiri logged an increase of 0.18 sq km in the past two years.

The Mangrove cell expedited the procedure of notifying man-

groves as reserved forest and taking possession of land reserved as mangrove under its ambit. The process has helped in protecting the mangroves from destruction.

Since 2005, the state government has taken possession of 143.23 sq km. Out of the total, in the last one year (till June 2021), the Mangrove Cell in coordination with the state Forest and Environment department, has notified 98 sq km of mangrove area under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927, declaring it as reserve forests.

Experts believed an increase in the mangrove cover in the city limits is not plausible but providing it protection will help in conserving the salt-tolerant tree

species. "Thane municipal corporation is primarily responsible for the decrease in the district as they have started all the water-front projects on the mangroves. In Thane-Bhiwandi belt, Mumbra, Kopar, there is massive mangrove destruction. One reason I can think of for the decrease in the mangrove cover in the suburbs and Thane is varied infrastructure projects — trans-harbour link, Vashi bridge expansion," said Stalin D, member of the High Court-appointed Mangrove protection committee.

According to FSI data, mangrove cover in the state remained constant at 186 sq km from 2005 till 2013. Then a sudden jump to 222 sq km was reg-

istered in 2015. The process of mapping mangrove cover involves periodic analysis of vegetation through satellite imagery and then comparing it with previous vegetation.

Similar to the last report, the tree cover, which estimates the presence of trees outside the forest areas, has seen an encouraging improvement in the state. Maharashtra has the highest tree cover at 12,108 sq km.

As per the report, in Maharashtra, the open forest category has seen a marginal decline of 10 sq km but an increase of 13 sq km and 17 sq km in 'very dense forest' and 'moderately dense forest' respectively -- the cumulative

forest cover has increased by 20 sq km.

Dense forests are defined as those where the tree canopy density is 70 per cent or above while moderately dense forests are those with tree canopy density between 40 and 70 per cent and open forest area is when the canopy density is between 10 and 40 per cent.

While Mumbai has the second-largest tree cover among the seven major cities in the country at 110.77 sq km, it has marginally increased by 9 per cent in the last decade, states the report. The maximum increase in the green cover was in Hyderabad and Delhi, while Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata recorded a loss.



Tiger carcass found in Gondia forest

Mumbai: A five-year-old male tiger's body was recovered on Thursday at Arjuni Morgaon forest reserve under Gondia forest department. The carcass had teeth and whiskers missing which seem to have been removed by poachers. According to a forest official, two forest personnel came upon the body during patrol. The official said the body is at least two days' old and prima facie, it appears the tiger died by electrocution. Its autopsy will be performed on Friday. "A forest case has been lodged and with the help of sniffer dogs, the culprits are being traced," said an official. **ENS**

TACKLING FLOOD IN MUMBAI'S HINDMATA

Capacity of water tanks to be expanded, cost escalation on cards

EXPRESSNEWSERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE BMC'S ambitious project of building underground water storage tanks to tackle flooding in Hindmata is set to face cost escalation with the civic body planning to spend an additional Rs 67 crore on expanding the capacity of the tanks. The BMC is constructing two underground water tanks at Pramod Mahajan Kala Park in

BMC is constructing two underground water tanks at Pramod Mahajan Kala Park in Dadar West and at St Xavier's Ground in Parel

Dadar West and at St Xavier's Ground in Parel. Under the project, the excess rainwater from the Hindmata would be diverted to these tanks. After the rain subsides, the water from the tanks will be pumped out in nullahs. Now, the plan is to store 6 crore litre of water in the tank at Dadar and 4 crore litre in

Parel. A proposal for cost escalation will be tabled before the BMC Standing Committee on Friday.

"In the first phase, the BMC had constructed a tank of 1.62 crore litre at Dadar and 1.5 crore litre at Parel. The expansion work on these tanks will start after the proposal is cleared by the Standing Committee," said an official.

Further, a pumping station has been constructed in the space below the Hindmata flyover to push the water to both the tanks through a newly-laid pipeline network.

Hindmata and Parel are the city's chronic flooding spots during monsoon. When the project was planned, the corporation had said that it would cost Rs 130 crore.

ELGAAR PARISHAD CASE ACCUSED IN TALOJA JAIL

Physical meetings with family and lawyer stopped, but phone call facility yet to resume: Inmates to court

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

WITH A surge in Covid-19 cases, while the prison department has stopped physical meetings again of inmates with relatives and lawyers, the phone and video call facility is yet to be resumed in many jails.

On Wednesday, undertrials in the Elgaar Parishad case -- lodged in Taloja Central Prison -- were produced before the special court via video conference. The accused, including lawyer Surendra Gadling as well as ac-

tivists Gautam Navlakha and Vernon Gonsalves, told the court that they were not able to communicate with their families and lawyers since the mulaqats have been discontinued.

Special Judge Dinesh E Kothalikar asked the prison authority attending the video conference why the phone and video call facility -- provided to inmates during earlier curbs -- have not been resumed after the recent restrictions were put in place.

The prison official told the court that they are in the process of verifying the phone numbers of relatives and lawyers, following which the facility will be resumed.

To this, the court asked, "Why do you need to verify the numbers again if they were the same ones allowed during the previous lockdowns? Those who were provided the facility dur-

ing the previous lockdowns should be allowed to make phone calls with immediate effect."

Special Judge Kothalikar told the undertrials that he would speak with the jail superintendent and give specific directions.

The prisons in the state had discontinued mulaqats in March 2020 and restarted them in October last year after the number of cases went down. The phone and video calls allowed for undertrials and convicts during the lockdown were discontinued then.

Navlakha told the court that he was not able to communicate with his partner who resides in Delhi. He said that the court should intervene on humanitarian grounds. Gadling also told the court that mulaqats with his family members and legal interviews with his lawyer have been

denied. He added that with his pleas pending before the Bombay High Court, he was not allowed to give any instruction to his legal team.

Gadling's lawyer Barun Kumar told the court that when he visited the prison recently, he was told that he cannot meet his client as he represents himself in court. Kumar added that he had submitted relevant documents, including his vakalatnama, showing that he represents Gadling, but he was not allowed to meet him.

The court disposed Kumar's application with direction to the jail superintendent that he shall allow the legal adviser to have an interview with the undertrial in accordance to prison rules.

As the court was informed on Thursday that NIA's special public prosecutor is down with Covid-19, the hearing was adjourned to January 21.

Setback for BJP as NCP-Sena join hands to win Mumbai bank president post

EXPRESSNEWSERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

THE BJP, which has wielded overall control over the Mumbai District Central Cooperative Bank (MDCCB), suffered a body blow on Thursday as deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar got ally Sena on board to get NCP's Siddharth Kamble election to the post of the bank's president.

The MVA allies' agreement seems to have resulted from a closed door meeting between Pawar and Shiv Sena Minister Aaditya Thackeray where Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's confidant Milind Narwekar was also present.

BJP had fielded MLC Prasad Lad, one of the bank directors,

against NCP-Sena combine's Siddharth Kamble after its Praveen Darekar withdrew from the contest. Lad lost by two votes.

The vice-president post went to BJP's Vitthal Bhosale who defeated Shiv Sena's Abhishek Ghosalkar.

In terms of the number of board directors, BJP is ahead with nine -- Praveen Darekar, Vitthal Bhosale, Anand Gad, Kavita Deshmukh, Vinod Borse, Sarod Patel, Nitin Bankar, Anil Gajre, and Prasad Lad.

The NCP has eight directors -- Sandeep Ghandat, Shivajirao Nalawade, Puroshattam Dalvi, Vishnu Gamare, Siddharth Kamble, Jayshree Panchal, Nandu Katkar, and Jijaba Pakhar.

The Shiv Sena has three -- Sunil Raut, Abhishek Ghosalkar

and Shilpa Sarpotdar. For the fiercely contested bank president's post, the NCP and Sena together had 11 directors against BJP's nine.

This is being seen as a setback for both the BJP and Darekar. Darekar said, "The ruling NCP and Shiv Sena seem to have targeted me. Till now, bank polls were held in a cordial atmosphere with individuals rising above party and caste politics. But it is evident the CM and deputy CM have used their power to attack me." I hold the post of Opposition leader in council, so they used their power to settle scores."

However, an NCP official said, "Sena and NCP had more numbers and so they won. Why should BJP or its leader complain?"



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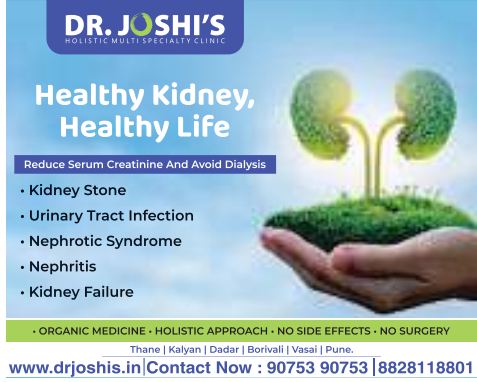
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SECTION 1 PRESS NOTICE NOTICE INVITING BIDS

THE Superintending Engineer, PMGSY, Konkarn Region, Thane on behalf of Government of Maharashtra invites the item rate bids in electronic tendering system for Construction of Bridge under **MukhyaMantri Gram Sadak Yojana** in the district of **RAIGAD, Tal- Shriwardhan** for package number **ADB-RAI-BR-01** (span length **21.00** meter) including their maintenance for five years from the eligible contractors registered with Govt. of Maharashtra, in Public Works Department/ Rural Development Department or Non-registered contractors. Date of release of invitation for Bids through e-procurement: **14th Jan. 2022**. Availability of Bid Documents and mode of submission: The bid document is available online and should be submitted online in <https://mahatenders.gov.in>. The bidder would be required to register in the web site which is free of cost. For submission of the bids, the bidder is required to have a valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities. **Last Date/Time for receipt of bids through e-procurement: 24th Jan. 2022 up to 1700 hours.** For further details please log on to <https://mahatenders.gov.in>.

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(J. R. Vihute)

**Superintending Engineer
PradhanMantri Gram Sadak Yojana
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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL ASSAM RIFLES, SHILLONG - 793 010

ASSAM RIFLES TECHNICAL AND TRADESMEN RECRUITMENT RALLY 2021-22 POSTPONEMENT OF PHYSICAL STANDARD TEST (PST) / PHYSICAL EFFICIENCY TEST (PET), TRADE (SKILL) TEST (TT) AND WRITTEN TEST FOR ASSAM RIFLES TECHNICAL AND TRADESMEN RECRUITMENT RALLY 2021-22

Memo No. I.12016/Rect Branch/2021-22/101 Dated : 11 Jan 2022
1. Please refer to our notification for Assam Rifles Technical and Tradesman Recruitment Rally 2021-22 published in the Employment News dated 11 Sep 2021 and I.12016/Rect Branch/2021-22/648 dated : 12 Nov 2021. The said notifications are also available in our official website www.assamrifles.gov.in.
2. In view of the prevailing situation arising out due to COVID-19, Physical Standard Test (PST) / Physical Efficiency Test (PET), Trade (Skill) Test (TT) and Written Test of the following centres are hereby postponed as per the date of postponement shown against each centre:-

Ser No.	State	Centres	Trades	Date of postponement	Remarks
(a)	Assam	ARTC & S, Diphu	Tradesmen: Cook,	With effect from 20 Jan 2022	
(b)	Nagaland	ARTC & S, 3 rd Mile, Dimapur	Tradesmen: Cook,	With effect from 16 Jan 2022	
(c)	Nagaland	ARTC & S, Sukhovi	Tradesmen: Cook,	With effect from 16 Jan 2022	

3. Successfully registered candidates who are in possession of valid call letter are hereby informed to not to report to the respective Physical Standard Test (PST) / Physical Efficiency Test (PET), Trade (Skill) Test (TT) and Written Test centres with effect from the date of postponement as shown above.

4. Fresh dates for conduct of Physical Standard Test (PST) / Physical Efficiency Test (PET), Trade (Skill) Test (TT) and Written Test will be intimated once the situation will be normalised. Candidates are advised to regular visit the official website of Assam Rifles (www.assamrifles.gov.in) for centre wise revised date of Physical Standard Test (PST) / Physical Efficiency Test (PET), Trade (Skill) Test (TT) and Written Test.

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(K S Thakur)

**Deputy Commandant
Staff Officer-2 (Recruitment)
for Directorate General Assam Rifles**



**Government of India,
Department of Atomic Energy,
Heavy Water Plant, Kota
Corrigendum - 1 to E-Tender Notice**

E Tender Notice No: HWP/KMECH/2021/MTA/283
Name of Work: Maintenance and Testing of large Size (30 valves covering sizes ranging from 12" NB to 36" NB at HWP/K during MTA-2022.
The Date of Tender for view and download has been extended to 28.01.2022 and date for opening has been extended to 03.02.2022.
Other terms & conditions of NIT shall remain the same. For more details visit www.hwb.gov.in and <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocurement>.
General Manager
For & on behalf of President of India

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY

NOTICE OF INVITING E-TENDER
E-Tender Notice No. SNT-JP-31-2021-22
DRM (S&T)/ North Western Railway / Jaipur, for and on behalf of the President of India, invite E-Tenders from registered tenderer/bidders for the following work, **Sr. No. : 1, Particulars :** Name or work with its location: **Description:** Annual maintenance contract for Electronics Interlocking (EI) System Medha Make at 9 EI stations on Jaipur Division (for 2 years), **Sr. No. : 2, Particulars:** Approx. Cost of work (Rs) : **Description:** Rs. 10909884.24/- **Sr. No. : 3, Particulars:** Earnest Money (Rs): **Description:** 204500/- (Online Payment Only), **Sr. No. : 4, Particulars:** Date & Time for Submission up to on www.irops.gov.in: **Description:** 02.02.2022 Up to 15.00 hrs., **Sr. No. : 5, Particulars:** Website Particulars & Notice board location: **Description:** www.irops.gov.in and DRM office/NWR/Jaipur 735-5821
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WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-Tender Notice No: JBPT/TRD/ Tender/2021/12, Date: 06.01.2022
Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD) West Central Railway Jabalpur is for and on behalf of the President of India invites sealed tenders from reputed and experienced contractors having valid Electrical License issued in the name of firm by State Government as required under IE rules, 1956 with one of the partner or in his own name if sole proprietor. (1) **Name of Work:** (A) TRD/OHE work for ROB in lieu of LC No-336 (B) TRD/OHE work for construction of ROB & LHS in lieu of LC-238 in PPI-BKH. (C) TRD work in connection with construction of LHS in lieu of level crossing No- 1 between 1088/9-10 between NKJ-SGRL section of JBP & BSP Division. (D) TRD work for construction of ROB NHAI at LC-11 in Bina-KTE section. (E) TRD work for construction of ROB NHAI at LC-19 in Bina-KTE section. (F) TRD/OHE work for ROB at LC-276 of Jabalpur Division (2) **Place of Work:** Jabalpur Division (3) **Completion period:** 6 months (4) **Tender value (Cost of the work):** ₹ 54.49,387.78/- (₹ Fifty Four Lakh Forty Nine Thousand Three Hundred Eighty Seven and Seventy Eight Paise only) (5) **Earnest Money:** ₹ 1,09,000/- (6) **Date & Time for submission/ opening of tender:** 28.01.2022 15.00 Hrs/ 28.01.2022 15.30 Hrs (7) **Website address:** <https://www.irops.gov.in> (8) Tenderers are advised to regularly visit IREPS website "<https://www.irops.gov.in>" to note any changes / corrigendum. Minimum eligibility criteria as per tender form shall be applicable for this tender.
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HARIDWAR DHARAM SANSAD

Police make first arrest in hate speech FIR

Waseem Rizvi held day after SC issues notices on petition seeking probe

AVANEESH MISHRA
DEHRADUN, JANUARY 13

THREE WEEKS after registering an FIR in connection with hate speeches targeting Muslims made at the Haridwar ‘Dharam Sansad’, Uttarakhand Police on Thursday made the first arrest in the case.

Waseem Rizvi, who recently converted to Hinduism and changed his name to Jitendra Narayan Tyagi, was arrested from Narsan border following a tip-off from an informant, the police said.

The arrest came a day after Supreme Court issued notices to the Centre, Delhi Police and Uttarakhand government on a PIL seeking a probe into hate speeches by participants at two separate events – one in Haridwar which was organised by Yati Narsinghanand and the other in Delhi which was organised by Hindu Yuva Vahini – in December.

The plea stated that no effective step had been taken by the police authorities although two FIRs had been registered against people who took part in the Haridwar Dharam Sansad.

Tyagi and Yati Narsinghanand were among five people named in the first FIR, which was registered on December 23 at Haridwar Kotwali police station on the complaint of one Gulbahar Khan. Other speakers named in the FIR were Dharamdas Maharaj, Annapurna Mah and Sagar Sindhuraj Maharaj. The FIR was registered under IPC Sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups and acts prejudicial to harmony) and 295 A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings).

Another FIR was registered on January 2, invoking similar

IPC provisions, on the complaint of a social worker, Nadeem Ali, against Tyagi and some unidentified people for making hate speeches at the Haridwar event and continuing to do so in the days that followed.

Haridwar police in a statement on Thursday said Tyagi was arrested in connection with the second FIR.

“An FIR was registered against Tyagi and others on the complaint of Nadeem Ali for objectionable comments on social media against the Muslim community. After finding enough evidences of Sections 153 A, 295 A and 298 IPC against Tyagi during investigation, he was arrested on Thursday. He is being presented before a court,” the statement said.

Yati Narsinghanand, who was accompanying Tyagi when the arrest was made, sat on indefinite hunger strike at Sarvanand Ghat in Haridwar. He claimed that although he offered to be arrested along with Tyagi, the police let him go.

Narsinghanand and Tyagi were on the way to Haridwar from Dasna Devi temple in Ghaziabad when the arrest was made.

“They have arrested Jitendra Narayan Tyagi. This is injustice and I have sat on protest at Sarvanand Ghat in Haridwar against this injustice, and will not eat food or drink water until he is released,” he told *The Indian Express*.

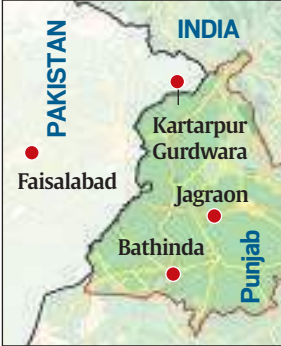
“I was with Tyagi when he was arrested, but the police did not take me. He was arrested because he was once a Muslim who converted to Hinduism. This is so that no other Muslim converts to Hinduism,” said Narsinghanand, claiming that he offered to be arrested as he too is an accused.

Parted 70 yrs, they ask for visa: ‘Let us spend rest of lives together’

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
PHULEWAL (BATHINDA),
JANUARY 13



Sadiq (left) and Sikka at Kartarpur Sahib on Monday.



and found themselves in two different countries.

“Sadiq believed strongly that his brother was still alive, and requested me to help him,” says Dhillon. The YouTuber made a video and shared it on social media, asking for information on Sadiq’s family.

Within a day, he was contacted by Jagirs Singh, the rural medical practitioner and dairy owner from Phulewal. He said the man Sadiq was looking for was Habib alias Sikka Khan, who lived in their village.

Singh says Sikka Khan and his relatives were among the Muslim families the village sheltered during Partition. “Sikka and his mother were guests at the village at the time. His maternal grandparents’ family still lives in Phulewal.” There are seven Muslim families in the village in all.

The brothers lost both parents soon after. Sikka told Sadiq how their mother killed herself when he was 4. Sadiq said their father Wali got separated from the rest of the family in the mayhem after Partition and they never found him.

FULL REPORT ON
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POLL SECURITY

Caste clashes to violence in CAA protest, 73 ‘sensitive’ seats in UP

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 13

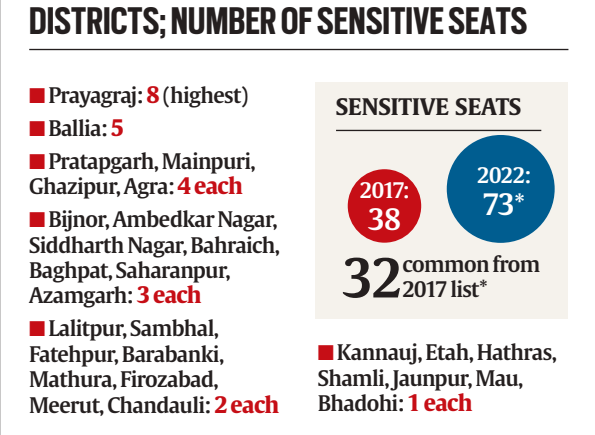
THE NUMBER of Assembly seats declared “sensitive” by the UP Police this election has risen to 73. That is 35 more than the 2017 state elections, when 38 seats were declared “sensitive”.

Notably, a day after the election schedule was announced, UP Police had said that they have identified 95 Assembly segments as “sensitive” in the state. The number was revised down to 73 after taking into consideration recent incidents related to law and order and deployment of security forces, said a senior police officer.

Among seats declared “sensitive” this time is Kannauj Assembly constituency, which was in news recently after Central agencies conducted searches at the residences of three perfume traders and recovered a large tranche of unaccounted money.

The Assembly segments represented by controversial MLAs Mukhtar Ansari and Vijay Mishra – Mau Sadar and Gyanpur in Bhadohi district – have also been declared “sensitive”. Both Ansari and Mishra are currently lodged in jail. Police have also declared Allahabad (West) – known to be the stronghold of jailed former MLA Atiq Ahmed – “sensitive”.

“There are different criteria to select ‘sensitive’ seats. These include caste position, previous law and order history, and who are contesting the election. Heavy deployment of security



forces in these seats ensure that elections are held smoothly,” Additional Director General (Law & Order) Prashant Kumar said.

Police have retained 32 Assembly segments from its 2017 list of “sensitive” seats, and dropped six – Mariyahu and Shahganj in Jaunpur district, Loni in Ghaziabad, Allahabad North in Prayagraj, Gunnaur in Sambhal, and Dibiypur in Auraiya.

In the current list, Prayagraj district has the highest number of “sensitive” seats – eight of its 12 constituencies – followed by Ballia with five. Three constituencies each of Baghpat, Saharanpur, Siddharth Nagar, Bahraich, Jaunpur, Ambedkar Nagar and Azamgarh districts have also been declared “sensitive”.

Among seats in the “sensitive” list this year are:

Rampur Maniharan,

Saharanpur district

The Assembly constituency witnessed caste-related violence in 2017 that started after members of two communities clashed over a procession in memory of Rajput ruler Maharana Pratap at Shabbirpur, a Dalit-dominated area. A 35-year-old man, Sumit Rajput, was killed and 16 others were seriously injured in the violence. At least 25 houses were torched. Bhim Army, led by Chandrashekar Azad, came to the limelight after the incident. In all, nine FIRs were lodged in connection with the clashes.

Mohammadabad, Ghazipur district

The area witnessed caste-related violence in June 2018. The clash was allegedly triggered by a quarrel between Nawali village head Vimla Singh’s son and the owners of a mobile shop, who

Gomes said.

Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress’s Goa state in-charge Mahua Moitra said on Thursday that the Congress alone could not defeat the BJP in the state. Reacting to a statement made by Chidambaram that the contest was between the BJP and the Congress, Moitra said, “The Congress alone is incapable of defeating the BJP. The TMC is asking all anti-BJP forces to come together to oust the BJP in Goa.” She said that if it was a “binary fight” between the BJP and the Congress, there would have been no need for the TMC to come to Goa.

‘Economy, ethos among Cong’s 5 Es’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PANAJI, JANUARY 13



P Chidambaram

lege at the undergraduate level due to their circumstances are also given certification. The party aims at making the education provided in the state more career-oriented and students more employable. The party’s manifesto is expected to be released later this month,

SENIOR ELECTION observer of the Congress in Goa, P Chidambaram, on Thursday said the party’s election plank in the state will be centred around five ‘Es’.

“The Congress’s election plank in Goa will consist of the following central themes: economy, employment, education, environment, and ethos of Goa. Congress will appeal to the voters that ‘Goa must be ruled by Goans’,” Chidambaram said on Twitter.

While the Congress’s election manifesto has been in the works for months, the party has already declared some of the its poll promises. It has announced that if voted to power, it will scrap the three linear projects cutting through the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and the Mollem National Park.

Bureaucrat-turned-politician Elvis Gomes, who is part of the Congress’s manifesto committee in Goa, said that under the broad themes that Chidambaram had announced, the party intends to set up an education system in which those dropping out of col-

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E-TENDER for washing patient's dirty cloths has been published on 12.01.2022 on <http://mahatenders.gov.in>. It will be available on the site from 12.01.2022 to 27.01.2022. Interested/vendors/suppliers are requested to go to above site and fill the tender.
Sd/-
Medical Superintendent
E.S.I.S. Hospital, Worli, Mumbai-18
DGIPR-2021-22/3672

Government of Gujarat
Narmada Water Resources, Water Supply and Kalpasar Department
Tender Notice No. 04 of 2021-22
ONLINE Tender is invited for the work of
1. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of South Gujarat, Central Gujarat & North Gujarat under National Hydrology Project (Package -1)
2. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region - Amreli, Bhavnagar, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package-2)
3. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region Surendranagar, Botad, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -3)
4. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region- Devbhumi Dwarka, Porbandar, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -4)
5. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region - Jamnagar, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -5)
6. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region - Girsomnath, Junagadh, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -6)
7. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region - Morbi, Rajkot, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -7)
8. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Saurashtra Region - Rajkot, etc. under National Hydrology Project (Package -8)
9. Assessment of storage capacities of reservoirs (Bathymetry Survey, Topography Survey) of Kachchh Region under National Hydrology Project (Package -9)
by The Executive Engineer, W.R.I. Division, Ahmedabad. Last Date of Online Tender submission: 05/02/2022 up to 16.00 Hrs. Subsequent addendum and corrigendum will only be published on www.nprocure.com. Website and it will be bound to all the bidders. For further details contact to this office during office hours. Detailed Tender Notice can also be seen on www.nprocure.com., www.nhp.mowr.gov.in. and www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in
No.INF/ABD/1501/2022

14TH ROUND OF INDIA-CHINA MILITARY TALKS

No breakthrough on disengagement, next round soon

KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

THERE WAS no breakthrough on disengagement from Hot Springs in the 14th round of Corps Commander level talks between India and China on Wednesday, but both sides agreed to meet again soon. Although there was no agreement, the talks were in a positive direction, sources told *The Indian Express*.

A joint statement issued on Thursday, the two sides said they would consolidate earlier outcomes and stay in close contact.

The statement said representatives from “defence and foreign affairs establishments of the two sides” were present at the meeting and had “a frank and in-depth exchange of views for the resolution of the relevant issues” along the LAC in the Western Sector.

Both sides agreed to “con-

solidate on the previous outcomes” and make efforts to maintain security and stability on the ground in the Western Sector and to “stay in close contact and maintain dialogue via military and diplomatic channels and work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest”, the statement said.

In this context it was also agreed that the next round of the commanders’ talks should be held at the earliest, it said.

It was also agreed that “both sides should follow the guidance provided by the State Leaders and work for the resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest”.

“It was noted that this would help in restoration of peace and tranquility along the LAC in the Western Sector and enable progress in bilateral relations,” the joint statement said.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Govt. of Bihar
Patna Medical college Hospital, Patna
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS (NIT)
FOR
Outsourcing of Generator Services For Installation & management Of Pressure Swing Adsorption Plant at Patna Medical College & Hospital
Tender Enq. Ref. No:121
1) **In Reference To letter no- 72(10) Dated-05.07.2021 Of Honourable Additional chief Secretary, Health Department Bihar, For Installation & management Of Pressure Swing Adsorption Plant at Patna Medical College & Hospital Patna.** PMCH Authority invites tenders from eligible and qualified organization for Outsourcing of Emergency Power Supply through Electrical Generator For Installation & management Of Pressure Swing Adsorption Plant.
2) Tender documents may be collected from **Patna Medical college Hospital Patna** or downloaded from the website state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar in payment if INR 2000/- (In form of D.D). The technical bid should accompany a refundable bid security of Rs. 7.5 Lakhs (Seven lakhs fifty thousand in Form of demands Draft/ Bank Guarantee Drawn in Favor of **Superintendent, Patna medical college Hospital, Patna**
3) Bidders can submit their bids on or before **07.02.2022 up to 17:00 Hrs.** along with Bid security, either through speed post or registered post. (Submissions by hand, courier, fax, email or any other mean will not be accepted). The tenders submitted up to the scheduled date and time shall be opened **09.02.2022 At 12:30 PM**. The bidder's authorized representative may attend the tender opening (technical bid) on the date and time mentioned above.
4) Pre-bid meeting is scheduled at **12:30 Hrs. on 20.01.2022 at Patna medical college Hospital, Patna**. Interested Prospective bidders may attend the pre-bid meeting to seek clarification on any aspects of the tender documents.
5) All the further notification/amendments, if any shall be posted of the aforementioned website. No separate communication shall be made with individual bidders.

Date & Time Of Pre-bid Meeting	20.01.2022 At 12:30 PM
Last Date & Time of Submission of Bid	07.02.2022 up to 17:00Hrs
Date & Time of Opening of Bid	09.02.2022 At 12:30 PM

PR- 11603 (Health) 2021-22
Superintendent,
Patna Medical college Hospital
Patna
नरो से बनानी दूरी है, क्योंकि परिवार जरूरी है।

राष्ट्रीय विज्ञान शिक्षा एवं अनुसंधान संस्थान, भुवनेश्वर
(परमाणु ऊर्जा विभाग, भारत सरकार के अधीन एक स्वायत्त संस्थान)
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, BHUBANESWAR
(AN AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTE UNDER DEPT. OF ATOMIC ENERGY, GOVT. OF INDIA)
पो-जटनी, जिला-बुर्दु, पिन-752050 / PO-Jatni, Dist. Khurda, Pin-752050, वेबसाइट/Website: www.niser.ac.in
विज्ञापन संख्या/ Advt. No. : FA-Rct./NA/01-2022
वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी के लिए विज्ञापन / Advertisement for Scientific Officer
सेंटर फॉर मेडिकल एंड रेडिएशन फिजिक्स, नाइजर में वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी 'डी' और वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी 'सी' के पद पर भर्ती के लिए पात्र भारतीय नागरिकों से आवेदन आमंत्रित किए जाते हैं। Applications are invited from eligible Indian citizens for recruitment in the position of 'Scientific Officer 'D' & Scientific Officer 'C' in the Centre for Medical and Radiation Physics, NISER.

क्रम सं./ S.N	वेतन के साथ पद Positions with Pay	आवश्यक योग्यता और अनुभव/ Required Qualification & experience	वर्ग Category	आगु Age	रिक्तियां Vacancies
1	वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी 'डी' (भौतिकी) Scientific Officer 'D' (Physics) स्तर / Level: 11 सूचकांक संख्या / Index No: 1 वेतन / Pay: 67700/-	आवश्यक योग्यता / Essential Qualification : प्रायोगिक परमाणु या कण भौतिकी में पी.एच.डी. के बाद कार्यात्मक उपकरणों और डिटेक्टरों को संभालने में एक वर्ष कार्य का अनुभव। Ph.D. in Experimental Nuclear or Particle Physics with working experience in handling cryogenic instruments and detectors with one year post-Ph.D. experience.	अनारक्षित UR	40 वर्ष years	01 (एक/One)
2	वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी 'सी' (अनुप्रयुक्त भौतिकी) Scientific Officer 'C' (Applied Physics) स्तर / Level: 10 सूचकांक संख्या / Index No: 1 वेतन / Pay: 56100/-	आवश्यक योग्यता / Essential Qualification : एप्लाइड फिजिक्स में एमएससी के साथ किसी प्रतिष्ठित विश्वविद्यालय / संस्थान / प्रयोगशाला में कण सोलिड स्टेट फिजिक्स या प्रायोगिक परमाणु में कम से कम 04 वर्ष का अनुभव। Msc in Applied Physics with 04 years post-MSc experience in experimental nuclear or particle or solid state physics at a reputed University / Institute / Laboratory.	अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग OBC	36 वर्ष years	01 (एक/One)
3	वैज्ञानिक अधिकारी 'सी' (चिकित्सा भौतिकी) Scientific Officer 'C' (Medical Physics) स्तर / Level: 10 सूचकांक संख्या / Index No: 1 वेतन / Pay: 56100/-	आवश्यक योग्यता / Essential Qualification : मेडिकल फिजिक्स में एमएससी या एमएससी (भौतिकी) के साथ रेडियोलॉजिकल फिजिक्स में डिप्लोमा एवं RSO प्रमाणपत्र. एमएससी बाद निम्नलिखित विभाग में से किसी एक क्षेत्र में कम से कम 4 साल का अनुभव। रेडियोलॉजिकल गणित या विकिरण डोसिमेट्री और मानकीकरण या विकिरण डिटेक्टर और इंस्ट्रुमेंटेशन या नैदानिक और विकिरण जीव विज्ञान, परमाणु चिकित्सा या चिकित्सा विकिरण चिकित्सा या विकिरण सुरक्षा की इमेजिंग। Msc in Medical Physics or Post-MSc (Physics) Diploma in Radiological Physics with RSO certificate and 04 years post-MSc experience in Radiological mathematics / Radiation dosimetry and standardization / Radiation detectors and instrumentation / clinical and radiation biology / nuclear medicine / medical imaging of Radiation therapy / Radiation safety.	अनारक्षित UR	36 वर्ष years	01 (एक/One)

संक्षेप में उल्लेखित उपरोक्त योग्यता मानदंड को पूरा करने वाले अभ्यर्थियों को केवल वेबसाइट (www.niser.ac.in) के माध्यम से ऑनलाइन में आवेदन करना चाहिए। ऑनलाइन में आवेदन करने की अंतिम तिथि **01.03.2022** है। अभ्यर्थियों को सलाह दी जाती है कि विज्ञापन के सभी पहलुओं के विस्तृत विवरण के लिए वे नाइजर की वेबसाइट (<https://www.niser.ac.in>) का अनुसरण करें।
Applicants fulfilling the above eligibility criteria mentioned in brief should apply ONLINE (www.niser.ac.in) only. The last date for applying online is **1st March 2022**. For full details of all the aspects of the advertisement, candidates are requested to follow the advertisement at NISER web site (<http://www.niser.ac.in>).
निदेशक / DIRECTOR

Militants using civilians as human shield new Pak strategy: J&K DGP

Jharkhand's Simdega. Jharlo Devi, sustained 40 per cent burn injuries. Six people were held. **ENS**

Vadodara Smart City Development Limited
CORRIGENDUM
www.vmc.gov.in

The Municipal Corporation invited online E-Tenders for the work of Installation of Water Supply System under Smart City Mission in ABD area (Vadiwadi and Sayajibug Water Supply command area) of Vadodara City for refurbishment of existing and new distribution network in part area, and construction of ESRs and GSRs including all works of civil, electrical, instrumentation, SCADA, retrofitting of House service connections and associated works including Comprehensive Operation and Maintenance for a period of 5 years" via PRO N0.805/2021-22 and tender ID-N0.805/2021-22. In the original Tender notice the last date for online submission date was 31/01/2022. As per this corrigendum it is being extended up to 31/01/2022. Now extended date for online submission will be 31/01/2022 and hard copy submission date will be 01/02/2022.

893/2021-22

CEO, VSCDL



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

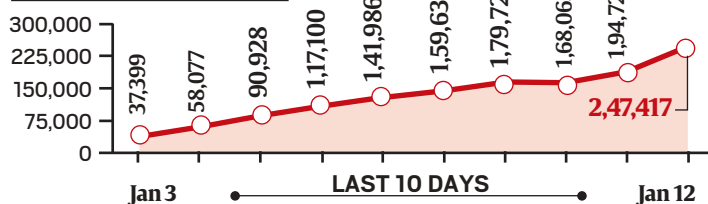
DASHBOARD, AS ON JAN 12

682 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN

New cases 2,47,417 | **Active cases** 11,17,531 | **Deaths** 380

Weekly CFR: 3.85% | Overall CFR: 1.39% | Total deaths: 4,85,035

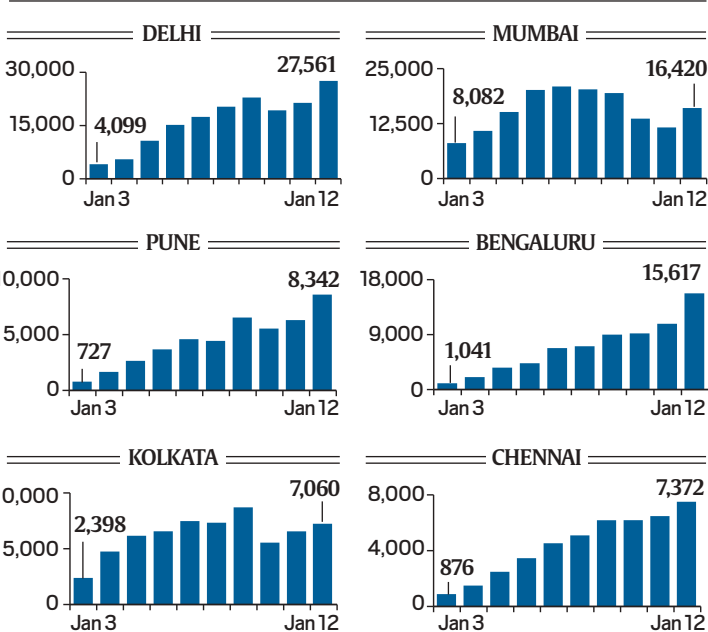
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

State	ON JANUARY 12			Weekly positivity
	New Cases	Active Cases	Deaths	
Maharashtra	46,723	240,122	37	20.33%
Delhi	27,561	87,445	40	21.70%
West Bengal	22,155	116,251	23	30.58%
Tamil Nadu	21,390	93,128	10	7.00%
Karnataka	17,934	88,959	19	8.89%

SURGE IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS

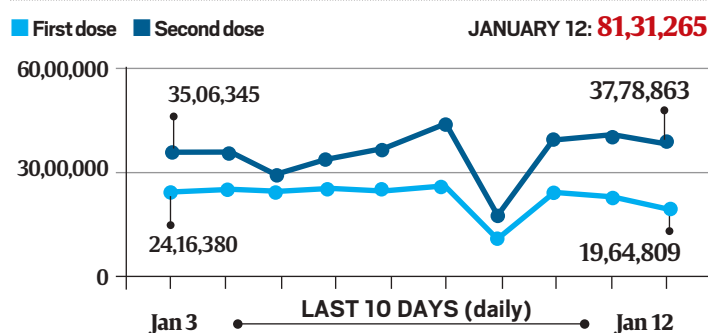


TOTAL TESTS

TESTS ON JAN 12: 20,37,247 | WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 10.07% | OVERALL POSITIVITY: 5.21%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES

(Adults 1st dose: 86,81,95,409; adults second dose: 64,53,95,901; 15-18 age group 1st dose: 2,98,74,770; precautionary doses: 26,73,385)



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SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Takeaways from Forest Report

The India State of Forest Report has found the country's forest cover has increased by 1,540 sq km since 2019. But a decline in the Northeast, and degradation of natural forests are a concern, experts note.

ESHA ROY

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

THE MINISTRY of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on Thursday released the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021. The report showed a continuing increase in forest cover across the country, but experts flagged some of its other aspects as causes for concern, such as a decline in forest cover in the Northeast, and a degradation of natural forests.

What is the India State of Forest Report?

It is an assessment of India's forest and tree cover, published every two years by the Forest Survey of India under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The first survey was published in 1987, and ISFR 2021 is the 17th.

India is one of the few countries in the world that brings out such an every two years, and this is widely considered comprehensive and robust. With data computed through wall-to-wall mapping of India's forest cover through remote sensing techniques, the ISFR is used in planning and formulation of policies in forest management as well as forestry and agroforestry sectors.

What are the key findings?

ISFR 2021 has found that the forest and tree cover in the country continues to increase with an additional cover of 1,540 square kilometres over the past two years.

■ India's forest cover is now 7,13,789 square kilometres, 21.71% of the country's geographical area, an increase from 21.67% in 2019. Tree cover has increased by 721 sq km.

■ The states that have shown the highest increase in forest cover are Telangana (3.07%), Andhra Pradesh (2.22%) and Odisha (1.04%).

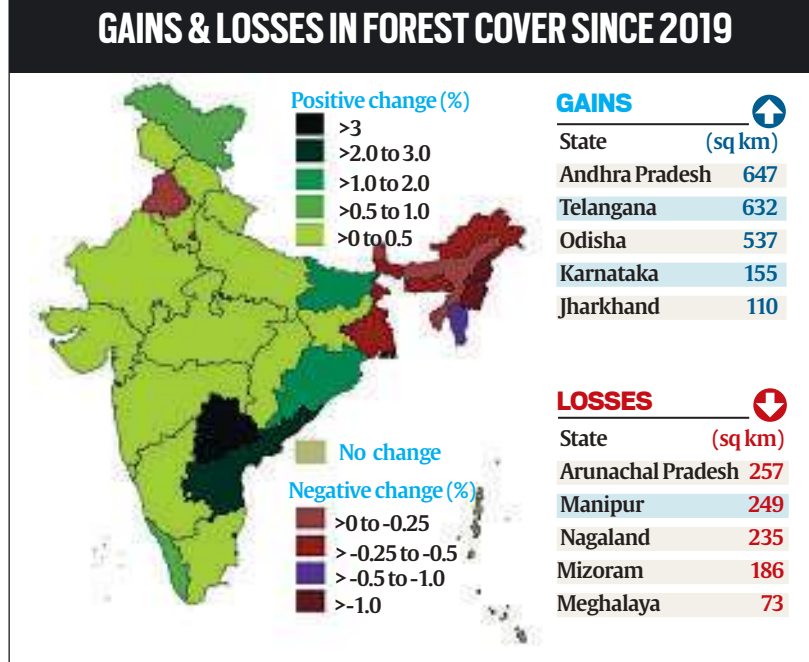
■ Five states in the Northeast – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have all shown loss in forest cover.

■ Mangroves have shown an increase of 17 sq km. India's total mangrove cover is now 4,992 sq km.

■ The survey has found that 35.46% of the forest cover is prone to forest fires. Out of this, 2.81% is extremely prone, 7.85% is very highly prone and 11.51% is highly prone.

■ The total carbon stock in country's forests is estimated at 7,204 million tonnes, an increase of 79.4 million tonnes since 2019.

■ Bamboo forests have grown from



13,882 million culms (stems) in 2019 to 53,336 million culms in 2021.

What kind of forests are growing?

While ISFR 2021 has shown an increasing trend in forest cover overall, the trend is not uniform across all kinds of forests. Three categories of forests are surveyed – very dense forests (canopy density over 70%), moderately dense forests (40-70%) and open forests (10-40%). Scrubs (canopy density less than 10%) are also surveyed but not categorised as forests.

Very dense forests have increased by 501 sq km. This is a healthy sign but pertains to forests that are protected and reserve forests with active conservation activities.

Experts say that was worrying is a 1,582 sq km decline in moderately dense forests, or "natural forests". The decline, in conjunction with an increase of 2,621 sq km in open forest areas – shows a degradation of forests in the country, say experts, with natural forests degrading to less dense open forests. Also, scrub area has increased by 5,320 sq km – indicating the complete degradation of forests in these areas, they say.

What explains the decline in the

Northeastern states?

The Northeast states account for 7.98% of total geographical area but 23.75% of total forest cover. The forest cover in the region has shown an overall decline of 1,020 sq km in forest cover. While states in the Northeast continue to have some of the largest forested areas, such as Mizoram (84.5% of its total geographical area is forests) or Arunachal Pradesh (79.3%), the two states have respectively lost 1.03% and 0.39% of their forest cover, while Manipur has lost 1.48%, Meghalaya 0.43%, and Nagaland 1.88%.

The report has attributed the decline in the Northeastern states to a spate of natural calamities, particularly landslides and heavy rains, in the region as well as to anthropogenic activities such as shifting agriculture, pressure of developmental activities and felling of trees.

Experts say that this loss is of great concern as the Northeastern states are repositories of great biodiversity. While natural calamities may have led to much of the loss, the declining forests will in turn increase the impact of landslides, they say. It will also impact water catchment in the region, which is already seeing degradation of its water resources. Unlike other states, where forests

are clearly managed by the forest department and state governments, the Northeastern states follow a different ownership pattern – community ownership and protected tribal land – which makes conservation activities challenging.

What else does the report cover?

ISFR 2021 has some new features. It has for the first time assessed forest cover in tiger reserves, tiger corridors and the Gir forest which houses the Asiatic lion.

The forest cover in tiger corridors has increased by 37.15 sq km (0.32%) between 2011-2021, but decreased by 22.6 sq km (0.04%) in tiger reserves. Forest cover has increased in 20 tiger reserves in these 10 years, and decreased in 32. Buxa, Anamalai and Indravati reserves have shown an increase in forest cover while the highest losses have been found in Kawal, Bhadra and the Sunderbans reserves.

Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh has the highest forest cover, at nearly 97%.

What impact has climate change had?

The report estimates that by 2030, 45-64% of forests in India will experience the effects of climate change and rising temperatures, and forests in all states (except Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland) will be highly vulnerable climate hot spots. Ladakh (forest cover 0.1-0.2%) is likely to be the most affected. India's forests are already showing shifting trends of vegetation types, such as Sikkim which has shown a shift in its vegetation pattern for 124 endemic species.

In 2019-20, 1.2 lakh forest fire hotspots were detected by the SNPP-VIIRS sensor, which increased to 3.4 lakh in 2020-21. The highest numbers of fires were detected in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

How comprehensive a picture does the survey present?

Experts say the survey results could be misleading as it includes plantations – such as coffee, coconuts or mango and other orchards – under forest cover. These plantations are distinctly different from natural forests where one hectare would be home to hundreds of species of trees, plants and fauna, whereas such plantations house only one species of tree. The forest survey is carried out as an assessment of India's biodiversity, but such an overarching survey does not meet that objective, experts say.

Issues women face in Kerala cinema: what now

A govt panel will examine Hema Commission's report submitted 2 yrs ago. Why did the commission find?

VISHNU VARMA

KOCHI, JANUARY 13

THE LEFT government in Kerala Wednesday formed a three-member panel to study and work out a plan to implement the recommendations of the Justice Hema Commission report, which has gone into the problems faced by women in the Malayalam film industry. The move came over two years after the report was submitted to the government in December 2019.

Why was the commission formed?

On February 17, 2017, a prominent woman actor was abducted and sexually assaulted for nearly two hours in a moving car near Kochi. Weeks later, Dileep, a leading actor in the Malayalam film industry, was arrested and arraigned as the eighth accused in the case with charges including abduction, conspiracy, criminal intimidation among others. According to a special investigation

team, Dileep ordered the attack as he nursed a grudge against the woman actor.

The incident threw the spotlight on the safety of women in the state, and the issues faced by women in the film industry, which is largely seen as a male-dominated space operating without a legal framework. In the aftermath, the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) was founded with the aim of addressing these issues. The WCC, consisting of women actors, producers, directors and technicians, appealed to the then Left government to appoint a panel to investigate gender discrimination. In July 2017, the government formed the three-member commission headed by retired justice K Hema with retired bureaucrat K B Valsalakumari and veteran actor Sharada as members. It was the first time a commission of this kind had been formed anywhere in India to scrutinise the inner workings of a film industry.

What did the commission do?

It interviewed dozens of members of the

film fraternity, including both men and women actors, producers, directors and technicians. According to reports, several women actors recounted stories of the harassment they faced on sets, on the condition that their names be kept confidential, and also discussed issues such as differing wages on the basis of gender, absence of adequate facilities for women on sets, and the lack of a proper forum for grievance redressal.

When was in its report?

The commission submitted a 300-page report to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on December 31, 2019, accompanied by a large set of documents, screenshots and audio clips. While the report was not made public, the commission reportedly highlighted the existence of a 'casting couch' within the industry where actors were asked to perform sexual favours in exchange for opportunities. It had testimonies on this from actors, both male and female. The commission also found that alcohol and drug abuse was widespread

on film sets. It recommended that the government form a tribunal to investigate all such lapses.

What has happened since?

The constitution of a three-member panel on Wednesday to further study the report comes amid mounting criticism against the government for sitting on it for over two years. Neither has the report been released in the public domain, nor has its recommendations implemented. The commission is learnt to have indicated to the government that the full contents of the report not be publicised as it contains testimonies of sexual harassment. But there are calls from activists and members of the fraternity to redact such sensitive portions and reveal the core findings of the report. Since the commission has not been appointed under The Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, its report does not need to be tabled in the Assembly. There is no clarity so far from the government on the delay in action on the report.

EXPLAINED YOUR MONEY

Covid cases are rising, and so are the markets. What's going on?



GEORGE MATHEW & SANDEEP SINGH

EQUITY INVESTMENTS have started the year strongly in spite of concerns over the Omicron spike that has once again led to restrictions on mobility, hit contact-intensive services, and threatened to slow the pace of economic recovery.

The third wave, which saw nearly 2.5 lakh infections in the country on Wednesday, has coincided with the decision of the US Federal Reserve to hasten the withdrawal of the stimulus, and indications that interest rates may increase sooner than expected. But these fac-

tors, along with rising domestic retail inflation, have not deterred Indian stock markets.

How much has the market gained?

The benchmark Sensex at the BSE moved in a narrow range in the last month of the last calendar, and closed at 58,253 on December 31. Over the nine trading sessions this calendar, the index has risen by 2,982 points or 5.1% – on Thursday, it closed at its highest level since October 26, 2021. Thursday's close (61,235) is only 530 points or 0.85% short of the highest ever closing of 61,765, seen on October 18, 2021. Although the services sector, including travel, tourism, and hospitality have been hit by the Omicron wave and demand is expected to come under pressure in many other sectors including FMCG, the market remains buoyant.

Why are the markets rising?

The markets have risen as the selling pressure from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) has eased and buyers have come into the pic-

ture, and domestic inflows into equities have continued.

FPIs, who sold stocks worth a net of Rs 38,521 crore in the stock markets between October and December 2021, have invested a net of Rs 3,227 crore in January so far.

On the other hand, domestic institutional investors, who invested Rs 31,231 crore in December, have invested a net of Rs 5,485 crore in January so far.

Retail investors and mutual funds have been in buying mode, with the latter getting investors' money amounting to Rs 25,000 crore in December.

The market has already factored in the Fed's tightening plan, and is hopeful that the Reserve Bank of India will continue its accommodative monetary policy in response to the need for supporting the economy.

While Omicron remains a threat and cases continue to rise across the country, market participants believe that the less virulent variant is not challenging the health infrastructure as of now, and is not expected to

majorly hurt the economy.

Is this how the markets behaved during the Delta surge too?

In the period between March 10 and May 6, 2021, when active cases in India rose from around 20,000 to over 4.1 lakh, the Sensex fell 5.9% from 51,279 (March 10) to 48,253 (May 4). However, as the cases declined over the next one month, the Sensex recovered quickly to hit a new high of over 52,000 in June. Over the next few months, it rose further and hit its all-time high of over 62,000 in October.

What risks lie ahead?

If the Fed tightens too fast, FPI outflows could follow, impacting the domestic market and the rupee. Investors are also waiting for third quarter earnings reports from the corporate sector. A possible increase in hospitalisations and deaths over the next couple of weeks may hurt sentiment and impact the economic recovery. The markets are also waiting keenly for the Union Budget in

February, and the RBI policy for clues.

"Having realised that even their (FPIs') relentless selling has not brought the markets down, as perhaps they expected, the FPIs are now on the back foot. Seizing the opportunity, exuberant retail investors assisted by the DILs flush with funds are driving the markets up," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

According to Vijayakumar, there is both a positive and a negative dimension to this rally. "The positive is that high-quality large-caps are leading the rally. The negative is that many low-grade stocks that do not justify any investment are also going up," he said.

Will the rally continue?

Even as the markets rise, concerns around valuations remain, and to that extent, if the earnings growth is not strong, the rally could hit a bottleneck.

A report by UBS economist Tanvi Gupta Jain raised this concern. "Despite our expectations of double-digit earnings growth in

FY23E/FY24E, we think equity upside is capped by expensive valuations," it said.

While FPI flows fuelled the rally over the last 18 months, they may not support the equity markets in the same way going forward because of Fed's decisions to withdraw the stimulus and raise interest rates.

Another constraint to the rally may come from a faster than expected switch to policy normalisation as inflation remains at elevated levels. There is a possibility that even RBI could hike interest rates in the second half of this calendar.

On the other hand, support for equities could come from a government-led infrastructure push and investments, higher FDI in manufacturing, and a production-linked incentive boost to manufacturing.

Investors must temper their expectations from the equity markets, experts say. However, they feel equities may continue to outperform other asset classes this year too – so, investors who are underweight on equities should continue to invest in them.

The Indian **EXPRESS**

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

6 CMs, 1 CONSPIRACY

Supreme Court has ordered a probe, cautioned against a war of words. BJP CMs' allegations don't help

THE BREACH IN the Prime Minister's security in Punjab on January 5 was grave. As this newspaper reported, in the run-up to the PM's visit, several letters were sent out to police officials on the field warning against disruption by protesters and urging them to make arrangements. The Supreme Court has set up a five-member committee headed by a former SC judge to probe the incident, observing that the matter cannot be left to "one-sided inquiries". At the same time, the court has also called out the "blame game" and "war of words" between the Centre and the state government — they stand in the way of a "robust mechanism to respond at such a critical juncture". In other words, instead of political point-scoring and grandstanding, what is needed is the sober pursuit of answers to serious questions about the breach, and what needs to be done to avoid a repeat. But the court's wise counsel may have fallen on ears that didn't hear. On Wednesday, at least six BJP chief ministers, almost in concert, came out to accuse the Congress and its government in Punjab of a "pre-planned, well-orchestrated conspiracy", two of them alleged the involvement of "Khalistanis", one even called for the arrest of the Punjab CM.

So far, the BJP has used party forums to accuse the Congress and its government of deliberately putting the PM in harm's way in Punjab. Even though senior BJP ministers at the Centre have echoed the allegations, the apparently synchronised attack of the BJP chief ministers is a disturbing escalation of intemperate rhetoric. As the ruling party at the Centre and in several states, the BJP needs to pause, and take stock. For one, as the court has pointed out, it is obscuring due process — by rushing to pronounce guilt, it is preempting a free and fair probe. Then, the accusation itself represents a new breakdown in a public discourse that is not always known to abide by standards of mutual civility or respect. After all, to accuse your political opponent of a conspiracy to do physical harm, to do so at the level of instant rhetoric, is to lead the political conversation into a very dark dead end. By invoking spectres of "Khalistan", BJP chief ministers are sending yet another disturbing signal — that the party which tried and failed to discredit the farmers' movement in Punjab is still looking for labels to tar and taint the state.

Alongwith other states, Punjab is going to polls in a few weeks, and it may be that calculations of electoral gain lie behind the BJP's apocalyptic rhetoric. But there are enough issues to take up in a state that is battling crises on many fronts and where the ruling party is visibly divided within. The PM's security is an issue that concerns all, across the political divide. Regardless of who wins or loses in Punjab or elsewhere, that is also how it needs to be addressed. The CMs, by echoing each other's conspiracy allegations, may be loyal party workers but as heads of their state governments, they diminish themselves. Maybe the SC panel should call them just in case they can shed some light besides their heat.

MANAGING THE RISE

Even as inflation remains elevated, pivot towards normalisation of monetary policy is likely to be slow and measured

DATA RELEASED BY the National Statistical Office on Wednesday showed that retail inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI), rose to a six-month high of 5.6 per cent in December 2021. As a consequence, inflation in the third quarter works out to just about 5 per cent, marginally lower than the estimate of 5.1 per cent projected by the Reserve Bank of India in the December monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting. However, worryingly, inflation is likely to inch upwards in the months ahead due to a combination of factors. First, the base effect is likely to remain unfavourable in the last quarter of the financial year. Second, with producers increasingly facing cost pressures — the wholesale price index has remained elevated, witnessing a record high of 14.2 per cent in November — they are likely to pass on the burden of rising costs to end consumers. And third, the possible disruption in supply chains, due to the imposition of restrictions on activities by state governments, could also push prices up. The central bank also expects inflation to rise. In the December MPC meeting, it had pegged retail inflation to rise to 5.7 per cent in the fourth quarter, perilously close to the upper threshold of the inflation targeting framework.

The disaggregated inflation data shows that food and beverages inflation rose to 4.5 per cent in December, up from 2.6 per cent the month before. This surge was largely on account of cereals, vegetables and milk. Worryingly, core inflation, which strips away the volatile components, continues to remain elevated, even as the first advance GDP estimates released by the National Statistical Office suggest muted private consumption in the second half of the financial year. Inflation in clothing and footwear, recreation and household goods and services remains elevated. As does health inflation.

It is likely that even as inflationary concerns persist, the central bank will continue to attach primacy to growth considerations. While it's still early days to accurately assess the impact of the third wave of the pandemic on the Indian economy, as the economic recovery continues to remain uneven, the pivot towards the normalisation of monetary policy is likely to continue to be cautious. While the RBI has begun to take steps on liquidity, considering the continuing economic uncertainty, the central bank may rethink or push back the timelines for the next policy steps which involve hiking the reverse repo rate, shifting the stance of monetary policy from accommodative to neutral, and hiking the repo rate.

LET KIDS BE

VHP alphabet: It's A for annoying, B for burden on C for children

BETWEEN THE "NEW normal" of digital learning, prolonged isolation and an environment of constant uncertainty and stress, you'd think children are going through enough. Not according to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), it seems, which wants the learning of the English alphabet to be "Indianised". To this end, the organisation has prepared a chart, which has, instead of "A for apple, B for ball...", religious and historical figures corresponding to each letter. The new alphabet speaks more of the VHP's ideological zeal than what 3-5-year-olds need.

Pedagogy in India has long been a victim of politics. A change in government, or "hurt sentiments", has often led to texts being unceremoniously dropped from university syllabi or textbooks being changed ahead of crucial board exams. So far, though, the desire to control how the young think didn't start till at least middle school. The alphabet is among the first things children learn when they have barely emerged from toddler-hood. Even the most committed ideologue, one would have thought, would let little kids be.

In its apparent eagerness to decolonise the coloniser's language, the VHP seems to have run out of Indian figures to correspond to letters. So, you get "Q for Queen Lakshmbai" (queen is an English word, and *rani* doesn't help matters) and "X for Laxman". The chart also betrays an odd failing of the Hindu right — it puts together historical figures it is trying to appropriate (Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh) with mythological ones (Laxman and a misspelt "Walmiki"). However, beyond the fodder for humour — what teachers for generations have called "silly mistakes" — the chart is terribly problematic. It places on children the annoying burden of correcting the imagined wrongs of history. A for annoying, B for burden, on C for children.



SATISH DESHPANDE

THE TRULY SHOCKING fact about the so-called "Bulli Bai" app (which reportedly featured a humiliating mock auction of more than a hundred Muslim women active in public life) is that some of its alleged perpetrators have actually been arrested. Vishal Kumar Jha, Shweta Singh, Mayank Rawat and Neeraj Bishnoi — those arrested so far — must be wondering if they have suddenly been transported into an alien world. Because, in the world that we have lived in for several years, this would clearly count as cruel and unjust punishment.

The "angry Hindu" cloak of impunity is evidently available to assorted godmen to incite mass violence against Muslims on millions of television screens. It is claimed by our highest elected officials to routinely denigrate those who say "*abba jaan*" or those who can be "identified by their clothes". It is also offered to mobs who prevent Friday prayers. And even killers who led lynch mobs are publicly feted and tacitly assured that the law will go easy on them. If all this can happen, then it is certainly unfair to single out a mere digital app that has, after all, killed no one. A police force eager to bend before the winds of power would immediately recognise that, regardless of the Indian Penal Code, nothing much needs to be done here since the alleged purveyors of the app bear clearly Hindu names and their targets are all Muslim women. This is what happened some months ago when a similar app called "Sulli Deals" appeared. Neither the Mumbai police — which has suddenly woken up in the Bulli Bai case — nor the Delhi, Gurgaon or Noida police showed any unseemly eagerness to act. Why the flurry of activity now?

The most plausible answers involve the unfavourable coverage in the international media and the fact that Maharashtra is not ruled by the BJP. But these are not entirely convincing, because nothing happened in Maharashtra when the previous app appeared. It is also possible, but unlikely, that sustained pressure from the victims (many of whom are prominent in public life) finally



SARBANANDA SONOWAL

THE SUN WILL rise a little to the north on Makar Sankranti, January 14, bringing along many messages of cultural, spiritual and agri-cultural significance for the country. The word "*sankranti*" signifies transitional movement, the movement for betterment within and without, transitions on a cosmic level and in the zodiac signs.

The Ministry of Ayush has decided to utilise this occasion to reach out to humanity with a special and topical message of rejuvenation through the *surya namaskar* — the set of yoga asanas used to "salute" the sun.

Most of us must have heard about the *surya namaskar*. Its significance goes much beyond a salutation to the sun. It has a profound impact on the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of humans. When performed appropriately on a regular basis, the *surya namaskar* not only improves our vitality and immunity but also helps maintain mental balance in a fast-moving and stress-generating world.

Considering the importance of yoga, the Ministry of AYUSH has dedicated due resources towards its growth and development — along with naturopathy — under the ambit of Indian traditional medicine systems. Furthermore, in a bid to popularise yoga at the global level, it has also been recognised as a competitive sport. The International Yoga Sports Federation (IYSF) has been constituted by the ministry and concrete steps are being

In most societies and in most times, the rich and the privileged are treated more leniently than the poor and the powerless. But long-familiar patterns of social pampering and persecution are being radically re-arranged now. The Hindu-Muslim divide is being elevated above all our other divisions, including those between victim and perpetrator, or the innocent and the guilty. Moreover, this division is being turned into a rigid dichotomy. In India, we are used to the messiness of our social categories — there are always exceptions, grey areas, or contextual variations. But the Hindu-Muslim divide is being purged of its porosity and turned into a sharp, permanent line — literally a social Line of Control.

forced the Mumbai police to act the second time around.

We may never be able to fully answer the why question, but the what questions are far more important. What is the larger significance of the uncharacteristic response to the Bulli Bai app? What does it point to or represent?

The first thing that the anomalous arrests point to is the changing character of our institutions. If we are surprised when the police act to curb crimes — something they are supposed to do — then it is obvious that a lot has changed. Of course, the law has never treated everyone alike in practice. In most societies and in most times, the rich and the privileged are treated more leniently than the poor and the powerless. But long-familiar patterns of social pampering and persecution are being radically re-arranged now. The Hindu-Muslim divide is being elevated above all our other divisions, including those between victim and perpetrator, or the innocent and the guilty. Moreover, this division is being turned into a rigid dichotomy. In India, we are used to the messiness of our social categories — there are always exceptions, grey areas, or contextual variations. But the Hindu-Muslim divide is being purged of its porosity and turned into a sharp, permanent line — literally a social Line of Control. A new border is being drawn inside our nation, where, as with international borders, no ambiguity is allowed about who is on which side.

This is still a journey, a process in the present continuous tense. But its end is not far, and all our public institutions are well on their way towards the same destination. Our Parliament, our highest courts, our hugely bloated media, educational institutions and the entire bureaucracy, including especially its coercive arms — they are all changing their tune. Like the animals in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, they are no longer a choir but a chorus chanting the same *doha* or couplet: "Hindus good, Muslims bad. Government good, opponents bad."

SALUTE THE SUN

On Makar Sankranti, a message of rejuvenation

The universal appeal of yoga is embodied in the surya namaskar. As the sun is the source of vitality for all living beings, the *surya namaskar* is a sure-shot dose of vitality for humans without any side-effects. The world is realising that vitality and strong immunity from within are the most pressing requisites to battle the re-resurfacing Covid-19 infection.

taken to promote it as a sport at the international level.

Since 2014, when the International Day of Yoga was recognised, the event has grown each year, with greater international participation. As a part of its commitment to promote yoga on a grand scale, the ministry is in the process of setting up a centre of excellence for Ayurveda and yoga in the United Kingdom. In order to further boost professional activity in the domain, the Ministry of AYUSH has constituted the yoga certification board for yoga professionals and accreditations to the institutions.

Building upon the "whole of government" approach of PM Narendra Modi, a *surya namaskar* demonstration programme is being launched in line with the tribute to 75 years of India's independence, Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. The AYUSH ministry has not only engaged other ministries and state governments but has involved all major stakeholders in the global yoga fraternity in this mass demonstration programme.

The universal appeal of yoga is embodied in the *surya namaskar*. As the sun is the source of vitality for all living beings, the *surya namaskar* is a sure-shot dose of vitality for humans without any side-effects. The world is realising that vitality and strong immunity from within are the most pressing requisites to battle the re-resurfacing Covid-19 infection. For this reason, the *surya namaskar* becomes even more important.

The second thing that the Bulli Bai arrests alert us to is that the last line of the couplet is the punch line — the first is only a means towards this end. The anti-Muslim agenda is the most potent weapon in the electoral armoury of the current regime, the *rath* or chariot that has brought it to power. Its pitch and intensity can be adjusted according to need. But the new — and increasingly, the only — benchmark for our institutions is the government line on any issue. They are behaving as though their highest duty is to obey the stated and even the unstated wishes of the ruling regime rather than the Constitution or their own charters.

But the third indication provided by this episode is the most crucial. The Sulli Deals and Bulli Bai apps are part of a large and ever-growing list of hate crimes that are the spontaneous initiatives of ordinary people. What we are witnessing is nothing less than the successful culmination of a nearly century-long campaign of empowerment. It is only habit that makes us think that this word should be reserved for politically correct things, like the empowerment of women. Whatever else they are or are not, Vishal, Shweta, Mayank and Neeraj are certainly shining examples of empowered youth. They are living evidence of the success of the larger campaign that has shaped the environment in which they came of age, and bequeathed to them the fantasies that they have felt emboldened to enact in real life.

Since it began in the 1920s, the larger Hindutva project of the Sangh Parivar founded on hatred for Muslims (and others) had only been battery-powered, so to speak, requiring the dedicated labour of anonymous activists to keep the batteries charged. The Modi-Shah regime has plugged this project into the power of the state. Today's spontaneous hate crimes are the bitter harvest of fields cultivated laboriously for a century and fertilised with state power since 2014.

The writer teaches at Delhi University. Views expressed are personal



JANUARY 14, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM HAS NEW CM

KESHAB CHANDRA GOGOI was sworn in as the new Chief Minister of Assam ending 197 days of President's rule. He was sworn in by Governor Prakash Mehrotra at a simple ceremony at Raj Bhavan minutes after it was known in a surprise announcement that the governor had accepted Gogoi's claim that he had the backing of 63 of the 125 members of the state assembly. Earlier, President N Sanjiva Reddy issued a proclamation revoking Governor's rule imposed on Assam on June 30 last year and extending for another term of six months. Central rule was imposed when the government of Anwara Taimur failed to get the Assam appropriation bill

passed by the assembly.

ANTULAY'S SUCCESSOR

WITH THE HIGH command of the Congress (I) unable to decide on a successor for A R Antulay mainly because of intense campaigning by both the chief minister's supporters and opponents, the "election" of the new leader of the Maharashtra legislative party is likely to be held only next week. Congress (I) general secretary Vasantrao Patil said it will take four to five days to appoint Antulay's successor. One of Antulay's critics, Shalini Patil, met the PM to impress upon her that the new CM shouldn't be from the camp

of the incumbent.

AGHA SHAHI'S VISIT

PAKISTAN FOREIGN MINISTER Agha Shahi will arrive in New Delhi on January 29 for discussions with the government on a no-war pact. The visit is likely to last three days during which he will have talks with External Affairs Minister P V Narasimha Rao.

SAUDI HELP TO PAK

PAKISTAN IS TO get Saudi aid worth 500 million dollars from Saudi Arabia to purchase arms.

THE IDEAS PAGE

Perils of a single-issue election

Critics and supporters of Prime Minister Modi must realise that narrowing down the political agenda to his personality stalls urgent conversations on structural issues of polity and economy



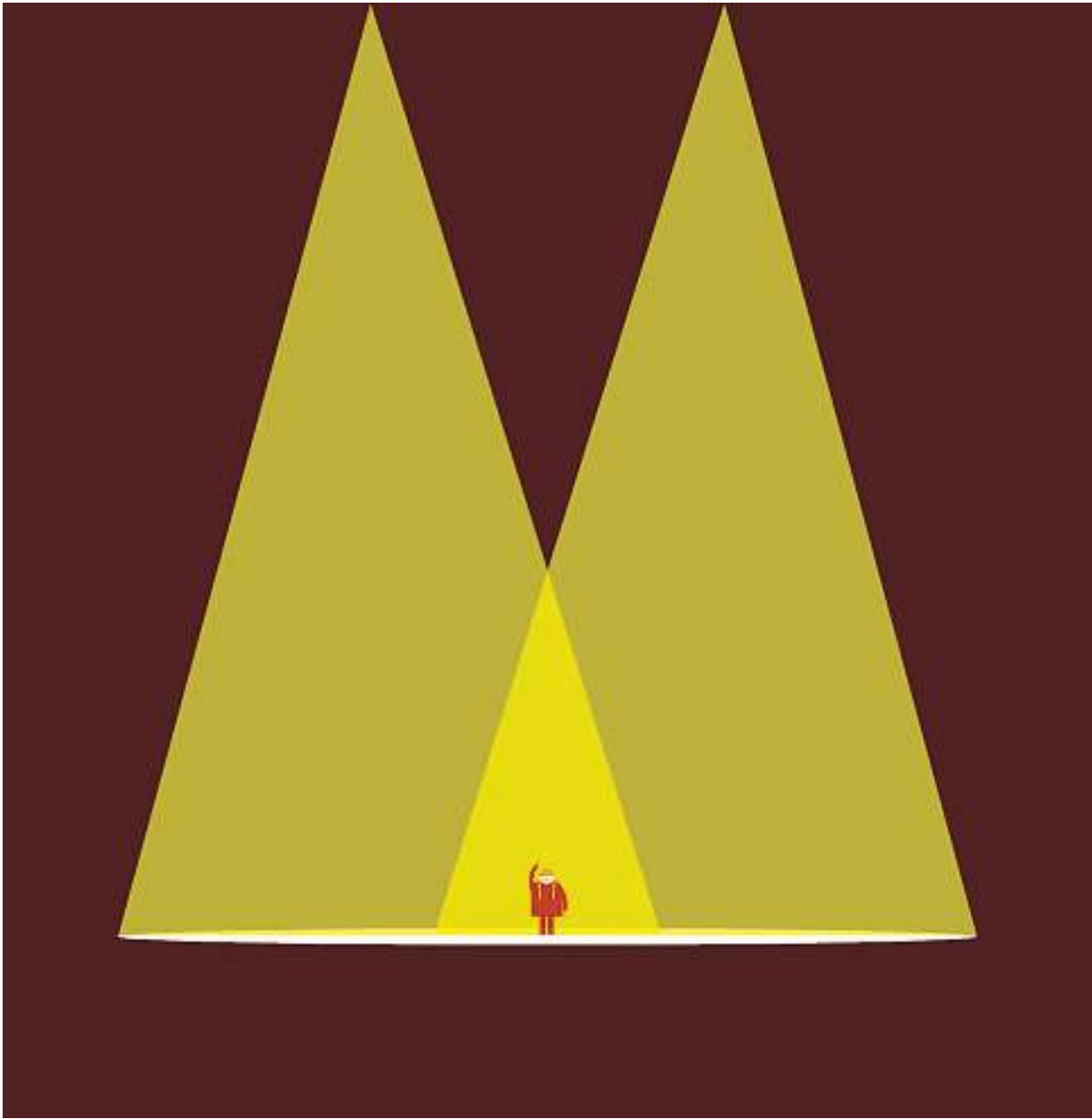
SUBRATA MITRA

THERE IS NO gainsaying the fact that the figure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emerged as the most significant talking point in Indian politics. Now that the Election Commission has set the dates for the five assembly elections, one can only expect the obsession of India's political commentators and campaign managers with Modi to grow, and the process of showcasing his persona as the epitome of all that is good, or evil, in the current politics of the vast country to be speeded up. The point that the critics and acolytes of the prime minister miss is the harm that the narrowing down of the political agenda to just one person does to the larger interests of the country and its bustling, resilient democracy.

This poverty of public discourse about the nature and content of politics in India with its rich, classical tradition in political theory, vigorous political debates during the long-drawn-out freedom movement, its continuation in the Constituent Assembly debates, and in parliamentary debates during the early decades after Independence, is astounding. Had agenda-setting not been as important as it is for the critical decades ahead, all the Modi-bashing of the political class and the cartoons around his theatricality, would have provided some comic relief during these dark days of the pandemic. But the stakes are much too high not to take notice of what gets left out of political discourse thanks to the obsession with Modi, to the point of merchandising his personal security, in the ruthless game of political upmanship.

How has this fixation with Modi and the reduction of the full range of politics entirely to his persona come about? To this question, there are two possible answers. The images of a "saintly" Modi taking a holy dip in the Ganges, widely diffused by TV channels, would lead cultural anthropologists to take a cue from Clifford Geertz in pointing to the causal link of pomp and theatricality with state power. The second answer, going back all the way to Marx, would argue more about the political acumen of a talented leader, exploiting a structural flaw to cast himself as the embodiment of popular aspiration and will. "Man makes history, within conditions imposed by history". Both insights help explain the emergence of Modi as the focal point of Indian politics, much like the parallel rise, quite ironically, of Gandhi and Churchill — in their deft use of language, metaphor, accoutrements, and theatricality — to the pinnacles of public visibility during the last decades of the freedom movement.

Deconstruction of Modi's rise reveals the adroit manner in which he has encapsulated three strands of the deeper layers of Indian politics — the stalled process of state formation, a deep collective anxiety about where to place medieval history within the structure of the present, and, of course, state subsidised welfare such as cooking gas, micro-bank-accounts, toilets, infrastructure and so on. An analysis of the outcomes of the two parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 and



CR Sasikumar

the assembly elections in between, shows how neatly the electoral performance of the BJP follows the combination of the three strands. The most spectacular demonstration of the vulnerability of a Modi-centric campaign was seen in West Bengal, where the region has found its own mode of integrating Islam within its political culture and the tap of welfare was firmly in the grip of Mamata Banerjee — the local supremo and an equally deft politician in the mirror-image of the prime minister.

Shifting the focus away from Modi as the single issue will help bring public attention back to the structural parameters of Indian politics that get scant attention today. Not doing so will have grave, unintended consequences.

As things stand, a Modi win signals the continuation of his symbolic acts such as cow worship — it skips any analysis of the proper role of the cow in the agricultural value chain. A Modi defeat reinforces the tendency to "let sleeping issues lie" and skip over stalled processes of territorial integration, reform in key sectors of agriculture and integration with the global market economy, or even deeper and more conflictual issues of citizenship and national identity. In brief, with a single-issue election, India loses, whether Modi wins or concedes defeat.

As things stand, a Modi win signals the continuation of his symbolic acts such as cow worship — it skips any analysis of the proper role of the cow in the agricultural value chain. A Modi defeat reinforces the tendency to 'let sleeping issues lie' and skip over stalled processes of territorial integration, reform in key sectors of agriculture and integration with the global market economy, or even deeper and more conflictual issues of citizenship and national identity. In brief, with a single-issue election, India loses, whether Modi wins or concedes defeat.

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Let us forget, a Modi-centric electoral discourse skirts around the biggest conundrum of the politics of transitional societies: Can electoral democracy replace revolution? Elections — however free and fair — can only process politics "within the system", but are not any good at tackling the "politics of the system". Elections produce mandates that promise structural changes in the economy and society, but the hardship that they entail for key sections of the electorate stymie their implementation. Caught in a "middle democracy trap", India is likely to go through cycles of "maintaining" elections that focus on the rewards of office, alternating with "transforming" elections that promise basic structural changes. By bringing the larger agenda of politics back in again, one would be able to prepare the electorate for the rough ride ahead as the next electoral cycle sets in, instead of their panicking about democratic "backsliding".

Mitra is an emeritus professor of political science at Heidelberg University. His The 2019 Parliamentary Elections in India: Democracy at Crossroads? jointly edited with Rekha Saxena and Pampa Mukherjee, will be published by Routledge, later this year

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"China's clear attitude of preventing chaos or war embodies the responsibility of a major power — that is, China will not stand by idly and let happen what are detrimental to China's national interests and to the common welfare of the entire region." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

In service of man and God

Mother Teresa passed away 25 years ago. The Missionaries of Charity carries on, caring for the poor and outcasts across the world



NAVIN B CHAWLA

I WAS far away from Delhi when news trickled in that the government had not renewed FCRA permission to the Missionaries of Charity, the organisation that Mother Teresa founded in 1950. It was the year that our Constitution was promulgated and she was amongst the first foreigners to become an Indian citizen.

Associated with Mother Teresa for the last 23 years of her life, and with the MC sisters for over four decades, the refusal of FCRA permission came to me as a surprise, but I believed it was the result, as is often the case, of accounting errors, which would be corrected. And so it happened. The sisters were able to explain the discrepancies to the concerned authorities and permission was renewed.

2022 awakened to the 25th year of Mother Teresa's passing away, in her beloved Kolkata. For me, it was also an occasion to recount a little of my association with her. We know where she started, a lone presence on Kolkata's streets with no money, no helper and no companion. By the time she passed away, she had created, one small step at a time, the presence of her Order in 123 countries. Together, with her band of 4,000 sisters and brothers, theirs would remain a unique brand of faith and compassion, reaching out to alleviate destitution, loneliness, hunger and disease, bringing hope and relief to millions of the abandoned, homeless, dying and leprosy outcasts, irrespective of their country, faith, or denomination.

Although she remained fiercely Catholic, her brand of religion was not exclusive. Convinced that each person she ministered to was Christ in suffering, she reached out to people of all faiths. Hers was not the 19th-century brand of imperial evangelism. Unlike most in the Church, she understood the environment in which she lived and worked. In the course of writing my biography, I once asked Jyoti Basu, that indomitable chief minister of West Bengal, what he, as a Communist and atheist, could possibly have in common with Mother Teresa, for whom God was everything. With a smile, he replied, "We both share a love for the poor."

With such a long association and so many memories, I can at best present a few vignettes of an arduous yet joyful life that was ordained for her. I vividly recall my first visit with her to a huge leprosy settlement, not far from Kolkata. It was a very moving experience to see her surrounded by hundreds of inmates, many with no arms or legs, all reaching out to hug or touch her. "Ma", as they called her, had made them feel needed by giving them the important task of weaving the saris that are worn by the MC Sisters worldwide.

During her visits to Delhi, where she had "homes", I would help steer her through our

labyrinthine bureaucracy. Over time, I became familiar with the work of the MC. The Shishu Bhawans were crammed with abandoned infants, dressed in cheerful clothes, stitched by the sisters or volunteers; the "house" at Majnu Ka Tila for abandoned elderly destitute persons; the home for disabled children in South Delhi, many suffering from Down Syndrome and cared for in their cots.

It was here that my daughters and I first met Kusum, then a child of six. Two things struck me at once. The first was that she could not stand, and the second was her infectious smile. Whenever I visited, this little girl always greeted me with a smile. As she could only crawl, the sisters, helpers and volunteers fed her, bathed her, dressed her in fresh clothes every day, and carried her to the toilet every time she needed to go. They changed her clothes each time she soiled them.

Painstakingly, she learnt to say "hello" to me and one day, to my delight, added "uncle" to complete the little sentence. Kusum was found begging on a street. On the afternoon the sisters found her, it was pouring. The drenched child had a wracking cough. Unable to find a parent or guardian, they customarily reported the matter to the local police. After her condition stabilised in a nearby hospital, they brought her to their "ashram" to join about 60 children with physical and mental problems. Doctors had opined that her legs and arms had been broken, perhaps deliberately. When I once asked her who had done this to her, she burst into tears. It was the only time she cried. For the rest of the time, Kusum's smile would invariably reach her eyes. When she died at the age of 18, the sisters cremated her body at the nearby cremation ground.

When I asked Mother Teresa how she and her mission could care for hundreds of thousands of destitute persons, and what made this possible, she explained to me simply but meaningfully. "You can, at best, look after a few loved ones in your family. My sisters and I can look after everyone, because for us they are all God". So, the leprosy-affected man chained by his brothers in a hut, the infant left under a truck and saved just in time from prowling dogs, the woman dumped on a rubbish heap by her own son and left to die because he had now secured her property, were manifestations of her God in suffering.

Perhaps the most succinct summing up of Mother Teresa's life and work was made by the chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, John Sannes. In his speech at the Nobel prize ceremony in Oslo in 1979, he said: "The hallmark of her work has been respect for the individual and the individual's worth and dignity. The loneliest and the most wretched, the dying destitute, the abandoned lepers have all been received by her and her sisters with warm compassion, devoid of condescension, based on her reverence for Christ in man... This is the life of Mother Teresa and her sisters — a life of strict poverty and long days and nights of toil, a life that affords little room for other joys but the most precious."

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India



SUMANA ROY

LET US now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us ... (Ecclesiasticus 44:1)

"Are you a distinguished person?" I ask my friend in a text message. "Very," he replies, prompter than usual. "How did you become distinguished?" I ask, not giving up on my research. "I made an application," he says.

My question to him wasn't a joke. It came on the heels of a discussion I'd just had at home. My husband, an academic, had been looking for an appropriate title for the lectures he wanted to organise in his department. I'd offered my suggestions, some of which had been taken, but there was one word that I kept protesting against. "Distinguished" — "Distinguished Lecture Series".

"Why do you need to call something or someone distinguished?" I asked.

His answer was simple: "Otherwise people wouldn't know that it is".

"Let people decide whether it is distinguished or not ..." I gave up after some time.

"Distinguished" is only one of the many words that belong to the genre of image-building in the world of arts and letters. To many of us it might seem like putting the cart before the horse, for a word like that is meant to force obedience — we've been told that it is distinguished, and there is no space allowed for disagreement. This is how consensus is built, but, more importantly, this is how fake news is created. The whisper network has the butterfly effect, but the whisper begins from one person. Quite often, particularly in our times, the whisper about greatness begins

from the person whose greatness is about to be proclaimed.

The mode of operation is similar to that of a ponzi scheme (I'm also thinking of the stunt that entrepreneur Elizabeth Holmes was able to pull off for years). Like the non-existent company that investors trust their money with, adjectives are conjured to create reputations. It is, of course, a scam. But we are its willing collaborators. One only needs to look at the bios of writers and academics to see its operation. People calling themselves "eminent" in their bios is a sad commentary on the culture of self-advertisement that is necessary for survival, or "eminence".

"Prestigious" is a word used for forums, but now, like a transferred epithet, also for people. Since it is hard to call oneself a prestigious person, particularly because the sophisticated society I am talking about wouldn't ever be caught saying "Pata hai mera baap kaun hai?", we call our endorsers prestigious. This is our way of endorsing those who endorse us, so that their endorsement of us is magnified.

"Famous", "great", "well-known", "eminent", "excellence", "esteemed", "legendary", "magisterial", "much-travelled", "award-winning" — these are some of the stocks; there are the other more common ones: brilliant, unique, original, and, increasingly, "a classic". This is the moment when I, in spite of my unease with such dictums, think of the MFA instructor's phrase: "Arrey baba, show, don't tell". King, Emperor, Raja, Sultan, Ustad, Pandit,

Gurudev — these were once the words designating a special status. In our new economy, the markers of fame have moved from nouns to adjectives. Once upon a time, one could be just a noun: "Professor". That isn't enough anymore. The adjectives must be worn like an army man wears their decorations.

There's a bullying economy in those adjectives, and the sound of the siren that announces the arrival of automobiles with red lights, not very different from Bond's use of the proper noun: the name is Bond, James Bond. The self-advertisement and self-congratulatory manner have been forced on us. A couple of weeks ago, while looking up a book online, I found an anthologist's bio that made me pause to check whether I had read it right: They had been called "the most respected anthologist in the country". Surely there had been a competition among anthologists whose news hadn't reached me.

There's a tragicomedy happening in our culture. We are praising ourselves because no one else is praising us. This is only part of the DIY culture that is essential for survival now. We are frantically arranging adjectives like one assembling a piece of IKEA furniture — the result must be as functional. That is the status of fame in our culture — its necessary functionality translating into axiom, like the United States of America calling itself the "greatest country in the world". First self-belief, in these words, only then will the world outside us believe us.

When I wrote about what we call "liter-

ary" as being Brahminical ("Read, without the sacred thread", IE, December 19, 2020), there was a sense of anger in a certain group of people. Needless to say, they had been beneficiaries of how the "system" operates. Like the surname that indicates our caste, the words that announce or trail our names are like our surnames — perhaps this explains why Indians, when using the English language, have often conflated "title" and "surname". Some of these new surnames are names and surnames of other people, often dead: Nobel, Fulbright, Charles Wallace, Windham-Campbell; or Booker and Chevening; or Oxford, Harvard, Rome; or New Yorker, Granta, The Paris Review, and so on. As if all of this weren't enough, we also have those who claim Adam-like status: "was the first to be awarded the (some award or fellowship) ..." and places which advertise themselves as "one of the greatest institutions in India".

One must find fame somehow, and the easiest way to do so seems to be contagion: To be touched by the famous, their versions of gurukul, their gharana, their endorsements, deriving pedigree from them like people once used to by virtue of birth and the wealth of connections that brought. As I see the fame toolkit in operation everywhere, I sometimes think of Mark Antony's words in Julius Caesar, and how he might have substituted "honourable" with famous today: "And... is a famous man".

Roy is a poet and author

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUST BALANCE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'In people we must trust' (IE, January 13). A fresh perspective has been given by the author when he points out how we have started trusting the product or service rather than the person responsible. While it may seem ironical, on a little exploration, the statement is factual. The question remains: Which society will work better? A society that trusts functions and operations or one that trusts the functionary and operator? I believe it is a combination of the two. For instance, I trust a person (elected representative), he formulates the process (enactment of law), the process in turn "entrusts" a specific duty to another person (delegation of function by enacted law). As such, we must trust in both people and processes.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

ALLAY FEARS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Network issues" (IE, January 12). The government's offer of providing equity (against its policy of getting out of business) to Vodafone-Idea, the third-largest telco, speaks of its good intentions to revive it. However, its style and governance of public sector undertakings have created doubts about the effectiveness of the gesture. To allay the fears of investors, it should appoint a corporate leader of high repute on the board of directors instead of a politician or a bureaucrat.

Y G Chouksey, Pune

PETTY ISSUES

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'All shops & establishments to display signboards in Marathi' (IE, January 13). Amidst the big-time politics in poll-bound states like UP and Goa, we have petty issues being raised in Maharashtra. All signboards should be displayed in Marathi and the font should be bolder than those displayed in other languages. Is this a burning issue today in the state? Is it a matter of life and death? According to the government's assessment, the situation on account of the pandemic is quite grim. Yet, they find the time to devote to such mundane matters as signboards. Oh, but then how can one forget the forthcoming civic elections in Mumbai!

Melville X D'Souza, Mumbai

BJP'S TURN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Twist in UP plot' (IE, January 13). Hitherto, the Congress has been the most affected by resignations and defections of senior leaders. Now it is the BJP's turn. In UP, it received a severe blow from the resignation of senior ministers and MLAs, including a powerful OBC leader. One thing that has become clear from this development is that people, especially in UP, are eagerly looking for a change as they have become fed up with BJP's divisive and communal-hatred policies. They want a government that cares for the people's welfare and not one that cares about its own agenda.

SS Paul, Nadiya

12 DECISION 2022



UTTAR PRADESH • UTTARAKHAND • PUNJAB • GOA • MANIPUR

19 out of 29 for RLD in west UP in alliance's first list

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 13

THE SAMAJWADI Party-Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance on Thursday announced its first set of 29 candidates for seats in western Uttar Pradesh in the upcoming Vidhan Sabha elections in the state. Out of the 29, the RLD will contest in 19 seats and the SP in 10.

The seats for which the alliance announced candidates are in Shamli, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Agra, Bijnor, Baghpat, Hapur, Gautam Budh Nagar, Bulandshahr and Mathura districts. Tickets have been announced for seats going to polls in the first, second and third phases.

The notification for the first phase nomination will be on January 14, and polling will take place on February 10. In the second phase, the notification will be issued on January 21, and polling will be on February 14. For third phase, the notification will be done on January 25, and polling will be held on February 20.

Of the 29 candidates announced on Thursday, Babita Devi, who will contest from Baldev constituency for the RLD, is the only woman. Agra Rural, Agra Cantt, Baldev, Khair, Purqazi

and Hapur are reserved seats for candidates from the Scheduled Castes (SC).

Among leaders who joined the alliance from other parties whose candidature was announced are former BJP MLA from Meerapur and four-time MP, Avtar Singh Bhadana, who had joined the RLD on Wednesday. He has been fielded on an RLD ticket from Jewar in Gautam Budh Nagar. Four-time MLA Gajraj Singh, who joined RLD from Congress on Thursday, has been fielded on an RLD ticket from Hapur.

Pankaj Malik, who has been fielded from Charthawal (Muzaffarnagar), is a former Congress MLA from Shamli who had joined the SP recently along with father and senior Congress leader Harendra Malik.

Haji Yunus, who had joined the RLD in December from the BSP, has been fielded from Bulandshahr Sadar seat. Yunus's convoy was attacked in Bulandshahr, a day after he joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal. One person was killed in the attack while four others were hospitalised. Police had said Yunus has accused his nephew Anas Alim of being behind the attack. Yunus, the former block pramukh from Sadar, is the brother of former BSP MLA Haji Alim, who was murdered in 2018.



Akhilesh Yadav and Jayant Chaudhary during a joint rally in Meerut. *Twitter/samajwadiparty*

HASHTAG POLITICS



Two Modi photos to make a statement

Amid the exit of OBC leaders from its fold, UP BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh (@swatantrabjp)

posted two pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, showing him washing the feet of a woman and showering flower petals on workers involved in the construction of the Kashi corridor. The caption read, "The poor, Dalits and the marginalised reside in the heart of the honourable PM. Exploited by the opposition, honourable Modi ji has embraced them as his own, honoured and empowered them".

6K LIKES, 1.2K RETWEETS IN 10 HOURS

Twitter announces initiatives, Koo adopts 'code of ethics'

Microblogging platforms Twitter and Koo announced new initiatives ahead of the elections. Twitter's efforts will include a dedicated search prompt with hashtag #AssemblyElections2022 for updates from the Election Commission and other sources. Rival platform Koo announced the adoption of a "voluntary code of ethics" for fair and ethical use of social media during polls, originally created by the Internet and Mobile Association of India for the 2019 general elections.

Congress candidates for UP polls

The Congress included 50 women in its list of 125 candidates for the UP polls. In a 346-minute long video released by the party on social media, some of the candidates introduced themselves, recalling the atrocities faced by them.

291 LIKES, 145 RETWEETS IN 9 HOURS

BALLOTIN

Punjab CM Channi recites verse to wish PM Modi long life

New Delhi: Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday expressed regret to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the breach in his security during a visit to the state and recited a verse to extend his wishes for a long life to him, sources said. Channi used the occasion of Modi's video interaction with chief ministers over the Covid-19 situation to convey the message to him. He regrets whatever happened during his visit to Punjab, Channi told Modi. "Tum salamat raho qayamat tak, aur khuda kare qayamat na ho," he said in Hindi, reciting the verse to express his wishes for a long life to him. **PTI**

WOMEN VOTERS IN U.P.

Marathons to freebies: every party wants the woman vote

Among reasons: Rise in number of women voters, polling percentages, social changes



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed an all-woman gathering of self-help groups in Prayagraj in December. *PTI*

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 13

LAST MONTH, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed an all-woman gathering of self-help groups in Prayagraj. The Congress, led by general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, has based its entire campaign on women. The Samajwadi Party and the BSP are doing all they can to impress women voters. The Jat-dominated RLD isn't far behind, promising reservation in jobs for women.

In Uttar Pradesh, a state where caste and religion usually blur all other considerations during polls, this season, political parties are tripping over each other to get women voters behind them.

Data show that over the last few elections, women voters — or "aadhi abadi", as political parties have been referring to the demographic that makes up 46.5 per cent of the state's voters — have risen not only numerically, but there has been a steady rise in the numbers coming out to vote and those ending up on the winning side, making them a significant target group for all political parties.

Increasing numbers

On January 8, when Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra declared the polls, he informed that the number of voters in Uttar Pradesh is now about 15 crore, of which women voters account for almost 6.98 crore and men about 8 crore. He said that of

2017 UP ELECTION

NO OF VOTERS
14.16 crore
Men 7.7 cr
Women 6.46 cr

VOTING PERCENTAGE
Men 59.15%
Women 63.31%
4.5 cr voters
4.1 cr voters

NO. OF CANDIDATES
Total 4,370
WOMEN: 482,
OF WHOM 42 WON

the five states headed to the polls, Uttar Pradesh has witnessed the maximum rise in the number of women voters — an addition of almost 52 lakh women voters since the last election. In 2017, of the total 14.16 voters, 6.46 crore were women and 7.7 crore men.

More coming out to vote

In 2017, 63.31 per cent or 4.5 crore women voters came out to vote in the state as against about 59 per cent or 4.5 crore of the male voters.

This number has been going up steadily.

In the 2012 Assembly polls, when Uttar Pradesh had 12.74 crore electors — 7 crore men and 5.7 crore women — the polling percentage among women stood at 60 per cent (4.12 crore) as



The Congress, led by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, has held a number of events focused on women in Uttar Pradesh. *PTI*

against 58.68 per cent for men.

This was again higher than in 2007, when the BSP formed the government. Of the 5 crore women voters, just about 42 per cent or 2.1 crore, came out to vote as opposed to 49.53 per cent among men.

More winners

In 2017, when the BJP came to power, the state got 42 women legislators in the 403-member Assembly. 482 women contested that year. In 2012, 35 women were elected to the Assembly from among the 583 women who contested. In 2007, only 23 women MLAs were elected from among 370 women in the fray.

The ruling BJP is doing its best to ensure women voters, who are said to have voted for the party in big numbers in the previous election, stay on.

The party has entrusted Geeta Shukla, Rajya Sabha member and its mahila morchha chief, to run an online campaign focused on 'Kyon Uttar Pradesh ki mahilaen kehni hain ki Yogi sarkar jaroni hai? (Why UP's women say Yogi government is needed?)'. As part of the campaign, party leaders have been asked to talk about the women-centric schemes of the state and Central governments.

The Congress, arguably the weakest pole this election, has, however, managed some attention for its campaign that's based entirely on women, with its marathons for girls ending up as a big draw. The party, which started off with a promise to set aside 40

per cent poll tickets for women, on Thursday announced 50 women candidates as part of its first list. The party has also come out with a special manifesto promising reservation in jobs, free bus services, free electric scooters as well as smartphones for women.

"The political narrative is changing. Women's empowerment is no longer about toilets or free cylinders but about financial and social independence...," said Congress leader Supriya Shrinete, who has been travelling with Priyanka as part of the 'Ladki hoon, Lad sakti hoon' campaign.

The Samajwadi Party has also come up with a host of measures focused on women. Apart from talking about 1090, the women's helpline launched by the party during its previous term, and other schemes such as the Samajwadi pension for women and financial assistance for women sportspersons, the party has coined the slogan, "Uttar Pradesh ki nari, Bhajapa par paregi bhar", to allege that women have had to face hardships during the BJP government.

The BSP, meanwhile, has been talking about how it's the only party to have had a woman CM in the past and how it's a strong votary of the 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the state Assembly.

In its manifesto, SP ally RLD has announced reservation for women in government jobs and promised that those with record of crimes against women would be denied tickets.

Women candidates for Cong in UP: From Unnao rape victim's mother to TV anchor

MAULSHREE SETH,
AMIL BHATNAGAR & AMIT SHARMA
LUCKNOW, NEW DELHI, MEERUT, JANUARY 13



Sadaf Jafar and Pankhuri Pathak are among Congress's candidates for UP

THE CONGRESS party Thursday announced its first list of 125 candidates for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. As promised by Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the run-up to the elections, the party has fielded 40 per cent women candidates — numbering 50 nominees in this list, most of whom would be first-time poll contenders. Here are some of them:

Asha Singh, Unnao seat

She is the mother of Unnao rape victim. In the horrific Unnao case, ex-BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar was convicted for rape and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Sengar was also convicted in the death of the victim's father. Asha used to barely step out of her home before the 2017 incident and knew little about the outside world. She lived in fear after the incident amid constant threats, fearing for the lives of her daughter and other family members. But, now she says the fight for justice for her daughter has changed her life. She says she is ready to fight the election from the Unnao seat to step up her campaign for justice.

Poonam Pandey, Shahjahanpur seat

Poonam Pandey is an Asha worker. While demanding an increase in their honorarium last year, Poonam along with other Asha workers were allegedly roughed up by police while they were marching towards Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's residence in Lucknow. A video of the incident had then gone viral. Later, Poonam, who had marks of injury on her face and a plastered right hand, along with other Asha workers met Priyanka Gandhi. The Congress has now fielded her from the Shahjahanpur constituency.

Sadaf Jafar, Lucknow Central seat

An actor-turned-activist, Sadaf Jafar was arrested on December 19, 2019 in Lucknow while she was

doing a live Facebook session during a protest against the CAA-NRC. She was booked on the charges of attempt to murder, rioting, criminal conspiracy, assault on public servant, etc. She was also among activists whose posters were put up at prominent crossings across Lucknow by the UP government, which described them as "rioters". She had also received the government's recovery notice asking her to pay for the damage of property during the protests that had become violent. After being declared as the Congress's candidate from the Lucknow Central constituency, Jafar said the government's crackdown could not succeed in "scaring" activists like her.

Pankhuri Pathak, Gautam Buddh Nagar

Hailing from Uttarakhand, Pankhuri grew up in Delhi. Her parents are doctors. As a student of Delhi University, Pankhuri was joint secretary in DU's Hansraj College. She later joined the Samajwadi Party and worked for its youth outfit. In 2016, she became the party's first woman spokesperson, but early 2019, following differences with other party members, she quit to join the Congress. Her husband, Anil Yadav, also a former SP spokesperson, too resigned last year and joined the Congress. Pankhuri is currently vice chairperson of the Congress's UP Media Department.

Nida Ahmad, Sambhal

Born to a Sambhal family associated with the Congress, the 36-year-old Nida Ahmad began working as a journalist in Delhi nearly 12 years ago. A TV anchor, Nida has been part of the Aaj Tak Group, Zee Media, News India 24x7, among others. Earlier this week, she joined the Congress.

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Punjab: Rift in farmers' outfits over seat sharing

SUKHBIR SIWACH
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 13

THE ALLIANCE talks between Gurnam Singh Chaduni's Samyukt Sangharsh Party (SSP) and Balbir Singh Rajewal's political outfit Sanyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM) for the Punjab Assembly election seem headed for collapse over sharing seats. Chaduni, who had demanded 25 seats for his outfit, claims the SSM is offering only nine his outfit and all other farmers and workers' outfits associated with it.

"They are offering us only nine seats. I asked Rajewal ji to give us at least 25 seats. Either they give us our due share, or we will be forced to field our candidates separately," said Chaduni.

The SSM had earlier formed a committee for deciding on the seat-sharing arrangement with the SSP. On January 9, Chaduni had held talks with the SSM for the poll pact and after that, he stopped the scheduled announcement of his party's 10 candidates for the February 14 polls.

In a video message, Chaduni, who is the chief of the Haryana unit of BKKU, said he had demanded 25 seats but SSM, starting with five seats, sought to offer only nine seats to all outfits associated with SSP, which include Sanjha Sunehra Punjab, Punjab Kisan Dal, United Republic Party, Taxi union Punjab and Bharti Republic Party.

Chaduni said: "We have been preparing for the polls for the past six months. We have candidates for 40-50 seats. They (Rajewal faction) have been ignoring (us) since formation of SSM while we want to contest the elections unitedly."

Fate of projects PM was to flag off in Punjab now uncertain

RAAKHI JAGGA
LUDHIANA, JANUARY 13

ON JANUARY 5, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to lay the foundation stones of projects worth Rs 42,750 crore in Punjab, but following a breach in his security, the PM had to cancel his engagements and return to Delhi. Now, with the model code of conduct in place till a new government takes over and with a row raging between the Centre and the state government over the security breach, the fate of these projects, many of which were announced earlier and were stuck, is up in the air all over again pending the inauguration.

While the PM was to physically lay the foundation stone of the Rs 490-crore PGI satellite centre at Ferozepur, the remaining projects were to be inaugurated virtually from Ferozepur.

The *Indian Express* examined these projects and found that all of them were either in the stage of tender allotment or land acquisition, though civil works were yet to begin. While the PGI satellite centre and two upcoming medical colleges — in Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala — are to be funded by

VOTING ON FEBRUARY 14

the Centre and state government in a 60:40 ratio, the remaining projects are Centrally funded.

The biggest of these projects is the 669-km-long Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway worth Rs 39,500 crore. The longest stretch of this expressway will pass through Punjab. The highway, once ready, is expected to reduce travel time between Amritsar and Delhi to six-and-a-half hours from the present eight hours that the Vande Bharat train takes.

R P Singh, National Highway Authority of India Manager for North region, said, "For DAK expressway, work has been awarded for all the 10 slots, but civil work is yet to commence."

Another project the PM was to inaugurate is the four-laning of the 77-km-long Amritsar-Una highway at a cost of Rs 1,700 crore. NHAI had called for bids for this project in February 2019. Here too, work was yet to start.

RP Singh said, "Work has been awarded for two packages of the Amritsar-Ghoman-Tanda expressway. The civil work is yet to start." Construction of a 27-km rail-

way line from Mukerian to Talwara in Hoshiarpur district is another of the projects waiting for a formal inauguration. Hoshiarpur Deputy Commissioner Apneet Riyat said, "Land acquisition for this project is going on and work is in progress."

O P Soni, deputy CM Punjab, said the projects for which the PM was to lay the foundation stones had all been announced earlier. "Yes, these had already been announced by the Central government and are not brand new. However, so far we have not been conveyed anything on these projects. Moreover, the model code of conduct is in place in Punjab now and whatever has to happen will happen after the polls."

Anil Sarin, chief spokesperson of the BJP's Punjab unit, said, "It's true the projects were announced at one or the other. But if the foundation laying ceremony had taken place, civil work would have started irrespective of the code of conduct... But due to the Congress's petty politics, the people of Punjab have been deprived of the benefits of these projects. The projects have been delayed, but they will be completed for sure as the PM is committed to the development of Punjab."

Goa: Staking claim on Parrikar legacy, son eyes BJP ticket

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, JANUARY 13

FOR MONTHS ahead of the February 14 Goa Assembly elections, Utpal Parrikar has been waiting for the BJP to green-light his entry into the electoral arena.

The son of former defence minister and three-time Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar, Utpal has staked his claim to a BJP ticket for the elections from Goa's capital Panaji — the constituency from where his late father was elected five times since 1995.

For the ruling BJP, conceding Utpal's demand will be a tough call given the claims of other formidable party aspirants for the Panaji seat.

This was reflected when the BJP's Goa in-charge and ex-Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis said Wednesday that the BJP does not give election tickets to candidates just because they are party leaders' children.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Utpal said he did not want to comment on the statement made by Fadnavis, who, he



Utpal Parrikar. *Mayura Janwalkar*

VOTING ON FEBRUARY 14

pointed out, is a senior BJP leader. "If I wanted a ticket only as Parrikar's son, I would have insisted on that the last time (2019) when it was denied to me through the back door. Since 1994, a lot many BJP workers have toiled with my father. And if you see on the ground, they are now toiling with me," said Utpal.

He said after completing his door-to-door canvassing on Wednesday, "I am unable to tolerate the level of degradation of the value system in Goan politics. And hence, I am asking for a ticket because it is always better to work from within."

13 ECONOMY

SENSEX: 61,235.30 ▲ 85.26 (0.14%) NIFTY: 18,257.80 ▲ 45.45 (0.25%) NIKKEI: 28,489.13 ▼ 276.53 HANG SENG: 24,429.77 ▲ 27.60 FTSE: 7,545.99 ▼ 5.73 DAX: 16,011.53 ▲ 1.21



GOLD

₹46,919



RUPEE

₹73.90



OIL

\$83.28



SILVER

₹60,777

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of January 12

International market data till 1900 IST

SECTOR WATCH
TELECOMMUNICATIONSVi's 35.8% stake
with govt: How will
management workAASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

THE GOVERNMENT clarified recently that it was not interested in holding any board position in any of the three telecom service providers that had opted for the interest-to-equity scheme. Of the three companies, the largest is Vi (formerly Vodafone Idea), which will allocate 35.8 per cent shares to the government on a preferential basis. These shares will be allocated to the government through the Specified Undertaking of the Unit Trust of India, MD & CEO Ravinder Takkar has said.

How will Vi's arrangement
on the interest-to-equity
scheme with the
government work?

Vi, which is reeling under debt in excess of Rs 2 lakh crore, will offer these shares on a preferential basis to the government. It will be a non-cash transaction, where in the debt that was owed to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will simply be turned into equity.

At a virtual press conference Wednesday, Takkar said the company had opted to convert the interest on all deferred payments to equity as it gave the company a chance to clean its books. Since Vi had a significant amount of debt as well as a stretched balance-sheet, this interest-to-equity scheme would give it a chance to put aside more funds for investing in newer tech.

How does this ensure that
Vi will not be a government
run company now?

After the completion of the deal, the government will become the single largest stakeholder with 35.8 per cent stake, and the current promoters — Vodafone Group and Aditya Birla Group — will see their holding reduce to 28.5

Vi, which is reeling
under debt in excess
of Rs 2 lakh crore, will
offer these shares on
a preferential basis to
the government

per cent and 17.8 per cent, respectively. This, however, will not mean a change in board positions. By another resolution, the current promoters have also agreed to amend the shareholder agreement and have brought down the minimum qualifying shareholding threshold from 21 per cent to 13 per cent. This means that both Vodafone Group and Aditya Birla Group will continue to hold rights to make important decisions about the company, such as appointment of directors and other key officials, among others. On the other hand, the government has also clarified that it would not take any board seats or appoint any executives to the board of Vi.

Will it be easy for Vi to
survive the competitive
telecommunications
market now?

Since a large part of the debt Vi owed to the government has been converted to equity and handed back over to the DoT itself, Vi will have much cleaner books now. This, in turn, will make it easier for the company to raise funds from global as well as domestic investors. That the government is now also the single largest shareholder will enhance Vi's chances of raising funds. That said, most experts and analysts believe the company will have to look for avenues to raise its average revenue per user from Rs 109 to around Rs 300 per user to be able to sustain in the long run.

Full report on
www.indianexpress.com

FRESH BUOYANCY SEEN IN DIRECT, INDIRECT TAX COLLECTIONS

Privatisation can kicked down
the road, push in health & PLIBUILD UP TO
BUDGET
2022-23SUNNY VERMA &
AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

AMONG THE key reforms unveiled in Budget 2021-22, the privatisation of two state-owned banks and downstream oil major BPCL is now expected to stretch into next year, even as the Centre is fighting against time to bring in Life Insurance Corporation's IPO before this quarter is over. Depending upon the size of the offering, LIC's IPO could help the Centre partly meet its Rs 1.75-lakh-crore FY22 disinvestment target, of which only around 5.3 per cent, or Rs 9,329.90 crore, has been raised so far, as per official data.

While the enabling framework for privatisation of one of the four general insurance companies — a key Budget announcement —

has been wrapped up, with amendments to the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act being cleared in the monsoon session of Parliament, the insurer targeted for the stake sale is yet to be finalised. Market participants expect the pending IDBI Bank stake sale to face delays. The progress on a set of other proposals presents a mixed bag.

Framed in the backdrop of a record contraction last year, Budget 2021-22 aimed to "support and facilitate the economy's reset" to ensure sustainable growth. Privatisation and asset monetisation were the key components of this planned economic reset. While the government could sell Air India to Tata group and bring out a National Monetisation Pipeline, the privatisation of state-owned banks is yet to gain momentum.

The Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 "regarding privatisation of two Public Sector Banks" was listed for introduction in the just concluded winter session of Parliament. But it was not taken up by the Cabinet despite a draft being ready, an official said. Bank unions' opposition to privatisation, the Centre's pullback on the farm laws and the upcoming Assembly elections are said to have been factors behind the delay.

Other companies in line for privatisation include Shipping Corporation of India, BEMIL, Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited, Contai-



Life Insurance Corporation office, Mumbai. The insurer's initial public offering is in the works. File

ner Corporation of India and Pawan Hans. The government had also proposed setting up a National Faceless Income Tax Appellate Tribunal with complete electronic communication, which is yet to be set up. As private investment and consumption nosedived in the wake of the pandemic, government capital spending has been enhanced. But its pace has been slower than what the Budget had targeted. During April-November, the government has incurred 49.4 per cent or Rs 2.73 lakh crore of its total budget target of capex.

The Union Budget 2021-22 had provided a capital outlay of Rs 5.54 lakh crore — a jump of 34.5 per cent over 2020-21 Budget Estimates. The government had also made provision of over Rs 2 lakh crore for states and autonomous bodies towards their capital expenditure. Officials argued that capex spending would come close to the target due to lumpy expenditure in the last quarter.

Behind the less-than-anticipated capex is the delay in stake sales and the second and now the third Covid wave affecting project execution. Besides privatisation, asset monetisation is the other leg of the "economic reset" and the government has put out a four year National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) worth an estimated Rs 6 lakh crore.

Full report on
www.indianexpress.com

On the taxation front, the government had proposed making some changes in the faceless assessment scheme. Over the year, it has been easing norms for taxpayers wanting a personal hearing

health sector: spending for better healthcare infrastructure, production-linked incentive schemes and mega parks for investment in textile sectors. The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development and the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd have been set up.

Among other financial sector proposals, deposit insurance cover has been raised to Rs 5 lakh per account from Rs 1 lakh earlier while foreign direct investment (FDI) cap has been raised to 74 per cent from 49 per cent as proposed in the Budget. A pre-pack insolvency resolution framework has also been introduced for the MSMEs. Queries sent by *The Indian Express* to the Finance Ministry went unanswered.

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Adani, POSCO
to set up steel
mill in MundraEXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AHMEDABAD, JANUARY 13

THE ADANI Group and South Korean firm POSCO signed a 'non-binding memorandum of understanding' for setting up a "green, environment-friendly integrated steel mill" in Mundra, Gujarat. The project entails an investment of \$5 billion, said a release Thursday.

The collaboration includes evaluating a joint integrated steel mill in Mundra, based on POSCO's technology and R&D capability. POSCO and Adani intend to utilise renewable energy resources and green hydrogen, in line with both partners' ESG commitments to sustainability and energy efficiency, said the release. The pact intends to collaborate at the group business level in various industries like renewable energy, hydrogen, and logistics in response to carbon reduction requirements.

Rajya Sabha
MP asks FM to
stop CEL sale

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament John Brittas has written to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asking her to stop the sale of Central Electronics Limited (CEL), alleging that the central public sector unit was being sold to a private organisation which neither had the competence in the field, nor the managerial or technological expertise.

In his letter to both Sitharaman and Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Science and Technology & Earth Sciences, Brittas said CEL has assets that far outvalue the amount for which it is being sold to Nandal Finance and Leasing. "Today's market value of the 50-acre land CEL possesses in the National Capital Region (CEL's Annual Report for 2019-20) in itself exceeds Rs 500 crores. Even if any of its assets are on lease basis, its value for the remaining unexpired tenure of lease may fetch several hundreds of crores."

"There are allegations that as per the financial statements filed by Nandal Finance and Leasing Pvt Ltd in 2019-20, 99.96% of its equity were said to be held by M/s Premier Furnitures and Interiors Pvt Limited which has no link to the business of CEL. If this be true, we cannot dismiss the allegations that the Government is proposing to sell a strategic PSU, having ramifications in the defence sector also, indirectly to a furniture company," Brittas said in his letter. **ENS**

India, UK kick off FTA talks,
will avoid 'sensitive issues'ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

LOOKING TO double the trade between India and the United Kingdom (UK) by 2030, the countries launched formal free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations on Thursday, which they hope to conclude by the end of the year.

Bilateral trade between the countries is worth about \$50 billion per year. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said both countries had agreed to avoid "sensitive issues" and focus on areas where there is more complementarity. The agriculture and dairy sectors are considered sensitive sectors for India in trade talks. Goyal and UK Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan said the countries will also look at concluding an interim or early harvest trade agreement over the next few months. He said a trade deal with the UK could boost exports for large job creating sectors such as textiles, leather goods, and footwear.

"Through our commitment to a new and transformational comprehensive strategic partnership, and the 2030 roadmap for future UK India relations, we aim to double trade between our countries by the end of this decade," Trevelyan said. When asked if there were any key issues that India felt were necessary for a trade deal to materialise, he said, "Nothing is necessarily a deal-breaker in this agreement." Goyal



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan launch negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement on Thursday. PTI

added relaxation of visa restrictions, which has been a key issue for India to boost services trade, was not a "a pressing or an overriding demand" and that neither side had any demands that were deal breakers or considered to be "a must" for an agreement.

Commerce Secretary B V R Subrahmanyam said the two countries would aim to conclude an early harvest trade agreement by Easter. "I would say in the interim (agreement), we'll reach about 60-65 per cent of coverage for goods. By the time we reach the final agreement, we will look at 90 plus percentage coverage of goods," he said, adding the interim agreement would also likely deal with trade in 50-60 services of a total of 160.

Subrahmanyam noted that even though the UK imposed

small tariffs on most goods, it made a major difference to the competitiveness of a number of Indian products including textiles.

Interim agreements, which reduce tariffs on some products, can however in some cases lead to significant delays in achieving comprehensive FTAs. India, in 2004, signed an interim trade agreement with Thailand to reduce tariffs on 84 goods, but the agreement was never converted to a full-fledged FTA.

Early harvest agreements that do not graduate into full FTAs can also face challenges from other countries at the World Trade Organization as WTO rules only permit members to give preferential terms to other countries if they have bilateral agreements that cover "substantially all the trade" between them.

Working through
challenges with
govt, says Musk

New Delhi: Tesla is "still working through a lot of challenges with the government" in India, chief executive Elon Musk said on Twitter on Thursday, responding to a question on when it would launch its electric cars in the country.

Musk didn't identify the "challenges" being worked on in his Twitter post.

Tesla had plans to begin selling imported cars in India last year and has been pitching the government to slash import taxes on electric vehicles (EVs) before it enters the market. The Indian market for premium EVs is still in its infancy and charging infrastructure is scarce. **REUTERS**

BRIEFLY
SBI fundraise

Mumbai: State Bank of India raised \$300 million (around Rs 2,220 crore) of Regulation S Formosa bonds at a coupon rate of 2.49 per cent. **ENS**

Yezdi relaunch

New Delhi: Classic Legends re-launched Yezdi, with roll out of 3 models, between Rs 1.98 lakh and Rs 2.09 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi). **PTI**

Braithwaite & Co

New Delhi: State-run Braithwaite & Co Ltd was granted 'Miniratna' status by Railway Ministry. It plans to be a listed company by FY26. **ENS**

Sandberg, industry leaders at ExpressAWE today

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

WITH THE economy in general malaise and most lives upended by the pandemic, the times have been the toughest for women in workplaces. It is with good reason, therefore, that *Financial Express* chose to institute ExpressAWE — Awards for Women Entrepreneurs.

Put together, in its inaugural year in partnership with FICCI FLO and with Ernst & Young as knowledge partners, ExpressAWE is to recognise the grit and perseverance of those inspiring women entrepreneurs who not only held their ground but also forged ahead and created an impact in their respective domains. All of it is to unfold on Friday when the winners will be announced across these categories — e-commerce, technology, social impact, education & skill



development, health & wellness, media & entertainment, fashion & lifestyle, food & beverages, travel & hospitality. Apart from these, there are the FICCI-FLO excellence award and special awards for lifetime

achievement, newsmaker of the year and the Legacy spin-off.

But what makes the Friday evening function a not-to-miss treat is the thought sharing and insightful discussions that are to unfold with iconic global and Indian business leaders. The evening is to begin with Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Meta, in conversation with Anant Goenka, executive director, The Indian Express Group. This will be followed by discussion on what is enabling and hindering the Power of Her by Indian industry veterans and the grand jury members who chose the winners in the organisation/established business category. They are: Deepak Parekh,



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₹5.9L cr Gujarat
investment: RIL
eyes green pushENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI/AHMEDABAD, JAN 13

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES Ltd (RIL) on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Gujarat government to invest Rs 5.95 lakh crore as part of investment promotion activity for Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2022. These projects will create 10 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities in the state, RIL said.

"To make Gujarat net zero and carbon free, RIL proposes to invest Rs 5 lakh crore in the state over the span of 10 to 15 years to set up 100 GW renewable energy power plant and green hydrogen ecosystem development," an RIL release said. It added the company will develop an eco-system for assisting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and encourage entrepreneurs to embrace new technologies and innovations leading to captive use of renewable energy and green hydrogen.

RIL has started scouting land for a 100-GW renewable energy power project in Kutch, Banaskantha and Dholera in consultation with the state, and has requested for 4.5 lakh acres of land in Kutch.

RIL will invest Rs 60,000 crore in setting up new energy manufacturing-integrated renewable manufacturing: solar PV module (manufacture of polysilicon, wafer, cell and module), electrolyzer, energy-storage battery and fuel cells. Rs 25,000 crore will be invested in existing projects and new ventures over the next 3-5 years. RIL also proposed investing Rs 7,500 crore in 3-5 years to upgrade Jio Network to 5G and Rs 3,000 crore in Reliance Retail.

'Auto parts industry revenue
growth to fall to 15-17%

Amid Omicron, chip shortage and low demand, Icra cut auto components sector's FY22 revenue growth forecast to 15-17%



Domestic aftermarket demand is expected to grow 8-10% in FY22

DRIVING FACTORS FOR GROWTH OF INDUSTRY

- Domestic OEM
- Export volumes
- Pass-through of commodity prices

Domestic original equipment sub-segments are expected to register healthy volume growth

Exports remain bright spot, with an estimated growth of over 20% this fiscal

Healthy volume growth would come on a low base of FY21, with a downward bias to the estimates in case of prolonged lockdowns or demand slowdown

Source: Icra/PTI

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : Re T No.66&67/2021-22/SE/Q. Mace. of JICA Assisted KWSS to Meenad and adjoining villages(P1)-O&M of intake well and WTP at Panamkuttimala, Construction of OHSR, laying pumping main and other work in Kareera Panchayath. EMD : Rs. 200000, 500000. Tender fee : Rs. 10000+1800, 15000+2700(18% GST-It will be paid by the contractor on reverse charge basis while filing his returns). Last Date for submitting Tender : 02-02-2022 02:00:pm. Phone : 0474 2745293. Website : www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in
KWA-JB-GL-6-888-2021-22 Superintending Engineer, PH Circle, Kollam

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport Undertaking (Of The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation)

TENDER NOTICE

E-tender is invited for the supply of following item.

(1) 72762 - 4 D Distributor for Midi CNG Buses,

RE-INVITED E-TENDERS

(2) 70983, (3) 71584, (4) 72408, (5) 72253.

Note : For more details, log on to website <https://mahatenders.gov.in>.

PRO/AAM(M)/108/2022 GENERAL MANAGER

NMDC Limited
(A Government of India Enterprise)

'Khanji Bhavan', 10-3-311/A, Castle Hills, Masab Tank, Hyderabad - 500 028.
Corporate Identity Number (CIN) : L13100TG1958GOI001674

PC DEPARTMENT - e-tender Notification

Tender Enquiry No: HO(PC)/DNM/KIOM/HEMM/21MT, Dated : 14-01-2022
MSTC Ref. No. : NMDC/HO/78/21-22/ET/380

NMDC Limited, A "NAVARATNA" Public Sector Company under Ministry of Steel, Govt. of India invites online bids in two bid system from Domestic bidders for "Hiring of Plant & Mining Machineries for excavation of 210 LT (+/- 20% of ROM and 48LT (+/- 20%) of waste / low grade iron ore in three years at the rate of 70LT (+/- 20%) of ROM and 16 LT (+/- 20%) of waste / low grade iron ore per year in KIOM and extendable by one more year with mutual consent" of Kumaraswamy Iron Ore Mine.

The detailed NIT and Bid documents can be viewed and / or downloaded from 14-01-2022, 11:00 Hrs. onwards from following website links ;

- NMDC website - <https://www.nmdc.co.in/nmcdtender/default.aspx>
- Central Public Procurement Portal - <https://www.eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app> and search tender through tender enquiry number.
- MSTC portal - https://www.mstcecommerce.com/eprochome/nmcd/buyer_login.jsp

For further help refer to 'vendor guide' given in MSTC website.

The last date for submission of tender is 15:30 Hrs on 17-02-2022 and the tender will be opened at 16:00 Hours on the same day.

The bidders are requested to submit their bids online through MSTC Limited website. The details of submission of bid through online are given in NIT. The Bidders on regular basis are required to visit the above-mentioned websites for corrigendum / clarifications / time extension / amendments, if any, at a future date.

For further clarifications, undersigned can be contacted :
Executive Director (PC), NMDC Limited, Hyderabad, Tel No. +91-040-23538765, email : hopc@nmdc.co.in

Executive Director (PC)

TOPOF THE
WORLDPakistan PM Imran Khan. *Reuters*

PAKISTAN

Imran to join China Olympics opening event

Islamabad: Prime Minister Imran Khan will be travelling to Beijing next month to attend the opening ceremony of Winter Olympics, bolster the all-weather bilateral ties and seek more investments in various projects under the ambitious CPEC, the Foreign Office said on Thursday. The Beijing Winter Olympics will be held from February 4 to 20, followed by the Paralympics Winter Games from March 4-13, amid a diplomatic boycott by several Western countries over concerns of China's alleged human rights abuses. Khan will also have an interaction with the Chinese leadership to further strengthen strategic cooperative partnership and to exchange views on regional and international issues. **PTI**

UNITED KINGDOM

'Woman Chinese agent active in Parliament'

London: The UK's secret service MI5 has warned members of Parliament that a woman Chinese agent has been active in Parliament, it emerged in the House of Commons on Thursday. Senior Conservative Party MP and outspoken China critic Iain Duncan Smith brought up the issue with reference to a letter sent to Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle by MI5. China has placed sanctions on Smith for speaking up against its treatment of the Uyghur minority in the country's restive Xinjiang. **Uyghur Autonomous Region. PTI**

SRI LANKA

Ex-prisons head gets death penalty

Colombo: A top Sri Lankan court has sentenced to death a former prisons commissioner over the Welikada Prison riot in 2012 which killed at least 27 inmates. The Colombo HC trial on Wednesday found the former superintendent Emil Ranjan Lamahewa guilty and passed the death sentence. The first defendant in the case, the then Inspector of the Police Narcotics Bureau, Neomal Rangajewwa was acquitted from all charges. The case was heard for nearly three years before a three-member bench. **PTI**

US announces 500 million more tests, military help for hospitals

Teams to assist Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio and Rhode Island

THE NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 13

PRESIDENT BIDEN on Thursday stepped up his administration's response to a coronavirus surge driven by the Omicron variant, sending what he said is urgently needed help to overwhelmed hospitals and pledging to provide Americans with free tests and masks as the country enters the pandemic's third year.

Biden said he was directing his staff to purchase an additional 500 million Covid tests for distribution, doubling the government's previous purchase. In addition, the President said he is sending a total of 120 military medical personnel to six states where hospitals have been overrun by cases. And he promised to reveal next week plans to help Americans by providing free, high-quality masks that are better at preventing infection from the virus.

"That will mean a billion tests in total to meet future demand," Biden said. "And we'll continue to work with the retailers and online retailers to increase availability."

But it is unclear when the tests will be available. Biden announced the first batch of 500 million tests just before Christmas, and the first batch from that announcement will not start being delivered until later this month, according to White House officials. Details about how Americans can request those tests, including a government-run test website, are slated to be unveiled on Friday.

The President did not say when the new batch of 500 million tests will be manufactured and ready for distribution. But he said the at-home tests — along with more than 20,000 testing sites around the country — will help to meet the surging demand as people try to continue work, school and social life despite the rapid spread of the virus.

People wait in line for a Covid-19 test at a mobile testing site in Paramount, Calif on Wednesday. *AP*

AstraZeneca says early trial data show third dose helps against Omicron

PUSHKALA ARIPAKA & LUDWIG BURGER
JANUARY 13

ASTRAZENECA said on Thursday that preliminary data from a trial showed that its Covid-19 shot, Vaxzevria, generated an increase in antibodies against the Omicron and other variants when given as a third booster dose.

The increased response, also against the Delta variant, was seen in a blood analysis of people who were previously vaccinated with either Vaxzevria or an mRNA vaccine, the drugmaker said, adding that it would submit this data to regulators worldwide given the urgent need for boosters.

AstraZeneca has developed

the vaccine with researchers from the University of Oxford, and lab studies conducted by the university last month already found a three-dose course of Vaxzevria boosted antibody levels in the blood against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant. The brief statement on Thursday, which did not include specific data, was the first by AstraZeneca on the protective potential of Vaxzevria as a booster shot following a two-shot-course of either an mRNA based vaccine or Vaxzevria. Vaccines based on mRNA technology are made by BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna.

The company said the findings "add to the growing body of evidence supporting Vaxzevria as a third dose booster irrespective of

the primary vaccination schedules tested". The data on Vaxzevria's potential as a booster came from a comparative analysis in a trial testing a redesigned vaccine which uses the vector technology behind Vaxzevria but targeting the now-superseded Beta variant. AstraZeneca is trying to show the Beta-specific vaccine has potential also against other variants and more trial data is expected during the first half of the year.

Separately, Oxford University and AstraZeneca last month started work on a vaccine specifically targeting Omicron though Astra and other vaccine makers in similar development projects have said it was not yet clear whether such an upgrade was needed. **REUTERS**

UK ministers rally around embattled Boris Johnson, for now

JILL LAWLESS
LONDON, JANUARY 13

WITH VARYING degrees of enthusiasm, senior British government ministers on Thursday expressed support for Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson and rejected demands he resign for attending a garden party during the country's first Covid lockdown.

Many other Conservatives held their tongues, waiting to see whether the crisis threatening Johnson's premiership will fade or intensify.

Johnson apologised in the House of Commons on Wednesday for attending a "bring your own booze" party in the garden of the PM's Downing Street office and residence in May 2020. About 100 staff were invited by a senior Prime Ministerial aide to what was billed as a "socially distanced drinks" event.

At the time Britons were banned by law from meeting more than one person outside their households as part of measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Johnson urged people to await the conclusions of an investigation by senior civil servant Sue Gray into several alleged parties by government staff during the pandemic. Gray, a public service veteran with a reputation as a straight-shooter, is expected to report by the end of the month. He was spending Thursday holed up in Downing Street. A planned visit to a coronavirus vaccination center was called off after a family member tested positive for the coronavirus, the Prime Minister's office said. **AP**

GERMAN COURT VERDICT

Ex-Syrian colonel guilty in war crimes trial

THE NEW YORK TIMES
JANUARY 13

A COURT in Germany found a former Syrian security officer guilty on Thursday of crimes against humanity and sentenced him to life in prison. He is the highest-ranking Syrian official to be held accountable for abuses committed by the government during a decade of civil war.

The former officer, Anwar Raslan, was accused of overseeing a detention centre where prosecutors said at least 4,000 people were tortured and nearly 60 were killed.

Prince Andrew's military affiliations returned to queen

London: Buckingham Palace said on Thursday that Prince Andrew's military affiliations and royal patronages have been returned to Queen Elizabeth II with her "approval and agreement."

The palace statement came after more than 150 navy and army veterans wrote to the queen asking her to strip Andrew of all his military ranks and titles amid continued legal

EXPLAINED
UN hails judgment

THE UN called the verdict a landmark leap forward in the pursuit of truth, justice and reparations for the serious human rights violations perpetrated in Syria over more than a decade.

The verdict marks a watershed moment for an international network of lawyers, human rights activists and Syrian

war survivors who have struggled for years to bring officials who sanctioned or participated in the violence to justice.

Through nearly 11 years of civil war, the Syrian government bombed residential neighbourhoods, used poison gas and tortured countless detainees in state lockups, but until now, no high-level officials had been held accountable for these acts, which human rights lawyers describe as war crimes. Raslan's guilty verdict, they say, bolsters the ability of European courts to pursue similar cases while sending a message to war criminals around the world that they could one day face consequences.



Prince Andrew's

trouble for the prince, who is embroiled in a sex assault lawsuit in the United States.

"With the queen's approval and agreement, the Duke of York's military affiliations and royal patronages have been re-

turned to the queen," Buckingham Palace said in a statement. "The Duke of York will continue not to undertake any public duties and is defending this case as a private citizen."

A United States district judge on Wednesday refused to dismiss a civil case against Andrew by an American woman, Virginia Giuffrè, who alleges the royal sexually abused her when she was 17. **AP**

UK CUTS ISOLATION DAYS FROM 7 TO 5

London: The UK government on Thursday announced that the minimum period of self-isolation for someone who tests positive for will be reduced from the current seven days to five, effective from Monday. UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid made a statement in the House of Commons to confirm the change for England, with devolved nations of the United Kingdom usually following similar patterns. From Monday, fully vaccinated people will be able to leave isolation on day six after negative lateral flow tests on that day and a day before. **PTI**

S KOREA GETS SUPPLY OF PFIZER COVID PILLS

Seoul: South Korea on Thursday received its first supply of Pfizer's antiviral Covid-19 pills to treat patients with mild or moderate symptoms. The pills will be moved to a pharmaceutical warehouse in central South Korea before being administered to patients nationwide starting Friday. Because supplies of Paxlovid will be tight at the start, the pills will initially be available only to patients 65 years or older who are being treated at home or in shelters for mild or moderate symptoms. **AP**

DENMARK: 4TH SHOTS TO SPECIAL GROUPS

Copenhagen: Denmark will offer fourth coronavirus vaccination shots to risk groups and vulnerable citizens as the pandemic situation in the country has worsened. Danish Health Minister Magnus Heunicke said Wednesday that health authorities would offer fourth vaccine jabs to the "most vulnerable groups" such as those with weakened immune systems. Heunicke didn't say when the rollout of the fourth jab would begin in the country of 5.8 million. **AP**

Belarusian peacekeepers attend the official ceremony starting the withdrawal of its troops in Almaty. *AP*

Kazakhstan: Russia-led troops prepare to pull out

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, JANUARY 13

TROOPS OF a Russia-led security alliance were preparing to pull out of Kazakhstan on Thursday, the Russian Defense Ministry said. The withdrawal comes only a week after they were deployed to the ex-Soviet nation on the request of its president, who was seeking to quell extremely violent mass protests.

The demonstrations started on January 2 in western Kazakhstan, with local residents outraged by a sharp rise in fuel prices, and quickly spread na-

Russia says Ukraine talks hit 'dead end', Poland warns of risk of war

REUTERS
VIENNA/MOSCOW, JAN 13

POLAND'S FOREIGN minister said on Thursday that Europe was closer to war than any time in the last 30 years as Russia gave a bleak assessment of diplomatic efforts this week to defuse tensions over Ukraine.

Russia said it was hitting a dead end as it tried to persuade the West to bar Ukraine from joining NATO and roll back decades of alliance expansion in Europe.

It offered a stark view before the week's security meetings have even finished, with talks under way in Vienna on Thursday at the 57-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Without naming Russia in his address to envoys from the 57 OSCE members, Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau mentioned tensions in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova, all countries with active or frozen conflicts in which Russia has been alleged to be a party.

"It seems that the risk of war in the OSCE area is now greater than ever before in the last 30 years," he said. He reported no breakthrough at the meeting.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told RTVI television that Russian military specialists were providing options to President Vladimir Putin in case the situation around Ukraine worsened, but diplomacy must be given a chance.

The US envoy to the OSCE talks said the West should not give in to blackmail.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said: "Despite the unsatisfactory week of great diplomacy for Russia, I believe that the only way for the Russians to confirm their lack of intention to solve problems by force is to continue the discussion in the established formats, in particular in the OSCE."

GOVT JOBS GIVEN AS PATRONAGE TO EX-FIGHTERS AND EXILES LIVING QUIETLY IN PAK, BUT NOT ALL POSSESS TECHNICAL SKILLS NEEDED FOR JOB

Filling the gaps: Taliban have staffing issues, look for help in Pakistan

ZIA UR-REHMAN AND EMILY SCHMALL
KARACHI, JANUARY 13

IT WAS 20 years ago when the jihadi, a defence ministry official in the Taliban's first government, fled Afghanistan as US troops swept into the country. He settled in southwestern Pakistan with other Afghans, bought a house and became a baker.

Then, after Kabul fell to the Taliban last August, Khyal Mohammad Ghayoor received a call from a stranger who identified himself only by the dual honorifics, Hajji Sahib, which roughly translates to a distinguished man

who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The man told Ghayoor he was needed back in Afghanistan, not as a baker but as a police chief. Now, Ghayoor oversees 1,450 people as the head of Kabul's traffic police.

"I am very excited to be back in a free and liberated Afghanistan," he said.

Five months after their takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban are grappling with the challenges of governance. Leaders promised to retain civil servants and prioritise ethnic diversity for top government roles, but instead have filled positions at all management levels with soldiers and theologians. Other

government employees have fled or refused to work, leaving widespread vacancies in the fragile state.

To help fill the gaps, Taliban officials are reaching into Pakistan. For years, Pakistan officially denied the existence of Ghayoor and thousands of other ex-Taliban fighters quietly living within its borders. Now, the Taliban are privately recruiting them to return and work in the new government.

It is unclear how many former fighters have returned from Pakistan, but there have already been several high-profile appointments, including Ghayoor. Arsalan Kharoti, who had been

Khyal Mohammad Ghayoor, centre, working at his office in Kabul. *NYT*

working as a community organizer at a refugee camp in Pakistan, is now the deputy min-

ister of refugees. Mawlawi Saeedullah, a preacher at a mosque in a Karachi slum, was

appointed to a district judge position in Afghanistan's eastern province of Paktika, resuming a job he gave up in 2001.

The new hires are walking into a mounting catastrophe. Hunger is rampant. Many teachers and other public sector employees have not been paid in months. The millions of dollars in aid that helped prop up the previous government have vanished, billions in state assets are frozen and economic sanctions have led to a near collapse of the country's banking system.

"Running insurgency and state are two different things," said Noor Khan, 40, an accountant who fled Kabul for Islamabad

in early September.

In the first weeks of the Taliban's takeover, roughly 120,000 people — including civil servants, bankers, academics and doctors — fled through airlifts organised by the US and other countries. Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman, recognising the personnel challenges the new government would face, tried to convince the US to suspend its evacuation process in August.

"Afghanistan needs the expertise of its skilled people," he said. "They should not be taken to other countries."

Then as now, the Taliban preferred filling the government

ranks with jihadis and loyalists. But this time, some civil servants have also stopped showing up for work, several of them said in interviews, either because they are not being paid, or because they do not want to taint their pending asylum cases in the United States or Europe by working for the Taliban.

With any new regime comes new appointees, but the difference in Afghanistan is that the new government had operated as a hard-line Islamic insurgency for two decades, so the cadre of people they are plucking leaders from are soldiers and religious scholars, rather than political allies or technocrats. **NYT**

BRIEFLY

Khalin Joshi grabs lead in Singapore

Singapore: Khalin Joshi, the last Indian golfer to win on the Asian Tour, made a strong bid for a second title as he overcame strong winds to claim the first-round lead with a five-under-par 67 at the Singapore International here on Thursday. Joshi, who won the 2018 Panasonic Open for his maiden Asian Tour success, leads Englishman William Harrold (69) by two shots in the USD 1 million event at the Tan Merah course. It could have been a one-two for India as Ajeetesh Sandhu was 4-under through 13 holes but dropped shots on 14th and 16th before picking a birdie on 18th. He was 2-under 70 and placed tied-third alongside American Paul Peterson. Another Indian in Top-10 was Abhijit Chadha (72) at T-9, while Shubhankar Sharma shot 73. PTI

Nieva set to be retained by BFI

New Delhi: Indian men's boxing team's High Performance Director Santiago Nieva is all set to be retained for at least one more year after several rounds of deliberation within the national federation following an underwhelming Olympic performance by the male pugilists. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) will also look for a High Performance Director for women boxers and invite applications. That position was left vacant after Italian Raffaele Bergamasco's contract was not renewed after the Tokyo Olympics, where Lovlina Borgohain was the lone pugilist to clinch a medal. Nieva, who is at his base Sweden right now, was given a three-month extension after the Tokyo Olympics. PTI

Hyderabad draw against Chennaiyin

Margao: Chennaiyin FC squandered a one-goal lead as Hyderabad FC rallied to earn a 1-1 draw in an Indian Super League game on Thursday. Chennaiyin went ahead through Mohd Sajid Dhot in the 13th minute but could not hold on to their slender lead till halftime as Javier Siverio (45th) continued his scoring spree with a goal. There were no goals in the second period as Debjit Majumder made a string of saves in Chennaiyin goal and the home side put pressure in added time for the winner but in the end, it ended all square. Hyderabad moved third in the table with 17 points while Chennaiyin remained sixth with 15 points. PTI

Victory over rusty Saina a stepping stone for Malvika

A 21-17, 21-9 win against an opponent she grew up idolising points to a good future

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

MALVIKA BANSOD knows she's not exactly moved mountains by showing a barely exerting and unfit Saina Nehwal the exit door at the India Open Super 500. At best, she sent a pebble skimming to skip on still waters, with a nice leftie side-arm action. Playing a mostly steady game of badminton, the 20-year-old, ranked 111 in the world, created those surface ripples, which look spectacular when bouncing twice or thrice gleefully before they disappear to the water bed. A 21-17, 21-9 win in the second week of January, beating an opponent she grew up idolising, is happy tidings.

Now, onto Akarshi Kashyap, the next opponent. There's a quarterfinal to be won, once the headlines are put to bed.

What Bansod will be pleased with during that upset win over Nehwal – who is trying to shake away early-season rustiness, is coming off injury and has no semblance of form for two years – is how she reacted to the senior pro's gameplan.

Nehwal was cutting off Bansod's soft drops and avoiding the knee-aggravating lunge by parking herself at the forecourt. The younger player managed to make her backpedal with pushes to the backcourt. Nehwal wouldn't be able to avoid the long stride at the net and find herself out of position. Bansod had run up a 16-9 lead for an assertive start, but it is in the next few points that she would pick the biggest takeaway from this win.

"I think after I get a big lead, the next two-three points I give away through unforced errors," she would admit later of a tendency that'll not go unpunished on another day. Indeed, Nehwal had narrowed the lead to 18-16 in favour of the youngster, before smashing wide twice and conceding the first set.

Thereafter, Nehwal didn't push. And Bansod didn't pull back while racing to the win, playing what she called an elementary plan. "Not just against her (an injured Nehwal), but that is the general strategy in badminton: to make the opponent move," she said, subtly downplaying the part Nehwal's injury might've played in the win. It's clever thinking, clear thinking too, against someone who Bansod claimed she was over-



20-year-old Malvika Bansod aims for a return against Saina Nehwal in the India Open. Bansod sealed her spot in quarterfinal with a win over Nehwal.

awed by when she was growing up.

There was no hint of being star-struck in their first face-off though. And in that composure lies Bansod's promise. The game needs to hike up leaps and bounds.

Power, a big missing element

Bansod made India's Uber Cup team last fall, but there's very little to go with if one is to anoint her the 'next Saina.'

Out of her teens, Bansod can claim one good win against Spanish World No 51 Beatriz Corrales. She nicked a set off the other Spanish No 2 Clara Azumendi, ranked 46. But at age 20, Nehwal was a Super Series winner and Commonwealth Games champ, and considered formidable by the most recognised Spanish player, Carolina Marin. Southpaw Bansod has miles to catch up.

She went 17-all against World Champion Akane Yamaguchi last year, before the Japanese wrapped up 21-12, 21-17. And Pornpawee Chochuwong didn't let the Indian cross 15 in 4 played sets.

A winner at the Lithuanian International, Bansod has three domestic ranking titles, but the international level can make her falter rapidly, even if she's shown glimpses of the circuit not fazing her.

Yet, concerns remain about the power in her strokes. Malvika tends to start slow – a recurrence at Sudirman/Uber Cup – and hits her groove by the second set. That's a set too late

if she wants to make breakthroughs.

Nehwal lauded her ability to tackle rallies – Bansod thinks on her feet. But she'll need the strength in her shoulders to enforce winners. "There's no upper limit to improving speed, strength," Bansod said astutely later. But currently, she has a good season of strengthening to do, given the gentle drops can only take her this far.

Yet there's hope. What sets Bansod apart from many other talented stroke-makers is her early awareness of fitness – the downfall of all women's singles players, save Nehwal and Sindhu. "My transition from juniors to seniors wasn't a shock because I always focussed on fitness even when young. I always saw badminton as a physically taxing game, hence needing fitness," she stated, aware of the sole pivot on which careers hinge.

Bansod is a voracious reader, also studious. Perhaps her most canny ability might lie in measured discretion. Ask her about what gameplan worked: "Just an all-round game." What does she like reading: "Just novels, just a lot of reading." What are her goals: "Just a better ranking to play Super 300s, 500s."

A dream come true it might well be. But she might just be that player who folds this win neatly away into a drawer, and gets down to figuring out the next opponent. Kashyap might prove a handful with her frenzied, uninjured bustle.

Seven shuttlers test positive at India Open

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, JANUARY 13

SEVEN SHUTTLEERS, including India's top stars Kidambi Srikanth and Ashwini Ponappa, have tested positive for Covid at the ongoing India Open Super 500 badminton tournament at the IG Stadium in New Delhi.

Eight more shuttlers have been withdrawn from the draw as they were either doubles partners or established close contacts of those who tested positive. Subsequently, the tournament saw 11 walkovers on Thursday.

On Monday, *The Indian Express* reported on key concerns expressed over the tournament not being held within a strict bio-bubble with only top players being accommodated in the sanitised tournament hotel.

Among those whose RT-PCR tests were found positive, only World Championship silver medalist Srikanth and former CWG doubles champion Ponappa were housed at the official hotel.

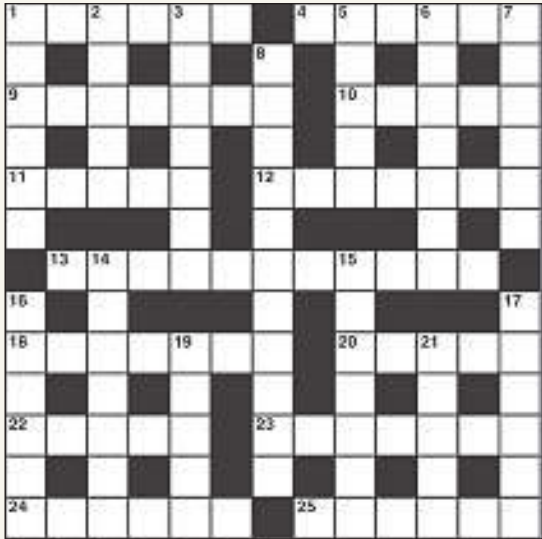
The other five -- Mithun Manjunath, Simran Singhi, Ritika Thaker, Treesa Jolly and Khushi Gupta – had arranged their own accommodation for the tournament. The close contacts forced to pull out are Sikki Reddy, Dhruv Kapila, M R Arjun, Gayatri Gopichand, Sai Pratheek, Akshan Shetty, Utkarsh Arora and Kavya Gupta.

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) said: "The players returned a positive result to a mandatory RT-PCR test conducted on Tuesday. Doubles partners deemed close contact of the seven players have also been withdrawn from the tournament."



Kidambi Srikanth is among the seven shuttlers, who tested positive for Covid in the India Open.

CROSSWORD 4637



ACROSS

- 1 He's far out once more (6)
- 4 Hole made by a tracer? (6)
- 9 Putting out precise cooking instructions (7)
- 10 Garment unusual in cut (5)
- 11 Unwritten authority? (3-2)
- 12 Where to find one so to speak (7)
- 13 Continues to reform though still argumentative (11)
- 18 A show presented before the show (7)
- 20 Failure to supply material (5)
- 22 One is confused in two ways by the lights (5)
- 23 Give a ring to various agents where actors appear (2,5)
- 24 Time that egg (6)
- 25 Fishermen use many spinners (6)

DOWN

- 1 Stop doing wrong? (6)
- 2 Unstable mountain range in Canada (5)
- 3 Pile up in game (7)
- 5 Estimated distribution of trade (5)
- 6 Going out one aunt takes the back seat of a car (7)
- 7 Secluded place for a break (6)
- 8 He first noticed the gravity of the world situation (5,6)
- 14 The coolest of wild cats? (7)
- 15 An Ivory cutter (7)
- 16 It's full of holes yet still holds water (6)
- 17 Bedclothes used as ropes (6)
- 19 Children might be well read (5)
- 21 A stone may bar the way (5)

Solutions Crossword 4636: Across: 1 Spotted, 5 Salad, 8 Auction bridge, 9 Steam, 10 Enemies, 11 Dotted, 12 Stowed, 15 Phueton, 17 Affre, 19 Spirit-rapping, 20 Tense, 21 Dredger, Down: 2 Seals, 2 Orchestration, 3 Trimmer, 4 Donkey, 5 Serve, 6 Lady-in-waiting, 7 Dressed, 11 Deposit, 13 Traipse, 14 Ingrid, 16 Thine, 18 Elgar.

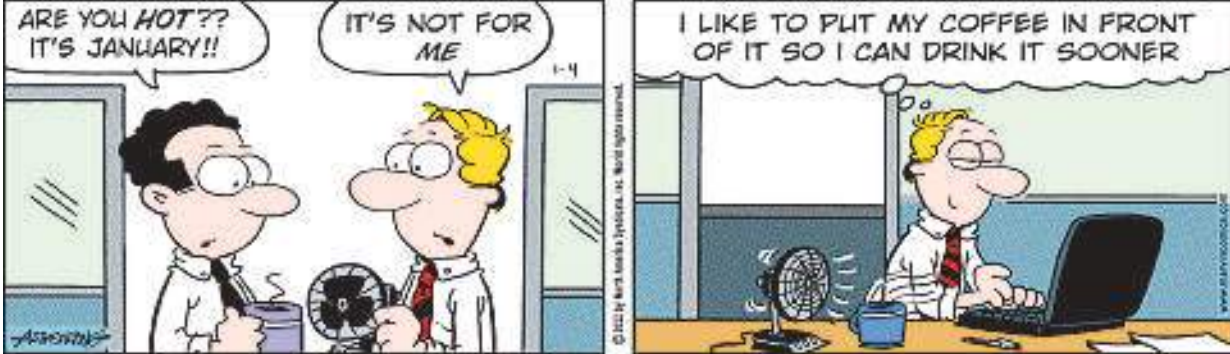
OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

___ is perhaps the most painful companion of ___. - Coco Chanel (5,5)

BDAEI



HNOSDU



OOLTT



LIGHTS



SOLUTION: ABIDE, LOTTO, UNSHOWN, SLIGHT. Answer: Light is perhaps the most painful companion of death. - Coco Chanel

SUDOKU 4714

Difficulty Level 1s

Instructions

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level

1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4713



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
Planetary activity is certain to make you realise that you must have more money if you are to finance your dreams. A little more of the old filthy lucre would go a long way towards easing certain personal restraints. It's not that you want money for its own sake, but for the good it can do.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
There are clear signposts as to the next step, but you may not see them until tomorrow, or even the day after. Get on the phone, write letters and ask anybody who will give a candid answer for what you should be doing. You don't have to follow all their advice, just some of it.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
Even though it is difficult to express your thoughts, needs and desires with any clarity, I don't think this should hold you back. Say the first thing that comes to your mind, but listen carefully to partners' responses. And never believe that you are automatically right: you're not.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
Press ahead with social plans and give a high priority to personal contacts at work. It will all seem very worthwhile, but, in point of fact, by tomorrow you may be inclined to withdraw your favours. Perhaps you'll begin to see old information in a new light.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Jealousy, resentment or fear on the part of someone close is always likely to burst out. Yet if you can possibly exert a little personal discipline, others will thank you for your sense of duty and honour. If you do the right and proper thing, then friends and family are bound to respect you much more, even if you don't have so much fun.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
In some small way, a new dawn is coming. Some kind of reawakening is about to take place and within a few days, you might be prepared to take more on trust. You may have a secret and you'll certainly be in the know to an extent which others may envy.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Business-minded types should be in top form today. It is time to make a few skilful purchases and profitable investments. Those in the property market or spending money on a home will succeed particularly well. It's a question of buying what you need rather than what you want.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 22)
You have learned a great deal about self-preservation and I doubt if anyone will be able to undermine you. You can reach out and restore a friendship that has gone adrift, and put on a pleasant face for new acquaintances. You may also begin to feel passions stirring in surprising ways.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23 - Dec 22)
Sometimes you just have to knuckle down and get on with the tasks at hand. The work ethic rears its head, and you may have to pay a great deal of attention to your duties and obligations. You have a greater capacity to work in a methodical and routine manner than associates often believe.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
Far too much time has already been expended on unnecessary disputes or conflicts. Today, I'd advise you to look only on the bright side and to make the most of all contacts with friends and partners. I once heard someone say that our friends are our greatest treasure. How true.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
These are still early days. I'd say that one phase of expansion and improvement is now complete and that you should begin to retrench. If you're making long-range plans, put down a marker for about four months' time, and set that as the target for achieving your personal goals.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
It seems to have been a long time since you were encouraged to prove yourself. Actually, you have dodged one or two opportunities that you might have done better to accept. Still, that's all in the past now. You finally appear able to face up to the future.

It's all happening at Newlands

DRS decision leaves Indians livid; Pant's attacking century, exit of Elgar keeps visitors in hunt for historic series win

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
JANUARY 13

A FEW resemblances are hard to ignore as this hard-fought Test series goes into its deciding day. Four years ago at Newlands, India were set a target of 208 by South Africa. Four years later at the same venue, India set a target of 212 for South Africa.

The hosts had gone on to win that match by a comfortable margin of 72 runs. That may well have served as motivation for India at the start of the chase on Thursday, but as South Africa closed Day Three on 101/2, that kind of victory margin — if not perhaps the victory itself — is out of the question now.

There is another, and probably more pertinent, resemblance. South Africa had closed Day Three of the second Test at Wanderers last week on 118/2 in pursuit of 240. In Cape Town, they are 101/2, needing another 111 with the same number of wickets left.

But crucially, South Africa's captain and premier immovable object Dean Elgar was unbeaten at stumps in Johannesburg; he would go on to fashion a famous series-level-elling win the next evening with an unbeaten 96. At Newlands, Elgar fell caught behind down the leg side off Jasprit Bumrah to what turned out to be the last delivery of the day.

Elgar's dismissal broke a 78-run second-wicket stand with Keegan Petersen, which was well and truly taking the match away from India. They thought they had Elgar lbw with the South African score on 60, but ball-tracking showed R Ashwin's delivery bouncing over the stumps to the Indians' utter shock. That got to them and for the rest of the evening, they kept going after the host broadcaster, making sure they were close to the stump mike when they voiced their colourful opinions.

Elgar and Petersen rubbed it in immediately with a boundary each in the next over. The South African captain had got under the Indians' skin in the Wanderers chase too, and he had done the same again at Newlands.

After his five-wicket haul in the first innings, Bumrah had said that this was a new-ball pitch, and once the ball got old and the seam wore off, it got easier for the batsmen. But the Indians were able to strike only once with the new ball in the chase, and that too when Aiden Markram went after a Mohammed Shami outswinger only to edge it to third slip.

Instead, it was Marco Jansen and Kagiso Rabada who had proved Bumrah's words to be true in the morning. Armed with a 17-over old, still-new ball, Jansen had bounced Cheteshwar Pujara with the leg-trap laid and got him to glove the second ball of the day to leg slip. In the very next over, Rabada had produced one of those unplayable brutes; it had rocketed from a good length, and there was no way Ajinkya Rahane could have pulled his gloves away in time from the impending doom.

However, once Virat Kohli resumed his second vigil of the match, and Rishabh Pant counter-attacked, the South African attack's bite began to get blunted. It was quite the combination; Kohli refused to play a stroke, Pant refused to stop playing them.

The contrast lasted for nearly 30 overs, before Kohli decided to finally play a big drive and nicked to second slip for 29 off 143, making it 12 successive dismissals in overseas Tests caught in the slips or by the wicketkeeper. Even as Pant tried his best to farm the strike with the tail on way to his fourth Test hundred, India fell from 152/4 to 198 all out inside the next 20 overs. It is very well for Ashwin and Shardul Thakur to be tagged as allrounders, but perhaps they could have shown more match-awareness. Both departed for single-digit scores playing expansive shots instead of attempting to hang in there and provide support to Pant.

Barring the first innings in Centurion

They thought they had Elgar lbw with the South African score on 60, but ball-tracking showed R Ashwin's delivery bouncing over the stumps to the Indians' utter shock. That got to them and for the rest of the evening, they kept going after the host broadcaster, making sure they were close to the stump mike when they voiced their colourful opinions.

when they got probably the best batting conditions of the series on the first day, India's batting has largely under-achieved with scores of 174, 202, 266, 223 and 198.

The Cape Town pitch has some grass along the lines of the cracks to prevent them from opening up too much but the ball was still taking off now and then from a good length. In the chase, Petersen was fortunate to escape a few times, albeit with a couple of painful blows on the gloves.

But overall he was again the best of the South African batsmen on display. His ability to punch the slightest width or error in length through the covers off the back foot keeps the runs coming when there is nothing available to drive. He was also pretty quick on the feet against Ashwin, rocking back to slap the offspinner through the off side for fours. Already, he is two short of his second fifty of the match, and stopping him on the final morning will be critical to India's remaining hopes of winning in the 'final frontier.'

It is this venerated bowling attack that has delivered Test wins for India around much of the cricketing world. And fittingly, it is in the bowlers' hands whether the feats of Australia and England will be repeated in South Africa. The batsmen haven't given them much to play with. But they have already overcome that drawback once in this match itself, when they successfully converted an under-par 223 into a first-innings lead of 13. It will be doubly historic if they can conjure a win out of this situation. As centurion Pant said later from behind the stumps in encouragement, '*poora dum lagayeenge* [we will give it everything].'

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: 223 all out
South Africa 1st Innings: 210 all out
India 2nd Innings: (Overnight 57/2)

KL Rahul c Markram b Jansen	10
M Agarwal c Elgar b Rabada	7
C Pujara c Petersen b Jansen	9
V Kohli c Markram b Ngidi	29
A Rahane c Elgar b Rabada	1
R Pant not out	100
R Ashwin c Jansen b Ngidi	7
S Thakur c Verreynne b Ngidi	5
Y Yadav c Verreynne b Rabada	0
M Shami c van der Dussen b Jansen	0
J Bumrah c Bavuma b Jansen	2
Extras: (b 8, lb 9, w 2, nb 9)	28
Total: (all out in 67.3 overs)	198
Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-24, 3-57, 4-58, 5-152, 6-162, 7-170, 8-180, 9-189, 10-198	
Bowlers: Rabada 17-5-53-3, Olivier 10-1-38-0, Jansen 19.3-6-36-4, Ngidi 14-5-21-3, Maharaj 7-1-33-0	
South Africa 2nd Innings:	
A Markram c Rahul b Shami	16
D Elgar c Pant b Bumrah	30
K Petersen batting	48
Extras: (lb 6, nb 1)	7
Total: (for 2 wickets in 29.4 Ov)	101
Fall of Wickets: 1-23, 2-101	
Bowling: Bumrah 9.4-3-29-1, Shami 7-0-22-1, Yadav 2-0-5-0, Thakur 5-1-17-0, Ashwin 6-1-22-0	

South Africa need 111 more runs to win Day 4: Live on Star Sports Network, 2pm



Rishabh Pant (100 not out off 139 balls) scored more than half of India's runs in the second innings of the third Test. AP

Tinsel ton: With a little tweak, Pant stays true to his natural game

SANDIP G

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

ESCHEWING A high-risk stroke because it was his undoing just two innings ago?

Not in Rishabh Pant's gospel of batting. Binning a high-risk, low-percentage stroke when his team is in strife? Not in Pant's gospel of batting. Reviled and ridiculed back home he could be, his head on the chopping block it could be, but Pant remains true to his gospel of batting.

In the second innings at the Wanderers less than a week ago, he attempted a hideous swipe over extra cover off Kagiso Rabada no less and was made to look foolish, as he only contrived to edge the ball to the wicket-keeper. It let the meme-wagon rolling and tongues wagging. So stinging has been the backlash of that shot—even projected as a metaphor of the maladies that afflict Team India and the IPL-groomed generation. All at once, he cut a comic, tragic and villainous figure in the country.

None of these were to deter or distract Pant from banishing the stroke forever or shoveling it to the back-burner.

He raced out again to another fast-bowler, the more benign Duanne Olivier and crashed him through covers. A lot of variables were different. When he executed the shot in this innings, he had already soaked 32 balls and gotten a measure of the pitch. Besides, Olivier was bowling from around the stumps and the ball was much fuller. That afternoon at Wanderers, he had just faced two balls, Rabada was angling the ball across him from over the stumps and it was short of length. But for all these differences, to show the audacity to play the very shot that was ripped apart with the frenzy of national calamity, embodies the essence of Pant's batting.

Little doubt that Pant judiciously chose

CENTURION

100*

■ Rishabh Pant's unbeaten ton is the highest score by an Indian wicket-keeper in South Africa. Before Thursday, this record was held by MS Dhoni, who made 90 at Centurion in 2010. ■ Pant also holds the record of highest score by an Indian wicket-keeper in England (114) and Australia (159 not out).

his moments and deliveries, not so much though the bowler, to pick his boundaries. He left more deliveries, blunted even more and resisted some of his temptations, but the fundamentals remained the same. The hundred at Newlands might be one of his more sedate ones, but it had all the shots that make and unmake him. There were slashes and swipes, heaves and hoicks, and even an attempted reverse-scoop.

Common sense and intelligence

The recipe behind his century was that he, rather than compromising his natural aggression, as many under-fire batsmen would be prone to, blended it with common sense and intelligence. He was aggressive, but not reckless. He would always look to attack. Not just the bad ones, but half-good ones, and once the innings rolled along, even the good ones. In the past, perturbed by criticisms on his hyper-aggressive stroke-making, he had woven a shell of circumspection around him. And, often failed. Had he espoused such an approach, like his captain Virat Kohli at the

other end, he would have self-destructed.

Instead, he bounded into the crease with a mindset to attack any ball that buffered in his bandwidth. Bowl short, he would pull. As he did to get off the mark off a bouncer. Short and wide. He would ferociously cut. Full into his body, he would drive and flick. He leant into a sumptuous drive off Lungi Ngidi early on. There was no fuss; there were no frills. No shot in anger or adrenaline. One boundary necessarily didn't bring the next. Perhaps, this was the concept of controlled batting, according to Pant's gospel.

The sashay-down-the track to Olivier was the first real risk he sought. Again, he didn't embrace another risky shot for the 20 balls. That was when Dean Elgar introduced Keshav Maharaj, who he disdained over long-on. It was again Maharaj he targeted for his next two big shots, both sixes, back to back, again after 20 balls. But in the interlude between sixes, he kept gliding and nurling, stealing six singles and a double, thus ticking the scoreboard along. Singles, twos and a three constituted 52 off his 100 runs. It's his template, though often forgotten in the pile of his boundaries.

It was his blueprint until Kohli departed, whereupon he invariably ran to more aggression. Olivier, lacking the pace and lift of the past, was buried for a six and four off successive balls. Both meaty pull shots. In the vicinity of his hundred and with partners running out, he backed away and cuffed Rabada through covers. In effect, it was a characteristic Pant knock in its very essence.

Even when he was within the sight of his hundred, it never crossed his mind to slam on the brakes. He went for the big strokes, even though he couldn't connect with many of them. The single that brought up his hundred was a full-blooded whip rather than a feline tickle. True to the gospel of batting, according to Rishabh Pant.

3 REASONS WHY SA ARE AHEAD IN THIS TEST

NEW-BALL PITCH

It's a new-ball pitch, as Jasprit Bumrah said on the third evening. South Africa had removed India's top order within the 20-over mark. From then on, though the taller bowlers got some bounce, there wasn't much seam movement on offer. Rishabh Pant played pretty compactly and though Virat Kohli was tied down in terms of scoring runs due to the well outside-off line, he wasn't in great trouble either. The ease with which Pant batted told a story of its own. When the ball seams around, he can get into a tangle but he batted so comfortably well that it was clear that there were no demons — in terms of exaggerated movement — on the surface.

TALLER BOWLERS

Even with the new ball, when they dismissed the Indian top order, it was the taller South African bowlers Rabada and Marco Jansen who caused the damage. Jansen got it to bounce high and awkwardly at Cheteshwar Pujara who gloved it to leg slip. Ajinkya Rahane got a brute of a lifter from back of length from Kagiso Rabada that would have taken out most batsmen. It was deadlier than the famous deliveries that Ian Botham and Curtly Ambrose bowled to nail Sachin Tendulkar in the past. The Indian bowlers don't have that height and have hardly extracted that kind of bounce. Even the South Africans couldn't get that kind of bounce once the seam flattened out as the ball got older. And when they managed to get, Pant could swat it away with relative ease. Pre 25-over mark, Kohli had the balls leaping at his head a couple of times but post that, that kind of awkward bounce wasn't seen as much.

FULL LENGTH PROBLEM

The Indian bowlers have prided themselves on hitting the right lengths, usually full-length, to hit the top of the off stump. But on this pitch, with abnormal bounce, their bowling was nullified to an extent. The South Africans took off-stump guard, with little or no trigger movement, and shifted their weight balance well to punch away those bouncing deliveries. Without the height of the South Africans, Indian bowlers couldn't get it to bounce too awkwardly. And their natural line of attack on the stumps was already being nullified by the pitch's extra bounce.

SRIRAM VEERA



Jansen got the ball to bounce high and awkwardly to dismiss Pujara.

For India's U-19 stars, one eye on World Cup, one on IPL auction buzz

PRATYUSH RAJ
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

THERE IS a pot of gold not at the end of the rainbow but right there at the start, winking at the teenagers, even as they embark on the Under-19 World Cup campaign. The razzmatazz of the IPL is just around the corner with the auction in February, scheduled to be held a few days after the final.

How do the young India cricketers, with the awareness that performances in one tournament can open the pathway to another, handle the pressure of quick fame and potential big money?

Harnoor Singh Pannu, warmed up for India's opener against South Africa on Saturday, with an unbeaten 100 against Australia Under-19 in the warm-up game. Hamoor is not oblivious to the windfall an IPL auction can bring. But he has his sights trained on the junior World Cup. "IPL auction is definitely in the back of our mind, but I am focussing on winning the World Cup for India."

India's brightest young stars have had one eye on the auction and another on the World Cup since the junior tournament has just preceded the auction which was first held in 2008.

Not everyone can multitask. Pannu's roommate and fellow U-19 cricketer from

Chandigarh, Raj Angad Bawa, has blanked out the auction. The all-rounder says, "Right now, my only focus is on the upcoming matches. I am not thinking about the IPL auction."

The middle-order batter Nishant Sindhu is more pragmatic. "If we do well in the World Cup, we'll automatically be picked for any IPL team. But before that, we want to win this tournament."

A typical cocktail of hopes but how does it actually play out on the ground. The clue lies in the recent past. Sample this from Mandeep Singh, the vice-captain of the 2010 U-19 World Cup. "I remember a coach told me 'India U-19' is a direct entry to the national side. You don't need to play Ranji Trophy to represent India."

Abhishek Sharma, who is the newly-appointed Punjab captain, points out he was saved from the IPL obsession by the wise words of Rahul Dravid, who coached that 2018 team. "I would be lying if I say there was no talk about the IPL auction in the dressing room back in 2018." It's when Dravid stepped in.

"Rahul Dravid sir told us IPL auctions are going to be the part of your life, but you have to make the decision, which is more important to you — playing for India at present or the IPL, that you guys will play in the future. Having this opportunity to play for India in the World Cup, that doesn't come very often," Sharma recalls.



India will open their campaign against South Africa in the U-19 World Cup in Guyana, on Saturday. Asian Cricket Council

He was bagged by Delhi Daredevils for Rs 55 lakh after his heroics in the 2018 World Cup.

For the current generation, which has grown up watching the IPL, distraction isn't quite the right word. It's been part of their cricketing ecosystem right from the start.

Taruwar Kohli, who scored 218 runs, in-

FROM A FEW LAKHS TO CRORES

AFTER CAPTAINING India to the Under-19 World Cup title in 2008, Virat Kohli joined Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 20 lakh. But since 2014, when junior players were taken out of the draft system and placed in the auction pool, market forces have taken over and the pay cheques have gotten fatter. A look at the top earners since 2014.

Name	Team	Amnt	Year
K Nagarkoti	KKR	₹ 3.2cr	2018
S Mavi	KKR	₹ 3cr	2018
Y Jaiswal	RR	₹ 2.4cr	2020
R Bishnoi	KKIP	₹ 2cr	2020
P Garg	SRH	₹ 1.9cr	2020
S Gill	KKR	₹ 1.8cr	2018

cluding three consecutive fifties in the 2008 edition, says you can't blame young cricketers for following the auction closely.

"IPL started in 2008, and these guys must have been 6 or 7, when they started following cricket. They have grown up watching IPL and the big names in it, and that's why this generation of cricketers prefer white-ball

cricket more," said Taruwar Kohli, who was selected by the inaugural IPL champions Rajasthan Royals in 2008.

Mandeep Singh layers it further by pointing out how even international players are quitting red-ball cricket to play in different T20 leagues. "I would not blame the youngsters for prioritising IPL over playing for India. There are so many international cricketers who are quitting red-ball cricket to play in the different leagues across the globe."

Jaydev Unadkat, who was a member of the India U-19 squad in 2010, suggests that social media nowadays plays a big part in creating the buzz around the auction.

The cricketing world has changed beyond recognition, he says.

"For me, I never thought about the IPL auction because the feeling of getting to play for India U-19 was itself so high that nothing else mattered. And at the same time, it was a time when U-19 players were picked in the draft instead of auction like today. We were playing in New Zealand then, and there was not that great buzz like we see today. Probably because there was no social media."

Ultimately, it would come down to mentoring. Just as Abhishek Sharma talked about the influence of Dravid, so does the man who played with Kohli in 2008. Tanmay Srivastava was to be the captain before Kohli was reinstated just before the start of the tournament.

Srivastava, the highest scorer in that world cup, calls for good mentoring. "Post U-19 World Cup, the most important thing is to find the right mentor, and especially if you have won the tournament. The sudden fame sometimes makes players feel that they are at the top of the world, which is certainly not a good thing."

The wiry seamer Arshdeep Singh, who was also part of the batch of 2018, talks about the valuable inputs to be gained by sharing an IPL dressing room with some of the best players. In his case it was Mohammed Shami. "I would have never thought that I would share the new ball with Shami. Playing and training with world-class players certainly makes you a better cricketer."

The transition from U-19 cricket to the national side is not guaranteed, even for the most talented juniors. Only a few will break out of the pack and move ahead.

Unadkat recalls how he quickly understood that it is not all roses.

"For me, the reality check happened a week after I returned from the U-19 World Cup. I was picked for the Saurashtra Ranji Trophy team. I felt it would be an easy passage for me. I was wrong. Mumbai scored some 550 runs and I was wicketless," recollects Jaydev Unadkat.

With inputs from Devendra Pandey
Playing tonight: VI vs Aus & SL vs Scotland, 7.30pm, Live on Star Sports Network