



## GROWING IN STATURE

Kriti Sanon feels now she is in a position to try something different and challenging

LEISURE

P2



## GRAVEYARD FOR ANIMALS

41 exotic animals died at PM Modi's pet project, the Statue of Unity Zoological Park at Kevadiya in 2 years

TWO STATES

P7



## SCO JOINT EXERCISE

India, Pakistan and China will participate in a SCO joint anti-terrorism exercise this year

INTERNATIONAL

P10

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IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Believe me, you are not being arrested for running an extortion racket. Hon'ble minister wants you to come and train our officers.

## First Odissi danseuse Laxmipriya no more



**BHUBANESWAR:** Noted Odissi dancer Laxmipriya Mohapatra, the wife of legendary classical dancer Kelucharan Mohapatra, has died due to old age-related ailments, family sources said Sunday. She was 86. Mohapatra died at her residence here around 11.20 pm Saturday, they said. She is survived by her son Ratikanta Mohapatra and daughter-in-law Sujata Mohapatra, who are also Odissi dance gurus. Starting her dancing career at an early age at the Annapurna Theatre in Puri in 1947, Laxmipriya came in contact with Kelucharan Mohapatra at the Annapurna Theatre-B in Cuttack. Though he was an expert in Odissi and Gotipua dance forms, Kelucharan was then performing as a tabla player in the theatre. They got married in 1947.

## 4 killed as ambulance rams into gas tanker

**ANGUL:** At least four persons were killed while three others sustained critical injuries when an ambulance met with an accident on NH-55 near Jharapada in Angul district Sunday morning. The ambulance, which was carrying a patient from Sambalpur to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, had a head-on collision with a gas tanker near Jharapada killing four persons, informed Angul SP Jagmohan Meena. Sources said the ambulance driver lost control over the wheels and rammed into the gas tanker.

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP		
MAX	40.0°C	39.6°C
MIN	23.2°C	22.6°C
Humidity	31%	40%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Light rain likely	

# Tigress Sundari to bid adieu to Odisha soon

THE MAIDEN EXPERIMENT OF INDIA'S INTER-STATE TIGER RELOCATION PROGRAMME WILL RECEIVE A SETBACK WITH SUNDARI'S RETURN TO MP

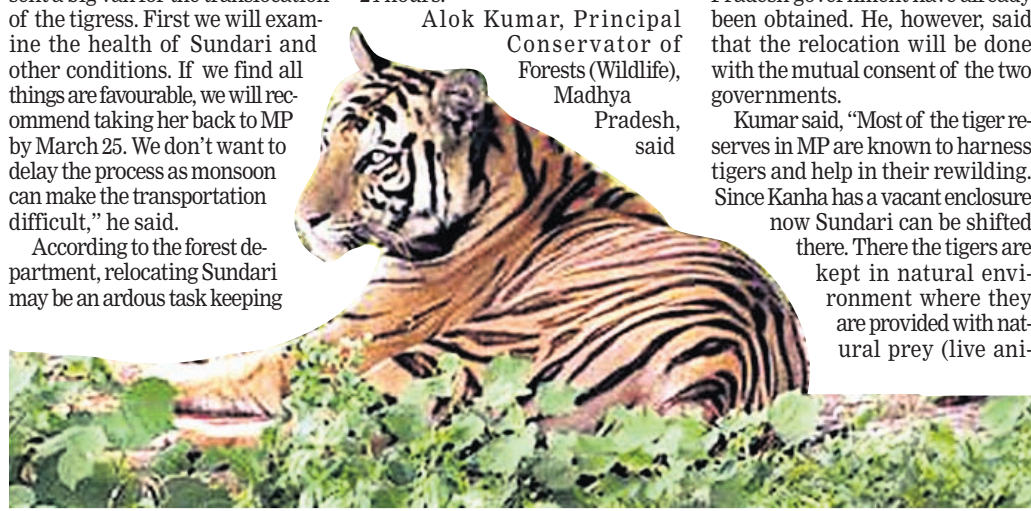
MANISH KUMAR, OP

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** The Madhya Pradesh government has sent an eight-member team from the Kanha National Park to take back tigress Sundari from Satkosia to her native state. The move to send back Sundari to Madhya Pradesh comes after India's maiden inter-state tiger relocation programme failed to yield the desired results and Sundari could not be resettled in Satkosia, Forest department officials told Orissa POST. "Eight officials from MP, a deputy director rank official, Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF), a veterinary doctor, have been dispatched to Odisha. They will examine the health of Sundari and look into the feasibility of relocating the tigress," SK Singh, Director,

Kanha National Park, told this reporter. Singh further said, "We have sent a big van for the translocation of the tigress. First we will examine the health of Sundari and other conditions. If we find all things are favourable, we will recommend taking her back to MP by March 25. We don't want to delay the process as monsoon can make the transportation difficult," he said. According to the forest department, relocating Sundari may be an arduous task keeping

in mind the movement of a tigress inside the van and travelling around 800 kms, which may take more than 24 hours.

Alok Kumar, Principal Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Madhya Pradesh, said



that adequate approvals from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Madhya Pradesh government have already been obtained. He, however, said that the relocation will be done with the mutual consent of the two governments.

Kumar said, "Most of the tiger reserves in MP are known to harness tigers and help in their rewilding. Since Kanha has a vacant enclosure now Sundari can be shifted there. There the tigers are kept in natural environment where they are provided with natural prey (live ani-

mals) to help them revive their natural instincts," he said.

Kanha has around 800 sq kms for tigers and is known for rewilding animals since 2002. This reserve forest is known to be unfrequented by humans. The entire translocation exercise was stalled earlier due to COVID-19 as well as technical and logistic problems in MP, which was reluctant to take back Sundari.

The maiden experiment of India's inter-state tiger relocation programme will receive a setback with Sundari's return to Madhya Pradesh. In 2018, the MP government had sent a tiger named Mahavir and tigress Sundari to Odisha. While Mahavir was killed in an alleged poaching activity, Sundari was kept in an enclosure after she attacked some villagers.

# Law dept putting RTI activists' life in danger

GYAN RANJAN MOHAPATRA, OP

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** Often miscreants try to harm the whistle-blowers through inducements, issuing threats to their lives or mental humiliations. In the past, many whistle-blowers who dared to expose rampant malpractices and illegal activities in various sectors of governance were brutally killed by the wrongdoers.

For instance, miscreants reportedly killed RTI activists Ranjan Kumar Das of Kendrapara in February 2020, Abhimanyu Panda of Kandhamal in December 2019, Ganesh Panda of Ganjam in 2014 and Krupasindhu Sahoo of Cuttack in 2015 for exposing various malpractices by the local administration.

A state-based body of RTI activists claimed that during the past several years as many as 55 activists have received life threats from miscreants.

Despite this, Public Information Officers of the state Law depart-



ment have been putting the RTI applicants' life in danger. They are flouting all the guidelines by posting the details of the applicants on the 'eDespatch' website. In fact, they are accused of uploading the scanned copies of the applications along with the applicants' details on the e-despatch site making the identity of the applicant public. The state government introduced the eDespatch or electronic transfer of letters system to uploaded documents, and not details of the applicants, so that can be accessed by general public.

Recently, the Law department uploaded the scanned copy of one application in which the applicant had sought details related to Lord Jagannath's land in Sakhigopal area

of Puri that have been encroached upon by local influential persons.

"Who will be held responsible if the alleged encroachers inflict any harm on the applicant whose identity was made public by the PIOs of Law department," questioned RTI activist Pradeep Kumar Pradhan.

This is not an isolated case as the department has been posting the details of almost all the RTI applicants on the eDespatch site.

"The RTI application form used in Odisha also asks the applicant to provide personal details in contravention to Section 6(3) of the RTI Act," added Pradhan.

In 2013, the Kolkata High Court delivered a landmark judgment prohibiting the government PIOs from making public details of the applicants. Following the judgment, the Department of Personnel and Training of the Union government and the state Information and Public Relations Department issued circulars to the PIOs to follow the court rulings for the safety of the applicants.

# Prez bats for inclusive development of country

PRESIDENT RAM NATH KOVIND INAUGURATED A SUPER SPECIALTY HOSPITAL AND PARTICIPATED IN THE 18TH CONVOCAION OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (NIT), ROURKELA

PNN & AGENCIES

**Rourkela, March 21:** President Ram Nath Kovind Sunday emphasised that strong socio-economic structure is necessary along with the industrial advancement for the inclusive development of a country.

The President said that Rourkela Steel Plant has played a major role in the industrial development of our country. He was addressing the inauguration of a Super Specialty Hospital and a medical college Ispat Post Graduate Institute here.

The 200-bedded hospital has facilities for neurology, neuro surgery, cardiology, cardio thoracic & vascular surgery and nephrology. The hospital is also adorned with avant-garde medical equipment like MRI 3 Tesla, CT scan 256 slice, 2 Cath Labs (uniplane & biplane), CRRT machine besides having five modular operation theatres laced with sophisticated technology.

Kovind said that Rourkela Steel Plant has made conscious efforts to bring changes in not only in the industrial activities but also in the fields of health-care, education, culture and sports.

The President noted that till now



President Ram Nath Kovind addressing the 18th convocation of the NIT, Rourkela, Sunday

this area was deprived of super specialty medical facility. About six years ago, the Prime Minister had laid the foundation for developing the Ispat General Hospital as a Super-Specialty Hospital.

The work on a 200-bedded super specialty hospital was completed within a period of two years with funds available from the Centre and Rourkela Steel Plant after Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and local MP Jual Oram demanded the works of the hospital be expedited before the Prime Minister in 2019. And today, it is ready to serve the people of the region. He noted that this Hospital would not only cater the super specialty medical needs of Odisha but also of the adjoining areas of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

"Covid-19 pandemic has shown its macabre form across the world. In this difficult time, our medical fraternity has fought an extraordinary battle against an invisible and unknown enemy," Kovind said.

P3

## 'More women should pursue tech education'

**ROURKELA:** President Ram Nath Kovind Sunday called for enhanced participation of women in the field of science and technology. Kovind, while addressing the 18th convocation of the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela here, said, "Growth and excellence of women in the technical area will add a new dimension to our national development." He said more girls need to get higher education, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Quoting a recent survey, he said enrolment of women in engineering and technical institutions in India is abysmally low at only 20 per cent. "Our girls should be encouraged to pursue technical education and excel in the same manner as they do in other areas. Our daughters are outshining boys and getting more gold medals in arts and other fields," he said. Kovind said three of the seven gold medal winners at NIT Rourkela are women and the situation is similar in other central universities.

## Large asteroid to zip past Earth at 124,000 kmph

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Washington, March 21:** The largest asteroid to pass by Earth this year will swing closest Sunday, giving astronomers a rare chance for a good look at a space rock that formed at the dawn of our solar system.

While in astronomical terms this marks a close encounter with the asteroid - called 2001 FO32 - NASA says there is no threat of a collision with our planet "now or for centuries to come". The nearest it will get will be two million kilometres away, according to the US space agency.

That is roughly 5.25 times the distance of the Earth from the Moon but still close enough for 2001 FO32 to be classified as a "potentially hazardous asteroid." "We know the orbital path of 2001 FO32 around the Sun very accurately," said Paul Chodas, director of the Center for Near Earth Object Studies.

NASA says 2001 FO32 will pass by at about 124,000 kilometres per hour.

# India fourth most powerful military in world: Study

CHINA HAS THE STRONGEST MILITARY FORCE IN THE WORLD FOLLOWED BY THE UNITED STATES



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 21:** China has the strongest military force in the world while India stands at number four, according to a study released Sunday by Defence website Military Direct.

"The USA, despite their enormous military budgets, comes in 2nd place with 74 points, followed by Russia with 69, India at 61 and then France with 58. The UK just about makes the Top 10, coming in 9th place with a score of 43," said the study.

The study said "ultimate military strength index" was calculated after taking into consideration various factors including budgets, number of inactive and active military personnel, total air, sea, land and nuclear resources, average salaries, and weight of equipment.

China has the strongest military in the world, scoring 82 out of

100 points in the index, it noted.

"Based on these scores, which account for budgets, men, and things like air and navy capacity, it does suggest that China would come out as top dog in a hypothetical super conflict," it mentioned.

The world's biggest military spender with a budget of \$732 billion per year is the USA, it noted, adding that China comes second with \$261 billion, followed by India at \$71 billion.

**The USA, despite their enormous military budgets, comes in 2nd place with 74 points, followed by Russia with 69, India at 61 and then France with 58. The UK just about makes to the Top 10, coming in 9th place with a score of 43**

"China would win by sea, USA by air and Russia by land" in this hypothetical conflict, it said.

"USA wins in an aerial war with 14,141 total airships vs Russia with 4,682 and China with 3,587. The Russian Federation wins in a land war with 54,866 vehicles vs USA with 50,326 and China with 41,641," it mentioned.

China wins in a sea war with 406 ships vs Russia with 278 and the USA or India with 202, it said.



**FORTUNE FORECAST**

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accuracy • reliability • trust  
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

**ARIES**

You are an imaginative and enterprising person, and today you may taste success. Ganesha says that you are ambitious but warns you not to take on more work than you can handle. You are positive about your capabilities, so work sincerely and have faith in God.

**TAURUS**

Today, you are likely to be more reckless than ever in plunging your hard earned money. Ganesha strongly advises you to leave your credit card at home today. Using it for making purchases will only make matters worse.

**GEMINI**

Today will be a day filled with energy and enthusiasm. You will have an optimistic view of life and this will help you attain success. You will be able to exercise your free will and take up tasks to your liking. While the day will be busy, it will also be rewarding, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**

A restless or irritating mood is indicated. Keep you cool and be calm even in adverse circumstances, suggests Ganesha. If you do so, you will always succeed in life. It is difficult to wriggle out of adversity, if you have hot temper.

**LEO**

You will be filled with extraordinary self-confidence today. You will be able to take firm decisions when it comes to work related issues. You will not face any difficulties in completing your tasks today, and will achieve success.

**VIRGO**

It is quite possible that you will love financial challenges that are thrown at you, as they whet your appetite for success. You will come up with innovative ideas and improved methods of problem-solving. Ganesha assures you that your current business ideas will work wonders.

**LIBRA**

Ganesha says you will showcase your ability and skills today in your work field and impress people. You will develop and express your inner love for art and artistic things and you will purchase a new work of art today.

**SCORPIO**

According to Ganesha, you will be soaked in your work today. During the day, you may be loaded with duties and responsibilities, however, evening has a different story to reveal. Exciting as ever, a get away with friends may be liberating and relaxing.

**SAGITTARIUS**

Take it as a piece of advice: if you have been dishonest your karma will make you pay for it. The day has a lot of ups and downs in store for you. So be careful in what you do and say. Drop your ego and haughtiness and surrender yourself. Take the advice given by your near and dear ones, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**

Forced to some back-breaking work today, you will feel exhausted by the end of the day. It is a cut-throat competition when it comes to the business world. Your arch rivals are looking out for one small opportunity to damage your business and reputation.

**AQUARIUS**

You may receive some good news from the foreign shores today. The day will bring on a positive note and it will remain like that for the whole twenty-four hours. You'll be in a mood to merry and it will be transformed to everyone around you, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**

Those who work hard to move towards their goals will do well today. It is a good day for business. You will be able to do a lot of new things in your job-business today. With Ganesha's blessings you will definitely succeed, but you need to work hard without getting disappointed.



**KATIE CASSIDY TO AUCTION OFF HER DIGITAL ARTWORK**

Arrow star Katie Cassidy will be auctioning off a series of artworks, which features the 34-year-old actress covered in just black and white paint. The works are of Katie's photos, shot by celebrity photographers The Riker Brothers.

**McCONAUGHEY WOULD LOVE TO REPRIS BRIGANCE'S ROLE**

Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey would 'love to reprise' the role of lawyer Jake Brigance - a character in the novels by John Grisham - who was portrayed by McConaughey in the 1996 film *A Time to Kill*, which was based on Grisham's book by the same name.



**Sonakshi doesn't pay heed to trolls**

**Mumbai:** Actress Sonakshi Sinha says that she doesn't pay much heed to trolls. The actress adds that there was a point when what they said would really bother her, but it does not anymore.

"There used to be a time where I used to get really bothered by what is being said about me on social media by trolls and would react as well. But now I have reached a point where it doesn't affect me at all and I have learned to move on," she said. She adds that trolls are only people who hide behind their phones and spread negativity.

They have no place in her life.

"These guys sitting behind their phones and constantly spewing negativity aren't important to me. My fans have been extremely supportive and that's what matters. I have always been myself on social media and I will continue to keep it 'asli'," she says.



IAN S



It feels nice not to repeat myself: Kriti

**Mumbai:** Actress Kriti Sanon will play diverse characters in upcoming films such as *Bhediya*, *Mimi* and *Adipurush*. She feels now she is in a position to try something different and challenging.

"When you establish yourself a bit and people are liking you and the film is doing the numbers that you want to do, it gives you confidence to take up something challenging. I feel as an actor you also get bored repeating yourself and the audience also gets bored seeing you in same kinds of films. Yes, there is a deliberate attempt to try doing something different and not repeating yourself," she says. She adds: "I have also been lucky enough to have liked scripts that belong to different genres. If tomorrow there are two horror comedies I am loving, I would do both. It is a nice feeling for me to do something different and not repeat myself." IAN S

**SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI'S DRAMA FESTIVAL**

**Akuha Kahaninarrates an unwed mom's vulnerability**



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar:** Members of Smurti Cultural Association, Puri presented the play *Akuha Kahan* on the third evening of theatre festival Ranga Sangam here at Bhanja Kala Mandap, Sunday.

The five-day event is being jointly organised by Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi (OSNA) and Department of Odia Language, Literature and Culture, Government of Odisha.

Written by Ganeswar Mahapatra and directed by Ramkrushna Mahapatra, the 110-minute Odia play tells the tale of an orphan boy Sidhant who has been searching for his parents since childhood.

After roaming around for years, he happens to join a Maoist camp. But destiny takes Sidhant to the house of a doctor Akash as he

sustains bullet injuries in a police encounter. The doctor's wife Aliva, a nurse, who tries to remove the bullets from Sidhant's body, shockingly discovers that the latter is in fact her son. Aliva recalls how she had abandoned Sidhant on a temple premises after his birth

**RANGA SANGAM: DAY 3**

fearing shame and humiliation as she was unmarried then. She still is in dilemma whether to reveal Sidhant's true identity before Akash. The rest of the story revolves around Aliva's helplessness and sufferings as a mother.

The guests who attended the event included theatre director Dhira Mallick, Odisha Natya Sangh president Haren Sahoo, Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalay principal Guru Bijay Jena and OSNA Secretary Prabodh Kumar Rath.

**FASHION DESIGN COUNCIL OF INDIA-LAKME FASHION WEEK: DAY 5**

**KIARA, KARTIK TURN SHOWSTOPPERS FOR MANISH**

*The designer says, he wants to bring together a new composition that is balanced in its heterogeneous elements*

**V**eteran fashion designer Manish Malhotra showcased his latest couture collection Nooranayat with stars Kiara Advani and Kartik Aryan as the showstoppers for his phygital show at the Fashion Design Council of India

(FDCI)-Lakme Fashion Week in Delhi, Sunday.

The designer presented a line-up of bridal wears - dominated by metallics and a lot of blacks and blue. The primary line of inspiration for the collection is from the old world repertoire-the embroidery in particular, says the designer.

For the show, Kiara wore a shimmering silver gown with cut outs and a silver sheer, long shoulder train. While Kartik was dressed in a black, bundgala jacket with three silver reindeers embroidered, teamed with an asymmetric ink kurta and slim pants.

"Everyone knows my fondness



for the deft embroidery, the intricate and ornate designs. However, I've given my own take to the collection where it is influenced by contemporary times. I wanted to bring together a new composition that is balanced in its heterogeneous elements, where everything exists," says Malhotra.

The collection also saw a mixture of sumptuous sorbet and blush shades, like vibrant pink with lilac, grey-blue and royal beige-gold. The fabrics used were pure two-toned silks and Dupion silks, gold silks, sheer organzas, lush crepes and tissue fabrics.

There were oversized jackets and

colour blocked lehengas, Kalidar kurtas, the diaphanous lehengas, gowns, shararas, kurtas, palazzos, jackets and traditional dupattas.

Women's bridal wear included silver and gold gowns, backless and button less cholis. The designer has used mini capes with gowns, floor-kissing ornate robes, kurtas and kurtis with cropped, flowing pants.

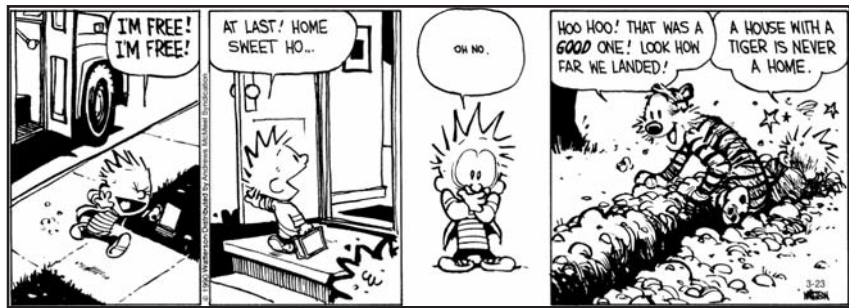
For men's wear, Manish offered a variety of jackets with beaded lapels or silver shawl collars. He teamed the conventional or jodhpuri jackets with kurtas and added discreet, animal motif embroidery for the Sherwanis.

AGENCIES

**PEANUTS**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

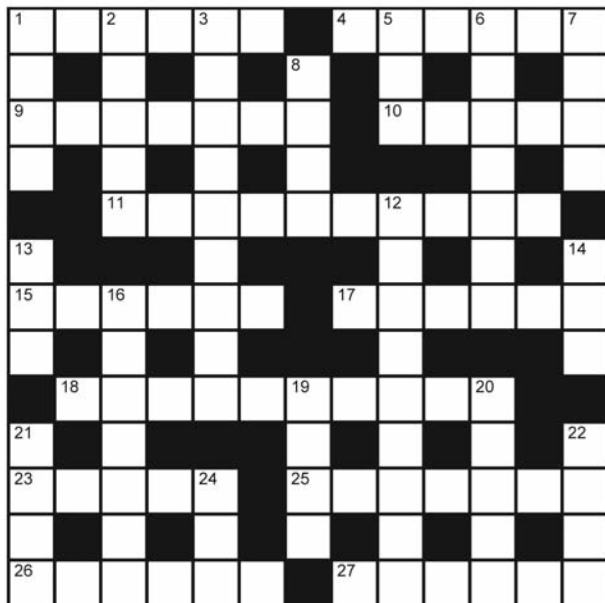


**BREVITY**



**FUN post**

**CROSSWORD**



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**Across**

- 1 Keep
- 4 Argentine grassland
- 9 Griddle cake
- 10 Cheapskate
- 11 Fortune teller
- 15 Lean
- 17 Involuntary muscular contractions
- 18 Salon worker
- 23 Playground item

**Down**

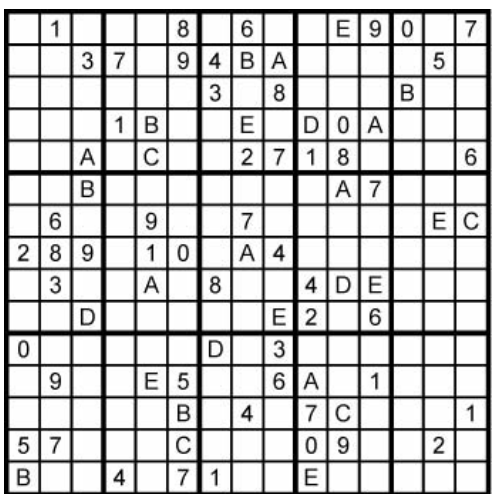
- 1 Torture device
- 2 Bridge support
- 3 Off-the-cuff
- 5 Ready for battle
- 6 Pale or light colours
- 7 Like some losers

**8 Eczema symptom**

- 12 Dish washer, e.g.
- 13 Belief system
- 14 Egyptian snake
- 16 Enumerate
- 19 \_\_\_ of Wight
- 20 Man-made fibre
- 21 Bygone autocrat
- 22 Pesky insect
- 24 Bearded antelope

**SUDOKU**

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

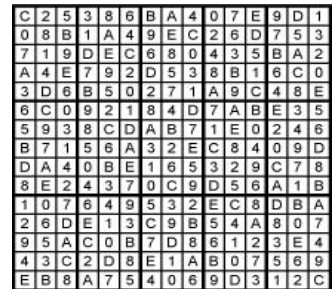


**SOLUTIONS**



**CROSSWORD**

**SUDOKU**



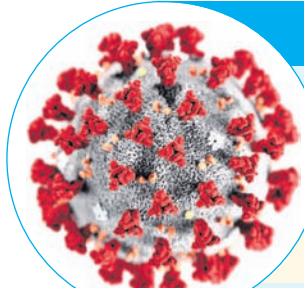
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW





AT LORD'S ABODE

Hindi film actor Govinda returns from Srimandir after paying obeisance to Lord Jagannath, Sunday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	12,35,47,498	9,95,28,243	27,23,707
India	1,15,14,489	1,11,30,288	1,59,755
Odisha	3,38,817	3,36,124	1,919

CM launches 'Mo College' campaign

NAVEEN CALLS UPON ODIA ALUMNI TO HELP REBUILD THEIR OWN INSTITUTIONS



PNN/AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Sunday called upon the Odia alumni across the globe to be a collaborative force in rebuilding their own institutions in their motherland.

The Chief Minister rolled out the 'Mo College' (my college) campaign in line with the 'Mo School' (my school) programme and also launched a web portal through virtual platform, to connect former students with their institutions. He said that the state government has been taking steps to enhance the structure and functioning of higher education.

"Never the less, the personal contribution of the alumni will have a magical touch to it," Patnaik said. The Chief Minister was optimistic that 'Mo College' would bring a similar response for higher education institutions as that of the 'Mo School'.

Welcoming the Odia diaspora around the globe and alumni members of different colleges who were connected through live streams, Patnaik said, "This campaign is an emotionally invested platform reconnecting the Odia Alumni. There's nothing more rewarding than going back to the treasured memories of our college days."

Naveen said that the campaign is not limited only to the alumni. Non-alumni philanthropists, charitable organisations, group of persons and institutions can also be part of this initiative.

He said the mission strives for a healthy learning atmosphere and that it is grounded on the principles of nation-building, promoting creativity, skill development and nurturing teamwork, thereby making the colleges and universities an innovative and exciting place to study.

He said, "We all should realise the joy of giving back to our respective alma maters, where we enjoyed the most vibrant period of our youth and shaped our future."

Higher Education Minister Arun Sahoo described this campaign as a unique experiment of the Chief Minister to reconnect the alumni for development of institutions.

He further said the contribution of our schools and colleges are enormous in our life. So this is the right platform to be a part of the development of the alma mater, he added.

Former MLA Akash Das, the chairperson of the 'Mo College' campaign, gave a detailed account of the campaign and its future course of action.

He said 755 government colleges and universities, including technical and professional institutions

IN A NUTSHELL

As many as 755 government colleges and universities, including technical and professional institutions, are included in 'Mo College' campaign

A corpus fund has been constituted by the state government to support the movement

Under the campaign, the government will provide the grant equivalent to double the contribution made by former students of universities and colleges

The government will take steps for the development of the institutions with the contribution amount

are included in the campaign.

A corpus fund has also been constituted by the state government to support the movement.

Under the campaign, the government will provide the grant equivalent to double the contribution made by former students of universities and colleges. The students, individuals and members of the society can contribute. The government will take steps for the development of the institutions with the contribution amount.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Senior prison official in trouble over graft charges

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** The State Prisons department has ordered enquiry against a senior official for allegedly taking bribe in order to hush up an enquiry against a jailor. The issue came to fore after an audio call record, purportedly held between a wader and the officer, went viral few days back.

According to sources, a jailor was recently found engaged in various malpractices and administrative wrongdoings. The Director General of Prisons, Santosh Kumar Upadhyaya later directed a senior superintendent in Sambalpur to initiate a probe into the matter.

Meanwhile, accused jailor took help of one warden in order to offer the superintendent Rs 1 lakh requesting him to conclude the charges made against him as false in the probe report. Sources claimed that the conversation between the warden and the enquiry officer later accidentally got leaked. The officer was asking the warden to keep the money with him which he would receive after submitting the report to the higher authorities.

Speaking to **Orissa POST**, Upadhyaya said, "None will be spared if found involved in any wrongdoing. Charges have been drafted against the enquiry officer over the issue."

Security beefed up ahead of Prez's Srimandir visit



PNN&AGENCIES

**Puri, March 21:** About 40 platoons of police personnel besides 250 officers of various ranks would be deployed in the Pilgrim City and at Konark during the visit of President Ram Nath Kovind Monday morning.

ADG Yashwant Jethua Sunday inspected the Srimandir security corridor and helipad as well as discussed with the DIG and SP regarding the security arrangements. A mock drill of a carcade from helipad to the 12th century shrine was also conducted.

An hour before the President's visit to the shrine, the complex would be cleared of devotees.

Except servitors on duty, none would be allowed into the temple during his stay.

The district administration had discussed with the servitors in this regard about arrangements for the President's visit to Srimandir.

Barricades would be raised on both the sides of the road enroute from helipad to Srimandir, including Grand Road. Similar arrangements were also put in place at Konark. As per programme, the President and first lady would arrive at Puri helipad at 8.55am and would reach temple gate at 9.05am.

Srimandir administrator Krishan Kumar, district Collector Samarth Verma and the President's family panda Narayan Gochhikar would escort the couple inside the temple.

After spending about 40 minutes, they would return to the helipad and fly to Konark at 10.05am.

The President and the first lady would visit Sun Temple at Konark at 10.55am and return to Konark Yatri Niwas at 11.15am. They would take lunch at Yatri Niwas and after taking rest, the President would return to Bhubaneswar and later to New Delhi.

This would be his second visit to Puri temple as President of India.

RELISH FOR READERS ON WORLD POETRY DAY

BDA gifts 'Forest Park Library' to denizens

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** In a bid to develop reading habit, especially among youngsters, Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) opened a public library at Biju Patnaik Park, popular as Forest Park, here on the occasion of World Poetry Day, Sunday.

A first-of-its-kind initiative in the state, the 'Forest Park Library' was inaugurated by Chief Advisor to Chief Minister's Office, R Balakrishnan, in presence of BDA vice-chairman Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

Praising BDA's effort in setting up the ultramodern library, Balakrishnan said, "It's a great step by BDA to step up and promote park library culture at a time when reading habit is declining among youngsters. The library will definitely attract children, students, book lovers and those visiting the park to spend some time in reading in a cool and peaceful environment."

He pointed out that there is a decline in book reading habit in the age of Internet. Hence, initiatives like park library will definitely help encourage and promote reading habits among all.

The initiative is a collaboration between BDA and city-based BAKUL Foundation. While BDA has provided the space and physical infrastructure required for setting up the library, BAKUL Foundation developed it into a creative space with racks and books and attractive murals. BAKUL will be managing the library as well, according to a BDA source.



Chief Advisor to CMO, R Balakrishnan, BDA vice-chairman, Prem Chandra Chaudhary, and others during the inauguration of Forest Park Library in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

OP PHOTO

Chaudhary said that more such libraries will come up in other big parks in the City. "The main purpose behind setting up a park library is to provide an opportunity to book lovers, especially underprivileged children, in reading different kinds of books which are quite expensive to buy from market. We will ensure that the library gets a good collection of Odia books from different genres. To promote park library culture in the City, BDA is planning to set up more such libraries in other big size parks in the Temple City," the BDA vice-chairman pointed out.

According to the civic body sources, as the library is located within the park, it opens and closes according to the park's timings. "It is open from 7am to 10am and from 4pm to 7pm. The library is open throughout week except for Mondays," it said, adding that since the library is located in the heart of the sprawling park, it is shut off from the noise outside and is an ideal haunt for quiet reading.

The book section includes a collection of Odia and English books and has shelves with books for children too, with chairs and tables meant for them. Besides the stock of Odia books, it has English best-sellers and classics, and a host of textbooks for students.

The Forest Park Library has the BAKUL signature with beautiful and alluring murals on the outside, attractive open bookshelves and a wonderful curation of books focusing on children but with books for adults as well. The books have been graded into difficulty levels and genres to get a child interested in reading without intimidating them. There is a shelf for children's books in Hindi and French as well.

BAKUL will engage its volunteers who will conduct storytelling sessions, creative workshops and live performances to attract students and youngsters into the library and inculcate a habit of reading.

Founder-Secretary of BAKUL Foundation, Sujit Mahapatra, who was present on the occasion, said, "A librarian will be engaged in the Forest Park Library who will guide children choosing books and help them discover their tastes in reading." Currently, around 2000 books, including fiction, non-fiction, biographies, classics and textbooks are available in the library. More books will be added soon, Mahapatra added.

The library opens and closes as per the park's timings—7am to 10am and from 4pm to 7pm. It is open throughout week except for Mondays

Currently, around 2000 books, including fiction, non-fiction, biographies, classics and textbooks are available in the library

BAKUL Foundation-engaged volunteers will conduct storytelling sessions, creative workshops and live performances to attract students and youngsters into the library and inculcate a habit of reading

ADDING COLOURS



An artist drawing a mural at an under-construction park in Cuttack, Sunday

OP PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** The Forest and Environment department Sunday observed the International Day of Forests at Jayadev Vatika here.

The theme of this year's International Day of Forests was 'Forest restoration: A path to recovery and well-being'.

"Forests act as a safeguard against pollution. The safety of forests determines the future of mankind," said Forest and Environment Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha while participating in the event.

As per a recent survey, Odisha has 61,204 sq km of forest coverage and the state achieved 4th rank in terms of forest coverage after Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The survey claimed that 39.31 per cent geographical area of the state is covered with greenery, said the Minister.

The state government has planned to cover 1.50 lakh hectare area of Odisha under afforestation programme in 2021-22 fiscal.



Forest and Environment Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha and other dignitaries on the occasion

OP PHOTO

Out of this, more than 44,000 hectare area will be covered under the initiative of Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) while 55,000 hectare will be covered under MGNREGA.

This year, around 3.92 crore saplings have been planted in the state under various afforestation programmes. Apart from that, 4.66 crore saplings have been distributed among the people through government and private organisations.

Minister said that the Forest and Environment Department had targeted to take up plantation along the banks of Mahanadi as part of the ambitious Mission Green Mahanadi project in 2017. Under this mission, 96 lakh saplings have been planted in last three years.

Additional Chief Secretary Forest and Environment Department, Mona Sharma, said locals are being involved in various afforestation programmes of the state government.



# Odisha cites 1934 declaration for its claim over Kotia villages



FILE PHOTO

**New Delhi, March 21:** The state of Odisha has cited the declaration of Privy Council dated March 1934, wherein Maharaja of Jeypore Estate was allowed to collect revenue from disputed villages, in the Supreme Court to press for its claim over the three villages in Kotia panchayat.

In the rejoinder affidavit, filed through advocate Sibashankar Mishra, Odisha submitted that prior to formation of Odisha, there was a dispute regarding the transfer of Zamindari and apportionment of Paishcush between Maharaja of Jeypore, Estate under

**Odisha contended that the documents of 1937 & 1939 indicate that the then Koraput Collector was assigned to collect cess from the disputed villages**

Madras Presidency and Zamindar of Pachipenta. While deciding the dispute, Privy Council had given declaration in favour of Maharaja of Jeypore that he had a right to separate registration and apportionment of Paishcush in respect of

the properties falling under disputed villages.

The state government submitted the revenue collection receipts of 1934 to support their claim over disputed villages. It also contended that the documents of 1937 and 1939 also indicate that the then Collector of Koraput was assigned to collect cess and Paishcush from the disputed Kotia group of villages.

“After the abolition of zamindari and Estates, the estate belonging to Jeypore and Pachipenta were vested in the territorial and administrative control of Odisha in 1952,” Odisha submitted the copy of notification dated 1952.

Odisha also annexed several letters exchanged between Chief Electoral Officers of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh in 1960s and letters exchanged during 70s and 80s between Chief Secretaries of both the states where Odisha had claimed its control over the disputed villages.

The state government also submitted Census reports of 2011, 2001 and 1991 and contended that the disputed villages had been mentioned in the Potangi taluk of Koraput district.

It is to be mentioned here that Odisha has filed a contempt petition against Andhra Pradesh in the apex court for holding panchayat elections in three villages of Koraput district.

## 98 fresh Covid cases

**BHUBANESWAR:** Odisha's Covid-19 tally Sunday surged to 3,38,817 after 98 more people tested positive for the infection, while one more fatality, after a gap of eight days, pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 1,919, a health department official said.

## WASSUP TODAY

- BHUBANESWAR**
- 13th Kalinga Herbal Fair 2021 by State Medicinal Plants Board, Idco Exhibition Ground, Unit-III, 6pm
- Inauguration of water shed, Janamangal Parishad camp, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, 10am
- Annual festival of Ekamra Baristha Nagarika Sangha, Kedar-Gouri Resort, 10.30am
- Protest by Power Distribution Franchisee Employees' Association, TPCODL headquarters, Idco Towers, 11.30am
- Agitation by Utkal Sammilani Kendriya Committee, near state Assembly, 12noon
- Protest by Ayush Doctors' Development Association, Lower PMG, 1pm
- 'Samarpam' by Bhubaneswar Music Circle, Rabindra Mandap, 6.30pm
- State-level theatre festival 'Rangasangam', Bhanja Kala Mandap, 6.30pm

- BALIANITA**
- Inauguration of second annual Uslam Premier League, Balianita Andilo Eidgha Ground, 8am

- CUTTACK**
- Inauguration of photo expo on Mahatma Gandhi, Old Jail Road, Dargha Bazar, 7pm

Programmes/announcements for **wassup** today may be sent to [opwassup@gmail.com](mailto:opwassup@gmail.com) for record, it must also carry the sender's mobile number for our verification, but not for publication.

## CLASSIFIED

### AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit dt.8.3.2021 sworn before Executive Magistrate, Bhadrak, I, Rupashree Pandua change my surname to Rupashree Barik, W/o Ramchandra Barik at present- At- Palli, P.O.-Atto, P.S.- Sabarang, Dist.- Bhadrak by marriage. Henceforth, I shall be known as Rupashree Barik for all purpose.



Former Chief Justice of India Gopal Ballav Pattanaik being honoured with *Utkal Ratna Samman* at an event of Utkal Sahitya Samaj in Cuttack, Sunday OP PHOTO

## Light rain likely for next three days

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** India Meteorological Department (IMD) Sunday predicted light to moderate rain in different parts of state for next three days.

The department has not issued any warning of heavy rain in any part of the state. While forecasting the weather Monday, the department said, “Light to moderate rain or thundershower is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Koraput, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Boudh, Angul, Mayurbhanj and dry weather very likely to prevail over the rest districts of Odisha.”

The trend is predicted to continue till Wednesday when northern and southern parts of Odisha are may record light to moderate rain. However there will be no respite from heat in state Capital.

The Met said, “Maximum temperature (day temperature) is likely to be above normal by 2-3°C at a few places over the districts during next 4-5 days. Maximum and Minimum temperature are likely to be around 39°C and 23°C respectively on Monday.”

## Man gets life term for raping daughter

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, March 21:** The special Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) court here has convicted and sentenced a man to life imprisonment for raping and impregnating his minor daughter.

According to Commissionerate Police release, justice Bandana Kar awarded life imprisonment to Suryamani Behera, a resident of Dagarpada in Chandinichowk here, in connection with a case (120/2018) registered with Mahila Police in the Millennium City under Sections 376(2) of the Indian Penal Code and 6 of the POCSO Act. “The court has also slapped a penalty of Rs 20,000 on Behera,” the twin city said.

Elaborating case details, the release said that victim's mother had approached Lalbagh police here December 25, 2018 alleging that her husband had, on multiple occasions, sexually exploited their minor daughter and impregnated her.

“The minor had delivered a baby girl. Initially, a case was registered with the Lalbagh police and later it was handed over to Mahila police for investigations,” said the release.

Mahila inspector in-charge Anusaya Nayak investigated the case and submitted the chargesheet March 11, 2019 after establishing prima facie evidence U/s 376(2)(m)(n)/376(3) IPC/6 POCSO Act upon completion of all the scientific methods of investigations.

# Speech, hearing impaired couple ties knot

PNN&AGENCIES

**Sambalpur, March 21:** A speech-and-hearing impaired couple, who found each other on social media, tied the knot in presence of family members, friends and well-wishers at a mutt Sunday.

Laxmirani Tripathy of Chiplima, Sambalpur and Mahabir Prashad Shukla of Latapahar, Manoharpur, Jharkhand are both deaf and dumb by birth. Laxmirani, 43, a matriculate, has completed sewing and beautician courses and Mahabir, 48, is an electrical contractor.

They met each other on Facebook around six months ago. Since phone



calls, a mainstay for long distance relationship, were of no use for the speech-and-hearing impaired couple, they conversed with each other through messages on social media and sign language on WhatsApp video call to know each other.

Technology helped couple overcome every barrier they had known.

It allowed them to speak their heart to each other and helped Laxmirani find the person closest to her heart, around 370 km away from her native place.

Laxmirani's 21-year-old nephew, Arnava Babu said, “My aunt found Mahabir Ji on Facebook and after conversing through the new-age

technology for around six months, they both decided to get married. My aunt told about her decision to the family and like my aunt, Mahabir Ji also informed his family that he wanted to get married to Laxmirani. Both the families agreed for the marriage and the marriage was held today.”

Arnav said the family had never imagined that Laxmirani would get married to a man from such a far-off place. “The family members consider it 'God's will' that the two decided to tie the knot. Since both are speech-and-hearing impaired, they will certainly share a peaceful and happy relationship,” he said.

# Agitating Forestry students take out mock funeral procession

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, March 21:** On the occasion of International Day of Forests, the students of College of Forestry, OUAT took out a mock funeral procession at Lower PMG in the city here as part of their agitation to press for various demands.

The students are on a strike for last several days urging the state government to make 4-year BSc degree in Forestry as minimum qualification for recruitment to key posts like forest range officer, assistant conservator of forests, assistant manager of Odisha Forest Development Corporation (OFDC) and junior manager of OFDC.

“Our agitation entered its 28th day Sunday. But the state government is yet to fulfil our demands. So, we held a mock funeral procession as part of our ongoing agitation,” said an agitating student.

The agitating students had earlier met Forest and Environment Minister, Bikarm Keshari Arukha to put forth their demands.



The students claimed that 1/3rd of Odisha's geographical area is under natural forests. In addition to that, huge area of the state is under plantation by farmers, industries, Forest department, OFDC and various other agencies. These vast resources and plantations are contributing immensely in various forms of goods and services to the entire human and animal population of the state, they added.

The students also claimed that

states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir have already made bachelor's degree in Forestry as minimum qualification for various forestry-related posts.

“The state government should induct more technical manpower having sound knowledge of forestry to boost forest resources and ensure sustained supply of goods and services to the steeply rising population,” said a Forestry student.

# 200 Anganwadi centres lack own buildings



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nimapara, March 21:** Many Anganwadi centres in Nimapara area of Puri district are yet to have their own buildings.

“These centres are functioning from rented buildings, community halls and school buildings,” locals said.

According to sources, villages and localities coming under Nimapara block and Notified Area Council (NAC) have 379 Anganwadi centres in total. Of these, only 166 have their own buildings while the remaining 213 are functioning from school buildings, community halls and rented structures. “Only recently, the authorities concerned have started constructing concrete buildings for 66 Anganwadi centres in the locality,” sources said. Notably, as many as 6,000 kids have been enrolled into these centres.

“The administration is yet to construct permanent buildings for around 200 Anganwadi centres in Nimapara area. Children are being forced to attend classes at rented buildings and community halls. The authorities concerned should

take the issue seriously,” said a local.

In the absence of permanent buildings, Anganwadi workers are facing a lot of difficulties in storing dry food materials meant for the kids.

“The administration has recently started construction for 66 Anganwadi centres in the locality. But, no step has been taken to expedite the work,” said a source.

Nimapara Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) Kumudini Mishra admitted that construction work for 66 Anganwadi centres has been delayed. “We have raised the issue with the block and district administration,” she said.

Nimapara Block Development Officer (BDO) Manoj Kumar Behera said that they have asked the assistant executive engineer, junior engineer and other officials to expedite the construction work for Anganwadi centres.

“The construction work has been delayed due to the Covid-19 restrictions. We are taking steps to finish the work before the rainy season,” said Nimapara assistant executive engineer MK Senapati.

## SALES EXECUTIVES' MEET



Dignitaries at the 17th biennial conference of Odisha Sales Executives' Association at the Town Hall in Cuttack, Sunday

OP PHOTO

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RANDOM MISUSE BY INDUSTRIAL UNITS IN JAJPUR

Groundwater level plummets alarmingly

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, March 21:** World Water day is observed March 22 every year so as to create awareness on saving water and to use it judiciously. However, the groundwater level in mineral and industrially rich Jajpur district is alarmingly dipping while level of contamination is also high, a report said.

The report said that groundwater level in mineral-bearing Sukinda and industrially rich Danagadi blocks has been continuously nose-diving due to overuse through bore-well for industrial purpose. The three-year data about the groundwater provided by the Directorate of Hydrometry reveals this reality.

Normally, water available five metres below the earth cater to the need of the people. Besides, harmful elements in water have been affecting the health of locals, it said.

There are a number of restrictions on the use of groundwater, but the industrial units are not abiding by the rules. It was reported that each industrial unit has dug 15 to 20 bore-wells on their premises through which they have been exploiting water wantonly.

The result is that in many cases, tube wells after being dug in rural



WORLD WATER DAY

What is more alarming is that groundwater is getting contaminated with abnormal level of iron, total coliform and fecal coliform. Presence of high level of such harmful elements in groundwater is dangerous for health. This was revealed by test report of the OSPCB which had collected water samples from Kaliapani, Tisco, Saruabila and Kamardha areas in October 2018

pockets fail to provide water. In summer, people in many pockets of Sukinda and Danagadi face acute water crisis. As per the agreement with the Water Resources department, the industrial units are mandated to use water judiciously by installing flow metres. The state government has directed the industrial units to submit detailed reports about the quantity of water they have been using. But this directive

has been flouted, it was alleged.

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Many people in these areas have died of kidney diseases while over a thousand people are affected by the same problem, it was learnt.

Debahsis Patnaik, executive engineer of the Jaraka Water Resources division, said that water cess is being collected from users according to the amount they use. Regular monitoring of water use by industrial units is being done, he added.

FOLK CHARM



A cultural programme is underway at Kapilamuni Mahotsav in Padmapur area of Bhadrak, Saundary

OP PHOTO

Woman, son electrocuted while rescuing neighbour

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, March 21:** A woman and her son were electrocuted to death after they came in contact with a live wire in their neighbourhood. The two unfortunate victims were rushing to rescue a man next-door whose house had caught fire owing to short circuit late Saturday night. The tragedy occurred at Nalipur village under Balichandrapur police

limits in Jajpur district.

The deceased were identified as Chand Biwi and Wasim. Sources said that the house of their neighbour Sara Biwi caught fire late at night. After hearing screams of the distressed family, the mother and son duo woke up and rushed to their rescue. However, the duo came in contact with a live electric wire which was hanging at a low height and were killed on the spot.

A team comprising of fire personnel from Chandikhol and Balichandrapur police rushed to the mishap site. The fire personnel doused the flames after striving for over an hour. Later, the bodies of the mother and son were recovered by the firefighting team.

A pall of gloom descended the locality after the tragic deaths, a Nalipur villager said.

Admin steps up vigil as Covid cases surface

MASK WEARING MADE COMPULSORY IN GANJAM



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur, March 21:** Amid the rise of Covid-19 (new strain) cases in other states, officials of the Ganjam district administration have stepped up its vigil so that the pandemic doesn't take serious proportions on more.

A large number of people from this district are working in Mumbai and Maharashtra. Incidentally, Maharashtra has been one of the worst hit states by the 2nd wave of Covid-19. With a large number of people from that state returning to Ganjam district on a daily basis, there is always the apprehension of the disease spreading among the local here. The Khallikote and Chhatrapur railway stations see huge number of returnees every day. This has become a cause of concern for the district administration.

According to a report, new cases of Covid-19 infection cases are again on the rise in Ganjam district so the district administration has again imposed some prevention and safety measures. As festivals of 'Budhi Thakurani' and 'Danada Yatra' are approaching, it is expected that a large number of migrant workers will return to their homes.

In a tweet, District Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange earlier said

**Khallikote and Chhatrapur railway stations see huge number of returnees every day**

that if anyone comes from any state to Ganjam, they will have to inform the sarpanchs of their respective villages, executive officials of the NACs and the Commissioner of the Berhampur Municipal Corporation.

It is now mandatory for anyone arriving in the district to go through a check-up at health centres close to their residence. If a person shows Covid-19 symptoms, he/she will have to undergo mandatory RT-PCR tests. Accordingly, isolation and home quarantine will be arranged for them, said the Collector. "Tackling Covid-19 is a team work. We had controlled the disease earlier with team work. Now, it is the time to remain alert while new cases of infection come to the fore in other states," observed Kulange. "If people do not abide by Covid-19 protocols, it will again have its impact on the district," he added.

Kulange also informed that wearing of masks is compulsory and said that the Covid-19 situation in the district is well under control for the last four months.

ESI hospital awaits inauguration; workers fume

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Banarpal, March 21:** The central government has set up a super class hospital for labourers included in ESI scheme at Balaram Prasad in Angul district. However, the hospital is still not functional a year after its completion. This is causing resentment among the labourers, a report said.

According to the report, over 25,000 labourers are working in private and state enterprises in Angul and Dhenkanal districts. They are being deprived of ESI healthcare facility in their home districts.

Considering the huge numbers of labourers in the industrially rich Angul district, the Union Labour and Employment Ministry decided to set up the ESI hospital in Banarpal area. In 2013, five acres of land was purchased at Balaram Prasad. The work for construction of the hospital started in 2017 with an estimated project cost of Rs 65 crore. The super class ESI hospital equipped with 100 beds is under the Regional Director of ESI, Bhubaneswar.

In the hospital there are departments of cardiology, neurology, pediatrics, gynecology, medicine, orthopedics and ENT. Besides, it is



CONSIDERING THE HUGE NUMBER OF LABOURERS IN THE INDUSTRIALLY RICH ANGUL DISTRICT, THE UNION LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT MINISTRY DECIDED TO SET UP THE ESI HOSPITAL IN BANRPAL AREA

equipped with modern machines for scanning, ECG and X-ray. Infrastructure for emergency ambulance service has also been put in place.

Locals alleged that the authorities concerned have not yet initiated process to appoint doctors, experts and specialists and para-medical staff till date.

About two months ago, a top official of the central government had

taken stock of the work of the hospital. He assured that the hospital was to be inaugurated January 24, but till date nothing has happened.

Prasanna Kumar Mohanty, vice-president of the 'Nalco Nirman Mazdoor Sabha' said steps are not being taken to make the hospital operational. He said that sooner it starts the better it will be for the labourers.

Babuli Sethi, president of the

Youth stabbed to death in Sambalpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, March 21:** A youth was stabbed to death and his friend was seriously injured when they were attacked by others at Sunapali under Dhanupali police limits in Sambalpur district Sunday.

The deceased and injured have been identified as Banke Oram and Laba Oram respectively, residents of the Saralakani village.

Reports said tension erupted around Dhanupali police station soon after the murder. Police tried to break up a large crowd which had gathered in front of the station and it led to the escalation of tension. Locals alleged that the youth died due to police negligence.



They said that the IIC of the police station has been neglecting his duty. The law and order situation has deteriorated in Sunapali area as two murders have taken place in the last four months, they said.

"We demand immediate transfer of the IIC and intensive patrolling in the area," locals demanded. Banke and Laba had gone to

Berhampur ITI bags gold medal

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS TO FIGHT COVID-19 VIRUS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, March 21:** For its efforts to fight the coronavirus outbreak and several issues pertaining to it, the Berhampur Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Ganjam district bagged a gold medal Saturday at the 72nd SKOCH summit held in New Delhi. The institution was selected to receive the top award for developing innovative products in the fight against coronavirus.

The students of Berhampur ITI had developed several types of equipment to fight COVID-19. Among them were mobile smart

of the ESI have reviewed the present situation. However, nothing tangible has so far worked out, he said.

Dr Prince Prakash, the district chief of the ESI, said that a large number of labourers were registered under ESI, but the dispensary for them is in a precarious condition and that too is being run from a rented house. If the ESI hospital starts, labourers would avail of various healthcare facilities, he said.

swab collection kiosk, smart UVC show sole sanitiser, UVC Robo Warrior, UVC sanitiser, Covid-19 security system, aerosol box and automatic sanitiser dispenser.

Out of these products, the institution had filed three of its products for patent registration. These three products were the mobile smart swab collection kiosk, UVC Robo Warrior and smart UVC show sole sanitiser. The mobile smart collection kiosk helps technicians collect swab with zero chance of getting infected. UVC Robo Warrior disinfects surfaces of public transport and isolation rooms occupied by Covid infected or suspects.

FOREST PROTECTION



The forest department engages folk artistes to raise awareness on forest protection as part of Jungle Jiban Surakhya Abhiyan in Deogaon area of Bolangir, Sunday

OP PHOTO

Consent given for truncated festival by BeMC

Month-long festival marks the journey of Goddess Budhi Thakurani, presiding deity of the Silk City, to her parental abode at Desi Behera street. People move around dressed as mythological characters during the festival.

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, March 21:** A joint meeting of various administrative departments gave permission Sunday for observance of famous biennial 'Budhi Thakurani Yatra' festival in this town.

The decision to observe the festival was taken after the meeting which was attended by Municipal



BUDHI THAKURANI YATRA

Commissioner Siddheswar Baliram Bonder, Sub-collector V Kirti Vasan, Berhampur MLA Bikram Kumar Panda and festival organiser Durga Prasad Desi Behera. The meeting

was conducted at the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC).

The festival will be organised following COVID-19 protocols and only local devotees will be allowed

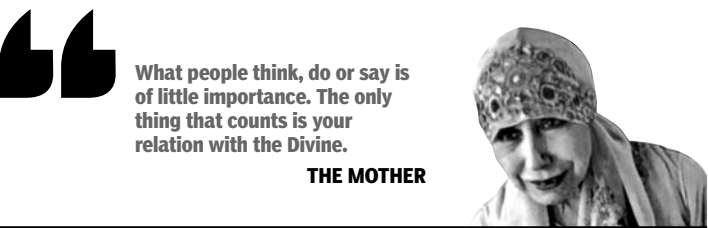
to participate, the BeMC commissioner said. In the first phase, only seven days have been allowed for the festival. The situation will then be reviewed before the permission for its extension is given, a communiqué from the BeMC said.

The Subha Khunti' (auspicious pillar), which marks the beginning of the Budhi Thakurani Yatra will be installed Monday midnight, and the festival will begin with it.

However, Durga Prasad informed the BeMC commissioner at the meeting that the time period allotted to conduct the rituals is not sufficient.

The month-long festival marks the journey of Goddess Budhi Thakurani, presiding deity of the Silk City, to her parental abode at Desi Behera street. During the festival, people move around dressed as mythological characters. The festival is basically celebrated by the local weaver community, known as Devangiris.





What people think, do or say is of little importance. The only thing that counts is your relation with the Divine.  
**THE MOTHER**

## US Embrace

India needs to tread cautiously while intensifying defence cooperation with the US Commands in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa ostensibly to checkmate China. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh sounded confident during a joint media address along with US Secretary of Defence General (Retd) Lloyd James Austin III on March 20 with whom he reviewed a wide range of bilateral and multilateral exercises and agreed to pursue enhanced cooperation with the US Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command and Africa Command.

Obviously, the US is trying to cash in on Sino-Indian tension over the border skirmishes in Ladakh and at the same time safeguard its own interests in the Indo-Pacific region for which Austin hinted at Beijing's growing military activities in the South China Sea zone. He was quick to point out India-US defence partnership will grow in the coming years since it stands for freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce and adherence to international laws.

As is well known since long, ties with the US always come with strings attached. Over-dependence on the US enables it to dictate terms to its partner country. Last week, top Biden administration officials were in Tokyo and Seoul where they got red carpet welcome because the two Northeast Asian countries are Washington's full-fledged treaty allies.

But, India is a different ball game for the US. True, India has closer cooperation with the US, allowing American warplanes to refuel at India's islands or engaging with the Quad countries on coronavirus vaccines and drawing up common strategy to take on China in the Indo-Pacific region. The thorn in the flesh of Indo-US ties, however, is that India is still doing business with Washington's adversaries, the latest being the inking of a \$5.5 billion deal for the Russian S-400 air defence system. The future delivery of the weapon systems could expose New Delhi to the risk of American sanctions and put a brake on the Indo-US relationship.

Turkey's purchase of the same Russian system has already strained its ties with the US which imposed sanctions against a Turkish institution that manages the defence industry. The real reason for the sanction is that the US and NATO-allied countries fear that Turkey's deployment of the S-400 could neutralise the advanced F-35 fighter jet's stealth capabilities by exposing it to the Russian system's powerful radar. This prompted the US Defence Department to expel Ankara from the advanced fighter jet programme in July 2019. The Trump administration ultimately issued very limited sanctions on Turkey in December 2020 so that the country's economy was not shattered creating further problems to NATO members.

Another reason for US' opposition to India obtaining the Russian missile system is that Russian arms, that constitute a big chunk of India's arsenal, have a lower price tag and fewer strings attached than US arms sales. Moreover, unlike the US, Russia doesn't mix its arms deals with human rights rules and conditions. This outweighs the disadvantage of arms trade with Russia keeping India dependent on it for maintenance and spare parts.

On the other hand, the Russian S-400 system scores over the US Patriot missile system with its larger, longer-range Terminal High Altitude Area Defence capabilities.

This explains why the US has tried to use the continued instability on India's border with China to nudge New Delhi away from its traditional nonaligned status and embrace it as its strategic partner. The government is also conveniently wilting under the pressure and slowly and carefully shedding New Delhi's nonalignment strategy. India is learnt to have sent signals to the US about its concern over Beijing's navy moving between Africa, the Persian Gulf, Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca as well as Chinese buildups in Sri Lanka and at Pakistan's Gwadar Port, as well as in Djibouti.

India should not lose sight of the fact that it needs the US to keep China at bay as much as the US needs India to protect its own interests in the South China Sea region. Hence, it would be wrong to overturn the country's old time tested approach as is being done and continue to benefit from both the US and Russia.

### WISDOM CORNER

The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm.  
**ALDOUS HUXLEY**

Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions.  
**THE DALAI LAMA**

Always go with your passions. Never ask yourself if it's realistic or not.  
**DEEPAK CHOPRA**

### WORDSWORTH

#### Mickey Finn

The original and fuller form of the phrase is slip someone a Mickey Finn and does indeed refer to the action of drugging a drink for some nefarious purpose. The drug has varied. These days, a Mickey Finn is usually taken to be knockout drops to render someone insensible so that they can be robbed. The drug most commonly mentioned is chloral hydrate, though American Speech in 1936 claimed that it was actually cigar ashes in a carbonated drink, a surprising concoction we can hardly believe was effective. But the drug has sometimes been said to have been a purgative or emetic, this being a quick way for staff to get an obnoxious drunk or violent patron out of a bar. Another reason for slipping someone an emetic became a notorious case in Chicago in 1918. This is from the Washington Post of June in that year: State's Attorney Hoyne, acting on information as to coercive measures used by waiters to compel the giving of tips, arrested 100 waiters, members of Waiters' Union, Local No. 7, today. Mr. Hoyne had a report that waiters used a certain powder in the dishes of known opponents to the system. The powders, according to Mr. Hoyne, produced nausea and were known as "Mickey Finns." It is thought that many cases of supposed ptomaine poisoning reported after meals in downtown cafes and hotels may have been caused by the "Mickey Finns." The "certain powder" was later reported to be tartar emetic. This scandal is the first time that a Mickey Finn is mentioned in print. The case was widely reported and it seems to have been the stimulus for the term's becoming widely known. So who was Mickey Finn? There's some doubt over the matter but he may have been the man of that name who ran the Lone Star Saloon and Palm Garden in Chicago from 1896 to December 1903. Most of what we know, or think we know, about Mr Finn's activities comes from a 1940 book by Herbert Asbury called Gem of the Prairie (Mr Asbury also wrote The Gangs of New York, from which the Martin Scorsese film of 2002 was adapted). The establishment seems to have been a dive of the lowest kind, in which Finn fenced stolen goods, supervised pickpockets and ran prostitutes. He had a sideline, as Mr Asbury tells it, by which he drugged patrons with chloral hydrate, robbed them, and dumped them in an alley. This is all rather circumstantial, not least because of the big gap between Finn's supposed activities and the first recorded use of the term in 1918, not to mention the further 20 year gap before Mr Asbury wrote his account. However, Mr Finn certainly existed and his activities were recorded in the local press at the time. The Daily News wrote on 16 December 1903 about "'Mickey' Finn, proprietor of the Lone Star saloon", which it reported as "the scene of blood-curdling crimes through the agency of drugged liquor" and the following day the Inter-Ocean headed a report: "Lone Star Saloon loses its license. 'Mickey' Finn's alleged 'knock-out drops' ... put him out of business." The Chicago locale for the 1918 scandal suggests that the term may have been circulating in the city underworld in the intervening years. Mickey Finn, of course, is a common Irish name and in the 1890s an author named Ernest Jarrold had written stories about a character called that. They had become extremely popular; a book of them was published in 1899 under the title Mickey Finn Idylls, which was turned into a comic play in 1903. So the name would have been in the air at the time the real Mickey Finn was running his illegal business and the combination of the two might have caused it to stick in people's minds.

# BEYOND THE LABOUR CODES

### FOCUS EMPLOYMENT



## MSMEs that were creating most employment have been badly hit by demonetisation, GST implementation and lockdown

is cheaper. Let us say a worker used to weave 10 meters cloth in a day previously. It will become profitable for an industrialist to continue to employ him if he starts weaving 20 meters cloth in a day. Otherwise, he may prefer to use an automatic loom and with less numbers of workers.

The model adopted by China was different. China improved the productivity of labour and simultaneously expanded the market. The worker started to weave 20 meters cloth now against 10 meters previously. At the same time the market expanded from 10 meters to 40 meters. Thus, the industrialist who was using one worker to produce 10 meters cloth previously began to use two workers to produce 40 meters cloth. In this way employment grew along with increase in labour productivity because the market was expanding rapidly. Our situation is fundamentally different because our growth rate today is not only lower than China's growth rate in the last 40 years but it has also been declining in the last six years even if we exclude 2020-21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus increase in productivity today will lead to reduction of employment. Our dismal situation is brought to the fore in a paper published in "Developing Economies" that shows that the productivity of an Indian worker was 47 per cent

more than the Chinese worker in 1978. The situation changed dramatically in the next 25 years. The productivity of an Indian worker was 42 per cent less than the Chinese worker in 2004.

We confront a difficult situation today. The number of workers employed will reduce if we increase the productivity of workers due to the limited market. And, the number of workers employed will also reduce if we do not increase the productivity of the workers because industrialists will use machines. There will be job-displacement in both the situations. The only choice before us is whether we will reduce the size of our cloth by using a pair of scissors or by tearing it.

The second aspect of the problem is that of global competition. Our cost of production will be high and we will be priced out of the global market if we do not increase the productivity of our labour. Therefore, we have to necessarily increase the productivity of our labour. The main objective of the labour codes should have been to secure an increase in productivity so that we could stand in global competition irrespective of whether large numbers of jobs are created or not. However, there is little in the codes in this direction.

The main obstruction to increase in labour productivity is that the industrialist cannot dis-

miss an inefficient worker without giving any reason. He has to follow the principles of 'natural justice' before he can dismiss a worker. The legal process is so tortuous and uncertain that an industrialist prefers to use machines rather than try to employ large numbers of workers and take the risk of going to labour courts.

We necessarily need to increase the productivity of our worker to stand in the global market. The labour codes fail here. The facility of closure or retrenchment without previous permission given to establishments employing 100 to 300 workers is like capital punishment. It makes it easy to 'kill' an establishment. It does not enable the industrialist to extract more work from the employed workers. Thus the codes will not beget an improvement of productivity of workers and we are likely to continue to slip in the global market. Further, even if provisions like dismissal without reason were introduced, that would not lead to the generation of much employment because fewer workers will be required to produce the same amount of goods. That will only help us stem the reduction in the current levels of employment but not get an increase in the same.

We need to look beyond the labour codes for generation of employment. One possibility is to impose high rates of taxes on machines such as earth-movers, harvesters and the like that lead to displacement of large number of workers. Second possibility is to provide in government contracts such as in the making of highways that specified works will be undertaken by labour rather than machines. Third possibility is to subject goods produced from labour intensive methods to lower rates of GST. The main point is that increased productivity will lead to reduction in employment. Therefore we need to implement other economic policies to generate employment.

*The writer is a former Professor of Economics at IIM Bangalore. Views are personal.*

### SPECTRUM ENVIRONMENT

# Green hydrogen as a clean fuel in India



Sanjib Kumar Karmee

## HYDROGEN IS THE MOST ABUNDANT ELEMENT IN THE UNIVERSE AND REGARDED AS A CLEAN FUEL SINCE IT DOES NOT CONTAIN CARBON

Environmental degradation and climate change are driving formulation of policies for sustainable living in the best interest of society. Hence, several nations are opting for low-carbon technologies for energy generation. Along this line, scientists are investigating new, and renewable fuels for several reasons such as: depletion of conventional fossil fuels, increasing demand for energy, to ensure energy security, to lower dependency on oil rich countries, and to minimise environmental pollution. In this regard, different alternative fuels viz. hydrogen, lignin-derived hydrocarbons, bioethanol, biodiesel, bio-oil (pyrolysis-oil), bio-butanol, and bio-ethers etc. are being explored.

Hydrogen is the most abundant element in the Universe and regarded as a clean fuel since it does not contain carbon. According to International Energy Agency, "hydrogen is today enjoying unprecedented momentum. The world should not miss this unique chance to make hydrogen an important part of our clean and secure energy future."

Hydrogen can be synthesised from natural gas, nuclear power, biomass, solar and wind. Such a wide range of options for production makes hydrogen attractive as a fuel. Not all hydrogens are born equal. Processes for hydrogen prepa-

ration are known to be energy intensive. Depending on the starting materials used and processes employed; the colours (types) of hydrogen are: brown, grey, blue, and green. Brown hydrogen is obtained via gasification of coal; whereas, grey hydrogen is generated through a process utilising natural gas (derived from fossil fuel) which produces carbon as waste. Blue hydrogen can be made from natural gas by systematically removing the resulting carbon dioxide through advanced carbon capture and storage technologies. Basically, grey hydrogen is produced in a similar manner to blue hydrogen except that the emission is discarded into the atmosphere. In contrast, green hydrogen synthesis involves utilisation of electricity for the electrolysis process which splits water into hydrogen and oxygen. The required energy for electrolysis could be obtained from renewable sources like solar or wind. In line with this, research on electrolytic splitting of seawater is underway to tap hydrogen fuel from the ocean.

Internationally, several industrial units are performing basic research and implementation projects on hydrogen fuel. Some of these are: Shell, SSAB (Swedish Steel Company), Maersk, Siemens, and Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems. Shell has four hydrogen filling sta-

tions in California; and it is currently expanding its hydrogen refuelling network in the US and Europe. Significantly, Shell is also developing hydrogen based truck refuelling network in California to facilitate heavy duty transport. At present, grey hydrogen from fossil fuels is used on a global level in oil refining, ammonia production, methanol production and steel production industries. Hence, there is a scope for emission reduction using green hydrogen as a clean fuel.

The Pentilateral Energy Forum comprising Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and Luxembourg has declared its cooperation for the development of green hydrogen. In India, current demand for hydrogen is around 6 metric tonne per annum; which is mainly used in fertilizer industries and refineries. According to an estimation by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), demand for hydrogen could increase by around five fold by 2050. Recently, in the 2021 Budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the introduction of "National Hydrogen Energy Mission"; which will work towards generation of green hydrogen. According to news reports, RK Singh, Union Power Minister, stated that wider consultations with different ministries and stake-

holders are underway to increase the footprint of green hydrogen in near future. Also, the minister further stated that the government will call for green hydrogen bids in upcoming months. Furthermore, discussions and deliberations are underway among all stakeholders to put a mandate on using 10 per cent of indigenous green hydrogen in some of the industries. In this regard, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) have taken several initiatives. The MNRE has established hydrogen refuelling stations at Indian Oil R&D Centre, Faridabad and National Institute of Solar Energy, Gurugram. The public sector company NTPC has already signed an MoU with Siemens for production of green hydrogen. Additionally, NTPC is working on developing a prototype for sea water electrolysis for green hydrogen generation. Looking at the recent developments, the future of green hydrogen fuel looks bright in India. An excellent coordination between central and state governments, industries, academia, and policy makers is necessary to speed-up the implementation of green hydrogen policies and development of new technologies.

*The writer is a scientist and an alumnus of IIT Madras.*

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

### Unsavory saga

Sir, The unsavory saga of the alleged misdeeds of the Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh does not come as a surprise in today's environment of devaluation of politics and, most importantly, lack of integrity of those in power. What is also not surprising is the fact that he has been a part of every government in the state from 1995 onwards, except during the regime of Devendra Fadnavis, since such people come in handy to the political establishment due to various reasons. One look at some of the portfolios he has handled like Excise, PWD, Food and Civil Supplies clearly betrays the kind of clout he might have wielded in advancing the pecuniary interests of those concerned. And his party the NCP, headed by none other than the wily patriarch Sharad Pawar, has always chosen to look the other way, as it has also done towards some of its other members who caused considerable embarrassment to the party. Deshmukh is not the first politician to have been so exposed nor would he be the last. As the political caravan of the country sinks into its lowest abyss, the hapless electorate resigns itself to its fate with hardly any chance of redemption coming their way in the near future.

**Bhaskar Roy, NEW DELHI**

### Pak's responsibility

Sir, This is in reference to the news item "Control ISI before talk on stability: Punjab CM to Pak General Bajwa". **Orissa POST**, March 20, Pakistan's Army Chief of Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa's call for movement towards cooperation - a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan made similar overtures towards New Delhi is not without the strong reasons: Pakistan suffered a huge loss of \$38 billion due to the Financial Action Task Force's decision to keep it in the grey list for thrice and its total public debt was recorded at \$36.3 trillion. While its economy is scraping the bottom of the barrel with unemployment zooming, the government is in panic mode after the UAE demanded its \$1billion back. The country now feels the heat of economic distress and political backlash across the globe. However, New Delhi reiterated that 'talks and terror' can't go together. The poor record of Pakistan in honouring the commitments made in past to rein ISI - which is constantly engaged in anti-India activities calls for caution in Indian establishment. The responsibility to create a conducive atmosphere for beginning talks lies with Pakistan.

**N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE**





# '75% job quota for Tamils will doom industry in state'

THERE ARE ALREADY PROVISIONS IN THE TAMIL NADU INDUSTRIAL ACT TO PROVIDE RESERVATION TO TAMILS IN COMPANIES WHICH ARE SETTING UP SHOP IN THE STATE AND USING GOVERNMENT FACILITIES OR RATHER SUBSIDIES

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, March 21:** With the election season in progress, the political parties are on a promise spree, some realistic but many "unrealistic and non-feasible".

The DMK, the main opposition party of Tamil Nadu that is expected to return to power, if poll surveys are to be believed, has in its election manifesto promised 75 per cent reservation for Tamils in private jobs.

This seems far-fetched as there could be lack in skills among the locals and this would deprive a highly skilled and talented workforce. Also there are other states like Karnataka, Telangana and even Kerala which can provide jobs to these skilled workers.

Centre for Policy and Development Studies, a think tank based out of Chennai, has conducted a study among professionals and entrepreneurs on the impact of such a reservation and found that this would lead to lesser number of talented workforce, migration of companies thus leading to a slump in economy.

C. Rajeev, Director of Centre for Policy and Development Studies, who led the study told IANS: "Freebies have been a culture of Tamil Nadu politics and people have accepted it as rampant industrialisation has led to the state



meeting the finances of these freebies but if you restrict even private sector jobs to Tamil populace, that will lead to a migration of companies from this state directly leading to a slump in economy."

The industry is also worried about such an announcement by a prominent political party for the sake of votes.

M. Velmurugan of the Tamil Nadu Small and Medium Industries Association based out of Guindy industrial estate told IANS: "Reservation for Tamils is good but it has to be restricted to non-skilled people but extending this to 75 per

**“Reservation for Tamils is good but it has to be restricted to non-skilled people but extending this to 75 per cent reservation of jobs in private sector for Tamils, will doom the industrial situation of the state**

M. VELMURUGAN

cent reservation of jobs in private sector for Tamils, will doom the industrial situation of the state."

"Even now there is a huge deficit of skilled blue collar workers and if

this is put in practice, then it will be difficult for industries to survive." There are already provisions in the Tamil Nadu industrial act to provide reservation to Tamils in companies which are setting up shop in the state and using government facilities or rather subsidies.

RK Doraiswamy of Tamil Nadu Industries association said, "The companies which use government facilities and subsidies are bound to provide reservation for Tamils, but for large companies who don't have anything to do with the state rather than helping it become more and more industrialised, this will

lead to chaos and moving away to other more industrial friendly states. Even in the heydays of M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalithaa they have brought in such a manifesto. This will doom the industry."

The study also revealed that there is a clear failure on the part of the government to impart skilled training to youths and if the youths are properly trained and adaptable to industry, then it's different. KM Shajahan Khan who is running a software company in Chennai while speaking to IANS said, "It will be better if political parties stress on skilling youths and Central government is providing all facilities for that. If youths have enough skills, getting jobs is not at all an issue."

The Centre for Policy and Development Studies is planning to present the DMK, AIADMK and other mainstream political parties with a memorandum for increasing the skills of the youths rather than providing them jobs on a platter.

Rajeev said, "Jobs should not be given in a platter, instead youths must be made industry friendly and make them trained in proper skills. Jobs will come to them and thereby the state will also be benefited. Gimmicks will not develop the state industrially as in a highly competitive industrial atmosphere investors will choose the state's that have better investor friendly policies."

# If AIADMK wins, it will be BJP's victory: Stalin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kancheepuram, March 21:** Even if the AIADMK emerged victorious in a single seat, the victor would be a 'BJP MLA' and hence people should vote for his party and its allies in the April 6 Assembly elections, DMK president MK Stalin appealed to the electorate here Sunday.

In his campaign at Uthiramerur near here, Stalin said he had been saying that his party-led combine would win 200 out of 234 segments in Tamil Nadu.

However, considering the feedback from the people to his continuous campaign across the state, the DMK top leader said, "only we are going to win in all the 234 constituencies."

Even if the AIADMK won a single seat in Tamil Nadu, the victor would not be an "AIADMK MLA but only the BJP MLA."

The lone AIADMK Lok Sabha Member of Parliament from Theni, P Ravindhranath, who is the son of Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam functioned only as a 'BJP MP' and this proved his contention, he claimed.

"...We should not allow the BJP (to win) and similarly the AIADMK also must not come (succeed)," he said and asked the people to remember this aspect.

Reiterating his allegation of corruption against Chief Minister K Palaniswami, the DMK chief claimed that the AIADMK is a



**For sure Palaniswami is not going to assume power and they may even promise a helicopter and aircraft for every household**

MK STALIN | DMK PRESIDENT

'branch' of the BJP. Palaniswami has time and again dismissed such graft allegations as lies and derogatory.

DMK has tremendous confidence that all its poll assurances including the Rs 1,000 'rights' assistance per month to women family heads could be fulfilled, he said.

"After I announced this promise (Rs 1,000 assistance for women), Palaniswami declared that Rs 1,500 would be provided to women as if the AAIDMK is going to come to power.. For sure Palaniswami is not going to assume power and they may even promise a helicopter and aircraft for every household," Stalin claimed adding the people were not ready to believe the AIADMK's electoral promises.

# 20% students in Guj deprived of admission under RTE quota

Congress alleges the government has given a free hand to private schools to levy exorbitant fees, and deliberately ignore the mandatory 25% RTE quota admissions



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Gandhinagar, March 21:** The Gujarat government has admitted in the state Assembly that around 20 per cent of the underprivileged children were deprived of their right to study in private schools under the Right to Education Act (RTE) during 2019 and 2020.

While admissions under RTE have been initiated in many states for the next academic years and

lakhs of underprivileged children are availing the benefits of it, the situation in Gujarat has raised several questions after the information regarding admission under RTE quota was tabled in the Assembly Saturday. In a series of questions by several Congress MLAs on how many students were admitted in private schools under the RTE quota in the last two years, the government replied that a total of 1.94,783 students were eligible for admission

during 2019 and 2020. The admission vacancies under the RTE were as per the 25% quota of the total available seats in the private schools. However, despite having seats, a total of 40,530 students were deprived of admissions in the private schools under the RTE quota. Education Minister Bhupendra Chudasma in a written reply disclosed the district-wise details. In 2019-2020, a total of 1,04,045 students were eligible for admission under RTE, of which 82,726 students were admitted, whereas 21,319 were deprived of admission.

Likewise for the academic year 2020-2021, there were 90,738 students entitled for admission under the RTE quota in private schools, of which 71,527 were enrolled in the schools, while 19,211 students were deprived of admission.

The Congress alleged that the government had given a free hand to the private schools to levy exorbitant fees, and deliberately ignore the mandatory 25% RTE quota admissions.



A woman pushes a cart with plastic containers, filled with water, on the way to her house after collecting it from a public well as seen on the eve of World Water Day, in Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, Sunday.

PTI PHOTO

# ZOO NEAR STATUE OF UNITY TURNS GRAVEYARD FOR EXOTIC ANIMALS

**41 EXOTIC ANIMALS DIED AT PM MODI'S PET PROJECT, THE STATUE OF UNITY ZOOLOGICAL PARK AT KEVADIYA**

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Gandhinagar, March 21:** Without mentioning the deaths of three of giraffes, zebras and impalas each among exotic animals translocated from abroad, the Gujarat government has admitted that 41 exotic animals died at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project, the Statue of Unity (SOU) Zoological Park at Kevadiya.

The information was disclosed during the ongoing Budget Session of the state Assembly. Congress legislator from the tribal region of Garbada, Chandrikaben Bariya in a written question, had asked the government as to how many animals and birds brought in from abroad and from other states for the Jungle Safari set up at Kevadiya - what was the expenditure incurred and how many have died in the past two years.

Replying to the question, Ganpatsinh Vasava, the Forest Minister informed that a total of 170 animals were brought for the Jungle



Safari at Kevadiya, out of which 22 animals were from foreign countries, while 148 were brought from other states. The 22 species from abroad included a giraffe, three zebras, three wildebeest, two Oryx, five alpacas, four lamas and four wallabies.

Similarly, two Scarlet Macaws, five orange winged Amazon, blue gold Macaws, green winged Macaws and other species were brought

from other states.

The state government had spent a total of Rs 5.39 crore on these animals during the two-year period.

While answering to the question, as to how many animals and birds had died during the past two years, the minister omitted the three giraffes, three impalas and some other animals' deaths which occurred during January, February last year

which were brought from abroad.

The minister informed that out of the total 22 animals from abroad, five animals had died which included two alpacas, two lamas and a wallaby.

While 41 animals including 29 Cougars, a ring tailed Lemur, a Marmoset and some exotic birds were lost during the span of two years.

# BJP workers not infected by Covid as they work hard: MLA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** A Gujarat BJP MLA Sunday said workers of his party do not get infected with novel coronavirus since they work hard.

Rajkot (South) legislator Govind Patel's take on coronavirus came after reporters asked him if the flouting of guidelines by political leaders and workers during poll campaigning was resulting in a spike in cases.

"Those who work hard do not get coronavirus infection. BJP workers work hard, and therefore, not a single worker has been infected with the virus," Patel claimed.

Incidentally, during the campaigning for the local bodies polls last month, Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani was detected with the infection, and among others in the ruling party who have tested positive at different points of time include state unit chief CR Paatil and several MLAs.

Saturday, Vadodara BJP MP Ranjanben Bhatt had announced that she was admitted in hospital for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, state Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel refuted talk that local polls as well as the Test and T20I cricket matches in Ahmedabad were prime factors behind the COVID-19 spike.

# No Holi celebrations in Guj



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** The Gujarat government Sunday said permission won't be granted for Holi celebrations due to the surge in COVID-19 cases in the state though the religious ritual of 'Holika Dahan' associated with the festival can take place with crowd restrictions.

Holi falls on March 29 and Holika Dahan on its eve on March 28.

The government will only allow 'Holika Dahan', a pyre lighting ritual symbolising the victory of good over evil on the eve of Holi, that too with a limited number of people in housing societies and villages, Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel said. Patel, who also holds the health portfolio, said people won't be allowed to form crowds to throw colour at each other, a prime part of the boisterous celebrations associated with Holi.

"No permission is granted for celebration of Holi. Action will be taken against violators. However,

I believe the people of Gujarat will follow rules and will not play Holi," Patel said.

Gujarat's COVID-19 tally increased by 1,580 Sunday to reach 2,87,009, while the toll rose by seven and the recovery count by 989, an official said.

The state's death toll stands at 4,450 and the number of people discharged is 2,75,238, or 95.90 per cent of the caseload, leaving it with 7,321 active cases, including 71 on ventilator support, he added.

"Surat accounted for 510 of the new cases, followed by 451 in Ahmedabad, 132 in Vadodara and 130 in Rajkot. Of the seven deaths recorded on Sunday, three took place in Ahmedabad, two in Surat and one each in Gandhinagar and Vadodara," the official informed.

A state government release said 2,16,439 beneficiaries were administered COVID-19 vaccines in Gujarat Sunday, including 2,09,305 senior citizens and those above the age of 45 and suffering from comorbidities.



## of the day quote

We have to create a long-term vision for the welfare of the people of Punjab. We will work with a vision of forming a new Punjab once the AAP government is formed in the state



Now that the number of COVID-19 cases is increasing, we have once again taken a strict action. When the number of cases decreases, everything will go back to normal



Decision to allow electric good carriers to ply on the streets of Delhi during all hours has been taken on the basis of feedback provided by the fleet companies



## SHORT TAKES

### Two 'Nihangs' shot dead

**Tarn Taran (Punjab):** Two 'Nihangs', traditional Sikh warriors, were shot dead by police during an encounter after the duo attacked policemen with swords at a village in Punjab's Tarn Taran Sunday, officials said. The two 'Nihangs', identified as Mehatab Singh and Gurdev Singh, were wanted in a murder case at Nanded in Maharashtra, they said. After their mobile location was traced in Sursingh village, the Nanded Police alerted the police in Punjab and a team of two SHOs were sent to nab them.

### 3 killed as truck catches fire

**Hassan (Karnataka):** Three persons, including the driver, were burnt to death when a truck caught fire after it overturned and fell into a ditch in Karnataka's Hassan district around midnight, police said Sunday.

### Man held with heroin in Jammu

**Jammu:** The police have arrested a man here and recovered five grams of heroin from his possession, a police official said Sunday. Amit Raina, a resident of Miran Sahib, was moving suspiciously when he was apprehended at Indira Nagar by a police party, the official said.

## 'Dark, ominous shadows looming over democracy'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, March 21:** Pratap Bhanu Mehta, who recently resigned as Professor of Ashoka University, has written to the varsity's students, saying that their protest was also about the "dark and ominous shadows looming over India's democracy".

Calling them "Superheroes" in a letter Sunday, he said he has been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and affection displayed by the students of the university.

"Ashoka, as an institution, stands indicted before your bracing moral clarity and deep political wisdom. Your protests grasped instantly, what we, as elders failed to adequately understand. Your protest was not about two individuals. It was about Ashoka's institutional integrity. But it was also about the dark



# MASSIVE RELIGIOUS GATHERING WORRIES INDIA AS CASES SURGE

INDIA RECORDED 43,846 NEW CORONAVIRUS CASES IN A DAY, THE HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY RISE SO FAR THIS YEAR, TAKING THE NATIONWIDE COVID-19 TALLY TO 1,15,99,130

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, March 21:** India's health ministry warned Sunday that a huge gathering of devotees for a Hindu festival could send coronavirus cases surging, as the country recorded the most new infections in nearly four months.

## JUMP IN NEW COVID CASES

The ministry said up to 40 people were testing positive for COVID-19 daily around the site of the weeks-long Mahakumbh that began this month and peaks in April in the Himalayan holy town of Haridwar, next to the Ganges.

The festival is held only once every 12 years. Organisers have said here more than 150 million visitors are expected, as many Hindus believe bathing in the river during this period absolves people of sins and bring salvation from the cycle of life and death. In a letter to the state government of Uttarakhand, where Haridwar is located, the ministry told local authorities their daily coronavirus testing of 55,000 people in Haridwar was not enough given the large numbers of pilgrims expected, and that cases were already rising.

"This positivity rate has the potential to rapidly turn into an upsurge in cases, given the expected large footfall during Kumbh," the ministry said in a statement, citing the letter. "Currently more than 12 states in India have shown a surge



## NIGHT CURFEW IN 8 RAJ DISTRICTS

**Jaipur:** Amid apprehension of a second wave of coronavirus, the Rajasthan government Sunday announced to impose night curfew in eight districts and also made negative RT-PCR report mandatory for visitors travelling to the state from across the country. The night curfew will be clamped from Monday between 11pm and 5am in Ajmer, Bhilwara, Jodhpur, Kota, Udaipur, Sagwara, Kushalgarh and Jaipur. However, all the emergency services are exempted from the curbs. The decision was taken in a meeting by a Corona Core Group committee on Sunday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. In an effort to curb the the spread of Covid-19, orders were also issued to close the markets across all the cities of the state from 10 pm.

in COVID-19 cases during the past few weeks, and pilgrims expected to visit Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela could also be from these states." Uttarakhand's government says it has made mask-wearing

The Modi government has hiked cooking gas prices to ₹850 per cylinder, it will reduce the price by ₹100 just before the elections and then increase it again and these people are talking about implementing the seventh pay commission

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER



## 5 KIDS SUFFOCATED TO DEATH

In a tragic incident, five children suffocated to death after they jumped into a grain storage container while playing at Himmatasar village in Rajasthan's Bikaner on Sunday, police said



## 'Lay seige to B'lore with tractors to protest farm laws'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Shivamogga, March 21:** Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait has exhorted farmers of Karnataka to lay siege to Bengaluru with their tractors in protest against the three contentious farm laws passed by the Centre and convert the city to the focal point of agitation, like in Delhi.

"You have to turn Bengaluru into Delhi. You will have to lay siege to the city from all directions," he told a farmers' mahapanchayat here late on Saturday.

Only tractors should be used, like in Delhi, where over 25,000 have blocked entry points to the city, he said. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at the Delhi border points -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- for over three months, demanding the repeal of farm laws and a legal guarantee on the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their crops. Tikait claimed that lakhs of farmers and their families have laid siege to Delhi by ag-

itating at the border points and said the stir would continue until the three laws are repealed. "Unless the three laws are repealed, unless there is a law related to the MSP, you need to continue this agitation in Karnataka as well," Tikait said.

He said though the stir was to repeal the three farm bills, there were other 'controversial' bills in the pipeline, aimed at grabbing farmers' lands, forcing them to work as daily wagers in factories.

"Besides these three laws, other bills pertaining to milk, electricity, seed and pesticides will also be introduced," he said.

Tikait alleged that privatisation of banks would result in farmers who have availed of loans through Kisan Credit Cards, with land as collateral, being asked to surrender them. "If the farmers do not have money to repay the loans, then they will take away your land," he alleged.

**FARMERS UNIONS CONDEMN ECAA:** Unions condemn implementation of ECAA Farmer unions Sunday condemned the demand for immediate implementation of the Essential Commodities Amendment Act (ECAA) by a parliamentary committee. The ECAA is one of the three laws against which farmers have been protesting at Delhi's borders.

The parliamentary panel, which also has members from opposition parties, including the Congress, TMC and the AAP, asked the government to implement in "letter and spirit" the ECAA.

## 6 cr nCoV vaccine doses sent to 76 nations: Vardhan



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, March 21:** More than 6 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been sent to 76 nations, while 4.5 crore doses have been administered to beneficiaries in the country till now, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sunday.

He also called for making the vaccination drive a 'Jan Aandolan' (mass movement). "Until this morning, nearly 4.5 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been given to the people in this country. More than six crore doses have been sent to 76 nations," Vardhan said during a media interaction at the Institute of Microbial Technology (CSIR-IMTECH) here.

"Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party (BJP) president J P Nadda have called for making the vaccination drive a 'jan andolan' (mass movement)," he said. In a major boost to entrepreneurship in life sciences, Vardhan, the Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, inaugurated IMTECH Bio-Innovation Centre which is an extension of the Atal Incubation Centre (AIC)-CCMB, Hyderabad.

The aim of the IMTECH Bio-Innovation Centre is to become a hub for life sciences, biotechnology start-ups and MSMEs from all over the country in a short span of time. Sanjeev Khosla, director, IMTECH apprised the minister about the various activities of the institute and especially the work done by scientists during the COVID-19 pandemic in the last one year.

"Science has the potential to solve many of our longstanding issues, they may belong to any sector. When I see the science happening in all the labs of CSIR and other places, I feel convinced that it (science) has the potential," Vardhan said.

## Man sews wife's genitals to prove her loyalty to him

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Rampur (UP), March 21:** In a shocking incident, a man sewed his wife's genitals with an aluminum thread after he suspected her of having an extra-marital affair.

The incident took place in the Milak area in Rampur Saturday. The husband has been arrested while the woman is undergoing treatment at the district hospital. According to reports, the husband first asked his wife to give a 'test' and prove her loyalty. When she agreed, he tied her hands and feet and allegedly sewed her genitals with an aluminum thread. After the incident, the husband fled the spot, leaving his wife bleeding profusely. The woman somehow

managed to inform her mother who lives nearby and she rushed her to the hospital. The mother then lodged a complaint at the Milak police station. The husband was arrested late on Saturday evening.

Meanwhile, a panel of doctors at the district hospital has examined the woman and confirmed the assault.

Rampur SP Shogun Gautam told reporters, "The medical examination of the woman has confirmed that she has suffered serious injuries. We have arrested her husband and he will be sent to jail. We are ensuring that she gets proper treatment at the district hospital." The woman told reporters that she was often beaten up by her husband.

## SELFIE TIME



Women attend an event to celebrate the upcoming festival of Basanta Utsav in Kolkata

PTI PHOTO

## Where have gregarious house sparrows gone?

Ornithologists attribute a number of reasons for the decline of the house sparrow, *Passer domesticus*. They include lack of nesting sites in modern buildings, use of pesticides and non-availability of food

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

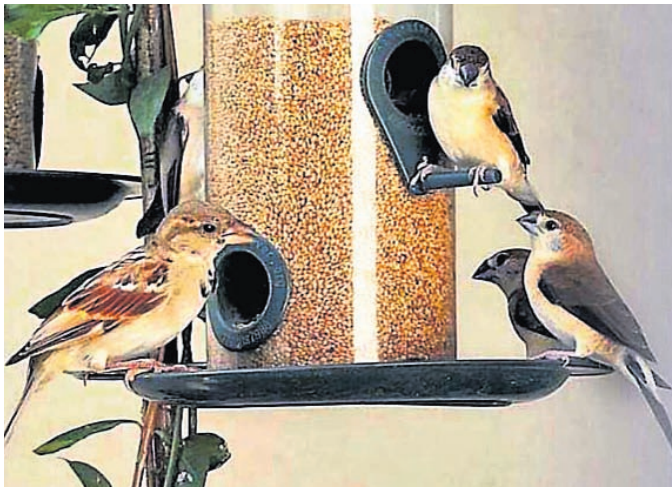
**Chandigarh, March 20:** Cities and towns of Punjab and Haryana are no longer a habitat of the house sparrow, small plump brownish bird once closely associated with the man, ornithologists said.

With their population drastically declining largely in urban areas over the last 20 years, its chirping has faded.

Ornithologists attribute a number of reasons for the decline of the house sparrow, *Passer domesticus*. They include lack of nesting sites in modern buildings, use of pesticides and non-availability of food. Mohammed Dilawar, the man behind the first celebration

World Sparrow Day, which falls on March 20, said five species of sparrows are found in India.

Out of the five, only one species is migratory. The most abundant and widespread is *Passer domesticus*. "It's important to save sparrows by installing nest boxes, bird feeders, planting native plants and reducing use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers," he said while delivering a keynote virtual address organised by Pushpa Gujral Science City to



mark World Sparrow Day.

He emphasised on saving sparrows to save humanity. WWF-India Coordinator Gitanjali Kanwar said there are about 50 species of birds that live closest to human dwellings. They include bulbul, sparrows, pigeons, warblers, parakeets, etc. Such birds find birdhouses safer, protective and habitable.

"It is the survival instinct that enables the endangered sparrows to shift their natural habitats from

houses and buildings to the artificially built birdhouses," she said. Speaking at the occasion, Jalandhar-based Pushpa Gujral Science City Director General Neelima Jerath said the house sparrow is a bird that most of "us grew up with".

"The chorus of chirping that greeted us at sunrise and sunset was as good as clockwork but slowly and surely these little delightful and hyperactive birds have bid adieu to our homes and cities. This

has been an ongoing process since the 1990s.

"Further, each year March 20 is observed as the World Sparrow Day and rightly so, as these birds deserve our sincere conservation efforts to restore these birds to their genuine habitats." Science City Director Rajesh Grover said it was important to raise awareness about the decreasing population of sparrows. "We may hear stories from our next generation narrating once upon a time there was a little bird called a sparrow." Old-timers in Chandigarh say earlier houses had a number of crevices and holes.

This enabled the bird to make nests. These days houses have little space for making nests. Use of heavy doses of pesticides in kitchen gardens and fields results in the decline of invertebrate fauna. Small insects play a very important role in the survival of newborn sparrows.

Reduced spillage of grains, improved storage, decline in the practice of feeding sparrows, increased predation by owls and cats and competition for food by other species, including pigeons, have also threatened the existence of sparrows.



## of the day quote

We are at the beginning of the second wave of coronavirus. Let us all join hands to control it because the next three months are crucial for us

DR K SUDHAKAR | KARNATAKA HEALTH MINISTER

I was listening to the Prime Minister's speech yesterday. He very seriously said that he was very sad about a development. I thought he would speak about Assam's development or how BJP worked in Assam

PRIVANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONG LEADER

There is no element of truth in fielding Vijayendra from Basavakalyan. Seniors have the expectations that he should go to Mysuru and reside there to cover four to five districts

B S YEDIYURAPPA | KARNATAKA CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Former MLC quits Mehbooba's party

**Srinagar:** Former Jammu and Kashmir legislative council member Khursheed Alam quit the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Sunday. Talking to reporters, he said he has resigned from all the positions and even the basic membership of the party. He said the party lacked political vision and his inputs were not being taken into account for its revival.

### Om Birla tests Covid positive

**New Delhi:** Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has tested positive for Covid-19, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) said Sunday, adding that his condition is stable. "Om Birla, Hon'ble Member of Parliament and Speaker of the Lok Sabha, tested positive for Covid March 19," AIIMS said.

### All eyes on Tirupati by-poll

**Tirupati:** The forthcoming Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election will be one of the most watched elections in Andhra Pradesh as well as beyond over the next one month. The Parliamentary constituency reserved for the Scheduled Castes fell vacant after the sitting Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) MP Balli Durga Prasad succumbed to coronavirus in September 2020. It has been vacant for almost six months and only recently the Election Commission of India (ECI) scheduled the election April 17.

### Spurious liquor kills four in UP

**Chitrakoot (UP):** Four people died while three more took ill after allegedly consuming spurious liquor in a village here, police said Sunday. Inspector General, Chitrakoot Dham (range), K Satya Narayan said a sub-inspector and a constable have been suspended on charges of laxity following the incident, and action is being initiated against the station house officer of Rajapur. "A person of Khopa village died after consuming liquor on Saturday evening, while another died at a private hospital," he said.

### Trader shot dead

**Patna:** A trader-cum-property dealer was allegedly shot dead by two unknown bike-borne assailants in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, a police officer said Sunday. The deceased, who has been identified as Vinod Kumar, was killed outside his house late Saturday evening near the Ahiyapur police station.



**We (India) have basic technology, capability to launch earth observation and communication platforms. But we have missed the opportunity in global marketing**

G MADHAVAN NAIR | EMINENT SPACE SCIENTIST

## FIRE BREAKS OUT AT DELHI MALL

Fire was reported in the Ambience Mall in south west Delhi's Vasant Kunj area Sunday, which was later controlled. Six fire traders were rushed to the spot, according to the fire officials



# Ex-top cops bat for SC monitored probe



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, March 21:** As several key questions remain unanswered in the SUV case related to the explosives-laden Scorpio parked near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai last month, former police chiefs have suggested that in the interest of justice, a Supreme Court monitored probe is necessary to investigate the police-criminal-politician nexus, which ostensibly exists in India's commercial capital.

As the case snowballs into a huge political controversy that could upset the equations in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra, several former DGPs have suggested that it would be better if the probe is handed over to a senior officer of high integrity, monitored by the apex court, instead of a state or Central agency.

"As relations between the BJP and the Shiv Sena are at loggerheads, the state agency (Anti-Terrorism Squad) and the Central agency (National Investigation Agency) cannot work in close coordination. In a situation where the relations between the state and the Centre have turned sour, a Supreme court monitored probe remains the only option to ensure a free and fair enquiry," said celebrated police officer Prakash Singh, considered as the key architect of police reforms in India. Voicing the concern of the

IPS fraternity, Singh, the former DGP of BSF in Uttar Pradesh and Assam, said that when a Home Minister (Anil Deshmukh) has been accused by his former Commissioner (Param Bir Singh) for exploiting policemen to extort money from businessmen and industrialists, it becomes clear that the rule of law in the state is being blatantly abused by those in power.

"We do not know the entire details and the break up of the monthly collections of ₹100 crore, as alleged in the former Commissioner's letter. But it seems that a large amount of the extortion money was going to the party, the minister concerned, and a percentage could as well be pocketed by the police," said Singh, the Chairman of the Indian Police Foundation and Institute.

In a sensational twist to the SUV case Saturday, Param Bir Singh hit out at Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh by virtually alleging that the minister wanted his team member, arrested cop Sachin Vaze, to 'collect' ₹100 crore per month from bars and hookah parlours. On the role of suspended Assistant Police Inspector (API) Sachin Vaze, another celebrated cop and former DGP of Uttar Pradesh, OP Singh, said that an API level officer is too junior to execute a plot at the behest of the

state's Home Minister. On giving unlimited power to an API rank officer like Vaze, former BSF DG and Joint Director in CBI, Rajnikant Mishra, said that such blunders do happen when a police officer is asked to do extra-legal work on behalf of the ruling party. "When subordinates deviate from their prescribed charter of work and indulge in such activities (extortion), they often cross the limits. Vaze deviated from the given standard operating procedure (SOP) and got involved in all sorts of work (criminal activity). The question is who was at a much bigger fault, Vaze or his masters," asked Mishra, who investigated several high-profile cases of political corruption during his tenure in the CBI.

Why did the vigilance and anti-corruption wing of the Maharashtra government turn a blind eye on Vaze's nefarious operations? On this question, Mishra said: "Vigilance agencies of the state have their limitations. They do not have the infrastructure and liberty of initiating suo-moto action against corrupt officials in the CBI or the ED. State intelligence agencies also do not have the mandate and resources that the IB at the Centre has in keeping a tab on such shady operations.

# MODI ATTACKS CONG AT ASSAM POLL RALLY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati, March 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday accused the Congress of giving "false guarantees" when it was in power at the centre and also in Assam at the same time earlier, and failed to provide security and stability in the northeastern state.

The Congress can go to any extent for coming to power and this is evident from the "lies" that they are spreading through the manifesto, the Prime Minister said at an election rally in Bokakhat.

"When there was a Congress government at the centre and in the state at the same time, there was double neglect, double corruption and double infiltration," he said.

"They had given false guarantees of providing employment and women empowerment," he added. The double engine NDA govern-



ment, however, ensured that the foundation for development is laid and the state is connected with the rest of the country, while during the next five years there will be more all-around speedy development, Modi said.

"Congress means lies, confusion, instability, violence and corruption. The party's coffers are empty and they want to come to power at any cost to fill it", Modi said taking a swipe at the grand old party.

During Congress rule, people used to think will Assam be ever free of bomb blasts, guns or violence and peace would prevail, but the NDA government has ensured that there is peace and stability in the state.

He also accused the Congress of patronising poachers, but the NDA government has ensured that rhino poaching is stopped and poachers are put in jails, while the famed Kaziranga National Park has been freed of encroachers.

## No blood donation for two months after 1st Covid shot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 21:** A recent order by the National Blood Transfusion Council has said that a person cannot donate blood for the next 28 days after taking the last dose of COVID-19 vaccine.



As approved in the 30th meeting of the governing body of the NBTC held February 17, the deferral criteria for blood donation post COVID-19 vaccine was finalised as "28 days post vaccination deferral after the last dose of COVID-19 vaccination irrespective of the type

of the vaccine received."

The order implies that the donor has to wait for 28 days after taking second dose of the vaccine, which means that he or she cannot donate for 56 days after taking the first jab. The order was issued by NBTC director Dr Sunil Gupta March 5.

According to the Union Health Ministry, two doses of the vaccine need to be taken by an individual 28 days apart to complete the immunisation schedule. Protective levels of antibodies are generally developed two weeks after receiving the second dose, it has said.

Also, on whether one should avoid alcohol after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, the ministry in a series of FAQs March 2 clarified that "according to experts, there is no evidence of alcohol impairing the effectiveness of the vaccine".

## Armed forces in JK strengthen bullet-proofing of vehicles

AGENCIES

**Srinagar/New Delhi, March 21:** Security forces in Jammu and Kashmir have strengthened the bullet-proofing shield of their vehicles and bunkers after steel bullets which can pierce through normal protective shields were recovered from terrorists during an encounter in South Kashmir recently.

A few days back, local commander of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammed terror group, Vilayat Hussain Lone alias Sajjad Afghani, was killed in an encounter at Shopian.

The army had recovered 36 rounds of armed steel-core bullets. The recoveries raised alarm bells within the security establishment as these bullets can harm personnel even wearing a regular protective shield. Officials said that now the vehicles, especially deployed in South Kashmir, and personnel moving for anti-terror operations are equipped with shields which have an extra layer of protection for blunting such penetrative bullets.

The ammunition normally used in the AK series rifles was being modified from across the border with the help of Chinese technology of encasing bullets with hard steel core, the officials said. The bullet, termed Armour Piercing (AP), is built of hardened steel or tungsten carbide, they explained.

**PAK INTRUDER HELD:** A 40-year-old Pakistani intruder was arrested by the BSF along the International Border (IB) in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir early Sunday, officials said here. Raja Hamid, a Pakistani national, was taken into custody by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel at Chak Dulma outpost near Ghagwal around 2.30 am, they said. The officials said the man was being questioned to ascertain his motive behind crossing the border and entering Indian territory.

## BENGAL POLLS

# Shah releases BJP's election manifesto

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, March 21:** The BJP Sunday unveiled its Manifesto for the West Bengal elections, promising to build a "Sonar Bangla" by providing employment, strengthening social security schemes and vowing to clear the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act in the first cabinet meeting of the new government.

Unveiling the "Sonar Bangla Sankalpa Patra" at EZCC in Salt Lake, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that BJP will ensure the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat healthcare scheme and the PM-Kisan programme in the state, besides giving at least one job per family.

Assuring to provide arrears of ₹18,000 to ₹5 lakh farmers of the state

under PM-Kisan, the BJP promised ₹10,000 per year for them, if voted to power, with ₹6,000 being contributed by the Centre and the rest by the state.

The party also announced a ₹5,000 crore intervention fund to assure farmers' economic security, besides accidental insurance worth ₹3 lakh for small farmers and fishermen. The party promised a Sonar Bangla fund to promote art, literature a Tagore Prize on the lines of the Nobel Prize. The party also promised free KG to PG education for all women and free travel for them in public transport. Shah said that when the BJP forms the government in West Bengal, people would not have to go to court for organising Durga Puja and Saraswati Puja.



## No data on adverse reaction of vax

India is now vaccinating more than 30 lakh people daily and if the officials in the Ministry of Health are to be believed, the target is to take it to 40 lakh vaccination a day so that 30 crore people could be vaccinated by June-July. The government is keen to open up vaccination for all after people above 60 years and above 45 years with comorbidity. However, immunologists and health experts are voicing their concerns that the government

has not shared any data relating to Adverse Event following Immunization (AEFI) after February 26. The alarm bells rang in India after nearly 12 European countries suspended usage of AstraZeneca vaccine due to blood clotting and other effects. Since India's Covishield is made of AstraZeneca technology & seed, there are some concerns among the experts here. They wonder as to why the Union Health Ministry has not been sharing the AEFI data after February 26. There are reported to be 70 deaths and over 200 adverse effects out of which nearly 90 hospitalised. BJP to sell 100

## PSUs for ₹5L crore

Eight ministries may have chalked out a mega plan to earn ₹2.50 lakh crore by selling assets or divesting shares in companies etc. But in addition, the Modi government is working over-time to fine-tune divestment of 100-odd Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) including 70 sick units to mobilise ₹5 lakh crore. It will fast-track divestment programmes after the Assembly polls in five states. The Prime Minister is reported to have directed the NITI Aayog to submit a revised action-plan

to monetize 100 PSUs faster. It transpires that the PM is also considering the setting up a panel of outside experts to fast-track divestment programme. Modi has publicly accused the bureaucracy for creating hurdles in implementation of government programs. According to data submitted by Minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Prakash Javadekar in Lok Sabha last year, 70 loss-making CPSEs during 2018-19 generated ₹31,635 crore losses to the exchequer. This apart, the Centre is planning to off-load many prized PSUs including BPCL, Shipping Corporation, Container Corporation, BEML, ITDC, Dredging Corporation and others. Interestingly, the government has decided to invest heavily in the 8 major loss making companies to modernize them in the key sectors including BSNL, MTNL, Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corp. Ltd, Hindustan Steelworks Construction Ltd, Konkani Railway Corp. Ltd, and four closed fertilizer plants at a massive investment of ₹one lakh crore.

## 317 bankrupt companies sold

The banks and creditors have recovered as much as ₹2.01 lakh crores from the

re-sale of sick companies. This is as much as 40% of the total amount of the money that these sick companies owed to the banks. As many as 317 companies which went bust have been re-sold to the new buyers under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) as December 31, 2020. The IBBI is the regulator of the companies that have gone into liquidation. In addition, as many as 1126 cases have been ordered for liquidation. Interestingly, the realizable value for creditors from the approved resolution plans of 317 cases is ₹2.01 lakh crore. This is 39.37% of total admitted claims of ₹5.11 lakh crore. Obviously, the huge amount of ₹two lakh crore went to the lenders and banks and the government too recovered its money proportionately. Ever since the IBC code came into being in January 2017, the banks and creditors take the companies to the liquidator who then re-sell them through a procedure. The owners responsible for making their companies as NPAs lose their assets. Interestingly, 3.82 lakh "Shell Companies" were identified and struck off during the last three years up to the financial year ended 2020. Interestingly, out of these

331 suspected shell companies, 221 companies were listed on stock exchanges and doing trading too.

## Centre's new narrative for I-Day celebrations

The 75-week long 75 years of India's Independence will see a completely new narrative as PM Modi has new ideas such as setting up two tribal museums by 2022 in the memory of those who had played a key role in the Independence movement. One such museum will be set up in Gujarat-- Tribal Freedom Fighters' Museum. A massive search is on for new Heroes who have been unsung, unknown to the country so far. PM Modi wants to unfold his vision of the celebrations which will kick off August 15, 2021. The PM wants that the new Parliament house complex be completed by August 2022 so that a special session of Parliament can be held in there. New kind of literature is also being written for the occasion to highlight the role played by the RSS and many such organisations and individuals whose contributions were never highlighted or depicted in the country's Independence struggle.



# international

## of the day quote

We hope that Turkey will soon join again the European Union in defending the rights of women and girls, a fundamental element of human rights, peace, security and equality in the 21st century

**JOSEP BORRELL** | EU FOREIGN AFFAIRS ENVOY

The main issue is that Taliban has to reduce violence, Taliban has to negotiate in good faith and Taliban has to stop supporting international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda

**JENS STOLTENBERG** | NATO SECRETARY-GENERAL

We must not put our guards down ... To prevent the infections from rebounding. We would still face ups and downs, but we will surely find a light ahead of us

**YOSHIIHIDE SUGA** | PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN

## SHORT TAKES

### Attack on Syria hosp kills five

**Beirut:** Artillery shells fired from government areas hit a hospital in a rebel-controlled town in northwestern Syria Sunday, killing at least five civilians and wounding medical staff, rescuers and activists reported. The shells landed at the entrance and in the courtyard of the hospital in Atareb, a town in rural western Aleppo, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The hospital is located underground, a tactic used by the opposition to avoid targeting in the conflict-prone area.

### Famous Rio beaches closed

**Rio de Janeiro:** Rio de Janeiro's world-famous beaches have been closed to the public due to a dramatic rise in the number of daily coronavirus cases in Brazil, local media reported. Police officers took up positions in front of the beaches of Copacabana, Ipanema and Barra da Tijuca Saturday, dpa news agency quoted news portal G1 as saying in a report. "The progress of the epidemic is leaving us in a more difficult situation," said Mayor Eduardo Paes.

### Oz's NSW hit by severe floods

**Sydney:** Flooding in parts of New South Wales (NSW) was declared a natural disaster Sunday and residents in flood-hit areas west of Sydney were evacuated as Australia's most populous state continued to be hammered by heavy rain. Sixteen areas, primarily in the north of the state, were declared "disaster ridden", dpa news agency quoted NSW Police and Emergency Services Minister David Elliott as saying at a press conference.

### Palestine kicks off poll nomination

**Ramallah:** The Palestinian Central Elections Commission (PCEC) has started receiving nomination applications for the upcoming legislative election. In a statement, the PCEC said it started receiving applications from Saturday and it will continue until March 31, reports Xinhua news agency. It said electoral lists have been asked to submit the names of their candidates to the commission's headquarters in Ramallah and Gaza.

## India, Pak, China to join in SCO joint exercise

*Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is an economic and security bloc in which India and Pakistan were admitted as full members in 2017*



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing, March 21:** India, Pakistan, China and other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) will hold a joint anti-terrorism exercise this year, the eight-member bloc said.

The decision to hold the joint exercise "Pabbi-Antiterror-2021" was announced during the 36th meeting of the Council of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan March 18.

At the meeting, representatives of the SCO member states also approved the draft program of co-operation for 2022-2024 to counter-terrorism, separatism and extremism.

"Decisions have been made to improve cooperation between the competent authorities of the SCO member states in identifying and suppressing channels that finance terrorist activities," China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported, quoting a RATS statement.

Delegations of the competent

### The other founding members are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

authorities of India, Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the RATS Executive Committee attended the meeting, Xinhua reported.

RATS, headquartered in Tashkent, is a permanent organ of the SCO which serves to promote cooperation of member states against terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO is an economic and security bloc in which India and Pakistan were admitted as full members in 2017. Its founding members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The next meeting of the Council of the RATS SCO is scheduled to be held September in Uzbekistan.

## Pak bans travel from 12 countries

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Islamabad, March 21:** Pakistan imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, including South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania, in a bid to curb the spike of coronavirus cases as the country Sunday recorded 3,667 new cases, taking the national tally to 626,802.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) notified a fresh list of countries categorised into A, B and C after emergence of South African and Brazilian strain of the virus and imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, categorised as C.

The travel restrictions and a ban on inbound passengers from 12 countries will remain effective from March 23 to April 5.

Botswana, Brazil, Columbia, Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia have been placed in category C.

The CAA in its notification said there will be a complete travel ban on inbound travel to Pakistan from category C countries, including withdrawal of exemptions earlier provided to certain categories of travellers like Pakistani passport



holders.

The temporary measure is being introduced in continuation to the steps being taken to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan, it said.

The CAA also updated its category C, for inbound travellers and shifted the United Kingdom from category C to category B.

The CAA said the international travellers from category A countries do not require COVID-19 PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test before entry into Pakistan. Australia, Bhutan, China, Fiji,



Reflect on the value of this marvelous and non-substitutive gift of God. Water isn't some good of commerce but 'fount of life and of health'. It is necessary to assure that everyone has potable water

**POPE FRANCIS** | HEAD OF VATICAN CITY

## NO THREAT TO MODI'S VISIT: B'DESH

**SOME HARDLINE ISLAMISTS, LEFT LEANING GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY MEMBERS RECENTLY STAGED DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST MODI'S VISIT, REFERRING TO INDIA'S NEW CITIZENSHIP LAW**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dhaka, March 21:** Bangladesh has ruled out any security threat to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the country later this week and said "few" left wing and hardline Islamist groups are against his trip but there is "nothing to worry" about them.

Prime Minister Modi will visit Bangladesh from March 26 to 27 to attend the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country's independence and the birth centenary of its founder 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This would be his first trip to a foreign country since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are proud to invite him to Bangladesh... people are with us," Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen told reporters Saturday night.

Momen said "only a few can oppose this visit and let them do it". "There is nothing to worry about



," he added. "Bangladesh is a democratic country where people have the right to express their opinion and the government is not worried about it," he said, adding that the protesters are "few in number" and just taking the advantage of the "freedom of expression". Prime Minister Modi and heads

of state and government from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives will be among the distinguished foreign guests to join the celebrations under separate schedules.

Momen said authorities have taken every required step to ensure security of all visiting foreign dignitaries.



A parakeet eats a cherry blossom in St. James's Park, London

reuters

## ISRAEL TO BUILD AI CONTROL ROOM FOR DRONE TRAFFIC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Jerusalem, March 21:** Israel is expected to develop a national artificial intelligence (AI) control room that manages all the country's drone traffic by the beginning of 2023.

Wednesday, Israeli authorities demonstrated the first national air test in which a group of drones, operated by their respective companies from a control room about 50 km away, flew simultaneously at a distance of a few meters away from each other, Xinhua news agency reported Saturday.

The flight tasks performed at the same time by the drones in shared small air space included lifting equipment, shooting videos, and delivering goods to a designated distribution station.

Israeli authorities stated that the pilot would be run for two years, and it will be a significant global breakthrough in the ability to manage drone operations at scale. In early 2020, a government steering committee was es-

tablished to support and promote a national drone network operation titled the NAAMA Initiative.

The project is supported by the Innovation Authority, Israeli Prime Minister's Office, Civil Aviation Authority, Ministry of Transportation, private companies and others.

In recent years, more and more Israeli companies, as well as amateurs, have begun to use drones for a variety of purposes such as photography, monitoring crops and securing properties.

Israel is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and has thus one of the most packed skies. Israel's busy sky necessitates the regulation of all air users to prevent fatal air accidents.

I think it is one of the first worldwide drone experiment that tests multiple drone operations over the urban skies, said Zor.

In case of a potential collision, the system will give alerts to drone operators to change their routes.



## ITALY MARKS 'TIRAMISU DAY'

As a distraction amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, Italians Sunday marked International Tiramisu Day to celebrate the traditional dessert

## New book chronicles Indian fugitives who escaped to UK

*'Escaped: True stories of Indian fugitives in London', released worldwide Monday, tracks 12 cases involving alleged offenders wanted in India*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, March 21:** A new book on some high-profile as well as lesser-known Indian extradition cases attempts to decode why the UK is considered a safe haven for those wanting to escape the law in India.

"Escaped: True stories of Indian fugitives in London", released worldwide Monday, tracks 12 cases involving alleged offenders wanted in India to stand trial for offences ranging from loan defaults to murder.

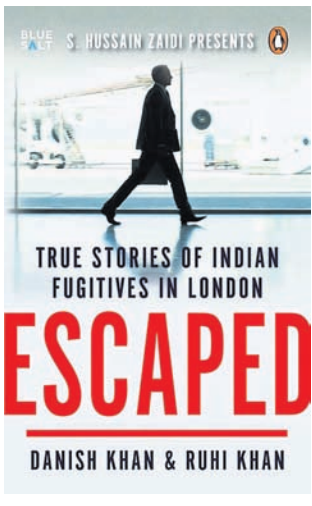
The book, by London-based journalists and researchers Danish and Ruhi Khan, includes a recap of the more recent cases involving former Kingfisher Airlines boss Vijay Mallya and diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on

fraud and money laundering charges, as well as some historic ones including those of former Indian Naval officer Ravi Shankaran and musician Nadeem Saifi.

"These 12 cases were chosen as much for the significance of the allegations against them as for the interesting arguments raised during their hearings and the observations made in their judgments," said Danish Khan.

"We have studied in much detail many other extradition cases, have had long interviews with experts and pored over case laws and parliamentary reports to understand the principles underlying the extradition process that we explore in our last chapter," he said.

As journalists covering the recent court cases in London, the couple



said they drew on their own observations and reporting and also

dug into British archives, old newspaper records and parliamentary reports to review cases dating back to the 1950s that have had a significant impact on the India-UK extradition policy.

"We have used investigative reporting and eye-witness accounts to bring to life the stories of the flamboyant billionaire Vijay Mallya and diamond czar Nirav Modi. We have also made extensive use of the British archives and historical newspapers reports to bring into focus the less heard but extremely important and intriguing stories of other fugitives that throw a spotlight on India over the past seven decades - whether it is the under-world-cricket-Bollywood nexus or the Indo-Pak diplomatic wars," said Ruhi Khan.

Among some of the past extradition cases is that of a key lieutenant of Dawood Ibrahim, Iqbal Mirchi, who set up a base in London at a time when the Middle East was the most popular destination for underworld dons and it proved a good choice as he was successful in his fight against being extradited to India.

The authors say they have tried to take a close look at how Mirchi built his empire, rising from the mohallas of Bombay to London's millionaire row.

The book similarly tracks the lives of all these fugitives who "escaped" from India, many winning their battle against extradition and others carrying on a long-drawn legal fight to stay on in the UK.

## Philippines: 200 Chinese vessels at disputed reef

REUTERS

**Manila, March 21:** The Philippines urged China Sunday to recall more than 200 Chinese boats it said had been spotted at a reef in the South China Sea, saying the presence of the vessels violated its maritime rights as it claims ownership of the area.

Authorities said the Philippines coast guard had reported that about 220 vessels, believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel, were seen moored at the Whitsun Reef, which Manila calls the Julian Felipe Reef, March 7.

"We call on the Chinese to stop this incursion and immediately recall these boats violating our maritime rights and encroaching into our sovereign territory," Defence Minister Delfin Lorenzana said.

The Philippine military had conducted air and maritime patrols in the South China Sea to further validate the report, spokesman Marine Major General Edgard Arevalo said, but did not say when.

The military had submitted its findings to other government agencies, and they would be used as basis for taking "appropriate actions not limited to filing diplomatic protests", he said in a statement, without elaborating.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines will not renege from our commitment to protect and defend our maritime interest within the bounds of the law," Arevalo said.



## of the day quote

**NTPC** Bongaigaon has crossed its installed capacity of 750 MW for the first time since commissioning, and has achieved the highest-ever generation of 18,2499 MUs as on March 18, 2021 with 101.39% PLF

**MADHURJA SINGHA LAHKAR** | SR. MANAGER, NTPC BONGAIGAON

Rupee hasn't shown any signs of weakness. Large inflows on the back of numerous bunched up IPOs in March have helped the local currency. Rupee has now emerged as the best performing currency in the last 1 month. Rising yields and inflation remain the key risk for the currencies

**SAJAL GUPTA** | HEAD, FOREX AND RATES AT EDELWEISS SECURITIES

We've expanded our facilities, bought high-tech equipment and even created an R&D department where we are working on three projects (on technological revamp) and hope we can patent to provide more intelligent products and services

**SIMONE SCAFFETTA** | CO-FOUNDER, ECOFILTRI

## SHORT TAKES

### Visionet plans to hire 1,500 people

**New Delhi:** Business process management firm Visionet expects 50% y-o-y growth in 2021 and 2022 on account of higher demand for digitisation across several verticals, mainly in banking, finance and insurance segments. The company also plans to hire 1,500 people this year. "In 2020, we have grown by almost 60% overall. In 2021, we are expecting over a 50% plus growth rate and we are also forecasting a very strong growth rate of 50% in 2022."

### 750 global buyers join 'food show'

**New Delhi:** Over 750 global buyers from about 52 countries, including the UK and Europe, are participating in a two-day food and beverage show - IndusFood 2021, Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) said Sunday. The show, which started from March 20, aimed at showcasing huge potential exists in the sector for global and domestic players. TPCI said the fair attracted maximum buyers from GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region from where more than 150 buyers attended the show.

### Gold imports slip 3.3% to \$26.11bn

**New Delhi:** Gold imports, which have a bearing on India's current account deficit, fell 3.3% to \$26.11 billion during April-February 2020-21, according to the commerce ministry data. Imports of the yellow metal stood at \$27 billion in April-February 2019-20. The decline in gold imports has helped in narrowing the country's trade deficit to \$84.62 billion during the 11-month of the current fiscal, as against \$151.37 billion a year ago.

### Voltas expects double-digit growth

**New Delhi:** Tata Group firm Voltas is expecting a strong double-digit growth in sales of air conditioners this year on account of "buoyant summer" and hybrid working model adopted by people in the backdrop of the Covid pandemic, a top company official has said. The company attained the pre-Covid sales numbers during the festival season last year and expects to continue with the positive momentum this summer.



Given the initiatives announced by the government and the speedy rollout of vaccination, we expect the growth to return in coming months. There is also a gradual recovery in global trade which will have a positive impact on the export sector

**MAHESH DESAI** | CHAIRMAN, EEP

## CARGO TRAFFIC AT MAJOR PORTS FALLS

India's top-12 ports witnessed considerable decline in cargo traffic for the 11th straight month in February to 600.62 MT, according to ports' apex body IPA. Traffic at the major ports dropped by 6.61% to 600.62 MT during April-February this fiscal, the Indian Ports Association (IPA) said



# Household debt soars to 37.1% of GDP: RBI

The inverse relation between the household savings rate and GDP growth may sound counter-intuitive, but studies have shown that households tend to save more during the economic slowdown and greater income uncertainty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, March 21:** The year-long pandemic left households more indebted, which has sharply jumped to 37.1% of GDP in Q2 of FY21, while their savings rate plunged to a low 10.4%, according to latest data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The household savings plunged as the pandemic has led to tens of millions losing jobs and almost all forced to take deep pay-cuts, forcing them to borrow more or dip into their savings to meet expenses. This has the share of households in the overall credit market jumping to 51.5% in Q2, up by 130 bps y-o-y.

In a counter-seasonal manner, the pandemic-induced spike in the household financial savings rate in Q1 of FY21, when it had touched an unprecedented 21% of GDP, has plunged to 10.4% in Q2, the March issue of the RBI bulletin released over the weekend showed. However, this was still higher than 9.8% registered in Q2 of FY20, the report said.

The RBI house economists said normally when the economy stalls or contract, household savings go up and when the economy recovers it falls as people become more confident of spending. In our case, the savings jumped to an unpre-



cedented 21% in Q1, when GDP contracted by a record 23.9%, and when contraction moderated to 7.5% in Q2, household savings plunged to 10.4%.

"The inverse relation between the household savings rate and GDP growth may sound counter-intuitive, but studies have shown that households tend to save more during the economic slowdown and greater income uncertainty," the report argued.

A similar trend was also observed during the global financial crisis in 2008-09 when household savings jumped by 170 bps as per cent to GDP in FY'09 and moderated subsequently as the economy picked up.

But, the report warned that the household savings rate would have further gone down in Q3, citing

preliminary numbers as a result of near normal consumption and economic activity.

"The household debt to GDP ratio, which has been steadily increasing since Q1 of FY'19, has jumped sharply to 37.1 in Q2 of FY'21 from 35.4 in Q1. There was also a significant pick-up in the share of household loans in the overall credit market, which increased by 1.3 bps to 51.5% in Q2," as per the RBI bulletin.

While households' deposits and borrowings have also picked up, their holding of currency and savings in mutual funds has moderated, the report said, which has attributed the increased consumption, particularly its discretionary components, to a resumption in economic activities following the easing of lockdowns.

## 'FPI inflows into stocks at record high since FY13'

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, March 21:** Foreign portfolio investors have pumped in a record 36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, which is the highest since FY13, shows the latest data from the RBI.

On the other hand, net foreign direct investment inflows jumped to \$44 billion, till end January, up from \$36.3 billion a year ago, driven by the massive inflows in November and December, with the last month of the year getting a record 6.3 billion.

But the inflows moderated in



January due to lower inflows into equities, shows the latest data from the March issue of RBI Bulletin released over the weekend.

"Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) made net purchases in the equity segment so far this fiscal, while have been net sellers in the debt market during the period. Cumulatively, FPIs have pumped in a record \$36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, which is the high-

est since FY13," says the bulletin. The report further notes that the quality of FPI inflows improved during the period as category-I foreign investors, comprising central banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, regulated entities and multilateral organisations, increased their stake to a high 95% of total equity assets at end-February compared with 87% at end-December 2019.

According to depositories data, FPIs were net buyers of equities so far in March at ₹8,642 crore. FPIs poured in ₹14,202 crore into equities but pulled out ₹5,560 crore from debt segment between March 1 and 19, leaving net investment to ₹8,642 crore. Prior to this, overseas investors had invested ₹23,663 crore in February and ₹14,649 crore in January, on a net basis.

According to analysts, domestic equities are attractive for foreign investors due to the higher returns. Also a rejig in some of the global indices has led to net inflows into domestic equities.

## BIZ BUZZ

### Saudi Aramco sees 2020 profits drop to \$49bn

**Dubai:** Saudi Arabia's state-backed oil giant Aramco announced Sunday that its profits nearly halved in 2020 to \$49 billion, a big drop that came as the coronavirus pandemic rolled global energy markets. Saudi Arabian Oil Co. Released its annual financial results a year after the pandemic sent the price of oil crashing to all-time lows as people stopped moving around the world to stem the spread of the virus. In recent weeks, however, the price has edged up as movement restrictions ease, commerce increases and more people get vaccinated against Covid-19. Still, analysts caution that a peak in demand may still be far off. Despite the 44% drop in net income, Aramco said it would stick to its promise of paying quarterly dividends of \$18.75 billion due to commitments the company made to shareholders in the run-up to its initial public offering.



### Samsung 'Baker Series' microwaves launched

**Bhubaneswar:** Samsung, India's most trusted consumer electronics brand, announced the expansion of its kitchen appliances range by launching the Baker Series microwaves. Along with world-class technology, this sleek and stylish looking range also includes models in clean pink colour enables the evolved home chef to make extremely delicious desserts, crispy, oil-free snacks and steamed dishes in the 'Baker Series' microwaves, which was earlier possible only in high-end convection microwave models. Samsung launched five models under the new Baker Series: two Grill Fry models and three Steam Cook models, available in 23 litre capacity. The range is available with prices ranging from ₹10,290 to ₹11,590. The new 2021 range of Samsung Baker Series microwaves come in Clean Pink, Pure Black and Clean Gray colours giving the aesthetics of kitchens a new and stunning enhancement.



### Colgate rolls out toothpaste for diabetic patients

**Bhubaneswar:** Colgate-Palmolive (India) Limited has researched and developed a special toothpaste for people for diabetes, Colgate for Diabetics, through a collaboration with dentists and diabetes experts. This launch aims to bring attention to the bidirectional link between Diabetes management and Oral Health management and provide an effective solution for oral health problems faced by diabetics in an effort to help overall diabetes management. A prominent research institution in the field of diabetes—Research Society for the study of diabetes in India and a leading oral health institution—Indian Society of Periodontology came together to study the link between diabetes and oral health. This Colgate for Diabetics toothpaste is a clinically proven formula with a unique blend of ayurvedic ingredients that can kill anaerobic bacteria in the mouth which is the root cause for many oral health problems for diabetics.



## MARKET WATCH

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, March 21:** Surge in the Covid cases as well as global bond yields might dampen the key equity indices next week, analysts contended. Accordingly, market watchers, said that the upswing seen late on last Friday on account of rejig in international index weights might not sustain in the coming week. "Nifty has showed remarkable bounce from the intraday lows March 19. One will have to watch as to whether this uppishness continues early next week even after the FTSE rebalancing is done with,"

"US Bond yield moves will be one of the important factors to track. 14,919 remains a strong resistance for the Nifty while 14,529 could be a support." Last week, the key domestic indices posted losses

amid high volatility as markets closed in the red on 4 out of 5 trading sessions.

Factors such as resurgence of Covid-19 cases in various part of the country made investors jittery.

"The Federal Reserve could remain a source of angst for markets in the week ahead, with chairman Jerome Powell scheduled to testify twice before Congress and more than a dozen other Fed speeches expected,"

Besides, a contraction in IIP data for January and spike in India's inflation had also triggered selling.

A sharp increase in the US treasury yields and firm crude oil prices did not help investors' sentiment.

"The market may remain volatile in the near term given concerns over rising bond yields, increas-



ing commodity prices and risk of increase in inflation," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail

Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"In addition, resurgence of Covid

The market may remain volatile in the near term given concerns over rising bond yields, increasing commodity prices and risk of increase in inflation

**SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA** | HEAD (RETAIL RESEARCH), MOTILAL OSWAL FINANCIAL SERVICES

cases continues to worry the market and hence it may continue with its roller coaster ride."

Furthermore, the issues surrounding higher US yields will continue to be material to the markets in the coming weeks, said Joseph Thomas, Head of Research, Emkay Wealth Management.

# India's trade deficit normalises to pre-Covid levels, says report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, March 21:** Positive annualised growth in exports and imports for three straight months has taken India's trade deficit figures to pre-Covid levels, Acuite Ratings & Research said.

In its report on the February Trade Balance, the ratings agency said that bulk of normalisation is likely to have been driven by the sharp increase in global commodity prices, especially in the last 4-5 months.

"Going forward, as activity levels pick up further, the widening of India's trade deficit would get re-inforced," it said.

India's merchandise trade deficit has eased to \$12.6 billion in February 2021 from \$14.5 billion in January but printed higher than \$10.2 billion posted during the corresponding period of last year.

"The sequential moderation in merchandise trade deficit in Feb-21 was accompanied by a marginal increase in exports along with a marginal decline in imports vis-a-vis the previous month". "This appears to be in line with the usual seasonal trend."

Earlier, official data showed a rise in India's February merchandise exports to \$27.93 billion from \$27.45 billion in January and \$27.74 billion reported for the corresponding period of 2020.

"This happens to be a 21-month high print on outbound shipments."

In terms of imports, India's inbound shipments in February 2021



India's merchandise trade deficit has eased to \$12.6bn in February 2021 from \$14.5 billion in January

increased by 6.96 per cent to \$40.54 billion from \$37.90 billion during the corresponding period of 2020. On a sequential basis, they stood lower than January's import bill of \$41.99 billion.

"The relatively higher growth in imports in the last 3-months also signals that incrementally India's domestic demand is on the path of recovery, with support from favorable statistical base effect and accommodative monetary and fiscal policies."

In the near term, the report cited some minor disruption to external trade can be expected on account of the fresh wave in Covid infections, globally as well as in India.

On a sequential basis, they stood lower than January's import bill of \$41.99 billion.

## CAIT objects to DPIIT meeting with e-Comm officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, March 21:** Traders' body CAIT Sunday raised strong objections to the DPIIT meeting India-based representatives from e-commerce majors under the banner of industry chambers, saying it was "akin to falling for wolves in sheep's clothing".

"It is perfectly fine for DPIIT to meet any of these executives under their own company's banner, but deeply problematic for them to be allowed to pass off their machinations under the holy banners of CII, NASSCOM, Assocham, PHDCCI, NASSCOM, FICCI, etc.," Confederation of All India Traders said.



At a vital stakeholder-DPIIT meet March 19 on issues pertaining to FDI in e-commerce where the Commerce and Industry Ministry had asked one spokesperson from each association to make submissions, an Amazon official represented Ficci but the chamber later said his views represented only one section of its e-commerce members, PTI had reported Friday.

Higher US bond yields drive away foreign capital from emerging markets' asset classes to the more lucrative treasury bills.

"The Fed sees growth and inflation, so the yields will go higher -- this is something that is heard on the street again and again," Thomas said.

"This may have consequences for equities, though in a limited way, in the coming days. The trajectory of the US markets will be closely followed."

According to Rohit Singre, Senior Technical Analyst at LKP Securities: "Once nifty cross above 14,800 zone bullish piercing pattern will get active and we may see a good move towards immediate hurdle zone of 14,900-15,000, supports still at 14,650-14,580 zone holding above said levels structure can be positive."



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