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Campaign for Phase 2 poll ends, 8 lakh voters will decide the fate of 92 candidates

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

The election campaigning for Phase-2 of the Manipur Assembly Elections ends as the silent period begins from 4 pm today. In the second phase, polling will be conducted at 22 constituencies out of the total 60 seats on Saturday.

Ahead of the silent period, the political heavyweights of both ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and opposition Congress parties continued to address public meetings at different areas of the poll-bound assembly and appealed to

vote for their respective parties.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh led BJP leaders attended a public meeting at Lilong Haoreibi Mayai Leikai in Thoubal district while the AICC senior observer Jairam Ramesh and Manipur Secular Progressive Alliance leaders led by Dr M Nara Singh appealed to the people to vote for their alliance candidates.

A senior functionary of the BJP Manipur said they are expecting minimum 14-15 seats from the 22 assembly constituencies. On the other hand, Congress leaders said they will sweep the Thoubal

district.

In 2017 assembly elections, Congress bagged a total of 8 seats out of 10 seats in Thoubal district.

In the second phase of polling on March 5, 92 candidates including 2 women candidates, will contest at 22 assembly constituencies under six electoral districts. A total of 8,47,400 voters including 4,28,968 females and 4,18,432 males will franchise their rights.

BJP fielded candidates for all the 22 assembly seats while Congress fielded 18 candidates, BJP ally National People's Party has 11, Naga

People's Front and Janata Dal(U) have 10 each.

The first phase of polling will decide the fate of former Chief Minister O Ibobi Singh, his son O Surjakumar, former Deputy Chief Minister Gaikhangam, forest minister Awangbow Newmai, Water supply minister Losii Dikho, former education minister Th Radheshyam, who were seeking re-election from Thoubal, Khangabok, Nungba, Tamei, Mao and Heirok Assembly constituencies.

A maximum of 8 candidates are contesting in Wangkhem Assembly constituency.

Five farmers severely beaten by armed cadres in Churachandpur District

IT News
CCPur, March 3:

Five farmers belonging to Suangphu village, Singnat Sub-division of Churachandpur District were beaten up and seriously injured by armed cadres under suspension of operation with the government between 3 to 4 pm on Wednesday on their way to paddy fields. The five persons were identified as Mansonkhup (21 years) s/o Manglamkap, Pauminthang (34 years) s/o Thangzasuan, Thangkhangkup (37 years) s/o

Chinsuanmang, all residents of Suangphu village situated near the Indo-Myanmar border in Churachandpur district. As per the statement of the victims, they were assaulted by cadres of ZRA.

Report said the five persons were on their way to work to paddy fields when all of a sudden some armed miscreants suspected to be cadres of ZRA waylaid them and took to their Muanvial designated camp near Singnat sub-division headquarter where they were beaten black and blue.

All five were undergoing

treatment at Singnat Community Health Centre (CHC). News reporters who visited the Singnat CHC witnessed that the injured farmers were not able to stand up on their feet. The incident is believed to be the repercussion of the recently held 12th Manipur MLA Election 2022 where first phase of the polling was held on 28th February in some constituencies including 60-Singhat AC. Out of four candidates in the fray, the BJP and KPA candidates were seen to be two heavyweights tussling for poll victory in Singhat AC.

As per the statement of the five persons, they were tortured and beaten up and were forced to sign on a paper stating that they will not do anything against the Zomi interest in future. They said that they were further warned of "death" if they continue to do so, and even leak this incident to anyone. When asked about what they did against the "Zomi interest", the victims answered that they were beaten up just because they supported the KPA party during this election.

Evening news papers boycott Congress party

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

Evening newspaper based in Imphal had boycotted the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee for humiliation to the newspaper. All Evening newspaper - Kanglapao, Kangleipakkhi Meira, Paqjel, Pandam, Kangleipakkhi Meira, Paoninkhol and Imphal Times have dropped all news press conference of the Congress Party today.

The decision to boycott the MPCC related news was taken in a virtual meeting held today. The meeting seriously discussed about the attitude of the MPCC towards evening newspaper based in Imphal.

Zeliangrong CSOs urge not to interfere in the choice of individuals while casting vote

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

The Zeliangrong Civil Organisations (ZCOs) comprising of ZeliangrongBaudi, Zeliangrong Youth Front and Zeliangrong Students Union have strongly urged to all concerned to leave the people alone in the matter of Election so that the people is allowed to exercise their democratic right in free and fair manner.

"Let the people use their wisdom and decide their own choice to vote and choose the right candidate to represent them. We have been witnessing development deficit, economical backwardness and tardy social progress in Zeliangrong areas due to disturbances, interferences, obstruction and intimidation to

voters from different factors during election time in the guise of different issues and agenda", a statement said.

The Zeliangrong Civil Organisations also expressed dissatisfaction towards some people who imposed road blockade in two different locations near Tamphung village and Magamai village areas situated along the Maram-Peren road under Tadubi Assembly Constituency, Senapati District, Manipur. Zeliangrong voters comprised of students and others who are doing different professions and coming to exercise their democratic right from Nagaland side were forcibly turned back towards Peren side at Tamphung village and those voters coming from Senapati and Imphal side were forcibly turned back to-

wards Maram Centre side at Magamai village, the statement said.

"Such unlawful and criminal act indulged and committed by those group of people is totally unacceptable and uncalled for and strongly condemned and also demand the concern authority to enquire into the incident and identify the people who are behind the incident and book them immediately as per law of the land. The weakness and the ineffectiveness of the Govt should not unnecessarily render the democratic citizen of the country to suffer in such a manner. Failure on the part of the Govt to act as per law of the land will only set as a precedence in the coming future", the statement added.

contd. on page 4

CEO announces Re-poll in 12 Polling stations of 5 Assembly Constituencies

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

The Election commission of India has announced re-poll in 12 polling stations of 5 Assembly constituencies where election was held in the first phase.

Repoll of the 12 polling stations will be held on March 5 from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The 2nd phase polling of the 12 Manipur Legislative Assembly will also be held on the same day.

The 12 polling Stations going for re-poll are 1/20-Sarouthel in Khundrakpam Assembly Constituency of Imphal East district. 51/46-

New Keithelmanbi of 51-Saitu(ST) Assembly constituency of Kangpokpi district; 56/5-Songsang, 56/10-Maite and 56/19-Tinsuong of 56-Thanlon (ST) Assembly constituency; 57/20-Majuron Kuki, 57/31-N.Chingphei, 57/34-Khoirentak, 57/39-Molsang and 57/49-Leinom of 57-Henglep (ST) Assembly constituency; 60/36-Teikot and 60/43-Maukot (60-Singhat (ST) assembly constituency in Churachandpur District.

A statement of the CEO Manipur said that the proposal for re-poll in these polling stations was recommended based on the facts

and information received/ reported from respective Returning Officers. One of the main reason for consideration of re-polling was connected to damage of EVMs by miscreants during and after the poll. These kind of incidents lead to major discomfort to the electors of the polling station as their right to franchise gets infringed on the poll day and they will now need to come out again to exercise their rightful franchise on the day of re-poll.

The CEO has appealed all electors of these polling stations to come out in big numbers to exercise their franchise.

Police arrests 2 persons for the destruction of 1st phase election proceedings

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

Churachandpur district Police has arrested one Onjalal Kipgen of K. Phaijang on March 1, 2022 for causing damage to EVM with a hammer. He was the polling agent for Leinom Polling Station. As per the FIR registered at District police, Churachandpur based on the report submitted by the Returning Officer, Henglep Assembly Constituency, the EVM allotted to Leinom Polling Station had been damaged by a person on poll day of Phase-I, February 28 at about 3.45 pm. The District Police, during their course of investigation through eye witness testimony and call tracing ar-

rested Onjalal Kipgen from B Aijalon area of Churachandpur District.

It may be mentioned that such offence is in contravention to section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984, section 171-C, section 427 and section 506 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and with fine.

In another incident, District Police, Kangpokpi also arrested one Manggoulun Haolai (19) of Mollen, Kamsei Village, Ukhrul District. He was arrested as per a complaint lodged by Returning Officer, Saikul Assembly Constituency Bungba Maibam Khuman for

causing damage to VVPAT machines at around 11.40 am February 28, first phase poll day at Leplen polling Station by some unknown miscreants.

A case was registered at Saikul Police Station on the same day as per the complaint lodged and later added Section 136(2)(b) Representation of People Act, 1951. Soon after the registration of FIR, District Police led by OC Saikul police station under the supervision of, DSP Saparmeina Seikhomang Khongsai and the overall supervision of district SP Amrita Sinha started investigating the case by visiting the place of occurrence (Leplen Polling Station). Investigation is also on to arrest the other co-accused persons.

CEO condoles the demise of IRB Constable

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur condoles the demise of an India Reserve Battalion (IRB) constable namely, K Lalawmpuia in an accident occurred on March 1 at Tamenglong district. He also prayed for speedy recovery of other personnel injured in the accident.

Late Lalawmpuia, who hailed from Zion Veng in Champhai district of Mizoram, was currently posted at 2nd Battalion Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB), Mizoram. The IRB personnel from Mizoram were part of the security force which had come for duty to Manipur for the State Assembly Election. They were travelling from Mizoram to Manipur for the

second phase polls on March 5 where they met with an accident near Tamenglong College early morning on March 1 at around 1.30 am.

The CEO Manipur also conveyed his deepest condolences and sympathies to the members of the bereaved family and prayed the Almighty God to give them strength to withstand the loss.

Petroleum prices are going to up next week

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



The cost of crude oil in the international markets has gone up to \$ 100 per barrel, due to which a difference of 9 rupees per liter has been created in the price of petrol. To fill this gap, the Government

of India will have to raise the prices of petrol and diesel in the country from next week after the state elections are over. One of the reasons for the sudden increase in the price of crude oil in the world market is Russia's fierce military operation in Ukraine. The oil market fears that the supply of oil and gas from Russia may stop due to this war or due to economic sanctions from Western countries. Let me tell you that Russia is a major supplier of crude oil and natural gas. Russia has been supplying one-third of the oil and gas needs of European countries, and the pipelines through which this supply has been made pass through Ukraine. In addition, Russia has been fulfilling 10 per cent of the total requirement of the international market. However, India buys less than 2 percent of the total imports of oil and coal from Russia. Therefore, India is not worried about the supply of oil, but its concern is definitely the growing prices of crude oil in the international markets.

This type of concern is being felt in the international market for the first time since 2014. According to the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) of the Ministry of Oil, India had to pay \$ 102 per barrel on March 1, 2022 for crude oil. In November last year, the price of oil was \$ 81.5 per barrel. Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPC) are incurring losses of Rs 5.7 per liter on petrol and diesel due to increase in oil prices, which does not include their margin of Rs 2.5 per liter. To bring both losses and margins to a balanced level, these state-owned oil companies will have to raise the price by Rs 9-10 per liter. India has not allowed oil prices to rise for three and a half months since November, while oil has been getting expensive in the global markets. The country imports 85 percent of its oil and gas from outside. Oil prices are reviewed on a daily basis, but in view of the elections in five states including UP, Punjab, Uttarakhand, this is not being done at the moment.

The Russia-Ukraine war has raised fears of inflation of all kinds, not just petrol and diesel. As mentioned earlier also in this column, the heat of the war will be felt in every part of the world for a long time. The loss is not only happening to Ukraine, but the people of Russia will also bear this loss for a long time. The effect of economic sanctions of USA and European countries is already visible there. Even Russia had to close its stock market for a week. The price of the Russian currency Ruble has been falling against the US Dollar and interest rates in the country have gone up. Orders from Russian traders have started getting canceled and many multinational companies have started closing their business with Russia.

World Wildlife Day Human life is directly related to wildlife



By: Vijay Garg

This time this theme of World Wildlife Day is considered very important. This time the discussion will focus on the conservation of those species, which have the greatest contribution to ecological conservation. For several decades in a row, the most neglected was wildlife. We must have expressed concern on the conservation of tigers, lions and elephants broadly, because they appear to be extinct, but today such species of flora and other fauna are disappearing, which keep the ecosystem stable. We do not know how many species have been lost by man since he took his dominion over the earth. Roughly about 8,400 wildlife and flora-species are threatened by us and it is believed that the existence of about 30,000 species has been raised in great questions. Earlier it has also been believed that if this continues, then we will push about one million species towards extinction in the coming time. We have certainly discussed extinct species, but perhaps if we had data about the adverse effects of these species, whether wildlife or plant species, their extinction would be more serious. The overall health of our ecosystem is probably also directly related to human life, because if deteriorating winds can directly attack our respiratory system, it is somehow linked to the climate. Be it pure water or all the issues and questions related to our food, they also have a direct relationship with the ecosystem.

The earth has woven the entire ecosystem through a fabric of 46 million years of labor, in which every small life or non-living element has a fine relationship with each other. They have interdependence and this is the reason that if this dependency is broken for any reason, then there is upheaval in the ecosystem. Now the reason for the loss of biodiversity is humans themselves. According to the IUCN report, 121 plant species and 735 animal species have come in the 'Red List'. One-third of the species are in the threatened category, of which 41 percent are amphibians, 25 percent mammals and 13.30 percent bird species. These are data after the study of 63,838 species, which is only four percent of the total species available in the earth, meaning 96 percent of the species have not even been studied. The understanding of nature, science and systems is negligible in all our education, because if it were part of education from the early stages, then perhaps we would have increased the understanding of our ecosystem and the same would be reflected in our development policies.

For some time now, if we also look at the rate at which we have lost forests every year, then perhaps we will understand some seriousness. The figure is in front. Every year we lose 1090 million hectares of forest around the world. Also understand that Amazon, which is called the lungs of the world, loses forest equal to a football field every minute. Today we should also know that 400 dark zones have already formed in the ocean, which means that life in these areas has become zero.

We have set up sanctuaries around the world to protect wildlife, but these sanctuaries have become victims of ambushes. This does not merely raise questions of mismanagement, but points to the more important collective participation, which is nil. Look in your own country. The death toll of a tiger every two days has come only recently. Still we have not been able to seriously understand that life in our education, which in one way or the other contributes a lot to our economy, food and our other needs, which are directly related to human life. Until such a great understanding is not made, we will continue to celebrate such days every year to show off.

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India: A suicide narrates mainstream media's susceptibility

By: Nava Thakuria



The news broke from Chennai in south India as a senior photojournalist killed himself on 13 February 2022 in his office itself. Initially it was assumed T. Kumar's suicide as a personal affair, but soon the harsh reality surfaced. The victim did not receive full salaries for nearly five years and he was in desperate need of money. His wife (Kavitha) underwent medical treatments and only daughter Pavithra's engagement ceremony was also approaching. Kumar (56) might have exhausted the borrowing space from family members and well-wishers! Hence, it was his last undesirable action.

After the incident, I could realise Kumar was known to me as he worked in Guwahati as a representative of the United News of India (UNI) for some months. Kumar had a very amiable nature to nurture friendship and even tried to help everyone according to his capacity. We had a number of chatting over the media as a whole. Kumar was a passionate listener to my 'lectures unending', which often crossed the limit. At the end of my discourse, he always concluded the session saying - Nava-da you have to come to my place soon.

Reactions to Kumar's demise was little slow as everybody understood it as a self-killing matter, but when the real cause came out, the Indian media fraternity got a real jerk. A responsible journalist, who was with the UNI for more than three decades, had to end his life as was being denied his dues. Kumar was not waiting for any lottery or other funds to support his family in distress. He was only expecting his salaries, unpaid fully for over 50 months, and it was the commitment of UNI management authorities while engaging him in work. Should not it be treated as a crime against the insensitive UNI management for slowly putting Kumar on the verge of self-destruction?

Lately various media rights bodies have come forward condoling

Kumar's unacceptable death and also raising some funds for the bereaved family. There are over 200 UNI employees across the country, who are also waiting for their dues for years. Need not to deny that the Indian media fraternity has been suffering heavily since the Covid-19 hit the country two years back. Morning newspapers lost their circulation drastically, so their business, influence and visibility. Satellite news channels also start missing valued audiences. And as a dependent agency on the mainstream media outlets (also some government organs), the UNI also faced a humiliating downfall.

The largest democracy on Earth with a billion-plus population today supports around 82,000 registered publications with more than 15,000 in the newspaper category. Published in various languages like English, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujarati, Punjabi, Odia, Assamese, etc the daily newspapers have a cumulative circulation of around 110 million. But following the corona-crisis, these physical newspapers have lost almost one-third of their actual circulation figures because of the prolonged nationwide lockdown and various after-effects.

Similarly, India has around 1,600 satellite television channels where more than 400 are news related out-

lets. As most satellite news channels are free-to-air (FTA) in nature, they heavily depend on commercial advertisements for survival. These news channels cannot ask money from their viewers (subscribers) and the proprietors have to manage all expenditures from running offices to staff salaries to productions to flawless distributions from their resources. More amazingly, the FTA channel owners have to pay a huge amount of money to cable operators and direct-to-home (DTH) agencies.

However, there is no clarity on how much money a cable operator or a private DTH agency can demand from an FTA channel. The logic behind the financial transactions narrates that those cable operator/DTH agencies can charge the amount of money for providing space into their respective packages which are distributed to viewers. On the other hand, they collect money from the consumers as well as the freight charges for downloading the signal from the satellite and distributing it to the households. Nobody knows if these financial transactions fall under the government financial tax network or not!

With the advent of internet services, which are drastically cheaper in India, millions of digital news platforms are coming up to feed the population where the literacy rate is grow-

ing above 75 per cent in recent years. One can say, today's media family has increased its outlets significantly. The digital platforms have cleverly blended the flavours of daily newspapers, news channels and also radio outlets, where the audience can get text messages as well as audio-visual inputs. In the long run, taking advantage of the expanded space of smartphones, the digital media may ruin the combined market of traditional outlets by slowly grabbing advertisement revenues.

The fall of mainstream media outlets have affected the business of news agencies as they generate revenues mostly from the morning dailies, news channels and private radio outlets. Initially the Indian news agencies (including UNI) played an important role as a trusted bridge between the international news providers and local media outlets. But with the change of government policies and invasion of the internet service, the agencies start losing their space. The last blow to the UNI came in 2017 as Prasar Bharati decided to withdraw its subscription for All India Radio and Doordarshan. The agency had to incur a huge loss after the move.

But for any reason the UNI management cannot escape the blame for Kumar's tragic end. The board of directors with its faulty policies started destroying the agency long back (at least before the corona-disaster). When it was in a sound financial position, the management launched a multi-lingual television news agency (UNI TV), but soon it failed to generate adequate subscriptions seemingly because of its unprofessional news intakes. So, for the unprofessionalism on part of the management, employees must not suffer. The UNI management should promptly pay all the outstanding dues to the Kumar's family, if not any compensatory amount at this moment.

(The author is a Northeast India-based Media Commentator)

'Silverline' Project and Kerala's failing Ecological Health

The K-Rail SilverLine Semi-High-Speed Railway Project is the prestigious dream project of the Kerala Government that proposes to make high speed rail travelling possible between the south and north of the state. The proposed railway line covering 11 districts of the state is estimated to take passengers in 4 hours from the southern district of Thiruvananthapuram to the northern district of Kasaragod. As of now, the time to cover the same distance is 12 hours. The state government's ambitious semi high speed rail project would run trains with 200 kms per hour speed. The government believes that this project would revolutionize the state's development and give a boost to its tourism sector.

In its second tenure, the Pinarayi Vijayan government led by the CPI(M) moved with greater energy in articulating the entire project to bring it on to the track. Expecting the project to finish by 2025, the Kerala Rail Development Corporation Limited (KRDL), a joint venture between the Kerala government and the Ministry of Railways began its work. Though the project was a well thought out plan, it received severe criticism and opposition from various sections of the society including political parties and NGOs. Being a small state, with high density of population, the government wanted to reduce the travel load of traffic from the roads and help the existing railway system in the state to be less burdensome. The state government had to face severe opposition from the public as the land acquisition, it alleged, was started without proper rehabilitation being planned for the evacuees. The public opposition culminated in launching an outfit called K-Rail Silver Line Virudha Janakeeya Samiti, to carry out the agitation and stage protests at various levels. The Detailed Plan Report (DPR)

proposes to build flats for an estimated 7000 households who would be evacuated. To accommodate these families, the report estimates to procure 10 hectares of land worth Rs 1730 crore.

The opposition is mainly due to the failing ecological health of the state converting it from the 'God's Own Country' to the 'Floods' Own State'. In recent years Kerala witnessed torrential rain causing dangerous flash floods and landslides damaging lives of thousands of people. The state is located along the Western Ghats with many of its towns at the foothills. The flood that hit the state in 2018 and the subsequent landslides in 2020 were so catastrophic that they affected the lives of thousands of people, making many of them homeless and turning their land unfit for cultivation. Unprecedented landslides buried many families under torrential sludge in 2020. A large area of the state, especially the areas attached to the rivers were submerged in water leading the state to run a massive evacuation drive. All the 14 districts of the state coming under the fury of rain and flood, the Government of India declared it as a level three natural calamity. The state had to release water from all the major dams which intensified the flood water to rise further. That was the first time the state witnessed such a precarious water fury. Studies found various reasons for the cause of the disaster. According to experts, issues such as heavy rainfall, the rampant mining and quarrying, construction on the highlands, and massive deforestation might have provoked nature, breaking its balance. Being a densely populated state, Kerala went on for

massive construction to accommodate more people, inviting unprecedented calamities. Rampant construction on the hilly regions, shaving their green heads with uninterrupted human activities turned them into places of heavy

landslides.

According to the report prepared by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, excessive mining and quarrying also contributed to the disaster. The state witnessed a massive change in its climatic situations in recent years. This was not the case some years ago. The ecology of the state was well maintained with beautiful green coverings across its landscape making the state the real God's Own Country. The recent rains, landslides and flash floods triggered much opposition against the K-Rail project presumably expecting a huge ecological imbalance that the project would bring. Experts have already warned the State Government on the expected environmental issues that the rail project would intensify deteriorating the vulnerability of its ecology further. The other reason that the project is gaining opposition is for the fear of economic burden that it would bring on the state. Investing a huge sum of about Rs.64000 crore on a single rail project, the state would have to pay interest of an estimated Rs.5000 crore every year. Experts view it as a huge financial burden that the state is risking while taking up a project that it considers the most prestigious. The project is also opposed for being launched without any adequate studies and surveys conducted on the natural and economic disaster it is ex-

pected to bring. Though protests are underway, the government is firm on taking the project forward to its final stage.

Meanwhile the Kerala high court raised its eyebrows on the silence of the Central government on the K-Rail Project. Warning the state government for implementing the project in a haste, the court asked the union government to make its stand clear. With the Railway Board coming against the state's prestigious project in the court, the Silver Line Project by the State government might be shelved temporarily. As a huge amount of debt is involved in the project, the Ministry of Railways is examining its financial viability. The project also invited severe criticism from the metro-man of India E. Sreedharan. The K-Rail is expected to damage thousands of hectares of farm land and areas of human settlement. As the land acquisition for the project contains wetlands, forest areas, backwater areas, residential areas with high density of population, and a huge farm land with rice cultivation, the project is viewed to disrupt the ecology of the area in future. Passing through flood prone Mid-Highlands, the project is to take place on elevations and cuttings. Studies reveal the fact that such constructions can easily be damaged during flash floods and the situation will worsen in the state during the rainy season. What remains to be seen is the pace with which the state government executes its prestigious project amid pressure mounting on it to abandon it. One thing is sure, as a state, Kerala holds less ecological health to face the kind of disasters that it has undergone recently. Will the K-Rail Silver Line Project make it more vulnerable?

(The author is a Freelance Journalist/Social Worker)

Ukraine war: Centre to operate 19 flights today to bring back over 3,700 Indians

Agency
New Delhi, March 3:

Nineteen evacuation flights will operate today to bring back 3,726 Indian nationals stranded in war-torn Ukraine. These flights will operate from Ukraine's neighbouring countries, to which Indians are being taken via land routes because Ukrainian airspace is closed.

"Under Operation Ganga, 3726 Indians will be brought back home today on 8 flights from Bucharest, 2 flights from Suceava, 1 flight from Kosice, 5 flights from Budapest and 3 flights from Rzeszow," civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia tweeted.

"With all hands on deck and (under) the direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji, we will get 3,726 of our people back home today. Jai Hind!" Scindia wrote on the microblogging site.

The above announcement comes as the government increases flights under Operation Ganga - which was launched to bring back Indian nationals from war-ravaged Ukraine since Russia's full-scale attack on February 24.

Currently, Scindia is in Romania to coordinate evacuation efforts along with three other Union ministers- Hardeep Singh Puri (Hungary), Kiren Rijiju (Slovakia) and General (ret'd) VK Singh (Poland).

Given the closure of Ukrainian air space for civilian flights, India has been evacuating its nationals through special flights from Ukraine's western neighbours such as Romania, Hungary and Poland.

As many as 17,000 Indians

50 out of 230 Northeast students return from Ukraine so far



Agency
Guwahati, March 3:

Around 50 students out of over 230 students of three northeastern states - Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, who were stranded in war-ravaged Ukraine, have returned to India so far.

Assam Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua has directed the district administrations to reach out to parents of students stranded in Ukraine.

An official in Guwahati said that the Assam government so far prepared a list of 160 such students and the process of evacuating them has been going on in coordination with the External Affairs Ministry.

He said that four more

have been evacuated from Ukraine so far since advisories were issued.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has also joined the evacuation efforts and has brought back

students from Assam arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday, taking the total number of returnees from Ukraine to 32.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, in a tweet, said that 12 students from his state studying in Ukraine have reached India safely, six are on their way to Delhi and nine are en route to the border.

Another Eleven students have reached safely in neighbouring countries and will be flown back to India soon, Sangma said.

Tripura Chief Secretary Kumar Alok said that District Magistrates and Sub-Divisional Magistrates in all the districts have physically contacted family members of 33 students who are studying in Ukraine.

stranded Indians in four flights. All four aircraft of the IAF were the C-17 military transport.

Prime Minister Modi has said the government was work-

The CS said that five students have reached India and 24 have crossed the Ukraine border and are on their way to India while four are still in Ukraine but they remained safe.

The Centre is making all arrangements for them, he added.

The state governments of most of the northeastern states are in constant touch with the MEA to safely evacuate the stranded students and other citizens of these states in Ukraine.

The government is trying to bring back Indians stranded in war-torn Ukraine by asking them to cross into neighbouring countries from where they are flown back by special aircraft to the country.

India logs 6,561 Covid infections, 142 deaths in a day; active cases decline to 77,152

Agency
New Delhi, March 3:

India's COVID-19 case tally rose to 4,29,45,160 with 6,561 people testing positive for the infection in a day while active cases declined to 77,152, according to Union Health Ministry data on Thursday.

The death toll has climbed to 5,14,388 with 142 more people succumbing to the disease, the data updated at 8 am stated.

It was for 25 consecutive days that India recorded less than one lakh daily COVID-19 cases.

Active cases comprise 0.18 per cent of the total infections while the national Covid recovery rate improved to 98.62 per cent, the Health Ministry said.

A reduction of 8,528 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a day.

The daily positivity rate was 0.74 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 0.99 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 4,23,53,620, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.20 per cent.

The cumulative Covid vaccine doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 178.02 crore.

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

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of two

crore on May 4 last year and three crore on June 23.

Among the 142 fatalities reported in a day, 96 were from Kerala and 12 from Karnataka.

In total, 5,14,388 deaths have been reported so far in the country with 1,43,706 from Maharashtra, 65,597 from Kerala, 39,969 from Karnataka, 38,009 from Tamil Nadu, 26,127 from Delhi, 23,468 from Uttar Pradesh and 21,178 from West Bengal.

The health 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," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Bid to conserve water, NF Railway installs first-ever Automatic Coach Washing Plant in Guwahati



Agency
Guwahati, March 3:

In a big step towards the commitment of water conservation, the Northeast Frontier Railway has installed its first-ever Smart Automatic Coach Washing Plant (ACWP) at Kamakhya Coach Maintenance Depot in Guwahati.

The plant, having a multi-stage cleaning facility was inaugurated on Wednesday by Anshul Gupta, General Manager of N. F. Railway, said a statement.

This system is eco-friendly and provides an efficient and cost-effective technique for outer body cleaning with optimum utilization of water, it said.

Currently, coaches were being manually cleaned which is time & water-consuming.

The automatic Coach Washing Plant ensures reduce, recycle and reuse principle through its water treatment plant, the statement added.

It uses only 300 litres of water out of which 80% is recycled water and only 60 litres

(i.e. 20%) of water is freshwater as compared to 1500 litres per coach in manual cleaning.

The plant can clean up to 300 to 350 coaches per day. The system is equipped with controlled chemical and soap dilution, which ensures no pollution.

It can save around 1440 litres of water per coach in cleaning activities, thus saving 34 thousand litres of water per rake of 24 coaches. Cleaning of coaches through this process also involves saving of manpower, thereby reducing the expenditure.

The Plant is equipped with PLC based Intelligent Control System which has an auto-start system when the train enters the ACWP.

It can count the number of

coaches, calculate the speed of train and generate an MIS report.

It is also capable of self-diagnosis and auto-indicates any failure in the system.

Thus, the state-of-art system provides better quality of cleaning as compared to the conventional manual system of coach washing.

This Railway plans to install 8 more ACWPs at Siliguri, New Jalpaiguri, Dibrugarh, Katihar, Silchar, Naharlagun, Alipurduar and Agartala, it added.

N. F. Railway has put one more step forward in the direction of leveraging technology to achieve environmental sustainability with the commissioning of this plant at Kamakhya.

Name Change

I. Saikhom Ratan Singh, S/o Saikhom Hemchandra Singh, aged about 49 resident of Sagolband Salam Leikai, Imphal, Manipur, House No. 30 have changed my name to **Saikhom Ratan** for all future purposes.

Sd/-
Saikhom Ratan
Sagolband Salam Leikai

Covid infected people may have different variants hidden in several body parts: Study

Agency
London, March 3:

People suffering from COVID-19 may have several variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus hidden away from the immune system in different parts of the body, according to the findings of two studies.

A international team led by researchers from the University of Bristol, UK, and Max Planck Institute for Medical Research in Germany noted that this may make complete clearance of the virus from the body of the infected person much more difficult.

The studies, published in the journal Nature Communications, demonstrates how the virus can evolve distinctly in different cell types, and adapt its immunity, in the same infected host.

The researchers investigated the function of a tailor-made pocket in the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein in the infection cycle of the virus.

The pocket in the spike protein, which the virus uses to enter and infect the cells, played an essential role in viral infectivity, they said.

"An incessant series of variants have completely replaced the original virus by now, with Omicron and Omicron 2 (a subvariant) dominating worldwide," said Professor Imre

Berger from the University of Bristol.

"We analysed an early variant discovered in Bristol, BrisDelta. It had changed its shape from the original virus, but the pocket we had discovered was there, unaltered," Berger said.

The researchers noted that BrisDelta presents as a small subpopulation in the samples taken from patients, but appears to infect certain cell-types better than the virus that dominated the first wave of infections.

"Our results showed that one can have several different virus variants in one's body," said Kapil Gupta, lead author of the BrisDelta study.

"Some of these variants may use kidney or spleen cells as their niche to hide, while the body is busy defending against the dominant virus type. This could make it difficult for the infected patients to get rid of SARS-CoV-2 entirely," Gupta said.

The team applied cutting-edge synthetic biology techniques, state-of-the-art imaging and cloud computing to decipher viral mechanisms at work.

To understand the function of the pocket, the scientists built synthetic SARS-CoV-2 virions in the test tube, that are mimics of the virus but have a major advantage in that they are safe, as they do not multiply in human cells.

Using these artificial virions, the researchers were able to study the exact mechanism of the pocket in viral infection.

They demonstrated that upon binding of a fatty acid, the spike protein decorating the virions changed their shape.

This switching 'shape' mechanism effectively cloaks the virus from the immune system, according to the researchers.

"By 'ducking down' of the spike protein upon binding of inflammatory fatty acids, the virus becomes less visible to the immune system," said Oskar Stauffer, lead author of the second study.

"This could be a mechanism to avoid detection by the host and a strong immune response for a longer period of time and increase total infection efficiency," Stauffer said.

"It appears that this pocket, specifically built to recognise these fatty acids, gives SARS-CoV-2 an advantage inside the body of infected people, allowing it to multiply so fast. This could explain why it is there, in all variants, including Omicron," Berger added.

However, the researchers noted that the same feature also provides a unique opportunity to defeat the virus, exactly because it is so conserved - with a tailor made antiviral molecule that blocks the pocket.

Union Health Minister addresses 10th World Hearing Day Celebration

PIB
New Delhi, March 3:

Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare stressed on the importance of collaborative efforts for enhancing awareness among communities regarding hearing disorders and hearing impairment. He stated that "With Jan Bhagidari and Jan Andolan, everyone can effectively contribute to adding to the existing knowledge among communities regarding benefits of early identification, and timely treatment of hearing disorders". When left undetected and untreated, hearing ailments can transform into disabilities thereby adversely impacting the productivity and quality of life of many. He was addressing the 10th anniversary of World Hearing Day celebrations at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in the presence of Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, here today. The theme for this year's World Hearing Day is "To hear for life, listen with care".

The Union Health Minister acknowledged the crucial role of ASHAs and ANMs, Doctors, NGOs, nurses in creating awareness in this regard. He urged them to further educate the communities and parents of young children for early screening and identification of hearing impaired.

Biden to Decide on Applying or Waiving Sanctions on India for S-400 Purchase from Russia: US Official

Agency
Washington, March 3:

US President Joe Biden will decide whether to apply or waive sanctions on India, one of America's key partners, under the CAATSA law for its purchase of the S-400 missile defence system from Russia, a senior administration official has told lawmakers.

The US administration is required under a domestic law, Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), to impose sanctions on any country that has significant transactions with Iran, North Korea or Russia.

CAATSA is a tough US law which authorises the administration to impose sanctions on countries that purchase major defence hardware from Russia in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections.

Responding to a question on possible CAATSA sanctions on India, Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism on Wednesday that it was for the President Biden to decide whether to apply or waive sanctions on India.

"I can assure you that the administration will follow the CAATSA law and fully implement that law and will consult with Congress as we move forward with any of them. What unfortunately I am not able to say is to prejudice the decisions of the President or the



(Secretary of State) on the waiver issue or on the sanctions issue, or whether Russia's invasion of Ukraine will bear on that decision," he said.

Lu said that the Biden administration is yet to decide on applying sanctions on India under CAATSA.

"India is a really important security partner of ours now. And that we value moving forward that partnership and I hope that part of what happens with the extreme criticism that Russia has faced is that India will find it's now time to further distances," Lu said.

The senior American diplomat said it is going to be very hard for any country to buy major weapon systems from Russia because of the sweeping sanctions now placed on Russian banks.

"What we've seen from India in just the last few weeks, is the cancellation of MiG 29 orders, Russian helicopter orders and anti-tank weapon orders," Lu said.

Lu's remarks came as India faced flak from US lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats for choosing to abstain from a UN vote on Wednesday to rebuke Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A total of 141 nations voted in favour of the move condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and five nations were against it, with 35 countries, including India, abstaining. The UNGA resolution was similar to the one circulated in the 15-nation Security Council last Friday, on which also India had abstained.

The UNSC resolution, which received 11 votes in

favour and three abstentions, was blocked after permanent member Russia exercised its veto. In October 2018, India had signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions.

The US has already imposed sanctions on Turkey under the CAATSA for the purchase of a batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia. Following the US sanctions on Turkey over the procurement of S-400 missile systems, there were apprehensions that Washington may impose similar punitive measures on India.

Russia has been one of India's key major suppliers of arms and ammunition.

2nd batch free coaching started at Khongman

IT News
Imphal, March 3:

Inaugural function of the free coaching for students of class IX and X for four months was held at Mela Lampak School today. The inaugural function was

attended by Prof Dr Ch. Ningomba as chief guest.

This is the 2nd batch of free coaching organized by Khongman Youth Development Committee, in Imphal East. The Free coaching aims to shape the future of society and exhorted them

to move towards the right path. The free coaching is being organized under the theme "Lousing Gi Mangal"

The free coaching will be held at Mela Lampak school, Kitna Panung in Thongju Assembly constituency.

Centre sanctions Rs.15 crore for strengthening border trade with Myanmar, Bangladesh

Agency
Aizawl, March 3:

The Centre is making massive efforts to facilitate border trade between Mizoram and its two neighbouring countries, Myanmar and Bangladesh, Mizoram commerce and industries minister Dr. R. Lalhangliana informed the state legislature on Wednesday.

Mizoram shares a 510 km long international border with

Myanmar and 318 km with Bangladesh.

Replying to a question from ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) member and Champai North MLA Dr. ZR Thiamsanga, the commerce minister said that the Centre has taken a proactive measures to strengthen the Indo-Myanmar border trade point at Zokhawthar village in east Mizoram's Champhai district.

The Central government

has sanctioned Rs.15 crore for strengthening and upgrade of land customs station at Zokhawthar, he said.

The sanctioned fund will be utilised for upgradation of infrastructures for the land customs station such as immigration check post, animal quarantine station, plant quarantine station laboratory, renovation of food testing laboratory, weight bridge and warehouse.

Contd. from Page 1

Zeliangrong CSOs urge not to...

The statement further said that it is not wise to obstruct the rights of the others while trying to achieve their objective. The best approach and the most effective method of winning the Election is to convince the hearts and minds of the voters by way of rightful and acceptable means. Obstruction, interference, disturbances, coercion or intimidation caused to others people's from exercising their free and fair democratic right by another group in order to win the Election will only bring negative impact to social progress in addition to social disharmony

and escalation of animosity among the people. Therefore the ZCOs urged to all concerned to refrain from resorting to such acts. Let there prevails peace and social harmony by respecting the rights of the others people.

It is the bounden duty of each and every citizen of the country to support and co-operate each others by ensuring the participation of every voters to exercise their democratic right by choosing their own choice of candidate. The selection of candidate in the Election time without giving the opportunity to the people to

think is the root cause of social backwardness and poor economical condition of the people. Selection of candidates by certain group or organisation by means of intimidation or coercion to voters during the election time is a suppressive policy and anti-people approach which should be stopped forthwith in the larger interest of the people. The ZCOs urged to all voters to exercise their democratic right in free and fair manner and to ensure and to achieve it is the responsibility of the Govt to uphold the Democratic right of the people.

Sports

ISL 2021/22: Kerala Blasters inch closer to semi spot with 3-1 win over fellow contenders Mumbai

Agency
Vasco (Goa), March 3:

Kerala Blasters FC sharpened their semifinal chances with a 3-1 win over Mumbai City FC in a rescheduled Indian Super League clash at the Tilak Maidan Stadium here on Wednesday.

Alvaro Vazquez (45th P, 60th) scored a brace either side of halftime after Sahal Abdul Samad (19th) opened the floodgates for Kerala who are now in fourth spot having 33 points from 19 games. They take on FC Goa in their final fixture while Mumbai — in fifth spot with 31 points from 19 matches — play Hyderabad FC in their final league game, hoping Kerala lose to Goa and they win against Hyderabad.

For Mumbai, Diego Mauricio scored a consolation goal from the spot in the 71st minute. Both teams started cautiously in the opening exchanges before Sahal showed individual brilliance to help Kerala nose ahead.

A botched clearance from Cassio Gabriel saw Sahal rob the ball off him to then twist and turn past the Brazilian and



a couple of more Mumbai shirts before drilling a low shot past Mohamad Nawaz who was perhaps blinded by the defenders in front of him as the ball nestled into the net.

It was Sahal's fifth goal of the campaign, underlining his upturn in form. Mumbai tried to forge an immediate comeback but it was not to be as Kerala doubled their lead, albeit a penalty after Mourtaada Fall brought him down inside the area.

The Spaniard was ice-cool from the spot, pausing in his

run-up to send Nawaz the wrong way with aplomb. At halftime, Kerala were cruising with a 2-0 verdict.

Kerala also scored another at the start of the second period but Luna's exceptional effort from outside the box was well saved by Nawaz. The yellow shirts did not have to wait long for the third goal, Nawaz making a meal of an easy clearance this time after Fall back passed to him.

Vazquez needed no second invitation as he slotted home

into an open goal. Mumbai pulled one back after Mauricio went down inside the box from what looked like a Ruivah Hornimpam push but as Kerala players appealed the decision the referee pointed to the spot. Mauricio stepped up and slammed home from the spot to make it 3-1.

Luna could have had a goal moments later as his free-kick was pushed as far as the post by Nawaz as Kerala held on to win 3-1 and sharpen their semifinal chances.

ICC T20I Rankings:

Virat Kohli slips out of top 10, Shreyas Iyer jumps to 18th after Sri Lanka series

Agency
New Delhi, March 3:

Former captain Virat Kohli slipped out of the top 10 of ICC T20I Batting Rankings once again after missing the recently-concluded 3-match series against Sri Lanka. Skipper Rohit Sharma also slipped 2 spots to 13th after an ordinary outing against the visiting Lankans in Lucknow and Dharamsala.

Virat Kohli, who was at the 10th spot after the conclusion of the 3-match T20I series against the West Indies, was rested for the final match of the series and the whole of the T20I series against Sri Lanka. Notably, Kohli had shown signs of a return to form when he hit a match-winning fifty against the West Indies in the 2nd T20I.

Meanwhile, Rohit Sharma, who has had a spotless record as captain since taking over as full-time T20I skipper, looked uncharacter-

istic in the Sri Lanka T20Is, getting out to Dushmantha Chameera on 2 occasions. He managed just 50 runs in the 3 matches against Sri Lanka.

Shreyas Iyer, who was in stunning form during the series, moved 27 spots to 18th in the T20I Rankings for Batters. Iyer scored three unbeaten half-centuries during India's 3-0 rout of Sri Lanka last month, with the 27-year-old amassing an impressive 204 runs at a strike rate of 174.

KL Rahul, who also missed the Sri Lanka series, is the only Indian among the top 10. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka scored an impressive 75 in the second game of the series and he was rewarded with a six-spot rise to ninth on the rankings.

Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan of Pakistan continue to hold the top 2 spots in the ICC T20I Batting Rankings for men.

In the bowling charts, Bhuvneshwar Kumar rose 3 spots to the 17th after a good

showing against Sri Lanka. He is the only Indian bowler among the top 20 while Jasprit Bumrah dropped 3 spots to 28th.

ICC T20I Rankings - India batters in top 10

KL Rahul - 10
Rohit Sharma - 13
Virat Kohli - 15
Shreyas Iyer - 18

The biggest mover on the Test rankings was South African quick Kagiso Rabada, who shot up three places to third following his impressive display against New Zealand.

Rabada managed 10 wickets during the two-match series, with his magnificent haul of 5/60 in the first innings of the second Test helping the Proteas on their way to an important 198-run triumph.

Marnus Labuschagne remains as the top ranked Test batter, with New Zealander Devon Conway jumping six places to 17th following his 92 in the second innings of the second Test against South Africa.