

BJP unlikely to announce all the names of its candidates today due to NPF factor - Source

IT News
Imphal, Jan 29:

Even as the leaders of the state BJP had time and again stated that all preparation has been completed for the announcement of the party's candidates in all the 60 assembly constituencies to be contested in the upcoming state assembly election scheduled to hold in two phases, however, a highly reliable source told Imphal Times that the State BJP is facing tough time due to condition put by Naga National Front (NPF).

The reliable source said that the NPF has put strict restrictions on BJP against the filing of BJP candidates to Assembly constituencies where the NPF is contesting. A meeting over this issue may

be held tomorrow at New Delhi with NEDA Convenor Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, NPF leaders, and the Central BJP leaders.

Earlier, source close to the BJP Manipur Pradesh had stated that the preparation of the candidates' list has been finalized and the Party President A. Sharda Devi may announce the name at any time probably today evening.

But the reliable source said that the BJP may announce names of candidates for some constituencies by leaving the assembly constituencies that the NPF is demanding to fill candidates.

There is no pre-poll alliance between the BJP and the NPF, however, if the condition placed by the NPF is accepted

it will be no different from the super pre-poll alliance as no question of the friendly fight will happen.

Meanwhile, the NPF is scheduled to officially announce its candidates by February 2.

Last date of nomination for the first phase Manipur election scheduled on February 27 is February 8 and the Second phase election scheduled on March 3 is February 11.

A political analyst, while talking to Imphal Times however said that the delay in the announcement of its candidates by the BJP Manipur is due to the differences of opinions among the state BJP leadership. When asked about the NPF demand, the political analyst said that it will be suicidal for BJP.

Governor urges religious leaders to cooperate for a successful Covid Vaccination Programme

IT News
Imphal, Jan 29:

Governor of Manipur La Ganesan urged religious leaders in the State to co-operate the Government's initiative for COVID vaccination programme. He was speaking at an interaction programme of different religious leaders held today at Darbar Hall of Raj Bhavan in Imphal.

Governor said, COVID pandemic has been a challenge not only in the State of Manipur but to the whole world. He said, vaccination and to follow the COVID appropriate behaviors

are the means available to fight the pandemic. Expressing concern over the low coverage of COVID vaccination mostly in the hill districts, La Ganesan said, in this critical juncture, all stakeholders including various religious and local leaders have to play a major role in reaching out to the people about the benefits of



COVID vaccination. He further said that people respect religious leaders and in view of such importance, religious leaders should encourage people to come out for vaccination. Gov-

ernor also appealed to the people to come out and vaccinate at the facilities provided for the purpose throughout the State.

Mission Director of National Health Mission, Manipur, Dr. N. Shyamjai while participating at the interaction programme said, 63,000 people have been identified that have co-morbidities. Even though, precautionary dose should be administered to them to fight the COVID pandemic. Dr. Shyamjai said, almost all the health facilities have been provided vaccines and

mobile vaccination teams have been pressed into service in the far flung areas of hill districts in order to enable people to vaccinate themselves.

President of Jamiat-ul-Ulama, Manipur, Moulana Sayeed Ahmad, General Secretary of Manipur Baptist Convention, Losui Mao also spoke about the importance of cooperation to the vaccination programme and assured to encourage people to achieve a successful vaccination programme in the State.

State extends night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am

IT News
Imphal, Jan 29:

The state government has extended the night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am.

As per an order issued on Saturday, State Executive Committee Chairman and Chief Secretary Dr. Rajesh Kumar mentioned that the decision was taken in view in view of the huge increase of

infection by the highly mutant Covid-19 variant B. 1.1529 (Omicron) in the country, hereby orders the following with immediate effect in the state.

"In the exercise of the powers conferred under Section 20(2)(a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 in his capacity as Chairperson, the State executive committee of the State Disaster Manage-

ment Authority, in view of the huge increase of infection by the highly mutant Covid-19 variant B. 1.1529 (Omicron) in the country, hereby orders the following with immediate effect", the order read.

It added that micro containment zones shall be strictly monitored by dedicated Police Department teams and health Department teams. DCs are also directed

to involve the local Clubs/ local bodies with specific jurisdictions.

It also directed to isolate fresh cases of Covid-19 infections as soon as possible and the health department to scale up vaccination, contact tracing, and testing by providing additional manpower, mobility support, and IEC-Advocacy.

contd. on page 4

Condolence



Th. Naoba (Sarat) Sharma S/o Late Th. Joygopal Sharma Y. Sanjiv Singh S/o Y. Romil Singh L. Anil Singh S/o Late L. Irabot Singh

At this hour of sadness, I extend my heartfelt condolence to the untimely demise of my three brothers -

Th. Naoba (Sarat) Sharma, Y. Sanjiv Singh, and L. Anil Singh of Lairembi Leikai (Kalinagar), Jiribam in an unfortunate car accident that occurred on 18th January, 2022.

And I also share the pains and sorrow of the families of my departed brothers. May God bless their souls.

With love
L. Veerjit Singh
Spokesperson, BJP Manipur Pradesh and Family

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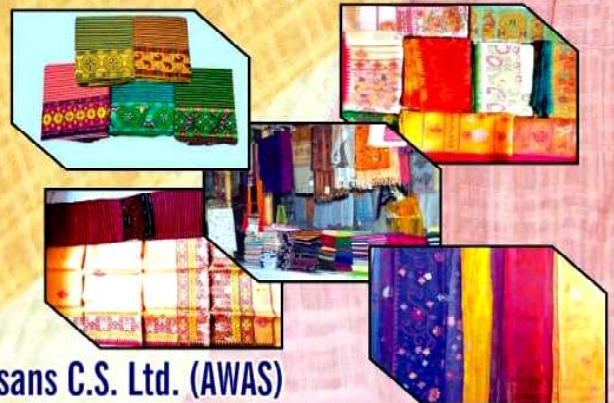
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‘Maharaja Returns’ to take India to soaring heights

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



Air India, which had been costing the country's taxpayers 20 thousand rupees every day to keep it flying for the past many years, has now returned to its founder, Tata Group. The Tata Group is the pride of the nation and is always ready to take India to glorious heights. The ‘Maharaja’ of Air India, after seeing countless ups and downs for 69 years, has now reached his palace with full gusto. It is a moment like the homecoming of the Maharaja. In the 90-year history of Air India, its owner changed, but the mascot i.e. Maharaja did not change. The long moustache and red turban of Maharaja has always been a global rage in all the airline's ad campaigns. Air India, which was started by JRD Tata in 1932, has now again come to the Tata group. Then its name was Tata Airlines. After independence, it was nationalised in 1953. The government named it Indian Airlines for domestic services and Air India International for global services. Today, Air India, apart from its 144 aircrafts, has 4480 landing and parking slots within the country and 2738 abroad.

The status of Maharaja mascot, which was adopted in the year 1946, continues to this day, although in 2015 the Maharaja took a modern look with jeans and sneakers. The Maharaja's mascot was designed by Sorab Kaikurusu alias Bobby Kukka, the then commercial director of Air India, and Umesh Rao, an artist of an advertising agency named J Walter Thompson Ltd. Bobby was so impressed by his friend industrialist Syed Wajid Ali's moustache and turban that he took the Maharaja's look from there. Meanwhile, Tata Sky's name has been changed to Tata Play. In such a situation, it is being speculated that the three airlines of the Tata group (Air India, Vistara and AirAsia) may now operate under the banner of Tata Sky. The Tata group has announced a focus on digital, new energy, flexible supply chain and healthcare in the coming years. Tata Sons chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran says the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected India's economy to grow at 8.5 per cent, which is higher than the world's estimated 4.9 per cent growth.

The Tata group expects that it can play an effective role in fulfilling India's ambition of becoming a three trillion dollar (about Rs 225 lakh crore) economy by 2024. India's civil aviation market has been facing the brunt of the pandemic for the last two years. Due to low passenger turnout, airlines have to cancel their flights frequently. But in the next six months, apart from Air India, two other airlines are also preparing to open their wings. The flights of the stock market king Rakesh Jhunjhunwala's Akasa and Jet Airways are about to start. In terms of air passengers, India is at number three after China and America. If all goes well, then in the next seven to eight years period, India can reach number one position in the world and Air India will play a decisive role in this feat, there is no doubt about it. Air India is supposed to regain its glory under the leadership of Tata group.

Rice water has been used in Asian beauty rituals for centuries to achieve glowing and smooth skin. Using rice water for skin is a natural home remedy in treating and preventing acne, removing acne scars, and getting rid of hyperpigmentation.

Rice water contains amino acids, vitamins B and E, and minerals which promotes cell growth, stimulates blood flow and keeps the skin smooth, youthful and bright in chilly weather conditions.

It's literally a beauty booster used for more and more people all over the world.

Rice is of course delicious as one of the key culinary ingredients around the world, so we all know how to make it but when we are using it for beauty purposes it's a different process, very simple by the way.

You can use rice water cubes to boost collagen and nourish, refresh skin. Put rice water into the ice tray and freeze it. Add cucumber too. Apply these ice cubes onto the face and uncovered areas around the face, neck and uncovered area around face etc as a toner. Rice water is great to keep the skin glowing and hydrated during winters.

You can use rice water for reducing dark patches or achieving fair complexion by mixing rice powder with raw milk to form thick paste. Apply thick paste on your face and uncovered skin and leave it for a few minutes and wash it with clean fresh water. Repeat it once a week to achieve amazing results. Although many beauty companies have launched soaps, toners, creams etc. containing rice water, it is always advisable to go for herbal home products.

Rice water acts as an excellent hair conditioner. You can add a few drops

Beauty Benefits of Rice Water

of essential oils like rosemary, lavender or tea tree oil and apply it on hair to balance PH level on the scalp and act as an excellent hair conditioner. After shampooing, apply rice water to your hair along with a few drops of lavender essential oil or rosemary essential oil. Let the rice water dry on hair in a natural environment for 15-20 minutes and then rinse with normal fresh water. Fermented rice water is rich in vitamin B which also happens to promote melanin production for hair.

Fermented rice water protects the skin from UV rays and sun tan. Leave your boiled rice water out on your kitchen in open space for 48 hours. When it starts to smell slightly sour, bottle it up and store it in your fridge. You can use fermented rice water in the same ways you can use regular rice water. Using rice water is also an effective remedy in treating sunburns. Applying it on sun-damaged skin can help the burns heal faster.

You can also prepare rice water with fermentation. In a glass jar put some rice and water (twice the quantity of rice). Keep it at room temperature for a day or two. Strain the mixture and keep the water in the fridge.

Rice wine increases the collagen in the skin, which keeps your skin supple and helps prevent wrinkling.

Rice is part of India's beauty legacy which contains ferulic acid, a powerful antioxidant and allantoin which contains anti-inflammatory properties. So, whether you eat rice



By: Shahnaz Husain

or not, use it in your face pack for glowing skin. The starch in rice water is said to soothe the skin in conditions like eczema. Dip a clean washcloth into the rice water, then apply it over the affected area. After 2 to 3 minutes, allow the skin to dry by itself. In fact, acne-prone skin or even

skin with acne eruptions can be washed with rice water to soothe and heal the skin. It also helps to tighten the pores and refine the skin. Rice water may be applied on the face with cotton wool and then massaged for a few minutes to revitalize the skin. In fact, rice water has an astringent effect and helps to prevent pimples and acne.

Mix cornstarch powder and rice powder in 1:2 ratio. Apply the powdery material evenly on the face by using a makeup brush and wash with clean water after a few minutes for silky smooth skin.

Rice powder or rice flour can be used as a facial scrub. It is ideally suited to oily skin and is effective as a facial scrub. It helps to deep cleanse the skin and unclog the pores, discouraging and dislodging blackheads. It removes dead skin cells, tightens the pores and brightens the skin. Mix rice powder with curd and a pinch of turmeric. Apply on the face and rub gently on the skin with circular movements. Wash off with water.

Rice powder can also be added to ubtan for body scrubs, along with gram flour, curd, rose water, powdered lemon and orange peels, etc.

Rice wine contains antioxidant properties which prevent premature ageing and wrinkles on the skin.

Prepare thick paste of rice flour, castor oil and banana and apply over dark circles and wash it after some time with clean fresh water. It will lighten skin around your eyes and keep you younger and fresh.

Take rice powder and Multani mitti in equal proportions and make a paste of it. Apply the paste on your scalp and rinse off with fresh water after 45 minutes for smooth, soft and lustrous hair.

Mix honey and rice powder and apply the thick paste on the face and open areas. Leave it to dry in the natural atmosphere and wash after it has dried completely.

Cook a cup of rice. Remove the water and grind it to a thick paste with honey and milk. Apply a thick layer of this paste on the face and neck and let it dry before washing it off with lukewarm water.

Apply yogurt to the mixture of sugar and rice. Apply the paste on your face and wash your face with fresh water after half an hour to get a flawless, fair and attractive complexion.

It is preferable to use organic rice, clean filtered water, and rinse the rice thoroughly before use to get rid of any topical pollutants and pesticides. White rice is preferred over brown or red rice – since the water from the former has more extensive benefits.

Transcending the boundaries of food, rice offers a plethora of benefits for your skin and hair, a rather surprising beauty staple that's been used across the world.

(The author is an International Fame Beauty Expert and is called Herbal Queen of India)

BSF Steps Up Strict Vigil Along Bangladesh Border Areas

By: Ashis Biswas

As the new year gets under way, the law and order situation along the difficult Indo-Bangla border (4096 kilometres long) still remains somewhat unsettled, despite the best preventive initiatives taken by the Border Security Force (BSF).

A cursory analysis of current criminal trends from the East and the North-east border areas suggests that the medium term outlook for security maintenance is mixed: while there has been a major drop in cattle smuggling to Bangladesh, illegal infiltration causes concern.

Despite stringent BSF efforts to curb Bangladeshi infiltration, smuggling and other crimes, recent stats indicate that the volume of illegal influx to West Bengal still remains sizable.

The sensitive issue of illegal Bangladeshi migration is a somewhat underplayed irritant in the context of otherwise warm Indo-Bangla bilateral relations. It belongs in the same category as the mutually agreed but as yet unresolved Teesta water sharing issue.

Over the years, India has had to pay a heavier diplomatic price for leaving such contentious issues pending indefinitely. China has won more space within the Bangladeshi interest map than India, by offering concrete steps to save the Teesta river. Also, at present, Dhaka has indicated it would stay 'neutral' between China and India when it comes to big power regional rivalry — a significant change from the days when it saw and declared its relationship with India as 'special'.

Analysts feel Indian policymakers should appreciate that even among the friendliest of regional neighbours,

long pending issues have definite consequences, as with most local developments, positive or otherwise.

To return to the existing situation along the Indo-Bangla border: there is now a 360 degree divergence of official opinion about continuing illegal infiltration from Bangladesh on both sides of the boundary. BSF (South Bengal) authorities recently told newsmen that during the last three years, over 6500 Bangladeshis had been arrested for entering India illegally. This worked out to over 2000 arrests annually on average.

During the same period, over 2500 Indians were arrested for their involvement with various border-related crimes, including illegal cross-border movement of people.

The official Bangladeshi stand is that there has been no illegal infiltration into India from its territory in recent years, contrary to official Indian claims. Delhi-based Bangladeshi diplomats commenting on the matter once told Indian mainstream mediapersons that illegal movement of Bangladeshis to India had almost ended because of two reasons.

One, Bangladesh has made impressive economic progress by all accounts, which helped its citizens raise their living standards significantly. Two, the Bangladeshi diaspora, always active to explore opportunities abroad, was more keen to reach advanced countries in the EU such as Italy, or the US. Besides these days, the Bangladeshi taka and the Indian rupee were valued almost at par in recent years mostly, unlike in the past.

At present the number of Bangladeshis living/working overseas was over 7.6 million and it is rising steadily.

Meanwhile, the BSF in Tripura has installed superior surveillance equipment and adopted measures like plugging drains and culverts with iron bars, in vulnerable border areas. Upgraded, sensitive cameras have been 100 installed along 24 points, according to reports.

Contraband smuggled goods worth Rs 35 crore were seized by end 2021, of which narco items accounted for Rs 15 crore. While 128 Bangladeshis were arrested in 2020 charged with illegal crossing, the figure dropped to 95 in 2021. Local authorities also complimented the Border Guard of Bangladesh (BGB) for their consistent co-operation in cracking down on border related crimes.

However, opinion in Bangladesh whether in the mainstream media or among political parties was not particularly favourable towards the crime fighting techniques of the BSF, nor positive about the present situation in the border areas.

Firing against armed criminals by the BSF often killing Bangladeshis remained a prickly issue. The number of fatalities during BSF operations has dropped significantly thanks to a strong media/HR groups campaign in Bangladesh in recent times. In some areas the BSF had agreed to use rubber bullets during clashes/encounters. Bangladesh authorities have also accused Indian troops of occasionally killing innocent people in the past.

Countering the change during joint meetings periodically held between BGB/BSF authorities, Indian officials said that often, even as they tried to engage/approach suspected cattle smugglers and others in conversation, the criminals opened fire. The BSF had to retaliate in self defence. A number of BSF men too had died in shootouts with well armed criminals.

(Courtesy: IPA Service)

Pandemic Has Pushed Digital Learning Ahead By Years'

The pandemic has reset equations everywhere, moving digital learning ahead by years and has seen Oxford University Press, one of the prime players in the educational publishing space, strengthening a key learning solution that today caters to more than 150,000 students and over 7,000 satisfied teachers through its comprehensive suite of aids.

"The Covid-19 pandemic reset all equations everywhere, including in educational publishing. It has moved digital learning in education ahead by years. As a direct result, there has been a sharp increase in the adoption of our digital resources, which has helped us to continue supporting the teaching and learning needs of teachers and learners, as well as improving access to knowledge for researchers," OUP-India Managing Director Sumanta Datta told IANS in an interview.

The company has focused its efforts on strengthening its "blended learning products and in trying to help as many teachers, educators, parents, and students as possible to adapt to the 'new normal'. Our steadfast effort has been to ensure that teaching and learning are not hampered, even though we may have sold fewer books", he said.

"We invested in strengthening Oxford Advantage, which is our integrated learning solution that provides schools with a comprehensive suite of educational materials and services. It today caters to more than 150,000 students and has over 7,000 satisfied teachers," Datta added.

The company has also trained teachers extensively to help them cope with the newer tools and modes of teaching.

"In the last one year alone, OUP in India has conducted over 1,100 such trainings and workshops and helped more than 100,000 teachers to navigate the transition to online teaching with a sharp focus on pedagogy and methodology. We conducted several



By: Vijay GarG

pan-India surveys with teachers across the country to understand how they felt about this transformational phase. The insights we gathered will now inform all our product designs moving forward," Datta explained.

With a fresh surge of Covid cases and the resumption of full in-class academics seemingly in doubt for the next few weeks, if not months, how does he see the year 2022 panning out?

"Over the last two years, there have been many learnings for us all in the publishing world. We are now better prepared to steer through tough times. Teaching and learning will always be fundamental needs of the world, and no matter what form or shape they take, OUP will always deliver to that," Datta maintained.

The publishing industry started significant recovery in 2021 from the immediate effects of the pandemic, "and we believe that recovery will continue in a graded manner into 2022 as well. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has emphasised the need to review the existing curricula and focus on new-age blended learning tools and solutions, which we believe is the future of education", he said.

To this end, the company has reviewed and aligned most of its existing titles to the NEP framework and now has 142 new titles that align with NEP 2020.

"We are also preparing to make further amendments to our titles once the revised National Curriculum

Framework is released. At OUP India, we will continue to channel our efforts in strengthening our blended learning products and introduce new ones," Datta asserted.

This year, the company is also preparing to relaunch its holistic, standardised assessment, Oxford STAR, that empowers educators and students by diagnosing scholastic and behavioural learning needs of the students "as they deal with the transition of returning to the schools. In our higher education vertical, we expect our titles for emerging technologies and professional skills to be in the spotlight", he added.

Speaking of some of the titles that OUP has planned to publish in 2022, Datta said: "Continuing to refresh most of our titles in alignment with the NEP 2020, we have already revised some of our flagship titles, and are now preparing to publish many more in 2022. Some of them include those for exam preparations, such as Civil and State Services Examinations, UGC-NET, NRA-CET, etc., the fourth edition of the Oxford Student Atlas for India, revised editions of bestseller titles for Python Programming and Technical Communication".

The company, he said, regularly updates its lexical content (Oxford Dictionaries) based on evidence from one of the world's largest language research programmes, "which helps us to create and curate quality content for non-native speakers of the English language or learners with English as their second language".

"Several world-leading academic institutions, enterprising start-ups, and technology giants such as Google, Apple, and Microsoft, have embedded our lexical content at the cutting-edge of language research and global communications to power programmes and products that are equipping communities around the world with authoritative, evidence-based content of the highest quality," Datta added.

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Parental vaccination against COVID-19 protects kids as well: Study

Agency
Jerusalem, Jan 29:

Parental vaccination against COVID-19 confers substantial protection to children residing in the same household, according to a study that reinforces the importance of immunisation to curb the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, and protect those who cannot be vaccinated.

A team of researchers from Harvard University, US, Clalit Research Institute and Tel-Aviv University in Israel, analysed one of the world's largest integrated health record databases to examine the indirect protection provided to unvaccinated children.

The study, published in the journal Science on Thursday, shows that not only is a vaccinated parent less likely to experience a documented infection, they are also less likely to transmit the infection to other household members if infected.

"Vaccination not only provides direct protection, it also provides indirect protection to

unvaccinated individuals living with the vaccinated individuals in the same household," said Samah Hayek, senior researcher at Clalit Research Institute.

"This study highlights the indirect protection provided by vaccinated parents to their unvaccinated children, irrespective of household size or the child's age, for both the Alpha and the Delta variants, Hayek said.

Between June and October 2021, a wave of infections dominated by the Delta variant swept through Israel.

During this period, the researchers studied 181,307 unvaccinated children from 76,621 distinct households.

They compared parents vaccinated with a third dose of the Pfizer preventive to parents who received only two shots at least five months prior.

The study estimated that a single boosted parent decreased the risk of infection by 20.8 per cent, while two boosted parents decreased the risk for infection by 58.1 per cent.

The researchers also con-

ducted a similar study during an earlier wave from December 2020 through March 2021, in which the Alpha variant was dominant.

During this period, they studied 400,733 unvaccinated children and adolescents from 155,305 distinct households.

They compared unvaccinated parents to those receiving two doses of the vaccine and found the indirect protection of parental vaccination on children to be even stronger.

The researchers found the indirect effects of parental vaccination to be fairly consistent across households of different sizes, and across different age groups of children.

This included the youngest age groups of 0-2 and 3-6 years old that are still ineligible for vaccination, they said.

"While the age range for vaccination continually expands, many children and adolescents remain unvaccinated for different reasons, said Noam Barda, from Clalit Research Institute.

"The current study shows

that parental vaccination confers substantial protection for children living in the same household, emphasising that vaccination not only protects vaccinated individuals, but also their loved ones," Barda said.

These results reinforce the importance of increasing vaccine uptake among the vaccine-eligible population to curb the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and protect those who cannot be vaccinated.

"This study of Clalit data suggests vaccinated and boosted parents provide impactful protection from Covid-19 to their unvaccinated children," said Ran Balicer, Director of the Clalit Research Institute.

"By quantifying the indirect protection provided from vaccinated parents to unvaccinated children, several mechanisms of protection emerge, including lower transmission from vaccinated parents with a breakthrough infection to their unvaccinated children, as compared with unvaccinated parents," Balicer added.

'BJP turned country into Bigg Boss show': Opposition mounts attack at Centre over NYT report on Pegasus



Agency
New Delhi, Jan 29:

The Opposition sharpened its attack at the BJP-led Centre over a New York Times report which claimed that India bought the Israeli Pegasus spyware in 2017 as part of a USD 2-billion defence deal of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear. India had reportedly signed the arms deal during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landmark visit to Israel - the first by an Indian Prime Minister to that country.

Sharing the report on Twitter, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tweeted, "Modi Govt bought Pegasus to spy on our primary democratic institutions, politicians and public. Govt functionaries, opposition leaders, armed forces, judiciary all were targeted by these phone tapings. This is treason. Modi Govt has committed

treason."

According to the NYT report, India bought controversial Israeli-made Pegasus spyware in 2017 as part of a USD 2-billion defence deal of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear. India had reportedly signed the arms deal during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landmark visit to Israel - the first by an Indian Prime Minister to that country.

The report titled 'The Battle for the World's Most Powerful Cyberweapon', claimed that the spyware, which is classified as military-grade software and produced by the Israeli firm NSO Group, was part of a "package of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear worth roughly

USD two billion" between India and Israel.

Hitting out at the Centre over the report, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said on Twitter, "Why did Modi Govt act like the enemies of India and use a warfare weapon against Indian citizens?"

"Illegal snooping using Pegasus amounts to treason. No one is above the law and we will ensure that justice is served," he said.

Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi alleged the spyware was used not for defence purposes but to snoop on opposition and journalists. "If there is BJP, it is possible. They have made the country into a Bigg Boss show," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

Rajya Sabha MP and senior Congress leader Shaktisinh Gohil alleged that the "revelations" in the report imply that the government "misled" the Supreme Court and Parliament on the issue.

"Why @narendramodi is silent? It is @PMOIndia's duty to clarify. New York Times revelations today that it did indeed subscribe by payment from tax payers money of 300 crores to spyware Pegasus sold by Israeli NSO company," he tweeted.

Mandaviya Bats for Teleconsultation, Asks States/UTs to Avail It for Better Health Management

Agency
New Delhi, Jan 29:

Highlighting the role that teleconsultation has played to serve the people in far-off places as well as Covid patients in home isolation, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday asked the states and the union territories to focus more on such services for better public health management. He also said more than the projected requirements of Covid vaccine doses were provided to the states and the UTs to ensure that there is no let-up in the pace of the inoculation drive.

Stressing the role that teleconsultation and telemedicine have played in the country to serve the far-flung regions and those in home isolation, Mandaviya advised the states to focus on ramping up opening of more teleconsultation centres as part

of the Hub and Spoke Model for better public health management, a statement issued by the Health Ministry said. The teleconsultation centres will help us not only during the COVID pandemic but also for non-COVID medical care, he said.

The minister was speaking after holding a meeting with the states on virtual format. Kerala informed the meeting that non-Covid medical care for cancer, diabetes management, mental health etc were also provided through telemedicine centres to those in home isolation who could not access the institutional facilities, the statement said.

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, which have shown good progress in eSanjeevani with very large number of teleconsultations, were appreciated for their efforts, it said. Mandaviya underlined the importance of sturdy and resilient health infrastructure and the

ECRP-II package under which the funds have been provided to states and UTs and said they need to be utilised before March 31.

While some states have expedited effective utilisation of the approved funds for health infra creation, other states may also review the physical and financial progress under ECRP-II and expedite the progress, he said. Mandaviya reiterated that the five-fold strategy of 'Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate & Adherence to COVID Appropriate Behaviour' along with effective surveillance of cases remains crucial for COVID-19 management.

The states and UTs were advised to keep a close watch on the emerging clusters and hotspots. Those states which have reported lower share of RTPCR in Covid testing were advised to review the same, the statement said. They were also advised that adequate and

timely testing will help in prompt identification of the infected cases and prevention of a sudden surge, it said.

Assuring states of all support from the Centre in their efforts for Covid response and management, the Union health minister urged them to provide data on time as it will lead to more sturdy and efficient policymaking. Union Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar encouraged the states to fully utilise the ECRP-II funds.

She urged the states and the UTs to strengthen laboratories, place timely purchase orders of medicines in case of shortages, expedite commissioning of PSA plants and open more teleconsultation centres. She highlighted that teleconsultation will help in treating patients in the future and emphasised on the need to give special attention to co-morbid patients, the statement said.

Mizoram reports 2,064 new COVID-19 cases, second-highest single-day spike

Agency
Aizawl, Jan 29:

Mizoram reported 2,064 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, the second-highest single-day spike ever, taking the state's tally to 1,67,725, a health department official said.

On Tuesday, the state reported the highest single-day spike ever as 2,222 people had tested positive for the infection, he said.

The death toll remains at 591 as no fatality was reported

for the second consecutive day since Thursday, he said.

Aizawl district reported the highest number of fresh cases at 1,435, followed by Mamit (171) and Lunglei (137).

The single-day positivity rate dipped to 27.32 per cent from 27.51 per cent the previous day.

At least 325 children were among the newly infected people, he said.

The northeastern state now has 13,721 active cases, while 1,53,413 people have so far recovered from the infection.

The recovery rate among COVID-19 patients is 91.46 per cent and the death rate is 0.35 per cent.

The northeastern state has so far tested 16.53 lakh samples for COVID-19 and out of these 7,554 samples were tested on Thursday.

According to state immunisation officer Dr Laluanawma Jongte, Over 7.92 lakh people have been inoculated till Thursday and 6.13 lakh of them have received full dose.

Maharashtra NCC Directorate Wins Prestigious PM banner at R Day Parade 2022

Ninety Universities Across the Country Opt for the NCC as an Elective Subject

By Raju Vernekar
Mumbai, Jan 29:

The Republic Day camp (RDC) 2022 for the NCC during "Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav" (75 years of independence) and Swarnim Vijay Varsh (Golden Jubilee of India's victory in 1971 Indo-Pak war) culminated with the PM's Rally at Carriappa Parade Ground, Delhi Cantonment on Friday.

On the occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wore the signature bottle green coloured turban with red badge hackle clipped to his headgear as he inspected the Guard of Honour and reviewed March Past by NCC contingents. He also witnessed the NCC cadets displaying their skills in army action, slithering, micro light flying, and parasailing as well as cultural programs.

"I am proud that I was also an active member of NCC. Our govt is taking several steps to

strengthen the NCC. A large number of girl cadets participated in the rally, this is the change India is witnessing today," Modi said while addressing the event. He also mentioned that in the last two years, over one lakh new NCC cadets were added in border areas.

"We all need to connect with the roots of India. We can change India's future with your determination and support. The youth of the country can play a big role in "Vocal for local" and to make India self-reliant. Drug addiction destroys the life of youngsters, we need to fight against this. The drugs should not reach the school/college where there is NCC or NSS. Help the friends who are not in NCC-NSS to give up this bad habit too," he stressed.

Modi said 90 universities across the country have chosen the NCC as an elective



subject and this was a good sign. After the culmination of the rally, Modi distributed medals and batons to the NCC candidates.

Cadets from 17 NCC Directorates from various states participated in the month-long RDC. The Maharashtra Directorate had fielded a Contingent of 57 Cadets, both boys, and girls, drawn from various

districts of the state.

In the camp, the cadets did their best in various competitions like Drill, Rajpath Marching, Guard of Honour to PM, PM's Rally Line Layout, Flag Area briefing, and cultural event. The consistent excellent performance of the contingent throughout the camp in all events saw the Maharashtra NCC Directorate being ad-

judged the Best Directorate.

Modi presented the prestigious PM Banner to Maj Gen Y P Khanduri, Additional Director General, NCC Directorate Maharashtra. Senior Under Officer Siddhesh Jadhav was the Banner Bearer and Cadet Captain Nikita Khot was the Trophy bearer. The prestigious PM Banner was won by the State Directorate after seven years. In 2014 Maharashtra NCC had won the PM banner. Last year it was a runner-up.

The winning PM banner was a proud moment for Maharashtra. The NCC Group from Pune was responsible for selection and training officers. The staff and cadets toiled day and night for over two months in preparations for the R Day parade till December 18, 2021, an official from Maharashtra NCC Directorate told the "Imphal Times".

In October 2021, the shoot-

ing team of the Maharashtra Directorate had won the coveted Inter Directorate Shooting Championship. The Pune Group had fielded 09 out of the 10 firers of the team, winning 09 Medals.

Brigadier R K Gaikwad, Commander NCC Group Pune complimented the contingent led by Lt Col Anirudh Singh, assisted by Major Arusha Shete and Senior Officer Manoj Phirange and the cadets for their outstanding performance. The professional ethics and values of the Armed Forces are closely linked with the values of society from which it draws its people. He appreciated the parents who permitted their wards to participate in the camp despite the COVID and outbreak of the OMICRON variant.

With this back-to-back victory, there is the right environment in Maharashtra for the students to feel motivated to

strive to join the NCC and thereafter the Indian Armed Forces.

During the year the NCC achieved many a milestone. They included: The launch of NCC Training App Ver 20 to enhance online NCC training, the induction of simulators for .22mm rifle firing, rowing training, and training of flying Microlight aircraft and "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Camps".

Over 12 lakh cadets and their family members across the country participated online in the International Yoga Day. The cadets participated in an awareness campaign about 825 statues of National Heroes, in Puneet Sagar Abhiyan (cleaning beaches) and felicitations of 75 War Heroes of the 1971 Indo-Pak War at 75 locations. Besides, over 1.6 lakh cadets and 24000 staff members across the country joined as "COVID Warriors" to assist civil administration through Exercise "Yogdan".

India reports 2,35,532 fresh COVID-19 cases, 871 deaths as active active tally drops to 20 lakh

Agency
New Delhi, Jan 29:

New Delhi: India's active COVID-19 caseload dropped by more than 1 lakh today, even as 2,35,532 fresh cases were reported. Data from the Health Ministry on Saturday morning also indicated that 871 deaths and 3,35,939 recoveries had been reported in the last 24 hours. With this, the active tally has come down to 20.04 lakh.

The list of casualties incidentally includes 258 deaths that were after the reconciliation of data from Kerala. Even

as India remains firmly in the grip of a 'third wave' of infections, many parts of the country have begun reporting a downward trend. At the state level, Kerala leads the list with 3,34,162 active cases, followed by Karnataka and Maharashtra. The latter two however have reported a significant dip in recent days.

According to official data, active cases stand at 4.91% (down from 5.18% on Friday) while the recovery rate is presently at 93.89%. The daily positivity rate stands at 13.39%. India has so far conducted 72.57 crore tests,

with 17,59,434 COVID-19 tests being conducted in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, India's cumulative vaccination coverage has crossed 165 crores. Nearly a month after the nationwide inoculation drive was expanded to include older children, over 4.5 crore individuals between the ages of 15 and 17 have been administered one shot of Covaxin. More than one crore individuals have also taken a third 'precautionary' dose of vaccine. As per Health Ministry guidelines, only frontline workers and comorbid senior citizens are eli-

gible to take the third jab.

A total of 1.6 billion vaccine doses have been administered so far under the nationwide Covid-19 vaccination drive, the ministry data showed. This includes 56,72,766 doses in the last 24 hours, comprising 6,74,623 booster shots for the eligible population and 5,84,492 first doses in the 15-18 age group.

India's crossed the one-crore mark in Covid-19 cases on December 19, 2020. It surpassed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 last year, subsequently crossing three crore on June 23.

Risk persists even though Covid cases starting to plateau in parts of India: WHO

Agency
New Delhi, Jan 29:

Even though some cities or states in India may be beginning to see plateauing of Covid-19 cases, the risk persists and the focus must be on reducing transmission and implementing situation-specific measures, senior WHO official Poonam Khetrapal Singh said.

The Health Ministry said on Thursday that early indications of Covid cases plateauing have been reported in certain geographies in the country but the trend needs to be observed.

Responding to a question that coronavirus cases have started plateauing in India, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region said the risk of Covid-19 remains high and no country, irrespective of their current transmission scenario, is "out of the woods" yet.

"Hence, even though some cities or states may be beginning to see plateauing of cases, the risk persists. We need to

continue to remain vigilant. Our focus must be on reducing transmission. Implementing situation-specific public health and social measures and increasing vaccine coverage—that's the way forward for all countries in the ongoing pandemic," Singh told PTI in an interview.

On January 21, the country reported a total of 3,47,254 new Covid-19 cases after which the daily infection count has been reducing. A decline in Covid cases and positivity rate has been especially observed in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Odisha, Haryana and West Bengal.

Asked if the pandemic is entering in endemic stages, Singh said, currently "we are still in the midst of the pandemic and the focus should be to curtail the virus spread and save lives".

"By becoming endemic doesn't mean that the virus will not be a cause of concern," she said.

Compared to the Covid-19's Delta variant, she said Omicron is able to more rap-

idly infect the tissues of the upper respiratory tract rather than the lungs, which may also help the spread of this variant.

"There appears to be a lower risk of severe disease and death following Omicron infection as compared to other variants. However, due to the very high numbers of cases, many countries have seen a significant increase in the incidence of hospitalisation, putting pressure on healthcare systems," she said.

Data suggests that infection with Omicron may be associated with a lower risk of hospitalisation compared to infection with Delta, Singh said, but noted that the severity of illness increases with age and in the presence of underlying medical conditions and among people who are not vaccinated.

She stressed on the need to rapidly accelerate efforts to vaccinate all at-risk populations in all countries.

"There is growing evidence on vaccine effectiveness for Omicron, but we still

have a lot to learn. So far, we think that vaccines are less effective against Omicron infection and symptomatic disease compared to Delta. Having a booster shot seems to increase protection," she said.

However, vaccines still seem to remain highly effective at protecting people against serious illness, hospitalisation, and death, she said, adding that vaccines remain an effective method to reduce the likelihood of severe disease caused by the Omicron variant.

Singh said the emergence of Omicron means that the protective behaviours remain critical such as keeping a safe distance from others, avoiding crowds, wearing a well-fitted mask covering mouth and nose, cleaning hands regularly, keeping indoor spaces well ventilated, and covering coughs and sneezes.

India is presently battling the third wave of Covid-19 driven by the Omicron variant. On Saturday, 2,35,532 people tested positive for the coronavirus infection.

Ahead of polls, Congress leader resigns, likely to join a national party



Imphal, Jan 29:

The opposition Congress party's announcement of a pre-poll alliance with five political parties and their subsequent decision to support a common candidate in Khurai constituency in the upcoming Manipur assembly elections evoked sharp reaction from an aspiring candidate in the constituency.

Veteran Congress leader Khurajam Ratan Kumar Singh, who had been campaigning for Khurai seat under Imphal East district, resigned from the party on Thursday after being denied party ticket and announced his plan to join a national party to fight in the upcoming elections.

After Ratan Kumar's resignation from Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, the Khurai Block Congress Committee (BCC) has been dissolved.

solved.

Informing this, a key functionary of the Khurai BCC, who also later resigned from the party, told media that they had been working hard when the congress was not in a good position since the last few years. "But, in spite of all efforts, they failed to acknowledge it," he said.

On Thursday, MPCC president N. Loken Singh in the presence of the representatives of political parties, announced a pre-poll alliance with CPI, CPI(M), Revolutionary Socialist Party, Janata Dal (S) and Forward Block.

He also informed that the Congress will support their common candidate (CPI candidate) in Khurai seat while the party will have a friendly contest in Kakching seat.

Earlier, another intending Congress candidate and a former congress legislator from

Hiyanglam seat also strongly reacted to the grand old party's decision when his name was excluded from the party's first 40 candidates list.

On January 22, the Congress announced names of 40 candidates for the assembly elections in Manipur. Out of them, 12 are sitting MLAs, 9 are ex-MLAs while the rest 19 are new faces.

Similarly, the National People's Party, a coalition party of the BJP-led government, also announced names of 20 candidates recently. But the ruling BJP and its ruling ally Naga People's Front are yet to announce their list till date.

Manipur will go to polls in two phases on February 27 and March 3. In the first phase, elections will be held for 38 constituencies and the remaining 22 constituencies will vote in the second phase.

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State extends night curfew....

Gathering of people is allowed to a maximum of 50 (fifty) persons or half of the capacity whichever is less in case of closed spaces

and a maximum of 200 (Two hundred) persons in case of open spaces.

The order, however, all establishments of Print and

Electronic Media and movement of their personnel are allowed during curfew.

Sports

Manipur's boxer Sarjubala signs deal with boxing promoter Mujtaba Kamal

Agency
Imphal, Jan 29:

Manipur's ace boxer and Olympian Sarjubala Devi has signed a deal with leading Indian boxing promoter Mujtaba Kamal and Grassroot Boxing Promotions and Management in Imphal.

The 28-year-old Manipuri boxer will be making her professional boxing debut on February 26 in Dubai.

Sarjubala is a silver medalist in the 2014 AIBA World Boxing Championship in Korea and a former Youth World Boxing gold medalist.

She is also a four-time national champion and has represented India in many international tournaments.

Sarjubala has won medals in almost all competitions that she has participated in.

She was ranked second in 2014 in her weight category.

Mujtaba's company currently manages some of the top Indian professional boxers like Sabari J (current WBC



India champion), Karthik S (WBC Asian silver winner), Faizan Anwar, Lalrinsanga Tiau (WBC youth world champion), Asif Asad, Gurpreet Singh and some other boxers.

Mujtaba said that he was happy to have added a sensational boxing talent to his stable.

"Today marks a significant day for our sport with the news that Sarjubala is joining

the professional ranks," he said.

"She is one of the most recognised Indian women's amateur boxers of all time and a public figure in Manipur," Mujtaba said.

Women's Asia Cup hockey: India beat China 2-0 to win consolation bronze

Agency
Muscat, Jan 29:

Last edition champions India defeated China 2-0 to win a consolation bronze medal at the women's Asia Cup hockey tournament here on Friday.

The Indians left behind the disappointment of their semifinal defeat to Korea and controlled the proceedings in the first two quarters, scoring two goals in the process, to go into half time with a 2-0 lead against China.

They, however, failed to score any more goals in the second half.

The Indians started brightly and earned a couple of penalty corners and from one such situation, Sharmila Devi gave her side the lead in the 13th minute, scoring from a rebound after Gurjit Kaur's initial flick was saved by the Chinese defence.

India continued in the same vein in the second quarter and

had the better share of chances.

The Indians kept up the pressure on the Chinese defence with relentless raids and secured another penalty corner in the 19th minute which was converted by Gurjit with a superb drag-flick to make the scoreline 2-0.

China responded swiftly, securing a penalty corner which was brilliantly kept away by India captain and goalkeeper Savita Punia.

Down by two goals, China came out with more intent after the change of ends and tried to put pressure on the Indian defence but to no avail.

The Indians kept up the pressure on the Chinese defence at the start of the fourth and final quarter but failed to create any clear cut chances.

China earned a penalty corner 10 minutes before time but the Indians defended in numbers to thwart any danger to their citadel.

Towards the end of the match, China pressed hard and secured three consecutive penalty corners with two minutes left in the clock but lacked in final execution as the chances went wasted.

Japan will be up against Korea in the summit clash later on Friday.

Lack of match practice due to the COVID-19 pandemic after finishing a historic fourth at the Tokyo Olympics, cost defending champions India dearly as they produced inconsistent performances in crucial matches to crash out of the title race.

After thrashing lowly Malaysia 9-0 in their opener, India suffered a 0-2 defeat against Asian Games champions Japan before beating Singapore 9-1 to qualify for the semifinals.

But in the semifinals, some sloppy defending and poor penalty corner conversions put paid to India's hopes as they were beaten 2-3 by Korea.