



CLIMATE CAMPAIGNER

Actor Bhumi Pednekar says she is dedicated to highlighting the seriousness of the climate crisis and its repercussions

LEISURE P2



DEMS TO SEIZE SENATE

Democratic Party takes a step towards seizing control of the US Senate as they win the first of 2 Georgia run-offs

INTERNATIONAL P10



THIRD TEST TODAY

India look to start afresh against Aus with big-hitting Rohit Sharma's presence in Sydney

SPORTS P12

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Everything is happening the way our democracy works. Even before the construction started the Opposition has walked out!

Petrol, diesel prices hiked breaking a month-long pause

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: The new year has broken the patience of oil marketing companies as they increased the pump price of petrol and diesel breaking over a month long pause.

Accordingly, the retail price of petrol and diesel increased by 26 paise and 25 paise per litre to ₹83.97 and ₹74.12 a litre respectively here, Wednesday.

PRICES IN BHUB

Petrol - ₹84.49/LTR (+₹0.33)
Diesel - ₹80.63/LTR (+₹0.34)

Across the country as well, the price of the two petroleum products increased at varied levels depending on the prevalent taxation structure.

With the increase, petrol price has come very close to breaching the all-time high level of ₹84 a litre (reached October 4, 2018). The new highs could be reached Thursday, if there is another increase in fuel prices.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VIATION
SENSEX	48174.06	↓ 263.72
NIFTY	14146.30	↓ 53.20
DOLLAR	73.66	↓ ₹0.29
EURO	90.35	↑ ₹0.26
GOLD	₹51,116	↓ ₹604
SILVER	₹69,920	↓ ₹938

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	33.5°C	33.8°C
MIN	15.9°C	15.0°C
Humidity	70%	77%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Fog/mist in the morning

RSP gas leak: 4 dead

THE MISHAP TOOK PLACE AT A COAL CHEMICAL FACILITY

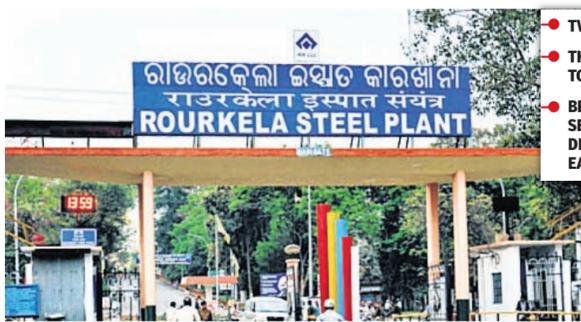
POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela/Sundargarh, Jan 6: Four workers died Wednesday and a few others fell ill after inhaling a toxic gas which leaked from coal chemical division at Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) of the state-owned SAIL in Steel City, Wednesday.

The mishap took place at a coal chemical department facility in the morning when 10 workers were on duty there. "The four contractual workers, engaged by a private consultancy firm Star Construction Company, felt unwell at 9 am, following which they were taken to a health facility of the plant and later admitted to the ICU of the Ispat General Hospital where they died," an official of the steel plant said.

The four deceased were identified as Ganesh Chandra Pahil (55) and Rabindra Sahu (59) of Fertiliser Construction Colony, Abhimanyu Sa (33) of Lathikata and Bramhananda Panda (51) of Sector-1 in the city. All the workers died by 11 am while undergoing treatment at the IGH.

According to a preliminary report, the four workers died due to carbon monoxide gas leak from the unit, the officials said, adding that some others, who also fell ill after inhaling the



toxic gas, were being treated at the RSP dispensary. The incident occurred when Panda and four of his co-workers were exhausting the gas mixing tank in coal chemical division of the steel plant. The rest six workers were present at the spot. They were opening the bolts of the tank when they came in contact with the toxic gas.

After reports surfaced, relatives of the workers and labour union leaders assembled outside the plant and alleged that the four workers died due to negligence of the plant authorities and lack of safety measures in the concerned division.

They demanded compensation to

- TWO DGM RANKED OFFICERS SUSPENDED
- THE RSP ALSO ASSURED TO PROVIDE A JOB TO ONE IN EACH FAMILY OF THE DECEASED
- BESIDES, THE AGENCY THAT HAD HIRED THE SERVICES OF THE FOUR HAS BEEN DIRECTED TO PAY ₹2.5 LAKH EX-GRATIA TO EACH OF THEIR KIN

Chattaraj condoled the demise of four contractual workers and said the authorities will extend all the supports to the bereaved families. He assured of a high-level probe into the incident as the RSP authorities suspended two deputy general managers of the plant on the charge of negligence.

The two suspended officials are Nabhendhu Das, the DGM of Coal Chemical department and Gopabandhu Barik, the DGM of Energy Management department. After a preliminary investigation, the two officials were found guilty of dereliction of duty, sources said.

Following the mishap, the plant authorities have taken a series of measures including jobs to one family member of each deceased. The authorities have also directed the third party vendor who had employed the contractual employees in the plant to provide compensation of Rs2.5 lakh to the families of each deceased.

Relatives of the workers and labour union leaders assemble outside the plant after the mishap, Wednesday

the bereaved families and jobs to the next of their kin. A high-level committee has been formed to inquire into the cause of the incident. The plant is functioning normally, the RSP officials said. RSP chief executive officer Dipak

STATE NOD TO 8 INVESTMENT PROPOSALS WORTH ₹6,443 CR

The projects aim to create employment opportunities for 4,631 persons

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: After recording ₹1.19 lakh crore worth of new investments since February last year, the state government Wednesday approved eight investment proposals worth ₹6,443.32 crore.

The High Level Clearance Authority (HLCA) headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik issued an in-principle approval to three major industrial projects worth ₹5,358.24 crore while State Level Single Window Clearance Authority (SLSWCA) chaired by Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra cleared five industrial projects to the tune of ₹1,085.08 crore.

These projects are in the metal and metal downstream, cement, refinery and petrochemicals, fertilisers, food processing and tourism sectors. The three industrial projects are expected to create employment opportunities for 4,631 persons in the state.

The HLCA approved the proposals for expansion of Yazdani



Steel & Power Limited's integrated steel plant from a capacity of 0.07 million tonne per annum (MTPA) to 1.19 MTPA with an investment of ₹2,415 crore in Kalinganagar, Jajpur. The project has the potential for employment opportunities for over 2,867 persons.

Shiva Cement Limited (SCL) will be setting up an additional clinker capacity of 1.32 MTPA and cement capacity of 1.05 MTPA at Telighana in Sundargarh district with an investment of ₹1,523.24 crore. It will generate employment opportunities for over 600 persons. The CM level panel also approved the proposal of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL)

to set up development of crude oil terminal at Paradeep. This project will bring investment of ₹1,420 crore and provide employment to over 200 persons.

Before the HLCA meeting, the SLSWCA has approved a sulphuric acid expansion project unit with an additional annual capacity of 6,60,000 MT by IFCCO to be set up at Paradeep. The total cost of the project will be ₹400 crore. It is expected to generate employment for 21 persons.

Notification for Matric exam form fill-up out

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 6: The dates for filling up forms for the annual High School Certificate Examinations-2021 were announced by the Board of Secondary Education (BSE) Odisha, Wednesday.

The filling up of forms will be conducted via online mode for students of regular, ex-regular and correspondence courses. The drive will begin from 10am of January 10 and continue till January 28 midnight, a notification issued by the Board in this regard stated.

Students will have to pay the requisite exam fees January 27. However, those students who fail to fill up forms within the stipulated date and time can do the same by paying a fine between January 29 and February 2, the BSE notification elaborated.

Notably, the drive for filling up of forms for regular as well as ex-regular students will be monitored by the heads of respective schools. Whereas, the same for correspondence courses will be supervised by deputy secretary of regional Board office, the notification read. Detail instruction regarding the form fill-up will be available on the Board website www.bseodisha.ac.in within the scheduled time.



1800 266 266 1 (tollfree)

After 6 months, no fresh Covid fatality

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: After a gap of over six months, the state Wednesday did not report any fresh fatality due to COVID-19, while 231 new cases pushed the state's case-load to 3,30,921, a health official said.

As many as 133 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while 98 infections were detected during contact tracing, he said.

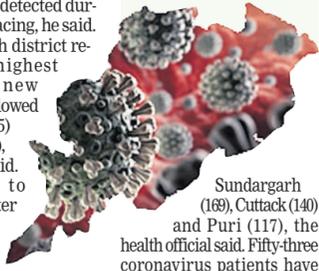
Sundargarh district reported the highest number of new cases at 32, followed by Bargarh (25) and Angul (21), the official said.

"Happy to share that after over six months, there are no COVID deaths reported in the state on 5th January, 2021. We salute our COVID Warriors whose tireless efforts have made this possible," the state Health Department tweeted.

The state's coronavirus death toll remained unchanged at 1,887. Khurda district, under which Bhubaneswar falls, has so far reported the highest number of COVID-19 deaths at 326, followed by Ganjam (247),

IN NUMBERS

- As Jan 5, Sundargarh reported the highest number of new cases at 32, followed by Bargarh (25) and Angul (21)
- Odisha now has 2,203 active coronavirus cases, while 3,26,778 people have recovered from the infection so far



Sundargarh (169), Cuttack (140) and Puri (117), the health official said. Fifty-three coronavirus patients have died to comorbidities so far, he said. The state reported its first COVID-19 fatality April 7 last year when a 72-year-old man from Bhubaneswar succumbed to the infection.

Odisha now has 2,203 active coronavirus cases, while 3,26,778 people have recovered from the infection so far. The state has so far tested over 70.65 lakh samples for COVID-19, including 20,195 Tuesday, he added.

Dispel any misconception on vaccine: CM to officials

With the state all set for a massive vaccination drive against Covid-19, CM Naveen Patnaik asked concerned officials to create massive public awareness to dispel any misconception regarding the vaccine, Wednesday. Chairing a meeting to review Covid-19 situation and preparedness made for the vaccination drive, Naveen said the vaccine has raised hopes among the people and India has become the world's leading vaccine producer. "The state is fully prepared to undertake the vaccination programme," he said. Therefore, massive public awareness needs to be created on the vaccine to dispel doubts and misconceptions, he added. As the state has been relaxing Covid restrictions, Naveen appealed the general public to be more cautious in the next two months. Further, the CM said that the second wave of Covid-19 has started in England and Europe and the lockdown has been re-imposed in some countries.

'No' improvement in situation: Apex court

FARMERS' PROTEST



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Supreme Court Wednesday expressed concern over the ongoing farmers' protest against the recently enacted three farm laws at various Delhi borders.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde told Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta and Attorney General (AG) K.K. Venugopal, representing the Centre, "There is absolutely no improvement in the situation."

Mehta submitted that the Centre is in discussion with the farmers to resolve their issues with the laws and since healthy talks are

going on between the farmers and Centre, it would not be advisable to take up the matters immediately.

The AG said filing of response by the Centre may close avenues of negotiations underway between the farmers and Centre.

Venugopal added that there is a possibility that parties involved in discussion may come to a conclusion in the near future.

The bench also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian agreed with AG and SG submissions, and said if it is told Monday (January 11) that discussions are still underway, then it would adjourn the hearing. "We understand the situation. We want to encourage the talks. We will keep matter on Monday and will adjourn if you say so," said the CJI.

The observations from the top court came during the hearing on a petition filed by advocate M.L. Sharma who challenged a 1954 amendment to the Constitution for putting agriculture in the concurrent list.

SC accepts pleas challenging anti-'love jihad' laws

HOWEVER, THE TOP COURT DECLINES TO STAY THE PROVISIONS OF AN UTTAR PRADESH ORDINANCE AND AN UTTARAKHAND LAW, BROUGHT TO CHECK 'UNLAWFUL' RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS FOR INTER-FAITH MARRIAGES

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Supreme Court Wednesday issued notice on petitions challenging the inter-faith marriage and religious conversion laws (love-jihad laws) enacted by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

A three-judge bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde agreed to examine the validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition Of Unlawful Conversion Of Religion Ordinance, 2020, and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, enacted by the BJP ruled states. The bench issued notice to Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments returnable in four weeks.

During the hearing, senior advocate Chander Uday Singh submitted that the legislations are obnoxious in nature and sought stay on the provisions of the legislations. "We need stay on provisions which require one month prior notice for marriage and burden of proof on the accused to show that they have not converted by marriage. It is obnoxious



to seek prior permission for marriage from magistrate," Advocate CU Singh said. However, the Chief Justice stated that stay cannot be issued until the opposite parties are heard especially under Article 32 jurisdiction.

Significantly, several petitions have been filed in the apex court challenging the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition Of Unlawful Conversion Of Religion Ordinance, 2020, and the

Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, which regulate conversion and inter-faith marriages. Both legislations bar conversion to any other religion for the purpose of marriage.

The ordinance passed by the UP states that no person shall convert or attempt to convert either directly or otherwise any other person from one religion to another by use or practice of

misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage nor shall any person abet, convince or conspire such conversion.

The petitioners submitted that Act and ordinance seemed to be premised on conspiracy theories and assume that all conversions are illegally forced upon individuals though they have attained the age of majority.

It intrudes into the right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution and freedom of religion under Article 25, petitioner contended. "The burden of proof gets shifted and it is dangerous as it is a non-bailable offence and also under a circumstance where they are pitched against hostile communities and family members who masquerade in the glory of protection of women," the petitioner highlighted.

Petitioners sought to declare the punishments under these laws as ultra virus and null and void claiming they disturb the basic structure of the Constitution.



KIM, KANYE ARE GETTING DIVORCED: REPORTS

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian and her rapper husband Kanye West are getting a divorce, according to reports. Multiple sources said that 'divorce is imminent' for the couple, with Kardashian hiring Laura Wasser, a divorce attorney to many stars.

GRAMMYS 2021 POSTPONED OVER COVID 19 CONCERNS

The 2021 Grammy Awards ceremony, originally scheduled for January 31, has been postponed due to Covid concerns. "After conversations with health experts, we are rescheduling the 63rd #GRAMMYS to be broadcast March 14, 2021" said a tweet by the organisers.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
If your work has anything to do with money, today you will be busy counting your riches! If you've applied for a loan, it may get sanctioned today. Look for variety, says Ganesh, and you may find your day filled with smiles and what not.

TAURUS
You are likely to be mentally alert and watchful today, says Ganesh. Creativity will run through your veins no matter what you attempt. You may dabble in performing arts, designing, graphics or special effects. Your charm will play Pied Piper to the opposite gender today.

GEMINI
Your physical appearance and personal attitude will see a marked improvement today, predicts Ganesh. A well-groomed you will climb up the popularity chart among peers, friends and members of the opposite sex.

CANCER
You will be firing all cylinders in the creativity department, says Ganesh. Even your colleagues may pitch in, and will give you new ideas to make your work better. Those looking for a new job will ace the interview and clear the selection process as easily as clearing the fog from their glasses.

LEO
Karmic balance dictates an equitable distribution of joy and sorrow, says Ganesh. So if your day seems drab and depressing today, rest assured, your evening shall be all the more refreshing and exciting.

VIRGO
Play dodge ball with prejudice today. Do not let intolerance find shelter in you today, advises Ganesh. Instead, chances are you will seek to find love, affection and goodwill among those around you. Stay away from negativity as it may bog you down.

LIBRA
Lights, camera, and action! Be prepared as the limelight is focused on you on this very motivating and inspiring day, enabling you to attract excellent public praise. Today is an encouraging day to set in motion innovative projects, especially for those who desire to be their own masters and embark upon fulfilling self-financed ideas.

SCORPIO
You are most likely to resent the dominating and overbearing nature of your partner today. Patience will probably go to the dumps in this case then. But Ganesh advises you to sit together and resolve all personality clashes and quarrels in view of the larger scheme of things.

SAGITTARIUS
The nerd in you will rise to the fore today. Religious literature will catch your fancy. Ganesh also sees you diving deep into pages of detective tomes, murder and science fiction. Au contraire, find some relief from the roller-coaster by listening to some soothing music.

CAPRICORN
You want to enhance your knowledge by exploring foreign shores, but luck hasn't favoured you yet. Ganesh predicts today to be a favourable day for you to try again for higher studies. If associated with the Stock Market or speculation, you are likely to make profits.

AQUARIUS
The day is taxing. You may find that others have dumped their share of work on you. But you are not one to admit defeat, and will deal with the challenge squarely, says Ganesh. You will outwit your opponents, and toast your success by starlight!

PISCES
While your day is unlikely to be very satisfactory, keeping your expectations low will help lessen your disappointment, says Ganesh. However, the evening is likely to be as refreshing as your day was depressing, with all the socialising in store for you.

Climate change is upon us: Bhumi

Mumbai: Actress Bhumi Pednekar, who is a climate warrior too, says she is dedicated to highlighting the seriousness of the climate crisis and its repercussions.

"Climate change is upon us and it is real. Through my initiative of Climate Warrior, I diligently try to highlight the seriousness of the crisis and its repercussions," Bhumi said. Now, the actress will call upon the young generation as part of Sony BBC Earth's Young Earth

Champions initiative. The nationwide contest aims at inspiring young minds of India to think about a better and a more sustainable future. Bhumi along with an expert will judge this initiative.

"Young Earth Champions is offering a great platform to trigger exchange of creative ideas among kids, who have the power to bring about change. I am looking forward to an encouraging participation from incredible, young talents and a stimulating discussion about a sustainable future," she added.



'To remain a working actor is a blessing'

Mumbai: With shows like *Marzi*, *Betaal* and *Sandwiched Forever*, actress Aahana Kumra had quite a busy 2020. She is happy that the year gone by let her stay busy with work despite the pandemic-induced lockdown.

"The best thing I realised is it is a blessing to remain a working actor. In 2020, I had multiple releases on digital platforms and the fact is, being an outsider since I am not part of any camp or driven by PR activity, the only way for me to remain visible is my work. Since there were not many promotional activities before release, it has proven again that for an actor what matters the most is acting skill," Aahana said.



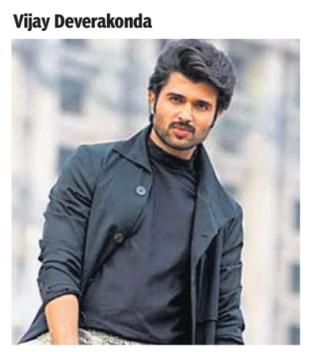
The actress will be seen next in the upcoming web film titled *Bawri Chhori* that also features Rumana Molla, Vikram Koccher and Niki Walia, and is scheduled to premiere on the OTT platform Eros Now January 11.

Top South stars gear up for B-Town sojourn

A galaxy of stars from the Telugu and Tamil film industries is set to make their debuts in Mumbai this year.

These are not ordinary debuts of newcomers. They are all established stars down South. Although most of them are known names even outside their domain, the Hindi film audience is yet to fully experience their acting prowess and glamour.

Here is a list of some of the southern biggies lined up to take a bow in Mumbai film industry this year:



Vijay Deverakonda
The Telugu superstar is already known to pan-Indian audiences as the titular hero of *Arjun Reddy*, which was remade as *Kabir Singh* in Hindi. Vijay is now ready for his debut Hindi project. The Puri Jagannath directorial co-stars Ananya Pandey, and is produced by Karan Johar.



Samantha Akkineni
She is one of the most sought-after female stars in south film industries. Her work down South includes films such as *Rangasthalam*, *Mahanati*, and *Theri*. This year, Samantha will be seen in her first Hindi project, *The Family Man 2*. The second season of *Raj and DK's* web series is being awaited by the audience with anticipation.

Vijay Sethupathi
The Tamil star is known for his acting chops, and he garnered acclaim beyond his home turf with the OTT-re-

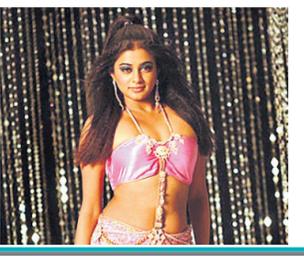


leased film *Super Deluxe* last year. He has started the year with bang, announcing his Hindi film debut. The actor will star in *Santosh Sivan's* *Mumbaikar*, a Hindi remake of the 2017 Tamil hit, *Maanagaram*.



Rashmika Mandana
This blue-eyed girl from the Telugu film industry is taking a big leap this year, as she enters Mumbai film industry with a bang. Rashmika, whose brand has always been that of the girl next door, enters the Hindi film industry as Sidharth Malhotra's co-star in *Mission Majnu*, a spy thriller.

Priyamani
All-India audiences have already seen her in the web space in the first season of *The Family Man*, as well as prop roles in *Raavan* (2010) and *Rakht Charitra 2* (2010), besides the hit dance number 1234 get on the dance floor in *Chennai Express* (2013). This year the talented actress makes her debut as a bona fide Hindi film heroine in *Amit Sharma's* *Maidan*, alongside *Ajay Devgn*.



Big B's Ladakh trip has fans concerned

Mumbai: Amitabh Bachchan left netizens curious and concerned after he spoke about visiting Ladakh in minus 33 degrees.

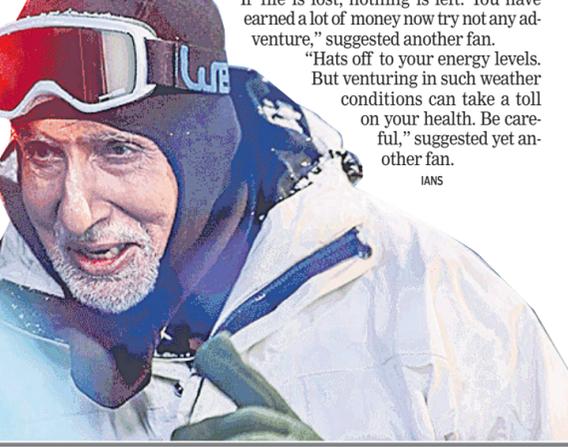
"Went to Ladakh and back... minus 33 degrees.. even this could not save me from the cold..!!!" Bachchan posted on Facebook.

Commenting on his post, fans expressed concern for the 79-year-old actor's health, worrying about him especially because he is a Covid-19 survivor.

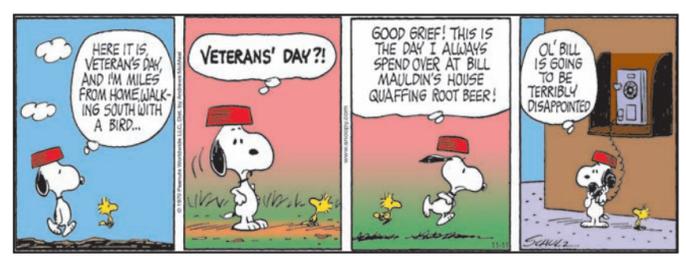
"Dear Amitji! You are working more than any other younger actor I am very happy you are in such demand. We love you a lot. Please take care of your health. We need you. With lots of love," commented a fan.

"I think you should not risk your life, however, important the assignment is! Chronologically, you are a Septagenarian. If life is lost, nothing is left. You have earned a lot of money now try not any adventure," suggested another fan.

"Hats off to your energy levels. But venturing in such weather conditions can take a toll on your health. Be careful," suggested yet another fan.



PEANUTS



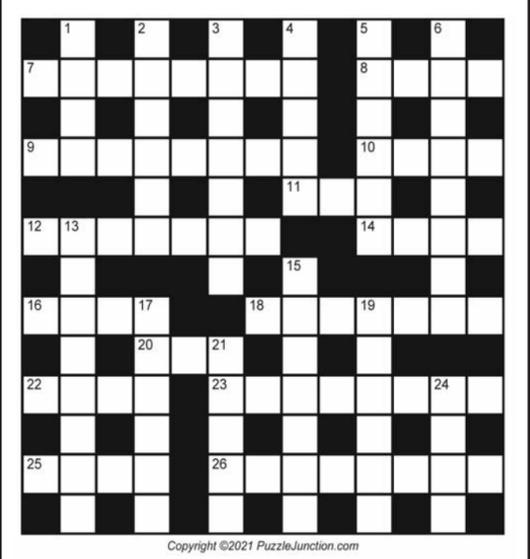
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Singing voice
 - 8 Camera setting
 - 9 Storms
 - 10 Resting places
 - 11 Greek vowel
 - 12 Dreamlike
 - 14 Peru's capital
 - 16 Celestial bear
 - 18 Olive family shrub
 - 20 Swedish shag rug
 - 22 With, in
 - 23 Tame, in a way
 - 25 Pleased
 - 26 Scatter
 - Down**
 - 1 Relative of a rabbit
 - 2 Smoked herring
 - 3 German city
 - 4 Honkers
 - 5 Beauty treatment
 - 6 Star's stand-in (5,3)
 - 13 Comes apart
 - 15 Crop picking time
 - 17 Gaming area
 - 19 Xylophone striker
 - 21 Litmus reddeners
 - 24 Insolence

SUDOKU

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

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

Q	U	A	A	E	A	I	F
I	N	T	E	R	I	M	A
X	I	T	P	C	A	E	
O	N	C	E	J	N	A	W
T	S	S			E	A	
I	G	N	I	T	E	A	M
C	E	A	A	A	A	T	
A	S	S	E	M	B	L	Y
M	T	L	B	H	R	R	
U	P	E	N	D	O	R	
S	H	E	R	I	T	M	
H	I	G	H	R	I	S	

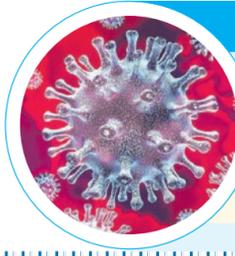
SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



NEW ASSIGNMENT
IAS officer Samarth Verma (L) takes charge as Puri district Collector from his predecessor Balwant Singh (2nd from left), Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	8,71,62,394	6,17,44,676	18,82,459
India	1,03,74,932	99,97,272	1,50,114
Odisha	3,30,921	3,27,008	1,887

Covid shots not mandatory for health workers: Govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: The state government Wednesday said that Covid-19 vaccine would not be mandatory for health workers in the state.

The Health department said that the health workers who do not want to take the vaccine can opt out. State Health department director Bijay Panigrahi Wednesday briefed the media about the latest developments.

"No specific dates have been conveyed to us but we have been asked by the Centre to stay prepared. We are working on the plan to ensure how the vaccine, after its arrival, is dispatched to all the districts in a streamlined manner," said Panigrahi.

He also said, "After the vaccine arrives, it will stay in the state vaccination centre and later it will be dispatched to other districts. The supply will be given to the state as per the beneficiary list. The health workers, on the other side, have the liberty to opt out of the vaccine intake."

INOCULATION DRIVE



No specific dates have been conveyed to the state government but it has been asked by the Centre to stay prepared

After the vaccine arrives, it will stay in the state vaccination centre and later it will be dispatched to other districts

Job manufacturers will directly send the vaccines to the state government

The supply will be given to the state as per the beneficiary list

The official said that the manufacturers will directly send the vaccines to the state government as per the list of beneficiaries sent by the government earlier. The Centre is now also in touch with the state government on the mass vaccination drive.

The department has asked all the District Collectors to identify

the sites for the vaccination by January 8 and by the end of January 10 the state is likely to be ready with its roadmap for the mass inoculation drive.

The state government on the other side has already prepared draft guidelines for scrutiny of the beneficiaries who would come to take the shots.

Use of mother tongue stressed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Institute of Odia Studies and Research Wednesday submitted a proposal and outline to Higher Education and School and Mass Education departments regarding implementation of National Education Policy, 2020 in the state.

Institute vice president Sipra Mallick submitted the proposal to principal secretary of Higher Education department Saswat Mishra and principal secretary of School and Mass Education department Satyabrata Sahu.

Mallick said, "We proposed that focus should be more on use of Odia language in the education system as teaching through mother tongue will be easy to learn and understand."

She said that focus on mother tongue will help in making the youth employed and self dependent. Unfortunately, the state students are not getting right kind of Odia education. "Therefore, before implementing the NEP we must review and rework on the existing policy," she added.

SUNSET & THE BEACH



A boat left idle on the beach as sun sets over Puri horizon, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

Cong seeks probe into electricity mgmt in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Congress leader Pradeep Majhi, Wednesday, slammed the state government for handing over electricity management of some discoms to a big corporate house in alleged violation of its own laws.

The leader has demanded a probe into the incident. Majhi raised several concerns over the whole tender process and allocation of the power to one single corporate house. The leader also wanted to know when the entire nation was following online tendering, why the Odisha government went for physical tendering during the pandemic. "I demand any inquiry into all

these misconducts. This is a clear case of corruption. The Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) flouted the state electricity guidelines in order to favour a private entity in connivance with government and minister," he said.

"There is a deliberate attempt by the OERC to help crony capitalists. The government is rolling out red carpets for monopolization of electricity ownership in the state. A corporate house has now been awarded rights by the government to manage the works earlier managed by different discoms in clear violation of laws," he said.

There is a deliberate attempt by the OERC to help crony capitalists. The govt is rolling out red carpets for monopolization of electricity ownership
PRADEEP MAJHI | CONGRESS LEADER

Fake tea unit busted in Cuttack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 6: Police Wednesday busted a fake tea manufacturing unit operating at Mukameswar village under Sadar Police limits here.

Acting swiftly on a lead from a similar case earlier, a police team conducted raids at Mukameswar village. They seized a huge quantity of powder, duplicate labels of many branded tea companies, tea-processing machines and raw materials. One person has been detained in this connection for questioning.



Earlier, the cops here also seized various duplicate eatables and other products including fake honey, Ganges water, sauces, spices, edible oil, turmeric powder and ghee. Several manufacturing units had also been busted in the city.

In December, a joint team of Commissionerate Police and food inspecting officials of Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) had recovered more than one quintal of synthetic paneer from a bus during a raid.

The officials of Chauhananj police station and CMC seized the spurious paneer while it was being transported from Kolkata to Cuttack in the private bus.

85% kids wish to come back to schools: OSCPCR

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR) Wednesday made some recommendations to School and Mass Education department regarding the measures to be taken before reopening of schools.

Three crucial precautionary measures children and parents suggested are: mandatory use of facemasks, hand wash and temperature check while entering the schools

OSCPCR chairperson Sandhyabati Pradhan said, "We have carried out a study on the impact of Covid-19 on children's learning covering all the 30 districts. The study revealed that about 85 per cent of children supported reopening of schools. However, the three most important precautionary measures chil-

Disinfection drive in full swing

Meanwhile, city-based government and private schools are reportedly taking all the safety measures for students. Sonamika Ray, headmistress of Capital High School, said "Sanitisation of classrooms and bathrooms is in full swing and we will make sure that all the students wear masks and have sanitisers with them. We will also comply with safety guidelines and make sure that no classroom has more than 20 students while maintaining social distance."

She added that class teachers have conducted virtual meetings with parents and are taking no-objection certificates (NOCs) from them. "No student shall enter the school premises without NOCs. Online learning will continue to



Classrooms of Capital High School in Bhubaneswar being sanitised thoroughly before the resumption of classes January 8

OP PHOTO

be the preferred mode of teaching." BJEM School Principal Sandhya Jena said, "We are cleaning the school precincts thor-

oughly. We're in talks with the parents and will seek consent of every parent before allowing their wards to the school."

dren and parents suggested are: mandatory use of facemasks, hand wash and temperature check while entering the schools."

Pradhan suggested that in addition to the general preparation for reopening of schools, it is necessary

to make sure that everyone understands how to stay safe and healthy at schools. Sick students, teachers and staffers should not come to schools.

This apart, the cleaning and sanitizing of school premises, con-

sultation with parents guardians and obtaining their consent, ensuring safety measures in schools, special drive for enrolment and retention are important steps that should be taken without fail, observed the panel.

Special schools to reopen Jan 8

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: The Social Security & Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) department has decided to reopen special schools, higher secondary schools and hostels functioning under its fold for Class X and XII students January 8.

The SSEPD department has written a letter in this regard to the district Collectors of Balasore, Cuttack, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Koraput, Keonjhar, Puri, Khandhamal, Sundargarh and Khurda, where such schools are running. The department has asked to reopen the

schools and hostels as per the date fixed by School and Mass Education department.

The Collectors have been asked to take steps for reopening of the special schools, higher secondary schools and hostels functioning in their districts subject to the instructions issued by S&ME department.

The district social security officers concerned have been instructed to regularly monitor the functioning of schools and hostels and submit monthly report on attendance of students and additional arrangement made, if any, for residential accommodation of the students keeping in view social distancing norms.

These winged beauties land on Mahanadi waters

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 6: Colourful Indian skimmers that are normally found in South Asia are now nesting at sandbars dotting Kakhadi and Mundali areas of River Mahanadi.

According to a recent survey report, the number of the beautiful birds is somewhere around 300 at Cuttack. "Their number will grow during the breeding period between February and May," according to Athagarh divisional forest officer (DFO) Sasmita Lenka.

Interacting with Orissa POST,

The number of Indian skimmers will rise during the breeding period between February and May

Lenka said, "These birds are categorised as vulnerable species by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and found in colonies associated with terns and cormorants. They breed once a year and it takes 21-30 days for an egg to hatch."

According to a research, these birds are social species and often seen resting in flocks on rivers, clean beaches, sandbars and islands. The skimmers often breed in summer when the water level of the river goes down.

Odisha is one among the 16 states of India where these birds are spotted. The Forest department will make special efforts to notify these areas of Mahanadi as protected area so that skimmers can nest and breed safely, said the DFO.

Forest staffers would be deployed in these protected areas to protect the eggs of these birds. Along with



these birds fresh turtles were also found in abundance at Kakhadi area. Apart from Forest depart-

ment, local fishermen are protecting these wild lives during their breeding season.

FIRE MISHAP IN CITY



Fire brigade officials assessing the damage caused by a fire at a fast-food stall near Gopabandhu Square in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

'Virtual Tour of Cosmos' to mark planetarium foundation day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Students, especially budding scientists, can experience a spectacular overview of the universe as the authorities of Pathani Samanta Planetarium here have decided to host a 10-day virtual discussion event on cosmos, "Virtual Tour of Cosmos" to mark the 31st foundation day of the institution, Friday.

According to Pathani Samanta Planetarium deputy director Subhendu Pattnaik, experts from different planetariums in the country will take part in the event scheduled to kick-start January 8 and conclude January 17.

"Students can connect and ask questions on topics like astronomy, astrophysics, solar system and



galaxy," Pattnaik said, adding that science enthusiasts can also watch planetarium shows on YouTube at 6pm everyday during the period.

Pattnaik said that Science and Technology department Principal Secretary Santosh Kumar Sarangi will inaugurate the foundation day event.

Experts from different planetariums in the country will take part in the event scheduled to start January 8

and a celebration of life on earth will be showcased," Pattnaik said.

He added that the event will showcase the birth of the universe, the formation of stars and galaxies, development of the solar system and the creation of earth as well as first life on it. Notably, the cosmos is the universe. Using the word cosmos rather than universe implies viewing the universe as a complex and orderly system or entity; the opposite of chaos.

BMC to launch student helpline

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: With the state government issuing instructions to re-open schools for class 10th and 12th students, Jan 8, the civic authority here issued guidelines for the reopening and stated that it will run a dedicated helpline number for seamless communication with students and school authorities.

In a meeting held between the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) and about 45 representatives from government and private schools, the BMC Commissioner said that a helpline number will be made operational for students and school authorities to clear any doubts regarding any queries about re-opening.

Issuing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), the BMC authorities mentioned that sanitisation will be given priority for the safety of students who will be at-



tending the classes. "Every school must determine how to run the school basing on the number of students, number and size of classrooms available. Maximum 20-25 students (depending on classroom size) should be allowed to sit in a class to ensure safe distancing among students," the SOP said. "The school should display state helpline numbers and also numbers of local health authorities to teachers/students/employees to

contact in case of any emergency. Other posters related to the preventive measures about COVID-19 must also be displayed," it added.

Furthermore, the SOP prohibited assemblies, sports and events that can lead to crowding are prohibited. Meanwhile, it also instructed that recess/break should be staggered for different classes to ensure there is no overcrowding at common spaces and toilets. Moreover, syllabus for all classes, as revised and communicated by the State government, will start from the beginning.

"School provided transportation should also be discouraged to reduce risk. It may run at maximum of 50% capacity with adequate sanitization before picking up and after dropping students. Moreover, no outside vendor should be allowed to sell any eatables inside the school premises or within 100 meters from the entry gate," the SOP said.

AT LORD'S ABODE



As Lingaraj Temple reopens for all with Covid restrictions, devotees stand in a queue for thermal screening before entering the 13th century shrine in Old Town area of Bhubaneswar, Wednesday. (Right) Devotees come out of the shrine after having a darshan of the deities

Covid warriors can't be removed now: HC

CUTTACK: In an interim order, the Orissa High Court Wednesday ruled that health workers engaged by the state government to manage the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be removed from the services till the next hearing scheduled for January 28. Justice Bishwanath Rath directed the state government to file a report on a case pertaining to termination of the services of health workers engaged to fight the pandemic. Surya Narayan Mishra and a few others had moved the HC saying that the Health department had decided to engage paramedical staff and staff nurses in various hospitals in the wake of pandemic. The department had issued a notification in this regard March 23, last year. On the basis of the notification, several health staffers were recruited in various hospitals. However, the department recently issued a notification announcing that it would not extend the services of the health workers after December 31, 2020.

As of now, no new bird flu case in state



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra Wednesday clarified that there have been no reports of any outbreak of bird flu anywhere in the state.

Reviewing the possible outbreak of bird flu in the state, at a high-level meeting here, Mahapatra said 11,000 samples collected from different areas have been tested but not a single sample has been tested positive so far.

The Centre has asked all the states and Union Territories to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality amongst birds and to report immediately to take necessary measures.

The direction was issued after the spread of Avian Influenza in four states which could possibly infect humans and livestock of the country.

The Chief Secretary said that strict vigil has been kept on the arrival and movement of the birds. This year more than 12 lakh birds of 184 species came to Chilika lake, over 98,000 birds of 10 species to Bhitarkanika and 1.60 lakh birds to Hirakud reservoir.

Mahapatra said there is no need to be panicked as all preventive measures are being taken and the field level officials are kept alert in areas visited by migrating birds.

The clinical, virological and serological survey have been increased right from the beginning for the identification and prevention of the disease.

The Chief Secretary directed the officials to remain alert to meet any eventuality and to conduct surveys on the water bodies like lakes and reservoirs visited by the migrating birds.

The meeting decided to constitute a rapid response team composed of experienced doctors to meet any exigencies.

The Chief Secretary directed to provide required protective equipment and kits to them.

OHRC seeks report on child beggars

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: The Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has sought a detail report from the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Bhubaneswar, with regard to child beggars in the Capital City.

While hearing a complaint filed by human rights activist and CITU leader Pradipta Nayak on child beggars, the OHRC has asked the DCP, Bhubaneswar, to submit his report by the next hearing of the case scheduled for March 22.

The rights body sought to know details regarding the number of child beggars in Bhubaneswar, their native places and the steps taken by the authorities concerned to deal with the social malady.

In his complaint, Nayak alleged that malnourished children are being engaged in begging in the Capital City by their parents and some middlemen. The middlemen are hiring the malnourished children by paying anywhere between



₹10 and ₹20 per hour to their parents, alleged the petitioner. Nayak further alleged that the middlemen are collecting huge amounts by engaging the children in begging for around

15 hours in a day. "The children are not being provided proper food and care. Every effort is being made to keep them under malnutrition. The middlemen think that malnourished children can fetch good amount through begging," the petitioner informed the OHRC.

Liquor consumption at ON shops allowed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: The state government Wednesday allowed consumption of liquor at ON shops. The state Excise department has issued an order in this regard.

"The government after careful consideration in exercise of powers conferred under Section-93 of the Odisha Excise Act-2008 allows consumption of liquor in the Restaurant 'ON'/Hotel 'ON'/Beer Parlour 'ON' and Club 'ON' outside the containment zone with immediate effect," read the order.

The opening hours of such shops will be as per their licence condition. The shop owners are asked to follow SOP issued to prevent spread of Covid-19.

The district Collectors are authorised to close the shops in case of violation of above provisions by the licensees, the order said.

The government, June 30 last year, had allowed counter sale of liquor at ON and OFF shops.

No age bar to visit Lingaraj Temple

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Following resentments from different factions of the society, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Wednesday, withdrew age restrictions on entry of devotees into the Lingaraj temple as the shrine reopened its door for everyone since Covid-19.

Earlier, the civic authority had barred the entry of devotees above 65 years and below 10 years. However, the decision had to be altered after some elderly devotees from outside the state expressed

their resentments over the age cap. Moreover, the COVID-19 testing has also been shifted from all to only symptomatic patients.

"Covid-19 negative report was made mandatory for all the devotees who wanted entry into the temple for the first three days. However, now only symptomatic cases would be tested. There will be thermal screening facility to detect the symptomatic cases," said BMC Commissioner, Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

According to reports, the authorities have also put up barricades outside the temple to ensure

smooth darshan and proper implementation of the Covid-19 guidelines. Moreover, temporary kiosks have been put up near the temple for testing Covid-19 free of cost. Visitors without test reports could avail the testing facility before entering the shrine.

Meanwhile, as per sources, about 872 devotees visited the temple, Wednesday. Out of these, about 426 visited the BMC camp for checkup. However, none were tested positive. It can be mentioned that a maximum of 500 devotees are allowed to enter the temple at any given time.

SC grants bail to Jena

The Economic Offences Wing of Odisha Crime Branch had in 2017 arrested Santosh Kumar Jena for allegedly cheating over 166 depositors after promising them to provide plots in Bhubaneswar

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Supreme Court has allowed bail to Santosh Kumar Jena, who was arrested by EOW of Odisha police for allegedly duping 166 people, after depositing property security worth of ₹4 crore and bond of ₹2 Lakh as surety.

A bench of the apex court headed by Justice NV Ramana has asked the trial court in Cuttack to examine the securities to be furnished by the petitioner (Jena) and on such verification, if the court is satisfied that the properties are free from any encumbrance and with a clear title, he be released on bail.

Significantly, Jena had filed a special leave petition in the apex court challenging the imposition of conditional deposit of ₹2 crore of cash security, property security of ₹2 crore and bond of ₹2 lakh with two sureties of like amount, before grant of bail to the petitioner. Jena expressed his willingness to submit properties worth of ₹4 crore.

"According to the petitioner, the bail condition imposed by the High Court is onerous and he is willing

to submit properties worth of ₹4 crore and ₹2 lakh without any encumbrance and with a clear title before the concerned Trial Court," the bench observed.

However, during the hearing, state counsel Shibashish Misra objected to the suggestion made by the petitioner citing that the petitioner is not having property worth of ₹4 crore.

Following the submission made by the state counsel, the apex court asked the trial court to examine the securities to be furnished by Jena and if the court is satisfied that the properties are free from any encumbrance and with a clear title, he be released on bail.

It is to be mentioned here that Jena was arrested in April 2017 by the Economic Offences Wing of Odisha Crime Branch (CB) for allegedly duping over hundred investors in providing land in Bhubaneswar.

He was arrested from Khandagiri area of Bhubaneswar. His company Ms Creative Assets Developers Pvt Ltd allegedly cheated over 166 depositors promising them to provide plots in the city.

'Stop' felling trees in Ekamra Kshetra

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Aggrieved citizens of Ekamra Kshetra have now written to the state government, urging officials not to fell aged-old trees in Ekamra Kshetra for development projects in the area.

The petitions have been filed before the Chief Secretary, Forest Department and others seeking their intervention. "For last two months, in the name of renovation and beautification of Lingaraj Temple and Ekamra Heritage Plan, Bhubaneswar Municipality and a private firm have started felling hundreds of aged-old trees of various species," the petition read.

The petition said that the area is rich in tree species of mango, neem, bela, krushnachuda, nageswarchampa, swarnachampa, banyan and tamarind.

"These plants are witness to the century-old Ekamra Heritage and they need to be preserved. As such, in the worst case scenario, the trees can be transplanted in a different location and hence we appeal you to stop further felling of trees and all the existing trees in the Ekamra Kshetra Project should be preserved in the better interest of environment and culture," the petition said.

Firearm seized from youth at BPIA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: A firearm was seized from a youth at Biju Patnaik International Airport here Wednesday evening. Following the seizure of the firearm, the Commissionerate Police detained the youth, Rama Chandra Jena of Krushnaprasad in Puri and interrogated him.

Jena was scheduled to travel in an Air Asia flight from Bhubaneswar to Chennai via Bangalore. During the luggage screening at BPIA, security officials detected a country-made firearm in a bag of Jena at 6.20pm.

Based on a report of the airline's security in-charge, a case was registered at the Airport police station. Investigation is on to find out the youth's criminal antecedent and from where he procured the firearm, police said.

TAKING STOCK



Cuttack MP Bhartuhari Mahtab takes stock of the items developed by the students of state-run ITI at Khapurja on the institute premises in the Silver City, Wednesday

Sahani becomes Sangeet Natak Akademi member

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Renowned Odissi dance maestro and senior Professor Chittaranjan Sahani has been selected as a member of Odisha Sangeeta Natak Akademi.

Sahani is a celebrated Odissi dancer who has performed in many dance programs in countries globally and his dance school in Cuttack named Nrutyasala has been teaching various students the art of Odissi dance and Abhinay. Interacting with Orissa POST, Sahani said, "Whatever I teach my students about the various hero and heroines of Odia poetry, I glorify them on stage through my dance. The various characters of my write-ups are like my soul."

ECoR launches automatic coach washing plant at Puri

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Jan 6: East Coast Railway commissioned an automatic coach washing plant at Puri Coaching Depot Wednesday. The depot senses the motion of an incoming train, helps to minimise time, water and manpower to complete the washing process of trains effectively.

The plant operates automatically upon sensing the movement of the train rake through the unit. A full rake will take maximum 5-7 minutes for complete washing. Washing takes place in many stages. In the first stage, pre-wetting is done by treated water followed by detergent spray and water brushing. It is then followed by disc brush cleaning followed by soft water cleaning. At the end, RO spray is done. The plant is equipped with a cap-



tive effluent treatment plant where the used water is treated and the final discharge from the ETP meets the environmental norms. The unit has a water treatment plant, ETP, Control Room for central monitoring. It

uses vertical and disc brushes, high pressure nozzle, and air blower. Due to the automation and efficiency of the plant, it is expected that this will lead to save revenue in external washing cost for the depot.

CLEANING PROCESS

In the first stage, pre-wetting is done by treated water followed by detergent spray and water brushing

It is then followed by disc brush cleaning followed by soft water cleaning. At the end, RO spray is done

The plant utilises less water compared to manual washing resulting into a savings of million liters of fresh water every year. It was commissioned in November, 2020. The Automatic Coach Washing Plant is an environment friendly and cost-effective option and a great step towards automation in train maintenance.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before Notary Public, BBSR, I have changed my name from Sheikh Jallaluddin to Sheikh Jalaluddin. Henceforth I shall be known as Sheikh Jalaluddin for all purposes.

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LOWER SUKTEL IRRIGATION PROJECT

Govt gets cracking to resolve R&R impasse

APPOINTS SPECIAL PROJECT DIRECTOR, SPECIAL LAND ACQUISITION OFFICER

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, Jan 6: The construction of the ambitious Lower Suktel project in Bolangir has been stalled for last two and a half years due to local opposition over bottlenecks in rehabilitation and resettlement issues. Now, the project work is likely to resume as the government has braced up again to restart the work, a report said.



The government has also issued a directive to the project authorities to outsource the services of RI, amins and other staff required for the project work

not made much progress due to protests. The inordinate delay in the project has escalated its cost. People in 15 villages on one side of the Suktel river were partially affected. It was said that the Land Acquisition Act 2013 will not be applicable to those villages while it will be applicable for 14 other vil-

lagers on the other side of the river. People had raised objections over dual policies in case of compensations for the project affected people. The people supporting the dam project have been demanding compensations as per the Land Acquisition Act-2013. Now the state government is thinking to pay compensations as ex-gratia to the people who are not eligible under the Land Acquisition Act 2013. Locals had long been demanding appointment of a special officer to sort out the R&R issues. A directive has been issued to outsource the services of RI, amins and other staff required for the project work, said project engineer Niranjana Rout.

Youth beaten to death on theft charge

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kabisuryanagar, Jan 6: A youth was allegedly beaten to death by villagers while another was rendered critical on charge of theft at Sunapali village under Kabisuryanagar police limits in Ganjam district late last night. The deceased was identified as Ganga Kandi, 36, of Ranipada village in Polasara block.

Ganga and his associate Lakshmi Moharana, 24, went to Sunapali around 11.30 pm with an intention of theft. Later, locals nabbed the two and thrashed them mercilessly. The duo was critically injured while Ganga was taken to Polasara Hospital where he succumbed to injuries during treatment. The deceased's wife has lodged a police complaint.

SAVING THE GIRL CHILD



A vehicle to raise awareness on 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' programme being launched in Buguda area of Ganjam

Short shrift to Gopalpur-Rayagada rly project

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 6: The railways ministry has given a short shrift to south Odisha as the ambitious Gopalpur-Rayagada railway project has been confined to survey only. Another project like a rail wagon factory at Sitalpalli has been shifted by the NDA government elsewhere, a report said.

According to the report, 12 years have passed since the survey for the Gopalpur-Rayagada railway project was conducted. The project has been stuck in a stalemate. Similarly, another project passenger halt station in Berhampur has been neglected. Various quarters alleged that MLAs and MPs in south Odisha have failed to pressurise the central government to work on these projects.

Notably, the UPA government initiated efforts for the railway project to connect Gopalpur to Rayagada when then Congress MP Chandra Shekhar Sahu was a minister. Sahu has pressurized the then railway minister to execute the project. Sahu laid the foundation stone for the survey work for the project. A private agency was awarded the survey work and even submitted its report to the railway ministry in time. Rs 4 crore was spent for the project.

In 2012, the Planning Commission had approved its cost estimate. The railway project was expected to pave the way for connectivity to various tribal-dominated pockets in the south, apart from pushing economic progress in the region. Significantly, apart from passenger service, it would provide



cargo transportation. Products of Nalco in Koraput district would easily be transported to Gopalpur port and from there the products would be exported to various countries. It will also help in commercial performance of the port. Various quarters and intelligentsia have always been laying stress on the execution of the project. As for the Sitalpalli rail wagon factory, over 100 acres were identified in the area. Later, a technical team of the railway ministry had taken stock of the status several

times in the past. But the water factory project was stalled later. A part of the land identified for the wagon factory has been used for Tata Hospital. People of the Silk City have staged agitations demanding execution of the passenger halt station. They have formed Passenger Halt Sangram Samiti for this purpose. Four years ago, when the Samiti members intensified their agitation for the project, some railway officials had taken stock of the situation. In 2016, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had taken up the issue with then Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu. But it is a matter of pity that the project has not been executed. The proposed railway station, once executed, will benefit people of 25 villages in the periphery.

Over 12 lakh migratory birds spotted in Chilika

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chilika, Jan 6: The annual bird census that began Sunday found arrival of over 12 lakh migratory birds in Chilika lake, the first Indian wetland of international importance under Ramsar Convention and UNESCO world heritage site.

ANNUAL BIRD CENSUS



This is the highest ever bird count in the water lagoon in last two decades. A report said the officials spotted 12,04,351 birds of 111 species this year during the annual bird count in Asia's largest brackish water lagoon, Tuesday. Last year, the number of birds was estimated at around 10.70 lakh. In 2019, around 10.47 lakh birds had been sighted at the lagoon. Of the total bird population counted in Chilika this year, as many as 38,475 birds flocked to the wetland from local areas, added reports.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Chilika Kedar Kumar Swain said, "As compared to the past year data, the bird population in Chilika has increased by 1.35 lakh. Similarly, Nalabana saw an increase of 18,000 migratory birds and two new species of migratory duck. Falcated teal and Mallard duck were spotted during the census in Mangalajodi sector." Notably, the annual bird census began January 3 with counting of avian species in Puri and Mayurbhanj districts. The census

DMF Sanjeevani for Keonjhar patients

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Jan 6: DMF Sanjeevani Yojana has been one of the major successful schemes in Keonjhar. The scheme has been most beneficial for the patients being shifted from Keonjhar district to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack for advanced treatment.

The patients no longer get exploited or duped by middlemen in Cuttack. With efforts from Collector Ashish Thakare, DMF Sanjeevani, an organization, has been formed. Rs 1.45 crore has been sanctioned for the purpose. Karuna Trust, a local organization, has been chosen to run the outfit. Two attendants are provided to look after each patient seeking treatment in SCB Medical College and Hospital.

Besides, an attendant accommodation centre has been set up at the SCB Medical College and Hospital for night halt of the attendants with provision of food. This service has been working since March, 2020. Till date, over 1100 patients have received medical benefits. A coordinator of the scheme plays as facilitator for patients at sub-divisional and the district headquarters hospitals. There is a provision of halt, washroom, CCTV cameras and lockers for patients and attendants in Cuttack.

Irregularities in mineral transportation detected

POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda, Jan 6: Amid allegations and detection of irregularities in mineral transportation in Joda mining circle of Keonjhar, Integrated Mines and Mineral Management System (i3MMS) that is meant to check such irregularities has hardly been followed by transporters in some cases, a report said.

BYPASSING THE i3MMS



According to the report, irregularities were committed at a private rail siding near Jaribahal. Reliable sources said iron ore is being transported from a mine under Koida mining circle to this private rail siding. The government has implemented i3MMS for mineral transportation. This system is aimed at preventing mineral thefts during the transit. Through an online mode, the mines department can keep a strict vigil on the quantities of minerals being loaded in trucks, keep a track of the vehicles' movement, their halts till they reach their destinations. Monday iron ore was transported from a mine in Koida area to a private rail siding, but the mineral was transported in a different route. The vehicles passed through a mining lease area.

As a rule of the mines department, before unloading minerals at the rail siding, transit records are checked at the entry gate. This is

how the mines department know how much minerals were carried by the vehicles and how much was unloaded at the destination. Monday, trucks carrying minerals were not checked at the gate. There were no records about how much mineral was transported and unloaded.

After the matter was intimated to Salil Kumar Behera, joint director of Joda mining circle, he got it probed by a mining officer and a senior mines inspector. Behera admitted that there was shortage of officials for i3MMS. Staff will be appointed soon, he added. In the past, irregularities in mineral transportation had been detected in Joda and Koida mining circle. Locals alleged that many unscrupulous mining officials might have been involved in the mineral irregularities. They demanded a high level probe into such irregularities.

STF team beaten, detained by locals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Phulbani: In an untoward incident Wednesday, locals allegedly thrashed and detained a seven-member team of the special task force (STF) of Crime Branch when they were conducting a raid at Kakendri village under Sadar police limits in Kandhamal district.

Acting on a tip-off on illegal peddling of cannabis, the STF team raided Kakendri village Wednesday morning and interrogated some villagers, an official informed. However, it triggered trouble. The STF personnel were not in their uniforms and the villagers could not identify them. The villagers grew suspicious and detained them. Some of the STF personnel were also manhandled. A member of the STF team somehow managed to escape from the spot. He then informed the local police station about their ordeal.

Immediately, Sadar police swung into action and rescued the sleuths. Later, the injured STF members were given medical treatment.

Civic body to turn garbage into organic fertiliser

POST NEWS NETWORK

Basudevpur, Jan 6: The authorities of Basudevpur municipality in Bhadrak district have initiated efforts to prepare organic fertilizers from garbage. The fertilizers will be of great help to farmers who are now turning their attention to organic crops. Many farmers are not interested to use chemical fertilizers in the land whereas organic fertilizers boost land fertility, giving a boost to production.

The civic body aims at getting rid of garbage-induced pollution and ensure clean environment. It has started construction of two garbage treatment plants - one in ward 5 and another in ward 22 - for preparation of organic fertilizers from city waste. The treatment plants will also reduce pollution from dumping of garbage in yards. Each treatment plant, estimated at a cost of Rs 38.61 lakh is expected to process over 3 tonnes of garbage every day while sanitation workers will collect garbage in battery-operated vehicles. Significantly, the demand for vegetables, rice, cereal and other crops being grown in organic way is going up as the crops are beneficial for health. Organic fertilizers prepared from the garbage treatment will cater to the needs of farmers keen to take organic farming. Krupasindhu Barik, a farmer of Bhairabpur, said after completion of the two projects, farmers will avail of organic fertilizers. Sanitation expert Biswarnajana Jena observed the civic body has been laying focus on producing organic fertilizers.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, DEOGARH (R&B) DIVISION, DEOGARH INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)

Table with 2 columns: Item No. and Description. Includes details for building and road works, bid cost, and opening dates.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER RURAL WORKS ELECTRICAL DIVISION, BHUBANESWAR

Table with 2 columns: Item No. and Description. Includes details for installation of a sub-station, estimated cost, and opening dates.

WORKS DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, ROURKELA (R&B) DIVISION, UDITNAGAR, ROURKELA. Government of Orissa "e" Procurement Notice. Bid Identification No. 42/2020-21 Dated: 05.01.2021.

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक Punjab National Bank. PNB CIRCLE OFFICE, CUTTACK. At-Plot No.: A/32, Khavela Nagar, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar-751001. PUBLIC NOTICE regarding branch mergers.

"e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE JAJPUR MUNICIPALITY, JAJPUR. Tender Call Notice No.41/ Date: 06.01.2021. Bid documents consisting of the schedule of quantities and the set of terms & conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in the Government Website i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in.

FOCUS CLIMATE CRISIS

CARBON PRICING NOW



Carbon pricing is by far the most efficient way to reduce emissions, because it persistently alters emitters' decision-making over time

US President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration comes just a month after the fifth anniversary of the Paris climate agreement, auguring long-overdue progress in the global fight against climate change. Despite recent political commitments by major emitters to achieve carbon neutrality by mid-century, the world still is not yet on track to prevent global warming from exceeding 2° Celsius – a target that must be reached to avert massive disruptions to human societies.

Fortunately, we can at least quantify the challenge at hand. According to the International Energy Agency, global energy-related carbon-dioxide emissions in 2019 totalled roughly 33 billion tonnes – a figure that ultimately must be reduced to net zero.

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) can remove carbon from the air, but it varies significantly in cost. Assuming this technology be deployed at scale at an average cost of \$100 per tonne, we can calculate that removing the CO2 emitted in 2019 would cost \$3.3 trillion. And considering, not unreasonably, that the cost of abatement (\$100 per tonne) coincides with the social cost incurred by global warming, we can then compare this figure to the wealth created by an economy like Germany where 2019 GDP amounted to \$3.861 trillion. That yields the formidable price that must be paid annually to prevent any further aggravation of climate change.

To economists, the obvious solution is to follow the "polluter pays" principle. Each country should tax or set a price of \$100 per tonne of CO2 emitted on its territory, the proceeds of which should go toward purchasing the carbon that has been removed by firms engaged in CCS. The problem with this option is that it lacks even the slightest chance of being adopted anytime soon. Many constituencies would object that this approach places a disproportionately large cost on the most economically vulnerable

people. But let us bear in mind that these people suffer the most from climate change. The more immediate task should be to mobilise funds needed to deploy CCS on a global scale. One of the Paris agreement's primary weaknesses, in addition to its "nationally determined contributions" being non-binding, is that it addresses the volume of emissions, giving hardly any role to the price of carbon. With a more explicit, universally applied carbon price, we could simultaneously discourage emissions, encourage innovation and investment in decarbonisation technologies such as CCS, and start using it to suck carbon out of the air.

Now consider the European Union, which has pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and a 55 per cent reduction by 2030. Many member states have already adopted legally binding targets (including Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, and Sweden). To move things along, the EU can use the emissions market that it created 15 years ago. This powerful device already covers 45 per cent of the bloc's emissions, but it could be improved.

Because Europe's carbon market initially targeted only the volume of carbon emissions – relying on a cap-and-trade structure – carbon price was very volatile. Hence, after the global financial crisis, it

lost more than 80 per cent of its value, and remained moribund for many years. Only recently did the European Commission realise that it needed to be focusing more on the price of carbon, which is now over \$30 (\$37) per tonne.

Carbon pricing is by far the most efficient way to reduce emissions, because it persistently alters emitters' decision-making over time. The higher the price of carbon, the stronger the incentive to shift to low- or zero-carbon energy, and to pursue long-term clean-energy projects. These projects' potential comparative advantages warrant more attention.

But a high carbon price cannot be imposed overnight. Rather, the price must be gradually increased over time, following a trajectory that is compatible with a given carbon-neutrality objective. The European Commission is right to take a rising price into account. But it could greatly enhance its strategy's efficacy by announcing a price target for carbon ahead of time. To promote this idea, I have created a Task Force on Carbon Pricing in Europe, which brings together not only economists and policy scholars but also business leaders who understand that they need clear market signal to make the right investments in due time.

Around the world, more and more governments – from Japan

and South Korea to New Zealand and the United Kingdom – have announced net-zero emissions targets. China's recent pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 is particularly important, given the size of its population and economy, which accounts for more aggregate (though not per capita) emissions than the US and Europe combined. Moreover, China has already created a market for carbon; but, as in Europe's case, this mechanism could be used more efficiently if there were a more explicit carbon price.

Because climate change is a global issue that requires cooperation among countries, the Task Force on Carbon Pricing in Europe has launched a joint initiative with the International Finance Forum, a Chinese think tank, to promote a convergent carbon price. The US, where the federal government's approach to climate policy will soon undergo a dramatic change, could play a major role in this respect. In addition to reaffirming America's commitment to the Paris agreement, Biden is filling key positions with seasoned climate policymakers such as former Secretary of State John Kerry and former US Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, who has led the Group of 30 Working Group on Climate Change and Finance.

Needless to say, a joint initiative on carbon pricing between the world's three leading emitters – Europe, the US, and China – could dramatically strengthen the global effort to combat climate change. We already know that carbon pricing is necessary for upholding all recent carbon-neutrality pledges. With a credible global framework to fill this gap in the Paris agreement, all of the pieces would finally be in place to address humanity's most daunting challenge.

The writer, an ex-Finance Minister of France, is Chairman of the Task Force on Carbon Pricing in Europe.

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Edmond Alphandery

A JOINT INITIATIVE ON CARBON PRICING BETWEEN THE WORLD'S THREE LEADING EMITTERS – EUROPE, THE US, AND CHINA – COULD DRAMATICALLY STRENGTHEN THE GLOBAL EFFORT TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE



The whole world yearns after freedom, yet each creature is in love with his chains; this is the first paradox and inextricable knot of our nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

Sex, Lies & Drugs

According to a research, people lie at least once a day, but even that number is probably a lie. However, humans are not the only species on earth that are capable of deception. You will find as much danger and intrigue in the animal kingdom as in a Tarantino film. Many primates, especially the common chimpanzee, display the ability to deceive in order to gain competitive advantage. Such acts range from the simple, as in a chimpanzee deliberately leading his troop away from a hidden food stash, to the relatively complex, like a subordinate chimpanzee exploiting the fear of darkness of a superior chimpanzee in order to stop his bullying behaviour. Their lying is not malicious or mischievous, it is only to improve their own chances of survival. Nor is it only their own kind that primates seek to fool. There is the infamous case of Koko the gorilla blaming a kitten for the mess he had made in his den. Sounds exactly like any teenager!

As with us, broken homes often cause problematic, even dishonest, behaviour among animals. Take the reaction of bird chicks. Studies found that infant chicks were more dishonest when there was family conflict. If the parents were likely to divorce or die, the chicks engaged in more exaggerated begging behaviour. This makes sense because the loss of one parent would mean that future babies would not be full siblings to the existing chicks. Exaggerated begging behaviour was common in species that lay a lot of eggs and mate with multiple partners, such as blackbirds. Dishonesty was rarest in long-lived, hardy species that mate for life, like the albatross. This shows that evolution has resulted in sibling dishonesty when it would help chicks compete with potentially unrelated siblings.

Some of the animals, expert at the game of deception, are Cowbirds, Blue Jays, Cuttlefish, and Eastern Grey Squirrels. Cowbirds trick other birds into incubating and nurturing their offspring by sneaking their eggs into the nest of their target birds. The Eastern Grey Squirrel pretends to bury nuts while still holding onto them, like in a magic trick, fooling potential robbers who are spying on him. The animal kingdom boasts of magicians as cunning as our own. The cuttlefish who, despite the name, is not a fish but a mollusc, is nature's own camouflage expert. Gifted with specialised skin cells that allow them to instantly change colour, look how creative these clever creatures are. Researchers noticed that the male sometimes displays a strange, split-down-the-middle colouration. On the side facing a female, he shows typically male pulsating stripes. On the side facing a male, he shows mottled camouflage—a typically female pattern. It was observed that this behaviour occurred only in groups where there were two males and one female. So the male cuttlefish reveals his identity to the female he is wooing and fools his rival male into thinking that it's just a couple of girls together. The fact, that males only display this behaviour in a very specific context, proves that they are able to correctly assess a situation and behave accordingly.

Nor is cheating uncommon among animals. Gouldian finches cheat on their mate, not just once or twice but multiple times. Research has shown that the females have the ability to differentiate between higher and lower quality sperms, and whether the new lovers' genes are compatible with theirs. This prompts them to engage in serial adultery in quest of better genetic prospects for their young. Since her partner would either leave her or, in rarer case, put in less effort in raising the offspring, this little lady hides her infidelity from him for fear of enduring the hardship of a 'single mother'.

In the animal world, as in ours, sex sells. Female penguins, whether they are single or attached, will barter sex for 'precious' stones. Stones, to the penguins, are truly valuable materials because that's what they need to keep their eggs afloat. The prostitution starts with the female penguin initiating courtship by joining a male at his site and 'head-bowing' to him, soon followed by copulation. She will then collect a stone from his nesting site and return to her own nest. In some exceptional cases, female penguins manage to cheat a male out of his stones without providing any sexual favours in return.

"Me Too"? They too. Sometimes sexual conflict occurs: for instance, males might become persistent and forceful in their mating behaviours with a lack of courtship rituals. The female evolves ways to handle this, evolving traits specifically to avoid male harassment and forced copulation. Male mosquito fish have a modified fin, called a gonopodium, that they use to inseminate females. Researchers found that as the males evolved larger gonopodia, the females evolved larger brains. Extra intelligence helps the females to find ways to avoid unwelcome male advances.

As for kinky sex, we are not a patch on animals. In fear of being eaten by a female during mating, the male Argonaut Octopus will often rip off his own penis and fling it at the female to 'do' herself. With lobsters the opposite is true. Here it is the female that feels vulnerable as, in order to mate, she must first shed her hard shell, rendering herself open to predation. So, first the female tests whether she can trust the male to protect her while she is exposed, moving in with him for extended foreplay lasting several days. Once sure of her man, the female disrobes, slowly shedding both her hard shell and the pouch where she had banked sperm from a prior mate. Her new shell has a new sperm pouch; she thrusts a packet of sperm into it using appendages called gonopods. The deed is done. As soon as one mate leaves, the male will welcome another. Rather than mating for life, a dominant male lobster mates with an entire harem.

Finally, humans aren't the only creatures on Earth to indulge in substance abuse. Dolphins have been seen passing a Pufferfish between them for upto 30 minutes at a time. These Pufferfish release a potent defensive chemical, when threatened, that has trance-inducing qualities. The dolphins carefully and deliberately handle him in such a way that's indicative of the fact that they know what they're doing, and it's not the first time they're doing it. African apes and humans share a genetic mutation that enables them to effectively metabolise ethanol. Chimps frequently drink fermented palm sap—an alcoholic, naturally-occurring sort of wine that humans are also partial to. The slow loris ingests fermented nectar from the Bertam palm, while green monkeys at St Kitts shamelessly target tourist cocktails.

To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org



Maneka Gandhi

You will find as much danger and intrigue in the animal kingdom as in a Tarantino film

SPECTRUM GLOBAL TRADE

WTO: The journey so far

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), the first multi-lateral global organisation with rule enforcement rights saw the light of the day on 1 January 1995.

The WTO succeeded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which had regulated world trade since 1948. Over the past 25 years, the WTO has made a major contribution towards strengthening and stabilising the global economy, helping to boost trade, resolve numerous disputes and bringing forth developing countries into the trading system. The main objective of WTO is to ensure that trade flows smoothly, predictably and freely. Former Director General of WTO Roberto Azevedo recently made a significant statement: "Global trading system continues to face significant challenges. There is an urgent need to ease trade tensions, resolve systemic issues and further modernise rulebook. By doing so, we can ensure that the WTO continues to provide stability and predictability for trading nations large and small, thereby supporting growth, development and job creation around the world."

At present, WTO has got 164 member countries that handle 98 per cent of world trade. Twenty-two countries are currently seeking accession as members. WTO is not just about opening markets, in some circumstances its rules support maintaining trade barriers –

for example, to protect consumers and the environment or to prevent the spread of disease.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a significant add-on to the WTO mechanism. GATS defines trade in services in terms of four types of transactions: Mode 1 – cross-border supply (a supplier in one WTO member provides services to a consumer in another member's territory); Mode 2 – consumption abroad (a consumer from one member consumes services in another member's territory); Mode 3 – commercial presence (a foreign company provides services through establishment in another member's territory); and Mode 4 – presence of natural persons (individuals move to supply services in another member's territory).

Importantly, world trade in services has been growing faster than trade in goods. Services trade grew 5.4 per cent annually on average from 2005 to 2017. Traditional statistics on trade in services do not cover all four modes of services supply, as defined by the GATS. However, a new WTO experimental dataset includes GATS mode 3 – commercial presence in another country – for the first time, thereby capturing the total value of services trade. Using these new estimates, trade in services was worth US\$ 13.3 trillion in 2017. Distribution and financial services have emerged as the most traded services glob-

ally with each accounting for almost one-fifth of trade in services, while trade in computer services and research and development have recorded the most rapid average annual growth of above 10 per cent from 2005 to 2017. Some services, such as education, health or environmental services account for a negligible share of trade at present but are rising rapidly. Commercial presence accounted for 58.9 per cent of services trade in 2017, followed by cross-border services transactions, at close to 30 per cent. Commercial presence represents an even more important share of trade in finance and distribution sectors. However, increased digitisation is reshaping business models, opening more possibilities for cross-border supply in these sectors too. Developing economies have increased their share in services trade, albeit unevenly; the share of least-developed countries remains small, but has increased significantly since 2005.

Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) are reciprocal preferential trade agreements between two or more trading partners, blocs. RTAs have risen in number and reach over the years. Non-discrimination and treating as Most Favoured Nation (MFN) among trading partners are the core principles of the WTO. But RTAs constitute one of the major exemptions. Trade is considered as engine of growth. Merchandise trade grew by 4.6 per

cent in 2017, 3 per cent in 2018 and decreased to 2.6 per cent in 2019. The WTO has projected 9.2 per cent fall in volume of world merchandise trade in 2020 due to the pandemic followed by a 7.2 per cent rise in 2021.

Digitisation can accelerate economic growth through innovation. A few countries have embarked upon a new type of trade agreement which aims to create a framework for digital economy. These agreements specify that they co-exist with the parties' rights and obligations contained in other international agreements such as the WTO agreements and RTAs. New trends are emerging. Australia and Singapore signed the Australia-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement in August, 2020. The World Trade Report 2020 mentions international cooperation can play a significant role in making the pursuit of digital development and technological innovation more effective. India stands for multilateral, rule-based system. During the 11th Ministerial Conference of WTO at Buenos Aires, India strongly expressed its stand on the fundamental principles of WTO which is a bedrock of rule-based multilateral trading system based on consensual decision-making buttressed by independent and credible dispute resolution process.

The writer is a former central banker.

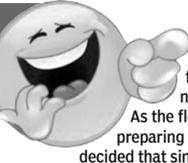
WISDOM CORNER

- To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment. RALPH WALDO EMERSON
- Every positive value has its price in negative terms... the genius of Einstein leads to Hiroshima. PABLO PICASSO
- If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. WILLIAM BLAKE

LOL

Birthday Gift

A fellow was very much in love with a beautiful girl. One day she told him that the next day was her birthday. He told her he would send her a bouquet of roses... one for each year of her life. That evening he called the local florist and ordered twenty-one roses with instructions that they be delivered



first thing the next morning. As the florist was preparing the order, he decided that since the young man was such a good customer, he would put an extra dozen roses in the bouquet. The fellow never did find out what made the young girl so angry with him.



Dasarathi Mishra

WORLD TRADE IN SERVICES HAS BEEN GROWING FASTER THAN TRADE IN GOODS

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

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Burying the hatchet

Sir, Covid vaccine manufacturers, Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech have done well to make peace after getting into a slugfest earlier. In an unexpected development, the two companies appeared to bury the hatchet as they jointly pledged for a smooth roll-out of vaccines in the country and the world. Karnal, Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata will receive the first lot of vaccines, and 6.3 lakh health workers will get the first jab in mid-January. **NJ Ravi Chandar, BANGALORE**

No repeat bail for repeat offenders

Sir, Bail is a matter of right in some crimes but not in some others. By definition, it is a temporary privilege and Section 436 of the CrPc defines bailable offences. The underlying principle behind granting of bails by courts is personal liberty and freedom. Jurists all over have said that keeping an accused in jail before the final verdict is neither preventive nor punitive. But what should be done if an accused, released on bail, misuses his liberty? In other words, can an accused consider bail as a licence to commit more crimes? Karnataka High Court has strongly spoken against the tendency of accused released on bail misusing their right. The right to claim bail becomes 'circumscribed' according to the High Court. The court has decreed the tendency of an accused to commit more bailable crimes after being released on bail. Can such a person go to the court again for another crime? He can, but can he repeatedly construe bail his 'right' for more than one offence? The High Court has univocally said 'no'. The court's opinion is significant because it is agreed that no individual should feel the system is unfair to him/her, but at the same time no person should be contemptuous towards the system. The detrimental effects on the society by accused claiming bail again and again is appalling. Liberty, freedom and equality are all envisaged under different articles of the Constitution. However, courts should sift the case to strike a balanced approach in cases pertaining to repeat offenders. **Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA**

Why vaccination?

Sir, There is no need of COVID-19 vaccine in India. This pandemic is in total control in the country except in Maharashtra and Kerala. Half the new cases (16,278) and half the active cases (2.28 lakh) are in these two states. The population of these two states is less than 12 per cent of India. All control measures including vaccination be implemented only in these two states and precaution in all other states. **Gopal Prasad Mittal, BHUBANESWAR**

Repeal farm laws to resolve crisis, Amarinder asks PM



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chandigarh, Jan 6: Stressing that there was nothing wrong with the demands of the farmers, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh Wednesday urged the Prime Minister to immediately repeal the farm laws in order to resolve the crisis.

Categorically rejecting as "highly irresponsible" reports in a section of the media that Punjab had already implemented the new farm laws, the Chief Minister said Food Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu's statement had been mischievously twisted by one newspaper, with others picking it up.

Punjab was the first state to have opposed the Central farm laws and, in fact, passed amendments Bills to negate their dangerous impact on agriculture, he pointed out, slamming the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for spreading misinformation on the issue with their fake propaganda machinery.

"The Governor, he said, 'should have forwarded our Bills to the President for assent, which he has not done'."

The Chief Minister made it clear that Punjab would not allow the lives of its farmers to be ruined by the new laws.

"We will do whatever possible to help the farmers and their families, for whom the state government had already started two helplines on which they could reach out in case of any emergency," he said. Urging the Prime Minister to withdraw the controversial laws and talk to the farmers, Amarinder Singh said, "The farmers have made their stand very clear that the laws should be repealed. It is the job of the government of India to listen to them."

The Centre can bring in new laws after due consultation with the farmers, he said, pointing out that the Constitution has been amended many times and can be done again for the revocation of

The farmers have made their stand very clear that the laws should be repealed. It is the job of the government of India to listen to them

AMARINDER SINGH | CM

the recently enacted farm legislations. Noting that farmers from across the country had joined the protests against the farm laws, Amarinder Singh said after six-seven meetings, it was time that the matter is resolved and the farmers, who are sitting out in the cold and rains, can go back and everyone else can get on with their lives.

The Chief Minister lambasted those calling the protesting farmers Naxals and terrorists, terming it as wrong and irresponsible.

Alleging that the Congress government in Punjab has implemented the contentious farm laws in the state, the Aam Aadmi Party Wednesday demanded resignation of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh for "overt and open betrayal of the farmers".

Citing news reports about Punjab's Minister of Food and Civil Supplies Bharat Bhushan Ashu's comment that the Congress government has allowed farmers from elsewhere to sell their produce in the state, AAP's Punjab co-incharge Raghav Chadha accused Singh of "lying to everyone".

"It is indeed sad to note that this year has begun on such a grim note with the biggest fraud and betrayal committed by the Congress and Amarinder Singh who have implemented the black farm laws in Punjab. The Aam Aadmi Party demands his resignation," Chadha said.

"With the backdoor implementation of the three black farm laws, Amarinder Singh has lied to everyone, he has betrayed not only the farmers of Punjab, but the fields of Punjab, the land of Punjab and the 'annadaatas' (food providers) of Punjab," he said.

Haryana women training for R-day 'tractor parade'

The farmers protesting against the legislations had announced January 2 that if their demands remained unmet they would take out a 'tractor parade' towards Delhi January 26, when the country would be celebrating its Republic Day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 6: Several rural women in Haryana's Jind district are receiving training to drive tractors for taking part in a 'tractor parade' in the national capital on January 26 against the three new farm laws.

The farmers protesting against the legislations had announced January 2 that if their demands remained unmet they would take out a 'tractor parade' towards Delhi January 26, when the country would be celebrating its Republic Day.

Women hailing from three villages - Safa Khari, Khatkar, Pallwan - in Jind are learning to steer the tractor wheel.

"Around 200 women are being imparted training to drive tractors," Sikim Nain Sheokant, the president of Jind-based Kisan Ekta Mahila Manch said over the phone.



She said though some of the women can drive tractors in the fields for farm operations, they do

not have experience of road driving. "We want women to drive tractors on highway January 26 without

any help," she said. Sheokant said several villagers were also helping them out by of-

fering their tractors and providing them required training.

Women are undergoing training at a toll plaza on Jind-Patiala National Highway for handling tractor-trolleys on road. The protesting farmers have declared toll plazas "free".

"We are getting the training for driving a tractor for participating in the tractor parade," said a woman who has been receiving the lesson.

They are also trying to provide training in villages, said Sheokant.

She feels the new farm laws are not in the interest of the farming community. Thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana and other parts of the country have been camping at three Delhi border points - Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur for more than a month, mainly demanding a repeal of the three farm laws and a legal guarantee for minimum support price for their crops.

SGPC not to extend invite to Modi for 'anti-farmer' stand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 6: Owing to his 'anti-farmer' stand by bringing three farm laws that the farmers have been demanding to revoke, the highest religious body of the Sikh community, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has decided that Prime Minister Narendra Modi won't be extended the special invite for the Sikh centenary events.

Normally, the SGPC extends special invites to the Prime Minister and the President on historical occasions.

"We have decided not to extend any special invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the upcoming centenary events, including the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur," SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur said.

The reason, she cited, was the Prime Minister's reluctance to revoke the three laws that the farmers fear will affect their livelihoods.

At the same time, the SGPC chief said, "Anyone can come to attend any religious function of the Sikhs."

Earlier, Modi was the chief guest at the event to mark the 500th birth anniversary of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak in November 2019.

Now, the SGPC is going to start year-long celebrations for the 400th birth anniversary of the ninth Sikh master, Guru Teg Bahadur, from April.

Bibi Jagir Kaur also demanded the reopening of the Kartarpur corridor that links Dera Baba Nanak town in Gurdaspur district with Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Shakargarh tehsil in Narowal district of Pakistan.

"Keeping in mind the sentiments of the sangat (community), the government of India should re-



open the corridor that was temporarily shut due to the coronavirus pandemic," she added.

In the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, travel for Kartarpur Sahib was suspended March 16, 2020, by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Modi November 9, 2019, had opened the Kartarpur corridor by flagging off the first lot of pilgrims to visit the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara, believed to have been built on the site where Guru Nanak died in the 16th century, located some 4 km inside Pakistan.

The SGPC chief had Tuesday said it will install solar systems at

historic gurdwaras to reduce the cost of electricity and a plan would be drawn for the preparation of 'langar' by steam.

During a meeting of the interim committee held in Amritsar

Tuesday, SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur said solar systems would be installed at gurdwaras and a committee of office-bearers, officials and technical experts would be constituted for its implementation, according to an official release here.

Also, a plan is being chalked out for adopting steam method for 'langar' (food prepared at community kitchen) at gurdwaras, as also for making cardboard and paper from the leftovers.

We have decided not to extend any special invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the upcoming centenary events, including the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur

BIBI JAGIR KAUR | SGPC CHIEF

Punjab issues advisory for surveillance of wetlands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 6: (PTI) Amid a bird flu scare, authorities in Punjab have alerted officials to keep tabs on any unusual deaths of migratory and poultry birds in the state, officials said Wednesday.

They said no case of bird flu has been reported so far in Punjab. Punjab Animal Husbandry Director Harbinder Singh Kahlon said an advisory has been issued for "surveillance of commercial poultry farms and backyard poultry farms to find any unusual mortality in birds".

The advisory has been sent to all 22 deputy directors of the department to ensure regular visit of field staff to commercial and backyard poultry farms in the state, he added.

In case any "unusual mortality" in poultry birds is found, samples will be sent to the Northern Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (RDDL), Jalandhar, to ascertain the cause, the officials said.

Similarly, the Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation has also issued an advisory for maintaining extra vigil around lakes and wetlands in the state, they said.

A large number of migratory

birds such as gulls, reeve etc arrive at Harike Pattan in Tarn Taran every year. Other wetlands in the state are in Gurdaspur, Rupnagar and Nangal.

Protocols have also been issued for collection of samples in case any migratory bird is found dead, the officials further said, adding that all possible precautions were being taken.

Notably, samples of dead migratory birds at Pong Dam Lake sanctuary in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh have tested positive for the H5N8 strain of bird flu.

Four lakh poultry birds have died at 20 farms in Haryana's Panchkula district in the past several days.

A team of experts from the RDDL collected samples from the farms Tuesday.

Panchkula's Barwala-Raipur Rani area is one of the largest poultry belts in the country with nearly 70-80 lakh birds in more than 100 farms.

According to the officials, the mortality rate in poultry birds was unusually high this winter.

However, there was no confirmed report of avian influenza as of now. Poultry farmers in Panchkula have attributed the high mortality rate in birds to extreme cold weather conditions or the disease Ranikhet.



Punjab to reopen schools from Jan 7

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 6: The Punjab government Wednesday decided to reopen all schools from January 7 for students of classes 5 to 12.

State Education minister Vijay Inder Singla said following the persistent demand of parents, the state government has decided to reopen all government, semi-government and private schools from January 7 onwards. In a statement here, Singla said the timings of the schools will be from 10 am to 3 pm. The students only of classes 5 to 12 will be allowed to physically attend their classes, said the minister. Singla said while giving his nod, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh directed the department to ensure the safety of the children, amid COVID-19 pandemic.

The minister said following the CM's directions, all school managements have been asked to strictly comply with all anti-Covid precautions in schools. The Cabinet minister also said that the Education Department had taken feedback from school heads. Besides ensuring safety of the children, they also suggested the reopening of schools before the annual exams for final revision of the course, he said.

Women cultivate a new voice in farm protests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kundli (Haryana), Jan 6: India's rural landscape is notoriously male-dominated, but thousands of women have become a pillar of the farmer protests blocking roads into New Delhi that have become a huge challenge to the government.

Women of all occupations and ages - from those who tend cattle or toil in the fields, to city professionals and grandmothers in wheelchairs - are braving the freezing winter temperatures in a bid to make the government withdraw market reforms. "I am fighting for my children and my grandchildren," said Parminder Kaur, 40, who chants slogans at rallies during the day, then in the evening helps make chapati flatbread and curry to feed the tens of thousands of protesters.

Women have traditionally been the silent backbone of Indian agriculture - working the land without the influence that goes with it. Repeat studies have shown how they suffer from poverty, discrimination and domestic violence.

About 85 per cent of women in rural areas have some kind of agricultural activity, yet only 13 per cent own land, according to anti-poverty activist group Oxfam.



Although India's rural communities are traditionally male-dominated, women have played an active role in the recent farmer protests.

But Kaur was visibly proud at the way women were "walking shoulder-to-shoulder" with men to defend rural welfare.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been forced onto the back foot over three laws which allow farmers to sell their produce on the free market, after decades of channelling their wheat and rice through state-run markets with a guaranteed minimum price.

Modi insists the reforms will attract badly needed investment to a sector which employs about two-thirds of India's 1.3 billion population, but only contributes about 15 per cent to its economy.

However, farmer leaders say the changes will lead to a takeover of the agriculture business by Indian conglomerates.

Kaur's family has two acres (about 8,000 square metres) of land where

they grow wheat.

"This land is everything for us, it is like our mother," she said.

"They want to snatch our mother away from us, how can we allow this?"

'Tension & violence' fears

Ranjana Kumari, who heads the Centre for Social Research, a Delhi-based non-profit group, said that while women do not own the land, they fear a cut in revenue will badly

hit their households. "When the family income falls, it affects women's health and well-being the most. Less income also means more tension and violence at the hands of men. That is why they are angry and vocal about these laws."

The women's active participation in the protests has been appreciated by the leaders.

Rana Bhatti, who is from a farming family in Haryana, said the protests were a way for women to show their strength.

"I feel the time has come for us to take to the frontlines and steer the challenge against this arrogant government," said Bhatti as she led a group of women holding flags and placards. One read: "No farmers, no food, no future."

Kumari said that women are more politically aware than ever before, a trend that Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has seized upon and credited with helping it to two landslide election wins.

This land is everything for us, it is like our mother. They want to snatch our mother away from us, how can we allow this?

PARMINDER KAUR

"Looking at the way the women are joining these protests, it makes a statement about their aspirations and the need to be heard. They are saying we won't take things lying down."

The farmers' cause has drawn an urban contingent of female supporters too. Dressed casually in jeans and a shawl, Jassi Sangha, 33, is an artist and filmmaker who has been at the protest since it started.

She helps bring out a bi-weekly newspaper for the farmers and organises education for children in the camp. Sangha said she was drawn by the protest as soon as she heard about it. "I left my work and came, we have to fight or we are done." The farmers' rudimentary camps have been blocking key highways since November 26, and the government has appealed to the protesters to send women, children and the elderly back home, as India endures one of the coldest winters in three decades.

But Kaur, who has two children, said she is staying "for the long haul". "At least we can proudly tell future generations that we raised our voice."



Brainstorming is on for how early schools can be reopened in Delhi, especially for board classes as the dates for exams have already been announced
MANISH SISODIA | DELHI DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

FRESH AVALANCHE WARNING ISSUED IN J&K
Jammu and Kashmir Disaster Management Authority (DMA) Wednesday issued high, medium and low level avalanche warning for the higher reaches of the avalanche prone areas of J&K



of the day quote

There are always different points of view to look at things. No good work is easy and difficulties always come. Problems arise in everything, but it all depends on how we see things and how we deal with them. It is all about the point of view.
PIYUSH GOYAL | UNION MINISTER

The way Sonia Gandhi adopted Indian womanhood is an example. When the government was formed, she worked for providing so many rights to people from right to work to right to information. The way she has adhered to culture, family values and social obligations, it enhanced the honour of Indian womanhood.
HARISH RAWAT | FORMER UTTARAKHAND CHIEF MINISTER

Lakhs of farmers committed suicide between 2004 and 2014 because no one was there to take care of them. But after our government came into power, farmers are using new farm technologies and are on the path to success.
YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

India, France to hold dialogue Jan 7

New Delhi: India and France will hold their annual strategic dialogue on Thursday and the two sides will hold discussions on wide-ranging bilateral and global issues, a Ministry of External Affairs statement said. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval will lead the Indian delegation at the talks, while the French delegation will be led by Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to the French President.

'Proof' against Arnab Goswami

Mumbai: The Mumbai Police Wednesday told the Bombay High Court that "some evidence" was found against Republic TV and its editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami in the Television Rating Points (TRP) scam case, and therefore, it did not want to continue granting them any protection from any coercive action. However, as the high court adjourned the matter without hearing any arguments during the day, the police agreed to continue its previous assurance of not taking any coercive action till January 15, the next date of hearing in the case.

Sikkim HC gets new CJ

Gangtok: Justice Jitendra Kumar Maheshwari was Wednesday sworn in as the new Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court. Governor Ganga Prasad administered the oath of office to Justice Maheshwari during a function held in Raj Bhavan.

Mamata meets Dhankhar

Kolkata: Amid the rancour between the state government and Raj Bhavan, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called on Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, a development sources in the secretariat called a "courtesy visit". Banerjee went to the Raj Bhavan straightaway from the state secretariat Nabanna. The meeting between the two was seen in the political circles as the usual practice. "It's only a courtesy visit. There is nothing official in it. The honourable CM wanted to exchange New Year greetings with the Governor," a highly-placed official in the state secretariat told PTI.

Centre issues advisory to contain spread

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Centre Wednesday deployed multi-disciplinary teams in bird flu-affected areas of Kerala and Haryana, while Madhya Pradesh, where crows have died due to the influenza, banned the entry of chicken consignments from southern states for 10 days as a precautionary measure.

Thousands of chickens and ducks were culled in two districts of Kerala to contain the spread of the H5N8 avian influenza strain and Rajasthan reported that bird flu was detected in Swai Madhopur, after Jhalawar, Kota, Baran and Jaipur districts. Punjab was the latest after Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to put its officials on alert and Himachal Pradesh started random sampling of poultry around a wetland, where 3,000 migratory birds have died since December 28.

Bird flu outbreak has been reported at 12 epicentres in Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, and advisories have been issued to contain further spread of the infection in poultry ducks, crows and migratory birds, the Union fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying ministry said. The current bird flu outbreak is reported barely a few months after India in September 30, 2020, declared the country free from the disease. India notified the first outbreak of avian influenza in 2006. The



BIRD FLU OUTBREAK

ministry said it has set up a "control room" in Delhi to keep a watch on the situation and control measures are being taken as per the guidelines of a national action plan for avian influenza.

The Union health ministry said that the teams have been deployed in Haryana's Panchkula district and in Alappuzha and Kottayam districts of Kerala.

Reports of avian influenza has been received from poultry samples from Panchkula district, the ministry said in a statement, a day after samples were collected from farms by the Jalandhar-based Regional Disease Diagnosis Laboratory (RDDL) in the wake of

over four lakh poultry birds dying in the past 10 days. Two multi-disciplinary teams comprising experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), National Institute of Virology, PGIMER Chandigarh, RML Hospital and Lady Hardinge Medical College in New Delhi, have been deployed to the affected districts on January 4 to assist the health departments of the states in implementing the health ministry's avian influenza containment plan.

Over 69,000 birds, including ducks and chickens, have been culled in the two Kerala districts to contain the H5N8 strain of bird flu, state animal husbandry minister K Raju said, adding that 19 teams were en-

gaged in the exercise.

There is no history of the H5N8 virus being transmitted to humans, he said, but cautioned that the virus may mutate. "So we have to remain alert," the minister said.

In Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state will not allow entry to chicken consignments from Kerala and other southern states for the next 10 days. "Bird flu symptoms were found in chickens in Kerala and other southern states. Therefore, we have decided that no chicken from these states will be allowed to enter Madhya Pradesh for the next 10 days," Chouhan said, without specifying any other state.

Chicken trade with a "few southern states will remain banned for a limited period" as a precautionary measure, a public relations department official said. Officials in Himachal Pradesh have collected 120 samples of live poultry birds from around the Pong wetland in Kangra district for tests.

The poultry samples, collected randomly, were sent following the death of over 3,000 migratory water birds in and around the wetland after December 28, they added.

The Karnataka government has asked all districts to be on 'high alert' and take preventive measures in the wake of bird flu (H5N8) outbreak in neighbouring Kerala, Animal Husbandry Minister Prabhu Chauhan said Wednesday.

Second nationwide vaccine dry run Jan 8

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: Ahead of the roll-out of coronavirus vaccine in few days, another dry-run will be conducted across the country January 8.

On January 2, almost all states and Union Territory conducted dry run at 285 session sites spread across 125 districts to assess ability and readiness of authorities to administer shots to hundreds of millions of people, including many in remote corners of the country. It was conducted to test the end-to-end planned operations and the mechanism that has been set up to ensure smooth conduct of the Covid-19 vaccination.

On December 28 and 29, the first dry run was conducted in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, Rajkot and Gandhinagar district of Gujarat, Ludhiana and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar of Punjab and Sonitpur and Nalbari districts of Assam. The Central government plans to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people in the first phase of drive. It will be offered to one crore health-care workers, along with 2 crore frontline and essential workers and 27 crore elderly, mostly above the age of 50 years with co-morbidities. The Health Ministry Tuesday announced that vaccina-



tion drive will be rolled-out by January 13.

The Centre will send a high-level team to support public health interventions for COVID-19 management in Kerala as the state has been reporting a "very high" number of daily coronavirus cases, the health ministry said on Wednesday. The team headed by the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Dr S K Singh, will reach Kerala on Friday.

The number of people who have tested positive for the new UK variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the country has climbed to 71, the Union Health Ministry said Wednesday. These 71 cases include the 58 which were announced by the ministry till Tuesday.

Beware of fake 'CoWIN' apps, warns Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Union Health Ministry Wednesday cautioned people against downloading and sharing personal information on some apps named CoWIN, "created by unscrupulous elements", that sound similar to the upcoming official platform of the government for carrying out the COVID-19 vaccination process.

"Some apps named 'CoWIN' apparently created by unscrupulous elements to sound similar to upcoming official platform of Government, are on Appstores. DO NOT download or share personal information on these. MoHFW Official platform will be adequately publicised on its launch," the Union Health ministry tweeted.

The CoWIN (COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network) app, a digital platform created for real-time monitoring of COVID-19 vaccine delivery and distribution by the Centre, is almost in its final stages of implementation and hasn't gone

live on Google play store or any other app store.

Meanwhile, states and UTs have collected data of healthcare and frontline workers who would be administered the anti-coronavirus vaccine on first priority and the data is being uploaded on the CoWIN software, the ministry said.

The health ministry had earlier at a press conference stated that "CoWIN digital platform includes a free downloadable mobile application which can help record vaccine data. One can register themselves on it if they want the vaccine.

"There will be five modules in CoWIN app - Administrator module, registration module, vaccination module, beneficiary acknowledgement module and report module."

The administrator module is for the administrators who will be conducting these vaccination sessions, it said. Through this module, they can create sessions and the respective vaccinators and managers will be notified.

HIDDEN TALENT



A farmer shows his skills during a protest against the new farm laws, at Ghazipur border in New Delhi. PTI PHOTO

Around 500 poultry birds found dead in HP amid bird flu scare

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shimla, Jan 6: Amid a bird flu scare, around 500 dead poultry birds were found dumped by the side of a national highway in Himachal Pradesh's Solan district Wednesday, state animal husbandry department officials said.

Samples have been taken for testing for avian influenza and the carcasses have been buried as per bird flu protocol, they said. It is not known who dumped the carcasses near Chakki Mor, the officials said.

Earlier in the day, officials had said that 120 samples of live poultry birds from around the Pong wetland in Kangra district were sent for testing.

The poultry samples were sent following the death of over 3,000 migratory water birds in and around the wetland after December 28 apparently due to an outbreak of avian influenza among the birds, the officials said.

So far, no unusual death among the poultry has occurred here but if the samples test positive, all poultry birds in backyard farms within one kilometre of the lake's periphery will have to be culled and commercial farms in the area would be disinfected, they added. Kangra Additional District Magistrate Rohit Rathour, meanwhile, on Wednesday directed officials to identify at least one site in each subdivision of the district for the safe burial of dead birds.



Himachal to have first mountain health institute

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Shimla, Jan 6: The Himachal Pradesh government Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding with Six Sigma Healthcare to set up Asia's first mountain health institute in Sirmour district with an outlay of Rs 100 crore.

Six Sigma Healthcare is providing free high altitude medical services pilgrimage destinations - Amarnath, Kailash Mansarovar, Kedarnath and Manimahesh.

At a meeting with Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, the



proposal for setting up the institute was given by its Chief

Executive Officer, Pradeep Bhardwaj.

The Chief Minister accepted the proposal and said the government would provide support in the purchase of the land for the institute in Shimla and Sirmour districts.

Bhardwaj said the institute would provide jobs to 727 youths. He said that the objective of the institute is to develop all types of research in allopathy, homeopathy, ayurveda, naturopathy and yoga concerning high-altitude and to educate professionals in mountain medicines.

460 Naxals killed since 2018: RTI data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: A total of 460 Left Wing Extremists, also called Naxals, have been killed by security forces in the country since 2018, an RTI response has revealed.

During the same period, 161 security force personnel laid down their lives in the line of duty, the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Division, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, stated in the reply.

Noida-based lawyer and RTI activist Ranjan Tomar had sought the data on deaths of security personnel and killing of LWEs from the MHA between 2018 and 2020. The official response, however, had fig-

ures updated till November 2020.

In its reply, the division stated that 460 Left Wing Extremists have been killed and 161 security force personnel died in LWE violence from 2018 to November 2020. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in September 2020 said the LWE or Naxal violence had reduced considerably in the country with the menace being prevalent in just 46 districts.

Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy had said that 90 districts in 11 states in the country were considered left-wing extremism (LWE) affected and covered under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme of the MHA.

India suffered longest internet shutdowns in 2020 globally

AS IN PREVIOUS YEARS, INDIA CONTINUED TO RESTRICT INTERNET ACCESS MORE THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY -- OVER 75 TIMES IN 2020

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 6: India suffered the longest internet shutdowns in 2020 for the second year running globally, bearing the biggest economic impact of \$2.8 billion and 8,927 hours lost, affecting 10.3 million users in total, a new report from the UK-based privacy and security research firm Top10VPN has revealed.

As in previous years, India continued to restrict internet access more than any other country - over 75 times in 2020. "The majority of these short blackouts were highly

targeted, affecting groups of villages or individual city districts and so were not included in this report, which focuses on larger region-wide shutdowns.

The true economic cost is therefore likely to be even higher than the \$2.8 billion we have calculated," the researchers informed.

In Kashmir, authorities lifted restrictions in March 2020 after imposing in August 2019.

"However, after the restrictions were lifted authorities continued to severely throttle internet speeds, with citizens only able to access 2G connections," it mentioned.



In India, internet blackouts lasted for 1,655 hours while bandwidth throttling resulted in 7,272 hours lost.

"India and Myanmar were responsible for the longest shutdowns for the second year running, with restrictions originally imposed in

2019 continuing throughout 2020," the report mentioned. Chad again restricted access to WhatsApp after they blocked the app for more than a year in 2018/19.

"Combined, these countries experienced a total 64 per cent increase in the number of hours of restrictions in 2020, despite the global public health emergency".

Globally, the internet shutdowns cost the world economy, already devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic, a further \$4 billion. This, however, represents a 50 per cent decrease in impact compared

to \$8.05 billion in 2019. Nearly 268 million people were affected by major disruptions in 2020 globally, up three per cent year-on-year. According to the report, 93 major shutdowns took place in 21 countries in 2020 and the total duration of major disruptions around the world was 27,165 hours, up 49 per cent from the previous year.

Globally, internet blackouts resulted in 10,693 hours lost and internet throttling in 10,920 hours lost. Social media shutdowns resulted in 5,552 hours lost, the report said.



No citizen of this country can be branded as an outsider in any part of India JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR

DELHI'S AIR QUALITY TURNS POOR

Delhi's air quality turned "poor" Wednesday due to unfavourable meteorological conditions, weather department officials said



of the day quote

DMK president M K Stalin is conducting Makkal Gram Sabha (people's gram sabha) only to blame the government and to mislead the people K PALANISWAMI | TAMIL NADU CM

Challenges keep coming up in life, but even in adverse circumstances if we don't give up and fight resolutely then that is our real victory NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

Yes, ours is a Bible party, Bhagavad Gita party and Quran party. YSRCP is an amalgamation of these three. It is a party of all religions AMBATI RAMBABU | SENIOR YUVAJANA SRAMIKA RYTHU CONGRESS PARTY LEADER

'400 TERRORISTS ACROSS LOC WAITING TO INFILTRATE'



130 al-Qaeda militants from India, B'desh trained in Pak

Around 130 al-Qaeda members hailing from India and Bangladesh have received training at Miranshah in North Waziristan in Pakistan and have shifted to Afghanistan for carrying out coordinated attacks there, Indian intelligence agencies have warned the government and security establishment. The security establishment is now trying to identify people from India who have joined the al-Qaeda terror network in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The intelligence agencies also said that these 130 al-Qaeda-trained members could carry out coordinated attacks along with the Haqqani Network in the Af-Pak region. The Haqqani Network is an Afghan terror group and considered an offshoot of the Taliban with links to al-Qaeda.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Jan 6 : Around 400 terrorists are currently in launching pads across the Line of Control (LoC), waiting to sneak into Jammu and Kashmir during the winters, after a tight anti-infiltration grid frustrated attempts by Pakistan to push them into the Indian side, according to security officials.

A top police official said that Pakistan is trying to infiltrate terrorists along the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir even during the winters when most of the passes and mountainous areas along the border are covered in heavy snow.

Rattled by the success of India's anti-infiltration grid with the blocking of several key routes, the Pakistan Army carried out 5,100 ceasefire violations in 2020, the highest since the 2003 truce came into effect, in its attempt to push in more terrorists in Jammu and

BIG THREAT

- There have been reports of infiltration by 44 terrorists in 2020 as compared to 141 in 2019
In 2018, 143 terrorists manage to infiltrate into J&K
This year, they are also trying to infiltrate terrorists into J-K even during the months of heavy snowfall

Kashmir under the cover of mortar shelling and firing, the officials said. "There are 300 to 415 terrorists in various launching pads in Pakistani Occupied Kashmir (PoK) along the LoC ready to infiltrate into Jammu and Kashmir to disturb peace and normalcy by engineering violence," an official said.

While 175-210 terrorists are in launch pads along the LoC on the other side of the north of Pir Panjal

(Kashmir valley), there are 119-216 terrorists opposite to the LoC area south of Pir Panjal (Jammu region), they said.

"Pakistani agencies are using tunnels to push in armed terrorists, weapons, ammunition and explosive material in J-K. "They are also using drones to ferry and drop weapons and explosive material into border areas in Jammu and Kashmir along with narcotics to finance terrorism," an official said.

"In December last year, terrorists infiltrated into Poonch despite heavy snowfall but were neutralized," an official said. A group of four JeM terrorists entered Samba via a tunnel and were neutralized after a truck carrying them to Kashmir was intercepted on the highway at Nagrota in Jammu in November last year, they said.

Weapons and explosives besides narcotics were being dropped at seven places along the borderline

with Pakistan in 2020, the officials said. Security agencies identified over 20 entry routes along the Indo-Pak border in Jammu and Kashmir and put in place multi-tier security to thwart any attempt by Pakistan to infiltrate armed terrorists.

The terrorists had infiltrated into the Valley in recent months using routes from higher reaches of Gulmarg, Bandipora and Boniyar in Baramulla (north Kashmir) to reach southern parts of the state via Yusmarg, like the tribal raiders from Pakistan. Bandipora-Gangbal-Chatargul route, which had remained dormant over the years, was also being used by the militants this time, sources said. The infiltration routes have been identified along the LoC and the IB in Kathua, Samba, Jammu, Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, Bandipora and Kupwara in districts, the sources said.

SHORT TAKES

Gujarat to get ₹180 cr from Centre

Ahmedabad: The Gujarat government will receive ₹180 crore from the Centre during this financial year under the post-matric scholarship scheme announced recently for the Scheduled Caste (SC) students, a minister said Wednesday. In December last year, the Union Cabinet had approved ₹59,000 crore for the post-matric scholarship for more than four crore SC students.

3 booked for hunting deer

Lalitpur: Three men have been booked allegedly for hunting swamp deer in a forested area under Balabehat police station of Lalitpur district, police said Wednesday. The booked accused were identified as Kadorilal, Ghasiram and Chuncha Sahriya. They were booked on a complaint of Forest Department officials, who had recovered a slain deer's head besides 30 kg of meat and various weapons used to kill the deer form a makeshift hut belonging to the trio in the jungle area.

U'khand CM apologises

Dehradun: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat has apologised to Congress leader Indra Hridayesh on behalf of the state BJP president who had made derogatory remarks against her. Uttarakhand BJP president Bansidhar Bhagat had referred to Hridayesh, who is Leader of Opposition in the state assembly, as "arre budiya," derogatorily calling her an "old woman".

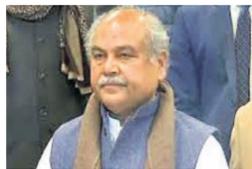
Eight rescued from mudslide

Banihal/Jammu: Eight people were rescued after their vehicles got trapped in a mudslide near Panthiyal along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, officials said on Wednesday. The 270-km highway was closed for traffic on Sunday following heavy snowfall and incessant rains which triggered multiple landslides and shooting of stones from the hillocks.

Engineer killed

Patna: An engineer was allegedly killed by unknown persons in Muzaffarpur in Bihar. According to the local police, the incident took place on Tuesday evening when the accused tied the hands and legs of the B Tech graduate before hanging him in his own house, attempting to make the crime look like a suicide.

Farmers will understand idea behind laws: Tomar



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar Wednesday said a large number of farmers from across the country are coming out in support of three farm laws and urged protesting unions to understand the sentiments behind reforms brought through these legislations.

He also expressed confidence that the protesting unions will focus on farmers' interests and help the government reach a solution through constructive dialogue. Speaking to reporters after meeting a group supporting the laws, Tomar said the government is committed towards all farmers of the country and their interests.

"Therefore, we are meeting those farmers who are coming out in support of the three laws, in addition to a continuing dialogue with

those opposing the Acts," the minister said. He further said, "A large number of farmers from across the country are coming out in support of the laws. We are meeting them and also getting their letters and phone calls. We welcome and thank all of them."

Seven rounds of talks between the government and representatives of protesting farmers have failed to resolve a long-running agitation against the three laws enacted in September.

While the government has presented these new laws as major reforms aimed at increasing farmers' income and improving their lives, the protesting groups see these legislations as pro-corporate and against the current MSP and mandi systems. The next round of talks with protesting unions is scheduled for January 8, while the government has also separately meeting various farm groups that have extended support to the laws. Earlier in the day, the minister met the All India Farmers Association (AIFA), headed by former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson Sanjay Nath Singh, which submitted a representation in support of the new farm laws.

TOWARDS DESTINATION



Tourists take a shikara ride across Dal Lake with snow clad Zabarwan mountains in the backdrop, in Srinagar PTI PHOTO

69% Indians still hesitant to take the COVID vax

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 6: Even as India gears up for the mass-vaccination drive which is slated to begin within few days, about 69 per cent are still hesitant to take the Covid-19 shots, a survey revealed on Wednesday.

The Drugs controller General of India (DCGI), on Sunday, announced approval of two vaccines - Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin - against coronavirus infection for restricted emergency use.

The survey conducted by LocalCircles in January has concluded that Indians' hesitancy over Covid-19 vaccines remains unchanged in November and December 2020, with 69 per cent maintaining that they will not rush to take it.

To the question that received 8,723 responses, only 26 per cent of citizens said that they will get it as soon as it becomes avail-

able via private or any healthcare channels, while five per cent said they are for health or frontline workers and will get themselves vaccinated on priority through government channels.

The survey result indicated that the hesitancy of citizens remains unchanged at 69 per cent unwilling to take it despite two vaccines receiving the regulator's green signal for vaccination.

This percentage remains unchanged with the result pub-

lished in December 2020. In November and October 2020 surveys, 59 per cent and 61 per cent of citizens were hesitant to take the vaccine.

India's drug regulator has reportedly given the green signal to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin for administration on children above 12 years old.

When LocalCircles asked parents: "If the Covid-19 vaccine is made available for school children, would you consider giving it to your child or grandchild?" Only 26 per cent Indian parents approved of their children receiving the vaccine if it is made available by April 2021, or before school session.

Further 56 per cent of parents voted "Will wait three months or more and then consider based on data or findings", while 12 per cent

said "No". The survey to the question received 10,468 responses.

This is noteworthy because it suggests that a large majority are hesitant at this point to give a Covid vaccine to their children.

With 69 per cent parents in a LocalCircles survey saying they want schools to open from April 2021 or after, it is clear that with declining caseloads parents are becoming more comfortable to send children to school and only a small per cent, i.e., 26 per cent are seeking vaccine safety for their children.

On Tuesday, the Union Health Ministry had said that it is prepared to roll out the coronavirus vaccine by January 13, paving way for mass-vaccination drive in the country.

The announcement is a major relief for India which has the second highest number of infections in the world, after the US.

UP HORROR

50-year-old Anganwadi worker raped, murdered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Budaun (UP), Jan 6: A 50-year-old anganwadi worker was gang-raped and brutally murdered allegedly by a priest and his two accomplices in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh, police said Wednesday.

Two of the accused were arrested Tuesday night after the post-mortem report confirmed rape while the priest is on the run, they said, adding that the woman's leg and a rib bone were fractured and there were injuries in her private parts.

The incident, which triggered an instant hue and cry in the political circles, took place Sunday and the matter came to light when her body was brought home at night. The FIR was registered two days later following which the duo was nabbed.

Opposition parties attacked the BJP government in the state and termed the incident "horrific" and "shameful", with the Congress comparing it to the Nirbhaya incident of 2012. "The post-mortem report confirms rape and there are injuries in her private parts and a fracture in the leg," Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma said. She suffered from a rib fracture too, he said, citing the autopsy report.

"On Sunday, the 50-year-old woman, who had gone to a temple, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Family members of the woman have accused the temple mahant (priest) and his accomplices of raping and murdering her. Based on this, a case was registered against the accused. Two of the accused persons were arrested on Tuesday night, while the mahant is still absconding," he said. Four teams have been formed to nab the priest, the SSP



District Magistrate Kumar Prashant (blue coat) and Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sankalp Sharma investigate the case PTI PHOTO

said. The case was registered yesterday after the post-mortem report came. "Based on complaints of the family members and the post-mortem report, a case has been registered under section 376D (gang-rape) and 302 (punishment for murder) of IPC," the SSP said.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who is the Congress' general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh, hit out at the Yogi Adityanath government, alleging that there was something wrong in the intentions of the Uttar Pradesh administration on the issue of women's security. Tagging a media report, Gandhi tweeted: "In Hathras, the government administration did not listen to Bahujan Samaj Party supreme Mayawati termed the incident as "extremely saddening" and "highly condemnable". The Budaun incident comes months after a Dalit woman from Hathras was allegedly raped by four men September 14 and died September 29 at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital.

Shashi Tharoor suggests cancelling R-Day festivities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has suggested cancelling the Republic Day festivities after Prime Minister Boris Johnson cancelled his India visit due to the coronavirus situation in the UK, saying getting crowds to cheer the parade as usual would be "irresponsible".

Johnson, who was scheduled to attend the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi as chief guest, has cancelled his visit to India later this month due to the growing health crisis created by the new coronavirus variant in the UK.

"Now that @BorisJohnson's visit to India this month has been cancelled due to the COVID Second Wave, & we don't have a Chief Guest on Republic Day, why not go one step further & cancel the festivities altogether?" Tharoor asked Twitter on Tuesday night. "Getting crowds to cheer the parade as usual would be irresponsible," he said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephonic conversation with Johnson on Tuesday, during which the British leader reiterated his thanks for India's invitation for him as the chief guest of the Republic Day celebrations, but regretted his inability to attend. Johnson's call with Modi came a day after he addressed the nation to announce a new stay-at-home lockdown in the UK as his medical chiefs warned that the National Health Service was under threat of being overwhelmed by the rising infection rates.

international



We've been able to bring our vaccination commencement schedule forward from the middle of the year, to the second quarter, to late March and now to early March, and I'm not ruling out further steps
GREG HUNT | HEALTH MINISTER, AUSTRALIA

WIPRO, TEL AVIV UNIV SIGN MOU

Strengthening the India-Israel scientific collaboration, Indian MNC Wipro has signed a MoU with Israel's Tel Aviv University for research and analysis in quantum science and technology



of the day quote

As we promote peace and well-being in the region, India has been strongly committed to the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Our support for the reconciliation process here is longstanding, as indeed for an inclusive political outlook that encourages ethnic harmony



S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER, INDIA

Some 800 people crossed from Ethiopia's Tigray region into eastern Sudan in just the first few days of the New Year



ANDREJ MAHECIC | SPOKESMAN, UN

Anytime you start a big (vaccination) programme, there's always glitches. I think the glitches have been worked out



ANTHONY FAUCI | DISEASE EXPERT, US

SHORT TAKES

3 children die in Pakistan

Peshawar: Three minor brothers died and two other children were seriously injured in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Wednesday, when an abandoned hand grenade they were playing with exploded, police said. SP, Peshawar Saddar Circle, Waqar Ahmed said a group of children found the hand grenade in a field of suburban Zangali area, Peshawar city. Not knowing what the metal object was, the children started playing with it, when it suddenly exploded on the Peshawar-Kohat Road of Zangali Khwar, he said.

US, Sudan to settle debt

Cairo: The US and Sudan Wednesday agreed to settle the African country's debt to the World Bank, widely seen as a key step toward the nation's economic recovery after the 2019 overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir. The move came during Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's visit to Khartoum, making him the first senior American official to land there since President Donald Trump's administration removed the African country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Netherlands begin vax prog

The Hague: Nearly two weeks after most other European Union nations, the Netherlands Wednesday began its COVID-19 vaccination program, with nursing home staff and frontline workers in hospitals first in line for the shot. Sanna Elkadir, a nurse at a nursing home for people with dementia, was the first to receive a shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at a mass vaccination center in Veghel, 120 kilometers SE of Amsterdam.

3 nabbed at J'burg airport

Johannesburg: South African police are investigating a possible international gold smuggling syndicate after three suspects were arrested at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg with gold bars weighing 73.5 kilograms in their carry-on luggage. The gold bullion, worth an estimated \$4.1 million, looked suspicious when the three put their bags through a security check, according to the police.

HK police arrest 53 activists under national security law

The mass arrests, including former lawmakers, were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by Beijing last June

AGENCIES

Hong Kong, Jan 6: Hong Kong police arrested 53 former lawmakers and democracy proponents Wednesday for allegedly violating the new national security law by participating in unofficial election primaries for the territory's legislature last year.

The mass arrests, including of former lawmakers, were the largest move against Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by Beijing last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory.

"The operation today targets the active elements who are suspected to be involved in the crime of overthrowing, or interfering (and) seriously destroy the Hong Kong government's legal execution of duties," John Lee, Hong Kong's security minister, said at a news conference.

He said those arrested were suspected of trying to paralyze the government, via their plans to gain a majority of the seats in the legislature to create a situation in which the chief executive had to resign and the government would stop functioning.

In a video released by former lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting on his Facebook page, police turned up at his house and told him he was "suspected of violating the national security law, subverting state power." Police told those recording the video to stop or risk arrest.

The legislative election that would have followed the unofficial pri-



EU calls for 'immediate release'

Brussels: The European Union called for the immediate release Wednesday of the 53 former lawmakers and pro-democracy activists who have been arrested in Hong Kong after being accused of violating a new security law. The mass arrests, including of former lawmakers, were the largest crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement since the law was imposed by China last June to quell dissent in the semi-autonomous territory. EU spokesman Peter Stano told a press conference that the arrests send the "signal that political pluralism is no longer tolerated in Hong Kong." He added that the security law is being used "to crush dissent and stifle the exercise of human rights and political freedoms." Stano did not exclude the possibility of sanctions against China, saying that EU authorities and member nations are currently "thinking about the best measures to take to react." Stano said the issue could be discussed during a meeting of the bloc's foreign affairs ministers later this month but insisted unanimity among EU nations will be required to green light sanctions. The crackdown in Hong Kong took place only days after the European Union sealed a business investment deal with China despite concerns about the human rights situation in the country. EU Commission chief spokesman Eric Mamer separated the two topics, saying the EU is working with China "in a different way, in different areas."

maries was postponed by a year by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who cited the public health risks during the coronavirus

pandemic. Mass resignations and disqualifications of pro-democracy lawmakers have left the legislature largely a pro-Beijing body.

Democrats on brink of US Senate control

REUTERS

Atlanta, Jan 6: Democrats won one US Senate race in Georgia and surged ahead in another Wednesday, moving closer to a stunning sweep that would give them control of the chamber and the power to advance President-elect Joe Biden's policy goals.

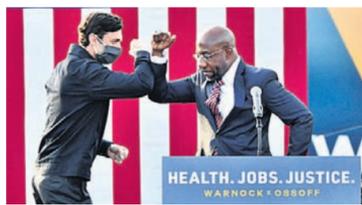
Raphael Warnock, a Baptist preacher from the historic church of Martin Luther King Jr., beat Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler to become the first Black senator in the history of the deep South state. Jon Ossoff, a documentary filmmaker who at 33 would become the Senate's youngest member, held a narrow lead over incumbent David Perdue in the other race, with a final outcome not expected until later Wednesday at the earliest. The results were a repudiation of outgoing President Donald Trump in a state his Republicans have controlled for decades.

Trump campaigned for both Republicans in Georgia Monday. But his support was overshadowed by the two months he has spent trying to subvert his own presidential

election loss, with false accusations of fraud, including attacks on Republican officials in the state.

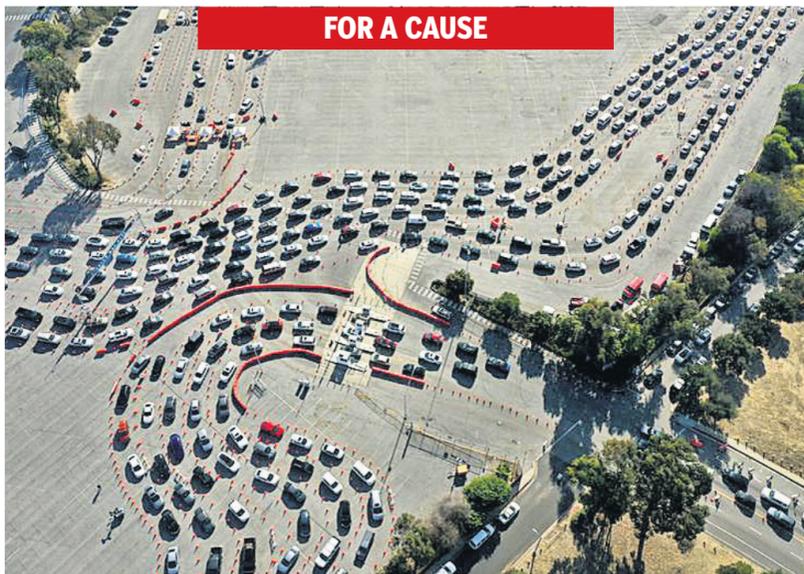
Later Wednesday, Congress will meet to certify Trump's election loss over the objection of a number of Republican lawmakers who have said they will try to reject some state tallies though there is no chance of success. With 98% of votes counted, Warnock was ahead of Loeffler by 1.2 percentage points, roughly 54,000 votes, according to Edison Research. Ossoff led Perdue by more than 16,000 votes.

Winning both contests would give Democrats control of the Senate, creating a 50-50 split and giving Vice President-elect Kamala Harris the tie-breaking vote once she and Biden take office January 20. The party already has a narrow majority in the US House of Representatives. If Republicans hold the second seat, they would effectively wield veto power over Biden's political and judicial appointees as well as many of his legislative initiatives in areas such as economic relief from the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, healthcare and criminal justice.



Raphael Warnock, beat Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler to become the first Black senator in the history of Georgia

Jon Ossoff held a narrow lead over incumbent David Perdue in the other race



People line up for coronavirus tests in their vehicles at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, California

REUTERS

UK court denies bail to WikiLeaks' Assange

REUTERS

London, Jan 6: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was denied bail Wednesday by a British judge who said there was a risk he might flee justice while the United States tries again to secure his extradition.

Assange, who has spent more than eight years, either holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London or in jail, had asked to be freed on bail after the court ruled on Monday that he should not be extradited because he would be at risk of suicide.



"I am satisfied that there are substantial grounds for believing that if Mr Assange is released today he would fail to surrender to court to face the appeal proceedings," Judge Vanessa Baraitser told London's

Westminster Magistrates Court. "As far as Mr Assange is concerned this case has not yet been won... the outcome of this appeal is not yet known."

The US Department of Justice says it will continue to seek Assange's extradition to face 18 criminal charges of breaking an espionage law and conspiring to hack government computers.

Assange's partner, Stella Moris, said the judge's decision to deny him bail was a huge disappointment and urged the US to pardon him.

Russia, West clash over Syria chemical weapons sanctions

ASSOCIATED PRESS

United Nations, Jan 6: Syria and close ally Russia clashed with the US and other nations Tuesday over a Western initiative to suspend Syria's voting rights in the global chemical weapons watchdog for failing to provide details of three chemical attacks in 2017 that investigators blamed on President Bashar Assad's government.

The confrontation in the UN Security Council foreshadowed a showdown when the 193 member states of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons meet in The Hague, Netherlands, in April to consider a French-drafted

measure, on behalf of 46 countries, to suspend Syria's "rights and privileges" in the body.

The French proposal was a response to Syria's failure to meet a 90-day deadline set in July by the OPCW's executive council for Damascus to declare the nerve agent sarin and chlorine, which OPCW investigators said last April were dropped by the Syrian air force on the central town of Latameh in late March 2017.

The Western effort reflects a much broader effort to obtain accountability for Syrian chemical attacks and highlight claims that Assad's government is secretly continuing its chemical weapons pro-



gram. Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013, pressed by Russia after a deadly chemical weapons attack that the West blamed on Damascus.

By August 2014, the Assad government declared that the destruction of its chemical weapons was completed. But Syria's initial declaration of its chemical stockpiles and chemical weapons production

sites has remained in dispute.

Ireland's UN Ambassador, Geraldine Byrne Nason, a new council member, said it was "deeply disturbing" that the OPCW still cannot determine whether the initial declaration was accurate or complete because of gaps and inconsistencies. She said the problems are not "minor" as some would portray, alluding to Russia. "Over those seven years, the number of issues that need to be addressed has expanded from five to 19," Byrne Nason said.

"There have been 17 amendments to Syria's declaration including the addition of a production facility, four research and development cen-

ters, and doubling of the amount of declared agents and chemicals."

In addition, she said, there are issues related to "hundreds of tons of missing agents and munitions reported destroyed" before Syria joined the chemical convention as well as recent reports of a production facility that Damascus declared as never having been used, "where there is clear evidence to the contrary."

Norwegian Ambassador Mona Juul, another new council member, also expressed concern at Syria's failure to explain an unnamed chemical that can be used in chemical weapons but also has non-weapons uses.

Moderna's Covid-19 vax gets EMA's nod

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Amsterdam, Jan 6: The European Union's medicines agency gave the green light Wednesday to Moderna Inc.'s Covid-19 vaccine, a decision that gives the 27-nation bloc a second vaccine to use in the desperate battle to tame the virus rampaging across the continent.

The approval recommendation by the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) human medicines committee - which must be rubber stamped by the EU's executive commission - comes amid high rates of infections in many EU countries and strong criticism of the slow pace of vaccinations across the region of some 450 million people.

"This vaccine provides us with another tool to overcome the current emergency," said Emer Cooke, Executive Director of EMA. "It is a testament to the efforts and commitment of all involved that we have this second positive vaccine recommendation just short of a year since the pandemic was declared by WHO."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the approval and added in a tweet: "Now we are working at full speed to approve it & make it available in the EU." The EMA has already approved a coronavirus vaccine made by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. Both vaccines require giving people two shots.

Ahead of the meeting on the Moderna vaccine, the agency said in a tweet that its experts were "working hard to clarify all outstanding issues with the company." It did not elaborate on what those issues were. Moderna also declined to comment.

German Health Minister Jens



This vaccine provides us with another tool to overcome the current emergency. It is a testament to the efforts and commitment of all involved that we have this second positive vaccine recommendation just short of a year since the pandemic was declared by the WHO
EMER COOKE | EXEC DIR, EMA

Spahn - who has in the past been critical of the slow pace of the EMA - said he expected the Moderna vaccine to begin rolling out to EU nations next week. Germany would get 2 million doses in the first quarter and 50 million in all of 2021, Spahn told reporters in Berlin. "The problem is the shortage of production capacity with global demand," he said.

Early results of large, still unfinished studies show both the Moderna and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines appear safe and strongly protective, although Moderna's is easier to handle since it doesn't need to be stored at ultra-frozen temperatures.

The US, Canada and Israel have already approved use of the Moderna vaccine. The US gave it the green light for emergency use in people over 18 years December 18, followed by Canada five days later with an interim authorisation also for people over 18.

Cold wave warning to be issued in Seoul for first time in 3 years

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Seoul, Jan 6: A cold wave warning is set to be issued in Seoul Wednesday for the first time in about three years, as the capital and central parts of the nation came under the grip of the season's coldest weather.

The Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA) said that the cold wave warning will take effect for the whole of Seoul at 9pm., marking the first such warning since the previous one was issued January 23, 2018, Yonhap news agency reported. The cold wave warning is issued when the morning low is below minus 15 degree celsius for more than two consecutive days, or when the temperature drops sharply and major damage is expected.

The warning was already is-



sued for many areas in Gyeonggi, Gangwon, Chungcheong and North Gyeongsang provinces at 9 pm Tuesday, and the number of affected areas is expected to grow Wednesday.

Incheon, many southern cities, and the southwestern provinces of Jeolla are to come under a cold wave alert, which is issued when the morning low is below minus 12 degree celsius for more than two days.



India does not want to merely fill global markets with its products. We want Indian products to win the hearts of people around the world. This is possible by adopting the high-quality and improving productivity

PIYUSH GOYAL | UNION MINISTER

UDAAN RAISES \$280M

Udaan, India's largest B2B e-commerce platform, has announced that it has raised \$280 million in additional financing from its existing and new investors. The financing highlights the immense potential of market-fit of Udaan's business model to the Indian trade market



of the day quote

These emergency use (of vaccines) authorisations will soon bring the vaccine to many millions of people and are proof of our long-held commitment to broad and equitable access around the world

PASCAL SORIOT | CEO, ASTRAZENECA

For us, at Ducati, the majority of our launches and plans were pushed to 2021 and this year is going to be one of the most exciting year for us, with new launches planned in every quarter

BIPUL CHANDRA | MD, DUCATI INDIA

We plan to expand our global footprint to cover international terrains with our Made in India products and continue to play an active role in the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan

MAHENDRA NAHATA | MD, HFCL

Housing sales down 37 pc in 2020 across 8 cities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: Housing sales fell 37 per cent year-on-year during the 2020 calendar year while gross office space leasing declined 35 per cent on low demand because of the coronavirus pandemic, but demand improved significantly in the last quarter to cross pre-COVID level, property consultant Knight Frank India said Wednesday.

In its 'India Real Estate - Residential and Office Update H2 2020' report released on Wednesday, the consultant reported that sales of residential properties fell 37 per cent to 1,54,534 units in 2020 across eight cities as compared with 2,45,861 units in the previous year. Similarly,



COVID IMPACT

the gross office space absorption declined 35 per cent to 39.4 million sq ft from 60.6 million sq ft.

However, both housing sales and gross office leasing during October-

December 2020 were higher than the corresponding period of the previous year. The sales of residential properties in the fourth quarter of the 2020 calendar year

Despite the on-going pandemic, the H2 2020 sales growth in some cities is fairly encouraging. In Q3 2020, the real estate market started witnessing revival signs, further recording a significant improvement in home sales during Q4 2020

SHISHIR BAJAJ, CMD, KNIGHT FRANK INDIA

rose to 61,592 units from 58,402 units in the year-ago period on pent-up and festive demand, while office absorption increased to 17.5 million sq ft from 16.4 million sq ft.

As per the annual data, housing sales fell in all eight major cities during 2020, with demand falling most

in Ahmedabad and least in Pune. In the office market, Hyderabad witnessed maximum decline in leasing activities and Ahmedabad the least.

Knight Frank India tracks eight property markets - Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, and Ahmedabad.

In the residential property market, housing sales fell 18 per cent in Pune to 26,919 units during 2020 from 32,809 units in the previous year, while Mumbai saw 20 per cent decline at 48,688 units from 60,943 units. The Maharashtra government's decision to temporarily cut stamp duty on registration of properties led to higher sales in Mumbai and Pune region in last four months of 2020.

LIC introduces feature of online proposal deposit collection



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 6: Following the overwhelming response received for Atma Nirbhar Agent New Business Digital Application, (ANANDA), LIC of India has introduced the feature of Online proposal Deposit collection in ANANDA, where the customer can pay the Online proposal deposit through Payment Gateway using various options like Credit Card / Debit Card/ Netbanking / Wallets / UPI etc at his own convenience. This feature was launched at the hands of LIC Chairman M R Kumar in the presence of Managing Directors, T C Suseel Kumar, Vipin Anand, Mukesh Gupta and Raj Kumar.

All the Zonal Managers and Executive Directors of LIC attended the programme through video conferencing. With Online BOC, the LIC customers are now enabled to invest ULIP plans through the Agent Digital Application.

LIC launched its first Digital Application, "ANANDA", an acronym for Atma Nirbhar Agents New Business Digital Application, November 19, 2020. The Digital application is a tool for the onboarding process to get the Life Insurance policy through a Paperless module with the help of the Agent. ANANDA is a first of its kind in the Indian Life Insurance industry.

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE

FM reviews progress of projects worth ₹3.6L cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Wednesday reviewed the progress of projects worth ₹3.6 lakh crore under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), an official statement said.

The projects are being implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

During the meeting, the finance minister asked the two ministries/departments to push infra expenditure by effectively implementing all NIP projects in time and ensure quick resolution of issues in coordination with state governments and other ministries.

Secretaries of these two departments were asked to promote investible projects by holding discussions with prospective investors, the finance ministry said in the statement.

This was the second review meeting by Sitharaman with various ministries and departments to monitor and accelerate NIP project implementation.

"In the review meeting, in addition to infra spending along with annual targeted and achieved expenditure by these two ministries/departments, various initiatives taken by them to expedite were also discussed.



The NIP was launched with 6,835 projects, which has now been expanded to more than 7,300. Projects identified under the NIP require investment of a whopping ₹111 lakh crore during 2020-25

"24 projects worth ₹80,915 crore under the Ministry of Health and 10 large projects worth ₹2,79,604 crore under the Department of Water Resources were reviewed in detail along with bottlenecks, if any, being faced in the project implementation," it said. It was explained in the meeting that despite the pandemic, the NIP has managed to achieve substantial progress.

The NIP was launched with 6,835 projects, which has now been expanded to more than 7,300. Projects identified under the NIP require investment of a whopping ₹111 lakh crore during 2020-25. Many ministries/departments have shown substantial progress in project implementation and expenditure, especially in the second quarter of 2020-21, the statement said.

In addition, the majority of ministries/departments have targeted substantially high infra expenditure in the current fiscal than the actual expenditure of FY'20. Ministries were also asked to update the National Infrastructure Pipeline dashboard regularly to allow seamless online monitoring.

SHORT TAKES

MP, AP get financial aid

New Delhi: Centre has given additional financial assistance of ₹1,004 crore to Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh for capital expenditure after they completed three out of the four citizen-centric reforms. The two states have completed the One Nation, One Ration Card Reforms, Ease of Doing Business Reforms, and Urban Local Bodies Reforms, Ministry of Finance said in a statement Wednesday.

SpiceJet to run 21 new flights

New Delhi: SpiceJet said Wednesday it would operate 21 new domestic and international flights from January 12. The airline will introduce two weekly flights on the route from Mumbai to Ras Al-Khaimah in the UAE and increase frequency on the Delhi-Ras Al-Khaimah route to four weekly flights, according to a statement. It will connect Jharsuguda in Odisha with Mumbai and Bangalore with new flights, and operate bigger B737 aircraft on the Delhi-Jharsuguda, the release said.

MSI's production rises 34 pc in Dec

New Delhi: Maruti Suzuki India, the country's largest carmaker, Wednesday said its total production in December 2020 increased 33.78 per cent to 1,55,127 units. The company had produced a total 1,15,949 units in the same month of 2019, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said in a regulatory filing. Passenger vehicles production stood at 1,53,475 units last month as compared with 1,14,962 units in December 2019, a growth of 33.5 per cent. Production of mini cars comprising Alto and S-Presso models stood 8.42 per cent up at 27,772 units last month.

'PE deals jump 108 pc in 2020'

Mumbai: Close to \$18 billion that Reliance Jio and Reliance Retail mopped up from a slew of private equity transactions in 2020 has pushed up the money inflows through this route by 108 per cent to \$33.8 billion, according to an industry report. As per the data collated by Refinitiv, private equity investments increased 108 per cent in 2020 over the previous year, with the number of deals jumping from 665 in 2019 to 791 in 2020 at \$33.8 billion, despite the pandemic.

'Service sector output growth further eases'

Despite falling from 53.7 in November to 52.3 in December, the latest figure pointed to the slowest pace of expansion over the aforementioned sequence

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: India's services sector output growth further eased in December, but remained on the recovery path. The IHS Markit India Services PMI data showed that both output and new business rose for the third straight month in December but at a slower pace than previous months. The data report cited that staff hiring came to a halt due to liquidity concerns, labour shortages and subdued demand, while business optimism faded.

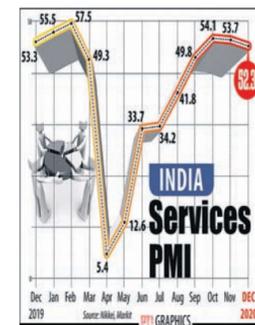
Consequently, the seasonally adjusted index reading remained above the critical 50-mark that separates growth from contraction for the second month in a row during November.

Despite falling from 53.7 (index reading) in November to 52.3 in December, the latest figure pointed to the slowest pace of expansion over the aforementioned sequence.

Companies indicated that growth was supported by securing of new work, though curbed by competitive pressures, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Global Covid-19 restrictions, particularly travel bans, reportedly restricted international demand for Indian services at the end of 2020. New export business decreased sharply, but at the slowest pace since March," the report said.

"Job shedding was resumed in December, with some firms men-



tioning that liquidity problems, labour shortages and subdued demand caused the latest fall in employment. The decline in payroll numbers was the ninth in ten months, but marginal overall," it added.

Resultantly, the Composite PMI Output Index fell from 56.3 in November to 54.9 in December, with underlying data showing slower rates of expansion at both manufacturers and service providers.

"Similarly, aggregate new orders rose for the fourth month running but at the weakest rate since September. Manufacturers and services companies saw weaker expansions," the report said.

"Private sector employment declined in December, marking a ten-month sequence of contraction. The rate of reduction was slight, but quickened from November," it added.

Airtel moves SC claiming error

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: Bharti Airtel has approached the Supreme Court over the assessment of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues payable by the company.

According to the telecom operator, the assessment by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has errors. As per DoT's assessment, Airtel's total dues stand at ₹43,980 crore, out of which ₹25,976 crore is due. Airtel's calculation, however, shows that its total dues stand at ₹13,004 crore. The telco has already paid ₹18,004 crore.

"The applicants pray that the respondents be permitted to complete the process of assessments after considering the representations made by the applicants in this respect (including for the mathematical and calculation errors) and thereby determine the amounts due and payable," Airtel's petition said.

The petition also seeks "limited clarification" or modification or recall of the orders dated March 18, 2020, September 20, 2020, and paragraph 38 (i) of the order dated September 1, 2020. In September, the apex court allowed telecom operators 10 years to pay up AGR dues.

DoT's AGR ASSESSMENT

WhatsApp updates privacy policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 6: WhatsApp has updated its terms of service and privacy policy regarding how it processes user data and partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the social media giant's products.

Users have received in-app prompts informing them of the update in terms of use that take effect February 8, 2021. The message to users noted that the key updates include more information about WhatsApp's service and how it processes user data; how businesses can use Facebook hosted services to store and manage their WhatsApp



chats; and how WhatsApp partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the company products.

The message added that users will need to accept these updates to continue using WhatsApp.

When contacted, a WhatsApp spokesperson said, "As we've previously talked as part of WhatsApp's business vision in October 2020, in order to enable small businesses better, we are updating our terms

of service and privacy policy as we work to make WhatsApp a great way to get answers or help from a business." The spokesperson said the updated terms of service and privacy policy include additional information on how the company handles user data.

"For example, we've added more information about more recent product features (like catalogs/ add to cart feature, etc) and functionalities, how we process your data for safety, security and integrity, and added more direct links to user settings, Help Center articles and how you can manage your information," the spokesperson said.

'GLOBAL ECONOMY LIKELY TO EXPAND BY 4% IN 2021'

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 6: As the COVID-19 vaccine started rolling out in many countries, the World Bank expects that the global economy will expand four per cent in 2021, but will still remain more than five per cent below its pre-pandemic trend.

"The global economy appears to be emerging from one of its deepest recessions and beginning a subdued recovery," World Bank President David Malpass said Tuesday in a forward to the Global Economic Prospects report, according to which a recovery will likely be subdued, unless policy makers move decisively to tame the pandemic and implement investment-enhancing reforms.

Although the global economy is growing again after a 4.3 per cent

contraction in 2020, the pandemic has caused a heavy toll of deaths and illness, plunged millions into poverty, and may depress economic activity and incomes for a prolonged period.

Top near-term policy priorities are controlling the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring rapid and widespread vaccine deployment. To support economic recovery, authorities also need to facilitate a re-investment cycle aimed at sustainable growth that is less dependent on government debt, the report said.

"While the global economy appears to have entered a subdued recovery, policy makers face formidable challenges - in public health, debt management, budget policies, central banking and structural reforms - as they try to ensure that this still fragile global recovery gains traction and sets a foundation for robust growth," said Mr Malpass.



strengthen transparency and governance," he said.

The collapse in global economic activity in 2020 is estimated to have been slightly less severe than previously projected, mainly due to shallower contractions in advanced

economies and a more robust recovery in China.

In contrast, disruptions to activity in the majority of other emerging markets and developing economies were more acute than expected, the Bank said in its report.

growth is projected to moderate to 3.8 per cent in 2022, weighed down by the pandemic's lasting damage to potential growth. In particular, the impact of the pandemic on investment and human capital is expected to erode growth prospects in emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) and set back key development goals.

The global recovery, which has been dampened in the near term by a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, is expected to strengthen over the forecast horizon as confidence, consumption, and trade gradually improve, supported by ongoing vaccination, the report said.

Although aggregate EMDE growth is envisioned to firm to an average of 4.6 per cent in 2021-22, the improvement largely reflects China's expected rebound.

While the global economy appears to have entered a subdued recovery, policy makers face formidable challenges as they try to ensure that this still fragile recovery gains traction and sets a foundation for robust growth

DAVID MALPASS | PRESIDENT, WORLD BANK

SCG TO TURN PINK

All eyes on Rohit as India look to retain Border-Gavaskar Trophy when they lock horns with Australia in the third Test in Sydney, starting today

SQUADS

INDIA (XI)

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane (C), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah & Navdeep Saini.

AUSTRALIA

David Warner, Matthew Wade, Will Pucovski, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Cameron Green, Tim Paine (C & wk), Nathan Lyon, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Marcus Harris, Mitchell Swepson & Michael Neser;

1 India have only one win in 12 Tests at SCG, losing five and 12 ended in draw. The win came in 1978 under the leadership of Bishan Singh Bedi

705/7d

The highest total at SCG, posted by India in 2004. The last time India played here in 2019, they posted 622/7d with Cheteshwar Pujara (193) and Rishabh Pant (159 n o) scoring big in the drawn Test

107

The lowest total, posted by Australia in 1947, in the matches between India and the Kangaroos at the SCG. India's lowest total at the ground, 150, came in 2000



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Steve Smith's calibre, looked so circumspect and literally intimidated by an Indian bowling unit, which isn't operating at full-strength.

Pacer Navdeep Saini will make his debut here, replacing Umesh Yadav who went home following an injury. The pressure is understandable as Australia are literally pushing a 70 per cent fit David Warner out there in the middle to combat fire with fire even as his statements make it clear that he is not at all comfortable with the idea.

And in this backdrop, enter Rohit, whose last couple of months have been loads of off-field drama. First it was his absence from the initial part of the tour due to a hamstring injury sustained while playing the IPL. Then his subsequent quarantine for two weeks in a Sydney apartment.

And when he finally united with his teammates, an excited fan inside a Melbourne restaurant led to an inquiry against him and four other teammates for what was called by the local media, a potential bio-security breach.

But the white-ball legend has learnt the art of being unfazed, which was evident from his intense net session Tuesday when he was comfortably facing the first team bowlers like Ravichandran Ashwin.

His mere presence has added spring in the strides of the team and the youngsters in this current set-up swear by him, the reason he replaced Cheteshwar Pujara as vice-captain after just one Test.

The Sydney track has traditionally favoured the batsmen as Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri, Sachin Tendulkar and even Pujara and Rishabh Pant, who got centuries here during last tour, will vouch for.

If Rohit and Shubman Gill can give the team a good start, the under-pressure Pujara will be much more relieved while playing his own defensive game.

Rahane, after one of his more copy-book hundreds constructed in adversity during the last game, will enter the arena with more confidence while facing the Australian quartet of Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

KL Rahul's injury has given Hanuma Vihari one more chance



Australian players pose for a photograph in Sydney as they get decked up for the traditional Pink Test

despite his returns being as underwhelming as Mayank Agarwal, who has been forced to make way for Rohit.

But it is Australia's wobbly batting that will again be put to test by Ashwin on a track, that has traditionally helped spinners. With 10 wickets and a new-found confidence, Ashwin has won both on and off-field battle against opposition's key players such as Smith and Marnus Labuschagne.

It's not just the wickets that he has scalped but the manner in which the intelligent Chennai engineer has managed to create doubts in the minds of world class batters is worth its weight in gold.

As much as Australia needs Smith to be back in form, they would also need someone like Travis Head to deliver as he has failed to get a hang of both pace and spin.

Jasprit Bumrah, who is still some games short of 20 Tests, will be leading the pace attack and is expected to show the way with his bagful of tricks.

Whether it's Siraj or Saini, who ever shares the new ball will have their task cut out as they aim to match the highest standards set by the likes of Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma.

SCG wicket has 'a hard surface with lot of grass'



SYDNEY: A hard surface with lot of grass awaits the Indian and Australian players at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), the venue for the third Test, curator Adam Lewis said Wednesday. Lewis said hosting a Test is the biggest stage for them and considering the fickle weather this year, they have rolled out a pretty good wicket for the match, starting Thursday. "The weather was our main concern and just the talk about not getting the Sydney Test. We understand that the amount of effort that goes into preparing a Test like, you got to understand, this is our grand final," Lewis said at a virtual press conference. Asked whether the surface was similar to the one when Australia took on New Zealand last year, Lewis replied in an affirmative and said, "The key is that every year, it is so different with the weather. So, we try to give them (the teams) that hard surface with a good amount of grass."

One fan at MCG tests COVID +ve

MELBOURNE: A fan, who attended last month's Boxing Day Test between India and Australia at the MCG, has tested positive for COVID-19, and authorities have urged other spectators to get tested and isolate if they sat nearby. According to a report in "The Telegraph", the state health authorities said the man in his thirties was not infectious while at the famed Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on the second day of play "but there is potential he acquired the virus while there" or at a nearby shopping centre. "The MCG is being investigated as a potential source for the infection," Victoria's Department of Health was quoted as saying in the report. "We're encouraging anyone who was in The Great Southern Stand, Zone 5 of the MCG between 12.30pm and 3.30pm December 27, to get tested and isolate until they receive a negative result." India won the second Test at the MCG where close to 30,000 people watched the live action.

Sydney, Jan 6: Having touched nadir and zenith in a span of 10 days, Ajinkya Rahane's India will look to start afresh against Australia with the big-hitting Rohit Sharma's presence adding a new dimension to what promises to be an enthralling third Test starting here, Thursday.

The Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), despite being witness to some extraordinary batting performances from the touring Indian sides over the years, has not ex-

actly been a happy hunting ground with six defeats. The lone win came a good 42 years back.

If Rahane's side can go 2-1 up and ensure the retention of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, it will be one of the finest hours in the history of Indian cricket. Making it even more special is the fact that the side has been without two world-class performers and a senior pacer against a nearly full-strength Australian team.

Seldom has an Australian batting unit, that boasts of a player of

PRE-MATCH REACTIONS

AJINKYA RAHANE

SCG WICKET: See, as per history of Sydney, it is a very good wicket, very good wicket, so you just have to play some good cricket. (Speaking of SCG wicket which aids spinners) we have good spinners but Nathan Lyon is their quality spinner, who has done well here, so we don't want to take anybody lightly.

Momentum: As I said earlier, whatever happened in Melbourne it is history now. Australia are a very good team, especially when playing in Australia. They are a dangerous team and we respect that. We just want to be in the moment and start well tomorrow (Thursday).

SPIN TWIN: Ashwin is always looking to learn new things. He has good skills but (he) is always looking to learn new things, and that's what makes him great. Jadeja has improved a lot, both as a batsman and a bowler, and that is a massive point as a team's perspective.

ABOUT ROHIT: He is batting really well in the nets. He has had good seven-eight sessions. He came to Melbourne, started his practice straight away when our Test match got over.

QUARANTINE: We are not at all annoyed but yes there are some challenges in quarantine as life in Sydney is completely normal. We are not at all annoyed and we know what's our priority here. It's about being in the moment and playing some good cricket. First thing first, we are not complaining on anything and we are just focussed on the game. Just want to start well.



TIM PAINE

ABOUT WARNER: Regardless of whom we are playing, we are a better team when David Warner is in that team from the runs he scores or the energy he brings into the group. He protects our middle-order a bit with Marnus (Labuschagne) and Steve coming in. Other guys coming when bowlers are a bit tired, it's an advantage. So David has got a huge role for us.

HINTS AT PUCOVSKI'S DEBUT: Will (Pucovski) has been fantastic as well. He has been out of the bubble for a couple of weeks. He is fresh and batting well in the nets, looks ready to go if he is called upon. Will's been hit on the head a few times but he plays the short ball really well. As long as he is comfortable, we are comfortable. He is good to go and that's not a concern for him.

BOUNCER TACTIC: Playing Test cricket is difficult and playing short ball of that pace is uncomfortable if you know someone had weakness in that particular area. It's part of the game. It tests your mettle and shows what you are made up of unless you show otherwise. That's the tactic we have used and we expect to get plenty of back as well.

BRISBANE TEST UNCERTAINTY: It will be fascinating not just from cricketing point of view but also the tension boiling under the surface with lot of unnamed sources coming out from their camp as to where they are going to play their fourth Test, where they don't want to go. So let's see how it goes. A bit of uncertainty because when you hear things like that coming particularly from India, which holds a lot of power in world cricket, it's likely that it could happen.

ISL: Odisha FC look to end winless run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bambolim, Jan 6: Odisha FC would be keen to end their winless run this season in the Indian



Pressure keeps mounting on Odisha FC coach Stuart Baxter as his side look for their maiden win this season

Super League (ISL) when they take on a struggling Kerala Blasters, who would fancy their chances for their second win of the season, here Thursday.

Odisha are yet to win a game and it could be Kerala's best chance to get three points for the second time this season. Kerala are on ninth spot with six points while Odisha are at the bottom with just two points from eight matches.

Kerala coach Kibu Vicuna need to find out how his team scores more goals. Kerala have scored just three goals from open play all season, the second-lowest in the league.

Odisha coach Stuart Baxter said that recent results were not a fair reflection of how his team has been playing. But there is no denying the grim reality that Odisha find themselves in.

"The biggest issue we have right now is that despite playing well in most games, we haven't been able to turn it into results. Despite playing reasonably well in most games, and dominating at times, those are not being translated into results. That can damage belief," Baxter said.

10-man East Bengal hold Goa



Bright Enobakhare wheels away in celebration after putting SCEB in front

POST NEWS NETWORK

Goa, Jan 6: Another late goal saved the day for FC Goa as they managed

to grab a point in a hard-fought 1-1 draw against a 10-man SC East Bengal at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, Vasco Wednesday.

In what was initially a cagey contest, SCEB took the lead through Bright Enobakhare's (79th minute) stunning solo goal. But Goa fought back with a goal from substitute Devendra Murganekar (81st) to deny their opponents a second successive win, who were brought to 10 men in the second half.

Goa, who dominated the first half, continued to pile on the pressure on their opponents after the change of ends.

But SCEB's hopes of grabbing control of the game suffered a huge blow when Fox was sent off in the 56th minute. The SCEB captain received his marching orders for a rough challenge on Alexander Jesuraj.

Despite the man-advantage, a defensive error from Goa almost gifted SCEB the lead.

Enobakhare displayed a moment of magic and made his way into the box beating four markers before placing his shot into the bottom corner, finishing off a stunning solo goal.

But Goa soon drew parity as SCEB's defence was caught napping. Saviour Gama delivered a cross at the near post and Murganekar rose high to put Goa on level terms. Both sides continued to hunt for the winner but in the end, settled for a draw.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Son, Sissoko lead Spurs into League Cup final

LONDON: Jose Mourinho reached his first final as Tottenham manager after Son Heung-min and Moussa Sissoko clinched a 2-0 victory over Brentford in the League Cup. But he will have to wait 110 days before Tottenham contests the final against either of the Manchester clubs, with City playing United in the other semifinal. Second-division team Brentford gifted Tottenham an opening goal in the 12th minute when Sissoko was left unmarked for a header. Spurs, in the 70th minute, extended their lead when Son lifted the ball into the net after Harry Kane and Tanguy Ndombele combined for the breakaway. Brentford finished with 10 men after Josh Dasilva's high studs-up challenge left Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg with a gash on his left shin.



SON HEUNG-MIN

Kiwis become No.1 in Test for first time ever

DUBAI: New Zealand grabbed the No.1 position in the ICC Test rankings for the first time in history after decimating Pakistan by an innings and 176 runs in the second Test in Christchurch, Wednesday. The comfortable series-clinching victory pushed the Kiwis to top of the heap as they became the sixth country in the past 10 years to be ranked No.1 in Tests. Overall, they are the seventh side in the world to hold the No.1 spot. They now have 118 points, two more than Australia and four clear of third-placed India. NZ skipper Kane Williamson consolidated his top spot in the batting list ahead of Virat Kohli and Steve Smith. The Black Caps are also inching closer to the top two spots in the ICC World Test Championship standings. They are still third with 70 (PCT) percentage points but are narrowing the gap with Australia (76.7) and India (72.2).