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6 states report crop damage due to excess rains, rabi sowing on track elsewhere

NEW DELHI: Data from Agriculture Ministry on Friday showed that overall trend of Rabi crop sowing progress is progressing satisfactorily owing to the fact that major growing states have received recent winter rainfall, beneficial for Rabi crops, even as some states have reported crop damage due to excess rains. Rabi crops have been affected in Madhya Pradesh (48,871 ha), Rajasthan (69,375 ha), Uttar Pradesh (1,11,700 ha), Haryana (97,676 ha), Maharashtra (5,276 ha) and Tripura (13,542 ha), according to data as updated by the respective states after a video conference on January 11. The total sown area under Rabi crops as on Friday is 664.59 lakh ha against 656.44 lakh ha area during the corresponding period of last year, thus recording an increase by 8.15 lakh.



Sowing reported under wheat is 336.48 lakh ha against 340.74 lakh ha last year, while rice sowing is over 19.82 lakh ha against 24.33 lakh ha area of last year, according to the data. The area coverage under pulses is 160.20 lakh ha against 160.13 lakh ha area of last year and for coarse cereals at 47.82 lakh ha against 48.91 lakh ha area of last year. However, the area coverage reported under oilseeds is 100.27 lakh ha area

against 82.34 lakh ha area of last year, thus showing a significant increase. In oilseeds, mainly significant increased area coverage has been recorded under rapeseed and mustard at 90.45 lakh ha compared to corresponding period of last year of 72.93 lakh ha. As per the Central Water Commission statistics, as on January 13, the live water storage available in 137 reservoirs in the country is 101 per cent of live storage of corresponding period of last year and 122 per cent of average of last ten years. That is because of widespread rainfall across the country. Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and some North-Eastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland received rainfall during this period. Most of the states are still expected to achieve the targeted area of pulses within this month while sowing/transplanting of Rabi rice will be carried out in the southern and eastern region till end of January to first week of February," said an official. Besides, sowing window for wheat is up to the first fortnight of January which is going on, the official said, adding, the area coverage under Rabi crops will be finalised by the end of January 2022 and progress of preliminary summer crop area coverage will be reported from the first week of February as per the system. **AGENCIES**

India logs 2.69 lakh Covid cases, 402 deaths in a day



NEW DELHI: India registered 2,68,833 new Covid infections in a day taking the tally to 3,68,50,962, which includes 6,041 omicron variant cases, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Saturday. With 402 more deaths, the number of people who have succumbed to the viral disease has risen to 4,85,752. The case fatality rate was 1.32 per cent. A total of 6,041 Omicron cases have been detected so far, an increase of 5.01 per cent since Friday, the data updated at 8 am showed. The daily positivity rate was 16.66 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was 12.84 per cent. Active cases have increased to 14,17,820, the highest in around 223 days, and comprise 3.85 per cent of the total infections. The national Covid recovery rate has decreased to 94.83 per cent, the Health Ministry said. In a day, the active caseload in the country has increased by 1,45,747. The total number of people who have recuperated from the disease so far has increased to 3,49,47,390. The cumulative Covid vaccine doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide inoculation drive has exceeded 156.02 crore. The 402 new fatalities include 199 from Kerala and 34 from Delhi. Of the total deaths reported so far in the country, 1,41,756 are from Maharashtra, 50,568 from Kerala, 38,411 from Karnataka, 36,956 from Tamil Nadu, 25,305 from Delhi, 22,949 from Uttar Pradesh and 20,013 from West Bengal. **AGENCIES**

Rajdhani Express train hits cement pillar placed on track in suspected derailment bid in Gujarat

VALSAD: The Mumbai-Delhi Rajdhani Express train hit a cement pillar, which some miscreants had allegedly placed on the railway track near Valsad in south Gujarat, although no passenger was injured, police officials said on Saturday. The police suspect that the incident, which took place around 7.10 pm on Friday, was an attempt to derail the Delhi-bound train. They have registered a case. "The Mumbai-Hazrat Nizamuddin August Kranti Rajdhani Express train hit the cement pillar placed on the railway track close to Atul station near Valsad. After being hit by the train, the pillar got pushed off the track. The incident did not affect the train as it moved on and no passenger was hurt. The loco pilot immediately informed the Atul railway station personnel," an official of Valsad rural police station said. On being alerted, senior police and railway officials rushed to the spot. "Some miscreants had placed the cement pillar on the track. The train hit the pillar, after which the train manager immediately informed the local station master," Rajkumar Pandian, Range, IG of Surat, told reporters. It appeared to be a case of an attempt to derail the train, he said, adding that the police are conducting an investigation. An FIR was lodged against unidentified miscreants at Valsad rural police station, and efforts are on to nab the culprit using technical surveillance and human intelligence, the Valsad rural police official said. **AGENCIES**

Parliament's Budget Session begins from Jan 31, Union Budget on Feb 1

NEW DELHI: The CCPA-Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs has recommended the commencement of the Budget Session of Parliament on January 31, sources said on Friday. The Budget is to be presented on February 1. The President is likely to address the joint sitting on January 31 and the same day the economic survey will be tabled in the House. The session will be conducted in two parts -- the first part will end on February 11 and after that the House will resume again on March 14 after a break. The session proceedings will fall in between the elections in five states, and the notification for the first phase of polls in Uttar Pradesh has been issued by the EC. The session will be conducted amid Covid protocol. On Tuesday, Lok Sabha Speaker



Om Birla inspected the Parliament House Complex (PHC) to take stock of the health safety related measures in light of the recent spike in Covid-19 cases in the country. Birla visited the Covid-19 testing facility set up in Parliament House Annexe for the Members of Parliament, officers and staff of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariats and reviewed the preparations there. The Rajya Sabha Chairman and the Lok Sabha Speaker directed Secretaries-Generals of both the Houses to suggest measures for the safe conduct of the upcoming Budget Session. Both the Rajya Sabha chairman and the Lok Sabha speaker have directed the secretary generals to review adequacy of the Covid protocol followed during last the Winter Session in the current situation and submit a proposal in this regard at the earliest," the sources said. **AGENCIES**

India improves global passport rank, Japan-Singapore top list, Pak among worst

NEW DELHI: The Indian passport now ranks at 83rd position on the Henley Passport Index, climbing seven places from the 90th rank last year, the London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm, said. It released the rankings for the year 2022, based on exclusive data provided by the International Air Transport Association. As per the report, Japan and Singapore top the list of being the most powerful passports in the world for the year 2022. The visa-free score of both countries is at 192. Afghanistan (rank 111) and Iraq (rank 110) continue to be in the 'worst passports to hold' category having a visa-free score of 26 and 28 respectively. Pakistan's passport is fourth among the worst or least powerful passports. The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different destinations. Updated quarterly, the Henley Passport Index is considered the standard reference tool for the global citizen and sovereign states for assessing passport rank on the global mobility spectrum. **AGENCIES**



PM lauds Army on Army Day

NEW DELHI: On the occasion of Army Day on Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the Indian Army, saying it is known for bravery and professionalism, and words cannot do justice to its invaluable contribution towards national safety. Army Day is observed on January 15 to mark Field Marshal KM Cariappa taking over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, replacing his British predecessor in 1949. Indian Army personnel serve in hostile terrains and are at the forefront of helping fellow citizens during humanitarian crisis, including natural disasters. India is proud of the stellar contribution of the Army in Peacekeeping Missions overseas as well," the prime minister said. He added, "Best wishes on the occasion of Army Day, especially to our courageous soldiers, respected veterans and their families. The Indian Army is known for its bravery and professionalism. Words cannot do justice to the invaluable contribution of the Indian Army towards national safety." **AGENCIES**



Appropriation Act 2021 gets Presidential assent

NEW DELHI: President Ram Nath Kovind has given his nod to the Appropriation (No 5) Act 2021 that authorises payment and appropriation of Rs 3.73 lakh crore from the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of the financial year 2021-22. According to a gazette notification published on Friday, the President gave his assent on January 12. The Act authorises the expenditure of Rs 3,737,035,100,000 as voted by the Parliament, Rs 574,900,000 charged on the Consolidated Fund totalling to Rs 3,737,610,000,000 from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India towards defraying the several charges which will come in course of payment during the financial year 2021-22 in respect of the services specified. Generally, after the budget proposal discussions and later voting on demand for grants, the government introduces the Appropriation Bill in the Lok Sabha, which when passed by the Parliament, is then sent to the President. **AGENCIES**



No breakthrough in 14th round of India-China border talks: Joint statement

NEW DELHI: There was no breakthrough in the 14th round of talks between the militaries of India and China and the two sides agreed to stay in close contact and maintain dialogue to work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest, according to a joint statement. Indian Army Chief General M M Naravane had said on Wednesday that India was hopeful of resolving issues related to disengagement at Patrolling Point 15 (Hot Springs) in eastern Ladakh in the 14th round of talks. The 14th round India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting was held at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the Chinese side on Wednesday. Representatives from the defence and foreign affairs establishments of the two sides were present at the meeting, The two sides had a frank and in-depth exchange of views for the resolution of the relevant issues along the LAC in the Western Sector



The joint statement said. "The two sides had a frank and in-depth exchange of views for the resolution of the relevant issues along the LAC in the Western Sector (Ladakh border)," it mentioned. They agreed that both sides should follow "the guidance provided by the state leaders" and work for the resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest, it stated. "It was noted that this would help in restoration of peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the Western Sector and enable progress in bilateral relations," it mentioned. The two sides agreed that the next round of the commanders' talks should be held at the earliest, the statement said. The 13th round of talks had taken place on October 10 last year and it had ended in a stalemate. **AGENCIES**

The two sides also agreed to consolidate on the previous outcomes and take effective efforts to maintain the security and stability on the ground in the Western Sector including during winter, it said. "The two sides agreed to stay in close contact and maintain dialogue via military and diplomatic channels and work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest," it mentioned. The two sides agreed that the next round of the commanders' talks should be held at the earliest, the statement said. The 13th round of talks had taken place on October 10 last year and it had ended in a stalemate. **AGENCIES**

HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK

- 1 PM Narendra Modi lauds Army on Army Day**
- 2 Parliament's Budget Session begins from Jan 31, Union Budget on February 1**
- 3 No breakthrough in 14th round of India-China border talks: Joint statement**

FAKE CURRENCY RACKET: NIA files second supplementary charge sheet



NEW DELHI: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday said that they have filed a supplementary charge sheet against Sariful Islam who was pumping counterfeit Indian currency in the nation. The charge sheet was filed before the special NIA court in Lucknow, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The case was initially lodged by ATS Lucknow. Acting on a tip-off, they recovered fake Indian notes of the face value of Rs 2,49,500 from Ghaziabad. Since this case was related to the cross-border crime, the NIA took over the investigation. In 2020, the case was re-registered by the NIA and a team was formed to look into the matter. The NIA, after completing the probe, filed a charge sheet in this connection in June 2020. It filed supplementary charge sheet in the matter in March 2021. Investigation revealed that the earlier charge-sheeted accused persons had received high quality Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) from accused Sariful Islam. It was also revealed that Islam was in contact with Bangladesh-based smugglers and conspirators involved in illicit trafficking of FICN. An NIA official said that they have collected a lot of evidence to prove that a cross-border conspiracy is going on to pump fake Indian notes across the nation. Various modules are working into this, and the conspiracy is larger that it appears, the official said. **AGENCIES**

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Channi regrets PM's security breach during virtual meeting on COVID



HIGHLIGHT

“TUM SALAMAT RAHO QAYAMAT TAK, AUR KHUDA KARE QAYAMAT NA HO (MAY YOU STAY SAFE TILL THE END AND MAY THERE BE NO END),” SOURCES QUOTING CHANNI SAID

end and may there be no end),” sources quoting Channi said. On January 5, The Prime Minister’s rally in Ferozpur had to be cancelled due to a security lapse after some protesters blocked a route and forced his convoy to spend about 20 minutes on a flyover. The Prime Minister was enroute the National Martyrs Memorial at Hussainiwalla when the incident happened. Channi had earlier said that there was no security breach during the Prime Minister’s visit to the state. “There was no security lapse of any kind and there was no situation of any attack,” Channi had said. **AGENCIES**

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday expressed regret over the security breach during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the state on January 5. Channi expressed regret while participating in a virtual meeting chaired by Prime Minister Modi with Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors/ Administrators of states and

UTs to review the prevailing Covid situation as well as the ongoing vaccination drive. “You visited Punjab. ‘Jo hua uske liye mujhe khed hai’ (I regret whatever happened),” Channi reportedly said. Sources said that Channi also wished the Prime Minister a long life. “Tum salamata raho qayamat tak, aur khuda kare qayamat na ho (May you stay safe till the

‘Bhagwant Mann tallest leader’, but Kejriwal puts onus of naming CM on people



HIGHLIGHT

“OFTEN, IT IS SEEN THAT THE RELATIVES OF POLITICIANS ARE MADE THE CM FACE IN SOME PARTIES. BHAGWANT MANN IS VERY DEAR TO US. HE’S MY YOUNGER BROTHER AND THE TALLEST LEADER OF THE PARTY. WE HAD DECIDED THAT HE SHOULD BE THE CM FACE, BUT HE SAID THE PEOPLE SHOULD CHOOSE THEIR CM”

CHANDIGARH: Less than 24 hours after announcing that the AAP’s chief ministerial candidate for the Punjab assembly polls will be announced within a week’s time, the party’s national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said state chief Bhagwant Mann is the tallest leader but he put the onus of naming the Chief Minister on the people. Launching the ‘Janata chunegi apna CM’ drive in Mohali near here in the presence of state party president Mann and state in-charge Raghav Chadha, the Delhi Chief Minister asked the voters to opt for tele-voting at 70748-70748 till January

17 and name their choice for the Chief Minister. “Often, it is seen that the relatives of politicians are made the CM face in some parties. Bhagwant Mann is very dear to us. He’s my younger brother and the tallest leader of the party. We had decided that he should be the CM face, but he said the people should choose their CM,” Kejriwal said. Responding to this development, Mann told the media, “Kejriwal had suggested his name be declared as the CM face. I suggested the people of the state should be asked. Kejriwal agreed to my suggestion. The people will be

assured of their choice.” The 117-seat assembly will go to the polls on February 14. The results will be announced on March 10. A multi-cornered fight is expected as the ruling Congress, the BJP and its allies, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Akali Dal and the Sanyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM), a group of farm organisations, are in the fray. **AGENCIES**

‘Punjab needs serious people’: Manish Tewari attacks Channi, Sidhu

NEWDELHI: Congress MP from Punjab’s Anandpur Sahib has once again attacked Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and state party president Navjot Singh Sidhu on reports that both are pushing to be named as the Chief Ministerial candidates. Tewari on Wednesday said, “Punjab needs serious people”, and took potshots on both Channi and Sidhu and dubbed them as non-serious persons who are entertaining people. Tewari tweeted, “Punjab requires a CM who has solutions to Punjab’s challenges, capacity to take tough decisions. Punjab Needs serious people whose politics is Not Social Engineering, Entertainment, Freebies and NOT regime favourites rejected by people in successive elections.”



Singh Sidhu on Tuesday said it is the people who will choose the next Chief Minister of the state and not the high command. Unveiling the first set of plans in his Punjab Model with focus on resurrection of Punjab, Sidhu, in the absence of Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and his Cabinet colleagues, told the media here: “Punjab Model is people’s model, an effort to give a roadmap to return power to people.” To counter the powerful ‘mafia model’, which has power to even stop the notification of Cabinet passed resolution, he said a model is needed to redistribute state resources and give power back to the rightful beneficiaries. **AGENCIES**

2.5 kg RDX, one detonator seized in Punjab

CHANDIGARH: Close on the heels of terror module backed by the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) busted, Punjab Police on Thursday said it has recovered 2.5 kg RDX, one detonator, codex wire, five explosive fuses along with wires, 12 cartridges of AK 47 Assault Rifle. Director General of Police (DGP) V.K. Bhawra said the recovery was made on the interrogation of Amandeep Kumar, the prime accused in the two recent incidents of grenade attacks in Pathankot. Amandeep was among the six operatives of ISYF arrested on Monday. He confessed to have carried out two grenade attacks in Pathankot, including at an Army camp in Pathankot.



HIGHLIGHT

“THE CONSIGNMENT WAS PROVIDED BY SELF-PROCLAIMED CHIEF OF ISYF (RODE) LAKHBIR SINGH RODE, PRESENTLY RESIDING IN PAKISTAN, TO AMANDEEP THROUGH HIS ASSOCIATE AND HANDLER OF THIS TERROR MODULE, SUKHPREET SINGH

(Rode) Lakhbir Singh Rode, presently residing in Pakistan, to Amandeep through his associate and handler of this terror module, Sukhpreet Singh. Between June and July in 2021, Rode figured prominently in operationalising a series of terror modules through his network in Punjab and other countries. A

large number of militant hardware that includes RDX, tiffin IEDs, associated explosive material for assembling IEDs, hand grenades, fire arms and also narcotics have been pushed by him across the international border mainly via drones and using his network of cross-border smugglers, an official statement said. **AGENCIES**

I am not running for any post: Navjot Sidhu



NEW DELHI: Amid the heated debate over who will lead the Congress in poll-bound Punjab, the party state unit chief Navjot Singh Sidhu said on Thursday that he is not running for any post. “A system which could not give justice to our Guru

and could not punish the big fish involved in Drug trade needs to be demolished. I categorically state that I’m not running for any post and it’s either this system will stay or Navjot Singh Sidhu,” he tweeted. “The fight is to change

this system which has eroded Punjab like termites and is being run by Mafias in connivance of mischievous politicians. This system cries for a change & reforms as the glory of Punjab has been annihilated by the nexus of Few political leaders and Mafia,” Sidhu said in another tweet. The Congress, so far, has not named anyone as the chief ministerial face for the upcoming Assembly elections in Punjab, as the party feels that it might lead to infighting and internal rift. But state unit chief Sidhu had said on Tuesday that people will choose the next chief minister of the state, and not the party high command. Unveiling the first set of plans of his ‘Punjab Model’ with focus on resurrection of the state, Sidhu had told the media here: “Punjab Model is people’s model, an effort to give a roadmap to return power to the people.” **AGENCIES**

Farmer outfit releases first list of candidates for Punjab polls



CHANDIGARH: Just a month away from the Assembly polls in Punjab, the Sanyukt Samaj Morcha (SSM), a group of farm organisations, in its maiden electoral foray after getting the Central agricultural laws revoked, on Wednesday released its first list of 10 candidates out of 117 seats. SSM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal will contest from Samrala, and Prem Singh Bhangu from Ghanair. The

SSM has ruled out alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party. In a setback to the SSM, its prominent partner at the year-long farm agitation on the national capital borders, the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan), announced this week that it would neither contest the Assembly elections nor support the SSM. However, it clarified that it would not oppose the SSM in any constituency. **AGENCIES**

No lockdown in Gurugram; no need to panic, says DC



GURUGRAM: Amid rumours of a lockdown in the district in view of the recent surge in Covid cases, Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg said on Wednesday that the Covid infection is under control and there is no need for a lockdown given the current situation in the district. The people of the district, especially the workers, should not panic but take precautions, he said. “The number of Corona patients has increased, but most of them have mild symptoms. Only 1 to 2 per cent of the patients need to be admitted to the hospital. There is no need to panic, but people should take all necessary precautions,” Garg said. The Deputy Commissioner said that production units and industries are running regularly in Gurugram and the rumours being spread about workers’ migration have been found to be baseless. “The workers are not going anywhere from Gurugram,” he told IANS. The patron of Daulatabad Industrial Area Association, Vinay Gupta, said that industrial units are being operated regularly and the rumours of workers returning to their respective states are false and misleading. **AGENCIES**

12 years minor raped 8 years minor sexually molested by father & uncle in child abuse case



SATISH HANDA Ambala

Women Police Station Ambala City on the complaints of neighbours in a Ambala City colony frequently hearing cries of a child during night started investigations which revealed that elder daughter of age over 12 years during interrogation disclosed been quite often raped by her father under the influence of liquor and on her refusal mercilessly beaten by him. The younger daughter in a statement made to police also blamed her father and uncle (younger brother of her father) sexually torturing her and playing with genital organs. Devinder Kaur in-charge police station told that on the statement of both minor girls a case was registered against both alleged accuse: complainants father and uncle under child abuse act, arrested them, produced in the court ordered to lodge them in jail. She told that both

minor girls were handed over to department of Child Welfare Council (CWC) for counselling which sent both to Children Shelter Home. Investigation by police as well as CWC revealed that about six years ago marriage conflict between parents of both minor children started resulting break between the two, followed by divorce with mutual consent in a ‘Panchayat’ when the mother married to another person a resident of Ambala City and left along with a feeding male child when the husband refused to hand over both daughters. Devinder Kaur SHO Women Police Station told that during counselling by CWC both victim minors expressed desire to stay with their mother and court too on the statement made by both minors under section 164 ordered both minor girls should be handed over to their mother. SHO told that mother of both minors had also visited police station demanding possession of both daughters. **AGENCIES**

Gang involved in kidnapping, human trafficking minor girls busted with 6 arrests in Haryana

SATISH HANDA Ambala

Ghaziabad police in U.P busted a gang operating from Haryana involved in human trafficking of minor girls kidnapped from different places and arrested six members of gang including three women and started search for another five members yet absconding and conducted raids at several places. Among six members of the racket arrested by the police were identified as prime accuse Jasbir a resident of village Baroda in Haryana state to whom a kidnapped minor girl of age 12-13 was sold at Rs 70000, Sunil and Dharam Raj both residents of Rohtak district, Karan resident of Gohana in Sonapat district, Nazreen resident of Hapur district in U.P, Pooja resident of Ganaur (District Sambhal) and Kiran resident of Sonapat district. Whereas another five members of the gang absconding so far were identified as Naushad resident of Hapur, Nawab resident of Vijay Nagar in Ghaziabad, Ram Krishan resident of Sambhal, Bhupesh and Kabool both residents of Rohtak district. Information reveals, female members in the human trafficking gang used to kidnap after luring minor girl children while playing near their residential places in thickly populated residential areas as well as residing in slum areas and send them to Rohtak in Haryana state for selling to buyers for child abuse or willing to marry them getting attractive price.

Un-efficient police officers on Vij’s hit list demands action on complaints in 10 days

SATISH HANDA Ambala

Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij holding ‘Janta Durbars’ at his office at Chandigarh and camp office at Ambala quite often attended by people from all over in the state usually complaining against police for not listening or delaying action on their complaints expressed disappointment while talking to media persons said that maximum number of the complaints



received by them are usually related to police inaction, delaying to sort out complaints for a long time even months. Vij in a digital meeting with all senior officers in Haryana state including IGP, Police

Commissioners, SPs, ASPs, SPs and DSPs all over in the state in the presence of Home Secretary Rajiv Arora, DGP Haryana P.K. Aggarwal, Additional DGP A.S. Chawla, CID Chief Alok Mittal, IG Amitabh Dhillon and Secretary Home Department Balkar Singh. Sometime ago, Vij expressed deep concern over eight districts in Haryana state having maximum number of complaints received by him which included Rohtak, Palwal, Rewari, Narnaul, Panipat, Kaithal, Kurukshetra

and Panchkula and written to SPs of these districts public for delay in attending their grievances. Vij also conducted surprise raids at few police stations in the state in past some time and recently suspended three officers at Shahabad police station finding that large numbers of police complaints received in the police station were pending since a long time or not attended for months.

Pre-natal examination racket in govt hospital busted with 2 arrests

SATISH HANDA Karnal

Health department team from Karnal and Ambala busted a gang involved in illegal pre-natal examination inside government hospital at Rajpura in Punjab. According to Dr Yash Pal Civil Surgeon, on a secret information a fake pregnant woman was prepared, accompanied with the team comprising of Dr Sonu Choudhary, Dr Sandeep Abrol and Dr Paramjit left for government hospital at Rajpura and finalised deal with Ram Murthy a class IV employee in the hospital to determine sex of unborn child in pregnant woman client and the deal was finalized at Rs 25000. Ram Murthy took female to a residential quarter inside the hospital campus where a portable ultrasound machines was lying to determine sex of child by a youth later identified as Sonu Bajaj alias Krishan Gopal a resident of Chhota Bazar Ambala when team of doctors accompanied by police arrested him and seized portable ultrasound machines, Jelly, other articles used for checking sex of unborn child in pregnant women and also recovered Rs 24000 currency notes. According to information, involvement of some doctor in the hospital is also in suspected in this illegal business. Police arrested Ram Murthy and Sonu Bajaj and started investigations.

Over 46 crore scam in International Football Stadium at Ambala

SATISH HANDA Karnal

The file of the case of alleged fraud worth about Rs 46 crore detected in Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij’s one of the dream projects International Football Stadium in War Heroes Memorial Sports Stadium Ambala Cantt in which Superintending Engineer PWD (B&R) recommending immediate suspension of three officers: Executive Engineer, Sub Divisional Officer and Junior Engineer involved in embezzlements along with the contractor submitted to head office on October 12, 2021 remained dumped without any action for the last about three months saving

alleged accused for reasons best known to them in-spite of the fact during preliminary investigation allegations against three were confirmed which clearly indicates that alleged accuse are blessed by senior bureaucrats or a political leader or some influential persons. During recent visit of Deputy Prime Minister Dushyant Chautala to Ambala on the inauguration of a function when media persons raised the issue, he assured all those officers or contracting firm involved in this fraud or any conspiracy will not be spared at any cost. He assured action against those managed to dump this file for months, taken no action and kept him in dark.

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BJP CEC to meet next week to finalise more VS polls candidates



NEW DELHI: The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) will meet next week for the second time to finalise candidates for Goa, Punjab, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh. In its first meeting on Thursday, the BJP CEC has finalised candidates for 172 Assembly seats of Uttar Pradesh where polling will be held

in the first three phases. Goa has already recommended shortlisted names to the party's CEC for approval, and Uttarakhand will be sending shortlisted names in a day or two.

While several rounds of meetings for Uttar Pradesh have been held in Lucknow and in the national capital. On Thurs-

day, the BJP CEC meeting to finalise candidates for Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls was held in hybrid mode as few of the CEC members, including party chief J.P. Nadda, have tested positive for Covid-19. Sources said that the next meeting of the BJP CEC is likely to be held mid next week to finalise more candidates of Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Punjab, and Uttarakhand. "Depending on the health of CEC members, the decision to hold meetings physically or in hybrid form will be decided," a party leader said.

Before Thursday, a lot of discussion and deliberation took place in meetings chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday and Wednesday. In Uttar Pradesh, the Assembly polls will be held in seven phases in February-March starting from February 10, while in Punjab, Goa, and Uttarakhand elections will be held on February 14, and in Manipur, it will also be in two phases - on February 27 and March 3. Counting of votes will take place on March 10. **AGENCIES**

Maha adds 1 lakh COVID cases in 2 days, Pune tops in Omicron infections

MUMBAI: Maharashtra has added over one lakh new Covid-19 cases to the state tally which shot above 71 lakh on Friday with a stupendous 200-plus Omicron cases, with Pune overtaking Mumbai, health officials said here. After recording record high of 46,723 on Wednesday, the number of new Covid infectees in the state figures dropped to 43,211 and the fatalities also fell from 36 to 19, and the mortality rate dipped from 2 per cent to 1.98 per cent. After 207 Omicron cases on January 9, the state infections of the variant shot up to a new peak of 238, sparking fresh concerns among the health authorities.

The government is continuing the intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - since December 1. A total of 277,114 travellers have landed here, including 42,062 from the "high risk" countries from where 523 have tested positive and 580 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron. Besides, another 4,641 positive samples from



field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with the results of 83 are awaited, the officials said. Omicron has spread extensively across several districts in the state, and out of the 1,605 cases till date, 859 have recovered. Mumbai was edged out by Pune as far as the total Omicron infections are concerned.

Now, Pune has 677 cases of the variant, followed by 629 in Mumbai, 79 in Thane, 59 in Sangli, 51 in Nagpur, 19 in Raigad, 18 in Kolhapur, 13 in Satara, 11 in Osmanabad, nine in Amravati, six each in Palghar, Akola, and Buldhana, three each in Nanded, Aurangabad, and Gondiya, two each in Ahmednagar, Gadchiroli, Latur, Nandurbar, Nashik, and Solapur, and one in Jalna. Of the

HIGHLIGHT

OMICRON HAS SPREAD EXTENSIVELY ACROSS SEVERAL DISTRICTS IN THE STATE, AND OUT OF THE 1,605 CASES TILL DATE, 859 HAVE RECOVERED. MUMBAI WAS EDGED OUT BY PUNE AS FAR AS THE TOTAL OMICRON INFECTIONS ARE CONCERNED

43,211 new Covid-19 cases, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region alone accounted for 22,037 infections, while Mumbai city remained at a high, with 11,317 new cases. The next is Pune circle's 11,421 infectees, Nashik circle's 3,182, Nagpur circle's 2,552, Kolhapur circle's 1,264, Latur circle's 1,227, Aurangabad circle's 913 and Akola circle's 615. The number of people sent to home quarantine shot up hugely - from 17,95,631 on Thursday to 19,10,361 now, and another 9,286 have been shunted to institutional quarantine. **AGENCIES**

SC agrees to hear whether recording wife's phone conversation infringement of privacy

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a petition in connection with the issue whether recording a wife's telephonic conversation, in the absence of her knowledge, is violation of her privacy. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by a man challenging the single bench order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, in December last year. After hearing brief arguments in the matter on January 12, a bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.V. Nagarathna issued notice. The high court order had come on a plea filed by a woman, who challenged a Bathinda family court order passed in 2020, allowing her estranged husband to prove a CD in connection with the recorded conversations between them, subject to the correctness of it.

The high court had observed that recording of wife's telephonic conversation without her knowledge is a clear-cut infringement of her privacy. In 2017, the husband had moved a



petition seeking divorce and in 2019, during the hearing in the matter, he had moved an application seeking permission to bring on record the CD and transcripts of conversations recorded in memory card or chip of the mobile phone. In 2020, the family court allowed the husband to prove the CD subject to the condition of correctness. The wife moved the high court challenging this decision of the family court. The high court observed that it is evident that these conversations would necessarily have been recorded surreptitiously by one of the parties.

The couple's marriage was solemnised in 2009 and they had a daughter together. **AGENCIES**

'Stand up for friends', Cong slams Centre over reports of Chinese construction in Bhutan



NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday slammed the Centre over reports of China constructing villages in disputed Bhutan territory, which is less than 30 km from the trijunction Doklam plateau. The former Congress President alleged that the government has already surrendered its land, but it is not standing for 'friends' like Bhutan.

As per reports, China is constructing villages in a disputed territory in Bhutan, which is less than 30 km from the trijunction Doklam plateau.

The revelation came after high-resolution satellite imagery surfaced with the security establishments. "(The) Modi government first surrendered our land and has now jeopardised our close neighbours by its inaction in pushing back China. If you don't stand up for yourself, how will you stand up for your friends," Rahul Gandhi tweeted.

In October last year, China and Bhutan had signed a pact on a three-step roadmap to resolve their boundary disputes. India in its response had said, "It has noted the development." "Boundary negotiations between Bhutan and China began in 1984 and the two sides have held 24 rounds of talks and 10 rounds of meeting at the expert group level. **AGENCIES**

Sources said the Chinese villages within the disputed territory in Bhutan are likely to be used for both military and civilian purposes.

Doklam plateau was in limelight in 2017 when the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were locked in a bitter standoff for over 70 days. The Chinese had to finally retreat from the area after the Indian troops contested the plateau. Doklam is an area of 100 sq km comprising a plateau and a valley at the trijunction between India, China and Bhutan. The plateau is circled by the Chumbi Valley in Tibet, Bhutan's Ha Valley and India's Sikkim.

In October last year, China and Bhutan had signed a pact on a three-step roadmap to resolve their boundary disputes. India in its response had said, "It has noted the development." "Boundary negotiations between Bhutan and China began in 1984 and the two sides have held 24 rounds of talks and 10 rounds of meeting at the expert group level. **AGENCIES**

EC reduces notice period for registration of political parties

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India on Friday reduced the notice period from 30 days to seven days for registration of political parties under Section 29 A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, in view of the ongoing third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The EC had announced the poll schedule for Assembly elections in five states - Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur on January 8.

"After considering all aspects of the matter, the Commission has given a relaxation and reduced the notice period from 30 days to 7 days for parties which have published their public notice on or before 08.01.2022," an EC statement said. "For all parties, including of those parties which have already published the public notice in less than 7 days prior to



08.01.2022, objections, if any, can be submitted latest by 5.30 PM on 21st January, 2022, or by the end of the originally provided 30 days' period, whichever is earlier," it added.

"As per the existing guidelines, the applicant association is inter-alia asked to publish the proposed name of the party in two national and two local dailies on two days for submitting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from such publication," the EC said. **AGENCIES**

Samyukt Kisan Morcha meet tomorrow at Singhu Border

NEW DELHI: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) will hold a review meeting at their Singhu Border camp site to decide the future course of action for the agitation that was suspended after three farm laws were repealed in December first week. The SKM, a consortium of 40-odd farmers' organisations, had on December 9, 2021 declared to suspend their 15-month long agitation that was started to protest the three contentious farm laws passed by the Parliament in 2020.

The agitation had continued even after the three laws - the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020 - were repealed by the Parliament as the farmers' stuck to their other demands vis-a-vis legal backing for minimum support price (MSP) for all farmers being the prime demand after repeal of the three laws. **AGENCIES**

Manjhi criticises Yogi for eating food at house of Dalit family

PATNA: The Bharatiya Janata Party may be part of the government in Bihar but its alliance partners are not letting go of any issue to criticise its leaders and policies. On Friday, Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) founder Jitan Ram Manjhi slammed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after

the latter uploaded a photograph on social media of eating food in the house of a Dalit family in Gorakhpur. Manjhi without taking the name of Yogi Adityanath, said people eating food in the house

of a Dalit family are snatching our morsel of food. "When elections come, many leaders of different political parties will go to the houses of Dalits and tribal families to eat food. They are responsible for taking away the development share of Dalits and tribal people of the country," Manjhi said. Manjhi also attacked the BJP over comparing Samrat Ashoka with Aurangzeb. He said that the BJP leaders reckoned that Samrat Ashoka belonged to the backward class community and that is why they are humiliating a great ruler just because of his caste. Manjhi announced to hold demonstrations at Jantar Mantar in Delhi from January 17. Jitan Ram Manjhi is a leader who claims that the Ramayan is not based on the truth. It is an imaginary book. The character of Lord Rama is also imaginary, he says. Manjhi is president of the Hindustani Awam Morcha in Bihar having 4 seats in the assembly and trying to play the role of a kingmaker in the state. **AGENCIES**



Maha Congress to appoint women as 'working chiefs' in 60 districts

MUMBAI: Taking a cue from party General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi, the Congress's Maharashtra unit on Friday announced that it will appoint a woman as Working President in all the party's districts in the state.

"The Congress has a progressive tradition of giving important responsibilities to women in politics at all levels. Women leaders of Congress have held top posts like Prime Minister, President, Speaker, Governors, Chief Ministers, ministers, and other

important positions. Taking ahead this glorious tradition, we shall now appoint a woman Working President in each of the 60 District Congress Committees (DCCs) in the state," said state Congress President Nana Patole.

The move on Makar Sankranti day follows the decision by Priyanka Gandhi to give 40 per cent representation to women candidates in the upcoming Assembly elections with her slogan "Ladki Hoon, Lad Sakti Hoon". **AGENCIES**

Former minister Ramveer Upadhyay resigns from BSP



HATHRAS: Ramveer Upadhyay, the BSP MLA from Sadabad Assembly constituency here, has resigned from the party. Upadhyay, who held several important portfolios during the BSP government in Uttar Pradesh, was suspended from the party in 2019. He, in his resignation, has levelled

many serious allegations against the party. Upadhyay has said that he has to resign as the party has deviated from the principles and ideals made by Kanshi Ram.

In a letter sent to the party chief Mayawati, he said, "I brought to your notice that the party's cadre is slipping away from us and urged you to review the party's performance. The truth I told you was neglected. I was suspended from the party. This has hurt the sentiments of my supporters." **AGENCIES**

Goa Political parties witness resignations, jumping ships as election date draws near

DOMINICK RODRIGUES

Goa is set to go to the polls for the Legislative Assembly on February 14 - a day that is celebrated as "Valentines Day" in Goa and worldwide - and the results will be declared on March 10. The last date for filing nominations is January 28, while January 31 is the last date for withdrawal of nominations.

Keeping in mind the rising numbers of covid-19 cases, the Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra has put restrictions of campaigning and election rallies while asking political parties to provide masks, hand sanitisers for people attending the rallies if they are allowed.

"Winnability" cannot be the reason for any political party to choose candidates having criminal cases, he said while making it compulsory for political parties to publish the criminal antecedents of their candidates in newspaper, websites, and television channels.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant recently emphasized that the BJP government had fulfilled 80 per cent of its promises made to the people over the decade, while incorporating public suggestions in its 2022 election manifesto.

Even as two BJP MLAs including one cabinet minister quit the party, Sawant said that "defection by a few for their agenda of greed and personal interest" would not affect the party's prospects in the 2022 legislative assembly elections. "The BJP is a big family and

a few defections cannot deter the party's agenda of good governance," he said, adding that the Goan people had witnessed BJP's governance and development model for a decade.

Former Union Minister and All India Congress Committee (AICC) election observer P Chidambaram highlighted his party's willingness to accept support of any political party that was aiming at defeating the BJP in the forthcoming Goa legislative assembly elections.

The Congress released a 21-point charge sheet highlighting the BJP government's failure to maintain law and order, protect the environment and safety to women, GPCC president Girish Chodankar said while alleging collapse of health infrastructure, damage to the State's industrial sector and cooperative sector, inadequate public bus transport and damage to heritage and tourist sites. Describing the chargesheet as "shocking" and a "cloud hanging over the polls," Chidambaram said the Ministers named in this would have to answer in this regard. "How will tourists visit Goa if there are no proper bus transport and Internet facilities," he queried.

Meanwhile, the Goa Pradesh youth Congress committee (GPYCC) has demanded a forensic test of the answer sheets of police exams in which candidates - who scored low in the written exams for the post of police constable - scored high in exams for the post of police sub-inspector (PSI) post.

"The candidates had left the answer sheets blank which were



filled in later by the examiner, and forensic test will expose this act," GPYCC president Varad Mardolkar said about alleged manipulation in this process while stating that the Congress will approach the court to expose the BJP's corrupt practice of selling jobs.

Noting that the Congress had in the past exposed manipulation for junior engineer and technical assistants posts in the Goa PWD, Mardolkar alleged that the same modus operandi was being used for the posts of police and urged the BJP to scrap the police recruitment process.

Meanwhile, "Jumping Ships" continues in Goa politics during the buildup to the 2022 State legislative assembly elections as different Ministers, MLAs, party leaders and workers make their choices on what would be best for them. The BJP lost their first minister when Goa Minister for Ports and Calangute MLA Michael Lobo resigned on January 10 while seeking to join the

GOA NEWSLETTER

Congress party. BJP Goa President Sadanand Tanawade said that Lobo had sought two BJP tickets for him and his wife Delilah to contest in the elections from Calangute and Siolim. "All these resignations are due to personal reasons including not having chances of getting an election ticket or seeking too many tickets," he said, adding that the BJP was fully aware of this possibility and has an alternative plan in place.

Mormugao MLA Milind Naik resigned as Minister following his alleged involvement in a sex scandal. Mayem MLA Pravin Zantye, Alina Saldanha and Carlos Almeida were the BJP MLAs who had also quit the party ahead of the elections. Zantye had stated that with Goa's public debt reaching Rs 22,000 crores, the new government taking over after the 2022 elections should take measures to restart mining activity and attract industries to the state.

A total of 10 sitting Goa legisla-

tive assembly MLAs have resigned since September 2021 - reducing the strength of the house to 30 members. These include: Luizinho Faleiro (left Congress to join TMC), Goa Forward Jayesh Salgaonkar quit to join BJP, Congress' Ravi Naik joined BJP, NCP's Churchill Alemao merged the NCP's legislature wing with the TMC, Independent Rohan Khaunte joined BJP, Congress' Aleixo Reginaldo joined the TMC and Independent Prasad Gaonkar joined Congress.

The post-2017 Goa legislative assembly elections had witnessed several Congress MLAs 'jumping ship' to help the then minority BJP form the state government.

However, the Congress is keeping this in mind and its leader P. Chidambaram had held off from inducting Michael Lobo into the party, according to Congress ex-MLA of Calangute Agnelo Fernandes. Goa's capital Panjim is witnessing an interesting tussle as late BJP Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar's son - Utpal Parrikar - is campaigning for himself against the Panjim MLA Atanasio Monserrate, even as both are waiting to see which of them will be given the party's ticket.

Meanwhile, the aftermath of the festive celebrations in Goa witnessed garbage pileups as panchayats struggled to deal with disposal of the waste. With dumping space at a premium, some panchayats are seeking to even rent space in their own villages for garbage collection and sorting. When the sleepy hamlet of Uccassaim in

North Goa collected over a tonne of garbage over barely four days, the village panchayat Sarpanch Anand Gadekar highlighted the need for being given rental waste collection space to the village Comunidade, which owns the comunidade lands.

Lifting one of the garbage bags with the help of his assistant, Gadekar said the village panchayat had been seeking 500 metres space - for setting up the garbage centre - from the comunidade over the past seven years, because at present the collected garbage piles up for days before being hauled away to the treatment plant at Saligao village. Meanwhile, the Goa Panchayats received a 'shot-in-the-arm' following the Goa Government finally forming a three-member "Third State Finance Commission" that had been pending for over a decade. The Commission will be headed by former retired finance secretary Daulat Hawaldar and has one year to submit its report on various measures to strengthen panchayat bodies.



Space needs to be utilised for greater success

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has got a new chairperson in S. Somanath, who heads the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thiruvananthapuram. He succeeds K. Sivan, who also came to head ISRO after having led the efforts at VSSC. Somanath is the third consecutive chairperson of ISRO to have a master's degree in engineering from the Indian Institute of Science. It is to be seen if Somanath's specific expertise in leading innovations in rocket engines, the cryogenic engine, for instance, will shape future developments at ISRO. If earlier the Mars Orbiter Mission, which broke the records for expense by costing just Rs 7 per kilometre, and Chandrayaan 2, had kept anticipation high, the new chairperson will oversee the unfurling of the human space flight programme — Gaganyaan. Another long-awaited mission is Aditya-L1. This has morphed and grown into what will be India's grandest investment in space dedicated to science, specifically, solar physics. Taking a space observatory to the Lagrangian point one to study the Sun is yet another job. Somanath will also lead a transition in the stance of ISRO towards privatisation. Until a few years ago, ISRO had remained largely preoccupied with deriving socio-economic benefits from space technology, and applications that were used by the Government of India and some international collaborations. These ventures had a strong industry participation, but privatisation reforms have been pursued hard recently. In March 2019, the NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) was floated in. After that, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center was created in June 2020 — a channel through which non-governmental private enterprises can carry out space activities. The country's imagination to get up to speed with other competing nations would be put to the test under the new leadership.



ARUN MAIRA BELIEVES PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS MUST NOT BE OVERPOWERED BY PROPERTY RIGHTS

Liberal economics creates illiberal societies

A surging tide of nationalism and authoritarianism has imperilled democracy globally, and within presumptively democratic nations — the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and the European Union — too.

Economies are not doing well. The benefits of growth are being sucked up to the 1% on the top; 'trickle down' to those below has diminished. With every global crisis — the financial crisis of 2007-08 and the ongoing COVID-19 crisis — the rich get richer while millions at the bottom fall off the ladder. Inequalities of wealth have increased around the world and India is becoming one of the world's most unequal countries.

Like the COVID-19 virus, whose origins scientists are struggling to understand, another disease has been crippling the well-being of nations for 30 years. Political symptoms of the disease are the weakening of democracy and secularism. Its economic symptoms are inequities within economies and an unsustainability of economic growth. The socio-political and economic pathologies are inter-related. Economic despair is feeding the rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, and identity politics. Liberals who continue to advocate for more liberal economics must understand how their ideas have caused the rise of anti-liberal societies and governments which they lament. They can no longer have their cake and eat it too.

Opening national borders to free trade became an ideology in economics in the last 30 years. Taxes of incomes and wealth at the top were also reduced. The ideological justification was that the animal spirits of 'wealth creators' must not be dampened. Otherwise, the pie will not grow and there will not be enough to share. With higher taxes until the 1970s, the U.S. and many countries in Europe had built up their public health and education infrastructure and strengthened social security systems. The rich are now being taxed much less than they were. The pie has grown larger but the rich-



est few have been eating, and hoarding, most of it themselves.

Governments are hamstrung without resources to provide public goods. 'Privatisation' of everything became another ideological imperative in economics by the turn of the century. Selling off public enterprises raises resources for funds-starved governments. Another justification is efficiency in delivery of services, setting aside ethical questions of equity. When 'public' is converted to 'private', rich people can buy what they need. In fact, they can buy more with their higher incomes even if the services become more expensive — better health care as well as better education for their children at the world's best schools. The children of wealthier people with better education have greater access to opportunities in the future also. The gaps between the haves and the have-nots become larger.

With not enough in the present, and receding hopes of better conditions in the future, people lose faith in their governments. History shows that whenever hopelessness spreads in societies, they are fertile grounds for messianic saviours who whip up pride in citizens' identities to distract them from their woes. History has not ended, even though Francis Fukuyama said it had when the Soviet

Union collapsed. With it, he suggested, the idea of totalitarian governments as saviours of the people had been debunked; and the idea of public ownership of property, which the communists had taken to an extreme by abolishing all private property, had failed.

History has returned. Authoritarian governments are now being democratically elected by people seeking a way out of the morass. The U.S., the leader of the Cold War against the Soviets, built the "Washington Consensus" around a starkly "unsocialist", capitalist ideology which swept across erstwhile socialist countries of Europe and India too. Socialism seems to be back in U.S. politics now with Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and young Democrats.

Liberal economists, promoting free markets, free trade, and privatisation, are worried by nationalism and authoritarian governments. They rail against "populist" policies of governments that subsidise the poor and adopt industrial strategies for self-reliance and jobs for their citizens. Liberals must re-examine their ideas of economics, to understand their own culpability in creating authoritarian and illiberal societies.

The property problem

Thomas Piketty's Capital and Ideology traces the ideology of "property" rights and its encounters with evolving ideas of "human" rights over the last three centuries. In proprietarian societies, it is just that he who owns more must have a greater say in the governance of the enterprise. In truly democratic societies, human rights must prevail, and every person, billionaire or pauper, must have an equal right to determine the rules of the game.

Democratic and capitalist principles were becoming reconciled with "socialist" ideas in Europe and the U.S. after the World Wars, and in developing countries such as India after the collapse of colonialism. The socialist era ended with the collapse of communism and the resurgence of neoliberal economics

around the world afterwards.

While communism had lifted living standards, and the health and education of masses of poorer people faster than capitalism could, communism's solution to the "property" question — that there should be no private property — was a failure. It deprived people of personal liberties. Capitalism's solution to the property problem — replacing all publicly owned enterprises with privately owned ones (and reducing taxes on wealth and high incomes) has not worked either. It has denied many of their basic human needs of health, education and social security, and equal opportunities for their children.

The private property solution has also harmed the natural environment. The belief that private owners will husband natural resources sustainably for all has proven false. When natural resources, and knowledge converted into "intellectual property", become the property of business corporations, they will use them for the purpose for which a business corporation is created — which is to increase the wealth of its owners. The ecological commons are harmed, and social equity suffers.

Communism and proprietarian capitalism carried too far have both failed. Climate change and political rumblings around the world are both warnings that capitalism needs reform. Economic policies must be based on new ideas. Thought leaders and policymakers in India must lead the world out of the rut of ideas in which it seems to be trapped. Principles of human rights must not be overpowered by property rights. A new form of "Gandhian" democratic socialism, powered by cooperative economic enterprises, is required in the 21st century, to create wealth at the bottom, not only at the top, and save humanity and the planet.

Arun Maira, Former Member, Planning Commission, is the author of A Billion Fireflies: Critical Conversations to Shape a New Post-pandemic World. Views are personal

FIVE OBSERVATIONS

COVID POSES NEW CHALLENGE FOR EC, CLAMOUR GROWS FOR BANNING POLL RALLIES

1 CLAMOUR FOR BANNING RALLIES, CAMPAIGNING
The clamour to ban rallies and campaigns is growing louder with every passing day. After the West Bengal Assembly Election last year, the Calcutta High Court had rapped the Election Commission for its handling of the election during the second wave of Covid-19.

2 PARTIES PLANNING TO GO DIGITAL THIS ELECTION SEASON
From the Congress to the BJP to the Samajwadi Party, all major stakeholders in the upcoming elections are planning to go digital.

3 CONGRESS'S SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY
Throwing light on the Congress' plans, Rohan Gupta, the party's chairman of the social media department said, "We have our social media strategy in place for doing digital rallies, town halls, interaction programs with Priyanka Gandhi on Instagram.

4 PARTIES WANT ECI GUIDELINES TO AVERT COVID THREAT
While some parties are preparing themselves and embracing social media as a tool to campaign, others feel the onus of making elections safe lies with the Election Commission.

5 ECI PREPARING FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS
While the Election Commission is getting weekly updates on the Covid-19 numbers from the five poll-bound states, it is also simultaneously working at increasing manpower, getting all officials vaccinated, and increasing polling stations.

LETTERBOX

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ANURIMA EXPLORES WAYS THAT MAY HELP INDIA COUNTERBALANCE CHINA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

New Delhi must dive deep into SAGAR to woo small powers

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi recently visited Sri Lanka to mark the completion of 65 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. On the occasion, he proposed a forum of Indian Ocean Island countries sharing similar experiences and common needs. It had a striking resemblance to the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative launched by India in 2015.

Through SAGAR, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbors and assist in building their maritime security capabilities. For this, India would cooperate on the exchange of information, coastal surveillance, the building of infrastructure and strengthening their capabilities.

The proposal may intensify the maritime rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean region.

Indian Ocean: no more a "Zone of Peace"

On December 16, 1971, Sri Lanka successfully had the United Nations General Assembly declare the Indian ocean, together with the air space and ocean floor, as a 'zone of peace' for all time. A 'zone of peace' is a soft law adopted by the United Nations general assembly. It is a geographical region of the world in which groups of States have maintained peaceful relations among themselves. The law was adopted to prevent western powers from flexing muscles into the Indian Ocean region. However, the concept remained illusory. A glaring



example of it is Diego Garcia military base of USA in Indian Ocean. To avert China from the Indian Ocean, India has continuously supported the idea of a "zone of peace" that apparently proved futile. India cannot counterbalance China if it keeps living the illusion that the Indian ocean is a zone of peace. Without Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD or QUAD), which is gradually turning into military alliance and AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States), India cannot counterbalance China in the Indian Ocean as the Dragon already has a strong presence there.

China's advances in the Indian Ocean region

China has expanded its trade route in the Indian Ocean region decently well. For example, China-Myanmar economic

corridor starts from Kunming province of China to Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar. From there, it enters into the Indian Ocean region reaching to Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka and then to Gwadar Port in Pakistan, encircling India in the maritime. Hambantota and Gwadar are well-established Chinese-sponsored potential Naval bases in the Indian Ocean region. This is how China is reaching out to the Indian ocean countries and strengthening its hold in the Indian Ocean region. India-sponsored Chabahar Port in Iran is to balance out the Chinese-sponsored Gwadar Port in Pakistan. However, a \$400 billion deal between Tehran and Beijing in March 2021 is adding more pearls to the "string of pearls" of China. Moreover, the constant surveillance by Chinese satellite networks on the Indian Ocean raises concerns for India.

Changing priorities in a realist world order

In the modern world, small powers seek economic advantages. Evidently, countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and other African countries are supporting Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) openly. Powers like India and China seek regional hegemony. China seeks hegemony through money and debt trap is its *modus operandi*. Keil's Institute of World Economy has estimated that the world owed \$5 trillion to China in 2017. Beijing's economic advantages and priorities of small power fit in like a couple made for each other.

On the contrary, India seeks hegemony through soft power, which is impressive but not compatible with the rising realist world order. Way forward India needs to hit the nail at the BRI lacunae as the initiative is well known for its unaccountability. Through SAGAR, India must promote an "openness" that the BRI doesn't offer. Offering a better alternative will help India attract small powers and get their cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. Realizing the utility of QUAD in space technology advancement is crucial for India to balance out China's decade-ahead space technology. However, the Trincomalee Port in Sri Lanka is an optimistic step towards the realization of leadership by India in the Indian Ocean.

Anurima is a student of Masters in International Relations. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New book focuses on 4 steps to a happy job and career

In this new normal of the pandemic era, when peoples' means of livelihood has been unprecedentedly challenged and most professionals are scrambling to secure themselves financially, the book 'When Your Job Sucks' suggests you 'Embrace Your Crazy'.

The book dissects the readers' state of mind, performance levels as well as emotional and energetic index to help them soar to the next higher phase in their professional life.

The protagonist Samar Rao, who allegedly attempted suicide, finds himself alone with broken ribs and limbs in the care of an octogenarian nurse who not only heals him physically but also equips him with the tools

to rebuild his career.

The book is neat and crisp at 200 pages, with short chapters divided into 3 main sections — Transition, Transformation & Transcendence.

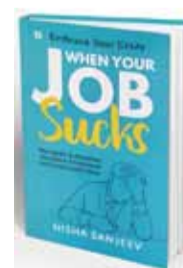
The main takeaway from the book is that a job change or a career change happens across 4 levels, with the physical move being the last stage.

Using one's intuition to check if the decision to quit or start afresh is right should be the first step, suggests the author Nisha Sanjeev. She uses the 80-20 principle of the mind-intuition combination to explain why job hoppers find themselves sulking a few months into a new job.

The book also gives a revelation to all those who have tried

The main takeaway from the book is that a job change or a career change happens across 4 levels, with the physical move being the last stage. Using one's intuition to check if the decision to quit or start afresh is right should be the first step

changing careers and failed. The trick is in holding through the 'Dark Night of the Soul Phase'



When Your Job Sucks: Embrace Your Crazy
By Nisha Sanjeev
Notion Press
202 pages; Rs195

— a period when you know your destination, but you cannot see the path to walk along that will get you there.

That is when we must face our real fears, because it is those real fears that cloud our vision [pun intended]. Real fears are the demons inside us, which we know but do not acknowledge.

The self-assessment journal pages bring clarity to the reader. These pages help us dissect all our previous successful and unsuccessful professional moves.

This brings me to the other interesting question the author raises. One of the basic reasons

why people feel stuck is because they consider their professional life separate from their personal life. In fact, the idea put forth through the book is there is just one life — professional time and personal time are parts of the same. And state of being in one affects the other.

The Magical Cards are for keeps. They are thought-provoking and insightful, making us question our beliefs. For instance, 'Real Success is Permanent Happiness. And Success is Joy'. This challenges the commonly accepted social belief that money = success and success = happiness.

The Handbook for Success section in the book is a quick read to get the gist of the book.

Narrated in a fable, When Your Job Sucks also gives practical tips to follow before a career change. For instance, how important it is to sharpen one's Ace while transitioning to build a career in the field of one's micro niche.

ALSO READ | OMICRON COULD PUSH AIR TRAFFIC RECOVERY INTO FISCAL 2024: CRISIL * P7 | IRDAI CLOSED FY21 WITH RS 124 CR SURPLUS, M&A FEE RS 8.14 CR * P7

NEWSBRIEF

TVS Motor moped domestic sales down, exports up

CHENNAI: HS India's only moped maker TVS Motor Company Ltd sold 33,395 mopeds last month in India, said Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM). According to SIAM, the two and three wheeler maker TVS Motor last month had sold 33,395 mopeds, down from 59,923 units sold in December 2020. For the period April-December 2021, TVS Motor had sold 363,868 mopeds in India, down from 462,107 units sold during the same period the previous year. The company, however, logged growth in moped exports during April-December 2021 shipping out 8,464 units up from 6,539 units registered during the previous year corresponding period. **AGENCIES**

Two-wheeler maker Yezdi back in Indian market after 26 years, launches 3 models

NEW DELHI: Motorcycle company Yezdi on Thursday announced it was making a comeback in the Indian market with three new motorcycles. The re-entry into the Indian market comes after a gap of 26 years. The motorcycles include 'Yezdi Adventure', 'Scrambler' and 'Roadster'. The company aims to target riders looking for regular commute as well as those willing to take off-beat roads. Price for Adventure model starts at Rs 209,900, Scrambler at Rs 2,04,900 and Roadster at Rs 1,98,142 all prices ex-showroom in Delhi. "The new range of Yezdi motorcycles will be available across Classic Legends' dealership network, which already retails Jawa Motorcycles, in India for viewing, test rides, bookings and deliveries starting today," it said in a statement. Yezdi is reportedly the third brand revived by Classic Legends, a unit owned by Mahindra Group. **AGENCIES**

IMD, POSOCO launch report on use of prior weather information

NEW DELHI: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) and national grid operator Power System Operation Corporation Ltd (POSOCO) on Friday jointly launched a report which lists out the advantages of prior weather information for reliable, secure and economic operation of the power system. The report 'Use of weather information for secure, reliable and economic operation of the Indian grid', which brings out the fact that the energy sector is among the most pivotal spheres of human activity which is highly dependent on weather conditions, was released by the Union Science and Technology Minister, Dr Jitendra Singh on Friday during the IMD's 147th Foundation Day function.

A dedicated weather portal for the power sector has been developed jointly by POSOCO and IMD and contains information related to weather forecast, real time weather scenario and past data of various locations across the country. "The

Vedanta Aluminium becomes India's largest industrial consumer of renewable energy

NEW DELHI: Vedanta Aluminium Business, India's largest producer of aluminium and value-added products, has become the biggest industrial consumer of renewable energy (RE) in 2021, leading renewable energy procurement on the country's power exchanges - Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) and Power Exchange India Limited (PXIL). The company has procured about 2 billion units of RE power in the year 2021 for consumption at its Aluminium Smelter in Jharsuguda, Odisha, thereby reducing GHG emissions intensity at the smelter by more than 1540 KtCO₂e (kilo tonnes of CO₂ equivalent) in the year.

Vedanta Aluminium's Jharsuguda unit is India's largest renewable energy buyer on Green Term Ahead Market (G-TAM) platform at IEX. Vedanta's subsidiary Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) has led the renewable energy trading session, procuring 59 per cent of the traded RE certificates (RECs) in November 2021 alone, and a total of over 2,861,700 RECs in the year. Speaking about Vedanta Alu-



minium's ESG vision, Rahul Sharma, CEO - Aluminium Business, Vedanta Limited, said: "We are committed to our vision of achieving Net Zero Carbon by 2050. To that end, we have stepped up our endeavours along key three pillars - continuously improving energy efficiency of operations, increasing the quantum of renewable energy in our energy mix, and replacing fossil fuels with greener and cleaner alternatives - all powered by emerging green

technologies. Becoming India's largest industrial consumer of RE in 2021 reflects our persistent endeavours to increase our share of green power in our energy mix and accelerate our transition into low-carbon operations."

Rohit Bajaj, Senior Vice President and Head - Business Development, IEX, added: "Indian Energy Exchange's (IEX) Green Market comprising the Day-ahead collective auction market as well as the Term-Ahead Contracts

leverages innovation and technology to offer market participants an opportunity to trade in solar and non-solar renewable energy at the most competitive prices, and in a flexible manner. As the leading industry participant in the Green Market, Vedanta Aluminium Business has indeed set a very strong precedence for the Indian manufacturing industry to step up green energy consumption towards reducing their carbon footprint. We greatly appreciate Vedanta Aluminium's focused endeavour towards building India's sustainable tomorrow." Prabhajit Kumar Sarkar, MD & CEO - Power Exchange India Ltd. (PXIL), said: "We congratulate BALCO for being the leading buyer in the November 2021 REC trading session. Focused RE adoption strategy by industry leaders such as Vedanta Aluminium shall inspire the industry at large to accelerate the pace of energy transition. Power Exchange India Ltd. (PXIL) is helping industries achieve their ESG goals through integration of renewables in the power markets. **AGENCIES**

Flipkart acquires electronics recommerce platform Yaantra

BENGALURU: Flipkart Group on Thursday said it has acquired electronics recommerce company Yaantra for an undisclosed sum. The acquisition, said Flipkart, will augment its existing refurbishment business in the smartphone category.

"Through the acquisition of Yaantra, we are enhancing our capabilities in a domain that is critical for the growth of the digital economy in India, as well as developing a comprehensive service ecosystem to support its expansion," said Ravi Iyer, Senior Vice President and Head, Corporate



Development, Flipkart. Founded in 2013 by Jayant Jha, Ankit Saraf and Anmol Gupta, Yaantra repairs and sells refurbished consumer tech products such as smartphones and laptops.

The recommerce market in India is growing at a rapid pace. However, the Indian smartphone refurb-

ishment market is largely unorganised and fragmented, which has posed trust and convenience issues for end consumers. With the acquisition of Yaantra, Flipkart said it will enable greater access to affordable refurbished smartphones, offering value and convenience for the end consumers.

The Yaantra team will help Flipkart build capabilities in this domain and accelerate its recommerce scale-up plans. The business will report to Prakash Sikaria, Senior Vice President and Head of Flipkart's Growth Charter. **AGENCIES**

SC stays HC directions against OLX in cheating case regarding motorcycle

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has stayed the Punjab and Haryana High Court direction to OLX India to adopt a screening mechanism in connection with sellers, who could post an advertisement on the online platform.

A bench of Justices U.U. Lalit, S. Ravindra Bhat, and Bela. M. Trivedi said: "Liberty to serve the learned standing counsel for the State. Pending further consideration, the effect and operation of the order under challenge to the extent it issued certain directions against and in relation to the petitioner shall remain stayed." Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra represented OLX India B.V. in the top court. The top court was hearing a plea



by OLX India B.V. challenging the high court order, which was passed in December last year. The high court had passed a slew of directions to OLX, in a matter where a person had used another person's identity to post an advertisement on the online platform.

The plea, against the high court order, contended that OLX is an online marketplace, which connects sellers with potential buyers and is nothing more

than a passive conduit between a buyer and a seller similar to the classifieds column in a newspaper. The plea added that the platform qualifies as an "intermediary" as defined under Section 2(1)(w) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The matter before the high court was that a police official had gone to the petitioner's house and handed him a notice that a person identified as Umar Ali, had used the petitioner's Aadhaar card to post an advertisement for sale of a motorcycle. The petitioner was informed that the impersonator had cheated a person in connection with sale of the motorcycle, and an FIR has been registered against the petitioner. **AGENCIES**

Traders' body moves Competition Commission against Amazon-Cloudtail deal

NEW DELHI: The Confederation of All Indian Traders (CAIT) has moved the Competition Commission of India (CCI), seeking a direction to block the acquisition of Cloudtail India by Amazon. Cloudtail is a 100 per cent subsidiary of Prione Business Services, a joint venture of Amazon and Catamaran Ventures and is also presently the largest seller on Amazon's e-commerce platform, Amazon.in.

Citing the proposed structure of stake in Cloudtail, the plea said: "Amazon would have 100 per cent stake in Cloudtail, post the proposed combination. It is submitted that if the proposed combination is allowed, then it would cause an appreciable adverse



effect on competition." CAIT argued that complete control of Amazon will result in Cloudtail getting further preference on its platform. In a statement, CAIT, providing instances wherein Amazon gives preference to Cloudtail, said such preference will only become more pronounced after this trans-

action, which would have a destabilising effect on the e-commerce market in India. The traders' body petition said: "Another evidence showing that Amazon has given preference to Cloudtail on its platform is the fact that Cloudtail's revenue has increased significantly over the years. **AGENCIES**

Supply side constraints dent India's auto sector Dec sales

MUMBAI: Supply as well as demand constraints impacted India's auto sector sales in December 2021 on a year-on-year basis. Similarly, the sector's current off-take of passenger vehicles, two-and-three wheelers, were far behind the 2019 sales levels. In terms of PVs, challenges pertaining to electronic components' availability dragged sales lower on a year-on-year basis in December. Sales of passenger vehicles fell to 219,421 units in December as compared to 252,998 units sold during the corresponding month of 2020.

The data furnished by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) does not include sales figures from some key players such as Tata Motors. Segment-wise, a total of 112,873 passenger cars



were sold in the domestic market in December, down from 146,864 units sold in the like period of 2020.

The sales of other sub-categories such as utility vehicles (UV) grew whereas vans' degrew on a year-on-year basis. As per the data, UV sales rose to 97,137 units from 94,787 units, on the other

hand, the off-take of vans declined to 9,411 units from 11,347 units in the year-ago period. Besides, two-wheelers' sales were lower in December 2021 at 1,006,062 units from 1,127,917 units sold in the like month of 2020. However, three-wheelers' sales during the month under review rose to 28,111 units from 22,476

units sold during December 2020. Overall, the domestic automobile sectors' off-take representing the sales of passenger vehicles, two-wheelers, three-wheelers and quadricycle fell to 1,253,604 units from 1,403,391 units sold during the same period of last year. Furthermore, the data showed that exports were flat on a YoY basis.

The overall exports, including PVs, two and three-wheelers and quadricycles rose to 463,176 units from 463,802 units during the same period of last year. "Demand of passenger vehicle segment was largely affected due to supply constraints while the two-wheeler segment was majorly impacted due to subdued demand. Sales of passenger vehicles in Q3 has been the

lowest in five years, while for the two-wheelers it has been the lowest in nine years," said Rajesh Menon, Director General, SIAM.

"Only the 'Heavy Goods' segment in 'Commercial Vehicles' have shown positive growth compared to Q3 of previous two years. Sales of buses and three-wheelers continue to be a concern. Barring 2020, the sales of commercial vehicles in Q3 has been lowest in last 5 years and sales of three-wheelers, barring 2020, has been the lowest in last 13 years." According to Hemal Thakkar, Director, Crisil Research on SIAM data: "... it is very clear that passenger vehicle dealers continue to have very lean inventory and demand continues to outpace supply." **AGENCIES**

Adani, Posco in pact for steel project at Mundra



NEW DELHI: Billionaire Gautam Adani's group and South Korea's Posco have signed an initial pact to explore business opportunities to invest around \$5 billion on projects

that include setting up an integrated steel mill at Mundra in Gujarat, the two firms said on Thursday.

The non-binding pact, if it fructifies, will give Adani Group

HIGHLIGHTS

THE NON-BINDING PACT, IF IT FRUCTIFIES, WILL GIVE ADANI GROUP AN ENTRY INTO STEEL MANUFACTURING. FOR POSCO, IT WILL FULFIL ITS LONG-HELD AMBITION OF HAVING A LARGE STEEL UNIT IN INDIA TO CASH IN ON GROWING DEMAND IN THE COUNTRY.

an entry into steel manufacturing. For Posco, it will fulfil its long-held ambition of having a large steel unit in India to cash in on growing demand in the country.

South Korea's largest steelmaker had a few years ago dropped plans for a \$12-billion steel plant project with an annual capacity of 12 million tonnes in Odisha due to inordinate delays in land acquisition. **AGENCIES**

Tata Teleservices stocks hit 5 pc lower circuit for 2nd straight session



NEW DELHI: Shares of Tata Teleservices have hit the five per cent lower circuit for the second consecutive session on Thursday as the company on Tuesday decided to opt for conversion of the interest from adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues into equity. Post conversion of dues into equity, the Centre is expected to hold a 9.5 per cent stake in the company, it said in a regulatory filing on Tuesday. The conversion, however, will be subject to a mutual agreement on the terms and conditions, including the governance of the company post-conversion of the interest amount into equity shares, it added in the same filing. The company's shares settled five per cent down on Thursday at Rs 261.9. Tata Teleservices deals in broadband, telecommunications and cloud services. On the same day Tuesday, Vodafone Idea too approved the conversion of its adjusted gross revenue (AGR) and spectrum liabilities into equity, and said that the Centre would hold around 35.8 per cent stake in the company. Following the announcement, its shares declined nearly 20 per cent on Tuesday, while subsequently they rebounded sharply on Wednesday as the telecom company clarified that the Centre would not participate in the management of the company as well as not take over the operations. **AGENCIES**

CESL to set-up 900 more EV charging stations in 2022

NEW DELHI: State-run Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) plans to install at least 900 more electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in the country in 2022. CESL is a wholly owned subsidiary of Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) - an entity under the Ministry of Power. In a conversation with IANS, CESL's MD Mahua Acharya informed that 396 charging stations have already been installed across India.

"As on date, 396 charging stations have been installed across the country, out of which 166 are commissioned," she said. "When we see a projection for 2022, we are doing all we can to expand the



number of charging stations in the country - including install or enable the installation of another 900 more."

At present, the state-run firm has tied up with various private and public companies to set up public charging infrastructure. It has also partnered with urban local

bodies to create such infrastructure. One of the main requirements to set up charging infrastructure is the availability of 'land', which in most cases, is provided free of cost by most municipal bodies or firms for public chargers to CESL.

Currently, many automobile companies and other private players, including stand-alone charging infrastructure developers, are also installing these facilities. Besides, the company intends to accelerate the adoption of e-vehicles in the country. Recently, it launched the 'MyEV' app a digital marketplace to enable the deployment of electric vehicles in the country. **AGENCIES**

ALSO READ | AFRICA'S 4TH COVID WAVE FLATTENING: WHO * P8 | RIGHTS OF AFGHAN WOMEN, GIRLS UNDER ATTACK: UN * P8

RBI likely to hike interest rates by up to 100 basis points in 2022

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday chaired a meeting with chiefs of public sector banks and assessed their readiness to tackle any possible disruptions due to the Omicron variant.

The Finance Ministry said during the meeting with bank CMDs/MDs, held through virtual mode, the minister also asked lenders to support sectors, besides farm, retail and MSMEs, that face interruption due to COVID. Sitharaman also reviewed various steps taken by PSBs in implementing pandemic-related measures initiated by the government and RBI.

"During the review meeting, Smt. Sitharaman assessed various steps taken by PSBs in implementing pandemic-related measures initiated by Government of India and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and readiness to tackle possible future disruptions that may occur due to the ongoing variant of the COVID-19 pandemic," the ministry said in a statement. The ongoing third wave of



the highly infectious Omicron variant of coronavirus has led to various domestic rating agencies lowering India's growth forecast for the current fiscal. India Ratings and Research cut its forecast to 9.3 per cent, from 9.4 per cent earlier, while Brickwork Ratings has revised its estimates to 8.5-9 per cent from 10 per cent. While appreciating the success of ECLGS, the Finance Minister said it is not time yet to rest on our achievements, and that our collective efforts must strive

towards supporting sectors that face interruption due to the continued onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sitharaman also conveyed to the bankers to continue supporting the agriculture sector, farmers, retail sector and MSMEs, according to the statement. Sitharaman noted that business outlook is progressively improving despite the headwinds from global development and Omicron spread.

The Finance Minister underlined that contact inten-

During the review meeting, Smt. Sitharaman assessed various steps taken by PSBs in implementing pandemic-related measures initiated by Government of India and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and readiness to tackle possible future disruptions that may occur due to the ongoing variant of the COVID-19 pandemic"

sive sectors may require more support to help them fight against the pandemic. She also said that credit demand is expected to pick up on account of growth in retail segments, improvement in overall macroeconomic prospects and improving financial health of borrowers, as per the statement. **AGENCIES**

WB retains India's economic growth forecast at 8.3 pc for 2021-22

NEW DELHI: The World Bank has retained India's economic growth forecast for the current fiscal at 8.3 per cent as the recovery is yet to become broad-based. As per the first advanced estimates of the national income released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) last week, the economy is projected to grow at 9.2 per cent in 2021-22, surpassing pre-COVID level in actual terms, mainly on account of improved performance, especially in farm, mining and manufacturing sectors.

"India's economy is expected to expand by 8.3 per cent in fiscal year 2021/22 (ending March 2022), unchanged from last June's forecast as the recovery is yet to become broad-based. "The economy should benefit from the resumption of contact-intensive services, and ongoing but narrowing monetary and fiscal policy support," the World Bank said in its latest Global Economic Prospects report released on Tuesday. Further, the report said that growth



forecast has been upgraded for 2022-23 and 2023-24 to 8.7 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively. The upward revision reflects an improving investment outlook with private investment, particularly manufacturing, benefiting from the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, and increases in infrastructure investment.

"The growth outlook will also be supported by ongoing structural reforms, a better than-expected financial sector recovery, and measures to resolve financial sector challenges despite ongoing risks," the report said. It also noted

that consumer inflation in the major economies of South Asia has been above central banks' targets since late 2019. In India, easing supply disruptions related to COVID and deficient demand contributed to a return of inflation toward the mid-point of the 2-6 per cent target range since mid-2021. Core inflation, however, remains at the upper end of the target range. The report said that following the major setback to health and economic activity caused by the mid-2021 second wave of COVID in South Asia, economic activity has recovered. **AGENCIES**

CEL privatisation put on hold after employees move court

NEW DELHI: The government has put on hold the privatisation of Central Electronics Ltd (CEL) after the employees union approached the court against the sale of the company to a little-known firm, a top official said on Wednesday. Allegations of under-valuation in the Rs 210 crore highest bid made by the city-based Nandal Finance & Leasing are being examined, said Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary in the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management, which is running the privatisation process.

The Letter of Intent (LoI) for sale of 100% government shareholding in CEL to Nandal Finance & Leasing has not been issued, as the allegations are being examined, Pandey said. The government had in November approved the sale of CEL, under the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, to Nandal Finance & Leasing for Rs 210 crore. The transaction was scheduled to be completed by March 2022. **AGENCIES**

NEWS BRIEF

Fintech platform Refyne raises \$82 mn to simplify personal finance

NEW DELHI: Fintech platform Refyne on Wednesday said it has raised \$82 million in its Series B funding led by Tiger Global. The platform enables employees to withdraw their earned salary in real time before the payment is due, thus reducing debt traps by providing instant access to earned salary. The Earned Wage Access (EWA) solution provider said since its inception (December 2020), it has raised a total of \$106 million. Earned Wage Access provides access to a portion of their accrued (but unpaid) salary any time before payday. EWA is not a loan, therefore does not involve borrowing on the part of the employee and carries no cost to the employer. **AGENCIES**

Equities decline on Friday after five consecutive sessions of gains

NEW DELHI: The 30-scrip Sensitive Index (Sensex) and broader 50-scrip Nifty on the National Stock Exchange declined in early trade on Friday. Notably, indices had been gaining for the past five trading sessions. At 10.28 a.m., Sensex traded at 60,986 points, down 0.4 per cent from the previous close of 61,235 points. It opened at 61,040 points. Nifty traded at 18,192 points, down 0.4 per cent from the previous close of 18,257 points. It opened at 18,185 points. Aurobindo Pharma, HCL Technologies, Axis Bank, Adani Transmission, and Asian Paints were some of the top losers, NSE data showed. Top gainers during the early trade were Tata Consumers, IOCL, ACC, Ambuja Cements, and Bosch. **AGENCIES**

Indian mobility tech startup EVage raises \$28 mn

NEW DELHI: Indian all-electric commercial original equipment manufacturer (OEM) EVage on Friday said it has raised \$28 million from US-based venture capital firm RedBlue Capital. Founded in 2014, EVage in India is supplying EV trucks to major delivery fleets such as Amazon India's Delivery Service Partner. The seed-round funding will help the mobility tech startup complete its production-ready factory outside of Delhi in FY2022-23 and scale up production, said the startup. **AGENCIES**

India's Dec merchandise exports up over 38 pc YoY



NEW DELHI: India's December merchandise exports rose to \$37.81 billion, higher by 38.91 per cent on a year-on-year basis, official data showed on Friday. Exports during December 2020 stood at \$27.22 billion.

The data by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry showed that in comparison to December 2019, last month's exports rose by 39.47 per cent. "Non-petroleum and

non-gems and jewellery exports in December 2021 were \$28.92 billion, registering a positive growth of 29.67 per cent over non-petroleum and non-gems and jewellery exports of \$22.30 billion in December 2020," the ministry said.

In comparison to December 2019, non-petroleum and non-gems and jewellery exports in December 2021 registered a positive growth of 37.31 per cent. **AGENCIES**

NABARD pegs Odisha's credit potential for 2022-23 at Rs 1.34 lakh crore

BHUBANESWAR: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected Odisha's credit potential for the financial year 2022-23 at Rs 1,34,665 crore, officials said here on Tuesday. The credit project for the year 2022-23 is 21.61 per cent higher than the previous year's Rs 1,10,735 crore. This was known from the NABARD's State Focus Paper for Odisha for the year 2022-23 released here on Tuesday. Out of the total credit potential for the priority sector, the highest amount of Rs 52,050.78 crore (38.65%) has been assessed under the agriculture sector.

Under the agriculture sector, credit flow of Rs 48,221.10 crore (92.64%) is estimated under farm credit, which comprises both crop loans and term loans for agriculture and allied activities. Besides, credit potential under agriculture infrastructure and ancillary activities has been estimated at Rs 1,824.33 crore and Rs 2,005.34 crore, respectively. Credit potential under MSME sector has been assessed at Rs



60,001.27 crore, constituting around 44.56 per cent of the total priority sector. Other sectors consisting of export credit, education, housing, renewable energy, others and social infrastructure have around 16.79 per cent share in the total credit potential under priority sector.

Releasing the paper, Odisha finance minister Niranjan Pujari emphasised upon the need for increasing the bank credit for priority sector in Odisha as government has been pushing lot of support through various schemes like Balaram, Kalia, Samrudhi, Millet Mission, FPOs etc and

it's time for banks to increase the credit flow for private capital formation substantially. Activities such as animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc., leading to asset formation and diversification of the income basket of farmers need to be credit linked, Pujari said. Principal Secretary Finance, Vishal Kumar Dev said that the State economy could withstand the negative impact of Covid and proved its resilience. Dev indicated that a five year long term planning exercise has been commenced for a structured development of the state. **AGENCIES**

Paytm stock hits all-time low

NEW DELHI: The Paytm stock hit an all-time low, trading down a further 2.16 per cent on Tuesday at Rs 1,132 after an almost 6 per cent slide the previous day. Manoj Dalmia, Founder and Director at Proficient Equities Private Limited said Paytm Share plunged by 6 per cent and is further down 1.48 per cent making its all-time low.

Dalmia said Paytm's payment business accounts for about 70 per cent of revenue, which will be under threat if there are any regulatory changes. Also, its entry into insurance sectors has been rejected by regulators. The stock is trading at about 17 times FY23 sales which seems overvalued considering higher expenses and risk of attrition of senior executives, Dalmia said. Ravi Singh, Vice President & Head of Research, Share India Securities said Paytm's try into insurance was recently rejected by IRDAI, this could also impact its prospects of getting a banking licence. We expect Paytm to be more downside to touch the levels of Rs 1050-1000 in near terms. Investors



may remain cautious towards taking fresh positions in Paytm for the time being, Singh said. Foreign brokerage Macquarie said on Monday there are no signs of headwinds abating at Paytm as it slashed the target price to Rs 900.

One 97 Communications or Paytm stock was down almost 5.95 per cent on Monday at Rs 1,158. Since 18 November, Paytm's stock price has fallen 40 per cent vs Sensex's flat performance, Macquarie said. Post the various business updates and results, Macquarie said, "Revenue projections, particularly on the distribution side, is at risk and hence we pare down our revenue CAGR from 26 per cent to 23 per cent for FY21-26E." **AGENCIES**

Omicron to impact auto component industry's FY22 revenue growth: ICRA

NEW DELHI: The ongoing Omicron wave will impact the growth of Indian auto component industry's FY22 revenues on a year-on-year basis, said credit ratings agency ICRA. Besides, delayed recovery in semi-conductors and muted two-wheeler demand will also impact the revenue growth of the industry in FY22, it said.

The ratings agency's growth forecast for FY2022 has been revised downward by 200 bps to 15-17 per cent from the earlier estimates. However, healthy demand



from domestic OEMs as well as replacement market, and robust exports will bring in some stability to the revenue stream. "ICRA expects a 15-17 per cent revenue growth in FY2022 for

the Indian auto component industry, driven by domestic OEM, replacement, export volumes and pass-through of commodity prices," said Vinutaa, Assistant Vice President and Sector Head, ICRA.

"The healthy volume growth would, however, come on a low base of FY2021. There could be a downward bias to our estimates in case of prolonged lockdowns or significant demand slowdown because of the Omicron wave." According to the agency, most domestic

OEMs' sub segments are expected to register healthy volume growth in FY2022, albeit on a low base of the last fiscal. However, certain segments like 2Ws and buses will be impacted by the Omicron wave.

"We expect delayed recovery in the 2W segment because of affordability and dampened sentiments. Also, demand for buses is expected to be impacted during the upcoming school season for the third year in a row," the agency said. "Supply-chain issues could prolong further as well. Easing of Covid 2.0

related lockdown restrictions and improvement in personal mobility, healthy freight movement and pent-up demand arising from deferment of purchases last year, supported replacement sales for auto components in Q2 and Q3 FY2022."

Additionally, the agency said that while there could be some impact on mobility because of the ongoing covid wave, freight movement and deferment of fresh vehicle purchases will result in healthy replacement demand in Q4 FY2022. **AGENCIES**

Over Rs 72 cr of Kudos Finance attached by ED in PMLA case

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said that they have issued a Provisional Attachment Order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), attaching Rs 72,32,42,045 lying in various bank accounts and payment gateway accounts of Indian NBFC company Kudos Finance and Investments Private Ltd and its various fintech partner companies. The ED official said that the agency was conducting money laundering investigations against a number of Indian NBFC companies and their fintech partner Mobile Applications (APPs). Initially, Telangana Police lodged FIRs against them for illegal lending and for using extortionist means



to recover exorbitant rates of interest from their customers, and the ED started its PMLA probe on the basis of the Telangana Police's FIRs. Its investigation revealed that various Indian companies which were flush with investments from China, and Hong

Kong created MoUs with defunct NBFCs and gave security deposits in the name of 'performance guarantees'. The NBFCs opened separate Merchant IDs (MIDs) with Payment Gateways like Paytm, Razorpay, etc, and against RBI guidelines, allowed these fintech companies

to piggyback on their license and do full-scale lending in their names. Mobile APPs of the fintech companies were providing unsecured instant micro personal loans for terms ranging from 7 days to 14 days. They used to deduct 15-25 per cent of the loan at the time of disbursement itself in the name of processing fee. The rate of interest charged was also exorbitant.

Their APPs would also capture customers' mobile data by getting various access privileges etc. In order to obtain more profits, they resorted to harsh recovery measures via call centres. Personal data of the customers was misused and calls were made to their friends and relatives of the customers and abusive language was used.

Even social media posts were made against the defaulters to shame them. Unable to bear the level of harassment, certain people have committed suicide.

These APPs managed to have a recovery rate of more than 90 per cent and earned huge profits. Kudos Finance and Investment Private Ltd was one such NBFC company that signed MOUs with 39 fintech companies, illegally accepted 'security deposits' from them and allowed them to do lending activity. Despite not having net-owned funds of more than Rs 10 crore, in complete violation of RBI guidelines, this NBFC, or actually its partner Mobile APPs, did lending of Rs 2,224 crore in a short span of time. **AGENCIES**



AHMEDABAD: Reliance Industries (RIL) on Thursday signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with the Gujarat state for a total investment of Rs 5,955 lakh crore as part of the investment promotion activity for 'Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2022', which was supposed to be held from January 10-12 in Gandhinagar, but was postponed due to the surge in the number of Covid cases in the state. These projects will create 10 lakh employment opportunities in the state. "To make Gujarat net zero and carbon free, RIL proposes to invest Rs 5 lakh crore in the state over the span of 10 to 15 years to set up 100 GW renewable energy power plant and green hydrogen eco-system development," the company said in a statement.

"RIL will develop an ecosystem for assisting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and encourage entrepreneurs to embrace new technologies and innovations, leading to

captive use of renewable energy and green hydrogen," it added. Besides, in consultation with the state government, RIL has started the process of scouting land for 100 GW renewable energy power project in Kutch, Banaskantha and Dholera. "The company has requested for 4.5 lakh acres of land in Kutch," it said. "RIL will invest another Rs 60,000 crore in setting up new energy manufacturing-integrated renewable manufacturing, solar PV module (manufacture of Polysilicon, wafer, cell and module), Electrolyzer, energy-storage battery, and fuel cells," the company said.

A total of Rs 25,000 crore investments will be made by RIL in the existing projects and new ventures over the next 3 to 5 years. "RIL has also proposed to invest Rs 7,500 crore over 3 to 5 years for Jio Network upgradation to 5G and another Rs 3,000 crore over 5 years in Reliance Retail," it said. **AGENCIES**

Union Labour Minister
interacts with HR heads
of industry

NEW DELHI: In a first of its kind initiative, Union Labour and Employment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Wednesday interacted with the human resource heads of the industry representing various sectors, including manufacturing, staffing agency, automobile, construction, hotel etc. The interaction was facilitated by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Yadav mentioned that evidence-based policy making and last-mile delivery are pillars of good governance, and effective and targeted delivery of services. For this purpose, his Ministry has launched new surveys for migrant and domestic workers. Further, with the objective to create a comprehensive database in both for informal and formal sectors, besides an All India Quarterly Establishment-based Employment Survey (AQEES) for organised sector, an area-based area-frame establishment survey has also been decided for establishments having nine or less workers.

The Union Minister said that in order to have collaborative approach involving employers and employees in the last meeting of Central Board of Trustees of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and Corporation of Employees' State Insurance, he has constituted committees for improving grievance redressal of 6.5 crore members of EPFO, strengthening technological interventions, capacity building, effective monitoring of ongoing projects and enhancing coverage under social security. **AGENCIES**

India's Dec wholesale price inflation
sequentially eases to 13.56 per cent

MUMBAI: Lower prices of manufactured goods and fuel slightly eased India's December 2021 wholesale inflation on a sequential basis. Accordingly, the annual rate of inflation, based on wholesale prices, rose to 13.56 per cent from 14.23 per cent reported for November 2021. However, on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data furnished by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has risen exponentially over December 2020, when it stood at 1.95 per cent. "The high rate of inflation in December 2021 is primarily due to rise in prices of mineral oils, basic metals, crude petroleum and natural gas, chemicals and chemical products, food products, textile and paper and paper products etc., as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," the ministry said in its review of 'Index Numbers of Wholesale Price in India'

for December. "The month over month change in WPI for the month of December, 2021 stood at (-) 0.35 per cent as compared to November, 2021," it added.

As per the data, the primary articles segment, which has one of the highest weightages in the WPI, increased at a faster rate of 13.38 per cent in December 2021 as compared to 10.34 per cent reported for November 2021. In the fuel and power segment, which has a weightage of 13.15 per cent, the rise in inflation was recorded at 32.30 per cent, as compared to 39.81 per cent in November 2021. Similarly, cost of manufactured products, which has a weightage of 64.23 per cent, increased at a slower rate of 10.62 per cent from 11.92 per cent in November 2021. However, the growth rate of WPI food index consisting of food articles from the primary articles group and food



products from the manufactured products group rose to 9.24 per cent from 6.70 per cent in the previous month. "The WPI inflation printed in double digits for the ninth consecutive month, easing only modestly in December 2021 from November's high, with a jump in primary food and non-food inflation absorbing a part of the correction in other item," said Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA

"The primary food inflation has spiked from the marginal 0.1 per cent in October 2021 to an unpleasant 23-month high of 9.6 per cent in December 2021, reflecting the unfavourable base, particularly for vegetables," Nayar added. According to Suman Chowdhury, Chief Analytical Officer, Acuite Ratings & Research: "The data indicates that the incremental price pressures in the primary article and the fuel segments have eased

in the previous month, although a fresh rise in global crude prices can make such a relief temporary. "As expected, there is a moderation in the wholesale food category driven by the seasonal drop in vegetable prices, including a sharp drop in onion and potato prices. While the pass through of higher input costs to manufactured products has continued in December 2021, the sequential growth is low at 0.22 per cent for that category due to the loss of momentum in demand recovery."

D.R.E Reddy, CEO and Managing Partner at CRCL LLP, said: "The WPI has fallen month on month, mainly due to a high base. "The wholesale inflation is expected to weaken as we move ahead in 2022, largely due to falling commodity and primary article prices. High food and vegetable prices remain a concern." **AGENCIES**

Budget FY23: Realty seeks
incentives on home loans, rental
income, GST cut on inputs

NEW DELHI: With the Union Budget for FY23 round the corner, real estate developers have started making their suggestions and recommendations to the Centre for including them in the Budget document. The Budget will be tabled in the Parliament on February 1. After facing strong headwinds during the initial days of the pandemic, the real estate sector has largely managed to come out of the turbulent clouds in 2021.

To keep the momentum intact in the high-growth potential realty sector, several developers have requested the government to provide incentives on taxes (both principal and interest) for home loans, and the rental housing segment, and extend some concessions on income from renting of housing properties. Also, some urged the government to remove taxation on notional rental income in order to further boost demand for new properties, besides reducing GST on raw

materials. "Housing demand did bounce back strongly after the first as well as the second wave of the Covid pandemic, driven mainly by historical low interest rates on home loans. However, the sector is still plagued with two perennial problems — unsold inventories and stalled projects. The third wave has emerged as a challenge for the sector and the economy," said Dhruv Agarwal, Group CEO at Housing.com, Makaan.com and PropTiger.com. "The corpus of the government-backed stress fund 'SWAMIH' should be hiked to at least Rs 1 lakh crore. The current corpus of Rs 25,000 crore has already been committed." In November 2019, the Centre launched the 'SWAMIH Investment Fund' to help complete over 1,500 stalled housing projects, including those that have been declared non-performing assets (NPAs) or had been admitted for insolvency proceedings. **AGENCIES**

Omicron could push air traffic recovery into fiscal 2024: Crisil

MUMBAI: The ongoing third pandemic wave led by Omicron could pose fresh turbulence for air traffic, pushing its full recovery into fiscal 2024, ratings agency Crisil said on Thursday. The agency had earlier expected the full recovery to happen in fiscal 2023.

It said that a material impact on the credit quality of airport operators, however, is unlikely as the dip in revenue is expected to be limited by a likely strong rebound, and the operators have adequate debt servicing cushions, liquidity buffers and financial flexibility to absorb the blip in traffic. An analysis of the

top four private airports — Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad — which accounted for 90 per cent of air passenger traffic handled by private airports and 50 per cent of all passenger traffic last fiscal, indicates as much, the agency said.

"The high infection rate of Omicron has resulted in several state governments and local authorities, such as Delhi and Mumbai, announcing restrictions on movement," said Manish Gupta, Senior Director, Crisil Ratings. "In fact, domestic traffic is down by 25 per cent from the highs of December 2021 in the first week

of January 2022 itself. Both personal and business travel will take a hit in January and February, leading to air traffic plunging an estimated 30 per cent sequentially in the fourth quarter of this fiscal."

This spill-over impact, the agency said, is likely to delay recovery of air traffic from "our earlier expectation of it happening in fiscal 2023". However, recovery is expected to be achieved within the early part of fiscal 2024. "This is because air traffic is likely to rebound faster this time around, compared to the second wave, when it took from May to November

2021 to recover from 16 per cent to 85 per cent of the fiscal 2020 traffic," the agency said.

"The rebound confidence is underpinned by higher proportion of vaccinated populace — over 71 per cent now vis-a-vis only 5 per cent as of end May 2021 — as well as learnings of governments and authorities from the past waves in implementing Covid-19 protocols for safe travel. The case load, too, is expected to peak in February and return to the December 2021 level by the end of March 2022," it said. **AGENCIES**

IRDAI closed FY21 with Rs 124 cr
surplus, M&A fee Rs 8.14 cr

nual report, the total fee income of the insurance regulator last fiscal was about Rs 194 crore, up from about Rs 180 crore earned in FY20. The primary revenue for IRDAI is annual licence renewal fee from the insurers — life/non-life/reinsurers/agents/brokers/penalties and others.

Last fiscal, IRDAI earned Rs 8.14 crore as fees for processing of amalgamation of insurers, up from Rs 7.19 crore earned under the head the previous fiscal. During FY21, IRDAI had earned a surplus of income over expenditure of about Rs 124 crore on a total income of about Rs 269 crore, up from about Rs 102 crore on a total income of Rs 268 crore earned during FY20. **AGENCIES**

India-UK launch crucial free trade negotiations

NEW DELHI: Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, on Thursday launched the negotiations between India and the UK for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries in the presence of British International Trade Secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan. The FTA negotiations in New Delhi are expected to facilitate the target of doubling bilateral trade between India and the UK by 2030, set by the Prime Ministers of both the nations, Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson, in May 2021. Speaking on the occasion, Goyal said that both India and the UK are vibrant democracies, with a partnership build on the shared history and rich culture of the two nations.

The diverse Indian diaspora in the UK, who act as a 'Living Bridge', adds further dynamism to the relations between the two countries, he said. The FTA with the UK is expected to provide certainty, predictability and transparency and will create a more liberal, facilitative and competitive services regime, the minister noted. "The FTA negotiations with



the UK are expected to increase our exports in leather, textile, jewellery and processed agri products. India is also expected to register a quantum jump in the export of marine products through the recognition of 56 marine units in India. "The mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) on pharma could provide additional market access. There is also great potential for increasing exports

in service sectors like IT/ITES, nursing, education and healthcare, including AYUSH and audio-visual services. India would also be seeking special arrangements for movement of its people," Goyal said.

The minister assured that subsequent to the unveiling of the FTA, the two nations would proactively and regularly engage with each other, for deliberating on the scope and coverage of the trade

deal. Observing that the UK is a major trade partner of India with substantial bilateral volume of trade in goods and services, Goyal said that with the cooperation extended across areas like tourism, technology, startups, education, climate change etc., the two nations are looking forward to a mutually beneficial trade deal with balanced concessions and market access package in a wide range of sectors. Calling for the enhancement of sectoral cooperation by addressing market access issues and removing trade restrictions, Goyal said that it would help generate direct and indirect employment in both the nations.

Earlier, Trevelyan had stated before leaving London: "We want to unlock this huge new market (offered by India) for our great British producers and manufacturers across numerous industries from food and drink to services and automotive. "India marks the start of our ambitious 5-star year of UK trade and will show how the deals we negotiate will boost the economies across all nations." **AGENCIES**

Commerce Minister
interacts with industry
leaders

NEW DELHI: Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has interacted with the leaders of the major industry bodies to seek their suggestions and inputs to ensure continuation of fast rebound of economic activities, and high growth rates, officials said on Wednesday. He congratulated the Indian industry for bouncing back after taking a hit due to the pandemic and for the resilience displayed while grappling with the pandemic, especially in the field of exports. The Minister said that the growth in services exports, in spite of travel and tourism restrictions was truly commendable and said that we must aim to reach \$250 billion services exports. He added that Indian professionals had demonstrated great success in working from home and therefore the nation had succeeded in meeting every single one of its international commitments, even during the pandemic, earning it the title of being a trusted partner to the world. **AGENCIES**

CHENNAI: The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)

closed FY21 with total fee income of about Rs 194 crore. According to IRDAI's an-

Bag full of gold, fake currency
valued at Rs 18L seized

KOLKATA: The Customs officials at the Indira Gandhi International Airport here have seized a trolley bag and arrested two persons for smuggling gold and fake currency, officials said on Friday. As the case is related to FICN (Fake Indian Currency Notes), the National Investigation Agency (NIA) was also informed to investigate any possible terror funding links. As per the Customs department, an Indian passenger arrived at Terminal-3 of IGI airport from Ras AI Khanim International Airport, UAE on January 12.

While scanning his luggage, the customs officials found gold valued at Rs 7,65,000, and 2,000 fake Indian currency notes of Rs 500 denomination, worth



Rs 10 lakh. The customs officials also arrested one person from the arrival gate of IGI Airport who came to receive this passenger, to take the delivery of these goods.

"The gold weighing 175 grams and FICN of face value Rs 10,00,000 were concealed by the passenger in his trolley bags and

the same were seized under Section 110 of the Customs Act, 1962, on January 12. The passenger and his receiver have been placed under arrest in terms of Section 104 of the Customs Act, 1962. Further investigation is under progress," the office of the commissioner of customs, IGI Airport, said in a statement. **AGENCIES**

FTA golden opportunity to put UK businesses
at the forefront: British Trade Secretary

NEW DELHI: After the formal launch of the negotiations between India and the UK for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two nations here on Thursday, British International Trade Secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, said that the UK is broadening its economic horizons and forging stronger partnerships with the fastest-growing economies of the world.

"As an independent, deal-making nation, the UK is broadening its economic horizons and forging stronger partnerships with the fastest-growing economies of the world. India marks the start of our ambitious 5-star year for UK trade and we will show how the deals we ne-



gotiate boost the economies across all nations and help level up all regions of the UK," Trevelyan said.

Trevelyan is on a two-day visit to India to officially launch negotiations on a new, ambitious FTA, which is supposed to create huge benefits for both the countries and could boost India-UK bilateral trade by up to 28

billion pounds a year by 2035. The first round of negotiations is expected to start next week — making it the UK's quickest start of formal talks between negotiating teams following a launch, a demonstration of the strength of the UK-India relationship. The UK-India economic relationship is already strong and bilateral trade totalled over 23 billion pounds in 2019, supporting nearly half-a-million jobs in each other's economies.

In May 2021, the Prime Ministers of the two nations had set the ambition to double the value of UK-India trade over the next decade through the '2030 Roadmap' plan, Trevelyan said. **AGENCIES**

'India's recovery is on a solid path', is world's top economic performer: UN report

UNITED NATIONS: "India's recovery is on a solid path", the UN said on Thursday reporting that the country recorded the highest estimated growth rate among the major economies last year and is set to be on the same trajectory during this year and the next. The UN's annual World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report estimated the growth rate of India's gross domestic product (GDP) at 9 per cent last year and forecast it to moderate to 6.7 per cent this year and 6.1 per cent next year but still retain the highest growth rates among the large economies.

In 2020, the year Covid-19 pandemic struck the world, India's economy had shrunk by 7.1 per cent — a negative growth rate — according to the report. China, which came next among



the large economies, was estimated to have grown by 7.8 per cent last year and forecast to grow by 5.2 per cent this year and 5.5 per cent next year. Overall, the global economy's growth was estimated to be 5.5 per cent last year, bouncing back from a shrinkage of 3.4 per cent in 2020. The growth projections are 4 per cent this year and 3.5

per cent in 2023. The report said: "India's economic recovery is on a solid path, amid rapid vaccination progress, less stringent social restrictions and still supportive fiscal and monetary stances."

The WESP raised India's growth estimate for last year by 1.7 per cent and the growth projection for this year by 0.8 per cent from the expecta-

tions in its report a year ago. It ascribed slowing down of growth from 9 per cent last year to 6.7 per cent this year to waning base effects. While "robust export growth and public investments underpin economic activity", the WESP warned that "high oil prices and coal shortages could put the brakes on economic activity in the near term". "It will remain crucial to encourage private investment to support inclusive growth beyond the recovery," it advised.

"Inflation is expected to decelerate throughout 2022, continuing a trend observed since the second half of 2021 when relatively restrained food prices compensated for higher oil prices," the report said while attaching a note of caution: "A sudden and renewed rise in food inflation,

however, due to unpredictable weather, broader supply disruptions and higher agricultural prices, could undermine food security, reduce real incomes and increase hunger across the South Asia region." The report estimated India's consumer price inflation at 5.9 per cent last year and projected to go down to 5.6 per cent this year and 5.3 per cent next year. The WESP said that it expected the Reserve Bank to raise interest rates throughout this year.

In its snapshot of the world economy, the report said: "The global economic recovery is facing significant headwinds amid new waves of Covid-19 infections, persistent labour market challenges, lingering supply-chain challenges and rising inflationary pressures." **AGENCIES**



'Outsider who broke down barriers': 'VANITY FAIR' puts Priyanka on its cover

Priyanka Chopra has achieved what every star anywhere in the world aspires for -- to be on the cover of 'Vanity Fair'. She's on the cover of the February 2022 edition of the magazine celebrated internationally as much for its in-depth articles as for its cutting-edge photography.

Unveiling the cover, 'Vanity Fair' tweeted: "After a journey into 'The Matrix', the actor enters 2022 with her cup overflowing -- reflecting on her storied Hindi film industry career, marriage, and creating a path for herself in Hollywood." Looking artfully messy, a sultry Priyanka appears on the cover in an off-shoulder, off-white ruffled dress from Fendi.

The magazine, previously edited by celebrity journalists such as Tina Brown and Graydon Carter (who's played by Jeff Bridges in the film 'How to Lose Friends and Alienate People'), is now helmed by Radhika Jones, an Indian American.

Describing her as "a driven woman who has transcended what's previously been possible for an Indian actor in Hollywood," the 'Vanity Fair' cover story goes on to say: "She is an outsider who broke down barriers and built a place for herself within the walls of Hollywood. Now she's on a mission to welcome others in."

Priyanka, notes the article that traces her life's story from her days at the Army Public School, Bareilly, will finally be playing lead film roles as she had in India" with the rom-com 'Text for You' and Amazon's ambitious spy series 'Citadel' later this year.

And about her own story, especially her rise to stardom in Hollywood, Priyanka says: "It's taken a lot of pavement pounding to be able to get people's attention, and to be able to get an acceptance of the fact that someone like me can be the lead of a Hollywood feature."

She adds (and the sentiment will go down well back home): "There's very few of us from South Asia who get to do that. I hope that the part that I play in it will sort of push the envelope a little bit."

"IT'S TAKEN A LOT OF PAVEMENT POUNDING TO BE ABLE TO GET PEOPLE'S ATTENTION, AND TO BE ABLE TO GET AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE FACT THAT SOMEONE LIKE ME CAN BE THE LEAD OF A HOLLYWOOD FEATURE."

AGENCIES



'Loop Lapeta' trailer shows a thrilling cut to the chase

The trailer of Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin's comedy-thriller 'Loop Lapeta' was released on Thursday.

It shows an exhilarating journey of Savi, essayed by Taapsee Pannu as she tries to save the life of her boyfriend Satya, played by Tahir Raj Bhasin, when he loses cash belonging to a mobster in a gambling bid. The film, which is based on the German experimental thriller 'Run Lola Run', is helmed by debutant director Aakash Bhatia.

Taapsee said, "Loop Lapeta' is a film that will always be very close to my heart. I fell in love with the characters and the story the moment I read the script!

The film is about the choices that Savi makes and how her decisions carve out her journey with the one she loves. A perfect combination of comedy and thriller, 'Loop Lapeta' will keep you at the edge of your seat, while you rejoice at the comical situation that Savi and Satya have gotten into. Can't wait to bring this to audiences worldwide on Netflix."

Expressing his excitement on the trailer launch, Tahir said, "I am so excited to have my second project release with Netflix within a span of a month and to now begin the adrenaline rush of Satya and Savi's rollercoaster ride against time. Their electric chemistry will make you laugh, cry and leave you on the edge through the consequences of

the couple's wild choices."

Talking about his debut venture, director Aakash Bhatia said, "I am enthralled to share a peek into the world of 'Loop Lapeta'. I'm hoping that this makes for a thrilling and enjoyable ride for the viewers. My approach has been to experiment with form and style while navigating through this time twisting journey, and also to tightly hold on to the emotional core of our story and characters. Taapsee and Tahir lead an ensemble of fantastic performers in our show of sound and visuals."

'Loop Lapeta' produced by Sony Pictures Films India and Ellipsis Entertainment along with Ayush Maheshwari, will premiere on February 4, on Netflix. AGENCIES

Novak Djokovic 'playing by his own rules', says Tsitsipas



MELBOURNE: World number four Stefanos Tsitsipas said on Thursday that Novak Djokovic has been 'playing by his own rules' and has put his Grand Slam at risk, adding that the Australian Open defending champion has made vaccinated tennis players 'look like fools'.

The star player from Serbia was on Thursday drawn to start his campaign in the Australian Open against compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic, the World No 78. However, there is uncertainty over his participation as Djokovic's visa saga continues in Australia.

Djokovic, who had reached Australia for the year's first Grand Slam with a certificate claiming exemption from vaccination as he had tested positive for Covid-19 in December, had his visa cancelled by the Australian government before a Federal Court in the country intervened to give him respite.

There were still doubts over his participation in the event and there was intense speculation on Thursday when the draw ceremony for the event was delayed for some time. However, the organisers went ahead with the formalities with the Serbian's name being included in the draw.

"For sure, he's been playing by his own rules and has been doing what not many players had the guts to do, especially after the ATP announced certain criteria for players to enter the country," Greece's Tsitsipas told WION.

"No one really thought they could come to Australia unvaccinated and not having to follow the protocols... it takes a lot of daring to do and putting the Grand Slam at risk, which I don't think many players would do," he added.

The ATP, which governs men's tennis, has said 97 of the top 100 male players are vaccinated.

Notably, American world number 93 Tennys Sandgren had said earlier this month that he had pulled out of the Australian Open because of the vaccine mandate and he opted not to apply for a medical exemption.

Asked if Djokovic should defend his title at Melbourne Park next week, Tsitsipas said: "There are two ways to look at it. One way is that almost every single player is vaccinated and did what they had to do in order to come and perform and play in Australia."

"On the other sense, it seems not everyone is playing by the rules...a very small (minority) chose to follow their own way, which kind of makes the majority look like fools," he added.

Djokovic, the nine-time Australian Open winner, is hoping to become the most successful player in the Grand Slam by claiming his 21st men's singles title in the Australian Open, which starts on January 17, breaking a tie for most titles with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. AGENCIES

Hockey midfielder Lilima Minz retires at 27

NEW DELHI: One of the most experienced midfielders in hockey Lilima Minz decided to retire from the sport on Thursday. Lilima, who made her debut for the national side at the 4-Nation Women's Hockey Tournaments held in Argentina in 2011, has been part of many glorious moments with the Indian Women's Hockey Team.

The midfielder, who hails from the Sundargarh district of Odisha, scored 12 goals in 156 matches for India. She was part of the bronze medal-

winning campaign at the Asian Games 2014, silver medal win at the 2018 Asian Games and the gold medal victory at the FIH Women's Series Finals at Hiroshima in 2019.

Lilima was part of the squad when the Indian women qualified for the Olympics for the first time after 36 years and took part in the Rio Olympic Games in 2016. The midfielder was also part of the Indian team which booked a place in the Tokyo Olympics through the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers



2019 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Hockey India president Gyanendro Ningombam congratulated the two-time Asian

Games medalist for her outstanding contribution to Indian Hockey.

"Lilima has made a huge contribution to Indian hockey during her fantastic career and we cannot thank her enough for her efforts. She has played a massive role in the growth of the Indian Women's Hockey Team in the last few years. Hockey India congratulates her on a wonderful career and wishes her all the very best for the next chapter of her life," he said in a release. AGENCIES

Rights of Afghan women, girls under attack: UN

KABUL: The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has said that the rights of Afghan women and girls are "under attack" and that they need the world body's support and solidarity now more than ever.

In a statement on Thursday, the OCHA said that girls and women in the war-torn nation are deprived of basic rights and humanitarian organisations must aim to scale up assistance by providing food, healthcare,



education, livelihood opportunities and protection services, reports TOLO News. According to the OCHA, 11.8 million

women and girls need urgent humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. The statement came after

a gathering of women activists in Kabul on Wednesday stayed awake all night and "lit candles for freedom".

Reacting to the OCHA statement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the allegations were baseless and "false information".

In a tweet, Mujahid said that since the Taliban took over Afghanistan last August everyone's rights have been protected, including women. AGENCIES

N.Korea warns of 'stronger' reaction after US imposes new sanctions

SEOUL: North Korea on Friday warned that it will have to take "stronger and certain reaction" after the US imposed new sanctions over Pyongyang's recent missile launches.

In a statement carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), a spokesperson for the North's Foreign Ministry said the recent launch of what it claims to be a hypersonic missile was an "exercise of right to self-defence".

"If the US adopts such a confrontational stance, the DPRK will be forced to take stronger and certain reaction to it," Yonhap News Agency quoted the KCNA statement as saying.

DPRK stands for the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

On Wednesday, the US slapped sanctions on six North Koreans involved in the reclusive regime's weapons of mass destruction and



ballistic missile programs.

The move came a day the North launched what it claims to be a newly developed hypersonic missile on Tuesday, the second such test in less than a week.

"The DPRK's recent development of new-type weapon was just part of its efforts for modernizing its national defence capability," the KCNA statement said.

"It did not target any specific country or force and it did not do any harm to the security of neighbouring countries." AGENCIES

Africa's 4th Covid wave flattening: WHO



ADDIS ABABA: After a six-week surge, Africa's fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic driven primarily by the Omicron variant, is flattening, marking the shortest-lived surge to date in the continent where cumulative cases have now exceeded 10 million, the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

Weekly cases having plateaued in the week ending on January 9, Xinhua news agency quoted a statement issued by the WHO's regional office for Africa as saying on Thursday.

It said that Southern Africa, which saw a huge increase in infections during the pandemic wave, recorded a 14 per cent decline in infections over

The crucial pandemic countermeasure badly needed in Africa still stands, and that is rapidly and significantly increasing Covid-19 vaccinations. The next wave might not be so forgiving

the past week, with South Africa, where Omicron was first reported, recording a 9 per cent fall in weekly infections.

North and West Africa, however, are witnessing a rise in cases, with North Africa reporting a 121 per cent increase

this past week compared with the previous one, warned the WHO.

Across the continent, though, deaths rose by 64 per cent in the seven days ending on January 9 compared with the week before mainly due to infections among people at high-risk.

Nonetheless, deaths in the fourth wave on the African continent are lower than in the previous waves.

So far 30 African countries have detected the Omicron variant, while the Delta variant has been reported in 42 nations.

"Early indications suggest that Africa's fourth wave has been steep and brief but no less destabilising. The crucial pandemic countermeasure badly needed in Africa still stands, and that is rapidly and significantly increasing Covid-19 vaccinations. The next wave might not be so forgiving," said Matshidiso Moeti, WHO's regional director for Africa.

While the continent appears to be weathering the latest pandemic wave, vaccinations still remain low.

Just around 10 per cent of Africa's population has been fully vaccinated, noted WHO. AGENCIES

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