



HOLISTIC APPROACH

Actor Shilpa Shetty has shared yoga lessons which she claims will boost self-confidence, fearlessness

LEISURE P2



‘WON’T CROSS DOUBLE-DIGIT’

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor claims the BJP will struggle to cross the double-digit mark in WB polls

TWO STATES P7



OLI DEFENDS MOVE

Nepal's PM KP Sharma Oli defends move to dissolve Parliament, saying the rift within the party hit his govt's functioning

INTERNATIONAL P10

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NATIONS SEAL OFF UK

Several countries, India included, suspend flight services to UK; uncertainty looms over British PM Boris Johnson's scheduled show as chief guest at India's Republic Day function

AGENCIES

London, Dec 21: India and France have joined a growing list of countries suspending flights to and from the UK amid concerns of an "out of control" new variant of coronavirus spreading COVID-19 at a much faster pace in parts of England.

India followed Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, the Irish Republic, Turkey, Canada and Hong Kong in suspending flights. France became the latest European country to close all its borders with Britain. "Considering the prevailing situation in UK, the government of India has decided that all flights originating from UK to India to be suspended till 31st December 2020 (23.59 hours)," the Indian High Commission in London said in a statement on Monday.

According to a civil aviation ministry statement, all flights originating from the UK to India will be temporarily suspended until 11:59 pm on December 31, with the suspension to start from 11:59 pm on December 22.

"As a measure of abundant precaution, passengers arriving from UK in all transit flights (flights that have taken off

NO NEED TO PANIC: HARSH VARDHAN

NEW DELHI:

The government is fully alert and there is no need to panic, Union Health Minister



Harsh Vardhan said on Monday amid concerns over the emergence of a new coronavirus strain in the UK. The Union Health Ministry has called an urgent meeting of its Joint Monitoring Group Monday to discuss the new strain, which has led to a surge in the infection rate in the UK. Responding to a question on the panic and a demand to ban flights from the UK, Vardhan told reporters, "I would say this to all that all these imaginary situations, imaginary talks, imaginary panic... Don't involve yourself in this." "The government is fully alert about everything. If you ask me, there is no reason to panic the way we are seeing in this press conference," the health minister said.

or flights which are reaching India before 22nd Dec at 23.59 hrs) should be subject to mandatory RT-PCR test on arrival at the airports concerned," the ministry added.

With most of Britain now in the strictest Tier 4 lockdown, all non-essential travel remains banned for the majority. Other countries and territories to announce restrictions on UK travel include Israel, Iran, Croatia, Argentina, Chile, Morocco and Kuwait.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is to chair a meeting of the government's emergency committee on Monday to take stock of the situation as a huge backlog builds up on the border with France after even trucks and ferries were blocked entry at the ports. European Union (EU) member states are also due for a meeting in Brussels to discuss a more coordinated response as the number of coronavirus infections in the

much faster spreading new mutation of the novel coronavirus, with the country's death toll rising by 326 to hit 67,401.

"Everybody, particularly people in Tier 4 areas, needs to behave as if they might well have the virus – that is the only way we are going to get it under control," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said, adding that the situation is "deadly serious" as the government tries to contain the rapid strain of an "out of control" virus.

"This is a deadly disease, we need to keep it under control, and it has been made more difficult by this new variant," he said. The new variant is said to be 70 per cent more transmissible, though health experts say there is no evidence that it is more deadly or would react differently to vaccines.

"It is really too early to tell... but from what we see so far it is growing very quickly, it is growing faster than [a previous variant] ever grew, but it is important to keep an eye on this," said Dr Erik Volz from Imperial College London.

"The amount of evidence in the public domain is woefully inadequate to draw strong or firm opinions on whether the virus has truly increased transmission," added Professor Jonathan Ball, a virologist at the University of Nottingham.

ORERA serves no purpose as posts lie vacant

GYAN RANJAN MOHAPATRA, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The Odisha Real Estate Regulatory Authority (ORERA) has failed to deliver justice to aggrieved home buyers in the state. Sources said the housing and urban development department is showing little interest to fill up vacant positions in the real estate regulator.

Several positions including the chairman's post at ORERA have been lying vacant for long. Similarly, the adjudicating officer's post has been lying vacant after the retirement of Bijay Kumar Jena May 31, 2020. The ORERA Act came into effect in October 2017. Meanwhile, Jena was appointed as the first adjudicating officer after the lapse of more than two years in November 2019.

Answering to an RTI query filed by Biswaranjan Mishra, the ORERA authorities revealed that it has written two letters (1086 and 1530) to H&UD department requesting to fill up the vacant position.

Sub section 1 of section 71 of the RERA Act has ordained that the state RERA authority should appoint one or more adjudicating officers in the rank of district judge to hear grievances of allottees and various voluntary organizations.

The adjudicating officer has to decide on the quantum of compensations or interest claimed under the RERA Act within 60 days from the date of receipt of the application. However, the RTI report revealed that half of the cases filed before the adjudicating officer (AO) had been pending at RERA.

Sources said 30 cases were filed before the adjudicating officer over last three years.

However, 15 cases are pending with the AO till now. On the other hand, many duped home buyers are yet to get compensations awarded by the AO as RERA has failed to execute the cases owned by such buyers.

State gets ₹208cr GST gap funding

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Centre Monday released eighth weekly instalment of ₹208.08 crore to Odisha as back to back loan to meet the GST compensation shortfall. With the release of the latest tranche, the finance ministry said, ₹1954.21 crore has been raised through the special window and passed on to the state to meet its GST compensation shortfall. The Centre has allowed ₹2,858 crore additional borrowings to Odisha to help it mobilise additional financial resources.

The Centre released ₹6,000 crore as back to back loans to states to meet their GST compensation shortfall. It released ₹5,516.60 crore to 23 states and ₹483.40 crore to three Union Territories with

Legislative Assembly (Delhi, J&K & Pondicherry) who are members of the GST Council. The finance ministry said remaining five-states, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim do not have a gap in revenue on account of GST implementation.

Significantly, the Centre had set up a special borrowing window in October this year to meet the estimated shortfall of Rs1.10 lakh crore in revenue arising on account of implementation of GST.

The finance ministry said that the borrowings are being done through this window by the Centre on behalf of the states and UTs. "The amount borrowed so far was released to the states October 23, November 2, 9, 23, December 1, 7, 14 and 21.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Motilal Vora dead

NEW DELHI: Senior Congress leader Motilal Vora died Monday at a hospital here following post-COVID-19 complications. He was 93. Vora was admitted to Escorts Hospital in Okhla here a few days ago with a urinary infection. He also had a lung infection and was put on ventilator support. He completed 93 years only Sunday. He will be cremated in Chhattisgarh where his body will be taken either later in the day or Tuesday. Vora, a former CM of undivided Madhya Pradesh and also a former Governor of UP, had served as an RS member four times and as an LS member once.

MARKET WATCH			
INDEX		VARIATION	
SENSEX	45553.96	↓	1406.73
NIFTY	13328.40	↓	432.10
DOLLAR	74.19	↑	₹0.48
EURO	90.06	↓	₹0.08
GOLD	₹50,458	↑	₹154
SILVER	₹68,625	↑	₹718

WEATHER			
	BHUB	CTK	
MAX	27.8°C	28.2°C	
MIN	12.3°C	11.0°C	
Humidity	91%	78%	Forecast
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	Mist in the morning

Asset lists must for all elected reps: CM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Elected representatives starting from sarpanchs to Chief Minister and officers from entry-level to Chief Secretary must submit their annual property statements to government and they will be put in public domain. Chief Minister and BJD President Naveen Patnaik made this announcement while addressing the BJD's State Council meeting here Monday.

"Right from sarpanchs to block chairpersons, Zilla Parishad presidents, MLAs, ministers to Chief Minister; everyone's property statement will be uploaded and set an example for the entire country," he added. "As regards MPs, our party MPs will do it voluntarily and set an example for the entire country," he added.

Similarly, all government officers starting from entry level to Chief Secretary will have to submit their property statements every year. "The move will be a major step in curbing corruption. Odisha will be the first state to take such

a measure, the CM said.

Emphasizing on anti-corruption and transparency, Naveen said, "From the very beginning, our government is fighting against corruption which is the biggest enemy of development."

"Fight against corruption will help us in our fight against all ills of society, be it inequality, poverty, injustice, in fact, all maladies," Naveen said. In the past one year, action has been taken against 91 corrupt officials in the state, he mentioned.

Odisha's ongoing fight against corruption has brought laurels for the state from across the country. "Odisha is one of the few states which has done a remarkable job by setting up special courts for the trial of corruption cases or confiscation of properties belonging to corrupt persons/officials, he said.

Patnaik said the state has a strong Lokayukta and the government has been taking strong and exemplary actions against corrupt officials irrespective of their influence or positions.



ting more importance in the saffron camp than the loyal ones.

"Despite enduring physical attacks, sacrificing so much to get my husband elected to Parliament,

BRAVING COLD



Farmers rest inside a tractor-trolley on a cold winter morning during their sit-in protest against Centre's farm reform laws at Tikri border in New Delhi, Monday

PTI PHOTO

CM invites ideas for better governance

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The Biju Janata Dal President and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday sought ideas from members of the BJD's state council for betterment of governance and the party.

Addressing party leaders at the council through virtual mode, Naveen said, "I want one important suggestion from each of the council member on party and government. I will go through each one of the suggestions and all the good ones would be implemented."

NAVEEN CORRECTS BOBBY

Party organising secretary Pranab Prakash Das aka Bobby Das told council members to give one suggestion either for the party or for the government. However, Chief Minister Naveen immediately corrected him, saying everyone will have to give two suggestions—one for the party and one for the government. Then, Das said sorry and rectified his mistake.

He expressed happiness on a resolution made by the Mayurbhanj district committee recommending a

name change of North Odisha University as Shri Ramchandra Bhanja Deo University. "Our government will approve this suggestion," he assured. Urging district panels to be proactive, Naveen said his government and party will take their suggestions seriously. He asked all ministers present in the meeting to interact with district functionaries during their visits and act on their suggestions.

For the first time since the inception of BJD, the party president sought such suggestions from the party's grassroots leaders.

Politics wrecks BJP MP's marriage as wife joins TMC

‘PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING ‘KHAN’ SURNAME HEREAFTER; PLEASE DON'T REFER TO YOURSELF AS SAUMITRA KHAN'S WIFE’

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Dec 21: Sujata Mondal Khan, wife of BJP MP Saumitra Khan, switched over to the TMC from the saffron camp Monday, claiming that she did not get recognition even after taking several risks to get her husband elected from Bishnupur during 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

An incensed Khan said he would be sending a divorce notice to Sujata, and urged her not to use his surname anymore. Earlier in the day, at a press meet, Mondal Khan said that "misfit and corrupt leaders" are get-



ting more importance in the saffron camp than the loyal ones.

"Despite enduring physical attacks, sacrificing so much to get my husband elected to Parliament,

I got nothing in return... I want to work under our beloved leader Mamata Banerjee, and our dada Abhishek Banerjee," she said.

Asked if her decision would, in

any way, influence her husband, who is also the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) state unit chief, she said it was up to him to decide his future course of action.

"I hope he would realise one day... Who knows he might be back in the TMC one day," the newly inducted leader of the Bengal's ruling party said. Khan told a hurriedly called press meet a little later that he is sending a divorce notice to Sujata, "severing our 10-year relationship". "You are being used by some people who did not hesitate to create rift between a husband and wife who stood by each other dur-

ing the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Yes, you were my pillar during the Bishnupur Lok Sabha campaign.

"However, please don't forget I had won by 6,58,000 votes and this margin was made possible because of my party, because of my reputation in the area," Khan said. "Please refrain from using 'Khan' surname hereafter; please don't refer to yourself as Saumitra Khan's wife. I am giving you all the freedom to chart your own political destiny. But please don't forget you are siding with those who had attacked your parents' residence in 2019 after I joined the BJP," Khan said.



"We arrested the youth after getting required evidence against him. Sexual assault was the motive behind killing of the little girl," Bothra told reporters.

The accused was produced at a POCO court in Nayagarh Monday which allowed the SIT to take him on remand till December 24.

Rejecting the claims of innocence made by the student and his family, he said the youth was interrogated a number of times in the last ten days before his arrest.

"The involvement of any of his associates in the case is still under investigation," Bothra said. The youth had been absconding for the past five months since the girl went missing, he said.

The crime branch of Odisha Police had said in a press release Sunday that a person had been arrested in connection with the case under various sections of the IPC and the POCO Act.

The youth's mother has claimed that he is innocent and the girl's parents have doubted the SIT's findings.

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Curl, massage, clip, tweeze, polish, gloss, condition... today, will you attempt to shed your old skin. A dream date may have you in jitters but Ganesha suggests that you take it easy. True relationships are not sealed by glossy kisses alone!

TAURUS
Fortune favours the brave and you will wake up feeling gutsy. Your performance will peak today and you will reap the benefits of real estate and construction business. Your peers and boss will extend all the support you need. All in all, a day to bask in the glory of advantages and awards.

GEMINI
Today, you are likely to rack your brains to get things done. But your modesty will not do you any good. You will have to show that you are the boss, even if you are not. Your extraordinary brilliance will translate into exceptional performance and will save the day. Never forget that your family is the foundation of your success, says Ganesha.

CANCER
Today, you are likely to be brimming with love and compassion. However, certain negative thoughts will spoil all your good work. But don't fret! Your efforts won't go wasted and you will get the desired results sooner or later, says Ganesha.

LEO
On some days, the sun doesn't seem to have risen from the east, and neither does it seem you have gotten up on the right side of the bed. You start your day in a tensed atmosphere in the morning, caused by some annoyance on the part of one of your family members. But the day is not as bad as it seems.

VIRGO
The artist, the comedian and the showman in you are all set to take the floor today. Entertain people and set the evening ablaze with your arsenal of jokes and gags, says Ganesha. But save valuable time and energy for other pressing matters and responsibilities too.

LIBRA
Monotonous is the word to describe the way things have been till now, but no more, says Ganesha. It might be a very good idea for you to take a break from things around you and go on a small trip. Invigorate yourself with a small picnic with family and friends.

SCORPIO
Investing in real estate could yield maximum profits today, says Ganesha. An unusual gain from speculative trade is also on the cards. But you may need to spend time in the waiting room, before a more profitable opportunity comes by.

SAGITTARIUS
Settling for a new, better employment will help you fast-track your career growth. A telephonic interview might ring in a new offer. A lucrative deal with an MNC would serve well. Your dedication and devotion to work will also peak today, says Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
It may seem too far-fetched, but your boss will bank on your brilliance and unmatched abilities to get respite from the existing problems, says Ganesha. Moreover, much to the dismay of your rivals, you will have your way and gain popularity by winning the hearts of your clients.

AQUARIUS
You will come out top in whatever you choose to do, and success will smell honeysuckle sweet! Naturally, recognition and rewards await you. Take your friends to that trendy café; you needn't wait for a reason to party, says Ganesha.

PISCES
You are likely to be grinding yourself under at the workplace today. A turning point will arise in romantic liaisons, though if the evening awaiting you is anything to go by, it is something you should welcome wholeheartedly, says Ganesha.



GRANDE ANNOUNCES ENGAGEMENT

Pop star Ariana Grande has announced her engagement on Instagram to realtor Dalton Gomez by sharing a photograph of the diamond ring he gave her. The couple has been dating for nearly a year.

SIMON COWELL ON PATH OF RECOVERY

Music and TV mogul Simon Cowell is recovering well after injuring his back a few months ago. He now walks five miles a day, says a friend. After the accident at his Malibu home, Cowell had to cancel appearances on the show Britain's Got Talent.



Shilpa suggests yoga for fearlessness

Mumbai: Actress Shilpa Shetty Monday shared yoga lessons for her fans that will boost self-confidence and fearlessness, apart from health benefits.

Shilpa shared a video on Twitter where she can be seen performing EkaPada Dhanurasana and Dhanurasana.

“Whether we're indoors all day or stepping out for work (with a mask), the to-do list is never-ending. Even on extremely busy days with 2 kids & working from home, it's a priority for me to start my day with #yoga. Yesterday, began with EkaPada Dhanurasana & Dhanurasana,” Shilpa tweeted.

Sharing the health benefits of the asanas, the actress further wrote: “Apart from giving the back some much-needed stretching; it improves the function of the pancreas and stimulates reproductive organs.

Yami Gautam feels secure working in home state

Mumbai: Actress Yami Gautam Monday revealed that she feels a sense of security while shooting in her home state Himachal Pradesh.

Yami wrapped up shooting for the first schedule of her forthcoming film *Bhoot Police* across locations in the state where she stayed for almost a month, December 5.

The actress informed that she has just commenced shooting for her remaining portions of the horror comedy flick in Mumbai.

“As I commence the Mumbai schedule of *Bhoot Police* cannot help but think of our shoot in Himachal. Pandemic has hit us all &

everywhere but the security that your hometown gives you is amazing. Home is where is the heart is... #shootdiariesofHimachal #dalhousie,” she wrote on Instagram.

Yami's Instagram account bears proof of how much she has enjoyed working and staying in Himachal Pradesh after a long time.

The actress flooded social media with photographs and videos from the picturesque hill stations where they shot throughout her stay.

Directed by Pavan Kirpalani, the horror comedy film also stars Saif Ali Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arjun Kapoor and Jaaved Jaafari.

Akshay plays Shah Jahan in front of Taj

Mumbai: Actor Akshay Kumar has shared a snapshot on Instagram from his upcoming film *Atrangi Re*, dressed as Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.

In the picture, Akshay poses with a rose in hand in front of the Taj Mahal.

Akshay's heroine in the Aanand L. Rai directorial, Sara Ali Khan, also shared his look on Instagram and wrote: “Because it can't get more Atrangi

than this. Not Shah Jahan - Mr Kumar it is. @akshaykumar.” Sara had earlier shared on social media that she feels ‘privileged, excited and thankful’ to be sharing the screen with Akshay Kumar.

Aanand L. Rai's *Atrangi Re* is billed as a cross-cultural love story. Sara reportedly plays a girl from Bihar; and she has romantic tracks with Akshay as well as Dhanush in the film.

IANS

'It's time Disney created an Indian Princess'

Mumbai: Suhana Khan, daughter of top star Shah Rukh Khan, believes it is time Disney had an Indian princess. Suhana took to her verified Instagram account story Monday to express her feeling through a meme.

The star kid shared a meme featuring the popular Disney princess Jasmine. In the meme, Jasmine stands with a sad face and says “@disney make an Indian princess.”

While Disney princesses are known for their beauty and powerful personality, Suhana

rightly pointed out that there is no Disney princess hailing from India yet.

Earlier this year, Suhana had opened up on how she was told ugly because of her skin tone since the age of 12. The 20-year-old had said she has not get her skin lightened, adding that she would never do it.

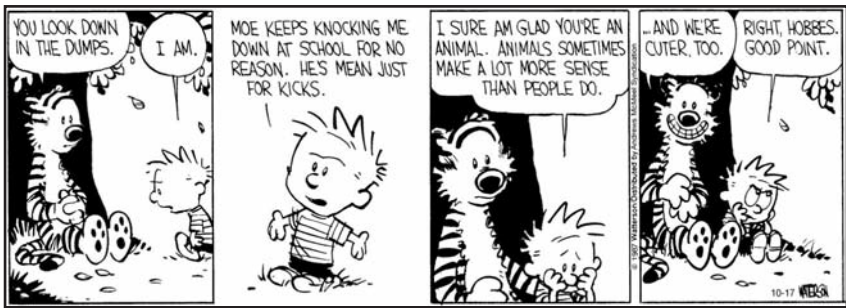
Urging to end colourism, Suhana had shared in an Instagram post: “I'm sorry if social media, Indian match-making or even your own families have convinced you, that if you're not 5'7 and fair you're not beautiful. I hope it helps to know that I'm 5'3 and brown and I am extremely happy about it and you should be too. #end-colourism.”

IANS

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

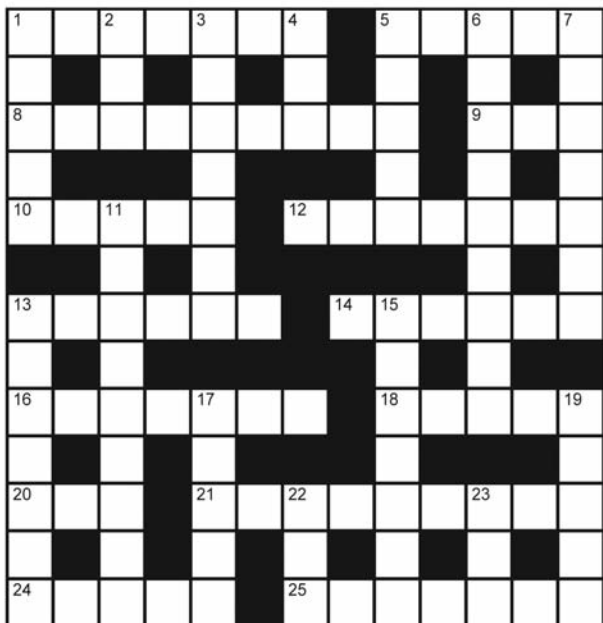


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



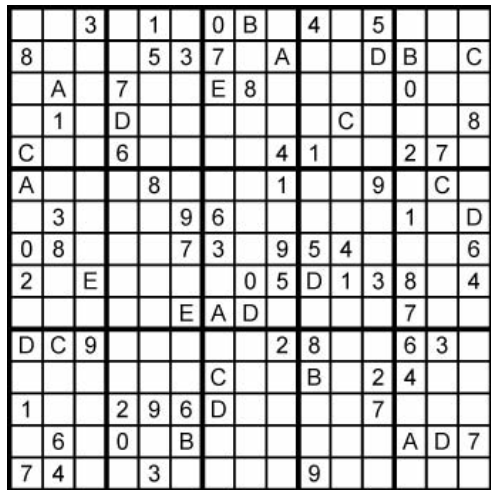
- Across**

 - Attila the Hun, for one
 - Oomph
 - Confess (4,5)
 - Make a move
 - Little rascal
 - Detective or hunter, e.g.
 - Lacking in insight
 - Japanese attire
 - Unpredictable
 - Organ part
 - Musical Yoko
 - Happen
 - Perspicacity
 - Tailor's tools
 - Fires
 - Resistance unit
 - A chef uses them
 - Artist's asset
 - Italian seaport
 - Potato chips, e.g. (5,4)
 - Smallest of the Great Lakes
 - Time of day
 - Spotted wildcats
 - Stalemate
 - Frau or Señorita
 - Vichyssoise vegetables
 - Barley bristle
 - Not in the pink

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

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



downtown

Leopard population in Odisha doubles

Increase in tiger, lion and leopard population over the last few years is a testimony to the conservation efforts and of the fledgling wildlife and biodiversity of the country, says Union Environment and Forest Minister Prakash Javadekar

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Dec 21: Leopard population in Odisha has doubled to around 760 as compared to around 345 in 2014 census, revealed the 'Status of Leopards in India 2018' report released by Union Environment and Forest Minister Prakash Javadekar here, Monday. According to the report, the population of leopards in the state is estimated to be around 760. The report shows a tremendous increase in the population of the spotted big cat as compared to the 2014 estimates. Significantly, more than 60 per cent increase in the population of leopards has been recorded in the 2018 report across the country. The country now has 12,852 leopards as compared to the previous estimate of 7,910, as per the census conducted in 2014, says the report. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra recorded the highest leopard estimates at 3,421, 1,783 and 1,690 respectively.

Phulbani shivers at 4° Celsius

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Cold-wave situation in state further intensified with mercury falling below 10 degrees Celsius at 11 places, Monday. As per Bhubaneswar Met Centre, Phulbani recorded a minimum temperature of 4 degrees Celsius to become the coldest place of Odisha while it was 5.8 degrees at Jharsuguda and 6 degrees at Daringbadi. Other places which recorded below 10 degrees Celsius are—Angul (6.6), Baripada (7.6), Keonjhar (9.3), Bhawanipatna (7.8), Bolangir (8.8), Koraput (7), Sonepur (9.4) and Boudh (9). Excluding three places, other places recorded a minimum temperature above 10 degrees and below 15 degrees Celsius. Forecasting severe cold-wave situation in the state, the Met department has issued orange and yellow warning for several districts for three days. Cold-wave situation will grip the districts of Mayurbhanj, Angul, Bargarh, Dhenkanal, Koraput, Kandhamal, Sonepur, Boudh, Kalahandi, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Nuapada and Deogarh, Tuesday night and early Wednesday.

Boating complex in Birupa by March

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Dec 21: If everything goes as per plan, a boating complex will come up in Birupa river at Magura in Choudwar area for which work is in full swing. Cuttack District Collector Bhabani Shankar Chayani along with former Choudwar-Cuttack MLA Pravat Ranjan Biswal visited Monday the proposed boating complex site and reviewed the infrastructure. Chayani also held discussions on the issue with officials of the Tourism officials, sub-collector and local civic body officials. "We are hoping that a major part



Photo: @WCT_India

RISE IN COUNT

The population of leopards in Odisha is estimated to be around 760	More than 60 per cent increase in the population of leopards has been recorded in the 2018 report across the country	Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra recorded the highest leopard estimates at 3,421, 1,783 and 1,690 respectively
The country now has 12,852 leopards as compared to the previous estimate of 7,910 , as per the census conducted in 2014		

The Union minister said that increase in tiger, lion and leopard population over the last few years is a testimony to the conservation efforts and of the fledgling wildlife and biodiversity of the country. Javadekar remarked that monitoring of the tigers in India has clearly shown its umbrella role in the ecosystem, which has shed light on other charismatic species like the leopard. It has been further revealed that a total of 5,240 adult individual leopards were identified in a total of 51,337 leopard photographs using the pattern recognition software.

Statistical analysis puts the leopard population at 12,800 within the tiger's range. "The leopards were estimated across forested habitats in tiger range areas of the country but other leopard occupied areas such as non-forested habitats (coffee and tea plantations and other land uses from where leopards are known to occur), higher elevations in the Himalayas, arid landscapes and majority of North East landscape were not sampled and, therefore, the population estimation should be considered as minimum number of leopards in each of the landscapes," the ministry of Environment and Forests said.

SPREADING AWARENESS



Artists draw murals on the theme of tribal art and culture at Sahid Nagar in Bhubaneswar, Monday

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

Preserving biodiversity key to food security: Experts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: On the second day of Odisha Environment Congress-2020, organised by HDF Centre for Development Action and Research in association with Centre for Environment and Development and others, experts deliberated upon the theme 'Biodiversity: Food Security and Pandemic'. They said that nature has created diverse species of plants, animals and microbes in course of evolution and interlinked them in the form of various food chains and webs, in addition to their association with the abiotic components, resulting in dynamic ecosystems. These species ensure food security to human species; but for the



exploded human population and its detrimental impact on the natural ecosystems, food supply has become more vulnerable and unsustainable. Scientists estimate that three-

quarters of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops have been lost over the last century. "Decline in genetic diversity and biodiversity entails a reduction of options for ensuring more diverse nutrition, en-

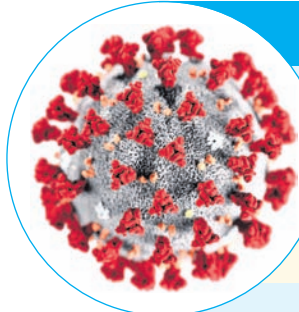
Scientists estimate that three-quarters of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops have been lost over the last century

hancing food production, raising incomes, coping with environmental constraints and managing ecosystems, that too in the era of climate change," said the experts. Thus, the priority now is to conserve biodiversity in a sustainable manner and emphasise on benefit sharing accruing out of it, they added. Ajay Parida, Director of the Institute of Life Sciences, who spoke on the topic 'Biodiversity conser-

vation with tribal perspectives', narrated the traditional practices adopted by tribal people in protecting and conserving the local biodiversity without causing any harm to the ecosystems. The second session was held on the sub-theme 'Sustainable biodiversity and benefit sharing' VP Upadhyay, former advisor to Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), spoke on 'Biodiversity assessment in environmental impact assessment' and explained how precautionary measures need to be taken for protecting biodiversity while undertaking developmental projects including industries, mining, construction of railways and highways and urbanisation

FOR WARMTH

As temperature plummets, denizens buy winter clothes at Sahid Nagar in Bhubaneswar, Monday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	7,72,90,791	5,42,22,677	17,02,055
India	1,00,56,281	96,05,415	1,45,845
Odisha	3,26,596	3,21,647	1,839

MARITAL DISCORD

SCW serves notice on Anubhav

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The State Commission for Women (SCW) Monday issued notices to Kendrapara MP Anubhav Mohanty and his parents in connection with the marital discord issue. Earlier, December 15, his wife Varsha Priyadarshini had approached the SCW here and sought its intervention in the dispute between the actor couple. The SCW reportedly asked Anubhav and his parents to appear before it December 29. Varsha has also recently filed a



The SCW has asked Anubhav and his parents to appear before it December 29

complaint with Purigat police in Cuttack against her husband accusing him of trying to defame her by making viral videos. The actor-turned-politician had given his response in connection with the allegations of domestic violence made against him by Varsha. Notably, Anubhav had filed a divorce case in a local court in New Delhi a few months ago.

Ensure quality monitoring of OMBADC projects: Chief Secy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy Monday directed the officials of the departments concerned to ensure quality monitoring of the projects approved under OMBADC. He reviewed the projects sanctioned under Odisha Mineral Bearing Areas Development Corporation (OMBADC) wherein corporation Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Uma Nanduri outlined the issues for discussion. Resolving the issues relating to ground-level implementation of the projects, Tripathy directed the administrative departments concerned to undertake micro-level monitoring and management through independent technical professionals. Further, the Chief Secretary advised the officials to ensure procurement of furniture, classroom equipment and general materials necessary for modernisation of educational and technical institutions from local micro, small and medium enterprises promoted under 'Make in Odisha' initiative. Target was set to complete infrastructure building civil work projects for by first quarter of 2021. Additional Chief Secretary of Health & Family Welfare department PK Mohapatra said, "Five categories of projects including up-gradation of health infrastructure at ₹971.83 crore, improving access to health services (Rs 95.31 crore), improvement in emergency care services (Rs 19.06 crore), telemedicine care project in health institutions (Rs 4.75 crore) and special public health programmes (Rs 207.90 crore) are being implemented in the OMBADC districts like Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Jajpur." That apart, a 150-bed maternal and child care hospital building

FOCUS MINING-HIT DISTRICTS



THE CHIEF SECRETARY ADVISED THE OFFICIALS TO ENSURE PROCUREMENT OF FURNITURE, CLASSROOM EQUIPMENT AND GENERAL MATERIALS NECESSARY FOR MODERNISATION OF EDUCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS FROM LOCAL MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES PROMOTED UNDER 'MAKE IN ODISHA' INITIATIVE

SEVERAL PROJECTS TO BOLSTER HEALTH SERVICES ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED IN OMBADC DISTRICTS LIKE KEONJHAR, SUNDARGARH, MAYURBHANJ AND JAJPUR

has been taken up in Jajpur, he added. Skill Development and Technical Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh said, "The projects for modernisation of government ITIs and engineering schools along with skill development of tribal youths have been taken up under OMBADC funding." Specific activities include placement linked training programme for 1,200 tribal youths at a cost of around ₹8.80 crore while construction of four hostels and two skill development centres, estimated ₹8.05 crore, and pre-recruitment training camps in four OMBADC districts (estimated at ₹0.97 crore) have been taken up. So far, 243 youths have completed the training and out of them 132 have been placed in different sectors whereas another 267 youths are undergoing training. Construction of two hostels (1 for boys and another for girls) has pro-

gressed up to roof level in Mayurbhanj district. Similarly construction of one boys' and one girls' hostel in Jajpur district has been expedited. Singh further said that modernisation of four ITIs – Government ITI Rourkela, UGIE Rourkela, OSME Keonjhar and Government ITI Barbil – has been taken up with an estimated cost of ₹47.40 crore. School & Mass Education Secretary Satyabrata Sahu projects for development of critical infrastructure and other facilities in Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and elementary & secondary schools have been taken up under OMBADC funding. The estimated cost of these projects is ₹1652.20 crore. The Chief Secretary directed the department to constitute a technical committee for expediting the projects at ground level.

CP moves SDJM court seeking Pathak's remand

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The Commissionerate Police Monday approached the SDJM court here to take tainted IFS officer Abhay Kant Pathak on remand for further probe into the ₹65 lakh fraud case. However, the police refused to reveal the exact period of remand sought by Kharavela Nagar police. Abhay is accused of conniving with his son in cheating Sky King, a city-based travel agency of around ₹65 lakh. Meanwhile, his son, Akash Pathak, who is the prime accused in the case was Monday produced before the SDJM court as his four-day remand ended Sunday. Speaking to media persons outside the court here, Akash rubbished claims by investigating officials regarding his admission to the allegations levelled against him. On December 1, the travel agency filed a complaint with Kharavela Nagar police here alleging that Akash, allegedly impersonating the MD of TATA motors, booked private charter plane tickets and rooms in star hotels at various cities. Akash allegedly refused to pay ₹65



Akash rubbished claims by investigating officials regarding his admission to the allegations levelled against him

lakh out of the total bill of ₹2.78 crore due to the agency. Several investigating agencies including Vigilance and Crime Branch have been investigating the unlawful activities by the father-son duo. The CB had earlier taken Akash on remand to question him in connection with the job scam. Akash along with Gopalpur MLA Pradeep Panigrahi has allegedly duped several job seekers of crores of rupees on the pretext of providing jobs in TATA motors.

PLUS III ADMISSIONS

Guidelines for Phase 2 issued

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The state Higher Education department Monday sent letter to all the principals of degree colleges specifying guidelines and timelines for the second phase of Plus III admissions in 2020-21.

In the letter Rajesh Kumar Sahu, deputy director of Performance Tracking cell, Higher Education department, said, "I am directed to inform you that the second phase of admission in UG Class (+3 1st Year) under SAMS will be held as per the guidelines mention below."

As per guidelines, those who have not submitted CAF during Phase-I can submit fresh application for Phase-II and have to deposit the CAF fees online. Applicants/ students who have already taken admission/ not taken admission during Phase-I can also apply for Phase-II admission.

They are not required to deposit CAF fees again. There will be reservation in the category of SC, ST, ESM/SDP/CoM in respect of vacancies available in different colleges/ subjects. There will be weightage for applicants/students in the categories of NCC, NSS, Rover& Ranger, Sports & Games as per Common Prospectus.

Selection of the applicants/ students will be done purely on mark basis. However, applicants/ students with physically disability (PwD)



FILE PHOTO

Important dates

Common Application Form (CAF) will be available in the website December 23

The last date for applying online is December 28

The merit list of the second phase will be out January 2, 2021

will be admitted based on the reservation scheme irrespective of the marks in all categories, the letter said.

The dates of availability of online Common Application Form in the website is December 23, 2020 (11:00 AM) and the last date of applying online is December 28, 2020 (11:45 PM).

The date of publication of second phase Merit List is January 2, 2021

(02:00 PM) and online deposit of admission fees by login to SAMS [Student] account is January 2, 2021 (02:00 PM onwards) to January 5, 2021 (5:00 PM).

The Online admission and data updation of students selected in Phase-II selection will be from January 6 to 10 (5:00 PM).

The application process of Plus III first year admission was started from September 8. The first phase merit list were published September 28.

In the first phase, out of a total of 2,13,959 students, 1,58,540 have been selected for admission in the first phase which was held from September 29 to October 2.

Earlier, the government also notified about spot admission to be conducted between November 23 and November 27.

Conman held for duping job seeker

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Commissionerate Police Sunday arrested a person for allegedly duping a job aspirant of ₹45,000 on the pretext of providing a job in Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. The accused has been identified as Bikash Swain alias Bubun, 35, of Sahid Nagar area.

According to sources, the accused used to befriend random persons through various social media platforms. Subsequently, he would develop a relationship with young victims posing as a government official. He also assured the victims high profile jobs in various central and state government departs. He even duped many by promising them IAS and IPS posts.



The accused Bubun had allegedly received around ₹45,000 from the complainant, Prasanjyoti Malla of Acharya Vihar to get him a job in FSSAI. He later avoided Malla after collecting the money from him.

Sahid Nagar police arrested Bubun after registering a case based on the complaint lodged by Malla.

LORD'S DARSHAN AMID PANDEMIC



Bamboo barricades installed on Grand Road, Monday, as Puri gears up to welcome devotees and tourists to the Lord's abode, albeit with restrictions

OP PHOTO

363 NEW COVID CASES, 3 DEATHS



FILE PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha's COVID-19 tally Monday mounted to 3,26,596 after 363 more people tested positive for the infection, while three fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,839, a health department official said.

The new cases were detected in 27 of the state's 30 districts, with 208 reported from different quarantine centres and 155 are local contact cases.

Khurda and Sundargarh districts each recorded the highest of 50 new cases followed by Sambalpur (35). Taking to twitter, the health and family welfare department said: "Regret to inform the demise of three numbers of Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

The fresh fatalities were reported from Sundergarh (2) and one patient succumbed to the infection in Kalahandi district.

Apart from 1,839 fatalities reported so far, 53 other COVID-19 positive patients also died due to comorbidities.

Of the total 1,839 fatalities reported so far, Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, alone accounted for 313 deaths followed by

Now, antigen test at ₹100

Bhubaneswar: The state government Monday reduced the cost of antigen tests by private laboratories from ₹450 to ₹100. Health and Family Welfare department has issued a notification in this regard. The private laboratories can conduct the test under the supervision of Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Bhubaneswar following guidelines issued by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Ganjam (246), Sundergarh (161), Cuttack (138) and Puri (113).

Twenty-five other districts reported fatalities below 100, he said.

Odisha currently has 3,057 active COVID-19 cases, while as many as 3,21,647 patients have recovered from the disease so far.

The state has tested 66.35 lakh samples for COVID-19 so far, including 32,367 on Sunday. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.92 per cent, the health and family welfare department said.

'Students should get 6 months to prepare for exam'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha Parents' Federation wrote a letter to chief minister Naveen Patnaik Monday urging him to direct schools to reschedule the academic calendar so as students get five to six months to prepare before board exams.



Chairman of the federation Basudev Bhatt said, "The parents are a panicked lot after announcements by CBSE and ICSE on conducting Std X and Std XII board exams during March-April, 2021. Earlier, you announced that all educational institutions will be closed till December 31."

As per School and Mass Education minister Samir Ranjan Dash, only 31 percent students are covered under online classes in the state and in private CBSE and ICSE schools, 50 percent students were covered in online classes.

In these circumstances, we request your and School and Mass Education minister's kind intervention for consultation with stakeholders and prepare govt and private schools to conduct board examinations 5-6 months after the commencement of physical classes for betterment of lakhs of students in Odisha, the letter read.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

Before Notary Public, Berhampur, GM, I, J Jyotisankar Panda, S/o Pramoda Kumar Panda, Jyotinagar, 7th Lane, Berhampur, P.S.- B.N. Pur wrongly mentioned in my Passport as Jyoti Shankar Panda. But both Jyotisankar Panda and Jyoti Shankar Panda one and same person. Therefore I shall be known as Jyotisankar Panda (As per my Aadhaar) for all purposes.

BJD council passes 18 resolutions

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The State Council of BJD Monday passed as many as 18 resolutions including formation of Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council) in the state.

The party has also passed resolutions for appointment of local youths in Central PSUs and reservation of seats for students of government schools in medical and engineering colleges.

As the party president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has already raised voice against the BJP government at Centre, the party has decided to continue its fight

against central negligence to Odisha, rising fuel prices, special category status, etc.

The Council has also cleared a resolution to put pressure on Centre for implementation of 33 per cent reservation for women in Assembly and Parliament.

The ruling party has further decided to demand reservation of seats for OBC students in higher education and various recruitments. Besides, a corpus fund will be created to provide financial assistance to kin of party leaders, in case of death.

To further strengthen the organisation, BJD vice-president

Prasanna Acharya proposed certain amendment to constitution of the party and all were approved. The amendments include creation of posts like senior vice-president, general secretary (organization and headquarters) and senior general secretary.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister approved all proposals placed before the Council by members and leaders of BJD.

He highlighted proposals such as reservation for students of government schools at medical and engineering colleges, backward class survey and women empowerment.

FOR A GREENER TOMORROW



OP PHOTO

Science & Technology Minister Ashok Chandra Panda, Energy Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra and BJB Autonomous College principal Suprava Pattnaik among others pose after installation of rooftop solar power system at the premier institution in Bhubaneswar, Monday

City ITI signs MoU to enhance expertise in drones

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Govt ITI Bhubaneswar, and IG DRONES, which provides enterprise drone solutions and pilot training pan India.

Under this MoU, both the parties agreed upon collaborating and aligning the training infrastructure of ITI with an objective to make them industry ready and offer the best skills to cope them with the dynamism of the revolutionary technology.

The MoU was signed between Jeetamitra Satpathy, principal of ITI Bhubaneswar and Rashmi Ranjan Mohapatra, Head, Skill Development and Board Member, IG Drones.

As a part this MoU, which will be progressive in nature, IG DRONES

and Government ITI, Bhubaneswar will aim to provide training to targeted trainees.

As per the MoU, IG DRONES will be setting up a Drone Excellence Center with equipments for training powered by High-End workstation engaged with industry standard relevant softwares to facilitate the experience of flying, providing safety gears to be used while on-field training along with the placement support for the trained pilots upon feasibility.

ITI, Bhubaneswar would be providing space of approximately 2,000 sq.ft. with adequate infrastructure. This apart, a six months course will be given on drone pilot training for the students.

Om Prakash Das, Co-founder, IG Drones said with years of experience and expertise of enterprise drone solutions, design & development, IG Drones will share the

NEXTGEN TECH



knowledge and technology with ITI Bhubaneswar through this Centre of Excellence to train the youth for next generation Drone Industry. The center will create employment opportunity for hundreds of youths of the state for an upcoming in-

dustrial revolution. The trained youths not only serve the industry but also help the Govt in case of natural calamities and pandemic when the necessity arises. Aligned with Odisha's Skill Development Program, this centre

will introduce a new curriculum for Drone Pilot Training.

Das said that this training will help them in gaining skills and training in drone technology and employment in the drone sector. "We will also provide them drone pilot

training," he added.

A lot has changed in the drone industry. Now, drones have become more sophisticated and focused on niche applications. We've also seen the rise of the dronepreneur. There is lot of jobs in drone sector such as drone pilot, dron delivery and drone agriculture," he added.

During Covid 19, we have seen the use of drone in sanitizer spraying, and delivery of products so it has a job potential in future years, he added.

Principal, ITI Bhubaneswar, Jeetamitra Satpathy said, "The objective of this MOU was to collaborate and align the training infrastructure of Government ITI of Bhubaneswar for Drone Pilot Training, with industry requirement and to expose the trainees to latest technologies and relevant industrial best practices with an objective to make them industry ready"

FOR CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS CONTACT OUR BOOKING STATIONS

Acharya Vihar-Dayal Agency-9437135727, **A.P. Tours and Travel**, Maitri Vihar, C.S. Pur- 9861301598, **Aurobindo Market**-Sai Audio & Electronics-9438304668, **Airport Road**-Sai Baba Variety Store-9090071530, **Anish Infotech**- Tankapani Road-9861341488, **Bapuji Nagar**- Dreamland Studio- 9777517314, **Baramunda Rental Colony**-Maa Ramchandi Communication-9658821469, **Baramunda Housing Board Colony**-Pappu Variety Store-9040500106, **Cuttack Road**-Alishan Snacks-8984236754, **District Center (Chandrasekharpur)**-Sai Google Mart-9776056507, **Forest Park**-DTDC Couriers & Services (HB Services)-7381024156, **IRC Village**-Bapi Xerox-9090090404, Gift Hut(Antriksh Gifts & Decors Pvt. Ltd.)-9954781084, Pruthvi Medicine-9853314816, **Janpath-Krupajal Book Store**-7978646669, **Jaydev Vihar**-AK Enterprises-7978116618, Subam Sai Books Store-8895550649, Swain Graphics- 9337121249, **Jagannath Mobile Point**- Janpath Road, Ram Mandir- 9938475415, **Kanan Vihar**-Auro Electronics-8260697560, **Khandagiri**- Swosti Mobile Centre- 7992914045, World Solution- 9938317559, **KIIT Road**-Jugad Jn-9338545031, **Laxmi Sagar**-Aditya Mobile-9438191836, **Lewis Road**-Spider Web-7809186415, **Metro Satellite City**-Arogya Mitra Medicine Store-9853621640, **Madhusudan Nagar**-Mohapatra Communication-9124446664, **Maa Santoshi travels**- Gajapati Nagar- 9777675867, **Nayapalli**- The Cake Room- 7873660137, **Near Mayfair Lagoon**-Cookieman-9439491273, **Nigamananda**-Omm Sai Travels-9668284823, **Nr Cosmopolis Main Gate**- Shreeram Medical Store- 8763711714, **Net Square**- Niladri Vihar (C.S. Pur)- 9937586626, **Satya Nagar**-Baisnnavi Mixture & Sweets-7894821764, **Samantapur**- Download Point-7504557743, **Sailashree Vihar**-Harsha Book Store-8093449515, **Saheed Nagar**-Jagannath Graphics-7978652670, Photo World-7978468191, Sainath Photo Studio-8984436129, Shanti & Co-9937071063, **Siripur**-Omm Maa Sarala Communication-9777682449, **Sushree fashion**- Jagmara-9938714347, **Shree Vision**- Sailashree Vihar-9861476678, **Unit-3**-LIC of India Premium Point-9337787080, **Unit-7**- LIC Premium Point- 9338227422, **VSS Nagar**-Friends Cake & Bake-8658200930, Jeet Infoworld-7205195782, **XIMB Square**-LD Books-9658061373.

Express train runs over tusker

The Puri-Surat Express train was clocking 50km/h near Bhabanipali between Hatibari and Maneswar railway stations under Sambalpur division when it hurt the pachyderm, late Sunday night



Repair work underway after the mishap
POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Dec 21: A tusker was run over by Puri-Surat Express train near Bhabanipali between Hatibari and Maneswar railway stations under Sambalpur division late Sunday night.

Railway sources said that the Surat bound train departed from Hatibari station in Sambalpur district around 1.55 am. Six wheels of the train got derailed following the mishap; train services resumed after four hours. This is the second such elephant death within a fortnight.

The train was running at such a high speed that it dragged the carcass of the 14-year-old tusker stuck

Forest officials blame the Railways for the mishap

Forest personnel claim that despite information about movement of elephants on the route in evening, the loco pilot ignored the warning and did not slow down

in its engine for over two metres. However, no casualties were reported as well as passengers onboard and the railway crew members including the loco pilot are said to be out of danger, a Railways official said. The train was moving at a speed of around 50 km/h when the tusker crossing the rail

tracks came in front of it. As a result, six of the wheels of the front trolley got derailed on the spot.

Divisional Railway Manager Sambalpur along with other senior railway officials reached the spot to take stock of the situation. A relief train also immediately reached Redhakhol to bring back the rake to Hatibari railway station.

Senior forest officials including divisional forest officer (DFO) Sanjeet Kumar also reached the spot and recovered the carcass of the jumbo. The carcass was sent for post-mortem. Notably, railway communication on the route was disrupted following the mishap. Puri-Durg express train was stopped at

Jujumara station and Koraput-Bhubaneswar express train was left stranded at Sambalpur station and started for their destinations after five hours.

RCCF Chittaranjan Mishra, DFO Sanjeet Kumar and forest officials rushed to the spot and took stock of the situation. Forest officials however, blamed the Railways for the mishap as the mishap site falls in an elephant corridor.

They claimed that despite information about movement of elephants on the route in evening the loco pilot ignored the warning and did not slow down the train.

Reportedly, work on another railway track is on near the elephant corridor. The mishap occurred as workers have dumped soil on the corridor for which the pachyderms often fail to trace their path and come up on railway track to move to the other side.

The Sadar ranger said that a herd of elephants comprising seven females, three tuskers and five calves was holed up near Babupali and Bhabanipalli villages in the evening. The herd tried moving into the villages following which forest officials and villagers tried to drive them away. The deceased tusker was crossing the track when it was hit by the express train and killed.



A doctor checks the eyes of a child at a health camp, sponsored by Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd, organised at Chhamunda in Sambalpur district, Monday
OP PHOTO

LIVES PUT IN JEOPARDY TO COMMUTE ACROSS BRIDGE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baliguda, Dec 21: For years, more than a thousand people under Gadaguda panchayat in Tikabali block of Kandhamal district have been pleading for a safe commutable path.

Their life hangs on a wooden log—the only means of connectivity among the villages in the panchayat and other parts of the district.

Located at a distance of 40 kilometres from the block headquarters, the wooden log has been the only mode of connectivity for ten years for these villagers, who are forced to regularly risk their lives during their commute.

Adults and children are forced to walk around 35 to 40 kilometres to reach Tikabali headquarters for their daily work. However, locals say that it is not the distance, but the route that bothers them.

“The distance is not a matter of concern but we are worried about



For residents of this Kandhamal hamlet, life hangs on a wooden log—the only means of connectivity among the villages in the panchayat and other parts of the district

students crossing a nullah to reach their schools. The ‘nullah’ remains dry for half the year. For the rest of the year, we tie the wooden log to cross the nullah. It has been a continuous process for the last ten years,” a local said.

Natives further alleged that despite relentless complaints raised with the concerned authorities, there has been no improvement in the situation.

The lack of connectivity is not only hampering the daily life of

villagers, but also the availability of medical services.

When asked, sarpanch of Gadaguda panchayat Chitaranjan Pradhan said that the villagers are using the wooden log only to bring wood from the jungle. “There are also other ways to commute with the main places of the district,” he added.

Pradhan further said if more villagers will complain in this regard then he would be able to take necessary steps.

Drug peddlers have found haven in Nayagarh district

WHAT EXACERBATES THE SITUATION IS, ADDICTS WHO ARE DEAD POOR, ARE PAWNING OFF THEIR VALUABLES IN EXCHANGE FOR BROWN SUGAR

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, Dec 21: Smuggling and peddling brown sugar is a booming business in this district. And none but the police are being blamed for this.

It is learnt that brown sugar business is thriving in areas including the district headquarters, Itamat, Godipada, Khandapada, Sharankul and Gania. Itamati being a business hub in the district, brown sugar trade is flourishing here.

According to some locals, the police are conducting raids but not able to put a check on this business. Sometimes the raids are conducted only to put up a show. And sometimes, the traders and peddlers are informed about the movement of the police well in advance. So, the police have to return empty handed after raids.

These traders also outsmart the cops by not doing their business at a particular place for a long period. They keep on changing their locations.

What makes the situation worse is that they are reportedly providing brown sugar to the addicts even



if they do not have money. They keep some valuables in pawn and supply the contraband.

On the condition of anonymity, a trader admitted that brown sugar business is doing well in Nayagarh district. When asked the reason, he said raids and checking are next to nothing here in the district.

“We are spending less and earning more. We are spending to spread our business and get security,” he said. “We are carrying out our business without any fear from police or Excise department because, we know they can’t afford to lose their handsome monthly earnings from us. Local residents are also not objecting to our business”

When contacted, Nayagarh town police station IIC Jayadeep Mohanty and Sharankul IIC Bimal Mallick said they are putting their best ef-

We are carrying out our business without any fear from police or Excise department because, we know they can’t afford to lose their handsome monthly earnings from us. Local residents are also not objecting to our business

A PEDDLER

We are putting our best efforts to check brown sugar business. We are conducting raids from time to time

BIMAL MALICK | SHARANKUL IIC

orts to check brown sugar business.

“We are conducting raids from time to time,” he said.

Echoing the same, sub-inspector, excise mobile squad, Dhananjay Patra said they had raided a place at Sinduria Bank Chowk and seized 15 grams of brown sugar.

“Our raids will continue in coming days,” he added.

Brother-sister duo meets watery grave

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Dec 21: In a tragic incident, a minor girl and her brother met their watery grave in a pond at Danigiri village under Rajkanika police limits in Kendrapara district, Monday. The deceased have been identified as Mamuni Behera (seven) and Biswajit Behera (three).

The two were playing while sitting on the bank of the pond. Somehow they slipped and fell into the pond and got drowned. As there were no other persons around, their cries of anguish went unnoticed and unheard.

Also, three picnickers drowned in Koel river in Sundargarh district while taking a bath December 20.

Daringbadi sees season’s first snowfall

POST NEWS NETWORK

Daringbadi, Dec 21: Daringbadi in Kandhamal district is not called ‘Odisha’s Kashmir’ for nothing.

This hill station witnessed the season’s first snowfall Monday, giving tourists a feel of snow-capped peaks of Kashmir.

Daringbadi recorded the season’s lowest temperature of six degree Celsius Monday morning, resulting in snowfall.

“We had heard a lot about the winter in Daringbadi. This year we decided to feel the chill here. So, we have come here with our family. For people of Odisha, seeing snowfall is rare. We witnessed



it Monday and got our money’s worth,” said a tourist.

Monday offered tourists a view that they had been waiting for. There was a layer of snow seen covering the paddy fields, farmlands, meadows, roofs and trees in Daringbadi and nearby areas like Kilabadi, Greenbadi, Simanbadi, Kirikuti, Badabanga, Sonapur and Parttamaha.

Tourists were seen capturing the scene in their cameras and mobile phones. Youngsters were seen clicking selfies with such views forming the backdrop.

While tourists enjoyed the chilly weather, on the other hand, the drop in temperature has made life difficult for some people. Normal life has been thrown out of gear. After sunset, roads and lanes are bearing a deserted look with people choosing to remain inside. To beat the cold, bonfire is the only means to get some much needed heat.

It is feared that in the following days the temperature will drop lower.

Kalinganagar oustee seeks euthanasia

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kalinganagar, Dec 21: Displaced people here in Jajpur district find themselves at the crossroads of their lives after failing to get compensation towards loss of land, a report said.

They are finding it difficult to arrange two square meals a day in the absence of any livelihood opportunities. Left with no option, they have written to the state government and the district administration pleading to grant them right to end their lives through euthanasia.

An elderly man here writing to the district Collector seeking euthanasia



Ridei Mohanta (L) and his wife Rajani

to him and his family members is a case in this point. The matter came to fore after Ridei wrote to the district Collector

seeking euthanasia for him and his family members, November 28

The man was identified as Ridei Mohanta, 60, a native of Kalinganagar. He was managing his family of 13 by cultivating his two acre of farmland provided by the Sukinda royal to his grandfather in the past.

He was a happy-go-lucky man comprising his wife Rajani, 55, two sons, two daughters-in-law and seven grandchildren. However, his life went upside down when his two acres of farmland was acquired for the construction of rail tracks for Angul-Sukinda-Duburi rail route.

He was expecting that the district

administration will provide him financial assistance for the loss of land with which he will buy land at another place and earn his livelihood. However, he is yet to receive the compensation and left with only his homestead land after losing his farmland. His family is living in hunger after losing their farmland.

The Covid pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to them as the family had spent up everything they had in the absence of any alternative livelihood opportunities. This has affected the health condition of Ridei as he wrote to the district Collector seeking euthanasia, November 28.

3 arrested for evading ₹42cr GST in Rourkela

THE ACCUSED HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS SOUMYARANJAN MOHANTY, SMRUTIRANJAN MOHANTY AND RAJIB MISHRA



POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 21: Three persons were arrested Monday morning in this city in connection with evasion of Goods and Services Tax (GST) amounting to over Rs 42 crore. The accused have been identified as Soumyaranjan Mohanty, Smrutiranjana Mohanty and Rajib Mishra. The three were arrested by the officials of CT & GST Enforcement Unit.

Sources said a large number of fake firms have come up in the Steel City. These firms are being used to evade payment of GST. They are making transactions in the names of labourers and poor persons to avoid paying taxes.

A case in point is that of vegetable vendor Kartik Kamila of this city. He was served with a default notice for failing to pay Rs110 crore as GST. The notice shocked Kartik. He said that he is clueless about any such transactions or tax fraud. He added that someone might have procured his official documents and used them to commit

the offence. Recently, a driver in this town was also victimised in a similar manner.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. ST-OT-TMS-WORKS-KUR-204, Dated : 15.12.2020
Name of Work : SYSTEM DESIGN, SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, TESTING, INTEGRATION & COMMISSIONING OF TRAIN MANAGEMENT SYSTEM COVERING 104 STATIONS AND 864 RKM OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY.
Tender Value (₹) : 3,25,67,235.54, EMD ₹: 3,12,800/-, Cost of Tender Document ₹: 11,800/- (Including 18% GST).
Bidding start date : 24.12.2020, **Tender closing date & time :** at 1100 hrs. of 07.01.2021.
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : <http://www.ireps.gov.in>
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (Signal & Telecom),
PR-431/L/20-21 Khurda Road

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA No. C-254
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, P.H. DIVISION, SAMBALPUR
Phone No. : (0663) 2412135, Fax No. (0663) 2412335
E-mail ID : eephdsbp@gmail.com, eephdsbp@nic.in
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement
Bid Identification No. EEPHSBP-05/2020-21 Dt.18.12.2020
01. Name of the Work : 1 No. Work
02. Type of Bid : Single Bid System
03. Estimated Cost : Rs.19.32 lakhs
04. Period of Completion : 2 (Two) Calendar Months
05. Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal : From 11.00 A.M. of Dt.24.12.2020 to 5.00 P.M. of 04.01.2021
06. Last date/time of receipt of bids in the portal : 5.00 P.M. of 04.01.2021
07. Date & time of opening of Technical Bids : At 11.30 A.M. of 05.01.2021
08. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid : Executive Engineer, P.H. Division Sambalpur, Brooks' Hill, Near Stadium, At/P.O. - Motijharan, Dist.-Sambalpur - 768 001.
Further details can be seen from the website <http://tenders.ori.nic.in> or www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Engineer
P.H. Division, Sambalpur
OIPR-13026/11/0006/2021

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA No. O-771
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BERHAMPUR
Identification No. ADB (RRNMU)-Online Tender/13-2020-21/BPR Dt.18.12.2020
1. Name of the Work : Procurement of Supply, Delivery and Installation of Equipment for RRNMU at Berhampur in the State of Odisha
2. Total No. of lots : 8 Lots
3. Class of Bidder : "D" Class and above for each lot
4. Period of Completion : 02 Calendar Months
5. Other details :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of Lots	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding From	To
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Berhampur	ADB-Online Tender/13-2020-21/BPR, Dt.18.12.2020	8 Lots	23.12.2020 11.00 hrs.	06.01.2021 upto 15.00 hrs.

Other details can be seen in the bidding documents which is available in website www.pmgstenders.gov.in. Any other changes/corrigendums may be seen only in website www.pmgstenders.gov.in.
Sd./- Superintending Engineer
Rural Works Circle, Berhampur
OIPR-25071/11/0012/2021

“Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism.”

SRI AUROBINDO



Oli’s Coup

The sudden decision taken by Nepal’s Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli to dissolve Parliament on Sunday has plunged the Himalayan country into a new phase of political turmoil. Though the crisis is due to an internal power struggle within the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), the development has supposedly rattled China which is trying to encircle India with the help of Nepal and Pakistan. China has, for the past few months, been striving to keep the NCP united so that Nepal remains under its orbit of influence. Earlier this month, China’s Defence Minister Wei Fenghe and a number of senior diplomats and leaders of the Communist Party of China (CCP) visited Nepal. They met top leaders of the NCP, including Oli and his co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka Prachanda, advising them to resolve their differences and remain united.

NCP came into being in 2018 when Oli’s Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) merged with Prachanda’s Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). But, the relations between the two factions of the NCP soured when Oli pushed for an amendment in order to get a free hand in running the government.

Oli has been under pressure to withdraw the ordinance issued on December 15 to amend the Constitutional Council Act (Functions, Duties and Procedures), 2010. He had got it endorsed by the President the same day. The ordinance, which states that a majority of the Council members can hold meetings, was issued following postponement of a meeting of the Constitutional Council because Speaker Agni Sapkota refused to attend. The Speaker is one of the members of the Council, headed by the PM, which makes recommendations for key appointments including its Constitutional bodies, judiciary and foreign missions.

Oli is believed to have gone ahead with issuing the ordinance to checkmate the attempt by his rival faction to place before the NCP’s Standing Committee a document listing charges of corruption and authoritarian behaviour against him. With the help of the ordinance he can appoint a man of his choice to go into charges of corruption against his rivals. This is why the Prachanda faction-dominated Standing Committee has early last week instructed Oli to withdraw the ordinance. But, Oli didn’t oblige the faction and equivocated on the issue.

For Oli, dissolution of Parliament is a gamble since the country’s Constitution has no such provision and his action is going to be challenged in the Supreme Court. However, an opinion is also gaining ground that there are ways to circumvent the law. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari’s office said in a statement the next vote will be held on April 30 and May 10 as per Oli’s recommendation.

This turn of events appears to have put China on the back foot. China’s mouthpiece, Global Times, carried a news hinting that India had a hand in Oli’s ‘coup’, though its Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang put up a brave front saying in a statement “the friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Nepal will not change due to the fall of the Oli government. China and Nepal share weal and woe.”

During his recent visit to China, Oli signed the Transit Transport Agreement (TTA) to improve the connectivity between Nepal and Tibet to end decades-old dependence on India for daily supplies. Beijing, in a strategic move, has also agreed to extend the train link in Tibet to Nepal to improve connectivity by road and rail.

The move to neutralize China’s growing influence on Nepal could have got a boost during the visits, in quick succession, to Nepal by Indian Army Chief Manoj Mukund Naravane, foreign intelligence (Research and Analysis Wing) chief Samant Goel and Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardan Shringla. However, India’s responses are invariably delayed and give an impression of immature knee-jerk reactions to a much deeper problem. Diplomacy, especially the international 21st century model, will not function in out-dated mode. India has to learn to be proactive, not reactive.

WISDOM CORNER

- “Don’t limit yourself. Many people limit themselves to what they think they can do. You can go as far as your mind lets you. What you believe, remember, you can achieve.”
MARY KAY ASH
- “I wake up every morning and think to myself, ‘how far can I push this company in the next 24 hours.’”
LEAH BUSQUE
- “If people are doubting how far you can go, go so far that you can’t hear them anymore.”
MICHELE RUIZ

WORDSWORTH

■ Billy-o

Some time back, the town of Maldon in Essex began a scheme of a type common in heritage-minded towns throughout Britain, in which blue plaques are attached to buildings to commemorate significant events in local history. One of a set of four was placed on the United Reformed Church in Market Hill. This marked the arrival in 1696 of a nonconformist minister named Joseph Billio, who built a chapel to hold 400 and filled it with a congregation that heard his impassioned – and, it’s rumoured, lengthy – sermons. His enthusiasm, the plaque says, introduced a new phrase into the language, like billio. Unfortunately, the word is first recorded only from the end of the nineteenth century, which makes it much too recent to be linked with Mr Billio, who otherwise is a minor figure even in Maldon history. It’s not often a folk etymology comes with a blue plaque attached – it will be a permanent record that the civic pride of Maldon people exceeds their etymological knowledge, though there’s nothing new in that – see my piece on lynch law. For reasons unconnected with World Wide Words, I’ve been looking in some detail in recent months into the stories people tell about the history of words. A good tale will resist any number of attempts to refute it – the story is everything and evidence is nothing. For many people, history is all of a piece: everything before their own lifetimes is lumped together into an undifferentiated mass called the past, in which anything is potentially able to be connected to anything else. And, it goes almost without saying, it’s rare that people do even the most elementary checking of a story before putting up a plaque. Nobody knows where the idiom really comes from, though the first part might be from Billy, a pet form of William, which has been a common generic term for a man in parts of Scotland and the north of England for centuries.

LOL

GI insurance

Jones explained the basics of the GI Insurance to the new recruits, and then said: “If you have GI Insurance and go into battle and are killed, the government has to pay \$200,000 to your beneficiaries.” “If you don’t have GI insurance, and you go into battle and get killed, the government only has to pay a maximum of \$6000.” “Now,” he concluded, “which groups do you think they are going to send into battle first?”

FOCUS ON HUMAN CAPITAL

FOCUS HEALTH & EDUCATION



Ajit Ranade

ON ONE HAND THE ECONOMY IS ON A STRONG REVIVAL PATH, BUT ON THE OTHER THE HUMAN CAPITAL BASE OF THE ECONOMY NEEDS SUBSTANTIAL REBUILDING AND INVESTMENT

The macroeconomic winds are blowing favourably as we enter the New Year. The stock markets are at an all-time high. Share price indices are up nearly 60% from their lows of March. The stock market is supposed to be a harbinger of economic times to come, so clearly it is indicating a strong revival. Liquidity in the banking system is more than ample. The interest rates are at multi-decadal lows. The gap between Indian and Western policy rates is the lowest it has been in a long time coupled with inflation rates above 6%. What this means is that for borrowers the real interest rates are close to zero or negative. This should bring cheer to the government which is the biggest borrower in the system, or to those contemplating taking a home loan, or those businesses planning to raise loans for expansion. The lead indicator, called purchasing managers’ index has been expressing bullish expansion for four months in row. If all this business confidence manifests in a robust rise in hiring and recruitment, and visible job creation, then that will give a boost to consumer confidence as well. Both business and consumer confidence build on each other. So, a positive virtuous circle would be greatly welcome. The Finance Minister is promising a Budget like never before, which hopefully is signaling a big spending stimulus. Spending on infrastructure will benefit allied sectors like construction, and of course employment.

And yet it is worth pointing out the grim side. Firstly, despite an anticipated sharp V-shaped recovery next year, the fact is that this year has been a recession. We are going to have a reduction in GDP and national income by about 8% to 10%. A sharp recovery next year of say 10% to 12% would still mean that over two years the net income growth is barely above zero. Secondly, due to measures like the harsh lockdown, and earlier slowdown of four years, the potential growth rate of the economy has possibly slipped closer to 5%. So, any growth above that is sure to cause overheating. Hence, we will have to



The human development report 2020 shows India’s rank as 131 out of 189 countries. Sri Lanka is at 72 and China is at 85. More worryingly only one fifth of India’s labour force can be called ‘skilled’. Such low percentage puts India in the same league as Sudan, Cameroon and Liberia

watch out for inflation, which can hurt household budgets, and also business sentiment. As such for the past twelve months the consumer price index-based inflation rate has been above 6% (except for being marginally lower in March). This is above the tolerable band of the Reserve Bank of India. Sooner or later the RBI which has been extremely accommodative in its monetary stance will have to start tightening money supply. This will affect growth adversely. Thirdly, there has been a lot of forbearance regarding tolerating credit in-discipline. So, after a prolonged moratorium, and restructuring of stressed loans, it is possible that the day of reckoning is not too far for India’s banking sector. Be prepared for a nasty spike in the bad loan ratio, which will need substantial capital infusion by the government. Fourthly and most importantly, is the silent and deadly impact on education and health.

The human development report 2020 out this week shows India’s rank as 131 out of 189 countries,

and has slipped by two ranks in the past two years. Sri Lanka is at 72 and China is at 85. More worryingly only one fifth of India’s labour force can be called ‘skilled’. Such low percentage puts India in the same league as Sudan, Cameroon and Liberia. All of its South Asian neighbours have a higher percentage. India also has 42% of its population in the vulnerable category, i.e. just above the bare minimum poverty level of \$1.9 a day. The pandemic, the loss of livelihoods or illness in the family can easily make it fall back below the poverty line. The pandemic and lockdowns have severely affected the informal sector and small and micro enterprises. The worst impact has been on children. The latest national family health survey (NFHS 2019-2020) shows high levels of child stunting and wasting. These are respectively lower height, and weight for the child’s age. It is reflecting chronic undernutrition and malnutrition. The more worrying aspect is that either the stunting or underweight aspect

has gone up in 14 out of 17 states in India. This has happened even as access to sanitation and safe drinking water has improved. Clearly this is the result of a slowing economy and loss of livelihoods. For instance, during the lockdown, since schools were closed, so were the mid-day meals. For many kids from poor or nearly poor households, that was the only meal they got during the whole day.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the education of 290 million people across the country. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) states that nearly 5.3% of the kids in the 6 to 10-year age group have been pulled out of schools. Many kids have been pulled into supporting the family’s livelihood. Similarly, even among school going children almost 38.2% had no access to smartphones. So online learning has bypassed a large section of the students, partly because they had no access or could not afford digital access. Digital inequality has worsened, and is most visible in education. Similarly, in healthcare too, the high priority to Covid treatment has meant that patients of diseases like HIV, cancer and renal disease who need regular access to hospitals have been denied treatment or have faced immense hardship.

Thus, on one hand the economy is on a strong revival path, but on the other the human capital base of the economy needs substantial rebuilding and investment. Both in children’s education and overall healthcare the governments at all levels have to increase their financial and resource commitment. Public health expenditure should be increased to 3% and education to 5% of the GDP. Even if that means a higher fiscal deficit, it is worth noting that spending on human capital is an investment for the future. India’s public spending on both health and education is below global benchmarks, and its enhancement must be given high priority.

The writer is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution.

THE BILLION PRESS

SPECTRUM ECONOMY

Government puts up its hands!



Shivaji Sarkar

2020 IS A YEAR EVERY INDIVIDUAL WOULD WISH HAD NOT BEEN ON THE CALENDAR. THE DEVASTATION IS IMMEASURABLE. CORRECTIONS ARE DIFFICULT

2020 is a year every individual would wish had not been on the calendar. The devastation is immeasurable. Corrections are difficult. Getting back to normal is not easy. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman sums it up, telling the Indian Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata that no amount of government intervention is adequate for pandemic-hit economy. Early 2020, she says, green shoots and revival signs were visible, but it was upturned by the pandemic.

No doubt the crisis has hit the world over but a complete lockdown of all activities in the country since March has created enormous hardship for the industry and the people leading to job losses, bank repayment crisis, severe -23.9 per cent GDP contraction and the race to have a vaccine for an illusory disease leading to collapse of the health sector. Wealthy Indians and those in the formal sector covered by government and private insurance schemes are not affected, but the poor are.

The hospitals are either non-functional or emerged charging

the people at super rates further adding to the hardship. The farmers issue may not have been there in a normal economy but the pandemic panic lockdown has accentuated the problem with loss in income as they could not sell their products or sold at lower price despite about ₹1.5 lakh crore doles announced for their pension and pandemic blues.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday told farmers at Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, that they are today facing the problems because other governments though made manifesto promises but did precious little to make the reforms real. Warehousing and other promises made in the three Bills are the panacea, he asserted. However, reports coming from Madhya Pradesh itself say that amidst the new farm laws and pandemic, State mandis have taken a big hit. Mandis at Shahdol and at 143 other places have seen their revenues drop by a whopping 40 to 50 per cent in October, 2020 and an overall business fall by 20 per cent after the Centre’s farm laws came into effect. The State Mandi Board

Managing Director Samndeeep Yadaav, says the mandis have recorded a drop in business of about 20 to 25 per cent as a chunk of business has started taking place outside the mandis. In 2019, 259 mandis in MP generated about ₹1246 crore of revenue and paid ₹413 crore in taxes. The maize prices have fallen to ₹800 from ₹1100 a quintal as no procurement of maize has been done this year. So despite another ₹1600-crore dole to the MP farmers announced by Modi there is nothing to cheer about.

Amid such scenario the GDP is projected to shrink by 7.8 per cent to 10 per cent by various rating agencies. An optimist Reserve Bank of India says it will shrink by 7.5 per cent in December money policy outlook against its own projection of 9.5 per cent in October.

The pandemic has also lowered India’s human development ranking to 131 from 130 earlier in the UN Human Development Index report. This is a sad reflection on the way the country is taking care of its people. The closure of government activities have seemingly affected the well being of the people.

The loss of revenue and consequent problems has impacted the social system. Overall spending, including revenue expenditure, by the Centre and States will rise only 15 per cent over the ₹33 lakh crore second half of spent in the first half of the fiscal 2020-21. The economy has not received much government support in the second quarter, when government expenditure fell 22 per cent, though post-October there has been some improvement.

However, the State’s capital expenditure (capex), owing to GST tangle, have sharply fallen by ₹1.2 lakh crore in the first half and is likely to remain subdued in the second half as well. It may be one of the lowest in recent years and may achieve no more than 46 per cent of the budget target, about ₹3 lakh crore against targeted ₹6.5 lakh crore. The public capex of States and Centre and public sector enterprises in 2019-20 was about ₹5 lakh crore.

No wonder, Sitharaman says that no amount of government intervention would improve the situation.

INFRA

Attachment of Farooq’s assets

Sir, It has been reported that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached the properties of Former J&K Chief Minister and now chairman of Gupkar alliance, Dr Farooq Abdullah worth Rs 11.86 crore in J&K Cricket Association money laundering case. His son Omar Abdullah has tweeted that the properties attached are largely ancestral dating from the 1970s with the most recent one built before 2003. If the properties attached are ancestral; the records and documents have to speak a lot buttressing his claim. Truth cannot be held in wraps forever. It may be recalled that CBI had reported that Farooq Abdullah has built the Alishan bungalow in Sujwan at the cost of crores of rupees by occupying Forest Department land. There is also allegation against Dr. Abdullah that while purchasing 3 kanal of land in 1998, he encroached upon 7 kanal. During his regime, Roshni Act was enacted in 2001. J&K High Court has declared this Act as unconstitutional. Earlier CBI, which probed the JKCA scam, had charge-sheeted Abdullah for misappropriation of Rs 43.69 crore in 2002-11. Truth must come out. Abdullah needs to come clean through court of law instead of issuing political statements on seizures.

KV Seetharamaiah, HASSAN

Indo-Bangla ties

Sir, The affability witnessed during the virtual meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina is akin to a proclamation of the strong ties between the two countries. The relationship between the two neighbours is perhaps the most significant one in the region. Hasina called India “our true friend” while Modi considered Bangladesh “a significant pillar” of India’s ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy. The 49th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is a propitious time to acknowledge the progress of bilateral relations. The reopening of the Chilahati-Haldibari railway line is a reflection of increased mutual cooperation and understanding between the two countries. There have been vast turnarounds in the relations between the two countries under PM Manmohan Singh and Sheikh Hasina. The intention behind PM Narendra Modi’s “Neighbourhood First” policy is to sustain relations between the two countries. Both countries are likely to come even closer next year when India will commemorate the golden jubilee of the 1971 war against Pakistan and Bangladesh will celebrate the golden jubilee of its existence.

VENUGS, KOLLAM

‘BJP assault on Bengal’: Pawar talks to Mamata

NCP chief joins other Opposition leaders to side with Mamata in her battle against the saffron camp and the Centre

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Dec 21: Amid the intensifying fight between the BJP and the TMC in West Bengal ahead of the Assembly polls, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar has joined several other Opposition leaders to side with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her battle against the saffron camp and the Centre.

Trinamool Congress sources Monday said that the party is mulling to organise a mega rally of opposition leaders in Kolkata as part of its effort to prop up an anti-BJP front, but nothing has been finalised as of now.

“Sharad Pawar and Mamata Banerjee share a very cordial relationship since their days in the Congress. During a telephone talk, Sharadji expressed his support to her. He has also expressed his desire to come to Bengal and campaign in favour of the TMC,” a senior party



leader privy to the development said. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) national spokesperson Nawab Malik also alleged in Mumbai earlier in the day that the BJP is using the Centre to destabilise the West Bengal government. Pawar and Banerjee held a discussion on the issue, he said.

Captain Amarinder Singh, Arvind

Kejriwal, Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot, chief ministers of Punjab, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan respectively, recently alleged that the Centre's order transferring three IPS officers on deputation is interference in the functioning of West Bengal's administration.

While Punjab, Chhattisgarh and

Rajasthan are governed by the Congress, Delhi is ruled by the Aam Aadmi Party. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) president M K Stalin has also described the "unilateral transfer" of three West Bengal IPS officers by the BJP-led central government as "autocratic and anti-federal".

The three IPS officers were responsible for the security of BJP national president J P Nadda whose convoy was attacked by alleged Trinamool Congress activists during his recent visit to West Bengal where the Assembly polls are due in April

May next year.

Banerjee, who is opposing the Centre's move, on Sunday expressed gratitude to these opposition leaders for voicing solidarity with the state on the issue.

A senior TMC leader said that the party is planning to hold a mega anti-BJP rally ahead of the assembly polls.

“Nothing has been finalised as of now. We are thinking if such a rally could be organised. Let's see what happens. We also have to keep COVID-19 situation in mind,” the leader said.

A conspiracy is being hatched to overthrow the TMC government in West Bengal by violating the state's authority and powers at the behest of the BJP government at the Centre. Although law and order is a state matter, the Centre is interfering by changing the officials. This is a very grave matter

NAWAB MALIK | NCP MINISTER

BJP won't cross double-digit mark in Bengal polls: Kishor

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Dec 21: A day after Home Minister Amit Shah left West Bengal, following his two-day high-voltage campaign in the state, election strategist Prashant Kishor Monday claimed on Twitter that the BJP will struggle to cross the double-digit mark in assembly polls.

Kishor, who has been roped in by TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee to strengthen her party's poll prospects, said that he would quit the micro-blogging site if the saffron party does any better than what he predicted.

'India will lose an election strategist'

KOLKATA: After political strategist Prashant Kishor said he would quit Twitter if the BJP manages to perform well in the West Bengal Assembly election, BJP National General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya quipped that the country would have to lose an election strategist (Kishor) if the BJP forms the next government in West Bengal. Vijayvargiya, who is BJP's West Bengal in-charge, targeted Kishor on his claim. “After the tsunami of the BJP in Bengal, this country will have to lose an election strategist after BJP forms the government,” he said, in a mocking reference to Kishor. “Very happy that an ‘Expert’ who can make such a ‘Statement’, is leading the Poll Campaign of @AITCofficial & @MamataOfficial? Which world does he stay, what diet has #TMCchi put him ONGreat thing is, come 2021, na rahega Saanp (TMCchi) na bhajegi (PK ki) Bansuri @BJP4India, Union minister from Bengal Babul Supriyo said in a snappy wisecrack.

that it would win over 200 seats in the upcoming polls.

Assembly elections are likely to be held in West Bengal in April-May.

For all the hype amplified by a section of supportive media, in reality BJP will struggle to cross double digits in West Bengal

PRASHANT KISHOR | ELECTION STRATEGIST

“For all the hype amplified by a section of supportive media, in reality BJP will struggle to cross double digits in West Bengal,” he tweeted.

“Please save this tweet and if BJP does any better I must quit this space!” Kishore added.

The saffron party, which recently received a shot in the arm after political heavyweight Suwendu Adhikari, a TMC MP and nine MLAs joined its camp, has asserted



‘CHILLAI-KALAN’ BEGINS IN VALLEY

AGENCIES

Srinagar, Dec 21: ‘Chillai-Kalan’, the 40-day harshest winter period, began in Kashmir Monday on a dry note even as there was improvement in the minimum temperature across the valley, MeT officials said.

They said the 40-day period from December 21 to January 31 is considered the harshest winter period as a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies, including the famous Dal Lake here, as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley.

The chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially in the higher reaches, receive heavy snowfall, the officials said.

For ecologists and environmental scientists, ‘Chillai-Kalan’ is a welcome period since snowfall during this period replenishes perennial water reservoirs.

The flow of rivers, streams, springs and lakes during hot summer months depends upon how bountiful has the snowfall been



during this 40-day long period.

To keep the body and the soul together during the bitter cold of 40 days, Kashmiris eat high calorific diets, including ‘Harisa’ which is prepared by stewing mutton with spices in large vessels over simmering fire during the night.

While ‘Chillai-Kalan’ will end January 31, the cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir with a 20-day-long ‘Chillai-Khurd’ (small

cold) and a 10-day-long ‘Chillai-Bachha’ (baby cold).

Meanwhile, the night temperature rose across the valley last night owing to a cloud cover, but the minimum still settled below the freezing point, the officials said.

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 4 degrees Celsius, up from the previous night's minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, they said.

The mercury in Pahalgam tourist

HARSH WINTER

For ecologists and environmental scientists, ‘Chillai-Kalan’ is a welcome period since snowfall during this period replenishes perennial water reservoirs

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resort in south Kashmir improved by over three degrees from the previous night's low of minus 7.7 degrees Celsius to settle at a low of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

Is Kashmir's terror heartland turning its back to militancy?



File picture of Burhan Wani and other militants

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: Southern Kashmir's Tral in Pulwama district has for long retained several dubious distinctions in the last 31 years of armed insurgency in the valley. This was the crucible from where Burhan Wani to Zakir Musa, and scores of top-notch militants emerged. Wani's death in an encounter in July 2016 led to a four-month-long street turbulence in which over 70 demonstrators and arsonists got killed and thousands, civilians as well as security forces personnel, sustained injuries.

Dadsara, a village in Tral, is said to have created the maximum number of militants among all villages and towns across the valley. It was because of the people of Dadsara and other villages that a two-lakh strong procession gathered to form Wani's funeral procession. Four years later, Dadsara is singing to a different tune. On December 8, three local cadres of ‘Albadar’ outfit-Merajuddin Lone, Umer Ali and Owais Farooq—were killed in an encounter with Police and security forces at Tiken in Pulwama. One of them was a resident of Dadsara. The bodies were buried as per the Covid-19 protocol in distant Baramulla.

Unlike on scores of similar killings and encounters in the past, Dadsara and all other villages in Tral were calm in the morning after. Hardly anyone gathered to offer condolences to the militants' families and nobody demanded burial of the bodies at the local cemetery, let alone an effervescent funeral procession and a gun salute at the tombstone. There was no shutdown in Tral.

No rule of law in J&K: Mehbooba

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

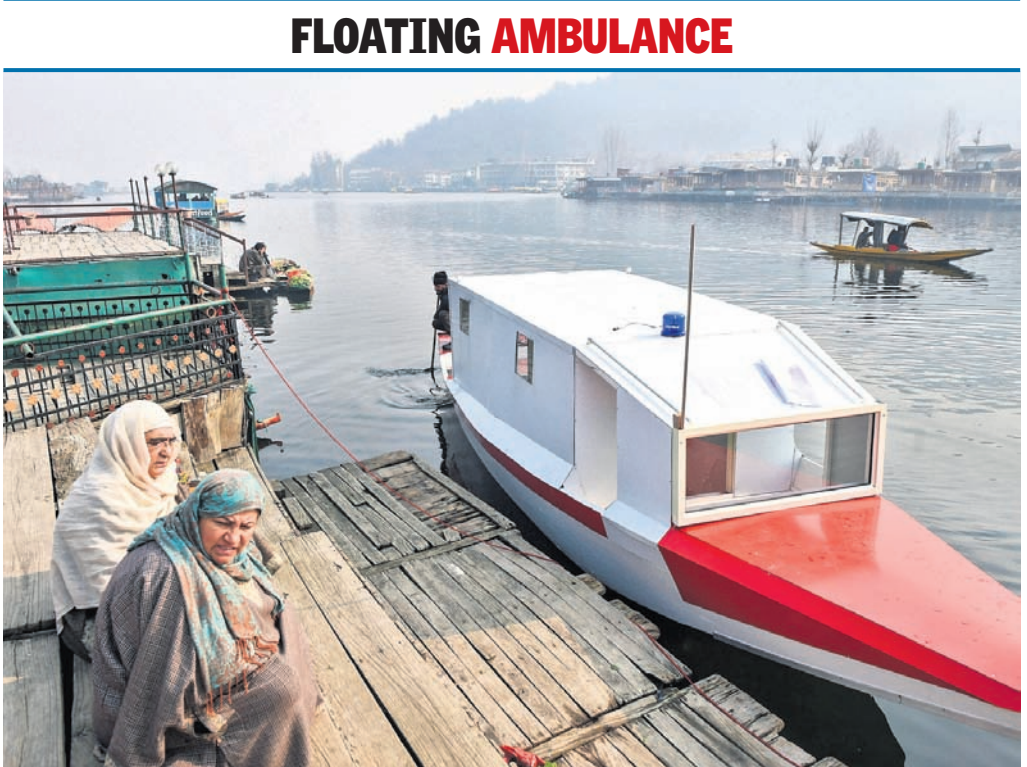
Srinagar, Dec 21: Two senior PDP were detained Monday by a central agency for questioning in a money laundering case, evoking sharp reaction from party chief Mehbooba Mufti who claimed there was ‘no rule of law’ in Jammu and Kashmir. Reports here said that officials of the investigating agency detained Sartaj Madni, who is also a maternal uncle of Mehbooba Mufti, and Peerzada Mansoor Hussain in Anantnag district.

Reacting sharply, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chief tweeted: “Total lawlessness as PDP's Sartaj Madni and Mansoor Hussain were arbitrarily detained today on the eve of DDC election results. Every senior police officer here is



clueless as it is ‘upar say order’. No rule of law in J&K anymore. It is out and out Gunda Raj.”

Senior PDP leader and party's youth wing chief Waheed Para is presently in National Investigation Agency remand after his arrest in a terror funding case also involving dismissed Deputy Superintendent of Police Davinder Singh.



A shikara-ambulance, equipped with health facilities, floats on the Dal Lake, ahead of its operation, in Srinagar, Monday. Tariq Ahmad Patloo, a houseboat owner, who is the man behind this initiative, says he decided to start this service as nobody except a friend came to help him reach the hospital after he tested positive for COVID-19 a few months ago. The special floating ambulance service, which will be operational soon, is aimed to help thousands of dwellers who are living in houseboats.

PTI PHOTO



The pandemic has had the worst impact on education. Schools had to be shut down, and classes were shifted online. Though nobody thought studies could be shifted online, our teachers stepped up despite not being trained for it

MANISH SISODIA | DELHI DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

DELHI'S MINIMUM TEMP RISES SLIGHTLY

Delhi's minimum temperature rose slightly to 5.5 degrees Celsius Monday under the influence of a fresh Western Disturbance affecting the upper reaches of the Himalayas



of the day quote

Sharad Pawar and NCP should join the NDA. Sharad Pawar's experience as a farmer leader would certainly help the NDA. But whether the NCP joins or not, is dependent on them



RAMDAS ATHAWALE | UNION MINISTER

Sad to hear that veteran Congress leader Shri Motilal Vora is no more. He was humility personified, and belonged to a generation of leaders who carry their politics with unflinching conviction till end. My heartfelt condolences to his family and friends



RAM NATH KOVIND | PRESIDENT

It is likely that there will be differences between certain aspects like antibodies but it doesn't necessarily mean that vaccines will be ineffective. Vaccines will be equally effective despite the mutation. So there is no reason to panic



SHEKHAR MANDE | COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH DIRECTOR GENERAL

SHORT TAKES

NIA arrests 17 SDPI, PFI activists

Bangalore: The National Investigation Agency Monday said it has arrested 17 leaders and activists of the Social Democratic Party of India and Popular Front of India in connection with the Bengaluru violence August 11. With this, 187 people have been arrested in connection with the case. About 3,000 to 4,000 people had gone on a rampage torching the residences of Pulakeshinagar Congress MLA R Akhanda Srinivasa Murthy and his sister Jayanthi over an alleged inflammatory social media post by the MLA's relative.

Vehicle snatched at gunpoint

Gurugram: Two unidentified miscreants snatched a Hyundai Creta car belonging to a Rohtak-based contractor at gunpoint near Dhankot village on the Dwarka Expressway here Sunday night, the police said Monday.

Teacher stabbed to death in Bihar

Patna: A group of unidentified criminals fatally stabbed a teacher in Bihar's Jamui district Monday morning, police said. Angry locals blocked a road in protest and pelted police with stones, injuring at least two policemen.

Nine held

Thiruvananthapuram: Nine persons, including a woman, were arrested during a raid at a rave in a resort in pristine Vagamon, a popular tourist destination in Kottayam district, police said Monday. The raid at the resort allegedly owned by a Communist Party of India leader was conducted Sunday night following a tip-off to Kottayam's top police officials, and preliminary investigation revealed consumption of drugs, the police added.

Maoist killed

Ranchi: A Maoist guerrilla carrying a reward of ₹15 lakh on his head was killed in a gunbattle with the security forces in Jharkhand's Khunti district Monday, the police said. Jindan Gudiya, zonal commander of the banned Maoist outfit, the Peoples' Liberation Front of India (PLFI), was killed in a joint operation by the state police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

Ready for talks but need proper solution: Farmers



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Farmer leaders Monday said they are always ready for dialogue as long as the government is offering a "concrete solution", but claimed that there is nothing new in the Centre's latest letter to them seeking a date for the next round of talks.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait said that the government, in its letter, mentioned that it wants to hold talks over its earlier proposal of amendments in the new agri laws. "On this issue (government's proposal), we did not talk to them earlier. We are currently discussing how to respond to the government letter," Tikait told PTI.

The sixth round of talks December 9 was cancelled. In the letter to 40 union leaders, the Agriculture Ministry Joint Secretary Vivek Aggarwal Sunday asked them to specify their concerns over its earlier proposal of amendments in the laws and choose a convenient date for the next round of talks so that the ongoing agitation could end at the earliest.

"There is nothing new in their letter. We have already rejected the government's proposal to amend the new farm laws. In its letter, the government has asked

Punjab farmer attempts suicide

A 65-year-old Punjab farmer protesting against the Centre's agriculture laws attempted suicide by taking some poisonous substance near the Delhi's Singhu border on Monday, a police official said. Niranjan Singh, who hails from Punjab's Tarn Taran, was admitted to the Rohtak's PGIMS and his condition is stated to be stable, the official said.

us to discuss its proposal and convey a date to it for another round of talks. "Don't they know our demand? We just want a complete repeal of the new agriculture laws," another farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said. In the letter, the Union agriculture joint secretary said the Centre is making all efforts with "an open heart" to find an appropriate solution to resolve all concerns raised by farmers. The officer said that in its draft proposal sent on December 9, the government had proposed to make necessary amendments on at least seven issues, including providing a "written assurance" to the farmers that the existing minimum support price (MSP) system would continue.

Punjab Police, BSF shoot Pak drone

AGENCIES

Chandigarh, Dec 21: Five days after busting a drone module, Punjab Police have seized 11 arges 84 hand-grenades dropped on the night of December 19 by a drone launched from Pakistan, which was engaged and shot at jointly by police and Border Security Force (BSF) close to the border in Gurdaspur district.

The consignment was found in a field in Salach village, located about one km from the border, Gurdaspur Senior Superintendent of Police Rajinder Singh Sohal told PTI over the phone. The box of hand grenades had been attached with a wooden frame and was lowered from the drone to the ground with a nylon rope, said police, adding that they recovered it on Sunday evening. Director General of Police (DGP) Dinkar Gupta said they launched a search operation immediately after receiving information from the Border Security Force about the drone movement.

The BSF personnel deployed at



Representative image

the Chakri border outpost in the Gurdaspur sector had noticed a Pakistani drone entering the Indian territory around 11.30 pm and they immediately fired multiple shots to bring it down. After the BSF alerted the Gurdaspur police about the incident, the station house officer of Dorangla reached the spot. On hearing the buzzing sound of the drone, cops fired multiple shots from AK-47 and SLR rifles to bring it down but it soon disappeared, said police. A search and comb-

ing operation was launched on Sunday morning, leading to the recovery of a plastic box containing 11 Arges-type HG 84.

The drone, however, was not recovered and it is suspected that it managed to fly back into Pakistan after dropping the recovered payload, said police. The Arges-type HG 84 is a conventional system, spraying shrapnel out to a distance of 30 metres, the DGP said.

A case under the relevant sections of the Explosive Substances Act has been registered at the Dorangla police station in Gurdaspur and further investigation is on, said the DGP. The first incident of dropping of arms and weapons through drones from Pakistan came to light in Punjab in September 2019 when police recovered AK-47 rifles, magazines and rounds of ammunition, hand grenades, fake currency and other items in Tarn Taran district.

Police Monday said they have arrested two more people in a case involving the cross-border smuggling of arms and drugs through drones.



position and other factors.

In a study published in the journal Nature Astronomy, astronomers reported finding the presence of a chemical called "phosphine" in the atmosphere of Venus. The discovery surprised scientists as on Earth this gas is known to be produced by bacteria. The team believes their discovery is significant because they

NIGHT CURFEW BACK IN MAHA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 21: Ahead of the Christmas and New Year celebrations, the Maharashtra government Monday declared a night curfew in municipal corporation areas from December 22 to January 5 as a precautionary step amid growing concerns over a new coronavirus variant spreading in Britain.

According to an official statement, it has also been decided to compulsorily put in institutional quarantine for 14 days those who arrive at the states airports from European and West Asian countries. The institutional quarantining of the travellers from these countries will begin from Monday itself, it said.

Passengers coming from other countries to Maharashtra, the worst COVID-19-affected state in the country, will be home quarantined, the



statement said.

The decisions were taken after Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held a review meeting at his official residence Varsha here in the light of the situation in the UK. Thackeray has asked officials to ensure strict screening of international passengers, the statement said. A decision has been taken to

impose a night curfew from tomorrow (Dec 22) 11 pm onwards to 6 am in municipal corporation areas (cities) of the state.

"It will be in effect till January 5, Thackeray said, according to the statement. Additional precaution is being taken in the state due to the new variant of coronavirus and we need to remain extra alert over

the next 15 days, he added. Once passengers arriving from European and Middle-Eastern (West Asian) countries are put in institutional quarantine, their RT-PCR test will be conducted on the fifth or seventh day, the statement said.

They will be allowed to go home only after their quarantine period is over, it said. Thackeray instructed municipal commissioners to arrange for hotels and separate hospitals to quarantine passengers arriving at international airports in their respective jurisdiction.

The chief minister also gave instruction to arrange for separate hospitals for passengers coming from European countries and showing symptoms of the new coronavirus variant, the statement said. He asked officials to provide PPE kits to all the employees screening passengers arriving at airports from these countries.

GEARING UP



Workers construct a pontoon bridge over River Ganga for upcoming Magh Mela, in Prayagraj

PTI PHOTO

MAN SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR RAPE, MURDER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Tezpur, Dec 21: A man was sentenced to death Monday by a court in Assam's Bishwanath district for raping and killing a five-year-old girl.

Bishwanath Additional Sessions Court Judge Dipankar Bora sentenced the man to death after convicting him under IPC Sections 376 (A) that deals with sexual offences leading to death, and 302 (murder).



He was also sentenced to life imprisonment under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and a fine of ₹7,000 was imposed.

The court also gave him seven years in jail under IPC Section 363 (kidnapping), besides slapping a fine of ₹3,000.

The incident happened in November 2018 at a tea garden in the Sootea police station area, officials said.

The convict was a relative of the girl and had come to her house for some work, they said.

He had lured the girl by offering her chocolate and took her to a nearby jungle where he raped her, killed and hid the body. The man hails from the Lokhra Burhagaon area of the Sonitpur district.

Public Prosecutor Jahnavi Kalita said that altogether 16 witnesses, including doctors and police, were examined during the trial.

CBI court verdict awaited in Abhaya 'murder' case

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 21: Finally, after 28 years of the infamous Sister Abhaya 'murder' case, a CBI special court here will deliver its verdict on Tuesday.

Facing trial in the case are Catholic priest Thomas M.Kottur (first accused) and Nun Seffi (third accused) among others.

The second accused in the case -- another Catholic priest Jose Poothrikkayil, however has been discharged by this court in 2018.

Abhaya, an inmate of Pius X convent in Kottayam, was found dead in the well of the convent on March 27, 1992.

The case has dragged on with initially both the Crime Branch

and the CBI dismissing it as a suicide, however, public activist Joemon Puthenpurackal formed an Acton Council and pursued the case.

The turnaround in the case happened after Puthenpurackal, managed to get the case reopened, following which the 13th batch of CBI officials cracked the case and on November 19, 2008.

They arrested the three accused, including Poothrikkayil, a former Malayalam professor at the Kottayam college where Abhaya studied; Kottor; the Diocesan chancellor of the Catholic Church at Kottayam and Seffi, a resident of the convent when the incident took place. On January 1 2009, though all three accused got bail.



Pandemic put no limit to space exploration in 2020

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: If one thing triumphed in 2020 despite all the challenges, it was science. While scientists from around the world worked at a break-neck speed to find a solution to beating Covid-19, the pandemic could not slow down the human pursuit to explore space objects.

This year specially proved to be great for bringing back samples from distant space objects that can significantly augment our understanding of the evolution of the universe.

Chinese scientists achieved a great feat towards the end of the year when its Chang'e-5 probe retrieved about 1,731 gram of samples from the Moon. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) in mid-December announced that its Hayabusa2 spacecraft successfully brought back samples from asteroid Ryugu. NASA's first asteroid

sample collection mission, the OSIRIS-REx probe, also completed the most challenging phases of its mission after it successfully stowed samples of asteroid Benu this year. The spacecraft is targeting delivery of the sample back to Earth in September 2023.

In July, the US space agency also launched the Mars 2020 Perseverance rover which will seek signs of ancient life and collect rock and soil samples for possible return to Earth.

In fact, in December, NASA announced that it had approved the Mars Sample Return (MSR) multi-mission effort to advance to the next phase in preparation to bring the first pristine samples from Mars back to Earth. Other major discoveries of the year included finding of a possible marker of life on Venus, a planet which has not been a significant part of the search for alien life because of its extreme temperatures, atmospheric com-

The discovery was made using Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA), a joint project of NASA and the German Aerospace Centre. The results published in the journal Nature Astronomy furthers the case that water is not limited to Moon's cold shadowed regions and may be distributed across the lunar surface.

No less significant are achievements of SpaceX, a private aerospace company of tech billionaire Elon Musk who aims to make humans interplanetary species.

SpaceX became the first private US company to transport NASA astronauts to space. This is the year NASA finally certified SpaceX to carry astronauts to and from the International Space Station (ISS) on its Crew Dragon spaceship. Several critical events paved the way for this achievement, including ground tests, simulations, uncrewed flight tests and NASA's historic SpaceX

Demo-2 test flight in the middle of the year with astronauts Robert Behnken and Douglas Hurley.

Indian-American astronaut Raja Chari will be among four astronauts who will serve as crew members for SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the ISS which is expected to launch in the autumn of 2021.

This will be the first spaceflight for Chari, who became a NASA astronaut in 2017.

Notably, Chari, whose father Sreenivas V.Chari immigrated from Hyderabad, is also among the 18 astronauts selected by NASA to form the Artemis Team and help pave the way for the next lunar missions, including sending the first woman and next man to walk on the lunar surface in 2024. The pandemic, it now appears, did exert some strains on the works of the scientists, but it could not stop their efforts in making new discoveries about the worlds far away from us.

of the day quote

All along I have played a very temporary politics, my real politics will begin in 2023

H. D. KUMARSWAMY | JANATA DAL (S) SECOND-IN-COMMAND

The Congress' government in Chhattisgarh has launched the 'Go-dhan Nyay Yojana' to resolve the problem and the Yogi government could emulate the scheme

PRIVANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

The purpose of the BJP is to derail the farmers agitation and break farmers unity, as after three years of the Supreme Court decision, no action has been taken by the state Government on Sutlej Yamuna Link

BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA | CONG LEADER

SHORT TAKES

5-yr-old girl raped, killed

Chandigarh: A five-year-old girl was allegedly raped and killed by a man living in her neighbourhood in Haryana's Jhajjar city, police said Monday. The 30-year-old man, who has a criminal background, kidnapped the girl from her house at night and took her to his residence where he allegedly raped and then killed her, a police official in Jhajjar said.

4 killed as car falls into ditch

Gwalior: Four youths died while one person was injured in a car accident when the driver lost control of the vehicle and it fell into a ditch in Gwalior city of Madhya Pradesh, the police said. According to information from the police control room, the accident happened late on Sunday night when the driver of the car lost control and it fell into a ditch in the Jorasi area.

337 grams heroin seized

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Police have seized 337 grams heroin, valued at ₹1 crore, from two residents of Haryana's Ambala in the hill state's Mandi district, officials said Monday. The duo was travelling towards Mandi town from Ambala in Haryana in a car when a police team intercepted them and recovered the drugs from their possession.

Man kills wife

Gurugram: A young man hailing from Bihar has been arrested on charge of murdering his 21-year-old wife in Gurugram district as he suspected her of having illicit relations, police said.



The way the lies of the BJP government have been exposed in the Hathras incident, the process of exposure of false cases in UP has started

AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF

OWNER OF 'BABA KA DHABA' OPENS NEW RESTAURANT

Kanta Prasad, the owner of the small eatery 'Baba ka Dhaba' that was recently in the limelight on social media, on Monday opened a new restaurant in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area



New lethal Covid variant puts world on high alert

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: While several countries are still struggling to tame the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the emergence of the new and deadly mutated variant of the "pandemic coronavirus" has put the world once again on high alert as 2021 knocks at the door.

The scientists have scrambled to figure out whether the UK variant titled 'B.1.1.7' is really more adept at human-to-human transmission. They're also wondering how it evolved so fast.

According to the prestigious journal Science, the 'B.1.1.7' variant has acquired 17 mutations all at once - a feat never seen before.

"There's now a frantic push to try and characterise some of these mutations in the lab," Andrew Rambaut, a molecular evolutionary biologist at the University of Edinburgh, was quoted as saying by the magazine on Sunday.

According to the researchers, it seems that this variant (also dubbed as VUI-202012/01) is now starting to dominate over existing versions of the coronavirus.

The worry is: Scientists say that 'B.1.1.7' may already be much more



widespread. Other than the UK, it has been detected in the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and Australia.

"The United Kingdom may just have picked it up first because that country has the most sophisticated SARS-CoV-2 genomic monitoring in the world. Many countries have little or no sequencing," said the report. According to Rambaut, among the 17 are eight mutations in the gene that encodes the spike protein on the viral surface, two of which are par-

ticularly worrisome.

"One, called N501Y, has previously been shown to increase how tightly the protein binds to the ACE2 receptor, its entry point into human cells," he noted.

The other, named 69-70del, leads to the loss of two amino acids in the spike protein and has been found in viruses that eluded the immune response in some immuno-compromised patients.

"There's now a frantic push to

try and characterise some of these mutations in the lab." The evolutionary process that led to B.1.1.7 may also occur elsewhere, fear the scientists.

"Whatever enabled the B.1.1.7 lineage to emerge is likely going on in other parts of the world. Will we be able to actually detect it and then follow up on it? That, to me is one of the critical things," said Kristian Andersen, an infectious disease researcher at Scripps Research. Scientists are becoming more convinced that the new variant of coronavirus is more transmissible.

"Notes from a meeting of the UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) on December 18 state that the group "has moderate confidence that VUI-202012/01 demonstrates a substantial increase in transmissibility compared to other variants."

That might seem obvious given how quickly the strain appears to be spreading, but it can be hard to exclude other explanations such as a super-spreader event giving the variant a boost - particularly since scientists don't know what might be making the viral strain more infectious.

FOR A CAUSE



Community health volunteers of Mahapalika Arogya Seva Karmachari Sanghatana stage a protest at Azad Maidan, in Mumbai

PTI PHOTO

MUTANT COVID STRAIN

50% INDIANS WANT FLIGHTS BANNED

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: To limit the spread of mutated variant of novel Coronavirus from the UK and South Africa reaching Indian shores, 50 per cent citizens want bubble flights from impacted countries to be suspended, a survey revealed Monday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson December 19, announced that the newly identified strain of the virus may be up to 70 per cent more transmissible. His Health Secretary Matt Hancock emphasized that the new variant is "out of control".

The infectious mutation of the Covid-19 virus has caused serious concern around the world. Saudi Arabia, Italy, Belgium,



France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, etc., have banned flights to and from the UK after report of the mutant strain came to the fore. 'LocalCircles' conducted a survey on 7,091 people after the news also created ripples in India, which is already reeling under the burden of coronavirus infections with over 1 crore and 50,000 cases already.

A question - 'a new variant of coronavirus has been found in UK and South Africa which is

NCB grills Arjun Rampal for 2nd time

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Dec 21: For the second time in a month, the Narcotics Control Bureau on Monday grilled model-turned-actor Arjun Rampal in the ongoing probe into the drugs nexus with Bollywood being probed by the central agency, officials said here.

Rampal, 47, was summoned last week, but he had written to the NCB seeking time till December 22, citing some 'personal' commitments.

Earlier, he was interrogated for nearly 7 hours on November 13 after the NCB raided his home and took away nearly a dozen electronic gadgets besides some (medical) tablets.

Later, he had told mediapersons that he has handed over a medical prescription of a particular painkiller which the NCB took up for prescription. Besides Rampal, the NCB has questioned his South African girlfriend Gabriella Demetriades and her brother Agisialos Demetriades, who was arrested and later secured bail. As the drug probe shifted the needle to the involvement of other foreign nationals, another of Rampal's friends, Australian Paul Bartel, was arrested last month. Unravelling the Bollywood-drugs mafia links, the NCB has arrested more than two dozen people so far, including film personalities, drug



peddlers, financiers, suppliers, etc.

At one point during the probe, an NCB team was attacked on November 23 by some drug-peddlers in Goregaon and earlier in December, two NCB officials were suspended pending a probe into alleged 'lapses' into their conduct. Several other prominent film personalities such as Deepika Padukone, Shraddha Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan, Rakul Preet Singh, Bharti Singh, Harsh Limbachiya, besides some other industry professionals have been questioned, and last week, the NCB has issued summons to film-maker Karan Johar.

The NCB initiated the high-profile probe into the Bollywood drugs angle after the June 14 death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput in Bandra, Mumbai. Ranked as an A-lister, Rampal has acted in several films like "Om Shanti Om", "Rock On!", "Pyaar, Ishq Aur Mohabbat", "Raajneeti", "Housefull", and other blockbusters.

RESOLUTION AGAINST FARM LAWS

Kerala to call special Assembly session Dec 23

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 21: A special session of the Kerala Assembly is being convened on Wednesday to discuss the three contentious central farm laws and pass a resolution against the acts, whose repeal is being insisted by farmers agitating at the borders of Delhi for nearly a month.

The decision to convene the special session on the laws was taken by the CPI-M led LDF government at a Cabinet meeting presided by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday, official sources said.



Finance Minister Thomas Isaac in a tweet said Kerala was in "total solidarity" with the farmers' struggle and the session would discuss and 'reject' the laws.

"The cabinet has decided to recommend to the Governor to convene a special session of the assembly December 23. The session has been called to discuss the three agricultural laws against which farmers have held country-wide agitations," a press statement issued by the Chief Minister's office said.

AI can help predict cholera outbreaks in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Cholera outbreaks in coastal regions of India can be predicted with an 89 per cent success rate using climate data taken from Earth orbiting satellites combined with artificial intelligence (AI) techniques, according to a study.

The research, published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, is the first to demonstrate the use of sea surface salinity, or dissolved salts in water, for forecasting cholera.

The researchers from ESA Climate Office and the Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML) in the UK focused on predicting cholera outbreaks around the northern

Indian Ocean, where they said over half of global cases of the bacterial disease were reported in the 2010-16 period.

"The model showed promising results, and there's a lot of scope for developing this work using different cholera surveillance datasets or in different locations," said Amy Campbell, who led the study.

Cholera is a waterborne disease caused by the intake of water or food contaminated with the bacterium Vibrio cholerae, which is found in many coastal regions of the world, particularly in densely populated tropical areas.

The pathogen generally lives under warm temperatures, moderate salinity and turbidity - the degree to which water loses its transparency due to the presence of



suspended particles - and can be harboured by plankton and debris in the water.

Researchers noted that global warming and an increase in extreme weather events are driving outbreaks of cholera - a disease that affects 1.3 to 4 million people

each year worldwide, and causes up to 143,000 fatalities.

The relationship between the environmental drivers of new cholera cases during a time period, are complex, they said. They vary seasonally, with different lagged effects, for example from the monsoon season, the researchers explained.

They say machine learning algorithms can help to overcome these issues by learning to recognise patterns across large datasets in order to make testable predictions.

Machine learning (ML) is a type of AI which involves the study of computer algorithms that improve automatically through experience. The research team used an ML algorithm called the random forest classifier which can recognise patterns across long datasets and make

testable predictions.

The algorithm was trained on disease outbreaks reported in coastal districts in India between 2010 and 2018, and learned the relationships with six satellite-based climate records generated by ESA's Climate Change Initiative (CCI).

By including or removing environmental variables and sub-setting for different seasons, the algorithm identified key variables for predicting cholera outbreaks, including land surface temperature and sea surface salinity. "It would be interesting to test the impact of including socio-economic datasets; remote sensing data could be used to develop records to account for human factors that are important for cholera incidence, such as access to water resources," Campbell added.

TRANSPORTATION OF COVID VACCINE

Rlys in talks with govt

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: Even as the trials of several Covid vaccines are in progress, the Indian Railways is in talks with the government over the transportation of the vaccine through its refrigerated wagons, however, no final decision has been taken on the same, officials said on Monday. A senior railway ministry official, wishing anonymity, said that once the decision is taken for transporting the vaccine, they will announce.

He said that there are several "technical issues" with implications as to the temperature required for the transportation of the vaccine and others. "And these points are being discussed. So once

the decision is taken, we will update everyone," the official added.

On Friday, Railway Board Chairman and CEO VK Yadav had said "We are in talks with the government and we are discussing the possibilities", to a question over the transportation of Covid vaccines in railways' refrigerated vans. He further said that as of now "no decision" has been taken. "We are in continuous touch with several ministries for the transportation of Covid vaccines," Yadav had said.

The national transporter operates several refrigerated vans for the transportation of perishable cargo like vegetables, fruits, dairy products, fish and meat attached in several of its mail or express trains.



We've come to recognize that the President (Donald Trump) has a blind spot when it comes to Russia
MITT ROMNEY | REPUBLICAN
US SENATOR

LIKE SO MUCH ELSE, VISITS WITH SANTA GO VIRTUAL DUE TO COVID

As the pandemic rages, children's visits with Santa Claus are going virtual to protect both them and the men in high-risk groups who dress up as old St. Nick



of the day quote

While it (the highly infectious new mutant Covid-19 strain) seems to be more transmissible, we do not have evidence yet that this is a more deadly virus to an individual who acquires it



VIVEK MURTHY | JOE BIDEN'S NOMINEE FOR SURGEON GENERAL

More than ever, we must work together; as our hopes turn to vaccines for Covid-19, we must extend the same compassion and spirit of cooperation



VOLKAN BOZKIR | PRESIDENT OF THE 75TH SESSION OF THE UNGA

We are prepared to defend ourselves, our friends and partners in the region, and we're prepared to react if necessary



GENERAL KENNETH MCKENZIE | HEAD OF THE US CENTRAL COMMAND

SHORT TAKES

7 killed in Afghan bomb blasts

Kabul: Seven people, including a highway police chief, were killed in two improvised bomb blasts in Afghanistan Monday, according to authorities. In Parwan province, five police officers, including provincial highway police chief Wali Mohammad, were killed in Charikar city after their vehicle hit an IED, a senior police official told Xinhua news agency. In Badghis province, two civilians were killed and another wounded after a cargo truck was torn apart also by an IED in Muqur district.

Tropical depression leaves 8 dead

Manila: Floodwaters and landslides triggered by a tropical depression that battered the Philippines over the weekend have left at least eight people dead, two injured and one missing, authorities said Monday. According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the casualties were reported in the regions of Eastern Visayas, Davao and Caraga, reports Xinhua news agency. The NDRRMC said the tropical depression affected over 36,000 residents in central and southern Philippines and caused infrastructure damages worth 110.4 million pesos (\$23 million).

6.3-magnitude quake jolts Japan

Tokyo: An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale jolted Japan's Aomori prefecture Monday, but authorities did not issue a tsunami warning. According to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), the quake occurred at 2.23 a.m., with its epicenter at latitude of 40.7 degrees north and a longitude of 142.7 degrees east, and at a depth of 10 km, reports Xinhua news agency. The earthquake logged 5 lower in some parts of Iwate prefecture and 4 in Aomori prefecture on the Japanese seismic intensity scale which peaks at 7.

Rockets hit near US embassy in Iraq

Baghdad: A volley of rockets exploded near the US embassy in Baghdad Sunday, as tensions mount ahead of the anniversary of the US killing top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on Iraqi soil. AFP reporters in the capital's east heard at least five booms Sunday night, followed by whistling sounds.

Nepal enters politics of disarray, uncertainty, confusion

AGENCIES

Kathmandu, Dec 21: With the sudden dissolution of the House of Representatives of Nepal's Federal Parliament by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, the Himalayan nation has now entered a stage of confusion, disarray and uncertainty.

Oli's recommendation to dissolve the House Sunday was swiftly approved by President Bidhya Devi Bhandari without any delay has invited politics of chaos and mayhem. Along with the House dissolution, Oli has also recommended to conduct the mid-term elections April 30 and May 10, 2021.

Oli, who was heading the most powerful government in Nepal's modern history now became sources of instability where party leaders and experts say that this has rattled the long cherished dream of stability, prosperity, peace and development, party leaders said.

In a special editorial, Nepal's leading English language newspaper: The Kathmandu Post said that with one fell swoop, Prime Minister Oli pushed the country to yet another quagmire of instability and political crisis when he orchestrated a po-

HIMALAYAN PROBLEM



litical coup as his Cabinet recommended the dissolution of the House.

Leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party said that with the move, Oli has prepared a background to split the party. If the ruling party will split, the making and unmaking of governments will begin and Nepal will enter into a politics of instability and confusion.

Some of our friends had already planted the seed of party split, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali said in an interview Monday.

The Prime Minister was engulfed and picketed by several elements

Oli, who was heading the most powerful government in Nepal's modern history, now became sources of instability

Leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party said that with the move, Oli has prepared a background to split the party

If the ruling party will split, the making and unmaking of governments will begin and Nepal will enter into a politics of instability and confusion

where he couldn't move on, he could not deliver so he decided to take fresh mandate and decided to go to the people, Gyawali, a close confident of Oli, said.

Oli was facing a huge trust deficit within the party since he assumed office in February 2018.

Former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda was running the Opposition camp inside the party, criticising Oli's style of governance, flourishing corruption, inept in service delivery. Oli's ambition to become a totalitarian ruler.

Oli also kept on dishonouring the party decisions and ruled the gov-

ernment unilaterally.

Oli deserves action and punishment for this act, former premier Madhav Nepal said, he does not deserve to become the party members too. The party is preparing to take action him, the former Prime Minister but a long time Oli's friend said during an interview.

To chart out the future strategy, both the Oli and Prachanda factions have called meetings of their respective camps Monday where they are expected to discuss their next move.

Main Opposition, the Nepali Congress has also summoned an all party meeting to discuss the latest political development.

Ruling and Opposition party cadres have staged protest in several parts of the country against the decision to dissolve the House.

It is also learnt that Oli was all set to face a no-confidence motion within the party if he had not dissolved the House.

Majority of the party parliamentarians have collected signature against Oli's government and filed a petition at parliament secretariat to summon the house session where they were preparing to register the no-confidence motion.

Oli defends move to dissolve Par'l

KATHMANDU: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli Monday defended his move to abruptly dissolve Parliament, saying he was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as the rift within the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected his government's functioning. In a special address to the nation, Prime Minister Oli said that he was forced to dissolve Parliament and announce mid-term elections after he learnt about a plan to move a vote of no-confidence against him. "I was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as attempts were made against my government, not to allow it to function properly," the Prime Minister said while defending his decision to dissolve Parliament and announce dates for mid-term elections. Oli said that the intra-party rift in the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected the government's functioning.

London could be under lockdown for months



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

London, Dec 21: UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock has warned that London could be under a lockdown for months, as it will be "very difficult" to keep a highly infectious mutant strain of the novel coronavirus under control until vaccinations are rolled out.

His remarks Sunday came just hours after the new Tier Four restrictions came into force in the British capital and parts of south-east England, reports Xinhua news agency. The new tighter restrictions will be reviewed December 30.

Hancock however indicated that it was unlikely they would be relaxed at that point.

"It is going to be very difficult to keep it under control until we have the vaccine rolled out," he told Sky News.

"We know with this new variant you can catch it more easily from a small amount of the virus being present.

"All of the different measures we have in place, we need more of them to control the spread of the new variant than we did to control the spread of the old variant. That is the fundamental problem," the Health Secretary added.

Hancock also criticized people who fled London before the new Tier Four lockdown came into force as "totally irresponsible".

Interpol fears jump in crime over Covid vaccine shipments

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Berlin, Dec 21: Interpol chief Juergen Stock predicted Monday a sharp rise in crimes with robbers seeking to get their hands on precious vaccines aimed at stopping the coronavirus pandemic.

"With vaccines rolling out, crime will increase dramatically," Stock told business weekly WirtschaftsWoche. "We will see thefts and warehouse break-ins and attacks on vaccine shipments."

The secretary general of the France-based global policing agency said he also expected more cases of graft related to Covid-19 vaccines. "Corruption will be rampant in many places to get the valuable vaccine quicker," he said.

A vaccine produced by German company BioNTech and US giant Pfizer has already been approved for use by 16 countries.

The European Union's EMA is poised to make a similar decision on Monday, with the first jabs to begin in the bloc Sunday (December 27). In Germany, federal police will be deployed to secure transportation of the vaccines, which will also be stored in secret places.

SANTA AMID RUINS



An Iraqi woman, dressed as Santa Claus, rides her bicycle in the old city of Mosul, Iraq

REUTERS PHOTO

JAPAN CABINET NOD TO OVER \$1TRN DEFENCE BUDGET

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo, Dec 21: Japan's Cabinet approved a ninth straight increase in the nation's defence budget as the government bolsters funding to develop longer-range cruise missiles and stealth fighters to counter potential threats from China and North Korea.

The record 5.34 trillion yen (\$51.7 billion) defense budget planned for fiscal 2021 is the first under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and is a 1.1 per cent increase over the current year's budget.

It is set for parliamentary approval early next year as part of a 106 trillion yen (\$1.03 trillion) national budget totaling for the fiscal year beginning in April.

The budget plan includes the costs to develop extended-range

The Japanese government bolstered funding to develop longer-range cruise missiles and stealth fighters to counter potential threats from China and North Korea

missiles that can be fired from destroyers or fighter jets, defense ministry officials said.

That's part of Japan's new missile deterrence plan adopted by Suga's Cabinet last Friday that would allow Japan to expand missile deployment in areas including islands it controls in the East China Sea that are also claimed by Beijing.

Racism targets Asian food, business during pandemic

AS THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE US, BIGOTRY TOWARD ASIAN AMERICANS WAS NOT FAR BEHIND

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Dec 21: As the coronavirus spread throughout the US, bigotry toward Asian Americans was not far behind, fueled by the news that Covid-19 first appeared in China.

Some initial evidence suggested the virus began in bats, which infected another animal that may have spread it to people at one of Wuhan, China's "wet markets."

Such markets sell fresh meat, fish and vegetables, and some also sell live animals, such as chickens, that are butchered on site to ensure freshness for consumers.

The information quickly got distorted in the US, spurring racist memes on social media that por-

trayed Chinese people as bat eaters responsible for spreading the virus, and reviving century-old tropes about Asian food being dirty. Fueling the fire, President Donald Trump repeatedly referred to Covid-19 as "the China virus." "That old-school rhetoric that we eat bats, dogs and rats - that racism is still alive and well," said Clarence Kwan, creator of the anti-racist cooking zine "Chinese Protest Recipes."

The speed with which such false stereotypes resurfaced during the pandemic is "a reflection of how little progress we've made," Kwan said.

In the Wuhan market where the virus is believed to possibly have originated, vendors also advertised wildlife for sale. Of the 33



samples from the market that tested positive for the coronavirus, officials say 31 were from the area where wildlife booths were con-

centrated. But wildlife and other "exotic" animals are not part of the modern mainstream Asian diet, either in Asian countries or

in the US. All of the misinformation has had serious consequences.

Stop AAPI Hate, a coalition of Asian American advocacy groups, issued a report in August stating that it had received more than 2,500 reports of hate and discrimination across the country since the group was founded in March, around the time the outbreak began to seriously worsen in the US. The group said it received data from 47 states, with 46% of the incidents taking place in California, followed by 14% in New York.

In addition, Asian American small businesses have been among the hardest hit by the economic downturn during the pandemic. While there was a 22% decline in all small business-owner activity na-

tionwide from February to April, Asian American business-owner activity dropped by 26%, according to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Many businesses that survived have been subject to stigmatization, Kwan said. "Restaurants have been vandalized. As if the pandemic wasn't hard enough, there's this added threat to Asian businesses of this lingering hate." Conversations about the stigmatization of Asian food reached a crescendo this month when Philli Armitage-Martin, a contestant on "MasterChef: The Professionals," used the phrase "Dirty Food Refined" and the hashtag #prettydirtyfood in her Instagram bio, which described her as an Asian food specialist.

of the day quote

The pandemic has had a deep impact on India's informal economy, especially among microfinance borrowers and MSMEs. NACL's unique business model of working with the most impacted segment of MSMEs and financial institutions makes them an ideal partner

CHRISTINE ENGSTROM | DEPARTMENT DIR, PRIVATE SECTOR OPERATIONS, ADB

The e-2 wheelers segment was expected to witness faster penetration among all segments of the automobile market, given the favourable economics and limited reliance on a widespread charging infrastructure. However, e-2W sales vis-à-vis targets set under FAME II have been tepid so far

SHAMSHER DEWAN | VICE-PRESIDENT, ICRA

Our Das WeltAuto Excellence Centers with multi-brand options, aims to professionalise the customer purchase experience and be a one-stop shop for all the customer's needs. We intend to further penetrate the markets by launching 10 more facilities in 2021

ASHISH GUPTA | BRAND HEAD, VOLKSWAGEN PASSENGER CARS INDIA

SHORT TAKES

'FPIs pump in record \$8.1bn'

Mumbai: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own more than 24% of the domestic market, pumped in a record \$8.1 billion last month, highest in 12 years, and at \$5 billion to date, December also looks to get record inflows, says a foreign brokerage report. At \$8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging market peers in November, as Brazil got only \$6.2 billion, South Korea (\$5.2 billion), Taiwan (\$4.5 billion) and Thailand at \$1.1 billion.

30K powerlooms closed for a week

Erode: 30,000 powerlooms used for production of rayon cloth here have been closed for seven days from Monday, December 21, due to rayon yarn price hike. Erode is noted for textile production and more than 50,000 powerlooms function in the district, of which at Kalingarayanpalayam, Veerappanchattram, Asokapuram and some other places, 30,000 powerlooms produce 24,000 metres of rayon cloth a day.

PepsiCo to set up potato chips unit

Lucknow: 'PepsiCo', the multinational food and beverages company is going to set up a new (greenfield) potato chips production unit in Uttar Pradesh with an investment of ₹814 crore. According to the government spokesman, the unit will be set up on about 35 acres of land provided by the State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) in Kosi-Mathura. Starting in 2021, over 1,000 people will get direct and indirect employment from this chips factory.

ASSOCHAM gets new president

New Delhi: Vineet Agarwal, the Managing Director of logistics major Transport Corporation of India Limited (TCIL), has taken over as the new President of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).



The pandemic has had a direct, immediate and continuing impact on the travel industry. Our Travel Insights with Google tool recognises that, and amid this volatility, provides players real-time, actionable analysis of travel intention and sentiment

ROMA DATTA CHOBEY | DIR (TRAVEL), GOOGLE INDIA

SOLAR POWER TARIFF DIPS TO ALL-TIME LOW

Solar power tariff has dropped to an all-time low of ₹1.99 per unit in an auction of projects of 500 MW capacity by Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd last week. State-run power giant NTPC, Torrent Power, Saudi Arabian firm Al Jomaih Energy have emerged as the lowest bidders



Auto cos need to realign supply chains: Report

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 21: Automobile companies in India will need to map vulnerabilities and realign their supply chains to meet current challenges in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a report by consultancy firm EY.

With the supplier base of a majority of components in the Indian auto industry not diversified, the report - Non-linear automotive supply chain - "COVID-19 and Beyond", said the impact of the global health crisis on the industry has been deep-rooted. Commenting on the findings of the report, EY India Partner and Automotive Sector Leader Vinay Raghunath said: "The Indian automotive supplier base is currently not too diversified for the majority of components. This was to drive volume-based price efficiencies. However, this strategy is



MEETING CHALLENGES

highly exposed to risks arising from disruptions in geographies that supply key auto components."

Stating that the impact of COVID-19 on the industry has been "deep-rooted" the report recommended "a bottom-up evaluation of the supply chain architecture and its vulnerabilities against external factors like the pandemic".

"Automotive firms will need to map vulnerabilities and realign

their supply chains to meet current challenges," EY India said.

The sector's dependency on imports - \$17.5 billion worth of auto components - has also played a part in escalating the challenges of the sector due to higher costs.

"Before the pandemic, to enforce 'Make in India', the government in the union budget 2020-21 hiked customs duty on raw materials and inputs imported by domestic man-

The Indian automotive supplier base is currently not too diversified for the majority of components. This was to drive volume-based price efficiencies. However, this strategy is highly exposed to risks arising from disruptions in geographies that supply key auto components

VINAY RAGHUNATH, PARTNER AND AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR LEADER, EY INDIA

ufacturers' 2.5 per cent-5 per cent, and completely built units (CBUs) from 30 per cent-40 per cent for commercial vehicles other than electric," EY India said.

Traditionally, logistics costs in India have been comparatively higher than its other neighbour-

ing nations.

"The key challenge for the Indian automotive supply chain would be to manage the cost escalation year-on-year, driven by rising fuel costs. OEMs, therefore, need to explore the ability of key suppliers to fulfil orders from alternative locations," it added.

Stating that the Indian auto industry needs to deploy crisis management, governance and supply chain intelligence, the report also said the critical first step would be to identify a company's key direct suppliers and dependencies - both in the supply and the demand side.

"It requires an in-depth mapping exercise to understand its ability to meet supply requirements and responses during potential risk scenarios. This will enable the creation of a flexible ecosystem comprising suppliers and distribution partners," it added.

Investors lose ₹6.59L cr as new Covid strain jolts markets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Investor wealth eroded by ₹6.59 lakh crore Monday as equities tanked after the UK reported a new strain of the COVID-19 virus. The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 1,406.73 points or 3% to close at 45,553.96. The benchmark hit an all-time high of 47,055.69 during the session.

Following the sharp selling, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms plummeted by ₹6,59,313.65 crore to ₹1,78,79,323.05 crore.

"Brutal bloodbath witnessed in today's session after a new coronavirus strain was found in Britain. Market extended losses in late afternoon session, tracking sell-off in the European markets amid concern of fresh travelling lockdown restrictions across countries.

"Uncertainties over the Brexit deal also dented the investors' sentiments," said Sumeet Bagadia, Executive Director, Choice Broking.

Global markets were knocked off highs after the UK government reported a new strain of the coronavirus that was up to 70% more contagious.

The UK imposed a fresh lockdown in London and southeast England, warning that the potent new strain of the COVID-19 virus was "out of control".



Global markets were knocked off highs after the UK government reported a new strain of the coronavirus that was up to 70% more contagious

All 30 Sensex companies closed the day with losses, with ONGC tanking the most by 9.15%, followed by Indusind Bank, M&M, SBI, NTPC and ITC which shed up to 6.98%.

"Concerns of new COVID-19 strains in the UK and emerging doubts over efficacy of COVID-19

vaccination dented investors' sentiments globally.

"Indian markets were the worst performer today... profit-booking could also be a key reason as domestic equities have outperformed global markets by a wide margin in recent months," said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE mid-cap and small-cap indices tanked up to 4.57%.

All BSE sectoral indices also closed lower, with metal, oil and gas, utilities, realty, basic materials, industrials, power and bankex falling as much as 6.05%.

At the BSE, 2,433 companies declined, while 592 advanced and 167 remained unchanged.

Delhi HC rejects FRL's plea against Amazon

The high court said another reason why it did not grant an interim injunction was that both FRL and Amazon have already made their representations and counter representations to the regulators

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Delhi High Court Monday declined to grant Kishore Biyani led Future Retail Ltd's (FRL) plea for an interim injunction restraining e-commerce giant Amazon from writing to the SEBI, Competition Commission of India and other authorities about the SIAC arbitral order against its asset sale under a ₹24,713 crore deal with Reliance Retail.

Justice Mukta Gupta said that while FRL has made out a prima facie case of interim injunction, the relief cannot be granted as the balance of convenience lies in favour of both Future Retail and Amazon, and whether any irreparable loss would be caused to either side, has to be determined during trial of the suit or by a competent forum.

The high court said another reason why it did not grant an interim injunction was that both FRL and Amazon have already made their representations and counter representations to the statutory authorities or regulators and "now it is for the statutory authorities'/regulators to take a decision thereon". It further said that FRL's August



29 board resolution approving the deal was not invalid or void as claimed by Amazon and the e-commerce giant's representations to that effect to statutory authorities and regulators was "based on incorrect assertions" which meant that its action was based on "unlawful means".

Therefore, FRL has made out a prima facie case of "tortious interference", the high court said and added that "the act of Amazon would fall foul of the freedom of FRL and Reliance to enter into the transaction thereby causing loss to both FRL and Reliance which would be a civil wrong actionable by both FRL and Reliance in case they suffer any loss".

The term 'tortious interference' means to intentionally damage someone's contractual or business relationships with a third party.

BIZ BUZZ

'Micro food processing firms should be uplifted'

Bhubaneswar: Principal Secretary of state MSME department Satyabrata Sahu urged SBI officials to promote the entrepreneurs under PM Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme for the upliftment of micro food processing enterprises. Sahu also stressed on the need to provide more credit facilities to micro & small units. In this occasion, he inaugurated SME Branch at Rayagada in virtual mode. He requested bank authorities during a sensitisation programme for SBI officers dealing with MSME loans, held Monday. He appreciated SBI's efforts in disbursing Guaranteed Emergency Loans to MSME units to overcome the difficulties during Covid-19. Principal Secretary also handed over 101 sanction letters in virtual mode and 2 in physical mode, to PMEGP beneficiaries. Sahu also appreciated SBI's lion share in providing credit facilities under various government sponsored schemes.



Smart pre-paid energy meters go live at Paradip

Bhubaneswar: In a first in Odisha, Paradip Port Trust (PPT) brought in pre-paid smart energy meters which have gone live from Monday. As a part of the Green Port initiatives, the Chairman, PPT Rinkesh Roy inaugurated the smart meter project with the first recharge of the three-phase smart meter installed at the BPCL outlet in the Port city. The smart meter project has been implemented at PPT by Gram Power. The smart meters offer complete transparency to the electricity consumers of PPT along with advantages like monitoring of real time energy consumption data to an hourly resolution, recharge the smart meters by payment through a mobile phone, see the payment history, etc. through a 24 X 7 Consumer Mobile App. The consumers are, thus facilitated to analyse their consumption and accordingly help regulate the electricity consumption by them by reducing the losses.

'Indians most optimistic about job prospects in 2021'

AGENCIES

Bangalore, Dec 21: Indians are the most optimistic in Asia Pacific region about job and pay rise prospects in 2021, job site Indeed said Monday, citing its global study.

Indian workers (56%) are more than twice as positive about their chances of getting a pay rise next year compared to their counterparts in Australia (20%) and Singapore (23%).

Over one in three Indian workers are very optimistic about their career prospects in 2021, the highest in all countries surveyed, it said.

"Indian workers deem workplace

safety (59%) and employee wellbeing (44%) as the two most important considerations for the 2021 workplace," the study revealed.

India's resilience as it prepares to embrace a new year and a potential vaccine drive is reflected in the optimism of its workers over the job market.

Yet, 54% said they would not pursue other job opportunities even if approached by other employers, some citing current workplace satisfaction but most pointing to job insecurity.

Speaking of resilience, more than two in five employers said the decisions taken at the outset of the pandemic were effective in ensuring



THE GLOBAL SURVEY MEASURED THE SENTIMENT OF 3,600 EMPLOYERS AND 14,142 EMPLOYEES ACROSS THE UK, THE US, AUSTRALIA, INDIA, FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, SINGAPORE, CANADA AND 5 OTHER COUNTRIES

their business continuity. 66% employers also credited

their workforce for pulling together and helping their company

FINGERS CROSSED

Indian workers (56%) are more than twice as positive about their chances of getting a pay rise next year compared to their counterparts in Australia (20%) and Singapore (23%)

India's resilience is reflected in the optimism of its workers over the job market

6% employers credited their workforce for pulling together and helping their company during the pandemic

in this time of crisis. Although forced into lock-

Rural lending required to boost economy: MSME min



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: State MSME minister Divya Shankar Mishra Monday encouraged the role of rural lending in boosting the economy.

"In order to bring prosperity in the economy and the industries to flourish the gap between the Indian banking system & the industries need to be bridged. For the banks, to change their perspective of lending and mindset of ignoring, the low ticket lending must change," said Mishra.

The minister was attending the webinar at the ICC National Banking & Finance Conclave.

Principal Secretary of Finance department Ashok KK Meena said that the banking system must move away from collateral-based credit-to-cash flow based credit.

"In order to reduce the NPAs, banks must understand their customer closely apart from doing only the KYC. The forum said that the CD ratio is less than 40% in 12 districts and must improve to increase the credit flow," Meena said.

'Odisha poised to become global economic hotspot'



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha is uniquely poised to become the global economic hotspot as the state possesses rich mineral resources, said Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Petroleum Minister.

Pradhan addressed a webinar on 'CA: The Catalyst—learning, unlearning and relearning' at VSM series, Monday.

Pradhan said that Odisha is uniquely poised to become the global economic hotspot as it possesses rich mineral resources, demographic dividend and market. The state is uniquely poised to leverage the upcoming opportunities in the global markets.

"The country is coming out of the Covid crisis and slowly entering into the post-crisis period. In the last three months, we saw all major economic indicators showing signs of recovery.

Whether it is power consumption, oil and gas consumption, GST collection, all are presenting picture of a sharp recovery," he said. Talking about the development vision of the eastern region, Pradhan said that the central government has given unprecedented priority to the development of eastern India and Odisha is uniquely poised to benefit from the Mission Purvodaya.

"Odisha provides major share of coal, iron ore and other commodities to the nation. We must work to integrate even more with the global supply chain," he further added.

down this year, Indian workers cited greater family time and inclusion/flexibility as positive side effects.

Two in five workers said "more time with family" and "more opportunities to work from home" had the biggest impact on their personal circumstances in 2020.

According to an Indeed statement, the global survey measured the sentiment of 3,600 employers and 14,142 employees across the UK, the US, Ireland, Australia, India, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Singapore, Mexico, Brazil and Canada between November 13 and November 20 this year.

INDIANS CONSIDERING ALL OPTIONS FOR QUICK FIGHTBACK IN TEST SERIES

FIT JADEJA MAY REPLACE VIHARI AT MCG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Adelaide, Dec 21: The Indian team management is keenly monitoring Ravindra Jadeja's progress leading up to the Boxing Day Test against Australia this weekend. If Jadeja is declared fit, the all-rounder in all probability will walk into the playing XI in place of Hanuma Vihari. Jadeja had suffered concussion during the first T20I. He also suffered a hamstring injury which ruled him out of the first Test.

Sources stated that Jadeja has recovered over the past few days and has been going through net sessions. So his progress is being watched. If the axe will fall on Andhra Pradesh batsman Vihari, it is not because of his low scores in the Adelaide Test. The change will be purely based on the best combination that Ajinkya Rahane and Ravi Shastri can put on the field.

"If Jadeja gets fit to bowl long spells, then there is no debate at

all. Jadeja replaces Vihari on the basis of his all-round skills. Also it gives us an option to play five bowlers at the MCG," a senior BCCI source said Monday.

Jadeja has 1,869 runs in 49 Tests at an average of 35 plus which includes a hundred and 14 fifties. He has struck half centuries both in England Australia on previous tours. On the other hand, Vihari, in his 10 Tests, has scored 576 runs with a century against the West Indies and four 50s at an average of 33 plus.

If pure batting skills are considered, then there is not much of a difference between 'specialist Vihari' and 'all-rounder Jadeja'. However, Jadeja's ability to bowl long spells may turn the tide in his favour if he is fully fit. Now that Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of the series, India might just be tempted to go in with five specialist bowlers to try and restore parity in the Test series.

The Indian team had a scheduled practice session Monday at the Adelaide Oval but due to steady rain, it had to be cancelled. Skipper Virat Kohli is set

to leave for India Tuesday and the squad travelling to Melbourne, the skipper apparently had a chat with his team on the way forward after the 36 all-out debacle here.

JADEJA IS BEING CONSIDERED BECAUSE OF HIS BETTER BOWLING SKILLS

THERE IS NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VIHARI AND JADEJA AS FAR AS BATTING IS CONSIDERED

VIRAT KOHLI TALKED WITH TEAMMATES, MOTIVATED THEM AHEAD OF LEAVING FOR INDIA

RAVINDRA JADEJA

Burns wary of Indian firepower

AUSTRALIAN OPENER FEELING CONFIDENT AFTER HALF CENTURY



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Adelaide, Dec 21: Australian opener Joe Burns has said that it feels great with some runs finally under his belt. He also said that even though India are world class opponents, they will find the going tough without skipper Virat Kohli and injured fast bowler Mohammed Shami. He also pointed out that even though Australia won the first Test quite easily, there are some 'scars' that need to be addressed.

"We have got some scars as well, we just have to prepare well, start well and carry on the momentum from the last game," Burns said during a virtual press conference Monday. "We know that Indians will try to bounce back in the next Test. The result at MCG is going to play a crucial role in (deciding the)

Virat and Shami are obviously big losses for India. They are world class players and India will certainly miss them

JOE BURNS

fate of the series," the opener added.

The absence of Kohli and Shami will be 'big losses' but Burns is convinced the visitors will try to make a strong comeback.

"I think Shami and Virat are obviously big losses for India. Even then the India do have very good depth as well. So, they are still going to be very challenging," Burns stated. "It is always hard to replace world class players. However, you got to look at the talent that may replace the two. Well they are also very good. So we have to be careful about a strong Indian fightback," he added.

Burns was woefully out of form in the run-up to the series opener. He got his mojo back with a half century in his team's second innings at the Adelaide Oval.

Burns said that a pull shot he played off pacer Umesh Yadav for a boundary changed the momentum for him. "It is obviously nice to make some runs myself again, it just was nice get back the rhythm," the 31-year-old pointed out.

Burns said that Australians are the best team in the world and they would like to win the remaining three Tests also. And he wants to contribute by getting big hundreds.

"We are the best team in the world, very confident against everyone in every venue. Our bowlers are unbelievable. We have got three more Tests to go and my goal is to go and get big match-winning hundreds in those games," he signed off.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fastest goal

MILAN: Rafael Leão scored the fastest goal in Serie A history, netting after just six seconds to set league leader AC Milan on the way to a 2-1 win at Sassuolo here Sunday. Alexis Saelemaekers scored Milan's other goal as the Rossoneri remained a point clear of second-place Inter Milan who beat promoted Spezia 2-1. "Yes, it's not like we're brushing our dolls," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli, when asked if Milan had prepared the goal in training. "We prepare ourselves, we study our opponents and we try things. Today it went off very well," he added.

Repeat act

LONDON: Seven-time Formula One (F1) champion Lewis Hamilton capped another successful year by claiming the BBC's 'Sports Personality of the Year' prize. The 35-year-old driver, who last month equalled Michael Schumacher's record of seven F1 titles, overcame Jordan Henderson and Hollie Doyle to win the British broadcaster's prestigious prize in a public vote Sunday. He won the same prize in 2014.

Help required

NEW DELHI: Olympic-bound boxer Vikas Krishan sought help Monday from External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar after his coach got stuck in the US due to new visa protocols. Krishan, in a tweet, said it very important for him to train with his coach as the Tokyo Olympic Games are 'fast approaching'. "Dear sir Dr S Jaishankar - my coach is stuck in the US and unable to return to India due to the new visa protocols. With the Tokyo Olympics fast approaching, his presence is very important for my training as I aim to win India an Olympic gold. Could you please help with this," Krishan tweeted.

Kallis reappointed

LONDON: South African legend Jacques Kallis was Monday appointed as the batting consultant of the England team for next month's two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement that the team will depart for Sri Lanka January 2. "Seven coaches will join the squad for the two-Test tour. Former South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis joins the England setup as batting consultant, the second time he is doing so. His experience will come in handy" the ECB said Monday.

AGENCIES

BRILLIANT VARDY STUNS SPURS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

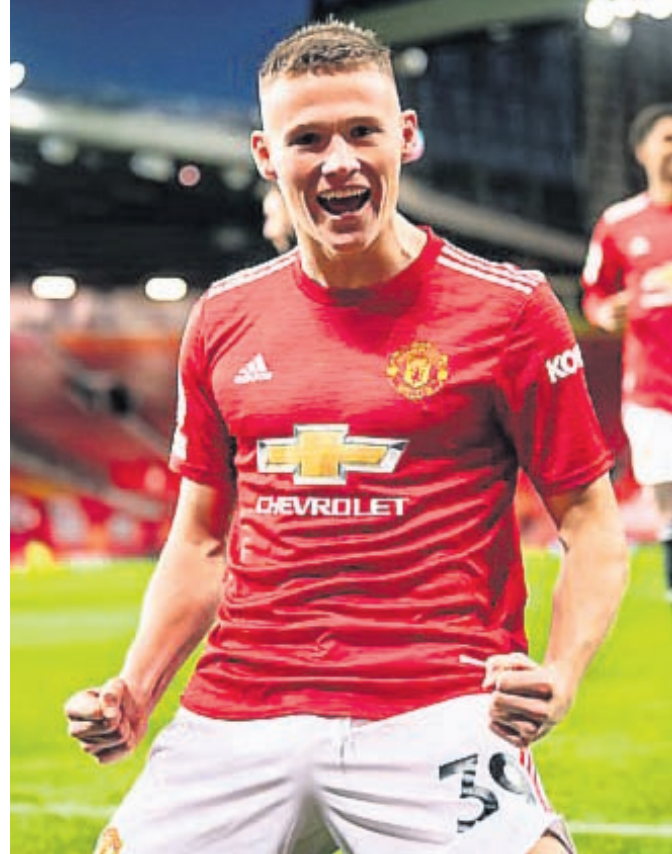
Manchester, Dec 21: Manchester United waited 16 years to play old rival Leeds in the Premier League, and then made it look distinctly second-class. Man U charged to a 6-2 victory here Sunday at Old Trafford. The win propelled Manchester United into third place in the points table and propelled them into title contention.

In another game played on the day, Tottenham Hotspur suffered an unexpected 0-2 loss to Leicester City. Jose Mourinho's side have now one draw and two defeats in their last three games... their worst spell this season.

Scott McTominay looked like one of the Premier League's top scorers as Man United swept into an early lead over Leeds. Defensive midfielder McTominay - who hadn't scored in the EPL since March - netted in the second and third minutes after he was left plenty of space to run through the Leeds defense.

Bruno Fernandes and Victor Lindelof extended United's lead amid more static defending from Leeds, with more goals from Daniel James and Fernandes in the second half.

Man United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer credited his team with



WHAT A NIGHT! Scott McTominay is all pumped after scoring his second goal for Manchester United against Leeds, Sunday

Man U brush aside Leeds

beating Leeds at their own game.

"We had a plan to get after them and go forward when we got the ball, and Scott got two goals in the first three minutes which is a great start," Solskjaer said. "We had to earn the right to win the game by running just as much or more than them, so that was a challenge against one of the fittest teams in the league," he added.

VARDY ON SCORG

Jamie Vardy's hot form in away games in 2020 continued as he scored one goal and forced an own-goal in Leicester's win over Tottenham. That took Vardy to 19 goals in his last 19 away games in the PL.

Vardy gave Leicester the lead in first half added on time with a penalty after a foul by Serge Aurier. He then set up the second when he headed the ball onto defender Toby Alderweireld, who deflected it into the net.

"We came here with a game plan and we absolutely nailed what we wanted to do and it set us on the way to getting the three points we deserved," Vardy told 'Sky Sports'.

It was hardly the performance Jose Mourinho would have wished for to prove Tottenham's title credentials. The Portuguese coach claimed Wednesday that the 'best team lost' when Liverpool beat Tottenham 2-1.

Benzema brace helps Real overcome Eibar



ON THE PROWL: Karim Benzema (left) of Real Madrid celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening goal against Eibar, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Dec 21: Karim Benzema scored one goal and set up another to lead Real Madrid to a 3-1 win at Eibar, keeping the defending champions level on points with Atlético Madrid at the top of the Spanish league points table.

Zinedine Zidane's side are behind Atlético on goal difference. The city rivals are three points ahead of Real Sociedad and eight points ahead of Barcelona, who are in fifth place behind Villarreal.

Benzema opened the scoring in the sixth minute Sunday when he controlled an superb pass from Rodrygo before knocking the ball past Eibar goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic.

The French striker assisted Luka Modric in the 12th minute after he

dribbled around a defender and found the Croatia midfielder arriving unmarked at the edge of the area. Modric fired a right-footer into the upper part of the net to score and double the tally.

Eibar stayed true to coach José Mendilibar's playing style of pressing high up the field, and what looked like a Madrid rout became an entertaining contest.

Kike Garcia got Eibar back in the game in the 28th when the striker scored with a brilliant strike from outside the area, curling a long shot beyond the reach of Thibaut Courtois and inside the far post.

In the second half, moments after Sergio Ramos blocked a chance by Eibar's Pedro Vigas, an attack at the other end saw Lucas Vázquez beat Dmitrovic for Madrid's third goal.

Baxter's boys praying for turnaround

AGENCIES

Bambolim, Dec 21: With only a point in their kitty from six games, Odisha FC (OFC) will be desperate to turn their fortunes around when they face NorthEast United (NEUF) in the ISL game here Tuesday.

The Bhubaneswar-based side are lying at the bottom of the table having suffered five defeats this season - the most in the ISL. They will face stiff challenge from fourth-placed NEUF, who will be aiming to bounce back after witnessing their unbeaten run end in the previous game. Odisha will need to find form soon, having struggled in both attack and defense. They



OFC coach Stuart Baxter (right) has a point to explain to his boys during a training session

have conceded nine goals with seven of those scored against them coming in the first half. In such a situation Odisha will have to keep a tight watch on NEUF forwards Idrissa Sylla

In the game played Monday, ATK Mohun Bagan (ATKMB) beat Bengaluru FC by a solitary goal to go atop the points table. They have 19 points from eight games. David Williams got the winner for ATKMB in the first half.

and Kwesi Appiah. Both have scored two goals each in the tourney so far.

"NEUF have got quite a few players who are quick. They get the ball to their strikers, so we need to defend as a team," Baxter said Monday. "Whatever solutions we're planning will be as a team, it won't be based on individual man marking."

BBSR-A, Cuttack-A win 10-team IPL from 2022 only: BCCI

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: BBSR-A and Cuttack-A recorded facile wins in super league matches of the OCA Inter-District T20 cricket tournament here Sunday. At the KIIT ground, BBSR-A defeated Cuttack-B by six wickets while at the Railway ground, Cuttack-A trounced BBSR-B by 58 runs.

BBSR-A put Cuttack-B into bat and bowled them out for 127 in 19.1 overs. Alok Chandra Sahoo (89) was the only batsman to resist the opposition bowlers. Basant Mohanty (3/29), Shiva (2/17) and Shantanu Mishra (2/19) bowled well for BBSR-

A. Chasing a victory target of 131 runs, BBSR-A scored 131 for four in 19 overs to win the game. Shantanu (48 n o) and Sandep Patnaik (43 n o) batted well for the winners to ease them over the finish line..

In the other game, Cuttack-A posted 190 for five with Abhishek Rout (70) and Biplab Samantray (58) stealing the show. The Cuttack-A bowlers, then restricted BBSR-B to 132 for seven. Pratik Das (53) batted well for the losers. However, it did not help against some tight bowling by the Cuttack-A bowlers. Ashish Rai and Deepak Behera claimed two wickets each for Cuttack-A.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The BCCI's all-powerful general body will give approval to a 10-team Indian Premier League during its AGM, Thursday. However, the 10-team format will be implemented only from 2022 instead of next year. One of the major points in the agenda of BCCI's AGM to be held in Ahmedabad is the inclusion of new IPL franchises.

It has been learnt that most of the stakeholders feel that having a nine or 10-team IPL in 2021 will be a hasty decision. It means that the new franchises will get very little time

to build a competitive team.

"There are a lot of modalities that needs to be discussed and most of the stakeholders feel that with IPL being held in April, there is very little time for a mega auction and to have a uniform retention policy, agreeable to all the existing franchises," a senior BCCI official told this agency on conditions of anonymity.

"You have to invite tenders and have a bidding process ready. In case you have two teams winning bids in late January or early February, they need to be given time for auction which can then



be held only in March. That leaves a new team with very little time to plan," the official added.

A 10-team IPL means 94 games and nearly two-and-half months window which can throw the in-

ternational calendar into disarray. Also the availability of the top foreign players for the entire duration of the IPL needs to be ensured and the broadcast money per year which is for 60 matches also needs to be re-negotiated.

As of now, Star India pays Rs 16,347.50 crore for a period from 2018-2022 and till date it was for 60 matches per year.

Some of the biggest names who seem to be interested in buying teams include business tycoons Gautam Adani and Sanjeev Goenka (erstwhile owner of Rising Pune Supergiants).