

**OPINION 6**  
THE LAND OF FREEDOM  
AND DEMOCRACY

**MONEY 9**  
BANKING SERVICES HIT AS  
EMPLOYEES GO ON STRIKE

**SPORT 12**  
TEAM INDIA LANDS IN SOUTH  
AFRICA FOR TEST SERIES

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA  
Late City Vol. 16 Issue 345  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

CHANDIGARH, FRIDAY DECEMBER 17, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹2



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I MISS MY  
FATHER:  
RANBIR  
10 VIVACITY

## ‘Omicron multiplies in lungs 70 times faster than Delta’

Together with its ability to escape vax immunity, variant’s threat high: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the first findings on how the hypermutated Omicron variant infects the respiratory tract, researchers from Hong Kong University (HKU) on Thursday reported that the virus multiplies 70 times faster in the bronchi than Delta and the original SARS-CoV-2 virus, which, they said, might explain why Omicron transmits faster. The researchers said Omicron infection may be less severe, depending on the body’s immune response. The variant reaches higher levels in the tissue, compared to Delta, 48 hours after infection, said the study.

The preliminary data, published online on Wednesday, gives for the first time a look at how Omicron may behave inside the respiratory tract — and the data offers a tantalising clue as to why this heavily mutated variant is spreading so fast and even outcompeting Delta.

Michael Chan Chi-wai, who led the work, said the result needed to be interpreted with caution because the severe disease is determined not only



A health worker collects swab sample of an outstation passenger for Covid-19 test at Bandra Terminus railway station in Mumbai on Thursday. PTI

by how quickly the virus replicates but also by a person’s immune response and, in particular, whether the immune system goes into overdrive, causing a so-called cytokine storm.

“It is also noted that by infecting many more people, a very infectious virus may cause more severe disease and death even though the virus itself may be less pathogenic,” he

said. “Therefore, taken together with our recent studies showing that the Omicron variant can partially escape immunity from vaccines and past infection, the overall threat from the Omicron variant is likely to be very significant.”

Jeremy Kamil, an Associate Professor of microbiology and immunology at Louisiana State University Health Shreveport,

pointed out that Delta, which turned out to be more pathogenic, showed a similar pattern of replicating more slowly in the lungs.

“These authors found Omicron replicates fantastically well — even far better than either Delta or the original virus — in bronchial tissue,” Kamil said. “This could in some ways contribute to an advantage in spread/transmission between people.”

“Of course, a huge component of Omicron’s transmissibility in real life is going to be its potential to escape neutralising antibodies that protect against infection in the first place. It’s very likely spreading well even between vaccinated people, especially those who haven’t recently gotten a booster shot.”

### DELHI ADDS 85 COVID CASES

**New Delhi:** Delhi on Thursday recorded 85 fresh Covid-19 cases with a positivity rate of 0.15 per cent, according to data shared by the health department here.

With this, the city’s Covid-19 caseload climbed to 14,41,935. Of this, over 14.16 lakh patients have recovered from the disease, the health department bulletin stated.

The death toll remained unchanged at 25,100, it said.

## India celebrates 50th anniversary of liberation of Bangladesh

Prez Kovind addresses Victory Day in Dhaka; Rahul, Priyanka slam Govt for no mention of Indira in PM’s tribute

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN

India on Thursday celebrated Vijay Diwas to mark the 50th anniversary of 1971 war and liberation of Bangladesh. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled the valour and sacrifice by the Indian Armed forces, President Ram Nath Kovind addressed the Victory Day in Dhaka and said the 1971 Liberation War has a special place in the hearts of every Indian.

Modi led the nation on Thursday in paying tributes to the Armed forces by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial.

“On the 50th Vijay Diwas, I recall the great valour and sacrifice by the Muktiyoddhas, Biranganas and bravehearts of the Indian Armed forces. Together, we fought and defeated oppressive forces. Rashtrapati’s presence in Dhaka is of special significance to every Indian,” PM Modi wrote on Twitter.

However the occasion was marred by a controversy with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi criticising the Government for ignor-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the homage and reception ceremony of Swarnim Vijay Mashaals on the occasion of ‘Vijay Diwas’ at National War Memorial in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

ing former PM Indira Gandhi, who played a pivotal role in the 1971 war.

Four victory torches (Vijay Mashaals), which were taken across the country during the last one year, were merged into the memorial’s eternal flame by the PM.

These victory torches, which were lighted by the PM exactly a year ago, were carried to various parts of India, including to villages of the awardees of Param Vir Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra of the 1971 war, as a part of Golden Jubilee year celebrations

(Swarnim Vijay Varsh). Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and chiefs of the three Armed forces were present at the National War Memorial during the event. Modi said on Twitter, “On this special day of Vijay Diwas, I had the honour of paying my respects at the National War Memorial and merging into the Eternal Flame, the four Vijay Mashaals which traversed across the length and breadth on Dhaka.”

President Kovind on Thursday said India has always attached the highest priority to its friendship with Bangladesh

and that New Delhi remains committed to doing all it can to help realise the full potential of its friendship with Dhaka.

Addressing the Victory Day celebrations here, President Kovind said the 1971 Liberation War, struggle for freedom has a special place in the hearts of every Indian.

“India has always attached highest priority to its friendship with Bangladesh. We remain committed to doing all we can to help realise the full potential of our friendship with Bangladesh,” he said.

## Delhi to deregister 10 yrs old diesel vehicles; to give NOC for use elsewhere

Process from Jan 1  
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government will deregister all diesel vehicles which will complete 10 years on January 1, 2022, and issue no objection certificate (NOC) so that they can be re-registered in other places in compliance with the National Green Tribunal’s directions.

However, no NOC will be issued for diesel vehicles, which have completed 15 years or more on the date of applying for it, according to an order issued earlier this week by the Delhi Transport Department.

The NGT has issued directions relating to restrictions on registration and plying of diesel vehicles more than 10 years old and petrol vehicles more than 15 years old in Delhi-NCR.

In an order in July 2016, the tribunal said its direction for deregistration of diesel vehicles, which are more than 10 years old, will be complied with effectively and without



default.

The deregistration of diesel vehicles, which are 15 years old, was to be taken up in the first instance. The transport department order said that “accordingly, the department will deregister all such diesel vehicles in Delhi on January 1, 2022, which have completed or would be completing 10 years on that date.”

The department has been deregistering vehicles that have completed their lifespan. NOC for diesel vehicles, which are 10 years old, and petrol vehicles, which are 15 years old, can be issued for any place in the country, it said. This will be, however, subject to condition that NOC will not be issued for the places which are identified by states as restricted area for re-registration, the order said.

## Young national level shooter found hanging

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/HOWRAH

Young national-level shooter Konic Layak was found hanging at her hostel in Bally in Howrah district, police said.

According to Howrah Police sources, a suicide note was found with her where she blamed “depression” as the reason for taking the extreme step. The incident happened on Wednesday.

“She was depressed for not getting chances, she wrote in the note,” said a police official, adding that the 26-year-old girl was due to get married in February. This is the fourth such case in recent times in the shooting fraternity.

The shooter, who had won a few medals at the state level, was training along with Olympian and Arjuna Awardee Joydeep Karmakar in Kolkata.

Police have started investigations into the death of the shooter who was from Dhanbad in Jharkhand.

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) is aware of the shocking incident.

## Naravane appointed chairman of chiefs of staff committee

Army chief to serve as head till a new CDS is appointed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Army chief General MM Naravane has been appointed Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee. He is the senior-most among the three Services Chiefs and will serve as the Chairman till a new Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is announced.

The institution of Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, was functional till two years ago to ensure cohesion and synergy between the three Services. However, the role was taken over by General Rawat when he was made the first CDS of the country in January last year and the Committee was made redundant.

Naravane’s appointment as the head of the Committee is a



stop-gap arrangement till the political leadership appoints the new CDS, sources said here on Thursday. General Rawat, his wife, and 12 others were killed in a helicopter crash on December 8. The Government went by the principle of selecting the senior most amongst the three Chiefs for the newly created CDS post and appointed General Rawat as he was the senior-most then.

## Amarinder in Delhi to finalise ties with BJP

New Delhi: Former Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh has reached Delhi to finalise the alliance between the BJP and his newly formed Punjab Lok Congress Party.

He will remain in Delhi for the next three days and will meet senior BJP leaders.

On Friday evening, Amarinder will meet BJP national president JP Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

However, it is not yet clear whether the picture will be clear about the seats during this visit of the Captain to Delhi.

With the formation of the Punjab Lok Congress Party, he has announced to enter the election fray along with BJP and other Taksali parties. Recently, he met BJP’s Punjab election in-charge Union Minister Jagendra Shekhawat at his Siswan farm house.

The Captain had apprised the BJP of his seat-sharing formula in this important meeting and the same was liked by the BJP’s central leadership, according to sources.

## Akhilesh buries 5-yr-old feud with uncle, forges alliance for UP polls

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his estranged uncle and Pragatishheel Samajwadi Party Lohia (PSPL) chief Shivpal Yadav buried their five-year long family feud on Thursday and forged an alliance for the forthcoming Assembly polls.

The SP chief reached Shivpal’s residence in the evening and held a closed-door meeting, which lasted for about 40 minutes. Sources said apart from Shivpal and Akhilesh, the former’s son, Aditya Yadav, was also present at the crucial meeting.

Following the meeting, Akhilesh tweeted and confirmed the alliance between the SP and the PSPL. “Met the PSPL chief and confirmed our alliance. The strategy of alliance with smaller parties is strengthening the SP and is taking the SP along with alliance parties towards a historic win,” said



Akhilesh Yadav meets Shivpal Singh Yadav at his residence in Lucknow on Thursday. PTI

Akhilesh. The decision of seat-sharing, however, has not yet been announced by either of the leaders. During the meeting, hundreds of supporters of both parties gathered outside Shivpal’s residence and raised the slogan “Chacha -Bhatija zindabad”.

## CAPSULE

**2 LET MILITANTS KILLED IN ENCOUNTER IN J&K**  
Srinagar: Two LeT militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Kulgam district of Jammu & Kashmir on Thursday, police said.

**MAX TEMP TO DROP ON CHRISTMAS: IMD**  
New Delhi: Due to a ‘Western Disturbance’, the maximum temperature this Christmas will be colder with light to moderate rain or snowfall over the western Himalayan region, northwest India, and adjoining areas of central India, the IMD said.

Armed forces personnel pay tribute to the mortal remains of late Group Captain Varun Singh in Bengaluru on Thursday. PTI

## Sheena Bora alive, claims Indrani

Her letter to CBI gives a sensational twist to murder trial

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After having been behind bars for more than six years on charges of murdering her daughter Sheena Bora, Indrani Mukherjea has now — in a bizarre claim made in a letter to the CBI — said that her daughter “is still alive” and “is currently in Kashmir” and asked the CBI to track her down.

In what is being seen as a tactic to further delay or derail the already much-delayed trail in the sensational case, Indrani claimed in her letter to the CBI that her fellow inmate at the Byculla Women’s Jail had told her that the latter had met Sheena in Kashmir and want-



ed the Central investigating to trace her daughter.

Talking to the media persons here, Indrani’s lawyer Sana Raees declined to divulge the details of the letter but said that she on behalf of her client would file an application in the Bombay High Court on December 28, after which she would share the letter her client had written to the CBI with the



media.

However, there was no reaction yet from the CBI till the evening on the claim made by Indrani, who has been lodged in Byculla Women’s Jail in south Mumbai ever since she was arrested on August 25, 2015 for the alleged murder of Sheena.

However, Peter Mukherjea — who separated from Indrani

by way of divorce through mutual consent in October 2019 while both were behind bars — has been out on bail for the last 10 months. The Bombay High Court had on February 6, 2020 granted bail to Peter on the ground that prima facie there was no evidence to prove his direct involvement in the murder.

## Bill soon to raise legal marriage age of women from 18 to 21 years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has decided to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years, bringing it at par with that of men. Experts, however, have raised concern over the decision, saying the move is akin to treating symptoms instead of the underlying causes.

The Union Cabinet had on Wednesday cleared a proposal to bring in uniformity in the marriageable age of men and women, sources said on Thursday.

The Government is likely to bring a bill in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, they said. The proposed Bill may also seek to make consequential



changes to various personal laws relating to marriage of different communities to ensure a uniform marriage age, the sources said.

As of now, the legal age of women to get married is 18 while that for men is 21 years.

The decision came a year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Government was deliberating on what should be the minimum age for marriage of women.

## Setback for BJP as Metro man to stay away from active politics

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The BJP in Kerala suffered a major setback on Thursday after E Sreedharan, former chairman of Delhi Metro Rail, announced he would stay away from active politics in future.

“I joined the BJP and contested the Assembly election with the sole aim of serving the people as their servant. But the BJP failed to win even a single seat. Moreover, at my age I am not able to go out and work to strengthen the party. I am staying away from active role, I’ll be always available to the general public for any help and guidance,” he told reporters.

But sources close to him said it was the indifferent attitude of the BJP State leadership that led to his decision.

# Winter Session of Haryana Assembly to begin today

### To continue till Dec 22

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Winter Session of Haryana Vidhan Sabha, starting on December 17 has been extended till December 22.

The decision to extend the session was taken during the Business Advisory Committee meeting held on Thursday here. Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kanwar Pal, Home Minister Anil Vij, Leader of Opposition Bhupendra Singh Hooda, Deputy Speaker Ranbir Gangwa were present in the meeting presided over by Speaker Gian Chand Gupta.

Before the BAC meeting, the Speaker also held a high-level meeting regarding the security arrangements in which Leader of the Opposition

Bhupinder Singh Hooda and senior police officers of Haryana and Chandigarh were present.

After the meetings, the Speaker said that the winter session of the State Assembly will begin at 2:00 pm on December 17 amidst tight security along with following the COVID-19 protocol.

It has been decided to hold the winter session till December 22. It is for the first time that a BAC meeting was held a day before the beginning of the Assembly session, he said.

The State Government had earlier recommended convening the session from December 17-21.

Gupta said that he wants to give maximum opportunities to all the MLAs of the state to express their views on various key issues during the winter session. In this connection, Zero Hour has been started in Haryana Vidhan Sabha on the lines of Lok Sabha, he said.

The Speaker said that 273 starred and 173 unstarred ques-

tions have been received by the Legislative Assembly Secretariat for the winter session. The draw has been done for the first three days of the session. The draw for the Question Hour to be held on December 22 will be held on December 17. Along with this, the MLAs have also sent 33 calling attention motions, he said.

During the BAC meeting, the Chief Minister Manohar Lal said that the State Government is in favor of making the session more and more effective and certainly there should be a comprehensive discussion on the topics of interest to the state.

Notably, at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccination has been made mandatory for MLAs, officers and employees attending the winter session of Haryana Assembly. Those who will not be able to get even one dose of vaccination by December 17 due to any reason will have to bring the negative report of the RT-PCR test conducted before 72 hours.

# Opposition gears up to corner BJP-JJP Govt on HPSC job scam

### BJP-JJP Govt is likely to face a tough time during the session on the issue of Haryana Public Service Commission recruitment scam

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Winter Session of Haryana Assembly, which will commence on December 17, Friday, is set to be a tumultuous affair, with the opposition parties Congress and Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), geared up to confront the Manohar Lal Khattar Government on the issues of HPSC recruitment scam, unemployment, cases registered against farmers, among others.

The BJP-JJP Government is likely to face a tough time during the session on the issue of Haryana Public Service Commission recruitment scam. Congress MLAs and INLD's lone MLA Abhay Chautala have demanded an

independent inquiry into the recruitment scam. Recently, a Congress delegation led by former Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda had also met Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and sought an independent probe into the HPSC recruitment scam of dental surgeons under the supervision of a sitting High Court judge.

Notably, HPSC Deputy Secretary Anil Nagar (HCS) was dismissed by the State Government after his arrest for allegedly taking bribe to manipulate marks of candidates for their recruitment as dental surgeons.

Leader of Opposition, Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that the issues of HPSC recruitment scams, shortage of DAP and urea, law and order situation, MSP issue, cases registered against farmers, rising unemployment, inflation among others will be raised by the Congress MLAs during the Assembly session.

Congress Legislative Party meeting will be held on Friday before the beginning of the ses-

sion to discuss the party's strategy, he said.

Earlier, the CLP meeting was held on December 8 in the city. The Congress demands an independent inquiry under the supervision of a sitting HC judge into the recruitment scam, Hooda said.

Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala said that the State Government is prepared to answer all the questions to be raised by the opposition during the winter session of Haryana Assembly.

On the first day of the winter session, obituary references will be made for those who have passed away in the intervening period between the previous session. This will be followed by question hour, zero hour and a calling attention motion moved by Congress MLAs regarding the recruitment of staff for varsities through HPSC/HSSC. Another calling motion attention regarding amendments in the recruitment procedure of teaching and non-teaching posts in the Universities in Haryana has also been accepted for the day.

# Himachal adjudged first in implementation of CCTNS

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh has been awarded the first position among hill states in the implementation of Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS).

Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has congratulated Director General of Police Sanjay Kundu and his team for their effort.

It was announced Thursday at a Conference on Good Practices in Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) and Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS). The virtual event was hosted at the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), New Delhi and was attended by senior police officers of all states and union territories.

The Chief Minister said the state police's stellar performance in the field of CCTNS would boost the con-

fidence of HP Police in using technology in day to day policing.

This is a national level award for hilly states and Himachal Pradesh has been declared the best performing state amongst the 10 hilly states for a second year in succession.

CCTNS is a Central government project for creating a comprehensive and integrated system for effective policing through e-governance. There are 22 different parameters/criteria viz hardware/software deployment, network connectivity, data migration, capacity building etc. to decide this award.

CCTNS was conceptualised in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai attack and it aims to integrate all the data and records of crime into a core application software (CAS), spread across 29 states and 7 union territories of the country.

# Punjab Govt to regularise services of safai sewaks, sewerage men

PNS ■ LUDHIANA

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday said that the State Government will soon complete the process of regularizing the services of safai sewaks and sewerage men in the State.

The Chief Minister, addressing the gathering after handing over Rs 1.83 crore cheque for development of Bhagwan Valmiki Bhawan, said that the State Government has already set the ball rolling for regularizing the services of safai sewaks and sewerage men. The entire process will be completed shortly to give reprieve to these people, said Channi, adding that he has already passed on the necessary directions regarding the same.

"The State Government is leaving no stone unturned for the well being of the poorest of poor section of society. This is part of the State Government's commitment to ensure com-

prehensive development of the State and prosperity of its people. Our Government is making concerted efforts to make Punjab a front runner state in the country," he added.

The Chief Minister said that in order to perpetuate the rich legacy of Bhagwan Valmiki ji in every nook and corner of the world, Punjab Government has already announced a budgetary grant of Rs five crore annually for already existing the Bhagwan Valmiki Ji's Chair in Guru Nanak Dev University.

**FOUNDATION STONE OF 'ATAL APARTMENTS' LAID TO FULFILL DREAM OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL**

Taking a leap forward towards realizing the dream of affordable housing for all, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday laid the foundation stone of ambitious "Atal Apartments" in Shaheed

Karnail Singh Nagar area on Pakhowal Road in Ludhiana. "This project is being constructed by Ludhiana Improvement Trust (LIT) under "100 percent Self Financing Scheme" and would have 12-storeyed 336 HIG and 240 MIG flats," said the Chief Minister adding that providing affordable housing to its residents is the first and foremost priority of the Congress-led Punjab Government. He said that LIT is coming up with this scheme in 8.80 acres near Shaheed Karnail Singh Nagar, Pakhowal Road, Ludhiana. "The land for the proposed flats is in the possession of Ludhiana Improvement Trust," he said, adding that interested persons can apply for this scheme till December 18, 2021, and the draw of lots will be carried out on December 24, 2021.

**TRAUMA CENTRE IN BABA SAHEB'S NAME TO COME UP AT LUDHIANA**

Punjab Government will construct a state-of-the-art Trauma Centre in the name of Bharat Ratna Baba Sahib Dr BR Ambedkar at Ludhiana. Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, addressing a gathering after dedicating Ambedkar Bhawan to the masses, also handed over Rs 4.14 crore cheque to Ludhiana Municipal Corporation for completing the ongoing works at the prestigious Ambedkar Bhawan in the district.

"The Trauma Centre will be a real tribute to Baba Sahib Dr Ambedkar and will be set up at a cost of Rs 10 crore," he said. Giving a major respite to the street vendors (rehri/fadi), the Chief Minister announced that these hard workers will not be unnecessarily harassed by the Police or administration. "These street vendors should work fearlessly as the Chief Minister is their voice from now onwards," he said.

**11 KANAL ALLOTTED TO DURGA MATA MANDIR MANAGEMENT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF SUPER SPECIALTY HOSPITAL**

The Chief Minister on Thursday announced to allot an alternate piece of land to Durga Mata Mandir Management for the construction of an ultra-modern super specialty hospital. The Chief Minister, who paid obeisance at the holy Durga Mata Mandir, said that the temple's management was doing real service of society by imparting quality health services to the people in temple premises only. "However, this needs to be given more boost for which a hospital site of 11 Kanal, equivalent to the existing temple complex, will be allotted by the State Government," he said while also announcing to shift the Police station in the vicinity of the temple to a new place and allot it to the temple.

# Kejriwal takes a dig at Channi, terms Govt 'nautankibaaaz'



PNS ■ LAMBHI

Taking on Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi from left, right, and centre, Aam Aadmi Party's national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday took a dig at the Congress leader for being "the first Chief Minister in world history who meets people even in the bathroom."

Delhi Chief Minister, addressing a public meeting in the Badal's bastion ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections, said: "Current Punjab Government is the most 'nautankibaaaz' and 'dramebaaz' government in the world. A few days ago, I was listening to Channi ji's interview on TV. In the interview, he said that he keeps meeting the public 24 hours a day. Channi said that people sit in my drawing room, verandah, go to the bathroom there...people come with me (Channi) and keep meeting people there also."

"In my opinion, he is the first Chief Minister in world history who also meets people in the bathroom," he said.

"The interviewer further questioned him (Channi) about the conditions of NRIs in the state. Channi said that I am an NRI. Earlier, I (Channi) used to stay in pind (village), and now I live in the city. The interviewer began laughing," quipped Kejriwal.

Continuing his jibe against Channi, Kejriwal said that he may not know how to play "gulli-danda" (Punjab's local street game) like Channi, "but I know how to build good schools. I may not know how to put up tents like Channi, but I know how to make power bills zero."

Coming down heavily on Channi, Kejriwal said that Punjab Chief Minister "is saying everywhere that he is from SC community. But Kejriwal is a member of every family in the SC community, who (Kejriwal) provides free education to every child of SC community, best treatment and free training to be an officer."

Further slamming the Congress by calling them "Indian National Circus," he said: "Navjot Singh Sidhu does

not bond with Channi. Channi does not bond with former state Congress chief Jakhar. Jakhar does not bond well with Partap Bajwa. They are all fighting amongst each other. They punch each other in their Cabinet meeting. They cannot give any future to Punjab."

He said: "They are the most corrupt government in Punjab. They know that they are going to lose power."

Also terming the present Congress Government as the "most corrupt and hypocritical government" in the history of Punjab, Kejriwal said that Chief Minister Channi had made a mockery of the government.

"In this election, Punjab should decide for itself whether it needs a puppet government that can play 'Gulli-danda' or a pro-people government to build schools and hospitals," he said while appealing to the people that they should give AAP a chance in 2022 too, as "you (referring to people) have given opportunities to Congress for 25 years and SAD-BJP for 20 years and tried their governance many times."

# 'Action against perpetrators of mining, post-matric scheme'

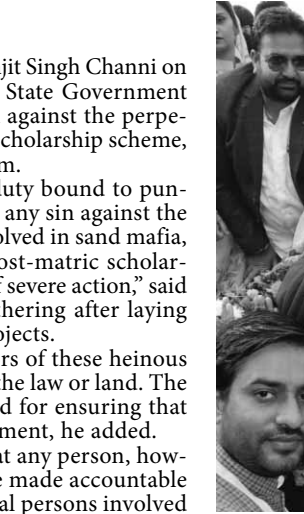
PNS ■ LUDHIANA

Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi on Thursday asserted that the State Government would soon take a stern action against the perpetrators of mining, post-matric scholarship scheme, desecration, and irrigation scam.

"Congress government is duty bound to punish every person who has done any sin against the state and its people...Those involved in sand mafia, sacrilege, irrigation scam or post-matric scholarship scheme will face severest of severe action," said Channi while addressing a gathering after laying foundation stone of several projects.

He said that the perpetrators of these heinous crimes will be punished as per the law or land. The State Government is committed for ensuring that sinners get appropriate punishment, he added.

The Chief Minister said that any person, however affluent he may be, will be made accountable for these sins. "Even the political persons involved



in these crimes against humanity will not be spared at any cost. Punjab Government is duty bound to put these culprits of the State behind the bars," he said.

Lambasting the AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal for "hypocrisy," the Chief Minister urged the people to remain cautious from his nefarious plans to grab power. "Kejriwal's promises are a bundle of lies which vary from state to state," he said.

Citing an example, Channi said that in Punjab, he is promising an allowance worth Rs 1000 to women every month, but in Goa, the same allowance promised by him is Rs 5000.

"As a fact of the matter, it is a dubious character of Kejriwal and company and people must be cautious of this. Contrary to this, the State Government is making strenuous efforts for the well being of every strata of society," said Channi adding that no stone is being left unturned for the well being of common man.

of issues and concerns raised by them.

The poll panel also reviewed overall poll preparedness with the District Election Officers-cum-Deputy Commissioners and CPs or SSPs of all 23 districts as also the Chief Electoral Officer, State Level Police Nodal Officer, and the CAPF Nodal Officer and also the Health Department nodal officers.

The ECI team also met with nodal officers of enforce-

ment agencies. Besides, discussion on administrative support, budget and election related arrangements were also held with the Chief Secretary, DGP, Home Secretary, Secretary Finance, Secretary Health and other senior officials of the State.

CEC Chandra said that the political parties have raised their concerns about misuse of money and distribution of liquor and drugs in the forthcoming Assembly polls.

"The Commission met leaders of two national and six state-level political parties...After meeting them, we reviewed poll preparedness with district electoral officers and other nodal officers, including those from Excise, Income Tax, RBI. We also discussed strategy to curb distribution of liquor, money, and freebies during elections," he said.

"The political parties raised certain concerns. They were

# ECI to keep close tab on movement of narcotics, money

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Amidst all the hullabaloo about drug menace in Punjab, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has decided to keep a close tab on movement of narcotics and money for checking narco-politics and ensuring free and fair elections in the state.

Concluding its two-day Punjab visit on Thursday, the country's election regulator has issued strict instructions to the Deputy Commissioners and also all the enforcement agencies to step up their vigil to ensure that "inter-state and cross border movement of drugs, liquor, and cash is effectively checked."

The poll panel asked the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) to check the inter-state movement of drugs. Directions were also issued to deal seizure of liquor, drugs, and cash with a heavy hand.

Besides, the Commission has also sought a weekly report from all the agencies. At the same time, the ECI maintained that to check the use of drugs, money, liquor, it has already drawn an action plan, which would be reviewed during its next visit.

The details of the ECI full commission's visit to Punjab were shared by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra, who made it clear that conducting "inducement-free and ethical elections" is their prime importance.

"The Commission has zero tolerance towards abuse of money power or government machinery," he asserted while addressing the media after holding series of meetings with various representatives, officers during two-day visits.

During the visit, the ECI team met the representatives of national and state level political parties and took cognizance



of issues and concerns raised by them.

The poll panel also reviewed overall poll preparedness with the District Election Officers-cum-Deputy Commissioners and CPs or SSPs of all 23 districts as also the Chief Electoral Officer, State Level Police Nodal Officer, and the CAPF Nodal Officer and also the Health Department nodal officers.

The ECI team also met with nodal officers of enforce-

ment agencies. Besides, discussion on administrative support, budget and election related arrangements were also held with the Chief Secretary, DGP, Home Secretary, Secretary Finance, Secretary Health and other senior officials of the State.

CEC Chandra said that the political parties have raised their concerns about misuse of money and distribution of liquor and drugs in the forthcoming Assembly polls.

"The Commission met leaders of two national and six state-level political parties...After meeting them, we reviewed poll preparedness with district electoral officers and other nodal officers, including those from Excise, Income Tax, RBI. We also discussed strategy to curb distribution of liquor, money, and freebies during elections," he said.

"The political parties raised certain concerns. They were

concerned about law and order situation in elections and distribution of drugs and liquor. They asked for deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). They also raised issue of inequitable treatment by district authorities and partisan behaviour," added Chandra.

The CEC added that the political parties have asked for 100 percent VVPAT use and 100 percent web-casting at polling booths. "Cutting across the party lines, they wanted EC

to take steps for fair conduct of elections, and we have assured the parties that our endeavour is to encourage maximum voter turnout and free and fair elections," he said.

Chandra added that the political parties have mentioned "money power" as a cause for concern along with liquor and drugs.

"The Commission has reviewed the concerns cited about law and order situation with the District Magistrates and Police Officers. Concerned officials have been directed to ensure speedy execution of non-bailable warrants (NBWs); and speedy disposal of pending cases of the electoral offenses from the previous elections," he said.

CEC Chandra said that vulnerable constituencies have been identified, and "adequate CAPF deployment will be ensured so that no one is able to unduly influence the voters or intimidate them."

**OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Webcasting to be arranged in all polling stations except those in border districts which come under shadow areas
- 165 all-women managed polling stations to be set up with all-women polling staff, including women security personnel
- To boost morale, PwDs to exclusively manage 56 polling stations
- Linking voter card to Aadhaar will help in deleting duplicate votes, maintaining purity of voters
- Punjab's women voters surpassed one crore mark out of state's total 2.2 crore voters
- All polling stations to be located on ground floor with assured minimum facilities like drinking water facility, toilets, ramps, wheelchair, electricity, volunteers, shades, help desks, etc
- Emphasis on development of rural polling stations
- Polling booths to be COVID-safe; all polling stations to be sanitised and kept COVID-free



सत्यमेव जयते  
Government of Rajasthan



**Ashok Gehlot**  
Chief Minister, Rajasthan



“Extending heartiest greetings on the completion of three years of the state’s sensitive, transparent and accountable government. I wish for the happiness, prosperity, healthy life and all round development for the people of the state. Come, let us together take steps for the all-round development of Rajasthan with full devotion and commitment, and play our role with mind, promise and duty by being a partner.”

Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan

**Happy people, prosperous Rajasthan - These 3 years brought smile on every face**

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### ● Excellent Corona Management

Rajasthan Model State. Praised All Over the World.  
Free treatment provided to the people of nearby states also

### ● Resolution of ‘No One Should Sleep Hungry’ during Corona

Financial assistance of Rs 5,500 each family given to 32 lakh destitute families

### ● Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana

Each family is getting free treatment of Rs 5 lakh

- Election Manifesto announced as a policy document  
70% promises fulfilled

- Loan of approx Rs 15,000 Crore of 21 lakh farmers waived off till now

- No increase in electricity rates for farmers for 5 years

### ● Mukhyamantri Kisan Mitra Urja Yojana

Grant of Rs 1000 per month on electricity bills  
Electricity bills of small farmers are almost zero  
Grant of Rs 18,000 crore released so far

- 1 lakh unemployed got Government Jobs

One Lakh recruitments under process, appointment to be made soon

- Medical Colleges opening in 30 out of 33 districts in the State

### ● Indira Mahila Shakti Yojana

Fund of Rs 1000 crore for women empowerment

### Udaan Yojana

- Distribution of free sanitary napkins to all adolescent girls and women

### ● Mahatma Gandhi English Medium Schools

87,293 students enrolled so far  
1200 schools are being opened in every village and town with a population of more than 5000

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on the occasion of completion of  
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**Saturday 18 December, 2021**

Energy, Water Resources, PWD, Public Health  
Engineering Department, Urban Development,  
Local Self-Government, Forest, Dairy, Agriculture  
and Cooperative Department

**Total Works - 2512 Total Amount - 13186 Crore**

**Sunday 19 December, 2021**

**Launch**

**Udaan**

Scheme of free distribution of sanitary napkins to all  
adolescent girls and women and inauguration and laying  
of foundation stones of various works

and

schemes of Home, Women and Child Development,  
Medical and Health, Social Justice and Empowerment,  
Minority, TAD, School/Higher/Technical Education, Skill  
and Employment, Disaster Management, Information  
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**Total Works - 1207 Total Amount - 1306 Crore**

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**Department of Information & Public Relations, Rajasthan**

# Work on permanent solution for Delhi-NCR pollution: SC

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Supreme Court directed the Commission for Air Quality Management on Thursday to invite suggestions of the public and experts about a permanent solution to the problem of air pollution in Delhi-NCR.  
A Bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana took note of a report filed by the Commission which informed it that a decision to lift the ban on certain industries has been taken.  
"The committee's report states measures that have been taken. So far as construction activities have been taken it's been stated that a decision will be taken tomorrow. We will list the matter in the first week of February. Meanwhile, we direct the commission to invite suggestions of the general public and experts about a permanent solution to the pollution," the bench also comprising Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant said.  
Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that

operation of industrial processes related to milk, dairy processing, manufacture of drugs, life-saving medicines and medical equipment has been permitted. He said some industries were permitted for eight hours, some industries said their nature of industries is such that eight hours is not sufficient. "We have asked them to have a continuous process but five days not seven days. And we have staggered industries so they don't function on the same days," Mehta said.  
"Thermal power plants that are closed will remain shut but more will not be closed. Decision on construction activities will be taken tomorrow. Hospital constructions are permitted, while trucks, etc continue to be banned," he submitted.  
Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for the petitioners in the case, said only short term measures have been proposed and the problem of air pollution, long term permanent measures are needed.  
The bench asked him to submit suggestions which



would be considered by an expert group constituted by the commission. The commission has told the top court that milk and dairy processing units, medicines, drugs and life-saving equipment industries have been allowed to resume full-time operations.  
Besides these, paper and pulp processing industries have been allowed to work five times a week while paddy, rice industries and textile, garment

# Eye on Omicron, States told to be ready with O2, equipment

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Taking cue from the rapid surge in new Omicron variant cases in various countries and in India where tally has touched to 73, an alarmed Center has asked the States and Union Territories to monitor their availability of oxygen supply, equipment, ventilators and concentrators among other things on a daily basis to ensure that there is absolute preparedness to tackle any rise in the number of infections.  
In India, Omicron cases are gradually inching up. From 25 on December 4, the cases have risen to 73 with more States coming into its grip. In the wake of the rapid spread of the 'super-variant', Omicron, Maharashtra recorded 32 cases till Wednesday — the highest in the country — prompting the state government to extend the Covid-safety curbs in Mumbai till December 31 with new rules. Rajasthan was second on the list with 17 cases.  
In a review meeting with the states and UTs on Wednesday, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan advised states to ensure the gap between equipment and systems deliv-

ered to the districts and installed at the healthcare facilities is reduced to zero. States have also been asked to conduct mock drills of all installed and commissioned PSA plants to ensure that they are fully operational so that oxygen of required quantity, pressure and purity reaches the intended patients at their bedside. These drills are to be completed by the end of December, the health ministry said.  
Uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen in sufficient quantity is of critical importance to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, the Centre said.

While equipment and systems have been sanctioned and delivered, in many states these have not been sent to district health facilities and when delivered, some have not been made functional, Bhushan said.  
State nodal officers were requested to streamline coordination with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), HLL Infra Tech Services Limited (HITES) and Central Medical Services Society (CMSS) for resolution of electricity-related and site-related issues for ensuring quick operationalisation of the entire medical oxy-

gen supply infrastructure supplied to them.  
So far, a total of 3,236 PSA plants have been installed in the country from various sources with a total commissioned oxygen capacity of 3,783 MT. Moreover, 1,14,000 oxygen concentrators are being provided to states under PM-CARES (1 lakh) and 14,000 from Emergency Covid Relief Package (ECRP-II), the government said.  
It was also pointed out that ECRP-II funds have been sanctioned to them for installation of 958 LMO storage tanks and medical gas pipeline systems in 1,374 hospitals.

# PM leads nation in paying tribute to 1971 war martyrs on Vijay Diwas

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the nation on Thursday in paying tributes to the armed forces on the occasion of 50th anniversary of India defeating Pakistan in the 1971 war. It led to the creation of Bangladesh.  
Modi laid a wreath and paid his respects at the National War Memorial on the occasion of Vijay Diwas, which is celebrated in commemoration of India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war.  
Four victory torches (vijay mashaals), which were taken across the country during the last one year, were merged into the memorial's eternal flame by the Prime Minister.  
These victory torches, which

were lighted by the Prime Minister exactly a year ago, were carried to various parts of India, including to villages of the awardees of Param Vir Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra of the 1971 war, as a part of Golden Jubilee year celebrations (Swarnim Vijay Varsh).  
Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and chiefs of the three armed forces were present at the National War Memorial during the event. Modi said on Twitter, "On this special day of Vijay Diwas, I had the honour of paying my respects at the National War Memorial and merging into the Eternal Flame, the four Vijay Mashaals which traversed across the length and breadth of the country over the course of last one year." December 16 is celebrated as Vijay Diwas.

# Indira took 32 bullets for country but ignored on 1971 war anniv: Rahul

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI**  
Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the BJP Government of ignoring the role of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the 1971 War as India celebrates the 50th anniversary of the victory, which he said was achieved as the country was united then.  
Referring to his grandmother and the former PM, Rahul said she took '32 bullets for the country' but her name was not even mentioned at an event in New Delhi on the anniversary of the victory over Pakistan.  
Parliament paid tributes to Bangladeshi freedom fighters and Indian armed forces on the 50th anniversary of Vijay Diwas, which celebrates India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war that led to the liberation of Bangladesh. Making a reference in the Lok Sabha, Speaker Om Birla remembered the exemplary courage displayed by freedom fighters of Bangladesh

as well as the Indian Army, the Navy and the Air Force.  
With Indira not being named in either of the house of Parliament, Congress members raised slogans hailing late prime minister Indira Gandhi for leading the nation during the 1971 war. In the Rajya Sabha, Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said the display of dauntless courage and gallantry by Indian armed forces in 1971 is still remembered with pride and zeal across the country, which continues to inspire the people of the nation.  
Congress accused the Government of indulging in petty politics by not remembering Indira Gandhi during the Vijay Diwas celebrations. "It does not make any difference because I know what she (Indira Gandhi) did for the country by giving her blood," Rahul said launching his party's campaign for the Uttarakhand Assembly polls during a rally at Parade Ground in Dehradun.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla welcomes Vuong Dinh Hue, Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam, and his delegation at Parliament. Vuong Dinh Hue is on a five-day visit to India

# French Defence Min to visit India today; boosting strategic, defence ties on agenda

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
India and France will discuss at length maritime security including the Indo-Pacific region during the talks here on Friday between visiting Defence Minister Florence Parly and her Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh.  
France on Thursday said the visit of its Defence Minister to India highlights its "centrality" in the French strategy for the Indo-Pacific and called for friendly powers to unitedly defend the rule of law and reject all forms of "hegemony" in the region. The Pioneer had reported about the visit on Wednesday.  
Parly will hold extensive talks with Rajnath with a focus on maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, industrial partnership and ways to deal with the threat of terrorism, the French Embassy said.  
It said she will call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and also meet National Security Advisor (NSA) SA Ajit Doval particularly for discussions on

regional security issues. The two had met in November during Doval's visit to Paris.  
Parly visited India in September last year primarily to attend a ceremony in Ambala that was held to induct the first batch of five Rafale jets into the Indian Air Force.  
The embassy said that since then, a total of 33 Rafale jets have been delivered to India "all perfectly on schedule despite the disruptions of the pandemic."  
"The minister will reiterate France's commitment to strengthening India's defence industrial base and its willingness to offer the best of its technology with a high 'Make In India' component," it said.  
In a statement, the embassy said she will be on an official visit to India on Friday to strengthen Indo-French strategic and defence ties.  
"This visit highlights France's engagement in the Indo-Pacific and the centrality of India in the French strategy. It comes in the wake of several major bilateral air, navy,

and army exercises this year," the embassy said.  
There have been growing global concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region. "In this respect, Minister Parly will detail the recently unveiled EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific that brings a multiplier effect to this comprehensive approach for the region," the embassy said.  
"Upon taking the presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1, 2022, France will make the Indo-Pacific and India a key priority," it said.  
The embassy said the "in-depth talks" she will have in India will cover all aspects of the wide-ranging Indo-French defence ties. It said the areas to be covered in the talks will include operational defence cooperation, particularly maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, industrial and technological partnership in line with Make in India and counter-terrorism cooperation.

# Yechury seeks removal of J&K HC Chief Justice

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Thursday urged President Ram Nath Kovind to remove Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (J&K&L) High Court's Chief Justice Pankaj Mithal for allegedly speaking 'against the Indian Constitution'. While addressing a programme organised by advocates' organisation affiliated to the RSS on December 5 at Jammu, Mithal spoke "against the Constitution of India", Yechury claimed in his letter to Kovind.  
"It has been widely reported in the media that Mithal addressed a seminar organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad and said the following, 'Inclusion of the terms secular and socialist in the Preamble of the Constitution had narrowed India's spiritual image,'" Yechury said. "Mithal is further

reported to have said, 'Sometimes, we bring amendments due to our adamancy,' he noted.  
Utterances against the country's Constitution by a High Court Chief Justice, that too from a platform which preaches a particular ideology, is an unpardonable offence which is in violation of the oath taken by him to carry out his constitutional functions, the CPI(M) leader asserted. "Mithal's conduct (is) unbefitting of the constitutional office of the chief justice that he is holding (and it) warrants his immediate removal from the said office," he said.  
"As the custodian of the Constitution, as the head of the State and as the appointing authority of Mithal, I request your good self to immediately set in motion the process for his removal from office to uphold the sanctity of the Constitution and independence of judiciary," Yechury said.



# PM: Organise cultural, sports events to 'identify talents'

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who held a breakfast meeting with BJP Members of Parliament from five Southern States on Thursday asked them to organise cultural, sports and other events in their constituencies to "identify talents" and to have constant outreach with the people like a common man.  
He also suggested that they visit the Kashi-Vishwanath Corridor that was inaugurated on Monday and experience its "glory." Members from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala interacted with Modi who had similar interaction last week with the BJP MPs from the North-East region.  
The Prime Minister is understood to have conveyed that MPs should be avoiding airport lounge and instead stand in queue, meet people and behave like a common man. He encouraged them to be proactive in their areas while assuring that he was there to win elections.  
The newly inaugurated Kashi-Vishwanath corridor figured prominently in the meeting, sources said.  
"The glory and the divinity of Kashi can only be experienced by visiting it," he is said to have told the MPs.

# NEET-PG COUNSELLING

## Resident doctors' body warns of withdrawing from all services from Dec 17

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Resident doctors in healthcare institutions under the platform of the Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA) have threatened to withdraw from all services, including routine and emergency services, from December 17 over their demand of urgent hearing of NEET PG counseling 2021, which is pending before the Supreme Court.  
The FORDA has written to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, in this regard. The resident doctors' associations across the nation have been protesting since November 27 against the multiple postponement of the NEET PG counseling and the subsequent admission of the fresh batch of resident doctors in the medical colleges. The RDAs have boycotted emergency and routine services in hospitals from December 6.  
However, the federation announced to suspend its agitation for one week after getting positive assurance from the Health Ministry on December 9.  
The federation has said in the letter that the resident doctors across the nation have waited patiently since the agitation was put on hold on December 9 for one week following assurance of expediting the NEET PG counseling and considering multiple factors, including patient care.  
With the threat of the third wave of Covid-19 looming large, the best the authorities could have done was to expedite the counseling and a subsequent admission process, but instead there is inaction and lack of urgency in the matter, the letter read.  
Urging the Health Ministry to take the measures for fast-tracking court hearings and for expediting NEETA PG counseling and admission process, the federation said that it is left with no choice but to go for withdrawal from all services, routine as well as emergency, in the healthcare institutions from December 17.  
Admissions for NEET PG have been delayed due to the dispute over revising the income criteria for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) quota. Approximately 16 lakh candidates too are waiting for the NEET UG Counseling 2021 this year.

# PM exhorts farmers to adapt agriculture to new requirements, challenges

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for the adaptation of agriculture according to new requirements, new challenges of the journey till the 100th year of independence and urged the farmers to shift their focus from 'chemistry laboratory experiments' and connect it with the 'natural farming' methods.  
The Prime Minister said that those who will benefit the most from natural farming, constitute about 80 percent of the farmers of the country. "Those small farmers, who have less than 2 hectares of land. Most of these farmers

spend a lot on chemical fertilizers. If they turn to natural farming, their condition will be better," PM Modi said.  
Addressing the summit on natural and zero-budget farming being held at Anand, in Gujarat through video conference, the PM Modi said, "In the past 7 years, with 'Beej se leke, bazaar tak' we have introduced several reforms to modernise the Indian Krishi sector with technology and reviving organic ways to protect mother nature."  
Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar were present on the occasion,

"The time has come to shift our focus from 'Chemistry lab experiments' to natural farming methods in the agriculture sector to support our environment. We have to take our agriculture out of the lab of chemistry and connect it to the lab of nature. When I talk about nature's laboratory, it is completely science-based," the Prime Minister said.  
PM Modi said today the more modern the world is becoming, the more it is moving towards 'back to basics'. "It means connecting with your roots. Who understands this better than all of you farmer friends? The more we water the roots, the more the plant

grows", PM Modi said. "We need not only to re-learn the ancient knowledge of agriculture but also to sharpen it for modern times. In this direction, we have to do research afresh, mould ancient knowledge into the modern scientific frame", he said.  
"There is no doubt that fertilizers led to green revolution. But this is also true that we have to keep working on alternatives. The main reason for this is we have to import fertilisers for other countries, which increases the cost of farming. Hence, there is a need to be aware (about natural farming)," PM Modi said.  
Citing the prevalent

notions of burning crop residue, Modi also expressed concern over the issue of stubble burning, saying the practice would actually harm the productivity of the agricultural land. He said time has now come to "correct the mistakes" that have become part of farming. He said that this happens despite experts having established that by setting fire to the field, the earth loses its fertile capacity.  
"It is a fact that fertilizers have played a crucial role in the green revolution. But it is also imperative to work on their alternatives. It is the right time to take big steps before the issues related to farming become severe," the PM said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Coming of age

The Govt wants women to marry not before they turn 21 so they can take better hold of their lives

The Union Government proposes to raise the legal marriageable age of women from 18 to 21, the same as men, by amending the marriage Acts concerned. The Government will have to clarify whether the amended age will be applicable to personal laws of all religions. The proposal is based on the suggestions sent to NITI Aayog a year ago by a Central task force that examined "matters pertaining to the age of motherhood, imperatives of lowering Maternal Mortality Rate, improvement of nutritional levels and related issues". The task force, however, was quick to point out that empowerment of women was its primary consideration. The proposal ticks all the right boxes. It is one more way to assert that child marriages and marriages of minors are illegal. It should steer families towards adapting to changing times and encouraging young adults to take independent decisions instead of rushing them into marriages the moment they get their undergraduate degrees. The younger generation does not want to be thrust into marriage just as they leave their teens and the proposal backs their thought. It clears the path for women to become economically independent and not be dependent on anyone for their livelihood. It paves the way for women to enjoy the right of choice, in terms of factors where they feel the pressure from their families the most — marriage, sex, or motherhood.



It is not that society's attitude towards women will improve once the amendments become law. It is that the country is making a conscious decision to create circumstances for women to take hold of their lives. We must remember that till 1978, women's marriageable age was only 15, which was then raised to 18. Women have moved up on the ladder of choice and parity in the four decades since then and are consciously pursuing higher studies and professional careers like never before. If the age limit ensures women are not married off before they attain mature adulthood, it is also a caution that they are not married off the moment they attain the age of consent. The point of the exercise is to respect women's right to consent. The limit also discourages the marriage of minors, a social evil still prevalent in several parts of the country. It means women should be able to convince their families that at 21 they are mature enough to exercise their choice about all things in life, including, and especially, marriage. Empowerment is not selective. It is not conditional. An empowered woman has the right to educate herself, make adult choices vis-à-vis relationships, take up employment and choose the time to have a life partner. The right gives her the choice to not choose as well. That is the critical point that society at large needs to understand. Otherwise, empowerment has no meaning. Needless to say, the biggest responsibility of respecting everything the proposal stands for lies with the State apparatus.

## PICTALK



Artistes dressed as Lord Hanuman take part in a procession to mark Hanuman Jayanti, in Bengaluru

PTI

## To \$ or not to \$

The Centre must not rush to ban it as cryptocurrency is the future, say experts

The winter session of Parliament is on and the Government is planning to bring a Bill on cryptocurrency. Locally, it is being dubbed a Bill to ban, or at least regulate, cryptocurrency. It had an impact on the crypto market and Bitcoin tumbled down 15 per cent before staging a recovery. For nearly 10 years now, cryptocurrency has been in news and its exponential growth has made instant billionaires, which led to a mad rush for Bitcoins. It has also opened an additional hawala route to transfer funds. Why is the Government so keen to ban it? Its alarm may have been triggered by the fact that crypto is being used for all the wrong purposes like procuring drugs and arms through the darknet, a hidden internet used by fugitives. The Enforcement Directorate has discovered that ₹4,000 crore were laundered out of India using cryptos last year. Though indeed a serious problem, crypto is not the only way to make such transactions. There are several other nefarious routes, and these continue unabated.

Cryptocurrency is not issued by any bank or Government but by anyone who wants to float his currency, just like airlines offering 'flying miles' or malls issuing their plastic money. Therefore, nobody — least of all a Government — has any control over it, which means regulating or banning it is nigh impossible, even though a number of Ministers have hinted that it may get banned. The Government can at best declare it to not be a legal tender, which isn't in most countries barring a few South American nations such as Ecuador and Chile. No doubt the concerns are many, but would it really be possible for the Government to control or, for that matter, ban it? If yes, would it be in the nation's interest? What happens to the 'Digital India' drive as experts feel that cryptocurrency is here to stay and, in future, it would be the mainstay for online transactions. The Government would do well to wait and watch rather than jumping the gun and deciding in haste. Except China, no country has so far banned cryptocurrency. In fact, many countries with weak currencies are promoting it. Even the US, the UK and France have not tried to control it. Crypto is the future and it won't be possible for any single nation to control it; it has to be done collectively. Banning it would in fact be a setback for 'Digital India'!

# The land of freedom and democracy

At Biden's 'Summit for Democracy', Modi appropriately underlined the point that the democratic spirit is integral to India's civilisational ethos

It is safe to assume that US President Joe Biden had in mind only electoral democracy when he invited many a head of Government to his December 9 'Summit for Democracy'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a telling point when he said that the democratic spirit is integral to India's civilisational ethos. Centuries of colonial rule could not suppress the democratic spirit of Indians. He avoided extending the proposition to a faith in the phenomenon of karma which is nothing, if not democratic, on a metaphysical scale. All humans have a fair and equal opportunity to be automatically rewarded with or denied a *bhagya* or fate commensurate with her/his karma without a divine entity, say God, having an overriding say in the *bhagya*. The belief in the operation of karma is like the law in physics that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. This is a faith as near science as yet possible.

Another symptom of Indian democracy is its history down the ages. Anyone who arrived whether via the Hindu Kush or Arabian Sea as the early Jews or other traders, the Parsees, British and many others were welcome, or at least allowed to stay and settle on Indian soil. No one was expelled regardless of being cruel or kind.

The idea behind the open welcome to one and all was that the world was one family, *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. An advantage of this policy — call it Indic — or conduct was that the culture-cum-civilisation became resilient and, regardless of its disinclination to fight, survived against any number and kinds of invasions. Few cultures could withstand it and survive. It began with the advent of the Caliph and his successors, from Arabia, on to Egypt and the Mediterranean countries certainly up to Spain. On the eastern side were Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan *et al* but, strictly speaking, not India. If conversions of the indigenous on any scale took place, they were well after the Islamic conquest.

After the Sepoy Mutiny was



over in 1858 AD, contact with Britain was reasonably close and frequent. As a result, Indian youth, even women, learnt the British ways of education, culture and socio-politics by the early years of the 20th century. By the time we won Independence, Indian leaders were ready to adopt electoral democracy as the means to choose Governments, at the Centre and in the provinces. We also chose a parliamentary system and not the American presidential style, although it would have been more suitable for India. Every adult was straightaway entitled to vote; those with more education, property or influence could exercise the advantage in their profession but not in an election. This insistence on equality is a hallmark of true electoral democracy. With the passage of every election, the Indian nation has learnt to participate better. There have so far been general elections at the Centre while the States have also been disciplined in holding their polls. The only significant interruption was the Emergency imposed by the Indira Gandhi regime in 1975; it lasted until early 1977. It was unpopular because it was declared only



THE INSISTENCE ON EQUALITY IS A HALLMARK OF TRUE ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY. WITH THE PASSAGE OF EVERY ELECTION, THE INDIAN NATION HAS LEARNT TO PARTICIPATE BETTER

with the intent of saving Indira's hold on power. Except for those 21 months or so, India's record of electoral democracy has been commendable.

Even when dealing with Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League during Partition, India's behaviour was, if anything, overdemocratic. In anticipation of the separation, the Qaid-e-Azam and his colleagues were insistent that all Muslims should be facilitated to migrate to the new Islamic country, their homeland. They were at times so vehement as to insist that all Muslims should migrate from India. In his rabid enthusiasm, one of the League bigwigs Sir Feroz Khan Noon thundered in February 1946 in Patna that if the Hindus in India came in the way of the transfer of Muslims to Pakistan, the League would re-enact the orgies of Chengiz Khan and Halaqu Khan.

Indian leaders remained calm and implied that Muslims were also their brothers and they should be allowed to decide for themselves. An Exchange of Population plan was proposed and supported by Jinnah whereby Muslims, preferably all of them, would migrate to Pakistan. And

reciprocally, all non-Muslims would move to India. Rajendra Prasad, who subsequently became the President of independent India, wrote a book entitled *India Divided* wherein he suggested that those Muslims who didn't emigrate could stay in India as aliens with visas issued by the Government of India. The same could be done by Pakistan to the non-Muslims who remained behind in that country.

Jinnah promptly agreed with Prasad. Yet, the other Congress leaders kept quiet. In the end, Pakistan, with the help of violence, loot and killing chased out most Hindus whereas Muslims were allowed to stay back in India if they wished. Some went away from East Punjab (India), UP and Bihar but compared to Pakistan, India did practically little. This is true to this day, 75 years later.

This was the practical essence of democracy. It is difficult to think of any other example of such devotion to freedom. India is indeed the land of freedom and, therefore, democracy.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### RECOGNITION FOR FEMALE ATHLETES

Sir — Hyundai Motors has struck a big blow for gender parity by signing a MoU with four Indian women cricketers. So far, it was only men who were given almost god-like status in advertisements across all media. Even on the world stage, not many women get as much attention as their male counterparts do. In Indian cricket, male sportspersons have always been given preference by companies as the face of their brands. India has produced some of the finest athletes in various sports who should have been promoted but were not. Therefore, this becomes an important and perhaps a bold step by the company.

This move will benefit not only the four players who have been signed up but also serve as an example for other brands to follow suit. It will also give an added impetus to the many budding sportswomen who are trying to make a mark in the national and international sports arena. There are many dedicated and elite women athletes in the country who need and deserve such recognition. Other brands, too, should go ahead with women brand ambassadors and promote gender equality. With more women reaching the top in various fields, it certainly seems as if happy days are on the way to the women of the nation.

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

### THE BAND OF BROTHERS, FOR EVER

Sir — The soldiers of our country have protected their land and its people forever. Their supreme sacrifice has always been the flame of example that can never be extinguished. They have never failed in winning the hearts of the people by their duty as well as gesture. Recently, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), jawans attended the marriage ceremony of martyred Constable Shailendra Pratap Singh's sister in Uttar Pradesh. The jawans, Constable Singh's colleagues, performed all the brotherly rituals and gestures in the wedding of his sister.

Constable Shailendra Pratap Singh was martyred in a terrorist attack in Pulwama last year. This gesture by the

## Sack the untenable Minister



After the Special Investigation Team's (SIT) finding that the Lakhimpur Kheri carnage was 'pre-planned', the position of Minister of State (MoS) for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni has become untenable. Propriety requires that he steps aside till a court finds his son, against whom the SIT found prima facie evidence, not guilty of running over four farmers and a journalist and killing them. Circumstantial evidence suggests that his son may have been abetted in the alleged commission of the crime by

him. The fact that the killing of farmers occurred following the MoS' threat that it would take him 'two minutes to discipline the protesting farmers' if he so wished, may not be sufficient to implicate him in the crime, still it is not without its own underlying import or significance.

One thing is clear, were the killers not drunk in power, the farmers would not have lost their lives. The inclusion of sections under the Arms Act in the charge-sheet spells trouble for Ajay Mishra since it was from his burnt vehicle that empty cartridges were recovered. By venting his anger on journalists, he can assert his VVIP status, but he cannot exonerate himself from the charges. The Supreme Court deserves credit for taking suo motu cognisance of the tragic incident and ordering a credible SIT without allowing the Modi Government or the Yogi Government to pervert the course of justice.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

by his contribution to the blockbuster Tamil film *Konjum Salangai*.

The song *Singara Velane Deva*, in which playback singer S Janaki sang in tandem with Arunachalam's nadaswaram, mirroring every phrase of the song, became a runaway hit. Though Janaki sang innumerable songs and won plenty of awards, Singara Velane Deva remains a watermark in her outstanding career. This song is an eternal favourite, tugging at the heartstrings of the young and old and transcending time and age boundaries. In an era when song-tracks are recorded separately and then synthesised, this immortal song was a pioneer for such an innovation more than five decades ago. It was veteran director MV Raman who directed this epic film in technicolour which reportedly cost around ₹40 lakh, something unheard of in those days.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Jawans has caught the eyes of the country and a video of them performing marriage rituals has surfaced on social media and is winning hearts. The jawans showed what brotherhood actually looks like. They not only protect our motherland but have also set benchmarks for us that brotherhood does not end with the end of one's life. It leaves a very deep message encouraging us to remember our brother and sister even after they've left the world.

Manoj Kumar Jena | Cuttack

**AN EVERGREEN MAESTRO'S CENTENARY**

Sir — A documentary film, *Paravaikalam*, has been made on nadaswaram maestro Karukurichi Arunachalam, whose birth centenary is being celebrated. The documentary has been titled so because the legendary artist would play the instrument effortlessly like a bird in flight. At the height of his fame, Karukurichi Arunachalam had a huge fan following which was enhanced

## SOUNDBITE

The Government's refusal to sack Ajay Mishra Teni is the starkest indication of its moral bankruptcy.



Congress leader —Priyanka Gandhi

At the moment, I have no plans to attend the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

Japanese Prime Minister —Fumio Kishida

We gained experience by doing 60-70 films but the new actors already have that kind of experience.



Actor —Akshay Kumar

There was no offence, no hesitation and not once was I told that you should not leave T20 captaincy.

India batsman —Virat Kohli

When the AAP forms Government in Punjab, the country's biggest sports university will be set up in Jalandhar.



Delhi Chief Minister —Arvind Kejriwal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S CONNECT: A CENTRAL ASIA POLICY

Despite a solid economic partnership with China, central Asia is well aware of its deceitful nature



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Leaders from five central Asian countries comprising of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan could be the chief guests on the next Republic Day. This comes close on the heels of the Russian president's tour to India that re-emphasized Indo-Russian strategic friendship. All this happens in the backdrop of India finding new strategic allies such as the US, and Russia's growing intimacy with China and Pakistan. It brings the focus on the big global powers trying to recalibrate their strategic, geo-political and military alliances in a post-COVID, multipolar and a more transactional world order. India, therefore, has made the right move by focusing on a specific regional cluster of nations, i.e., Central Asia, within its larger foreign strategy. If the heads of state of the five Central Asian republics attend as chief guests on January 26, 2022, it would be the second occasion after 2018 when regionally important ASEAN leaders had been the chief guests. It would



be a good optical moment for India to showcase its increased influence over the central Asian republics, specifically to China and Pakistan. The five countries share land borders with Afghanistan and some also with China, Russia and Iran. The Afghanistan situation is increasingly threatening to spill over and start impacting the rest of the landlocked neighbors and beyond. The immediate threats are a barrage of illegal Afghan immigrants spilling into these five countries and onwards to Russia and perhaps China and Iran, too. There are additional threats of drug and human trafficking, terror activities and smuggling and the whole of Eurasia starts feeling the tremors. India has a unique position in the relationship because of its historical, cultural and infrastructural linkages with these countries in the past; even though it is now isolated due to its evolving relationship with China and Pakistan. Pakistan, and by proxy China, would not spare a chance to use the Taliban-trained militia to create problems for India. China and Pakistan have significant political, economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan that serves as a key gateway into Eurasia for them. China, dictated by its expansionist foreign policy almost teetering towards colonization, steadily strengthened its economic relations with Central Asia over the years. The annual trade between them is approximately \$100bn compared to India's less than \$2bn with the same group of countries. That leaves a yawning gap for India to fill by nurturing a strong relationship with them at the earliest.

India was one of the first countries to officially recognize these Central Asian republics in the 1990s. Prior to that, India's engagement with them was through the erstwhile Soviet Union. In the past three decades, India has hardly developed meaningful partnerships with these geo-politically important countries neighboring Afghanistan. In wake of the current Afghan crisis and a gradual recalibration of the global order, lethargy of the past has to be dropped. Central Asia despite having a robust economic partnership with China is well aware of the deceitful nature of the Dragon. They are also more influenced by Russia and Iran for their security, and strategic interests. Russia, even though it has an empathetic view of China's narrative on the evolving global order, knows that India is a tried and trusted friend in the region who can be a balancing component. Therefore, Russia would also encourage these central Asian countries to expand their security, economic partnerships with India and have complementarity of policies on regional concerns such as terrorism, drug trafficking and Afghanistan. India has done well by rekindling its Central Asia connect policy (first conceived in 2012). The roads from Tashkent to Thiruvananthapuram and Samarkand to Surat need to be built. (The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Poor hygiene brings the economy down

The challenges in accessing adequate water supply, sanitation facilities and poor hygiene practices lead to a rise in diseases, causing increased economic burden



KRITHIKA MURALI SWATI MAHAJAN

Access to hygiene and sanitation facilities is a fundamental human right and one of the key determinants of health. According to the 2017 Household Survey for the Assessment of Toilet Coverage under Swachh Bharat Mission, 39.9 percent of India's rural population defecates in open and about 26 percent people do not use soap or detergent to wash their hands afterwards (National Sample Survey 2019). The challenges in accessing adequate water supply and sanitation facilities coupled with poor hygiene practices lead to a rise in diseases which can result in higher economic burden, exceeding investments in hygiene and sanitation systems.

The sixth Sustainable Development Goal is to 'Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all' by 2030. Since Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programs have a direct impact on health and socio-economic indicators, they have played a central role in improving India's overall health over the past decades. Hygiene, water and sanitation programs are a proven cost-effective investment for public health.

Ever since Independence, WASH Programs have been synonymous with the country's public health agenda. Too many lives have been lost to preventable diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, cholera, smallpox and other infectious diseases — all caused by poor hygiene, sanitation and inadequate water supply. As a result, the Government of India put emphasis on improving health indicators with a focused approach towards water supply and sanitation across the country.

In the 10th five-year plan adopted in 2002, the role of sanitation and hygiene were intrinsically linked to the objectives of reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR); Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR); ensuring completion of five years of schooling for all children by 2007 and providing potable drinking water in all villages. The Swachh Bharat Mission and the Jal Jeevan Mission are two recent government initiatives aimed at improving the supply of clean water and moving the country toward sustainable sanitation standards. While the Swachh Bharat Mission was aimed at achieving universal sanitation coverage, the Jal Jeevan Mission sought to ensure piped water supply for all households in the country; providing a significant boost to the rural water and sanitation industry. According to Lancet's 'The Global Burden of Disease' study, through these efforts India managed to add quality years of life expectancy to its people, indicating a substantial increase in the overall health of the country.

However, given the wide inequalities in the social and economic demographics of the population, India continues to experience mixed progress in terms of hygiene and sanitation-related outcomes.

The economic consequences caused by inadequate access to sanitation has reper-



TO OVERCOME THE ISSUES RELATED TO HYGIENE AND SANITATION AND PREVENT ITS NEGATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS, THE COMMUNITIES, GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE SECTOR AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS MUST MAKE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TOWARDS INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

(Dr Swati Mahajan is chief of party, USAID-NISHTHA project and leads the comprehensive primary healthcare portfolio for Jhpiego. Krithika Murali is leading the communication, documentation and knowledge management portfolio for USAID-NISHTHA project, implemented by Jhpiego. The views expressed are personal.)



ussions at multiple levels. Along with loss of GDP, communities suffer due to decreased productivity and increased expenditure on healthcare. A World Bank study on the economic impacts of poor sanitation in India estimated that the country lost the equivalent of 6.4 percent of GDP due to inadequate sanitation. Over 70 percent of it (₹1.75 lakh crore) was accounted for by premature mortality and health-related costs.

While social impacts are difficult to quantify, some risks are often exacerbated, affecting the most vulnerable groups including women, children and people with disabilities. For example, poor pregnancy outcomes, maternal mortality, violence and psychological stress are some of the serious consequences of lack of access to clean water and sanitation among women and girls. Inadequate access to WASH can also lead to vulnerability, rape and attacks, and the fear of such assaults can prohibit women and children from using toilets and sanitary facilities outside their homes at night. Similarly, problems of dignity, safety and privacy to maintain good hygiene get compounded for disabled persons as they experience increasing feelings of disgust, fear of violence, injury and shame due to lack of proper hygiene services.

To overcome the issues related to hygiene and sanitation and prevent its negative socio-economic impacts, communities, governments, private sector and development partners must make collaborative efforts towards innovative solutions. Governments and supporting agencies need to foster innovation, especially from the commercial sector, to make hand hygiene a universal practice in all contexts. To tackle issues of shortage of water,

inaccessibility and unavailability of hand washing facilities and soaps, new solutions are urgently required. Multi-stakeholder collaborations in such situations assume an important role in providing market knowledge and recommendations on enhancing hand hygiene and strengthening WASH facilities.

A collaboration between the World Bank, UNICEF, Johns Hopkins University, USAID and Unilever to form a Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing in 2001 is a case in point. More notably, Unilever has been involved in tackling epidemics such as cholera and has been able to reach over 1.2 billion individuals with programs and awareness campaigns through their Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition partners. Through close collaborations with Government/ public enterprises, HBCC has been able to advocate for hand and surface hygiene among the vulnerable slum populations even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interventions to promote hand hygiene should also be founded on a thorough understanding of what people care about, and should incorporate appropriate social norms to help build sustainable habits. The emphasis needs to move towards a transformative approach focusing on needs of the community, going beyond the benefits of WASH in sanitation research and programming and eliminating the less safe forms of sanitation. Projects like NISHTHA, USAID's flagship health system strengthening project being implemented by Jhpiego in partnership with Unilever, support various state governments in leveraging the Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) platform under Ayushman Bharat. One of the key

aspects of this project is the health and wellness session, where local communities are educated on the importance of healthy hygiene. Considering the local context, this project leverages on existing limited resources and funds to establish handwashing corners and appropriate social norms to strengthen handwashing behaviours.

Transformative approaches to hygiene and sanitation require stronger governance, management and increased accountability. There is a need to build capacities of health workers and sanitation workers, create mass awareness among the larger public and collaborate with the private sector and other partners for investing in the area of WASH. This would not only ensure access to sanitary facilities to households but would also empower people to take sustained action at local levels.

Overall, investments in toilet usage, hygiene promotion, increased access to potable water, and effective waste management are estimated to save India \$32.6 billion (₹1.48 trillion) or \$29 (₹1321) per capita, according to a Water and Sanitation Program report. Improved sanitation yields several economic benefits, including direct benefits such as avoiding illnesses (the sum of money saved on healthcare expenses), indirect economic benefits such as fewer sick days and a longer lifespan because these benefits permit people to work more. As estimated by WHO, every dollar invested in hygiene and sanitation provides a return on investment for the society of \$5.50 due to lower health costs, increased productivity and fewer premature deaths. Therefore, it is imperative to carefully shape policies and regulations that prioritize and adequately fund hygiene and sanitation.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

I WANT TO SEE THE BJP LOSE ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS. IT WILL BE *KHELA HOBEY* AGAIN.  
—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE



MAMATA BANERJEE HAD SAID SIMILAR THINGS IN 2014 AND IN 2019, AND ALL OF US HAVE SEEN THE RESULT.  
—BENGAL BJP PRESIDENT SUKANTA MAJUMDAR

Unifier's unflinching legacy: A tribute to Sardar Patel

Adhering to the ideals of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is taking initiatives to realise his goals

December 15, marks the death anniversary of the nation's great unifier, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The right tribute will be to adopt his ideas, actions and nationalistic spirit. The people of India will forever remain indebted to him for his leadership during the freedom struggle and his vision, wisdom, and statesmanship in the post-Independence era.

Starting his public life from being a municipal councillor in Ahmedabad to becoming India's Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Patel had a very granular understanding of the various stakeholders of governance, administration, their relevance, roles and responsibilities. His steadfast approach to handling the nation's complexities made



ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

(The writer is Union Minister of State for Culture & Parliamentary Affairs & represents Bikaner constituency in Lok Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)

him a responsible and reasoned voice of the masses.

With unflinching zeal and rare boldness, he handled the task of unification of the princely states. Patel's diplomatic maneuvers secured "accession" of these states and provided shape to the nation by bringing them in line with the constitutional framework. The unsuccessful unification of Kashmir turned out to be a grave mistake of Jawahar Lal Nehru under Shaikh Abdullah's pressure. On December 23, 1947, Nehru took J&K away from Patel's charge and placed it under Gopaldaswami Ayyangar. It hurt Patel deeply and in his reply to Nehru's letter, he expressed his will to resign. All three stalwarts of the constituent assembly, Bhimrao



Ambedkar, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Sardar Patel, outrightly opposed J&K's special status from the beginning. Intra-party power struggles and sheer hollowness of democratic values of Congress surfaced while choosing the Prime Minister of Independent India. Twelve out of 15 Congress Committees chose Sardar Patel for presidency, but still Pandit Nehru was selected. Socialistic leader Jayaprakash Narayan once remarked: "If Sardar Patel, and not Pandit

Nehru, had been the first PM of India, maybe, Partition of the country could have been averted."

Sardar Patel's famous letter of November 7, 1950, highlights his vigorous criticism of Nehru's foreign policy of in the context of mishandling of Tibet, China and Kashmir. This criticism finds consonance with Ambedkar's vision of foreign affairs. These Nehruvian interventions resulted in Sino-India and Indo-Pak wars over the course of our history. The 41-year delay in posthumously awarding Bharat Ratna to the Iron Man still highlights Congress's ill-will towards him. Sardar Patel was denied his fair share in history due to a lack of the rationality of Nehruvian and leftist historians. Thus, it is

imperative to bring a rational account of his monumental legacy to the new generations.

After his task of unifying India, the Iron Man of India was instrumental in making the Steel frame of India, i.e., creating a massive administrative grid through the All-India Services. He also decided to culturally connect the shared heritage and ethos of Indians by reconstructing the demolished Somnath temple that would depict the story of India's resurgence and victory of construction over destruction. Adhering to the ideals of Sardar Patel, the government under PM Narendra Modi is taking initiatives to realise his goals. The steel frame of India is further strengthened to prepare future-ready civil servants through Mission Karam

Yogi. This capacity-building program aims to overcome the modern challenges of a technologically connected world, facilitate ease of life to citizens, provide best governance and emerge as the world's best civil service.

The repeal of Article 370 was a well-articulated move to correct a historic blunder. The government is fulfilling the dream of Sardar Patel through the overall development of the Somnath temple complex.

On his 143rd birth anniversary, the 'Statue of Unity', the tallest statue in the world, was dedicated to the nation that radiates the wisdom of Sardar Patel and enlightens the path of the present as well as future generations. From 2014 onwards, his birth anniversary is

observed as National Unity Day. The Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat initiative further strengthens the sustained and structured cultural connection between different regions.

It is worth realising that our forefathers did everything for the ambience we have inherited. They had worked hard to institutionalise the framework that empowers individuals to attain their full potential and collectively scale new heights for the nation. As part of the ongoing 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the death anniversary of Sardar Patel is the apt moment to recall the supreme sacrifices of countless named and unnamed individuals and pay our fitting tribute by pledging to achieving the futuristic goals for building a New India.

US faces a double coronavirus surge as omicron advances

Washington: The new omicron coronavirus mutant speeding around the world may bring another wave of chaos, threatening to further stretch hospital workers already struggling with a surge of delta cases and upend holiday plans for the second year in a row.

ongoing and, in fact, accelerating. And on top of that, we're going to add an omicron surge," said Dr Jacob Lemieux, who monitors variants for a research collaboration led by Harvard Medical School.

France to restrict travel from Britain to fight omicron

Paris: France will sharply restrict travel to and from Britain because of fast-spreading cases of the omicron coronavirus variant, putting limits on reasons for travelling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival, the government said Thursday.

Moderna vax 'highly effective' against Covid variants: Study

Los Angeles: Two doses of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are highly effective against SARS-CoV-2 variants, but protection against Delta infection decreases over time, according to a study conducted in the US.

vaccines. But, MacInnis warned: "There's much more that we don't know about this variant than we do, including the severity." At the same time, Lemieux said, there seem to be fewer tools to fight it.

EU leaders to discuss rise of infections, spread of omicron

Brussels: European Union leaders are trying Thursday to coordinate action to tackle the surge of coronavirus infections across the continent and the emergence of the new omicron variant while keeping borders open.

Notice Inviting e-Tender No.SSA/Esst/KGBV-Utensile/3702021/7945 Date: 15.12.2021 Mission Director, Axom Sarba Siksha Abhijan Mission (Samagra Shiksha), Kahilipara, Guwahati-19.

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GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR Office of the Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti PHE, Ground Water Division, Sgr. Gist of e-Tender. NIT No: - e-PHE/GWDS/63 of 12/2021, Dated: - 15-12-2021

NIT No: - e-PHE/GWDS/63 of 12/2021, Dated: - 15-12-2021 For and on behalf of Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir e-tenders are invited in 02 Cover System for Construction of tube wells at below mentioned site for registered water well drillers/contractors as per the details given in tender document.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY Auction Notice No.: 13/2021-22 E-Auction Program for the Month of January-2022 All prospective bidders are invited to participate in the on-line public auctions being conducted for sale of scrap material.

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China's #MeToo victims face abuse, payback for going public

Taipei: Human resources and upper management wouldn't deal with her accusation of sexual assault, a former employee of Alibaba said. So she went into the busy cafeteria at the Chinese e-commerce giant's headquarters and screamed out her plight.

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen has book deal

New York: The former Facebook manager who startled the world this fall by leaking tens of thousands of internal documents and accusing her former employer of caring more about money than about public safety has a book deal.

TECHNOFAB ENGINEERING Regd. Office: 913, Hemkunt Chambers, 89 Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110 019, CIN: L74210DL1971PLC00512

Israel to donate 1 million Covid vaccines to African countries

Jerusalem: The Israeli government on Wednesday said it was donating 1 million coronavirus vaccines to the UN-backed COVAX programme. The Foreign Ministry said the AstraZeneca vaccines would be transferred in the coming weeks, a decision that was part of Israel's strengthening ties with the African countries.

NORTHERN RAILWAY Tender Notice No. :- NR/FUELLCELL/DEMUP/1/2021 Dt 15.12.2021 Open Tender is invited for "Hydrogen Fuel cell based DPRS with regenerative braking system 1200 KW DEMU"

5 children die in bouncy castle accident in Australia Sydney

Sydney: Five children died and four others were in critical condition on Thursday after falling from a bouncy castle that was lifted 10 metres (33 feet) into the air by a gust of wind at a school on Australia's island state of Tasmania.



Banking services hit as employees go on strike

New Delhi: Banking operations were impacted across the country on Thursday as lakhs of public sector bank (PSB) employees began their two-day strike to protest against bank privatisation.



Employees of various public sector banks shout slogans against the move to privatise their banks during a protest near parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

Shutters of many branches of PSBs like State Bank of India (SBI), Punjab National Bank and Bank of India were down on Thursday with a message informing customers about the strike.

According to AIBEA General Secretary C H Venkatchalam, about 20.4 lakh cheques worth ₹18,600 crore could not be transacted on Thursday. Public sector lenders, including SBI, had earlier informed customers that services in their branches might be affected due to the strike.

Sensex snaps 4-session slide amid firm global cues; IT stocks shine

Mumbai: Equity indices eked out modest gains on Thursday after a four-session losing streak, in tandem with an upmove in global markets despite a hawkish tilt by the US Federal Reserve.

feel the performance of the global markets would be critical in days to come. At the same time, we expect the buzz to continue in the primary market.

A rebounding rupee also bolstered sentiment, though unabated selling by foreign institutional investors capped the upside, traders said. After a choppy session, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 113.11 points or 0.20 per cent higher at 57,901.14.

Sectorally, BSE IT, energy, tech, consumer durables and oil and gas indices climbed as much as 1.25 per cent, while power, utilities, realty and bankex nursed losses.

Bajaj Finance led the Sensex gainers' chart with a jump of 2.61 per cent, followed by Infosys, Titan, Reliance Industries, HCL Tech, M&M and Nestle India.

Rupee posts first rise in 7 days, ends 23 paise higher at 76.09 a dollar

In contrast, Maruti, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Auto, Sun Pharma, IndusInd Bank and SBI were among the laggards, slipping up to 1.51 per cent. Domestic bourses closed flat with a mild positive bias despite an upbeat economic outlook by the US Fed.

Mumbai: The rupee on Thursday clocked its first gain in seven sessions, rebounding 23 paise to close at 76.09 against the US dollar as participants took note of weakening of the greenback after US Fed turned hawkish.

"The Fed chair announced their decision to double the pace of asset tapering by early 2022 rather than a mid-2022 paving way for three interest rate hikes, backed by a rapidly strengthening economy and employment gains amid inflation concerns," he added.

"Rupee traded positive on US Fed statement of tapering, but economic data relevance did not support the dollar index, helping the rupee to take support near 76.25. Going ahead rupee can be seen range of 75.75-76.25," Jateen Trivedi, Senior Research Analyst at LKP Securities said.

COMMODITY TRADING

Sebi comes out with cut-off time framework for risk parameter file generation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Thursday came out with a framework pertaining to cut-off time for generation of last risk parameter file used for collecting margins from commodities traders.

Electric vehicle mkt to see investment of ₹94,000 cr in next 5 years: Report

New Delhi: Electric vehicle market is likely to attract investments of ₹94,000 crore over the next five years and is expected to generate business opportunities in the real estate sector, according to a joint report by Colliers India and Indospace.

Cryptocurrencies a challenge for emerging markets, regulation needed: IMF chief economist

New Delhi: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Gita Gopinath has made a strong case for regulating cryptocurrencies, saying it will always be a challenge to ban them as they operate from offshore exchanges.

emerging economies than in advanced economies," she said while addressing an event organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) on Wednesday.

The report 'Electric Mobility in Full Gear' mentioned that the electric vehicle (EV) industry in India is currently at a nascent stage but it is likely to grow, backed by government initiatives and a move towards recognising climate change.

Gopinath also suggested a global policy and co-ordinated action for regulating cryptocurrencies.

trying different things, there is obviously challenges to banning (cryptocurrencies and assets)," Gopinath, who is slated to be the first deputy managing director of the IMF early next year, said.

India is taking a step towards sustainability and has vowed to cut its carbon emissions. At the recently concluded CoP26 summit, India pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. In India, the transport sector is currently the third-largest emitter of CO2.

"I think cryptocurrencies are a particular challenge for emerging markets. It seems to be more attractive to adopt cryptocurrencies and assets in Countries around the world are

The new framework will be effective from January 15, 2022, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular. The regulator, in November 2019, had mandated that the cut-off time for the purpose of determining minimum threshold of margins to be collected by members from their clients will be 5 pm for commodity derivative contracts that are traded beyond banking hours.

Currently, 15 Indian states have either approved or notified EV policies, with six more states in the draft stage. States like Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Meghalaya are focusing on demand incentives, whereas southern states and Uttar Pradesh are focusing on manufacturer-based incentives.

As both banking facilities -- RTGS and NEFT -- are functional round-the-clock on all days now, Sebi said its circular issued in November 2019 "stands withdrawn".

Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (GMVN) E-TENDER NOTICE. Invites tenders from Nationalized Banks / M.N.C./ Government / Semi Government / N.G.O. / Other reputed organisations/ Private Person for providing office building of GMVN on Lease/ Rent situated at C-50, Sector-62, Noida performing permissible institutional activities for the period of five years.

C.G. Police Housing Corporation, Raipur. Manual Short Tender Notice (1st Call). Manual tenders are invited for providing and fixing of Fencing with punched tape Concertina Coils (PTCC) conforming to defence specification No.IND/ENGG./PRO/1245 B or COAE/5660/1602a & its connected drawing of 1050mm dia in close condition in pyramid shape i.e. 3 tiers two row at bottom and one at top the five rows of RPT i/c transportation and cost of all materials and labour etc. complete.

UJVN LIMITED. Date Extension Notice-1. Last date of submission of hard copies of bids :Upto 17:00 hrs of 23rd Dec 2021. Last date of submission of soft copies of bids :Upto 17:00 hrs of 23rd Dec 2021. Date of opening of bids on website : at 12.30 hrs of 24th Dec 2021.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE. ICICI Bank. Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) R/W Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, (on underlying pool assigned to ICICI Bank by Dewan Housing Finance Ltd.) in relation to the enforcement of security in respect of a housing loan facility granted pursuant to a loan agreement entered into between DHFL and the borrower, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

BSES wins prestigious Greentech Awards

New Delhi: There is a lot of outstanding work taking place at BSES. This is being increasingly recognized and appreciated by the industry, stakeholders and the peers. In the latest instance, BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) have been adjudged as winners of the coveted 'Greentech 8th CSR India Award' for outstanding achievements in the category 'Corona Warriors'. Apart from this, BRPL has also been bestowed with the 'Greentech Corporate Governance Award 2021'.

C.G. Police Housing Corporation, Raipur. Tender No. J0773.3075/CGPHC/Bldg/2021. TENDER NOTICE (1st Call). Online Tenders are invited according to Key dates for (Group-A) Supply, Construction and erection of Prefabricated Barracks (13 Nos) for Paramilitary Force of sandwich puff panels along with developmental works at Padergaan, Antargah Block, District - Kanker & (Group-B) Construction of Road, digging & construction of bund temporary kitchen, morcha, toilet block, entrance gate, site leveling and temporary koth at Padergaan, Antargah Block, Distt - Kanker. Tender System No. - 8952 & 8953 which are available from 16.12.2021 (17:30) to 28.12.2021 (17:30pm) in CGPHC Portal https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in along with other details.

UJVN LIMITED. NOTICE INVITING TENDER. For and on behalf of UJVN Ltd., Executive Engineer (Civil), Pashulok Barrage Rishikesh, invites sealed & separate tenders from interested contractors for following works: 1. Tender Notice Reference: NIT No. 20/2021-22/EE(C)/Pashulok Barrage:-Construction of Parapets on left side of chilla Power Channel from kaudia bridge-I to kaudia bridge-II.

IMPORTANT NOTICE. This is notified for the information of rail passengers that Railways have decided to revise timings of Train No. 12618 H.Nizamuddin-Ernakulam Mangla Lakshadweep Express (Daily) at the following stations as per details given below:- Revised Timings of 12618 H.Nizamuddin-Ernakulam Mangla Lakshadweep Express (Daily) w.e.f. 20.12.2021

PUBLIC NOTICE. Mrs Jyoti Basanti Minj intend to purchase Flat No. 803 Block G4 DDA LIG flat Rohini Sector-28, New Delhi from Mr Raja Jephther Beck. I wish to create mortgage on the said property for a loan from SBI, RACB/Robini/Pearl Best Height, I NSP Pitampura Delhi 34 (B code 15653). Original possession letter dt 26/7/12, Original possession slip, Original NOC for water and electricity issued from DDA relating to the property have been lost. FIR has been lodged with police vide LR no 1061553/2021 dt 16/12/21. In case any party has any claim towards the said property the same should be lodged with the intending party and also with the above stated branch of SBI within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

RAILMADAD HELPLINE NO. 139. For any kind of information such as detailed Time -Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App. All kinds of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 may please be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER P.H.E.D CIRCLE TONK. NOTICE INVITING TENDERS THROUGH e-procurement system. NIT No. 26/2021-22. Online tenders through e-procurement system are hereby invited, on behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan from enlisted contractors with the department in appropriate class under the Government of Rajasthan and enlisted contractors with CPWD/Postal, Telecom, Railways, MES, other state Govt./ Central Govt, undertaking / organization equivalent to 'AA' Class of Rajasthan provided they meet out prescribed eligibility criteria for the following works. The details may be seen on the DIPR web site and tenders can be downloaded from website http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in.

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER. No. RMSA/CW/RIDF-XXVI/1475/2021/22. Date : 15.12.2021. The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam invites bids for the following building works from registered Class-I contractor under PWD (Building), Assam having experience of similar nature of work in Assam.

Table with 6 columns: Sl, Package no., Name of work, Approximate value of work (Rs. in lakh), Time of completion (in month), Earnest Money Deposit (General, Reserved category), Tender cost. Contains 5 rows of tender details.



**Bollywood**  
 'Oh My Ghost is scary in some parts and funny in others. I think that's a clever combination.'  
 —Sunny Leone

# PARADIGM SHIFT

Quack Quack shares a yearly round-up report of everything in online dating in 2021.

By RAVI MITTAL

If the year 2020 seemed grim for this planet, 2021 took it upon itself to be the chilling reminder that it wasn't so much about the year but the general times we have come to live in. Every domain and every sector has gone through seismic changes, both for the better and the worse. However, very few realms have observed an entire paradigm shift across 2021 as significantly as that of online dating.

Chronicling and charting out the key observations in the year 2021's dating trends becomes of paramount importance to assess where online dating stood and where it is headed. This is where a survey conducted by an Indian dating app, QuackQuack, assumes importance.

The pandemic has indeed thrown a few curveballs towards individuals wanting to date. Males and females alike are rapidly coming to terms with a new universe of online dating every single day and embracing more self-paced and healthier ways of dating, an evolving process that shall be the norm soon.

The key takeaways from the survey can be best summarised as below:



## VACCINATION IS A MUST

With the world changing ever so slightly every millisecond, we are coming to terms with the notion that a new normal is not just beckoning but is very much here. The survey corroborates this very trend whereby a distinct eight out of every 10 people, who were part of the sample size of the survey, voiced their opinion in favour of compulsory vaccination as a precursor to a date.

A fairly significant 65 per cent and 75 per cent of people belonging to the age groups of 18-20 and 21-30 respectively agreed upon the same. The importance of a double jab was uniformly highlighted across both the top cities as well as the tier two cities of the country as 75 per cent and 70 per cent of the sample size belonging to each felt that the first step towards a safe date would have to be complete vaccination of the other. It was also observed that 80 per cent of the women and 70 per cent of the men who were part of the survey sample felt the necessity of inoculation prior to dates.

## DATING WITH A PURPOSE

The survey outlined the notion that, owing to the protocols surrounding Covid in place, people have had very little reason to venture outdoors, thereby leading them to reflect on the nature of the dates they have found on the dating app as against plunging for matches with a sense of desperation. 47 per cent of the

women and 35 per cent of the men, who were part of the survey, vouched for this behavioural change and also commented that the process of reflection and introspection led them towards healthier relationships than before. The difference in the trend of intentional dating between individuals residing in urban areas and those belonging to rural or semi-urban areas was comparatively

similar. While nearly 37 per cent of urban teenagers found that their dating process had taken a purposeful turn, 39 per cent of those from rural or semi-urban areas felt likewise.

## HAILING FROM THE SAME LOCATION IS PIVOTAL

The survey found that a staggering 58 per cent and 56 per cent of individuals ranging between the age groups of 18 to 20 and 21 and 30 respectively preferred pairing up with those belonging to a different location as it would help expand their radius of search for a prospective partner. This trend seemed to be more prominent within women as 58 per cent of them were comfortable dating partners from other locations as against a relatively lower 50 per cent among men. Further investigation into a demographic analysis of the sampled data revealed that 46 per cent of those residing in major metro cities preferred dating beyond the confines of their home location whereas a comparatively higher 57 per cent chose the same in the case of smaller cities as well as towns. The numbers indicate that a significant number of individuals do

not find location to be a major barrier when it comes to dating and are flexible with having partners from a place other than their own.

## VIDEO CALLING VERSUS MEETING IN PERSON

The survey revealed that a major percentage of 56 per cent in the age group of 18 to 20 preferred having their first date on a virtual medium and were risk-averse owing to the ongoing Covid situation across the country. However, in contrast, 43 per cent people in the age bracket of 30 and above, belonging to a more old school approach, chose to meet in person whilst following all the necessary safety precautions.

In conclusion, this survey should be seen, more than anything, as a stepping stone towards more such insightful study aiming to explore the contemporary trends in the dating arena along with the ebb and flow of user habits and behaviors that is bound to accompany the vast expanse i.e. online dating.

(The author is the founder and CEO of QuackQuack.)



## NEW PARTY ANTHEM

The video of A R RAHMAN and DALER MEHNDI's song, *Saala Garda Uda Diya*, from *Atrangi Re*, goes viral. By TEAM VIVA

*Saala Garda Uda Diya* is the new slang that is trending. The internet went gaga over the music video which crossed two million views in the first few hours of its video release. The love for Daler Mehndi's voice with AR Rahman's music and Irshad Kamil's lyrics can be seen in the comment section of the song on YouTube. One person commented, "A R Rahman plus Daler Mehndi gave us *Rang de Basanti* way back in 2006 and the same magic is seen in 2021".

Mehndi shares his experience of working with Rahman and for the first time with Kamil. He expressed, "I remember getting a call from Rahman *saab* and I was extremely happy to be his only choice for this song. My excitement doubled when I heard that Kamil is the lyricist".

He added, "Whenever Rahman *saab* and I come together, there's some magic. Receiving such a warm response from the audience in the first few hours proves that our magic works".

Even after 25 years in the music industry, Mehndi never disappoints his audience. There is something new and exclusive in every song and every work he does. He is the powerhouse of the Bollywood music industry and his songs are a full power-pack deal. There is no doubt that *Garda* is the new party anthem of the year.

Zindagi ropes in Fawad Khan and Sanam Saeed for their forthcoming original which will stream on ZEE5. The yet-to-be-titled series is helmed by critically acclaimed director Asim Abbasi who also directed Zindagi's first original *Churails*.

The show blends together magical realism and supernatural fantasy within a family reunion setting, and deals with themes of love, loss and reconciliation. In this series, Khan plays a single parent — charming but ridden with guilt for what he has lost. With his son, he tries to be every bit the father his own father was and wasn't. Saeed plays the central female character in the series. Harboursing otherworldly secrets, she takes it upon herself to heal, and make whole, everyone who surrounds her.

The series has gone on floors and a large part of it has been shot in the picturesque Hunza valley.

Speaking on the announcement of the new series, Shailja Kejriwal, from Zee Entertainment Enterprises said, "We've had a very rewarding association with Fawad, Sanam and Asim individually with their past projects and are thrilled to bring them together on this one. This time we've experimented with the genre as well as the storyline. While audiences have often seen shows on family dynamics this one is infused with realms of mystique

## Blend of mystique and fantasy

Actors FAWAD KHAN and SANAM SAEED roped in as Zindagi's yet-to-be-titled show. By TEAM VIVA



and fantasy, making it a fascinating watch."

"I think Zindagi is taking bold and brave decisions when it comes to storytelling. It's nat-

urally evolving into a platform that encourages diversity of opinion and inclusiveness for all filmmakers and material ranging from everyday mainstream

to avant-garde and noir. I feel there's a place for everyone in this artistic landscape," shared Khan.

Saeed expressed, "I'm

thrilled to be collaborating with one of my favourite directors Asim Abbasi again, this time for Zindagi. This new project embarks on a fantastical journey with some stunning performances by a very meticulously picked cast. I can't wait for everyone to see the magic that's been created in this beautiful limbo land."

"Zindagi has become a pioneer, not only for India-Pakistan OTT collaborations, but also for encouraging artists to push boundaries of narrative storytelling. I experienced that with *Churails*, and I am experiencing that again with this project. Under Shailja's support and guidance, Zindagi has truly become a home for many filmmakers like me, where we can see our craziest, wildest ideas come to fruition. I am feeling blessed, and very hopeful that this new project will have a very strong emotional resonance not only with the South Asian viewers, but a global audience," said Abbasi.

One of the greatest and most loved contemporary actors, Khan and Saeed have been known for their superlative work in the popular television series *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*.



Bollywood actors Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt and director Ayan Mukherji during their forthcoming film *Brahmastra's* promotion at Thyagraj Stadium in New Delhi



—Photos by Pankaj Kumar

## TRENDBLAZER

### RANBIR KAPOOR MISSES HIS FATHER

Actor **RANBIR KAPOOR** is all set to return to the big screen with his superhero saga *Brahmastra*, helmed by Ayan Mukherji. He revealed that Rishi Kapoor used to bombard him with a lot of questions about the film.

"I miss my father terribly today. I remember during the making of this film, during these last how many ever years, he kept fighting with Ayan and me and kept questioning us, 'What are you doing?' 'Who takes so long to make a film?' 'Who spends so much money? Ranbir, you're not making one penny on this film. India mein koi VFX film nahi dekhta.'" the *Barfi* star confessed.

### fairtalk

PANKAJ TRIPATHI



"Being a village boy, I never thought of becoming an actor when I was young, so meeting my favourite cricketer was out of question. Now, when 83's offer came to me and as part of the workshop I met Sunil sir and Kapil sir, it was emotional. It was a pinch-me moment for me. The young boy from the village has come this far — I am emotional about it."

### dailytalk

DHANUSH



"Somehow, Anand L Rai found me. He saw one song of mine from a film called *Aadukalam*. He wanted somebody like that to play Kundan (the character in *Raanjhanaa*). And then he was crazy enough to fly to Kolkata the same day he spoke to me, because I was there performing for an event. Then he spoke to me for ten minutes about impossible achievements. I was amazed by the conviction he had."

### BEN AFFLECK ON HIS PAST

Hollywood star **BEN AFFLECK** says that if he and his former wife Jennifer Garner had not divorced in 2018, he would feel trapped.

Affleck shared, "We probably would've ended up at each other's throats. I'd probably still be drinking. It's part of why I started... because I was trapped. I was like 'I can't leave 'cause of my kids, but I'm not happy, what do I do?' I would drink a bottle of scotch and fall asleep on the couch, which turned out not to be the solution."





