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## A YEAR AFTER VACCINATION BEGAN

## 3 of 4 adults are now double-jabbed, 95% have got the first dose

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

A LITTLE over a year after India began its inoculation drive, three out of four eligible adults are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, health ministry data show.

A total 165.90 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines had been administered until Sunday. An estimated 95% of the eligible adult population have received the first dose, and 75% have received both doses, the data show.

India started vaccinating on January 17 last year, beginning with healthcare workers and frontline workers, and the older population of the country. Vaccination was subsequently expanded to cover everyone aged 18 years and older. Adolescents in the 15-18 age

## INDIA FIGHTING WAVE WITH GREAT SUCCESS: PM

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi Sunday said Covid cases are declining and India is fighting the new wave with "great success". "Almost 4.5 crore children have taken the vaccine till now. So, 60% of those aged 15-18 took the vaccine in just 3-4 weeks," Modi said during his Mann Ki Baat programme.

REPORT, P7

group were made eligible on January 3 this year.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## For Gujarat Covid victim family, hope for ex-gratia hinges on a prescription

SOHINI GHOSH &amp; AVINASH NAIR

AHMEDABAD, JANUARY 30

FIFTY-FOUR-YEAR OLD Manilal Chavada, a resident of Kanodar village in Banaskantha, died at home on May 2 last year, just two hours after his family managed to arrange an oxygen tank. The medical certificate of cause of death states: "Patient (came) with severe breathlessness and fever. The report (showed) suspected case of Corona".

However, the family's claim for Rs 50,000 ex-gratia, an-

nounced for Covid deaths, was rejected on January 17. Now, they are looking for a piece of paper from eight months ago in which the doctor prescribed oxygen for Chavada, so as to approach a Grievance Redressal Committee to appeal against the rejection.

In an order dated January 19, the Supreme Court expressed displeasure over the relatively low disbursement numbers of ex-gratia claims in most states, and directed them not to reject any on "technical grounds". The court order also recorded data submitted by the Gujarat

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## In Odisha betel hub, farmers say steel plant fight is for survival

AISHWARYA MOHANTY  
DHINKIA (JAGATSinghpur), JANUARY 30

ENVELOPED IN fog and an uneasy silence is Dhinkia, a village in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district that is at the centre of one of the latest flashpoints over land acquisition for industry. Until a fortnight ago, its residents had stood guard round the clock, blocking the entry of the administration and protesting against JSW Utkal Steel Ltd's 13.2 million tonne per annum integrated steel plant that is proposed to



A betel vineyard in Dhinkia. Residents say this coastal area is suitable for the crop.

Aishwarya Mohanty



## 21ST AMONG EQUALS

Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning the Australian Open final, a record 21st grand slam title, against Daniil Medvedev. In an epic showdown that lasted 5 hours and 24 minutes, Nadal came back from two sets down to win 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5. Reuters

REPORT, P16

## Disquiet over jobs and prices, but free ration, 'law & order' weigh in for Yogi

LIZ MATHEW  
MATHURA, HATHRAS, JANUARY 30

THERE IS disquiet among youth over the absence of new jobs, palpable disappointment over the gap between what the BJP government promised five years

ago and what it delivered, discontent over rising fuel and cooking gas prices, and anxiety over how and when will the economic tide turn.

Yet, there's evidence from the ground that the coin does not seem to have flipped entirely from dis-



DECISION 2022

content to anger against the Yogi Adityanath government in UP.

Of course, the ruling party's charged poll campaign, with lines such as "fark saaf hai (the difference is clear)" and "soch imandar

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## After Rahul's remark on CM face, Cong puts up Channi from 2 seats

KANCHAN VASDEV & MANOJ CG  
CHANDIGARH, NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

DAYS AFTER Rahul Gandhi announced that the Congress will project a chief minister face in Punjab before the state polls, the party has fielded Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi from a second seat in what is seen as a signal that he is the frontrunner in the race. But the move has also sent out mixed signals.

Channi's name figured in the third list of eight candidates announced by the Congress Sunday. The party called the two-seat move a "masterstroke" aimed at denting Aam Aadmi Party's prospects by consolidating

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## IDEA EXCHANGE

ED, NIA CAN WALK IN ANYWHERE: SUKHBIR  
PAGE 12

## CRPF man's son is India's hero in U-19 World Cup, sets up win over Bangladesh

PAGE 1  
ANCHORDEVENDRA PANDEY  
MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

AT THE CRPF camp in Odisha's Maoist-affected Rayagada district, no one knew Ravi Kumar. A handful knew his father, Rajinder Singh, an Assistant Sub Inspector. But Saturday night changed it all. Ravi, a left-arm seamer, nabbed three wickets for 14 runs — highlighted by an opening spell of 5-1-5-3 — to set up India's five-wicket victory over Bangladesh for a place in the semifinals of U-19 World



Cup in West Indies.

It was India's sweetest moment in the tournament yet, as Bangladesh had beaten them to the trophy in the previous edition. Today, all the talk in the CRPF



Seamer Ravi Kumar (left) and his father Rajinder Singh.

camp is about Rajinder and Ravi. "Kal tak toh koi Rajinder ko yahan janta nahi tha. Aaj sab saheb jante hai (Until yesterday, no one knew Rajinder here. Today, all the officers know)... Ravi ka papa

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Kesh Kanti

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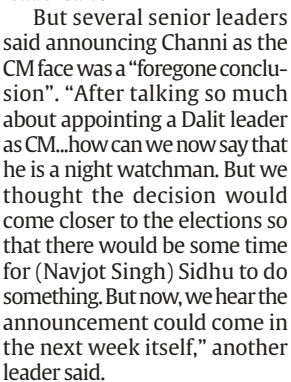
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## 4 THE CITY


**VACCINATIONS IN  
LAST 24 HOURS**  
**70,263**
**OMICRON  
CASES**  
**549**
**DELHI: TOTAL  
CASES**  
**18,27,489**

	Total	Vacant
HOSPITAL BEDS	15,428	13,877
ICU BEDS	4,462	3,865

**PATIENTS IN HOSPITAL: 1,567**  
**OXYGEN SUPPORT 357**  
**VENTILATOR SUPPORT 143**

	Cases	Recoveries	Deaths	Tests
Jan 29	4,483	8,807	28	60,532
Jan 30	3,674	6,954	30	57,686
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,490*</b>	<b>17,80,172</b>	<b>25,827</b>	<b>3,48,57,713</b>

\*Total active cases in Delhi

Noida		
	Jan 29	Jan 30
Cases	620	364
Deaths	3	1

Gurgaon		
	Jan 29	Jan 30
Cases	1,338	1,267
Deaths	3	3

## 'DELHI MUST TAKE A STRONG DECISION'

## Private school body renews push for reopening, writes to L-G's office

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
 NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS have sharpened their stance on reopening schools and have requested for a delegation to discuss the issue with the Lieutenant Governor.

The Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools, a large umbrella body of private schools in the city, wrote to the L-G's office Sunday, pushing for schools to open and requesting a meeting with him.

Last Wednesday, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia had met with a delegation of parents who had submitted a memorandum requesting that schools and anganwadi centres be the first to reopen as and when Delhi begins lifting its cur-

rent set of Covid restrictions.

After this meeting, he had said the government would recommend the reopening of schools in the Delhi Disaster Management Authority meeting held last Thursday. However, the DDMA — chaired by the L-G — had decided to defer discussions on the issue to the next meeting.

"We are now directing our requests to the L-G since the Aam Aadmi Party government has already stated their support for reopening," said an office-bearer.

"It is our humble request to you to kindly reopen schools as our students at all levels have been facing major learning losses for around two years now. We assure you of the safe and smooth reopening of schools. Many major metro cities in India and abroad have reopened schools. We believe it is time when Delhi



Some school administrators said they need to work towards doing away with the choice of not attending physical classes

also takes a strong decision to reopen physical learning spaces," read the letter to the L-G.

"In addition, kindly allow a delegation of Action Committee Unaided Private Schools to meet your excellency to discuss this is-

sue in detail," it stated.

In the meantime, some school administrators believe that a stronger approach needs to be taken towards reopening.

Minakshi Kushwaha, principal of Birla Vidya Niketan, said

they need to work towards doing away with the choice of not attending physical classes.

"This will be a huge loss for generations if we do not act fast. I think we need to take a strong stance and do away with the option of not attending physical school, with mandatory vaccination. I think that is the only way to move forward and break out of the complacency... For instance, the United States has done away with hybrid schooling," she said.

Sources said that the DDMA is examining the proposal to allow schools to reopen in the city.

The Indian Express had reported that from March 1, 2020, to October 31, 2021, Delhi schools were shut for 85 weeks or approximately 19 months — fully closed for 65 weeks, partially for 20 weeks.

## Cloud over efficacy against omicron but monoclonal antibody therapy still in use

**ANONNA DUTT**  
 NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

WHILE THE second wave of the pandemic saw rampant use of antivirals and immune-modulating drugs that led to shortage and black-marketing, the third wave has seen a slew of patients being prescribed monoclonal antibody therapy.

Currently, there are two cocktails approved for use in Covid-19 patients in India — Casirivimab and Imdevimab called Regen-CoV2, and Eli Lilly's Bamlanivimab and Etesevimab. Both cocktails are indicated for use in those with mild to moderate Covid who do not require oxygen but who are at a high risk of progressing to severe disease.

However, many patients prescribed the therapy in the current wave were those with no significant co-morbidities or high-risk contacts of positive patients, who were given the "full" dose using the entire pack instead of sharing it with two people.

While the treatment resulted in reduction in viral load in delta variant infections, it has been found to be ineffective against the heavily mutated omicron variant. Last Monday, the US Food and Drug Administration revoked the emergency use authorisation of both the antibody cocktails approved for use in India. A third monoclonal antibody, Sotrovimab, which is effective against the new variant, isn't approved for use in the country.

The Indian Express spoke to two patients who were prescribed the therapy — one of them opted for it while the other did not.

■ A 38-year-old woman studying in Melbourne, Australia, returned to Delhi feeling fatigued and jet-lagged. When she got fever and chills a day later, she decided to use the home-testing kits for Covid-19. They were negative, so she got an RT-PCR test that turned out to be positive. She immediately sent in a request for tele-consultation with a doctor from a reputed private hospital in the city.

"The doctor called me 30 minutes after the allotted time, from the middle of traffic, and said I should take the antibody cocktail therapy that would cost around Rs 1.5 lakh. I was shocked and told him that I would get back to him later," the student said. She has no co-morbidities.

The prescription that she received after the consultation had listed paracetamol, azithromycin, and some supplements along with the therapy. She asked some physicians she knew and decided to stick with just the oral medications. "I got better with just those drugs. I still feel a little tired, but that's it."

She added, "Thankfully I checked with others, but many might just take the therapy without questioning. My mother was admitted to a hospital in Assam with Covid-19 and she said some of the others in the ward received it."

Dr Sumit Ray, medical superintendent and critical-care specialist from Delhi's Holy Family Hospital, said: "What we have seen is that there is a demand by patients, who have relatives in Mumbai or Kerala, for the therapy because it is being used back home. There are some doctors also who are pushing it."

■ On the other hand, 37-

## THE THERAPY

**LAB DEVELOPED** antibodies that bind with the virus rendering it unable to infect human cells

**IT HAS** to be given early on when the virus is replicating in the body

**THE THERAPY** has been shown to reduce the number of deaths, hospital stay, and the need for mechanical ventilator

**THE THERAPY** should be given to those with mild to moderate symptoms but are at a risk of developing severe disease such as the old, those with co-morbidities, or the immune-compromised

**TWO ANTIBODY** cocktails



2 cocktails are approved for use in Covid patients in India. Tashi Tobgyal

have been approved for use in India — Regeneron's Casirivimab and Imdevimab, and Eli Lilly's Bamlanivimab and Etesevimab

**BOTH HAVE** been found to be ineffective against omicron variant of Sars-CoV-2

year-old Mumbai resident Karan thought that his hypertension and grade III fatty liver disease meant that he needed the therapy to stay out of hospital. He was prescribed the "full dose" of the Regen-CoV2 antibody cocktail.

"I had come in contact with a colleague who had the infection; I had no symptoms when I tested positive. By the same evening, I got a 102 fever and body ache. My doctor suggested that I get the full dose of the antibody cocktail because of my co-morbidities. Thankfully, for me the cost, which was over Rs 1 lakh, wasn't an issue as my company covers medical treatment," Karan said, adding that his doctor couldn't have had a monetary incentive as she herself suggested he get the therapy at another hospital near his home.

"It is a precautionary treatment; I know I wouldn't have been able to manage on my own if I had more symptoms. My fever subsided the same night that I got the therapy," he said.

The "full dose" suggested by his doctor means he was administered the complete 1,200 mg each of Casirivimab and Imdevimab that comes in a single package of the Regen-CoV2 antibody cocktail.

## How it works

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals had initially used the 1,200 mg dose each of both molecules for its clinical trial but was approved at half the dose, or 600 mg each, by USA and India when the efficacy of both doses was found to be almost the same. The company, on its website, says that Regen-CoV2 significantly reduced the risk of hospitalisation or death by 70% (1,200 mg) and 71% (2,400 mg) as compared to placebo.

The therapy uses lab-designed antibody molecules or a cocktail of such molecules to bind with the Sars-CoV-2 virus and prevent it from entering human cells.

A study recently published in the journal *Nature Medicine* that tested the efficacy of all available monoclonal antibody therapies in neutralising the omicron variant of the Sars-CoV-2 virus in the petri dish found that both therapies approved in India have "completely lost neutralising activity against B.1.529 (omicron) virus".

The country's foremost vac-

cine expert Dr Gagandeep Kang took to Twitter to describe the case of her 90-year-old uncle from Chennai who was given the antibody treatment after coming in contact with someone who had tested positive for Covid. "We know that 90% or greater infections are currently omicron in Indian cities. We know that the licensed monoclonal antibody products in India do not neutralise omicron. Yet doctors in private hospitals are prescribing monoclonal antibody therapy. Please remember that even among clinical vulnerable, most contacts will stay asymptomatic or have mild symptoms & recover," she said. "It is unethical, immoral and unscientific," she said.

However, doctors and medical professionals are themselves using the therapy despite evidence that it does not work against the omicron variant. At least two doctors from Delhi, on condition of anonymity, said their colleagues and doctor friends had taken the therapy.

Dr Vinay Aggarwal, chairman of Pushpanjali hospital, said, "I did receive the therapy. I am over 70 years old, I have chronic bronchitis and heart conditions. I have had a history of coughing so hard that I broke my ribs. The government says that 80% cases are omicron, and the therapy does not work. But very few samples are sequenced and only about 8,000-9,000 omicron cases have been confirmed by the government across the country. So why should they say it should not be used? Our doctors have the experience in using the therapy and have found it to be beneficial. Not everything is misuse, clinicians should be given the freedom to prescribe therapies once they have been approved."

After testing positive for Covid-19, Delhi-based cardiologist Dr Prem Agarwal also received the therapy. He administered it to his wife and mother as well on suspicion of having the infection.

"My wife is a cancer survivor, my mother is over 90 years old, both are at a high risk of developing severe disease. All of the medicines that have been tried out for Covid-19 work the best when given early on. So, I decided to administer it to them," he said.

## New keyboard that recognises Hindi, Urdu words to help cops record FIRs

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
 NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

IN A bid to help police personnel lodge FIRs and update case diaries easily, the Delhi Police has introduced a phonetic keyboard with a voice-typing feature that records Hindi and Urdu words.

Police said the feature will help personnel and complainants, who use Hindi, record their statements and facts. The feature has been added to the Crime Criminal & Networking Systems (CCNS) software that is used by police to file FIRs, write case diaries

and submit chargesheets.

A Delhi Police spokesperson said, "The investigating officers (IOs) faced difficulty in typing in Hindi and translating statements. With the new feature, the IOs can speak and record their work through the keyboard. Earlier, Hindi typists or data entry operators were used and the work was difficult and not 100% accurate. Also, the system didn't accept the Hindi script."

The technology has been developed by Muktesh Chander, Special CP (Technology and Implementation), and is AI-based. It has a dictionary of traditional Hindi and Urdu

words that are often used by police and courts.

"The system catches new Hindi and Urdu words as well and stores the same in the database. The dictionary will update itself. It has improved speed and accuracy," said the officer.

Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana approved the technology and started a pilot project in all police stations in New Delhi and the North districts of the Delhi Police.

The IOs and other duty officers will be trained to use the voice feature and Hindi-typing keyboard to lodge FIRs and update their diaries.

## BRIEFLY

## Broker held for cheating home buyers of crores

New Delhi: The Delhi Police Crime Branch has arrested a 47-year-old broker who allegedly cheated around 50-100 home buyers on the pretext of selling them luxury apartments in Delhi-NCR and fled with their money five years ago. According to police, the accused, Sanjeev Kumar Mavi, operated more than seven shell companies in Delhi. The first complaint was received from Ranholi district in 2017, when he allegedly cheated buyers of Rs 1.75 crore. Then, he went on the run. Dheeraj Kumar, JCP (Crime), said, "... He has been arrested and booked in six-seven cases."

## SDMC to build parking lot at Punjabi Bagh

New Delhi: Seeing the overwhelming response of people to the Bharat Darshan park at Punjabi Bagh, the SDMC is planning on building a parking space in the area. "The initial idea is to build an automated five-floor parking lot with space for around 200 cars," a senior SDMC official said. The parking lot would cost around Rs 36.9 crore, and will take a year's time to be completed, he added. **ENS**



Empty beds at the CWG village Covid care centre. As per Sunday's health bulletin, only about 10% of the 15,428 hospital beds reserved for Covid patients were occupied. Tashi Tobgyal

## Daily Covid cases drop to 3,600; worst is over in capital for now, say officials

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
 NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

MAINTAINING A consistent decline, Delhi reported 3,674 Covid cases on Sunday at a positivity rate of 6.37%, a drop from 7.41% on Saturday. Delhi government officials said that the case trajectory over the past week has made it clear that the worst is over in the capital for now.

"We had seen this in South Africa as well. Cases rose very quickly and then reduced at a similar pace. Delhi reached a new peak of cases in this wave, but hospitals were not over-

whelmed. This is the right time to reopen activities and institutions, including schools, as there is clear evidence that we are in a better position now, especially with vaccination," said a senior government official.

As per Sunday's health bulletin, only about 10% of the 15,428 hospital beds reserved for Covid patients were occupied. Of 1,508 patients admitted, 447 were on oxygen support while 143 were on ventilator support.

Despite the city crossing the daily cases peak recorded in April, the number of patients on ventilator support has remained low. Less than a tenth of patients ad-

mitted in hospitals have needed ventilator support, data shows.

In January, the highest occupancy of ventilators was 164 out of around 1,400 beds. During the second wave in May, in contrast, all 2,500 ventilator beds available at the time were occupied.

Over the past two months, meanwhile, the overall case fatality rate in the city has dipped. Between May 2020 and September 2021, the rate stood at a consistent 1.74%. Since then, however, the rate has dipped to 1.41%.

"The two main observations during this wave are that those falling ill are not experiencing very

severe lung infections and pneumonia. The second is that the death rate is very low. Most of the people who have died had serious co-morbid conditions. It also seems like vaccinations have helped save many people from severe symptoms," the official said.

Out of close to 1.5 crore adults eligible for vaccination in the city, 1.2 crore have been fully vaccinated so far. Over 8 lakh children in the 15-17 age group have also been vaccinated.

The pace of the precautionary dose, however, has been slowing down. So far, around 2.7 lakh have been administered the third dose.



The community health centre in Nuh, where people queue up outside the single window for vaccination. Express

the district and appealed to people to not spread rumours and misinformation.

In the 15-17 age group, only a third (29,206) out of over 90,000 eligible teenagers have been inoculated with the first dose since January 3.

Health department officials attributed the slow pace of immunisation to several factors including lower literacy, ignorance and rumours, and misinformation among locals on vaccines.

Dr Harshit Goyal at Nuh com-

munity health centre (CHC), said, "There is a myth among people here that vaccines cause infertility among men. A lot of people say 'hamare bachhe nhi hongee teeka lagwaya toh (If we get the vaccine, we will not be able to have children)'... We have been trying to educate people, but they indulge in conspiracy theories, and that along with a low literacy rate, contributes to a lower vaccination rate."

Officials said since the government had made it mandatory

for people to get vaccinated and linked it to provision of services — ration, petrol, pension, bank services etc — there had been a slight uptick.

Nishar Khan, a resident of Tauru, who got his first dose earlier this month, said, "I could not get the vaccine earlier as I had been staying at my wife's house in Rajasthan since the pandemic hit. I recently returned and decided to get the shot as it has been made mandatory to access services and ration."

At the community health centre in Nuh, a single counter for vaccinations of all age groups had been set up. A health department worker was filling up registration details of people on the CoWin portal before their inoculations. "A majority of people who come here are not internet savvy. So, our staff helps them out in registrations," he said, requesting anonymity.

Sunita, an ANM worker at a primary health centre in Ghasera, said that vaccine hesitancy was a major concern: "There is a lot of misinformation and rumours about Covid still in this part of the state... Some be-

lieve that the vaccine programme is a conspiracy of the government. At the village and community level, we are working with panchayats to counsel people about the long-term benefits of vaccination."

Earlier this week, the Nuh SDM held a meeting with local clerics and maulvis, appealing to them to educate people about the benefits of vaccination and to not believe in rumours, after certain videos about the ill-effects of vaccine had gone viral on social media in the district.

Dr Surender Kumar, chief medical officer, Nuh, denied that misinformation and rumours were behind the low rate of third doses. "Since the rate of vaccinations only picked up in the district after November 2021, a majority of population is not yet eligible for the precaution dose. In schools, we have set up camps and have vaccinated almost a third of eligible teenagers. There is some ignorance among a minority of population, but our staff is constantly conducting awareness programmes to dispel rumours."



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



CONG'S CM HUNT

IS CONGRESS high command's decision to let Charanjit Singh Channi to contest from two seats a signal that he will be the party's CM face in Punjab? The jury is out on that. But the Congress claims it has set in motion an exercise to find out the opinion of the public as well as its rank and file on their preferred CM choices. Sources said as many as 70 people have been deployed by the data analytics department to get real-time feedback on the party's prospects in Punjab. The social media department has deployed close to 250 people to collect inputs from the public. Besides, at least two external agencies are doing surveys to find out the preferred CM candidate. Opinion of the party functionaries right from the block level is also being sought, the sources claimed.

COVID PRECAUTIONS

AS THE Budget Session of Parliament begins on Monday, all members have been asked to undergo RTPCR tests at least 48 hours before the session commences. In case any one tests positive, they can come back after seven days of home quarantine, and won't need a negative test report. Members will be seated across the galleries and chambers of both the Houses. Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, who just recovered from Covid, met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday to take stock of the situation. Both Houses will lose an hour of functioning each, due to the staggered timing.

LUNCH TREAT

IT WAS a rare treat for the team that created and performed for the Jammu and Kashmir tableau after the Republic Day celebrations this year. The team members were called by Union minister Dr Jitendra Singh, who hails from Jammu, for lunch at his official residence in the national capital before they returned home. The delegation turned up in full traditional costume to join the minister for lunch.

Politics of polarisation not acceptable to BJP: Rajnath

Accuses SP, BSP of 'crossing all limits to get votes of a particular religion'

LALMANI VERMA  
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 30

EVEN AS Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath continued to invoke Ayodhya movement to hit out at the Opposition SP, accusing it of opening fire on karsevaks in 1990, his party leader and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said that the "politics of polarisation" was not acceptable to the BJP.

Addressing people in Kasganj and Farrukhabad districts, he accused the Opposition parties — SP BSP — of "doing politics of polarisation" and "crossing the limits to get votes and support of a particular religion".

"The politics of polarisation is not acceptable to the BJP as it believes in politics of justice and humanity instead," Singh said. "We will not do politics on the basis of caste, community and religion."

He urged all communities to be cautious and said politics should be done for nation building and not only to form govern-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in Kasganj on Sunday. Express

ment. "Either it is SP or BSP, they want to do politics by dividing society. That is not acceptable to us," he said. "SP is doing the politics of polarisation. They cross all limits to get votes of one community."

Taking a jibe at SP chief Akhilesh Yadav for taking 'anna sankalp' with a red pouch at a press conference in Ghaziabad on Saturday, Singh said, "Laal potli se kaam nahi chalega (red pouch

won't work). Not sure what was tied in that red cloth. They say that grain was tied in it. One needs to make sacrifices to win the trust of people. The people will not trust potli (pouch)."

Singh said the SP should accept the reality and answer why riots occurred during their tenures only, and no one dares to do rioting with the BJP in power. Claiming that the BJP government ensured good law

and order as well as development in Uttar Pradesh, he said goons used to roam freely when the SP was in power. "When law and order is good, development takes place rapidly. Today, if UP is witnessing development, then there is better law and order behind it. Now goons, mafia do not get protection, but bulldozers are run over their illegal properties."

"And after 2017, the BJP government did development with 4G speed. If the party comes to power again, development will be done at 5G speed," he added.

Appealing to the people to vote for BJP and Apna Dal (Sonelal) in Farrukhabad district, Singh said: "Everyone wants Goddess Lakshmi to come to their homes. Goddess Lakshmi never comes on elephant (BSP's symbol), not on bicycle (SP's symbol) and never comes waiving hands (Congress symbol). Whenever Laskhmi comes home, she comes only on lotus (BJP symbol)." Constituencies in Kasganj and Farrukhabad vote on February 20.

Number of death row prisoners 488, highest in 17 yrs, says report

APURVA VISHWANATH  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE NUMBER of prisoners on death row at the end of 2021 stood at 488, the highest in 17 years, according to the Death Penalty in India Report.

"2021 saw the highest number of prisoners on death row at the end of the year since 2016 at 488, an increase of nearly 21% from 2020. When compared with data from the Prison Statistics of India reports released by the National Crime Records Bureau, this is the highest the death row population has been since 2004, when it was 563," it stated.

The report on annual statistics on death penalty by Project 39A is expected to be released Monday. Project 39A is a criminal law reforms advocacy group at the National Law University, Delhi.

The report suggested that limited functioning of courts due to the pandemic has impacted the priority given to death penalty related cases.

"The limited functioning of ap-

pellate courts in both 2020 and 2021 meant fewer appeals of prisoners sentenced to death being decided, and a far greater number of prisoners remaining on death row at the end of the year," it said.

According to the report, while trial courts imposed a total of 144 death sentences in 2021, high courts decided only 39 matters in the same period. In 2020, high courts decided 31 matters related to death penalty compared to 76 in 2019. The Supreme Court, despite listing death penalty cases on priority in September last year, decided only 6 cases in 2021 compared to 11 in 2020 and 28 in 2019.

The report stated that of the 39 cases involving death penalty decided by high courts, only four resulted in confirmation of the death sentences. While 18 were commuted to life imprisonment, 15 in acquittal of all charges, and two cases were remitted back to the trial court. The report stated that the majority of cases in which trial courts imposed the death sentence involved murder, bucking an increasing trend of awarding death sentence for sexual crimes.

Former minister raises allegations against Kerala Lokayukta: 'Will do anything for adequate reward'

SHAJU PHILIP  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JANUARY 30

CPI(M)-BACKED LEGISLATOR KT Jaleel, who was forced to quit as Higher Education Minister in the previous LDF regime after the Lokayukta indicted him of nepotism in appointments, on Sunday raised serious allegations against Kerala Lokayukta Justice Cyriac Joseph, a former Supreme Court judge.

On his Facebook page, Jaleel posted the copy of a 2005 Kerala High Court verdict, issued by a bench also comprising Justice Joseph, which dismissed writ pe-

titions seeking action against the then UDF minister P K Kunhalikutty in a sex scandal.

Highlighting the name of Justice Joseph in the copy of the verdict, Jaleel attached a list of V-Cs of Kottayam-based Mahatma Gandhi University. In this list, he again highlighted the name of Prof Jancy James, whose tenure as V-C was from 2004 to 2008.

Along with this, Jaleel alleged: "The Lord, who had bargained the post of the MG University V-C for his own brother's wife for rescuing a UDF leader from a sensational case, would do anything, if he gets adequate reward."

Without naming Justice Joseph, Jaleel said the UDF has



Kerala ex-minister KT Jaleel

found a "new knife" to backstab the Pinarayi Vijayan government after three central government agencies had probed in vain. "The UDF leaders want to destabilise the present LDF regime, by allowing this gentleman, whose name

was recommended by Congress as chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, to continue in his present post," he alleged.

Justice Joseph was not available for comment.

Referring to the proposed amendment in the Kerala Lokayukta Act, which would reduce the orders of the quasi-judicial body into advisory in nature, Jaleel said people of the state would give scant regard for the demand that the orders of the Lokayukta should be binding on the government.

Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan said it was unbecoming of Jaleel, who had served as

Higher Education Minister, to abuse a judge, who had delivered the verdict against him on charges of nepotism in government appointments.

"By coming out against Justice Joseph, Jaleel had disproved his own godfather Pinarayi Vijayan, who had considered Joseph as Lokayukta," he said.

"The verdict and the appointment of MG University V-C are before the public. Nobody had then raised any allegation about the V-C's appointment. No scandal had emerged during her regime as we had seen when Jaleel was the minister, Jaleel has now emerged as a suicide squad for Vijayan," said Satheesan.

Disha Publication emerges as a Leading Player changing the Test Prep Market



COVID-19 has forced the world into a new reality. Although the crisis is still unfolding, the last two years have seen a lot of companies going out of the market due to the deadly virus. However, at the same time, we have also seen companies converting this threat into an opportunity. The team at Disha Publication realized this opportunity and emerged as the 2nd Top Indian Academic Publisher by working harder during this period to serve the student community. In the recently concluded The Peoples' Choice Publisher Award conducted by Front List & The Federation of Indian Publishers with Nielsen as the Knowledge Partner, Disha emerged 2nd among the Top Indian Academic Publishers.

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## 6 DECISION 2022

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## HASHTAG POLITICS



## ● Of flower and fire

AAP's attacks on its electoral opponents are getting quite filmy, literally. The party's Goa unit has come up with a meme based on the recent Allu Arjun-starrer Pushpa. Taking a dig at the Congress, AAP Goa tweeted, "*MLA Doh Ke Bikau Samjha Kyu? Congress Ka Nahi, AAP Ka MLA Hai* (Did you think MLAs are for sale? I am not from Congress, I am an AAP MLA)."

992 LIKES, 503 RETWEETS IN 7 HOURS

## ● 'Topi' take

The BJP has come out with a video attacking the SP. The video, uploaded on Twitter, is titled "*Tab leyn nahin laaye they hadlaas tum* (Why didn't you bring change then?)". The video asks why Akhilesh did not bring about a change when the poor struggled for a roof over their heads, and "*jab topiwala kamzoron pe hansta tha* (when those wearing caps laughed at the weak)", in a reference to red caps worn by SP members. 2.9K LIKES, 1.4K RETWEETS IN 14 HOURS

## BALLOTIN

## BSP declares 8 more candidates

**Lucknow:** The BSP announced eight more candidates on Sunday for the fourth phase of the UP Assembly polls, replacing two from Unnao district. Eight candidates from Pilibhit, Sitapur, Hardoi and Unnao districts have been declared in the list. The party announced the candidature of Sevak Lal Rawat from the Mohan (SC) seat and Brijkishore Verma from the Bhagwant Nagar seat in Unnao, replacing Vinay Choudhary and Prem Singh Chandel respectively. **PTI**

## Punjab election mascot unveiled

**Chandigarh:** The state Chief Electoral Officer's office unveiled its election mascot, "Shera", on Sunday. Five persons with disabilities were specially invited on the occasion as the guests of honour. Punjab CEO S Karuna Raju said dressed in traditional Punjabi attire, "Shera", depicting a lion, represents the rich cultural heritage of the state. **PTI**

## Shah in Goa, picks on 'small parties from other states'

MAYURA JANWALKAR  
PANJIM, JANUARY 30

ON HIS maiden trip to Goa to campaign for his party, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that Goa's voters would have to choose between a "Golden Goa" and a "Gandhi parivar ka Goa".

"For us Goa is Golden Goa and for the Congress, Goa is the Goa of Gandhi parivar – they need a good vacation spot. Their leaders take a lot of vacations. They need a vacation spot. You tell me, *Golden Goa chahiye, ya parivar ka Goa chahiye?*" he told a gathering in Ponda, from where the BJP has fielded former CM Ravi Naik, who quit the Congress last month.

At his three public addresses in Ponda, Sanvordem and Vasco, the themes were recurrent. Shah trained guns on the Congress's "parivar first" approach, said parties like the Trinamool Congress (TMC) or the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had no plan for Goa's development, and, at every address, paid tribute to late defence minister and former Chief Minister of Goa, Manohar Parrikar.

Attacking the Congress, Shah said Goa's annual budget under the previous Manmohan Singh-led government at the Centre in 2013-14 was Rs 432 crore. "It was the Sonia-Manmohan government and TMC was supporting it,"



Shah during a door-to-door campaign in Sanvordem, Sunday. Courtesy: Goa BJP

Shah said, adding Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allocated Rs 2,567 crore for the state in 2021.

Shah said major infrastructure projects like the Atal Setu, the Zuari Bridge and the Mopa International Airport were possible in Goa only because of the "double engine" BJP government at the

Centre and in the state.

He said while the former Congress government in the state led by then CM Digambar Kamat had nothing to show for infrastructure development, his party was going into polls under his leadership.

"They have not announced it but he is going everywhere and saying it," said Shah. "Can

Digambar Kamat do this (development)? Rahul Baba won't allow it. He will fear that Modiji will be popular, let it be. He does not care about Goa's development. He has developed Modiophobia... Achcha hi hai Rahul Baba, aap Modi, Modi hi karte rahiye (It's good. Rahul, keep chanting Modi... Modi). Look at his tweets. You won't see one positive tweet. Such people cannot give development to Goa."

With the TMC, the NCP and the AAP also in crosshairs, Shah said: "I don't know why all the parties from the country have descended on tiny Goa? I want to tell Goa's voters that there can be development only when there is stability... Can these small parties, parties from other states, give Goa development? Do they understand your problems? Do they

have solutions to these?"

"No party has come here to give a stable government. Someone wants to be an all-India political party, somebody wants to open their account... they can't form a government. Only the BJP can form the government and that is why we need your blessings," he added.

In Sanvordem in South Goa, along with CM Pramod Sawant, Shah walked from one house to another, distributing leaflets to voters and urging them to vote for the lotus symbol. About Parrikar, he said, "He was such a leader who had given Goa a name not only in the country but all over the world. Parrikarji laid the foundation of development here, where Dr Pramod Sawant is now constructing a strong building."



## VIA GUJARAT

Gujarat Congress leader Hardik Patel campaigns in Varanasi on Sunday. **PTI**

## 24 women in Congress 4th list of 61 candidates for UP polls

MAULSHREE SETH  
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 30

THE CONGRESS party Sunday released its fourth list of 61 candidates, 24 of whom are women nominees, mostly newcomers.

The Congress has fielded a woman candidate, Reeta Maurya, from the Ayodhya constituency. It has also fielded Sudha Dwivedi from the Sareni seat in Rae Bareilly. The party fielded Mohd Fateh Bahadur from the Gauriganj constituency in Amethi.

In Rae Bareilly's Harchandpur seat, from where its sitting MLA Rakesh Singh had defected to the

BJP, the party nominated Thakur leader Surendra Vikram Singh.

The Congress has so far announced 316 candidates for the elections to the 403-member Assembly. Of them, it has fielded 127 women candidates in keeping with AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's pledge that the party will give poll tickets to 40 per cent women candidates. Barring a few known faces, most of its women candidates so far are electoral debutantes, who are newcomers to politics too.

The party had named 50 women contestants in its first list of 125 candidates, 16 women in its second list of 41 candidates,

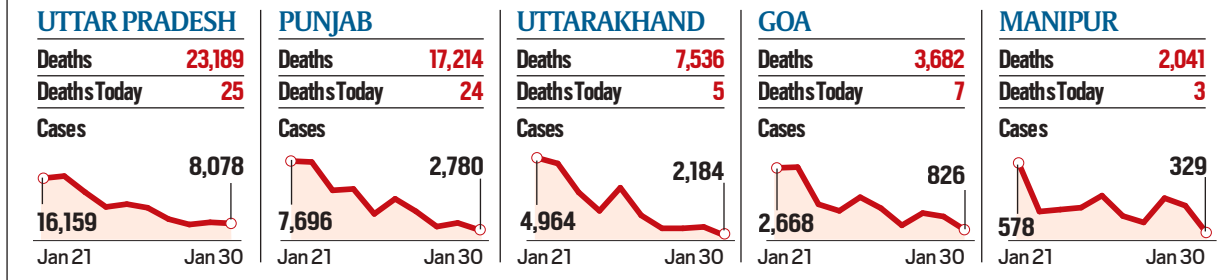
and 37 women nominees in its third list of 89 candidates.

"While they might not be big names, they are active on the ground and whoever visits their constituencies would get to know about them from now onwards, and that is what the Congress is aiming at," a senior party leader said.

However, several UP leaders also could not recognise many candidates, but said they would know them as they become active in their respective belts.

The Congress has fielded Karishma Thakur from Govindnagar. She is currently Mahila Congress chief in Bundelkhand.

## TRACKING COVID IN ELECTION-BOUND STATES



## FARMERS &amp; POLITICS

## Old model of polarisation will no longer work: Tikait

ASAD REHMAN  
LUCKNOW, JANUARY 30

"FARMERS FORCED to sell their produce at half price and hit by lathis know who to vote for," said farm leader and Bhartiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, stressing that the "old model" of communal polarisation would no longer work in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the election.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* on Saturday, Tikait also maintained that he would play no active part in the election campaign and refused to openly back any party, underlining, instead, the importance of people's movements to keep governments in check.

"If governments are not working, people must learn to raise their voice in their language. People and farmers must keep their organisation and movement strong. Governments will come and go," he said in Lucknow.

"I am separate from the election. After the 13-month farm

agitation, I don't need to tell farmers who to vote for. They are selling their produce at half price. Potato, sugarcane and other produce is not being bought at MSP. There are no jobs and there is rampant inflation. People are buying gas cylinders at a high price and women are being forced to bring wood from forests to cook at home. Families involved in the milk trade are also suffering. Large companies are entering the food market. People, farmers have stood in lines, gotten hit by lathis. They are smart, and they know who to vote for," Tikait said.

He said politics over religion won't work anymore. "It is an old model now. Once or twice, the Hindu-Muslim factor came first. But now, there are models — of development, schools, etc. The old model will definitely not work."

Tikait, notably, had supported the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha and 2017 Vidhan Sabha elections. He defended himself, saying: "The whole country had supported the party then... This



Tikait says he will take part in Samyukt Kisan Morcha's 'Mission Uttar Pradesh' against the BJP. Vishal Srivastav

time, I will only cast my vote. I will only tell people about the movement."

"After the movement against the farm laws, political parties have started talking about farmers, the poor, the adivasis. They talk of education now," said Tikait.

The farm leader from Western Uttar Pradesh, one of the most visible faces of the movement, was in the state capital on Friday and Saturday to meet a government committee and discuss the "unmet" demands of the farmers over the Lakhimpur Kheri incident.

Four farmers and a journalist had been run over by a convoy of SUVs including one owned by Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra Teni. His son Ashish, accused of driving one of the SUVs, has been arrested.

## CONG VS CONG

## Punjab Cong has a familiar problem: factionalism

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR  
AMRITSAR, JANUARY 30

SPEAKING IN Amritsar on Sunday, Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chief Navjot Singh Sidhu said, "Nobody can defeat the Congress. Only the Congress can defeat itself."

He was responding to a question on factionalism and infighting in Congress that is in the midst of a crucial Assembly election.

In all three regions of Punjab — Majha, Doaba and Malwa — candidates of the party have been at each other's throats and in some cases, levelling serious allegations against each other.

## Majha: 25 seats

In 2017, Sidhu, then a new entrant in the Congress, had managed to effect a swing in favour of

his party not only in Amritsar East, where he was the candidate, but also other seats in Amritsar city. But the tables have since turned. Sidhu is no longer a uniting force for the Congress in the region.

Deputy CM Om Prakash Soni, contesting from Amritsar Central, and Cabinet minister Raj Kumar Verka, contesting from Amritsar West, are not on the best of terms with Sidhu. Though Sidhu actively campaigned for him in 2017, Amritsar North MLA Sunil Dutt also does not enjoy good relations with Sidhu.

It's this open factionalism that Bikram Singh Majithia, the Shiromani Akali Dal candidate against Sidhu in Amritsar East, will hope to cash in on.

Amritsar MP Gurjit Aujla also shares frosty ties with Sidhu.

In Batala seat, Sidhu managed to get a ticket for Ashwini Kumar, but that only set off more infighting in the Congress. Cabinet min-

ister Tripat Rajinder Singh Bajwa called a gathering at his house where speakers openly asked the Congress high command to give the ticket to Tripat Rajinder Bajwa, the party's reluctant Fatehgarh Churian candidate, or his son.

Meanwhile, Khadoor Sahib Congress MP Jasbir Singh Dimpai is opposed to at least two party candidates, Ramanjeet Singh Sikki from Khadoor Sahib and Santokh Singh Bhalaipur from Baba Bakala. Dimpai has decided to field his brother and former SSP, Harpinder Singh, from Khadoor Sahib as an Independent.

## Doaba

Four Congress legislators — Sultanpur Lodhi's Navtej Singh Cheema, Jalandhar North's Bawa Henry, Phagwara's Balwinder Singh Dhaliwal and Bholath's Sukhpal Singh Khaira — had ap-

proached Sonia Gandhi, asking for the ticket of minister Gurjit Rana to be cancelled from Kapurthala. While their request hasn't been granted, an angry Rana is getting his son Rana Inder Parat Singh to contest against Navtej Cheema from Sultanpur Lodhi.

## Malwa

One of the biggest embarrassments for the Congress in this region is Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi's brother Manohar Singh filing his nomination as an Independent against sitting Congress MLA Gurpreet Singh GP in Bassi Pathana.

There has been more mudslinging. The party's Bathinda Rural candidate Harvinder Laddi held a press conference in Chandigarh to level allegations of drug smuggling against a powerful Congress minister. Despite levelling such serious allegations, Laddi managed to get a ticket.

## I HEREBY DECLARE

HARISH RAWAT  
Congress candidate from Lalkuan

TOTAL ASSETS:  
**₹79,72,822 (self)**  
Wife: **₹6.89 crore**  
IMMOVABLE ASSETS:  
Self: **₹36,00,000**

Wife: **₹2.99 crore**  
LOANS AND LIABILITIES:  
**₹1.65 crore on wife**  
PENDING CRIMINAL CASES: **Nil**  
PROFESSION: Pensioner (Ex Member of Parliament & Ex MLA)  
SOURCES OF EARNING: Spouse (Business income, interest on FDRs and deposits)  
EDUCATION: LLB, Lucknow University (1978-79)

## Manipur BJP list finally out, three MLAs kept out

JIMMY LEIVON  
IMPHAL, JANUARY 30

BATTLING A problem of plenty in ticket aspirants, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) released on Sunday its much-awaited list of candidates for elections to the 60-member state Assembly.

While Chief Minister N Biren Singh will be contesting from his home constituency, Heingang, the party has refused tickets to three sitting MLAs. Only three of the 60 candidates in the list are women.

The BJP list comes four days behind its own deadline for the announcement. Many believe the saffron party was having a tough time choosing candidates, with four to five ticket aspirants in every constituency. The delay was also causing disquiet among ticket aspirants facing a tough competition as many leaders of other parties, such as the Congress, had joined the party ahead of the elections.

In Sunday's list, the party has dropped senior MLA Y Irbot Singh and given the ticket from his Wangkhei seat to Congress turncoat Okram Henry Singh, the nephew of former CM Okram Ibobi Singh. In Moirang, M Prithviraj has replaced MLA P Saratchandra, while in Kakching, the party has fielded Y Surchandra instead of the sitting legislator M Rameshwar Singh. Another former Congress

leader, Th Shyamkumar Singh, who had supported the BJP government in forming the government in 2017 despite its falling short of seats, will contest from Andro constituency.

The replacements have caused anger among many ticket aspirants in the party, with angry workers burning BJP flags and banners in protest. In Sagolband, where the party has fielded Congress turncoat RK Imo Singh, BJP workers ransacked the mandal office and uploaded a video on social media threatening to close it down. RK Imo, the son-in-law of incumbent Chief Minister N Biren Singh, switched over to the BJP from Congress November last year.

Of the 20 seats in the hills, however, the BJP has retained all its six MLAs along with the new entrants from other parties. In Nungba, it has fielded retired IAS officer Dinganglung Gonmei against veteran Congress leader Gaikhangam. In Henglep and Tamenglong, where two BJP MLAs defected to Congress, it has fielded new faces, including a retired bureaucrat.

Meanwhile, the party has fielded L Basanta Singh against former Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh in Thoubal. In Uripok, the party has fielded a retired bureaucrat Kh. Raghumani Singh against NPP MLA and deputy Chief Minister Y Joykumar Singh.



# EXPRESS NETWORK

## BRIEFLY

### TELANGANA

Car driven by teen kills four

**Hyderabad:** Three women and a girl died when a car allegedly driven by a 16-year-old hit a group of labourers sitting on a pavement in Telangana's Karimnagar town on Sunday morning, police said. The incident took place around 6.50 am when the teenager lost control over the vehicle and rammed into a divider and hit those sitting on the pavement, they said. A police official said three women (aged between 27 and 32 years) and a 14-year-old girl died in the incident and two others were injured. The minor driver pressed the accelerator instead of the brake, Karimnagar commissioner of Police V Sathyanarayana said. According to the police, he and two other minors who were in the car fled the scene after the accident, leaving behind the car. They were later apprehended by police and the owner of car was also taken into custody for allowing his minor son to drive the vehicle. **PTI**

### MAHARASHTRA

Lata Mangeshkar recovers; doctor

**Mumbai:** Lata Mangeshkar is now cured of Covid and pneumonia, said Dr Pratik Samdani, who is leading the team of doctors attending her. Mangeshkar (92) was admitted to the intensive care unit of the Breach Candy Hospital in south Mumbai in the first week of January after she contracted Covid-19. Dr Samdani said that she continues to be in the ICU and off ventilator. Mangeshkar had lung ailments two and a half years ago and was treated for them. She used oxygen often at home too. **ENS**

### KARNATAKA

Probe into prison 'irregularities'

**Bengaluru:** Following allegations of special treatment and alleged corruption at Bengaluru Parappana Agrahara Central prisons, the Karnataka government has ordered a probe. The allegations emerged after a video, purportedly showing a prisoner in conversation with two senior jail officials, started doing the rounds. The government has appointed ADGP S Murugan to probe into the irregularities. The DIG (Prisons) has been directed to assist Murugan in the investigation. Earlier, Home Minister Araga Jnanendra and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai had assured to conduct a detailed inquiry into the matter and take stern action. **ENS**

### MEGHALAYA

Low-intensity blast in Shillong

**Guwahati:** A low-intensity blast was reported in the heart of Shillong Sunday evening. However, no casualties were reported. The blast occurred near Delhi Mistan Bhandar shop, located in the town's Police Bazar area between 6 and 6.20 pm, police said. "We are on the job right now and do not have much details but we can confirm that it was a low-intensity explosive. No casualties have been reported," said Idashisha Nongrang, Meghalaya Special DGP. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma took to Twitter, describing it as a "cowardly act". **ENS**

## MANN KI BAAT

# India very successfully fighting new wave of Covid-19, says PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi said on Sunday, in his monthly Mann Ki Baat programme, that the number of Covid-19 cases in India are decreasing and the country is fighting the new wave of the pandemic with "great success".

"India is very successfully fighting the new corona wave. It is a matter of great pride that almost 4.5 crore children have taken the corona vaccine till now. This means that almost 60 per cent of the youngsters in the age group 15-18 took the vaccine within just 3-4 weeks. This will not only protect our youth, but also help them continue their studies," Modi said during this year's first Mann Ki Baat episode.

"Another heartening fact is that within 20 days, one crore people have taken the precaution dose as well. This trust of our countrymen on the indigenous vaccine is our great strength," he added.

On Sunday, the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country crossed 165.70 crore, and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat on Martyrs' Day, observed to mark the death anniversary of the Father of the Nation, on Sunday. **PTI**

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said more than 75 per cent of adults in India have been fully vaccinated.

The Prime Minister began his latest Mann Ki Baat programme talking about Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary, which is observed on January 30, and said

the day is a reminder to everyone about the teachings of the Father of the Nation.

Modi also referred to the installation of the hologram statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at India Gate, and said the way people from across the country welcomed this and expressed

their joy was "unforgettable".

"Friends, in the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the country is re-establishing its national symbols through these efforts. We saw that the Amar Jawan Jyoti near India Gate and the jyoti lit at the National War Memorial... were merged. There were tears in the eyes of many countrymen and martyr families on this emotional occasion," he said.

The Prime Minister also urged people to visit the National War Memorial. "Do take along your family and children too. Here you will feel a different energy and inspiration," he added.

Talking about the Padma awards, Modi said there were many "unsung heroes who have done extraordinary deeds in ordinary circumstances" in this year's list of recipients.

Pointing out that he had received many letters and messages with suggestions for 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', Modi said it was "unforgettable" that "more than 1 crore children" from the country and abroad "have written to me through their Mann Ki Baat post cards".

**FULL REPORT ON**  
**www.indianexpress.com**

## Bengal viewed as gas chamber of democracy, says governor

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, JANUARY 30

IN ANOTHER showdown with the Mamata Banerjee-led state government, Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said people view West Bengal as a "gas chamber of democracy" and alleged "trampling of human rights".

After paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary at Gandhi Ghat in Barrackpore, Dhankhar said: "I cannot see the land of Bengal getting drenched in blood and becoming a laboratory for trampling of human rights. People are saying that the state is turning into a gas chamber of democracy."

The Governor further said the situation in Bengal because such that the Calcutta High Court had to direct the National Human Rights Commission to form a fact-finding committee to probe into alleged human rights violations in post-poll violence last year.



West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar

"No amount of insults will deter me from my path. It was not appropriate for the chief minister of the state (Mamata Banerjee) to make derogatory remarks within and even outside the state. It has to be everyone's effort to ensure that there is peace in the society in line with the Constitution of the country".

Hitting back at him, state education minister Bratya Basu said Dhankhar to avoid acting "like the spokesperson of a party".

"The Governor has no idea about the history of Bengal or the history of Indian politics. Now if incidents of violence have taken

## Mumbai's Covid-19 test positivity rate drops to 2.5 per cent

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

MUMBAI RECORDED 1,160 new Covid-19 infections on Sunday and an overall recovery rate of 97 per cent, officials said. The test positivity rate (TPR) — the number of positive cases against the total tests conducted — in the state capital dropped to 2.5 per cent, down from 4.3 per cent recorded three days back. The TPR has recorded a sharp fall from 28.9 per cent witnessed on January 7.

On January 30, out of 46,307 tests conducted, 1,160 turned positive. Besides, 10 new Covid-19 deaths were recorded in the city.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is expecting the number of positive cases to drop below 1,000 in the days to come. However, the civic body has appealed to citizens to not let their guard down.

On January 7, out of the 72,442 tests conducted, 20,971 samples had returned positive. But after hitting its pandemic peak around January 10, the daily cases gradually started declining in the city.

On January 11, out of the 62,097 tests conducted, 11,647 were detected with Covid-19 with a TPR of 18.7 per cent. A



A health worker gets a third Covid-19 vaccine dose, in Mumbai on Sunday.

Ganesh Shirsekar

week later, on January 18, the number of daily cases dropped with 6,149 infections recorded out of 47,700 tests at a positivity rate of 12.8 per cent.

The total active case tally in Mumbai is presently at 10,796 with 10,15,451 recovery cases. The civic body said that there was no need to panic as only 6 per cent of the total hospital beds were occupied in the city. On Sunday, out of the total 1,160 positive cases, 190 were hospitalised and only 29 required oxygenated beds.

While the number of daily positive cases is registering a steady decline, the number of deaths due to the infection remained high. On Sunday, 10 Covid-19 deaths were recorded in the city.

## RAJASTHAN PAPER LEAK

## BJP MP says state minister involved; he denies claim

DEEP MUKHERJEE  
JAIPUR, JANUARY 30

THE OPPOSITION BJP on Sunday stepped up its attack on the Rajasthan government, alleging that a state minister was involved in the Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers (REET) paper leak case and demanding his resignation from the post.

The BJP, which has long sought a CBI probe into the issue, also questioned the role of an NGO that purportedly has links with the state minister.

BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Kirodi Lal Meena said that technical education minister Subhash Garg was involved in the paper leak case and was also linked to the NGO, named Rajiv Gandhi Study Circle.

Garg denied the accusations as "baseless" and said they were motivated by political concerns.

## Two arrested for attack on Dalit man in Rajasthan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
JAIPUR, JANUARY 30

POLICE HAVE arrested two suspects for the alleged abduction and attack on a Dalit man in Rajasthan's Churu district this week, officials said on Sunday.

"We have arrested two of the accused — Umesh and Birbal. They were arrested on Saturday evening. We are investigating the role of the other named accused and some of them are absconding," said Rajgarh circle officer Himanshu Sharma on Sunday.

Eight men, believed to be from the Jat community, allegedly abducted 25-year-old Rakesh Meghwal on the night of January 26. They then assaulted him and

forced him to drink their urine.

In the FIR registered the next day, Meghwal — a resident of Rukhasar village — alleged that the assault stemmed from a dispute during the festival of Holi last year.

Meghwal also said the accused used casteist slurs and a derogatory term, saying that the Dalits "would be taught a lesson" for having the "audacity" of getting into a confrontation with the Jat community.

At least six other accused are yet to be arrested. The suspects have been booked under IPC sections related to abduction, unlawful assembly and others. Relevant sections of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 have also been invoked.



Activists of Swarajpeeth Trust during a silent protest at Banka, Bihar, on Sunday. **Express**

## Bihar: Gandhian group protests against hate speech event

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
PATNA, JANUARY 30

HUNDREDS of activists of Swarajpeeth Trust on Sunday sat on a silent protest at six places in Bihar — Banka, Araria, Supaul, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga and Saharsa — to protest against the hate speech made during Dharma Sansad in Haridwar in December last year.

A Gandhian organisation, Swarajpeeth Trust's Bihar unit convenor Pranav Sanjay told *The Indian Express*: "The idea behind the silent protest is to counter hate with love and compassion. All activists observed a fast on Sunday."

Sanjeev said that among the silent protestors at six places included 31 Muslims. "They (Muslims) are conveying that they treat Hindus, Sikhs and Christians alike, still if you (Dharma Sansad) want to annihilate us, we are present before you. We would offer no resistance or lodge any complaint".

Dharma Sansad's Supaul unit convenor Pancham Singh said: "It was heartening to see several Hindus joining our Satyagrah. They said that if people of other religions are as much part of this country as they are..."

The Gandhian trust's Banka convenor Bhola Prasad Yadav said: "The beginning of any violence starts with resistance. But

we believe in spreading love and compassion".

The three-day conclave was held in December last year in Haridwar where several hate speeches were made targeting Muslims and calling for violence against them. Two FIRs were registered and a special investigating team is probing the case. Five people — the key organisers of the conclave and the controversial priest of Dasna temple in Ghaziabad, Yati Narsinghanand, Waseem Rizvi alias Jitendra Narayan Tyagi, Dharamdas Maharaj, Annapurna Maa and Sagar Sindhuraj Maharaj — were named in the FIRs. So far, Narsinghanand and Tyagi have been arrested.



CM Ibrahim

**EXPLAINED**

Siddaramaiah had become an "orphan" in the Congress and so there was no one to speak for him. "Siddaramaiah has given me a gift.

He has delivered it through the Congress party. I have accepted it happily," he said. "Shivakumar and Hariprasad are a good team, they have the same mindset so the AICC (All India Congress Committee) seems to have made the appointment".

The AICC's move to nominate Hariprasad as the Council's Opposition leader came a day after it appointed a former minister MB Patil, a Siddaramaiah loyalist, as the chairman of the party campaign committee for the 2023 state Assembly elections.

It is an open secret in the Karnataka Congress that Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah do not see eye to eye and are rivals in the chief ministerial race if the party comes to power next year. The two leaders cannot be more different from each other, with Shivakumar dubbed a "capitalist

to the core" and Siddaramaiah a "socialist".

While both leaders are known to have a brash way of dealing with party colleagues, Siddaramaiah has found relatively more acceptability and loyalty among Congress legislators. Shivakumar however earned more political capital in recent days by leading the Mekedatu protest march. The Congress leadership's call for sinking of differences and bringing the party back to power has resulted in the two leaders putting up a united front in recent days.

The simmering differences between Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah surfaced last October when two pro-Siddaramaiah party functionaries' conversation was picked up by microphones ahead of a press conference. This private chat be-

tween a Congress media coordinator and a spokesperson dwelt on Shivakumar's "shortcomings" as party president and seemed to indicate their greater confidence in Siddaramaiah's leadership.

While Shivakumar has attempted to inject new energy into the Karnataka Congress after becoming party chief in July 2020 amid the Covid first wave and lockdown, the bulk of 68 party MLAs are known to be more aligned with Siddaramaiah.

Shivakumar was appointed the state party chief months after being arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) over money laundering charges following an Income Tax (IT) investigation into his alleged tax evasion during 2017-18. He is one of the most wealthy legislators in Karnataka with assets close to Rs 850 crore declared ahead of the

2018 Assembly polls.

Since taking charge, Shivakumar has tried to get the party out of Siddaramaiah's grasp by replacing several old functionaries with his own loyalists. On his part, Siddaramaiah has tried to maintain his control over the party unit by ensuring that Shivakumar does not have a unilateral run and is assisted by as many as four working presidents.

Many Congress MLAs believe Siddaramaiah is a more versatile leader who does not carry the baggage of pending cases of corruption or other economic offences.

A section, however, also feels both the leaders have shortcomings and would not be able to capitalise on the anti-incumbency factor against the incumbent BJP government and lead the party effectively in the 2023 polls.





## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# UNLOCKING CLASSROOM

Restarting schools must be a priority, vaccination of under-18 must pick up pace

THOUGH OVER TWO lakh Covid-19 cases are being reported every day in India, the third wave seems to be plateauing in large parts of the country — and so, reopening schools must now move to the top of the agenda of all governments. The crisis in learning and education, the regression of children's foundational skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, and the cost in terms of nutrition and equity have been underlined by various surveys. According to a parliamentary standing committee report last year, "around 320 million children in India had not stepped into a classroom for more than a year". Several states had reopened classrooms for a few months last year, but the Omicron-driven wave of infections led to another interruption. Children in the national capital lost more school-days to pollution.

As the third wave peaks in some cities, states like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana have announced dates of reopening schools. Since 2020, when schools shut down to contain the imminent first wave of the coronavirus, then an unknown and unpredictably dangerous pathogen, we have come a long way. With 75 per cent adults vaccinated, better treatment protocols and a low rate of hospitalisation in the current wave, governments cannot afford to keep schools, and the lives of children, in a limbo for much longer. But the decision to reopen must be guided by data and science. It must not be a top-down diktat, but involve teachers, district administrations and parents. Two years into the pandemic, all states must have — at the very least — by now, devised an SOP that helps school administrations decide on reopening schools on the basis of the case positivity rate or the number of occupied hospital beds or other criteria devised in agreement with medical experts. Given that, at any moment of time, the burden of disease varies from state to state, district to district, this must be a local decision, taken transparently — and without panic.

The case for reopening schools is a strong one but it is not hard to see why state governments continue to exercise caution. Earlier fears that children will be carriers and infect the elderly at home have been assuaged by the high levels of vaccination among the adult population — 75 per cent of the adults have been fully vaccinated. The vaccination of children in the 15-18 age group has started but is showing signs of slowing down. That needs to pick up pace, schools need to be made part of the vaccination process. Surely, the choice is not a simple binary one and there will be risks. But as the third wave wanes, as the adult population moves to total vaccination, state governments must go to work on a reopening plan that ensures safety of children as well as access to learning. So far, the policy debate in the shadow of Covid has been, as it should, dominated by reviving the economy and ameliorating distress. Similar urgency, thought, planning needs to be brought to unlocking classrooms — the future is a terrible thing to waste.

## BATTLE FOR MANIPUR

The BJP hopes to extend its run in Imphal, Congress wants to retake the state

IN FIVE YEARS, the roles have reversed for the Congress and the BJP in Manipur, where the first phase of elections is due on February 27. In 2017, the Congress was in pole position in state politics, having held office for three consecutive terms, and the BJP, the emerging challenger, was looking for allies. The Congress fell short of a majority by three seats, but it was the BJP, which had seven MLAs less than the Congress, that got to form the government, with some help from the Governor. A depleted Congress has now formed a pre-poll coalition with four Left parties and the Janata Dal (Secular) while the BJP, on Sunday, announced candidates for all 60 seats. The BJP's erstwhile allies, the National People's Party (NPP) and Naga People's Front (NPF), seem to be on their own.

The Congress's willingness to form a coalition and the BJP's decision to contest all seats have been triggered by a churn that began even before the 2017 elections. The BJP's extraordinary gains in that election was the outcome of many senior Congress leaders crossing over to the saffron party that had power at the Centre and funds at disposal. Biren Singh, who eventually became chief minister, was a member of the Ibobi Singh-led Congress government until a few months before elections. Over five years, many Congress, NPP and NPF MLAs and leaders joined the BJP, which while strengthening the party has also triggered factionalism within. In short, the BJP faces a problem of plenty but believes it now has enough leaders to fight battles in the Imphal Valley as well as Naga and Kuki-dominated hill seats. Also, with the leverage of office at the Centre, the BJP is well placed to negotiate post-poll deals if it falls short of a majority. The Congress, on the other hand, hopes to consolidate the anti-BJP by allying with the Left parties, which have a committed but shrinking vote base. But as in most northeastern states, elections in Manipur are influenced by kinship, proximity to power centres, etc. more than party or ideological affiliation.

To the BJP's credit, or call it luck, its term in office has seen fewer incidents of insurgency-related violence, road blockades and so on, as compared to the Congress years, which allowed the government to focus on state-building. Yet, Manipur recorded the highest number of arrests under UAPA in 2020, behind UP and J&K, with the government wielding the sedition law against journalists at will. The killing of an Army colonel and six others last year has disrupted the narrative and revealed the precarious state of peace. Holding up that peace is a challenge for the political process.

## FREEZE FRAME

## E P UNNY



ASHOK GULATI

THE UNION BUDGET for 2022-23 to be presented by the finance minister is likely to talk much about macro-economic recovery, be it V-shaped or K-shaped. She may announce some measures to boost the MSME sector, greater investments in infrastructure, and so on. However, common people are more concerned with surging inflationary pressures, inflicting an "inflation tax" on their savings. Containing the fiscal deficit has always been a challenge. And it would be more so this year when economic recovery is still fragile. But what one hopes is that the FM will keep the budget accounts transparent.

Transparency in budgetary accounts is critical for the credibility of the budget. In this context, the FM deserves compliments for her last year's Union budget, when revised numbers for food and fertiliser subsidies were put up way above the budgeted numbers, clearing almost all arrears of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the fertiliser industry. Think of revising the food subsidy budget estimate of Rs 1.15 lakh crore to Rs 4.22 lakh crore, and the fertiliser subsidy estimate of Rs 71,309 crore to about Rs 1.34 lakh crore. That was a bold move towards transparency. Even this year, the revised estimates of food and fertiliser subsidies are likely to be significantly higher than the budgeted estimates of Rs 2.43 lakh crore and Rs 79,530 crore respectively, and one hopes that the FM will keep them transparent and clear all the bills in the revised estimates.

Looking at the budget from the food and agriculture angle, I see the subsidies on food, fertilisers, and payments under the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi will dominate, and easily cross Rs 4 lakh crore, and may even go towards Rs 5 lakh crore in total. As a percentage of net tax revenue of the Union government (after deducting the share of states), this subsidy amount may turn out to be around 30 per cent. This share of subsidies, which are basically doles, is multiple times the government's expenditure on agri-R&D through its



T V PAUL

AS A YOUNG PhD student studying the Kashmir conflict at Yale University in the early 1950s, Michael Brecher had no idea that he would end up as a pioneering scholar of Indian foreign policy and its emerging position in the international system. Leaders of the Indian elite, including Jawaharlal Nehru, V K Krishna Menon, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Sheikh Abdullah, would confide in him, even though he wrote sympathetic yet somewhat critical essays about India's policies on controversial topics like Kashmir and nonalignment.

Brecher, who retired as a distinguished professor at McGill University's political science department last year after a nearly seven-decade-long stellar career, passed away at the age of 96 on January 16. He had made enormous scholarly contributions on topics such as Indian and Israeli foreign policies, Asia's new states and, later, large-scale studies on crises in world politics. In his long career, he wrote more than 30 books, scores of articles, and book chapters.

From his early days as a scholar, Brecher developed a striking skill for interviewing top political leaders and bureaucrats. In his unpublished autobiography, he narrates how he was successful in conducting candid interviews with key figures associated with India's independence and Partition. Louis Mountbatten, Clement Atlee, and other key figures spent several hours with him in the waning days of the Raj. Mountbatten's introduction to Nehru opened a door to this young doctoral student and soon-to-be assistant professor from Canada. Born to Jewish parents, Brecher had seen discrimination in his early days in the academy and in Canadian



# Budgeting for farmers

Investment in research, efficiency in government spending can increase agricultural incomes

The upshot of this is that if the Union government wants the biggest bang for its buck, the right approach is to double or even triple the amount on agri-R&D and extension, especially in the emerging areas of high-value agriculture (horticulture, medicinal plants, livestock, fishery, etc). This is not just to raise their productivity but also build efficient value chains to supply these to lucrative markets, so that farmers' incomes can be significantly augmented. That's where the role of the private sector becomes important. ICAR needs not only a big infusion of funds but also an overhaul to collaborate with the private sector and FPOs to make its research outcomes marketable.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), which hovers around Rs 8,000 crore. Interestingly, our research at ICRIR shows that investment in agri-R&D brings five to 10 times higher returns in terms of agri-GDP or even poverty alleviation than the same amount spent through, say, fertiliser subsidies (or even power subsidies by states).

The upshot of this is that if the Union government wants the biggest bang for its buck, the right approach is to double or even triple the amount on agri-R&D and extension, especially in the emerging areas of high-value agriculture (horticulture, medicinal plants, livestock, fishery, etc). This is not just to raise their productivity but also build efficient value chains to supply these to lucrative markets, so that farmers' incomes can be significantly augmented. That's where the role of the private sector becomes important. ICAR needs not only a big infusion of funds but also an overhaul to collaborate with the private sector and FPOs to make its research outcomes marketable.

On the food subsidy front, which is ballooning, we know it is the result of the high economic cost of rice and wheat to the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the low issue prices at which it has to supply grains for the public distribution system (PDS), and the large population (67 per cent) to be covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). The economic cost of wheat and rice is almost 40 per cent higher than their MSP. Take, for example, rice, whose economic cost hovers around Rs 40/kg, but it has to be given at Rs 3/kg through PDS and almost free under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Given our weak governance of the PDS, ground reports suggest there is not only massive leakage of rice in the open market but it also goes towards ramping up our rice exports, which may touch 20 million tonnes this year, the highest ever in history. It would have been a matter of pride if these exports were on its competitive strength. But the reality is that

the export unit value is much below the MSP of rice. And when India exports, say, 20 mmt of rice in a global market that hovers around 45-46 mmt, it brings down the global prices of rice. This means that India has to export more quantities of rice to get the same amount of dollars, a perfect case for imposing an optimal export tax on rice. Also, this amount of rice which is being produced through heavy subsidies on power for irrigation and extremely low urea prices, means that we are exporting at least 40 to 50 billion cubic metres of water.

We surely need better policies on grain management and fertiliser subsidy. NITI Aayog has come up with a Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) putting Indian poverty at 25 per cent for the year 2015-16 based on NFHS data. The 2019-20 data set would give an even lower poverty ratio. Poverty based on the international definition of \$1.9 per capita per day (PPP) is even lower (around 11 per cent) for 2017-18, as per the World Bank. The Economic Survey had earlier made a case for reducing the coverage of beneficiaries under NFSA from 67 per cent to 30 per cent, which makes ample sense for targeting the poor and bringing efficiency to the PDS. I would submit that beneficiaries also be given the option to receive the money in cash in their accounts, which could be equal to MSP plus, say, 20 percent, in lieu of physical grains. This would reduce leakages, and also save on the high economic costs of these grains. If the coverage of beneficiaries under NFSA cannot be reduced, at least those who are non-poor can be charged at half the price of the economic cost.

Similar moves are needed on the fertiliser subsidy front. Else, the budget documents remain a mere accounting exercise, without ensuring efficiency and inclusiveness in government expenditure. That's not exciting.

The writer is Infosys Chair professor for Agriculture at ICRIR

## WINDOW TO INDIA

Michael Brecher was a pioneering scholar of Indian foreign policy

society and developed a sympathy and understanding for India and its struggles. Nehru was so impressed by him that he took him along during his gruelling electoral campaigns and offered him several hours of his time for comprehensive questioning. *Nehru: A Political Biography* (1959) was the end-product. It portrays not only Nehru's politics, but also his personality and the extraordinary rapport he had with the masses.

Brecher's dissertation-turned book, *The Struggle for Kashmir* (1953), is one of the first scholarly analyses of the conflict and its intractability. A series of books on India followed, including *Nehru's Mantle: Political Succession in India* (1966) and *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (1968). These opened up scholarship on India to the West and the larger world. His works received much acclaim for being rigorous yet accessible to a wide array of readers. India's elite found in him a committed scholar who would bring much-needed international attention to the young republic's foreign and domestic policies.

Brecher was instrumental in the creation of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute in 1966, which is still in operation, with joint headquarters in Calgary and New Delhi. It enables hundreds of Indians and Canadians to visit each country for scholarship and academic exchanges. This initiative occurred to him during a visit to India in 1965 and when he proposed it to the then Finance Minister T T Krishnamachari, it was immediately embraced. The Indian External Affairs Ministry and Canadian foreign ministries as well as former Prime Minister Lester Pearson were very much in support and the institute was an-

nounced during Prime Minister Shastri's visit to McGill in June 1965 by Shastri himself. The institute was named after Shastri following his untimely death in 1966 and began operations in 1968. It is a rare success story of on-going inter-state academic exchanges.

In the late 1960s, Brecher moved on to studying Israel's foreign policy after developing strong bonds with leaders such as Ben Gurion. From 1975, Brecher and a University of Maryland colleague, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, initiated the International Crisis Behaviour project, studying various forms of crises and their progression toward war, using a large dataset and quantitative and qualitative analyses.

As his colleague for the past three decades, I have witnessed Brecher's immense productivity and feel fortunate that his family shared excerpts from his unpublished autobiography. His passing away occurs after the death last year of another pioneering scholar of South Asia, Baldev Raj Nayar, whom Brecher brought to McGill. Nayar and Brecher were great role models for scholars of India and South Asia globally. Both exhibited thoroughness in scholarship and were willing to face challenges in field research and personal lives. Their ability to approach and gain the trust of leading political figures of the day was unparalleled. Notable was the academic freedom that the founders of the Indian republic cherished and allowed, a far cry from today's controlled environment and lack of access.

The writer is James McGill Professor of International Relations at McGill University, Montreal, Canada

## JANUARY 31, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

### PEACE WITH PAK

THE PRIME MINISTER has offered to sign a treaty of peace and friendship with Pakistan. Surprisingly, Mrs Gandhi made her offer at the end of her hour-long meeting with Pakistani journalists and not at the formal Indo-Pakistan talks that began on January 30. While Indian officials were attaching considerable importance to Mrs Gandhi's remarks, the Pakistani delegation did not appear to be impressed by it. Pakistani journalists, who heard Mrs Gandhi, said her offer came too casually and in response to a question by journalist on the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty. It's possible that Prime Minister Gandhi made the offer to see how the Pakistani side would

react to it. Perhaps, it was an attempt to recover lost ground after initial opposition to talks on Pakistan's proposal for a no-war pact.

### CPM'S LINE

AT THE END of the 11th party Congress, the pro-Moscow view of the central leadership of the CPM succeeded in reversing the pro-Chinese line that had been adopted after the 1964 split with the CPI. The Vijayawada Congress adopted a political resolution taking a strong pro-Soviet and anti-China stand. Even till the 10th Congress in Jullundur in 1978, the CPM had criticised and praised China and Soviet Union in equal measure.

### BILLA, RANGA TO HANG

BARELY 18 HOURS before his execution, condemned prisoner Billa admitted to having murdered seven persons in Bombay but remained non-committal on his role in the murder of Sanjay and Gita Chopra. "It's better that I am dying. What's the purpose of living in a society that does not trust you," he said. Meanwhile, Ranga "confessed" innocence and regretted he couldn't get justice.

### EX-CHOGYAL DEAD

FORMER CHOGYAL OF Sikkim, Paiden Thondup Namgyal has died of cancer. He was 59.



9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Case for a health booster

Budget can add momentum to transformation in healthcare system burdened by the pandemic. It needs to invest in cadre of skilled medical workers



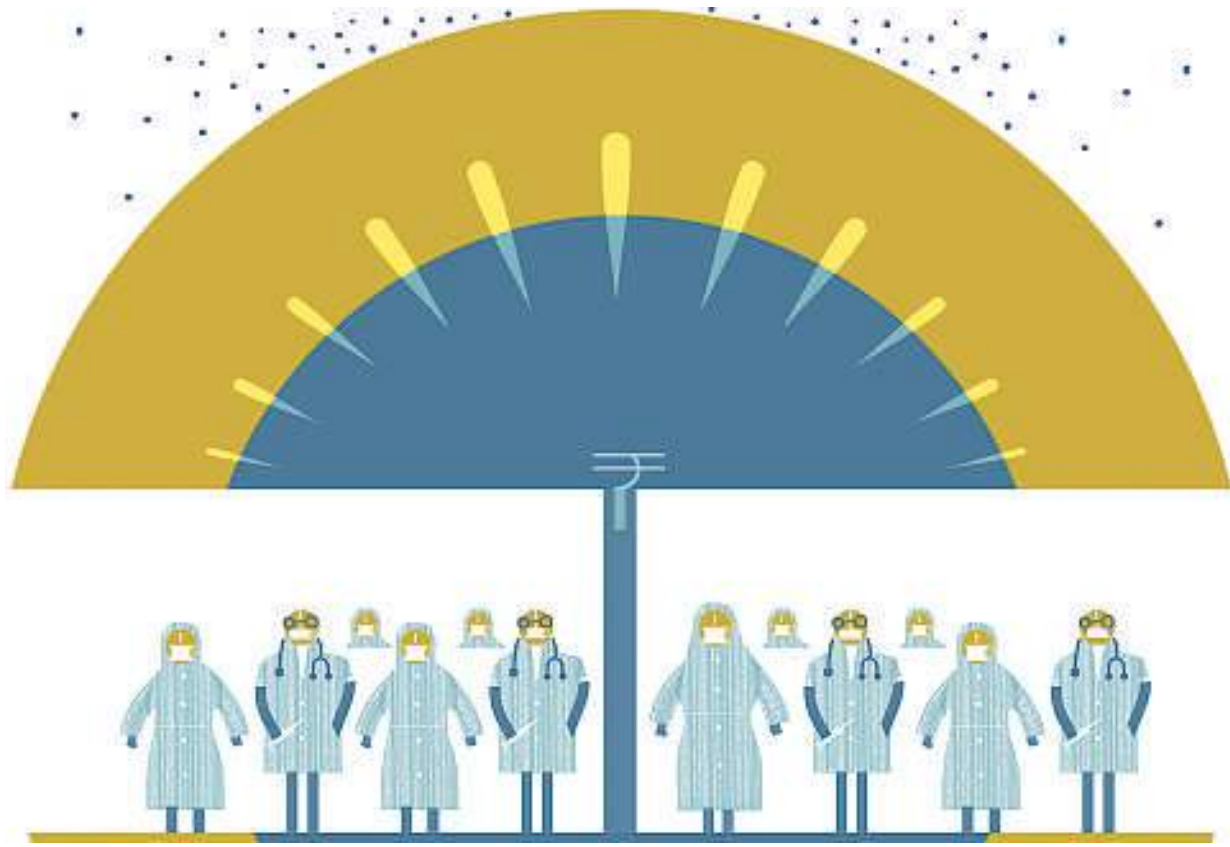
K SRINATH REDDY

APRE-BUDGET assessment, just ahead of the presentation of the budget, is somewhat like a pitch and weather report by a cricket commentator before the start of play. It states how the match might be influenced by the prevailing conditions without showing any certitude that it will actually develop along those lines. So, this piece is more of a prayer than a prediction, hoping that the finance minister will provide the vulnerable health sector the protective “booster” it needs.

After decades of low government expenditure on health, the Covid pandemic created a societal consensus on the need to strengthen our health system. The recommended priorities varied, depending on whether they came from super-specialist doctors arguing for more hospitals and specialists or public health votaries pleading for the expansion and quality enhancement of primary healthcare services and disease surveillance systems. The Fifteenth Finance Commission accepted both viewpoints and recommended greater investment in rural and urban primary care, a nationwide disease surveillance system extending from the block-level to national institutes, a larger health workforce and the augmentation of critical care capacity of hospitals. The Union budget of 2021 reflected these priorities in a proposed Pradhan Mantri Aatmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana (PMASBY) to be made operational over six years, with a budget of Rs 64,180 crore. The Finance Minister also projected a broader vision of health beyond healthcare by merging allocations to water, sanitation, nutrition and air pollution control with the health budget. This resulted in a 137 per cent increase in the allocation to health, though the increase to the health ministry itself was a modest 11 per cent.

In the months that followed the budget, two major health missions were launched, under the Ayushman Bharat umbrella. The Digital Health Mission was launched in September 2021. The Health Infrastructure Mission, launched in October 2021, was a renamed and augmented version of the PMASBY. It aims to create a strong nationwide healthcare and disease surveillance infrastructure, ranging from health and wellness centres (HWCs) and block-level laboratories to more medical colleges and National Institutes of Virology.

These missions join the two other components of Ayushman Bharat launched in 2018. The Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC) component is nested in the National Health Mission (NHM) while the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) is steered by the National Health Authority (NHA). Bringing these various missions together under the umbrella of Ayushman Bharat will help to create a coherent and connected healthcare delivery system. Primary healthcare services under the CPHC and linkage with water, sanitation, nutrition and pollution control programmes will strengthen the capacity of the health system for health promotion and disease prevention, going beyond disease management. The budget of 2022 must not only fund these missions adequately but indicate how they will link synergically while functioning under different administrative agencies. It will be appropriate for the Health Ministry to



C R Sasikumar

be the convening platform, even if the budget lines are separated.

The NHM received only a 9.6 per cent increase in the 2021 budget. Apart from the capital expenditure on new primary healthcare infrastructure, it needs an increase in its operational budget too, especially as long neglected urban primary healthcare needs urgent attention. PMJAY did not see an increase in allocation last year, because its utilisation for non-Covid care declined sharply in the previous year. The limited number of accredited healthcare facilities in tier-2 and tier-3 hospitals, in many states, is also a limiting factor for the scheme. More importantly, limiting cost coverage to hospitalised care reduces the PMJAY’s capacity to significantly lower out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) on health, which is driven mostly by outpatient care and expenditure on medicines. The promise of HWCs to provide essential drugs and diagnostic services — it has been stalled by Covid — needs to be delivered soon if primary care has to become an effective instrument for reducing OOPE.

The Digital Health Mission can enhance efficiency of the health systems in a variety of ways. These include better data collection and analysis, improved medical and health records, efficient supply chain management, tele-health services, support for health workforce training, implementation of health insurance programmes, real time monitoring and sharper evaluation of health programme performance along with effective multi-sectoral coordination. The financing of this mission will be a feature of interest in the budget.

While increased investment in infrastructure and digital health is needed and will be of high value for strengthening our health system, that capacity will be a carriage without wheels if we do not develop a multi-layered, multi-skilled health workforce. We need to increase the numbers and improve the skills of all categories of healthcare providers. While training specialist doctors could take time, the training of frontline workers like Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) can be done in a shorter

District hospitals need to be upgraded, with greater investment in infrastructure, equipment and staffing. In underserved regions, such district hospitals should be upgraded to become training centres for students of medical, nursing and allied health professional courses. Medical college hospitals too should be strengthened. Public health cadres must be created in every state and training institutions must be established to infuse public health expertise into health programmes. While much of this needs to be done by the states, the Centre should incentivise and support such efforts by the states. Will the Union budget signal such an intent and commitment?

time. Every village should have two ASHAs and every sub-centre designated as a HWC should have two ANMs as a minimum. Similarly, urban HWCs too should be well staffed. Training and deployment of mid-level health workers in the HWCs too is a priority.

District hospitals need to be upgraded, with greater investment in infrastructure, equipment and staffing. In underserved regions, such district hospitals should be upgraded to become training centres for students of medical, nursing and allied health professional courses. Medical college hospitals too should be strengthened. Public health cadres must be created in every state and training institutions must be established to infuse public health expertise into health programmes. While much of this needs to be done by the states, the Centre should incentivise and support such efforts by the states. Will the Union budget signal such an intent and commitment?

With increased central investment in health, OOPE should continue the declining trend reported in the last reported National Health Accounts (2017-18). However, the decline should not be driven only by an increase in capital expenditure on infrastructure. An increase in current operational expenditure is also needed to improve service delivery and have an early impact on healthcare related financial burden of families. There may be some savings on Covid response this year, especially on the amount allocated to procure vaccines. Those savings must flow to improve non-Covid services which suffered neglect for the past two years. Research and innovation too must see greater investment. The expanded ambit of health, as defined in last year’s budget, must continue for aligning other sectors to public health objectives. The Union budget of 2022 can add further momentum to our health system transformation. I fervently hope it will.

The writer, a cardiologist and epidemiologist, is President, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The views expressed are personal.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Closing down schools is the absolute last decision that should be considered as a potential measure to mitigate any further spikes in the number of infections.” THE DHAKA TRIBUNE

Why FM must not cut taxes

Buoyancy in tax revenues next year is uncertain, exports boom caused by pandemic is likely to diminish. These will put constraints on GDP growth



RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

WITH THE UNION Budget to be presented in Parliament tomorrow, many people are hoping that taxes will be cut to boost private spending and growth. Ordinarily, this might be a good idea. However, there are four main reasons why tax cuts are not prudent now.

First, the strong revenue performance during 2021-22 gives a misleading impression of the government’s fiscal position. Revenues this year have benefitted from some exceptional factors. One, strong profit growth in the private corporate sector, led mostly by the large firms; two, robust collections from the goods and services tax (GST); and three, rapid GDP growth. The crucial question to ask is what might happen to these factors in 2022-23. Here we run into some difficulties.

It is risky to assume that corporate profits will continue to grow as rapidly going forward. This is because we do not yet fully understand what led to the growth in 2021-22. If we look at the data of listed non-financial, non-oil firms in the private sector, we find that by June 2021, their profit margins were higher than in the pre-pandemic period. This could have been the result of an increase in their market share, given that the smaller firms bore the brunt of the pandemic. The larger firms also took emergency measures to cut costs. It is not obvious that as the pandemic recedes, the same trend will continue in 2022-23. If it does not, then corporate tax growth would not be as high as in 2021-22.

In addition, GST growth is likely to slow down. In 2021-22, average monthly GST collections increased to Rs 1.2 trillion from Rs 0.94 trillion in 2020-21. This increase was mostly on account of the resumption of economic activity. GST on imports also played a big role, fuelled by an import boom and higher tariffs. It is unlikely that we will witness a similar import boom next year.

As the recovery period ends and the economy normalises, GDP growth will slow down too. The main engine of growth for an emerging economy like India is private sector investment, which is still not showing any signs of acceleration, even as the broader economy recovers. Another engine of growth is exports. India has experienced an export boom in 2021-22. However, as the developed countries normalise their macro-policies, the global exports boom will diminish, and this will impact India as well. Hence, it is not certain where high GDP growth will come from in the next fiscal year. All these factors lead to uncertainty

about tax revenues.

Second, the fiscal deficit, targeted at 6.8 per cent of GDP for 2021-22, continues to be very high. There is little room to cut spending since demands for social spending such as on MGNREGA remain high, interest payments continue to be a big component of expenditure, and given the mounting pressure on the government to increase capital expenditure. There is consequently no room to provide tax relief without imposing further pressure on the deficit. Nor is it a good idea to allow the deficit to increase. The government’s total debt has already reached 90 per cent of GDP, the highest ever, and there is significant pressure on the bond yields to go up. This could make it costlier for everyone to borrow.

Third, the pandemic has caused supply shortages the world over. India too has been experiencing supply chain bottlenecks. In a supply-constrained environment, any attempt to boost demand by increasing households’ after-tax income would lead to inflation. This is exactly what has been happening in the US and other developed economies. In India, retail inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, has been running at 5-6 per cent, close to the upper limit of the RBI’s target band. And, already there are pressures for inflation to go up as a result of rising oil and commodity prices. Tax cuts and the resultant increase in spending might push inflation beyond the limit, forcing the RBI into an uncomfortable choice: Raise interest rates sharply at a time when the recovery is beginning or allow inflation to tax the country’s poor.

Finally, we are entering a period of global macroeconomic uncertainty. The US economy is experiencing its highest inflation in 40 years. The US Fed will consequently raise interest rates this year. When the developed world pulls back its expansionary policies, emerging economies like India need to display strong macroeconomic fundamentals, and the government must come across as credible.

One of the key reasons India was badly affected by the taper tantrum episode of 2013 was because it was doing poorly on macro fundamentals. In a way, the situation now is not very different. Once again, we are running a high fiscal deficit and the real interest rate is negative because inflation is higher than the policy rate. True, inflation is lower than it was in 2013, but the government debt ratio is substantially higher. Hence, the government needs to be somewhat careful about its fiscal math.

With state elections coming up, it might be tempting for the government to slash taxes and win votes. But given its own fiscal limitations and the uncertainty surrounding India’s growth and inflation trajectories in the next fiscal year, this would not be a prudent call.

The writer is Associate Professor of Economics, IGIDR

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OLD & NEW FRIENDS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Making connections’ (IE, January 29). The importance given to the five Central Asian Republics (CARS) is evident from the invites sent to their heads to grace India’s Republic Day function as chief guests. Though the pandemic played the spoiler, India earnestly wants to buttress its trade ties with CARS. This is also in keeping with India’s Connect Central Asia policy of 2012. Recent developments in the region with the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan have also made CARS warm up to India. Moreover, China’s ambitions to bring smaller nations under its political and economic ambit are making CARS diversify its business dealings and look beyond China. India must seize the initiative and play a bigger role in Central Asia.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial ‘Making connections’ (IE, January 29). The government’s reaching out to five central Asian nation’s may be good optics. However, India’s relations with immediate neighbouring countries — Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh — are at all time low. These nations were considered to be all-weather friends. The much touted Chabahar port in Iran is also proving a non-starter

Deepak Singhal, Noida

REGRESSIVE MOVE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Weakening the watchdog’ (IE, January 28). The Kerala government’s proposed move to bring an ordinance to snip the powers of the Lokayukta is highly questionable. The haste with

which the move is taken through the route of ordinance speaks volumes of the government’s intent. The decision is not likely to pass the muster of judicial scrutiny, if challenged in the courts. The move goes against CPM’s much touted credo of purging corruption from public life.

Ravi Kumar Mathur, Ghaziabad

BURDENING COURT

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Misreading jurisdiction’ (IE, January 28). A corollary to the issues raised in the article about the Supreme Court’s decision in the Alapan Bandyopadhyay case is the steep increase of the workload of the Delhi High Court. For a number of reasons, the DHC already has a lot on its plate. Because of this judgment, the cases that would have otherwise been dealt with by other High Courts, will now be filed before the DHC.

Ayush Baheti, Jaipur

STEROID OVERDOSE

THIS REFERS TO the report ‘Steroid use, blood clots: AIIMS seeks nod to study Covid impact on bones’ (IE, January 28). It is heartening that the AIIMS had submitted a proposal to Indian Council of Medical Research, seeking approval to conduct a study to probe cases of Avascular Necrosis (AVN) or death of bone tissue among Covid patients due to steroid use and blood clots. The study could throw light on the adverse effect of widespread use of steroids during the pandemic’s second wave. It could also suggest remedial measures to overcome this problem among the affected persons.

Rethesh Balakrishnan, Delhi



G N DEVY

VADODARA WAS known as a cosmopolitan city in the 20th century. I moved there in 1980, and was surprised to see two striking instances of communal boycott and to read about a third instance that had occurred decades before my time in the city. The one before my time involved the young B R Ambedkar, who had returned from the US after completing his studies at Columbia. He had to take shelter in the house of a Parsi as no Hindu was willing to let out his house to the young lawyer despite being summoned by the Maharaja of Baroda as the Law Officer of Baroda state. Pained by the attitude, Ambedkar decided to leave the city in less than two weeks. The one instance I saw closely relates to the legendary theatre director Habib Tanvir who arrived in Baroda in 1985 for a year-long stay leading to the production of a new play. Like Ambedkar, Tanvir had to wind up his planned stay in Baroda as Hindus were not willing to rent a house to a Muslim, and the Muslims did not want a Leftist anywhere near them. In the 1980s, the RSS had already started making Gujarat its social laboratory. Its full scale erupted before the public eye later.

The third instance of social boycott that I know relates to J S Bandukwala. A nuclear physicist, he had come to Vadodara in the early 1970s to teach at MS University. He was

The conscience keeper

J S Bandukwala fought for human dignity and equality all his life

ostracised by his own community, not so much for who he was but for what he thought. In an interview with Ajaz Ashraf, Bandukwala narrates: “After completing my studies in the United States, I returned to India in 1972. I chanced upon the Bohra Syedna [spiritual head of the Bohra sect of Muslims] in Vadodara. He was praying in a garden. I stopped to pay my respect to him, and started talking to two of his family members. I was dressed in pants and a shirt. When they heard that I was a Bohra, they aggressively asked me how I could come to meet the Syedna in the clothes I was in. When a Bohra meets the Syedna, he is supposed to wear the traditional Bohra dress, stand and approach him in a particular way. They said, ‘You are supposed to be Abde Syedna,’ which means the slave of Syedna. My response was that it was not possible for me to be the slave of anyone but Allah. They tried to put pressure on me but I was not willing to compromise.”

During the 1980s, I used to teach at the English department of MS University. It was but natural for me to get drawn to Bandukwala who was in the science faculty. I have seen his amazing journey in life over these decades and have felt impressed and inspired by his quiet courage and his ability to speak out fearlessly even in the face of the

worst threats to his life. During the last 50 years, till he passed away on Saturday, the professor continued to speak simple truth to power and paid a heavy price for it.

When he was a young lecturer and the warden of a boy’s hostel on the Baroda University campus, his house was vandalised by students. When he decided to contest elections, the university authorities refused to sanction his leave. As a rare case in the history of the university, Bandukwala decided to forfeit his salary for his work on the campus. He started teaching children from poor families without taking fees from them, as well as some students from affluent families to keep his finances going. After the small residential flat he occupied as a lecturer was vandalised by goons on the campus, the university authorities shifted him to a slightly larger flat meant for professors. After spending some time there, he quietly shifted to a house he had built in Sama. That house was attacked by a large mob during the 2002 Gujarat riots. I remember him telling me how the most precious things, such as his family albums and personal letters, were burnt before his eyes. Friends helped him to escape the mob of rioters which would have killed him that day.

After the riots, he sent his children away from Vadodara; and after the death of his wife, he lived the life of a lonely but unflinch-

ing crusader. He continued to work with the community, funded the education of innumerable children, wrote and published articles on issues of vital interest for social harmony and, most of all, refused to be intimidated. Throughout his life, he continued to face fatwas from Muslim clerics and threats and harassment from Hindu fanatics. Besides, given his identity, thoughts and social engagement, he remained outside the social circles that make up the hugely materialistic and somewhat bohemian society of Vadodara. For most of the time, the who’s who of Vadodara pretended to have forgotten that J S Bandukwala continues to live in a small flat in Pratapgunj until they were forced to acknowledge his presence when important thinkers and social leaders from all parts of the world came to visit him. A conscience keeper, neglected by his own city and applauded by the world, an inspiring friend and a courageous crusader for human dignity and equality, JSB left this world on January 29. He left a large gap in Vadodara’s moral core and a big imprint on the collective memory of an India caught in communal strife.

The writer is a cultural activist and a former colleague of J S Bandukwala at the MS University of Baroda



# After over 2 years, court acquits man accused of raping air hostess

I Shoaib Akhtar S/o Iqbar Khan R/O A-76 Gali No-2, Gokal Pur, Northeast Delhi-94. That my correct name is Shoaib Khan vide affidavit IN- DLT1247778154507 sworn before notary dated 29-DEC- 2021	0050189644-1
J Jitender Singh S/O Joginder Narula residing at WZ- 283/297,Vishnu Garden,New Delhi - 110018, have changed my name to Jitender Narula Infuture For All Purposes vide affidavit dated 28/01/2022 at Delhi	0050191156-1





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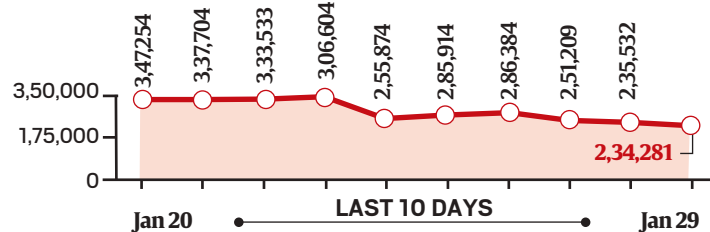
If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

### DASHBOARD, AS ON JAN 29

699  
DAYS SINCE  
PANDEMIC  
BEGANNew cases  
**2,34,281**Active cases  
**18,84,937**Deaths  
**893**Weekly CFR: **0.29%** | Overall CFR: **1.33%** | Total deaths: **4,94,091**

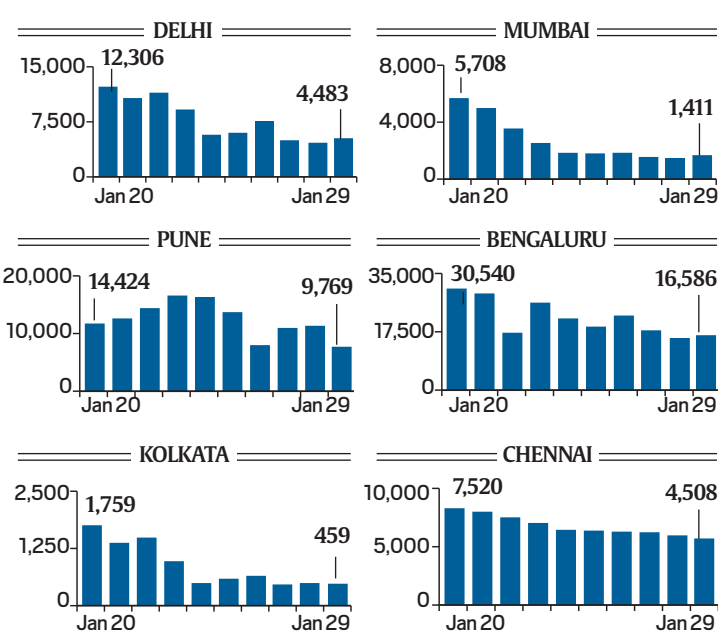
### NEW CASES, DAILY



### SURGE IN THE STATES

State	ON JANUARY 27			Weekly positivity
	New Cases	Active Cases	Deaths	
Kerala	50812	3,36,920	405	46.83%
Karnataka	33337	2,52,162	70	23.33%
Maharashtra	27971	2,44,344	71	18.73%
Tamil Nadu	24418	2,08,350	46	19.23%
Gujarat	11794	98021	33	11.33%

### CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



### TOTAL TESTS

**72,73,90,698**

#### TESTS ON JAN 29

**16,15,993**

#### WEEKLY POSITIVITY

**15.63%**

#### OVERALL POSITIVITY

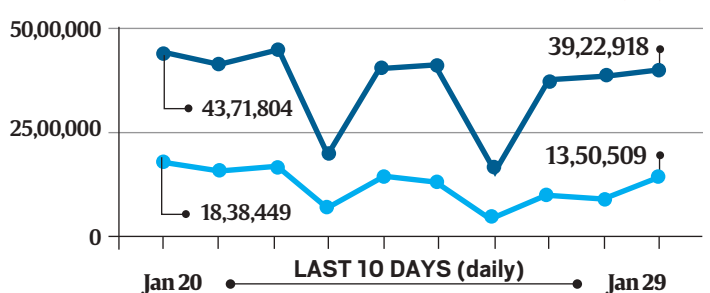
**5.65%**

### INDIA TOTAL DOSES

**165,70,60,692**

(Adults 1st dose: **89,33,70,213**; adults second dose: **70,63,48,368**; 15-18 age group first dose: **4,56,48,949**; precautionary doses: **1,16,93,162**)

■ First dose ■ Second dose

JANUARY 29: **65,73,432**

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## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# Ukraine, Russia and India

India has broken its silence on the crisis arising out of Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's border. What are Russia's intentions, why is the West concerned, and what are India's stakes in its ties with each side?

SHUBHAJIT ROY

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

INDIA THIS week gave its first official statement amid the tension between Russia and the West — led by the US — over Ukraine. It's been a tense one-and-a-half months, with the possibility of war looming large.

#### What's happening?

Ukraine has become a bone of contention in Moscow's relations with the West, with Russian troops massed near its border and NATO's forces on standby in case Russia attacks its neighbour. Ukrainian forces have been patrolling the border in the east and the north, including in Chernobyl in Ukraine, which falls on the shortest route between Russia and Kyiv, Ukraine's capital.

The crisis began in mid-December when Russia told Western powers that it had a list of demands. It wanted a guarantee from the West "in writing" to stop further eastward expansion of NATO, the removal of NATO troops from Poland and the Baltic states, and the possible withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe. Among the most important demands was that Ukraine should never be allowed to join NATO. The US and the West have ruled this out. The two sides are negotiating in Paris, in the presence of interlocutors from France, Germany, US and Russia. French President Emmanuel Macron and US President have separately spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bid to resolve the crisis.

#### Why is Russia doing this?

The New Yorker's editor David Remnick, the Washington Post correspondent in Russia between 1987 and 1991, has written a book, *Lenin's Tomb: Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, in which he quotes Vladimir Lenin as saying: "For us, to lose Ukraine would be to lose our head." This has been the attitude of rulers in Moscow over the centuries, from the Tsar and the Bolsheviks to Putin. Throughout his 22-year rule so far, Putin has sought to restore Russia's influence in the countries that were part of erstwhile Soviet Union. Ukraine was the most crucial of the 14 then republics whose control Russia lost when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. It was the second largest economy, and second-most populous.

In an article on the Kremlin's website in July 2021, Putin wrote that Russians and Ukrainians were one people who shared a single "historic and spiritual space" and that the emergence of a "wall" between them in recent years was tragic. Ukraine disputes Putin's version of history.

#### What are the historical connections?

Historians say that Russia and Ukraine had been linked since the 9th century when Kyiv became the capital of the ancient state of Rus. From 1654, the two were united by treaty under the rule of the Russian tsar. They speak closely related languages and later formed, with Belarus, the Slav core of the Soviet Union.

When the Tsar's empire collapsed after the revolution led by Lenin, the Ukrainians created a state of their own and declared independence in January 1918. Although it turned out to be short-lived as the Bolsheviks took control over most of Russian Ukraine in 1920, that two-year period planted the seeds of independence among the Ukrainian people.

"The Bolsheviks were forced to recognise Ukraine as a separate nation and even grant a pro forma independence to the Ukrainian Soviet republic," historian Serhii Plokhy, a professor of Ukrainian history in Harvard University, wrote in *The Financial Times*.

The Ukrainian referendum of December 1 1991, in which over 90% of participants voted to leave the USSR, spelt the end of the Cold War superpower. Economics too played a role: Russia could not bear the burden of the Union

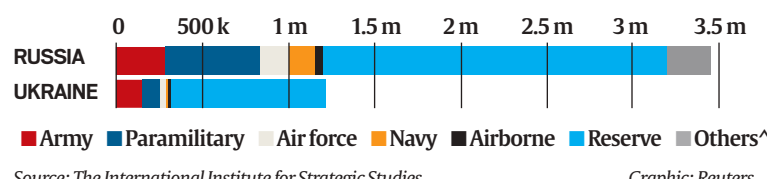
### WAR CLOUDS OVER UKRAINE

US President Joe Biden believes his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin could 'move in' to Ukraine. How could that scenario unfold, according to the American think tank CSIS?



Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies

### MILITARY SIZES IN 2020



Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies

Graphic: Reuters

without its second-largest economy.

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe too. It has major ports on the Black Sea and shares borders with four NATO countries. Europe depends on Russia for a third of its natural gas — providing enormous leverage to Putin in any dispute with the West — and one of the main pipelines passes through Ukraine.

#### How did the West come into the picture?

Since the Cold War ended, NATO has expanded eastward by taking in 14 new countries, including some from the former Soviet Union. Russia views this as a threat, and feels the West is not respecting the non-threatening commitments made in the early 1990s.

Ukraine is not a NATO member but has an assurance made in 2008 that it will eventually be able to join. After a pro-Russian president was removed in 2014, Ukraine has come closer politically to the West. It has done joint military exercises with NATO and been delivered weapons including US anti-tank missiles. This, according to Kyiv, has been done to boost Ukraine's defence after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and reportedly provided support to separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Putin says NATO may use Ukraine as a launchpad for missiles targeted at Russia.

#### Where does India stand on this?

India made its first statement on the crisis on Friday. Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson Arindam Bagchi, responding to questions at the weekly briefing, said, "We have been closely following the developments relating to Ukraine, including the ongoing high level discussions between Russia and the US. Our Embassy in Kyiv is also monitoring local developments. We call for a peaceful resolution of the situation through sustained diplomatic efforts for long term peace and stability in the region and beyond."

#### Why now?

On January 19, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman called up Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and discussed "Russia's concerning military build-up on Ukraine's borders". New Delhi did not issue an official statement then, but has now finally broke its silence.

With key strategic partners on both sides, India can't afford any hasty moves. While there is concern about Russia's "muscle-flexing", India does not want to jeopardise its close military ties with Moscow, particularly amid the stand-off with China on the eastern border.

#### What's at stake in these ties?

The relationship with Russia goes back seven decades. While it has stagnated in some areas and atrophied in others, the strongest pillar is defence. Although New Delhi has consciously diversified its new purchases from other countries, the bulk of its defence supplies — estimates say 60%-70% is from Russia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held informal summits with the heads of only two countries — Putin and China's Xi Jinping. Russia has now emerged as a key diplomatic player amid the tension between India and China: Indian and Chinese foreign and defence ministers have negotiated in Russia. Russia is also key to India's engagements in Afghanistan, after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

#### And, what about ties with the West?

The US and Europe are both important partners from India's strategic calculus. Many American platforms have been used for reconnaissance along the India-China border. Winter clothing for 50,000 troops has been sourced from Western partners.

#### Isn't the Russia-China axis a concern?

India is indeed conscious that the hostile-

### YEARS OF CONFLICT

#### 2004: ORANGE REVOLUTION

Allegations of widespread fraud in presidential election led to mass protests. Top court voided election; fresh vote was held; pro-Europe Viktor Yushchenko became President.

#### 2013-14: MAIDAN PROTESTS

President Viktor Yanukovich said he was suspending EU talks to revive Moscow ties; huge street protests broke out. Maidan Square uprising forced Yanukovich from power in Feb 2014.

#### 2014: RUSSIA INVADES

In Feb and March 2014, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea. In April, pro-Russian separatists declared independence in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine; fighting broke out.

#### AIRLINER IS DOWNED

In July 2014, a missile brought down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 above Donbass, killing 298 aboard. Buk surface-to-air missile was traced to Russia; Moscow rejected allegation.

#### 2018: KERCH CRISIS

In Nov 2018, Russian border guards clashed with Ukrainian ships in Kerch Strait connecting Black Sea and Sea of Azov; pro-West President Petro Poroshenko declared martial law.

#### CONTINUING CONFLICT

Ceasefires with Russian-backed separatists have not lasted. Violence has continued in Donbass, which has a large ethnic Russian population.

Reuters

ity between the West and Russia may push Moscow in the direction of Beijing.

The West's approach towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea brought Moscow closer to China. India has always felt that it was the West that enabled this with Washington's anti-Chinese rhetoric and the collapse of oil prices, making Russia increasingly dependent on Chinese consumption. Western analysts see this as a "friendship of convenience" between two countries led by strongmen.

#### Are there other concerns for India?

There is an Indian community in Ukraine, mostly medical students. The Indian Embassy in capital Kyiv has started collating information on them, as part of preparations for possible hostilities. As per government estimates, 18,000 Indian students were in Ukraine in 2020, but the numbers may have dipped due to lockdowns and classes moving online.

#### So, where does India stand now, after the statement?

When Russia had annexed Crimea, India had expressed "concern" but also qualified it by talking of "legitimate Russian interests". Putin had thanked India for taking a "restrained and objective" stand, and called up then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to express his gratitude.

Keeping in mind its ties with Russia, sources said, India hasn't issued any condemnatory statements as the Western powers are doing. For now, New Delhi is hoping that the situation will be resolved by skilled negotiators on both sides. CIA chief William Burns has handled several such tough talks in his previous diplomatic roles, while on the other side is Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

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# In India visit by Oman's Al Zaabi, old friendship and strategic ties

SHUBHAJIT ROY

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

INDIA IS laying out the red carpet for Mohammed Nasser Al Zaabi, the top defence official of Oman, who is in the country on an official visit.

#### Why is the visit important?

Al Zaabi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence of the Sultanate of Oman, is the executive head of the Omani defence establishment. The charge of Minister is held by Deputy Prime Minister Sayyid Shihab. Zaabi will co-chair the Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC), the highest forum of defence engagement between the two countries, with Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar. This will be the first meeting of the JMCC since 2018, and it is expected to make a comprehensive evaluation of ongoing defence exchanges, and provide a roadmap of ties for the future.

Oman is India's closest defence partner in the Gulf region and an important anchor

for India's defence and strategic interests. Defence cooperation has emerged as a key pillar for the robust India-Oman strategic partnership. Defence exchanges are guided by a Framework MoU, renewed last year.

Oman is the only Gulf country with which all three services of the Indian armed forces carry out regular bilateral exercises and staff talks, enabling close professional cooperation and trust. Oman also provides operational support to the Indian Navy's anti-piracy missions in the Arabian Sea.

#### What has been the trajectory of India-Oman ties over the years?

For almost 50 years until January 2020, Oman was ruled by Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said, who was a friend of India. The Sultan's father was an alumnus of Mayo College, Ajmer, and the Sultan himself studied in Pune, where his teacher was Shankar Dayal Sharma, the future President of India.

Sultan Qaboos died at age 79. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had met him in February 2018 when the two countries signed an agreement for the use of Oman's



strategically-located Duqm port, described the late leader as a beacon of peace for the region. The Government of India announced a day of national mourning on January 13, 2020 in the Sultan's honour, and in March 2021, conferred on him the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019.

Sultan Qaboos had played a vital role in the release of Father Tom Uzhunnali, the

Catholic priest who was abducted in Yemen in March 2016 and held captive for a year and a half. The Sultan had also intervened to ensure the release of three Americans and a Canadian held by Iran, and of German and Australian hostages in Yemen.

His successor, his cousin Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, has been a generous benefactor of the Indian community in Oman. About 6.2 lakh people of Indian origin live in the country, of whom about 4.8 lakh are workers and professionals such as doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, teachers, managers, and nurses. Some Indian families have been living in Oman for 150-200 years.

#### What is the strategic imperative in India's relationship with Oman?

Access to the Duqm port is important for India to counter Chinese influence and activities in the Gulf region. This was a key take-away from Modi's visit to Oman in February 2018. Duqm overlooks the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, and close to Chabahar port in Iran. Along with Assumption Island that is being developed in the Seychelles and

Agalega in Mauritius, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.

Following the signing of the military co-operation agreement, Duqm port and dry dock are available for the maintenance of Indian military vessels. In recent years, India has deployed an attack submarine, a warship and two P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft to the port.

Following Modi's visit to Oman, the joint statement said the two sides noted that the MoU on Military Cooperation, signed in 2005 and renewed in 2016, provided the general framework to strengthen bilateral defence ties. "Recognising their common responsibility towards promoting regional peace and security, the two sides underlined the importance of further cementing bilateral strategic engagement, especially in the areas of security and defence," it said.

#### Is there scope for cooperation beyond the military partnership as well?

Duqm port also has a special economic zone, where Indian companies have made investments of about \$1.8 billion. The Adani

group has signed a MoU with the Duqm port authorities.

In the context of strategic oil reserves near Duqm, India had invited Oman to participate in building strategic oil reserves in India.

#### What else is on Zaabi's agenda in India?

On the sidelines of the JMCC, Zaabi is expected to call on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and receive exposure to the Indian defence production industry to explore possibilities of procurement and joint production.

A series of high-profile defence engagements is lined up in February, including visits to India by the Chiefs of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force of Oman, staff talks between the two navies, and a bilateral Air Force exercise in Jodhpur, which will see the participation of over 150 Omani personnel.

The visits of the Omani Naval and Air Force Chiefs will take place after a gap of five years, and will enable high-level re-engagement between the forces of the two sides.

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12

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL, PRESIDENT, SHIROMANI AKALI DAL

The Centre has taken away all our powers. States are like municipalities... beggars... ED, NIA can walk in anywhere

Sukhbir Singh Badal on the Akali Dal's chances in the polls, the newly-minted farmers' party, the challenge from AAP and the Centre's stranglehold over states. The session was moderated by MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA, Resident Editor, *The Indian Express*, Punjab

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: Most pollsters are making it out to be a contest only between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) with Akali Dal in the background. What do you have to say about that?**

I think this election will mark the end of pollsters because earlier there used to be 'paid news', now it is 'paid polls'. Arvind Kejriwal has misused Delhi's publicity funds of over Rs 800 crore to get this service. These channels approached me too for a poll, I said no, I don't have Rs 20 crore to give you.

Last time, the same pollster said AAP will get 100 seats, but they got 20. That too when there was an AAP wave and every-one was against the Akali Dal. We still got 31 per cent vote share, Congress got 36 per cent and AAP 21 per cent. Two years later in Parliament elections, AAP (seat share) went from 21 per cent to six per cent while the Akali seat share went up, and the difference between the Congress and Akali Dal was reduced to half a per cent. Six to eight months back, there were 13 corporation committee elections in Punjab. Out of 1,300 committees, AAP only got 25, we got 400.

You mark my words. We are going to form the government. Congress will not cross more than 15 seats. There is a complete rebellion in Congress. AAP is limited to pockets. There is no AAP in Majha and Doaba areas. And this time there's no AAP wave. Secondly, Kejriwal has indirectly started projecting himself as the main face, which the Punjabis do not want at all.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: But AAP has projected Bhagwant Mann as the CM face.**

No, have you seen the new slogan, 'Kejriwal *aur* Bhagwant Mann *ko mauka do*. Why Kejriwal? Has the Congress ever said, Rahul Gandhi *aur* Navjot Singh Sidhu *ko do*? Has the BJP said, "So and so *aur* Modi *ko do*? Punjab CM is a constitutional post. How can people say Kejriwal *ko mauka do*? Are we voting for Kejriwal or Bhagwant Mann? AAP is controlled entirely by Kejriwal. None of the AAP leaders in Punjab are allowed to hold a press conference; they are held by their spokesman Raghav Chadha. What was the philosophy of AAP? That an *aam aadmi* will be their candidate, like a milk-man, or a workshop man, or a doctor. Where are those candidates now? Sixty per cent of the candidates fielded by AAP are defectors from Akali Dal and Congress. Their basic philosophy has completely vanished, that's why people have started moving away from them.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: What makes you so confident? Because even now, the sacrilege issue is alive and more recently, there is a drugs case against Bikram Majithia (president, Akali Dal youth wing).**

These are all false cases and everyone knows it. For five years, they tried their best to blame us, but they could not get a single proof. I'm confident because of the strength of our cadre. We have a strong cadre base; we are a 100-year-old traditional party, and in every village, every town, we have a base. And even with a storm like in the last polls, we got 30 per cent.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: What about Akali leaders like Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa who say Akali Dal has become a family party?**

And what has Dhindsa done? Fielded his son, his son-in-law. Today I am the president of Akali Dal, next it can be somebody else. It's a 100-year old traditional party.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: Do you think you should have come out more strongly against the farm laws when they were tabled?**

We told the BJP that if you implement the laws without approval of the farmers, we will not be part of you. So the day they forced the Bill in Parliament, we left them. Ninety per cent of the farmers' base is with the Akali Dal. Most of the unions are one of the subunits of the Communist Party. The ones who are fighting the elections here are mostly from the Communist Party.

**Sunny Verma: You withdrew support from the NDA primarily due to the farm laws. Now that the government has repealed those laws, will you be open to aligning again with the NDA or the BJP?**



WHY  
SUKHBIR SINGH  
BADAL

Sukhbir Singh Badal is president of Shiromani Akali Dal, the oldest regional party of the country, which has formed government in the state seven times. The party, which broke away from long-term ally BJP over the farm laws in 2020, is now fighting hard to stage a comeback in a contentious five-cornered poll contest this February

We, at the moment, have now aligned with the BSP. We are not the types to switch sides. Now we are with the BSP, there's no question of going with the BJP.

**Vandita Mishra: You sort of tried to say that the farmers' agitation was basically a Left union-led movement. But all of us who went to the ground could see how deeply it had**

**percolated and that there was popular cynicism towards established parties like yours.**

I think you did not take my answer in the right spirit. I said this agitation was led by farm unions, but the movement was of the people of Punjab. Now the unions have come back to fight elections, they will lose security deposit in at least 90 per cent of the seats they fight. During the agitation, maybe the farm unions were the frontmen. Now our cadre has come back

to us, the Congress cadre has gone back to them. Even Balbir Singh Rajewal, who's supposed to be their CM face, will not even be the second runners-up at Samrala.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: What about the charge that Captain Amarinder was in cahoots with the Badals and their work did not stop despite the change of the government?**

After Charanjit Singh Channi came, Navjot Singh Sidhu said Channi is in cahoots with us. Earlier, he was accusing Amarinder of being involved with us. Why are they so scared of us? As you said, we are written off. They have been trying their best to find something on us, but they failed. Amarinder registered a case against my family. We were acquitted by the courts. So these

are political statements to cover up their misdeeds.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: What about the charge that Jat Sikhs have had a hegemony over the CMship despite being only 25 per cent of the population and that Akali Dal is a Jat Sikh party?**

Akali Dal is an all-inclusive party. Akali Dal has the maximum Hindu candidates. Most of the time, Akalis win all the Dalit seats as well.

**Vandita Mishra: In 2010, you had gone very strong on development issues like the Saanjh Kendra, the self-certification push, in your campaign. Today what we are hearing is the Majithia case, the Bargari issue. Do you think this election campaign is now not leaving you space for those kinds of issues anymore?**

Travel anywhere in Punjab and you'll see the road network created by the Akali Dal. We made Punjab power-surplus, we've created an airport network. In the last five years, you cannot find even one example of such development. The reason they are sticking to Bargari and Majithia case is because they want to cover up the incompetent five years. Congress shut down the Seva Kendras.

**Vandita Mishra: What about the issue of whether a Hindu can be chief minister of Punjab?**

I think anybody can be chief minister, he has to be competent. He has to have leadership qualities. Why should there be a difference between Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims?

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: Have you met the Prime Minister after the farm laws, after this break? He has been calling up your father.**

No, I have not met the Prime Minister. There are certain courtesies that are extended at that level of leadership, so you cannot read too much into it. We left them because they stabbed us in the back. It is not that we wanted to leave.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: So there is no**

**going back to the BJP? Never?**

Never, I can't say. But at the moment, no.

**Sukhbir Siwach: Are the issues of farmers and the three farm laws still central in the upcoming election?**

Agriculture as a whole is a Central issue, farm laws not anymore because they have been withdrawn. Now other issues have come up.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: Sidhu has been saying the state government should encourage diversification by giving MSP for vegetables etc.**

Why didn't they give it in the last five years? I challenge Congress to name one new school they built, one new road, one new bridge, one new sewage treatment plant. They cannot even name one. This is the worst government Punjab has ever had. They have just ruined the state, fighting with each other.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: The last time, sacrilege and drugs were the two issues that led to Akali Dal's defeat.**

No, sacrilege was one small part. At that time Capt Amarinder Singh swore on *Gutka Sahib* that he would waive off all the loans, be it from banks, arhtiyas or any moneylenders, and people believed him. But they were defrauded. If sacrilege was a major issue, the Akali Dal wouldn't have got 31 per cent. There were at least 30 seats on which we lost by less than 1,000 votes.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: It's alleged that Akali Dal did not collect revenue for the government but for its own leaders.**

Please look at the revenue generation during the time of Congress and Akali Dal. Liquor revenue in 2002 was Rs 2,000 crore a year. In 2007, when Captain Amarinder left, it was Rs 2,000 crore a year; no increase in five years. We took it from Rs 2,000 crore to Rs 5,500 crore a year. Even in this tenure, the Congress government has failed to increase its liquor revenue. When we took over, VAT was Rs 5,000 crore, we took it up to Rs 70,000 crore a year.

**Navjeevan Gopal: Coming to this**

**drugs case against Majithia, the Congress is claiming that it is the first step towards justice.**

How many DGPs did they have to change who said we cannot register a case because it's false. Two DGPs of the state had to be removed. Two Bureau of Investigation chiefs had to be removed. Then finally, they had to get Siddharth Chattopadhyaya. They made him (the DGP) just for those 20 days to register a case. In those 20 days, there was a bomb blast in Ludhiana, sacrilege in Darbar Sahib, and security lapse during Prime Minister's visit. Then, he filed an FIR, not in any police station of the state but in a temporary *thana* in his office. They used non-bailable sections, they planned out everything (against Majithia).

**Vandita Mishra: You say that the AAP is not a Punjabi party; it is from**

depends on when we get the funds from the Centre. Earlier, every day, money used to come into our accounts. So we could play with our own finances. Now dues are not cleared for months. So we have become beggars. Today, wherever the Centre

wants, it sends the ED there. NIA walks in from anywhere. Look at the new rule for IAS officers. They can transfer them, so all instructions will come from them. You're creating a dictatorship in stead of a democracy.

If we want an outsider, why don't we get some party from Germany or the US? Why AAP?... National parties have other interests. They compromise the state's interest

**P Vaidyanathan Iyer: What about politics itself? Do**

**you see politics itself becoming very vitriolic, very bitter?**

I think it is. The cordial relationships which used to be commonplace during my father's time have vanished. It's become more personal, vindictive, abusive.

**P Vaidyanathan Iyer: What would you attribute that to?**

I think the new generation. In my father's time, the leader, the statesman, never went beyond a limit. Now, everyone has become a street fighter. Media also loves interviewing these kind of people.

**P Vaidyanathan Iyer: What is your vision for taking forward Punjab's industrial growth and economy?**

First of all, Punjab needs to elect a strong CM who is decisive, who has a vision and who has performed. Everything depends on a CM. The CM is the engine, the rest are all coaches. In the last five years, the engine was stuck in a farmhouse. You don't need money, you need ideas, money follows.

**Manraj Grewal Sharma: If you come to power in Punjab, what are the three challenges that you face? And how do you plan to resolve them?**

Last time, my priorities were the road network and power. I challenge any state to have the infrastructure we have. This time, my priority is education and health care. Education means government education. I want to change from quantity education to quality education. I'm going to have a 500-bed medical college in every district. It solves two purposes. One, you're going to educate your children to become doctors. Second, a 500-bed hospital facility is created in the district.

**Rahul Sabharwal: AAP pitches the success of its healthcare and education in Delhi as two of its main planks.**

How many *mohalla* clinics are working? Is anybody saying that 250 *mohalla* clinics are doing well? How many New Delhi schools have been upgraded out of the 2,000? You do one, two or 10 schools and show that you've done everything there. Majority of the *mohalla* clinics are shut.

**Anant Goenka: Punjab is an agrarian economy, but why is climate change not an election issue despite the falling water table? And when do you think climate change will become an election issue in your state?**

It is a very important issue, but everyone is brushing it under the carpet. In fact,

it is the most important issue. The way the water level is dipping, in another 20 years, Punjab will be a desert. I have a plan for it. We are going to do groundwater recharging in our rivers — Sutlej, Beas. Second, my whole thrust now is going to be on solar power. I'm going to allow industries to set up their own solar power plants. As for power subsidies, instead of giving cash to the electricity department, we will set up a parallel solar plant and we will transfer that much power to the power company. And this will be a self-financing model.

**Kanchan Vasdev: If the Akali Dal is voted to power, what would be the fate of the Majithia case?**

What happens in false cases? What do you do? Same thing will happen.

Illustration: Suvajit Dey



# 13 THE WORLD

## TOP OF THE WORLD



Israeli President Isaac Herzog and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah. *Reuters*

### UAE

## Israeli President makes first UAE visit

*Dubai:* Israel's president, making his first visit on Sunday to the United Arab Emirates, said his country supports the Gulf state's security needs and wants more countries in the region to join its new detente with the Arab world. Isaac Herzog discussed security and bilateral relations with the UAE's de facto ruler Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. "We completely support your security requirements ... We are here together to find ways and means to bring full security to people who seek peace in our region," Herzog said during the meeting, in comments released by his office. **REUTERS**

### SRI LANKA

## Hardline Tamil minority holds protest

*Colombo:* Sri Lanka's hardline Tamil minority party Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) on Sunday organised a protest march in Jaffna to protest against the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. "Tamils reject 13th amendment" rally was held near Nallur Kovil, organisers said. The amendment is aimed at creating provincial councils in Sri Lanka and enable Sinhalese and Tamil as national languages while preserving English as the link language. **PTI**

### PAKISTAN

## Christian priest shot by gunmen

*Peshawar:* A Christian priest was shot dead and another wounded by unidentified gunmen who opened fire on them as they were returning home from Sunday mass in Pakistan's northwestern Peshawar city, police said. Bishop William Siraj was shot multiple times and died on the spot, while Father Naem Patrick was wounded in the attack in the Gulbahar neighbourhood of Peshawar, police said. The police rushed to the spot and started the search operation. A strict security has been made at the entry and exit points to nab the culprits. No group has immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. **PTI**

### PEGASUS ROW

## NSO says criticisms 'hypocritical, denies violation charges

**HARINDER MISHRA**  
JERUSALEM, JANUARY 30

ISRAEL'S EMBATTLED cyber tech company NSO Group has denied wrongdoing as it called criticism of its sale of Pegasus spyware programme to non-democratic countries "hypocritical," comparing the surveillance technology to military weapons systems being sold by others, amid mounting allegations that software was misused globally, including in Israel.

An undeterred Chief Executive Officer of NSO Group, Shalev Hulio, in an interview to Israeli Channel 12 on Saturday, strongly defended the company's operations, though he also conceded that some "mistakes" may have happened over the years. "I sleep soundly at night," Hulio told the Channel's interviewer when asked if he can do so amid so much worldwide criticism.

Hulio's interview came a day after a New York Times report on Friday claimed that India bought Pegasus spyware as part of a \$2 billion defence deal with Israel in 2017, triggering a major controversy with the Opposition alleging that the government indulged in illegal snooping that amounted to "treason".

"There is not one country we've sold to, not one" that the US does not sell to, or that Israel

## EXPLAINED What is Israel's position?

ISRAEL DISTANCED itself from the controversy triggered by the blacklisting of the NSO Group after allegations of illegal use of its Pegasus spyware to target government officials, activists and journalists globally, saying it is a private company and it has nothing to do with the policies of the Israeli government

doesn't sell to. So it's a bit hypocritical to say it's okay to sell F-35s and tanks and drones, but it's not okay to sell a tool that collects intelligence," Hulio said.

He also pointed out that out of almost 90 clients that turned to them for the technology, they sold only to around 40 as per laid down norms.

In reaction to the blacklisting of the company by the US Department of Commerce in November, the company's senior most executive called it an "outrage" that he hopes will be lifted soon. "Our technology has over the years helped the interests and national security of the US quite a bit," he claimed. **PTI**

### UKRAINE CRISIS

## NATO concerned over Europe's energy security amid tension

Russia's Lavrov: NATO wants to 'drag' Ukraine into alliances

**REUTERS & AP**  
LONDON/MOSCOW, JANUARY 30

EUROPE NEEDS to diversify its energy supplies, the head of NATO said on Sunday, as Britain warned it was "highly likely" that Russia, the continent's biggest natural gas supplier, was looking to invade Ukraine.

Moscow denies any plan to invade but said on Sunday it would ask NATO to clarify whether it intends to implement key security commitments, after earlier saying the alliance's response to its demands did not go far enough. "If they do not intend to do so, then they should explain why," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on state television. "This will be a key question in determining our future proposals."

The foreign minister also claimed that NATO wants to pull Ukraine into the alliance. NATO "has already come close to Ukraine. They also want to drag this country there," Lavrov said. "Although everyone understands that Ukraine is not ready and could make no contribution to strengthening NATO security."

In a sign of the tensions, Canada said on Sunday it was temporarily withdrawing non-



A Ukrainian soldier at a frontline near Myronivsky on Saturday. *NYT*

essential personnel from its embassy in Ukraine but added that the embassy would remain open. The European Union depends on Russia for around a third of its gas supplies and any interruption would exacerbate an existing energy crisis caused by a shortage. read more

"We are concerned about the energy situation in Europe because it demonstrates the vulnerability of being too dependent on one supplier of natural gas and that's the reason why NATO allies agree that we need to work and focus on diversification of supplies," NATO Secretary-

General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Britain, meanwhile, is considering making a major NATO deployment as part of a plan to strengthen Europe's borders in response to Russia massing troops on the border with Ukraine, the government said on Saturday. Britain has said that any Russian incursion into Ukraine would be met with swift sanctions and would be devastating for both sides. NATO, meanwhile, has no plans to deploy combat troops to non-NATO member Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday.

## Deal on Russia sanctions bill likely this week, say senators

Washington: US senators are very close to reaching a deal on legislation to sanction Russia over its actions on Ukraine, including some measures that may take effect before any invasion, two leading senators said on Sunday.

Senators Bob Menendez, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and James Risch, its top Republican, hoped to move forward on the bill this week.

"I would describe it as that we are on the one-yard line," Menendez said on CNN's "State of the Union," using an American football reference meaning very close to the goal.

There is strong bipartisan resolve to support Ukraine and to punish Russia if it invades, Menendez said. Asked if an agreement will be reached this week, he said, "I believe that we will get there." The Senate bill would target the most significant Russian banks and Russian sovereign debt, as well as provide more US military assistance to Ukraine. **REUTERS**

## North Korea tests longest-range missile since 2017

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
SEOUL, JANUARY 30



Kim Jong Un

NORTH KOREA on Sunday fired what appeared to be the most powerful missile it has tested since President Joe Biden took office. The Japanese and South Korean militaries said the missile was launched on a lofted trajectory, apparently to avoid the territorial spaces of neighbours, and reached a maximum altitude of 2,000 km and traveled 800 km before landing in the sea.

The flight details suggest the North tested its longest-range ballistic missile since 2017, when it twice flew intermediate-range ballistic missiles over Japan and, separately, three intercontinental ballistic missiles that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland.

Sunday's test was North Korea's seventh round of launches this month. The unusually fast pace of tests indicates its intent to pressure the Biden administration over long-stalled nuclear negotiations as pandemic-related difficulties put further stress on an economy broken by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons programme. **AP**

## H-1B registration for 2023 starts on Mar 1: USCIS

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 30

THE REGISTRATION for the much sought-after H-1B visa for the fiscal year 2023 will begin from March 1 and the successful applicants will be randomly selected and notified online by March 31, according to the US federal immigration agency.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in a statement said the initial registration period for the fiscal year 2023 H-1B cap will open at noon Eastern on March 1 and run through noon Eastern on March 18, 2022.

During the period, prospective petitioners and representatives will be able to complete and submit their registrations using the online H-1B registration system, the agency said in a statement on Friday.

"If we receive enough registrations by March 18, we will randomly select registrations and send selection notifications via users' myUSCIS online accounts. We intend to notify account holders by March 31," the USCIS said in the statement.

As mandated by the Congress, USCIS can issue a maximum of 65,000 H-1B visas in a year. It can also issue another 20,000 H-1B visas to foreign students who have completed higher studies from a US university in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. **PTI**



Trucks sit parked on Wellington Street near the Parliament Buildings as truckers and their supporters take part in a convoy to protest Covid vaccine mandates for cross-border truck drivers in Ottawa on Saturday. *Reuters*

## Canada protest against vaccine mandates blocks Ottawa for second day

**STEVE SCHERER**  
OTTAWA, JANUARY 30

DOZENS OF trucks and other vehicles blocked the downtown area of Ottawa for a second day after thousands descended on Canada's capital city on Saturday to protest against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Covid vaccine mandates.

Trucks remained parked on the streets near parliament on Sunday morning, a day before lawmakers are due to resume work after the holiday break. Some truckers said they will not leave until the mandate is overturned.

Thousands gathered peacefully on Saturday, though some inci-

dents caused anger. One protester filmed dancing on the tomb of the unknown soldier and the appearance of flags bearing swastikas sparked anger on social media. The rally started out as a protest against a vaccine requirement for cross-border drivers, but turned into a demonstration against the Trudeau government with a strong anti-vaccination streak.

"Large crowds remained in the downtown core throughout the night," Ottawa police said in a statement. "Officers encountered several challenges with demonstrators, including sporadic road blockages by trucks... These high-risk situations were de-escalated and resolved with no arrests." **REUTERS**

## Britain to offer vaccinations to kids aged 5-11

*London:* Britain will this week begin offering vaccinations to children aged between five and 11 who are most at risk from coronavirus, the state-run National Health Service said on Sunday. Britain has been slower than some other countries in offering the shots to 5-11 year olds, and is not planning to vaccinate the age group more broadly.

NHS England said children in the cohort who were in a clinical risk group or who live with someone who is immunosuppressed would be able to get a first Covidshot, in line with advice issued last month by the Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunisation. Children will be offered two 10 microgram doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, which is a third of an adult dose. **REUTERS**

## Nepal PM unhappy with coalition on key issues

**YUBARAJ GHIMIRE**  
KATHMANDU, JANUARY 30

IN A conflict with two major coalition partners on crucial issues, Prime Minister and Chief of Nepali Congress Sher Bahadur Deuba warned that he was ready to end the current coalition in instead of "no-cooperation".

Deuba's warning came on Saturday as he failed to persuade two key coalition partners — Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist centre) and the Unified Socialist — that refused to support the 500 million dollars Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal compact deal for ratification in Parliament.

Deuba's reaction came after the leaders of the two parties said they would oppose the offi-



Sher Bahadur Deuba

cial resolution on MCC deal, although in the form of a grant, saying that, in the current form, the deal will have larger implications, including on the sovereignty of the country.

A leader, who was part of the meeting, said Deuba was initially firm on tabling the resolution on Sunday and have it endorsed on February 1. "I am under pressure to have it endorsed by February 1 for which I need your support," the leader quoted Deuba.

But, Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Jhala Nath Khanal from the Maoist centre and Unified Socialists, respectively, said they

## Pak looks to secure \$3-bn loan from China

**SAJJAD HUSSAIN**  
ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 30

CASH-STRAPPED PAKISTAN is looking to secure a \$3-billion (PKR 529 billion) loan from China and investments in half a dozen sectors during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Beijing next week, according to a media report on Sunday.

Khan will visit the Chinese capital on February 3 to attend the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics and to also meet the top Chinese leadership on the sidelines for bilateral talks.

The Express Tribune reported quoting government sources that a final meeting to



Prime Minister Imran Khan

shape the agenda of the visit would take place on Tuesday.

A senior finance ministry official said the government was considering requesting China to approve another loan to the tune of \$3 billion in China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange, known as SAFE deposits, so as to boost its foreign exchange reserves.

China has already placed around \$11 billion (PKR 1940 trillion) with Pakistan in the shape of commercial loans and foreign ex-

change reserves support initiatives, including \$4 billion in SAFE deposits.

The Chinese money is part of the country's current official foreign exchange reserves recorded at \$16.1 billion. In the last fiscal year, the country had paid over PKR 26 billion in interest charges to China only for using a \$4.5 billion Chinese trade finance facility to repay the maturing debt.

Last month, Pakistan also received a loan from Saudi Arabia of \$3 billion, which the country has used. The Pakistan government aims to secure Chinese investment in six priority sectors by highlighting the competitive advantages that the country — cheap but skilled labour, geographic access to Europe and Asia and tax exemptions. **PTI**

## Afghan soil would not be used against neighbours, Taliban assures Pak NSA

**SAJJAD HUSSAIN**  
ISLAMABAD, JAN 30 (PTI)

NATIONAL SECURITY Advisor Moeed Yusuf travelled to Afghanistan where he discussed trade ties and other issues with the top Afghan Taliban leaders who assured him that the Afghan soil would not be used against its neighbours, including Pakistan.

Yusuf, who led a high-level inter-ministerial delegation to Kabul on January 29-30, held talks with Afghanistan's acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi and Acting Foreign Minister Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi.

"The policy of the Islamic Emirate (of Afghanistan) is clear that we will not allow anyone to use Afghan soil against [our] neighbours and other countries," a statement issued by the presidential palace in Kabul quoted Hanafi as saying.

"We also want similar action from others," Hanafi said, while hosting the inter-ministerial delegation in the Afghan capital.

Yusuf just before his visit said that Pakistan was "not completely optimistic" of the Taliban government as organised terrorist networks are still operating in the war-torn nation and the Afghan soil is still being used against his country. **PTI**

**JILL LAWLESS AND JO KEARNEY**  
LONDON, JANUARY 30

A POLITICIAN'S troubles are a humorist's treasures.

The scandal-prone British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has given cartoonists and meme-makers unimaginable riches for years, and with his hold on power now in jeopardy, their fortunes are only growing.

Johnson and his staff are facing civil and criminal investigations into social gatherings they hosted last year while the rest of the UK was hunkering down under Covid restrictions. The

episode raises serious questions about Johnson's leadership and political accountability.

But what gives it extra bite — and gives humourists much to chew on — are the often ludicrous details: political aides hauling suitcases of wine into the Prime Minister's residence, or drunkenly breaking a swing set belonging to Johnson's toddler son.

One recent newspaper cartoon captured the collision of tragedy and farce by depicting Johnson as the betrayed Roman ruler Julius Caesar, stabbed in the back with corkscrews.

Martin Rowson, a political cartoonist for *The Guardian* says mockery is one of the trade-offs



Political cartoonist Martin Rowson in London. *AP*

in democratic societies between government and governed:

"They have power and we have the right to laugh at them."

Britain has a long and proud tradition of political satire. In the 18th century, cartoonists such as James Gillray lampooned British politicians and royalty with an irreverence — even viciousness — that shocked European visitors.

When Johnson became Prime Minister in 2019, some feared he would be hard to satirise because he was already a cartoonish figure, with his thatch of blonde hair, rumpled clothes and blustering manner. Steve Marchant, learning coordinator at the Cartoon Museum in London, says they needn't have worried: Johnson is a gift for humourists.

"All you need to draw is an egg with some straw on top and you've

got Boris before you even attempt to draw the face," Marchant said. "And he is so — gaffe-prone is probably the polite term I should use. Every week something happens with Boris. No cartoonist is going to die poor thanks to the antics of Boris Johnson."

Rowson says Johnson's cartoonish persona is deliberately crafted. He's the latest in a long line of politicians who have "played to being caricatures" to keep themselves in the public eye.

"Even though we ridicule them at the same time, it's a price worth paying for them," Rowson said. Even so, not all publicity is good news for politicians. Much of the humour around "partygate" has an undercurrent of anger. **AP**



# 14 ECONOMY

## MANUFACTURING CAPABILITIES NEEDED TO SUPPORT MODEL: EXPERTS

# Eyeing non-metros, first-time buyers, e-tailers foray into social commerce

PRANAV MUKUL  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE SOCIAL commerce model — pioneered by Facebook-backed unicorn Meesho and which essentially connects buyers and resellers — is seeing a surge in the number of non-traditional e-commerce companies mushrooming across the country. These include Dealshare, Mall91, SimSim (which was acquired by Google's video streaming platform YouTube), among others. The biggest conventional name to enter the space happened in July last year when Flipkart launched its Shopsy app, with a catalogue of 15 crore products across categories such as fashion, beauty, mobiles, electronics and home.

Products listed on these platforms typically include unbranded or lesser-known brands that are bought by resellers from these marketplaces to get sold on their social channels to individual customers. The fundamental differentiator of purchasing power between the urban online buyer stationed in metro and tier-I cities, and the lower ticket size generating buyer in the rural and tier-II+ towns is what is

driving e-commerce firms to jostle in the social commerce jungle to deepen penetration in non-metro segments. However, retail sector experts believe that a replication of the Chinese success in the social commerce space may depend on India's ability to support this business with manufacturing capabilities.

Among the global names to enter the space, Singapore-based consumer internet company Sea Group's e-commerce platform Shopee has stormed into the segment. Having launched only in November 2021, the app has become the second most downloaded free app on Android platforms in December and January, according to SensorTower data.

The small-town placement of these social commerce apps, through which they are essentially looking to target first-time online buyers, has been witnessed in the numbers recorded. Meesho, for example, in 2021 saw that 71% of all new users came from Tier 3+ regions like Malkangiri in Odisha, Baikunthpur in Chhattisgarh, Munnar in Kerala, Mankachar in Assam, Khalari in Jharkhand, Lalganj in Uttar Pradesh and Mahua in Bihar.

"There have been some mod-

## EXPLAINED How it works

PRODUCTS LISTED on these platforms typically include unbranded or lesser-known brands that are bought by resellers from these marketplaces to get sold on their social channels to individual customers.

els in China relying on social commerce that have been very successful. People use social media channels to aggregate demand. Theoretically, in this model, you only manufacture or source after you have aggregated a minimum quantum of demand. Pinduoduo has been very successful in China in this model. Within India, what we've seen is the model being copied with a distinction from China that the purchasing power there is significantly higher than India, and secondly the supply chain and penetration of e-commerce in China is much better," Arvind Singh, chairman and MD of retail advisory firm Technopak told *The Indian Express*.

"In India, even when you go to the middle-income group the purchasing power significantly falls. The discretionary spending power even more so. Many of these start-ups have the wrong idea about the addressable demand in India and the challenges in aggregating demand and delivering the products. Furthermore, Chinese supply chains are very efficient — a benefit that a company like Pinduoduo derives," he added.

While the market split of online buying is still heavily in favour of traditional e-commerce companies, compared to social commerce platforms, majority of the growth, even globally, is being tapped by the social commerce companies. According to a RedSeer report, during the Black Friday sale of 2020 in the US, leading social commerce company Shopify clocked \$5.1 billion in gross merchandise value, while Amazon was slightly lower at \$4.8 billion.

A significant issue being flagged with this model is the rampant incidences of fake and counterfeit goods being delivered through the platforms, given that there's little or no control over the supply chain and inventory. Most recently, according to reports, an

FIR was filed against Shopee in Lucknow by a complainant alleging duplicate products being delivered from the platform.

In response to a set of queries sent by *The Indian Express*, a statement from Shopee noted: "Shopee is a Singaporean company committed to helping Indian small businesses thrive through our online e-commerce marketplace. We aim to partner in India's digital economy mission while contributing to the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. We are humbled that thousands of local sellers are already growing their online business on Shopee".

"The sale of counterfeit items, and other products that infringe IP, is strictly prohibited on our platform. We require our sellers to be compliant with both local regulations and our own policies. We also employ various proactive screening measures to identify listing violations, and we provide procedures for IP holders to request takedowns of infringing listings," it added. In India, the next frontier being targeted by these social commerce companies is the grocery space, where many of them including Flipkart and Meesho have marked their presence.

## 'Boost for Q3 manufacturing outlook, cost of doing biz a worry'

Outlook for the manufacturing sector seems to have improved in October-December even as the cost of doing business remains a cause for concern and hiring prospects remain subdued, according to a FICCI survey



**63%** respondents reported higher production in the third quarter of 2021-22 (October-December 2021-22)

**61%** of the respondents in October-December 2021-22 had a higher number of orders as against July-September 2021-22

**MANUFACTURERS ARE** looking forward to the upcoming Union Budget to enhance growth and investments in the sector

**HIGH RAW MATERIAL** prices, high cost of finance, the uncertainty of demand, shortage of working capital, high logistics cost, low domestic and global demand due to supply chain disruptions are some of the major constraints that are affecting the expansion plans of the respondents

**HIRING OUTLOOK** for the manufacturing sector remains subdued as around 75% of respondents mentioned they are not likely to hire additional workforce in next 3 months," FICCI stated on the survey

Source: FICCI/PTI

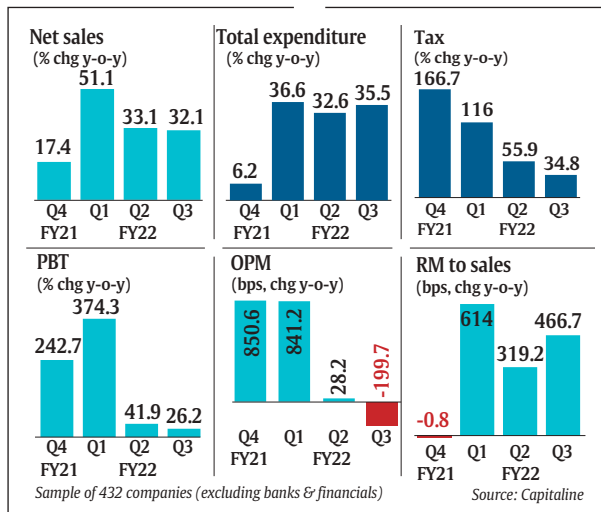
**Manufacturing sector showing sustained economic activity, with existing average capacity utilisation in the range of 65 to 70 per cent, as per the findings of the latest quarterly survey**

# High costs dent profit margins of India Inc in Q3

ENSECONOMICBUREAU  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE ELEVATED cost of inputs punctured the margins of most in India Inc in the three months to December 2021. Operating profit margins for a sample of 432 companies (excluding banks and financials) contracted 200 basis points year-on-year as raw material costs jumped 466 basis points y-o-y. However, with aggregate revenues rising smartly - 32 per cent y-o-y for the sample - operating profits were up 20 per cent y-o-y and net profits increased a good 24 per cent y-o-y.

RIL and TCS account for just under a third of the revenues of the sample; excluding the two, revenues have increased by only 27 per cent while profits have gone up by 21 per cent y-o-y. The recovery is somewhat uneven; even as the IT services companies continued to turn in splendid results, business was dull at Bhel where



order inflows were weak due to delays in tendering. At Larsen & Toubro, order inflows during Q3 were a shade below estimates.

Top-line growth was impressive as companies were able to push through price hikes even if the growth in volumes was mod-

est. Companies with strong brands were gainers. However, high product prices appear to be keeping demand muted in some categories. Several managements point out the recovery in rural geographies, post the second wave, has been rather muted. **FE**

REUTERS  
BEIJING, JANUARY 30

GROWTH IN China's factory activity slowed in January as a resurgence of COVID-19 cases and tough lockdowns hit production and demand, but the slight expansion offered some signs of resilience as the world's second-largest economy enters a likely bumpy new year.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) registered 50.1 in January, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction, but slowing from 50.3 in



Mong Kok district, in Hong Kong. Reuters file

December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Sunday. The official results contrasted with those in a private sur-

BY 1 YEAR

# IPO in sight, LIC Chairperson's tenure extended

ENSECONOMICBUREAU  
MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

WITH THE mega initial public offering (IPO) expected in the current fiscal, the government has extended the tenure of LIC Chairperson MR Kumar by one more year.

The extension is for a further period beyond March 13, 2022 or till he attains the age of superannuation, or until further orders, whichever is the earliest, the government said in an order on Sunday. The extension is to facilitate the launch of LIC's IPO which is expected in March this year. The corporation which is in the final stages of the IPO launch is expected to submit the draft prospectus to market regulator Sebi in the coming weeks.

Kumar's term as LIC Chairperson was originally supposed to end on June 30, 2021, but the government extended his term by nine months till March 13, 2022. LIC IPO is expected to be the largest in the history of Indian capital market.

The government has also extended the tenure of LIC MD Raj Kumar by one more year beyond



M R KUMAR  
Chairperson, LIC

the date of his superannuation on January 31, 2022 or until further orders.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has cleared the extensions. "These extensions may be treated as a one-time measure which are not to be quoted as a precedent," the government said in the order.

Earlier this week, LIC reported a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 1,437 crore for the first half of ongoing fiscal against Rs 6.14 crore in the year-ago period. The insurer said new business premium growth rate stood at 554.1 per cent in H1 FY22, against 394.76 per cent during the corresponding period of FY21.

# Budget should bring more PLI rates to boost job creation: CII

ENSECONOMICBUREAU  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

AHEAD OF the Budget, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Sunday pitched for additional incentive rates to be included in the Production Linked Incentive Schemes based on the number of jobs created.

The CII has suggested that employment-intensive sectors such as leather and food processing could be provided an incentive scheme to attract investments and create employment.

"With the imperative to support jobs and create new employment as the country recovers from the pandemic, CII

**The CII suggested that employment-intensive sectors such as leather and food processing could be provided an incentive scheme**

suggests that the Budget add a job-creation component to the incentive.

CII also recommends that more employment-intensive sectors be brought under the purview of the PLI schemes which will greatly encourage investments in these sectors," CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said.

DHFL CASE

# NCLAT sets aside order that directed to consider Wadhawan's 2nd offer

ENSECONOMICBUREAU  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE NATIONAL Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has set aside an earlier order of the Mumbai bench of the NCLT, which had directed the administrator of the debt-ridden DHFL to put the second settlement proposal by erstwhile promoter Kapil Wadhawan before its lenders for consideration.

The appellate tribunal observed that NCLT has passed directions to consider the second proposal from Wadhawan, despite the fact that the Committee of Creditors (CoC) of DHFL had already by an overwhelming majority approved the Piramal Capital & Housing Finance's resolution plan and the administrator had applied before it for its approval.

Citing a recent judgement

# PDIL sale: Bid deadline pushed to Feb 28

ENSECONOMICBUREAU  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE GOVERNMENT has extended by about a month till February 28 the deadline for prospective buyers of PDIL to submit EoI.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) had on December 14 invited preliminary bids for selling the government's 100 per cent stake in the CPSE which is under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers.

Earlier, the last date for submitting expression of interest (EoI) was January 31. In view of the prevailing situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic and on the request of the interested bidders, the late date for submission of EoIs is extended to February 28, DIPAM said in a notice on its website.

As of March 31, 2021, Projects & Development India Ltd (PDIL) has paid-up equity share capital of Rs 17.30 crore, revenue of 129.68 crore and net profit of Rs 19.07 crore. PDIL was incorporated on March 7, 1978 and is engaged in providing engineering and consultancy services in design engineering and related project execution services from concept to commissioning of various projects. **WITHPTI**

The incentives could be based on the proposed number of jobs being created in the project, giving higher weightage to job creation in the PLI schemes, said CII.

Apart from the PLI scheme for employment, CII brought out a range of measures that could be taken up in the forthcoming Budget that would help jobs to gain traction as the pandemic impact is being felt across income classes.

To provide relief to workers hit by the pandemic in the rural areas, the chamber recommended that the outlay for MGNREGA be enhanced considerably to support the rural poor, which would also encourage consumption growth. **WITHPTI**

passed by the Supreme Court in the case of Ebix Singapore, the NCLAT said "there was no scope for negotiations between the parties once the CoC has approved the resolution plan".

"The said exercise was beyond the jurisdiction of the adjudicating authority (NCLT), hence unsustainable and liable to be set aside," said a three-member NCLAT bench in its judgement passed on January 27, 2022.

The NCLAT direction came over a batch of petitions filed by Union Bank of India on behalf of the CoC, DHFL's Administrator and Piramal Capital & Housing Finance — successful resolution applicant challenging NCLT order.

On May 19, 2021, the NCLT had directed the administrator of DHFL to place the second offer by Wadhawan before CoC for consideration, decision, voting and to inform it within 10 days. **WITHPTI**

# Pharma: Beijing to tighten anti-monopoly efforts

REUTERS  
BEIJING, JANUARY 30

CHINA WILL toughen law enforcement to curb monopoly practices and unfair competition in the pharmaceutical industry as the government seeks to foster a good business environment, the industry ministry said on Sunday.

The action follows November's regulatory guidelines to stamp out monopolies in active pharmaceu-

tical ingredients (API). China leads the world in making and exporting these products. In a statement, the ministry of industry and information technology said it would "strengthen law enforcement against unfair competition, and resolutely investigate unfair competitive acts like commercial bribery".

It will also stiffen enforcement of anti-monopoly laws in the areas of drug shortages and APIs, prepare and adopt antitrust guidelines in the API market, it added.

## BRIEFLY

### ComMin plan

New Delhi: The commerce ministry has proposed repeal of decades-old laws pertaining to tea, coffee, spices and rubber, and introduce new legislations. **PTI**

### Apex Chamber

New Delhi: Kuldeep Singh Bagga, chairman of Taxation Committee of Apex Chamber of Commerce & Industry of NCT Delhi, in a memorandum to the finance minister, has suggested rebates in the Budget. **ENS**

# UK growth at slowest pace since last April

REUTERS  
LONDON, JANUARY 30

BRITISH BUSINESSES grew at the slowest pace since April 2021 during the past three months, after demand for face-to-face services slumped due to the Omicron variant of coronavirus, the Confederation of British Industry said on Sunday.

Britain's economy only recovered to its pre-pandemic size in November, before being hit by the highly infectious Omicron variant

which led to government advice to work from home and restrictions on hospitality in Scotland and Wales. The CBI's monthly growth index — which is based on quarterly growth rates from its previously published surveys of manufacturers, retailers and other services businesses — fell to +12 in January from +21 in December.

That was the lowest reading since April's, which covered a three-month period when pubs, restaurants and non-essential retailers were largely closed due to a previous COVID wave.

# China Jan factory activity growth slows as Covid surges

REUTERS  
BEIJING, JANUARY 30

GROWTH IN China's factory activity slowed in January as a resurgence of COVID-19 cases and tough lockdowns hit production and demand, but the slight expansion offered some signs of resilience as the world's second-largest economy enters a likely bumpy new year.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) registered 50.1 in January, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction, but slowing from 50.3 in

December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Sunday. The official results contrasted with those in a private sur-

vey of mostly small manufacturers in coastal regions, which showed activity fell at the fastest rate in 23 months.



# After sexual assuault charge, Man United player arrested

ENS/AGENCIES  
JANUARY 30

MANCHESTER United's star forward Mason Greenwood has been arrested on alleged sexual assault and domestic violence charges. The Greater Manchester Police have confirmed an arrest in the case, without revealing the name of the person.

"An investigation was launched and following enquiries we can confirm a man in his 20s has since been arrested on suspicion of rape and assault.

He remains in custody for questioning," said the police statement.

The Associated Press in its report, however, has mentioned that Greenwood, 20, has been arrested.

"Manchester United player Mason Greenwood was arrested on suspicion of rape and assault on Sunday after a woman posted visual and audio allegations on social media of an incident," the report said.

United have suspended the player, pending inquiry, as a club statement to Reuters said: "Mason Greenwood will not return to training or play matches until further notice."

The Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) backed the club's decision, posting on Twitter: "The club has now confirmed that Mason Greenwood will not return to training or play matches until further notice. MUST fully support the decision of the club in this regard."

This follows a post on Instagram, capturing pictures and videos of a young woman with several cuts and bruises and blood gushing out from a wound. The woman also



Manchester United said Greenwood will not return to training till further notice.

REUTERS

shared an audio clip in which a man was heard threatening a woman for refusing to have sex with him.

The posts have since been taken down. United had initially said they wouldn't comment on the matter until the facts were established and adding: "Manchester United does not condone violence of any kind."

The Daily Mail reported that police officers visited the woman's family home where her father said they had been devastated by the revelations.

Greenwood had earlier got into trouble while playing for England. Back in 2020, he and Phil Foden had been axed from the England team for sneaking girls into the team hotel while on the national team duty.

Later he had issued an apology, promising that he would learn from his mistakes. "It was irresponsible of me to break the COVID-19 protocols which are in place to protect players, staff and the public.

"In particular, I want to apologise to Gareth Southgate, for letting him down, when he had shown great trust in me," Greenwood had said then, adding: "Playing for England was one of the proudest moments in my life and I only have myself to blame for this huge mistake. I promise my family, the fans, Manchester United and England that this is a lesson I will learn from."

However, there have been reports about Greenwood arranging rowdy parties at a secret location during lockdown. Greenwood became United's youngest ever player to play in the Champions League, against PSG, at the age of 17. His football flourished after that and the United academy graduate became a first-team regular.

# Musetti, star attraction

The young and not-so-young hope to launch 2022 campaign on Indian soil

SHIVANI NAIK  
JANUARY 30

DANIIL Medvedev wasn't exactly battling windmills when he had a tilt at the chair umpire, complaining against Stefanos Tsitsipas allegedly receiving on-court coaching in the Australian Open semifinal. Maybe he read the winds of change howling in - with pinpoint tactics. Fresh off the Next Generation Finals last November at home in Milan where coaches could yell out instructions during a match, 19-year-old Lorenzo Musetti reckons coaches steering on-court strategy could well be the future of tennis.

The Italian youngster, who nicked two sets off Novak Djokovic at the French Open last year and was dubbed a sensation after becoming one of the youngest to crack the Top 100, is at Pune's Balewadi courts for the Tata Open Maharashtra. He comes armed with a single-handed backhand and an equally strong conviction that on-court coaching is the way forward.

"As I always said, we got the chance to use it (on-court coaching) in the Next Gen (tournament). It's really helpful. It's gonna be the future for sure because every sport has it. In WTA, they use it already. In the future probably, (it'll be) used more. When you get a warning for coaching, it sounds like you don't accept (it) too much. To be able to speak to a coach is not a big fault. I'm 100 percent pro-coaching," Musetti asserted. Considered one of the upcoming stars of the sport, the Italian is following in sure strides and in the slipstream of compatriots Fabio Fognini, Matteo Berrettini and Jannick Sinner. Musetti has scalped Stan Wawrinka, Grigor Dimitrov, Diego Schwartzman, Kei Nishikori and David Goffin. In Pune, he arrives as a potential roadblock to defending champion Jiri Vesely. The tournament was last held in 2020 on the cusp of the pandemic wreckage sweeping the world, when the Czech player won.

Musetti went out to fellow Next-Genner Alex de Minaur at the Australian Open in the opening round, but is looking to go deep into the draw here. "I'm here to play good matches and get my confidence back," he stated, adding he was hoping to reach the same levels that helped him rattle Djokovic in Paris last summer. Russian Aslan Karatsev is the top seed in Pune.

## Indians keep plodding on

Four Indians find themselves in the singles main draw, all facing steep challenges - like the fort faces in this city - as opponents. Ramkumar Ramanathan meets a good friend and fierce rival in eighth seed Stefano Travaglia. For a while now - since Somdev Devvarman briefly sparked - expectations from Indians in singles have been massively tempered. Precious points to improve their



Italian Lorenzo Musetti had taken two sets off Djokovic last year. Tata Open Maharashtra

rankings, at best, is the expectation. "It's a good feeling to have tournaments back in India. Hopefully we'll have good matches, and get rankings up," Ramkumar said. "Hopefully, I serve well and get fired up," says the Indian ranked 184, who won his first ATP Challenger title at Manama in November. This was around the same time as the Next Genners were sprouting at Milan. At 27, that train of 'promise' is long gone, but the hard-working Chennai man continues to plod. The first five months of the pandemic, he even took some initiative to get going.

The break in March 2020 came as a blessing in disguise. "We did some fitness. Hadn't been home for years, because it's a different lifestyle living out of a suitcase, travelling and training a lot. Did some core sessions with friends. We had a group. Used it in a good way. To start with it was a Zoom call, just seven of us Chennai friends. Just planned to do core workouts through Zoom calls. For an hour. Then we started adding other tennis players from India. Sania (Mirza) came in. (Rohan) Bopanna came in. Purav Raja was there. 5-6 in the evening. One hour each day, one player as coach would lead us through a workout. Didn't miss even one of those 150 days," Ramkumar recalls. When the tour resumed, it was a pile of paperwork to travel - "More letters, fill more papers, visas were difficult. Still, we could get to do what we love - play matches." So, in the lead-up to Manama, Ramkumar strung together a few good weeks with quarterfinals and tidy runs in Challengers. "I paced it real well. In the quarters, I was 5-3 down in the third set. Somehow, I could turn things around. That match gave me a lot of confidence," he recalls. Yet the Indian interest - as the week slides on - will drift to doubles, where Ramkumar combines with Bopanna again, after their recent Adelaide title.

## N-th comeback

Yuki Bhambri doesn't believe in luck determining his fate, never mind the myriad injuries. Having hinted that he'll tilt towards doubles more seriously now, though, the Delhi man - once India's top stroke-maker - seems liberated. Forever jinxed by injuries in his staccato career, he has turned philosophical of late. "I definitely have to work harder than an average tennis player out there who doesn't get injured. Do a little bit more. Recover better to peak fitness. But having experience of doing it so many times, you know how to go about it, and that's kept me going. You don't take things for granted and have more gratitude. Coming here, playing matches - I won't say content - but I try playing tennis with a bit more smile, less frustration," he says. His umpteenth injury rehab blended with the onset of the pandemic, and that meant more outdoor runs than the gym training he'd have liked. He found kindred souls in some of Delhi's fast bowlers he's friends with, who had the same proclivities for breakdowns.

"I try and play other sports when not tennis, like cricket and soccer. I'm friends with fast bowlers because we had the same trainer. I'm a big lover of cricket and enjoy listening to stories. And there's always banter on who's fitter. They thrive off it. Navdeep Saini is a good friend. On fitness, in running it would probably be me better than him, but lifting, strength-wise it'd probably be him," he says. On the court though, the mileage is one slow step after another in goals for 2022. "Get the ranking up, to be able to play Grand Slams again."

Daniel Masur withdrew from the qualifying due to illness and was replaced on the updated ATP draw by the alternate, Borna Gojo. Strict guidelines are in place including a precondition of double vaccination.

# Pacer Ravi steers India into U19 semis

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA  
COOLIDGE (ANTIGUA), JANUARY 30

LEFT-ARM pacer Ravi Kumar bowled a sensational opening spell as India's 'class of 2022' exacted a sweet revenge on Bangladesh, knocking out the defending champions by five wickets to enter the semi-finals of the U-19 World Cup here.

In the last edition of the tournament, India lost to Bangladesh in the title clash. Four-time champions India will meet Australia in their semifinal on February 2, having won an unprecedented seven out of their nine U-19 World Cup quarterfinals.

Ravi, who has followed in the footsteps of his illustrious state senior Mohammed Shami to ply his trade for Bengal, ended with excellent figures of 7-1-14-3 on a tacky track as Bangladesh were all out for 111 in 37.1 overs on Saturday.

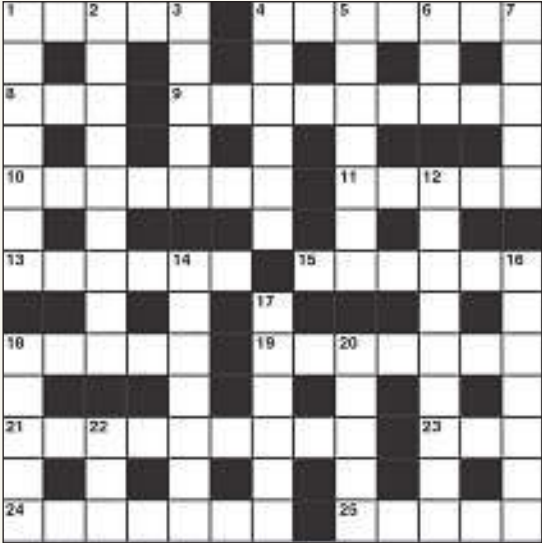
Bangladesh were 56 for seven at one stage before SM Mehrob (30) and Ashiqur Zaman (16) added 50 runs for the eighth wicket to take the team past 100-run mark. In reply, India chased down the target in 30.5 overs with opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi's 44 being the top score.

Skipper Yash Dhull made 20 not out and his deputy Shaik Rasheed contributed 26. The victory was even more satisfying considering the youngsters came back without any training post recovery from COVID-19.

It was a fitting reply from the 'Boys in Blue' to the 'Tiger Cubs' after their predecessors lost an ill-tempered final of the 2020 edition. For the current batch, the win was also necessary after they were beaten twice by this same side last year during a four-nation meet in Kolkata. India won a good toss and Ravi made full use of the moisture underneath, with initial movement in the air helping the team's cause. Ravi, who has the natural ability to bring the ball back into right-handers, had Mahfijul Islam (2) beaten all ends up with an inswinger in the second over. His opening partner Iftakher Hossain (1) was done in by the slowness of the track as he tried to square cut and was held at point by vice-captain Shaikh Rasheed. One drop batter Prantik Nawrose (7) was not at all comfortable during his stay and was late into the drive to a delivery that swung away, offering a catch to Kaushal Tumble in the slips.

Left-arm spinner Vicky Ostwal (9-1-25-2) was as consistent as ever, with his flight and dip causing problems for the opposition batters. However, if anyone deserves the credit for restricting Bangladesh to a paltry total, it is Ravi, who played for a Kolkata club cricket. **Brief Scores:** Bangladesh 111 all out (SM Meherob 30, Ravi Kumar 3/14) lost to India 117 for 5 (Angkrish Raghuvanshi 44, Ripon Mondol 4/31)

## CROSSWORD 4651



### ACROSS

- 1 Dances in films (5)
- 4 One may itch to do it (7)
- 8 Part of play passed by Parliament (3)
- 9 Not a scrap of bias (4,5)
- 10 House journal carrying debatable material (7)
- 11 Money - marks perhaps (5)
- 13 As a golfer he doesn't need to keep to one side (6)
- 15 We get trained about the way tea's made (6)
- 18 Bear two letters for the personal assistant (5)
- 19 I may be scared about travelling beside a motorcycle (7)
- 21 Youth employed to skin fish (9)
- 23 It's charged for half ration (3)
- 24 Peak time before break (7)
- 25 A good time going through Berlin (5)

### DOWN

- 1 Stretched and was in pain again (7)
- 2 Longer period perhaps on the phone (9)
- 3 Capital piece of furniture envelops one (5)
- 4 Start an uproarious din inside, resulting in a brawl (6)
- 5 A worker in oils perhaps (7)
- 6 Played by children at a loose end (7)
- 7 He's at the middle which he doesn't like (5)
- 12 He called to give the news (4,5)
- 14 An illustration no longer large enough (7)
- 16 Exploding grenade produces disorder (7)
- 17 Beast of burden given first aid (6)
- 18 Law-abiding company? (5)
- 20 He painted pictures of French fuel (5)
- 22 Kind of bread found in every East German house (3)

Solutions Crossword 4650: Across: 1 Christened, 8 Putts, 9 Martine, 10 Sheathe, 11 Overt, 12 Induce, 14 Eskimo, 17 Never, 19 Rissolo, 21 Testate, 22 Rides, 23 Takes apart. Down: 2 Hothead, 3 Inset, 4 Temper, 5 Nervous, 6 Drive, 7 Destroyers, 8 Passionate, 13 Car park, 15 In order, 16 Preens, 18 Visit, 20 Scrap.

## JUMBLD 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.

Writing is nothing more than a \_\_\_\_\_. - Jorge Luis Borges (6,5)

HVAEE



AENDDD



BTIRU



LOOYGM



SOLUTION: Writing is nothing more than a jumbled word. - Jorge Luis Borges

## OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



## CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



## MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



## SUDOKU 4731

### Difficulty Level 3s

#### 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 4730



## DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

### ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Planetary aspects are hopeful, optimistic and inspired at the beginning of the week and you're likely to be in an expansive and extravagant mood. Friends will be urging you to experiment with new enterprises. It's all down to two planets, Mercury and Neptune which, between them, enhance your imagination.

### TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

The theme for this week must be reconciliation, especially for those of you who feel that you have been the victim of quite undeserved criticism. It takes more courage to turn the other cheek than to seek revenge, so don't let other people pressurise you into doing what you know is wrong.

### GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Your life is by its very nature complicated, which is why interpreting your planetary picture at the moment is so difficult. The problem is that, while you are being urged to take a gamble, there is no absolute or ultimate guarantee of success.

### CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

The focus of activity must be your immediate environment, which doesn't only refer to family chores or domestic decorations and repairs; you may also be getting more involved in some sort of community action; perhaps you're coming to see the wider world as a sort of extended part of your own family.

### LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

Daily trends are ruled mainly by the Moon's rapid motion. Today issues close to home dominate your thinking. The obsessive planet Pluto will be turning your mind to what you can do to improve the situation, encouraging you to accept only the real thing; no imitations, please.

### VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Spending money must now be more important than saving it. How is this? Are there perhaps items you can buy which will dramatically improve your lifestyle or enhance the quality of life? Luxury seems to be more important than necessity, so relax a little.

### LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

The current planetary alignment is ideal for those of you who are participating in a spiritual quest, but not of much help to those who are bogged down with practical cares or snowed under with chores. A word of advice, though, try and take whatever time off you need.

### SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 22)

Current transits highlight the higher side of life, the human quest for Truth. The ideal way to express your planetary patterns for the next few days is to willingly sacrifice your interests in the service of those who are genuinely in need of sympathy and support.

### SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23 - Dec 22)

The current celestial picture is highly expansive. As far as you are concerned this might mean that your investments or savings may yield a greater than expected return, but also that, over the next month, your spending may spiral out of control.

### CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

If worldly ambitions seem to be meeting practical problems, don't kick against fate. Instead, switch your attention to long-term plans; if you could wish for anything in the world, what would it be? World peace, perhaps? Or at least an end to a confrontation in your own life.

### AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

It is your inner world of dreams and beliefs that is most important at the moment. Unfortunately, if you are concerned with daily trivia, the subtleties of the present time may pass you by. Raise your sights as high as you can and look at the bigger picture.

### PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

This week's stellar alignments are ideally suited to your imaginative and impractical nature. Press ahead with social, professional and financial schemes, but not to go beyond the planning stage just yet. Give yourself at least until next week.



STARC OPTS OUT OF IPL AUCTION

Melbourne: Australia pacer Mitchell Starc has said that he opted out of the IPL auction at the last minute as he did not want to spend another 22 weeks in a bio-bubble. "I was a click of the button away from entering the auction but personally didn't want to spend 22 more weeks in a bubble," said Starc, who won Australia's men's cricketer of the year award on Saturday.

PTI

‘ONE MONTH AND A HALF AGO, I DIDN’T KNOW IF I WOULD BE BACK ON THE TOUR PLAYING TENNIS AGAIN. TODAY, I AM HERE...’

RAFAEL NADAL

Nadal Majors in Greatness

Spaniard comes back from the dead against Medvedev for second Australian Open and record 21st Grand Slam title

GAURAV BHATT  
JANUARY 30

RAFAEL NADAL did it, in the most Rafael Nadal way.

For more than two sets and two hours in the Australian Open final, Nadal, 35, was outplayed by Daniil Medvedev, the higher-ranked, 10-year-younger, in-form Russian.

Nadal then tapped into his seemingly endless reservoir of self-belief, orchestrating a historic comeback to defeat Medvedev in 5-1/2 hours. With the 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 victory, the Spaniard became just the fourth man in history to win all four Majors at least twice. It was just the third comeback from two sets down at a Major for Nadal in his career and first since 2007. More importantly, he broke a three-way tie with Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer to scale Mount 21.

But before he could reach that summit, he had to climb out of a pit.

If the first set was frustrating, the second — lost from a lead of 4-1 — was crushing. Hammer, nails, coffin analogies from commentators flew faster than Medvedev's 190kmph serves. Nadal was 2-6, 6-7, 2-3 (0-40) down against the best hard-courtner on the planet currently. A defeat, though bittersweet, would have come with no shame.

By Nadal's own admission during the tournament, "Just to compete and play tennis at the high level again, facing the most important players of the world, it's something unbelievable."

A runner-up finish would have far exceeded all pre-tournament expectations. For the injury-ravaged veteran from Mallorca, 2021 was especially painful. He braved a back injury to compete at the French Open, where he suffered an unusual semi-final exit. Then a foot injury sidelined him for the majority of the season, and almost forced him through the door of retirement.

Finally fit, Nadal returned for exhibition games in Abu Dhabi and contracted Covid-19. "I was in bed for four days after contracting the virus, and three more days I was destroyed physically," he told reporters.

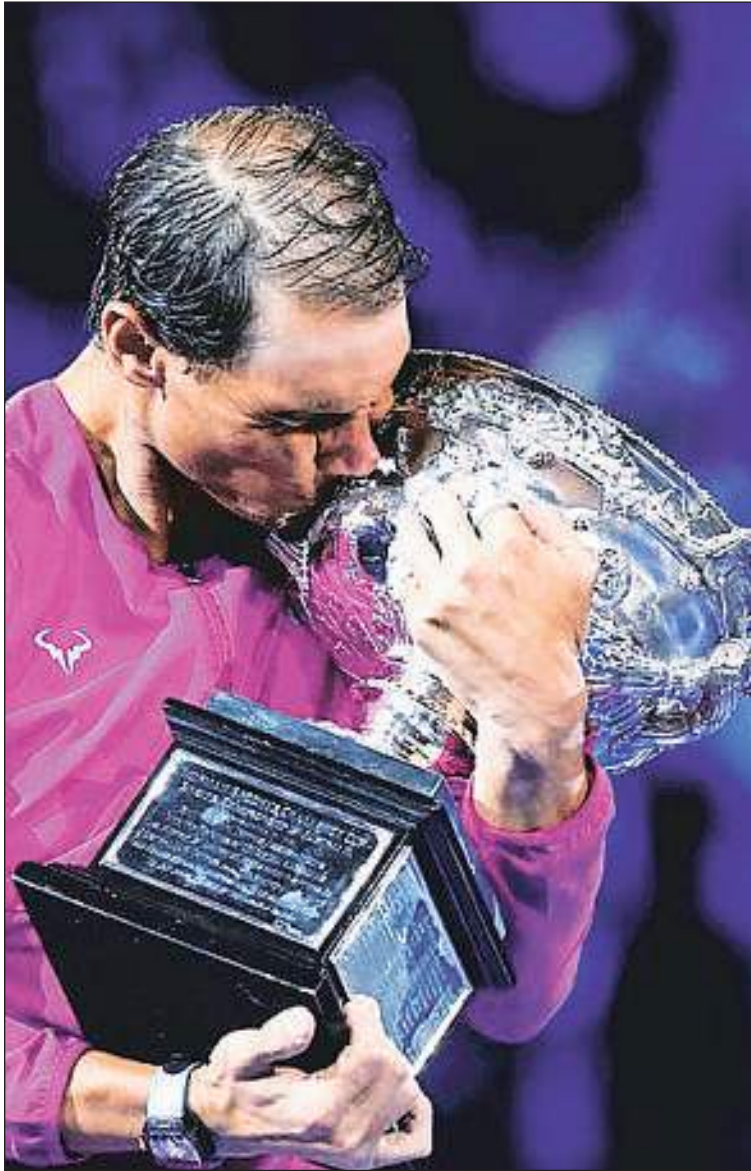
"I had a lot of conversations with the team, with the family about what is going to happen if things continue like this, thinking that maybe it is a chance to say goodbye," Nadal said after his semifinal win in Melbourne, explaining the uncharacteristically emotional outburst after making what was his 29th Grand Slam final. "To be able to be where I am now — I don't know, I really can't explain in words how important it is for me in terms of energy, in terms of personal satisfaction."

Two months after pondering retirement, an Australian Open final would have been achievement enough for Nadal.

A win for Medvedev, meanwhile, would have furthered the new world order, and cemented his reputation as a spoiler. The Russian had dashed Novak Djokovic's calendar Grand Slam/21st title bid in New York last September. Such a habit Medvedev has made of razing dreams that it's almost surprising he didn't take the court for home favourite Ash Barty's drought-ending title match on Saturday.

How exactly, then, did Nadal thwart Medvedev? Well, how do you explain the unexplainable?

Sunday's instant classic was more about grit and less about serves and rallies. More about character, less about strokes. There were, however, moments that stood out



GOTCHA!

With the 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 victory, Rafael Nadal became just the fourth man in history to win all four Majors at least twice.

Reuters

“Congratulations to Rafael Nadal for 21st GS. Amazing achievement. Always impressive fighting spirit that prevailed another time. Enhorabuena!” (Congratulations in Spanish)

— NOVAK DJOKOVIC

“A few months ago we were joking about both being on crutches. Never underestimate a great champ. Your incredible work ethic, dedication and fighting spirit are an inspiration to me & countless others...”

— ROGER FEDERER

from the melee in Melbourne.

Twist in the tale

Medvedev, known as the Octopus on the tour, is all limbs. The unorthodox Russian's loading into a shot is minimal, and the swings fluid. He twists and pivots in unnatural ways, imparting sensational spin and power from half-turns. His lanky 6'6 frame and superior movement cover the court effectively.

All that is to say, Medvedev is seldom wrong-footed. But Nadal almost brought

him to his knees.

During the 84-minute second set, Nadal secured a break at 5-3 with a drop shot, beautifully-disguised as a full-blooded forehand down the line.

Medvedev never saw it coming, stumbled and scampered. Nadal lost the set but regularly won the battle of drop shots, as Medvedev squandered chances with questionable execution and timing.

The momentum truly shifted at 4-4 in the third set. After a strong serve, Medvedev pinged a simple volley into the

Actor Eric Bana may have been in the stands but Nadal was both Hector and Hulk on the night. He defended the court like it was Troy, and began smashing after taking enough punishment.

net, and mocked the cheering crowd. He conceded the break, and the red mist descended. To be fair, the majority of Rod Laver Arena audience interrupted Medvedev's serves and cheered for unforced errors and faults.

But Medvedev is used to being the villain. He was public enemy No.1 in the US Open final for the New York crowd, who had left Djokovic sobbing with their unprecedented support.

On Sunday, however, the Russian engaged with the hostilities. "They are idiots. No brains. Empty brains. Probably in their life it must be very bad," he chatted with the chair umpire during the changeover.

To make matters worse, he began conceding the physical battles to a man 10 years his senior. After losing his way in the third set, Medvedev found it tough to course-correct the contest.

But he refused to go away. With Nadal serving for the championship and the crowd squarely against him, Medvedev capitalised on an opening and made it 5-5 in the decider. But he couldn't go through. Nadal broke him again and served out the tournament.

Memorable contest

Actor Eric Bana may have been in the stands but Nadal was both Hector and Hulk on the night. He defended the court like it was Troy, and began smashing after taking enough punishment. It wasn't high-quality tennis. But the rough, error-strewn match was one for the ages.

At the presentation ceremony, removed from the contest, the two rivals chatted, giggled and gesticulated. Two tennis fans amazed like the rest of the world, two artists beaming with pride at what they had accomplished.

"Tough to talk, after five hours-thirty, and losing ... I want to congratulate Rafa because what you did today, I was amazed," Medvedev said. "During the match, I tried just to play tennis, but after the match, I just, you know, asked him - 'Are you tired?'"

Nadal was speechless.

"I don't even know what to say, guys. For me, it's just amazing, being honest, one month and a half ago, I didn't know if I was going to be back on the tour playing tennis again. And today, I'm here in front of all of you with this trophy with me, and you don't know how much I've fought to be here."

Minutes later, Nadal was pedalling away on a bike, cooling down while still gushing over his triumph with coach Carlos Moya. He got off the bike to meet Aussie legend Rod Laver, then climbed back on.

For now, Nadal has no plans of going away.

"One month and a half ago I said maybe there was a chance that's going to be my last Australian Open," he said. "But now that's plenty of energy to keep going, so thank you very much!"

Scariest still for Nadal's rivals, the Grand Slam caravan moves to Paris next.

From Down Under to 21st century

GAURAV BHATT  
JANUARY 30

IT'S FITTING that Melbourne Park was the venue for Rafael Nadal's record-breaking 21st Grand Slam title. The 2-6, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 over Daniil Medvedev also ended his long wait of winning all four Grand Slams at least twice.

Injuries and bad luck had put the 'hard' in 'hardcourts' for Nadal at the Australian Open — christened the 'Happy Slam' by Roger Federer for being the first Major of the season for the recharged, inspired players. After winning his first hardcourt Major at the Australian Open in 2009 — a five-set victory that reduced the Swiss great to tears — Nadal had had a horrid run of luck Down Under. The venue has witnessed two of the only three times that Nadal has retired midway into a match: the 2010 and 2018 quarterfinals.

In 2010, his knee gave out while he was down 0-3 in the third set against Andy Murray, while in 2018 Nadal had to retire 0-2 in the fifth set against Marin Cilic due to a hip injury.

In 2011, Nadal was gunning for a fourth straight Grand Slam triumph when a hamstring niggle and spirited compatriot David Ferrer ended his campaign in the quarterfinal. "For me, it's all about the Australian Open more than anything else, no?" Nadal had said ahead of Sunday's final. "It's just an amazing event. I have been a little bit unlucky during my career with some injuries and other times I played amazing finals with good chances against Novak (Djokovic) 2012, against Roger 2017. I was close a couple of times. I feel very lucky that I won once in my career."

Injuries and seven quarterfinal exits since winning the 2009 title would have stung, sure. But defeats in classic Australian Open finals would have hurt unbearably. Nadal has been part of epics in Melbourne, but only as the second lead.

Bittersweet memories

The 2012 final against Novak Djokovic, regularly cited as the greatest tennis match of all time, saw the two titans play their hearts out in a five-hour, 53-minute contest. Nadal was 4-2 up in the decider, before a regular backhand missed its mark. The Serb clawed back and shut the door. The presentation ceremony from 2012 is recalled as vividly as the match itself.

While the dignitaries talked, the two twenty-somethings stretched, bent over, rested their hands on their knees and even leaned up against the net for support... before a benevolent fellow retrieved two chairs. The 2014 final saw Stanislas Wawrinka win his first Grand Slam against a hobbling Nadal. He had suffered a back injury during the warm-up, competed for four sets while nursing a blister the size of a Rs10 coin on his hand, and eventually lost to a player he had a 12-0 record against.

Then in 2017, Nadal and Federer turned back the clock. The former had the match under control before the 35-year-old Federer fought back from 1-3 down in the



Rafael Nadal has been part of epics in Melbourne, but only as the second lead until now.

fifth set to win five straight games, and spark a mini-renaissance for himself.

The final against Djokovic in 2019 was an epic of a different kind. Djokovic dismantled Nadal 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. "Things started so quick," Nadal snapped his fingers to explain his heaviest final defeat. There was no chagrin. Only the cold, hard, 'you-got-me' acceptance of a gunslinger who had lost to a quicker draw.

He didn't fare much better against #GenNext. Last year, he lost to Stefanos Tsitsipas after being 2-0 sets up — only the second such Grand Slam loss for Nadal.

"I'm not at all feeling unlucky for me and I'm not at all complaining about my luck here in Australia. Everyone has what they deserve, tennis isn't a sport that is fair and I have what I deserve in my career," he told reporters. "Probably here in Australia, I've had chances but I was not able to convert it, so that's all. I didn't deserve more. We can find a lot of excuses and reasons but all the reason is I was not able to convert the opportunities I've had in my career."

Polite to a fault

Nadal, of course, refused to cite bad luck. But so painful was his record at the tournament that even tennis writers went into denial. Earlier this month, a veteran journalist quizzed Nadal: "You haven't reached the semifinals at the Australian Open since you won the title in 2009. I just wondered if there's anything you find difficult or challenging about the conditions compared to other Grand Slams."

Befuddled and bemused, the 35-year-old corrected the reporter, in signature Nadal politeness. "I am very sorry to tell you — I don't want to — but I have been in the final of 2012, '14, '17, '18. I got injured a couple of times here in my tennis career, so of course, it's been a great tournament for me, and of course, I had a lot of challenges in terms of injuries in this event."

"Sorry to correct you," he repeated with a grin. The monkey's off his back now. Another five-set epic, that too against a younger star, and this time Nadal was decidedly the star of the show.

"I am super, super-tired in all ways. I can't even celebrate. But was the day to give everything, no?" Nadal told reporters. "At the end, having this trophy with me means everything today, no?"

For Nadal, Melbourne Park is Heartbreak Hotel no more.

TIE-BREAKER

How Rafa moved ahead of his great rivals in Grand Slam race

TUSHAR BHADURI  
JANUARY 30

HE TOOK the scenic route, but Rafael Nadal finally got to the magic number of 21, breaking the tie with his great contemporaries Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. Their progress in this Grand Slam race over almost two decades has hooked tennis fans and prompted various arguments in the GOAT (Greatest of All Time) debate.

HERE'S A LOOK AT THE VARIOUS STAGES IN THIS INCREDIBLE COMPETITION ACROSS TIME:

Federer era (2003-2007)

The Swiss was supreme during this period. He won at least one Grand Slam title each year, and on three occasions (2004, 2006 and 2007) three of the four. In fact, in 2006 and 2007, it was only losses to Nadal in the French Open finals that prevented Federer from completing the Calendar

Grand Slam. He clinched 12 of his 20 titles during this period (3 Australian Opens, 5 Wimbledon crowns, 4 US Opens)

Bipolar rivalry (2008-2010)

Nadal broke on to the scene in 2005, winning Roland Garros in his first attempt. He won it four times in a row, but was often considered only a clay-court beast till he beat Federer in a memorable Wimbledon final in 2008. The two won 10 out of the 12 Grand Slam titles in the three-year period. The Swiss won four and the Spaniard six of those.

Three-way contest (2011-2018)

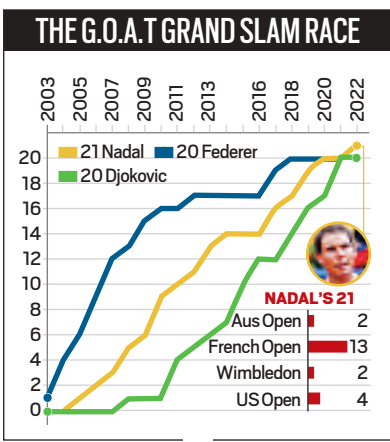
A few more contenders entered the fray (Stan Wawrinka, Andy Murray, Marin Cilic), this period saw Federer, Nadal and Djokovic monopolizing most of the big titles among them. The Serb's first Grand Slam title was the 2008 Australian Open, but it was the 2011 season when he turned into his dominant self, winning three of the four crowns. All three of them took turns

to be the top dog. Of the 32 Grand Slams played, 25 were taken by the Three Musketeers. Nadal won eight of those, but it was Djokovic who was the most prolific (13 Grand Slam titles). As far as Federer is concerned, when he was considered past his best having not won a big one for four-and-a-half years, he came back to win three of five, starting from the 2017 Australian Open.

Djokovic era (2019-)

It is a period during which Federer, due to his advancing years and age, was not much of a factor at the Majors. In fact, apart from the great 2019 Wimbledon final, where he held two match points before succumbing to Djokovic, the Swiss never got close.

The Serb won six of the Grand Slam titles during this period, while Nadal kept chipping away being the great survivor he is. He has always been the biggest contender at Roland Garros, but managed to make his presence felt on hard courts too.



Now, with the French Open next and a question mark on Djokovic's participation in big events due to his Covid vaccination status, Nadal may have an opportunity to put some daylight between him and the chasing pack, even though there are a host of young challengers on the prowl.



The golden age of men's tennis started with the rivalry between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal before Novak Djokovic emerged and made it the Big 3.

Reuters