



FOR A CAUSE
Actor Katrina Kaif has posted a video stressing increased access of lesser privileged kids to quality education



ALARMING DEVELOPMENT
Delhi suffered highest per-capita economic loss due to air pollution last year, a Lancet study suggests



HARD TIMES
Five countries have suspended flights from South Africa after a Covid variant was discovered in the country



IRREGULAR by MANJUL
Last year too, he said next year will be wonderful

Accused a necrophiliac

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: A man arrested for the murder of a five-year-old girl had tried to have sex with the body after strangling the child at his house in Nayagarh district, SIT chief Arun Bothra claimed Tuesday.

Accused Saroj Sethi had strangled the girl from Jadupur village when she resisted his rape attempt. After she died, Sethi attempted to have sexual intercourse with the corpse, Bothra told media persons in Cuttack. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) led by Bothra is probing the alleged abduction and murder of the girl. The SIT chief said the prime accused was addicted to child pornography.

He said that the girl had gone to Saroj's house, about 100 metre from her house, July 14 to collect berries. Saroj, who was alone at his house, took her to a room and allegedly tried to undress her. She resisted and started crying, after which he strangled her. "After killing the girl, Saroj tried to have sex with the body. It



SIT chief Arun Bothra addressing the media at Cuttack, Tuesday

PARI MURDER

- Experts' report on stains established that these were semen
- Every house in village had members present, except for accused
- A pop-up on the accused's phone showed a report on the minor girl
- Accused refused to polygraph test while all villagers agreed to this

clothes, he added.

Later, the accused stuffed the body in a gunny bag and hid it under coconut fronds near a pond. Reacting to SIT chief's statement, the girl's father said it was all scripted. "We have been demanding a CBI probe into the murder, but the SIT is creating drama. Two other girls, who were playing with my daughter, had said that Kanhu had abducted my daughter and taken her to Babuli Nayak," he told media persons. The parents alleged that Minister Arun Kumar Sahoo was shielding accused Babuli Nayak, who allegedly abducted and murdered their daughter.

MISSING LEGGINGS

BHUBANESWAR: The SIT team went about the probe with organ trafficking in mind. However, it failed to get clues to prove that. The missing leggings of Pari raised suspicion about sexual abuse. This small yet vital clue helped the SIT crack the case. The leggings were not found with the frock near her body, pointing to the possible sexual abuse of the girl. The body of Pari was found naked while the dress she had worn was lying near her body. The SIT found stain marks on outside parts of the dress. Had she worn the dress at the time of her death then the stains would have been spotted in the inner side of the dress as well, Bothra said, adding there were no dirty marks inside the dress. Experts' report on the stains on the frock established that these were semen marks. Later, the team found out that every family of the village had one member or more July 14, except for the accused which turned the needle of suspicion to Sethi. Bothra revealed that while checking up his mobile phone, the team came across a pop-up on the phone regarding a news report on the rape and murder of a minor girl. The team started suspecting Sethi for searching such items on his phone. Google search details were found deleted by the accused too. The accused refused to undergo polygraph test while all villagers agreed to face the test.

CLOTHES FOUND

NAYAGARH: The missing leggings of Pari were recovered from a pond in Jadupur village Tuesday after fire personnel emptied the water of the pond. Earlier, the frock worn by the minor girl except for the leggings had been recovered. The water was pumped out late in the evening after the SIT team suspected that the accused might have thrown the leggings in the pond.

1800 266 266 1 (tollfree)

SOPs FOR UK FLYERS ISSUED

RT-PCR test on arrival, separate isolation for COVID positive cases

New Delhi, Dec 22: The Union health ministry Tuesday issued a set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for passengers arriving from the United Kingdom amid the detection of a new variant of the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) there.

As per the SOPs, all international travellers will be required to declare their travel history of the last 14 days and fill up a self-declaration form to be screened for Covid-19. Those travellers from UK who arrived in India between November 25 and December 8 will be contacted by District Surveillance Officers & advised to self-monitor their health, the ministry said.

The passengers should undergo RT-PCR test and be isolated in a separate unit of an institutional facility if found positive. Passengers found negative in RT-PCR test at the airport would be advised quarantine at home and followed up.

A spike gene-based RT-PCR test should also be performed by an appropriate laboratory in case of a positive sample, the health ministry recommended.

India Monday suspended all passenger flights connecting the UK till December 31 in the wake of the emergence of a mutated strain of the virus there, joining several other countries that have imposed a similar flight ban.

Also, contacts of such travellers who were found COVID-19 positive at airport testing would be subjected to institutional quarantine and tested according to ICMR guidelines.

"If the genomic sequencing indicates the presence of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, then the patient will continue to remain in a separate isolation unit. While necessary treatment as per the existing protocol will be given, the patient shall be tested on 14th day, after having tested positive in the initial test. "In case the sample is found positive on the 14th day, further sample may be taken until his two consecutive samples taken 24 hours apart are tested negative," the guidelines stated. **MORE P3**

AGENCIES

SHORT TAKES

Custodial death: HC for report by Jan 11

Cuttack: The Orissa High Court Tuesday asked the state government to submit all the reports with regard to alleged custodial death of a person in Puri by January 11, 2021. A division bench of Chief Justice Mohammad Rafiq and Justice BR Sarangi asked the state government to submit the postmortem, medical examination and the probe reports by the judicial magistrate. The High Court bench also sought to know from the state government whether FIRs have been registered against the accused police officials under Section 302 of the IPC. The HC also directed the Advocate General to ensure proper handling of the case. The next hearing has been posted for January 11.

Pathak goes on two-day remand

Bhubaneswar: The SDJM court Tuesday allowed commissioner police to take suspended IFS officer Abhay Kant Pathak on a two-day remand in connection with his alleged involvement in the ₹65 lakh cheating case. The police had earlier taken Akash Pathak, son of Abhay Kant on a 4-day remand in the same case. Police said Abhay Kant in connivance with his son defrauded Sky King, a city-based travel agency, of ₹65 lakhs. The police are hopeful of eliciting important information on the fraud and Abhay Kant's role in it during the remand period.

Raina held after raid on posh club

Mumbai: Thirty four persons including cricketer Suresh Raina and Hindi film celebrity Sussanne Khan were arrested after a raid at a posh club near the Mumbai airport Tuesday for violating social distancing norms, police said. Those arrested in the raid at the Dragonfly Experience club near the Mumbai international airport included 13 women and seven staffers of the club, police said. **P12**

No CBSE board exams in Feb, '21



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 22: Every year the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducts examinations for classes 10 and 12 starting in February, but the board exams in 2021 would be delayed.

According to Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, there is no proposal to conduct board examinations in February 2021. Along with this the Union Ministry of Education has clarified that other procedures related to the board examinations will also be given additional time.

Giving information about the upcoming board examinations Tuesday Nishank said, "The process of board examinations will no longer be started in January-February this time". Usually the board examinations start from the last week of February. There are also various practical examinations conducted during January every year.

In the 22nd edition of 'Shiksha Samvad', the Education Minister on Tuesday in a live interaction with teachers held extensive discussions on online education, board exams, entrance tests, evaluation process, teacher training and other education-related issues.

Thousands of teachers from across the country took part in the 'Shiksha Samvad' and raised many questions about various education-related issues. The Minister addressed all their apprehensions and concerns. The CBSE board exams would not be held online in 2021 and the students will be writing the exams with pen and paper as in the past. The CBSE officials have clarified that there is no proposal to conduct the board examinations online. However, the exam dates have not been decided yet.

Many parents have demanded that the dates of the board exams be extended by nearly three months and have sent a proposal to the Union Ministry of Education on this. On the subject of a dialogue with the teachers, Nishank said, "I have always been keen to interact with teachers, understand their hopes and aspirations and work accordingly. When I speak of teachers, it reminds me of my early days as a teacher."

FIGHT IS ON



Farmer leaders addressing a press conference regarding their protest against the new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi, Tuesday

PAGD takes lead over BJP

Jammu, Dec 22: The latest trends in the counting of votes for the District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir indicated that the Farooq Abdullah-led People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) has taken a big lead over the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) even as the counting of votes is underway Tuesday to determine the fate of 2,178 candidates.

According to the latest leads reported for 231 out of 280 segments that went to the polls across J&K, the PAGD is leading on 96 seats while the BJP is ahead on 56 constituencies. The overall voting percentage in all the eight phases across the Union Territory was 51.42 per cent and over 30 lakh votes have been counted at the counting centres across J&K.

The PAGD is an alliance of Kashmir's mainstream parties which is fighting the elections jointly to prevent the BJP from making inroads in J&K. The PAGD was floated October 7 for the reversal of constitutional changes made to Jammu and Kashmir on August 5 last year.

National Conference President Farooq Abdullah was appointed the president of the alliance, PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti its vice president and People's Conference leader Sajad Lone as the spokesperson and CPI-M leader Yousof Taragami as its convenor. The flag of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir was adopted as the symbol of the alliance.

Anganwadi worker in Vig net Expand credit flow, banks told

Berhampur, Dec 22: Vigilance sleuths Tuesday conducted raids at the residence of an Anganwadi worker of Berhampur Municipal Corporation on charge of amassing assets disproportionate to her known sources of income.

The Anganwadi worker was identified as Namita Dalai, working at ward No-9 in the Silk City under the territorial jurisdiction of Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BEMC). The anti-corruption officials conducted simultaneous raids at seven places including her 3-storied residence at Laxmi Nrusingha Nagar, Ganesh Nagar and at the house of her relatives at Dalua Sahi in Berhampur, two apartments in Bhubaneswar.

The raids have sent the chatters abuzz in Silk City. She also owns two flats at Goutam Nagar and Sundarpada in Bhubaneswar and another at Soral mouza under



Kanishi tehsil of Ganjam district. Preliminary inquiries suggested that the movable and immovable properties of Dalai who joined as an Anganwadi worker, November 27, 1990 has been roughly estimated to be around ₹2,25,96,647, Vigilance SP Anil Kumar Patra said. Dalai started her career as an Anganwadi worker with a monthly allowance of ₹275 but went on to become a crorepati within a short time. The way Dalai amassed properties would even put big babus to shame. All the properties in her house including furniture, a car, a scooter, a sattu manufacturing machine, gold and silver ornaments worth ₹3,34,353, deposits in various banks in the name of Dalai and her and son Soumya Ranjan Dalai worth ₹12,79,076 have been traced and are being estimated, he said.

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: After a detailed review of the credit flow to farmers, SHGs and MSMEs, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Tuesday asked banks and districts to expedite the process of disbursements to ensure credit reaches every needy citizen in the state.

Holding a meeting with all collectors and bankers, Naveen said, "We are going to enter a new year with great hope that the vaccine will help bring back normalcy to the world. We need to take this hope of revival to every house in the state which is dependent on your credit. Our systems and organizations have no meaning if we cannot help our citizens when they need us the most." The farmers, Mission Shakti groups and MSMEs are entrepreneurs who are asking for small credits so that they can stand on their feet. In fact, they will make the



We need to keep the momentum till every single citizen of state asking for credit is taken care of

CM NAVEEN PATNAIK

economy stand on its feet, he said. Expressing happiness on progress in credit disbursement over last few weeks, the CM asked collectors and bankers to keep the momentum till every single citizen asking for credit is taken care of.

He commended Sundargarh, Sonepur and Bolangir districts for their achievement in extending credit to farmers and instructed Malkangiri, Dhenkanal and Kalahandi Collectors along with Central Bank of India, Punjab National Bank and UCO Bank to improve their performance.

On credit support to Mission Shakti groups, Sambalpur, Kandhamal, Nuapada and Baleswar and the Odisha Gramya Bank, UCO Bank, Canara Bank and SBI have performed well. Naveen hoped that Jajpur, Mayurbhanj, Ganjam, Puri and other districts would improve in the coming months.

Central Bank of India and PNB have exceeded the targets while the SBI has given maximum credit support to MSMEs to the tune of ₹7,250 crore. However, Bank of Baroda, Indian Bank and AXIS Bank should also come forward and give more credit linkages. He instructed all Collectors and banks to achieve their credit targets set for this financial year.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	46006.69 ↑ 452.73
NIFTY	13466.30 ↑ 137.90
DOLLAR	74.29 ↓ ₹0.17
EURO	90.33 ↑ ₹0.31
GOLD	₹50,213 ↓ ₹203
SILVER	₹67,901 ↓ ₹1117

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	27.9°C	27.8°C
MIN	11.7°C	10.5°C
Humidity	91%	70%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Mist in the morning

leisure



ERA OF THE EIGHTIES HAS INFLUENCED ME: PEDRO

Actor Pedro Pascal says he has been influenced by the 1980s, and it is something that continues to stay with him. The actor asserted that the era added a different sort of charm to the world of the upcoming film, *Wonder Woman 1984*.

TOM HANKS READY TO TAKE COVID-19 VACCINE PUBLICLY

Hollywood star Tom Hanks says he would be taking the Covid-19 vaccine publicly to shun fear and instill faith among people. Hanks opened up about his plans to get vaccinated for Covid-19 along with wife Rita Wilson, in an episode of Today show, reports *dailymail.co.uk*.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You may be alone, but not necessarily lonely. You may want to listen to your inner voice, and express your true self creatively. Spend the evening with a loved one who can hear the music in your silence too, suggests Ganesha.

TAURUS
Today, you may experience the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain. Household tasks may weigh you down around afternoon. Later in the day, you will be able to achieve whatever you desire solely on account of your determination and mental strength. Pleasure awaits in the warmth and company of your soul mate, says Ganesha.

GEMINI
If you are into retail business, planetary positions indicate today is a day for bumper sales. You will set records in making profits. After work, you may want to take your beloved out shopping. Though it may burn a hole in your pocket, the returns you get once you reach home will be worth every penny!

CANCER
Today, you may focus your entire attention on your relationships – your ties with your parents, spouse, children, siblings and even neighbours. However, all that effort and energy may not get its due, and you may get a cold response from one or more of your relatives. Still there is no reason to lose heart.

LEO
The discomfort similar to the fish-out-of-water syndrome will be a thing of the past, as today you will be quite flexible and would want to remain on the move, says Ganesha. So much so that you may even begin to feel bound by the environment in your office. Ganesha sees this as a good sign, as being adaptable will help you manoeuvre your way around people.

VIRGO
Razor-sharp and aesthetic to the last cell in your body, entertain and enthrall people with your guile, especially at a social do, says Ganesha. But conserve that zest and save the time to pay due attention to matters of supreme importance, warns Ganesha.

LIBRA
Your instincts are at their peak today. Generally, this means a lot of good, but for you, it may also mean having to put up with the trouble of small things bothering you in a big way. So, it becomes highly important for you to remain balanced and focused. Do so and you may produce wonderful results at work, and also look forward to raking in the money from various sources, says Ganesha.

SCORPIO
Ganesha predicts today will be a day full of focus and a clear thought process. The clarity of thought you have been acquired over a period of time, says Ganesha, and that could make all the difference. A crisp application of thoughts to ideas and actions will bring much appreciation from bosses and peers.

SAGITTARIUS
Your friend base is slated to multiply today. At work, additional responsibilities will be thrust upon you, and you will also be given charge of new resources. Ganesha predicts you taking up the challenge and emerging triumphant in all spheres today.

CAPRICORN
It's going to be a day of pleasant surprises. You will try your level best to help people around you, and will find it exceedingly frustrating when the results won't be as expected, says Ganesha. In fact, this may even dampen your spirit and shake your self-confidence. But try and transform your weaknesses into strengths – it will help you develop a more positive approach to life.

AQUARIUS
You may huff and puff, but today is not the day when you'll finish what you started. Don't lose heart, the future is promising. Take a break, says Ganesha, you've worked enough. The results are on the way.

PISCES
Major expenses are coming your way, but the good news is a lot of them can be avoided simply by drawing a line between your needs and your wants. Exercising a little restraint now will go a long way in boosting your savings later on, says Ganesha.

DECOR TRENDS going away in 2021

The concept of placing fake plants in drawing rooms worked magic for a considerable period over the past decade but it'll be out next year, predict experts

In the year 2020, several trends evolved during the lockdown, from Dalgona coffee to filmy gossip... and people spent every moment inside their homes realising the need to re-decorate and rearrange their interiors.

But the thing about trends is that they change rapidly within the times. Customers across the world have been driven towards creating an environment that brings them peace. Therefore, decor that incorporated bulky designs and dominating colours are going to be passed in 2021. Here is a look at the trends that experts say one should leave behind at the end of the year.

White-oh-white
White furniture and white paint was preferred to showcase being posh and opulent; yet, it's grown quite old and outdated.

Pin or fork legs table
Tables with industrial designs have been a well-liked option for several years, but it's already out of fashion and one cloud opt for classic table designs.

Expensive furniture clusters
Many homes use various sorts of costly and exorbitant decor

items to show off price and luxury. This concept worked earlier but it doesn't portray any character. Every home should reflect the style and personality of its times or of its owner.

Themed spaces
Refrain from using themes to embellish rooms, especially for your children, because it's often used for limited time and then you have to redecorate. So, it's better to think about a topic which will be relevant for your child for much longer time.

Fake decor
Sometimes, for the sake of giving a natural touch to the decor we frequently display fake plants in our drawing rooms. This concept worked magic for a considerable period over the past decade but it'll be out next year. The same applies, to mirrors and stuffed animals.

Less luxury
It is observed often that folks want to make the entrance an area which portrays luxury. This concept is out as with the COVID-19 the safe and cushy environment makes for a better reception. So, less luxury isn't getting to affect your personality, it'll enhance it.



KATRINA CHAMPIONS RIGHT TO EDUCATION

MUMBAI: Actress Katrina Kaif Tuesday posted a video emphasizing on right to education and increased access to quality education without discrimination.

In the Instagram video, Katrina urges everyone to come forward and contribute towards creating classrooms, so that children coming from underprivileged homes can access quality English medium education.

"So proud to present to you all the school built from the ground up by my mom and her charity. Since 2015, Mountain View School in Madurai has

actively been working to provide quality English-medium education to lesser privileged children. They currently teach two hundred students, have classrooms up to grade four and need to add 14 more," Katrina captioned the video.

"Let us do our bit so that more and more children can fulfill their dreams. Considering the tough times we are in, it is even more important to be there for one another," she added.

Katrina has extended a helping hand to a school in Madurai, Tamil Nadu that has actively been working towards educating children, especially girls, since 2015.

Kanika Kapoor super excited for Jugni 2.0

MUMBAI: Singer Kanika Kapoor made fans dance to her fun song *Jugni ji* eight years ago. Now she is excited to give it a new twist.

Back in 2012, she had teamed up with artistes Shortie and Dr Zeus for *Jugni ji*. Now, she is gearing up for the release of *Jugni 2.0*.

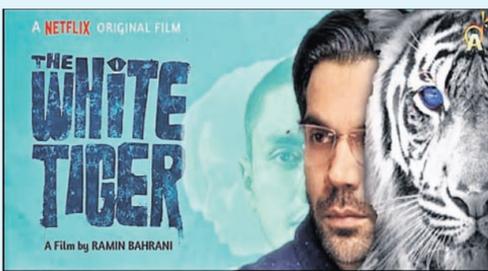
"It feels great to be able to bring a track which has stayed close to

all music lovers. I am super excited for the song, *Jugni 2.0*. This is my first song release for the year and it's a fun foot-tapping song which will make you all let loose on the dance floor. It's a new twist to the original *Jugni* track and we all have worked really hard to make it more contemporary, holding onto its essence yet be an enchanting, groovy track for everyone," said Kanika.



BIITM conducts SPARK 2020 to welcome freshers

BHUBANESWAR: Biju Patnaik Institute of Information Technology and Management Studies (BIITM), a prominent management institute of the city, is conducting SPARK 2020, a six-day induction program from December 21st to 26th on its campus to welcome a new batch of students admitted to MBA course. As many as 240 students took oath on the first day of the programme which was attended by Principal Prof. Dr P. K. Tripathy, Advisor Prof (Er) P.R. Pattanayak, Dean Prof. Dr. Mihir Ranjan Nayak and Placement Dean Prof. K. Chandrasekhar. Several corporate leaders from Axis Bank and Reliance General Insurance Company Ltd., Kolkata were also present. Speaking on the occasion, Principal Tripathy advised the students to practice Gayatri Mantra which he said is the powerhouse of energy. Addressing the parents of the newly admitted students, Prof. Pattanayak stressed on the importance of punctuality while Dean Nayak put emphasis on time management. A two-minute video on campus life was screened to give the students a feel of college life during this induction program. Prof. Varun Agarwal delivered a motivational talk while Prof (Er) Manoj Ku Rout apprised the students of varsity's rules and regulations. Dr. Neha Gupta, Dr. Bonita Mitra and Prof Mrs. Tapaswini Nayak introduced the faculty and staff members to the freshers.



The White Tiger gets a release date

NEW DELHI: The Priyanka Chopra and Rajkummar Rastarner, *The White Tiger*, will release January 22. The team of the film revealed the release date while sharing a new trailer of the project.

"The *White Tiger* comes to Netflix globally on January 22. #TheWhiteTigerNetflix," Rajkummar shared.

American-Iranian filmmaker Ramin Bahrani directs the India-centric film that stars Adarsh Gourav in a central role. The film is based on Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize-winning novel of the same name.

In the film, Priyanka and Rajkummar are seen as an affluent couple, who have been living with their family in India after returning from the US for their business. Adarsh is seen as their driver, Balram Halwai.

From class divide to the dark realities of the society, the film will explore several themes through the story of Balram Halwai as he 'uses his wit and cunning to escape from poverty and become an entrepreneur'.

Priyanka is also attached to the project as an executive producer along with Emmy award-winning filmmaker Ava DuVernay.

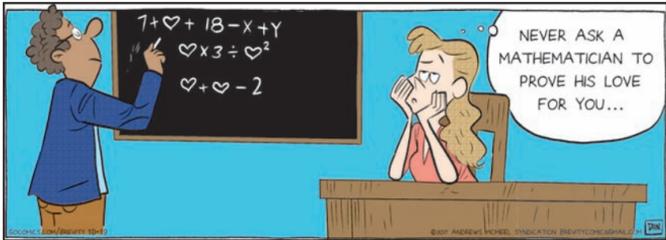
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

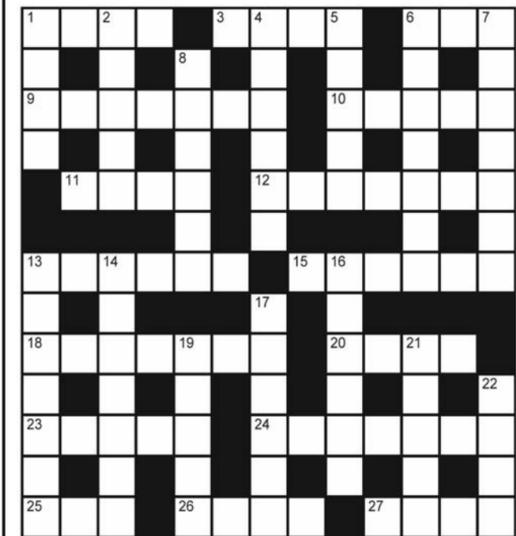


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Mongrel
 - 3 Queries
 - 6 Plant production
 - 9 Rust
 - 10 Dogma
 - 11 Cuzco's country
 - 12 Larval frog
 - 13 Marionette
 - 15 Cohoe
 - 18 Pergolas
 - 20 Manacle
 - 23 Plaudits
 - 24 Pasta dish
 - 25 Plea at sea
 - 26 Some stingers
 - 27 Small whirlpool
 - 5 Filled to excess
 - 6 Solarium
 - 7 Sewing aid
 - 8 Water down
 - 13 Solar system members
 - 14 Small stones
 - 16 Niche
 - 17 Fish hawk
 - 19 Give voice to
 - 21 Greenland sight
 - 22 Shipshape
- Down**
- 1 Like some points
 - 2 Strong string
 - 4 Detective

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, each row, column and box must contain the numbers 0 to 9 and the letters A to E.

B	7	C	8			D			A
	3	1	4	A	2			0	7
	2					4	6		E
0		E		A	1	5	2		B
8			0	B	7			2	
9	7	4				8			E
A	7			3			1		8
E				5	4				
		3	8	B					9
	4	1		D	2				
6	D			E					A
	8	0	1		9		E		2
2	9	B	6	1			3		
	C	D		9	0	8	2		B
1				E	9	A	D		B

SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

9	2	3	E	1	8	0	B	C	4	7	5	D	6	A
8	E	0	9	5	3	7	1	A	2	6	D	B	4	C
6	A	4	7	C	2	E	8	D	3	9	B	0	5	1
5	1	7	D	B	4	2	3	6	A	C	0	9	E	8
C	B	D	6	A	0	9	5	4	1	8	E	2	7	3
A	D	6	B	8	5	4	7	1	0	E	9	3	C	2
B	3	5	4	0	9	6	C	E	7	2	8	1	A	D
0	8	C	1	D	7	3	2	9	5	4	A	E	B	6
2	7	E	C	B	A	0	5	4	1	3	8	9	6	A
4	9	1	2	A	D	6	8	0	9	3	7	0	5	1
0	C	9	A	7	1	E	2	8	0	4	6	3	8	9
3	0	8	1	D	C	6	7	B	A	2	4	1	9	5
1	5	A	2	9	6	D	4	B	A	3	7	C	8	0
E	6	2	0	4	8	9	3	C	5	1	A	D	7	0
7	4	B	8	3	C	1	A	0	9	D	6	5	2	E

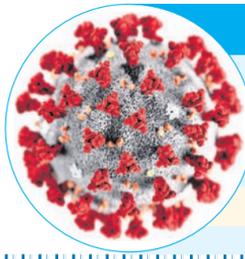
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



RAZING DOWN

An excavator engaged by BDA pulls down an illegal structure in Chandrasekharpur area of Bhubaneswar, Tuesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	7,78,62,704	5,47,53,689	17,12,010
India	1,00,76,387	96,36,334	1,46,154
Odisha	3,26,915	3,22,344	1,843

Srimandir is reopening today

ONLY FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE SERVITORS ALLOWED TO VISIT THE 12TH CENTURY SHRINE TILL DEC 25

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Dec 22: After remaining shut for people for around nine months in the wake of novel coronavirus pandemic, Srimandir, the abode of Lord Jagannath, is all set to reopen Wednesday with strict adherence to the Covid-19 norms.

As per the earlier decision of the shrine authorities, only family members of the servitors would be allowed to visit Srimandir till December 25.

The residents of Puri city would have the opportunity to visit the shrine from December 26, said an official of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA).

The district administration Tuesday released a detail schedule for the visit of Puri residents to the 12th century shrine.

As per the schedule, the locals would be allowed to have darshan of Lord Jagannath in three phases in a day.

"The first phase of the darshan will start at 7.30 am and continue till 11.30 am while the second phase is scheduled to begin at 12 noon and continue till 4 pm. The last phase of Lord's darshan would



Security personnel stand guard in front of a barricade near Srimandir, Tuesday

STRICT SCHEDULE

AFTER DEC 25, PURI LOCALS ALLOWED DARSHAN OF LORD JAGANNATH IN A PHASE-WISE MANNER

The first phase of the darshan will start at 7.30 am and continue till 11.30 am

The 2nd phase is scheduled to begin at 12 noon and continue till 4 pm

The last phase of Lord's darshan would begin at 4.30 pm and end at 9 pm

begin at 4.30 pm and end at 9 pm," said Collector Balwant Singh.

The Collector further revealed that residents of ward no. 6 and 9 would be allowed to visit Srimandir during the morning phase of December 26 while locals of ward no. 12 and 15 would have the opportunity to enter into the shrine during the afternoon phase. The people residing at ward no. 11, 2 and 3 would visit Srimandir in the evening phase, Singh said.

"The residents of ward no. 13

would have the opportunity to visit Srimandir in the morning phase of December 27 while the locals of ward no. 16 and 18 would enter into the shrine in the afternoon phase. People of ward no. 17, 4 and 20 would be allowed to have a darshan of the deities in the evening phase," Singh added.

As per the schedule, people residing at ward no. 10 and 19 would visit the shrine in the morning phase of December 28, residents of ward no. 8 and 21 in the afternoon

phase and locals of ward no. 5 in the evening phase.

The residents of ward no. 14 and 32 are scheduled to visit Srimandir in the morning phase of December 29 while the people of ward no. 22 and 26 would be allowed to enter into the shrine in the afternoon phase. The evening phase of the day would be kept reserve for the people of ward no. 1.

"Residents of ward no. 23 and 24 can visit the temple in the morning of December 30 while the residents

of ward no. 25 and 30 in the afternoon phase. Locals of ward no.7 and 27 would be allowed in to the shrine in the evening phase," Singh said.

According to the schedule, locals of ward no. 28 would have the opportunity to visit Srimandir in the morning of December 31 and people of ward no. 29 and 31 in the afternoon.

"The administration is making all arrangements to ensure smooth darshan for the locals. Barricades have been erected to regulate the crowd. Steps are being taken to provide drinking water and toilet facilities to the devotees," said the collector.

Meanwhile, the SJTA has formed a team of 15 Pratihari servitors to assist the administration in regulating crowd at Srimandir. "The team will help the SJTA to identify family members of servitors at the temple entrance," said a source.

Notably, the administration had earlier announced that it would provide tokens to the locals of Puri to visit Srimandir. "The locals can enter into the shrine by producing the tokens along with their identity proof," stated the administration.

Interior Odisha shivers as mercury nosedives



As temperature plummets, agitating ANMs lit a bonfire at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Tuesday

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Normal life in interior Odisha was severely hit Tuesday as the mercury level plummeted to 4 degrees Celsius at Phulbani in Kandhamal, making it the coldest place in the state.

The weather office has warned continuation of the cold wave to severe cold wave in five districts during the next 24 hours.

Minimum temperatures observed no large change at most places over the districts of Odisha. Almost all places experienced temperature below normal. The IMD said that the condition is likely to prevail till December 24.

This apart, shallow to moderate fog has occurred at one or two places over the districts of Koraput, Malkangiri and Nayagarh of south Odisha. The Regional Meteorological Centre said in a bulletin that the five districts affected by severe cold conditions are Angul, Dhenkanal, Kalahandi, Sundargarh and Jharsuguda.

While severe cold conditions prevailed at one or two places over the district of Angul of north interior Odisha and cold wave conditions also prevailed at one or two places in the districts of Sundargarh, Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Koraput in the interior parts of the state.

The night temperature in 13 places in the state dropped below 10 degree Celsius. The MeT office said Phulbani recorded 4 degrees Celsius, followed by Daringbadi at 5.5 degrees, Angul 6 degrees, Koraput 6.6 degrees, Bhawanipatna 7.2, Jharsuguda and Sundargarh 7.5, Baripada 8.5, Balangir 8.8, Keonjhar

and Titlagarh 9, Sonepur 9.2, and Boudh 9.5 degrees Celsius.

The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack registered minimum temperatures of 11.7 and 10.5 degrees Celsius respectively, it said.

The highest maximum temperature of 30 degrees Celsius was recorded at Malkangiri and the lowest minimum temperature of 4 degrees Celsius was recorded at Phulbani in the plains of Odisha, the bulletin said.

On the impact of the continuing cold wave, the IMD said that there is an increased likelihood of various illnesses like runny/stuffy nose or nosebleed, which usually sets in or get aggravated due to prolonged exposure to cold. Livestock too may be affected due to prolonged exposure to cold.

The IMD also suggested that people stay indoors during the night in view of the cold conditions, make arrangements to keep livestock in shaded or indoor areas, avoid movement at night especially in two-wheelers or open cars and take safety measures while using heating devices. There is no large change in minimum temperature (Night Temperature) over the districts of Odisha during next 3-4 days, and it will be below normal by 3-4 degrees Celsius over the districts of Coastal Odisha, the IMD said.

Keeping in view the IMD forecast, the special relief commissioner (SRC) PK Jena in a letter to all the district Collectors and commissioners of municipal corporations said that necessary public awareness campaigns be conducted on dos and don'ts to protect the people and livestock from the prevailing cold wave.

Clamp down on drunken driving

Cops asked to conduct breathe/blood analysis of drivers in case of fatal accidents

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: To check drunken driving, the state government has asked police to conduct blood or breathe analysis of drivers in cases of fatal accident.

Commerce and Transport secretary Madhu Sudan Padhi wrote a letter to Police DG, Police Commissioner, and Health and Family Welfare in this regard, Tuesday.

"Necessary instructions may be issued for compulsory blood/breathe test of drivers in case of fatal accident & cases of grievous injuries and viscera test in case the driver dies in accident to detect drunken driving," Padhi said in his letter. The field-level officials have been instructed to submit a monthly report in this regard.

According to official data, 1,068 road accidents have occurred due to drunken driving during 2019, which is 9.65 per cent of total accidents. But, feedbacks have been received from field level officials that the drunken driving cases are under

reported, he said. Therefore, to detect the drunken drivers responsible for road accidents, it was decided to conduct blood/viscera/breathe test of drivers in fatal accident cases and cases with grievous injuries.

The government has also decided to conduct joint inspection by officials from Motor Vehicle department, police and road engineer, in case of a road mishap with serious injury or death.

During a meeting held last month, a Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety observed that there has been steady increase in number of fatalities due to road accident from 2014 to 2019 by about 36 per cent. The panel had asked the state government to take all possible steps to improve the position within a couple of months.

The Committee had also directed to submit a report whether accidents have increased or decreased at the black spots after taking up the traffic calming measures at these spots.



FILE PHOTO

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



14-day home quarantine for persons with UK travel history

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: In a precautionary measure for new mutant variant of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) detected recently in UK, state government has made 14 days home quarantine mandatory for persons with travel history to UK.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, PK Mohapatra has issued necessary instructions to the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Commissioner, Capital Hospital director, chief district medical officer of Jharsuguda and the directors of airports at

Bhubaneswar and Jharsuguda. At a time when the number of Covid positive cases is declining steadily in the state, any interjection of a SARS-CoV-2 variant virus through passengers with air travel history may pose critical risks for management of the pandemic in the state, Mohapatra said.

In view of the emerging situation, he added, passengers with travel history of UK and transiting through the airports in UK within 14 days of the arrival at the airport will have to fill up the Self Declaration Form. All such passengers will have to re-

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE



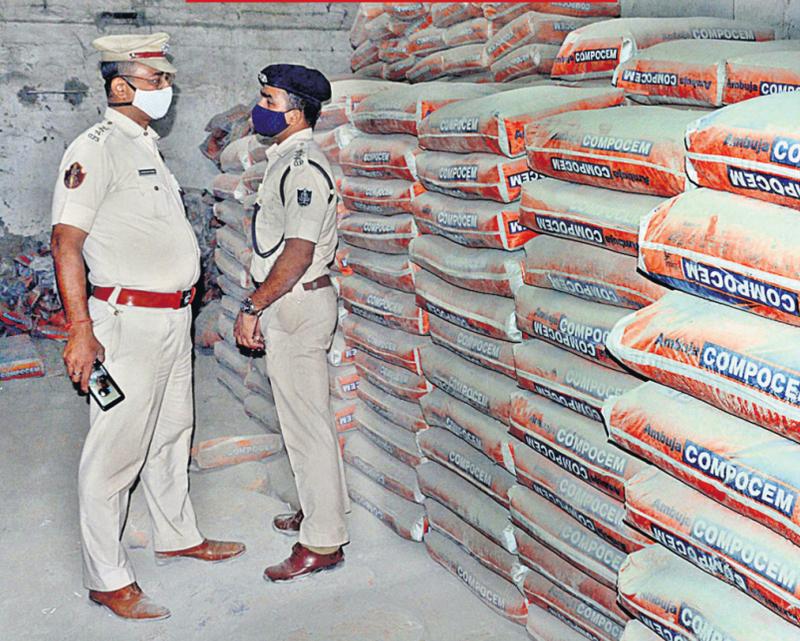
main in mandatory 14 days home quarantine with self monitoring and periodic monitoring by the Rapid Response Team.

If any such person is found symptomatic within the quarantine period, RT-PCR test will be conducted. If s/he is tested positive, s/he will

be isolated in an institutional isolation facility and advised for treatment as per the protocol. If the person is tested negative, s/he will be advised to complete the 14 days home quarantine period, he instructed.

For prevention of the spread of the new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the state, Mohapatra asked the officials to ensure strict adherence to the SoP issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with mandatory screening of the persons with travel history of UK and necessary follow up action.

CRACKDOWN ON FAKE UNIT



Police officials raid a fake cement manufacturing unit in Jagatpur area of Cuttack, Tuesday

OP PHOTO

Ideas invited for state Budget 21-22

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: The state government has started preparation for the annual Budget for the year 2020-21, which may be presented in the Assembly in February next year.

Finance Minister Niranjan Pujari Tuesday invited suggestions from general public for the preparation of the Budget. In order to make the budgetary process more open and participative using information and communication technology (ICT), Finance department has initiated the process of obtaining inputs for budget preparation through the dedicated budget web-portal, e-mail, WhatsApp and SMS, he said.

One can submit the suggestion in the budget web-portal <https://budget.odisha.gov.in>, e-mail to odisha.budget@gov.in, Whatsapp to 9438161111, and through social media platforms like Twitter (@FdOdisha) and Facebook (@FinanceOdisha), he added.

The Finance Minister informed that the facility will be available



for one month from December 22 till January 21, 2021.

He requested members of the public, civil society organisations, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to make use of the unique opportunity to participate in the budget-making process of the state government.

As per guidelines laid down by the Finance department, the annual Budget for the next year will be prepared in adherence to expenditure rationalisation measures taken by the government in view of Covid-19 impact on economy. Allocation under State Sector

Schemes (SSS) will not be made for the un-approved schemes. Allocation for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and Central Sector Schemes would be proposed taking into account the likely level of Central assistance to be received for the schemes for the budget year within the overall ceiling communicated for the sectors, official sources said.

Sufficient allocation is likely to be given for different schemes under the Programme Expenditure for tribal sub-component and scheduled caste sub-component, as per the norm.

To make the budgetary process more open and participative using information and communication technology, the Finance department has initiated the process of obtaining inputs for budget preparation through the dedicated budget web-portal, e-mail, WhatsApp and SMS

NIRANJAN PUJARI | FINANCE MINISTER

For the preparation of Finance Minister's speech, the Finance Secretary Ashok Meena has asked all other departments to submit details on achievements of last five years and proposed policy along with physical targets under various major schemes during 2021-21.

The government had presented a budget with total outlay of Rs 1.50 lakh crore for 2020-21.

Another 4 succumb to virus

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: State's Covid-19 tally rose to 3,26,915 Tuesday as 319 more people tested positive for the infection, while four fresh fatalities pushed Odisha's coronavirus death toll to 1,843, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

As many as 184 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while the remaining fresh infections were detected during contact tracing, said the official.

Sundargarh district reported the highest number of new cases at 72, followed by Angul (35) and Khurda (23). The four fatalities were reported in Khurda, Jajpur, Kalahandi and Puri districts.

As many as 53 Covid-19 patients have died due to comorbidities so far, the official pointed out.

The state has so far tested over 66.65 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 29,721 Monday, the official added. Meanwhile, the state government has fixed the maximum cost for Rapid Antigen Test conducted by private laboratories at Rs 100 (inclusive GST) within Odisha.

The notification from H&FW department December 21 read, "In supersession of this Department no-

	CONFIRMED	ACTIVE	RECOVERED	DECEASED
Odisha	3,26,915 [+319]	3,063 [+315]	3,21,956	1,843 [+4]
	3.24 % of India case	1.05 % of India case	3.34 % of India case	1.26 % of India case
India	1,00,76,387 [+959]	2,91,213 [+283]	96,36,334 [+669]	1,46,154 [+7]

Numbers vis-à-vis national data



FILE PHOTO

tification dated 14.7.2020. Government after careful consideration have been pleased to refix the maximum cost for Rapid Antigen Test conducted by Private Laboratories @ Rs100 (inclusive of GST) within the state of Odisha (sic)."

The tests will be conducted by private laboratories under the supervision of RMRC at Bhubaneswar fol-

lowing ICMR guidelines regarding the testing protocols for Rapid Antigen Test, the notification read.

Earlier this month, the state government reduced the maximum price for the RT-PCR COVID-19 tests by private laboratories to Rs 400 from Rs 1,200. Odisha government's decision came after Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government ordered to re-

IN NUMBERS

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The four fatalities were reported in Khurda, Jajpur, Kalahandi and Puri

The state has so far tested over 66.65 lakh samples for Covid-19 including 29,721 Monday

duce the rate of RT-PCR tests in Delhi to Rs 800 from existing Rs 2,400.

India, on the other hand, recorded 19,556 fresh cases of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), the lowest daily rise since July, and 301 deaths in the last 24 hours, the Union health ministry's data showed Tuesday morning. India's active caseload has also dropped to 292,518, the lowest in 162 days. The active cases of the coronavirus disease were 301,609, July 13.

FARM WORK



Workers threshing newly-harvested paddy by using a machine at OUAT farmhouse in Bhubaneswar, Tuesday

BMC calls pvt players to fund Aahar Centres

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Following a state government order, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Tuesday, called a meet of major private corporations and hotels of the city for funding the Aahar centres operated under its jurisdiction.

In an order recently passed by the Home and Urban Department (H&UD), the state government instructed all the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to henceforth organise and manage funds for Aahar centres which it had been providing earlier. Following this, the BMC also passed a subsequent order and called upon private players in the city.

"As a preparatory step towards the initiative, BMC has communicated different agencies to discuss the issue to arrive at a solution of continuing the different Aahar centres in the city. Looking at the benefits the centre has been providing to citizens, especially the urban poor, we have asked the agencies to contribute towards the cause their CSR (Company Social Responsibility) fund," said Abanikanta Pattanaik, Additional Commissioner, BMC, who also



chaired the meeting.

It can be mentioned here that Aahar centres which have been providing meals at Rs 5 are said to have been providing about 9,200 meals at 12 Aahar centres on a daily basis. With about operational cost of Rs 20 per meal along with establishment costs, the civic authority has been looking ahead for sponsoring of about Rs 60 lakh funds per month and about Rs 2 lakhs per day.

"As of now, representatives from NALCO, JSPL, May Fair, Trident Hotel, Swosti Group, Sky automobiles, Axis Bank, UCO Bank, Punjab National Bank, CO Bank and others have participated in the meeting. The members present were requested to decide on the issue by 30th Dec. Moreover, the BMC will organise a second meet in January where more agencies are expected to join," informed Deputy Commissioner, Kamala Kanta Behera.

Festival spl trains to ply till Jan end

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: It has been decided to extend the running of festival special trains originating from East Coast Railway jurisdiction up to the last week of January, 2021, Railways officials said. Presently, 20 pairs of festival trains are originating from East Coast Railway jurisdiction.

Bhubaneswar-Anand Vihar-Bhubaneswar bi-weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Wednesday and Sunday and from Anand Vihar on every Tuesday and Friday will run up to January 31, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Lokamanya Tilak Terminus (LTT)-Bhubaneswar bi-weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Monday and Thursday and from LTT on every Wednesday and Saturday will run up to January 28, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Tirupati-Bhubaneswar weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Saturday and from Tirupati on every Sunday will run up to January 30, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Chennai-Bhubaneswar weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Thursday and from Chennai on



every Friday will run up to January 28, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Bangalore Cant-Bhubaneswar weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Sunday and from Bangalore Cant on every Tuesday will run up to January 31, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Pondicherry-Bhubaneswar weekly Special leaving from Bhubaneswar on every Tuesday and from Pondicherry on every Wednesday will run up to January 26, 2021 from Bhubaneswar.

Bhubaneswar-Rameswaram-Bhubaneswar weekly Special leav-

PRESENTLY, 20 PAIRS OF FESTIVAL TRAINS ARE ORIGINATING FROM EAST COAST RAILWAY JURISDICTION

January, 2021 from Sambalpur.

Puri-Patna-Puri Special leaving from Puri Monday and from Patna on every Wednesday will run up to January 25 from Puri

Puri-Jayanagar-Puri Special leaving from Puri on every Thursday and from Jayanagar on every Saturday will run up to January 28, 2021 from Puri.

Puri-Surat-Puri Special leaving from Puri on every Sunday and from Surat on every Tuesday will run up to January 31, 2021 from Puri. Puri-Lokamanya Tilak Terminus (LTT)-Puri weekly Special leaving from Puri on every Tuesday and from LTT on every Thursday will run up to January 26, 2021 from Puri.

Puri-Chennai-Puri Special leaving from Puri on every Sunday and from Chennai on every Monday will run up to January 31, 2021 from Puri.

SENIOR CLERK UNDER VIGILANCE SCANNER

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: The Vigilance officials Tuesday conducted raids at the residence of senior clerk, R&B Division-1, Bhubaneswar, Asit Kumar Nayak on charges of amassing properties disproportionate to his known sources of income.

Asit Kumar Nayak, son of late Gokulananda Nayak of Kaithapalli village under Golanthara police limits in Ganjam district, resides on plot no LIV 178, Phase IV, Dumduma, under Khandagiri police limits in Bhubaneswar.

Sources said a team of anti corruption officials conducted simultaneous raids at five places including his three-storied building at LIV 178, Phase IV, Dumduma, one duplex and one plot at Pradhan Sahi, Jatni, parental house at Kaithapalli, Golanthara in Ganjam, one flat at Berhampur in Spectrum Construction and his office room at R&B Division. The sleuths carried out the simultaneous raids on the strength of search warrant issued by special judge, Vigilance, Bhubaneswar. The raids were learnt to be still going on at the time of filing of this report. And while the value of his total assets is yet to be ascertained, cash amounting to Rs 10, 62, 605 was recovered. Further details are awaited.

STREET PLAY



Nalco Mahila Samiti holds a street play at Gandhi park in Puri, Tuesday

OP PHOTOS

DMs told to be ready for vax drive

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: The state government Tuesday asked all district Collectors to be prepared for Covid vaccination drive. Chairing the state-level Steering Committee here, Additional Chief Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Department, PK Mohapatra directed the Collectors to be ready with a plan of action to create awareness on Covid vaccination and make arrangement for the vaccination drive.



He emphasised on extensive

BCJD state executive meet today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: A meeting of state executive body of Biju Chhatra Janata Dal (BCJD) will be held Wednesday here at BJD party office. BCJD's general secretary (organisation) Pranab Prakash Das will inaugurate the meet while Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is scheduled to address the new student leaders.

All office bearers of the BCJD along with presidents and zonal presidents of all 34 organisational districts will attend the meet.

City schools observe Mathematics Day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Many schools in the Capital city here Tuesday observed the National Mathematics Day.

The National Mathematics Day is celebrated December 22 to commemorate the birth anniversary of India's renowned mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan.

The mathematics department of BJEM School observed the day by paying floral tributes to the mathematics genius.

"Though Ramanujan had no formal training in pure mathematics, he made substantial con-

awareness, proper training of personnel to be engaged in vaccination in the district and block level. He directed the Collectors to be well prepared for the process. Mohapatra further asked the Collectors to undertake block visits if required to supervise the arrangements.

National Health Mission (NHM) director Shalini Pandit highlighted the need to prepare guidelines to identify health workers, frontline workers and persons above 50 years of age for vaccination.

OPF MISSIVE TO NAVEEN

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Odisha Parents' Federation (OPF), a state-level parents' body, Tuesday wrote a letter to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik seeking reservation for government school children in engineering and medical colleges as well as rollback of the decision to close a huge number of state government schools.

In its letter, OPF chairman Basudev Bhatt said, "We would like to bring to your kind attention about reservation for government school students in engineering and medical colleges. Recently, Tamil Nadu government has notified and ordered 7.5 per cent reservation to government school students, who have cleared the National Eligibility and Entrance Test (NEET) in admission to undergraduate medical courses," Bhatt said.

He said that at present, Odisha has 63,280 government primary and upper primary schools, 6,193 government-aided secondary schools, 849 recognised high schools and 151 permitted high schools. As many as 5.60 lakh students appeared the matriculation examination in 2019-20."

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Joint survey with AP officials begins

Farmers of S Kabiti village in Srikakulam district have claimed the land owned by Gajapati farmers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paralakhemundi, Dec 22: Even as the border dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha in the fringe areas of Gajapati district remains unresolved, the revenue departments of both the states have started joint survey in the areas, a report said.

According to the report, for the last few years, the neighbouring state has been trying to claim parts of bordering areas in Gajapati illegally. The land owned by some farmers in Gajapati is near the borders of Srikakulam district.

Some farmers of S Kabiti village in Srikakulam district have allegedly claimed ownership of the land owned by Gajapati farmers. They have even undertaken farming on the land.

Gajapati farmers have raised their objection in this regard at the district administration.

Paralakhemundi tehsildar Achyutananda Jani had drawn attention of the Collector towards the land issue. The issue was ear-



lier discussed by the Collectors of Gajapati and Srikakulam districts.

Following direction from the Collectors of the neighbouring districts, the Paralakhemundi and Purunapatnam tehsildars and field level revenue officials have started demarcation work with the help of border maps recently.

Paralakhemundi tehsildar Achyutananda Jani told reporters that during the land settlement, survey stones have been set up at different fringe areas where the dispute has cropped up.

"These survey stones are being measured and other missing stones are being looked for. It will take two to three days to demarcate the land and the dispute will be resolved," he added.

The joint survey team comprising Paralakhemundi tehsildar, a RI, an ARI, four amins of Gajapati, Purunapatnam tehsildar M Kalika Prasad, a circle surveyor, a VRI and four village surveyors is on its toes identifying the borders.

It may be noted here that the disputed land is under Chiridiguda

Khasapa mouza under Khasinagar tehsil. People of S Kabiti have been forcibly cultivating the land owned by farmers of Chiridiguda Khasapa mouza.

Ten days back, a special settlement team from Berhampur along with local revenue staff of Koraput had conducted a survey to ascertain the Odisha-AP border. The team found that the original boundary marks were intact as per the 1955 settlement survey by Madras Presidency and not "manipulated" as claimed by AP villagers.

However, some encroachment of government land for cultivation was detected from both sides and Koraput Collector was informed to do the needful. The border row has been raging since a month after some AP villagers repositioned a boundary signboard 500 metres into the Odisha side.

Meanwhile, a similar territorial dispute was witnessed in Gajapati district where villagers claimed encroachment by bordering AP villagers and prompted a joint survey on the day.

RALLY FOR FAITH



People of tribal communities take out a rally, demanding constitutional recognition of 'Sarna' faith as a religion, in Keonjhar Tuesday

OP PHOTO

Farmers oppose paddy procurement by SHG



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak/Padmapur, Dec 22: Hundreds of farmers opposed paddy procurement by an SHG at Berhampur Cooperative Society in Bhadrak, Tuesday.

Farmers of Kedarpur, Berhampur and Bentala panchayats carried their paddy in trucks and tractors to the cooperative society and parked the vehicles on a road in protest against the decision to hand over paddy procurement to the SHG.

According to the report, the district administration has authorized the SHG instead of the society to buy paddy from farmers.

Earlier, over 500 farmers from the three panchayats had submitted complaints to the Collector; the district civil supplies officer; the co-operation minister and the SP for reconsideration of the decision December 17.

Some farmers had received messages in their mobile phones about paddy procurement December 18.

They were infuriated when they found in the website of the food supplies and consumer welfare department that an SHG has been asked to procure paddy. They staged a dharna outside the society Monday.

As the administration paid no heed to their concern, they descended on the road Tuesday. Hundred of buses, truck and other vehicles were stranded on the both sides of the Bhadrak-Chandbali and Bhadrak-Basudevpur roads.

As tension prevailed, police were deployed at the spot. On the other hand, 32 farmers came with their paddy to Sriram SGH in Erada panchayat Monday. Two millers had refused to receive paddy, citing poor quality. The farmers guarded their paddy amid chilly weather throughout the night.

GST official under vigilance radar

ROURKELA: Vigilance officers Tuesday conducted simultaneous searches on the properties of assistant commissioner of commercial tax-cum-GST officer, Alekh Mahananda, on charges of amassing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. Four teams are conducting the raids. Following the direction of vigilance SP Subas Chandra Swain, the teams led by DSP Birendra Nayak carried out simultaneous raids on his house in Chhend area in Rourkela, on his office chamber, GST office at Udit Nagar, ancestral house at Mangaspur village under Bhashma police limits in Sundargarh district and his in-laws' house at Chakarpur village under Gopalpur police limits in Sundargarh.

Youth killed in road mishap

SORO: Tension gripped Malichua village under Soro police limits in Balasore district following a road block staged by the villagers over the death of a youth in a road mishap Monday night. The deceased was identified as Ganesh Singh. According to a source, Singh was returning home when a tractor hit him, injuring him critically. The local people rescued him and rushed him to Balasore district headquarters hospital. While undergoing treatment, Singh breathed his last. As the news spread, hundreds of villagers along with the deceased's family members came onto Singakhunta-Bagudi road and staged a road block.

Youth gets ten years in jail for minor's rape

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Dec 22: A local court handed 10-years of imprisonment to a youth after convicting him for the 2016-rape of an eight year old girl under Marshaghai police limits in this district, Tuesday.

Special judge-cum-chief judicial magistrate MR Dora heard the matter and awarded the punishment to Baguli Khatua, 27, alias Kala, a native of the survivor's village under the same police limits.

The judge also slapped a penalty of ₹10,000 on the convict apart from the sentence. In case of default, the judge ordered Khatua to undergo an additional three months of imprisonment.

According to the case diary, the incident occurred during the celebration of 'Ashtaprahari Kirtan' in the village April 9, 2016. The incident first occurred when Khatua molested the survivor participating in the 'Kalash Yatra' for the festival with her younger sister, April 7.

Later, he noticed the minor with her younger sister on road and lured her near a bush where he raped her April 9. The survivor's father has alleged before police that he even thrashed the former's younger sister when she offered resistance.

Rlwys starts probe into tusker's death



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Dec 22: A day after a tusker was run over by Puri-Surat express train near Bhabanipali village between Maneswar- Hatibari railway stations, a high-level team of railways officials launched a probe into the incident, Tuesday.

The team members collected reports by visiting the spot and talked to the loco pilot and the railways guard. Meanwhile, the forest department also issued a show-cause notice to the Sadar Range Officer Gouri Das on charge of dereliction of duty. The forest authorities have questioned as to how the mishap occurred. The Sadar forest ranger has come under scanner following the unnatural death of five elephants under its territorial jurisdiction this year.

Three tuskers have been killed by poachers while, the rest two were run over by trains crossing the railway tracks. This has sparked resent-

ment among animal lovers while environmentalists have expressed concern over the development.

Sources said a tusker was run over by Puri-Surat express train while a herd of elephants was crossing the railway tracks passing through a railway corridor. The mishap was so severe that the train dragged the 14-year old tusker for over two metres after applying brakes.

As a result, six wheels of the train got derailed following the mishap while train services resumed after four hours. However, no casualty was reported during the period.

Meanwhile, the presence of a herd of elephants on the outskirts of Sambalpur town has sparked fear among the residents. The pachyderms are reportedly camping near Maneswar, Gulundipali, Halipali, Brahmanipali, Kudernisha, Kirtipur, Jhankarpali villages and straying inside after evening in search of foods.

Ranchi-bound bus overturns in Rkl, 14 hurt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 22: As many as 14 passengers were injured when a bus they were travelling in overturned on NH-143 near Kuarmunda in Sundargarh district Tuesday.

However, no casualties were reported in the mishap. According to reports, a private bus carrying over 40 passengers from Rourkela was en-route to Ranchi of Jharkhand district. As lane extension work on the national highway was underway, the driver lost control of the bus near Kuarmunda and the vehicle turned turtle.

Following the accident, locals rushed to the spot and rescued people trapped under the bus. They admitted the wounded people to Kuarmunda Primary Health Centre (PHC).



Later, three critically-injured were shifted to Rourkela Government Hospital (RGH) as their condition deteriorated.

On receiving the information, Kuarmunda police reached the spot, seized the bus and began an inquiry into the incident.

RAISUAN AIRSTRIP REVAMP WORK WALLAWS IN NEGLECT

POST NEWS NETWORK

Raisuan, Dec 22: The central government's proposed project to upgrade small aerodromes and airports across the country under UDAAN has turned out to be a damp squib for Raisuan airstrip in Keonjhar district, a report said.

progress. Mining and industrial experts pointed out that Raisuan airstrip is only 7 km from the Keonjhar town. The district is rich in terms of mineral reserves and industries. Both the state and central governments have been earning thousands of crores of rupees from mining and the

shrift in almost all sectors, except mining and industries. In view of the necessity of air connectivity for the mineral rich district, a proposal had been sent to the central government to develop the airstrip January 21, 2016.

The public works department later conducted a survey and proposed the state government for acquisition of 22 acres of land for development of the airstrip. Following a plan to develop it as a low cost project, a delegation of the Airport Authority of India had visited the area. In 2011-12, ₹1 crore was invested for building a boundary wall around the airstrip. Besides, a runway of 920X30 metre was blacktopped. Thereafter, no progress has been done, locals alleged.

The length of the Raisuan airstrip is 1,062 metre and its breadth is 160 metre. The length of the runway is 920 metre with a width of 30 metre, which is too small for big aircraft to land. The government gives only ₹1 lakh

per year for its repair and maintenance, said sources. Notably, many political bigwigs like Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Biju Patnaik and scores of mining barons had landed and taken off from the airstrip at different times in the past.

PROJECT YET TO TAKE OFF

The length of the Raisuan airstrip is 1,062 metre and its breadth is 160 metre. The length of the runway is 920 metre with a width of 30 metre, which is too small for big aircraft to land

Notably, the airstrip is one of the oldest in the country. Its renovation work has allegedly been neglected. Such neglect has hurt the sentiments of the people in the district.

Reports said, Jharsuguda airport has been operationalised while development of other airports at Rourkela, Jeypore and Kalahandi is in

industrial sectors. However, they haven't paid any heed to the development needs of Raisuan airstrip, which bears much importance in boosting faster communication to the mining and the industrial areas, they lamented.

73 years have passed since independence, but the district has been given short

HEAVY TRAFFIC JAM AT NH 49

KEONJHAR: For two days, the NH-49 connecting Mumbai and Kolkata was chock-a-bloc with thousands of mineral-laden trucks and buses while other vehicles remained stranded at Thakurdih under Keonjhar block. Traffic chaos reigned on NH 49 for 48 hours, leaving life paralyzed for patients, passengers and affected essential services on the route, a report said. The problem was the outcome of two trucks breaking down in the middle of the road. Police Tuesday removed the two trucks, paving way for traffic flow. Report said, traffic chaos has become routine on this route due to plying of thousands of mineral-laden trucks. Various stretches of the NH-49 lie out of bounds for people, leaving public movement in a complete stalemate.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
SAMBALPUR IRRIGATION DIVISION, SAMBALPUR
"e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO.- 04/2020-21
Bid Identification No. SID-04/2020-21
No. 5313 Dt. 21.12.2020
No. A-397:- Bid documents consisting of work, estimated amount put to tender, cost of tender paper, EMD, time of completion, class of contractor, the set of terms & conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>.

- Name of the Work :- "Bank protection to right bank of river Tikira near village Sahabi RD 115m to 640m of Nakideul Block under Sambalpur District."
- No. of Works :- 01 No. of individual work.
- Estimated cost for put to tender :- 63,09,804.00
- Period of completion :- 11 (Eleven) calendar months each.
- Date & time of availability of bid documents in the portal :- From Dt.24.12.2020 at 10.00 hours to Dt.11.01.2021 at 17.00 hours
- Date of receipt of bids in the portal :- From Dt.24.12.2020 to 10.00 hours to Dt. 11.01.2021 at 17.00 hours
- Date of opening of Technical Bids :- Dt. 13.01.2021 at 11.30 hours in the O/o Executive Engineer, Sambalpur Irrigation Division, Sambalpur
- Date of opening of Financial Bids :- Dt. 22.01.2021 at 11.30 hours in the O/o Executive Engineer, Sambalpur Irrigation Division, Sambalpur
- Date of Lottery (if required) :- Dt. 27.01.2021 at 11.30 hours in the O/o Executive Engineer, Sambalpur Irrigation Division, Sambalpur
- Procurement Officer/ Name & address of the Officer Inviting Bids :- Executive Engineer, Sambalpur Irrigation Division, Sambalpur

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any Addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in said website.
Executive Engineer,
Sambalpur Irrigation Division,
Sambalpur
OIPR-32129/11/0007/2021

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
Office of the Executive Engineer
Bhanjanagar (R&B) Division, Bhanjanagar
(Phone/Fax: (06821) 241133/E-mail: eerbnbngr@yahoo.in)
Ltr. No. 8371 Dtd. 15.12.2020
No. B-546:-
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
E-Procurement Bid Identification No. E.E.- BNJ-R&B-15/2020-21

- Name of Work :- Building Works
- No. of Works :- 04 Nos. Building works.
- No. of Covers :- Single Cover
- Estimated Cost :- Rs. 43.72 to 6.94 lakhs
- Period of Completion :- Six to Three Calendar Months.
- Date of time of availability of bid document in the portal :- From 12.00 Noon of dated 24.12.2020 to 5.00 PM of dated 04.01.2021.
- Last date/time for receipt of bids in the portal :- Upto 5.00 P.M. of dated 04.01.2021
- Date of opening of bid documents :- At 11.00 A.M. of 05.01.2021.
- Class of Contractor :- "D", "C", "B" & "A" Class Contractor
- Name and address of officer inviting Bid :- Executive Engineer, Bhanjanagar (R&B) Division, Bhanjanagar

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal www.tendersodisha.gov.in. The Addendum / corrigendum if any will be hosted in the website only.
Sd./- Executive Engineer,
Bhanjanagar (R&B) Division
OIPR-34015/11/0008/2021

NOTIFICATION
No. MM-113: This is for information of all concerned that the following Forest Roads of Keonjhar Forest Division in Keonjhar district will remain closed to Traffic on 30th December, 2020 from "0" (Zero) hour to 24 hours in accordance with Rule - 284 with Orissa Forest Department Code 1979. The movement of Traffic on the date as specified above will be violation of Section-26 of Orissa Forest Act and hence will be liable for prosecution.

Sl. No.	Name of the Range	Name of the Forest Road	Length (in Km.)
1	Barbil	Harmatha - Nadidiha	6
2	Barbil	Murga - Karo	3
3	Ghatgaon	Kadabahali - Baiganpal	17
4	Ghatgaon / Patna	Baiganpal to Bhimkund	20
5	Ghatgaon	Melan - Mahisagotha	8
6	Ghatgaon	Melan - Musal	5.29
7	Ghatgaon	Murgapahadi - Mahisigotha	11
8	Patna	Banamahuldiha - Tando	5
9	Ghatgaon	Sunariposi - Khuntaposisi	18
10	Keonjhar	Badkhaman - Janghira	12
11	Telkoi	Badkhaman - Similipal	10
12	Telkoi	Ahigola - Sankoi	10
13	Telkoi	S.N. Pur Goda - Talpada	7
14	Telkoi	Sankoi - Similipal	7
15	Telkoi	Talpada - Pithagola	7
16	Telkoi	Ranibeda - Karamangi	7.59
TOTAL			153.88

Sd./- Divisional Forest Officer
Keonjhar Division
OIPR-08042/11/0001/2021

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
"e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Bid Identification No 21 of 2020 - 21
No.O-735:- The Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Balangir on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites Percentage bid through e - Procurement in single cover system according to norm of e - Procurement system in online mode for the different work in different blocks under Balangir District.

- Nature of Work :- Construction of ESR, OGR , pump house with laying of rising main and distribution in different villages of Balangir District.
- Total No of work :- 18 Nos
- Estimated Cost :- Rs. 17.35 to 49.85 lakh
- Eligible Class of Contractor :- "D, C, B & A Class" Contractor.
- Period of Completion :- Six Months / Eight Months
- Other Details

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender Online for bidding	
		From	To
Executive Engineer, RWSS Division, Balangir	21 of 2020-21	Dt. 24.12.2020 at 11.00 hrs	Dt. 13.01.2021 upto 17.00 hrs.

Further details can be had in the DTCN available in the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
Sd./- Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Balangir
OIPR-25033/11/0004/2021



When one does not progress one feels bored.

THE MOTHER



Vanquisher Unknown

The much publicised meeting between G-23 leaders, i.e. a group of 23 senior Congress dissenters and the party's interim president Sonia Gandhi on the back lawn of her residence at 10 Janpath can at best be described as an exercise in breaking the ice and an attempted rapprochement between party veterans and the younger generation led by Rahul Gandhi. According to reports, none of the concerns raised by the G-23 in their bombshell letter to Sonia Gandhi in August was, however, addressed except for underscoring the need for organising more such meetings and brainstorming in future. The dissenters, led by Ghulam Nabi Azad-Kapil Sibal-Anand Sharma, in their letter clamoured for a thorough overhaul of the party's leadership structure at all levels from top to bottom as the only way to come out of its moribund state following defeat after defeat in general and state elections for the past six years. The fact that the senior leaders appear convinced that the party's Gandhi-Nehru family tag is no longer a talisman, was obliquely admitted by Sonia Gandhi when she emphasised at the open-air meeting that the Congress was "one family" meaning it is a political unit of all the members and not simply the fiefdom of one particular family.

The meeting was organised in the backdrop of a virtual open revolt by the 23 leaders. Even Pranab Mukherjee, in his memoirs, had tried to wash the Congress' dirty linen in public but it only reflects his opportunism and timidity to take on the Gandhi family as long as he remained a key Union minister of Congress-led governments in different capacities. Compared to him, the G-23 has at least shown the guts to air their views that the only way left to save the party from becoming extinct is to recast the leadership from the post of party president down the ladder.

Reports claim both Sonia and Priyanka seem to have got the message and decided to mollify the senior leaders. The dissenters have in turn laid down certain conditions. There were, in all, 19 leaders, including six of the dissenting group -Anand Sharma, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Manish Tewari, Shashi Tharoor, Prithviraj Chavan and Vivek Tankha. Mercifully for the Congress, the issue of Rahul Gandhi spearheading the party was not raised and the dissenters made it clear they won't even lend their support to any proxy candidate of the Gandhis. Due process of election for all the posts will be acceptable to them.

But, old habits die hard and Gandhi acolytes such as Pawan Bansal kept telling the media: "No one has a problem with Rahul Gandhi, and this is not just for today. Everybody said that we need Rahul Gandhi's leadership. We must not fall into the trap of other people who are trying to distract the party's agenda."

As long as the Congress continues to prop up a scion of the Gandhi family as its automatic leader, it will be easy for the BJP to change the political discourse from its performance or the lack of it to the dynastic politics of the Congress which the nation has rejected. For, the majority of the people won't think twice if they are given a choice between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi or Modi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The latter two can't hold a candle to the former despite his "monumental mismanagement" of the country.

The fact is, every single one of these dissenters has had long innings at Parliament and state Assemblies but has not matured as people's leaders. The reasons are well known. None of them made any effort to listen to people or even to their own party workers. While holding offices of power and money they were concerned about their own well being and nothing beyond. The realisation to change is rather too little too late.

It is, therefore, time for the nation to look away from the Congress. The vanquisher need not be from a predictable stable.



SN Misra

IT IS TIME FOR ALL COUNTRIES TO REDESIGN THEIR PATH TO PROGRESS BY FULLY ACCOUNTING FOR THE DANGEROUS PRESSURE HUMANS PUT ON THE PLANET

In 1990, Pakistani Economist Mahbub ul Haq, in close collaboration with Noble laureate Amartya Sen evolved the Human Development Index (HDI) which went beyond the misdirected power of GDP to account for human development capability in terms of education and longevity. Two decades later the UNDP added three more measures of human development -- gender inequality index (GII), inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) and multi-dimensional poverty index (MDPI). The HDI factors in maternal mortality rate, female workforce participation and representation in Parliament. The IHDI takes into account inequality while measuring a country's average achievements in health, education and income. The MDPI goes beyond education and health and looks at household level deprivation in terms of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), nutrition, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, housing, electricity and asset holding.

The UNDP has now introduced a new index called planetary pressure-adjusted HDI (PHDI) which looks at how carbon dioxide emission and material footprint are going to affect human progress. In the wake of Covid-19, a UNDP report assesses that around 100 million people have slumped into extreme poverty. Given the record-breaking temperature and spiralling inequality, the UNDP thought it fit to redefine progress when our carbon consumption footprints are no longer viable. It is therefore, time for all countries to redesign their path to progress by accounting for the dangerous pressure being put on the planet. PHDI clearly shows how 50 countries have dropped out of very high HDI grouping, reflecting their high dependence on fossil fuel and material footprint. On the other hand, countries like Costa Rica and Moldova have moved up the ladder by working on sustainable environment. The next frontier of HDI would require working with and not against nature. For example, by 2030 the poorest of countries would experience around 100 days of extreme weather due to climate change, which can be cut down by half if the Paris agree-

FOCUS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

TECTONIC SHIFT IN HDI



By tackling inequality, capitalising on innovation and working in harmony with nature, human development could take a transformational step forward to support people and the planet together

carbon dioxide emissions and its material footprint. The UNDP report has rightly brought out the perils of climate crisis, biodiversity collapse and ocean acidification. Instead of the planet shaping the humans, the humans are increasingly shaping the planet. Therefore, the frontier of human development index would require to work with nature and not against it.

While India seems to show a reasonable record in terms of adhering to the expectations of the Paris agreement, the government needs to look at the challenges of high degree of poverty, malnutrition and increasing inequality. Growth, development and sustainability are the tripod of any sensible public policy. The present obsession with growth has to give way to a greater momentum towards human development capability, reduction in income disparity by using fiscal instruments like progressive income tax, if India wants demographic dividend to become a sustainable reality.

The report brings out the stark choice for world leaders to reduce the immense pressure being exerted on the environment and the natural world as people and the planet enter into an entirely different geological epoch, the Anthropocene or the age of human. It is time for all countries to redesign their path to progress by fully accounting for the dangerous pressure humans put on the planet and the gross imbalance of power, income and opportunity that prevents change by adjusting HDI to include carbon dioxide emission and material footprint. The new index shows how the global development landscape would change if both the wellbeing of the people and the planet are made central to define humanity. The world must not look at only the size of its GDP pie but the oven that bakes it. By tackling inequality, capitalising on innovation and working in harmony with nature, human development could take a transformational step forward to support people and the planet together.

The writer teaches Economics. Views are personal.

WISDOM CORNER

- All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent. **EDMUND BURKE**
- What is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after. **ERNEST HEMINGWAY**
- While they were saying among themselves it cannot be done, it was done. **HELEN KELLER**

WORDSWORTH

Welfare

The word welfare, like the closely-related wealth, has moved a long way since it first appeared in the fourteenth century. It was formed as a combination of well, in the sense we still use it, with fare. The latter was originally a verb meaning "to travel" (the modern German verb fahren is a close relative). So the phrase "fare well" was a wish on parting that you should have a safe journey, which later became our farewell (in Julius Caesar, Shakespeare uses both forms in one sentence: "Farewell my dearest sister, fare thee well"). Our modern sense of the price of a journey rather than the journey itself is a classic case of a transferred meaning. A figurative sense grew up of how you were doing or how well you were being provided for ("how are you faring?"), and this was the origin of the word in its sense of "food" (as in bill of fare). Originally welfare meant the state or condition of how well one was doing, of one's happiness, good fortune or prosperity. Shakespeare has Queen Margaret say in Henry VI: "Take heed, my lord; the welfare of us all / Hangs on the cutting short that fraudulent man." And John Locke, in an Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690): "Thus the being and welfare of a man's children or friends, producing constant delight in him, he is said constantly to love them." This remained so until the beginning of the last century, when changes in the relationship between individuals and the state caused an extended sense to appear of an organised effort to maintain the members of a community in a state of well-being, both physical and economic. One reason for this new usage was that older terms, particularly charity, had too many unacceptable overtones relating to recipients' loss of self-respect and dignity in accepting help. So welfare was useful in expressing similar ideas but without this historical baggage of associations. Its rise was fairly meteoric, with welfare work being spotted first in 1903, welfare manager in 1904, welfare policy in 1905, and welfare centre in 1917. The defining term in this lexicon, at least in Britain, welfare state, is first recorded in 1941. One result of this new usage was that the word moved from being a term for a condition to one for a process or activity.

IN JEST THIS

Remembering 2020 for more than just Covid



Melvin Durai

SENATOR KAMALA HARRIS IS SET TO BECOME THE FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT IN US HISTORY WHO KNOWS HOW TO MAKE DOSA

Many of us are counting down the days to 2021, eager to put 2020 in the rear-view mirror. But while we'd like to forget 2020, it's a year we'll probably remember for a long time, if not the rest of our lives.

There are many reasons to remember 2020, and each of us would make a different list of our memorable moments or events of 2020. Here is my list, in no particular order:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic caused turmoil all over the world. The virus actually originated in late 2019 in China and made its way to almost every corner of the world, giving a major boost to China's Department of Exports. This was mainly due to the export of cloth masks.
2. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle quit the British royal family. Announcing that they plan to step back as "senior" members of the royal family and work to become financially independent, Harry and Meghan turned down a contract from Penguin Random House to write a tell-all book, because the publisher insisted on paying them royalties.
3. As a result of the pandemic,

As a result of the Black Lives Matter protests, President Donald Trump issued an executive order, instructing police departments that the killing of innocent people, whether suspected of crimes or otherwise, should be distributed equally among races

many important events were held virtually through online platforms such as Zoom and Skype. Olympic boxer Amit Panghal tried to practice against an opponent virtually, but knocked out his internet connection. It was his first TKO of the year.

4. Black Lives Matter protests erupted around America and other parts of the world. Millions of people took to the streets to protest racial injustice following the killing of a black man named George Floyd by police. As a result of the protests, President Trump issued an executive order, instructing police departments that the killing of innocent people, whether suspected of crimes or otherwise, should be distributed equally among races.

5. After repeatedly calling a COVID helpline to request samosas, a man in Uttar Pradesh received samosas from local authorities. In addition to samosas, the UP man also received a broom — so he could clean drains as punishment for misusing the COVID helpline.

6. Jyoti Kumari, a 15-year-old girl from Bihar, caught the eye of the Cycling Federation of India (CFI) after she rode a bicycle from the outskirts of New Delhi to her village in Darbhanga, Bihar, carrying her injured father behind her. CFI chairman Onkar Singh invited Jyoti to a trial in Delhi, offering to pay all travel expenses. He was soon flooded with videos of girls carrying their fathers on bicycles.

7. Parle-G, the popular brand of biscuits, recorded its best sales in about eight decades during the lockdown in India. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan urged Indians to follow a balanced diet, with no more than 50 per cent of daily calories from Parle-G. He received several nasty tweets, including one

that said, "Why do you have to be so Harsh?"

8. An internet outage during the final of the 163-nation Chess Olympiad prompted Fide, the international chess federation, to declare Russia and India as joint winners and gold medalists. India had never before won gold at the biennial team tournament. Junior star Divya Deshmukh said she enjoys playing chess online, and is particularly fond of internet outages.

9. President Donald Trump lost the U.S. presidential election to former Vice President Joe Biden. This created much excitement in India and the Indian diaspora, largely because Biden's running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, is set to become the first vice-president in U.S. history who knows how to make dosa.

10. Neelakantha Bhanu Prakash of Hyderabad became the first Asian (and first non-European) to win gold at the Mental Calculation World Championship at the Mind Sports Olympiad (MSO) in London. Known in India as the "world's fastest human calculator," Prakash declined an invitation from Donald Trump to travel to America and help recount votes.

LOL

Incredible dogs



Four workers were discussing how smart their dogs were. The first was an engineer who said his dog could do math calculations. His dog was named T-Square, and he told him to get some paper and draw a square, a circle and a triangle, which the dog did with no sweat. The accountant said he thought his dog was better. His dog was named Slide Rule. He told him to fetch a dozen cookies, bring them back, and divide them into piles of three, which he did with no problem. The chemist said that was good, but he felt his dog was better. His dog Measure was told to get a quart of milk and pour seven ounces

into a ten ounce glass. The dog did this with no problem. All three men agreed that their dogs were equally smart. They all turned to the union member and said, "What can your dog do?" The union member called his dog whose name was Coffee Break and said, "Show the fellows what you can do." Coffee Break went over and ate the cookies, drank the milk, went to the bathroom on the paper, claimed he injured his back while eating, filed a grievance for unsafe working conditions, applied for workmen's compensation and left for home on sick leave.

Rein in cybercrime

Sir, Galloping cybercrime is a growing concern for every section of the society these days. The fraudsters pay little attention to the anti-cybercrime measures initiated by the police as their moves are much more advanced technically. Though electronic transactions have made life more comfortable by saving precious time, more so in the pandemic days, the cybercriminals, many of them qualified, are having a field day. The latest techniques help them invent new modus operandi for committing crimes and duping gullible people. Although there are constant advisories being issued by banks, the fraudsters adopt new tricks every time. Awareness programmes are the need of the hour. Simultaneously, there is a need to devise ways and means to unearth the traps that are being thrown by cybercriminals to hoodwink the public every now and then.

Sanjib Das, CUTTACK

New demon

Sir, The demon as a new variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that has shut down large parts of the United Kingdom has set alarm bells ringing. Indian equity benchmark indices tanked three per cent on Monday in one of the sharpest selloffs since the recovery late in March. The aviation ministry has done well to suspend UK flights until the end of the year, but the curbs need to continue beyond December. It is scary that several flyers from the UK have slipped into the country without tests over the past fortnight. The authorities must spare no effort to trace these passengers and put in place testing and quarantine protocols.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Deliberate attempt by FB?

Sir, History has documented the fact that when exploited masses speak out against injustice, the government uses its power to crush their movement. The farmers protesting against the Centre's farm laws formed a media team called 'Kisan Ekta Morcha' to spread the word about their movement to the people. The idea behind this was that the national media was only talking about the government's version and the right news could not reach the people. An interview of farmer leader Yogendra Yadav was streaming on Facebook Live. However, the event was abruptly shut down 12 minutes later and the Facebook page of 'Kisan Ekta Morcha' was deactivated with a message "it violates the values of our community." Interestingly, after three hours of protests by farmers and the general people, Facebook again had to activate the page. Was the social media giant's move pre-planned and deliberate?

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

LANCET REPORT

Delhi suffers highest per-capita economic loss due to pollution

The study said the economic loss due to lost output from premature deaths and morbidity from air pollution was 1.36 per cent of the GDP in India in 2019



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 22: Air pollution woes have quadrupled for Delhi, as the state suffered the highest per-capita economic loss due to air pollution last year, a study in the peer-reviewed medical journal Lancet suggests.

For years, northern India - especially New Delhi - has been battling critical levels of air pollution, which have remained consistently in the hazardous mark, for many days at a stretch, during winters. This air pollution has already taken a big toll on the health of the citizens and rattled the government, forcing it to devise new governance mechanism to address the menace of pollution in the capital.

The study said the economic loss due to lost output from premature deaths and morbidity from air pollution was 1.36 per cent of the GDP in India in 2019. In Delhi, the loss due to lost output from premature deaths and illness attributable to air pollution as a percentage of state GDP was 1.06 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh recorded highest loss to GDP at 1.34 per cent followed by Punjab at 1.22 per cent. "Delhi had the highest per-capita economic loss due to air pollution, followed by Haryana in 2019, with 5.4 times variation across all states," said the findings.

According to the study, the economic loss per capita was highest in Delhi, which was to the tune of

\$62.0 followed by neighbouring Haryana at \$53.8.

The study's findings suggested that 1.67 million deaths were attributable to air pollution in India in 2019, accounting for 17.8 per cent of the total deaths in the country.

The crude death rate per 100,000 population due to household air pollution decreased in India by 64.2 per cent from 1990 to 2019, due to reduced use of solid fuels, while that due to ambient particulate matter pollution increased by 115.3 per cent and that due to ambient ozone pollution increased by 139.2 per cent. "The death rate due to household air pollution decreased by 64.2% (52.2-74.2) from 1990 to 2019, while that due to ambient particulate matter pollution increased by 115.3% (28.3-344.4) and that due to ambient ozone pollution increased by 139.2% (96.5-195.8)," said the study.

The authors of the study suggested that in 2019, the economic loss due to lost output from premature deaths attributable to ambient ozone pollution as a percentage of GDP in India was 0.05 per cent and varied 11.2 times across the states, ranging from 0.01 per cent in Nagaland to 0.12 per cent in Uttar Pradesh.

The economic loss due to lost output from premature deaths attributable to air pollution in India in 2019 was \$28.8 billion and from morbidity attributable to air pollution was \$8.0 billion.

Cong, BJP in a fix after revelations of CBDT report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhopal, Dec 22: A report by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) after the revelations in the income tax raids during the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh has left both the Congress and the BJP in a fix as it includes names of several leaders from both the parties.

The Income Tax Department conducted several raids in Madhya Pradesh during the Lok Sabha elections in 2019. Many important documents were recovered from the close aides of former Chief Minister Kamal Nath along with transactions worth several crores of rupees. The documents also revealed that funds, through the hawala channel, were utilised to

build the headquarters of a political party. Following the raids, the CBDT prepared a report in this case, on the basis of which the Election Commission directed to register an FIR against four senior officials of the state.

Sources said the CBDT report has names of more than 50 MLAs, including several ministers of the then Kamal Nath government, and two ministers and 11 MLAs of the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government. It also includes names of those MLAs and ministers who left the Congress and joined the BJP along with Rajya Sabha MP Jyotiraditya Scindia. Sources also said that former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh has been named in the CBDT report.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh



Chouhan said that the law will do its job no matter how powerful the people are while Digvijaya Singh questioned the probe, saying "what

kind of investigation is this where I have not been given a single notice to record my statement". Senior Congress leader K.K.

Mishra said, "It is a conspiracy to defame Kamal Nath. Nothing was found in the income tax raids. Two Scindia supporters, who are ministers in Shivraj Singh Chouhan's government, and several MLAs have also been named in the CBDT report. Will an FIR be filed against them too or have they now become corruption free?"

Political experts said that Shivraj Singh Chouhan is on the back foot as the CBDT has named MLAs from both the parties. If the government goes ahead on the basis of this report, then it might affect its ministers also, which is why the party is in a fix. However, the government can also pressurise Scindia as the report also names those who had left the Congress and joined the BJP.

Capital's industries asked to switch over to PNG by Jan-end

Considering the fact that the industrial sector is one of the major contributors to air pollution in Delhi and the NCR, the Commission for Air Quality management has issued notices to about 1,644 industrial units

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 22: All the industrial units spread across 50 areas in Delhi have been directed to switch over to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) by January 31 next year. This move is aimed at reducing the city's air quality index which has been deteriorating regularly.

Considering the fact that the industrial sector is one of the major contributors to air pollution in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), the Commission for Air Quality management has issued notices to about 1,644 such industrial units which are running in different areas in Delhi.

Though a sizeable number of industries are using PNG, the Commission stressed the need for all identified industries in Delhi to switch to PNG.

Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) were impressed upon to complete the pipeline network, metering and associated infrastructure.

"IGL, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and Delhi government were also asked to work in close coordination with the industrial units so as to target completion of infrastructure works and complete switch over to PNG,

by all the identified industrial units in Delhi, by January 31, 2021," said a statement from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The DPCC was also directed to inspect and identify the industries using unapproved fuels and to take stringent penal action in case of non-compliance.

The air quality of the national capital has been deteriorating continuously and remained in the very poor category with overall AQI of 373 recorded Tuesday by the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR) under the Ministry of Earth Science. "The overall air quality has deteriorated to the higher end of the very poor category as forecast. Surface-level winds are low and westerly.



MP to bring in lifer provision for food, drug adulteration



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Dec 22: The Madhya Pradesh government Tuesday decided to introduce a provision for life sentence for those found guilty of food and drug adulteration, state home minister Narottam Mishra said.

The current punishment includes imprisonment for a period of upto three years and the nod for an amendment to bring in a provision of life sentence was given in a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during the day, Mishra informed. The Penal Laws (Madhya Pradesh

Amendment) Bill 2020, which provides for those indulging in food and drug adulteration to be sent to jail for life, will be introduced in the state Assembly soon, he added.

The Penal Laws (Madhya Pradesh Amendment) Bill 2020, which provides for those indulging in food and drug adulteration to be sent to jail for life, will be introduced in the Assembly soon

Mishra said international agencies have been warning about fake COVID-19 vaccines and there have also been a couple of cases in Gwalior where adulterated plasma was detected.

"Those selling food and drugs past their expiry dates will be sentenced to five years in jail," he said. Mishra added that a bill to prevent marriages with the intention of religious conversion will be discussed in the next cabinet meeting December 26.

'Tiger state' MP now leads in leopard population as well

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Dec 22: Madhya Pradesh Forest Minister Vijay Shah Tuesday congratulated citizens over the state having the highest leopard population in the country.

In a message, Shah said the MP government was working to improve the state's biodiversity.

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar Monday released the 'Status of Leopards in India 2018' report, an estimation using the camera trapping method.

The report says India had 7,910 leopards as per the estimates of 2014 which increased to 12,852 in the 2018 estimates.

As per the report, the maximum number of big cats (3,421) were found in Madhya Pradesh, followed by Karnataka at 1,783 and Maharashtra 1,690.

"It is a matter of pride for us. The state government is making continuous efforts to enhance its biodiversity," Shah said in his message.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra also expressed happiness over Madhya Pradesh leading in the number of leopards in the country.

MP also has the maximum number of tigers in the country. While releasing the report, Javadekar had remarked that monitoring of the tiger in India has clearly shown its umbrella role in the ecosystem, which has shed light on other charismatic species like the leopard. A total of 5,240 adult individual leopards were identified in a total of 51,337 leopard photographs using pattern recognition software, the report



said. "The leopards were estimated across forested habitats in tiger range areas of the country but other leopard occupied areas such as non-forested habitats (coffee and tea plantations and other land uses from where leopards are known to occur), higher elevations in the Himalayas, arid landscapes and majority of North East landscape were not sampled and, therefore, the population estimation should be considered as minimum number of leopards in each of the landscapes," it said. As for region wise distribution,

the highest number of 8,071 leopards were found in central India and eastern ghats, which include the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In the western ghat region, which comprises Karnataka, Tamil Nadi, Goa and Kerala, there are 3,387 leopards while there are 1,253 leopards in Shivalik and Gangetic Plains which includes Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Bihar. In the northeast hills, there are just 141 leopards.

Delhi airport aims to start distributing vaccine in Jan

REUTERS

New Delhi, Dec 22: India's largest airport plans to start distributing COVID-19 vaccines in January with up to 5.4 million vials a day, its CEO said Tuesday, underscoring the logistical challenge of reaching everyone in the country of 1.3 billion.

The Indian government is considering emergency use authorisation for three vaccine candidates - one from AstraZeneca (AZN.L, another from Pfizer (PFE.N), and a separate one developed by the Indian firm Bharat Biotech.



"If we are able to rotate cargo twice a day, then 5.4 million (vials) can be distributed in a day," Videh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO of the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) said. Overall, the airport had the capacity to handle up to 8 million vials a day,

he said. India has the world's second-highest number of cases after the United States - totalling over 10 million, with more than 146,000 deaths as of Tuesday.

The government said Tuesday it would track down everyone arriving in recent weeks from Britain.

If we are able to rotate cargo twice a day, then 5.4 million (vials) can be distributed in a day

VIDEH KUMAR JAIPURIAR | CEO, DIAL

A 'champi' parlour to keep heads cool

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: "Swad aa gaya, jinde raho" (I really like it, god bless you), murmured 65-year-old farmer Ranjit Singh as he received a 'champi' at a makeshift parlour set up at the anti-farm laws protest site at Singhu border.

Reclined on a chair and soaking in the winter sun, the farmer, who is part of the ongoing protests at the national capital's border points against the three agri laws, said a champi (traditional Indian head massage with oil) helps in "keeping a cool head".

The parlour is the brainchild of Gurvinder Singh (24), hailing from Punjab's Jalandhar who has been part of the ongoing protests since it began on November 26.

With days turning into weeks and weeks almost turning into a month, it is imperative that the protesters especially the elder ones feel relaxed, says Gurvinder Singh, who was a member of one of the many langar sewas at the protest site.

"Saade buzurg relax rehn chahide,

HEAD MASSAGE FOR FARMERS



eh soch ke sewa shuru kiiti hai (The only thought behind starting this initiative is to ensure that our elders feel relaxed). We are a team of 10 people and anyone is welcome here," said Gurvinder Singh.

"We started the service at 10 in the morning. Don't know when we will call it a day, but rest assured we will stay put till the time our demands (scrapping of farm laws) are not met," he added.

Barely hours after it was launched Tuesday morning, the 'champi sewa' attracted eyeballs as well as footfalls as the stall equipped with the bare minimums like a handful of chairs and tiny bottles filled with hair oil became a hit among the protesters who queued up to fill the chairs.

Ranjit Singh was visibly happy and relaxed after getting a soothing head massage. "This will keep me charged for the rest of the day," he said as a volunteer smoothly moved his finger tips in small circles with a shampooing-like motion on his scalp. "These small efforts by the youngsters to help aged people like us will go a long way in strengthening our fight against the centre," the farmer added.

Earlier, a 'salon sewa' started by a Haryana man and foot messagers installed by international NGO Khalsa Aid at the protest site had hogged the headlines.

Tens of thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, are demonstrating at the national capital's border points since late November demanding that the agriculture laws be repealed.



This (BJP-JDU) alliance can break anytime and elections might happen, so we have to be ready for the situation
TEJASWINI YADAV | RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL LEADER

LION MAULS TEEN TO DEATH IN GUJARAT'S JUNAGADH DISTRICT

A 14-year-old girl was mauled to death by a lion in Dhanfuliya village of Gujarat's Junagadh district, an official from the forest department said Tuesday



of the day quote

All along I have played a "temporary politics" and my "true politics" will commence only in 2023 when Karnataka will be heading for Assembly polls



HD KUMARASWAMY | FORMER KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER

There are still two and a half years until the election. Therefore, it is neither right on my part nor anyone to talk on the issue of merger. Let them (JDS) build theirs and let us focus on building ours



BS YEDIYURAPPA | KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER

We are confident that soon there will be a dialogue between the government and the farmers' organisations and we will arrive at a solution



KAILASH CHOUDHARY | UNION MINISTER OF STATE FOR AGRICULTURE

3K Maha farmers start 'procession to Delhi'

With a target to reach Delhi Thursday, the Maharashtra contingent hopes that many more will join it as the procession winds its way through the winter chills

AGENCIES

Nashik (Maharashtra), Dec 22: Over 3,000 farmers, under the banner of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), started their 1,270-km-long 'Vehicle Jatha' (procession) from Maharashtra to join their counterparts from north India currently protesting outside Delhi, organisers said Tuesday.

In a related development, a large number of farmers staged protests outside the offices of certain corporate houses in Mumbai Tuesday afternoon.

AIKS spokesperson PS Prasad said that over 2,000 farmers started in vehicles from Nashik Monday evening and more than 1,000 joined them in Malegaon during the day as they were proceeding to the state



Farmers show black flags to Haryana CM

Ambala: A group of farmers protesting against the Centre's new agri laws Tuesday showed black flags to Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar when his convoy was passing through Ambala City, sources said. Some of the farmers allegedly tried to block Khattar's motorcade but police managed to provide a safe passage to the chief minister, sources said. Khattar had come to Ambala to address public meetings in support of party's mayoral and ward candidates for the upcoming civic bodies' polls. The farmers waved black flags at the chief minister's convoy while it was crossing the Agrasen Chowk. They also raised slogans against the government and said that they would continue to protest till the three farm laws are not repealed.

borders from Dhule.

Thousands of locals, non-farmers and representatives of various political parties turned up to wish them safe journey and success in their endeavours.

With a target to reach Delhi Thursday, the Maharashtra contingent hopes that many more will join it as the procession winds its way through the winter chills currently experienced in most parts of the country.

Biryani tops India's lockdown food choice: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: The Covid-19 pandemic might have discouraged foodies from dining out, but it did not come in the way of them ordering in their favorite food - biryani, according to a new report by food aggregator Swiggy. In its fifth annual "stateatistics", the on-demand delivery platform found that even though these were unprecedented times, India stayed loyal to biryani in 2020 by ordering "more than one biryanis every second". "The mighty chicken biryani reaffirmed its place as India's favourite dish. Also, over three lakh new users made their Swiggy debut by ordering in a chicken biryani," the Bangalore-based pan-India company said in a statement.

However, its vegetarian counterpart did not have the same luck.

For every veg biryani, there were six chicken biryani orders, it added. The delectable rice dish was followed closely by masala dosa. Also making it to the list of top five dishes India enjoyed this year were paneer butter masala, chicken fried rice, and garlic breadsticks. With the pandemic confining people to their homes, demand for cappuccinos, varied flavours of tea, and street food saw a spike.

"Perhaps missing their office cappuccinos and masala 'chai' while working from home, lakhs of hardworking Swiggy users fought the post-lunch slump by ordering in varieties of tea and coffee," the report said.

"What did Indians miss the most this 2020? Not colleagues, not friends, but their 'pani puris'. Swiggy ensured there was no social distancing from this most missed 'chaat' as they delivered over two lakh 'pani puri' orders.

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL



Farmers warm themselves on a cold winter morning at the site of a protest against new farm laws at Singhu border near New Delhi

SISTER ABHAYA CASE

Catholic priest, nun found guilty of murder

The court held that Fr Thomas Kottoor and Sister Sephy of the Catholic Church were guilty of murder under Sections 302 and 201 IPC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 22: Twenty eight years after the mysterious death of Sister Abhaya, an inmate of St. Pious convent at Kottayam in Kerala, a CBI special court here Tuesday held it was a case of murder and found a priest and nun guilty of killing her.

Special CBI Judge K Sanal Kumar, while pronouncing the verdict, said the murder charges against the two will stand.

The court held that Fr Thomas Kottoor and Sister Sephy of the Catholic Church were guilty of murder under Sections 302 (punishment for murder) and 201 (tampering of evidence) of the Indian Penal Code.

It also found Father Kottoor guilty of offence under Section 449 of the IPC (criminal trespass).

The court will pronounce the quantum of sentence Wednesday.

The accused, who were on bail, were taken into judicial custody after the mandatory Covid-19 testing. Father Kottoor was shifted to the Poojapura Central jail and Sister Sephy, to the Attakulangara women's prison here.

The order came in connection with the controversial death of 21-year-old Abhaya, whose body was found in the well of St Pius convent March 27, 1992.

Abhaya, a second year student of BCM college, Kottayam, was staying at the convent.

Another accused in the case, Fr Jose Puthrikkayil, was discharged earlier due to lack of evidence.

Initially, the case was investigated by the local police and state crime branch, which concluded that Abhaya had committed suicide. The CBI, which took over probe March 29, 1993, filed three closure reports, saying that though it was a case of murder, the culprits could not be found.

However, September 4, 2008, the Kerala High Court came down heavily on CBI over the handling of the case, saying the agency was "still a prisoner of those who wield political and bureaucratic power" and directed that the Delhi unit hand over the probe to its Kochi counterpart.

Following this, the CBI arrested two priests and a nun in 2008 - Fr Thomas Kottoor, Fr Jose Poothrikkayil and Sister Sephy on the charge of murder.

According to the prosecution, Kottoor and Poothrikkayil were allegedly having an illicit relationship with Sephy, also an inmate of the convent.

On the night of March 27, 1992, Abhaya allegedly saw Kottoor and Sephy in a compromising position, following which the three accused hacked her with an axe and threw her into the well, it had said in its charge sheet.

The accused were arrested in 2008 and released on bail by the Kerala High Court a year later.

SHORT TAKES

Major blast in Gujarat kills 1

Gandhinagar: A massive explosion apparently in a gas pipeline here in Gujarat claimed two lives and injured at least four others. The blast occurred around 7 a.m. Tuesday in Kalof tehsil, which brought down two houses and damaged a dozen others. The fire fighting teams fought the flames and simultaneously tried recovering people from the rubble. The blast occurred in a house in the Garden City society in Saij village.

Maoist wanted in over 18 cases held

Chaibasa (Jharkhand): A member of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit wanted in over 18 cases has been arrested in Jharkhand's Paschim Singhbhum district, police said Tuesday. Acting on a tip-off, police launched an operation in Hoilora forest in Gudri police station area on Monday and nabbed Akash Mundu, Superintendent of Police Ajay Linda said. A 7.65 mm pistol, two magazines and 17 cartridges have been seized from his possession, he said. Police is interrogating him to find out the whereabouts of his associates, the officer added.

6-year-old girl raped in UP

Fatehpur (UP): A six-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a 50-year-old man in a village in Fatehpur district of Uttar Pradesh, police said Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday evening in the Lalauli area here, SHO Sandeep Tiwari said. The accused, Ramu Tiwari, had fled the spot after villagers were alerted by the girl's cries for help but was later arrested, he said. The girl was admitted to a hospital, and her condition was stated to be stable, he added.

Leopard hit by train dies

Guwahati: A leopard died after it was hit by a speeding train in the Titabor town of Jorhat district of Assam. The female leopard was around the age of four to five. As per reports, the leopard's carcass was discovered by locals on the rail tracks near the Melamati area of the town. Locals said the leopard had been terrorising the area for a long time. Sanjeev Dutta, a local resident said the leopard was hit by the Intercity Dibrugarh train at night.

Govt against religious discrimination: PM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Tuesday that his government was committed to ushering in development in the country without any discrimination on the basis of religion.

"I assure that nobody will be left out and not discriminated against on religious lines. Everyone will move forward by enjoying the Fundamental Rights given in the Constitution," Modi said while addressing through videoconference the centenary celebrations of the Aligarh Muslim University in Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh.

Modi is only the second Prime Minister to address an AMU function after Lal Bahadur Shastri 56 years ago.

The Prime Minister pointed out that during the nationwide lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic, the Union government did not dis-

criminate anyone and gave free food grains to 80 crore poor.

He said that the Union government had also got opened 40 crore bank accounts, given houses to 2 crore persons and built toilets for 10 crore others under the 'Clean India Mission'.

"Developmental issues should not be looked at from the political angle. The new India will shun the narrow political outlook," Modi remarked.

Due to government policies, the dropout rate among Muslim women, which was 70 per cent in the last many decades, had now dropped to only 30 per cent due to increase in the number of toilets constructed in educational institutions, he added.

During his speech, Modi recalled the AMU's rich heritage of 100 years.

Modi quoted Sir Syed Ahmed Khan - who set up the Muhammadan-Anglo Oriental



College that later became the AMU - that a person who loved his country will think of the welfare of the people without any prejudice.

He said that there may be ideological differences but the new India will offer common ground to all, as was the case during the freedom struggle. The Prime Minister con-

gratulated the university for increasing the number of female students to 35 per cent, adding that the government had provided 1 crore scholarships for such students. Education leads to employment and entrepreneurship which in turn results in economic independence, he pointed out.

Climate change ravages Kashmir's 'red gold' saffron crop

IN KASHMIR, DRY CONDITIONS BLAMED ON CLIMATE CHANGE HAVE SEEN YIELDS OF SAFFRON HALVED IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Pampore, Dec 22: On sweeping fields once blanketed in lush purple, a thin and bedraggled crop of flowers is all farmers in Indian-administered Kashmir's saffron-growing region Pampore have to show for this year's harvest.

Dry conditions blamed on climate change have seen yields of the world's most expensive spice halved in the past two decades, threatening the future of a cash crop that has brought wealth to the region for 2,500 years.

"These fields used to be like gold-mines," said Abdul Ahad Mir in Pampore, just south Srinagar.

Saffron has long thrived there, and Mir's family was reared in the del-

icate work of plucking the lucrative but tiny crimson threads from purple crocus flowers.

"In my childhood we needed 80 men over a week to pick the flowers," Mir said, adding, "Today our family of six finish it in a day."

Warming temperatures caused by climate change have made rainfall erratic, depleting the thirsty saffron fields of water. Shrinking glaciers across the Himalayan region have also cut water flows to the foothills downstream.

It takes around 160,000 flowers to yield one kilogram of the precious spice, which will sell for around \$1,350 in local markets.

But official figures show that harvests of the so-called "red gold" were just 1.4 kilograms per hectare



in 2018 - half the figure recorded in 1998.

Mohammad Ramzan Rather says his acreage in Pampore only produced around 30 grams of the crop this year, down from two kilograms

12 years ago.

The harvest season - which lasts for just two weeks at the end of autumn - has also been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as recent security lockdowns

in response to a long-running insurgency in the disputed territory, claimed by both India and arch-rival Pakistan.

ANCIENT PRIDE

Historians say saffron has been cultivated in Kashmir since at least 500 BC.

Locally the spice is added to traditional dishes and used as an ingredient in Kehwa, a sweet drink served during special occasions such as marriages. Elsewhere in the world, it is prized for its use in cooking and cosmetics and can fetch prices of more than \$10,000 per kilogram on the international market. Nearly 90 per cent of the world's saffron is grown in Iran, but experts consider Kashmir's crop to be

superior for its deep red colour and distinct aroma. In 2010, Indian authorities sought to halt the impact of climate change by launching a \$54 million fund to introduce modern agricultural technology to farmers.

Authorities have touted it as a success, claiming it has rejuvenated Kashmir's 3,700 acres of saffron fields. But farmers disagree. They have ripped up plastic irrigation pipes that are now strewn across fields, saying they bring little water and make it harder to till the land.

Others say high-yield seed varieties introduced under the scheme have ruined their crops.

Jalal-ud-Din Wani said some farmers were turning their land into orchards because apples need less water.



More than 30 farmers have so far lost their lives for which the BJP government is directly responsible. The ruthless BJP government is dogged by its arrogance
KUMARI SELJA | HARYANA CONGRESS CHIEF

NEW POPULATION OF BLUE WHALES DISCOVERED IN INDIAN OCEAN

Scientists have found evidence of a previously undiscovered population of blue whales living in the western Indian Ocean based on an analysis of sound recordings from the region



of the day quote

People have made Narendra Modi the prime minister and it is his duty to listen to the voice of people
SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL | SHIROMANI AKALI DAL CHIEF

I believe EVMs were not hacked during elections. Rather, party members who were not active during the elections led to the party's defeat
ABDUL BARI SIDDIQUI | RID LEADER

The state government is giving importance to the surrendered militants and has taken steps so that the youths who have decided to come to the mainstream can take the benefits of the government schemes
SARBANANDA SONOWAL | ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER

CBI chargesheet in Hathras case highlights UP Police's 'lapses'

The 19-page chargesheet alleged that the police did not take down the woman's oral statement at the Chandpa police station when she went there September 14 to report the crime

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi/Hathras (UP), Dec 22: The CBI has raised questions on the handling of the alleged Hathras gangrape and murder case by the Uttar Pradesh Police and alleged that the latter ignored allegations of sexual assault and did not get the victim's medical examination conducted on time.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a charge sheet in the Hathras case December 18 in a Hathras court. The 19-page chargesheet, accessed by IANS, alleged that the police did not take down the woman's oral statement at the Chandpa police station when she went there September 14 to report the crime.

Police twice ignored her allegations of sexual assault, which led to loss of forensic evidence, the agency said.

"Her statement was written five days later and she was medically examined for sexual assault only on September 22 - eight days after the alleged crime," the charge sheet claimed.

Coming down hard on the police working, the CBI said that the victim used the word 'zabardasti' (use of force) at the Chandpa police station but it was ignored, and neither any medical examination got conducted nor rape law invoked.

It said that the 19-year old victim was referred to Aligarh as her condition was serious.

The CBI said that September 19, the victim in her police statement used the word 'chedkhani' (molestation)... at that time only Section 354 of the IPC was added but again



AIIMS REPORT DOESN'T RULE OUT GANGRAPE

New Delhi/Hathras: Sexual assault on the 19-year-old Hathras victim cannot be ruled out as the pattern of injuries sustained during sexual violence may show considerable variations, an AIIMS medical board's report submitted to the CBI has said. The 19-page charge sheet, accessed by IANS, points out that the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Multi-Institutional Medical Board (MIMB) headed by Dr Adarsh Kumar, Professor of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, has submitted its report to the agency. The MIMB report said that "...the possibility of sexual assault cannot be ruled out. The pattern of injury sustained during an incident of sexual violence may show considerable variations. This may range from complete absence of injuries (more frequently) to grievous injuries (very rare). In this case, since there was a delay in reporting or documentation or forensic examination for sexual assault, these factors could be responsible for the absence of significantly visible signs of genital injury."

neither the police requested for or referred her for medical examination in the light of sexual assault.

"Only on September 22, after the victim explicitly used the word 'balatkaar' (rape) against the four accused, was her medical examination for sexual assault carried out by medical officials."

While putting down her statement in writing for the first time, the police did not add the names of two other co-accused though the

same were mentioned, the CBI alleged. The Dalit woman was allegedly gang-raped by four men in Hathras September 14. She died September 29 at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital.

The police's handling of the case - particularly the late-night cremation of the victim allegedly without the family's approval - led to angry protests across the country.

The officials, however, maintained that the cremation was done "as per the wishes of the family".

Mutated Covid strain not seen in India so far: Centre

Eight passengers who arrived Monday night on two separate flights from London have tested positive for the novel coronavirus

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 22: A mutated and more aggressive strain of the novel coronavirus, which was first identified in the United Kingdom in September, has not been seen in India so far, the government said Tuesday.

According to initial data, the new strain is at least 70 per cent more easily transmitted and has sparked concern worldwide, amid surging infection rates in the UK and fears the first lot of vaccines may not be as effective against the mutation. "The new strain or mutation of (the) coronavirus in the United Kingdom has not been seen in India, so far," Dr VK Paul, a member of government think-tank NITI Aayog, said.

"(And) as of now, it has no impact on the potential of vaccines being developed in our country and (which) are available in other countries," he added.



India has joined over 25 other countries in imposing a temporary ban on all flights to and from the UK; the ban begins midnight Wednesday and will be in place till December 31. Meanwhile, eight passengers who arrived last night on two separate flights from London have tested positive for the virus. Those on a British Airways flight that landed in Delhi Tuesday were tested but found negative.

Dr Soumya Swaminathan, the chief scientist at the World Health Organisation (WHO), Monday said that the mutated strain (named B.1.1.7) may already be present in other countries. Cases of the mutated virus, which has around 17 potentially significant changes in its viral genetic code, have been reported from Italy, Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands.

SHORT TAKES

Four of a family found dead

Durg: Four members of a family were found dead in Khudmuda village under Amleshwar police station limits in Durg district of Chhattisgarh Monday. As per Director General of Police (DGP) DM Awasthi, while the man, his wife, his father, and his mother, were found murdered, the victims' 11-year-old son was severely injured and has been admitted to a hospital. "We have discovered four corpses. All four were family members. The minor who is injured is being treated at a hospital and is out of danger now," the DGP said.

Pak violates ceasefire again

Jammu: Pakistan continued ceasefire violation on the line of control (LoC) on the fourth consecutive day Tuesday in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials said. Defence Ministry spokesman, Colonel Devender Anand said at around 9.30 a.m. Tuesday, Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and shelling with mortars along the LoC in Mankote sector of Poonch district. Indian Army retaliated befittingly, the spokesman said.

2 terrorists give up in Kashmir

Srinagar: Two terrorists surrendered Tuesday during an encounter with the security forces in South Kashmir's Kulgam district, officials said. Police said the encounter in Tongdounu took place on the basis of a specific input about the presence of terrorists in that area. The area was cordoned off and an operation was started. While the operations were underway, families of the holed up terrorists appealed to them lay down their weapons and surrender.

3 die due to food poisoning

Hyderabad: Three members of a family died and two others taken seriously ill after consuming contaminated food in Telangana's Sangareddy district, police said Tuesday. The incident occurred on Monday night at Palvatla village in Vatpally Mandal. According to police, five people fell ill after consuming jowar roti at their home. They were admitted to government hospital at Sangareddy, where Sushheela, 60, and Chandramouli, 55, succumbed.

BJP wins any seat in Kashmir for first time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 22: The BJP Tuesday won an election for the first time from any seat in Kashmir while facing regional heavyweights like the National Conference and the PDP.

Aijaz Hussain won the Khonmoh-II District Development Council seat in Srinagar, while Aijaz Ahmad Khan gave the party more reason to cheer by winning the Tulail seat in Bandipora district. Crediting the policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and hard work of party workers for his success, Hussain said the DDC election was a fight between the BJP and rest of the parties.

"This is a win for the BJP. The propaganda has been bust as people have shown their faith in the prime minister and his policies. This is a message that nationalists are prospering in Kashmir," he told reporters outside the counting centre at SKICC here.

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi had campaigned for the BJP candidate in the predominantly Shia area of Balahama in the Srinagar district periphery. Hussain said the BJP has put up a good fight against the regional parties.



A train runs slowly on its tracks during a foggy winter morning, in Prayagraj, Tuesday

PTI PHOTO

MISTY MORNING

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2021

'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' culture takes centre stage in Bengal

THE SAFFRON PARTY HAS ENGINEERED AN EXODUS OF TMC LEADERS TO JOIN THE BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Dec 22: Once a reviled practice in West Bengal, the 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' culture of frequently changing political allegiance has taken centre stage in the state ahead of the Assembly elections due in April-May next year.

The state's politicians, till the previous decade, ridiculed the culture of switching sides at the drop of a hat. However, since the TMC's ascendance to power in 2011, lawmakers of the Congress and Left parties joining the ruling party to be a part of the "development process initiated by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee" had become a common practice till the other day.

The ruling party, however, is now

getting a dose of its own medicine with several of its leaders joining the BJP.

The saffron party has engineered an exodus of TMC leaders, with party heavyweight Suvendu Adhikari and 15 other MLAs and an MP, joining the BJP since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The TMC witnessed the biggest desertion from the party on a single day when Adhikari, a former state minister, along with 34 other leaders, including five MLAs and an MP, joined the BJP during Union Home Minister Amit Shah's rally at Medinipur Saturday.

In what is being seen as a political retort, the TMC inducted Sujata Mondal Khan, the wife of BJYM state chief and Bishnupur MP



Soumitra Khan, from the BJP on Monday. Bimal Gurung's Gorkha

Janmukti Morcha, the BJP's ally in Darjeeling hills for over a decade, also switched allegiance and vowed to back the TMC in the forthcoming elections.

A senior TMC leader, on condition of anonymity, said the party should not have pursued the "immoral" 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' culture, coined after Haryana legislator Gaya Lal who changed his party thrice within a fortnight in 1967.

"It was wrong on our party to induct so many lawmakers from the Congress and the Left. It was immoral politics on our part and we should have refrained from doing it. Sometimes, to increase your support base, you have to take decisions which might affect you in the long run," he said.

Political desertions were rare in West Bengal, where ideological convictions identify politicians.

The first instance of defection can be traced back to 1952 when four Forward Bloc MLAs joined the Congress after the first West Bengal Assembly elections. They resigned from their posts, leading to by-elections.

However, the first major defection took place 15 years later in 1967 when Congress leader and former Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh walked out of the Bangla Congress and CPI(M)-led United Front government with 17 MLAs and joined the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF). This led to the collapse of the United Front government.

After the 1970s, however, no major

defection or switching of political allegiance took place till 1998, when a section of Congress leaders led by Mamata Banerjee formed the Trinamool Congress.

Between 1998 and 2001, several Congress MLAs who had joined the newly floated TMC obeyed the grand old party's whip inside the Assembly to avoid getting disqualified under the Anti-Defection Law but functioned as TMC leader outside the House.

After 2011, however, the state witnessed massive defections as not only Congress and Left legislators, but even other elected representatives switched allegiance, as a result of which entire Opposition-held zilla parishads and municipalities came under the TMC's control.



After successful completion of the first phase, CPEC is expanding into its second phase as per schedule despite a very serious setback of Covid-19 around the world, ensuring economic stability and well-being of the people of Pakistan

ASIM SALEEM BAJWA | CHAIRMAN OF THE CPEC AUTHORITY

BIDEN PUBLICLY RECEIVES VACCINE

US President-elect Joe Biden publicly received the COVID-19 vaccine and said he was doing this to demonstrate that people should be ready to take the vaccine when it is available



of the day quote

15-day curfew would begin immediately and last from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. The sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages were also banned



LENIN MORENO | ECUADORIAN PRESIDENT

We (UK-France) are working with our friends across the Channel to unlock the flow of trade as fast as possible



BORIS JOHNSON | BRITISH PRIME MINISTER

So far, even though we've seen a number of changes, a number of mutations, none has made a significant impact on either the susceptibility of the virus to any of the currently used therapeutics, drugs or the vaccines under development



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN | WHO CHIEF SCIENTIST

SHORT TAKES

House passes nCoV relief

Washington: The House easily passed a USD 900 billion pandemic relief package Monday night that would finally deliver long-sought cash to businesses and individuals and resources to vaccinate a nation confronting a frightening surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths.

Thousands protest in Armenia

Yerevan: Thousands of people took to the Armenian capital's streets again Tuesday, demanding the prime minister's resignation over his handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan.

Blast in Kabul kills 5

Kabul: At least five people were killed and two others injured in a blast in Kabul Tuesday, police said. According to police spokesman Ferdaus Faramarz, the blast, that targeted a car carrying doctors, took place at Doghhabad area in Police District 7.

Customer leaves \$5,600 tip

Washington: A customer left a whopping \$5,600 tip at a restaurant in the US state of Ohio, which allowed the establishment's 28-person staff to take home \$200 each, a media report said.

Prachanda camp removes PM Oli as party chairman

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE UNANIMOUSLY NOMINATED SENIOR LEADER MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL AS THE PARTY'S SECOND CHAIRMAN IN PLACE OF OLI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, Dec 22: The ruling Nepal Communist Party's Central Committee faction led by Executive Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' Tuesday removed Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli from the post of chairman and decided to take disciplinary action against him, virtually splitting the party more than two years after its formation.

The Central Committee unanimously nominated senior leader Madhav Kumar Nepal as the party's second chairman in place of Oli. Prachanda is the first chairman of the party.

"Now Dahal and Nepal will chair the meetings in turn as stated in the party statute," said Rekha Sharma, a central committee member.

"Oli has been expelled as the party chair for going against the party," Sharma was quoted as saying by the Kathmandu Post.

Former prime minister Jhalanath Khanal and former agriculture minister Ghanashyam Bhushal were among the senior leaders who attended the Central Committee meeting of Prachanda-led faction. Nearly two-thirds of the Central Committee members were present in the meeting. Out of 446 central



committee members, 313 were present at the meeting organized by Prachanda-led faction.

Prachanda would be elected as the parliamentary party leader on Wednesday, the paper said, citing party leaders.

Prachanda-led faction, having majority in all the party committees, has decided to take disciplinary action against Oli on Sunday, the paper said.

The next meeting of the Central Committee has been scheduled for Thursday, said party spokesperson Narayanakaji Shrestha.

The Prachanda-led faction has also decided to file a separate petition in the Supreme Court seeking reinstatement of the dissolved House of Representatives. Eleven writ pe-

titions have already been filed in the apex court on Sunday and Monday demanding for reinstatement.

The party will also launch nationwide protest rallies in collaboration with other major political parties, said Sunil Manandhar, central member of the party.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Oli, one of the two chairmen of the ruling party, organised a separate meeting of the Central Committee leaders close to him at Baluwatar, the prime minister's official residence.

Oli announced a new 1,199-member committee to organise the party's general convention November 18-23 in Kathmandu next year. Earlier the party's convention was scheduled from April 7 to 12, 2021.

5 COUNTRIES BAN FLIGHTS FROM SA

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Johannesburg, Dec 22: At least five countries have suspended flights from South Africa after a coronavirus variant was recently discovered in the country.

Germany, Turkey, Israel, Switzerland and Saudi Arabia are among the countries that have announced the ban in an effort to prevent the spread of the new strain currently termed 501.V2 Variant, reports Xinhua news agency.

The ban came into effect Monday in most of these countries. Germany was one of the first nations to announce the ban.

"Because of the reported coronavirus mutation, the federal government intends to restrict travel options between Germany and Great Britain and South Africa," said Government Spokesperson Martina Fietz.

Israel also banned the flights on Sunday, saying that its citizens returning from South Africa would be required to undergo a 30-day mandatory quarantine on their return.

The new variant was discovered in the Eastern Cape and also affects Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape. Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said his department has been observing a huge number of young people with no illness testing positive lately.

"The evidence that has been collected, therefore, strongly suggests that the current second wave we are experiencing is being driven by



this new variant," he said. This new variant of the virus was discovered through routine genomic surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 performed by a network of laboratories around the country (Network for Genomic Surveillance South Africa, (NGS-SA), according to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), a national public health institute of South Africa.

The new variant has been identified in almost 200 samples collected from over 50 different health facilities in Eastern Cape, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

The new variant is different from the others that were circulating in South Africa because it has multiple mutations (changes) in the spike protein. A number of countries have also added Britain to their list of banned flights following the discovery of a new mutant variant. Authorities in the UK on December 14 reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) that a new SARS-CoV-2 variant was identified through viral genomic sequencing.

Trump presents Legion of Merit to PM Modi

AGENCIES

Washington, Dec 22: President Donald Trump has conferred the Legion of Merit, one of the highest military honours of the US, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership in elevating bilateral strategic partnership and accelerating emergence of India as a global power.

Prime Minister Modi thanked President Trump for the honour, saying the award recognises efforts of people of India and US to improve ties. "I am deeply honoured to be awarded the Legion of Merit by @POTUS @realDonaldTrump. It recognises the efforts of the people of India & the US to improve bilateral ties, reflected in the bipartisan consensus in both countries about the Indo-US Strategic Partnership," Modi tweeted on Tuesday.

He said the 21st century presents both unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities. "The India-US relationship can leverage the vast potential of our people's unique strengths to provide global leadership for the benefit of entire humanity," Modi said in another tweet. "On behalf of the 1.3 billion people of India, I reiterate my government's firm conviction and commitment to continue working with the US government, and all other stakeholders in both countries, for further strengthening India-US ties," Prime Minister Modi added.

China hits back with visa bans against US officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 22: China Tuesday said it would impose reciprocal measures against unnamed American officials and their family members who were behind a legislation passed by the US Congress on Tibet, asserting that it brooks no interference in its internal affairs.

The US Congress has approved a USD 900-billion COVID-19 relief package late Monday, along with USD 1.4 trillion of regular government funding, that also includes some acts regarding Tibet and Taiwan, as well as clauses relating to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The act directs the US government to issue economic and visa sanctions against any Chinese official who interferes with the Dalai Lama's succession.

The bill also prohibits China from establishing any new consulates in the US until Washington is granted its own diplomatic outpost in Tibet, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. Reacting angrily to the new legislation on Tibet, the Chinese Foreign Ministry called on US President Donald Trump not to sign it into law.

"Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong affairs bear on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are purely China's internal affairs that brook no foreign interference," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here while responding to questions on the new US legislation.

MASK MUST



A toy bear with a protective mask is seen at a Christmas fair in central Kyiv, Ukraine

REUTERS

Putin allows ex-Prez to become Senators for life

REUTERS

Moscow, Dec 22: President Vladimir Putin signed legislation Tuesday that allows former presidents to become lawmakers for life in Russia's upper house of parliament once they leave the Kremlin, a government website showed.

The legislation follows sweeping changes to the Russian political system initiated by Putin this year that, among other things, allow him to run for two more six-year terms in the Kremlin if he chooses. He had been due to step down in 2024. The reforms are being closely parsed for clues as to what Putin may do at the end of his current presidential term, his second consecutive and fourth overall.

Tuesday's legislation would allow presidents to name up to 30



senators to the Federation Council, Russia's upper house, and also to become a senator themselves once they have left office. Other legislation that is yet to be signed into law, but has already been backed by the lower house of parliament, would grant ex-presidents immunity from prosecution for any offences committed in their lifetimes, not merely while in office.

BioNTech CEO confident vaccine will work on UK variant

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Berlin, Dec 22: German pharmaceutical company BioNTech is confident that its coronavirus vaccine works against the new UK variant, but further studies are needed to be completely sure, its chief executive said Tuesday.

The variant, detected mainly in London and the southeast of England in recent weeks, has sparked concern

worldwide because of signs that it may spread more easily. While there is no indication it causes more serious illness, numerous countries in Europe and beyond have restricted travel from the UK as a result. "We don't know at the moment if our vaccine is also able to provide protection against this new variant," Ugur Sahin told a news conference the day after the vaccine was approved for use in the European



Union. "But scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine also can deal with

the new virus variants."

Sahin said that the proteins on the UK variant are 99% the same as on the prevailing strains, and therefore BioNTech has "scientific confidence" that its vaccine will be effective.

"But we will know it only if the experiment is done and we will need about two weeks from now to get the data," he said. "The likelihood that our vaccine

works ... is relatively high."

Should the vaccine need to be adjusted for the new variant the company could do so in about 6 weeks, said Ugur, though regulators might have to approve the changes before the shots can be used.

BioNTech's vaccine, developed together with U.S. Pharmaceutical company Pfizer, is authorized for use in more than 45 countries including Britain, the United States and the EU.

In South Africa, child homicides show violence 'entrenched'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cape Town, Dec 22: According to official figures, around 1,000 children are murdered every year in South Africa, nearly three a day. But that statistic, horrific as it is, may be an undercount.

The official figures are "just the tip of the iceberg," said Mathews, the director of the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town and probably the country's leading expert on child homicides. In a country where more than 50 people are murdered every day, children are not special and are not spared. In 2014, she embarked on a research project to uncover the real extent of those child deaths. She did it by getting forensic pathologists to put the dead bodies of hundreds of newborn babies, infants, toddlers and teenagers on examination tables to determine exactly how they died.

Child death reviews are common in developed countries but had never been done in South Africa before Mathews' project. As she feared, the findings were grim.

Over a year, the pathologists examined the corpses of 711 children at two mortuaries in Cape Town and Durban and concluded that more than 15% of them died as a result of homicides. For context, Britain's official child death review last year found 1% of its child deaths were homicides. Mathews' research showed homicide was the second most common cause of death for children in those two precincts.

Doctors found severe head injuries and told the mother to go to the police, but no one followed up. The mother never reported the death. When investigators tried to revive the case nearly two years later, the baby had long been buried and the evidence was cold. Joan van Niekerk, a child protection ex-



Representative image

pert, recounts numerous cases tainted by police ineptitude and corruption.

"I sometimes go through stages when I am more angry with the system than I am with the perpe-

trators and that's not good," she said. She said justice for children in South Africa is unacceptably "hard to achieve." And failures of justice sometimes lead to more deaths.

The neighbour originally charged with killing Wandu Zitho was released and the case provisionally dropped because the police didn't deliver enough evidence, possibly because of a backlog in analyzing forensic evidence, according to one policeman working the case. Months later, the woman was arrested again and charged with murdering two other children. Then there was the case of Tazne van Wyk.

Tazne was 8 when her body was found in February dumped in a drain near a highway nearly two weeks after she disappeared. She had been abducted, raped and murdered, police said. Tazne's parents blame the correctional system for paroling the man charged with their daughter's murder despite a history

of violent offenses against children. He'd already violated his parole once. They also fault police for failing to act on a tip that might have saved Tazne in the hours after her disappearance. The case was high profile. The Minister of Police spoke at Tazne's funeral and admitted errors. "We have failed this child," he conceded, pointing at Tazne's small white coffin, trimmed in gold. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa visited the van Wyk home and promised meaningful action.

Nine months later, Tazne's parents feel it was all lip service. "How many children after Tazne have already passed away? Have been kidnapped? Have been murdered? Still nothing is happening," said her mother, Carmen van Wyk. She sheds no tears. Instead, anger bubbles inside her and her community. Houses connected with the suspect and members of his family were set on fire in the wake of Tazne's killing.

of the day quote

The investment in India is in phases. In the first phase the investment will be around USD 100 million, which will be spent over a period of two years



AZAD MOOPEN | FOUNDER CHAIRMAN AND MD, ASTER DM HEALTHCARE

This is Oppo's first 5G lab overseas. With this lab setup, while we work towards developing core technologies for the 5G era and strengthen the overall ecosystem, we also aim to support India



TASLEEM ARIF | VICE PRESIDENT, OPPO INDIA

We are pleased to work with our partners at GRA and Applii to be the first in Canada to file an application for oral solid tablets for COVID-19 treatment



VINOD RAMACHANDRAN | VICE PRESIDENT, DR. REDDYS LABORATORIES

SHORT TAKES

ICICI Bank ups focus on MNCs

Mumbai: With the increase in foreign direct investment into the country, ICICI Bank on Tuesday said it is upping its focus on serving the multinational companies (MNCs). The second largest private sector lender is looking at services beyond credit needs of such overseas corporates with an eye on the fee income possibilities, its executive director Vishakha Mulye told reporters. It already serves about 1,500 MNCs out of an overall market of up to 5,000 companies, she said.

OIL signs pact with two firms

New Delhi: State-owned Oil India Ltd Tuesday said it has signed a preliminary agreement with Assam Hydrocarbon and Energy Company Ltd (AHECL) for cooperation in oil and gas exploration and development as well as the marketing of natural gas in Assam. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in Guwahati on Monday, OIL said in a statement. While Oil India is the country's second-largest state-owned explorer of oil and gas, AHECL is an Assam government firm.

EV market in India to grow

New Delhi: The electric vehicle (EV) market in India is expected to hit over 63 lakh unit mark per annum by 2027, according to a report by India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA). As per the findings of the report, which covers the present scenario and forecast of electric vehicle (EV), EV batteries and the public charging infrastructure market in the country, demand for the batteries is also going to rise substantially over the same period.

BKS seeks hike in urea pricing

New Delhi: Bharat Krishak Samaj (BKS) on Tuesday said the government should incentivise balanced use of fertilisers by increasing urea price and lowering rates of phosphatic and potassic (P&K) nutrients in the upcoming Budget. In a virtual pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and top officials of the Finance Ministry, BKS Chairman Ajay Vir Jakhra also sought reduction in taxes on diesel and transport subsidy on fruits and vegetables, but demanded tax on unhealthy foods.



BHEL is interested in indigenisation of more than 300 items across 9 categories, currently imported by our 16 manufacturing units, valued at over ₹3,000 crore per annum

NALIN SHINGHAL | CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, BHEL

MARKETS REGAIN FOOTING

The Sensex made an emphatic comeback Tuesday following the previous session's massive selloff, as European markets reversed losses amid expectations that the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against a new virus strain in the UK.



Crude oil production slips 5%

THE GOVT IS PUSHING DOMESTIC OIL EXPLORERS TO RAISE OUTPUT TO HELP CUT DOWN IMPORTS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: India's crude oil production fell by 5 per cent in November primarily due to a sharp drop in output at Rajasthan oil-fields operated by private sector Cairn Vedanta, government data showed Tuesday.

India is dependent on imports for 85 per cent of its needs and the government is pushing domestic explorers to raise output to help cut down imports.

Crude oil production in November at 2.48 million tonnes was lower than 2.61 million tonnes produced in the same month a year back.

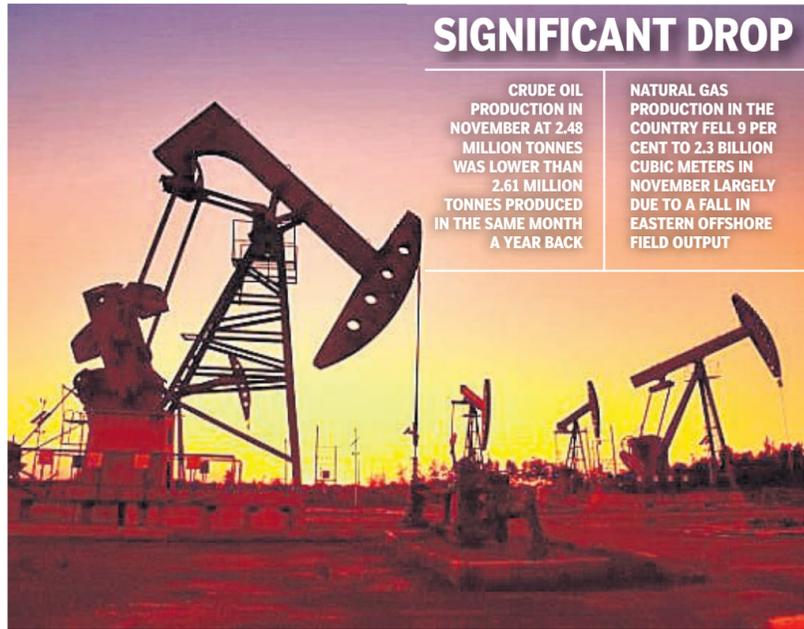
Rajasthan fields produced 9.6 per cent less crude oil at 476,990 tonnes as Mangala, Aishwarya and other fields in the Cairn block flowed less oil for a variety of reasons, according to data released by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) produced 1.5 per cent less oil largely due to lesser than the anticipated output at newer fields.

Oil India Ltd produced 6.6 per cent less oil from Assam due to protests in the state following the Baghjan blowout.

During April-November, India's oil production was 6 per cent lower at 20.42 million tonnes. The output from Rajasthan during this period dropped 16 per cent to 3.91 million tonnes.

Natural gas production in the country fell 9 per cent to 2.3 billion cubic meters in November largely due to a fall in eastern offshore



field output.

ONGC produced 3.7 per cent less gas after the Hazira processing plant was shut down for maintenance.

Gas output during April-November was 18.7 bcm, down 11.8 per cent over the previous year.

With the economy slowly reflatting, crude oil processing by the nation's 23 refineries was fast returning to normal. They processed 20.78 million tonnes of crude oil

in November, down 5.11 per cent year-on-year, but 13 per cent higher than 18.3 million tonnes crude processing in October 2020.

Top refiner Indian Oil Corporation's (IOC) nine units operated at over 100 per cent capacity during November and so did units of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL).

Reliance Industries' only-for-export refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat

operated at 90 per cent of its capacity while the run rate at the company's adjacent domestic market-oriented unit was 106 per cent.

Nayara Energy's Vadinar refinery in Gujarat too operated at 90 per cent of the capacity. All the refineries put together produced 21.42 million tonnes of petroleum products, down 5 per cent over last year but 13 per cent higher than 18.87 million tonnes produced in October 2020.

3.75 cr ITRs filed in 2019-20 fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: As many as 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income Tax returns for Assessment Year 2020-21 (fiscal year 2019-20) till December 21, the Income Tax department said Tuesday.

Do you know that 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income Tax Returns for AY 2020-21 till 21st December, 2020? Have you filed yours yet? If not, File NOW!, the Income Tax department tweeted.

This includes 2.17 crore taxpayers filing ITR-1, 79.82 lakh filing ITR-4, 43.18 lakh ITR-3 and 26.56 lakh filing ITR-2.

The deadline to file I-T returns by individual taxpayers for 2019-20 fiscal (Assessment Year 2020-21) ends on December 31, 2020, while the same for taxpayers whose accounts require to be audited is January 31, 2021.

The due date has been extended from July 31 and October 31, 2020, respectively in view of the COVID pandemic. At the close of deadline for filing ITR without payment of late fees for fiscal 2018-19 (assessment year 2019-20), over 5.65 crore returns were filed by taxpayers. The deadline last year too was extended till August 31.



THIS INCLUDES 2.17 CRORE TAXPAYERS FILING ITR-1, 79.82 LAKH FILING ITR-4, 43.18 LAKH ITR-3 AND 26.56 LAKH FILING ITR-2

Giving a comparative analysis of the ITRs filed, the Income Tax department said 3.63 crore ITRs were filed till August 21, 2019, compared to 3.75 crore filed till December 21, 2020.

Returns in ITR-1 Sahaj can be filed by an ordinarily resident individual whose total income does not exceed ₹50 lakh, while Form ITR-4 Sugam is meant for resident individuals, HUFs and firms (other than LLP) having a total income of up to ₹50 lakh and having presumptive income from business and profession.

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 22: Private sector thermal power plants are in for better times with a likely ₹40,000-crore liquidity boost coming in from government initiatives along with Coal India decision to offer longer term credit to them, says a report.

While the government has decided to liquidate the overdue receivables from state discoms under a rescue package, national miner Coal India has decided to allow private thermal power plants to get coal on 90-180 days credit.

These two measures can help them with a liquidity support of ₹40,000 crore, improving their overall credit profiles, Crisil said in a report on Tuesday.

The government support is by way of a ₹1.2-lakh-crore loan scheme to enable discoms to pay outstanding dues to genscos. The scheme requires the first tranche, accounting for half the package, to be disbursed immediately and the balance upon discoms committing to operational improvements.

Delayed payments by state discoms and the weakening cash flows due to the lockdowns have the overdues to private genscos to the tune of ₹59,000 crore as of October. The overall overdues run up to ₹90,000 crore as of March 2020. This includes overdue to Central, state and private capacities and also



LIQUIDITY BOOST

across coal, gas, hydro and renewables.

To reduce the overdues, discoms have already begun signing into this loan scheme. As of end-November, nearly half of the first tranche has been disbursed. Given the policy thrust, we expect full disbursement by March.

Private coal-based power plants should see a liquidity relief of about ₹30,000 crore given that half of the overdues are owed to them, says the report.

In addition, genscos received relief from Coal India which caters to 80 per cent of their coal demand,

BIZ BUZZ

VerSe Innovation raises over USD 100mn

NEW DELHI: VerSe Innovation, which runs Dailyhunt and short video app Josh, Tuesday said it has completed an over USD 100 million (about ₹739 crore) fund raising round from AlphaWave, Google and Microsoft. Existing investors, Sofina Group and Lupa Systems also participated in this round, a statement said. With this new infusion of capital, the company is now valued at over USD 1 billion, it added. "VerSe plans to deploy its new capital steadily in the continued scaling up of Josh, the augmentation of local language content offerings, the development of content creator ecosystem, innovation in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) and the growth of its truly made-in-Bharat-for-Bharat short-video platform," the statement said.

Govt invites bids to sell 63.75% SCI stake

NEW DELHI: The government Tuesday invited expressions of interest for strategic disinvestment of its 63.75 per cent stake in Shipping Corp of India along with the transfer of management control. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has issued Preliminary Information Memorandum (PIM) inviting Expressions of Interest (Eoi) from potential buyers by February 13, 2021. Shares of Shipping Corp were trading at ₹86.30, up 4.54 per cent over its previous close on the BSE. At the current market price, the government's stake sale in Shipping Corp is valued at about ₹2,500 crore. The government has appointed RBSA Capital Advisors LLP as its transaction advisor to manage the disinvestment process.



Glance raises USD 145 mn from Google



NEW DELHI: Glance, a part of SoftBank-backed InMobi Group, on Tuesday said it has closed a USD 145 million (around ₹1,071.6 crore) investment round from Google and existing investor, Mithril Capital. In September last year, Glance had raised USD 45 million (over ₹323 crore) in funding from Austin-based Mithril Capital, and the latest round takes the total fund raising by Glance to USD 190 million. While details around valuation were not disclosed, InMobi would continue to hold a majority stake in Glance. Glance will use the new investment to deepen its AI capability across Glance and Roposo, InMobi Group founder and CEO Naveen Tewari told PTI.

Reliance fastest wealth creator in last 25 years

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 22: What began as a yarn trading business has emerged as the biggest wealth creator over the last 25 years, growing along the way to enter sectors ranging from oil to telecommunications and retail.

Reliance Industries accounted for ₹6.3 trillion in wealth created since 1995, according to Motilal Oswal Financial Services' annual wealth creation study, the 25th edition of which was released on Tuesday. The closest rival was Hindustan Unilever which was at ₹4.9 trillion.

Much of the gains came in the last five years. The study said that it added ₹4.4 trillion in wealth between 2015 and 2020. Companies like Infosys and Bajaj Finance also figured the list of fastest and biggest wealth creators.

"Over 1995 to 2020, the Sensex rose from 3,200 levels in March 1995 to 29,500 by March 2020 i.e. a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.2... (per cent). Coincidentally, exactly 100 companies delivered returns higher than 9.2... (per cent)... We call these 100 the Fastest Wealth Creators," it said.

The top twenty of the fastest wealth creators all gave the equivalent of 20 per cent returns every year.

Embracing new normal, corporates set to step up hiring

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: Adapting to the new hybrid normal of remote and office work, cautiously optimistic corporates are looking to hire more people and provide better appraisals in the new year as they step out of the pandemic-ravaged 2020.

The coronavirus pandemic emerged as the biggest inflection point for the Indian job landscape. For the corporates, work-from-home and remote workers became the new normal and for the professionals, online learning and digital skills took centre stage.

In 2020, most companies "de-prioritised" their hiring plans amid uncertain economic outlook while industries like travel, hospitality, retail, aviation, real estate, construction and automobile were severely hit. Nevertheless, there is a cautious



optimism among corporates and it is getting reflected in their recruitment plans for the new year.

"Yes, the market is showing positive signs of recovery with almost all industries showing growth in

SALARY TRENDS

Salary Trends Survey stated that companies in India gave an average pay increase of 6.1 per cent during 2020, the lowest since 2009

The survey also noted that companies in India will give an average pay hike of 7.3 per cent in 2021

hiring but with caution.

"Overall, the intent to hire recovered smartly from 11 per cent during the lockdown period to 18 per cent for HY (half year) and this number is growing," Deval Singh-Business Head, Mobilization (Hiring) at TeamLease Services.

While there is caution in hiring, the market is displaying optimism. According to Singh, there is a 50

per cent increase in employment opportunities from the lockdown days.

Pay cuts have been reversed since Diwali in most organisations and bonuses were issued in few. Some technology companies even declared early appraisals, Singh noted.

The latest ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, that covered 1,518 employers across the country, showed that corporate India is showing "healthy signs of recovery" and plans to hire more people in the first three months of 2021 compared to the quarter ending December.

"With encouraging results of vaccine efficacies and the market largely back to how it was, there is a positive sign of recovery in the job market."

"Today, with emergence of the hybrid work model, I believe there will be a big push for Agile Talent.

'Remote working' as an employment category is going to open up many opportunities for both employees and employers for niche skills," Krishna Prasad, Senior Director of HR and Operations at Skillsoft India and APAC said.

Experts believe there is no going back to the pre-COVID-19 world in its entirety and the digital transformation that changed the very fabric of the Indian workforce in 2020 is likely to accelerate further in 2021 and beyond.

"Solutions such as video interviews, artificial intelligence (AI)-based facial recognition tech, data driven on-boarding - which were being talked about as being futuristic as early as 2019 were quickly adapted by many organisations in 2020," Nishith Upadhyaya, Director - Advisory Services, SHRM (APAC and MENA) said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bradman cap gets astronomical price

SYDNEY: Australian businessman Peter Freedman has purchased Donald Bradman's first baggy green Test cap for 450,000 Australian dollars (\$340,000) at an auction. It is the second-highest price paid for a piece of cricket memorabilia. He now plans to tour Bradman's Test debut cap around Australia. The price for the 1928 cap sits behind the \$1,007,500 (\$760,000) paid at an auction for Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne's Test cap earlier this year - the world-record price for an item of cricket memorabilia, officials said. Bradman played 52 Tests for Australia and ended his career with an astonishing average of 99.94. "Sir Don Bradman is an Aussie legend," Freedman said Tuesday. "So its great to have his baggy green."

Consolation victory

NAPIER (NEW ZEALAND): Stand-in captain Mohammad Rizwan (89, 59b, 10x4, 3x6) steered Pakistan to a consolation win over New Zealand in the third T20 game played here Tuesday. Chasing New Zealand's score of 173 for seven, Pakistan coasted home with two balls to spare when Iftikhar Ahmed (14 n o) settled the issue with a six taking Pakistan to 177-6. The victory will certainly put the visitors in a positive frame of mind before the first Test. Rizwan was well supported by Mohammad Hafeez (41, 29b, 2x4, 3x6). When the Kiwis batted Devon Conway (63, 45b, 7x4, 1x6) top-scored for the hosts with a timely knock.

5-game ban

BERLIN: Borussia Mönchengladbach striker Marcus Thuram has been banned for five games for spitting in the face of Hoffenheim player Stefan Poschs. The incident happened Saturday during the Bundesliga encounter. Thuram also admitted his mistake later in the day on Instagram and apologised for his actions. The German football federation said Monday the ban applies to the German Cup and Bundesliga. Thuram was also fined 40,000 euros by the federation Monday. Gladbach had already fined the French player a month's wages that will be donated to a social cause.

6-week rest for Shami

New Delhi: Pace bowler Mohammed Shami whose bowling hand was fractured Saturday while batting on the third day of the first Test match in Adelaide, has been advised rest for six weeks. He will be flying out of Australia for India, Wednesday. The injury makes Shami doubtful for the first Test against England beginning February 5 at Chennai. The Indian pacer suffered the fracture after being hit by a Pat Cummins express delivery. Shami had to retire hurt in the second innings at Adelaide. Lster on scans revealed that he had suffered a fracture. He will have to undergo quarantine on return.

RAINA ARRESTED FOR VIOLATING COVID-19 NORMS, GRANTED BAIL

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 22: Former India cricketer Suresh Raina was arrested here early Tuesday morning for violating COVID-19 protocols. Raina however, was later granted bail. The cricketer's management team said that Raina was not aware of the rules and that led to his arrest. It should be stated here that Raina announced his retirement from international cricket, August 15 this year. Raina's team issued an official release following the former Indian cricketer's arrest. He was among the 34 to be arrested by Mumbai police for violating COVID-19 norms. "Suresh was in Mumbai for a shoot which extended to late hours. He was invited by a

friend for a quick dinner post the shoot. He was to take the flight back to Delhi Tuesday morning itself. He was not aware of local timings and protocols," the statement said. "Once pointed out, he immediately complied with the procedures laid out by the authorities. Raina regrets the unfortunate and unintentional incident. He always holds rules and laws laid down by governing bodies with the highest regard and will continue to do so in the future as well," the statement added. Others who were arrested along with Raina were singer Guru Randhawa and Suzanne Khan, ex-wife of superstar Hrithik Roshan. The raid took place around 3.00am at the Dragonfly club near the Mumbai airport.

Raina had also missed IPL-2020. He went with the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to the UAE. However, during quarantine only, he returned to India. Sources said that he was unhappy with the accommodation arrangements and so came back. The Mumbai Police, in its statement said: "Offence has been registered u/s 188, 269, 34 IPC and u/s 51 NDMA against 34 persons at Sahar police station after raid was conducted at 2.50am at Dragonfly pub, for keeping establishment open beyond permissible time limit, not following COVID-19 norms such as social distancing and not wearing face mask."



SURESH RAINA REGRETS THE UNFORTUNATE AND UNINTENTIONAL INCIDENT. HE ALWAYS HOLDS RULES AND LAWS LAID DOWN BY GOVERNING BODIES WITH HIGHEST REGARD

TEAM RAINA

Shuttler training in London is hopeful of participating despite flight bans

SINDHU seeks success in Thailand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: A second wave of COVID-19 infections has hit the United Kingdom and a new mutation of the virus strain is forcing countries to suspend flights to London. However, World Champion shuttler PV Sindhu remains unfazed by the worsening COVID-19 situation in England. For the past two months, Sindhu has been training in London. She remains hopeful of travelling to Thailand for tournaments in January despite countries increasingly banning flights from the UK. Sindhu has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics and has been training rigorously. She is scheduled to play her first tournament since the break in Thailand. She will have to be in Bangkok by January 3 to compete in the two Super 1000 events (January 12 to 17 and January 19 to 24). "I plan to travel in the first week of January. There is no travel ban from UK in Thailand, so I can travel from Doha. The idea is to use the Gulf route to reach Thailand," Sindhu informed Tuesday. The 25-year-old had left for London in October to focus on her

nutrition and fitness at the Gatorade Sports Science Institute (GSSI). Sindhu has been training alongside British shuttlers Toby Penty and Raviv Ouseph at the

National Training Centre. "Thankfully, my training is going on pretty well. The National Centre is not closed. It is run as a bubble centre, so I have been able to practice ahead of the events in Thailand," Sindhu said. It should be stated here that Thailand has also seen a spurt in COVID-19 cases recently. The country reported 548 new cases Saturday. However, Sindhu is hopeful that

the tournaments will be played. "We need badminton to restart just like other sports," she opined. The Sports Ministry had recently approved Sindhu's request to have her personal physio and fitness trainer accompany her to three tournaments in January. Sindhu last competed in March when she participated in the All England Championships, following which all tournaments were either cancelled or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In October, Sindhu had pulled out of the Denmark Open, one of the only two events to be played since March.



THANKFULLY I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TRAIN IN LONDON BECAUSE THE CENTRE IS BIO PROTECTED. I HAVE REALLY WORKED HARD IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS

PV SINDHU

PATERNITY LEAVE FOR SKIPPER

Kohli leaves after pep talk with mates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Adelaide, Dec 22: Indian captain Virat Kohli left Australian shores Tuesday after a pep talk with his beleaguered teammates. In Kohli's absence Ajinkya Rahane will lead India. They certainly have a task in hand when the Boxing Day Test starts December 26 after being bowled out for their lowest score - 36. Kohli is coming back to India for the birth of his first child in January. Before boarding his flight back home, the star batsman met his teammates. He encouraged them to give their all in the remainder of the series, which the visitors trail 0-1. The idea behind organising the pep talk was to boost the confidence of the players and keep them in a positive frame of mind heading into the second game, sources said.

Kohli, who has been leading the Test team since 2014, urged his players to show intent and express themselves on the field without any inhibition.

Meanwhile Steve Smith said Tuesday that Kohli deserves credit for prioritising the birth of his child over cricket as 'there would have been a lot of pressure' on the India skipper to stay for the entire duration of the ongoing Test series. "Obviously, it's a big loss for India, not having him for the rest of the series. We just have to look at the way he played in the first innings at the Adelaide Oval. That was a pretty classy display," Smith told reporters during a virtual press conference. "I just fist-pumped him at the end (of first Test) and said 'Mate safe travels, hope everything goes well with the baby, and pass on my best to your wife'. That was about it," Smith said.

INDIA WERE BOWLED OUT FOR 36 AT THE ADELAIDE OVAL, THEIR LOWEST TEST SCORE

KOHLI ASKED TEAMMATES TO PUT THE DISASTER BEHIND AND PLAY WITH INTENT IN THE REMAINING GAMES

RAHANE WILL LEAD INDIA IN THE REMAINDER OF THE SERIES



BLUES RIDE ON ABRAHAM STRIKES

AGENCIES

London, Dec 22: Chelsea striker Tammy Abraham scored a late opportunist double Monday to secure a 3-0 home win for the Blues over West Ham United in the Premier League. Earlier Brazilian defender Thiago Silva had fired Chelsea in front with an early header. The result lifted Chelsea to fifth on 25 points from 14 games, a point behind fourth-placed Everton. It was a welcome victory for Chelsea after two successive defeats and Abraham acknowledged there was a rallying cry in the dressing room before the kick-off. "The boys said we needed a performance and that's what we did today (Monday)," the 23-year-old told 'Sky Sports'. "As a striker, scoring goals gives you confidence, my teammates created a lot of chances and we defended well as a team. It's



CLINICAL FINISH: Tammy Abraham (No.9) slides the ball past the outstretched hands of Lukasz Fabianski to score his first goal Monday for Chelsea

something you do in the park, get in the right areas and be ready when the ball lands," he added. West Ham's Declan Rice had a goal disallowed for offside before 36-year-old centre-back Silva planted a thumping header past visiting goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski in the 10th minute as he met a Mason Mount corner. The Hammers twice came close but on both occasions the Chelsea defenders were able to scramble the ball away. However, Abraham settled Chelsea's nerves when he made it 2-0 in the 78th minute after Werner's scuffed shot from the edge of the penalty area fell kindly for the England forward, who diverted it into the net with the slightest of touches. He added the third two minutes later when he side-footed in a rebound from a tight angle after Christian Pulisic's close-range header was parried by Fabianski.

Cuttack-A bag Inter-District T20 title

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Dec 22: The final of the OCA Inter-District Senior T20 cricket tournament turned out to be a thriller with Cuttack-A beating ECORSA by seven runs to win the title at the Barabati Stadium here Tuesday. The pendulum of the game swung with each over: The Cuttack-A players held their nerves to ultimately emerge victors. ECORSA won the toss and put Cuttack-A into bat. Even though they lost wickets at regular intervals, Cuttack-A posted a fighting score of 130 before being bowled out with one ball of the innings remaining. Ramachandra Behera (34) and for-

mer Odisha captain Biplab Samantray (32) batted well for Cuttack-A. Some late order hitting by Deepak Behera (23) took them past the 125-run mark. Among the ECORSA bowlers, Jayant Behera (2/15), Suryakant Pradhan (2/26) and Alok Mangaraj (2/34) stood out. If ECORSA had aspirations of winning the game in a canter, they were in for a rude shock. The Cuttack-A bowlers, especially Sunil Roul (2/18) and Ashish Rai (2/22) restricted the flow of runs and picked up crucial wickets. In the end ECORSA could only manage 123 for seven in their 20 overs. Rajesh Mohanty (35 n o) played a valiant hand but it was not enough for Cuttack-A.



The victorious Cuttack-A players pose with the T20 trophy Tuesday at the Barabati Stadium

BLATTER MUSEUM UNDER FIFA GLARE

GENEVA: FIFA has filed a criminal complaint against former president Sepp Blatter over the finances of its loss-making soccer museum in Zurich. FIFA said Tuesday it suspected 'criminal mismanagement' by FIFA's former management and companies appointed by them 'to work on the museum - long seen as a pet project of Blatter. The 'FIFA World Football Museum' opened in 2016 after \$140 million of soccer money was spent refurbishing the 1970s office building to also include 34 rental apartments. Blatter committed FIFA to a rental contract with the building's owner, insurance firm 'Swiss Life'. It requires FIFA to pay \$360 million through 2045 at above market rates, soccer's world body said.

OFC, NEUFC share points, goals

AGENCIES

Bambolim (Goa), Dec 22: Odisha FC's (OFC) winless streak continued into their seventh game, but they put up a better display to hold a strong North East United FC (NEUFC) to a 2-2 draw here Tuesday. It was a game where fortunes swung like a pendulum. OFC took the lead only to find themselves behind in the second half. However, Stuart Baxter's boys finished strongly to salvage a point from the game. Diego Mauricio (22nd) and Cole Alexander (67th) scored for OFC while Benjamin Lambot (45th) and Kweisi Appiah (65th) got the goals for the Highlanders. The draw



Diego Mauricio meant OFC took their points tally to two and they maintained their 10th position just above bottom-ranked SC East Bengal. Odisha had a couple of chances in the first session after NEUFC dominated early possession. They first came close to scoring, but

Mauricio's looping attempt floated wide of the post. However, in the 22nd minute he made amends with a powerful shot from the top of the box. Initially the goal was ruled offside but the referee overturned the linesman's decision. NEUFC went on pressing and were duly rewarded at the stroke of half time when Lambot scored with an exquisite header off a cross by Mehta. In the second half the Highlanders had again more possession and they duly took the lead when Appiah converted a spot-kick. However, the NEUFC joy was short-lived with Alexander giving the finishing touches to a brilliant through ball from Mauricio.

Tokyo organisers to spend \$900mn to fight COVID-19

AGENCIES

Tokyo, Dec 22: Organisers of the Tokyo Olympics will spend \$900 million on measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus at next year's Games, they said Tuesday. The officials were unveiling their latest budget for the delayed tournament. The organisers repeated their projection that the total cost of the postponement, including the COVID-19 counter-measures, would come to about \$2.8 billion, bringing the entire cost of holding the Games to about \$15.4 billion. It means a 22 per cent increase in budgetary costs. Earlier the expenses were earmarked for USD 12.6 billion for the Games. The Olympics will open July 23, 2021. The Paralympics starts August 24. Audits by the Japanese government over the last several years, however, show the costs are higher than officially stated and are at least USD 25 billion. Tokyo said the Olympics would cost about \$7.5 billion when the IOC awarded the Games to the city in 2013. A University of Oxford study earlier this year said Tokyo is the most expensive Summer Olympics on record. Japanese government entities are responsible for all of the costs except for USD 6.7 billion in a privately funded operating budget. Decisions about fans and preventive measures for the pandemic are expected to be rolled out in 2021. People will be informed accordingly, officials said.