

TIME AND US

DAILY

Srinagar, Kashmir

SATURDAY

- DECEMBER, 23, 2017
- 04 RABI-AL-SANI 1439 AH
- ISSUE: 300
- VOLUME: 03
- PAGES: 08

WEATHER TEMPERATURE		
STATION	MAX TEMPERATURE	MIN TEMPERATURE
	ACT	ACT
SRINAGAR	12.8	2.3
JAMMU	22.5	8.3
LEH	5.1	-9.1
KARGIL	.04	-8.2

SUNSET SATURDAY: 05:27 PM
SUNRISE SUNDAY: 07:35 AM

LOCAL FORECAST OF SRINAGAR
 Generally Cloudy sky. Maximum & Minimum temperatures will be around 11°C & 2°C respectively.

RNI NO: JKENG/2015/62397 • PRICE RS.3/- (AIR SURCHARGE FOR DELHI, JAMMU & LADAKH 50/- PAISA)

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GOVT COMMITTED TO EMPOWERMENT OF SPECIALLY-ABLED: DY CM

UP CM CALLS ON INVESTORS TO TAP OPPORTUNITIES

PCA FRAMEWORK NOT INTENDED TO CONSTRAIN NORMAL BANKING OPERATIONS,

AJMAL AMONG TOP PAKISTANI CRICKETERS STUCK IN UGANDA

Restrictions imposed in Srinagar areas, Jamia closed for 3rd consecutive week

Situation remained peaceful: IGP

Srinagar, Dec 22: The district administration on Friday imposed restrictions in Srinagar areas in view of the valley-wide protest call given by the Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL).

The pro-freedom leaders including Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Muhammad Yasin Malik in a joint statement had called for protest against the civilians killings and had appealed religious clerics to highlight the current situation.

Officials said that the restrictions were imposed in several areas falling under the jurisdiction of Khanyar, Rainawari, Nowhatta, M.R. Gunj and Safa Kadal Police Stations while the areas falling under Kral Khud and Maisuma Police Stations were put under partial restrictions as precautionary measure.

A large contingent of Police and forces were deployed in Srinagar areas who had erected concertina wires



on the wires, halting the vehicular as well as the pedestrian movement.

Authorities also disallowed the mandatory congregational Friday

prayers today for the third consecutive week at the historic Jamia Masjid here.

Local sources said that the authorities bared people to offer the Friday prayers at the historic Jamia Masjid today.

"All the four of the gates of the Jamia Masjid remained closed for the fourth straight week today," local sources said.

Meanwhile, the Jamia Masjid's head cleric, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was placed under house detention on Thursday evening.

Mirwaiz said that the Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti is breaking the record of her predecessors by disallowing Muslims from offering Friday prayers and imposing restrictions in old city.

"18th Friday of this year #JamaMasjid locked down once again by the Anti Muslim ruling regime. @MehboobaMufti following the

See **Restrictions...** Pg 02

Peace talks with Pakistan take place only when it stops supporting militancy in J&K: Army chief

SRINAGAR, DEC 22: Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat today said peace talks with Pakistan can take place only when it stops supporting militants in Jammu and Kashmir.

Given its actions, it doesn't appear that Pakistan really wants peace, the Army chief added. He was in the western sector, close to the India-Pakistan border, to witness the Hamesha Vijayee exercise conducted by the Southern Command in Thar desert.

Rawat said Pakistan should stop support-



ing militants. Only then can we say that peace

See **Army...** Pg 02

DINESHWAR SHARMA'S STATURE TOO LOW TO RESOLVE KASHMIR ISSUE: NC

GOI belittles Kashmir crises by appointing retired Govt. servant as interlocutor

Srinagar, Dec 22: The opposition national conference on Friday termed the GOI's special representative for Kashmir- Dineshwar Sharma- as a low rung official having no mandate to resolve decades old Kashmir conflict.

The party has stated that Sharma's appointment was

See **NC...** Pg 02

POLICE SEIZES THOUSANDS OF CODEINE BOTTLES ANNUALLY

Srinagar, Dec 22: Jammu and Kashmir has turned a major importer of banned drugs from various parts of the country with police seizing thousands of Codeine Phosphate bottles annually.

Police sources told KNS that Srinagar police recently recovered atleast 1200 Codeine bottles from drug dealers. "These bottles were recovered in Srinagar city and police made few arrests," a police official, said.

On December 1, police arrested one truck driver for transporting banned drug in his vehicle from Jammu to Valley.

"12 cartoon cases (1200 bottles) of banned drug Codeine Phosphate was recovered from the vehicle," the police official said.

The seized Codorex containing codeine is manufactured by one of the top Pharmaceutical Company of India

See **Police...** Pg 02

Major relief for thousands of Workers SRO-520: GOVT NOTIFIES RULES FOR REGULARIZATION OF CASUALS

Fulfilled the commitment made in the Legislature during last Budget session: Dr Haseeb Drabu



Jammu, Dec 22: In a significant initiative which will provide major relief to thousands of daily-rated, casual, seasonal and other such workers, the Government has issued the much-awaited notification to formally set into motion the process for their regularization.

"Jammu & Kashmir Casual and Other Workers - Regular Engagement Rules 2017" outlined in SRO-520 issued by the Finance Department last evening will benefit nine categories of such appointees including daily-rated, casual, seasonal, HDF

(Hospital Development Fund) and local fund workers, NYCs, land donors and ad-hoc/contractual appointees left-out under the J&K Civil Services (special provisions) Act 2010 for want of eligibility criteria. The policy will also take care of ITI trained workers engaged by various Departments.

"During the previous budget session, the government under the leadership of Chief Minister Ms Mehbooba Mufti made a commitment on the floor of the House that the process for regularization of casual workers of various categories, whose fate was

hanging in balance for decades, will start from the next financial year and today we have fulfilled that commitment," said Dr Haseeb Drabu, Minister for Finance.

According to the SRO-520, these workers will be categorized as Skilled and Non-Skilled on the basis of their educational, technical and professional profile, for regularization and the remuneration will be commensurate with the length of their engagement.

The regularization process would begin immediately

See **SRO...** Pg 02

Kashmir welcomes India's stand at UN over Jerusalem

Bilal Bashir Bhat

Srinagar, Dec 22: The people in Kashmir from different shades of life Friday welcomed India's clear-cut rejection by voting against the United States decision on Jerusalem's status at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The UNGA on Thursday adopted by a decisive vote of 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions, a motion rejecting the US decision to recognize Jeru-



salem as Israel's capital.

Terming the India's stand at UN as 'proud' Jammu and

Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti said the India's

vote reaffirms our stand &

support to Palestine. "Very proud to see that India joined over 100 countries at the UN to vote against recognizing Jerusalem as the official capital of Israel. This vote further reaffirms our stand & support to Palestine," Mehbooba Tweeted.

Expressing his satisfaction over the resolution passed in the United Nations General Assembly, Hurriyat (M) Chairman and Kashmir's

See **UN...** Pg 02

DR. FAROOQ WELCOMES UNGA RESOLUTION ON JERUSALEM

Expresses gratitude to 128 countries who supported resolution

Srinagar, Dec 22: National Conference President and Member of Parliament, Dr. Farooq Abdullah on Friday welcomed the passage of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution opposing the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the United States. Expressing gratitude to all the 128 countries that voted in favour of the resolution declaring the US move on Jerusalem as "null and void", the National Conference

See **Farooq...** Pg 02

Fulfill promises made with NHM staff: Tarigami to Govt

Regularize ASHA workers as govt. health workers

Jammu, Dec 22: While urging the Government to immediately fulfil its promises made with National Health Mission (NHM) employees from time-to-time, CPI (M) leader and MLA Kulgam Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami Friday said the strike of the NHM staff has hit the health services in the state badly.

In a statement issued to KNS, he said the strike has affected the health services to a large extent with patients facing a lot of inconvenience in rural as well as urban areas. Government must fulfill its promises made with the NHM employees and immediately



formulate a policy to regularize them. There

See **Tarigami...** Pg 02

TASADUQ MUFTI NOMINATED AS MLC, GOVERNOR ACCEPTS RESIGNATION OF ANDRABI

Srinagar, Dec 22: Jammu and Kashmir governor N N Vohra has approved the nomination of Tasaduq Mufti as a member of Legislative Council.

"In exercise of powers vested in Governor under sub-section (6) of section 50 of the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, Governor N.N. Vohra has nominated Sh. Tassaduq Hussain Mufti as a Member of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Council against the seat available in the Council," said a Raj Bhawan spokesman.

Meanwhile, Governor N.N. Vohra has accepted the resignation of Sh. Syed Farooq Andrabi, Minister of State Haj and Aquaf (Independent Charge), PDD, PHE, I& FC and I& C.

Geelani completes eight years under house detention

Condemns Asiya Andrabi's re-arrest

Srinagar, Dec 22: Hurriyat Conference (G) chairman, Syed Ali Geelani has strongly condemned the re-arrest of Dukhtar-e-Milat chairperson Asiya Andrabi, despite court quashing her PSA.

In a statement issued to KNS, Geelani said, "Asiya is unwell and is suffering from many ailments but puppet rulers claiming to represent a democratic coalition have



most undemocratically kept her incarcerated, only for rais-

ing voice for suppressed people's right."

Geelani while praying for her speedy recovery said that Delhi groomed henchmen while unleashing atrocities on people are serving interests of their egoistic nature.

Meanwhile, protest demonstrations led by religious clerics, resistance leadership and activists were held in nook and corner of state, said Hurriyat conference.

See **Geelani...** Pg 02

LOCALS APPEAL GOVERNMENT TO STOP ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS AT STATE LAND

Srinagar, Dec 22: Locals from Malabagh Lal Bazar area in the outskirts of Srinagar city Friday alleged that a couple of influential political workers in connivance of some Revenue Department officials have grabbed the state land on prime location and are busy in raising constructions there.

A group of people from Malabagh area told news agency CNS that state land comprising 3 kanals along the road side was first occupied by two influential political workers and now they have started construction process on it.

"The Revenue Department official particularly the concerned Patwari played a key role and acted mute spectators to help the land grabbers. They don't take any action

See **Land...** Pg 02

MLA ZANSKAR CALLS ON DY CM, MINISTERS

Thanks Ministers for showing keen interest to fulfill people's demands on priority

JAMMU, DECEMBER 22: A delegation from Kargil led by MLA Zanskar, Aga Syed Mohammad Baqir Rizvi on Friday called on Deputy Chief Minister Nirmal Singh and many other cabinet ministers to apprise them about various issues of their areas.

The legislator congratulated to Deputy Chief Minister for taking up the Panikhar to Pahalgam road project with the Union Minister for Roads and Highways Nitin Gattkar in which he assured that the road project Panikhar to Pahalgam will be taken as National Highway from Panikhar to Pahalgam. MLA said the road was the main demand of Zanskar constituency as it will be later shorten distance to Amarnath Cave for pilgrims. He said the road will also be beneficial for the people of Kargil and Leh being the all weather safest route and will remain open throughout the year.

Legislator along with deputation of Zanskar Constituency thanked the Deputy Chief Minister for his commend-

able job for taking up this project through Union Ministry.

In the meeting MLA Zanskar Aga Syed Baqir Razvi also demanded for Suru Hydel Project which is also the burning demand of Zanskar constituency and also demanded that this project having capacity of 100 MV should also be taken immediately which will feed the area and will also generate the employment to this area.

In the meeting it was also demanded that a mini airport should be established at Zanskar as it remains cut off from other parts of the valley and also projected a demand of establishment of Sankoo Development Authority. The Deputy Chief Minister assured that in this connection a team of concerned officers will examine the matter and decision will be taken accordingly.

Later, the delegation from Kargil also met Minister for Education, Syed Altaf Bukhari. Teh delegation lead by MLA Zanskar demanded establishment of a Degree College at Sankoo besides up-

graduation of six High Schools to Higher Secondary School and five Middle schools to High school. The minister assured the delegation that these demands will be considered favourably at an earliest.

During its meeting with Minister for Health, the delegation was assured that PHC Panikhar will be upgraded to CHC within a short period of time and non-availability of doctors and para-medical staff at Sankoo will be filled immediately.

The delegation also called on Minister for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Distribution Chaudhary Zulfiqar Ali. The minister assured them that thirty fair price shop will be opened at Zanskar constituency that will solve the problem for distribution of ration. Minister also assured that a range office will be opened at Tehsil headquarter at Taisuru which was demanded in the meeting.

The Legislator thanked all the Ministers for providing their keen interest to fulfill the demands on priority.

Continue from Front Page

RESTRICTIONS

path, rather breaking the record of her predecessors by disallowing Muslims from offering Friday prayers and imposing restrictions in #ShareKhaas!" he tweeted.

Meanwhile, reports said that the train services which resumed on Thursday after two days, was again suspended for "security reasons" in the Valley.

"We have again suspended the train services in the Valley for security reasons," a railway official said.

Inspector general of Police (IGP) Kashmir Range, Munir Ahmad Khan said that the situation in Kashmir remained peaceful and under control. "No untoward incident occurred anywhere today," he said.

ARMY

talks should take place, he told reporters in the exercise area near Barmar.

"We also want relations should be better but given what kind of actions there are (from their side) and terrorism is spreading in Jammu and Kashmir, it doesn't appear that they really want peace, Rawat said.

The Army, paramilitary forces and Jammu and Kashmir police have been taking actions against militants in Jammu and Kashmir successfully and the action will continue, he added.

Rawat's comments come a day after Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said India would like good relations with Pakistan provided Islamabad takes action against terror groups.

"It is important for Pakistan to understand our core concern, which is militancy. We have time and again asked them to take action against militants who are operating from their soil. This is something they (Pakistan) will have to handle if they are serious in cultivating this friendship," Kumar said.

The assertions follow Pakistan's Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa pledging his support for better ties. According to reports, Bajwa has said he will support any initiative of the civilian government to resolve issues with India through talks.

In a rare move, the Pakistan Army chief briefed the Senate - the upper house of the parliament - on security situation and regional issues on Tuesday.

NC

made by the government of India in a bid to belittle the importance of Kashmir issue and hoodwink the world that it is taking measures for sustainable peace in Kashmir. "Who is Dineshwar Sharma, a retired government official. Do you think that he has a stature to resolve the issue which is at the United Nations?" NC additional general secretary Sheikh Mustafa Kamal told KNS.

NC's most outspoken leader who is also uncle of former chief minister added further that Sharma who all his life remained a government servant cannot even understand Kashmir issue, leave alone doing anything for its resolution. "It is nothing but a mockery going on. It reveals nonsensical attitude of the government of India towards Kashmir. Mr Sharma says he will talk to roadside vendors-is this some kind of a joke?"

Kamal said that Sharma has no stature when it comes to the previous interlocutors who came to Kashmir and submitted their reports. "They were parliamentarians and senior civil society actors. Do you think Sharma can be compared with them? The fact is that the government of India is only trying to mislead the world community through Sharma's appointment. Only insane could pin hopes from his visit," Kamal told KNS.

SEIZES

despite a blanket ban on its manufacture and sale.

On December 3, police recovered 35 bottles of Codeine Phosphate in Rafiabab area of district Baramulla.

Giving details how the drugs are being imported into Kashmir, the police official said, "These people label these drugs as B-complex. When get registered, they remove this label and put another label of Codeine over them and sell in Kashmir," the official said. "This is how they are selling these drugs. A lot of youth have got involved in drugs in the state," the official said.

Sources said that over the last "five to six years", 968 quintals, or 96.8 tonnes, equivalent to 12 truckloads (at 8 tonnes per truck), of narcotic drugs have been seized.

"Between 2014 and August 2017, 118 kg of heroin was seized," a police official has said.

In the same period, as many as 18,435 drug addicts reported for treatment at the two hospitals associated with the Government Medical College (GMC) in Srinagar and a Drug De-addiction Centre (DDC) run by the Jammu and Kashmir police in the city, official data at the two hospitals and DDC has revealed.

"Drug addiction is a bigger challenge than militancy in Jammu and Kashmir," state's director general of police, Shesh Paul Vaid had said recently.

In September 2017, Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti directed senior police officials to use the most draconian laws, including the Public Safety Act (PSA)—a law under which a person can be detained without trial for upto two years—against those involved in the cultivation and smuggling of drugs.

SRO

and on regularization they shall be designated as Government Services Assistants (GSA). They will be entitled to all the financial and service benefits including annual increment, pension under NPS, leave and medical reimbursement, periodical hike in remuneration akin to pay commission, maintenance of service records and will be covered under work, conduct and discipline rules, including retirement.

The skilled workers whose period of engagement is above 10 years and upto 15 years would be initially entitled to remuneration of Rs 13000 per month, while those having more than 15 years of engagement period and upto 20 years would get Rs 18000 per month. Those skilled workers who have worked for over 20 years would get monthly remuneration of Rs 24000.

The Un-Skilled workers whose period of engagement is above 10 years and upto 15 years would be initially entitled to remuneration of Rs 10000 per month, while those having more than 15 years of engagement period and upto 20 years would get Rs 15000 per month. Those un-skilled workers who have worked for over 20 years would get monthly remuneration of Rs 20000.

The cut-off date for regularization, as per the SRO, has been set 17.03.2015, when the powers to make such engagements were withdrawn by the Government.

According to the SRO, the prospective workers for regularization should be state subjects of J&K, possessing minimum educational qualification of 8th standard or above, on the date of their initial engagement, their age should be within minimum/maximum age limit as prescribed for appointment in the government service, they must have completed 10 years of continuous working, they must be continuing in the department as on date and their conduct must be satisfactory and no disciplinary proceedings should be pending against them.

"The provisions of Article 35-A of the J&K Civil Service Rules will apply to a CSLW in respect of determination and verification of age. The concerned Administrative Department will have the powers to grant relaxation in the age/qualification for regular engagement of a CSLW on case to case basis," the SRO states.

The Government would set up an Empowered Committee in the Finance Department to recommend creation of commensurate positions of General Service Assistants after proper scrutiny of proposals from the concerned Departments.

The Administration Secretary, Finance would be Chairman of the Committee. The Members will include Administrative Secretary of the concerned department or Representative not below the rank of Special Secretary, Administrative Secretary GAD or Representative not below the rank of Special Secretary, Administrative Secretary, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs or Representative not below the rank of Special Secretary and Director (Codes), Finance Department.

The NYC workers will initially be re-engaged on the wages, which were paid to them before their disengagement. The orders of their re-engagement will be issued by the Youth, Services and Sports Department. The NYC workers will be entitled to regular engagement on the pattern of a CSLW on the completion of prescribed period of continuous service after clubbing their service rendered earlier as the NYC workers.

The land donors, who have donated their land free of cost to the Government, will be eligible for engagement as casual workers on the recommendations of a Committee to be constituted by the concerned Administrative Departments and to be headed by the concerned Administrative Secretary.

"The cases of land donors, who have donated land after 31.12.2001 up to coming into force of these Rules only will be considered. The minimum land donated should be one kanal of proprietary land and it should be legally mutated in favour of the State Government," the SRO said.

It added the left out adhoc/contractual/consolidated workers, who were not entitled to regularization under the provisions of J&K Civil Services (Special Provisions) Act, 2010, will also be considered for regular engagement at par with casual, seasonal and daily-rated workers subject to fulfillment of eligibility criteria.

Regarding Hospital Development Fund and Local Fund Workers, the rule will mutatis mutandis apply to them subject to fulfillment of prescribed eligibility criteria. However, they will continue to be paid from Hospital Development Fund/ Local Fund and the enhancement of their remuneration will be subject to availability of resources in the respective funds.

Pertinently, the state cabinet had, on October 23 this year, accepted the roadmap prepared by the high-level committee headed by the chief secretary for absorption/regularization of casual/seasonal labourers/daily-rated workers to ensure sustainable livelihood to hundreds of such workers engaged over a period of several years.

The cabinet had asked the Finance department to draft and issue the formal orders for operationalization of the roadmap.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SRO-520
-9 categories of casuals including daily-rated, casual, seasonal, HDF (Hospital Development Fund) and local fund workers, NYCs, land donors, ITI workers and ad-hoc/contractual appointees left-out under the J&K Civil Services (special provisions) Act 2010 for want of eligibility criteria,

to benefit from Regularization Policy

-They will be designated as General Service Assistants (GSAs) after regularization

-GSAs to get a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs 10000 and a maximum of Rs 24000 depending on their skills and length of engagement

-They will be entitled to an annual hike of 3% on remuneration

-They shall be covered under NPS along-with Employer's Share to be contributed by the Govt

-They shall be entitled to Leave & Medical Reimbursement benefits

-The service bio-data/ records of a GSAs shall be maintained at the level of Head of Office in each department in the form of a Service Book

-The GSAs shall continue in a department upto the age of 60 years

-For purposes of conduct, discipline and appeal, a GSA shall be regulated in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Jammu & Kashmir Civil Services (Employees) Conduct.

UN

chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said the majority vote in UNGA has proved that US president Donald Trump decision was unilateral, partial and anti-Palestine. He said the majority vote in UNGA in favour of Palestine has left Trump in isolated and vindicated the just cause of Palestinians, adding, long pending disputes of Palestine and Kashmir are the two hot issues of the present times and its the moral responsibility of world community especially UNGA to take concrete steps to resolve both the issues for the world good.

Former Chief Minister of the state Omar Abdullah, while tweeting over India's stand at UN against US said, "I called this one wrong in the morning. Well done MEA for not taking the easy/safe option of abstaining like the 35 others. Donald Trump's threat backfired spectacularly."

Pertinently, despite the U.S.'s unethical oppression and threats of to cut funding to countries that back the measure, the international community showed that it remains committed to U.N. resolutions and international law on Jerusalem. A total of 128 members voted in favor of the resolution, nine countries voted against it and 35 others abstained.

"The India's stand at UNGA is indeed a great feat. It depicts that India that has been pioneer of non aligned movement still takes an independent stance on issues of universal importance. India by favoring UNGA resolution once again shows that the legacy of standing for oppressed people has not died down in Indian foreign policy, though internal people's movements for justice, self determination and political rights may be trampled through iron fist policy but the policy of standing with the wretched of the earth has not died down completely in India" said Mushtaq ul Haq Sikandar, a prominent young writer and activist from Srinagar while talking to Kashmir News Bureau.

Senior Awami Action Committee leader Advocate Yasir Dalal while terming the UNGA vote "historic" for Jerusalem, Palestine and international justice, said the resolution would be beneficial for the whole world, adding, it is high time for the world bodies to take steps for the implementation of pending resolutions regarding Kashmir issue at UN. He said Indian stand at UN over Jerusalem undoubtedly deserves kudos but at the same time they should also take tangible measures for the long lasting resolution of Kashmir issue.

Young Human Rights Activist Advocate Syed Mujtaba said that "the India's stand at UNGA was the due to the friendly foreign policy approach of India besides its cordial relations with most Muslim countries like Iran and Afghanistan and others this may be the reason India choosed to go against US."

According to the Kashmir News Bureau monitoring desk, on Dec 08, 2017 despite restrictions in many parts of Valley, the Muslims length and breadth of Kashmir held protests to condemn the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The call of protests was given by Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL) comprising of Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Muhammad Yasin Malik. Dozens of protest rallies were carried out in the nook and corner of Valley against the US President Donald Trump's move to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

FAROOQ

President also expressed satisfaction at India's support to the resolution and said this had upheld India's considered, principled and independent stand on Palestine.

"I thank all countries that voted to support the resolution. The move to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the United States was an arbitrary, unjust and baseless move that defied history and tenets of justice. India, by voting in support of the resolution along with other countries, has upheld its considered and principled stand on Palestine", the NC President said in a statement issued from National Conference Headquarters 'Nawa-e-Subha' on Friday.

The National Conference President said no such steps should be allowed that would hamper peace and stability in the Middle East and deprive the people of Palestine of their rights. "India has traditionally and consistently considered East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and India's support to the UNGA resolution re-affirms that stand and commitment", Dr. Farooq Abdullah added.

TARIGAMI

is a dire need to chalk out a regularization mechanism for employees, including doctors, paramedical and management staff working under NHM.

The NHM employees are paid only one third of emoluments in comparison to their counterparts in the state which needs to be enhanced substantially keeping in view the nature of their duties and price escalations. These employees are working on meager salaries for last more than a decade and they don't have any job security. The Government's callous attitude towards the NHM staff is unfortunate as they are the backbone of the health services in the state and work with utmost dedication.

Earlier, this year after a similar protest by the NHM employees, the government had formed a four-member committee asking it to draft a proposal regarding their regularization before May 2017. However, unfortunately, the promise was never kept, forcing the NHM employees to again come on streets.

Meanwhile, the CPI (M) leader also urged the State Government to take immediate steps to regularize ASHA workers as government health workers, as it is they who are contributing a lot to make the NHM a success scheme. The Government must provide a dignified monthly honorarium to ASHA workers and paying poor compensation for extreme hard work should come to an end to protect the women folk working in different sectors.

The Government must consider the genuine demands of ASHAs which includes minimum wages of Rs 15,000 per month, all social security benefits like pension and gratuity, the NHM should be made a permanent health programme of the government, with universal application and adequate financial allocation and supply of special kits.

GEELANI

The Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL) had called protest demonstration against innocent killings and use of indiscriminate pellet guns against peaceful people, Hurriyat added.

"Meanwhile, state authorities imposed restrictions and people throughout state were barred from offering Friday prayers," Hurriyat (G) said.

Hurriyat leaders and activists including Hakim Ab Rashid, Mohd Yusuf Naqash, Bashir Ahmad Qureshi, Mohd Rafiq Owasi, Meraj-u-Din Rabbani, Mukhtar Ahmad Sofi, Ishfaq Ahmad Khan, Ramiz Raja, Sajad Ahmad Pala and Sajad Ahmad Sofi addressed several public gatherings and while ridiculing authorities for unleashing reign of terror against innocent civilians, said that barring people from peaceful protests against civilian killings and barring from offering Friday congregational prayers, simply exposed their tall claims about their rhetoric regarding democracy and freedom of expression.

Hurriyat strongly condemned the continuous detention of Umer Adil Dar, Molana Mudasar Nadvi and Ab Ahad and said that, since last week they are in STF custody and criticised authorities for restricting Mohd Ashraf Sehrai, Mohd Ashraf Laya, Molvi Bashir Ahmad Irfani, Mohd Yasin Ataie, Syed Imtiaz Hyder, Bashir Ahmad Bhat and Mohd Yusuf Bhat from carrying out their socio-religious and political obligations, saying that local ruling class have always favoured their arbitrary measures.

"These tactics based on mere political vendetta can't muzzle or break the resolve of pro-freedom leadership," said Hurriyat.

Hailing the spirit and dedication of people, Hurriyat said, "even in difficult situation the people remained committed and never gave up their commitment with the movement, saying we are sure that we will achieve our cherished goal."

Meanwhile, Geelani on Friday completed eight years under house detention, a Hurriyat spokesperson said.

The spokesperson, according to a statement, said that no court has ever issued any formal detention order for Geelani's detention.

Spokesperson strongly condemned the house detention of Geelani and said that the rule of law has been thrown to dust in Kashmir.

Strongly condemning the continued house arrest of its chairman Syed Ali Geelani, spokesperson said that stopping pro-freedom leaders from performing their religious, political and social responsibilities is gross violation of human rights and interference in the personnel and religious rights.

"Police authorities have so far failed to produce any court order or any administrative document in support of this illegal detention. What is the justification in turning his residence into a sub-jail," asked spokesman.

"Nobody and not even media can meet him," said spokesman and terming these curbs as state terrorism, added that such cowardice acts are unjustified, unethical and illogical.

LAND

against the land grabbers," the group of locals said. They said concerned Ward Officer tried to take action but succumbed under political pressure.

The Patwari couldn't be contacted, however, concerned Tehsildar Mr Qaumuddin said that he will direct his subordinates to immediately halt the construction process and dismantle the illegal structures.

Budget 2018-19: Dr Drabu holds consultations with Jammu Inc, other stakeholders

Govt taking measures to facilitate expansion of economic activity in JK: FinMin

JAMMU, DECEMBER 22 - Minister for Finance Dr Haseeb A Drabu today said the government is alive to the problems of people associated with trade, commerce and industry and the State Government is taking all the requisite measures to supplement the biz-friendly environment in the State to expand economic activity.

He said the Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime has provided an opportunity to clean up the system and very soon the desired results would be seen on the ground.

The Minister said this during series of pre-budget consultations with the representatives of various business & trade associations and other stakeholders, here today.

Principal Secretary Finance, Navin Kumar Choudhary, Commissioner Commercial Taxes, P I Khateeb, Excise Commissioner Javed Khan, DC Commercial Taxes Bal Krishan, DC Excise and other senior officers of Finance and Commercial Taxes and Excise Departments were present during the consultations.

Various suggestions were received from representatives of Press Club of Jammu, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Jammu (CCIJ), All J&K Transport Welfare Association Jammu, Federation of Industries Jammu, All Jammu Hotels & Lodges Association, Jammu Hotel Restaurant & Bar Association, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chamber of Trader Federation Jammu.

The representatives of Press Club Jammu led by its President Ashwani Kumar sought the Government's support for setting up of a High-Tech Media Centres in the State on the pattern of National Media Centre, New Delhi to meet the growing demands of journalists and to facilitate them.

The PCI delegation also suggested that the government should take a holistic review of existing News Media Empanelment Policy so that it is ensured that the media organizations adhering to the Labour Laws and journalistic welfare only get empaneled for advertisement support from the government. They also asked for incorporating various other important guidelines as listed in the National Media Empanelment and Accreditation Policy.

President, Chamber of Commerce & Industry Jammu Rakesh Gupta called for converting lease agreements to freehold rights for permanent residents of J&K in all industrial estates, Amnesty Scheme for onetime settlement of electricity bills, abolition of negative list for industry, allocation of funds for creation of new Industrial Estates especially for cluster development, redressal of the issue of delayed payments by various government departments, zero rated category for cattle feed manufactured in state, adoption of Disability Act at par with GoI, one-time Amnesty to waive off interest and penalties during GST and VAT regime upto July 7, 2017.

The Transport Welfare Association also presented various demands before



the Finance Minister including withdrawal of increased fees/taxes/penalty imposed by centre/state govt from December 2016, exemption of payment of taxes, Amnesty Scheme for passenger tax, soft loan for replacement of old vehicles on low rate of interest and others.

Chairman, Transport Welfare Association, S T S Wazir requested the Minister for taking special initiatives for revival of transport sector in the state. Dr Drabu informed the Association that the State Financial Corporation is providing finance for transport sector and they can approach the SFC for financing. Responding to the issue of Adda fees being collected from trucks on national highways, the Minister asked the Commissioner Commercial Taxes to look into the issue.

Federation of Industries Jammu led by its Chairman Rattan Dogra demanded conferment of freehold rights on industrial plots to local entrepreneurs. They also raised the issue of not receiving 'C' Forms from purchases outside the state after the GST regime. Besides,

the Federation also demanded one-time settlement of electricity bills for industrial sector, continuation of Toll Tax on imports & exports, price/purchase preference and others.

The Finance Minister asked the Commissioner CT to take up the issue of 'C' Form with his counterparts so that the issue is resolved.

Jammu Hotel Restaurant & Bar Association and All Jammu Hotels & Lodges Association while presenting their demands said that besides, getting declared as industry, Hotels & Restaurants are not getting any benefit. They requested for some kind of relief to hotels in Jammu for their survival. Various other demands presented included review of Bar licenses fee, provision of sufficient funds exclusively for publicity of Jammu district, soft loans for repair & renovation of hotel rooms, exemption of GST for hotel industry for further 5 years as was exempted from VAT/Services Tax upto March 2018.

Hotelier Associations also pitched for expediting Mega Projects related to

the tourism sector in Jammu besides, dedicated TV Channel for publicity of tourism sector. They also thanked the Minister for Amnesty Scheme announced by the state cabinet on Thursday.

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) highlighted the concerns of the Industry and requested for levying Toll Tax on Wheat Bran as it is not being used as raw material for manufacturing cattle feed but for sale in local market, creating a holistic environment to promote tourism in Jammu, special focus on Skill Development, interest free loan for training to ITES units ensuring employment to youth of the state, setting up of small agro parks with common infrastructure facilities and others.

PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry led by its President Vikrant Kuthiala also shared suggestions regarding rationalization of GST rates and requested for steps to be initiated to broaden the base of Tax Assesses. They urged for simplifying and streamlining the GST System including integration through digital technology.

PHDCCI sought intervention of the Finance Minister in ensuring timely release of government payments to MEME manufacturers, no abolition of Toll Tax at Lakhampur. Representatives of PHDCCI also suggested that other areas of hospitality industry providing food related services should be brought under 5 % slab.

They also pitched for providing incentives to Tourism Industry as applicable to Industry sector in the state and

making J&K State Electricity Regulatory Commission (JKSERC) functional.

Chamber of Traders Federation while sharing their inputs thanked the Finance Minister for introduction of GST in the state and reasonable modifying the GST rates and other relaxations in other provisions involved.

President CTF, Neeraj Anand also thanked the state government for announcing Amnesty Scheme. He presented their demands including quarterly returns in place of monthly returns across all sections of traders, bringing down stationary items and electrical appliances to lower slab, recommendation of bakery products in 5 % and catering services under 5 % as in the case of restaurants.

CTF also raised issues confronting the LoC traders and requested for involving some mechanism to safeguard the investments. They also suggested the Minister to bring 'Trade Policy' in consultation with people associated with it. Dr Drabu while addressing the stakeholders said that Government only can generate revenue if the industry survives and they generate income out of their established units. He further said that there is a need to build our own sustainable investors who can come forward and take the lead.

The Minister assured the participants that he would try to accommodate as many viable suggestions as possible in the budget for meeting the expectation of trade, commerce and industry related people.

Labour Commissioner inaugurates workshop on Child Labour

JAMMU, DECEMBER 22 - Labour Commissioner, J&K and Secretary to Government, Information Department Dr Abdul Rashid on Friday inaugurated 2-day workshop on state level consultation for development of J&K state Action Plan for prevention and elimination of Child Labour.

The workshop was organized by Save the Children in collaboration with Labour Department J&K and supported by UNICEF.

In his inaugural speech, Dr Abdul Rashid laid emphasis on the need for the development of State Action Plan for prevention and elimination of child labour. He said all should work in the best interest of the children and should be our focus while dealing with children. He highlighted the need of coordination among various departments to eliminate the child labour.

Participants from various departments including Labour, Social Welfare and Police department besides NGOs and civil society attended the workshop and discussed in detail about the issues in implementation of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, and shared recommendations for checking child labour in the state.

During the two-day workshop, various sessions will be conducted on overview of Child Labour in the state, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act along with amendments and measures for its effective enforcement.

Earlier, Assistant Manager, Save the Children Neha Gandotra, welcomed all the participants and emphasized on the need of State Action Plan on Child Labour.

Asma Dhar, Assistant Manager, Save the Children introduced the Save the children and their work at National and state level. Hilal Bhat, resource person in the workshop presented scenario of the child labor and the law in the State. He briefed the participants on the procedures, mechanism, initiatives and challenges on ground. Another resource person, Nimisha, presented overview of the draft of State Action Plan on Child Labour Prohibition and regulation.

Different departments like Labour, Information, Police, ICPS, Social Welfare, Urban development, rural development, education and Health department were involved in the development of the State Action plan.

Rajiv Khajuria Founder of National Development Foundation also briefed about existing child protection mechanisms.

Deputy Labour Commissioner Ankur Mahajan and other officers of Labour department were also present on the occasion.

Deputation calls on DDC Shopian

SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 22: A deputation of Trenz today called on District Development Commissioner (DDC) Shopian Mohammad Aijaz Asad and raised the issues of power, water supply, road connectivity and delivery of health services.

The DDC instructed the officers to resolve all the genuine issues on priority and assured the deputation that he will take up the matter with the concerned department for due justice.

The deputation also apprised the DDC that numerous problems are being faced by the locals. The deputation asked the DDC to take appropriate action so that local residents do not suffer for want of potable drinking water.

He assured the people that their issues would be given due priority and certainly a roadmap would be established to resolve the issue in due course of time.

Govt committed to empowerment of specially-abled: Dy CM

JAMMU, DECEMBER 22: - Deputy Chief Minister, Dr Nirmal Singh, today said that the government is committed to redress the grievances of specially-abled people, for which several welfare schemes are being undertaken so that they are empowered for a better life.

The Deputy Chief Minister was speaking at a function organized in connection with the celebration of World Disability day by Jammu Chapter of the National Federation for Blind (NFB) at Louis Braille Memorial Residential School for Girls at Roop Nagar.

State Convener NFB, Mo-

hinder Badyal and other senior functionaries of the Federation and management of the school were present on the occasion.

Dr Singh said that the schemes, launched by the Centre and State governments, will ensure that specially-abled people are provided with requisite support providing them an opportunity to lead an emancipated life. He said necessary instructions and mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that the benefit percolates to the genuine and targeted beneficiaries.

While highlighting the achievements registered by



the specially-abled people in different fields of life, the Deputy Chief Minister said that they have proven their mettle in as varied fields as sports and arts and it is obligatory on the part of all of us

to provide them moral and other support.

Referring to various initiatives taken by the Prime Minister to improve the living standards of specially-abled, the Deputy Chief Minister said

that he is taking personal initiatives to see that these people are provided with all requisite facilities so that they are empowered and equal opportunities are provided to them.

Later, the students presented cultural items, showcased their martial arts skills besides exhibiting their paintings.

Deputy Chief Minister, while interacting with the inmates and people, assured them that all their issues and grievances would be settled at an earliest.

ON THE OCCASION, book titled "Kahin-Ankahn" written by Dr Kusum Lata Malik was also released by Deputy Chief Minister.

The Deputy Chief also provided financial assistance to the school, out of his salary.

DDC Anantnag tours Qazigund, reviews implementation of CM's directions



ANANTNAG, DECEMBER 22: The District Development Commissioner, Anantnag Mohammad Younis Malik today toured Qazigund area to take stock of the implementation status of CM directions which were passed in the public durbar on 11th of November this year.

During the tour, the DDC was accompanied by SDM Dooru, ACD, executive engineers of R&B, PHE, Tourism, Ground Water, UEED and RDD, concerned Tehsildars and BDOs, and other district officers.

While visiting TRC Harnag, the DDC was satisfied over the pace of work and directed the concerned to start the work on the second building. The work is being executed under PMDP at an estimated cost of Rs 12 crore.

At Panzeth, the DDC directed the Executive Engineer Tourism to prepare a DPR for development of three spots at Eidgab, dam and source point along the swathe of spring and to start the work within 15 days.

The DDC also visited Watihall to take stock

on the execution work of borewell drilling. After completion, the borewell shall be catering Watihall and Saliyalu villages.

Later, he also visited Manzmoh where tourism infrastructure shall be developed. The DDC was informed that feasibility report has been finalized. It was further revealed that trackways shall be developed to Churpal, Maldar, Masnard and Kund which will boost tourism in the area. In addition, the Tourism department will be investing in skill development, Interpretation Centre and physical accommodation.

The DDC also inspected the road of 1.75 km connecting Manzmoh with Dangiware, which has been constructed by the RDD at an estimated cost of Rs 7 lakh. The DDC directed the concerned BDO to upgrade the road connectivity for which necessary funding shall be made.

Meanwhile, the DDC also interacted with the locals who demanded augmentation of power-supply and drinking water facilities. The DDC directed the concerned officers to sort out these issues at an earliest. Besides, he directed the Exen PDD to provide a substation to a habitation of Manzmoh.

In addition, the DDC took stock of other facilities like winter tuition, ration supply, dumping position of food grains, healthcare and others.

SIC initiates penalty proceedings against erring PIOs

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 22: The J&K State Information Commission (SIC) has initiated penalty proceedings under section 17 of J&K RTI Act, 2009 against the Public Information Officers (PIOs) in over 25 cases of appeals and complaints.

It was revealed that penalty may be imposed by the SIC on the erring PIO on the grounds mentioned in section 17 of the Act at the rate of Rs 250 per day of delay beyond 30 days after the filing of the RTI application subject to the maximum of Rs. 25000. The SIC is also empowered to recommend disciplinary action against the erring PIO on the same grounds.

Since March 2017 the SIC has conducted over 600 hearings at Srinagar and Jammu and through video conferencing from Srinagar and Jammu with the appellants, complainants, Public Information Officers (PIOs) and First Appellate Authorities from Kargil, Poonch, Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar and between Jammu and Srinagar offices of the SIC.

It was further revealed that between March and November 2017, the State Commission has disposed of over 225 appeals and complaints. The final orders are being uploaded on the State Information Commission's Website www.sic.nic.in.

DDC conducts public grievances redressal camp at Haribudha

POONCH DECEMBER 22-District Development Commissioner (DDC) Poonch, Tariq Ahmed Zargar today conducted public grievances redressal camp at Haribudha in Poonch district and listened the various issues and grievances of the general masses.

Senior officers of PDD, PHE, RDD, Education, R&B, Agriculture and Horticulture departments were present on the occasion.

High School Haribudha, up-gradation of power infrastructure, adequate staff in health and educational institutions, old age pension and supply of ration as per scale fixed by Food, Consumer Affairs and Civil Supplies department. During the camp, the DDC gave patient hearing to the demands and issued on-the-spot directions to the concerned officers to mitigate the problems without further delay.

Regarding up-gradation of Naria to Haribudha road, the DDC asked the Executive Engineer R&B to immediately call the tenders for early start of the project. He also directed the health department

to immediately post one pharmacist at PHC Haribudha.

DDC informed that settlement of old age pension cases is under process and would be settled at the earliest. He said Aadhar enrollment centre will be set up at Serikha-waja where the Aadhar card will be prepared twice in a month. He also informed that Government has provided 17 lakh to PWD department for the construction of school building under district plan, adding that the project would be started after completing tendering formalities. DDC asked the Horticulture and Agriculture departments to conduct awareness programmes for educating.

Time and Us

Editorial
SRINAGAR
J&K

SCAM, OR FOLKLORE? ON 2G CASE VERDICT

What is illegal from the point of view of administrative law may not necessarily be an offence from a criminal court's perspective. The Supreme Court declared in 2012 that the allocation of 2G spectrum by the Congress-led UPA government was illegal and an arbitrary exercise of power. It went on to cancel all 122 telecom licences allotted to companies in early 2008 during the tenure of A. Raja as Communications Minister. With the trial court's en masse acquittal of all those arraigned by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the 2G spectrum allocation case, the claim that this was the biggest scam in India's history lies in tatters. Every ground that the CBI had adduced to prove that Mr. Raja manipulated the first-come, first-served system to favour Swan Telecom and Unitech Wireless, among others, and helped them make a wind-fall profit by offloading their stakes, has been rejected by Special Judge O.P. Saini. The immediate fallout is that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, to which Mr. Raja belongs, and its national ally, the Congress, will at last be in a position to shake off the perception that they were irredeemably beset by corruption. The Congress, in particular, is now in a position to reiterate that the spectrum allocation resulted in 'zero loss'; also, that its rule between 2004 and 2014 was not as scam-tainted as it was generally made out, a perception that has impacted its electoral performance since. Attention will now turn to Vinod Rai, whose sensational report as Comptroller and Auditor General, pegging the loss as a result of not auctioning spectrum at ₹1.76 lakh crore, contributed to the perception that a huge scam had taken place.

Many had argued that the figure was only notional. Mr. Raja said that not revising the entry fee and not auctioning spectrum ensured cheaper telephony, increased tele-density and contributed to the sector's overall development. He has been undoubtedly vindicated, but there is a lesson for everyone in the long 2G saga: public perception and audit reports cannot be the sole basis for criminal trials; investigating agencies must carefully sift the available material before deciding to prosecute. Eliminating graft from public life is not only about making allegations stick during election time, but also about diligent investigation and efficient prosecution. The CBI's image has taken a beating, with the court calling it out for its waning enthusiasm in pursuing the case. There is a cloud over the present government's commitment to fighting corruption. It may yet have a chance to redeem itself, as the CBI has said it will appeal the verdict. An appeal is in order given the sweeping dismissal of the CBI's contentions, so sweeping that it dismisses, arguably a tad too breezily, what the prosecution said were suspicious quid pro quo transactions. It is said that the folklore about corruption is bigger than the actual incidence of corruption.

GST, A WORK IN PROGRESS

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) raised much hope that it would herald the emergence of a 'good and simple tax' with 'one nation, one market, one tax'. However, there has been considerable concern with the new tax, both in its structure and operational details, including the ease of paying the tax and filing returns. Trade and industry have been grappling with the problem of payment, filing the returns and claiming input tax credit, and exporters have been facing liquidity crises as the zero-rating of the tax has not worked and refunds have not been forthcoming, with difficulty in filing returns. Of course, the GST Council has been quite responsive to tweak the structure and operational details to make it simpler. Yet, considerable work needs to be done to ensure a smooth transition and to reap the revenue and productivity gains to the economy.

History of GST
Introduction of the GST is an important reform and is a standard policy recommendation for every country going in for the structural adjustment programme of the International Monetary Fund. This has been a major money spinner and a source of productivity gain. According to Michael Keen, of over 165 countries which have adopted GST in one form or another, only five have repealed it (Belize, Ghana, Grenada, Malta and Vietnam), but have reintroduced the tax later. The GST has taken centre-stage in many countries and is considered important in view of the competitive reduction in corporation tax rates due to high mobility of capital. It is also true that there is no "one-size fits all" GST and each country has to adopt the structure depending on political bargains and operational feasibility. It is a major reform, and even as every country makes a lot of preparations before it is introduced, it takes time to smoothen the rough edges and settle contentious issues.

International experience shows that some features of the reform are inherently desirable. It is important not to have too low thresholds. In fact, reasonably high thresholds will reduce the compliance burden to a large number of small businesses without much impact on revenue. Richard Bird and Pierre-Pascal Gendron, after a detailed examination of a number of countries adopting GST, suggest that in developing countries, a threshold closer to \$100,000 would eliminate 75% of the taxpayers with a revenue loss of less than 4%. (See Bird and Gendron, *The VAT in Developing and Transitional Countries*, Cambridge University Press, 2007). Another desirable feature of a successful GST is to have fewer rates. Multiple rates create classification problems, are harder to administer and would require the general rate of tax to be higher. It would also invite a lot of lobbying by special interest groups. Third, it is important to prepare well before the plunge. Most countries take at least two years to prepare for the introduction of reform to ensure a smooth transition. This is particularly necessary for developing and testing the technology platform, educating the tax collectors and tax payers and to avoid any anomalies in the structure of the tax.

The Indian version
In the Indian context, given that the reform had to be evolved by taking into account the views of 29 States, two Union Territories with



There is some concern that the revenues from GST in the past few months are somewhat below expectations. Things could improve as the new changes bring in stability and technology platform stabilises. Hopefully the implementation of GST may help in augmenting income tax as well.

legislatures and the Union government, compromises are inevitable and it is impossible to expect the structure of the tax to be ideal. As stated by Bird and Gendron, some bad initial features may be an essential compromise to get the tax accepted in the first place.

It would have been preferable to evolve the structure with two rates, one lower on items of common consumption and another general rate on consumer durables and luxuries. Notably, given that the VAT in the earlier regime had predominantly two rates, it should have been possible to convince the States of the need to fix the GST rates at two rather than four. In addition, the levy of three rates of cesses has further complicated the structure. Having four tax rates and three rates of cesses should have been avoided. As mentioned above, multiple rates create problems of classification, inverted duty structure and large-scale lobbying. It enormously complicates the technology platform to ensure input tax credit mechanism. It therefore appears desirable to move immediately towards three slabs with the final goal of reducing the slabs to two. It would also have been desirable for the "fitment committee" to evolve the rates by thinking afresh instead to merely adding up the excise and VAT rates to fit the item to the nearest rate decided. This is particularly relevant in the case of commodities which are predominantly inputs as in the earlier VAT regime they were placed in the

lower rate category. Hopefully, the GST Council will act soon on this.

Raising the threshold
As mentioned above, expert opinion based on international experience shows that there is much to be gained by having the threshold at reasonably high levels. As mentioned above, international experience is that a threshold closer to \$100,000 would eliminate 75% of the taxpayers and the sacrifice in terms of revenue would be less than 4%. Moreover, it is the small businesses which produce and trade in commodities and services which are predominantly consumed by low income groups and therefore, keeping the threshold high would be desirable from the viewpoint of equity as well. Considering this, going further, it may be desirable to fix the threshold at ₹50 lakh. The revenue loss will be minimal but ease of doing business will be high. The inclusion of petroleum products in the GST base will depend on mainly the revenue gains from the reform. Nevertheless, it is a desirable objective and the GST Council must act on it. International experience shows that including real estate may not be easy.

There is some concern that the revenues from GST in the past few months are somewhat below expectations. Things could improve as the new changes bring in stability and technology platform stabilises. Hopefully the implementation of GST may help in aug-

menting income tax as well.

Strong political commitment, to implementing the reform, thorough advance preparation, adequate investment in tax administration and taxpayer services, extensive public education programme, support from business community and good timing of reform are the important pre-requisites for successful implementation of the GST. It is also important to note that problems of transition to a major tax reform are unavoidable and most countries go through this. In this regard, the approach of the GST Council must be commended for being receptive to the concerns of businesses and in dealing with the glitches in technology. Some of the noise heard is also due to the fact that all traders, in one way or the other, are brought into the formal sector. That hurts some. The GST Council has recognised that it needs to carefully calibrate the reform until the desired goal of a Good and Simple Tax is realised. Hopefully the GST Council will keep the goals clear and consider the reform effort as a work in progress.

C. Rangarajan is former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM and former Governor, RBI. M. Govinda Rao was member, 14th Finance Commission, and is Emeritus Professor, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy

From owning a home to feeling at home

► Meera Srinivasan

S. Indira Gandhi owns a brand-new house now. She is one of the first few from Sri Lanka's hill country Tamil community — that has a two century-history in the island — who can call this home, and the piece of land beneath it, her own.

A full-time worker in a tea estate, the 33-year-old, along with her husband, is busy giving finishing touches to her cement-walled home in Dayagama, in Nuwara Eliya district in the Central Province. They have recently cut a path leading to the entrance of their home, where saplings bearing sprightly pink flowers pop up from either side. For the young couple, the home is much more than a secure place of residence, or a permanent dwelling.

From the time the British brought down hundreds of thousands of Tamils from south India in the 19th century to Sri Lanka, successive generations have been toiling in the country's plantations. Even today, most of them live in colonial-era line rooms — closely packed match-box like dwellings on the hills — and many still work in the estates in difficult working conditions and with poor wag-

es. Their story is better known as the global rise of the famed Ceylon Tea, a product that fetches precious foreign revenue, about \$1.2 billion in 2016.

Following the transition from being stateless to becoming citizens in 2003, the ongoing change from being landless to owning a modest house on a small plot marks another significant shift for the community. Neither was an outcome of state benevolence. In fact, both followed persistent struggles by the nearly million-strong community and larger political dynamics.

Houses such as Indira Gandhi's have been built by the Indian government as part of an initiative to construct 14,000 dwellings for Hill Country Tamils, to supplement the Sri Lankan government's own efforts towards providing housing in the region. In an earlier project, India built 46,000 homes in the island's Tamil-majority North and East for the war-displaced.

Malayaha (Hill Country) Tamils are quick to appreciate India's attention to their community. As Tamils of most recent Indian origin here, they have been invisible not just to the Sri Lankan state, but also to New Delhi and Tamil Nadu

for most part. Without doubt, they feel some affinity towards Tamil Nadu and India, through ancestral and cultural links. "My father gave me that name because I was born the day Indira Gandhi died," says her namesake, smiling brightly.

All the same, many in her generation feel that the oft-used "Indian-origin" tag is both dated and distant. "Even my national ID defines me as a 'Sri Lankan estate worker'," says her husband, K. Vijayakumar. "We are people of this country." That is how they would like to frame their demands to the state — in the unmistakable voice of a rightful citizen, without tags that bear the baggage of uneasy histories.

In an apparent recognition of that emphatic voice, the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe government put out an ambitious National Plan of Action for the social development of the plantation community, spanning five years beginning 2016. Among other initiatives, the plan envisions building 1,60,000 homes, financed partly with a government grant and the remaining with a 7.5% interest-loan. About 30,000 homes have been constructed so far.



For pensioner E. Sellappan, his new home in Hauteville Puram, built by the Minister of Upcountry New Villages, Estate Infrastructure and Community Development, is the only asset for his children. "This sonda veedu (own home) is the first recognition of my labour for my 36 years' work at the estate," he says.

The government points to its share

of challenges. Despite a widespread campaign from workers for 20 perches land each, the government could manage only seven (about 2,000 square ft). "Finding land is our main challenge. The plantation companies are rather reluctant to part with productive land, or end up giving land that has no easy access to the main road," says M. Vama-

devan, an adviser to the Minister.

The gap between required resources and the actual allocations is also glaring. While the national action plan points to an estimated 15 billion Sri Lankan rupees investment in 2018 needed for the project — it will cost 70 billion rupees over five years — the annual allocation in the recent budget is only 2 billion rupees.

Housing is only one of the many long-ignored demands of the workers, who face historic neglect and exploitation. From education, to health to fair wages, many of their concerns remain unaddressed. "Even if wasps attack us, we have to put in our own money and get treated. Our struggle for a minimum wage of 1,000 (Sri Lankan) rupees earlier this year also failed after our political leaders signed a collective agreement with the companies. We are now stuck with 630 rupees a day," says estate worker R. Pushparani, squinting her eyes against the glaring sun, while she rapidly plucks tea leaves with both hands.

In pointing out their current reality, she highlights the difference between a few workers owning homes, and all of them feeling at home.

Bikaner land scam case: ED should also be transferred to PMO, says Swamy

NEW DELHI: Welcoming the Enforcement Directorate for arresting two persons in connection with the land scam case">Bikaner land scam case, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Subramanian Swamy on Friday said ED should also be transferred to the Prime Minister's Office till 2019.

"Now I hope the PM will intervene because our own prestige for 2019 depends...All this talks about 'khaunga nahi, Khane dunga nahi' all will fall back on us.

Therefore I am very happy that clearance has come and I think that the ED should also be transferred to the Prime Minister's office till 2019 at least," he said.

The ED today arrested Jaiprakash



Bagarwa and Ashok Kumar under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in Rajasthan's land scam case">Bikaner land scam case.

As per the ED, Ashok Kumar is a close associate of Mahesh Nagar of M/s Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd, which is linked to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra.

The Bikaner land scam is a land grabbing case, in which fraudsters in collusion with the state government officials got allotted land under the name of fictitious individuals, who were found to be non-existent. The land was actually earmarked for people who got displaced due to the setting up of Mahajan Field Firing Range.

UP CM calls on investors to tap opportunities

MUMBAI: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said the state has considerably become investor-friendly from the time they came into power. Talking at the Uttar Pradesh Investors Summit 2018 in Mumbai, Adityanath also called on the investors to take part in the investor summit being organised in the state in the month of February. "A favourable environment for business is being witnessed in the Uttar Pradesh and we want to take advantage of it. When we look back at the condition of the state, the situation a year back was not good.

We were concerned what will happen and a change was necessary for that. When we came to power in the state the first thing was to change the situation in terms of doing business. We started working with a team spirit and were able to witness a major change within a short span of time", Adityanath said.

Adityanath said that with the growing interest of the world and the nation to invest



in the state would provide ample amount of employment opportunity to youths.

Further stressing on the issue, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister said there were two major concerns of the state before 2017-lawlessness and too much of Red Tapism. He added they are trying to tackle with both to provide an amicable environment to investors.

2G scam case: We were wrongly framed, says Kanimozhi

CHENNAI: A day after being acquitted in the 2G case, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP Kanimozhi on Friday said she was wrongly framed in the multi-crore scam.

"The DMK was blamed unnecessarily and we had been framed wrongly. The whole case was based on a notional loss. What we have been saying all these years, now finally the judge said the same thing," she told media.

All accused in the 2G spectrum allocation scam cases - including former telecom minister A Raja and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP Kanimozhi - were, earlier on Thursday, acquitted by a Special CBI court.

The verdict was announced nearly seven years after the first arrest was made by the CBI in 2011.

The alleged scam relates to the granting



of 2G spectrum licence allocations in 2007-08, which caused, according to a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, a loss of Rs 1,76 lakh crore to the public exchequer. It was among the major corruption scandals that came to light during the second term of the UPA government headed by former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

Delhi ashram matter: HC directs accused baba to appear before it

Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) Chief Swati Maliwal on Friday said the High Court had directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate the alleged illegal confinement of girls and women in an ashram owned by Baba Virender Dikshit and had asked the accused baba to appear before it. "The High Court has ordered accused Baba Virender Dev Dikshit to appear before it. It was learnt that there are eight more ashrams of the baba in Delhi. DCW requested the inspection of these ashrams," Maliwal told media here.

Maliwal also added the High Court had ordered DCW, the Delhi Police and two senior lawyers to inspect the matter," she added.

The rescue operation was carried out after the Delhi High Court formed a panel consisting of lawyers and the DCW chief, to inspect the premises of the so-called institute, owned by the Baba Virender Dikshit where girls and women were allegedly kept in illegal confinement.

Maliwal also tweeted yesterday: "Finally, after three days, in a mammoth operation, 41 minor girls were rescued from Baba Virender Dikshit Ashram with the help of CWC and the Delhi Police.

These girls will now be counselled; their parents will be contacted and their ages will be verified. This place needs to be shut and the baba should be arrested!" The rescued girls, who were sent to the shelter homes, will now be counselled. The residents of the area alleged that these minors had been "trapped" inside the ashram and were trained to work as sex workers.

These girls will now be counselled; their parents will be contacted and their ages will be verified. This place needs to be shut and the baba should be arrested!" The rescued girls, who were sent to the shelter homes, will now be counselled. The residents of the area alleged that these minors had been "trapped" inside the ashram and were trained to work as sex workers.

ED arrests two in Bikaner land scam

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday arrested Jaiprakash Bagarwa and Ashok Kumar under a Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in Rajasthan's Bikaner land scam case.

As per the ED, Ashok Kumar is a close associate of Mahesh Nagar of M/s Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd. The Bikaner land scam is a land grabbing case, in which fraudsters in collusion with the state government officials got allotted land on the name of fictitious individuals (who were non-existent) which was actually earmarked for people who got displaced due to the creation of Mahajan Field Firing Range.

The fraudsters created forged allotment letters purported to be issued by the Colonisation department and 1422 Bigha land was recorded in revenue record in the name of these fictitious allottees without due verification of these allotment letters from the department.

Tehsil officers like Patwari, Girdawar, and Tehsildar were active partners in the conspiracy and fraud and allotted land to fictitious people without any verification. Rajasthan Police had filed 18 chargesheets initially and later on, two more chargesheets were filed by the state police, making Ashok Kumar an accused among others. "M/s Skylight Hospitality Pvt. Ltd had purchased 69.55-hectare land in Rs. 72 lacs, sold it to M/s Allegeny finlease Pvt Ltd for Rs. 5.15 crore and earned huge profit of Rs. 4.43 crore. M/s Allegeny finlease Pvt. Ltd as a company is not involved in any real business activity and many of its shareholders were found to be non-existent during the investigation," a release by the ED said. Earlier, during the investigation, the ED issued a Provisional Attachment Order under the provisions of the PMLA attaching movable and immovable properties worth Rs 1.18 crore.

Further investigation is in progress. The ED had reportedly issued a notice to a firm allegedly linked to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra as part of its investigation into an alleged land scam in Rajasthan's Bikaner city.

According to sources, the notice had been issued to Skylight Hospitality firm under the provisions of the PMLA. The ED had earlier on May 6 conducted searches at eight premises in Bikaner and nearby areas in connection with the case.

The ED registered a money laundering case against certain real estate developers and the Rajasthan government officials to probe the Bikaner land scam.

The investigation is related to the purchase of 275 bigha land allegedly by the company in the Kolayat area of Bikaner.

'Rice pulling' fraudsters gang busted, four arrested

The police have arrested a gang of four persons for duping people into buying objects like bowls, pots, and coins, claiming they would attract rice by virtue of having supernatural powers.

The police also seized an amount of Rs 34,19,000, an Innova car, three rice pulling bowls and eight cell phones from the possession of those arrested.

The gang was apprehended by the commissioner's task force, Hyderabad and North Zone task force. "This gang would catch hold of innocent people and manipulate them to purchase the rice pulling bowl. The accused Vema Anjaneyulu, Md Fazaluddin, T Bablu and S Babu Rao maintained an office on the fourth floor of Surya Towers in Secunderabad," the police informed.

A victim, G Vishnumurthy, a car driver, lodged a complaint earlier this month in Bowenpally under section 420 and 406 of IPC.

The accused lured the victim by promising that they will get Rs 2 to 3 crore if he invested Rs 20 lakh. The victim got convinced and further roped his friends to invest money in rice pulling business. Another victim Thammishetty Ramesh lodged a complaint on December 16 at the Mahankali Police Station.

Complaint filed against Salman Khan, NCSC seeks reply

NEW DELHI: The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) has sought a reply from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and the police commissioners of Delhi and Mumbai over complaints against Bollywood actor Salman Khan and actress Shilpa Shetty for allegedly using derogatory language against the Scheduled Castes in TV shows.

The NCSC has asked to file a reply on the action taken against the actors as per the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 2015, within a week.

The commission issued the notice after it received a complaint from an ex-chairman of the Delhi Commission for Safai Karamcharis, Harnam Singh.

Singh, in his complaint, said that the actors used the word 'bhangri' in TV shows which clearly insults the entire Valmiki community of the world.

Salman had used the word during the promotion of his film 'Tiger Zinda Hai', while referring to his dancing skills. Shilpa had reportedly used the word to describe how she looks at home.

Rijju bats for modernisation of police forces

NEW Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijju on Friday said that the Centre is ready to provide all kind of assistance for modernisation of the country's police forces as he talked about the need for the state governments to allocate required funds for the betterment of forces. "We believe the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) is an organisation which will help the modernisation of police. It will be very helpful in planning, research, policy etc. We met the senior officers here today. I believe that after 14th Finance commission, the responsibility of modernisation of the police goes to the state governments - to do the funding," Rijju told ANI.

"I would appeal that the states should at least allocate the minimum required amount; rest, the Centre is always there to help," he added. According to reports, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, in September said the Union Government would support the States under a



new umbrella police modernisation scheme for three years until 2019-20 and Rs 25,060 crore will be allocated for this programme.

The Centre will provide 80 per cent of the financing and the states the rest.

This decision, taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), would

take forward internal security, law and order, women's safety, modern weapons' procurement, logistics support, hiring of helicopters, upgrade of police wireless, national supply network and e-prison project. It will cover the north-eastern states, Jammu and Kashmir and Left-wing extremism-affected states.

INDIA'S PUBLIC PUSH TO A DIGITALISED ECONOMY COULD FURTHER MARGINALISE WOMEN: UNICEF

KOLKATA: With less than one-third of India's internet users being females, the country's girls and women risk becoming further marginalised in society and at home if they remain digitally illiterate in the backdrop of the country making a public push towards a more digitalised economy, a Unicef report says. "There is a digital gender gap as well. Globally, 12% more men than women used the internet in 2017. In India, less than one third of internet users are female.

"... Recently, India has made a public push towards a more digitalised economy, including reducing dependency on physical cash. If girls and women remain digitally illiterate, they risk becoming further marginalised in society and at home," says the 2017 edition of Unicef's annual flagship publication "The State of the World's Children Report" launched here on Thursday.

Themed "Children in a digital world", the latest report provides



country-level examples to give a sense of the kinds of barriers girls and women confront.

In India, where only 29% of all internet users are female, girls in rural areas often face restrictions on their use of ICTs solely because of their gender, it says.

Citing examples, the report quotes a village governing body in rural

Rajasthan as stating that "girls were not to use mobile phones or social media". "Another village in Uttar Pradesh banned unmarried girls from using mobile phones along with a ban on wearing certain kinds of clothing, such as jeans and T-shirts."

Pointing out that digital connection and literacy offer advantages in a knowledge-based society, im-

proving children's lives and their future earning potential, the report says: "At the same time, connectivity doesn't always equalise opportunity." "Digital divides can mirror broader societal divides -- between rich and poor, cities and rural areas, between those with or without an education -- and between women and men.

"India is one place in which the digital divide highlights society's deep chasms," says the report, calling for addressing the disparity at the highest levels for universal, safe access to be realised.

It says the digital gender divide is caused by a number of factors -- "social norms, education levels, lack of technical literacy and lack of confidence among them -- but is often rooted in parents' concern for the safety of their daughters.

"Many fear that allowing girls to use the internet will lead to liaisons with men, bringing shame on the family. For most girls, if they are allowed to use the internet, their every move is monitored by their parents or brothers.

"In a society that is still largely patriarchal, for girls, traits like deference and obedience are often valued over intelligence and curiosity. In some households, technology is not seen as necessary or beneficial for girls and women," the report says.

Parents, take note! Feeding fish to your kids once a week can improve sleep, IQ

Emphasizing the health benefits of fish consumption in children, a study has suggested that doing so once a week results in better sleep and improved IQ scores.

The study, carried out by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania in the US, suggested that instead of imploring their kids to go to bed, parents should simply consider changing their diets.

While omega-3 fatty acids found in fish have previously been shown to improve intelligence and sleep which in turn improves IQ, this is the first time all three have been linked together.

The scientists believe that it may be that the improved sleep brought on by omega-3 which helps boost IQ rather than the fatty acids themselves.

For the study, research Breakthrough gene editing technology may prevent hearing loss in humans

The findings showed that a single treatment involving injection of the gene tool CRISPR-Cas9 cocktail prevented progressive hearing loss in young animals that would have otherwise gone deaf.

Breakthrough gene editing technology may prevent hearing loss in humans

US researchers, with the help of gene editing technology CRISPR, have edited a gene variant that leads to deafness in mice, a breakthrough that could transform future treatment of genetic hearing loss in humans.

Hearing loss is the most common form of sensory loss in humans, and almost half of cases have an underlying genetic component.

The findings showed that a single treatment involving injection of the gene tool CRISPR-Cas9 cocktail prevented progressive hearing loss in young animals that would have otherwise gone deaf.

"We hope that the work will one day inform the development of a cure for certain forms of genetic deafness in people," said David Liu, researcher at Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) -- a US-based non-profit.

In the study, detailed in the journal Nature, the team focused on a mutation in a gene called Tmc1 -- a single spelling error in the genetic code, that causes the loss of the inner ear's hair cells over time.

Just one copy of a mutated Tmc1 gene causes progressive hearing loss leading to profound deafness, both in humans and in mice.

The researchers used CRISPR-Cas9 technology that acts as molecular scissors, snipping the genome to disable a target gene, and injected the gene editing solution directly into the infant mice's hair cells -- the sound-sensing cells of the inner ear -- with the hearing loss mutation.

Once the mutated gene was disabled, the inner ear hair cells survived, and mice otherwise genetically destined to become deaf retained a portion of their hearing.

After eight weeks, the hair cells in treated ears resembled those in healthy animals, densely packed and tufted with hairlike bundles. The hair cells of untreated mice, in contrast, looked damaged and sparse.

If used in humans, the treatment could be best during childhood, because hair cell loss in the inner ear is progressive and irreversible. Liu added, ers asked 541 school children aged between nine and 11 to fill in surveys about how much fish they ate, and then measure their IQ. Their parents were then asked about the quality of sleep.

team, found that children who reported eating fish weekly scored 4.8 points higher on the IQ exams than those who said they seldom or never consumed fish. Those whose meals sometimes included fish scored 3.3 points higher. In addition, increased fish consumption was associated with fewer disturbances of sleep, which the researchers say indicates better overall sleep quality.

The new study reveals sleep as a possible mediating pathway -- the potential missing link between fish and intelligence, the researchers said. "Lack of sleep is associated with antisocial behaviour, poor cognition is associated with antisocial behaviour," said Adrian Raine, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

"We have found that omega-3 supplements reduce antisocial behaviour, so it's not too surprising that fish is behind this." The study "adds to the growing body of evidence showing that fish consumption has really positive health benefits and should be something more heavily advertised and promoted", said Jennifer Pinto-Martin, Professor at the varsity.

Penalise stress, anxiety by cycling regularly

Cycling can be one of the easiest ways to stay fit. Besides controlling your weight, it can reduce depression, stress and anxiety, say experts.

R.M. Anjana, Managing Director at Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre and Deepali Badoni, Physiotherapist at AktivHealth Clinic, talk about the benefits of cycling:

* Cycling is an aerobic exercise which has several health benefits. It reduces the risk of heart diseases. The activity boosts production of chemicals like serotonin, dopamine and phenylethylamine in the brain that makes you feel happy and keeps depression at bay.

* Static cycling is better for people suffering from knee or joint pain.

* People suffering from diabetes should make sure that they are well-hydrated while cycling. Type-1 diabetics should carry some carbohydrate based snacks if they are cycling for more than an hour.

Diabetics can track their blood sugar before, during, and after exercise using a finger-stick style blood glucose meter or a continuous glucose monitor (CGM). A prescription for a CGM is required if you are cycling regularly, especially over long distances or in races.



Want a healthy heart? Consume more of soy nuts, pulses daily

One of the primary reasons for people falling victim to heart disease is high cholesterol levels, which can choke the blood flow in the arteries.

Meat eaters, however, can avoid cholesterol build-up by replacing one or two servings of animal proteins like meat and milk products with plant proteins such as soy, nuts and pulses daily, a study has suggested.

The findings showed that one to two servings of plant proteins every day could reduce the main cholesterol markers low-density lipoprotein cholesterol -- LDL or "bad" cholesterol, non-high density lipoprotein cholesterol and apolipoprotein B -- by about 5 percent.

"We are seeing a major interest in plant-based diets from Mediterranean to vegetarian diets in the supermarket and the clinic, and this comprehensive analysis of the highest level of evidence from randomized trials provides us with more confidence that these diets are heart healthy," said lead author John Sievenpiper of St. Michael's Hospital in Ontario, Canada.

The health benefits could be even greater if people combined plant proteins with other cholesterol-lowering foods such as viscous, water soluble fibres from oats, barley and psyllium, and plant sterols, said Sievenpiper.

For the study, the team conducted a system-

atic review and meta-analysis of 112 randomised control trials in which people substituted plant proteins for some animal proteins in their diets for at least three weeks.

According to a previous study, a diet high in animal protein is associated with a higher risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, a condition in which fat builds up in the liver, in overweight people. Long-term adherence to plant-based diet can lead to changes in body composition which help in reducing the cholesterol levels as well as help weight loss and lower blood pressure.

The study was published in the Journal of the American Heart Association.

Here's how to boost your child's memory, attention

Are your students unable to concentrate and retain their lessons at school? Take heart. Just 15 minutes of break with a run or walk activity at their own pace, may help improve their memory and attention span, finds a study.

The findings showed that the children who participated in the run or walk activity reported feeling more awake and taking the break, responded quicker to the attention task, were better at controlling their responses and were also more able to remember words in sentences.

"Ultimately, we found that 15 minutes of self-paced exercise can significantly improve a child's mood, attention and memory, enhancing their ability to learn," Naomi Brooks,



from the University of Stirling, said in a statement. "This suggests that children should be encouraged to exercise at their own pace during short breaks from class. This may help children be more ready to learn when they returned to the classroom," added Josie Booth of the University of Edinburgh. For the study, the team included a total of 1,613 children in the UK -- including 1,536 from Scotland

-- to discover the impact of taking a short break from the classroom to complete a physical activity on their mood and cognitive abilities.

The children underwent, an intense running activity, a run or walk activity of intermediate intensity, a control activity, which was least intense. "Overall, our study concluded that exercising leads to improvements in children's mood

and cognition," said Colin Moran from the Stirling University. "In most tasks, participating in a run/walk activity was more beneficial than doing the run test, where children should be closer to exhaustion," Moran said.

However, they should not be discouraged from doing more vigorous exercise, the researchers noted.

Sing Christmas carols in groups to boost mental health, stay happy

Christmas carols are an integral part of the festivities -- the melodious tunes make everyone want to join in the chorus. But did you know that Christmas carols have a big part to play where health is concerned?

Well, as it appears, a new research has revealed that singing Christmas carols in groups could not only make you happier, but also help improve mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

The finding showed that people who took part in a community singing group maintained or improved their mental health.

Community singing had positive effects on people's mental health, while for some it was a key to their recovery or maintenance of health, for others it induced fun and happiness.

Moreover, the combination of singing and socialising was an essential part of recovery



because it promoted an ongoing feeling of belonging and well-being that often lasted a day or more as well as improved social skills and confidence.

"We found that singing as part of a group contributes to people's recovery from mental health problems," said lead researcher Tom Shakespeare, Professor at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

For the study, published in the BMJ journal Medical Humanities, the team analysed participants who took part in the Sing Your Heart Out (SYHO) project -- an initiative which runs weekly singing workshops, aimed at people with mental health conditions as well as the general public.

The research project followed the group for six months and undertook interviews and focus groups with participants, organisers, and workshop leaders.

Taking part on a weekly basis provided structure, support and contact that helped people improve their mood, feel good, and function better in day-to-day life.

"We heard the participants calling the initiative a 'life saver' and that it 'saved their sanity'. Others said they simply wouldn't be here without it, they wouldn't have managed -- so we quickly began to see the massive impact it was having," Shakespeare said.

Air pollution linked to increased risk of low-birth-weight babies: Study

Air pollution, but not traffic noise, appears to be linked to an increased risk of having low-birth-weight babies, reports a new study from the UK.

Previous studies have tied road traffic air pollution to low birth weight. Road traffic produces noise as well as pollution, but studies of noise pollution have had conflicting results, say the authors. "We know that noise is associated with adverse health effects, e.g. sleep disruption, increased blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease, so it could plausibly have an impact on mothers' health in pregnancy and the health of unborn babies," study leader Dr. Rachel Smith Smith at the School of Public Health of the Imperial College in London told Reuters Health in an email. Smith's team wanted to investigate the effect of exposures to both traffic-related air and noise pollution during pregnancy on babies'

birth weight.

"We found increased risk of babies being born with low birth weight or small for gestational age, at term, to mothers with higher exposure to air pollution from road traffic during pregnancy. We did not see an independent effect of road traffic noise on birth weight," she said. As reported in The BMJ, Smith and colleagues used national birth registers to identify over 540,000 live, single, full-term births occurring in the Greater London area between 2006 and 2010. Specifically, the study team was interested in low birth weight (less than 5.5 pounds) and being born small for gestational age. Mothers' home addresses at the time of birth were used to estimate the average monthly exposure to traffic-related pollutants including nitrogen dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter, or PM2.5. The researchers also es-

timated average day and night-time road traffic noise levels.

Increases in traffic-related air pollutants, especially PM2.5, were associated with 2 to 6 percent increased odds of having a low birth weight baby and about 1 to 3 percent increased odds of a baby being small for gestational age, even after taking road traffic noise into account.

The risk associated with air pollution should be considered in context, i.e. the size of the effect of air pollution on an individual baby's birth weight is relatively small compared to the well-recognized effect of smoking, said Smith.

"However, at the population level the impact could be large, because collectively more women are exposed to air pollution than are exposed to smoking during pregnancy," she said. There is a limit to what individuals can do to reduce their exposure to air pollution because

making major changes to lifestyle, travel or where they live is just not feasible for the vast majority of people. Improving air quality and reducing air pollution in our towns and cities, and thus reducing health impacts of air pollution, requires action by policymakers, said Smith.

The study "should increase awareness that prenatal exposure to small particle air pollution is detrimental to the unborn child," Sarah Stock and her colleague wrote in an editorial in The BMJ. Stock, a researcher at the University of Edinburgh Queen's Medical Research Institute in Edinburgh, UK, said air pollution from traffic is well known to be detrimental to child and adult health. "This study provides further evidence that air pollution from traffic is also harmful to unborn babies. However, it shows that traffic noise is unlikely to be related to low birth weight in babies," Stock,

who was not involved in the study said. Pollution should be high on agendas at a local and national level, with pollution control integrated into development planning, said Stock.

"Key initiatives include enforcing emission control technologies in motor vehicles; ensuring easy access to affordable and efficient public transport; encouraging walking and cycling; and mandating clean air zones," she said. Unfortunately, women have few options to reduce their risk on a personal level, said Stock. "Avoiding air pollution is difficult, and we have no evidence that lifestyle measures, or wearing protective masks actually reduces chronic exposure to harmful pollutants. We do know avoiding exposure to tobacco smoke is really important. More research in this area is needed to find out the best ways for women to reduce their risk," she said

Pearl Academy celebrates art and design with Noida Design Carnival

NOIDA: Pearl Academy, India's leading institution in design, fashion, business and media, hosted the Noida Design Carnival—a unique celebration of design, art and culture, as part of its ongoing 25th anniversary celebrations.

The carnival was organized at its Noida campus and saw a brilliant showcase of creations designed by more than 200 students of Pearl Academy. It involved an array of innovative ideas, interesting opinions by eminent personalities and creative expressions of various fraternities of design, art and culture. Through this carnival, Pearl Academy has put Noida on the design map of India. It created an

interactive space that witnessed budding aspirants display their creative talents. There were activities like design immersion workshops, demonstration of various crafts and a gala fashion show. A series of expert talks with renowned personalities like filmmakers Meera and Muzzaffar Ali, theatre director Arvind Gaur, textile designer Peter d'Ascoli and Manil and Rohit Gupta from The Creative Network kept the audiences engaged with interesting discussions and enlightened aspiring designers about the various aspects of design.

Muzzaffar Ali, a renowned filmmaker said, "Creative wonder



is possible only when you have a set of young minds. Students in India are full of talent, they just need a guiding force to help them lead towards their respective goals and I am happy to share that Pearl Academy is a leading example of it." "In today's world, students are lucky and unlucky both, as they have enough opportunities. I want to tell students that they should do what gives them a sense of satisfaction and not just work for money. Ultimately it's our vision that will help achieve sustainability," Meera Ali added. Commenting on the success of the carnival, Nandita Abraham, CEO, Pearl Academy said, "For the last 25 years, Pearl Academy has

been driving creative education in India. Noida is an important centre for design in India and we, at Pearl, work closely with the creative industries here. Noida Design Carnival is an initiative to let people experience the magic of design. For all these years, Pearl Academy has been driving creative impact and I am proud to see so many of our students and alumni showcasing exceptional creations."

The one-day event was packed with fun-filled activities and proved to be a great design immersion experience for students, teachers and principals from more than 25 schools and colleges from the National Capital Region (NCR).

Incredible India organizes 'The Great Indian Blog Train'

NEW DELHI: It's time for all travel bloggers to pack their bags and get set to go on a journey that is as spectacular as the destination. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in association with the tourism departments of the States of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Rajasthan and the Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corp. Ltd. is organizing 'The Great Indian Blog Train' that will allow travel bloggers from across the world experience a train journey befitting the royal past of a land varied, rich and expansive in its grandeur, India. So, if you got the zing to write and love to travel, you can get yourself registered starting now till 5 January, 2018 and the selection list will be published on 7 January, 2018. The journey will have four luxury trains - Palace On Wheels, Deccan Odyssey, Golden Chariot and Maharaja's Express, that will take 60 bloggers on a 7N/8D journey across India's finest historical destinations spread across Delhi, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya

Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The most sought-after destinations have been picked and an itinerary has been created to give you the best memories to take back home. Be it Rajasthan's royal forts and palaces, Hampi's mesmerizing ruins or the statuesque Ellora Caves near Aurangabad, dynamic history and heritage await you in every corner of India.

This is where the past and the present co-exist and nurture the country's heritage. The finest luxury trains have been selected to take you on a voyage that you'd want to treasure forever.

The unforgettable journey will begin on 7th, 10th and 19th February filled with lots of amusement and magnificence. All you need to do is register yourself on the Great Indian Blog Train website and tell us why you want to visit the country. So what are you waiting for? Register now and expect a whole new world aboard these trains!

PCA FRAMEWORK NOT INTENDED TO CONSTRAIN NORMAL BANKING OPERATIONS, SAYS RBI

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday clarified that the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework is not intended to constrain normal operations of the banks for the general public.

RBI had come across some misinformed communication circulating in certain sections of the media about closure of some Public Sector Banks (PSB) in the wake of their being placed under the PCA framework.

The apex bank further clarified that the Reserve Bank, under its supervisory framework, uses various measures/tools to maintain sound financial health of banks. The PCA framework is one of the supervisory tools, which involves monitoring of certain



performance indicators of the banks as an early warning exercise. Its objective is to facilitate the

banks to take corrective measures, including those prescribed by the Reserve Bank, in a timely

manner, in order to restore their financial health.

The framework also provides an opportunity to the Reserve Bank to pay focused attention on such banks by engaging with the management more closely in those areas.

The PCA framework is, thus, intended to encourage banks to eschew certain riskier activities and focus on conserving capital so that their balance sheets can become stronger.

The Reserve Bank has emphasized that the PCA framework has been in operation since December 2002 and the guidelines issued on April 13, 2017 is only a revised version of the earlier framework.

RBI has again reiterated the above position.

Wishfin launches India's first loan application product offering free CIBIL score

NOIDA: Wishfin has launched India's first loan application product that offers free CIBIL score in addition to a choice of products from 40 partner banks.

Wishfin customers will have free access to a CIBIL score check for a period of 12 months, and can leverage the same to apply for personal loans, home loans or credit cards. A detailed CIBIL report will help customers to know her credit history and status. 12 month free access will help customers monitor their credit-worthiness over a long period of time. It gives them an opportunity to rectify errors and take steps to improve credit-worthiness.

It also helps customers get best offers instantly on Wishfin.com, enabling them to save money on loans.

Scores are received instantly along with loan quotes, in one convenient location, saving customers valuable time by streamlining the application process.

Wishfin.com is the first fintech firm to offer this facility in partnership with

TransUnion CIBIL.

"CIBIL is considered to be the gold standard in credit reports. Almost all banks base their credit decision for retail customers on their CIBIL score. Until now we used to see customers start the application process with a certain degree of uncertainty - they would apply without knowing their credit health. Several entities claiming to offer valid 'credit scores' added to the confusion. CIBIL was a premium service that cost a substantial sum," said Chairman, Wishfin.com, Puru Vashishtha.

"We wanted to change this, we wanted our customer to apply with the confidence of knowing their genuine CIBIL score, while keeping this empowered application process truly free," Vashishtha added.

The availability of a ready credit score/report will empower the consumer in his dealings with the lenders and will also enable Wishfin.com in guiding consumers to make the best

financial decisions.

It is to be noted that close to 79 per cent of all loans in India are disbursed to consumers having a CIBIL score of over 750. The CIBIL scale is graduated from 300 to 900 points.

The credit score and report will be available on Wishfin.com but customers will be able to view it only after an informed consent is provided by the consumers. This is to ensure compliance with the strictest data protection policies that Wishfin.com follows. Wishfin.com has really simplified the process and customer experience of procuring a CIBIL Score and Report.

"Our vision has always been to assist consumers obtain faster and cheaper access to credit in order to help them achieve their dreams. This is our first step towards helping the financial ecosystem spread awareness about credit scores and reports," said VP and Head, Direct to Consumer Interactive at TransUnion CIBIL, Hrushi Mehta.

Vodafone Premier Badminton League Season 3 to be exciting for Vodafone customers

NEW DELHI: The New Year is set to be a smasher for lovers of shuttle play as Vodafone customers once again take centre stage in yet another sporting extravaganza Vodafone Premier Badminton League Season 3. As our Indian shuttlers are ready to take on the world starting December 23, 2017, Vodafone is also making it equally exciting for its customers by giving them a chance to be an integral part of this grand affair. The popular Vodafone SuperFan contest is back this Vodafone Premier Badminton League to provide 23 lucky Vodafone customers with a money-can't-buy experience to watch the Badminton players play live. Each Vodafone SuperFan along with a friend will arrive at the match location, watch the match from the hospitality box and get the shuttlecock autographed by the winning player, as millions of viewers watch live on TV. A lucky Vodafone SuperFan will get an opportunity to meet



and play a friendly match with the badminton champions. Additionally, a four-member Vodafone Fan Army and the beloved ZooZoo will be present to cheer for the Badminton players. A Star India spokesperson said, "The Vodafone Premier Badminton League has transformed the sport of Badminton for Indian sports fans.

In the campaign, #SmashTheHouseDown, fans can see aggression of a typical shuttler, coupled with style and the uniqueness to flaunt their skills on or off the court.

The league is bigger and better this year, and we are looking forward

to some smashing Badminton action." "Vodafone, as of one India's most loved brands, continues to partner with our customers to enable them to be at their personal best, or as we say, #BeSuper. Our association with PBL acknowledges our belief that the future is exciting for our Badminton stars on the global stage. We wish the PBL team a fantastic season ahead and look forward to creating more excitement and delight for our Vodafone customers," Siddharth Banerjee, Executive Vice President, Marketing, Vodafone India, said. The inaugural match of the Vodafone Premier Badminton League is scheduled on December 23, 2017 in Guwahati. Eight franchises - representing the cities of Delhi, Hyderabad, Awadh, Chennai, North-East, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Bangalore - are competing. The final of Vodafone Premier Badminton League will be held on January 14, 2018 in Hyderabad.

Magicbricks spreads warmth with second season of MagicBag initiative

NEW DELHI: After spreading cheer across Delhi/NCR in its first year with the MagicBag initiative, Magicbricks' unique activity was back to spread the warmth again to the homeless community and this time it was extended to the homeless community of Bengaluru and Mumbai as well on Dec 20, 2017.

Magicbricks, India's No.1 property site, along with its NGO partner Uday Foundation distributed MagicBags, which are customised sleeping bags made out of used advertising hoarding flex materials to the homeless community in Delhi at AIIMS and at the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai. In Bengaluru, the bags were distributed at Sheshadripuram and Netaji Road Slum.

The used flexes were donated by Times OOH. The flex utilized for the outdoor campaigns were brought into a recycling unit and lined up with warm blankets and foam sheets Prasad Kumar, Marketing-Head of Magicbricks, said,

What once was an outdoor campaign was converted into a weather proof sleeping bag. For those who could not even afford a blanket to stay warm, what Magicbricks created was pure magic.

"Last year we came up with this innovative idea of spreading warmth among the homeless community during the harsh winter



in Delhi/NCR.

We received a phenomenal response and this year we expanded this initiative to Bangalore

and Mumbai as well. The enthusiasm and contentment we have seen in our employees and the beneficiaries after this initiative

is unparalleled. We thank Uday Foundation for their wonderful support in ensuring the success of this initiative. It is extremely

heartening to see the results from this drive, and the smiles on the faces of those who have received the Magic Bags."

Rahul Verma, Founder of Uday foundation, said, "We are extremely pleased to partner with Magicbricks for their unique MagicBag campaign for the second consecutive year. We feel encouraged to see their employees dedicatedly and willingly wanting to do their bit for the marginalised section of the society. We hope to partner with Magicbricks for many more such campaigns that spread the warmth among the homeless community in the country."

Magicbricks' MagicBag initiative has been awarded the Foxglove Award 2017 (Ambient Media - Traditional Billboards) and Outdoor Advertising Awards 2017 (Gold-Special Category-Green Initiative). The MagicBag initiative was designed to mark the 10th anniversary of Magicbricks. Having completed a decade of providing the best value to people for their home buying needs, the celebrations were extended by spreading warmth among the homeless during the winter.

MS Dhoni eyes a 'special 50' in Indore T20 against Sri Lanka

MUMBAI: Former Indian captain MS Dhoni is not new to records. Dhoni, who is the only Indian captain to win two World Cup cricket titles (2007 T20 WC and 2011 ODI WC) under his regime, owns a number of achievements on the cricket field.

And now, the Indian wicketkeeper is set to achieve another rare feat.

MS Dhoni is only three catches away from becoming the first wicketkeeper to complete a half-century of catches in T20 Internationals.

Dhoni has taken 47 catches from 84 T20 internationals so far and will have an opportunity to bring up this 'special 50' when he takes to the field against Sri Lanka in the second T20 of the ongoing three-match series in Indore on Friday. The Ranchi star is already way ahead of other wicketkeepers in terms of number of catches taken in T20 internationals.

He has taken 15 more catches than second-placed West Indian wicketkeeper Denesh Ramdin on the list. With a tally of 74 (47 catches and 27 stumpings), Dhoni is also the leading wicketkeeper in terms of overall dismissals behind the stumps in T20 internationals. Following him is Pakistan wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal, who has effected 60 dismissals (28 catches, 32 stumpings) in 58 games.

Dhoni was in a terrific form in the first T20 as he bludgeoned a 22-ball 39 before returning to effect four dismissals behind the stumps to help India maul Sri Lanka by 93 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the series.



Ajmal among top Pakistani cricketers stuck in Uganda after payment dispute

KARACHI: In a bizarre incident, nearly 20 Pakistani cricketers including top names like Saeed Ajmal, Yasir Hameed and Imran Farhat have been left stranded in Uganda over payment dispute with a T20 league organiser.

The players had gone to Kampala, Uganda to play in a T20 league after taking due permission from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

But upon landing in Kampala, they found out that the league has been abandoned after a dispute over payment issues.

After the first two days of the league were washed out, the

Pakistani cricketers demanded 50 per cent of their contractual fees as committed by the Uganda Cricket Association.

But the organisers refused to disburse the money stating that the sponsor of the league has withdrawn. "It was then that we were told payments could not be made since the main sponsor of the league had backed out and there was no money," one of the players told PTI from the east African nation. "We wanted to leave immediately for home but on reaching the airport we were told that since the organisers had de-

faulted on other payments the travel agency, which had issued tickets, had blocked all seats and we had to return to the hotel," he said. The player said that they had contacted the PCB and the Pakistan embassy and were now preparing to return home later today.

"Hopefully, we should be home by Saturday but it has been a bad experience for us. Instead of earning money, we had to spend out of our own pockets," he added.

The PCB said in a statement yesterday that it was investigating the matter.

"We had inquired about the

bonafides of the league from the ICC. Only after we were advised by the ICC that the Afro T20 League has been approved by them and is being played under the umbrella of the Uganda Cricket Association, we issued NOCs to the players," the statement said.

The PCB said the ICC had even sent them a list of players which were provided by the organisers.

"We are looking into the incident which has taken place during the Afro T20 League and once complete information is received, further course of action will be advised," it said.

Ashes: Steve Smith vows no let-up on bouncers to England's tail

MELBOURNE: Australia captain Steve Smith says his fast bowlers will continue to bombard England's tailenders with short-pitched deliveries despite claims their beleaguered batsmen deserve more protection from the umpires.

Smith's uncompromising stance comes after former England captain Mike Atherton called on umpires to better enforce the game's laws around bouncers which are designed to shield batsmen down the order.

Australia trounced the tourists by an innings and 41 runs in Perth on Monday to reclaim the Ashes and hold an unassailable 3-0 lead with two Tests to play in Melbourne and Sydney.

In the three Tests so far, Australia's pace battery has targeted England's tailenders with short-pitched deliveries. Last man in James Anderson was struck a fearsome blow on the helmet grille by a brutal bouncer from Pat Cummins in Perth which drew criticism from Atherton, writing in The Times.

Atherton said he was dismayed by the continued attacks on the England tail, which included six bouncers to Anderson in the last rites of that Test.

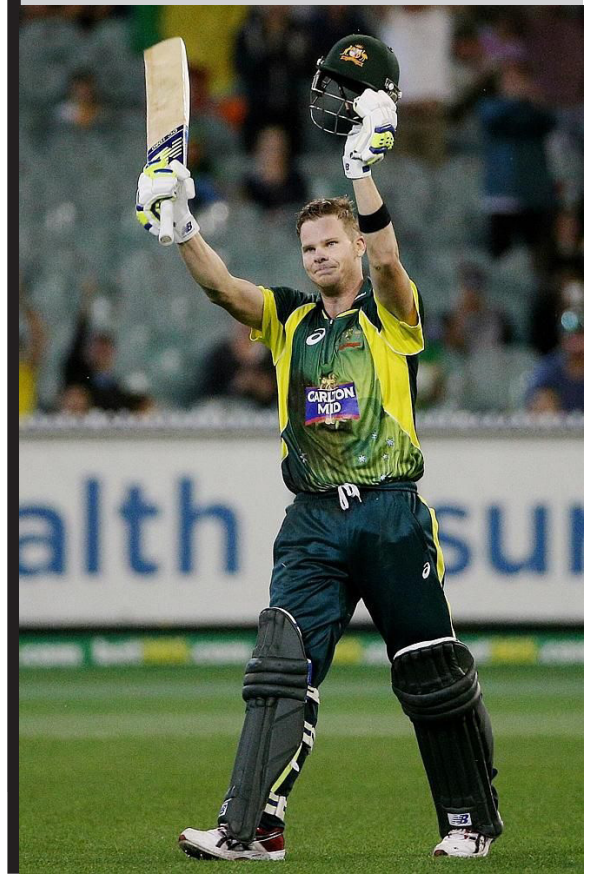
But Smith said there would be no let-up in the fourth Test starting in Melbourne on Boxing Day, adding that it was a strategy England would employ themselves if they could.

"We obviously had a plan from the start of the series that we were going to bowl a lot of short stuff to those guys, much like we did back in 2013," he told reporters late Thursday.

"And no doubt if they have the kind of pace our bowlers could generate they would probably do the same thing." Former pace spearhead Mitchell Johnson, who put England to the sword in that 2013 home series, said rather than worry about the laws the tourists should just "learn to bat".

"Isn't it two short balls in an over? That's the rules. If it's not over their heads or the shoulder restriction, how is it dangerous?" Johnson told Fox Sports. "I don't see the issue with it -- yeah, some guys struggle to hold the bat. But whose fault is that? That's not the fault of the Australian quicks. (England) should be working on their batting."

Another former Australia Test quick Trent Copeland tweeted: "What's missing from this (Atherton) article? The fact that ENG would do exactly the same IF they were fast enough to do so, and the Aussie lower order players work hard enough at their batting so that it's not an issue. Sorry, but it's TEST cricket. Suck it up."



“Lionel Messi has also benefited with three of Alba's six assists this season setting up the Argentine.”



El Clasico: Five keys to Real Madrid vs Barcelona

MADRID: Real Madrid realistically need to end Barcelona's 24-match unbeaten run to maintain hopes of retaining their La Liga title when Spanish football's two behemoths meet in El Clasico on Saturday (1200GMT).

Barca lead fourth-placed Madrid by 11 points at the top of the table, albeit Real do have a game in hand. However, it was at the Santiago Bernabeu that Barca last tasted defeat in August as Real cruised to a 5-1 aggregate win in the Spanish Super Cup. Here is a look at five keys to deciding who will end the year victorious.

Messi-Alba connection Barca have overcome Neymar's departure with relative ease thanks to left-back Jordi Alba's return to form, in large part caused by the Brazilian's absence on the

left side of Barca's attack. "I have a lot more room to go forward and in all honesty for me it is much better," admitted the Spanish international. The Alba-Messi connection also gave Barca a famous 3-2 win as Messi scored with the last kick of the ball at the Bernabeu in April when Neymar was suspended. Madrid right-back Dani Carvajal has played just five games since September due to a long-term virus and a lack of cover offered by Madrid's narrow four-man midfield could give Alba plenty of space to exploit.

'BBC' finally fit to return? Madrid's famed 'BBC' front three of Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale have yet to play a single minute of action together this season, largely due to Bale's injury problems.

However, the Welshman scored on his return to action to help Real win the Club World Cup last week leaving Zinedine Zidane spoilt for choice with his starting line-up.

Zidane is expected to stay loyal to the side that started the Champions League final in May with Bale only featuring from the bench.

Yet, the pace offered by Bale and Marco Asensio, who has scored in his last three matches against Barca, could prove decisive in the second-half.

Being multicultural and multiracial has helped us rebuild, says Zimbabwe coach Heath Streak

MUMBAI: Coach Heath Streak knows all too well the challenges Zimbabwe cricket faces, but believes the surprise return of experienced players and the shedding of an underdog mentality has been behind the team's more competitive recent performances. Streak, a formidable all-rounder in his playing days, is preparing the side for the inaugural four-day Test against South Africa starting in Port Elizabeth on Dec. 26. He has been leading the side since October, 2016 and in that time has engineered a return for the country's top batsman Brendan Tay-

lor and their primary seamer, Kyle Jarvis, who had previously committed their futures to County Cricket in England. "It was not easy (to persuade them to return), everybody has seen the political and economic challenges Zimbabwe has," Streak said. "But I suppose we can be a bit more excited now we have a change of president and things are looking a little bit more hopeful. For us as cricketers, we realise how unifying and important cricket is as a sport to our country. We have seen how multicultural and multiracial our team is, and that plays an important

role in rebuilding the new Zimbabwe. "We are really excited and want to make people back home proud of how we perform in this next Test." Zimbabwe have gradually improved during Streak's first year in charge, with their last Test a home draw against West Indies in which they batted for 144 overs in their second innings to save the game. They also edged Sri Lanka 3-2 in an away one-day international series in July that showed the potential of the side in the shorter formats.

"It's well documented how little Test cricket we have played, but I think for us it is

less about the type of cricket and more about just playing at international level," the 43-year-old said. "Whether we are playing ODIs or Tests, it is the gaps between fixtures that is the biggest challenge for us. Our domestic level isn't high, so for us to step up, that's the challenge." "I think for the first time in a long time we have got a pretty well-balanced team in terms of what we have from the seam and spin departments. We also bat pretty deep and we have got some exciting guys in the squad."

WITHOUT FEAR Streak added he has been

working hard on his side to play without fear and not go into games scared of heavy defeats. "The main thing is instilling belief within the players, I think shaking off that underdog mentality that we have and also playing to win, not to just compete and try not to embarrass ourselves," he said. "The series in Sri Lanka was really a watershed for us, more mentally than anything else. We have also identified our fielding as an area we can be as good at or better than the rest of the world. We are out to play winning cricket. We would rather lose trying to play a winning brand than just compete."