

Presidential Elections in July next will test opposition strength and unity

By: Harihar Swarup
New Delhi, April 9:

In July 2002, APJ Abdul Kalam became choice for President as the ruling Atal Behari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance did not have enough votes to get anyone from its ideological family elected. Fifteen years later, the NDA-led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was

much better placed yet it tried for a consensus pick.

Though there was consensus, the NDA candidate Ram Nath Kovind got the support of friendly regional parties. This year, the NDA will again support of friendly parties to get its choice elected as the 15th President of India. It may make an effort towards consensus, though it is likely to be dis-

missed as tokenism by the opposition.

President Kovind will complete his tenure on July 24. A President who often insisted on following constitutional morality, Kovind has had a successful and controversy-free tenure so far. He made 29 foreign visits till December and rejected all seven mercy petitions that came before him. The official website says that he has discharged his duties with "foresight and humility".

Kovind was a surprise pick but it fell into the BJP's outreach to dalits. He was only the second dalit to occupy the post after K R Narayanan. There is already much discussion regarding whether Kovind will get NDA's backing for the second term. Given Modi's style of secrecy, no one is willing to guess. In fact, in 2017, in in-

formal setting, then BJP chief Amit Shah has teased journalists about how none of them could guess Kovind's name before he was picked.

Gubernatorial appointments are another indication into Modi's style of functioning. In eight years of NDA rule, most of the governors have been replaced after a five-year term so that veteran politicians could be rewarded with the post. While leaders who are 75 or older are not part of union cabinet, there are half a dozen governors who are over 80. Kovind himself is 76.

After Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, no President has had a second term. But that may not help Modi and Shah from nominating Kovind again. Another convention has been to pick a governor, a vice president, or a senior minis-

ter for the top constitutional post. The only two prominent groups not to be represented in the president's office are OBC and tribal. In 2017, the name of BJP's tribal leader Draupadi Murmu had made the rounds. If a new candidate is picked, the choice will be politically significant and will be used to send a message to voters.

Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's tenure will also be over by August. Naidu has been an active vice president, commenting on government's policies, and pushing and praising it. As Rajya Sabha chair, Naidu has been a stickler for the rulebook and has managed the house amid incessant protest. He has also not shied away from commenting on social issues like when he lashed out against hate speech in January.

contd. on page 4

Singngat MLA plans to create an education hub in his constituency



IT News
Imphal, April 9:

The Singngat MLA Chinlunthang had interacted with the Singngat areas Civil Society Organisation, CSO, leaders and Singngat areas government teachers at the Singngat Government HS/meeting hall on Friday.

During his speech the MLA highlighted about his plan to make Singngat as the hub of education and learning with quality in tune with the modern hi and fi development in the back drop of the various government development schemes coming into the areas.

Noting about the various steps he undertook for provisions of education earlier like in Behiang and Khuangkhai areas, he envisioned to turn Singngat Higher Secondary School into a college by making it functions properly and setting up of matric and higher secondary examination centre at Singngat.

Singngat has the potential to accomplish this vision as it is endowed so far with 8 high school and this should be harnessed he stated while making an appeal to the CSO leaders and government teachers to extend cooperation.

Regarding the issues raised CSOs pertaining to abolition of appointment of substitute teachers and making of government institution functions properly at Singngat by making the SDO function from Singngat and not from Churachandpur town he said he is at the nascent stage and will initiated steps phase

A CSO leaders identified as Khaiminhang during his sharing suggested the making of Government appointed teachers turn up and work from their place of posting stressing about the need to make the Singngat SDO functions from Singngat and not from Churachandpur so as to ensure that he cannot be oblivious about the hard realities of the peoples problems.

Singapore base beauty industry chooses Diana as brand ambassador

IT News
Imphal, April 9:

Lumiere International Pvt. Ltd. Singapore has chosen Mayanglambam Diana as Mrs. Worldwide Special Queen Brand Ambassador 2021-2022.

Diana, originally held from Manipur and is presently settling in new Delhi. She is the first to get the recognition in India.

Mayanglambam Diana had earlier joined International and National Beauty Contest and had brought laurel of the country. She was crown as Mrs. Beauty Queen at several contests.

Lumiere International Pvt. Ltd. is a Singapore base Beauty Industry established in 2002.



The Editorial:

Taking time in fielding the vacant Ministers: Is the CM helpless?

It may be a government matter, however, people speculate more as BJP's organisational matter for taking such a long time in fielding the vacant ministerial berth in the N. Biren Singh 2.0 government.

Just a couple of days ago most of the Imphal-based media carried a report about the probable induction of at least 4 ministerial berths out of the 6 vacancies. However, till today there has been no such induction. Perhaps, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh may have a hard time choosing the best among the BJP MLAs who may perform at the best level. Or maybe, the Chief Minister is waiting for completion of the recruitment of posts at various departments which are yet to be announced. This is being speculated as the people have heard time and again about the Chief Minister's announcement to make the state free from corruption. If he himself supervise the whole recruitment process till the declaration of the result, his promise to make a corruption Free State in the recruitment of government post or in any other government-related matters may be proven.

If that is the case then, it will not be wrong to speculate that the Chief Minister is still confusing about whom to trust among the elected BJP MLAs.

On the other hand, there are reports spreading around about the Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's inability to choose his cabinet colleagues of his choice as the central leadership have limited his power. Source said that the central leadership of the BJP took some advice from the Chief Minister as well as the state BJP president; however, the final decision for fielding of vacant ministerial berth is in the hand of the central BJP leadership.

This means that the BJP led state government is directly controlled by the central leadership, which also means that the state of Manipur today has been reduced to the status of Union Territory.

Such a situation is created due to lack of unity among the BJP MLAs as well as a lack of trust in the leaders they have elected. Let's hope a better powerful government like the one in UP where the state authority has full power in choosing ministers by the Chief Minister. This lies to the wisdom of N. Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur.

KKL Rising Day

IT News
Imphal, April 9:

The 4th Rising Day of the Kangleipak Kamba Lup was celebrated yesterday at Jupiter Yambem Centre, Paona Keithel. KKL resolved to guide the youth of the state away from intoxicants and show the right

way. KKL felicitated Chief Advisor of All Assam Manipuri Youths Association (AAMAYA) Ksh Kundal and appreciated the move of the AAMAYA when some organizations from Nagaland blockaded the life line of Manipur, Imphal-Dimapur Road.

Many drugs under price control no more affordable for majority

Poor patients doomed to suffer after the highest ever price hike

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak
New Delhi, April 9:

From April 1, 2022, the majority of drugs have become costlier, and the poor patients are doomed to suffer, which is being termed as the highest ever price hike in the country. Even the drugs under price control mechanism many seem no more affordable for the majority of the common people, since they have already spent almost all their savings and surplus money during the last two years of COVID-19 crisis. It is the direct effect of the announcement of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) of India made

on March 25 to allow an increase on the prices of essential drugs by 10.76607 per cent, much more than 1.97 per cent in 2017, 3.43 per cent in 2018, 4.26 per cent in 2019, and 1.88 per cent in 2020.

The first week of price rise on majority of medicines have passed in chaos on the medical stores across the country. Simply because medicine shops were asking for the supposedly increased prices on their older stocks of medicines on which older prices were printed. New stocks of medicines are slowly coming into the market with new prices printed on, and during that time many drugs are being sold on

higher prices than the printed ones, which can be termed nothing less than "being sold in the black market".

Such a market condition is being reported by patients and common people from across the country despite the Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had tried to allay the concerns about any increase in prices of medicine early this week. He had said that "These are the drugs that are priced a few rupees and therefore, a 10 per cent WPI increase may lead to the price rising by a few paise." The real value of his expression "a few rupees" is perhaps known to only those millions of poor

households in extreme poverty who even don't possess a surplus "single rupee" and are compelled to live somehow on less than \$1.9 per day, and often go without even a paracetamol tablet getting costlier every year. Moreover, Mr Union Health Minister was factually wrong even on pricing, since official ceiling price wef 1.4.2022 for 872 drugs in the list is ranging from a few rupees for a tablet, capsule, ml or a pack to hundreds or thousands of rupees, several of them from Rs 1000 to little over 44,000. Since the list is on public domain anyone can see the complete list of these essential drugs and their price since

April, 2022.

Nevertheless, actual drug market condition in terms of price had already been hitting common people hard, since the prices of drugs already had gone up 15 to 130 per cent for essential drugs. Paracetamol is just one example the price of which went up by 130 per cent. Prices of many other drugs had went even by about 300 per cent. Even in the beginning of 2022 many drug manufacturers had increased prices of over 460 drugs by an average 5 per cent. The present announcement has only exacerbated the condition. The prices of drugs have already gone up by 15-20 per cent in the last few days.

The further price rise (when new packs with new prices would come in the market) would also increase the actual taxes paid even on life saving essential drugs which would ultimately increase the out-of-pocket expenditure of people on medical care.

NPPA, the apex price regulatory body under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, came with the move of allowing such a steep price hike on the basis of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data provided by the Office of the Economic Advisor, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The annual change in

the WPI worked out to be 10.76607 per cent during the calendar year 2021 over 2020.

NPPA fixes the ceiling price of scheduled drugs as per the provisions of the Drugs (Price Control) Order, 2013 every year. This year NPPA has fixed ceiling prices for 886 scheduled formulations and 4 scheduled medical devices and fixed retail prices of 1,817 new drugs.

As for the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of the non-scheduled medicines, a drug manufacturer is at liberty to fix it at its will subject to an increase of not more than 10 per cent yearly for any particular formulation.

(IPAService)

Age gracefully and spread happiness all around

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



The elders are said to be a treasure trove of experience and wisdom. The post-retirement age is a time of freedom and fulfillment for many others it is

a phase of health related issues. Physical problems can be kept to a minimum if preparations are made in advance and lifestyle is maintained properly. In our country, there is no such guarantee of social security for the elderly as is provided in many developed countries. Yet there are a few government schemes which can be availed at this age. The total number of elderly people above 60 years of age in India is 140 million, which is about 10 percent of the total population of the country. It is estimated that by the year 2050, the number of elderly people in the country will swell to more than 300 million. An employment portal is also to be started by the government for the elderly who are willing to work post retirement.

A few welfare schemes are being run by the government to support the senior citizens in the country. There is the Prime Minister's Senior Citizen Scheme, in which a minimum pension of Rs 3000 to a maximum of Rs 10,000 per month is given. It is a pension scheme for citizens above 60 years of age in which 8 percent interest is given on deposits for ten years. Basic medical facilities for senior citizens in government hospitals and government health centers are given either free of cost or at very subsidized rates. There is a separate window for senior citizens for priority in medical tests and other government works etc. Indian Railways gives a concession of 40 percent to men above 60 years, and 50 percent discount to women above 58 years, on tickets in all types of trains. Similarly, almost all airlines offer senior citizen discounts of up to 50 percent on domestic flights. The front two seats are reserved for senior citizens in roadways buses of all states. Legal disputes related to senior citizens are heard in the courts on priority basis and efforts are made to expedite the procedure.

In Himachal Pradesh, it has been announced to give old age pension to citizens above 60 years of age from 1st April onwards. Earlier this pension was available only to those who attained the age of 70 years, which has now been reduced by ten years. The monthly pension will be Rs 1000 for 60 to 69 years age category and Rs 1700 per month for those above 70 years. To avail this pension, senior citizens will have to apply in the office of the District Welfare Officer. Age is sure to grow with time and physical weakness is also to follow soon. How to age gracefully, happily and with dignity, depends on the individuals. Some people consider old age to be a curse and they keep themselves and others unhappy. On the other hand, there are many senior citizens who spend this phase of life with laughter, joy and enthusiasm. Post retirement life can be lived happily if preparation is done in advance for financial, mental and physical matters. This is the time when people can take a tour of the country, read books and can indulge in activities which require free time.

Self-introspection the way to success



By: Vijay Garg

In the Indian society, the high expectations that are attached to the students about the examinations, they become the cause of their mental pressure in the course of time. As a result, they are often under stress and are unable to produce the expected results. Undoubtedly, these examinations have special significance for children, but they cannot be the ultimate goal of life. The Prime Minister's address to the students before the recent examinations is a pleasant initiative. He has boosted the morale of the students by participating in such programs in the past as well. But this

time the educational scenario of the country is very challenging. Many academic sessions have been affected by the Corona crisis. Anomalies of online education have come to the fore. Students are in the examination arena with half-completed studies. Obviously students will go through mental pressure. However, CBSE has divided the examinations into two parts due to disruption in teaching work. Along with this, the syllabus has also been cut to a limit. Despite this, the need of the hour is to boost the morale of the students so that they can appear in the examinations in a better way without any stress-pressure. Undoubtedly, it is the responsibility of the teachers and parents to give psychological support to the students so that they can take the examinations without any stress. By going to the examination hall with ease, students will be able to take the examination in a better way. In fact, under fear and pressure, some students, despite being educated, start forgetting in the examination hall out of desperation.

Ironically, in our society, getting high percentage in examinations has been made a matter of prestige. Without knowing that every child's receptivity, ability and analytical abilities are different. Every child is unique in itself. Nature develops it for a specific purpose. This difference also occurs at the biological and psychological level. Therefore, not every child can be judged by the same standard of marks. There are many examination taking institutions in the country at the central and state level and there is a huge difference in their educational standards. There is a difference in the exam pattern and marks standards. In such a situation, driving everyone to a standard can never be called natural justice. It is necessary that the examinations evaluate the children on a comprehensive level. Many a times it happens that students who score third class marks in examinations achieve peak success in various fields. Of course, there should be exams, marks should be scored, but marks should not be taken as the ultimate goal of life. As has been attempted in the New Education Policy, priority should be given to skill development in children. The education system should make children a sensitive and responsible citizen, not sow the seeds of frustration and depression in them, whose fatal consequences we can see as incidents of ending lives when the results of board examinations come. We have to make children mentally strong.

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail: imphaltimes@gmail.com. For advertisement kindly contact: - 0385-3590330 (O). For time being readers can reach the office at Cell Phone No. 9862860745 for any purpose.

Story of South Asian countries: 'Bangladesh' a 'miracle story' while Sri Lanka and Pakistan 'disaster tales'

By: John Rozario

The South Asian Island nation of Sri Lanka is currently going through an extreme economic crisis. Foreign exchange reserves have fallen so low that school examinations have been closed indefinitely due to a lack of imported paper. In addition to cooking gas, there has been a shortage of kerosene or petrol. Blackout has started due to a lack of electricity.

The situation is so dire that due to inflation, high unemployment, and shortages of almost all necessities, many Sri Lankans are fleeing their country in the hope of a better life abroad. Countless Sri Lankans are now being forced to do something other than their main occupation as not everyone can afford to leave the country. Or living an inhuman life. The suffering of the people of that country is coming up in the world media.

The country has never been in such a bad situation since independence in 1947. To cope with the situation, the Sri Lankan government has asked for a new loan of 1.5 billion US dollars from neighboring India. When Sri Lanka faced problems, Bangladesh provided 250 million in currency assistance for the first time. This was the first loan from Bangladesh for any country. They again asked for a loan from Bangladesh. Besides, they have been repaying loans of different countries through the exchange of goods.

Sri Lanka was quite capable of human resources and internal prosperity. Then why their situation? In this regard, economic analysts have brought forward various factors, from which different countries can learn lessons in their current and future plans.

Sri Lanka has undertaken several mega projects in their country for more than a century. These include seaports, airports, roads, and other projects that are currently considered unnecessary and redundant. Different governments of Sri Lanka have taken loans from different sources at home and abroad. As a result, their foreign exchange reserves gradually run out. According to the country's economists, there has been little foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka in the last 15 years. Instead of foreign investment, various governments have focused on borrowing.

The country's government has issued sovereign bonds since 2007 to raise money. This type of sovereign bond is sold when the expenditure is more than the income of a country. Such bonds are sold in the international capital market to raise money. That is what Sri Lanka has done. But he did not give much thought to how the money would be paid. At present, Sri Lanka has a debt of 12.5 billion for that bond alone. Besides, the government has also borrowed from domestic sources.

The once-self-sufficient country is also in dire straits due to tax cuts, reduced income from tourism remittances, and unplanned decisions in agriculture. Different countries including Bangladesh have to learn from this situation. The world economic situation has begun to change rapidly since the Russia-Ukraine war, at which time any country could fall into a new crisis. Although our foreign exchange reserves are in a good position so far, the situation in Sri Lanka can be kept in mind in future state plans. At the same time, we are hopeful that friendly Sri Lanka will soon be able to return to normalcy with the help of various countries and organizations around the world.

On the other hand, the economy of these 220 million countries (Pakistan) is in turmoil. Pakistan is in debt, amounting to 130 billion USD. At the same time, inflation seems to have picked up speed (12 percent). Over the past three years, Pakistan's progress has stalled.

The recent political instability has created a crisis in Pakistan. The recent political unrest has shaken the business and industrial sectors. The country's economy is already fragile due to the depreciation of the rupee, declining reserves, rising commodity prices, and revenue shortfalls.

Not only has the currency depreciated, but the wheel of Pakistan's economy has slowed down over the past three years. The recent political unrest has shaken the business and industrial sectors. The instability in Pakistan's politics is showing no signs of abating anytime soon. A few days before the fall of the government, it affected the economy. The Pakistani rupee is depreciating. The rupee depreciated against the dollar

on Thursday, hitting a new record. 188 Pakistani rupees are available for one dollar. Never in the history of Pakistan has the rupee depreciated so much.

The biggest challenge for Imran Khan's government was the economic crisis and he claimed that he would change the country's economy. He won't go to the IMF, reduce debt, and bring down inflation.

During his tenure, there has been an increase in the amount of debt, ranging from inflation, to a record fall in the value of the Pakistani currency, with the finance minister changing it three times. According to Prime Minister Imran Khan, despite the improvement in the economic situation, the Corona epidemic broke out and global inflation soared.

On the other hand, the small size of Bangladesh is currently a wonder of development. The implementation of big projects is now just a matter of time. City facilities have also been ensured in the villages. Visible flyovers on most of the roads in the capital. Metrorail will be launched in a few days. The long Padma bridge is not a dream now, it is real. Economists speculate that the GDP growth rate could rise to one percent for the bridge. This bridge has given new hope to the people of the south. The implementation of such a project with the government's own funding was at one time unimaginable. The country is moving forward with a sound plan.

The present government in Bangladesh has shown great prudence and foresight in the progress of Bangladesh. For this reason, there is nothing to be afraid of seeing the situation of any country as a nightmare. For example, the mega project Padma Bridge and Metrorail utility and how much is already known to everyone. 100 economic zones are being formed. Investment is coming from different countries. Foreign exchange reserves are adequate (45 billion USD, January 2022), and remittances are satisfactory. It can be said that every economic foundation of Bangladesh is still in a strong position.

During the Sri Lankan corona, the tourism industry was almost destroyed by giving more importance to the health sector. Unnecessary

development projects have been done with loans, the return of which has not come the organic agriculture sector has come to a standstill and the tax on public welfare has been greatly reduced but the economy of Bangladesh was also active in Covid emphasis has been laid on revenue collection and the agricultural sector of Bangladesh is very strong

According to him, Bangladesh is in a positive position in terms of foreign exchange reserves, remittances, and export earnings.

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves now stand at more than 45 billion, despite rising import costs. With which we will be able to meet the import cost of six months. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, is less than two billion dollars. It is not possible to meet the cost of one week's import. So, Bangladesh cannot be compared with Sri Lanka.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's growth rate was way above Pakistan, even before the pandemic; in 2018-19 it was 7.8% compared to Pakistan's 5.8%. Various international organizations, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the Economic Intelligence Unit, have identified Bangladesh's economic development as a "wonderful puzzle". while the current economy of Bangladesh is 410 billion, the size of Pakistan's economy is about 260 billion.

Bangladesh has improved its quality of life, economic strength, prosperity, education, and research in every field. Due to the global coronavirus pandemic, Bangladesh's growth has slowed down. But where the growth of all the developed countries of the world was negative in these years, the achievement of Bangladesh was also noticeable.

Successful statesman Sheikh Hasina has achieved full potential to move from a least developed country to a developing country. It has been possible because of People's hard-working, strong leadership. Political stability, the flow of FDI, empowerment of women, unique poverty alleviation model, inclusivity of economy, etc. That is the story of South Asian countries: 'Bangladesh' is a 'miracle story' while Sri Lanka and Pakistan are disaster tales.

India's Booster Dose Policy is Anti-poor

Poor below 60 with less immunity will suffer most

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

India's booster dose policy announced on April 8 by Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is clearly anti-poor, since de facto they cannot get vaccinated with booster doses against COVID-19, though theoretically they are also eligible to have it at private vaccination centres along with any adult aged 18 years or above.

As per the announcement, all coronavirus vaccine beneficiaries aged 18 years and above, who have completed nine months since the administration of the second dose of the coronavirus vaccine, will now be eligible to get booster doses from April 10 at private vaccination centres. They will be allowed to visit private vaccination centres for their third dose or precaution dose. This facility would be available in all Private Vaccination Centres.

Since this decision of the government excludes availability of the booster or precaution doses in government vaccination centres it can

be termed as anti-poor and anti-people, because the entire population of the country have been dependent on getting vaccines since its launch from January 16, 2021. Moreover, despite mismanagement, wrong policies, policies in favour of the private players etc, people fought for their rights and the Modi government was compelled to vaccinate all the citizen of the country free of cost at government vaccination centres. There was also a time when the centre tried to shed its responsibility and made policies for private vaccination drive which was thwarted by the stiff opposition of the people.

Vaccination drive has to be centred around the government vaccination centres. So far, about 96 per cent of vaccine beneficiaries aged 15 and above have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose while about 83 per cent of them have received both doses. Over 2.4 crore precaution doses have also been administered to healthcare workers, frontline

workers, and senior citizens of 60 years and above. Additionally, 45 per cent of beneficiaries aged 12 to 14 years have received the first dose already. Most of these achievements have been accomplished through government vaccination centres.

Not allowing for booster doses at government vaccination centres is now a bad decision in favour of the private players allowing them to derive maximum benefit from even the COVID-19 crisis. The poor people, though eligible to get vaccinated at private vaccination centres, cannot get the booster or precautionary doses because they don't have enough money to pay.

Moreover, in the last two years of the crisis, common people have already spent their savings and many have become indebted. Getting booster doses for three to five members from the same households will not remain affordable for them. They will therefore simply avoid getting precautionary or booster

doses due to paucity of fund in the family which will not only make them vulnerable for further infection but also will in turn make the whole society vulnerable for future mutations of the coronavirus. It would weaken the India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The effort of shedding its own responsibility by the Modi government in favour of private money making lobbies is therefore unacceptable. More so because new mutants are just emerging in several states and many of them have withdrawn COVID-19 curbs, including the mandatory wearing of masks and social distancing. Centre should also take note of its own warning to five states - Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Mizoram, and Haryana expressing concerns over the recent rise in the COVID-19 cases. The states have also been advised by the centre to monitor the spread of infection and bring down positivity rate.

contd. on page 3

India records 1,054 fresh cases, 29 more deaths

Agency
New Delhi, April 10:

With 1,054 fresh cases, India's COVID-19 tally has climbed to 4,30,35,271, while the death toll due to the viral disease has gone up to 5,21,685 with 29 more fatalities, the Union health ministry said on Sunday.

However, the number of active cases of the infection has further declined to 11,132, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am.

The active cases account for 0.03 per cent of the total caseload, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate remained at 98.76 per cent, the ministry said.

A reduction of 233 cases was recorded in the active caseload in a span of 24 hours, it added.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 0.25 per cent and the weekly positivity rate was 0.23 per cent, according to the ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has gone up to 4,25,02,454, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.21 per cent.

The total number of Covid vaccine doses administered in the country has exceeded 185.7 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 2020, 40 lakh on September 5, 2020 and 50 lakh on September 16, 2020.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 2020, 70 lakh on October 11, 2020, 80 lakh on October 29, 2020, 90 lakh on November 20, 2020 and the one-crore mark on December 19, 2020.

The country crossed the grim milestone of two crore Covid cases on May 4, 2021 and the three-crore mark on June 23, 2021.

The 29 new fatalities include 21 from Kerala.

Of the 5,21,656 Covid deaths reported so far in the country, 1,47,816 are from Maharashtra, 68,360 from Kerala, 40,057 from Karnataka, 38,025 from Tamil Nadu, 26,156 from Delhi, 23,499 from Uttar Pradesh and 21,200 from West Bengal.

The ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," it said on its website, adding that a state-wise distribution of the figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

14th Manipur State Film Awards conferred to winners, Governor La Ganesan vows possible support for Manipuri Cinema's growth

IT News
Imphal, April 10:

The prestigious 14th Manipur State Film Awards, 2022 were distributed yesterday during Award Ceremony, held at Palace Auditorium of Manipur State Film Development Society.

The award for the Best Feature Film was won by 'Eikhoigim Yum' directed by Romi Meitei and produced by Chingshubam Sheetal. Best Direction Award was handed over to Bobby Haobam for the film 'Rongdaif'. For the non-feature section, the Best Non-Feature Film was bagged by 'Ayekepasinggi Pukkei' directed by Debendra Thiyam and produced by Brojeshwori Maibam. The film also won the awards for Best Film of a Debut Director, Best Audiographer, Best Music Direction and Best Voice Over or narration. 'Pabung Syam' directed by Haobam Paban Kumar and produced by Films Division, won the Best Biographical Film. The film also won the award for Best Director. The Best Social issue for non-feature film was bagged by Beyond Blast, a film by Saikhom Ratan, on a budding artist whose legs were amputated because of bomb blast.

Speaking during the award distribution ceremony, Governor La Ganesan opined that much of the nation's history is being imparted through movies. The Governor, while noting that cinema is a powerful medium, exhorted the State's filmmakers to produce films that showcase the diverse and rich culture of Manipur. He also vowed that he will extend all possible support to facilitate growth of Manipuri Cinema. The Governor also exuded confidence that efforts of MSFDS will elevate the status of Manipuri Cinema and encourage the State's budding filmmakers, technicians and enthusiasts.

Water Resources and Relief and Disaster Management Minister Awangbow Newmai, in his presidential address, stated that one has something to learn from every film. Meanwhile, Lifetime Achievement Award winner, renowned filmmaker L. Banka Sharma expressed gratitude on being honoured with the prestigious award. He confided that he had always longed for the



medium, exhorted the State's filmmakers to produce films that showcase the diverse and rich culture of Manipur. He also vowed that he will extend all possible support to facilitate growth of Manipuri Cinema. The Governor also exuded confidence that efforts of MSFDS will elevate the status of Manipuri Cinema and encourage the State's budding filmmakers, technicians and enthusiasts.

Water Resources and Relief and Disaster Management Minister Awangbow Newmai, in his presidential address, stated that one has something to learn from every film. Meanwhile, Lifetime Achievement Award winner, renowned filmmaker L. Banka Sharma expressed gratitude on being honoured with the prestigious award. He confided that he had always longed for the

award. Earlier during the day in observation of 'Mami Numit', the birth of Manipuri Cinema, Manipur's legendary filmmaker, Aribam Syam Sharma fumed over remark by few personalities that Manipuri Cinema will evanesce considering its present state of affairs. The internationally acclaimed filmmaker expressed desire for the younger generations to strive harder, seek advice from the seasoned artists and get professionally trained to foster growth of Manipuri Cinema. He further pointed out that there are negligible technological disadvantages in the present day. Besides, Manipur has a rich culture, he said and refuted the idea that Manipuri Cinema will fade away.

The attendees of the 'Mami Numit' observation, paid floral tributes to departed pioneers of Manipuri Cinema at the Ningshing Nungbi, Memorial Stone erected inside the MSFDS complex.

The awards distribution ceremony of the 14th Manipur State Film Awards, 2022 amid its ambience of jubilation and cheers, witnessed a turning point as a third gender actor was honoured with Best Actor Award in a first in Manipur.

Even as third gender persons have long been associated with Manipuri Cinema when it comes to make-up and costumes, the award distribution ceremony gave a reason for everyone to celebrate as Bishesh Huirem strode on the MSFDS Palace Auditorium stage in the spotlight to receive the award from Manipur Governor La Ganesan during the ceremony here today.

PAN-Aadhaar Linking: Pay Rs 500 Fine to Link Aadhaar-PAN Now or Face These Consequences

Agency
New Delhi, April 10:

The last date to link PAN-Aadhaar has already passed last month, and those who have not done the job will have to face certain consequences. However, it would not mean that your PAN will be rendered inoperative, the Central Board of Direct Taxes, or CBDT, has said in its latest circular. The board, which fixes income tax-related rules, has said that those who have not linked Aadhaar-PAN can do it by paying a fine of up to Rs 1,000 until next year.

The CBDT has extended the deadline to link PAN-Aadhaar to March 31, 2023, but such people who are yet to link will have to pay a fine. A penalty of Rs 500 is to be paid "in a case where such intimation is made within three months from the date referred to in sub-section," that is by June 30, 2022. Beyond that, one has to pay a fine of Rs 1,000 to link Aadhaar-PAN.

"Hence, in order to have the smooth application of section 234H and existing rule 114AAA, it is clarified that the impact of sub-rule (2) of rule 114AAA i.e. where a person whose permanent account



number has become inoperative under sub-rule (1), is required to furnish, intimate or quote his permanent account number under the Act, it shall be deemed that he has not furnished, intimated or quoted the permanent account number, as the case may be, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, and he shall be liable for all the consequences under the Act for not furnishing, intimating or quoting the permanent account number, shall come into effect from 1st April 2023 and the period beginning from 1st April 2022 and ending with 31st March 2023, shall be the period during which the said sub-rule shall not have its negative consequences of the nature referred to in the said sub-rule or specified in paras 4 and 4.1 above. However, the taxpayer shall be liable to pay a fee in accordance

with sub-rule (5A) of rule 114," the CBDT said in a circular dated March 30 this year.

Accordingly, in case of failure to intimate the Aadhaar Number by the last extended notified date, that is, March 31, 2023, the PAN allotted to the person shall be made inoperative in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the CBDT added.

An inoperative PAN will lead to a number of consequences like not being able to file tax return, pending returns and refunds not being processed, tax deductions at a higher rate and many others. Further, the taxpayer might face difficulty at various other areas like banks and other financial portals, as PAN is one of the important KYC criterion for all kinds of financial transactions. Thus, PAN-Aadhaar linking is an important task.

Agency
New Delhi, April 10:

Experts in India have said that XE, a more transmissible variant of Covid-19, could be displaying a different set of symptoms than Omicron and may trigger a loss in smell and taste, symptoms which were prominent features of the deadly Delta variant.

Notably, Gujarat reported its first case of the XE variant after a man from Mumbai tested positive for Covid-19 during his visit to Vadodra, a state official said. The genomic analysis of the Covid XE variant sample from Gujarat is still underway and results are expected soon, Union health ministry sources said on Saturday.

Earlier to this, Mumbai civic body officials had said that a woman who had arrived from South Africa in February-end and tested positive in March has been infected by the XE variant, but the health ministry has not confirmed it to be so. The ministry on Wednesday evening said that present evidence does not yet indicate that it is a case of the XE variant.

"Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) experts examined the FastQ files of the sample and have inferred that the genomic composition of this variant which infected the Mumbai woman does not correspond with the genomic composition of the XE variant," an official source had said, adding that INSACOG is conducting a genomic analysis of the Mumbai sample.

INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium)

has advised the public to avoid panic in the wake of the emergence of a new covid variant and has assured that it is keeping a close watch on the variant with a focus on its severity and need for hospitalization, however, experts are of the opinion that people should look out for the symptoms of the XE variant which may be different from Omicron.

What is the XE Variant?

The XE variant is a mutation of the BA.1 and BA.2 Omicron strains, referred to as a "recombinant". As per the initial studies, the XE variant has a growth rate of 9.8 per cent over that of BA.2, also known as the stealth variant because of its ability to evade detection, however, so far it has not shown severe traits. According to the World Health Organization, the first strain of this variant was detected in the United Kingdom on January 19 and so far more than 600 cases of this strain have been reported.

A Traveling Variant: Know the Symptoms

Dubbed as the traveling variant, this newest variant of Covid-19 had risen its head in countries across the globe from Thailand to the UK to New Zealand before staking a claim in India. One of the most

telltale signs of this variant is that people afflicted with this virus experience loss of smell and taste, a symptom common to the Delta variant which was responsible to drive the second wave of the Covid pandemic in India. Other symptoms are the same as that seen in any Covid patient like fever, sore throat, scratchy throat, cough and cold, skin irritation and discoloration, gastrointestinal distress, etc.

Inconsistency in Symptoms

Medics are of opinion that the inconsistency or variability of symptoms in the XE variant of Covid could be a result of its recombinant nature. RN Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences (RTIICS) intensivist Suren Panja while talking to TOI noted that the XE variant might be displaying a loss of smell or taste because mutant sub-variants tend to have the properties of the original strain.

"During the third wave, there had been some cases of Delta or a variant which is a combination of the Delta and Omicron. We know that Delta had triggered the loss of taste and smell and it's possible that XE carries some characteristics of Delta," Panja told TOI.

Contd. from Page 2

India's Booster Dose Policy from today....

Vaccination is the chief medical protection against the pandemic and which is being carried on by the state governments. The policies are being decided by the Centre unilaterally and enforced on the state irrespective of the merit or demerit of the decisions. If the states are not allowed to take decisions on even vaccination, what is the use of blaming them for the spread of infection. Moreover, the people cannot be thrown on the private players to be exploited by them, and the government facilities be blocked for booster or precautionary doses.

Though the ongoing free vaccination programme through government vacci-

nation centres for the first, second, and the precaution doses to healthcare workers, frontline workers, and people aged 60 and above will continue and the pace would be accelerated, as per the assurance given by the Union Ministry of Health, the present decision would severely affect the vaccination process for adults below the age of 60, particularly those who cannot afford the cost. Serum Institute has said that the Covishield precaution dose will be priced at Rs600 per shot for eligible individuals. Bharat Biotech is yet to indicate a price. It is also unacceptable that people should be allowed to be charged over thrice the cost that the gov-

ernment has been paying. In June 2021, the Centre had capped the administration charges of Covishield at Rs150 per dose.

Though the move is seen as an extra step to ensure protection in view of the newly emerged recombinant of Omicron XE, there seems to be another purpose also. The expansion of the ongoing vaccination drive through the present decision will liquidate inventory lying with vaccine manufacturers. It should also be noted that the SII and Bharat Biotech had stopped vaccine production recently because of low demand and product pile-up. The present move may increase their activity for profit. Out of 185

crore doses of vaccines, Covishield of SII accounted for 83.3 per cent while Covaxin of Bharat Biotech accounted for 16 per cent. Obviously, they will bag the profit of the booster dose decision.

The centre has already instructed the private vaccination centres not to charge more than Rs780 for Covishield, Rs1410 for Covaxin and Rs1145 for Sputnik V including taxes and administration charges of Rs150. Presently, at private vaccination centres Covishield costs Rs600, Covaxin Rs1200 and Sputnik V Rs 948 without GST. Biological E has said that it would price Corbevax at Rs800 per dose without taxes. (IPA Service)

Sports

I-League: Cagey affair between TRAU, Sudeva Delhi ends in draw

April 10:
Naihati (West Bengal), April 10:

Match number 61 of the Hero I-League 2021-22 season between Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU FC) and Sudeva Delhi FC ended in a goalless draw in the Naihati Stadium on Saturday.

Neither side would be too happy with the result in the context of their chase for a Top 7 finish. Chances were few and far between for either side over the course of the 90 minutes. The game was characterised by an intense physical battle between both sides and resolute defending which saw both defences blunt the attacking edge of their opposition on the day.

In the end, a point each was a fair result for both sides as a tussle for the balance of power on the pitch saw TRAU and Sudeva Delhi cancel each other out.

TRAU FC had the pick of the chances in the first half after a rapid counterattack resulted in Joseph Olaleye playing Ferdinandinho through on goal in the 37th minute. TRAU FC's Brazilian import was the favourite to score as he chopped onto his



left foot, but Sachin Jha in the Sudeva Delhi goal was not to be beaten as he made the game-saving stop in a 1v1 situation.

In response, Sudeva Delhi made their best move of the match in the 38th minute. A free-flowing, 'one and two touch' passing move down the left flank took the side from the capital into the final third of the field. As the ball was squared into the box for Sreyas VG, the midfielder just fell short of applying the finishing touch to an impressive attacking move.

TRAU FC's dangerous duo of Joseph and Ferdinandinho nearly combined to good effect again in the

40th minute. Joseph made up the yards in rapid fashion as he carried the ball over 50 yards with a lung-busting run before laying the ball off to Ferdinandinho inside the box. Ferdinandinho stumbled at the crucial moment and tripped on the ball, letting the chance go begging.

Changes were in order for both sides in the second half, and one such change from coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo nearly paid off for Sudeva Delhi in the 69th minute.

TRAU defender Gerard Williams made a blunder, to begin with as he failed to bring a regulation long ball under his control. The mistake allowed Shubho Paul to

bear down on goal one-on-one with the keeper. Paul was on the verge of making an instant impact barely minutes after coming onto the pitch, but Williams made the recovery in the nick of time to deny Paul a chance to finish.

The last big chance of the match fell to TRAU FC in the 82nd minute. After a promising team move, Fayazuddin played a cross in from the left flank, which was met at the back post by Milan Singh. The substitute should have done better with the chance as he arrived in the box completely unmarked. The chance went begging once again as Singh failed to keep his first-time effort on target.

Royal Challengers Bangalore won by 7 Wickets beat Mumbai Indians in IPL 2022



Agency
Pune, April 10:

Royal Challengers Bangalore won by 7 wickets beat Mumbai Indians here at MCA Stadium Pune.

After restricting Mumbai to 151/6, the Challengers knocked it down with nine balls to spare, with brilliant performances from opener Anuj Rawat (66) and former skipper Virat Kohli (48 off 36).

The Challengers were impressed with both bat and ball as they won their third game of the season, while the Mumbai Indians continued to struggle as they lost their fourth game in a row.

RCB bowlers had a good performance, despite Suryakumar Yadav's onslaught in the last four overs, as wickets dropped after Rohit Sharma and Ishan Kishan's opening combination. Mumbai passed the 150-

run barrier thanks to the elegant Suryakumar's second successive fifty.

The RCB openers set up a 50-run stand after restricting the former champions to 151/6. The Challengers strolled to victory, with former captain Kohli impressing with the bat, and rookie Rawat (66 of 47) scoring his first half-century in the IPL.

To help RCB win, Rawat and Kohli put together an 80-run partnership off 52 deliveries. Glenn Maxwell, who made his first appearance of the season, closed it off with back-to-back boundaries.

Meanwhile, Rohit Sharma said "It feels fantastic. Mumbai is a good squad, and we bowled well for at least 18 overs". In the first innings, the bowlers had something to play for. We didn't want to make a good first impression on them. Rohit hit a few excellent strokes, but his wicket was crucial.

Further, he also added that "I basically proceeded with what I thought was the finest mix, according to Rohit Sharma. We picked the finest

run from what we had. I wanted to stay as long as possible in the game, but I was called out at the wrong time. We were in the middle of a 50-run alliance, but we departed at the worst possible time. This makes us feel a little uneasy. Surya proved that you can bat reasonably against a 150-run pitch even if there isn't one. We knew Surya deserved praise, but we also knew it wouldn't be enough. You can improve in a variety of ways. In the batter's box, we want our batters to go as deep as possible. In the group performance, there appears to be a gap".

Hence Faf du Plessis and Anuj Rawat gave RCB a strong start with a 50-run stand with 152 runs to chase. It didn't seem to matter that Jaydev Unadkat had dismissed Faf du Plessis. An 80-run stand between Virat Kohli (48) and Anuj Rawat (66) helped RCB get close to victory.

Therefore, a very comfortable win by RCB and Mumbai need to introspect and go head for the next game and try to win.